

The adventures of Pony Dexter

# PONY DEXTER

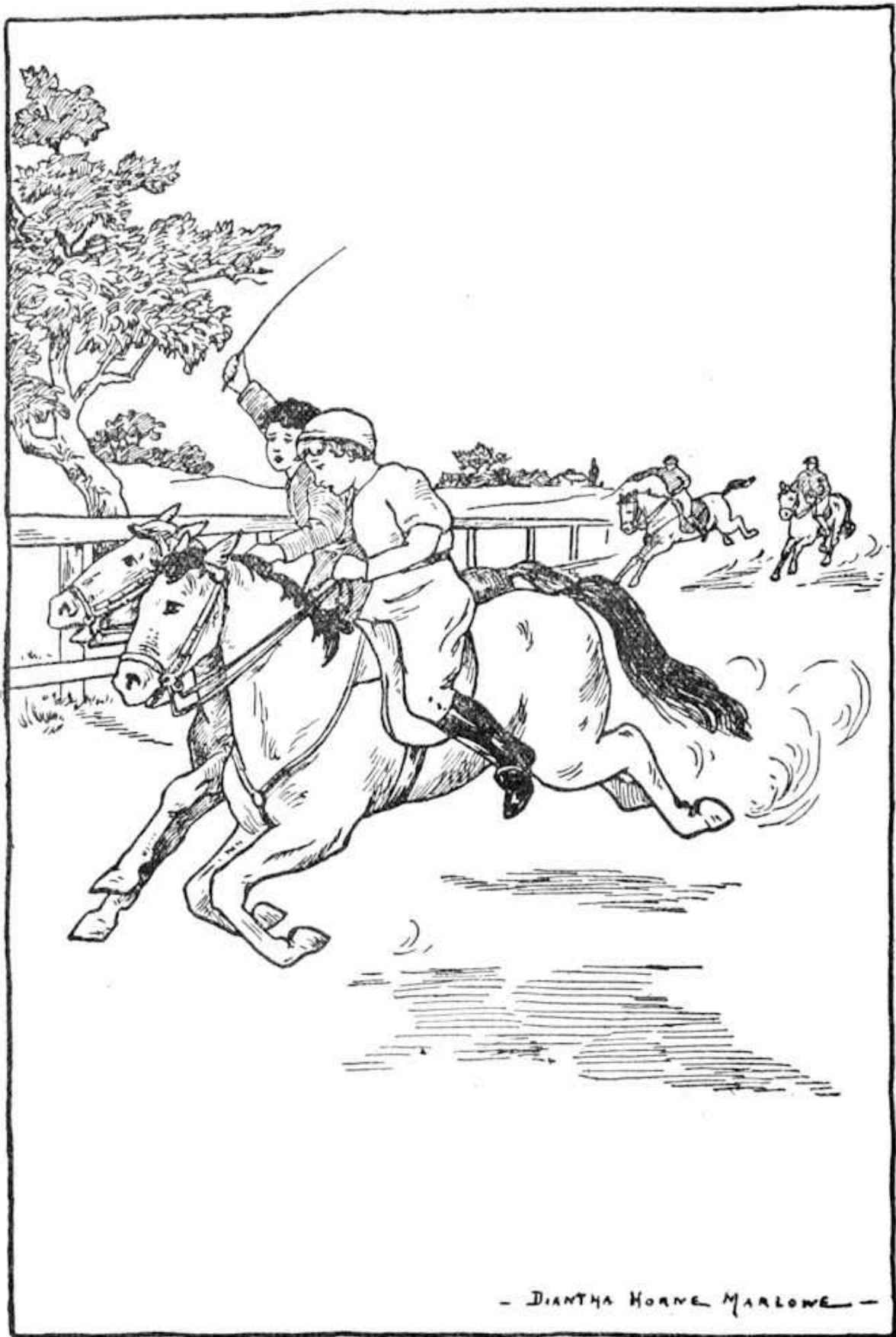


HARRIET A. CHEEVER

# THE ADVENTURES OF PONY DEXTER

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FOR A BRIEF SPACE WE SPED NECK TO NECK.



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# THE ADVENTURES OF PONY DEXTER

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## CHAPTER I

SUCH a bright beautiful morning as it was when we set out for the pony trot! Several well-grown boys in our neighbourhood owned ponies. There was Marco Boo, owned by Will Barrows; Tony Swift, owned by Thomas Gray; Go-It, the property of Hiram Wilks, and myself:—Pony Dexter, with Perley Bolt for master. It was the four of us that were entered for the morning's run.

Now a pony has eyes with which to see, and ears with which to hear, and it was no fault of mine that I heard grown lads, pretty young girls, and even a number of men, praise what they called my "dandy appearance" and extra fine "points."

So, once I began to notice more particularly the various things said in my hearing, it did not take me long to understand that my neck was long and unusually well-arched for a pony, my head short, ears upright, while there was a perfect curve from the top of the head to the middle of the back. The body was rather slender in which "rich veins" showed: the legs, with neither splints nor side bones of objectionable size, were straight, with flexible muscles and delicate fetlocks, the hoofs strong and high-heeled.

My dam, or mother, was a Welsh pony that had been brought to this country, and probably both speed and endurance were traceable to this lineage. For colour I was a light bay, with coal black mane and tail, both long and full-haired.

I wish it could be said with truth that I loved my master. Horses large and small, and ponies young or well grown are naturally affectionate and if only kindly treated, are gentle, kind and willing.

But I once heard a man say that Perley Bolt, my young master, had things too "soft" for his own good. I gradually found out that this meant Perley had too much money to do what he pleased with, was allowed to do pretty much as he chose, and had in consequence become a self-willed, high-tempered young fellow.

I was reared on a large stock-farm, a place where a great many horses and ponies were bred, trained and sold. It is not much fun being trained or "broken" as they call it. In first attempting management they allow a certain length of rein that a pony does not understand the use of. Then, if he bolts, tries to run, shows temper or great resistance, first thing he knows, by some trick of raising a strap that has been attached just above the hoofs, he is tripped up, and there he is on his knees, head down and unable to rise.

He tries to kick, no use; tries to make a plunge, impossible. Then he does the only thing there is to do, lies quietly down. They teach some startling lessons while he is in this position. Shake a newspaper before his ears and eyes, a thing said to often terrify a horse or pony if it flaunts unexpectedly before them in the street.

Sometimes a trainer rings a bell or even fires off a dreadful thing called a pistol while we are prostrate and unable to rise. But with a man standing close by there is a feeling of safety. And these are good and useful lessons. They teach fearlessness, and that a great many sights and sounds that would make us break the traces or throw a rider and run away if we knew nothing about them, are yet perfectly harmless of themselves and need cause poor horsy or pony no fear.

I was kindly treated and very happy during the first three years of my life at the cattle farm. The first simple lessons in training began when I was a year old. In this department I was a mere "kid pony," and in a large field was driven round and round every day, merely guided by reins, until I had learned to turn to right or left according to the pressure of the bit in my mouth.

After a few months, I trotted along nearly every day beside a staid, steady going horse much larger than myself, taller and stronger, that was hitched to a farm wagon. After I had learned courage and some stability by these means, a careful, good-natured groom began training me to the saddle, also to being harnessed to a light cart or wagon. But my chief use was to be that of a saddle horse.

It took time and patience to bring me up to what was considered a degree of ripe training, yet during that time I was made useful in many ways. Then, when at the age of three years, I was sent to a great "Horse Fair," it took but a few hours to have several fine offers made for me, and almost the first thing I knew, a tall

lad named Perley Bolt had become my new master. And I was sent properly tagged and ticketed to a place called Greenpoint, where a number of wealthy families had beautiful summer residences.

Near the "farm," which always for me means my first home, there were several children who used to be allowed occasionally to mount the ponies once they were considered sufficiently steady and gentle to be guided by the young people. I liked well the touch of the smooth hands and the laughing, coaxing voices.

They would tickle me with make-believe whips of braided twine or with a bunch of tied-up grasses when wanting a swift run around the field. It was my nature to be brisk and sportive, so, when a merry boy or a lively, fun-loving girl would leap astride my shining back, giving me a smart little slap, away I would go, fleet, sure-footed, enjoying the fun quite as much as my youthful rider. And if the wispy whip showed they wished to go still faster and romp along, romp I would until an indrawn rein warned that I must tone down, and take the way more slowly.

I have spoken of Marco Boo, owned by Will Barrows, another boy of Greenpoint, and as Marco like myself was reared at the farm, I of course felt interested in him as an old acquaintance.

Marco was a fine, spirited creature, but very nervous and apt to be irritable if teased or driven until overtired. Will Barrows unfortunately was fond of teasing everything that came his way. A cat or dog or even his little sister were objects he delighted to worry and hector; so I felt sorry for poor mettlesome Marco, fearing it would go hard with him, having his own disposition to contend with and Will Barrows for a master.

But here we were settled at Greenpoint and not very far from each other. And I began by alluding to the pony trot about to take place one charming day in early June. Also the four ponies whose names were given together with their owners, were the ones entered and were to compete as said before.

At the outskirts of the town was a large automobile manufactory with a wide circular track around the buildings where the machines were tried and tested. As more cars were ordered than could be completed in several months, there was likely to be but little outside practice for a few days. So the boys were given permission to run their ponies around the even drive as long as they liked that fair morning. [Pg 16]

At the fourth round, the pony coming first to the stake was to be declared the fastest one in town, and was to be given a pretty blanket.

Now Perley Bolt cared nothing whatever for the blanket. All kinds of covers were neatly folded on shelves in the harness-room of his father's stable; but he did care to have it said he owned the fastest pony in town. I was determined he should. Phil, the groom, combed my coat of shining bay, then rubbed it down with flannel and chamois until I shone like a polished mirror. Moreover he wet my fetlocks, sponged my head, and wove a red ribbon in my mane.

In high fettle I started out, arching my neck and lifting high my hoofs in token of the pride I felt in coming victory.

We were to start four abreast; I next to Marco Boo who was at one end, Tony Swift was on my other side, Go-It on the other end. News of the race had spread far and wide, and the enclosure was full of people. Men, boys and gay lassies were on hand to witness the test, which after all was to be of the simplest character. Merely four ponies, each trying to outrun the others.

At a given signal off we started, Go-It slightly in the lead. He had a free, swinging gait, and by means of an occasional kick-out kept well ahead during the first round. The face of Hiram Wilks showed one broad grin, so pleased was the big boy at the brave output of his spunky little pony. [Pg 17]

But during the second round, Marco Boo all at once, with head stretched forward, tail afloat and hoofs flying, shot ahead of poor Go-It, and the grin that had been on Hiram Wilks' face was transferred to that of Will Barrows.

I felt fear in a pony way for Marco Boo, because from what among other things I had heard and seen at the farm, I knew that a violent spurt of unusual speed could not long be kept up. And sure enough, at the beginning of the third round, Marco suddenly "broke up," and despite Will Barrows' loud cries and waving of the stinging pony whip, both Tony Swift and I, Pony Dexter, flew ahead. Then it was nip and tuck for us two. Tony was a quarter hand taller than I, the heaviest built of us all, and as his name indicated, swift and enduring.

Had our riders but known it, it would have been far better to have kept more quiet, bent to the work of guiding us, trusting to our own instinctive ambition to strive to run the other down. But Thomas Gray

shouted, hooted, rose in the saddle, and acted as though the noise he made and the mad figure he cut was going to rush Tony Swift to sure victory.

Perley Bolt, astride my back, was nearly as bad. He jerked the bit in my mouth, pulled my mane, dug his heels into my sides and roared at me as if to scare me into swifter action.

Until now I had not put forth all my strength. But suddenly I felt the good blood that was in me rising and clamouring to assert itself: I felt also the pushing power of those watching eyes, had heard the huzzahs when Tony and I took the lead in the race, almost felt the pounding of Perley's heart as with breathless heat he urged me on.

Tony Swift's fleet hoofs seemed scarcely to touch the hard track as he bounded along at my side. For a brief space we sped neck to neck. I scarcely saw the bars of the fence as we shot by them. The crowd grew quiet with interest and excitement. I caught a gasping sound in Tony's breathing. The way was becoming short, Tony was going in leaps; so was I. Then I gathered myself for one great plunge, made it; added half a dozen astounding leaps, and—the race was won!

The blanket was mine.

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THERE was a great hubbub all around and about me as the race ended. Perley Bolt, naturally tall, looked as though he had grown still taller as the young people pressed forward, shook his hand, said pleasant words of praise, and patted my face, neck and moist sides.

A very proud pony I was as my prouder master, mounting me, rode slowly away. Phil rubbed me down thoroughly, but would take no notice of my desire to get over to the trough and satisfy my eager thirst. Not until he had rubbed me dry and thrown a light linen cover over me would he let me drink.

I suppose knowing creatures like men, can tell when it is safe or unsafe to let animals drink cold water. Certain it is I had to wait Phil's time to get near the trough. Then how grateful, how delightful, the long, deep draughts of refreshing water! Surely man and beast must be thankful for this common boon and blessing.

I believe Phil gave me a little more than my usual supply of timothy and sweet clover for dinner, then, like a sensible pony, I dozed and rested quietly through the long, delicious summer afternoon.

Toward evening, my master, Perley, sauntered over to the stable, and during the talk he had with PHIL, I gathered that a second pony race was already being planned. Will Barrows claimed that Marco Boo made an unfortunate sprint because of being stung by a great green fly at just the wrong moment. And Thomas Gray declared that the only reason Tony Swift failed of winning the race, was because of having had the wrong bit in his mouth by mistake.

A day or two afterward in talking the affair over with his friends, Perley said with an air of importance:—

“Now there's one thing certain, whichever pony wins the race—that is, if I consent to enter Dexter again—there must be no making up excuses for those who fail. The one who comes out ahead wins fair and square.”

I scarcely knew why a touch of scorn crept into the boy's voice as he added,

“I'm sorry Dexter can't race for another prize, but my father doesn't like the idea. He gave away the blanket Dexter won and said it was glory enough to know I owned the fastest little trotter in town. He wasn't going to have stakes put up on anything in his stable.”

“I shall be satisfied to have Marco Boo come into his own, and be acknowledged the fastest pony in town,” Will Barrows said provokingly.

“Let's see him do it,” laughed Thomas Gray, owner of Tony Swift.

As the other boys turned away, Perley said to me,

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“Now, Mister Dexter, you're to take it easy until next trotting day; meantime, I must teach you a little something about saving your strength and speed in racing, for a strong final struggle.”

He needn't have troubled himself about teaching me that. Had I not already proved having some sense of the advantage of hoarding breath and muscle for the last hard reach?

The second trial came on attended with even more interest and a larger crowd than before. And every pony of the four came to the auto circle, fresh, full of spirit, and understanding what was expected of him—to prove himself the fleetest footed pony in the town. Reward enough it would be to either one to be patted, petted, and praised for having won the race.

Tony Swift held high his glossy head and sniffed the air as if to say: “Now watch me win where the other day I failed.”

Go-It stepped lightly and looked the game little fellow he really was.

Marco Boo took no notice of the rest of us, not even of me, his special acquaintance. I fancied Will Barrows might have taunted poor, sensitive Marco for not having outdone me on those last momentous leaps when we raced before.

We were drawn up in line ready for the starting signal to be given, when a soft-hearted young girl exclaimed,

“Oh, I think it's a shame to race those pretty creatures! Cruel, to pit them one against another, making them fly like mad, straining every nerve and wearing themselves out in the exertion they must make.”

She was with an older sister, who replied laughingly,

“Why, Bettie, they like it! It’s just as much fun for a horse or pony to run and race as it was for you to play ‘tag’ a few years ago. There is nothing cruel in running a healthy young pony round this small ring four times. It wouldn’t tire out four strong boys. So, enjoy it, Bettie, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t.”

She spoke the truth. As long as we are not unduly forced, lashed, or pricked with spurs, we like to dash out, show our speed, and realizing there is a goal ahead, run for it with all the vim there is in us. Who has not seen two or three dogs rushing along, heedless of everything but a desire on the part of each to leave the others behind. Just so, we small fellows of the great horse family feel our ambition to run and win in the simple trial of speed.

I was glad to see that Bettie looked happily on as we awaited the signal to start. Her eyes shone and once she felt the sport was sport indeed for us, she was quite as ready to enjoy it as anyone.

The flag was waved and off we flew. Marco Boo, who I thought looked sullen as he fell into line, lagged at the rear, taking no notice apparently of Will Barrows’ angry cries and efforts to make him push on. I was slightly ahead from the start, Tony Swift but a pace or two behind. Go-It was keeping up a steady, sweeping gait without a sign of breaking.

At the end of the second round Marco Boo was way behind. Go-It was nearly at my side. Tony Swift had fallen back by a couple of hands’ breadth.

All at once Marco Boo lowered his head, struck out his heels, shook his mane like an angry steer, and tore as if wild, causing loud shouts and cheers to rise from the amused and now freshly expectant crowd.

Before the third round was completed Marco had distanced all but myself, and I, bound to be the winner again if possible, ran as if for my life, no more than a yard ahead of the suddenly awakened Marco.

And so on until within a few feet of the goal. Will Barrows, ready to shout with triumph, sat lightly in the saddle, raising himself every other moment as if to lighten the pony’s load, his high, exultant tones no doubt lending speed to Marco’s bounding hoofs, at the same time I knew Perley Bolt was trembling with excitement, as with fierce and husky voice he called me “good, good boy,” and entreated me to make but one bound more.

Only a bound it seemed, and a second time I should have leaped to success, but within that short stride to a second victory my hoof caught, I tripped, and amid loud huzzahs Marco Boo rushed to the pole.

I did not quite fall, but the sharp halt at the critical moment proved my Waterloo. There had been a slight defect in the splendid track from the first of our starting out. It may be our flying hoofs had deepened it. What wonder that my small hoof catching directly in the little rut should have arrested my flight, and stopped the headlong race?

It was Will Barrows’ turn to exult and receive congratulations as he patted Marco Boo’s head with real pride. Leaving me to myself, Perley Bolt went over to the spot where I halted, then going up to the group about Will Barrows he said angrily,

“Why shouldn’t Dexter have slipped? Go look at the hole big as my two fists where his hoof caught. Wonder is he wasn’t thrown and I with him!”

“Oh, none of that,” jeered Will Barrows. “You made the terms yourself, Perley,” he repeated laughingly: “There must be no making up of excuses for those who do not win. Whoever comes in first will do it fair and square the same as I did with Dexter. I’ve got the fastest pony in town.”

Of course, Perley could not say a word to this, and he turned away with a frown on his face not pleasant to see. I was wishing he would come to me for my left knee was beginning to be painful, and I realized that in sinking downward on clapping my hoof into that hole I extricated it with a wrench that was going to tell.

As I stood by the rail merely fastened by my bridle I longed to have Phil apply the liniment that always helped me when sprained or bruised. I gave a low whinny, looking toward Perley, but he impatiently bade me “shut up” and I wondered how I would fare when at last he should deign to notice me.

I soon felt that a bunch was rising on my knee, but speechless animal that I was, it was useless trying to make my displeased young master understand that I needed care and easing.

That is one of the hard parts of being a mere animal without voice to make a plaint or tell of suffering. Patience is the only thing that helps us, and few human beings imagine how much patience and endurance

poor dumb animals have to teach themselves, in order to bear their aches and pains, and also to excuse the thoughtlessness of masters, young and old.

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It seemed as though Perley would never come to my aid. But alas! how cold and unkind was his manner when he finally stood beside me!

With a cross, impatient jerk he drew the bridle from the rail, and pulled me along, not stopping to mount as usual. For this, however, I was thankful as my knee ached so it would have been hard to have borne him. He did not go along the usual road, but branched off toward a piece of woods lying between Greenpoint and Emsted, the next station.

What was he about to do? The forbidding expression of his face boded no good for poor pony being led through this forest path. Not one word had he spoken thus far since leaving the auto grounds, only had paced along in sullen silence, now and then jerking at the rein. But he was my master, my keeper, and I could but follow where he led; then an unavoidable stumble made me long for a bit of sympathy, until stretching my long neck, I rested my chin for an instant on his sturdy shoulder.

“Get away there, you dunce!” he cried, tossing me aside with such a violent motion that I kept as far from him as possible.

In a secluded corner he fastened me securely.

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“There!” he cried defiantly, “stay where you are until you can learn to stand upon your feet instead of getting down on your knees just before the end of a race. When I get ready I’ll come for you.” And off he strode.

At the farm I had heard all kinds of stories about the treatment of animals at the hands of masters good and bad. Among others, I had heard how some men would stop right where they were with a stubborn horse, unharness, and tie him to the nearest tree, there leaving him all day and perhaps all night without food or water.

Well, perhaps a horse or pony would deserve to be left alone and kept hungry and thirsty who through willfulness or ill temper refused to do a master’s bidding.

But there was I, a faithful pony, if I do say it, always willing and obedient, because of an accident which I could in no way prevent, condemned to be left for hours without food or water, and without greatly needed care.

What right-minded person would not cry shame on the ungrateful boy, willing to so misuse me!

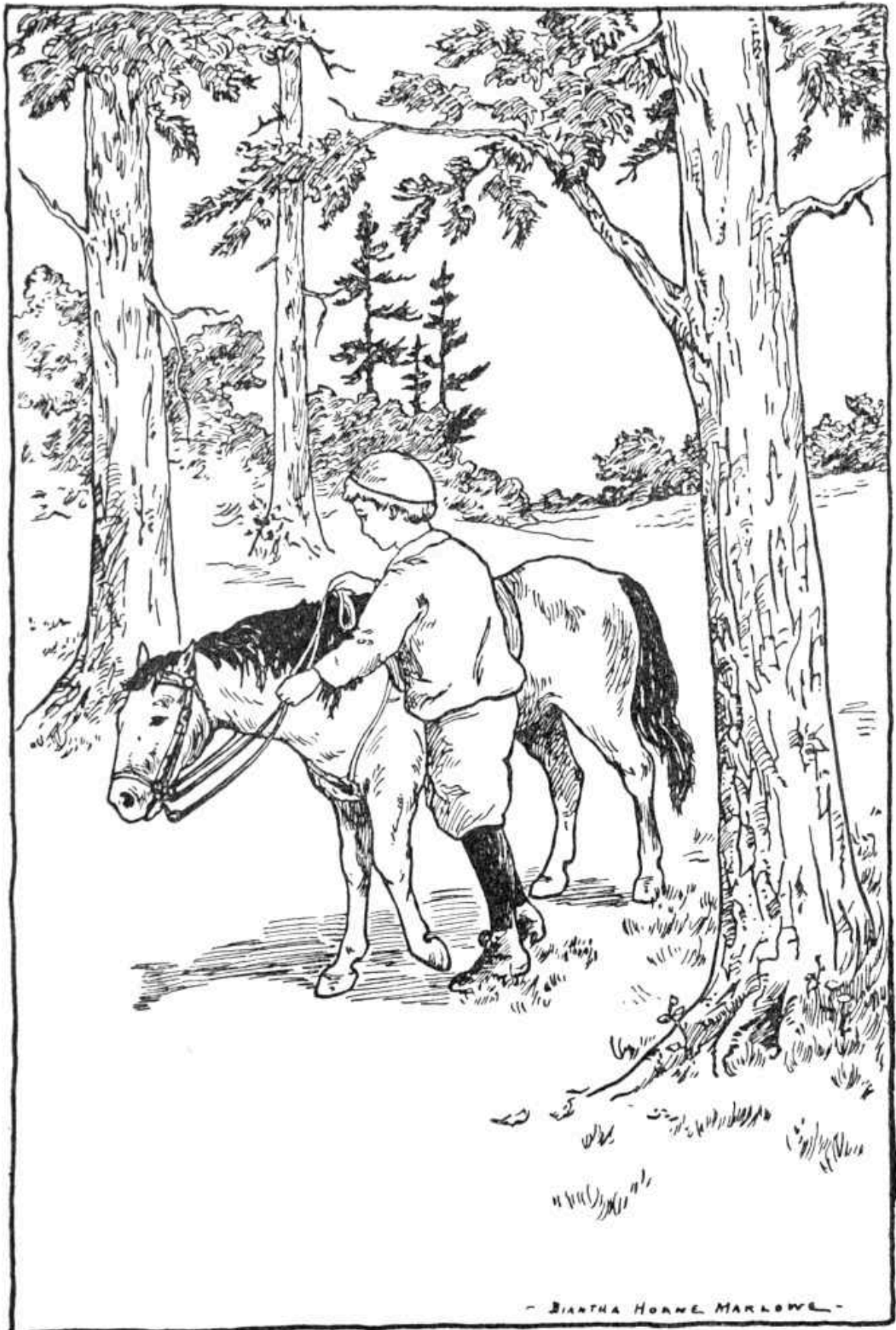
I gave one prolonged, pleading whinny as Perley marched away. He took no notice of it and was soon out of sight. Had he noticed that I limped as he led me along? He probably had as he did not mount as usual, but was too much maddened to appear either to notice or care.

The hot June sun filtered through the trees, but a soft breeze fanned and helped me. If I only could have lain down, it would have been great relief. But the bridle was fastened tightly to a branch on a level with my head, and either lying down or cropping grass was an impossibility.

It was an hour before noon when Perley left me. A far away clock had struck four in the afternoon before anyone passed through the woods. I was truly to be pitied. My mouth was parched after the hard run. I was hungry, as my breakfast had been an early and hurried one. My knee by this time felt about three times as large as it really was. It was particularly wearisome holding up my head as I was obliged to, and all my pony-being was silently crying for relief.

All at once I pricked an upright ear. A sound of whistling came from afar. Gradually it came nearer. My ears are keen and can distinguish between sounds even at a distance. I soon knew it was quite a young boy who was approaching, one who had not whistled very long.

Sure enough; pacing through the woods, his hands in the pockets of his short trousers, a little old polo cap on his head, came a boy eleven or twelve years of age. His sunny hair fluffed around his forehead scarcely concealed by the cap on the back of his head, the gay tune he was attempting going well with the bright, boyish face and careless stride.



WITH DEFT FINGERS HE UNFASTENED THE STOUT REIN.

He was passing me by, seeing nothing of the poor pony hidden by rank bushes taller than he. I could not see him go. A long, shrill whinny made him look around in surprise. Another instant brought him to my side. His voice, the gentle, caressing voice of a dear, tender-hearted laddie, was like music and healing to my ears.

“Why, hossy!” he began, his dark eyes running me over with not altogether unpractised an air, “How came you here, your head strapped up in that style, your eyes heavy for this time o’ day? Bless us, but you’re tired!

Been running?”

He was passing a hand swiftly over me as he talked, and I stood with one leg uplifted, for my knee was aching with dull thuds.

“Ha!” he cried suddenly, “what’s this? What’s got your knee, hossy? Looks to me as if you’d been used pretty hard. Come here, now.”

With deft fingers he unfastened the stout rein, letting down my tired head. Then he led me across to where a large rock high enough for him to seat himself comfortably, enabled him to look me over more thoroughly.

“Thirsty?” he asked.

I whinnied and stretched my head toward the kind hands.

“You come with me,” he said again.

“Lame, aren’t you? Well, you’re too fine a little fellow to get the treatment somebody’s given you. Jinks! but I wish you was my little hossy, wouldn’t you get the care though!”

He smiled a bit ruefully and added: “Between you and me, pony dear, I don’t get just the care myself I might have. But never mind! I’m going to take care of myself before long, then I’ll have a better chance perhaps. May have a fine little hossy of my own some day, who knows? Now drink.”

He had been slowly leading me along a foot path I had never trodden before, and all at once before my half-closed eyes gleamed the clear water of a spring,—oh, gladsome sight! I drank and drank as if never to be satisfied. Then I cropped the sweet, fresh grass growing all around the green glade.

“You’re tired and hungry and hurt,” said the boy; “chomp away there until you’re satisfied, then let’s see what ails that puffy leg.”

After satisfying my hunger, I felt overcome with fatigue, but on dropping to my knees, I whinnied with pain, then stretched my left leg straight along the grass. This gave the boy a good opportunity to examine it closely.

“Jinks!” he exclaimed, “you’ve got a sprain there that’s got to be looked after, or first thing you know, you’ll have a stiff joint, then—they won’t want you long.”

He felt all around, pressing gently the swelling, and peering close as if attempting to discover the cause of the wound. Then he looked into my mouth, quite with the air of an experienced little jockey. He seemed puzzled and began whistling as if to help out his thoughts. Then he said a queer thing:—

“Hossy, I don’t believe I should think much of your master, and I’d like to know you, if I should see you again.”

He got up and went over to the spring. In a moment back he came, his rather doubtful looking handkerchief sopped full of water. Oh, but it felt good, that cool, refreshing, helpful rag, bound far as it would go about my inflamed knee. I lifted my heavy eyes in dumb, yet I hoped, expressive gratitude to his face.

“Feels good, doesn’t it?” he said. “Well, let’s have it again.”

Four times he went to and fro, kind, bonnie, willing, pressing cooling water against the hurt knee, already less painful as the wet, healing bit of cloth was applied.

It was past five o’clock when tramping feet were heard, coming briskly through the woods, and at a little distance Perley Bolt began looking for a vanished pony. In a few moments he came into view when my sunny young friend called out,

“Hullo there! Looking for an injured hossy?”

Perley came over in hot haste. “What you doing with my pony?” he asked, neither his voice nor manner those of a young gentleman.

But he of the sunny hair was not afraid. He began,

“I found this pretty pony in anything but a pretty fix. He was starved, parched and his head tied up so high he couldn’t rest neck or limb. Worst of all, he’s got a sprain that if you don’t liniment or salve pretty freely when you get him home, he’ll have a knee stick stiff, then let’s see you drive or ride pretty hossy any more.”

“I’m able to take care of my own pony,” was the haughty reply. “He went back on me at a race this morning. I tied him up as a punishment for his clumsiness, pitching into a hole, and losing me the victory of having the fastest pony in town. He might have looked where he was going and not disappointed me so! Have you let him feed?”

“Yes,” the boy answered brightly, “I let him crop grass and watered him. I tied up his leg too.”

“Well, he won’t get anything more to-night,” snarled Perley. “As to his knee, Phil at the stable can see about that.”

I knew the kind boy watched as Perley urged me to my feet and led me away. I tried at the last moment to look my gratitude, and hoped my young friend understood. At the edge of the woods Perley mounted me, but I had to limp so badly he soon took to leading me again. He gave directions to Phil not to feed me, but to see what my knee might need. As he went toward the house, Phil, a great-hearted, characteristic Scotchman, muttered:—

“Hoot! an it’s mesel will feed Meester Dexter all he desarves. Plenty o’ water the laddie will get too. An’ ye may think yersel lucky, Meester Perley, if the braw leetle beastie gets oot o’ this wi’ a whole knee, th’ foolish lad that ye are! Cross an’ cranky because the bit o’ a horse treeped into a hole, like as ye’d done yersel, had ye coom upon it, wi’ your eyes feexed on a pole!”

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THE next morning I was much better. Phil's strong liniment had put down the swelling, but my knee was still sensitive and when Perley proposed riding me to a spot three miles distant to see a ball game, Phil declared it would be unwise and perhaps ruinous to do so.

But my headstrong young master would not listen to the knowing groom, and so to the game and back I bore him, six miles in all. Before we reached home, I was quite lame again with worse pain in my knee than I had felt before. Phil rubbed and bandaged, gave me a careful drying off, and a nice warm mash of bran and meal. The next day something in his keen blue eye made Master Perley think it best not to meddle with his judicious treatment.

I was coming up all right again, but one night when it had suddenly grown cold for June, Perley, without saying a word to Phil, put on my saddle and rode me to Emsted, where some young people were to have a moonlight dance. Here I was left standing in an open shed for several hours without a sign of a covering. [Pg 35]

At midnight, Phil, who had a good room upstairs in the stable, heard me breathing hard and laboriously. He knew an attack of asthma had come on, a trouble to which horses and ponies are quite subject upon taking a sudden cold.

This proved disastrous. What with my knee, which swelled again, and the wheezing, difficult breathing, I was a poor sick pony, entirely unfit for use for several days. At that juncture something occurred which brought about one of the important changes of my life.

Once again I was getting better, when Perley resolved to drive me a mile beyond Emsted in company with Marco Boo and Tony Swift, whose owners like himself were to attend a picnic. Phil refused to get me ready, declaring it a sinful shame to ride a pony not wholly recovered from a bad bruise and an illness besides.

Phil was a thoroughly experienced groom, caring well for me as well as for a splendid Morgan bay in a wide box stall at the other end of the stable; but being a carriage horse only, I seldom saw the valuable thoroughbred of which Mr. Bolt, Perley's father, was both fond and proud.

Now, Phil stood his ground, declaring me still a half sick pony. Hard words followed. Cuddled in my comfortable stall, I heard Perley give lordly orders, and Phil declare he'd be "pickled, salted an' roasted" before he'd comb or saddle me again until I was fit for the road.

Perley threatened to go and tell his father that Phil had refused to obey orders. But this time the Scotch temper was thoroughly roused. "'Tis to your father I'll gang mesel'," spurred Phil, "an' tell the whole story o' yer mischeevous ways wi' the puir leetle hoss! Meesery enough ye've caused him, now I'll hev a bit worr'd to say."

At that I noticed Perley changed his tune. He told Phil he needn't get me ready, he'd do it himself. But Phil's sturdy reply would have made me smile, could a pony manage to smile.

"It's neither you nor me will saddle th' pony th' day. To yer father I gang, an' wotever cooms o' it, may coom. I'll stan' noo more o' yer dour actins, ye'll see noo!"

Off strode Phil in the direction of the house. In a few moments he returned, Mr. Bolt with him. Perley tried to look spunky and injured as his father approached, but before he could speak a word his father asked sternly,

"What's this I hear about your determination to use a lame, sick pony? If what Phil tells me is true, I'll sell the little fellow next thing I do!"

Mr. Bolt was an indulgent, generous man. It was a fact that his son had more money to spend than was good for him, also the boy had been allowed to have his own way to too great a degree. But his father, if open-handed and easy-going, was of a kind, humane nature, and anything like cruelty and injustice [Pg 36] toward defenceless animals, was something he had no mind to tolerate.

Perley listened, half smiling at his father's indignant outburst, not thinking it best to deny the things Phil had accused him of. But as his father turned away he said with a low laugh:—

"Dad blusters and scolds, then forgets everything before he reaches the next corner."

Phil made no reply. Mr. Bolt started for the city, and Perley went off to go by train to the picnic.

About the middle of the morning a brisk, businesslike man made his appearance at the stable, saying he had come for “Dexter”, a pony Mr. Bolt had sold him.

Phil was taken by surprise, notwithstanding what Mr. Bolt had said. In fact he found it hard to believe the truth until Mr. Van Vim, whom he knew for a straightforward man, showed the receipt, convincing him that I and certain effects had really been sold. Mr. Van Vim, who kept a first-class livery stable only a few streets from Mr. Bolt’s place, had not needed to look me over before purchasing. I was well known in Greenpoint.

As Phil went about getting the saddle and blankets, now also the property of Mr. Van Vim, he talked to me in grieved, regretful strain:—

“Dexter, dear-r, I’ll be greetin’ fer ye! I will that! But Meester Bolt, he hev a temper matchin’ Master Perley’s, an’ maybe it’s a gude thing that he hev. Wot th’ lad will say when he finds ye’ve ganged awa’<sup>[Pg 38]</sup> I’m sure I dinna ken. It’s to a kind mon ye go, but ye’ll hev plenty to do at the livery. Verra like ye’ll not bide there lang. Bye, bye, laddie; keep yer coorage oop an’ gude luck attend ye!”

And so I passed from my snug quarters at Mr. Bolt’s, having learned what a hard, unhappy thing it is for a pony to live with man or boy, who, having a hard, strong will, is too willing to indulge it.

But I was to have a jolly kind of life at the livery.

Go-It, Hiram Wilks’ smart stepping pony, was there, and several gentlemen of Greenpoint kept fine thoroughbreds with Mr. Van Vim, an experienced horseman himself, who gave the best of care to the animals committed to his keeping.

A man named “Tillings” was my special groom, a rollicking Irishman who sang in time to the curry comb, or stamped and whistled with the back and forward movement of the polishing cloths.

Under Tillings’ careful treatment I was soon thoroughly myself again. All signs of asthma disappeared, my knee healed and grew strong, and I was ready to race and romp with the best of them. By this time, July had come with its great heat, its myriad flowers, its thunder showers and usually delicious mornings. One day, a breezy girl came to my stall, exclaiming, “So this is Dexter? Well now, do you suppose he’ll take kindly to the side-saddle? Father won’t let me ride astride as some girls do, he thinks it isn’t graceful, but I’m going on that mock hunt to-morrow, and should like to ride this beautiful pony if I can.” [Pg 39]

Then I had a new experience. Tillings put on me a handsome leather saddle, with shorter stirrups than ever had dangled at my side before, and led me out to the stable yard. At a high block, Miss Gladys Fleming mounted, and Tillings began leading me, until, as he said, I “got uset to the flopping o’ skirts aboon the knees.”

It did feel funny, all that cloth flapping against my sides, but the girl was light as a feather and must have ridden before, for in a few moments she told Tillings to let go, and sat firm and fearlessly as I ran at a good pace around the stable yard.

There really was great sport the next day at what was called the “fox hunt”.

It amounted to this: an anise-bag—a bag filled with anise seed or flower, of a strong, pungent odour—had been dragged over a considerable number of miles, and sporting hounds taking the scent raced toward the pretended lair of poor Reynard, who fortunately this time was a mere myth. Marco Boo was also in the race, and for the rest there were chiefly young horses.

I gathered from what was said, that it was very unusual for ponies to be in a fox hunt, as the dogs were swifter than even trained hunters; beautiful, lithe horses, fleet, sure-footed, and fond of racing, folding their forearms and leaping a fence like cats, while scudding with light hoofs in eagerness to be “in” when ~~the~~<sup>the</sup> fox is run down.

But this was a kind of “make-believe” hunt, and I tested my speed with real zest and enjoyment until horses and ponies stopped with the dogs at a thick patch of bushes, in which had been hidden a great black rag doll, placed for fun at the end of the anise trail.

Could you but have seen the fate of the big rag doll! It was tossed and tossed, high as the indignant dogs could fling. Had it not been made strong with linen twine and leather bindings, the mimic man would have been a mere mass of tatters in less time than it takes to tell of it. But after half an hour of tossing, bounding, pulling and rending, there remained only fragments of what had been a funny figure serving as a decoy or piece of false game.

Then the chief fun of the day being over, we raced home, a beautiful, sleek Arabian trotting with rhythmic measure to the light clatter of my hoofs. Go-It also made brave time, striding along with steady, even gait, Hiram Wilks using neither voice nor tightening rein to spur him on.

It was a mirthful, healthful run, the sportive hounds alternately lagging behind, or rushing with lolling tongues way ahead of the ambling cavalcade that rode to the music of cheery voices and rippling laughter.

It was a bright, happy chapter in my pony life.

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I HAD soon decided that Gladys Fleming was an attractive, winsome young creature of warm heart and loving nature. She enjoyed putting me to my best speed on part of the homeward way, and I found hearty pleasure in responding to her clucks and smart little pats, leaving light hoof-prints along the even, sunny road.

I also felt it certain that the lordly looking young man mounted on the mottled Arabian, a horse of medium build and perfect shape, knew quite as much concerning Miss Gladys' fine traits as anyone did. The graceful Arabian was close beside me all the homeward path. "I want father to buy me this pony," said the laughing girl, "but Tillings says that Perley Bolt is desperate to get him back. He stands ready to pay more than Mr. Van Vim gave for him. But Mr. Van Vim said he shouldn't have him back under a week from the time he began to be driven again if at all. I've told Tillings to let me know just the hour the week is up and he promises he will. Then if Perley hasn't reclaimed him, father says perhaps I shall have Dexter for my own dear pony. I want him dreadfully!"

"When will the week be up?" asked her companion, Mr. Chester Moore.

"Next Thursday at noon," Gladys replied.

Now I at once became anxious to have the three days remaining before Thursday noon expire. What would take place before then, who could tell? I only knew I was very, very anxious to have Gladys for a mistress, but was helpless to let her know it. I could only stretch out my neck for the caress she was quick to give as she dismounted at the stable, and look after her with beseeching eyes as they led me back to my stall.

Two days after this we had a bit of rare sport at Van Vim's. There was a great cat that persistently kept around the stable. Had he been useful and of a good disposition he would have been welcome and kindly treated. But he was determined to tease and pester the more nervous horses, and would worry the little dogs that were really afraid of him. Consequently the stable men tried to get rid of him.

One day, Tillings was obliged to go some twenty miles into the country, taking a horse and buggy to a man who had purchased both. He was to return by train. Here was a grand chance to dispose of "Hector," as he had been dubbed. It was thought to be no cruelty to drop a great healthy cat, and let him grub for himself or find a good home, as he could, if he only would behave himself.

The trip was taken, Hector released, and given the privilege of teasing where he could. Late in the afternoon Tillings entered the stable to behold Hector perched a-top of a great bran box, as the man said, "grinning from ear to ear." He had reached Greenpoint by ways best known to himself, sooner than Tillings had reached it by train.

Before this, a grocer had wanted him, and one morning carried him away. No; Hector had made up his pussy-cat mind to stay at Van Vim's stable, and stay he would whether wanted or not.

So there he was still nibbling at the fetlocks of mettlesome horses, and tormenting every little dog that followed its master to the stable. Tillings set his mind to work wondering by what means he could drive him away once for all. He could do nothing cruel, yet was bound to rid the place of him as soon as possible.

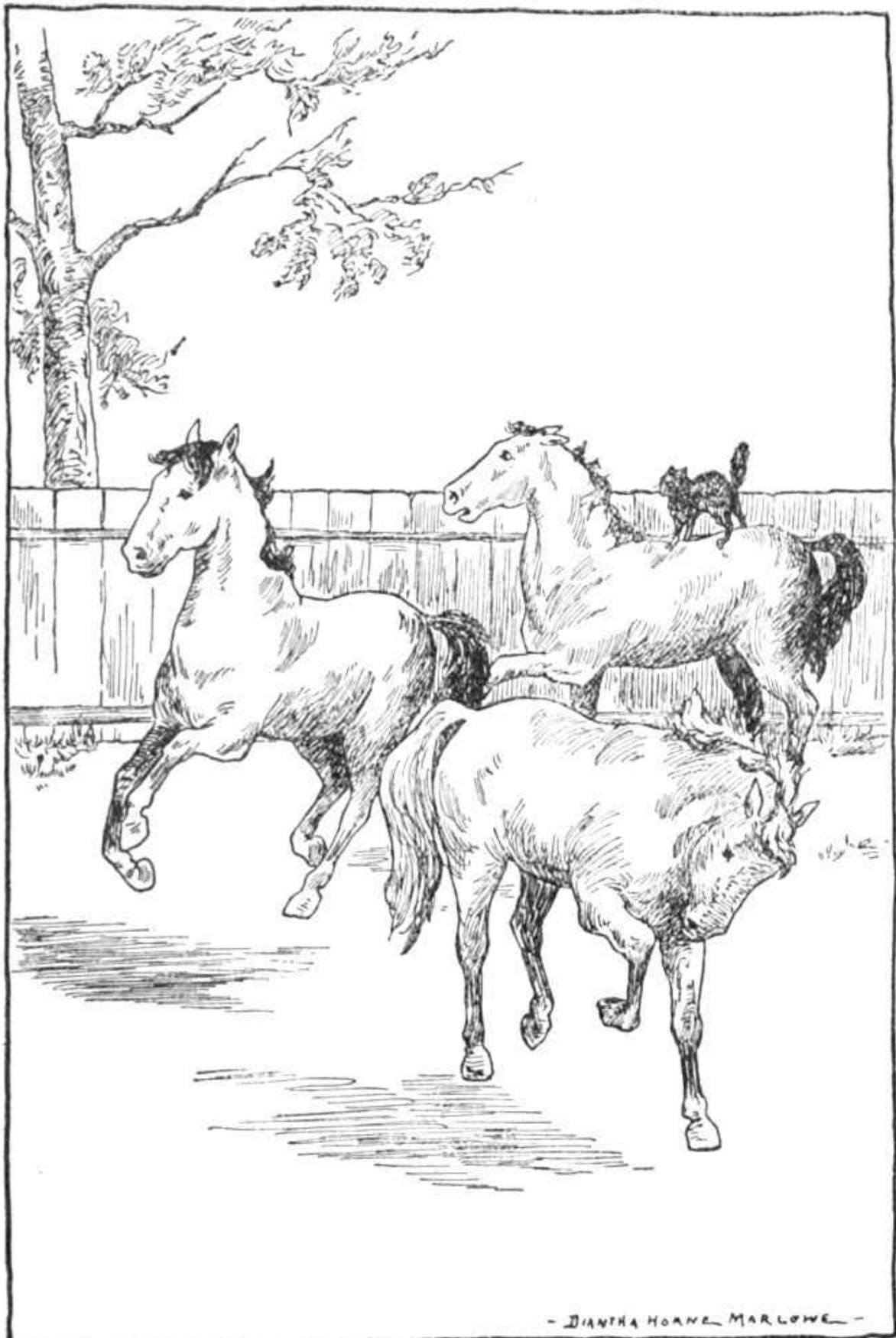
On that day, the second after the fox hunt, Marco Boo, two or three frolicsome young horses and myself were in the stable yard, all full of life and fun, as without tether or rein we were free to caper about as we chose. Tillings was fastening a "boot" around the leg of a horse that "interfered" when Hector gave a sly nip at the thoroughbred's hind leg.

"Quick as a wink" Tillings seized the great cat and threw him over into the stable yard midst the kicking, romping horses. A spry animal like a cat is hard to be cornered. It will either run up a tree, leap to a fence or cuddle in a corner, defiance in every bristling hair. Nature has taught him the sharp trick of eluding running hoofs and rolling wheels.

But for once Hector was completely confused. There was no tree to climb, the fence was too high to be reached by a single bound, and the rounding fence offered no corners. Neither was horse or pony going to mince matters for the frightened cat's accommodation. Had Tillings stopped to witness Hector's dilemma, his kind heart might have failed him in carrying out the deserved penalty.

He ducked as for his life between our legs, tried to leap the fence but failed, clawed at it for a knot hole, but there was none. Finally in a fierce attempt to reach a crack at the stable door, he came down plump on Marco Boo's back. The pony immediately laid down, and rolled over, shedding the nimble cat, who squeezed himself close to the fence while perilously near the bounding hoofs he could not seem to elude.

At length in wild frenzy he made a bold dash, flew to the back of a horse and from that flew completely over the fence, landing with a slam on the back of an astonished staghound, who immediately gave fierce and growling chase. The loud whistle of his master called him back, but Hector's flying heels made the men who witnessed the droll scamper roar with laughter.



HE MADE A BOLD DASH—FLEW TO THE BACK OF A HORSE, ETC.

And that was the last of Hector. What with scratching for his life midst a yardful of heedless, scampering horses, escaping by a furious bound and merciless tumble, to be chased by a great growling hound of a dog, Hector evidently was warned by every scrap of feline instinct he possessed, that he had better seek pastures new in which to indulge his teasing nature.

The week was not quite up when it would be decided who was to become my new mistress or master when an event occurred, which, all unforeseen, was to bring greater changes in my life than any I had yet even

dreamed of.

From remarks that have reached my ears, it must be that men and women think their lives are changeful, but they perhaps seldom give a thought to the fact that poor dumb animals feel change only second in keenness to the way human beings feel it. We are susceptible to great homesickness, notice, sometimes quite unhappily, a different diet, and have been known to grieve to death over parting with a beloved master or mistress.

But in speaking of changes, I had heard Phil at Mr. Bolt's stable, exclaim, "Ah, weel a-weel, sic is life!" and Tillings at Mr. Van Vim's livery, cry, "Faix, an' sich is life!" So I suppose if many an animal could use human language, its cry would be, "Ah well, such is life!"

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THE July night closed in misty and dark, for there was no moon. Tillings had long since gone up to his room, and for hours the dull thunder of his heavy snoring had boomed along our stalls.

I slept and waked and waked and slept after the manner of most animals. As I slowly opened my eyes after a long nap, I heard a low, slow, grating noise which did not in the least disturb Tillings' deep slumber. No dog was about the place or his quick ear would have heard the quiet picking, and a roaring bark would have brought Tillings down in great haste.

Very stealthily at length a man entered, carrying a queer kind of light. I know now it came from a "dark lantern," a kind of lantern shedding light from a small opening that could be quickly closed. It is sometimes called a "bull's eye."

This silent figure tiptoed from stall to stall, casting a swift, searching glance into each. Then he came back to mine, lifted my feet very gently, and I think stuck some kind of soft, thick padding along each hock. He next unhitched my long, leather chain and led me slowly and guardedly out. As he did so, I gave a loud, long whinny, but for once Tillings did not hear, and it was so against my nature to kick or struggle, it never occurred to me to do either.

He closed the stable door without a sound, walked me fully a quarter of a mile, then mounted bareback and set me to a smart, steady pace. We journeyed all the rest of the night, and nearly all the next day, until I could scarcely hobble.

Before daylight the pads in my hoofs, which made my hoof beats almost noiseless, had rolled into little balls hurting me so the man relieved me of them. And at times he would dismount and walk beside me a few miles. As he was a heavy man I could not have stood the long journey as I did, had he made me carry him all the way. At noon he gave me a small pail of oats.

Toward dusk, such a queer place as I found myself in! A wide, green space, with things called "tents" in which lived men, women and children. It was a gipsy camp. And a man named "Rondo," a gipsy, had stolen me.

I was not unkindly treated. Once we reached the encampment, water was given me,—clear and delicious it was too, right from a spring, and I was fed, meagrely I must confess, then fastened to a tree under which I could lie down, on a large, thick blanket, which was old and ragged, but yet kept me warm.

I must have slept immediately upon lying down for I knew nothing more until a smart slap on my plump flank roused me, and a July sun was already high in the heavens.

A busy scene was all around. Women were washing dishes at a rude table, breakfast was well over; men were brushing showy garments, while a few children danced to the music of bones and tambourines. I was given a scanty breakfast of plain hay, no oats, no sweet timothy rich with clover, but just dry hay and water.

Then came the queerest performance in which I ever hope to figure. A swarthy man held me firmly by the bridle, while another man *painted* me from ear-tips to ankle-ends, and—black, coal black! my whole body matching mane and tail of midnight hue. Then they named me "Don."

So I was no longer a bay pony called Dexter, but a black pony by the name of Don.

A brand new life was before me. It transpired that I was to be a "trick pony," and although the few things I was to be taught were very simple, it yet was astonishing how soon I learned.

First, I was to let no one mount me but Rondo and a boy called "Nick," who fed, watered and cleaned me,—all I ever was cleaned. Every little while I was given a fresh coat of colouring, which I somehow hated. Soon I was taught to dance, "taking steps" after the manner of dancing men. Are you curious to know how this was done?

I am glad to say no cruelty was resorted to. Animals, a great many of them, are just as fond of sugar as are little boys. This is particularly true of horses and ponies. A chunk of sugar weighing half a pound or more was placed before me, and in time I came to know, just as a child would, that when I had done what was required I would be given the sugar and not before.

Rondo would stand before me, lift a foot and crook a knee. Nick would slap my leg, reaching out his hand to take my hoof. In this way I learned the first movement toward dancing.

Then Rondo would slide a foot across the sward. I learned to slide a hoof in the same manner. Pretty soon I understood with a kind of “horse sense” that I was to try doing whatever Rondo did, at lesson time. Sugar rewarded each victory, and as said before, it was astonishing how soon I could lift a hoof, bend a knee, slide, half curvet, lift another fore hoof, slide, curvet, turn, chassé, and promenade a few steps.

Then I was taught to “shed” anyone and everyone who attempted to mount me, except Rondo, Nick, and one of the little girls, if she was placed on my back by one of the men. I must shy, curvet and elude anyone else. Should anyone by a dexterous movement succeed in getting on to my back, I must lie down, half roll over, and adroitly spill the venturesome one.

For several weeks my life in the gipsy camp was full of variety and much that was amusing while the warm weather lasted. The outdoor life was pleasant and free, what was expected of me was easy in the main although I often was miserably tired when I laid down at night. My food also was coarse and scanty, and I missed pitifully the careful grooming that hitherto I had always received.

One thing I had been taught with particular strictness was not to allow people to pat or caress me. This, no doubt, had to do with the paint or stain with which I was continually covered. Tricks however were not all that was expected of me.

Every pleasant evening, Rondo, Mother Hubbard—the Madame of the tribe—two or three children and Nick, went to different villages around the place of encampment, and under a light, flimsy tent, Mother Hubbard told fortunes, Nick played bones or the tambourine, the children danced, and I showed off my few tricks.

Wherever we travelled to and fro, on my back was a big box containing the velvet gown and tinsel cap in which Mother Hubbard arrayed herself as the fortune teller. Also in a great, unwieldy bundle was the portable tent which always must be erected by eight o’clock. Besides this, on the return trip the children would take turns in riding a-top of the load with which I was already burdened.

Our tramps were long and tiresome. It was wonderful that the younger people could trudge so far, dance their jigs and flings, then walk even a portion of the way home. But there was excitement in seeing <sup>troups</sup> of people, chiefly young, in gay spirits and bright summer attire, pouring into the lighted tent, and midst jokes and laughter hearing the fortunes told, which always must have been pleasant and agreeable, for they went as they came, full of high spirits and laughter.

Once in a while older people came, and more than once, an officer of the law, in helmet, and with brass buttons on his coat, would come and look around, but he always found things quiet and orderly.

I sometimes felt a hope stirring within me that he might be looking for a lost pony, but how, pray, would anyone know me for a bay pony when wearing a coat as black as black could be?

After being in a place about two weeks, we would pack up and go—always by night—to some other town, select a rural spot, a bit of woods if possible, pitch the tents, then at night go to some “open” near the village and draw the crowds sure to assemble.

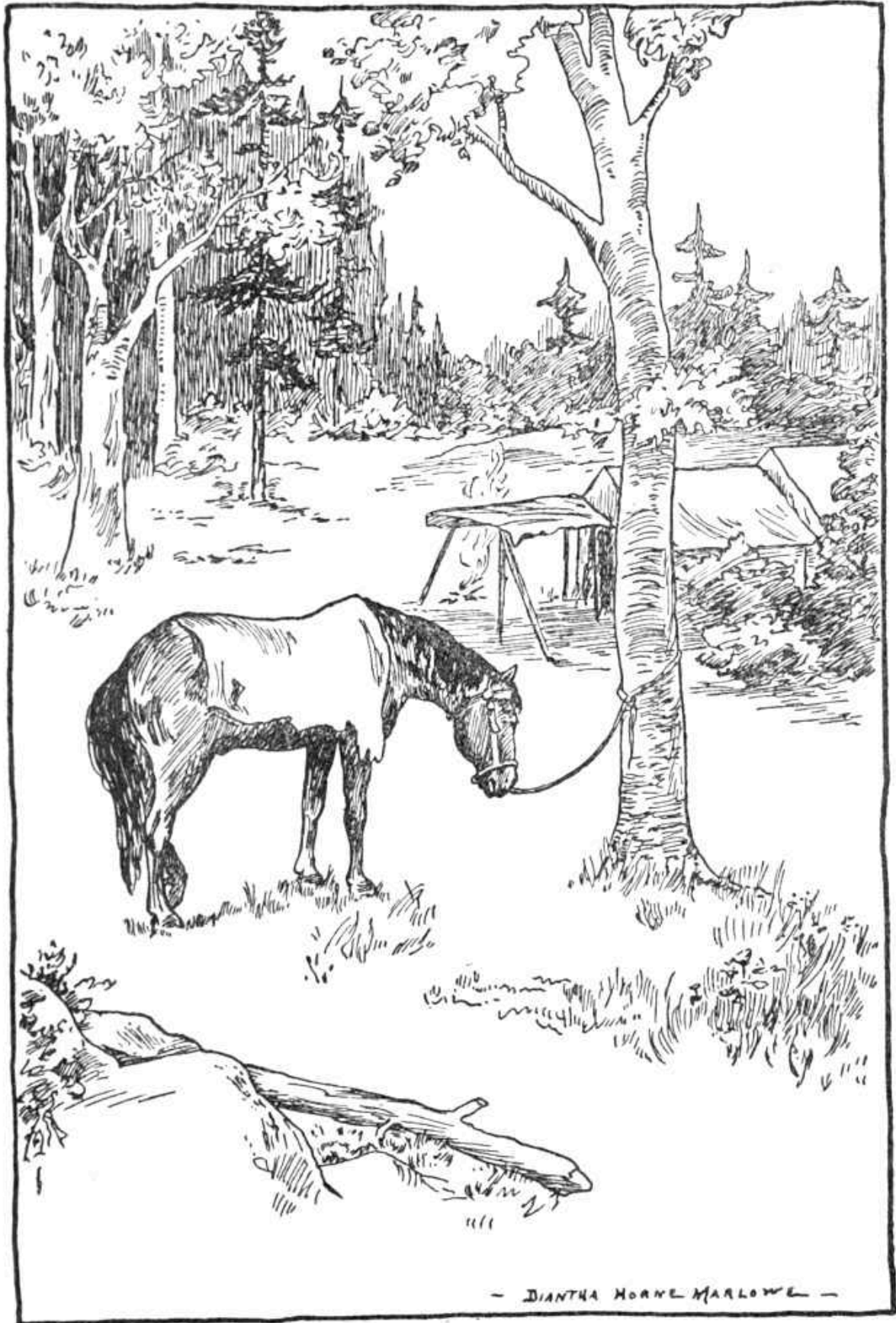
I think a good deal of money rolled into Mother Hubbard’s tin cup. The tribe had plenty of food such as it was, but they lived on coarse supplies, and largely from the baker’s wagon sure to promptly find us out. The men smoked a good deal, as also did Mother Hubbard.

As for me, I soon began to pine for the healthful nourishment always enjoyed until now. Hay and freshly dried grass, never anything else was given me. No sweet timothy, fragrant with clover, no oats or <sup>crushed</sup> corn; never a mouthful of scalded bran after a long, long march in a chilly drizzle. For by the last of August we began to have cool, damp nights, when the men, women and children would drink steaming tea brewed over a good hot fire kindled outside the main tent after the night’s tramp.

But no one thought of poor “Don” tethered too far off to feel the warm blaze, and longing for a little outside or inside warming.

During September I began to show the effects of hard work and no play. My smooth coat had grown rough, my ankles swelled from too much wearisome travel, and I was tired all the time, very tired. I should have really suffered now from the cold but for an old piece of carpet that was thrown over me at night.

Oh, how I longed for the home farm, or Mr. Bolt's warm stall, or Mr. Van Vim's well kept stable, with Tillings to care for my pony wants!



OH! HOW I LONGED FOR THE HOME FARM!

PRETTY soon I began to hear talk about going into “winter quarters.” I didn’t know what this meant, but in time it was going to be understood. Through September we had mild, beautiful days, and the first part of the month the nights were not so bad, seeing I had the piece of carpeting to keep me warm. Business was still brisk during the evening, and our tramps were taken as usual.

But one night toward the last of the month there came a terrible rain storm. Oh, how the winds whistled through the piece of woods, and how the wet, brown leaves came twirling down! The big tent shook as if the stout poles and thole pins would not be strong enough to keep it erect.

Great sheets of rubber cloth were stretched and fastened outside, while a little charcoal stove made the inside comfortable. The wind sent whiffs laden with the scent of steeping tea across to where I stood, not half protected from mighty gusts of wind and rain.

The storm passed, but my joints were left stiff and sore from unkind exposure. Dancing was out of the question, neither could I journey forth at night laden with boxes and the weight of a child. My old enemy, asthma, returned, and after two nights the men had raised a rude shed in which I felt some approach to comfort.

This was doubtless felt to be a necessity, for I heard Rondo say to Nick: “We can’t afford to lose him, the best pony we ever had.”

I did not know in just what way he might “lose” me, but I confess to feeling that I didn’t much care what became of me. I had become nothing better than one of those “pack horses” I had heard talked of at Van Vim’s stable.

Yet even they were better off than I. For being naturally beasts of burden, did I not once hear Mr. Van Vim telling of a pair of short, hardy Percheron draught-horses, splendid creatures of style, strength and endurance, that could do their twelve hours of hauling day after day, and seem not a whit worn from month to month?

I was not cut out for a beast of burden, yet that was what I had become.

October came while I was still wheezing with asthma, although getting better from day to day. The stiffness also was getting out of my joints, but with that horse sense which often serves dumb animals well, I still pretended great stiffness, for I knew that once I appeared able to get about with anything like ease, I would have to do severe work in helping to move heavy loads, for now the tribe was all ready for winter quarters.

It was getting far too cold to pitch the flimsy tent at the outskirts of villages; even the young people now preferred indoor sports, and it was plain to see that gipsying was over for the season.

It was just at this time, when the camp was about to break up, that Nick, boy of all work, tent cleaner, pony tender and errand boy, was taken ill, and Rondo with great unwillingness declared that another boy must be hired for a few days. No time must be lost in moving, as the authorities had given notice that they must move on.

I had learned many things about gipsies during the nearly quarter of a year I had been with them. Above all, that they desire secrecy, seclusion, to be let alone by people from outside. To this end they avoid all help except such as their own company can furnish. The same few persons will keep together year after year, as it is deemed a misfortune to receive even new members to what is called “the tribe.”

Each one, even to the children, has his or her special work to do. They bought almost nothing in the way of wearing apparel at this camp. One woman begged such clothing as was needed, mended and kept it decent. Mother Hubbard cooked, washed dishes and told fortunes at night.

Nick’s duties have already been told. Now he was down with fever symptoms at a time when he was specially needed, and someone must be hired for a few days to help.

From all accounts it appeared that many miles distant was a broken down building, half house, half barn, where they managed to live for the winter. Their journey to this place must be taken within a few days.

Rondo was anxious and snappish, Mother Hubbard also vexed and disappointed at being obliged to wait, and to hire help in getting necessary preparations made.

“I shall get a raw hand, and get rid of him soon as possible,” was Rondo’s remark as out he started in quest of the “raw hand.” He did not return until near night, then all I could see was that he had someone with him.

Ah, but what was this? Why at the sound of the new voice did my sides suddenly quiver with excitement and my nostrils dilate with expectancy?

Surely I had heard that voice before! And strangely enough too, at a time when I was yearning for sympathy and aid.

There were duties claiming Rondo’s attention when he returned, and I had not been fed since early noon. So the new boy was sent to give me my dry, coarse food, fasten on my carpet blanket, and shut the loose door of the shed for the night.

Oh, oh! how like music came the familiar tones!

“Hullo, hossy, how are you? Well, well, what’s got you? Been sick? Lame in the joints, hey?”

He lifted a lantern and eyed me at close range.

[Pg 57]

“Jolly! but you make me think of a gay little duck of a pony I knew once, a fine dashing little fellow, all spirit and fire, but you’re thinner than he was, much thinner; besides, he was a bay, and you’re black as Egypt.”

Could I but have cried out, how thankful would I have been! But, how happened it that this sunny-haired, sunny-tempered lad had wandered from Greenpoint, to this woody place, many miles distant as it was?

Ah, but did he not whisper to me that day when Perley Bolt had left me to myself: “Between you and me, pony dear, I don’t get the care I might have. But I’m going to work to take care of myself before long, then I’ll have a fair chance perhaps: may own a fine bit of a hossy myself some day.”

Hope was strong within me that when daylight came he would see things more clearly. But alas! so deeply ingrained had become the black stain completely covering me there seemed little likelihood of being able to make myself known. They called the boy “Archie,” and to my delight he was sent again to feed me in the morning. His habit of talking while working was a great comfort.

“Now, hossy,” he began, “you’re going to be well curried, for sadly you need it, but first you must be watered and given something to eat. You breathe better than you did last night, but these joints are pretty stiff yet, I see.”

“Phew! you ought to have hot mashes these brisk mornings, and your legs ought to be poulticed overnight. They haven’t half cared for you, have they, boy? Never mind, you’ll be better one of these days, only I sha’n’t be here to see. I’m on my own hook now, earning here a little, there a little. I’m going to be what they call a ‘vet,’ a veterinary doctor, able to take care of ailing horses and other animals. I love a nice hossy, as I do a nice man, and never a rough touch will any creature o’ God’s get at my hands.”

He was rapidly preparing my meagre breakfast as he talked, and while so busy Rondo came to the shed, saying he wished to comb me himself.

Oh, what a disappointment! For I had thought that the vigorous combing Archie would give me, might rub off some of that false colouring and set his quick wits working in a way to lead to a discovery.

Early in the afternoon it became necessary for Rondo to take a long tramp, seeking certain supplies from the distant village. Also there came a welcome call for Mother Hubbard to tell fortunes at a fair to be held in the village. Caring nothing for the walk of two miles and more, out set the pair, to be absent nearly the rest of the day.

Archie had been given orders to put fresh straw in my shaky stall, a thing greatly needed, also to nail on a few shingles where the rain could run in rather too freely.

Hope again rose within me as he promptly set about doing as he had been told. I learned that Nick was some better, but still confined to his mattress of straw in the chilly tent. As usual Archie began talking as he worked:—

“I should think it was high time something was done to this draughty place, Mister Pony. It needs more than about half a dozen shingles to make it fit for any kind of a creature to sleep in, but I’m going to get out of this as soon as I can: had to sleep last night rolled in a blanket, but thank fortune, ’twas my own! Carry it in a big roll wherever I go: that, and a comb, toothbrush and a couple of decent towels.”

“Lord Rondo offered me good pay to take another boy’s place for a few days, but the other boy must get well quick for I don’t think much of this crowd.”

He broke into a merry whistle, as out he thrust the old grass that had grown damp and musty in the miserable shed, then, still whistling blithely, he began bringing in a little straw, and such dry underbrush as he could find.

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**C**OULD I not make some sound or sign to make him understand? I turned on him eager eyes and whinnied in a low, urgent manner.

He stopped abruptly and looked at me attentively.

“Jolly!” he cried, “how exactly you whinny like that little hossy I knew a few months ago.”

I tried again, stretching far my neck in endeavour to reach his kindly hands.

He dropped a mass of brush and came close to me.

I rubbed my head against his shoulder, beseeching in every way I could that he would find me out.

The boy looked puzzled. “If only your coat wasn’t so black,” he murmured, “I’d surely think I knew you, but it couldn’t be a pony would change like that.”

He rubbed his hand along my neck. Ah! that was just what I wanted him to do.



HE STOPPED ABRUPTLY AND LOOKED AT ME ATTENTIVELY.

“How rough you are!” he murmured again. “Not half combed. I wonder where Lord Rondo keeps the curry? He didn’t tell me not to use it; perhaps thought I wouldn’t know how. Ah, I see it on this nail. Great comb I should say: stumpy, harsh, bah! What a thing to use on a decent pony!”

He ran it slowly, deeply, along my neck, then paused and looked at it. I trembled with joy and anxiety.

“I never felt such sticky, stubby hair on any created beast before,” he said under his breath.

I whinnied and moved close to him as I could.

“You want a good, thorough cleaning, don’t you?” he asked, his hand on my head.

I tried to whinny. “Yes, oh, yes!”

He ran the comb along the same place.

“You look brown where I’ve scraped,” he said, the puzzled look deepening on his face.

“Hossy,” he cried softly, “I’m going to *wash* you where I’ve combed and scraped, but don’t tell.”

He went out and was gone some time. When he came back he had found a rag and a bit of soap. Then he rubbed and rubbed. Finally he gave a long, low, and much surprised whistle.

“As true as you’re a born pony, you’re a *bay*,” he said, “and—jinks! but I understand!”

I stamped, whinnied and stepped and stepped with excitement.

“Oh, I’ll find you out fast enough now, I reckon,” he added, as if in reply to my urgent antics.

He felt my fetlock, carried a slow, cautious hand across my left knee; “Yes, that’s where it was hurt and swelled,” he ruminated.

I switched my tail and fairly nodded my head, trying to assure him he was perfectly correct. [Pg 62]

Then to my joy he looked into my mouth.

“The very hossy!” he exclaimed with a gleesome chuckle. “I said I should want to know you if we met again, and here we are! Nippers show over three years of age, milk teeth all gone. Now, Mister Pony, let me tell you a story:—”

“There was a great hullabaloo when a certain pony’s stall was found empty one morning early in last July. Tillings at Mr. Van Vim’s stable was wild about it. He was sure the stable door was securely bolted the night before, and no sound reached him during the night.”

“The meanest thing about it was”—the lively voice dropped, and it was in hurt, grieved tones that the boy went on, “Perley Bolt, your former master, raised a story that I, *I* had let you out!” I looked around. “Oh, I know you well enough now,” he said with decision; “you’re the ‘Dexter’ that disappeared from Greenpoint three months ago, and has not been heard from since.”

“You see, Perley Bolt never forgave my helping poor pony the day he was left tied, head up, in the sun, without food or water and with a hurt knee.”

“More than one person was sadly put out by your disappearance. Mr. Van Vim felt you a considerable loss. Perley Bolt made a great noise about it; blustered, scolded and said you must be found, as he considered you were almost as good as his again, and finally tried to fasten the matter on me.” [Pg 63]

“I am thankful to say the story was so ridiculous no one believed it, for those who knew me best, knew me for at least an honest boy, who would have wronged no one in such a way. Besides, when they looked around in the morning, there were footprints in the mud where the hose had been used before the stable door, that must have been made by a man wearing about a number ten shoe. Such a shoe as Lord Rondo must wear.”

“I had been working for my half-uncle, a hard, driving man, who would give me no chance for study, paid me almost nothing, and never praised me even when I became almost sick in my efforts to please him.”

“Perhaps the person who felt the worst over your vanishing, next to Mr. Van Vim and Tillings, was Mr. Clifton Moore. He is soon to marry sweet Gladys Fleming, and as she was very much in love with you, he had it all arranged that you were to be one of his wedding presents. Perley Bolt would not have got you anyway.”

“Now I must think up what to do. I’ve been going westward, hoping to get steady work, but I’ll get you back where you belong somehow,—see if I don’t!”

After a few moments I heard the boy mutter, “Now I must cover up my tracks;” and after a long search he came with the familiar pot of black juice in his hand, and carefully smoothed over where he had rubbed the blackness off.

My heart seemed at rest. When, or in what manner “Archie” would restore me to rightful owners I could not tell. But the very idea of occupying what now looked to me like the most luxurious place in the world,

my box stall at Van Vim's stable, and receiving Tillings' skilled care, was enough to make me patient and almost content.

True, I was kept in the dark a number of days as to what Archie intended to do, for there was further delay; Nick's recovery was tryingly slow, and Archie had stayed on for a week, when one morning he came to the shed, his face troubled, his voice trembling with indignation.

"Hossy," he began, "your time has come; *our* time I mean. Rondo refuses to pay me what he promised. He says I have only earned my keep. He agreed to give me fifty cents a day in money: little enough for what I've had to do and the miserable scraps of food I've had to put up with."

"I'm sure now that he was the one who stole you, for last night when I was snoring to pretend sleep, I heard Mother Hubbard ask:"

"'Wot would you do, Rondo, if Greenpoint folks found out as you took Don?'"

"I heard an angry cluck, then all was still."

"Mother Hubbard took great risk in asking such a question when I was in the tent, even if I was asleep, and even though she never supposed I had ever heard of such a place as Greenpoint. Be patient a bit longer, Pony Dexter, and we'll see what we'll see."

At noon back he came to the shaky shed, his face one broad grin, yet with a manner so quiet and reliant, I knew something of importance was about to happen.

"Great luck, hossy," he chuckled softly, "great luck!"

"Mother Hubbard goes to some kind of a 'bazar' this afternoon in her fortune-telling rig. Nick must have more medicine, and Rondo won't trust me with money to buy it. Besides, he wants to see a pedlar about borrowing a big horse to help in moving certainly by another week. He knows I intend making off tomorrow, pay or no pay."

"I've told him 'Don' must be walked up and down the road, or he'll be too stiff to travel next week. I hope you could walk pretty briskly now if you tried."

I kicked out first one hoof, then another. He gave me a sportive slap: "I do believe you could run," he said with another low chuckle. He went on:

"Now, Dexter, I'm going to have my bundle all ready at the edge of the woods, and as soon as Rondo is out of sight I'll lead you slowly along out to the road, then—we'll run for it!"

"Fortunately Rondo goes in a different direction from the one we must take, and if only you have the courage and strength, we'll be miles away from this place before anyone knows we have gone."

Up came all my proud, hot blood. I no longer had asthma. I no longer was lame. True, I trembled like a leaf, but only because of my wild desire to be out and away. With Archie on my back, how I would romp and tear, leaving the gloomy woods and the unkempt gipsy tribe far, far behind me.

No knowledge and no care as to how the night would be spent occurred to me; one thing was sure: I should fare as well as my trusty rider, and all the comfort he could devise would be mine.

The grand moment came. Into the shed walked Archie, a grave look on his young face. He knew more than I did of the risk he was about to run, but there was no hint of faltering.

He had to quiet me as we left the shed, for I was inclined to jump and caper at the joyful prospect before me. In fact I was so frisky that only when Archie turned as if to lead me back to the shed could I come down upon my four feet and manage to walk sedately along.

"That's right, pony," he cheered, "it will be time enough to show how smart you are when we take to the road in earnest. For a noble trot there is before you, my boy, before we'll sail or swoop into harbour."

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AT the spot where he had left his great bundle, Archie unrolled it, and doubling his blanket into a square, put it on my back, for he had brought away only the bridle which was rightfully mine. This reduced what he had to carry to a quite moderate package.

Once fairly started, I still was not allowed to rush or put forth all my strength.

“Steady, steady there!” warned Archie; “prudence is the word for you and me, pony boy; the way will be as long as you can stand until to-night, and will be still longer to-morrow. I hope to-morrow night will see us at home, but you must not tire too soon. Besides, there is no knowing what Lord Rondo may do. He isn’t the man to let a fine pony escape him if he can help it, even if it was stolen in the first place.”

“Keep on going, but don’t get winded before we reach a place of possible concealment. So, ho, pony, it looks as if we were on the high road to good times, you and I! Let me tell you something not mentioned before.”

“Mr. Van Vim has offered a handsome reward to anyone discovering or bringing you back. I don’t care for money just because it is money. I’d have returned you, or told your whereabouts merely to have seen right done, but if I should get a little help to start me on my way, don’t you see what a thing it would be for me?”

“I could begin by helping an experienced horse doctor, with perhaps a chance at some schooling. But you see a chap must have clothes. I’ve got three precious dollars earned by doing odd jobs, and I’ve managed to find food and shelter for nearly two months.”

“That is all the money I own, and Rondo ought to be ashamed of himself to go back on his word, but, was I at all wise to trust a gipsy?”

Away we went at a steady, sensible gait, and thankful I was that breathing seemed easy, and my legs after their rest of a few days had gained more strength than I had supposed.

Archie kept me to by-paths and back streets all he could, yet taking care to follow the telegraph poles, which he knew to be a guide. People did not appear to take much notice of us as we tripped along. Fortunately the weather had held mild, and before the early dusk had fallen, not a few miles had been gone over.

As it grew darker the boy drove me to the back of a barn at the rear of a house that had no tenants. Here he tied me, saying, I thought a little anxiously:

“Now don’t whinny, or make any sound. I’ll soon be back.”

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He went away, and I was glad on looking around to see a neglected orchard back of me, a place where it was not likely anyone would be strolling at that hour. But I was relieved when my boy-rider returned, a long, stout paper bag in his arms.

He managed to mount, and with the paper bag before him drove me on. There was a young moon and by its light he guided me still further until we came to what I felt sure he was looking for, a piece of woods.

The place was at the end of a long, straight road, and in the stillness of night any sound could be heard a long distance away. Into the shade of partially leafless trees I was led, and from the big paper bag was given a small measure of oats and hay.

“Must keep some for to-morrow,” Archie said.

From the pocket of his loose cardigan jacket he took some crackers, which furnished all his meal. Shortly before entering the rather too open dell, I had stopped at more than one water trough, so I did not suffer for a drink.

Animals of nearly all kinds require a great deal of water, but there was a joyous instinct keenly alive that night making me feel sure of having as much water as would be good for me, all in good time.

The boy who was now my kindly keeper did some strange things in preparation for the night. He appeared to examine every foot of ground within a large space. He also forgot to talk aloud as he peered hither and yon. At length he gathered together a great pile of leaves; oh, a very great pile. Spreading his blanket on the

[Pg 70]

ground, he bade me lie down. As I did so, he spread a portion of the blanket over me, so that it was both under me and forming a coverlet.

“Now, hossy,” he said, “it may be tough, but you must do just as I say. After I get you fixed, lie still, don’t attempt to roll over or lift your head, but lie perfectly quiet.”

Then he began heaping leaves over the blanket, which fortunately were not damp, as they might have been. I had sense enough to know he was hiding me. My head was on a little mound which made it easier for breathing, and tired as I was, sleep would not be long delayed.

Archie crouched at the foot of a still leafy tree. I feared he would take cold, although under the cardigan jacket was a decent sweater; but we were just a boy and a pony trying to work our way to home and proper shelter, not over strong either of us, and just now rather unprotected.

But the idea kept floating through my head: “Only for to-night, only for to-night, and then our tribulation will be over.” In broad daylight, the brawny gipsy would not dare to follow and claim me, for then, Archie could declare boldly that I had been stolen, and investigation would follow.

But in the dark and stilly night it would not be pleasant to have him discover and overpower us. [Pg 71]

It grew very quiet and very dark as the young moon set and the night grew late. Even the few crickets that had chirped for a while drowsed off into silence. It must have been past the middle of the night when pounding hoofs sounded from afar on that long stretch of road.

Then a rustling nearer at hand caused me to partly raise my head and peep around. Archie was climbing the leafy tree. He had caught the thud of those heavy hoofs and was ascending to a place of safety where he could see and not be seen.

I curled under my nest of leaves, but kept ears alert. The hearing of animals is acute. I knew by the way that rider approached that his was an eager quest. Two men were on the back of the powerful horse that doubtless had been borrowed to aid in the night search.

At the strip of woods they halted, and the light of a lantern flashed amidst the darkness. I heard Rondo’s harsh voice say:

“They can’t be here. We can see right through the trees and there’s nothing tethered. I think the spry young rogue would push on to that thicker bunch of trees and tangle two miles farther on.”

“Do you think the pony could go that far?” asked the other. “I doubt me but we’re on the wrong track altogether.”

“Don’t croak,” snapped Rondo, “we’ll push ahead to the other thicket; the pony might be glad to get away, and do better with his legs than we’d think for.”

Ah, Mister Rondo, you were right that time if never before!

He swung the lantern to his arm, made a circuit, coming to within a few yards of where I lay quiet as the leaves that covered me. I could imagine how big the boy’s eyes must have grown as he watched the search-party that now wheeled and rode away.

As the hoof beats grew distant, Archie came to the ground, cowering close to me as if to get warmth and comfort from my warm sides. I moved a little to change my cramped position, while feeling glad to have the boy near me. And very glad I was to hear the tones of his voice.

“That’s right, hossy, turn a little; it will relieve you. But we must be wary. I think our pursuers will come back when they miss us two miles ahead. Now I must heap up these leaves again; it won’t do to have an ear or a leg give a suspicion.”

He scattered handfuls of leaves all about me, then lay down close to my curious bed. Could he only have been sure of the course Rondo had taken, we might have stolen off in an opposite direction, but no doubt the boy was wise in thinking it the best plan to stay where we were.

I felt as though another night had passed when distant hoof beats again sent Archie climbing the tree and after hastily scattering more evenly my covering of leaves.

The great horse came thumping along, stopping short while the men took a second sharp look by lantern light along the sombre network of bushes and scattered trees. But neither figure of boy nor form of pony were visible in the dampness and unbroken stillness of the place.

“They haven’t been here,” growled Rondo, pulling a sharp rein, and clattering along the road, went horse and men, but not on an unbroken trot. Every little while they stopped, and it was evident, listened if possibly the sound of a pony’s foot might reach their ears.

As all grew still again, back to my side came Archie, his teeth chattering with cold and anxiety. I sat up partly, enabling him to rest his head on my shoulder, but I do not believe either of us slept for a long time. Then I was glad when the sound of heavy breathing told me the boy was sleeping, his sunny head on my shoulder, his light form resting against my side.

I dozed too, for I was very tired. The trot of the long afternoon, although deliberate, had taken a good deal of pluck and strength, and the few hours of complete rest now taken were worth a great deal. And if I felt cramped from lying unusually long in one position, not for anything would I have disturbed the dear laddie, resting so quietly beside me.

The pale light of an October morning was glimmering through the trees when at length the boy awoke. <sup>[Pg. 74]</sup>

“Hullo, hossy,” he cried, a note of triumph in his glad young voice: “here we are, all right! Now for a make-believe rub, a bite of breakfast, then a long pull and a hard pull, and if I’m not mistaken, we’ll sleep in snug, warm quarters to-night—somewheres.”

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THE rest of the oats and hay were sweet to my taste and I could have wished there had been more; as for water, I must wait for that until some friendly fount or trough appeared on the way.

Archie ate a few crackers, shook out his sweater and jacket and gave the blanket a vigorous flouncing, but could do no more for me than to shake off or pull away the damp leaves clinging to mane and tail. The blanket was strapped to my back, and then to the road again.

It will always be my belief that that was the longest day of my life. I was made to travel slowly from the start, and it was fortunate that such was the case: otherwise I never could have accomplished such a tramp. Archie, too, walked miles, for every little while he would dismount and stride along beside me.

At noon, my legs began to ache, I did not breathe quite easily, and had it not been for the belief that by night the hard journey would be over I feel sure discouragement would have overtaken me. And an unlooked for trial was before us.

Early in the afternoon, Archie stopped at a store where "hay, grain and feed," was on a sign over the door, and suddenly came face to face with the man, Rondo.

"Ah, my fine, honest friend," the man began, "so you thought to make off with my pony, Don, did you? Well, you see I can travel by train faster than you can pony-back. Now I'll trouble you to get off, and let me get on that sprightly Don."

"No, I sha'n't," said Archie stoutly. "This pony belongs to Mr. Van Vim of Greenpoint, and I'm going to take him home. He was stolen away last July, and his name is Dexter, not Don at all."

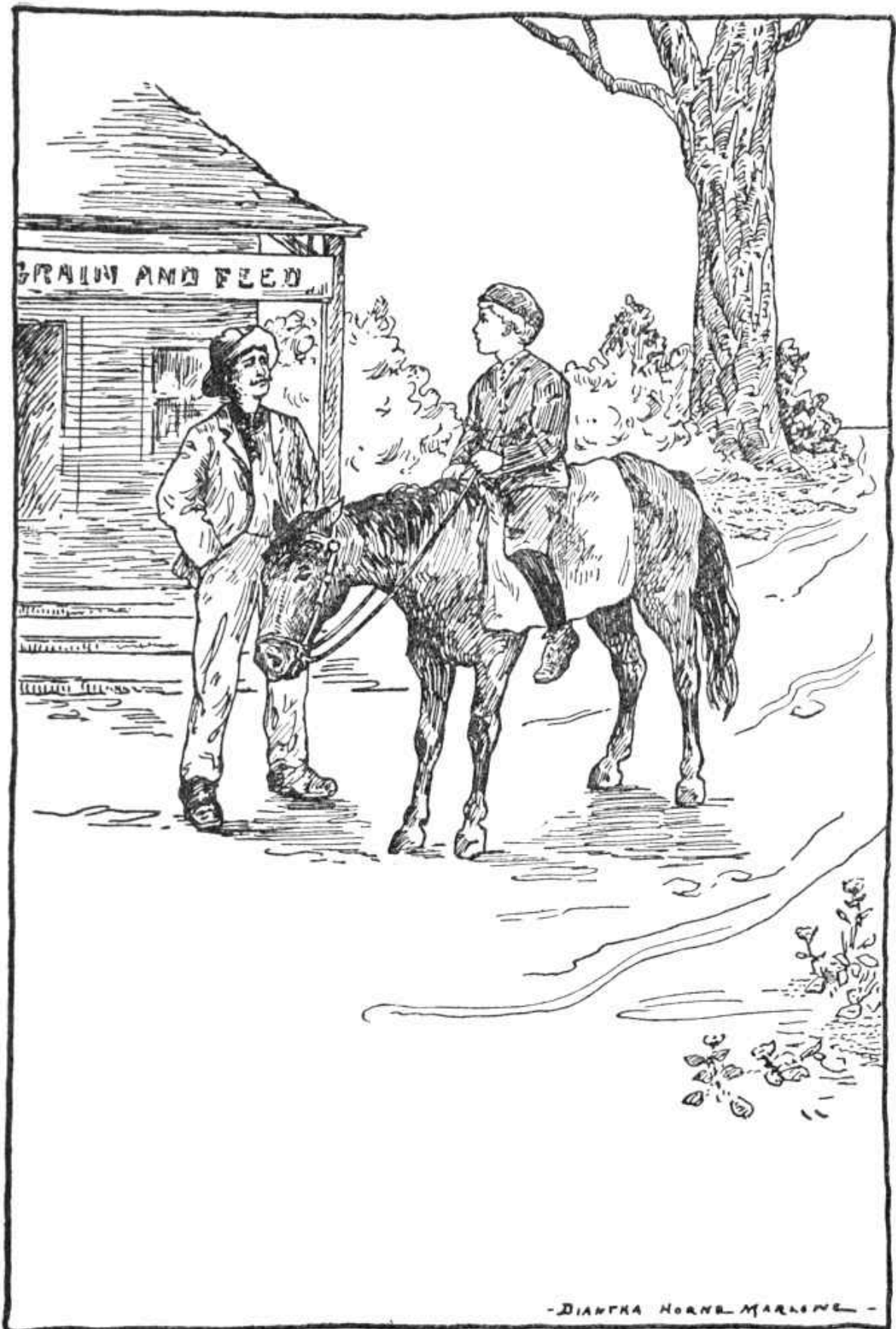
"You can't prove that," roared Rondo. "I'll call a policeman and tell him you are a young thief."

"Call away," said Archie. "This little hoss has been advertised for, and I'll ask Mr. Policeman to give the pony a scrub and see him turn from rough black, to a smooth, handsome bay."

At that, the gipsy said some very improper words but moved off muttering:

"I wish I'd caught you in the night, you young cub!"

Archie made no reply, but I was glad Rondo had found out that we knew how I came to be a trick pony in his unclean camp. We saw no more of him. He had reason to be afraid of us, while we had no reason to be afraid of him, seeing we were not alone or in the dark.



SUDDENLY CAME FACE TO FACE WITH THE MAN RONDO.

Again, mile after mile was passed during the afternoon, and until the early darkness fell. At last the way became familiar. Ah, how good it seemed! Here were outlying places where I had galloped and romped, first with Perley Bolt on my back, then with the lark-loving boys who hired me from Van Vim's. Tillings also had exercised me along these smooth roads, and there was the great auto building and track where the races had taken place.

Oh, joy! I could almost see the snug, warm box stall at Mr. Van Vim's livery, and smell the clover-laden hay as wearily, haltingly and nearly spent, I reached the stable door.

There was Tillings taking in a great pitchforkful of bedding from a side door, and at the boy's sharp whistle he paused, a curious look of inquiry on his ruddy face.

"Hullo, Tillings," Archie sung out in his blithest tones.

"Hullo, yourself," Tillings replied aghast: "thought you'd started out to find your fortune, Archie Train. What forlorn little beast you got there?"

"It's Dexter, I've brought him home."

Archie spoke quietly, yet I felt him quiver with satisfaction and delight. Tillings replied in disgust,

"No, you don't! That sorry little nag any relation to Dexter? No, oh, no! You can't come that over me!"

"Ah, but I've the great story to tell you, Tillings. First, though, the poor little hoss wants everything the stable can do for him. He's cold, hungry, thirsty and footsore and lame from almost endless travel. He's been worked, half fed, and exposed, until he's poor as a crow. Then again he's been painted black right over his natural coat of bay."

Tillings by this time was standing open-mouthed, the pitchfork of straw tilting ludicrously in mid-air.

"Where's he been?" he gasped.

"Off in a gipsy tent. Gipsies stole him. They've taught him to dance and show off. Come now, I tell you the poor little hoss is all used up."

For answer, Tillings rushed into the stable, threw the bedding into a stall, and called lustily:

"Misther Van Vim! Misther Van Vim! will ye be comin' here, plaze."

In a moment Mr. Van Vim appeared, and Tillings jabbered off the strange story just heard as if only half believing it. Meantime Archie stood holding me by the bridle.

"Take care of the poor little fellow," Mr. Van Vim ordered. "And you, Archie Train," he added, "had better go and stay with Widow Hebble for a few days; she will be glad of your help, I know; then something may turn up for you to do. But I want to ask one thing: please say nothing to anyone about Dexter's return. I have my own reasons, for not wanting it known at present. I hope you will oblige me in this respect."

Archie promised to keep the matter strictly to himself, waved me a cheery good-bye, and went his way, leaving me thankful at knowing he had a good place awaiting him.

How could a pony describe the comfort and luxury of what followed for me! Exhausted as I was, Tillings knew all about the refreshment and renewing that would come through needed treatment.

First, I was watered, but not too freely, then fed, oh, how delightfully! Never can I forget the satisfaction and healing of that hot mash! It was only bran thoroughly scalded with a little meal added, but it really gave me strength for what Tillings thought should be done before letting me lie down for the night.

Next into the washing trough went pails of hot water. But before washing, Tillings put some strong smelling stuff all over me. I know now it was to make that colouring matter come off the more easily. The man worked more than an hour, talking and scolding to himself as spongy after spongy of dark, sticky stuff yielded to the vigorous rubbing and was washed away.

Three times the trough was filled before Tillings considered me cleansed. Then how good the curry comb and drying cloths felt. At last I was all soft, glossy and *bay*!

Tillings, surveying his work, cried almost with a sob:

"Lean as a starved cat ye are and weak as a new baby; but it's plump as a patridge an' sassy as a magpie we'll be havin' you in no time, that we will, thin!"

He added more in his own jolly tones:

"Your oarn toasty blanket will cover ye all spick an' span; now to bed wid ye, an' if there's a claner, more promisin' little hoss than you be th' night, jes' trot him up, an' I'll be takin' off me hat till him; I will that!"

He led me to my beautiful, longed for stall. Then what glory! In my own fine bay coat, clean, well-fed, and having been abundantly watered, I laid me down to such sweet, untroubled sleep as I had not known for

many a long week.

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EARLY the next morning, Tillings had me out for another thorough wash and such a combing as a boy would have called "fierce." He surely had some reason for wishing me to look my best, and I was willing to believe him when he said I looked like "velvet," whatever that may be.

My breakfast of oats, timothy and clover, put still further new life into me, and everything took on a fresh, bright look on that cool October morning.

No sooner was I polished for the day than in came Mr. Van Vim and with him a gentleman that I did not at first recognize. They came directly to my stall.

"You see," Mr. Van Vim began, "he is the same fine, shapely little fellow he always was, very thin just now, but that is owing to having been overworked and underfed. In a couple of months he'll be the Dexter of last spring, fleet of foot, sound of limb, as clipper a little pony chap as ever stood."

"Perley Bolt has given me no rest in his craze to know if the pony has been found. He would be glad to pay more for him than in the first place. But I'd rather not sell him back to young Bolt. He's a heady lad, and apt to forget that animals have feelings."

By that time I knew the gentleman for Mr. Clifton Moore, who was to marry pretty Gladys Fleming. Was he about to buy me? If so, what cheer! For although I had the best of care at Mr. Van Vim's, yet it was a livery stable, and there was no knowing who might come along and hire me, or become my master.

It was a pleasure to find that Tillings had the same habit as Archie of talking to himself aloud or to an animal he might be grooming, for in that way I found out a great deal that otherwise I would not have known.

In fact I have noticed that most men and boys are apt to address an animal, giving considerable confidence, as if sure of not being betrayed. They never are. And we really and truly understand much more than human beings suppose us able to.

As days went by I found that a good deal of secrecy was being observed concerning me. I felt it must be that Mr. Van Vim and Tillings were taking great care to conceal the fact of my return, and I of course remembered the charge that had been given Archie not to speak of me.

I was led several times around the stable yard early in the morning and again after dark for exercise, but at other times was kept in my stall, where no one from outside would be likely to see me. Orders to the stable hands would doubtless be obeyed.

One morning on bringing me my oats and hay Tillings broke out:

"Ah, th' jolly b'y you're gettin' to be, an' not belonging to us anny more aither! Whist, whilst I tells ye: Mither Moore was on th' point o' buying Marco Boo, young Will Barrows' spruce young pony, when Marco ups and throws Mither Will, cracking one o' his ribs."

"Will, he confessed to bein' at teasing Marco by ticklin' first one ear, then th' other, but Mither Moore he wouldn't thrust his sweetheart ov a lady with anny beastie wotever that wud toss a rider even wor it bein' teased. It's the patience ye hev to hev! An' it's th' poor dumb crathers that must offn be found fault with, wen it's th' young oarner that's to be blamed."

So much I learned from Tillings: yet I was left in the dark as to whether it was Mr. Moore who had bought me.

Another day while Tillings was grooming me, he began:

"Faix, and it's the sly dogs are them gipsies! The boy as brought you back told some secret officers, as Mr. Van Vim had him to, where the rogues wor encamped, an' right away th' very nex' day the police was afther him; but naither hide nor hair, trace nor trail cud they find. Off in the night they'd sthayed, an' not a rag left on th' way."

"P'raps it's jus' as well. A brave bit av a lad is Archibald Train. Good luck till him! An' good luck will it be to anny animal as comes under his hands, be it dog, horse or pony. 'Tis th' gentil touch he hev that coodles thim over to onct."

Tillings left me unsatisfied. What about Archie—Archibald Train? Tillings said just enough to make me curious, forgetting I did not know his thought although hearing his words.

But one glowing day soon afterward it was all made plain. Into my stall bounced Archie, bright-eyed, joy and gladness written all over his boyish face. He began in the old, familiar way:

“Hullo, hossy, my, but aren’t you getting the boss for looks! The cock of your ears is grander than ever. Your neck arches like the pictures of those swans, and the gloss you’ve got on you!”

“Have they told you the news, hossy dear? P’raps not, because it’s a great secret, and a secret they are bound to keep it until the right moment comes for things to be known.”

“Do you know to whom you belong? Well, just now your owner is Mr. Clifton Moore, but the last of the month you will be the property of *Mrs.* Clifton Moore.”

“You’re all bought, hossy, and have you heard of the fine new stable that is going up?”

I gave a little stamp to show my interest.

“No? Well, there’s a fine new house going up not far from here, and at the back of it, they’re building a very pretty stable. When Mr. Moore gets married he is to take his lovely wife to the new house, and you are to be one of his wedding presents to the beautiful Gladys, your home to be in the brand new stable, and for a little while I am to care for you.”

“Won’t you get combed and fed? And won’t your fine bay coat have a shine on it that won’t come off? We’ll see, we’ll see! Another hossy will keep you company there.”

“That high-blooded Arabian will have a wide box stall, and an older groom is to look after us all. But Mistress Gladys is to know nothing about your being on hand until she sees you in the stall, then, won’t she dance?”

“Mr. Moore knows how much she was pleased with you and her desire to have her father buy you. And very badly she felt on hearing that you had been spirited away. Not that she had any great hopes of your becoming her pony, for Perley Bolt has told up and down, high and low, that some time he should get you back.”

“Perley Bolt knows nothing of your being in town. Wouldn’t he raise a rumpus if he heard? Not that it would do any good if he did; but Mr. Van Vim says quiet ways are always the best.”

“Nighty-night, hossy. Great days coming for you and me. Look sharp, they’ll soon be here.”

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So here I am, the luckiest pony in the world. Three box stalls are in the well-built, convenient stable where I have my home. The mottled Arabian occupies one, and the third is reserved as an “extra,” a good thing to have, and likely to come in use at any time.

Dick, the older groom, knows so much about horses it is a pleasure to watch him go about caring for us both. Does a joint swell? He knows exactly the liniment or salve that will put it down at once. Does the Araby beauty “strike” or “interfere”? Dick has a “boot” on in time to prevent serious mischief. Is either of us threatened with colic? Dick is the boy that forces something down our throats, stopping the pain in a trice.

Tillings had me clear of threatened asthma, in less than a week after my return from the camp, and he showed skill in bandaging my knee, so that that too became rid of all bad symptoms, caused by too much dancing and burden-bearing in the gypsy camp.

Was not Gladys indeed a gladsome creature when she saw me? After hearing my story and knowing I had been rescued and returned to become her own dear pony, her delight was like that of a happy, overjoyed child.

I think her husband must have felt repaid for having so promptly secured me, in seeing her great satisfaction. And won’t I bear her carefully over the road, fly with her, nimble and sure-footed on the merry fox hunt, speed evenly and without stumbling on the morning gallop, or race for her without breaking? Should there be another test of pony speed?

Archie said, in telling of the new home, that he was to care for me for a little while.

Yes; I am his special care. But I have gleaned the fact that he is to go to school as a boy of his age should. He has a home with the "Widow Hebble," a good motherly woman who looks after him with kindly interest, receiving in turn a portion of his moderate wages with Mr. Moore, and the many helpful turns the boy is able to give her.

Dick tells him that when he is through school there will be plenty of skilled veterinary surgeons who will be glad of his assistance, meantime teaching him how to care for and cure ailing and valuable animals.

One day, Perley Bolt saw me in a paddock by the stable door.

"Handsome than ever!" he muttered, eyeing me ruefully. "If ever I own a fine pony like you again, I hope I'll know enough to treat him decently."

So it may be Perley will grow sensible as he grows older.

I was glad to hear Dick telling Archie one day, that Marco Boo had been sold to a boy of a kind and gentle disposition who had no trouble with him at all. Marco is deserving of the best of treatment, and will be steady and willing, I feel sure, with a young master of the right kind.

I must tell how amused I was at something Dick said the other day. He had been chattering away <sup>half</sup> to himself and half to the Arabian when he said briskly:

"I tell you that young mistress o' yours needs watchin'! Apples and lump sugar are all very well for hosses and ponies once in a while. But apples and sugar given too frequent brings on colic and all sorts o' jim jams."

But my laughing young mistress calls on me very often, especially when it is too stormy for her to go out. Whether Dick is "watchin'" or not she usually gives me a great lump of loaf sugar, and merrily enough I champ it down.

I don't believe sugar hurts ponies. And how I do love a great glistening chunk of white lump sugar!

But better than that, and far better than all else in the world, do I love my fair young mistress, and dear Archie Train.

THE END.