

KING OF THE HERD

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A few days later Alec got out of bed for the first time. His injured leg weakly supported him. As he dressed, a knock came upon the door.

"Come in," he called.

Pat entered. In his hand was a radiogram. "It's from your folks." He grinned.

Alec took it and read: "Thank God you're safe. Cabling money to Rio de Janeiro. Hurry home. Love. Mother and Dad."

He was silent a minute, then looked up at Pat. "It'll be great to get home," he said.

Pat smiled. "How's the leg feel?"

"Not so bad," Alec answered as he continued his dressing. "How's the Black doing?"

"I'm afraid he's feeling better—it's a good thing you're able to get down there today!" answered Pat.

Alec drew on a pair of large pants which one of the sailors had given him.

"Kinda big for you, aren't they?" asked Pat.

"Better than walking around without any." Alec grinned.

He finished dressing and slowly limped to the door. "Have to get to the Black before he tears the place apart." He folded the radiogram and placed it carefully in his pocket. "Thanks, Pat," he said.

"Don't stay on your feet too long, son," Pat warned. "Remember what the Doc said."

When Alec entered the hold, he heard the Black's pounding above the bedlam of the other horses and cattle. He came to the horse's stall and saw his dark head raised above the door. His large eyes moved nervously about. Alec called—the stallion's head jerked toward him. His nostrils quivered and he neighed. Alec reached a hand out. "Hello, fella," he said, "did you miss me?" The stallion shook his head and thrust his nose toward him. Alec ran his hand across the soft muzzle.

He took from his pocket an apple which he had saved from his breakfast. He held it out to the Black, who swept it out of his hand. Alec picked up the currycomb and brush from the floor, opened the door and went inside. "Guess it was tough on you, fella, but they didn't have any choice," he said. The next hour he spent in brushing the Black until his body shone brilliantly.

The days passed quickly for Alec, as he spent most of his time in the hold with the Black. His leg healed and was soon as good as ever. The captain and Pat at first attempted to get him interested in the boat and the voyage, but at last they gave up. The friendship be-

tween the boy and the stallion was something too much for them to understand.

The captain's hand rose to his chin as he and Pat watched Alec inside the stall. "Y'know, Pat," he said, "it's almost uncanny the way those two get along—a wild beast like that, a killer, and yet gentle as a kitten when the boy's around."

Pat nodded. "Yes, sir," he said, "one of the strangest things I've ever seen. I wonder where it'll take them?"

Five days later they steamed into Rio de Janeiro. The captain delegated Pat to go with Alec to the wireless office, where he could secure the money his family had sent him, and help arrange for his sailing to the United States.

As Alec walked with Pat through the South American city, he thought how close he was getting to home. He was on the last leg of his journey! They reached the office and went in. Pat spoke to the man at the desk in Portuguese. After a few minutes the man handed him a pen, and Alec signed his name. Then he was handed his money.

Next they went to the ticket office. There they found that the next boat for the United States would sail the following day. Alec had just enough money for himself and the Black, and he booked passage. He looked at Pat. "That doesn't leave me anything for the captain and you fellows."

"Don't you worry about that, Alec," Pat answered.

When they returned to the boat, Alec made his

way to the captain's office. He found him behind his large desk working over some papers in front of him. He looked up, motioned the boy to sit down and continued writing. Finally he stopped and sat back in his chair.

"Well, son," he said, "we've come to the parting of the ways, haven't we?"

"Yes, sir," answered Alec. "Pat and I got the money and everything all right." He shoved his hand in his pocket and drew out some change. "But this is all I have left. You see, sir—well, Mother and Dad didn't know about the Black, and what they sent was just enough to get us both back to New York."

"And now you're thinking about what you owe us, aren't you?" the captain interrupted.

"Yes, sir," replied Alec. "If it hadn't been for you, we'd probably still be back on the island."

The captain got up from his chair and walked over beside Alec. He placed an arm on his shoulder. "Don't you worry about us, son. We don't expect anything—and you and that horse gave us more excitement around here than we've had in years." He smiled, and they walked toward the door. "You just see that you get the rest of the way home safely, and that'll be fine!"

"Thanks, Captain," Alec said as he went out onto the deck.

"And don't let anyone steal that black devil from you either!"

"I won't, sir, and thanks again," replied Alec.

The next afternoon he walked the Black down the gangplank. He had a firm grip on the stallion's halter, and kept talking soothingly to him. The ship that was

to take them home had arrived during the night and was now being loaded with cargo. Pat and some of the sailors gathered around him as he reached the dock.

One by one they said good-bye, until only Pat remained. "So long, Alec," he said. "Take good care of yourself."

"You bet," answered Alec. "And remember, Pat, whenever you get to New York, you promised to look us up."

"Sure, some day perhaps . . ." He paused. "What are you going to do with the Black when you get him home?"

"I don't know, Pat; I haven't given it much thought. I just hope Dad and Mother will let me keep him."

Pat was looking at the stallion. "He's built for speed. I'll bet he could tear up a track."

"You mean—race?" asked Alec.

"Perhaps. Eight years ago, before I went to sea, I trained some pretty good horses in Ireland. I've never seen any that looked more like a runner than this one!"

"You can bet your last penny on that," Alec said. Memories flashed back of his breathtaking rides on the island. "Well, Pat, I have to go now, they've almost finished loading over there. Good-bye." He held out his hand and the other grasped it.

"So long, Alec," he replied, "and good luck!"

"So long, Pat."

Alec led the Black to the other end of the dock. A group of horses were gathered in one corner waiting their turn to be loaded. Dockhands rushed back and forth. A mixture of cattle and fruit smells filled the air.

The Black reared, and the other horses shrilled in fright as they saw him. Alec took the stallion to a far corner. His ears were pitched forward, his eyes glared masterfully over the others.

"Reminds you of the old days, doesn't it, fella?" said Alec. He smiled, wondered what his mother and dad would say when they saw the Black. He was glad now they had moved out from the city last year to Flushing, one of New York's suburbs. He was sure he would be able to find a place near his home where he could keep the Black, providing his mother and dad would let him!

Suddenly the Black screamed loudly and Alec felt him tremble. An answering scream filled the air. The other horses shoved each other in confusion. Alec saw a chestnut stallion being led toward the dock. He was big, almost as big as the Black.

The men leading him stopped on the farther side of the dock. Alec was thankful that he wasn't going to be loaded on the same boat with the Black. The black stallion pulled restlessly at his rope, his head high in the air, his eyes never leaving the chestnut.

The man holding him was having his troubles, too. The chestnut rose in the air. The Black screamed and pulled harder on the rope. The other horses began to neigh loudly. Alec tried to quiet the Black, but he could see that something wild and instinctive was rising within him. He remembered the stories that his uncle had told him about the tribes of wild horses—how one stallion alone was king!

"Whoa, Boy—take it easy," he said. The stallion

was snorting, one leg pawed into the wood, his ears were flat back against his head. The chestnut's whistle rose loud and clear. Alec saw him rise into the air. There were yells and shouts from the sailors. Then he saw the man holding the chestnut fall to the ground, and the stallion was loose!

The Black reared on his hind legs, and his scream was terrorizing. Alec knew now that he could not hold him. The rope was jerked from his hands.

The chestnut and the Black rushed toward each other, their thunderous hoofs shaking the boards. The distance between the two closed rapidly, and then they clashed! High in the air they rose on their hind legs, their forelegs, pawing, striking madly at each other. Teeth bared, they lunged at each other's throats. The Black got a hold on the chestnut and savagely hung on. Furiously they kicked, their manes whipping in the air. The chestnut broke the Black's hold, and for a minute they squared off; then they were lunging at each other again.

Alec couldn't look—couldn't look away. Sounds of hoofs striking bodies, and squeals of terror from the other horses mingled with the screams of the two savages who fought for supremacy. The Black shrieked—louder than Alec had ever heard him before. His strength and experience were slowly overpowering the chestnut. His striking hoofs swept the chestnut stallion off his feet, and he fell to the dock. The Black went high in the air and his hoofs came down on top of him. Alec closed his eyes. A moment later the Black's scream again came to his ears.

He saw the Black standing over the chestnut, his eyes blazing, his body streaked with blood and with lather. What would he do next?

The Black's head turned toward the group of horses gathered in the corner. Majestically he strode toward them. They neighed nervously, but none moved. Slowly the black stallion walked around them—his eyes piercing, triumphant.

Alec followed him. He heard voices yelling at him, "Keep away, boy, keep away till he calms down!" But he kept walking. The Black turned and saw him.

The stallion stopped still. Alec came closer. The huge black body was torn and bleeding, but his head was high, his mane flowing. Alec watched his eyes—he had learned much from the stallion's eyes. He saw a little of the wildness leave them. His nostrils stopped trembling. Alec spoke to him softly.

A minute passed, then another. He picked up the rope, still attached to the Black's halter. He drew up the slack and then pulled gently. The stallion's head turned toward him. He hesitated a moment, and then turned back to the other horses. Alec waited patiently while the stallion surveyed his newly acquired band. Then he looked again at Alec. It seemed to Alec as if he was trying to make up his mind between them. He took a few more steps toward the horses—then he turned and walked quietly toward the boy.

Shouts of astonishment broke out among the sailors. Alec attempted to lead the stallion toward the gangplank. The Black stopped and turned his head once again toward the horses. For a minute he gazed at them. The ship's whistle blew. Alec pulled a little

harder. "Come on, Black," he said. Another minute passed, and then the stallion turned again.

The sailors fell away as they approached. When they reached the gangplank, Alec looked over his shoulder and saw a crowd gathering around the chestnut, who was slowly climbing to his feet. The man was running his hands over the horse's legs. Then he walked him—the chestnut seemed to be all right. Alec was glad—for even though the chestnut had started the fight, it might have meant staying behind if the Black had hurt him seriously.

Up the plank they went—onto the ship. One sailor, more courageous than the rest, called to Alec, "Follow me, kid—down this way!" He led the way to a box stall, and then moved a safe distance away.

Alec led the Black into the stall, took off the halter, and spread the bedding around. He filled a pail full of water. The sailor brought him the antiseptic he'd asked for. He was young, not much older than Alec, and his face was filled with wonder. "I never in my life saw anything like that," he said.

"Neither did I," answered Alec. He felt the Black's legs and sides. "It would be swell if you could get me some clean cloths," he said. "I have to be careful of these cuts."

"Sure thing!" the sailor answered. "We're shoving off in a few minutes, but I'll be back with 'em as soon as I can."

HOME

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Alec heard the ship's whistle give three short blasts. The last horse came into the hold, shying nervously as he passed the Black's stall. The stallion reached his great head out over the door, his ears pricked forward, and his eyes moving from stall to stall.

The boat trembled as the engines began to turn over. Alec bent down to wet the cloth in his hand. "It won't be long now," he thought. Carefully he cleaned a deep cut in the Black's side where the chestnut had kicked him. He felt the stallion quiver as the antiseptic entered the wound. He was so big and powerful. Would he prove too much for Alec to handle? And what *would* his mother and father say when they saw him? He had thought of a place to keep him. Two blocks from their house in Flushing was an old run-down estate. The large, brown house was now being used to accommodate tourists. But in the rear was an old barn, badly in need of repair, and an acre of ground. It would be an ideal place to stable the Black. If only his parents would

let him keep the stallion, he would fix up the barn himself, and find work after school to pay for his feed.

Alec finished his work, and the Black turned his head. "Had a pretty tough day, haven't you, fella?" The stallion shook his head, and shoved his nose against the boy's chest, pushing him back against the wall. Alec laughed and picked up the pail and cloths.

He shut the door of the stall behind him. The stallion's nostrils quivered; his eyes followed Alec as he backed slowly away. "Take it easy now, Boy," he said. "I have to see what my own bunk looks like!"

The Black screamed as Alec began to climb the stairs. There was a loud crash as the stallion's hoofs went through the side of the stall. Alec rushed back. "Easy, Boy," he said. "Easy." The Black shoved his nose toward him, and he placed his hand upon the tender skin.

Grooms from the other stalls came running toward them. "Everything all right?" one asked.

"Yes," answered Alec. "He's still excited."

"He's a mean one, he is! You'll have to watch him!"

"He just doesn't like to be left alone," said Alec, "so I guess I'll stick around."

The grooms went back to their jobs. Alec looked at the stallion. "Black," he said, "you're something!" He went around to the side of the stall and pushed the broken board back into place. He looked around the hold, and noticed that the grooms had opened cots and were placing them beside the stalls. Alec found one and did the same. "Looks as though I'm going to bunk down here whether I like it or not," he said.

Alec tossed on his cot that night, as the ship plowed through heavy, pitching seas. Every wave seemed destined to send him rolling off his bed. The horses were finding it difficult, too, and their poundings made the hold a bedlam. Alec could hear the Black pawing at the floor of his stall.

It was still rough the next morning, and continued to be rough throughout the day. The horses began to get sick and the grooms were kept busy. Only the Black remained well. He still held his head as high as ever, and moved gingerly about in his stall.

Night fell and the ocean became wilder. Bolts of lightning flashed in the sky and a gale whistled outside. Alec thought of the *Drake* and the storm that had sent it down to the bottom. He rose from his cot and went to the stall door. The Black was awake, and pushed his nose toward the boy.

"Not frightened, are you, fella?" A streak of lightning made the hold as bright as day, and there was a loud crack as it struck the water. The ship quivered. Alec's fingers tightened on the Black's mane. Again darkness, and the ship lurched forward. The engines throbbed and once more took up their steady chant.

The Black's eyes were moving about restlessly. He shook his head and his foreleg pawed into the bedding of the stall. Alec couldn't blame him for being frightened. He reached in his pocket for some sugar and held it out to the stallion. The Black moved away and pounded harder than ever.

The ship staggered as a wave crashed against it. The grooms were rising from their cots, awakened by

the storm. The other horses were quiet—most of them too sick to cause any trouble. Alec was afraid the Black would get out of control. He opened the door and went inside. The stallion backed into a corner. Alec held out the sugar. “Easy, Boy,” he said. The Black’s head was high in the air. He stopped his pounding as Alec put a hand on his neck. He reached down for the sugar. “That’s a good fella!” said Alec. Slowly the Black quieted under his hand.

Hours passed and dawn broke in the sky. The wind lessened and a torrent of rain poured down. One of the grooms came over to the Black’s stall. “Isn’t he sick at all?” he asked.

“A little,” Alec answered, “but mostly he’s just nervous, though.”

The man looked at the Black admiringly. “He certainly must have an iron constitution to go through seas like this without being sick. He’s the only animal on board that isn’t!”

Later in the day Alec began to feel queasy in his stomach. Desperately he fought against it. At last he had to admit that he was seasick. “Guess you’re a better man than I am, Black,” he said.

The next few days Alec didn’t care whether he lived or died. Most of the grooms were sick, too, so they didn’t pay much attention to him. The ship’s first mate, who acted as doctor on the ship, came down, and tried to make him go to his cabin, but sick as he was, he realized that he couldn’t leave the Black.

Three mornings later, Alec weakly rose to his feet and walked up to the stallion. The ship had stopped

rolling. "Hello, Boy," he said. "I see you're as spry as ever!" The stallion's ears pricked forward and he shook his head.

A groom came up. "How d'you feel, kid?" he asked.

"A little weak," Alec said, "but otherwise okay." He paused. "How much longer before we reach New York?"

"About two more days," the groom answered, "unless we run into some more rough weather—but I think we've had our share of it."

"I hope so," Alec said—and he meant it.

Two days later the ship's whistle blew for Quarantine, where the boat was to be inspected before passing into New York harbor. The Quarantine inspectors entered the hold and went from stall to stall, examining the horses. Alec noticed that each groom produced papers and showed them to the officer in charge. What would he do when they came to him? Perhaps it would be better if he went over now and explained why he didn't have any. Alec started toward the officer. Suddenly the Black's scream stopped him in his tracks. He turned and saw that one of the inspectors had crossed the hold and was opening the stallion's door. "Watch out!" shouted Alec, but he was too late. The Black reared and struck out with his front feet, striking the man and sending him flying against the door.

Alec rushed to the stall and flung himself between the stallion and the inspector. Desperately he grabbed the halter. The Black's frightened eyes never left the man on the floor. The inspector, spluttering angrily,

climbed to his feet. Alec felt relieved; if he was angry, he couldn't be hurt very badly. His trouser was ripped where the Black had struck him, but there were no other signs of injury.

The other inspectors came running. "What's the matter here?" asked the officer in charge.

"This horse attacked me, sir!" said the man. "He's a dangerous animal."

The officer walked closer to the door. "What have you to say about it?" he asked Alec, who was tightly holding the Black's halter.

Alec looked at the tall, sharp-featured man, and wondered whether the officer could prevent the Black from entering the country. He felt sick at the thought. They just couldn't do that. He met the officer's eyes. "I'm sorry about what happened, sir, and I know he wouldn't have done what he did if your inspector hadn't entered the stall like that. You see, he isn't used to people, sir. No one has ever been near him except me."

The officer's eyes traveled over the stallion. Then he walked toward the door and went inside. Alec took a firmer grip on the halter. "It's all right, Black," he said. "Whoa, Boy." The stallion moved uneasily.

The officer walked slowly around him. "He's quite a horse. Is he yours?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered Alec.

"Are your papers all in order?"

"I haven't any, sir, but the captain told me it would be all right. We were in a shipwreck and—"

"Oh, you're the one," interrupted the officer. "We've received orders about you. You're to go

through." He smiled. "You've certainly had a tough enough trip as it is without our making it any tougher." He turned to the inspector, who had his trouser rolled up and was washing his leg. "How's the leg, Sandy?" he asked.

"It's okay, I guess, sir—but that horse is the wildest one I've seen around here in fourteen years!" he answered.

"And I think the best, too!" The officer smiled. He turned to Alec. "You must have quite a story, son—shipwrecked, and turning up with an animal like this."

"It is, sir. We were both on the *Drake* when it went down, and from what I've heard we're the only survivors." He paused. "It's a pretty long story, sir." He turned to the stallion. "How about it, fella?" The Black snorted.

With a clean bill of health, the ship left Quarantine and steamed through the Narrows into the harbor. Alec eagerly peered through the porthole beside the Black's stall. His throat tightened as the skyline rose before him. Here he was back home again! How differently he had left it five months ago—it seemed more like five years!

Alec felt the Black's heavy breathing on his arm. He turned and ran his hand across the tender nostrils. "Well, Black," he said, "we're home!"

He could see the two small tugs effortlessly pushing the big freighter. The buildings climbed higher and higher into the sky. A large liner, ocean-bound, passed them—its stacks belching white smoke into the heavens. Tankers and flatboats loaded with railroad cars crept past. In the distance Alec saw the Statue of Lib-

erty. His eyes filled with tears. What was the matter with him? He was too old to become emotional. But his throat tightened and he swallowed hard as they neared the symbol of freedom and home!

An electric ferry plowed through the water beside the ship, its decks crowded with people. The sun was sinking behind the buildings on the Jersey shore. The Black sniffed at Alec's hand. He turned and smiled. "Only a few more minutes, Black," he said. He reached in his pocket and pulled out two lumps of sugar and a radiogram. The stallion took the sugar from his hand. Alec opened the yellow piece of paper, and read it once again: "Will be at pier. Can hardly wait. Love. Mother and Dad."

The steamer was now opposite Brooklyn, where it was to dock. The tugboats swung the ship around and headed toward the shore. The hold was filled with noise as the crew prepared to unload the ship. The Black became uneasy.

Then the boat slid up beside the dock. Alec heard the bumping of the boat against the dock. A few minutes later the hold doors were thrown open.

The crew began to unload the horses. Because of the Black's reputation, they made him wait until all the others were off. Then one of the crew signaled to him. "Okay," he said. Alec smiled as he saw him move quickly away out of the way.

Alec led the Black out of his stall, his hand tight on the lead rope. The stallion's head rose high; he knew that something unusual was going to happen. Lightly he pranced toward the door. The pier was crowded with people. Dusk had fallen and the lights were on.

The Black snorted; he had never seen anything like this. He reared, but Alec brought him down. It was a cool fall night. A breeze blew in through the open door, whipping his mane. His large eyes moved nervously, and he uttered a short, sharp whistle. He shook his head and screamed louder.

Sudden silence fell upon the dock, and all eyes turned toward the Black as he stood in the doorway. Slowly Alec led him down the gangplank. He felt the stallion's black body tremble as the city noises became louder now that the pier was quiet. Halfway down, the Black suddenly went high into the air. Alec brought him down. Three of the crew started up the gangplank to help. The Black saw them and rose again, his legs striking out in front. The men stopped in their tracks. The stallion had broken into a sweat.

Alec knew that he was losing control over him. He took a firmer grip on the rope, holding with two hands. A truck drove onto the pier, its two blazing headlights coming swiftly toward them. The Black screamed and rose once again. Alec was lifted from his feet, still gripping the rope. The stallion flung him to one side; he lost his hold, fell down to the gangplank. High above him he saw the pawing hooves. Cries from the spectators shattered the stillness.

The Black came down, his forelegs landing on each side of Alec's head! He snorted, turned and disappeared inside the hold. Alec lay still, dazed for a moment. Then he felt hands helping him to his feet.

"Are you all right?" one of the men asked.

"Yes, I'm okay," answered Alec. "Just a little shaken."

"You should be after that! He's a wild one!"

A policeman came running up, his gun in one hand. Fear for the Black crept into Alec's heart. He looked at the officer.

"Don't shoot him!" he said.

"I'm not going to," answered the policeman, "unless he endangers any lives."

Alec's strength slowly returned.

"I'll get him," he said.

"I'll go along with you," said the officer. The other men backed down off the gangplank.

"Perhaps I can do this better alone, sir," said Alec.

"Perhaps—but I'll go along just in case—"

Alec entered the hold first. He saw the horse standing beside his stall. His frightened eyes turned toward the boy.

"What's the matter, fella?" Alec said. "Is New York too much for you?" Cautiously he moved forward and placed his hand on the stallion's neck. The Black moved nervously. "Sure, it's new to you, but it really isn't so bad after you get used to it."

The stallion shoved his nose against Alec's chest. Alec put his hand in his pocket, drew out some sugar and gave it to him. He waited while the wild look gradually left the Black's eyes.

Then he took hold of the halter and led the Black toward the door. The policeman moved to one side. The stallion reared again when he again saw the lights and the crowd. Alec quickly turned him and went back to the stall.

The officer spoke up, "Take off your sweater, kid, and blindfold him."

"Good idea." Quickly he drew off his sweater. He led the stallion to a box, and stepped on it so as to reach his eyes. He folded the sweater and placed it across them, tying it in the back. The stallion jerked his head and tried to toss it off. He half-reared. Alec's assuring hand and voice calmed him down.

Once again he led him toward the door. When they appeared in the doorway, the crowd shouted. Carefully Alec led the stallion down the plank. He saw the stallion's ears prick forward and then go flat back against his head. His breathing became heavier. He shook his head and half-reared again. Alec glanced below; it seemed that thousands of upturned faces were watching them.

Halfway down, the Black again reared into the air. Once again Alec felt himself start to leave the gangplank. He let the rope slide through his hands. The stallion went high and then descended. Alec dodged the front hoofs. White-faced, he led the Black down. A few more feet and they were on the dock. The crowd shoved aside quickly to get out of the stallion's path.

The Black made a beautiful sight. He moved lightly on his feet; he tossed his head trying to rid himself of the blindfold; his mane waved in the wind. Alec's white sweater across his eyes made a sharp contrast against his coal-black body. "He's getting used to the noises," thought Alec, but he never relaxed his hold on the stallion.

Suddenly he heard his father's voice. "Alec, Alec—here we are!" He turned, saw his mother and father standing on the edge of the crowd—Dad just as tall and thin as ever, Mother just as short and plump. Their

faces were as white as the sweater across the Black's eyes. Alec moved toward them, then he remembered the stallion. He saw his mother grip his father's arm. He stopped a short distance away from them.

"Hello, Mother and Dad!" was all he said, though his heart was full. He could see his mother had been crying. Grasping the end of the rope so as to keep hold of the Black, Alec ran up to her, threw his arms around both of them.

"It's good to see you, Alec," his father said after a few minutes.

"It's good to be home," answered Alec. His mother smiled.

The Black moved restlessly beside him. Alec looked at him, then at his parents. "He's mine," he said proudly.

"I was afraid of that," said his father. His mother was too astonished to say anything. He saw his father's eyes going over the stallion. He had done a lot of riding in his day and it was from him that Alec, even as a small child, had learned to love horses. He said nothing, but Alec could tell that he was admiring the Black.

"I'll tell you the whole story later. I owe my life to him."

His mother seemed to have regained control of herself. "But he's so dangerous, son—he threw you down—" But she stopped, puzzled, as she met the calm, self-reliant look in the eyes of the boy who was holding the horse. This couldn't be her son, the boy who had left her only five months ago!

"What are you going to do with him, now that you've got him?" asked his father.

"I don't know, Dad, but I do know where I can keep him!" The words poured out of his mouth. He knew that he must convince his parents right now, once and for all, that the Black must be his—for keeps. "There's that old barn in the old Halleran place up the street where the Daileys are living now. I'm sure they'd let me keep him there for almost nothing, and he'd have a whole acre of ground to graze in! I'll work, Dad, after school, to make money to pay for his feed. Let me keep him, won't you?"

"We'll see, son," said his father quietly. He smiled reassuringly at Alec's mother. "We'll take him home and see how it works out. Only remember, Alec, he's your responsibility—yours to take care of and yours to feed. You've got a big job on your hands. I'll see to it that he gets to Flushing, but from then on it's up to you!"

A young man made his way cautiously around the Black and walked up to them. He carried a camera in one hand, with the other he removed his hat, disclosing hair as black as the stallion's body. "Pardon me," he said to Alec, "I'm Joe Russo of the *Daily Telegram*. I'd like to take a few pictures and get your story. I understand you're the only survivor of the *Drake* that went down off the coast of Portugal."

Alec pointed to the Black. "He was there, too," he said.

"Say, this is a story!" Joe Russo exclaimed. "You mean that horse was on the boat, too?"

"Yes," Alec answered. "He certainly was."

"What happened when the boat sank?" Joe asked, genuinely interested. He wrote hastily with his pencil.

"It's too long to tell you now," Alec replied. "Besides there is so much to be done around here. . . ." He turned to the Black, who was moving restlessly.

"Let me help you with him," Joe said with all the persistence of a young reporter. "You're going to need a van to get him home, and I think I know where I can get one. Then later on you can give me the whole story!"

"Okay," Alec said, grateful for any assistance with the immediate problem of getting the Black home.

NAPOLEON

8

An hour later Alec led the Black into a covered truck that Joe Russo had secured to carry him home. His mother had gone ahead, driving the family car. "You won't get me to ride with that horse!" she had said. His father sat in front with Joe Russo and the driver. Alec, afraid to leave the Black alone, stood in the rear with him. The stallion snorted as the truck began to move into the street. His eyes were still covered with the sweater.

Taxicabs roared past, their horns blowing loudly. Trucks rattled toward the ship to pick up cargo. Men shouted in the streets. Cart peddlers clamored their wares. Noise, noise, noise—this was the Black's introduction to New York.

Alec's hand was firm on the halter. Out of the small window in back of the driver he could see the buildings blazing with lights. New York seemed strange to him, too—he had forgotten. The stallion moved uneasily, his head jerked in an attempt to throw off the

sweater. "Whoa, Boy," said Alec. He patted the smooth, black coat. Down through the city streets they went.

Alec's father kept looking around, as if he couldn't take his eyes off Alec and the stallion. Slowly the truck moved in and out of the traffic. An elevated train roared overhead. The stallion whistled and half-rose, almost hitting the top of the truck. Alec pulled him down.

Gradually the traffic lessened. They moved farther out of the business section and turned toward Flushing. The worst was over now, and the Black was quiet. Alec was free to think of what fun it was going to be to ride him in that big field near the barn—if they would only let him keep him there.

Then the van was going down the main street of Flushing. Alec peered out the window eagerly. It was good to see the familiar stores and buildings again. Two more blocks and they turned down a side street. Another ten minutes, and Alec saw his own house on the right. His father turned and smiled at him through the window. Alec smiled back.

The truck rolled on past and down the street to the old Halleran house. The van turned into the driveway past a large sign that said TOURISTS. It came to a stop in front of the door.

Alec's father came around to the side of the van. "Okay, Alec," he said, "it's up to you now. Better go in and see whether Mrs. Dailey will let you keep him in the barn."

Alec let go of the Black's halter. "Take it easy, Boy," he said. Then he jumped off the van, went up the

porch steps and rang the doorbell. The Daileys had moved into the old Halleran place shortly before Alec went to India, so he wasn't very well acquainted with Mrs. Dailey, who now came to the door. She was a large, comfortable-looking, heavy-set woman.

"Hello, Mrs. Dailey," Alec said. "Remember me?"

"Why, you're the young lad from up the street, but they told me—" She paused in obvious amazement. "They told me that you had been drowned in a shipwreck."

"We were rescued," Alex said. "Just got home tonight."

"Your mother and father must be awfully thankful," she said. "You must have had an awful time!"

"It was pretty bad, Mrs. Dailey—but what I wanted to see you about, Mrs. Dailey, was—well, I brought back a horse with me—we were rescued together."

"A horse!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," said Alec, "and Dad told me I could keep him if I found a place for him to stay. I'd like to put him in one of the stalls in your barn—I'll pay you for it," he added.

"But the barn isn't in very good shape, son," said Mrs. Dailey. She smiled. "And we already have a boarder in the one good stall!"

"A boarder?"

"Yes, Tony, the huckster, keeps old Napoleon down there now."

"Napoleon? Do you mean the old gray horse he's always had?" Alec asked.

"Yes, that's the one—seems to me he should die any day now, though, then you'll be able to use his stall!"

"But I don't know of any other place I could keep my horse, Mrs. Dailey." Alec was beginning to feel desperate. "Don't you have another stall he could use?"

"Well, I suppose the stall right next to Napoleon could be fixed up, but I haven't the time or the money to have it done. If you want to keep your horse there, you'll have to fix it yourself."

"Sure I will, Mrs. Dailey!" said Alec happily. "Could I keep him there tonight?"

"Oh, all right," she gave in with a smile. "And if you do a good job in the barn, I'll go easy on the rent."

"That's swell of you, Mrs. Dailey. I'll do a good job all right!"

"I'll get my husband to open the gate for you," she said. "Henry!" she called loudly. "He'll be down in a few minutes, I suppose. You can drive to the gate—I'll have him meet you there."

"Thanks again, Mrs. Dailey," said Alec. "Thanks a million times." He turned and leaped down the porch steps.

"She's going to let me keep him here!" he shouted as he jumped on the running board of the van.

"That's good," answered his father.

"You're quite a salesman!" laughed Joe Russo. Alec saw that he was making notes on his pad.

"Wait until she sees what's going to stay in her barn!" said Alec's father gravely.

They drove past a high iron fence until they reached the gate. There they stopped and waited for Henry. Finally he showed up—a short, chunky man with large shoulders. He came toward them walking in jerky, bowlegged strides. His white shirt tails flapped in

the night wind. He wiped a large hand across his mouth. "Right with you," he yelled. He shoved a key inside the lock and then pushed back the heavy gate; the hinges creaked as it swung open. "Come on," he said.

The van rolled through and went up the gravel road to the barn. The headlights shone on the large door. Henry came up behind them. "I'll open the door," he said, "and you can bring him right in."

Alec let down the side door of the van so that he could get the stallion out. He grasped the halter. "It's your new home, Boy!" he said. Slowly he led the stallion down to the ground. The Black tossed his head and kicked up his heels.

"Look at him!" said Alec. "He feels swell already!" He saw the men gazing admiringly at the stallion.

Henry leaned on the barn door; his eyes moved slowly over the Black. "The Missus told me you had a horse—but I never expected one like this!" He shook his head. "Good head, wide chest, strong legs," he muttered, almost to himself.

Alec led the Black into the barn. In the box stall nearest the door was Napoleon, his old gray head hanging out over the stall door. He whinnied when he saw the Black and drew his head back into the stall.

"Shall I put him next to Napoleon there, Mr. Dailey?" Alec asked. "Do you think it'll be safe? He gets pretty nervous sometimes."

"Sure, put him there. Old Napoleon will be more of a help to him than anything—steady him down." Henry went over to a corner of the barn and picked up a bale of straw which he carried back into the stall and

spread around. "We'll borrow some of Tony's straw for bedding. He won't mind. Now you can put him in, son," he said. "There are a few things that need to be fixed, but I guess it'll hold him—you can do a better job tomorrow."

"Thanks," Alec said.

"What are you going to feed him tonight, Alec? Did you think of that?" his father asked.

"Gee, that's right!" said Alec. "I *had* forgotten!" He turned to Henry. "Where do you think I could get some feed, Mr. Dailey?"

"Well, Tony gets his down at the feed store on the corner of Parsons and Northern, but I imagine they're closed now. But you can use some of Tony's and pay him back when you get your own."

"Great," answered Alec. He led the Black into the stall next to Napoleon's. It was a little run-down, but it was roomy, and Alec could tell that the stallion liked it. He stood very patiently while Alec removed his halter and rubbed him down. Then Henry handed Alec a pail of feed and Alec dumped it into the Black's box.

Old Napoleon stuck his head curiously over the board between the stalls. The Black saw him, strode over and sniffed suspiciously. Napoleon didn't move. Alec was afraid they might fight. Then the Black put his head over into Napoleon's stall and whinnied. Napoleon whinnied back.

Henry laughed. "See, what'd I tell you? They're friends already."

Alec left the stall, feeling more easy about the Black than at any time since they had begun the long journey home. "I'm glad he liked Napoleon," he said.

"Perhaps I can leave him now. He has to learn to be alone sometime."

"He looks as though he'll be all right," said his father. "In fact, he seems to like it here. He isn't so wild, after all!"

"He's all right, Dad, when he gets used to things. It's just when something new upsets him that he gets out of control."

"Well, son, let's go home and see your mother. She's probably worrying herself to death."

Joe Russo spoke up. "I hate to make a nuisance of myself, Mr. Ramsay, but I'd like to go along and get your son's story. It has all the earmarks of a good yarn and I certainly could use one!"

Alec's father smiled. "Sure, it's all right. Glad to have you. This is a day of celebration for us, you know!"

Henry led the way out of the barn. Alec heard the Black's soft whistle as the light went out. Then there was silence. Henry shut the barn door.

A slight chill had crept into the air. The van had already gone. They walked slowly down the gravel road toward the gate. Henry handed Alec the key to the lock. "You can have this, son," he said. "I've another up at the house, and you'll probably be coming around here a lot now."

"Thanks, Mr. Dailey," replied Alec. "I certainly will."

"That's all right—and you don't have to call me Mr. Dailey—just call me Henry like everyone does around here. Anything else seems kind of funny!"

"Right, Henry."

Henry left them at the gate. They crossed the street and walked up toward the house. Alec saw a light on the front porch and his legs traveled faster.

"Take it easy," said his father. "I'm not as young as I used to be, you know!"

"I can't even keep up with that pace myself," laughed Joe, "and I'm still pretty young."

"I'll meet you there," said Alec, and he broke into a run.

He reached the house and took the porch steps two at a time. He flung himself at the door. It was unlocked; he ran into the hallway and glanced into the living room; it was empty. He put a hand on the banister and started up the stairs. Then he heard his mother's voice from the kitchen. "Alexander, is that you?"

"Yes, Mom, it's really me," he yelled. He ran into the kitchen and flung his arms around his mother. "Boy, it's good to be home!" he said.

He looked up at his mother and saw that her eyes were moist. "What's the matter, Mom? What are you crying for?"

Mrs. Ramsay smiled through her tears. "Nothing's the matter. I'm just glad you're home, that's all."

Alec put his lean brown arm through his mother's soft plump one, and together they went into the living room as his father and Joe Russo came in from outdoors.

The reporter looked around the room with its soft shaded lights and its comfortable-looking furniture, then at Alec and his father and mother. "Guess you couldn't blame him for wanting to get back to this," Joe said.

"You bet!" Alec agreed.

His mother sat down on the couch and Alec sat beside her, his arm still in hers. His father was filling his pipe in his favorite chair in the corner. "All right, son," he said. "Tell us all about it."

"Well," Alec began, "it was a few days after I left Uncle Ralph at Bombay that we stopped at a small Arabian port on the Red Sea—"

The clock on top of the radio ticked off the minutes as Alec told his story. Once more he was on the *Drake* and seeing the Black for the first time. He forgot that his mother, his father and Joe Russo were listening to him. He was in the storm, hearing the roar of the gale and the smashing of the waves against the boat. He heard the loud crack of lightning as it struck the ship. Then the Black was dragging him through the water—hours and hours they battled the waves in the darkness. He roamed the island, fighting against starvation. He discovered the carragheen that had saved them both. He rode the stallion for the first time—that wild, never-to-be-forgotten ride! Then the fire, that awful fire, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The joy that was his when he saw the sailors dragging their boat up the beach. Rio de Janeiro—home. . . .

He finished, and there was silence. His mother's hand was gripping his. The clock ticked loudly. It seemed to say, "You're home . . . you're home . . ."

His father's pipe had gone out. "I don't know what to say, son"—he broke the silence—"except that God must have been with you—and with us." He turned to Mrs. Ramsay. "We're pretty thankful, aren't we, Mother?"

Alec felt the pressure of her hand. "Yes," she answered, "we have much to be thankful for."

"I can understand now how you love that horse," Joe Russo said.

"Yes, Alec," said his father, "I can promise you now he'll always have a place here with us."

"If it wasn't for him—that wild, untamed animal—" his mother said.

Joe Russo stood up. "I want to thank you for letting me stay," he said. "If there is anything I can ever do—"

Mr. Ramsay rose from his chair. "That's all right. Glad to have helped you," he said. "Good night." He held out his hand.

"Good night, sir." He smiled at Alec and his mother. "Take good care of that horse," he said to the boy.

"You bet I will," answered Alec. "And thanks for all you've done."

Not long after Joe left, Alec said good night to his parents and went to bed. The excitement of being home and sleeping in his own bed again made him restless. He lay awake for an hour, then he fell into a sound sleep.

Suddenly a shrill whistle awakened him. He opened his eyes sleepily. Had he been dreaming or had he actually heard the Black scream? The night was still. A minute passed. Then he heard the whistle again—it was the Black.

Alec jumped out of bed. The clock on his dresser told him it was only a little after twelve! He was wide awake as he pulled on his robe and quickly ran down

the stairs and out the door. He heard the Black scream again as he entered the gate. Lights flashed on in Henry's house—then in the houses near by. The Black was waking everyone up! Alec sprinted toward the barn. He reached the door. The light was on!

The Black screamed when he saw him. His head reached far out over the stall.

"Dio mio!" a voice was moaning from inside Napoleon's stall. Alec couldn't see anybody—only old Napoleon, who stood trembling on the far side of his stall. His frightened eyes turned beseechingly toward Alec. *"Dio mio!"* came the voice again.

"Hello," yelled Alec. "Who's there?"

The Black pawed nervously at the floor of his stall. Then Alec saw a hand move over the top of Napoleon's door and cautiously push it open. Suddenly, like a charging fullback, a man plunged through the stall door.

He swept past and was outside before Alec could catch a glimpse of him. The Black whistled again. "Hey, Black," yelled Alec, "take it easy!" Then he ran toward the door and looked out into the night. Alec saw a man standing beside Henry, who had just arrived on the scene. It was Tony, the huckster, owner of Napoleon! Poor Tony, he'd probably been frightened to death at the sight of the Black in the stall next to Napoleon!

"Hello, Tony," Alec called as he made his way toward him. Some of the neighbors, their robes pulled hastily about them, were coming up the driveway. Then the sound of a police siren reached Alec's ears.

"Gosh," he said as a police car turned into the driveway. "Tony, you're all right, aren't you?" he asked.

"Sure, he's all right," answered Henry, grinning. "The Black just surprised him."

Tony only nodded. He was still too scared to speak. A small crowd gathered around them. "What's the matter here?" asked the policeman as he got out of his car.

"Nothing serious, officer," Henry spoke up. "I own this barn and took in another horse tonight, unknown to Tony here. They both sorta surprised each other—that's about all there is to it."

"That right?" the officer asked Tony.

Tony found his voice. "Si," he said, "that's-a right. I ver' busy make-a better the harness sore on my Nappy when I look-a up and see heem. He sure make-a me the surprise all right."

The crowd laughed at Tony's comments. "Well," said the policeman, "guess everything's all right around here, then. Who owns the horse?"

"I do, sir," Alec answered.

"You're rather young to own a horse that does such a big job of scaring people." The officer smiled.

"I just brought him to New York yesterday," Alec replied. "He's still pretty nervous, but he'll get over it."

"He sounds like quite a horse. Would you mind letting me take a look at him?" the policeman asked.

"Be glad to," Alec said.

The small crowd moved forward, pushing Tony in front of them. Alec stopped at the door of the barn. "Most of you will have to watch from here," he said. "Too many people will get him excited again."

The Black neighed softly as Henry, Alec, Tony and the policeman approached the stall. Napoleon stuck his head over the stall door and neighed at the sight of Tony, who hung back. The Black still pawed at the floor of his stall. Alec rubbed his nose.

"He's a beauty," the policeman said. "I've always had a weakness for horses ever since I spent two years on the mounted force. Don't know as I've ever seen one like this, though." He paused, then after watching the Black a few minutes, he continued, "Yep, looks like everything's okay around here—and I have to get back to the station. So long." He left, taking the crowd with him.

Tony stayed in the barn with Alec and Henry. Gingerly he moved toward Napoleon, keeping one watchful eye on the Black. The stallion pushed his head forward. He neighed. "He likes you and Napoleon," Alec said.

Tony reached a hand to the Black's muzzle, then jerked it away quickly as the stallion shook his head. Alec and Henry laughed. "Si," said Tony, "I like-a heem, too, after a while!"

A short time later, Alec once again climbed the stairs to his bedroom. Luckily his parents were both sound sleepers—it was better that they didn't know of the commotion the Black had made.

Alec climbed wearily back into bed. He was really tired now. He glanced at the clock—two-fifteen—and he wanted to be over to the barn early the next morning! His head fell back on the pillow. He was soon fast asleep.

ESCAPE

9

The next morning when Alec opened his eyes, he saw the familiar high school banners hanging on the walls. It was good to be in his own room again. Then right away he wondered how the Black was after his rumpus of last night! Alec turned on his side and looked out the window. The sun was rising. It must be around six o'clock.

Not much sleep—but then he was accustomed to that after the last few months. The leaves on the trees were turning a bright autumn red. He was glad his father had told him he wouldn't have to go to school today. "One more day won't hurt," he had said, "and it'll give you a chance to accustom yourself again." He knew what his father had really meant was that it would give him a chance to accustom the Black to his new surroundings!

Alec jumped out of bed and ran to the bathroom. He took a cold shower, dressed and tiptoed down the stairs. He opened the door and went out into the crisp

morning air. It was quiet as only early morning can be. The grass was wet with a heavy dew. He walked down the street, softly whistling to himself. A safe distance away from the house he began to sing.

He found the gate ajar. Someone must be there already—perhaps Tony! He ran up the road toward the barn, and heard a deep bass voice coming from inside. "*San-ta Lu-ci-a, Santa Lu-cia!*" Sure, that couldn't be anyone else but Tony! The barn door was open. Alec saw the little Italian sitting on a chair, his eyes fastened on the two stalls from which were coming deep munching sounds.

"Hello, Tony!"

Tony turned, his dark, wrinkled face creasing into a broad smile. "Hello," he said. "You see, I'm not afraid of heem any more!"

"Yes," Alec laughed, "I can see that. You'll get along swell with him as time goes on!"

"Ah, he's one great fella—make-a me think when Napoleon was-a young! So frisky, so full of pep, and when he saw me feed Napoleon, he let me feed heem, too!"

"That's pretty good, Tony. Usually he won't let anyone get near him but me."

"Look at them," Tony said.

Napoleon had shoved his nose through the bars and was trying to get at the Black's feed box. The stallion playfully nipped him. Napoleon withdrew his head and looked over the stall door.

"Time to go to work, young fella," laughed Tony. He let him out of the stall, and rubbed his hand over

the gray, ragged coat. "Tomorrow I give heem a good bath so he'll be white as snow!" he said.

Alec watched Tony harness Napoleon. He saw him tenderly arrange a thick pad over the cut on Napoleon's shoulder. He noticed that the Black was also an interested spectator.

"Give me a hand, will you, Alec? We're kinda late this morning," Tony said.

Alec helped to harness old Napoleon to the little huckster's wagon. It seemed child's play to handle the gentle old gray horse after the spirited stallion.

They heard the Black scream inside. Alec ran into the barn. "What's the matter, Black?" he said.

The long black neck was stretched questioningly into the next stall. He missed Napoleon.

"Napoleon has to go to work, Boy, but he'll be back tonight." Alec opened the door and took the Black by the halter. He grabbed the lead rope from a nail outside the stall and fastened it to the halter. Then he led the Black out.

Tony was climbing into the seat of the wagon. "Well, Alec, we gotta go," he said. "See you tonight. Come on, Napoleon."

Napoleon raised his head and neighed as he saw the Black. He refused to move. Tony shook the reins. "Come on, now, Nappy. We gotta go!" he repeated. Napoleon shook his head, looked at the Black, then resignedly started off.

The Black pulled at the rope. He wanted to follow. Alec held him back. He reared high into the air; his ears pitched forward and he snorted angrily.

Alec smiled. "Hate to see your roommate leave, don't you?"

They watched Tony and Napoleon go slowly down the gravel road to the gate. Napoleon broke into a slow trot down the street.

When they were out of sight, the Black moved in a circle around Alec.

"Feeling pretty good, aren't you, Boy?" Alec let the rope out to give the Black more room. He led him toward the open field, encircled by a stone wall. "You're going to like this to graze in," he said. "Just look at all that grass!"

The Black cropped the green grass hungrily. When he seemed to have had enough, Alec ran down the field with him. "Not too fast now, Black!" Alec called as the stallion cantered ahead of him. Halfway down the field he found himself tiring and pulled the Black to a halt.

"How about giving me a ride now, Black?" he asked. He looked for a place to mount him. He drew the stallion alongside the stone wall, climbed up on it and slid onto the Black, grasping the halter with both hands.

He hadn't had a chance to ride him since the island. The Black stood still a moment, then broke into a trot. Alec was able to guide him fairly well with the halter and he found that the stallion still remembered his lessons on the island.

Down the field they went, the wind whipping in Alec's face, the early morning stillness echoing with the stallion's hoofbeats. His long powerful strides made the field seem much too small. Alec turned him around

the edge and started him back up the field. They went faster and faster. Alec dug his knees into the stallion's sides and his own body moved rhythmically with the Black's. They swept past the barn and Alec turned him back down the field again. Around and around the field they went.

After a while Alec managed to slow him down a bit. The Black continued around the field at a gallop. Then he slackened into a trot. Alec had never been happier. Home at last—and with a horse like this! All his very own! He buried his head in the Black's mane and wiped his hand across his eyes, drying the tears the wind had brought to them.

They approached the barn. Alec saw Henry Dailey leaning against the door watching them. He rode up to him and dismounted, catching hold of the stallion's halter. "Morning, Henry," he said. He felt the Black's coat. "Not even wet. . . . What a horse, Henry! We've been going around that field like the wind! Did you see us?"

Henry didn't move from the door but Alec saw his small gray eyes going over the Black inch by inch. "Sure, I saw you," he said. "Son, I've seen a lot of horses in my day and rode my share of 'em, but I never saw one give any better exhibition than that!"

Alec beamed with pride. "He is swell, Henry, isn't he? I still can't believe he's mine!" The stallion's long neck reached down to the ground and he buried his nose in the green grass.

"Let him loose, Alec. See how he likes it," said Henry.

"Do you think it's safe?"

"He's all right now. You gave him a good run. Besides he has to get used to being left alone, anyway."

"Guess you're right, Henry." Alec unsnapped the lead rope from the halter. The stallion raised his head and his nostrils quivered. Suddenly he wheeled and trotted swiftly down the field.

Alec and Henry watched him. "It's the first freedom he's had in a long time," said Alec.

"And he's sure enjoying it." Henry looked after the Black admiringly.

The stallion stopped and turned his great head toward them. He whistled softly.

"Boy, I'd love to see him on a track!" Henry said thoughtfully.

"You mean race, Henry?" Alec asked.

"Yep."

Alec turned to the Black, who was now loping down the field again in an easy, graceful canter, his head turning from side to side. "It'd take a long time before he'd be safe on any track though, Henry."

"Well, we have plenty of time, haven't we, Alec?"

"We?" Alec stared at the small husky man beside him. "You mean, Henry, that you and I could do it?"

Henry hadn't moved—his eyes still followed the Black around the field. "Sure, we can," he said quietly, and then his voice lowered so that Alec could hardly hear him. "Never liked this business of retiring, anyway," he said. "Not too old—still have plenty of good years left in me! This life's all right for the Missus—she's got enough to do to keep her busy, but I need ac-

tion. And here I have it shoved right into my lap!" His voice grew louder. "Alec," he continued, "I know we can make a champion out of the Black." His face was wrinkled with excitement, his eyelids narrowed until they were only slits in his lined face.

"You really mean it, Henry? But how—"

The old man interrupted him and he moved for the first time. "Sure, I'm confident, Alec, and I know my horses." He took the boy by the arm. "Come with me and I'll show you something."

Henry led him to the far end of the barn. He knelt down beside an old trunk. He took a key from his pocket, inserted it into the lock and opened it. The trunk was crammed to the top with trophies and silver cups. Henry dug down and pulled out a large scrapbook. "The Missus always kept this for me, even before we were married."

He turned the faded yellowish pages that were filled with newspaper clippings. Headline after headline caught Alec's eye as he knelt beside Henry: DAILEY RIDES CHANG TO VICTORY IN SCOTT MEMORIAL—DAILEY BRINGS WARRIOR HOME FIRST IN \$50,000 FUTURITY—TURFDOM ACCLAIMS DAILEY AS GREATEST RIDER OF ALL TIME—Henry stopped turning the pages, his eyes gazing steadily at a photograph in front of him. "This, son," he said, "is where I got the greatest thrill of my life—riding Chang home first in the Kentucky Derby. Wouldn't think that little guy there was me, would you?"

Alec looked closer. He saw a small boy, with a wide grin on his face, astride a large, powerful-looking red horse. Around the horse's neck hung the winner's

horseshoe of roses. Alec noticed the large, strong hands holding the reins and the stocky, broad shoulders. "Yes," he said, "I can tell that's you."

Henry smiled and reached down into the trunk again. He took out what looked to Alec like old dried-out leaves. Then he saw that they were in the shape of a horseshoe. He looked again at the photograph.

"Yes," Henry said, "it's the same one they placed around Chang's neck that day. Not much left of 'em, but they still hold plenty of memories!"

Henry put the dried flowers back into the trunk. "When I finally got too old and too heavy to ride horses any more, I trained them instead," he continued. "I married the Missus and we were both pretty happy. We had two children—both girls; now they're married. Somehow, I've always missed not having a boy—someone like you, son, who loved horses, and who would sort of follow in my footsteps, because there isn't anything so exciting in the world as lining up there at the post with a four-legged piece of dynamite underneath you!

"Well, to go on, I was pretty successful as a trainer, made good money. And then came the day when the Missus thought it was time for us to retire and get away from the track. Can't say as I blame her, it's the only life she ever knew after she married me, and I guess it wasn't in her blood like it was in mine. We did a lot of movin' around for a good many years, then we bought this place, and here we are. It's been two years since I saw my last race—two years. I don't think I can stand it much longer."

Henry paused again. "You see, Alec," he said, "I'm telling you this to show you that if there is only one thing that I do know anything about it's whether a horse is any good or not—and let me tell you we can make the Black the greatest racer that ever set a hoof on any track!"

Henry closed the book with a sharp crack and placed it back inside the trunk. He rose to his feet and put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "What do you say, son—are you game?"

Alec looked at the old man and then toward the open door where he could see the Black in the distance. "It would be great, Henry!" he said. "And I know he would give any horse in the world a real race—if we can just keep him from fighting."

"It'll be a tough job, Alec, but it's going to be worth it to see him come pounding down the home-stretch!"

"Where can we train him, Henry?"

"We can't do much until spring, Alec—just let him get used to it around here. You can ride him around the field and I'll teach you all the tricks I know. We won't be able to do much else with him with winter coming on. I don't think we'll even bother with a bridle and saddle yet—we'll wait until early spring for that, too. By that time we shouldn't have much trouble putting them on him. Then I think I can find a way to get him over to Belmont for some workouts on the track—that's when the real training begins!"

"Sounds swell, Henry! Do you think I'll be able to ride him in the races?"

Henry smiled. "Unless I'm very much mistaken, that horse isn't going to let anyone else ride him."

As they walked toward the door, the loud drone of an airplane filled the air. "That fellow's awfully close to the ground!" said Alec. "His motor seems to be missing, too!"

They ran outside and saw a plane flying low over the barn; its motor stuttered and then caught again, shattering the early morning stillness with a deafening roar. "He's got it!" said Henry.

But Alec wasn't watching the plane now; he had heard something above the plane's roar. The sharp, piercing whistle of the Black! Alec saw the stallion rise on his hind legs and wheel in the air, running at break-neck speed down the field.

"Look, Henry!" Alec shouted. "The Black!" The stallion was nearing the end of the field, his pace never slackening, his long, black mane whipping behind him like waves of smoke.

"Lord!" said Henry. "The plane scared him! He'll kill himself on those rocks!"

"He's not going to stop, Henry!" Then they saw the Black gather himself, and, like a taut, powerful spring just released, sail through the air and over the fence.

"Seven feet if it's an inch!" exclaimed Henry. "Come on, we've got to get him!" Together they rushed down the field. They saw the Black in the distance—then he was out of sight! Suddenly Henry stopped. "I'll go back and get the car, Alec. You keep after him!" he said.

"All right," Alec shouted over his shoulder. "He's headed for the park!" Quickly he climbed the fence, and ran as fast as he could in the direction the stallion had taken. Soon Henry caught up to him in the car. "Climb in, son," he said. The Black was nowhere to be seen.