


"The most famous fictional horse of the century."  
—*The New York Times*

A black silhouette of a horse rearing up on its hind legs, set against a background of turbulent blue and white water. The horse's mane and tail are flowing.

# THE BLACK STALLION

Walter Farley

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## HOMeward BOUND

### 1

The tramp steamer *Drake* plowed away from the coast of India and pushed its blunt prow into the Arabian Sea, homeward bound. Slowly it made its way west toward the Gulf of Aden. Its hold was loaded with coffee, rice, tea, oil seeds and jute. Black smoke poured from its one stack, darkening the hot cloudless sky.

Alexander Ramsay, known to his friends back home in New York City as Alec, leaned over the rail and watched the water slide away from the sides of the boat. His red hair blazed redder than ever in the hot sun; his tanned elbows rested heavily on the rail as he turned his freckled face back toward the fast-disappearing shore.

It had been fun—those two months in India. He would miss Uncle Ralph, miss the days they had spent together in the jungle, even the screams of the panthers and the many eerie sounds of the jungle night. Never again would he think of a missionary's work as easy work. No, sir, you had to be big and strong, able to ride

horseback for long hours through the tangled jungle paths. Alec glanced down proudly at the hard muscles in his arms. Uncle Ralph had taught him how to ride—the one thing in the world he had always wanted to do.

But it was all over now. Rides back home would be few.

His fist opened. Lovingly he surveyed the pearl pocketknife he held there. The inscription on it was in gold: *To Alec on his birthday, Bombay, India*. He remembered, too, his uncle's words: "A knife, Alec, comes in handy sometimes."

Suddenly a large hand descended on his shoulder. "Well, m'boy, you're on your way home," a gruff voice said, with a decidedly English accent.

Alec looked up into the captain's wrinkled, wind-tanned face. "Hello, Captain Watson," he answered. "It's rather a long way home, though, sir. To England with you and then to New York on the *Majestic*."

"About four weeks' sailing all in all, lad, but you look like a pretty good sailor."

"I am, sir. I wasn't sick once all the way over and we had a rough crossing, too," Alec said proudly.

"When'd you come over, lad?"

"In June, sir, with some friends of my father's. They left me with my uncle in Bombay. You know my Uncle Ralph, don't you? He came aboard with me and spoke to you."

"Yes, I know your Uncle Ralph. A fine man, too. . . . And now you're going home alone?"

"Yes, sir! School opens next month and I have to be there."

The captain smiled and took Alec by the arm.



"Come along," he said. "I'll show you how we steer this ship and what makes it go."

The captain and crew were kind to Alec, but the days passed monotonously for the homeward-bound boy as the *Drake* steamed its way through the Gulf of Aden and into the Red Sea. The tropic sun beat down mercilessly on the heads of the few passengers aboard.

The *Drake* kept near the coast of Arabia—endless miles of barren desert shore. But Alec's thoughts were not on the scorching sand. Arabia—where the greatest horses in the world were bred! Did other fellows dream of horses the way he did? To him, a horse was the greatest animal in the world.

Then one day the *Drake* headed for a small Arabian port. As they approached the small landing, Alec saw a crowd of Arabs milling about in great excitement. Obviously it was not often that a boat stopped there.

But, as the gangplank went down with a bang, Alec could see that it wasn't the ship itself that was attracting all the attention. The Arabs were crowding toward the center of the landing. Alec heard a whistle—shrill, loud, clear, unlike anything he had ever heard before. He saw a mighty black horse rear on its hind legs, its forelegs striking out into the air. A white scarf was tied across its eyes. The crowd broke and ran.

White lather ran from the horse's body; his mouth was open, his teeth bared. He was a giant of a horse, glistening black—too big to be pure Arabian. His mane was like a crest, mounting, then falling low. His neck was long and slender, and arched to the small, savagely

beautiful head. The head was that of the wildest of all wild creatures—a stallion born wild—and it was beautiful, savage, splendid. A stallion with a wonderful physical perfection that matched his savage, ruthless spirit.

Once again the Black screamed and rose on his hind legs. Alec could hardly believe his eyes and ears—a stallion, a wild stallion—unbroken, such as he had read and dreamed about!

Two ropes led from the halter on the horse's head, and four men were attempting to pull the stallion toward the gangplank. They were going to put him on the ship! Alec saw a dark-skinned man, wearing European dress and a high, white turban, giving directions. In his hand he held a whip. He gave his orders tersely in Arabic. Suddenly he walked to the rear of the horse and let the hard whip fall on the Black's hindquarters. The stallion bolted so fast that he struck one of the Arabs holding the rope; down the man went and lay still. The Black snorted and plunged; if ever Alec saw hate expressed by a horse, he saw it then. They had him halfway up the plank. Alec wondered where they would put him if they ever did succeed in getting him on the boat.

Then he was on! Alec saw Captain Watson waving his arms frantically, motioning and shouting for the men to pull the stallion toward the stern. The boy followed at a safe distance. Now he saw the makeshift stall into which they were attempting to get the Black—it had once been a good-sized cabin. The *Drake* had little accommodation for transporting animals; its hold was already heavily laden with cargo.

Finally they had the horse in front of the stall. One

of the men clambered to the top of the cabin, reached down and pulled the scarf away from the stallion's eyes. At the same time, the dark-skinned man again hit the horse on the hindquarters and he bolted inside. Alec thought the stall would never be strong enough to hold him. The stallion tore into the wood and sent it flying; thunder rolled from under his hoofs; his powerful legs crashed into the sides of the cabin; his wild, shrill, high-pitched whistle filled the air. Alec felt a deep pity steal over him, for here was a wild stallion used to the open range imprisoned in a stall in which he was hardly able to turn.

Captain Watson was conversing angrily with the dark-skinned man; the captain had probably never expected to ship a cargo such as this! Then the man pulled a thick wallet from inside his coat; he counted the bills off and handed them to the captain. Captain Watson looked at the bills and then at the stall; he took the money, shrugged his shoulders and walked away. The dark-skinned man gathered the Arabs who had helped bring the stallion aboard, gave them bills from his wallet, and they departed down the gangplank.

Soon the *Drake* was again under way. Alec gazed back at the port, watching the group gathered around the inert form of the Arab who had gone down under the Black's mighty hoofs; then he turned to the stall. The dark-skinned man had gone to his cabin, and only the excited passengers were standing around outside the stall. The black horse was still fighting madly inside.

The days that followed were hectic ones for Alec, passengers and crew. He had never dreamed a horse could have such spirit, be so untamable. The ship



resounded far into the night from the blows struck by those powerful legs. The outside of the stall was now covered with reinforcements. The dark-skinned man became more mysterious than ever—always alone, and never talking to anyone but the captain.

The *Drake* steamed through the Suez into the Mediterranean.

That night Alec stole out on deck, leaving the rest of the passengers playing cards. He listened carefully. The Black was quiet tonight. Quickly he walked in the direction of the stall. At first he couldn't see or hear anything. Then as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he made out the pink-colored nostrils of the Black, who was sticking his head out of the window.

Alec walked slowly toward him; he put one hand in his pocket to see if the lumps of sugar he had taken from the dinner table were still there. The wind was blowing against him, carrying his scent away. He was quite close now. The Black was looking out on the open sea; his ears pricked forward, his thin-skinned nostrils quivering, his black mane flowing like windswept flame. Alec could not turn his eyes away; he could not believe such a perfect animal existed.

The stallion turned and looked directly at him—his black eyes blazed. Once again that piercing whistle filled the night air, and he disappeared into the stall. Alec took the sugar out of his pocket and left it on the window sill. He went to his cabin. Later, when he returned, it was gone. Every night thereafter Alec would steal up to the stall, leave the sugar and depart; sometimes he would see the Black and other times he would only hear the ring of hoofs against the floor.

## THE STORM

### 2

The *Drake* stopped at Alexandria, Bengasi, Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers, passed the Rock of Gibraltar and turned north up the coast of Portugal. Now they were off Cape Finisterre on the coast of Spain, and in a few days, Captain Watson told Alec, they would be in England.

Alec wondered why the Black was being shipped to England—perhaps for stud, perhaps to race. The slanting shoulders, the deep broad chest, the powerful legs, the knees not too high nor too low—these, his uncle had taught him, were marks of speed and endurance.

That night Alec made his customary trip to the stall, his pockets filled with lumps of sugar. The night was hot and still; heavy clouds blacked out the stars; in the distance long streaks of lightning raced through the sky. The Black had his head out the window. Again he was looking out to sea, his nostrils quivering more than ever. He turned, whistled as he saw the boy, then again faced the water.

Alec felt elated—it was the first time that the stallion hadn't drawn back into the stall at the sight of him. He moved closer. He put the sugar in the palm of his hand and hesitantly held it out to the stallion. The Black turned and once again whistled—softer this time. Alec stood his ground. Neither he nor anyone else had been this close to the stallion since he came on board. But he did not care to take the chance of extending his arm any nearer the bared teeth, the curled nostrils. Instead he placed the sugar on the sill. The Black looked at it, then back at the boy. Slowly he moved over and began to eat the sugar. Alec watched him for a moment, satisfied; then as the rain began to fall, he went back to his cabin.

He was awakened with amazing suddenness in the middle of the night. The *Drake* lurched crazily and he was thrown onto the floor. Outside there were loud rolls of thunder, and streaks of lightning made his cabin as light as day.

His first storm at sea! He pushed the light switch—it was dead. Then a flash of lightning again illuminated the cabin. The top of his bureau had been swept clear and the floor was covered with broken glass. Hurriedly he pulled on his pants and shirt and started for the door; then he stopped. Back he went to the bed, fell on his knees and reached under. He withdrew a life jacket and strapped it around him. He hoped that he wouldn't need it.

He opened the door and made his way, staggering, to the deck. The fury of the storm drove him back into the passageway; he hung on to the stair rail and peered into the black void. He heard the shouts of Captain

Watson and the crew faintly above the roar of the winds. Huge waves swept from one end of the *Drake* to the other. Hysterical passengers crowded into the corridor. Alec was genuinely scared now; never had he seen a storm like this!

For what seemed hours, the *Drake* plowed through wave after wave, trembling, careening on its side, yet somehow managing to stay afloat. The long streaks of lightning never diminished; zigzagging through the sky, their sharp cracks resounded on the water.

From the passageway, Alec saw one of the crew make his way along the deck in his direction, desperately fighting to hold on to the rail. The *Drake* rolled sideways and a huge wave swept over the boat. When it had passed, the sailor was gone. The boy closed his eyes and prayed.

The storm began to subside a little and Alec felt new hope. Then suddenly a bolt of fire seemed to fall from the heavens above them. A sharp crack and the boat shook. Alec was thrown flat on his face, stunned. Slowly he regained consciousness. He was lying on his stomach; his face felt hot and sticky. He raised his hand, and withdrew it covered with blood. Then he became conscious of feet stepping on him. The passengers, yelling and screaming, were climbing, crawling over him! The *Drake* was still—its engines dead.

Struggling, Alec pushed himself to his feet. Slowly he made his way along the deck. His startled eyes took in the scene about him. The *Drake*, struck by lightning, seemed almost cut in half! They were sinking! Strange, with what seemed the end so near, he should feel so calm. They were manning the lifeboats, and Captain



Watson was there shouting directions. One boat was being lowered into the water. A large wave caught it broadside and turned it over—its occupants disappeared in the sea.

The second lifeboat was being filled and Alec waited his turn. But when it came, the boat had reached its quota.

"Wait for the next one, Alec," Captain Watson said sternly. He put his arm on the boy's shoulder, softening the harshness of his words.

As they watched the second lifeboat being lowered, the dark-skinned man appeared and rushed up to the captain, waving his arms and babbling hysterically.

"It's under the bed, under the bed!" Captain Watson shouted at him.

Then Alec saw the man had no life jacket. Terror in his eyes, he turned away from the captain toward Alec. Frantically he rushed at the boy and tried to tear the life jacket from his back. Alec struggled, but he was no match for the half-crazed man. Then Captain Watson had his hands on the man and threw him against the rail.

Alec saw the man's eyes turn to the lifeboat that was being lowered. Before the captain could stop him, he was climbing over the rail. He was going to jump into the boat! Suddenly the *Drake* lurched. The man lost his balance and, screaming, fell into the water. He never rose to the surface.

The dark-skinned man had drowned. Immediately Alec thought of the Black. What was happening to him? Was he still in his stall? Alec fought his way out of line and toward the stern of the boat. If the stallion

was alive, he was going to set him free and give him his chance to fight for life.

The stall was still standing. Alec heard a shrill whistle rise above the storm. He rushed to the door, lifted the heavy bar and swung it open. For a second the mighty hoofs stopped pounding and there was silence. Alec backed slowly away.

Then he saw the Black, his head held high, his nostrils blown out with excitement. Suddenly he snorted and plunged straight for the rail and Alec. Alec was paralyzed, he couldn't move. One hand was on the rail, which was broken at this point, leaving nothing between him and the open water. The Black swerved as he came near him, and the boy realized that the stallion was making for the hole. The horse's shoulder grazed him as he swerved, and Alec went flying into space. He felt the water close over his head.

When he came up, his first thought was of the ship; then he heard an explosion, and he saw the *Drake* settling deep into the water. Frantically he looked around for a lifeboat, but there was none in sight. Then he saw the Black swimming not more than ten yards away. Something swished by him—a rope, and it was attached to the Black's halter! The same rope that they had used to bring the stallion aboard the boat, and which they had never been able to get close enough to the horse to untie. Without stopping to think, Alec grabbed hold of it. Then he was pulled through the water, into the oncoming seas.

The waves were still large, but with the aid of his life jacket, Alec was able to stay on top. He was too tired now to give much thought to what he had done.

He only knew that he had had his choice of remaining in the water alone or being pulled by the Black. If he was to die, he would rather die with the mighty stallion than alone. He took one last look behind and saw the *Drake* sink into the depths.

For hours Alec battled the waves. He had tied the rope securely around his waist. He could hardly hold his head up. Suddenly he felt the rope slacken. The Black had stopped swimming! Alec anxiously waited; peering into the darkness he could just make out the head of the stallion. The Black's whistle pierced the air! After a few minutes, the rope became taut again. The horse had changed his direction. Another hour passed, then the storm diminished to high, rolling swells. The first streaks of dawn appeared on the horizon.

The Black had stopped four times during the night, and each time he had altered his course. Alec wondered whether the stallion's wild instinct was leading him to land. The sun rose and shone down brightly on the boy's head; the salt water he had swallowed during the night made him sick to his stomach. But when Alec felt that he could hold out no longer, he looked at the struggling, fighting animal in front of him, and new courage came to him.

Suddenly he realized that they were going with the waves, instead of against them. He shook his head, trying to clear his mind. Yes, they were riding in; they must be approaching land! Eagerly he strained his salt-filled eyes and looked into the distance. And then he saw it—about a quarter of a mile away was a small island, not much more than a sandy reef in the sea. But he might find food and water there, and have a chance

to survive. Faster and faster they approached the white sand. They were in the breakers. The Black's scream shattered the stillness. He was able to walk; he staggered a little and shook his black head. Then his action shifted marvelously, and he went faster through the shallow water.

Alec's head whirled as he was pulled toward the beach with ever-increasing speed. Suddenly he realized the danger of his position. He must untie this rope from around his waist, or else he would be dragged to death over the sand! Desperately his fingers flew to the knot; it was tight, he had made sure of that. Frantically he worked on it as the shore drew closer and closer.

The Black was now on the beach. Thunder began to roll from beneath his hoofs as he broke out of the water. Hours in the water had swelled the knot—Alec couldn't untie it! Then he remembered his pocketknife. Could it still be there? Alec's hand darted to his rear pants pocket. His fingers reached inside and came out with the knife.

He was now on the beach being dragged by the stallion; the sand flew in his face. Quickly he opened the knife and began to cut the rope. His body burned from the sand, his clothes were being torn off of him! His speed was increasing every second! Madly he sawed away at the rope. With one final thrust he was through! His outflung hands caressed the sand. As he closed his eyes, his parched lips murmured, "Yes—Uncle Ralph—it did—come in handy."



## THE ISLAND

### 3

Alec opened his eyes. The sun, high in the heavens, beat down upon his bare head. His face felt hot, his tongue swollen. Slowly he pushed his tired body from the ground and then fell back upon the sand. He lay still a few moments. Then he gathered himself and once again attempted to rise. Wearily he got to his knees, then to his feet. His legs trembled beneath him. He unbuckled the battered life jacket and let it fall to the ground.

He looked around; he needed water desperately. He saw the Black's hoof marks in the sand. Perhaps, if he followed them, they would lead him to fresh water; he was sure that the stallion was as thirsty as he. Alec stumbled along. The hoof marks turned abruptly away from the ocean toward the interior of the island. There was no sign of vegetation around him—only hot sand. He turned and looked back at the now calm and peaceful sea. So much had happened in such a short

space of time! What had happened to the others? Was he the only one who had survived?

A few minutes later he turned and made his way up a high sand dune. At the crest he stopped. From where he stood he could see the entire island; it was small—not more than two miles in circumference. It seemed barren except for a few trees, bushes and scattered patches of burned grass. High rock cliffs dropped down to the sea on the other side of the island.

The Black's hoof marks led down the hill, and a short distance away beneath a few scattered trees, Alec saw a small spring-water pool. His swollen tongue ran across cracked lips as he stumbled forward. To the right of the spring, a hundred yards away, he saw the Black—hungrily feasting upon the dry grass. Alec again saw that small Arabian port and the crowd gathered around the prone figure of the Arab whom the Black had struck. Would he be safe from the stallion?

The Black looked up from his grazing. The boy noticed that the horse had torn or slipped off his halter somehow. The wind whipped through his mane; his smooth black body was brilliant in the sun. He saw Alec, and his shrill whistle echoed through the air. He reared, his front legs striking out. Then he came down, and his right foreleg pawed into the dirt.

Alec looked around him. There was no place to seek cover. He was too weak to run, even if there was. His gaze returned to the stallion, fascinated by a creature so wild and so near. Here was the wildest of all wild animals—he had fought for everything he had ever needed, for food, for leadership, for life itself; it

was his nature to kill or be killed. The horse reared again; then he snorted and plunged straight for the boy.

Alec didn't move. His body was numb. Hypnotized, he watched the stallion coming. Then, twenty-five yards from him, the Black stopped. The whites of his eyes gleamed, his nostrils curled, his ears were back flat against his head. He whistled shrill, clear and long. Suddenly he moved between Alec and the spring. He pawed furiously at the earth.

Alec stood still, not daring to move. After what seemed hours, the stallion stopped tearing up the earth. His gaze turned from the boy to the pool and then back again. He whistled, half-reared, and then broke into his long stride, running back in the direction from which he had come.

Alec forced his legs into action, reached the spring and threw himself on the ground beside it. He let his face fall into the cool, clear water. It seemed that he would never get enough; he doused his head, and let the water run down his back. Then he tore off part of his shirt and bathed his skinned body. Refreshed, he crawled beneath the shaded bushes growing beside the pool. He stretched out, closed his eyes and fell asleep, exhausted.

Only once during the night did Alec stir; sleepily he opened his eyes. He could see the moon through the bushes, high above the star-studded sky. A big, black figure moved by the spring—the Black, and only a few feet away! He drank deeply and then raised his beautiful head, his ears pricked forward; he turned and trotted away.

Alec awoke very hungry the next morning. He had

gone a day and a half without eating! He rose and drank from the spring. The next thing was to find food. He walked for quite some distance before he found anything edible. It was a berry bush; the fruit was unlike that of anything he had ever tasted before. But he might not easily find anything else that he could eat, so he made a meal of berries.

Then he explored the island. He found it to be flat between the sand dune that he had climbed the day before and the rocky cliffs of the other side of the island. He made no attempt to climb over the large boulders. There were few berry bushes and little grass, and Alec realized that food would be scarce for him and the Black. The island seemed to be totally uninhabited. He had seen no birds or animals of any kind.

He walked slowly back in the direction of the spring. From the top of the hill he looked out upon the open sea, hoping desperately that he would see a boat. Only the vast expanse of blue water spread before him. Below he saw the Black cantering along the beach. Alec forgot his problems in the beauty of the stallion as he swept along, graceful in his swift stride, his black mane and tail flying. When the horse vanished around the bend of the island, Alec walked down to the beach.

The next thing that he must do was to erect some sort of a shelter for himself; and first he must find driftwood. Alec's eyes swept the shore. He saw one piece, then another.

For the next few hours he struggled with the wood that he found cast upon the beach, dragging it back toward the spring. He piled it up and was surprised to see how much he had gathered. He looked for a long,



heavy piece and found one that suited his purpose. He pulled it toward two adjoining scrub trees and hoisted it between the two crotches. Suddenly his arms shook and he stopped. Painted on the gray board was the name DRAKE—it had been part of one of the lifeboats! Alec stood still a moment, then grimly he fixed the plank securely in place.

Next he leaned the remaining pieces of wood on each side of the plank, making a shelter in the form of a tent. He filled in the open ends as well as he could. With his knife he skinned the bark from a tree and tied the pieces of wood together.

Alec went back to the beach and gathered all the seaweed that he could carry. He stuffed this into all the open holes. He surveyed his finished shelter—he was afraid a good wind would blow it down on top of him!

He looked up at the hot sun and guessed it to be near noon. His skin and clothes were wet with perspiration from the terrific heat. He cut a long, slender staff from a tree, tested it and found it to be strong. Carefully he skinned it and cut it to the right length. Then he tied his knife securely to the end of the stick with a piece of bark.

A short time later Alec stood beside a small cove which he had discovered that morning. The water was clear and the sand glistened white beneath it. He seated himself upon the bank and peered eagerly into the water. He had read of people catching fish this way. After some time he saw a ripple. Carefully he raised his improvised spear. Then Alec flung it with all his might; the long stick whizzed down into the water and pierced its way into the white sand. He had missed!

He pulled his spear out and moved to another spot. Again he waited patiently. It was a long time before he saw another fish. A long slender shape moved in the shallow water beneath him. He raised his spear, took aim and plunged again. He saw the knife hit! Fearing the knife would slip out of the fish if he pulled the spear up, he jumped into the shallow water and shoved it against the bottom. Desperately Alec's arm flew down the stick, seeking the fish. The water was churned with sand. He came to the end; only the steel blade met his searching fingers. He had lost it!

For the rest of the afternoon, Alec strove to catch a fish. As darkness fell, he rose wearily to his feet and walked slowly back to his new "home." His eyes ached from the hours of strain of constant searching into the depths of the water.

On his way, he stopped at the berry bush and ate hungrily. When he reached the spring, he saw the Black not far away. He looked up, saw the boy and continued to eat. Moving from one place to another, he tore away at the small patches of grass that he could find. "I'll bet he's as hungry as I am," thought Alec. He dropped down and drank from the spring.

Darkness came rapidly. Suddenly Alec felt the stillness of the island—no birds, no animals, no sounds. It was as if he and the Black were the only living creatures in the world. Millions of stars shone overhead and seemed so close. The moon rose high and round; its reflection cast upon the pool.

The Black looked up from his grazing. He, too, seemed to watch the moon. Alec whistled—low, then louder and fading. A moment of silence. Then the

stallion's shrill whistle pierced the night. Alec saw the Black look in his direction and then continue searching for grass. He smiled and crawled into his shelter. The day's work had made him tired and he was soon asleep.

The next morning found Alec beside the cove again with his spear, determined to catch a fish for breakfast. At noon he ate berries. Mid-afternoon he was sick; his head whirled and he could hardly keep his eyes from closing.

A small whirlpool appeared on the surface of the water. Alec grabbed the spear beside him and rose to his knees. He saw a gray shape in the water below. He raised his spear and moved it along with the fish. Then he plunged it! The spear quivered in its flight. He had hit! He jumped into the water, shoving the spear and fish against the bottom. He mustn't lose this one! His hand reached the knife. The fish was there—wriggling, fighting. Then he had it. Quickly he raised the fish from the water and threw it, and the spear, onto the bank. Wearily he climbed up and looked at his catch. "Two feet if it's an inch," he said hungrily. He drew out the spear, picked up the fish and went back to camp.

Alec washed the fish in the spring. Then he placed it upon a piece of wood and scaled it. Now if he could only get a fire started. He remembered watching a man in India build a fire without matches. Perhaps he could do the same.

He gathered some small pieces of bark, dry wood and a deserted bird's nest, and spread them on the ground in front of him. He picked out the driest piece of wood and, with his knife, bored a hole halfway

through it. Carefully he tore small threads of straw from the bird's nest and placed them inside the hole; they would ignite quickly. Next he cut a sturdy elastic branch about eighteen inches long from a nearby tree, skinned it and placed one end in the hole. He leaned on the stick, bending it, and then rapidly turned the curved part like a carpenter's bit.

It seemed to Alec that an hour passed before a small column of smoke crept out of the hole. His tired arms pushed harder. Slowly a small flame grew and then the dry wood was on fire. He added more wood. Then he snatched the fish, wrapped it in some seaweed which he had previously washed, and placed it on top of the fire.

Later, Alec removed the fish. He tried a piece and found it to be good. Famished, he tore into the rest of it.

The days passed and the boy strove desperately to find food to keep himself alive; he caught only one more fish—it would be impossible for him to depend upon the sea for his living. He turned again to the berries, but they were fast diminishing. He managed to keep his fire going as the heat made dry fuel plentiful. However, that was of little use to him as he had nothing to cook.

One day as Alec walked along the beach, he saw a large red shell in the distance. He gripped his spear tighter; it looked like a turtle. Then hunger made him lose all caution and he rushed forward, his spear raised. He threw himself upon the shell, his knife digging into the opening where he believed the turtle's head to be.



Desperately he turned the huge shell over—it was empty, cleaned out; only the hollow shell met Alec's famished gaze. He stood still, dazed. Then slowly he turned and walked back to camp.

The Black was drinking from the spring. His large body, too, was beginning to show signs of starvation. Alec no longer felt any fear of him. The stallion raised his proud head and looked at the boy. Then he turned and trotted off. His mane, long and flowing, whipped in the wind. His whistle filled the air.

Alec watched him, envying his proud, wild spirit. The horse was used to the hardships of the desert; probably he would outlive him. The boy's subconscious thought rose to the surface of his mind: "There's food, Alec, food—if you could only find some way of killing him!" Then he shook his head, hating himself. Kill the animal that had saved his life? Never—even if he could, he would die of starvation first! The stallion reached the top of the hill and stood there, like a beautiful black statue, his gaze upon the open sea.

One morning Alec made his way weakly toward the rocky side of the island. He came to the huge rocks and climbed on top of one of them. It was more barren than any other part of the island. It was low tide and Alec's eyes wandered over the stony shore, looking for any kind of shellfish he might be able to eat. He noticed the mosslike substance on all the rocks at the water's edge, and on those that extended out. What was that stuff the biology teacher had made them eat last term in one of their experiments? Hadn't he called it *carragheen*? Yes, that was it. A sort of seaweed, he had said, that grew

abundantly along the rocky parts of the Atlantic coast of Europe and North America. When washed and dried, it was edible for humans and livestock. Could the moss on the rocks below be it? Alec scarcely dared to hope.

Slowly Alec made the dangerous descent. He reached the water level and scrambled across the rocks. He took a handful of the soft greenish-yellow moss which covered them and raised it to his lips. It smelled the same. He tasted it. The moss was terribly salty from the sea, but it was the same as he had eaten that day in the classroom!

Eagerly he filled his pockets with it, then removed his shirt and filled it full. He climbed up again and hurried back to camp. There he emptied the moss onto the ground beside the spring. The next quarter of an hour he spent washing it, and then placed it out in the sun to dry. Hungrily he tasted it again. It was better—and it was food!

When he had finished eating, the sun was falling into the ocean, and the skies were rapidly growing dark. In the distance Alec saw the stallion coming toward the spring. Quickly he picked up some of the moss for himself and left the rest on the ground beside the pool. Would the Black eat it? Alec hurried to his shelter and stood still watching intently.

The stallion rushed up, shook his long neck and buried his mouth into the water. He drank long. When he had finished he looked toward the boy, then his pink nostrils quivered. The Black put his nose to the ground and walked toward the moss which Alec had left. He sniffed at it. Then he picked a little up and started

eating. He chewed long and carefully. He reached down for more.

That night Alec slept better than he had since he had been on the island. He had found food—food to sustain him and the Black!

## THE WILDEST OF ALL WILD CREATURES

### 4

The next day Alec set out to obtain more of the carragheen. As he neared the rocks, he saw the stallion standing silently beside a huge boulder. Not a muscle twitched in his black body—it was as if an artist had painted the Black on white stone.

Alec climbed down into a small hollow and paused to look out over the rocks below. Suddenly he heard the stallion's scream, more piercing, more blood-curdling than he had ever heard it before. He looked up.

The Black was on his hind legs, his teeth bared. Then with a mighty leap, he shot away from the boulder toward Alec. Swiftly he came—faster with every magnificent stride. He was almost on top of him when he thundered to a halt and reared again. Alec jumped to the side, tripped on a stone and fell to the ground. High above him the Black's legs pawed the air, and then descended three yards in front of him! Again he went up and down—again and again he pounded. The ground on which Alec lay shook from the force of his

hoofs. The stallion's eyes never left the ground in front of him.

Gradually his pounding lessened and then stopped. He raised his head high and his whistle shrilled through the air. He shook his head and slowly moved away, his nostrils trembling.

Alec regained his feet and cautiously made his way toward the torn earth, his brain flooded with confusion. There in front of him he saw the strewn parts of a long, yellowish-black body, and the venomous head of a snake, crushed and lifeless. He stood still—the suddenness of discovering life, other than the Black and himself on the island, astounding him! Sweat broke out on his forehead as he realized what a poisonous snake bite would have meant—suffering and perhaps death! Dazed, he looked at the stallion just a few feet away. Had the Black killed the snake to save him? Was the stallion beginning to understand that they needed each other to survive?

Slowly the boy walked toward the Black. The stallion's mane swept in the wind, his muscles twitched, his eyes moved restlessly, but he stood his ground as the boy approached. Alec wanted the horse to understand that he would not hurt him. Cautiously he reached a hand toward the stallion's head. The Black drew it back as far as he could without moving. Alec stepped closer and to the side of him. Gently he touched him for an instant. The stallion did not move. Again Alec attempted to touch the savage head. The Black reared and shook a little. Alec said soothingly, "Steady, Black fellow, I wouldn't hurt you." The stallion quivered,



then reared again and broke. One hundred yards away he suddenly stopped and turned.

Alec gazed at him, standing there so still—his head raised high in the air. "We'll get out of this somehow, Black—working together," he said determinedly.

Alec walked back to the top of the rocks and again began his descent. He made his way carefully down to the water level. Cautiously he looked before he stepped—where there was one snake there might be more. Reaching the bottom, he once again filled his shirt full of the moss and made his way back. High above him he could see the Black looking out over the cliffs, his mane whipping in the wind. When he reached the top the stallion was still there. He followed a short distance behind as Alec went back to the spring.

Days passed and gradually the friendship between the boy and the Black grew. The stallion now came at his call and let Alec stroke him while he grazed. One night Alec sat within the warm glow of the fire and watched the stallion munching on the carragheen beside the pool. He wondered if the stallion was as tired of the carragheen as he. Alec had found that if he boiled it in the turtle shell it formed a gelatinous substance which tasted a little better than the raw moss. A fish was now a rare delicacy to him.

The flame's shadows reached out and cast eerie ghostlike patterns on the Black's body. Alec's face became grim as thoughts rushed through his brain. Should he try it tomorrow? Did he dare attempt to ride the Black? Should he wait a few more days? Go ahead—tomorrow. *Don't do it!* Go ahead—

The fire burned low, then smoldered. Yet Alec sat beside the fire, his eyes fixed on that blacker-than-night figure beside the spring.

The next morning he woke from a fitful slumber to find the sun high above. Hurriedly he ate some of the carragheen. Then he looked for the Black, but he was not in sight. Alec whistled, but no answer came. He walked toward the hill. The sun blazed down and the sweat ran from his body. If it would only rain! The last week had been like an oven on the island.

When he reached the top of the hill, he saw the Black at one end of the beach. Again he whistled, and this time there was an answering whistle as the stallion turned his head. Alec walked up the beach toward him.

The Black stood still as he approached. He went cautiously up to him and placed a hand on his neck. "Steady," he murmured as the warm skin quivered slightly beneath his hand. The stallion showed neither fear nor hate of him; his large eyes were still turned toward the sea.

For a moment Alec stood with his hand on the Black's neck. Then he walked toward a sand dune a short distance away. The stallion followed. He stepped up the side of the dune, his left hand in the horse's thick mane. The Black's ears pricked forward, his eyes followed the boy nervously—some of the savageness returned to them, his muscles twitched. For a moment Alec was undecided what to do. Then his hands gripped the mane tighter and he threw himself on the Black's back. For a second the stallion stood motionless, then he snorted and plunged; the sand went flying as he doubled in the air. Alec felt the mighty muscles

heave, then he was flung through the air, landing heavily on his back. Everything went dark.

Alec regained consciousness to find something warm against his cheek. Slowly he opened his eyes. The stallion was pushing him with his head. Alec tried moving his arms and legs, and found them bruised but not broken. Wearily he got to his feet. The wildness and savageness had once more disappeared in the Black; he looked as though nothing had happened.

Alec waited for a few minutes—then once again led the stallion to the sand dune. His hand grasped the horse's mane. But this time he laid only the upper part of his body on the stallion's back, while he talked soothingly into his ear. The Black flirted his ears back and forth as he glanced backward with his dark eyes.

"See, I'm not going to hurt you," Alec murmured, knowing it was he who might be hurt. After a few minutes, Alec cautiously slid onto his back. Once again, the stallion snorted and sent the boy flying through the air.

Alec picked himself up from the ground—slower this time. But when he had rested, he whistled for the Black again. The stallion moved toward him. Alec determinedly stepped on the sand dune and once again let the Black feel his weight. Gently he spoke into a large ear, "It's me. I'm not much to carry." He slid onto the stallion's back. One arm slipped around the Black's neck as he half-reared. Then, like a shot from a gun, the Black broke down the beach. His action shifted, and his huge strides seemed to make him fly through the air.

Alec clung to the stallion's mane for his life. The wind screamed by and he couldn't see! Suddenly the Black swerved and headed up the sand dune; he

reached the top and then down. The spring was a blur as they whipped by. To the rocks he raced, and then the stallion made a wide circle—his speed never diminishing. Down through a long ravine he rushed. Alec's blurred vision made out a black object in front of them, and as a flash he remembered the deep gully that was there. He felt the stallion gather himself; instinctively he leaned forward and held the Black firm and steady with his hands and knees. Then they were in the air, sailing over the black hole. Alec almost lost his balance when they landed but recovered himself in time to keep from falling off! Once again the stallion reached the beach, his hoofbeats regular and rhythmic on the white sand.

The jump had helped greatly in clearing Alec's mind. He leaned closer to the stallion's ear and kept repeating, "Easy, Black. Easy." The stallion seemed to glide over the sand and then his speed began to lessen. Alec kept talking to him. Slower and slower ran the Black. Gradually he came to a stop. The boy released his grip from the stallion's mane and his arms encircled the Black's neck. He was weak with exhaustion—in no condition for such a ride! Wearily he slipped to the ground. Never had he dreamed a horse could run so fast! The stallion looked at him, his head held high, his large body only slightly covered with sweat.

That night Alec lay wide awake, his body aching with pain, but his heart pounding with excitement. He had ridden the Black! He had conquered this wild, unbroken stallion with kindness. He felt sure that from that day on the Black was his—his alone! But for what—would they ever be rescued? Would he ever see



his home again? Alec shook his head. He had promised himself he wouldn't think of that any more.

The next day he mounted the Black again. The horse half-reared but didn't fight him. Alec spoke softly in his ear, and the Black stood still. Then Alec touched him lightly on the side, and he walked—a long, loping stride. Far up the beach they went, then Alec tried to turn him by shifting his weight, and gently pushing the stallion's head. Gradually the horse turned. Alec took a firmer grip on his long mane and pressed his knees tighter against the large body. The stallion broke out of his walk into a fast canter. The wind blew his mane back into the boy's face. The stallion's stride was effortless, and Alec found it easy to ride. Halfway down the beach, he managed to bring him back again to a walk, then to a complete stop. Slowly he turned him to the right, then to the left, and then around in a circle.

Long but exciting hours passed as Alec tried to make the Black understand what he wanted him to do. The sun was going down rapidly when he walked the stallion to the end of the beach. The Black turned and stood still; a mile of smooth, white sand stretched before them.

Suddenly the stallion bolted, almost throwing Alec to the ground. He picked up speed with amazing swiftness. Faster and faster he went. Alec hung low over his neck, his breath coming in gasps. Down the beach the stallion thundered. Tears from the wind rolled down Alec's cheeks. Three-quarters of the way, he tried to check the Black's speed. He pulled back on the flowing mane. "Whoa, Black," he yelled, but his words were whipped away in the wind.



Swiftly the stallion neared the end of the beach, and Alec thought that his breathtaking ride of yesterday was to be repeated. He pulled back harder on the mane. Suddenly the Black's pace lessened. Alec flung one arm around the stallion's neck. The Black shifted into his fast trot, which gradually became slower and slower, until Alec had him under control. Overjoyed he turned him, and rode him over the hill to the spring. Together they drank the cool, refreshing water.

With the days that followed, Alec's mastery over the Black grew greater and greater. He could do almost anything with him. The savage fury of the unbroken stallion disappeared when he saw the boy. Alec rode him around the island and raced him down the beach, marveling at the giant strides and the terrific speed. Without realizing it, Alec was improving his horsemanship until he had reached the point where he was almost a part of the Black as they tore along.

One night Alec sat beside his campfire and stared into the flames that reached hungrily into the air; his knees were crossed and his elbows rested heavily upon them, his chin was cupped in his two hands. He was deep in thought. The *Drake* had left Bombay on a Saturday, the fifteenth of August. The shipwreck had happened a little over two weeks later, perhaps on the second of September. He had been on the island exactly nineteen days. That would make it approximately the twenty-first of September. By now his family must think him dead! He doubled his fists. He had to find a way out; a ship just had to pass the island sometime. Daily he had stood on top of the hill peering out to sea, frantically hoping to sight a boat.

For the first time, Alec thought of the approaching cold weather. The heat had been so intense upon the island since his arrival that it had never entered his mind that it would soon get cold. Would his shelter offer him enough protection? He had used every available piece of wood on the island to reinforce it, but would that be enough? How cold would it get? Alec looked up at the clear, starlit sky.

He rose to his feet and walked toward the hill. The Black, standing beside the spring, raised his head and whistled when he saw him. He followed Alec as he climbed to the top. The boy's eyes swept the dark, rolling sea. White-crested swells rushed in and rolled up the beach. The stallion, too, seemed to be watching—his eyes staring into the night, his ears pricking forward. An hour passed, then they turned and made their way back to camp.

A wind started blowing from out of the west. Alec stoked the fire for the night, then crawled wearily into his shelter. He was tired, for he had spent most of the day gathering carragheen. He stretched out and was soon asleep.

He didn't know how long he had been sleeping, but suddenly the Black's shrill scream awakened him. Sleepily he opened his eyes; the air had grown hot. Then he heard a crackling noise above; his head jerked upward. The top of the shelter was on fire! Flames were creeping down the sides. Alec leaped to his feet and rushed outside.

A gale was sweeping the island and instantly he realized what had happened. Sparks from his campfire had been blown upon the top of the shelter and had

easily set fire to the dry wood. He grabbed the turtle shell and ran to the spring. Filling it, he ran back and threw the water on the flames.

The Black pranced nervously beside the spring, his nostrils quivering, while Alec rushed back and forth with his little turtle shell full of water, trying to keep the fire from spreading. But it had a good start and soon it had enveloped the whole shelter. Smoke filled the air. The boy and the horse were forced to move farther and farther back.

Soon the two nearby trees caught. Alec knew that the fire could not spread much farther—the island was too barren of any real fuel. But right now the flames were devouring everything in sight. They roared and reached high into the air. There was nothing that Alec could do. The one thing he really needed—his shelter—was gone. And there was no more wood.

The fire burned a long time before it started to die down. Then the wind, too, began to diminish. Alec sat beside the spring, watching the flames, until the first streaks of dawn appeared in the sky. He blinked his smoke-filled eyes, gritted his teeth—he wasn't licked yet! He'd find some way to make a shelter, and if that wasn't possible, then he'd sleep outside like the Black.

Determinedly he set out for the beach. Perhaps some wood had been swept ashore during the night. The Black trotted ahead of him. Then Alec saw him snort and rear as he reached the top of the hill, and plunge back down again. Alec hurried forward. From the crest of the hill, he looked down. Below him was a ship anchored four hundred yards off the island!

He heard voices. He saw a rowboat being drawn

up on the beach by five men. Incredulous, unable to shout, he rushed down the hill.

"You were right, Pat, there *is* someone on this island!" he heard one of the men shout to the other.

And the other replied in a thick Irish brogue, "Sure, and I knew I saw a fire reaching into the heavens!"

## RESCUE

### 5

Alec's eyes blurred; he couldn't see. He stumbled and fell and then clambered to his feet. Again he rushed forward. Then they had their arms around him.

"For the love of St. Patrick," the man called Pat groaned, "he's just a boy!"

Words jumbled together and stuck in Alec's throat as he looked into the five pairs of eyes staring at him. Then he found his voice. "We're saved!" he yelled. "We're saved, Black, we're saved!"

The sailors looked at him—he was a strange sight! His red hair was long and disheveled, his face and body so brown that they would have taken him for a native had it not been for the torn remnants of his clothing, which hung loosely on him.

One of the men stepped forward. From his uniform he was obviously the captain of the ship. "Everything is going to be all right, son," he said as he placed an arm around Alec and steadied him.



Slowly Alec gained control of himself. "I'm okay now, sir," he said.

The sailors gathered around him. "Is there someone else with you on this island?" the captain asked.

"Only the Black, sir."

The men looked at one another, and then the captain spoke again, "Who's the Black, son?" he asked.

"He's a horse, sir," Alec answered.

And then he told them his story—of the storm and the shipwreck, the hours spent in the raging sea holding desperately to the rope tied to the stallion's neck, their fight against starvation on the island, his conquest of the Black, and the fire which that night had reduced his shelter to ashes. Sweat broke out on his forehead as he once again lived through the twenty days of hardships and suffering since the *Drake* had gone down.

When he had finished there was a moment of silence, and then one of the men spoke. "This lad is imagining things, Captain. What he needs is some hot food and a good bed!"

Alec looked from one face to another and saw that they didn't believe him. Rage filled him. Why should they be so stupid? Was his story so fantastic? He'd prove it to them, then—he'd call the Black.

He raised his fingers to his lips and whistled. "Listen," he shouted. "Listen!" The men stood still. A minute passed, and then another—only the waves lapping on the beach could be heard in the terrifying stillness of the island.

Then the captain's voice came to him, "We have to

go now, son. We're off our course and way behind schedule."

Dazed, Alec's eyes turned from the island to the freighter lying at anchor, smoke belching from its two stacks. It was larger than the *Drake*.

The captain's voice again broke through his thoughts. "We're bound for South America—Rio de Janeiro is our first stop. We can take you there and radio your parents from the ship that you're alive!"

The captain and Pat had him by the arms; the others were in the boat ready to shove off. Desperately Alec tried to collect his thoughts. He was leaving the island. He was leaving the Black. The Black—who had saved his life! He jerked himself free, he was running up the beach.

Their mouths wide open, the sailors watched him as he stumbled up the hill. They saw him reach the top and raise his fingers to his lips. His whistle reached them—then there was silence.

Suddenly, an inhuman scream shattered the stillness—a wild, terrifying call! Stunned, they stood still and the hairs on the backs of their necks seemed to curl. Then as if by magic, a giant black horse, his mane waving like flame, appeared beside the boy. The horse screamed again, his head raised high, his ears pricked forward. Even at this distance they could see that he was a tremendous horse—a wild stallion.

Alec flung his arms around the Black's neck and buried his head in the long mane. "We're leaving together, Black—together," he said. Soothingly he talked to the stallion, steadying him. After a few minutes he descended the hill and the horse hesitatingly followed.

He reared as they approached the sailors, his legs pawing in the air. The men scrambled into the boat; only Pat and the captain stood their ground. Fearfully they watched the Black as he strode toward them. He drew back; his black eyes glanced nervously from Alec to the group of men. Alec patted him, coaxed him. His action was beautiful, and every few steps he would jump swiftly to one side.

Approximately thirty yards away, Alec came to a halt. "You just have to take us both, Captain! I can't leave him!" he yelled.

"He's too wild. We couldn't take him, we couldn't handle him!" came the answer.

"I can handle him. Look at him now!"

The Black was still, his head turned toward the freighter as if he understood what actually was going on. Alec's arm was around his neck. "He saved my life, Captain. I can't leave him here alone. He'll die!"

The captain turned, spoke with the men in the boat. Then he shouted, "There isn't any possible way of getting that devil on board!" He paused. "How're you going to get him out there?" The captain pointed to the ship.

"He can swim," answered Alec. "He'll follow me. I know he will."

There was another discussion between captain and crew. When he turned, the captain's heavily lined face was more grim than ever. He doffed his cap and ran a large hand through his gray hair. "Okay, son," he said, "you win—but you'll have to get him out there!"

Alec's heart beat heavily and he gazed at the stallion. "Come on, Black," he said. He walked forward a

few steps. The Black hesitated and then followed. Again Alec moved ahead. Slowly they approached the group. Then the Black halted, his nostrils quivered and he reared.

"Get in the boat, Captain," Alec shouted. "Move up to the bow. I'm going to get in the stern when you get her in the water."

The captain ordered his men to shove off, and he and Pat climbed in; then they waited for Alec.

Alec turned to the Black. "This is our chance, Black," he said. "Come on!" He could see the stallion was nervous; the horse had learned to trust him, but his natural instincts still warned him against the others. Soothingly Alec spoke to him. Slowly he backed away—the Black raised his head nervously, then followed. As the boy neared the boat, the stallion stopped. Alec kept backing up and climbed into the boat. "Row slowly," he said, without turning his eyes away from the horse.

As they moved away from the beach Alec called, "Come on, Black!" The stallion pranced, his head and tail erect, his ears forward. He half-reared and then stepped into the water. Like a flash he was back on the beach, his foreleg pawing into the sand and sending it flying. His black eyes never left the boat as it moved slowly out into the water. He ran a short way down the beach, and then back again.

Alec realized the terrific fight that the stallion was waging with himself. He whistled. The Black stopped in his tracks and answered. Slowly the boat moved farther away.

Suddenly the stallion rose high into the air on his

hind legs, and then plunged into the water. "Come on, Black," shouted Alec. "Swim!"

The Black was in water up to his big chest now—then he was swimming and coming swiftly toward the boat.

"Row for the ship, Captain," yelled Alec.

The black head rose in the water behind them, the eyes fearfully following Alec as he half-hung out of the boat and called to the stallion. The large, black body slid through the water, its legs working like pistons.

Soon they reached the freighter. The captain and three men sprang up the ladder. Only Pat remained behind with Alec. "Keep him there for two minutes!" the captain yelled over his shoulder.

The Black reached the rowboat and Alec managed to get his hand on the stallion's head. "Good boy!" he murmured proudly. Then he heard the captain's hail from on top of the deck. He looked up and saw the cargo hoist being lowered; on the end was a wide belly band to go around the Black so that he could be lifted up. He had to get that band around the stallion's stomach!

Alec saw the Black's eyes leave him and gaze fearfully at the line descending over his head. Suddenly he swam away from the boat. Frantically Alec called to him.

As the band came within reach, Pat grabbed it—his fingers tore at the straps and buckles. "We've got to get this around him somehow!" he shouted to Alec. "It's the only way!"

Alec tried desperately to think. Certainly there



must be some way! The stallion had turned and once again was looking in their direction. If he could only get close to him. "Let me have the band, Pat, and more line," he said.

Pat handed it to him and signaled above. "And what are you going to do?" he asked.

But Alec didn't seem to hear his query. He gripped the straps of the band tightly. "We've come this far," he said to himself. He climbed over the side and lowered himself into the water. Pat was too astonished to speak. Alec swam a few yards toward the Black, the band stretched out behind him; then he stopped and trod water. He called softly and the stallion swam toward him.

He came within an arm's reach and Alec touched him, keeping his body far enough away to avoid the driving legs. How could he get the band around the stallion? Pat was yelling suggestions, but Alec could think of only one way that might be successful.

He sank lower in the water, his hand gradually sliding down the Black's neck; he held the straps of the belt tightly in the other. He took a deep breath and filled his lungs with air; then he dived sideways and felt the waters close over his head. Down he went, striving desperately to get enough depth to clear the stallion's legs. He swam directly beneath the Black's belly; the water churned white above his head and he caught a glimpse of striking hoofs. When he felt sure that he was on the other side, he started up, his fingers still tightly closed upon the straps and the band dragging behind.

When he reached the surface, he found the stallion in the same position, his eyes searching for him. Now

the band was directly below the Black! He signaled for Pat to pull up the slack between the boat and the horse. All that he had to do now was to tighten the band around the stallion by getting these straps through the buckles on the other side! Alec moved closer to the Black. He would have to take the chance of being kicked. He kept as close to the middle of the stallion as possible. Then he was beside him. He felt the waters swirling on both sides. The line was taut now, ascending in the air to the top of the hoist on the freighter.

The Black became uneasy. Alec reached over his back and desperately tried to pull the straps through the buckles. A searing pain went through his leg as one of the Black's hoofs struck him. His leg went limp. Minutes passed as his fingers worked frantically. Then he had the straps through and began pulling the band tighter. The stallion went wild with rage as he felt it tighten around him. Alec pulled harder. Once again he felt the Black's hoof strike his leg—but there was no pain. He had the straps through the buckles as far as they would go; he made sure they were securely fastened, and then wearily pushed himself away from the Black.

A safe distance away, Alec signaled the men on the freighter to hoist. He heard the starting of a motor and the chain line became more taut. Then the stallion was dragged through the water until he was beside the ship; his teeth were bared, his eyes were filled with hate! Then the hoist started lifting him up. Slowly the Black moved out of the water—up, up in the air he ascended, his legs pawing madly!

Alec swam toward the rowboat, his leg hanging

limp behind him. When he reached it, Pat hung over the side and helped him up into the boat. "Good boy," he said.

The pain in his leg made Alec's head whirl. Blackness seemed to be settling down upon him—he shook his head. Then he felt Pat's big arm around his waist and he went limp.

When Alec regained consciousness, he found himself in bed. Beside him sat Pat—a large grin on his face, his blue eyes crinkling in the corners. "For the love of St. Patrick," he exclaimed, "I thought you were going to sleep forever!"

"What time is it, Pat?" Alec asked. "Have I been sleeping long?"

Pat ran a large, gnarled hand through his black hair. "Well, not so long, son—you were pretty tired, y'know." He paused. "Let's see, we picked you up Tuesday morning and now it's Wednesday night."

"Whew!" said Alec. "That's some sleeping!"

"Well, we did wake you up a couple of times to give you some soup, but I guess you wouldn't be remembering now."

Alec moved slightly and felt a pain go through his leg. His eyes turned to Pat. "Did I get hurt bad?" he asked.

"The Doc says not—went to the bone, but it's healing nicely. You'll be all right in a few days."

"And the Black—what happened?"

"Lad, never in my life did I ever expect to see the like of him! What a fight he put up—he almost tore the boat apart!" Pat's blue eyes flashed. "Lord, what a

devil! The moment his hoofs touched the deck he wanted to fight. If we hadn't still had the band around him, he would have killed us all! He plunged and struck his legs out like I've never seen before. He wouldn't stand still. You could have helped us, son. We hoisted him in the air again, off his feet. I thought he had gone crazy, his face was something terrible to see—and those screams, I'll hear them to my dying day!"

Pat stopped and moved uneasily in his seat. Then he continued, "It was when one of the boys got a little too close, and that black devil struck him in the side and he fell at our feet, that we decided there was nothing else to do but choke him! We got our lassoes around his neck and pulled until we had him pretty near gone. It was tough on him, but there was no other way. When he was almost unconscious, we let him down once again and somehow managed to lower him below.

"It was a job, lad, that I hope I'll never have to be in on again. We have some other horses and cattle in the hold, too, and they're all scared to death of him. It's a regular bedlam down there now, and I hate to think what might happen when that horse is himself again! We've got him in the strongest stall, but I'm wondering whether even that'll hold him!"

Pat rose from his chair and walked to the other side of the cabin.

Alec was silent, then he spoke slowly. "I'm sorry I've caused you all so much trouble. If only I'd been able to—"

"I didn't aim to make you feel like that, lad," Pat interrupted. "I guess we knew what we were doing, and from the looks of that animal he's worth it. Only we all

realize now that he needs you to handle him—the Lord help anyone else that tries to!”

“Tell the captain I’ll repay him and you fellows, too, Pat, somehow.”

“Sure, lad, and now I have some work to do. You try and get some more sleep, and tomorrow or the next day you’ll be on your feet again.” He paused on his way to the door. “If you give me your address, we can radio your parents that you are safe, and tell them where we’re bound.”

Alec smiled and wrote his address on the piece of paper Pat handed him. “Tell them I’ll be with them—soon,” he said as he finished.



## KING OF THE HERD

### 6

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

### 7

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.