

THE BLACK MARE.

A Story of Punchestown Races.

CHAPTER I.

THE BLACK MARE.

"So it makes a chaser any-how!"

The speaker was a rough-looking man in a frieze coat, with wide mouth, short nose, and grey honest Irish eyes, that twinkled with humor on occasion, though clouded for the present by disappointment, not to say disgust, and with some reason. In his hand he held a broken strap, with broad and dingy buckle; in his feet, detached from shafts and wheels, lay the body of an ungainly vehicle, neither gig, dog-cart, nor outside-car, but something of each, battered and splintered in a dozen places. While "fore-anime" him, as he called it, winced and frotted a young black mare, snorting, trembling, fractious, and terrified, with ears laid back, he tucked down to her strong cowering quarters, and an obvious determination on the slightest alarm to kick herself clear of everything once more.

At her head stood a ragged urchin of fourteen; although her eyes showed wild and red above the shabby blinkers, she rubbed her nose against the lad's waistcoat, and seemed to consider him the only friend she had left in the world.

"Get on her back, I say," said the man. "Fair, she's a well-lepped wan, an' we'll take a hute out of her at Punchestown, with the bloom!"—Augh! See now, here's the young captain! Ye're welcome, Captain! It's meself was proud when I seen how ye cleared them out last week on 'Garryowen.' Ye'll come in, and welcome, Captain. Go on in front now, and I'll show you the way!

So, while a slim, blue-eyed, young gentleman, with curled moustache, accompanied his entertainer into the house, Patsy took the mare to the stable, where he accoutred her in an ancient saddle, puipey, weather-stained, with stirrups of most unequal length; proceeding thereafter to force a rusty snaffle into her mouth, with the tightest possible nose-band and a faded green and white front. These arrangements completed, he surveyed the whole, grinning and well-pleased.

That the newowner could only be a subaltern of Light Dragoons, was obvious from his trim equestrian appearance, his sleek, well-cropped head, the easy sit of his garments, also, perhaps, from an air of imperious good-humor and self-confidence, equivoal to any occasion that might present itself, social, moral, or physical.

Foot against "dandies of punch" and such hospitable provocations, he soon deserted the parlor for the stable.

"And how is the mare coming on?" said he, standing in the doorway of that animal's dwelling, which she shared with a little cropped jackass, a Kerry cow, and a litter of pigs. "I always said she could gallop a bit, and they're the right sort to stay. But can she jump?"

"The beautifullest ever ye see!" replied her enthusiastic owner. "She'll go wherever a cat would follow a rat. It there's a horse in Connemara that ad charge on the sharp edge of a razor, there's the wan that can do it! Kick—she's a plaster! It's in that breed, and like the old mare before her, so long as you'd hold her, it's my belief she'd stay in the air!"

An object of these praises had now emerged from her stall, and a very likely animal she looked, poor and angular indeed, with a round neck and somewhat sagging ears, but in her lengthy frame, and large clean limbs, affording promise for the future of great beauty, no less extraordinary power and speed. Her head was exceedingly characteristic, lean and taper, showing every vein and articulation beneath the glossy skin, with a wide scarlet nostril and flashing eye, suggestive of courage and resolution, not with a considerable amount of temper. There are horses, and women too, that stick at nothing. To a bold rider, the former are invaluable, because with the secret it is possible to keep their mettles under control.

"Hurry now, Patsy," said the owner, as that little personage, diving for the stirrup, which he missed, looked imploringly to his tall crown-companions for a leg up.

But it was not in the nature of our young gentleman, by name John Waters, known in his regiment as Patsy, to behold an empty saddle at any kind without longing to fill it. He had altered the stirrups, cocked up his left leg for a bit, and lit fairly in his seat, before he astonished Patsy could make any more vigorous protest than a lurch of her front legs back, and whisk of her long

"Begorra! you'd get it now," said her owner, half to himself, half to the Kerry cow, which discreet animal he thought it prudent to attract his attention, distrusting alike the quality of his own filly, and the English-

her stride on the bank with the accuracy of a goat, landing lightly beyond, to scour away once more like a frightened deer.

"You can jump!" said he, as she threw up the head that had been in its right place hardly an instant, while she staided herself for the leap; "and I believe you're a flyer. But, by Jove! you're a rum one to steer!"

She was quite out of his hand again, and laid herself down to her work with the vigor of a steam-engine. The daisy-sprinkled turf floated like falling water beneath those long, smooth, sweeping strides.

They were careering over an open upland country, always slightly on the rise, till it grew to a bleak brown mountain far away under the western sky. The enclosures were small; but notwithstanding the many formidable banks and ditches with which it was intersected, the whole landscape wore that appearance of space and freedom so peculiar to Irish scenery, so pleasing to the sportsman's eye. "It looked like galloping," as they say, though no horse, without great jumping powers, could have gone two fields.

It took a long Irish mile, at racing pace, to bring the mare to her bridle, and nothing but her unusual activity saved the rider from half-a-dozen rattling falls during his perilous experiment. She bent her neck at last, and gave to her bit in a potato-grout; and, nor, if he had resolved to buy her for the sake of her speed and stamina while she was running away with him, did he like her less, we may be sure, when they arrived at that mutual understanding, which unks together so mysteriously the intelligences of the horse and its rider.

Turning homewards, the pair seemed equally pleased with each other. She played gaily with the snaffle now, answering hand and heel cheerfully, desirous only of being ridden at the largest fences, a fancy in which he indulged her, nothing loth. Trotting up to four feet and a half stone wall, round her own stable-yard, she slipped over it without an effort, and her owner, a discerning person enough, added fifty to her price on the spot.

"She's a good sort," said the soldier, patting her reeking neck, as he slid to the ground; "but she's uncommon bad to steer when her monkey's up! Sound, you say, and rising four year old? I wonder how she's bred?"

Such a question could not but entail a voluminous reply. Never, it appeared, in one strain, had been united the qualities of so many illustrious ancestors. Her pedigree seemed enriched with "all the blood of all the Howards," and her great-great-grandam "Camilla by Trentham, out of Phantom, sister to Magistrate!"

"An now ye've bought her, Captain," said our friend in frieze, "ye've taken the best iver I bred, an' the best iver I seen. Av I'd let her out o' my sight wanst at Ballinsloe, the Lord-Liftenant ad have been across her back, while I'm tellin' ye, an' him leadin' the hunt, up in Meath, or about the Fairy House and Kilruie. The spade wasn't soldered yet that would dig a ditch to hold her; and when them sort's tired, Captain, begorra! the very breeches ad be wore to rags betwixt your knees! You trust her, and you trust me! Wait till I tell ye now. There's only one wan thing on this mortal earth she won't do for ye!"

"And what's that?" asked the other, well pleased.

"She'll not back a bill!" was the answer, "but if iver she saches with ye, reuaging, or such like, by this book, I'll be ashamed to look a horse, or so much as a jackass, in the face again!"

So the mare was sent for, and Patsy, with a stud reduced to the donkey and the Kerry cow, sued bitter tears when she went away.

Refusing.

CHAPTER II.

MISS DOUGLAS.

It is time to explain how the young black mare became linked with the fate of certain persons, whose fortunes and doings, good or bad, are related in this story.

So that end the scene must be shifted, and laid in London—London, on a mild February morning, when even South Audley Street and its tributaries seemed to exhale a balmy fragrance from the breath of spring.

In one of these, a window stood open on the drawing-room floor—so wide open that the baker, resting his burden on the area railings below, sniffed the perfume of hyacinths bursting their bulbs, and beat time with floury shoes to the notes of a wild and plaintive melody, wailing from the piano-forte within.

Though a delicate little breakfast-service had not yet been removed from its spider-legged table, the performer at the instrument was already hatted and habited for a ride. Her whole heart, nevertheless, seemed to be in the tips of her fingers while she played, drawing from the keys such sighs of piteous plaint, such soft sweet seductive sorrow, as

of harmony, through which there came a short quick gasp for breath like a sob. Then she shut the piano-forte with a bang, and walked to the door over the fire-place.

It reflected an amazingly fascinating face, so irregular of features that women sometimes call it "positively plain;" but on which the other sex felt neither better nor wiser men when they looked. The cheek-bones, chin, and jaws were prominent; the eye-brows, though arched, too thick; and for feminine beauty, the mouth too firm, in spite of its broad white teeth, and dark shade pencilled on the upper lip, in spite even of its saucy curl and bright bowdlering smile.

But when she lifted her flashing eyes fringed in their long black lashes, there was no more to be said. They seemed to blaze and soften, shine and swim, all in one glance, that went straight to a man's heart and made him wince with a thrill akin to pain.

Pale women protested she had too much color, and vowed she painted; but no cosmetics over yet concocted could have imitated her deep rich tints, glowing like those of the black-browed beauties one sees in Southern Europe, as if the blood ran crimson beneath her skin—as if she, too, had caught warmth and vitality from their generous climate and their sunny, smiling skies. When she blushed, it was like the glory of noonday; and she blushed now, while there came a tramping of hoofs in the street, a ring at the door-bell.

The color faded from her brow, nevertheless, before a man's step dwelt heavily on the staircase, and her visitor was ushered into the room as "General St. Josephs."

"You are early, General," said she, giving him her hand with royal condescension; "early, but welcome, and—The horses will be round in five minutes—Have you had any breakfast? I am afraid my coffee is quite cold."

General St. Josephs knew what it was to starve in the Crimea and broil in the Mutiny; had been shot at very often by guns of various calibres; had brought into discipline one of the worst-drilled regiments in the service, and was a distinguished officer, past forty years of age. What made his heart beat, and his hands turn cold? Why did the blood rush to his temples, while she gave him greeting?

"Don't hurry, pray!" said he; "I can wait as long as you like. I'd wait the whole day for you, if that was all!"

He spoke in a husky voice, as if his lips were dry. Perhaps that was the reason she seemed not to hear.

Throwing the window wide open, she looked down the street. Taking more of that thoroughfare than was convenient by advancing lengthways, with many plunges and lashings out, and whiskings of her long square tail, a black mare with a side-saddle was gradually approaching the door. The groom who led her seemed not a little relieved when he got her to stand by the kerb-stone, patting her nose and whispering many expletives suggestive of composure and docility.

TO BE CONTINUED.

TILBURY NOGO.

There were, however, two grand exceptions to the general run of commoners constituting this assemblage, in the persons of a dowager viscountess, and an earl's younger son, and the deference with which poor old deaf Lady Ricketts was listened to, and the Honorable Lionel Legerdmain toadied, were instructive proofs of the respect in which England still holds the illustrious ornaments of her aristocracy. The sufferings of poor Lady Ricketts from intermittent paralysis prevented her being anything more than a passive recipient of the general homage she commanded; but Mr. Legerdmain's popularity did him, indeed, the greatest credit, inasmuch as there must have been some admirable though hidden virtues concealed beneath so unpropitious an exterior, to render that short, thin, dirty and vulgar-looking man the centre of an admiring crowd. Badly dressed, not half washed, and more than half drunk, he was relating to a listening circle that day's run with the stag hounds; the chief merit of the performance being the fact that he had ridden nearly a hundred miles on the road, exclusive of hunting, since breakfast—and this feat, perhaps, in a measure accounted for his seedy appearance.

"Main, my boy!" said a good looking, fresh-colored young gentleman, who seemed to derive much reflected honor from the familiar abbreviation.—"Main, my fine fellow! what did you do to-day with The Back?"

"Ran ten minutes, and broke my horse's back," replied Main, who is evidently a man of few words.

"I'll mount you to-morrow with the Duke," good-naturedly suggests the pitying inquirer, who is basking in that time of life when the loss of a horse is the greatest conceivable affliction.

"Wouldn't give a thank-you for fox-hunting!" is the somewhat unaccountable reply,

Constantine Slopes is a "gone coon!" The old story, Kate—you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" "Sport to you, but death to him!" Mr. Slopes, probably for want of anything better to say, hazards a stammering request that "Mrs. Bagshot will give us a little music;" and the clergyman's lady, calm, radiant, and collected, sits down to the piano-forte, protected in flanks and rear by two post-captains and a Commander-of-the-Bath, *vis-a-vis* to a general officer with one leg, whose infirmity obliges him to remain seated, and assisted by Mr. Constantine Slopes, who hangs over the fair performer, and turns the leaves of her music-book, with an *empressment* that forcibly reminds me of days not long gone by, when I was as great a fool, as intimated a victim, as that simple young man. Who shall account for the fascination exercised by some women upon all who approach their sphere? The peculiar power of the rattlesnake, whose eye is said to lure the conscious victim unsuspectingly to its doom, and the attractive properties possessed by certain ladies, and by them used with equal recklessness and cruelty, are two arrangements of Nature which make me a believer in "Mesmerism;" and I am convinced that Mrs. Bagshot possessed fully more than her share of the magnetic influence. What else could it have been that, ere she had run her fingers over the keys with her own peculiar touch, half through one of those complicated preludes she executed so brilliantly, drew me irresistibly towards the piano-forte from the other end of the room, and brought me, open-mouthed, to gaze and listen spell-bound by the enchantress, forgetful of the presence of my own legitimate Mrs. Nogo, the proximity of Joe—who, by the way, hated music—and all, but those sounds which bore me back upon the wings of harmony to the shades of Windsor, the green alleys of Virginia Water, the villa at Ascot, and the dreamy follies of the past?

Then, as if the music, accompanied by the half-reproachful glances shot at me from beneath those long eyelashes, was not enough, Kate must needs complete the charm—there, I acknowledge, incited by the supplication of Mr. Constantine Slopes—by warbling forth one of those plaintive ditties which people who are not "by way of" singing, sometimes execute so beautifully and so touchingly. With just enough accompaniment to melt the tones gradually away; with just enough expression not to mar the plaintive simplicity of the sentiment; and with looks of pitiful tenderness that might have thawed St. Anthony into a sighing Strephon, and that did make me very uncomfortable and caused young Constantine Slopes to shake like an aspen-leaf, she drew from the responsive chords a soul-stirring harmony as she poured forth her plaintive wail for

"THE DAYS WHEN WE MET."

"There is mirth in the sunshine, there's peace in the shade,
There's the fragrance of June on the flower;
There is love in the whisper that steals through the glade—
But the sunshine may pale, and the roses may fade,
And the skies may be dark in an hour;
And the heart may grow weary—the brain may forget—
And the loved one be changed since the days when we met."

"There is morning to hope for, when darkness is past;
There's a dawn that shall smile into day;
Though the winter be chill, and unsparing the blast,
Yet the flow'et shall bloom in its spring-time at last,
And the bird carol forth from the spray.
But the heart hath no morrow, when its sunlight is set,
And its music is hushed since the days when we met."

"Will you seek for a blossom when the tree is laid low?
Will you look to find life in decay?
Is there joy in despair? is there laughter in woe?
Can you ask me to smile through the tear-drops that flow
For the hopes which have faded away?
No! the cheek shall be pale, and the eyelash be wet,
While I mourn all alone for the days when we met."

Amidst the applause that succeeded to the "voice of the charmer," I caught a glance from Mrs. Nogo which somewhat moderated the fervor of my approval, and a peremptory order to "see about the carriage" sent me into the dark street to grope up and down for the fly which had brought us, and which, according to agreement, was to be ready to take us back. The interval having been whiled away by the driver in the consumption of exciseable commodities, we were not long on our homeward journey, and were soon arranged for the night in our comfortable dormitory at the "White Rose."

Shall I confess that as I laid my head on the conjugal pillow, the still-present " refrain" of "The Days when we Met" was yet ringing in my ears, and I was

unflattering mirror, is the same 'Tilbury Nogo who, but a few short years before, bounded up the steps of this exclusive caravanserai with all the buoyant elasticity of youth, and swaggered through its halls, in the pleasing consciousness that "the world was all before him, where to choose." The very waiter seems to glance incredulously at the country-made boots and ill-fitting attire of a gentleman whom, it argues now no vanity to say, he remembers once the most particular in his *chassure*—the most scrupulously correct in his attire. Well may he look as much astonished as a waiter is capable of looking—for these functionaries, like the chairs and tables with which they are chiefly associated, never grow old. For them the spring-tide and winter of life are not. Who ever collects to have seen a waiter either in the bloom of youth or the decrepitude of old age? If he should be short-winded and gouty, your father remembers him afflicted with these inconveniences when he himself was a young man. If he is light, wiry, and active—light, wiry, and active he will remain, when you are tottering upon crutches, or writhing on a water-bed. Leave England, to seek your fortune at the antipodes; pursue your search after the fleeting jade from pole to pole; and when half a lifetime has elapsed, return to London, bankrupt at least in health and constitution, and so altered as not to be recognized by the very cousin with whom you have been brought up from a boy, walk into that club in which the wholesome rule, that "members abroad are not liable for their yearly subscription," has induced you to keep your name, and the same waiter, apparently in the same attire, offers you the evening paper, with the same flourish that used to call a smile to your countenance twenty years ago; and for a moment the magic of association makes you feel as young as that evergreen attendant. Look at him; he is neither bent nor wasted, neither wrinkled nor grey; he always looked like a waiter, and he looks just as like a waiter now as he did before you went abroad. What is his secret? and can he be induced to part with it for love or money? Perhaps he has no family cares—Ah! the daily epistle from Mrs. Nogo, which the rogue presents on a silver salver, with a careless air that is enviable to a degree.

"Waiter, bring me a large glass of sherry and a biscuit."

"Glass of sherry, sir—yes, sir. Biscuit, sir—yes, sir."

And now to see what information my news-loving lady can give from Bath, where we still hold our head-quarters, and are considered, I rather flatter myself, what the purser's wife in "Peter Simple" calls the "Smiths, of London"—"quite the topping people of the place." She still crosses her letters word for word, and line for line; and her hand, though faint and ladylike in appearance, gets more illegible every day. I wonder if I shall have to come to glasses at last! however, with the assistance of alternate sips at the goblet of sherry, I manage to decipher the contents, which a respect for the confidence of conjugal correspondence prevents me giving *verbatim*, but by which I am glad to learn that "the cockatoo and the white mice are well, though the bullfinch has broken his leg!" (The reader will infer from the importance of these pets, that establishment is unblest with a nursery.)

"The mastiff puppy, as yet nameless, has been lost, and recovered at an enormous sacrifice; and Toko—a long-eared, useless spaniel—has been bitten by the butcher's dog. My own two hunters have the influenza, and one of the carriage-horses is lame"—which bulletin concludes the domestic details of this daily report. The remainder of the epistle, like its predecessors, is full of that ever-increasing intelligence which men call news, and gods scandal, and for the growth of which the climate of Bath appears peculiarly favorable. From its perusal I learn that the Honorable Lionel Legerdmain has been concerned in some most equivocal proceedings on the turf, and that it is doubtful whether even his exalted rank will enable him to retain his position in the immaculate society of Bath; that old Admiral Dolphin is paralytic, and poor Lady Rickett dead; and young Graceless—formerly of the Guards—has behaved shamefully to her niece; that venerable Miss Dido, supposed to be the most inveterate of spinsters, had been seen at ten o'clock at night walking with a man in a cloak, who, Mrs. Nogo's maid thought, was the postmaster at the corner, but whom Mrs. Chamfront likewise saw and declares to be Louis Napoleon; that people did more than extraordinary things every day; and that she, Mrs. Nogo, did not know what the world would come to at last, etc., etc. The letter concluded with an earnest hope that my business in London would soon be brought to a close, and was further elongated by a postscript, to the effect that "she had just seen young Constantine Slopes driving four-in-hand down Lansdowne-place; and people received him just the same as ever; though what had become of that Mrs. Bagshot, she had not an idea—only it would be extremely painful considering the relationship and all, if acci-