

A Stormy Day

by Anna Sewell from *Black Beauty*

Black Beauty is the story of a black horse in England in the 1800s. It tells the story from the horse's viewpoint. The book covers Black Beauty's life from the time he is born until his old age.

In this passage, Black Beauty has been harnessed to a cart to take his owner, or master, and his caretaker named John on an trip into town. It had been raining a great deal. Now it has stopped raining, but the wind was blowing very hard. As the passage begins, they are on their way home as it gets dark.

So back we went and round by the crossroads, but by the time we got to the bridge it was very nearly dark; we could just see that the water was over the middle of it; but as that happened sometimes when the floods were out, master did not stop. We were going along at a good pace, but the moment my feet touched the first part of the bridge I felt sure there was something wrong. I dare not go forward, and I made a dead stop. "Go on, Beauty," said my master, and he gave me a touch with the whip, but I dare not stir; he gave me a sharp cut; I jumped, but I dare not go forward.

"There's something wrong, sir," said John, and he sprang out of the dog-cart and came to my head and looked all about. He tried to lead me forward. "Come on, Beauty, what's the matter?" Of course I could not tell him, but I knew very well that the bridge was not safe.

Just then the man at the toll-gate on the other side ran out of the house, tossing a torch about like one mad.

"Hoy, hoy, hoy! halloo! stop!" he cried.

"What's the matter?" shouted my master.

"The bridge is broken in the middle, and part of it is carried away; if you come on you'll be into the river."

"Thank God!" said my master. "You Beauty!" said John, and took the bridle and gently turned me round to the right-hand road by the river side. The sun had set some time; the wind seemed to have lulled off after that furious blast which tore up the tree. It grew darker and darker, stiller and stiller. I trotted quietly along, the wheels hardly making a sound on the soft road. For a good while neither master nor John spoke, and then master began in a serious voice. I could not understand much of what they said, but I found they thought, if I had gone on as the master wanted me, most likely the bridge would have given way under us, and horse, chaise, master, and man would have fallen into the river; and as the current was flowing very strongly, and there was no light and no help at hand, it was more than likely we should all have been drowned.

Questions

1. What did the master do when Black Beauty wouldn't go across the bridge?
2. When did Black Beauty know that something was wrong?
3. What had happened to the bridge?
4. Was it John or the master who first knew something was wrong?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. pace
2. dare
3. dog-cart
4. lulled
5. current

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "We were going along at a good **pace**"

- a. direction b. condition; health c. hour or time d. speed when walking or running

2) "I **dare** not go forward, and I made a dead stop"

- a. heard or listen b. try or risk c. saw; observed d. happily or with joy

3) "he sprang out of the **dog-cart** and came to my head"

- a. small vehicle pulled by a dog b. kennel for dogs c. two-wheeled wagon pulled by a horse d. leafy green bush

4) "the wind seemed to have **lulled** off after that furious blast"

- a. increased; became stronger b. changed directions c. chilled; more cold d. eased or calmed

5) "the **current** was flowing very strongly"

- a. movement; motion b. recent or new c. excitement or emotion d. water animals; fish