

THE BLACK STALLION

Shipwrecked with a wild stallion!



YEARLING

Walter Farley

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."

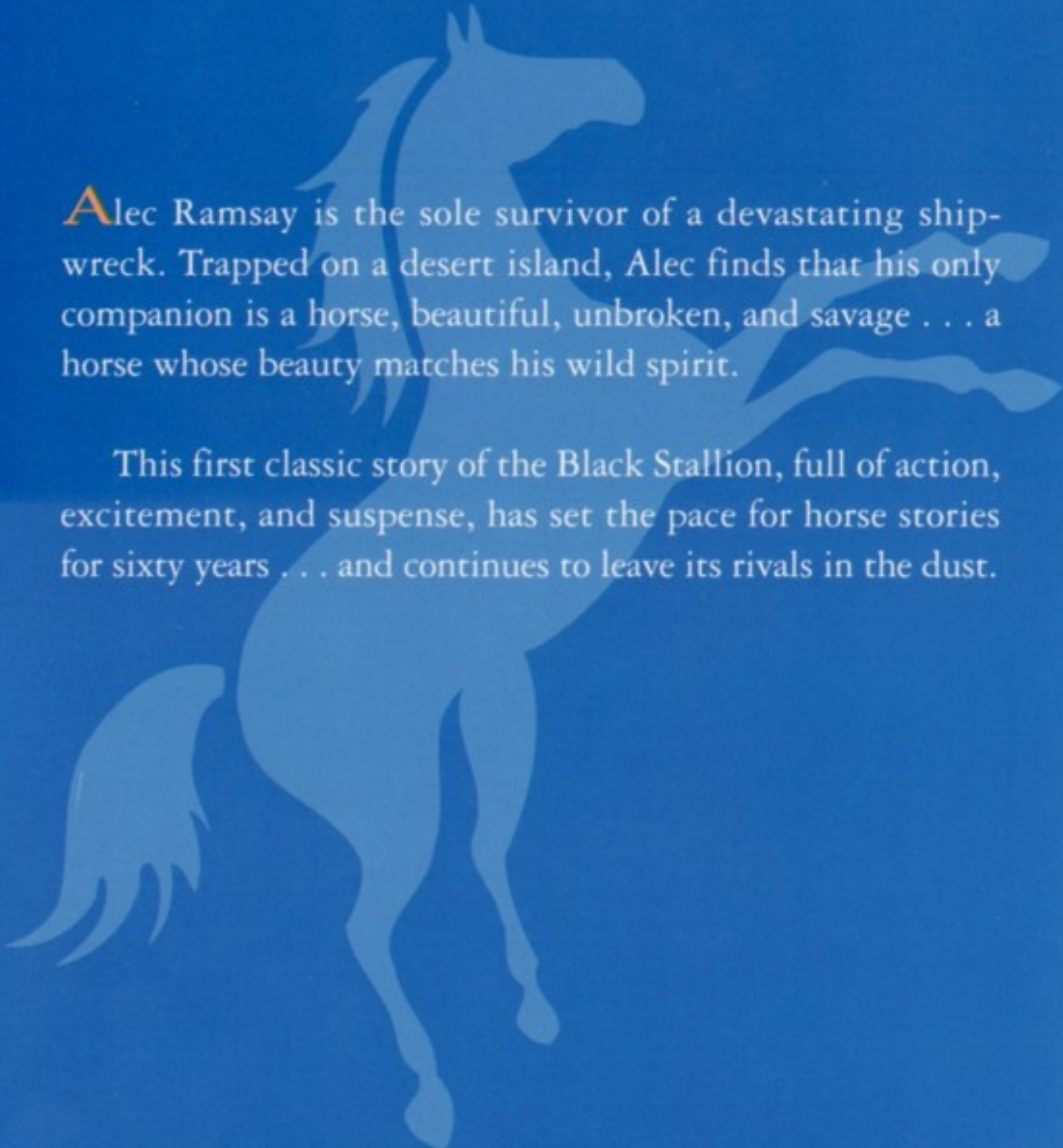
The captain and crew were kind to Alec, but the days passed monotonously for the homeward-bound boy as the *Drake* steamed its way through the Gulf of Aden and into the Red Sea. The tropic sun beat down mercilessly on the heads of the few passengers aboard.

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



Alec Ramsay is the sole survivor of a devastating shipwreck. Trapped on a desert island, Alec finds that his only companion is a horse, beautiful, unbroken, and savage . . . a horse whose beauty matches his wild spirit.

This first classic story of the Black Stallion, full of action, excitement, and suspense, has set the pace for horse stories for sixty years . . . and continues to leave its rivals in the dust.

www.randomhouse.com/kids

US \$5.99 / \$8.99 CAN

ISBN 0-679-81343-8

50599



9 780679 813439



YEARLING

A Yearling Book

New York

RL: 5.3

009-012

Cover art © 2002 by John Rowe

COVER PRINTED IN THE USA