

CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

THE WONDER-  
BOOK OF HORSES

James Baldwin

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

# The Wonder Book of Horses

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JAMES BALDWIN



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## HELIOS'S FOUR-IN-HAND

**H**ELIOS, as you know, was the most famous charioteer that the world had ever seen. Just how long he had been driving the chariot of the Sun nobody could tell; but it must have been many, many years. People said that he had never done anything else; and the oldest inhabitant had no recollection of the time when he began. He never missed a day—not even Sunday; and on holidays he was always up and at it early, cracking his whip cheerily to waken the children. Starting from the home of the Dawn in the far, far East, he made a daily trip to the verge of Old Ocean's stream in the distant West. How it was that he always got back to his starting-point before the next morning was somewhat of a mystery. Nobody had ever seen him making his return trip, and hence all that men knew about it was guesswork. It matters very little to us, however; for that question has nothing to do with the story which I am going to tell.

The old charioteer always slept soundly in the morning, and seldom awoke until he heard his young sister, the maiden whom men call Aurora, rapping at the door of his bedroom, and making her voice echo through the halls of the Dawn.

“Up, up, brother Helios!” she would cry. “It is time for you to begin your journey again. Up, and delight the world once more with your shining morning face and your life-giving presence!”

Then Helios would hasten to the meadows where his steeds were feeding, and would call them each by name:

“Come hither, beautiful creatures! Hasten, for Aurora calleth. Eös, thou glowing one! Æthon, thou of the burning name! Brontë, thou thunderer! Sterope, thou swifter than lightning! Come quickly!”

The wing-footed steeds would obey. The servants would harness them to the golden car, and Aurora and the Morning Star would deck their manes with flowers and with wreaths of asphodel. Then Helios would step into the car and hold the long, yellow reins in his hands. A word from him and the proud team would leap into the sky; then they would soar above the mountain tops and mingle with the clouds, and grandly career in mid-air. And Helios, holding the reins steadily, would gently restrain them, or if they lagged would urge them forward with persuasive words. It was the grandest sight that men ever saw, and yet they never seemed to think much about it—perhaps because it was seen so often. If Helios had failed for a single day, what a wonderful hub-bub and fright there would have been!

The wife of Helios was a fair young lady named Clymene, who lived not far from the great sea, and who, according to some, was a nymph, but according to others a fisherman's daughter: and they had an only son named Phaëthon. Helios loved this son above all things else on earth; and he gave him many rich and noble gifts, and counseled him to be brave and wise, and especially to be contented with his lot in life. And Phaëthon grew to be a tall and comely lad, fond of his looking-glass, soft-handed, and proud of his ancestry. Some of his companions, who were only common mortals, liked to flatter him because of his supposed

wealth, while there were many others who despised him because he affected to look up to the Sun.

“See the upstart who calls himself the son of Helios,” sneered one.

“Ah, but he will have a sorry fall some of these days,” said another.

“You are a pretty fellow to claim kinship with the charioteer of the Sun,” said a worthless loafer whose name was Epaphos. “With your white face, and your yellow curls, and your slender hands, you are better fitted to help your mother at her spinning than to be a leader of men.”

“But,” said the boy, “my father Helios, who drives the burning chariot, and who—”

“Don’t talk to me,” interrupted the unmannerly fellow— “don’t talk to me about your father the chariot-driver. Why, you would be frightened to death to drive your sister’s goat-cart over the lawn; and you would shriek at the sight of a real horse. How dare you claim descent from the charioteer of the skies? Nonsense!”

“A pretty son of Helios, indeed!” laughed the other rowdies who were with Epaphos; and some young girls that were passing tossed their heads and smiled.

“I will show you!” cried Phaëthon, angrily. “I will do what none of you dare do: I will ride the wild horses of the plain; I will harness them to the king’s war-chariot, and drive them in the great circus! I will prove to you that I am worthy to be called the son of Helios!”

“Perhaps you will take his place as driver of the sun-chariot? A day’s rest now and then would do the old man great good,” sneered Epaphos.

Phaëthon hesitated. “My father,” said he, “is one of the

immortals, and I am earth-born. And yet—and yet—”

“And yet,” shouted his tormentors, “until you have driven the sun-chariot through the skies, nobody will believe that you are the son of Helios!”

And they went on their way laughing.

“You may sneer, and you may laugh,” said Phaëthon, “but the time will come when you will honor me, both for what I am and for what I can do.”

Steadily, and with a determined purpose, he set about making himself ready for the great undertaking of his life. He exercised himself daily in feats of strength; he practised running and leaping and throwing weights, until his muscles were hardened and made as elastic as Apollo’s bow. Then he took lessons in horsemanship from the greatest riding-masters in the world. He spent months on the grassy steppes of the Caspian, where he learned to lasso wild horses, and, leaping astride of them, to ride them barebacked and bridleless until they were subdued to his will. He entered the chariot races at Corinth, and with a team of four outdrove the most famous charioteers of Greece; and at the great Olympian games he won the victor’s crown. No other young man was talked about as much as he.

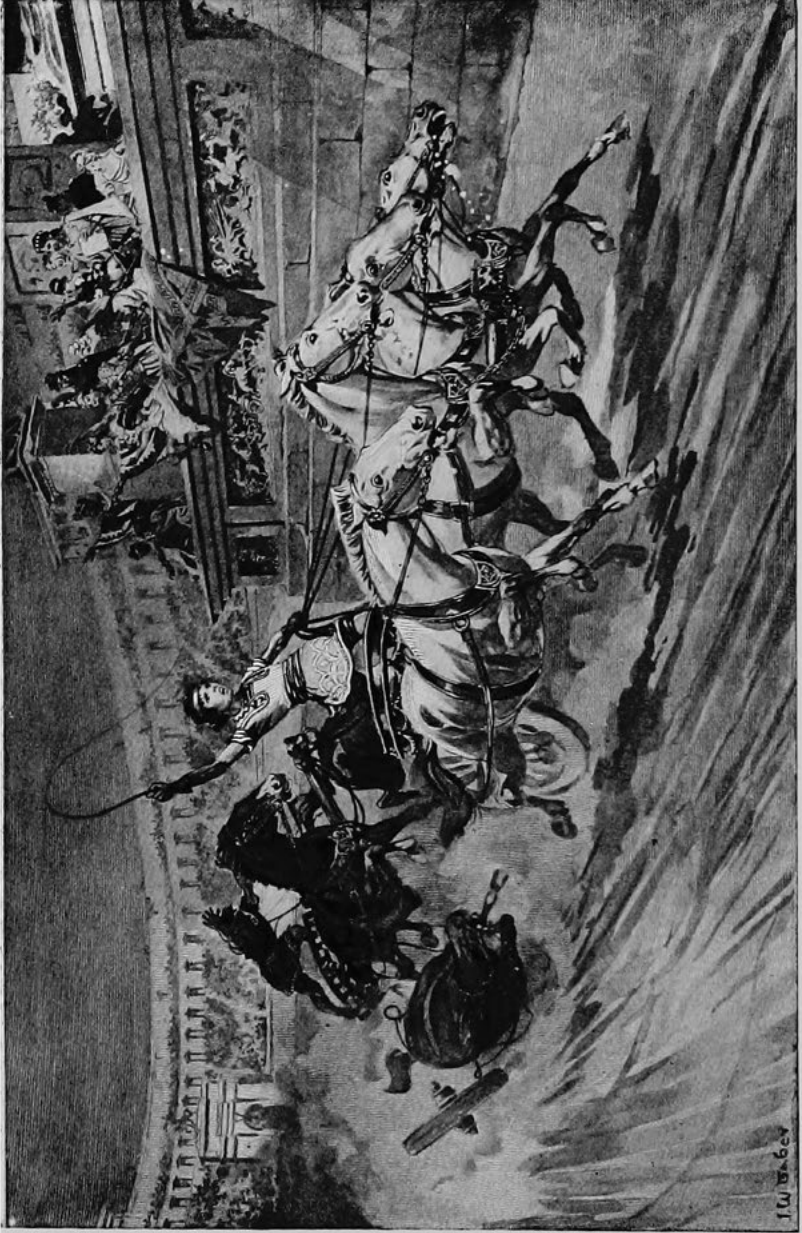
“A bright young fellow with a brilliant future before him,” said some.

“A fine example of what hard work and a little genius can do,” said others.

“A lucky chap,” said still others—“a mere creature of circumstances. Any of us could do as well, if as many favorable accidents would happen to us to help us along.”

“A vain upstart,” said those whom he had beaten in the





“AND WITH A TEAM OF FOUR OUTDROVE THE MOST FAMOUS CHARIOTERS OF GREECE.”

race—"a fop with a girl's face, and more hair than brains, whom the gods have seen fit to favor for a day."

"He claims to be of better blood than the rest of us," said the followers of Epaphos; "yet everybody knows that he was born in a miserable village a long way from Athens, and that his mother is the daughter of a fisherman."

But the young girls whispered among themselves: "How handsome he is, and how deftly he managed the reins! What if he be indeed the son of Helios! Wouldn't it be grand to see him sitting in his father's chariot, and guiding the sun-steeds along their lofty road?" And they said to him, "Phaëthon, if you will drive your father's team for only one little day, we will believe in you."

At length Phaëthon made a long journey to the golden palace of the Dawn in the far distant East. Helios, with his steeds, had just returned from the labors of the day, and he was overjoyed to see his son. He threw his arms about him, and kissed him many times, and called him by many endearing names.

"And now tell me," he said, "what brings you here at this quiet hour of the night, when all men are asleep. Have you come to seek some favor? If so, do not be afraid to tell me; for you know that I will do anything for you—that I will give you anything that you ask."

"There is something," said Phaëthon, "that I long for more than anything else in the world; and I have come to ask you to give it to me."

"What is it, my child?" asked Helios, eagerly. "Only speak, and it shall be yours."

"Father, will you promise to do for me that which I shall ask?"

Then Helios lifted up his hands, and vowed by the river Styx which flows through the underworld, that he would surely grant to his son Phaëthon whatsoever he desired. And this he did, knowing full well the terrible punishment that would be his in case he should not observe that vow. Nine years he would have to lie on the ground as though he were dead, and nine other years he would be shut out from the company of his friends; his sun-car would be broken in pieces, and his fleet horses lost forever, and the whole world doomed to everlasting night.

The young man was glad when his father had made this vow. He spoke quickly, and said: "This, then, O father, is the boon which I have come to ask, and which you have promised to give: it is that I may take your place to-morrow, and drive your chariot through the flaming pathway of the sky."

Helios sank back terrified at the request, and for a time could not speak.

"My child," he said at last, "you surely do not mean it. No man living can ever drive my steeds; and although you have kinship with the immortals, you are only human. Choose, I pray you, some other favor."

Phaëthon wept, and answered: "Father, there are some people who do not believe that I am better than mere common men, and they scorn me to my face. But if they could once see me driving the sun-car through mid-air, they and all the world would honor me. And I can drive your steeds; for have I not mastered the wildest horses of the desert, and have I not driven the winning chariot in the Corinthian races? By long years of patient training I have fitted myself for this task."

Through all the rest of the night Helios pleaded with the young man, but in vain: Phaëthon would not listen to any refusal. "This favor I will have or none," said he. "I will drive the sun-car through the heavens to-morrow, and all men shall know that I am the son and heir of Helios."

At length Aurora, in her yellow morning robes, knocked at the door, and Helios knew that no more time could be spent in vain entreaties.

"Ah, my son!" he said, "you know not what you have asked. Yet since I have made the vow I will not refuse you. May the immortals have you in their keeping, and ward all danger from you!"

Then the four horses were led out and harnessed to the car, and Helios sadly gave the reins into Phaëthon's hands.

"Thy folly will doubtless bring its own punishment, my son," he said; and, hiding his face in his long cloak, he wept.

But the young man leaped quickly into the car, and cried out, as his father had been wont to cry: "On, Eös! On, Æthon, Brontë, Sterope! On, ye children of the morning! Awaken the world with your brightness, and carry beauty and gladness into every corner of the earth. Sterope, Brontë, Æthon, Eös, on with you!"

Up sprang the steeds, swift as the thunderclouds that rise from the sea. Quickly they vaulted upward to the blue dome of heaven. Madly they careered above the mountain tops, turning hither and thither in their course, and spurning the control of their driver; for well they knew that it was not their old master who stood in the chariot behind them. Then the proud heart of Phaëthon began to fail within him. He quaked with fear, and the yellow reins dropped from his hands.



"MADLY THEY CAREERED ABOVE THE MOUNTAIN TOPS."

“O my father!” he cried, “how I wish that I had heeded your warning!”

And the fiery steeds leaped upward and soared in the heavens until they reached a point higher than any eagle had ever attained; then, as suddenly, they plunged downward, dragging the burning car behind them; then, for a long time, they skimmed close to the tree-tops, and dangerously near to the dwellings of men. From the valley of the Nile westward, across the continent of Africa, they passed in their unmanageable flight, and the region that had once been so green and fertile was scorched into a barren desert. The rivers were dried up, and the fishes in them died. The growing grain, the grass, the herbs, the trees—all were withered by the intense heat. The mountains smoked, the earth quaked, and the sky was lurid with flame. The fair people who dwelt in that ill-fated land hastened to hide themselves in caves and among the rocks, where many of them perished miserably from thirst and the unbearable heat; and those who survived and came forth again into the light of day were so scorched and blackened that their skins were of the hue of night, and no washing could ever make them white again. Then all living creatures, great and small, cried out in their terror, and besought the ever-living powers to save them from destruction. And mother Gæa, queen of earth, heard them; and, pitying them, she prayed to great Zeus, ruler of gods and men, that he would do something to stop the mad course of the driverless steeds ere the whole world should be wrapped in flames. Zeus, from his palace on high, heard her prayer, and hurled his thunderbolts upon the head of the hapless Phaëthon. The youth, stricken and helpless, fell headlong from the car,

and the team of Helios, frightened into obedience, soared aloft to their accustomed pathway, and, though driverless, pursued their journey to the shore of the western ocean. Helios was there awaiting their coming, and when he saw that Phaëthon was not in the car deep sorrow filled his heart; he covered his face with his cloak, and it was long ere his smiles were seen again as of yore.

As for Phaëthon, he fell into the great river Po, and messengers hastened to carry the news of his death into the country of his birth.

And the daughters of the West built him a noble tomb of marble near the shore of the great sea; and they caused an inscription to be engraved upon it, which said that although he had failed in what he had undertaken, yet he was worthy of honor, because he had set his mind on high things.

## THE HORSES OF SOL AND MAANE

**A** VERY long time ago there lived in the far North a man named Mundilfare, who had two children that were famed all the world over for their beauty and grace. The name of the boy was Maane, and that of the girl was Sol, and their father boasted that neither in heaven nor upon the earth were there any beings so fair to look upon as they, so bright of face, so firm of step, so noble in action. Of course his boasting gained for the children no friends, but rather stirred up envy and hatred; and the Asa-folk, who were the mightiest people in that country,—so mighty that they were sometimes called gods,—planned how to get them out of the world. Had Mundilfare been wise, he would have praised the children of the Asa-folk and let people think as they would about Maane and Sol.

The Asas had two horses, noble steeds as yellow as gold and swifter than the storm-winds. They also had a chariot made of hammered gold, in which they had stored by a kind of magic all the sparks that flew up out of the vast fiery region of the South. Once they harnessed the horses to the chariot and sent them out over the earth, driverless and without a guide, to carry light and heat to the nations of men. But the plan was a failure. The horses, wandering whither they pleased, did not serve all parts of the world alike. Some lands were almost burned up with the intense heat that was given out from the car; others were



not visited at all, and the people who lived there perished in the cold and the darkness. And so the Asas were upon the point of giving up the scheme entirely; for, although under ordinary circumstances, as in the din of battle or in the roar of the storm, they were the bravest of the brave, yet none of them dared try to drive the golden steeds and the burning chariot. Then one of the wisest among them proposed a plan by which they might kill two birds with one stone, and at the same time bring great honor to themselves.

“This fair maiden Sol and her pale-faced brother Maane,” said he, “are, as everybody knows, skilled in the management of horses. Now, let us put the girl into the burning chariot, with the shield Swalin in one hand, and the long, stout reins in the other, and let it be her duty to guide the fiery steeds through the pathway of the skies, favoring all men alike. And let us do likewise with the boy, giving him charge of the feebler team and the silvery chariot, which have stood idle these many years because none of us knew what to do with them. Thus we shall rid ourselves of the hateful boastings of this fellow Mundilfare, and shall confer blessings not a few upon all mankind.”

No sooner was this proposition made than all the Asa-folk gladly agreed to it. They took the two children from their homes, and imposed upon each the wearisome task that had been suggested. To Sol they gave the burning chariot, which was henceforth called the sun-car, and to Maane they assigned the silvery car that carried the moon. When fair Sol ascended to her place and took the long golden reins in her hands, the fiery steeds, of whom even the bold Asas were afraid, leaped up into the sky and, under her firm and

gentle guidance, journeyed whithersoever she wished. And she named them Arvak and Alswin because they were ever wakeful and as swift as eagles on the wing. But the sparks which flew from the fastturning axle of the sun-car were exceedingly hot and dazzling, and the steeds and their fair driver would have been burned up had not the cool shield Swalin reflected back the heat and sheltered them from the blinding light; nor, indeed, would the horses have been safe even then, had not the Asas hung upon their necks two wind-bags that blew cooling breezes about them all day long and kept them ever fresh and vigorous.

Maane's team was a very gentle one, and he had no trouble in guiding it wherever he wished; and his chariot gave out no heat, but only a soft, silvery light which everybody, and especially children, loved to look upon. Now and then some child who had been very good, or some silver-headed man or sweet-voiced lady, would catch a glimpse of Maane's beautiful face; but it was not often. Once upon a time two children named Juke and Bil—or, as you have it in English, Jack and Jill—went up to their father's well to fetch a pail of water; and the pail was hung from a long pole which they carried on their shoulders. Looking up at the round full moon sailing in the sky, they saw the bright charioteer, and were so charmed by his lovely face that they forgot all about their errand and thought only of the fair vision in the sky above them. And so, wherever Maane drove his team, there they went also, careless of their burden and thoughtless of the bumps and falls which they got in running after the moon. Maane, who had been watching them all the time, was touched by their devotion to him, and finally, after they had wandered very far from

home, he drove his team close down to the earth and lifted them into the car beside him. And now, any bright night when the moon is full, you may see Jack and Jill in it, with the pole lying on their shoulders and the pail of water still hanging below it; for they never, never tire of admiring the beauty of their master's face.

The life of Sol and Maane was not an unhappy one, for they loved the horses which they guided, the one daily, the other nightly, over the vaulted blue roof of the sky. There was not much that happened anywhere on the earth without one or the other of them seeing it. For when Sol sank to rest in the great sea, or drove her fiery steeds down behind the western hills, Maane would start out with his feebler team and drive silently onward among the clouds and the troops of stars—silently lest he should waken the sleeping earth. But his sleek-coated horses were never able to keep pace with Arvak the ever-wakeful, and Alswin the eagle-chaser, which drew his sister's car; and so, even if they started together, he was sure to fall steadily behind, little by little, every day, until at the end of four weeks Sol would gain upon him one entire trip. Then, when she passed him in her swift car, he would hide his face in his long cloak because of the dazzling sunlight, and the two would begin the race over again. But it always ended the same way: Sol would make twenty-eight trips to Maane's twenty-seven.

But by and by, when the Asas had been almost forgotten, a wise man came into the world, who spent all his time in looking at things through a glass, and in writing long rows of figures in a little book, and in putting everything at right angles on shelves instead of letting them lie around loose.

He looked at the sun-car and the moon-car through his glass, and declared that he saw neither horses nor drivers, nor indeed any wagons, but only the sun and moon. But there is no wonder that he did not see them, for his eyes were not of the right kind, nor his heart either, for that matter. Then he set out to prove by figures that the sun always stands in the same place, and that the moon is too big to be put into a wagon of any kind; and, after much talking, he succeeded in making a great many people think that he knew more about such things than did the charioteers themselves, or even the Asa-folk, who had started the whole affair. Of course Sol and Maane did not care to stay in the business after they found that the world was losing faith in them, and so they went into retirement, as people would say nowadays—that is, they turned their steeds about and drove their chariots into the safe and pleasant country of Fairyland, where all such creations of the fancy find refuge.