



SUNNY HANCOCK ILLUSTRATION © TOM BAKER 2001

## The Horse Trade

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I traded for a horse one time,  
he wouldn't take no beauty prize;  
A great big long-eared, blue roan gelding,  
not too bad for weight or size.  
I had to make some tough old circles  
and this trader guaranteed  
This horse would show me lots of country  
and not need too much rest or feed.

He said "Now this here ain't no kid's horse  
but he'll pack you up the crick,  
He will hump up on some occasions  
and he has been known to kick.  
I wouldn't trade him to just anyone  
without having some remorse  
But if you're a sure enough cow puncher,  
mister, he's your kind of horse."

I stepped on that horse next mornin';  
he began to buck and bawl.  
That trader maybe hadn't lied none,  
but he hadn't told it all.  
Because we sure tore up the country  
where he throwed that equine fit  
And I almost ran out of hand holds  
by the time he finally quit.

I guess that musta' set the pattern;  
things just never seemed to change,  
Although I showed him lots of country,  
every corner of the range.  
But every time I'd ride that booger,  
why, he'd keep me sittin' tight.  
I knew I'd make at least three bronc rides  
'fore he'd pack me home that night.

Which woulda been okay  
with lots of horses that I knowed.  
But that old pony had my number;  
I'd just barely get him rode.  
And the thing that really spooked me  
and put a damper on my pride  
Was he was learning how to buck  
faster'n I was learnin' how to ride.

I pulled into camp one evening;  
it was gettin' pretty late.  
I see this grey horse in the corral  
and there's a saddle by the gate.  
I looked that grey horse over  
and I sure liked what I seen,  
Then this kid showed up around the barn;  
he musta been about sixteen.

He said he'd lamed the grey that morning  
coming down off granite grade,  
And he wondered if I had a horse  
I'd maybe like to trade.  
He said he didn't have the time to stop  
and rest and let him heal,  
And since that beggars can't be choosers,  
he'd make most any kind of deal.

When a feller's tradin' horses,  
why, most anything is fair,  
So I traded him that blue roan  
for his grey horse then and there.  
But then my conscience started hurtin'  
when I thought of what I did,  
To trade a "fly blown" dink like that  
off to some little wet-nosed kid.

So next mornin' after breakfast,  
why, I tells him, "Listen lad,  
If you want to know the truth,  
that trade you made last night was bad.  
That old blue horse is a tough one,  
bad as any one you'll see.  
He'll kick you, strike you, stampede.  
He's a sorry SOB.

"It's all I can do to ride him  
and I'll tell it to you straight,  
I think you'll be awfully lucky  
just to ride him past the gate.  
There's two or three old horses  
out there in the saddle bunch.  
They ain't got too much going for 'em  
but I kinda got a hunch

"They'll probably get you where you're going  
if you just don't crowd 'em none,  
But, damn, I hate to see you ride  
that blue roan booger, son!"



*"She ain't slicker broke," says Zane Bishop of the Sombrero ranches in Craig, Colo. "Early on she was a good ranch horse and so broke that I even rode her in a bar until she decided she wasn't." This setup was staged for a photo workshop. Zane manages over 700 horses. Photo © Sandy Crawford*

He said, "I told you there last night  
I'd make most any kind of trade,  
And I appreciate your tellin'  
what a bad mistake I made.

"But my old daddy told me when you're tradin'  
that no matter how you feel,  
Even if you take a whippin'  
that a deal is still a deal.  
That horse, you say has lots of travel,  
and he's not too bad for speed.  
Well, sir, I'm kinda' in a tight  
and that's exactly what I need.

"I traded for him fair and square  
and damn his blue roan hide,  
When I pull outta' here this morning,  
that's the horse I'm gonna ride."  
I watched him cinching up his saddle  
and he pulled his hat way down,  
Stepped right up into the riggin'  
like he's headed straight for town.

Stuck both spurs up in his shoulders,  
got the blue roan hair a-flyin'  
Tipped his head straight back and screamed  
just like a hungry mountain lion.

You know, I've heard a lot of stories  
'bout the bucking horse ballet.  
I've heard of poetry in motion,  
but the ride I saw that day

Just plumb complete defied description  
though I still can see it plain,  
Like it had happened in slow motion  
and was branded on my brain.  
I don't suppose I could explain it  
to you, even if I tried.  
The only thing that I can say is,  
by the saints, that kid could ride.

He sat there plumb relaxed  
like he was laying home in bed,  
And every jump that pony made,  
that kid's a-half a jump ahead.  
When it was over I decided  
I could learn a few things still,  
And I said, "Son, I'm awfully sorry  
I misjudged your ridin' skill."

He just said, "Shucks, that's OK, mister,"  
as he started on his way,  
"But if you think this horse can buck,  
don't put your saddle on that grey."