

Good Horses to Ride

By Dallas Coleman

"Tuck? Tuck, you in there?" He heard Jim's voice like it was rolling down a canyon, a little echo and a lot of hollow and that bare rush of wind carrying it along the stones and scrub brush. He lifted his head up as best he could and tried to nod, wincing as his bones ground and creaked together. He'd stopped being able to holler out long afore the sun started lighting the sky up to pink, which surely didn't seem fair, as his goddamn body hadn't figured how to forget to hurt. Lord no.

Lord, have mercy, Tuck reckoned that glint of sunshine on metal was either the Jim's good boots or that damned Mexican's knife, still sitting where it'd fallen that last time. Since it was feeding time and Jim was a fucking girl about them ostrich boots getting even a hint of horseshit on 'em, it had to be that knife. He could see the shine of it, plain as day, shining like a new penny and sure enough if his Jim saw it, the man'd come to look – hoping it was fallen treasure and telling himself he was only looking because it might be a ten-penny nail and those would wreak havoc on a horse's hooves and goddamn but Tuck didn't care so long as Jim bent to look and peered over with them bright, pretty eyes and saw him, please God.

Please, God.

He'd made that prayer more than once, from the minute he'd seen the sorry sumbitch in the Star, making eyes at that whoreson, Johnny Tabor, little bastard that'd been caught cheating more than once – at roping and cards and love. Tuck still had the fucking scars, carved right into his pride with a wicked sharp tongue. Lord, he'd done everything he knew to catch Jim's attention, from buying the durned fool a beer to picking a fight with Sam over the Rangers and Astros and getting his nose broke in the parking lot.

There was something about Jim's ass in those Wranglers, tight and tiny and fine in that way a cowboy with broad shoulders and a wee waist had. Tuck liked his men that way, broad enough at the top to hold tight to while his cock plowed the way in a hole tight enough to be a fist. Liked the man's laugh, too. It weren't no pussy-sound, wasn't fake or too loud or grating. It put his mind to being younger and easier in his own skin, driving on Old Airport Road to go muddin' with the rest of them, a case of beer in the bed and a bucket of chicken and biscuits in the middle between all of them boys, not a care in the world beyond having enough pennies to fill the tank.

Tuck reckoned he'd spent more than his fair share of time – that first night and for the next three weeks -sitting and staring at that goat-roper straw hat that had hit the dirt one too many times, that pretty green shirt that never fucking changed, but seemed clean each night and hoping God would turn Jim's eyes toward him, let something happen and catch sparks.

Hadn't worked, either, at least not until Jim'd finished the race with Tabor and went from heading down the straightaway to crashing and burning on Business 35 after already paying entry fees for the VFW rodeo. Of course, Tuck figured the good Lord hadn't give him money nor sense, beauty nor an even temper, but he could rope and ride and he always showed somewhere at the right possible second.

He could hear it, plain as day and clear like he was right there, standing under a blazing July sky, the hint of a storm just on the southern edge of the Hill Country, his Chevy purred as he idled on the side of the highway and looked at Jim and Dix.

"Lord, son. Where's your ride?" Man and horse was all lathered and stamping on the asphalt that was damn near liquid with the heat.

"Heading to the arena with Mickey Underwood and my money." That old hat came off, kerchief wiping that sweat off that crew-cut. "Hey, Tuck."

Well, well. Jim did know his name. He didn't hoot, but it was a close fucking thing. "Well, I reckon you're lucky you got your ride and tack. I seen him leave guys with less."

"No shit." Jim spit into the tall grass to the side of the road and sighed, shoulders rolling a little under a sweat-soaked t-shirt, the white gone damn near clear, showing off nipples and flat-flat belly. Oh, fuck him raw, he could get on his sore knees and worship at that altar for an hour and not feel the gravel on the road. "I don't reckon there's enough room in that trailer for another?"

"Well, Dollar don't mind sharing and it looks like we're both heading the same way and God knows it's a hot day to walk it..."

That was the first time that grin'd been turned upon him and Tuck knew he was bound and fucked right there. Weren't no use arguing with it, neither, and God knew Tuck didn't try. He always did know when to give thanks for the shit God offered. It didn't take 'em much, neither, to get Dix and Dollar settled and Jim's bag tossed in the truck, that wet t-shirt stripped off, showing off tanned, pretty shoulders that made little Tuck stand up and salute, sure as shit. They got themselves buckled in and decided on whether they was in a Garth or George or Alan mood. Then they popped a couple-three beers and headed on.

He reckoned he'd been good that whole first ride, singing with the radio and laughing at Jim's jokes. They'd roped together and made them both some money, then went together with a couple of tire-irons and explained the way to things for old Johnny and Mickey.

Explained shit real fucking clear. Some folks were slow learners.

They'd been bloodied and bruised some, running like spooked hares when the black and whites came whooping. They drove down to the Sonic and got them some chili pie and Dr. Pepper and hooted as Dix and Dollar stomped and tossed their heads.

They made it all the way past Austin and into Jarrell before Jim's hand came creeping over the seat. Little Tuck went sproing and reached right for those fingers and they both chuckled some. Soon as they hit Killeen, though, they'd stopped and Jim'd followed him right into that cheap-assed hotel room and locked the door behind them, cock hard as Chinese algebra against his thigh, both of them smelling of sweat and horses and hay and beer.

He'd hit his knees hard, neither of them even sharing a kiss because, damn. Then it was about hot and heavy and right fucking *now* cowboy. Then it was all sucking that swollen tip into the back of his throat and swallowing hard, hearing his name ringing out and bouncing off of thin sheetrock. It took a while for it to be about real shit.

It hadn't mattered none right then, though. Right then Jim's hands had tilted his head back and those green-grass eyes had stared into him and shit. That boy was fine when he shot.

They'd turned that little room inside out, from the little shower to the too-soft bed. He'd drilled that tight little ass and Jim'd liked to eat him alive, biting his fingers, nibbling his belly, taking his nuts in that furnace of a mouth and sucking 'til he reckoned he'd die happy.

They got back to Kilgore and went their separate ways without much of a word. He hadn't fussed about it, neither had Jim. Least for a couple days until the marks faded and Tuck started thinking that he might need him a little more of that. Hell, he'd got himself shaved and washed, clean shirt on and his good watch on his wrist.

'Course, when he'd grabbed his keys from Granny's bowl sitting there by the front door, Jim was standing right there on the porch, looking like a lost puppy and Tucker grinned and scooped that pretty little ass right on in, not even bothering to go for beer. Kept the kid, too. Hell, his fucking name was on the man's hip, along the curve of a rope circling a steer's horns. He'd taken Jim over to Fort Worth to get it done where there weren't no one to point or make comment or nothing. It'd been real easy, even. A picture and an idea and some folding money and pow. Jim was all marked. His.

If he had a matching set of ink, Jim weren't gonna tell no one and he weren't either. Looked pretty good, even on his skinny ass.

The horses were snorting and stamping up a storm and Tucker sorta frowned. He was awful busy, damn it. The memories were coming good and they was better than just laying there and hurting. Hell, he reckoned Jim was just about the best thing that happened to him.

Well, Jim and roping.

"Tuck? Honey? Fucking bed was cold like you ain't even slept in it. Blue norther caught me up near to Magnolia or I'd'a been home last night late. You ain't mad, are you? I got us some good money for them calves and I brought four yearlings and a Beefmaster that's..." It had been the knife. Tucker knew 'cause that son of a bitch caught on the toe of Jim's work boot and went skittering over the hardpack. "What the..."

Hands landed right on his shoulders, shaking him a little and making him sputter. "What are you doing on the... Tuck? Honey? You're cold as ice..."

Then the world went red-hot and hurting, the edges of thing plumb grey where they framed Jim's face "Oh, Jesus fuck. Tucker. I. Shit."

He'd've laughed, if he could. Yeah. Shit.

Jim'd asked him to come on this trip, make it like a vacation sorta, but he had a bit of work over to the Parkers and Jimmy Dale paid real good and God knew they could use the buffer after the transmission went out on the Ford. Goddamn that piece of shit. Not only that, but the missus was known to make up a cobbler that was damn near as good as a long-term cowboy and hell, he was looking forward to a couple days of sleeping across the bed and stealing all them covers.

If he'd only not gone for some suds at the watering hole. Or not got into a pissing match with Jack Marshall over the goddamn ball game and ended up duking it out in the parking lot. Or if he'd not broke Jack's nose when Jack'd called him a no-account faggot.

Hell, even if Jack Marshall's greasy bitch of a wife hadn't called her little brother and friends to come up to the house and prove that the whole lot of them folks weren't worth pissing on if they was on fire, he might've been better off.

They'd started off with throwing mud at the house, then they'd broke the headlights on his truck

and he'd come out of the house like his ass was on fire, turning the hose on them and wishing to hell that he hadn't given the shotgun to Jim for the road.

There'd been a shitload of them, but he'd held his own up to the end – weren't that always the way? Everything was solid up to the end when shit went haywire and one of them had a knife and took it too far? Couldn't let the fuckers hurt the critters, though. Man had to defend them that was his. Jimmy'd get that, no question at all. Jim was a good'un.

He felt Jim land beside him with a thump, fingers sliding on his face. "Shit, Tuck. You just hold on now, huh? Don't you wander far. Help's coming."

"You manage that trailer okay?"

"Yeah. Yeah, Tuck. I did fine. Kept it between the lines." Shit, Must be raining, the way Jim's cheeks was all slick and shiny. "What happened, honey? Who did this?"

"Bunch of Mexicans." Christ on a crutch, he was tired. Cold too, except where Jim was holding him. "Busted the lights on the Ford."

"You out chasing their women again, honey? I keep telling you, them dares ain't worth taking."

He'd've laughed, iff'n he could, but there just wasn't none left in him. "You 'member playing dares over up at Lake Fork?"

God have mercy, Jim'd looked fine-fine that night, all nekkid and lit up by the full moon like the man was in some black and white movie. Or maybe was one of them statuedealies that them Italian folks made. He'd sat and watched with his teeth in his mouth, little Tucker waving and bobbing and making a ton of promises, yessir.

He'd got Jim to lie out on a picnic table – with a blanket underneath for the splinters – and work that pretty cock while he watched.

It'd been fine.

Hell, it'd been a pure-D sin and he'd do it again, given time. Hell, yes. Just sit himself in a lawn chair and get Jim to spread and show all that glory.

"...now. You gotta stay here, honey. I bet we'll hear the sirens, any second."

Tucker sorta frowned some, trying to figure out how he'd got so old, so fucking sore. It

hadn't been all that long since he'd been chasing chickens to get Momma's eggs and had been out riding on Old Pie.

He hadn't seen Old Pie in a while...

"Where's Pie?"

"Who?"

"My horse, damn it. Where..." Lord, the air was heavy, just like it was fixin' to blow up a gullywasher. They could use it, yessir. The ground was so dry it had cracks all the way to China. "Honey. Honey, hold on, now. I know it's gotta hurt like the dickens, but you can't die on me, you hear? You *cain't*."

Die? Him? Shit.

He wasn't fixin' to die. There was still shingles to be fixed on the house and he had to repack the bearings in the tractor.

Not only that, but just 'cause he hadn't been roping good for a while, didn't mean he couldn't get it back. Hell, he had Jim for a partner, didn't he?

Yessir.

He could hear sirens, or maybe they was them damnable mockingbirds up in the persimmon tree. Shit, he oughta cut that thing down afore the stupid birds went and got themselves drunk on the rotted fruit.

That sure made Jim laugh, though, them things fluttering and tilting and falling.

Goddamn.

It sure did.

"Here they come, Tuck. You're gonna be fine. I swear. I do."

Tucker blinked a little, trying to get the fog outta his eyes. "Jim."

"Yeah, Tuck. I'm right here, honey."

"You're a fine man. A real fine man." The sun set Jim to glowing and Tuck just smiled,

loving it, through and through. "I sure do love you, you know."

"Yeah. Yeah, come on. Stop that, honey. You just save your breath."

"But you know?" He wasn't sure why it was important. Probably just because he was tired and stupid-cold, but it was.

It was real important.

Jim sighed and nodded, fingers sliding over his cheeks, down his throat. "I know, honey.

You been real clear, from the start. I ain't got no complaints. No complaints at all, you ornery bastard."

Well, there it was.

God's honest truth.

Settled deep down, Tucker closed his eyes and nodded, thumb tracing the scar on Jim's palm. Damn rope near took the man's pinkie finger off, which would've been a damn shame.

His Jim had fine hands and could his man
ride? Lord, lord. There weren't nothing
better on Earth or in Heaven. Amen.