The Horse Trader and the King of Hell

(Bakuro)

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Horse Trader

Emma, King of Hell

EMMA (Singing.)

Emma, the king of hell,

The great king of hell, Emma

Now ascends into the mundane world to beg for alms.

(Speaking.) The king of hell, Great King Emma is I. These days humans in the mundane world have become so very clever with the laws of their eight or nine different religions that they all troupe off to paradise, both those who do Zen meditations and those who adhere to the Pure Land sect, throwing hell into a desperate state of famine. As a result, I, the Great King Emma have made up my mind to go up to the Crossing of the Six Roads. Any and all sinners who come by, I will capture and eat on the spot. (Singing.)

From the home I love,

From my beloved home in hell, I venture forth,

From my beloved home in hell, I venture forth,

Allowing my feet to lead me where’er they will,

Allowing my feet to lead me where’er they will,

I now arrived at the Crossing of the Six Roads

(Speaking.) Traveling with urgency, I now find myself at the Crossing of the Six Roads. I will rest here for a time, and if any sinners should come by, I will capture and eat them on the spot.

HORSE TRADER (Singing.)

I am a horse trader who never cheated anyone,

A horse trader who never cheated anyone,

And I am on my weary way to the netherworld.

(Speaking.) I am a horse trader of great fame in the mundane world. Life expectance is set for no one, so urged on by the winds of transcience, I am now headed for the netherworld.

(Singing.)

Throwing off regrets for the familiar mundane world,

Regrets for the familiar mundane world,

I proceed with faltering steps,

And now arrive at the crossing of the six roads..

(Speaking.) With unexpected speed, I have now arrived at the crossing of the six roads. I have been told that one becomes confused at this point. I will take care to avoid confusion as I continue on my way.

EMMA I smell a human, I smell a human. It must certainly be a sinner coming this way. Indeed it is a sinner. I will capture and eat you, capture and eat you. (He chases the Horse Trader about, but is unable to catch him.)

HORSE TRADER Oh, please forgive me, I beg you to forgive me.

EMMA Hey, you, who were you in the mundane world?

HORSE TRADER I am a horse trader.

EMMA Then that means that you are a most serious sinner. I will eat you, so prepared your heart for that.

HORSE TRADER But I am not a sinner. So please lead me to paradise.

EMMA What are you jabbering about! I know for a certainty that you are a most serious sinner. To begin with, you make old horses seem to be young horses and deceive people into buying them, or you cut a line in their hides and draw out blood, or you apply a hot iron to brand them, or you whip and beat them mercilessly. Are these not quite prodigious sins?

HORSE TRADER Oh, no, all of those are means of nurturing horses, no none of them constitutes any sort of sin.

EMMA Hey, there, what is referred to as nurturing consists of massaging where the have been injured and brushing them down. So how can you say that pulling out their teeth and drawing their blood is called nurturing, how can you say that is nurturing? I must say, what a hateful rascal you are. I had intended to gobble you down in a single gulp, but I now feel that it would be a waste to eat you so abruptly, so I will torment you and lead you off to hell in pain, and after we arrive in hell, I will eat you at my leisure. Now, shall I take you to the summit of Sword Mountain, or shall I pull out your tongue, or shall I pull you through a straw, just what is best to torment you? In any case, time passes by swiftly, so, I say, you sinner, hell is nearby and paradise is far away, so let’s hurry on our way to hell.

(The Demons join Emma in chasing after the Horse Trader, but he strides his bamboo pole and gallops like a horse, avoiding their blows and running off to the edge of the stage.)

EMMA Do you understand what we’re doing, do you understand?

HORSE TRADER Oh, forgive me, please forgive me.

EMMA Hey, you have something that has been making a lot of racket since the start. What might that thing be?

HORSE TRADER This is a bit and bridle.

EMMA And just what is a bit and bridle for?

HORSE TRADER It is part of a horse’s harness. If you put this bit in a horse’s mouth and pull the bridle over its head, even the most frighteningly wild horses will immediately become tamed and ride-able.

EMMA So you say that if you put the bit in its mouth and the bridle over its head, it will never buck the rider off and throw him to the ground?

HORSE TRADER There is absolutely nothing to worry about, for the horse will not object in the least.

EMMA That is indeed a great treasure. I want to practice horsemanship for a bit. So you must teach me how to do it.

HORSE TRADER Why do you want to practice horsemanship?

EMMA Day after day when I climb the mountain of swords, I find it most painful, and when I cross the triple river, the water sometimes gets very deep, so I want to ride horseback in such circumstances.

HORSE TRADER What you say is most reasonable. So I will indeed teach you horseback riding. So to start with, you must play the part of the horse so that you can get the feel of the bit and bridle and reins. And you must also get the feel of the saddle and other parts of the harness.

EMMA What you say is most reasonable. So I will play the part of the horse. But who will be my rider?

HORSE TRADER I will be your rider.

EMMA How impertinent you are! If you mount me, I will not let you stay on my back for any great length of time, for I will buck you off quickly.

HORSE TRADER That is not possible, not the least bit possible, for as soon as I put this bit and bridle on you, will not be able to buck even the slightest bit.

EMMA Come, come, just mount me and see.

HORSE TRADER So I will bit and bridle you, so come all the way over here.

EMMA With all my heart.

HORSE TRADER First you must take this off. (He helps Emma remove all his clothing and accouterments.) Well, now since we have met in a very strange place, so first tell me who you are.

EMMA I am Emma the king of hell.

HORSE TRADER But what I heard in the mundane world is that Emma, the King of Hell, wears a jeweled crown, a stone sash hangs at his waist, and he is dressed in robes of gold and silver, all in all a most dazzling sight to behold. But your accouterments are nothing of the sort.

EMMA Well, I must say, things have come to a most embarrassing pass. And just as you say, indeed it is true just as you say. But these days humans in the mundane world have become so very clever with their prayers to enter paradise, so that when they die, they all troop off to paradise, throwing hell into a desperate state of famine. So, as you see me now, I have ended up coming out here to the Crossing of the Six Roads with the intention of tormenting sinners into hell.

HORSE TRADER Well, I must say, what trouble you endure. So now I will bit and bridle you.

EMMA So mount me if you like.

HORSE TRADER Then I will mount you.

(Emma whinnies and bucks like a horse, but he is unable to throw the Horse Trader off his back.)

HORSE TRADER This is the basic way to ride, so you must learn well the feel of the bit and bridle and reins.

EMMA This is most uncomfortable.

(The Horse Trader rides Emma around the stage while all the Demons snort and whinny like horses.)

HORSE TRADER Come, come. (Singing.)

Now I ride on the back of the demon,

CHORUS

Never revealing the secret techniques,

Either in the past or the present,

Due to the importance of the whip, the reins,

The saddle and the stirrups,

Paying strict attention to all the aspects

Of a flying and bucking horse,

Keeping a tight grip on the reins and stirrups,

Raising high the whip

To strike in revenge for the torments he suffered,

He strikes and strikes with intensity and frequency.

EMMA Ow, ouch. Wait, oh, wait a minute. None of any of this is the least bit interesting. Stop now, stop!

HORSE TRADER If it was alright for you to torment me as you did a bit ago, then it is alright for me to do this to you. (Whipping Emma again.)

EMMA Oh, wait, please wait. Let’s stop this horse-riding. Get off my back quickly.

HORSE TRADER Then lead me all the way to paradise.

EMMA After getting on my back, you have made numerous demands, so just go off to paradise as you like.

HORSE TRADER (Whipping Emma again.) Do you still refuse to lead me to paradise?

EMMA Ow, ouch. Ow, ouch. You are stronger that I am. There is nothing more for it. I will show the way. What you see to the left is paradise. What you see to the right is hell. So since they are the same, I beg you to go to the right.

HORSE TRADER (Singing.)

Now that I can see paradise to the left,

CHORUS

Now that I can see paradise to the left,

I continue in that direction toward paradise,

Avoiding the path to the right that leads to hell,

Drawing my reins strongly to the left,

I apply the whip between my mount’s ears,

I gallop toward the Pure Land,

My horse trader’s hand never failing

Or fearing Emma, king of hell,

I gallop on toward the Pure Land of paradise.