

## Unknown

### "Dead Horse"

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The Dead Horse

Oh, a poor old man came riding by,  
An' we say so! An' we know so  
A poor old man came riding by!  
Oh, poor old horse!

Says I, "Ol' man, yer 'orse will die."  
Says I, "Ol' man, yer 'orse will die."

An' if he dies we'll tan his hide,  
An' if he don't we'll ride him again.

For one long month I rode him hard,  
For one long month I rode him hard.

One month a hell-bent life we've led,  
But ye've laid in a nice warm bed.

But now yer month is up, ol' Turk,  
Git up, yer swine, an' look for work.

Git up, yer swine, an' look for graft,  
While we lays on, an' yanks ye aft.

After hard, hard work an' sore abuse,  
We'll salt ye down for sailor use.

An' if ye think this ain't not true,  
In the horse-cask look, an' ye'll find his shoe.

He's as dead as a nail in the lamproom door,  
He won't come a'hazin' us no more.

We'll use the hair of his tail to sew our sails,  
We'll use the hair of his tail to sew our sails.

We'll yank him aft to the cabin door,  
An' now goodbye, ye son-o'-a-whore.  
We'll hoist him up to the main yardarm,  
We'll hoist him up to the main yardarm.

An' we'll drop him down to the depths of the sea,  
We'll drop him down to the bottom of the sea.

We'll sink him down with a long, long roll,  
Where the sharks 'll have his body, and the devil have  
his soul!

Oh, 'tis growl ye may but go ye must,  
If ye growl too hard yer head they'll bust.

I thought I heard the Old Man say,  
Just one more pull, lads, then belay!

This needs a bit of historical explanation. Sailors would arrive in harbor, and spend all their wages long before the ship left. This was somewhat depressing, since somehow most of the "attractions" of the port would NOT take credit . . . and so the custom of "drawing on a dead horse", or drawing a month's wages in advance, came into being. I'm told that this still exists in the US Navy. Unfortunately, this leads to the equally depressing pay a month later where your buddies are getting paid, and you aren't. A kind of ritual developed around the belated "death" of the debt. The ship's sailmaker would use the materials at hand to build an effigy of a horse, and at dusk a solemn candlelight procession would form on deck. The horse would be paraded around the ship three times, and then hoisted on a rope to the topmost yardarm. There, the youngest member of the crew would cut the rope on cue, dropping the horse into the sea. The traditional three-cheer salute was given, and the captain would issue a ration of grog (watered rum) to each man. JY

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