

The Misadventures of Donald and Paco

Halloween

By

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Bam! Donald and Paco were startled awake by Esmerelda's harried entrance. She was excited about sharing the big news just posted at Slinky's Tavern, her favorite haunt. Paco and Donald had decided to take a nap after cutting wood all morning and drinking beer all afternoon. Donald looked at the wall clock. It read 9:30 pm.

"Oh Paco, Slinky is having a big Halloween contest next week. The best costume gets fifty dollars. We have to think of something clever to wear," Esmerelda explained, her voice full of child like glee.

Paco rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands, stood up and with a big yawn said, "What?"

Donald shook his head gingerly to clear the Budweiser buzz away.

"You know, Halloween costumes. Slinky is having a contest next Friday and the best costume will get fifty bucks. Second place gets twenty-five and third, fifteen dollars. I think we can win it, but we have to come up with something clever. You know, be original. I can sew up something nice and scary."

"Fifty bucks? That's all?" Paco turned to Donald. "Want a beer?"

"Sure," said Donald.

Undaunted by Paco's lack of enthusiasm, Esmerelda pleaded. "But it will be a real hoot, Paco. Come on, we always go to the Halloween party every year anyway. Might as well go for the bucks too."

Cognitive thinking capacities were returning to Donald, and Esmerelda's *Go for the bucks* lit his imaginative fire. "Yeah, Paco, Esmerelda is on to something. It will be an easy fifty bucks. Slinky's crowd is not the sharpest tools in the shed." Donald looked down at a pamphlet lying on the coffee table that Esmerelda had brought home from Mass the previous Sunday. He picked it up and studied the cover picture of Joseph and Mary on their trek to Bethlehem, thinking that it was far too early for Christmas. "All the better," he proclaimed.

"Better?" Asked Paco from the kitchen.

"I have a grand idea for a great theme for our costumes. But we need to find a donkey." Donald looked toward the ceiling, his right elbow resting on the palm of his left hand and his chin resting delicately on his right hand finger tips in what some might call a scholarly pose.

Paco stopped in the kitchen doorway and stared at Donald with a scowl on his face and asked, "Donkey?"

Esmerelda squirmed past Paco on her way through the doorway. "What in hell do you intend to do with a donkey, Donald?" She smiled to herself, satisfied that her planted seeds were growing. She knew that, unlike Paco, Donald's small brain was fertile ground, needing but a small seed of thought from which to blossom into grand bloom, albeit sometime ending in not so grand results.

"For Essie to ride," Donald said as he soaked in the picture of Joseph leading the donkey carrying Mary.

"To hell I will," echoed from the kitchen. "Why would I want to ride a donkey?" Esmerelda stuck her head back through the doorway.

Donald held forth the magazine cover for her to see. “Joseph and Mary. You and Paco can go as Joseph and Mary and I’ll be one of the wiseman.”

Esmerelda stepped through the doorway with her fists on her hips and elbows postured forward aggressively. “Well, that’s just pure sacrilege of the Blessed Virgin Mother and I won’t do it. Besides, I ain’t riding a damned jackass anywhere.”

Raising his eyebrows at Paco, Donald thought that no one at Slinky’s would miss the not so subtle irony of Emeraldalda playing the role of the sacred virgin. “But Essie, no one would think to include a live donkey in their theme. We’d be sure winners. Right, Paco?”

Paco handed Donald a beer. “Sure. Where you going to find a donkey?”

This sudden revelation stopped Donald before he put the can of beer to his lips. He sat that way for some time until he heard the television channel change and an announcer declare a Grand Cage Match as the final WWF wrestling program. Like moth’s to a flame, Paco’s and Donald’s attention was lured away from Halloween costumes to their favorite male soap opera.

Esmerelda sat at the kitchen table considering the possibility of going it alone. “I’ll show those two idiots,” she murmured.

Esmerelda rose early the next morning, full of inspiration. She put a big X over Monday on the kitchen calendar to start the countdown. Friday night was Slinky’s party, leaving just five full days to ready her award-winning costume. She had decided not to wait for Paco and Donald to come around. Regardless of how original and novel Donald thought his idea was she wasn’t going to ride a donkey, or any other four-legged creature. With a plan at hand, Esmerelda set out for the Salvation Army store and then to the Dollar store in search of materials.

Donald woke up, kicked his feet off the couch to the floor and sat up, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles. A Halloween commercial playing on the television caught his attention, pulling his mind out of the beer-induced fog from last night. Paco walked into the living room from his bedroom, and then veered into the kitchen for a cup of coffee. Esmerelda left it for him every morning. She was thoughtful that way, which was why Paco loved her – they were the perfect example of the notion that there is always someone for everyone; and that tens attract tens, fives attract fives and, in their case, twos attract twos.

Following Paco into the kitchen, Donald poured a cup of coffee and laced it with milk and four teaspoons of sugar. He stirred the caramel-colored mixture slowly as he turned to Paco. “You know, we can win Slinky’s Halloween contest if we can get us a donkey.”

Cocking his head slightly, Paco clenched his teeth, baring them in a discouraging grin. “Aiyee, amigo, I don’t know anyone who has a donkey, only a cow. Besides, Esmerelda told me again last night there is no way in hell she is going to get on any animal. She said she is going to go on her own.”

Donald swallowed his first sip of coffee and smacked his lips. “Just as well. Fifty bucks split two ways is better for us.”

“I think we should go as superheroes. You know, Batman and Robin, or the Green Lantern and Cato. I think being Cato would be cool.” Paco suggested as he sat at the kitchen table watching Donald pull up a chair across from him and sit down.

Holding his cup in both hands with the handle looped over his right thumb, Donald replied, “That’s old stuff. Everyone does superheroes. Now, Joseph and Mary and a real donkey, that’s original. Who did you say had a cow?”

“You won’t get Esmerelda to play the Virgin Mary. No way. She’d have to go to confession for a month over something like that. Delmar Swift has an old cow.”

“What color is it?”

“Kinda light brown, but it’s a girl cow. You know, with those things.”

“Udders. They have udders.” Donald held his chin between the thumb of his right hand and his index finger, slowly rubbing his chin – a sure sign that the wheels of imagination were whirring dizzily. Paco waited with anxious anticipation.

Donald looked at Paco. “There’s possibilities. Let’s go out and see this Delmar and his cow, then we’ll stop by Slinky’s and check out this contest more thoroughly.”

Esmerelda leaned against the kitchen counter while the coffee finished brewing, then spun to the calendar and put a big X across Tuesday. When she turned back to the coffee pot, Paco walked into the kitchen scratching the top of jet black mop of hair. She poured him a cup of coffee and set it on the table. “Only three more days until Slinky’s costume party. Have you and Donald decided whether or not you are going to enter the competition?”

“Donald’s working on something, I guess. You know how he gets about these sorts of things.”

“Ha. What bright idea has he come up with this time?” Esmerelda stood with her hands on the bulge that surrounds her ample waist.

Paco shook his head. “He told me not to tell you since you don’t want to be Mary and ride the donkey. What did you decide to do?”

“No way Jose. That’s my little secret. You and Donald will blab it all over town and I want it to be a big surprise. It’s going to be good though, and I am going to win that fifty

bucks,” she said with a little sass, and then, her hands proudly planted on her hips, she sashayed out of the kitchen with a debutante’s airs. “Stay out of my room.”

Paco went into the living room and before he could turn on the TV, he heard the click and whir of Esmerelda’s sewing machine. He smiled to himself because, although there were few things that she could do well, she could sew with the best of them. Very creative is what he thought, making most of her own clothes from materials she picked up at yard sales. He admired her for that.

Esmerelda marked off Wednesday on the calendar and humming gaily “The Monster Mash” – her holiday favorite – she made coffee for Paco. He and Donald had been out late the night before and she wanted to be out of the house by the time Paco crawled, blood shot-eyed, out of bed, and stumbled into the kitchen for an infusion of caffeine. She planned to set off to find the finishing touches for costume.

With her domestic responsibilities behind her, Esmerelda walked into town to pay a visit to an old high school classmate, Clifton Eldridge. Since childhood, Cliffy, as most friends called him, had had a fascination with magic. He was a favorite of many mothers around town, who hired him to entertain at children’s birthday parties. Cliffy also performed in local variety shows and worked a few adult parties throughout the county. It was the general agreement of most of the town’s citizens who had seen his show that Cliffy did some quite remarkable tricks.

The door opened shortly after she knocked. The balding, portly man jovially waved her in. “Hi, Essie. Boy, have I got just the thing for you. You will dazzle the crowd at Slinky’s for sure. Wish I could be there to see the look on their faces when you make your grand entrance.”

Esmerelda smiled. She knew Cliffy would come through for her.

Donald sat down at the table with Paco and took a sip of coffee. He glanced up at the calendar as Esmerelda scratched out Thursday, turned to the two and said. “Only one more day, boys. Got your Halloween costumes yet?”

Paco saw the look of panic in Donald’s eyes.

“Yeah, we’re all set and sure to win.” Donald sputtered.

“We are?” asked Paco.

“Oh yeah. I’ve been working on it and we will win first prize.”

Esmerelda knew better, knew the blustering bluff, and smirked, knowing that they did not have anything put together yet, which meant she would surely win. “Don’t forget the judging is at six o’clock tomorrow, boys. Make sure to get there early for my grand entrance and the presentation ceremony when Slinky gives me my fifty bucks.” A big smile crossed her face and lit up her eyes as she saw Donald’s smoldering competitiveness flash into a full-fledged inferno.

“You’ll be lucky to get third prize after they see our outfits.” Donald snarled.

“So, what are you guys going to go as?” Esmerelda asked.

“Oh no, you don’t. You aren’t telling what you’re wearing. We’ve got something really cool all set.”

Wide eyed and bewildered, Paco said, “We do?”

Standing at the sink finishing last night's supper dishes, Esmerelda was again humming "The Monster Mash," rocking back and forth to the beat when Paco wandered in for coffee. She stopped and poured him a cup then walked over to the calendar and made several loops with a pencil, around Friday. Inside the circle she wrote \$50. Then she waltzed out of the kitchen, cackling like an evil Boris Karloff.

Her loud cackle from the hallway grated on Paco's well earned hangover from last night. His funk was interrupted when Donald stormed through the back door. "Come on, get ready. We've got to get over to Delmar's and get his cow."

"We do?" Paco scratched the top of his head.

"For Slinky's costume contest, remember? Joseph and Mary, remember. We need a donkey."

"But, Delmar has a cow."

"It'll do. We'll just have to make it look like a donkey."

"We will? It's a girl cow."

Donald threw out his arms. "Of course, we'll use a little creativity and ingenuity. You know, the American way. But, we've got to get going."

"Ok." Paco wandered back to his room.

When he returned, he met Esmerelda carrying two large grocery bags that she swung away from Paco to conceal the contents. "I'm going over to my aunt Tillie's," she said. "I'll see you guys at the presentation ceremony. Bring the camera and take my picture getting the fifty bucks."

“Ok,” said Paco.

It took a good deal of convincing to get Delmar to let them borrow his pet jersey cow, Lulu, for the day. Lulu, although eleven years old, was still producing milk. So, before they left, Delmar showed Paco how to milk her later in the day. He also instructed them to be sure to feed her as soon as they got her to the house. Lulu loved to graze on grass, Delmar said, adding. “Be sure to tie her to a tree because she is a bit of a wanderer and might take off on you if she gets spooked.” He put an old harness that he had used in her show days, and attached an eight foot- long rope to a ring that hung under her chin. He handed the rope to Paco. “You take real good care of my girl, hear? You hear me, Paco?”

Donald reached over and took the rope from Paco. He gave it a gentle tug. “Come on, Lulu, let’s go for a little walk,” he said gently to the lethargic bovine. Lulu would not move, however, until Delmar slapped her on the rump. She began walking behind Donald and Paco.

Delmar hollered after them. “Just give her a little pat on the rear if she stops. It’ll get her to movin.”

“Ok,” said Paco, and they made their trek back to Paco’s house without incident.

“We’ve got to put her in the house so no one will see her,” Donald said as they walked into the backyard.

Paco looked over his shoulder at Lulu, who batted her long eyelashes over her big brown eyes at him, then he said to Donald, “We do?”

“Of course. If people see this cow in your backyard they will start asking questions and we will lose our element of surprise at Slinky’s.”

With his eyebrows raised skeptically, Paco looked back at Donald. “Ok.”

It took a little pushing and pulling to coax the reluctant Lulu up the two steps of the stoop at the back of the house. She now stood in Paco and Esmerelda’s living room. Donald tied the lead rope to the door knob of Essie’s bedroom.

Donald looked at the white blaze across Lulu’s forehead. “Paco, Delmar said we had to feed her when we got here. What have you got that she will eat?”

Paco shrugged. “Not much.”

“Run down to the corner store and get her something.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. Use your imagination. What would you like to eat if you were a cow? Also, get a roll of duct tape and a can of brown shoe polish.”

Paco nodded and said, “Ok.”

While Paco was marshaling supplies, Donald went to the kitchen for a beer. “Lulu, I’ll bet you are thirsty.” So Donald went back to the kitchen and picked up a clean, pure white, salad bowl. He popped the beer can top and poured the contents into the bowl.

“Here you go, girl.” Donald held the bowl under Lulu’s nose. The cow pulled her head up when the popping carbon dioxide bubbles spritzed her sensitive nostril membranes, startling her. Donald placed the bowl on an end table and pulled the table under her chin. “There you go, girl.”

Donald went for another beer then sat down on the sofa and clicked on the television. He took a sip of beer, noticed Lulu’s nose go into the bowl, and heard her slurp away at the beer.

After finished the beer, Lulu bent her head down and sniffed the old green shag carpet. She nibbled at a tuft, but could not pull it loose. The cow jumped a little when the front door opened, and turned her head to see Paco carrying two large sacks through the doorway and place them on the coffee table in front of Donald.

Donald peered into one of the bags. “I gave Lulu a beer. She was thirsty. Better get another. What did you get her to eat?”

“Cheese puffs.” Paco said as he walked to the kitchen for a couple of beers and a bowl to put the cheese puffs into. Donald dug out the shoe polish and duct tape. Then he pulled out one of the three bags of cheese puffs and looked at the ingredients. “They have some soybean in them, Lulu. You should like that.”

Lulu shuffled a little and turned her head to look at Donald, who was impressed that she might have understood what he had said. *Pretty smart for a cow*, he thought.

Paco returned and poured another beer into the empty bowl, then put down a big green plastic bowl beside it. He grabbed a bag of feed and dumped it into the green bowl. Lulu

swung her head back to the end table and sniffed the cheese puffs, then dove in. Paco smiled. “Hungry, Lulu?”

Satisfied that he had hit a homerun with Lulu, Paco sat down on the couch and took a sip of beer. “What’s the plan?” he asked.

Donald looked at his wristwatch. “Well, it’s about noon. We need to make some cardboard donkey ears and find some brown cloth to cover Lulu’s udders. I’ll work on those. You need to dig out the long brownish rain ponchos and your sandals.”

“Ok, but who we going to get to be Mary?”

“Who else. You!”

“Me!?!?”

“Of course, you. You are the shortest.” Donald was at least six inches taller than Paco. “Don’t you think it would look odd to have Joseph looking up at Mary?”

Uncertainty about the role he was to play waned as Paco considered Donald’s logic. He grabbed two more beers and put the last bag of cheese puffs in Lulu’s bowl, then filled the water dish with one of the beers before going out to the back porch to look for the ponchos. When he returned, he found Donald duct taping the ears onto a perfectly contented Lulu, who was munching and slurping away.

Donald then wrapped a beige sheet around Lulu’s udders and secured it with more duct tape. Lulu seemed oblivious to the work being done on her, which amazed Donald, and pleased him as well, convincing him more than ever of the cleverness of his plan. When he finished he went to the fridge and got another beer for him and one for Lulu. As Donald returned, he turned to Paco, who was standing in the living room holding the ponchos and with flip-flops on his feet, smiling broadly.

Paco held out the ponchos. “These ok?”

“Perfect,” said Donald as he poured Lulu a beer. She gave Donald a look, he thought if cows could give such a look as if to say, *Thank you*. Then she turned and began slurping up the beer.

Satisfied that preparation for the contest was nearly complete, and beaming with confidence of a sure first-prize win, Donald proclaimed. “I love it when a plan comes together.”

Lulu’s posture stiffened and a look of distress – if cows can have such a look – crossed her face. Deep from within her, Paco and Donald heard an angry rumble, then saw Lulu raise her tail as she expelled a large plume of methane. Apparently the cheese puffs and beer were not compatible with the bovine gastro-intestinal system – at least not when served together.

When the methane expanded – as gases in open space generally do – a foul and offensive odor filled the room, causing Donald to wince, close his eyes tightly, pinch his nose and pucker his mouth in a strange and twisted grimace. Paco covered his nose and mouth with a doily off the arm of the sofa.

In fear that Esmerelda would come home and smell Lulu’s presence in the living room, Paco lit a couple of incense candles, one which sat strategically directly behind Lulu on an end table.

In time, an adequate amount of oxygen to sustain life returned to the living room, so Donald and Paco began to don their costume attire. Donald put Esmerelda’s blond wig on Paco and finger combed it into presentability. (Esmerelda’s Hispanic lineage was evident in her dark brown hair, yet she liked to let loose periodically and go blond.) Although uncertain

as to whether Mary, the mother of Jesus was blond or not, Donald thought Paco being blond added certain panache to his costume. Besides, it was the only wig they had.

With a touch of rouge, blue eye liner and bright red lipstick, Donald turned Paco toward the mirror to appreciate his art work. Paco screamed, “Eeyie.” He pulled off the wig. “No way.”

“Oh, come on, Paco. It’s a costume. You’ll only have to wear this stuff for an hour. Besides, it is almost time to head out.”

Reluctantly, Paco consented. “Ok.”

Donald and Paco grabbed a couple of beers each for the walk to Slinky’s and stuffed them into the poncho pockets. Paco grabbed a heavy wool blanket to throw across Lulu’s bony back bone, which presented undesirable consequences when straddled by a man. Donald then picked up Lulu’s lead rope to leave. But Lulu’s body stiffened as rigid as a slab of granite and she had a painful expression on her face again – if cows can have such expressions.

Pulling on Lulu’s rope, Donald saw her raise her tail and yelled, “No Lulu, hold it Lulu” – clearly without any understanding of the autonomic functionality of bovine plumbing, and much less the notion that a cow might consider self-deprivation of such relief due to its environment or close proximity to others, unlike the most sophisticated of humans.

Another angry rumble emanated from within Lulu and she stretched her neck forward, head tilted slightly and her eyes furrowed in a strained look – if cows can actually have those sorts of looks. Paco ducked as Lulu let loose a thunderous cloud directly over Esmerelda’s burning incense candle, which predictably ignited the methane with a dull whoomp, creating a bright blue ball of flame reaching floor to ceiling, and the full length of the couch – one that assuredly high school boys and college frat boys across the nation would have considered quite impressive.

However, Lulu was startled by the whooshing sound and the heat of the flames offensively licking at her personal parts, causing her to make a bucking kick backwards, launching the end table and now snuffed out candle to the far wall in pieces. Wisps of smoke drifted lazily upward off the normally light green but now indiscriminately scorched brown sofa. Paco pounded at the fabric with the woolen blanket until any evidence of smoldering pockets had been extinguished.

Still holding the lead rope, Donald noticed, much to his amazement, that there was no breathtaking odor this time, just a smoky burnt hair smell. He checked Lulu's behind and only had to put out a small spot of burning sheet that was wrapped around her udder. When he saw that Paco had the living room secured he said, "We'd better get going or we'll be late."

Paco looked up at him and said, "Ok."

In spite of a little tenderness under her tail, Lulu was much more comfortable now and actually had a bit of a buzz on from all of the beer she had consumed. As Donald led her out of the front door, she soaked in the fresh, much less smoky air and Donald thought her eyes brightened in anticipation – that is if cows could actually anticipate anything of a nice walk.

It was a short quarter-mile walk to Slinky's place, as the crow flies anyway, but they had to wind through the neighborhood streets, which to their good fortune were nearly empty.

Esmerelda watched the trio leave the house from a faraway look out, and scurried ahead for her strategically positioned hiding place, intent on having some fun at their expense. She stopped into Slinky's and told the gathering crowd of her plan. Esmerelda, being a good Christian, felt compelled to share the joy and laughter with her friends and fellow contestants.

When they arrived at the corner to make the turn left, they were only a block from Slinky's. Donald helped Paco place the woolen blanket over Lulu's back, then provided Paco a hand up to mount her. After a little adjusting for comfort, Paco nodded ok. Donald picked up the lead rope and led Lulu slowly around the corner toward the bar. Paco put his hands on his thighs and pulled the poncho out over his legs.

As they ambled down the sidewalk, a stick-thin, short scruffy Stinky Welborn staggered out of the bar, hand rolling a cigarette. Nobody remembers how Clarence came by the nickname Stinky, nor did they understand why it stuck, because he was not particularly offensive in spite of his questionable hygiene habits – long, unkempt hair and beard, or his lack of teeth, or even being the honorary town drunk.

Neither Paco nor Donald were surprised to see Stinky walking their way. By five most afternoons, Stinky had drunk his fill, yet remained cognizant enough to navigate his way home – albeit a bit of a wobbly trek on most days. To save money and support his indulgences, Stinky bought cheap loose leaf tobacco and his own papers, and rolled his own cigarettes. As he did his little three steps forward, half step sideways – either way- then a back step, starting over by leaning forward for gravitational assistance in the direction he intended to go, he focused intently as he packed the tobacco in the folded paper, then he lightly licked the edge and rolled the paper closed. He stuck the whole cigarette in his mouth and looked up just before he walked directly into Lulu's muzzle. He wobbled forward and back and blinked his eyes a few times as he stared directly into Lulu's face, then pulled the cigarette out of his mouth and said. "Cow?"

Donald smiled. "That's a donkey, Stinky. Don't you know the difference between a cow and a donkey?"

Stinky glanced briefly at Donald then noticed Paco sitting on Lulu's back and staggered back a half-step and wobbled. "Who's the ugly broad on the cow?" He then reached into his pocket for a book of Slinky's Tavern matches and struck one. But, because there was a bit of wind, it was snuffed out before he could get his cigarette lit.

“That’s the Blessed Mother Mary.” replied Donald.

“You just comin from church?” Stinky slurred as he tried another match but it too was blown out by the gentle breeze before he could get the flame to the tip of his cigarette.

As Donald began to reply, he heard a deep rumble coming from within Lulu and saw her body stiffen. He looked up at Paco and saw the concern in his eyes. Paco had felt the vibrations from Lulu’s sides and then her body go rigid.

If Donald had looked, he would have seen the dozen or so faces staring out of Slinky’s bar windows, but at the moment his attention was on the immovable Lulu. After Stinky passed by him, Donald moved forward of Lulu and Paco and gave the rope a tug. “Come on, girl; let’s get you down the alley beside the tavern before you blow.”

Lulu was not about to budge though, at least until the sharp stabbing pain in her stomach was relieved. She stiffened her legs and raised her tail.

Stinky was alert enough to recognize that as he got past the cow the wind was blocked, so he bent over slightly and he struck his match. Just as he did, Lulu, much to her relief, let forth an impressive cloud of methane, creating an equally impressive blue halo, completely engulfing Stinky.

The furumph and heat flash behind him caused Paco to turn to see Stinky stagger backwards, his facial and head hair smoldering, his cigarette in one hand and the blown-out match in the other, and him looking back and forth at them. Then Lulu bucked a little and kicked backward to defend her rear flanks from whatever it was that was singeing the hair on her backside. Fortunately, Stinky was just out of her kicks range, but Lulu’s movement sent Paco sprawling forward.

Confused and agitated by yet another offensive assault to her back side, Lulu started walking at a rather crisp pace toward the bar, intent on putting some distance between her and the source. Now, Donald was attempting to slow her down. “Whoa, girl. Take it easy, girl. Lulu!!”

Paco wrapped his arms around Lulu’s neck and squeezed his legs tight around her.

Standing against the building across from Slinky’s, Esmerelda waited in the alley, fully decked out in her handmade witch’s costume. When she saw Lulu’s snout come into view she threw one of Cliffy’s handmade smoke bombs onto the sidewalk beside Lulu, creating a great poof and gray cloud. Then, she let loose a blood-curdling scream and jumped out of the alley, waving her long, black finger-nailed hands menacingly, startling Donald first, then , into high pitched girly screams. Lulu gave a huff, which might have been a fearful cow scream – that is if cows have such screams.

Sure that this black demon was the source of the recent rear offensives, Lulu turned diagonally and within three strides had hit a full on sprint, snapping Donald off his feet, dragging him behind her as he screamed a long screechy wail. In her excitement Lulu was sure the demon was hot on her heels. Instead, it was Donald twisting and bumping across the blacktop still clutching the lead rope in a death grip, until Lulu jumped the curb, dislodging Donald and sending him cart-wheeling after her.

Paco was bouncing along atop Lulu, emitting an eeyie...eeyie...eeyie with each gallop, until she came to the Catholic cemetery fence on the outskirts of town. As Lulu closed in on the three and a half foot-high wrought iron fence, with pointy tips, Paco scrunched his eyes shut. But for her years, when sufficiently motivated, for a cow, Lulu was actually quite nimble – that is as nimble as most cows go –and with perfect timing launched her body gracefully over the fence. She descended and stopped; Paco didn’t. Losing his hold, Paco continued in an upward arc. At the pinnacle he screamed...eeyie...arms flailing to find a hold on anything to stop his return back to earth. He landed with a breathtaking thud against Father Henry

Moynihan's large, beautifully crafted, headstone that read, *Father Henry Moynihan, 1887 - 1954, 'Into his arms ye shall come.'*

Slinky's patrons crowded out of the bar just in time to see Lulu clear the cemetery fence. After a brief conference of the contest judges, Slinky crossed the street to where Donald lay sprawled out like an angel, staring up at the coming dusk. Slinky bent over Donald and asked. "You all right?"

Donald shook his head yes, unconvincingly.

Slinky dropped an envelope on Donald's chest. "Boy, that was some show all right. Everybody agreed that you and Paco are the winners for sure. I think them pyrotechnics were the best part though. Can't wait to see what you boys come up with next year." He slapped Donald on the chest and turned to walk back to his bar and said. "First round is on me."

Donald winced with Slinky's slap on his chest and made a sound like, "Uh."

Epilogue

Esmerelda had stopped her screaming when Lulu bolted across the street, dislodging Donald, then Paco, on the other side of the cemetery fence. She turned and saw Stinky smoldering and ran to him, patting out the embers in his matted hair and beard, as he continued to stare at the cigarette and match. Then, he tossed them to the sidewalk and dug the pouch of tobacco and packet of papers from his pocket and pitched them to the side.

"What are you doing that for?" Esmerelda asked.

Stinky blinked the remaining stubble of eye lashes and scratched the top of his head. “That Surgeon General Warning said smoking was dangerous to your health. That boy knows what he’s talking about.” Then he turned and took three steps forward, one step sideways, a half step back, and leaned forward, heading home with only a faint smell of burnt hair and minor smoldering patches on the back of his jacket.

Paco sat, leaning against the good father’s head stone, regaining his wits while watching Lulu deliver a humungous cow pie on Mayor Darryl Sumpter’s grave site.

Lulu must have felt relieved to have passed the source of her discomfort and began nibbling at the green cemetery grass, thinking, *This has been a helluva day* – that is, if cows actually think about those sorts of things.