

The Misadventures of Donald and Paco

Grave Diggers

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Esmerelda sashayed into Slinky's Tavern in her Sunday best that she'd wore to Saturday mass at St Mary Magdalen Church. She found her man sitting with Donald at the end of the bar where Donald was holding his own sermon of sorts to Stinky and another fellow she had not seen before. Both men appeared to be so drunk there is little doubt that they understood nothing of Donald was chirping on about, that is if they even heard him at all. She slid in between Paco and Donald and pulled a sheet of paper from her purse and slapped it on the bar. "It's about time you two freeloaders get a job."

Donald stopped midsentence and turned away from his audience and looked at the paper. It read:

Help Wanted

St Mary Magdalen Parish

Grave Diggers for the

Parish Cemetery

Interested parties are to

Contact: Father Kilpatrick

Esmerelda explained. "I talked to the father after mass and he said the work is as needed, he meant when someone needs to be buried, and pays two hundred fifty dollars for each hole."

Paco rubbed his right eye and hitched the bill of his ball cap up a little higher. "I don't know about that."

"About what?" Esmerelda threw her arms out.

"I don't like cemeteries." Paco still had flashbacks of the Halloween incident that resulted in he and Lulu's desecration of that very cemetery's sacred grounds.

Monday afternoon Donald left Father Kilpatrick's office, with a folder full of instructions, the keys to the Catholic Cemetery's tool shed and dollar signs in his eyes. He was on his way to Slinky's Tavern to hook up with Paco to review the instructions over a few Pabst's. The sun shone bright adding a little pep to his step. That and a mission in hand. Donald hated the ordinary, the mundane. He thought a man without a mission was nothing more than a eunuch. Father Kilpatrick's confidence and encouragement in giving him and Paco the grave digging job had him standing straighter, tall, with his chin up. He pushed open the bar door determined not to let the good Father down.

Paco sat on his usual perch at the end of the bar and watched Donald strut in and plop the folder and keys on the bar beside him. Donald said. "We have some studying to do."

"We do?"

"Yeah. There's more to this grave digging than I suspected. The Father gave me instructions and the keys to the tool shed. We have our first job."

Paco looked uncertainly at Donald. "We do?"

"You know who that snake Horace Witzel is don't ya?"

Paco shook his head no.

"No matter. He died yesterday and they're gonna plant him Wednesday at eleven. So, we have to study these instructions to make sure we get the hole right. All goes right we get two hundred-fifty smackeroos Thursday."

"Ok." Paco said hesitantly. He remained unsettled about going anywhere near the cemetery.

Late afternoon, Tuesday, Esmerelda arrived home after her days' work to find Donald and Paco sleeping across the kitchen table. Scattered under more than a dozen empty beer cans were grave digging instructions. When she'd left that morning the two were drinking coffee trying to get their wits about them with the intention of going through the instructions, then going to the cemetery to dig the hole. By the looks of the mess before her she was ninety-eight percent sure that hadn't happened. Esmerelda grabbed her large cast iron frying pan from the cupboard and a heavy steel spoon and held it an inch over the back of Paco's head and gave it a good rap.

"Eeeyii!" Paco screamed as he launched himself off the table connecting firmly with the frying pan then falling forward into a face plant on the tabletop.

Donald hadn't flinched so Esmerelda held the pan closer to his head and did a John Bonham virtuoso on it until he eventually opened his eyes. "What the hell is that?" He muttered.

Esmerelda was able to bring the two back from alcohol oblivion and took them to Slinky's for something to eat and a pot full of coffee. Donald ate a burger and Paco a bean and beef burrito with a side of refried beans. When they were recharged and cognizant of their surroundings, she dropped them off at the tool shed of the cemetery. "You two can walk home when you're done. It will do you good."

Donald opened the shed and surveyed the equipment, which wasn't much – a few shovels, two pick axes, a wheel burrow, a post hole digger and an assortment of hand tools and tarps. They each grabbed a shovel and roamed the cemetery until they found the Sholzenberger flag flapping before a small headstone that read 'Wetzel'.

Donald held up his thumb and eyed down it then stabbed his shovel into the ground. "We start here." Then he paced off the length of the hole and pulled the Sholzenberger flag and marked the end. "This should be long enough."

Paco said. "Ok." And they both started removing the sod.

Paco looked down at the ragged edge of the result of the first pass of digging and asked. "How wide?"

Donald held up his thumb, sizing up the site, and took a giant step from the corner nearest the headstone and jammed his shovel in the ground. "Bout here." He then paced off to the far end and stuck the flag in the ground. "That should do it." He wiped the sweat from his brow and said. "Man, I need a drink."

Paco jammed his shovel in the ground and said. "Me too." He started to walk away.

"Hey. Where are you going?" Donald barked. "We have a hole to dig here. I'll go get us some beers."

Paco turned around and came back. "Oh."

Donald strode off down the roadway. "Be right back."

Paco looked at the shovels then at Donald striding away. He began to shovel.

Donald had been sitting at the bar for nearly an hour when Slinky asked him. "Where's Paco?"

Donald sat up straight. "Oh shit. Give me eighteen to go. Put it on my tab. I'll pay you Thursday when I get paid." Slinky bundled cans of beer into two doubled bags and handed them to Donald. Donald finished his draft beer and hustled out of the bar, across the street to the cemetery. When he arrived at the grave site he found Paco knee deep in the hole. He cracked a beer and handed it to Paco. "Lookin good."

Paco swilled the beer in two long draws then held out his hand for another. He sat down beside Donald. "Your turn."

At thirty inches deep Donald hit hard dry clay. "We need a pickax." He climbed out of the hole and walked to the tool shed to retrieve the one they'd seen earlier. Paco remained kicking his heels lightly against the grave wall, drinking beer.

Donald returned and held the pick out to Paco. Paco finished his beer and began chipping away at the hard packed soil. When he paused for a sip, he asked Donald. "How deep?"

Donald shrugged. "Bout four feet should do it."

As they neared the self-proclaimed depth Donald climbed out of the hole and wobbled on the rim looking into the hole to assess their work. "I'm going to the tool shed to see if there is a flashlight. Might want to make sure the bottom is cleaned up." They had kicked, tossed, and knocked from the rim a half dozen beer cans and had left a shovel at the bottom.

Paco rolled to his belly and lowered himself into the hole. He sloshed around the hole like an ancient deck hand on a three masted ship in a heavy storm. The weight of the day of drinking and late-night manual labor hit him like a sledgehammer and he slumped to the ground. He was fast asleep within seconds.

Donald returned as cloud cover blanketed the quarter moon like flipping off a light switch. He had not found a flashlight in the tool shed. The wind was beginning to pick up and a damp chill was seeping in as he staggered around the graveyard unable to find the site where Horace Wetzal was to be buried hollering. "Paco, I'll meet you at Slinky's." There was no response. *Maybe he'd already left.*

Delbert Sloan was an old man. He had been a friend of Homer Sholzenberger's father and had worked for the funeral home for over fifty years as sort of a handy man. At daybreak Wednesday morning it was his duty to prepare the grave site. For his age he was quite spry but

because of yet to be repaired cataracts he was limited to tasks that required little precision. Because of the good weather forecast for the time of burial – mid 60s, partial sunny and no rain – Delbert only had to set up six chairs, roll out astro-turf and set up the casket lowering devise. He had the low boy that sat only ten inches off the ground.

As he assembled the aluminum components, he heard a “snert”. He stood and looked about but because of his cloudy vision saw only vague shadows. He shrugged and finished his duties and picked up the beer cans, shovel and pick ax. He loaded them into his old Chevy 150 and drove to the tool shed. He stored the tools and locked the door then made a mental note to let Homer know about the grave digger’s carelessness.

Father Kilpatrick led the burial party following the pall bearers carrying the economy casket Edna had purchased to the grave site. Edna had decided long ago that Horace Wetzel was a shit. The stories of his drinking and philandering had not escaped her attention. But she needed his handsome paycheck because she had few skills that would keep her in the lifestyle she had grown accustomed to. Besides she had two boys who adored her husband – sadly they had grown up adopting his wayward ways, hence were real shits. So, despite their insistence that Horace be buried in a luxurious casket she chose the cheapest one Homer had. If the state would have let her, she would have waved the embalming, stuffed him in a pine box and dumped him in the grave without any service. After all, Horace had a half-million-dollar insurance policy that was now all hers. She planned to sell the house and move to Florida and spend every dime of it, leaving her two embarrassments for sons to fend for themselves.

Homer Sholzenberger walked behind the Father escorting Edna, her arm looped over his elbow. Seventeen other family and friends trailed them. The local VFW representatives had already arrived and draped the American flag over the casket when the pall bearers placed on the casket lowering devise. Seven uniformed men with rifles were lined the length of the casket in honor of their Vietnam Veteran brother and drinking buddy. The sun broke through the clouds and shone down on them as the Father began his final words for Horace and his family.

When the Father said, “Let us pray” the bean burrito that had been percolating in Paco’s gastrointestinal system let loose a profuse cloud of methane. The light gas rose aloft, seeping through the gaps on each side of the casket. Father Kilpatrick curled his lip and squinted his eyes in a herculean effort to maintain decorum while finishing the prayer. Homer, with less discipline,

stood at the foot of the casket and turned sideways in an attempt to get a breath of fresh air. Edna pulled a kerchief from her handbag and placed it over her face while the crowd behind her wrapped their arms across their faces or hands over their noses to endure the offense. The VFW guard stood their ground unoffended by the all-too-common odor experienced in their circle.

After the Father finished his reading of the 'Lord's Prayer' the guard leader played taps on his bugle then issued commands for the twenty-one salute and they fired the first round. The explosive blast startled Paco awake. The second round got his attention. The third round got him to his feet. As he shot (no pun intended) to his feet he banged his head on the casket and dropped to his knees.

Father Kilpatrick, Edna, and many other attendees heard the thump and saw the casket shift slightly on its moorings. Father Kilpatrick looked across the box at Homer as if to ask. "Are you sure?" Homer looked down at the box considering the possibility. He was certain that he had pumped two and a half gallons of preservative into old Horace. He looked up at the Father and shook his head, no.

Paco scrambled back to his feet, banged his head again. "Ouch. What the hell!" The Father and Homer both took a step back. Edna fainted at the prospect that Horace was still alive. The crowd behind her shrunk back.

Paco yelled. "Donald, Donald, help me, Donald.

Donna Lebowski, Horace's last dalliance before his heart attack (some thought he'd had it while in action) thought she heard Donna, Donna, help me, Donna. Standing at the back of the audience she elbowed her way through the pack screaming. "I'm coming, I'll save you, my love." When she broke through the front row, she threw herself onto the casket yelling. "Open it up, open it up. I'm here Horace. I'm here for you, my love."

Homer, Delbert, and Father Kilpatrick had a fitful time pulling the scrappy Ms. Lebowski away from the casket, enlisting a couple of the guards to escort her out of the cemetery. Her voice could be heard from the street. "I'll be back my love. I will be back."

Hearing the commotion above him Paco yelled. "Help me. I'm stuck down here." This prompted the remaining guards and a pall bearer to remove the casket from the lowering device. Paco held up his hands.

Homer said. "Give me the shovel." Paco passed it up to him, then two of the guards helped him climb out of the hole.

Father Kilpatrick started to ask Paco how he happened to be in the hole, but the grave digger walked by him lamenting. "I hate cemeteries."

Homer Sholzenberger peered into the hole then looked at Delbert. "No way that casket will go into that hole. Better get Jefferies Excavation to bring their small backhoe over."