

The Misadventures of Donald and Paco
The Ichiban Hibachi Grill
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By
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“Paco.” Donald yelled, as he stood behind his friend who was bent over the fender of an ancient Maverick wagon.

“Eeeeeeyiii!” Paco jumped, banging his head on the hood,

Donald shook his head knowing Paco reacted the same way every time, especially after a hard night of drinking, which was pretty much daily. “Whatcha working on?” He asked casually trying to ignore the grimace on his old partner in crimes face as Paco tested the back of his head for a forming goose egg.

“New plugs” Paco muttered.

“I was at the Barber Shop this morning...”

“Hey.” A shrill screech blasted out the open kitchen window. “I thought I cut your hair?”

“I didn’t get a haircut. I just stopped to talk to Slinky. He was getting a cut.” Donald explained to Esmerelda.

“Ok.”

Donald spun around and sat against the fender. “I read an article about this new restaurant concept that’s becoming real popular. That got me to thinking maybe it’s an enterprise we can get into, cheap. We could be the first in town to offer the cuisine. Could be a big hit. We’ll make a fortune.”

Paco’s blank stare gazed back at him.

“So, I stopped at the library to see if they had any tapes of Japanese cooking and wouldn’t you know it,” Donald whipped a VHS tape up in front of Paco’s face causing him to flinch, banging his head on the hood again. “Common, let’s go watch it.”

Paco, getting thirsty anyway, said, “Ok,” and rubbed the back of his head as he followed Donald into the house.

After three beers each the video ended and Donald leaned back into the burnt green couch. “Man that Chef can handle a knife. Did you see the way he flipped the food around and juggled those knives? Heck, that should be a breeze for you.”

“What.” Paco glared over the beer can held at his lips.

“You know flip and chop like that guy did.”

“What?” Paco’s brow furrowed.

“Well with a little practice you know. There isn’t anyone in the county who can dress a rabbit or filet a fish like you can.”

Paco smiled and raised his beer can.

Donald raised his can in salute. “So, you will be the chef.”

“What!” Years of experience, mostly bad, with Donald’s grand schemes engendered an instinctual resistance for Paco.

“Yeah. Of course you’ll need some practice with the juggling thing.” Undeterred, Donald laid out his grand plan.

Cletus McCoy was a fine young man of solid parenting and a Catholic catechism graduate. His good manners and demeanor were widely recognized. Home for summer college break he sought out the prim and proper Galinda Hatfield for a long awaited date. To impress her on their first time alone together, Cletus chose to take her to the Grand Opening of the Ichiban Hibachi Grill. He was intrigued about the oriental cuisine and surprised when the owners, with grand flair, announced they were opening such an exotic cuisine in this fair village of 4000.

The location seemed a bit odd, but then, the old Shell station, east of town, did offer plenty of parking. The building was painted bright yellow with the name Ichiban unartfully drawn in blue over the bay roll up doors. Galinda gave Cletus a questioning look as he pulled into a parking spot.

They walked through a full glass entrance door with a picture of a dragon taped to the inside and were greeted by a familiar face. “Esmerelda?” Cletus furrowed his brow.

Wearing a blue kimono, adorned with bright yellow flowers, Esmerelda chimed, “Hi Cletus. Who’s your friend?” After introductions, Esmerelda asked if they would like a table for two or to sit at the Hibachi bar.

Cletus looked at Galinda and when she shrugged, he said. “Let’s be adventurous and do the Hibachi thing.”

Esmerelda put the menus she was holding away, saying, “you won’t need these.” She led them into the first bay of the old station. Galinda scrunched her nose at the musky smell of oil and grease that had been trampled into the concrete floor over the past five decades.

In the center of the bay sat an ancient Charbroil grill with the cover off and the grates replaced by a piece of sheet steel. On three sides of the grill sat card tables with two folding chairs each. The red and white checkered table clothes seemed out of place. In the center of each table were water glasses filled with unfamiliar flowers.

Esmerelda said. “Take any seat you want. Your waiter will be with you shortly.” Then she explained. “We are just so excited. You are our first customers.”

Cletus pulled out a chair and Galinda bent over to inspect the metal seat. Satisfied, she sat down. Cletus turned right when a voice asked if they would like something to drink. “Donald!?”

“Hi, Cletus, welcome to our new establishment.” Donald was wearing a black Nehru jacket and had a beige kitchen towel draped over his left arm. “What would you like to drink?”

“Do you have a wine list or drink menu?” Cletus said.

Donald tapped his head with a finger. “We serve a house wine and Pabst Blue Ribbon, and of course water and coffee.”

“I’ll have the wine.” Said Galinda.

Cletus asked for a beer, explaining that he’d never had a PBR.

Donald returned and set a frosty unopened can of beer in front of Cletus. “Can I have a glass?” Donald’s brow furrowed in obvious contempt. He was still staring at Cletus when he placed the quart jar filled to the brim in front of Galinda. As he turned away, Donald said. “Your chef will be with you shortly.”

Galinda took a sip and held the jar out. “Interesting, I wonder what this is?” She handed it to Cletus. “Try some. Tell me what you think.”

Cletus took a swig and swished it about his mouth. “Definitely something fruity, like strawberries.” Donald returned and sat a glass beside the beer. Cletus asked what the name of the wine was.

“Boones Farm Strawberry Hill,” He said.

Galinda said she had never heard of it and Donald said. “Oh, it’s been around for years.” He slid two plates in front of the diners, each with a napkin, knife and fork lying in

the center. Then Donald walked to the grill and lit the burners. He looked up and smiled. "The show's about to begin."

Bent over their drinks in deep conversation about the restaurant, neither noticed the Chef until he set the large bakery rack down with a thud on the bench behind the grill. When the chef turned toward them Cletus looked up. "Paco?"

Paco smiled and said, "Hi."

Cletus said, "Hi. Are you the chef?"

Paco returned with, "Hi."

Cletus scowled and replied, "Hi. I said are you the Chef?"

Paco, now rummaging below the grill surface, muttered, "Hi."

Growing angry, Cletus growled, "I already said Hi, Paco. What are you doing here?"

Donald, overhearing the conversation, stepped beside Paco and in a stiff authoritarian voice explained. "Hi in Japanese means yes. He's learning more words."

Cletus shrugged and looked at Galinda and saw the look of astonishment on her face. He turned back to Paco and saw him flipping large knives catching them in hands heavily wrapped in gauze and band aids.

Realizing their look of fear, Donald said. "This will be quite a show. He's been practicing."

Paco scooped a wad of margarine with the knife in his left hand and plopped it on the grill. The grease bubbled and sizzled as he spread it over the hot steel with his right-hand knife.

Donald stepped behind Cletus to watch the show. He was smiling like a proud father whose son had just hit a grand slam walk off home run.

Paco spun around and picked up a plate of assorted vegetables and turned back to the diners. He tapped the plate twice with a knife then dumped it onto the grill. The veggies sizzled and threads of smoke spiraled off the grill as Paco chopped and diced. He picked up a large red onion and tossed it in the air. As it fell back downward, he swiped his knife at it and hit the onion at the bottom. Galinda ducked as the onion zipped past her head, hit the floor and rolled out of the bay to where Esmerelda was seated. She yelled from her post. "Hey, don't waste the food."

Paco turned and picked up another onion and tossed it in the air. This one narrowly missing Cletus.

Donald gave Paco a spin of the finger, signifying for him to speed up the grilling.

Paco picked up the last onion and held it out before his audience. With a curt bow he let out a scream, "Hi!" And with a deft stroke he severed it in half, and along with it the tip of his middle finger, cut to the bone.

"Eeeeeeyiii," Paco screamed and flipped the knife into the air. It landed point first sticking into the table inches from Galinda's right hand. She gasped.

Paco held up his hand giving the bird to Donald. The severed digit spouting a fountain with each heartbeat.

Galinda's chair clanged to the concrete when she passed out and tumbled to the greasy floor.

Mesmerized by the arterial spirts, Cletus said to nobody in particular. "That can't be part of the show."

Donald was bent over Galinda, tugging on her limp arm trying to get her sitting up right. Realizing she was out cold he grabbed the quart of Boones Farm and splashed it on her face. She snapped awake and swiped at her face trying to swat away the wetness.

In the meantime, Paco was picking through the fried vegetables looking for his finger tip.