

Donkey Show

By Bryon Quertermous

The man who ended my career and had me sent to prison sat across from me in a dive bar in San Antonio. We were drinking beers before noon and there was a picture of his daughter on the table between us.

"She's involved in a donkey show. In Mexico," Rafael Delagetto said. "You've been over there. You know that side of the border, Joe."

He'd called me a few days ago, asking for my help. I told him to fuck off and that I'd never work for him. He sent a messenger to my house the next day with \$5,000 in cash.

"Listen, Senator," I said. "You had me thrown out of the Rangers for, quote, knowing that side of the border. You can't wage a crusade against my ties to Mexican police corruption to enhance your career and then try to use those connections for personal favors."

"Have you ever seen one of these shows?"

I shook my head. I'd seen a lot of nasty things in Mexico, but never that. Most of the reported cases of donkey shows turn out to be bullshit though and I told that to the Senator.

"My son's friend saw it," Delegetto said.

"Friends lie. Friends try to show off. Friends are bullshit," I said.

"Can you just go talk to him? See what you can find out?"

"And then what? This sure as hell isn't about your daughter, is it?"

"What are you implying Joe?"

"Daughters that fuck animals for money can be a liability on the road to the governor's mansion."

"Don't insult me. I love my daughter and want her safe."

"So you want me to charge into Mexico with my guns blazing and rescue your daughter?"

"I'll send you with money, you can give it to her whether she comes back or not. Just go ask around. See what you can find out."

"People don't go asking around Mexico about girls and donkeys," I said.

"People like you do," Delagetto said. "But go to Laredo first. Talk to my son and his friends and see if you can break their story."

"And I keep the money you sent?"

He nodded.

* * *

Cisco Delagetto lived with three other guys in a cinder block apartment building near Laredo Community College. I parked in a lot in front of the building that was nearly deserted at 8p.m. The apartment I was looking for was on the top floor of the five-story structure. I didn't think I'd run into

any problems, but I always like to know the easy way out of wherever I go. I also popped the glove box and pulled out my 9mm Sig Saur automatic and clipped it to my belt, hidden by my untucked shirt.

A tall, gangly boy with a funky smell and bleached skin answered the door after the fourth knock. His eyes were unfocused and look a little bit over my head as he asked who the hell I was and why I was knocking during his nap.

"I'm looking for Cisco," I said. "His dad said I could find him here."

"He's out. Class or something."

"Are you a friend or just a roommate?"

The bleached kid gave me a confused look then his eyes widened.

"It's not like that," he said. "We're friends, yeah, but not...*friends*."

Not like that."

"You know his sister Renee?"

"Oh yeah. She's hot. Well, used to be hot."

"You've been to Mexico with Cisco, haven't you?"

"I don't know, I mean...what are you talking about? I think you should wait for--"

"You're the one I came to talk to," I said. "What's your name?"

"Fuck this, man. Get out of my—"

I pulled the gun from my belt and rammed it against the kid's head.

"I asked you for your name."

His eyes were very focused on me now. He was shaking a little bit and he started to rock back on his heels.

"Chuck," he said. "My name is Chuck."

"Tell me about the donkey show, Chuck," I said, pushing my way into the apartment with my gun still against Chuck's head. "Tell me about Renee."

"I don't know what you're talking about, man."

"Bullshit," I said.

I took my gun hand and raised the palm up and smacked Chuck in the center of the head with the gun. He stumbled backward toward a ratty couch but I grabbed his t-shirt and pulled him back to me before he fell over.

"Tell me about Renee in Mexico."

"It probably wasn't even her," Chuck said, his voice cracking.

"I don't care. Tell me about it."

He started to deny it again so I hit him again with the gun. Harder this time, and I didn't stop him from falling back into the couch. His arms flailed as he went down and knocked over an end table with several half empty glasses on it. The crashing noise seemed to scare and jar him more than my hit had.

I took a couple of large steps and was on top of him on the couch before he could move away. I was about to ramp up my interrogation when

I heard another door open in the apartment. My gun hand swerved away from Chuck toward the back of the apartment and the source of the noise. Another kid, with slightly darker skin and more filled out body than Chuck was coming out of the bathroom with his eyes on a portable video game device in his hand. He looked up though in time to see my gun pointed at his chest.

"Jesus," he said.

"Who are you?"

"Who the fuck are you?" he asked.

"I'm looking for Cisco Delagetto."

"That's not him," the kid said, pointing to Chuck.

"I know that. Who are *you*?"

"Oh shit, you must be the cop. The one his dad called about."

"Who's dad?" I asked.

"Cisco. He said you'd probably be by asking about Renee."

I got up off of the couch and let Chuck scurry away.

"What do you know about Renee?"

"He said there might be some kind of, reward or something, maybe."

"Reward? Do I look like fucking Crime Stoppers?" I asked. "Tell me what you know about Renee so I don't shoot you in the head."

"Jesus, boss. Calm down. I'll tell you. I've got to look out for myself though."

I looked around the living room at the furnishings. While the apartment building and the actual unit were straight-up college ghetto fabulous, the furnishings were right out of Sharper Image. There was a huge plasma TV screen hanging from a warped and cracked wall at the southern end of the room with a leather couch and two leather recliners pointed directly at it. At the other end of the living room was a big screen TV with several video game consoles plugged into it. Two battered beanbag chairs and three of those cheap video game recliners were spread in front of the TV. Something didn't match.

"Looks like somebody's looking out for you," I said. "What is it you do for a living again?"

The kid squinted his eyes and walked over to me with large, imposing steps. He was face-to-face with me and barely an inch between us.

"Ask you're questions about Renee, cop. Then I got shit to do."

"What's your name?" I asked him, not stepping back.

"I said to ask your questions about Renee, not—"

I punched the kid in the face with the gun still in my hand and put my leg behind his when he flopped backward so he fell to the ground.

"I asked for your name, not lip you little bastard."

"Daniel," he said, crawling backward away from me. "Jesus, you don't have to hit me."

"Tell me about the donkey show, Daniel."

"We went over spring—"

"We who? You and Cisco? Chuck go too?"

He nodded his head quickly. I was still standing over him and had my gun at my side.

"All of us, we took another guy too, Tony."

"Where did you go?"

"Mexico, I mean Nuevo Laredo in Mexico. Over the border."

"Did you go over there to see the donkey show?"

"Not just that. We needed to burn off some steam and wanted to drink but couldn't really think of any place that wouldn't be full of college students."

"Like yourselves?" I asked.

"We were just looking for something different, you know. After a long—"

"Who's idea was it to go over the border?"

"Cisco said he knew a place close to the border but out of the touristy areas," he said.

"Why the hell would you go outside of the tourist areas? Don't you know what happens over there?"

"I'm from Ohio, how the hell am I supposed to know anything? Cisco's been here his whole life and knew what he was doing."

"Could you get back there if you had to?"

"Yeah, sure. Of course. You want to go over?"

"That was too easy," I said. "What are you doing?"

"I don't want you to fucking hit me again," he said.

"You said Chuck went too, right?"

"Chuck couldn't find his way back to his bed from the living room without a sherpa and a mountain goat."

"I don't trust you."

"Fuck you then. Get out of my house."

"I'll leave you over there if you try something. They'll do things to you. Very bad things before sending your body back to your parents in pieces."

Daniel's face went pale and he looked around at the stuff in his apartment. I knew he was trying to figure out if screwing me over was worth it. Apparently he needed to get the matching furniture because he sucked it up, then smiled and nodded at me.

"Don't worry about me," he said.

* * *

We took I-35 out of Laredo across the International Bridge into downtown Nuevo Laredo. Daniel was trying to act hard, but he still had the eyes of a tourist as we went through the border patrol booth. His face went

pale again as the officer asked us some questions and made sure we weren't taking any bad shit in or planning on bringing any out. Once in Mexico, we cruised slowly through downtown past Senor Frog and the Cadillac Bar and all of the other college/tourist-friendly places.

"It wasn't here," Daniel said. "This is the crap we wanted to avoid."

"Boys Town," I said.

"Yeah, how did you know that?"

"I spend a lot of time down here, kid."

"Then what the hell did you bring me for if you know your way?"

"Bait. Offering. Scapegoat. Sacri—"

"Never mind. What do you do when you come over here?"

"Kill people mostly," I said.

"Ha," he said, a little less than jovially. "No, seriously."

I pulled the car to a stop along side the road and turned to Daniel.

"I'm not joking. It's not all I do, but it happens. You've heard about Mexican jails, right?"

Daniel gulped and nodded.

"I've been in them," I continued. "Both sides of the bars. And I've made friends."

I reached under my seat and pulled out my Sig Saur. His eyes widened and I was pretty sure he thought I was going to kill him and dump his body.

"They don't let anybody in the country with these," I said. "*Nobody.*"

"The guards d-didn't seem to know you," he said.

"Tell me what you're supposed to do here," I said.

"You're the one who brought—"

"What did the Senator want you to do? Is it a trap or what?"

"I don't know what you're—"

"Don't fucking lie to me Daniel," I yelled.

"I'm not, I swear."

He wasn't paying close enough attention to my attitude so I got out of the car and went around the passenger's side door and pulled Daniel from the car. I threw him to the ground and put my gun to his knee.

"It's not a setup," he said quickly. "It's not. He really—"

I took my gun away from his knee and shot him in the foot.

"Jesus," he screamed. "I swear to god I'm not lying."

"He paid for that stuff in your apartment, didn't he?"

Daniel nodded his head.

"What did he want you to do for it?"

"Tell him about Renee and the donkey show."

I chambered the next round into the gun and put it to his other knee.

"I've got a full clip, Daniel."

"That's all. He said he heard from somebody his daughter was in a donkey show somewhere so he sent us over here for spring break."

"Delagetto sent you to Mexico to look for his daughter?"

"He paid for everything and gave us a bunch of other stuff. All we had to do was find out if we could see her and then tell him about it."

"That sounds like bullshit," I said.

Before I could get any further with that, a small police cruiser pulled up behind my car and put its flashers on. It was bound to happen, two white guys arguing on the side of the road. I kept my gun pointed at Daniel as I waved to the officer, still in his car.

"Stay here," I said.

I put my gun in the waistband of my pants and then approached the car slowly. I'd been doing business in this part of the country long enough that I knew most of the officers by sight, but there was always the possibility of getting a new recruit who wouldn't hesitate to shoot me on the spot. I relaxed a little when the officer got out of the car and it was a tall man with graying black hair. He was one of the first corrupt cops I'd met in Nuevo Laredo. We embraced and chatted up a bit in rapid Spanish. I told him what I was there for and slipped him a hundred dollar bill from my pocket. He smiled and nodded as I pointed to Daniel, still lying on the ground.

"Come here, Daniel," I said.

He looked at me and then at the police officer and shook his head.

"I'm not going to rot in a Mexican jail for some new furniture," he said.

"Your foot needs attention. Officer Escobaz will help you."

"Bullshit," he said.

I tapped the gun at my waist and winked at Daniel.

"Stay with me then," I said.

"Damn," he said. "Damn, damn, damn."

Escobaz said something in Spanish to Daniel as he struggled to get off the ground.

"You better not be screwing with me Daniel. I'll tell Escobaz here to take care of you if I find out you screwed me."

"Shit," Daniel said.

Escobaz put his thick arm on Daniel's shoulder and guided him toward the back of the car.

"You'll be in good hands," Escobaz said.

* * *

Boy's Town is a walled in complex of six streets, each and everyone packed with bars, stores, restaurants, and little rooms for prostitution. I was looking for a place called Donkey's in the southwest corner of Boy's Town. The bar followed your standard international strip club layout with the bar to the right of the entrance and a stage with a pole at the back. Small tables were crammed into every other available space. A tiny Latina woman was the featured performer on the stage when I walked in. She had

her top off and was using inventive ways to latch her legs to the pole but there weren't any animals in sight.

"Beer," I said to the bartender.

He grunted and threw a glass bottle in front of me. I wasn't exactly sure how to go about asking my questions. The people I dealt with usually had been paid off in advance and since I was in a relatively special field I tended to deal with the same people on a regular business. I'd never been in a donkey bar and never had any desire to see the show so I was on strange ground.

The ground got a little more familiar when I saw Renee Delagetto come from the bathroom and take a seat at an empty table. She wasn't wearing stripper clothes. I took the seat across the table from her and said, "You don't get the donkey tonight?"

"Don't sit there," she said.

"I won't be long. Your father—"

"My father is dead to me."

I reached around to my back pocket where I had an envelope with the money Raphael Delagetto had given me for his daughter.

"Keep your hands on the table," a thick voice from behind me said.

I heard the voice a fraction of a second before I felt the tip of a knife knick the back of my neck.

"Meet my new papa," Renee said.

"It's just money," I said, freezing my hand where it was.

"This one is not for sale," the voice said.

"I'm sure I could find a couple of spare pesos to scrape together for her," I said.

"You know this man, Renee?"

"He just sat down at the ta—"

"Do you know him or not, *puta*?"

"She's never met me in her life," I said.

The body attached to the voice behind me swung a meaty arm around my neck and dragged me to the floor. The knife moved from the back of my neck to the front. I was looking up at a man that looked like the mascot from a taco package. He had dark skin and thick black hair slicked back and his bushy mustache gleamed.

"Let the *puta* speak for herself," he said.

"Her father sent me," I said. "She had nothing—"

"Is this true?" He asked Renee.

"I brought money," I said. "You two can split it and I don't have to tell her father a thing."

I saw the taco man flare his nostrils and twitch his lip.

"My money's not good enough for you?"

"She had nothing—"

"I told you to shut up old man," the taco man said, slashing the knife across my stomach.

He slashed at Renee's face a few times before concentrating all of his effort on me. He got in a few good punches to my kidneys and face and some sucker punches that did more damage. I managed to get off a few good slugs of my own, but when it looked like I might really start fighting back he enlisted two hulking bouncers to hold me down.

When he was done hammering me, I heard him yell for rope. Then the few patrons in the bar started chanting *burro, burro, burro*. Taco Man pulled me to my feet and dragged me to the stage where the Latina woman continued her show unhindered. The three men stripped me, bent me over, and tied my feet together and my hands around the pole. Then they brought out the donkey.

* * *

I woke up later, naked in an alley, bleeding from every orifice. Renee's body had been dumped next to mine, her face and throat and chest slashed repeatedly. She was dead and there wasn't much time left for me. Running on pure rage, I pulled myself to my feet and stumbled back to the small police station at the front of the compound. They were ready to throw me in the jail and finish me off until I gave them Escobaz's name. After verifying he did indeed know me, I was put on the phone with Escobaz. I told him where I was and what had happened.

"And the boy?"

"Let him go," I said. "Tell him he needs to see Rosita at the San Antonio Eagle and tell her his story. Make sure it leads back to Senator Delagetto."

Escobaz said he would, and then, after a pause, began saying the Lord's Prayer.

Padre nuestro que estás en los cielos...

Bryon Quertermous's stories have been previously published in Shots, Crimespree, Detective Mystery Stories and Flashing In The Gutters. He also edits the noir 'zine Demolition.