



KOJAC AND PAPA

The mad, slobbering beast pawed sod, snorted, raised and lowered his head, focusing wild bloodshot eyes on the blue overalls pant legs of his enemy, Papaw.

Papaw had not quite made it to his little red barn and became a captive of his own bull. The old man jumped inside the lean-to cow shed and barely got the hinged gate closed.

He talked to himself and to his bull – there wasn't anybody else. "Huh, what does Cliff Parker know? I always said I'd get a fine bull. He tells me that I had no sense buying you for my little herd of twelve cows. Well, Mr. Parker, I paid for him and he's mine."

The old-timer bought his oversized Brahman bull at the County Sale Barn about two months prior. He was proud of the slick, dark grey hide to lighter grey in the middle, no horns, six feet tall, stomping animal.

Papaw leaned over the planks, yanked his sweaty working straw hat from his balding head, and slapped it across the bull's face, repeatedly. Kojac didn't seem to know that was meant to send him away.

The bull tried to ram his head through the bending planks of the stall. "If this blame animal would stop charging me for a minute or so, and I had my pitchfork, I'd stick that fool in the butt.

"Who would have thought that just because I busted that 2x4 across your behind, chasing you back inside the pasture, would have made you so mad. There ain't no use talking to you.

"If I had my 12 gauge, it would do my talking. You don't know who you're fooling with. Dad-gum-it bull. I'll not be chased this way by no cow of mine. Back-up!"

The fight had been going-on since late afternoon and now evening shadows fell across the barn roof into long, getting darker, stretches almost reaching the edge of the pond. "Why hasn't anybody come to see me? People drive-up when I don't need them.

"When I want company, nobody shows-up. Looks like somebody would want advice, or just come to admire my new bull. They haven't had the pleasure of a close-up look like this.

"You nearly tore the sideboards off my Dodge the day I brought you home. You think I'm just somebody to fool with? Cliff Parker was jealous because he bid too low. He may have hundreds of acres, big barns, and lots of cows but I got you."

The bull looked over his left shoulder as if checking to see how much back-up room he needed before making another assault. Chickens walked under him on their way to their usual

cracked-corn feeding, always done at the barn by Papaw late in the afternoons. Ducks quacked and followed in wobbling fashion behind the faster chickens. Two old geese let-out a honk or two, wiggled their tails, held heads high, and stepped ashore from the pond on their way to the expected feeding.

“No use in you fowls coming up here right now. I got no corn, not even my bucket. If I could get to that feed bucket, I’d trick him into thinking I was about to feed him. But he doesn’t have enough sense to let me out of this stall.

“You think I should have simply asked you to come back inside the fence and not whacked you with that 2x4? Ha. That was pretty funny. Felt good, did it? Only thing I see is you keeping me from eating supper.

“I might have made a mistake buying you. But after big shot Mr. Parker popped-off about how I wasn’t qualified to buy such a bull, I’d have died first. He thinks my sixty acres ain’t big enough for a ranch.

“I’ll spend the night standing in cow manure, but ole boy, you can’t beat me.”

It was dark now. Kojac had not shown much interest in finding anything else to do. He leaned into the warped boards, groaned some, and then backed-off, eyes fixed on blue overalls. The combatants stood motionless, like two statues, trying to win by default. About a half- hour or so later, Kojac looked up, seemingly to stare at the moon, and bellowed the loudest complaint he had made since being on the farm. He repeated his defiance every once-in-awhile.

“I guess he’s hungry. So am I. And I reckon I’m the only one of us that’s worn-out. Dad-blame-it, do something besides keeping me in this stinking stall.” (Stinking stall – that’s

what most folks called it; but until now Papaw insisted the rotting manure smelled like money to him.)

Kojac stared into his target's face. Papaw asked, "What do you think you're doing, trying to scare me or what?" Kojac didn't answer directly but turned his butt around and kicked the boards as near to where Papaw stood as only mean bulls could do. Then, he jerked both hind legs high in the air as if getting a Rodeo rider off.

"Do all that high steppin' you want to. That won't make it easier on you when my turn comes." Kojac lowered his head, plowed a bit of sandy clay soil, slinging it about three feet into the air, grass and all, and let loose another bellow that echoed across the pond and up the hill. Papaw said, "I hope such carrying-on will get attention and help from my neighbor.

"They never did like you, bull. I know they chased you down the hill and back to my pasture about once a week."

Papaw slumped down, then squatted down, and finally sat down. He rested with his knees up and his butt on the ground in wet mushy cow manure. He didn't care.

Kojac danced stiff legged in slow circles as if looking for something better to do. Or maybe he had forgotten what started the fight.

Papaw spotted his collection of cane fishing poles that he kept in the rafters of the stall. He used them more for knocking wasps' nests down than for catching bream in his pond. He stood up, brushed off as much of what stuck to the seat of his overalls as he could and climbed the weakened stall boards, stretching and groaning to reach a pole.

The bull objected. He made his noise, lowered his head, and charged. Papaw had not quite climbed back down the old boards, still being about a foot or so off the ground. Kojac whammed into the planks, sending Papaw on a fast flight into the barn wall and down into manure.

“I have now, finally, really, lost my patience.” Again, he wiped the more solid stuff off the seat of his overalls, eyeballed his nemesis, and stood his ground (so to speak).

Kojac watched Papaw. Papaw watched Kojac. A lull in the fight was on. The bull waited. Papaw didn't. With a loud shout and a country boy yell, Papaw attacked from his somewhat safe position inside the stall. He ordered the bull to 'take this' and 'take that', as he wailed away with the big end of his cane pole – right on the nose of his bull. Kojac jerked his head side-to-side, like he did when he wanted pesky flies out of his face. The ineffective licks kept landing.

A heifer strolled up as if looking to see what the racket was about. Kojac moved near her and seemed to want her company. They walked into the dark, some distance from the battleground.

Papaw made his escape. He limped and ran while looking back into the night until he was across the levee, through the gate, and into his house. He threw his dirty overalls in the yard, bathed, ate a cold supper, lit his pipe, and rested.

Within a week or so after the stand-off, Kojac walked through the old fence, into the river bottoms, and reportedly was never seen again. Some say you can hear him on cold dark nights, deep into the woods, bellowing a challenge to anybody, anytime. Papaw said that ain't necessarily so. Near his shotgun was a new box with one shell missing.

