

Maggie Milk

Dan Evans, February 1978

The sun was slidin' down between the tree tops and the clouds was lookin' like they was on fire when I punched the itty-bitty button on my e-lectrical wrist watch to see what time it was. It never has worked just right so all it could show me was that it was still March 27th, 14 degrees C or 54 degrees F, that I had 301 days to get my Christmas shoppin' done, my biorhythm was 13.7 time pie minus the logarithm of 2 and that I was facin' west.

I did some fancy figurin' on the fender of my 1947 Allis Chalmers tractor and concluded that I'd better milk the steer before it got dark. But, then I remembered we didn't have no steer, so I settled for Maggie, our genuine, authentic, purebred, Holstein-Jersey-Guernsey cow.

I swung a black rubber-booted leg over the top wire of the barnyard fence and then reached down to grab the insulated handle to keep from slippin' on a muddy rock that I been fixin' to move for the last 27 years, but just never had the time or the inclination all at once – you know how them things go.

Well, I was about to grab on to that there handle when my left eyeball noticed that there wasn't no handle – that's one of them other things I just never got around to doin'.

Now you might think that I discovered that little problem just in the nick of time, but for me, that's never ever soon enough. So, I sorta hung there for a few minutes, straddlin' the wire like a Hoot Owl fryin' on the power line and rememberin' that I'd also neglected to unplug the box on the barn wall with the big green and red blinkin' lights that meant there was 9,000 volts of electricity travelin' down the fence wire, through my anatomy and into the ground.

If just so happened that Molly, Luther Whipple's mule, had sauntered through a hole in my fence the size of Model 'A' truck (that's cause Luther's boy Will drove their truck through the fence last summer) and was standin' there draggin' her tongue 'cross my two dollar and twenty-seven cent co-op salt block not two feet from where I was bein' barbecued by the electric fence.

It must have been the sight of me squirreling' in the air like the tail on a kite flying in the middle of a South Dakota blizzard, and the smell of my smoldering britches that prompted old Molly to send her back hooves a flyin' into my chest and me to landin' on my rump, smack dab in hill of fresh cow pies.

I was sittin' there, split-legged, slowly sinkin' into the stinkin' mud and gunk of the barnyard and pickin' rotted hog slop outta my left ear, when Maggie – the cow – took off a trottin' 'cross the south forty – AWAY from the barn.

I stood up, threw my hat against the side of the barn (and missed) and then took off a runnin' after the cow. We went across and back, and back and across, from corner to corner and back again, 'til Maggie decided she was bored and went back to her stanchion in the barn. Heavin' and pantin', coughin' and chokin' and pukin' up my guts, I dragged my feeble frame into the barn and promptly stepped right through a hole in the floor and tore a sleeve of my brand new Sears and Roebuck, green and red plaid flannel shirt. I was startin' to lose my patience.

After I yanked my leg up outta the hole in the floor, I tipi-toed real sneaky like over to where Maggie was chompin' on my hat and I slammed the stanchion closed so she couldn't get away.

Well, I'd got through the easy part of the job in one piece (more or less) and now I had to get down to the actual milkin'.

I broke a Dan'l Boone trail through the cobwebs up to the nail where the milk pail was supposed to be hangin', but wasn't, tripped over a rusty pitchfork and tumbled head first into a pile of old burlap feed sacks, where I found the pail.

After I emptied the bat droppings out of the pail and picked up the one legged milking stool that used to be a three-legged stool before I ran over it with the cultivator, I went back on over to where Maggie was locked in the stanchion and belchin' from eating my hat and commenced to milkin'.

Everything was comin' along without a hitch. The pail was half full, Maggie was sufferin' too much from gas to worry 'bout causin' a fuss and a steady ache had replaced the sharp pain in my right foot, which was caused by Maggie standin' on it, when all of a sudden the barn door blowed open and a gust of mid-western March wind jumped in and kicked over the pail...I lost the milk.

It was dark and rainin' when I limped back up the hill to the house to break the news to Pearl – Pearl's my wife – 'bout not getting' the milk. I was fixin' up a story in my head 'bout how the cow had froze up cause of the cold and nothin' would come out, when I noticed that the lights was off and there was a note stuck to the door. The wind was slappin' my face with my torn shirt sleeve and the sharp pains had come back to my foot, but the fire was pretty much out in what was left of my britches by the time I got close enough to read the note that said:

Be back soon.
Have gone into town to get some milk.
Don't bother to milk the cow.
Pearl.

Heavens to mergatroid, Pearl.