

Chapter Two

Slim Gets Fired Up

WHOMP!

Slim's hat flew off and his head disappeared in a cloud of fire. That trash barrel had become a trash canon, and it shot a column of burning garbage straight up into the air.

At that point things began happening pretty fast. When his head re-appeared out of the cloud, his beard and hair were on fire. Now, that was something to see. He slapped his face and head and got those fires out, and then he started stomping out the other thirty-five fires that were burning in a circle around the barrel.

And then Drover went into action, which was a little hard to believe since he and action seldom got together. But this time he sprang into action.

Would you like to guess what he did? He started chasing ashes that were floating in the air, and I mean running after them and jumping up and trying to bite them!

Of all the crazy things the little mutt had done over the years, this might have been the craziest. I mean, why would a sane and normal dog chase ashes? It made no sense to me.

I called him back. "Drover, come here. We need to have a talk." He came padding up with a silly grin on his face. "Let's get right to the point."

"Okay."

"Why were you chasing ashes?"

"Well...I don't know. I never stopped to think about it."

"You should think about it, son. Everything we do on this ranch should have a reason. Otherwise we're not making good use of our time. Time management is very important in our business."

I waited. He continued to stare at me with that huge blank in his eyes. "Well? Why were you doing it?"

"I don't know. It just seemed the right thing to do, and it looked like fun and I did it."

"That's no reason. Not only were you wasting valuable time, but you looked ridiculous.



What if someone pulled up and saw you doing that?"

He hung his head. "I don't know."

"They would think you were nuts, and that would reflect back on me."

"Gosh, I never dreamed that chasing a few ashes could cause so much trouble."

"Well, you didn't take the time to think through your behavior to its logical extremities. Just for example, did you realize that you didn't CATCH any of the alleged ashes you were chasing?"

"I didn't?"

"No, you certainly didn't. I observed the whole ridiculous ritual and I know for a fact that you chased three ashes and missed every one of them."

"Well, I thought they might taste bad."

"You thought..." I shook my head and heaved a sigh. "Drover, that's a lame excuse."

"Yeah, but my leg's feeling better."

"Be quiet and listen. If you're going to chase ashes, you should catch them. That would give at least a shred of meaning to what is otherwise an absurd exercise. Now, try it again and see if you can make a catch or two."

"Well...my leg's been bothering me."

"You just said it was better."

"The pain comes and goes, and besides, I don't know how to catch ashes in the air." I studied the little mutt with a gaze of purest steel.

"Is that the truth? You really don't know how to do it?"

He raised his left paw. "Scout's Honor."

"Okay, if you really don't know how to do it, I'll give you a demonstration. But you must promise to pay close attention and take advantage of this opportunity to improve your mind."

"I will, Hank, Scout's Honor."

"You're a very lucky dog to have someone around who cares about your mental development."

"I know, and I sure am grateful."

I began to loosen up the enormous muscles in my soldiers. "Stand by for a demonstration of ash-catching. Watch and study your lessons."

"Okay, I'm all set."

For a moment I watched Slim doing his polka on the Ring of Fire. Then I turned to the task at hand, studied the pattern of ashes in the air, and went through the Target Selection Procedure.

I picked my target; punched in the numbers for range, bearing, and asparagus; locked in on Target Alpha; and then hit full throttle on all engines.

I went streaking towards the target and switched over to Lift-Off and Snap. Got that one, snatched him right out of the air! Then, in a flash, I re-targeted and zoomed in on another. And another.

Jump, snap. Jump, snap.

You should have seen me blasting those ashes out of the sky! If you've never seen a Blue Ribbon, Top-of-the-Line Cowdog in action, you've...

Hmmm. Suddenly I realized that my mouth was filled with, well, ashes, you might say. And they tasted pretty bad, and even though I tried to push the cinders out with my tongue, the bad taste remained.

And laughter?

Loper had come down to the burn barrels and it appeared that he and Slim had been watching...me?

Chasing ashes?

And Drover, the little dunce who had started all of this, had vanished without a trace.

He would pay for this.