

Chapter Eight

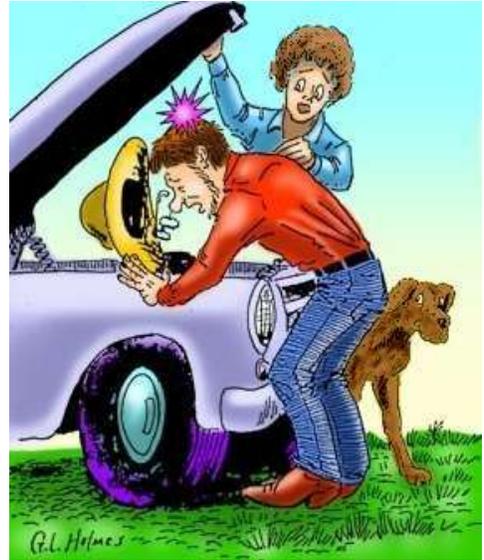
A Shocking Experience

"EEEEEE-YOWWWWWWWW!!!"

He'd been draped over the grill, see, but when the spark plug wire shocked him, he straightened up in a hurry and banged his head against the hood. It knocked his hat off.

"By gollies," he said, rubbing the top of his head, "why don't you kill that thing before it kills me."

Viola reached through the window and turned off the key. Then she came back around to where Slim was rubbing the back of his head. "Slim, what on earth happened?"



"Well, them spark plug wires carry a pretty good jolt of electricity and I kind of forgot what happens when you grab one with the motor a-going. But now I remember."

"Oh dear. I'm sorry."

"No, it was my own fault for being dumb."

"How badly is your head hurt?"

"Oh, bad enough to tell me not to do it again."

"Here, let me look at it."

"You can look, but I can already tell you that I ain't going to any doctor for stitches."

"Hush and bend over." He hushed and bent over, and she parted his hair and studied the injury. "My stars, your hair's been burned!"

"That come from a different deal. I was burning Sally May's trash this morning and used a little too much gas."

She clicked her tongue. "You're too careless, Slim. You need to take better care of yourself. Well, you've got a goose egg and a cut. Let's go to the house and clean it up."

"It's okay."

"It's NOT okay. It's a deep cut and it's bleeding down the back of your neck and you might need some stitches."

"I've got work to do, and I ain't going to..."

"March to the house, Slim."

"...no dadgum sawbones doctor."

"NOW!"

He picked up his hat and the three of us started back to the house. On the way, Miss Viola looked down at me and said, "Has he always been this stubborn?"

Yes ma'am, always.

"I can't believe that a grown man could be so silly about going to the doctor and getting a few little stitches."

"It ain't the stitches, Viola, it's the drive into town. And I've got work to do."

"Oh fiddle." Inside the house, she made him sit down in the living room. "Now, you sit right there while I get some hot water and a wash cloth."

"The thermocouple's shot on the hot water heater."

"What does that mean?"

"You'll have to boil your water on the stove."

She blinked her eyes. "Oh. Kay. So we'll boil water on the stove."

"But don't make it too hot."

She went into the kitchen. "Don't be such a baby."

"Well, it's my cut, and my cut says, 'Don't be throwing any scalding water on me.'"

"I'm trying to ignore you, Slim." She got the water going on the stove and came back into the livingroom. "Now, we need a clean washcloth."

"Out on the clothesline."

She disappeared out the front door and returned a moment later with two white washcloths and a towel. "Did you just do your laundry?"

"Two weeks ago." She laughed. "Two weeks ago, and the clothes are still out on the line?"

"I leave 'em out there until I need 'em. It saves folding and finding a place for 'em."

"Slim, honestly!"

"Well, it works. You ought to try it sometime."

"Bachelors! It's a wonder you're still alive."

"Survival of the fittest, I reckon. Them that's tougher than the germs will survive."

She got all her stuff and came up behind him. "Now, I'm going to wash the cut with soap and water."

"Could we skip the soap?"

"No. It might sting a little bit, so grit your teeth and don't complain." She went to work with her soft pretty hands, while old Slim bit down on his lip and glared at the wall. "Does that sting?"

"Is the Pope Catholic? It feels like you're cleaning it out with a hoof rasp."

"Well, it's a pretty nasty cut."

"It was fine 'til you put soap on it."

"Please hush." She finished up her work and then hustled off to the bathroom.

She came back with a little red bottle of something. "Now, hold still another minute and we'll be done. I'm going to put some antiseptic on it."

"Will it burn?" She glanced at the label on the bottle. "No. This is the kind that doesn't burn."

"Good."

She dabbed some red stuff on the wound and stepped away. Slim's eyes got bigger and bigger, and then he jumped out of the chair.

"Jeemanee crickets! I thought you said it wouldn't burn!"

She smiled. "I misread the label."

"Yes ma'am, I think you did. Either that or somebody lied."

"It won't burn for long, and it just might save you from an infection."

"Right now, I'd go for the infection." He paced around the room for a few minutes, fanning the back of his head. Then he dropped into the chair again. "Whew, boy! That stuff's even worse than soap."

She watched him for a moment. "Slim, you really should go to town and get a few stitches in that cut. It would heal faster if you did."

"I ain't going to the doctor."

"Then at least let me trim your hair." His eyes swung around and locked on her. "Trim my hair? What for?"

She closed her eyes for a moment, then patted him on the arm. "Slim, sometimes it's hard to get a point across to you in a subtle way, so let's talk man-to-man. With half your hair burned, you look ridiculous."