

## Chapter Nine

### Slim Gets A Haircut

They stared at each other for a long moment. Then Viola said, "I'm sorry to be the one to tell you, but it's true."

Slim's adam's apple moved up and down. "Well, a guy ought to do everything he can not to look ridiculous, I reckon." She nodded. "Nobody but a barber's ever cut my hair."

"Do you want to go into town to the barber?"

"Not really."

"And you don't want to go around looking like a scorched possem, so...where does that leave us?"

He smiled. "Scorched possem, huh? Does it really look that bad?"

"Why don't you go into the bathroom and look at yourself in the mirror."

"Well, okay." He pushed up from the chair and shuffled into the bathroom. He was in there for several minutes, then came back and flopped into the chair. He handed her a pair of rusted scissors. "It does look pretty strange. Are you sure you know how to cut hair?"

She rolled her eyes. "Slim, I've been cutting Daddy's hair since I was eight years old."

"Well...okay."

And with that, Miss Viola went to work. Against incredible odds and using only the scissors and a comb from her purse, she attempted to make Slim the Cowboy look partly human.

She wrapped a towel around his neck, pinned it at the back with a safety pin she'd found on one of his shirts, and went to work with the scissors.

While she snipped at his fried hair, I curled up at her feet. This was True Happiness, lying at the feet of...burp...a lovely lady, excuse me.

The snipping stopped, and Viola said, "Slim, do you notice a fishy smell in this house?"

"It's probably just my dirty socks. If I'd have known you was coming, I'd have spent some time picking up the house. It's kind of a mess."

She gave her head a nod and her lips formed the word, "Yes!" Slim didn't see it but I did. And then I surrendered my body and mind to the tide of sleep and drifted out into a delicious dream about...

My goodness, what a delicious dream! I had taken Miss Viola to the dance, see, and there we were in the moonlit yard, dancing the Texas Two Step and...yikes!

Someone stepped on my tail.

"Hank, you're going to have to move. I can't cut Slim's hair and stumble over you at the same time."

HUH?

I lifted my head and cracked one eye. Miss Viola was standing over me, with her hands on her hips, and we weren't dancing any more. It appeared that...

"Hank, please move."

Oh. It appeared that I had gotten in the way of her lovely little feet, so I jacked myself up and moved seven inches to the north and flopped down on the floor.

"Hank. Move."

Fine. I could take a hint, but it didn't seem fair that I had to move while Slim got her full and undivided attention. I mean, I was the one who had invited her to the dance...okay, maybe it was just a dream but...

I moved my freight over to the stove, where Drover was curled up in a little white ball. He raised his head and gave me his usual silly grin.

"Oh, hi Hank. What happened?"

"I was dancing with Miss Viola but she stepped on my tail, so now she's giving Slim a haircut."

"Boy, you miss a lot when you take a nap."

"Exactly, which just proves a point I've made many times, Drover. When you sleep all day..."

The runt was asleep again, which was fine with me. I had better things to do than carry on a pointless conversation with him.

I spent the next fifteen minutes casting adoring looks at Miss Viola, and wondering when Slim was going to invite her to the dance. I mean, here was a perfect opportunity. Surely he wouldn't let it pass.

The minutes dragged by. Miss Viola snipped and combed. Slim talked about horses and cattle, the grass, the weather, and a bearing that had gone out on the stock trailer.

And all at once, the haircut was over.

While Viola swept up the hair on the floor, Slim went into the bathroom and looked at himself in the mirror. He came back, all smiles.

"By gollies, Viola, you didn't have much to work with but you sure did a fine job. I believe it's just as good as store-bought, or even better 'cause..."

I held my breath and waited for him to finish the sentence: "'Cause you're a whole lot prettier than a barber." I KNEW that's what was on the tip of his tongue, but dern his hide, he didn't say it.

You know what he said? He frowned, chewed his lip, shuffled his boots around, started jingling the coins in his pocket, and turned red in the face.

Miss Viola stared at him, waiting to hear the rest of the sentence. "Yes? Because what?" "Because..." We were all waiting. Even Drover had raised up to listen. "Because...your haircuts are free."

I couldn't believe it.

What a clod! What a meat head!

The little smile on Viola's lips faded. A shadow seemed to pass over her eyes. She went for her purse. Slim stared at the ceiling and jingled his coins.

He'd had a perfect opportunity to give that fine lady a compliment, and then to ask her to the dance, but he'd blown it, totally blown it. "BECAUSE YOUR HAIRCUTS ARE FREE."

No dog in history had ever made such a stupid statement or smudged such a great opportunity. I was very tempted to bite him on the leg.

In fact I made a vow to do just that. When Miss Viola left, I would sneak up behind him and...

All at once I kind of wished I hadn't eaten that last sardine.

