

## Chapter Seven

### Slim Serves Her Green Bean Juice

Slim must have noticed too. "Something wrong?"

"Did you buy this recently?"

"Well, yeah, last time I went to the store, must have been last week or the week before.

Why?"

"Oh, the date shows April 13."

Slim squinted at the numbers. "Two months ago? Boy, these days sure run together, don't they? Maybe you'd better not use it."

"That's fine, Slim. I don't need the calories anyway." She took a sip of her coffee and fellers, there for a second I thought she was going to jump out of her chair. She coughed and stared into the cup.

"Slim, I don't believe this is coffee."

"Really?" He took a slurp of his. "By gollies, it ain't. You don't reckon I poured the green bean juice into the coffee pot, do you?" He sampled it again. "Yep, that's what I done, all right. I hated to waste it, you know, and couldn't find a clean jar to pour it in, so I just...here, let me brew us up a cup of coffee from scratch."

"Oh no, I can't stay that long. Actually, I was just passing by on my way home and, well..." Her eyes wandered up to the ceiling. "...my car started acting up. It came on all of a sudden, and I wondered if you might have time to look at it."

"Why yes, I'd be glad to. I'm no mechanical genius, but I work cheap."

He slapped his hands down on his knees and pushed himself out of the chair. That wasn't as easy as it might sound because the cushion in that old chair just about swallowed anybody who sat in it.

He offered her a hand and helped her up. "Viola, I want you to know that I've never served green bean juice to a lady before. I'm sure sorry about that, but maybe I can fix your car."

"That would be wonderful."

"Me and kitchens don't get along so good."

She smiled. "Slim, what you need is..."

"Yeah, I need a clean mason jar to hold my bean juice."

He headed for the door. Miss Viola lingered for a moment, and I'm almost sure that I saw her smile.

When we got outside, Slim already had the hood up on Miss Viola's car. He had his elbows propped on the fender and was staring at the motor with a dark expression on his face.

"Start 'er up and we'll see what she says."

Miss Viola climb under the wheel and started the motor. Slim cocked his ear and listened. "Yep, I can hear it. It's got a knock in the motor, all right, and it sounds pretty serious."



"Oh, surely it's something simple. It happened all at once."

"I know, but that's how all these problems start. Kill it and let me check the oil."

She turned it off and came around to watch. Slim reached into the motor and came out with the dipstick. I knew what was coming. I looked around for Drover, but the little dummy had stayed inside.

"Hank, come here."

Well, there was nothing I could do but answer the Call of Duty. I stepped forward and offered my ear to the Cause. He wiped the dipstick on my left ear, said "Good dog," and plunged the it back into the motor.

The dipstick, not my ear.

Miss Viola seemed to think this was funny. "Do you always wipe the dipstick on Hank's ear?"

"Most usually. I've used the hair on his back before but the ear is better." He brought the dipstick out again and squinted at it. "It saves going for a rag or using my jeans. Huh. Oil's okay. Maybe the oil pump's gone bad. We'd better tow it to town and get a mechanic to look at it."

"Oh my, surely it's not that bad."

"Yes ma'am, it sounded pretty bad to me."

She pressed her lips together. "But Slim, shouldn't you always start with the simplest explanation first? A loose wire or something?"

"Well, yes, but when your engine is missing like this one is, you can pretty well be sure that it's something serious."

"Now, it seems to me that I've heard Daddy say something about loose wires."

"Yes ma'am, you do have wires and sometimes they get loose, but they don't make the kind of sound this one is making. This motor's got big troubles and we might as well find the nylon tow rope and start for town."

She placed her hands on her hips. "Slim, I'm just sure it's not as bad as you think. It ran fine until...well, it didn't start making that funny noise until I reached your mailbox. Maybe if I started it again, you could check it one more time."

"Well, I guess we could, but I'm pretty sure we're looking at a major overhaul here. Fire it up."

Miss Viola started the car again, but this time she got out and left it running. She joined Slim and they listened to it together.

"What is that clicking sound?" she asked.

"Oh, it could be a busted crankshaft or push rods or a scalded piston. It ain't good, I can tell you that."

"Oh dear." She frowned at the motor for a moment. "Slim, what is that little thing there?"

"What thing?" He leaned over the fender. "That's a spark plug wire."

"And...does it do anything?"

"Oh, sure, yeah. You've got to have your spark plug wires and...you know, that thing's worked loose."

Miss Viola looked away. "My goodness."

"Here, I'll just..." He reached in and took hold of the spark plug wire. That turned out to be a big mistake.