

## Can't Help Myself

### Chapter 9

Thester

I can hear the wind swishing through the leaves of the trees and bushes; it's that quiet. And empty. Dilbert's gone. Off to Iceland. Without me. The day feels like the sound of an empty water trough. And it has the flavor of my empty oat bowl. Totally blah. I gotta find something to fill the empty. So, I decide to snoop around Dilbert's doghouse-office for a bit.

Yes! I've found his stash of disguises. The ones he uses on special cases, the ones he keeps promising to show me but never does. Printed across the box's outside is a message: "Thester—KEEP OUT!" So I do—I take the disguises out of the box. Using my flexible, rubbery lips, I pick up a pair of broken eye glasses and put them on, trying to cheer myself. Huh, weird...there's a brown curly wig. It's weird how familiar it seems. I decide to try it on. *Whip*...I crank my neck, comma-scooping the air with my face... *Whoosh*... and fling the curly brown thing into the air. *Plop*. It lands on my head. Dilbert has a metal hubcap propped up in his doghouse; it's aimed to catch the light so it works like a mirror. I admire myself. I turn my head left and right. Come to think of it, the wig kind of looks like Mrs. Fieldjoy's old hairdo.

Hmmm...I blow a spiraling curl out of my face...now what? Nope, this disguise hasn't done the trick, still feel that gone-without-you feeling.

*Wish I could have gone with him on that airplane... Guess sometimes a hound dog's just gotta be alone. Guess I understand.*

I sigh, giving my lips a good rattle.

*What to do?... What to do?...*

And then I remember; I haven't pulled a good prank all morning—had to disappear for a while and let Mr. Fieldjoy cool off about that wallet joke. Guess it wasn't very funny. Did I tell you about the Easter egg prank I pulled last year? Boy, that was a good one; yolk got all over the place. Yep, that one worked. But what to do today.... I sigh again, trying to think. It comes to me.

*Why do I need Dilbert's permission? I can do a little spying of my own.*

The idea makes me feel better. So, I prance on over to the sunflower garden and mosey up to the farmhouse window. There she is, Mrs. Fieldjoy. She likes me so much. A huge smile spreads across my face. I can feel it. Suddenly, I notice that cookies are flying in the air and Mrs. Fieldjoy is screaming.

"YIKES, Thester! Don't scare me like that!" She stops to catch her breath and places her hand on her heart while staring at me through the window.

N-E-I-G-H!

One side of her mouth gradually moves upward, forming a crooked smirk. She chuckles.

N-E-I-G-H!

Isie runs to the window to look too. "Ha! Where'd he get those glasses! And that wig!" she shrieks. "He looks like a crazy person!" Now, they're both laughing.

Ha—forgot I still had 'em on. Not bad.

Now it's Mrs. Fieldjoy who's sighing, except hers is more of a groan. "Now I've got to replace these cookies I've promised to bake for the picnic. Come on, Isie. We're going to the store." Mrs. Fieldjoy grabs her purse and keys and rushes out the door with Isie.

Oh no, what are they thinking, leaving Isie's crystal on the kitchen table like that? Some bad guy could just snag it.

Suddenly, *mmm*... I raise my nose to the air to get a bigger sniff of a familiar aroma. Coconut cake. I widen my nostrils and lift my snout. Its perfume swirls between my brain cells; it's an irresistible smell, like a big, fat red button that says, "Do not push!" You know you gotta...you just gotta push a button like that..

*Mmmm*....That darn, hypnotic, devious scent. It extends its arm toward me, reaching out from the refrigerator and through the screen door. It stretches around the corner—stretches, stretches—until it reaches me outside the window. It motions for me to follow. I'm dumbfounded, hypnotized, and completely zombified. Ooh, that sneaky aroma; it's so naughty. It forces me inside the kitchen. Now if I can just open this refrigerator door.

Meanwhile, on the plane...