

The Beauty Shop at Carrie June's
by Sweetie Mooney

The only plan I ever had for my life was to marry Rusty Heppner and have babies, even though his snooty mama never liked me. Then the week after we graduated high school, he found himself another gal over in Mango, so I was dragging around the house like I'd missed the second coming. Late one hot afternoon I was sitting on the back stoop, staring at the tangerine tree and feeling sorry for myself when Mama come and sat down beside me.

"Sweetie," she says, that's what everybody calls me, Sweetie, "that boy ain't no good—ain't worth his salt, treating you like that."

"Oh Mama, I just don't know what I'm—"

"Hah!" she says. "He ain't nothing but a fool. But don't you worry now. There's lots more frogs in the pond."

I give her a sad look. "Not around here, there ain't."

"Now, just listen to me for a minute. You're a pretty girl, lucky you got your daddy's hair, that pretty auburn color with that little bit of natural curl. And you've always been good at cutting hair. I was thinking you could start up a little beauty parlor. We ain't never had no beauty shop in Toad Springs, but the ladies here want to look nice, just like the ladies do everywhere."

Now, normally I wouldn't of listened to my mama, but when she said that, I quit thinking about Rusty for the first time in days and my heart felt a little lighter. "Why, that's a good idea, Mama," I say. "I could wash their hair right here in the kitchen and . . ."

"Well, you know, Sweetie," she says, looking over at me, "I was thinking you might could do it at your aunt Carrie June's. She's right in town, and she's got that great big kitchen. I hear she's been lonely since she quit teaching school, and with Tully gone so long now and them not having any kids, she's there by herself a lot. You could pay her a little somethin' for rent; I figure she could use a few extra dollars."

The more we talked, the better it sounded. Finally we decided I should go visit Carrie June by myself, 'cause her and Mama didn't get along too good since that big argument over who was gonna get Grandma's wedding ring. Mama thought it should be hers 'cause she was the only daughter, but instead Grandma give it to her son, my uncle Tully, and he give it to Carrie June 'cause she was his wife. And after Tully died, Carrie June said she was keeping it. She said it nice, like she always says everything, but the way she does it just makes you want to slap her.

Anyway, when I called her she seemed kind of interested in the beauty parlor idea, but said she'd have to talk it over with Sorrey May and Aunt Never first and for me to come see her in a couple of days. Now, neither one of her sisters ever had a forward-thinking idea in their whole lives so it didn't seem too likely that they'd cotton to it. Me and Mama talked about all the reasons they'd find to tell her not to do it and come up with some good answers I could give 'em right back.

The day I went back to see her I wore my blue dress with the little yellow flowers that looked so fresh, and curled my hair in the latest style so I'd look responsible. She invited me in,

sat me down at the kitchen table, then poured two cups of coffee. After she put the coffeepot back on the stove, she sat down herself and tumped four spoons of sugar into her cup. When she finished stirring it, she looked at me, and said, “Well, Sweetie, I talked to Sorrey May and Never, and neither one of ’em thought I ought’a let you run a business here.”

I was ready. “But remember, you could be earning money without doing nothing at all, yourself,” I said. “I’m just trying to help you out.”

“I know, dear, I know. But both of them thought it was a bad idea to rent out part of my house to anybody.”

“What are they talking about? Aunt Never used to rent out a room in her house. To a man!”

“I know, dear. I know. But that’s just one person. Like Never said, you’re talking about having people coming in and out of my house any time they please, at all hours of the day and night. Why they’d feel like they could just come strolling in, any old time they took a mind to.”

Just like Aunt Never, I think, to say something like that. “Well,” I say, “people wouldn’t just drop in. We’d have regular hours, so they’d only be coming in when they had an appointment.”

She took a sip of her coffee and went on like I hadn’t said a word. “And I’d have to keep the house all cleaned up all the time. Couldn’t relax or nothing. Five days a week.”

“Wouldn’t be five days a week,” I said.

“Well, Sweetie, I don’t know. Sorrey May and Never both thought—”

“And I know you need some money coming in, Aunt Carrie June. What with you not teaching school and Uncle Tully gone and all.”

Right away she looks down, like she always done when anybody said Tully’s name. “I know. I know.” She’s real quiet. “I just don’t know what to do.”

I take a sip of my coffee. “Well, that’s what he’d want for you. Don’t you think?”

I sit there ’til she looks up at me. Then I say, “Well, how’s about this? How’s about if we just try it for a little while and then you can decide. I mean, it couldn’t hurt nothing.”

“Well, I, um . . .”

“Please? Please? If you don’t like it, I’ll quit. I promise.”

Carrie June looks down at the table. “It’s really against my better . . .”

“Please?”

She sips her coffee again and thinks for a minute. I sit there quiet—the hardest thing I ever done in my life. Then she says, “Well, all right. Just for a little while.”