

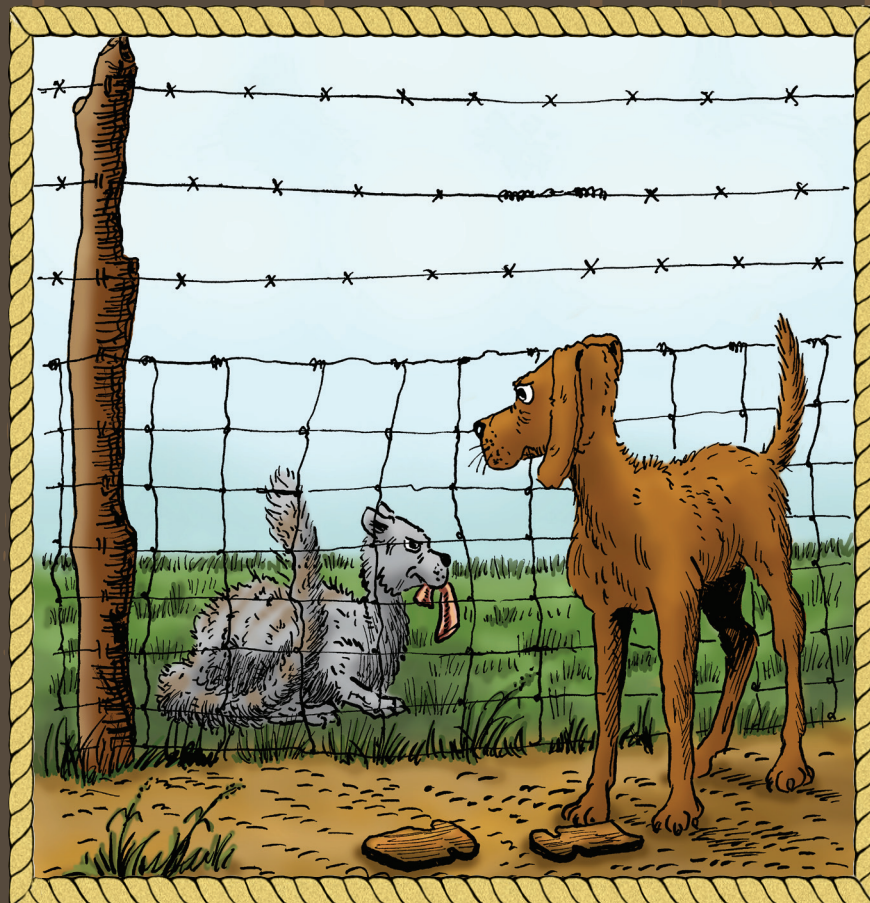


**A ONE-ACT PLAY BY JOHN R. ERICKSON**

# **"Burned Toast"**



**ADAPTED FROM THE HANK THE COWDOG SERIES OF BOOKS  
- PUBLISHED BY MAVERICK BOOKS, INC. -**



**Hank the Cowdog: Burned Toast**  
**A One-Act Play**

By

John R. Erickson

Adapted from the Hank the Cowdog Series of books

Published by Maverick Books, Inc.

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**Setting:** a modern-day ranch in the Texas Panhandle

**Characters:**

Hank, a ranch dog

Drover, a chicken-hearted little mutt

Pete, a crafty cat

Alfred, a five-year old boy

Sally May, his mother

Grandma, Sally May's mother-in-law

CURTAIN OPENS.

We see a modest ranch house with a yard enclosed inside a fence. Sally May comes out the door. She's dressed in a leisure clothes, jeans and an old shirt. She looks pretty and serene.

Her son, Alfred, follows her out on the porch. His hair is combed and he's wearing clean clothes.

SALLY MAY

Well! Everything is right on schedule. Your daddy should be back from the hay field around noon. I've got the casserole in the oven and the house is clean. And Grandma should be here...

She glances at her watch.

...in one hour. That gives me just enough time to shower, fix my hair, and get dressed. For once in my life, I'm ready for company.

ALFRED

Can I play outside?

SALLY MAY

Yes, but don't get dirty. I want you to look nice for Grandma.

ALFRED

Okay, Mom.

She kisses him on the forehead.

SALLY MAY

We want to impress my mother-in-law, don't we?

ALFRED

I guess so.

SALLY MAY

Believe me, we do.

She steps toward the door.

Oh, sweetie, would you put out the breakfast scraps for the animals? That's one thing I forgot.

ALFRED

Sure, Mom.

SALLY MAY

Feed them in separate spots and don't let the dogs bully my cat.

ALFRED

Okay.

Sally May sighs and beams a sparkling smile.

SALLY MAY

We're going to have a wonderful visit with your grandma.

They go back inside the house. The screen door closes with a crack.

There is a moment of silence, then Drover enters stage left. He is excited and running.

DROVER

I heard the screen door slam. Scrap Time, oh boy!

Hank the Cowdog enters right behind him, running to catch up.

HANK

Drover, halt, stop!

Drover stops, looking dejected.

DROVER

Yeah, but it's Scrap Time and I'm starved.

Hank slows to a walk and approaches Drover.

HANK

I understand that it's Scrap Time and I understand that you're hungry, but that doesn't alter the fact that you cheated.

DROVER

No, I just got a head start.

HANK

You cheated. I am the Head of Ranch Security and I'm supposed to get first dibs on the scraps.

DROVER

Yeah, but I smell bacon and it's driving me nuts.

Hank sniffs the air.

HANK

It smells delicious, doesn't it? Now, sit.

Hank points a finger at the ground. Dejected, Drover sits. Hank goes to the gate, looks around for scraps, and sniffs the air.

It appears that the scraps haven't arrived yet. But what's most important is that we have beat the cat to the scraps. With any luck, the little sneak will get what he deserves: not bacon but burned toast. Heh heh.

The door opens and Little Alfred comes out with a plate of scraps. He is also carrying a big wooden spoon.

DROVER

Here come the scraps!

HANK

Stay where you are and concentrate on being a good little dog.

DROVER

Oh drat.

HANK

And we'll have no more of your naughty language.

DROVER

Oh fiddle.

HANK

That's better.

Little Alfred walks to the gate, where Hank is sitting in the begging position, quivering with excitement.

ALFRED

Hi, Hankie. Where's Pete?

HANK

Who? Oh, him. How should I know? The good news is that he's not here. Uh...what's on the plate?

Hank stretches toward the plate and sniffs.

Holy smokes, fatty, juicy ends of bacon!

Alfred moves the plate away.

ALFRED

My mom said you have to share scwaps with the cat.

HANK

What a weird idea.

DROVER

Can I come now?

HANK

Not yet, son. I feel you need a little more time alone.

Alfred looks away from Hank and calls the cat.

ALFRED

Here, Pete! Here, kitty! Come for scwaps!

Hank stretches his neck toward the plate but Alfred shoves him back.

ALFRED

No!

HANK

Hey, I was just...well, shopping.  
(glaring around the yard)  
Where is the pampered little snot?

ALFRED

Here, Petie!

Pete enters stage right. Moving very slowly, he rubs his way down the side of the house, grinning and purring. From long experience, Pete knows that this drives Hank crazy. And the cat loves it.

HANK

(mutters to himself)  
Always late, always smirking. That's a cat for you.  
(to Pete)  
Will you hurry up? The whole world is waiting.

PETE

I know, Hankie, but cats are never on time. We know that the show doesn't start until the star arrives.

Hank notices that Alfred is watching the cat. Hank inches forward and cranes his neck until his nose reaches the plate. He twists his head to the side and sticks out this tongue, trying to coax a piece of bacon into his mouth.

Alfred sees him and whacks him on the nose with the wooden spoon.

ALFRED

Stop that! No, no.

HANK

Hey, I was just...achoo!

Bless you. DROVER

Thank you. HANK

You're welcome. Can I come now? DROVER

No. Achoo! HANK

Bless you. DROVER

Thanks. HANK

You're welcome. You got allergies? DROVER

No, I don't have allergies. Alfred hit me on the nose with that...achoo! HANK

Bless you. DROVER

Thanks. HANK

You're welcome. Achoo! DROVER

Bless you. HANK

Thanks, Hank. DROVER

You're welcome. Why are you sneezing? Achoo! HANK

Bless you. DROVER

Thanks. HANK

You're welcome. Oh, I guess by allergies are ag-ding ub. DROVER

Sorry. HANK



Thags. DROVER

HANK

You're welcome. Achoo!

Bless you. DROVER

Thanks. HANK

DROVER  
You're welcome.

HANK  
Drover, this conversation is going nowhere. Achoo!

Bless you. DROVER

HANK

So could we just drop it?

Sorry. DROVER

HANK  
You're welcome.

Hank turns a dark glare at the cat, who is still slithering toward the gate, taking his sweet time.

I can't stand any more of this.

While Alfred is watching the cat, Hank makes another attempt to get the scraps off the plate. Alfred notices and gives Hank a shove.

ALFRED

No, no, Hankie! And just for that, you don't get any bacon swaps. I'm going to give them all to Pete.

What! HANK

PETE  
Well, just darn the luck, Hankie.

Alfred scrapes the bacon scraps on the ground for Pete, and pitches a piece of charred toast on the ground in front of Hank. Hank is stunned.

HANK

Burned toast? There must be some mistake.

Alfred wags a finger in Hank's face.

ALFRED

Now you be nice to Pete. I'm going to...

Alfred looks toward the house.

...pway with the garden hose.

Alfred leaves the gate, goes into the yard, and picks up a garden hose. He turns on the hydrant and starts spraying water on the side of the house.

Hank glares at Pete, who kneels down in front of his bacon scraps and starts making a big show. He sniffs the bacon, moans, puts a little morsel into his mouth, sighs and groans.

PETE

Oh, my, my! This may be the best bacon I've ever experienced! Do you like bacon, Hankie?

HANK

I can take it or leave it.

PETE

I think you'd love this.

HANK

Oh yeah?

Hank glances around to see if anyone is watching, then swaggers over to the cat.

I think I'll take it. Scram, kitty.

Hank shoves the cat. Pete humps his back and starts yowling. Hank growls. Pete hisses. Hank barks in his face. Pete slaps him across the face.

Okay, that did it! Charge! Bonzai!

Hank barks and jumps the cat. The door flies open and Sally May comes out of the house. She is wearing a bathrobe and slippers, and one side of her hair is rolled up in curlers. She holds an orange juice can.

When Sally May appears, Alfred drops the water hose and runs offstage. Drover covers his eyes with his paws.

SALLY MAY

Hank! Leave my cat alone, you big bully!

Hank freezes, stunned. Immediately, Pete gets up and starts limping in a circle and moaning.

HANK

Huh? Leave your...Sally May, I was just minding my own business, and your rotten little cat...

PETE

Did you get caught, Hankie?

HANK

No, I got framed. You're despicable, Pete.

PETE

I know, Hankie, but it's so much fun!

Sally May goes to a corner of the yard and dumps out the contents of the can. Hank watches her and sniffs the air. Whatever is in that can is very interesting. Sally May goes back to the porch.

SALLY MAY

That's bacon grease, Hank. Don't eat it. It'll make you sick.

HANK

Yes ma'am.

Sally May looks at her watch.

SALLY MAY

I'd better hurry.

Sally May rushes back into the house.  
When the screen door slams shut, Alfred  
comes back into the yard and starts  
playing in the water again.

Pete returns to his bacon scraps and  
starts eating again.

Drover uncovers his eyes.

DROVER

Hank, can I come out now?

HANK

Might as well. The cat has hogged all the good stuff.

Drover darts to the toast and sniffs  
it. He face falls.

DROVER

Oh drat, burned toast.

Hank's mind is on better things now:  
the bacon grease. He looks to the  
house to be sure Sally May isn't  
watching, and eases down the fence to  
the bacon grease. He sniffs it. He  
licks it. He brightens.

HANK

Well, this isn't burned toast. It smells like bacon and it  
tastes like bacon. Therefore...it's bacon!

Hank gobbles down the bacon grease.  
Drover watches Hank.

DROVER

Sally May said it would make you sick.

HANK

Just an old superstition, Drover. Nothing to it. Hey, this  
stuff is great!

(to Pete)

Who needs your scraps, kitty? Not me!

Alfred tires of spraying the house and  
sees the cat. He turns the spray on  
Pete. Pete looks up at the sky and  
runs for cover under a shrub. Alfred  
sprays him. The cat runs to another  
shrub. Same thing.

Hank watches the action with huge satisfaction, and drifts back to the gate to watch the show.

HANK

Hey Drover, check this out. The cat is so dumb, he thinks it's raining!

DROVER

Yeah, tee hee, what a dumb cat.

Hank flops down in the middle of the gate and watches the show.

HANK

Oh, this is rich! I love it! Hey Pete, how's the water?

Hank laughs, but then his laughter dies. He feels his stomach, frowns, and burps. Drover is watching.

DROVER

What's wrong?

HANK

Nothing. Almost nothing at all.

LIGHTS DOWN. LIGHTS UP.

Later. Alfred is on his hands and knees, playing in the mud. His face is covered with mud. Pete is gone. Hank sits beside the gate, staring with wooden eyes, his head drooped. Drover sits nearby, looking at Hank.

DROVER

Hank?

HANK

What?

DROVER

You look kind of...sick.

Long pause.

HANK

Remember what I said about that bacon grease?

DROVER

Let me think. You said it was...great stuff.

HANK

I was misquoted. It wasn't great stuff. In fact, it may very well have been toxic waste.

DROVER

Gosh, you mean...

Hank keels over.

HANK

I'm dying of poisoned bacon grease!

Drover frets and turns in circles.

DROVER

Oh my gosh, what'll we do? Help!

Hank starts crawling toward the porch.

HANK

I must find Sally May!

Drover stops hopping and stares at Hank.

DROVER

She doesn't even like you.

HANK

If I must die, let it be in her arms. She would want it that way, I know she would.

DROVER

I'm not so sure about that.

Hank drags himself to the porch.  
There, he collapses.

The back door flies open and Sally May steps out, looking disheveled and unready for company. And she looks mad as well.

When Drover sees her, he starts slinking away. Alfred, who is now covered with mud, freezes.

DROVER

Uh oh, I think this is a good time to leave.

Drover runs offstage.

SALLY MAY

Alfred, I don't have any water pressure in the shower. Have you been...

She sees Alfred.

Alfred Leroy, what are you doing!

ALFRED

Well, Mom, I was just pwaying.

SALLY MAY

Oh, Alfred, you ran all the water out of the pressure tank! And look at you! Your nice clean clothes! Turn off that water and get in this house!

She starts toward Alfred. He runs.  
She doesn't see Hank lying beside the porch. Alfred runs offstage.

Alfred Leroy, come back here!

She steps off the porch to chase Alfred and stumbles over Hank.

Idiot! What are you doing in my yard!

She kicks at Hank but misses. Her momentum causes her to spin in a circle.

Get out of the way!

HANK

Sally May, you don't understand. I've been poisoned!

She storms after Alfred.

SALLY MAY

Alfred Leroy, come back here this very minute!

She listens. Alfred doesn't answer.  
Hank lets out a groan.

She turns off the water hydrant and stomps toward the porch. She is in a frenzied state of mind.

The little brat! I can't believe he'd do this to his own mother! And on this day, of all days!

(yelling to Alfred)

Just wait until your father gets home, young man!

She looks at her watch, lets out a groan, and runs toward the porch. She has forgotten about Hank lying there.

HANK

(moaning)

Sally May, before I die, we should try to patch up our relationship.

Sally May steps on Hank, trips, and falls head-first into the door. She sprawls across the porch, stunned.

There is a long moment when nothing moves and not a sound can be heard. Then Hank groans and lifts himself up to his hands and knees.

HANK

Sally May, you...you shouldn't have stepped on my stomach. The bacon grease...the toxic bacon grease...

Hank's head moves up and down.

Some terrible force is stirring in the dark pit of my stomach...and it's moving up! Sally May, stand back!

Hank barfs. He looks around and blinks his eyes. He smiles.

Hey, that's much better.

Slowly, his gaze moves down to the porch, where he barfed.

Her slipper?

Sally May groans and sits up, dazed. Her gaze moves to the spot where Hank barfed. Her face takes on a look of crazed anger as she realizes what has happened. Hank looks at her and winces.

Hey, Sally May, great news: I'm not going to die. Now we need to perk you up.

He licks her on the face. Sally May is seething. She grabs him around the neck and starts strangling him. Hank gasps and wheezes.



SALLY MAY

Idiot! Imbecile! You threw up in my shoe!

Over the sound system, we hear the sound of a car pulling up. A door slams. Sally May doesn't hear.

Grandma enters. She is an elderly lady nicely dressed and wearing an old fashioned hat. She is smiling, anxious to see her daughter-in-law.

GRANDMA

Yoo hoo, Sally May? I'm here.

SALLY MAY

Moron! Meat head!

Grandma stops in her tracks and her smile drops dead. She stares at Sally May, strangling the dog. Little Alfred comes on-stage, a muddy wreck.

Sally May's eyes come up, glazed. Her hands are still around Hank's throat. She sees Grandma.

Oh...why Mom! I was just...you can't be here already! I still have fifteen minutes.

GRANDMA

I'm a little early.

Sally May's face falls into complete despair. She releases Hank, covers her face with her hands, and bursts out crying.

SALLY MAY

Oh Mom, you must think I've lost my mind!

Grandma goes to the porch and helps Sally May to her feet. Hank crawls away, gasping.

GRANDMA

There, there, dearie. It's all right.

SALLY MAY

It's not all right! I look like a wild hag, Alfred's covered with mud, I've ruined your visit...ohhhhh!

Sally May buries her face on Grandma's shoulder and cries. Grandma pats her on the shoulder.

GRANDMA

It's all right. Shhhh.

Sally May composes herself, sniffles, and wipes her eyes.

SALLY MAY

Mom, we don't live like this all the time. I tripped over the stupid dog and he vomited in my shoe. And I...I just wanted to murder him!

Grandma looks at Hank and starts laughing.

GRANDMA

Dogs. I would have done the same thing, sugar. Don't fret. Let's go inside and make some coffee.

Sally May nods and tries to laugh. They go inside the house. Alfred follows them, leaving Hank alone at the gate. Drover enters, looking nervous.

DROVER

Hank, I heard someone yelling. What happened?

HANK

I was being murdered by a deranged woman.

DROVER

No fooling? Gosh, how come?

HANK

I have no idea. I licked her on the face and she started strangling me.

DROVER

She's kind of strange sometimes.

HANK

Very strange. You know, Drover, sometimes I think it's impossible to please these people.

DROVER

Yeah, it's hard, being a dog.

HANK

They just don't understand.

They are silent for a moment, each lost  
in his thoughts. Drover brightens.

DROVER

Hey look. That piece of burned toast is still there.

HANK

(looking)

Hmmm. So it is. You want to split it?

DROVER

Heck yeah. I'm starved.

Hank tears the toast in half. They  
stuff their mouths.

It's pretty good.

HANK

No one makes burned toast like Sally May.

LIGHTS DOWN. CURTAIN. THE END.