

JUNKYARD DOGS

JUNKYARD
DOGS

A NOVEL

By BUD SIMPSON

ALSO BY BUD SIMPSON:

The Reluctant Guest

A Missing Piece of Sky

A Dark Place

The Olio Folio

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For Margo; especially.

Thanks also to Lancaster Auto Recycling
(Lancaster, Ohio)
for the use of their fine products
in my cover photograph.

“If one’s friends do not
openly laugh at him, they are
not in fact his friends.”

Dean Koontz
Forever Odd

Chapter One:

ARNE SWANSON:

THERE ARE SOME FOLKS who believe that it doesn't get very hot in Maine. The fact is, an August sun glaring down on you at high noon through a cloudless, humidity free Maine sky, even at nearly 45 degrees north latitude, can still cook you just as well done as a grilled T-bone if you let it happen ... and Arne Swanson was letting it happen. Arne's skin glistened as if it were the orange-red shell of a boiled Maine lobster. In his mellow reverie, he could hear his long departed, nagging mother; whom he had once joined the Navy for four years to escape, shouting at him even now.

Arne Swanson! Come in here right now and put a shirt on! You're gonna burn up and catch a sunstroke lying around in the friggin' sun like that!

To hell with *her*! She was *long* gone. She couldn't tell him to do a damn thing anymore that he didn't want to do. So he gets a bad burn; who the hell cares? So he gets sunstroke; who the hell cares? So he dies from it all; *who the hell cares?*

Arne Swanson didn't give a flying "F" if he lived or died. I beg you pardon ... Arne Swanson didn't give a flying "F" spelled with a great big capital, bold faced "F" if he lived or died. If he died, who in hell would miss him, anyway? He would probably be dead and smelling real ripe before anyone found his body. He didn't that get much company out here, anyway. He had been alone for a long time now; alone meaning, *no woman*. His wife, Jenny Sue, (Otherwise known by

Bud Simpson

him as, *that miserable bitch!*) had left him more than ten years ago.

Of course, there *was* Harwood. Harwood really shouldn't count because he was only a cat. Worse than that, Harwood was a one-eyed, feral cat. Even worse than that, Harwood was a flea bitten wreck of a cat with chewed up ears, and a permanent sneer from lips that had been chewed up more than once. Harwood probably had looked good for only the first six months of his wild life. The only reason he hung around Arne's place at all was because he could mooch a meal from Arne when the hunting was slow. He was orange in color and covered with deeper colored orange spots except for his tail which was striped and bent at a sharp angle near the tip. It looked as if it might have had a door slammed shut on it at one time. Arne could touch him on occasion, but apparently, Harwood saved his real affections for a few feral females in the area who were almost as decrepit as he was.

One time Arne thought he might be making strides toward winning Harwood's heart. The cat had wandered over to the front stoop of Arne's place; gulped down the days rations and then meandered over to where Arne was sucking up suds in his lawn chair. Harwood curled up at Arne's feet and started to purr. Then he looked up and gave Arne what he had interpreted as a loving look with his one good eye. Arne reached down and patted the cat on top of its dirty, ragged head and rubbed him behind his ears, which looked as if they had been made by a madman with pinking shears. Harwood struck like a cobra and Arne's reward for his display of camaraderie was a fierce bite on the tip of his middle finger. Arne had yelled, leaped up, kicked at the cat, and then had fallen on his ass in a heap, seemingly in one contorted motion. Fortunately for Harwood, Arne had been a tad woozy from being over-heated and over-imbibed and had missed his mark by slightly less than a country mile. Not that it would have made any difference. By the time Arne had staggered to his feet, Harwood was already watching Arne's fall from grace

Junkyard Dogs

from a safe vantage point behind the post of the mailbox by the road.

“You little bastard,” he had yelled from his unsteady position. “If you were female, I’d rename you Jenny Sue! If we’d had kids, they’d probably all act just like you, you miserable, ungrateful, flea chewed prick! They’d probably all bite the hand that feeds them.”

Fortunately for Arne, he and Jennie Sue had never had any kids. Damned good thing, too! With *his* luck, all those little bastards would probably have looked like either the mailman or that big turd that used to live next door before his trailer had burnt up. And he just knew they *all* would have had that miserable bitch’s pissy-ass disposition. He considered himself lucky she had left him when she did and he was luckier still that he had never sired a brood with her that would have had those miserable, bitching genes of hers festering away and fermenting inside of them.

So, here was Arne, just sitting there again in the heat of the noonday sun in the short, weed covered drive of his decaying, one-bedroom home. Some would; and did, call it a shack. It hadn’t always looked like a shack. It had good bones but Arne hadn’t done much in the upkeep department over the years since his miserable bitch of a wife had left. So there it sat, growing older and more decrepit (much like its owner.) about three miles outside of Summerville, Maine.

Arne wore no shirt; no shoes; no socks; and if it weren’t for the small amount of traffic that drifted by on occasion; he wouldn’t be wearing any god-damned pants, either! The sun was shining down on him as he spread his scrawny frame out in a dilapidated lawn chair positioned beside the driveway. Arne was small and wiry; five foot eight and weighing in at only a hundred and thirty five pounds now, but thanks to a steady input of beer over the years he had acquired a tidy little potbelly. He had a head that was still covered with wavy, black hair. Years ago, women had actually found him attractive. Now he had more lines and wrinkles on his face than an elephant’s

Bud Simpson

ass, as his buddy, Double Wide Rivers had said to him. Double Wide kidded him about his belly, too. He had told Arne that he looked as if he was about seven months along. His other Buddy, Joey Gargiulo, had told him that his dick must have back fired on him while he was reading a *Playboy* magazine. None of that bothered him. They could say whatever they wanted. He didn't give a great big flying "F" one way or the other.

So, there he sat, just relaxing, soaking up the noon day sun and waiting for the Lord to take him. With a little bit of luck, he would get sunstroke and be gone before the day was through. Of course, he *was* giving the Lord a big helping hand by trying his damndest to give himself a bad case of cirrhosis of the liver along with the sunstroke he seemed to be striving for.

Arne had gotten to the point where he would drink about anything that had a hint of alcohol in it, although he *would* prefer to leave this earth as the result of over indulgence in Coor's Light beer; his personal favorite. Fortunately, he could always get a small job or two when needed and come up with enough cash to indulge in this liquid diet. He wasn't beneath mowing a lawn or two or fixing something that needed fixing. He seemed to have a talent for putting things back together that had fallen apart ... except for his own life, that is. His regular trade had been as a hand sewer in one of the now defunct shoe factories that used to be the number one industry down in Summerville, Maine. However, those friggin' jobs dried up years ago, too; just like his marriage. He had never felt the urge to move on to some other town or industry to better himself. There's an old Maine saying that Arne thought was pure gold; "If you're already there, why move?" Why indeed? As long as they sold beer down there to the Summerville IGA and he could get enough money together to buy it, why move? It tasted just as good here in Summerville as it would have in any other spot in the world, didn't it?

Junkyard Dogs

He smiled to himself as he tried to set a new world's speed record by guzzling down one of his recently acquired, brand new cans of Coor's Light without taking a breath. As much as you *could* smile with the contents of a cold can of Coor's Light chilling your tonsils. Finished, he held the can above his lips and tapped its bottom with his other hand. Two or three drops of the golden liquid dropped from the can into his open mouth. As near as he could tell, it wasn't a new record but who the hell cared? He licked his lips and muttered to himself, "There, by God! Good to the last drop!" He paused only long enough to wipe his lips on the back of his hand, and then, *Br-r-r-ab-ab-ab-ab-pp!* Arne let loose a long, resounding belch that would have scared away a hunting black bear. His body shook from a bad case of the giggles as he thought of how that miserable bitch, Jenny Sue, would have reacted to that gargling, throaty roar. She would have lit into him and used words he had never heard of before and tried to make him feel like some kind of a low life. To hell with *her*, too! Arne didn't give a flying *capital* "F" *how* she would have felt!

Then why in hell did she keep popping into his head after all these years?

The Lord (or was it the devil?) had recently helped out considerably in his quest for Arne's soul. One day last week just before noon, (Arne couldn't remember exactly which day ... must be getting old.) a beverage truck had attempted to take the turn about a quarter of a mile below Arne's untidy little home. It had been clipping along just a tad too fast for that curve down there. The right rear wheel had dropped into a pothole and the rear of the truck had bounced a little too high. Then a soft shoulder had finished the job the pothole had started. The truck had ended up in the ditch at a steep angle and nearly on its side. Arne had seen it happen and had hustled on down the road to give the driver a helping hand, but just before he got there, some damned do-gooder in a pickup truck had come along and beat him to the punch and had assisted the cursing, but uninjured, driver out of the truck. The driver

Bud Simpson

had hopped into the Good Samaritan's pickup ahead of Arne's arrival and the last Arne saw of them, they were headed into town, probably to call the driver's office or to look for a tow truck.

But, as some wise sage has said, it's an ill wind that doesn't blow someone some good; or some such stupid saying. Arne had been standing there in the shade of the truck's body when a noisy, metallic, creaking sound had reached his ears. Then; as if in slow motion, one of the rear doors fell wide open before his disbelieving eyes and the truck disgorged a mother lode consisting of several cases of Coor's Light beer. They cascaded unhurriedly through the opening and laid themselves almost lovingly at his feet. Arne had never been accused of being the sharpest tack in the box, but his momma had raised no *total* fools. Arne did not look this divine gift horse in its mouth. Without thinking for a even one second about the ramifications, he reached down, picked up a case and ran into the woods where he stowed it away behind a large rock, then turned and ran back to the truck.

He was able to repeat this process twenty-four more times before he heard the squealing of tires on asphalt in the direction of the truck as he stashed away that twenty-fourth case. He sneaked quietly back to the road and peered out from behind some roadside bushes as four teenaged boys leaped from their car. One of them he recognized as the pimply-faced, scrawny son of a guy who occasionally had a drink with him down at the Hair of the Dog Tavern. Another one with spiked hair and more metal hanging from his pierced face than would be required to build a 1958 Chevrolet from scratch was the first to grab a case of Coors and stash it away in the car. Almost as an afterthought (maybe there might be a dead man behind the wheel) this kid ran to the truck; clambered up onto the running board and peered into the cab. He leaped back down; threw both arms into the air and let out a high-pitched rebel yell that would normally have attracted a lot of attention; but not out here in the middle of nowhere.

Junkyard Dogs

“There ain’t nobody in there!” he exclaimed loud enough to be heard a mile away.

All four of the boys now swarmed around the back of the truck like flies on the carcass of a road killed raccoon and started passing cases of beer from one to another in a hastily formed bucket brigade. Many cases rapidly disappeared into the trunk and backseat of their car. Before they could leave, a second noisy carload of teens arrived.

“Free beer!” shouted the first group.

“Yee-ee-e *haw*,” screamed the second group.

The doors of the newly arrived car flew open as one and all within its confines leaped out and proceeded to join in on the thievery. When the first group could fit no more beer into their vehicle and still leave room for their bodies, they started up their car and slowly drove off from the scene of the crime in the direction of Summerville. The car looked as if it had had a custom lowering job performed on it. Arne would have bet that they would bust a spring before they got too far if they didn’t take it easy. His face had taken on the sad look of a bloodhound and he had slowly shaken his head as all that beer ... *his* beer, as he had begun to think of it ... departed slowly down the road and disappeared around the bend.

Then, Arne’s ears had perked up and he had muttered, “What’s that?” Then he knew. It was the sound of a siren coming from the direction of town. The local constabulary (probably old “Beer-Belly” Doughty and one of his flunkies) was on the way. The joyous shouting of the kids in the second car apparently prevented them from hearing that warning wail. Before they realized what was happening, the Summerville cops roared around the bend and screeched to a halt beside the now silent boys before they could leave the scene of the crime. Arne didn’t hang around for the show. He slinked back into the woods to his cache of beer. He gathered brush as quietly as he could and laid it lovingly over his stash, blew a kiss in its direction, and then headed back to his shack through the woods.

Bud Simpson

It might have been entertaining for Arne to have watched the cops hassle the teens from up close behind those bushes, but he knew those town cops all too well. Hell, they knew *him* all too well. He knew what the scenario would be. They would make the boys unload the beer from their car, scare them half to death and send them on their way. He knew that for certain because one of the boys in the second car had been the Mayor's son. The Chief knew what side *his* bread was buttered on. He wouldn't hassle the kid too badly. After all, the kid was the son of the man who had gotten him his job. Then, after the boys had been properly chastened and been sent on their way, the law in Summerville would make a few calls on their radio and then *their* buddies would arrive at the scene and help themselves to however much of the liquid treasure they wanted. Any losses the driver would discover when he arrived back at his considerably lighter truck would be written off as thievery by a person or persons unknown before the cops had arrived at the scene. The insurance company would pay and a good time would be had by all. End of story. He would watch from the safer distance of his tired abode.

Arne counted himself lucky to have been as close to the accident as he had been even though most of the beer had departed in the company of others. His guts had told him he should leave the beer in the woods for a couple of days before carrying it back to his home. It turned out that it might have been a good thing he had listened to his guts this time. The next day, who should appear in his driveway? Why, none other than the Summerville fuzz led by Chief Bradley Doughty himself. Arne was sitting in his usual spot in front of his abode doing his usual thing; sucking up suds and trying to cook himself to the proper degree of doneness to bring about his demise. Harwood; with whom Arne had grudgingly declared a truce, was laid out on his back near Arne's feet with all four feet pointed to the blue sky above. The only indication that Harwood was still among the living was an occasional twitch of

Junkyard Dogs

a battered ear and if you looked real close, you could see a breath being taken when required to sustain life.

Arne knew what this was all about. Something didn't add up and they wanted to check him out. He didn't move from his chair ... if you could call that contraption a chair. He had picked up a set of four of them at a yard sale seven years ago for twenty-five cents apiece. The aluminum frames on three of them had caved in long ago from excessive use and abuse and a few years of not being brought in and sheltered through the Maine winters. Arne had actually given some thought to taking them inside during the winter, but eventually, the others chairs had joined the growing pile of junk out by the rear door behind his shack. The junk there consisted mostly of beer cans. *Hundreds* of beer cans! One of these days he was going to have to gather them up and sell them. After all, here in Maine they had a five cent apiece bounty on their heads thanks to Maine's bottle law. He had tried to figure out how much they might be worth once, but gave it up as a lost cause. Better to just bag them and let someone else figure it all out. Just like Arne, this last chair was a stubborn sucker and simply refused to give up the ghost. He had replaced the torn webbing on its seat with a piece of thin, flexible plywood he had screwed into place. The makeshift chair was comfortable enough for him and would be sorely missed when it finally went to that great junk pile in the sky ... or rather, out behind the shack.

The Chief and a patrolman Arne had never seen before stepped slowly; almost theatrically, from the car. Chief Doughty stood as straight as a morbidly obese man with a huge belly could, and positioned his hat on his red, balding pate. He liked it to be forward and low over his eyes; just like he had seen on TV. He then walked directly towards Arne. The patrolman exited from the passenger side and slicked his hair back with the palms of both hands and put his hat on, too. He then adjusted his sunglasses; hooked his thumbs behind his black leather belt; fixed his gaze on Arne (Arne figured he was trying for the intimidation factor) and then started a slow

Bud Simpson

march in Arne's direction, almost in step with the Chief. Arne raised his half empty can of Bud in a salute to the Chief while his body shook slightly from suppressed giggling at the sight of the two marching toward him. Arne had always thought that Doughty looked like a well-fed bulldog. His jowls seemed to hang lower every time Arne ran into him. His belly hung so far out over his pants that the front of his shirt refused to stay put behind his belt; not that you could actually *see* his belt. Arne just assumed he was wearing one because his pants weren't down to his ankles.

"Hail to the Chief! Want a cool one, Brad?"

Chief Bradley Doughty frowned and slowly shook his head. Arne wasn't sure if the head shake meant no, or if it was just a show of disgust and contempt because he had to work and Arne didn't. Arne didn't give a flying capital "F" *which* one it meant, really. There had been a lot of years between right then and the last time he and Jack Doughty had shared a friendly drink together. It would probably be a lot more than a few before they would do it again. Arne had always had his suspicions about Brad's relationship with his long departed, miserable bitch of a former spouse. With thoughts like that in your head, you don't make a good drinking buddy for the alleged perpetrator.

"I was just wondering if you happened to be out here the day that beer truck went off the road down there." The Chief motioned over his left shoulder with his thumb in the direction of the curve.

"Nope!" lied Arne. "I *heard* it though. When I came out here, some fella in a pickup truck was helpin' the driver out of the truck and then they took off toward town. I don't guess the driver was hurt much"

"Nope, he wasn't. Just pissed off more'n anything. Says he's going to file a law suit against the town for not keeping the roads in good repair. All I can say is, good luck to him with *that*! Well, the reason I'm asking is because we caught a car load of boys trying to make off with some of that truck's contents.

Junkyard Dogs

They claimed that before they got there, some *other* boys took off to town with their car loaded down with beer from that truck. I was wondering if you might have seen anything.”

“After that pickup took off with the driver,” said Arne; still lying, “I didn’t really pay a whole lot of attention to the goin’s on down there. That truck was loaded with beer, you said?”

“Yup! That it was.”

“What brand was it Brad?”

“It was all Coor’s Light.” Chief Doughty glanced down at the Bud in Arne’s hand.

“Who-o-o-a, *baby!* Wish I’d of known *that!* That’s my *fave-o-right* beer. Maybe I shoulda gone down there and helped the mayor’s son and those other boys out. Then I wouldn’t have to be sittin’ ‘round here drinkin’ my *second* favorite brand.”

“I thought you said you weren’t paying any attention to what was going on down there. How did you know it was the Mayor’s boy down there?”

Arne eyes squinted and he gazed directly at the Chief. “I said I wasn’t payin’ a *lot* of attention. I didn’t say I wasn’t payin’ *no* attention to what was goin’ on down there. I was half asleep here when you and your crew arrived.”

Chief Doughty’s eyes opened wide. He frowned as if thinking and began to gulp as if a dry pill had caught in his throat. A nervous tongue flicked quickly across his lips and he looked past Arne. Harwood’s good eye opened wide and seemed to fix its gaze on the Chief’s now nervous hands. Harwood licked his lips also. He started an ominous, rattling purr.

“So ... you didn’t see the boys who were there before the Mayor’s boy and his friends got there?”

Arne smiled before he answered. He guessed that the Mayor’s boy hadn’t ratted out the other carload by name. “Nope! All I saw was the Mayor’s boy and his friends ... and then *you* got there, with that car of yours all lit up like a Christmas tree and soundin’ like a banshee from hell.” Arne

Bud Simpson

paused for a few seconds for effect and let his words sink in. Then he drawled, "Of course, there *was* that *other* car that came after you drove them boys off. It came while you were still there; don't you remember? I think it belonged to Billy Rodham ... one of the Councilmen. Now that Billy; he's about as civic minded as a man can get, ain't he? I really liked the way he pitched right in there and helped you guys clean up that mess. I supposed you were tryin' to lighten the load on that vehicle so it would be easier to haul out of that ditch, huh? You should have come up here and got me. I'd have been glad to give you all a helpin' hand." Arne was still smiling as he cast a knowing wink at the Chief. It was good to see the Chief's face turning all the colors of a tropical sunset.

"Well ... uh, uh, Arne ... uh," the Chief sputtered, "that's all I needed to know, Arne. We won't bother you anymore. You have a good day now." He turned quickly on his heels and nervously jerked his thumb at the nameless patrolman to follow him. The doors slammed shut and the patrol car's engine roared to life. The Chief backed the vehicle out onto the road. Arne raised his now almost empty can of Bud in a parting salute to the Chief as he drove away.

His surviving twenty-five cent chair gave out a tired sounding squeak plus a dangerous sounding snap as he leaned farther back into its metallic embrace. Arne looked down at the cat. "Well, Harwood, I know you would have liked for the Chief to reach down and scratch you behind the ears, you little bastard. I was kind of hopin' he would have. But ... better luck next time, big fella. It looks like maybe I'll be able to bring my stash up out of the woods and put it to proper use here at my little castle now. I don't think they'll be back again too soon. Maybe I should've asked them to help me carry them." His body shook in a silent laugh as he thought of that look on the Chief's face. He sucked the last few drops out of his can of Bud and crushed it like a man before tossing it onto the growing pile of empties beside the cooler. He lifted its cover and plunged his hand wrist deep among the ice cubes and cold

Junkyard Dogs

water. The next time he reached into this cooler it would be; for *damn* sure, filled with Coor's Light. His fingers searched; struck gold, and hauled out the last remaining can of Bud. He popped the tab and raised it to his still smiling lips. This was going to be a good tale to tell to his buddies down at the Hair of the Dog Tavern at the regular Friday Night Meeting.

Chapter

Two:

“DOUBLE WIDE”:

LESTER "DOUBLE WIDE" RIVERS was called that for very good reasons. He was pushing six feet eight inches in height and the last time he had stepped on the scales; *many* years back, he had weighed in at three hundred and twenty-one pounds. He was sure he had gained more than a few pounds since then, although he stayed far away from any scales. In spite of all that mass, Double Wide didn't look fat; in fact, he *wasn't* fat. He was just *big* ... *anfully* damned big! Double Wide sported a head that seemed to be chiseled from pure granite. Craggy features, deep set gray eyes, nearly bald at forty-five years of age ... but there was a kind look about him, nonetheless. Children didn't fear the giant in the farmer jeans but seemed attracted to him instead. If he sat down on a bench at the park, in no time at all, a group of children would be staring up at him. One wide-eyed four-year-old boy wanted to know if he lived in the clouds on a beanstalk. Double Wide laughed at that and didn't spoil the child's fantasy. Instead, he asked him if he liked beans.

“What kind ... magic ones?”

“Only if your name is Jack,” Double Wide had said in his deep, bass voice.

Obviously, the boy's name was not Jack because a sad look had appeared on his face and he had turned and walked over to his mother.

Trademark farmer jeans and cotton shirts were his usual attire. He couldn't afford to shop in those big man stores for classier duds anyway, but that didn't bother him too much. Who was he going to dress up for, anyway? He was a quiet

Bud Simpson

man and lived alone. He had learned to be quiet over the years. He didn't like drawing unnecessary attention to himself. He got enough attention by just being someplace. He didn't want the added attention that nice new clothes draped on his huge frame might bring to him. By the age of fifteen, he had grown to be over six feet tall and for a while, it seemed to him as if he were never going to stop growing, but he eventually had, of course.

His family hadn't been financially able to send him to college after he graduated from high school. Looking to further his education, sans college, he had allowed himself to be conned into joining the Navy by a fast talking recruiter who told him that he would be guaranteed admittance to any military service school he wanted. It hadn't been a *total* lie. He *did* get sent to a service school after boot camp. It wasn't the one he had wanted, though. He wanted to go to electrician's school but instead they had sent him to instrument school where he had learned to repair clocks, among other things. Clocks weren't much different than watches except in size, so he eventually teamed up with an old-time Instrumentman First Class with twenty-five years of service under his belt. That guy used to work in a jewelry store repairing watches before he had joined the Navy. Double Wide had been a good pupil at the Naval Service School. With what he had learned there and what he had learned from the old timer about repairing watches, it was no time at all before they had a "for money" watch repair business going on right there on board the ship. The Chief in charge of the repair Division had looked the other way at this slightly illegal enterprise as long as the ship's work got done first ... *and* he got a percentage of the take, of course.

Twenty years later, after retiring from the Navy, Double Wide had supported himself by working in his only uncle's jewelry store for several years repairing watches. Then, the digital age sneaked in and caught them unawares. People didn't buy many wind-up watches anymore and that end of the jewelry repair business slowed to the point where his uncle reluctantly had to let him go. The digital watch business blew in

Junkyard Dogs

like a hurricane and the bulk of the windup watch repair business had blown away for good. For less than ten bucks, you could buy a watch that kept better time than any wind up or self-winder. When the battery died, you could either replace it or toss the old watch away and buy another one for slightly more than the cost of the battery at some place like K-Mart or Wal-Mart or some other Mart.

Way down deep, Double Wide hadn't really minded losing that job. A big guy like him hunkered over a watch the size of his thumbnail or smaller and peering through a jeweler's loupe always struck him as a ludicrous sight. Some people had even said that about him, although not to his face or in those exact words. His big size did have a few benefits. His Navy retirement check was not a whole lot, but that and a little income from some money he had saved over the twenty years in the Navy was more than enough for him to live on. He owned a really nice two bedroom, double wide trailer outright and only had to pay a couple of hundred bucks a month lot rent. He picked up odd jobs here and there and felt a new sense of freedom from the workplace. There was plenty left over after buying buy food and clothes, such as they were, to buy a nice used pickup truck. Fortunately for him, he did not have expensive tastes. Being able to go fishing or hunting or out with his buddies whenever he wanted to was becoming an almost heavenly thing to him.

Of course, he had his dreams. Doesn't everyone? He would love to be able to travel out west or up to Alaska and fish in some of those cold, clear legendary streams and rivers where the trout and salmon grew as long as a man's arm. He would just love to hunt some game bigger than the rabbits, squirrels, whitetail deer and black bear in the area where he had lived in Alabama and Maine. At least here in Maine there was a chance that someday he might be able to hunt for moose if he were lucky enough to have his name drawn in the annual moose lottery. He dreamed of a caribou hunt way up there in

Bud Simpson

Canada or an elk hunt way out there in the Rockies where their antlers grew to the size of a small tree.

Those dreams were far different than the ones he had when he had first joined the Navy. Back then, the only thing the young Double Wide wanted was to get enough money together so when he finally got out, he could buy a big white Cadillac convertible and a cream-colored cashmere sports coat. Then he would put the top down on that Caddy and drive it real slow right down the middle of the main drag of that little jerkwater hick town in Alabama where he had grown up. Only *that* would have satisfied him in those days.

Look at me now, you sons-of-bitches in your beat up Ford and Chevy pickups! Look at me now you worthless sons-of-bitches!

He had felt then that that really *would* have been enough to have made up for all the snide, hurtful comments people had made about him behind his back for all those years because of his large size. As the years went by, however, his ill feelings toward those small minded and small-bodied people had changed. He had matured and began to know that he was better off without any of them, so after he retired, he did not go back home. The closest he had come to his past life was to work in his uncle's jewelry store in a town more than five hundred miles from his roots. His uncle never asked why he didn't visit his hometown or his other relatives; he *knew* why.

Both of Double Wide's parents had died long before he retired from the Navy. His only sibling, an older brother named Orville, was serving a life term in prison for shooting a store keeper and his wife during a robbery that netted him the magnificent total of thirty-four dollars and twenty-seven cents in cold, hard cash plus two six packs of beer, a carton of Camels and a copy of the latest *Hustler* magazine. Double Wide had never written to him or visited him in the joint. His brother had been as cruel to him as everyone else had been, so why waste his time and emotions on him? As far as Double Wide was concerned, Orville could rot in prison and go to hell; and he probably *was* going to do that very thing.

Junkyard Dogs

His only uncle was now dead. Shortly after his death, a chance letter from his old Navy buddy, Joey Gargiulo, convinced him he should come to Summerville for a short visit. The short visit had turned into permanent residency. The variety of fishing and hunting in Maine convinced him to stay on. When Maine revived the hunting of moose, Double Wide was doubly certain that Maine was not a bad place to live.

Double Wide had never married and he was the last of his line carrying this particular Rivers name. Marriage and having a family had passed through his mind on more than one occasion. It would be nice to have a son to carry on the Rivers name, but Double Wide was painfully shy when around woman. Red faced and stuttering or just not knowing what to say next made him certain that he appeared to be a blithering idiot to the opposite sex. In fact, his buddy, Arne Swanson, had used those very words about him just last week at the regular Friday Night Meeting. That had pissed him off more than just a little. Of all the people in this world to call *him* a blithering idiot, Arne couldn't say much. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black! Everybody new that Arne wasn't the brightest or most ambitious guy in town ... not even close! He was always between jobs or drunk or both. If his folks hadn't given him ten acres of land with that now falling down shack on it, he probably would be among the homeless right now. The only reason Double Wide hung around Arne at all was because he felt sorry for him because everyone treated Arne the same way they had treated him when he was young.

Besides, Arne could be a funny guy. He always had these weird little stories to tell. It seemed that something out of the ordinary was *always* happening to him. Like the time he had gone poaching with another drunken friend of his. According to Arne, he and his buddy had gotten liquored up one night and decided that it would be fun to go poaching about a month before deer season was to open. They had taken a two cell flashlight and a beat up, single shot twenty-two caliber bolt action rifle with them. The rifle had cost Arne only three

Bud Simpson

dollars because it supposedly did not work. Arne had taken it home; frigged with it, as he liked to say, and then it worked like a charm. Arne was a hell of a shot, too, and this light little gun was all he ever hunted with on his poaching soirees. For only three dollars, he wouldn't mourn its loss if he ever got caught.

Arne and his well lubricated buddy had taken an adequate supply of booze with them that night and were in the act of passing the bottle back and forth when they had heard a loud, rattling crash behind them. They had turned; shined the light in the direction of the noise and were amazed to see that a big buck had run head first into the woven wire fence behind them and its antlers were caught up in its wires. At the same instant, Arne's buddy spotted what he thought was the headlights of the game warden's pickup truck driving down the road about a couple of hundred yards from them and he abruptly turned off the flashlight.

Under normal circumstances, Arne would have just walked up to the buck, stuck the muzzle of the little twenty-two behind the deer's ear and ... pop; one deer for the freezer. The possibility of the warden hearing the shot prevented Arne from doing that simple little thing, so Arne's mind had immediately turned to plan B. Plan B for Arne usually meant whatever thing; no matter how ridiculous, that popped into his head at that moment. He had whipped out his hunting knife; groped for the deer in the dark; leaped onto the buck's back and tried to cut the its throat. The operation might have gone smoothly, but when the scared animal felt the weight of the boozed up Arne on its back, it had found a hidden source of strength; tore its antlers free from the fence; leaped over it (with Arne still clinging to its back) and landed in the stream that ran alongside the fence. When the deer had hit the bottom of the brook, its front legs collapsed momentarily and came to a sudden stop. Arne didn't, and was bucked off into the cold waters and the sudden cold bath sobered him up more quickly than he would ever have thought possible. Arne took that happening as a sign that, just maybe, that particular night was

Junkyard Dogs

not the best night to continue with his poaching activities. Besides, he had lost his hunting knife in the stream as the buck had leaped the fence and bucked him off.

Things such as that were *always* happening to Arne. Double Wide grinned to himself as he thought, *I wonder what cockamamie story Arne will have to tell me and Joey at the regular Friday Night Meeting this week.*

He shook his head, smiled to himself, and started towards the Hair of the Dog Tavern and the Back Room, where they always met.

