

THE
OLIO FOLIO

THE OLIO FOLIO

By Bud Simpson

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The Crop

By Bud Simpson

*Pretty words all in a row.
These are the crops that poets sow.
Nurture the crops; tend them well,
And soon a story they will tell.*

*Stories short and stories small,
The words are meant for one and all.
Big and tall, young or old,
Introvert or very bold.*

*Hold these stories in your mind,
Remember them and you will find,
Gold and jewels; just like treasure,
Bring them out for your pleasure.*

*If the poet does succeed,
The crops will not produce a weed.
The words, as flowers, will start to grow,
Beautiful thoughts, row by row.*

This book is for my wife, Margo, and also, for all
Those people who were kind enough to actually pay money
for any of my previous books. Many thanks!

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INTRODUCTION

BACK WHEN I WAS a kid, John Paul's clothing store was located on Pickering Square in Bangor, Maine. It specialized in men's clothing. I remember listening to their ads on radio and seeing them in the Bangor Daily News. John Paul's clothing store had a catchy slogan. It was so catchy that it has snagged onto one of my memory circuits and is still there today. Their slogan went something like this: "Short or tall; big or small; John Paul fits them all!" That's sort of what this collection does. If one of these stories doesn't fit your fancy, toss it out. But, keep reading; maybe you will find one that does, even if you have to wait a while.

In my hand-me-down childhood, much of the clothing I wore didn't fit very well, but that was not cause to throw them away. As with these stories, I never threw them away either. Here they are; some after many years of storage. As my mother said on occasion, "Don't worry. Maybe it will fit better next year." Or, "Put some paper down into the toes. Then these shoes will fit better." She might put a nip here, a tuck there, and say, "Now, how does that feel?"

These offerings are not in any particular chronological or topical order. Some of these offerings are pure fiction. Others are fictionalized versions of actual happenings. Many, however, are factual. In some I have changed the names to protect the innocent, but in others, I changed the names to protect the guilty. Even the guilty have innocent relatives and friends ... maybe even me. I apologize in advance if any of you see yourself in the fictional stories. As the disclaimer in other books goes: "Any resemblance of the characters in these stories to persons living or dead is purely coincidental." ... or is it? I will tell you this much. The lead story, "Maine Woods Justice," is pure fiction, (almost) but after that, you're on your own. One story in this collection, "The Missing Piece," I later turned into

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a mystery novel called, "A Missing Piece of Sky" with other characters involved, but the premise of the story remains.

I tried to use as many stories with a Maine theme as I could to bring a little cohesiveness to this grouping of stories and poems, but, as I look back on my life, most of my years were spent in places other than Maine. I lived fourteen years in California and another three or four years in New Hampshire and since 1994, I have lived in Logan, Ohio. In my travels, I have managed to spend time, if only hours or a few days, in all but three of the remaining states plus in many other countries of the world as well. As Merle Haggard's song put it, "I've been everywhere, Man ..." Well ... maybe not *everywhere*, but I've been to an awful lot of places.

I've included some essays of my so-called "Naval Career" in here as well. Some of these tales may read like comic fiction, but I can assure you, they were not. In fact, if I were to include some others, I would have to tone them down a little to increase their believability. Sailors in particular, and all other military personnel, can get themselves into truly unbelievable situations at times. Maybe at some future point in time, I'll set my whole naval experience down in type, but, that's for another day.

I love stories about two people who are doing illegal things, who we really enjoy watching despite the fact that we know they are doomed in some way.

Famke Janssen

MAINE WOODS JUSTICE

JEFF PARTRIDGE COULD FEEL the warmth of the early morning sunshine on the back of his neck as he strode toward the diner. In spite of the chill in the late fall air, he also felt an inner warmth and it brought a smile to his weathered, craggy features. It was a smile of deep self-satisfaction ... the kind of smile that comes when you know that all is well in your own little part of the world.

Cradled in the crook of his left arm was a long slender gun case. Not just any gun case, mind you, but a very expensive one. It was made from soft, mellow leather and lined with the softest of shearling to protect its even more expensive contents. Re-enforced at strategic points in contrasting leather; it had a solid brass zipper that glided as smoothly as silk and held the case closed and protected the gun within from dust and the elements.

It was not unusual to see someone carrying a gun case in the fall of the year in the State of Maine, but it was highly unusual to see Jeff with one. The only gun Jeff had ever carried within the memory of anyone around there was a long and ancient Winchester of .38-55 caliber. Jeff swore by that gun and shunned the newer high velocity weapons. Everyone knew that the combination of Jeff Partridge and that .38-55 spelled certain defeat for anyone foolish enough to enter a turkey

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shoot with Jeff as a participant in it, and it spelled doom in capital letters for any deer within its range.

As he neared the diner, a delicious aroma of bacon mingling with the scents of hot coffee and sausage caressed his nostrils. Jeff felt himself getting hungry again in spite of the fact that he had eaten at home only four hours earlier.

He knew that the diner would be crowded. It always was at this time of the day, but it would be especially so this morning. This was the first day of hunting season in Maine. The diner would be filled with late risers who would be trying to pick the brains of the early risers who had, perhaps, already shot their deer. They would be trying to get a little information as to the where a bouts of the game in this area.

There would be lots of good-natured bantering back and forth. Tall tales and outright lies would be filling the air almost as thickly as the odors of the good food served there. Jeff was anticipating the good fellowship as he reached for the door, for he had a tale to tell, also; one that he was sure that would not be topped that day, nor in any day in the near future for that matter. Jeff pulled the door wide open, stepped inside and stood there, dramatically; the expensive gun case and its expensive contents still cradled in the crook of his arm. The door closed slowly behind him.

Jeff's dramatic entrance had the tried-for effect. The high pitched babble that had filled the diner lowered in pitch and intensity as the eyes of the patrons turned and settled on Jeff. Not that they wouldn't have, anyway, because Jeff was an imposing figure. Over six feet in height and as lean as a spring bear, his wiry body sported a head with very impressive features. Twinkling, pale blue eyes peered out from beneath heavy, shaggy white eyebrows that would have made John L. Lewis envious. His weathered nose surmounted the dominant feature of his physiognomy; a white handle bar moustache that far surpassed in awesomeness those hoary eyebrows. This magnificent piece of white foliage at times covered his mouth and made his normal sized chin seem under-sized and

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receding. More of that shaggy white hair spilled out from a fluorescent orange hunting cap set squarely on his head.

The blaze-orange cap was a grudging concession to Maine law. Whenever Jeff would sit in the woods for a period of time, off came the cap and under his green, buffalo plaid wool jacket it went. "Them damn deer kin see it fer miles!" he would tell anyone who would listen.

Others had told Jeff that someday another hunter would mistake that white patch of hair for the south end of a north bound deer and put a bullet into his ear. "No harm done as long as they hit me in the head," he would answer.

Most of the hunters in the diner either knew Jeff or knew who he was. His reputation as a woodsman was well known in the local area and throughout most of the county. Jeff was considered by many to be the ultimate authority on hunting, fishing and woods lore. If you don't believe that, just ask Jeff. But, dear friend, do not be fooled. Jeff could back up his brags. No matter how wild his stories; no matter how closely they were scrutinized, no one could shake anything out of them but pure truth. And so his reputation was built; tale by tale, feat by feat, and he had become a legend among his peers.

Jeff thoroughly enjoyed this lofty status. His only problem was living up to the legend. If he went fishing, he was expected to catch the limit. If he caught the limit, he was expected to have at least one big lunker among them. Each year he felt that he was expected to bag a bigger buck than in the previous year. Fortunately, his woods savvy and natural abilities as a woodsman allowed him to perform these seeming miracles, but each year civilization encroached farther into his territory and these feats were becoming harder to perform.

"Jeff! You old woods dog! Come over here and sit down," a loud voice at the end of the room shouted. Jeff recognized the loud voice as belonging to the owner of the diner. In fact, he was called "The Voice" by most that knew him because of his loud manner.

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Jeff sauntered slowly down the length of the counter to where the command had come from. The Voice slid over to make room for Jeff in the last booth. Jeff slid into the seat beside him.

"How ya been. Jeff? Haven't seen ya in quite a spell!" The Voice's eyes settled on the gun case in Jeff's hands. "What'cha got there? That a new case for that ole .38-55 of yours? A little too late to try and protect that ole relic, ain't it?" The Voice guffawed loudly.

Jeff's blue eyes sparked at the mention of his faithful old firearm. "Ain't no need fer you t' poke fun at a gun what's shot more bucks then all the guns in this here slop chute put together," intoned Jeff coldly.

"No offense, Jeff, no offense. Just curious, that's all. Been huntin' yet? Shot yer deer yet?" The Voice was fairly quivering in anticipation. Jeff usually came in later than this on opening day and The Voice could sense something unusual in this early appearance. The electricity faded from Jeff's eyes and was replaced by his usual humorous twinkle.

"Wal," he drawled slowly, "I have and I haven't." He paused to watch the effects of his words on The Voice.

"You mean you been huntin' and didn't get nuthin'?"

"Wal, yes an' no," said Jeff as he stroked the smooth leather on the gun case which was now resting on the table of the booth in front of them.

The Voice was now getting noticeably exasperated. "C'mon now Jeff! What'cha talkin' about? Either you been huntin' and got a deer or you been huntin' an' didn't get one! Which one is it?"

"Neither," said Jeff dramatically, relishing The Voice's agony. "Ain't been huntin' at all, but I got my deer."

The Voice rolled his eyes toward the heavens and moaned, "Jeff what's it gonna take t' get the truth out'a you?"

"I'm *tellin'* the truth. You know I don't lie." By now Jeff had the audience that he wanted. The entire patronage of the diner had become still and expectant. They had all heard the

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exchange between Jeff and The Voice. Eyes and ears were straining to see and hear.

“O’course, we could get t’ th’ crux o’ the matter a bit quicker if you wuz t’ buy a hungry ole hunter a cup o’ coffee,” crooned Jeff, carefully inspecting the fingernails of his left hand.

“OK, Jeff, anything yuh want. Just get to th’ point, will yuh?” With a shake of his head and a sigh, The Voice motioned his hand to the waitress and she came over.

“Hi, Jeff. What can I get for you?” she asked cheerily.

“Wal,” drawled Jeff, with a wink of his eye, “a cup o’ coffee; black ... two scrambled eggs and about a half dozen o’ them sweet sausages. Oh yeah, an’ some pancakes with some maple syrup on th’ side, please.”

“Hey!” screamed The Voice, “You jest said, coffee!”

“Wal, yes I did, but you said, anything. You are a man o’ yore word ain’t cha?”

A roar of laughter rolled through the diner. Another hunter spoke up and said, “You got us all for witnesses. Jeff.”

The Voice shook his head in frustration and moaned, “Ya got me! Can we hear it now, please?” His eyes were as large as two fried eggs, sunny side up and his face was beginning to turn as red as the woolen underwear protruding from his shirt.

Jeff smiled; his contentment obvious. Leaning back, he stretched his long arms toward the ceiling, bellowed a mighty yawn and began his story.

Jeff had always set his alarm clock for two hours before sunrise during the hunting season and today was no exception. He enjoyed getting up early, having a light breakfast and waiting for dawn to break over the wooded hills behind his property. To him, this was the most pleasant time of the day. Sometimes he would just walk around his house and out buildings and count his blessings for owning such a beautiful piece of the world.

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About a hundred feet from the front of his house, the dirt road that headed toward town, curved down the steep hill on which his house was perched. Three hundred yards down the hill, a cold little trout brook ran parallel to the road. When it got to within a hundred yards of the house, it veered sharply away from the road and followed the base of the hill upon which Jeff's house was built.

The brook was too deep to wade and a little too wide to jump across, so Jeff had built a rough log bridge across it at the head of the best trout pool. The path that crossed the bridge led to an ancient apple orchard growing in the clearing on the other side of the brook. The trees were not good bearers and the apples were not of the best quality, but they did attract animals such as deer, bears and families of raccoons. Jeff kept them pruned and cared for them to get the best out of them that they were capable of producing.

Beyond the apple orchard was Jeff's wood lot, which extended over a ridge where Beech, Maple, Ash and Birch grew for the taking. Where the brook flowed by the wood lot, there were a couple of acres of White Cedar and small Fir trees. During bad winters, deer wintered there. Jeff could not have asked for a better place to live.

This morning Jeff had finished a light breakfast of scrambled eggs and toast. He did not like a heavy breakfast before going hunting. "Food takes th' edge off o' my animal instincts," he was fond of saying.

He was standing by the sink, washing the few breakfast dishes and peering out the window into the early morning darkness. The false dawn that comes before the real light of morning was just beginning. Jeff could see the outlines of the trees and hills against the distant horizon, but not much else.

Jeff, like most avid hunters, had always looked with anticipation toward the first day of hunting season, particularly so this year. He had been keeping his eyes on a special buck for the last two months. It was probably the largest buck that Jeff had ever seen. He had told no one of it, not because he was

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afraid someone else might bag it, but because he wanted to savor the looks of envy in the eyes of his friends when he brought it in. This buck would definitely add to the Jeff Partridge legend. They probably would not believe him if he told them of the size of this deer anyway, he reasoned. They would have to see it to believe it, and besides, he had begun to think of this big deer as "his deer."

He had tracked the deer many times during the previous months. He was beginning to know its habits as well as he knew his own.

"Right now," he mused aloud, "my deer is prob'ly down there 'cross th' brook. He's munchin' some o' them frost-bit North'n Spies. When th' light begins t' come, he'll head up over th' ridge; kind o' meanderin' this way n' that, nosin' up some beechnuts in th' wood lot, headin' fer th' cedars where th' brook cuts through. An' that's where I'm gonna be jest as th' sun comes up. I'll be I'm gonna be sittin' right there on that ridge. Yes sir, mister buck, you an' me, we got us an appointment!" The thought of out witting his deer in the first few hours of opening day made Jeff's hands tremble a little. The dry dish made a little clattering noise as he put it away.

As Jeff closed the cupboard door, the muffled sound of automobile tires on the dirt road in front of his house came to his ears. Someone's off to an early start, he thought as he headed to the window to take a look. The car drove slowly past Jeff's driveway. Too slowly, Jeff thought. It was heading down the hill, and the driver pumped the brakes occasionally to maintain the slow pace as the car headed away.

"That's a funny way t' drive," Jeff muttered. "Th' road ain't in bad enough shape t' have t' drive that slow." Then a thought hit him. "Poachers!" he coughed. "Damn poachers!"

The words had no sooner left Jeff's mouth than the driver suddenly hit the brakes and brought the car to a sudden stop at the bottom of the hill. Dust drifted up in front of its headlights. A bright beam of light pierced the cold morning

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darkness from the passenger side of the vehicle. The beam was aimed into Jeff's apple orchard.

Jeff turned quickly from the window and reached for a set of battered binoculars that were always kept near. As his hands closed over their cold, metal barrels, a shot echoed through the still, morning air. Jeff froze for a moment, not wanting to believe what he was experiencing. "My buck! Them bastards is shootin' at my buck!"

He ran out through the back door, binoculars in hand and trained them on the lights of the vehicle at the bottom of the hill. Jeff cursed the darkness. He could not see much except the lights of the car. He tried to make out the license number but all he could see was five indistinct white numerals on a dark blue background. "They're from out o' state," he thought out loud. The small light that illuminated the license plate also showed that the car was a pale green color.

Two figures appeared on the edges of the car's headlights. They had come from the direction of Jeff's orchard. They conversed and motioned in the direction of the orchard. The driver walked around in front of the car's headlights and got into the car. Jeff noted the driver was a smaller man than the passenger and he caught a brief glimpse of spectacles on his face. The other man got into the car on the passenger side. The double thump of the doors closing drifted hollowly up the hill and the car drove away, but at a much quicker pace this time.

"They must o' missed," Jeff conjectured. He turned and went back into the warmth of the kitchen. Jeff felt a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach as a sudden realization came to him. They may not have missed! They would not be able to cross the brook at that spot. In fact, they probably would not have seen the brook in the darkness until they walked over toward the orchard.

Jeff decided that he would have to investigate further. In another half-hour it would be light enough to see a little. He went into his bedroom and started to dress for the outdoors. He did not like synthetic fabrics. All his clothes were either

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cotton or wool. He put on a heavy, well-worn cotton chamois shirt over his long, cotton underwear. Then, on went a pair of high cotton socks. Over the cotton socks went a pair of thick, woolen socks. The he climbed into a pair of hunter green wool pants and tucked the shirt in at the waist. All this was secured in place with a wide, black leather belt that he had made himself. Ten-inch high-topped moccasins were then laced up over the socks.

His green plaid, hunting jacket was always hanging by the door on a wooden peg put there just for that purpose. Jeff pulled on the jacket, stuck a two-cell flashlight into a pocket and stepped through the door into the frosty morning. He paused for a moment on the steps and inhaled deeply. He could feel the frost biting at the hairs in his nostrils and smell the wood smoke from the kitchen stove as it hung there in the early morning stillness. Not a breath of wind disturbed the tranquility of the day. It was, thought Jeff, a perfect day for the hunt if only ... Jeff did not dare to dwell on the big "if."

He hopped off the steps and set a brisk pace down the path that led to the bridge. The frosty ground made crunching noises at each step. "Ain't gonna need the light after all," he said half aloud. The sky was brightening now and he could easily discern the pathway in the dim light. This made it easy for him to cover the couple of hundred yards to his log bridge in good time. The bridge was slippery from the coating of frost on the logs and Jeff nearly lost his footing in his haste to get across.

"Careful, you damn fool!" he muttered to himself. "All you need is t' break a leg an' finish yer huntin' season right now." He cleared the bridge with no further problems and headed toward the old apple trees where the poachers had aimed their light. He scouted the area around the trees carefully, but to his great relief, found nothing. There was not a single track in the frost-covered grass.

"Maybe they wuz shootin' at a ghost," he speculated as he turned and headed back toward the bridge. By now it was

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beginning to be very light. In a half-hour or so, the sun was due to keep its appointment with the day and poke its warming face over the horizon. Jeff wanted to get back to the house quickly, pick up his gun, knife and compass and get to the ridge to keep his own appointment.

Then he saw the tracks. They came from the far edge of the clearing and headed toward an apple tree that the buck did not normally visit. He easily recognized the tracks as belonging to his deer. They were the only set of tracks that large in the whole area and they could belong to only one deer. The uneasy feeling was with him again as he followed the tracks to the tree. Standing beneath its branches, he slowly scanned the surrounding area. His gaze stopped at a dark colored mound fifty feet away near the brook. He walked toward the mound, but he knew before he got there what his eyes were going to see. His worst fear was confirmed as he looked down at the huge deer lying there. "It's my deer, f'sure," he muttered.

He recognized that thick set of antlers. Two weeks earlier, through his binoculars, he had counted every point on them. Jeff had been sitting on the beech ridge in the late afternoon sun. He had been enjoying the warmth of a beautiful fall day and was watching the antics of two feuding Chickadees through his binoculars. Suddenly the great buck had appeared; so close that it filled the field of view. Jeff had not moved a muscle and the buck had passed so close to him that he could have hit him with a thrown stick. That close encounter had burned the buck's identity into his brain forever.

Jeff leaned down and lifted the head of the buck by its massive antlers and could see where the bullet had struck. It had hit the deer squarely in the throat beneath its chin, grazed a vertebra and came out below the left ear. It had apparently cut the jugular, judging from the amount of blood on the ground. Jeff was surprised that the deer had dropped on the spot, but speculated the shock of the bullet hitting the bone must have knocked it down.

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"It wuzn't fair, ole feller. It jest wuzn't fair. They didn't give ya no chance a'tall." Jeff shook his head sadly and stood there, gazing down at his deer. He raised his head and looked toward the road. Grudgingly, he admitted to himself that it had been a very good shot. It had been nearly seventy-five yards in the dark with only the reflection of the deer's eyes to guide the shooter. But that didn't even things up ... not at all.

As Jeff trudged up the hill to the house, he knew that he would not hunt today. The enthusiasm and spirit of the hunt had left him and he felt empty and cold. "Maybe another time; maybe not ag'in this year. I'll jest call th' game warden and let 'im know what happened," he muttered to himself. "Not that it'll do any good, but ya never know."

The warmth from the wood stove felt good on his face as he entered the cozy kitchen. Removing his coat, he hung it on the wooden peg and laid the flashlight on the sideboard by the sink. He set the coffeepot on the front cover of the stove to re-heat and then Jeff picked up the phone. He called the Sheriff's Department and asked them to get word to the local Warden that Jeff Partridge wanted him to drop by whenever he was free. "No. No big hurry," said Jeff. "Jest whenever he gets a chance. He knows me and he knows where I live. Thanks."

When the coffee was hot, Jeff poured a big mug full and set it down on the table. He put two heaping tablespoons of sugar into the dark, steaming liquid and stirred the brew absent mindedly for a few moments. He was still thinking about his deer. "Guess I'll have t' go down an' dress him out soon's I finish my coffee," he said to no one in particular as he slumped down into a chair.

The sound of tires popping on his gravel driveway awoke Jeff from his reverie. It was the Game Warden, Tom Jones in his green, rather beat up pick-up truck. Tom liked to use his own truck during hunting season. It had fooled many a poacher into thinking that it was just another hunter driving around instead of the Warden.

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Another trick that Tom used was a set of running lights that he would attach to the top of his cab at night. The official vehicles of the Warden Service did not have running lights on them and some poachers were tricked into letting Tom get close enough to trap them in their illegal activities.

“Wal now, how about that? It’s Tom already,” he grunted as he headed for the kitchen door. Swinging the door open, he shouted, “C’mon in Tom, th’ coffee’s hot.”

Warden Tom Jones swung his legs down from the cab of his dusty, green pick-up and when his feet hit the ground, he responded, “Thanks, Jeff. I could use some. I’ve been up most of the night.” He climbed up the worn, wooden steps and entered the kitchen.

“Sit down, Tom. Git yerself comfy.”

Jeff poured another mug full of the hot, brown liquid and asked, “Ya need some cream? Sugar’s right there.”

“No thanks, Jeff,” replied Tom, “I’ll take it black.”

“Ya sure got here fast, Tom. My license dollar is buyin’ me some mighty good service.”

Tom laughed. “Well, Jeff, the truth is that I was over this way just riding the back roads. It can get pretty hectic on opening day, as you know. I was just a couple of miles up the road when the Sheriff relayed your message to me on the radio, so I just dropped by. What can I do for you?”

Jeff took a long drink from his cup of coffee and set the cup firmly down on the table, nearly splashing some onto its surface. With as much detail as he could remember, he told Tom what he had seen earlier.

“Do ya think ya might be able t’ get ‘em, Tom?”

“Well, the chances are that if they are still in the area, I’ll be running into them sooner or later. Only thing is, Jeff, I don’t think we have anything here that will hold up in a court of law. Even a dumb lawyer could get them off if I ever did find them.”

“Wal, I guess way down inside o’ me I knew that, Tom. I wuz jest hopin’, that’s all. This thing has kind ‘o ruined th’

huntin' season fer me." All expression had left Jeff's face and he stared into his cup of coffee.

"I know it's not much consolation, Jeff, but you can still have that deer. We don't have much of a case here, so I don't have much hope of using it as evidence. It won't be charged against your license."

"That's not th' point, Tom, as ya well know. I kinda felt like that deer wuz mine. I been watchin' him since his horns wuz in velvet; just plannin' th' hunt this fall. Now that I think about it, I might not o' shot him at all when th' chips wuz down. I don't know. Jest outwittin' him might o' been enough fer me."

An awkward silence followed Jeff's words and Tom could see the old man's eyes start to glisten as his suppressed emotions started to work on him. Tom had never seen Jeff in this deep of an emotional state before, and it surprised him. Jeff had always given Tom the impression that he was always in control of most situations that he would run up against. I guess he's human, too, Tom thought.

Suddenly Jeff looked up, instantly alert like a cat awakened from its sleep. Then Tom heard it, too, the sound of a car driving slowly up the hill on the dirt road. Tom looked over at Jeff, but Jeff was seeing nothing. His woods-trained senses were concentrating on that sound. The car passed Jeff's driveway and then stopped. The driver put the car into reverse, backed up a short distance and turned into the driveway. For the second time that day, Jeff heard the muffled popping of tires on gravel as the car approached his house.

"Wal," said Jeff, eyes still narrowed, "how blessed can I be? Two visitors in one day an' th' sun's hardly up." He got up from the chair and again went to the kitchen window.

Tom saw Jeff's shoulders suddenly stiffen and Jeff froze on the spot. "Can you b'lieve that? Can you b'lieve that?" he repeated slowly and coldly.

"What's up, Jeff?" inquired Tom.

"C'm'ere an' take a look," replied Jeff.

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Tom went to the window and looked out over Jeff's shoulder. Parked in the driveway behind Tom's pick-up was a light green Lincoln sedan. Affixed to the bumper was a dark blue out of state license plate. Tom noted the five white numerals on the plate and glanced at Jeff. Two men were sitting inside, talking and looking down the hill toward Jeff's orchard. The car's engine was still running.

"What are you thinking, Jeff?" asked Tom.

"I'm thinkin', Tom," said Jeff coldly, "jest exactly what you think I'm thinkin'. That's them thievin' poachers as sure as I'm standin' here. I'm jest wonderin' exactly what in hell their game is."

"I'll go out and talk with them and see if I can find out," Tom said.

"You won't do no sech thing, Tom. Let's jest wait 'til they deal th' cards." Jeff continued to stare through the window. Tom was beginning to get a little worried. He had never seen Jeff so cold and distant as he was at that moment.

The driver reached for the ignition and shut the engine off. "Guess they're through shufflin' th' deck, Tom. 'Pears like we'll find out what they want any time now."

The front door opened and the driver got out of the car. Through thick-rimmed glasses he peered at the kitchen door. He appeared to be very nervous and turned to look back at his passenger, a much bigger man. The other one motioned toward the house; irritation showing in his gesture, and said something to the timid one. The little one then walked toward Jeff's kitchen door.

"Tom, do me a big favor an' stay out of sight, will ya? I'll let ya know if I need your help," whispered Jeff.

"Okay, Jeff. Just remember this; we don't really have a thing on them. Behave yourself, please" pleaded Tom.

"Don't worry about a thing, Tom. I'm gonna be so sweet t' them guys that quite possibly you'll throw up. Jest stay close t' th' sink in case ya do!"

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Tom smiled and nodded at Jeff. He felt a little easier about the situation now. It was obvious to him that Jeff had regained his self-control. "Go get 'em, Tiger!" whispered Tom as Jeff turned to the door.

A timid knock sounded. Jeff winked at Tom and reached for the doorknob. When he swung the door open, a new man greeted the stranger. "Wal, howdy, Stranger," smiled Jeff theatrically. "What brings ya t' this neck o' th' woods?"

The timid man relaxed noticeably and smiled. "Hi there!" he said in a falsetto voice. "My name is Jack Howe. Me and my friend out there are up here hunting and we were wondering if we could get your permission to do some hunting behind your orchard down there." Mr. Howe motioned in the direction of Jeff's orchard.

"Now that's mighty thoughtful o' you Mr. Howe," said Jeff. "Most folks ain't decent enough t' come an' get my p'mission. They jest tromps all over yer propety like it wuz their own and then get highly upset when ya asks them t' leave." Jeff stepped through the door and down the steps, leaving the door wide open so that Tom could easily see and hear all that was taking place.

Jeff could sense their plan now. He was now certain of what they wanted. He was also certain that these two men were the poachers that had shot his deer. It was all very simple. They would obtain his permission to hunt beyond the orchard. Then they would walk down to where the buck lay. Maybe they would walk into the woods a ways and sit there for a while. When they felt that the time was right, the big boy sitting there so smugly in the green Lincoln, would fire a shot into the air. Then they would walk calmly over to where his deer lay, dress it out and drag it up to the car; flaunting it to show what great hunters they were.

Wal', by th' great lord Harry, it ain't gonna happen that way! It ain't gonna happen that way a'tall, thought Jeff. He cooled his rising temper in deference to Tom. He would just love to have grabbed that goggle-eyed little twerp standing

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there in front of him and squeeze his scrawny neck until his gizzard popped out, but instead, he smiled and said, "I don't know, young fella. I don't really know if I want a bunch o' people wanderin' all over my place and shootin' at anything that moves. Things like that don't set too good with me."

"Hey, Old Timer, you don't have to worry about that. In fact, my buddy over there is a champion rifle shot. He can probably shoot better than any of the locals. I know that you natives have a low opinion of us non-residents hunters, but I think I can get you to change your mind. Why don't you talk to my old buddy, Bob, over there and maybe he can convince you?"

Jack Howe's character had sunk even lower in Jeff's eyes, if that were possible. He hated being called "Old Timer", and besides, most of the non-resident hunters he had met were decent men who obeyed the hunting laws better than most of the locals he knew. He did not care for Howe's presumptuous statement.

Without waiting for a reply, "The Twerp" (That was now Jeff's unspoken name for him) motioned for "Old Buddy Bob" to come over. The man in the passenger seat opened the door and stepped out. Then he ducked back in and reached for something in the back seat of the Lincoln and drew it out into view. It was an expensive gun case.

"Old Buddy Bob" was a big man and he reeked of money with a capital "M". Everything about him screamed, "Expensive!" He laid the gun case across the hood of the car, and with right hand extended, stepped toward Jeff, flashing a superior smile.

"Pleased to meet you, Old Timer," he said.

Jeff was glad that "Old Buddy Bob" had called him that. Now he could hate him, too, without any reservations.

"Same here, Bob," lied Jeff, grabbing Bob's hand in his. Bob tried to make Jeff holler "uncle" with his manly grip, but Jeff was equal to the task and when Bob finally let go, his eyes betrayed surprise that the "Old Timer" had such a firm grip.

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"This young fella says yer a champeen rifle shot, Bob. That true?" queried Jeff.

"Sure is," blustered Bob, pride oozing from every pore.

"What do ya hunt with?" asked Jeff.

Bob sauntered back to the hood of the Lincoln and unzipped the gun case. He drew out the weapon from within, walked back to Jeff and handed it to him. "That's something you don't see every day, Old Timer. I had this .243 made up just for this trip. That's the best French walnut stock that money can buy. Custom barrel, three to nine power scope; the whole works ... best money can buy!" he repeated.

Jeff recognized quality when he saw it. He slowly turned the beautiful weapon over in his hands, admiring the classic lines and beautiful workmanship. As he looked at the gun and listened to the bragging of Bob, a plan was slowly formulating in his mind. It was coming to him as if it were not him doing the thinking ... it was an almost divine happening. This embryonic plan taking shape in his head just might gain back for him the pleasure that he had felt earlier in the day before the poaching incident had stolen his day from him.

"I got nuthin' this fancy, Bob, but I do have a reputation 'round here for bein' a fair enough shot t' put meat on th' table when I need it," Jeff said slowly. "How 'bout a little demonstration? Let's see what ya kin do."

"Glad to, Old Timer, glad to!" exclaimed Bob, puffing up like a penguin in heat.

With mock seriousness, Jeff looked around for a target suitable for "Old Buddy Bob's" talents. "I kin see jest th' thing fer ya, Bob." Jeff pointed out across the field behind the house to several old power line poles.

"Them poles is all that's left uv an ole power line. Th' wires wuz tore down years ago, but th' insulators are still there. Now, they ain't no bigger 'n five or six inches tall by maybe three of four inches wide. I paced the poles off one time an' they come out t' be 'bout a hundred 'n fifty yards off. Think ya could do any damage t' them?"

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“Well,” replied Bob, feigning humility, “I don’t know, but I’ll give it a try.”

Jeff handed the gun back to Bob who reached into his pocket and pulled out a box of hand-loaded cartridges. As he opened the box, Jeff noticed that there was one cartridge missing. Bob opened the bolt of the rifle, removed a cartridge from the box and inserted it into the chamber of his rifle. He closed the bolt and walked back to the Lincoln. He slid his left arm through the sling of the rifle and leaned across the hood of the car. He knows what he’s doin’, thought Jeff, and for a fleeting moment, he had some doubts about his embryonic plan.

Bob settled carefully into place, reached up and turned the scope up to nine power. Snuggling his big cheek up against the rifle’s stock, he aligned the crosshairs of the scope onto one of the insulators. He took a slow, deep breath and let it out. Then he took a half breath and held it. Slowly, ever so slowly, he squeezed the trigger. When the gun went off, Jeff was looking at the power pole. The insulator on the left disintegrated; blown up as if from an internal explosion, its particles sparkling in the low, morning sun just edging over the hills.

Jeff knew that it was an excellent shot, but could not resist a small barb. “I sure wisht you o’ called which one o’ them things you wuz aimin’ at, Bob. I thought you wuz takin’ th’ one on th’ right.”

Bob sputtered for a moment and a dark look crossed his face. “Damn right I hit the one I was aiming at! Here, Old Timer, try one yourself if you think you can do any better!” Venom dripped from his words as he pushed his gun toward Jeff.

“Thanks anyway, young fella, but I don’t have a whole lotta faith in the high-power jobs. Too temper’mental. First shot’s good, but th’ second one sometimes goes astray. I kind o’ like them older, bigger bore pieces m’self.”

“Whatever turns you on, Pops. Go get your piece and let’s see what you can do,” sneered “big buddy Bob.”

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"Wal now, I jest might do that ... if th' price wuz right," Jeff responded.

"Oh ho!" sneered Bob. "Do I detect that I'm in the presence of a betting man? Careful, Old Man. I might walk away with your life savings."

"I ain't talkin' 'bout money, young fella. I'm talkin' yore piece again' mine. If you shoot better'n me, you git my gun. Likewise, if I shoot better'n you, I get yers."

The smile left Bob's face. "Your serious, aren't you, Old Timer? Well, I don't buy pigs in pokes. Let's see you gun."

"Stay right where ya are, young fella, an' I'll be right back." Jeff climbed the steps and went into the kitchen.

"Jeff," whispered Tom as Jeff walked by. A look of concern was on the young warden's face. He knew how much Jeff loved that old gun. "Are you crazy? I've never seen shooting like that before. Do you know what you're doing?"

"You ain't never seen shootin' like yer gonna see now, either, Tom. Don't you fret none. I know zackly what I'm doin'." Jeff walked calmly into his bedroom and emerged with his old Winchester in one hand and a few cartridges in the other. The final pieces of his plan had fallen into place as he had watched Bob's shooting exhibition and he felt confident that it would work. He walked past Tom and whispered, "Pay close attention. I'm gonna need ya on this'n."

Jeff went down the steps and walked toward the two men standing by the Lincoln. "Old Buddy Bob" took one look at the gun in Jeff's hands and gave a disgusted laugh. "Oh, come on, Old Timer. You don't expect me to wager a work of art like this against that old junker, do you?"

"This here's a collector's item, young fella. Take a look at this." He turned the gun over and showed Bob some engraving on the receiver. "Presented to Pres. Theo. Roosevelt by the Winchester Arms Co." it said simply.

"Take a good look at 'er. That's select walnut in that stock an' that checkerin' and engravin' ain't standard, neither. This here gun is prob'ly worth a lot more 'n that piece o' yores if we

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wuz t' get 'em appraised. "O' course, if yer afraid o' *losin'* that piece o' yores ..." Jeff's voice trailed off and he shrugged his shoulders.

The shine of greed came into Bob's eyes. "Hell no, I'm not afraid. I'm not going to lose. Besides, I could get another one of these built tomorrow if I wanted to," he blustered.

"You may haf'ta," dug Jeff.

Bob knew that if Jeff hit one of those insulators with iron sights at a hundred and fifty yards, it would be a small miracle, but Bob did not know that Jeff knew this also. What Bob also did not realize was that now the game was now being played out using *Jeff's* deck of cards.

"Let's get on with it," piped up the "Twerp" excitedly.

"You still here? I thought you went home," said Jeff, his eyes narrowing with disgust.

"There are still three insulators left, old man. Watch this."

Bob re-assumed his former position across the hood of the Lincoln and inserted another cartridge into the chamber of his gun. "The one on the *left*, Old Timer," he said, emphasizing the word "left." He squeezed the trigger and the insulator exploded in a puff of ground glass as the .243 bullet smashed into it.

"Now, look at the one on the *right*, Old Timer." Again, Bob emphasized the word "right." He inserted another cartridge into the chamber and repeated his performance. The insulator on the right disappeared into oblivion.

"I left the one in the middle for you, Old Timer," he sneered, emphasizing the word "middle."

"Wal now, I gotta admit; that wuz some shootin'," said Jeff, slowly shaking his head. "But, if I wuz t' hit that one in the *middle*, I wouldn't beat ya, all I would do is *tie* ya. Ain't that right?" Jeff continued. "Besides, we should have someone else t' judge this here contest. I wouldn't wanna be accused o' cheatin' no one." Jeff cupped his hands over his mouth and shouted at the house. "Tom! Come out here will ya. We need yore help."