

Junkyard DOG

Nora R. Hobbs



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Junkyard Dog

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The Race

Though Ariel always hung out with the upper class kids with money, she would smile at him when she caught him looking at her. There was an acceptance in that smile that he did not find with anyone else. He longed to ask her out, and finally got up the nerve one day at the lockers. She tilted her head and her blue eyes flowed over his face. Diana was there and she hid a smile and ducked her head.

“I can get my dad’s car and we could go over to the drive-in,” he said, trying to assure her that it was a real date he wanted.

“I’m sorry, Erick,” she let out a deep sigh. “I’m seeing Randy, right now.”

Erick looked down and shifted his weight to one leg. “K,” he nodded. “I had to try.” He was bummed out the rest of the day, skipped his last class, walked down to the City Lake, and sat staring at the water and skipping rocks across it.

If he just had money like the Bakker boys, he knew

she would take him seriously. When she caught him watching her in class, she would give him one of the sweetest smiles and it made him warm inside. That was where his idea was born. It would not only get her to notice him, but all the kids that hung out at the Collins Café.

Standing up, he ran most all the way back home and then started his project. It would take a long time, but she was worth it. It was hot, hard work and he spent as much time building his car as he could. His father yelled and screamed at him for wasting time on it when he could be working on something for the salvage, but he ignored him as much as possible. Every time his dad caught him working on the car, he made him go to work on stripping parts off of cars at the salvage. That was his father's business and that earned him the name "Junkyard Dog."

He really didn't mind being called Junkyard Dog, because those dogs were usually mean and fierce. Learning to survive his hard and abusive father was no easy thing, especially after his mother died. She always came to his rescue when his dad was angry with him, so it was with deep grief that he said his good-byes at her graveside. There was little sympathy for him from his dad and he had to grow up fast and hard.

As soon as the Bakker boys found out that he had approached Ariel Collins for a date, they met him in the ball field after school and laid into him. Even though there were two of them, his hard life gave him an edge and the Bakker boys went home with as good as they gave. Nevertheless, his dad finished the job for them, because he was late coming home. It was poker night and his dad had been drinking.

Saturday night, the stars were bright overhead, and it was the first time Erick took his car out in public. He had built it from the ground up, and even his dad was impressed

with it. It took him two years to get all the right parts, modify and tweak them for the best performance. He knew his car could outrun all the hotrods on the drag strip and tonight he was going to prove it.

His first stop, however, was at the Collins Café. He had some strong feelings for Ariel Collins and he knew she would be hanging out there with her friends. Erick was dressed in his best clothes. He had on a T-shirt with a werewolf on the front, howling at the moon, and over that, a black leather jacket with zippers on the sleeves, several zipper pockets and it zipped up the front with a small skull trinket for a pull. A large chain hung from a snap holder at the top of the shoulder and ran under his arm in a circle. His hair was long and combed back into a 'V' that swept forward to hang down on his forehead. He looked at his raw-boned features in the rear view mirror. He was better looking, in his opinion, than the Bakker brothers with their Howdy Doody look.

His eyes were dark and shined with the defiance that filled most of his life, first for his abusive dad, then for being rejected at school and tagged the Junkyard Dog. At first, he fought to stem the tide and find acceptance, but he soon learned that was not the way. He dealt with this by setting out to have the best car in town.

Tonight he would show Steven and Randy Bakker what a street rod was all about, and then thumb his nose at those rich kids, because a junkyard dog has a better car than all their dads' money could buy. It would make him just as good as they were... and maybe catch the eye of Ariel Collins.

He envisioned himself driving through town, honking at everyone, with Ariel beside him. The guys would all flock around his car and he would be the king of the strip tonight. They would not turn away when he walked up, and the girls would all be jealous of Ariel. Tonight, he knew, was his, and he walked into the café, confident, poised and

cocky.

As always, when someone came in, everyone glanced up to see who that it was. When they saw him, they all went back to their conversations and food. The café smelled of greasy hamburgers and fries. There were six booths down the left side under a row of windows and on the right side was one large corner booth with the seats wrapping around the table against the right wall and the back. Beside that, on the right wall was a hall to the bathrooms, separating a row of stools at the counter. On a raised platform sat the jukebox with a fast tune coming from it. Nearly all the booths were taken by little groups of kids and the several stools were taken, as well.

Erick walked up to the table where Ariel sat beside Randy Bakker, leaning on his shoulder. Her long dark hair caught the light as it cascaded down onto her shoulders. She had deep blue eyes that contrasted with her hair and full red lips that turned into a smile as he approached. It was that smile that gripped Erick's heart.

Ariel always seemed restless and wanted to be doing something, and it was she who motivated the gang of kids she hung around with. She never had much to do with Erick, but there was that smile that made him know there was something about him she liked. If he had money like Randy, she would be leaning on his shoulder, he was sure of that. She was very popular at school and usually had important positions in the activities, and all Erick did was play football until his dad put a stop to that, so he could work in the salvage yard.

Erick had dreamed about Ariel being his girl for a long time, and paying attention to him like she did Randy Bakker. He dearly loved it when she smiled at him. He had a big crush on her and sometimes he thought she knew it from the way their eyes would meet in the hall or in class. He would flirt with her at the lockers and she didn't seem to mind. She would just laugh. He loved to hear her laugh.

His flirting sure made the other boys she ran around with jealous, especially Randy, and that was a consolation, all by itself. Well, money is not everything. He had the “Junkyard Dog” sitting in the parking lot, and that was going to change his life.

“What’s up?” Erick said after giving Ariel the once over.

“Get lost, Dog,” Randy sneered at him. “We’re trying to eat and don’t need the smell.” Steve, Rachael, Joe and Diana sat in the round booth with them and snickered.

“Randy,” Ariel swatted him on the shoulder. “That’s not nice.”

Randy had rust colored hair, cut close, the same as his brother Steve. You did not have to look twice to tell that they were Bakkers. Both had a round face with a few freckles across the nose. They had small mouths and usually a cigarette hung out of it. They were boyishly handsome and they had money.

Rachael was a brunet with long curls and she was a cute, sexy, wide-eyed girl with a reputation among the guys that made them all drool when she went by. Joe was a laid back, sort of fun-loving guy. He had brown hair and hazel eyes. He was proud of the shadow of a beard he was growing. Diane was Ariel’s best friend and they were like the right and left hands. You never saw one without the other. She was not pretty, with a long Italian nose and full lips, but she looked nice.

Erick tried to ignore Randy’s comment as he always did, but tonight he really wanted to bust Randy in the nose. “Ariel, want to go for a ride in my new car?”

“Get out of here,” Steve said with a wave of his hand. “You don’t have a car. Who are you trying to kid?”

“You wanna bet?” Erick shot out at him. “She’s better and faster than anything *your* money can buy.”

“Is that right?” Randy answered for him. “What did you do, steal it?”

Erick reached out and grabbed him by the shirt and pulled him up in his seat. "No, I built it and tonight you had better watch your mouth," he gritted in his face.

"Oooh, I'm so scared, I'm shaking." He breathed out with a big grin. When Erick made no effort to let go of him, his face grew sober.

"If you built it," Steve said with a laugh, "it's got to be a piece of junk."

"Take your grubby hands off me," Randy tore Erick loose from his shirt.

"It can outrun your high priced tin can anytime," Erick said turning his attention to Steve. "You want to put your money where your mouth is, garbage bin?"

By now the whole place was staring at them, because Erick was not whispering. Steve stiffened and started to come up out of his seat.

"Erick," Ariel said sharply, "you're causing a scene." Erick caught Steve's shoulder and shoved him back in his seat.

"You want a piece of me?" Erick gritted at him. "Let's take it outside."

Ariel pushed on Randy's shoulder. "I want to go see Erick's rod."

Erick turned his attention back to Ariel and Steve swiped at his shoulder as though to dislodge something. "Come on," Erick held out his hand to her.

"Yeah, let's all go see Erick's junk car ...if he even has one," Randy laughed, sliding out of the seat. Erick was not interested in what Randy was saying. He was too delighted by the fact that Ariel actually took his hand. She was wearing jeans that hugged her shapely hips and a shirt with a knot tied in the tail of it at the waist, against her stomach. The first button was unfastened and drew Erick's eyes to her full, pointed breasts.

"Well?" Randy slapped him on the arm with the back of his hand.

Erick shrugged off his slap and turned for the door, dragging Ariel along behind him.

There it sat in the parking lot, a '57 Chevy with the top chopped off and the new blue and white paint glistening in the café sign and streetlights. Erick squeezed Ariel's hand and looked proudly at her.

As the whole café gathered around there was total silence. "It's beautiful," Ariel squealed and ran over to it. She ran her fingers down the fender and on the door was the sign done in a swirling, laid-back cursive style ... "Junkyard Dog." Little white lines came from each word to give the idea of flying.

Then everyone converged on the car and someone blew the horn. It made an "ah-OO-ga" sound that came off of an old Model 'A' Ford. This brought a cheer and laughter. Erick went over to where Ariel stood and opened the door for her. She grinned at him and slid into the seat.

"Hey," Randy shoved Erick away and caught Ariel's wrist. "You're *my* girl. You ride with me."

"I am not," she jerked loose. "I ride with whoever I like, and I do whatever I like." Randy reached out to catch her arm again, but Erick moved fast and caught his wrist, instead. Randy tried to move his arm, but Erick had become strong, working in the salvage yard, and he squeezed it tight. Randy glared at him and he did not finch. It was a test of strength and Erick was going to win to impress Ariel.

"Get lost," Erick said between clenched teeth and released him with a shove when he was satisfied that Randy saw he could not break his hold.

As Erick went around to climb into the car, Ariel scooted over in the middle and waved at Diane. "Come on, Dee!" Diane looked at Erick and he nodded.

"Can Joe come?" Diane asked getting in.

"Sure," Erick grinned at her, so Joe climbed over and settled down in the back seat. James, a short kid with

black-rimmed glasses and a pudgy nose, pushed his way up to the driver's side door and said, "Can I go?" He too took the brunt of the kids' teasing, because he was a dorky looking kid.

Erick grinned at him and pointed with his thumb at the back seat. He would make it his night, too. He climbed in as Erick started the car. It leaped into action with a deep, throaty rumble that rose as he gave it some gas, until it sounded like a roar. The two Bakker boys stood watching along with about two-dozen other kids. They had drawn quite a crowd.

"That piece of junk won't go two blocks," Steve challenged loudly and everyone one grew quiet.

Erick climbed up and sat on the top of the front seat back. "How much money you want to bet on that?" Erick took up the challenge.

"More money than you have to cover it," Randy pointed at him.

"I'll race you for the pink slips," Erick returned.

"No!" Ariel said quickly, grabbing his jeans leg.

"Bah! You don't even own a pink slip on that thing." Steve laughed, "It's garbage!"

Erick looked down at Ariel's hand and then over at her beautiful blue eyes that looked up at him with excitement in them. "I have a pink!" Erick looked back at the two brothers. "Do you have one on yours or does that car belong to Daddy?"

"It belongs to us!" Randy snapped and looked at his brother. "Let's do it! We can always sell his car for junk."

His brother looked at him and blinked. "Okay," he nodded. "Listen to it run. It's on its last leg already."

"Don't do it, Erick!" Ariel begged. "You'll lose your car. They'll drive their Corvette." This was not news to Erick. Everyone had to listen to them crowing about it, when they came to school in it last month.

"Yeah, Erick, listen to her." Diane entered.

“You going to chicken, Junkyard Dog?” Randy taunted.

“No,” Erick stiffened. “Are you?”

“We’ll see you at the drag strip, Dog!” Randy jeered. Erick slid back down in the seat. Then Randy pointed at Ariel. “Come on,” he beckoned with his hand.

“No!” Ariel shook her head. “I’m going with Erick.”

“You go with him, you find another boyfriend.”

“That won’t be any problem,” she returned and put her arm through Erick’s and he grinned at her. He was going to become her new boyfriend and that meant more to him than winning the race. But he would win ...he would win for her.

Two sets of car lights came to a stop at a yellow line drawn across the road, and a bunch of other cars pulled up behind them with giggling girls and excited guys piling out of them. The evening was warm and the moon hung bright in the eastern sky. The air was charged with excitement like static electricity.

“Joe,” Erick said, “set the line.”

“You got it,” he said and leaped over the side of the car. He came to the front door and held his hands out to Dee. She climbed up in the seat and let him pull her into his arms.

“You better get out of here, too,” Erick said to Ariel. “Could get dangerous.”

“Not on your life,” Ariel said. “I want to go with you.” She wet her lips and looked into his brown, hard eyes, which softened in her gaze. Her lovely blue eyes captivated him and he could not look away. Then she reached up and gave him a kiss that erupted through him like an earthquake. Boy, she could kiss and it caused a reaction that made him squirm.

“You two going to make love or are we going to race?” Steve shouted over the roar of the engines.

“We’re racing,” Erick shouted and squeezed Ariel’s

hand. "Hang on, babe."

"Ariel," Dee screamed, "don't do it! You could get killed."

"I'm ready," she returned with excitement in her voice, ignoring the frantic warning of her friend.

Joe set the cars and raised his arms in the air. Both men revved up their engines and were ready for the starting signal. The race was two miles down a straight two-lane road. Most of the kids piled back into their cars and headed for the finish line, leaving only Joe and a few others there to oversee the start.

When Joe dropped his arms, Steve squealed the tires on his cream-colored Corvette, sending a plume of black smoke in the air. Erick raised the clutch and the Chevy lunged forward, but he clutched it again to stop the squealing of the tires and went flying down the road. The second clutch launched the car away from the Corvette while it burned rubber.

They raced along as the wind snatched at their hair, whipping it in their faces. The roar of the engine became a hum, and the rock-n-roll music belching from the radio became distorted. The Corvette drew up beside them and Steve gave them the finger when he began to pull away.

"Damn," Ariel called over the roar of the wind.

"It's not over, hold on," Erick shouted. Then he tromped the pedal to the floor and the Chevy gave a second burst of speed. The roadside became a passing blur and their hair stung their faces. Up ahead, the line of cars waiting at the finish line came into view. They were not far from the end of the race now and the Corvette's taillight was at his side mirror. Steve's loud taunting laughter came to them on the wind. He was so confident that the Corvette was going to win.

Erick straightened in the seat and took a stronger grip on the wheel. Then he felt Ariel's hand on his thigh and he glanced down at it. When he looked back up, the Chevy

was passing the door on the Corvette and still gaining on it.

All the hours of work tweaking the engine, adjusting spark plugs and carburetor, was paying off. He had to win this race to win Ariel. She was into the race now and was showing him attention, but if he lost, he would probably lose her, too.

The Chevy was gaining, but would there be enough time for it to pull ahead? Erick held his breath and his heart was racing as fast as the car. Every second seemed to be an eternity. Slowly, they were taking the lead. There were two guys squatted down on each side of the road at the red line drawn across it. They were going to judge the winner, if it was close. The closer they came to the finish line, the harder Ariel squeezed his thigh and it was disturbing his concentration, as well as raising his hormones.

In the light of the cars parked on the side of the road and with the cheers of the kids, they roared across the finish line. Erick knew he had won for he could see the Corvette headlamp out of the corner of his eye. He had to be at least two feet in front of it. That was the call of the judges, and although some, led by Randy, objected to the call, the judge's were shouting that Erick had won. When they turned around and returned to the finish line Ariel was sitting up on the back of the seat with her hands in the air.

Erick brought the car to a stop and climbed out. He went over to Steve who was climbing out of the Corvette and held his hand out.

"Get out of my face," Steve slapped it away.

"The Corvette is mine, give me the pink."

"Forget it, Dog! You didn't win. It was a tie," Steve growled at him.

"I wasn't a tie. Everyone here saw it. I won!"

"It was a tie, all right," Randy said, coming to his brother's side. "Some say you won, some say Steve won, so it was a tie."

“Randy, you know Erick won,” Ariel said putting her hand on her hip.

“Let’s take a vote,” Randy suggested. “All who saw Steve win raise your hands. A few did and as Randy and Steve looked the group of kids over, several more raised their hands, then some more. “See,” Randy, turned back to Erick, “It was a tie.”

“That car is mine and you know it,” Erick stabbed Steve in the chest with his finger. Then he turned and went over to the Chevy, leaped in without opening the door and started the engine.

“Wait,” Ariel shouted and he looked around at her. He watched her come around, open the passenger door and slide into the seat. He was sort of surprised that she would do that. Though he won the race, the Bakkers had stolen the glory of it, making him a loser again. He watched as she scooted over close to him. He looked at her face and she smiled at him. He tromped on the gas and the Junkyard Dog’s tires dug into the street, sliding sideways with a loud, long squall, and left everyone in a cloud of burnt rubber.