

THE HONEYCUTTS OF BLACKTHORNE

By James Robert Campbell

Chapter Four Freaky Frank

“Wake up, Rezin,” said his wife, grabbing him by the left big toe.

“I’m awake,” he said. “Sometimes I wish I hadn’t promised to patrol every night.

None of the sheriffs I know do it, but it may be the reason I get re-elected.”

The alarm clock by the bed said nine p.m.

“I’m tired of it,” she said. “I don’t see much of you.”

“I guess it’s more boring for you since Donny graduated and went in the Army.”

“I knew it was going to be tough when I signed on to be a cop’s wife. I can live with it, but I don’t think it would hurt to take a night off every now and again, go to a show or something.”

“I’ll consider it. I ain’t catching many criminals anyhow.”

They ate bacon and tomato sandwiches, and he kissed her and went out to his SUV, marked “Fitzhugh County Sheriff’s Office” on the doors. A peculiar February nighttime sandstorm was blowing as he drove to the office, where he met Deputy Ed Bondurant getting off duty. “Do you reckon old Crownover will plant marijuana in his corn again?” Burkett asked.

“I doubt it since we busted him last summer,” Bondurant said. “But I’ll get out in it with my flashlight soon as he gets a stand.”

“You almost can’t blame him, bad as cotton prices have been.”

“No.”

“Except he was trying to be a gangster,” said Burkett. “Besides, if we let him do it, before you know it we’d be in Cannabis County, Texas.”

The dispatcher patched Rita through to Burkett at four a.m. Saying it would look questionable, he refused to come by her house, but she persuaded him to meet her in a half-hour at Taylor's Trees, a small forest on the northeast side of the county where they could hide their cars. She arrived first, waiting on the dirt roadside with her lights off, and she followed him on a one-lane trail into the trees. He met her between the vehicles. "Rezin, Herrell called and tried to talk me out of the settlement," she said, giving off the scent of recently applied Obsession perfume. "He didn't really threaten me, but he was pressing me. I told him no, I have to go through with it. I think he still has feelings for me, but he'll do whatever that old man of his tells him to."

"He's a Myrmidon."

"A what?"

"Like one of Achilles' soldiers. He does anything Hound Dog says without thinking."

"That's them. They seem like everybody else a lot of the time, but they're not. They just don't give a damn what they do to anybody. You should hear some of the things I've heard. Will you hug me at least?"

"Okay." They hugged, and it turned into an embrace. She tried to kiss him, but he turned away. "I can't be kissing you, Rita."

"I know. I just feel like it. It ain't like we never kissed."

"I ain't ever kissed another woman but Adelaide since we got married. Man's penalty for adultery is sometimes not that bad, but God's penalty is severe. I'm afraid He would cut me into two pieces. Baptists believe it's as bad as

murder. Not that I don't want to. I still think you're the most beautiful woman I ever saw. I always thought you married him for his money."

"Yeah, and when you do that, you earn every dime."

"Looks like it."

"You could kiss me, anyway. Kissin' ain't adultery."

He kissed her and started trembling. "Damn, Rezin, I didn't think you'd get the heebie jeebies," she said. "I'm just old Rita."

"You ain't old, baby."

"I didn't come out here to seduce you. I just wanted to tell you about Herrell without him finding out."

"This is about as good a place to hide as there is in the county," he said, looking at the yellow moon with its averted eyes and half-grinning, half-grimacing mouth suggesting, yes, I have seen everything that ever happened, and the spectacle of mankind on Earth continues. There were car lights in the distance.

"Can you meet me here when I have things to tell you?" she asked.

"I guess so, as long as you understand that I take my marriage seriously. Addie's been a good wife. I won't do anything to hurt her."

"It can't hurt her if she don't know, and I ain't going to tell her."

They kissed again, a little longer this time, and left for Rita to go to work and remind Samantha not to oversleep. Burkett returned to the office to learn about a murder discovered at dawn. Coldstone and Deputy Rocky Rivas called him from the scene at a Jeep on a county road on the north-central side where a man in his late twenties, Ronald White, had been found by a passer-by stabbed and shot. The deputies

said White and his best friend, Jerry Ray Chudd, had been suspected of committing a series of armed robberies elsewhere around Texas and New Mexico and that Chudd had been having an affair with White's mother Jolene. The deputies had heard that Chudd assaulted White's father Dakin a week before the murder when the father confronted him. Methamphetamines were involved, and Rivas reported that Paschal County Sheriff Bill Garst had arrested Chudd at the home of a fellow shady character in Fortner. Leaving with Rivas for Coldstone to deal with the justice of the peace, ambulance and tow truck, Burkett said, "I guess Cowboy will have somebody in there who is even meaner than he is."

Harrell Honeycutt I stopped outside Angleton's to make a call. "Hello, Tractor?" he asked.

"Yeah, who is it?"

"Herrell Honeycutt in Blackthorne, Texas, White Eye."

"Yeah, brother," Tractor said. "How is everything?"

"All right. I'm thinking about coming to Dove City."

"Anytime. I haven't seen you since you got out."

"Would Thursday be okay?"

"I'll be around. Just call this number when you get here, and I'll send somebody. We're having a rally this weekend if you can stick around for a couple of days."

"I might. Thought I'd buy a couple of motorcycles."

"Okay, bro. See you here."

Honeycutt called Darlene to say he was leaving on a business trip to Dallas, and after packing he changed license plates with a set from New

Mexico and began the trip just after sundown. It was a four hundred-fifty-mile drive that he did not want to spend all night on, so about one a.m. he checked into a roadside motel disguised with a snap-on beard, sunglasses, a gray cap with the bill pulled low and a fake New Mexico driver's license. He left at seven and stopped for food at a convenience store in McKinney, north of Dallas, and drove through a cold rainstorm with a motorcyclist and his girlfriend passing him between trucks. "Dream on, dream on, teenage queen, see you on the movie screen," he sang off-key in his deep voice. Reaching Dove City, a leafy town of about fifteen hundred on the north range of East Texas, in mid-afternoon, he stopped at a convenience store to call. "It's White Eye," he said.

"Are you here?" Tractor asked.

"Yeah, just pulled in. I'm at the Gas 'N Vittles."

"I'll send Killer Bee. We're partying down, man."

Killer Bee, a skinny, grim biker on a Harley-Davidson, wheeled up in a few minutes and waved Honeycutt, waiting on the curb, to follow. Killer Bee rumbled at a modest pace out of town to the south and turned left onto a two-lane dirt road in a heavy forest. They turned right onto a narrower road and reached a complex of a half-dozen trailer houses in a clearing on a hill. There were some motorcycles but more cars and pickups indicating the presence of perhaps two dozen people. A big man with a beer belly, wearing an unbuttoned leather vest, black leather pants and motorcycle boots, came down the steps of one of the trailers and embraced Honeycutt, saying, "It's great to see you, man! How was the trip?"

"Good, caught some rain and cooled down."

“Come in and have a beer, bro.”

There was a circle of tough-looking men and women, passing marijuana cigarettes, in the living room where the TV showed wrestling with Ric Flair and King Kong Bundy. Honeycutt joined the circle, accepted a can of Natural Light beer and deeply inhaled the smoke each time the joints came his way. “This is a real good bro from West Texas, Herrell Honeycutt, White Eye,” Tractor said. Indicating the members, Tractor said, “Ronnie Boone, Killer Bee, Omar Rideout, Sleepy, Bill Deshotel, Bushmaster, Arnold Whitecotton, Pitchfork, Harold Purity, Ting-a-Ling, and Randy Barrington, Sweetwater Mike.” After Flair won, mugging the crowd and hooting “Whoo!” Honeycutt motioned with his head for Tractor to follow him out. It was getting dark, and they walked into the tall, thick pine trees.

“I got a little deal going,” Honeycutt said.

“What kind?” Tractor asked.

“The kind pays twenty-seven K. It’s worth more, but that’s all I can get together. My wife is suing for divorce and threatening to take me big time.”

“So you want her got rid of?”

“Unh hunh. I brought the money.”

“It is a little light, but we got a prospect we’ll give it to. He come to us from the Evil Adolfs in Denver, and I think he’ll be okay. He’s done it before.”

“Can I give you the instructions?”

“Yeah.”

“It won’t be possible to dispose of her body. He’ll have to kill her in the house and leave her there because it’ll be daytime. I have to know when he’ll do it so I can be out

of town. It needs to be between two-thirty and four in the afternoon because my daughter will be coming home from basketball practice. It would be ideal if we could do it when she's at an away game on a Tuesday or Friday. She usually stays all night with a friend."

"You got the money?"

"In my money belt," Honeycutt said, patting his midriff. "I can give it to you now if you want."

"Might's well. Big as I am, nobody'll notice the dif."

Honeycutt took off the money belt, Tractor strapped it on and they walked out. "I'll let you meet the boy tomorrow," Tractor said. "His name is Steve Sullins. We call him Freaky Frank. Give him the details."

"Sounds good, man. I really appreciate it."

"No problem; happy to help."

Buoyant upon returning to the party, Honeycutt opened his brown briefcase with Confederate battle flags on the sides and held up a plastic zip bag almost full of white powder. "I brought plenty of crank if anybody wants it," he said. Everyone did, and Tractor's wife Lula brought a big round mirror from another room. They cut lines of the narcotic with Tractor's lockblade knife, and the members and their wives and girlfriends began snorting up a line each through a rolled-up fifty-dollar bill supplied by Honeycutt, who lay back on the couch and said, "It's primo. I made it. I'll show you how if you want."

"How do you do it?" Lula asked.

"You need special equipment to go into business. You just about got to be a

chemist. But I can get you started with a cold cook in the bathtub. We need liquid anhydrous ammonia like the farmers use for fertilizer, ground-up ephedrine pills like cold medicine from a pharmacy, lithium from cut-up batteries, ether from fire-starting fuel and maybe some Red Devil Lye.”

“I seen it done,” Sleepy said.

“Sweetwater Mike helped me get all these pictures,” Tractor said, gesturing at the unbroken three-deep line of Civil War battle scenes around the walls. “Mike’s up on a murder charge in Spartacus, but they don’t have a case.” There were also photos of Confederate Generals Hood, Pickett, Early, Shelby, Longstreet, Lee, Stuart and Jackson and Colonels Mosby and Quantrill along with Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, who, Tractor noted, helped found the Ku Klux Klan.

“We ain’t white supremacists like them, brother,” Honeycutt said. “We’re separatists.”

“Yeah, but we’re sympathetic,” said Sweetwater Mike. “The Klan wore sheets to make the slaves think they were the ghosts of the Confederate dead.”

“I know that, but I don’t go in for killing for show. If you kill, you ought to be forced into it. The Ghosts of the Confederacy Constitution is very idealistic. It says we shouldn’t break the law or use hard drugs, but we can take it as a general guideline.”

“Yeah, and you can bend the rules in a few other areas, too, if you’re a good Ghost,” Sweetwater Mike said.

“A great Ghost,” said Tractor. “He’s my sergeant at arms.”

“It’s a privilege to know you, bro,” Honeycutt said, getting up for Barrington, who also stood to embrace.

“This is primo,” Tractor said, inadvertently patting the money belt. “I’m ‘bout to blow up.”

“It’ll do that to you, bro,” Honeycutt said. “Might ought to taper off with a couple beers. I love your pictures,” he said, walking around the room, which was dominated by a black flag with dark red “Quantrell” lettering over the fireplace. “Have you got them all over the house?”

“Sure do.”

“These pictures of all the Rebel boys where they fell to the Yankee cannon, grapeshot and minnie balls,” Honeycutt said. “I hope I can be like them if it ever gets down to it.”

Exclamations of “Don’t we call?” and “That’s the ultimate!” went around the room, and Tractor rose to say, “Me and Lula are going to bed.” He told Honeycutt there was a bed for him in the back of the next trailer over, and the party slowly broke up after two a.m. as the die-hards watched Jake the Snake Roberts coiling his python, the Great Kabuki laying everybody out with Asian Dust, the Honky Tonk Man swinging his guitar and Rick Rude, Abdullah the Butcher, Jimmy “Superfly” Snuka and Randy the Macho Man Savage punching and slamming one another and boasting extravagantly.

Honeycutt arose the next morning with a plastic six- pack holder stuck to his check, and he picked his way to the bathroom through empty whiskey bottles and beer cans on the floor. “Oh, man,” he exclaimed, standing over the commode in the nude. Another Ghost, a younger man with long red hair and a goatee, appeared in the doorway.

“Pitchfork,” Honeycutt said.

“I think I got a little too much crank,” Pitchfork said.

“It’ll kick your ass if you ain’t used to it,” Honeycutt said. Giving way to Pitchfork, he asked, “Have you got any beer?”

“You can check the cooler in the living room. Might not be cold.”

“I don’t care.” He found a bottle of Lone Star in the room temperature water, opened it and sat on the couch. Pitchfork returned to bed in the other room. Honeycutt turned on the TV, muted it and was channel surfing on the opposite end of the couch from a sleeping woman when Charlie “Tractor” Green came in with a short, uptight man he introduced as Steve Sullins.

“No offense, White Eye, but we’ll pass on the cold cook,” Green said. “The individual Ghosts in my chapter do what they want, but we all love crank so much that we’d do it all the time if we had it, and before you know it the cops would be on us, maybe even the feds. They don’t care about beer and pot. Anyway, now might be a good time for you and Freaky Frank to get acquainted.”

“It’s your call,” Honeycutt said. “I can come back and help if you ever change your mind. It’s good money, but it can be dangerous.”

Honeycutt and Sullins walked into the woods where Green and Honeycutt had talked. Sullins said he had the general details and reason, and Honeycutt said he would write down the address. “She’ll be there, right?” Sullins asked.

“Should be. She’s tired when she gets off work, so she will probably be home.”

“How do I get in?”

Undoing a key from his keyring and giving it to Sullins, Honeycutt said, “This opens the front and back doors. Get in quiet and try to sneak up on her in bed.”

“It’s a good house, so I can use a gun and nobody’ll hear it?”

“Nah, it’s brick and a ways off the road. In and out and just keep going. You should get away clean.”

“I’ll dump the gun on down the road,” Sullins said. “What about the timing?”

“Can you do it in three weeks between two-thirty and four on Friday the twenty-seventh? My daughter should be out of town, and she’ll stay with a friend overnight when they get back. With luck, my wife Rita won’t be found till early the next day when she don’t show at work. I’m going to New Mexico.”

“Sounds feasible. You don’t need to worry. I’ll do a good job, and I’ll die before I rat.”

“I trust you, man,” Honeycutt said, embracing Sullins. “You’re going to be a great Ghost.”

“Okay, man. I like to tweak, but when I’m on a job I’m all business. Can’t afford to be no other way.”

“Got some great crank with me. I can hook you up right now if you want.”

“Yeah.”

They returned to the trailer, where Honeycutt got his still-impressive baggie from between the mattresses in his bedroom, gave Sullins half of it and slapped him on the shoulder. Sullins left on a restored Indian motorcycle, and Honeycutt went inside to watch TV. After a half-hour, he loaded his pickup and went to Tractor’s trailer. Green saw him through the storm door and asked, “You’re going to hang around for lunch, ain’t you, White Eye? The girls are cooking up a mess of catfish.”

“I’d like to, man,” he said. “It’s great seeing you again, but I’m kind of restless. Think I’ll hit the road. Is there some kind of a old bike I can pick up for a couple-three

thousand? I said that's what I was going for, so if anybody wants to press it I'll have the proof."

"Sure, I got an old Harley. Still runs good, but I don't take it out much. I'll let you have it for seven- fifty."

"That's a real nice price, man," Honeycutt said, taking the cash from his wallet. "Can you help me load it?"

They walked the motorcycle up a corrugated ramp into the back of Honeycutt's pickup and tied it down with a rope. "Great to see you again, White Eye," said Green. "Guess it'll be awhile before you make it back."

"Unfortunately," said Honeycutt. He drove away and in a few minutes was on the road west. He turned on the radio and got a station playing "Here I Go" by Bob Seger. Passing state highway patrolmen ten miles apart, he checked his speed. A light drizzle started, and he switched to a station playing Williams' "At the First Fall of Snow" and Frizzell's "Cigarettes and Coffee Blues." The hours elapsed to the bass and treble tones of the engine and tires. It stopped raining, and he put the windows halfway down. The air was fragrant with burgeoning plant life and moist soil. He passed Dallas-Fort Worth and pulled into a roadside park to don his beard, cap and sunglasses. Reaching the small town of Hedgerow, he got a cheeseburger, fries and a chocolate milkshake in the Dairy Queen drive-through and went to a drive-through liquor store for a quart of Crown Royal whiskey and three quart bottles of Coke. He checked into the relatively inexpensive Bascombe Motel, ate, had three drinks and watched "Password." He drank to intoxication and turned the sound up on a war movie, "Guadalcanal Diary," with William Bendix and Anthony Quinn. Marching around the room and saluting the TV,

he took out his lockblade knife and opened it. Going into the bathroom and pointing the tip at himself in the mirror, he exclaimed, “Honor the Confederacy!” Gingerly but decisively, he cut one side of a swastika into his chest and belly and then the other. His only tattoos were on his forearms, one forming the initials “GOC” and the other the likeness of Robert E. Lee. “It ain’t bad,” he said, scraping the knife point up, down and around the swastika. His deliration continued until the blood ran, and he finally stopped to use a washrag, soap and water. He dried the wound, poured whiskey on it, rubbed it and said to himself in the mirror, “I’m sorry, honey.” He went to sleep on his back and awoke to find himself thirsty and hung over with his chest burning. He slapped it up and down with both palms, hollered “I hate it!” and poured more whiskey on it. He couldn’t go back to sleep, but rather than leave at four-thirty a.m. he waited till dawn, dressed, put on his disguise and drove away toward Blackthorne.

Copyright 2024 by J.R. Campbell. “The Honeycutts of Blackthorne” is on sale as an eZine for 99 cents from Amazon and other major retailers. The novel is an exercise in naturalistic super-realism with nothing but what the characters do, see, say, hear, taste, feel and sense so that the reader may experience the story on the level of a character. This is work of fiction. Any resemblances to organizations or people who are living or dead are unintended and coincidental. Next week: Next week: “A Still, Clear Morning.”