

THE HONEYCUTTS OF BLACKTHORNE

By James Robert Campbell

Chapter Twelve

That's Him, the One I Saw at Rita's!

The Ranger and the sheriff left Dove City early, after breakfast at the Hornswoggle Cafe with Sheriff Connally, and had been on the road for an hour when Somerville got a radio call. "What's your twenty?" the caller asked.

"We're on our way toward Dallas," Somerville said. "Should get there around ten."

"We got into this tree row about a half-mile long late yesterday afternoon," the caller said. "We started working it again this morning, and I think we may have something for you."

"Find something?"

"Looks like it. We dug up some things that fit your description. If you're on your way, we'll wait here for you."

Looking at Burkett, who was nodding emphatically, Somerville said, "We'd sure appreciate it."

"We need to keep the van here, but we have a yellow and white Chevy Impala that we'll park on the south side of the interstate, BPJ-1442," the caller said.

"We'll be along," the Ranger said. After exchanging "ten-fours" with the leader of the forensic team, he said, "This is the way to start a day."

"I can't wait," Burkett said. "Seems like we ought to turn on the lights and siren and kick it up to ninety-five."

"It does," Somerville said, smiling at the sheriff. "There is that feeling of elation when you get your man cornered."

The sun was halfway up the eastern sky, making Somerville's hands hot on the steering wheel and causing his gold wedding band to glint. "Been married long?" Burkett asked.

"Fourteen years, three children," the Ranger said. "And you?"

"Nineteen years, one boy."

"I guess we're kind of unusual. Most of the officers I know have been divorced, some more than once."

"It's hard on families," Burkett said. "It's not just us that are in it, it's everybody around us."

"A lot of men find it hard to talk about at home," Somerville said. "I don't talk about it all the time, but I talk some. I think you have to include your wife and your kids, after a certain age, in what you do to keep it from it being such a mystery. If you stay mum, their imaginations can run away with them and they end up thinking it's a lot worse than it is."

"That and you can get wound too tight, seem like you don't have any feelings."

"We have a passion or we wouldn't be doing it, but a balance is needed."

"You've heard the saying that the love of money is the root of all evil," Burkett said.

"Sure, but we know that's not the whole picture."

"No, just about every case involving violence, you can boil it down to either money or sex. In this one, it was money, of course."

"Sometimes it's power, wanting it or not wanting to give it up," Somerville said. "I've seen a few of those in South Texas, especially. I have always wondered how many there are in Washington or related to Washington that never come to light."

"I think more than that, it's human depravity. People start down that road, get more

and more depraved, and at the end of it they kill. With every man, you have the man and the shadow man, the sociable guy and the one behind him who watches, thinks and calls the shots. I got one, you got one, but there ain't much difference between us and our shadows. With people like that, the face they show is bad enough. Their shadow is a black reflection of the devil himself."

They saw the yellow car well before they reached it, and Somerville found the west end of the tree row and rolled up to the van two hundred yards from the end. Coming out of the thick, relatively short stand of trees, a man in a blue Texas Rangers baseball cap waved at them. "I'm Ronnie Thurlkill," he said. "This was the seventeenth place we looked."

They ducked to enter a hollow place that was almost like a grotto. It was a hiding place, they saw, where a three and a half-foot hole no more than two feet wide had been dug. Nearby on a dark green Army blanket were the jewelry boxes and jewelry, the bowls, the coffee set, the license plates, the Colt snub nose pistol that Rita had kept in her nightstand and the twenty-two pistol that was the probable murder weapon.

"Hallelujah!" Burkett exclaimed.

"Did you notice if the twenty-two has a serial number?" Somerville asked. "It has been filed off, but I think we can bring it up with acid," said Thurlkill, who was with a man and a woman.

"You folks did a fantastic job," Burkett said.

"We'd been using a metal detector," Thurlkill said. "But we were also looking for a place that looked like it had been dug up because sub-surface metal is very common. This one did. Your perpetrator had humped up the ground a little bit so it would settle down, which it had, but he had pulled up some grass and weeds and stuck them in there. We noticed it because all the surrounding plant life was greening up, but it was dead over the hole. Then the metal detector beeped, and we got interested real quick. It's nice that you were just coming up the highway and could see it fresh laid out. These are the other members of my team, Jacy Eddowes and Larry McDade."

Burkett shook hands with each one, saying, "Thanks to you, we now have a case."

"We sure hope it helps," said Jacy Eddowes, a middle-aged woman in blue jeans, a blue and red Houston Oilers sweatshirt and a green John Deere cap.

"It can't help but," Somerville said. "Do you know when your report will be ready? I'd like to start tracing the twenty-two as soon as possible."

"Should be about this time next week," Thurlkill said. "I'll mail the report and put the evidence on the bus. I will also call before I send the report and tell you what I've got."

"That will be fine," Somerville said. "On behalf of the Rangers Service, you have my sincerest gratitude."

The team members beamed proudly, and the Ranger and the sheriff ducked again to exit. Burkett skipped his patrol that night to take Adelaide to Althea's Country Diner and see "Stakeout" with Richard Dreyfuss and Madeline Stowe at the Lariat Theatre. He showed much more passion when they made love and then lay back with his face close to hers and said, "I love you, Addie."

"How would you like it if I did it?"

"I wouldn't."

"I'll forgive you, Rezin, but it will be awhile before I forget. You know that love can turn

to hate.”

“I know. Do you hate me?”

“I have had some of those kinds of feelings, and I’m sad to say that I’m not sorry about your girlfriend because I don’t think you broke it off like you said you would.”

“Well, she’s gone now. I can promise you that I will never do it again.”

“Let’s try to forget about it, what do you say?”

“Okay.”

Somerville had said after they left the evidence cache that Regina Ragavoy agreed to be hypnotized, and she came in the next morning in blue sandals and an orange dress with blue polka dots. Somerville called the sheriff to say she was there with the Department of Public Safety’s laboratory chemist and forensic hypnotist from Lubbock, Arlo Sneed. You could not tell from Sneed’s appearance, looking as he did like a high school science teacher with gold wire-rimmed glasses and a white pocket protector holding four ballpoint pens, that he had such an exotic profession. But he took a gold metal pen from the protector and told Mrs. Ragavoy that he would use the eye-fixation method to take her back and have her re-experience her sighting of the suspect. “You have to relax, ma’am, and trust me or it won’t work,” he said. “Do you feel like you can trust me?”

“Sure, I trust you,” she said. “You’re from the state, aren’t you?”

“Yes, ma’am, from the DPS.”

“I trust you then.”

“You will stay sitting up, but this will otherwise be like going to sleep. When I wake you up, you won’t remember any of this. Okay,” he said, holding the pen straight up in front of her face by the tip, “Watch the pen as I move it slowly back and forth and count down from ten. When I reach one, you will be back in your car, driving past Mrs. Honeycutt’s house. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one! Where are you, Regina?” With her eyes still open but looking dazed, she said, “In my car, going to get groceries.”

“Have you come to the Blackthorne Highway yet?” “No, I’m coming up on the Honeycutt house.”

“Do you see anything outside the house?”

“A dark pickup.”

“Anything else?” Sneed asked.

“A man in a dark suit on the porch. He’s knocking on the door, but I hope she don’t let him in.”

“Why not?”

“He looks sorry.”

“Has he got anything in his hand?”

“A green suitcase,” Mrs. Ragavoy said. “Why on earth does he have that?”

“Can you see the numbers on the license plate of the pickup?”

“Ain’t trying to.”

“That’s okay. What else do you see?”

“He must have heard me because he turned halfway around to see who it is. He has gloves on.”

“You can see his face?”

“Just his profile.”

“Could you recognize him if you saw a picture?”

“Prob’ly. I don’t like him. Glad he never come to my house.”

“That’s wonderful, Regina. You’re going to wake up now.

I will count to ten, and when I reach ten, you will have no memory of our conversation. Ready?”

“Yes.”

He counted, and she came back to herself, asking, “Is it over? How did I do?”

“You did wonderfully,” Sneed said, putting his pen up.

“Would you mind looking at some pictures?” Somerville asked.

“Not a bit.”

Somerville handed her five photos from Dove City, all showing Sullins.

“Who are they?” Mrs. Ragavoy asked.

“Some Civil War re-enactors in East Texas. Have you seen any of them?”

She looked closely at the photos, shuffling them and putting one close to her face. She stiffened and shook. “Oh, Lord,” she said. “That’s him, the one I saw at Rita’s!”

“Which one?” Somerville asked. “Can you point him out?”

“That one,” she said, putting her fingertip on Sullins. “That’s him.”

“Are you sure?”

“You’re damn right, I am. I got a good look at him that day from the same angle.”

“You know it’s about twenty yards from the road to the porch.”

“I don’t care. I saw him, and I’m telling you that’s him.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Ragavoy,” said Somerville. “We believe you. If you will wait just a minute, I will draw up an affidavit for you to sign to that effect.”

“What’s his name?”

“Keep it under your hat?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Steven Lee Sullins.”

“This helped, didn’t it?” she asked.

“Yes, ma’am, it sure did.”

“Glad to be of help. Does he have any connection to the Honeycutts?”

“We are looking into that.”

“I bet a dollar to a doughnut he does.”

After Mrs. Ragavoy had signed the affidavit and left, Burkett said, “I guess we can issue the arrest warrant.”

“It will go out today,” the Ranger said.

“How hard do you think it will be to connect White eye to Dove City?”

“We can be sure all the gang members and their wives and girlfriends saw him, but none of them will admit it, at least not now.” “

“Good old Regina and her glasses.”

In Dove City, Sheriff Connally and his deputies verified that Sullins hadn’t returned and got unanimously negative responses to their questions about White Eye. Somerville took a call from Thurlkill that the serial number had been raised on the murder weapon, which had been reported stolen three years ago in a burglary at a retired Royal Canadian Mounted Police sergeant’s home in Vancouver, British Columbia. Thurlkill said the ballistics analysis had made a probable match of the bullet that penetrated Rita’s heart with the riflings in the pistol barrel. Somerville contacted the Mounties and city police in Vancouver and sent them copies of Sullins’ mug shot, information and warrant.

Tractor called a meeting of the gang and got reports on the sheriff's and deputies' contacts. "They may find some way to prove White Eye was here, but until then we stay dummed up," he said. "If we end up having to admit it, we'll just say we don't say anything to outsiders about our club functions. White Eye showed up, partied, bought a bike and left. He never asked us to do anything. I found out they think he hired Freaky to kill his wife, but that's a crock. Freaky would have told me, and he never said nothing."

None of the members said anything, and Tractor said they would call up another great Confederate leader that night, Colonel William Clarke Quantrill. "He was one of the best," said Pitchfork. "Why ain't we ever called him up before?"

"It always seemed like a general from a major battle was ahead of him," Tractor said. "Quantrill got a bad rap like we always do, but he was a gentleman, educated and polite, soft-spoken. He didn't smoke or drink, and most of his men didn't, either. He was blond-headed and blue-eyed. He had a broad-brimmed black slouch hat with a red Canna blossom in the band, gold tassels on the brim, a gold neck cord and a heavily decorated brown Bushwhacker's shirt with four thirty-six caliber Navy pistols and a big knife on his belt. With the cops on our butts, I think he can help us because he was great at getting out of jams."

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