

## THE HONEYCUTTS OF BLACKTHORNE

By James Robert Campbell

# Chapter Eight The Ghosts of the Confederacy

“Blam, blam, blam, blam, boom, boom, boom!” Sheriff Burkett and Deputies Coldstone, Rivas and Bondurant were at the firing range by the landfill east of Blackthorne, where Burkett’s and Rivas’s Colt forty-five pistols were giving the loudest reports over Coldstone’s and Bondurant’s Glock and Beretta nine millimeters. They were all good shots, but Burkett was the best, punching out the heart in his man-size target, stitching the forehead and knocking out each eye. The air was so heavy with spent gunpowder that a couple of them coughed. They didn’t talk between magazines or targets but just kept reloading and shooting, wearing determined, even grave, expressions. Their hour-long practice was not a marksmen’s competition but appeared a mutual expression of resolve.

Vernon Doyle’s murder had been maddening because he was a colleague with a family, and it could easily have been one of them; however, while that case had been closed by the killer’s suicide, Rita Honeycutt’s murder was more disturbing in the sense that it was unsolved. The autopsy had not helped much. She had been killed by two twenty-two hollow point bullets, likely made by Remington, that come apart. The county investigators had hoped that the one to the heart would be sufficiently intact to identify the pistol if it could be found, but the light, thirty-six grain bullet had been severely misshapen by a rib.

Burkett had not wanted to be too quick to go after White Eye Honeycutt, considering that he had no evidence, but on the afternoon of the seventh day after the

murder, he left a note on the door of Honeycutt's apartment, asking him to come to the office. On the following Monday, Honeycutt showed up with Barney Biggers and began by saying he had nothing to do with the crime. Biggers said they were eager to help in any way they could because the husband is always suspected in a case like this, but they preferred that Burkett ask all his questions, after which they would give him a written response within ten days..

"I can't prove you were behind it, White Eye, but I strongly suspect it based on your history of domestic violence and the land claim Rita was making," the sheriff said. Biggers made notes, but Honeycutt and he said nothing. "The Rangers are looking into it, and I expect to be getting their preliminary report in a few days."

"We'll be getting back to you, sheriff," the attorney said in leaving with his client.

They had been gone for a half-hour when the phone rang. "Hi, Booger," Honeycutt said.

"Hello, White Eye."

"Just wanted to tell you I knew about you and Rita. I watched you coming out of Taylor's Trees a couple of times, and I know about your last time at the Draggin' Inn."

"So which one of us is worse?"

"If I'm ever arrested, you can count on the whole county finding out. It will come out at the trial. You'll have to admit it under oath, and your personal involvement will undermine the whole case. You might as well leave me alone because you can't make it stick."

"You better keep your mouth shut about her, low life."

"It takes one to know one, and I don't give a damn if this is recorded."

“I look forward to getting your statement,” said Burkett, hanging up. It was Thursday morning, two days before Rita’s funeral. Her body had been returned to the Gerther Brothers Funeral Home. Ira Somerville had called to say he would be by with his initial findings, and he knocked on schedule at eleven a.m., handing Burkett the document but sitting down to go over it verbally and add a few things that he had not written down. “How are you doing, sheriff?” he asked.

“I’m not happy,” Burkett said. “As a matter of fact, I’m very upset.”

“Understandable, but I think we have some information for you to chew on. Don’t know that it will make you feel any better, but it may clarify your thoughts and help us go forward. The perpetrator tried to make it look like a burglary, but it almost certainly wasn’t. However, if the case comes to trial, the burglary angle will make the murder for hire harder to prove unless we can find the stolen jewelry, purses, cut glass, her pistol, the silver, etcetera, where it was disposed of and show that the burglary was a sham.”

“Have any of the credit cards been used?” Burkett asked.

“No, which supports my theory. It’s highly doubtful they will be. The best thing is that if we find this evidence, we will probably recover the murder weapon.”

“Do you know what it was?”

“I’d say a good quality twenty-two revolver, which eliminated the need to recover the brass, a western style pistol, double action with a relatively long barrel,” said Somerville. “He probably cocked it to fire the first shot and then fired the second one just by pulling the trigger.”

“I found out the hollow points busted up. Will we be able to prove that’s the gun that fired them if we find it?”

“I would be surprised if we couldn’t make a good argument. Any kind of similarity rules out most other possibilities.”

“So who do you think did it?”

“In view of what was at stake in the Honeycutts’ divorce, the value of the property and the husband’s long-standing pattern of violence toward the wife, I have no doubt that he was involved from a distance. The fact that he went to Ruidoso, New Mexico, just before the crime supports this theory because the smarter play would have been to stay in the area where he could have still had an unimpeachable alibi, like spending the afternoon in Exeter or Fortner. That way, he wouldn’t have gone to such a great effort.”

“He hired someone,” Burkett said.

“His father, Hound Dog, probably supplied the money. White Eye has resources from his legal and illegal activities, but we don’t think he had enough to hire a professional, which the killer almost surely was. As you know, White Eye became a member of the white separatist motorcycle and prison gang, the Ghosts of the Confederacy, while he was incarcerated in our state prison system for manufacturing and selling methamphetamines, which he has resumed doing, although only as the ringleader, no longer as the maker and seller. He has two or three cooks who make it inside and outside Fitzhugh County and seven or eight men who sell it. He makes small quantities for himself and friends, but that’s the only time he handles it, so if he’s caught with it, he can claim it was only for his personal use. If he can’t be convicted of murder, he could probably be indicted on a drug charge. We would have to send in buyers and turn a couple of his cooks and dealers, and we’d need to get the Blackthorne city police involved.”

“I know they would like to bust him again, but he got more sophisticated,” Burkett said. “What do you know about the Ghosts of the Confederacy?”

“Quite a bit. They originally called themselves the Ghosts of the Confederate Dead, kind of a takeoff on the origin of the Ku Klux Klan, who started terrorizing the ex-slaves after the Civil War by riding in white sheets and hoods as a representation of the Confederate soldiers who had died in battle. They’re a typical biker gang in many respects, but they’re atypical in some of their beliefs and practices. They have a written constitution that espouses a good family life and discourages drug and alcohol abuse. Violence is frowned on except in instances of self-defense. However, they are one of the more ruthless groups when challenged or confronted. The Ghosts have been implicated in disembowelments, decapitations and immolations in prisons in Texas and other states, and they take their loyalty rituals very seriously. There is no joining the gang for protection in prison and turning your back on it when you get out. The penalty for refusing to aid a fellow Ghost at any time can be a severe beating by two to five members on one and in the worst cases where a member has really flouted their law, they will kill him. But like most outlaw bikers, their most violent behavior is toward rival biker gangs. That’s where the mutilations usually come in.” “

“Mean, hunh?”

“They seem to have a special quality bred by what they feel is their real connection to the Confederate dead,” the Ranger said. “The leaders in particular tend to have large numbers of the Matthew Brady battleground photos of Confederate Civil War casualties scattered or piled like wood, up close in detail. These boys get high and believe they are

the reincarnations of the dead Rebels. They do that high Rebel yell and rave about not corrupting the white race by mixing in dark blood.”

“Rita told me White Eye had some of those pictures and wouldn’t take them down, and he took them with him when she finally run him off.”

“They especially revere the Confederate generals. They have ceremonies sort of like a seance where they get into Confederate uniforms with the black powder guns and swords. I’m convinced they’re hallucinating, but they claim to be able to call up Jackson, Bragg, Pickett, Shelby and others. They like to do it near the anniversaries of battles the generals fought in. They say these generals appear for a while, respond to questions and then sort of evaporate. These nuts claim that Nathan Bedford Forrest will appear on the anniversary of the massacre at Fort Pillow and say, ‘I said if I had to storm their works, they might expect no quarter.’”

“You’re woofin’ me,” Burkett said.

“Afraid not. Honeycutt said he was going to Dallas on business about a month ago. We’d normally think he was going to buy chemicals, but now we suspect he went on into East Texas to spend time with a buddy from the French Robertson Unit at Abilene, Charlie ‘Tractor’ Green, the Ghosts’ statewide vice president. You would probably underestimate him just to look at him, but he is high-ranking for a reason. He is very shrewd, and he can be as ruthless and cruel as he thinks he needs to be. He is a vicious brawler, armed or unarmed, and strong as he is smart. He rules a Ghosts compound outside the small town of Dove City, and we suspect that that’s where Honeycutt went to arrange his wife’s murder.”

“Did he have to pay for it?”

“Without a doubt. They don’t do this sort of thing for nothing, even for a member.”

“How much do you figure it cost?”

“That’s where the difference comes in,” Somerville said. “If it was for a non-member they trusted, it would be in the range of seventy-five or a hundred thousand dollars. For a member like White Eye, they would do it for forty or fifty, but he probably gave his dad one number and the gang a lower one and took the rake-off.”

“Don’t guess you know who they sent.”

“Not yet. We haven’t had a good enough reason till now to infiltrate them, but that may be the only way to develop a suspect. This won’t be easy, sheriff. The Ghosts are relatively small in number, fewer than a thousand in the country, and they all know one another. We have had dealings with Tractor before, and he is always on the lookout for an informant. I will be going there soon, and you can go with me if you’d like.”

“Damn right.”

“It may be futile to try to infiltrate them because they are really cloistered, a closed society if you will,” Somerville said. “We may have to depend on local law enforcement to help us identify a possible suspect. The Claxton County sheriff, Dan Connally, is a good investigator, and I’m sure he watches them. It’s such a rural, sparsely populated county that the sheriff and his two deputies are the only law enforcement to speak of. I have spoken to Dan and made him aware of the situation. I thought you would want to go.”

“If it looks like we’re closing in on his boy, do think this Tractor guy will get rid of him?”

“I’d be very surprised. For a member like Honeycutt or a prospect who earned his way in and made the gang a lot of money, Green would rather die than give him up or kill him. Remember, they see themselves as heroic Rebels. That’s why Honeycutt went there. He can be sure that they will never sell him out.”

“So we’re up against it?”

“Like I say, it won’t be easy. But we have solved hard cases many times. After our trip, we’ll start looking for the gun and the things that were taken from Mrs. Honeycutt’s house. There are a number of bodies of water that the killer could have used, but I’m hoping he buried it somewhere close to the highway. We will try that first because there are actually fewer likely locations for burying it than there are for throwing it in water. I don’t expect to get any fingerprints because the killer must have been gloved. But there might be some way to connect the Ghosts to the pistol if we can find it, and it will negate the burglary theory and point the finger at them if it’s along the route from here to there.”

“Great job, Ira,” Burkett said, shaking the Ranger’s hand. “I do feel better now, much more optimistic.”

“Don’t get your hopes too high. We’re still in the theoretical stage. We have no evidence to take to a D.A. and grand jury.”

“Why don’t you let me get lunch at Contreras’s?”

“Let’s go. My appetite is keen.”

“Mine, too.”



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