

Hippie Hollow - Murder on a Nude Beach

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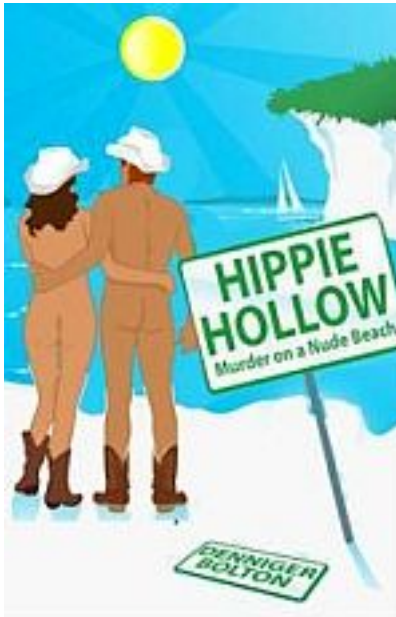
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Story Summary: Meet B.B. Rivers, rodeo cowboy turned private eye, as he takes on the 'unsolveable' Hippie Hollow murder case. This book is humorous, sexy, irreverent, and contemporary - a truly wild ride!



Chapter One

***“Cowboys – No shirt, no service.
Cowgirls – No shirt, free Lone Star”***

Sign at the front door of Kickers bar

Last night, a fully loaded patron took it upon himself to dismantle the watering hole where I work. *Kickers* is uncommon for a bar, not because it

opens onto Sixth Street, Austin's prime party scene, not because the restrooms are marked *Dudes* and *Dudettes*, but there's a rodeo arena out back where I barrel race, calf rope and wrestle steers for tips which gain stature the more dirt I eat. Unlike sanctioned rodeo, it pays to be imperfect on the saloon cowboy circuit. My boss, Jimmy Don, who owns *Kickers*, fills in as our rodeo clown, and passes the Folgers can after my ride.

In addition to cowboying, Jimmy Don hired me to keep the eclectic clientele – yuppies, bikers, rednecks, tourists and collegians – from destroying the place. And if tact and patience fail (which happens a lot), I'm paid to bounce their rowdy asses out. I grabbed my latest ejectee by the back of the neck, like a rattlesnake and we headed for the exit. He kicked over a table, a couple of barstools and a washtub of Mexican beer swimming in ice; cerveza and finger-food were flying, but I held on. As we danced through the swinging front doors, he called me an *overweight mesomorph*. I pegged him for a college student. Bikers lack the vocabulary.

"What the fuck's *that* supposed to mean?" Cowboys are not all that wordy either.

"Look it up asshole!" I was tempted to pop his nose. But on those all too frequent occasions, words Jimmy Don hammers into us bounce-personnel, splinter free:

"We want 'em to come on back, but not with their lawyers."

The throng coursing Sixth Street two-stepped around as if we were an island in their stream of humanity, a blip on the radar, scarcely worth noticing and definitely not something to get involved in.

I shoved our ex-patron gently downstream away from the front of the bar. I'm a big guy and *gently* is relative at six four (in sock feet), 250 pounds and moderately agitated. I looked at him sprawled amongst the beer cans, half eaten turkey legs, pizza crusts, Copenhagen spit and nightly litter of The Street. My curiosity got the better of me.

"Okay, at least spell it." I pulled a Sharpie from my boot.

"O-v-e-r-w-e..."

"Fuck you," I turned for the swinging doors. The guy was not funny.

"Hey cowboy?" Folks call me cowboy because of the Stetson, bright white western shirt, creased jeans breaking a half inch above the pavement, pointy toed reptilian hide boots, hard-earned but admittedly ostentatious, or as we say around here *Austin-tatious*, rodeo belt buckle (*Texas Steer Wrestling Champion*) affixed to a hand tooled Mexican leather belt.

He lobbed me the bird. Pathetic.

"I.Q. or blood alcohol level?" Love to use that one.

"*Overweight*, well I *don't* need to look up that." As I nestled my frame into my over-stuffed couch, I leafed through the dictionary. "Let's see, *mesomorph, an athletic body type*." Sounds like me, alright. Twas a good thing I hadn't redecorated his nose. I grabbed a handful of *Boulder Malt* potato chips, a *Dos Equis* and did a finger workout with the remote control. That was last night.

In the light of this June, Austin, Texas afternoon, standing in front of Captain Hollers' door, I found myself grappling with a handful of undeniable truths –

I didn't want to be here.

I didn't want to submit myself to another pointless job interview.

I didn't even want a job.

Unlike most folks, this cowboy knew exactly what he wanted and where he wanted to be.

A simple ambition really – to be semi-prone on my couch, drinking mass quantities of cold, dark cerveza, taking my chances with sports programming until the old movies kicked in. Exactly where I would be if not for this job interview.

During my formative years at the family ranch in Blanco, Texas, in the Texas Hill Country an hour west of Austin, we didn't have cable TV. No satellite dish in the yard. No HBO, no ESPN, no CNN. What we had was Channel 7. For me, *the* perk of being a townie was cable.

What possible reason then could there be for standing at the door instead of hunkering down with the International Pygmy Bowling Invitational?

Patricia Pearsall.

Patricia's the reason I bailed the ranch for Austin.

She and ESPN.

And she's the reason for the threads, the starched white shirt, the western-cut khaki colored wool sport coat with leather elbow patches, the silver and turquoise string tie.

Captain R.A. Hollers **Vice President - Investigations**

Deep breath. Knock. Wait.

I've been a big guy for awhile. As a kid, my mother drug me to the *Husky* rack at Monkey Wards but this past year with the life style change and all, I've noticed extra padding on the gut. Had to relocate that little metal thingy to the next notch on my belt.

But here's the point: While gaining non-musculature weight is uncool; so too is hauling my butt out of bed at five to jog around the block. Lots of things I'd rather be doing at that ungodly hour. Sleeping comes to mind.

Early this morning, after my long ass shift at *Kickers*, after escorting seventeen drunken dudes through the swinging doors and wrestling the same god dammed steer a dozen times to the point where he'd see me coming and roll on his own, after I ate a bucket of dirt mostly for looks, I slathered myself with Ben-Gay and slept in, missing my five a.m. jog again.

Damn.

I knocked on the Captain's door a second time and heard a booming voice.

"Quit the damn racket and open the damn door!"

"Captain Hollers?" I yanked off my Stetson. A mop of red hair jumped free.

Jabba the Hutt loomed behind a huge oak desk. Sleeves rolled to elbows. Shirt soaking wet. Telephone cradled between shoulder and ear. He was the fattest man I'd ever seen. The guy in the *National Enquirer* story trapped in his bed. Too obese to hoof it to *Subway*. I smiled, feeling better about my piddling extra inch or so, wishing I could share this wonderful moment with someone. Not with Patricia. Richard A. Hollers, Vice President of Bergstrom Investigations, was her uncle.

Uncle Rick told Patricia about his latest investigation, that he'd be hiring an additional investigator. She told Uncle Rick about me, about my experience in law enforcement. It was my first and only referral interview in the year since I left A.P.D. All my other multitudinous interviews have been cold.

"Set!" Hollers aimed a fat finger at the straight backed wooden chair in front of his desk and returned his attention to the phone.

Like a real detective, I did a quadrant scan. Antique gun cabinet with glass front, shotgun, 30-06 with scope, pistols and knives, hat rack in the corner, *Astros* cap, *Round Rock Express* cap, two cowboy hats, summer straw, winter felt, size 80 sports coat. Photos on the wall. Governor of Texas, President of the United States, and a couple of unfamiliar men in suits on either side of a plate glass window overlooking I.H. 35, Austin's very own interstate highway. Filing cabinets. Stacks of *Office Depot* file boxes covered one wall. Water cooler. He has his own water cooler. Large oak desk with neat stacks of folders. The man was maybe fifty and pushing four hundred pounds. What the hell, made me feel slim.

I wondered if the beautiful, slim, Patricia shared any DNA with the man. Maybe a fat gene showing up at some unsuspecting day to haunt.

I sat in the hard backed chair, sweating. It was June and getting, as we say around here, warm, very, very warm. A mere preview of July and August when it's hot, very, very hot. And yet, Captain Hollers' office was beyond warm, beyond hot. It was stifling. Sauna-esque. Amazonian. Amazonian in the steamy river sense rather than the tall women with large breasts and spears sense (although that can be hot too). I watched beads of perspiration well up on his balding head and flow like a Lone Star Beer commercial, down his nose. I could see the sweat and the irritation in his eyes. It was pitiful.

By this date, deep in the Corazon de Tejas, summer is here to stay for the rest of our god damned lives. Like ancient pagans who felt the December sun was going, going, gone, Austinites facing two or three more months of this shit, feel it will never, ever, be cool again.

There are but two choices for those who would dare live here:

A, vacation to Colorado for the season, or,

B, stay home, float a loan to cover utilities, situate oneself in front of the cranked up a/c consuming mass quantities of iced tea or cerveza until about October.

As a Plan B-er, I knew the futility of flapping my jaws about how hot it was. Complaining will not make it any cooler. One must carry on, visualizing snow capped mountains, dashing from air conditioned home to air conditioned vehicle, taking air conditioned trips to the local swimming hole, movie theater or mall.

Since Hollers was busy with his phone call, I took off my coat, hanging it over the back of the chair. Sweat tickled as it dripped down my sides. I looked out the window, watched the traffic. I didn't bring anything to read and there was nothing around. I popped my spine straightening my back to my full six foot four. I was erect, no thanks to the idiotic bull riding episode in high school. It was one of those occasions you know from the get-go to be a foolish choice. It was a dumb idea to mount the beast. His name was the *Sterilizer* for Christ sakes. The *buckle bunnies* cried as they looked at the bloody heap that was once my body. All were concerned I'd ever have kids or ride horses again. The memory of getting stomped shakes me so much I avoid Jimmy Don's mechanical bull.

I've cut back on horse riding since I live in town now. My rodeoing these days is of the urban cowboy genus at *Kickers*. I turn a few barrels, throw myself onto a fleeing baby steer and wrestle him to the ground, rope a calf or two, lasso a couple of human fillies every night (they love it).

As for the issue of progeny, it's a sore subject around the townhouse and bull riding doesn't have a thing to do with it.

For the first year after my downward departure from the Austin Police Department, I'd squander the a.m. drinking lattes. By p.m. I had segued into cerveza. During the lucid time after caffeine but before alcohol, I'd do interviews with police departments, security companies and detective agencies.

One night six months ago, with no full time employment prospects in sight and rodeoing for tips, I was washing down the evening's dirt with *seis equis de cerveza* (third bottle of *Dos Equis*) when called upon to do something, in retrospect seemingly foolish. I grabbed an antique lasso off the wall, alleged to belong to Charlie Goodnight, and I roped and hog-tied a couple of belligerent bikers who'd been hitting on Jenny, one of the waitresses. I don't mean they were winking at her and telling her how cute she was. They were actually slapping her around. She was awful with change, but was enough reason for fisticuffs? I stepped in and did the Tom Mix thing. Jimmy Don watched the scene and when I came through in one piece, offered me a job as a bouncer.

"You're a natural."

I figured what the hell, I'm in here most every night drinking beer, might as well make some walking around money, and it was good being a natural at something.

The work was easy enough since those needing an escort to the street more often than not, underestimated my cute little (okay, cute big) Opie Taylor looks. Bright red hair. Matching freckles. Precious country accent. The typical ejectee seemed not to notice the nose broken half a dozen times, until presented directly in his face. He might get in a lucky punch or kick but he

would be on his way somewhere else, off-the-wall comments about mesomorpheness notwithstanding.

As I waited for Captain Hollers, random thoughts dripped like Chinese water torture upon my head. I thought about how, like it or not, I was attracted to pain. Or maybe pain was attracted to me.

There was job pain from bouncing drunks who didn't care to be bounced. Ear. Lip. Gut. Shins. Nose.

Football pain still gnawing ten years later. Knees. Hamstrings. Back. Shoulders. Ribs.

Patrolman pain from sitting on my ass eight hours a day. Lungs. Knuckles. Asshole. Brain.

Rodeo pain. Stupid ass Brahma bull kicking me in the groin, pain.

Ranch pain. Grabbing hold of barbed wire cutting through the glove, pain. Cow stepping on the foot, pain. And the ever popular horse-kick in the chest, pain.

And lately, a new, subtler nuance, the painful sound of escape routes, one by one slamming shut leaving only the holy matrimonial aisle left to walk.

Hidden deep within me, under the forever adolescent, cowboy gene was an entrepreneurial gene fighting to manifest. I thought about the marketing program for the private detective agency I intended to open. Implementing the plan took a mere investment of \$11 for an ad in the *Greensheet*. To my surprise, I was getting work from it, although not enough for me to say, "Hey, look at me, I'm a real detective!"

Missing cats. Stolen trucks which with some digging proved to be repossessions. Following the errant husband or wife. Surveys. And I didn't have a P.I. license or a permit to carry a handgun.

Shortly after I got run from the Austin Police Department, I interviewed Bergstrom, the largest agency in the state and the one most likely to employ me, but they turned me down. Not hiring. Cutting back actually. That was a year ago.

Hollers was now looking for an experienced investigator. As a patrol cop for three years, one does not do a lot of detective work. Knock on some doors. Ask a few questions. Mostly, I drove the streets of Austin. I watched. I reacted. I told folks to move along. I tried to avoid hitting my head on the cruiser when I got in and out of the thing. And I figured Hollers was seeing me to be polite.

Dang it all, I looked pretty good on paper though. Degree from Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos in Criminal Justice – Law Enforcement, enrolled at Austin Police Academy, graduating in the top ten percent. Plan was to stay with the Austin Police Department, retire from A.P.D. like my dad, Harry Rivers.

I patrolled Quail Hollow, a seedy, gang and drug infested neighborhood in East Austin. And me, who didn't even like drugs (except for an occasional left handed cigarette and ibuprofen for the pain habit). There were disagreements, complaints, a few citations and a few more reprimands.

My career at A.P.D. and my invitation to the Texas Patrolman's Hall of Fame, came to a screeching halt the day a gang of dealers set up a street pharmacy across from an elementary school.

Pissed me off.

I asked them to move along. They didn't and we commenced to duking it out. I won the battle but was in the wrong place and of the wrong complexion to win that war.

"Department's damned lucky you didn't cause a race riot." Lt. Ashby, my supervisor had his hand out. "Badge and gun please." He didn't like me much and I wasn't sure why. Maybe it was the nickname I laid on him. *Lt. Ass Wipe*.

"*You* are a disgrace to the uniform. I personally cannot wait to hear what *your* father, the great policeman, has to say about this." My dad before he retired was Ass Wipe's boss. Ashby and Dad worked Homicide and for some reason Ashby was transferred to Traffic. After Dad retired, Ashby brownnosed his way back to Homicide.

"You're just jealous, since Dad actually made some arrests."

"I'm going to call him right now."

"You might get him on the phone but I doubt if he'll know what you're talking about. It's the Alzheimer's. Every time I see him we have to be reintroduced."

"Harry Rivers was an asshole. He was *always* pretty fucked in the head and..."

Lt. Ass Wipe never developed that particular line of thought, because I decked him. Lying on the floor out cold, I knew I had crossed the god damned line again and tossed my police issue Smith & Wesson and police issue badge on his police issue stomach. I resisted the urge to kick him in the ribs and walked.

See? I *can* control my temper.