

# Honk if You're Jesus - Murder on the Bay

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**Story Summary:** “Blend in if you can” has become B. B.’s unlikely new maxim. In his third case, he sheds his boots, jeans, freshly ironed white western shirt, his Austin-tatious rodeo belt buckle and Stetson, and dons sneakers, running shorts, and a Giant’s cap.

He’s in San Francisco, and his best friend O. C. Flowers, notorious rock singer/guitarist has disappeared. Reviled by religious leaders because of the sacrilegious, irreverent music of the *Honk If You’re Jesus* band, was O. C. kidnapped, or a drug trip gone wrong, or something else altogether? With nothing to go on, except that O.C. was last seen heading for Chinatown, our boy hits the mean streets of The City.

Here is the third book in the B. B. Rivers Trilogy. It’s Cormac McCarthy meets Jackie Chan.



## Chapter One

*“Onward thru the fog.”*

**Oat Willie**

Sitting on a barstool at the Rogue Ale Public House, in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco, California, I tossed down a Dogtown Pale Ale, a popular local Bay Area brew. I was beat, having driven straight through the

night from Taos, New Mexico. I napped at rest stops on I-40, arriving in the City by crossing the Bay Bridge in a killer fog at mid-morning.

Traditionally, Autumn had been my time for escaping from the intense Texas summer heat. If a Central Texas dweller, could suffer through June, July, and August without combusting from the high temperatures, he or she would inevitably live to see September. Even though, with the promise of cooler temperatures on the way, there would be in almost every year, yet another month of hot weather. It didn't seem fair, but that's the way it came down in the Lone Star State.

If you had the bucks, and could afford to exit to cooler climes in August, you'd do it. But the cruel fact was, you'd still have to return to Texas to a hot September. My scheme was to grin-and-bare-it until Labor Day. And then I'd take off for cooler climes. The college kids who take up so much space out on the trails and in the rivers of the wilderness, would be back in school and I'd have the mountains, lakes, streams and rivers to myself. It was as close to a play as anything I did all year.

I was vacationing for two weeks in the Sangre de Cristo Range, which in actuality was the southern region of the Rockies. I rode Too Tall, my horse, through the Carson National Forest, taking established trails, but at times I'd take a bearing across country to explore an out of the way lake. The air was fresh and clean, and smelled of conifer. We, my horse and I, camped beside rushing rivers and serene blue lakes, or in meadows of wildflowers, all of which allowed us to shake off the kinks of our everyday routines.

And, dang it all, it was cooler at 10,000 feet than whatever elevation Austin managed to eke out, maybe a couple of hundred feet. Rule of thumb, for every 1000 feet of elevation, it is 4 degrees cooler. That's a 40 degrees temperature drop from sea level.

Every late summer, early fall, since I can remember, I've worked in a horse camping trip. I go alone, almost always to New Mexico or Colorado. My buds, now in their 30s and 40s, have settled into their recliners and hot tubs, from which they rule their kingdoms with cans of light beer, tubs of KFC, and the NFL Network. Some have golf carts and golf clubs, none owned tennis rackets, and not a one was in the least bit interested in what I was up to in the backwoods.

Some day, I would take my daughter Meredith, who was only a year old now. She'd get her own pony and I'd fix her up with a mini bed roll, and we'd head out. I could hardly wait.

My wife Patricia also had better things to do than "regular" camping. She would go backpacking, but no car camping or equine riding, feeling the mounting and control one wielded on the horse to be exploitative.

Even though she wouldn't ride, she let me slide on horseback riding, given cowboying was my heritage. And I was not one of those manipulative wranglers who held control of his horse through the bit. Giving Too Tall his head, I merely tried to hold on. That was my philosophy. If we went in the generally desired direction, that was good enough for me. The way I saw it, my

horse and I were equals. Even at rodeo events, Too Tall led the way, having better instincts in that arena.

Too Tall loved our jaunts into the natural world as much as I did. He's been my horse since high school, and being about 18 in man years, I didn't figure he had a hell of a lot more horse years, or trips to the woods left in him. Maybe this would be his last, but he was in top form for this one, stepping vigilantly through fields of scree, hauling my fat ass up steep mountainsides, and performing a couple of feet first slide-downs that if I were a horse, I sure as hell wouldn't have attempted.

My horse trusted me enough that if I "suggested" we take the trail less traveled, he could know without doubt, we'd end up in one piece at the end of it.

The Autumn Equinox was a week away in Texas, and that fact didn't mean much to me anyway, except U. T. Longhorn and Dallas Cowboy football were back. But out here in the wilds, having attained higher elevations, we encountered snow flurries whipping around the quaking aspens, now shedding their golden leaves, and sleet turning to misty rain, as the trail dropped a few hundred feet in altitude as we followed the up and down of the trail.

Patricia leant me her one-man backpacking tent, an ultra light but complicated little outfit that I had to relearn each time I put it up. Now, does this tube fit through this loop? It seemed to be a different configuration each time I tried it. How could that be possible? After three nights in the thing, I gave up on it, stuffed it back in its sack and went back to my tried-and-true method, a routine cowboys have employed since Wyatt Earp was a kid.

Raking up a bed of pine needles, tossing down a saddle blanket, and using your saddle for a pillow. It took about a minute to set up camp. And I would rather be sleeping out under the stars anyway, than being cooped up in a small enclosure like that piece of shit tent. A twig from a tree brushes across the roof, and I'd wake up with a start, thinking there was a bear out there.

Being outside in the open, I sleep like a baby, with no thoughts of being devoured by wolves, dragged off by coyotes or nibbled to death by a pack of rabid marmots.

There was, at the ready, my 30-30 rifle, handy for deer and varmint, my full length somewhat water-shedding gunslinger coat for a cover in a misty rain. My Stetson was there to keep the precipitation off my face, and a modern day piece of rolled up plastic sheeting ready for a downpour.

More than once, I woke up soaked to the bone. But hey, this is what cowboy camping was all about. Diving naked into a 40 degree alpine lake, contemplating the beauty of a snow capped mountain, so close I could touch it, eating veggie hotdogs over an open fire, making coffee with water from a nearby alpine stream. It was enough.

Not more than enough. Certainly not less.

But enough.

It was a word I hung out with. Some folks picked a word like love. Or trust. Truth. Success. Happiness.

Enough was a word that caught my attention. One of our marriage and family therapists, in a sessions, let it flop out on the table. I think she wanted

me to pick it up where she dropped it, and work with it. I did just that. Beside the sapphire lake, white capped mountains in the backdrop, I knew what the word meant.

This moment was enough to allow me to forget the mortgage. There was no room to squeeze in consideration for the overdue truck payment, or that I had maxed out my Visa card on the way over from Central Texas.

With the scene bookmarked in the Favorites folder of my brain, I saddled up and rode the trail down from the alpine elevations. I skirted past the Taos Ski Basin, picking up the paved road down past a handful of communities, folks who lived with a longer winter and a shorter summer than in the Village of Taos, a thousand or two feet lower in elevation. As I descended, the mundane existence of work, bills, mortgages and the like, flooded back as society became more evident.

Every so often, I'd entertained the notion that if it got unbearable, if I really had enough, I'd just pack up my bedroll, mount my horse and ride off into the sunset. But things had changed these last few years. Now, my life, was infused with wife and kid, bills and a new business to develop, I found myself on a short set of reins called responsibility. Among other things.

The makeup of the community of Taos, and the state of New Mexico, was a mixture of Native Americans, Norteños (this land was once Northern Mexico) and Caucasians. Taos was one place where the pale people were not the overwhelming majority.

My destination was Eske's Brew Pub, looking to feed my addiction to their green chile beer. There is nothing better when one is out in the wilderness decompressing, than to reenter society by means of a beer. When I told my buds back home about chile beer, they scoffed. When I sang its praises, a few were willing to try it.

"Where is this mysterious beer that tastes so damn great?"

"I'm sorry, but I drank it. You're just going to have to trust me on this one, it's the best. You're going to have to come to Taos and try it yourself."

Besides the thrill of the ride, I could hardly wait for my yearly pilgrimage to the place as a way to reenter civilization. Even if I camped in Colorado, I'd swing back through Taos on the way back to Texas. Arriving at the pub, I bullshitted with David behind the bar. He put back a case of brew for me, but told me he had had many offers to buy my stash. Being a late summer thing, once chile beer season was over, it was over. The hatch chiles were picked, the ale was made. The ale was drunk. But trusting guy that he was, he knew I would show my unshaven and campfire smudged face at his door before the snow flew.

Looking like I had just rode in from 1880, two weeks growth of beard, hair shaggy and uncombed, my once white Stetson now grey and heavy-wet on my head, long black coat dripping with precipitation, I entered the pub.

"Hey David."

"B. B. Rivers. OK, this time you really do look like you've been rode hard and put away wet, but come on in and set a spell."

As I took a chair at a window table, I grinned and knocked off two quick mugs of the delectable brew. I inhaled them, realizing I had once again survived my pilgrimage to the god of nature. It wasn't all that dangerous really, but since my horse was getting a little long in the tooth, I considered he might pass on to the big pasture in the sky on this trip. That would cause some problems. How would I get back? What would I do with the carcass?

And now that we had made it out alive, I couldn't just let him die out in the our pasture at the ranch. I'd want nothing more than for Too Tall to go out on his own terms, but he handled this trip so well I was thinking I'd rename him Brett, after Brett Favre the quarterback for the Green Bay Packers. Every year we take a look at him, and every year he'd come back for one more time. I needed to ride him more during the year, is all. Too Tall not Brett Favre. We could go on some short trips around the Hill Country of Texas. There were ranches that were open for riding, as well as state parks.

There was Big Bend National Park as well, where I had never ridden, and hadn't been since high school. We could do some desert rides, and trails along the Rio Grande River, with head waters in Creed, Colorado, flowed past Taos, past Big Bend, emptying into the Gulf of Mexico at the bottom tip of Texas.

Now that I had handled priority numero uno – beer, numero Dos was check for cell phone messages. My phone was off during the backcountry trip, as there were no cell towers in the wilderness. Once, the previous year, when I was still excited about my brand new cell phone, I thought maybe I could pick

up a signal on top of 13,000 foot Mount Wheeler. I thought it would be fun to call my pals from the top of the world. What I didn't realize was how hard it was to climb a mountain in cowboy boots.

At the top, I began to realize though, why people climb mountains. It was for the 360 degree view, and the perspective it gave. As for cellular connections? No bars. No service.

The network returned again in Taos. Upon pushing the power button, the phone began playing Willie's *Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain*. My dad, Harry Rivers had programmed it for me, selecting individual ring-tones and tunes for each person in my address book. He was the unlikely phone-nerd of the family. The wife, Patricia, was *Pretty Woman*. Aptly, my bank was *Darth Vader's Theme*. Dad put the ranch phone in Blanco, where he and my mom lived, *Hello Muddah, Hello Fadder, here I am at, Camp Granada*.

There were 23 verbal messages and 10 texts.

"Whoa."