

HUNT FOR THE CHUPACABRA

~ a short story ~

Michael Hebler

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ALSO BY [MICHAEL HEBLER](#)

[Night of the Chupacabra](#)

(Chupacabra Series - Book One)

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[The Night After Christmas](#)

(A Holiday Classic Picture Book)

Hunt for the Chupacabra

Calvin Hawte knew he was getting closer; after all, the Confederate Army had diligently trained him to be one of their best. He supposed it was due in large part to the fact that he was half Blackfoot; therefore, tracking was in his blood. It was only in the beginning of his military career that he was charged to hunt Union stragglers who got themselves unluckily separated from their squadrons, although his duties had quickly shifted to yellow-bellied Confederate deserters who needed to be brought to justice. But that was back during the war, which had been over for two years now, and this was no man he was hunting.

The impressions in the desert terrain were precise and undisturbed; an advantage for any tracker out in the middle of nowhere. Calvin had been following this trail for days now, leading him in a direction that was quite unusual. He hadn't seen a spring or a brook since the start of this journey and couldn't understand where this thing was getting its water or how it was staying hydrated, which reminded Calvin... he unhooked the canteen from his belt and lifted the spout to his dried, cracked lips. With only one sip left to intake, Calvin drank it all to the very last drop. For five days he had stretched his small supply of water; he quietly thanked the Confederate Army for the rationing knowhow.

Once Calvin hooked the canteen back onto his belt, he hopped down from his horse for a closer inspection of the tracks. They belonged to the thing he'd been chasing all right; paw prints with five finger-like extensions. But there was something different about these markings. There were only two indentions in the sand per stride instead of a set of four. It was as if the thing was still walking about after having its two front legs blown off.

Calvin had been so deep in thought while attempting to decipher the mystery of the missing two paw prints that darkness had crept up on him without his knowledge. The sun had nearly set behind the distant hills. Normally, this would be about the time he would begin to set up camp, but not tonight. He was too close to killing the thing to stop now. After six days of this hunt, tonight was the night that he was finally going to serve justice on the creature that had murdered his son.

He climbed back onto his horse and slapped the reins, and together, they tore off towards the far hills; all the while, Calvin was being haunted by the face of his young son, Henry.

For no other reason would he have crossed such a vast and dangerous desert so feverishly. Not for all his livestock that had been left bloodless or for all the destructive damage to his land and property. This was revenge, plain and simple, for the slaughter of his own flesh and blood; the amazing little man who had not only survived a complicated birth where all his other siblings had not, but for also surviving more than six months living on his own after the untimely death of his mother but before Calvin could return home from the war. Even at the age of seven, to call Henry a boy would be an insult. Henry was a man.

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Once he snapped out of his trance, Calvin found himself surrounded by a row of vegetation that lined the first source of water he had seen in days. The time he spent

traveling this last leg had passed in what only felt like minutes, but judging by the miles of distance between him and his last stop, it had, in fact, been hours.

He dismounted to give his horse some time to revive in the small river while he searched for the beast's prints at the water's edge, but there were none to be found. The tracks that led across the desert floor just seemed to disappear before reaching the river's bank. Although Calvin did not know which direction the creature had taken, there was one thing he did know for certain, the beast was still here, hiding somewhere within the shadows of the mesquite shrubs and live oaks. It was the weight of the creature's stare that tipped him off.

He once again unhooked the canteen from his belt then uncorked the lid and began to refill the canister with river water, but this undertaking was nothing more than a ruse; a routine act to deceive his dexterous enemy from realizing that he was aware of its whereabouts. But Calvin was nobody's fool; he kept a steady eye on the water's reflection even if the ripples made it difficult to see anything until it would be immediately upon him. Still, every second would be as precious as gold in this fight.

Water was only passing over the canteen now as it had long been filled. Whatever the creature would do to him wasn't going to happen this way. After Calvin corked the lid back onto the canister and fastened it on his belt, that was when he first noticed the reflection of the pair of red hot coals in the trees behind his head. Calvin slowly released his water ration and reached for his pistol.

Whether the thing knew what Calvin was up to or not, the burning coals disappeared and the oak leaves suddenly began to rustle as if a strong gust of wind just blew through.

Calvin spun around with his pistol cocked and raised, but the rustling had already ceased. He waited a moment for the thing to give another sign of its location, longing to end this chase once and for all. All he needed was one signal; a noise or movement or... and there it was; more rustling, but from a patch of brush just down the river's bank.

The weight of his wet boots didn't slow Calvin down one iota. He raced up to the brush and leapt behind the shrubs to find that the culprit was nothing more than an iguana, scurrying away from danger. But Calvin's disappointment was only short lived once he heard the distressed cries from his abandoned horse.

The animal tipped over into the river so effortlessly that Calvin first thought it had simply stepped into a deep hole, but the animal could not regain its footing, no matter how hard it struggled. Instead, it violently splashed and continued to whinny for help from its rider. Whatever kept the animal pinned to the river's floor had a grip that wouldn't give.

Calvin squinted in the dark for a better look at the thing while racing to his companion's aide. To this very day, he had never been able to distinguish what the beast looked like other than it was the size of a man with piercing red eyes and spikes that ran down its back from head to tail. But once again, it was to Calvin's disappointment that the only lasting impression of the beast's appearance was the clawed arm that reached around from under the horse and hooked into the side of its belly while the rest of the creature stayed crushed under the weight of the horse in the waist-high water.

It was for some unknown reason that the monster did not seem to be affected by the horse's weight nor the loss of air while trapped beneath the surface. The thing seemed to

have the animal exactly where it wanted and there was no chance it was going to escape without Calvin's help.

The struggle ended. Calvin could not wade through the water fast enough to be of any help to his fallen ally. An overbearing guilt began to resonate as he realized his failure to stop his loyal stallion from dying a painful death was much like his failure to stop his son from meeting the same fate.

He crept up on the corpse, not letting his guard down for a second, and keeping his weapon aimed where he last saw the beast, but it had disappeared again; however, it had not gotten far. Calvin knew it was still lurking somewhere in the water.

Every step he took was calculated and cautious. Even though tracking through water was next to impossible, simple common sense was still his greatest tool.

Calvin stared beyond the reflections to watch for any movement of shadows beneath the surface when a tiny splash came from behind, like a fish caught on a hook, which had him whip around to fire off a single shot into the river. Even though he credited himself to be an excellent shot, he was not confident that he had killed the beast, let alone hit it.

Calvin carefully advanced, waiting for the water to reveal the monster's location once more. He only waited but another second before a second small splash alerted him, merely feet ahead. He fired repeatedly at the water until his gun ran dry. This time he was confident that he had shot the beast and that it had died. He waited for the confirmation to rise to the surface, but no body rose.

It was impossible, he thought. The creature was too big and there was no possibility that it could have swum away so quickly. Only a fish was small enough and fast enough to avoid his gunfire... and that's when Calvin realized that he had solved his own mystery.

He began to reload his pistol when he felt a sharp pinch from something slimy and wet at the back of his neck quickly followed by a pain that erupted in every nerve of his body. Instinct would have immediately spun Calvin around, but he could not move. He tried to force himself with every muscle he had in him to even so much as lift a finger, but to no avail. His entire body was paralyzed.

However, there was still something he could move... Calvin looked down at the water's reflection and witnessed the red eyes glowing next to the back of his head, and accepted that this was his moment to die, although he was not dismayed. Even before setting off on this hunt, Calvin had come to terms with the idea that no matter what the outcome, he would be pleased either way. If he would be successful in killing the thing that had murdered his boy, a wrong would be righted, but if he failed his quest, he and his boy would be reunited once again.

The red eyes in the water faded, but not because the beast was leaving, the whole world was fading.

The creature released the hold it had on its prey and let his body drop forward into the river. It had only eaten enough to replenish its strength from the long, punishing journey because this particular meal was not to its taste.

the series will continue with Book I...

[Night of the Chupacabra](#)

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