

Robbie Honey

Climbing ~~along~~ the slow rise of the river bank behind Jack, to where the sun climbed <sup>up</sup> ~~up~~ to meet them the other side to meet them, Syle watched the rays fan around his new brother-in-law like ~~the~~ ~~from~~ ~~the~~ ~~picture~~ at church.

Everything was different now, and Syle wished with all his wild beating heart that he had ~~not~~ come this time. He wished Jack had gone & messed up and married his sister ~~Maureen~~ Mayre <sup>last</sup> <sup>year</sup> <sup>even</sup>. Syle's sense of direction in the woods ~~that~~ <sup>this</sup> morning is off - his sense of smell too. And he's been here a thousand times, thru the al Hannonock, following Jack, to the ~~black water~~ creek with the black water of the Alapaha. And he's always liked it. He breathes deep, <sup>untangles</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>li...</sup> <sup>a...</sup> trying to get back the feeling, but the sweet spring bay blossom smell ~~means~~ thick musty like pear blossom in a hot room.

Jack goes on along the bank, bamboo tearing at his ~~thick~~ legs. He pays ~~them~~ ~~no~~ ~~mind~~, ~~and~~ ~~he~~ ~~is~~ ~~about~~ ~~as~~ ~~much~~ ~~mind~~ ~~as~~ ~~he~~ does Syle - which is none.

Syle knows he's thinking about Mayre; he can smell that too. He's only eleven years old, farm dumb, but smart enough to know Jack & Mayre slept in the same bed the night before. Ed it feels all wrong. Jack is like a bottle; Mayre's Syle's sister. Her favorite sister who ~~helps~~ calls out ~~the~~ Syle's spelly words ~~all~~ when he gets off the school bus every evening. Close enough in the porch swing that Syle can smell her girl's roomness, her easing away.

Jack ~~steps~~ ~~sidles~~ behind a tupelo that ~~puts~~ ~~out~~ ~~over~~ the deep part of the river, goes on, and Syle comes ~~in~~ ~~behind~~ ~~him~~, <sup>into</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>margin</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>river</sup> a foot in Jack's big boat track. Syle's left to hang there <sup>white</sup> <sup>poler</sup> Jack stops & listens, his scrubbed shiny face at attention. Jack

2  
creeper his can the way he does when they're <sup>day</sup> hunting. Lyle stops breathing  
& listens too, but not because he ~~gives~~ a day if it's a deer or  
not, or if they never, ever find that black flowing water ~~at the~~  
below where the sun mirrors like a painted polished glass. Then  
he hears buzzing and follows Jack's ~~to~~ clear <sup>blue eyes</sup> to the  
thicket of bamboo scrub oaks a few yards off the bank.

"Bea," Jack steps easy, his square thick body ~~only~~ a  
round headed shadow on the vines. "Come on." He doesn't  
look back.

Lyle lets go of the tape & creeper behind Jack, trying to imagine  
what he's doing ~~but~~ following <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>bees</sup> - the sound ~~comes~~ <sup>as</sup>  
they stop off in the shady ~~under~~ <sup>under</sup> trees & ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> palm trees.

Jack is smiling, his ~~two~~ short even teeth showing through  
his thin shiny lips - his teeth never <sup>have</sup> shown when he  
smiles; and Lyle doesn't know, <sup>yet</sup> ~~he~~ <sup>does</sup> know that

~~Lyle does~~  
what ever they're up to, maybe it's at the center of it  
Lyle smells honey, a syrupy sweet he can feel on his  
cool bare arms, and he thinks ~~he~~ <sup>he</sup> ~~doesn't~~ know  
The swarm of yellow striped bees buzz & hover around a  
~~dark~~ <sup>dark</sup> the ~~dark~~ <sup>dark</sup> trunk of a sweet gum - like <sup>prime</sup> ~~sun~~ spots from

thrown by a mirror.

Jack's more Indian than Jesus now, as he types  
toward the tree, arms long & dark as an ape's by his  
side. "Come up easy," he whispers.

Lyle thinks wonder if he's talking to the bees, or to him, and  
it sounds like he's gently ~~Jack's~~ <sup>Jack's</sup> ~~mana's~~ <sup>mana's</sup> ~~smell~~ <sup>smell</sup> ~~comes~~ <sup>comes</sup> and  
somehow he ~~doesn't~~ <sup>like</sup> feels Jack's making light of him - of his  
youth and what youth does & doesn't know - can't know.

3  
had he 'a good that Mayre has such a temper, that she'll be  
moed an usual when they get home and make Jack scratch  
his dumb head the way he does when she flies off the handle.  
That is what Syle's mama says about Mayre, the prettiest  
girl in the family, the youngest, the sweetest, the one all the  
boys come calling on, and her laughing, little squeaky half  
eye in her throat like music. She's really too leggy & short-  
waisted, her ~~the~~ fine blond hair too thin to be the beauty she is -  
a real mystery - but her eyes are <sup>clear</sup> aqua & big, <sup>they</sup> hold you  
Jack's ~~straggly~~ <sup>straggly</sup> matches, grinning, and trying to get fire to his  
old white handkerchief. Then ~~the~~ <sup>his</sup> handkerchief catches fire, a cordem,  
curls & flares in a black half circle up toward his ~~head~~  
thumb & finger that holds it like its ~~own~~ <sup>own</sup> nest. When the  
white cloth smokes good, Jack leans back, holds it out &  
fans it, smoke arching to the arch of ~~his~~ <sup>his</sup> scattered beer.  
He laughs low, a rising laugh, high pitched and cruel in his  
square, light bearded face.

Syle feels weak - weak stomachs - watching Jack and  
thinks he's never seen this man before. ~~Some~~ <sup>Some</sup> stranger in their  
old fishing place. Some stranger Syle wishes he could leave  
them for ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> handkerchief & laughing - more devil now than

India or Jesus.  
"Come on," Jack ~~moves~~ <sup>makes</sup> with a roll of motion  
into his other hand for Syle - ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> while ducking  
beneath the scatter of beer & smoke. Then he starts  
tearing ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> dry splintered wood from the dying sweet gum, while  
fanning the handkerchief behind <sup>him</sup> ~~his~~ back.  
The beer gathers & hovers just on the ~~edge~~ <sup>clustering</sup> scrub  
oaks to tear the bank like they're grasping to fight.  
Syle tips toward Jack, ducking lower

4  
"Look at that, will you?" Jack poked his head in the hollow of the tree, his right hand still waving.

Lyle couldn't look if he wanted to as the search smell really presses up his sense of smell & directs into woods. He doesn't know why, but he doesn't want Jack to know he's messed up or that he gives a hoot whether Mayre married him & moved out.

Jack says, "Minnon, that's good," licking two <sup>high-</sup> fingers, and then he looks back at Lyle like he's got something on him. "Dumb Minnon & buy two buckets here."

Lyle stands there a minute, looking for Jack to the shell metal minnon bucket, then ~~he drops the bucket~~ <sup>he drops the bucket</sup> ~~he~~ <sup>he</sup> ~~has~~ <sup>has</sup> ~~been~~ <sup>been</sup> ~~between~~ <sup>between</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~river.~~ <sup>river.</sup> He ~~leans~~ <sup>drops</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~bucket~~ <sup>bucket</sup> ~~against~~ <sup>against</sup> ~~an~~ <sup>an</sup> ~~willow~~ <sup>willow</sup> ~~branch,~~ <sup>branch,</sup> ~~fearing~~ <sup>fearing</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> ~~he~~ <sup>he</sup> ~~might~~ <sup>might</sup> ~~set~~ <sup>set</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~bees~~ <sup>bees</sup> ~~off~~ <sup>off</sup> ~~if~~ <sup>if</sup> ~~he~~ <sup>he</sup> ~~leaves~~ <sup>leaves</sup> ~~them~~ <sup>them</sup> ~~on~~ <sup>on</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~willow~~ <sup>willow</sup> ~~between~~ <sup>between</sup> ~~him~~ <sup>him</sup> ~~&~~ <sup>&</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~river.~~ <sup>river.</sup> Then he starts back along the trail to keep from walking thro' the bees, to dump the minnon in the river.

"Where you going, Little Bit?" Jack hollers, waving the smoky, dwindly handkerchief.

"I go dump the minnon in the river."

"Oay, boy, dump Jack says, waving the smoky handkerchief, ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~bees~~ <sup>bees</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~flies~~ <sup>flies</sup> ~~little~~ <sup>little</sup> ~~myself~~ <sup>myself</sup> ~~from~~ <sup>from</sup> ~~you~~ <sup>you</sup> ~~out.~~ <sup>out.</sup>

Lyle looks at the bucket then at Jack.  
"What are you throwing away?" Jack strikes matches, holding a tiny flame to the ragged back end of the handkerchief. He has to strike two before one lights & he curses twice.

He always curses when he's up with Lyle because men curse, are supposed to curse, take a drink, & dip. ~~And he has~~ But before he's been Lyle's big-brother teacher.

Lyle flips the half lid, preched holding and dumps the sting sticks full to the dirt. They flip & curl in the puddle, as as it runs

6  
of a snake into the loamy dirt, they flip to their back & beat  
the dirt like ~~they~~ ~~was~~ ~~under~~ ~~old~~ ~~wood~~ ~~chairs~~

"Now get that bucket over here," Jack says, not mean now  
but eager, full of fun.

He's dipping his finger back in the hollow of the trunk &  
fasting. "Um." He shakes his head & wrinkles his  
forehead, his creased scalp pushing up spatters of sunlight  
as it creeps over head. He's forgot to want to be chief &  
the swarm of bees have honored closer.

Syle ~~is~~ ~~is~~ ~~is~~ ~~is~~ wide, to avoid the bees, and steps  
behind a patch of palmetto, watching the swarm. He  
should holler out for Jack to wave the handkerchief brushing  
closer now to his finger & thumb. He should.

The bees have moved to the clearing at Jack's back, not  
close yet, but nearer. Near enough.

As though he senses the bees, Jack flays the  
handkerchief, still daisy the honey, and the bees swarm  
toward Syle. He cracks thru the palmetto, his rubber

~~Syle~~  
boots rubbing his heels raw, and looking back at the bees  
come up to Jack. "Here." ~~Syle~~ ~~at~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~

hunger Jack's back, looking back at the bees.  
"The gone fell it up, Little Bit," ~~Jack says~~ ~~that~~

~~pop~~ his finger ~~his~~ ~~mouth~~ making a popping noise as  
he pulls it from his mouth & looks back. "Mayre's  
gone love this or biscuits."

She can't cook, Syle thinks, remembering how his  
mama, who was old when he was young had done her  
best to get Mayre to learn to cook.

"I don't care too cents about cooking, Mama." ~~She~~ ~~id~~  
laughed & whirled about the old kitchen, where the wood stove

le devored the wood Lyle bought in. "Then you have a maid to wait on me?"

"Yeah," Mann said, "and your old woman might be poor..."

Lyle was glad that was true & hoped Jack beats the fire out & maybe for not cooking.

"You could eat it on light bread," Lyle says before he thinks.

"Huh?" Jack, still simply, too honey, looks back & his face glowers with honey smeared. The looks ugly & Lyle wonders why he used to want to look like Jack. "Nothy."

Of Nothy & Lyle's

Lyle's 6 brother an older, ~~he~~ <sup>ally had been</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> the service - 4 fighting the Korean war - the other 2 fought in World War II. And when they came back they told war stories in the front porch at night & ~~made fun of~~ <sup>talked down to</sup> Lyle because he'd had to stay at home <sup>on the farm</sup> into his old name & Daddy Ed. ~~able for~~ <sup>had been</sup> scared of bombs & ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> ~~scared~~ <sup>scared</sup> of bombs. He never never told them that he'd spent long hours of every day & night checking the sky over Lovell for the Mr. Dave Peterson for bombs. His name knew, even proud she said. But she didn't tell them & Lyle wondered if maybe she was ashamed of him, or was she protect ~~been~~ <sup>been</sup>, when they boys <sup>and</sup> she called him brother, reared back on the porch rocker & smoked.

I tried to out war-story each other.

Jack had never belittled Lyle till ~~now~~ <sup>this</sup> day.

"Hold the bucket, Lyle," Jack says. "Right here, up against the trunk." He drops the bucket, ~~stoves at~~ <sup>stoves at</sup>

Jack holds it, watching the trunk & Jack scooping at ~~handful of~~ <sup>handful of</sup> ~~brown~~ <sup>brown</sup> cone & honey to the can.

The smell is so strong it reminds Lyle of the taste strong sweet, strong. He wishes he had a drink of water.

"What you think?" Jack ~~at least~~ wasn't really asking; he had  
away of look as he plucked the honey in ~~the~~ bucket, a pile  
of ~~honey~~ on ~~the~~ liquid & waxy cone. "You sicker like that?"

"Yes sir." Lyle watched the bees, honey back to  
the clearing.

"Yes sir?" Jack stood his square in the eye - not  
blinking. He laughed, <sup>his hands dripping honey.</sup> "Some what did you go to saying  
yes sir to me?"

Lyle looked ~~off~~ down, could see the top of his white  
nose.

"How bout if you come over to our house & eat  
some biscuits & honey for dinner supper tonight?"

"Can't," Lyle watched the bees make figure eights,  
nearby, then buzz clear & strong & grating. ~~And~~  
~~longer~~ The muscle in his larynx & legs tightened.

~~"No."~~  
"Bet you Nana would mind." Jack plucked  
another double handful of honey in the bucket, glassy  
look at the bees. "One more." The bucket was  
almost full.

"She can't cook," Lyle said through his teeth.

The bees were swarming nearer - swarming with an  
pattern - getting fiercer by the way.

Jack laughs. "I know. I'm liable to stave."  
He looks back quick at the bees, like one dripping sticky  
fingers and slugs his hands. The bees cluster & swarm  
closer then, getting closer. "Let 'em get the hell out of here."

8 Lyle stands there as Jack darts at them the trees  
slung long teardrops of honey onto palm-trees &  
bamboos. Lyle feels cold & stiff, like <sup>the</sup> rain ~~the~~  
the sun shining, dropping thru his yellow <sup>curly</sup> hair to  
his scalp.

A bee lights on the thick gum of honey in the bucket  
& stirs, then another & another & another, till when  
he dare step forward into the bucket bringing his bees,  
he's carrying ~~the~~ a whole swarm. And he doesn't  
know whether to drop the bucket & run or carry  
the swarm into the honey. He walks on anyway,  
watching the bees, then Jack, who has stopped  
to look back & stands framed against the  
light spilling from the sun shot water. Rays  
all around him.

"I came to the bucket," Jack says, his eyes  
wide & still & sad.

"No, <sup>it's</sup> ~~the~~ honey," Lyle walks on with the bucket bringing his  
bees, or one by one the bees tear free & swarm back  
to the hive.