

# HONEY

Honey stood outside the door of his fish-shack, wavering uncertainly back and forth, much like an elm tree in a slight breeze. This was nothing new for Honey; he had been drunk for so many years that hardly anyone was still living who remembered a time when he had been sober.

Many stories about Honey's youth were told about the wharf, how he had graduated ~~high~~ from high school with honors, and how he had distinguished himself during the first world war. Long ago, in the days when Honey still made sense when he spoke, he had blamed the war for turning him to drink.

He may have been right about this, but no one really knew. It was known however, that Honey practically lived on cheap Portuguese wine which he bought for about fifty cents a gallon. A jug of the purplish fluid was always within an arm's length of him wherever he was.

It was ~~xxxx~~ evil smelling stuff by itself. ~~When xxx~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ When he talked to anyone, it was like trying to face a flame thrower. However, in his shack, mixed in with the tar and salt of long neglected fishing gear, the smell seemed to blend in quite well.

This day, as usual during the long summer days, a group of us young boys was gathered about Honey as he scratched his thin hair and squinted at us through watery blue eyes.

We stood there quietly for a few minutes, and then Herb said ?"Honey, your fly's open."

Herb's father had formerly been a captain in the merchant marine, but now he was retired and had a forty foot power boat which he used to take fishing parties out on. We were always trying to talk Herb into getting his father to take us out.

"I donot know, boys," said Honey, fumbling unsuccessfully with his buttons, "boys nowadays are pretty fresh."

He smiled foolishly as he said this and continued trying to button himself. Finally, with one of the four buttons in placem he gave the whole thingx up as a bad job.

"I've got ta get out to my pots," Honey muttered.

He always talked a big string of pots, or a huge trap full of mackersl, but somehow or otherm he never seemed to be able to make it outof the mouth of the harbor. Down the wharf from his shack, his dory sat baking in the sun, the seams cracked open from long neglect.

Honey never seemed to have owned a good dory. His was always one of the castoffs of one of the othe fishermen. If Honey hadn't been around, the gear that was sold to him would probably just have been thrown away. As it was, he could usually be cajoled or bullied into buying some unnecessary bit of equipment for the big fishing voyage that was never going to come off.

The three of us went into Honey's shack and flopped down on one of the moundsof nets stored there. The twine was so rottn that we could ~~xxxx~~ feel it snap as we laid down. None if us spoke much, for we were trying to figure out a way to get Honey ~~xxx~~ angry.

When he lost his temper which wasn't often for he was too afraid he would come out the loser, he was very funny to see and hear. He would stand looking at the onject of his wrath, body hunched slightly foeward, and his once-blue eyes redder and more piggish that usual. Looking for something to throw, he would scream curses in Finn.

The other fishermen would sit there chuckling away. When it seemed as though he was going to get too violent and hurt himself, one of them would sawy over and hold him down until he had cooled off. Years of steady drinking had made Honey as weak as a child, and when held down, there wasn't much he could ~~do but spit and curse.~~ ~~fishermen there wasn't much he could do but spit and curse.~~

One time, Honey got violently angry at Bib, one of the younger fishermen six foot and do of brawn and almost two hundred pounds of raw muscle. Bib was a quiet, easy-going fellow for the most part, and I never could figure out what he said that made Honey so infuriated.

He was sitting on a nail keg mending a length of seine net and, when he looked up, Honey had found a length of board with a big spike sticking out one end of it. He was staggering toward Bib swinging the plank wildly through the air. His face was contorted with moronic fear and fury, and his mouth twitched and opened exposing the blackened and rotting stubs of what had once been teeth.

The rest of the fishermen who had been sitting around Bib scattered when they saw Honey coming. Bib just sat there, one end of the big seine net hanging loosely ~~in his hands~~ from his hands. Suddenly, when Honey was almost on top of him, he jumped up and threw the net. Catching in the swinging board, it soon entangled Honey in its mesh. In a few seconds, his violent struggles to get free had tripped him off his feet, and he lay helplessly caught, unable to move, glaring up at Bib.

After seeing that he was ~~harmless~~ harmless, the other fishermen had gathered around again to have a big laugh and

and to remark about the strange fish Bib had caught. Some of the men had been scared , so ~~know~~ now they were angry, and they called Honey a rum-dum and a son-of-a-bitch.

Bib just kind of smiled.

"Well, Honey," he said, "when you think you've got enough of that rum soaked out of your system, I'll let you up. You might just as well stay there for now and soak up a little sunshine."

This happened some time ago though, and Honey had been too afraid to loose his temper since then.

"Say, Honey," said Sock, "do you ever do any work?"

Sock was the third member of our gang. He had received his nickname from his ability to fight. He could lick both Herb and Iz me, but we derived a slight amount of pleasure of ~~know~~ thinking of the time another kid had beaten him up. We ~~xxxx~~ got along together most of the time.

Honey ignored Sock's remark and, fixing his eyes on me, he asked me if I wasn't the boy from New York who had been there last year

hanging loosely from his hands, until suddenly, when 'Honey' was almost on top of him, he jumped up and threw the net. The net fell over 'Honey', and what with the swinging plank ~~being~~ caught and his own violent struggles to get free, he was soon so tangled up that he lost his balance and fell to the ground. The more he struggled, the more tangled he became. Finally, he lay there, helpless, unable to move, and glared up at the men.

After seeing that he was harmless, the other fishermen had gathered around again to have a big laugh. Some of the men had been scared, so now they were mad, and they called 'Honey' a run-dum and a son-of-a-bitch, but 'Bib' just smiled and said:

"Well, 'Honey', when you think you've got enough of that Guinea rum out of your system, I'll let you up. You might just as well stay there for now, and soak up a little sunshine."

For the next few days, all the talk on the wharf was about 'Honey's' big fight, and about how 'Bib' had just calmly thrown the net over him.

"Say, 'Honey'", said 'Soko', "do you ever do any work?"

'Soko' was the third member of our gang, and he had received his nickname by his ability to fight. Herb and 'Sock' and I were the three inseparables in the Cove, but when Herb and I were alone, we used to talk about the time 'Sock' had been beaten up by another boy and had been sent home crying. He could lick us both, so we were kind of afraid of him. That's why we derived a slight amount of pleasure by talking about him between ourselves, and by knowing that someone had been able to beat him up. He was a pretty good pal, though, and the three of us got along good.

'Honey' ignored 'Sock's' remark, and fixing his eyes on me, he asked if I wasn't the boy from New York who had been there last year. Although I wasn't the boy he was talking about, I said that I was just to see what he would say.

"Ja", said 'Honey', but he pronounced it as though it was 'jar'. Someone had told him that that was the correct way to ~~say~~<sup>say</sup> it, and he exhibited a childish pleasure in his command of a foreign tongue. "Ja, I remember you from last year. You used to fish with 'Matt'."

I agreed with him, and we all sat there wiggling all over trying to contain our laughter, while he told us all about me, only it was someone else. Although he punctuated his speech with numerous god-damns and sons-of-bitches, his grammar on the whole wasn't too bad. When he had finished his talk, he reached over to his work bench and picked up the gallon jug that had just an inch or so of purplish fluid in it. He held the jug up to the light and squinted at it, concentrating his whole body into the squint as though he were a physicist figuring out some complicated problem in calculus. Then, he looked at us in his old foolish way and, after wiping some of the posing smuff from his chin, he lifted the jug to his lips and gulped rapidly.

We looked at him nervously, each of us wondering what it would be like to ~~try~~<sup>try</sup> some. What would this wine taste like? We had all been warned by our parents of the evil of liquor and had had 'Honey' pointed out to us on numerous occasions as an example of what would happen to us if we drank.

"Say, 'Honey', let's try a swig of that."

'Sock' and I both turned to Herb as he said this, but he tried to act very casual and matter-of-fact about it, just as though he was used to asking people for swigs of wine all the time. 'Honey' looked at us uncertainly.

"You boys are too young," he said, but we could tell by the way he tried to hide the jug that it wasn't our ages he was worried about, but merely the fact that we might ~~try~~<sup>try</sup> to drink all the wine.

"Come on, Yohanis," said 'Sock', using 'Honey's' real name because he knew it would flatter him, "just a little swig for all of us. Here, have

a cigarette."

'Honey' reluctantly held out the jug to us, reaching with his other hand for the cigarette 'Sock' held out to him, and muttered "Boys, boys, boys", in a silly discouraged voice. 'Sock' and I watched Herb, our hearts pounding with excitement, while he ~~subbed~~<sup>raised</sup> the jug to his lips. I don't know what we thought would happen. Perhaps, we expected Herb to shrivel up and look like 'Honey'.

"Great stuff, boys," said Herb, gulping rapidly, and trying not to let us see how watery his eyes were. He wiped his mouth and handed the jug to 'Sock'.

I was next, and I held my breath as 'Sock' tilted his head back and swallowed. All sorts of visions were running through my head, and my whole body glowed and buzzed. As I took the jug from 'Sock', and wiped the top of it carefully with my grimy hand, the one thought uppermost in my mind was 'Honey's' broken and rotted teeth. Gulping down the wine, I envisioned all my teeth being eaten away, and when I lowered the jug, I quickly felt inside my mouth to make sure they were all there.

'Honey' grabbed the jug out of my hand, and finished off the contents before we should have a chance to ask for any more. I felt a little sick. I guess we all did, but we looked at each other smiling self-consciously, and we acted very casual about it all, just as though we were in the habit of drinking fifty-cent-a-gallon-Portugge-wine all the time.

All thoughts of antagonizing 'Honey' had disappeared from our minds, and we leaned back contentedly on the nets, until Herb said: "Let's go up the quarry for a swim."

"Great", 'Sock' and I agreed, as we quickly rose and left 'Honey's' fish shack. We each gave him a little shove as we went past him, just so he would know we hadn't forgotten him.

"Last one in the water's a son-of-a-bitch!"

\*\* F I N I S \*\*