

THE BEAS NEST

John Boston

"That's the biggest goddamn hornet's nest I've seen," said Rico

"It's a monster. It's like the Trump Towers for hornets," said Mike.

"You think we should tell somebody?"

"Out here? Nobody is going to care. Maybe we can shoot firecrackers at it or something?"

"Rico.....there could be a million bees or hornets in that thing. We go pissing them off, they could attack us and where the hell are we going to go?" said Mike

Rico hadn't thought of that. He figured they were far enough away so that they would be safe, but then again, he was certainly no expert on hornets.

The two of them were sitting in the remains of an old truck overlooking a wooded area with a steep drop-off. In days gone by, it would have been referred to as a *dingle*. How the car ended up there didn't really matter. It was out of the way and secluded in an area that had very little seclusion. Mike, Rico, and James would all meet there after school and just hang out. It had a name and that name was *The Beas Nest*, named affectionately after Mike, whose last name was Beas. They would sit around and have a few beers, smoke some weed, and just relax before going home. This was their senior year and next week, they would graduate and move on with their lives and leave the Beas Nest behind, hopefully for good.

Rico was supposed to leave for basic training two weeks after graduation. Mike had been accepted to Cal-Poly. James, their third wheel hadn't really decided on a future. At this point, they both just hoped he was smart enough to stay out of jail. James had become a bit of a problem lately. His behavior was just downright *unacceptable*.

"The hell are we going to do about James? I don't want him coming to the graduation party and starting a whole bunch of shit. You just never know with him. He's gone downhill since his sister died." said Rico as he opened another beer.

"Yeah. Acting like an asshole ain't going to help him any. I mean it sucks what happened to her, but that doesn't give you the right to act the way he does. That boy is going to get his ass beat good one of these days."

"Tell me about it. He's going to run into a lion in the jungle one of these days," said Rico

"Is he coming?"

"He said he is. Who knows. Maybe he got into a fight on the way here." said Rico

"Don't go too hard on him. He's going through a lot," said Mike.

"I just don't want to see him throw his life away. He used to be a good guy. Remember when we were freshmen and we used to sneak out to go to his house and get high? Man, those were the days."

"I remember the time we were all hungover from Emma's party and we went to school the next day and we bet each other, who would puke first?" said Mike

"Yeah and we all puked at the exact same time?"

"Classic. Man, we had some good times. What are you going to do about that Rosalyn girl?"

"Her? Man, she's a hoodrat. They're only good for one thing.....*and it ain't stimulating conversation.*"

"I hear she might be pregnant."

"She probably is. It ain't mine. I always wore a rubber. I ain't going to be a child support slave like my older brothers."

"I hear that. You really going to go into the Marines?" asked Mike

"I have to. Family tradition. My dad and my uncles both went in and served, and so did my older brothers and cousins. If it were up to me, I'd pass, but I got to make my dad happy."

"Your dad ain't even around most of the time."

"He's a truck driver. He's over the road. It's not like he's left us."

"Still man, if your dad really cared about you, he'd want what is best for you, not what's best for him."

"Mike, you're a white boy. It's a lot different in Mexican families. Tradition is all we have. Trust me, you don't want to be the family member that breaks tradition."

"Rico, you ain't no Marine. Why don't you join the Air Force? That just seems so much better. Everybody just seems so much cooler in the Air Force."

"I wish I could man. It's just the reserves. It ain't like I'm going to do it full-time." said Rico

"Yeah, until there's a war, then your ass is going to be right on the front line."

"Hey boys," said James as he walked up to the old car.

"James my boy. I was hoping you could make it," said Mike as he handed him a beer.

"This could be the last time we get to hang out at the Beas Nest. I couldn't pass it up. Well, I've got some big news.....not sure if it's good or bad." he said.

"What's up?"

"The family is moving to Florida. My mom got this huge promotion. She'll be making double what she is now and doesn't have to pay a state income tax. I'm going to be a Florida man."

"Damn.....you're really leaving us?" asked Mike

"I have to guys. The last year has been nothing but a horror show at my house. My dad blames himself for what happened. Every time I go by Jessica's room I tear up. We can't stay in that house any longer. I think Florida will be a new start for all of us.

"Damn James.....well, good for you. At least you're getting out of this town."

"I sure am going to miss you guys. You damn well better come to Florida for Spring Break. I'd be heartbroken if you didn't."

"We'll be there. Don't you worry? We won't leave a man behind."

"What the hell is that? Are those bees or hornets?" he asked.

"You didn't see the giant nest at the bottom?"

James took his beer and walked over to the edge of the dingle and looked down. He had a hard time believing what he was seeing.

"What the hell is that thing? That ain't no regular hornet's nest. It's like the Death Star for hornets."

"I recorded it on my phone. Nobody is going to believe us."

"It's right behind the school. The baseball team is only half a mile away."

"It's not on school property, they won't do a thing."

"I want it gone," said James as he finished his beer.

"Um, James.....have you seen the size of that thing? How the hell are you going to make it disappear?" asked Rico.

"We'll firebomb it. We'll launch them from right here. They won't know what hit them." said James as he grinned from ear to ear.

"Maybe we should just call an exterminator?"

"Guys.....*I am a fucking exterminator,*" he said emotionless.

Rico and Mike both looked at one another. They knew where this was headed and they wanted no part of it. The hornets weren't bothering them.

"Besides, the cross-country team runs out here all the time. They go right by here. We'd be letting them run right into this damn thing. They could be killed."

"You want to firebomb them? We could burn down the whole forest?" said Mike

"Naw. The fire won't leave this canyon. There's too much junk down here. All we're going to do is burn that nest. I want to see that damn thing burn."

"Okay.....why do you want to see it burned?"

"Cause hornets shouldn't exist. Hornets are what killed Jessica. Hornets destroyed my family."

"Hornets? I thought she drowned," said Rico

"No, that's just what we told everybody. We didn't want anyone to know how she really died. My dad thinks it was all his fault. He said he should have done something about that damn nest before it got too big. She was playing near the barn. She must have pissed them off somehow and they just attacked her. Our dog managed to make it into the house and was barking his head off. We went outside and found her. We couldn't even do anything to save her until we got rid of the bees. Worst fucking day of my life."

"Jesus man, I'm sorry." said Mike

"Yeah, met too. Killed by bees. I'm going to burn every goddamn one of them."

Rico and Mike looked at one another. They knew it would be pointless to try and talk him out of it. His mind had been made up. All they could do was try and make sure James didn't kill himself.....or somebody else.

Two days later, they met at the same spot. James brought several cans of gasoline, water balloons, and a giant slingshot. He said he had tested it earlier in the day and it would definitely reach the nest. He would just keep lobbing firebombs at it until it was engulfed in flames.

"There's an old concrete foundation right underneath that nest. I figure about a dozen or so of these babies and that nest will be gone forever," said James

"James, what if the bees come after us? I mean what the hell do we do then?"

"I don't know.....run like hell I guess."

"That's not really much of a plan. We don't know what the hell will happen if they're attacked."

"My teacher Mr. Ross says he's pretty sure they're Africanized Honey Bees, you know, the real nasty ones. They can chase somebody for half a mile. He says he spotted some of them on his car last week." said Rico

"James, I know you're pissed man, but we could be signing our own death warrants here," said Mike who was more than just a little nervous. He'd seen what can happen to beekeepers when things go wrong. One wrong move and you're dead.

"Guys, every kid in the block plays down here. If we don't kill them, we could just be setting them up for a horror show. They were all over Jess in seconds. Poor kid never even knew what hit her."

"James, I'm sure the school will do something if we tell them, I mean we're going to be graduating on the field right across the street in a few days."

"Mike.....I thought you were my friend man. Don't bitch out on me now."

"James, I'm almost out of this town, and so are you. You really want to mess that up?"

"Just get back and watch me do my thing. Revenge is a dish best served cold.....well, maybe hot in this case," he said and began to set up his massive slingshot between two small trees. He test-fired a small bottle. He pulled back on the band as far as he could and let it go. To everyone's amazement, the bottle sailed a few hundred feet in the air and landed on the other side of the dingle. James had a small grin on his face.

"Man the torpedoes boys, this is not a drill," he said as he poured the gasoline into the water balloon using a small funnel. He filled all of them until they were full. He made sure to put one water balloon in the other to give it extra strength. He cut several small rags to make a wick and twisted it inside. About fifteen minutes later, their arsenal was ready.

"We got to be quick. We'll launch all of them as fast as we can. We had that freak storm a few days ago and it rained out pretty good. I don't think the fire will spread."

"I see you've really put a lot of thought into this one," said Mike as he handed him the first water balloon.

"Yeah, I have. I knew I was going to get even with them, I just didn't think it would happen this soon. We have to show these little bastards who's boss. We have to show mother nature who is in charge." he said as he loaded the water balloon into the slingshot.

"Light me!" he said.

Rico lit the rag and as soon as it was lit, James let the rope go that was holding the slingshot back. The balloon sailed across the valley and landed about twenty feet from the massive nest and turned into a small fireball.

"Fire two!" he said as Mike put another gasoline bomb in the slingshot. The balloon landed on the concrete and exploded in flames. The boys could not believe how many bees quickly emerged from the nest. It was like a wall of bees had suddenly appeared.

"Keep em coming," said James as he launched another one. This time he spent more time aiming and the balloon was almost a bull's eye. It landed right underneath the nest and its flames were spreading everywhere.

The boys kept launching the balloons. James was aiming the gasoline bombs with incredible precision. Another one landed on the tree that was holding the nest in place.

"Jackpot. Let me have the last one," he said. Mike handed him the firebomb and lit the wick.

"This is for Jessica. I hope you all burn in bee hell," he said as he launched the balloon. Somehow, James managed to land the firebomb only a foot or two away from the nest. The entire area was now engulfed in flames that were spreading quickly beyond the nest.

"Let's get the hell out of here!" said Rico

"*Burn in hell you little fuckers!*" shouted James before running back to their cars. They managed to make it back to the vehicles before the bees descended upon them. Mike had never seen so many bees before in their lives. They made sure the windows were rolled up and sped away.

"I knew you guys wouldn't bitch out on me.....I knew I could count on you. We stared death right in the face and came out on top." said James gleefully.

"Yeah.....that was pretty awesome," said Mike.

"You just got to have a little faith, Mikey. You can't be afraid of mother nature. Aware of it, yes, afraid of it, hell no. You'll be running for the rest of your damn life."

The two boys high-fived one another and opened a beer in Mike's driveway when they got home. Mike was just glad to be alive, but James was on cloud nine. It was like he had won a gold medal or something.

"We're going to remember this day for the rest of our lives. We're going to remember that was the day we beat mother nature. That was the day we got revenge for Jessica." he said triumphantly.

Mike called Rico after James had left. The fire department couldn't put the fire out for two hours due to the bees. They just had to let it burn. James was right, it never went beyond the boundary of the dingle. Mike knew they would be looking for them, but James had been careful to cover their tracks. He knew James would probably go around bragging about it and would end up hanging all of them. He just had to hope it wouldn't interfere with his scholarship. Rico was not at all amused. In fact..... he was downright *enojado*.

"That dumb ass almost got us killed, Mikey. We're lucky we got out of there alive."

"This was just something he needed to get off his chest. Doesn't look like we did any permanent damage, I've been listening to the scanner traffic from the fire department."

"What does he think he's going to do? Kill every bee he comes into contact with?"

"He's hurting right now, Rico. You just have to let a man handle his own business. I'm just glad we were there to supervise him."

"Look, Mikey.....I'm sorry his sister died, man. I'm sure that sucks, but that doesn't mean we have to join her, which we almost did today. I'm done with him."

"Graduation is in two days. You never have to see him again."

"Yeah, about that. I'm not going to graduation."

"What? Why not?"

"I failed economics and don't have enough credits to graduate. I've got to do this online class, then I get my diploma. My parents are pissed, but I don't want to graduate now anyways. They moved my date for basic training until August. I'd have to just hang out until then anyway."

"Man, that sucks. You still going to my graduation party, right?"

"I guess I could stop by."

"Well, don't do me any favors. Wouldn't be the same without you."

"I'll be there. I'm the life of the party anyways."

Mike sat down next to Natalie Brown. This graduation was a very big deal. The marching band had their time to shine. The principal gave a speech that almost no one listened to. The class valedictorian gave a speech. Everybody and their mother gave a speech. Jame's mother gave a speech as well. This one he did listen to.

"Our family is so grateful for the support you have given us in this very difficult time. You all mean so much to us. We will never forget any of you. You are all part of our family now." she said tearing up at the podium.

"Holy shit, just give us our diploma, so we can get the hell out of here," said Natalie.

"You coming to my party?" asked Mike.

"Maybe. You got any weed at your house?"

"Shit.....is the Pope a catholic?"

"I don't know."

"I'll take care of you. Bring Nancy and her hot cousins too. Rico's been trying to climb on them for a while."

"Rico? I thought he got deported."

"Just a big misunderstanding. He's going into the Marines."

"What the hell is that noise?" she asked.

Mike could hear it now too. It sounded like a buzzing sound. It was like the entire sky was buzzing. Mike looked up. He could see the clouds beginning to rapidly change shape, only he quickly realized they weren't clouds at all. They were something else entirely. Something that had come looking for revenge.

"You got to be kidding me," he said softly

"Oh, my God! Are those bees?"

The first one landed on his leg and stung him through his gown. It felt like someone was sticking a hot needle into his leg. He swatted it just as another one landed on the back of his neck. Pretty soon, all he could see were bees.....everywhere. The swarm must have been in the millions. They were attracted to the stadium lights used for the ceremony.

"Everyone, get inside quickly!" shouted the principal.

All Mike could hear was screaming. The bees were everywhere. They attacked in wave after wave, striking down anyone who moved.

In the chaos that quickly followed, Mike tried to run. He was getting stung so many times, he lost count. They were on his face and neck and arms and in his hair. They were here to deliver a message and the message was received loud and clear by all in attendance.

Mother nature might lose the battle, but she will never lose the war.

The venom and poison from the stings were beginning to cause Mike's body to shut down. He ran over to James whose body was now covered in bees. He tried to let out a scream, but all Mike saw was a bee coming out. He fell to his knees as the fire from the stings was causing his nervous system to shut down.

Guess I'm not going to make it out of this shit-hole town after all.

Ten minutes later, the swarm was gone, but it was most certainly not forgotten. James and Mike were both dead, as were countless others. Bees don't discriminate.