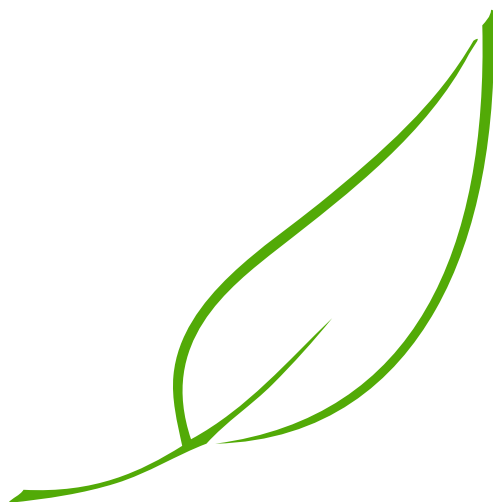


DRUMMY SUTTON

by Ken Bradbury



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Oh, we can do some foolish things
‘tween mama’s womb and death’s cold sting.
But nothin’s worse before the tomb,
than when we judge a man too soon.

Drummy Sutton lived on the hill that looked
right down on that town of mine.

We boys’d give each other thrills with dares of who’d
be first to climb.

“You slack belly coward!” I’d yell at Jake, and he’d
yell back, “You chicken liver!”

And on and on we’d jaw and yack ‘bout who’d
be first to climb on up.

Such a ghostly house you never seen unless it was
inside your dreams

When Ma made too much onion broth that’d come and
get you in your sleep.

The house ...

It sat perched up on the ridge that snaked on down to
where we lived.

And when the moon was not in sight, when the clouds
had hid it’s light,

that old house moved left, then right; its fingers reached to snatch the night.

“Let’s go tonight!” I said to Jake, a sort of boyish joke I didn’t think he bought it. But that ignorant fool said, “Heck, why not!” and I was caught. “Let’s creep the back way up so he can’t see us!” Jake did say.

Drummy Sutton, so they tell, pushed intruders off his hill, and those who live here surely swear that they can hear the ghosts a cryin’ there. ‘Though there’s no bodies ever found, they say it’s souls that make that sound.

When I was little, they told us boys if we’d not share our sweets and toys then Drummy’d come down off his hill and drag us up and make us still. And many nights I’d lie awake and jump at sounds the wind would make, and many nights I’d sweat and cry, feared of Drummy’s evil eye.

‘Twas midnight when we reached the top. I turned to Jake, “We’d better stop and climb back down ‘cause Ma, she’ll wake and find us gone and we’ll be missed ‘til mornin’ ... then she’ll tan our hide!” I looked at Jake. He knew I’d lied.

And he was nigh as skeered as me but we was dumb as boys could be, and dumber still ‘cause we crept up to the bottom of Drummy’s steps.

Oh, how I wish I’d never gone ... And it’s easy to confess that I wish I’d had the sense to leave it well alone ... I guess.

“Oh, Jake, my heart’s about to burst! It’s beatin’ fast and what is worst ... is Drummy! He can surely hear it thuddin’ with his one good ear!” And then the door, closed off for years ... that door we’d seen inside our fears ... that door we’d watched since we was young ... it opened ... just a crack ... He’d come!

Jake dug his fingers in my shirt and tried to run but nothin’ worked. My feet was stuck! Like a statue I was froze! No breath would come to mouth or nose. I tried to cry, but made no sound! And Jake was feared but stood his ground!

Two red eyes, like ugly sores, blinked inside that summer door. Two white teeth, that’d lost their mates, grinned at us like devil’s fate. One big old warty nose swelled from out a face. It was like those you’d heard about from some old liar while circled ‘round a camp-out fire. A stubbly beard-like gristle growed upon a chin both white and old.

I looked at Jake; he looked at me. We both looked like sheets you’d see hangin’ on ma’s washin’ line, all pale and starched. We was near to cryin’ but ‘fore we turned to run and hide, a gravel-voice said, “Come on inside ...”

When Jake flew off that porch and stair, he left his shadow standin’ there. Further down the hill ... then *it* passed him, and both cried out like wicked sin.



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