

Desperate For A Good Leg

by kate hill cantrill

My guess, it's meant for bigger things, for something needed way up high. The first time Desperate came for it, the man was shuffling along a beam. This old-time Dutchman builds his own, and raises barns and ranch-style homes for neighbors, too. Upon the roof of one such place did he slide careful and hold on tight when Desperate and his sorry team came down like vengeful wind to shake that certain beam, on which he stood, too much in one direction, far too much the next.

Of course the man went tumbling, and though he fell not far, a falling with a body full of meats and sweet breads makes the landing something awful-not so bad that Desperate got it-only so the leg puffed like a blue, rain swollen, earth-bound cloud. It's gone to limping, now, like something late. Desperate thought it still looked good, so one day sent old Trouble down to scatter nails but Trouble found that Dutchmen wear thick, sturdy soles and as he walked upon the heads he bellowed out in low-down notes and rumbled like a rolling drum, *Oh, Barrow boy! Young Barrow Boy!* So Desperate made a deal with Havoc to tip the one-wheeled see-meant roller, but Havoc played too much with Time and missed his chance. So, when the Dutchman sang, *Oh Barrow, Boy! Young Barrow Boy!* the young kid rolled that one-wheeled beauty straight and sweet, just like a bow across a string.

Desperate liked the old man's song, but tried once more that autumn day the man went burning leaves. Not much to it: a can of fuel, half-full and not so weighty then, and piled leaves left thankfully un-winded. Desperate, needing, but having doubts, kicked

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up Confusion when the gas was poured, and again when the Dutchman struck upon the match for flames-his arms half-bent, his right leg damp then jumping hot. Now, Desperate, once he smelled the flesh, he changed his heart and grabbed the man about the shoulders, helped him hobble like the best of them toward the lazy hose. *Damnation!* cried the old Dutchman. *To Hell with you!*

While Desperate slunk away he thought about those words, looked up and down while leaves got winded. Mad, he threw all Caution in it. For a moment he suffered Vertigo, when down was up and up was down and only by the steam that rose so soundless was he made to feel sure footed for the long float home-without the leg he came down for, now blistered like a wounded soul, both tender from the flames and fall, but hearty from a well-fought war.

