

"McDUGAN'S BARN"

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There is a place in my neighborhood that has been standing since I was a child. It is McDugan's Barn. It stands alone in a wooded area, and stands out like a sore.

If McDugan's Barn was out in the country, fringed in miles of telephone poles and yards of wheat, it would fit in the landscape. But in my area, the barn looks disjointed and unhappy being juxtaposed against new buildings and paved streets.

McDugan's Barn is rotting wood and broken splinters of glass. Rumor has it, that the place was infested with spooks and odd goblins. If one entered the lair, he or she would be dead before the dawn, never to see daylight again.

But on this August evening, the barn looked almost pretty, with pastel shades of the sunset washing against its great sides. The warm feeling from the barn brushed against my skin and gave me goosebumps. McDugan's Barn was asking me to come inside.

Suddenly, a cool breeze sounded and the change in temperature stung my nostrils. I walked up the rutted path to the barn, and listened to the bugs and insects hooting as I passed them by.

The barn towered above me. Peeling emerald paint was coming off in flakes with the change of seasons. The battered frame was bent by moisture and uncaring owners. I thought about the inside and how much better it should look than the outside.

I turned on my heel, and started to walk away from McDugan's Barn. Haunted thoughts, and an eerie feeling had taken me over. As I walked along the outline of the weeds, I took one last look at the beckoning barn.

The barn was waiting, as it had been doing for so many forgotten years. Stones littered the space around the base of the barn. The rocks sat there after bouncing off the front doors. Young brats chucked the rocks at McDugan's Barn, as if that would ease their fear that the building would someday kill them before the dawn. At least half a dozen of those stones flew from my fist.

I shook off the past and struggled to open the swinging doors. I got a splinter up my thumbnail, and I bled. After a few seconds, I shoved the doors wide and walked over the threshold.

The inside was different than I imagined. A layer of dust, the thickness of rose petals, covered the dirt floor. McDugan's Barn was dank, musty, cold, and quite wonderful. It must've been years since a human had tread on the floor. A fraying rope swung silently above, and the rafters played host to a smattering of bird's nests. A few feathers floated down, and a scared mother wren started scolding me for the intrusion.

I tipped my hand to her and went to the back of the barn. Rusting rakes and abandoned wooden crates were strung out along the back wall. They looked retired and content to be out of general usage.

My footprints followed me to an old feed sack. Movement came from within, and my heart jumped as my stomach turned. Spooks were in that sack, and I knew that I would never see the morning sun again!

Seconds passed, and my heartbeat echoed throughout the barn. Unfreezing my mind and body, I realized that I hadn't been attacked. I peeled back the sack and found a mother dog and her pups. I counted four small noses. The mother looked at me with desperate eyes. A low moan slipped from her throat, and I saw that two of her children weren't suckling. Their mother was thin and shaking.

For a moment, I considered picking up the whole company and taking them away from the barn. I knew that taking them would be wrong. Nature meant for them to be in there, for McDugan's Barn to take care of them. If they lived, they did, if they didn't, it was the law of survival. How else could I justify the death of half her offspring?

Walking home, I couldn't forget the sight of McDugan's Barn. It was all dead-looking and tattered on the outside, yet inside something was being protected. Life continues, even in the lonliest and most desperate-looking places.

Atop the hill leading to my home, I looked across the horizon and saw the weathervane on top of McDugan's Barn. It waved to me in the wind.

At that moment, with a new light of day due in hours, I decided that my arm would never cast another stone at McDugan's Barn.