The House Itself Does Not Burn

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Characters

CLARA, a young pioneer girl from the 1800's

ANNIE, owner of a local diner

BEN, her twin brother, a roughneck

GRACE, the oilgirl

JOHNNY, a roughneck, quiet

Setting

A small town in Western North Dakota. Present Day

An oil rig. A diner. The back of a truck. A field.

A bit of burlap and rope, metal pipes and lace, stools and upturned milk cartons ought to be enough. The sky is big, the land mostly flat with fields of grasses spreading across the horizon. One ought to feel the vastness of the sky and light in even the most intimate scenes.

Excerpt

12.

GRACE and JOHNNY sit in the back of a pick up truck. It's dark. We can barely see them.

JOHNNY

Only place you can still feel how dark it is.

GRACE

Hm.
Back home my brothers used to drive out all night. Fucking around. Scared my mother to pieces.

JOHNNY

You miss it? Home?

GRACE

Been too long to miss a thing like that. Anyway not like it's a romantic thing or anything. They weren't ever up to any good.

JOHNNY

I bet not.

GRACE

You ever do anything like that when you were growing up?

JOHNNY

Whattya think Grace?

GRACE

Can't always tell with a man like you.

JOHNNY

What's that supposed to mean?

GRACE

Nothing.

JOHNNY

You thirsty?

GRACE

Mhmm.

JOHNNY

Got some pop in the back if you—

She reaches in the back and starts going through his cooler.

GRACE

You got a whole kitchen back here.

JOHNNY

Well you never know.

GRACE

Salami. Cheese. Ketchup. Some potato chips.

JOHNNY

Alright. Alright snoopy.

GRACE

You want a rootbeer Charlie Brown?

JOHNNY

(laughing)

Sure.

GRACE

I hate rootbeer.

JOHNNY

Yea me too.

GRACE

So you want something else?

JOHNNY

That was all that was left at the WalMart.

GRACE

You gotta go early. Place gets wiped out like there's some kind of national disaster looming every single fucking day.

JOHNNY

Just a lotta folks is all.

GRACE

Aha! One lone beer Johnny. Who has one beer?

JOHNNY

You want it?

GRACE

I can't take your last one.

JOHNNY

Lemme split it with you.

GRACE

You don't have to—

JOHNNY

Aw c'mon. What else are we gonna do out here?

She opens the beer with a lighter.
Takes a swig.

GRACE

You want kids Johnny?

JOHNNY

What?

GRACE

I don't.

JOHNNY

No?

GRACE

Nope. Too many things.

JOHNNY

Sure.

GRACE

Too much fucking commitment. To some guy I'm supposed to be in love with. To some baby. To myself. I mean fuck all I want is to be alone. Like in a big fucking field. With some cows or something.

JOHNNY

Cows.

GRACE

Yea. Cows.

JOHNNY

Alright.

GRACE

You get that?

JOHNNY

Sure.

GRACE

That's why I like you Johnny. You get the cows thing.

JOHNNY shakes his head. Smiles.
He hands her the beer.

GRACE

Thanks.

She takes a swig.

JOHNNY

So you gonna enjoy your time off?

GRACE

That's what this is. Isn't it? Sure. I mean after today—

JOHNNY

Let's not—

GRACE

Right. Well…it's always a little strange, all this time after none of it.

JOHNNY

You deserve it though.

GRACE

Whattya saying that for?

JOHNNY

You're good Grace. These past few weeks. I've noticed. You're real good at your job and you don't quit.

GRACE

I think you just complimented me.

JOHNNY

Don't get used to it.

GRACE

(she smiles)

So nine days, huh. What're you gonna do with all this empty time?

JOHNNY

Try real hard not to go crazy.

GRACE

How you gonna do that?

JOHNNY

Everytime it's the same. I sleep and buy food and call my mother. Not much else.

GRACE

I haven't called my mother in months.

JOHNNY

No?

GRACE

Nope.

JOHNNY

Why not?

GRACE

She doesn't approve of this "lifestyle."

JOHNNY

This lifestyle?

GRACE

Well what would you call it?

JOHNNY

She's not so into you swinging metal pipes 40 feet in the air?

GRACE

(laughs drily)

Definitely not.

Still wants the check though.

Beat.

JOHNNY

I send mine back too. Well most of it.

GRACE

You're not saving for something big? Like a new truck or house or something?

JOHNNY

I got a house.

GRACE

What do you mean you got a house?

JOHNNY gives her a look

GRACE

Are you married?

Silence.

GRACE

Mine was a science teacher.

JOHNNY

Hm.
What's his name?

GRACE

Alex.

JOHNNY

Alex.

GRACE

Please don't—

JOHNNY

It's ok.

GRACE

Where does your wife live?

JOHNNY

You want another beer Grace?

GRACE

Sure.

JOHNNY

Look I shouldn't have brought it up. I didn't mean to upset you.
I don't talk about it—

GRACE

About her.

JOHNNY

Cause it's complicated. Ok?

GRACE

Ok.

JOHNNY

I might have some more in the back.

He goes to check.

GRACE

I shouldn't have—Alex was a fucking asshole. Your wife is probably real nice. If Alex was nice I could see why it might be hard to—

JOHNNY

Yea. We're not gonna—

GRACE

I'm sorry is all.

JOHNNY

That's ok.

He pulls out some whiskey, takes a swig, hands it to her.

Beat.

GRACE

You ever inhale the water wells accidentally? You know that—

JOHNNY

You shouldn't do that Grace.

GRACE

I know. I said accidentally. Like before you knew how bad it was.

JOHNNY

Yea everyone's smelled it at some point.

GRACE

But it's that acid taste in your mouth. The way you feel like you're gonna be sick but instead how it sits there.

JOHNNY

You gotta wear your mask Grace. You shouldn't be going around sniffing chemical wells.

GRACE

I almost passed out once.

JOHNNY

Grace.

GRACE

(She toasts him and drinks.)

But I didn't.

JOHNNY looks at her. Looks out.
A horn.
The sounds of the rig can be heard faintly.

13.

In the diner, after hours, ANNIE dials and redials her phone, sitting on the counter while CLARA is building a small ladder out of sticks and twine. She is out of breath and singing.

CLARA

Under the moon under the sweet moon
Oh my laddy, my dear
I'll sweep you away as the cold breeze blows
Oh my laddy, my dear
I'll run down the green fields
I'll fall in the deep wells
All for my laddy, my dear.
Our bones will burn, our skin alight
Our love forever, our kisses in flight
Our fingers touching, our hearts abright
As the smoke rises, we run out of sight
Oh my laddy
Under the sweet moon

Oh my laddy
Under the sweet moon
Oh my dear

CLARA starts digging in the ground.

14.

Later, JOHNNY paces a few feet away from his truck. He's on the phone.

JOHNNY

Hey sorry I couldn't pick up earlier. Yea I was recording my video. Well cause I—
You doing ok?
Babe?
Yea…yea… Wanna put Lilly on the phone? Put her on for me. C'mon—tell her OilMan's got an important question for her.
(he laughs.)
(beat.)
Lil? Hey kiddo! Hey! How's it going?
Pizza! Wow.
Well you're one lucky kid. She's really spoiling you today isn't she?
Oh yes, OilMan wants to know if you played with the other kids at school today.
Aw kiddo. That's ok. Tomorrow will be better.
I don't know sweetie. Remember what I told you?
Well OilMan has got to stay up here a little longer. Yea well you just better keep helping your mom. If you're the best little OilKid then maybe you will grow up big and strong and be an OilWoman. Right? Just like OilMan. Alright you gotta---yup go ahead—ok put your mom on—
Aw c'mon. It's a story babe—it's harmless—it's—ok. Ok.
That's tomorrow? Oh right. Shit. Ok. Yea well sometimes it's hard to keep track of the—
No I'm not drunk.
Yea Of course I know it's her birthday. I forgot the day of the week—I—
I'll remember to call. *(beat)*
You get her something from both of us?
A batman cape?
That sounds great. *(beat)*
Did the bank—
Ok—

GRACE sits up in the back of the truck.

Ok we'll talk later—
Yup you too.

He hangs up.

GRACE

Drive me home.

JOHNNY nods.