

Silly Land very Short Story

Not so Silly Shelter
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If I'd known... His head was weighed with guilt, *If I had known they were there to help... I never would've done that...* Lifting himself from the cold ground, the rugged man stumbled onto his feet. The shack was dark, The only light was the bright moonlight shining through the cracks of the doors. The room was full of supplies—none of which were necessary just yet—and 5 other people, all sleeping. He carefully stepped over the scattered obstacles, moving towards the exit, then opened the door as slowly as possible to not disturb the others. The door creaked softly, frosty air flowing in, he quickly shuffled outside, pushing the door shut behind him. A soft blanket of snow covered the land as far as the eye could see, the only sound was the faint rustling of the leaves. He and a group sought shelter in a small abandoned barn atop a mountain, there wasn't enough room for everyone, so he and a few others volunteered to sleep in the shack behind the barn. He knew it was the better choice, for all of them. He pulled out a cigarette from a pack he had left in his coat pocket, his hands shivered in the cold as he struggled with the lighter. The flame flickered in the cold night air, and he inhaled deeply, the smoke filling his lungs, *I should leave*, he thought. *They don't want me here anyway.* He exhaled, the bitter wind chilled him down to the bone. *But, where would I go? I'd freeze before I found shelter.*

He clenched his fist, his nails digging into his palm, a moment passed, “Dammit.” He muttered, he made his choice, he would have to prove himself, but it beats freezing to death alone.

“Hey, wake up.” A familiar voice poked him in the arm, the rugged man groaned, his eyelids resisting to open. “C’mon now, they’re eating without you, don’t wanna miss out, yeah?” The poking became more of a kick. He finally opened his eyes to see a man towering above him, “That’s more like it!” The grounded man huffed out a laugh, his broad yet causal stature comforted the rugged man. The grounded man extended his hand, gesturing to grab on. The rugged man took the offer, pulling himself to his feet.

“How you feeling? I came straight here after I noticed you weren’t in the barn.” The grounded man’s voice was low, his concern was evident. The rugged man took a deep breath, steadying himself before speaking.

“Didn’t get much sleep, guess I finally fell asleep at some point.” He looked around, they were the only ones in the shack, everyone else had left.

“No one woke you up?” The question came as though the reason wasn’t obvious.

“Guess not, can’t blame them though...” The rugged man let out a sigh and looked down at the floor, shame filling his mind.

The grounded man was quiet for a moment, assessing what to say. “Don’t beat yourself up, anyone would’ve done that.” He tried to be reassuring.

“No they wouldn’t.” The rugged man’s jaw tightened, his gaze focused elsewhere.

“He came at you with a gun!” The grounded man raised his voice, the rugged man clearly taken aback. His tone softened immediately. “Grant, please, it’s not your fault.” He stepped closer, with urgency in his voice. “I saw what happened, what you did wasn’t wrong.”

The silence was stretched thin, then slowly it began to swallow Grant, his mind flooded with thoughts—thoughts he didn’t want to confront, thoughts he couldn’t escape.

After a long moment, the grounded man exhaled, his body relaxed and he stepped back. “Look,” he said, trying to break the tension. “You gotta eat. Come to the barn, it’ll be okay.” The man turned and walked towards the door, “No hard feelings?” He turned his head back at Grant, smiling, before walking out. Grant stood still—in silence, before readjusting and began to follow the man.

Fog rolled in, the cold wind still blowing. Walking across in the snow, Grant made his way towards the barn, each step crunching into the snow beneath his feet. As he approached the barn, the sound of laughter and chatting filled the air, but it would soon end when Grant entered. Inside, the group sat in a loose circle around a rusted metal barrel, inside contained a fire.

“Morning,” he muttered, his voice low, but still he caught the eyes of nearly everyone. A few nodded before quickly looking away, returning to their meal, while some remained—some unsteady, some openly hostile.

“Glad you could join us.” The grounded man had already seated himself amongst the group, he patted the ground next to him, inviting Grant to join the circle.

Grant hesitated, his feet set in place, warmth was tempting, but the looks made his chest tighten. Contemplating whether to go back to the shack or not, another voice spoke up.

“You can’t sit here.” The voice was sharp, cold—colder than the snow outside. Grant froze, his gaze cutting to the source. A girl, fairly young, maybe in her early twenties, she had long ginger hair and unnaturally piercing blue eyes. Whispering started up between the others in the group in response to the girl.

“*Yes* he can.” The grounded man said firmly, trying to assert authority.

“You can’t pretend he’s one of us, Rusty.” The girl snapped, her words firm. She looked back at Grant, with more hostility than before.

He stood there, his whole body tense, unsure what to say—his insecurities rushing back to the surface.

“Grant, sit down with us.” Rusty said, barely concealing his frustration. “We’re in this together, we *need* to work together.”

Grant let out a slight smile before awkwardly moving to the circle.

“Together? He’s not part of our group! You can’t convince me that he is!” The girl shot up from her seat, she looked ready to fight, clenching her fists.

Grant stopped dead in his tracks.

“*Settle down*,” Rusty was bursting at the seams, ready to explode.

“He killed my brother!” The girl shouted at Rusty, pain in her voice. Her body trembling, her emotions overtaking her.

“That’s enough!” Rusty barked, his calm completely faded. “You weren’t there!” He lowered his voice, his tone remaining. “We all miss him. Terribly! But we broke into *his* house, and he almost shot Grant!”

The girl was already submitting, she sat back down, holding back her tears.

Rusty continued, calmer. “It was self-defense. Grant tried to help after he realized what he did, blaming him isn’t helpful, for anyone.”

The barn was completely silent. There were tears flowing from the girl’s face, it pained Grant to see someone so distraught from his own actions.

“Now, please sit down with us Grant, have some food.” Rusty once again patted the ground next to him, this time he had a bowl in his hand.

“Thanks...” Grant trembled, he wanted to say more, but he was unsure what he could say.

The group remained quiet, but resumed eating. Grant finally moved for the first time in minutes, he quickly made his way to his spot. Rusty extended the bowl of soup to grant.

“Here, please eat.”