

by Allison Moore

Characters

ABBY, 14. Wears cute, trendy clothes. A city kid.

BILLY, 15. Wears Wranglers, ropers, and a cowboy hat. A farm boy.

Scene

Abby has just moved from Minneapolis to an old farm house in Cambridge, Minnesota. The suburbs encroach all around, pitting farm kids against suburban kids at the local high school. Abby wanders into an abandoned barn near their house and is met by Billy, a farm kid who's mercilessly bullied at school.

(It is night. Sound of cicadas, wind. ABBY unwraps a piece of gum, puts it in her mouth, chews. She unwraps another piece of gum, does the same. She continues this process as she walks, until she comes to the shell of a barn. She circles the outside of it, tentatively, chewing her huge wad of gum, holding all the wrappers. She steps into the structure. BILLY, until now unseen by ABBY, shines a flashlight on ABBY.)

BILLY. What are you doing?

ABBY. *(Mouth full of gum.)* Nothing. Who's there?

BILLY. You shouldn't be out here.

ABBY. Billy, right?

BILLY. Place is haunted.

ABBY. So.

BILLY. What's in your mouth?

ABBY. Do you have some paper?

BILLY. Here.

(BILLY hands her a piece of paper from his back pocket. ABBY unfolds it, there is a drawing on it.)

ABBY. But—

BILLY. It's all right. I got about a thousand of them.

(ABBY puts her gum wrappers carefully in her pocket, then spits her gum into a corner of BILLY's paper.)

BILLY. Coulda used one of those wrappers.

ABBY. I'm saving them.

BILLY. For what?

(ABBY looks at BILLY's drawing.)

ABBY. It's really good.

BILLY. It's just a sketch.

ABBY. You got the shading for the muscles and everything. It really looks like he's running.

(ABBY offers the paper back to BILLY, who does not take it.)

You guys live back over there?

BILLY. Yeah.

ABBY. So what's this?

BILLY. Old Shoewalter barn.

ABBY. How do you know it's haunted.

BILLY. 'Cause, I've seen it.

ABBY. What, like ghosts? Ooooooooooooo—

BILLY. You shouldn't be walking around out here. My dad leases this land.

ABBY. I'm not hurting anything.

BILLY. Just because you bought the farmhouse doesn't mean you can go anywhere you want. Mr. Swenson still owns the land, and he leases it to my dad.

ABBY. What, is this like your secret hideout? You do your secret things here?

BILLY. Forget it.

(BILLY starts to leave.)

ABBY. I'm sorry. Look, hey. Why's it haunted.

BILLY. Why do you care?

ABBY. I don't. I'm just curious. You're probably making it up anyway.

BILLY. You sure you want to know.

ABBY. Yeah.

BILLY. Mr. Shoewalter shot his head off with his hunting rifle. Right here in the barn. Mr. Swenson knocked the house down a couple years back.

ABBY. Why'd he kill himself.

BILLY. My dad says they were gonna foreclose on the farm. This quarter used to be his. It was a pretty small operation, and there wasn't a co-op then. He left a note for Mrs. Shoewalter, telling her he was in the barn and to call

Mr. Swenson, because he didn't want her to see him with his brains blown out. And he didn't want to mess her carpet or whatever.

ABBY. Did she go out and look?

BILLY. I don't know. She called Mr. Swenson, though, and Mr. Swenson called my dad.

ABBY. When was this?

BILLY. Probably like ten years. I was little.

ABBY. What happened to his wife?

BILLY. She flipped. She opened all the windows and then just left. Didn't take hardly anything with her, my dad said. Went to some home or something in St. Cloud, near her son. Whole place rotted.

ABBY. I don't think I could not look. I'd want to see.

BILLY. My dad said it was pretty terrible.

ABBY. My dad died, in a car accident. Last August. By the time Trina and I got to the hospital, they were already operating on him. He died in the operating room. So when we saw him, he was already, like, cleaned up, you know? And he looked pretty much normal, cause he didn't have any injuries to his head or anything, his face was just kinda, slack. I think it might make more sense if I had seen the blood.

BILLY. So why'd you all move out here?

ABBY. I guess my mom flipped, too. You got a pencil?

(BILLY hands her a pencil. ABBY has smoothed the drawing on the ground. She takes one of the gum wrappers and places it over part of his drawing, shiny side down. She begins rubbing the wrapper with the pencil.)

BILLY. What are you doing?

ABBY. Making a belt-buckle. For the bull rider. See?

BILLY. You got the silver off.

ABBY. Gum wrappers work the best—only the sticks, though. I can sometimes get gold off of like, the Rolo wrappers? But you have to rub pretty hard.

BILLY. Sometimes they tip the horns, too, with silver? Not on the Tour, but other places—Mexico or Spain. The horns suck on this one. I was mostly working on the back legs. I'll show you.

(BILLY pulls a book out of his backpack, flips through, showing ABBY.)

ABBY. Where did you get this?

BILLY. Farm auction. It's got cows, bulls, horses—

ABBY. Oh my god, those are naked people.

BILLY. It's for drawing. You gotta know which muscles to draw, otherwise it just looks posed. See how he's using the back legs to take his weight here? And here in this one, it's these other muscles.

ABBY. Yours is just as good as this one.

BILLY. No way. I won't be able to draw them until I ride. Know what it's like up close.

ABBY. Wouldn't you be scared?

BILLY. There's no time to be scared. That's what Cody Custer said. He's a rider? He said you get scared after, when you remember how close the bull was to goring you, or stepping on your chest. But the second you understand how bad it really was, you remember you're out of the ring. You survived. So you always win.

(Sound of a school bell.)

ABBY. Can I keep this?

BILLY. Sure.