

ESCAPE GOATS

A play in one act

by

Bradley Hayward

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SYNOPSIS

In the middle of a blizzard, a free spirited farmer and her disillusioned son hunt for two escaped goats that have become accidental symbols of rebellion. As the howling of wolves close in, they stop chasing and start standing their ground, realizing that staying put is the bravest thing they can do. It's an existential comedy about the weight of being an outlier, and the thin line between finding freedom and getting lost in the dark.

CHARACTERS

CINDY: (33) A free spirited farmer. She's tender when she wants to be and tough when she needs to be. She wears a thick parka and carries a lantern.

JARED: (13) Her son. He's curious about the universe, but doubts the fairness of the world. He's covered head to toe in a one piece ski suit.

SETTING

A field in the dead of winter. There are a couple of stray fence posts, but otherwise it is an aggressive amount of white.

RUNNING TIME

10 minutes.

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(The lights rise on a vast field in the dead of winter. A couple of fence posts poke out of snow drifts that are knee deep. CINDY enters and trudges through the snow, holding a rusted lantern that flickers weakly. JARED follows in her literal footsteps, stepping exactly where she steps to avoid the height of the drifts.)

CINDY: (Yells) Boots! Waldo! Get your hairy butts back here!

JARED: Mom, my toes are officially past tense. Can we please just go back? If they wanted to stay with us, they wouldn't have jumped the fence.

CINDY: It wasn't a jump, Jared. It was a calculated heist. Boots has been eyeing that loose wire for weeks. He's a contrarian. He doesn't want the hay because the hay is provided. He wants the frozen thistles because he thinks it makes him an outlaw.

JARED: He's not an outlaw. He's a goat. And he's going to be a Popsicle by midnight.

(CINDY stops. She looks out into the blinding white void.)

CINDY: Exactly. That's the trap. People, and goats, think running away is an act of rebellion. But usually, they're just running toward a different kind of ending.

JARED: Is this about Dad again?

CINDY: No. This is about livestock.

JARED: The other goats are fine. They're in the barn. They're eating the provided hay. Why do we have to hunt down the two who chose to leave?

CINDY: Because the world needs someone to blame. If the wolves get them, the neighbours will say I'm a bad farmer. If the herd gets sick, they'll say it's because those two brought back a virus. They leave, and they take all our peace of mind with them.

JARED: That's not fair.

CINDY: Fair is a word people invented to keep from screaming. Listen to me. People will try to make you the reason for their own mess. They'll point their fingers until you feel so heavy you think the only way to breathe is to run into the woods.

JARED: Like Boots?

CINDY: (Nods) Like Boots. But look at this field. Is there anywhere to hide?

(JARED looks at the endless, flat horizon.)

JARED: Not really.

CINDY: Exactly. So if you're going to be blamed for the fire, stay and warm your hands by it.

(A goat bleats in the distance. It's a pathetic "maaaaaaaaa" from the darkness.)

JARED: That sounds like Waldo. He sounds regretful.

CINDY: Good. Regret is the first step toward a warm barn.

(She kicks at a snow drift, hoping it's a goat. It's just a rock. She sighs.)

JARED: Maybe they're already gone. Like, gone gone. Past the treeline.

CINDY: Boots doesn't have the cardio for the treeline. He's all ego and no strength.

JARED: Dad had cardio.

(CINDY stiffens. She holds the lantern out further, its amber light bouncing against the white.)

CINDY: Your father didn't leave because of cardio. He thought the fence was the problem, not the fact that he didn't know how to stand still.

JARED: He told me he was stifled. That's a word for being choked by a pillow, right? He said this farm was a pillow.

CINDY: (Laughs) A pillow. Right. A forty acre pillow that requires manual labour at 4:00AM in a blizzard. He wasn't stifled. He was just tired of being the one who had to hold the lantern. It's easier to be the guy who disappears into the dark than the one who has to stay and keep the light from going out.

JARED: But everyone thinks we drove him away. Grandma said you were too much for him. That he had to leave to find his center.

CINDY: (Stops dead) See? There it is. The escape goat. He runs, he abandons his post, he leaves a teenager and a failing dairy operation behind, and somehow I'm the reason the gate was open.

JARED: I stayed.

CINDY: You did.

JARED: Am I too much, too? Is that why it's so cold?

(CINDY drops the lantern low, the light pooling around their boots. She reaches out with a gloved hand and brushes the frost off JARED's eyebrows. Her expression softens.)

CINDY: You're exactly the right amount, Jared. Staying is the hardest thing in the world. It's a quiet kind of brave. People love a runner. They love the drama of the exit. But the people who stay? We're the ones who keep the world from freezing solid. We didn't stay because we're stuck. We stayed because this is our dirt.

JARED: (Looks down) It's mostly ice right now.

CINDY: Ice is just dirt with an attitude.

(Another bleat echoes, but it sounds further away now.)

JARED: If we don't find them, does that make us the villains of the story?

CINDY: Only to people who weren't out here shivering with us.

(She gestures toward the horizon.)

The neighbours think we're hoarding the land. They see the overgrown wildflower patches I planted for the bees and they call it neglect. They see your books on solar cycles and they call it nonsense.

JARED: Old Man Hudson told me that if we keep playing scientist instead of playing farmer, the soil will turn sour. He said we're trying to change the rules of the dirt.

CINDY: The rules of the dirt haven't changed in ten thousand years. It's the rules of the porch that are the problem. They want us to be like them. Predictable, quiet, and afraid of anything that doesn't look like "The Donna Reed Show." To them, we're the outlaws because we're not asking for permission to exist. They're probably watching us from their kitchen windows right now. Sipping lukewarm Sanka and waiting for us to fail so they can say that's what happens when you let a woman run a farm with a boy who thinks for himself. Our success is an insult to their traditions.

JARED: I like the wildflowers. Even if they're dead under the snow right now, I like knowing they're waiting.

CINDY: (Smiles) That's the heist. We're holding this ground for something better. This farm isn't just about goats and cheese. It's a sanctuary. It's the only place for fifty miles where you're allowed to ask why without someone handing you a Bible or a pitchfork.

JARED: So we're, like, rebels? In parkas?

CINDY: The most dangerous kind. We're the ones who stayed to prove that you don't have to leave home to find a new world. You just have to plant it right where you are.

JARED: Maybe that's why Boots and Waldo left. They got scared of the experiment and ran back to something they understood.

CINDY: Maybe. Or maybe they just couldn't handle the weight of being different. It's heavy, Jared. Heavier than this snow.

(Suddenly, there's a new sound in the distance. A low howl from beyond skyline.
JARED freezes in place.)

JARED: I don't think that's the wind.

CINDY: (Tightens her grip on the lantern) No. That's the neighbourhood watch.

(The howl continues, joined by a second. And then a third. And then a fourth. The sound quickly swells into the chorus of a dozen wolves.)

JARED: Mom, the goats. They're a walking snack. They don't know how to fight a wolf. They don't even know how to fight a garden hose.

CINDY: The wolves don't just want the meat. They want the thing that wanders. A wolf is nature's way of punishing anything that thinks it can survive without a pack.

JARED: Is that what they want for us? To wait until we're alone in the dark and then –

CINDY: They don't need teeth to get us. They use whispers. They use concerns about our lifestyle. They wait for us to get tired, or cold, or start doubting that the wildflowers were worth the effort. They want us to run back to the pack so they can tell us how to bark.

(The howls get closer. JARED looks toward the white void.)

JARED: It's not fair that they might die just because they wanted to see what was past the wire.

CINDY: It's the price of the gate being open. You can be safe in the barn and belong to someone else, or you can be out here and belong to the wind. But I'll tell you a secret about wolves –

JARED: What?

CINDY: They only go after the ones who look like they're already lost.

(She stands taller, lifting the lantern as high as her arm will reach. She shouts as loud as she can toward the wolves.)

CINDY: NOT TONIGHT!

(The howling stops abruptly. A beat as they take in the silence.)

JARED: (Whispers) Do you think they went away?

CINDY: Maybe. Or maybe they're just waiting to see if we blink. Don't blink, Jared. The minute you show them you're afraid of the dark, that's when they move in.

(She lowers the lantern, her breathing heavy.)

We stay. For the goats, and for us. We show the wolves, and the Hudsons, that being outside the gate doesn't make us prey. It just makes us harder to catch.

(The wind picks up and whistles across the tundra. CINDY holds the lantern higher, the flame dancing violently against the glass.)

Let them watch. Let them wait for the tragedy. We're going to walk back to that house, we're going to make hot chocolate, and tomorrow, we're going to fix that fence. Not to keep ourselves in, but to make sure that when we change things, we do it on our own terms.

JARED: What about the goats?

CINDY: They'll be at the back door by morning, shivering and begging for the provided hay. And I'll let them in. Because unlike our neighbours, I know what it's like to realize the wilderness isn't nearly as welcoming as the fire you tried to run away from.

JARED: You know, Old Man Hudson's goat doesn't even have a name. He just calls it Number Four.

CINDY: Exactly. Imagine living a life where you're just a digit on a ledger. No wonder Boots has an ego. We gave him a personality and a library card.

JARED: He doesn't have a library card, Mom.

CINDY: He chewed the corner of your history textbook. In our house, that counts as a formal education.

(JARED starts to laugh. A genuine belly laugh that cuts through the chill.)

JARED: We're the only people in the county who talk to livestock about evolution!

CINDY: (Laughs with him) And we're the only ones who see a blizzard and think it's beautiful, instead of complaining about the driveway!

JARED: I'm glad we're the outlaws. It's way more interesting than being a Number Four.

CINDY: It's the best job in the world! We get to see the stars because we aren't afraid of the dark. And we get to keep each other warm because we aren't waiting for anyone else to light fire.

(She swings the lantern in a wide, triumphant arc. The light streaks across the snow and illuminates the sky behind them. A scrim across the entire rear of the stage begins to glow brightly behind them.)

JARED: (Looks up) The stars are really bright tonight. Like they're cheering.

CINDY: They aren't cheering, Jared. They're witnessing. And I'll take an audience of a billion suns over a judgmental porch any day of the week.

END OF PREVIEW

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