

**SKY FULL OF POPCORN**

A dramedy in one act

by

Bradley Hayward

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by Bradley Hayward

## **SYNOPSIS**

On the eve of their high school graduation, childhood sweethearts Adam and Erin sit under a sky full of clouds and imagine the diverging movies of their futures. While Adam finds his soul in the quiet corners of his family farm, Erin is desperate to trade her small town life for the electric hum of a city that never sleeps. It's a tender, bittersweet comedy about the moment two people realize that loving each other might not be enough to share the same horizon.

## **CHARACTERS**

(1m, 1f)

**ADAM:** (17, m) A bright farm kid who finds genuine purpose in the physical labour and history of his family's land. He wears a casual t-shirt and jeans.

**ERIN:** (17, f) An adventurous girl who longs for the excitement of a big city. She wears a casual summer dress and clutches a garment bag containing the emerald green dress she chose for graduation.

## **SETTING**

A vast wheat field on the outskirts of a small town, where the golden stalks sway under a sprawling sky full of clouds.

## **RUNNING TIME**

10 minutes.

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(The lights rise on a vast wheat field on the outskirts of a small town, where the golden stalks sway under a sprawling sky full of clouds. ADAM and ERIN, both 17 years old, sit side by side. ERIN clutches a garment bag in her lap as ADAM points up the sky.)

**ADAM:** That one looks like a kernel that didn't quite pop. You know, duds at the bottom of the bowl that nearly break your molars?

**ERIN:** That's not a dud. That's a cumulus cloud with a dream. And for the record, those are the best ones. They have all the salt.

**ADAM:** If it starts raining butter, I'm never leaving this spot.

**ERIN:** (Softly) You're never leaving this spot anyway.

(ADAM grins, missing the weight of her words.)

**ADAM:** Why would I? Best seats in the house. No sticky floors, no crying babies, and the air doesn't smell like Pine Sol. Just wheat, and you. Though you currently smell like a hardware store.

**ERIN:** (Laughs) I was helping Mom pick out weather stripping today. I like the smell of Home Hardware. It smells like potential.

**ADAM:** You're the only person I know who gets a dopamine hit from a plumbing aisle.

**ERIN:** It's because it's in town! You can walk there. You don't have to check the transmission fluid just to go buy a light bulb. It's glorious.

(She stands up, holding the garment bag high, and unzips it just an inch to peek inside.)

I picked it up today. The dress.

**ADAM:** What colour?

**ERIN:** It's emerald green. It's got these thin straps that feel like they might snap if I breathe too hard, which is terrifying and wonderful. It's not a farm dress. You couldn't gather eggs in this. You couldn't even stand near a tractor without it staining. It's a city dress. It's a walking across that stage at graduation and never looking back dress.

**ADAM:** (Quietly) You'll look like a movie star.

**ERIN:** (Looks up at the clouds) I want to be in the movie, Adam! I don't want to just watch it from the field anymore. I want to be where the lights don't come from the moon.

(ADAM picks a stalk of wheat and chews on the end of it.)

**ADAM:** I like the moon. It's got a gravitational pull that's good for the crops.

**ERIN:** (Smiles down at him) You're going to be the smartest farmer there ever was! You're going to play your Herb Alpert records for the chickens, and they're going to lay the most sophisticated eggs in the country.

**ADAM:** (With a half smile) They do appreciate a good brass section.

(There's a long beat.)

We're supposed to be at the Miller's barn right now. Drinking lukewarm beer and dancing to songs we're gonna hate in five years.

**ERIN:** Who needs a graduation party? I'd rather be here. With the popcorn sky, watching the Adam and Erin double feature.

**ADAM:** How does this one end?

(ERIN's voice wavers.)

**ERIN:** I'm afraid the main characters are about to go to different theatres.

(ADAM lies down on his back, his hands behind his head.)

**ADAM:** Different theatres. That's a tough ticket to sell. I don't think I can get a refund on the last four years.

**ERIN:** Who'd want one? Eighth grade you was a disaster. You wore that knitted vest to the fall dance. You looked like a lost geography teacher.

**ADAM:** Hey, my granddad wore that vest to propose to my grandma. And it worked, didn't it? I got you to dance to that terrible country song in the middle of the gym.

**ERIN:** I only danced with you because you were the only boy who didn't smell like Axe body spray. You smelled like old paper.

**ADAM:** (Softly) I still do.

(ERIN sits down next to him. She gently tickles his arm as she speaks.)

**ERIN:** I know. It's my favourite smell in the world. But I look at these fields and I feel like I'm holding my breath. Like if I stay, I'm just going to stop breathing altogether. When Dad...

(She falters for a second, then starts again.)

When we were still on the farm, I remember him looking at the horizon like it was a fence. Not a view. A fence.

**ADAM:** It's not a fence to me, Rin. It's a floor. It's the thing that holds everything else up. My dad looks at that horizon and sees a schedule. He sees work, yeah, but he sees a life that makes sense. I look at the dirt and I see a hundred and fifty years of my family's DNA. If I stay, I'm not just taking over a farm, I'm staying in the conversation.

**ERIN:** And I'm just starting a new one. I'm loud, Adam. I want to be where the noise is louder than me.

**ADAM:** You're not loud. You're just vibrant.

**ERIN:** I love this town because you're in it. But I love the road out of it because it's the only place I feel like I'm actually moving. Remember last Tuesday? When we piled everyone into the Tercel?

**ADAM:** (Laughs) You mean the sardine can? I'm pretty sure Daniel's knees were touching his chin the whole way to the city.

**ERIN:** But we made it. We got the extra large Slurpees, the green ones that turn your tongue neon for three days, and we sat in that air conditioned movie theatre and felt like we were part of the world. Then, on the drive back, that's the best part.

(She leans her head back, looking up at the sky, her voice dropping into a dreamy tone.)

It's midnight. The highway is just a black ribbon and the headlights are the only things that exist. Daniel is asleep against the back window. Cara is passed out with her head on a bag of Oreos. Lynette is squished between them like the middle of an Oreo. And except for your snoring from the passenger seat, it's so quiet. But it's a different quiet than this field. It's the quiet of a mission accomplished. I look at them in the rear view mirror, dreaming about things they haven't seen yet, and I feel like I'm the captain of a spaceship. I'm the one bringing you all home. And I look at the city lights fading behind us in the mirror, and I think, "I'm coming back for you." Not to the city, but to the lights. I'm going to be one of those lights.

(ADAM sits up and gently takes her hand.)

**ADAM:** You already are. You're the brightest one I've ever seen.

**ERIN:** (Squeezes his hand) Then why does it feel like I'm breaking something?

**ADAM:** Because you are. We've been "Adam and Erin" since we were thirteen. That's a long time to be one word.

**ERIN:** (Laughs) "Adamerin." Sounds like a prescription for hay fever.

**ADAM:** (Grins) Side effects include excessive board game nights, a weird obsession with vinyl, and an inability to say goodbye in a wheat field.

(ERIN leans her head on his shoulder.)

**ERIN:** Okay, let's do it. The double feature. What are we watching?

(They both look upward, toward the sky.)

**ADAM:** First movie. It's a slow burn indie flick. Very prestige. There's a scene where the protagonist... that's me, obviously... is standing on the porch at 5:00AM. The air is cold, the coffee is black, and the only sound is the earth waking up. I've got the old record player hooked up to the outdoor speakers. Ella Fitzgerald is playing. The cows are confused, but they're into it.

**ERIN:** (Giggles) Jazz cows. It's a niche market.

**ADAM:** It's a masterpiece! I spend my days out smarting the weather and my nights reading

books that haven't been touched since the library was built. And every now and then, I look at the passenger seat of the tractor and I remember the girl who used to sit there and complain about the dust.

**ERIN:** (Softly) She wasn't complaining about the dust. She was complaining about the lack of a soundtrack.

**ADAM:** Right. But in my movie, I'm happy. It's a quiet happy. Like a well oiled hinge. It fits. Now, what's playing on screen two?

(ERIN's eyes light up, wide and bright.)

**ERIN:** Screen two is a summer blockbuster! Opens with a montage. I'm wearing this green dress and I'm walking down a sidewalk, in Manhattan, where nobody knows my name. Isn't that amazing? To be a stranger? I'm working in a building that has an elevator. A real one, and not a grain elevator that smells like pigeons. I have a tiny apartment with a fire escape, where I grow tomatoes in pots just to prove I haven't forgotten everything you taught me.

**ADAM:** (Laughs) You'd kill them in a week. You'd forget to water them because you're too busy at a gallery opening or something.

**ERIN:** I'll hire a tomato sitter! And at night, I'll go to the movies. Not a multiplex, but a place where the ceiling is painted like the Sistine Chapel. I'll sit in the dark, and when the lights come up, I'll step out onto the street and the city will be humming. It'll be midnight and people will be eating dinner! It's a place where life doesn't stop just because the sun went down.

**ADAM:** Sounds exhausting.

**ERIN:** It sounds like being alive!

(She looks at him, the excitement fading into something more vulnerable.)

But in my movie, there's a part of the montage where I'm at a party, surrounded by all these brilliant, fast talking people. And someone says something funny. Something really witty and really smart. And I turn to my left to catch your eye, but you're not there.

(A silence stretches between them. After a beat, ADAM takes a deep breath.)

**ADAM:** In my movie, when the harvest is done and the barn is full, I go inside to wash the grease off my hands, I walk past the kitchen table, and I see a postcard. It's got a picture of a skyline on it. It's a little bit crumpled because I've read it about a hundred times.

**ERIN:** (Whispers) What does it say?

**ADAM:** It says: "The popcorn here is terrible. And nobody understands my jokes. But the lights are really bright."

**ERIN:** It would also say that I found a hardware store that stays open twenty four hours a day, just in case I need a light bulb at 3:00AM.

(ADAM turns, to look her in the eyes.)

**ADAM:** You're really going, aren't you? Not just to the city. You're going away.

(ERIN nods.)

**ERIN:** (Softly) We were always going to be the ones who stayed until the lights went out.

(ADAM runs his hand through the stalks of wheat.)

**ADAM:** My dad says this dirt is stubborn. He says it takes more than it gives. But I don't see it that way. When I'm on the tractor and the sun is just starting to come up, everything feels intentional. Every seed I put in the ground is a promise I'm making to the future. I love the way the grease feels on my hands. It's like I'm part of the machine. I look at these rows and I don't see work. I see a story that started long before I got here and is gonna keep going long after I'm gone. I want to be the one who tells the next chapter. I want to look at a storm coming in and know exactly which way the wind is gonna bite because I know the curves of this land like I know the back of my hand. I don't see it as a prison. I see it as a conversation with the world.

(He looks at her, his voice softening.)

I know why you don't see it that way. I know the land took something from you it can never pay back.

(ERIN turns away, unable to look him in the eye.)

**ERIN:** It took everything. When the cancer came back, my Dad would just stare out the window at the fields he couldn't plow anymore. He hated them by the end. He looked at the wheat like it was a clock, counting down. When he died, the silence on that farm was so loud it felt like it was crushing us.

**ADAM:** Your mom did what she had to do.

**ERIN:** She was a ghost for a year. Moving us into town, into that cramped little house with five kids and one bathroom. It was supposed to be a tragedy. My sisters cried for months because they missed their horses. My brothers missed the creek. And I felt...

(She pauses, looking down at her hands.)

I felt like I had finally been plugged into a socket. I felt horrible for it. I'd look at Mom, exhausted, dragging us to the hardware store to buy cheap paint for the kitchen, and I'd be secretly thrilled because the store was only three blocks away. I loved that the sidewalk started at our front door. I loved the sound of the neighbour's lawnmower because it meant people were close. I felt like a traitor every time I caught myself smiling because we weren't farm kids anymore. And for the first time, I wasn't waiting for the day to end. I was waiting for it to start.

**ADAM:** You shouldn't feel guilty for liking the way the world opens up.

**ERIN:** But it opened up because his life closed. How am I supposed to deal with that? I found my freedom in the middle of our family's worst nightmare. And now, I'm using that freedom to leave you, too.

(ADAM plucks a stalk of wheat and tucks it behind her ear.)

**ADAM:** You're not leaving me because of a nightmare. You're leaving because you're a city girl who accidentally spent seventeen years in a wheat field.

**ERIN:** I'm a traitor. I'm sitting in a beautiful field with a beautiful boy, and all I can think about is how much I want to hear sirens and buy a seven dollar coffee.

(ADAM leans back on his elbows and looks at the popcorn clouds in the sky again.)

**ADAM:** Okay, fine. Let's play it out. Screen three. I move to the city with you. We get one of those apartments that's basically a closet with a view of a brick wall. I get a job. I don't know, in an office? Sitting under those humming fluorescent lights that make everyone look like they've been underwater for three days.

**ERIN:** You could be a landscape architect! You know plants.

**ADAM:** (Shakes his head) I'd be the guy yelling at the sidewalk because the drainage is all wrong. I'd spend my lunch breaks in a concrete park trying to find a patch of dirt that doesn't have a cigarette butt in it. I'd be wearing a plaid tie and I'd feel like I'm being strangled by a colourful snake. I'd be looking at my watch every five minutes, not because I have a meeting, but because I'm trying to calculate how many hours of sun I'm missing. I'd be a ghost. A well dressed ghost who forgets what his own hands are for.

**ERIN:** (Softly) You'd hate the noise.

**ADAM:** I'd hate that the noise doesn't mean anything. Out here, a noise means a belt is slipping or a storm is turning or a coyote is near the coop. In the city, a noise is just noise. I'd be lost in the middle of a million people, and I'd still be the loneliest guy in the room.

**ERIN:** And I'm already that girl. I love you, Adam. I love you so much it hurts my teeth. But I've lived here my whole life and I know exactly what happens if I stay.

**ADAM:** Tell me.

**ERIN:** Screen four. We get married in the church on Main Street. I wear a dress that's sensible because we have to save for the new grain bin. I work at the school or the bank, and every Friday we go to the same bar and eat the same wings and talk to the same people about the same rain that didn't fall. And I'd love you every single day, but every time a car drove past our house with a foreign license plate, I'd feel this pull in my chest. Like a hook. And eventually, I'd start to resent the very thing you love. I'd look at this field and I wouldn't see a conversation. I'd see a golden wall that I never had the courage to climb.

(She turns to look at him, her eyes sad, but honest.)

I don't want to wake up at forty and realize I've been holding my breath for twenty years. I want to see if I can actually swim.

(A long silence.)

**ADAM:** The thing about movies is, they usually have a sequel. But I don't think sequels work if they're in different genres.

**ERIN:** Maybe it's not a movie at all. Maybe it's just a really beautiful short film. Ten minutes. Perfect and sweet. And then the lights come up.

(ADAM pulls her close, his chin resting on the top of her head.)

**ADAM:** The sky is getting dark. The popcorn is turning into shadows.

**END OF PREVIEW**

To request a complete script, or apply for production rights, contact:

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