

TRAPPED OR SAVED – YOU DECIDE ...

BEST OF ALL WORLDS



KENNETH OPPEL

'A masterpiece – as soon as you finish, you'll want to talk to someone about it.' **DAVID LEVITHAN** *author of EVERY DAY*

A goat bleated, and it took me a few seconds to realize this was not a normal cottage sound. For the first time that morning, I looked out the window, and the lake was . . . gone. Instead of a lawn sloping gently to the dock, there was a red barn and a fenced pasture. Inside the pasture was a shelter with an open front, and beside it stood a brown-and-white goat.

I stood. To the right of the pasture were rows of green plants. Farther off was a cornfield. My brain was already telling me a story, reasonably explaining how this must have been done overnight: building the barn, planting the crops, drain-ing an entire lake. Or maybe it had dried up overnight from the heat dome. Wasn't stuff like that happening all over the world now? I stopped myself. No. It wasn't just a change. It was *completely* different.

I usually avoided going into Dad's bedroom now that it was also Nia's bedroom, but this was important. The two of them were still asleep. Dad had on one of his weird nose strips that Nia made him wear because he snored.

“Dad. Dad!”

He lifted his head from the pillow. “What’s wrong?”

“Outside is all different. The cottage—it’s moved.”

His head dropped back onto the pillow. “Xavier.”

“I’m not joking. We’re on a farm. There’s a *goat*.”

Helpfully, the sound of bleating came through their curtained window.

“That’s definitely a goat,” Nia said, stirring.

“Just come look!”

Nia raised herself onto her elbows and affectionately rubbed her humped belly. With a grunt, Dad levered himself into sitting and followed me down the hall in his boxers and a McGill T-shirt.

“Must’ve gotten loose,” Dad said, yawning. “Didn’t the people down the road get a . . .”

At the window he stopped talking. There were now two goats in the pasture. From Dad’s lips slid a word that sounded like “faaaaaawk.” He walked to the kitchen, whose windows looked out front. Our car wasn’t in the driveway. There was no driveway at all, no road connecting us to the other houses built around the lake. Instead there were more fields of crops, a small orchard, and a big blue sky over all of it.

Nia was laughing in the family room, and I felt hopeful. It was all a joke, and now they’d explain it to me. When Dad and I joined her by the big windows, the view was unchanged.

“Why’re you laughing?” Dad asked her.

“I just can’t take it seriously.” She stood there in her mauve maternity yoga gear, shaking her head as she took in the view. “Everything I can think of is insane. Unless I’m still asleep.”

“We’re not asleep,” Dad assured her.

“Maybe it’s just video screens,” I said. “Pushed up against all the windows?”

Dad looked at me, bewildered. “Why would anyone do that?”

“I don’t know! Why would anyone move our lake?”

“You can’t just move a lake,” said Nia.

“Can’t just move a house either,” Dad said.

“You can,” I told him. “There’s this video where people moved a three-story house on a flatbed trailer.”

“Not with people sleeping inside. It’d be a huge job—and noisy, especially in the middle of the night. Ripping a cottage off its foundations?” Something occurred to him and he returned to the kitchen and turned on the tap. Water gushed out. “And we wouldn’t have plumbing. Or electricity.” He flipped a switch and the lights came on. He looked out where the driveway used to be. “How would you get a flatbed trailer in here without a road? I’m not even seeing tire tracks.”

“Does it smell weird to you?” I asked.

“I’m getting my phone,” Nia said impatiently, marching to the bedroom.

“How do we even have electricity?” I asked Dad, pointing out the window. It wasn’t just the road that was gone; there wasn’t a power pole in sight.

When Nia returned, she was holding her phone as well as Dad’s, and shaking her head. “No service.”

Outside in the pasture, both goats were still bleating.

“Where the hell are we?” said Nia angrily, like Dad or I was responsible.

I opened the map app on my phone. Instead of the familiar outlines of the township, it was just a blank grid. That wasn’t so unusual when you didn’t have data. What *was* unusual was that there was no blue GPS dot.

“We’re not anywhere,” I said, showing the phone to Dad.

Nia checked on her own phone. “This is unbelievable.”

She reached for the latch on the sliding door, but my father caught her hand.