

ESCAPE

K. R. Alexander

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ESCAPE YOUR TROUBLES! ESCAPE TO ADVENTURE!

It was the same tagline Cody had read a hundred times. But he still felt a thrill every time he read it. ESCAPE wasn't just a theme park. It was an Event. A Happening. It promised everything a kid could want, and more.

Want to cast magical spells in cutting-edge VR?

Done.

Fly among dragons and dinosaurs on a real live hang glider?

No problem.

Eat all the junk food you can stomach and stay up until four in the morning?

Go for it.

ESCAPE was built to cater to dreams. Whatever you wanted, whenever you wanted it—the moment you stepped foot within the park’s doors, it was yours.

And the best part?

No. Adults. Allowed.

Cody would have given anything to go. He was obsessed. He’d read every article, interacted with every post, watched every behind-the-scenes video. But he knew, deep down, that he wouldn’t get the chance.

ESCAPE wasn’t built for kids like him.

He wasn’t famous enough.

For the incredibly exclusive grand opening week, only a hundred tickets had been made available, given out one at a time with grand announcements.

For the first few months, Cody watched as every single ticket went to someone he knew. Not because they were his classmates, but because the kids were famous. Pop star, social media sensation, child actor, business-tycoon-kid famous. He had to watch as ESCAPE posted them one by one to its feed. The kids gloated and humblebragged about getting to go. *The chance of a lifetime*, they called it. Yeah—but to them, those chances came every day.

Cody had still liked the posts. Just in case.

Then, a month ago, the website had changed.

A registration form had appeared.

Along with it came a new promise: The final thirty kids chosen wouldn't be celebrities. They'd be selected by a random drawing.

Whoever wanted to register would have a chance.

Cody signed up. Of course he did. He clicked submit before even reading the fine print.

He would do anything to get out of his nowhere town. Even though he had a few friends, he still felt closed in. He knew Laura and Patrick didn't dream as big as him, didn't spend their days thinking of building their own massively popular theme park and traveling the world exploring new rides.

They were happy here.

He was not.

So for the next twenty-six days, Cody watched as, one by one, regular kids like him were picked from the draw.

Twenty-six more opportunities lost.

Every time, he felt like the walls were closing in a little bit tighter. Every time, he felt his chances of ESCAPE—both the theme park and getting out of his town—were slipping from his hands.

If only he'd known that soon, he wouldn't be trying to escape his boring routine.

Instead, he'd be trying to escape with his life.