

FINDING SAFE
BY
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CHARACTERS

BOY, portraying a ten-year-old
GIRL, portraying a ten-year-old

(At rise, GIRL, wearing private school attire, is sitting on a park bench reading a playbook. BOY enters sneaking towards GIRL until he gets close to her.)

BOY
(Tapping GIRL.)

Tag!

(BOY rushes away from GIRL, but she doesn't notice. BOY creeps back to GIRL slowly.)

BOY
(Tapping GIRL.)

Tag!

(BOY rushes away from her. GIRL brushes where BOY tapped her and continues her reading. BOY marches over and pokes her.)

BOY

I said tag.

GIRL

Is that some kind of cue?

BOY

Tag. That means you're it.

GIRL
(Looking up from playbook.)

It?

BOY

Haven't you played tag before?

GIRL

Who wrote it?

BOY

It's been around forever! You're supposed to chase me after I tag you and then you try to tag me back. That's how the game is played.

GIRL

(Returning to playbook.)

Sounds too simple.

BOY

There's other ways to play the game, like freeze tag, TV tag, shadow tag, flashlight tag, imagine-it tag—that's one that I made up. When someone's tagged, the new it gets to call what machine or animal or anything imaginary that they are, like a chariot, or a cheetah, or a centaur, and they have to pretend to be a chariot or a cheetah or a centaur or whatever they're pretending to be until they tag the next person. I haven't played imagine-it tag yet, but I bet it's fun.

(A beat.)

Let's play imagine-it tag! You're it!

GIRL

I don't have time to play games.

BOY

I'm always playing games.

GIRL

(Setting the playbook down.)

You play games all the time?

BOY

I've got all the time in the world. My mom and dad are always kicking me out of the house to play games.

GIRL

(Imagining with interest.)

All the time in the world...

BOY

Aren't you going to chase me?

GIRL

What would be my motivation?

BOY

You want me to be it so you're not it anymore. Nobody wants to be it.

(GIRL looks between BOY and the playbook.)

GIRL

Why do you want to play with me?

BOY

You have to play with me.

GIRL

Why me?

BOY

You're the only kid here at this park.

GIRL

Why can't your mom and dad play with you?

BOY

They're too busy planning their big digging trip. They're going to Egypt for a whole year soon.

GIRL

Find one of your friends then.

BOY

I don't—they're busy.

GIRL

It's a Saturday. All kids are free on Saturdays.

BOY

So you're free?

GIRL

(Picking up the playbook.)

Consider me not a kid.

BOY

(Pointing to the playbook.)

What's that?

GIRL

My drama.

BOY
Your book doesn't have pictures.

GIRL
It's a play.

BOY
So you do have time to play.

GIRL
I only have time to study my lines. That's what my dad says.

BOY
Ask your mom. Maybe she'll let you play.

GIRL
My mom's dead to me.

(Awkward silence.)

BOY
Dead or playing dead?

GIRL
Please leave me alone. I need to memorize these lines.

BOY
Lines for what?

GIRL
For the play. Auditions are tomorrow.

BOY
You have to try out to play?

GIRL
That's how theater works.

BOY
Anyone can play my game.

GIRL
Plays aren't like that. Not everyone can perform in my school's production.

BOY
Your school?

GIRL

I go to the performing arts academy. It's private.

BOY

Everything's private.

GIRL

Don't they have drama clubs at your public school?

BOY

I dunno. I'm always stuck at my aunt's house after school because my mom and dad work late at the university.

GIRL

At least your dad doesn't work at your school.

BOY

You get to see your dad all the time?

GIRL

Criticizing my every move in his drama class. And then in drama club after school. Always about an audition. That's why I need to memorize these lines.

BOY

Can I play?

GIRL

I just told you I can't play.

BOY

Can I play your play?

GIRL

You want to help me with my lines?

BOY

(Sitting next to GIRL on bench.)

Is that how the game is played?

GIRL

(Handing the playbook to BOY.)

It goes like this: you hold the playbook and read Hansel's lines and I'll try to recite Gretel's.

BOY
(Squinting at the playbook.)
What do you call this?

GIRL
It's Hansel and Gretel.

BOY
Hand-sail and Great-all? Sounds like an adventure!

GIRL
Hansel and Gretel is a fairytale.

BOY
A fairy tale?

GIRL
Classic stories, like Cinderella and Billy Goats Gruff and Three Little Pigs.

BOY
And Hercules and Osiris and King Arthur?

GIRL
Those are myths.

BOY
They sound the same to me.

GIRL
Fairytale are what dads read to little kids. Moms can read them too. Not sure if mine did. She left when I was born. Didn't your parents read to you?

(BOY shakes head.)

Your aunt?

BOY
I taught myself to read.

GIRL
I wish I didn't learn to read. Then I wouldn't have these lines to recite. My dad said that if I don't know my lines well enough for this play that he's going to transfer me to a public school.

BOY
Then you'll go to my school! Then we can play all the time!

GIRL

My saga wouldn't end there.

BOY

I know all about sagas. I used to read them on weekends from whatever textbook was around the house. But that was before my parents were tenured.

GIRL

Ten-yearred?

BOY

More like twenty or thirty years. They'll never stop teaching. That's because they teach archaeology now.

(GIRL looks confused.)

That means they try to figure out every secret from the dead. They bring home really cool books about it, full of pictures of artifacts and mummies. Some even have pull-out maps! I think these books are for their big adventure. But I haven't snuck a good look at them yet. They're always kicking me outside so they can pack or do something about Egypt.

GIRL

Egypt sounds like a better play.

BOY

It's a hard game to get to play.

GIRL

(Pointing to the playbook.)

Then let's play this. Start on page fifteen.

BOY

Why aren't we starting on page one?

GIRL

I'm auditioning to be Gretel and the lines I need to memorize start on page fifteen.

BOY

What's the point of the first fourteen pages?

GIRL

Only the Dad and Step-Mom have lines on those pages.

BOY
Let's read them.

GIRL
I don't need to know what they say.

BOY
I do.

GIRL
Page fifteen. You read Hansel's lines. We are sitting around a campfire deep in the forest and we have just learned that our parents have abandoned us.

BOY
Why?

GIRL
Why what?

BOY
Why did our parents abandon us?

GIRL
They don't want to feed us anymore.

BOY
They just leave us? They can do that?

GIRL
They built us a fire before they left.

BOY
Why don't we just follow them back home? Why do we just stay?

GIRL
We fell asleep and didn't see them leave.

BOY
They tricked us?

GIRL
That's how the story goes.

BOY
What am I supposed to do?

GIRL
You read Hansel's lines.

BOY
(Reading.)
Don't cry Gretel.

GIRL
(Acting horribly.)
How are we to get out of the forest now?

BOY
(Reading.)
I left a trail of breadcrumbs from our cottage. We'll follow those home.

GIRL
Why would you...wait, I got this. Why wouldn't you eat your bread! No, that's not it. Why would you crumble your bread! Why didn't you share your bread! Is that right?

BOY
(Reading.)
Our breadcrumb trail is gone.

GIRL
(Disappointed.)
Let's start the scene over.

BOY
(Reading.)
Don't cry Gretel.

GIRL
How are we to...to...what's my line?

BOY
(Reading.)
How are we to get out of the forest now.

GIRL
How are we to get out of the forest now?

BOY
(Not reading.)
Grab a log. We'll light them like torches so that when it gets dark we can still see. I know the way home.

GIRL

Those aren't your lines.

BOY

You seem to know my lines.

GIRL

Just read your lines so that I can recite mine.

BOY

What I said makes more sense.

GIRL

We're not supposed to know our way home. We're supposed to try to follow the breadcrumb trail home.

BOY

Every kid knows how to get home.

GIRL

We only know how to follow breadcrumbs.

BOY

The breadcrumb trail is gone. We're lighting torches.

GIRL

No, we wander around the forest until we find the candy cottage.

BOY

Let's find the candy cottage, go back home, then bring our parents back to the candy cottage. That way we can enjoy it together. Then we'll all go to Egypt.

GIRL

That's not how the story goes.

BOY

That's how it should go.

GIRL

Are you going to help me or not?

BOY

I'm bringing us back to our parents.

GIRL

The candy cottage distracts us.

I want to go home.	BOY
I want to go to the candy cottage.	GIRL
There's no place like home.	BOY
It's better than being at home.	GIRL
Our parents are at home.	BOY
Our parents don't want us.	GIRL
How did I make breadcrumbs? They must have given me bread.	BOY
They were obligated to give us bread.	GIRL
I don't want to go to the candy cottage. My aunt lives there.	BOY
The old lady lives there.	GIRL
The candy cottage is a trap. If we enter the candy cottage, we'll never get back to our parents.	BOY
We will eventually. I just need to get to the candy cottage first.	GIRL
I'm tired of waiting to go back home. I'm going back now.	BOY
We're supposed to stick together.	GIRL
I'm going home.	BOY

GIRL
Fine. Abandon me too.

BOY
I will come back for you with our parents.

GIRL
Don't you see they don't want us?

BOY
They have to want us.

GIRL
If we go back, they're going to remind us why we're hungry. They're going to remind us why we're suffering. He's going to remind me why Mom left us.

(A beat.)

BOY
Because you were born?

GIRL
(Softly.)
Because I was born. If I can just get to the candy cottage...

(GIRL starts to cry.)

BOY
Don't cry.

GIRL
How are we to get out of the forest now?

(BOY picks up the playbook.)

BOY
(Reading.)
I left a trail of breadcrumbs from our cottage. We'll follow those home.

GIRL
Our breadcrumb trail is gone.

BOY
(Lowering the playbook.)
Our breadcrumb trail is gone.

(A beat.)

I'm not getting home.

(BOY sets down the playbook and holds his head in his hands. GIRL taps BOY's shoulder.)

GIRL

Tag.

BOY

I'm it.

(GIRL brings hands to her lap.)

GIRL

I think we both are.

BLACKOUT