

Things with Horns and Sideways Eyes

by

Ariana Ferrante

They say the devil chose the goat to be his animal, that the devil gave him his eyes and his horns and his hooves and his power. And perhaps just as the devil was damned to a world of fire and brimstone, so too was the goat damned to county fair petting zoos.

It's not too terrible a fate, the goat thought one morning, munching on pellets, the little brown things drier than the hay that the humans gave him for bedding. *I could be far worse off*. He could be shut up in a slaughterhouse, waiting for the inevitable, or he could be a nanny in a milking parlor, grubby human paws squeezing away at his udders. No, as far as things usually went, he deemed himself pretty lucky.

Certainly, there *had* been bad days. Terrible ones, too. There always were. Such an experience was universal to both man *and* beast. There were times the human children would pull at his horns and poke at his snout with their nails and scratch him too hard when they pet. But they could only reach so far over the mesh fencing that kept him in place, and if he walked away, they'd quickly find another animal to bother.

One would be wrong to say he hadn't thought of escape. Far from it, in fact. The thought crossed his mind at least once a day. To leap out of his pen, butting and trampling all who got in his way, until there was no cotton candy, no popcorn, no screaming human children or dry pellets and hay. To run and run as far as his hooves would carry him, until grass and sunshine and freedom was all that surrounded him. It was tantalizing, tempting.

But every hopeful daydream crumbled against the weight of logic. The humans possessed strength in numbers, in the hundreds. They would catch him. They would only need a few, but once they got their paws around him they would take him right back to the petting zoo.

I just need a distraction, he thought, hoof scraping at the hay-covered dirt beneath him, seeking out the last of the scattered pellets. *And when I have it, today will be the day*.

He licked the earth beneath him free of the last few smatterings of crumbs. He lifted his horned head, sideways amber eyes scanning the vicinity. It was still early in the morning. Not many children, not yet. But they would come. Until then, he could formulate his escape.

He cleared a portion of hay near the wooden den the humans gave him. He'd marked the ground with the runes he used to cast, and pored over the selection with eager eyes. Fire? Too dangerous. Earth? Not entirely helpful, same with air, unless he wanted to get himself and everyone in the vicinity covered in dirt. Water? Too messy, and he wasn't the swimming type. He'd been trying his best on the transformation spells, but those remained a gamble. He'd one turned a fly into an ant, and quickly given the thing an identity crisis. And he'd *certainly* never use them on himself. There was no guarantee that he would still possess the affinity for casting if he did.

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