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THE GREAT ANIMAL ESCAPE

BY LINDA HARKEY
ILLUSTRATED BY JEFF YESH





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This book is dedicated to
Uriah Smart
The First great-grandson in our Family

- Linda Harkey



CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 Going fo cooking School?	ı
CHAPTER 2 Planning the Escape	6
CHAPTER 3 Escape from cowlick Ranch	12
CHAPTER 4 The Lightning Storm	16
CHAPTER 5 four-wheeled, Two-eyed Monsfers	24
CHAPTER 6 Safe at the Duck Pond?	32
CHAPTER 7 The Hunfress	36
CHAPTER 8 Ravens fo the Rescue	42
CHAPTER 9 Ready for Refiremenf Life?	50
READING GUIDE	54
THE CDEATIVE TEAM	£ 9





Going to Cooking School?

The red animal bus bounced over the potholes and gravel on the country road, sending dirt and rocks flying everywhere. The bus jerked to a stop at the entrance to Cowlick Ranch. Clouds of dust whirled upward. Cows and two-legged creatures called People swarmed around the open gate. The People prodded the Angus and Hereford bulls and cows aboard the bus.

No one noticed that two animals were missing

—Lova-Bull, a small but powerful dark-red

Hereford bull, and Mud Pie, a black Angus cow.

Lova-Bull and Mud Pie hid beneath a large yellow aspen tree. The aspen was surrounded by evergreen trees, right along the bank of the murky Raven River. Above them, a tree held a gigantic raven nest packed with seven chirping chicks.

The nest was woven out of cow hair, bark strips, and grass. It measured five ravens wide and two ravens high. Both animals ignored the shouting and mooing from the bus and the commotion of shrieking birds in the nest.

The bull watched the cow closely.

Lova-Bull thought, She chews her cud like those little two-legged creatures when they have globs of gum in their mouth. She can eat and moo at the same time. What a great friend. She's my kind of cow!



At that moment, the fall wind rushed from the north. It whirled and whistled through the trees. Bright red, yellow, and brown leaves were ripped from branches. They scattered through the air and littered the ground.

Bernie was one of the silvery black raven chicks in the big nest. The whirlwind swept him out of his home. He sailed from the nest and landed on Mud Pie's back.

Afraid that he might fall, Bernie sank his tiny pink claws into the cow. The chicks in this nest fell out so frequently, cattle in the herd rarely paid any attention to them.

Mud Pie jerked her head up. She snorted and mooed, "Is that you, Bernie?"

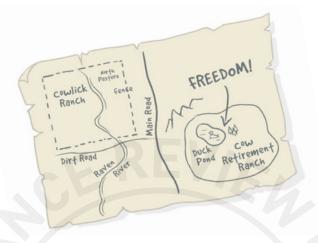
"Yep," Bernie cawed. "Hey, I heard the bus is taking the herd to cooking school today. They're going to learn how to make hamburgers. Why



aren't you both going with them?"

Lova-Bull grunted, "Gracie told us something that scared us silly. That old gray burro said that we weren't going to cooking school to learn how to make hamburgers. Hamburgers were going to be made out of us!"





CHAPTER 2 Planning the Escape

For the first time in his young life, Bernie was speechless. The big bull kept talking.

"Mud Pie and I are planning on slipping away this evening in the moonlight. Gracie will lead us to freedom! She hee-hawed that we could live at the Cow Retirement Ranch," he explained.

"It's only a two-day walk on the other side of the road. That ranch is close to the Duck Pond, where we can drink lots of water. Bernie, where did you hear about the cooking class?" Lova-Bull asked.

Bernie squawked, "You're going to bust the fence and run? That'll be a great adventure! Can I come?"

Mud Pie looked back at Bernie. "You'll have to ride on my back since you can't fly yet," she said. So, who told you about the cooking class?"

"It was Blue Moon, the Chihuahuan Raven,"
Bernie croaked. "She hears almost everything from
the ranchers. Blue Moon chattered on and on about
the cooking class. She loves to spread rumors."



Lova-Bull chewed his cud and mooed, "Why does Blue Moon come here? I thought her nest was in Mexico."

Bernie cawed, "You're right. Her home is in Mexico. But I guess she's just confused about where her nest is located. She keeps flying back and forth to Mexico. I hope she'll be back soon. Did you know she can caw in both English and Spanish?"

Mud Pie hung her head. "We didn't learn Spanish when I was in cattle school. I wish we had since some of our cowboys speak Spanish," she said. "We don't know what they are saying."

Bernie lost his balance, and his talons lost their grip on Mud Pie. The little raven flapped wildly as a swift breeze landed him on an oak shrub loaded with brown acorns.

Bernie cawed, "Whoopee, that was fun!"



He tried to stand up on an acorn but toppled off, sliding down into a pile of dark brown, slimy poop. On the ranch, it was known as a cow patty. Bernie struggled to stand. He finally kicked himself up and out of the smelly, sticky lump of what birds called "dumps."

"Ah-ha, Bernie!" Lova-Bull snorted. "Your beak is no longer pink. It's brown!"





Mud Pie backed away giggling. "You look like a mound of mud with two blue eyes. What a great disguise for running away."

Bernie's whole body dripped

with muck. He shook and flapped his small wings. Poop flew everywhere.

Lova-Bull and Mud Pie's legs and chests were freckled with bits of soft, slimy goo. Mud Pie continued to munch on grass. Then she said, "Lova-Bull, can you smell that? I didn't realize

how wonderful our poop smells—like rotten eggs."

Lova-Bull nodded.

"Mud Pie, I like it! It has that sweet skunk smell."



The big bull glanced at the sky. "Mud Pie, you know we need to keep up our strength for our getaway. We need to eat at least 20 pounds of grass today," he explained. We better get munching. Let's chow down in the north pasture. It has the best grass!"

Mud Pie whispered, "Don't forget that we need to take a cow nap. This is sure to be a long trip!

On our way, let's find Gracie so we'll be ready when it's dark."



CHAPTER 3 Escape from cowlick Ranch

Bernie made a shrill caw. "Wait for me! There's seven of us in the nest, so Mom and Dad won't notice I'm gone. They're in the south pasture hunting for our dinner."

Lova-Bull and Mud Pie stopped and waited for Bernie.

The little raven glanced down and saw a fat worm. He grabbed it with his beak, then yanked and twisted the worm from the ground.

"We'll need a snack in case it's a long trip," he said proudly.

"One worm won't feed all of us, Bernie!" Lova-Bull mooed.

"Okey-dokey, I'll swallow it myself when I feel hungry."

Bernie waddled close to Mud Pie. The wiggling worm hung out both sides of his beak as he dragged it along the ground.

"Bernie, see if you can heave yourself and your snack up on my back," Mud Pie mooed as she plopped down.

With worm in tow, Bernie moved slowly towards Mud Pie. He tripped over the long worm



as he tried to jump on her back. The little raven bounced off the cow's side and landed in a thorny green bush.

Poor Bernie! He landed on his back, beak open, legs up. Bernie screeched as his snack wiggled away.



Gracie the Burro heard the ruckus and came trotting up.

"I'll help Bernie," she said. "It'll be easy for him to hop on me. I'm small." Gracie flopped down on her front knees.

Terrified of the spiky needles on the green bush,

Bernie drew in his downy feathers and wriggled
his way through the stickers at record speed.

Free of the bush, he leaped over a tuft of grass and hopped up on Gracie.



CHAPTER 4 The Lightning Storm

Lova-Bull, Mud Pie, Gracie, and Bernie huddled together under a big cottonwood tree. They waited patiently for the darkness of night.

The animals dozed off beneath the tree—all except Bernie! He felt a bit lonely.

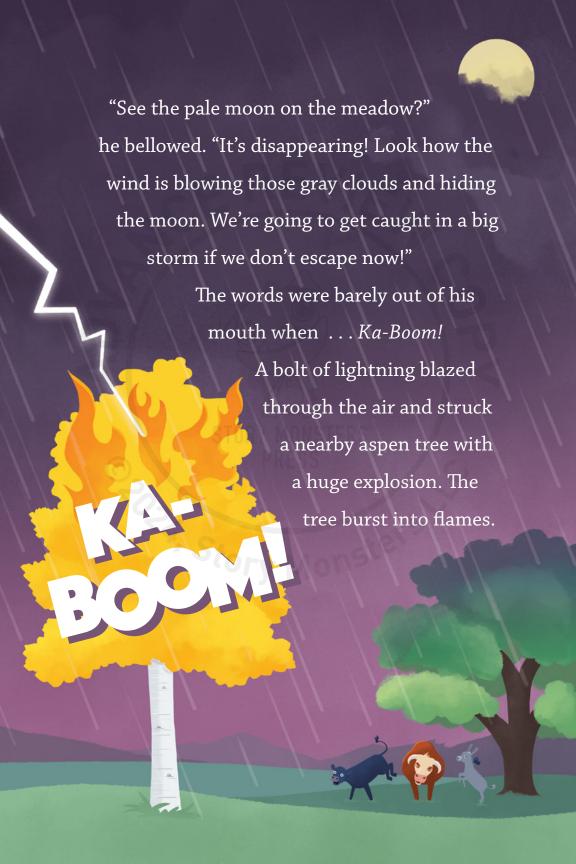
I wonder if my family knows that I'm missing,
Bernie thought. I have so many brothers and
sisters. Will they come looking for me? Will they
be mad at me for running away? What will they
do if they find me?

Later that evening, the wind began to blow.

Flashes of lightning lit up the sky on the horizon.

Lova-Bull stretched his head high, sniffed the air,
and pricked his ears up.





The burro reared up and cried, "Hee-Haw! Hee-Haw!"

Bernie held on to her mane with one claw as sheets of rain poured down and drowned the fire.

Mud Pie let out a shrill, "Moo! Moo!" She whipped her tail from side to side and kicked her back legs right into Lova-Bull.

The bull snorted as he backed away from Mud Pie. "Watch it!"

"Sorry, Lova-Bull," Mud Pie bellowed, "You know I twitch my tail before I kick."

"Well, don't make a habit of kicking me or I might just kick back!" Lova-Bull said.

"Hee-Haw," Gracie brayed as she shook and trembled. "Let's get out of here! I'll go first with Bernie on my back. Mud Pie, you're second. Lova-Bull is third. That way, we're protected from the

rear with Lova-Bull. Mud Pie guards the middle. And I'll protect us up front!"

Mud Pie swished her tail. "I'm nervous. Are we doing the right thing, Lova-Bull?"

"We don't have a choice, Mud Pie. No twolegged creature is going to eat me! We don't want to be hamburgers!" bawled Lova-Bull.

Bernie dangled off Gracie's mane, hanging on with one talon. Then he managed to hoist himself back up.



The wind whistled through the trees. A rush of raindrops poured from the sky. Black clouds devoured the moon. Thunder boomed again and lightning lit up the dark sky.

As the friends fled on their journey, they didn't notice a large tawny-colored creature with yellow eyes slinking along in the grass behind them.

Following were two smaller creatures with blue eyes, fluffy heads, and brown spots on their yellow coats.



The four friends picked up their pace as the downpour swelled into a full-blown thunderstorm. They splashed through streams and puddles of water. There was a squashy sound as hooves plunged into the mud.

Gracie trotted down the fence line. She stopped between two wooden posts that had five strands of barbed wire between them. The top strand was broken.

Gracie brayed, "Lova-Bull, see the thin spiky wires—knock them down!"



Lova-Bull mooed, backed up, pawed the muddy ground, and charged between the fence posts.

He rammed the wire strands with his entire body. There was a loud *TWANG* as the four wires snapped and whipped back to each side.

The four friends were free at last!





CHAPTER 5 Four-wheeled, Two-eyed Monsfers

The storm raged for hours before the rain finally slowed to a drizzle. Then it was over.

Lova-Bull, Mud Pie, and Gracie slowly tramped along the muddy cow path. Bernie was still holding on to Gracie's mane. He bounced like a pine cone on the burro's back.

Finally, the morning sun peeked through white, billowy clouds. The animals were soaked, thirsty, and tired.

"Hee-Haw! Hee-Haw!" bellowed Gracie. "Now's the dangerous part. We need to race across this

dirt road to avoid the four-wheeled, two-eyed monsters. They're fast! Bernie, hold on tight!"

No four-wheeled, two-eyed monsters were on the road, at least, not yet! Gracie trotted across the roadway with Bernie flopping back and forth.

"Wait, Gracie! Wait for us!" bellowed Lova-Bull.

"It's too late," Mud Pie mooed loudly. "Gracie and Bernie are across. We need to catch up."

Mud Pie started across. But she froze in the middle of the sludgy road. Her tail switched back and forth.

"Lova-Bull, I'm frightened! What's making that screeching sound?"





Lova-Bull mooed, "It must be the blue, twoeyed monster that's coming straight toward us!"

A huge, blue pickup truck blared music and a thumping noise as the tires spewed gravel and dirt. As the monster hurtled toward them, Mud Pie let go a whoosh of pee.

"Hurry! Hurry!" Lova-Bull mooed. "We'll get hit."

I need to save Mud Pie—but how? he thought.

Oh! I know. I'll charge!

Lova-Bull bolted toward the monster. He dropped his enormous head, pawed the dirt ground, and aimed his horns at the front bumper.



The blue monster swerved at the last second.

Both animals heard the brakes squeal. The truck skidded off the muddy road and ended up teetering like a seesaw next to the ditch.

Tires spun. The motor roared. Grass and mud flew everywhere. Then everything was quiet. A dazed human jumped out of the monster's side and stumbled away.

Mud Pie was in a panic. No longer frozen, she scurried to the other side of the road. Lova-Bull scrambled to catch up with her.

"Close call, you two," Gracie shouted. "That blue monster is stuck by the ditch. It can't hurt us now!"

Gracie flipped her long tail and shook her forelock. She waited for her friends to catch up.

Bernie crawled up Gracie's neck to the top of her head. Perched between the burro's ears, he yelled, "Hooray! Gracie, I can smell water from here."

"Great, Bernie. I always knew my head was good for something!" the burro laughed. "Let's take a stroll up the hill."



They paused at the top of the hill. The meadow on the other side had many ponds. There was plenty of shade under the evergreen trees. There was lots of green grass to chomp down. And lots of crystal-clear water to drink.







CHAPTER SIX Safe at the Duck Pond?

"Look! There goes a rabbit," Bernie cawed.

The friends trotted down the hill and stopped at the largest pond. Gracie whispered in a hoarse voice, "See the two Mallard ducks flying up? This is the Duck Pond. We can rest here."

Gracie, Mud Pie, and Lova-Bull munched on tasty green grass and guzzled clear, cool water.

"Oops! I'm hanging on your ear!" Bernie cawed, as he dangled upside down on the burro.

Gracie dropped to her knees. Bernie leaped to the soft grass. There were bugs everywhere he looked. He snatched them with his beak.



"Wow, these bugs are crunchy. They taste good!" he cawed.

With tummies full, the friends snoozed until dawn the next day.

Mud Pie woke up first. She heard screams echoing in the still morning air. The cow stomped her feet and shifted closer to Lova-Bull.

She mooed, "Lova-Bull, I'm frightened! What was that sound? I see little blue eyes and a pair of big, yellow eyes peering at us. What are those creatures?"

Bernie was now awake. He cawed and scrambled to the top of a tree stump. "Those blue eyes look like my young brothers and sisters!

Are they ravens?"



RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!

CHAPTER 7 The Huntress

Gracie hee-hawed, "Come out and face us, whoever you are! We're not afraid of you!

Lova-Bull defeated the four-wheeled, two-eyed monster. He'll defeat you, too!"

A huge, yellow-eyed animal stalked out of the bushes. It was growling.

"You should be afraid! We're hungry," the animal snarled.

The creature's long tail whipped back and forth. With another loud growl, it moved toward Gracie.



"It's a mountain lion! Run for your life!" Mud Pie shouted as she dashed toward Lova-Bull to hide behind him.

Lova-Bull held steady. "Don't worry, Mud Pie.
This creature is not going to eat us! Gracie, you kick, and I'll charge."



Quick on her feet, Gracie turned and kicked the mountain lion with a great whack. The lion somersaulted through the air and landed on its back. Stunned, but just as quick, it jumped up and leaped for Gracie again.

"Jeepers, did you see that?" cawed Bernie.

"That mountain lion is so strong it sailed over
Gracie and crashed into the tree trunk. Look, it's standing up and staring at me. Uh-oh! Gracie, help! The lion's going to bite me!"

Gracie was no coward. She chomped on the mountain lion's neck and shook her like a rag doll. Gracie dropped the lion in a heap and stared down as it cowered beneath her, ears back and whiskers twitching.

The burro snorted, "That'll show you not to mess with us!"

Lova-Bull bumped Gracie's shoulder and

mooed, "Great going Gracie! I didn't even have to charge."

Gracie looked closely at the mountain lion.

"Wait, I know you! You're called Huntress," she said. "Last year, you wanted me for dinner, but then a coyote diverted you. Remember? I'm Gracie."

The mountain lion was shocked. She thought, Dinner doesn't usually bray or moo and it's not this hard to catch! *I must be weak from hunger*.

"Gracie the Burro? I don't remember you. All burros look alike!" said the lion in a low voice.

Gracie was insulted. "No, we don't! Our coats are many colors. Some burros are gray. Some are black. Some are brown or white..."

Before Gracie could finish, Huntress thought, I really don't like this burro. All she does is bray, bray! I better teach my cubs to hunt small,

tender animals first—like rabbits—not some vicious, biting burro.

Then the lion jumped up and faced Gracie.

That bite really hurt! I'm mad! I'll show her!

Huntress extended her sharp claws. She
opened her powerful jaws wide, showing off
lots of long, pointed teeth. Then she moved





CHAPTER 8 Ravens to the Rescue

Precisely at that moment, a flock of ravens flew overhead.

Caw! Caw! Caw! they screeched.

The sky was filled with dozens of birds. A large, shiny, blue-black raven dive-bombed the mountain lion. Its long wings whooshed and fluttered. Its sharp talons clawed at the lion's head.

Bernie jumped up and down on the tree stump. He stood tall with his chest puffed out.

"Whoopee, that's Mom! She'll fight Huntress.





She's the strongest raven around. Go, Ma, Goooo!"

Huntress winced. She shook her head and batted at the bird. Wobbling on her two back legs, Huntress tried to claw the raven off of her head. But the big bird's sharp beak jabbed her again and again.

Huntress shook her body. Tufts of hair and feathers flew everywhere.

Twigs broke and leaves scattered. The two small, blue-eyed mountain lion cubs jumped out of the bushes and ran to their Mama. Seeing the cubs, all the ravens flew off and perched in the trees—except for Bernie's Ma.

Bernie cawed, "I knew it! Blue eyes! You must be Huntress's cubs."

"You bet we are," one cub hissed. "Ma's teaching us to hunt. We're very hungry!"



Bernie stared at them and squawked.

"You can't eat Gracie," he said. "Her meat's too tough for you. You can't eat Lova-Bull or Mud Pie. Their meat is old and dry. And you can't eat me. The meat on me isn't even enough for a snack."

Bernie's Ma flapped her wings and flew off of the lion's head. She swooped down and grabbed Bernie with her talons. With a few more powerful wing-flaps, they were both safe on a branch high in a tree.

Lova-Bull, Mud Pie, and Gracie heard the big raven cawing.

"My work is done," Ma said. "Bernie, we missed you so much! It's time to come home and grow up."

Bernie and his Ma circled several times above them.



Bernie cawed, "Bye, everyone. I sure had fun. Good luck with Huntress. I'll come back when I'm bigger. I had a great adventure!"

Huntress was exhausted from the fight. She noticed a large black bird perched on a rock by her cubs. It was Blue Moon, the Chihuahuan Raven. She'd been grooming herself while watching the big fight.



"Psst! Psst! Hey lion. Why don't you and your cubs trot over to the cooking school? You'll find plenty of rabbits and deer to hunt."

Huntress growled, "Are you sure about that?"

Blue Moon cawed,
"I swear by my tail
feathers, it's true."



Huntress thought, We need to leave these animals alone. They're too much trouble! Rabbits and deer sound like a much easier meal!

Huntress and her cubs slunk back into the bushes.

Blue Moon cawed as she flew away. "See you later. I'm going to follow Bernie back to his nest. Since his Ma and Pa have all those babies, they won't notice one more mouth to feed."



CHAPTER 9 Ready for Refirement Life?

Gracie turned to Lova-Bull and Mud Pie. "I'm going to miss Bernie."

"We are too!" Mud Pie mooed.

"Why can't we stay right here? There's plenty of grass and water. And no one is trying to make hamburgers out of us," Lova-Bull said as he munched on a mouthful of grass.

Gracie brayed, "Look, let's trot over to that sign."

The sign read:

Rancher Girard's Cow Retirement Ranch

In smaller print, the words below said:

No gate, no fences, just happy cattle!

"This sounds perfect for you and Mud Pie," Gracie said. "You'll be safer on the ranch. You never know when that lion will come back."



Lova-Bull mooed, "Wait a minute. Why don't they have barbed wire fences and gates to keep the cattle inside the ranch?"

Gracie said, "They don't need them. I heard that no one ever leaves. The cows and bulls and burros are always happy. Rancher Girard treats all the animals at his place like family."

Months later...

Lova-Bull, Mud Pie, and Gracie were last seen in a pasture at the Cow Retirement Ranch.

Rancher Girard was there as well. He was giving each one of them a big hug and a pitchfork of delicious hay.

There were loud sounds coming from the trees just off in the distance. The animals turned their heads to listen. It sounded like a raven. Could it be Bernie?



The best way to read a book with a child is as a partnership. The child sees that the adult loves reading, and in turn, the child understands that reading is a fun activity. Here are questions and activities that can accompany the reading.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WHILE READING

- Who do you think is telling the story?
 This is called the narrator.
- What time of year is it?
- The animals are being loaded onto a bus.
 Is it a school bus or what do you think it looks like?
- Why are Lova-Bull and Mud Pie over under a tree and away from the other cows?
- There is a mistake in what is happening. The cows think they are going to cooking school, but what is really going to happen?
- Who are the two-legged and who are the four-legged creatures mentioned in the story? One has no legs at all.
- What do Lova-Bull and Mud Pie plan to do after the "bus" leaves?
- How would you describe Bernie?

- Blue Moon gets confused. What does he not remember?
- Who is the hero of the story? Since you have a couple of choices, explain why you chose the one you did.
- Why is the ranch they found called a retirement ranch?
- Retelling: The animals have things happening to them.
 Can you tell about two of them?

ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

Use the tune of "Old McDonald Had a Farm" for the creatures in this story and Rancher Girard as the farmer.

Example: Rancher Girard had a farm E I E I O and on that farm he had a pig. E I E I O. With an oink, oink here and an oink, oink there; here an oink, there an oink, Rancher Girard had a farm, E I E I O

Cow= moo

Raven= caw

Burro= hee-haw

Duck= quack

Can you add the sounds of another animal?

Activity 2

There are many plants mentioned in the story. Can you arrange the order from largest to smallest? Write the names in the boxes in order. Acorn, thorny green bush, cottonwood tree, leaf, pine cone, and grass.

		(largest)
N.		K
0,	PRESS	
19,	Story Monst	ers
		(smallest)

Activity 3

Can you put these animals in the order you learned of them in the story? In the right column, write the names in order.

Fat Worm	1
Mountain Lion	2.
Lova-Bull TORY	MON STERS' RESS
Mallard Ducks	4
Gracie	Nonster
Blue Moon	6
Bernie	7

THE CREATIVE TEAM

About the Author



Linda Harkey loves dogs and loves teaching children. She is the author of eleven children's books and has been featured in several magazines, including American Kennel Club Gazette, OKC Pets Magazine, Tulsa Pets Magazine, Story Monsters Ink, ® and Tempo: Arts & Entertainment Magazine from The Taos News, as well America Tonight Radio show with Kate

Delaney and WebTalkRadio with John Crowley. For over 22 years, she diligently worked as a volunteer docent at two outstanding museums in Oklahoma. During her tenure, she helped develop curricula for children's programs and gave countless presentations to children both at the museums and local schools. Her experiences as a mother, school teacher, volunteer docent, and hunting dog owner have inspired her to write her award-winning children's books.

About the Illustrator



Jeff Yesh is an illustrator and graphic designer whose award-winning work has been featured in multiple children's books, including A Squirrel's Story—A True Tale. He is also the artistic talent behind the Story Monsters character and is the graphic designer for the award-winning Story Monsters Ink,® the literary resource for parents, teachers, and librarians. Yesh graduated from

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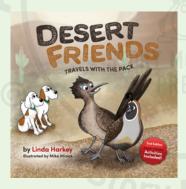
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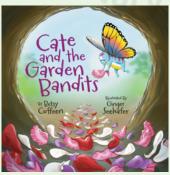
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PREPARE FOR AN UNFORGETTABLE JOURNEY: DIVE INTO THE WORLD OF THE GREAT ANIMAL ESCAPE!

Calling all young adventurers and curious minds! Join us on an exhilarating escapade with Gracie the Burro, Lova-Bull, and Mud Pie in *The Great Animal Escape* by Linda Harkey. This thrilling tale is a must-read for parents and kids alike, promising an engaging and heart-pounding adventure that will leave you on the edge of your seat.

Get ready to embark on a rollercoaster ride, from facing off against four-wheeled monsters to braving the challenges of the great outdoors. As our brave animal heroes overcome obstacles with courage and teamwork, young readers will be inspired to discover their own inner strengths and embark on their own daring quests.

Filled with humor, action, and heart, *The Great Animal Escape* is perfect for children ages 8 to 12 who crave excitement and are ready to be swept away by a story that celebrates friendship, unity, and the power of never giving up.

Let the adventure begin!





