

WHERE THE SMALL THINGS ARE

by

Penwing

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CHAPTER I

WISHFUL THINKING

Whoosshhh...

The wind buffeted dangerously through Adrienne's short curls. She knew exactly how high up she stood on this building, and she did not need to look down to confirm it. The queazy feeling in her stomach settled somewhat as she lowered herself in a crouch, but even the steadying index finger with which she caressed these red clay roof tiles would do little to slow the pounding of her heart.

Some rogue she was.

The clatter of loose dirt and tile under her foot siezed her rapidly beating heart to a short stop. Luckily, the sliding stopped too. Adrienne breathed a deep sigh in relief. And frustration.

Steeling her eyes, she mentally tested the grip of her rubber-soled shoes on the tiles. Her fingers wrapped around a small charm that hung from the band on her wrist.

The cat's paw-pad. An amulet of agility.

And so, like a feline spirit possessed her, Adrienne stole across the tiles with ever-increasing confidence and speed. She would need the speed when she got to the edge of the roof. Hopefully the boon of the amulet would be enough.

The sloping graduated slowly, and Adrienne found herself able to straighten into a run.

Adrienne.

Knees pulled to the sky and shoulders drew back as Adrienne lengthened her stride. The wind pulled like a gale through her rogueish robes, her speed locking in her focus.

Adrienne.

The rooftop of the second building loomed. Taller, steeper than she imagined it would be. Adrienne did not know what she expected otherwise; government buildings always had a tendency to sport those awful gothic-style roofs.

Didn't they?

Adrienne!

Her thoughts launched her toward the very roof she was contemplating, the rush of wind beneath her as she sailed across the empty late-night main street. The amulet slipped from her fingers, hitting against the wrist it was tethered to. Arms and legs flailed like windmills as Adrienne did what she could to extend her time in the air before reaching a mistimed landing . . .

“ADRIENNE!”

Feet met the floor followed closely by knees and hands.

"ow..."

"Adrienne, what the hell, dude? It's like, three in the fucking morning."

Alan's blazing brown eyes, normally accusing or concerned at his flatmate's increasingly singular antics, were now devoid of whatever sympathy there would have been in the weeks before. "Blazing" would also be the incorrect description at this point. It would imply a sense of energy.

To be frank, Alan's eyes, pallid skin, dishevelled hair and sourly impassive expression altogether painted an accurate image of a young man that was thoroughly dead inside.

"Sorry." Adrienne apologised sheepishly, not making eye contact. Instead she shifted her gaze to the clock sitting on her small desk. "02:53" the red seven-segment displays shone, the diminutive electronic barely visible among the clutter of sticky notes and papers.

"Are you ready for tomorrow?" She asked, hoping to change the subject. She knew he was awake until now too. Engineering students had a very strange way of coping with exam season. At least "studying", or sitting frozen before the same set of notes until your eyes glazed over as Alan did, was healthier than most.

Healthier than getting "lost", as Adrienne called it. Which was happening more and more lately. She refused to grow too concerned about it. She would not normally be, at least not for herself. Adrienne was more concerned at Alan's increasingly low tolerance for her, and how she felt helpless to fix that.

"I would be, if I could get some fucking sleep. Go to bed, Adrienne. Or study. Or actually, no. Go to sleep."

"Sorry, Alan, I..."

"Go to sleep. I will personally drag you to the green-roofed house if you don't."

A note of care could indeed be found in Alan's voice — but it was for nought. Adrienne was quite wounded and mortified by Alan's threat. Well, Alan's "threat". Alan did think that Adrienne's daydreaming was increasingly maladaptive to the point of concern, even for an exam season. But what concerned him more than her behaviour at the moment was the possibility of losing out on whatever precious little sleep either of them would be getting before the exam the next day.

Well.

Later the same day.

"... sure. Sorry."

Alan made no move to acknowledge Adrienne's apology. Instead, he simply gestured from the clock to the bicycle helmet hanging on Adrienne's bedroom wall.

"Bike or lift?"

Adrienne slowly stood from where she landed on the floor. She considered Alan's offer carefully: normally she would prefer cycling. It would clear her head. However, with most of her study time procrastinated away in a flurry of home-brewing a new and wishful DragonRPG campaign that culminated in RP'ing as a rogue at midnight...

"Lift, please." Adrienne supplied quietly. The extra time to memorise some of her flashcards would likely do little to increase her chances of a good score, but it would ease some anxiety.

"You are up and ready at seven. Go to sleep."

Alan's retreating footsteps were punctuated by the closing of her bedroom door.

Adrienne's eyes fell on the clock again. 03:00 on the dot.