

Winter had come to Escarpment, with winds howling across the stony cliffs. It had been centuries since the town was needed for its strategic position, and the town's great brick fort had long since been made into an archive, with its grand library serving as the pride of an otherwise disgruntled town.

Yet even such repurposings could be laid low by change. In a week, the Escarpment Archives would be closed to all, its tomes shipped off to various other parts of the country and its halls vacated. The fort was too large, they said, too old. Let us build greater things in its place.

Anne did not think that there could be much greater built here, as she guided her friends into the library. Even if there was, it would be built on the ruin and rubble of the dreams and fantasies of countless generations. How many had let their mind wander here, slipping into stories that captivated their eager minds? **"They've given us the run of the place."**

Raymond nodded, sliding under the little velvet rope that normally restricted patrons to the front of the library. This took a bit of effort, large as he was, though such things could not keep him out forever. **"More like they don't have it in them to stop us."**

Carl slid in behind them all, arms held close and eyes peering all around. Libraries were usually dull places for dull research... to actually have an adventure in one? He was delighted, even if he knew not how to show it. **"Well, if we find something interesting, be sure to let them know."**

"As thanks?"

"Sure, why not."

Old stairs led them down to the 'ground' level; while the library was built on a hillside, there was no reasonable way to reach the lower levels save from above. In return, the place offered a wonderful view of the countryside, peering over a small cliff's edge to flowing grasslands far beyond. **"Bit of a shame, really. You don't come by buildings like this often."**

"It's missing something though."

"Funding?"

"Mmm..." Anne pondered, running fingers along the wooden shelves as she stared out towards the balcony. **"Purpose, I guess."**

"You can come here to read."

"Not anymore!"

"But like... this is the kind of place stories are made about. Tall arching roof with rafters to peer up at, ancient knowledge waiting in store."

"Needs some secret passages."

"Maybe you just wanna write a book."

"I don't want to write a fantasy, I want to live it. To have places like this be, I dunno... magical."

The wind whistled through an opening door up above, and self-consciousness returned in force. Each turned to their own explorations, browsing the tomes on display. Someone had left Book Titles for Authors out(second edition by Jameson Nameson), and Raymond doubted it would be

taken anytime soon. Whispers in the Windowsills... sounded like a steamy romance. Tales of Tails seemed nice, though the cover was a bit lacking. Perhaps take it anyway, to see what the happy fox on the cover was all about.

“Kinda warm in here. Toasty.”

“Good. It was freezing outside.”

“Still, didn’t think they put their heater up that high.”

Anne liked it warm, so long as the heat was drafty. She never much cared for tiny spaces, tiny places, and wandering somewhere like this helped her feel like the world could be just that much larger. Roof far beyond your grasp, for the far wall to be a journey rather than a mere step, almost as if every footfall felt that little bit shorter...

Why did it feel shorter? Why did *she* feel shorter? Anne brushed her head with an open palm, letting her nails run... she’d never kept her nails long. What...

Raymond felt a spring in his step, and almost started to whistle. He hadn’t felt this way in a long time, and something about the library seemed... inviting. While glimpses at Seafaring Snake Sails provided a chuckle, his eyes kept coming back to looking... further abroad. Not just words, but destinations. Places to go, to explore! He set the book down, or made to, as it fumbled against the edge of the shelf. **“Whoops.”** He could have sworn that the shelf was lower down... that his hand hadn’t reached quite so high up when grabbing it the first time. And why did his hand look... almost chestnut in color?

The wind whistled ever more clearly, as Carl’s ears perked up to listen. Slowly, he placed a hand to his cheeks... then to his ears... then even further up his ears as they bent and smooched back down under his embrace. They tensed with concern, and were all too eager to *fwip* up past his hands as soon as they got the chance. **“Wh... wha?”**

A loud **“eek!”** echoed among the shelves, both like and somehow squeakier than Anne’s voice. Quickly they hastened to each others’ sides, only to stare in awe at the sight before them. **“What’s... happening to you?”** Anne seemed smaller (if such a thing were possible), and the hand she reached out towards Carl was clawed, long and grasping like a mouse’s paw. Her nose twitched, and a brief shimmer of whiskers floated about her lips.

“To me? What about you?!” Raymond’s appearance was almost comical, jacket slipping and clothes flopping about in an abrupt turn inwards. The others weren’t quite sure what had happened to his weight, but he felt almost impossibly sure: something was pushing its way out of his butt. Furiously, forcefully, puffing out wide and fluffing so soft, it was all he could do to push up against the shelves. But brown striped fur would win the day, sneaking ever so slyly down past his attempts to hide it.

“You look like... like... animals.” Carl shivered under the touch of Anne’s paw on his ears, a reflex unbidden but not unwelcome. Everything felt so tall, so massive, even his own ears! And yet to shrink, to slip, to soften... it was the most freeing thing. **“Like storybook animals!”**

Something was whispering, off in the distance. A pull, a call, though one without words. Light, at least, for little green streaks seemed to be fluttering through the air towards the deeper parts of the library. Anne held out her hand, and watched as one of the green streaks seemed to rise from her own palm to fly onwards.

“Something in here is doing this.”

“Cmon!”

One was not supposed to yell in the library, nor run through the aisles. But the library no longer felt like some quaint place of storage, as shelves that were once eye level began to tower over them all. Shoes were quickly left behind in favor of scampering paws, as they followed the light around corners and into the fantasy section.

Anne stared at her hands as she ran. How strange a mouse’s paw looked on her, in person! Much larger than she was used to, and yet... as she wriggled her fingers they moved as she expected. There was something freeing about the shape, about the power within. Brief terrors of being a mouse in mind shattered as she realized... she was thinking more clearly than ever before. She felt... alive!

Raymond stumbled, tripped up by the ever growing carpet behind his behind. Long and striped, a squirrel’s tail in so many hairs. He stared at it with irritation, anger, but wonder took him as he watched the rest of him deflate. So many years burdened with great weight, and the squirrel he was becoming seemed almost... toned. Flat stomach with firm muscles, if a tiny creature could be said to be muscular.

Carl watched with disbelief as Anne, once the tallest of them all, was now shorter than he! He was shrinking, but not quite at the same rate. Longer ears, and softer everything. A hand shoved off his encumbering jacket, only to pause at the... feel of how it came off. Smooth, gentle. He was smooth and gentle, as he always wanted to be. Slowly, carefully, he reached towards his chest, feeling the fluff squish inwards... then the flesh squish inwards as well.

“Eep!”

“Carl?”

“I’m... I’m fine! Cmon!”

But she was more than fine. The strange magic knew, how could it have known? Even as she padded along, her worries turned to grinning to giggling. This... this was a proper adventure! The sort of thing that she wanted for so long, and she could play the best part! (her own)

“It’s up there!”

On one of the flat desks in the fantasy section, an open tome lay basking, absorbing all the green streaks of light that flew into its pages. And yet the shelf was so, so far above them.

“How do we get there?” Anne stared at the much larger friends, mind reeling as it tried to understand. Raymond was a squirrel person, almost a squirrel properly. Carl was a bunny, and seemingly a girl as well. And he... he? Now wasn’t the time, was it. He’d figure himself out after the world was righted.

“I’ll climb up!” Raymond darted, how fast and swift! Strange reflexes he never had before, clambering from shelf to shelf up to the horizontal part of the furniture. Up and over, bushy tail fluttering before disappearing beyond the horizon.

“We can’t follow you!”

“I’ll push... it... down!”

They scampered as the tome came crashing into the middle of the aisle. It more resembled a hallway now, large and overpowering, an edifice to literature that the small creatures were not quite sized for. But they heaved the hardcover book up from its splayed position, clapping it shut with firm paws.

MousEscarment

A fantasy tale for the small creatures in us all.

The cover was beautifully painted, of a large forest castle manned by tiny rodent people in cute little outfits. Closing the book ended the lightshow, but their forms remained.

“We’re still... fluffy!”

“Open it again?”

“What?”

“Just... open it.”

Sighing, Anne hefted the front cover over, letting the pages flutter until they saw a landscape inset: a full-page spread of the forest with the castle in the distance. The pages shimmered slightly before relenting, hard parchment giving way to a cool breeze and open skies.

“You wanna... go in?”

“Well yeah! You wanted an adventure, right?”

“But, I...”

“It won’t be the same without you.”

Anne hesitated, seeing Raymond and Carl holding their paws out. This... this was what he wanted though, wasn’t it? To DO things, to explore and find that the world was much larger than he ever thought possible. Placing a paw in theirs, he nodded.

Mouse and Squirrel and Bunny let themselves fall into the pages, eyes agog at the words flying past them. The smells! They could smell the forest, smell the wind and the flowers in bloom. They fell, but with bodies so small it wasn’t really like falling at all. And when the wind flowed under their little arms and whisked them away... they laughed. It seemed the book had need for characters after all, people who craved for their dreams to come to life. And when the sound of a book closing overhead met their ears, they didn’t care one whit.

Andrew, Raymond, and Carla let their feet land on the soft dirt. Not quite the soft grass, for grass itself was large and massive, stalks of produce that couldn’t even compare to the towering trees above. Off in the distance, the red brick castle stood, waiting for its new arrivals.

“All good?”

“Yeah... better than ever.”

“Shall we find out what this world’s about?”

“We shall, yes. Probably an interesting tale.”

They giggled about tails and tales, but such was their purview. They were free.