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Written by

A.F. Harrold

Illustrated by

Emily Gravett

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REMEMBER

Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of the future that you planned:
Only remember me; you understand
It will be too late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you remember and be sad.

Christina Rossetti

INTRODUCTION

Amanda was dead.

The words were like a hole through his chest, like a well he was falling down.

How could it be?

Amanda, dead?

But he'd seen her with his own eyes. She hadn't been breathing. She was dead.

Rudger felt sick. Felt lost. Felt like the world had fallen away from him.

He leant on his knees in the park, looking round at the grass and the trees. He could hear birds singing. A squirrel bounced across the path and onto the grass, ignoring him.

How could this all be so green? How could it all be so alive when Amanda was dead?

It was an awful question with an awful answer: one girl's death mattered so little to the rest of the world. It might break him, might



destroy her mother, but the park and the town and the world would all go on unchanged.

But Rudger loved the changes, loved how, when Amanda came into a room, it came alive, her imagination colouring it, filling out the details, turning a lampshade to an exotic tree, a filing cabinet to a chest of stolen pirate treasure, a sleeping cat to a ticking time bomb. Her mind was sparky, she made the world sparkle, and Rudger had shared in it. But now…

He looked around at the park. It was the sort of place Amanda would have dreamt into being a whole new world, but no matter how hard he looked, the park stayed stubbornly parkish. He didn't have enough imagination.

In fact, he thought, he didn't even have enough imagination to imagine himself.

He could see the faint outlines of trees through his hands. He was fading. Without Amanda to think of him, to remember him, to make him real, he was slipping away.

Rudger was being forgotten.

He felt sleepy, and sleepier.

What would it be like to fade away? To vanish entirely?

Time would tell, he thought, soon enough, time would tell.

Birds sang him lullabies.

The cool sun shone. He was asleep.

And then a quiet, clear voice said, 'I can see you.'

And Rudger opened his eyes.



ONE

That evening Amanda Shuffleup opened her wardrobe door and hung her coat up on a boy.

She shut the door and sat down on her bed.

She hadn't taken her shoes off before running upstairs and her feet were wet. It wasn't just her feet, either. Her socks and shoes were soaked through too. Her shoes, and the laces.

The knots were cold and damp and hard and refused to come undone. She picked at them with her fingers, but that just hurt her nails. It felt like *they'd* pop off before the knot loosened.

If the laces never came undone, she thought, she'd never get her shoes off. And that meant she'd go through life with wet feet. Not only that, but wearing the same shoes forever. Amanda was the sort of girl (as she'd happily tell you) who *liked* wearing dirty old trainers (because they're comfy and it doesn't

matter if they get dirty because they're already dirty), but even she could imagine a day, one day, when she might want to wear *different* shoes.

And also, she thought, what if her feet wanted to grow? At school Miss Short had shown them a bonsai tree. It was an oak tree the size of a dandelion, kept that way by growing it in a small pot.

If she couldn't get her shoes off she'd be stuck girl-size for the rest of her life, just like the tiny root-trapped tree. That was all right today, but in ten years' time, being the size she was now might be less of a good thing. It might, to be frank, be rubbish.

That made it more important than ever to get these shoes off.

Amanda picked urgently at the sodden knot and still nothing budged.

So, after a moment, she stopped. Looked sideways at her feet. Pondered. Hummed. Tutted. Hummed again.

Then, quick as a cat, she ran to her dressing table, pulled open several drawers and rummaged through them, spilling stuff on the floor until she held aloft the object of her search.

'Aha!' she said out loud, feeling like a princess who's just found a dragon tied to a tree and has pulled from her rucksack the exact thing she needs to set it free (a sword, say, or a book about rescuing dragons).

Sitting back down on the edge of the bed, she lifted a foot into her lap, pulled the knot up, slid the blade of the scissors between

the taut lace and the tongue of the shoe, and, with a simple and satisfying *snik*, cut it in two.

With the end in sight she quickly tugged at the lace, loosening it all the way down, and pulled the shoe off, chucking it, and her sock, into a corner of the room.

She wriggled her damp toes in freedom.

A moment later she repeated the operation on the other shoe and threw it into the same corner.

Amanda shuffled backwards on the bed. Her feet were pale and clammy and she blew warm air on them and patted them dry with the duvet.

She, Amanda Shuffleup, was a genius. This much was clear. Who else, she wondered, would have found so simple a solution so quickly? If Vincent or Julia had come home with wet shoes (these were friends of hers from school), they'd still have wet shoes on now, and their feet would be *really* cold. So cold, they'd probably have caught pneumonia.

That would never have happened, though, because Vincent and Julia were the sort of kids who didn't spend their Saturday afternoons out in the rain splashing through the biggest puddles they could find. But that just went to show.

'Amanda!' a voice called from the bottom of the stairs.

'What?' Amanda shouted back.

'Have you been treading mud in the carpet again?'

'No.'

'Why's there mud on the carpet, then?'

'It weren't me, Mum,' Amanda shouted, sliding off her bed and onto her feet.

There were footsteps coming up the stairs.

She picked up the wet shoes. Actually, they were a *little* bit muddy, she thought. Sort of. If you looked really hard.

She stood there for a moment, the shoes dangling from her fingertips. If her mum came in and found her holding them like that, and saw the mud on their soles, then she'd *leap to a conclusion*. Amanda had to get rid of the shoes, and quick.

Opening the window and chucking them out would take too long. She could throw them under the bed, except her bed was the sort of bed that didn't have an *under* underneath it, just big drawers, and they were already cram-packed with important junk.

There was only one thing to do.

She pulled open the door to her wardrobe and tossed them in there.

They hit the boy who was still holding her coat. He said, 'Oof,' as the shoes bounced off his stomach and fell to the carpet.





Amanda was just about to tell him off for dropping them when her bedroom door burst open.

'Amanda Primrose Shuffleup,' her mother said in that annoying way mothers have. (They seem to think that if they can remember all your names you'll somehow feel more thoroughly told off. Since, however, they probably named you in the first place, it's never really that impressive.) 'What have I told you about taking your shoes off in the hallway *before* coming upstairs?'

For a moment Amanda didn't say anything. She was thinking fast, but confusion was winning.

There were two doorways. One led out to the landing and was filled up by her mum. The other, that of the wardrobe, framed a boy she'd never seen before. He looked about her own

age, held her dripping raincoat, and was smiling nervously at her.

This was a little odd, but so long as her mum didn't bring the strange boy up, Amanda decided, she wouldn't mention him either.

'What have you got to say for yourself?'

'There was knots,' Amanda said, pointing at the filthy shoes that were lying on their sides in between her and the boy's feet. (His shoes were just like hers, Amanda noticed, except cleaner, as if he'd never jumped in a puddle. *Just my luck,* she thought, *a boy appears in my wardrobe, and he's just another Vincent or Julia—afraid of getting mucky. Hmmph.*)

'Knots?' Her mum rolled the word around her mouth as if trying to decide whether it was a good enough excuse. 'Knots. *Knots?*'





'Exactly. So I had to come up here,' Amanda went on, 'to get the scissors, otherwise I'd be stuck in the shoes forever. And then my feet wouldn't grow and—'

'And what's that?' her mum said sharply, interrupting her just before she began an illuminating lecture about bonsai trees.

Amanda stopped talking and followed the invisible line that ran from the tip of her mother's finger straight into the wardrobe.

If Amanda had been her mum, she reckoned this would have been the first thing she'd have done. No going on about wet shoes or anything, she'd've been all about the boy. Either, she reckoned (thinking as if she were her mum), it meant her daughter had been smuggling friends home without asking first, which was against all the rules of politeness, or it

meant the house had a case of burglars. That would be bad news, wouldn't it? After all, if this boy could just break in on a Saturday afternoon, who else might be able to break in some other time? They'd be overrun by burglars before you could turn around, and then where would they be? Robbed, that's where.

'I said, "What's that?" Her mum was still pointing at the boy in the wardrobe.

Amanda screwed up her face, cocked her head to one side and stared intently at him, as if she were giving it a lot of thought.

'It's not really a "What?", Mum,' she said, tiptoeing through her answer. 'It's more a "Who?", don't you think?'

Her mother strode across the room, snatched the dripping wet coat from the boy's hand, turned and held it up.

'What is *this*?' she said, her back to the wardrobe.

'Oh,' said Amanda. 'That's my coat.'

'And what's it doing in there?'

'Hanging up?' Amanda suggested cautiously.

'But, darling,' her mum said, in a quieter voice. 'It's all wet. Look, it's dripping. Hang it up downstairs by the radiator. I've told you before, don't just stick it in the cupboard. It'll get mouldy. When are you ever going to learn?'

'On Monday at school,' Amanda said.

Her mum sighed, shook her head and lowered the coat.

'I'll take these downstairs too,' she said, stooping to pick up the trainers.

The strange boy in the wardrobe smiled at Amanda over her mum's back.

'It was a good joke,' he said.

'What have you done?' her mother gasped, standing up and waving the shoes. 'You've cut the laces!'

'I told you they had knots,' Amanda said, reasonably.

'But you *cut* the laces?'

'Well…'

'Sometimes I don't believe you, Amanda,' her mother said. 'I simply don't believe you.'

She was walking back to the door now.

'Um, Mum,' Amanda said quietly.

'What?'

'You're dripping on the carpet.'

The coat was indeed dripping dirty drops of water and it *was* exactly the sort of thing Amanda's mum would normally have pointed out to her, but this time she just *harrumphed* grumpily and disappeared downstairs.

Oh well, Amanda thought, *you can't expect to understand grownups all in one go.*

She looked at the boy in the wardrobe and he looked back at her.

'You liked my joke then?' Amanda asked.

'It was quite funny.'

'*Quite*?' she snapped. 'I think it's about the funniest joke I've said all day.'

