

Halloween for Everyone

by Angie

"And rainbows have nothing to hide"
- Kermit the Frog.

Two children had recently arrived in the tunnels via a Helper. Orphans, they had been considered 'problem' children, not 'normal', but were reported to be quite intelligent never the less. They weren't related, but were certainly friends. They were not forthcoming, even about their names.

They did not appear frightened, Father told Vincent, puzzled. They slept side by side in the dormitory, ate what they were given and listened apparently with understanding, but without comment, when attending class. No one tried to make them do more than they would.

So Vincent had taken it upon himself to talk to them, rationalizing that his appearance might bring down some barriers in the too-quiet kids, who so far, had spoken to no one but each other. He had decided to talk to them in the school chamber, where they would be uninterrupted in the evening and had had Father tell them to meet him there.

They walked in together, and stopped abruptly when then saw him. He motioned them to sit and they did, silently, on the two chairs he had set up in front of him.

The children were dressed in what he considered 'everyday' wear for the tunnels - pants, shoes, a sweater and a vest. They looked a lot alike, he supposed deliberately and he guessed they were about nine years old - old enough to be more than a child, less than a teen. He remembered his own ninth year, the year Devin had left.

"You know who I am," Vincent stated looking at them both with a slight grin.

"Vincent," one said, and the other nodded. *Progress*, he thought.

"May I have your names?" he asked, although he had been told them.

"Bobbie," said one, "Jan", said the other.

Vincent did not show that he knew these were not their given names, but merely nodded.

Many people coming to the tunnels left their names, as well as their lives, behind them. It was their decision, however old they were.

"Halloween is coming very soon," Vincent told them. "Our children go above and trick or treat with an adult. Would you like to do that?"

They both nodded eagerly and one almost shouted, "Yes."

"What costume would you like to wear? We have many already made, but you can always make your own, if you wish."

They both looked interested, but it was Jan who spoke, asking a question.

"Are ghosts male or female?"

"Yeah, and goblins?" asked Bobbie.

Vincent had never considered that question before, and now wondered why it was important to these two.

"I guess they can be whatever you wish," he said at last.

"I don't want to be a white ghost," Jan said.

"I'd like to be a special goblin," said Bobbie.

"I'm sure that can be arranged," Vincent said. "Can you tell me why?"

Jan looked at him intently, then dropped her eyes to her hands. "People think I'm a girl, but I'm not, not inside. I want to be a boy."

"Then that's what you will be here, in this world," Vincent replied, happy she ... he ... had spoken up. "I'll tell Father and make sure everyone knows."

"Thank you," Jan said, looking at him with so much gratitude he was taken aback.

"I want to be a girl," Bobbie said in a small voice. He ... she .. looked at Vincent hopefully, Vincent smiled back and nodded. So this was why they were considered 'problem' children.

"You may be whatever you wish here," he said. "No one will question your choice, ever."

Both children got up and hugged him. He realized Bobbie was crying and Jan looked like she wanted to. He put his arms around them both and drew them as close as he could.

"What's wrong," he asked, wanting them to voice it.

"No one ever believed us before," Jan mumbled.

"Said we were too young to know that," Bobbie said through her tears.

Vincent sighed. He had read of such cases, and the animosity it caused among some parents and religious groups, some of it very distressing, especially when directed at public schools, which had a mandate to be inclusive and welcoming to everyone. The issue had gained prominence far beyond the local level, and it was no doubt upsetting to children and parents facing this issue alone. Orphans, like these two, would have nowhere to turn to. Orphanages had strict obedience rules, even the good ones.

Being what he was, he sympathized with the children, of course. In his life, he had experienced ostracism and even hatred and misunderstandings - but his main recourse was avoidance of those who didn't see him as human.

"I can understand how you feel," he said at last. "I will never be able to fix what I am, no matter what I call myself, but what you are is not something you should have to fight for. You can be what you wish, what is best for you. We encourage that."

The children moved from him and looked into his face, perhaps really seeing it for the first time.

"I wish you could do it too," Jan said. Bobbie nodded. "It isn't fair."

Vincent looked at them and smiled. "Here, everyone accepts differences. You will meet others who are different - although not as different as I am. Different in their manners or behaviour, their abilities, perhaps in their appearance. We have a deaf teenager who talks with her hands, and a boy who learned to speak here - but can make anything.

"Mouse!" both said.

Vincent chuckled. "Yes. Mouse would not survive in the world above. They would not try to understand him and he would be unhappy, perhaps imprisoned. Here he has a good life, helping us. So will you have."

The children thanked him and left.

Catherine went to the sewing chamber one day to find it in chaos. At least a dozen children were rummaging through boxes. Piles of multi-coloured garments and fabrics on a very long table in front of them, were growing as she watched in amazement. Annabelle, their dwarf seamstress, was sitting on an ornate throne-like chair, far out of the way. Far from being annoyed, she was grinning widely and seemed on the verge of laughter. She waved at Catherine, who waved back.

"They've found it," Catherine said quietly.

"Found what, Catherine?" Vincent said behind her, making her jump a little. She would never get used to how quietly he walked, always catching her off guard.

"The rainbow connection," she said.

Vincent chuckled. "They have indeed." He needed no further explanation. The song had been sung for weeks by the children below after some had seen '*The Muppet Movie*' years ago. The memory made him smile.

On Halloween, as was the tradition, the children stood before Father in their costumes, so he could see and enjoy their costumes before they headed above. The adults who were chaperoning them stood behind them, smiling.

All the children with fidgeting with excitement and grinning, but something was different this year. Father looked at them carefully and squinted a little in the dim light of the jack-o-lanterns.

He realized, finally, that there were no all black, or all white, or even one colour costumes, which had been the norm in the past for the most popular ones - witches and ghosts. This year, every child seemed to be a riot of of colour, obvious even to him.

"What on earth?" Father asked, astonished at the excited rainbows he saw before him.

Kipper, always the most forward, spoke up. "Bobbie and Jan got us all thinking. Why should costumes be the usual dull, boring colours? We decided to all be 'different' this year. It was fun. We found lots of neat stuff in the sewing chamber boxes."

"You did indeed," Father praised them. "I admit I've never seen such a colourful pirate, Kipper."

Kipper had found so many colourful costume pieces that he would have put a clown to shame. He wore a bright green wig tied in a pony tail under a battered tricorne hat decorated with feathers and ribbons of every colour. Samantha's witch looked cheerful and welcoming - not at all her usual look.

Jan laughed - a laugh that Father recognized, even though he couldn't see the face of the wearer of a particularly unique costume. It was a riot of long strips of many-coloured fabric pieces, tied to a string around his neck and hanging to his feet. He wore an old coloured bedsheet under it, with the traditional two eye holes to allow him to see.

A very unusual spook, a happy one, in this case, Father knew. Any why not? Halloween was supposed to be fun, and it was, after all, a children's night too. The old superstitions were just that. People went abroad to laugh at each other and enjoy the unusual camaraderie of everyone being something else.

Vincent and Catherine came in then and everyone looked at them and laughed loudly.

"Jan and Bobbie inspired you two as well, I presume," Father commented, rolling his eyes.

The couple did not outshine anyone - Father suspected that would be impossible tonight - but they had found a lot of colourful pieces, and a wore couple of cloaks that certainly could not be called dull. They both wore rainbow clown wigs, and Catherine wore a brown cat mask.

Vincent, of course, could show his face this night. Father had ceased to worry about that, so showed his approval and smiled at them.

"Well then, is everyone ready to go?"

There was general murmurs of agreement, but no one moved. Jan and Bobbie moved through the group and approached Father. They held a box and presented it to him.

He took it and then looked at them puzzled. "Not a mask, I hope," he said. "You know I can't go above because of my bad leg."

A chorus of "**Open it**", came from the assembly, and Father lifted the lid. He laughed loudly at what he saw, and tilted the box to display it to the group.

It was an enormous cookie, decorated with every kind of sprinkle he was sure William (perhaps with help from Catherine and the world Above) had to offer.

"I will think of you all as I eat this," Father said, grinning. "And I'll enjoy it with a nice cup of Williams hot cider."

"Leave some for us," Kanin quipped and everyone laughed again.

Suddenly, from the back, someone started singing, and everyone else took it up quickly,

Father sat back, amused. He would certainly never forget that song, which had echoed around the tunnels for ... it seemed like months. It was singularly appropriate this night.

"Someday we'll find it, the rainbow connection,

The lovers, the dreamers and me."

La, la la, La, la la la, La Laa, la la, La, La la laaaroooooooooooo." #

Everyone laughed and began to file out up the stairs, waving to Father as they did so.

It was a certainly Halloween to remember, Father mused, as he watched them all leave.

When they were definitely gone, beyond returning for something forgotten, at last, he rose to go to the kitchen, where William waited with the cider.

The two of them sat in front of the dining chamber fireplace, where they reminisced about the departed, and toasted them, one by one, getting a little happier with every sip. Father shared the cookie with William, since it really was too large for one old man.

Then, they toasted the tunnel community, not forgetting the two newest additions. Finally, they toasted each other with the 'spirit' of Halloween - and laughed at the pun.

END

Rainbow Connection (music and lyrics written by Paul Williams and Kenneth Ascher), featured in The Muppet Movie (1979). It was performed by Jim Hensen as Kermit the Frog and won Best Original Song at the 52nd Academy Awards (April 14, 1980).