

# Rainbows

by Angie

*“Someday we’ll find it, the rainbow connection  
– the lovers, the dreamers and me.”*

- Jim Henson (as Kermit the frog)

The tunnel community had started its plans and preparation for the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year. It was a time for reflection, looking outward and upward. It had become a tradition to do something special, a good deed in the world above.

Even though they lived below the city, they were aware that the streets above were quieter and the days and nights colder, not least because cold draughts blew into the chambers along the pipe conduits, giving everyone the shivers.

They were well aware that during the festive season, stress was more poignant than usual among those whose situation did not allow luxuries. The children had taken on the task of devising the good deed. They thought carefully about it and always came up with something unique. The adults only helped if asked.

The previous year, the children had presented a basket of wildly decorated gingerbread men to an old folk's home. Catherine had delivered the basket, with a platter and a colourful cloth, signed by all the children. She had told the happy recipients that the gift came from a special school supported by the Foundation she had set up – not really a lie, just a little stretching of the truth.

Earlier this year, the children had become enamoured of the old *Rainbow Connection* song from 1979 – thanks to Devin and Charles singing it to them on a recent visit - and wanted to do something to recognize it. They'd had several ideas, but none had inspired them. There was an unspoken rule that their projects had to be made with materials to hand. The one exception to this was food - within reason. William's kitchen and larder never lacked anything necessary for the making of uncomplicated treats.

"It has to be something rainbow-coloured," Samantha insisted, as she looked around the table at the handful of children who formed the committee. It was Friday afternoon after classes and they were all a bit fidgety.

They looked at her, mute. They had agreed to this much half an hour ago – but got no further. They had even repeated the words to the song several times, hoping for inspiration. Any rainbow-coloured food item was too much like last year's gift, and they wanted to give something special to the orphanage. Eric had suggested the recipient, and they had all agreed without hesitation, only too aware that many of them would have lived in one, as he had, if the tunnel community had not taken them in.

Samantha looked at him, her face showing her frustration. Clearly she would have to take charge.

"Eric, you were in an orphanage. What would children like most, that we might be able to give them?"

Eric looked thoughtful. The orphanage where he and Ellie lived had been part of an illegal child-selling ring – and had been shut down after their rescue. But he remembered one thing clearly. He supposed it would apply to any orphanage.

"We never had anything of our own," he said quietly, "not even clothes. And everyone had to share all the toys, and sometimes they got broken before you had a chance to play with them."

"Are the children allowed to have something for their own?" Samantha asked, fearing the answer.

"Something small that could be put in a pocket is ok, like a handkerchief."

"Would a small toy be allowed, do you think?"

"Sure." He had once had a tiny metal truck on a key chain. He had lost it when he was dragged to detention, just before Catherine rescued him.

"Well then, all we have to do is make a lot of small toys. They should all be a little different, so that each child can have their own and they won't get mixed up."

The children around the table looked very thoughtful now, wondering what they had in the tunnels that could be made into pocket-sized toys.

"Maybe we should ask Annabelle," suggested Minny, one of the smaller children.

"Good idea!" Samantha exclaimed. "Let's go and see her."

The children were happy to get up off the hard classroom seats and follow her to Annabelle's working chamber, where their dwarf seamstress kept all the raw materials for the community's clothing, linens, footwear and rugs.

It was a Friday, so the adult sewing group had been sorting, stitching, cutting and mending. They had now settled down at the table to sew and chat. There was never any lack of work. The six women and two men all looked up when the children quietly filed in and waited for Annabelle to notice them.

The dwarf heard the sudden quiet from her helpers and looked around from the treadle sewing machine where she was re-threading a bobbin. Catherine, busy patching a pair of Vincent's pants, smiled at the children, knowing full well that she would be the delivery person again. She loved doing it.

"Well," Annabelle boomed at them. "What have we here? The mice have come a-calling!"

She let out one of her mad, infectious laughs and the children smiled. Then they all started talking at once.

"Wait," she ordered them firmly, as she walked towards them. "I haven't got that many ears! Samantha, you look like you're itching to say something. Tell me what you all want."

Samantha took a deep breath and explained, backed up by the nods of the other children.

"Hmmm. Rainbows, eh?" Annabelle mused. She looked around at her sewing circle.

"Any of you have any ideas, before I strain my brain?" she asked.

There was chuckling from the group and the children, but no answer came quickly.

"Hmph!" she said, then gave her helpers a mock frown. "Not much imagination, have you?"

"We leave that to you," said Derek, waving a huge curved needle. He was the tunnel cobbler and was working stoically through a pile of footwear that needed repairing. There was more laughter at that.

Annabelle's outfit was always very unique, and today's was no exception. In fact, it could be called rainbow-coloured. Topped by her huge beehive of red hair, she made an imposing figure, though less than four feet tall.

Something then nagged at Alun, a shy 19-year old. With Annabelle's encouragement, he was becoming a talented on-the-fly clothing designer. He looked at the corner of the chamber where several boxes were neatly piled with fabric remnants. Everyone else followed his gaze. He had been sorting out those boxes earlier. What was nagging him?

Then he had it. He explained his idea and the children whooped for joy. Annabelle gave her blessing and then they fine-tuned the plan. Everyone got quickly to work, there being no time like the present, as she said. The children dug out the raw materials and the sewing group wielded their scissors to good effect. The next day, the "rainbow" work would be done, with all the children's help, and the next day the finishing touches. It would be a busy weekend.

"Go now," she told the children. "It's almost supper time. And don't tell anyone what we're doing, ok? We want to surprise them."

The children nodded solemnly and left, skipping happily down the tunnels and whispering plans to each other.

"Class dismissed," Annabelle announced then to her sewing group. "I think I can manage what has to be done here. We'll show the results to everyone in a few days. Until then, keep mum."

They obediently left, to the sound of her far-from-mum laughter following them down the tunnels.

Catherine went straight to Vincent's chamber, and found him quietly reading in his big chair. She tried to plant a kiss on his fuzzy nose, but he tilted his head up and she landed on his lips. She sighed with happiness. He moved his book to the table and hugged her to him, pulling her onto his lap.

"You're happy," he observed when they came up for air after a second, much longer kiss.

"Yes. The children have their Winter Solstice project decided."

"Our Annabelle is involved, I think. I could hear her laughter from here."

"Yes. The children will be busy all weekend, I'm sure."

"Good. Father will be pleased they're not underfoot."

The supper signal came over the pipes and the couple headed for the dining room. It was quite noisy with the chatter of the children, but a sharp rap on the table and a stern look from Father silenced them. Everyone ate the thick meat and vegetable stew, then their dessert of banana bread - in relative quiet. The children gobbled down their meal, asked permission to leave, then ran to the schoolroom. All the children had to know what to do the next day. Samantha had made out a roster for them, so that even the youngest child could help.

For the next two days, the children were remarkable by their absence. Annabelle's laughter from the sewing chamber left no doubt about where they were. Father had allowed the children to suspend their duties for the project, glad to have them safely busy elsewhere. They usually tried to sort out his book piles on weekends, which meant that he could never find what he wanted for his classical literature class on Monday. He wondered if that was deliberate, but dismissed it as paranoia. His library was a constant source of frustration to him, even without the children's "help".

On Monday, before breakfast, Samantha approached Father in his chamber, where he was sitting with his first cup of tea. She waited until he noticed her then approached him, barely suppressing her excitement.

"Father, we would like to show everyone the gifts we've made for the orphanage. We just need a table in the dining hall."

Father looked up and smiled. "Very well, Samantha. Would lunchtime be acceptable?"

Samantha nodded, said thank-you, and rushed out.

Father sighed. He quickly finished his tea and made his way to the dining hall. He found William filling up the enormous teapots that were passed around.

"The children want to show off what they've made for this year's gift. Can we set aside a table for them?"

"Certainly," William rumbled. He replaced the kettle on the stove and disappeared into the room he used as an office, returning with two large, day glow orange traffic cones.

"Mouse gave me these last week. Said I could use them to keep people out of the kitchen. Haven't used them yet. Should work to reserve a table. It's all I have. We don't do reservations here," he chuckled. He caught Father's expression and grunted. "Don't worry, they're clean."

Father sighed. "Very well." He really would have to have a word with Mouse - again - about bringing home junk from up top. Why just last week ... no, better not to think about that! It made his blood pressure rise.

Breakfast proceeded as usual, with Father reading out the announcements and work rosters as everyone tucked into their porridge. He told everyone to be prepared for a surprise exhibition at lunchtime. The children looked smug.

The children attended classes that morning, but the closer it got to lunch, the more fidgety they became. Vincent obligingly ended his history class early. There was a chorus of hoorays as they ran out of the classroom and down the tunnels to Annabelle's work chamber. The noise which followed destroyed any memories of the silence during the previous two days, continuing until nearly lunchtime. By then, everyone's anticipation was extreme.

Samantha and the children stood in the doorway of the dining chamber, nearly jumping with excitement. The tables had been moved slightly to allow one table to be set apart. Samantha called the group's attention to a curtain held by two children standing on chairs, obviously hiding the special table.

"We have made something special this year, for an orphanage. Hope you like it." She signalled to the two children and the curtain dropped.

There were gasps of astonishment from everyone. Annabelle, who had not been involved in the table setup, suddenly broke into a raucous guffaw when she realized what formed the centrepiece of the display. It was echoed by many others.

On top of the table was a pyramid of little shapes, draped around William's traffic cones. The toys, in a seemingly endless variety of vaguely geometric shapes, were fuzzy and dyed in rainbow-hued swirls, dots and stripes. Each was decorated with an imaginative assortment of lace, buttons, cord, metallic thread, ribbon, and even an eye or two. A crocheted lanyard was firmly attached to every toy. Two of the children demonstrated the usefulness of the latter, looping it around a wrist, then a button, then a belt loop.

There were lots of oohs and ahhs as the tiny toys, none more than three inches long, were examined by a crowd of curious adults. Each was unmistakably unique - and all were beautiful.

"Please sit down," Samantha shouted over the hubbub. "We have one more surprise."

The tunnel folk obeyed, quietly taking their seats, somewhat dazed. The children formed into a circle around the table of toys. Samantha stood in front of them, waiting until the noise of shuffling chairs was stilled. "Now!" she said, raising her hand. All the children suddenly broke into song.

*"Why are there so many songs about rainbows  
And what's on the other side?  
Rainbow's are visions, they're only illusions  
And rainbows have nothing to hide  
So we've been told and some choose to believe it  
But I know they're wrong wait and see*

*Someday we'll find it  
The Rainbow Connection  
The lovers, the dreamers and me!*

*Who said that every wish would be heard and be answered  
When wished on the morning star?  
Somebody thought of that, and someone believed it  
And look what it's done so far!  
What's so amazing that keeps us star gazing  
What do we think we might see?*

*Someday we'll find it  
The Rainbow Connection  
The lovers the dreamers and me*

*Have you been half asleep, and have you heard voices?  
I've heard them calling my name  
Are these the sweet sounds that called the young sailors  
I think that they're one and the same  
I've heard it too many times to ignore it  
There's something that I'm supposed to be*

*Someday we'll find it  
The Rainbow Connection  
The lovers, the dreamers and me."*

“WE FOUND IT”, shouted the children, who then grabbed a toy or two each and held them over their heads, cheering. Their cheers were echoed by the adults sitting around the tables, who spontaneously stood up and gave them a standing ovation.

Father then rapped on the table in front of him, persisting until everyone was quiet.

“I think I speak for all of us when I say you children have done something very special this year! Congratulations! We just need one more thing to make it complete – the gift card.”

The children looked at each other, a little crestfallen. They had completely forgotten about the card!

“We didn’t forget,” Father assured them. “This is our contribution.”

He looked to the doorway and rapped his cane on the floor three times. Devin and Charles entered to the astonishment of everyone, children and adults, none of whom had been aware they were home. They had obviously been waiting for the signal just out of sight.

And between them they carried an enormous card, which they opened up to display a beautiful fold-out rainbow rising against a perfect blue sky. The children’s eyes widened with wonder, as they gazed at it. It even had the song’s chorus written below the rainbow in large gold letters. There were gasps of delight from many of the adults.

Samantha felt she had to know more, for her committee’s sake, and walked up to the two men, who were beaming around the chamber. The diners watched silently, sure they knew what she was going to say.

“How did you know?” she asked them, half-accusingly.

“We didn’t,” Charles said softly. “But we remembered how much you liked that song, so we thought we should bring a card with a rainbow. We asked the advice of a helper and she made this for us, specially.”

Devin and he walked over to the table and carefully stood the card up among the toys.

“I think we found the rainbow connection,” Devin commented in a mock Kermit voice, to groans from both children and adults, quickly followed by more laughter and clapping.

Catherine stood up and held up her hand. Everyone quieted.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been asked to deliver anything more wonderful!” she exclaimed, then looked at Devin and Charles. “Welcome home, and thank-you too!”

The children, who were getting fidgety again, suddenly laughed when William emerged. Annabelle gave a huge guffaw that quickly spread around the dining hall. He was wearing a rainbow-decorated apron, which because of his girth, had become a very high arch. But the children’s eyes were fixed on the huge platter of colour-swirled, oversized cookies he was carrying.

“I heard about the rainbow song, too,” he rumbled, when the laughter had died down. “Annabelle asked to borrow my food colouring, so I thought I’d better use some in case I didn’t get it back.”

“To make the plumpest rainbow ever!” Annabelle inserted, to more laughter.

Then there was blessed silence for a time, while everyone munched the delights. People gradually filed out to their chambers for the night, big smiles still wreathing their faces.

Peace reigned in the tunnels again, but the infectious happiness of the children warmed everyone for many days. The shortest day, when it arrived, was hardly noticed.

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