

Waste Not

by Angie

'Waste not, want not'

- old saying popular with mothers everywhere

It was time to visit Mr Long, Vincent informed Catherine one morning. She had been taking a bath, so had missed the pipe message.

They never knew what they were going to get, but it was always useful and it was always a pleasure to chat with the grocer. As they were walking down the tunnel, Mary joined them.

"Welcome," Vincent said, smiling at her. I hear you are coming too."

"I needed a bit of a change," Mary confessed. "But also, Mr Long sent down a note that he might have something I could use. I don't know what it could be!"

Vincent raised his eyebrows, but said nothing.

Catherine linked arms with Mary and smiled at her. "I don't believe we've ever walked together," she commented. "Nice to have a woman along."

Vincent was pushing the hand cart, but they three would be doing the pickup on their own. The children had taken the day off to go swimming in the Mirror Pool and many adults were either joining them or watching them.

The three didn't mind. The job wasn't onerous, just a long walk. The two women chatted about tunnel news, while Vincent silently pushing the unwieldy cart with its much worn wheels over bumps and dips, all his concentration needed in some areas, to avoid breaking an axle.

At the tunnel basement entrance to the grocery store, they knocked and Mr Long opened it almost immediately, looking a little harried.

"I have so much for you." He looked out the door and saw the handcart, and sighed. "I hope you can take it all. It is a long way to make two trips."

Vincent went inside with him and began to haul out the boxes of lettuce and other vegetables put aside for them. Then Mr Long smiled at Mary and showed her a large sack that had once held 50 lbs of flour.

"This is for you," he said.

Mary looked at it, uncertain. "What is it?"

Mr Long laughed. "Not flour," he said. "We get water-damaged rice and other dry goods every so often, but we cannot sell it. I do not like to throw out food - so we fill up an old bag with it." He waved at a shelf where a neatly folded pile of other bags sat.

"It is almost full now, so I thought you might be able to use it ... but not to eat."

Mary smiled at him and was about to ask him how on earth he had known, when he chuckled.

“You want to know how I know. Kipper came for some coffee and told me there was nothing to fill their bean bags. He was alone then, so I made note to tell you for next delivery day.”

“Their bags do seem to have an awfully short life sometimes,” Mary admitted. “And William refused to let anyone near his bean supply.”

“He would not want to waste food,” Mr Long nodded. “In here you will find beans, rice, barley and other dry stuff. Can you carry it on the cart?”

“Yes, we can,” Vincent broke in. “It will give the cart weight and make it a little easier to move ... although more difficult to stop,” he said this last quietly, almost to himself.

They all hugged and thanked Mr Long, who nodded happily, glad to have helped again.

“I hope you have no trouble on the way,” he remarked, having remembered that terrible time years ago, when the child from the outsider gang had ambushed them.

“I wasn’t paying attention then,” Vincent admitted wryly, looking at Catherine. “We’re all more careful since then. Luckily, it has not happened again, but we are always on the alert. The world above has become a dangerous place.”

“It has indeed,” Mr Long agreed. “I haven’t had trouble since Kanin helped me install the big metal door.”

Vincent nodded, wishing such a system would work for some of their entries. Long’s ‘door’ rolled up into the ceiling. Kanin had told him about it. His shop had become a target of petty thieves, who broke the expensive front windows to gain access – although they didn’t find much that they could sell for drugs. The door protected the glass and hid the contents of the shop.

Back in the home tunnels, Mary and Catherine went to visit the tunnel seamstress, Annabelle. They didn’t see her at first, then Catherine pointed at something brown waving above a stack of boxes, and giggled. When they investigated, it was to find the dwarf trying to reach the top box from a small stepladder, her tall hairdo waving about like Marg Simpsons’ – a comparison Catherine did not mention, since there were no TVs below.

“Can we help?” Catherine asked. Annabelle nodded and clambered off the ladder. Catherine went up and gave the box a push, since even she could not reach the top. Vincent would not have needed the ladder, but he was helping William unpack and store the food delivery.

The box toppled sideways, and burst open to reveal a lot of canvas.

“Canvas!” Mary exclaimed. “Can we make some bean bags – and some smaller ones for pincushions?”

“That’s what I was going to do,” Annabelle chuckled. “I heard we have some filling now. I’ll sew up some different-sized ones, and I think if you crochet over them, they might last longer.”

“There are no secrets in the tunnels,” Catherine commented, still wondering how the news had beat them to Annabelle. There had been nothing on the pipes. Annabelle seemed to have her own news network, though. It was almost impossible to surprise her about anything.

“Now there’s an idea,” Mary mused, at Annabelle’s idea. “Yes, I think we can do that.”

“And I’ll help,” Catherine chimed in. She had become fond of making things.

“Give me an hour or two, and you can have a bunch of bags,” Annabelle promised.

The next day, the bags being done, Catherine and Mary began filling them and sewing the open end closed with strong thread.

They had made a few granny squares in the meantime, solid ones for the pin cushions and tougher ones from string and cord for the larger bean bags.

The stack of bean bags soon disappeared. The children were encouraged to play games, but not with balls, which had the unhappy habit of rolling long distances and disappearing in hard to reach – or dangerous - places. Bean bags were replaceable and didn’t travel on their own.

The little pincushions were also popular and Catherine took one for herself. Even in their household, it seemed as if pins were ubiquitous – and always in the wrong place, or somewhere else ... or underfoot.



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