

# Worlds Upon Worlds

## —The Storyteller

by Angie

*Vincent sat back in his chair and shook his hand a little to get the stiffness out of his fingers. He had been writing for a long time and it was now the wee hours. However, looking at what he had accomplished, he was pleased with himself. He felt he had done justice to that very early time in the history of their community, even though some had people had not said much, or anything. \**

*He was, after all, writing it in the third person, but from Winslow's father's viewpoint. He had been their storyteller and it was important that be obvious from the beginning. He deserved recognition for passing the tales along to others, and so well that Vincent remembered virtually every word.*

*The next story would be a little more difficult. Their world had faced many challenges, and not a few disagreements, but that was in the future. There was still much to remember and record of those early days, the days before he himself had been found, before Devin had been born even.*

*(\* Part One of The Storyteller appears in the 2019 Onzine)*

## Tale 2

### Reckonings

*In those days did this embryo city present the rare and noble spectacle  
of a community governed without laws.*

- Washington Irving, Knickerbocker's History of New York;

Warnick groaned, as usual, as he arose, then poured water from a chipped pitcher and washed himself as well as he could in the old cracked, mis-matched basin. It was still much better than what he had been able to do in the world they had left. He had decided to let his beard grow for now, as it kept his face warm. He did trim it, but his hair, even thinning as it was, he chopped off as close to his skull as he dared with the non-too-sharp scissors he had, and wore a wool hat, something they all affected now, along with the fingerless gloves.

Although it was warmer here in their subterranean world, it was still chilly and there were ferocious drafts – originating no one knew where, exactly, but the pipe channels were everywhere and the wind found them. They didn't have enough braziers, or fuel, to keep the caves warm all day, so they used their heat sources sparingly, only for an hour or so around supper time, when all were tired, and needed heat to relax.

Afterwards, they took turns in the hot spring pool, women first, then men. It was a delight they all looked forward to, and afterwards they fell gratefully into bed and a deep sleep. To Warnick, it was heaven, no matter what work he had been doing during the day.

He was certainly getting fit, much more so than he would have thought possible. Wielding hammers and chisels, to say nothing of shovels and brooms, had given him muscles and made him leaner. That was true of everyone, he had noticed. They all worked hard, no matter what they did. There was a lot of materials to be shifted, always, and many other things to store, stack or organize. And they did not eat extravagantly. They couldn't. Food was limited, but Jacob ensured they divided it evenly and that the labourers got a little more, when possible.

Warnick had been making a mark on the wall every morning, just so he knew how many days had passed. He assumed they had used Narcissa's temporary entrance around midnight on October 31, and spent the following six hours getting to their current

location. Yes, they had slept in the morning of that day, but they had risen several hours later and continued to explore. They were all tired enough to sleep again after supper that day. Although he could not know the exact time, he knew the subway train schedules as well as any New Yorker, having slept in no few of the entries in his time. He knew they had passed several days already, productive days, days that passed quickly because they had so much to do and were energized by doing it for them all, rather than just to survive one more night. And they used their lanterns and candles sparingly.

Yes, this was a good place, as Narcissa had said. She had retreated to her own world further below, but told them she would come if needed. The extra pair of hands would have been nice, but she had bluntly told them that she was too old to do much of that kind of work. How old was she, Warnick wondered. She did not seem much over 40, but she did have some grey in her hair. Her face was ageless, like many of the large black women he had known in his youth.

Warnick was happy with what he had accomplished, all very necessary. He had freed the doorway into the park culvert for their use and fixed the levers so they would work the heavy metal door as noiselessly as possible. He had adapted a coal chute in the old warehouse Narcissa had shown them, so that anything found could be dumped down it quickly, allowing them to scavenge for more. He had rigged up a warning bell that alerted them when someone used the chute.

The other day, he had created another entry in the cellar of Lou's barbershop. Lou had become what they now called a 'Helper', the first. Jacob had known him in his old life, which he never talked about. The barber cut their hair gratis, occasionally when he wasn't busy, but more importantly, he kept them apprised of news. When he had something important to tell them, he dropped an old hair tonic bottle down a grate with a rolled message or newspaper clipping. He let them know, for instance, of any city public works that might affect their movements to and from their world. That was invaluable, since they didn't get newspapers regularly.

Jacob had also recruited a fellow doctor, Dr Peter Alcott, when it became obvious that only antibiotics and vitamins were going to help when serious infections plagued them. Their diet was better, but not so good that they could claim to have a balanced one. The vitamins addressed some of their deficiencies, especially the lack of fresh fruit ... and sunlight, for they usually foraged at night now, so they could use their entrances without being seen.

Jacob and Grace had set up a home together in one of the caves, and seemed happy. While Grace went out every day to scavenge, Jacob concentrated his efforts on building a library and organizing first aid supplies. Warnick had found some old metal stairs and railings at the bottom of a pit, long sealed from above, and found them solid enough to create a second level in the library Jacob was building. They hacked away at the rock

with old pickaxes, to expand it where the stairs ended. He also found a battered metal cabinet, that Jacob gratefully used for their medical supplies. Old carpets were hung over the railings of the long metal staircase and beaten with rebar to remove the dust, which flew upwards in the updraft, away from them. Several caves now had carpets on their sandy floors.

They all participated in finding books, often discarded in alleys when landlords threw out tenants, or bookstores gave up trying to sell them. Dr Peter gave them some medical volumes and books from his years of study, and Jacob happily placed them where he could browse them as necessary.

John and Anna lived a little further away from the main caves, occupying one and using the other as a workroom. John was always making a concoction for something – the purpose of which he did not reveal. Anna and Grace often spent the afternoons together in the library, the one chamber that was usually warmer, in order to keep the books from getting damp. They had managed to furnish it with some repaired chairs and a padded bench. Usually, the other members of the group joined the two women just before supper, and they discussed what needed to be done and what had been accomplished.

Grace and Anna had taken over the cooking duties in one of the caves, using the Coleman stove, and some white gas which Lou supplied as they needed it. He used a small gas burner to heat up his shaving cream and clean his tools. Pascal sometimes filled in as kitchen helper, when there was a sudden influx of food that needed to be used right away. Their big cooking pot was in constant use, and a kettle was kept nearby for anyone wanting hot tea. Sometimes they found instant coffee and that was always handy. Milk was a luxury, but they had pooled their few coins to buy a large bag of milk powder. It was used sparingly.

Warnick and Jacob had managed to construct a long dining table from several pieces of board found in the warehouse. It rested on several makeshift sawhorses, but was heavy enough not to shift easily. They sat on old chairs that rocked alarmingly on the uneven stone floor, but at least they could eat sitting down in a civilized manner.

Pascal sometimes went above and had a good nose for where to find food they could use. Grace was best at finding clothing and linens. Anna seldom left the word below, but when she did, it was because she needed to feel the night air, she said. She found surprising things by rifling through the trash behind hospitals and clinics. Jacob admonished her, knowing full well that there were unsavoury and dangerous things in such garbage, but Anna was very careful, she said, and even wore a pair of old leather gardening gloves when she searched. Thus it was she who found bent trays, dented metal bowls and many pieces of old crockery and utensils that were still quite serviceable, and a welcome change from their tin cups.

All in all, Warnick was somewhat surprised how well they all got along. There were no rules as such, and no need for any, as far as he could see. They all did what needed to be done and no one complained.

It was John who had suggested they treat their new home like a real community, and be grateful for their luck. No one objected to that, but he would not countenance complaints either. There were few of those, mostly inconsequential, more in the way of suggestions. No one was petty, their old life still very clear in their memories.

Warnick had worked with Pascal to map all the pipes and find their termini in the pipe chamber, but it was John who, with Pascal, had worked out a system of Morse code-like taps to allow the group to communicate with each other over long distances. It did not take long to set up a system of basic codes they could all learn, and to find enough small metal rods so that everyone had one handy as needed. It also ensured that they all knew where others were, especially if there was some sudden emergency. It was a great consolation, since they often worked alone and seldom saw each other except at supper, their one solid hot meal of the day.

But even if they didn't see each other, the sounds of their work was enough to keep them aware. Caves were being enlarged, pipe leaks repaired as best they could.

Warnick had found a welding torch and flux, and took charge of leaks. He helped shore up some with metal straps, and put warning paint on the hot ones in the pipe chamber. He also worked with others to carve out bathing chambers, and find or create more outlets for the fresh water and hot water.

Warnick, once the heavy work was done, took time to explore, taking one of the lanterns. He found massive chambers, that perhaps had been meant to be the start of new subway tunnels, or air shafts. He found abandoned subway platforms, ornate and beautiful, but dusty with decades of neglect. Most of what he just saw, he just filed away as interesting. Few of these places were any use. One, which he called the Chamber of the Winds, seemed to be a junction of many tunnels. Going down one, on a survey foray weeks later, he found Narcissa in a deep cave, the entrance on a higher level. He clambered down a short metal ladder and greeted her. She smiled at him and welcomed him.

"Greetings, Warnick. I trust all is well with you and the others."

"Well enough," he replied. "The work is endless, but we are eating and warm. Do you need anything?"

Truth to tell, Warnick was intensely curious about Narcissa. How did she get food? She no longer joined them for their meagre diet of soups and stews.

She smiled at him. "This old lady does not eat much. I sell simple herbal medicines to people above and buy canned beans and fruit with those few coins. It is enough. I do

not work hard as you do.”

She chuckled. “I can hear you working. Be careful or you will make men who work for the city curious.”

Warnick frowned. They were far below the city tunnels, the ones used to maintain sewer and water lines. But he took the hint and resolved to tell the others. These days, that kind of work was much less. They had other worries, light and heat still being among the most critical.

“If we can do anything for you, Narcissa, you have only to ask. Just tap on the pipes.”

“Ah, I have heard your tapping. It is a good way – not noticed by workmen, where there are so many noises. You have been kind to an old black lady. I have one thing to give you.”

She rummaged in a basket and retrieved a little red cloth bag tied with a string. She handed it to Warnick, who looked at it and then at her again. She waved him to silence.

“It is not for you. Give it to your doctor, Jacob, and tell him to mix it with warm water. It will help with pain. He will know when to use it.”

Narcissa turned away and moved to a table where many candles were burning. Warnick was curious, but knew better than to press the old woman. She never said more than she needed to.

He found his way back to the windy junction and retraced his steps to the home tunnels and the meeting cavern, now officially a library and Jacob's place of work. Their doctor was there with Anna, sorting books as usual. They had very few bookshelves, but they had managed to make a library of sorts using planks and bricks, with more bricks as bookends.

A message over the pipes called everyone to supper, so they filed into the cave that had been adapted for dining. It was stew again, but no one complained. Grace had made some biscuits, somehow, and they were gobbled up greedily. Bread of any kind was a rare treat. They needed a proper stove and oven, Warnick reminded himself again. That would not be easy to find – and getting it to where it was needed would not be easy either.

After supper, Warnick managed to get Jacob alone and gave him the little bag from Narcissa, along with the instructions. Jacob looked as puzzled as he had, but he put the bag into a pocket of his vest overcoat and thanked Warnick.

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Lighting was still a challenge. Most of the tunnels had none, but Warnick had rigged up

some electric bulbs that borrowed electricity from the few fixtures they had found working here and there. Half empty reels and long strands of electrical wiring was found wherever workmen had finished their jobs. Stringing it together had proven challenging, but not impossible.

For their chambers, they had managed to scavenge discarded candles and paraffin and melted them to create some ugly but serviceable pillars by using old loaf pans. It was a start.

Although there was less work now, they were all stretched thin trying to keep the group fed. They needed more people to scavenge. It took good timing and a lot of luck to find anything edible, what with so many others doing the same. What bothered everyone, when they discussed it, was how to choose new recruits. They could not afford to lose anyone to incompatibility or ill health. But they could not count on finding people with skills they needed either, although that was not a big consideration. Anyone could swing a pickaxe, Warnick pointed out. A cook would be a wonderful addition, they all agreed, but they needed a stove as well. No one could do better with a Coleman stove than they were.

Warnick, who was above more than most, kept his eyes and ears open. He wandered around some of the old areas he used to frequent, attracting no attention since he was known, at least by sight, in many places. Therefore, he was amazed one day to hear his name called. He turned to find a young black woman he had known briefly, when he still had some paying day work. She was carrying a very young baby and he smiled as he looked down at the sleeping child.

"He's yours," she stated outright, then waited to see his reaction.

Warnick was shocked, but also a little skeptical.

"Are you sure?" he asked, just to have something to say.

"Yes, Warnick. I could use some help keeping him fed."

Warnick considered the problem, and furrowed his brow. Sally was intelligent, but like himself, seldom had work. He wasn't denying the child was his, just uncertain what to do about it, as he was certainly not working in the usual sense of the word. Also, how much could he reveal about his present life? Should he say anything?

He had a few coins in his pocket, found under storm drain grates in the tunnels underneath, enough to buy them both a coffee. So he offered to do that and she accepted, with relief. He realized then that she had expected him to deny it and walk away. He couldn't do that.

A nearby small cafe provided them both with a coffee and a small cookie. Sally sighed, relaxed and sipped it gratefully. It was cold outside and she had obviously been walking for some while. Warnick didn't know where to start. Sally did, though.

"Have you found work, Warnick?"

"In a way I have," he replied carefully. "I don't get paid, but I do work in exchange for food and a place to sleep. Several of us are doing different things. At least we're out of the weather."

"I can sew," she remarked, not too hopefully. "I can cook too, when there's anything to cook. You remember that. If you can find me something to do, I'll do it, whatever it is, just so Winslow here can keep feeding. I'm breast-feeding him, but I ... I'm not eating enough. I know that."

That did it for Warnick. How could he ignore that plea? He nodded and looked her in the eyes.

"I'll take you to this place I'm ... um ... working. We do need more people to do this and that. Someone to cook and repair our clothes would be very welcome."

"When can I come?"

"Right away, if you wish."

Sally nodded. "Just let me go to my friend's and pick up my things. I've been sharing space with her. There isn't much, but I have a sewing work box and some clothing, and some diapers for Winslow here."

So Warnick accompanied her to a run-down tenement where they tramped up filthy stairs to the attic level. Sally used a key to open the door and within a few minutes had collected everything she wanted. She wrote a note to her friend and when they left, she wrapped it around the key and slid it under the door.

"I wouldn't want her to worry. I just said I had found Winslow's father and we were moving in together."

Warnick nodded and carried her small suitcase and sewing box, while she carried the baby in a sling on her chest. He stopped when they were outside her apartment building, considering what way to take her that would be closest. She was obviously tired. They were closest to Central Park, although it was several blocks. He decided on a culvert entrance, on the edge of the park, but not in it. He led her there, looked around to make sure that no one was nearby and took her arm to quickly move her into it. Once they were around a curve, there was no more worries about being seen and he relaxed.

Sally looked at the end of the culvert and stopped.

"Where are we going? Surely you don't live in this!"

"Come just a little farther and I'll explain. I want to make sure no one can hear us."

He guided her to the brick wall and stuck his hand in a gap where a brick had come loose. The brick panel slid slightly open, just enough to let them through, and he



pushed it closed from the other side. He let out the air he had not realized he was holding, in a big whoosh.

"We don't normally use this one during the day," he told her.

He led her to a nearby lookout post – usually unmanned as now – really just a deep indentation in the rock wall, but where the tunnel made a sudden curve, so it couldn't be seen easily. He gestured for her to sit on the wooden bench they had placed there.

Sally was looking around her with interest and then looked at him expectantly. Warnick took a deep breath and started talking, telling her about their group and how they had come here and how they were living.

"It's not luxurious, but it's dry and relatively warm. We don't have to worry about the weather. We all share the work and we are making it a little better every day. But it has to be kept secret and you have to agree to that before I take you there. If you can't do that, I can take you back out."

Sally smiled at him, a little uncertainly.

"I know you mean well, Warnick, and I understand why you don't trust me completely. But you have to understand that this is the best offer I've had since I saw you last. There are few jobs for a black woman and none at all for a women either pregnant or with a child. I'll do what you wish, make a home for you, and never say a word to anyone."

Warnick gave her a guilty smile and took up the lantern in the sentry post, making a mental note to replace it as soon as he could. He led Sally along the complicated route, which took some time, but was at least more direct than that first one, so long ago. They had found better ones. Sally kept up with him, holding Winslow in her arms and missing nothing in the light of the lantern. She was quiet until they reached collection of caves they were using and had entered his own. She looked around then and smiled at him.

"Warnick, you've made this comfortable. I'll help and do what I can to make it better. I'll see about getting another sleeping pad and something to keep the baby in. Don't you worry."

So that was Day 15, by Warnick's reckoning, the day he brought Sally and their son Winslow to his world. Jacob had immediately asked to examine the child and Sally had been happy to let him. Winslow was pronounced healthy and Jacob told her to eat more protein. He would make sure she got more.

For her part, Sally was an extra pair of hands, and with Winslow in a sling on her back, she helped out with the kitchen duties. They had established it in a corner of the cave they used for dining, and had even found old cupboards to store their dry goods in, such as they were. An adjoining cave could be more storage, but they had little to put in it as yet.

During the next few days, Sally proved to be a cheerful worker and seemed to enjoy being with the other women, repairing any clothing that needed it – which was most of what they found.

The old warehouse was still revealing treasures in adjoining rooms, and in one Pascal found an old treadle sewing machine on a metal and wood desk, covered with dust, turned on its side and with a broken leg, which Warnick easily repaired. He also cleaned and oiled it to free up the long unused gears. Sally found some bobbins, thread, and needles in one of the desk drawers, and a few odd buttons in another. Added to her own sewing kit, she was well-supplied for the time being, she said. She tested it on some old rags and it was pronounced good enough. She stitched up some assorted terrycloth to make larger towels for them all.

After a while, with a little more work and some more tests, she started making clothes for Winslow, from whatever smaller clothing she could find. She also made him cloth diapers from layers of soft flannelette and soon had a stack of them. She washed almost every day because he used a lot. Soap powder was not easy to find, but they had become expert at shaking out what they could from discarded boxes in trash heaps, especially behind laundromats. They used it sparingly, and dried their clothing in one of the windy places close by. Sally rigged up some long bamboo poles someone had found, rammed between two walls, and these made very good clothes lines with some discarded hangers. More poles arrived as people realized how useful they were and some were used to make open closets in their chambers. Sally did so in hers and Warnick's.

Watching all this activity around his small son, Warnick shook his head in disbelief. He had not realized how much work babies were. Winslow was the first in the tunnels, so he was of great interest to everyone, and the presence of a child seemed to make everyone happier too.

Sally and Warnick were what he termed friends. She did not seem to want more from him and he was only slightly disappointed. To be honest, he was so tired at the end of the day, that food and a bath were the extent of his ambitions. Winslow was, fortunately, an easily satisfied child and Sally continued to breast feed him. He was obviously thriving.

They had all bent all their efforts into bringing as much stuff as they could find to their new home. It was surprising what they found, when they realized they had someplace to bring it. Someone, Jacob perhaps, found a stack of metal single bed springs behind a furniture store, obviously discarded. They managed to bring them down one by one and there were enough for everyone, even some spares. With some wood boards, or a piece of old carpet, and a pad, they at least kept everyone off the cold stone floors.

They kept a list of items they needed on a broken chalk board in the meeting chamber,

and it surprised everyone how soon they were found, sometimes more than one, and that was a source of amusement. That list never seemed to get any shorter, though.

One item did remain on the board for a very long time – a full stove. It wasn't so much because they couldn't find one – there were lots of old electric ones discarded – but they could not use them. There wasn't enough electricity they could steal for it. They needed an old type oven that could be fired with wood. Their Coleman stove was adequate, but couldn't make them anything much but soup and stews. They did find a camping oven, which allowed Anna to make scones and muffins, a pleasant change from the toasted stale bread that was their usual fare.

Meat was still a challenge to find also, although they haunted the back alleys behind corner stores and small supermarkets. Meat discarded was usually past the stamped due date, so they quickly used it to make stews – their most common meal, but one they all enjoyed and were able to make in infinite variety. A second large pot usually had soup going, what Warnick thought of as 'eternal soup' – since it was continuously fed with water and more ingredients as they found them. All in all, he thought, they were all eating better than most had in many years.

Their little community had grown somewhat. Sam had joined them, a younger and welcome pair of hands to help Warnick with handyman jobs, since none of the others had such skills, although they all tried.

There was always furniture repair and Sam was good at that, even spending some of his hoarded dollars on wood glue and clamps. So now they had some furniture to make their personal caves ... chambers, Warnick reminded himself, using the word that Jacob had suggested ... more homey.

So those early weeks passed. It was now late November and they were thinking about having a celebration of sorts, to mark what they had accomplished, some time in December. Over John's objection, they decided to keep a large cave they had found early on for special occasions, but which was some distance from the main caves and lower, down a lot of windy stone steps. It was also a very windy cave. John had found some tapestries, really just old rugs, but ones with woven scenes, and had covered the sources of the wind, so that the cave itself was at least free of that. It emerged, after some prodding, that he wanted the cave for his own use, but the looks he received from the rest of the group were enough to keep him from pressing the matter.

As it happened, it was Lou the barber who solved the most pressing requirement of their little community. One day, as they were planning their celebration, he came puffing into the meeting room, so excited he had to sit down and catch his breath. He was a tall rotund man, with little hair of his own.

"I know where there's an old oven, the kind you want," he panted out at last.

"Restaurant down the street has one in their basement. They were renovating and

found the thing under a lot of lumber. That place has been a restaurant forever, so it was probably used to cook, until some owner decided that a modern commercial hotplate and oven was better. They didn't move it, just built another floor on top of it and moved the restaurant to it. I told them I knew someone who wanted one, so it's yours if you can get it away.”

Warnick nodded and they set up a work crew. He thought the stove would probably come apart, enough to carry it to Lou's and then into the tunnels from his cellar. So it proved, when he went to look at it. The top burner plate could be lifted off, as could the hutch at the back. The doors also hooked off. That left the main part, which was very heavy, but which they managed to move with four of them - Warnick, Lou, John and Jacob. Getting it down the long route home was easier with their wheeled trolley, now with a new axle. However, the move down the stone steps was hair-raising and needed a lot of rope and care.



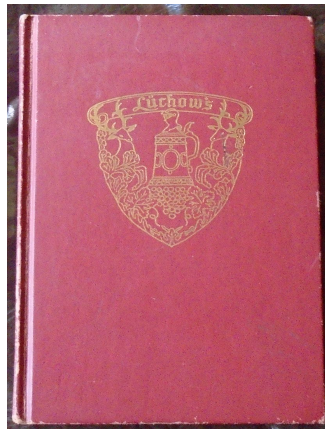
They managed, however, and installed it in a cave a little distance from their residence chambers, one that had sufficient room for storage and had good ventilation. They also took all the lumber, which the owner didn't want, so they had a good supply of wood. Charcoal would also work, and they had found old bags of briquettes here and there too. A battered axe from the storage room was put to good use chopping up the long boards to be used in the stove. Luckily, it had not been treated. Most was dry, but some

they left on the spiral stairs to dry completely.

Sally and Anna were pleased with the new appliance, and went to work scrubbing it with steel wool. It turned out to have been well-cared for and fired up well when they tried it.

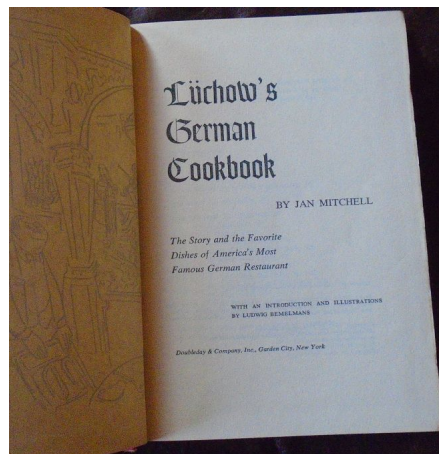
Food was an obsession, still, Warnick realized, and no wonder. None of them had been eating well until they had formed their little community outside in the Park, and now they were at least getting sufficient, although it was still a struggle and there was certainly nothing but the basics. The Winterfest meal was almost gourmet by comparison.

Warnick was helping Jacob arrange some newly-arrived books one day when he picked up an old book with a red fabric cover. It had a coat of arms and a name - '*Lüchows*'. He looked at the spine and the title, '*GERMAN COOKBOOK*', got his attention. He opened it in curiosity and was amazed to discover that it was about a New York Restaurant in the East Village, and was dated 1952. He showed it to Jacob, who registered a little shock and then relaxed and smiled in memory.



“This is a wonderful place, Warnick. A restaurant for which New York is justifiably renowned. I went there once with my wife, a special treat. The food was what could be termed 'good home cooking' in the German style, meaning tasty, generous and satisfying.”

Jacob leafed through the book and his face became quite animated, a rare thing for him, at least in Warnick's experience. Warnick had often wondered how he had come to be living on the street, a man with good clothing, so obviously unsuited to it. The handyman had followed the unspoken agreement amongst them, not to ask. This time, Jacob obviously found the memory less hurtful and more pleasant.



“A cookbook! I had no idea they had produced one. We must try some of these, Warnick, now that we have a real stove. They are not beyond possibility, if we can get the ingredients – although we do not have the resources of a restaurant like this.”

Warnick thought about it that night. Their community did tasks willingly, without complaint and the common ones were done without having to be asked. They posted a list of jobs on the chalk board and organized work groups where needed. But they did need more people, especially ones with skills, and particularly someone who could cook more than the basics.

Food was always a concern. What could they do about it? Neither Jacob, nor John had given any thought to it, he knew. Grace and Anna went above frequently and brought back what they could. Their part-time cooks did what they could, but soups and stews were still their main offerings, even with a stove, mainly because those ingredients were most often to hand.

Neither Sally, Anna or Grace were cooks, really, and the menfolk were no help at all. Either no one had ever had to cook much, or perhaps never had the opportunity to learn more than the very basics. They needed a greater variety of food, certainly, but they also needed someone who could cook it. But now, at least, they had a proper stove.

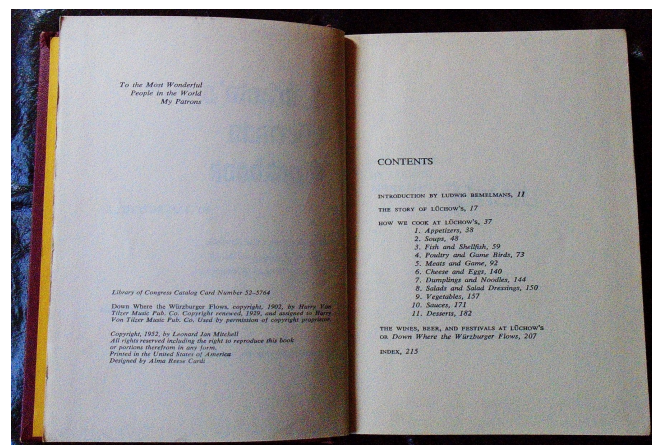
Could Dr Peter supply more food? Warnick immediately discounted that. He was a good helper and always willing to give them medicines and vitamins when they needed them, but it was unfair to ask him to supplement the diet of an outcast group, even if Jacob was his friend.

Warnick read the Luchow's recipe book often in his spare time over the next couple of days, almost drooling over the meals. Thinking about it, he had an idea. He still liked to read on a Park bench, when he could, weather permitting. Perhaps he could read the book on a bench where there were several restaurants nearby. People were always curious to know what someone read in public, and perhaps a cook's helper or someone

from a commercial kitchen, would get interested.

If he picked a time when kitchen staff were unlikely to be busy – between meals – it just might work. *Use a cookbook to catch a cook*, he thought, laughing silently at the notion. But what else was there to try? It wasn't as if they could put an ad in the paper – and they wanted a cook, now, someone who cared about the difference between a ladle and a slotted spoon.

He put his idea into action the very next day. It was a bright winter day, and New York seemed spun from crystal – bright, clean-edged and cold. He sat himself down on a bench that was clear of snow or wet patches, and opened the book. Even the Table of Contents was interesting!



He soon became absorbed in the scrumptious recipes, and wondered again how they could acquire the ingredients. He paid no attention to the foot traffic going by. If someone was interested, they would stop and address him.

That plan didn't work past the second day. He sat in his spot for an hour, and he had read the recipe book pretty thoroughly after two days. Enough to know that this was food he wanted. Nevertheless, he kept his eyes on the book and made a show of turning pages, just so he would be aware if anyone did seem more than usually interested.

And so it happened. On the fourth day, when he chose to sit in mid-afternoon, the mornings apparently being ill-advised, a large man seemed to hesitate in front of him, but kept on walking. Warnick thought perhaps he needed to encourage the interest, so he sat in his spot on the following day, at the same time. And he was certain the same man again hesitated. On the third day, Warnick looked up as he saw the man approach and shifted slightly. The man stopped and Warnick caught his eye.

"What a place this must be," Warnick commented, and the man's mouth stretched a little, in what Warnick supposed was a smile.



"Indeed," came a deep rumbling voice from the stranger. "The smells in that place could raise the dead."

"You've eaten there?" Warnick asked in a conversational tone.

"Once. Long ago, when I first came to New York. Always wanted to work there. Never did. Instead I work at a place where the customers come because they want to be seen, not because they want to enjoy the food."

"Ah," Warnick replied, not sure exactly how to proceed. He took a chance.

"I've never eaten there either, but then I'll eat just about anything, as long as there's lots of it and it's hot."

"Those are the criteria that matter," the big man stated bluntly. "Plus well-prepared, I should add. Tasty."

"Yes. Our cooks can certainly satisfy our hunger, but these recipes ... they're something special, hearty, tasty – real food. They sound wonderful."

"Mind if I sit down?" the stranger asked.

"Be my guest," Warnick answered and moved over a little to make that point, even though there was still plenty of room, even for two such large men as they were.

The man sat down carefully and sighed. "Been on my legs all morning and through lunch. Feels good to sit. The sun warms a body, even in winter. Never see it until this time of day. Where do you work?" he asked Warnick, turning to look at him.

For a few moments, Warnick didn't know what to say. He had not even considered an answer, he realized. He had not really expected to be asked even so basic a question. He berated himself soundly, then tried to get his brain to cough up a reasonable answer. He cast his mind back. *Yes, this would be plausible.* He smiled at his companion.

"Um, well it's a kind of soup kitchen, you know. A place for folks down on their luck. It serves soups and stews and bread. All good solid fare. Just not fancy."

"Damnation on fancy," the big man rumbled. "I've had it up to my hair with fancy. I'd rather cook for people who appreciate it. Where is this place? I'm thinking I need to change my job."

"But, this place, they don't pay much," Warnick said, improvising hurriedly. "But they'll give you a place to stay, even a good stove to work on. And lots of hungry stomachs. But these recipes," Warnick waved the book, "might be too ambitious. They don't have money for things like they use in these recipes. A lot of the food is donated, so they use what they get."

"You know a lot about them," the stranger observed.

"Been with them a few months, helping out," Warnick told him. Nothing he had said was a lie, but the truth would be more difficult. Perhaps the only way to proceed was to



show his new friend.

"I can take you to the place," Warnick offered. "You can decide after you see it. But don't you get paid well where you are?"

"I get paid," the man rumbled. "But I don't enjoy the work. We spend a lot of time making a little look like a lot on the plates. Decorative you know. That's not food. And I like my food, as you can probably tell."

The cook chuckled, stroking his impressive stomach. "I don't eat there. I go to a little family place that piles my plate and satisfies my hunger. They're friendly and treat me like a guest, like they do everyone."

"Well, when would you like to see the place?" Warnick asked.

"How about now? I don't have to be back until 4:30 pm for the evening meal. If I like your place, I'll give my notice tonight after dinner. My sister would be happy – she keeps telling me to return to the farm, that farm folks like us don't belong in the big city."

A farm! That settled it. Warnick stood up and made a decision. "Come with me then ..." He paused.

"Name's William," the man said, and got up. "Lead on ..."

"I'm Warnick," he told him and held out his hand to shake. William didn't hesitate and shook it warmly. Warnick was already impressed. White men didn't always want to shake the hand of a black man, especially one looking as he did, obviously in patched clothing.

Warnick paused. "Just have to tell you that the way there is a bit unusual. Once we're on the way, I'll explain everything."

"Fine by me," William answered.

So Warnick led the way into the Park, deciding that the culvert might be the best route for a newcomer. It was longer, but it showed some of the features of their world that a newcomer should see. Also, being as it was winter, they were unlikely to be given any attention. It was away from the main paths and many of the smaller ones in the park were never plowed.

Warnick looked around, but there was no one, not even a dog, in sight. They followed the little stream down into and through the culvert. There wouldn't be any footprints anyone would notice. William was obviously curious, but said nothing. When they reached the iron gate, Warnick walked over to the panel and pulled the lever. The heavy inside door opened gratingly and Warnick opened the metal gate with a tug, and beckoned William in, closing it behind him. Then he pulled the lever to close the door. There wasn't a sound to be heard, except some tapping. That was so common, Warnick

paid it no heed, but William's face knit in a slight frown.

Warnick turned to his new acquaintance and got a questioning look in response.

"Never seen a short cut like this," William muttered.

Warnick chuckled. "And never will again," he stated. "This, William, is the beginning of the road to the place I told you about, but it's not a typical soup kitchen. It's a community, small right now, for a few people who have lost everything, or almost everything. They were shown this place and chose to stay, to make it their home.

"We care about each other and share everything, and it's warmer than out there, but it isn't luxurious and the food is plain. We found a wood stove recently, and you'll have a proper kitchen with everything we can give you."

"Sounds good to me," William said.

"There's one other thing," Warnick paused and spoke carefully, feeling a sense of déjà vu. He had done this exact same thing with Sally not so very long ago. He continued, speaking clearly now.

"This is a secret place. We're safe here, but only because no one knows we're here. We're careful about that. Even if you don't want to stay after you see it, you must promise never to say a word to anyone."

William reached out his hand and Warnick shook it.

"Friends don't snitch!" William declared.

Satisfied, Warnick led the way and William, he could tell, was amazed at what they passed. There were some lights, now, courtesy of old tunnel wiring, so it was less daunting than when they had first arrived.

Wait until he sees the stairs, Warnick thought. They didn't move swiftly but it was a fair distance and William was puffing a little by the time they reached the stone staircase.

"Not far now," Warnick told the big man. William nodded.

They descended and were soon in the home tunnels. Warnick led the way right to the kitchen, and let William get his breath back. There was a lantern burning, but Warnick turned on an electric light. It was one of the few they allowed themselves here, also strung from one of the many lights left burning in the tunnels by long forgotten workmen. The cook looked around, then at the stove and opened the oven door to peer inside. He nodded when he stood up.

"I'll take you to our meeting room," Warnick said, and William followed him to the chamber now being slowly made into a library, but which still had their dining tables at present. Warnick turned on the electric light there. It didn't shed a lot of light because of the size of the space, but he lit a couple of candles too. No one else was there, it being too early for supper preparation yet. They both sat down on chairs, William with

a sigh. He looked around and nodded again.

"You're living okay here," he rumbled. "I can see that you're organized. I like what I can see."

"And..." William paused to get his breath again. "My sister, Agatha, runs our family farm. There's only the two of us. We never married. We can maybe find a way to get some produce and meat from her."

Warnick looked at William with amazement. *Not just a cook, but also a supplier? How lucky was that?*

"You sound like you want to stay," he commented at last.

"Yeah, I do. I have to go back to give my notice and get my things. I don't have much – but I'm not easy to outfit." William chuckled.

Warnick nodded, well aware of the clothing problem himself.

William continued. "And I have some cooking stuff because I sometimes cook at home. I'll bring everything I can. Take a couple of shopping bags and a suitcase."

Warnick nodded his thanks. "When you're ready, I'll show you back out and tell you how to contact us when you come back. I'll be there to meet you," Warnick promised.

William nodded and sat back on the chair. "That cookbook – I'm sure I can make many of those recipes."

Warnick smiled at that and handed over the book he'd put in his pocket. *Yes, indeed*, he thought. *This was their lucky day!*

William accepted it, leafed through it for a while, then handed it back with a smile.

"Put it in the kitchen and I'll use it. Meanwhile, I must get back and I'll phone Agatha. You can trust her. She'll be thrilled I've found a place she'll approve of."

He stood up and Warnick led him back out a different way, taking him to the entrance on the outskirts of the park, near where they had met. Another culvert, but more convenient. He stopped and showed William the nearest pipe.

"This is how we communicate," he told the cook, and picked up a rock left under the pipe. "When you come back you tap out a simple Morse code message 'I' and then 'W' on the pipe. The 'I' is two dots - a quick tap for each. Then you wait a second, and then tap out 'W'; - which is one dot and two dashes. You do the dashes by spacing them out further. Then after a double long space, tap out 5 dots – for this entrance location – and then a space and one dot - 'E' – for end." Warnick illustrated the method with the rock on his hand.

"This tells us who and where you are. Can you remember all this?"

William nodded. "Have to remember recipes in my head. I can do a few dots and

dashes.”

Warnick grinned. “This entrance would be easiest for you to use, I think. I'll listen for you. Are you coming back tonight?”

William considered that. “Got to do dinner tonight at the restaurant, then get my stuff packed. Also got to tell my landlord I'm leaving. I'm paid up until the end of the month, so he won't care. Got no furniture and not much else. I should get some sleep, though – first time in a long time I won't have to get up at the crack of dawn. Tomorrow morning okay with you?”

“Fine by me,” Warnick said, and held out his hand again.

William smiled and shook hands again. “See you soon, friend.”

He arrived the next morning, around 8:00 am, by the clocks they had in the tunnels – no two of which agreed, and Warnick went to meet him. William was eager, he said, to set his kitchen to rights, and displayed two heavy shopping bags, one of which clinked. A big suitcase sat on the floor, one with wheels.

“My herbs and spices, and a few tools I need ... and some other things,” William told him when Warnick inquired.

Warnick relieved William of the two shopping bags, leaving the cook to pull the suitcase. They made their way to the home chambers and Warnick again took William to the kitchen, and explained about the electric light.

“If you need another one or two, I can rig them up for you,” Warnick offered.

William looked around and nodded. “I need one over the stove and another there ... over that table. Need to see what I'm doing.”

The 'table' was an old door sitting on two sawhorses, but it was solid oak, so not likely to budge, Warnick hoped. There were a couple of large, well-used cutting boards on it, and some bowls and wooden spoons, all recovered from various alleys behind restaurants and thoroughly scrubbed with bleach and well-rinsed in their water, which Jacob had determined was cleaner than city tap water. Dr Peter gave them as much bleach as they wanted, agreeing with Jacob that it was necessary, considering where they lived.

Warnick went to work on the lighting while William organized his kitchen, delving into boxes that had been stored there because they were kitchen items, although there was no place to store them. William put what he could on the table and stood back, hands on his ample hips.

“Is there some old bookcases, or and old sideboard, or something?” he asked eventually.

“Not at present,” Warnick answered, from his perch on the ladder.

“Never mind then,” William said. “I’ll get Agatha to come in with the truck and bring us some root vegetables, meat and some old furniture for this kitchen. Where can she deliver it?”

That was a question, Warnick admitted. “But I know who we can ask,” he told the cook. “Meanwhile, you’ll want a place to sleep.” He showed William the small unused storage room off the kitchen, then brought him one of the spare springs, along with a rug, a couple of blankets and a pillow made from an old sweater, moth-eaten but carefully darned, stuffed with fabric scraps and old foam rubber – one of Sally’s innovations. William nodded and declared himself well-satisfied.

William went to work and made some bread and a bean stew using some of his own ingredients and herbs. Seasonings were one thing they lacked. No one ever threw those out and this was not the season for searching the park grounds. Warnick headed off their usual cooks, who were more than happy to learn they had a real cook.

William happily served everyone in the dining area and there were satisfied and complimentary expressions as they all spooned it up. William had brought yeast, along with the contents of his food cupboard, including flour and other useful items. It was a meal to remember, the first of many, Warnick was sure. A good start.

Warnick brought up the problem of how to accept deliveries. William explained about the farm and immediately he got everyone’s attention.

“There must be a way,” Jacob murmured. They had not yet explored all the tunnels, but there were no exits which would safely allow a truck delivery. “Peter might know.”

As it happened, Peter paid them a visit that evening. He found the whole community sitting in the library chatting happily with William, whose looked more than content. He told their guest what he had told Warnick.

“My sister looks after our family farm, alone. She can supply us with a lot of meat and vegetables, even some fruit in season. She cans and bottles and makes jams, so she’ll have some of that too. And she can give me some furniture for my kitchen – if there’s a place where she can bring her truck.”

Peter looked thoughtful at that, and spoke up slowly. “I may have a solution, if you can give me a couple of days to set it up.”

William nodded and Jacob spoke for all of them. “Peter, we appreciate everything you do for us. Of course we can wait.”

“Today’s Monday. I’ll should know by Wednesday, so I’ll come down then and let you know my idea.”

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Peter returned on Wednesday, as he had promised. He told them about a warehouse used by some medical professionals for delivery, such being not a good idea in the city. It was near the docks, but in a safe area, almost a compound, where several companies kept their inventory. There was an old freight elevator that went to a basement no one used. They all drove in to pick up supplies. The ground level warehouse was large. If they could make a tunnel entry to the basement, they'd have their delivery place.

Peter then produced a map he had bought from the City, showing the area in old Brooklyn where the warehouse was located, also a larger one showing New York proper, and yet another map of the underground sewers and fresh and storm water system, overlaid with the subway train network and tunnels. Warnick and Jacob looked at the maps with interest, realizing with a shock that they had never considered that such maps existed, because they had never had a reason to. Of course, the city must have them for its own purposes. *Obvious when you think about it*, Warnick berated himself.

Washington Irving had not mentioned them, Warnick knew. Perhaps they had been made later – or Irving had not considered them important.

“We're here, I think.” Warnick pointed to an area not far from Central Park. “We go up here now,” he pointed to the three main Park entries. “There are lots more tunnels going south, and some go under the East River, towards Brooklyn. Maybe Sam and I can go on a search to see what's there.”

Sam nodded. “Might take a couple of days, but be worth it.”

“Map out the pipes while you're about it,” Pascal suggested. The other two men nodded.

“If William can make us some journey food, we'll go tomorrow,” Warnick added.

“Can do,” William responded. “I have a flask you can take some water in.”

So the next day, Warnick and Sam set out to explore, carrying lanterns and William's lunch in a battered pail. They had instructions to tap in on the pipes every so often. Pascal promised to be listening.

After an hour of steady walking, they came to massive gallery with several tunnels leading from it. Their lanterns barely showed them the roof.

“What do you figure this was?” Sam asked. Obviously, it had been abandoned long ago, whatever it was.

“Might be a subway tunnel they decided against, for whatever reason.”

There was the sound of water dripping somewhere, echoing around the vast space, but the light was dim, and it was impossible to tell where it came from. It didn't smell

damp, though. There was some wind coming through from somewhere too. Warnick mentally noted the fact. The tunnels often had winds that seemed to originate far below them.

They consulted a compass they carried and chose a tunnel that seemed to be leading the right direction, then tapped out a brief 'identification' – just their initials and 'we're here' on the pipes. They got a return acknowledgement, which made them feel less alone.

It wasn't long before Warnick stopped in amazement again. Off to their right was a long curved-roof tunnel with a dimly lit bulb hanging forlornly half way down it. There were odd bits of lumber and other junk, none of which looked current.

“A service tunnel,” Sam muttered.

They did not speak loudly because their voices carried and echoed back alarmingly. No telling if anyone would hear. They must be near the river now, Warnick guessed. Their compass seemed to indicate they should go down the service tunnel, so they did. It did in fact go under the river. It was obvious that no one had been there for a long time, as their feet kicked up clouds of dust. They hurried, in case anyone saw the evidence of their passing.

At the end of the tunnel, Warnick picked up a rock and again tapped out his initials and Sam's in Morse code and then 'OK'. He put his ear to the pipe and after a few seconds heard a faint 'PRE' in response. Pascal had heard him even here! That was also worth remembering. With lighter hearts, they continued their journey across Brooklyn, following the pipes and tunnels to where the warehouse was located. They didn't immediately know where it was, exactly, and had to measure their steps back and forth in the area. The maps were to scale, being engineering drawings.

Finally, they were sure they had reached the spot and tapped on a wall of the rough cement tunnel. It rang hollow. How were they to get in, though? They continued on and found a manhole, not realizing until then how close to the surface they were. They looked at each other and Warnick led the way up the rungs until he could push against the manhole cover. He did so as quietly as he could to look around. They were inside a building! He signalled to Sam and pushed the cover onto the floor and climbed out. It was exactly as Dr Peter had described it – a high-roofed, but bright warehouse with a row of reinforced glass windows all around the upper half of the very high walls. *No worries about being overlooked*, Warnick thought.

Warnick and Sam could see the place was empty at a glance, and lingered to enjoy the natural light of morning before heading to the elevator. They found it a basic, unlocked model with a wooden door. They opened the door to a large compartment with a metal floor and took it down to the basement, a smaller room with a low ceiling, barely taller than the elevator.

They walked to the wall they figured went to the tunnel and tapped it with a bit of broken concrete. It was definitely hollow. Looking around, they saw that the room was thick with dust, except for a box of tools in one corner, recently added, Warnick guessed, by Peter. There were also some old wooden pallets, and an old metal door lying on the floor. Closer examination and a little cleaning, revealed it had a plaque with 'Utility Room' on it. Warnick laughed. Beside the elevator was a similar door marked 'Electrical Room', presumably housing the elevator machinery.

"Bet someone brought the wrong door and couldn't be bothered to take it away," he remarked. Been there a loooooong time."

Which gave him an idea. He figured he could rig up a lever outside in the tunnel to unlock the door as he had for the culvert entrance. Once inside, they'd have to prop it because there was no place for a lever that wouldn't be noticed. But there were water pipes, he noticed, and tapped one with his initials and 'OK' again. He listened and heard something, but it could have been caused by anything, he reckoned. They were a long way from that mess of pipes Pascal loved. They'd need a relay to get anything to Pascal from here.

Warnick went over to the tools and pulled out a sledge hammer.

"I think we can break through quickly, just enough to show us where, and then hide the hole behind a skid for now," Warnick remarked. Sam nodded.

Warnick took aim and put his weight behind the sledgehammer and got a satisfying shattering of the wall with less noise than he expected. The basement was well-insulated and didn't echo. The wall wasn't very thick. He could already see a darkness behind it. He gave it one more whack and the hole was large enough to stick his hand through.

"Perfect," he muttered. "We leave it at that and do a proper job from the other side. I can put up the door later and rig up a lever. Let's get back down."

They placed a palette against the wall to hide the hole and returned to the tunnels via the manhole. Then they sat down near the hole to eat a late lunch. The rest was welcome. Neither wanted to think too much about the length of the trip back to the home tunnels, but if this was where the food was coming, they would have to do it. Maybe they'd find a better way later, when they'd explored more.

They returned home after lunch and reported their success to everyone at lunch, and Warnick gathered what he'd need to create the lever, promising to do it the next day.

William went above that afternoon, and contacted Agatha to give her directions. One day after Warnick fixed the entry to the warehouse, she drove in with a large truckload of assorted furniture, root vegetables, a couple of smoked hams, a lot of eggs and some jams and pickles. The tunnel folk were waiting for her and had their wheeled cart in the



tunnel. She greeted them cheerfully, invited them to her farm if they could get away, then drove off, after making it plain they should get William to call her when they wanted more.

They loaded on a shelf unit and filled it full of food. William had accompanied them and offered to carry the eggs, about three dozen of them. They made good time, but it was a long way and they really couldn't contact Pascal until they reached the maintenance tunnel, because they had no idea where the pipes ran. But once they reached the large tiered cave, Jacob, John, Grace and Sally joined them and helped them unload everything. Then they went back for more. The cave proved to be a good spot to transfer, as the route from there was straight.

William, seeing that no one else wanted them, asked for the single bed frame and mattress Agatha had brought, and a small dresser. He put them in his small bedchamber and declared it perfect. It now had a small hurricane lamp and Warnick gave him a large pitcher and bowl.

So it was, that they decided to plan a little celebration for early December, which Jacob suggested they call First Winter Festival. This was soon shortened to Winterfest. They cooked a turkey supplied by Dr Peter, and baked potatoes and yams supplied by Agatha, who had also supplied them with carrots, rutabagas and parsnips ... and jams for the wonderful bread William made. Lou brought them cupcakes and cookies, and even chocolates – a luxury no one had had for many years.

They lit as many lanterns as they dared in what they now called the Great Hall, and set up trestle tables to eat on. It was a small group, that first one, but they made up for lack of numbers with their great joy and an eagerness to make it special.

Narcissa made an appearance, and had given little cloth wrapped gifts to Sally and Grace 'to celebrate children'. To Anna, she gave a little leather bag and told her to keep it close. Jacob, who recognized the bag as similar to the one she had given him, wondered at it, but said nothing. His own bag never left his neck.

Lou brought along a friend, Sebastian, who was a itinerant entertainer in the subways, one he vouched for as a font of information, as well as discretion. He wore a top hat and tails, and entertained them with card tricks and other 'magic' when they had eaten. He also pulled out a little flute from an inside pocket and played a selection of tunes, some popular, some classical. The sound of music echoing in their underground world was so unexpectedly beautiful, it brought tears to many eyes. When he had finished, they looked at each other, stunned. Their eyes affirmed it; they must try to introduce more music to their lives.

Jacob rose and thanked Sebastian, and then everyone else, by name. He cleared his throat and voiced what all of them had thought.

“We have found a place of safety after a dark time, without hope. We have made this place a home, and for this we must thank Narcissa. We have all brought our energy and hopes to this place, where we all work together. I hope we can make this celebration an annual event.”

There was room to dance and some did. Sally and Sam seemed to be dancing a lot, Warnick noticed, and discovered that it didn't bother him at all. They were the two youngest and he had no claim on her, even if she had shared his chamber and cared for his child. So he wasn't surprised at all when Sally approached him after the meal and told him that she wanted to move in with Sam. She also said she wanted him to take Winslow after he was weaned. Warnick wondered a bit at that, and decided that perhaps she and Sam were a couple, and wanted to get married. In any case, Winslow would be cared for, no matter where he was officially, so Winslow gave her his blessing. She smiled at him and thanked him.

Sally moved into Sam's chamber, but left her sleeping pad and spring – and Winslow with Warnick. Sam had made them both a proper bed from bits and pieces. Winslow slept happily in his cradle, in Warnick's chamber, Sally feeding him as needed, so Warnick had piled up the two springs and double pads, giving himself some height and more comfort. He sighed. This was the best bed he had had in years. He'd had no real friendship with Sally, so he was not hurt by her leaving. He had always considered himself a bachelor. But he did love his son and made sure he was with him as much as possible. Sally helped him willingly. Everyone did.

Jacob and John announced that Grace and Anna were pregnant, which got them a round of applause. So Winslow would have playmates, Warnick thought, somewhat selfishly. It was good – they were beginning to be a true community, and a growing one, and that boded well for their future. They needed more people to do the amount of work that seemed to challenge them almost daily, but that too was less than it had been, and gave them more time to reflect and relax.

After Winterfest, they were eating leftovers for some time, but no one complained. They were eating better than ever and although they had no refrigeration, John had found an ice cave not too far away, where they could store food. That changed everything. It was a phenomena Warnick had never heard about, but which Jacob explained as a geological anomaly caused by cold running water over the walls of an old lava tube or limestone wall. It created a cold spot that generated ice, a unique micro-climate. Such caves, Jacob said, existed all over the world, and some were tourist attractions.

Everyone looked forward to a year of less work and more time for leisure. What the latter would look like was anyone's guess, but Sebastian had offered to come down and play for them whenever they wished. They welcomed him and gave him a small

chamber on the outskirts of the known tunnels, a place he could reach from a subway maintenance entry. He declared he was not a communal-type man, but he appreciated a place to store his things. No one argued.

As Lou said, Sebastian read the newspaper and kept them apprised of what was happening in the world above. He started coming down every Saturday and gave a precis of the news. It served to make them even more grateful for their fortune. Winters in New York always meant casualties. He also told them when he made friends with people he thought would fit into their community. There were not many, but slowly their group grew and two of the new women had young children. That bestirred Jacob to consider education. It was important that they not forget the necessary skills needed, even in the tunnels, he said. He devised simple lessons and organized his growing library of books to encourage readers.

Meanwhile, Pascal and John created a language that could be easily tapped on the pipes and gave each outside entry a code. Warnick knew it was based on Morse code, but that some adaptations had had to be made for brevity. Pascal used an old ledger book to record the various codes and encouraged everyone to learn them.

Meanwhile, two person teams continued to map the pipes and established relays for the more distant places, like the warehouse, to be manned as needed. They also, with more younger men now in the community, established a rough sentry route. Warnick himself liked going on patrol, and often took the late night shift. He himself often met the scavengers on their return, usually late at night, and helped them carry what they had found to the storage room, which soon had to be expanded into a second. No one was inclined to examine garbage piles during the day, but some did scout out likely places, so that those going out at night could go directly to them. They always went out in pairs too. With so few people in their group, each one was valued greatly. They did not want to lose any to carelessness.

Even with the generosity of Agatha, they wanted to reap what the city could provide. They did not want to put too much of a strain on the farm. At least now, they would not have to scavenge leftover food. Disease and danger was still a part of their lives, so they were careful. Jacob was always nearby if anyone wanted a decision on some item, or needed a medical opinion.

Fear was also present in the world below. There were many places where bridges were needed, some of which would shorten trips to the world above. One, over what they had come to call the Abyss, would nearly halve that trip. They debated how to bridge it, but agreed there was only one way – a built structure that could be pulled over into place. They began to search out materials, especially rope and planks. Two very long pieces of wooden beam would be needed for the bridge understructure, something to nail the cross planks to. They also needed something for railings and a lot of rope.

The materials came together gradually over many weeks. An abandoned construction site yielded the long beams and a good many of the planks, some of which had obviously been used as concrete pour forms. Sam and Warnick fitted and nailed the planks to the beams in an adjoining tunnel, then used some old broom handles and lighter weight wood for the railings. The rope joining the railings was rough and seldom long, but Pascal taught them some sailor's tricks to join the frayed ends. By the end, they had a structure that was both sturdy and safe. But getting it in place was going to be a challenge.

They gathered all the tough nylon rope they could find, spliced it together where necessary, and created two teams – one to hold a rope that led from the other side of the chasm to the newly-made bridge waiting in the tunnel. A second team held the bridge with more ropes.

It would take all their people to do this. They ran the rope ends through very large ring bolts Warnick had hammered into the wall. as an anchor, on both sides.

The day chosen for the work, everyone was excited, but only cautiously optimistic. They decided to do the job in the morning, when everyone was fresh. William made them a good breakfast, of tea, porridge and toast and doled out some of the precious jam.

If either team failed to hold the heavy structure, it would end up in the Abyss and all their work lost. No one commented the obvious – that some of them might go the same way. Warnick anchored one end at the ring bolt, William the other, as the two largest men in the group. Everyone else divided themselves between the two, and used old pieces of leather formed into palm protectors to hold it and save their hands from rope burns.

Warnick could hardly bear to look as the rope began to loosen up. He held on, wrapping the rope end around his waist and tying it with a complex slip knot Pascal had shown him, one that bore a remarkable resemblance to a hangman's noose. He rationalized that no matter what happened, nothing could pull him through that ring bolt. The knot would never go through it, although it might tighten the rope around him. He kept it as slack as he dared.

Slowly, he saw the rope gather into loops behind John, who was end man, and stood on the rope as their team pulled the bridge towards them. Warnick couldn't see the rest of the team because he was around the curve. He pulled the slack through, and stood on it, in turn, while he adjusted what was around his waist. All seemed to be going well. He heard yells of encouragement echoing from the other side and equally excited ones on his.

Then, suddenly the rope stopped and he heard a lot of shuffling from his team as they adjusted to whatever had prevented movement. Warnick felt the rope begin to try and return through the ring bolt, so he leaned against the noose, grabbing the rope with

both hands and pulling. Was the bridge too heavy for them? John turned, saw Warnick's predicament and added his weight to the rope beyond the ring bolt. They held on like madmen, their feet against the wall with the ring bolt. They held on far beyond the point either thought he could, for what seemed like hours. They couldn't let go without damaging themselves. Warnick feared being cut in two and closed his eyes to concentrate. Sweat poured down his face.

Then the backward movement stopped and the slack began to build again behind the pulling team. The two men sighed heavily and John returned to the end of their team and resumed pulling and holding. It seemed to be very much slower now, almost tentative. They might have been pulling the length of the Golden Gate Bridge, rather than the 25 feet or so of the bridge.

*What was taking so long*, Warnick wondered. He held on, his arms feeling like they were ready to give way, having already been strained by the previous challenge, whatever had caused it.

Then there was a yell of triumph, taken up by several other voices, near and far. Warnick felt the rope slacken, this time in a good way. John fell back onto his rear end with a deep sigh, and Warnick collapsed gratefully onto the ground, after quickly passing a loop end over the ring bolt and secured it against any possible retreat. Pascal came back to tell him the work was done – the bridge was across! John and Warnick closed their eyes and slumped onto their backs, too exhausted to respond, while they tried to rest their weary arms and get their breath back.

They heard a song being sung, after a while, and managed to get to their feet, wordlessly supporting each other. They shuffled to the tunnel entry overlooking the Abyss and Warnick felt John stiffen in shock. Warnick's dark face, he said later, must have gone almost white, as he regarded the rope they had used to pull the bridge across. More than half of the heavy, much-spliced strands had separated near their end of it, meaning it must have been almost in the middle when it began to part. It was a miracle that it had held long enough to get the structure safely across. If it had failed, and the bridge had fallen, it would have been a disaster. Several people would undoubtedly have gone with it, he had no doubt. It had been very much more difficult to drag the heavy structure over the stone tunnel floor than they had anticipated, much more so than over the gap. The rough floor must have contributed to the stress on the rope and its fraying. They should have put wheels on bridge, Warnick thought, irreverently, knowing full well that wheels were not exactly common in their world.

Warnick dragged his eyes from that terrible sight to watch Jacob leading Sam, and Sally holding little Winslow, along with some of the others, across the bridge. Sam was beating an old drum and singing loudly '*We Shall Overcome*'.

Warnick almost giggled, in fatigue and relief. *Come over, over come ...* he thought and

closed his eyes in gratitude for whatever fates allowed them to continue to make progress in this underground world.

When everyone had returned to the hub side and was milling around chatting, William bellowed, "SILENCE".

Into the quiet, he made an announcement. "Knew we wouldn't have time or strength enough for much after this, so I've got a roast ham and baked vegetable casserole waiting for us. Should be just about ready now."

There were whoops of joy and cheers at this and everyone followed William back to the home tunnels and the dining chamber. They laid the table then sat down and waited eagerly.

William first brought out a pitcher of beer, another of his sister's products, and a tray of assorted glasses, and John took it upon himself to fill glasses and pass them around. Then William brought out the ham, neatly sliced, and then the casserole with a large serving spoon. Plates were passed along and he filled each with a generous portion, then lastly his own.

Jacob rose and waved wearily for silence. "Friends, we have accomplished a great thing today, together. Let us give thanks, each in his or her own way, for the strength to do this and for the food and drink we are about to enjoy."

There was a silence as everyone bowed their head. Into the short silence, William spoke. "May our community always succeed."

There were a few '*amens*', and many '*hear, hears*'.

"Let's eat!" William insisted and there was a collective sigh as they ate and drank. Most were so tired that they could not eat quickly, but they did so efficiently. The ham disappeared, as some asked for seconds, and the jug of beer was filled a second time from a cask William had in the kitchen.

When everyone was satisfied, they all rose and, prompted by Jacob, sang "*For he's a jolly good fellow*", to William who blushed and waved his thanks, unable to speak.

John rose and suggested they all take the rest of the day off, sleep if they wished. He wished everyone a good day and he and Anna left. The rest of the group made no argument and left in ones and two for their own sleeping quarters.

Warnick flopped down on his bed, removed his boots and jacket, and crawled under the blankets. His last thought was that with this job done, there was nothing they could not attempt. But he hoped they never had to use such rope again.

END