

All That Glitters

by Angie

Vincent was just entering his chamber after dinner when he heard a familiar voice behind him. He turned to see Mouse jumping from foot to foot, his headband flashlight bouncing in rhythm.

“Vincent must come! Arthur in trouble! Needs help!” Mouse almost shouted.

Vincent gave a mental sigh and went to get his cloak. The raccoon was often in some kind of trouble, but it was usually the mischievous kind that tunnel residents had to deal with. He couldn't remember when the raccoon himself actually needed help. He picked up his cloak, resigned, and something glittered, a gift scarf from Samantha, one he must remember to wear, sometime. He looked at it speculatively for a second, then stuffed it into his pants pocket before grabbing a lantern and lighting it.



“Show me where, Mouse,” he ordered and their intrepid gizmo maker immediately ran down the tunnel.

It didn't take long to find the location. He looked up where Mouse pointed and could see Arthur's eyes glinting at them from a ledge some way up the wall of a tunnel that wasn't often used, being closer to the surface, and removed from most entrances.

“Jumped off my shoulder,” Mouse explained. “Saw something. Rat maybe?”

The wall was dry, which was good. With a sigh, Vincent removed his boots and socks and threw his cloak on top of them. On a hunch, he pulled out the glittery scarf from his pants pocket and put it around his neck. In the dim light of Mouse's flashlight and his own lantern, it actually did show up well. At least Samantha would not be able to claim he hadn't worn it.

“May I borrow your flashlight, Mouse?” he asked his companion. Mouse immediately took it off his head and Vincent put it on his. It would allow him to keep his hands free, awkward though it was.

He began the slow climb to where Arthur could be heard moving around, his claws scratching the rock. He had to take a route slightly to the side, the part below the raccoon being quite sheer. At last he reached a level where he could see Arthur. The raccoon's eyes reflected the

flashlight, and sure enough, he had caught a small mouse, which was now mostly ignored in the raccoon's concern about escaping the ledge.

Vincent paused to think. He was not within arm's reach of the raccoon, and there seemed no convenient hand or footholds to get him closer. Arthur obviously did not want to risk his own neck trying to get down, with or without his prey.

Vincent sighed. There really was only one way, and he hoped Samantha would understand. Carefully, he pulled the scarf from his neck and immediately caught the attention of Arthur, likely because it glittered. He grabbed the small end of the triangular scarf, made sure he had a good foothold and a stable hold for his right hand, and threw the scarf's wide end over Arthur. The raccoon predictably scrambled back on the ledge but his back claws caught in the mesh of the scarf. The dead mouse fell off the narrow ledge onto the tunnel floor. Mouse ignored it.

Slowly, Vincent reeled in the scarf, with Arthur still fighting somewhat, but only getting another foot caught. Good. At the edge, Arthur scrambled to prevent himself being pulled off, but failed and in turning, got himself further tangled. Vincent yanked the scarf before Arthur could do more, and when the raccoon was hanging, he dropped the bundle carefully into Mouse's hands. Arthur screeched and chattered angrily, but Mouse had grabbed enough of the scarf to hold it away from himself before Arthur could react, so he didn't get scratched.

Vincent made his way carefully back down the wall and reached the ground, relieved. He put on his socks and boots and regarded their captured varmint.

"Think he'll have learned a lesson?" Vincent asked.

"Mouse won't take Arthur on trips anymore," came the reply. "Mouse sorry."

Vincent picked up the dead mouse by its tail and they both returned to the home tunnels. Vincent tossed the creature into a crack in the Abyss on the way back. He didn't like the idea of Arthur eating vermin anywhere they lived.

Once they got to Mouse's chamber, it took both of them to free Arthur from the scarf, which did not look damaged, at least that Vincent could see. Arthur, on the other hand, quickly disappeared under Mouse's bed, still chattering angrily.

"Will come out when wants food," Mouse predicted.

"I am sure of that," Vincent replied. He took the scarf back to his chamber, and gave it a hand wash. It had proven useful after all. Mouse hadn't seen it before, so perhaps he wouldn't mention it.

Mouse had indeed noticed what he thought was a neat net, but had no idea what it was. He went to Mary to ask for a 'neck net' like Vincent's, and she, wise woman that she was, immediately knew what he meant. She had taught Samantha to make it, after all.

Rather than explain, she looked around her stash of yarn and with some despair. Yarn strong enough for a net had to be special. Vincent's had been cotton, but there was no more of that. She gazed at the stack of yarn reels she had received from a helper who had disposed of their knitting machine. Such yarn was not in great demand in the tunnels, but there was such a lot of it

Mary suddenly had a brainstorm. Once, long ago, an old sailor who lived with them had showed her how to make strong rope from thin string. She had used that technique to make a

lot of rope for the tunnel folk, but now she wondered if it might be applied to thin yarn for a different kind of project.

She took a reel and experimented. Yes, it would be quite strong enough for the kind of net Mouse wanted. And why not make it into a scarf? Very handy, as Vincent had discovered. She smiled a little at that. Mouse always recognized useful things, but had not known where Vincent got his. She didn't enlighten him; Samantha would be hurt.

Mary got to work and made a very practical mesh scarf in about an hour, astonishing herself on how well it worked. She tapped a pipe for Mouse and he came almost immediately. He was thrilled when she gave him the scarf and immediately put it into one of his many pockets.

"Mouse needs. Thanks." He rushed out, as if he already had a use. She hoped it was nothing too dangerous.

Within a few days word got around that a net around the neck was a handy accessory for tunnel life – no doubt Mouse was making the suggestion liberally, perhaps demonstrating his own. Mary was flooded with requests and luckily most of the tunnel dwellers were quite willing to make the mesh scarves themselves, after she showed them how to work the yarn. It was a very simple pattern, as well as being both attractive and practical. The pointed end could thread through the wide end too, to make a sling – as she showed them.

When the scarves began to appear more often among the community, Vincent remained silent, still worried that Samantha might find out the origin of all this interest. They were being used quite frequently now, but their origin wasn't questioned. Mouse had obviously thought Vincent very clever to have such a thing. They soon seemed to be everywhere.

One of Vincent's students carried books in one, then he saw Father carrying some wood for his brazier in another. Rebecca used one to carry candles, to replace those in the various chambers. He was willing to bet everyone had one, when even William was seen wearing one – but their cook had also found them useful to hang up delicacies he wanted safe from Arthur, which Vincent found ironically amusing.

Vincent himself was given a string mesh scarf by Mary, who winked at him conspiratorially, and he noticed she was also wearing one. She commented how useful it was to gather toys and such at the end of the day. It was even strong enough to hold a baby and bigger ones were being used by new mothers as a sling.

Vincent thanked her for the scarf and put it into his cloak pocket, just in case. He didn't like anything around his neck, so Samantha's scarf stayed hidden under his cloak on the coat rack.

Arthur, it seemed, had done some good, for a change, Vincent decided. Best not to mention that, though.

(Samantha, meanwhile, was gratified that a scarf she had made was suddenly so popular, even if not entirely for its original purpose. She had given one to Mary, after making Vincent's – just because she knew Mary did not often receive gifts, and certainly deserved more.

She supposed that word had got around the tunnels in its usual mysterious way. Samantha had by that time forgotten about Mouse's story. Not to be left out now, she made herself a glittery one too – and was soon glad she had. She wore it and soon found it a useful 'soft' weapon for whacking Kipper when he teased her.)

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