



Photograph of mural by Jim Bartlett

Making a home

“Don’t throw those out. I can do something with that.”

Cheryl groaned. “Dad, you’re a hoarder. They are just cardboard boxes. I was about to fold them, but they pack nicely inside each other, so I think I’ll leave them nicely stacked for the bin men.”

“That’s what makes them special. They stack, just like Russian dolls. Does your Katy still like playing with those tiny play figures?”

Cheryl nodded, remembering that she was forever trodding on one, the heavy plastic often digging through her light shoe or slipper to pierce her foot.

“Please, Dad, they’re just rubbish, taking up more space. I wish you hadn’t seen them.”

She realised he was determined and the cardboard boxes would stay.

"Right, they're yours but if they are still in the corner of this room on Wednesday when I call, I'll be taking them with me, straight to the tip.

He could see she meant business and he nodded acceptance of the terms.

As soon as his daughter was out of the way, Charlie set to work, suddenly animated with the thought of a new project which had to be completed within the next few days. First, he would need to draw up plans and work out what extra materials he would need. He was a skilled carpenter used to working with wood, but this was cardboard. It would need some added support to strengthen the structure.

By the end of the day his assignment was taking shape and he was quite pleased with what he had achieved. He had made a list of items he would need from the local hardware store but that could wait for another day.

The following morning was chilly but dry. He grabbed his old jacket and reached for the familiar knitted purple hat. It had been some time since he had worn either; in fact, it had been some time since he had been outside. He decided to walk to Calder's Hardware and was greeted by Derek, the owner.

"Well, Charlie, good to see you out and about. How are you doing? I was so sorry to hear about Elsie. You had a good many years together, didn't you?"

Charlie nodded. It had been a long time, but they had been good years and he knew he could not stay in and feel sorry for himself any longer. Elsie wouldn't have wanted that.

He gave Derek the list of supplies he needed. They were quite straight forward, everyday items, except for the last one. Derek raised his eyebrow querying the addition of pink unicorn fabric.

"No, you'll have to go down the road for that. Young Lindsay has taken over the old haberdashery store, done it all up. I'm sure she'll have something suitable for you."

And, indeed, young Lindsay did have pink unicorn fabric, knew the obsession with unicorns was the latest thing to hit the high streets, making the bank accounts of designers and manufacturers increase by the minute.

Wednesday arrived and Charlie heard the front door open and his daughter's familiar voice.

"Dad, I've brought you a meal so you won't have to bother"

She stopped mid sentence.

"Dad, you're so clever. Is that really those three cardboard boxes? I can't believe you've made all this and how did you make those unicorn curtains? Katy will love this."

Derek smiled. The boxes had become three small houses, all fitting into each other, just like Russian dolls. The curtains had been fiddly but he had enjoyed making them. It was time to bring some happiness to others now and his beloved granddaughter would be the first recipient.

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