

Waste

Every little boy hates something or other. Fat slugs or green vegetables or girls. Ugh! Jamie didn't mind any of those things (except girls who were a little scary and strange, he thought). No. What Jamie hated was waste. It was just silly. His long-suffering (but very smart) mother and father tried to explain it to him why waste existed at all on the planet, but it just didn't make any sense to Jamie. He just didn't understand and all his parent's answers to his questions left him deeply unsatisfied and a little bit angry.

Why?

Why can't the rain just stay in the sky? It was just a waste of water!

Why can't you eat those spikey green tops of tomatoes? They were still part of the tomatoes, weren't they?

Why can't you keep every empty packet that crinkly crisps had come in? Every bag is useful for keeping something in, isn't it?

So Jamie kept things. Quite a lot of things. His mother would always complain that Jamie would get stomach-ache as he tucked into his bowl of apple cores and parsnip tops, but Jamie didn't mind. They didn't taste *amazing* or anything, but at least they weren't going to waste. It was important, Jamie thought.

His father would grumble about it as he gathered up all the biscuit wrappers that Jamie stored in the cavernous airing cupboard at the top of the stairs next to the bathroom and Jamie would have to tell him off. 'No Dad! It's naughty! Someone worked very hard to make that blue and that red and that

green look as pretty as it does. Why do you want to throw it away? Keep keep keep. Keep everything all the time!’

His father would try to debate: ‘But Jamie, we don’t have room for all these things.’

‘Well, we shall have to move to a bigger, better house, with turrets and cellars and more airing cupboards and bigger rooms. It seems to me that there are going to be more and more things to save. MUCH more than more and more, even.’ And with that, he marched back into his bedroom to replace the salvaged biscuit wrappers under his bed, next to his Christmas paper and triple-decker cheese and ham sandwich cartons that his father would try to throw in the bin every Saturday lunchtime.

(By the way, the present that Jamie got in the aforementioned wrapping paper was a sign that his parents had bought for him to hang on his bedroom door. It looked like this:



and it was his fifth favourite thing, next to his friend, Billy, his smart bear with the patterned waistcoat, his scruffy bear with the ragged ear, his biscuit wrapper collection and his truck, which was also good at collecting things that people threw away.)

Secretly Jamie had to admit that perhaps his father had a point. It *was* getting quite crowded under his bed. Jamie decided it was a situation he would think more carefully about at another time.

Going outside into the outdoors was always a bit of a trial for Jamie. There was so much work to do! Phew!

Firstly, every bin would have to be inspected, many being too tall for him to see into. He'd proposed they take his father's big rickety wooden steps out with them when the family went shopping, but no one seemed too keen on *that* suggestion. Never mind. He would just see what he could see. But really! They didn't make it easy for you, did they?

Then, for seconds, there was all the stuff that was left on the floor outside. It once took Jamie six minutes to get to the end of his street! Crisp packets and scraps of paper and bits of gum, which was especially tricky to pick up and sometimes he'd have to leave there, which he hated. He was so tired afterwards that he had to go straight back home again. Something his mother thought was a good idea also.

Then there was shopping. Jamie *loved* to go shopping. He'd often take his big rucksack with the picture of the yellow bicycle on it, filled with empties from whatever supermarket they were going to. He figured they had their names all over them, so they must belong to them! He should return them to their rightful owners, immediately! Each trip to the big supermarket was a mission, but Jamie was always prepared.

His very patient mother was full of apologies to the security guard at the big supermarket when Jamie presented him with an empty bag of frozen peas, an empty tin of red kidney beans and a selection of crispy crisp packets (hand picked from his personal collection), but the security guard was very smiley and he took them away anyhow and Jamie considered this a job well done.

On his journey around the supermarket Jamie made all manner of plans for any possible waste that might come from that week's shop. More teabags to be dried on the shelf, it looked like! And the green bit of cauliflower that wrapped up the white bit of the cauliflower (that no one seemed to like) would be back on the menu again.

No waste. Yum!

The one person who shared Jamie's strong point of view was his Grandfather, who Jamie called 'Grandpa'. For some reason Grandpa called Jamie, 'Jimmy'. Anyway, he got it, all right.

Grandpa was very clever and he did magic. He had wispy hair that would fly around all by itself and Jamie thought it might be magic too. He liked brown clothes. He also had a red face and was a little rounder than his father's and *definitely* rounder than his mother's.

Jamie would stay with Grandpa some weekends and it was pretty good. Jamie would sit on his sofa with the swirling roses on it and confide in Grandpa all his waste worries and Grandpa would listen and scratch his chin and then say something clever, which Jamie liked a lot.

Grandpa's would only do magic for Jamie, because he said that Jamie had 'the right kind of imagination'. Like the time when it was rainy all day and Jamie was becoming more and more frustrated because it was such a waste! After Jamie had stood outdoors for seventeen minutes with his mouth open to catch the rain and several glasses and buckets around him, he had to admit that it was all a little too much to catch. Grandpa said he would try one of his spells and, guess what? The rain stopped almost straight away! Well, about seven minutes later, give or take.

So that's how Grandpa would do magic.

Of all the wasteful culprits in the world (that Jamie knew of, anyhow), it wasn't a person that made him fume, but a time. Autumn to be precise. (Jamie liked to be precise). Yes, autumn bugged Jamie the most. Autumn was the naughtiest of them all.

One day, accompanied by his kind-hearted father, Jamie was on his way to one of his regular visits to the local recycling tip (to make sure all was as it should be and that everything was in order), when he spotted his next project. It was a small curly brown leaf that had gently fallen at his feet. Jamie picked it up and, with a frown, studied it carefully.

'Dad, why did the tree throw away its leaf?' enquired Jamie.

'Well, that's autumn, Jamie.' Answered his wonderfully knowledgeable father. 'Trees have to get rid of all their old leaves...'

'That's a waste!' Jamie interrupted. 'Why don't they just keep the ones they already have?'

'It's just nature, Jamie. When it gets to autumn things don't... live as well. You know – like when grandpa complains and never goes out when it's windy and rainy.'

'It's silly! I think the trees should keep their leaves, then there won't be any mess and there won't be any waste. And, anyway, wouldn't they be warmer? Like when grandpa *does* go outside and he puts on his big brown cardigan.'

Jamie's father nodded. 'You know what, Jamie? I think you have a good point. A very good point.'

Jamie was pleased, because he didn't always think that his father agreed with everything he said like Grandpa did.

Jamie picked the leaf up, then took a long hard look up into the tree. 'Mmm. Tall.' he thought. The leaf went into his bag with the picture of the big yellow bicycle on it. This was going to be a tough mission.

What he needed was a plan. He liked plans and this was the perfect opportunity to make one. Like most plans, he went to his number one source. Grandpa.

The ingredients for a plan: Pencil. Paper. Grandpa.

'Grandpa, I want to make a plan.' Jamie announced when he next found himself in Grandpa's bungalow. Jamie thought it was like a toy house. He was enjoying a bowl of onion-skins, which Grandpa had saved especially for him.

'Really?' replied Grandpa, scratching his chin, thoughtfully.

'Yes.'

'I'm intrigued, young man.' (He always called him that when he wasn't calling him Jimmy.) 'Tell me more, if you would please.'

'You know how trees throw away their leaves when it gets cold?'

'Mmm... yesm. Yesm, I believe I do.' Jamie once asked his very wise mother why Grandpa said 'yesm' when he meant 'yes'. Mother didn't know.

'Well, I want to give them the leaves back.' Jamie continued

'Oh, really?'

'Yes.'

'All the trees?'

‘Yes. I think so. Yes.’

Grandpa’s chin stroking had now taken on a whole new fury.

‘Okay. Well you *will* need a plan, won’t you?’

‘Yes. Definitely.’

‘Okaaaay...Well, the way I see it, we’ll have to start somewhere. Which tree shall we start with?’

‘How about that one there?’

Indeed, there in grandpa’s stood a tree with a big curly trunk. Virtually all its leaves were thrown away and it looked very naughty and a little sorry for itself.

‘Wow,’ said grandpa ‘that’s a big ‘un. How about we make that the next one? How about, instead of that one, that little tiddler over there?’

Grandpa pointed to a teeny-weeny tree that sat just in front of the garage where grandpa kept his brown car, which Jamie thought went very well with his brown clothes. Jamie thought that it wouldn’t have much impact, but he trusted his Grandpa enough to keep his objections to himself.

‘That one isn’t as silly as the others and has kept most of its leaves’ noted Jamie.

‘Yesm, true,’ replied grandpa, ‘but you have to start somewhere.’

And so a plan was hatched between the two greatest minds to do battle against waste and wasteful things. As there were only a handful of leaves to give back to the tree, grandpa decided that they should tie them back by their stems using a little bit of string that grandpa kept in some draws in his garage next to

his brown car. Jamie agreed almost instantly that this was, indeed, a good plan. He didn't feel he needed to add anything.

So, for the next 67 minutes, give or take, Jamie worked with his grandpa to give the tree its leaves back. Those that Jamie didn't think belonged to that tree he put in his bag with the yellow bicycle on it. He didn't want to give one tree another tree's leaves. It would be unfair and may confuse things.

When they were finished (Jamie had to admit that grandpa did most of the work, but he had *definitely* helped) it looked splendid. Some of the leaves that the tree had carelessly given away looked a little brown and ragged around the edges, but at least there were no longer any on the floor. They were where they should be. They congratulated themselves and celebrated their good work over a cup of tea for grandpa (using one of the teabags drying on the little dish with a mermaid on it that lived above the sink, where Grandpa kept the used ones) and an orange squash for Jamie, of which he drank every last drop.

This was a good start, thought Jamie. But there was loads more work to do. Tons, to be exact. He told Grandpa so. Grandpa had a little shine in his eye, which Jamie thought was a good sign because he had that look just before he did some of his magic.

'Jimmy. Listen to me.'

Jamie sat on the sofa with the swirly roses on it and concentrated hard.

'We've got our work cut out here, young man. I need you to talk to the trees and politely ask them if they wouldn't mind helping us?'

'Okay, Grandpa.'

'Then we'll see what we shall see.'

'Okay, Grandpa.'

‘Good Boy, Jimmy.’

Jamie was restless. He couldn’t help but worry about all those leaves. He remembered that his Grandpa had asked him to patient, which meant lots of waiting, but Jamie was an busy, busy young chap. Always had been. Even when he was born his mother had said that it only took him 30 seconds to come into the world and when he did he started complaining almost immediately. Jamie didn’t know about that, but he had to admit that he liked having something to do. Just sitting around watching television was a waste and he hated waste.

So, after a productive morning of scraping out the very last bits of toothpaste from the tube with his specially made toothpaste scraper (itself a recycled toothbrush which he’d owned since he had teeth - he was on his second batch of teeth now, his first set had fallen out but he kept them all in the second to last drawer on the eastern side of his bedroom), he went to work. Over the next 13 days Jamie started collecting leaves that had been thrown away by all the naughty trees, making sure he remembered which tree they had come from. Or which ones he *thought* they came from, at least. He talked to the trees at length, but they didn’t seem to listen. He spent most of his time looking for their ears, as he was sure they didn’t have any and that was a problem. He would talk to trees twelve or so at a time. He would talk to trees individually. He tried bribing them, but he didn’t know what trees really liked. So nothing seemed to work.

Some streets had *so* many leaves that Jamie decided he would have to come back and tidy up later. His mother didn’t always have time to help him pick up the leaves, although she helped when she could. His father couldn’t help out either because the doctor said he had a bad back, but even *he* collected the leaves

from the garden, which was *something*, Jamie supposed. He asked if grandpa would help him instead, but Grandpa said he was too busy trying to convince the trees to take all the leaves back, so Jamie was pretty much on his own.

Soon his bag with the big yellow bicycle on it was overflowing with leaves. Where would he keep them all? His mother wasn't a huge fan of Jamie's solution. One day she went to her wardrobe to find her fluffy cardigan, which reminded Jamie of a cat that used to roam the house once, which was called Moglet, and she was soon covered in all of Jamie's clothes, which had fallen out of *her* wardrobe. She was confused and a little bit angry. So much so that she interrupted Jamie as he was numbering his old socks that were too small for him and was keeping for a time when they would come in useful once again.

'Jamie, what are all *your* clothes dong in *my* wardrobe?' she asked, quite loudly.

'My wardrobe's full.' Jamie replied.

'Full of what?' asked his mother, with closed eyes. She was sometimes quite good at talking and sighing and she did it really well this time.

'Lea...'

'Leaves.' They said the answer at the same time, which Jamie thought was a little silly because if she knew the answer then why did she ask the question?

'You can't keep leaves in your wardrobe, Jamie,' explained his mother, which was also a bit silly because the leaves were already in there, so he *could* keep his leaves in the wardrobe. But Jamie ignored this anyway.

'Me and Grandpa are going to give them all back to the trees so they don't waste them.'

Jamie's mother did a sigh/ talk again. 'Grandpa.' Then she sighed and left the room, which she was also quite good at.

'That reminds me,' said Jamie, calling after his mother, 'can I call Grandpa and see how he's doing?' Because, Jamie had to admit, he was running out of space a little bit in his bedroom and he wasn't sure that his mother was going to like the idea of him storing some of his leaves in the kitchen cupboards (which he'd done that morning) if she hadn't like the idea of him putting them in his wardrobe.

So Jamie called Grandpa.

'Grandpa! How's it going?'

'Good news, Jimmy, good news! I'm close. I reckon in the next few days we'll be in a good place. I've collected thousands of leaves this end and I've been busy colouring them in green so they'll look good when they go back in the trees.'

Colouring? Jamie had forgotten all about that!

'I forgot all about colouring, Grandpa!' cried Jamie.

'Forgot! Well, best you get onto it, young man, yesm' replied Grandpa.

'I will! Right away!'

'Good boy, Jimmy. And keep an eye out in the next few days. I'm going to work soon!'

Jamie put the phone back and got his green pen out.

One of the best things about Grandpa is that whatever he said always came true. Always. One morning Jamie hopped out of bed and looked out of his window. Leaves on trees!

Jamie ran out of doors and, because it was now a bit warmer, he didn't mind one bit that he still had his pyjamas on and looked up at the big trees and they had some leaves on them. Not loads and they were a bit small, but as Grandpa had said 'you've got to start somewhere' and Jamie guessed that Grandpa had started with the small ones first.

When Jamie saw Grandpa later that day, Grandpa confirmed that he had, indeed, started with the small ones but would get onto the bigger one as soon as possible. And also, after Jamie had finished his lunch of crispy bits that collected in the bottom on fish finger packets on toast, Grandpa had suggested that he go out and thank all the trees for agreeing to take all their leaves back, even if they were a little stubborn to begin with. So that's what Jamie did.

Jamie couldn't stop talking about how excited he was that the trees had their leaves back and that he considered it 'a good day's work.' Mother and father were really pleased too, as it meant that all the leaves that Jamie had collected could now be delivered to Jamie's Grandpa to put back in the trees. Jamie was beaming. When he asked Grandpa if he could go on one of his night trips out to reattach all the leaves, Grandpa had said that Jamie had to sleep at night but, because he was adult, Grandpa could stay awake and do it. Jamie thought that was fair enough because he didn't like to be tired.

Throughout the warm, warm summer Jamie said thank you to the trees every day. They were doing a good job of keeping all their leaves to themselves and Jamie appreciated this because it meant he could concentrate on all the other waste that was going on in the world.

One day, when Jamie was around at Grandpa's, Grandpa sat Jamie down on the sofa with the swirling roses on it and told him some things. He told him that he'd been talking to the trees and they weren't sure they could keep hold of all their leaves forever and that they might need their help to collect them again in the future. Jamie thought this was a bit silly, but then Grandpa explained that, what if you had to stand in one place holding loads of things the same time? And wouldn't you get tired? And Jamie thought that he probably would, so he thought it was fair enough.

Then Grandpa told Jamie that he was too tired to do it alone next time and asked Jamie if he wouldn't mind taking over, which Jamie didn't mind at all. Then Grandpa told him that he might not be available for too many more plans, which Jamie thought was a little rude because Jamie hadn't even talked about a new plan. But then he was okay because his Grandpa was giving him a hug, which was always quite nice because it was like being in bed on Saturday morning when you're tired and you don't have to get up and go to school.

They sat down to a cup of tea for Grandpa (from used tea bag, which was always on the mermaid dish beside the sink) and a mashed up apple core for Jamie, which he loved. When they had finished, Jamie looked out of the window at the little tree which Grandpa had stuck all the leaves back onto.

'Phew,' said Jamie, to no one in particular 'So much to do. I can't waste a minute.'