

## **Trouble for Three**

**A story on friendship, recycling and cooperation**

*by Caterina Tzoridou*

### **Summary**

Vrasidas is a recycling bin that has just come out of the factory. He and other recycling bins have been placed on various corner of a town, so that its inhabitants can place their recycling materials, since, recently, the municipality has started a recycling project. Vrasidas is a paper-recycling bin and he is full of enthusiasm for his newly-assumed task and he dreams of the tons of paper he is going to help be recycled, thus contributing to the protection of the environment.

Despite his good intentions, his enthusiasm will soon be dampened: yes, people do bring their paper to the recycling bin, but there are also those who bring garbage bags, those who throw stones or hit him with balls as they play, and also those who simply believe he is in the way, therefore move him back-and-forth regularly, so that he stays out of their way.

The last drop comes on the day that Vrasidas is completely full; so full, that his lid cannot close anymore. The truck that collects paper for recycling does pass by, nevertheless the employees decide to pick the paper later, an idea that doesn't seem so good, as it is about to rain. And, indeed, it rains. As a result, the paper in the recycling bin turns into a dark pulp and Vrasidas himself turns furious and decides it's time to do something: therefore, after he is emptied from paper and washed clean by the employees, he decides to escape.

What surprises him, once he manages to sneak away, is that other "colleagues" of his have had the same idea: the recycling bins in town are tired of being mistreated, therefore they decide to react; and once they meet Vrasidas, they decide he is going to be their leader. Now, all together, they have to think what their next step will be.

Furly Furly is a pencil that, on a first glance, looks just like any regular, black pencil. His big problem, though, is that he cannot draw one single black line: once he starts writing, all he produces are curly lines of all colors. Considered defective, he is sent to a concentration camp, a "Reform Institute", as it is called, directed by the cruel Permanentink. There, together with other pencils with similar deficits, he will struggle, without much success, to learn how to draw straight, black lines, like a "real pencil" should. But despite the fact that Furly Furly would really like the lines that he draws to be black and straight, what he really wants is one and one thing only: to escape.

After yet another failed attempt to draw black straight lines, the heaviest of punishments is cast upon Furly Furly: he is locked in the camp's gym, together with the hungry pencil sharpener Chewall; there, he has to endlessly draw lines, until he finally achieves his goal. Of course, every now and then the pencil has to be sharpened and, if this process is repeated for too long, the consequences will be lethal for Furly Furly. Now, escape is simply his only choice.

Mimis is a 10-year old boy that has just come out of an annoying hardship: he has gotten rid of the cast around his left arm, which he had to bear so that his broken arm would be healed. Even though he is very happy to see his hand again, deep inside he is really worried: is he going to be able to write neatly again, like he used to?

After his first day at school and quite a few failed attempts to write like he used to, Mimis is completely frustrated. Now, back in his room before he goes to bed, he is afraid that he will never manage to write like he used to. Again and again he fills pages with lousy handwriting and, upon seeing the last one, he furiously throws first the crumbled piece of paper and then the entire notebook out of the window, only to hear a whispered complaint!

Surprised, he will look out of the window and, much to his amazement, he will see two recycling bins rolling slowly into the night. He can't help following them, in order to see what is going on.

Soon, among the big group of the runaway recycling bins, the three runaways will meet and will tell their stories: Vrasidas will speak about his disappointment because of the citizens' behavior; Furly Furly will tell them about the horrible life at the institution/camp; and Mimis will express his frustration and anger about his hand and how it simply won't write like before. Nevertheless, while they're speaking of their own problems, it is clear to all of them that they would like to work together on recycling. Now, the only thing left is to find a plan of action, but nobody has a clue as to how they should proceed.

Suddenly, Vrasidas comes up with an idea: they should draw the citizens' attention to the fact that the recycling bins have disappeared. This way, people will start wondering about the reasons the bins have disappeared. Vrasidas also thinks of an original way of making their disappearance evident: they will write the message "Where are they?" on the sheets of printer paper they already have, then put each sheet in an empty plastic water bottle and leave the bottles outside various shops in the city. What they need now, is someone to write all the messages.

That's what Mimis and Furly Furly can give a helping hand with. The boy and the pencil, escorted by Vrasidas, return back home carrying the pages, and spend the biggest part of the night writing. What is strange, is that Mimis' letters start getting better as he practices. A few hours before his school day starts, the boy falls asleep, having finished the package of "homework" he was given by Vrasidas and his friends.

On the next evening, the bottles are distributed and the morning after the first questions begin. Some think this is an advertising campaign, nevertheless everybody starts wondering. Now, there is a next step, which also requires quite a lot of work on behalf of Mimis and Furly Furly: there will be one more batch of bottles distributed; this time, the question will be more specific: "Who took the recycling bins?"

After a couple of sleepless nights, Mimis and Furly Furly finish their work and deliver it to Vrasidas and his friends. But as they are walked back home by Vrasidas, Furly Furly has a very strange feeling: that they are being followed. His feeling is not his imagination, since there are four sets of eyes, following every move they make.

The new batch of bottles has a definitely stronger impact. Now everyone knows that the recycle bins are gone, but they cannot imagine who took them and, above all, why. The time is perfect for the next move: they are going to tie with string 365 plastic bottles, 365 newspapers, 365 glass jars and bottles and 365 aluminum cans. This way, they will show everyone how big a volume of recyclable materials could one single person accumulate in a year. This means yet another big task for Mimis and Furly Furly: they have to write stickers with numbers from 1 to 365, which then will be stuck on the empty bottles, newspapers, glass jars and bottles, and aluminum cans. Right as they start discussing which way they will proceed, they hear a voice, telling them there is something else they have to take into consideration. As they all turn around, Mimis sees his father standing in front of them.

After the first moments of surprise and after they hear how Mimis' father followed his son in the middle of the night, they discover that they have a new ally. This means more efficient ideas as to their next step and also less work for Mimis and Furly Furly, since they won't have to write the labels by hand: Mimis' father will have them printed and he will also make a brochure, explaining how much energy and resources can be saved by merely recycling 365 items made of each of the materials they have tied in string. When he is asked where will all the materials be left for everyone to see, his answer is immediate: on the Town Hall square.

What seems like a wonderful day dawns for the mayor; the feeling is about to change dramatically, though, as he approaches the town hall, going to his office: outside the building, he will find the recyclable materials, while some citizens have started distributing leaflets which offer information on recycling.

While the mayor wonders how he is going to get out of the challenging situation, he has a visit: a group of people, headed by Mimis' father, are there to see him, in order to discuss the issue of the lost recycling bins as well as some other matters, all of which the mayor would like to avoid. Nevertheless, he puts on a nice smile and does his best to give answers he doesn't have to the questions asked by the group of citizens.

Apart from the questions, there are also some suggestions as to how recycling could be made more efficient, but also an idea: the citizens would like to organize a "Recycling Festival". Even though the mayor is everything but enthusiastic about it, he is forced to agree, since municipal elections approach and his opponent supports recycling. Things start to look brighter for Vrasidas and his friends.

The day of the Festival is approaching, with everybody anticipating it. The group of citizens visits the mayor once more, in order to take care of some last details, but on their way out of the City Hall, they see smoke in the sky, coming from an old factory, right outside the city. Mimis' father panics, knowing that this is the hideout of the runaway recycle bins, but also that his son and Furly Furly were supposed to go there in the afternoon. He runs to the factory, where a fireman tells him that, fortunately, there was nobody in the building. Just when he starts wondering where his son, Furly Furly and the recycle bins are, he hears Mimis' voice calling him.

Mimis leads his father to the new hideout that the bins had to hastily choose. Everybody is safe and sound, but after they tell him in what mysterious way was the fire set, they come up with a new, unpleasant surprise: they have no idea where Furly Furly is.

After a search in the area, there is still no sign of the pencil. Just when everyone starts getting worried, they hear a loud clanking; when they run to see what happened, they are told that one of the recycle bins saved Furly Furly from the hands of three mysterious figures dressed in black trench coats.

Despite their relief, they can't help but ask questions: who are these figures? Why would they want to take the pencil away? Soon, they will have their answers: the figures are three fountain pens, members of the famous Cynikink Brigade, which makes sure that everything runs smoothly at the Reform Institution. Therefore, once Furly Furly was gone, they set out to look for him. Once they discovered him, they were waiting for the right moment to get him and take him back. Since he was around Mimis and the recycle bins all the time, they thought of an absurd and dangerous way of distracting everybody: to set the old factory on fire. And, as they point out, their mission had a successful outcome: they've found the runaway.

But neither Mimis nor any other is ready to let Furly Furly go, least of all to the concentration camp. Vrasidas takes over and informs the Cynikink Brigade members of the version of the story they'll give Permanentink: there was an accident during the fire and the pencil was burnt to ashes. His last sentence will convince Furly Furly's chasers: either they leave, or he'll show them how you can recycle a fountain pen!

Everybody is relieved and happy. On the next day, the recycle bins are back at their place and everybody is delighted to see them again. Shortly after, the Recycle Feast begins and it is a great success. Everyone is happy that life has gotten back to normal and even though the recycling alliance has to part, they all promise that they will make sure they see each other as often as possible.