

Prudy's Problem and How she Solved It

By Carey Armstrong-Ellis

Prudy seemed like a normal little girl. She had a sister. She had a dog. She had two white mice. She had a mom and a dad and her own room at home.

Yes, Prudy seemed normal.

But Prudy collected things.

Now most kids collect something. Prudy's friend Egbert collected butterflies. So did Prudy. Belinda had a stamp collection. So did Prudy. Harold collected tin foil and made it into a big ball. So did Prudy. All her friends had collections. And so did Prudy—but Prudy collected *everything*.

She saved rocks, feathers, leaves, twigs, dead bugs and old flowers. She kept a box full of interesting fungi in the bottom drawer of her dresser. She saved every picture she had ever drawn, and every valentine she had ever gotten. She saved pretty paper napkins in her desk drawer. She had six hundred and fourteen stuffed animals in different unnatural colors.

She had collections of ribbons, shoelaces, souvenir postcards, flowered fabric scraps, pencils with fancy ends, pink scarves with orange polka dots, old calendars, salt and pepper shakers with faces, dried-out erasers, plastic lizards, pointy sunglasses, china animals, heart-shaped candy boxes with the paper candy cups still inside, tufts of hair from different breeds of dogs...

She just could not throw anything away.

It drove her dad to distraction. He was a very tidy person who did not like clutter. He started saying unpleasant things as he tried to mow the lawn. "Prudy, you have a problem," he said.

"What do you mean?" she asked, baffled.

"You just have too much stuff. Why don't we haul it all to the dump?" he suggested hopefully.

"I don't have too much stuff, Dad," Prudy said.

It even got to be too much for her mom, who did not mind clutter but could no longer navigate the living room.

"Maybe you could take all this to the thrift shop," she said. "Surely someone could use this old mushroom..."

"I *like* that mushroom," Prudy said.

"Prudy, you have to face your problem," said her mother.

"I do not have a problem," said Prudy.

Prudy's little sister started putting together collections of her own.

"Uh-oh," said Egbert, eyeing Evie's little piles of pine twigs and used toothbrushes. "Prudy, how about if you packed everything all up and stuffed it into a rocket and sent it to Neptune?"

"Yeah, that would solve your problem!" agreed Harold and Belinda.

"*There is no problem!*" shouted Prudy.

But Prudy herself found that she could barely get to her desk to feed her mice.

She could not even get out of her room without setting off an avalanche of one thing to another.

And then one day while Prudy was walking home from school, something shiny caught