

## The Most Beautiful Garbage Truck

A huge storm swept through Wriggle Town. It was late in the evening and everyone was getting ready for bed when the strong wind rattled the windows and started wrestling with the trees along the roads. Wera, the wise old water truck, closed the garage door of Waste Works Yard in a hurry. The roof crackled from the gusts of wind and enormous raindrops rapped on the window panes.

But the garbage trucks of Waste Works were not bothered by the thunderstorm. They felt safe in the garage, and they had plenty to do. They had to fix up all their pieces and parts, because everyone had received an invitation to the City Hall at noon the next day. Once a year the mayor held a reception in their honour where he thanked them for the work they did all year.

The citizens of Wriggle Town are very appreciative of the gang at Waste Works Yard for all they did to keep their streets clean and pretty. They knew all too well that without them, the streets would be filthy and full of litter, and the parks and playgrounds would not be very nice places to be in..

if Clara and Malvina didn't empty the bins,  
if Wilma and Waldemar didn't sweep the streets,  
if Wanda didn't make sure to keep Old Town tidy,  
if Walter didn't empty the containers in time,  
if Willy didn't plough the snow or help cars out of the ditches when they slid on ice,  
if Wera didn't water the streets on hot summer days,  
if Goliath didn't help to trim dry branches off the trees, or  
if Samson didn't gather and remove waste from building sites,  
then nobody would be able to recognize this ever so clean and beautiful town.

“They say that they will hand out some sort of a prize at this year’s banquet. I am curious to see what the mayor has cooked up.” Wanda was looking at herself in a broken mirror and was shining her windshield with a newspaper. “If they have a beauty contest, I am certain that I will get the prize for the most beautiful garbage truck,” she made the acknowledgement with satisfaction. “I am only missing two ribbons from my rear view mirror, and then all will be splendid. I can't decide, which one shall I wear tomorrow?”



“You look great in blue!” complimented Walter, turning bright red. Everyone at the yard knew that the recycling vehicle liked the pretty little garbage truck very much.

Wilma listened to them quietly and glanced in the direction of Wanda with envy.

“I can shine my windshield as much as I like; the broom heads fastened to my bumper still ruin everything,” she sighed sadly.

It was late night by the time the garbage trucks had scoured and buffed everything. Everyone did everything to look their best; Waldemar even got a new hubcap from somewhere for his wheels. They wanted to arrive to the banquet suitable for the occasion.

The next morning, not much after sunrise, Splotch appeared at the garage door. The little stuffed toy breathlessly shouted:

“Wilma, Wilma, wake up and come quickly! There is a big problem at the kindergarten! Yesterday’s storm tore up the chestnut trees next to the fence! The whole courtyard is filled with branches and leaves! The children cannot play like this! You have to help clean it up!”

“Right now? We are leaving soon for the City Hall! I cannot miss the reception!”

“Calm down, you are not going to miss anything! I am going to help too, and we will finish in no time!” Splotch encouraged her wholeheartedly.

By the time they arrived at the courtyard of the kindergarten, Splotch was not so sure that they would finish quickly. The wind blew out all the sand from the sandpit and covered the monkey bars, the swings and all the playthings. To make matters worse, broken branches and piles of leaves were lying everywhere.

One of the kindergarten teachers rushed to them with hope in her eyes:

“Can you please help us? As long as we have this much garbage in the yard, we cannot bring the children out into the fresh air. Right now they are playing inside, but they really wish they could come outside.”

Wilma sighed deeply and quickly started to work. First she picked up all the fallen tree branches and collected them in one place. Then she swept up the prickly chestnuts into one pile. Splotch was also trying to help; he was carrying the leaves with the children’s play buckets into a corner.

They had a harder time with the sand. It looked like the wind had done a thorough job: it didn’t leave a grain of sand in the sandpit but blew everything out into the yard.

“I am certain we won’t finish by noon. And I am definitely sure I will not have time to get ready and clean myself up. And I cannot go to the City Hall filthy,” moaned Wilma.

---



But Splotch didn't pay attention to her. He was standing at one of the glass doors looking at the children running around inside. The kindergarten teachers were trying to calm them down, but to no avail. They were building long rails for the toy train, cooking pretend food in the play pots for the teddy bears and brushing all the dolls' hair in vain, the uproar did not want to subside. The children longed for the courtyard. They were used to playing outside in the mornings, and they missed the chance to run around, to ride their bikes and to build sandcastles. When it seemed like the whole place was going to turn upside down, they noticed Splotch.

“What a sweet little toy! Look at the nice colours!” shouted the children to each other.

In no time at all one of the little boys opened the glass door and Splotch found himself inside the room, surrounded by a group of children. He winked at them mischievously and started performing stunts right away. He did somersaults, stood on his head and danced around. The children, forgetting about everything else, laughed and shrieked with joy.

Splotch was the clown of Waste Works Yard. If someone was down, he could cheer them up right away. Everyone started to smile when they noticed him. His head was made of red plush material, his body yellow. One of his arms was sewn out of a flowery pattern, the other chequered. He had long bunny ears and an elephant trunk, and his legs must have belonged to a rag doll wearing dark knitted shoes. In reality it looked like nothing anyone had ever seen. A long time ago a kind red-haired little girl forgot him in the zoo, where he ended up in a garbage can. It was Malvina who fished him out from there. He had been living at Waste Works Yard ever since, to the great happiness and joy of everyone around.

Wilma was looking at the clowning Splotch resentfully.

“It's easy for him; he doesn't have to slave away here. Why is it that I have to work today while the others have plenty of time to prepare for the banquet? This is just not fair!”

But the little street sweeper didn't have much time for self pity. A merry whistle came from the other side of the fence.

“Hello Wilma! Can I help you?” The voice belonged to Clara, one of the garbage trucks. She didn't wait for Wilma's answer but opened the gate of the kindergarten wide and rolled into the courtyard. She lifted a shovel with her lever and loaded the debris into her container in the blink of an eye.

“I hope you didn't think we were going to leave you all alone? You cannot miss going to City Hall!”

With the help of Clara order was quickly restored in the courtyard.

---



“Thank you a million times over!” said Wilma with gratitude. “I was ready to give up being able to attend the ceremony.”

“There was no point in getting exasperated. See how fast we got everything cleaned up? Now I am going to rush back to Waste Works Yard, you should hurry up too!”

“All right, I’ll just go and find Splotch!”

Splotch was still running from table to table, looking at the children's pictures. One of the kindergarten teachers had a brilliant idea: the children should paint the funny-looking rag doll to take their attention away from the calamity outside. The kindergarteners liked the idea: soon they were all sitting at their tables, zealously dipping their paintbrushes into the red and yellow and blue and green paints. But they were not only colouring the paper; plenty of paint managed to make it onto the tables, their aprons and even their hands.

“Come on Splotch, hurry up or we will be late!” Wilma rushed her ecstatic friend, waiting by the entrance.

“Right now, when I am having such a great time? Everybody is painting *my* picture! Look how wonderfully they are turning out!”

And at that moment the children noticed Wilma.

“Garbage truck!” shouted a shaggy-haired little boy.

“No-no, this is a street sweeper truck!” another one disagreed.

“Let’s go closer and find out,” many of them shouted, but they were peeping sideways to check their teacher's reaction.

“Let’s take a look,” agreed the kindergarten teacher, and in no time at all they were all outside in the playground just as they were, up to their ears in splodges of paint.

Wilma suddenly couldn’t move with so many children surrounding her. At first they were just looking at her and sizing her up, but they soon took heart and started examining her parts. They were touching her brooms, prodding her bumper, stroking her side and even peeping into her cabin. Wilma tried to pull away at first, but quickly gave up. She surrendered to the siege of the little girls and boys.

“Look! What a cool steering-wheel! And you can fit two people in the back seat! What a cool broom on the front! I have never seen such a great truck! I want one just like it!” The children kept interrupting each other as they were discovering the parts of the smallest truck of Waste Works Yard.

In the great ruckus they could barely hear the bell signalling noon. Wilma raised her cabin in alarm.



“My goodness! It is twelve o’clock! I have completely forgotten about the time! I am late now! What shall I do?”

“We must leave immediately!” realised Splotch. A little bit of delay is not the end of the world. We can still make it there!”

But Wilma looked at herself dispiritedly:

“Look at me! How do I look? My brooms are dusty, my mirrors are dirty, and I can barely see through my windshield. I have smudges all over, and I am covered in paint!”

In fact, while the children were touching Wilma all over, they smeared her everywhere with the paint on their hands. Tiny colourful handprints embellished the side, the front and the back of the truck.

“This is horrible! I look like a clown!” Wilma summed up the situation.

“I have got a great idea!” exclaimed Splotch. “Let’s not give up this easily!” And with that he ran to the closest kindergarten teacher and whispered something into her ear. The kindergarten teacher clapped her hands and called the children to gather into a group.

“Listen to me now, because we have to help! Today is the esteemed day when the garbage trucks are being celebrated at City Hall. This little street sweeper has been helping us all day, and while doing this she got dirty. To make matters worse, you touched her all over with your smudgy hands. She cannot go to the banquet looking this messy. It is our turn now to help her. Let’s clean her up and decorate her, so she can be the most beautiful garbage truck there! We don’t have much time!”

The children didn’t have to be told twice, they started working immediately. They brought water from the garden faucet. They scrubbed the dirt and dust off of Wilma with sponges and made the paint disappear, then they wiped her with soft rags. Within minutes she was shining from front to back.

“She has turned out wonderfully, well done children!” the kindergarten teacher praised them. “But something is still missing to make the little street sweeper the highlight of the celebration!” And with that she ran into the building and returned with buckets of paint. Then she took the palm of one of the little girls standing next to her and dipped it into the red paint. After that she pressed the painted hand onto Wilma’s side. A beautiful handprint appeared in its place: it looked like a little bird with its wings stretched out wide. Wilma couldn’t speak, she was so surprised.

No one wanted to miss out on the fun. Everybody was pushing and shoving around the paint buckets to get a chance to place a feathered creature on the little street sweeper. One by



one the kindergarten teacher took each child's hand, pressed them into one of the buckets, and within moments countless little colourful birds adorned Wilma's side.

"Now we can go!" ordered Splotch. "We have prepared for the banquet worthily."

In the courtyard in front of the City Hall the trucks of Waste Works Yard stood around in a half circle and rolled in front of the mayor one by one, who thanked each of their hard work and pinned an insignia on all of their rear view mirrors. Wilma arrived in the last moment. Only one last insignia remained on the grandstand, looking very lonely.

"I would like to give this award to the one truck who we can always count on in trouble. Let's give a round of applause to our most selfless helper, Wilma. And if we were to hand out such a prize, she would also receive one for the most colourful personality!" the mayor raised his hat to Wilma. "This year we are going to take her photo for the cover of Wriggle Town's Chronicle!"

The little street sweeper was very moved as she stood on the grandstand, and she didn't mind that she had spent her morning with work any more.

**THE END**

