

The Uninvited Guest

Clara and Malvina were like a pair of twins. Both garbage trucks were bright orange, they both loved observing the world and talking during work, and they both had a lever on their backs so they could easily lift garbage cans and empty them into their containers.

“I love Wednesday mornings!” Malvina exclaimed with joy as she rolled through the gates of Waste Works Yard with Clara right on her tail. “At last I don’t have to work on the busy boulevard amongst the scrambling cars, but rather in the peaceful suburban area. The road is shady and lined with trees and bushes, and the houses are friendly and not as big as the ones in the more modern part of the city.”

“I agree!” Clara nodded. “And on top of all this, there is always something interesting to see in that part of town that we can talk about later at the yard. I can hardly wait to take a look at the cats stretching lazily in the courtyards and the birds preening on the branches of the trees. And not to mention the children! They always sweep me off my wheels when I see how joyfully they greet us.”

“I even love those dogs that run around behind the fences in such feather-brained ways. As soon as they hear us, their loud greeting fills my cabin and they bounce up and down as if they were ready to burst.”

At the beginning of Apple Blossom Street the two trucks said goodbye to one another; Clara went left, Malvina to the right.

“Have a good day at work!” Malvina shouted.

“The same to you! I will see you at the yard later in the afternoon. Let’s race each other to see who gets back faster!” Clara answered.

“Then get going, because you are behind already!” Malvina shouted back to her friend and with a great clatter she turned into Melody Horn Street.

In the yard of the first house tiny baby clothes were drying on the clothes line. Malvina tried to make as little noise as possible while lifting the garbage cans lined up in front of the house, lest she woke the little baby napping sweetly on the patio.

In the meantime Clara stopped in front of a brown gate in Mockingbird Street, and while she was emptying the garbage can she took a peek in the direction of the windows. She knew that the lonely old lady living in the house was watching what was happening outside from behind her curtain.



“When I start rattling and clattering,” she thought, “the neighbouring children know that I am on the way.”

Three little children lived under Number 7 Mockingbird Street with their parents. Whenever Clara went that way, they eagerly rushed to the gate to watch how she was emptying the trash cans. For their sake Clara worked slowly and thoroughly, lifting the garbage cans many times as if she was checking to see if there was anything left in them. But there was never anything, she just wanted to delight the children with the show.

Time passed by quickly during work, Clara soon finished with all the streets, and with a full container on her back and a pleasant tiredness in her wheels she turned in the direction of Waste Works Yard.

“I hope Malvina didn’t beat me! I was in such a hurry to be the first one there,” she speculated.

Arriving at the yard, she noticed contentedly that Malvina had not returned. She slowly rolled to the disposal, emptied her container and went to the Car Wash to clean herself from the dust and dirt she had collected during the day. She composed all the nippy comments that she was going to welcome her friend with well in advance. She washed all her parts and was finished with the drying as well, but Malvina was nowhere to be seen.

“I cannot imagine where she might be,” she was mumbling to herself, “she should have been here ages ago! Just let her come back, I will give her an earful!”

But Malvina didn’t care about the race, she had something much more important to do. After she had said goodbye to Clara, she started lifting the garbage cans at maximum speed because at first she also wanted to win.

“I’m making great time, I only have one street left before I can head back to the yard. And I am lucky too,” she rejoiced, when she turned into Touch-Me-Not Street where there was only one lonely trash bin on the side of the street. She stretched her lever out towards the garbage can with a big swing when she suddenly heard a thin, strange noise. At first she thought the sound was coming from the house by the road, but somehow it seemed too close so she came to a halt. Because of this, the half-lifted garbage can tilted and fell back on the ground. The trash spilled out and covered the pavement. Everything was all over the place: plastic bottles, leftover food, empty bottles, and even tin cans. First she fumed as she saw what was pouring out of the bin, but then something completely different caught her attention.



A piece of garbage that looked like a hairball rolled a little further away and gave out a thin, mewling sound.

“Look at that, it is that same strange sound! I’ll take a closer look at what this could be,” she said out loud.

She carefully rolled closer to the hairball and watched in amazement as she saw that what she had thought to just be a ball grew legs. A shaggy-haired, tiny kitten stood shakily in the shadow of the garbage truck. She was startled and ready to run. Crumbs were stuck on her little whiskers, and seeing this, Malvina immediately understood what had happened. The kitten was hungry and was looking for food in the garbage can.

“It’s so fortunate I heard her voice! It would be horrible to think what could have happened had she fallen into my container or the trash bin had fallen on her. I had better take her to a safe place,” she thought.

“Come here little kitten, don’t be afraid of me! Kitty, kitty, come here to me!” As a sign of friendship, Malvina flashed her light and opened the door of her tool compartment. The frightened kitty backed away seeing the opening door, her fear obviously increasing. Malvina didn’t know what to do. Luckily, a car turned into the street and approached them swiftly. The kitten felt like it was in a tight spot. In the end she chose the lesser evil: in a split second she jumped into the tool compartment of the garbage truck and lay there shivering, awaiting her fate.

Malvina stopped at the gates of Waste Works Yard with grinding wheels, where an anxious Clara was waiting for her.

“Where have you been all this time? I thought something bad had happened to you!” she was flashing her headlights with reproach.

“Don’t be so worried! I dropped a garbage can and everything spilled out. It took me a long time to clean up. Horrible things came out of it. Glass shards, leftover food, everything all mixed up. Somebody didn’t sort their trash again. We have told them a million times that they shouldn’t throw everything in one place, they need to separate it. People can be so awful! Why don’t they listen to us?” the residential garbage truck complained endlessly. “But I found something. It is still a surprise. Go, join the others, and I will come and show it to you!”

After getting rid of the contents of her container, Malvina rolled into the Great Assembly Hall. The other garbage trucks were already waiting for her impatiently, excited to hear about the surprise. First she asked everybody to be quiet, then she carefully opened door of her tool compartment. The tiny grey kitten was sleeping deeply inside, curled into a ball.



“Let me see, let me see!” Roll over a bit!” little Wilma pushed herself to the front because she couldn’t see anything from behind Goliath and Samson.

“Oh, she is so sweet, where did you find her?” Malvina asked curiously.

“It is not allowed to bring animals here!” Waldemar, the pedantic street sweeper ended the excitement. “It is forbidden, see? There is even a sign that says so on the wall!” he continued to reason.

Suddenly everybody started to talk. The cacophony was stopped by Vera’s firm voice.

“Be quiet! Can’t you see how peacefully she is sleeping? Don’t wake the poor thing!”

“She crawled into a garbage can, and I almost dumped her into my container. Thank goodness she started meowing. She looked so downtrodden,” Malvina explained quietly why she had brought the little thing with her. “And on top of everything she was extremely lucky that the glass shards in the garbage didn’t cut her legs.”

“I’ll look for something for her to eat. I will check the compost for the leftover bags of food,” Wanda offered, and off she went, rolling out of the Great Assembly Hall. They could always count on the pretty little garbage truck when somebody was in need of help. With her petite figure she could fit through the narrowest of spaces, and with her modern equipment she was able to perform all kinds of feats. During the day she collected the garbage from the narrow streets of Old Town, but after work she was happy to fuss around. By the time the others came to their senses, she was already back with two small boxes in her lever. One had leftovers of smoked sardines in it, and the other had some curd wobbling at the bottom. She carefully put them both down in front of the curled up kitten.

“Yuck! This fish stinks!” Wilma grimaced. “Are you sure this will be good for her? Won’t we poison her with it?”

“Don’t be silly Wilma,” Walter rebuked her, “Fish smell like this! Even a small child knows that cats like fish!”

And as if she had wanted to agree with Walter, the kitten first moved her little nose, let out a big yawn and finally opened her eyes. Throwing all her care to the wind, she pounced on the cans that emanated the delicious smells. A few seconds later they could hear her purring with satisfaction. The trucks looked happily at the sated kitten.

“Let’s make her a soft nook,” Wili suggested. “We could stuff it with all kinds of rags and soft clothes. And I will watch over her during the day!”

“I have already told you all that animals are not allowed here!” Waldemar thundered. “And we cannot even be sure that someone is not already looking for her.”



“That’s right!” Malvina realized. “It is possible she’s got an owner. We should find out and take her back.”

“Come on, take a good look at the poor thing! She is scruffy, her fur is shaggy, her legs are scabbed and there is no collar around her neck! I don’t think anyone has been taking care of her,” Wili tried to convince the others.

“Stop, stop, stop! Back your bumpers up!” Wera shouted sternly when she noticed that the startled little kitten huddling herself up. “We are scaring her! Please be quiet! One truck speak at a time! Seeing the state she is in, I also think she might not have an owner.”

“Then she is in need of a loving owner,” Wilma stated in the sudden silence. She was rapidly moving her windshield wipers because she was ready to cry when she imagined the ill fortune this poor animal must have had so far.

“Let’s find her someone who will love her and care for her!” Wanda continued.

“This is a great idea,” Walter took over, who was always happy to decide in Wanda’s favour because he really liked the pretty little truck.

“We could look after her too...” Wili tried again, who really wanted the kitten to stay with them. He had much less to do during the day than the others, and the truth was that every once in a while he was bored alone. This way he could have some company.

They began a long debate. Not everyone wanted to accept that the kitty couldn’t stay with them at the yard. Even Samson and Goliath chimed in from time to time, although they usually didn’t enter into such deliberations.

“Alright, you are correct, I admit she cannot stay with us!” Wili grumbled. “I know how serious our work is. If we neglect it, the city will soon be covered in garbage. With that we couldn’t have enough time for a kitten.”

“Not to mention the dangers a pet would face here at the yard,” Waldemar added.

“So we can agree that we need to find her a reliable owner,” Wera summed things up. “Now the question is who it could be.”

“What would you say if we looked for somebody in the suburbs?” Clara asked. “I know a family there. The children are still small, they are at home all day with their mum, and I am sure they would be happy to have a kitten!”

“Not a chance!” Malvina stated decisively. “How can you think of something like that? Don’t you remember the house clearance last year? They put a box filled with broken toys next to the garbage can!”



“You are right!” Clara sighed. “I have never seen that many toy cars without wheels, dented trains, stuffed animals without arms and legs..”

The garbage trucks looked at each other in astonishment.

“The boys are still too small to care for a kitten!” Walter proclaimed.

“We need somebody who is at home a lot. Maybe...” Wera couldn’t finish what she wanted to say because Clara interrupted her frantically.

“I got it! Why haven’t I thought about this sooner? Let’s take her to the lonely lady in Mockingbird Street! She lives alone and she is at home all day long. I am sure she would be happy to have company!”

“This is a brilliant idea! Let’s take the kitten to her!” everyone was excited.

Only Waldemar wrinkled his bumper with worry.

“But this cat is dirty! She may not even want her in this condition!”

“Well, we can fix this problem easily! If we are really good at something, this is it!”

Wera smiled confidently.

Wanda brought soap, Wilma looked for towels and Wili dug up an old, dingy wash basin from somewhere. After a while nobody could recognize the shaggy little fur ball any more. The kitty snorted angrily from the soap suds, she shook the water off and then looked at her shiny, clean fur with contentment. In that same evening a very unusual procession arrived to Mockingbird Street. As usual, the old lady was watching what was going on outside from behind her curtain. It happened so rarely that she didn’t want to believe her ears when her doorbell rang. Ten garbage trucks lined up in front of the house with Clara in front, who, using her lever, placed a white box tied with a ribbon on top of the garbage can. The others were flashing their headlights. They waited until the kind lady got out of the house, and then rolled hurriedly towards the corner and disappeared into the neighbouring street.

From that day on the happy kitten and her even happier owner waited at the gate every time for Malvina to show up, and they waved to her from afar.

And the kind old lady even took it upon herself to walk over to Touch-Me-Not Street with her kitty and have a talk with the homeowner, whose garbage can the cat was looking for food in, and who will hopefully never ever mix up the separable waste in her trash bin again.

THE END

