

## The Overturned Garbage Can

As soon as Malvina turned into Apple Blossom Street, she was faced with a horrible spectacle. It seemed as if a tornado had swept through among the houses. Overturned garbage cans were lying all over the road, and around them piles of spilled waste covered the ground.

The residents of the peaceful suburban street put their garbage cans out to the side of the road every Wednesday night as they were supposed to, so that by early next morning the residential garbage truck could empty them out. But something had happened to the otherwise orderly garbage cans that night.

Helplessly, Malvina opened her levers wide.

“Just like last week!” she was appalled. “I don’t understand what’s going on here! There was no strong wind; there was no rainstorm, not even an earthquake! Then what could have happened? And only in Apple Blossom Street!”

There was nothing else she could do. Malvina, although reluctantly, headed out to pick up the garbage and straighten out the area.

In the garage of Waste Works Yard, everybody was getting ready for the night’s rest when Malvina finally rolled in through the gates. She was tired and grumpy.

“If I catch that rascal, I will be sure to teach him a lesson!” she murmured to herself. “If I could just get my levers on him...!”

“Has someone turned over the garbage cans again?” Clara asked regretfully. “Why didn’t you ask us for help?”

“I became so angry that I didn’t even think of that! But thank you anyway,” Malvina answered despondently and rolled to the Car Wash.

“We should do something,” Wera, the old water truck, spoke up. “We cannot sit here and watch idly as Malvina works this much in Apple Blossom Street every week.”

“I would be happy to go with her next time and help her clean up!” Wilma, the little street sweeper volunteered. “Together I am sure we would finish up much faster.”

“It is very kind of you, but I don’t think this is the solution to Malvina’s problem,” Waldemar took over. “Rather, we should find out who or what is capsizing the garbage cans and making such a humongous mess!”

“A real investigation! Great!” Wanda got excited about the adventure. “Count me in! I



have always dreamt of being part of an investigation, just like Sherlock Holmes from my favourite TV series. Does anyone have a magnifying glass?”

“Oh, come on, Wanda!” Wera smiled. “No detective on earth uses a magnifying glass any more. They use much more serious equipment to figure out crimes.”

“Still, what if we tried to organize an investigative team?” Waldemar, who got noticeably excited about the idea, interjected again. “We could couple up and be on the lookout at night. Malvina goes to Apple Blossom Street on Thursdays, so we should keep watch on Wednesday night and find out what happens with the garbage cans that have been set out. Who wants to take next week?”

“We are working at the construction site of the new shopping centre every day,” Goliath, the crane truck, and Samson, the three-axis container truck looked at each other. “It is not far from the suburb, so after work we could happily roll over to the crime scene!”

“Fantastic!” Waldemar rejoiced. “We will see what you find out, and after that we can discuss what to do next.”

The days until the following Wednesday passed by quickly. As they had agreed, Samson and Goliath rolled to Apple Blossom Street in the evening. It had become dark by the time they got there, but because of the street lights they could clearly see that the garbage cans were lined up nice and neat in front of the houses. There was nobody in the street.

“What if we went to the other end of the street and looked for a hiding place around the area with the trees and bushes?” Samson asked.

“Great idea!” the crane truck agreed. “And while we stand guard, you could tell me an exciting story so I won’t fall asleep. I worked a lot today, and I have become very exhausted.”

“I am also tired,” the container truck nodded in agreement. “I was carrying concrete debris from the construction site all day long. I don’t understand at all why they need to build such a large parking lot. The whole of Wriggle Town doesn’t have as many cars as the amount of parking spaces they are putting there.”

While they talked, they rolled behind the trees and took to their hiding place.

The following day Malvina could not believe her eyes. If possible, there was an even greater upheaval in Apple Blossom Street than in the weeks before. The garbage cans were lying all over the place, their contents poured out onto the street.



“I hope you slept well!” she remarked snappily to Goliath who was just about to open his headlights. “Today I get to work overtime again!”

“Goodness gracious! What happened here?” Samson gasped as he immediately woke up from hearing Malvina’s resentful voice. “We just closed our eyes for a second. I still remember Goliath telling me about his friends in Tiny Town...”

“Stop explaining things! Instead, everyone should go about their business!” Malvina rebuked them angrily.

In the evening the garbage trucks held an emergency meeting in the Garage.

“I gather it is better if I don’t even ask whether standing guard last night was successful or not,” Wera looked at the two behemoths.

“We fell asleep,” Samson admitted with a penitent face. “We were trying hard to stay awake, but we were so exhausted that after a while we both dozed off. We are really sorry, Malvina.”

“I am not angry!” the residential garbage truck looked at them, relenting. “I am just so tired, and we still don’t know what’s going on in Apple Blossom Street.”

“Let’s try again!” Wilma, the little street sweeper rolled next to Malvina. “We will join forces and catch the culprit!” she said with fire in her eyes.

“Yes, you are right. But there is something else that bothers me!” Malvina went on.

“And what is that?” Waldemar noticed Malvina’s dispirited voice. “Did something else happen that you didn’t tell us about?”

Goliath and Samson were puzzled as they looked at Malvina. They couldn’t imagine what else could be troubling the garbage truck.

“The contents of the garbage cans,” Malvina blurted out with difficulty. “The majority of the trash was not sorted out at all. After all, why do we teach people to recycle if there are no results?”

“But it was just last week that we put new flyers into the mailboxes! Paper waste goes into the blue containers, the glasses into the green one, the yellow ones get the plastic refuse and metal goes in the grey cans,” said Walter, the recycling truck.

“That’s what I am talking about!” Malvina sighed. “It looks like it was a completely unnecessary waste of paper. People still don’t recycle.”

Perplexity came over Waste Works Yard. Everyone was thinking about who could be



the one capsizing the garbage containers of Apple Blossom Street.

The following week Waldemar volunteered to take the night shift.

“I would also like to go with you and investigate!” Wilma, the little street sweeper begged. “The two of us will surely catch the miscreant.”

“Alright,” Waldemar smiled at her. “I will see you there tonight!”

When they arrived there after dusk, Apple Blossom Street was quiet and empty. As time passed, the windows on the houses went dark one by one as the residents retired to bed. Wilma felt her headlights growing heavier and heavier, and she could only keep them open with great difficulty. Waldemar was killing time with a crossword puzzle.

The silence was broken by a huge crash, and then another, and one more after that. Finally a stifled cry could be heard. Wilma and Waldemar immediately jerked up their cabins. They carefully peeped out of their hiding place. On the other side of the street, in front of the purple house, two garbage cans lay upside down. Behind them was a spinning strange shiny something.

“Oh, I am so scared!” Wilma whispered to Waldemar, moving much closer. “What could that be? I have never seen anything like that!”

“Of course you have,” the large street sweeper laughed encouragingly. “Let’s roll over there and take a good look!”

As they got closer, Wilma saw what had caused the crashes. A small red bicycle was lying among the spilled garbage, and one of its wheels was still spinning. Not too far from there they could hear quiet sniffing. Waldemar turned his headlights on a little brighter and directed them towards the sound. A small figure was crouching beside the fence of the purple house.

“Is that you, Sam?” he asked uncertainly as the blonde head turned towards her, squinting. “Did you hurt yourself?”

The mayors son didn’t say a word, he just kept sniffing and clutching one of his elbows.

“Show me your arm!” Wilma spoke up. “Maybe it is broken. We have to take you to the doctor’s immediately!”

“Aren’t you angry with me?” Sam asked frightfully. “I didn’t want to do anything bad.”



It was an accident!”

“You can explain this all later, now show me quickly where you hurt yourself!” Waldemar said seriously.

“Your suspicion was correct, Wilma!” he said thoughtfully, after he examined the slender arm. “I will call in to the station and ask that they send an ambulance for Sam as his arm is broken. And could you please wake up the mayor and explain everything that has happened to him!”

“I am out of here!” Wilma bustled and rolled towards the green house at the end of the street.

While they were waiting for the ambulance, Waldemar started asking the little boy questions.

“What were you doing outside in the street so late? You should have been in bed a long time ago! Tonight is a school night!”

“That is exactly the problem!” Sam looked at Waldemar with teary eyes. “There will be a great obstacle race for bikes tomorrow at school! Everyone is practicing for it. The person who can make it all the way through the obstacle course can go to a biking camp in the summer and even gets a cool sticker for their bike. The boys in class are all boasting about how well they can jump and turn. Guess what, Rob can even ride his bike without holding the steering wheel! But I am so clumsy. So that’s why, while everyone is asleep, I secretly get up to practice in the street. I have been doing it for weeks.”

“Unfortunately we have noticed,” Waldemar looked at him sternly.

A blue light appeared at the end of the street, and Gloria, the always elegant snow white ambulance, rolled next to them quietly. A few minutes later Sam found himself on a stretcher and was on his way to the hospital.

In the morning at Waste Works Yard everybody was listening to Wilma and Waldemar’s tales about the events from the night before.

“Poor Sam!” Wanda, the pretty little garbage truck said sorrowfully. “I am sure his arm hurts very much!”

“He endured things heroically,” Wilma explained sleepily, “and instead, he was worried about what we might think about the overturned garbage cans.”

“And it wasn’t even him who really had to worry,” Walter, the recycling truck



interjected grumpily, “but the residents of Apple Blossom Street.”

“Still, we shouldn’t congratulate Sam for making Maliva’s life miserable for weeks,” Wera, the wise old water truck added indignantly. “Of course we should speak to the residents of Apple Blossom Street as well.”

“You are right,” the others agreed. “It is time we figured out a good way of making people pay proper attention to recycling.”

At ten o’clock the children were gathering in the school courtyard. Wilma and Wanda could barely push their way through the crowd to the edge of the bicycle track.

“They have built you a fantastic course!” Wanda turned to Sam, who was standing next to her.

“It’s too bad they are going to tear it down after the race,” the little boy answered sadly. “And I cannot even try it,” he showed his plastered arm to the garbage truck. “I am missing the whole thing! I will be the only one who will not have a new sticker on his bike.”

“Perhaps we can help!” Wanda’s headlight brightened up, as she suddenly had a brilliant idea.

“Let’s build a bicycle obstacle-course for the children!” Wilma and Wanda barged into the garage after the race. “Then, after the competition, they will have a place where they can practice. And Malvina won’t have to clean because of the overturned garbage cans.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Waldemar rocked his cabin thoughtfully. “The only question is where, and using what?”

“If you are looking for a place, we have a suggestion,” Samson spoke up and exchanged meaningful glances with Goliath. “The parking lot next to the new shopping centre turned out to be too big. They don’t need all the space!”

“I was just talking to the mayor the other day about how we would need a good idea or utilizing the extra space. Let’s go talk to him!” the lanky crane truck added.

“I have two trucks worth of car tires in Recycling that are waiting to be shipped away. I can’t think of a better place for them than the bicycle course,” Samson continued the brainstorming.

After checking with the mayor of Wriggle Town, the garbage trucks started vigorous



work at Waste Works Yard so that they could be finished with the surprise for the children as soon as possible. They designed the bicycle course route; they put together different-sized ramps using recycled boards and beams and piled up the used car tires. The diligent labour was interrupted by the sharp sound of a bell. Sam was standing at the entrance to the garage.

“I am looking for Malvina,” he said quietly. “I came to say I am sorry.”

“Hello Sam!” Malvina rolled out from the corner as soon as heard she had a visitor. “How is your arm?”

“It’s much better now. I hope they will remove the plaster soon. I came to say I’m sorry I caused you so much unnecessary work. I didn’t want to cause trouble, I feel really bad!”

“I am not upset with you any more, Sam,” Malvina answered with a smile. “It wasn’t a good thing what you did, but at least we found out that very few people sort their garbage in Apple Blossom Street. They throw everything into one place: the garbage can. I have no idea how I could convince them to start recycling.”

“If you want, I could turn their garbage cans upside down again. If you don’t take away the bags from people who do not recycle properly, everybody will see who is messy!” Sam got excited.

“It is not that simple,” Malvina explained. “You saw yourself how many things were scattered all over the street. Detergent bottles, paint cans, spoiled food, newspapers, rusty screws, and so many other items. Imagine what would happen if a child stepped on a rusty nail, or if leftover paint got poured over a curious puppy. But it is a good idea to mark the ones that do not recycle in some way. We should figure out something that will make people feel ashamed and change this bad habit,” Malvina kept thinking.

“You could have told me Sam was here,” Wanda said resentfully as she arrived at the garage. “I have a surprise for him,” she said and rummaged up a shiny sticker from her glove compartment. “I found this yesterday. I thought I would give it to him when I had the chance. Even if it doesn’t look like the one the others got after the obstacle race, at least it suits a bicycle.”

“Wanda, you don’t even know what a great idea you just gave us!” Walter exclaimed. “What if we put stickers on the residential garbage cans? We could put red ones on those where we find unsorted garbage, and smiley green ones on those that recycle properly.”

“I would be happy to help with sticking them on!” Sam volunteered.



A great many people gathered for the inauguration of the new bicycle course. The children watched with amazement at how the many turns, jumps and slopes made the lengthy track exciting. They could hardly wait to try it out.

“But something important is still missing!” Gloria joked. Waldemar, who had helmets, knee and elbow protectors hiding in his cabin, rolled out to the sound of her siren.

The parents felt reassured when they saw that their children could finally practice safely. Thanks to the bumpers made from car tires, they no longer needed to worry that the kids would get injured.

**The End**

