

Garbage Can in Captivity

It was a beautiful summer day. Malvina, the resident garbage truck, turned into Sunflower Street in a good mood. She knew that as soon as she finished her work she could roll right back to Waste Works Yard.

“As soon as I arrive, I will take a refreshing shower at the Car wash and ask Clara if she saw anything interesting while working,” she was daydreaming as she kept lifting the garbage cans placed on the side of the road.

There was a lot of hustle and bustle in front of house Number Three. All the members of the Sweet family were working outside. They were carrying bricks and mixing mortar, and the humming of the cement mixer was making a monotone noise. Pretty red tiles were piled up on the pavement. When the children noticed the garbage truck, they ran to her right away.

“Hello Malvina! Guess what? We are building a new garbage can container!” Danny, the smallest member of the Sweet family, said enthusiastically.

“Mum designed it!” his older sister Judy added proudly. “You know, Mum is the greatest architect in the world! She has designed a lot of buildings in Wriggle Town.”

“Well, I am not so sure that I am the best,” Mrs. Sweet laughed, “but in any case, we thought we could build a much nicer and more proper garbage can container in the place of the old ramshackle one. For the sake of the children I have also designed a red tiled roof for the top.”

“We have to finish it this week,” meddlesome Matthew interrupted, “because on Saturday we are going on holiday! We are heading to the seaside for three months.”

“Not for three months, just for three weeks,” his mother corrected him, “but that is also a very long time. Finally we can have a proper rest,” she smiled.

“That sounds nice!” Malvina said with envy while she was looking at the work in progress. “I am very curious to see what it will look like when it is finished. I am certain it will be something special. But now I have to go, there are still a lot of garbage cans filled with waste lined up in front of the houses. Have a great time at the seaside!” she waved goodbye to the Sweet family and rolled on to the next house.



The garbage trucks returning from work arrived one after another to Waste Works Yard. They could hardly wait to wash off the dust and dirt they had collected in the heat. At the Car wash they had to get in line as they could only fit in there one at a time.

“The town is so empty!” Walter, the recycling truck broke the silence of the wait. “It's as if everyone has gone on holiday! I have barely seen anyone.”

“You are right, everything seems so deserted. Not even the little boys living in the purple house waved at me today,” Clara confirmed, who was waiting next to Walter. “They are my favourites. I was waiting for them in front of their gate in case they came out for a little chat, but it was all in vain. Their neighbour told me that they had gone on holiday to their grandmother's in the countryside.”

“Well, not *everyone* is on vacation,” Wanda, the pretty little garbage truck joined in the conversation. “Tamara's parents, who live in Old Town, don't have any money for a holiday. The poor little girl is at home bored all day.”

“Doesn't she have any friends? Or a sibling?” Wera, the old container truck asked.

“She has no siblings and her friends have all gone away. I feel so sorry for her. I see her many times by the window, feeling sad.”

“What if we tried to cheer her up with something?” Waldemar started following the conversation. “I have an idea. Walter brought a gigantic cardboard box yesterday. I was so upset about it; I knew it was just going to be in the way. What if we made a doll house out of it? I am sure Tamara would be very pleased.”

“This is a really great idea!” the others got enthusiastic. “After we finish in the Car Wash, let's get started right away!”

Waldemar couldn't see or hear. He went to his locker and started to look for something frenetically. In the end he triumphantly dragged an old newspaper out from all the litter.

“Look at this!” he pointed to the front page where a fabulous doll house was in full grandeur. It had an upstairs, lace curtains were hung on its windows and the walls were painted pink.

“Let's give it a go!” the others shouted zealously and started to work.



They carefully measured how big the various parts of the house should be and what kind of windows the rooms, the kitchen and the bathroom should have. They decided in what direction the doors should open and what type of furniture the building should have. As soon as they finished with the planning, the garbage trucks split the tasks amongst each other. Waldemar painted the cardboard box pink; Wanda found a nice piece of wallpaper she used to cover the walls inside and Wilma brought a piece of carpet for the floor of the doll house. Walter and Willy made tiny chairs, beds and wardrobes out of scraps of wood. They turned the entire Waste Works Yard upside down. They examined the contents of every container to see if they would stumble upon a few more treasures they could use to adorn the doll house further. Everyone participated in the work. It was evening by the time they finished. They looked at the end result with pride and satisfaction.

“It is so pretty!” Clara praised the little house.

“It turned out so well that I would like to keep it,” Wanda teased. “We worked a great deal with it, but it was worth it.”

“I also like it a lot, but it seems to be missing something.” Wera, the old container truck was looking at the doll house.

“The roof! It doesn’t have a proper roof!” the realisation struck Malvina. “It only has a flat lid. It would look so much better with nice red tiles. It could use something similar to what the Sweet family is putting onto their garbage can container.”

It didn’t take very long before the roof of the doll house was finished. It looked exactly like Malvina had imagined. It could be lifted up with one move so that anyone could easily peek inside the rooms and get to the dolls while playing.

Tamara was very thrilled to receive her present. She was beaming with joy and jumped around in her room. She was as happy as a clam at high water. She examined every little detail with care, she opened and closed all the doors; finally she removed the roof to place her dolls inside comfortably. Wanda never saw her standing by her window again that summer.

A couple of days later Malvina was heading home from Lilly Street. On her way she crossed Sunflower Street. Out of curiosity she stopped in front of house Number Three. The magnificent garbage can container was standing by the front entrance, ready for use. It was



covered with red roof tiles, its walls were painted pale yellow and it closed with a latticed gate. On its side a pretty little plate announced: Number Three Sunflower Street.

“This is quite the garbage can container!” Malvina marvelled. In the meantime the front door opened, and Danny came running out.

“Hi Malvina!” he said hello to the garbage truck kindly. “How do you like our new garbage can container?”

“It’s beautiful!” Malvina admired it. “I have never seen such a neat little building. You are very clever!”

“And look, we even have a key for it!” Mrs. Sweet showed her key chain where a smaller key was dangling as well. She used it to open the gate and empty the waste bin from the kitchen into the garbage can.

“But now you must hurry up inside, we need to start packing!” Mrs. Sweet shoed her smallest boy inside the house. Malvina smiled as she looked back at them.

“Three weeks! That must be so nice! I wish I could go on holiday somewhere too,” she thought.

The days passed by quickly. The following week Malvina was, as usual, heading in the direction of Sunflower Street. Much to her dismay, only three garbage cans were standing alone in front of the houses: two on the left side, one on the right side.

“Of course! The cans at Number Five, Seven and Ten were emptied last week, but since the families are on holiday their garbage cans are still out in the street,” she deduced. “But I need to empty the Sweet family’s litter right now.”

She rolled over to the garbage can container. The trash bin was standing behind the lattice of the pretty little building. It was filled to the brim with garbage. Its lid was only half way closed as it could not be shut properly because of the garbage bags stuffed into it. In the bags she could see mouldy bread, wilted vegetables and other foodstuffs. Before leaving, the Sweet family had thrown out everything that was perishable. They even emptied out their refrigerator. Malvina could smell the stench of the rotting food, and she knew she had to act. She kept rotating herself until she managed to reach the latch of the garbage can container. She pressed it down hard, but the latch wouldn’t budge.

“Emergency!” she thought to herself in despair, and she went racing back to Waste Works Yard right away.



“You need to help me!” she rolled into the Great Assembly Hall, out of breath.

“What’s the matter?” Wilma, the little street sweeper, asked worriedly. Everybody stopped what they were doing and gathered around Malvina.

“The Sweet family who live in Sunflower Street left for a holiday and didn’t put their garbage can out on the street. They are the ones who built that pretty new garbage can container I told you about.”

“I remember,” Waldemar nodded, “the one that has a red tile roof and yellow walls.”

“If I understand you correctly, they left the trash bin full in the locked garbage can container and now you cannot get it out of there,” Walter was trying to figure out what they could do.

“Exactly!” Malvina was nodding.

“I don’t think you should worry too much,” Clara, the other residential garbage truck tried to calm her friend. “It has happened to me before that I couldn’t collect the waste until a week later because someone forgot to put out their garbage can. You can empty it next week!”

“But that’s just my problem!” Malvina cried. “The Sweet family left for three weeks!”

“Then that’s definitely a problem!” Clara was perplexed. “I take it the trash bin is filled to the brim with garbage?”

“They couldn’t even close the lid properly.” Malvina complained. The trash is flowing out of it. I dare not think about all the things that could be rotting in there.”

“Then we must quickly figure out how we can open the latch, right?” Wera, the wise old container truck concluded. “Does anyone have any useful suggestions?”

“In the movies the burglars always use a bobby pin to open locks,” Wanda realized. “I have one we could use!”

“It is very kind of you to offer, but I think this only works in the movies. In reality it is not that easy to open a lock,” Waldy shook his cabin.

“Why don’t we go there and see the garbage can container with our own eyes? Perhaps it will be easier to find a solution that way!” Goliath, the lanky crane truck, suggested.

A short while later all of them were standing in front of the yellow garbage can container.

“It is truly a stylish little building!” Clara complimented.



“I would have been much happier had they put the garbage can by the side of the road,” Malvina grumbled almost inaudibly.

“I don’t think we will be able to open this lock,” Walter, the handyman among them, stated with disappointment.

“I just figured out what we should do!” Willy cried out. “I will fasten my bucket and dig a tunnel. That way we will be able to bring the garbage can out.”

“I think this is a great idea! I saw a movie once where the prisoners escaped from jail through an underground tunnel,” Goliath agreed. “Let’s free that poor little trash bin!”

“I don’t think this makes much sense,” Waldemar put a damper on the others. “It would create a huge upheaval and the damage would be far greater than the benefit. We need to look for a more simple solution!”

“What if,” Splotch, who had been watching the events from behind Waldemar’s windshield, started out timidly, “I climbed in through the lattice and handed the garbage out to you from the can piece by piece? I am small enough and can easily get in.”

“It is very kind of you to offer your services, Splotch,” Wera smiled at him, “but we cannot let you crawl into the trash bin. Can you imagine all the things that might be in there? Something might happen to you! Not to mention how long it would take. There must be another solution!”

“I didn’t think I would miss their old ramshackle garbage can container!” Malvina sighed.

“It is time to go back to the yard. This poor garbage container can wait a few days; we need a little more time to figure out the right way to do this,” Wera suggested.

Quite a few days passed by, but no matter how hard the trucks of Waste Works Yard thought they couldn’t come up with any good ideas. Walter had had enough of the mournful mood and decided to go and get some fresh air.

“Come on Splotch, let’s check out what Tamara is doing!” he called the always ready rag doll, who was happy to join him.

They arrived at the street and heard a blissful racket. A great many children were playing in the yard in front of Tamara’s house. They had laid a red blanket on the grass in the



shade from the trees where they had placed the garbage trucks' present, the beautiful doll house, in the middle.

There was a great buzz. All the little girls were hustling around the house, and the little boys were building cars from tiny wooden cubes for it. Suddenly, one of the little girls started crying because she could not put her doll inside.

"I cannot get to the house!" she complained to Splotch. "Everyone is squatting around it, and there is no room for my doll."

"Hold on for a little longer, I will figure something out!" Walter rolled next to the fence, and with his lever he cleverly lifted the red roof of the doll house. "There you go! Now you can put your doll in there. I am surprised you hadn't thought of this simple solution!" he smiled at the amazed children.

"Walter, you are such a genius!" Splotch shouted. "This is what we need to do with the garbage can container in Sunflower Street! We need to ask Goliath to remove the roof with the hook fastened to his crane and pull the garbage can out. This way Malvina can easily empty it. When that is done, Goliath can put both the garbage can and the roof back in its place. With a little smoothing over there will be no trace of this operation."

The Sweet family arrived home tanned, happy and well rested after their long holiday at the seaside. As soon as they parked and got out of the car, Mrs. Sweet rushed straight to the lattice gate of the garbage can container.

"If I remember correctly, we forgot to put the garbage can out before leaving," she said. "We were in such a hurry that it completely slipped my mind. I was distressed all throughout the holiday that the garbage was going to rot here, but now I am not worried any longer," she sighed when she saw the empty trash can. "The only thing I don't understand is why this roof is so crooked."

THE END

