

Otto's Tales



Let's Meet

a **GARBAGE COLLECTOR**

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“Ruff Ruff!”

Otto barked. “Where’s my red ball?”
Dennis was coming home from summer camp tomorrow, which meant the best friends could play fetch again.

The bulldog wandered into Dennis’s room. It was so clean! All the books were put away, the bed was made, but Dennis’s favorite lunchbox was...GONE!!



“Smidge!!!!” Otto panicked.

“Yes?” The kitten bounced into the room.

“Have you seen Dennis’s lunchbox? It was on his bedside table before he left for camp.” Otto was uneasy.

“That old metal box?” Smidge wrinkled her nose. “Oh yeah, remember Dennis was talking about acts of service before he left? I wanted to practice **service** by tidying up his room, and I threw it in the garbage last week. You were supposed to help me clean up, but you said it was a dirty job.”



The bulldog's eyes got wide. "I didn't think you'd throw it away!" Before Dennis left for camp, he asked Otto to hide a surprise for Smidge in the lunchbox.

"Well, it looked like garbage to me!" the kitten said. "I thought it would be nice to do something unexpected for Dennis and surprise him so he could come home to a clean room."

Otto sighed. "It was his *favorite* lunchbox."

Now Smidge looked worried. "The trash is long gone."

"Wait! The **garbage collector** comes every week! That's today!" Otto's ears perked up. He heard a loud rumbling from down the street. "Maybe he can help us find it!"



“Isn’t the **garbage truck** cool?” Otto’s tail wagged wildly.

The two watched the truck’s huge metal arms grip and lift a trash container up, up, up...and dump the garbage into its **bin**. A banana peel tumbled out and landed next to Smidge.

She frowned. “That truck is smelly and gross.”



The collector hopped out of his truck and smiled, picking up the peel. "Hi there, I'm Mr. Dustin."

"I'm Otto, and this is Smidge. Could you help us find something that was thrown away by mistake?"

Mr. Dustin nodded. "Of course, this happens all the time. What are you looking for?"

"Our friend's favorite lunchbox," Otto explained. "He comes home from camp tomorrow, so we need to find it quickly."



Mr. Dustin looked at his watch. "Well, today is busy. I've picked up my coworker's route since he was hurt a couple weeks ago. Someone needs to serve the people on his route. If you two can help me with the extra work, I'll help you find the lunchbox when I finish."

"We get to ride in your truck?!" Otto bounced.

"You bet!" The garbage collector popped open the door.

"It better not stink in there," Smidge mumbled to Otto.



Otto felt like he was flying as the tall truck lumbered down the road. “It must be fun to drive this all day.”

Mr. Dustin chuckled. “It’s one of the many things I love about this job.”

Smidge was confused. “You love picking up trash?”

“Sure!”

“Isn’t it dirty?” Otto added.

“It is a dirty job, but it’s very important,” Mr. Dustin shared. “If nobody picked up our trash, our streets would be piled with garbage—which would harm the environment and also make people very sick. Our communities are safer because of workers who do the dirty, difficult work.”

“I didn’t think about it like that,” Otto realized.



PLUNK. The garbage collector stopped at another house. With the push of a big button, the truck's metal arms grabbed the next garbage bin.

"So where does all the trash go?" Smidge asked. "And when do we start looking for Dennis's lunchbox?"

Mr. Dustin smiled. "Some trash goes to facilities where it's sorted by material but most trash ends up in **landfills.**"

"Oh no," Otto muttered. "Finding the lunchbox could take *forever.*"

"Yes, but I have you two to help me," Mr. Dustin reminded them.



The trash truck rumbled into town. Smidge and Otto gasped at the sight of massive **dumpsters** overflowing with trash! Everywhere they drove stunk of spoiled food and rotting garbage.

“Without garbage collectors, our community would look like this all the time,” Mr. Dustin explained.

“What a mess!” Otto moaned.

But, Mr. Dustin was determined. “We can clean it up, even if we have to **get our hands dirty.**”





Their progress was slow, but with each dumpster emptied, the town looked better. Soon, the truck began wobbling under the weight of its monstrous load...

"It's going to fall!" Otto exclaimed.

Smidge scrambled to the top and yelled to Otto. "Help me push it down!"

"No way!" Otto shook his head.

Unaware of what Smidge was doing, Mr. Dustin shouted, "I turned the **compactor** on, so everything will squish together and make more room!"

CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH!

The trash sank down, taking the kitten with it!





“Wait!!!” Smidge squealed.

The crunching stopped. Mr. Dustin jumped out and peered into the bin. Smidge scrambled out.

“Are you all right? Please be careful. This is powerful and dangerous equipment,” Mr. Dustin reminded her.

“I almost became a Smidge sandwich!”

“We’ll be more careful,” Otto promised. “Smidge, why did you jump in like that? You could have gotten hurt.”

The kitten brushed herself off. “When you didn’t want to help me, I did what I had to do.”

“Otto’s right, Smidge,” Mr. Dustin said. “You could have gotten hurt. While this is messy work, we also have to follow a careful plan so that everyone is safe. That means we have to look out for each other. Otto, remember to keep your partner safe by lending a helping hand.”

“We will,” they agreed.

“Great, then let’s get back to work.”





The friends finished the route. The streets were now clean, thanks to their determination.

“Off to the landfill!” Mr. Dustin declared.

At the very top of a winding dirt road, piles of trash towered as far as their eyes could see.

“This is way bigger than the town!” Otto felt defeated. “How can we search all of this?”





They hopped out, and Mr. Dustin was all business. “When did you throw away the lunchbox?”

Smidge gulped. “A week ago.”

“Hmm...then it should be somewhere over here...”

They crunched through the mounds of garbage. A glaring light flashed in Smidge’s eyes. “I see something shiny up there! That could be it!” The kitten scrambled up the pile.

“Uh-oh.” The trash shook beneath her.

“Get down!” Mr. Dustin cried.



CRASH! CRUNCH! SPLAT! Smidge fell to the earth, trash burying her. She popped her head up, and Otto laughed.

“What?” Smidge asked.

Mr. Dustin pulled a banana peel from her head.



“Eww!” The kitten was disgusted. She peeled away a wrapper stuck to her paw. “Wait! This is from one of *my* old snacks!”




Otto sniffed the packaging. “Spicy tuna chips? We must be close!”

“Cleaning Dennis’s room made me hungry.”

The bulldog paused. “I’m sorry you cleaned Dennis’s room all by yourself, Smidge. If I’d been willing to get my paws dirty and help you get the job done, we wouldn’t be in this mess.” He helped her up. “But now I see how important it is to serve others.”

Smidge smiled.





With a big breath, Otto stuck his nose into the trash and hunted for clues. He sniffed past some of Smidge's wrappers, an old pair of Dennis's shoes, and finally...the lunchbox!

He dove into the pile and disappeared.

“Help!” A muffled cry soon came from the mound. “I’m stuck!”

Smidge and Mr. Dustin reached into the foul heap and pulled Otto out from the mess. He had a big grin and was clutching the lunchbox!

“Well done.” Mr. Dustin was impressed. “I’m sure your friend will be relieved. Plus, you two served your community in a great way today. You got dirty and got the job done.”

Smidge nodded. “You know what, I actually liked cleaning up all that trash. It feels great helping people!”

Otto agreed. “It sure does.”

“Now you know why I like my job,” Mr. Dustin beamed. “I’m proud to make our town a better, cleaner place. Now, let’s get you two home!”



After waving goodbye to Mr. Dustin, Otto and Smidge tiptoed into the house. They were covered in dirt and grime...and surprised to find Dennis waiting for them!

“You’re home early!” the bulldog exclaimed.

“What have you two been up to?” The boy winced from the smell of gunk stuck to Otto’s fur.

Smidge proudly handed Dennis his lunchbox. “I accidentally threw this in the trash, but the garbage collector helped us track it down.”



“The garbage collector, Mr. Dustin, showed us where our garbage goes,” Otto piped in. “His job is difficult, dirty, and—”

“—and sometimes dangerous!” Smidge interjected.

Otto smiled, “But he really serves our community. Without people like Mr. Dustin, and all garbage collectors, trash would be piled up everywhere!”

Smidge added, “Sometimes, things we don’t appreciate turn out to be very important—like taking out the trash or your lunchbox.”

“This lunchbox is important,” Dennis winked. “It was the perfect place to hide a special gift—for you, Smidge.”



“For me?!” the kitten gasped. She opened the creaky tin and revealed a treat unlike anything she’d ever seen.

“A new cookie! I saw it at the store and thought of you,” Dennis beamed.

“Thank you! I’m going to enjoy this as soon as I get cleaned up.”



“That was my favorite adventure yet,” the bulldog howled.

“You say that every time, Otto,” Smidge giggled.

“Well, it’s not every day that we get to ride in a huge garbage truck with giant, mechanical arms!” Otto marveled. “Let’s write Mr. Dustin a thank-you note for his help and give it to him on the next trash day.”

“Way to not waste the opportunity to show your gratitude,” Dennis nodded.

“**Ruff Ruff!**”





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We Love Our Community

Serve: To help or do something for the good of others without expecting anything in return.

Garbage Collector: The person whose job it is to take away people's trash and dispose of it.

Garbage Truck: A large vehicle driven by garbage collectors to carry trash. There are different types of garbage trucks, including front loaders, side loaders, and rear loaders, depending on the size of the trash bin.

Bin: A type of container used for storing or holding things. It's often used for holding trash or recyclables.

Landfill: A large area of land where garbage and other waste materials are disposed of.

Dumpster: A large metal container where trash is kept until a garbage truck empties it. This type of container is bigger than the bins used for household waste.

"Get Your Hands Dirty": A phrase meaning you're willing to do the hard or unpleasant parts of a task.

Compactor: A machine that squishes trash to make it smaller and take up less space.



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**See you in
our *next* adventure!**

- Dennis, Otto,
and Smidge

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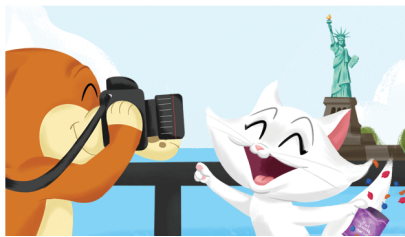
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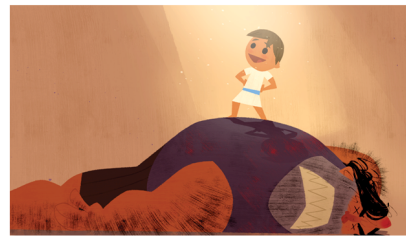
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