

## **The truck**

**By Matthew Harrison**

The truck arrived in its young master's home in the glory of its packaging. Impatient fingers pulled apart the card-and-cellophane wrapper, and lifted it out of the box. To the accompaniment of revving noises from the young master, the truck was pushed over the carpet, loaded up with wooden bricks, and pushed back. A small hand tipped the dumper, and there were chuckles of satisfaction as the bricks spilled out onto the carpet. Then the truck was loaded up again, and pushed on another trip.

This went on until the young master's bedtime. Even then, the boy insisted on taking the truck to bed with him, and clutched its chassis as he fell asleep. When she heard the gentle snores, the mother unwound the small fingers from the truck and took the vehicle back to the playroom.

There, from its vantage point on the table top, the truck surveyed its new home. It saw the other toys – cars, a fire engine, a train – in their box below, and it was proud. It had the love of the young master, it was lord of the table, it was above all the other toys.

The following day the young master played just as intently with the truck, taking it on ever-longer journeys around the house, even up the stairs. At the day-end, the master again took the truck to bed with him, and again it was prised out of his fingers and taken down to the playroom table. And again that night the truck's heart was full.

On the third day, the game changed. The boy played with the truck as before, but this time instead of bricks he loaded it with other toys. Small cars, the fire engine, the train were loaded onto the dumper, and the truck had to take them for the ride. It was a shock to have to share the master's attention with the other toys. But when at the end of the ride its dumper was raised and the small toys slid onto the floor, the truck again felt itself superior. And it was taken by the master when the time came for bed.

So the truck's life went on. As it took the other toys on the rides around the house, it noticed that some of them were broken. Fire engine had lost its wheels, train its funnel. How fortunate to be of its own resilient plastic! the truck thought. And sympathy for the smaller toys crept into its heart.

Then came a change. For several days the playroom door did not open, and the house was quiet. The truck stood on the table, confident in the young master's love. Yet when the sounds of the family again filled the house, the boy did not come. The truck waited. And as the hours lengthened it came to feel for the other toys, lying on the floor without hope.

Suddenly, the playroom door opened, and the young master appeared. Yet he did not rush up to the truck. No – to the truck's surprise he stood there, clutching a long silvery shape. What could this mean?

Slowly the young master raised the silvery object, now clearly a plane. Then he darted forward, making repeated 'Rat-tat-tat!' sounds as he swept the plane over the toys on the floor.

The master banked the plane, and swept over the toys again. This time he made exploding noises, and actually kicked the toys aside. The truck watched in indignant horror. But worse was to come. The plane was banked again, and this time it swept towards the truck. There was the 'Rat-tat-tat!', the explosions, and the truck found itself tipped onto the floor!

The truck lay upside down, dazed and bewildered at the boy's change of heart. But as the young master flew his new toy up and down the room, the truck saw that this must be the treachery of the plane. The plane had somehow bewitched him.

“Billy!” came a reproachful voice, and the mother strode into the room. The truck was picked up and firmly set back on the table; the other toys were put into their box. The plane was taken away and, wailing, the young master followed.

Shaken but with a restored sense of pride, the truck stood on the table. It felt solidarity with the other toys. Together, they would see off the intruder.

Yet in the days that followed, although the young master came into the playroom, it was always with the plane. He no longer attacked the other toys, but he did not play with them either. This new coldness was hard for the truck to bear. He thought with longing of the time when he had carried the other toys around the house, secure in his master’s love and the toys’ affection.

Time passed. The boy now played with other toys as well as the plane – even, on a warm summer’s day, taking the truck on a trip around the house. Yet the truck knew that it had lost the boy’s heart.

One day, the mother came in to the playroom with a silvery object. It was the plane, but sadly altered. Patches were worn in the silver of its fuselage, and one wing was broken. Yet hardest for the plane, the truck thought, would be the loss of the master’s affection. The truck might have felt triumph at the fall of its rival. But it felt only sadness at their common lot.

Summer turned to winter, winter to spring; another year went round, and then another. New objects entered the toy room – bats, balls, and finally a shiny flat oblong of metal and glass that made images and sounds and from which the boy was inseparable. The truck saw all of this with resignation. The boy came to the playroom less and less.

Then one day, the toys were put into a large box – the truck and the plane and the smaller toys together – and carried to the attic. There they remained in darkness for many winters and summers. The truck’s heart contracted, but it did not entirely forget the joy of its youth. And there was some companionship in the presence of the other toys, even of its old rival the plane.

A long, long time later, the box was heaved out of the attic and brought down the stairs. The lid was opened, and the truck and other toys brought out into the light. Exclaiming, the mother wiped around with a duster. The truck submitted itself to these ministrations, feeling long gone from its heart.

“There, Billy, don’t you remember?” came the mother’s voice, now cracked with age. A man laughed.

And then the truck heard a child’s excited cry, felt a small hand on its chassis...

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