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WILLY-WILLY'S FUNNY TURN

Penelope was a wind. Well, actually, she was not so much a wind as a breeze which blew gently around, fanning the countryside before drifting through the town. The folk who lived there welcomed her visits because she was cooling on hot summer days, and also helped to dry their washing. Sometimes Penelope would pause to listen as the people chatted to each other, usually about pleasant, happy things; but on this occasion a small group sitting in the garden behind the Town Hall was arguing and sounded quite angry. "They don't seem to care," said one. "Most people say they won't stop using plastic bags because they need them for their shopping, and they don't see any harm in them. When I said: 'Look at the mess they make,' they asked: 'What mess?'"

"I tend to agree with them," said another. "The town's always kept nice and tidy. Everyone puts their rubbish in the bins, and it gets taken down to the tip where it's all put in a big hole. Anyway, that's the other side of the hill so no-one needs to look at it."

*Yes, but it doesn't stay there," added the Mayor. "Once the wind gets up, all the stuff like plastic bags and paper is blown out of the hole and down onto the beach. Some of it ends up in the sea. Our beach is terrible and no-one wants to go there, especially not visitors; so people who own the beachside shops like ice-cream parlours and cafés find it very hard to make a living. This mess is giving the town a bad name and we have to do something about it..."

Penelope had heard enough and left the town folk to their arguing. What they had been saying, though, made her think; so she decided to drift down to the beach to see for herself. On arrival, it was clear why the Mayor and some others were concerned - the sand was littered with rubbish, while bags, plastic bottles and paper floated on the water. No wonder visitors were put off coming. Suddenly, Penelope had an idea how to fix matters and decided to have a word with her brother.

She found him spinning across a corn field, whirling round and round in a circle very fast, moving first this way then that, flattening the corn stalks as he went. This was Penelope's younger brother, Willy-Willy. Nowhere near as gentle as his sister, he was a sort-of miniature tornado; except, because he was only small, he never did much damage. What he really liked was a patch of dead leaves that he could suck up and whirl around, or dry sand that he could make into a mini dust storm - now that was cool; at least, Willy thought so. At first he was too

busy having fun to hear his sister calling. When eventually he did, he paused and just hung there, turning slowly. “What?” Willy asked, “Can’t it wait? I’ve got stuff to do.”

“Nothing special from what I can see,” said Penelope. “How would you like to do something useful for a change; something really important?”

“What could be more important than having fun?” Willy wanted to know.

Penelope began to breeze away, calling back to him: “Come with me and I’ll show you.” Knowing her brother could only move properly on flat ground, she took him around the side of the hill to the place where the tip was.

On seeing the hole with all of the rubbish, Willy became excited. “Hey, this is great. There’s a massive amount of stuff to twirl around. Thanks Penelope. Now, stand clear while I get some speed up.”

Willy had only just started winding up when Penelope stopped him. “It’s not here that I meant, Willy. The important work is further on, down at the beach.”

“The sand, you mean?” he said, quite disappointed. “I suppose that might be okay, but I’d much rather mess around in this rubbish hole. I can’t imagine I’ll have much fun on the beach. Tell you what – I’ll have a look and if it seems boring, I can always come back.” Once Penelope took him past the shops and cafés along the esplanade, however, Willy had no doubt that the beach was even better than the tip. “Hey, this is amazing,” he said with a giggle, “I can have some mega-fun twirling all this mess around. How did it get here?”

“The wind blew it from the tip,” his sister explained. “It’s originally from the town; the things people used only once and then just threw away. The mayor and some others are very worried about it and we can help them by tidying up the beach. I want you to do more than just twirl it around,” Penelope added. “I want you to pick it up and take back where it came from.”

Willy thought about that for a moment. “Um... could I have a play first – I mean like pick up stuff and race around the beach with it for a bit?”

“Well, I suppose so,” said Penelope doubtfully, “But only for a little while, then promise me you’ll do what I asked.”

“I promise,” declared Willy with delight; then he began getting up some speed. “This is going to be fantastic,” he said with a laugh, “It really is.”

He spent some time flitting along the beach, twirling as he went, gathering more and more rubbish and spinning it high into the air. About half way he realised that he had picked up all he could carry which meant he would have to make two trips. While he was turning on the spot, trying to decide what load of rubbish he would take first, his friend Cock-eyed Bob arrived. Bob was a small whirlwind the same as Willy and this seemed the answer to the problem. “G’day, Bob,” said Willy, “How do you fancy giving me a hand with this stuff? There’s all sorts and it’s great fun.” Willy went on to explain the job that Penelope had given him and Bob was only too pleased to help. Once the pair of them had picked up all of the rubbish from the beach, Willy said: “Follow me and we’ll take it back where it came from.”

In the meantime, Penelope had breezed back to the rubbish tip and was waiting by the hole for Willy to come. She was there for an age, but there was no sign of her brother and she was beginning to worry. Just as she was about to return to the beach to see what had happened to him, Willy came spinning around the side of the hill followed by Cock-eyed Bob. After saying hello to Bob, she asked Willy: "Where have you been; and where's the rubbish you were supposed to be bringing?"

"We dropped it off like you wanted," said Willy to his sister.

Penelope was puzzled. "But it's not here. This is where I told you to bring it."

"Excuse me," Willy replied, a little confused. "What you actually said was to take it back where it came from."

"That's right," Penelope reminded him, "Back here to the tip where the wind blew it from."

"Ah," said Willy, "I kind-of misunderstood. I thought you wanted it taken back to the people in town. You did say they were the ones who had it in the first place."

"Oh, Willy, you clown!" moaned Penelope. "I bet you've made a total mess of the town." She drifted around the rubbish hole and, unlike Willy and Bob who could only stay on the flat ground; she began climbing the hill, heading for the town. Part way up the hill she paused to call back: "You two stay here; and make sure you behave yourselves – no more funny turns."

Once she was over the top of the hill and drifting down the far side she could see something of what the town might look like. There were plastic bags hanging on fences, in trees and even on the horns of cows and goats. By the time she made it to town, there were people in the streets gathering up the mass of rubbish Willy and Bob had dropped there. Plastic bottles rolled up and down the road; plastic bags were caught on light poles and backyard washing lines; and there was paper everywhere. Needless to say, the town folk were not happy.

Realising it was her own fault for not giving Willy clearer instructions, she knew she had to put things right. The best way she could do that was to fetch Willy and Bob to come and clean up the town; and she was about to leave when she noticed people carrying rubbish along the main street, and all seemed to be heading in the same direction. Penelope followed to discover they were taking the rubbish to the council yard and putting it into two large trucks. The Mayor was standing by, saying to one of the council workers: "Once the trucks are full, take the rubbish back to the tip and cover it with dirt to make sure it doesn't blow away again. What I can't understand is why some of it is wet. It hasn't been raining."

Just then, someone ran up and was very excited. "The rubbish isn't from the tip, Mayor; it's from the beach. You should see it now – it's amazingly clean like it always used to be."

"That's it, then. I'm going to make sure it stays that way," declared the Mayor. "Let this be a lesson to us all. We'll have no more plastic bags in our town; and all the plastic bottles, paper and cardboard will be collected and taken to the recycling factory. That's an order."

Penelope was so pleased and she returned to tell Willy and Bob what the Mayor had decided. "So, in a strange way, Willy," she said, "Your mistake turned out to be a good deed after all. As long as the people stick to the Mayor's plan, in future there will be no more loose

rubbish to litter the beach or anywhere else. Doesn't it make you feel good to know that it all happened because of what you and Bob did?"

"I suppose," grumbled Willy, "But with nothing to pick up and twirl around it will be really boring."

"Well," said Penelope, "It is coming up to autumn and there'll be lots of leaves falling from the trees."

"Hey, yes," chirped Willy with a laugh. "We can pick them up and throw them around – a funnel of spinning leaves. It will be amazing. Do you reckon the town folk would like to see? We could whirl along down the main street with our leaves and stuff..."

"No, Willy," warned Penelope, "Definitely not. In your case, one good turn does not deserve another."

"Do you know what?" said Cock-eyed Bob to Willy-Willy, "You were right about your sister – she's turning into a real grump."

"Actually," Willy reminded his friend, "She doesn't turn at all, just breezes along in the same direction all the time. I guess that's what happens when you grow old. We'd best get moving before the same thing happens to us." And with that, Willy-Willy and Cock-eyed Bob went zooming off, spinning and laughing.

With a sigh, Penelope watched the boys go and smiled the way breezes do, saying quietly to herself: "Kids – who'd have them?"