

CHARLIE AND HIS GOLD TOOTHED MULE

By

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The children loved to follow Smiley down the tree-lined streets of their small town. Smiley, an old mule, lumbered along with his ribs poking out, looking like a big bag of bones with legs.

Charlie, his white-bearded owner, reminded the kids of Santa, and was always laughing and smiling. He sat high on the seat of his old wagon and gave Smiley his head as they made their rounds. Each day was a new adventure.

Smiley even looked different than other mules. He had a bright, shiny, gold tooth smack dab in the middle of his mouth. The old mule had cracked his big front tooth while eating a frozen Milky Way, one of his favorite snacks. Charlie, at great expense, had a special animal dentist come to the stable to cap the tooth in gold. He took great care of his mule's golden tooth, brushing it every day until it sparkled like a diamond.

The neighborhood kids loved spoiling Smiley and fed him from a bag of carrots they purchased at the grocery store. They trailed along

each day curious to find out what Charlie was up to. Charlie seemed to have a goal, but no one knew what it was. “All we have to do is find a few more things,” Charlie would say to Smiley, “and we’ll have everything we need.”

Charlie had been picking up different items for months! First there was a bright red rug that he found behind Big Ben’s Rug Shop. He cut that into different shapes and sizes and threw them into the wagon. “Perfect!” he said.

“Perfect for what?” asked one of the boys.

“You’ll see one of these days,” laughed Charlie.

Then there was the hubcap he placed on his head and asked, “How do you like my new crown?” Even Smiley hee-hawed at that one.”

“What about what happened today at the old fishing hole?” one of the girls whispered. His pole bent low towards the water and he yelled, ‘I got a big one!’ When Charlie hauled it in it wasn’t a fish but a tire. Checking it out, he said, ‘This tire is still in good condition, we’re really in luck today!’ Why would Charlie be so happy about catching a tire instead of a fish?”

It was a mystery that became more curious by the day.

The children really got confused at Charlie’s last stop--WALLEY’S GAS STATION, where he made his biggest find of all. A tow truck came into the station towing an old junked car, and Charlie took off all kinds of parts and pieces including the steering wheel and fenders. He was chuckling with joy when he tossed them into the wagon.

Wally, the service station owner was a kind man and always had something cool for Smiley. When he patted the mule on the head

Smiley would automatically open his mouth wide. Walley poured the mule's favorite drink, ice cold orange juice down his dry throat."

Charlie thanked Walley and headed home after saying their goodbyes. When they arrived, Charlie said, "Sorry kids, I have lots of work to do so I can't invite you in, but we'll see you later." Pulling through the gates of a high wooden fence he closed it tight behind them.

Within minutes the children heard loud banging and wondered what Charlie was up to. When they returned the next day to follow Smiley on his rounds, Charlie was still banging. There was a sign on the gate that said, SORRY, WE AREN'T GOING TO WORK TODAY.

"Wow!" exclaimed one of the boys, "that never happened before!" They really missed seeing Smiley as the days passed, but Charlie left them a note every day.

The children began worrying. What if Smiley was sick. Maybe he ate too many Milky Ways! But the banging and clanging of metal were still heard, so at least Charlie must be okay. More children began to assemble in front of the fence as the week went by. One day a hissing sound was heard and they smelled the aroma of fresh paint.

The children could no longer stand the suspense. Pressing their faces to the cracks of the fence to see what was happening, they saw nothing, but the Va-room--Va-room--Va-room of an unexpected roar of an engine, startled them!

From the pressure of their bodies crushing against the fence the gates suddenly flew open! The children couldn't believe their eyes! There was Charlie, behind the wheel of a beautiful red convertible sports car, made from all the parts he'd collected. Standing tall and

proud was Smiley in a custom made leather-lined back section with a large side door. Attached behind Smiley was the newly painted old wagon to collect their treasures.

Instead of pulling the wagon, Smiley would be driven by Charlie as his personal chauffer. With his gold tooth gleaming more than ever, Smiley, in his old age would now be riding in style, just like a king.