

The background of the cover features a white skull, possibly a cow skull, positioned in the upper right. In the foreground, there are several bright yellow flowers with green leaves, some in sharp focus and others blurred. The overall composition suggests a theme of nature and environmental impact.

*MURDO AND MEG*  
*CLEAN UP THE SEAS*

*a Waste Story by Ron Butlin*

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The back cover image was created from an original photo by Anna Wilson for Waste Stories. It was taken after a beach clean coordinated by the [Solway Firth Partnership](#).

# MURDO AND MEG CLEAN UP THE SEAS

Murdo and his wife Meg lived right on the sea.

They were standing on their cottage doorstep one morning looking out at the cloudless blue sky, the sea, the glorious –

‘No! No! Not again!’ yelled Murdo.

‘And look at my sunflowers!’ Meg hurried down to the row of bright yellow flowers she’d planted to mark where their garden met the beach.

But not today, it didn’t. Once again, a whole mess of rubbish had been washed ashore, tangling her flowers in netting, oily rope, polystyrene and plastic, plastic, plastic...

A long strip of nylon had wrapped itself around some of the plants, like it was choking them. The sun-yellow heads hung down, lifeless.

‘You –! You –!’ Furious, she shook her fist – but at what? Last night’s tide? The sea? She didn’t know, but she was raging mad at the whole world and all its rubbish.

Having put on his biggest gloves and stoutest boots, Murdo went down to the beach and soon he and his shovel were hard at work. Meg continued picking the rubbish out from the flower bed and heaping it into a pile.

By lunchtime Murdo had cleared the worst of it and loaded it onto his tractor and trailer. Meg’s pile shovelled on top, he drove to the local dump.

Where he got the shock of his life.

The gates into the dump were padlocked shut. There was a large sign.

DUMP CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

THANK YOU. HAVE A NICE DAY!

He peered through the railings. The dump was full.

He drove back home. He'd worry about it tomorrow.

Overnight there was a storm, and next morning their beach and garden were an even bigger mess than before.

'Well?' said Meg. 'We need to *do* something!'

No answer from Murdo. He just stood and stared, his mind a complete blank.

Meg took out her mobile. 'I bet we're not the only folk fed up with rubbish being dumped into the sea.' Her fingers raced over the screen. Message sent, she hurried indoors and was back out almost at once. She locked up the house. 'Here's your toothbrush. I've got mine. Can't go without them.'

Murdo was baffled. Toothbrushes? To scrub away the rubbish?

‘I’ll explain on the way,’ said Meg.

She did. At first Murdo was appalled. Then amazed. Then excited. He gave a whoop of joy and the two of them high-fived.

At the dump over a dozen tractors and trailers also heaped with rubbish were waiting for them. The gates were still locked.

Having thanked everyone for coming, Meg stood up in the tractor:

‘Our dump is FULL! Our trailers are FULL! Our beaches are FULL!’ She paused for breath. ‘And here’s what we’re going to do!’

She told them. There was a moment of stunned silence. Then everyone cheered.

Shortly after Murdo's tractor led them onto the motorway, images of the long procession of tractors and trailers heaped high with marine litter began appearing on X, Insta and TikTok – and soon went viral. At the first service station they were mobbed by other drivers asking what they were doing and where were they going; and when Murdo and Meg explained, some were so impressed they cancelled their own plans and joined the procession. At the next stop TV cameras were waiting. They became Breaking News on every screen in the country. More tractors and trailers joined them. TV vans drove alongside them. TV helicopters followed them.

By evening the line was well over a hundred vehicles long. On Day Two, it got even longer; and was joined by double-decker buses and coaches

crammed with anti-rubbish protesters singing anti-rubbish songs.

On Day Three they reached their destination.

Luckily, an Amazon van was just making its delivery. Murdo accelerated and managed to nip inside before the massive gates could swing shut.

The whole procession followed.

Inside Buckingham Palace, King Charles was saying:

‘It’s a lovely day, Camilla. Let’s have lunch out on the balcony.’

The royal couple stepped outside and – Instead of a regiment of soldiers drawn up for inspection in the courtyard, they saw a battalion of tractors and trailers filled with rubbish. No Royal Cavalry and no Military Band, instead, tourist coaches and double-deckers, their passengers belting out protest songs at the tops of their voices.

Meg and Murdo called up to the King and Queen, explaining why they'd come.

After they had finished, there was a long silence.

Finally King Charles raised a hand in acknowledgement. Without a word, Their Royal Majesties left the balcony.

Murdo and Meg stood and waited. They had done their best. Would the police be called? The army? The Royal Guard? Would they be arrested and sent to jail? Locked up in the Tower of London?

Five minutes later, the Royal Rolls appeared round the side of the palace and drove up to Murdo's tractor.

'Follow me!' came the royal command

The King led the whole procession to Parliament, where he gave his Prime Minister and all the government a right royal row. He demanded they take action immediately. 'No excuses!'

Also, he ordered an emergency delegation to be sent to the next COP summit, and he himself would lead it. In the meantime, the governments of all the other countries whose coastlines were threatened by marine litter, would be urged to send their own emergency delegations.

Almost a year has gone by since the COP resolution banning marine litter was passed unanimously.

Murdo and Meg are once again standing on their doorstep, looking out at a blue sky, blue sea, beach of golden sand and cheerful sunflowers welcoming the glorious summer morning.

‘For the first day ever, there’s not one piece of plastic or rubbish in sight! That was a brilliant plan, Meg!’

‘King Charles is keen on plants and Nature. I was sure he would do something. Especially when we told him that if he didn’t, we’d dump all the rubbish right under his balcony – and see how *he* liked it!’

Murdo laughed. ‘Even Kings and politicians sometimes need told what to do’.

‘Yes,’ added Meg. ‘And we’re the people to tell them!’

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This Waste Story was written by Ron Butlin for the *Waste Stories* project. *Waste Stories* is led by Anna Wilson, who works at the University of Glasgow where she likes to make stuff up about rubbish. It is generously supported by the Leverhulme Trust.

If you want to know more about Ron, you can visit his website: <https://www.ronbutlin.co.uk/>

If you want to know more about Waste Stories, you can visit our website: <https://wastestories.org.uk/>



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