

DELIVERY DAY

He sat, very comfortably, with his feet up on his executive desk in his executive office, took a deep draw on his Meerschaum pipe, exhaled the smoke slowly and felt at peace with the world. Over the years, his wife had nagged him and nagged him over his smoking to no avail. He wasn't bothered about the health effects but, recently, he had noticed that his white beard was turning a rather dirty brown colour around his lips. He had put on a considerable amount of weight in recent years which had caused problems for him on delivery day but, with most houses now having central heating, the situation had begun to ease.

His daydreaming was shattered by a loud knocking on his office door. Uninvited, the Shop Steward entered, walked swiftly across the room and placed his hands firmly on the desk. "Don't tell me", said the boss, "It is the middle of October and you have come to give me the yearly 'moans and tales of woe' from the workers." The Shop Steward opened his mouth to speak but the boss raised his finger to his own lips. "Now let me see if I can remember the gist of this annual outpouring. Ah, yes. It is only two months to delivery day and we are unlikely to meet the deadline. The electronic 'gizmos' asked for by the children are being upgraded weekly and we are unable to catch up. Those children who, in times gone by, would never have contemplated writing to us are, now, only too happy to email us and that has led to a huge increase in demand.

As I refuse to break with tradition by increasing the number of delivery vehicles, we cannot hope to complete all the 'drops' within twenty four hours. I think that sums most of it up my, much trusted, Shop Steward. What say you?" "Boss, yes it does. Well, what I actually mean is that, in previous years, that would have been a fair summary. This year, however, the situation is much, much worse and requires some drastic action without which I believe the survival of our organisation is in jeopardy.

Rather than me just telling you about the problems, I would prefer it if you came with me and saw the situation for yourself." As soon as he opened the door to the main work area, the boss knew that things were different. All his little workers were at their usual places and working away but he noticed that none of them were wearing their brightly

coloured felt jackets and that their bobbly hats were beside their machines. He spotted that there was no frost on the inside of the windows and that none of the gas fires had been lit. The atmosphere felt clammy and he was glad that he had left his jacket in his office. As he walked further into the room, his right foot slipped on what appeared to be a very fine film of water on the factory floor.

Fortunately, he did not fall. He was most concerned but said, "OK, I accept that we have a problem here but let's deal, firstly, with the shortfall in items to be delivered. You need to understand that children always ask for far too much and, on delivery day, are thrilled with what they get. In addition, is the drop in the age where the youngsters get 'the knowledge'. This means that our load is lightened by the parents buying a higher percentage of the gifts. You and I will open up the warehouses where we have stored the gifts we did not deliver last year because the children had been naughty. That will make up the shortfall." When they opened the first warehouse, they were immediately hit by a damp smell. Fungus was growing on the walls, ceiling, and floors and on the hundreds of boxes that were stacked there. Most of the boxes were falling apart and their contents were strewn across the floor. They were ruined.

The boss let out a loud groan. He open the cabinets that held all the 'Love From Mum and Dad, Aunty Ethel, Grandma etcetera labels' and they were all sodden. Even the strings had mould on them. He walked over to the shelves that held the wrapping paper. They were so damp that they had melded together into blocks. He determined to discuss this with his wife over their evening meal. They had been together for many centuries now and he valued her advice.

He ate his dinner and reflected that her dumplings made everything seem right. As she did every evening, as her little joke, his wife offered him some sherry and a mince pie. As he did every evening, he smiled and politely declined.

Then he told his wife what had transpired during the day. Calmly, she reminded him of the time, eons ago, when his friend Matthew was struggling with the gospel he was writing, and sought his advice about putting something in about the soundest place to build a house. She asked him if he recalled his advice to his pal that a wise man builds his

house upon a rock whilst a fool builds his on sand (or, in our case, ice she thought to herself). He did. “Well, my Beloved, we talked at length about where we should set up our business. You insisted that it would be the North Pole. “And your point is?” “I suggest you use Google to look up ‘Global Warming/Climate Change’ then look for a company that excels in overnight world-wide deliveries. We may well need their help.”