

SANTA HAS HIS COME-DOWNANCE

by Paul Busby

Mother Christmas was sounding forth: "Whiskers," which is how she addressed her husband, "it's time you found something useful to do with all your spare time", she said. "You only work one day a year, and the rest of the time you just mooch around up here leaving me to do all the housework."

"That's not true," replied her husband. "I have the reindeer to look after, I have tons of correspondence to see to. And I have lots and lots of presents to get hold of before the day itself."

"Yes but that still leaves months when you're not doing anything but loll about."

"I'm not lolling about. I'm preserving my figure. If I were to exercise more I would lose weight and not look so jolly any more."

"You can still be jolly without being grossly over-weight. A man of your age has to be careful. It's not as if you can call a doctor in this area. You must try and slim down, even a bit. It won't make your ho ho ho disappear. In fact it might increase it to a ho ho ho ho."

"Maybe you're right. Perhaps I should get a part-time job somehow, somewhere."

Mother Christmas was pleased to hear him say that, although he had not actually said he would help her out more. Life was getting more difficult, what with the rising temperature which was playing havoc with her fridge and reducing the amount of frozen food she could lay her hands on. The ice-bricks in their house were also starting to crack and she was worried that they would eventually thaw.

Santa made a list of the things he was good at: reading lists, making inventories, obtaining and packing the necessary items, keeping the reindeer well-fed and fit, circumnavigating the globe, climbing down chimneys, manning the grottos and ho-ing. He never had to worry about his red uniform, which his wife carefully washed and ironed and hung up until it was time to wear it again. He divided these skills into four categories and scoured the advertisements in the North Pole Times for any opportunities. Unfortunately there were no job vacancies in this newspaper, only news about missing polar bears, personal ads from walrus and information about ships stuck in the ice.

To find any vacancies, Santa had to extend his search area. In thinking about getting goods ready to dispatch, he immediately thought about applying to Amazon, based in Seattle in the state of Washington. "I am fully experienced in these matters," he wrote in his application letter.

He caught a lift down there from a passing reindeer and presented himself for work. All morning on his first day he occupied himself putting items into numerous sacks, which he had brought with him. The sacks began to take up more and more room in the car park and came to the attention of his boss who wanted to know what he was doing. He explained that when there were enough of them he would load them on his sleigh and deliver them.

"That will take far too long," his boss said. "People expect things to be delivered fast, often the next day."

Santa attempted to explain to him that he could cope with that, but it made little impression. Sad to say, he was himself sacked soon afterwards and had to return home.

The next skill was about looking after his reindeer. He applied to a herdsman in Lapland in Finland and travelled there the next day.

"I am very familiar with reindeer and sleighs," he told the herdsman. The first thing he

did was to inspect each one of the deer.

“What are you looking for?” he was asked.

“I’m looking for a reindeer with a red nose,” he answered. “You can’t get about at night without one - they are infra-red you know.”

The herdsman looked at him quizzically and left him to it. When he returned he was amazed to see Santa trying to lift the reindeer off the ground.

“I’ve tried for hours to get them to fly but they don’t want to. How do you get them into the air?” he asked the herdsman.

“They don’t fly, they run,” he stated. And that was the end of Santa’s short stay in Lapland.

“Well, I can always see about chimneys,” he announced to his wife.

“What do you think you can do with chimneys?” she asked.

“Well I can climb down them with a sack on my back.”

“Is there any demand for that sort of thing?”

“I’ll have to find out.”

He looked for a place where he could demonstrate his prowess in going down chimneys. There were still plenty of chimneys in Germany, but the job of chimney-sweep, which is what Santa imagined he could do, was very competitive and restrictive. He arrived at a town called Schornstein and made his way up to the roof of a house. He was promptly chased away by another chimney sweep who told him that all the chimneys in that area were reserved for him. He wandered around until he came across some other chimneys. Finding a nice wide one he lowered himself in and started to brush away at the sides as he descended. He continued this going lower and lower but was concerned that he did not come across any open fireplaces where he could make his exit so had to climb up again to the very top.

News of this stranger climbing into a chimney annoyed the local inhabitants. He was not wearing the right clothes for a proper chimney sweep – black jacket and trousers and a black top hat – so he aroused a lot of suspicion and was chased out of town.

Back he went to the North Pole and had a day off which he needed in order to clean his clothes before his wife saw them. Then he looked up the last category on his list – manning grottos. He had heard that there were plenty of these in Britain, so he headed first for The Wookey Hole Caves in Somerset. But it was too damp and smelled strongly of something called cheese, which was new to him.

He then travelled on to somewhere called The Cave of the Black Spring in Swansea and dressed in his Christmas costume sat down awaiting the arrival of any children. The only people he encountered were professional cavers who, to put it mildly, were very surprised to see him there. He mumbled an excuse and left.

His third visit was to Reigate where a cave system runs beneath the town. This looked more promising to him. He decamped and put his sack of toys and sweets beside him. It was not long before a family came up to him.

“Hello children,” he said jollily. “I’m Santa Claus.”

“But it’s the 21st of July,” said the father. “Are you late or early?”

“No, I’m just bringing good cheer to you, whatever the date. Now children, come and sit on Santa’s lap and tell me what you want and I’ll give it to you. Ho ho ho.”

The mother looked horrified.

“Oh let me, Mommy,” pleaded the little 4-year old Arabella and quickly went up to Santa. “I want a boyfriend who looks like Jake from the Whazza pop group.”

“And I want a thermo-nuclear bomb,” joined in her 6-year old brother, Charles, who had run forward to sit on Santa’s other knee.

“I’m going to call the police,” said the father. “If you know what’s good for you, you’d better disappear quick and never come back here again... which is precisely what Santa did.

Feeling very disconsolate, Santa went back to his home in the North Pole. His wife felt sorry for him and felt that maybe after all it was better for him to stay around there rather than causing trouble elsewhere. He had lost a bit of weight and needed feeding up a bit, but then he might just come in useful. His wife had found a job marketing ice lollies to other countries, and someone was needed to distribute them for her. But before he could start that job, she put him to work mending the cracks in the ice which had developed around their home – a never-ending job, but it would help to occupy his mind until the arrival of Christmas.