

Subernoj. 24 December 2021

He was the last to arrive. The other three applicants, seated separately around the small lounge-like waiting room, looked up from their clipboards and stared at him as he picked up the clipboard and pen on the remaining seat and settled himself down.

“Nice touch. Wish I’d thought of it” the elderly gentleman opposite him rued, nodding towards him.

He frowned, uncomprehending.

“The suit”

“Ah, my suit. It’s the only one I own actually” he explained which, for some reason, seemed to amuse the others. He then adjusted his wire rimmed glasses and set about reading the questionnaire attached to the clipboard. The other three returned to their own questionnaires, quietly penning answers in the spaces provided. All of them were elderly and grey-haired but he was the only one sporting white hair and a bushy white beard and moustache.

Having spent little time on the questionnaire, he stretched his legs and closed his eyes for a quick nap, as one by one, the other three were summoned through the door (marked Human Resources Manager) for their twenty-minute interview.

His reverie was eventually broken by a polite cough followed by “You can come through now.” He opened one eye to see he was now the lone interviewee left in the room.

“Sorry about that – must’ve dozed off” he explained to the well-dressed woman standing in the doorway to the HR Manager’s office.

“Never mind, understandable. My name’s Hilda Klime by the way and I’ll be conducting this interview for the upcoming temporary position with Farley’s Department Store” she replied warmly as she ushered him into her office and directed him to the chair opposite her desk. She settled herself into her own chair and asked “You’ve filled out the questionnaire?”

“I have, yes”. He handed over the clipboard, then relaxed back in his seat whilst she scanned the page in front of her.

“You didn’t really have to come dressed up in character by the way. It’s just an interview today.”

“Oh, I always wear this outfit. Have to maintain standards and all that” he replied.

“Must get uncomfortable with a pillow down the front though” she suggested with a smile.

He chuckled and patted the wide black belt that struggled to keep his large belly in place. “All my own work I’m afraid.”

She returned her attention to the questionnaire and frowned. “I see you haven’t put your real name and address on the form. We’ll need them for our

records.”

He leaned forward, bemused by the suggestion. “That is my real name and address” he advised.

“You’ve changed your name by Deed Poll at some stage?”

“No, that’s always been my name.”

“Really? Most unusual” she muttered. “And this address you’ve given – it’s quite a long way away. How did you get here?” she asked, curious now.

“The usual way. I flew” he replied casually.

“Then caught a taxi from the airport?”

“Er, no. I’m parked on the roof”

“The roof? Of this building?” she asked, incredulous.

“Well, it was rather convenient, the roof being nice and flat. For a change” he mused.

“Right” she sighed. “Moving along then, do you have a current Working with Children Accreditation?”

“Mmm, not that I’m aware of” he replied, puzzled by the question.

“Covid vaccinations?” she asked hopefully.

“Sorry” he said, starting to sense some obvious disappointment on Hilda’s part.

She began rubbing her temples in frustration. “Ok, look, I’ll send you a text message when I’ve made my decision. What’s your mobile phone number?”

“Oh, I don’t have a mobile phone, but if you could send me a letter...”

“Nobody sends letters these days, and with your address I doubt it would reach you”

“Well, I do get bags and bags of mail each year, so a letter will be fine. It’ll reach me no problem” he said confidently.

She stared at him for a few seconds, then picked up her pen and wrote across the bottom of his questionnaire the word *DELUSIONAL*. “As you wish” she replied, forcing a smile. “Well I think that just about wraps things up – I’ll let you know the decision. By letter.”

“Most kind” he said, rising from his chair and heading for the door. He stopped at the doorway, turned and raised a white-gloved finger in the air.

“Quick question, does your food court sell carrots by any chance?”

Part 2

Four weeks later. Christmas Eve.

He plonked himself down on the chair at the small table in the kitchenette on the mezzanine level above the factory floor and let out a long sigh.

“Have a cuppa dear, it’ll perk you up nicely” his wife said, pouring a brew into his Christmas themed mug.

“Thanks love, I need it” he said as he picked up the now crumpled single sheet of paper and smoothed it out on the table in front of him. He took a sip from the mug, looked across at his wife and said “You know, I still can’t

believe I didn't get that job at Farley's in Santa's Grotto. I'd have thought I was the ideal candidate, me being the real thing."

"Probably just as well though dear, what with things here being hectic enough these past few months" she consoled.

"Yes, I suppose so," he sighed "but still ..."

Just then, there was a soft knock on the door which slowly inched open to reveal a very small man in candy-striped stockings, a green and red outfit, a conical hat sporting a pompom on top and green pointy shoes. "All ready to go Boss. Everything's loaded and waiting for you. Bit nippy and snowy outside though" the little man advised rubbing his hands together.

"Right, well, I'll be off then" he said as he eased himself out of the seat, rounded the table and gave his wife a quick peck on her cheek.

"Good luck tonight Santa, and just remember dear – you've always got the *main* gig" she smiled after him.