



Santa Claus and the Copper Crisis



Tidings of comfort and joy....

The door to Santa's study rebounded off the wall as Dai Trying, his chief elf, barged in waving a fax.

"Well, that's it then, isn't it but? Copper delivery's not coming till after the New Year. It's a disaster, see?"

Santa didn't see. "Do we use much copper then?"

"Use much copper?! *Use much copper??!!!* Only for pretty much every present, that's all!"

"Well bless my soul. I did think the sleigh had been handling a bit heavy these last few years."

Dai rolled his eyes. "The presents aren't *made* of copper. They've got copper *in* them, see? Circuit boards. Can't have a circuit board without copper and we've got no copper to make circuit boards!"

"Forgive me, but what does this mean then?"

"I'll tell you what it means!" Dai took a deep breath. "No iPads, iPods, iPhones, Nintendos, netbooks, notebooks, computers, Kindles, cameras,"

"So it's bad then?"

"Bad?! BAD???!!!!" Exclamation marks radiated from him in waves.

"Now calm down. Sort out the letters we can do and we'll see where we are."

"I can tell you right now where we are, so I can!" Dai said, as he swept back out of the study. "Up shi."

The door swung tactfully shut.

He's making a list, he's checking it twice....

The letters were sorted. To one side, a cluster of sacks, full to overflowing. To the other, three sheets of paper stacked in a neat little pile.

Santa nodded. "Hmmm. And the requests we can fulfil would be...?"

"Right by here," said Dai.

Surprised, Santa looked to the right where the groaning sacks stood.

"Well what are we worried about?" he exclaimed, gesturing at the sacks.

"No," said Dai. "I said right by *here*."

He pointed at the three sheets of paper.

"But... isn't that left? And isn't that.."

he pointed to the sacks, "...right?"

Dai sighed patiently. "No. These are right by *here* and those are right by *there*."

Santa realigned his mental compass to point due Elf and nodded. "Well, well, I must certainly give this some thought."

Saying which, he sat down in his chair by the fire and fell fast asleep.

Just like the ones I used to know....

Twenty minutes later, he awoke, inspired. "I have it!"

The elves braced themselves. This

could be good, or....

"We will bring children an old-fashioned Christmas, full of traditional values!!"

... or it could be a catastrophe of gargantuan proportions. Dai groaned inwardly.

"Well. That's a grand idea, isn't it ever as like?" He waved a hand behind his back and all the elves nodded feverishly. "Well. Duw. I'm thinking it'd be hard to better an idea like that." He scuffed his toe in the sawdust. "But..."

"But?"

"Thing is, your Jolliness, kiddies aren't much interested in tradition. Haven't had time to learn any, see?"

"Then this year will be different!"

declared Santa. He snatched a letter at random from the nearest sack. "Now what does this little chap want? An X-Box and *Zombie Apocalypse*?"

Dai stood on tiptoe to read the letter. "Age six, too. Well well. There's a child that wants watching. Preferably from a safe distance. Can't fault his spelling, but."

Santa held up a hand. "We can improvise here. We'll give him a plastic gun and he can run around outside playing soldiers and shouting 'Bang!!'"

"An excellent idea, but."

"But?"

"Figure of speech. Although....?"

"Although *what*?"

"We-e-ell, there's a few things wrong with that picture. Running, for a start. And being outside."

"He wants to play soldiers *inside*?"

The elf nodded. "And he won't be too interested in shouting 'Bang!!' either."

"Really? How is anyone supposed to know when he's fired his gun then?"

"Er... someone's skull will explode and there'll be blood and brains spattered everywhere."

Santa recoiled in horror. "And this is *fun*?"

"Not so much if they're your brains, no."

Santa scabbled desperately in the sack for another letter. "Well what about this one then?" He read it twice. "She wants a wee?" He stared at the letter. "She wrote this two weeks ago! She can't hang on till Christmas!!"

"Bless you, sir, no, that's just bad spelling, isn't it but? She wants a *Wii*."

"Oh. What does one do with a...Wii?"

"Well .. see, you can play golf with it. Or tennis. Or football."

"Ah! Well we can definitely arrange something here. Healthy outdoor pursuits, eh?!"

"Er... you'd think, wouldn't you though? But... no. You play them in the living room. Or bedroom."

"But doesn't the ball cause a lot of damage?"

Dai cleared his throat uncomfortably. "Ye-e-e-es, see, there isn't a ball. Or a bat. Or a club, boot, racquet or net. It's just... a simulation."

Santa shook his head in disbelief. He snatched up another letter. "*Guitar Hero III*? Well this is easy. We can give this boy a real guitar. A future musical talent, I'll bet!"

"I think," ventured Dai, "this might be less about its instructive value..."

"And more..?"

"About noise. Lots and lots of noise."

Santa flung the letter down in despair. "And you believe playing with all these ... *gadgets* ... makes children happy?" he snapped.

"Duw. I hadn't even thought about the playing bit," admitted Dai.

"But ... " Santa was now thoroughly confused. "But ... what else is there?"

Here we go, thought Dai. The tricky part. "Well now. We-e-ell. See, often it's more about the *having* or the *not* having, isn't it but?"

Santa's stare went on for a little longer than was comfortable. "So correct me if I'm wrong," he said finally, "but what you're telling me is that a child's happiness depends on him getting more gadgets than his friends?"

Dai beamed at him. "There! You have grasped it after all! I wasn't sure you would."

"No," declared Santa firmly. "This is a sorry state of affairs. What happened to a proper childhood? What happened to imagination?"

"Er... I think they call it virtual reality now."

"That's not how it should be. And it's not how it will be." He stood up and clapped his hands to get the attention of the assembled elves. "Come on chaps! There's a world out there that needs our help. It's true that we can give a better life, so let's start building!"

One of the elves blew out a breath. "I don't care if it is near Christmas. If he starts singing *We Are The World*, I'm going to shoot him."

Santa Claus is coming to town....

As Santa strode purposefully back to his study, Dai tugged desperately at his coat sleeve.

"Are you sure you've thought this through, but?"

Santa raised his arm, bringing Dai swinging up to eye level. "Bless you, what is there to consider?"

"Well maybe that ... just possibly..." Dai fidgeted under the innocent blue gaze. There really wasn't a good way to say this. "Maybe a kiddie who asked for an iPad might not be happy with a Painting-By-Numbers set?" he suggested warily.

Santa looked honestly bewildered. "You think they might be disappointed?"

"Hard to imagine they wouldn't be, but."

"That bad?" asked Jones the Cocoa.

lowering him to the ground. "But perhaps a little research might be in order. Round up the sleigh crew and we'll make a field trip."

Twenty minutes later, Santa, Dai, Jones the Sack-Holder, Jones the Assistant Sack-Holder and Jones the Pooper-Scooper were aboard the sleigh and whizzing off to a typical "Santa's Grotto" in the toy department of a Swansea store. (The original toy store Santa was surprised to find himself suddenly locked in the toilet. Particularly as he had been in the cafeteria).

A small child of indeterminate gender was pushed towards Santa by its mother. The child seemed to consist mostly of bobble hat and scarf, with a slightly runny nose somewhere in between. Santa placed him/her/it on his knee.

"Ho-ho-ho! And what would you like for Christmas, small child?"

The child tugged its scarf down a millimetre or two and whispered, "S'ems'n' G'l'xy."

Dai leaned forward from behind Santa and filled in the vowels.

"Samsung Galaxy, your Jolliness. It's a smartphone."

"Ah. And therefore, in our current predicament....?"

Dai shook his head.

Santa beamed at the child. "Well now! That would be an interesting present, wouldn't it? But do you know what's even *more* interesting and fun? A *globe*!! With all the countries on it! And it spins round! Ho-ho-ho!!"

The child looked at Santa. It looked at its mother. Then it threw its head back and screamed like a banshee.

'Tis the season to be jolly...

Just over three hours later, Santa walked slowly into his study and gingerly sat down by the fire. Jones the Cocoa breezed in with a steaming mug and placed it beside him.

"Good to see you back, your Jolliness. And how was Swansea?"

Santa lifted his head and Jones the Cocoa stumbled back a step and then fled. Santa's eyes were those of a man who'd just bungee-jumped over the fiery pits of Hell.

Down in the kitchen, he found Dai and the rest of the sleigh crew slumped around the table.

"Duw!! What happened down there bach?"

Dai shook his head. "It was awful, but. Aw. Ful. They went berserk. And scream? I've never heard anything like it. Poor Blitzen had a panic attack in the stairwell."

The elves winced, remembering. The reindeer's panic had been ... widespread.

"Still," mused Jones the Pooper-Scooper, "it gave them that was in a hurry to leave an extra turn of speed by there, didn't it though?"

"And were they in a hurry then?" asked Jones the Cocoa.

"Parents dragged them away screaming," said Jones the Sack-Holder. "*Kicking* and screaming," Jones the Assistant Sack-Holder reminded him. "One of them gave him a right going over."

"Just because she couldn't have an iPhone," agreed Dai. "Did you hear what she said when he told her it was better to give than receive? She put him straight on that one and no messing. And the language! Shocking, shocking it was."

"That bad?" asked Jones the Cocoa.

"Duw, I couldn't repeat it," said Dai. "Maybe if you took the really bad words out?"

Dai mentally recapped. " 'You' . "

"What?"

"That's it without the bad words."

The elves sat in awe for a moment. It had been an education all right, but not as colourful as the education that little girl must've had.

"What now, boyos?" Jones the Cocoa asked. "Is he going to try another grotto? Bridgend maybe?"

"What was it he said when we left Swansea?" asked Dai. "Oh yes, I remember. '*There's not enough sherry in the world to make me forget the last three hours*'. So I'd reckon that's a no".

"It's a materialistic world, so it is," remarked Jones the Cocoa sagely.

"Yes, well, you don't know the half of it," muttered Dai, darkly. "It's shaken his confidence, hasn't it but? He doesn't want to do.... ", he grimaced, "... The Delivery."

The elves rocked back on their heels. "Not do.... *The Delivery*???"

Dai shook his head.

"But... but... but..." Jones the Cocoa stuttered to a halt.

Dai stood up. "We need copper, lads. That's all there is to it."

"But the suppliers said...."

"I know what the suppliers said. So we'll have to find our *own* copper," announced Dai firmly.

Jones the Pooper-Scooper raised a trembling hand. "Here, you weren't thinking of *mining*, were you? Them dwarves are vicious, but. I strayed into a mine once and they said I was claim-jumping, so they did. Grabbed me by the props." To this day, the sound of a *hi-ho* brought him out in a cold sweat.

Dai patted his shoulder.

"Don't you worry, lad. No mining at all."

It's Christmas time, there's no need to be afraid...

In the study, a log on the fire split with a loud *crack!* and Santa was out of his chair and flat on the floor with his hands over his head in seconds. He exhaled slowly. His nerves were shattered, absolutely shattered.

"Perhaps a nice bath would make me feel better," he thought, and ambled off to the bathroom.

He hung his jolly red hat and coat on the back of the door and leaned over to turn the hot tap on.

Nothing.

He turned it further.

Nothing. Not even a rumble in the pipes.

Santa sighed. Perhaps he'd phone Frosty the Snowman - that always cheered him up. He wandered back to his study, but when he lifted the receiver, there was no dial tone. Thoroughly grumpy now, he opened the door and shouted for Dai.

"I can't get the phone to work! Are those buggers at Lapland Telecom digging things up again?"

Dai's voice, slightly out of breath, floated up the hallway to him.

"Yes! That'll be right ... *pull lads!*... Definitely digging! ... *come on, there's at least forty metres of cable under here!*"

'Twas the night before Christmas....

Christmas Eve. Jones the Tea whistled as he entered the study.

"Evening your Jolliness. And what a perfect night for The Delivery."

"Not going," sulked Santa. "Got nothing anyone wants anymore. And where's my tea?"

"Tea... Ri-i-ight. ... *Small* problem with the water pipes today. But never mind!" he trilled. "You *shall* make The Delivery! Come and take a look!"

Grumbling, Santa followed him into the workshop..... where piles upon piles of laptops, digital cameras, smartphones, X-Boxes and other gadget goodies awaited. The assembled elves grinned at him.

"Well bless my soul!!" declared Santa.

"How did you manage this?! I'm amazed, simply amazed. Ho-ho-ho! This calls for a celebration, chaps! Beers all round!"

Dai's grin congealed around the edges and he tried to head Santa off before he reached the bar in the corner.

Too late. Santa put a glass under the tap and pulled. Nothing. Not even a *blurr!* of foam. In that moment, the penny dropped for Santa. (Or it would have, had the elves not already scavenged it for its copper content). "Is it just me," he asked casually, "or has anyone else noticed a general lack of copper piping around here today?"

There was a collective intake of breath. Then Jones the Sticky-Tape stepped forward, proving once again that there is no silence so great it cannot be filled by a suitably qualified idiot. "Nossir!"

"Oh come, come! Where have you been, man? Down a hole?!"

"Yessir! Busy stripping out the copper cable, sir!"

Right, my boyo, thought Dai grimly, *that's you demoted back to Jones Put-Your-Finger-on-the-Knot*. He looked up to find Santa standing over him, arms crossed.

"So-oooo...no baths for a while then?"

Dai shuffled his feet. "Er.. no."

"Nor phone calls."

"No."

"Computer?"

Dai perked up. "Did you want internet, but?"

"Yes."

He deflated. "Then... no."

Santa sighed. "Oh never mind. Let's get this lot loaded up. We've got a delivery to make tonight."

Later that night, little children all over the world heard the sound of sleigh bells. Little children with especially sharp ears heard something more...

"No, we haven't got time.... Well why didn't you go before we left home?..... Oh, not those pipes as *well*?!"

The End

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