

Jock's Instant Sunshine

There was no doubt about it. It had been a miserable start to the year. The city had been swathed in clouds for months and a thin miserable drizzle had kept people indoors unless they really had to go out. Takings were down at Murrays – department store of distinction in Edinburgh's Princes Street. Now things were even worse as a late fall of snow had taken everyone by their annual surprise. This heavy wet covering of snow gave no indication of clearing and gradually the glass roof of the Grand Hall in Murrays was encased in a thick blanket of the icy stuff. This cast a pall of gloom over the galleries and departments under the usually beautiful stained glass arc.

This pall of gloom enveloped Mr McElvey in Accounts too. He bemoaned the loss of revenue from sales but also the increased expense incurred by the reduction in natural light and increased heating costs. He groaned to Miss Murray,

“We can't sustain this level of overheads for much longer. Staff sickness levels have increased too. I think they just can't be bothered to turn up to stand about all day.”

Miss Murray ignored his doom-laden prognostications as she usually tried to but couldn't help worrying a little herself. It certainly was a depressing Spring.

In the Canteen, Barry, the head of Security, was entertaining his (sole) friend Jock the lift operator with the only poem he had ever managed to retain in his head:

*“The spring is sprung, the grass is riz.
I wonder where the boidie is.
They say the boidie's on the wing.
But that's absoid. The wing is on the boid.”*

Jock nodded politely as he always did when Barry recited this. He had heard it time and again as Barry liked to parade his imagined erudition.

Jock usually managed to present a cheerful face to his passengers, as he thought of the ladies who used his lift. They almost invariably ignored him though which, as ever, he accepted with a quiet smile. This year was different somehow. Everybody seemed to be so miserable. The noticeably fewer customers, the dimmer quality of light, the sneezes and coughs that echoed around the galleries from staff and customers alike had managed to penetrate even his good humour.

As Barry droned on about some imagined slight, Jock let his thoughts wander to how he could try to cheer everyone up. It would have to be simple, inexpensive and permitted by the Management. He looked up with a sudden smile. He had had an idea. Mumbling his excuses to Barry he stood up and made his way out of the crowded canteen. Barry paused in full flow to look at the disappearing back of his friend as he left via the rear entrance which led to the management corridor.

Mrs Pegram from Personnel listened to Jock's request in amusement then declared that his idea was sound. Better than sound really and authorised that he proceed to carry out his plans as soon as possible.

The next morning when the lift door opened on the ground floor to admit four depressed looking ladies, there were gasps of surprise.

"Oh my!" one lady couldn't help saying, "Look at this! Just look at it!"

Listening staff in Menswear looked up too late as the lift doors closed.

Inside the ladies smiled broadly as they regarded the bright yellow, crepe paper decked walls, the cerulean blue ceiling and the little row of plastic daffodils neatly pinned all around the walls at floor level. When the door opened on the second floor the bright flash of yellow caught the attention of staff all round the gallery. Smiles lit up as the ladies left the lift and infectiously cheered staff as the customers moved around the various departments. The lift moved onwards and upwards bearing its now cheery cargo. As the door opened at each floor it was as if there was a bright burst of sunlight. Everyone was talking about it. Strangers in the lift smiled to each other as they entered and there was a marked increase in general chat throughout the store. Over the next few days this sudden elevation in mood throughout the building translated itself into increased sales thus improving even Mr McElvey's finance focused state of mind.

In the Canteen at first break Barry was at first rather resentful of Jock's sudden popularity. As staff members from various departments passed their table they made positive comments to Jock, some just patting him on the back others thanking him for cheering them up. Jock nodded modestly. Eventually, Barry came round and, deciding to somehow grab some credit intoned loudly to anyone in earshot, "Well the boidies may not be on the wing but Spring has certainly sprung at Murrays!"