

## WHAT WOULD TRISHA DO?

(By M.S.Clary)

The last time I walked down Elsinor Avenue, I noticed that number 34 was up for sale. The garden looked neglected, dead leaves lay un-swept in the porch. There didn't seem to be anybody about.

It's blowing from the West today. No matter how hard I try to spear these bits of rubbish, they *whoosh* off. Like they're having a laugh. Sweet wrappings, old envelopes. You wouldn't believe. Shan't have to bother with that one now, it's gone over the fence. Just hope the Boss Man wasn't watching.

The first time it happened, it was definitely an accident. I'd had a recurrence of that pain in my back. The sort of low down pain that never goes away, and always seems to catch you when you bend. My load had got unbearably heavy with all that junk mail they send out. Those catalogues that nobody asks for that just get thrown away. I'd been to see Dr. Jones, and he'd put me on anti-depressants. I told him I was never depressed but he seemed to think they would relax my muscles. I'd already had a month off and was keen to get back to work, as strange to tell, I was missing it. Anyway, put it down to the new tablets if you like, but on my way back to the Depot that morning I noticed there was bunch of letters stuck at the bottom of the bag. I don't know how I'd missed them, but it was too late to do anything about it. With all that time I'd had off with my back, questions would have been asked. I thought, what if I left them, just for now. Deliver them the following day. So I parked up next to my car, and shoved them in the boot.

"How's it going Jack?"

"Not too bad, Mr. Howard."

"I'd like to get this area finished by lunch-time, if possible."

"No problem, Mr. Howard."

I try to do my best for Mr. Howard. His job is not an easy one.

A fortnight later, I had a flat on the way home from work. I was searching in the boot for the jack, and there was this bundle of mail. I came over a bit shaky because in my fifteen years with the Post Office, I'd never failed to deliver a letter. I didn't know what to do. I drove around a bit then the thought came to me, what if I took the lot back to my flat, sorted it out there and just delivered the important stuff. I picked out the handwritten ones, birthday cards and the like, and anything official looking such as a communication from the tax- man. After all, I didn't want anybody getting into trouble. I just slipped them in on my round next day. It was easy! But the problem was that it left a big pile of all this other stuff. Cellophane wrapped catalogues selling footwear and night-attire. White envelopes with advertising from the banks. People were hardly going to miss that sort of thing were they? While trying to decide what to do, I put them into a bin liner and shoved it under the bed.

It should be time for a break soon. Mr. Howard has been quite sympathetic about my back. Not like that bastard back at the Depot. I'll swear that when he knew it was playing up again, he put me on a new round on purpose. A big estate with lots of dead ends you couldn't turn the van in. I was having to carry everything on foot. It was then I really noticed the weight of the catalogues. Some houses had half a dozen delivered every day! What was the point? What benefit was this to my customers? Despite the anti-depressants, I was starting to feel depressed. It all needed a re-think. One wet morning, I decided to pop home for a cup of tea. Put my feet up, watch Trisha. She was good at solving problems. I did intend going out later to finish the round, but I must have dozed off. When I came to, it was time to get back to the Depot to clock off. I looked at my bag and wondered what Trisha would do. Anyway, I came up with my own solution and put it all with the first lot, under the bed.

After that, it became a bit of a habit. The strange thing was, nobody seemed to notice. I thought there would be lots of angry customers ringing in to find out where their mail had got to. But nothing happened. It was then that I realised that I had relieved a lot of people from a burden. They were not worried by the lack of post, but like me, were experiencing a kind of a release.

My yellow plastic sack is nearly full now. I can see a few of the other chaps standing about having a cigarette. Sometimes I wonder what they did to end up here like me. Abducted a child perhaps, or robbed a bank. Though some do boast, its one of the unwritten rules not to talk about it, 'specially not in front of Mr. Howard. For my part, I came to look upon my misdemeanour as a form of social service. I was always scrupulous about anything that had to be signed for. And I never kept anything back for my own gain. That went in my favour. And I always kept a look out for anything that looked personal. But that came to be my undoing.

I had noticed there was a woman in Elsinor Avenue, number 34, (you'll have guessed,) who often seemed to be waiting at her front door. She was nice and friendly, always smiled and said good morning. Even offered me a cup of tea once. I recall we had a nice chat about the weather. Some of the others would have thought it was a bit of a come-on, but she wasn't that type. She would be calling to the children to hurry up, or they'd be late for school. They were well-mannered kids too, not like those teenagers at the bus stop who used to shout out Postman Jack at me. But I didn't care for the husband. He never gave me a second glance as he drove off in his old grey Vauxhall. One day I realised I hadn't seen the car or the husband for quite a while. Something had happened. The children had started squabbling amongst themselves, and whenever I saw her, Mrs Smith just looked sad. She never offered me another cup of tea. I wondered whether she was waiting for a letter then one day I saw one addressed to her, handwritten, with a Derbyshire postmark. Curiosity got the better of me. Mr. Smith had written to say that he wasn't coming back, said he had met somebody else, and would send some money when he could. .

I tore it up. I couldn't let her read that, could I? Then I thought, what if I wrote a few words to her myself. It didn't take me long. I told her that I had gone away to find work, and that I would send for her and the children soon. As an afterthought, I put in a ten- pound note. Then I drove to Oxford, and posted it.

Here comes Mr. Howard again giving out more yellow sacks. I think he likes me. Well, I always do go that extra mile. I don't know whether there is a Mrs. Howard at home. Sometimes he looks as if he'd enjoy a good chat, but he stays professional. Some of the lads here can hardly string a sentence together.

“How many more hours have you got with us, then Jack?”

“About two hundred and forty, Mr. Howard.”

“Better get going then Jack, slowing down won't make them go any faster.”

“No, Mr. Howard.”

See what I mean?

I kept looking out for more letters from Mr. Smith, but none came. This seemed very careless of him. I started to worry about her, and the kiddies. Sometimes I used to walk down Elsinor and have a peep through the window. I went over in the evenings too, just to see whether the Vauxhall had reappeared. I couldn't forget about that poor lady waiting for a letter telling her all about their new life together. It was surely time to write to her again.

Dear Evaline,

How I am missing you and your warm kisses. Tell the children I am longing to see them too. How is little Angel getting on at school. And what about my Big Boy? Does he still want to be a footballer when he grows up? Tell them I love them and we'll all be together again soon. From your loving husband, Tom xxx. (P.S. I shall be able to afford a new car soon.) This time I enclosed a twenty-pound note. I suppose you could say I was becoming over-involved.

My back wasn't getting any better, and I began to look forward to my mornings at home with Trisha. What with my daily visits to Elsinor I found myself getting exhausted. My back was playing up too. Stress they call it today. The pile of

mail in my bedroom was getting so big, I had to start putting the overflow in the bath. One day, I took a pile to the tip. I tell you, it was a relief to see it go.

One weekend, I was walking past no 34, and saw Evaline in the garden. I waved and said hello, but she didn't reply. In fact, she seemed to turn away and hurry indoors. After what I'd been doing to help, I felt a bit snubbed. I decided the time had come to try to explain things, to let her know that she had somebody on her side. I went and knocked on her front door. She opened it a crack and I asked her how she was and told her not to worry. I said I thought Mr. Smith would be home soon. But she just shut the door. It was after that visit, I learned she had called the Police.

They found over 100 sackfuls of undelivered post. Even to me, that came as a bit of a shock. Because of my previous good record, and poor health, I was sentenced to 400 hours of Service to the Community. That's how I come to be spending my days on the roadside, picking up litter. It's not too bad. It's been a revelation to me how much rubbish there is on our streets. I feel I am doing my bit for society.

I know I shall never see her again, but sometimes, on a fresh bright morning, I think of Evaline. She is smiling as she once used to smile at me, and the children are singing some jingle they've learned off the telly. The air is sweet as we join hands together, and walk towards the park.

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