

What the Cleaner saw

Ethel surveyed the messy room. 'I bet people don't live like this at home she mused. Her name wasn't Ethel but because she was the cleaning lady and someone had said it in jest (she hoped) it had stuck

As she went about her job she was given to muttering to herself. ' Well there wasn't anyone else to moan to.'

She emptied the shredder which was full and then turned her attention to the paper in the bin thinking to herself 'why did they have to use the bin when they had a shredder '.

Without paying much attention she pulled out the few pages and went to stuff them in the black plastic sack, when she noticed in bold letters across the top of the paper HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL. FOR THE ADDRESSEE ONLY. Whereas normally she would not have been the least interested, the fact that it was a telegram made her look again.

It read 'Planning agreed - sale to go ahead. NOT A WORD TO ANYONE '. What's that all about she wondered and was prompted to look over the rest of papers that came out of the bin.

It transpired that the Planning referred to her own house. But not only hers, also those of neighbours on either side of her and a whole row over the road. The whole area was to become a redevelopment/improvement project and they knew nothing about it. How had this happened?

She started to panic but calmed down enough to work out that what was needed was a meeting with everyone involved. Thinking ahead, she thought about a possible venue. That could be the local scouts hut at the end of their road. This might also be affected.

It occurred to her that the next time she was at work she could photocopy a number of handwritten notes and put them through letter boxes on her way home. She found paper in the printer and hurriedly put the essential detail down on paper and put them in the copier. When they were ready, she hid them in the black plastic sack.

But oh no! She had spent so long on this that she only had 10 minutes left before the office staff started to arrive.

She cleaned like she'd never cleaned before and managed to return the office to a passably acceptable state. She would have to deal with it if anyone complained.

On her way home she posted as many notices as she could through her neighbours' letterboxes and rang the scout leader to arrange the hut hire. During this particular conversation she ascertained that they also knew nothing of these proposed plans.

Later that day as the group assembled, Ethel realised she had no idea how to run a meeting but had the forethought to bring along a small bell to try and keep order.

Promptly at 8.00 she rang the bell and silence fell. Ethel told the assembled company what she had stumbled upon. There was uproar and it took her about 10 minutes to calm everyone enough to get them to speak one by one.

A story emerged of whispers and innuendos which spoke of bribes and secrecy, money changing hands and contracts being granted without the required consultation process.

By 10.30, an action plan of sorts was beginning to form. Those at the meeting with contacts either on the Council, working for the local authority or in contact with the builders and contractors had promised to find out (in secret of course) all they could and they would meet again next week to decide what to do going forward. The most important decision to come out of the meeting was the need to confirm that this unfolding disaster was really true.

As Ethel locked up the scout hut she was rather pleased that things had gone so well. Perhaps she wasn't quite as thick as both she and everyone else thought she was.

TO BE CONTINUED.....

Gill Howes