

## SAGA 91 – The Final Instalment

E'Benn was lost. He had set out on a journey to find his lost red jumper, and now somewhere in Wales with the mist clamping down, and only a packet of sheep-dip flavoured crisps to sustain him, he waited for the dawn of Christmas day.

Enticed by the smell of E'Benn's peep-toed silicon wellies, two sheep sought his company, and snuggled up to him, glad of his manly warmth.

Pe must have dozed because suddenly he was awake, or so it seemed. It was Christmas at York Road. He saw the work-weary faces of another time, another place. Was that him, years ago, before he had been dubbed E'Benn the Bold.' Known then as Tiny Tone, he was crouched over a pile of three'penny bits. They had sold their birth right that year - their tea-break - for a few pennies to carry them through Christmas. Times was hard. in those days. Even Nigel Mansell was poor.

It was the Workhouse at Marsden Green. The memories came flooding back. It was here that the revolution had begun. He saw the plotters in a tiny room.

"But we must have overtime," said. Trevor Gearless. "I must have milk in my Ovalteen, just once for Christmas."

"And me," said Colin Widymouth. "Wrigglesby says that if I work over Christmas, I shall get time and five sixteenths and a chance to see Father Christmas. And, and, I should get enough that week." He looked around proudly at his friends. "To pay income tax!" There was a burst of applause.

"What's income tax?" Tiny Tone had been so innocent in those days

"It's what the posh people pay," said Doddy Bod from the D.O. "It's not for the working classes.

"I'm posh," said Tiny Tone. "I've got a new jumper." And so he had. Red and fitting like a glove; the sleeves were just long enough for wiping your nose, and keeping your hands warm on a cold winter's night. But he had little else to give him pleasure. Even being in charge of sparrow droppings had lost its edge of late.

"There will be no overtime ever again," said. Doddy Bod. "Tassman Wily Shields has banned. it in the interests of worker's solidarity and conserving bicycle lamp batteries." "Ding-a-ling," said Ballcock thoughtfully, knowing now that he would never be able to have a new bicycle pump. Out of such sacrifices tame great victories.

Doddy Bod, Ballcock and Tiny Tone went to tell the gaffers the had news.

The office was huge, the carpet was so thick that Tiny Tone walking against the pile, stumbled as he approached the desk. This symbol of capitalist oppression was so high that Doddy and Ballcock could only just see over the top, while Tiny Tone even standing on Ballcock's bicycle lamp could see nothing.

"What is it?" The voice of Wrigglesby boomed out, and Tiny Tone almost fainted with fear.

"There will be no overtime worked this Christmas day," said Doddy falteringly.

"No overtime." roared Wrigglesby. "When I have pleaded with Queens Street to spend nineteen and sixpence to make you comfortable on Christmas day. Paper plates, so that you may eat your sandwiches in some style, have already been purchased. A half bottle of pickled onions is at your disposal. I shall personally denote a bottle of my wife's carrot and beeswax wine."

Ballcock faced with such generosity was close to tears. This man was human after all. If you cut him would he not leak paraffin? If you left him in the rain would he not rust?

"But do you lads not want to give your wives and children a proper Christmas? They would only have to wait to February this year." interjected the voice of-reason. It was Barnyard, pretender to the throne, man of the people. He was a word-smith of some repute. "The festive board groaning with a joint of roasted Spam. Mulled nettle beer simmering in the washtub. A new liberty bodice for the wife, and camphor locket for the little ones."

"There will be no overtime," repeated Doddy in a voice now choking with raw emotion. "We are under orders."

"Just a little bit," whispered Tiny Tone. The thought of giving a new liberty bodice to his beloved had undermined him totally.

Ballcock kicked away the bicycle lamp and Tiny Tone fell in a crumpled heap; his head sticking firmly in the carpet pile.

It was lunchtime before the meeting ended, with nothing resolved. Ballcock and his two companions had nothing left to offer.

The lads in Protocamp were eating their re-cycled potato pies, kindly warmed by Mighty Mo, who being foreign and easily chilled, lived in the only working oven, and rented it out for warming purposes at lunchtime. They were close to revolting - even closer than normal - at the prospect of another bleak Christmas.

Dick Witterington spoke first.

"Even when I was in minesweepers during the Napoleonic wars we always had a bit of money for Christmas. Enough for a tot of rum, a surprise for the wife." Tedious Ted raised an eyebrow at this risqué remark; but then a sailor's life had always been a hard one.

"I'd like a cream cake," said Tony Eatall. "I've not had a cream cake since last Thursday week." As you can tell gentle reader, times were hard indeed.

The scene faded. Had Christmas past really been as hard as that? Had his red jumper ever been that new? E'Benn saw dimly through the mist, the years passing, scenes of yesteryear floating by, the ups and downs, the good and bad. Snatching defeat from the jaws of success. Sometimes just doing it right, or just in time.

Tiny Tone became E'Benn the Bold. The coming of Jill Slatcher. A glimpse of those pretty toes had turned hard-man E'Benn to jelly. The advent of Beck-and-Call (battery not included).

And Captain Bligh (why had he been Boot-ed. out?). The move to Porky Road, and the workers reigning supreme.

"Welcome to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Porky Road." blared the loudspeaker. "Because it's a nice day, there will be two members' meetings on the car park. The first at ten thirty, directly after tea-break to discuss the purpose and objectives of the afternoon meeting, which will start at two and finish at four thirty. Deckchairs will be provided and refreshments served."

"You were saying?" inquired Ballcock looking at his watch. "We have so little time for these meetings nowadays." They were sat in Wigglesby's spartan office, the lino on the floor striking cold through the soles of their company supplied safety slippers. The huge rosewood desk had gone, and the plush carpet sold to have Munster Dodge's bolt chromium plated. A being of his magnitude could not be seen with a common mild steel bolt through his neck, or so it had been said.

Wigglesby nodded, smiling through clenched teeth.

"I just wondered if we could slip in a bit of work between these members' meetings."

"Well it is getting increasingly difficult," said E'Benn. "Since the last pay settlement so many decisions are having to be made by the workforce under section 101, clause 4 of the agreement. Determining the ideal chip took us three days, and we now have to decide about the fish. The positioning of the JOC's new bouncy castle is now before a sub-committee of twenty nine representatives. And next week we must decide on the position of Wiseperson's underpants. Will he still be allowed to wear them on his head?"

"It's the safety aspect which is causing us most concern," said Wigglesby. "How does he see through them?"

"They are of the finest Chinese silk. A present from Dung Pong himself."

"He can see big objects," said Grunt Pud. "And people tend to avoid him if they can."

"The Lab are working on a high frequency sound system whereby he can ping as well as pong," said Plantoid sitting in a plant pot, long ago discarded by Bill and Ben.

"We are thinking of increasing the number of sub-contractors." interjected Wigglesby with some apprehension. "With myself and all the other managers working on the benches, we are still not meeting targets," he said apologetically.

"Are you all doing the maximum overtime allowable under the Herospace interim Protocol signed last month?" Ballcock inquired sternly.

Wigglesby nodded.

"Then I suggest you cut out tea breaks and subject yourself to time and motion study. Managerial meetings must be eliminated. Meetings are not productive," said E'Benn. "Everything must be cut back. Nothing superfluous. Look at my jumper. The ideal garment. Seventeen years and never been washed. Think of the soap powder that's been saved, the water. This is what conservation is all about. I have received the Friends of the Earth Green Bravery Award for wearing it. My jumper has been designated a sight of Special Scientific Interest. It is the European equivalent of the rain forest. A repository of long lost flora and fauna that one day may be needed by mankind."

Ballcock yawned, he had heard it all before.

"They ought to stuff it and put it in a glass case," said Wiseperson.

"This jumper is a living thing," said E'Benn. "Not some inert object to be cast aside in a museum. Take a closer look." He leaned over towards Wiseperson, who turned white and fell off his chair, damaging his sequined Toreador pants, this time beyond repair. Was it vanity that had made him discard his Marks and Sparks underpants for this Spanish frippery? But one could never hope to understand what motivates the true superbeing.

E'Benn sighed. There would be many casualties in the fight to save the earth. Someone, some day, would have to close the greenhouse door.

The scene faded. as the mist grew thicker, but still memories crowded in upon E'Benn the Bold. The going of Munster Kodge, friend of all the world. Tears flowed that day like week old concrete. The departure of Wigglesby, who managed for a while to keep returning, thanks to a long length of knicker elastic, but even that eventually broke - but then the best knicker elastic has it's ups and down (I couldn't resist that!). And Beck and Call finally making it through the door. And E'Benn, that opponent of the market place, the Arthur Daly of the left, finally deciding to go, a harbinger perhaps of what was to happen in Eastern Europe; or so the Times had said in its editorial.

The mists cleared and it was Christmas 1991, and Porky Road was a delight. Santa's Workshop was in full swing. There was a new Father Christmas. Uncle David was even

better. Looking slightly over the top in red cloak and dolphin friendly fishnet stockings he was the centre of attention as he strode amongst his little Overtweenies.

"Chip Butties are on the house this year," he announced proudly. "Bobby Davus is preparing them in his Full Authority Digitally Engineered Chippery at this very moment." There was a gasp of well rehearsed appreciation. Elfin faced Bobby Davus had a way with chips. Had he not worked in the States for McDonalds or was it McDonnell Douglas. No one would ever know, now that he was performing under a security blanket. His past, like his presence, would remain a mystery to all concerned.

And then in a blaze of glory, E'Benn saw the meaning of it all. What the struggle, the sacrifices, had all been about. The creation of CET. CHIP EATING TRAINING. Like potty training, but concerned with ins rather than outs. With its offshoots like; More Effective Management of Chip Eating. The Teeline method of eating chips at tea break - a lost art until resurrected by Ballcock and Talky.

A tear slipped gracefully down E'Benn's carefully sculptured cheek, as he remembered the time when had been a world authority on the chip, and had stood alone against the medical profession, and Sister Liz, in defending that last bastion of the British way of life. The celestial chip. He had finally been vindicated (without anaesthetic) and could now live happily ever after.

He thrust the sheep aside, and stood up. Whistling the Lucas Pensioners song - making it up as he went along - he walked confidently into the dawn. It would be a festive Christmas indeed. Roasted hedgehog for lunch, and a bottle of elderberry wine. All was well with the world.

Will Wiseperson get permission to wear his underpants on his head? Or will Brussel's bureaucracy triumph again?

Do we need a Lucas Pensioner's song? Replies on the back of a five pound note please, to Uncle E'Benn, c/o The Welsh Office. Do not - I repeat - do not send them to Wiseperson.

This is the End – Finale - of the York Rd Street Sagas!!