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McTavish Building, 10:14 a.m., Tuesday

Moira and Christine stood up in Neibert's Fine Coffees Shop in the basement of the McTavish building. "I haven't slept for two nights," said Moira. "It must be the phase of the moon." At the same time, for they were all on coffee break from their jobs at the Agency, Brian reflected, "I wake up at three a.m. and can't get back to sleep. I'm depressed. I must be depressed."

The McTavish building is a square cube with rows and rows of tiny square windows. It squats on the Ottawa River and houses the Agency at Arms Length. On the terrace and walkway facing the river, dozens of smokers scatter as the Agency's General Director stalks through on her way to the taxi stand. Her work day began at 4:30 that morning and by morning coffee break she was already convinced that no-one else in the world put in a real day's work. By seven thirty she had failed to connect with eleven people in the Eastern Time Zone. Now she was in a full-blown rage having found her secretary out of the office. She had ordered the commissionaire to get her a taxi. "Red Line O.K.?" asked the official through a slight buzz. "I'll clear this crowd of smokers out," she thought. "They look like hookers."

On the twelfth floor of the McTavish building, Julie was working on the 5-page report required for the weekly meeting on Wednesday. She had been unable to find a previous version in her computer although she vaguely felt that she had typed this information before. Actually, there were eight versions of the report there but she began to type it again, incorporating those minor editorial improvements which arise through the mindless retyping of the same document. Not surprisingly, her thoughts were not on the Logical Framework Analysis for project viability, but rather on the Agency Early Retirement package.

Brian, the deputy to the Assistant Financial Director, had recently given up Tai Chi but taken up Kai Gung. He practiced in the window office which his long standing at the Agency had made his due. Not having received any recent direction from his director, but considering it not to be ethical to do private work on government time, Brian stood in his office, the curtains drawn and the lights off, and perfected his monkey stance.

Other work proceeded in the Agency, although virtually everyone was aware that in the next few weeks a new budget might well bring major cuts. Lunch hours had been extended to two and three hours and telephone lines jammed as rumour and speculation were shared.

The twelve-member Air Quality and Occupational Health Committee was doing its weekly tour of the building and had issued three notices to administrators whose coffee was too close to their computer keyboards. At the

present rate it would take eleven months to complete their initial survey of occupational hazards in the Agency. This did not count the three-month secondments for training for all members of the committee.

Simon had just decided to accept the early retirement package that the Agency had offered all long-standing employees. Neither Brian nor Julie would qualify for this package, for their jobs and experience had been classified as essential to the on-going work of the Agency. Simon, the Director of Human Resources, and the person who had drafted the package, found that he qualified and that the package met most of his requirements. He put the final touches to a memo he was writing and made a call to arrange lunch with the administrator who would buy the contracted clerical services which Simon intended to sell to the government during his retirement. His memo assured the Planning Director that the Agency did not have 300 contract employees in addition to its full time complement of 300 positions. The memo avoided saying that the Agency did indeed have 300 contractors but since by definition contractors were not employees, these were not counted.

Shirley, the Deputy Director General in charge of Operations, had just completed an extremely unpleasant interview with Rodney and his union steward. Rodney had been running a catalog business from his government office using the government telecommunications network. Or this is what had appeared to be the case when a supervisor had had to access his files while he

was on computer training. His filing cabinets contained no files -- which was not surprising in an area of the government notorious for lack of corporate memory and paper trail -- but were overflowing with *ExtraLife Naturelix*. This, according to the catalogs for the *ExtraLife Longevity Programme* which were also in the files, was a botanical blend of more than 20 exotic herbs and fruit juice to be tried for over 50 disorders including Acne, Attention Deficit, Chronic Fatigue and High Blood Pressure. Confronted with the evidence, Rodney had expressed vociferous outrage, which had been echoed by his union steward. "Surely, Shirley," lectured Rodney, "the policy of the government was to ease the transition of public servants into the private sector." He had read it in the *Globe* that very morning. The meeting had lasted over an hour, with Rodney frequently speaking so loudly that the noise was heard in the corridor. Shirley resented the yelling but really wished the problem had not come to light and that she didn't have to try to solve it. Actually, she didn't, for after shouting his ultimate fury, Rodney slammed her office door and immediately fell down dead in the hall.

Alastair, the Director of Transitional Funding, put the final touches on the plan which had emerged from his weekly meeting. This plan addressed the intention of the government substantially to reduce the Agency Funding envelope and anticipated a five-year transition period, to ensure, well, an orderly transition to a reduced budget in the sixth fiscal year. At the same time, he

granted Brian's formal request to be put on a special project according to which he would tour the country gathering input about the new down-sized role of the Agency in relation to the fishery. His job in the financial analysis section would be done for the next two years by a contract employee. Alastair was popular with the ten front-line managers who worked for him, and if he had not spoken to Brian recently, he still felt that he gave the scope to his employees to pursue worthwhile projects in which they were interested. He was rather pleased with himself for his inspired secondment of Dieter to a prominent Non Governmental Organization, where Dieter's habit of writing speeches about Kirkegaard and Nitezsche might not be quite the liability they seemed in the financial arena. Alastair's superiors were happy with the performance of his section, for he had placed every one of his ten staff in outside projects and had replaced them all, ad interim, of course, with seven contract employees who actually were interested to do the work of his section and who did not need to be trained to operate computers.

Malcolm, the Director of Planning, suddenly understood why his data system was producing confusing and disturbing information. According to his most recent analysis, none of the full-time employees of the Agency was actually doing the jobs for which they had been hired. All three hundred people seemed to be seconded, acting or working on special projects that were clearly beyond the Agency's mandate.

Malcolm had an *Ah Hah!* experience -- something he had learned about at a seminar for focus-group facilitation in Toronto. The problem, he now saw, was not that people were not doing their jobs, it was that the information was being reported incorrectly. The bottleneck was that the language that people were using to describe their activities was too ambiguous. Malcolm seized his Bartlett's and, armed with the quotations he had found there -- *In the beginning was the Word,* *Every word a principle,* and *"Ill deeds doubled by evil words,"* -- he took the fire stairs to the roof where he would have the solitude required to start the development of a new language for data entry. The new language would be clear since it would be devoid of any associations with words people already knew. First he would identify the words and then, arbitrarily, assign meanings. "Neffulunk" came immediately to mind.

Meanwhile, at Neibert's Fine Coffees Shop in the basement of the McTavish building, Moira and Christine had just finished their coffee break. As Neibert, the proprietor, moved to pick up their mugs and clear away the crumbs from their muffins, he reflected how much tastier the coffee and muffins had become and how much better his sales since he had started adding a little MSG to his brew.

-- Rudi Aksim

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