

The Aspect Xmas Diary

Firstly, we're sorry to report that Louise has had to leave us due to ill health. Despite not being here very long, she's managed to leave a considerable void (& no, not just with her baking - we're not that shallow). We wish her well. (To those of you who wondered if I was semi-retired since I wasn't answering the phone during that period - what? You think I'm that rich, or just that old?) We are going through another recruitment process as we write, but it hasn't been without its hiccups. (Seriously, who applies to an ICT company & says that they began a number of IT courses at college but didn't complete any of them due to a lack of interest? I swear, we'd write a book on The Joys of Recruitment except we wouldn't make it past the intro page).

Now, if eeeeeuuuuwwww! suggests a full body shudder, then good. That's the effect we're looking for here We somehow managed to transport a spider kindergarten into the office in mid-Sept, probably inside a supplier delivery or a box from the van. Anyway, by morning, 100's of little babies had constructed their own personal Eden Project on the filing cabinets & were scaling the web dome & bungee jumping off the sides. If we've portrayed this as being in any way cute, may we remind you eeeeeuuuuwwww!

And now it's time for a bit of audience participation. (Oh no it isn't! Oh yes it is!) So anyway, we'd always thought that appearing in the newsletter was equivalent to being posted to a wall of shame, as you generally had to do something incredibly stupid to feature. Nobody in their right mind wants to be mentioned, surely? Well, ya'd think. But step forward one of our supplier account managers, who asked could he please, please be mentioned? So here are the criteria again: stupid or not in their right mind. Well James is far from stupid, but he's also about as far from being in his right mind as it's possible to be whilst still inhabiting the same head. Hey, congrats Mr Parkinson, you have merited a mention! (Now remember the deal: if you get a mention, you don't sing Ohhh, did we not mention that part of the deal?)

Reading the Chronicles of George (see Helpdesk of Horror) reminds us of a Service Desk admin we worked with briefly, many moons ago, who was responsible for the following prize specimen of a ticket. It read, in its entirety: "[client] has moved house. It is beeping."

Had a letter from our ISP in Oct advising us the activation date for our broadband would be 3 Mar 2016. It was too.

The implementation date for the new General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) is fast approaching, as you probably know (it's everywhere you turn these days) & besides the stipulations on handling & storing personal info, businesses are also obliged to make sure they don't send people anything they don't want to receive. (NB. Do not get in touch to say you'd prefer not to get invoices from us. It will not go well for you). We do send out this newsletter, of course, & equally, whenever anyone's asked us not to, we've also stopped sending it. (Yes, it's rare. Generally, people are more interested in whether they can still get it post-retirement. The answer's yes). But if you don't want to receive it anymore, please do let us know & we'll stop immediately, no questions asked.

And there we must sign off for another year. As ever, we'll leave it to our Xmas penguin to raise a glass (or in his case, a shovel) to the New Year.



The Last Laugh



The Aspect Newsletter Issue 37 - Christmas 2017



And what's wrong with that, pray? Look, the three wise men had camels, right? Therefore we have a camel-coloured Christmas newsletter. Live with it.

Welcome one and all to this festive edition of the newsletter where, by tradition, we stretch the already tenuous links to IT and Telecoms to breaking point. We promised last year that we'd have a more techie fairy tale this time around and have therefore composed *Numberella and the Charming Prints*. (And if it's still not techie enough for you, wait till you see next year's) If nothing else, the story should provide you with some colourful phrases to toss out at parties over the festive season. As always, and for a limited time only, all the Christmas tales have been collected on the website, including the current year's effort.

It being the last newsletter of 2017, we'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your custom in the last year - we wouldn't be here without you and we never let ourselves forget it. So from all of us to all of you:- have a wonderful Christmas and remember, if you find yourselves having a particularly prosperous New Year, there's nobody we'd rather you share it with than us ☺

What's inside

Pointless Sites The joys of virtual bubble-wrap	2
Web woes When what your website mostly says about you is that you can't spell...	2
Thinking inside the Box Sharing your data securely	3
Hunt the email Where to look when it refuses to arrive	6

Regular Features	
ABC FAQs	2
Vassilly's Xmas Blog	3
The Aspect Christmas Story:	4
<i>Numberella and the Charming Prints</i>	5
Helpdesk of Horror	6
Quiz page : <i>Guess how old the Meerkats are!</i>	7
Aspect Xmas Diary	8
The Last Laugh	8

Merry Christmas!

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Aspect BC FAQs

I've just come back from holiday and my computer password doesn't seem to be working.

Before we go assuming it was changed in your absence, let's first check the username shown on the screen. Is it actually yours? If someone else used your machine while you were away, it's probably still showing their username, and your password won't work with their username. Click on the 'Switch User' button and put your own username in. Try your password now?

We do find that people rarely look at the login name on their PC, so if you want an immediate in-your-face reminder that you are logging in as you, why not change your Account picture? If you right-click on the desktop and choose Personalize, there's an option to Change your Account Picture. They offer a bunch of standard ones, but you can also Browse to your own photos and pick something.

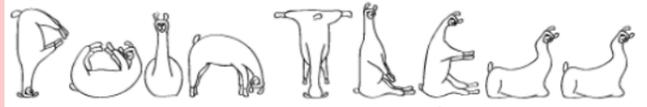


So for example, I use our cat as my Account Picture and I know if it's not him on the screen when I'm trying to login in, I'm not logging in as me.

Pointless Web Sites

In previous incarnations of the newsletter, we used to regularly feature some Pointless Sites. Pointless Sites are the internet equivalent of a film where you watch the credits roll at the end, and think "what the heck was that actually about?" From sheets of bubble-wrap that you can pop *ad nauseum*, through collections of random objects that look like Darth Vader, to cartoon horses that sing a-capella, Pointless Sites runs the gamut of the weird, the inexplicable and yes, the downright pointless.

For example, here's Llamafont, which spells words and phrases of your choice using, yup, you guessed it, llamas. The word choice here was 'Pointless'....



It turns out the collection is still going strong:- www.pointlessites.com

Do not be tempted to look while you're in work. For one thing, your company web browsing policies might block it (there's no offensive content but you still might not be able to get at it). But the main reason to avoid it during work time is because you'll get nothing else done. Ever.

The ABC of web design?

We've been 'cleaning' mailing lists since the last issue, which involved a lot of cross-checking of information against company websites. And it's begged the following question:-

Your website is your shopfront to the world, yes? So why do you let it sit there full of errors?

And we're not just talking an odd typo buried in the text. Oh dear no. We've seen 18-point bright red titles of "Commerical Heating" and 24-point, in-your-face, "Mult-Site Management". (We did Google 'Commerical Heating' in case we were pointing a clear and embarrassing finger at the above offender - nope, there's 445,000-odd other people out there who can't spell Commercial either. And more than half a million who can't spell Multi-Site).

Or how about this? (We've redacted some of the details to spare embarrassment again). Their street address is number 2, certainly. But what's with all the other 2's? Did someone say to the web designer "yeah, we'd like to line the address up on the '2'" so he did a perfect column of 2's? However it ended up like this, why hasn't someone noticed and fixed it?!

Contact Us

2 Street
2 Industrial estate
2
2Bridgend

We've also seen links that don't work, or go to blank pages, menu options still marked 'Test'... , even a page that clearly ought to have been full of photos, but instead just had a bunch of grey boxes as placeholders with their sizes marked on them in millimetres. Come on, your website is supposed to show prospective customers the kind of company you are. Do you really want it to say you're the kind of company that doesn't care?

We'd urge you to give your website a proper look sometime soon to be sure it's giving out the right message about your business. To be clear, we don't really do web design now, so we've nothing to gain here, though we are seriously tempted sometimes to offer a proof-reading service.

The Helpdesk of HORROR

Let it be the season of goodwill to users! Let us instead revisit The Chronicles of George, whom we last checked in with back in Aurora days. George is (or rather was - his questionable skills eventually being dispensed with) a genuine support technician, responsible for raising the worst tickets in the history of the world. NB. The following are not extracts - in each case, it constitutes the entire ticket.... NB(2). No, he's never heard of 'having'.



[...] would like to have access for her laptop login access multi user acces for that laptop and

It didn't make sense before it stopped dead.

[...] phone is has dailtone it is dead.

So-oooo, dead? Or not dead?

[...] called and said that his computer is not working at all.

Look, you can have perfect grammar or you can have diagnostics - you choose.

[...] is havening problems with her mouse,she says is movening really weird stuff

Havening and movening? Yeah, weird.

[...] is havening problems with a url popping up as his home page

Another one that needs to be filed under "things functioning as they're supposed to".

[...] phone is complete dead, i made check if it was plugged in correctly.

And? Was it? The suspense is killing me.

she is getting error message that say undeliverable messages,her hole area cannot send external emails

There ... Are ... No ... Words ...

everytime she is on the phone and somebody else calls they get a busy signal

To be clear, you think this is a fault?

[...] would like for [...] and [...] to have access to an excel sheet on a on a certain drive

I'll just guess which sheet and which drive, shall I?

[...] called and said that the fax machine on the 4th floor ,the one closer to her .

OK, well this is good. We know precisely which fax machine we're talking about. Now why are we talking about it, exactly?

[...] said she use to have a orgasmic keyboard and would like to know if she could have it back. The one she has know hurts her to bad.

Well hell, who wouldn't want it back?

[...] called he is recieving is not to turn on his machine

Ah ... ? No, forget it. Not got a clue.

[...] says havening problems with his sound coming out of speakers.

As opposed to where?

[...] is havening problems printing certain pages in Microsoft.

No, no, it's fine, really. I'll just guess which ones again.

[...] called and said that it is not printing and the power is not on.

Going out on a limb here, but how about if we try turning the power on?

[...] is havening problems with her mouse ,she said just won't work

More exemplary fault-finding.



We'd love to hear your comments and feedback. Just email:

newsletter@aspectbc.co.uk

(Recent issues are on the website if you missed them).

Pleeeeee release me, let me go

If you're expecting an email and it's not arriving, remember that if you use our Mail Protection service, you can check your quarantine at any time - you don't have to wait for the Digest Report to come through, nor do you really need to ring us and ask us to check. Just go to:

<https://mailprotection.aspectbc.co.uk>

... and login with your full email address and your password (NB. This password is not the same one as for your computer or email. If you're not sure what yours is, we can advise). Once logged in, go to **View Quarantine** from the left hand menu. If you spot the message you're waiting for, you can release it. As we've mentioned before, you can also safely read emails here if they've appeared in your Digest and you're not sure if they're genuine or not.

Just to remind you though, if a particular email is struggling to reach you, you need to bear in mind that a **Word attachment** will automatically cause the email to be side-lined by Mail Protection.



Is online file sharing secure?

With the GDPR deadline approaching, it's a valid question. And if you're in an industry governed by FSA (Financial Services Authority) regulations, then you're under more obligations than the rest of us when it comes to the security of your data. Obviously it all has to stay under lock and key, but what if you want to lock it in the Cloud?

You need encryption, of course, but we think it's best if you're in charge of choosing the encryption key, rather than the storage provider.

So we've found a possible solution. It offers centralised security controls, customer-managed encryption and it's compliant with HIPAA, FINRA SEC 17a-4, PCI and more. It's simply called **Box**.

If you'd like to know more about Box and its pricing, give us a call.

Vassilly's Xmas Blog

Grrrr!!! Is bad enough that Payrolls lady is find Santa suit *again*. But she is bring mirror and snap photo when I am catch sight of reflection. This, loyal fans, is face of 'kat transfixed with horror.

Tues 5 Sept

Today, Telecomms Boss Man is bring me on job to pizza restaurant. Mmmmm... piiiizzzaaaaaa.... But we are go early-early when is quiet and is no cookings ☹️☹️ I am squeeze behind washing machine in kitchen to fix cable and I am do bang-up spanking job. I am crawl out and someone is scream "RAT!!!" I am look but I am not see rat. Spoon is hit me in head. A-ha. Obviously rat is behind me so I am move out of way. I am get hit with egg! And then fork! Peoples, I am try to help find rat but kitchen people's aim is horrible! Everywhere I am go, I am get hit! In the end, I am run out and go sit in van. Pffff! They can find rat without me.



Thurs 14 Sept

Telecommms Boss Man say we are go on scenic job today, with nice views of water. Hmmm. Why is Spidey senses tingle.....?



OK, so here is photo and arrow is showing where I am. You are maybe hear that picture is paint a thousand words, yes? No, loyal fans. This picture is paint just one word:-

Aaaaaaaarrrrrrrrggggggghhhhhhh!!!!!!

Am I have my Weetybixes this morning? Yes. Am I expect to see them again soon? Yes.

Wed 27 Sept

Telecommms Boss Man is bring dog to Aspects. Gus is very playful pup and is full of excites to be meeting meerkats. He is so full of excites, he is chase us eight times round office and is sniff me in areas I am not being sniffed in since I am wear nappy. Is exhausting. And also is not dignified. So now when he is scamper in to play, we is stand very still till he is trot out again. Is like *Toy Story*.

Mon 9 Oct

Never fear, loyal fans, I am back! What are you mean you are not notice I am gone?! I am groan in sick-bed for week!! I am tell Aspects colleagues I am need special nice foods for to be recovering strength. Hint: Welsh cakes is good building-up foods. But Sergei is bring soup he say mother is make when he is a pup. (I think is same batch. Is *nasty*).

Wed 11 Oct

Payrolls lady is book Aspects Xmas party. I am not being allowed to go for *two years* now (hunh, you are mop up dinner leftovers and suddenly is international incident. Look, everyone is know that old ladies is not eat much so I am think she is finished, OK? Plus I am cross tables of five other companies to grab plate and not bump single glass, and am I get credit for fancy footworks? No, I am not). Anyways, I am look at Payrolls lady with big liquid eyes and winning smile what I am practice.... Yes!!!! Paw pump!! Look out Bridgend peoples! Vassilly is *ba-a-aaack!!!!*

Fri 13 Oct

Big bad luck day. Payrolls lady is always say I am disaster, so I say maybe is best if I am have day off, just in case? But she say no. She say she is have three meerkats on payroll - her luck is already in toilet.

Mon 16 Oct

Sun is turn red and darkness is fall at ten in morning. Some peoples is say is ~~apocalypse~~ ~~apoplex~~ ~~acropolis~~ some peoples is say is Doomsday, but no, is big wind called Ophelia.

Mon 30 Oct

For many year now, I am mean to ask - what is clock change thingamabob? We are lose hour, we are gain hour ... I am not understand. So this year, I am ask Payrolls lady. She say is simples: "spring forward, fall back". Nuh-unh. I am tell her how I am fall many time. I am trip over steps, cables, sometimes own paws, but always I am fall on face. Also, now I am think about it, I am never spring forward. I am spring up, yes, for examples from chair when I am smell Kit-Kat, but forward? No. I am explain all this, but Payrolls lady is give me look which is say "why are you still in front of me?" so this is big cue to leave. But I am sure she is mumble "spring up, fall on face" so maybe is catch on?

Wed 15 Nov

I am spring up many time this week. We are have Kit-Kat! Normal Kit-Kat, orange Kit-Kat, funny coffee Kit-Kat (IT Boss Man say is terrible thing to do to Kit-Kat. I am agree. Payrolls lady is like them, but she is also drink hot water with nothing in it. Weird).

Fri 24 Nov

Black Friday. Is day when peoples is get full of excites about big sales and bargains. IT Boss Man is away at Bike Show. Payrolls lady say two things is better not be connected.

Fri 1 Dec

Here I am at end of page and is only 1st Dec! I am tell Payrolls lady I am needing more space. She say I am free to go look for it somewhere else, but I am tell her I am never dream of leaving Aspects. She say is strange; she is dream of it all the time.

Merry Chrismassabobs loyal fans!

Vassilly's Christmas Quizzamabob

As mentioned in the last edition, this quiz is all about guessing the ages of our meerkats. Owing to the publication of a less-than-flattering Christmas photo of Vassilly in this issue which has caused him to threaten strike action (like we'd notice the difference), we've decided to let him handle the running of the quiz, in the vain hopes of some Peace on Earth. Over to you, Vassilly

Christmas Greetings, loyal fans!! Payrolls lady is put me in charge of Quizzamabobs, since (a) is all about meerkats and (b) she is try to make up for scary Blog photo. (Is not enough, peoples. Not by many long chalks. Are you *see* photo!?) Anyways, so here is clues about when I am being whelped (and also Sergei and Bogdan, but they is not important. I am Number One). I am give you big films from year, also songs which is in Hit Paradings, and some other clues about news-making things.

See if you can work out how old I am being this year. I am think is going to be big surprise because I am being blessed with youthful fur and bouncy whiskers. And if you is bored, you can make guessings for Sergei and Bogdan too.

Answers is on website, if you is follow link on page of newsletters. Is no prizes though. (Well is no prizes *now*. Payrolls lady is give me boxes of chocolamabobs for safe-keepings.... Ha! Maybe she is whelped yesterday!!) Oh, and do not be cheating with Googles, peoples. At least make *little* guessings.



Big films: Top Gun
Crocodile Dundee

(I am tell Sergei is Crocodile Tondu. He is give River Ogmore wide berth now).

Big hits: West End Girls
Manic Monday

Big news: Chernobyl disaster
Iran-Contra affair

Goodbye: Cary Grant
James Cagney

(ohhhh, I am like his films... "You is dirty rat!!")



Big films: Shane
Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

Big hits: That's Amoré (when moon is hit eye like big pizza pie)
How Much is that Doggy in the Window?
(this is joke, yes? No? *Really??*)

Big news: Eisenhower becomes US President
Korean War ends

Goodbye: Joseph Stalin
Dylan Thomas

(oooh, he is write Under Milk Wood, about place called Llareggub ... snh-snh-snh .. If you are read backwards, is spell OK, Payrolls lady is point out is not important... and probably circulation is come back to paw soon).



Big films: Notting Hill
The Matrix (is good film. Many leather jacket)

Big hits: Livin' la Vida Loca
Baby One More Time

Big news: Yeltsin resigns as Russian President
Euro introduced

(they is not let Meerkoovo join Eurozone. They say we is grasp economics like weasel is grasp veganism)

Goodbye: Dusty Springfield
Quentin Crisp



Numberella and the Charming Prints

A Modern Day Fairytale

"Ooooooh, look at you, working through lunch! Someone's angling for a promotion!" Ella smiled thinly and looked up into the sneering faces of her colleagues Grizelda and Drusilla.

"No," she said evenly, "I just want to finish this before I take a break."

"Good," snapped Drusilla, "because if anyone's getting a promotion around here, it's going to be me!"

"Or me," Grizelda elbowed her, and they pushed and shoved each other for a minute.

"A-n-y-w-a-y," purred Drusilla, "I know you won't mind doing a *leeeetle* bit of data entry for me..." whereupon she dumped a stack of folders a foot high on Ella's desk ... "because I've got an appointment at the beautician at four and I absolutely *can't* miss it if I'm to look my best for the office party tonight..." she paused to scowl at Grizelda who was mumbling about a silk purse and a sow's ear... "...and these have to be done today."

Ella opened the topmost folder. "But ... these are dated last week!" she exclaimed in dismay.

"Oh my. Are they really? I must have overlooked them. Be a dear and update them for me? Toodles." Drusilla sent her a lazy finger wave and tottered out arm in arm with Grizelda.

Ella sighed. There was at least six hours' work here. And if she didn't do it, she knew Drusilla would find a way to make her take the blame. *Again*. It looked like she wouldn't be going to the party after all. And she'd really wanted to, because the business had recently been taken under new management and they were supposed to formally meet their new owners tonight. Oh well. She set the first folder next to her keyboard and turned the page ...

"Well I declare! What in the *world* are you still doin' here, child?"

Ella bolted awake and skidded sideways in her chair, which tipped and deposited her on the carpet. She blinked up at the woman who stood by her desk.

"Who are you? How did you get in?" she babbled.

The woman waved a bejewelled hand dismissively and continued in an accent Ella hadn't heard since she'd last watched Scarlett O'Hara pout her way round Atlanta.

"Oh my stars, child. I go wherever I want." She picked up a cardboard sign from Ella's desk and held it distastefully between finger and thumb.

"*Numberella*? Well bless you, what is that s'posed to mean?"

Ella sighed and, from long practice, recited in a sing-song voice. "My name's Ella

and I work long hours in a poky cubicle plugging numbers into a computer, hence ... Numberella. It's meant to be a joke."

"Well I think it's just mean," said the woman, depositing the sign firmly in the bin. Ella didn't have the heart to tell her she was wasting her time. Over the years, she'd tried everything. Binned it, burned it, shredded it. It always came back.

"*You*," said the woman, poking Ella in the shoulder with a long, thin stick, "are s'posed to be gettin' ready for a party. But child, you look plumb tuckered out."

Ella hauled herself tiredly to her feet and waved a hand at the pile of folders she still hadn't even touched.

"I still have all this work to do, so I'm going to have to give it a miss. And why do you care anyway?"

The woman drew herself up to her full height (about four foot six) and responded indignantly, "Why? *Why*? Lands' sakes child, I'm your fairy godmother! It's my *job*!! I'm Loretta, by the way." (She pronounced it Low-retta). She glared at the pile of folders for a moment, then waved the stick at them. There was a tinkling sound, and they vanished. She turned back to Ella and beamed at her triumphantly.

"There! All taken care of. *You shall go to the party!!*"

"They're all on the spreadsheets? *All* of them?" Ella was amazed.

"What's a spreadsheet?" Loretta asked brightly. "I just sent 'em all for filin'." She looked Ella up and down with a frown. "Now, we really need to fix y'all up, child, because I am truly sorry to say it, but you look like ten miles of bad road."

Ella collapsed into her chair and put her head in her hands.

"Can you bring them all back *out* of the files, please?"

"Now why in the world would I want to do that?"

"Because they're not ready for filing!" snapped Ella. "I still have to put all the data into spreadsheets."

"What's a spreadsheet?" repeated Loretta.

"*Aaaargh!!* I have to read everything in those files and type all the numbers into the computer!" Ella wanted to weep.

"Well pooh! That don't sound like any way to spend a Friday night," declared Loretta. She tapped her lower lip with the wand for a second and then threw her arms up and waved the wand as though conducting an orchestra. The drawers in the filing cabinets flew open, folders burst out of them and flapped through the air. There was a chorus of *Ba-bing! Ba-bing!!* as all the PCs in the office booted up, and a couple of folders swooped in to land gracefully by each keyboard. Excel loaded up on all the

screens, and pencils jumped up to start hitting the keys, while the papers in the folders stood to attention for them.

Ella only realised her jaw had dropped open when Loretta gently closed it with the tip of the wand.

"Don't want to be catchin' flies, child. Well I reckon we can leave these boys to get on with things, don't you?"

Ella nodded dumbly.

"Then let's get this show on the road! I'll need four white mice! Come now, quickly!" Loretta clapped her hands.

Ella looked around the office dubiously. "Uhhh, I think they're all black."

"*Black* mice? Really? Oh my," Loretta pursed her lips, "well, I s'pose they'll have to do. Fetch me four."

"Does it matter if they're USB or wireless?"

"Pardon?"

"The mice. USB or wireless? We've got both." Ella held up a wireless mouse. "See?"

Loretta looked blankly at the mouse. "What in the world is that?"

"It's a mouse."

"Oh it is *not*," laughed Loretta, giving Ella a playful tap with the wand.

"Yes," said Ella emphatically. "It *is*." Loretta switched tack.

"Well but ... but I need *bibbidi-bobbidi-boo* mice," she explained, as if that clarified anything.

"Bibbydee bobbydee ...*boo*?" Loretta rolled her eyes.

"Lord love you, child! Don't they teach you *anythin*?" Punctuating each word with a prod from her wand, Loretta trilled:

" ♪ *Salagadoola, mechicka boola, bibbidi-bobbidi-boo ... ♪ put 'em together and what have you go-o-oo-ot ♪ ?*" She looked at Ella expectantly.

"Are you drunk?"

Loretta sighed loudly.

"You've got *bibbidi-bobbidi-boo*! Mercy, I thought my last godchild was a trial, and Lord knows that boy was so dumb, he could throw hisself on the ground and miss, but you are somethin' else, child." She threw up her hands in despair. "How'm I s'posed to rustle up a coach and horses now?"

"Well since the party is *upstairs*," said Ella peevishly, "I thought I'd walk."

Loretta smacked her with the wand.

"Do not be takin' that tone with me, child. I'm already busier'n a one-legged cat in a sandbox, and I can do without your snark." She took a deep breath. "All right, fine, we'll skip the coach and horses, but" and here Loretta pinned Ella with a glare, "we are *not* givin' up on the frock!"

She waved her wand and a tinkling noise surrounded Ella. Looking down, she saw she was now clad in a beautiful deep purple gown. It was absolutely perfect, except ...

"It's a bit on the long side," she said, hitching it up uncertainly.

"Well that's on account of y'all're wearin' those butt-ugly flat shoes. Y'all need heels." Loretta waved the wand towards Ella's feet, but nothing happened. She frowned, smacked it against her hip a couple of times and waved it again. Nothing.

"Well don't that just beat all? Darn thing's empty! Musta been settin' up all that spreadsheetin'." She flopped into Ella's chair and sighed. "No coach, no horses, no *shoes* ...? I declare, I know this story oughtta be Grimm, but it is just plain *ruined*."

Ella lifted the hem of her beautiful dress again and examined her mud- and grass-stained trainers. She *could* go barefoot, except it was cold, plus she'd trip over her hem all night. But if you didn't have magic, what did you have? Oh.

"Well we could always Oh but I don't know," Ella mumbled, "... it's really against the rules ... ummm.. but it'd probably work ..."

"Lord have mercy, you are slower than molasses. Spit it out, child."

"We have a 3D printer."

Loretta was still looking at her expectantly, so Ella tried to explain.

"It'll print anything. In three dimensions." Still a blank look. "We could print off some shoes for me."

Loretta's eyes nearly bugged out of her head.

"Y'all can print *shoes*?! Well butter my butt and call me a biscuit! Lead the way!!"

The 3D printer room was so completely out of bounds, Ella was amazed when she tried the door and it swung right open. It made more sense when she realised all the materials had been locked away in the store cupboard in the corner. There was nothing to print with. Or was there? Ella found a solitary box that had been left on a shelf, and lifted it down. The lid said "Transparent Resin". But that would mean...

"It's not going to work," she sighed.

"Well why ever not?" demanded Loretta. She tapped the box. "What's wrong with this?"

"It's transparent resin."

"Yes, child, I've been able to read since I was three, thank you. What's the problem?"

"Anything it prints will be transparent too. I'll have see-through shoes!"

Loretta brightened. "Well finally! I was despairin' of *anythin*' goin' right in this sorry mess of a tale." She clapped her hands. "Time's a wastin'. Let's get this thing fired up."

"3D printing takes a while, you know."

"Well now and why would I know that? Can't you make it print any quicker?"

"Only if I don't care that my half-baked shoes will disintegrate by midnight!"

Loretta's grin got wider. "Child, we are on a roll!!"

An hour later, Ella stared down at her feet, now encased in clear plastic shoes.

"Well aren't those just *darlin*'?!" declared Loretta. "They have got to be the most charmin' prints I have .. ever.. seen....." She frowned. There was something not quite right about that sentence but she couldn't put her finger on it... She shrugged.

"They pinch a bit," grumbled Ella.

"Oh now quit your whinin', child, and let's get y'all gussied up."

After fifteen minutes of largely unwanted attention, Ella was declared "fetchin'" and Loretta ran through the final instructions again.

"Now you make sure you hitch up those skirts 'n' skedaddle by midnight, y'hear?"

"Before my shoes dissolve, yes, I know." Ella shifted uncomfortably in her 3D shoes. There had better be some seating at this party, or her blisters would have blisters.

Loretta watched her fidgeting and blew out an exasperated breath.

"Yes, well, the *plan* was s'posed to be that you'd lose a shoe and then our hero would scour the *entire* town to find the one person that the shoe fits."

"But they *don't* fit!" wailed Ella.

"Just as well they're fixin' to fall apart, then, isn't it?" replied Loretta tartly.

Three hours later, with the spreadsheets all updated, the computers shut down and everything blessedly quiet, Loretta was resting in Ella's chair with her wand on charge when she heard voices.

"I mean, did you see her?" snarled the first voice. "When did she have time to get all dressed up?"

"And hogging the boss all to herself!" snapped the second voice. "'*Oooh, I have this idea and I have that idea, ooooh, aren't I brilliant?*' The nerve of her!!"

"Ha! Let's see how much he likes her when *her terminal* screws up all the company data!" They giggled as they approached Ella's desk.

Loretta twirled around in the chair to face them. Drusilla pulled up short and Grizelda crashed into her.

"Who are you? How did you get in?" snapped Drusilla.

"Oh honey, that's gettin' kinda old." Loretta looked from Drusilla to Grizelda and shuddered. "Bless your hearts, when you fell outta the ugly tree, you musta hit every branch on the way down."

"What do you mean?" growled Grizelda.

Loretta hopped out of the chair and looked up at her. She shook her head.

"Mercy, if I'd a dog looked like you, I'd shave its butt and make it walk backwards."

"Well!" declared Grizelda. "I have never been so insulted in all my life!"

"Aww honey, you need to try gettin' out more."

"I'm calling security!" said Drusilla.

"You run along and do that, but just 'fore you do ..." Loretta picked up her wand and pressed the white button on the end. It made a noise like "*sqwizzlesqwutsweeeeeeek*". She pressed it again and held it up.

"... *see how much he likes her when her terminal screws up all the company data!*"

Drusilla and Grizelda exchanged an anxious glance.

"We were only joking, of course," said Drusilla quickly.

"Uh-huh, and I s'pose that's why're you lookin' as nervous as a pair'a long-tail cats in a roomful of rockin' chairs?"

"Well... well, I mean, I can see how it might be misunderstood. By anyone who didn't know we were joking, that is."

"Mmm. Like security," mused Loretta. "Or your new boss, maybe." At that moment, her wand alarm went *beep!-beep!-beep!-beep!* It was midnight. Oh well, things to do, stories to tidy up.

She raised the wand and sketched a circle above Drusilla and Grizelda. "You two are 'bout as much use as a cat-flap in a

canoe, but I guess you got a right to earn a livin', so I'm fixin' to make you forget all about tonight. But there'll be no more mean tricks, and no more mean words. You hearin' me?" Drusilla nodded. Grizelda just stared. "Now I'm bettin' neither of you could carry a tune s'posin' you had a bucket with a lid on it, but you are goin' back upstairs right now and you are gonna karaoke your li'l hearts out, y'hear? Now get along, shoo!"

They tottered away in a fog of confusion. A few minutes later, Ella appeared, to be roundly scolded by Loretta.

"Well what in the world were you doin', child?!" She saw that the purple gown was once again trailing on the floor. "You were s'posed to leave 'fore they fell apart!"

"I know, I know, but I was talking to Mr Buttons about cloud storage and"

"Excuse me?"

"Cloud storage. It's where you store your data on remote servers and ..."

"Oh hush, child, I'm not talkin' 'bout that. Just *what* did you say his name was?"

"Buttons. Lloyd Buttons."

Loretta's hands flew to her cheeks. "*No-ooooo!*" she moaned. "You can't end up with *Buttons!* That's not how it's s'posed to go at *all!*"

Ella looked indignant. "Excuse me, I have no intention of 'ending up' with Mr Buttons, thank you very much. I just work for him."

Loretta wrung her hands. "No, no, no, *no!* You can't work for Buttons either."

"Beats working for peanuts," mumbled Ella.

"I declare, this story has just gone to hell in a handbasket." Loretta's lower lip quivered.

"You got no proper mice, we can't do the shoe-fittin' thing, you're hookin' up with *Buttons*, for cryin' out sideways... " She collapsed into a chair and tossed the wand on Ella's desk. "Stick a fork in me, I'm done."

Ella patted her shoulder. "It's not so bad."

"Not so *bad*?" Loretta sniffled. "How in tarnation am I s'posed to get a happy-ever-after outta this mess?"

"Well I'm getting a promotion," Ella pointed out. "And most of my blisters have gone down again. Grizelda and Drusilla smiled at me on the stairs just now, which I admit is scaring me a bit, but I'm pretty happy, all things considered."

"Well aren't you precious, tryin' to make me feel better." Loretta blew her nose. "But I guess a promotion *is* good, isn't it?"

"It's everything I wanted," smiled Ella.

"So-ooo... we could sing the *Bibbidi-bobbidi-boo* song together now?"

"No thank you."

"Oh... *Zippity-doo-dah* maybe?" Loretta picked up her wand again and twirled it.

"No ..." Several sharp little points dug into Ella's skin and she closed her eyes against the urge to look. "*Tell* me that's not a bluebird on my shoulder."

"We-e-ell"

"Get. It. *Off!*"

"Oh now don't go fright'nin' him, child... oh ... oh mywell, I'm sure that'll wash right out..."

The End

