

Carl the Worker

Frederick M. Zimmerman

Carl came from Sweden in nineteen thirty three
as a worker making chairs in the land of the free.
The shop grew and prospered until it became
the best known of any, the most recognized name.
Through the thirties, the firm survived
while others, less capable, stumbled and died.

During the fifties, chairs grew in demand
as more people sat and few liked to stand.
The sixties provided an increasing trend
in lawyers and bankers and officials no end.
All of these people needed chairs for their labor,
chairs for themselves and their visiting neighbor.

The chairs grew in size and in comfort and price.
The industry got bigger. The profits were nice.
At the time, Carl wondered if all this was good.
People weren't working the way that they should.
During the seventies, it seemed even more fitting
for people to work by conversing and sitting.
Though more chairs were sold, some costs were imposed
through regulations and taxes and lawsuits composed
to draw funds from producers and workers alike
so the sitters could experience a lifestyle hike.

And the government officials came to implore
more inspections and forms and reports galore.
And before the sawdust was put in the trash,
it had to be separated between pine, oak and ash.
Taxes went higher and went through the roof,
while government officials became more aloof.
Carl's workers were working and doing a good job
but they were losing ground to the rest of the mob.

Taxes rose even further to build more schools
to train people for sitting instead of using tools.
It was explained to Carl that it was his obligation
to fund activities and pay for litigation
and for race tracks and shopping malls and other endeavors
while his own costs kept rising, forever and ever.
Meanwhile, foreign producers, unburdened by torts
sent more and more goods streaming through U.S. ports.

The banker noted with some indignation
that company income was far short of inflation.
He said that without a strong profit trend,
the bank could no longer continue to lend.
Consultants came by and began to entreat
that the company could no longer compete.
It's outdated, they said. It isn't strategic.
No acquisitions, no mergers. It's truly anemic.

So the chair plant was sold to a firm from New York
financed by the state, a new form of pork.
Carl soon died and his sins he confessed
to St. Peter who listened and thoughtfully assessed.
"That ain't too bad," Peter said with a smile.
"But, go down and shovel coal for a while."
So down to purgatory Carl descended
"A short sentence," Peter said. "It soon will be ended."

But, he wasn't there long when Peter intruded.
"Carl!" he said, "You've been re--routed.
Your going back to earth. They need you there now.
The place is in chaos. They do not know how
to sharpen the drills or to lay out the job,
to set up the Bridgeport or turn the right knob.
They can't read a print and the grinding isn't right.
They can't use a gantry with all of their might.
Welding and painting are way beyond their scope.
Everyone just stands around like a dope.

The chairs ordered for the church picnic are late
We must hurry. It's important. A very big date.
The bishop has made an appeal to upstairs
for you to return and to finish these chairs.
So drop your shovel and leave with great speed.
It's urgent. It's crucial. We have a great need."

"How can I?" Carl said. "I can't leave my post."
"Forget it." said Peter. "You'll go back as a ghost."
So up from purgatory and back to earth
came Carl the worker as in a new birth.

The plant was closed when Carl walked in,
deserted, neglected, a truly great sin.
But Carl knew just how to proceed
and he began working which he did with great speed.
The chairs for the picnic were delivered on time.
The bishop was happy, the parishioners sublime.

But, Peter had forgotten that Carl was gone
and Carl kept working on and on and on.
The factory prospered again, of course,
a one--man performance, or really one ghost.

It was awkward, at first, because it wouldn't be right
for a ghost to be selling, especially at night.
But, the chairs were so good and the service so true,
people called in their orders and picked them up too.
Business was booming with much lower expenses,
no bankers, no consultants, a much improved census.
The firm, by itself, still prospers today,
with very few bureaucrats getting in the way.
The enforcement people cannot say desist
to someone who officially doesn't exist.
The cashflow is good with such low overhead.
When taxes are due, he just says that he's dead.

What this story shows is what we all know.
It's not the workers, its the rest of the show.
We have some good people but we get in their way.
We harass them and burden them and make them all pay.
We keep our best companies on the brink of despair,
but competing in the world is a family affair.
And, if we could learn that we must all work together
to improve our situation, we could make it better.
If services and overhead could be made more efficient,
American producers are surely sufficient.

Frederick M. Zimmerman, January 8, 1992