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## Addiction

by Marion Umney

With her it was shoes. Emelda Markoff would have been her heroine if she had known who Emelda Markoff was. She wandered around shoe shops touching them, stroking them, trying them on her feet – turning this way and that in front of the mirror, sometimes dismissing them entirely, but more often slipping into an imaginary world where she could, would wear such shoes. A world where she would be beautiful, admired; where people would say “Where did you get those shoes?” and she would reply with a smile, “They’re fun aren’t they.” Where she would be known as ‘that really stylish woman who wears such fabulous shoes.’

There was a shop in Brighton that sold the most amazing, colourful shoes, Minnie Mouse shoes, shoes with painted block heels, shoes with ribbons and bows. This was an Aladdin’s cave for her, and she was drawn to it as to a magnet. She rarely bought the shoes. They were expensive and with a sigh she would drag herself back to reality, stare down at her feet, shod in more affordable foot apparel and, with a sigh, replace the shoes on the shelf and force herself out of the door, back into the bustle of the North Lanes.

Then the pandemic hit, and she had to stay home. She was fine for a while, there was no-one to meet after all, no lost opportunity to shine. Like the rest of the population she wandered around the house in her sleep wear, or whatever came to hand; slippers on her feet, or occasionally a pair of beaten up trainers if she did what the Government recommended and went for a walk. The shoe shops were closed, but she found herself still drawn to stare through the windows at the stock slowly gathering dust in the windows or on the shelves inside.

Then she discovered the internet. It’s not that she didn’t use the internet for other things, but for shoe shopping it had never had the allure of the real thing.

Now she discovered she could buy shoes online, then send them back. She could actually have these beautiful things in her house, wear them, not just for a few minutes in the shop but for hours, days, before repacking them lovingly and returning them with a sigh.

It was the red shoes, which started the fall. The red shoes were just wonderful. They fitted like a glove, and they made her feel like a princess. She walked taller, she glided round the house, she felt so beautiful. The deadline for returning them just somehow came and went. Then it was the blue and green suede boots. They were so unusual and looked fabulous with her green skirt, she was sure she'd get use out of them once they could all go out again. Trainers were next. Her old trainers were wearing out after all that walking and there were some beautiful gold trainers with red stripes. She had to have them, and they too would get used so there was no need to send them back, was there? And so it went on.

She had stopped looking at the prices a long time ago. She had some money from the Government and once this was all over, she'd really pull the stops out on the business. She'd soon get it cleared. She'd stop now anyway. She had enough shoes. It had just been a bit of fun and she deserved a few nice things, didn't she?

She could tell herself she wasn't going to turn the laptop on, she wasn't going to look, she certainly wasn't going to buy, but somehow she always did. She told herself she'd send them back and occasionally she did, but mostly she didn't. She had an extra cupboard built for all her shoes and even she knew this was too much, but she couldn't stop until...

She lost the house of course. She couldn't pay the mortgage and they repossessed it. she was lucky. Her parents bailed her out, gave her a home, paid for therapy, encouraged her to sell the shoes. None of them knew that years later she would have the most successful online shoe business in the world and would be voted business woman of the year, or that in her acceptance speech she would thank lockdown madness, therapy and the most supportive parents in the world for her success.