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## Secret Santa

by Marion Umney

He'd gone viral and wasn't at all sure how to take it. Selfridges were after him, the police were after him but his children hailed him as a hero and so did the rest of the world, or so it seemed.

It all started with that stupid job. Acting is a pretty precarious career at the best of times and in these strange pandemic times it had been tough. He hadn't had any real work for almost two years and no government handouts. He'd had the odd voiceover and radio part, and a small part in an open air production in the summer, but the coffers were definitely looking thin so he'd accepted the job. Playing Father Christmas in Selfridges was a doddle, but he understood why they'd employed an actor. All those mothers and their obnoxious brats in their designer clothes and more money than sense. The nannies were better. They at least gave him an apologetic smile as their charges bombarded him with the list of things they were expecting from Santa for Christmas.

Then Omicron had taken a hold and the store slowly emptied. He enjoyed the slower pace, but the management didn't. They laid him off, by email, with instructions to return his "uniform" by Christmas Eve.

As he walked slowly up Oxford Street on Christmas Eve he felt angry and despondent. Shop assistants and restaurant staff stared out at the empty streets from behind the windows of deserted establishments. Their faces showed their anxiety. Several doorways housed the sleeping bags or blankets of the homeless. Were there more than last year? He wasn't sure, but it seemed like it. He turned the corner into the back of the store. A handful of delivery vehicles were parked in the loading bay, some half full, some ready to go, but the yard was deserted.

Looking back he wondered what on earth had possessed him, but at the time it felt as if a jolt of power ran through his body as he noticed the keys in the ignition of the van nearest the exit. Before he could change his mind he was in the cab, had turned the key and the van was heading for the gate. No one noticed. No one tried to stop him as he turned towards the Edgware Road.

As he approached the Mission he pulled off the road and put on the Santa suit. Better to have some disguise he reasoned, just might fool the CCTV.

By the time he arrived at the mission it was getting dark and it was easy to drop off the first couple of hampers without meeting anyone. Next stop the refugee centre; another couple of hampers left quietly by the back door, then the women's refuge and so on. He moved in a circle round the edge of London visiting everywhere he knew would be helping those short of food on Christmas Day, until finally there were no hampers left. Then he abandoned the van with the Santa suit in an alley and headed for the tube. He sat on the central line and wrapped his arms around himself. What had he done? He knew he could go to jail for this, but he didn't care. He felt warm and content for the first time in two years.

When he got home his wife was watching the news.

"Have you seen this?" She asked, and there he was, on TV.

"They're calling this guy 'Secret Santa'. Some are saying it's a goodwill gesture from Selfridges, but others are saying Selfridges' customers are furious because their hampers haven't arrived and it's because the Secret Santa has done a Robin Hood and robbed the rich to feed the poor. Whoever it is he's caught the public's imagination. This clip's gone viral!