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Secret Santa

by Miriam Silver

I've never been good at keeping secrets. I remember the reaction of my parents when they heard, "You're a liar, I don't believe you, I've just posted my list to him, Mum's taken it."

This was my baby brother's pitiful response to me, his big brother's revealing revelations, so I added, "and Dad puts all that stuff in your stocking."

That did it, Mum was furious, "you're horrible," she said, "you've spoilt his Christmas."

"Well you always tell me not to tell lies, there's no such thing as Santa Claus anyway," I threw out for good measure causing more misery and putting myself in the doghouse.

That was all a long time ago, I alienated my family then, which I continued to do throughout my life, in their own peculiar way they were ashamed of my academic achievements.

My brother Giles was good at everything, school, sport and even attracting the girls, much to my envy.

Although he was only six when I told him these truths he never really recovered from my jeers, we didn't have much in common anyway. I always suffered from Dad and Mum's plea,

"Why can't you be more like your brother?" they said, revealing admiration of their youngest's successes.

I was a day-dreamer, I lived in a fictional world I'd created, where I was David Copperfield, overcoming deprivation and hunger, or I was a scientist saving lives by discovering new vaccinations or even finding exotic plants.

It was in the library where I found my escape, there I developed a taste for literature, which made the rift between me and my family even bigger as the parents luxuriated in their youngest's sporting achievements,

“You’ll get bad eyes with all that reading - get out there play football with your brother,” they said, warning me.

In spite of my early self’s inability to keep secrets, I never told my parents that Giles, their blue-eyed boy was in serious debt, complete with bailiffs and had asked me to bale him out. Also that he had promised not to take any more payday loans for the ‘big boys’ who were threatening him. He also told me he was in fear of his life.

Debt to my parents was a real sin, they always preached , ‘only buy, use cash, otherwise save up’. Giles it appeared hadn’t taken any of that to heart seemingly buying a racy car, a house and holidays way beyond an income a salesman provided. He told me too, his girlfriend left him, not wanting anything to do with his troubles. Of course I helped him out.

By this time I was a successful children’s writer making a reasonable living. I never criticised him even at Christmas when the aged parents would always tell me to, ‘get a proper job’ like your brother.’

Until now, that is, as I sat in their house after the funeral, feeling like a trespasser, I knew I never would. Neither would they ever know what a well-known writer I’d become.