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Secret Santa

by Sue Hitchcock

I had never heard of “Secret Santa” before I started work at the Post Office. There were about a hundred people on our floor, so each section was to make its own arrangements.

The six people in our section consisted of four accounts clerks – all women, our boss – a man of course – and a data input clerk, unusually a young man in our section. I was the oldest, but the newest and although we all did the same work, dealing with bill enquiries, we weren’t exactly friends. Because of my pretensions to education, I was scorned, being the least able to get my customers to pay.

To my left sat Leonie, a tiny girl of Portuguese-Indian origins. She was the most organised, sitting at the end of the day with an empty in-tray. She had taught me the job and was highly regarded by everyone. Brenda and Sharon were good friends, though quite different to each other. Sharon had wanted to be a gymnast, but had been dropped from the National squad, when she was found to have a hole in her heart. Brenda was showy and brash, had two children like me, and a new partner.

The men were extraordinary. Mark, the input clerk, sat to my right, the most unlikely person to find in that job, he was handsome, athletic and garrulous. His best trick was to jump onto his desk, both feet together and I think high-jump was the event he wanted to excel in. Lastly I come to the boss. Martin had worked in the Accommodation Department and knew nothing about accounts – and he refused to learn. He was a skiver, but liked to play snooker with the department head, so escaped penalty.

He looked like Leonard Rossiter, but with a sneery, lavatorial sense of humour and it was Leonie he loved to tease best. He would pick bits of dried Tippex off the bottle and place them on the file on her desk, while she was at lunch. On her return he would tell her it was snot. The young Leonie treated him with mature humour, which somehow would provoke his next trick.

So now, with dread, I picked a name out of the box and it was as bad as it could be – Martin. The women would probably have been happy with toiletries or some decorative jewellery. Even Mark would probably like aftershave.

Christmas Eve came, with the office party and the presents were produced. Of course we weren't supposed to know who had chosen them. I received a very nice biro, with a gold coloured case and I assumed it was Leonie's choice. What did I buy for Martin? It should have been a gag to silence him or a calculator, hinting at his responsibilities. I don't remember now, but I suspect it was a half bottle of whiskey.