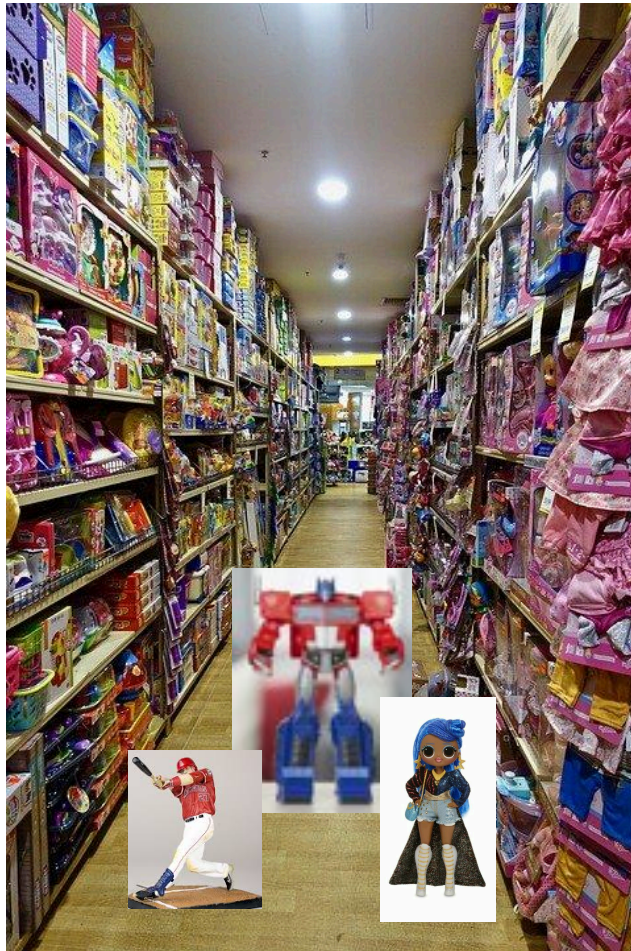


# The Christmas Eve Nightmare

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## The Christmas Eve Nightmare

The snow was piling up outside while I raced to complete my holiday shopping. My cart was only halfway full and a lot of what I was looking for was sold out. "Why do I always wait until the last minute to come to the toy store to do my shopping?" I thought to myself. I still had a lot of items to buy, but I had to go to the bathroom, so I steered my cart to the back of the store. After using the facilities, I washed my hands and splashed some water on my face to refresh myself before going back out into the chaos of the aisles.

The water from the sink splashed all over me, so I had to dry off before I exited the bathroom. I leaned down under the automatic hand dryer to dry my shirt. It seemed like the dryer was the perfect height for an elf, but I had quite a time bending down underneath it. After a while, my shirt was finally dry, so I pushed the door to the lavatory open. I expected to be pummeled by an oncoming cart. I looked out and...nothing. Literally nothing. There were no sounds; there were no people; there were no lights. "How long was I in there?" I asked out loud. The only response I heard was the echo of my own voice.

I grabbed my cart as my heart began to race. I wheeled it to the front of the store. There were no cashiers, no custodians, nobody. I peered out of the front window to the parking lot outside - there was not a car in sight. I ran to the front doors. Not only were they locked, but there was a two-foot snow drift blocking them. I looked closer. There were no footprints in the snow anywhere. All that I saw was six inches of fluffy, undisturbed snow on top of the messy slop from yesterday's storm. I quietly pondered how the employees and shoppers got out of the store without making a single footprint.

It dawned on me that there must be a second exit that the manager told everyone to leave through because of the snowdrift. I looked all around the perimeter of the store. I saw nothing except the employee office. Maybe there is another exit through there? I walked up to the door. It was locked and had a locked deadbolt on it as well. I let my head hit the door as my body began to tremble. My head hit a thumbtack sticking out of the door. It was attached to a

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paper that I hadn't noticed before. It was from the manager to the employees. It read, "Have a great day off and enjoy your holiday. We will be closed on Christmas!"

My heart sank. I thought of my wife and daughters sitting at home around a Christmas tree with no presents under it from me. My body began to tremble as a waterfall of tears poured from my eyes. How could this happen to me? Why is this happening? Where did everyone go? How long was I in that bathroom?

I lay down on the floor curled up in a ball and just let myself cry. I felt a poke in my back. "I must be imagining that," I thought as I continued to cry. I felt it again. "It's just my mind playing tricks on me." And again. And again, and again! Finally, I whirled around expecting to see nothing there. In front of me was a living, breathing, swinging Mike Trout MacFarlane Baseball Action Figure poking me in the back with his bat.

"Hey you" barked Mike Trout, "What's the problem? Can't get back in your box?"

"I don't live in a box," I answered as I grabbed the bat out of his hands so he didn't poke me again. I shoved my hands in my pockets and pouted. "I live at my home and I need to get out of this place!"

"Why? Don't like us? Just wait until I tell the Transformers! Hey guys - This big buffoon wants to get out of here!"

"What? What's his problem? I'm gonna blast him" Optimus Prime and some other Transformers taunted as they climbed out of their boxes.

"I don't want any trouble," I stammered as I rubbed my eyes in disbelief at the toy army that was quickly assembling around me. "All I did was use the hand dryer in the bathroom and before I knew it, I was locked in the store all along."

"You're not alone," giggled some LOL OMG Dolls. "We'll take care of you."

"This is weird," I thought to myself, suddenly feeling very vulnerable. "Look everyone, it's very nice to meet all of you and I'd love to become friends with you all, but" I looked longingly at the front door, "I really want to get home to my wife and daughters tonight so I can spend

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Christmas Eve and Christmas morning with them.”

“You’re married?” one of the LOL OMG dolls commented. “Forget you!” she screamed as she stomped away. “

“What’s with her?” I questioned her friends.

“She likes you,” they responded.

“I gotta get outta here,” I muttered to myself. I called out to the Millville Meteor, “You gotta help me Mike. I need to get back to Middletown so I can be with my family.

“There’s only one way that is going to happen,” Mike Trout whispered. “You are going to have to bring all of us with you.”

“But I have two daughters and most of you” I pointed to the Transformers “are toys for boys. My wife already bought all the toys for my daughters and my nieces and nephews, and we already spent too much on presents. I can’t afford to buy you all!”

“Well then, you’re stuck here through Christmas Day,” announced Mike Trout with what sounded like a lump in his throat. “That’s fine if you don’t want us. We’d rather go home with someone else anyway.”

“And we will get purchased,” commented the Transformers, “Especially when we are 50% off next week.”

“Now wait a minute!” I shouted. “Why is this happening to me? The shelves are pretty bare and you are all here. You weren’t wanted at full price! You won’t be wanted at half price! You are all mean, selfish leftovers! The whole store is 25% off and you’re not wanted! But I am! My family wants me and they need me home. Now, get me out of this store or I will throw you all against the wall and smash you to bits!” I sounded like a 4-year-old in the middle of a tantrum.

“Hey big buffoon, you’d better be nice to us or we won’t tell you how to get out,” lectured Starscream.

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“Look, I’m sorry for yelling. I would love to bring you all home and you’d go great in my own office, but I can’t give you to my daughters, and they already have enough dolls so they don’t need any more.”

The Transformers and the other toys suddenly ran away and huddled up and the end of the aisle. I tried to follow them to listen in, but the jump ropes that were left on the shelves quickly created a rope fence that surrounded me. I couldn’t move anywhere; I was trapped. The Legos from the next aisle came over to my cage.” Let me out!” I pleaded. They didn’t seem to hear me as they began to hop on one another. “What are you doing?” I screamed! They began to form a wall. At first it was little, up to my ankles. But within 5 minutes or so, they were up to my chest, then above my head. “Help! Help” I called. I couldn’t see anything outside of my multicolored plastic prison cell. I looked up. I saw nothing but the drop ceiling and fluorescent lights above.

Suddenly I heard a noise. It sounded like whirring. As it got closer, I could hear the propellers cutting through the air. I looked up again. I saw the Lego City Coast Guard Helicopter circling above. “Grab on!” I heard. I moved to the side as the Lego rope ladder dropped down into my cell. I grabbed it with 2 of my fingers (Lego ladders are pretty small for a grown man’s hand), held on, and prayed. At first, the chopper seemed to lower itself down into the Lego prison, but then began to pull me up over the walls of plastic.

I was lifted out of the Lego cage and flown to a new destination. I stuck out my tongue at the huddle of toys that were looking shocked at my escape. “Pffft!” I gave them a raspberry and wondered what was in store for me next.

The Lego pilot looked out of his window. “When I count to three, let go of the ladder!” he yelled over the sound of the engine. “One, Two...” SMACK! The Lego City Coast Guard Helicopter slammed into the hanging fluorescent lights and smashed into 230 pieces. “Ahhh!” I shrieked as I plummeted down into aisle 12. I landed with an “oof” as I toppled an entire display of Tickle Me Elmo dolls. I wasn’t hurt, but got an immediate headache. All of the

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Elmos were immediately given life and began to surround me with their arms outstretched saying “Tickle Elmo” and “Elmo wants a hug”. I scrambled to my feet and ran as quickly as I could to the next aisle. Big Mistake. Lined up across the aisle with hundreds of tools. Fisher Price Drillin’ Action Tool sets, Black and Decker plastic tools, Just like dad hammers and saws, drills, talking measuring tape, and many others. I knew that there was no way through that aisle without risking serious injury, so I stepped slowly backwards out of the aisle, and peeked into the next one.

This one looked safe, Owleez, Hatchimals, and board games. I tiptoed down the aisle so I didn’t disturb them, and headed for the sporting goods section. I thought that if I could grab a bat or baseball that I could throw it at the front window, break it, and make my escape.

I found the sporting goods section and had a great idea. Goalie pads. I found the hockey section and immediately began grabbing pads off of the shelves, chest protector, glove, blocker, goalie mask, leg pads. I even found some roller blades so I could move more quickly around the store. I wriggled into them, grabbed a hockey stick, and was not ready to battle. I grabbed a 3-pack of hard rubber pucks off the shelf. I skated to the front of the store and ripped open the pack of pucks. I threw them on the ground, one next to the other. I circled around the pucks on my skates as I picked up speed. Then I lifted my stick over my head, brought it down with all my might, and let loose a slap shot that would have shattered any glass in the world. However, with my luck going the way it was going, my shot rang loud off the metal separation between 2 of the windows. “You’ve got to be kidding me!” I shouted, starting to get upset again. I continued to skate around the store to pick up speed. I headed for the second puck which seemed ready to be struck. I lifted the blade behind me to my shoulders and began to bring it down toward the puck. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a red Ferrari headed my way.

“Look out!” he wailed. There was fear in his eyes. I could tell he wasn’t controlling himself. Before I could move, the Ferrari drove between my legs and screeched to a halt in front

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of my skate. As I flew over it into the display of Smart 4K 50" televisions, I saw Mike Trout at the end of the aisle with a remote control in his hands.

"I got him! I got him!" Trout yelled as he jumped around giving the Transformers high-fives. As my body began to light up and spasm from the broken television fireworks show that I was laying on, I swore that one day I would get Mike Trout back.

I put my head back against the floor and closed my eyes. My body was in pain and my skin felt tingly from the sparks shooting out of the 4K LED pile.

I felt a poke in my back. Then another. Then another. "Not again!" I thought as I opened my eyes, There, standing over me, was my wife and my daughters.

"Daddy? Daddy, are you okay?" my older daughter asked. "Why did you fall off that ladder Daddy? What happened? That wasn't a smart thing to do!"

I sat up and looked around, confused. "How did...Where is...Who?" I couldn't get a single sentence out. My wife looked concerned.

"We should take you to a doctor. You took a pretty big shock when you plugged in those lights and knocked out the lights for the neighborhood. Didn't you turn off the circuits in the box before you plugged them in?"

My younger daughter chimed in. "Daddy, who's Mike Trout? You were mumbling about him while you were laying here. And I heard something about LOL OMG Dolls and Transformers and Elmo and Owleez and Hatchimals and a Lego City Helicopter and a 4K 50" Television! Are those things you are getting me for Christmas?"

"Get you for Christmas? Wh-what day is today?" I stammered.

"Um, the day after Thanksgiving, the day you put up the lights every year." my wife replied. "Wow, we really should get you checked out."

"No! It's only November? We have to go shopping! Now! We have to get it done early. Now. This weekend! We can't wait until right before Christmas ever again!"

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"Wait a minute," she replied. "You? You want to go shopping? In person? You must've shocked yourself even more than I thought!"

"No, I'm fine, really. Let's go!" I reached into my pocket to verify that I had my wallet and my keys so we could go. I pulled everything out of my pocket; my wallet, my keys, my cell phone, and...what's this? I looked closely. In the palm of my hand lay a miniature Mike Trout Old Hickory MT27 baseball bat.

"Well, maybe...uh...I should sit down," I said as I rubbed my head and tried to figure it all out.