

The Last Minute Shopper

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Steve's Short Story

Twas the day before Christmas and all throughout the mall, we were last minute shopping all except for, the smart little bastards that finished their bloody shopping weeks ago.

"I'm all done, how about you?" "Did you get your list done?" "I sure am, hate to be in the mall Christmas Eve." Friends and family quotes, followed by a hearty chuckle. Not me, I can't say those lines and not be lying to you. Although, as I stand here, inside the mall, in the extensive long, mind numbing line up, waiting very impatiently as others like me make their purchases, I wish I could.

You'd think I would have learned my lesson last year, and the year before, or the one before that, but I didn't. I must, deep down inside, really hate myself this time of year. And it's not like you can just hand someone a wad of cash in an envelope and say, "Merry Christmas, hope you like your money!" Well, sure, cash would be a fine gift, especially with the way things are now, but I would never hear the end of it, since I've always made a stink about how cheap and thoughtless money and gift cards really are.

But then that got me thinking, "are they?" The person who handed you the money wants you to go out, use that money to buy yourself something nice. Don't go use it on bills, gas or something on that level, go buy yourself that dress you've been eyeing for sometime, or that game you've been wishing you had the cash for. With that perspective, yeah, money and gift cards aren't so bad I guess.

Man, this damn lineup is at a crawl, can't start my frantic shopping without my cup of freshly brewed local coffee now can I. Yes, at this time, I am not shopping for someone; I'm in the middle of satisfying my coffee needs. Don't judge me, if I didn't get this craving calm, I couldn't make complex decisions on what gifts to buy. That's the excuse I'll use if I don't get all the presents today, that, or I'll make up some crazy story that makes me seem like the victim.

"Hmm" I then thought, that's probably why this damn lineup is terribly long and moving slower than a snail. People are buying gift baskets and cards for others. What a thoughtful gift for a coffee lover, then it hit me; I knew what I was going to buy for the coffee lover on my list. No, not for me, come on now, this isn't the time to buy yourself something, at least pretend you bought it for a friend, heck, and make up a name at least, then toss it under the tree and say 'From Santa.' Who can blame that poor old man for making a mistake? Right?

With a thirty minute delay, making sure I had my coffee, I took a leisurely glance at my watch, not bad, it was just coming up to one o'clock, four hours still to go, plenty of time. Now I need to fish out my list and take a look at who I need to buy for and what I figured out previously to get, see, I'm thinking ahead of time. Too bad I didn't think to come earlier and complete the task at hand, that would have been too simple. I set my coffee down, keeping an eye on it still, you can be too risky when it comes to a cup of coffee; some sick bastard might try to nab it because they don't want to devote the time to wait for their own and are jealous because you did.

Alright, a total of eight people minus one now, I bought a twenty dollar gift card and a can of delicious beans to brew at home for them. And that way, when I invite myself over, I'll know they'll have good coffee and not something else.

Things were looking good, until some idiot bumped me, knocked me forward and collided with my hot coffee, good thing it split all over the counter and onto my list, ruining the paper and spreading the ink, and not myself. Wait, neither option was a good thing, now I have no coffee and no list, but at least my clothes were still dry. And with it being as busy as it is, I couldn't find the culprit responsible for the tragic event, so no one to blame, just a good reason to bitch about it.

Distraught, I turned to the lineup, hoping it ahs shrank so I can sneak back in and grab another coffee. Yeah, the size of it must have tripled in the meantime; I can either waste another thirty minutes getting a coffee, or continue on shopping, and without a list, wasn't going to be as easy as I initially thought. I am extremely tired, my mind, elsewhere, a coffee would send much needed caffeine to my bloodstream and give that boost of energy I so desperately desire. I had to weigh the odds now, I was in quite the predicament, if I do not get my caffeine I crave, need, I will surely pass out in one of the excessive lines while I wait to buy said gifts. But, if I decide to stand and linger, drooling at the mouth as those intoxicating fumes enter my nasal passages and cloud my judgment, I will not have the time needed to complete the list, and in the end, what's important?

You thought I was going to say grab a coffee didn't you? I sure showed you, I didn't wait in the line for a coffee, I licked the counter where my spilt and went on my way. Yeah, should have left out that last part, it was cold, after lying there, in a pool of misfortune, but, stopped the craving for the time being.

Mind was spinning, was it the lack of caffeine, or was there some weird disease festering about on that countertop? Whatever it was, it was fogging my memory now, I tried to think, how who was on my list, how many people, I mentally counted in my head, one, two, three and came to the conclusion of seven. I tripled checked, seven didn't sound right, was I overlooking someone, and if I was, who? Seven stood out in my mind and it was in fact a prominent number, known for being lucky, so, with little choice, I went with it.

Time soared by without knowing it, it was coming down to the wire. I guess I wasted time, taking each gift I bought to the car, resting in the underground parking and setting it inside the trunk. I parked down there, with the intentions of dropping of the gifts and going out, during this white-out blizzard, wasn't going to be an option.

Since, deep down I knew seven just didn't seem adequate, I venture back inside the mall, short on time, thinking of a good gift to pick up. A gift suitable for either sex, in case the subject missing was either or, it wasn't my mom, nor girlfriend, I listed off all my buddies names, their girlfriends maybe? Who was I leaving out? Yeah, it flustered me, you know how bad it's going to look when we're all there, enjoying some grub and company and the person who bought you this incredible gift, the best one you received this year, heck, for a while, didn't get one back? You'd feel like a Grinch for sure, especially when you bought yourself something today...

Then it hit me, I was a genius, well, for now. There was a great movie that just came out and was a solid choice for either sex. Perfect, now, just to go now and snag a copy. I went to the closest video store located in the mall, boy, it sure was cramped full of people, also, in search for a great gift. And a bonus, the lineup hadn't grown yet, since people were still searching and not buying. I ran over, weaving in and out of the traffic of bodies to the new release section. Seriously, no copies, some sick twisted game someone must have been creating, a short lineup and no copy of the gift I have to get. Well, onward to the only other video store in the mall, fingers crossed that they didn't sell out by the time I got there.

I scurried down, since running wasn't allowed, and made it there with minutes to spare before closing time. This store was packed, had to squeeze in. Well, they too were out of copies and time was running out. What option did I have, I took a minute to think of a possible solution to the equation presented to me.

Now, I'm not normally this kind of person, but considering the circumstances and time of year, people change. I saw, out of the corner of my eye, this little old lady, slowly searching about, in her hand, the last copy of the movie I want. I peered towards the movie, she didn't need it as much as I did, she's old, she has the great excuse of saying, "Oh my dear, I guess I forgot." Well, I don't have that luxury; I mingled innocently over, with a sinister scheme

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unfolding in my mind. I got up behind her, and gave her a slight bump, just as I moved in, to give her that gentle shove, someone behind me tripped, pushing me forward, into the old lady, knocking her clean over.

Don't I feel sort of responsible, the sweet, nice lady, on her backside and the movie out of her grasp, inches from her fingertips as she tried to figure out what happened. I, not wanting to feel totally bad, stepped to one side, to aid her back to her feet. I bent down, slyly picked the movie up, tucked it away in my pants and helped the woman back up.

"Oh thank you" Her gratitude, not required but a nice thoughtful gesture nonetheless "And you recovered my movie as well, oh dear lord, thank you, my grandson will be more pleased." Now I saw her for the evil fiend she was, she could have left it alone, let me keep it as a reward for helping her back up, but no, this wench wanted her cake and eat it too.

"I'm sorry, you must be mistaken; this copy belongs to me." I retorted with, giving off that innocent tone I practiced in my youth, might have been out of practice, but an acting worthy of an Oscar I must say.

Other random people started with their accusations next, some claiming they didn't see me with the movie, some swear I was ripping the old bird off, but I knew something, they probably knew too, but I was going to use it to my advantage, possession is nine-tenths of the law. "Well, it's in my hands now, shouldn't have set it down." I shrugged and turned to the lineup. A hefty one indeed, roughly ten patrons, all waiting to pay, but with three cashiers working the tills, should go by swiftly.

With my back turned, the old broad made a bold move, I felt a sudden shock hit my body; the electrometric force was too much to bear. Almost instantly paralyzing me, I fell flat and hard to the ground, my grip, weakened and the movie was out of my hand. Twitching still from the shock, the old lady looked me dead in the eyes, retrieved her movie and stated with a wicked grin "What was yours is now mine once again. You cannot fool this old bird, sonny."

I got to lie there as everyone in the lineup, moved out of her way and let her pay. Once she was handed the receipt, proving it was now hers, the sensation of touch came back to me, I was on my feet, and everyone glaring at me was overwhelming, so I left.

Distraught and hands empty, the mall finally closed, I slowly walked through the underground parking, back to my car. How could I go to the party now, a present short, a present I'm still not sure if I am. But could I take that chance, I guess I'll have to.

Then I saw a miracle, that old lady that had my movie was struggling to get into her car. She saw me and asked "Could you please, my keys fell under my car, and I cannot get them, do you mind?" You're damn right I mind, do I look like the type of guy that doesn't? Sure, normally I would be happy to oblige, but really, did this broad not recognize me? Then a light went off in my head, if she doesn't recognize me now, she won't in a few too.

I smiled, sure, it was deviant, I had ulterior motives, but that wasn't her problem at the moment, she needed her keys. I reached under, grabbed them and stood up, dangling them before her.

"Oh thank you kind sir." She reached for her purse and pulled out a Looney, "Here's a dollar for your troubles." Is she serious? A buck, give me that damn movie you pried out of my prone hands.

"No, thank you, no trouble at all, just in the merry mood to help, you understand. Let me help you with those bags, boy do they look heavy."

A kind gentle smile "Oh, well, thank you very much." Sure lady, merry ho, ho, back to you. Upon setting her bags in the trunk, I quickly sifted through and found the movie I needed. So, I tucked it under my shirt and closed the trunk lid, "There you go, happy New Year as well."

“Oh, did you close the trunk, I need to make sure everything’s still there. Nothing rolled away, you know.”

I was hurt “You think I stole something from you, come on now, who would do such a thing, at this time of year?”

“It’s just that some maniac tried to steal something from me earlier, not your fault.”

“I understand, sounds like quite a monster, well; I’m running late, here are your keys.”

“You’re such a nice young man.” That was the last I saw of her, I got back to my car and hopped in, you might be wondering, don’t I feel bad, but I don’t. I worked more for that gift than any other today, so I feel it was justified.

Later I found that, yes, in fact there were eight people on my list, so I was quite thankful to get the last gift, also, the person I was looking over my indeed myself, I was the eighth person on the list and I thoroughly enjoyed the movie, until halfway through and found out it was scratched beyond repair and I couldn’t return it since I did not have a receipt...

THE END