

Dreadful Day Jack

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All Mark wanted for his seventh birthday was a Dark Knight action figure with working action cape. In his mind he could smell the plastic and envisioned the job of painstakingly removing the wires and thread that bound poor Batman to his package. He simply could not wait until his birthday to behold the gift he knew was coming. He knew where his mother hid his unwrapped present and decided that it wouldn't really hurt anything if he took a quick peek at it. He promised himself he wouldn't push the 'try me' button on Batman's foot to hear Batman issue a threat to his imaginary adversary, but Mark knew he would push the 'try me' button. As a matter of fact, he couldn't wait.

The candles had been blown out and the cake and ice cream had been eaten. It wouldn't be long before it was time to open presents. Mark had hardly touched his cake because the sour feeling in his stomach was growing to full blown nausea. He knew what was in that delicately wrapped box with the big red bow and it wasn't Batman. No, it wasn't Batman at all. Mark found himself wishing with all of his soul that Batman was real and would rescue him from that thing in the box.

“Time for presents!”

His mother's jovial decree rang in his head like a gong with a thick heavy sound that reminded Mark of the beginning of the Funeral March, time for presents indeed. Mark surveyed the table and decided to put off the present with the big red bow as long as possible. He chose a shirt box sized present and was not surprised to find Batman under-roos inside. Normally, he would have been embarrassed by the giggle snorts from the rest of the seven year old crowd, but today he didn't care one bit. He continued through the presents taking his time with each of them, prolonging the experience and avoiding the red bow box. Mark hardly noticed that his Dad had brought him a Batman action figure with action cape because Batman was the next to last present.

His mother pushed the box with the big red bow in front him. Mark noticed his mother for the first time and saw she was wearing a lot of makeup. With her arms outstretched and the big Cheshire cat grin, she reminded him of the Joker. Maybe his mother was the Joker. Who else would have put that creature inside of a box with a big red bow? No matter. His time was up. He had to open it and face the monster again.

Mark took the box from his mother and set it in his lap. He thought he was going to throw up or worse, cry. He was studying the box and thinking that if he could get his body to move, he could run. Who knows where he would go, but he could at least run. He snapped out of it when his mother said his name. Now or never he thought and opened the box.

Inside was another box, the jack in the box. Mark reached for it, pulled it out, and sat it on the table. “Don't be silly honey, turn the handle”, his mother said. Silly Mark thought. Obviously she

had not turned the handle before. She didn't know what was in there. Fine. If that what she wants, just fine.

With a new resolve, Mark reached for the handle and slowly started to turn it. The tune the jack in the box played was "Pop Goes the Weasel", but the lyrics Mark heard were

"Don't, don't, da don't, don't DON'T turn the handle"

Everyone else in the room looked on with anticipation, even excitement. Some of the kids were urging Mark to hurry and turn the handle faster. Why didn't they hear it? The warning was so clear. Mark continued to turn the handle, a bit slower now.

"Don't don't da don't.... don't.... DON'T TURN THE HANDLE"

That was two full revolutions. It would pop out anytime now. Would it be the third? Mark took a deep breath, licked his lips, looked at his mother one last time and continued to turn.

"DON'T..... DON'T.... DA DON'T... DON'T.... DON'T TURN THE HAND -----"