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Garage Sale Nightmare

by *Keith Long*

A couple of weeks ago I was bounced out of bed in the middle of the night by my wife, who seemed to be almost hysterically dancing about something.

"Is it a tornado?" I asked, trying to pull my way out of REM.

"No!" Anna replied. "Garage sale."

"Garage sale at 4:45 in the a.m.?" I asked unbelievably. I didn't even know there were two four-forty-fives. The only one I knew came midway through Jeopardy in the afternoon.

"Yes, garage sales. And you promised mom and me that you'd go with us."

"Okay, okay," I said, and felt my way through the night to the upstairs shower.

When I came downstairs, Anna and my mother-in-law, better known to kids as "Mossie," had commandeered the kitchen table and had a newspaper spread out all over. They were poring over it like a couple of generals planning the invasion of Omaha Beach. They had pens, pencils, pointers, and a look of determination that sent a shudder to my knees.

"Here's the plan," Anna said, mostly to Mossie, since I was considered little more than an innocent bystander. "Since the bulk of the action is going to be here (indicating with her pointer the middle of a map of town), we'll flank the action by starting over here."

"Right," Mossie said. "Then we can make a major push towards the northern part of downtown, efficiently blocking out any opposition from the east."

"Good, good," Anna said. "And at mid-morning, when the heat will be at its heaviest, we'll make a frontal attack on this area," she added, pointing towards one of

the up-scale additions in town.

By this time I was intrigued. I thought garage selling was just a matter of getting in and out of a car. "Gee," I said, "it seems to me like that would be the best place to start," pointing to the up-scale area.

"Bad maneuver," Anna said. "There's always good stuff there, but they're too proud of it. Give them three or four good hours of watching people walk away, and then they'll be ready to bargain."

"Yeah," Mossie said. "I once got a brand-new hamster playground and cage for only \$2. And they had started the day asking \$12."

"I didn't know you had a hamster," I said.

"I don't. They give me the creeps."

"Then why did you get the hamster cage?" I asked.

Both women glared at me with disdain in their eyes. "Do you want to go or not?" my wife asked.

I nodded.

"Then quit asking silly questions and making us late."

I wanted to pursue what I considered a perfectly logical line of inquiry, but then the girls were acting a little more illogical than usual, so I let it slide.

"Can I ask one more silly question?" I said, breaking the pre-dawn silence as we got into the car.

"What?" they said in unison.

"Just what exactly are we shopping for?"

"Stuff," my wife said.

"Stuff? What kind of stuff?"

"Stuff stuff. You know—the kind of stuff you need."

"And what might that be?"

"I can't tell you till I see it. I do know I'm looking for a ceramic red squirrel to nail to our tree. Now drive to 1903 Circle Drive."

"But we have real squirrels in our tree."

Both women glared at me through the dark. So I drove and didn't say anything else. As I approached the

residence, I saw a sign that said, "Garage Sale, 8-1 Saturday, no early birds."

"Pull in right there," Mossie said, pointing at a sliver of a space between a Volvo and a Ford Econoline van.

I parked. "That sign said no early birds. It's only 6:45. Maybe we shouldn't get out," I said.

I was too late. Both girls were already in the midst of stuff.

"They meant that for yesterday!" Anna yelled back, and began picking up stuff and moving it. I stood in the early-morning shadows and took mental notes.

Anna and Mossie were studying a table of old washer parts and lawn mower blades when I caught some of their conversation. "We're too late," Mossie said. "all the good stuff's gone."

"I know," Anna said. "I'll go pay for this and then we'll move on."

My wife bought a soap dish, an ice-cream maker crank, two blue bottles, and a pair of TV rabbit ears.

The next stop wasn't so crowded and the girls literally leaped from the car as I drove by.

"Find somewhere to park!" Anna shouted back at me, landing on the curb like a paratrooper.

By the time I got the car parked and had walked up to the garage sale, the girls had separated in order to cover more ground. Anna was at one corner of the stuff, looking at the remains of a stack of car tires. I didn't find Mossie right off, and, indeed, heard her before I saw her. She was buried upside down in a refrigerator box full of clothes. "Mnupppff," Mossie yelled. I called Anna, who grabbed one leg. I grabbed the other and we began pulling Mossie out of the box.

"Not all the way!" she shouted, once she was uncovered enough to be understood. "I can't get to the good stuff!"

We hit 42 garage sales that day, and picked up all kinds of good stuff. I even learned a little and managed to buy an air raft with the stem missing, a leaky Army canteen, 400 yards of nylon rope, a fifty-pound bag of rock salt, and a velvet portrait of Elvis that I thought would match the blue background of our den—all without having to break a dollar.

"Well," I said on the way home, "we never did find a ceramic squirrel, did we?"

"No," the girls said. "But there's always next week."