

# WALMART RETURNS

By Marc P. Valdez

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What’s keeping me positive? I’m positive about many things. We live in interesting times. The future is being set now. My house is like a spaceship, keeping me safe for the future.

Publish this? Sure.

## CHARACTERS

### Those who wear Covid-19 masks correctly

#### Customers

AMY: Mother who bought a kid’s bike, but needs to return it.

GEORGE: Amy’s friend.

GOATEED MAN: Athletic, handsome man.

#### Store Staff

FOUR CLERKS: Clerks 1 and 2 attend to Windows 1 and 2. Clerk 3 substitutes for Clerk 1 when she goes on break. Clerk 4 assists all, as necessary.

LOSS PREVENTION MANAGER

TWO SECURITY GUARDS

### Those who wear various, diverse Covid-19 masks incorrectly or askew – around chin, nose exposed, etc.

## **CHARACTERS (continued)**

### Those who wear Covid-19 masks correctly

#### Customers

ROLLATOR: Stringy long-haired, thin, stooped elderly man with a Rollator Walker.

MOBILITY: Overweight middle-aged man riding a Mobility Scooter with a basket for carrying items.

TWO MUSLIM MOTHERS and their KIDS: Two Muslim women wearing head scarves, with three scampering kids among them.

WOMEN 1, 2, and 3

#### Voices

VOICE OF 1-800-WALMART

DISEMBODIED VOICE

Additional Ensemble members can be added to cross stage and promote crowding as necessary.

#### At start

CLERKS 1 and 2 stationed behind counter; WOMEN 1 and 2 present in front of counter.

#### Order of the people in line:

GOATEED MAN, AMY and GEORGE, MOBILITY, WOMAN 3, MUSICIAN, TWO MUSLIM MOTHERS and their KIDS. Rejoining later, WOMEN 1 and 2, plus MOBILITY.

People standing around aimlessly: ROLLATOR

## **SET**

The Walmart Returns Area set consists of a counter featuring two return stations, Station 1 (Stage Left) and Station 2 (Stage Right). The primary entrance to the counter area is Stage Left. A tall, social-distancing Plexiglas barrier with a small window has been erected in front of each

station, but no one chooses to use them, choosing instead to talk in-between and around the Plexiglas barriers. Free-standing displays containing sale items (e.g., carpet cleaning products, magical expandable hoses, sun shades for cars, etc.) are strategically placed to guide the socially-distanced waiting line. Helpful arrows are placed on the floor to guide traffic (but at least in one case, point towards each other). There is a free-standing display at stage left, partly-blocking the entrance into the Walmart Returns Area.

## PLAY

(Amy and George are now second-in-line, behind a GOATEED MAN. GEORGE is guiding a small kid's bike.)

AMY: This is taking forever! I didn't realize the other two Walmarts wouldn't take returns.

GEORGE: The second Walmart could, but their system was down.

ROLLATOR: (Leaning in and looking at bike) Nice! Training wheels!

AMY: (Replying to George, but smiling at GOATEED MAN) Their system fried just as we got up to the counter. I hope the system here is working.

GOATEED MAN: (Turning around and smiling at Amy) Nice bike. Training wheels! Good for a young kid. What's wrong with the bike?

AMY: Oh, the chain keeps falling off.

GOATEED MAN: Shouldn't be hard to fix. I could do it. I used to bicycle in competitions.

GEORGE: (Frowning) The chain won't stay on. I've tried to fix it. It's hopeless.

GOATEED MAN: (Smile becomes steely.) My friends call me Satan. (Chuckling) All in good fun, of course. Because I always won our bicycle races. Would you like to know how many races I won?

GEORGE: 666?

(Woman 2 exits Stage Left)

CLERK 2: NEXT!

GOATEED MAN: (Portentously, as he departs and glares at George) May you find satisfaction here. [Sound of thunder]

GEORGE: (Sotto voce to Amy) That guy gives me the creeps!

AMY: (now at front of line) My phone is dying! Quick, bring up Walmart.com on your iPhone!

CLERK 1: (Quietly) We are all at the mercy of Walmart.com here.

(Woman 1 exits Stage Left)

GEORGE: (Fumbling with his phone) OK! Here!

CLERK 1: NEXT!

AMY: (To Clerk 1) Is your system working? We've been to two other Walmarts this afternoon. They wouldn't take returns at the first one, and the system crashed at the second one, and....

CLERK 1: (Politely) What are you returning?

AMY: This kid's bike. I brought back the training wheels. I ordered it on line. Here's the confirmation number.... (Starts to hand phone to clerk, and suddenly panicked) It's gone! Crap! George! What's your PIN? (Hands phone to George)

GEORGE: Here.... OK! (Hands back phone)

AMY: (Handing phone to Clerk 1) Here's the confirmation....

CLERK 1: (Scans document on phone) Move the bicycle over by the entrance. What's wrong with it?

AMY: Oh, the chain won't stay on.

GEORGE: Great! This will be easier than I feared.

CLERK 1: (Calling out) I'm sorry. You can't return the bicycle. The return period ended in mid-June.

AMY: No, that's not right! There's a 90-day return policy. I ordered the bike in April. I have until July 15<sup>th</sup> to return it.

CLERK 1: Hmm.... This doesn't work. I would need a Manager Override to do it, but I can't get one. (Philosophically) We are all at the mercy of Walmart.com here. Listen, I'm going to go on break now. I'll explain what's going on to the other clerk. What you need to do is call 1-800-WALMART and tell them your problem. Then, talk to the clerk.

(Clerk 1 hands Amy two slips of paper; one with the order number on it and the second one a Return Override failure notice. Clerk 1 confers privately with Clerk 3. Clerk 1 departs.)

CLERK 2: NEXT!

CLERK 3: NEXT!

(MOBILITY approaches Clerk 3 – now at Window 1 - and WOMAN 3 approaches Clerk 2.

MOBILITY takes up a lot of space as he starts discussing the car batteries in his scooter basket. Several random people cross the space. Amy and George and the kid's bicycle are now hard

against the Stage Left free-standing display, and not properly social-distanced from the pressing crowd.)

AMY: (Calls 1-800-WALMART and starts entering single-digit numbers in response to phone tree prompts. Amy toggles speakerphone so George can hear. Amy is jostled by crowd and she makes a bad choice. The Phone tree voice booms so all can hear....)

VOICE OF 1-800-WALMART: If you want the gardening department, enter 1. Life insurance products, enter 2. Porch Products Jubilee, enter 3.....

AMY: (Shouting into phone) No! What? Porch Products Jubilee? What the hell is that?

WOMAN 3: (Overhearing at Clerk 2 station) Porch Products Jubilee? That's what I'm here for!

AMY: (Shouting) I don't want it! None of these choices work! (Poking phone) Give me zero! A human being please!

WOMAN 3: (Leaves Clerk 2, walks past George, and points to his colorful T-Shirt) Nice T-Shirt!

GEORGE: Thanks!

AMY: I have the same one....

CLERK 2: NEXT!

(Musician approaches Clerk 2 at counter. Musician is holding a briefcase in his left hand, for return. Clerk observes Musician's unusual belonging in his right hand.)

CLERK 2: What's that?

MUSICIAN: This? Oh, it's a digital trumpet. Have you ever seen one? (Clerk shakes her head).

CLERK 3: NEXT! (Mobility begins to depart, crowding Amy and George against free-standing display at the entrance. In his wake, the 2 Muslim Mothers and their kids approach Clerk 3.)

MUSICIAN: You play the instrument like a trumpet, but it can sound like just about anything. Here, let me show you...

(Musician plays a lively dance tune that sounds nothing like a trumpet – more like a keyboard. The Kids automatically start dancing – moonwalking, dabbing, spinning in circles, etc. – as their mothers try to corral them. Several other people start dancing. Rollator starts rocking back and forth. A dance break follows. )

(Following dance break, WOMEN 1 and 2 rejoin line. Each carries items for return.)

AMY: (Shouting – still on speakerphone) Hello? I'm trying to return a kid's bicycle, and I'm in the 90-day return period, but they are saying the period expired in June, and....

DISEMBODIED VOICE: You are in luck! I show that the return period expires in August. Is there anything more I can help you with?

AMY: I need to return the bike. I don't want to return the bike in August. I want to return it today!

DISEMBODIED VOICE: You'll need a barcode to do that. We are all at the mercy of Walmart.com here.

(Amy hangs up. Mobility quietly rejoins the line, this time with a case of 'Ensure' in his basket. Amy takes advantage of the confusion, jumps ahead of mothers, and accosts Clerk 3.)

CLERK 3: Don't worry! There's another way. As they say, we are all at the mercy of Walmart.com here, but I have a superpower. I understand their website. (Tapping at keyboard) In a few seconds, they will send you an E-Mail with a barcode that we can scan for the return.

GEORGE: Great!

(Women 1 and 2 confer for a few seconds, and for unknown reasons exit Stage Left without approaching counter with their items. Only Mobility is left in line.)

AMY: Here it is! (Paging through message) But something is wrong! There is no barcode!

CLERK 3: (Taking a look) Let me send another message to you.

AMY: George! What's the phone's PIN again! (Accidentally turns on iPhone flashlight) The hell!

GEORGE: (Taking phone again) Here, let me.... (Sets phone aright again.)

AMY: (Looking at new message) There's no barcode here either! There's nothing!

CLERK 3: Hmm... I don't understand.

(Clerk 1 returns from break. Clerk 3 calls her over, and they confer. Clerk 4 joins the conversation. Goateed Man walks past downstage, from Stage Right to Stage Left, looks at the audience, and laughs knowingly. Musician finishes with Clerk 2, and leaves.)

CLERK 2: NEXT!

(Mobility approaches Clerk 2's station. A conversation ensues about the case of Ensure. Mobility hands Clerk 2 the gift card used in the purchase. A Loss Prevention Manager suddenly enters the space, Stage Right, reaches over and grabs card.)

LOSS PREVENTION MANAGER: (Shining a UV light on the now brilliantly-glowing card) This is a stolen Gift Card! We knew we had a problem, so we produced these decoy cards. See how it glows? (Turning to Mobility) You are nothing but a thief! (Two security guards appear, Stage Right) Come with these men!

(To everyone's surprise, MOBILITY jumps off his mobility scooter and runs away, exiting Stage Left. The Loss Prevention Manager and the 2 Security Guards pursue. The 2 Muslim Mothers jump on the scooter and drive after him, with their kids in pursuit. Even Rollator shuffles off after Mobility. The line of customers are now gone. Amy and George are the only customers left.)

GEORGE: What was that about?

(Clerks 1, 3, and 4 call Amy over, motioning her to bring the bicycle over to Clerk 2.)

CLERK 4: (Addressing Amy) We are all at the mercy of Walmart.com here, and we must play by their rules. We have no way to refund money to your credit card without a barcode. Still, we can take the bicycle refund, add it to a gift card, and then cash out the gift card. (Taking Mobility's gift card from Clerk 2) We may as well use this card here. (Checking card) Surprise! There's still fifteen dollars on this card!

(Clerk 4 processes the transaction, returning the purchase price of the bicycle plus an extra fifteen dollars.)

AMY: (to George) Wow! We're rich! Say, let's see what they have on sale over at Target.

(Amy and George exit Stage Left, and pass Rollator, now a Walmart Greeter, wearing a Walmart vest, and drinking from a bottle of 'Ensure'.)

ROLLATOR: (Gesturing farewell) Thank you for shopping at Walmart!

End