

# Code 33M at the White Front Store

*by* Jerry Ratch

“Attention, Shoppers,” the loudspeaker announced. “Yes, it's that time of the month and *Moonlight Madness* has officially begun.”

The manager of toys came sprinting into the warehouse behind the store. He was nervous and skinny and had about a 5 or 6 o'clock shadow. He looked anxiously all around.

“Where the hell is Maurice?” he yelled. “Jesus H. Christ, ain't nobody around when you need them!”

Then he spotted me sorting through a huge pile of entangled black and white plastic hangers. “You!” he shouted, looking around one more time. Sweat was dripping down the side of his face. “Come on,” he said. “You'll have to do. Come on. Who the hell are you, anyway?”

I didn't move fast enough for him. “I said come on! Come with me!”

He pulled me along with him by the arm, toward one of the doors heading out to the floor where the public was.

“Where are we going?”

“I want you to face the toys.”

“You want me to do *what?*”

We were almost trotting now.

"The area Supervisor is on his way here to look over the store, and I want you to face the toys."

"Face the toys. You want me to face. Face the toys."

"Are you hard of hearing, Ace? What's your name, by the way?"

"Well, it ain't Maurice."

"Oh, we got a funny guy here," the toy manager yelled out to the store, in case anyone was listening. "We got a funny guy over here!"

We stopped in front of these shelves in the toy department. Kids were running around all over the place, and toys were scattered here and there on the floor, and tilted in every direction on the shelves. "Pull them all forward, like this," he told me, moving one to the front of the shelf. "You know, face them. Make it look real orderly, like there were no kids anywhere near this stuff. Face them. Face them. Get it?"

When I got everything as organized as I could with the toys, I went back to the warehouse. I could hear someone over the loudspeaker almost yelling now, over and over, repeating "33M! 33M to the manager's booth! 33M! 33M"

Maurice was there, back from his break. "Where the heck were you?" he asked. "Didn't you hear them up front? Yelling 33M, 33M, over and over?"

"Yeah, what was that?"

"That means you! You're 33, and M means bring a mop. Somebody couldn't make it to the toilets in time and they got runny

crap all over the hallway, smelling like hell. Get a bucket and a mop and get your butt out there, or they're gonna fire your ass. Go! Get going! Run!”

“Well, where's the bucket and the mop?”

“Oh, fer Chrissake! Didn't they teach you anything?”

“No. I'm only making \$1.92 per hour.”

“Jesus H. Christ!” he said, looking me over. “No wonder. Well, when you're finished with the shit job and the mopping, I'll buy you a cup of coffee. Now go! Go on, before you get fired. \$1.92 an hour. Good God.”

