

NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY

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By James Collins

It was New Year's Eve, December 31, 1954, when Owen, Whitey and I, with dates, headed to a party in New Jersey. Owen and Whitey who worked in midtown Manhattan had asked two girls from work to go to the party. I just started college and took a girl that I had dated previously. We rode for over an hour on the bus to arrive at a pleasant house in the middle of New Jersey. We knocked on the door and three smiling girls answered. Then their faces fell. It was only then that I learned that the girls had invited Whitey and Owen to bring a buddy, assuming all would arrive stag.

Our visit was tense and about 11:15, we decided to leave. We actually spent midnight on the middle of the George Washington Bridge in a bus on our way back to New York. Until then, it was a miserable New Year's Eve but the Fates were to intervene. It would get worse.

The girls from Wall Street invited us to their house to extend the party. Their home was located in St. Mary's Park, a dangerous part of the South Bronx. After we acquired sodas, beer and whiskey, we climbed to the third floor of the apartment building. A Victrola supplied music and we just started to dance when there was a heavy knock at the door. The girl who lived in the apartment went to answer, and we heard a rather heated discussion with at least two young men in the doorway. I wanted to know what was going on, but since I did not know the girls, Owen and Whitey offered to find out what caused the dispute.

My friends went out to find out what the problem was and they all retired to the kitchen while my date and I sat in the living room. Owen came out after a few minutes, walked over to me and told us the story. Apparently, about a month ago, the two girls broke up with these two men who were long-term boyfriends. Owen and Whitey did not know anything about this entanglement, but the two guys were here and they were quite upset. The real problem was that the dark haired guy, a felon from Sing Sing Prison, just completed a three-year term for armed assault. The redhead was a friend of the felon and both were members of a notorious gang in this area. We were definitely in trouble.

Owen returned to the kitchen and my date and I sat there discussing the position we were in. Noises from the kitchen mixed with angry, loud, boisterous, shouts grabbed our attention. Screams from the girls and shouts from their ex-boyfriends were followed by the sounds of broken dishes, which put us on guard.

The hollering got more intense. I stood up and rapidly walked over to the edge of the doorway holding a full quart bottle of Canada Dry Ginger Ale and placed my back against the wall. Owen ran out of the kitchen, pursued by the felon who was waving an

eight-inch switchblade. It was obvious that he intended to kill Owen, and I was there to stop him.

At this point, time went into slow motion. I was swinging the bottle at the felon's head, knowing that if I hit him full on I could kill him, but I did not want to kill anyone. I had to render him unconscious and disable him at the same time. I did this by hitting him on the side of his head, slanting the bottle down over his ear unto his right shoulder, which I knew would break the collarbone. It all worked as planned. Immediately the felon hit the floor, dropping the switchblade. I spun around as the red head turned the corner carrying another switchblade. He stopped, took one look at me, saw the felon face down on the ground, threw his hands out to his side dropped the knife and said, "I want no fight. I've got no argument with you."

I tied them both up using their belts and asked Whitey to get me the switchblades

"I threw them out the kitchen window."

"Then get me the kitchen knives."

"I also threw them out."

"What are you crazy, or chicken hearted? They're out of the fight but we have to get out of here."

"They're all tied up. What's the problem? We can just ease out of here."

"Do you think they came alone? Look out the window. There are two dozen of their friends waiting for us downstairs."

"What are we going to do?"

My date came up with the solution. "Call the cops, and they'll come and help."

"Better yet, you call and sound hysterical," I told my date. "Tell them a gang is beating up a couple of patrolmen. Give the address and hang up."

Turning to the two girls, I ordered, "You two, get your coats we're leaving."

"But we live here."

"I don't care. Get the coats. Put them on, and each of you grab your date by the hand and do not let go until we are in a cab."

The NYPD riot squad showed up from all directions and clubbed the twenty hoodlums armed with chains and clubs. Three couples, in party clothes and three piece

suits, ran straight through the melee and located a cab two blocks away. We had the cabby circle the block and we put the two girls out on the corner.

“Are you just going to leave us here?” one asked.

“You both live here. It’s your neighborhood and seven squad cars are on the next corner. You are in no danger, but we still are, Happy New Year and good bye.”

THE END