

Water Cooler Hero

By Phillip Hall

"You wouldn't believe what happened yesterday," Jay said.

Everyone in the office rolled their eyes. Several people slipped away to avoid the impending conversation. Jay didn't even notice as he continued on.

"I was walking out to my car and I saw this guy trying to break into the car parked beside me. I couldn't believe it was happening in broad daylight," Jay said.

He paused for a moment, waiting for a reaction. Several other people walked away. Only a few of the nicest people in the office were still giving him their full attention. Jay locked eyes with Tommy who was one of the few people who'd actually be nice to him.

"The world is definitely in bad shape when someone tries to steal cars in the middle of the day," Tommy replied.

Jay leaned in closer to his targeted audience member. He shook his head and smiled.

"It is sad but I confronted him."

"You confronted the car thief while he was trying to steal the car?" Tommy asked.

Susan turned around from her desk and spoke up.

"That's a load of crap Jay and you know it. I went out the same time as you yesterday and I didn't see anyone in the parking lot."

"No really, the guy was leaning down between my car and the car he was trying to steal. You probably just couldn't see him but he was there."

Tommy, feeling quite uncomfortable with the confrontation that Susan was bringing into the mix, gave her a dirty look. He turned back to Jay.

"Go on Jay, what happened next?"

"Well I told the guy to stop what he was doing or I'd stop him myself."

"Oh really, you threatened the guy? Give me a break, Jay," Susan interjected.

"Honest, I told him to stop or I'd have to restrain him. So the guy shoots me the finger and kept trying to jimmy the door open," Jay said.

"Wow, so what happened after that?" Tommy asked.

"I just hauled off and decked the guy. He hit the ground pretty hard but he got up and ran off really fast. The craziest part is there was a woman hiding in the car."

"Seriously?" Tommy asked.

"Yeah. It turns out this lady had gotten in her car and then the guy tried to steal it but she locked herself inside. It's pretty amazing to think I saved her life."

"Way to go, Jay. That's an amazing story," Tommy said.

"Yeah, real amazing. You know Jay every single week you come in and have these great stories about how you saved someone's life or how you were this great hero. I just don't buy it. I think you're sad and making up stuff helps you feel better about yourself. You can feed your crap to Tommy or some of the other people in the office but I'm not buying it," Susan said harshly.

Jay sat down in his chair and ducked his head a bit. He shuffled some papers around then looked back up. Tommy had already gone back to his desk but Susan was still staring directly at him.

"I'm sorry you feel like that Susan. I didn't mean to make you angry. I really did save that woman's life though," Jay said.

Susan threw her hands up in the air. She shook her head, then laughed.

"Jay, last week you said you pulled a kid and his parents out of a burning house. The week before you dove off a bridge and pulled someone out of a submerged car. The week before that you stopped two men from mugging a woman downtown," Susan said angrily. "You've had more hero moments and saves in the past six months than every action flick that's come out over the past five years combined."

Jay watched as Susan turned around and punched at her keyboard. He hung his head and turned back to his own desk.

He busied himself with work and a few hours later his computer beeped with the arrival of a new email. He opened it but could not believe what he read. It was an invitation to Susan's annual Halloween party. He smiled and thought maybe Susan wasn't so mean after all. She probably felt bad for making such harsh comments about him.

Jay pulled up outside of Susan's house 40 minutes early for the party. There were no cars yet so he leaned his seat back and relaxed. It was already dark out and the

street was deserted. He noticed a light come on inside the house, then go off. He sat up and watched the windows of the house. There was still 30 minutes until the party was supposed to start. He finally shook his head and started to sit back. As soon as he did a different light came on within the house. This time Jay could see a silhouette of someone go past the window blinds. A few seconds later a larger outline went by the window, then the light went out.

"What the hell?" Jay said under his breath.

He grabbed the printed email invitation and got Susan's number off of it. He dialed his cell and held his breath as it rang. He watched as a light came on at the far side of the house. He watched the window closely and was startled when the phone was answered with a scream. He dropped the cell phone and frantically grabbed for it. Retrieving it he pressed it to his ear only to hear a click. He jerked his head back towards the window and his heart stopped. The blinds were hanging and staring directly at him was a large man covered in blood.

The large man held a meat cleaver in one hand. He wore a white shirt that was half soaked in blood. Slowly he took his free hand and ran his finger across his throat, then pointed at Jay.

Jay started the car and slammed his foot on the gas. His small sedan threw up rocks as he sped away. He fumbled with this cell phone, trying to dial 911 and keep control of his speeding vehicle. Just as he calmed himself enough to dial the number his cell rang. He clicked the answer button and jerked the wheel to swerve around a corner.

"Hello," Jay said.

"I've got your cell and license plate number. I'll be coming for you next hero," a voice said.

Jay slowed down and pulled to the side of the road. He gripped the phone tighter.

"You know what Mr. Scary guy, tell Susan the joke is up and she's a piece of crap for doing this. I really thought she wanted me to come to her party."

"The party is just starting."

"I bet Susan and all of you are having a real good laugh aren't you?"

"Oh Susan won't be laughing after I chop her head off. Don't worry hero, it won't be long till you suffer the same fate."

Jay crushed the gas pedal to the floor and spun the car around. He sped back in the direction of Susan's house.

"I'm looking forward to it you bastard. I'm coming over there now and I'm going to show you, Susan and whoever else is in on this just how scared I really am!" Jay yelled.

He mashed the end button on the phone and threw it into the floor board. He drove faster until he approached Susan's house. He didn't slow as he came closer but instead jumped the curb and skidded to a halt on the front lawn. He didn't even notice as Tommy and a few others were just pulling up. He jumped from the car and ran to the front door. He was enraged and beyond thinking. He kicked the front door hard but it held firm, which only served to anger him further.

"Jay what the hell are you doing man?" Tommy shouted.

Jay didn't reply but continued kicking the front door until it finally burst inward. He rushed into the dark house and immediately tripped over something. He landed in a pool of sticky wet liquid. He stood up quickly and his eyes adjusted to the dark. Standing near the front door was the large freak of a man, covered in blood. The beastly man laughed.

"You really came back. This is delightful. I'll kill you, then finish Susan off after," the man said in a vile tone.

Jay shook in rage. His entire life he'd been the butt of jokes. He'd never had friends. No one seemed to understand him. That all changed with the party invite. He thought it was time for his life to turn around. He thought maybe the people at the office would accept him. Blinding anger built up in his stomach as he stared at the elaborate trick put together just to scare him. So everyone could laugh at him.

"NO MORE!" Jay screamed.

He rushed forward with a maniacal rage powering his muscles. He lowered his shoulder and caught the large man off guard. They crashed out of the window and onto the lawn. Jay landed on top of the big man and he started punching him over and over in the face.

A crowd of co-workers that had arrived for the party were now standing frozen in place watching. Tommy was the only one who moved forward to help out. He pulled Jay off of the blood covered man who appeared to be unconscious.

"Jay, who is this guy and just what the hell is going on?" Tommy asked.

Jay looked at Tommy with eyes that were empty of all logic. Only rage and anger filled him. He looked down just in time to see the large man grabbing the meat

cleaver. He shoved Tommy out of the way, then jumped over the swing aimed at his legs.

The large man jumped to his feet with the deadly blade in hand. Fresh blood was running from his nose and from cuts all over his back where he'd gone through the window.

"Now you die you puke maggot!" the man growled.

The man moved forward with a limp and swung the cleaver down. He put his large frame into the killing blow.

Jay was too quick and dodged to the right. He let loose with a right jab that caught the big man square in the nose. Then followed that with a haymaker that landed on the man's jaw.

A sickening crack was heard as the jaw bone broke and the man stumbled backwards. He dropped the meat cleaver and blood poured from his mouth. He tried to speak but only gurgled sounds came out. The big man made one last desperate attack on the scrawny office worker.

Jay stopped the charge with a swift front kick to the man's groin. He finished up with a giant upper cut that knocked the beast of a man out cold.

All of Jay's co-workers stood amazed at what they'd just witnessed. Tommy stepped forward and grabbed Jay just as he passed out.

Jay awoke in a hospital bed. There were flowers and balloons all around. It took him a moment to process all that had happened. He looked around and spotted a police officer just outside his door. Then he saw Tommy sitting in a chair nearby.

"Hi Tommy," Jay said.

"Hey man, glad to see you awake. You've been out for a few days," Tommy said.

"A few days? Wow I really lost it. I guess the police are waiting for me to wake up huh?"

"Yeah, they've had someone here 24 hours a day. Everyone at the office is just freaked about this whole thing. They just can't believe what you did."

"I guess I won't have to worry much about all of them seeing as I'll be in jail."

"Jail? What in the world are you talking about? You're a hero for saving Susan's life and taking out a serial killer."

Jay quickly played the events back in his mind. He never imagined the situation had been real. Emotions filled his body as he realized he had willfully run into a house with a serial killer inside, then fought him almost to the death. He became nauseous and light headed.

"I think I'm going to sleep for a little while longer," Jay said.

"Sure thing man. I have to go but hopefully we'll see you back at work soon."

"So I called Susan's house to ask if I could stop by the store and grab anything for the party and that's when I heard her scream for help. So I did what anyone else in their right mind would do. I pushed my little car to the max and headed right to her house. I knew I was walking into almost certain death but I couldn't allow someone to die if it was within my power to stop it," Jay said.

A giant smile formed on his face as everyone in the office gathered around listening to his heroic tale of saving Susan.

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