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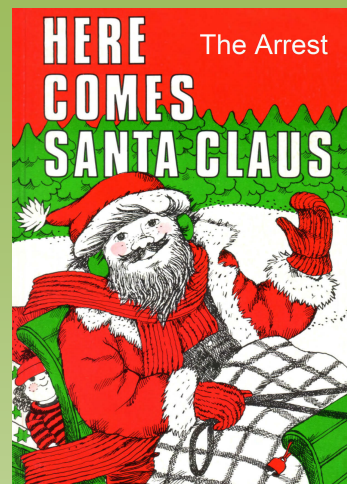
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Auszug aus:

The Arrest

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The arrest

Just before Christmas I saw a young policeman having trouble with two young drunks. They were dancing around him, waving their arms. And now and then he waved to them.

I watched from the front passenger seat of a parked car. The policeman told the two drunks to move along. All three of them walked on past the front of the car in which I was sitting.

They stopped about thirty yards away. The policeman grabbed the bigger of the two drunks. It was a young man who was wearing a long, black overcoat. The smaller drunk, dressed in jeans and a worn grey jacket, pulled at the policeman from behind. People hurried by, ignoring the struggle and leaving the policeman to deal with the two alone. The man in the black coat raised a threatening fist. I opened the car door and stood beside it, undecided. The policeman looked nervous and desperately lonely.

I had never walked towards trouble in my life, but I did so now. Feeling very public-spirited, a little heroic, and surprisingly, not at all afraid, I walked quickly along the pavement and asked: "Do you need any help?"

The policeman twisted the right arm of his smaller opponent up its owner's back. "Thank you very much, sir," he said.—Will you take his other arm, please?"

The man in the black coat turned away. Maybe he was being sick. He looked very pale and leaned against a wall. For no reason I could think of then or can think of now, we left him there. I found myself walking with the others away from the car. "Where are we going?" I asked.

"To the police station," said the policeman.



Now, as we walked uncomfortably past brightly lit shops, my public spirit drained away. The change in the balance of power made me feel foolish. After all, now we were two against one. In my hand I held a thin wrist. I looked at the prisoner and saw a boy of sixteen, narrow-shouldered, thin-faced and pale.

Then I remembered the car and its owner who had trustingly left me in charge while he called at a near-by office. We were two grown men against one thin youth, and I thought I might no longer be needed. "I've left a car there." I told the policeman. "That's all right, sir. I'll take care of that," he said. He obviously thought that I was expecting a parking ticket. It would have been too complicated to explain, so I let it go.

The boy's thin wrist remained slack in my grip, his hand hanging down limply. But his words made a totally different impression on me.

"You don't need to hold my arm so tight," he told the policeman. "Why don't you go and catch some murderers, instead of us kids? That's all you can do, catch kids, while all the murderers get away. Why didn't you put me and my mate in a taxi? Why don't you catch some murderers?"

Over the prisoner's head the policeman said: "I'd like to hit him, but I daren't." The boy spoke to me. "You wouldn't dare do this if you were by yourself." My reply sounded silly then, and it sounds silly now. I just said: "Oh yes, I would." "Two to one," the boy said. "Two men to one kid."

Inside the police station I stood back while the constable made a stilted report to his inspector. "He offered to hit me with a bottle, sir," was the only part of the report that was new to me. The inspector asked me to follow them into another room. The room had a concrete floor and was furnished with a bare table and a wooden chair. The constable searched the boy. From one pocket he took a bottle of beer. This he placed on the table a little too dramatically. The inspector invited me to tell him what I had seen. I said: "Nothing really. The constable seemed to be having trouble, so I offered my help." The inspector thanked me and took my telephone number.

At home I told my wife about the arrest. To her I wasn't a hero at all, for she said: "The poor little thing!" Frankly, my sympathies were now wholly with the prisoner. I ate miserably that evening. I was watching a detective film on



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