



## Sibling Rivalry Explodes at Valentine's Day Dance

by Michael Hawkins, correspondent

Sibling rivalry exploded into chaos at the 36th annual Hardy Falls Valentine's Day Dance held at the Grange Hall on Sunday, February 12th

The night started innocently enough. The Valentine's Day dance is one of the most popular events in town, and this year was no exception. The community descended in force, dressed in their best Valentine's Day finery.

"It's just nice to get out in the middle of winter, you know?" said Chet Hinkle, owner of Hinkle Insurance. "I mean, sure, this winter hasn't been too bad, but usually it's freaking cold. Besides," he laughed, "this is the only time I get to wear this suit.

The suit, bright white with dark red lapels, paired with a red vest decorated with hearts, certainly made a statement.

The large Grange Hall itself was a study in pink, white, and red, echoing Mr. Hinkle's suit. Volunteers from the town council, led by Mayor Margo Truelove, had spent days blowing up hundreds of balloons and hanging streamers.

"It looked like Cupid threw up in here," observed Martin Scanner, who manages reservations of the space for the town. "Made my teeth hurt. But everyone else seemed happy.

Attendees who didn't much care for the decor appreciated the large bar that had been set up, handled by Deacon Black and Matteo Guerrero of the Country Time Bar and Grill. The town council had hired a band – Roy and The Renegades – to provide music for dancing

While the townspeople mingled, drank, and danced in the hall, things took a downward turn out in the vestibule where Lola Peters, 83, owner of Hardy Hair, was collecting tickets at the door.

At approximately 9:00 pm, Birdie Nelson, 84, of Skytop, arrived and attempted entry into the dance, accompanied by Albert Cromwell, 82, of Hardy Falls. Ms. Nelson is Ms. Peters' sister.

According to reports, Ms. Peters had been dating Mr. Cromwell herself until three weeks ago. Apparently, she had not been aware that he was now dating her sister.

When she saw the two trying to enter the dance, she confronted them and demanded to know what was going on. Things escalated quickly from there, and soon the sisters were yelling obscenities at each other.

The shouting intensified when Ms. Nelson tried to get past Ms. Peters. Ms. Peters grabbed the pink orchid lei Ms. Nelson was wearing, ripping it and her dress and showering petals everywhere. Ms. Nelson slapped her.

“Ms. Peters yelled, “oh it is so on,” reported Tiffany Preston, who had been helping to collect tickets and witnessed to the event. “Then she tackled Ms. Nelson.”

Mr. Cromwell tried to intervene, but one of the women kicked him in the groin, and he went down.

The women fell to the floor, clawing and punching at each other. Martin Scanner and Joe Horton pulled Mr. Cromwell to safety and then tried to separate the two sisters. Mr. Scanner got an elbow to the stomach and had the wind knocked out of him. Mr. Horton was scratched and left to call the police.

“Hey, I’m no hero,” he said

At that point, Ms. Peters had the upper hand and pinned Ms. Nelson to the floor.

“She kept yelling, “what are you doing with him, you bitch? He’s mine!” and other things like that,” said Tiffany Preston. “Mr. Cromwell was still trying to protect his...um, himself, but he looked really stunned. I don’t think he knew Ms. Peters had it that bad for him.

It may be that Ms. Peters “has it bad” for Mr. Cromwell. But according to other long-time Hardy Falls residents in attendance, she also has a legendary hatred for her sister.

“Well,” said Mathilda Gregory, editor in chief of the *Hardy Falls Gazette*, “The way I heard it, when the girls were in their teens, Birdie Brady – that was her name then – glued down all of Lola Brady’s hair. Lola’s head had to be completely shaved, and she was a laughingstock for weeks. She’s never forgiven her sister. Their rivalry is legendary.” Ms. Gregory shook her head. “I don’t know what Albert was thinking.”

After a few moments, Ms. Nelson managed to get away from Ms. Peters and ran. She burst into the main hall, much to the surprise of those who had not realized something was going on in the vestibule. Ms. Peters followed.

Unfortunately, the theme of this year’s dance was “Love Among The Stars,” complete with Star Wars themed piñatas.

“I just wanted to highlight the new Star Wars line of candy we just got in at the Spun Sugar Candy Store,” Mayor Truelove said sadly. “Lightsabers to knock down Star Wars piñatas seemed like it would be fun.”

The piñata portion of the evening hadn't happened yet, so when Ms. Nelson and Ms. Peters barged into the Grange Hall, they ran right into the display. Ms. Nelson grabbed a lightsaber, Ms. Peters grabbed another, and soon the two women were hacking away at each other with the enthusiasm of experienced Jedi.

Since they were in a relatively confined space, things went about as well as you might expect. The piñatas were the first casualties, and candy scattered everywhere, tripping the people trying to separate the women and ground underfoot.

"Lola got me on the head with her lightsaber," said Martin Scanner, who'd rushed forward to try and help. "Lucky she didn't kick me in the nuts like she did Albert.

People at the bar scattered when the women took out cups of beer and other drinks with their lightsabers.

"Good thing we had the bottles lined up on the back wall," said Deacon Black.

Ms. Peters and Ms. Nelson were definitely tiring, panting, and hoarse as they continued to shout. Mr. Black and Mr. Guerrero were able to grab the women and finally disarmed them, before helping them to chairs on opposite sides of the room.

Chief Jacqueline Kline and Police Officer Harry Newman, who had been out on a call on the other side of town, arrived and took both women down to the station. Fortunately, they were able to transport them in separate cars.

"We're going to charge them with disturbing the peace, but we won't hold them," Chief Kline said. "It would be different if anyone had been seriously hurt. They'll have to pay for the candy, though."

"Easy for her to say nobody was hurt," Albert Cromwell grouched later and then shrugged. "I guess I forgot about that stupid glue. I mean, it happened over seventy years ago, for heaven's sake. Maybe they should let it go.

"Just goes to show you that you always need to think before you jump between sisters," Ms. Gregory said.

Mr. Cromwell declined to comment.