

Havin' the Time of Our Lives

Papa Ramos paces back and forth in the small living room of his shabby Florida bungalow. His daughter sits on an old sofa anxiously looking through a stack of bills, concern written into her weary face. His son slumps against a grimy wall, his expression one of utter dejection and despondency. Grandma Ramos reclines in a rickety old rocking chair, intently watching the family's only TV.

"It's New Year's Eve, 1999. How are you celebrating your Y2K?" the hostess of a New Year's Eve special cheerfully asks. Papa Ramos turns to face his dispirited family.

"What is everyone sitting here for?" Papa Ramos asks. "I mean, come on, it's New Year's Eve!"

"Papi, have you not seen?" his daughter replies. "We haven't paid the rent in two months, look at all these bills!" Papa Ramos bows his head and goes back to pacing in pensive silence. He brought his family here to America for a better life. He had been told America was a land of opportunity, a place where dreams could come true. All you had to do was work hard, they used to say. Now he has three jobs, but even so he can't afford to pay his rent. He works his ass off, but he still can't pay it though. At least, not if he wants to provide for his family at the same time.

"Papi?" his son ventures. "What are we going to do?"

"I don't know..." Papa Ramos trails off. Grandma Ramos leans forward in her rocking chair.

"Back in my day, when we needed a little help to pay the rent, we threw a rent party!" Papa Ramos and his kids exchange glances.

"You sure?" Papa Ramos inquires, an eyebrow raised.

"If you throw it, they will come," Grandma Ramos says, leaning back in her chair. And so it begins...

Floridians of all different shapes, sizes, and colors encircle the Ramos household, spilling over into the neighbor's yards and onto the street in what is fast becoming the house party of the century. The house party of the millennium, actually. And on the last night of the millennium, too. What a coincidence!

Everybody's feeling young, wild, and free. The place is intensely vibrant, intensely lively, and intensely LOUD. The euphoria is highly, highly contagious. Normally neighbors get all bent out of shape at this sort of thing, but these neighbors don't mind too much. In fact, they're at the party too!

Speakers are really bangin' and things are really blazin'. I mean sparklers, man, come on, what'd you think I was talkin' about? Joints? Cigs? Well, there were those too...

It's a revelry of pure raucous ecstasy. People are partying hard in all kinds of ways, never-before-seen kinds of ways (not even in Project X). People are rollin' up, pourin' up, drinkin' up, and, yes, even throwin' up. Everyone's havin' a good time. People are twerkin', jerkin', poppin' it, and lockin' it. You got people walkin' it out, crankin' it, smackin' it, whippin' their hair back and forth, doing the Dougie, the Stanky Legg, the John Wall, the Wop, the Two-Step, the Cupid Shuffle, the Harlem Shake, the Shmoney dance, and ridin' an invisible

horse, Gangnam Style. You got people wobblin' and puttin' a ring on it, wobblin' while puttin' a ring on it. You got people grindin' and playin' leap frog, grindin' while playin' leap frog. You even got some old-timers doing the Twist in the corner. And none of these dances have even been invented yet. Well, except the Twist...

People just keep on coming as the rent party gets bigger and bigger. And they all know that as a partygoer, you gotta bring something special to the party, your own personal pizazz. So you got people bringin' inflatable beach balls, bounce houses, swimming pools (one of which has an alligator in it--it is Miami, after all), palm trees, all kinds of stuff. Somebody even brought an inflatable boat, which people are now crowd surfing in. You got people bringin' balloons, glow sticks, disco balls, turntables, piñatas, skateboards, spandex, liquid nitrogen, and the game *Twister*, which only leads to old-timers doing the Twist while playing *Twister*. Oh, and now somebody also brought the movie *Twister*. So now you got old-timers doing the Twist, playing *Twister*, AND watching the movie *Twister*, all at the same time. Try wrapping your minds around that. You'll be playin' *Twister* too, only in your head.

You got people bringing RC vehicles, RC helicopters, even an RC flying balloon shark. You got people bringing strobe lights, black lights, flash lights, Christmas lights, spot lights, rock lights, all kinds of lights, even limelight (Pitbull and Ne-Yo stopped by). You got people bringing cornhole, horseshoes, badminton nets, volleyball nets (to go with those beach balls), basketballs, footballs, soccer balls, golf balls, all kinds of balls.

You got people bringing glitter cannons, confetti cannons, foam cannons, bubble blowers, squirt guns, Nerf guns, airsoft guns, heck, even real guns. There are even some goats runnin' around.

The party is absolutely wild, sublime, surreal. There really aren't any words to describe it. Of course, there are alcoholic beverages of all kinds, as well as some designer drugs. But I don't want to talk about those. The Ramos family frowns upon the use of drugs (except maybe alcohol). So all I'm going to say is that Jack Daniels and Captain Morgan are in attendance, and leave the rest to your imagination.

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11:30 p.m.

At a fancy cocktail party in a wealthy CEO's Miami mansion, some corporate execs are bored out of their minds. They sit at a fancy table with a white tablecloth and all glass silverware (glassware?). They make idle small talk, accompanied by light classical music playing in the background, but nobody's having a good time.

"So how about this party?" the CEO asks. "Pretty great, am I right?"

"Oh, yes, of course," one of the execs replies, not wanting to disappoint his egotistical boss, whom he and all his fellow execs can't stand. In truth, the party's moving extremely slowly. The whole thing's bogged down in the formalities of fine dining and business etiquette. But just then, one of the execs gets a message on his pager. He reads it, smiles, and then whispers to another exec sitting next to him: "Hialeah. House party. Spanish women. Pass it on." Word of

the house party makes its way around the table, stopping before it reaches the CEO. Then the exec who got the message stands up.

"Excuse me, sir, we all have somewhere to be, so we'll be leaving now, if that's okay with you," the exec says.

"You know what, no, that's not okay with me. I took the time to throw this party, and now you all will stay, and you all will like it!" the CEO declares.

"That's it!" the exec who stood up says. "You know what, we're tired of working for you and your suffocating ego. I'm out! Who's with me?!?!?"

"Jeah!!!!!" all the execs rally in unison. They all excuse themselves from the table and go to leave.

"No, you get back here! This is my party! Get back here!" the CEO shouts at them. "You're all fired if you don't get back here right this instance!!!"

"That's too bad," the exec who took charge says. He blows a raspberry and then walks out of the dining room. He and the other execs make their way out of the mansion and into a sleek black limo.

"Where to?" the limo driver asks.

"Hialeah."

"Do you know what we just gave up?"

"Our million dollar jobs. But I don't care, I'm gettin' loo-oose tonight!!!"

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The limo pulls up to the massive crowd of partygoers surrounding the Ramos house. The execs get out, wide-eyed and jaws agape. They slowly make their way through the throng of crazed partygoers to the Ramos house. They walk inside only to find everyone crowded around the Ramos family's only TV.

"3... 2... 1..."

"Happy New Year!!!!!" everyone shouts and then breaks out into crazy dancing, even Grandma Ramos. The execs join in. One of the execs sees a little glass bowl sitting on a table. Before tonight it was a fishbowl, but now it's stuffed full of cash and has a little sign taped on it that reads "Rent Party Donations".

"Now this is a party!!!" the exec shouts and tosses in his credit card.

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1:00 a.m.

Some cops show up at the party and slowly make their way to the Ramos house, much like the execs did. They knock on the door. Everybody in the house stops what they're doing and turns toward the door. Papa Ramos answers it.

"This is the police. What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm just tryin' to have me a good time, before my time is up, hey!" Papa Ramos answers. The cops soften considerably.

“Well...” the lead cop starts, “Who are we to stand in the way of such a noble mission, especially on New Year’s Eve? Come on, let’s get it now!” And so the cops join in on the honest fun, and the party just keeps getting better. After an hour or so more of wild, crazy revelry, Papa Ramos and family get up on top of their roof to survey what they’ve created. People extend from their house in all directions as far as the eye can see, and not one of them isn’t having himself or herself a good time. Papa Ramos procures a megaphone (brought by one of the partygoers), and begins to address the enormous crowd:

This is for everybody going through tough times...
Believe me, been there, done that
But every day above ground is a great day
Remember that

The crowd below cheers and the bass drops. Papa Ramos skateboards off his roof and into one of the inflatable pools (not the one with the alligator in it). And so the show goes on...

El Fin