

SAY IT AIN'T SO

By J.C. Henderson

I came to the party with the sole purpose of getting completely shit faced, to be perfectly honest. That was it, that was The Plan from the very beginning. I wanted more than anything that ever regrettable, forgetting-everything-you-learned-as-a-toddler kind of wasted that only either the completely stupid venture into, or the complete novice (given how naïve I was I think I fall more into the latter category). It was a very simple plan, but I like to think the simplest ones tend to be the most effective. The Plan sure as hell didn't involve everything else that happened that night, as all of that occurred quite naturally on its own.

I was in desperate need of drowning myself in booze because they had taken my best friend and comrade, Charley. The military took him to Iraq, that far away shithole where the only thing worse than the murderous heat was the bullets and bombs being exchanged. He was supposed to be inactive, he was supposed to have done his part and didn't need to be re-enlisted, but instead they packed him, wrapped him and sent him overseas without so much as a “what the fuck?”. The tour should have been an easy peasy nine months, but turned out to be considerably more.

Much more.

This self-destructive venture however was not a usual activity of mine; even though I *did* happen to drink from time to time, it was nothing as on par with The Plan. Oh yes, I planned on getting my hands on anything I possibly could, like a wild boozehound, now that the opportunity had presented itself to me.

This miraculous, spontaneous opportunity was Thomas, a friendly acquaintance of mine. Who, as usual in his undomesticated character, was having the celebratory super-party at his place: a humungous mansion with a property value impossible to calculate. See, Thomas' parents were rich—*very* rich. They were so rich in fact, that they owned their own plane, and a pilot to operate it.

This so-called pilot, however, was not only without an authentic license, but was also a hopeless drug addict, and ergo Thomas' parents didn't stand a chance in a fight against gravity and a coked out fake pilot.

In short, little Tommy inherited an unimaginable fortune without lifting a finger. That happened a little more than 15 years ago, when Thomas was barely a teenager. As far as what kind of company he inherited I had no clue, but as far as my understanding was and still is, he didn't truly run it in any conventional sense, he just received the checks.

What did he do with his life, you ask? Simply lived off the insane amount of money provided him. Going to college for kicks at his own leisure (which was where I met him), and most importantly to understand the the story I'm telling you, partied harder than anyone I've ever known in the history of existence.

I had personally known Thomas to a small degree for some time before then but had never seen where he lived. He always invited me to his parties via a text or handwritten message by one of the people working for him (some of them remind me of Bond henchmen: tall and big with little brains), but for some reason or other I never really made it to one. I heard plenty of stories however, about how grand his house was and the incredible debauchery that occurred within those walls. It had over the past few years become a sort of legend in our town, like a folk tale told from person to person because it's simply *that* larger than life.

But this particular time I would finally be going, this time there was nothing to get in my way, I sure as hell made sure of that.

Surprisingly, this time Thomas had personally invited me himself. He came to my apartment one evening, while I was wallowing away in self-pity. Somehow he had learned of my current emotional state and decided to invite me to his party, saying it would be a "proper antidote" to all my troubles. Only a few days later and there I was, driving down the road to his place for the party.

I didn't know any of the other guests that were going to be there, and for the most part I didn't really care, as long as there were more drinks than there were guests I would be as content as a lab monkey on sedatives.

He had given me general directions to his place via text message. The place turned out to be on the other end of town, the *fancier* end. I assumed every mansion in the neighborhood had at least one grand pool in the back and a large metal fence separating their individual properties.

His neighborhood was in a whole different dimension from the one I was used to. While my neighborhood involved the pleasant likes of hobos, coke addicts and prostitutes, this one was made up of doctors, dentists and lawyers...and then there was Thomas.

While everyone else had thick metal gates with call boxes on the outside, Tom's mansion had a dying lawn of grass covered in snow and the flag of Ireland hanging beside the entrance for a welcoming committee. The house was a two story with a wooden fence sheltering the backyard, two garages side by side on the far right of the property, several tall vertical windows with the shades open but the main entrance looked uninhabited. All I could see was something that looked like a library, with security cameras in the corners covering the entrance. It occurred to me that although Thomas was crazy, he was certainly not stupid.

It was mid-winter at the time, outside was cold as hell and there was a nice inch of dirty snow everywhere. I only had a leather jacket, jeans and a tee on, so I thought the sooner I got inside, the better. I rushed to the door with my arms wrapped around my chest and my feet moving swiftly.

I knocked on the door then waited patiently. I heard muffled yelling from the other end but couldn't make out a single word.

I decided to ring the doorbell this time. But I ended up waiting some more. Suddenly I heard footsteps, and when the door opened a man looking like the missing link was standing on the other side. Thick black eye brows, a block shaped jaw and tree trunk arms with a layer of fur failing to pass as human hair on them. At any moment I was expecting him to grunt at me or pound a fist on his chest in a predatorily defensive manner. Or drool.

“Hi.” I said to the ogre with a forced yet friendly smile.

Ogre shut the door in my face.

Not feeling persuaded, I rung the doorbell again. Muffled shouting from inside again, a little louder this time but I still couldn't understand any of the words.

The ogre opened the door once more, and looked a bit surprised to see me unrelenting. “Hi, I'm here for the party.” I told him as calmly as I could.

“You a cop?” He asked me, his voice a little higher pitched than I expected, sounding a bit closer to a nervous teenager than a caveman.

“Excuse me?” I asked, offended by the accusation.

“You’re a *mole*. I can smell it off you a mile away.” The ogre said, getting a bit more aggressive with each passing second. He slapped my chest with the back end of his hand like some kind of African gorilla, making me take a step back to brace myself from briefly losing balance.

“Uh...no, I’m just here for the party.” I said again in my defense. I wasn’t sure if he caught what I said the first time or not, but really the only other thing I thought of saying would have most likely gotten my face punched in.

“That so? You don’t look like the party type to me.” He said, now folding his arms across his chest. I start hearing a commotion from inside, lots of chatter with laughter mixed in.

“Really?” I asked him.

“Really.”

“Educate me.” I mimicked him and folded my arms as well.

“You look like a bookworm.”

“...A bookworm?” I asked, baffled. I was expecting something far more insulting or noteworthy. Is reading books even considered an insult in modern society?

“Paul!” I heard my name from inside the house. It was Thomas, coming towards the door to save me from a bloody, premature death. I noticed instantly that he was wearing brightly colored SpongeBob SquarePants boxers, a beat up old red silk bathrobe that looked like he stole it from a billionaire's laundry basket in the 1920’s, topped off with comfortable-looking pink fluffy slippers. His hair was a jumbled mess, but his friendly smile and maybe even the way he was dressed made him look like he could charm his way through any kind of ugly debacle; if you looked into his eyes you could see a man who's gears were working properly, though maybe a little haywire.

Or perhaps more than just a little. At any rate, Thomas stood beside the ogre, patting him on the shoulder like a pet.

“Rick, I hate to say it but you need to move away from the doorway— you know, fire codes n’ all. Can’t have my guests burst into flames.” Thomas said to him, he then turned his attention to me.

“*Hey stranger!* ‘Bout time you made it. Was starting to think you back pedaled on me.” He gave me a friendly slap to the left arm. “I must apologize for Rick, he’s not much of a doorman— or anything else, for that matter. Oh, please take off your shoes and put them by the door, will ya? Just had the carpets cleaned.”

I took off my shoes as Thomas closed the door behind me. At first the removal of the shoes slightly puzzled me, then I realized the glossy hardwood floor beneath our feet which dominated the spacious library that served as the entrance to the mansion, and from what I could tell from where I stood, down the hallway ahead of us. The room was rectangular in shape and had many doors connecting to other rooms and the main hallway of the mansion. In the far corner there was a grand staircase leading up to the second floor where there were even more doors and books.

“What the fuck is with you, Thom? You lettin’ just *anybody* in now?” Rick said, but Thomas ignored him and instead put his arm over my shoulder and guided me across the gigantic library towards the hall.

Thomas tilted his head towards me. “Don’t mind him, he’s drunk.”

“Does he work for you?” I asked him.

“Who, *Rick*? No no no. Really though, he’s a fine gentleman, if you speak to him while you’re heavily intoxicated. You have to be brought down to *his* level of intelligence in order to properly communicate with him, you see.” Thomas said.

I could feel Rick’s ogre eyes drilling holes into my back like laser beams.

“How come it took so long for somebody to answer the door?” I asked him while my eyes continued to wander around.

“If memory serves— which it does every once in a while— it’s *always* unlocked. Didn’t you hear us calling you?” He asked me while I was eyeing the ceiling where shiny and grandiose-looking chandeliers hung high above us.

I thought about that for a moment. Never did it occur to me to try and turn the stupid door handle. Silly me for doing the expected thing and knock on the door and

stand there, waiting like a moron. “I heard something that sounded like people shouting, yeah.” I said.

By the time we entered the hallway there was already more to look at. Thomas had paintings on each wall, I assume some of it was of his own creation (they looked either sloppy or overtly abstract) but some of them, as I found out later, were either given to him by people he knew or were movie posters he decided to buy on a money splurge.

We passed by a door to my right, and upon quick glance I could see it was a living room with three sofas, a large television that wasn't currently being operated, and the largest fish tank I'd ever seen. For a brief moment I wondered how difficult it would be to clean such a thing.

“Damn this place is *huge*...” I said, mostly to myself. I felt like I was walking into the White House.

“Eh, this is nothing. Now listen,” He turned me around so that we were face to face and he placed both hands on my shoulders. “I know about the shit you're going through, and I want you to fuckin' *forget* about it. Fuck your troubles, your worries, your sins— Forget about *all* that crap, 'cause that's all from the *outside*, man.” He waved toward the entrance to emphasize his point. “Because in *here*, we're safe. This party's our own little bomb shelter, my friend, nothing to hold us down but gravity. And who knows, maybe we'll even break the shit out of that tonight.” Out of nowhere a silver beer can appeared in his hand. Where it came from I have no idea, but he opened it and handed it to me.

“That sounds like the greatest idea I've heard all week.” I told him. The can was cold in my hand.

Thomas slapped my arm for the second time, and I nearly spilled the beer. “I'm glad you agree. You're in Thomas's world now Paul, brace yourself for a freakin' *amazing* night.”

“I don't suppose it'd be a stupid question to ask if you have enough room for all the sick drunkards that are going to be crashing here?” I asked after sipping a bit of the beer. We continued our trek down the hall; I could see that up ahead it opened up into this larger room. There was some noise coming from there but I couldn't tell from who or what.

“Well, from my guesstimates, I think we’re going to get the average amount of crazy people. We’ve got the usual’s mixed in with some newbie’s, everyone always seems to be bringing somebody— did you bring anyone, Paul-meister?”

I had never been called that before, and instantly I began hoping I never would be ever again. But I quickly let it slide on account of the gift of alcohol. I drank from it greedily, shaking my head in response once I finished.

“I really don’t have anyone that I could invite that would want to come, sad to say.” As I said it I imagined Charley jumping into his truck, speaking to me in a fast paced, excited manner about how wonderful the party would be. The tinge of bitterness was only brief that time.

The hallway ended suddenly and we were now in the living room. Or one of them anyway, I guess. I have to admit that calling it that seems to shrink its size, because it was far grander than that. If bedrooms have a ‘master bedroom’, this one deserves to be called a ‘master living room’. It was *that* big. It was a tad oval shaped, with a concrete fireplace to the right, which was venting warm air out into the room, which I could already feel from where I stood, and lighting the room with its dark orange glow. There was a double glass door entrance onto a patio, both their blinds were open and I could see the BBQ pit was currently inactive and the backyard was a landscape of white snow and tall black lines made from trees sticking out of it all.

Beside the doors was a 60-inch or so widescreen television, set up on the wall high enough for the whole room to see. I had never seen one so big outside of a department store. The television was showing a highly colorful Japanese video game that I didn’t recognize. There was a couch facing the TV, three dudes sitting on it and two in front on the floor. On the other end from the fireplace was another couch, smaller, and sitting on it was a very affectionate gay couple tying up the tongues in each other’s mouths.

I instantly noticed the two girls sitting on the floor. One of them had long red hair, reminding me of a modestly clothed version of the Birth of Venus. She wasn’t as pretty as that classic painting, though, but still quite attractive in her own right. The other girl had shoulder-length black hair; thick-rimmed glasses that I’m sure were more of a stylistic choice rather than one from limited selection, and wide, reddish-brown pretty

eyes. There was a young Audrey Hepburn feel to her face and body structure that really caught my attention. She eyed me looking at her from the corner of her peripheral vision, and for a second while our eyes gazed at each other the whole party slowed down to a freeze. The moment seemed to stand out, highlighted in some way I still cannot explain. Then I blinked, she returned her gaze to the television, and just like that, the moment had ended.

Everyone else in the room neglected to notice me, instead they were glued to the game that the three dudes on the couch were playing on the television.

“Paul, everyone.” Thomas said as he waved his arms to everyone, introducing me. “Everyone, Paul.”

I get a few waves, a weak 'hello' from somewhere. *Very excited crowd* I thought, feeling optimistic. *Things look promisingly going along with The Plan thus far.*

“Are all your parties like this?” I asked Thomas before taking another swig of my beer.

“Eh, usually we have a stripper or two, some drugs here and there, but alas the economy has to cut into everyone’s fun. Ok then,” Thomas said clapping his hands together, as Rick entered the room and hogged the remaining space on the larger couch. “Let's get fucked up.”

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SAY IT AIN'T SO: A Novella

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