



We've got to get you that margarita. Pronto.

LESLIE JOHNSON

IT'S JUST A PARTY

You came! You made it!

#

No, of course not, don't be silly. Better late than never, right? Isn't that what they say? That's what *I* say. Better late than never. Some people, quite a few different people, actually came early and left early, so it's good to have some late arrivals, too.

#

Oh, thanks! It's fun, isn't it, for Cinco de Mayo? It's not really Mexican but it looks kind of Mexican, doesn't it? With the embroidery and everything? The salesgirl at Lord and Taylor called it *tribal-infused* print. It's fun, isn't it?

#

No, of course not, you're fine. You came here from the club, right? That thing at the club? You look fabulous. Although, Jeff, you're probably going to want to loosen that tie if you start drinking tequila with Rog. He ordered something very authentic, Don Julio, have you heard of that?

#

Really? A triathlon? Geez, what are you trying to prove, Jeff? Ha — just kidding. You have to have a few sips of the Don Julio anyway, just to taste it. Anyway, come on in! Get in here, you two! You weren't waiting here at the door for long, were you? Were you waiting here for me to answer the door?

#

Oh, good! I'm glad you weren't waiting! Because I was going to say, the party's out back in the yard and the music got turned up a little too loud when everyone was dancing and I'd just come in for more ice

when I heard the doorbell ringing. You just missed it. Mary Callahan got everyone going in a conga line and it was *hilarious*. You should have seen it! Oh my god, I couldn't stop laughing. You know, I was going to hire a mariachi band, but Rog said why did we ever install the exterior sound system if we never use it, so we just downloaded all those old hits from Miami Sound Machine, remember? Oh my god, it got crazy out there! Here, let's go through the kitchen so you can see what we added.

#

Oh, I know I love Mary, too. I just love her. She's so funny. She had to leave early though.

#

No, she's not out there anymore. One of her kids is having a sleep-over at their place tonight and she felt like her and Tom should get home to be the adult supervision. I mean, she knew we were having our party this evening, so I'm not sure why she thought tonight would be a super night to let her daughter host a sleep-over, but whatever.

#

Right, I know what you mean. You're right, it *is* a lot to juggle, with the kids and all. For me, it's just about organization, though. A little forethought. So what do you think?

#

The countertops? Not the *countertops*, silly! The *backsplash*! You've seen my countertops lots of times. They're exactly the same. But you know, now that you mention the countertops, they might look different to you because of the new backsplash. I think the blue color of the backsplash is bringing out the flecks of teal in the granite countertops. I think—

#

What?

#

Oh, I'm sure Rog is out back with the others. He's going to be really glad to see you, Jeff. Go on out and join him! There's margaritas on the upper deck and lots of yummy food left over from dinner on the

lower deck. They served about an hour or so ago, but there's tons left. Try the enchiladas con carne! *So* delicious. Just help yourself. Jan and I will be out in just a minute or two.

#

Right, but wait for just a minute, Jan, okay? I want to ask you something about this new backsplash. I want to get your opinion on something. We went with the glass tiles, as you can see, instead of the ceramic, and since the glass tiles have such a richer tone—a bit of a shimmer, do you see that? So I didn't want it to be too overpowering and go too far with it, but now that it's in and it looks so beautiful, I'm thinking maybe I should have it expanded another three or four inches on each side. What do you *think*?

#

Well that's true, either way *would* be fine, but what do you really think? Because what I was thinking when I went with the glass instead of the ceramic is that sometimes a smaller amount of something special is better than larger amount of something ordinary.

#

No, I didn't get a chance to ask Mary.

#

I agree. Mary's always had interesting taste. Not always my own style exactly, but she has a sort of flair if you like quirky.

#

I know. It's too bad she's not here anymore.

#

Oh, lots of different people. Do you know the Morrisons? They're here. And the Langs. And you know Stephie Walters. Stephie's here. She brought Henry and Larson. They've already pulled down the sombreros from gazebo even though I told them, more than once actually, that they're just supposed to be for decoration. Actually, I was kind of surprised she brought them without calling first. I guess she and Jason are trading off the kids every other weekend now. But, like, did some kind of babysitter plague kill off all the babysitters in this town?

I mean, the last I checked, there were still babysitters in this town.

#

Oh, right. Sure. It *is* hard for single moms. That's for sure! When my kids were little I practically felt like a single mom myself because Rog was always working so much. And you're right, my kids *are* older now, so you're right it's easier for me in a way, but some things get easier and some things get harder. You'll see, Jan! Katie's fourteen now, right?

#

Just you wait, though, Jan. They go to bed one night a normal kid and wake up the next day some kind of weird zombie. That's if you're lucky you get the zombie. Or you get the snarling wolf-girl ready to rip the tendons out of your neck for offering her breakfast or something.

#

No, no, I'm just kidding! I didn't mean *Katie* will turn into a wolf-girl! I just meant teenagers in general. Ha!

#

Kylie? Oh, Kylie's great! She's really doing great.

#

Yes. That's true. Who told you that?

#

Well, they might call it an alternative high school, but that's really just because of all the technology they have there. She can actually take half of her classes online, and actually that's going to be really good experience for when she goes to college because according to the counselors so much of what they're doing at colleges now is online. I'll have to have her tell you about it! She's here. She's helping us out with the party.

#

I know, it *is* sweet of her, isn't it?

#

I know, we *should* get out there so you can say hi to her. Before we go out there, though, there's one more thing I wanted to ask you about.

Something I wanted to ask you. As a friend. Between you and me.

#

No, not the backslash. Something different.

#

It's, well . . . You came here from that thing at the club, right?

#

That's so totally fine! I mean, I wish I'd known about the thing at the club before I sent my invitations and then a week later Kathy and Jean and the Hendricks and the Jensens called to say they had this thing at the club—

#

Kathy said she didn't really *want* to go but felt she kind of *had* to because she was on the committee that chose the charity and that it wouldn't look right to just make a donation and not actually attend because it's such a good cause, I forget what she said it was—

#

Right. That's right. I don't know why I forgot that because I have a cousin with MS. She's had it for years, I remember my mother telling me about it years ago, and that it's such a terrible thing, but she looks totally normal to me. Last Thanksgiving I was watching her to see if I could see any signs, but she seemed just the same as always. She works full time. She works at a Lenscrafters. You know they have them wear white jackets like they're ophthalmologists but they're not. At least my cousin's not. I know she had some kind of training, but she doesn't have a medical degree. But she wears that white jacket to work, and I think that's kind of misleading.

#

Wow, a wheelchair.

#

Oh, no, right, I totally get what you're saying. My cousin's just lucky I guess. But *anyway* what I wanted to—

#

Oh, I'm sure he's fine. I'm sure by now Rog has twisted his arm and

gotten him going on that Don Julio —

#

I know, it *does* sound good! We're going to go out there and get you a margarita in ten seconds, that's a promise, but what I wanted to ask you, Jan, before we go out there, you know, just between you and me, is if you heard anything at the club about us, you know, me and Rog, or Rog, and why we're taking a break from the club this season —

#

In the fall, definitely. I'll be working with you again on the Harvest Fundraiser, don't you worry!

#

Right. Those kids in Tanzania really *do* depend on us.

#

Right. We'll probably be back in the fall. I'm sure we will. It's just that Rog just wants to try his hand at different golf courses this summer and I'm getting so super time-invested in my ceramics, so we figured it made sense just to take a break altogether. Some of the public courses are actually more challenging, at least that's what Rog says, and he's the one who's trying to tweak his long game, but *anyway*, have you heard anyone say anything different?

#

No, about why we haven't been at the club this spring?

#

Really? I mean, if you have, you can tell me.

#

Because Mary Callahan said something. About our membership being under review.

#

Yes! She said that! Tonight! Can you believe that? Right here at my party, when I was showing her my new backsplash!

#

Well. She didn't come right out and say it in those words, but she implied it. That she knows — or thinks she knows, I mean — something

about the status of our membership, which is ridiculous.

#

Well. She sort of put her finger on my wrist, which is weird, isn't it, to put your finger on someone's wrist when they're showing you something new in their kitchen? And she said I shouldn't be hard on myself for something that's not my fault.

#

Well, that something happened that someone's *fault!* That's what I think she was implying.

#

Right. Like Rog. Like she thinks Rog did something that's his *fault*.

#

Jan, that was like four months ago. He had a little too much to drink, maybe, like men do sometimes, right?

#

I know I wasn't there, but it really wasn't a big deal. That's what Mary told me herself when it happened and that's what Kathy's husband told Kathy, too, and anyway, what does that have to do with the fact that Rog wants to focus on a variety of golf courses this season anyway?

#

Oh, no, Jan! Don't be silly. I'm not upset that you brought it up. I mean, that whole thing at the club bar was really nothing, anyway. Nothing. But really, just between you and me, I *am* a little irked that Mary would be, well, inappropriate at my house during my own party. I mean, really. It's a Cinco de Mayo party! A *fiesta*. Not a time to put your finger on someone's wrist and try to be all *serious*. Right?

#

Well, yes. She's my friend. I mean, we went to college together. You knew that, right? We were in the same sorority. She was a legacy. They pretty much have to take you if you're a legacy. Geez, that seems so *long ago!* I guess because it *was* so long ago!

#

No, Mary and Rob were actually our secondary sponsors. The Morrisons were our primary sponsors. You knew that. Didn't you know that? I mean, don't get me wrong. I love Mary. But she can be a little . . . don't you think? Just between you and me?

#

Oh, geez, you're right! A *lot* longer than ten seconds! We've got to get you that margarita. Pronto. I just wanted, you know, so if you hear anything—

#

I'm coming with you! I'm right behind you. You have to try those enchiladas con carne. Seriously, you really have to.

#

I know! Aren't they fun? Chili pepper lights! I wanted them to be strung up in all the trees, too, but Rog didn't want to get up on the ladder. Not that he didn't *want* to but because of his back.

#

Hmmm. I don't know.

#

I know, that's funny. I don't see him. There's Jeff, though. Oh, geez, Stephanie's little boys have him cornered by the gazebo. What's he doing? What's he *juggling*? We should go rescue him.

#

Rog loves kids, too. *Loves* kids.

#

Hey, guys! Hey there, boys! Look, Jan, they're papayas. From my decorative fruit bowl. Ha. You're so talented, Jeff. A triathlete and a magician, too.

#

Right! A juggler. That's what I meant to say. Larson, do you think it's time for you and your brother to give Mr. Wellston a break?

#

I think it's time. Why don't you and your brother take those papayas off Mr. Wellston's hands and put them back in the big fruit bowl for

me, okay?

#

I'll tell you what, then. Why don't you go find Kylie and tell her it's time for the piñata, okay boys?

#

That's right, a piñata! Hurry up now! Go find Kylie!

#

Why aren't you *eating*, Jeff? Did you try the enchiladas?

#

Well how about Rog's special tequila? Did Rog fix you a drink?

#

What do you mean?

#

Well I'm sure he's *here*. You couldn't find him?

#

He's definitely *here*. He wouldn't be anywhere except for here. Unless maybe—

#

What, Larson?

#

Kylie doesn't smoke cigarettes, honey.

#

No she doesn't. They're bad for you.

#

If she's up in the tree house, she's probably just getting the piñata ready, that's all. She's probably going to hang it from one of those big branches. You boys go wait by the tree house, and call up to her, okay? Just call up to her and tell her to hurry up with the piñata.

#

I'm in the middle of talking to Mr. and Mrs. Wellston, Larson. So excuse you! If Kylie's busy, then go find your mother. Bye bye now!

#

Yes, well, that's putting mildly. I mean, I know Stephie's a single

mom now and everything, but if I'm remembering right they just got divorced less than a year ago. It's not like her kids were raised in the wild. I mean, manners are manners. What ever happened to kids and manners? And speaking of manners, that's what I was trying to tell you. I bet Rog is in his golf room. I bet someone asked to see his new drivers, and you know Rog, he never likes to say no when it comes to golf. Golf is really a sport of manners, that's what Rog says. A sport of courtesy. You've seen Rog's golf room, haven't you, Jeff?

#

Oh, you have to see it. It's in the finished basement. He got rid of the pool table and put in one of those indoor putting greens. You have to see it. Here. Around this way. The door's a walk-out to the side patio.

#

That's okay, Jan. You get a plate of those enchiladas. I'm just going to take Jeff to the golf room, and then I want to introduce you to my yoga teacher. My yoga's teacher's here! She's so great. You'll love her.

#

I know. Especially your spine.

#

Come on!

#

Follow me, Jeff. It'll only take a minute. I know you're going to want to see this new driver that Rog is so excited about. It's right around the side here . . .

. . .

Oh.

#

No, he's okay. I'm sure he's okay. Rog. Rog. Jesus, Rog, get up.

#

You don't have to feel his *pulse*, Jeff! He's just, he's resting. He had a headache all afternoon, and that Mary *Callahan* and her stupid *conga* line. That was just too much for him. What the hell does she think, that we're all still in college! Jesus. Rog. Rog!

#

You're right. Let's go.

#

I wouldn't say *sleep it off*, Jeff. He's resting. He gets these really horrible horrible headaches sometimes but he doesn't like to complain. You know Rog. He's not a whiner. Where's Jan? Let's find Jan. I want to introduce her to my yoga teacher. You should meet her, too Rog. Yoga is incredibly good for runners. It's not just regular stretching. It opens the connective tissues and lets it all breathe. Okay, there's *Jan*, but where's my yoga teacher?

#

Maybe.

#

I guess so. Maybe when I was showing Jan my new backslash.

#

I know, a lot of people have left. But then, you guys got here so late. Too bad you guys weren't here earlier when everyone was dancing. Oh my god, that was so hilarious! Here she —

#

Oh, Jan!

#

That's so funny. When did she text you? Just now?

#

I know, so cute! I mean, to *us* it's cute, Mary's singing karaoke with the slumber-party girls, but I feel kind of sorry for her daughter, you know? To have one of those moms who's always trying so hard to be cool?

#

Why, what did she say?

#

No, tell me.

#

Well that's funny. *Worried* about me. That's very funny. I have no idea

why she would even say that.

#

He's fine, Jeff. I told you. You know what, the one I'm actually worried about is Mary. If there's someone we should be worried about it's Mary, if you ask me.

#

Right, she seems that way, but you don't know her the way I know her. I mean, even in college she was such jealous person. It's sad really. It's—

#

Okay, Jeff, geez, enough already! You're an insurance salesman, not an Olympian! Nobody's going to care if you're not at the gym at the break of dawn.

#

But it's still early! Did you even try the enchiladas yet?

#

No, I know! I was just kidding. I know you're not a salesman.

#

Well, okay then, but Jan, you were going to say hi to Kylie, remember? Kylie wanted to say hi to you. She wanted to tell you about her Avatar Club. It's very high-tech. She's very involved with it.

#

Okay, then, Jeff, go ahead. She'll meet you in the car in like ten seconds. Go ahead!

#

Oh my god, Jan, I really admire you. I do. You're so patient. That would make me crazy to have to listen to him whining about that triathlon training every day like he's preparing for a space mission to Mars or something. But you, you're so patient!

#

That's true. It *is* good for them to take care of themselves.

#

I think she might be up in the tree house. She was getting the piñata

ready.

#

I know! We were going to do a piñata, but then we got so busy with everything else. Laughing and dancing! And then, you know, Mary got carried away with her conga line, and it was kind of embarrassing, actually, the way she has such a need to be the center of attention, but I didn't want to make her feel bad. I didn't want to make her think I was trying to rain on her parade. But you know what, I should have. I should have pulled her aside said *Mary*. I should have tried to help her *reflect* on why she feels this constant need to upstage me. But you know me, I wouldn't do that. Not at a party.

#

Actually, Jan, she does. She seems sweet, but she's really a very insecure person and it's sad, but that's why. That's why she's such a bitch. Between you and me, Jan, that's why our membership's under review. Because of her. *Mary*. She submitted an incident report to the board.

#

Right, supposedly anonymous, but it was her. I know it was her.

#

False. *Completely* false.

#

Really? How can her intentions be good if she's a jealous liar, Jan?

#

I *am* calm.

#

I not *jumping* to anything.

#

Well, whatever. *You're* just so sweet, though, Jan. You always have been. I mean it . . . KYLIE! COME DOWN! COME DOWN AND SAY HI TO MRS. WELLSTON!

#

I know, she probably has those earbuds on, plugged into her phone or iPod or whatever. These kids today are all going to be deaf by the

time they're forty . . . KYLIE! CAN YOU HEAR ME? MRS. WELLSTON WANTS TO TALK TO YOU!

#

No, I'm pretty sure she's up there. Wait here. Just wait here a minute. I'm going to go up there and get her. Don't move! Wait right here!

. . .

Kylie? Kylie. I'm coming up. Kylie? Geez, don't make me climb all the way up this ladder, Kylie! I want you to come down and talk to Mrs. Wellston . . . *I mean it, right now . . .*

. . .

Oh, great, Kylie. Just great. After you *promised* me.

#

Right. Sure. I can *smell* it. And your eyes are all red. What am I supposed to say to Mrs. Wellston?

#

Well, do you have any Visine stashed up here?

#

Well, check your pockets. I keep finding half-used bottles in your pockets.

#

Well, forget it anyway. There she goes. I can see their car from here. Fucking Jeff has the motor running. There she goes. Great. Thanks a lot, Kylie.

#

It's not what I want *from* you. It's what I want *for* you. You can't just . . . Wait, I'm coming in. Move over a little . . .

. . .

You can't just escape from your problems, Kylie.

#

Well, you have to *try*. I know that much at least. You can't just quit things all the time.

#

What about your Avatar Club?

#

I didn't say stupid. Did I? I might have said I didn't understand why you couldn't join something where real people actually get together in a real place, but at least it was *something*. It was something you were trying, at least. Like my party tonight. I saw Cinco de Mayo on my Unicef calendar, and I thought, okay, just *go for it*. Because you have to make an effort. I mean, it took me hours to hang up all those damn chili pepper lights. But we all have to keep trying, Kylie. We have to. Even if—

#

I'm not crying. I'm just . . .

#

I know. You're right, it's just a party. I know that. But it's more than that, you know? I feel tired, Kylie. It seems too hard sometimes.

#

Keeping our heads above water, I guess. As we climb the rocky mountain of life.

#

Well, excuse me Miss Smarty-pants. There could be a river, couldn't there? Or a lake? You could be climbing a mountain, *metaphorically* as you say, and get hot and decide to take a swim in a lake or something, couldn't you? Or fall into something by surprise. You could stumble on loose rocks on the trail that you didn't see and fall off a cliff, and just fall and fall, down and down into a deep, deep gorge—

#

What? Where are you going? Don't go yet. Stay up here with me a little longer.

#

Wait, Kylie. I couldn't—

#

I can't hear a word you're saying. ■