

THOMAS LIPTON, SUPERHERO
By Paul Lambrecht

Tom Lipton was a unique superhero, in that his superpower, unlike most, had questionable social benefit. Namely: it was driving while drunk, which no person of conscience would ever condone, and rightly so.

His friends from the faculty were urging him to slow down all night. This was at the tony shindig being thrown by another superhero with larger upside: Chesley Sullenberger III.

Chesley was a pilot who could land a plane anywhere in a pinch. Lipton was a menace to life and limb on the late night roadways, yet he always managed to get himself and his car home intact. It was an older model Toyota Corolla, but that is not integral to the larger question of whether this power was governed by mere long odds or by an innate talent.

This particular evening, with his friends trying to get him to slow down, Tom was going to town on G & T's. There also seemed to be the matter of the girl, Priscilla, who he had fallen in love with immediately, seated on the beige sofa near the fireplace, talking pleasantly with each in a stream of guys who sat down near her.

Lipton was about to make his move. Now he didn't like to bring up the fact of his superpower right away.

"How're you doing?" he asked her, sitting down, she thought about as gracefully as a wounded water buffalo.

"Fine," she said.

"How do you know Chesley?" he asked.

"I don't," she said. It was the way in which she said it, like it was meant to be interesting but really wasn't, which drew Lipton in. Strange girl, he thought.

Inextricably strange.

She had a blurry but pretty face. One of her front teeth looked too big for her mouth. When she smiled it looked like a tusk. Lipton's friends groaned in nervous anticipation as he sank his meaty hand into the bowl of pistachios between himself and the girl.

He better not be trying to take this girl home, they all thought.

Lipton's friends thought his supposed superpower boiled down to pure dumb luck.

This strange girl, Priscilla, and Lipton, had by now introduced themselves. It turned out they were both historians and professors of the Renaissance.

He of the Medici family political dynasty and its fortunes, and she of the bubonic plague's influence on the contemporaneous fashions.

By now it was getting late and Lipton's friends wanted to head home. Lipton and the girl had been talking for over an hour now, so one of the friends had to buck up and interrupt them.

"All right, Lipton, let's see the keys," said Lipton's boldest friend, Hillary.

Lipton grimaced, but his lady Priscilla seemed a little relieved. Not at first, but she was picking up on all the silent cues put forth by Lipton's friends.

"You're driving?" she asked. She had personally witnessed him down 3 G & T's and a couple flutes of champagne.

"You don't understand," said Lipton, as sure of himself as he was any chance for him that night had just gotten away.

"C'mon, hand'em over... What don't I understand???" I'll take you home and we'll come get your car tomorrow. Sorry,,," Edmund said, this last to Priscilla, Queen of the late 14th century Florentine lace corset.

They had heard his superpower crap before, and this time, his designated friend Edmund Hillary, was in no mood to humor this foolish talk.

But Lipton was always one to stay on stage after the curtain had fallen.

"Now, Priscilla, where was I??? Oh yes, well the next Medici was the nephew of the Cardinal, I believe his name was Tony... or Pepe. Now he had a deviated septum, which was common in all the blue-bloods of that time period, which I'm sure you knew. It's so nice to be talking to someone who knows a thing or two about these things. Does it feel like I'm lecturing to you?"

Priscilla shrugged and yawned.

Edmund was mad now.

"Damn it all, Lipton. Either you come with me now or so help me, I will knock you out, hog-tie you, and throw you in the back of my car."

Priscilla perked up at this possibility.

"Would you please excuse me?" said Lipton, a little embarrassed now, ironically for his friend. He felt the need to expurgate, clear some room, throw up.

He left Priscilla and Edmund alone together.

"Does he always get like this?" she asked.

"Nearly every time he drinks," he said, nodding his head sadly.

Prospects for the evening were definitely winding down, realized Lipton, dabbing at his sweaty forehead with a handkerchief in the mirror. It was time to gather up his marbles and go home.

Hillary and Priscilla were chatting, Lipton noticed as he left the bathroom. Edmund looked really tired and put-upon. Lipton had a frightening premonition, perhaps a result of another superpower as yet unknown to him, of the two leaving together and wrecking in the woods; and police peeling their charred bodies out of the car.

Lipton walked over to the host Chesley.

"Great party, old bean. As usual."

Sully smiled. One superhero to another.

"You drive careful, eh, Thomas."

"You bet Sull, and you stay out of the water hazards for a while..." Chesley laughed loudly at this.

"I've lost a lot of balls in the water, you know, but no passengers yet..."

Lipton's car started right up and simultaneously his mild-mannered alter-ego disappeared, leaving only the crisp night, a ton of steel, wheels, and the acquired wisdom of lubricated navigation. Tom saw Edmund now in the side window, chasing after the car, waving his fists. Tom waved back at him as he flew down the crushed gravel driveway, and tore around the terrace. The road was long through the forest to his house.

The first thing was to keep his eye out for cops. The second thing was to drive as normally as possible, not too slow, not too fast. Easy does it correcting for the swerving.

It was a peaceful night, Coast to Coast AM droned on the radio dial, and Lipton had already made it halfway home.

Despite violent hiccupping.

He was finally nearing his house when he got a scare. He heard, yanked back into the moment as if from a sweet dream, the screech of tires and a crashing noise. This was

followed soon by the lights and sounds of a squad car approaching.

Blaring past him going the opposite direction. As soon as it had safely passed him by, Lipton turned his headlights back on, and headed on towards home.

He had been briefly invisible, or was reasonably sure he had been.

He reached his house safely, ungracefully extricated himself from the car, and staggered into his little bungalow. He had left his study lamp on. Now he switched it off and closed his book on the Inquisition.

He crawled into bed, and fell asleep flipping through an old comic book with brittle pages from spilled beer.

End.