

Forty

ACT I

The scene is a suburban sitting room. A woman is sitting on the sofa toying with a drink and looking depressed. Another woman enters downstage left unnoticed, looks at the audience and says

Molly That's my sister that is – my baby sister – she's been like that for days, mooching about with a face like a depressed bloodhound. She's normally such a happy soul. Well I suppose it's up to mad Molly to find out what's the matter. Mad Molly – that's me. I'm not really mad – mind you I would say that wouldn't I? *(She enters the scene and plonks herself down with some force beside her sister).*
Hello Gail – lovely sister of mine.

Gail *(without enthusiasm)* Hi.

Molly Is that it?

Gail What?

Molly Is that how you greet your favourite and most glam sister?

Gail You're my only sister.

Molly True – but I do expect a little more enthusiasm from my baby sister on her birthday – especially when I've got a pressie in my hand. Happy Birthday! *(She kisses her sister and gives her a present).*

Gail Oh thanks. *(She doesn't undo the present)*

Molly Well aren't you going to open it? It isn't just a card you know.

Gail Oh right. *(She undoes the envelope and looks at the contents).* Ah – nice.

Molly Nice? Bloody nice? Is that all you have to say? That's a long weekend in gay Paris for you and your hubby and a few excursions included – a second honeymoon. Look it's in the same hotel you went to twenty years ago. It wasn't easy to get that. I mean to say I didn't expect a brass band but I did expect a bit more than "Oh nice".

Gail Oh I'm sorry Moll *(she hugs her sister)* It's a lovely thought. *(She goes back to her original, miserable pose).*

Molly Look here are you alright?

Gail Yes fine.

Molly I knew it! There's something wrong.

Gail I said I'm fine.

Molly I know – that means there’s something wrong.

Gail Well that’s a very odd way of interpreting the word “fine”.

Molly Oh no it’s not – “fine” means there’s something wrong but I don’t want to talk about it.

Gail So if I am fine – what do I say then?

Molly You? You’d say, “of course I am – why don’t I look alright? Am I a bit pale? Why did you say that?” And then you’d run across to the mirror to confirm that you hadn’t got the bubonic plague. Am I right?

Gail – am I right?

Gail Perhaps.

Molly Now when you start saying “perhaps” then I know that.....

Gail Alright, alright, don’t start that again.

Molly Aha! So there is something wrong.

Gail Not really – I’m just a bit depressed that’s all.

Molly Depressed? Depressed about what? Come on – about what?

Gail Nothing in particular – it’s just that – well today it’s all come to a head.

Molly What – on your birthday?

Gail Yes

Molly Oh now I get it – it’s the dreaded 40th birthday blues. I didn’t think you were like that. Look stop being such a misery. I’ve been forty for years and years – well not that many years – but it’s nothing. I hardly noticed it. I know a lot of women and men for that matter make a lot of it, but it’s just another birthday that’s all – one year older. No reason to get depressed you daft little bat.

Gail It’s not just getting to be forty. It makes you think that’s all. You know – about your life – what you’ve done with it, what you’ve achieved and what you’ve missed.

Molly Well quite right look what you’ve achieved. Alan – a lovely husband – you could hardly have done better (if you couldn’t have Hugh Grant that is). He’s honest, hardworking, faithful and quite sexy but I shall deny I ever said that if you repeat it. Two beautiful daughters doing well at college – both a credit to you – now they’ve got over the loony, spotty, hormonal early teens. You’ve got a good, well-paid job and, say it as I shouldn’t, you still look pretty good. Mind you that runs in the family (*simper*) so what’s the problem?

Gail No problem.

Molly Exactly! So cheer up Breezy.

Gail Don't call me "breezy" – I'm Gail.

Molly I must admit when we shared a room and you had a mania for mushy peas Gail suited you best. But now that you're older and have more control "Breezy" suits you better. *(They both burst out laughing).*

Gail You are disgusting you know.

Molly I know – I think I've got an excess of testosterone. That's better – you're prettier when you laugh – not much – but a bit.

Gail Oh I'm sorry I've been such a misery but you could always make me laugh couldn't you even when we were kids?

Molly That's always been my problem Good old Moll – one of the boys.

Gail Well I would hardly say that.

Molly No – it's true – it's a well known fact. If it weren't for the bobbies in front and the lack of a packed lunch in the knickers I'd be one of the lads.

Gail Oh come off it – you've had more men than I've had hot dinners.

Molly Now hang on – I've had my moments – but that's a bit of an exaggeration.

Gail No it's not! Just lately I've been thinking a lot about your love-life.

Molly Really? That's must have taken you all of two minutes.

Gail Right let's think about it then. *(She ticks off on her fingers)* Engaged four times.

Molly True – but the little devils escaped.

Gail Don't interrupt. Two marriages and I've counted you've lived with six partners for varying periods ranging from two months to two years since your last divorce and God knows how many one night stands in between that lot - I think.....

Molly Just a minute – what is this? "The Molly Wilkinson's a tart day?"

Gail Ah yes I forgot Ram Bum Ding who you stayed with in Saudi for a month.

Molly Enough! Enough! Anyway his name was Ram Dum Singh if you must mention the dusky dickhead at all. What I will say to you Gail Andrews nee Wilkinson is so what? Are you jealous?

Gail *(Very subdued)* Of course not.

Molly You are! You're jealous!

Gail Don't be stupid! I'm not! What have I got to be jealous about?

Molly Jealous! Jealous! Jealous!

Gail Don't make me laugh.

Molly Jealous! Jealous! Jealous! I can see it. It's in your face. Don't try to deny it – I always know when you're lying you know that.

Gail Well what if I am? It's not fair!

Molly What the hell are you talking about?

Gail You and your hundreds of men – I've only ever known Alan.

Molly Oh it's hundreds now is it?

Gail Oh Moll you know what I mean.

Molly (*Cooling down*) Is that what's really troubling you? Come on you can tell me all about it.

Gail Well it's not the hundreds..... many partners you've had that depresses me – it's my lack of any kind of sexual experiences. I started courting Alan at 15 and married him at 20 – end of sexual experiences.

Molly Aha! Now I don't want to pry sis but are you and Alan having problems – you know – in the bed department?

Gail Oh no – that's fine – well great.

Molly Has the bugger been playing away from home – if he has I'll..... (*Alan enters*) Hello Alan. (*Alan and Gail freeze. Molly gets up and walks to the audience*) Well here's a turn up for the books. I always thought my little sister was the placid, easy-going type without any sexual hang-ups, but I suppose we all feel like that about our baby sisters. Of course he would have to come in just at the wrong time – that's typical of a man – they're so insensitive. I shouldn't think he's noticed that Gail has been depressed – swine! Anyway back to the plot. (*She sits down again*)

Alan What'o Moll and how's my favourite sister-in-law?

[Molly I'm alright (*pointedly*)

Alan Good good – all ready for the party tonight?

Molly Yes – do you want any help down at the hall?

Alan No – I've organised it all. Drink, grub, disco and a surprise. Then all you two have to do is just roll up at 8.0'clock looking lovely.

Molly Yes well that could be a problem. Look I only called in on the way to pick up my car – shan't be long – see you in a few mins.

Alan No you won't I shall be down the hall from now on.

Molly Well I'll try to hide my disappointment – see you soon sis. (*She exits*)

Gail (*Back to depressed state*) Have you nearly finished at the hall?

Alan Not quite – Bob's coming to help me with the decorations, Jane's bringing the table centres and surprise surprise I'm organising the bar.

Gail You should have let me help.

Alan Certainly not – this is your day – you're just supposed to relax and enjoy it.

Gail I suppose so.

Alan Look – what is the matter with you? Is there something wrong?

Gail Course not – I'm fine.

Alan Fine? Now I know there's something wrong.

Gail What?

Alan Whenever you say "fine" like that – I know you're not.

Gail Not what?

Alan Fine – you always say "fine" when you're not.

Gail When – you just tell me when? Am I so predictable?

Alan Well for a start when I wanted to go to Paris for the rugby. And then there was the time that.....

Gail Alright alright – I'm just a little depressed at turning 40. (*he goes and looks out of the window*)

Alan Just checking to see if the vultures are assembling to pick your poor old bones.

Gail You are a nerk!

Alan I've been 40 for four years and I'm just as handsome, virile and downright attractive as when I was 24. (*he sits next to her and gives her a hug*) And I must admit for a 40 year old you're quite plumpious – and I've got a surprise for you. I was going to give it to you at the party but you can have it now to cheer you up. (*He gives her an envelope*).

Gail Oh I'm sorry love – you must think I'm stupid. I don't know why you put up with me.

Alan Neither do I. Come on, come on, open it up then.

Gail Oh right. (*She opens it*). Ah yes – how nice.

Alan Nice? What do you mean nice? It's a weekend in our honeymoon hotel and from what I remember 20 years ago – it was more than nice – it was fantastic wasn't it?

Gail Yes – it was wonderful – Paris in the spring. I remember our room so well and everything in it.

Alan Particularly the ceiling.

Gail What?

Alan Well I do recall we didn't go out much for the first week and you spent a lot of time

Gail Alan! Don't be so crude!

Alan I don't remember you complaining at the time when I imparted my vast knowledge of sexual techniques to you.

Gail I was very innocent.

Alan But easily corrupted by the master of the Karma Sutra.

Gail Is that where you found it all out?

Alan What – the Karma Sutra? No – never read it. It was just my carnal knowledge gathered over years of leching . Hee hee hee (*He puts on a lecherous face and twiddles imaginary moustaches*). And when I get you back to Paris my dear I shall impart more of my wisdom. *He grabs her and tickles her and they both fall back laughing on the sofa*).

Gail Pack it in you mucky devil. You've got a one track mind!

Alan Ah – cast aside yet again but I am nothing if not persistent (*he grabs her again*)

Gail Stop it Alan. Not now. Um – Alan?

Alan What?.

Gail How did you get your experience?

Alan What do you mean?

Gail Well – you know how did you know what you knew on our honeymoon?

Alan How did I what?

Gail It's a simple question.

Alan Where is all this leading – I mean – I've got things to do?

Gail How did you acquire your sexual knowledge?

Alan Well – to a stud like me it just came naturally.

Gail I'm sure it did – but who with?

Alan Look – what's all this about? We've been married for twenty years and you've never asked before – well apart from going on about Tracy Titchmarsh – you were obsessed with her and I never did any more with her than kiss her under the mistletoe – more's the pity. But you've never asked me about anybody else before.

Gail Well I'm asking now.

Alan Well tough! I'm not telling you – this is not the time or the place. I've got a lot to do at the hall – or you won't be having a party tonight and that won't please you will it? *(He gets up to go)*.

Gail Alan! I need to know!

Alan No you don't! You're just being stupid.

Gail How many girls did you have before me?

Alan Look – you can forget it. I'm not going into things like that now. Talk to me about it at a more suitable time.

Gail Aha! So there were lots of others?

Alan I never said that! Did I say that? What is the matter with you? *(She gets up and gets a drink)* And don't drink any more – you know what it does to you.

Gail Yes – and so do you! That's why you always liked to get me tiddly when we were courting wasn't it? Was that your technique? Get them drunk before you seduce them?

Alan I don't know what you're on about. Don't drink any more – I've got work to do. *(He starts to exit – just as their two daughters – Sophie and Charlotte enter)*

Alan Hello – it's the gruesome twosome.

Sophie Hello Mum– *(there is much hugging and kissing all round)* Hello Dad – are we all ready for the big night then?

Charlie Happy Birthday Mum.

Gail Hello *(she hugs them both)* You're very late – I expected you back this morning.

Sophie I would have been here but I had to wait for her – she'd had a heavy night.

Charlie Shut up! You said you wouldn't say anything – blabbermouth!

Sophie Well if you'd have seen the state of her room when I arrived....

Charlie Well – it was Tim – he left the mess – he'd only just gone.

Gail Who's Tim?

Charlie It wasn't my fault!

Gail Who's Tim?

Sophie Well I don't know who's fault it was then – it certainly wasn't mine – I told you I'd be there at nine.

Gail Who's Tim?

Charlie Oh listen to Miss Perfect.....

Alan Ah – things are back to usual I see anyway I've got to go back down the hall – there's much to do – secret things – you know (*he winks*) and have a word with your mother – she's going senile!

Sophie Ah – that's both of you now then is it?

Alan Yes – thank you very much – I'll remember that when you want some more money.

Sophie It was a joke – it was a joke – wasn't it Charlie?

Charlie Of course we both love you daddy – you're the best daddy in the whole wide world (*They both leap upon him and shower kisses all over him*)

Alan Get off! I know it's just cupboard love! I'll see you later – don't forget to talk to your mother and stop her drinking. Bye. (*He exits*).

Sophie What did he mean? What's up with you?

Gail Nothing – I'm fine – sorry - I'm alright – and who is Tim?

Charlie You don't sound alright.

Gail Oh – I'm fed up with this! Why can't people leave me alone?

Charlie Oh that's charming that is – we fight our way through the Saturday traffic, to be by our mother's side on her special day.

Sophie And I've left a delicious man in Leeds – simmering – and there's hoards of nubile females waiting to bring him to the boil – and this is the welcome I get!

Charlie Yes well I'm not without admirers you know – but yours soon move out don't they little sis?

Gail Move out? What do you mean move out? When did they move in? Why did they move in? What have you been up to?

Sophie Big mouth! I told you that in confidence!

Gail But I'm your mother – you shouldn't have secrets from me.

Sophie No – of course not.

Charlie Anyway Dad says there's something wrong with you and you've got to stop drinking.

Gail Don't change the subject – who moved in with you – how many – and for how long – and who's Tim?

Sophie Oh for goodness sake mother it was Nick – you know – you met him at the open day.

Gail The one with the bald head and six ear-rings?

Sophie You see – you do remember him.

Gail Yes – I remember Quasimodo as well. You said you were just friends.

Sophie We are – well we are now – now that he's moved out.

Charlie If you think he looked like Quasimodo you should see her latest neanderthal!

Sophie Just because I prefer men who look like men.

Charlie What's that supposed to mean?

Sophie You know very well.

Charlie My men are intellectual.

Sophie Puffs!

Charlie I can assure you they are most definitely not puffs – and I can prove it!

Sophie Oh yes – oh yes and what about lispng Christian?

Charlie He may have had a lisp but he also had an enormous....

Gail I don't think we want to hear this thank you.

Charlie..... artistic talent is what I was going to say.

Gail I think you're disgusting both of you. I seem to have raised a couple of nymphomaniacs

Charlie) Oh mother!

Sophie)

Charlie This is the twenty-first century – don't you remember we had all those celebrations for the millennium a few years ago.

Gail Oh I see – so in this new millennium if a girl fancies sex she just goes out and gets it does she?

Sophie Yes

Gail But you're only 17!

Sophie Well as Josh says – if you're big enough you're old enough.

Gail Sophie! *(To Charlotte)* And what about you? Why have I never seen any of these boys?

Charlie Well they're not the sort one brings home to meet mother – are they Soph?

Sophie No – they're alright to practice on – but you wouldn't want to have one for good. *(They both laugh)*

No – especially Todd – he was useless

Charlie How do you know about Todd?

Sophie Ah – would you believe I guessed?

Charlie No I wouldn't believe you guessed! You've always been the same. You always have to have what I have don't you?

Gail When you two have quite finished. This is your mother you're speaking to – Oh I need another drink!

Sophie Dad says you shouldn't have any more to drink.

Gail Bugger him! And Bugger you too! I'm just sick of it!

Charlie Sick of what? Us? Dad?

Gail It! I'm sick of it!

Charlie If this is what happens when you get to forty I shall kill myself!

Sophie Is there any point giving you your birthday present or will we just get abuse? We've clubbed together to get you something really special. You'll never guess what it is.

Gail *(Now well and truly sloshed)* Well if it's another bloody weekend in Paris – I don't want it – take Quasimodo with you – he could swing about the in the bell tower of Notre Dame - he'd enjoy that! If not no doubt you've got plenty of others to choose from! *(She plonks herself down on the sofa and stares moodily into her glass)*

Charlie *(whispering amongst themselves)* Dad said she was going senile.

Sophie Do you think it's the change? When do you get that?

Charlie It's around forty I think. I bet she's been getting hot flushes and mood swings. This is a mood swing.

Sophie Is this a mood swing mother?

Gail A what? No it's not – and I'm not having hot flushes either – the change doesn't come for years yet. You know nothing. Why don't you bog off down the hall and help your father. You're useless – I thought when I had two daughters they'd be a comfort to me. Well you're not!

Charlie Oh don't beat about the bush mother – tell us what you really think. *(The two girls laugh)*

Sophie It is the change – these are classic symptoms – I read about it once. They sometimes rip all their clothes off and run around naked. They have to be locked up for their own good until their hormones settle down.

Charlie Really?

Sophie Yeah I read it in Marie Clare. Janet next door showed me the article.

Charlie Oh Mum! Surely you're not going to join with the "let it all hang out" brigade next-door. I should be so embarrassed I'd just die!

Gail Janet and John are two sweet and thoughtful people – different to some I could mention. And just because they belong to a Naturist Club doesn't make them bad people.

Sophie Had you thought of H.R.T?

Gail Oh I don't believe this! *(She storms out)*.

Sophie Well – what was all that about?

Charlie Who knows? Todd says that once women get over forty they're useless – that's why blokes around that age find a new one.

Sophie What does he know?

Charlie Hello? Watch my lips? He is training to be a Social Economist actually you know.

Sophie That's got nothing to do with anything!

Charlie Well it's better than Daniel – a sanitation engineer – or as Todd says – a "poo prodder"

Sophie I've finished with him anyway.

Charlie Have you – why?