

### **Sandra's 40th birthday party**

I have hosted hundreds of dinners and events in my many years in hospitality. The most dramatic dinner I ever hosted was Sandra's 40th birthday party.

We'd spent all afternoon preparing the room. There were black walls, and white tables, and the most ornate centrepieces that you've ever seen.

And we'd prepared everything, the music, the settings.

There's this beautiful moment when you're preparing for a function; a stillness, a buzz, an anticipation. Yes, there it is again. The anticipation.

I knew everything about that dinner. All the wines, all the seven courses. I knew that the assyrtiko from Santorini was chosen to cut through the egg—from Bannockburn—yolk gel. And you go to all this effort. Learn so many stories. And are ready to tell them. But sometimes, that doesn't matter. Because people are not always out to hear their food's stories. Sometimes, they are busy with their own.

And this, this, was the story of Sandra's 40th birthday party....

... and they decided to play a game.

*Ingrid Taylor-Moss*

I first met Sandra when....

she showed up half an hour early for the function. And she was so elegant, she'd just come from work—a bank, a law firm, something, I don't remember—and she had on the most amazing dress, and her hair was done in this.... bun type thing.

The most memorable thing about her

was that she was just so organised. I asked, who's allergic to nuts, 'Dave, he's sitting right there'.

Of course, my response was never asked for. That remained for me only. Instead, the guests took their turns, standing up, and answering.

I first met Sandra when...

we were in high school.

My most memorable moment was when

she was my bridesmaid.

I first met Sandra when...

we were in Eco101 together—our fathers had both told us to do that class.

The most memorable moment was when

she helped me get that job.

I first met Sandra when

I was, also, in Eco101.

The most memorable moment was when

she stole that job from me.

I first met Sandra when...

she kissed my boyfriend

*Ingrid Taylor-Moss*

The most memorable moment was when

I kissed hers.

I first met Sandra when...

we were at uni.

The most memorable moment was when

she was away for, like, those 10 years.

I first met Sandra when...

we were at uni, as well...

The most memorable moment was when

Hey, remember that time she threw up on herself?

Oh, I first met Sandra when....

she threw up on herself!

And the most memorable thing.....

when she got arrested?

I first met Sandra when...

I snorted a line of cocaine off her stomach.

The most memorable moment was...

well, probably that moment actually.

I first met Sandra when...

argh.... hmmm.... oh, that was my bag by the way. Don't think I ever told you?

*Ingrid Taylor-Moss*

When I dropped dessert, Sandra was not at the table. I then walked past the bathroom.

‘Hi, sorry interrupt. I thought someone might want to check on Sandra, she’s in the bathroom.’

And they all stopped at the sound of my voice, turned their heads and stared. Then, when I finished, they turned back to resume their interrupted conversations.

Sandra got herself up off that floor, walked back into the room. She summoned the poise and elegance that she had had at the beginning of the night. Now, I don’t judge how drunk she was: she was drowning in their words, so drowned herself in alcohol.

It all would have been over if we weren’t on the second floor. This restaurant had hell stairs. Steep Victorian ones where you wonder what size people’s feet were a hundred years ago. So, RSA, I had to go first as the sober one and I asked two of the bigger looking blokes to help me. We came down and sure enough, she tripped, I caught her, and looking up I saw all their faces looking down. They hadn’t even moved a muscle to stop her falling down the stairs.

And this, this is what milestones do to you.

It’s like, when you’re eighteen, you’re drunk—because you did too many tequila shots, the wrong way round—but it’s ok! Because you’re surrounded by your friends and there's countless doors to exit out of!

And then you’re 25, and you had far too much red wine, but you’ve got three of your best friends with you, and there’s still three doors that all seem like good options.

You’re thirty. You’re in the toilet. But there’s a window. And you’ve got your phone. You can watch cute videos while you wait for the world to stop spinning.

And then you’re Sandra, forty, locked in a dark bathroom with no help coming.

But I am a storyteller and here’s the thing: what’s the difference between a happy ending and a sad one?

Where you leave the story.