

COMING OUT PARTY

By Albi Gorn

CAST OF CHARACTERS

DEIRDRE, 30 - 40. Persistent, sincere, well meaning, but clumsy.

SALLY, 30 - 40. Depressed, sweet, low self-image.

NATASHA, 30 - 40. Upper West Side Matron, assertive, direct, in charge.

MAN, 30 - 40. Pleasant, somewhat seductive.

(At a party, the room with the coats. SALLY sits on the edge of the bed, looking quite forlorn. DEIRDRE comes in)

DEIRDRE: Here you are.

SALLY: Hi, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE: Don't hi me. What is wrong with you?

SALLY: I was just putting my coat away.

DEIRDRE: For half an hour? What, are you reading it a bedtime story?

SALLY: I guess I was daydreaming.

DEIRDRE: I know why you're in here, Sally.

SALLY: That's not the reason.

DEIRDRE: You're letting Carter intimidate you again.

SALLY: I'm not.

DEIRDRE: Oh, well, all right, you tell me what you're doing in here.

SALLY: I, I—

DEIRDRE: Do you know what we went through to set you up with this guy?

SALLY: Yes

DEIRDRE: You're not the only single woman at this party, Sally. You just left him without saying a word, left him by the guacamole. Do you know how dangerous that is?

SALLY: Yeah. If the refried beans outflank him he'll never reach the sour cream alive.

DEIRDRE: I'm glad you think this is funny, Sally.

SALLY: I'm sorry, Dee. I appreciate everything you're trying to do for me, I really do. I just don't think I'm ready yet.

DEIRDRE: *(Sitting down on bed next to SALLY)* We've been through this, Sally. It's been four months since Carter moved out. It's time to move on.

SALLY: I don't know if I can.

DEIRDRE: Sally, as you well know there is not a lot out there. This guy is a gem. He's a lawyer—

SALLY: He said that.

DEIRDRE: — he sued Zabar's, for God's sake, what more could you want. He's cute, he's sweet, he's recently divorced. You can't let him slip through your fingers.

SALLY: I don't know what to say to him.

DEIRDRE: He's a lawyer. He'll do all the talking. You just say yes or no.

SALLY: I just feel so blech *(makes a blech face and gesture)*. He's going to look at me and no matter if I say yes or no he's going to see blech.

DEIRDRE: He won't see blech.

SALLY: Blech, I tell you. Blechblechblechblechblechblechblech...

DEIRDRE: Stop it. Sally, do you know why you feel blech?

SALLY: Yes.

DEIRDRE: Then let me tell you why.

SALLY: See, it doesn't matter if I say yes or no.

DEIRDRE: Carter makes you feel blech. That's the way it goes. You're feeling blech because that's how we're brought up, to feel blech. That first day your father realizes that you're not a cute baby anymore but a whining teenager, that's when the blech start. Now, when you meet the right guy, he looks at you and he doesn't see blech, he sees whoa. Whoa she's a knockout and whoa she's smart and whoa she's sexy. And eventually, you start to feel whoa. But once the unattainable goddess turns into the loving, caring wife, he stops seeing whoa, he stops saying whoa, and if, like Carter, he acts out —

SALLY: He's not acting out.

DEIRDRE: — you start feeling blech again. It's not you. It's how they're hardwired. Get over it. Carter is gone.

SALLY: I know. I keep thinking maybe he'll come back.

DEIRDRE: Do you want him to come back?

SALLY: I don't know. But I want him to want to come back.

DEIRDRE: It's not going to happen, Sally. When the saliva is sloshing around in your mouth, that's fine. But after you spit it out there's no way you're going to slurp it back in.

SALLY: *(Beat)* Not even if you were really, really thirsty?

DEIRDRE: This is why Natasha and I get so frustrated with you, Sally. You've been given a gift. Carter's neediness prevented you from ever getting in touch with what *you* need.

SALLY: That's not true. I know what I need.

DEIRDRE: What?

SALLY: I need to take care of Carter.

DEIRDRE: *(Exasperated)* Well you can't.

SALLY: Well, that's what I need.

DEIRDRE: You don't need that.

SALLY: I don't?

DEIRDRE: No.

SALLY: What do I need?

DEIRDRE: You need to get out of this room and go over to that lawyer and flirt your little ass off. *(DEIRDRE gets up and goes to and opens door)*

SALLY: I don't know.

DEIRDRE: Natasha has her claws in him right now, so you better move.

SALLY: Oh. Well, I don't want to offend Natasha.

DEIRDRE: *(DEIRDRE closes the door)* You don't want to offend her? Then come out of this room. I can tell you right now, she is much more offended by your being in this room.

SALLY: I don't want to butt in.

DEIRDRE: Natasha has her own husband. You'll be saving her from committing yet one more indiscretion that she'll regret and I'll have to hear about for the rest of my life.

SALLY: Maybe when she's through —

DEIRDRE: Natasha worked as hard as I did to set this up. Sally, you're driving me nuts.

(NATASHA enters and crosses immediately to the mirror)

NATASHA: What is going on in here?

DEIRDRE: Sally won't come out.

NATASHA: Is that any reason to be taking my name — in vain, I might add — over and over again?

DEIRDRE: How could you hear us with that hopelessly retro music blaring away in there?

NATASHA: I happen to like The Monkees. And in any event, my ears are acutely sensitive to the sound of my own name. *(To SALLY)* What's wrong, Sally?

DEIRDRE: She's a wimp, that's what's wrong.

NATASHA: That's the way to pump her up, Deedruh. (*Sitting down on bed on the other side of SALLY*) What's wrong, honey? Why won't you come outside?

SALLY: I, it's just, I, you know, I—

NATASHA: I don't want to hear that this has anything to do with Carter.

DEIRDRE: She says it has nothing to do with Carter.

NATASHA: Good.

DEIRDRE: And it's The Beatles, not The Monkees.

NATASHA: Sally, you know how anal Nancy is about her parties. Do you know what I had to do to convince her to invite this guy?

SALLY: No.

NATASHA: I had to go shopping with her.

DEIRDRE: So?

NATASHA: At a mall. In fucking New Jersey.

DEIRDRE: Like you've never been.

NATASHA: This was an outlet mall.

DEIRDRE: That's where you got those shoes.

NATASHA: (*Back to SALLY*) And why would I subject myself to this? So we could get you and this guy together. And what do you do? You run away from him and lock yourself in this room.

DEIRDRE: She didn't lock herself in.

NATASHA: Deedruh, did you come here straight from your session? Why do you always give me such a hard time?

DEIRDRE: Why do you always say the wrong thing?

NATASHA: I am taking certain liberties in order to motivate this dishrag friend of yours.

SALLY: (*To DEIRDRE*) I wasn't brought up blech.

NATASHA: I said dishrag, not blech.

SALLY: I wasn't brought up blech, Dee. My father loved me the best way he knew how.

DEIRDRE: First you defend Carter, now you're defending your child molester father.

SALLY: (*Shocked*) Deirdre, he never did any such thing.

DEIRDRE: Psychologically. Emotionally. He was a psychological child molester. He molested your psyche and your brother's psyche —

NATASHA: — and my psyche.

SALLY: What? You never told me —

NATASHA: Don't change the subject, Sally. This isn't about me.

DEIRDRE: Despite your best efforts.

NATASHA: This is about you.

DEIRDRE: And how blech you feel.

NATASHA: And how the only cure for that is to get back in the saddle.

DEIRDRE: Metaphorically.

NATASHA: Of course, metaphorically. Did you think I was suggesting a pony ride?

DEIRDRE: Things are very literal right now for Sally, I was just trying to be clear.

NATASHA: Things are not very literal right now for Sally. Do you think she's literally blech?

DEIRDRE: She literally feels blech, Tasha.

NATASHA: Literally feels? What could that possibly mean? And how many times do I have to tell you not to call me Tasha. It makes me feel like putting on a mumu and gross jewelry and going to Brighton Beach.

DEIRDRE: Would you rather I called you Nate?

NATASHA: You see, Sally? Deedruh has unwittingly brought up the perfect example. Because my couch potato parents were Rocky and Bullwinkle junkies and gave me this

dopey name, I could easily have gone through life feeling like a bowl of borscht. But I overcame it.

SALLY: How does a bowl of borscht feel?

NATASHA: Like the last thing in the world you want to do is go over to the guacamole. But you risk it.

DEIRDRE: That's the key, Sally. Risk. You have to take risks.

SALLY: Look at what happened the last time I took a risk.

NATASHA: When was that?

SALLY: When I married Carter.

DEIRDRE: There's a difference between risk-taking and codependency.

SALLY: (*An outburst*) I'm not codependent!

NATASHA: (*Patronizingly*) Of course you're not.

SALLY: I really, really need you to believe that.

DEIRDRE: (*Like a therapist*) Uh-huh.

SALLY: I just don't feel ready.

DEIRDRE: Good god.

SALLY: I appreciate everything you've done for me. I appreciate how hard it must have been to get Nancy to invite this guy.

NATASHA: Forget getting her to invite him. Do you know how hard it was to get her to invite you?

SALLY: (*Beat*) Oh.

DEIRDRE: That's your idea of motivating?

NATASHA: I think it's time she knew, Dee.

SALLY: Knew what?

NATASHA: You just bring people down all the time.

SALLY: Oh. (*Beat*) I guess I do. Ever since Carter and I split up —

NATASHA: This is from before you and Carter split up.

SALLY: Oh.

NATASHA: It's because you have such a low opinion of yourself; so self-deprecating, so eager to please. You make people feel uncomfortable.

DEIRDRE: You made Carter feel uncomfortable.

SALLY: I did?

DEIRDRE: That's why he moved out.

SALLY: It is?

DEIRDRE: Yes.

SALLY: How do you know?

DEIRDRE: Well, I — Natasha told me.

NATASHA: Thanks.

SALLY: You told her?

NATASHA: Indirectly.

SALLY: Is there like a whole network of people it had to go through before it came to me?

DEIRDRE: Of course not.

SALLY: How did you find out? Did Carter tell you?

NATASHA: Of course not. Not directly.

SALLY: It's not that I'm angry, I just want to know. Because I could never get any explanation out of Carter that made any sense. To tell you the truth, in all my years with Carter I never knew what he was thinking or feeling. If that's the reason he left, fine, now I know. I wish he would have told me himself, but now I know what to believe.

DEIRDRE: I don't think so, Sally. I don't think you do know what to believe.

SALLY: What do you mean?

NATASHA: What Deedruh is clumsily trying to say and what I've been telling you for years now is you have to believe in yourself.

SALLY: I know that. I just don't know how.

NATASHA: I can tell you how to start. Outside is a prominent, megawealthy, cute-to-die-for lawyer —

SALLY: But Natasha —

NATASHA: — who, if you give him a little encouragement, before this night is through will be believing in you like you wouldn't believe.

SALLY: He barely — when I was there he — I don't think so.

NATASHA: "I wonder where she went." He must have said that...three times after you left. "I wonder where she went."

SALLY: He said that?

DEIRDRE: He said that.

SALLY: You heard him say it too?

DEIRDRE: Other people told me he said it. And why wouldn't he? You're by far the prettiest woman at this party. Take a look out there. He's probably still wondering where you went.

(SALLY gets up and peeks out door)

NATASHA: *(To DEIRDRE, somewhat sotto voce)* Was that necessary?

DEIRDRE: What?

NATASHA: Going overboard like that.

DEIRDRE: What?

NATASHA: "By far the prettiest woman?" Really, Deedruh, she's not stupid.

DEIRDRE: Who's prettier?

NATASHA: But by far? Don't think I don't know who that was aimed at.

DEIRDRE: You know, Tasha is really the perfect name for you.

SALLY: He doesn't look like he's wondering about me.

DEIRDRE: What's he doing?

SALLY: Eating a stuffed cabbage.

DEIRDRE: *(DEIRDRE pops up)* Nancy's stuffed cabbage is out?

SALLY: Yeah. But not for long. Looks like there's only a few left.

DEIRDRE: *(DEIRDRE goes to door)* Look, you better get your ass out there soon, Sally. Do you hear me?

SALLY: Yes, but —

(DEIRDRE exits)

NATASHA: Really, Sally, you have to face this sooner or later.

SALLY: You make it sound like surgery. Natasha, don't you remember when we were teenagers we promised each other that we would never let a man define our lives; that the secret to fulfillment was to be happy alone first.

NATASHA: You see, Sally, that's your problem. You're still guided by adolescent bullshit. Are you even remotely close to finding happiness alone?

SALLY: Well, no, but —

NATASHA: Face it, Sally, you don't have a clue how to find happiness; alone, with someone, with drugs.

SALLY: I guess not.

NATASHA: But if you and this guy hit it off, you'll be happy, at least for awhile.

SALLY: Maybe.

NATASHA: And this time around you take notes. "This is what happiness feels like." And you start pushing your life in that direction. Isn't that logical?

SALLY: That sounds like what I did with Carter.

NATASHA: Sweetie, you have to work with us on this. *(Gets up)* Now, I am going out there. You get yourself together — your hair looks like a rat's nest, by the way —

SALLY: It does?

NATASHA: — and then you come join us. I won't say anything about where you were. Hopefully Deedruh will be too busy stuffing her mouth to have said anything. A little mystery, can't hurt. We can use these things to our advantage, see? And what better way to stick it to Carter.

SALLY: Really, Natasha, I can't play games like —

NATASHA: Sally, if I don't see you out there by the time the last stuffed cabbage is gone, I am sending him in here.

SALLY: No, Natasha, you can't —

NATASHA: The last cabbage. *(As she leaves)* Sounds like an O'Henry story. *(SALLY sits alone for a few seconds. She goes to the mirror and looks at herself. She makes a feeble effort to fix herself up and gives up in disgust and slumps back down on the bed. She is almost in tears. The door opens and a MAN enters)*

MAN: Oh, hi.

SALLY: *(Hiding the tears)* Uh, hi.

MAN: I was wondering where you'd gone to.

SALLY: I went in here.

MAN: With the coats.

SALLY: Yeah, I need a new coat.

MAN: So you were going to take one of these?

SALLY: No, I meant that I was checking out what people are wearing.

MAN: Oh. What are they wearing?

SALLY: Coats, they're wearing coats. *(Beat)* So, are you enjoying the party?

MAN: Not a hell of a lot, no. Food is good.

SALLY: Yeah, Nancy's a good cook.

MAN: *(Beat, you can faintly hear music from the other room)* I never understood why people feel the need to play music at parties. You start talking to somebody and you find yourself screaming just to be heard. And then when you're about to make a point or something, whoever you're talking to hears some song that's special to them and ... I was talking to some guy out there about, you know, something serious, and in the middle I see him start swaying his body, singing: *(He sings and sways)* "I've just seen a face I can't forget" and here I am —

SALLY: *(Starts swaying and singing, unconsciously interrupting him)* "The time or place where we just met." Whoops, sorry, now I'm doing it.

MAN: *(Smiles)* That's okay. I mean, that is a great tune.

SALLY: And a great lyric.

MAN: Yeah. *(Beat)* Man, those old Beatle songs make me feel so melancholy now. How about you?

SALLY: Uh-huh. Nostalgia is so seductive; at least it used to be.

MAN: Remember how high those songs used to make us feel?

SALLY: Yeah. *(Beat)* I know exactly what you mean.

MAN: *(Beat)* Of course, the pot helped.

SALLY: Big time. *(SALLY tries to surreptitiously straighten her hair)*

MAN: Great haircut, by the way.

SALLY: This? Please. This is what happens when you get desperate and you go to Edward Scissorhands.

MAN: You're right, what would a cretin like me know about haircuts?

SALLY: I'm sorry, I didn't mean — thanks.

MAN: You're welcome.

SALLY: That was a nice thing to say.

MAN: I meant it. You're the prettiest woman at this party.

SALLY: *(Laughs)* By far.

MAN: Why were you feeling desperate?

SALLY: Did I say that? I don't know, I just felt like I needed a change.

MAN: I know the feeling.

SALLY: I guess I wasn't really desperate.

MAN: No?

SALLY: It just felt desperate at the time — if there's any difference.

MAN: Difference?

SALLY: Between feeling desperate and being desperate.

MAN: I think there's a big difference. When I am desperate, I can usually work it out; when I feel desperate, I usually just fuck up, make bad choices, you know.

SALLY: Uh-huh. You mean like my haircut.

MAN: No, I—

SALLY: Sorry, just teasing. *(There is a silence)* What kind of something serious?

MAN: Excuse me.

SALLY: The guy you were dancing with —

MAN: I wasn't dancing with —

SALLY: — you said you were talking to him about something serious.

MAN: Oh, yeah. Well —

SALLY: I'm sorry, is that inappropriate of me to ask?

MAN: No, don't be silly. I wouldn't have brought it up if I — *(Beat)* I was just saying that sometimes you have a feeling about somebody and it's hard to know how to — how to —

SALLY: Say it?

MAN: Say it, right. And that can lead to all sorts of funny misunderstandings.

SALLY: Hmmmm.

MAN: And some that are not so funny, I guess. *(Beat)* Well, I think I'll be going back inside. *(Gets up)* Coming?

SALLY: In a second.

MAN: *(At door, the MAN turns back)* Listen, do you think you'd like to have dinner sometime?

SALLY: Me? Well, I—

MAN: I just feel like we have a lot we could talk about, you know?

SALLY: Yeah? You do?

MAN: Yeah, I do. So?

SALLY: Sure. Dinner would be fine.

MAN: Great. We'll make arrangements before you leave. *(Beat)* I better go; people will talk.

SALLY: Hopefully. Just kidding.

MAN: Right.

(The MAN is almost out the door)

SALLY: Oh, Carter, by the way, what am I supposed to say to your mother. I'm running out of excuses about where you are. Don't you think it's time we told her?

MAN: Can't you put her off just a little longer?

SALLY: I suppose so.

MAN: Thanks. See you inside?

SALLY: Sure. I'll just be a minute.

(The MAN leaves. SALLY sighs. She looks somewhat happy and relieved. She goes to the mirror and starts fixing her hair. As she sings the following, her mood changes to somber)

SALLY: *Falling, yes I am falling
And he keeps calling
Me back again.*

(SALLY picks up her coat, goes to the door, looks in the direction of the party and goes the other way to leave)

— end of play —