

40-Year-Old Version

By Barbarella | Published Wednesday, March 17, 2010

Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter. — Mark Twain



I positioned the necklace on the table — novelty beads flaunting the number “40” with a glittery pendant that read, “Behold the Ageless Wonder” — and sprinkled confetti around it. The confetti — shiny cutouts of lipsticks, shoes, and purses — matched the girlie-themed decorations I’d chosen. When I finished arranging everything, I stood by the door to appraise my handiwork. It looked festive and bright, none of that tacky, outdated “Over the Hill” crap I’d seen at the store.

The necklace on the table and the yellow “Caution” tape by the door (reading “40th Birthday Party in Progress”) were the only references to the milestone. I didn’t want to focus too much on the number — Jane has always been sensitive about her age. The day she turned 25, I found her crying on our parents’ bed. When I asked her what was wrong, Jane howled, “I’m almost 30!”

As the eldest of four girls, Jane is accustomed to being older than those around her. “Look at Demi Moore,” I told her the week of her birthday. “She’s almost 50.” Pointing out the hotness of older women or how often she’s been called a MILF never fails to pull my sister out of any age-related tizzy she might have worked herself into. Without the corroborating evidence, Jane won’t buy the whole “it’s just a number” thing.

I surmised the one thing Jane really wanted for her birthday was to feel *alive* — to be released from her responsible adult routine and reconnect with her inner adolescent. In the carefree days before she settled down, Jane would frequent downtown clubs with her

two best friends since high school, Jen and Marissa. Inspired by thoughts of the three wild women at the peak of their debauchery, I decided to honor my sister with a night of partying like it was 1995. After phoning her friends, it was clear Jane was not the only one who needed to blow off some steam. Marissa had just returned to work after having her second baby. When I described the evening's program to her, she said, "God, I think I need this more than Jane!" Jen, now living in Nevada, was more than happy to make the drive with her two-year-old son in tow.

I kept the number of guests small (four sisters, two friends) and manageable — "manageable" being the key word. I'd been to Vegas with these women. They should come with warning labels that read, "Caution — Drama Inside!" or "Emotional When Drunk." I wasn't expecting things to get crazy-freaky, but experience has taught me not to take any chances.

It wasn't until we were seated at El Vitral that it occurred to me I was the only non-mother at the table. This became apparent when the conversation gravitated toward the main focus in everyone else's lives. When my younger sister announced that she gets peed on once a day, I knew I had to reel the girls back in. With a sly smile that did little to betray whether or not I was joking, I said, "That's interesting, because I pee on someone once a day," thereby reminding everyone that they were there to *party*, not *PTA*. Once the topic of baby excretions had been abandoned, that dour mommy mood was replaced with youthful exuberance. Jen and Marissa took turns sharing old stories of the trio's antics while Jane, in an endless fit of laughter, gasped for breath and fanned her watering eyes.

After tequila drinks and Mexican food, I led the ladies to Andaz, our final destination for the evening. The new hotel had taken over the Ivy a month before, but no changes were made to the restaurant (Quarter Kitchen), wine bar (Ultra Lounge), or two dance clubs on the premises. This made it the perfect one-stop venue for a high-flying night on the town.

Our elevator door opened on the top floor. Escorting the girls down the hallway, I stopped before a door decorated with a giant red bow and opened it to reveal the "Cabana Suite" — the one room in the hotel with a private patio and a spiral staircase that led to the rooftop pool and club. Our cabana was decked out with plush sofas and a large plasma television. Jane broke through the caution tape and entered the room. She smiled at the sight of all the decorations and the flowers with which Jen had adorned the room. Then her eyes settled on the table.

"I'm not wearing *that*," said Jane, glaring at the beads.

"We don't expect you to — they're just for fun," I said. "Now put down your stuff so we can go grab a cocktail and get our groove on!" By the time we made it to the dance floor several drinks later, Jen had taken to asking every guy she bumped into how old he was, after which she'd ask him to guess how old Jane was. Time after time, the boys guessed Jane

was within five years of their own age — always 20-something. At first, Jane took all the mis-guesses for flattery, but as the night wore on, she realized the young men were being earnest. “They probably can’t imagine why someone so old would be here,” Jane joked.

One chiseled-chin brunette sidled up to Jane to initiate “the move.” Jane politely informed him she was married. “Your husband is a lucky man,” he said. Jane’s blush validated the cliché. Jen poked her head over and asked the guy how old he was. “Twenty-five,” he said. Before Jen could tell him to guess, Jane volunteered her age. But the guy didn’t believe her.

“No, really, we’re out tonight because we’re celebrating my 40th birthday,” she said. He asked for her ID to prove it, and Jane explained that she’d left it back in the room. Then, to soften what he clearly perceived to be a poorly executed brush off, Jane volunteered to be the guy’s wing woman. Being the potent saleswoman she is, the birthday girl helped her new friend hook up with the first chick he pointed to, a 20-something version of Jane.

As if they’d rehearsed to make Jane feel as though she were back in the ’90s, Jen and Marissa brought their old-school drama to the evening — some hilarious, some horrifying, all of it sworn to secrecy. Everyone danced until the wee hours, passing out sometime after fries were ordered from room service at 3 a.m.

After the leftover fries had gone cold and the sun had come up, Jane shook off her grogginess and donned the goofy pair of oh-so-Lady-Gaga novelty rock-star glasses I’d given her (each eye peers through the center of a guitar). We checked out and caravanned to the Tractor Room in Hillcrest for breakfast. I was halfway through my lemon-lavender mimosa when I noticed Jane was flashing another new accessory. “Are those the beads from the table?” I asked.

“Sure are,” Jane said, and proudly held up one of the glittering medallions that broadcast her age.