

THE LAST BIRTHDAY

By

Jill Lever

Jill Lever
33b Harcourt Street,
Hawthorn East,
Melbourne,
Vic 3123
Australia

#61 (0)423 606 494

Write2Jill@hotmail.com

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Cast:

Woman (36)

**Man, Her husband
Girl (18)**

Location:

Australia, contemporary. The woman's comfortable home. Woman sitting at dressing table placed front centre/left and looking towards audience. Throughout the piece the woman is getting ready to go out.

Woman is sitting at dressing table facing the audience brushing her hair. Girl enters speaking.

GIRL: It's my birthday!

WOMAN: Yes, I know, I was thinking about you.

GIRL: A special birthday.

WOMAN: Yes, eighteen is special.

GIRL: It's a pity we don't *really* know the date. I mean a birthday is usually a very definite thing but mine ... mine's more of a ... guess.

WOMAN: More than a guess.

GIRL: Not much more. I wish I had a real birthday.

WOMAN: I'm sure lots of people don't know their exact birthday. What if they were found on a doorstep? Or they could be say ... from some remote African village where they don't keep records. And the Queen has two. They can't both be real.

GIRL: I just need one. You'd never forget my birthday, would you?

WOMAN: Not this one. Eighteen years.

GIRL: Have the years flown by? Does it seem like yesterday?

WOMAN: Sometimes. But a lot has happened in those 18 years.

GIRL:: Do you think *he* remembers?

WOMAN: God, no! Well, I don't know but ...no.

GIRL: Did you even tell him my birthday, I'm sorry, (*she makes little air quote marks*) my "birthday".

WOMAN: I don't think a man would understand.

GIRL: Do I look like him? I don't look much like you.

GIRL puts her head alongside WOMAN and they look in the mirror together for a moment.

WOMAN: You have my eyes. I always thought I'd have a daughter with black hair and blue eyes.

GIRL: But the boys are blond.

WOMAN: Blond as angels, both of them.

GIRL: Do you believe in angels?

WOMAN: Of course not. It was just an expression.

GIRL: A lot of people do. It's quite fashionable to believe in angels.

WOMAN: Well, I don't believe in angels. And, I don't believe in God or any forms of religion. I don't believe in superstitions, ghosts, spirit voices, destiny, horoscopes, tarot cards or crystal balls. And I don't believe we get through this life and then all meet up for a nice family gathering in heaven.

GIRL: ... or hell.

WOMAN: Thank you. Or hell.

GIRL: Anyway, about him. You should tell me about him. We may run into each other one day.

WOMAN: How could you run into each other? That was a stupid thought.

GIRL: You don't know. You can't really be sure what happens *before*, what happens *after*. Some things are ... a mystery.

WOMAN: I just can't see how.

GIRL: Say .. say when we've both "crossed over".

WOMAN: "Crossed over". Where did that come from?

GIRL: You know where. It's that bloke John Edwards on television. The one who connects people with those who have "crossed over to the other side". Don't pretend you haven't watched a little bit when no-one else was home.

WOMAN: I wasn't watching! Talking to people who have died is ridiculous.

- GIRL: You don't know everything. What if it is true? Where does that leave me, eh? I'll tell you. With not a lot to talk about!
- WOMAN: Bernard Shaw once said that when people stop believing in God they don't believe in *nothing*, (*beat*) they believe in *anything*.
- GIRL: When people do that quoting thing have you noticed it's always Bernard Shaw or Oscar Wilde. The two of them must have never shut up. Yak, yak, yak.
- WOMAN: He didn't believe in God, either.
- GIRL: Who .. Oscar Wilde?
- WOMAN: Your(*hesitant*) father. He was an atheist. A communist.
- GIRL: That sounds rather exotic. My father - the last communist in England!
- WOMAN: He was a bit of a dreamer. And young. Just 20.
- GIRL: I just thought. You're 36 and this is my 18th birthday. So you were the same age when ...
- WOMAN: It seems so young now. Of course, I didn't think so then.
- GIRL: What was going on? What was happening?
- WOMAN: I'd just started University... we've gone over this before.
- GIRL: But I want you to go over it again.
- WOMAN: I'd just started University. I met him.
- GIRL: And you fell in love.
- WOMAN: I don't think so. It was just a kind of infatuation.
- GIRL: (*Angry*) Oh, that's different! You're changing it. I want you to tell it the same!
- WOMAN: I didn't know if it was love then. You can only know later. I thought it was but it probably wasn't.
- GIRL: And he was a journalist.
- WOMAN: Well, he was training to be a journalist.
- GIRL: I should have been starting university round about now. Do you see me as a studious girl, dux of the school?

WOMAN: Probably. The boys are very bright.

GIRL: Oh yes, the boys. The boys are bright. But they don't know anything about me.

WOMAN: No. And they never will.

GIRL: You didn't want to try for another? See if you could get a girl?

WOMAN: No. And yet I would have liked a daughter.

GIRL: Is that why I had to be a girl? Because you just had boys.

WOMAN: No! You just were always a girl. That is, I thought of you as a girl.

GIRL: And what was her name, this girl?

WOMAN: I don't want to say it.

GIRL: How much can it hurt to just say a name?

WOMAN: No.

GIRL: Yes, you must. Say it!

WOMAN: *(softly)* Robyn

GIRL: Say it out loud.

WOMAN: *(loud)* Robyn!

(MAN hears her voice as he enters)

MAN: What?

WOMAN: Nothing.

MAN: Are you OK?

WOMAN: Yes, fine. I'm nearly ready anyway.

MAN: OK. No rush. Josh wants me to finish his book. Max is almost asleep.
You look great. *(Quick kiss)*.

(MAN exits).

GIRL: He's so nice.

WOMAN: Yes, yes he is.

GIRL: You should say, "Yes he is, *Robyn*". But *he's* not my father.

(WOMAN shakes her head).

GIRL: So what happened to the other one?

WOMAN: He was around for a while.

GIRL: He didn't just dump you then? Didn't do a runner?

WOMAN: No, in fact, we ... we got married.

GIRL: What!

WOMAN: Afterwards. We got married.

GIRL: You married him!

WOMAN: Yes, but we weren't married long. It was a mistake. I think there was a kind of shadow ...

GIRL: But you didn't know that when you married him. No-one gets married thinking "this won't last long". (Beat) Some of the guests might think it.

WOMAN: I must have thought it would work.

GIRL: How long *after* did this marriage take place then?

WOMAN: I don't know. A year. A bit less.

GIRL: So why? Why couldn't I stay? Not a year and you were playing happy families. Why couldn't I have been with you?

WOMAN: It just wasn't right. I was too young. No proper job. I had plans.

GIRL: Yes, I'm hearing about the plans but doesn't sound like they were very good plans. Would it have made so much difference?

WOMAN: Yes, it would have changed everything.

GIRL: One little tiny baby – what difference would it have made?

WOMAN: Babies don't stay tiny. They need food and clothes, they need time and attention, they need parents, they need love, mostly they need love – they need to be wanted!

GIRL: But now you live with regrets.

WOMAN: I don't have regrets.

GIRL: Oh, come on!

WOMAN: I don't. It was the right thing.

GIRL: It's life though. Isn't there something about life, Mrs-Don't-Believe, that you think is sacred?

WOMAN: Life and death are all mixed up together. War, suicide, execution, murder, disease, infanticide, accidents, miscarriages, stillbirths, old age. So many decisions about who lives and how they live.

GIRL: So what gave you the right to decide?

WOMAN: In this, women have to decide. I do believe that. I do.

GIRL: And the men? Don't they get a say?

WOMAN: I didn't say it wasn't a tragedy sometimes. But this ... this was what he wanted too.

GIRL: Huh, so much for letting women decide.

WOMAN: What?

GIRL: You're saying your decision wasn't influenced by what he wanted? What if he had wanted the opposite. Really wanted the opposite. Wouldn't we all be getting dressed up for my 18th birthday party.?

WOMAN: Some animals, when life is stressful, can reabsorb their unborn young into their bodies or they can delay them growing until better times.

GIRL: Rabbits maybe, not people!

WOMAN: I took you back into myself until a better time.

GIRL: That's crap. "When people stop believing in God ... they believe anything."

MAN comes in and starts looking around for something.

MAN: Babysitter's here. Are you OK to leave in about ten minutes?

- WOMAN: Yes. That's fine. *(to GIRL)* I don't want to have this conversation any more.
- MAN: Are you all right?
- GIRL: You're not all right. Why don't you tell him why? Go on, tell him!
- WOMAN: Of course, why? *(to girl)* Why won't you leave me alone?
- GIRL: I can't answer that. Why won't I?
- MAN: You look a bit sad, that's all.
- WOMAN: *(beat)* I'm fine. *(to GIRL)* I mean it. I'm finished with this. Eighteen is enough. This is your last birthday!
- GIRL: Do you know what I've noticed? You never say the word. You never say the word and you never think the word. Let's try now *(beat)* abor/
- WOMAN: *(loudly)* It's ugly.
- MAN: The shirt? But you bought it.
- WOMAN: The shirt's fine.
- GIRL: An ugly word or an ugly thing?
- MAN: Have you seen my blue cuff links?
- WOMAN: The right thing at that time, for that girl – but yes, an ugly thing.
(WOMAN hands MAN the cufflinks. MAN exits).
- GIRL: If he'd been my father/
- WOMAN: *(speaking over GIRL)* /Don't say father/
- GIRL: /would it have been different?
- WOMAN: Who knows? This way we have a life, two beautiful sons ... a beautiful happy life.
- GIRL: How did you decide 10th December was my birthday.
- WOMAN: They said. You are eight weeks pregnant so we can go ahead if you decide that's what you want to do.
- GIRL: An did you go away and cry and think about when I'd be born and wonder what you should do?

WOMAN: No. I told them straight away, I'd already decided.

GIRL: That was it then. Like popping in for a haircut.

WOMAN: No, no. Not like that. I went on a bus to another town and I had to stay there for the night. There was a woman in the next bed – she was 40 and she had three children and she didn't want another.

GIRL: And?

WOMAN: I thought that was awful. Unbelievable! I was judging *her*. Perhaps she was thinking the same about me.

GIRL: And afterwards was there pain, guilt?

WOMAN: No, afterwards just relief.

GIRL: How come the romantic notions about birthdays then?

WOMAN: There was something unfinished and I didn't know what to do. And one day I picked up a calendar and counted the weeks.

GIRL: And you came to 10th December.

WOMAN: Yes.

GIRL: And why would that stick in your mind all these years?

WOMAN: *(Pause)* Because it's my birthday.

MAN enters.

MAN: Ready?

WOMAN: Ready.

THE END