

EVERSON
COLEMAN

A Birthday Carol



Bambi Everson

A BIRTHDAY CAROL

By Bambi Everson

With apologies to Charles Dickens

One act, approximately 45 minutes

CHARACTERS:

MARK (late 40s - early 50s, flexible) – Carol's longtime, long-suffering best friend.

CAROL (50s) – Virulently against anything celebratory, due to her massively disappointing experiences.

GIRL (teen) – Spirit guide. Upbeat often, sarcastic occasionally. She is a teenager with attitude. Aren't they all?

MOM'S VOICE (elderly, via audio only) – Has moderate dementia.

PLACE: Now

TIME: Now

SYNOPSIS: Approaching yet another birthday, Carol is determined to sleep through it, but is visited by unwanted guests.

SCENE ONE

Central Park. MARK and CAROL have been best friends for years. There is a re-occurring argument in progress.

MARK

Please.

CAROL

No.

MARK

Why do we have to go through this every year? I just want to acknowledge my best friend.

CAROL

You do that all the time. I don't want to come off like I'm ungrateful, but I don't see anything positive about being one step closer to death.

MARK

You're still here. All the shit you've been through... My God. More than your share, and you're still here. I see that as quite an achievement.

CAROL

Some achievement. I'm broke, my marriage broke up, my mother has dementia, my cat died, and my daughter ghosted me. All I see is what's lies ahead, and none of it is good.

MARK

The last thing I want to be is a "brightsider." I hate when people do that, but it is possible Stacey could come to her senses one of these days.

CAROL

Stacey hasn't spoken to me in over two years. Her last email said I was not worthy of forgiveness. She has never apologized for anything in 30 years.

MARK

I know. She has never been wrong. Remember that Thanksgiving, when she warmed the potatoes by putting them in a plastic dish with the turkey?

CAROL

We came back with ice cream and the whole house smelled like a fire in a tire factory. Stacey didn't even notice.

MARK

We had a Charlie Brown Thanksgiving. Cereal and ice cream. It was awesome. You have always been a great mom. You have to know that.

CAROL

30 years. Longest relationship I ever had. I miss her. Last month, she cleaned out our joint checking account. My last royalty check was \$1.13. That couldn't even buy a can of cat food, if I still had a cat, which I don't.

MARK

I am not saying everything doesn't suck, which is why we should do something. We don't have to call it a birthday thing, just a Mark and Carol friendship day. How about that?

CAROL

How about you just let me crawl under my shavings like a hamster? How about you let me wallow in my misery for one lousy day, and maybe on Thursday, we can go get pumpkin dumplings at that place near you.

MARK

It closed during COVID.

CAROL

Fuck.

MARK

I could try and make dumplings. I would undoubtedly fail, and then we could both feel bad.

CAROL

I think I'd rather stay home and rewrite my will. What do you want?

MARK

I want you to outlive me.

CAROL

Dammit! That's what I want. You give the best eulogies. No offense. I just want to go home, and pretend tomorrow is just another stupid pointless day, so please don't say anything online. It starts a chain reaction, and then I'm obligated to respond, and I just don't have it in me to be gracious.

MARK

Just saying, somebody else might, and then I'll look like the shitty best friend for not saying anything.

CAROL

I hate it. I hate all of it. Begging people to buy my books...

MARK

You don't have to beg, People want to.

CAROL

Stop trying to make me feel better. I'm going to eat a sleeve of Double-Stuff Oreos for dinner. Maybe I'll be lucky and fall into a coma, or better yet, die in my sleep. An ironic twist. Dying on your birthday, like Ingrid Bergman.

MARK

There's always that to look forward to, I guess. So, if you are still alive, I'll see you on Thursday. I love you.

CAROL

I love you too. Gotta go. My daily unpleasant Facetime with my mom awaits.

MARK

You are a very good daughter.

CAROL

Yeah, Ironic, huh? See ya.

CAROL exits.

LIGHTS CHANGE

SCENE TWO

CAROL enters her apartment. There is a package on her doorstep.

CAROL

Oh, God. Another stupid present from mom. Why does she even bother?

CAROL opens the package and shakes her head. She takes out her phone and dials her mom, putting it on speaker. It rings for a very long time. While it continues to ring, CAROL changes into her comfy pants, and checks her mail. All bills and junk. It goes right in the trash. Finally...

MOM'S VOICE

(coming through the phone)

Hello?

CAROL

Hi Mom, Only 14 rings. Think that's a record. It's Carol. Carol, your daughter. Can you turn down the TV, mom? It's really loud. I can't hear you. Yes. Yes, you do. The remote is right next to your bed. The red button turns it off. The volume button has the arrows. Down, Mom. Not up. Just tell Alexa. Alexa. I am not shouting at you, I just... Ok, Good. Phew. Hi Mom. It's Carol, Your favorite daughter. Hahaha. No. No, you don't. Just me. And your son. He's fine. He's in Hawaii now. Did you take your pills today? Well, let's look. Today is Tuesday. In the pill box I sent you. I don't know where it is NOW. Last time, I told you to put it by the computer, so I could check. Turn your phone around. Let me look at the desk. No, Mom, the other way. I still see you. Great. I see it. Next to the dinosaur. Mom, you really have to take out the garbage. Well, what is that, then? What are you doing with two cases of Trix yogurt? That stuff is vile to begin with. It should be in the refrigerator. Maybe we should check the expiration date. Well, if you're not going to eat it— never mind. Let's take your meds. Today is Tuesday. If it's empty, maybe you took them this morning. I don't know, Mom. I'm 3000 miles away. Well, if Wednesday and Thursday are empty, too, maybe you forgot to refill them. We can start again. I will remind you tomorrow. Tomorrow is Wednesday. Which is actually why I am calling. I got your birthday gift in the mail. It's very sweet of you to think of me, but I'm post menopausal. I don't need condoms anymore. Especially not glow in the dark South Park condoms. Cartman's face is the last thing I want coming at me, pardon the expression. Yes. I suppose I could use them as balloons, but I imagine they'd be hard to blow up, and decidedly unpleasant. I wish you wouldn't spend the money. You need it. For food. Real food. Not stuff you steal from the local bodega. No, mom.

CAROL (cont'd)

When it's outside the store it's because they are bringing it in, not giving it away. One day you are going to get caught. I'm not angry. I just worry. I should go. It's late here. I'll call you tomorrow. Nothing. I'm not doing anything. Because I'm not like you, Mom. I haven't had a Happy Birthday in years. I know. You were the one in labor, and I should be sending you a gift. Would you like some South Park condoms? I love you, Mom. I'll talk to you tomorrow. Tomorrow is Wednesday. Bye.

CAROL hangs up.

CAROL (cont'd)

Hopeless. Absolutely hopeless.

CAROL crawls into bed and takes some pills.

CAROL (cont'd)

Calgon, take me away.

CAROL closes her eyes. Lights out. We hear a loud ticking clock. Then...

LIGHTS CHANGE...

MARK

Carol, Carol, wake up.

CAROL

Mark? What are you doing here?

MARK

You gave me a key.

CAROL

For emergencies!

MARK

Well, if this doesn't constitute an emergency, I don't know what does.

CAROL

What's going on? Your dog ok?

MARK

Fine. That's what you're wearing to bed?

CAROL

It's what I always wear.

MARK

Um... You might want to change.

CAROL

I'm not changing. If this is some ploy to get me out of the house, so you can do some birthday surprise, FORGET IT! You know I hate surprises.

MARK

I'm here to warn you.

CAROL

Whatever you had in mind, Please. Just cancel it. I just want to sleep. What time is it anyway?

MARK

A little after midnight.

(pause)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

CAROL

(sarcastically)

Thanks. Now please go.

MARK

Tonight, you will be visited by three ghosts.

CAROL

What?

MARK

Well, maybe not three. Maybe just one. Budget cuts, you know. Actually, it may be just me, but I bought costume changes.

CAROL

Get the fuck out of here.

MARK

Ok, but consider yourself warned.

*MARK exits dramatically and suddenly in a
BLACKOUT.*

CAROL turns on a small light.

CAROL

Mark? Fucking Ambien.

CAROL picks up her cell phone and calls.

CAROL (cont'd)

Hey, Mark, I think I just hallucinated you. If you are still up, call me back, ok? I'm a little freaked out.

(checking the clock)

It's 12:08. At least it wasn't another sex dream about Ed Koch. I doubt I'm going back to sleep, so just call me, ok? Whenever... Bye.

*CAROL hangs up and looks at the pill vial.
Checking the dosage.*

CAROL (cont'd)

Damn meds.

CAROL lies back on the bed, and stares into space. She checks her phone. No messages. She puts it down, and goes back to staring into space. We hear the clock ticking... and then it strikes ONE! MICHAEL enters wearing some vintage '70s clothes. CAROL screams!

CAROL (cont'd)

Holy Crap! Is this actually you? Or an effect from a plethora of Oreo cookies and leftover Easter candy? Maybe someone laced the jelly beans with LSD!

MARK

It's me, when I looked my best. If only I appreciated it then. I was so full of promise and optimism. And hair. Oh, I had such great hair. I wish I could have told my younger self it's all a sham, and no matter what I did, I'd end up a broken man. But hey, this isn't about me. These pants are kinda awesome, though.

CAROL

Very '70s. I wish I'd known you then. I'd given up birthdays by then. When my mom gave me *The Joy of Sex* with "Happy 14th Birthday. Carol" written inside, it was kind of all over.

MARK

Take my hand.

CAROL

You smell funny.

MARK

In 1975, I used a lot of Paco Rabanne to mask my cigarette habit. I stole it from my dad. It did nothing for him, or me, either, as I soon learned.

CAROL

So, where are we going? Hope it's back to my England home.

MARK

Did you have birthdays there?

CAROL

I wish. My birthday was usually the first day of school. Too early to make new friends, and most of my rich friends were still coming back from vacations.

MARK

So, no. Not England. I know I am not dressed for it, but we are hitting the '60s.

CAROL

You were still in diapers.

MARK

Not a pretty sight for either of us, right now. Can you deal with the mod look?

CAROL

It's my hallucination. Do I have a choice? Lead on.

MARK and CAROL swirl around for a moment, then walk across the stage. Lights up on a little girl (played by an older GIRL) tap dancing and singing "On The Good Ship Lollipop."

CAROL (cont'd)

You know that movie is from 1934, right? Is that supposed to be me?

MARK

We were very lucky to get her. She's touring with *Into The Woods*.

THE GIRL finishes her number with a big splashy finish. CAROL and MARK applaud.