

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



If I Should Die Before I Wake

by Rebecca Lister

EXTRACT

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“If I Should Die Before I Wake”

by

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CAST:

Joan Anderson – mid 70’s. She has three children Martin, Gillian and Isabelle. Her husband Tom is dead.

Gillian (Gill) Anderson – Joan’s daughter, late 40’s. Gillian has an intellectual disability, with traits of autism. Intellectual age of about 7 – 8.

Isabelle Anderson – Joan’s daughter early 40’s. Isabelle is married to Robert. They have no children.

STAGE SETTING: There are three performance areas.

1. Most of the action takes place in the outdoor living area at the back of Joan’s house. There is a swing, an outdoor table setting, a garden shed and an area for potting plants. There is a portable stereo with remote control.
2. Gillian’s bedroom
3. Counsellor’s chair.

NOTE: the colour of hydrangeas can be manipulated using either lime, which is alkaline, to produce pink flowers or bluing fertilizer, which is acidic, to produce blue flowers.

ACT ONE

It is late summer.

SCENE ONE

Afternoon. Back garden of the Anderson home.

Gillian is sitting on the swing. Joan is pushing her. Gillian has the remote control for the stereo in her hand. There is music playing.

Push harder.

GILLIAN:

That's as hard as I can push.

JOAN:

I want to go higher!

GILLIAN:

Stand up on the swing and do it.

JOAN:

Joan moves away. She's puffed.

Aw, not fair! I want you to do it.

GILLIAN:

Maybe later.

JOAN:

Maybe later. You always say maybe later!

GILLIAN:

Gillian stands on the swing and starts to get it going. She has her remote control and turns the music up. She swings in time to the music.

Joan returns to her gardening. She is potting hydrangeas. She is grinding down lumps of fertilizer using a mortar and pestle.

There are a number of hydrangea plants in pots.

She transfers one of the plants to a larger pot and adds the fertilizer.

Using a ph meter prong she tests the soil.

She then adds a handful of lime from the lime box and goes back to grinding down the fertilizer lumps.

She watches Gillian on the swing

Do you want me to film you?

JOAN:

You don't know how to do it

GILLIAN:

JOAN:

Yes I do.

GILLIAN:

You don't do it properly. You make mistakes.

JOAN:

Once. I made a mistake once. It's because the buttons are so small and my fingers are swollen.

GILLIAN:

It's because you're a idiot.

Pause

JOAN:

Suit yourself.

GILLIAN:

I will.

Gillian continues to swing. She turns the music up louder. It's uncomfortable.

JOAN:

It's too loud.

No response

JOAN:

Did you hear what I said?

Pause

JOAN:

Gillian!

Gillian continues to swing

Joan goes to the main switch of the stereo and turns it off.

Gillian tries to make it work with the remote. She slows the swing down.

GILLIAN:

Work! Jesus Christ! Bastard thing!

JOAN:

Gillian!

Tries again with remote.

GILLIAN:

It's broken!

She throws the remote onto the floor

JOAN:

Now you probably have broken it!

GILLIAN:

Yeah well, you made me!

It was too loud!
JOAN:
 No it's not.
GILLIAN:
Joan picks up the remote and puts the batteries back into it.

You need to get your ears tested.
JOAN:
 Do not.
GILLIAN:
 You're going deaf.
JOAN:
 You are.
GILLIAN:

Pause
 Gillian?
JOAN:
GILLIAN:
 (*sanctimonious*) All right mother!

Joan puts the power back on. The sound blasts out. Gillian covers her ears. Joan points to the remote. Gillian turns it down.

*Gillian sits on the swing.
 Joan returns to crushing the fertilizer.*

GILLIAN:
 Is that for the hydrangeas?
JOAN:
 Yep
GILLIAN:
 To make different coloured flowers?
JOAN:
 Yep.

Pause
GILLIAN:
 Did God made the flowers?
JOAN:
 I suppose so.
GILLIAN:
 So you're like God?
JOAN:
 I don't know if I'd say that.
GILLIAN:
 Yeah you are 'cause you make the colours.
JOAN:
 I don't make the colours. I just change the colours.

Same difference but hey?

GILLIAN:

Maybe.

JOAN:

I like the purple ones best.

GILLIAN:

I know

JOAN:

The purple flowers are for me. Isabelle has pink. What does Martin have?

GILLIAN:

Blue.

JOAN:

Yeah, that's right. Blue. Martin has blue. But you don't do the blue ones any more.

Gillian gets off the swing and gets her video camera. She starts to record Joan.

GILLIAN:

Say something.

Pause

JOAN:

Have you finished your packing?

Gillian films the contents of the mortar.

GILLIAN:

Fertilizer.

JOAN:

mmm.

Gillian puts the camera back on Joan.

JOAN:

So, have you?

Pause

JOAN:

I'll assume the answer's no then.

Pause

JOAN:

Do you want a hand?

GILLIAN:

No!

JOAN:

When are you going to do it?

GILLIAN:

When I feel like it.

JOAN:

I think it would be good if you finished it tonight and then we won't have to rush around in the morning.

GILLIAN:

Yeah, well that's not what I think.

JOAN:

Right. So, what do you think?

GILLIAN:

None of your business.

Gillian continues to film Joan – the back of her head, her bottom etc.

JOAN:

I know what you're doing.

GILLIAN:

I know what you're doing.

JOAN:

Put it away Gillie. Please.

GILLIAN:

Don't want to.

Joan looks at her watch.

JOAN:

Look at the time.

Gillian looks at her watch

GILLIAN:

Get the tray.

JOAN:

I beg your pardon?

GILLIAN:

Get the tray.

Pause

JOAN:

Get the tray what?

GILLIAN:

Get the tray now.

JOAN:

Gillian.

GILLIAN:

What?

JOAN:

Could you get the tray please.

GILLIAN:

No. You get it

Joan waits, then exits.

Dickhead. **GILLIAN:**

I can hear you! **JOAN:**
(*offstage*)

Dickhead. **GILLIAN:**
(*Whispering*)

Gillian swears into her video camera.

Dickhead. Idiot. Fuck. **GILLIAN:**

Giggles naughtily.
Places the camera on the table. It is still on.

Joan enters with the tea tray.

Where's the sugar? **GILLIAN:**

Neither of us takes sugar. **JOAN:**

Gillian is annoyed

Do you want it? **JOAN:**

Its part of the set! Or didn't you know that?! **GILLIAN:**

Joan exits and returns with the sugar.
Gillian snatches it from her and arranges it on the tray.
Joan sits on the swing.

This event is a ritual. It is always done the same way.

Gillian sets the cups, saucers and plates in place.
Pours the tea and sets out the cake.
She is earnest, methodical and rhythmic.
When it is ready Joan joins Gillian at the table.

GILLIAN:
(*fast*)
For what we're about to receive may the lord make us truly grateful amen.

Amen. **JOAN:**

Go! **GILLIAN:**

Gillian gulps her tea and shoves in the cake as though she is in a race.