



## Birthday (Modern Plays)

*Joe Penhall*

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The birth of their daughter should be one of the happiest days of Ed and Lisa's life. An NHS maternity ward and their somewhat unusual circumstances make for an unsettling and satisfyingly comic sequence of events that tests their relationship to the core, and raises intrinsic questions about the nature of birth and renewal, fear and isolation. Subverting the received gender roles to darkly comic and disturbing effect, the play charts Ed and Lisa's personally fraught experience at the behest of an NHS labour ward. Penhall expertly weaves an acutely funny and emotionally charged sequence of events: he pitches wryly observed gender perceptions of a quite literal life and death situation against an indictment of the NHS system. The beautifully observed writing is at once vicious and searingly tender. *Birthday* achieves an intensely comic counterpoint to the visceral domestic drama sutured to bigger issues of aspiration, sacrifice, who we are, how we communicate, the triumph of tolerance, nature and ultimately love.

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