

THE BIRTHDAY PRESENT

KARLA'S MONOLOGUE

from

The **FIRST** play-along
ukulele musical
by Jane Cafarella



UKed!

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<https://www.davidspicer.com.au/news/uked-first-play-along-ukulele-musical>

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

KARLA explains to her colleague Julie via zoom how she came to buy herself a ukulele for her 50th birthday.

Happy Birthday to me! Happy birthday to me!

Hi, Julie? I can't see you. Turn your camera on. Hello? You need to turn on your speaker. Can you hear me now?

Hi! Thanks for coming to my Zoom party. I'm Karla...I'm a certified packing expert. I've seen you in the office. You're new?

I invited the whole Pack and track team... I don't know who else is coming. It's not an official work function. I just invited everyone to be polite.

Thanks! How old do you think I am? Twenty-one? *(She mouths and makes a five and a zero with her hands).* Fifty!

OH. MY. GOD!

Actually, my *actual* birthday was last month. On the seventh.

Brian, that's my boyfriend, was gonna take me out. But he had to rehearse. He's the first violin in the West Bendigo Chamber Orchestra.

He said he'd take me out tonight instead. He said it was gonna be a surprise. And it was.

She reads from a text on her phone.

Dear Karla,

I'm sorry. It's just not working out. I need someone more musical.

PS: It's not me. It's you.

Beat.

That's what they all say.

More musical? Like Kylie. Guess what she plays?

She opens her legs lewdly and pulls a face, imitating Kylie playing the cello.

Cello!

It's okay. I'm fine. Really. Not meant to be! That's Mum's philosophy. If it doesn't happen, it wasn't meant to be, and if it does happen, it was meant to be. Win-win!

She goes, “Karla, don’t worry! Be happy”. She says I have to forgive Brian and free myself. But that just frees him doesn’t it?

So I made up a rhyme. That’s what I do. It’s like therapy – but cheaper.

They’re not poems, ‘coz real poems don’t rhyme. You want them to, but they just don’t.

Sometimes I’m on a tram and I’m thinking, what rhymes with melancholy? (*She considers.*)
Nothing! It’s like orange. Nothing rhymes with orange.

Wanna hear my rhyme? I’ve dedicated it to Kylie.

She brings out a triangle and plays on the “dings”.

I’m the FIRST triangle in the West Bendigo Chamber Orchestra. People respect you when you play in an orchestra.

ODE TO KYLIE

I PLAYED THE TRIANGLE IN A CONCERTO BY LISZT

(Politely) (DING)

I’M SUCH A GOOD LISTENER, A BEAT I NEVER MISSED

(Louder) (DING)

BUT I COULDN’T COMPETE WITH KYLIE ON HER CELLO

(Even louder) (DING)

WITH HER TONES SO SOFT AND MELLOW

(Impatiently) (DING, DING)

OH SHE SPREADS HER LEGS SPREAD SO WIDE

(Angrily) (DING DING DING)

OH SHE SPREADS HER LEGS SO WIDE

(Furiously) (DING DING DING DING)

WITH HER TONES SO SOFT AND MELLOW

THAT’S KYLIE ON HER CELLO

(Hysterically) (DING DING DING)

HOW COULD I COMPETE WITH MY TRIANGLE SO SWEET?

(Softly) (DING)

OH KYLIE, KYLIE, WHY’D YOU TAKE MY FELLOW?

OH KYLIE, KYLIE, WITH YOUR TONES SO SOFT AND MELLOW.

OH KYLIE, KYLIE, SO WINSOME AND SO WILEY,
I HOPE THAT YOU GET TERMITES IN YOUR F-HOLE!

(A crescendo - DING DING DING DING.)

I took this online quiz: It matches your personality with the instrument you should play.

She dings the triangle again.

Voila!

She has another sip of her drink.

How do you tell the difference between a violinist and a dog? *(Grinning)*. The dog knows when to stop scratching.

The others? I dunno. I guess they're that tech savvy. Or they're sick of Zoom.

I rang Leonie. To invite her, coz I didn't have her email. You know Leonie?. Blonde, Tall. She works with me in the packing room.

I go, "Wanna get all b and t with a g and t?"

That's bitter and twisted.

But Barry, that's her husband, said she's in Bhutan – where all the happy people are.

That's what people do now. They don't retire. They travel and take pictures of their food.

Have you been – to Bhutan? Maybe I'll go to Bhutan? Can't stay in the orchestra now. Not with *(she spreads her legs)* KYLIE!

(Brightly) So I'll have Sundays free.

She thinks of lonely Sundays.

Maybe I'll go to church? Or synagogue. Are you religious? My family's Greek orthodox, but I've got a thing about the Sabbath. Ever since I saw *Fiddler on the Roof*. *(She sings)* Tradition! Sunrise! Sunset!

Every Friday night, the whole family around the table – together! Lighting the candles! So romantic! Instead of Friday night with chips, a DVD - and Mum.

Do you think it's crazy? I'm like, I don't know, Karla. Maybe I just like certain parts of the culture? Maybe I don't have to be religious? I can just take on bits. Bits of this and bits of that – like a pastiche.

I told Mum, and she goes, "In this life, Carlotta," – wow, I love it when she philosophises like that: it really settles me – "In this life, you will think you are many things. But one day, you will find where you belong."

She exhales wearily

That's my real name. Carlotta. Like a lotta cars. CARLOTTA! I changed it last year, to Karla, with a K. Like a Kardashian.

Maybe I'll go to Bhutan and be a Buddhist. They say meditating clears the mind. My mind's a hoarder's paradise. I keep adding more junk to the pile.

She throws off her party hat and picks up a book.

But sometimes, I add a bit of treasure. Like this.

She holds up the book 'Everywhere I Look', by Helen Garner.

Stories by Helen Garner. Have you read it? Mum gave it to me for my birthday. There's this little love story in it – about a...ukulele.

Listen to this:

Reading from the book.

“Sometimes I hold the uke on my knee, while I'm reading the paper or waiting for the kettle to boil. I love it, as I would any harmless creature.”

Aw!

I told Mum, I'm gonna buy one, and she goes, “What are you gonna play, ‘Frere Jacques’? Or ‘Tip Toe Through the Tulips’, like Tiny Tim - that guy who looked like Louis the Fourteenth and sang like a girl?”

I'm thinking, I don't know, Karla, maybe it's too weird? Then the guy in the shop showed me this.

She picks up a Kala ukulele covered in Not A Violin stickers.

Not a violin! And check this...

It's got my name on it. See – K-A-L-A – Kala!

Meant to be! I wrote a rhyme about it.

HELEN GARNER CAN'T BE WRONG
SHE'S A FAMOUS WRITER
AND IF SHE GIVES THE UKE A GONG
WHO AM I TO FIGHT HER?

She examines the ukulele.

It's my birthday present to myself. It's a tenor. (*Singing soprano*) I used to be a soprano, (*singing tenor*) but now I'm a tenor.

Do you play? You do! Wow! Maybe you can give me some tips?

I was gonna buy a book on how to play it, but the shop guy said just go on YouTube.

She picks up the ukulele and holds it close.

I'll show you whose more musical, Brian!

How hard can it be?

ENDS

Approx. 1200 words