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HEAVEN CAN WAIT
(1943)

Hell, 1942. Henry Van Cleve, age 70, has just died and (voiceover) as his soul "passed over the Great Divide, he realized that it was extremely unlikely that his next stop could be Heaven, and so, philosophically, he presented himself where innumerable people had so often told him to go." His Excellency, Satan, grants him an interview and asks him to name some outstanding crime he committed on earth. Henry replies he can't think of one, but can safely say his whole life has been one continuous misdemeanor. Henry's story is told in flashbacks set on his birthdays.

The Van Cleves' Fifth Avenue home, New York, 1872. Mother (a society lady) and grandmother dote over the infant Henry.

Central Park, 1874. A nurse flirts with an Irish policeman as Henry squalls in his carriage.

The same, 1881. Nine-year-old Henry's first lesson in the ways of the opposite sex: little Mary accepts a beetle from him as a gift and then charms and beguiles him out of a second one.

The Fifth Avenue house, 1887. Mrs. Van Cleve engages a French maid and pays her extra to tutor Henry in French. On Henry's birthday he is in bed with a strange sickness. It comes out it's nothing more than a common hangover, he and Mademoiselle slipped out and went carousing the night before. Mademoiselle is discharged.

The Films: Synopsis, Credits and Notes

The same, Sunday morning of Henry's twenty-sixth birthday, 1898. The older Van Cleves are concerned over Henry, who throws away his money gambling and running around with show-girls. Henry rhapsodizes privately to his mother he's finally found the girl for him though he's seen her only once and doesn't know her name. That evening Henry's stuffy cousin Albert brings his fiancée, Martha, and her parents, the E. F. Strabels, the meat packers of Kansas City, to Henry's party. Martha, it turns out, is Henry's special girl; he followed her into a bookstore the day before and pretended to be a clerk in order to talk to her. Later, when Martha has to excuse herself during someone's song to sneeze, she goes into the library and Henry is there. He kisses her and begs her to marry him. To the astonished stares of all those assembled, Henry carries her out of the house to elope. Mr. Strabel vows to disinherit her. Grandfather Van Cleve is delighted and sends money for a honeymoon.

The Van Cleve house the morning of Henry's birthday, 1908. Henry and Martha have an eight-year-old son, Jackie. At breakfast Mrs. Van Cleve says how wonderful it would be if Henry's father had lived long enough to see Henry settle down. Henry says it's all Martha's influence. About that time a telegram comes from Martha saying she's left him.

The Strabel home in Kansas. The Strabels are at breakfast when Albert Van Cleve arrives and says he ran into Martha on the train and she's right outside in a carriage. The Strabels are cool to Martha at first but finally they give in and tearfully welcome her home. That evening Henry and Grandfather are secreted in Martha's room when she retires. She says she knows Henry has continued his philandering; what she can't take is his constant maneuvering to cover it up--like on the present occasion, when he gives her a bracelet for an anniversary gift and at home she has seen a jeweler's bill for two bracelets. Finally she wavers and the three of them creep out downstairs past Albert, reading at a desk, and Mr. Strabel, snoring loudly in his chair.

New York, 1922. On his fiftieth birthday Henry pays a visit to Peggy Nash, a beautiful Ziegfeld Follies girl. He tries to turn on the charm, but has the wind taken out of his sails when she calls him a retired Casanova with a tummy. He pays her off to get her to stop seeing his son, Jack. He is crestfallen when she correctly guesses his age. Martha sees through him too and guesses what he's been up to. Jack comes in to say he's already given Peggy Nash up for another show-girl. Martha tells Henry not to worry--Jack is just a chip off the old block.

The Films: Synopsis, Credits and Notes

The Van Cleve house, 1923, during Henry and Martha's twenty-fifth anniversary party. In the library Henry insists on knowing whom a telephone call Martha just received was from. Martha finally confesses she's been seeing a doctor. They dance in the hall, and Henry's voice on the soundtrack tells us it was their last anniversary together.

An insert of the photograph of Henry's sixtieth birthday party; Henry informs us the total age of the assembled group was over fourteen hundred years. One day later that year Henry tells Jack (now in charge of the family business) he needs a bigger allowance to hire a reading companion. (He confesses she is twenty-four years old.)

Henry's bedroom, the day after his seventieth birthday. Henry is sick in bed from too much celebrating. A homely nurse wakes him up from a beautiful dream of dancing the "Merry Widow Waltz" with a gorgeous blonde. Shortly after, the day nurse is replaced by the night nurse, a gorgeous blonde. She closes the door to Henry's room and from outside we hear the strains of the "Merry Widow Waltz."

His Excellency's office. Henry says what a wonderful way it was to go. His Excellency says regretfully they can't give his class of people accommodations here. If he'll try the other place, he may not get into the Main Building at once, but he should be patient, as there are doubtless many inside who will be willing to plead his case. Elevator Boy: Down? Excellency: No--up. (The original plan called for Henry to get married again in his late fifties to a young, blonde, golddigging manicurist, whose whole crude family moves into the Fifth Avenue mansion; Jack was finally to kick them out when he came back on his father's sixtieth birthday and saw how cruelly they were taking advantage of the old man.)

Director:	Ernst Lubitsch
Screenplay:	Samson Raphaelson
Source:	The play, <u>Születésnap (Birthday)</u> (1934) by Laszlo Bus-Feketé
Photography:	Edward Cronjager
Art Directors:	James Basevi and Leland Fuller
Set Decorations:	Thomas Little
Associate:	Walter M. Scott
Music:	Alfred Newman
Technicolor Color	
Director:	Natalie Kalmus
Editor:	Dorothy Spencer
Costumes:	Rene Hubert

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Makeup:	Guy Pearce
Special Photographic Effects:	Fred Sersen
Sound:	Eugene Grossman and Roger Heman
Assistant Director:	Henry Weinberger
Cast:	Gene Tierney (Martha), Don Ameche (Henry Van Cleve), Charles Coburn (Hugo Van Cleve), Marjorie Main (Mrs. Strabel), Laird Cregar (His Excellency), Spring Byington (Bertha Van Cleve), Allyn Joslyn (Albert Van Cleve), Eugene Pallette (E. F. Strabel), Signe Hasso (Mademoiselle), Louis Calhern (Randolph Van Cleve), Helene Reynolds (Peggy Nash), Aubrey Mather (James), Michael Ames (Jack Van Cleve), Leonard Carey (Flogdell), Clarence Muse (Jasper), Dickie Moore (Henry Van Cleve, age 15), Dickie Jones (Albert Van Cleve, age 15), Trudy Marshall (Jane), Florence Bates (Mrs. Craig), Clara Blandick (Grandmother), Anita Bolster (Mrs. Cooper-Cooper), Nino Pipitone, Jr. (Jack as a Boy), Claire Du Brey (Miss Ralston), Maureen Rodin-Ryan (Nurse), Frank Orth (Coachman). Call Bureau Cast Service list of August 9, 1943 also lists: Alfred Hall (Albert's Father), Grayce Hampton (Albert's Mother), Gerald Oliver Smith (Smith), Charles Halton (Clerk in Brentano's), James Flavin, Arthur Foster (Police-men), Libby Taylor, Bernice Pilot (Maids), Michael McLean (Henry, age 15 months), Edwin Maxwell (Doctor), Scotty Beckett (Henry, age 9), Marlene Mains (Mary), Gerald Pierce (Elevator Boy), Doris Merrick (Nurse). Several filmographies also list: Claire James, Rose-Anne Murray, Marian Rosamond, Adele Jurgens, Ruth Brady (Ziegfeld girls).
Production:	Ernst Lubitsch for 20th Century-Fox
Shooting:	Begun at the 20th Century-Fox Westwood Studios on February 1 and completed April 10
Running Time:	112 minutes
New York Premiere:	August 11
Released:	August 13
Temporary Production Title:	<u>Birthday</u>

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Reviews:

New York Times, Aug. 12, p. 15; Variety, July 21, p. 22; Motion Picture Herald, July 24, Production Digest Section, p. 1441; Daily Variety, July 21, pp. 3-4; Film Daily, July 21, p. 11; Hollywood Reporter, July 21, p. 3; Time, July 19, p. 96; Newsweek, Aug. 9, pp. 84-85; Commonweal, Aug. 13, p. 421; New Yorker, Aug. 14; New Republic, Aug. 30, p. 284; Life, Aug. 30, pp. 61-62, 64; Nation, Sept. 4, p. 275; Photoplay, Sept., p. 32; London Times, Sept. 3, p. 6; Spectator, Sept. 10, p. 239; New Statesman and Nation, Sept. 11, p. 168.

Also see:

Variety, Dec. 16, 1942, p. 7; Hollywood Reporter, Feb. 16, p. 6 (Ziegfeld sequence), Aug. 16, p. 16 (excerpts reviews in New York papers); New York Herald Tribune, Feb. 28, VI.5; New York Sun, Aug. 2, p. 15 (press interview with Lubitsch); Saturday Evening Post, Feb. 9, 1946, p. 50; Cahiers du Cinéma, Jan. 1962, pp. 54-57; Dossiers du Cinéma (Paris: Casterman, 1971-), Films I, pp. 33-36.

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A ROYAL SCANDAL (1945)

The Imperial Court of Catherine the Great, St. Petersburg, the second half of the eighteenth century. His Excellency the Chancellor, a wily court politician, is trying to convince the Czarina of the need for a defense alliance with the French. The French Ambassador is due at any moment, but her royal highness is with her current lover, Variatinsky, Commander of the Palace Guard. Fortunately the Czarina gets into a violent quarrel with Variatinsky at just the right time and kicks him out. In double entendres from political language the Chancellor coaches the French Ambassador on how to deal with the amorous Czarina and is about to show him in when a young officer bursts in and insists on being allowed to see her majesty. He is Lieutenant Alexei Chernoff, fiancé of one of Catherine's ladies-in-waiting, Countess Anna. He forces his way into the Czarina's presence and tells her he has ridden three days and nights from the Western front to warn her that two of her most trusted generals are plotting against her. The Chancellor assures the Czarina he already knows of the plot and has had it defused. The Czarina is impressed with the devotion and especially the good looks and physical prowess of her young subject. She promotes him to captain, cancels her audience with the French Ambassador and the banquet in his honor, and commands Alexei to come to her at 10:00 that evening with a report on the state of things in the Western garrison. The Chancellor makes a gift to Alexei of a magnificent stallion and suggests he use it to return to the front. Alexei ignores the advice.