

HAPPY BIRTHDAY WILL

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By C.P. Stancich

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SYNOPSIS: The most creative curtain raiser in the history of curtain raisers. Friends try to get Shakespeare to loosen up on his special day. While the Bard wrestles with his latest play, he is beset by well-wishers, prophecies and an enigmatic warning about silencing electronic devices.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 FEMALE, 2 MALE)

WILL (m)..... A playwright. *(26 lines)*
KATE (f)..... A (saucy) wench. *(22 lines)*
AUGUSTINE (m) A player. Pronounced Augustin. *(31 lines)*

SET: There is a stool and a small table.

PROPS

- Paper
- Ink horn
- Quill
- Pie
- Scrolls

SCENE:

Late afternoon, Lambeth.

AT RISE:

Lights up for a shadowy loft. WILL is scribbling away at his latest play. AUGUSTINE, holding several scrolls, observes him from up left.

AUGUSTINE: Hard at work, I see.

WILL pauses a moment, but does not regard AUGUSTINE; he resumes writing.

AUGUSTINE: Will?

Still no reaction.

AUGUSTINE: *(Frustrated.)* Will Shakespeare!

KATE enters up left, pausing by AUGUSTINE.

KATE: Takin' no notice, is he?

AUGUSTINE: Yes...he isn't.

KATE: *(Unconcerned to AUGUSTINE.)* He gets like that sometimes.
(Steps closer to Will.) Master Shakespeare?

WILL hesitates, thoughtful, then continues writing.

KATE: It's Master Phillips from the theater, come to see you. Master AUGUSTINE Phillips...your friend and fellow player? *(To AUGUSTINE.)*
He was like this all yesterday.

AUGUSTINE: Perhaps we shouldn't bother him.

AUGUSTINE turns to go, but KATE pulls him back.

KATE: 'Ere! He needs to be bothered. This one doesn't half got 'im vexed.

AUGUSTINE: So I've heard. Burbage was going on about it.

KATE: Maybe he's depressed, it bein' 'is birthday and all. Did you know it was his birthday?

AUGUSTINE: *(Smiles, holds up his scrolls.)* Oh yes...sent over with some japes.

KATE: *(Shrugs.)* Well, there's nothin' for it but to frighten him out of his senses. *(Steps closer to WILL.)* Will Shakespeare: Your WIFE is here!

WILL jumps up, wide-eyed.

WILL: Oh God!

KATE falls into guffaws.

WILL: *(Squints, catching on.)* Oh...yes...very good, very droll.

KATE: 'ere Master Phillips, don't think he fancies a visit from his wife much.

WILL: Admittedly, she's an acquired taste. She's no bother for me, but I don't think London is ready for her. Augustine, you look a bit bilious. Is it the plague, or did Burbage send you to do his dirty-work again?

AUGUSTINE: I was sent by Dick...and others...to celebrate the anniversary of your birth.

WILL: Celebrate? By which you mean drinking and puking at the Rose and Polyp.

AUGUSTINE: We aren't drinking at the Rose and Polyp. We are drinking at the Duke's Appendage. Where the drinks are more reliable—

WILL: And the puking less obligatory? Hmm. Not sure I want to leave my work. Got some momentum at last.

AUGUSTINE approaches the table.

KATE: Oh go on! Do you good! *(Struck with a memory.)* 'Ere...I've got something to get you in the mood.

KATE exits. AUGUSTINE steals a look at the loose sheets of manuscript.

AUGUSTINE: Is this your dark Westphalian revenge tragedy?

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WILL: It used to be. It is now my dark Danish tragedy.

AUGUSTINE: (*Shrugs.*) Ah. Burbage was telling me about it.

WILL: I'm sure he was.

AUGUSTINE: He said it was a little creepy.

WILL: I'm trying something new.

AUGUSTINE: He quoted a speech: "O that this too-too putrid flesh would rise, animate and rampage through the streets anew—"

WILL: Something like that.

AUGUSTINE: And he said you described the hero's murdered father— (*Snorts.*) rising from the grave and snacking on a couple of spear-carriers.

WILL: (*Mildly irritated.*) It's a new concept. The undead will catch on, mark my words.

Enter KATE, carrying a pie with a lighted candle sticking out of it.

KATE: 'Ere we are.

WILL: (*To AUGUSTINE.*) Dicky Burbage wants you to get me to tone it down, doesn't he?

AUGUSTINE grins. They both turn to Kate.

WILL: Good God. What's that?

KATE: It's a pie...with a candle in it. It's your birthday pie, i'n't it?

WILL: My—

KATE: It's a celebration. Master Augustine's brought japes to read off. Right?

WILL and KATE look to AUGUSTINE, who has to tear himself away from the manuscript.

AUGUSTINE: Well...for the party.

KATE: Well, you don't change his mood now, there's not going to be a party at the Duke's bloody Appendage, is there?

AUGUSTINE: (*Considers and shrugs.*) Oh...right. Well, knowing your penchant for prophecy and portents, some of us decided to cast about for your legacy, and we consulted the Oracle at Delphi.

WILL: (*Cocks his head.*) The Oracle at Delphi?

AUGUSTINE: Well, as near as we could get.

WILL: Which was?

AUGUSTINE: Uh...Wapping. We consulted the Three Sisters of Wapping.

WILL/KATE: The Three Sisters of Wapping.

AUGUSTINE: Yes, have you heard of them?

WILL/KATE: No.

There is a pause.

AUGUSTINE: (*Pulling out a scroll.*) Yes, well they're a new act, soon to be known up and down the Thames.

WILL: (*Blows out the candle.*) And burned at the stake during a limited engagement in Greenwich.

AUGUSTINE: (*Clears his throat, Opening a scroll.*) This was rendered by the first sister, known as Fat Sally. (*Reads.*) William's works are sure to please...discerning tastes for centuries. A nation will claim him, though playwrights will blame him because of the heights that he reached.

KATE: Wow.

WILL: Yes...Fat Sally's something of a lyricist, isn't she?

KATE: I got chills. Is there another?

AUGUSTINE: Yes. Would you like to do this one, Kate?

KATE nervously accepts a scroll and unrolls it.

AUGUSTINE: This was offered by the second sister, known as Not-fat Sally.

KATE: (*Reads, becoming horrified.*) Why...this is 'orrible!

WILL/AUGUSTINE: What is?

KATE: I can't read!

KATE breaks into guffaws as the others roll their eyes. WILL yanks the scroll from her and reads.

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WILL: Shakespeare's legacy will so vex and inspire those playwright folk, they will write him in to their own plays as an inside joke.

WILL, KATE and AUGUSTINE turn to the audience, offering grins and winks. WILL sets the scroll down.

WILL: I think I am being smarmed. All right, let's have the last.

As AUGUSTINE opens the final scroll, WILL takes a pinch from the pie and speaks to KATE absent-mindedly.

WILL: What sort of pie is this?

KATE: Pigeon.

WILL deftly brushes away the morsel without trying it.

AUGUSTINE: Now this is by the youngest of the three sisters. She's much more...direct than the others.

WILL: And what's she called?

AUGUSTINE: She's called: Not-any-kind-of Sally.

KATE: Man, those are three weird sisters.

WILL: Ssh!

AUGUSTINE: *(Reads.)* Prepare, William Shakespeare. Within this play you are writing, a single line will become the most famous line in drama. It will follow your name wherever it is mentioned, it will haunt the ambitions of all players to come, and for four hundred years, it will be the most spoken phrase in theaters...until it will be replaced, at last, by another.

There is a pause.

KATE: Wow, Will, what's your line?

WILL: I've no idea. What I want to know is what line is going to be spoken more in four hundred years.

WILL and KATE look to AUGUSTINE, who is lost in supposition and takes a moment to notice them. He rouses himself and searches the paper.

AUGUSTINE: Ah, well there is a post script. (*Reads.*) Shakespeare's gonna want to know what his great line is, and I do not see it. I know what it will be replaced with, but don't ask me what it means.

AUGUSTINE pauses, leery.

WILL: Well?

AUGUSTINE: (*Cocks his head and sighs, then reads.*) Four centuries from now, the most spoken line on the stage will become: "Please turn off your electronic communications devices."

There is a pause as the three exchange squints and nose crinkles and other expressions of a "what the..." nature. They drift into silent consideration until KATE startles the other two.

KATE: (*Loud.*) Well! That was fun. Now I've got work to do. (*To AUGUSTINE.*) Now, you, take the birthday boy and get him rat-assed. (*Starts off, then hesitates.*) And if he's drinking at the Duke's Appendage, make sure he does his puking at the Duke's Appendage. Some of us got to clean 'round 'ere. Y'know?

Exit KATE. AUGUSTINE rolls and gathers the scrolls.

AUGUSTINE: What do you say, Will?

WILL: (*Considers.*) Yeah, all right.

WILL starts off. AUGUSTINE looks at the manuscript.

AUGUSTINE: (*Reads.*) The tragedy of Walter, Prince of Denmark?

AUGUSTINE joins WILL.

WILL: I'm not married to it.

They exit. Curtain.

THE END

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