

HAPPY BIRTHDAY WILL

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 males)

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?

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'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?

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