

"Happy Birthday, Will!"

by P.H. Lin

(a short fun and funny play  
intended to be presented via Zoom)

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### Cast of Characters

JILL: Female. In her 30s or 40s. Any race or ethnicity.

JACK: Male. In his 30s or 40s. Any race or ethnicity.

The time is the present  
during the corona virus "shelter at home" time

The play takes place entirely as a virtual Zoom meeting

### Brief Synopsis

JILL is hosting an open and public meeting on Zoom to celebrate William Shakespeare's Birthday. JACK (who has been searching FB for an event he might find diverting,) enters the "room."

He joins the party. As they honor the Bard, they share laughs and toasts and bond... until they don't.

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Playwright's Note: If interested I can provide digital virtual backgrounds for JILL and JACK as per the text.

This play shows a virtual meeting as would be experienced on Zoom.

At rise: JILL's screen illuminates. She putters making sure that her desk is tidy.

JACK's screen illuminates, indicating he's entered the meeting. JILL notices and greets him.

JILL

Happy William Shakespeare's Birthday?

(She toasts him with a [real] glass that she's been holding. JACK looks confused)

JACK

I guess.

JILL

That's not what we're celebrating? You didn't sign on for this through my Face Book link?

JACK

I was surfing the public feed. This looked interesting. So, what's this meetup about?

JILL

William Shakespeare's Birthday. I'm throwing a party. And I'd hoped everyone who showed would bring in something. About Shakespeare's life, his times, his work... whatever.

JACK

I was to prepare?

JILL

Not required. Just a thought.

(A beat)

JACK

Like I said.. I followed a link. Cabin fever, you know. That and no real place to call my own anymore.

JILL

Oh, I recognize this loneliness. This pain! Why I wanted to throw this party for the Bard! To celebrate his four hundred fifty-sixth birthday!

JACK

He'd be that old?

JILL

Born in 1564. Four hundred and fifty-six years ago today!

JACK

Four hundred and fifty-eight.. but then, who's counting.

JILL

Right. Four hundred and fifty, uh, eight.

(She drinks from her glass)

So where is it that you're calling from, uh..

(She peers at the bottom of his screen)

... Jack Marshall?

JACK

How'd you know my name?

JILL

It says so. Bottom left corner of your screen.

JACK

I guess it does.

(He peers at his screen)

And you would be "Jill tumbling after?"

JILL

I would be! Pleased to meet you!

(She toasts him. JACK toasts back)

JACK

Likewise, I'm sure.

(An awkward beat)

JILL

So... I'd, uh, hoped everyone would bring in something fun. Something entertaining. To entertain us. Like a sonnet to read, or a scene from a Shakespeare play. Thought we'd talk about his life, his times... whatever. Anything to take us out of this world that's been "thrust upon us!"

(She makes quotation mark signs with her hands)

JACK

Take us back to his world?

JILL

To revel! To marvel in!

(Quick beat)

JACK

I didn't bring anything fun.

JILL

No problem. I did!

(She holds up a piece of paper)

And since we seem to be the only ones showing up? I say we get started.

JACK

That's cool.

JILL

This isn't exactly the Bard's. Just some words that buzzed in my head, and I jotted down. 'Cause, for me, they were fun and funny. And that can help.

(She gets emotional)

Help distract from so much that I, too, find... particularly painful.

JACK

Enough prologue. Let's hear what you've got.

JILL

OK.

(A beat)

OK.

(Clearing her throat and reciting)

To eat or not to eat that is the question.

'Tis it better to open yon beckoning Frigidaire box  
or to bar it shut... turning thusly from temptations?

(Beat)

To weigh, or not to weigh... or to foreswear the scale?

To nevermore set flesh or foot upon it!

(She picks up a bag of potato chips, pulls one out,  
and addresses the chip)

Are you truly the last of your bag?

The last to console my self-isolating cravings?

A pox, then, on both of your houses! Both Ruffles and Ridges!

(She puts the chip down... at a distance)

JACK

I'm hurting, too... only different.

(Declaiming)

To sleep... perchance to dream? Aye, there's the rub!

(conversationally to JILL)

But the problem for me isn't "sleep." I do nothing but that. The  
problem is the "dreaming." That's hard to handle.

JILL

The Bard didn't say, "we're the stuff that dreams are made of?"

JACK

I think that's from something else. THE, uh, MALTEESE FALCON.

(JILL's feelings are hurt)

Not that it matters.

(Beat)

My dreams aren't sweet. More like bitter hallucinations.

JILL

In what way?

JACK

I need to get out. To spread my wings and fly! To find a new  
heart to touch... to touch me back.

JILL

"Frailty, they name is human!" That's HAMLET. I'm sure!

JACK

All I know for sure is this Misery is making for strange bedfellows!

JILL

That's funny! You're funny!

(Beat)

Well... if I'm condemned to dream? Let me dream on what pleases.  
Which in my case would be a perpetual sugar high!

(She goes back to examines the last potato chip)

Let me dwell on this crisp but in flavors I'd much rather savor!

(JILL takes up the chip again and addresses it)

Let me compare thee to a chocolate chip!

Oh, prime confection from the House of Toll!

Rough winds dare not brush crumbs from off this lip

Nor strive to mute thy crunch that thrills this soul.

Sometimes while still too hot, 'tis best to cool  
Lest tempted teeth, desirous to munch,  
Unwittingly ask tongues to play the fool  
And reap the burn of half-baked cookie clumps!

JACK

I get it! I love this! Jill? I think I love you!

(Encouraged, JILL plows on with more animation)

JILL

Thy gold-complexioned mien shall never fade!  
Nor aromatic scent from sense detach.  
Nor shall thy recipe succumb to shade  
While in the course of making it from scratch.

JACK

You are on to something, Girl!

JILL

So long as tongues can wag and buds can taste?  
Thy memory can never be effaced!

(She eats the chip, chewing it carefully, relishing  
and immersing herself completely in the experience)

JACK

That was... powerful. You are amazing!

(She wipes imaginary cookie crumbs from her mouth)

And you're right... it is so much better to laugh with someone.

JILL

(Raising her glass again)

Well... if we both feel the same, there's just one thing to say.

JACK

"Happy Birthday, Will?"

JILL

Here's to another four-hundred and fifty-eight more!

JACK

And here's to another party? Same time, next year? Only next time in a pub...

JILL

Or maybe a sweet shop?

JACK

That would be great! Only Jill?

JILL

Yes, Jack?

JACK

Check your "chat?"

(She reads aloud as he types)

JILL

"Can the wife and the kids come along?"

(She reacts)

Not nice, Jack. Not nice at all! And I'm ending this meeting!

(Both screens go dark)

End of Play)