

The Last Birthday: To Celebrate or Not to Celebrate

Final Draft

By Akram Triki

Scene 1:

Narrator: *Mariam Kaya as William Shakespeare.*

William Shakespeare enters the room, he bows to the audience and then sits down.

Narrator: "Alone sits William Shakespeare, the prodigy of Stratford-upon-Avon. Hamlet is his new drama to come into existence. Time is of the essence; life is fleeting, he believes. Life, death, and everything crossing his path he questions."

Silence.

William is sitting alone, candles on the table, a quill in his hand and some ink, writing his famous play: Hamlet. He thinks deeply, trying to come up with some lines. Then suddenly he raises his hands enthusiastically and writes:

"There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so"

Then he smiles and says: "Ah! A line that shall be remembered for eternity"

and then starts coughing, drinks some water and says: "I'm getting old!"

Jane Austen enters, stands by the door, gets introduced and bows.

Narrator: *Parnia Bayazidi as Jane Austen*

Jane: "William! Long time no see!"

"People have been asking about you!"

William responds: "Jaaaane! I've been busy. The characters I create are my sole companions these days!"

Jane: "Come on, William! There's more to life than having some imaginary characters as companions"

William: "And what's that?"

Jane: "Talking to them!"

They both laugh sarcastically.

William: "They also never disagree with me"

They both laugh again.

Jane: "Hey, have you heard?"

William interrupts her and panics: "Oh no! The queen is dead! The queen is dead!"

Jane: "You really are what they say about you...dramatic!"
"Listen! Today is a very special day, William!"

William: "special? Every day is just another day" responds pessimistically.

Jane: "today is your birthday, you fool" "ready?"

William: "wait, ready for what?"

Jane calls out: "Emily!"

All the characters enter with Emily carrying the cake, and all of them singing the birthday song.

"Happy birthday to you..."

William reacts in a disappointing manner to show his rejection of celebrations as they are shallow and superficial.

William: "No no no!" He screams, "Please stop!"

They stop singing, put the cake down, and look at him with concern.

Then they stand together and bow as the narrator introduces all of them:

Yarah Yaman as Emily Dickinson

Rital Meyad as Agatha Christie

Maha Tola as Virginia Woolf

Zareen Irshad as Lucy Montgomery

and

Layan Kernazy as Maya Angelou

They go back and ask Shakespeare:
"What's wrong "

William: "I wasted time, and now doth time waste me"

Jane: "You are such a drama queen"

William: "shh"

Jane: "don't shh me"

Emily: "Jane, stop! Leave him alone"

"Listen, William! Life shouldn't always be about deep thoughts and finding meaning. Life is also poetry, life is joy. When you celebrate something, you're actually celebrating life itself."

Pause. Silence.

William looks down, thinks for a bit and then says: "This is it!" "I have changed my mind." He yells.

Emily: "what's happening?"

William: "To celebrate or not to celebrate, that is the question."

"Here we go again" **they** say all together.

Jane: "if you're gonna act all sulky and mad like you do every year, you might as well do it with some cake this time"

William: "I'm not in the mood for your sarcasm, Jane!"

Jane: "dear friends, I have tried"

Jane and Emily step aside and stand/sit still.

Lucy: "Poor thing! Don't be too harsh on him! I've been through all of this before"

Lucy proceeds to say: "I have been afflicted with this monster," she looks at the audience and continues "people will call depression one day"

William: "I am NOT afflicted with whatever you just said, Lucy "

Lucy: "Okay! If you say so!"

Montgomery and Maya sit with Shakespeare.

Maya: "William, if you only know how many birthdays I have missed in my life, and unlike you, I had no choice but NOT to celebrate... the void that dwells in my heart will never be filled,"

she continues, “a moment joyously lived is a memory engraved forever”

William reacts in a way like he’s going to cry, but then tries to recollect himself.

Virginia sits with them unbothered. Without even looking at Shakespeare, and while reading her book and drinking her tea, she says: “Man is condemned to angst, a condition accompanied by the feeling of disconnection from societal norms. William, my friend, you’re having an existential crisis. Congratulations!”

Maya: “congratulations? I think you meant condolences!”

Virginia: “This is a path rarely taken. A path towards authenticity and freedom”

Jane: “Dear William, you’re cooked”

They all laugh except Agatha.

Agatha moves to stand behind Shakespeare with her hand on her chin, trying to understand him and find a solution for the problem.

She then says: “William! Words have always prevailed with people, and you are a master of words. You believe that good and bad are a mere reflection of our thoughts. Then I hate to tell you that the question is not celebrating itself, it’s your perception of it”

William feels that Agatha’s words make sense, but he wouldn’t accept. He pauses and thinks for a moment then stands up:
“I shall not celebrate.”

William then walks towards the audience and yells:
“Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow; what is a year but a step closer to silence, closer to nothingness”

Narrator: “we are helpless beings forced to find meaning in the absurdity of existence. Should we seek meaning through suffering, or succumb to the shallow depths of false elation.”

End of Scene 1.

Scene 2:

All the characters are sat at the table.

Narrator: "Since we're mortal beings, should we live and embrace the moment, or accept its innate banality"

William walks back and forth a few times murmuring:
"To celebrate or not to celebrate, to celebrate or not to celebrate..."

Jane laughing at him in the background.

William pauses and then continues to say:

"Whether it is nobler to embrace the joy of a new year, or mourn the gloomy passing of another. A year blessed, or a year lost."

He goes back to his seat.

Emily: "William! Don't you think that pondering upon whether you should celebrate is already a waste of precious time?"

Lucy: "Exactly! I say one must show gratitude to a moment so many have no luck to live"

Agatha: "Ladies! And man! The only thing that is making me sad right now is the fact that time is already dead, and I will never be able to find the killer"

William: "Does that mean we're not celebrating?" He says enthusiastically.

Agatha: "I believe doing the opposite would be more practical"

William: "Not you too, Agatha"

Maya: "Listen, William! A moment today is a special memory tomorrow, I promise.."

Virginia: "Enough!" "Time is irrelevant here"
"William! Either ways you'll be glorifying the past and memories that will fade away before our eyes. It's all meaningless!"

William: "Exactly! It's this regularness of life that's killing our spirits. These repetitive events remind me of the myth of Sisyphus. We share the same destiny."

Virginia: “I totally concur! There’s also this philosophical concept, eh ‘eternal return,’ which is basically a testament of how banal our lives can be, and in fact”

Jane interrupts: “can you guys quit philosophizing. It’s exhausting! I wanna celebrate”

Jane stands up and lights the candles on the cake: “Here you go, buddy! Make a wish.”

Agatha is still thinking, trying to find a solution.

“William! Once upon a crime, this woman was burned by the burden of freedom, to act with no pressure from society and tradition, and ultimately become true to her identity and self.”

William stares at the flame while Agatha says her line, not sure what to do, stands up, walks towards the audience and says:

“Life— the cradle of ceaseless uncertainty”
then leaves the stage.

William leaves the stage.

Silence.

Emily: “I get it now!”

“William might be drawn by the total rejection of societal norms that control our actions and beliefs”

Jane: “OMG! You’re turning into him”

Emily: “I truly understand him now. I feel that he might be right about all of this! We shouldn’t do things just because it’s what everyone does, we should act in accordance with what we truly believe in”

Maya: “But enjoying life has nothing to do with it”

Lucy: “Anyway, I think I’m gonna leave! Are you guys coming? Let’s just hope we can convince him tomorrow “

Virginia: “Hope is a dangerous thing!”

Jane: “Virginia!” Yells at her to stop philosophizing.

Everyone leaves but **Agatha**. She stays behind. She sits in William’s chair. Elbows on the table. Hands under chin. Thinks deeply while looking at the flame, and then blows out the candles and leaves.

William then comes back, stands still, goes down on his knees and says:

"All the world's a stage, and all people are the players."

He stands up, walks toward the table and sits down.

Narrator: "They say if you betray your beliefs and principles, you will live long enough to witness yourself having none. Live an authentic, or die a conformist"

The Narrator also leaves.

William looks around to see if anyone was still there, and then secretly eats from the cake.

End of scene 2