

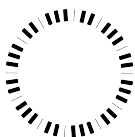
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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

Acting Edition

Birthday Club

by Phil Olson

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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BIRTHDAY CLUB was first produced in Central Virginia by Persimmon Tree Players and Victory Hall Players in association with Scottsville's Center for the Arts and the Natural Environment, with virtual performances in March 2021. The producer was Tom Green, the directors were Courtney Walker and Kristin Freshwater, with technical direction by Tom Green, and sound by Mike Montgomery. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

CHERYL..... Mandy Shuker
EMILY..... Emily Kinkead
ABBIE.....Jennifer LaFleur
KATHY..... Kelly Kroese
SARAH..... Victoria Byler

BIRTHDAY CLUB was subsequently produced by the Mighty Richland Players Dessert Theater in Orangeville, Illinois in April 2021. The director was Kim McIver, the stage manager was Andy McIver, the set designer was Paula Fulton, and the lights and sound/tech crew were by Sue Wichman. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

CHERYL..... Terrie Miller
EMILY..... Sandy Sweitzer
ABBIE..... Paula Fulton
KATHY.....Amy Jo Beightol
SARAH..... Keisha Leehan

BIRTHDAY CLUB is a winner in four playwriting competitions, including the Austin Film Festival Stage Play Competition, the Writer's Digest Stage Play Competition, the ScreenCraft Stage Play Competition, and the Mixing It Up Productions Playwright's Contest. The play had twenty-five Zoom readings in theatres around the US and Canada from March 2020 to February 2021.

CHARACTERS

CHERYL – (fifty) Married, successful business owner, anal-retentive, control issues. Marriage is strained. Stay-at-home husband.

EMILY – (forties) High school teacher. Divorced twice. Prolific Tinder dater. Has had lots of “work done.”

ABBIE – (thirties) Married. Stay-at-home wife. Easy life. Nice big house, pool, boat.

KATHY – (forty) Works in “law enforcement.” Married, four kids. Very tough.

SARAH – (twenties) Works for Cheryl. Member of the very strict “Heemish” religion. Wholesome, innocent, naive of all worldly things.

SETTING

Cheryl's living room

TIME

Present Day

ACT ONE

Scene One: Kathy's birthday.

Scene Two: Abbie's birthday. One month later.

Scene Three: Cheryl's birthday. A few months later.

ACT TWO

Scene One: Still Cheryl's birthday. Thirty seconds later.

Scene Two: Sarah's birthday. A few months later.

Scene Three: Emily's birthday. A few months later.

FOREWORD

I dedicate *Birthday Club* to Nancy Howland. I was the designated driver and observer of her Birthday Club for several years. Nancy has a close-knit group of loyal friends, with different personalities and backgrounds, who get together to celebrate, commiserate, and support each other while partaking in a glass or four of wine.

It was extremely entertaining and often times hysterical to be the “fly on the wall” and hear the candid conversations between these accomplished women. It was so entertaining that I asked Nancy if it would be okay to write a play about it, and with her permission and blessing, I wrote *Birthday Club*. Thank you, Nancy.

Phil Olson

Visit *PhilOlson.com* for more info about Phil's other plays and musicals.

ACT ONE

Scene One

(The setting is Cheryl's living room, nicely appointed, with a front door center stage right, a door to the kitchen upstage left, and an opening that leads to the den, bedrooms, and bathrooms, upstage center. In the living room is a couch, coffee table, two easy chairs, a dining table with four chairs around it, and a bar, downstage left, with wine bottles, glasses, and a fancy glass bottle filled with vodka, with a glass stopper [the kind of bottle that doesn't have any markings indicating it's vodka].)

(On the dining table is a fake birthday cake with unlit candles on it. On a coffee table in front of the couch is a bowl of crackers and a stack of coasters, napkins, and a martini shaker. Seated are CHERYL, ABBIE, KATHY, and EMILY, all with a glass of wine. It's KATHY's birthday and she is very pregnant. CHERYL, EMILY, and ABBIE start singing "Happy Birthday.")

CHERYL, EMILY & ABBIE. *(Singing to KATHY.)*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU,

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO -

KATHY. Okay, that's enough. Let's drink.

CHERYL. Get 'em up, girls.

(The WOMEN raise their wine glasses.)

EMILY. To Kathy.

CHERYL, EMILY, ABBIE & KATHY. Birthday Club!

(They all take a drink, then put their glasses down on the coffee table.)

CHERYL. Coasters!

(CHERYL passes out coasters to everyone. They put their glasses on the coasters.)

ABBIE. *(Emotional.)* Can I just say that I am so grateful to be part of this group.

You have all been so kind to me when I really needed a friend –

KATHY. Yeah, great, fine. Less talking, more drinking.

(KATHY takes a drink.)

CHERYL. Kathy.

KATHY. What? We *all* feel that way. It's *my* birthday. No sentiment.

(There's a knock at the door.)

CHERYL. That must be Sarah.

EMILY. Is she the new member?

ABBIE. "Prospective" member.

KATHY. She's late.

(CHERYL heads over to answer the door.)

ABBIE. How do you know her, again?

CHERYL. She works for me. She's a genius with numbers. I'm trying to groom her to be a manager but she's a little old-fashioned. I need your help to...bring her into the present.

(Another knock at the door.)

KATHY. Did you do a background check on her? Fingerprints?

(CHERYL opens the door.)

CHERYL. You made it.

SARAH. Sorry, I'm late. I got lost.

CHERYL. Oh, that's okay, it's your first time.

KATHY. First rule of Birthday Club, never be late.

EMILY. I thought it was, never talk about Birthday Club.

ABBIE. That's rule number three.

CHERYL. Everyone, this is Sarah.

EMILY, ABBIE & KATHY. Hi, Sarah.

SARAH. Hi.

CHERYL. This is Emily, Kathy and Abbie.

SARAH. Who's the birthday girl?

KATHY. *(Raises her hand.)* Present.

SARAH. Happy birthday. How old are you?

KATHY. Whoa, whoa, whoa!

EMILY. What the what?!

CHERYL. Rule number two: "Never discuss age at Birthday Club."

SARAH. Oh, I'm sorry.

KATHY. Jeez.

ABBIE. It's okay. She didn't know.

(KATHY sets her wine down and heads to the bar.)

KATHY. Can I get you a drink? We have wine, vodka...

SARAH. Oh, thanks, how about just a glass of water. I brought my own orange flavoring.

KATHY. Is she serious? Are you serious?

SARAH. Yeah, I can't drink alcohol.

KATHY. Why is she here?

CHERYL. For a different perspective. Now, be nice.

ABBIE. You've never had alcohol?

SARAH. No. It's not allowed in the Heemish religion.

EMILY. "Heemish"?

KATHY. What the hell is the Heemish religion?

SARAH. Oh, we're not allowed to swear. Or listen to swear words.

KATHY. Hell's not a swear word. It's in the Bible. Here's a swear word for you, I'll spell it, F. U. –

CHERYL. *(Cuts her off.)* Kathy!

SARAH. It's a very strict religion. Almost as strict as the Amish, except we can use toasters.

ABBIE. Is she joking? I can't tell.

SARAH. Oh, no, they don't allow us to joke.

EMILY. That seems like a joke.

KATHY. So, you don't know what alcohol tastes like?

SARAH. No.

KATHY. I'll get you some water.

(Whispers to CHERYL.) I don't trust her.

(KATHY pours SARAH a glass of water. She spills some.)

Oh, shoot, I spilled.

CHERYL, EMILY & ABBIE. Napkin!

(KATHY grabs a napkin and wipes up the spill.)

KATHY. Rule number six: "Never spill at Birthday Club."

EMILY. Cheryl is a little...particular.

CHERYL. A clean house is a happy house.

SARAH. Amen.

(She sees a birthday cake on the table.)

Oh, the cake looks good. What kind is it?

ABBIE. Oh, that's fake. We don't eat cake at Birthday Club.

EMILY. Too many calories.

ABBIE. We just look at it.

EMILY. We eat cupcakes. They're smaller.

CHERYL. So we eat, like, six of 'em.

ABBIE. *(To SARAH.)* Can I ask, if you can't drink or joke in the Heemish religion, what are you allowed to do?

SARAH. Oh, well, we can get married and have babies.
And if you're a woman, you can work until you have children.

EMILY. Wow.

ABBIE. That seems very...1800s.

(KATHY comes back with the glass of water. She holds the glass at the very bottom to not get fingerprints on the upper part of the glass. She hands it to SARAH.)

KATHY. Here you go.

(SARAH takes the glass.)

Oh, you know what, that glass is dirty. I'll get another one.

(KATHY takes the glass from SARAH, holding it, again, at the very bottom. She heads back to the bar.)

SARAH. Oh, no, you don't have to wait on me. I can get it.

KATHY. Okay.

(SARAH goes to the bar.)

SARAH. So, does everybody pool together to get a present, or...

CHERYL. No presents at Birthday Club.

(At the bar, KATHY takes out a makeup brush and brushes the side of SARAH's glass.)

SARAH. What are you doing?

KATHY. Cleaning.

(SARAH picks up the crystal vodka bottle and opens the top, ready to pour in a clean glass.)

(Not noticing what SARAH is doing, CHERYL grabs her cell phone to take a photo of ABBIE and EMILY.)

CHERYL. Smile.

(EMILY and ABBIE make faces, CHERYL takes the photo.)

Perfect.

(CHERYL looks at the photo, then shows it to EMILY and ABBIE.)

SARAH. *(Re: the vodka bottle.)* Fancy water bottle.

KATHY. *(To SARAH, warning her.)* Oh, no, that's not...

(SARAH fills a glass with vodka, KATHY looks to see the others aren't looking.)

SARAH. Not what?

KATHY. Nothin'.

SARAH. So, when is your baby due?

(SARAH puts orange flavor in her "water.")

KATHY. What baby?

SARAH. Aren't you...?

(She points to KATHY's stomach.)

Oh, I am so sorry. I'm so embarrassed.

KATHY. *(Looking at her stomach.)* Whoa! Where'd this come from?

SARAH. *(Uncertain.)* She's...joking, right?

EMILY. Yeah. Kathy does that sometimes.

KATHY. *(To SARAH.)* Just a heads up, I can be a little abrasive sometimes.

CHERYL. *(Sarcastic.)* Nooooooooooooooooo.

KATHY. But it's all done with affection. I love these bitches –

(Corrects herself for SARAH.) Ladies. I have their backs, and I'd do anything for 'em.

SARAH. That's nice.

ABBIE. I thought you said no sentiment.

KATHY. It's *my* birthday.

SARAH. *(Takes a drink.)* Oh, this tastes funny. What kind of water is this?

KATHY. Vitamin water. Lots of nutrients.

(With her cell phone, KATHY takes a picture of the glass with fingerprints, texts the photo to someone.)

(SARAH goes back and sits down.)

ABBIE. *(To KATHY.)* When are you due, in four weeks?

KATHY. Four more glorious weeks of swollen ankles, heartburn and constant peeing, followed by twenty pounds I'll never lose.

(KATHY goes back and sits. She picks up her wine glass.)

SARAH. I can't wait to have children. I'm sure you're looking forward to it.

KATHY. Not at all. This is my fourth. Purely an accident. I didn't even think I could have kids anymore.

SARAH. Just curious, is alcohol good for the baby?

KATHY. Oh, yeah, my doctor said it was okay to have a glass of wine.

CHERYL. When did he tell you that? 1952?

EMILY. My doctor said the same thing, especially in the third trimester.

KATHY. Hey, my mom drank through her entire pregnancy with me and I turned out just fine.

(EMILY, CHERYL, and ABBIE break out laughing. SARAH laughs, following the others.)

SARAH. That's crazy.

ABBIE. Uh-oh.

KATHY. *(Very serious.)* Pregnant woman are not "crazy." We have superpowers derived from our baby-making skills, that can be misinterpreted.

SARAH. Oh, of course. I'm sorry, I didn't mean anything by it.

CHERYL. Okay, let's go over a few more Birthday Club rules.

SARAH. You have a lot of rules.

KATHY. Without rules, we'd have chaos. Do you want chaos?

SARAH. Oh, no, I'm happy to follow any rules you have. I really wanna be in your club. I don't have many friends.

KATHY. Hmm, surprising.

CHERYL. We have eight rules. To add a new rule, you make a motion to do so, then we vote on the new rule with a majority required to ratify it.

SARAH. Got it.

(SARAH takes another drink.)

CHERYL. Okay, so we meet whenever somebody has a birthday. Pretty simple. We always meet at my house.

SARAH. Sounds good. Thanks for letting me be part of your group.

KATHY. Oooh, yeah, about that...you're not actually a member of the club until you're formally initiated.

SARAH. Oh, sure, okay.

KATHY. We're very selective.

ABBIE. There's a three-year waiting list to get in.

EMILY. The thing is, we do important work here. Lots of people wanna be members.

CHERYL. Oftentimes, we make life-or-death decisions.

EMILY. Like whether to go with vodka or wine.

SARAH. Wow. Okay, so, how do I become a member?

(SARAH takes another drink.)

CHERYL. Well, you first need to learn our history. Abbie?

ABBIE. Sure. We started Birthday Club five years ago when a friend of ours, Jennifer, was diagnosed with cancer.

SARAH. Oh, no.

EMILY. Birthday Club helped Jennifer get through some pretty tough times.

SARAH. Oh, I'm so sorry. How is she doing?

KATHY. She's dead.

CHERYL. Kathy.

KATHY. Well, she is. Which brings up rule number four: "Never miss Birthday Club for any reason. Reschedule any work conflicts, family vacations, weddings, funerals, illnesses or pandemics."

CHERYL. The bottom line is, the only valid reason to miss Birthday Club is if you are dead.

EMILY. And that excuse has a caveat.

(EMILY picks up the martini shaker.)

Say hi to Jennifer.

SARAH. That's Jennifer?! In the...?!

KATHY. Martini shaker. It's what she wanted.

SARAH. That is so...sad.

(SARAH takes another drink.)

KATHY. Yeah, very sad. Lots of tears. That's why you're here. We had an opening.

(To CHERYL.) Did you not tell her anything?

CHERYL. I've been getting a little forgetful, lately. Which reminds me, I need to take my meds.

(CHERYL takes out a bottle and pops a couple pills, drinks, and washes it down with wine.)

EMILY, KATHY & ABBIE. (*Singing to “If You’re Happy and You Know It.”*)

IF YOU’RE HAPPY AND YOU KNOW IT,
IT’S YOUR MEDS.

(**KATHY, ABBIE, and EMILY** *clap twice.*)

SARAH. Do those help with your memory?

KATHY. She has the menopause.

EMILY. “The” menopause. Isn’t it just, “menopause”?

KATHY. Not what *she* has.

CHERYL. My brain keeps hitting the delete button.

SARAH. Oh, is that what the menopause does?

CHERYL. That and the sleep deprivation, weight gain, cellulite and depression. Oh, and I pee when I sneeze.

KATHY. Doesn’t everyone?

CHERYL. And, oh, yeah, I’m growing a mustache.

KATHY. Hydrogen peroxide. Without it, I’d be Wolf Man.

ABBIE. (*To CHERYL.*) How are your mood swings?

CHERYL. Oh, I don’t have mood swings. I have the whole friggin’ playground.

KATHY. Something else to look forward to.

CHERYL. Okay, where were we? Oh, yeah, cancer. So when Jennifer was diagnosed, we started Birthday Club as kind of a support group.

EMILY. We wanted it to be a fun, happy time, when we could forget life’s struggles for a few hours.

KATHY. Because life sucks.

CHERYL. Kathy.

ABBIE. We wanted this to be a place where there were no filters, where we could talk about anything without being judged, out loud.

EMILY. And drink.

KATHY. Which we are not doing enough of.

SARAH. How did you all meet?

(SARAH takes another drink.)

ABBIE. We met at yoga.

KATHY. That's when we were actually going to yoga.

EMILY. Some of us still go.

SARAH. What do you all do? I mean, I know what Cheryl does, she runs a successful CPA firm. And she's a great boss. Very inspiring.

KATHY. Yeah, kissing ass will not get you points.

CHERYL. Oh, it'll get you *some* points.

EMILY. I'm a teacher at Lincoln High.

ABBIE. *(Re: EMILY.)* She's getting her PhD in education.

SARAH. Wow.

KATHY. I work for a branch in law enforcement that requires a specific set of skills. That's all I can say.

SARAH. That can mean a lot of things.

KATHY. And it does.

(She puts her index and middle fingers to her eyes, then points to SARAH à la Meet the Parents, i.e. "I'm watching you.")

ABBIE. I'm a homemaker.

SARAH. Oh, congratulations.

KATHY. She has a big house, swimming pool, tennis court.

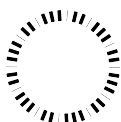
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