

Happy Birthday Theo

Everybody needs a purpose

by James Hutchison

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CAST of CHARACTERS

Theodore Thistle	A man, of any race, later in life who is frustrated with his current circumstances.
Montgomery Moon	A man, of any race, later in life who tends to be more content with his current circumstances.

SETTING

A junk heap where Theo lives and Monty visits. They have clearly fallen on hard times and been cast out by society.

TIME

Theo's birthday in April.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Theo is celebrating his birthday and lamenting his lost youth while hoping to find his true purpose in life.

NOTES:

The characters are each drinking wine and eating peanuts in the shell. Where these things happen will be discovered in the rehearsal process.

Settings and costumes would in my mind be more stylized in appearance than a reflection of reality. These are two sad figures in a bleak world that spend their days ruminating on life, drinking wine, and eating peanuts.

Please feel free to add appropriate pauses between lines or during a sentence. People pause all the time to sort their thoughts. It's natural and pauses are as much a tool for communication as is a word.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY THEO

SCENE: THEO'S HOME IN A JUNK HEAP

Setting: A junk heap with a couple of lawn chairs. This is where THEO lives and MONTY visits. A crate sitting beside the chairs has some peanuts in their shells in a cracked bowl from which THEO and MONTY occasionally eat. By the peanut bowl is a dusty looking short tumbler.

At Rise: THEO who is dressed in shabby clothing which includes a sad looking jacket has none the less tried to make himself look as presentable as possible. He is looking at himself in a broken mirror. He holds the mirror closer and then farther away and then scoffs and puts the mirror down. MONTY enters dressed in a shabby jacket and pants and is a little less concerned about his appearance than THEO. MONTY carries two bottles of cheap wine.

MONTY: There he is!

THEO: Here I am.

MONTY: The birthday boy himself.

THEO: Hoorah!

MONTY: Been waiting long?

MONTY hands THEO one of the bottles.

THEO: An hour maybe.

MONTY: Time to contemplate.

THEO and MONTY take the caps off the wine and MONTY drinks straight from the bottle. THEO pours his wine into the tumbler and drinks from the glass. After THEO pours the wine, he drinks it like a connoisseur swirling the wine in the glass, smelling the bouquet, and looking at its colour.

THEO: Yes. To think about life. To consider where I've been, and where I am, and where I'm going.

MONTY: Age old questions.

THEO: Indeed.

MONTY: Any conclusions?

THEO: None. Only frustrations. It's all been lost you see.

MONTY: What has?

THEO: My youth.

MONTY: Rather careless of you to lose your youth.

THEO: It was squandered.

MONTY: Well if it was squandered, as you say my dear Theo, then you're the one who squandered it.

THEO: Oh, really? Does the child born into poverty squander his potential because of the circumstances of his birth? No. He is forced to live a certain way – to be focused more on survival because he has so few options. He may be malnourished and under educated. Is that his fault? No. It is the fault of a society built upon the hollow and destructive glorification of profit.

MONTY: You make an excellent point, except for one thing.

THEO: What's that?

MONTY: You weren't born into poverty.

THEO: But if I was.

MONTY: But you weren't.

THEO: Still.

MONTY: This is about your birthday, isn't it?

THEO: Birthdays are a constant reminder of the passage of time.

MONTY: Time would still pass with or without birthdays.

THEO: You know, I've always thought it odd that we celebrate our birth on the day we were born. I'm not sure we should even celebrate birthdays at all. Isn't it the mother who carried the baby? Who nurtured this child in her womb with her very own body? Shouldn't the day she gives birth to this new life be her celebration and not his? She's the one who went through the pain and trauma. Shouldn't we lavish upon the mother gifts and cake and cards – not the offspring. The day of your birth should be called Mother's Day because that's the day the woman who gave you birth became a mother.

MONTY: So, Mother's Day would be 385 days a year?

THEO: Yes, why not? Makes complete sense. People are born 385 days a year why not make Mother's Day 385 days a year.

MONTY: That's ridiculous. It would never work.

THEO: Why not?

MONTY: For several reasons. First, what would happen to all those birthday cards that are already in existence? Those heartfelt and sentimental notes written by others that we give to our friends and family to tell them how we feel? They would no longer have a purpose. They would sit in card racks around the world gathering dust. And second, if a woman had four children, she'd have four mother's days.

THEO: And what's wrong with that?

MONTY: I just think you're making things more complicated than they need to be.

THEO: Well, I just think you're putting too much thought into this.

MONTY: Sounds like you haven't put in enough.

THEO: That's not the point!

MONTY: Well, what is the point?

THEO: I'm just feeling dissatisfied with my life. Look at me. Look at us. Living in a junk yard. What have we become? Cast aside because we're considered too old to work. There are so many things I wish I'd done differently.

MONTY: We all wish we'd done things differently, my dear Theo, but you can't change the past.

THEO: Oh no, let me ask you this. Where does our past reside?

MONTY thinks then answers.

MONTY: In memory.

THEO: Precisely my dear Monty, and since our past is nothing but a memory and since memory is fluid our past is constantly changing.

MONTY: For example?

THEO: Well, let's say you discovered that a friend – you thought had stolen from you – had actually been innocent. So, all these years, since the theft, you've been harbouring a grudge and a desire for revenge against this man whom you thought wronged you. Maybe you've even taken actions to right the wrong. And then evidence comes forward exonerating your friend and proving his innocence. That would change your past which would change your present, because you would then be obligated to make amends.

MONTY: What on earth did he steal?

THEO: Who?

MONTY: This friend of yours.

THEO: What friend?

MONTY: The one you were talking about. Wasn't me, I hope.

THEO: It wasn't anyone. It was hypothetical.

MONTY: Oh. I see. Oh. How disappointing. Real examples have much greater impact and more credibility, don't you think?

THEO: I'll make note for future reference.

MONTY: I quite agree that the knowledge we gain about events in our past can cause us to re-evaluate them, but I hardly think you should be focused on the past. I find it much better to focus on the future.

THEO: The unknown.

MONTY: Yes.

THEO: The past gives you a solid footing.

MONTY: You just said it was changeable. The future lets you dream.

THEO: And the present?

MONTY: The present. Well that's to be enjoyed. Cheers.

MONTY takes a drink from the bottle.

THEO: I don't know if I'd call the present particularly enjoyable. The truth is our circumstances in the present are based on the decisions we've made in the past and so now that I know how things have turned out for me and where I'm at in life I've determined that I squandered my youth and wasted my potential. So, many years lost.

MONTY: Now look Theo, I may be here because of the decisions I've made in the past, but it's the actions I take today that will influence my future.

THEO: I just don't want to squander the years I have left.

MONTY: Well don't then.

THEO: It's not so easy. I won't know if I've squandered them until sometime in the future.

MONTY: You're feeling lost.

THEO: Exactly, my dear Monty.

MONTY: You never found your purpose in life, did you?

THEO: No. Just drifted around. Different careers. Different wives. It's all a bit of a blur in some ways now.

MONTY: Well that's it then. If you don't want to squander away your old age, then you need to find your purpose.

THEO: Must you call me old?

MONTY: You're older than me.

THEO: By a day.

MONTY: When exactly does one become old, I wonder? Is it the day you begin to lose your hearing? "What's that you say?" The day you begin to lose your sight. "I can't read the label." The day you begin to lose your memory. "What was that guys name?" We do, it seems, all diminish in physical ability and mental capacity.

THEO: That's true, but what you're describing are the physical markers of age. Those are unavoidable. There are still plenty of older people sharp of mind and physically fit. I think old is when you see yourself as old. My mind is young but when I look in the mirror and I see this grey-haired wrinkled old man looking back at me, I don't recognize him, and yet I know it's me.

MONTY: So, given our conversation what is it you want to do?

THEO: I don't know. That's the problem. I don't know how to find my purpose otherwise I would have found it by now, don't you think? I'm running out of time. My options are limited. It takes twenty years to build a career. If I was to start something new now, then I wouldn't see significant success, more than likely, for two or three decades, if at all. And by that time, I'd be an old man.

MONTY: You are an old man.

THEO: Yes, so you keep saying.

MONTY: Why don't you write a book?

THEO: I've written books.

MONTY: So, you have. You could become an Olympic speed skater.

THEO: Now your making fun of me.

MONTY: I'm just offering suggestions.

THEO: I want to do something that makes a difference.

MONTY: Save the world?

THEO: Yes.

MONTY: Such as?

THEO: Oh, I don't know...something that can be easily done and have immediate results.

MONTY: Like planting trees.

THEO: Planting trees?

MONTY: Yes. Planting trees?

THEO: Oh. I like that. Although you'd have to plant an awful lot of trees, I think, to make a real difference.

MONTY: How many?

THEO: Millions. Tens of millions. Hundreds of millions.

MONTY: On your own?

THEO: Well, no not on my own. Don't be silly. There are organizations I could join and besides there's other ways to contribute.

MONTY: Raise money. Spread awareness. Lobby governments.

THEO: Yes, that sort of thing.

MONTY: You'd be good at that.

THEO: And you'd help?

MONTY: Me?

THEO: Yes, you.

MONTY: I hadn't thought of that.

THEO: It would pass the time and make a positive contribution.

MONTY: Yes.

THEO: It's a thought.

MONTY: Yes.

THEO: And in order to take action you have to have the thought. One precedes the other.

MONTY: And who says one's purpose need not change.

THEO: Exactly.

MONTY: Alright, I'll give it a go and get my hands dirty. How about you Theo? You're actually going to give this one a try?

THEO: Yes, I think I will.

MONTY: Excellent.

THEO: What do we do next?

MONTY: Celebrate your birthday.

THEO: Must we?

MONTY: Yes, we must. I got you a card.

MONTY hands THEO a card from his pocket in his jacket.

THEO: Oh, how thoughtful.

MONTY: I hope you like it.

THEO looks at the card.

THEO: This is the card I gave you last year with the names reversed.

MONTY: I would have gotten you a new one only I didn't have any money. Besides now that you've found your purpose in life is to plant trees it might be good to recycle things a bit more. Doesn't make a whole lot of sense to start planting trees and then to be wasteful with the things made of trees. Maybe we should get rid of birthday cards?

THEO: Maybe we should. Thank you, Monty.

MONTY: For what?

THEO: For listening, for your guidance, for your insights, for your friendship.

MONTY: Happy to oblige.

THEO: And tomorrow? What will we do tomorrow?

MONTY: We'll celebrate my birthday.

THEO: How?

MONTY: By planting a tree.

THEO: What a grand idea.

MONTY: Isn't it.

THEO: Happy birthday Monty.

MONTY: Happy birthday Theo.

Curtain