

*Acting Edition*

# The Gulf

An Elegy

by Audrey Cefaly

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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*THE GULF* (short version) was first produced in Silver Spring, Maryland, at the 2010 Silver Spring Stage One-Act Festival. The production was directed by Chris Curti. The cast was as follows:

**BETTY** ..... Erika Imhoof  
**KENDRA** ..... Audrey Cefaly

*THE GULF* (short version) later debuted in New York, where it won the 2015 Samuel French Off Off Broadway Short Play Festival. The production was directed by Joseph Holmgren. The cast was as follows:

**BETTY** ..... Effie Johnson  
**KENDRA** ..... Carolyn Messina

*THE GULF* (full-length version) premiered in October of 2016 at Signature Theatre (Arlington, Virginia). The production was directed by Joe Calarco. The cast was as follows:

**BETTY** ..... Maria Rizzo  
**KENDRA** ..... Rachel Zampelli

*THE GULF* (full-length version) received its Australian premiere in August of 2017 in Camperdown, NSW (Lume Productions). The production was directed by Mia Lethbridge. The cast was as follows:

**BETTY** ..... Brenna Harding  
**KENDRA** ..... Diana Popovska

## CHARACTERS

**BETTY** – (twenties – forties) An optimist. A thinker. Restless and tender-hearted.

**KENDRA** – (twenties – forties) A woman of few words. A loner. Scrappy, dark, brutish, and volatile.

## SETTING

A fishing boat. Late afternoon. Alabama Delta.

## TIME

Present day.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

The use of the word “elegy” is not required for marketing materials, but it is highly encouraged for show programs and press kits, as is the definition of “the gulf” given below.

**gulf (noun.)**

a body of water; an abyss; a separation; a void; a distance

A slash ( / ) is used to indicate an instance of overlap. The next line should begin wherever a ( / ) occurs.



(Silence.)

(**KENDRA** and **BETTY** sit in a small boat somewhere down in the Alabama Delta. **KENDRA** fishes for red drum, slowly reeling in the line. She is present, but her mind is elsewhere. **BETTY** lies with her feet in **KENDRA**'s lap, napping and holding a book, *What Color is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career Changers*. A noise rouses her.)

**BETTY.** (Sleepily.) Did you know that Dolores Pettaway has fifteen cats?

**KENDRA.** (Absently.) Hmn?

**BETTY.** I knew she had a lot of cats but that is a *lotta* fuckin' cats.

(Beat.)

I find that unusual.

**KENDRA.** *Unusual?*

**BETTY.** Yeah.

**KENDRA.** That's the word you're looking for?

**BETTY.** (Still lost in thought.) And she's not like fostering them or whatever. She's just *collecting* them. Like stamps.

(Beat.)

Until they die or she dies or somebody calls the cops.

(Beat.)

It's so bad over there, Lord, it's infested with fleas and it stinks, I was jumpin' outta my socks.

(Beat.)

Creepy.

(Beat.)

BETTY. Oh, we need toilet paper.

KENDRA. (*Absently.*) Mnn-hmn.

BETTY. It's gettin' dark.

(*BETTY hums a bit of a song.*)

Ugh. Song stuck in my head, I always wake up with a song stuck in my head.

KENDRA. I am aware.

(*KENDRA sighs. Casts her line again.*)

BETTY. Kinda bait ya using...

KENDRA. Fish ain't bitin' it ain't cuz of the bait.

BETTY. No?

KENDRA. Uh-uh.

BETTY. How come?

KENDRA. It's cuz they ain't there.

BETTY. Oh.

(*Beat.*)

Wan' go somewhere else?

(*Beat.*)

Rosella was talking about over by Dog River.

KENDRA. *Dog River?*

BETTY. I told her we were comin' out here.

(*Off KENDRA's look.*)

She was bein' helpful.

KENDRA. Rosella has no idea about fishin' and therefore Rosella is not helpful.

BETTY. What, ya can't fish in Dog River?

KENDRA. For boots and dead bodies.

BETTY. I thought there was good fishin' there.

KENDRA. Well there was, but not no more.

BETTY. How come?

KENDRA. *BP.* Fuckers.

BETTY. BP.

KENDRA. That shit got in. Choked it.

BETTY. Kendra, that was six years ago.

KENDRA. I'm tellin' you.

BETTY. You're thinkin' of Fowl River.

KENDRA. Fowl River, Dog River.

BETTY. It did not get up to Dog River.

KENDRA. Yes, it did.

BETTY. No, it didn't.

KENDRA. Yes, it did.

BETTY. No, it didn't.

*(Beat.)*

How do you know?

KENDRA. Because...I know.

BETTY. So you just wanna be right and the facts don't matter?

*(Regarding Kendra's boots.)*

Why are you still wearing those hand-me-down shrimpers, they don't even fit you and they goddamn stink.

*(Beat.)*

I bought you those new ones and you won't wear 'em.

KENDRA. / Again with this.

BETTY. And why do they have to be white? Just because you say so? Like everything else.

KENDRA. No, see, because this way when I get blood on 'em, I don't have to wash the whole boot.

BETTY. Are you serious?

KENDRA. *(One continuous thought.)* Would you stop it would you stop it would you stop it lemme see your shoe right there lemme see it lemme see it oh my god that is –

**KENDRA.**

*(Throwing Betty's shoe overboard.)* – The cutest thing I have ever seen will you stop it with the boots can we stop it Jesus Christ!

**BETTY.**

Kendra! Fine, fuck it, you don't wanna wear the boots I got you, whatever, that's my damn shoe!

*(Regarding the boots.)*

I just wanna know why they have to be white.

**KENDRA.** You know what a black boot looks like out here at night?

**BETTY.** What?

**KENDRA.** Do you?

*(Beat.)*

A gator mouth.

**BETTY.** Don't do me like that!

*(Throwing the other shoe at KENDRA.)*

Here, take the whole pair!

**KENDRA.** I already did. Go fish.

**BETTY.** You are somethin' else.

*(Silence.)*

Was I sleepin'?

**KENDRA.** Yep.

**BETTY.** Did I miss anything?

*(KENDRA does not respond. She focuses on her fishing, weary of BETTY's constant hum.)*

I'm gettin' hungry, are you gettin' hungry?

*(BETTY reaches into her pocket for a treat. She pulls out a piece of hard candy.)*

When I go to my grave, I want you to put me in my casket and then fill it with Abra Cabubble. Pop the lid on.

*(Beat.)*

Want one?

(**BETTY** hands **KENDRA** an *Abra Cabubble*.)

It's bad for you. High fructose corn syrup.

(*Sucking on her candy.*)

It's very satisfying, though. With the bubble gum inside, ya know. Like a tootsie roll pop.

(*Beat.*)

Just when you think you're all done...nope. More to love.

(**KENDRA** crunches into her *Abra Cabubble*.)

Stop it! That is not how you do it, Kendra! Really? You can't wait a damn minute?

(**KENDRA** now defiantly crunches on her candy.)

You don't know anything! Pearls before swine right there, that's what that is. Lard on a lobster.

**KENDRA.** (*Flatly.*) Do you speak English?

**BETTY.** Do you? I just won't share with you anymore, that's all. This is priceless penny candy, Kendra, you can't get these!

**KENDRA.** And yet you have them.

(*Silence.*)

**BETTY.** I bet not one of them fifteen cats is spayed or neutered, what do you think?

(*Beat.*)

She's on welfare, I found that out, she's got the EBT. Deanna told me she comes into Greers twice a week and that's all she buys is cat food. Tons and tons of Meow Mix and Friskies.

(*Beat.*)

Oh, and the National Enquirer. She gets that on Mondays.

(*Beat.*)

I think I must have been havin' a cat dream and woke up to talkin' about cats or somethin'.

*(Beat.)*

**BETTY.** I just don't know how you feed all those cats if you're on welfare.

*(Aghast.)*

Wait. You don't think she eats cat food, do you?

*(Off KENDRA's look.)*

What?

**KENDRA.** *(Incredulous.)* Why would she eat cat food when she can just eat Chef Boyardee?

*(Beat.)*

**BETTY.** *(Fascinated.)* You mean like the mini-bites? / Ravioli?

**KENDRA.** How do I get sucked into this shit...

**BETTY.** What?

**KENDRA.** / Whatever you're on about, fill in the blank, I swear to god!

**BETTY.** Can we just talk like normal people?

**KENDRA.** Yeah, cuz we're normal people.

*(Silence.)*

**BETTY.** Well now I wanna check the price of cat food. Why am I talkin' about this? Oh, yeah. I remember. Everybody at the bar is takin' turns feedin' the cats for Miss Dolores while she's up in Foley at her mama's funeral. I told 'em I didn't want to go over there by myself. It's too creepy.

*(Beat.)*

She left the TV on for 'em. Court TV. I thought about changin' the channel, mix it up a little, ya know, maybe.

*(Beat.)*

Home Shoppin', or...whatever.

*(Beat.)*

There's this one cat, Indigo. Yesterday mornin', she climbed through the kitchen window with a dead mouse and laid it right there at my feet like a present.

And then when I went back last night she had eaten all but the organs and the little bones, and laid 'em all out all pretty under the table for somebody to find. Like sushi.

*(Pause.)*

Do you hear me when I say things?

*(KENDRA unexpectedly gets a bite and nearly loses her rod.)*

**KENDRA.** Oh, shit!

*(To the fish.)*

You sonnnnnn-of-a-bitch! Tried to steal it, motherfucker!

*(She regains control of the rod and begins reeling in the line.)*

Got him in the mud, what'd I tell ya?

**BETTY.** I don't know, what'd you tell me?

**KENDRA.** *(More to herself than to Betty.)* Want drum, find the mud.

**BETTY.** *(Lifeless.)* Oh. Yeah.

*(KENDRA reels the fish close to the boat.)*

**KENDRA.** Lil thing, what you reckon?

**BETTY.** Lemme see – awww...

**KENDRA.** Aww, he ain't but a little fella. Lil rat red.

*(BETTY hands her the net.)*

He's cute though, looka there.

*(KENDRA nets the fish and hands the net to BETTY to hold. She unhooks the fish, while BETTY squirms.)*

*(To the fish:)*

Gon' be somebody!

**BETTY.** He's so cute!

*(KENDRA examines the lure.)*

**KENDRA.** He chewed the damn paint off my spoon! I like it!

*(KENDRA hands the fish to BETTY.)*

**BETTY.** Should we give it a name?

*(Beat.)*

Bad idea?

*(Beat.)*

Yeah.

*(BETTY leans over the side of the boat to release the fish.)*

*(The fish darts away.)*

**KENDRA.** Woop. Nice to meet ya!

*(KENDRA grabs the push pole and eases the boat forward.)*

**KENDRA.** Lemme get up in here...

*(Silence.)*

**BETTY.** *(Sweetly.)* That's the happiest I ever see you, when you're fishin'.

*(Beat.)*

It's / actually kinda –

**KENDRA.** *(Distractedly.)* Git me one of them cold ones, would ya.

*(BETTY finds a beer for KENDRA, pops the top, and hands it to her. KENDRA guzzles half of it down and then returns to nudging the boat along with the push pole, scanning the water.)*

*(More to herself than to Betty.)* Get on the fallin' tide, lose your water.

**BETTY.** I don't know what that means.

*(Pause.)*

You could tell me what it means.

*(Pause.)*

Hello to nobody...

(**KENDRA**, not hearing, hands **BETTY** her half-empty beer can.)

Man, you got some boobies.

(Off **KENDRA**'s look.) You do.

**KENDRA**. Wanna fight about it?

**BETTY**. I wanna get you home, is what I want.

**KENDRA**. Ever-ready.

**BETTY**. That's right.

**KENDRA**. Still suckin' that candy?

(**BETTY** sticks out her tongue, which is now red from the Abra Cabubble.)

**BETTY**. It's cherry...you want it?

(Beat.)

Kendra...

(In a breathtaking power move, **KENDRA** leans over **BETTY**, grabbing her hair from behind and yanking it back in a show of dominance. She then kisses Betty, **HARD**. As she pulls away, we discover she has stolen Betty's candy. **KENDRA** crunches it (audibly) in **BETTY**'s face and then shoves her back down into the boat.

FUCK. YOU!

**KENDRA**. Mnn hmn.

**BETTY**. Tease!

**KENDRA**. Boo hoo...

**BETTY**. I hate you.

**KENDRA**. (Sweetly.) Awww...I hate you too.

**BETTY**. No, I mean, like I *actually* hate you.

(**KENDRA** places her hand on her heart as if moved beyond words.)

Whatever.

(Beat.)

**BETTY.** You know...you got the whole Gulf of Mexico to fish in, we always end up here.

*(Beat.)*

Right here in the shallows, every time.

**KENDRA.** That's the whole point.

**BETTY.** I don't get it.

**KENDRA.** Exactly.

**BETTY.** What?

**KENDRA.** That's where the – nevermind.

**BETTY.** No, tell me. Please.

**KENDRA.** Fish in the skinny water, cuz that's where the fish are.

*(Beat.)*

Reds like to fight Betty, they fight...deep, shallow, whatever, any water. But in the shallows, they get more traction, see, the fight is bigger. More fun.

**BETTY.** For you, maybe.

*(Beat.)*

**KENDRA.** When did you talk to Rosella?

**BETTY.** Last night.

*(Beat.)*

It's warm, idn't it? I might hop in for a swim if I didn't think the gators would get me.

**KENDRA.** Assuming they'd want you.

**BETTY.** *(Slightly paranoid.)* No tellin' what's in there. You can't be too careful, you hear about that woman on the news from over in St. Bernard Parish, she gave her baby a bath one night and two days later he died from one of them brain-eatin' amoebas.

**KENDRA.** *(Disgusted.)* Stop talking.

**KENDRA.**

**BETTY.**

Just stop talking. You are  
so depressing.

Brain-eatin' amoebas!

BETTY. I'm just tellin' you, I don't trust it.

KENDRA. That's some bad math, Betty.

BETTY. No, it ain't.

KENDRA. You're talkin' about a bathtub? We are in the Gulf of Mexico, Betty? You dig that? *Brain eatin' amoebas?*

BETTY. Well, would you rather be right or be dead?

KENDRA. You make my head hurt.

BETTY.

KENDRA.

Nevermind!

For fuck's sake.

BETTY. Do what you want.

KENDRA. Doin' it!

*(Silence.)*

*(BETTY returns to half-reading her book, half musing about cats.)*

BETTY. What if maybe all them cats are like / therapeutic or whatever...

KENDRA. *(Annoyed.)* Oh, my god.

BETTY. *(Continuous. Not hearing.)* ...Ya know, like a service dog?

KENDRA. I don't think it works that way.

BETTY. Why not?

KENDRA. I don't know, I just don't think it does.

BETTY. Well, why else would you need fifteen cats? If the average person is fine with say one to three cats...

KENDRA. / Or zero.

BETTY. ...And she needs fifteen of 'em, then who's to say she's wrong and they're right, I mean, there's not like a rule or anything. Like a *rule of cats*.

*(Beat.)*

And if she didn't have any grandkids or whatever and no family that would come around, maybe that's what that is, ya know, maybe it's like family. Like / substitute family.

KENDRA. Or crazy, maybe it's like crazy.

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