

THE GULF
by Audrey Cefaly

Monologue: Betty, 20s-40s, Southern (Alabama)

Did you know that Dolores Pettaway has 15 cats? I mean I knew she had a lot of cats but that is a *lotta* fuckin cats. And she's not like fostering them or whatever. She's just *collecting* them. Like stamps. Until they die or she dies or somebody calls the cops. It's so bad over there, Lord, it's infested with fleas and it stinks so bad, I was jumpin' outta my socks. I bet not one of them 15 cats is spayed or neutered, what do you think? She's on welfare, she's got the EBT, I found that out. Deanna told me she comes into the Winn Dixie twice a week and that's all she buys is cat food. Tons and tons of Meow Mix and Friskies. Oh, and the National Enquirer. She gets that on Mondays. I think I must have been having a cat dream and woke up to talkin' about cats or somethin'. I just don't know how you feed all those cats if you're on welfare. Wait. You don't think she eats cat food, do you? Well now I wanna check the price of cat food. Why am I talking about this? Oh, yeah. I remember. Everybody at the bar is taking turns feeding 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. What if maybe all them cats are like therapeutic or whatever ...ya know, like a service dog? Well, why else would you need 15 cats? If the average person is fine with say 1 to 3 cats... ...and she needs 15 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*.

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It's warm, idn't it? I might hop in for a swim if I didn't think the gators would get me. 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. Brain-eatin amoebas! I'm just tellin you, I don't trust it. Where was I? Oh, right. So, theoretically, you could be just as happy as a garbage collector. They have the least amount of stress as any job, you know that? I read that someplace. And think about it. What do they have to be stressed about anyway, except maybe, you know, some maggots and dead rats and whatnot? And you know what... I bet after a couple weeks even the maggots would just be routine, whaddya reckon? Hello? You know what, you need to take a good hard look at yourself, Kendra. You sit there and you pretend not to listen and take full advantage of my stories in all their vivid detail and then you turn on me like a damn dog and give me shit for tellin em in the first place, and you can't have it both ways, Kendra, you just can't. Where is the respect for the story-teller?? I am fucking delightful!

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Well, yeah, actually, it is, if you wanna know. I do save a life from time to time. Jenny Bledsoe gave me some of her nitro pills to keep under the bar, just yesterday afternoon, in case she ever goes into cardiac arrest. I keep a box of condoms under there, Trojans, for Bobby Lee, right next to the margarita mix and the rock salt. Swear to god, it's a damn pharmacy under there. You wouldn't believe the shit I see. These folks, they come in there, half of 'em want to get laid, half of 'em want to get drunk and the other half just need to talk. And it ain't in my job description, but I do it, cuz that's what bartenders do. They listen. I listen to 'em and you know what I hear? (Beat.) Desperation. So quiet, only dogs can hear. In the eyes, the shaky voice. Starin' down at the ice cubes in the glass, like readin' tea leaves or some shit. I pour 'em one on the house, I look 'em square in the eye, and I ask 'em the same thing I'm askin' you. (Beat.) Oh, come on K, can't you open your mind and think about it. I mean is it really that hard to imagine? No, seriously. If you could be anything at all in the whole wide world, what would it be?

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Oh, please! PLEASE can we talk more about my dead-end life?! Why do you do that? God it's irritatin' as shit! You clip me, every time, start out talkin' about anything – whatever, you name it – and then I'm the one that needs fixin'. You are so ridiculous. You won't ever be happy with me. You won't. And we go round and round and I'm just so fuckin' ill all the time, I'm a beast, I'm pissed and miserable. It's whatever, but it IS...it IS happening, Betty. We can't stay in the shit like this. This is how people die, this is how they drown, and I don't wanna drown, Betty. I don't wanna drown! I just wanna fish and watch football and eat steak and eat pussy and not have a fuckin' thing to push me under no more. Is there ANYTHING I am that's good enough for you?!

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I want you to stop thinkin. When you *think*... I'm miserable. Could we move on, please...to some topic I give a shit about? I ain't gon choose my calling off some list you got from a self-help book. I had a plan. Yeah. I had a plan to do a little drum fishing, maybe catch a boo red or two and not have to deal with ridiculous questions and psychotic-analysis, how's that for a plan? And you speak Chinese, the fuck are you talking about? I'm... I'm afraid to live or some shit? And you don't know how to sit still, how about that? Nothin's ever good enough for you is it? We came out here to fish. But you never fish, Betty. You don't. And you don't want to learn either, you just want to sit there with your books and your papers and what not, and rearrange my life to make it fit yours in some magical futuristic happy place that exists where... I don't know... in your mind, maybe? Meanwhile, I'm doin it. I'm taking part in the *miraculousness* of life, Betty. REAL LIFE. Where folks catch fish, rip their fucking guts out and then eat 'em. And they don't think twice about it and you know why? CUZ IT'S JUST FISHIN!!!

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