

In The Eye of the Beholder

By Richard Sivers

Cast of Characters:

Kathleen Holiday, the widow
Becky Tanner, the mistress
John, the company owner
Susan, his wife
Ron, a co-worker
Al, a co-worker
Abby, a co-worker

THE PLAY TAKES PLACE IN A ROOM SET UP AS A FUNERAL HOME. THERE IS A LARGE, POSSIBLY ORNATE TABLE SET UP STAGE. ON THE TABLE MAY BE SOME FLOWERS, A PHOTO OF THE DECEASED HAROLD HOLIDAY, AND AN URN CONTAINING HAROLD'S ASHES. UNDER THE URN IS A PIECE OF FUCHSIA CLOTH. THERE ARE SEVERAL FOLDING CHAIRS ON EITHER SIDE OF THE TABLE. QUIET ORGAN "FUNERAL" MUSIC IS HEARD IN THE BACKGROUND.

KATHLEEN HOLIDAY ENTERS. NEARING 50, SHE HAS LOST MOST OF HER BEAUTY AND GAINED SOME WEIGHT. SHE IS DRESSED CONSERVATIVELY IN BLACK. AS SHE ENTERS, SHE DABS THE TEARS FROM HER EYES, PAUSES, TOUCHES THE URN AND THEN TAKES HER PLACE TO THE SIDE OF THE TABLE. JOHN ENTERS FIRST, WITH THE OTHERS FORMING A LINE BEHIND HIM. WHEN KATHLEEN SEES HIM, SHE LETS OUT A PIERCING WAIL AND BURIES HER FACE IN HER HANDKERCHIEF. JOHN APPROACHES HER.

JOHN: Kathleen, I'm so sorry. Harold was such an asset to our company. I know he hadn't been with us very long, but he will certainly be missed.

KATHLEEN: Missed? Yes! (*ANOTHER WAIL*)

JOHN: Is there anything we can do for you?

KATHLEEN: No, no. Just being here is such a comfort.

JOHN: Of course. I told everyone at the office they should take some time to stop by this afternoon.

KATHLEEN: You're so kind. (*ANOTHER WAIL*)

SUSAN: Kathleen, Kathleen. (*THEY HUG*)

KATHLEEN: Susan, Susan.

SUSAN: I'm still in shock. It was so sudden. What happened?

KATHLEEN: His heart. The doctor said it burst. Puff. (*WHIMPER*)

JOHN: How awful.

KATHLEEN: There he was. One minute watching American Ninja Warrior, cheering on the contestants, bouncing up and down on the sofa; he was like a little boy that way. Bouncing up and down, up and down, then suddenly I saw him leap to his feet, shout an obscenity, and drop to the floor like a Ninja Warrior who missed one of those climbing things.

SUSAN: How sad. You didn't even get to say good bye.

KATHLEEN: Oh, that's all right. He died happy.

JOHN: Cheering on American Ninja Warriors?

KATHLEEN: No, shouting curse words. He was so good at it. He always said the best thing in life next to making love was spouting four letter words.

RON: And he was good at it. Hardly an hour at work went by that Harold wasn't swearing. There was a real eloquence in the way he swore.

ABBY: You know, I never heard a swear word out of his mouth. He was always such a gentleman around women.

RON: Indeed he was, but a bit schizophrenic. One moment, a sweet teddy bear and the next, a rabid skunk.

KATHLEEN: *(PAUSE)* I loved them both.

ABBY: Excuse me?

KATHLEEN: The teddy bear and the skunk. *(WAIL)*

AL: *(TO RON)* You would have thought they would have needed a bigger urn.

RON: Ashes are ashes I guess.

AL: But I'm surprised his big ash would fit in that little jar.

JOHN: Kathleen, I want you to have this now. Our little company prides itself on being like family. Harold took out one of our life insurance policies, and we believe that paying right away is another sign of how we care for one another. *(HANDS HER ENVELOPE)*

SUSAN: *(PULLING HIM ASIDE)* John, shouldn't you have waited? This is a wake, not a retirement party.

JOHN: There's no funeral, this may be the only time I get to see Susan. I don't know what she's going to do after today. She's not from here, there's no reason for her to stay. Mailing the check would have been so...so impersonal.

(UNSEEN, BECKY TANNER ENTERS THE ROOM. SHE IS A STUNNING BEAUTY ABOUT TWENTY YEARS OF AGE. SHE WEARS A TIGHT, BLACK, VERY SEXY DRESS.)

ABBY: Harold brought in doughnuts for everyone, every Tuesday. I really missed them yesterday. It'd be nice if someone else brought them in from now on.

AL: A few less doughnuts won't hurt any of us.

RON: I suppose not, but they were good. Where did he buy them?

KATHLEEN: What?

ABBY: Where did Harold buy the doughnuts?

KATHLEEN: Down at "Lickety-Split" I suppose. That doughnut and ice cream store was his favorite place to shop. *(WAIL)*

BECKY: (*STEPPING FORWARD*) Indeed it was.

KATHLEEN: What?

BECKY: I said, "Indeed it was." So, Kathleen we finally meet.

KATHLEEN: And who are you? I don't believe we've ever met. Were you a friend of Harold's?

BECKY: You might say that. Harold and I have been having an affair for the last six months.

(*THERE ARE GASPS AND EVERYONE BACKS AWAY LEAVING BECKY AND KATHLEEN FACING EACH OTHER.*)

KATHLEEN: I don't believe it. Harold was as true as an arrow.

BECKY: Even arrows bend when released by the archer.

JOHN: Huh?

BECKY: (*MATTER OF FACTLY*) When an archer releases an arrow, the power of the bow causes the arrow to bend slightly under the pressure as it is shot forward.

AL: Is that true?

RON: Does it really matter?

AL: I bet it does to Kathleen. She didn't want Harold bending at the wrong time in the wrong place; if you know what I mean.

RON: Oh, shut up.

KATHLEEN: I don't believe you knew Harold at all. What was his favorite color?

BECKY: Fuchsia.

(*GASPS OF SURPRISE.*)

KATHLEEN: Who discovered the color?

BECKY: A sixteenth century botanist Leonhard Fuchs.

KATHLEEN: Who patented the color?

BECKY: Francois-Emmanuel Verguin in 1859. He called it Fuchsine.

KATHLEEN: What....

BECKY: The name was changed to magenta that same year to honor the French victory at the Battle of Magenta on June 4, 1859.

KATHLEEN: Why....

BECKY: Because his mother was buried in her favorite fuchsia dress and....

KATHLEEN: (*TEARFULLY*) Harold had a piece cut from the back of the dress she was being buried in, where no one would see it, and carried it with him all the time. (*SHE GOES TO THE TABLE, SLIDES THE CLOTH OUT FROM UNDER THE URN, BRINGS IT TO HER FACE AS BOTH WOMEN WAIL.*)

KATHLEEN: Tramp.

BECKY: Porky

KATHLEEN: Slut.

BECKY: Cow.

RON: Why am I suddenly hungry?

BECKY: Harold told me everything. We had no secrets.

RON: Seems like there was at least one secret.

JOHN: Ladies, this is not the time nor the place for this. We're here to honor the deceased.

AL: Don't stop them now, this could get interesting.

KATHLEEN: I should have suspected something. It was bowling night, wasn't it?

BECKY: Yes!

KATHLEEN: About six months ago, Harold said he joined a bowling league. He would leave the house with his balls, he had two of them, one a little heavier than the other, and be gone for about two and a half hours. Said he was out with the boys.

RON: Wow. If she's one of the boys, I'd like to meet the rest of the team.

KATHLEEN: Then it was two nights a week, then three. Always bowling. I should have suspected something when he stopped polishing his balls.

RON: I need to find this bowling league.

JOHN: We all need to calm down.

KATHLEEN: I'm speechless. Well, I never...

BECKY: Maybe you didn't, but I did, three nights a week.

KATHLEEN: And the bowling tournament in Wisconsin?

BECKY: It was just him and me at my place, all weekend long. (*KATHLEEN WAILS LOUDLY AS BECKY APPROACHES HER.*) You should know, he was tired of you. (*GASPS FROM ALL.*) You're passed your prime.

SUSAN: John, what does that say about us?

JOHN: Don't worry, Susan, you're no where near your prime.

SUSAN: What?

JOHN: Well, I mean....you're still in your prime.

AL: Nice save, boss.

BECKY: You've let yourself go, Kathleen. Harold wanted this.

KATHLEEN: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

BECKY: You believe that?

AL: I do, I do, and I see beauty.

BECKY: I want his ashes. (*GRABS URN*)

KATHLEEN: You can't have them. He's mine. (*GRABS URN*)

BECKY: He loved me. (*GRABS URN*)

KATHLEEN: He loved me first. (*GRABS URN*)

BECKY: Let's see, he was with me Thursday, died on Friday; he loved me last. (*GRABS URN*)

KATHLEEN: Oh, no he didn't. He came home from work early on Friday. I had him first and last. (*GRABS URN*)

JOHN: Ladies, ladies....

KATHLEEN/BECKY: Shut up!

KATHLEEN: Stay out of this. Where his ashes end up is our business, not yours.

(*JOHN PUTS UP HANDS WHILE ABBY, RON AND AL EXIT.*)

JOHN: Come on Susan, this could get ugly. If that urn flies open, it'll be Harold all over the floor. I don't want to see that. Let's leave. *(THEY QUICKLY EXIT TOGETHER. BECKY AND KATHLEEN WATCH AS THE OTHERS LEAVE, PAUSE AND THEN BOTH BREAK INTO LAUGHTER.)*

KATHLEEN: Are you certain they're gone?

BECKY: Oh, yes. Did you see the look on their faces? It never gets old. They broke down sooner than most.

KATHLEEN: I have the check, we're all set. Where's your father?

BECKY: Some little town in Oklahoma. He found a business there that needed his "expertise". He said he would call us when he finds the right apartments.

KATHLEEN: *(TAKES LID OFF URN AND INSERTS FUCHSIA CLOTH)* What did you think of the little addition of the tournament?

BECKY: Nice touch, but where did you come up with Wisconsin?

KATHLEEN: Just came to me. We'll have to remember that for the next time. Would you do me a favor?

BECKY: Sure, what?

KATHLEEN: Would you cut back on the weight thing?

BECKY: Well, Mother, you have....

KATHLEEN: Don't push it. It's all those damn doughnuts. I wish your father would stay away from them, just once. Maybe we can find a town without a donut shop.

BECKY: We're finished here. Number nine down.

KATHLEEN: And soon to be in the bank. *(WAVES ENVELOPE)* It still amazes me how some people are so gullible, even in this day and age. Your father certainly knows his stuff.

BECKY: Works every time. I just wish Dad would shorten the timeline a little.

KATHLEEN: We do seem to be spending more and more time in these small towns.

BECKY: Someday we're going to run out of insurance companies, then what do we do?

KATHLEEN: One big hit, that's all we need. I'll talk to your father about it.

BECKY: Guess I'll get going now.

KATHLEEN: Mess up your hair a little, just in case someone is watching.

BECKY: See you on the road. At least we get that time together. Love you. *(MUSSES UP HAIR AND STOMPS OUT)*

KATHLEEN: *(HOLDING UP URN)* You know Harold, I've carried around this urn for so long it's beginning to seem like you're really in there. You're more a part of me in funeral homes than where we live. The longer we keep up this deception, the better the chance you might be in here one day. *(PAUSE)* No way. I suppose it's possible. One last big hit and I might need to get a bigger urn after all. Hum, a bigger urn. One last big hit. No more donuts. Not a bad idea. *(EXITS)*

Blackout