

Happily Thereafter
A One-act Comedy by Stafford Krause

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By

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

Katie Johnston: a housewife and catering business owner in her late '30's

Betty Bailey: Katie's partner; single and in her mid '30's

Billy Stafford: Betty's boyfriend and owner of a casket retail business

*Mrs. Harold Upright: a potential business customer

*Harold Upright: Mrs. Upright's husband

*A Lady in Black

*John Underwood: A local funeral director

*Mrs. Arnold Grubberger: A customer of Katie and Betty

*May play multiple parts.

THE SETTING

The play is set in the present in a typical city. The play may be easily staged by spotlighting props for each scene at various locations on an open stage.

Scene 1: Katie's kitchen table

Scene 2: Katie and Betty's new office in the rear of Billy's store, a week later

Scene 3: Katie's kitchen table, a few days later.

Scene 4: John Underwood's office, the next day

Scene 5: A hallway, the following Saturday

SCENE 1

(As the CURTAIN RISES, KATIE and BETTY are seated at Katie's kitchen table downstage center. THEY are dressed in clown suits and seem very dejected.)

KATIE

I will never again cater to a child's birthday party.

BETTY

Yes those little darlings think we're those bounce-back clown dolls. They're always hitting and kicking us.

KATIE

And I'm sick of being the rear end that catches all those pin the tail on the donkey pins.

BETTY

And what about that boy who loved to squeeze my fake nose.
Only problem is ... this is my nose.

KATIE

You didn't have to bowl him across the room.

BETTY

He slipped.

KATIE

Yes. Right into that stack a birthday presents ... Strike!

BETTY

Why don't we run a regular catering business, with real people?
You know adults for a change.

KATIE

Because we can't cook that's why!
We can make pretty good boxed sheet cakes and tube cookies ... and pop a few
pop bottles ... but let's face it we can't cook adult style.

BETTY

Well there must be something else we can do besides being punching bags for a
bunch of delinquents.
We're good at planning and organizing games.

KATIE

Yes, and coming up with theme parties.

(BILLY enters from downstage left)

BILLY

Hi guys! How're things?

BETTY

Oh, hello Billy.
We were just bemoaning our fate ... you know as food and fodder for the
birthday set
How are things with you?

BILLY

Oh you know ... an open and shut case.

KATIE

Oh boy! Not another of your casket jokes.
How did you get into that business anyway.

BILLY

I think of operating a cut-rate casket store as more of an undertaking than a business.

KATIE

Not again! Not another casket joke.

BILLY

Sorry! You know what big business that is? ... it always has a future.

KATIE

Billy!

BETTY

But it's so morbid.

BILLY

Not any more. People aren't moping around funeral homes these days speaking softly of the dear departed.

KATIE

They're not?

BILLY

No! They are organizing parties, or rather theme celebrations, for the life of dear old Uncle Bill ... complete with wine and song.

KATIE

Theme celebrations?

BILLY

Yes with the party ... a celebration ... decorations and such geared to Uncle Bill's life work or favorite hobby.

BETTY

Hey! We could do that

KATIE

I'm not ready to be celebrated.

BETTY

No! We could organize these sendoffs for the dear departed. We're good at planning and all.

KATIE

I don't know. I've always felt creepy around dear departed.

BILLY

It doesn't even have to be around the DD

KATIE

DD?

BILLY

Dear-departed. Lots of times the final sendoff comes along after the DD is 6 ft. under or in an ashtray.

KATIE

Urn, Billy... urn!

BILLY

OK! Urn.

KATIE

There might be something here. But how will we get started?
How will we get customers?

BETTY

(...looking at Billy)

Well, we already have a source right here.

BILLY

Oh no! I'm not going to feed you DD's.

BETTY

Come on! Why not! It's an extra service you can offer your customers ... and we might work something out financially.

KATIE

Plus, I'd guess some DD's want to be in on planning their last bash. That means we could get you into the loop early to lock up the casket selection.

BETTY

But what about the funeral homes? They're not about to smile on us cutting in on their turf.

BILLY

It's the law that they can't bundle funeral services into packages that would eliminate competition.

For example, they can't keep a family from coming to me for a casket at 30 to 40% off by packaging the casket with embalming etc.services.

The same thing applies to the memorials service.

KATIE

Well, if we're getting into this business we can't just sit around looking like a couple of clowns. We have to look like a reputable business that you're willing to turn over your DD to.

BETTY

Yes! We need a name, a slogan, fliers and ad copy ... that sort of thing. So when a customer asks about us we can respond right back.

KATIE

And since we don't cook, play music or arrange flowers ... will need contacts to provide those services.

Now any ideas on a name?

BILLY

How about Dearly Departed?

KATIE

Agatha Christie and Alfred Hitchcock have probably already beat us to that one. Besides its dreary. We want something upbeat.

BETTY

How about Happy Trails?

KATIE

I'm afraid that Gene Autry, or was it Roy Rogers, has already spoken for that one.

(pause)

But there might be something in the idea of riding off into the sunset.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT on scene)

SCENE 2

(As the LIGHTS COME UP, KATIE and BETTY are seated at a conference table in their new office with MR. and MRS. HAROLD UPRIGHT, potential customers.)

MRS. UPRIGHT

Yes. Harold and I are here to preplan our ... ah... Sunset Celebrations. Aren't we, Harold?

HAROLD

Yes dear.

MRS. UPRIGHT

Now, we of course don't expect to both go at the same time ... but we would like our celebrations to be coordinated. Isn't that right ,Harold.

HAROLD

Yes dear.

MRS. UPRIGHT

Now, then. Can you suggest something with the intimacy of a cozy candlelight dinner but able to accommodate our expected 100 or more guests?

KATIE

Yes. Well, we first like to establish an overview for the event. Do you prefer an evening or daytime celebration?

MRS. UPRIGHT

Oh, definitely an evening affair. That would make evening dress optional, which I think our guests would appreciate.

KATIE

Good. Now, do you view this in more of a cocktail party or sit-down format?

MRS. UPRIGHT

Oh definitely a cocktail party atmosphere. We would want our guests to mingle and share their thoughts about us.

KATIE

Good. Now since you want the events to share a theme, what interests do you have in common?

HAROLD

(... under his breath)

None.

MRS. UPRIGHT

(... not hearing Harold)

We enjoy many interests together ... theater, dance, the arts ... travel.

HAROLD

We do? ...ah ... I mean, we do!

KATIE

Just off the top of course, we can provide a nice background of classical music with several screens showing slides of your various travels together.

MRS. UPRIGHT

Oh. We don't travel together.

KATIE

You don't?

MRS. UPRIGHT

I love to travel ... especially by boat. But I'm afraid that Harold is not a very good sailor, if you know what I mean. But he does so enjoy living my travels vicariously.

HAROLD

(... under his breath)

I do hope that I go first.

MRS. UPRIGHT

What was that dear?

HAROLD

I said that I always put that first.

KATIE

Well then, travel and classical music it seems to be.

Now, do you wish to be on premises for the Sunset Celebration?

MRS. UPRIGHT

On premises?

KATIE

Yes. I mean your deceased self, of course, in a casket or urn.

By the way, we do have contacts to personalize the casket.

In your case the shape of the ship might be appropriate.

HAROLD

I'd get seasick. I know that I'd get seasick.

MRS. UPRIGHT

Oh Harold, don't be silly dear. You'd be ... Oh never mind.

KATIE

Well that does it. We'll put together a formal proposal and be back to you shortly.

Let's see. I'd say that in \$15,000 single or \$28,000 dual up-front package should give you everything you desire. Is that agreeable with your thinking?

HAROLD

Maybe I could be in a dingy.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT)

SCENE 3

(As the LIGHTS COME UP, KATIE and BETTY are sitting at Katie's kitchen table, downstage center)

BETTY

Oh boy! This ad copy looks great.

KATIE

It should. It's costing us a fortune.

BETTY

That sunset shot is terrific. What DD wouldn't want a sendoff into that sunset?

KATIE

Remember, we're going to tone down that play on words. ... sunset ... Sun ... hot ... hot as Hades. Not good.

BETTY

Oh yes. But it's still great. And our slogan ...

KATIE

We have to both remember to call it our byline. Slogan sounds too much like "brush your teeth with blah-blah-blah"

BETTY

Well our slogan ... I mean byline ... that is great. "beautiful, tasteful, lasting"

KATIE

And I'm glad we switched the words around from "beautiful, lasting, tasteful". I'd hate to have us referred to by the acronym "BLT".

(BILLY enters a from downstage left)

KATIE

Hi Billy. What's up?

BILLY

Well I just had this great idea for a custom casket. If we made a casket that the DD could sit up in, rather than lie down, you'd save a lot of cemetery space by grouping DD's into eternal conversation groups.

KATIE

What?!!

BETTY

He's only kidding Katie.

(...shaking her fist the Billy)

Tell her you're only kidding, Billy.

BILLY

OK! OK! I was only kidding.

But if there was like a railroad hobby club, you could line up the DD's one behind the other.

(BETTY socks BILLY hard on the arm)

BILLY

Ouch!

(... meekly)

Just kidding.

KATIE

I never know! And I certainly wouldn't want to spend eternity in a conversation with you.

Now is anything going on with our mutual venture?

BILLY

Not much, except this lady all dressed in black and mourning came in today. She seemed very interested in our services and asked all kinds of questions.

KATIE

New business is great. But first comes the business at hand.

I really am concerned about the Grubberger service this Saturday.

BILLY

How's that?

KATIE

This service for Arnold Grubberger, CPA. Complete with casket and over a hundred guests. Mrs. Grubberger is one of those very, very picky types. She's lectured me a number of times on how proper and tasteful everything must be. I just know something is going to go wrong.

BETTY

Relax. What could go wrong?

KATIE

Well ...

BETTY

Well nothing. We've checked and double checked.
Let's go over our checklist one more time to make sure nothing does go wrong.

KATIE

OK. Maybe you're right.

BETTY

Of course I am.

(... picking up her checklist clipboard and a pencil)

Now. Flowers to be delivered fresh on Saturday morning?

KATIE

Check.

BETTY

Confirmed?

KATIE

Check.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT SLOWLY)

BETTY

(... voice trailing off)

Light classical music to be piped in softly during the celebration ...

SCENE 4

(Lights come up on the office of Mr. Underwood, a local funeral director. HE and LADY IN BLACK are seated at his desk, upstage right)

MR. UNDERWOOD

Well, what did you learn?

LADY

They seem to be in it for the long-haul.
They're getting ready to launch a big advertising campaign, according to their retail casket pal.

MR. UNDERWOOD

Damn! They and their casket boutique buddy are already making a big dent in our business. This new campaign could really hurt us.

LADY

Well what we do about it? Uncle Sam says that we have to work with them, if that's what the DD's family wants

MR. UNDERWOOD

That's it!

LADY

What?

MR. UNDERWOOD

Work with them. What's the next show of there's where we are providing the honored guest?

LADY

Why it's that Arnold Grubberger, CPA to-do this Saturday. Who could forget? I'd never seen anyone as picky as that Mrs. Grubberger.

MR. UNDERWOOD

Ah! And who is the last to arrive just before the doors are flung open to the grieving ... that is, celebrating ... family and guests?

LADY

The celebration service managers, for one final check.

MR. UNDERWOOD

And what if they are detained.

LADY

Why, we would be delivering the honored guest. Can't have him out of the fridge and hanging around too long before the festivities begin.

MR. UNDERWOOD

Well, then. When we drop off the DD, we'll just make a few adjustments to things.

LADY

You mean sabotage?

MR. UNDERWOOD

Not sabotage, my Dear. Just a few improvements
You just make sure to be there and keep the Sunset Twins out until I give the high sign.

LADY

And how am I supposed to do that?

MR. UNDERWOOD

You'll think of something.
Perhaps a grieving wife seeking their help might delay them at the door.

LADY

OK. But if I knock or kick the door twice ... *(in pig Latin)* Am-Scray!!

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 5

(LIGHTS COME UP center stage left on a cutout section of a room with a door opening to the stage (hall). The door jam partially hides a coffin, with a spray of flowers at its head. Classical music is

playing softly. KATIE and BETTY, obviously agitated, are whispering to each other at the side of the coffin.)

(Suddenly the coffin lid pops open and spring-loaded cloth snakes shoot all over the room.)

(Moments later, KATIE and BETTY burst through to the downstage side of the door, close it and lean with their backs against it. They are breathing heavily.)

KATIE

Oh my God! That was horrible!

BETTY

We will never live it down!

KATIE

We'll never work in this town again!
I thought you said everything was checked out?

BETTY

Well, you did too ... except for a last minute sweep of things, which got sidetracked by that babe in black moaning on and on about her poor George's demise.

KATIE

The pooh-pooh cushions were bad enough.

BETTY

And those flowers that squirted water at you when you walked by.

(pause)

And the guy that showed up in the clown suit with his potty-mouthed eulogy.

(pause)

I wish I could hide forever in my old clown suit.

KATIE

Me too!

But I thought Mrs. Grubberger was going to have a heart attack when the coffin popped open and dozens of those springy snakes sprung out all over the place.

(pause)

Oboy! From the hoofbeats it sounds like Mrs. Grubberger is headed this way right now.

(The door swings open and MRS. GRUBBERGER enters the hall)

MRS. GRUBBERGER

Girls, Girls, Girls! Who put you up to this? Charlie Ballard? Bill Ryan?
I was so surprised!

KATIE & BETTY

(In unison)

We were too!

MRS. GRUBBERGER

It was perfect! Just perfect !

KATIE & BETTY

(Again in unison)

Perfect?

MRS. GRUBBERGER

Yes. It couldn't have been better.
You look surprised.

KATIE

Oh. No. We're just surprised by HOW perfect it was.

MRS. GRUBBERGER

It was so selfish of me to force my lifestyle on Arnold's "final shot", as the clown man called it.

BETTY

It was?

MRS. GRUBBERGER

Yes. Arnold was such a practical joker. It was so much better to send him off this way.
I'm so glad that you found out and saved the day.
I'm so ashamed.

KATIE

You shouldn't be ... as long as everything worked out.

MRS. GRUBBERGER

Yes, the guests loved it too. "So Arnold", they said. "So wonderfully Arnold".

Thank you. Thank you again and again.

But now I must get back to my wet and laughing guests ...

But you can be sure that there will be a little something extra with the payment of your bill, and I and my guests will certainly sing your praises around town.

(MRS. GRUBBERGER exits)

BETTY

Well I'll be! How did that happen?

KATIE

I'm not sure. But I think somebody's plot backfired on them.

(pause)

But we can't rest on our laurels. We've got to move on.

Now next week we have a big celebration for that traveling salesman.

Any ideas?

BETTY

Well for a finale we could have the celebrating mob tar and feather him, and run him out of town on a rail.

(BOTH laugh heartily as LIGHTS FADE)

CURTAIN