

PRO-LIFE: A Solo Performance of My Own Design

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Abstract

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Cheryl is an unexpected voice of feminine fortitude in a small chapel in a small town in the middle of nowhere 'Merica - and she needs your help. This short play is a modern nod to The Janes who ran an underground abortion network in the 60s and 70s. Beyond its feminist themes, *Pro-Life* asks the audience to consider how they show up for one another in times of crisis and what makes a life worth living. This thesis details my process in gathering inspiration, information and imaginings and how I used what I learned in graduate school to write this short play. I will also note the challenge of a global pandemic when rehearsals and performances were scheduled to take place.

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### **“Pro-Life”: A Solo Performance of My Own Design**

In my second year of the Professional Actor Training Program at the University of Washington, I worked on a production of *Fefu and Her Friends* by the painter turned absurdist playwright, Maria Irene Fornes. For a period of time before rehearsals I voraciously researched Fornes’ life and creative work. I was enamored with her boundless creativity and playfulness. As one of her friends stated in the documentary about her life, “everything was food for her work.” (Memran 2018). This idea fueled me with creative vibrance. I started walking through the world with the confidence, perhaps even useful arrogance, that anything I saw could become a piece of theatre. I was reminded of Scott Hafso describing the work of artists in his Drama 251 lecture, “observe, interpret and relate.” This, I realized, was the action underpinning my life-long habit of compulsive journaling. I also realized that I had been training my skill of noticing (observing) through the practice of Viewpoints taught by Jeffrey Frace and daily Omnisensory Sweeps introduced by Cathy Madden.

The birth of Cheryl took place in the spring quarter of my second year in Jeffrey Frace’s Compositions class. We were given fifteen minutes to make

something out of nothing, to find a place in the room and invent a character. Upon receiving our assignment, I remembered the words Valerie-Cutris Newton offered, “there are hundreds of ideas already in the room. All you gotta do is find one.” So I found a table and an iron.

I had recently seen an On the Boards production of *Patti & The Kid* with Frank Boyd and Libby King. I was inspired by this absurdist original work about two apparent wanderers. Absurdism attracts me because I find it more true and revealing than most texts in the realm of realism. The time spent studying absurdist playwrights in Amy Thone’s class was some of my favorite time in my graduate training. I see beauty and resilience in the human instinct to hope against all odds, and I also recognize the ridiculous patterns we relentlessly repeat. And then comes the question of meaning, a question that keeps me dedicated to the art and craft of storytelling. I tell stories not in an attempt to answer, but in a decision to continue to asking.

I decided the table I chose was a park picnic table that had sheltered me for the night. Out of this, my imagination invented Cheryl: homeless, making her way to help her sister in Tennessee. Part of the assignment was to include a ritual, so, in keeping with the absurdist theme of arbitrary loops, I decided Cheryl wakes up every morning and irons the sheet she slept in. “Can’t have no wrinkles.”

For whatever reason, Cheryl was well-received amongst my classmates, and, apparently, comedic. I did not necessarily intend to make a comedy but I was overjoyed when my audience started to laugh. As Jane Nichols taught us in *Clown*

class, when you are truly in your clown, you won't know what is funny. I know now that Cheryl touches my inner clown. Cheryl is a part of me that is more honest, utterly okay with her own simplicity, and free of any artifice. She is a bleeding heart wrapped in an unadorned sense of humor. Cheryl acts on her need to speak her truth and to do something about the suffering she sees around her, simply because it is "the right thing to do." She is braver than I am, and she doesn't let anyone off the hook just because they're afraid.

When I started to write my solo show, I knew it was going to star Cheryl and I aimed to write an absurdist piece of theatre. I failed. I discovered that if Cheryl was the voice of my show, she was going to be holding the reins in a grounded, self-aware and straight-talking sort of way. So I let the idea of absurdism go and I continued on my creative search.

I happened to listen to a podcast in May of 2019 titled, *Science Vs. The Abortion Underground*. It stuck with me. I remember Carol Downer describing her experience of having an abortion procedure in 1963. She had gone to one of the only male doctors willing to do the procedure. After a quick and brutal operation, he sent her home and told her to call back in a week. She woke up the next morning, overwhelmed with relief that she was still alive. A week later she called and learned that the doctor had left gauze inside of her to stop the bleeding. She was instructed to remove it. The gauze had hardened. She described the process of removing it as slow and excruciating, like pulling razors out of her uterus. This experience was the start of The Janes, an underground movement of women

performing abortions for other women. When Carol set out to learn how to perform an abortion, she had little to no idea about her own anatomy. She had to take great pains to learn what she wanted to learn and she discovered that most of the other women she later taught were just as ignorant about their bodies. (Zukerman "The Abortion Underground" 2019).

My own experience of growing up and learning about my body was less than optimal. Instead of Sex Ed, I had "Christian Family Education". At home, we were not allowed to dispose of our used feminine hygiene products in the garbage beside the toilet without first double-wrapping them entirely with toilet paper because, as my mother told my sister and I, it made my father nauseous to see them. My elementary school teacher referred to our girl parts as "it" and instructed us to "wash it, don't play with it." She then warned us that she knew a friend who had played with "it" and ended up having to go to the hospital. I did not know that pre-marital sex was even an option until I was almost a teenager. Needless to say, abortion was unheard of in my household, a sin that would most certainly result in exile from the tribe.

So the story of The Janes resonated with me, for reasons less about abortion and more about what it takes to be there for one another, especially in times when the obstacle we face is wrought with socially-conditioned shame.

Around the same time as listening to this podcast, we were ruminating about the power of incongruence and broken expectations in Compositions class. I thought, what would happen if Cheryl was the voice of The Janes? Holding this idea,

I started extensive research about abortion, and particularly abortion networks, from the 60s and 70s to today. I would record my thoughts on sheets of paper and put them into a box in my room. This is a technique I learned from Valerie Curtis Newton's class in my second year. When it came time to write, I dumped all of the strips of paper on my living room floor and began sculpting a mosaic.

My writing process came in pieces. Fragments of the story (an image, a line, a theme) delivered themselves to me and the work became an ongoing arranging, re-arranging, and writing the connective tissue. When I arrived at a draft that felt ready to test, I was still craving a way to get my protagonist in trouble. What I had was a past narrative, and what I wanted was a fight. In my quest to activate the play, my key question became, who is my audience?

My curiosity about the intended audience was first sparked in Cathy Madden's Integrative Alexander Technique class in my first year. Ultimately, it is the inquiry that led the way to enhance what I had written from a narrative to a present moment pursuit of an objective, with some living detours through time.

Integrative Alexander Technique (IAT) is the tool that I found most universally applicable and instantaneously beneficial through my graduate school career. Applying the IAT process to my work, I developed an intimate and immediate relationship with my imagination as well as more trust in my instrument - my whole self.

I set out to apply IAT to every step of the creation of this play. I paid attention to my coordination while thinking, writing, typing, and arranging. I noticed that by

using the IAT process, I was learning about myself while I also learned about the play I was writing.

The following is some of the information I gathered about what I needed to do my work. I learned that it was important for me to be able to write in a way that was large, sloppy and erasable so I purchased a white board. I learned that I needed the technique I acquired from Scott Hafso and Valerie Curtis Newton of dividing the story into its events and giving them titles. I learned that it was then important for me to “dance” those titles, exploring a full-body gesture for each as a way of keeping my body engaged through the writing process, developing a cellular relationship with my script that I would, after all, perform with my body. I learned that the way I was using my voice to accomplish the accent was causing vocal fatigue so I knew I needed to build a plan that included the Linklater tools from Bridget Connor’s class.

I used the IAT process to take imaginary travels to the places within the developing story, asking myself for “gifts” and finding significant objects, sights and smells from Cheryl’s past that offered deeper layers of her history. This is an exercise we used often in Cathy Madden’s class, and one I use consistently in my creative work. Through exercises like these, I fall in love with each character I play. I discover their secrets, their dreams, the moments of tenderness and joy that motivate them to fight against the obstacles of their lives. Eventually, I build a “Palace of Beauty” (Madden.) for each character. In this way, the process of working

on a character is innately pleasurable and rewarding. The time I spend with Cheryl is deep and cherished time.

The next steps of my rehearsal process would be navigating an effective use of space for movements through time and location, clarifying several imaginary scene partners, and figuring out a clean change from embodying different characters. I would also be utilizing IAT combined with Linklater vocal training to find Cheryl's voice in a way that does not cause excess tension and fatigue.

Sadly, my rehearsals were cut short and all plans to perform this solo performance for a live audience were canceled due to the COVID-19 virus. I am mourning the loss of performing *Pro-Life* as I am mourning the loss of all the culminating events of my graduate school career. I am mourning the loss of sharing ritual and community with an audience. I mourn the theatres in crisis everywhere, several of which may not survive the cancellations of their season. This is a time when fear is rampant and the unknowns loom larger than any sense of security. There is now an enormous amount of despair in the world. It is a time when Cheryl calls on me with fierce determination and resilience to keep the faith. *Pro-Life* will continue to be developed and shared with live audiences.

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PRO-LIFE  
By Alyssa Franks

*The action of the play takes place inside a sparse chapel somewhere in an amorphous Bible-loving 'Merican town. Metal folding chairs arranged in rows perhaps with the odd hymnal on the seats. A table serving as an altar, large standing cross, and American flag at far upstage center.*

*Cheryl, a practical, salt-of-the-earth kind of woman who knows enough to know she doesn't have the answers, sits in the back row and faces the cross upstage. She wears a solid denim coverall, work boots and sports a mullet.*

*Shifts in time and location are accomplished through changes in lighting. They will also include changes in the ambient sound appropriate to the given place that underscores the action.*

*Note: While the actual location of this play is deliberately ambiguous, the accent and vernacular is inspired by a region on the west side of North Carolina and east side of Tennessee called by the Cherokee Indians, "the place of blue smoke". Words particular to this region are noted in the script with (\*).*

CHERYL:

Dear god  
Hullo  
It's me, Cheryl  
Reckon it's been a lil while since last we spoke  
Reckon you may not be too happy with me as of late  
What they say, you ain't on my side of the coin here  
Though tell ya the truth I ain't too happy with you either...  
Sometimes you can be a real sonuvabitch  
Sorry.  
Gotta lot of rage and remorse pent up in me, God.  
So I come here, try out some repentin'.  
Workin on being a better sorta person.  
since, well, yesterday.  
Darlene called me up - well I guess I ain't gotta tell you what happened  
Quite the plot twist there God..  
Is it true you gotta plan for everybody?  
Cause if there is,  
don't seem ta be a heck 'a lot of justice in mine  
Seems all sorts 'a sigogglin\*  
Now I come here because there's something I gotta ask for.  
Not from you - from Peggy, Jolene and Marsha.

Guessin' you know what it is and I'd like you ta help me out  
 Shed a little grace on me now  
 Give me what it takes to -

*(Cheryl hears a noise and turns suddenly, now facing the audience. The women approach.)*

Hi, Peggy, Jolene, Marsha!

*(The women greet her in turn, warmly, but surprised to see her.)*

Yeah, I know, been a minute since ya seen me in Church. Knew where I could find ya'll and came ta say goodbye. Been making my rounds to all the others. But you'ns 'specially. A last supper of sorts before I skip town.

*(Cheryl opens a Bible that has been hollowed to hold a flask of Moonshine)*

Don't call it the good book for nothin'. Made us some hoe cake\* here too.

*(Produces a tin of cornbread from her luggage. The women respond excitedly and then ask about Cheryl's plans to leave)*

Yup, I gotta split. Hitting the road after this.

*(A 'but why' reaction from the women).*

Ya see cause Darlene called me up from the big house yesterday.

*(An 'oh really?' reaction from the women).*

Yup, hadn't taken one of my calls since she got locked up six months ago. She said to me, she said "Cheryl, need ya ta come take my baby from me." She says, "Cheryl, you're the only hope I got" So a course that's what I gotta do. I owe her that.

I just can't do it here.

*(A 'why not' reaction from the women)* No way to raise a youg'n, haunted by the haints\* of a past life. *(A 'like who?' reaction from the women)*

Well Bobby, for one. Sonuvabitch Bobby. *(One of the women scolds Cheryl)*

What?

I didn't curse. Alls I said was sonuvabitch. And Bobby is a sonuvabitch. May he rest in peace.

You remember even on their wedding day he'd got drunk the night before and given Darlene a black-eye.

*(The lights shift to a blue tone indicating a change in time and place that belongs to the past.)*

*(Cheryl cracks open a can of PBR, addressing a small crowd of guests at her sister's wedding reception. She has perhaps had a few too many.)*

I wanna thank ya'll for coming all the way down to Earl's Ten Pins Alley for this extra special 'ccasion:

To Darlene and Bobby

*(raises a toast)*

My favorite sister! Oh, that's right - yer the only one I got!

Welp, You wrangled the town sheriff. Who'dve guessed. Oh, that's right, all of us 'cause you haven't shut up 'bout it since the first time he took you out for a dope\*.

*(A little laughter from the group.)*

Darlene, I know you dreamed 'bout this day from just 'bout the day we were born, I was outside shootin boomers\* with my beebie gun and you was inside gluing together pictures you'd ripped out of the magazines from the hair salon making a fancy co-llage of your perfect wedding.

I hope this lived up to somethin' like your picture.

*(A cheer from the small crowd.)*

'Cepting that you'ns sure ain't gonna find a creature resemblin' Bobby in a magazine - National Geographic maybe.

*(Bobby, who has definitely had too many, reacts violently, hurling an insult toward Cheryl.)*

Oh you go right ahead there Bobby, ya sonnavabitch! I've lived through worse than ugly words!

*(Darlene starts to cry)*

Oh no, Darlene! Darlene dooby doo...

I'm sorry

You look tee-totally\* beautiful.

I mean that from the bottom of my heart.

*(Indicates her eye)* It hardly even shows under all that makeup you got on.

*(Darlene sobs in wails.)*

Ah shit, I shudn't have mentioned it.

Hey big sis, I love you.

I'm just sorry Momma couldn't be here for your big day, she'd a been so proud of ya.

And Bobby... yer alright. It was sweet of ya to get us all a lil somethin for Christmas this year, shows you must be capable of some human kindness. 'Course if we all used what you'd got us e'ry woman you know in this town would walk 'round smelling like Dollar Tree Sweet Pea Mist!

*(The lights shift back to the general wash and Cheryl is once again with the women in the chapel.)*

Yup said some shit I regret. But I'm shapin' up. On accountta the fact that I'm now gonna be raisin' a youg'n.

Never did get hitched like the rest of ya. Never felt me a flutter in the undies for a man.

Though, tell ya the god's honest truth, I always dreamed of bein' a momma.

*(The women react with surprise, a few jeers at Cheryl)*

Sure I did!

Cuttin' crusts off the Wonderbread. Pencil markings up the wall and shit. Just reckoned it wadn't in the cards for me.

'Sides, I been workin', as you know. *(A change of tone in how the women are listening now.)* Takes just 'bout everything I got to be a one-woman show keepin' the society

runnin'. And keep it under wraps. *(The women don't know what to say. They say nothing.)* Been doin' this farther back than you realize. You remember back in high school - Jennie May?

*(The women respond with reverent recognition.)*

Best friend I ever did have.

Her big dewy eyes and a temper that could chop through wood.

Well, one day Jennie May comes to me in a panic, she says to me, she says "Cheryl, I ain't had my period in two months and if my daddy finds out about this he'll beat me to death, I'm sure of it."

Just held her and said "I ain't gonna let that happen"

But I didn't know what I was gonna do to stop it. And I also knew she was right.

I wanted ta run away someplace. Someplace where we couldda made a life and raised that young'n together.

But Jennie May, couldn't see it. Couldn't see a way out. It was death looking at me from behind her puffy red eyeball sockets.

Next time I saw her we was putting her in the Earth.

*(Lights shift to the blue and we are transported to Jennie May's graveside.)*

Hey there Jennie

*(Taking dandelions from her pocket)*

Couldn't afford none of them boo-quets from the store, so I hadta improvise  
Know you never liked flowers anyhow sos I also brought us some of the good stuff

*(takes a swig from the flask and pours some into the soil below)*

You know they put down the 'fficial cause a death down as "Food Poisoning"

Yup

Your Daddy at your funeral, he just stood there weeping over ya. Picked you up and held ya. Couldn't hardly pry him off to close yer lid. You looked so small in his hands. Tell you what. Ain't ever seen you look so small. Ain't ever felt so small myself.

But I came ta make ya a promise, a double pinky promise ta ya - and ta myself- that I ain't gonna let it happen like this to other people.

I had me a think and came to figuring there was another choice. Wished I figured it earlier. But hindsight is... a sonuvabitch.

I said ta myself "Cheryl, you can learn how to cook, learn how to sew, learn how ta change the oil on an ol' Ford. Don't see how this oughta be any different."

So last night, I got me to the library. Yes ma'am, I read me every anatological, surgilcological, physiological, gynecological book on the shelf.

Did you ever see what's going on down there when you was alive?

I mean really had a good look, inside, outside, all around. I squatted me over a mirror last night...stunned by the sight of it. First I thought ta myself "Cheryl, if that ain't the ugliest thing I ever seen" but longer I looked, and I don' mean ta be sappy here but it started to bring to mind the petals of a rose. Just like a pink rose. I mean, one with a big

'ol hole in it anyhow. Whys nobody ever talk about it? Did the boys you was with talk about it? Did they ever tell you you looked like a rose down there?

Alls Momma told me when I was a youg'n was that if I did mess with it, I'd break it and there ain't no doctor gonna fix it. Thought I was dyin' first time it bled, ran out to Darlene in a panic, tears streamin' down my face, showed her my bloody fingers, she said ta me "Cheryl, plug it up and shut up." Left a lot ta the 'magination.

Tell you what though...Found a heck of a lot out. The body of a woman, such a mystery to us. Dudn't need to be like that. Plumbing is simple enough - no more difficult than an 'ol Chevy. With machinery just as beautiful...curves of creation, it's like a cave - but it's got a silk door and some thick plushy walls that lead up to this holding place, the growin' place, where life is fed. Until it's ready to become something.

Course most folks in this town never really become nothing. They leave the womb to never really leave it. Don't blame ya for jumping ship.

You reckon that's what God had planned? Man with a plan up there. Men sure know a heck a lot more about our bodies than we know bout our own. Most of 'em have takin a pretty good look..

Reckon it's time ta take a look now. Take a look at what we can do.

*(The lights return to the general wash of the chapel.)*

And I did. As you ladies know. Part of the sisterhood.

*(Cheryl takes out a notebook from her pocket).*

Listen..Real reason I come here is cause I gotta ask ya for somethin'.

*(The women perk up.)*

Now when ya'll came in, you asked me "Cheryl, what all is this gonna cost? I ain't got much."

And I told you straight that most places it's a lot - up to \$3,000 bucks - sometimes more. But I wadn't ever in for a profit. I said ta each 'a ya, "Jolene, Marsha, Peggy, you go'head and pay me what you got. There's bound to be a time in my life when I'll be needin' a helpin' hand from ya."

Well

It's that time.

*(A hesitant ask from the women.)*

Oh, I don't want no money. I know there ain't anybody in this town that can pay..

Which is why this is gotta keep on runnin'

*(The women stand, apologetic but mortified about the direction this is heading. Cheryl stands.)*

Don't you walk away now.

90 percent of 'merican counties ain't got a single clinic - here we've got one in the whole state - yer lookin at it. You'd be amazed how many regular characters in this town I helped. Preacher man's wife e'en. *(They are stopped by this.)*

Folks have come traveling in. Some that don't e'en speak English but somehows they find out about me. They need some place ta go. *(A gesture of apologetic refusal from the others.)*

We gotta be there for those who come. Those who find themselves in despair. You've seen despair. Saw it in your eyes, same as I did Jennie May's.

Tell you what, despair ain't no ache. Despair ain't no sciatica, despair is a melanoma. That shit is aggressive. You notice despair in your life, you gotta attend to your faith - asap. We can be the keepers of faith.

*(This softens the women a little, Cheryl sees the window)*

I'll teach ya everything I know...

What I know is, there are easier ways to do it. But ya can't get your hands on those kinda pills in my town. No ma'am. There may have been a time for that but times in this country have changed. Sos the only way to go is more involved like it was with you.

You'll be gittin a little blood on your hands... You gotta be able to handle that.

*(One of the women asks..)*

Oh, you don't have ta worry about the cops now. Just don't leave a trace, 'specially after I'm gone. Pen and paper.

Figured out how ta get what ya need down ta a mason jar, aquarium tubing, plyers, and a turkey baster for suction. Sos the police ain't got nothing 'gainst ya.

Unfortunately this theory has been tested. *(‘What?’ from the women.)* Yup. Sonuvabitch Bobby. (May he rest in peace). Weeks 'fore all hell broke loose...he dun shut me down. And all over a damn tub 'o yogurt.

*(Lights shift to the blue and we are transported to Cheryl's clinic.)*

Soon as I heard 'em coming, I ripped out the sheets with all the names and numbers *(Cheryl tears out a page or two from her notebook)* bunched it all up in a tight wad *(she does and then puts the paper into her mouth and chews).*

*(mouth full of paper.)* I turn around and there, of course, is Bobby, sonnavabitch Bobby, staring at the sight of me drooling paper mache and sweating bullets.

*(As Bobby:)*“Damnit Cheryl.”

“Where is he? Where's the doctor?”

I said, “Bobby, you're looking at it. Now I ain't seen no warrant and you ain't got no evidence.”

Bobby rummaged 'round some more, knocking shit all left and right and finally pulls out a little jar from the side,

*(As Bobby:)*“Cheryl - now what on God's green earth is this drug-like substance?”

I said, “Bobby, its a tub a yogurt.”

*(As Bobby)*“Smell it, he said.”

*(Cheryl moves through the action of the following while she describes it)*

I unscrew the cap, scoop up a big dollop on my two fingers *(licks her fingers clean with an aggressive slurp).*

(As Bobby) "Alright Cheryl - now you want ta tell me just exactly what godforsaken thing you're doing with it?"

"Well, Bobby, since you're interested, I was using it to treat a yeast infection. Ask me in a court of law and I'll tell 'em its a good source of protein. Now, do you really wanna stand there and tell me what I can and cannot put down there?"

He says, "Well, Cheryl, I'm gonna have to charge you with practicing medicine without a license."

I said, "It ain't medicine, Bobby. It's yogurt."

Next thing I know, the Yoplait and I are in the back of his squad car headed to the station for questionin'.

*(The lights shift again to a reddish tone this time and we are transported to the police station. The upstage altar becomes Bobby's desk and Cheryl takes two chairs from the "pews" to place behind either side of the desk.)*

*(Cheryl sits in the chair facing downstage, she embodies Bobby, and mimes the action as he packs his dip, takes some into his lip, and spits into the mug on his desk. He glances at Cheryl. A long sideways glance.)*

(As Bobby) "Cheryl, I don't know how you got mixed up in all this mess but I sure as hell know you could go to prison for a very long time doing what you're doing in a town like this. Five years times the number of counts...what's that got you up to now days, huh?"

*(Cheryl does not respond.)*

Cheryl, Now, I don't think you want that to happen. And I don't want that ta happen cause you're family. And unlike you, I believe in family.

*(Cheryl does not respond.)*

Did ya ever consider anyone besides yourself here? Ever consider the marriages you were ruining. The guilt and regret of all those women who'll wake up one day and realize they murdered their own babies.

Did you ever think about Darlene, Cheryl? *(This one stings and Bobby sees it.)*

How ashamed she'd be of ya. How heartbroken. Darlene's pregnant Cheryl. *(Cheryl is stunned.)* Ah, shit, ya didn't know that now, did ya? Guess Darlene's got some secrets from you too. Now we've had our hard times but that baby is gonna put us back on track. It's our savin' grace. Think of how many couples you took that away from.

You got blood on your hands Cheryl. I don't know what kinda sick twisted need you got to be out playin' God like that but the way I see it you got two options now. I can lock you in that holding cell back there and call the media folks to blow the biggest scandal story this town has ever seen, Or...I can cut you some slack and we can come to some sorta alternate arrangement. *(Bobby moves around the front of the desk encroaching on Cheryl, his hands around his belt. He watches Cheryl jerk backwards defensively. He strokes her cheek and takes a gentle hold of her chin.)*

Don't be stubborn Cheryl. Alls you gotta do is get down on your knees, promise me you'll never do it again, and repent with your pretty little mouth.

*(Cheryl sits in the chair facing upstage, as herself, she spits in Bobby's face. Bobby retaliates with a backhand across the face which knocks Cheryl over sideways in the chair. In tears of pain and humiliation, she slowly crawls on her knees to in front of the desk facing where Bobby would be standing, at the level of his belt. She stops and drops her head. We see the reaction of Bobby violently grabbing hold of Cheryl by the hair. Under his grip, she slowly reaches her hands up to unzip his fly and freezes in a position that resembles a kneeling prayer. Stillness. Time stops for a long beat. Then, Cheryl turns suddenly.)*

Just then, the door swings open. Next thing I see has been branded into my mind for eternity.

The face of my sister. But it's not the face of my sister. It's that familiar look of death wearing my sister's eyes this time.

*(Darlene rushes out.)*

Darlene! Wait!

*(The lights shift back to the general wash of the chapel.)*

And then I was alone. Most alone I've ever been, in fact. Darlene refused ta speak ta me after. Didn't say a word to nobody.

*(The women don't know what to say. They say nothing.)*

So now ya know the truth a what happened.. Now ya seen both sides 'a the coin here.

*(The women don't know what to say. They say nothing.)*

When people feel alone they feel desperate, they do stupid shit.

That's why my sister Darlene shot her husband.

*(A reaction.)*

Yes ma'am.

Darlene shot the sheriff.

*(The women don't know what to say. They say nothing.)*

So I am gonna go off and find a way to raise that baby.

And I gotta find a way to keep my promise - keep helping the people that feel this sorta alone before they get themselves in deep water like this. Or worse.

But I need your help.

*(The women don't know what to say. They say nothing.)*

Listen, this world is a hard world to live in.

'Specially when you ain't got the means for it.

Cold and senseless. And no matter what sense of God you got, we all struggle.

We all have a staring contest with despair.

I just think that to a bring a new life inta this mess

People at least oughta want ta do it

They oughta feel they can offer a life that is livable.

Will you help your sisters?