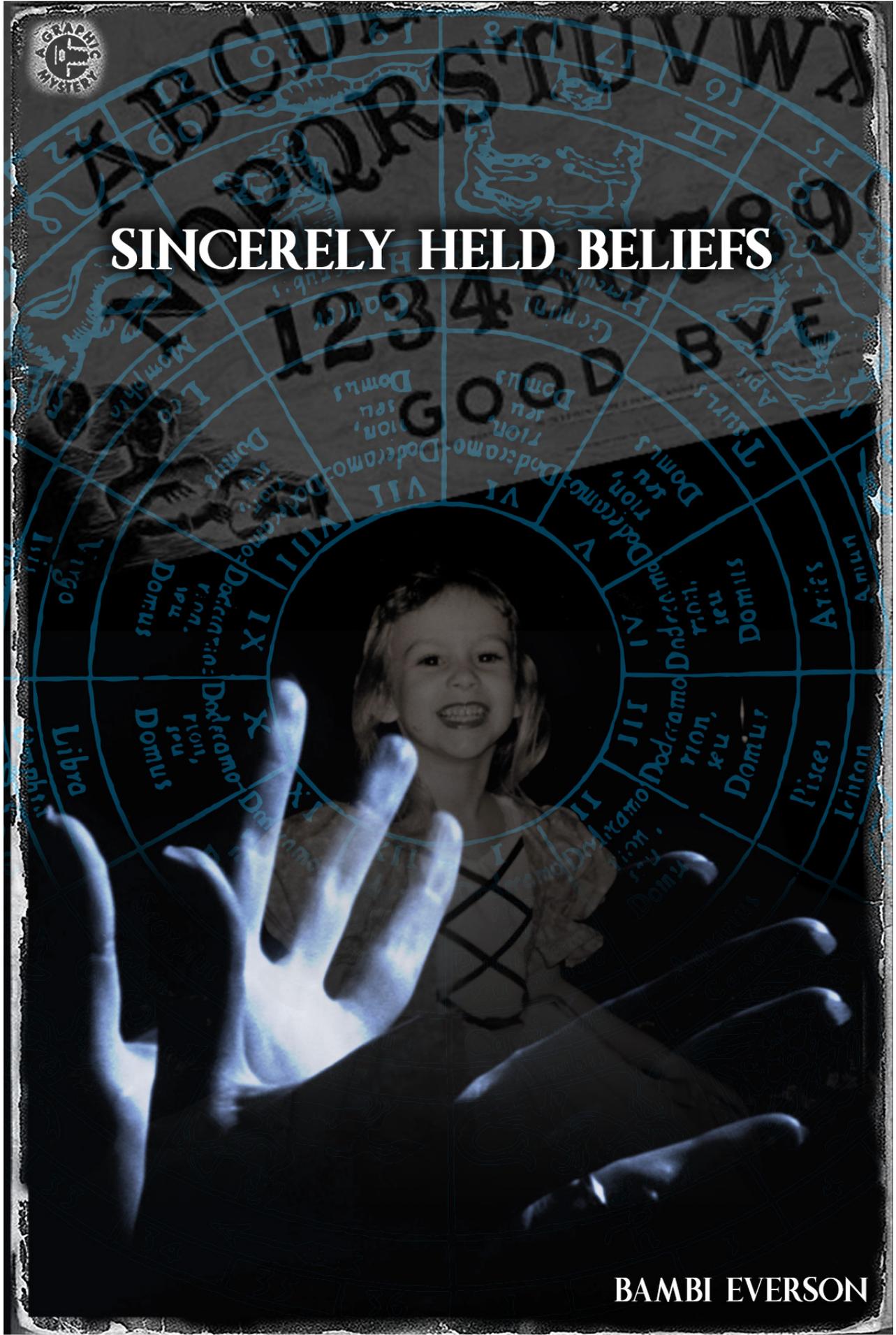




SINCERELY HELD BELIEFS



BAMBI EVERSON

SINCERELY HELD BELIEFS

One act, approximately 80 minutes.

CHARACTERS

MANDY (40s) - A genuinely good person. Loyal friend. Pragmatic.

MARSHA (40s) - Mandy's best friend from high school days. Into all things metaphysical, holistic and spiritual. Needy. She shoplifts.

HILARY (40s) - Mandy's close friend. They all knew each other from high school but Hilary's and Mandy's friendship grew stronger in recent years, due to the fact they were both devoted single moms.

TIME: The Present.

PLACE: New York City.

SYNOPSIS: Mandy is caught between her two friends. One a grieving mother, and the other a zealous clairvoyant who is convinced she is receiving messages from the other side. Mandy must try to mediate these two relationships, while staying true to her own beliefs.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: In the final scene replace "Diana Ross" or Cher with any celebrity that would suit the actors portraying the roles. Ellipses in the text... indicate that there is unspoken dialogue between characters. Not merely a pause.

SCENE 1

Weston's Funeral Home in Brooklyn, New York. An ante room off the reception area. There is an old oversized couch with throw pillows, and two end tables with boxes of tissues. An uncomfortable straight-backed upholstered chair with an embroidered cushion on it. Scattered pamphlets about "God and Grieving." At rise, MANDY rushes in and sits down. She takes some deep breaths. Her friend MARSHA follows her.

MANDY

I'm sorry. I just couldn't take it anymore

MARSHA

You look like you're going to be sick. Should we find a bathroom? You don't want to walk into the wrong room here.

MANDY

No. I just need a moment. I can't be the one falling apart in there.

MARSHA

I don't see how anyone can keep it together. It's awful. I can't imagine.

MANDY

That's the thing. I am a mom. I can imagine it. It's the worst possible thing that could ever happen to anyone. Those people in there... How can they say things like that? I just want to punch them in the throat.

MARSHA

Some people - not you, obviously - but some people take comfort knowing a child is in God's hands. This is a Catholic service, after all.

MANDY

God did not need another fucking angel!

MARSHA

Shhhhh. They'll hear you. She'll hear you.

MANDY

I don't care. What kind of God takes an eight-year old child? Tell me...

MARSHA

You're right. It's not fair., but... (you have to focus...)

MANDY

(interrupting)

You know what's not fair? That "God" chose to spare the idiot that mowed her down. That's what's not fair! A room chock full of mourners thinking they're virtuous because they're wearing their black and red ribbons of support. Where were they all after it happened? Who sat up with her for the first two nights while she screamed and trashed her apartment? Not GOD, that's for sure.

MARSHA

You have a lot of negative emotions right now and it is disrupting your body's energy system. Would you like me to do some tapping therapy on you?

MANDY

What? Here? Now?

MARSHA

We could go in the bathroom if you like. Some privacy. But here is ok.

MANDY

No thanks, Marsha. I am sad. A little girl is dead. I don't think I can, or want to, tap my troubles away.

MARSHA

Of course you are sad. I want to help manage your stress, not your grief. Grief is natural.

MANDY

I appreciate it, but I'm going to live with the feelings I have right now. Thanks, though.

HILARY LAWSON enters. She spots MANDY and MARSHA. MANDY jumps up to hug her.

HILARY

Mandy!

MANDY

Were we too loud? I'm so sorry. This place echoes like a tomb.

MARSHA nudges her.

MANDY (CONT'D)

Sorry. It's just...

HILARY

(hugging her)

I am so glad to see you. I was afraid... When did you get here?

MANDY

I couldn't do the viewing. I'm sorry. I couldn't see her like that.

HILARY

I understand. Thank goodness you are here now, I don't think I can handle this without you.

MANDY

I was here for the service. I tried to catch your eye but... your family-

HILARY

They've taken over everything. Draping her in a white dress, rosary beads in her hand. That's not my little girl. And where are her glasses? She needs her glasses. She can't see without them.

MANDY

They were crushed, remember? I'm sorry... The service was-

HILARY

Brutal. Not what I wanted. Thank God for Xanax! I need a breather and a bunch more tissues.

MANDY

Here. Take the box.

HILARY takes a few out, puts them up her sleeve.

HILARY

Ha! My grandmother used to do that. Put her snotty tissues up her sleeves. I always thought it was kinda gross.

MANDY

The video of her classmates was really sweet. Nice that so many of her teachers came.

HILARY

Yes. Thank you for facilitating that.

MARSHA nudges MANDY and clears her throat.

MANDY

Oh, sorry. How rude. You remember my friend Marsha, right?

I don't think so.

HILARY

She really wanted to come.

MANDY

Oh?

HILARY

MARSHA

From high school? We weren't in the same year but, you know... We are all family. Mandy and I were... (besties... M&M)

HILARY

(shaking her hand)

M&M. I remember now. Good of you to come.

MARSHA

Such a tragedy. I just want you to know I am here for you. Here's my card. In case you need help.

MARSHA goes in her wallet and pulls out her card.

Help?

HILARY

I am trained in EFT.

MARSHA

Electronic fund transfers?

HILARY

MARSHA

Emotional Freedom technique. And DBT, RRT, CBT, ITI and Primal Scream.

HILARY

That's a lot of initials to keep straight. Well. Thank you.... I'm sorry. It's been a nightmarish few days. And if one more person tells me Katya's in a better place...

MANDY

Ugh!! I hate that. Her place was here with you. And Steven. We all love her so much.

HILARY

She loved you, too. Every time, I told her Aunt Mandy and Olivia were coming to babysit, she practically pushed me out the door. You spoiled her.

MANDY

Olivia and Katya were a great team. Guess it's OK to tell you - we never ate what you left for us. We ordered pizzas and made s'mores.

HILARY

I knew. Her little fingers were always sticky with marshmallow goo in the mornings. You didn't work too hard to destroy the evidence. I didn't mind. I'm glad now she got to experience some of the finer things in life. You can never have too much chocolate.

MARSHA

Unless you are diabetic.

HILARY

(Looks askance at MARSHA - what a strange comment)

Look, I've got to go back in there. Not that I'll be missed. Katya's grandparents are holding court. Apparently, this is all about them. She was the only grandchild. They keep looking at me as if I'm somehow to blame.

MANDY

You are not to blame! The crazy bitch that lost control of her car. That's where the blame goes. No where else.

HILARY

Nobody knows how to deal with death. Especially a senseless one. People say the weirdest things.

MARSHA

My parakeet died after eating my mother's fruitcake.

MANDY and HILARY just stare at her.

MARSHA (CONT'D)

I was 14... I loved that bird. I named him Leonard Birdseed.

HILARY

Sorry for your loss. I gotta get back before my mother-in-law throws herself on the coffin again. You wouldn't by any chance have another...

MANDY

Sure. But go easy on them. You need your wits about you.

MANDY takes a Xanax out of her pocket.

HILARY

Thanks. You're coming back to the house right? The reception was catered by Arturo's.

MANDY

Absolutely. Go tend to your people. Deep breath. I'll be right there. Just going to splash some cold water on my face.

HILARY

Love you.

MANDY

Love you back. Hang in there.

They hug again.

MARSHA

Bye. Stay in touch.

HILARY exits. MANDY stares at MARSHA.

MANDY

Really?

MARSHA

What?

MANDY

You gave her your business card? Is that why you wanted to come? Not really the time for networking.

MARSHA

I wasn't going to charge her. Maybe I should have said that.

MANDY

Maybe you should just let her grieve for her dead child.

MARSHA

Do you think she noticed?

MANDY

Noticed what?

MARSHA

I'm wearing our high school T-shirt. It matched the ribbon colors. Ironic, huh?

MANDY

I think Hilary is just trying to get through this fucking day. She needs all the support she can get. I'm going back in. Coming?

MARSHA

I don't think it really mattered to her that I came.

MANDY

She said, "Good of you to come."

MARSHA

Yeah, but it seemed a bit disingenuous. Besides, I can't eat anything from Arturo's. That would totally trigger my IBS. I need to focus on my own emotional and physical well being at the moment. I'm going to call an Uber.

MANDY

OK. Well, thanks for accompanying me. I appreciate it. See you soon?

MARSHA

You're not going to wait with me?

MANDY

I need to get back in there.

MARSHA

I feel your fourth chakra is out of alignment. I could tap on that while we're waiting.

MANDY

I don't really have the time to achieve inner fucking peace right now. I'll call you later.
(hugs her)

MANDY exits, leaving MARSHA alone on stage. She sits for a moment, takes out her phone to dial an Uber, puts the box of tissues in her purse. She crosses, finds another box, puts that in her bag, too. She picks up the pamphlets, but doesn't think those are worth stealing. She walks to the front door.

BLACKOUT