

PROJECT DAWN by Karen Hartman

<https://www.concordtheatricals.com/p/64336/project-dawn>

In Project Dawn, women with three or more prostitution convictions--and no other criminal convictions--accept a final chance to rehabilitate themselves through the imperfect but stalwart Project Dawn Court's intensive program. Bonnie, a successful graduate who is now a motivational speaker, addresses the court. She works the crowd with expertise.

BONNIE

Who am I? You girls know me. I am Bonnie Mason. I am Shondell's sponsor. I am an activist. I am a lady in a relationship with a good and loving man! And I am a human being!

(Cheers from the group)

My whole life I've been Bonnie Mason but I wasn't sure on the resta that list.

If it wasn't for Gwen McGowan and the Project Dawn Court I would be dead right now. Period. First time I met Gwen, I was coming through third floor and she was the public defender. Third floor you're a number, no one knows you. Next time I see Gwen it's two years later, I'm in jail, I caught a beating, I look different, but Gwen stares and goes, "Bonnie is that you?" I was not remarkable I'll tell you that, just another junkie whore. But Gwen *knew me*: "Bonnie. Is that you?"

Gwen says I'm a perfect candidate for her new Project Dawn court because I'm the worst of the worst. Fifty priors. But I never harmed no one but myself, is the story I told myself at the time. I wasn't looking at my sons. Or my big girl Lacy following mom's ways.

I won't lie, I saw Project Dawn as a get out of jail free card. Any of you see it like that? But Gwen said some key words to me that kinda changed the scenery of that monopoly board.

One. You must plead no contest to participate.

Two. You finish the program, they drop your charges.

Three. You don't comply, you get upstate for two to five, worse than if you never met Project Dawn in the first place. It's our choice. One two three.

I signed them no contest papers. Like all you here. Like Tamika, Courtney, and LeeAnn who finished all four phases and graduate today!

This is a great day!

Graduates, you are strong. That's what got you here. For me it was the first time I graduated anything. But we didn't get into the life because everything was peachy, and nothing got peachier while we was *in* the life, you know what I'm saying? *Respect the demon*. Don't be so strong that you're weak.

I sign them papers for Gwen, and they send me to a 28 day rehab. How you gonna take an ex-prostitute, an addict, a sexual trauma survivor, and give her 28 days and done? 28 days sober is just enough for the pain to rise.

I leave my rehab day 29. They tell me, "There's a bed at Our Heart to Your Heart, pack your things and head over. Do you need an escort?" I say no I'm good by myself. Right. The El passes right over Kensington Avenue and I think, I could be high *right now*. I could taste the numb. I step off the bus, and next thing I know it's three days later, seventeen degrees, I'm nodding out by the pizza hut trash can with frostbite, no underwear, a broken rib. A woman cop shakes me awake. She goes "I'm arresting you" and I go, "No ma'am. You are saving me."

We all almost died. *We all* almost died. Demons come shouting as soon as you're loose, especially when things don't go your way, and I will tell you a big secret, they mostly don't.

Gwen gave me a second chance. She helped me find a room at May's Place. I stood outside that big stone house and it looked like a doll house.

Just sitting down for dinner at May's Place with Sister Carol and them. I'm used to squatting on a corner eating a little debbie and a bag of chips trying not to miss the next trick. The first night I ate dinner, I looked around the table and it reminded me of, it reminded me of the last supper.

I made a vow and a plan, and I kept that vow eight months with the support of Sister Carol and them. Then in the middle of the night Sister Carol knocks on my door, Bonnie you have a phone call. Hello? It's the police. Your daughter is dead.

My Lacy was twenty one.

I scream. I fall on the floor. I want to run. I want to get high. I want the pain to stop and I don't know how to make the pain stop except to *get* high. But this time I won't get high so I get very sick. I sit on my bed day after day. And Shondell Bridges does not leave me alone.

(Shondell is in the room)

Every day she brought me something to eat.

When I couldn't go down to the dining area, she'd tell me a dirty joke.

She asked about Lacy.

She said you can die of guilt, or you can live with the guilt.

So that's what I do. Every day.

You can't forgive yourself? Just get up.

(Monologue can end here)

Have respect for the demon. There's movie star millionaires can't kick this, you know what I'm saying? And they ain't sleeping at no Our Heart to Your Heart.

But if you know you are smaller than your demon, you can change.

Judge Kaplan told me I had two minutes but I don't care because talking is my drug now. If I stub my toe I'm gonna tell you and if it still hurts I'm gonna tell you again.

Girls. I was a guest at Senator Dinniman's office last week helping him with the language for his anti-human-trafficking bill. Bonnie Mason is helping to write a bill. He said to me, Bonnie please come to Harrisburg to speak with the other state senators; they should hear from you.

Now. I got fed a lot of stories as a child, but no one told me a story where I'm writing a *bill*, where I'm *changing* reality. And I like that story.

I am with a man who *respects* me, who is *kind* to me, who if I don't feel like doing it, guess what? I don't do it!

Girls, you will think about the life. You can let that thought become a feeling become an action. Or you can say:

“Uh uh, Thought. I have plans, Thought. I’m gonna finish school, raise my kids, lean on others and become someone others lean upon.”

God deals the deck, but we play the hand!

I love you graduates! I’m proud of you! Don’t kill me Judge!

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You are welcome to perform this monologue for free! It would mean a lot to me if you would [buy this play](#), and it’s a good idea for your performance too.

You may CUT but you may not CHANGE the words. Please introduce the monologue with title of play and author’s name (this is a monologue from Leah’s Train by Karen Hartman).

Feel free to send a video link to yourself performing the monologue through the Contact page, and let me know if I may share! Thanks and be well, KH

www.karenhartman.org