

THE SIXTH CHILD
A four-minute monologue
By JANE CAFARELLA

Drama

Australia, August 1970

EILEEN, 40s, is seated in the confessional talking to her parish priest about her sixth child

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

She crosses herself.

It has been 12 months since my last confession.

It's a long time, I know, and I'm sorry for that.

I've always been a good woman, Father. A good mother, a good wife. A good Catholic. I've given the church, my husband and my country six children.

The last nearly took my life...

"No more for you," Dr Sullivan said.

What was I to do? Refuse my husband?

Then Dr Sullivan told me...about that new cycle drug. That special pill.

Dr Sullivan is a good man, Father. He meant no wrong,

But the Holy Father...he said it was wrong...wrong to go against nature and God.

So, I came to you Father,...to beg for your blessing. You might remember?

You might remember what you said to me?

You told me, "What you are asking, is an insult to the authority of the Holy Father."

Beat.

I never felt so ashamed. I begged for your forgiveness, and you, in your wisdom, granted me absolution. Remember?

My sixth child was born seven months ago... you might remember his christening, father. He was wearing the lovely white lace robe that his two brothers and three sisters wore before him.

You might remember his pretty almond eyes with their upward edges, when I placed him in your arms, and his little flat nose, when you anointed his forehead with the Holy oil.

You might remember what you whispered as you passed him back to me...

(whispering and imitating the priest) "God has punished you for not wanting this child."

I'm a good Christian, Father, the Lord knows I am. I know that Jesus would have wanted me to turn the other cheek.

But Jesus was a man, Father – a man...without children – like you.

What would he know about growing, birthing and raising a child when there's not enough money for one child let alone six – and the last afflicted?

What would any of you know!

As the Lord's Prayer rang out from the congregation, I begged for forgiveness again, Father. I begged that God would forgive you for your ignorance and cruelty and for the ignorance and cruelty of all your brothers and sisters towards women like me.

Good women.

I prayed that my boy would find happiness in this world - despite people like you.

I have faith, Father, that he will be a better man than you.

She rises from her knees.

For these and all your other sins, which I'm sure you can't remember, I ask absolution, penance, and counsel.

May God forgive you!

422 words

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