

LIFE SUPPORT

A 10-Minute Two-Hander

by

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CHARACTERS (1M, 1W)

JAMES
SANDRA

Age 30. Ben's partner, any race/ethnicity
Age 42, Ben's sister, white

SETTING

A dreary institutional hospital waiting room, where they put people awaiting bad news.

TIME

The present.

SYNOPSIS

Ben, who never appears in the play, is in the hospital on life support following an accident. His lover of five years, James, and Ben's homophobic sister, Sandra, meet for the first time to discuss what happens next. The encounter does not go well as the two argue about the definition of family, religion, and whether one can "love the sinner but hate the sin."

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Lights up on a dreary institutional hospital waiting room. Perhaps occasional hospital sounds are heard in the background. JAMES sits absent-mindedly toying with a cardboard coffee cup. When he realizes it's empty, he crushes it and throws it across the room. SANDRA enters.

SANDRA

I assume you're Jamie.

JAMES

And you must be Sandra. Even if I'd never seen a picture of Ben's family I'd know you were his sister. I'm sorry we have to finally meet under these circumstances.

SANDRA (sitting)

I'm sorry I have to meet you under *any* circumstances.

JAMES

And it's James. Nobody calls me Jamie except ...

SANDRA

I pictured you a lot younger. The last time I heard Ben's voice was the voicemail he sent to say he was in love with a man. Jamie Harris he said. With a name like that I assumed you were just a kid.

JAMES

He spent the last five years hoping you'd call him back. Or answer any of the text messages he left.

SANDRA

Even if I'd wanted to, Mama forbade any contact. "That's not my son," she said. "I raised my son to be a good, normal, God-fearing man, not an abomination that lies with other men like unto a woman."

JAMES

Well, it sure didn't take us long to get around to the one verse anybody knows from the Book of Leviticus. Ben was no abomination. If anybody was made in God's image, he was.

SANDRA

I used to think that. Before the voicemail.

JAMES

Have you seen him? In there, I mean.

SANDRA

I hardly recognized him. Battered and bruised. All swollen up. Tubes everywhere. Some kind of machine buzzing and blinking. Awful.

JAMES

Life support. Life support they call it. What a joke. I was home when they called. I had a pot roast in the slow cooker and red wine breathing on the counter. Wondering why he was so late. Another driver crossed the center line and they crashed head on. Took them a long time just to cut Ben out of what was left of the car. The doctors say there's no coming back from his injuries. They want to stop the machines and let him die. It's what he would've wanted.

SANDRA

That can't be right. Our family believes in leaving it in God's hands. Deciding when somebody dies. After Daddy's heart attack, Mama insisted they do everything they could to keep him alive for as long God wanted us to.

JAMES

He saw what that did to you and her. He didn't want to put you through it again. I'm just his boyfriend. I can't give the order. It has to be a family member. Since your mother has Alzheimer's, it has to be you.

SANDRA

How'd you know about Mama?

JAMES

Ben still had friends he kept in contact with back in Mt. Nebo, mostly people he went to school with, people who could accept him even if his own family wouldn't.

SANDRA

Oh, Ben had lots of friends. He was very popular growing up. He was just naturally Mr. Personality. And he was smart and he was talented and he was athletic ... and he was so handsome. One time I overheard Mama bragging to one of her friends that Ben was the prettiest one in our family.

JAMES

Jesus.

SANDRA

Did you go to a small-town public school?

JAMES

I was an army brat. I was never in one place long enough to build lasting friendships.

SANDRA

Well, going to a small school means you have the same teachers your older brother did. And if you can't measure up to his impossibly high standards they let you know it. Oh, they don't mean to. You can just tell. ... But what's worse is your parents let you know it, too. "Why are you getting B's in algebra? Ben always got A's." "Ben always dresses so nicely. Maybe he could give you some pointers." But it was hard to resent him. There wasn't a conceited bone in his body. He *did* try to help me with my homework. He *did* try to help me with my wardrobe and my hair and what little makeup Mama would let me wear.

JAMES

But nobody realized he was gay?

SANDRA

It was hard to resent him but I managed to do it. And when Mama cut him off there was a little part of me that was glad. For the first time in my life I had her all to myself. I didn't have to compete. I had her full attention. Which lasted right up to the point where she no longer remembered who I am.

JAMES

He wanted to be cremated.

SANDRA

No. No cremation. If Mama was in her right mind she'd never allow it. He has to be preserved so when the time comes he can rise up and meet Jesus.

JAMES

Ben thought it took a certain kind of arrogance for someone to think they had a right to occupy space in the world in perpetuity. If God could make Adam from dust, He can gather up our ashes and make us whole again. That's what Ben believed.

SANDRA

Don't know where he got such a notion. It sure isn't in the Bible anywhere.

JAMES

It's in Job. "Though worms destroy my body, yet in my flesh I shall see God."

SANDRA

How'n the world would someone like you know that?

JAMES

You and Ben aren't the only people raised on church every Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday evening. But do what you want. Wherever Ben is—and that husk in there on life support sure isn't him—wherever he is, he's beyond caring.

SANDRA

He'll be in our plot at Mt. Nebo Cemetery. That's the way it's supposed to work. He's supposed to be with family.

JAMES (standing)

Where was his family the last five years? Oh, that's right. For the last five years I was Ben's family. Just think about that, Sandra. I have five years of memories of some of the best years of Ben's life. You and your mother and your kids could have had that, too. Ben's heart was big enough for all of us. And now it's too late. You have my sympathy.

JAMES starts to exit, then pauses when
SANDRA speaks..

SANDRA

Jamie. ... James. For what it's worth. Despite my resentments and his lies, I do love my brother. It is possible to love the sinner while hating his sin.

JAMES

And it was possible for Ben to love the believers while hating their beliefs. I'm not that charitable, but that was Ben. He loved you Sandra, you and your mother both.

JAMES exits. After a moment SANDRA takes her phone out of her purse, looks up a number, and dials the number of the Mt. Nebo local newspaper. Pauses in her monologue indicate the unheard responses.

SANDRA

Daily Chronicle? This is Sandra Jennings. I need you to get an obituary notice ready. ... No, it's not Mama. It's for my brother Ben. He was in a car wreck. ... Yes. It was a huge shock. He's still hanging on, but we expect God to take him home soon. I'll let you know. I'm just glad Mama will never realize he's gone. ... O.K. ... Benjamin Herbert Thompson. Age 43. Originally from Mt. Nebo. Died from injuries sustained in an automobile accident. He is survived by his mother Edith Thompson, née Kleinschmidt, his sister Sandra Thompson Jennings, his brother-in-law John P. Jennings, a nephew and two nieces. His father Herbert W. Thompson preceded him in death. ... No. ... There are no other survivors.

END OF PLAY