

WORSHIP

by Tom Smith

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Characters

Claire, 50s

Josh, 25, her son

Rachel, 28, her daughter

Time

The present

Location

Claire's living room, Kansas City

WORSHIP

The living room of a small, dated Midwestern home. JOSH, 25, is sneaking a peek through the closed drapes of a large picture window as his sister, RACHEL, 28, anxiously checks her phone. Their mother, CLAIRE, is drinking coffee in a small armchair.

JOSH

There's even more than yesterday.

(CLAIRE says nothing.)

Almost 20...

RACHEL

This is ridiculous! It's been three days. There's got to be something else they can cover.

JOSH

Mom, just go out there and get it over with. It doesn't matter what you say. Just...something. Then they'll leave.

RACHEL

Josh can go with you. Then things can get back to normal.

JOSH

Mom?

(CLAIRE says nothing. JOSH looks at RACHEL.)

RACHEL

Look, Josh and I can't keep running your errands, picking up groceries, getting the mail. We have to get back to our own lives, you know? Just talk to them!

CLAIRE

No.

RACHEL

Quit being stubborn!

JOSH

One comment. Anything.

CLAIRE

No!

RACHEL

...Fine, fine: forget it! Do what you want. But they won't go away!

JOSH

Rachel, don't freak out...

RACHEL

She doesn't want to talk, fine! But I don't want to hang around here if she doesn't need us. I'm going home. And if you were smart, Josh, you'd go too.

JOSH

We can't leave. Not now.

RACHEL

You may be ok getting sucked into whatever she's dealing with, but I'm over it. She wants to play the silent mourner, the grieving mother? Fine, that's her right; just don't expect me to stop my life because of it. I have a family back at home who needs me. More than she does, apparently.

JOSH

God, Rachel! Why are you being like this?

RACHEL

We all feel the loss, Josh. She's not the only one!

JOSH

You said you were staying until Monday.

RACHEL

I would if she needed me. But, look at her...!

JOSH

Well, I'm staying.

RACHEL

Of course you are. You'll do anything she wants ...

JOSH

What does that—? Screw you!

RACHEL

I'm going to go pack.

(To CLAIRE.)

I'll call you when I get home, Mom.

(To JOSH.)

Don't get pulled into all this, Josh. It'll be like Dad leaving all over again.

(SHE exits.)

JOSH

Mom, please, just go out there and say something. Answer their questions. Or just make a statement. Then this can all be over.

CLAIRE

Not yet.

IOSH

Then when?

CLAIRE

I don't know.

IOSH

Tomorrow? Next week? I'm supposed to go back to Omaha on Monday.

CLAIRE

I don't know!

IOSH

I'll tell them to leave.

CLAIRE

They won't.

IOSH

I know.

(Pause.)

CLAIRE

Where's the card? I want to read it again.

IOSH

Mom...

(SHE glares at him.)

Here.

(HE hands her a condolence card.)

CLAIRE

She has such beautiful penmanship. No one writes anything by hand any more.

(Beat.)

She wants me to call her. What on earth could we possibly talk about?

IOSH

She probably wants to thank you.

CLAIRE

For what?

IOSH

For what John did. For her family.

CLAIRE

She'd be thanking the wrong person.

IOSH

Look, just let me go outside and say something; they won't care if it's you or if it's me. They'll get what they need for their story and then you won't have to keep barricading yourself in—

CLAIRE

Your brother's death is not a "story."

IOSH

It's news. He's a hero.

CLAIRE

Heroes live.

IOSH

Why are you being like this? Do you want them out there? You like the media camping on your

lawn? Harassing your neighbors?

CLAIRE

How dare you!

IOSH

Then why won't you answer their questions?

(CLAIRE pours more coffee, saying nothing.)

Rachel's right. Maybe you do just need to be left alone.

CLAIRE

We're running low on coffee.

RACHEL

(Re-entering.)

Then go out and get some. Josh, I can catch a 4:30 flight. Will you drive me or should I call a cab?

IOSH

You're really going?

RACHEL

You're really not?

IOSH

I don't know. How can I leave her like this...?

RACHEL

This is ridiculous!

(To CLAIRE.)

I'm going out there.

CLAIRE

No! I forbid it!

RACHEL

I don't care, Mom. You don't get to control everything! Besides, they just want to hear that the family is proud of John: ask how long he was a firefighter, stuff like that. You don't want to answer their questions: fine. Issue a statement. I'll go read it and this will all be done!

CLAIRE

What statement could I possibly make?

RACHEL

That you're proud John saved that family. That he died a hero.

CLAIRE

Quit saying that! A hero does something selfless. John was just doing his job.

JOSH

Mom...!

CLAIRE

Is that the statement I should make? That he went in against orders and died because of it? Don't either of you get it? They want me to go out there and cry and talk about how brave John was, how there were things in his childhood that made him special. But there weren't. He was just an ordinary kid!

RACHEL

Who died doing something extraordinary.

CLAIRE

And what happens after I answer their questions? They'll go off and write their stories, sentimental crap that will make John into something he never was. And before you know it

there'll be a memorial service filled with people none of us know, that didn't even know John. Then they'll write stories about the outpouring of sympathy and suddenly John won't be ours anymore; he'll belong to the world.

RACHEL

Is that such a bad thing?

CLAIRE

Yes! Because newspaper stories become local tv news, and then national news, and national news becomes tv movies! And the more people write about John, the further away the truth will get! His life will become a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy. And we'll forget the real John: the part that wasn't very smart, that drank too much; the part that abandoned Suzette when she was seven months pregnant with Nathan. Instead, we'll start to believe the media version, the made-up version, and we'll lose the real John forever!

JOSH

Is that what this is all about?

CLAIRE

Have you seen what happens to those mothers? They aren't allowed to grieve in private anymore! They have to go to vigils and schools and churches and on talk shows—and for years they have to remain the grieving mother. Defined for the rest of their lives by the death of their son. "The mother of..."

RACHEL

It doesn't have to be like that!

CLAIRE

Tell that to Judy Shepard!

RACHEL

That's totally different! Her son was a victim. John sacrificed his life; sacrificed for people he

didn't even know! And if that means you have to sacrifice to let the world know what he did, how he gave up his own life to save others—

JOSH

Rachel, stop...

RACHEL

—I think you owe it to John to do that.

JOSH

Rachel, leave her alone!

RACHEL

For God's sake, Josh, don't tell me you're—

JOSH

Just shut up! No one has any answers here! Let Mom deal with this the way she wants.

RACHEL

...I'll call a cab.

JOSH

Your flight's not for another four hours.

RACHEL

I don't care.

(SHE turns to CLAIRE.)

Mom? You may not think John was a hero, but the rest of the world does. You shouldn't diminish that. If nothing else, let Nathan have that memory...

(SHE exits to her room, dialing her phone. Pause. CLAIRE looks at the condolence card.)

CLAIRE

...I can't, Josh.

JOSH

You don't have to.

CLAIRE

(Beat.)

I should write her back. Thank her for her card.

(Beat.)

If I start talking about John, everything will change. If I start...I won't ever want to stop.

RACHEL

(Re-entering with her suitcase.)

They can't send a cab for another half an hour.

JOSH

I said I would take you. Mom, do you need anything while I'm out?

CLAIRE

Coffee. Please.

(JOSH and RACHEL exit. CLAIRE slowly rises, peering out the window. SHE sits back down, picks up the card once more, stares at it.)

END OF PLAY