

D.N.R.
Do Not Resuscitate
Or
Democrats N' Republicans
(I suggest the title being billed as D.N.R.)
By Tim Pullen

Mrs. Hanna Plumb: A mother in a coma, Seventy- eight years old recent stroke victim.

Doctor Ian Hawthorn: Doctor caring for Hanna Plumb, Forty-five years old.

Elizabeth Plumb: (Beth) Middle sister, Forty-seven years old.

Angela Baker: Eldest sister, 52. Wife of a southern Baptist Deacon.

Jessica Plumb: Thirty-nine years old, youngest sister. She is a married lesbian (Point of issue with Angela).

Only Act, Only Scene

August 22, 2012

(Lights up on a hospital bed, containing an elderly woman in a coma. There is a machine next to her and tubes running from it to her body. A slow and steady beeping of a heart monitor is heard softly in the background. Beth is sitting at the foot of the bed, looking tired and worn the doctor is speaking with her holding his clipboard.)

Doctor Hawthorn: Try to understand Ms. Plumb, I am legally bound. Your mother has crossed all her T's and dotted her I's.

Beth: But she signed that- that - let me die paper.

Doctor Hawthorn: The do not resuscitate, yes- she did sign that. (He hands Beth the paper from his clipboard) unfortunately for her, she hasn't passed away. The damage from the stroke is so advanced and widespread there's no plausible way she can eat at this time without the placement of a feeding tube.

Beth: Then place the tube.

Doctor Hawthorn: We require authorization from-

Beth: If she survives, will she get better?

Doctor Hawthorn: I don't know.

Beth: You're the doctor, you're supposed to know.

Doctor Hawthorn: I don't want to mislead you, stroke victims have made recoveries. This was a very severe stroke, and with your mother's age- well, I'm not hopeful for a recovery.

Beth: If you turn off the oxygen she'll die?

Doctor Hawthorn: Yes, if the ventilator is deactivated, she will pass. Likely in minutes, but you can't make any of these decisions legally without the consent of her medical power of attorney. I'm trying to explain this Ms. Pl-

Beth: -Please, call me Beth.

Doctor Hawthorn: Beth. Look, I realize this is a lot to process, especially with all the emotions involved. Do you know who has medical Power of Attorney?

Beth: Yes, I believe my sister Angela.

Doctor Hawthorn: She could authorize us to turn off the oxygen.

Beth: Is that the right thing to do?

Doctor Hawthorn: I can't say, it's only been thirty-six hours.

Beth: She'll never agree to that anyway, but now she could have you insert the tube, right?

Doctor Hawthorn: She can authorize the procedure, however the insurance won't cover it entirely, you'll have to have the estate agree to pay for the balance.

Beth: Couldn't I just pay it?

Doctor Hawthorn: You can. It would be upwards of five thousand dollars.

Beth: Yeah, her estate should do that.

Doctor Hawthorn: That will require her financial POA.

Beth: My other sister.

Doctor Hawthorn: Like I said your mother was very well organized. This decision will require all three of her children.

Beth: What am I chopped liver? I have a Power of something or other.

Doctor Hawthorn: According to her lawyer she's named you executive of the will and general Power of Attorney.

Beth: A general is pretty high ranking, isn't that enough?

Doctor Hawthorn: If there wasn't a specific medical or financial power of attorney it would be, however the way she has it set up-

Beth: I'm screwed. Totally screwed.

Doctor Hawthorn: I wouldn't say that. You simply have to get together with your sisters and come to a decision.

Beth: You've clearly never met my sisters. If this was such a bad stroke, why didn't it kill her at first?

Doctor Hawthorn: She stopped breathing in the ambulance, by then the paramedics started the forced oxygen via-

Beth: But she had the do not resuscitate-

Doctor Hawthorn: They don't sort through legal paper work in an ambulance. She had been in ER a half hour before this was looked at. I'm sorry Beth a decision has to be made, and soon. I'm sorry to be rushing you, but she's going to starve to death in this coma, that can't go on, it's simply inhumane. We can place her in hospice and give her pain medications, if you decide to let her go, but all of these things will require your sister's consent. (He pauses, she is silent) It's two am. I know you're stressed and exhausted. Please get some rest, contact your sisters and let me know as soon as possible?

Beth: I- Okay. I can do that. (He exits.) Inhumane. Mom, why couldn't you just have a heart attack like dad? One (She grabs her chest and mimics her father's heart attack) and you're done. -Why is it always so complicated? (She cries by her mother's side a bit then pulls herself together) Fine. I'll get them here, somehow - you're asking for it -granted I'm the one that's gonna get it, but you asked for it. I wish I could wake you up from that damn coma so you could suffer through this with me.

(Lights dim out as Beth exits the hospital room. Pause then the lights come back up. As the lights come up a weeping Angie walks in with a bouquet of flowers and quickly sits by her mother.)

Okay maybe you could call this scene two- but I won't

Angie: Oh, mom. What's happened to you? Don't leave us mom, not yet. (She kisses her mother's forehead, then holds her hand. After a few moments she gets on her knees and quietly begins to pray by her mother's side. After a few moments Beth enters.)

Beth: I hope the trip up wasn't too bad.

Angie: I was driving early enough to miss the rush hour this place is so famous for.

Beth: I'm glad you could make it.

Angie: Of course I could, you should have called sooner.

Beth: She had the stroke at eight I called you by eleven, I was really preoccupied in the middle there.

Angie: Of course you were, of course you were. I didn't mean to scold you.

Beth: I really didn't feel all that scolded.

Angie: How are you holding up?

Beth: All right I guess, considering-

Angie: Oh, Elizabeth. You always were the strongest of us. Thank the lord you stayed so close. Mom had you in her time of need. I don't know how bad it would've been without you.

Beth: I can't picture it being worse.

Angie: Mom could be gone, we could've lost her.

Beth: Yeah, well - she had the paper for that.

Angie: Whatever do you mean?

Beth: Nothing Angie, ignore me, I'm exhausted. Did you know mom made you her medical power of attorney?

Angie: No, what does that mean?

Beth: It means I need you to make any medical decisions for her.

Angie: That's certainly not a problem, you know I'll help in any way I can, just tell me what you need.

Beth: Thank -you, but it's not that simple. (Jess walks in sees Angie and stops abruptly)

Jess: You didn't tell me she was going to be here.

Beth: Jess.

Jess: I'll come back when the room is more welcoming.

Angie: Wait, Jessica- please. I'll go, you can stay and have some time with mom. (She exits in tears again.)

Beth: No, Angie wait. You don't understand!

Jess: She's just not an understanding person.

Beth: Oh, shit Jess you don't get it either. Just stay here! (Beth runs after Angie.)

Jess: Hey mom, how's it going? Glad to see your good daughters are here taking care of you. Can you hear me? (She kisses her mother's forehead and holds her hand exactly as her elder sister did before.) Can you squeeze my hand or something? Well -I guess this is better than what dad did to us, at least we can say goodbye to you. (She wipes away a lone tear. Beth re-enters dragging along a reluctant Angie)

Beth: This is the only way you can help me.

Jess: You didn't mention the family reunion when you called Lizzy.

Beth: I didn't think you would come if I told you.

Jess: You always were the smart one. (She attempts to exit but Beth catches her arm and holds the two sisters at either side.)

Beth: Stop it you two! Please, please stop. I need both of you! Both of you in the same room! Look, I didn't sleep last night, part of it was the excitement from the stroke and the paramedics, and worrying about mom -but most of it was worrying about you two and if I could talk to you both, together-in the same room!

Angie: You know it wasn't always like this.

Beth: Bullshit! It was always like this! At Easter you fought over marshmallow chicks, at Thanksgiving it was the wish bone, then those ninety dollars boots you both had to have. Sure, it used to be because you were too much alike, and you're not anymore, but you're still fighting each other and I'm still in the middle! Thing is- this isn't Easter candy, or shoes or politics, this is me. -I need you, mom needs you, and I just don't have the energy to fight you over it. Just forget it.-(She lets go of them both then sits on the bed next to her mother. Defeated and sobbing.) I knew better than trying.

Angie: I'm here.

Jess: What do you need to talk with us for?

Beth: Mom is dying.

Angie: You say that so officially, people recover from strokes.

Jess: Don't you have to find out how much brain damage there is after she wakes up from the coma or something? You know, before you can know shit like that.

Beth: No, I don't have to wait for anything. She's not waking up. The stroke took her involuntary muscles out. That machine she's hooked up to is doing all her breathing for her, and she can't eat or process any nutrition or anything without a feeding tube, so she's starving.

Jess: That's gotta be awful.

Angie: We can only pray she can't feel it.

Jess: You do your praying.

Angie: I can't even understand how she had a stroke, she was healthy as a horse.

Beth: What kind of horse have you been riding?

Jess: Usually a high one-

Beth: She's been on three different anxiety medicines, she's been treated for ulcers she -

Angie: Why haven't you told us?

Beth: I don't want to make it worse.

Jess: What does she have to worry about?

Beth: It may have something to do with the fact two of her daughters won't talk to each other, or that she has to hide half the pictures on the wall every time one of you visits. Maybe she doesn't want to choose sides, and maybe, just maybe watching her family pull apart stresses her out.

Jess: She still keeps her picture up when I'm not there?

Angie: I never expected her to dis-own you.

Jess: I never asked her to choose sides. There are no sides. That can't be a reason. I'm going to talk to a doctor.

Beth: Listen to me. Maybe that's not the reason, maybe we'll never know the reason, but I have been talking to the doctors. I had five hours of talking with doctors. More than that looking all this stuff up on the internet to find out they were right. Mom and her lawyer have set up rings of fire for us to jump through. They did a better job than Barnum and Bailey. We have a decision to make, and the only way we can make it is if the three of us agree.

Jess: Then mom didn't want the decision made. I'll never agree with that woman, she knew that.

Angie: What exactly is the decision we have to make?

Beth: Putting a feeding tube in her and keeping her alive, or pulling the plug on the oxygen machine and letting her go.

Angie: What are her chances for recovery?

Beth: None, if she opens her eyes they don't think she'll ever move. The MRI showed very little activity -in the-the - ponds.

Jess: The ponds?

Beth: Whatever it is at the base of your spine, should I go get the doctor?

Angie: No. We understand the situation.

Jess: Well, we know what Angie wants to do. You know her kind.

Angie: My kind! What kind am I? I'm some particular kind because I'm not out encouraging children to have sex and get abortions to murder their unborn fetuses.

Beth: I am too tired for this.

Jess: I've never encouraged anything like that.

Angie: You don't still work for that - that- clinic.

Beth: Now Angie, that isn't all they do there.

Jess: She doesn't want to hear it. She doesn't want to know I help victims of rape, of incest, of molestation. She doesn't want to hear about the completely not pregnant, not hookers, un-gay women that I help.

Angie: You help by murdering the -

Jess: I do more work trying to prevent abortions than you do! I provide options and understanding instead of hate or judgment.

Angie: You have no qualm judging me or hating me for my religion.

Jess: You want to force your religion on everyone around you.

Angie: I want to save lives, souls, I want to stop murder.

Jess: Oh come on -

Angie: You may not think so but a life is a life! No exceptions!

Jess: You hypocrite, you're all for capital punishment.

Angie: That's different, that -

Jess: You just said no exceptions! Do you understand what that means?

Beth: I don't believe this.

Angie: You promote debauchery! Handing out condoms, telling children to go get laid.

Jess: Teaching young women about their own bodies, encouraging safe sex. Or does it just work better the way you and your husband do it? Just sit and pray women stop having vaginas.

Angie: Don't you dare use that language in front of me.

Jess: Dare I? What word? Vagina? You don't like the word vagina?

Beth: Ladies, please-

Jess: Fine then cunt!

Beth: Dear lord. Mom, I hope you can't hear us.

Jess: You sit around praying you didn't have a cunt!

Angie: Oh my -

Beth: Now this isn't the place or the time.

Jess: I bet your husband never prays his dick will fall off, does he? It's always the women that are sluts or the whores, the men just get weak and give in to temptation- sins of the flesh, they can get forgiven-

Angie: That is enough of that! You're just being vulgar to insult me.

Jess: You think everything's vulgar, no one is ever good enough unless they live up to your standards.

Beth: Shut up! Both of you. Jess you're getting defensive when she hasn't attacked you.

Jess: Take her side then, I'm used to it.

Angie: I thought there were no sides.

Jess: You two were always her favorite anyway-

Beth: I'm not taking sides! I hate you both equally at this moment. I'm being incredibly selfish, I just want you to get along long enough to help me through this thing with mom, then you can go right ahead hating each other till you're both dead for all I care. You're both my sister's, I love you, I do. Now really, Jess -what is it you want from Angie?

Jess: I want her to tell me it's okay. My life is okay, and she doesn't think I'm going to hell.

Angie: You want me to give up my religious beliefs.

Jess: No, I want you to keep them-keep them-just keep them to yourself and stop trying to tell everyone else what you believe. If you believe in God so much, let him do his own damn smiting.

Angie: What you do goes against God.

Jess: You think I don't believe in God? Well I do. God is all powerful! If God didn't want women's health care, it wouldn't exist. If God didn't want me enjoying sex, I would've been born straight! All I want you to do is say "okay, my sister's gay."

Angie: I can't do that. It's not okay. I won't lie to you, it's just not natural. You don't see that behavior in God's creatures. Have you ever seen a gay squirrel?

Jess: The hell if I know, what kind of sicko watches squirrel sex?

Angie: It's just not right. I believe you are destined for damnation; the life you choose is unnatural.

Jess: Choose? You think I chose to make life as difficult as I could for myself?

Angie: It says in the bible -

Jess: Oh God.

Angie: Yes, God.

Jess: God.

Beth: God! ...Damn it you two! (There's a moment of silence) Fine so she's burning in hell.

Angie: You too, you just took God's name in vain-

Beth: Fine. I'll burn if I have to, it's not like it's the first time -

Angie: I'll pray for you, just like I pray for Jessie, I don't want all my sister's down there, I'll miss you from heaven.

Jess: Don't pray for me sweetie, I'll send you a post card from my fireside table. That's all I get, people yelling at me, angry because I'm some kind of criminal monster or those that pray for me, like I've got some disease that needs cured.

Angie: You think I'm not ridiculed for being religious? Do you really think I'm blind to how people roll their eyes if I bring up the bible? You think I can't turn on a television and see the resentment society has for pious people?

Beth: Good! We all agree on something, you're both freaks! Angie, what is it you want from Jess?

Angie: Her happiness, her soul's salvation her -

Jess: My happiness is exactly what you hate! You wouldn't even come to my wedding!

Angie: I'm sorry but I cannot condone two women as a married couple.

Jess: You don't have to condone it! Just accept it! I'm not asking you to sleep with a woman. I just wanted you there. You know most of my friends don't even know I have two sisters.

Angie: That's a shame, I tell everyone about you, I keep your picture at my desk. That Christmas one we had done at Penny's your first year at college.

Jess: I bet you tell all your friends I'm gay.

Angie: Why should I do that?

Jess: Why not hide the blight on your family's good face.

Angie: That is not at all fair, I don't brag about any men Elizabeth fucks eith- !
(She is mortified by what just came out of her mouth.)

Beth: Oh.

Angie: Look at that! Look what you've done. You have me so upset -I -I -

Jess: You reverted back to your natural state. Don't worry, you've been born again and again, I'm sure one more time wouldn't hurt. Christ Ange, I just wanted you at the wedding, I never expected to get you in a bride's maids dress. My sexuality is part of me, part of what makes me different from Lizzy, from you. When you can't admit that, you might as well not admit I exist. Do you even tell them I work at a woman's health clinic?

Angie: I don't even like to think of that. To think of what you -you -do.

Jess: I'm a receptionist Ange. Is it the answering phones what bothers you or the paper work? Cause I gotta say I don't like that paper work much either.

Beth: I asked for one thing you wanted from her. Is your job that important to you?

Jess: No, I guess not. The wedding is my choice, that's more important.

Beth: I don't have a time machine handy, we can't redo your wedding now, so what do you want she can give you now?

Jess: Come over for dinner and actually talk with Grace.

Angie: I couldn't watch- that- that -

Jess: You couldn't watch us eat dinner? Grace chews with her mouth closed.

Angie: It's not that, but your relationship.

Jess: You don't want to watch two people that love each other? Is that what bothers you? Love? Jesus was really against that love stuff, wasn't he?

Angie: Not the love, the sexual acts of -

Jess: I did not have sex at my wedding! We don't haul out the strap ons for dinner parties! I've never forced anyone to watch that! I don't recall you and your husband doin' it at the alter either. Is that your entertainment for Thanksgiving? Talk about stuffin' that turkey.

Angie: I'm not saying that you would force me to watch- I'm just saying -Oh I don't know what I'm saying anymore.

Jess: I've been with Grace for fifteen years! That's longer than Lizzy can hold on to a pet!

Beth: Hey now, let's not go there.

Jess: A gay relationship that lasts is better than a straight one that fails, isn't it?

Angie: I pray for her too.

Beth: Don't start praying for me, I'm just a very busy woman this isn't the time in my life right now.

Jess: By the time you're ready for a husband your ovaries will be dust. I'll never be an aunt.

Angie: What do you suddenly have some desire for family values?

Jess: I've always wanted to be an aunt.

Angie: An aunt? For what reason? To molest a child.

Jess: I'm a lesbian not a priest!

Angie: What if I end up pregnant? You'd just tell me to abort it.

Jess: You're never having a kid! You have to open your legs for that, besides I'm not pro-abortion dumb ass! No one is!

Beth: (To her mother) I am, you should've had two.

Angie: What was that?

Beth: Nothing.

Jess: It's the choice I defend not the abortion itself! I'd love a world without abortion! And one without rape to get us there, but I always suggest adoption first- no matter what. Grace and me want to adopt. We have a little trouble because of narrow minded people like you!

Angie: Your people protest and picket our church on Sunday mornings, they flip us the -the bird as you'd say, while the congregation departs -

Jess: My people? I have people? You guys' invented protests! Your kind is at my place of work every other week picketing and harassing scared little girls that are in trouble! Your kind even protest at funerals for soldiers because you condemn their lives, the life they gave for your freedom.

Angie: That wasn't Christianity- That was one group of nut jobs. That was more of a cult than a church. What about your flags and your parades?!

Jess: Or your crosses, and those dumb fish outlines on the backs of cars. What's that even supposed to mean?

Angie: You see! You don't even try to understand the faith.

Jess: Have you ever tried gay sex?

Angie: No -never.

Jess: Then how are you trying to understand me? Mom had that rule! You can't say you don't like something unless you've tried it.

Angie: That was at the dinner table!

Jess: It doesn't matter where! Same principal. Instead, you're out there holding banners up God hates fags, and repent sinners of flesh and -

Angie: I wasn't there! I've never held a picket sign in my life!

Jess: Neither have I! I got to admit I have flipped you off a few times. But you still do what you can to stop progress, you still ram your heels into the ground and stay stubbornly back in nineteen fifty-three.

Angie: How? What do I do to stop you?

Jess: You vote for the Conservatives.

Angie: I do not.

Jess: Lying does not become you.

Angie: I haven't voted on the issue since you were married. I stopped voting eight years ago.

Beth: There hasn't been a decent candidate in twenty.

Jess: Voting meant so much to you. You did all that government stuff in school. What stops you?

Angie: You. I don't want to be a part of making your life harder. I do love you, whether you're damned or not, you'll still be my baby sister.

Jess: But your husband the deacon, he protests an awful lot.

Angie: Not against gays, no. I won't let him, he respects my wishes on that.

Jess: You can't keep him away from my clinic?

Angie: No, I can't. His first wife -she had an abortion - she didn't tell him about it-till after- it destroyed him.

Beth: He was married before?

Jess: How the hell can a divorcee be a deacon? Your church never heard of practice what you preach?

Angie: It was a biblical motive for a divorce, the congregation accepted that, and they were kind enough to accept me. His wife committed a sin that he could not live with. He wasn't given an option she just decided they weren't ready to be parents. God forgives sins, all you have to do is ask.

Jess: If I sin, I'll ask to be forgiven.

Angie: But you do -

Jess: I don't see love as a sin! And if God sees love as a sin, I'd rather burn in hell.

Angie: That won't be a problem.

Jess: Fine! I accept that. Don't you get that? If God is anything like you think it is I want to burn in hell, I'll be happier with Satan, than with a narrowminded God like that.

Angie: All I want is your happiness. (There should be an awkward silence as they realize they've come to an agreement)

Jess: You should know we don't do many abortions any more. With the morning after and all -and no one ever likes doing them. No one gets a kick out of it. Not at any trimester, it's never easy for a woman, once she knows - she is -you know.

Angie: It can be hard on a man too. Maybe my husband does get a little over zealous at making your life difficult, but he has his reasons. Good or not.

Jess: Never knew that. That had to be awful, losing your chance at parenthood before you knew you had it- I'm sorry that happened to him, that wasn't fair.

Angie: I suppose there are many things in life that aren't fair. You should know.

Beth: Can we do this? Can you two put your wings away? Left and right, and maybe act like people? Maybe even act like sisters?

Angie: I think so.

Jess: It's worth a shot.

Beth: Can we talk about out what happens with mom?

Jess: Yeah. I guess so. (She takes her mother's hand.) We have one thing in common, we all have a great mother.

Angie: That, we do, we are both lucky to have her and you Elizabeth. (She takes her mother's other hand.) You know it's against my views to let her die.

Jess: Yes, we know.

Angie: But I don't think it was against her views, I think she would want to pass on. I say we stop the oxygen.

Beth: Mom told me once-

Jess: What? Are you kidding me? You want to kill your own mother? How can you play a part in the murder of the woman that raised you?

Angie: If I were in her state that would be my wish, do on to others as you would have done to you.

Beth: She said to me-

(As the two begin to argue again, they can get creative using mom as a puppet.)

Jess: Don't start quoting biblical shit to me! I wish it was you, then I'd have no problem pulling the plug.

Beth: You know you don't mean that.

Jess: She wants to kill our mother.

Beth: Please listen to-

Angie: She wouldn't have wanted to live like this, Beth knows it too! You know that, she was always so independent.

Jess: Yet you can claim a fetus that was created by a rape deserves the chance to grow up being resented by its own mother, not to mention passing along the genetics of the sicko, that rapists-

Angie: You don't know that rapists' child. You don't know how they hated to be dependent on anyone - I knew mom!

Jess: Give me a break, you can't actually be that stupid.

Angie: Stupid? Now she's calling me stupid.

(The flat line beep is heard. The women stop arguing and look back at their mother as alarms go off in the room. It is up to the director whether the lines are pulled out by the bickering sisters or mom just dies.)

Beth: I hope you're both satisfied. You two can plan the funeral- I'll see you there!
(As she walks out the doctor is racing in, she puts out her hand with the DNR orders and physically stops him) Do not resuscitate!

(Lights Out as Beth storms out. Angie and Jess realize what has happened.)

I hope that was an enjoyable way to kill some time.

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