

Life Support

By Hilary Mackelden

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DEDICATION

*To Caroline Mazzey and Barbara Elsborg, with humble thanks
for your support, encouragement and inspiration.*

Ladies, I am in your debt.

STORY OF THE PLAY

With just two days to Christmas, all demons are completely swamped with work and cannot take on more. However, Lucy Farr and her assistant Bea L. Zaybub may have to. Their problem is Pauline Salmon, a hard-bitten businesswoman who has been one of Lucy's finest subjects. But the new pastor, Rev. Ledbetter, is praying hard for Pauline as he struggles to make his church viable once again.

Meanwhile, bad boy Jamie is trying to turn over a new leaf. Judgmental Pauline treats him badly and in retaliation, he steals from her shop. Escaping, he is run down by the mall's Santa sleigh and ends up in a coma on life support.

Lucy, still able to communicate with Jamie, makes him an offer he cannot refuse: keep Pauline from succumbing to the pastor's efforts between now and Christmas Eve or spend the next five hundred years burning in the fire pits of hell.

As Jamie tries to do the job, he learns that not everything is as simple as it looks. With the Christmas deadline approaching, Jamie, Rev. Ledbetter, Pauline, and others are forced to face a few home truths of their own.

This holiday play is unique in that two demons are characters, but the Christmas message that God loved us enough to send his only son, is just as reaffirming as ever.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

3 m, 5 w, 1 flexible

LUCY FARR: The devil.

BEA L. ZEBUB: Her assistant.

MARTIN LEDBETTER: New pastor dedicated to saving a dying church.

KASEY: Martin's wife and a doctor at the hospital.

ALF: Adult man playing Santa in the mall.

JAMIE JOHNSON: A 19-year-old man trying to reform.

GLORIA JOHNSON: Good-time girl and Jamie's mom.

PAULINE SALMON: President of Gaston Chamber of Commerce. Owns a perfume shop in the mall.

OFFICER SMITH: Local police officer. (*Written as a woman but can be played by a man.*)

Synopsis of Scenes

Act I

Scene 1: Morning, Dec. 22. The underworld, then an alley behind a mall.

Scene 2: A short time later. Pauline's perfume shop in the mall.

Scene 3: That evening. A hospital room.

ACT II

Scene 1: The next morning. The perfume shop.

Scene 2: The hospital room.

Scene 3: Perfume shop, that evening.

Scene 4: Christmas Eve morning. The hospital.

Scene 5: Christmas day. The hospital.

ACT I
Scene 1

(BEFORE RISE: Hell. The stage is in darkness. SFX: Bangs, chains clattering, anguished screams, maniacal laughter continue throughout the scene. A SPOTLIGHT shines on LUCY FARR and BEA L. ZEBUB. Lucy is mature, professional. Bea is younger, confident, insolent. Both wear black and/or red.)

BEA: You wanted to see me, Lucy?

LUCY: I need someone in Gaston.

BEA: Not me. I'm on Individual Life Destruction this month. You wouldn't believe how much they expect of me.

LUCY: This is bigger than I.L.D., Bea. This is Church Prevention. It's the duty of every demon in hell to support Church Prevention.

BEA: I'm not qualified. I missed the training course. Anyway, I'm busy.

LUCY: It's just for a couple of days, until I can find someone more permanent. Everyone is so tied up until after the 25th.

BEA: Couldn't you do it yourself? If there's no one else?

LUCY: No. I'm swamped. In the next week I've two major earthquakes, a war in the Middle East, a flood in Brazil and a famine in Africa.

BEA: Doesn't sound too bad.

LUCY: In mid-December? It's my busiest time. Before I even start I have to organize drunken fights, credit card temptation, overindulgence. Not to mention family get-togethers.

BEA: I love December.

LUCY: I'm stretched too thinly to give Gaston's church the attention it deserves. I need someone to look after it until after Chri – *(Gags.)* after Chri – *(Gags.)* after December 25th.

BEA: Just call it X-mas and be done with it.

LUCY: X-mas? (*Smiles cruelly.*) I like it. Now if I can just get someone to take care of this job in Gaston, all will be well.

BEA: Church Prevention's a big job. If you want my opinion, you should have started it before the busy season got going.

LUCY: I did. Finished it too, I thought. The place hasn't had a congregation worth mentioning for years, and none at all for the last eighteen months. It's dead.

BEA: Good.

LUCY: The diocese was ready to sell. The Chamber of Commerce was raising money to buy the land and extend the shopping mall.

BEA: What happened?

LUCY: Sneaky, underhand tactics, that's what. The last-ditch efforts of a desperate deity. The old pastor retired. A new man's come.

BEA: Old, new, what's the difference?

LUCY: This one's absolutely crawling with faith and optimism. If we're not careful, he'll spread infection.

BEA: Why worry? Soul for soul, you always win nine to one.

LUCY: Because I'm not as choosy as Him. All anyone has to do to come to me, is be born. He, on the other hand, demands you make a conscious decision. Choose Him deliberately.

BEA: Nine out of ten don't. What's your problem?

LUCY: I grieve for the one. (*Starts an oration.*) I have a dream. I dream of a time when all people are safe from Him. When his influence is but a distant memory. I dream of cities freeing themselves from His shackles... (*Clears her throat, embarrassed.*) I have a bad feeling. This new pastor's different. He doesn't hide himself away. He goes out into the town. And – he prays. For the people. Their futures. (*Shudders.*) Their leaders.

BEA: Oh, that's low. Targeting the leaders, that's downright dirty.

LUCY: He's got the President of the Chamber of Commerce in his sights. One of my best subjects, and he's got his grubby little prayers all over her.

BEA: Any danger she'll succumb?

LUCY: *(Nods.)* Humans are so fragile. But it gets worse. According to Command, Madam President will only be around for two more days.

BEA: You mean ...?

LUCY: At 9:55 a.m. on December 24th.

BEA: How? *(Eagerly.)* Will it be bloody? Dramatic?

(LUCY glares at HER.)

BEA: *(Cont'd.)* Oh come on. She hardly looks as if she's about to expire in her bed.

LUCY: Command is not specific on the details. They do so enjoy their cryptic puzzles. All they said was, "At 9:55 a.m., December 24th, Pauline Salmon, President of Gaston Chamber of Commerce, will no longer be of this world."

BEA: Seems clear enough.

LUCY: So are that pastor's intentions. He's only after one thing.

BEA: His sort always are.

LUCY: Try telling her that. They never learn. You warn them and warn them, then a sweet-talking enemy agent comes along and they hand him their souls on a plate. Well, he's not getting this one. She's mine. But she needs help.

BEA: Not me.

LUCY: I don't think you grasp the seriousness of the situation. It's desperate. Come with me, I'll show you.

(SHE takes BEA'S arm and steers her away from CS. The LIGHTS come up to reveal an alley behind Gaston Mall. It is uninviting, full of boxes, crates and garbage. SL is a delivery entrance into the mall. SR leads to a road. A sign stage right reads: "Pedestrian access to St Barnaby's Church." Bea and Lucy stand aside and watch as MARTIN, a clergyman, enters SL. He wears a coat and carries a box. In one hand he holds leather gloves. Wearily, he sits on a crate. He puts the box down, puts the gloves on top of it and does not notice when one glove falls to the floor.)

End of Freeview

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