

Peace of Mind

A one act play

By David Lohrey

CAST OF CHARACTERS

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JAMES BRADLEY: A well-preserved middle-aged guy who's been around. In full-uniform, or a coat and tie.

MRS. CHARLOTTE JEAN WILSON: Elderly, statuesque woman in her late sixties, who is only sure things will go right when she is in charge.

MRS. MARGARET ("MAGGIE") DUNNING: the type of woman who does not scare easily; elderly, but well put together.

MONIQUE CHAMBERS: Late thirties; has lived alone for too long and it shows.

MISS LEE: An old, frail woman in her eighties.

SCENE: Takes place in a sparsely furnished hall located in the basement of a Methodist Church in the suburbs of a small Southern city. It is autumn, not too long ago.

TIME: It is the present.

At Rise: Speaker stand at podium, as ladies sit on folding chairs. A table to the side is set with refreshments.

BRADLEY

Well, then, ladies, if there are no more questions.... Yes, Ma'am? The lady on the far right. May I have your name, please?

MRS. WILSON

You sure may. Charlotte Wilson. Mrs. Chester S., General.

BRADLEY

Colonel, ma'am. Lieutenant Colonel. But thanks for the promotion.

MRS. WILSON

You deserve one, Colonel, for all the work you're doing. You really do.

BRADLEY

I appreciate that, ma'am.

MRS. WILSON

What I wanted to ask...Oh, I'm sure it'll seem like a stupid question.

BRADLEY

The only stupid question is the one not asked. You go right ahead. Shoot.

MRS. WILSON

You know how they're always talking about...well, I'll give you a for instance: just last week, I reckon it's been...well, anyway, they had a panel of top scientists on, and they were talking about the increased chance of nuclear war. Did you see that, Colonel?

BRADLEY

There have been so many, uh....

MRS. WILSON

Well, they had a couple of experts on there, and they all swore up and down that this new missile defense system could trigger a third world war on account of the treaties we signed with the Russian. So, I was just wondering....

BRADLEY

Ma'am....

MRS. WILSON

...They were so...

BRADLEY

...If you'll just let me...

MRS. WILSON

...confident and all.

BRADLEY

You are absolutely right. I know just the types you mean. They are all over the place, you know, in Washington. I'll let you in on a little secret, though, ladies. Within ten years, through the efforts of President Reagan, the United States will have a defensive shield to protect us from a surprise missile attack. In the meantime – and that's why I'm here today, ladies – we must not allow the peaceniks and communist sympathizers succeed in driving our nuclear forces out of Europe. These so-called experts.... Sure, they'll tell you they've got it all figured out, but where are they going to be when the Soviet army...?

(Loud noise off; the door swings open. MISS LEE enters, wearing her nightgown, house slippers, and a fine hat.)

MISS LEE

Steven? I say, Steven, are you here?

MRS. WILSON

Oh, my goodness. Verna, honey! For heaven's sakes, what in the world are you doing out...here?

MISS LEE

I'm looking for that son of mine.

MARGARET

Goodness gracious.

MRS. WILSON

Maggie.

MISS LEE

Been expecting him now...

MRS. WILSON

...Hadrn't you better...

MISS LEE

...He called and said he'd be in today, so I went on down to the station. I've been waiting there all morning. You know how fond he is of your cookies, Charlotte Jean, so I thought he might have stopped in here for a spell.

MRS. WILSON

Uh, ladies? Won't one of you get a chair for Miss Lee?

MARGARET

For crying out loud. Won't somebody please just take her home.

MISS LEE

I told him to come directly to the station and wait for me at the old carriage stop.

MARGARET

I never heard such nonsense.

MRS. WILSON

(To MONIQUE:)

Would you mind, honey? Would you be kind enough, dear, to call over to the Lee place?

MONIQUE

Yes, of course.

MRS. WILSON

Now don't alarm Estelle. Just tell her how...

MARGARET

I expect Estelle'll know what to do, Charlotte.

(MONIQUE exits)

MISS LEE

He would have sent word if his train had been delayed. I just know he would.

BRADLEY

Anything I can do, uh, ladies? I'd be more than happy....

MRS. WILSON

I clear forgot all about you, Colonel. I am so sorry. Colonel Bradley, this is Miss Verna Mable Lee. Verna, honey, I'd like you to meet Mister...I mean, [Colonel...](#)

BRADLEY

Bradley, ma'am. Lieutenant Colonel James Bradley.

(Taking MISS LEE by the arm. To MISS LEE:)

You don't look too steady there.

MISS LEE

(Wrenching free)

I would be if you'd turn me loose.

BRADLEY

(To MRS. WILSON:)

Is the little lady all right?

MRS. WILSON

Just fine, thank you, Colonel. Miss Lee was the first widow of World War II to come out of Wyatt County. Her husband was lost fighting over in France. My husband was killed in Korea, serving with General MacArthur against the Chinese Communists. Now, Monique's husband...

(MONIQUE reenters; WILSON looks to her for an answer.)

MONIQUE

(Talking as she walks into the room)

I let that phone ring at least twenty times....

MRS. WILSON

Honey, you don't mind now, do you? We were just saying how we lost our husbands, and I was about to say that your Robert -

MONIQUE

Yes?

MRS. WILSON

Robert was killed outside Saigon, isn't that right, dear. In a helicopter crash?

BRADLEY

I'm very sorry to hear that, ma'am, I truly am.

MONIQUE

Well, it wasn't your fault.

MRS. WILSON

Miss Lee is the founding member and past president of the Wyatt County War Widows' League, a direct descendent of the original War Widows' League, which next to the Daughters of the American Revolution, is the oldest organization of its kind in the entire United States, bar none. And, well, we are just real proud of Miss Lee. Perhaps, Verna, you'd like to say a few...

MISS LEE

You sure can talk, Charlotte Jean.

BRADLEY

Oh, now I thought that was real interesting.

MISS LEE

Who the devil is he?

MRS. WILSON

The Colonel's come to ask our endorsement, Verna. All the way from Washington to ask our permission to use the War Widows' League on a petition to the President of the United States. Can you imagine that?

MISS LEE

The president of what?

MRS. WILSON

America, honey. The President of America.

MISS LEE

I thought he was dead.

MRS. WILSON

The new one, dear. The new President.

MISS LEE

Never heard of him. My husband used to say, "When they come to you, they want; when you go to them, you want."

BRADLEY

Your husband was a wise man, ma'am, because I do want something...

MISS LEE

...I knew it.

BRADLEY

...something, ladies, only I am not selling....

MISS LEE

...Well, Mr. President of the United States, you've caught me on a fine day. My boy is coming home. So you go right ahead and pitch the ball.

BRADLEY

It's a public statement, ma'am. Nothing official. I'm here strictly in a civilian capacity. Our supporters are solely interested in keeping the American public informed of the facts pertaining to the recent summit between our President and the Secretary General of the Soviet Union. Your political influence is vital to stopping the whole surrender of American nuclear forces to Communist...

...fiddlesticks.
MISS LEE

BRADLEY
...aggression. How's that, ma'am?

MISS LEE
Good heavens. You sound just like Paul McCartney.

BRADLEY
I don't believe I follow you there, ma'am.

MISS LEE
McCartney, McCartney. That perspiring so-and-so on the television.

BRADLEY
I believe you've lost me there, ma'am.

MARGARET
That's McCarthy, Verna. You're thinking of Joe McCarthy.

MISS LEE
There's been no President named Joe. No, not Joe.

MARGARET
Joseph, dear. Joseph McCarthy. And he wasn't the President.

MISS LEE
Well, I didn't vote for him.

MARGARET
Nobody did, silly. He wasn't running. He was holding hearings...

BRADLEY
...Ladies, if you'd just bear with me for a mo...

MRS. WILSON
...Attention, ladies. Let's give the Colonel our undivided attention.

BRADLEY
I appreciate that, thank you. Before I get down to reading the Declaration itself, uh, I think it only right to apprise you of the, uh, really impressive list of distinguished individuals and groups, organizations like your own, from

around the world, which have chosen to join us. Now, these, ladies, I've specifically chosen, because there's been a lot of talk about the folks in Europe not supporting our policies.

(MISS LEE gets up, begins to search the room)

MARGARET

(Gesturing and pointing)

...Charlotte. CHARLOTTE.

MRS. WILSON

Verna! Verna Lee, honey, where in the dickens...?

MISS LEE

...I feel a draft.

MONIQUE

(Offering her sweater)

Here, please, take it. I always feel a bit on the warm-side anyway.

MARGARET

I'd swear I'm losing my mind. Didn't I hear you say you called down to Miss Lee's house?

MONIQUE

Yes, that's what I said, but I couldn't get an answer.

MARGARET

I came down here to listen to the Colonel. Now she's just plain wasting our time.

MRS. WILSON

Stop making such a fuss, Maggie.

MARGARET

That's easy enough for you to say. She's not your...

MRS. WILSON

Just hush. That has nothing to do with it.

MARGARET

I won't. Making fools of us all. Why won't you admit it?

MRS. WILSON

Colonel, then, won't you continue?

BRADLEY

As I was saying...uh.... Ladies? Why don't I just go straight ahead and read the published declaration as it appeared last Wednesday in the New York Times. And I quote:

“We, the signators, direct an urgent call to the Governments and parliaments of all NATO countries to prevent the realization of the Nuclear Weapons Anti-Proliferation Treaty. What is at stake is nothing less than the political freedom of western civilization as a whole. We see the acute danger, that the ability of the West to defend itself is being irreversibly negotiated away for the sake of short-term political expediencies.”

MISS LEE

I can't hear a word you're saying, Steve. If you are to have the slightest chance in the state competition, you are going to have to speak up.

MONIQUE

Oh my!

MARGARET

Monique, exactly who did you talk to when you called over...?

MONIQUE

Not a blessed soul. And I let it ring over thirty times.

MRS. WILSON

Yes, well, I expect Estelle'll be along directly.

MARGARET

If all he wants is our endorsement, I say, let's give it to the poor man. Better than making him start all over again.

BRADLEY

Maybe I ought to comeback some other time.

MRS. WILSON

We'll have none of that, Colonel. You've come all this way. Isn't that right, girls?

MONIQUE

I think it just right and proper for us to listen to everything the Colonel's got to say.

BRADLEY

The removal of the tactical striking force would eliminate -

MISS LEE

(Out of her seat; Coaching)

Eye contact, son. And don't eat your words.

(BRADLEY doesn't know what to do)

MISS LEE(cont'd)

Go on now. Pick it up.

BRADLEY

would eliminate the capability of NATO to strike deep into enemy territory, and thus remove a powerful deterrent to Soviet aggression. The military effect of this, combined with the removal of the cruise missiles from Western Europe would be disastrous. Territorial aggression has been the centerpiece of Russian policy since the Tsars. Not only do we risk ultimate defeat in battle, but we endanger the lives –

MISS LEE

But also.

BRADLEY

Pardon me?

MISS LEE

"Not only, but also." If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times. Balance. You've got to have it, or the whole thing won't hang together.

BRADLEY

Ma'am?

MISS LEE

(Moving on MRS. WILSON:)

Charlotte Jean, this is exactly what I told you would happen when you all decided to stop teaching Latin.

BRADLEY

Yes, ma'am.

MISS LEE

(Turns quickly to BRADLEY)

And don't be so quick to agree, son. What kind of lawyer are you going to make if you're always agreeing with everything people say?

BRADLEY

Yes. Yes, I see. I understand...what you mean. Uh, I'm sorry, Mrs. Wilson, but I really don't think there's much point in continuing.

MARGARET

Let's just serve the punch and be done with it. I for one have had enough of this.

MONIQUE

There's no call for that kind of talk. We are still in church, even if it is only the basement.

MRS. WILSON

You're nearly finished, aren't you, Colonel? I would appreciate it, sir.

BRADLEY

If you say so, ma'am.

(HE finds his place)

Denuclearization would bring into effect the overwhelming conventional superiority of our adversaries. If advocates of the proposed treaty speak about

BRADLEY

a subsequent arms reduction agreement in the conventional area, it must be noted that anything less than a 6-to-1 asymmetric conventional disarmament would bring about the irreversible defenselessness of Western Europe. Russia would quickly reach its long term goal – to conquer the rest of Europe without the need to fire a shot.

MISS LEE

(To MONIQUE)

What did you say your name was honey? I don't believe we've met.

MONIQUE

(A loud whisper)

Monique. Monique Chambers.

MISS LEE

(Inappropriately loud)

That's my son up there. You'd never guess it, though, would you?

(Less directly to MONIQUE now)

Such a quiet one. Looks so much like his father. Ha! Such a mess. Called him Stinky for years, 'til the boys in the neighborhood started to tease him. Steven. Now that's a much finer name. Don't you think? A fine name. I can smell that odor even now as I'm talking. It used to just fill the house. It's a unique smell, that. I really don't know how he managed it with those little fingers. That's what was so funny. How he could take those diapers off. But he always did. And just rub that all over. On to his little face, into his hair. Oh, my, into the...He even got it into his eyelashes. His eyelashes. Can you believe it? You know, I think he

even put some into his mouth. Ha, ha, ha! He ate it. Isn't that nasty? And I believe I was down...that's right! I was at the kitchen sink. And I smelled something. And I looked and looked... you know... for something on the floor. I'm telling you, I had to open the windows. And do you know where that little stinker was? He was all the way upstairs in his play pen. His monkey cage, his father used to call it. And he had his pants off, and his diapers. Just standing there, all by himself, stark naked, and the biggest grin on his face. Oh, he was having a ball.

(There's a loud knocking at the door)

MARGARET

Estelle! Thank God!

MRS. WILSON

Well, then. Ladies, shall we...

MISS LEE

(Moving toward BRADLEY)

Steve.

MRS. WILSON

Miss Lee, honey. Margaret!

MISS LEE

(Advancing, with outstretched hands)

Don't leave me, Steve.

BRADLEY

Ma'am, hadn't you better go back...

MISS LEE

Steven.

MRS. WILSON

Come along now, Miss Lee.

MISS LEE

Kiss me, Steven.

BRADLEY

I'm not Steve, lady. My name's Jim. Jim Bradley, ma'am. Now you better...

MISS LEE

Don't be like that, son. Your mama loves you.

MARGARET

You got no business coming down here. Go home.

MISS LEE

Now, Steve. Give your mama some sugar.

MARGARET

For Heaven's sake, have you no decency?

MONIQUE

(Taking MISS LEE by the arm)

Miss Lee. Miss Lee, now, Steven's at home. Your son's at home waiting for you. He's back in his room, honey, waiting for his supper.

MISS LEE

(Pulling away. Desperately to BRADLEY:)

Please!

BRADLEY

(Helpless)

LADY.

MONIQUE

(Leading MISS LEE out)

I saw your Steven just this morning. He must be very excited to be back. Don't you worry yourself now.

(MONIQUE and MISS LEE exit)

MARGARET

Hallelujah!

MRS. WILSON

(Looks to Heaven)

Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!

MARGARET

I should have known.

BRADLEY

Good Lord. She must be out of her mind.

MRS. WILSON

She's a war victim, Colonel Bradley. A widow. I told you, she founded the Wyatt County Chapter of the War Widow's League after her husband was killed in the landings...

BRADLEY

...That's not Steve, is it?

MARGARET

My husband, Colonel. Steve was my husband... and her son.

BRADLEY

I'm sorry.

MRS. WILSON

He disappeared...

MARGARET

...Missing in Action.

MRS. WILSON

She always believed he would come home some day.

MARGARET

We'd just married. Steven wasn't but seven years old when he lost his father, one of the first officers to land on D-Day. He was determined to join the Army. And he looked magnificent that day.

MRS. WILSON

Colonel, I believe we've imposed on you long enough.

MARGARET

His mama insisted on accompanying us to the station.

MRS. WILSON

May I walk you out, Colonel?

BRADLEY

I'd like that. Thank you, ma'am.

(BRADLEY and MRS. WILSON exit. MARGARET remains on stage alone, lost in reverie, as LIGHTS fade.)

END OF PLAY

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