WAR

LETTERS

BY J. ROBERT WILKINS

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WAR LETTERS
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SETTING: The play takes place in the present. STAGE LEFT are a small kitchen table and a single kitchen chair. CENTER STAGE are a small rug and a bookcase filled with books. A teddy bear leans against the bookcase. STAGE RIGHT are an armchair and end table with a floor lamp behind.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
KAREN .................................................. A woman in her mid-thirties.
LILLIAN ............................................... Karen's elderly mother-in-law.
MARY .................................................... Karen’s thirteen year old daughter.
WAR LETTERS

LIGHTS UP: KAREN sits at the kitchen table, LILLIAN sits in the armchair and MARY sits on the rug. (NOTE: If possible, it would add a great deal to the play to light each area of the stage separately, bringing up the lights on each character as she speaks.)

KAREN: Jack got his orders today. He is going overseas. He'll be gone six months. I guess that's not so long. We've never been that far apart before.

LILLIAN: Karen called today. Jack is going overseas. I had hoped his regiment would stay at home. But I guess they are needed.

MARY: Daddy got some kind of letter today. He has to go over to Europe for a while. Mom says we'll be just fine.

KAREN: Jack has never been gone this long before. I can't imagine how Mary and I will cope without him. But I'm sure we'll manage. We'll be fine.

MARY: Grandma phoned last night. Daddy talked to her for a long time. I think he was upset.

LILLIAN: I think I always knew this day would come. I remember when Jack first told me he was going to join the forces. He was so happy, so proud. His father would have been proud as well. Lloyd had fought in the infantry in World War II and in Korea. He was proud to have served his country in a time of need. In some strange way, I think Jack needed to follow in his father's footsteps.

KAREN: I remember our first date. I met Jack at the Riverside Dance Hall the week before. Jack and I seemed to click right from the start. He asked me out for the next Friday. We went to a movie. That's when I found out he was in basic training. I didn't know much about the armed forces then. We fell in love very quickly. I never thought much about the possibility of Jack going to war. We were so in love nothing else seemed to matter. Being young and in love helps you fight off life's monsters.

MARY: Daddy's leaving in two days. He took me to a movie last night. It was just the two of us. Afterwards we went to McDonald's. Then we stopped at the empty parking lot by the school and he let me drive the car. He said that I did pretty good for the first time.

LILLIAN: Jack called this morning. He leaves tomorrow. I told him to be careful. He said he would. He said he loved me.
KAREN: Jack left today. I tried not to cry at the airstrip, but I couldn't help myself. Mary and I didn't talk much on the way home. The house seems strange, as if it is too big. I don't want to go to sleep tonight. I am sure the bed will seem too big.

MARY: (Writes a letter.) Daddy's been gone a week already. This is the second letter I am writing to him. I never realized how much there is to tell him.

KAREN: (Reads a letter.) We got a letter from Jack today. He says he is fine. The weather there is cold. Colder than it is here. He is in some general briefing sessions now but expects to get shipped into the "hot zone" within a few days. He says he will enjoy the warmer temperatures there. (Puts the letter down.) That's what I love about Jack. No matter what, he keeps his sense of humor. He has always made me laugh. I remember the time we locked the keys in the car up at the lake. It was getting dark. I was very worried about what might happen to us. But not Jack. He only saw the humor in the situation and he soon had me smiling, too. Life is one big adventure for Jack. He never panics. I guess that is why he is such a good soldier.

LILLIAN: I remember when Lloyd went overseas the first time. We had only been married a month. I wanted to wait but Lloyd insisted we get married before he went. I suppose I was afraid that I would be a widow before I got to be a wife.

MARY: (Writes a letter.) The dog next door barked all night again. I couldn't get to sleep at all. Sometimes I wish it would run out on the road and get hit by a car. Well, not really. It is kind of cute and everything. I would feel bad if something happened to it. I just wish the owners would take better care of him. School is pretty good. I like all of my teachers this year. Especially Mr. Tait. I am really enjoying math for the first time because of him. He really seems to know how to get it across to us. Maybe you will be impressed with my report card this year. I will be sure to send you a copy. Actually, I guess I had better go do some homework for tomorrow. (Thinks.) I love you, Daddy. I really do miss you a lot.

LILLIAN: (Reads a postcard.) This postcard came today. It is from Jack. He says he is fine. I've never heard of the place in the picture. It looks quite pretty really. I don't suppose it looks like that now. It is hard to imagine that this little piece of paper has come from a place of death and destruction. I wonder what kind of mayhem it has seen. I wonder if Jack saved it from a fiery death. Jack touched this card. These are his words. I hope someone is looking after him.
KAREN: (Writes a letter.) My dearest Jack. It is hard to believe that you have been gone six weeks already. I thought that it would get easier as the time went by, but that is not the case. It is difficult being both mother and father to Mary. (KAREN crumples the letter. She takes another piece of paper, sighs, and writes again.) My dearest Jack. Another week has passed. In less than five months you will be home again. Mary and I are doing fine. We have finished digging up the garden and have all the vegetables stored in the cold room. Mary has been such a big help. She is growing up so quickly. I am sure you will notice a difference in her when you return. We have put all the garden tools away including the lawn mower. I hope we put them all in the right places. I guess we will find out next spring when you go to bring them out. Our snow shovel looks pretty awful. I think Mary and I will go shopping for a new one this weekend. There is no snow in the forecast but you know how quickly the weather can change here. Mary is going to a school dance this Friday night. She has been busy all week deciding what to wear. And, of course, she has a hair appointment right after school on Friday. As you can imagine she seems to be on the phone constantly this past week. I will drive her and a couple of her friends to the school. Then I will pick them up afterwards. She is very excited. (She stops.) Oh, Jack. Why do you have to miss all this?

LILLIAN: (Looks in a shoebox of old letters.) I found these old letters yesterday. These are from Lloyd. When he was in Europe and Korea. I kept them all these years. I don’t know why. (She reads a letter.) My darling Lil. We have stopped to wait for supplies before pressing on. I thought I had better take this opportunity to drop you a note. I don’t know when the next chance will come. The supply troop will pick up our letters. It is getting worse every day here. We keep pressing on into enemy territory. As a result, we are in daily battles. You have to keep your wits about you all the time. Remember Al Stankie from over on Pleasant Street? He was killed yesterday. A sniper got him. But don’t worry. I am very careful. I use all my training and my good common sense. I am determined to come back to you all in one piece. I think about you every day, Lil. You know that old saying “Absence makes the heart grow fonder?” Well, it’s true. I never knew I could miss you as much as I do. (She stops reading and hugs the letter to her breast.)

MARY: (Holds a letter.) I got a letter from Daddy today. A letter all my own. (She reads from the letter.) My dearest Mary. I am sorry I have taken so long to write you personally. As you can imagine, things get pretty hectic here. Most days we don’t have lot of time to ourselves.
But you are always in my thoughts. Mom told me a bit about your school dance. I hope you had a good time. I'll bet you were the prettiest girl there. That's because you've got your mother's looks. I suppose all the boys were after you to dance with them. I remember those days and how all of us boys went ape over the pretty girls. But I am sure you handled them well. I hope you didn't have to use any of those special combat moves I taught you. I can't tell you much about my life here. Security and all of the normal soldier stuff. Some days are better than others. I just have to believe that we are doing some good over here. I really do miss being with you and Mom. I know I probably haven't told you enough when I am home, but I really do love you.  
(She stops and stares at the letter. She hugs the letter to her breast.)

LILLIAN: (She reads another letter.) This is the last letter I ever received from Lloyd. He was in Korea. (She pauses, stares at the letter and reads.) My darling Lil. We are holed up in a small village for the night. It used to be a pretty place I am sure. There is a big market area in the middle of everything, just like in Europe. We are bunking in what used to be a restaurant. From what I can tell there was an outdoor eating area. Kind of like that place down by the lake we used to go to. I wish we could be there now. Those days seem so long ago. When I get home, promise me we'll go back there. I can't wait until this whole mess is over and we are together again. I love you, Lil, and I always will. (She pauses.) I love you, Lil, and I always will. (She strokes the letter.) I love you, Lloyd, and I always will.

KAREN: (Writes a letter.) I spoke with your mother yesterday. She is doing fine. I am sure you know that she is stressed about you being gone, but she seems to be holding up well. She talked quite a bit about your father. I wish I could have known him. She speaks so fondly of him. He seems like such a good man. I am sure that you have some of his qualities. (She stops.) Oh, Jack. I hope I don't end up like your mother. I don't want a shoe box marriage.

MARY: (She hugs her teddy bear.) I caught Mom crying last night. She was writing a letter to Dad. She tried to stop when I came in, but she couldn't help herself. We had a long talk about Daddy being overseas. When I asked her why she was crying, she said that some days being without Daddy gets her down. She seemed frightened, although she tried hard not to show it. She asked me how I felt. I told her that I missed Daddy very much, especially in the evenings. I never realized how safe I felt just knowing that he was in the house. I don't really feel frightened now that he is not here. I guess I feel uncomfortable. Maybe that's how Mom feels. Maybe she's not frightened at all.

End of Script Sample
PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES

ON STAGE, LEFT: Small kitchen table, kitchen chair, letters, pen, stationery, typed letter.

ON STAGE, CENTER: Small rug, bookcase with books, teddy bear, pen, stationery, letter, birthday card, locket.

ON STAGE, RIGHT: Armchair, end table, floor lamp, postcard, shoe box full of old letters, pen, birthday card, stationery or “thank you” card.

LIGHTING

If possible, it would add a great deal to the play to light each area of the stage separately, bringing up the lights on each character as she speaks.
We hope you’ve enjoyed this script sample.

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