

Coconuts and Candles

A one-act play

Synopsis: It's a holiday reunion for the old-timers that served on the Pacific island of Wabu Wabu during World War Two. Johnny and Mitzi exchange bittersweet memories and laughs . . . until they both realize that a certain letter never found its true destination.

Characters

- JOHNNY** Seventies. Grumpy. WW2 veteran.
- MITZI** Seventies. Cheery, kind. Retired nurse.
- SHIRLEY** Seventies. Funny, gregarious. Retired nurse. Southern accent.

The time is 1995, New Year's Eve. The setting is a holiday reunion gathering for the soldiers and military personnel that served on the Pacific island of Wabu Wabu during World War Two. The characters are in a large room, furnished with a few chairs and a table. There are holiday party favors and scattered cups of punch and plates of food.

Hanging in the background is a large banner that reads *Welcome Back, Wabu Wabu!*

If possible, there may be an assortment of other holiday accessories, mistletoe, holiday wreaths, etc. There can also be a few reminders of Wabu Wabu, such as a tiki torch or decorative straw hanging from a table.

At RISE:

As the lights go up, Johnny is sitting in a chair, sipping punch, and SHIRLEY and MITZI have just entered the room, fervently chatting. The typical party noise and general hubbub from the other room are heard as they enter the room.

SHIRLEY

Well, that settles that. You were right, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Huh?

MITZI

We nurses just took a survey of every man here. And almost all of them said they still have a gun! Some of them even carry one in their car!

JOHNNY

What the hell did you expect? They were soldiers. Hell, I have one in *my* car.

MITZI

Johnny!

JOHNNY

Hey, Fremont isn't what it used to be. I need my protection.

SHIRLEY

I'm just surprised a bunch of old veterans are allowed to carry guns like that.

MITZI

You're telling me.

JOHNNY

Well. That's what we do.

(Beat.)

Hey, what was Darwin doing in there? He's not getting drunk, is he?

SHIRLEY

Maybe! Come on, it's a reunion, isn't it? The last time I saw him he was dancing with Betty White.

MITZI

(Laughing.)

Oh, stop it, Shirley! She wasn't Betty White!

SHIRLEY

Damn sure could've fooled me.

JOHNNY

(Grumpily.)

Well . . . keep an eye on him. He's careless when he drinks. Especially during the holidays.

MITZI

What's wrong, Johnny? Why are you in here?

JOHNNY

(Waving hand.)

I'm alright. Just got tired of the loud music.

SHIRLEY

Mitzi, aren't you going to tell him what else you just learned?

JOHNNY

What?

MITZI

Oh, right. I just talked to somebody, Johnny, that remembered *everything* about the war! He said it was Bob Hope that came to Wabu Wabu!

JOHNNY

Oh, Mitzi, no it wasn't! It was George Burns!

MITZI

It was *Bob Hope!*

SHIRLEY

I honestly don't know who it was.

JOHNNY

It wasn't that pansy Bob Hope. It was George Burns. I remember!

MITZI

Oh, you don't remember anything! At our last reunion you couldn't even think of the name of your own commanding officer.

JOHNNY

Huh?

MITZI

See what I mean!

SHIRLEY

Ha!

JOHNNY

(Waving hand in dismissal.)

Ehhhhh

SHIRLEY

Oh, I'm hungry! I'm gonna go try some of that chocolate cake they're serving.

MITZI

Oh, Lord . . .

SHIRLEY

Be right back!

(Exits.)

MITZI

(Suddenly remembering)

Oh, Johnny! *Chocolate cake!*

JOHNNY

Huh??

MITZI

When Bob Hope came, we had that gigantic chocolate cake in the shape of a battleship! Remember?

JOHNNY

Hmmm . . .

MITZI

And it was the same week we had the follies! We did all that work, building the stage, and getting the music together . . . ?

JOHNNY

That was the same week?

(Pause as he thinks.)

I remember that big cake. Lord. Someone there, doing a show. But I could have sworn it was George Burns. No, but wait, maybe he was there at a different time. Maybe Christmas.

(Throws hands up in defeat.)

I don't know!

MITZI

The follies were a hoot! Tommy and all those navy guys dressed up like women! Those grass skirts and makeup!

JOHNNY

I loved that!

MITZI

Bunch of clowns!

(They laugh and laugh. Pause as they look at each other.)

JOHNNY

Fifty years . . . wow.

MITZI

Yep.

JOHNNY

Mitzi, where did all that time go?

MITZI

Johnny . . . tell me, seriously. How is life in Fremont? How are things?

JOHNNY

I'm getting by.

MITZI

Are you still volunteering at the library?

JOHNNY

No. Had to give that up.

MITZI

Oh.

JOHNNY

It got to where I had trouble focusing for long periods of time. I just had to stop. I feel pretty good, overall, I guess.

(Pause. He is more uncomfortable.)

Some of the . . . of the infantry stuff comes back to me time and again.

MITZI

Ohh . . .

JOHNNY

Lots of it, to be honest.

MITZI

How many years has your wife been gone?

JOHNNY

Exactly three.

MITZI

And you're not dating?

JOHNNY

No. I . . . I tried. Sort of.

MITZI

Well, come on. Surely you've got something going on.

JOHNNY

Not a whole lot. Darwin and I play cards, and, you know, we have lunch.

MITZI

You just don't . . . seem happy, Johnny.

JOHNNY

In some ways, my life didn't turn out the way it was supposed to, Mitzi. That's all. Lots of things have happened over the years. I mean, I'm okay. The war . . . well, it really did a number on me.

(Pause.)

But, you know, I got into gardening. I see my grandkids every now and again. When my son isn't too busy with *his* life.

MITZI

Not dating. Tsk-tsk-tsk. You always were mysterious with the women, weren't you?

JOHNNY

Oh, please. Give me a break. You were the one nurse that caught the eye of every soldier in the Pacific.

MITZI

Johnny!

JOHNNY

Mrs. Mitzi, who volunteered to run the follies so she could be around all those officers. Mrs. Mitzi, who was always late for our dates.

MITZI

I am *shocked* at you!

JOHNNY

(Laughing a little.)

Well, it's true.

MITZI

Oh, go jump in the lake.

JOHNNY

Mrs. Mitzi . . . who lit all of those beautiful red candles under that coconut tree that night. For our dinner.

MITZI

Mmmm . . . I remember.

JOHNNY

You called it ‘coconuts and candles.’

(Pause.)

MITZI

What happened to us, Johnny?

(Pause. He is incredulous.)

JOHNNY

What *happened?* I can’t believe you’re asking me this.

MITZI

Why?

JOHNNY

What happened was I left Wabu-Wabu. I got transferred to Midway. *You* stayed there.

MITZI

But what happened?

(Enter SHIRLEY, abruptly.)

JOHNNY

Mitzi, what are you talking about? You *know* what happened.

SHIRLEY

Mitzi, I just told two fellers that you were a widow and now they’re looking for you!

MITZI

Oh, Shirley!

SHIRLEY

Ya’ll come in here and dance! They’re finally playing Glenn Miller! Come on, you’re missing the party!

Oh, goodness . . .

JOHNNY

Why did I come in here?
(Sees her drink.)
Oh, yeah. To get my drink. There it is!

SHIRLEY

Isn't there a bar in there?

MITZI

Yes, but the line is too dang long! Can you believe they ran out of eggnog?
(Sound of loud popping offstage.)

SHIRLEY

Whaa . . . ?

JOHNNY

What's that noise??

MITZI

Fireworks, goofy. It's New Year's Eve!

SHIRLEY

Oh.

MITZI

Mitzi, liven Johnny up and ya'll come in here!

SHIRLEY

Um, okay.

MITZI

(She exits hurriedly with her drink. Pause. JOHNNY and MITZI are still in mild shock.)

Um. Johnny—

MITZI

Mitzi, what were you just talking about? What *happened* to us? You . . .

JOHNNY

(Gets up stormily and paces.)

I *what*?

MITZI

JOHNNY

You never answered my letter! I . . . I poured my heart out to you in that letter! With a flashlight and a tablet and my pen!

MITZI

What??

JOHNNY

I sat on the deck of the James Madison, looking up at the Little Dipper! I wrote it all out! I told you how I felt! And all . . . all for *what?*

(She stands up, stunned.)

MITZI

Johnny . . .? I never got a letter.

(Long, dead pause.)

JOHNNY

Don't tell me that.

MITZI

I didn't. I never received anything. When you shipped off, I . . . I thought that was it. We had that awkward week before you left. You didn't talk.

JOHNNY

(Quietly, absolutely stunned.)

What . . .?

MITZI

I didn't know what to think. And . . . and . . . you *wrote* me? I always wondered why you didn't. But . . .

JOHNNY

I've been wondering for fifty years why you never answered. Why you never wrote back.

(Pause.)

Now I know.

MITZI

Oh, Johnny . . .

JOHNNY

(Standing, pacing in disbelief.)

Mitzi, I've *never* written a letter like that. Never before. Never since.

(Pause.)

I . . . I told you *everything!*

MITZI

Ohhh . . . !

JOHNNY

I know I was such a jackass when it came to face to face communication. But in that letter I told you I'd come back for you after the war! Wherever you were! Wabu Wabu, or your home in New Hampshire. Anywhere!

MITZI

Oh, I can't believe this . . .

JOHNNY

I wrote about that last date we had. The coconuts. The candles. How much that meant to me. I told you how much I loved you!!

MITZI

I never got it! I swear, Johnny! You know how the mail was during the war!

(Sits down, still in disbelief.)

Oh gosh! I'm speechless. There were so many people on Wabu Wabu. There's no telling where that letter wound up!

(Pause.)

Who knows . . . ?

JOHNNY

Who knows, indeed. I'm speechless too.

(Pause as he sets his drink down, begins to exit.)

Hey, I'm gonna go make sure Betty White isn't taking advantage of Darwin.

MITZI

Johnny?

JOHNNY

I just need a minute, Mitzi.

(Exits.)

MITZI

Johnny, wait!!

(She sits alone, confused. Lights fade to black. There is a quick music note, cueing a transition. Lights back up. MITZI and SHIRLEY are standing in the same room, talking. SHIRLEY is holding a party razzle and her drink. MITZI is very, very concerned.)

MITZI

He just walked out, Shirley. And that was—gosh—that was almost a half hour ago! He hasn't come back in yet!

SHIRLEY
Well, was he drunk?

MITZI
No.

SHIRLEY
What happened?

MITZI
Well. Nothing, really. But I'm just worried. He was so distraught.

SHIRLEY
At what?

MITZI
Well. It's a long story.

SHIRLEY
Did you two get into an argument?

MITZI
You aren't going to believe this. But—

(The sounds of gunshots are heard, from outside.)

MITZI
Oh, Lord, not again!!

SHIRLEY
That's just fireworks, Mitzi. What happened?? Tell me!

MITZI
No, listen! Those aren't fireworks! THAT'S A GUN!!

SHIRLEY
Oh! Shoot, maybe that is a gun!

MITZI
Oh heavens!
(Hurries to the door.)

SHIRLEY
Mitzi, don't go out there!

(Enter JOHNNY, abruptly, who bumps into MITZI.)

Whoahh!

JOHNNY

MITZI

Oh, there you are!
(Hugs him tightly.)
You're okay!

SHIRLEY

Johnny, are those guns we're hearing outside?

JOHNNY

What is all this??

MITZI

Shut up and just let me hug you.

JOHNNY

(Laughing slightly, as he hugs her back.)
Well, I'm not going to file a complaint to the War Department or anything.

SHIRLEY

Uh, it's now the *Department of Defense*, goofy. Were those the sounds of guns??

JOHNNY

Actually, those *are* the sounds of guns. Some of the younger veterans are out there trying to be tough guys.

MITZI

Oh! I thought you went outside . . . and did something disastrous.

JOHNNY

Huh? Oh. No! Roy and some of the guys are out there firing off a few rounds up into the air. Crazy. I had to come back inside. They're gonna get us all in trouble.

SHIRLEY

Jeepers Creepers!

JOHNNY

(To MITZI.)
So what gives?

SHIRLEY

Uh, yeah. What's up, Mitzi?

MITZI
Well. Um. Shirley?

SHIRLEY
Yeah?

MITZI
Johnny wrote me a letter.

SHIRLEY
He *what?* When?

MITZI
Oh, sometime around 1943.

JOHNNY
1944.

MITZI
Right. 1944.

SHIRLEY
A letter??

MITZI
Shirley . . .
(Takes the razzle from her hand, swirls it around.)
. . . would you do an old nurse a favor? And go get me a drink?

SHIRLEY
Uh, sure, Mitzi . . . I've got a feeling you've got a lot of 'splaining to do.

JOHNNY
That makes two of us!

SHIRLEY
(Exiting, eying her warily.)
She certainly does! Okay. Be right back!

(SHIRLEY exits. They stare at each other, still stunned.)

MITZI
Johnny. You don't want to know what I thought you did outside.

JOHNNY
I actually *do* want to know!

MITZI

Hush.

(She puts her finger to his lips.)

But what I *now* know is . . . what you did fifty years ago.

(She sighs, still in disbelief.)

And I still can't believe it.

JOHNNY

You can't believe it? How do you think I feel? Thank God for this.

(Points to his drink.)

MITZI

Johnny?

JOHNNY

What?

MITZI

I would have waited for you after the war. I would have. We . . . we had so many things unresolved. So many things that we didn't say. We were so young.

JOHNNY

I know.

MITZI

Just so many things. And yes . . . yes, you *were* a jackass of a communicator.

JOHNNY

That's what you called me that night under the coconuts.

(She laughs and then quickly kisses him.)

JOHNNY

Wow. Mmmm.

MITZI

Wow, indeed.

JOHNNY

Mitzi? Will we have another evening like that? With coconuts and candles?

MITZI

I sure hope so.

JOHNNY

I'll be 75 next month.

MITZI

That means you have a lot of catching up to do.

JOHNNY

Maybe I'll dig out some of my old George and Gracie songs. You know, to celebrate, uh, whatever we're doing here.

MITZI

(Kissing him again)
Um. You mean, *Bob Hope*.

JOHNNY

I mean *George and Gracie*.

(They laugh lightly.)

MITZI

Hey, it's New Year's Eve! What are we still doing in here?

JOHNNY

That's what I want to know!

MITZI

Let's join the party!

(They exit, to the sound of fireworks and the ongoing party, New Years Eve music, etc.)