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Dramatic Publishing

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

REST IN PEACE

By
Pat Cook



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(REST IN PEACE)

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REST IN PEACE
A Play in One Act
For Four Men and Three Women

C H A R A C T E R S

HORACE WILMERDING

NURSE

DOCTOR

HAZEL WILMERDING

MOTHER

MILTON HERBERTS

BASCOMB

PLACE: *Horace's hospital room.*

TIME: *A day in November.*

REST IN PEACE

SCENE: A hospital room -- the epitome of every sick room in America. White walls with no pictures. There are three doors. The door DR is the gateway to the rest of the hospital, the door through which all the characters associated with the sick man enter and exit. Upstage is the closet door. The third door is at L; it leads to the bathroom. The bed is DL and faces the first door. Beside the bed, on the audience side, is a night table; on the table are a telephone, a buzzer, flowers (artificial), and a pitcher of water and glasses. There is also a visitor's chair near the bed.)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: The room is occupied by a single person, the patient, MR. HORACE WILMERDING, a man of very argumentative energies. He is in his late thirties, of average height, a little overweight. He is, as usual, ringing for the nurse as the scene opens.)

HORACE (yelling and ringing). Nurse! Nurse! C'mon, c'mon. (Buzz buzz.) Where are you? There is a sick person in here requiring assistance. Nurse! (Buzz buzz buzz.) Put down the bottle! (Starts talking to himself.) I could've died. I could've died right here. None of them would know. They wouldn't catch on, either, until I didn't pay the bill. (Resumes yelling.) Nurse! Where are you? What do

you have, a union now? (Back to himself.)
I think my throat is going. (Feels throat.)
I only came in for a physical. Three days
ago, I came in for a physical.

(NURSE, a large woman in her forties, enters R
with a small paper cup. She comes to the bed
and stands unnoticed as HORACE continues
his soliloquy.)

HORACE. I was supposed to have been out
yesterday. (Realizing.) They found something
wrong. I know they found something wrong and
won't tell me. A few more tests, they said.
Hospital procedure, they said. I'm dying.
I gotta be. If you're not dying, they tell. If
you're dying, they don't change your flowers.
(Feels flowers.) Plastic. I'm dying. (Turns
and yells right in nurse's face.) Nurse! Oh,
here you are. Card game over?

NURSE. And what, pray tell, does the bedpan king
need now?

HORACE. If you'd have come a little later, you
could've brought a wreath.

NURSE (as if dealing with a small child). You,
contrary to your belief, are not the only patient
I have.

HORACE. Yes, and I'm doing them a medical
service by keeping you in here. I should get
a write-up in the journal.

NURSE. If you have nothing else, your highness . . .

HORACE. I got you in here for a reason.

NURSE (long-suffering). To listen to another of your
tirades on the medical profession? I have other
patients . . .

HORACE (interrupting). Yes, and they can die by
themselves. They don't need your gnarled,

webbed and surgically inaccurate hands working to speed up the process. Now listen closely, I have a little test for you.

NURSE (bored). Oh, Christ!

HORACE (continuing). What is the capital of California?

NURSE (irritated). You got me in here for a geography lesson?

HORACE. Answer it correctly and I'll give you a lump of sugar.

NURSE. Sacramento. Now may I go?

HORACE. Question number two.

NURSE (getting angry). Mr. Wilmerding.

HORACE. Who was the second president of the United States?

NURSE (gritting her teeth). John Adams.

HORACE. I didn't hear you.

NURSE. John Adams, you geek!

HORACE. Don't yell. This is a hospital, you know. That's a rumor I heard. Now for your final question.

NURSE (to herself). Why me?

HORACE. Now this is a toughie. When am I getting out of this hospital?

NURSE. I don't know.

HORACE (getting excited). You always blow that last one, don't you? What do I have to do? Hire a detective?

NURSE. Believe me, if I knew I would tell you. I would pack your bags for you. Now here. (Shoves small cup under Horace's nose.)

HORACE. What's this, rat poison?

NURSE (trying to control herself). It's a sedative. I brought you a sedative.

HORACE. I didn't ask for any sedative. I don't want a sedative.

NURSE. It was a unanimous decision by the nurses.

We took the rest of them.

HORACE. I'm not going to take this pill.

NURSE. You're going to take this pill or I'm going to hit you with a number three desk.

HORACE (thinking). Can I have a glass of water?
(NURSE pours him a glass and hands it to him.)

NURSE. Here. (He takes the pill and swallows.)
And don't try that old trick of putting it under your tongue or I will give it to you in a suppository form. (HORACE swallows again.)

Now, let's have a look. (HORACE opens his mouth and rolls his tongue around.) Fine.
The doctor will be in shortly after your nap.
(Takes the glass and returns it to table.)

HORACE. Nap? What nap? (He suddenly, to his own surprise, yawns.)

NURSE. That nap. (Starts to exit.) And maybe we can get some rest also. (Exits.)

HORACE (yelling). Oh, yeah? I'm going to sleep on the buzzer! (To himself.) Nurse guardian angel! Jeez! (He is now getting groggy.)
I come in here for a stinking physical and I get a barracuda for a nurse. (Yawns.) They won't tell me anything. (He can barely keep his eyes open.) That settles it. I'm going to break out. (He falls asleep. Lights fade out.)

(After a beat, the lights come up again. The setting is the same, except that the buzzer is gone. HORACE slowly wakes, blinks and looks around.)

HORACE. Hmmmm. Still here. Wait, the doctor will be in after my nap. Well, it's after my nap and where's the doctor? I'll buzz them and tell them I'm . . . (He cannot find the buzzer.)
Where's my buzzer? They took my buzzer.

To hell with them, I'll call them on the phone.
(Picks up receiver and listens.) Dead? My
phone is dead? I'm dying; my phone's dead.
That figures. I paid for a phone!

(HORACE jumps out of bed and is about to exit DR
when door opens and HAZEL, his wife, and the
DOCTOR enter. HAZEL is in her early thirties
and attractive. The DOCTOR is also in his
early thirties and rather tall. HAZEL is
staring straight at the bed. Neither of them
see or hear HORACE.)

DOCTOR. Here you are, Mrs. Wilmerding.
(HAZEL sits by the bed, her misty eyes glued
to the sheets.)

HORACE. Just the man I wanted to see. My phone
has been disconnected.

DOCTOR (still talking to HAZEL). Will you need
anything?

HAZEL. No, I . . . I'm all right. I just want to
sit here, by the bed.

HORACE. Peachy. I'm sure you two will be happy
together. Now listen to me, doc. That nurse
in there, King Kong, had my phone disconnected.
Now if you think I'm going to pay for . . .

DOCTOR (oblivious to HORACE). If you need any-
thing, just call. The phone's right over here.

HORACE (shouting). It's been disconnected!

DOCTOR. Wait, I think it's been disconnected.

HORACE. Wish I'd said that.

DOCTOR (trying telephone). Yes, yes, it's dead . . .
I mean . . . not working. I gotta stop doing that.

HAZEL. Don't worry about me, doctor. I've been
prepared for this -- (Looks back at the bed.)
-- since he came to the hospital.

HORACE. Prepared for what? Clean sheets? Why

do you keep staring at the bed?

DOCTOR. He seemed such a nice man.

HORACE. Nice man? Seemed?

DOCTOR. Before he started getting worse.

HORACE. Before he started getting worse? Will you stop staring at the bed? I'm over----
(Stops and feels his chest.) Yeah, I'm over here.
(Slowly he starts realizing that he cannot gain anyone's attention.)

DOCTOR. I have to go down the hall a minute.
Another patient.

HAZEL. I'll just stay here with him if that's all right. (Resumes staring at the bed.) Just to be alone, for a few minutes, with him.

HORACE. Him? Who him? Me him!

DOCTOR. I understand. I'll check back later.
(Starts to exit.) I wish someone had told me about that phone. (HORACE just stands there open-mouthed as the DOCTOR passes him and exits. He looks back at HAZEL. She is sitting in the chair, still staring at the bed.)

HAZEL (after a beat). Oh, Horace.

HORACE. Hazel?

HAZEL. Horace.

HORACE. Hazel.

HAZEL. Horace.

HORACE. Hazel!

HAZEL (forever staring at the bed). We were going to Wisconsin next month.

HORACE (waving). Hazel, can you see me? Can you see me at all?

HAZEL. That's all you talked about.

HORACE. Can you hear me? If you can hear me, knock twice.

HAZEL. Oh, Horace! (She breaks down and cries.)

HORACE. You can't see me? You can't see me.