

# CIVIL WAR DUOS

A Collection of Three Duets

by  
Anne Hughes



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## Midnight Encounter: A Ghost Story

by  
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*(A youngish woman, visibly tired, is vacuuming the carpet. SHE looks longingly at the bed [a desk may be substituted] and after an obvious battle with her drowsiness, puts her head down and falls asleep. The lights dim. A tall, gaunt man, wrapped in a shawl, enters silently like a shadow. After a few fits and starts the woman feels his presence and wakes up with a start.)*

CLEANING WOMAN: Oh, I must have fallen asleep! What will my boss say? I'll be fired! Oh, oh, I'm in trouble. **(notices the man)** Oh, you're from the cleaning staff, aren't you? I'm so sorry. This is inexcusable, I know. I know I shouldn't fall asleep on duty, but I've been working so hard. You see, I'm a single mother with two children and I have to work two jobs to support them. Oh, please don't tell my supervisor.

LINCOLN: **(laughs)** Of course I will not. I've pardoned many young men when they fell asleep on duty.

CLEANING WOMAN: It was really unpardonable and I will promise I won't do it again. You won't tell anyone will you?

LINCOLN: No, I promise you, little lady. I will tell no one.

CLEANING WOMAN: You must be a Middle Westerner. You don't talk like the folks around here.

LINCOLN: Yes, I am a Middle Westerner. That was a good guess.

CLEANING WOMAN: Who are you? Are you the butler I was told was so strict?

LINCOLN: I used to live here, little lady.

CLEANING WOMAN: They would be furious if they found out I took a little snooze. I would hate to lose this job. It pays so well and it fits in so well with my day job. I just got overcome - I only sleep four hours a night - on a good night. And I had such a hard time getting this job. I had to be screened for security and investigated by the FBI and all. It's just like war-time being so careful after they attacked the Pentagon.

LINCOLN: Yes, I know. It was war-time when I was here too.

CLEANING WOMAN: But this is different. There was a bunch of terrorists that struck on US soil. Over there just across the river. I'm so scared.

LINCOLN: It's really not so different. In my time, the enemy was only some 25 miles away.

CLEANING WOMAN: **(too polite to disagree)** I can't believe that an enemy came so close.

LINCOLN: Oh, yes. And did you know that the British Army was here once and even burned down the White House and gave the Madisons only a few hours to get out.

CLEANING WOMAN: Oh, that's history, isn't it?

LINCOLN: Yes, But history is very important.

CLEANING WOMAN: And look what friends we are with the British now. They're even fighting with us in Afghanistan.

LINCOLN: Yes. I remember the time a very disgruntled elderly lady came up to me and said, "We must not forgive our enemies; we must destroy them." Have you noticed that people who have the least experience of the battlefield are often the most ferocious warriors? I believe in forgiveness. I live by it. I said to the lady: "But, dear lady, do I not destroy my enemies when I forgive them?"

CLEANING WOMAN: **(laughing)** I'm sure she didn't have a reply to that.

LINCOLN: No, she didn't.

CLEANING WOMAN: Oh, I'd love to talk to you some more but I have to finish up this room and I have three more to do before I leave at daybreak. Do you still live here?

LINCOLN: No, I left a long, long time ago. You see, I was murdered.

CLEANING WOMAN: **(drops the vacuum and falls backs, putting her hand to her mouth startled)** Murdered! Then you must be a ghost!

LINCOLN: You can call me that, but I'd rather you thought of me as your friend.

CLEANING WOMAN: I've got the shivers. It's so strange talking to a ghost. Especially now that it's so late at night and the room so dark. It's a new experience for me, talking with a ghost. But I am not the least bit afraid of you.

LINCOLN: And why should you be?

CLEANING WOMAN: **(curious)** Do you come back often?

LINCOLN: No. Rarely. Just now and then. The after-life is very good, don't you see, and very few people want to come back and when they do they don't like what they see because everything is so changed. They've lost all their landmarks, you see. Tonight I'd just taken a fancy to come back. I thought all the rooms would be deserted - saving your good presence. But I can come back more or less at will. It is a privilege granted to all those who were murdered because they were torn from life so unprepared.

CLEANING WOMAN: But who would want to murder a kindly old gentleman like you?

LINCOLN: There are always political zealots. But don't worry. They caught the man who murdered me. He was killed in a shoot-out in a barn. And my Vice-President succeeded me very smoothly. You see he escaped another assassin bent on killing him. I can't rightly say I totally approved of his policies but when you're dead nobody pays much attention to

your views any more. Besides, you've moved a million miles away and everything on earth has become so distant and unfamiliar. It's like hearing somebody else's hound-dog baying miles away. You know he caught something but you really don't care what it is.

## END OF FREE PREVIEW

### Grant and Lee at Appomattox A Historical Drama by Anne Hughes

#### CAST

GRANT and LEE

*(It is 8:30 a.m. on the morning of Palm Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1865, a day in early spring. Phrases in quotation marks represent actual words spoken on that occasion.)*

*(There are no props or costumes required for this play other than a Confederate flag, which need not be large. For contest purposes where sound effects are not allowed actors should make hoofbeat noises where indicated.)*

#### LEE'S MONOLOGUE

*(A spotlight comes on GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE, Commander of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. HE is tense, strung out almost to the breaking point having gone three days without sleep. HE is preparing to meet GENERAL ULYSSES S. GRANT, General-in-Chief of the Armies of the United States, at the McLean house of Appomattox Court House, Virginia, for the purpose of surrendering his army. HE is tall and handsome, a Virginia aristocrat and a man of immense dignity and self-control. HE should speak with a Virginia accent.)*

*(To an off-stage orderly)* Sam, lay out my best gray uniform, if you please, clean linen, polished boots and the sword presented to me by the State of Virginia - the one with the ornate jeweled hilt and scabbard. I must meet General Grant to discuss the surrender of this army and I must make my best appearance. Thank you.

*(To himself, as HE begins agitatedly pacing back and forth, at times driving his fist into the open palm of his other hand)* Can this truly be the end? After four years of bitter, bloody struggle? This beautiful April day, with the sun so warm, the trees in bud and the new grass just sprouting green? *(looking up)* It is Palm Sunday, the day the Saviour rode in triumph into Jerusalem. But I, Robert E. Lee, the most unworthy of God's creatures, must ride out in defeat and despair to surrender the Army of Northern Virginia to General Grant, and with me goes the glory of the State of Virginia, for whose sake I rejected command of the Union Army when it was offered to me. When I hand over my sword to General Grant, I will be handing over also the last, fading hopes of the Confederacy. It is a bitter, bitter moment.

I defeated all the generals they threw against me, except this one. Shall I call back the messenger, bid defiance to Grant? Longstreet advises, "Keep on" but Porter Alexander suggests I should release the troops for guerrilla war. Very seductive. Jefferson Davis urges it. But I said, "No. If I took your advice, the men...would be compelled to rob and steal in order to live. They would become mere bands of marauders...No. We would bring on a state of affairs it would take the country years to recover from..." No.

My army is trapped. We are surrounded on all sides by the enemy, outnumbered six to one; we have no food and no prospect of reinforcements. All morning Gordon has been trying to break out to the Lynchburg road to join up with Johnston in North Carolina. He has fought his corps to a frazzle, and can do nothing. My troops have been marching three straight days and nights, without rest or sleep or food. Our supplies have been captured. All avenues of escape are closed. My brave troops! We are exhausted, sleepless and hungry; we are at the end of our tether, but the guns are still firing.

Ah, the mist is lifting. **(deep sigh)** "How easily I could be rid of all this and be at rest! I have only to ride along the line" and some sniper would put a bullet through me and "all would be over" **(Pause. The steel come back.)** But I cannot. I must do my duty to the end. I must lead my troops even in defeat.

"No. The only dignified course for me is to go to General Grant and surrender myself and take the consequences of my acts. Then there is nothing left for me but to go and see General Grant —and I would rather die a thousand deaths."

Was Grant sincere in his offer of fair terms - or was it a ruse to lure me into unconditional surrender? Why else is he called "Unconditional Surrender Grant?" He knows he has us at his mercy and can impose what terms he will. He is certain to lay down the harshest possible terms after four years of bitter and bloody war. The North will demand it; already they are howling for my blood. Hang Lee! Hang Lee! Victors have always been vindictive — throughout history this has been so. He has us in the palm of his hand; I have no room left even for negotiating.

**(deep sigh)** How I dread this interview. If he takes a surly, contemptuous attitude to me, how will I bear it? **(gloomily)** The future of 25,000 men depends on his whim. He will take us prisoner, me and my officers and men. He will put us in Federal prisons. Will we be paraded through the streets of Washington - there to be jeered at, spat upon, refuse thrown at us? Then my brave officers and men, will we be tried for treason, found guilty, of course, and hanged? And the families of my officers and men left to starve? Will my poor family be forced to watch our hanging? If it were only my own execution, I would face it unflinchingly. Will our property be confiscated and my poor wife and children left destitute, forced to beg from relatives, themselves impoverished. My very name — Lee, son of Washington's trusted general Light Horse Harry Lee — will be tarnished and disgraced forever, eternally scorned and reviled. My heart is breaking for myself and for all the brave men that followed me so valiantly with unquestioning loyalty throughout all our ordeals.

**(HE nearly breaks down, but bears up defiantly)** However dark the future, I must put up a brave front. I will wear my best uniform and go down with all flags flying. "I have probably to be General Grant's prisoner tonight, and I must make my best appearance."

**(Picks up the Confederate flag, kisses it, kneels and prays.)**

## GRANT'S MONOLOGUE

**(The spotlight fades and another comes up on the other side of the stage on Lieutenant-General Ulysses Simpson GRANT. HE is a complete contrast with LEE: HE is much younger, shorter and rumped in appearance. HE is a very unassuming man, so much that HE has always been persistently underrated, except by LINCOLN. Beneath his crisp, blunt manner, HE is very sensitive but conceals it. What HE hates most in life is cruelty to animals, and HE has an exceptional gift for managing horses. HE suffers from profound anxiety and blinding migraine headaches. At the moment HE is sitting under a tree holding his head in his hands.)**

Oh, my head! My aching head! This is the very worst time to get a sick migraine on the very day that may spell the end of four years of this terrible war. Lee has outfought and outmaneuvered four Union generals, but now I have him trapped and he knows it. It is now 11:50 a.m. on Palm Sunday and the troops of both armies are drawn up in line of battle in combat. But at any time now I may get Lee's reply to my suggestions that he surrender his army. If only I felt better —

if only I could lose this pounding sick headache that won't let up despite all the mustard plasters I put on my wrists and neck last night and all the hot foot baths I have taken.

What I am most afraid of, as is Lincoln, is that the rebels do not surrender but break up into guerrilla bands who will melt away into the hills. That would turn the war upside down. In no way does the enemy give us so much trouble, at so little expense to himself, as by the raids of rapidly moving small bodies of troops, and we are ill-equipped to handle them. If Lee does not surrender and his army becomes guerrillas, then the war will go on forever and the country will be permanently devastated.

Sheridan thinks my correspondence with Lee is a ruse so he can escape to join up with Johnston's army in North Carolina. "But I have no doubt of the good faith of Lee."

*(If possible, the sound of pounding hoofbeats. GRANT takes up a note handed to him by a shouting horseman with a nod of thanks and reads it.)*

It is from Lee. He requests a meeting to discuss the terms of surrender of his army.

## END OF FREE PREVIEW

### Alan Pinkerton Interviews a Confederate Spy

by  
Anne Hughes

#### CAST

PINKERTON and ROSE

#### TIME

June 1862

#### PLACE

The Old Capitol in Washington.

*(It was the building used by Congress after the public buildings in Washington were burned by the British during the War of 1812 and is now being used as a prison for female Confederate spies. Alan PINKERTON was the founder, in 1850, of PINKERTON Detective Agency which still exists. HE was an immigrant from Scotland and speaks with a pronounced Scottish accent. ROSE should not have a distinct Southern accent.)*

PINKERTON: Have I the honor of addressing Mrs. Rose O'Neal Greenhow, the famous Confederate spy?

ROSE: *(entering)* You know very well you do, you odious little man. It was you who arrested me last year. I'm sure I have nothing to say to you.

PINKERTON: Oh, I think you will. I have come with a proposal for you.

ROSE: *(pricks up her ears)* What kind of proposal?

PINKERTON: Well, not the romantic kind, of course. *(laughs)*

ROSE: *(splutters)* If you think that I would for a moment entertain even the slightest suggestion...Good day to you, sir. *(starts to leave)*

PINKERTON: I meant an exchange.

ROSE: *(pauses on her way out the door)* An exchange? Of prisoners?

PINKERTON: *(now that HE has her interest)* Something like that. I have been authorized...

ROSE: By yourself, no doubt.

PINKERTON: ...to offer you release from the prison where you are at present and give you safe conduct that will take you safely to the South.

ROSE: In exchange for what?

PINKERTON: For your telling me - just for my own information; this will not be used against you — how exactly you, dear lady, single-handedly turned the tide of the battle of Bull Run and made it a stunning Confederate victory when it should have been a Union victory. How, in other words, you got the secret, crucial information through all our Union sentries and pickets and guards. I want to know this so that I can stop it happening again.

ROSE: *(doesn't go for this)* I am either released or not released and I do not have to tell you anything, especially something for your own delectation. *(again turns to go)*

PINKERTON: Believe me, dear lady, I will give you the release in any case. You can bank upon it. It has been granted by the military authorities, and you should have it tomorrow. But in the meantime, as a professional detective, I want to know how you eluded all our safeguards and got your crucial information through to the Confederacy.

ROSE: Until you arrested me, you horrid little man. I am not likely to forgive or forget how you accosted me on the street when I was returning from my afternoon walk. You sprang at me in your major's uniform and coolly informed me, "I've come to arrest you." When I asked to see your warrant, you didn't have one, of course.

PINKERTON: *(mutters, embarrassed)* An oversight.

ROSE: But you took me into custody anyway. Trashed my house looking for evidence and set your men to watch my every movement day and night. *(with glee)* But you were foiled when my dear little 8-year-old daughter climbed a tree and called out to everyone who approached, "Mama's been arrested! Mama's been arrested!" until she was pulled out of the tree. It was a most trying day. *(SHE sobs into her handkerchief)*

PINKERTON: I do acknowledge that, dear lady. Exigences of war. But I am asking you to tell me how you, a gentlewoman of breeding and class, were able to change the course of the war. It is out of admiration that I ask. *(ROSE snorts)* Believe me it is. I have the greatest admiration for you even though we are on opposite sides of the war. Why, don't you remember when I was conducting surveillance through your parlor window and I nearly apprehended the captain with whom I had seen you conversing...

ROSE: "Conducting surveillance" you call it. I call it eavesdropping, something no gentleman would ever do. But you didn't come off well. It was pouring rain and you had taken off your boots because I found them the next day under the porch. When I saw your face at my parlor window I nearly screamed. I knew you had to be standing on the back of your assistant - in your wet stocking feet in the pouring rain. *(laughing)* Serves you right for playing Peeping Tom. I hope you got pneumonia.

PINKERTON: I very nearly did. But when I followed the captain after he took his leave of you...

ROSE: *(obviously a cherished memory)* In your wet stocking feet flapping on the pavement in the pouring rain. *(laughs)*

PINKERTON: I crept along behind him as stealthily as a cat. But suddenly he ducked into a building and out came not the captain but four Union soldiers who arrested me in spite of my Union uniform and hauled me off to jail. It took several hours before the War Department got around to releasing me.

*(The both laugh heartily.)*

ROSE: Serves you right for your ugly suspicious nature. *[But softening.]*

PINKERTON: What I want to do is to write a book and devote at least one chapter to you as the most effective — and *(meaningfully)* engaging — spy of the war so far.

ROSE: Devote a chapter to me? *(Vanity begins to take over. SHE sits down.)* Well. *(pause)* Did you know that I received a communication from our beloved President-Jefferson Davis - thanking me for that exploit? "The Confederacy owes you a debt," the President wrote.

PINKERTON: Really? Tell me more.

*(HE sits and takes out his notebook and pencil.)*

ROSE: I must confess I am very dissatisfied here - cooped up in this prison, where I had lived with my aunt before the War, when it was a rooming house she owned. Now it's not a boarding house, but a jail. I am surrounded by women generally of the lowest class with whom I have nothing in common. Perhaps I should tell you my story. I can do nothing while I am cooped up here. I could be more useful to my cause if I went South.

PINKERTON: *(Leans forward and lifts his pen ready to write.)* Yes. Yes.

ROSE: When Dr. Greenhow, my late husband, died, he left me little more than my house on 16<sup>th</sup> street. But I had extensive connections in Washington from my boarding-house days, when many senators stayed with my aunt and me. President James Buchanan was a frequent visitor. So was the then Senator from Mississippi, Jefferson Davis. William Seward. And I still have powerful friends in Washington - as no doubt you know.

PINKERTON: I do not deny it, dear lady. That is how the release was ordered.

ROSE: So I thought. Well, what is it that you want to know for your stupid book?

END OF FREE PREVIEW