

# CIVIL WAR DUOS

## By Anne Hughes

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# CIVIL WAR DUOS

A Collection of Three Duets  
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## Midnight Encounter: A Ghost Story

by  
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### CAST

CLEANING WOMAN and LINCOLN

### TIME

The present

### SETTING

The bedroom of a mansion

*(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.

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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.

CLEANING WOMAN: Are you sorry they murdered you?

LINCOLN: For the country, yes. I do believe my policies of mercy and forgiveness would have reconciled the country much more quickly. For myself, no. How can you, gentle creature that you are, understand what it means to be released - unexpectedly it is true - from four years of hell?

CLEANING WOMAN: (*sympathetically*) It must have been awful for you. They said such vile things about you.

LINCOLN: Yes, but that was the least of it. Every single, solitary day I was in office was agony. I had to keep a sense of humor to keep from going mad. The worst of it was all the blood. What I grieved about the most and what made me unable to sleep was all the rivers of blood. They were all my boys, on both sides - thousands, hundreds of thousands killed. I would have such dreams - such nightmares - four years of the most unutterable anguish. (*brightening*) But the last week of my life was marvelous. It was Holy Week. I knew that there would be a great victory because I always had the same dream preceding nearly every great and important event of the war. The dream was always the same. I seemed to be in some singular and indescribable vessel and it was moving with great rapidity to an indefinite shore. Then I knew that the news I received after the dream would be favorable. Do you ever dream?

CLEANING WOMAN: (*giggles*) No. Nobody believes in dreams any more.

LINCOLN: Yes, I know. Nowadays dreams are regarded as very foolish and are seldom told except by old women and young men and maidens in love. That last week was pure joy. Grant received Lee's surrender at Appomattox on Palm Sunday, the 9<sup>th</sup> of April. I felt as if a ten-ton boulder had been lifted off my shoulders. The people, too, were in a merry mood. The day after there was a great throng of them outside the White House demanding I come out on the balcony and clamoring for a speech. And you know what I said?

CLEANING WOMAN: (*enthralled by now*) No, what did you tell them?

LINCOLN: I said that if there was to be formal demonstration I would have nothing to say if they dribbled it all out of me before. So I asked one of the bands to play a particular tune which the South tried to appropriate, but I insisted that yesterday we had fairly captured it and the Attorney General gave it as his legal opinion that it was our lawful prize. So I asked the band to play Dixie. I was so happy for the first time in four years.

CLEANING WOMAN: But poor Mr. Lincoln, you only had a week of happiness after all that sorrow. Were you totally unprepared to be assassinated?

LINCOLN: No. That was not quite true of me because I was warned. In a dream.

CLEANING WOMAN: Oh, how old-fashioned you are! Nowadays we regard dreams as indigestion or sex fantasies.

LINCOLN: Perhaps you are right. But it is surprising how much there is in the Bible about dreams. Some 16 chapters in the Old Testament and 4 or 5 in the New. Dreams have always had a deep influence on my life. Do you believe in the Bible?

CLEANING WOMAN: I suppose so.

LINCOLN: I will tell you a story even though you tell me you don't believe in dreams. I do. Maybe you will change your mind.

CLEANING WOMAN: Oh, yes, please.

***(The lights go down a notch.)***

LINCOLN: I was not totally unprepared for death because I was warned in a dream. Mind you, I did not know the time or place, but I knew death was coming upon me soon. One night I had gone wearily to bed after waiting up late for important dispatches. Almost immediately I had fallen into a deep slumber and began to dream. There seemed to be a deathlike stillness about me. Then I heard subdued sobs, as if a number of people were weeping. I thought I left my bed and wandered downstairs. Finding no one, I wandered from room to room

seeking the source of the sorrowing sounds. I kept on until I arrived in the East Room, which I entered. There I was met with a sickening surprise. Before me was a catafalque, on which rested a corpse in funeral vestments. Around it were stationed soldiers who were acting as guards; and there was a throng of people, some gazing mournfully on the corpse, whose face was covered; others weeping pitifully. "Who is dead in the White House?" I demanded of one of the soldiers. "The President. He was killed by an assassin." **(pause)** And so, dear lady, like you, I have bent the rules. You fell asleep on duty and I return to the White House every once in a while even though I was not unprepared for my death. So we are even, are we not? I will not tell anyone about tonight's encounter and you will not tell on me either. Agreed?

CLEANING WOMAN: Oh, Mr. Lincoln, I will never, never forget this night. Yes, agreed - agreed - agreed!

***(SHE kisses him as HE vanishes into thin air. The lights come up. SHE resumes her vacuuming as if lost in a dream.)***

**END OF PLAY**

## 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.)**

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