

# **MEETING AT APPOMATTOX**

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A One Act Play  
By Chuck Puckett

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TIME

April 9, 1865

SETTING

The McLean Farm at Appomattox Court House, Virginia.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

**ROBERT E. LEE**, Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia

**U.S. GRANT**, Commander of the Union Armies

SCENE 1

A bare room, containing two tables. One table has two chairs facing each other, and on the table is an oil lamp, some papers, an inkwell and a pen. The other table has a whiskey decanter and some glasses. GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE enters the room. He is dressed immaculately, every crease in place. He surveys its simple contents, removes his hat, looks for a hat rack, and then places it on the whiskey table. He looks out the window. After a moment, GENERAL U.S. GRANT enters. Grant is not neat at all, almost slovenly, shirt wrinkled, etc. He wears no hat. He looks at his pocket watch

GRANT

General Lee. I note that you are precisely on time, sir.

LEE

I make it one of my priorities to be punctual.

GRANT

Yes of course, of course. I have left my staff officers on the grounds. I see you are also alone.

LEE

Indeed.

GRANT

I am glad. I had hoped we might have these few moments in private before concluding our... business.

LEE

Yes. Our business. Yes, I think we could benefit from some conversation.

GRANT

Shall we sit, sir?

Both men sit at the table facing each other for a few awkward moments.

GRANT (CONT'D)

I met you once before, General Lee, at a time when we fought on the same side. While we were serving in Mexico, you were with General Scott and you visited Garland's brigade, to which I then belonged. I have always remembered your appearance, and I think I should have recognized you anywhere.

LEE

Yes. I know that I met you on that occasion, and I have often thought of it and tried to recollect how you looked. But for the life of me I have never been able to recall a single feature.

GRANT

Ahem.

LEE

I appreciate the correspondence you initiated the day before yesterday, General Grant.

LEE pulls a letter from his coat.

LEE (CONT'D)

"The results of the last week must convince you of the hopelessness of further resistance on the part of your forces in this struggle. I feel that it is so, and ask of you the surrender of that portion of the Confederate States army known as the Army of Northern Virginia." Signed U.S. Grant, Lieutenant-General. I do not agree about the hopelessness of our situation. I submit that you may be wrong. But I completely agree that too much blood has been spilt. It is time we finally put these hostilities behind us.

GRANT

My thoughts exactly. Your men have fought bravely-

LEE

No blame can be attached to the men. I am alone to blame for any failure.

GRANT

The man in charge always shoulders the blame when he loses.  
And the fame when he wins.

LEE

Your men have also comported themselves well.

GRANT

On their behalf I thank you, sir. I have lost many more men  
than I might have, had the conditions of this war not been so  
demanding.

LEE

Each brave soldier's life is precious, General. But the truth  
is, the Northern armies always had many more men to lose than  
the Confederacy had to fight.

GRANT

And yet there is report that you recently had devised plans  
to remedy your shortage of manpower.

LEE

I am afraid I do not catch the drift of your meaning, sir.

GRANT

Come, come, General Lee. Our intelligence has it that you  
intended on using slaves as soldiers as recently as a few  
months ago.

LEE

Your intelligence is wrong sir. A slave will not fight for  
those who enslave him. But I do admit there is some truth to  
the report. My plan was not to use slaves as soldiers. My  
plan was to free those slaves who would train to be soldiers.  
But the plan was rejected by my government.

GRANT

It was a bold plan. I wonder if it would have helped your  
cause. Raw recruits-

LEE

I can make a soldier of any man who has two arms and two legs. But would it have made any difference? Your armies were simply too large. Only the Almighty will ever know.

GRANT

The North has a much greater population to draw upon. Still-

LEE

Sir?

GRANT

I will be frank, sir. I have lost many soldiers that, had I used other tactics, might not have died. War is not subtle.

LEE

Certainly not the way you wage it.

GRANT

Subtlety is a luxury I was not allowed. I do not complain, sir, nor do I claim that I would have acted differently. President Lincoln insisted this war be brought to a swift conclusion. Others before me had failed to do so.

LEE

Mr. Lincoln sent a long line of failures against me. General McClellan at Antietam, General Pope at Manassas, Burnside at Fredericksburg, Hooker-

GRANT

(stands)

Every one of those men is a foppish fool! They could not fight their way out of burlap bag. It was criminal the way they led their troops. Those battles will forever be remembered as nothing less than bloodbaths. Four years it has gone on. Four years of state against state, cousin against cousin, brother against brother.

LEE

I know, sir, I know. And through it all, I have mainly prevailed. Until now. Until you, General Grant. You say you are not subtle. That is true. You have used the hammer of your armies to crush the South.

GRANT

I had the forces. I employed them,

LEE

One uses the tools one has. Who can say what I might have done had I possessed the hammers of war that your Northern industries were able to produce? We have no such industries in the South. Oh, a few factories here and there. But surely you realize that we are a region based on farming: cotton and tobacco are the source of our wealth.

GRANT takes a cigar out of his coat and chews on it, unlit. He goes to the whiskey table.

GRANT

Well, thank God for the tobacco. And the South makes the finest whiskey in America, no doubt about that. I see our host has made some of those noble spirits available.

GRANT pours a glass of whiskey.

GRANT (CONT'D)

May I pour you a whiskey, sir?

LEE

Normally, I do not partake of whiskey. But, given the circumstances, I will make an exception.

LEE takes the glass and they drink.

GRANT

You said a moment ago that you would have used a hammer in this war if you had been given one.

LEE

I said I did not know whether I would have or not. Certainly the resources a commander has to employ must dictate the manner in which he wages a campaign.

GRANT

General, I think you would not have used a hammer, even if you had one.

LEE

Would I not?

GRANT

No, sir, you would not. I have studied your methods, General Lee. I have seen you outmaneuver and outfought every general Lincoln sent against you-

LEE

Until you, sir.

GRANT

Until me. Until I brought the hammer and hit you with it, over and over, until you had nothing left with which to hit back.

LEE

Yes, and one of those hammers had a name. General William Tecumseh Sherman. A hammer I wish you had left in the toolbox, sir.

GRANT

Sherman. The man is less subtle than me, even. His orders were to wage a campaign right across the heart of the Confederacy, and to rip that heart out. Because I knew when your heart was gone, it would only be a matter of time before the rest of the body would topple as well.

LEE

The reports of the destruction he left in his wake would stagger the mind of any sane man. He spared nothing, burned everything, every field, every factory, every building.

GRANT

"War is hell." That is what Sherman says. "War is hell".

LEE

Certainly it was wherever he laid his hand to the enterprise. But this is a new kind of war we have fought, General Grant. Our forefathers could never dream of the scale of carnage we were able to inflict on each other. The sheer numbers of dead and dying, the horribly wounded men that we left on every battlefield. You were not at Gettysburg.

(MORE)

LEE (CONT'D)

Pickett's charge at Cemetery Hill will forever haunt my waking memory. 50,000 dead and wounded. In three days.

GRANT

No sir, I was not at Gettysburg. But I commanded at Shiloh. My losses at Shiloh... the papers would not tolerate them. They called for my head. Yet I am still here.

LEE

No war before this war has been capable of slaughter of this magnitude.

GRANT

We have new weapons, sir. The repeater rifle alone has changed forever the way men will conduct war. And the accuracy of our mortars and cannon is astounding. Why, compared to the ancient firearms of the Revolutionary-

LEE

The Gatling gun is the devil's spawn. Spewing out death like the grim reaper. If the North had used that weapon on a larger scale, you might have defeated us years ago.

GRANT

A rifle that fires like a machine, capable of 400 rounds per minute. Who could stand up to such an onslaught? Yes, I grant you, the Gatling gun is especially horrible.

LEE

And it is not simply the weapons that have changed things. The railroads-

GRANT

(sits, facing Lee)

Now you have put your finger on it, sir! Our armies may still march like the Europeans have done since time out of mind-

LEE

An army must always march, General. That can never change.

GRANT

But without the railroads to move munitions and supplies, we would have had far greater obstacles to overcome.