

The Beginning, the End, and a Dolly

“Aunt Lucretia, can you tell me a story? A story about when you were a little girl like me, please?”

“All right, why don’t you sit here in my lap. This story begins when I was about three years old, so I don’t actually remember seeing what happened. I’ll just tell you how my Papa used to tell it to me. And by the way, my Papa is your Grandpa Wilmer McLean. We were living on a farm near a little town called Manassas Junction, in Virginia, of course. The stream that ran through our farm was called Bull Run. Now, in 1861 the War Between the States had begun. In July of that year, northern soldiers were hoping to capture Richmond, so they were marching south under General McDowell. Southern troops under General P.G.T. Beauregard met the Yankees at our town. It turns out this was the first major battle of the war. In fact, the war practically began in our backyard! Papa didn’t like this one bit because the soldiers were running through our fields and trampling everything! He said the battle raged over meadows, through woods, on the banks of Bull Run, and across our property. During this battle, someone said, “Look, General Jackson stands like a stone wall,” and that’s how he earned his nickname of Stonewall Jackson. Papa heard that neither side was winning, but then new Southern troops arrived by train. Stonewall Jackson told his soldiers to yell. Papa said they attacked with bloodcurdling screams which they called “the rebel yell”. This was too much for the Yankees, so the Confederates won that battle.

“General Beauregard had asked Papa if he could use our house as his headquarters while they were staying there. Of course Papa had to say yes. So while

they were there, General Beauregard and his staff were sitting down to their dinner in our dining room when suddenly a cannonball fell through the roof. And would you believe this? That cannonball fell right into the kettle of stew that was being prepared for General Beauregard! The kettle exploded with a bang and splattered stew all over the place!”

“Oh my goodness, Auntie! Did anyone get hurt?”

“Well, I don’t really remember what Papa said, but I don’t think anyone did. Anyway, after that battle the soldiers stayed around because the Yankees and the Southern troops both wanted to have control of the railroad lines that met at Manassas Junction. The next year they had *another* battle at our farm. Now, Papa *really* didn’t like this . . . the soldiers trampled everything again! Papa decided that he had had enough, so he sold our farm and all and moved us all the way to a tiny village called Appomattox Court House, still in Virginia.”

“Is that the end, Aunt Lucretia? I hope it’s not, ‘cause I like very long stories.”

“No, that’s not the end. That’s only the first part. The next part happened when I was your age, about seven. On April 9, in 1865, a man came to our house in Appomattox Court House. He said that he was Lt. Col. Charles Marshall and that he was General Lee’s aide. General Lee was the head of the whole Southern army. Lt. Col. Marshall asked my Daddy if there was a place where General Lee and General Grant, commander of the northern army, could meet. Papa showed him an empty building, but it wasn’t good enough. These two great men actually ended up meeting in our front parlor! And guess what?!”

“What! Did you get to sit in General Lee’s lap while they had a party in the parlor?”

“Oh, my, child, this wasn’t a party! General Lee was surrendering to General Grant. The dreadful war was finally over.”

“What did they look like? Did they have guns?”

“No, they didn’t, but General Lee had on a beautiful sword. The handle even looked like a lion’s head. General Grant looked rather muddy, though. Just as the men were getting settled in our parlor, I remembered that I had left my favorite doll on the sofa. Of course I couldn’t go in there and get her, so I watched through the keyhole to make sure she was all right. I heard General Grant say that General Lee could keep his lovely sword. Wasn’t that wonderful?! Papa told me later that the usual practice when a war was over was to take the losing general’s sword. And because he was such a noble man, General Lee had even worn his best sword to give away. General Grant also said that all the Confederate soldiers could keep their horses so they could go home and plow. What a generous, kind-hearted thing to do.

“Well, while I was waiting to get my dolly, I got bored and decided to play upstairs. That evening, I suddenly remembered my dolly and ran into the parlor to get her. I was very surprised indeed to find that two tables, some chairs, and Mama’s brass candle-sticks were gone. The men had taken them for souvenirs without so much as a by-your-leave!”

“And what about your doll, Aunt Lucretia, was she still there?”

“No, she was gone. All I can figure is that one of the men took her as a souvenir. I never got her back. And always after that, Papa liked to say that the war began in his dining room and ended in his parlor.”

“That was a good story, Aunt Lucretia. But it’s sad, too, ‘cause you lost your dolly. I’m glad nobody’s going to surrender in my parlor and take my dolly!”

The End

The man who took the doll was Union Captain Thomas C. Moore. For more than one hundred years, the Moore family kept the doll as a souvenir of the surrender on April 9, 1865. The family eventually gave the doll to the Appomattox Courthouse Museum where Lucretia McLean could see it today if she was still alive.

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