

ACT I

SETTING: *Various locations including a 4th grade classroom at St. Mary's Academy in Bristol, VA, a kitchen, a bowling alley, a Civil War battlefield, a coffee shop, and the streets of Charlottesville. The spring and summer of 2017.*

AT RISE: *The stage in black. In the darkness, we hear a voice giving a speech. Spot fades up on CURTIS JENKINS, a Civil War reenactor dressed as Confederate General Robert E. Lee. He is downstage center, facing the audience. After a few moments, lights fade up on three 4th grade students and their teacher, SISTER ANNE, arranged behind CURTIS. They, too, are facing forward, as if seeing him in a mirror. They are the audience CURTIS is addressing. The students – GENA, TODD, and KENNY – are dressed in Catholic school uniforms. GENA has a jump rope folded in two and draped over her neck. SR. ANNE is wearing a nun's habit.*

CURTIS (as LEE)

After the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, I saddled up Traveller, and rode back to Richmond, where my wife was waiting for me. Because of my service in the Confederate Army, my house in Arlington had been confiscated and Mrs. Lee and I were forced to find another place to live. Luckily, I was offered a job as President of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia. I served there for five years, until my death on October 12th, 1870 from a stroke.

(Beat. SR. ANNE begins clapping. The STUDENTS join in.)

SR. ANNE

Thank you, General Lee! I can't tell you how much we appreciate you coming to our class today to teach us about the Civil War. Isn't that right, boys and girls?

(The STUDENTS nod.)

No, no, no! When asked a question, the 4th grade class of St. Mary's Academy in Bristol, Virginia does NOT respond by nodding or shaking the head. We use our words, like ladies and gentlemen. Let's try that again. We appreciate General Lee coming here today, don't we, boys and girls?

STUDENTS

Yes, Sister!

SR. ANNE

What do we say to General Lee?

STUDENTS

Thank you, General Lee!

(CURTIS gives a little bow.)

CURTIS (as LEE)

You're most welcome.

(SR. ANNE looks at her watch.)

SR. ANNE

We still have a few minutes before class is over. Would you mind if the children asked you some questions?

CURTIS (as LEE)

Not at all.

SR. ANNE

Who would like to ask General Lee a question? Come on now, don't be shy.

(TODD raises his hand.)

Yes, Todd?

TODD

(To SR. ANNE)

What did General Lee feed his horse?

SR. ANNE

Ask him yourself, Todd. That's why he's here today.

TODD

General Lee, what did you feed your horse?

CURTIS (as LEE)

Well, young man, Traveller was fairly partial to oats and hay. But if he was especially good, I would try to slip him an apple. Traveller loved apples.

SR. ANNE

Next question?

(KENNY raises his hand.)

SR. ANNE (cont.)

Kenny.

KENNY

General Lee, what does the “E” stand for in Robert E. Lee?

CURTIS (as LEE)

The “E” stands for Edward. My full name is Robert Edward Lee.

SR. ANNE

We have time for one more...

(GENA raises her hand)

Gena.

GENA

General Lee, why did you fight a war to keep my people enslaved?

(Beat. CURTIS wasn't expecting this. He turns to SR. ANNE.)

CURTIS (as LEE)

Uhh...

GENA

(Pressing on)

Do you hate black people?

CURTIS (as LEE)

What?! No! Good heavens, no! No... What's your name, young lady?

GENA

Gena. My full name is Gena Renée Reed.

CURTIS (as LEE)

Well, Gena, the War wasn't fought over slavery. The War was fought over States' Rights...

GENA

You mean the State's right to own slaves.

SR. ANNE

Now, Gena – let General Lee finish.

CURTIS (as LEE)

The truth is, Gena, I opposed slavery.

GENA

Then why did you own slaves?

CURTIS (as LEE)

Now, hold on...

GENA

Are you a racist?

(The bell rings.)

SR. ANNE

Class dismissed.

(CURTIS stands there, stunned, as TODD and KENNY bolt for the exit. GENA stays in her spot, staring straight ahead at CURTIS.)

GENA

You *are* a racist, aren't you?

SR. ANNE

Gena. You better hurry or you'll miss the bus.

(With one last look at CURTIS, GENA removes the jump rope from around her neck and skips rope off, singing the following...)

GENA

*Cinderella
Was high yella
Massuh drug her
To the cellar
On the dirt
Ripped off her skirt
How many times did he make her hurt?
1, 2, 3, 4, 5...*

(She is gone. CURTIS stares after her, aghast.)

SR. ANNE

Bright girl, isn't she? One of my star students. She'll go far in this world. Thank you again for coming in.

(SR. ANNE exits. Beat.)

CURTIS

What the fuck?

(Behind him, GENERAL ROBERT E LEE enters, also facing forward. They stare at each other a long moment, then GENERAL LEE salutes. CURTIS returns the salute. GENERAL LEE exits. Music under as the scene around him shifts to his kitchen. A table and 4 chairs appear. He takes off his uniform jacket then sits down on a chair to take off his boots and uniform pants.)

PATTY (O.S.)

Honey, is that you?

CURTIS

Yep.

PATTY (O.S.)

How'd it go?

(He Nothing.)

Curtis? How'd it go?

CURTIS

I've had better days.

(PATTY JENKINS enters. She carries a laundry basket full of clothes to be folded.)

PATTY

Hey.

(They kiss. She sits down opposite and starts to fold.)

What do you mean? Where were you today?

CURTIS

St. Mary's Academy. Fourth graders.

PATTY

And...? What happened?

(CURTIS slams his hand on the kitchen table.)

CURTIS

I was ambushed, that's what happened!

PATTY

Ambushed? By a bunch of Catholic fourth graders?

CURTIS

Not a bunch. Just one. Well... *two*, if you count the nun.

PATTY

A nun ambushed you?

CURTIS

Well, she didn't save me, that's for damn sure.

PATTY

Save you from what?

CURTIS

She didn't lift a damn finger. And to think I volunteered for this! Took time off from work...

PATTY

Curtis!

CURTIS

She called me a racist!

PATTY

A nun called you a racist?

CURTIS

No! A kid. One of the students. Gena Renée Reid.

(He spits her name out bitterly. GENA enters his imagination, skipping rope on stage.)

GENA

That's right. Say it loud, say it proud.

PATTY

Why did Gena...whatever her name is...

GENA/CURTIS

Gena Renée Reid.

PATTY

... why did Gena Renée Reid call you a racist?

GENA

For the record, I was referring to him.

(She points off. GENERAL LEE enters CURTIS's imagination. He salutes CURTIS.)

PATTY

Curtis!

CURTIS

Huh?

PATTY

Why did this Gena girl call you a racist?

CURTIS

She didn't.

PATTY

But you just said...

CURTIS

She didn't call *me* a racist. She called Robert E. Lee a racist.

PATTY

Oh.

CURTIS

Can you believe that? And that teacher – that nun – never said a word.

GENA

Sister Anne is woke.

PATTY

Here. Fresh from the dryer.

((PATTY hands him a pair of jeans. He stands up and puts them on, still angry.))

CURTIS

“Why did I fight a war to keep her people enslaved...” the nerve.

GENA

Truth hurts.

PATTY

This Gena Renée Reid is a black girl?

GENA

Blackist.

CURTIS

Yes.

PATTY

Oh.

CURTIS

(To GENA)

Well, I've got news for you, Gena Renée Reid! I...

(He stops short and turns to PATTY.)

What do you mean by that?

PATTY

By what?

CURTIS

By “oh.” You said “oh.”

PATTY

I did?

CURTIS

Twice. The first time when I said it was Robert E. Lee she called a racist, and the second time when I said she was black.

(Beat.)

PATTY

Oh.

See? There you go again!

CURTIS

Here.

PATTY

(She hands him a clean t-shirt.)

Patty! What does that mean, that “oh?”

CURTIS

Nothing!

PATTY

Tell me.

CURTIS

It means...

PATTY

(She takes a deep breath. This is going to be big.)

Well, it means if I were a black woman, I might consider Robert E. Lee a racist, too.

Uh-oh. Shit’s about to get real.

GENA

(She skips rope around GENERAL LEE and sings...)

*Bobby Lee, Bobby Lee
Turn around
Bobby Lee, Bobby Lee’s
Going down
Bobby Lee, Bobby Lee
Do a jig
Bobby Lee, Bobby Lee
Racist pig...*

(She is gone.)

CURTIS

How can you say that to me? You know Robert E. Lee is my hero.

PATTY

Yes, but...

CURTIS

And he was my father's hero before me. And my grandfather's hero before him! Robert E. Lee is the reason I became a Civil War reenactor.

PATTY

So, *he's* the one to blame...

CURTIS

(Ignoring her)

To be able to portray – even in a small way – the man who saved the South from shame, the man who enabled us to keep our pride – this has been the greatest honor of my life.

PATTY

Curtis...

CURTIS

Also, you're completely disregarding his post-War profile.

PATTY

His what?

CURTIS

You know – the church thing.

(She stares at him blankly.)

The church thing! The church thing!

PATTY

What are you talking about?

CURTIS

Right after the war, Lee was living in Richmond and one Sunday he attends worship services at St. Paul's Church and when the times comes for communion a black man goes up to the altar railing and kneels down to receive...

(BLACK MAN enters CURTIS's imagination and crosses down stage.)

Well, the white members of the congregation don't know what to do – to take communion with a black man is obviously unthinkable...