

A HOUSE DIVIDED

The Civil War has yet again arrived at his family's doorstep, and Johnny McLean is a witness to history.

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“WHAT’S YOUR NAME, BOY?” the Union soldier barked, his bayonet just inches from Johnny McLean’s nose.

Johnny gulped, finding it hard to breathe.

It was nearly dark, and he couldn’t imagine how he’d been spotted. He’d made his way carefully through the woods, planning to sneak close to the Union camp to get a glimpse of General Grant.

But the Union lookouts had spied him as he scurried across the road. Now he was in real trouble.

“I said, *what’s your name?*” the soldier prodded him again, the bayonet inching closer.

“J ... Joh ... Johnny. Johnny McLean,” he stammered.

“Well, what do you know? Looks like we caught us an *actual* Johnny Reb,” the soldier smirked. Johnny waited for the Yank to lower the bayonet, but the sharp metal blade never wavered. *CONTINUED>>>*

“What you doin’ out here, Johnny Reb?” the soldier demanded. “You spyin’?”

“I ... spy? Uh, no, sir. I ain’t a spy. I live in Appomattox Court House, the town over yonder. ... You can see my house. It —”

“I think you’re lyin’. I think you come out here to see what you can and are gonna run right back and tell General Robert E. Lee, the commanding general of the entire Confederate Army, what it is we’re up to. That’s what I think.”

Johnny cursed his luck. He thought keeping to the trail through the woods would get him close to seeing General Grant.

He’d heard General Ulysses S. Grant was a monster. That he wouldn’t stop until he’d destroyed the Confederate Army to the last man. Some said Grant even had horns growing out of the side of his head like the devil.

Johnny didn’t know about that. All he knew is he wanted to see this man with his own eyes.

He’d snuck away after supper. Johnny didn’t mention his plans to his parents, who would have forbidden it. He was only 11 years old. All around them the two armies were fighting each other, and it was dangerous. As the Union Army had tightened a circle around their town, his parents had grown more anxious.

It was understandable. When the war started they had lived in Manassas, up in northern Virginia, and the very first fight of the war, the Battle of Bull Run, took place practically



them up and moved them away from Manassas to the town of Appomattox Court House in the center of Virginia. He thought his family would be safer there.

For a while, they were, but now the war had found them again, thanks to the monster General Grant, who had the Confederates on the run. General

voice cut through the night.

Having been focused on the bayonet, Johnny had failed to notice a small group of men riding up the road on horseback. Their faces were illuminated in the rising moonlight, and Johnny could see from the insignia on their shoulders that they were officers.

The soldier immediately dropped the bayonet and came to attention, as did his two companions.

“General Chamberlain, sir!” the sergeant said, saluting.

“What are you doing here, sergeant?” the general asked.

“I believe I’ve caught a rebel spy, sir!” the sergeant barked in reply.

The general considered Johnny from his horse.

“Really?” the general said. “They seem to be growing them awfully young these days.”

“He was sneaking about, sir, looked suspicious and —”

“What’s your name, son?” General Chamberlain asked Johnny.

“Johnny McLean, sir.” Now Johnny was even more nervous. He wondered

if this General Chamberlain was *the* General Chamberlain, the Union hero of the Battle of Gettysburg.

Johnny had read about him in the papers. He had been a college professor in Maine before the war. As the war dragged on, he’d been promoted all the way to major general.

“Are you a spy, Mr. Johnny McLean?” the general asked.

“No, sir. I was ... I just wanted to get a glimpse of General Grant, is all.”

“Let me guess,” General Chamberlain said. “You want to know if he has horns growing out of his head like the devil?”

Johnny didn’t say anything, but the look on his face caused General Chamberlain to laugh.

“We’re all aware of the rumors, son. Well, now. What to do? You were sneaking about. I can’t very well let you go. Not before tomorrow, at least.”

Johnny squirmed. “Excuse me, sir, but what is happening tomorrow?”

The general looked at Johnny. “General Lee has sent a message to General Grant asking for terms.

They’re to meet tomorrow. If General Lee accepts, the war is over.”

The pickets reacted with whoops and hollers. Johnny remained quiet, unsure of what he was supposed to do. “How do you feel about that, Johnny McLean?” the general asked him.

“How ... sir? I ... guess ... I ... I’m glad it’s over, sir,” Johnny stammered.

“Really? You’re a Virginian. ... Why are you glad?” The general seemed genuinely curious.

muddy uniform.

He doesn’t look like a monster, Johnny thought, *just a tired man.* He strained to listen from the kitchen, but the two men spoke too quietly to hear much. Johnny thought back to the day four years ago when the war started right outside their home in Manassas.

Johnny’s father was always talking about one of President Lincoln’s famous speeches in which he’d said,

He doesn’t look like a monster, Johnny thought, just a tired man.

Johnny shrugged. “I think it’s like my pa says. There’s been enough killing. On both sides. Maybe it’s time to start talking. Sir.”

The general shifted on his horse.

“I think you might be right, young man. I’m sorry General Grant is so busy. I have a feeling he’d enjoy meeting you. I can also assure you the rumors you have heard about him aren’t true. He’s a good man. Honest and fair. I think you’ll soon see that.” General Chamberlain reined his horse around and shouted. “Lieutenant!”

A young officer in his party spurred his mount forward.

“Yes, sir?” he said.

“Escort Mr. McLean back to his home,” he said. He turned to face the sergeant. “Sergeant, from now on, try to refrain from pointing your bayonet at civilians. That is all.”

General Chamberlain spurred his horse and rode off into the night.

As things worked out, the next day Johnny McLean *did* get to see General Grant up close. His pa informed him that General Lee would be coming to sign the surrender in their parlor. Right in Johnny’s house!

General Lee arrived long before General Grant and waited patiently for his enemy. He was dressed in an immaculate dress uniform and was courteous and kind to Johnny’s family. He politely replied with a “No, thank you, ma’am,” when Johnny’s mother asked him if he’d like anything to drink.

When General Grant finally showed up, he was wearing an old

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Lincoln believed the nation couldn’t survive with one side fighting against the other. Now Johnny looked at his own parlor, with General Lee on one side and General Grant on the other.

The house was still divided, but it was coming back together.

After a lengthy discussion, General Grant wrote out the terms of surrender. General Lee agreed and signed the document.

The war was effectively over.

Three days later, the Confederate Army marched into Appomattox Court House to formally surrender.

From the front of his house, Johnny spotted General Chamberlain watching as the defeated army marched by. With a wink at Johnny, he called out an order. His battalion of Union soldiers came to attention and saluted the tired, ragged Confederate soldiers as they stacked their muskets.

As the worn-out men staggered by, Johnny imagined that each step they took was a step toward a new day. Johnny returned General Chamberlain’s salute. The general smiled.

They’re small steps, Johnny thought. *But they are steps. ✦*

New York Times best-selling author and Eagle Scout Michael P. Spradlin has written many books for young readers, including the international best-selling *The Youngest Templar* series.

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