

MATTER OF HONOR

By Ray Hamby

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STORY OF THE PLAY

This romantic drama is set on a Southern plantation during the Civil War. A Confederate soldier, transporting a Yankee prisoner, stops off at his fiancée's home in hopes of arranging a quick wedding. He makes the mistake of leaving the prisoner in the charge of Aunt Patience, who knows how to hold a pistol, but can't bring herself to shoot the Yankee when he tries to enlist her help in escaping.

Lisbeth appears in her bridal dress ready for her vows, but she, too, falls under the spell of the prisoner. Is he lying when he tells her he has fallen in love with her? She isn't sure until they kiss.

Affronted by her interest in the prisoner, the would-be-groom challenges the Yankee to a duel. They go outside to settle the matter of honor. There is a single gun shot. Lisbeth drops her veil and tells the minister they will proceed with the wedding. The door opens and lighting fades before it is clear which man has returned.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 4 w)

LISBETH REDFIELD: Southern belle.

SAVANAH REDFIELD: Her younger sister.

MISS LOUISE: Their mother.

AUNT PATIENCE: Slightly daft sister of Miss Louise.

ALEX GRAHAM: Handsome Yankee soldier.

RANDY THOMAS: Lieutenant in the Confederate Army.

REVEREND LAWFORD: Clergyman.

Time: Summer, 1864.

Place: Antebellum living room of a plantation home near Mobile, Alabama.

SETTING

Ornately-decorated living room in the Redfield plantation house outside Mobile, Alabama. There is a small settee DSR, a door to interior USR, fireplace on DSL wall, window on USL wall, exterior door SL of UPS wall, an easy chair USL and stool before the fireplace. Additional chairs, bureau and decor, as desired.

PROPS

LOUISE: Sewing, bouquet of garden flowers.

LISBETH: Sewing; long, white wedding gown with veil.

SAVANAH: Sewing, rifle.

RANDY: Two pistols, holster, rope, gloves.

PATIENCE: Carafe of water, carafe of brandy.

MATTER OF HONOR

(AT RISE: MISS LOUISE, a motherly woman of 45, is seated on settee, sewing. LISBETH and SAVANAH are also sewing, but with less enthusiasm.)

LISBETH: Mammy says more of the darkies are planning to leave.

LOUISE: We'll do the best we can without them.

SAVANAH: Papa would have died before he'd let us do housework.

LOUISE: *(Coldly.)* Your papa did die — and you still have housework to do.

SAVANAH: *(Crossly.)* I don't know what the world's coming to.

LISBETH: I don't know either. A house full of women folk and only half a dozen darkies left. Who's to protect us if the Yankees come?

LOUISE: Hush that talk. The Yankees will never dare set foot this close to Mobile.

SAVANAH: Rheba Munson says the war's not going well. Not well at all. She just came back from Atlanta and she says things are terrible there.

LISBETH: *(Puts down sewing.)* If Randy were only here I wouldn't be afraid of anything.

LOUISE: *(Comfortingly.)* He'll come home — just as soon as those damn Yankees find out what they're up against.

LISBETH: *(Stands, dreamily.)* And I'll marry him the minute he steps foot on the plantation.

SAVANAH: If he steps foot on the plantation.

LISBETH: What do you mean by that sassy remark?

SAVANAH: Maybe he won't come back.

LOUISE: Of course he will.

SAVANAH: *(To MOTHER.)* He could have married her before he left. Her dress was ready, the rings were bought.

LISBETH: *(Angrily.)* He was too much of a gentleman to...tie me down. In case...in case he didn't come back.

Matter of Honor

-5-

SAVANAH: Or in case he changed his mind when he did come back.

LISBETH: Savannah Redfield, you are jealous, and spiteful and mean.

LOUISE: Girls, hush that talk or I'll send you to bed without your suppers.

LISBETH: Then make Vanny stop going on like that.

SAVANAH: I have a right to speak my mind.

LOUISE: Girls!

(From offstage comes BARKING of hounds. THE WOMEN look up, startled. There are men's voices. AUNT PATIENCE hurries in from USR. She is a frail spinster, loved by the family despite being a little daft.)

PATIENCE: Oh. Oh. Louise. Girls. There are men out front. Men on horses. They look like soldiers. Two men on horses.

(An electric silence. LOUISE puts down sewing, rises.)

LOUISE: Hand me the gun, Patience.

PATIENCE: I'm afraid.

LOUISE: Vanny.

(SAVANAH rises quickly, crosses to mantel, takes down rifle, hands it to LOUISE.)

LISBETH: Where's Sam, Auntie?

PATIENCE: Gone to the quarter. They're all gone. They're afraid, too.

LOUISE: Come away from the window, Lisbeth.

LISBETH: But they may be neighbors, Mama. They could be anybody.

(A MAN'S VOICE quiets dogs. PATIENCE wails.)

LOUISE: Don't carry on, Patience. If it's Yankees, they can take what they want so long as they don't bother us.

Matter of Honor

-6-

LISBETH: *(Peeking out window.)* They're coming across the verandah.

LOUISE: Come away from there, Lisbeth. *(LISBETH crosses to the OTHERS. They stand behind LOUISE. There is a KNOCK on exterior door.)* Come in.

(Door opens and a handsome, if bedraggled, young YANKEE SOLDIER, wrists tied, enters. He is followed by LT. RANDY THOMAS, in the gray uniform of the Confederate Army. LOUISE holds the gun with awkward determination. Then, as she sees Randy, she relaxes. LISBETH runs toward him with a glad cry of welcome.)

LISBETH: Randy! Randy!

RANDY: *(Pushes HIS PRISONER USL, returns pistol to holster.)* How y'all! *(To PRISONER.)* Now, mind your manners, Graham. *(LISBETH has thrown herself into HIS arms.)* Oh, Lisbeth! Honey! Lisbeth!

(Excited ad libs from OTHERS. SAVANAH starts forward but LOUISE stops her with a wave of the gun.)

LOUISE: Wait, Vanny. Randy, is that...is that a damn Yankee?

RANDY: Yes, ma'am.

LOUISE: And you brought him into our home — in the presence of ladies?

RANDY: He's harmless, ma'am. I had his wrists tied to the saddle horn.

SAVANAH: What're you doing with him, Randy?

RANDY: He's my prisoner.

LOUISE: Where'd you catch him? Not around here.

RANDY: No, ma'am. But it's confidential information — war talk not for women's ears. I been assigned to take him... well, where I'm going isn't exactly this direction...but I figured by riding hard I'd have time to drop by here and... *(To LISBETH.)*...maybe attend to some courting that was interrupted by the war.

LISBETH: Randy — you mean us?

End of Freeview

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