

HISTORICAL RECREATION

by
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CHARACTERS:

BROOKE: A woman between 40 and 60. She's wearing a simple frock and matching bonnet, charcoal gray or dark navy, in the style of the nineteenth century. She carries a bus ticket and a large book that might be a Bible. Despite the historic costume, she has a knapsack or day bag featuring colors, a pattern, and/or a well-recognized emblem that's clearly from the present.

WADE: A man between 30 and 50. He looks unkempt and wears secondhand clothes.

DEPOT CLERK: An offstage voice.

SETTING: The waiting area of the bus depot.

AT RISE: **BROOKE** reads her book. **WADE** enters from DL. He looks the place over and then begins to approach **BROOKE**, but her dress, bonnet, and book stop him. He *wants* to talk to her—but he can't. He crosses to the **RESTROOMS AND VENDING** area and exits.

DEPOT CLERK

Attention passengers. Those passengers heading east to Nerlington, Dowsan City, Vendetta, Krepley, and all points beyond: we are awaiting information regarding the arrival of your bus and will inform you of its arrival upon further information. We appreciate your inconvenience.

BROOKE, who has looked up to listen to the announcement, closes her book. She picks up her knapsack from the chair beside her, revealing that it's anachronistic, given her costume. She digs around to find her electronic device, takes off her bonnet, and puts on earbuds to listen. **WADE** returns with a cup of coffee. Sipping some, he

chokes a bit upon seeing BROOKE with earbuds. His curiosity pushes him to take a seat near her. He then stands to go, but he's pulled back to the seat, considering BROOKE the whole time. She notices him and removes her earbuds.

BROOKE

Did you want something?

WADE

It's your—uhm—your earbuds. I didn't think you people were allowed to—you know. Earbuds.

BROOKE

(has to think a moment first)

Oh, right! No, I'm not allowed to use them once I arrive and things get going. That wouldn't look at all appropriate!

WADE

Oh, okay! So, when you're outside the community, you're a—a rebel?

BROOKE

(lost again)

No. No, technically, none of us are rebels until we arrive and things get going.

WADE

Because—you all rebel against—the modern world? You rebel against—the world of—worldly distractions?

BROOKE

Noooo. The Rebels rebel against the Union.

Befuddled, WADE starts to slowly walk away. BROOKE cocks her head and then returns to what she's listening to. Suddenly, her eyes widen, and she lifts her earbuds again.

Were you thinking I'm Amish?

WADE

(nodding and sitting)

Yeah. That or—the other one. The one that's not as strict.

BROOKE

(laughs)

Mennonite, I think they're called. But I'm not either one. I'm heading to a Civil War reenactment. I'm going to be an aid in the camp—writing letters for the foot soldiers and that kind of thing. I would've changed into my costume there, but they only have dressing tents for the men. And I'd have driven there in costume, but my car's in the shop.

WADE

Aaaaah, a Civil War reenactment. Good costume. Thought it was genuine.

BROOKE

Between you and me, this costume isn't 100-percent historically accurate.

WADE

That's a shame.

BROOKE

Well, we try to be as accurate as possible. It's just that we can't always be as—

WADE

(interrupts)

No, I meant it's a shame you're not Amish. You looked so—so *holy* sitting there, reading your Bible. It was a nice contrast to everyone else with their—with their electronic devices. Their devices and their vices.

BROOKE

(shrugs)

I'm not even reading the Bible. It's a book about how Civil War history depends on who tells it. And when. And where.

WADE

You're a big history fan, then, huh? I've never met a Civil War re-creator here before. Is that the right word? Re-creator? Re-creationist?

BROOKE

We usually say reenactors. Some might call me a reenactress, I guess. It's mostly a guy thing, but women had important roles in the Civil War, too.

WADE

(stands and paces a bit)

But wasn't the Civil War—wasn't it one of the *worst* wars?

BROOKE

It was the deadliest war in American history! More lives lost than in any U.S. war before or since. Between combat and disease, there were seven-hundred and fifty thousand deaths. The death count used to be set at six-hundred and twenty thousand. One of those historical gray areas that show up more often than we—

WADE

(interrupts)

Then why reenact it? How'd that become a thing? Maybe I'm stupid, but why would anyone want to re-live such a horrible thing?

BROOKE

I suppose everyone has their own reasons. Some see the Civil War as a *test*. A horrible test, yeah, but one we somehow managed to pass. The nation wasn't even 100 years old, and it survived what might well be the most traumatic event in our history. Myself, I go to remind people that women played a part in that.

WADE

(not entirely convinced)

Hmm. Okay.

BROOKE

Okay?

WADE

Okay.

BROOKE

(pauses)

Okay.

(puts her earbuds back in)

WADE

(sits beside her again)

I was hoping you were Amish. Or that other one that isn't so strict.

BROOKE

(removes earbuds)

What?

WADE

Oh—I asked if you could give me a dollar. I'm a dollar away from being able to get a—
(glances at the cup of coffee he's holding)
a sandwich.

BROOKE goes through her bag for a dollar and gives it to him.

WADE

(shoving the dollar in his shirt pocket as if it's become routine)

God bless you.

BROOKE

So—are you, uhm—waiting for a bus?

WADE

(gives her an expression that asks “Are you kidding me?”)

BROOKE

Seemed like the thing to ask. Do you really only have enough money for a sandwich?

WADE

(wanders again, arriving at a spot where BROOKE can't see him)

Oh, I probably have enough for a burger tonight, too. If I don't tell people what it's for, they think I'm going to spend it on booze, so I always say I'm a dollar away from a cup of coffee or a sandwich. Sometimes, it's the truth. But I do tell lies a lot.

(checks the dollars in his shirt pocket—and slumps)

BROOKE

I imagine you have to.

WADE

I wish you could forgive me.

BROOKE

Oh—uhm—I forgive you.

WADE

I wish you *could*. You're not really qualified. You're not really Amish. Or that other one that isn't so strict.

BROOKE

Mennonite. I'm not sure either one of them is qualified to offer absolution, though. I think you need a *priest* for that.

WADE

I don't trust priests. There's one that comes in here. Keeps trying to convert me. Amish people don't come to this bus station to convert people. They come here because they don't drive cars. They're trustworthy.

BROOKE

(beat)

Okay.

DEPOT CLERK

Attention passengers. Those passengers heading north to Shinwurst, Grappleton, Sullen Lake, Pricket, and all points beyond: we are awaiting information regarding the arrival of your bus and will inform you of its arrival upon further information. We appreciate your inconvenience.

WADE

Is that your bus?

BROOKE

No, I'm on the later bus that's late. Hey, can I ask you a personal question?

WADE

Is it the one about what led me to being homeless?

BROOKE

(shrugs)

I'm interested in history.

WADE

(sits beside her)

A few years ago, I worked in the warehouse of a company that makes electronic devices. Pretty easy work, but I—well, I *lost my footing*. I started sending the wrong boxes to the wrong stores. And I really didn't care about my mistakes. I knew they'd fire me eventually. When they did, I still couldn't find my footing. Never bothered to look for a job anywhere else. Long story short: I lost my savings and got evicted.

BROOKE

What was it that made you lose your footing in the first place?

WADE

This is when people usually ask if I couldn't just stay with family or friends.

BROOKE

Obviously, you couldn't. How'd you lose your footing?

WADE

(rises to pace)

I was with a woman. We'd been together for three, four years. She was in *recovery*. But she wasn't—*recovering*. Long story short: one night, in bed, I reached over and found she was really cold. Wouldn't wake up. So I called for an ambulance. You know, back in the days of landline telephones, you could call 911, and they'd automatically know what your address is. Cell phones made that a lot tougher to do. Especially back when this happened. I had to tell them the address. I had to *correctly* tell them the address.

BROOKE

Oh God. And, of course, you were frantic.

WADE

And, of course, I was freaked. Maybe I said North Maple when I should've said South Maple—or the other way around. Maybe I couldn't even remember my own stupid address at *all!* But, to this day, I sure do remember hearing the ambulance siren coming, coming, coming—and then going, going, going. By the time they arrived and got Maggie to the hospital, it was too late. Too late to save her. And I'll never forget the sound of that siren. Coming, coming, coming. Going, going, going.

BROOKE

That's horrible.

WADE

And that's when I lost my footing. But now I don't have to remember any stupid address at all. No stupid address. No stupid cell phone. Devices and vices.

BROOKE

(almost to herself)

The Amish thing.

WADE

Hmm?

BROOKE

Nothing. It's really brave of you to tell that story so openly.

WADE

People ask.

BROOKE

(goes back into her knapsack for more money)

Here. I know this doesn't begin to—I know it's not *adequate*, but twenty dollars is enough to get something better than a burger tonight. Have yourself a good, solid meal. It's on me.

WADE

(sincerely grateful)

Oh. Really? It's been a long, long time since I've had seafood! But—really?

BROOKE

Yes, really. Go have some seafood.

WADE

Okay! Seafood, it is!

BROOKE

Okay!

WADE

(sitting, he's suddenly back to his routine of shoving the money in his shirt and saying halfheartedly)

Okay. God bless you.

BROOKE

Well. Uhm. God bless you, too.

WADE

You said your costume isn't historically right. What's not right about it?

BROOKE

It's not made of the correct material. It's a cotton *blend*. They had cotton cloth in the 1860s, of course, but there weren't cotton blends.

WADE

A blend, huh? Did women really write letters for soldiers? Right there on the battlefield?

BROOKE

Yeah, a lot of people from that period couldn't read and write. Some women who *could* volunteered to write letters for soldiers who *couldn't*.

WADE

Right there on the battlefield?

BROOKE

Well. No. Probably not right there on the battlefield. But in the camps, it's very likely they—

WADE

(interrupts)

Another blend, huh?

BROOKE

I—I don't understand.

WADE

(resumes pacing)

Another *blend*. Of truth and *lies*! It's a shame you're not Amish. They're trustworthy. You see them come through here sometimes, and they look like the only people in the world who don't blend the truth with lies.

BROOKE

It's true we don't get things completely right at Civil War reenactments—or with telling the history of *anything* for that matter. But that's different from blending the truth with *lies*. I mean, I assume the story you told about getting the address wrong that night was—wait. That's a bad example.

WADE

Are you calling me a liar?

BROOKE

It was a terrible example. Forgive me.

WADE

(retrieving the twenty dollars, which he holds out to her)

Here. Here, take your money back, if you think I'm a liar.

BROOKE

No. You keep it. I was just using that as an example of how we can't fully trust *any* story about the past. Historical *or* personal. You were frantic that night. Freaked! You might not remember each and every detail exactly right.

WADE

Take the money back! You have no reason to trust me! Maybe *I* was the one in recovery but not recovering. Maybe Maggie kicked me out. Maybe that's how I became homeless! Maybe there wasn't any ambulance at all! Now, *take your money back!*

WADE throws the bill at BROOKE and storms offstage. BROOKE rises to go after him, but sees he's leaving too quickly. She retrieves the bill and resumes her seat with some shame. She puts her earbuds to the side and takes out her book—but doesn't read it. With some overlap, WADE reenters, looks at BROOKE—and exits again. Quickly, he enters again, freezes, rubs his neck, takes a few steps toward her, but exits. Finally, he comes charging back to pace beside her again.

(still upset)

Look, I don't really know what happened that night. I needed a story because people keep asking. I needed a story because—because *I* needed a story. I don't know what the truth is about why I became this way. I don't even trust myself anymore. I lost my footing!

(calmer)

I don't have a good answer for how I became homeless, so I—I say what I say. I say what I say to get some money for another meal or two. And that's why I wanted you to be Amish. Or that other one that isn't—

BROOKE

(interrupts)

Mennonite! You wanted me to be Amish so I'd be qualified to forgive you? For lying?

WADE

To forgive me for not knowing *if* I'm lying. And for taking money for it!

BROOKE

(sighs first)

You asked about why we reenact the Civil War. Why we relive that horrible, traumatic point in history. I wonder if it's because we're trying to tell the story as truthfully as we can—even though we know it's probably not entirely accurate. Did seven-hundred and fifty thousand people die, or was it six-hundred and twenty thousand? We'll probably never know, but we need to have faith in *some* story in order to—

(beat)

to write the next chapter. In order to *find our footing!* Does that make sense?

WADE

(pauses, then sits a chair away from BROOKE)

Sort of. I guess.

BROOKE

(moves to the seat closer to WADE)

It almost doesn't matter how true the history is. You just need to trust in it enough to be able to make it a fixed point. For instance, I wonder if the 911 dispatcher just *heard* North instead of South or the other way around. What if you're not to blame at all?

WADE

(looking elsewhere)

That—makes sense. I guess. *That* makes sense.

WADE shuts his eyes. A siren is heard as if outside. It's heard coming, coming, coming—then going, going, going. WADE reacts to this by grimacing and curling his body. No one else reacts to it. Gradually, he relaxes.

No. No, I don't think it was the dispatcher's fault. I'm pretty sure *I* got the address wrong. *I* made a horrible mistake. You said some people see the Civil War as a test. I think I was being tested, too. Maybe by God. Even if not, I sure did *fail* that test.

(pause and rises slowly)

But now I—I gotta—what was that you said? We need to have faith in *some* story to—

BROOKE

Oh, uhm, I said—to have faith in some story to find our footing!

WADE

No. That's what *I* said. *You* said—to write the next chapter. I—uh—I gotta go, you know—go write the next chapter now. God bless you.

(starts to exit, but takes false steps, unsure of where to head)

BROOKE

Wait. Where are you headed now?

WADE

I'm—I don't really know. Where I'm headed.

(slumps, but then stands up straight)

Well, it's been a long, long time since I've had seafood! I think I'll go have some seafood for lunch instead of a sandwich!

BROOKE

Well, okay!

WADE

(grinning)

Okay.

(continuing to wait, his grin begins to waver)

BROOKE

(takes a moment to realize he needs the twenty dollars)

Oh! Okay.

(retrieves it and gives him the money)

WADE

(shoving the cash in his shirt)

Okay.

WADE exits DL. BROOKE resumes her original seat. After a deep breath, she finds her place in her book. Just as she's about to read, she stops and looks upward to listen to the announcement. She slumps during it and lip-syncs when it gets to "We appreciate your inconvenience."

DEPOT CLERK

Attention passengers. Those passengers heading east to Nerlington, Dowsan City, Vendetta, Krepley, and all points beyond: we are still awaiting information regarding the arrival of your bus and will inform you of its arrival upon further information. We appreciate your inconvenience.

(BLACKOUT)