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CHRISTMAS FOR TAD

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A Story of Mary and Abraham Lincoln

BY

HELEN TOPPING MILLER

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CHRISTMAS FOR TAD

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LINCOLN
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THE package was very tightly sealed.

There was a heavy cord around it fastened with thick blobs of wax and Tad Lincoln, who had been christened Thomas, stood fidgeting while his father worked at it patiently, with the old horn-handled knife that opened and shut with a sharp click.

Outside was the gloom of late December. That December of 1863, when the fortunes of the Federal armies had taken a little swing upward, but when war still lay like a poisonous, tragic, and heartbreaking shadow over a whole country. But to Tad Lincoln December meant Christmas, and packages meant surprises, important to a ten-year-old boy.

Tad stood first on one foot, then the other, impatiently, because Papa was so slow in open-

Christmas for Tad

ing this package. A round-faced boy, with his mother's brown eyes and hair, he was a sturdy figure in the miniature uniform of a Union colonel that his father had had made for him. The coat fitted him jauntily, all the brass buttons fastened up in regulation fashion; there were epaulets and braid and long trousers lying properly over his toes, so that the copper toes of his boots showed. He had a belt and a sword, but he was not wearing them now. Swords were for engagements, reviews, and parades, the officers of Company K had instructed him. Among friends indoors an officer took off his belt and hung it in a safe place.

His father's fingers were mighty long and bony, Tad was thinking, and awkward, too. One thumbnail was thicker and darker than the other nails and Tad touched it gently with his forefinger.

"What makes your thumb like that, Papa?" he asked.

The long yellowed hand put down the knife and the deep-set, steel-gray eyes of Abraham Lincoln studied the thumb intently as though he had never seen it before.

"Once there was an ax, Tad," he drawled, his

Christmas for Tad

heavy eyebrows flicking up and down, his long mouth quirked up at one corner. "It didn't want to go where I aimed it, so I said, says I, now who is boss here, Mister Ax, you or Abe Lincoln? You chop where I aim for you to chop, Mister Ax. So I made it hit where I wanted it to hit but it jumped back and took a whack at me just to show me that it could be the boss if it wanted to."

"It might have cut your hand off," worried Tad, still rubbing the dark nail.

"It might—but it didn't. It was a well-meaning ax. Just independent, like a lot of people."

"People take whacks at you, don't they? I hear about it," Tad said.

"Yes, some of 'em do." Lincoln picked up the knife again, poked at the stubborn seals. "But mostly afterwards they cooperate."

"Those people in New York didn't," insisted Tad. "Mother was scared to death when those draft riots were on and people yelled at her in that store. The police had to stand all around us with guns and you know something? Bob was scared but I wasn't. Ole Bob was plumb scared green."

Christmas for Tad

“That was a bad time, son.” A seal came loose at last and fell in scarlet fragments to the rug. He attacked a second one, gripping the knife, the skin stretched tight over his fleshless knuckles. “It was bad because people weren’t mad at you. They were mad at me, not at Bob or your mother. They didn’t want to be drafted to fight in this war and I said they had to be drafted.”

“Well, golly, you’ve got to have soldiers! General Grant and General Rosecrans and everybody are yelling for more troops. You have to get ’em, you can’t make ’em out of air. Hurry and open it, Papa. Don’t you want to see what’s in it?”

“I think I know what’s in it. Yes, Tad,” he went on musingly, as though he talked to himself. “I’m supposed to make soldiers out of air; anyway the New York newspapers seemed to think so. Make ’em out of air and feed ’em on air and give ’em air to shoot with.”

“And then if General Lee licks us you’re to blame!” cried Tad. “Oh, I know, John Hay and Mr. Nicolay hide the papers but I find ’em. Papa, I read where one New York paper called you a gorilla.”

Christmas for Tad

“What do you think, Tad? Don’t I look like one a little?” Lincoln dropped the knife, shambled bent across the room, his long arms dangling, his hands almost touching the floor. As the boy drew back aghast he bared his long teeth and snarled and Tad began to cry suddenly.

“No—no! Don’t do it!”

Lincoln laughed loudly, lifted him, setting the lad on his knee, holding him close. “For a man wearing the Union uniform, you scare easy, Colonel,” he teased. “Remember this, Tad. Names never hurt anybody. And the gorilla is one beast that’s never been tamed and only a heavy chain can master him.”

“Open the box,” gulped Tad, scrubbing his eyes with the cuff of his blue Union coat. “If anybody sent me a Christmas present, I’d want to know what it was.”

Lincoln dug the last seal away, cut the cord, and tore off the heavy paper. “Now, John Hay would say I’m a fool to open this,” he remarked. “He’ll say there could be something in it to blind or cripple me.”

“Maybe you’d better not, Papa,” Tad cried anxiously. “Let me call somebody.”

Christmas for Tad

“No, Tad. I trust the man who brought it and I know what’s in it. It isn’t a Christmas present exactly. I earned it in a kind of a way. Look!” He opened the heavy box and the smaller one inside that was covered with gold-colored plush.

“A watch!” exclaimed the boy.

“A solid gold watch.” Lincoln held it out carefully on his big palm. “From Mr. James Hoes, Esquire, of Chicago. I won it, Tad. Mr. Hoes offered the watch as a prize for the one making the biggest contribution of funds to their Sanitary Commission fair. I sent them a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation and they auctioned it off for three thousand dollars, so I won the watch.”

“You’ve already got a watch, Papa, but I haven’t got one,” said Tad eagerly.

Lincoln drew his old watch from his pocket, loosed it from the chain and seals. “I don’t have a solid gold watch. This old turnip is sort of worn. I guess I timed too many speeches and juries with it. But you’re not big enough for a watch, Tad. Not till you can wear a vest and have enough stomach to hold up a chain.”

Christmas for Tad

“Willie had a vest and he wasn’t so very much bigger than me,” argued Tad.

A shadow of pain ran over his father’s gaunt face and the tears, always quick when any emotion stirred him, were bright in his sunken eyes. The agony of Willie’s untimely death was still raw and aching in his heart.

“Willie was twelve years old, Tad. When you are twelve you can have a vest.”

“And a watch?”

“And a watch. Not this one.” Lincoln clicked the fastening of the bright new timepiece and dropped it into his pocket, along with the key that wound it. “I guess Bob will have to have this old one. Bob’s a man now and a man needs a watch.”

“He thinks he’s a man just because he can shave,” Tad scoffed. He studied his father’s face for a moment. “Why did you grow a beard, Papa? You didn’t have a beard when I was a little boy.”

“You’re still a little boy, fellow.” Lincoln gave him a poke in ribs. “Maybe I raised these whiskers because a little girl in New York asked me to. Maybe I just did it to keep my chin warm.”

Christmas for Tad

“All Bob has is little patches in front of his ears. They look silly.”

Lincoln lifted his long body erect and walked to the window.

“You’d better be respectful to your big brother, Tad,” he said dryly. “Some of the newspapers that don’t like me are printing that Bob Lincoln has made a million dollars out of this war. For a young fellow still in Harvard only twenty years old, I’d say he had uncanny perspicacity.”

Tad frowned thoughtfully. “It’s a lie, ain’t it, Papa?” In his agitation the boy’s tricky palate betrayed him as it often did. “It’s big, dirty *rie!*”

Lincoln’s bony shoulders twitched upward, sagged with resignation. “Son, if all the lies that have been printed about the Lincolns were piled up in a heap, they’d reach near to the top of that monument out yonder.”

Tad came to stand beside him and looked out of the half-finished shaft that would some day honor Washington. Now it was only a beginning, lost in a spidery web of scaffolding.

“Be plenty tall,” he observed. “If Bob had all that money, would it reach to the top, Papa? He

Christmas for Tad

could buy everything he wanted, couldn't he? Horses and carriages and gold watches and everything. Can't you put people in jail for telling such lies? You're the president."

Lincoln stood still, looking down on the trampled mall where a herd of cattle pastured, beef animals gathered to feed the Army of the Potomac. His eyes took on the faraway inscrutable look that so often baffled his intimates and infuriated his enemies; the look that lost itself on the horizon of a great land torn by hate and drenched in an anguish of blood and fire. Gettysburg, Vicksburg, Chickamauga, had deepened that hurt in his eyes and cut new lines about his mouth and brooding brows. Three years of war, and in the nation there seethed a dozen angry factions. Copperheads, only by a miracle defeated in Ohio; furious mobs resisting conscription in the cities; even in the Congress, oppositionists, critics, outright enemies.

Only a few weeks since, he had stood facing that raw November wind on the Gettysburg hill, speaking that little piece that now he was embarrassed to remember, the speech that the papers had dismissed as insignificant, dedicat-

Christmas for Tad

ing the ground where slept more than sixty thousand Union and Confederate dead. The dull ache in Abraham Lincoln's heart turned bitter as he thought of his own son, who should be in uniform and who was growing restless and unhappy at being the one young man of army age who was not permitted to fight for his country. Yet he dared not let Robert enlist. The President's son would be a prime hostage should he be captured, and used no doubt to wring concessions from his father.

"Let's go show Mama the watch." He shook off his dismal musings and scrubbed Tad's brown head with the flat of his palm, straightening the collar of the uniform that was Tad's pride and glory.

Tad looked up confidingly. "You know what Mama is worrying about, Papa? She owes an awful lot of money in New York. She's afraid you'll find it out. She said on the train when we came home that I mustn't tell you all the things she bought because you had troubles enough to kill three men."

Lincoln hunched a shoulder, stretching his lips into a dry smile. "See how my back is breaking down, Tad? That's General Rosecrans.

Christmas for Tad

And this side is General McClellan and General Meade made it worse when he let Lee get away across the river.”

“You cried then, I remember. Men don’t cry.”

Strong men had wept enough tears to put the Potomac in flood these last years, Lincoln was thinking. “When will it end?” he said aloud, with a groan. John Hay, his faithful secretary, looked up quickly from his desk in the outer room.

“When we’ve killed all the Rebs, I reckon,” said Tad complacently. “But if we killed ’em all I’d have a lot of uncles killed, wouldn’t I? I had one killed at Chickamauga already, my uncle Helm.—He was a general,” he told John Hay.

“It’s happened in a good many families, Tad,” Hay said. “That’s because we’re all Americans.”

“Well, my mother was Southern to begin with,” declared Tad, “so I’m kind of half Southern but I got over it.”

“Southerners are good folks, son,” Lincoln admonished him. “Fine people most of them. Just mistaken, that’s all—just mistaken.”

Christmas for Tad

"They fight good," was Tad's comment, as they went down the hall.

Abraham Lincoln always stepped carefully and quietly in this big house. He had never been at home in the White House. He always had a secret, haunting feeling of guilt as though he were a guest and a strange, uneasy, even an unworthy, guest. Mary, his wife, had no such inhibitions. She loved to sweep down the wide stairway, her widely flounced skirts moving elegantly over her hoops, her tight small bosom, her round white arms and her round white chin held proudly and complacently. All this was her due, her manner said, and her husband's humility and trick of effacing himself occasionally irked and angered her.

She was writing a letter at a desk when they entered her sitting room. The intent creases in her brow softened as the boy ran to her.

"Look Mama—look at Papa's new solid gold watch! He got it for the 'Mancipation Proclamation."

Lincoln pulled out the watch, grinning boyishly. Mary's eyes brightened as she fingered the handsomely engraved case.

"Why, it must be terribly expensive," she ap-

Christmas for Tad

proved. "What does Tad mean about the Proclamation?"

"I sent a copy to Chicago. They auctioned it off."

"For three thousand dollars," added Tad.

"My Heaven, you mean they got three thousand dollars just for that piece of paper?" exclaimed Mary.

"It was a pretty important paper, Mary, to a million or so poor black people anyway. A copy would be a historic memento a hundred years from now. Understand—" he fended off the small glint of avidity that so often troubled him in Mary Lincoln's pale gray eyes "—this was a charity thing. For their fair out there in Chicago."

"You only made one copy?" She turned the watch in her small, plumb fingers.

He hedged uneasily sensing the trend of her thinking. "I made one or two for old friends. No—" he raised a hand "—I'm not making any more, so put that idea out of your mind."

She flared. "Why do you always accuse me of things I'm not even thinking?" she cried angrily.

"Maybe because I know you better than you

Christmas for Tad

know yourself, my dear," he said gently. "You were thinking that this is a nice watch but that three thousand dollars is three thousand dollars."

"Well, it is a nice watch but it never cost that much money," she admitted grudgingly.

"Mary, this watch was a prize. It was competition. Anybody else could have won it, anybody who contributed more to their fair than I did." He took the watch from her hands and slid it back to his pocket. "Here—" he handed her the old one— "put this away. You can give it to Bob when he comes home. Run along now, Tad, I've got work to do."

Tad slipped out of the room a bit disconcerted. Mama ought not to have got mad. She was trying not to get mad so often, his father assured him. They had to help her, be careful not to provoke her. Tad skittered down the long stairs almost colliding with a workman who carried a stepladder, with a long wreath of greenery hung over his shoulder.

"What's that for?" the boy demanded.

"For the Christmas receptions and things. Decorations. Don't know how I'll get it hung.

Christmas for Tad

Can't drive no nails in this wall. Hard as rock. Nails just bends double."

"You could glue it," suggested Tad helpfully.

"Yah!" scorned the workman. "Get along out of my way, boy."

"My father is the President!" stated Tad, sternly, drawing himself up in his uniform.

"He is that, but you ain't—nor no colonel either."

"I am so. I'm an honorary colonel."

"Call it ornery and I'll agree. Now quit bothering me. I've got to figure where to put up two Christmas trees."

"Two?" Tad's eyes widened.

"One down here and one up yonder—private, for you I reckon. So everybody wants to get a favor out of your Pa can send you a present."

"All I want," sighed Tad, backing off to watch the man ascend the ladder. "is my nanny goat back."

"Your nanny goat has likely been made into stew by this time. You won't be driving a goat team through this house any more, busting up things and ruinin' the floors."

Christmas for Tad

"I bet I get her back." bragged Tad "All Company K is helping me look for her."

"Soldiers have got more important things to do than hunt goats," stated the man from his perch. "They got to find out who put that bullet through your old man's hat."

Tad was galvanized with excitement. "Hey! He never told me." He tore back up the stairs.

Mr. Stanton, the Secretary of War, was just coming out of his father's office. Tad backed off and flattened himself against the wall. Mr. Stanton was running the war; he was tall and grim with a long gray beard but no mustache to soften a stern mouth, and his eyes could look very hard and coldly at a boy through his round spectacles. Behind Stanton marched Senator Sumner and Tad knew him too. Senator Sumner was always mad about something and now, as he strode past the boy, Tad heard him mutter angrily, "Amnesty! Amnesty! I'd give North Carolina amnesty at the end of a rope!"

Tad wriggled behind the visitor and slipped in before anyone closed the door. He marched straight to the desk where John Hay was putting papers in envelopes and licking the flaps.

Christmas for Tad

“Who shot a bullet through my father’s hat?” he demanded.

Hay pressed down the flap with a fist. “Who told you that, Colonel Thomas Lincoln?” he inquired with careful unconcern.

“You never told me,” stormed Tad, “nor my father—nor Mama.”

“Your mother doesn’t know about it. We hope she’ll never know. Also we hope your father won’t ride alone out there at the Soldier’s Home any more.”

“Cavalry ride with him. With drawn sabers.”

“Now they do. But he rode alone out there and somebody shot a bullet through the top of his high silk hat. He doesn’t want his family or anybody worried about it, so I wouldn’t mention it if I were you, Colonel.”

“I won’t.” Tad was flattered by being addressed as colonel, and he liked his father’s grave secretary. He obeyed John Hay more readily than any one else. “But I want to see the hat.”

“We burned the hat. Too bad—it was a good eight-dollar hat.” Hay folded another sheet after verifying the scrawled signature: *A. Lincoln*. “We burned it by order of the President.”

Christmas for Tad

Tad looked a trifle shaken. He came close and leaned on the desk. "Why do people want to kill my father, Mr. Hay? They do. I know. That's why we have Company K here in the house and all over the yard."

John Hay shook his head. "This is war, Tad. You could ask, why is there a war? Why are there millions of people over there across the river who'd liked to blow up this town and kill everybody in it? Everybody who stands for the Union. Give me an answer to that and I'll answer your why. It's a black cloud of hate, Colonel, smothering everything decent in the country. Maybe it will lift some day. Meanwhile there's not much sense to it."

"Maybe some of those mean Secesh over there stole my nanny goat! I have to go out and see if the boys have heard anything about her. She was a nice goat. She liked me; she licked my fingers. She wouldn't just run off like Papa said."

"Maybe," remarked Hay, "she went over to see why General Meade let Lee's army get away from him. Go hunt your goat and don't bother your father. He's had people swarming in in there for the last hour."

Christmas for Tad

“All the women,” observed Tad, wise beyond his years, “have got a boy they want to be a colonel or a captain. And all the men want to know why Papa doesn’t take Richmond.”

“Get on out of here, Tad, or I won’t give you any Christmas present.”

“You know what I want,” stated Tad at the door. “My nanny goat back.”

THE man in the armchair across the desk looked formidable and expensive. Abraham Lincoln looked down at his own long, dusty, and wrinkled black breeches and unconsciously gave a hitch to his sagging coat, to his crooked black satin tie that had a perverse tendency to sidle around under his ear.

The visitor's swallow-tailed coat was pressed and elegant; his shirt was crisp with ruffles, his heavy watch chain held a jeweled seal. He rested plump white hands, covered with yellow gloves, on the gold head of a cane. His homely face was cold-eyed and stern. He had refused to state his errand to the people in the outer office and Lincoln knew how thoroughly they deplored his stubborn insistence on seeing as many who called as possible.

Christmas for Tad

“Some day,” prophesied Nicolay gloomily, “you’re going to admit the man with the little derringer hid inside a boot, Mr. President.”

“With the fences down all around, Nicolay, why put a bar over the one door,” Lincoln had argued calmly. “If they want to kill me they will unless you bolt me inside an iron box. I’m the people’s hired man. They put me here. I must listen to what they want to say.”

But obviously the portly stranger in the flamboyant apparel had little to say. He remarked about the weather, the unfinished Capitol dome, and the trampled mall where army beef grazed. His chilly visage did not soften or show animation or interest. Momentarily Lincoln expected him to announce icily, as had happened before, “Mr. Lincoln, your wife owes me a large account on which no payment has been made for some time.”

If this visitor’s errand was financial he made no mention of it. He stated that he was a friend of Secretary Seward and that he had attended the Convention at which Lincoln had been nominated.

“But I did not vote for you, sir,” he added.

“Your privilege and right, sir.” Lincoln filled

Christmas for Tad

a little following silence by pulling out the gold watch. "A gift I had today. From the Chicago Fair. Sort of a Christmas gift, I guess you'd call it." He felt as young as Tad under those coldly scrutinizing eyes, and as naïve and awkward.

"Very fitting and well deserved, Mr. President. Now I must tell you that I have no business here whatsoever. I merely came here to tell you that I believe you are doing all for the good of the country that it is in the power of man to do. And I want to say to you, Mr. President—go ahead, do as you darned well please and I will support you."

Lincoln's rare laughter whooped. He sprang up and pumped the hand of the startled stranger. John Hay put an inquiring head in at the door.

"This man," chortled the President, "came here deliberately and on purpose to tell me that I was running this country right—and all the while I thought he'd come to tell me how to take Richmond. Sit down, sir, sit down! I have not seen enough of you."

"My dear Mr. President," protested the visi-

Christmas for Tad

tor, "are words of approval so rare and exciting to the President of the United States?"

"Rare?" Lincoln dropped back to his chair, his face collapsing into a sudden, melancholy mask. "John, show this man that copy of the New York *Herald*—the one where they call me a fiend and a disgrace to humanity because I set human beings free from slavery."

"I destroyed it, Mr. President," Hay said. "I was afraid that the infamous thing might be seen by some of your family."

"Useless precaution, Johnny. I have a son in Boston, and I suspect that he keeps his mother supplied with interesting clippings. My friend, if to be the big boss of Hell is as tough as what I have to undergo here, I can feel mighty sorry for Satan. Come along and have lunch with me, if you will, sir. I reckon they've put the big pot in the little one by this time. John, will you see if Mrs. Lincoln is ready for lunch?"

"I believe Mrs. Lincoln went out, Mr. President. Mr. Nicolay ordered out the carriage and the black team."

"And an escort?"

Christmas for Tad

“Oh, yes, sir—the lieutenant arranged an escort.”

Mary would like that, Abraham Lincoln was thinking as they went down the chilly stairs. Fires burned in all the rooms but the ceilings were high and the walls cold and this was a bleak day with the lowering chill of late December. A few snowflakes timidly rode down the icy air, but Mary would wrap herself in rich furs, her round pink face nestled in a deep collar, a stylish bonnet perched on her smooth dark hair.

With white-gloved hands—smooth now, but once they had known a time of rough domestic toil—she would wave brief salutes to the people in the street. He hoped she wouldn't be haughty about it. He knew her shyness and uncertainty, her feeling of insecurity in a high place for which she had had so little training, and that too often she hid this uncertainty behind a too glib, too tart attitude of arrogance. To Abraham Lincoln's eyes, to his sensitive insight, it was like seeing a nervous little hen strut and bridle surrounded by the cold angry eyes of foxes and the sharp talons of hawks.

Christmas for Tad

There were, unhappily, too many people who misunderstood Mary Todd Lincoln.

Even John Hay had little sympathy for the President's wife. There had been a scrap of paper that Lincoln has found once, part of a letter Hay had begun and discarded calling Mary a "Hellcat" and adding dryly that she was lately more "hellcatical" than usual.

Too bad Mary occasionally indulged in temper tantrums in the executive offices. Her small explosions, her husband knew, were a form of relief for the eternally seething doubts of herself that tormented her. She adored her husband and the two boys that had been spared to them, but this love was fiercely jealous and possessive and not always wise or controlled.

Christmas would be a sad time for Mary. Last year Willie had been here, the gentle, quiet brown-haired boy who spent so many hours curled up in a chair with a book. Willie had known every railroad line, every station on every line. He had learned timetables by heart and drawn up schedules of his own. It had been just such a raw, dreary day as this last February when Willie had gone riding out on his pony.

Christmas for Tad

He had come home soaked and chilled and the nightmare of those next days would haunt Abraham Lincoln as long as he lived—Willie, burning with fever, babbling incoherencies; Mary sobbing and moaning, pacing the floor, her hands in taut, agonized fists, her smooth hair wild over her tear-streaked cheeks; and that ghastly night of the White House ball, with the Marine Band playing, he himself having to shake hands endlessly at the door of the East Room while Willie fought for breath upstairs.

After that, the end. The blue eyes closed and sunken, fading flowers pressed by Mary into the small cold hands, senators, generals, foreign ministers, pressing the numb hand of the President of the United States, while upstairs on her bed Mary writhed and wailed in uncontrolled grief.

Now Christmas would bring it all back. He was glad that Mary could forget for a little while, shopping, buying gifts for Tad who had too much already, who was in a fair way to be badly spoiled.

Deeply, poignantly, Abraham Lincoln dreaded Christmas. All over the land, north and south, would lie a load of sorrow like a

Christmas for Tad

grim hand pressing the heart of America, the heart of this tall grave man in the White House. He felt that burden as he walked into the small dining room. Mary had not returned. Tad slid in late and was sent out again to wash himself. The stranger waxed garrulous.

“I understand, Mr. President, that you have a plan to widen the breach between Governor Vance of North Carolina and Jefferson Davis, president of this so-called Confederacy?”

“That,” said Lincoln, “turned out not too well. Gilmore, of the New York *Tribune*, wrote too much and prematurely. Those fellows across the river got riled up and a Georgia regiment started a riot in Raleigh in September and burned the Raleigh *Standard*. So the citizens of Raleigh who didn’t have faith in Jeff Davis rose up and burned the Confederate newspaper, the *State Journal*. That widened the breach and Vance has already told Jeff Davis that he would welcome reunion with the Union states and any peace compatible with honor.”

He caught John Hay’s warning look then and said no more. He would not reveal that his agents has just brought in a letter sent by the Governor of North Carolina to Jefferson Davis

Christmas for Tad

—a bold and open plea for negotiation with the enemy.

“If North Carolina would make the break it would be a long step toward peace,” said his guest.

“It could also mean anarchy, outrages, and destruction in that state, calling for more Union troops,” Hay reminded them. “So far we have pushed back the borders of this rebellion, opened the Mississippi, and our Navy has tightened the blockade of all the Southern ports.”

“You will not, even under pressure, revoke the Emancipation Proclamation, Mr. President?” The visitor was anxious.

“I shall never revoke that Proclamation, sir.”

When the meal ended and the guest had taken an obsequious departure, Lincoln stopped at Hay’s desk.

“What was that fellow sent here to find out, Johnny? Was he sent by Sumner, you think, to put in a word against my idea of amnesty for any Southern state that wants to come back into the Union? Sumner wants ’em all hung down there and he has some powerful newspapers behind him. Some of ’em are saying I’m having

Christmas for Tad

my salary raised to a hundred thousand dollars a year, that I'm drawing it in gold while the Army gets paid in greenbacks, and that I've cooked up a scheme to have Congress declare me perpetual president for the rest of my life."

"Why do you let such fantastic rumors disturb you, Mr. Lincoln?" Hay protested. "That *New York World* editorial saying you've done a fine job and that your death would only prolong the war has been reprinted all over the country."

"If my death would end this war, John, I'd give my life gladly," Lincoln declared solemnly. "That would be a fine Christmas gift for this country."

THE soldiers of Company K One Hundred and Fiftieth Pennsylvania Volunteers had become practically a part of the White House family. Abraham Lincoln treated them as though they were his own sons, called most of them by their first names, personally arranged for their passes and furloughs.

So when Mary Todd Lincoln had all her shopping purchases carried up to the family sitting room and displayed, Lincoln's face wore a sober look of disappointment. Mary was tired and on edge but she excitedly showed him, one after another, the toys she had bought for Tad, the gifts for Robert, and a few items for members of the household staff.

"Look, Abraham, this gun—it fires like a real cannon! With smoke."

"Nothing for the boys?" he asked, rubbing

Christmas for Tad

his long hands over his knees, a characteristic nervous gesture.

“Why, I’ve just showed you—the wallet and cuff buttons for Bob and all these—”

“I mean *my* boys. The Company K boys.”

Mary stared incredulously. “Good Heavens—you can’t give Christmas presents to a whole company of soldiers! There must be a hundred of them.”

“I wish there were,” he said heavily. “I wish every company in our army was full strength but unfortunately they’re far short in numbers. There are less than forty of those boys and they’re far from home and Christmas is a bad time to be homesick.”

“They could be worse off,” she snapped. “They could be out there along the Rappahannock or down in those marshes of Mississippi. Pennsylvania’s not so far. Lord knows you’re always fixing up furloughs for them so they can go home. Why, it would cost a fortune to give gifts to all that company—and anyway, what can you give a soldier?”

“Some warm socks might come in good. That ground’s frozen out there and it’s likely to snow hard any day now.”

Christmas for Tad

“The commissary should keep them in socks.” She was testy as always in the face of criticism. “Don’t I do enough—going out to those horrid hospitals twice a week—carrying things—this house is practically stripped of bed linen, all torn up for bandages.” She fluttered about her purchases, flushed and breathless, her hands making little snatching gestures, picking up things, putting them down again, twisting string around her fingers.

“Very noble of you, indeed,” he approved. “I’m proud of what you do but I’m still thinking about Joe and Nate and those other boys. They curry horses and clean harness and saddles; they look after Tad and his goat—and of course they’re always on guard for fear I’ll get shot, though I can’t figure any place where I could be where nobody could get at me, unless they buried me.”

“That man, that one-eyed man, you’re crazy to let him come here!” Mary cried. “Mr. Nicolay says so.”

“Gurowski? I know.” He smiled patiently. “If anybody does the Democrats a favor by putting a bullet in my head it might very well be Gurowski. He croaks that the country is marching

Christmas for Tad

to it's tomb and that Seward and McClellan and I are the gravediggers."

"They'll be digging your grave if you don't have a care for yourself!" Her volatile mood had shifted; she was almost in tears. "That horrible creature with those old green goggles, that silly red vest and that big hat and cape—he looks like Satan himself, yet you listen to him!"

"I'm his hired man, Mary," Lincoln repeated. "The bald-headed old buzzard is smart enough. He had a good job working under Horace Greeley on the *Tribune*, but they had to let him go because he couldn't distinguish truth from slander. Then Seward put him in the State Department as a translator but he published so many slurs about Seward and me that they dismissed him from that job. He started as a revolutionary in Europe; now he thinks he can save this nation. Maybe by eliminating me. He's written down now as a dangerous character. He won't be allowed in here again, so don't worry."

Mary would never worry long, he knew. She was too mercurial, too easily diverted by trifles. What troubled Lincoln most was her impulsive inclination to meddle. She took a hand in de-

Christmas for Tad

cisions, was always writing indiscreet letters to newspaper editors, discussing national affairs too brashly; she interfered in decisions over post offices and appointments to military academies. When New York papers printed long items about her travels, her clothes, her bonnets and baggage, she was flattered and excited, unaware that her husband was unhappily reading into some of these accounts an amused note of criticism and contempt. She was as much a child as Tad, he told himself often, but unlike Tad she could not be controlled.

All through the evening she busied herself happily over her gifts, wrapping them in white paper, fetching bits of ribbon from her dozens of bandboxes for bows and decorations. Abraham Lincoln slipped off his elastic-sided shoes and stretched his bony feet to the fire. He dozed a little and had to be warned sharply by Mary when his gray wool socks began to smoke a little.

“I declare, Abraham, you’d burn yourself to a cinder if I didn’t look after you! You’ve even scorched your pantaloons. Yes, you have. I can see where the broadcloth is singed on that right leg. It’s like putting ribbons on a pig to try to

Christmas for Tad

dress you up decently. Sometimes I despair of ever making you into a real gentleman!"

Lincoln smacked absently at the hot fabric of his breeches. "In this town, Mary, gentlemen are as thick as fleas in a dog pound. Take credit for making me into a man but let the fashionable aspect go."

"People can't see how much you know," she argued. "All they see is how you look. No wonder that New York paper called you a 'pathetic, disheveled figure' when you made that speech at Gettysburg. I suppose your cravat was crooked and your socks falling down."

"They've called me worse things. Names don't stick unless your hide is soft. I got tough-end up back yonder."

"I notice you act kind of flattered when they call you a railsplitter—and a yokel."

"Well, I know I was a good railsplitter. If they called me a sorry railsplitter I'd resent it." He was unperturbed. "What is a yokel? A fellow from the country. So I must be a yokel for I sprung from about as deep in the country as you can get air to breathe, so deep there wasn't even a road there, just an old trace that meandered up the bed of the crick part of the way. Ameri-

Christmas for Tad

ca's made of yokels. Our side, anyway. Your friends down South have got a few stylish gentlemen but a lot of them lost their sashes and their plumes up at Gettysburg and they got buried right alongside the yokels. Humiliating to them, I reckon."

She had to laugh. "You're hopeless, Abe Lincoln."

"Well, I know you'd admire me a heap more if I could go around like Jim Buchanan. Long-tailed coat and white vest and my head cocked to one side like a tom turkey admiring all the gals. He brought plenty of elegance to this office but if he'd had a little yokel grit in his gizzard the country wouldn't be in this mess, maybe. One thing I know, you wouldn't want me sa-shaying around the gals like Buchanan. You'd spit fire if I commenced that. Go on and fuss at me, Mary; it don't bother me and I can still lick salt off the top of your head."

She pulled the cord of the little toy cannon and aimed it at him. The cork that was fired from it hit him in the stomach and he bent over, pretending to be mortally wounded, uttering grotesque groans. She clutched at him abruptly, holding both his arms.

Christmas for Tad

“Don’t do that!” she wailed. “It’s like my dream.”

He put his arms around her, pressed her head against his chest. “You having dreams again? I thought you’d quit that foolishness.”

“I’ve had the same one, over and over. I can’t see you but I can hear you groaning—like that. And I wake up in a cold sweat feeling something warm on my hands—like blood!” she moaned shuddering.

He patted her head soberly. “You eat too many cakes at parties. Too much syllabub. Getting fat, too.” He pinched her playfully. “Me now, I’m one of Pharaoh’s lean kine. More bones than a shad and they all poke out and rattle. You should have married a pretty little feller, somebody like Steve Douglas.”

“I didn’t want him. I wanted you.”

“Well, you got me, Mary, not anything extra of a bargain but I did set you up so high you couldn’t go higher unless you got made queen of some place. You’re a queen now, queen of a torn and divided country all drowned in sorrow and hate and woe. But it won’t always be like that.—I wish to the Lord I knew what to do about that little man, Ulysses S. Grant! I reckon

Christmas for Tad

I'll just have to give him command of the army." He put her gently aside, letting care return to possess him.

"He may be a fine soldier but he's a dirty, drunken little man," sniffed Mary, "and I don't like his wife either."

"He fights better, dirty and drunk, than a lot of elegant fellers I've got in commands. If he can win battles he can go dirty as a hog and it won't degrade him any in my estimation," Lincoln declared. "As for his wife, you've got a bad habit of not liking wives, Mary."

"That's not true. I like some of their wives—when they're not cold and distant and look down their noses. It's because I know how to buy pretty clothes and my bonnets become me. I do look nice when I'm dressed up, Abe Lincoln. And I know how to behave in company. After all there is a little respect due to my position," she stated, complacently.

He gave her a comradely pat and went back to his chair and the stack of papers he had put aside. "All right, Mama, you do the peacocking for this office and I'll try to win the war," he said, withdrawing into that remoteness that always baffled her.

DESPERATELY she wanted to be liked and admired. She did not even know that this desire tormented her like a hidden thorn. It was lost under the surface imperiousness that she had put on defensively, as a child might dress up in a trailing robe and play at being queen. She had no talent for adjustment or reconciliation and her husband's propensity for seeing the best in people, even his bitterest enemies, puzzled and irritated her. In her mind she put this down as weakness. When she disliked anyone, it was done with vigor and she made no secret of it. When she was displeased she let the whole world know, yet she could not understand why it was that she felt always alone.

The Christmas party at the White House had to be important, if not gay. State Department

Christmas for Tad

people, Supreme Court people, senators, generals and their wives, would not expect hilarity. Not with Lee's menacing army so near, the carnage of Chickamauga so recent, all the factional strife in New York and Missouri and Ohio only temporarily lulled, and definitely, Mary suspected, not defeated.

She had two dresses spread out on her bed, and Elizabeth Heckley, the mulatto seamstress, pinned bits of lace and ribbon bows here and there over the voluminous folds of coral-colored satin and purple velvet. The satin had wide bands of heavy embroidery touched with gold around the skirt and the folds that draped low over the shoulders. Elizabeth fastened a garland of roses at the bosom of that dress and let it trail down the side of the skirt.

"Needs a gold breastpin right there," she indicated the fastening place of the flowers. "What Mrs. President goin' to wear on her head?"

"A turban, Lizzie, of this same satin with some pale blue feathers in front and the roses hanging down over my chignon. This dress will have to be for the Christmas party and I know it's too gay and likely I'll be criticized for put-

Christmas for Tad

ting off my mourning for poor little Willie. Good gracious, down home where I was raised, I'd wear black for three solid years for a child and for a husband it was forever. But I look awful in black and I know it. It makes me dumpy and sallow and I do owe something to the people. There's too much crepe already in Washington. It depresses people and hurts the war."

"This other one would look mighty fine on you, Mrs. President." The seamstress lovingly stroked the folds of violet velvet. "This dress look like it was made for a queen." There were bands of embroidery on this gown too, but the embroidery was all gold cord and beads and there was a light overskirt of draped tulle in shades of lilac, lavender, and purple, caught up with little knots of gold leaves.

A queen! Abraham had called her a queen. Mary could see herself trailing a long robe of crimson with a border of gold and ermine. Too bad democracies did not favor such ornate display by their rulers—but the purple velvet did have a regal look. She would wear plumes in her headdress, three of them in the three shades of the overskirt.

Christmas for Tad

“I’ll wear this at the New Years’ reception, though it is a pity to waste anything so handsome on a company of just anybody. See about some feathers and gold trimmings for my head-dress, Lizzie, and plenty of white gloves. Last year I ruined four pairs.”

She must see to it that Abraham had plenty of gloves, too. He hated them; he was always pulling them off and stuffing them untidily into a pocket. He was always bursting them, too, and she kept spare pairs handy. His hands had a tendency to swell from prolonged handshaking and inevitably the buttons popped off or the seams split. A pair would be soiled in half an hour too from all those hands, some calloused, some grimy some too hot and eager.

The New Year’s reception was a great nuisance in Mary’s book—those tramping feet scuffing the floors and the carpets and almost invariably it snowed. And in spite of the vigilance of the guards she knew there was danger. Lately danger had become a haunting oppression to Mary Todd Lincoln.

The election of 1864 was coming up and even in the Union states there was radical opposition so bold it verged on treason, not to overlook

Christmas for Tad

the vicious attacks of the newspapers to the South. On those pages Abraham Lincoln was called everything from a degraded idiot to Mephistopheles reincarnate. The South, as Southern-bred Mary Lincoln knew well, was full of impetuous hotheads ready to dare or to do anything for their sacred Cause. There was that O'Neale Greenhow woman, arrested right here in sight of the White House—and even the Mayor of Washington temporarily lodged in jail. And they said that people right in the Provost Office had supplied the Greenhow woman with information that had brought on so many Union defeats at Manassas and other battles. Mary remembered having once met Rose O'Neale Greenhow at a tea somewhere. A handsome and arrogant woman, too friendly with men. She was banished South of the lines now, but women like that always had impetuous friends.

“Get me out something plain, Lizzie,” she ordered now. “I have to shop again this afternoon. The President thinks every soldier in Company K must have a Christmas gift, and where I'll find things the Lord only knows! ‘Socks,’ he said, ‘Wool socks.’ I doubt if any can

Christmas for Tad

be found, and they'd be two dollars a pair if there are any. Anyway, cakes and candy and tobacco—and all those getting harder and harder to get. The crowds in the streets are getting so rough, too, with all these soldiers coming in."

"I could go, Mrs. Lincoln," offered Elizabeth, "if you'd tell me what to buy and give me an order to have it charged—and send somebody to help carry."

"Would you, Lizzie?" Mary was eager with relief. "I'll send you in a carriage and a boy with you. I have to make a list. I think we'll forget the socks—there might not be any and anyway their mothers ought to knit socks for them. We wouldn't know sizes anyway." Mary fluttered, hunting pen and paper, sending a maid to order the carriage, getting out a heavy cape of her own to keep the sewing woman warm. "You go down to the market, Lizzie, away down on D Street. Things will be cheaper there. There are thirty-three of those men. Just so each one had some little remembrance the President will be satisfied."

She was grateful not to have to brave again the streets of Washington that were becoming

Christmas for Tad

more horrible every day. Deep mud, which Army wagons were churning up, caissons pounding by, cavalry splashing everybody, and soldiers crowding everywhere. The shops were always crowded with the impatient, pushing military and Negroes, and more colored people were thronging into the capital every day, homeless and bewildered. Some of the Negro men were being integrated into the Army but most were a problem that the provosts and police were coping with in desperate confusion.

It all made for discomfort and danger. No real indignity had as yet been offered to her personally since those grim days in New York in July, when she had been hooted in the streets and followed into a shop by a jeering mob of ruffians. Here in Washington her greatest cross was the thinly veiled contempt of the women, formerly socially important, the women the President called "those Secesh dames." Very boldly they let it be known that their sympathies were with the South.

Washington, Mr. Seward said, and Mr. Stanton agreed with him, was a nest of spies. In spite of imprisonment, grim guards, and ceaseless precautions, messages still went through

Christmas for Tad

the lines to Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis. It was said that Fontaine Maury, the Confederate admiral, had a direct pipeline into the very heart of the Capitol. Suspicion and distrust were rampant, and Mary harbored a constant, nervous fear that either she or Tad might be kidnapped by the Rebels and held as hostages.

She had wondered sometimes in moments of private bitterness just how much Abraham Lincoln would surrender to get his wife back, but Tad was the key to his heart. Lately Company K had had orders to keep close surveillance over the boy but Tad was quick and mobile as a flea. Less than a month before he had been brought back, shouting protests and struggling, from climbing the scaffolding of the half-finished Washington Monument.

She must go out and appear at the receptions and teas planned by wives of officials, but with Christmas at hand now there would be a hiatus in festivities until after the New Year reception at the White House. There was that tiresome affair to plan for, then this Christmas party; it was all hard work and expensive too, and that aspect practical Mary Lincoln always consid-

Christmas for Tad

ered seriously. She never saw an elaborate collation spread without secretly adding up in her mind how many bonnets, bracelets, and yards of silk could have been bought with the money.

The Christmas tree in the private sitting room upstairs had been set up and Tad put to work stringing popcorn and bits of bright metal for decorations. A corporal had brought in a sackful of scraps of brass discarded by a cartridge manufacturer and these Tad was tying to lengths of his mother's red wool. He insisted on doing all this in his father's office, stepped over by the endless streams of officials and callers, and Mary found him there, squatting behind Lincoln's desk, surrounded by the litter of his festive preparations.

She entered as usual without knocking, made a brief stiff bow to Noah Brooks, the correspondent from the West Coast, and puckered her brows at the small woman with curling grayish hair and unfashionable bonnet who occupied the one comfortable chair in the room.

The President unlimbered his long legs and jumped up, as did Brooks.

"Come in, come in, my dear!" he greeted his wife. "You know Mr. Brooks—and Mary, this is

Christmas for Tad

Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, the little woman who wrote the book that started a big war."

Mrs. Stowe held out a gloved hand. "I am happy to be privileged to meet Mrs. Lincoln."

"I read your book, Ma'am." Mary was gracious. "I cried over it, some parts—but part of it made me mad, too. My family owned slaves, Mrs. Stowe, but they never did beat them or set dogs on them—never!"

"One must emphasize the wrong sometimes, Mrs. Lincoln, to bring about what is right," said Mrs. Stowe. "Undoubtedly your family were Christian people, and exceptional."

"Mama!" wailed Tad. "You're standing on my yarn!"

"I only came," Mary was flustered, "to report to my husband that I have arranged Christmas gifts for his soldiers—as he requested," she added.

"Sit here, Mrs. Lincoln," Brooks offered his chair.

"No—no, you have business here. Happy to have met you, Ma'am. You must stay and have dinner with us." Mary bowed again and hoped she had made a graceful exit as became a queen.

She wondered, as she went down the hall,

Christmas for Tad

why women with brains always looked a little frumpy. That dress—homemade, probably, and it didn't fit anywhere! It was, she decided, safe to leave a woman of as few charms as Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe in the office, especially chaperoned by Noah Brooks. But Mary Lincoln knew well that if Mrs. Stowe had been young and pretty she herself would never have walked out of that office.

THE boy who jumped out of the dark shadow of the bushes slapped his rifle hard, brought it to port sharply.

“Mr. President,” he gasped, “if I had been an assassin you’d be dead by now!”

Abraham Lincoln stopped, shifted his high hat. A few thin flakes of snow lay white against the silk.

“And what would you have been doing, Joe, while an assassin was making a corpse out of me?” he asked amiably.

“I’d have done the best I could to protect you, Mr. President, but it’s powerful dark out here,” stammered the flustered soldier.

“I knew you were here, Joe, or I wouldn’t be out here,” Lincoln said. “Cold out here. Have you got some warm gloves?”

“Can’t handle a gun with gloves, Mr. President. But I get relieved in an hour.”

Lincoln looked at the sky. “Some mean weather making up, I’m afraid. Bad for

Christmas for Tad

Christmas. You boys keeping warm in those tents?"

"Well, the way I figure, sir, we're just as warm as those men of General Meade's over across the river. And there ain't nobody shooting at us, sir—I mean, Mr. President. The lieutenant ain't going to like it, Mr. President, you walking out here alone. You want to walk, you need a couple of us boys along."

"I make a good mark, don't I, Joe? I sort of rear up on the skyline like a steeple. Good thing it's too dark for them to spot me. I look at it this way. If the good Lord wants me to stay on this job He'll look after me. God and Company K. You see Tad anywhere?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. President." Joe stalked beside the tall figure, weapon alerted. "Tad's down yonder to the corporal's tent. He's got his billy goat down there. Some of the boys fixed up an army cap for that goat and the corporal's riveting a chin strap on it." Joe trotted a little to keep up with the long stride of Lincoln.

"Better anchor it tight or the goat will eat his headgear," remarked Lincoln. "Mrs. Lincoln sent Tad to bed so she could fix up his Christmas presents. Tad always sleeps with me but

Christmas for Tad

when I went to my room he wasn't there, so I decided he'd slipped down here."

"That goat sure means a lot to Tad, Mr. President. Tad treats him like he was folks. Nobody ever has found out what happened to the she-goat, sir. Last pass you give me I went all over that skinny town back yonder where the trash and niggers live but I never seen a sign of any goat—hide neither."

"Tad misses his brother. Christmas will be a sad time for all of us, but we'll try to make it happy for Tad."

"Just about a year ago you lost your boy, wasn't it, Mr. President?"

"Last February. Lung fever. He got wet and took a cold. Mrs. Lincoln hasn't gotten over it at all. She idolized her sons. We lost another one, you know, in Springfield. Little Eddie. But we have company, Joe. A great sorrowful company of people who have lost their sons."

Lincoln sighed heavily as he strode up to the lighted tent where a group of men hunkered down around Tad and his goat.

The corporal dropped his awl and leather and jumped up, eyes bulging.

"Attention!" he barked.

Christmas for Tad

Every man sprang up to stand stiffly. Tad threw his arms around the goat, yelling desperately. "Help me hold him! He'll get away."

"At ease, boys," Lincoln said "Grab that goat, some of you."

"Yes, sir, Mr. President, sir," gulped the corporal. "Get him, Bullitt. You, Joe—you're on post!"

"Joe," Lincoln said, "has been escorting me and protecting me from assassins, my orders. Very capably too. Tad, you'd better come along to bed. Tomorrow is Christmas and your brother will be here on an early train."

"Yes, sir, Mr. President." The corporal flicked a salute importantly. "Lieutenant detailed me and three of the boys to meet that train. We was just helping the boy here to pretty up his goat, sir, asking your pardon and meaning no offense."

"No offense taken, Corporal. I appreciate your taking care of my boys."

"Look, Papa," shrilled Tad, "lookit Billy's horns." The animal's rough pointed horns had been painted a bright scarlet and tipped with circles of brass. He shook them impatiently while Tad clung to his neck.

Christmas for Tad

"Mighty pretty," approved his father, "but you're getting paint on your uniform jacket. Your mama will have something to say about that."

"She'll have a duck fit," stated Tad disrespectfully; then his voice sank to a whimper. "Billy's pretty but he's not as pretty as a nanny goat, Papa. I want my nanny goat back." He began to cry thinly, and the corporal looked anxious.

"I sure wish we could get his nanny goat back, Mr. President. That paint will dry by morning, sir. We'll tie Billy out where he can't rub it off on anything. You, Bullitt and Gibson, escort the President and young Mr. Lincoln back to the house, And lemme see them rifles first. Half the time," he explained unhappily, "they ain't got no load ready and a man might as well carry a broomstick. All right. About face, March!"

Tad clung to his father's hand and Lincoln felt his palm sticky with undried paint. Behind them the goat blatted forlornly.

"He wants me," mourned Tad. "I feed him biscuits and all the boys have got is hardtack."

"Maybe we can find some biscuits," sug-

Christmas for Tad

gested Lincoln. "Mr. Bullitt and Mr. Gibson can carry them back to him. Come along in, boys, and report back to your corporal that I'm much obliged for everything."

He had never set foot in the White House kitchen. Now Abraham Lincoln walked timidly there as though he were an intruder who might be ordered out indignantly at any moment.

The long room, still odorous with baking bread and roasting meat, was warm, the huge ranges clinking as they cooled, water dripping from the spout of a pump. The cooks' white aprons and caps hung from pegs on the wall and one long table was covered with trays spread over with white cloths. Lincoln lifted a corner of a covering. Beneath was a great array of small colored cakes obviously baked for the Christmas party.

"Have one, boys." He took a pink dainty himself and bit into it. "Pretty good."

Tad wolfed down two and the privates nervously accepted one each.

"Wonder where they keep the biscuits?" Tad began to explore.

"You ought to know," said his father. "You snoop everywhere."

Christmas for Tad

Tad scurried about, opening ovens and cupboards, lifting lids of boxes and the great copper pots.

"Bread," he uncovered a stack of loaves, "but no biscuits."

"Your billy will eat bread, sir," suggested Private Bullitt. "He eats hardtack. He'll eat anything, Mr. President. He ate Sergeant Whipple's box from home. Had a cake in it. Et box and all, sir."

"We'll have to see to it that Sergeant Whipple gets another cake." Lincoln took down a long knife from a rack on the wall and whacked off the end of a loaf of fresh bread. "Good bread." He tasted a crumb. "Go good if we had some jam to put on it."

"There's jampots up there, Papa." Tad pointed to a high shelf.

"So there are." Lincoln reached a long arm, slit the paper that covered the top of a jar, dipped in a knife. "Blackberry." He sliced off a hunk of bread, spread it thickly with jam, handed it to Private Bullitt. "Have some, boys." He spread another slice for Gibson and one for Tad and himself. Perched on the edge of a table he ate, wiped his beard and fingers on a handy

Christmas for Tad

towel, passed the towel around. "Some drizzled on your jacket, Tad. Wipe it off. Now, I reckon somebody will get blamed for this piece of larceny, so I'd better take care of that."

The cooks' pad and pencil lay on a shelf and Lincoln tore off a sheet and wrote rapidly: *All provisions missing from this kitchen requisitioned by order of the undersigned. A. Lincoln.*

"That will fix it. You boys take this bread back to that billy goat and tell your sergeant I'll see that he's recompensed for his lost cake," he said. "Now Tad, you come along to bed."

The wreaths of greenery were in place in the hall and up the stairs, and in the East Room a tall spruce tree awaited the lighting of the candles. Festival! And out there on the cold ground boys like Robert, boys like Tad would soon grow to be, kept warm in flimsy tents with little fires, slept on straw with blankets far too thin, and there were men he knew in the field, in grim military prisons, who likely had no blankets at all.

The great bed in his room with its huge, soft bolster and tufted counterpane, its enormous headboard shutting off drafts and elaborately carved and scrolled, suddenly wore the aspect

Christmas for Tad

of sinful luxury. He would gladly have taken a blanket and gone out to join his men, but he knew sadly that that would not do. He had known the ground for a bed many times—in the Black Hawk War and on expeditions into the wilds—but now he was growing old and he had to uphold the dignity of high office.

He pulled off Tad's clothes, buttoned him into a long nightshirt, and tucked him into the big bed. Almostly instantly the boy was asleep. Lincoln was struggling with his own boots when the door opened and Mary came in, buttoned into a vast blue wrapper, a ruffled cap on her head.

"Forevermore!" she exclaimed. "Where have you been? I looked for you to help me with the Christmas things and couldn't find a hair of you or Tad either. Has that child been out in this cold wind?"

"We were having a little Christmas party with some of the boys, Mary. Tad's all right. Don't start scolding tonight; it's already Christmas morning now."

"You know how delicate he is. It will be just like Willie all over again and I can't bear any more sorrow, Abraham. I'll lose my mind if I

Christmas for Tad

have another grief to live through," she cried.

"Tad's tough, Mama. Not frail like Willie. We were in the kitchen anyway," he evaded. "It was warm down there."

"You didn't eat up my cakes?" she demanded. "I had trouble enough getting them baked. The cook says the blockade is to blame for making sugar so scarce and high. They ought to know we have to have sugar. There's no coconut either, nor nutmegs nor cinnamon."

"It's war, Mary. Some good people haven't even got bread," he reminded her.

She began to whimper, perching on the edge of the bed.

"Maybe I won't need any cakes for my party. I've had at least a dozen regrets already. An invitation from the wife of the President should be like a command from the queen," she declared, grimly. "I'm saving all those insulting notes and I think the people who wrote them should be properly dealt with."

Lincoln sighed as he hung up his coat and untied his lumpy satin cravat. The starched collar rasped his neck. He was glad to be rid of it. "Don't you cry now for Christmas, Mary,"

Christmas for Tad

he pleaded. "We have to keep things happy for the boys. Bob will be here in the morning."

She dried her eyes on the ruffle of her sleeve. "I can't help remembering that I've lost my son."

"You're one of a vast company, Mary. If all the tears that will be shed by bereaved mothers tomorrow were drained into one river we could float a gunboat on it. If only I could see a way so there would be no more—no more killing, no more graves, no more sorrowing women!" he cried, desolately.

It was a cry of anguish and Mary Lincoln felt a surge of terrible compassion for this gaunt, lonely man who was her love. She put her arms around him, standing on tiptoe, her cheek pressing the buttons of his shirt.

"You didn't make this war. You're doing all any man could do to end it!" she cried. "We could have ignored the country—we could have stayed in Springfield where nobody hated us. Here they all hate us. The ones who come to our party tomorrow will smirk and fawn to our faces and then sneer at our backs."

"Not all, Mary. There are plenty of good folks, loyal folks, who believe I'm doing right.

Christmas for Tad

Plenty of people we can call our friends. A sight of them voted for me, remember.”

“They want something!” she argued. “Every last one of them wants something. That General Grant is even being puffed up to run against you for president next year. Even the Illinois newspapers are for him.”

“Well, he might make a good president,” admitted Lincoln, “though no soldier ever has made a good president since George Washington. And if I’m beat, we can always go home to Springfield.”

“Slink home like beaten dogs!” she exclaimed, her mercurial mood shifting again. “Well, we’ll not do it. They’re not going to get us down, Abraham Lincoln! Democrats nor Black Republicans either. And they’d better show up at my party if they want any more favors from you!”

“You tear up those regrets, Mary,” he said soberly. “Tear up every single one of ’em. And forget the names of the people who wrote them. That,” he added very solemnly, “is an order from the President.”

ROBERT TODD LINCOLN was a young man trying sincerely not to be a snob, not to be blasé or obviously aware that his father was President of the United States. A medium tall, erect lad, Robert's dark hair was sleeked down over a head rounded like his mother's, but his long arms and still growing legs and feet he had from his father.

That long-tailed coat with braided collar was too old for Bob, Abraham Lincoln was thinking. So was his manner too old, a boyish kind of gravity that obviously he strove to keep from being condescending. His mother fluttered about him adoringly as they sat at the family breakfast table. She was continually straightening his cravat, feeling his brow anxiously, smoothing his hair. Lincoln, shrewdly sensitive,

Christmas for Tad

could see that his older son was a trifle annoyed by his mother's solicitous attentions.

"Bob hasn't got a fever, Mama," he interposed cheerfully. "He's the healthiest human being I've seen in a long time. Why don't we all go and see what Tad got for Christmas?" He pushed back his chair.

"Robert must get some sleep," argued his mother. "He says he didn't get a wink on that train."

"The cars were cold and smelly and they were jammed with soldiers, all of them cold and miserable," stated Robert. "Most of them coming South to join Pope's army and all sulky because they had to be away from home for Christmas. One chap sat with me—couldn't have been any older than I am and he had been home to Rhode Island to bury his wife. They all talked and they were plenty bitter against the bounty boys—those fellows who bought their way out of the draft for three hundred dollars."

"That was a compromise and an evil one, I fear," said his father. "Everything about war is evil. You can only contrive and pray for ways to make it a little less evil."

Robert stood up. His face was very white.

Christmas for Tad

“Pa—and Mama—I told lies coming down on that train. I told them I was coming home to enlist. I’ve got to get into the Army—I’ve got to! Those men on that train, they were dirty and shabby and some hadn’t shaved or washed in a long time, and most of them were rough and some ignorant but every one of them was a better man than I was! I could feel them looking at me—with contempt at first. It was in every man’s mind that I was a bounty boy. A shirker. Hiding behind a screen of cash! I was thankful nobody knew my name.”

“You could have told them your name,” insisted his mother. “You could have made them respect you as the son of the President.”

“No, Mary—no, no!” protested Lincoln. “Bob couldn’t do that.”

“I don’t know why not? Certainly your family are entitled to respect, Abraham Lincoln!”

“You don’t understand, Mama,” said Robert unhappily. “I was thankful I’d been able to duck away from those soldiers Mr. Stanton had detailed in New York. I didn’t want to be Robert Lincoln. I wanted to be nobody. Then when I got off here in Washington, there was that escort! Troops to guard me, as though I

Christmas for Tad

were a crown prince or something. A coward of a prince!”

“No, no!” Mary upset her cup in her agitation. “I still say you must finish your education. You must graduate from Harvard. You’ll be much more valuable to the country as an educated man than just another private in the army. Even if your father gave you a commission—”

“I don’t want a commission. Not if it has to be given to me,” Robert cried. “I’d deserve all the contempt I saw in some of those men’s faces if I took a commission I hadn’t earned.”

Lincoln’s face relaxed in a slow smile. There were times when his older son troubled him, but now a quiet pride warmed his spirit. But his heart sank again when he saw the stony set of Mary’s mouth, the flush that always heated her face when she was angry and determined to carry her point. She would not change. Her attitude was the same as that with which she had faced down General Sickles and Senator Harris not too long ago. They had inquired, coldly, why Robert was not in the service. The boy should, declared the General, have been in uniform long since. Mary had talked them

Christmas for Tad

down then, firmly, just as she would talk down all Robert's arguments now. But it was a joy to Lincoln that Robert did have pride and perhaps a mind of his own.

Mary's eyes were already glittering behind their pale lashes. Now the shine was exasperation but in a moment, after her fashion, it would melt into tears. Robert's chin was jutting and his hands trembled on the back of his chair. Lincoln interposed quickly trying to ease the tension, gain a postponement of a crisis.

"Let's talk this over later," he suggested. "Let's not spoil Christmas morning with an argument. Did Tad eat any breakfast, Mama?"

"No, he didn't." Mary got her control back with a gusty breath. "He wouldn't even take time to drink his milk. He took it with him and likely he's upset the glass all over the carpet by this time."

"Well, let's go and see what he found under the Christmas tree."

Robert followed them, silently, up the stairs to the sitting room, strewn now with paper wrappings and a confusion of toys. Tad was standing in the middle of the floor buckling on

Christmas for Tad

a wide military belt trimmed with metal. Hanging from it was a small sword. Tad worked awkwardly because his hands were lost in great white gauntlet gloves that reached almost to his elbows.

"From Mr. Stanton," he grinned, patting the belt. "I thought he didn't like me. I thought he didn't like boys."

"He likes being Secretary of War," said Robert dryly. He reached for a small package. "This is for you, Mama. The man said these things were real jade from China."

Mary took the parcel eagerly, kissed Robert, undid the wrapping, exclaimed over the necklace, pin, and earbobs.

"Oh, Bob, they're so pretty! I can wear them with my green taffeta."

She was a child for trinkets, Lincoln was thinking indulgently. He was glad that he had given her the big white muff. She would love carrying it to parties and on their carriage drives, nestling her two little round chins into the delicate fur. He thanked Robert for a pair of gold cuff links and there was laughter when they discovered that his gift to Robert had been an almost identical pair.

Christmas for Tad

“At least,” said Robert, “I shall have the distinction of imitating the President of the United States.”

“Well, they’ll fasten your shirt sleeves anyway,” drawled Lincoln. “That’s all a man can ask of them.”

Tad strutted around the room flourishing his sword. He gulped the last of his milk hastily at his mother’s command, put on his uniform cap, and swished a shine on the toes of his boots with his cuff.

“Now I have to show these to the boys,” he announced.

“But son,” protested his mother, “aren’t you going to play with all your pretty toys? Look—this little cannon. It shoots!”

“Yeh—shoots a cork!” Tad dismissed the weapon indifferently, “A ole Rebel would sure laugh if you shot him with that. Papa, I want a real gun. One with bullets in it.”

“My Heaven, Tad, you’re too little to have a gun,” declared Mary.

“If I had a gun I could ride with Papa and perteck him,” argued Tad. “Then nobody would dare shoot holes in his hat.”

Lincoln caught the startled look on Mary’s

Christmas for Tad

face, got his son hastily by the elbow. "Come along, Tad. Go show off your finery. And I've got work to do." He hustled the boy down the hall. "Who told you somebody shot a hole in my hat?" he demanded, when they were out of ear-shot.

Tad grinned. "Oh, I get information," he said blandly, "but if I had been along with a good ole gun nobody would have dared do it."

"Don't mention it again in front of your mother, you hear?" Lincoln seldom spoke sharply to the boy and Tad looked scared briefly.

"No, sir—no, sir, I won't," he stammered, his palate tripping him again.

"Mind now! And get along with you!" His father gave him a little shove, as he entered the office door.

Even on a holiday he was not free from intrusion, of being faced with the woeful problems of the people. A lad of about seventeen, in the faded uniform of a private, was standing, twisting thin hands together, his face scared and anxious.

"Sit down, son," ordered Lincoln, closing the

Christmas for Tad

door. "How did you get in here and what did you want to see me about?"

The boy dropped on the edge of a chair, twisted his legs about each other nervously.

"Nobody let me in, sir," he stammered. "I just told the man downstairs that I had to see the President and he searched me, and I didn't have no gun or nothing so he told me to come on up here and wait. And what I wanted to see you about, Mr. President—I want to be a captain."

Lincoln's long lips drew back and quirked up a little at one corner. "I see. And what military organization did you want to be captain of?"

"No organization, Mr. President, but I been a private in the Sixty-third Ohio a long time, sir—"

"How long a time?"

"Four months, Mr. President."

"And you have a company organized, maybe, that you want me to make you captain of?"

"No, sir—I haven't got any company organized. But I just want to be a captain. My mother says I should be a captain. She told me to see you about it."

Christmas for Tad

Lincoln clasped his bony hands around a knee. "What's your name, soldier?"

"Milo, sir. Milo Potter."

"Milo, did you ever hear the story about the farmer out in Illinois, where I was raised? Well, this fellow he was a good farmer and a dutiful son to his mother but he got up towards forty years old and he'd never married a wife. So his mother fretted at him, said she was getting too old to churn and milk and he ought to fetch a wife home to take some of the work off of her. So this farmer, call him Jim, he goes down to the church and hunts up the preacher. 'Preacher', says Jim 'I got to get married. Mammy says so.' 'All right, Jim,' agrees the preacher, 'I'll be proud to marry you. You go get your license and bring the woman here with you and I'll give you a real good marrying.' 'But I haven't got any woman, Preacher,' Jim argues kind of dashed. 'Well, you can't get married without a woman, Jim', the preacher tells him. That's your problem, Milo. You want to be a captain and you haven't got any organization to captain. What made you think you could be a captain, anyway?"

"Well, Mr. President," the boy flushed un-

Christmas for Tad

happily. "it was that captain we got in B Company. That last battle—he made us retreat. And right there in front of us there was a hole in that Rebel line I could have drove four wagons through. There wasn't no sense in that retreat, Mr. President. All of us boys said so. All of us was mad. So I thought I can be a better captain than that."

"Maybe you can, Milo. You go on back to B Company and be a good soldier and likely you'll make captain before this war is over."

"Mr. President, I can't do it! I run off. They'll put me in the guardhouse!"

Lincoln scratched his chin. "That was very unwise of you, soldier. But you can't dodge your military responsibility. I reckon you'll just have to go to the guardhouse. If you should try to hedge out of it you'd be as poor a soldier as that captain of B Company you complain about. It won't be too bad. Good luck to you, son."

The boy said, "Thank you, sir," and backed out, twisting his cap in his hands.

"Stand up straight, look the captain in the eye, and admit you ran off, son," advised Lincoln. "You needn't tell him you came here to get his job away from him."

Christmas for Tad

"No, sir, I sure won't."

John Hay came in when the young trooper had gone. "I shouldn't have let him in perhaps, Mr. President," he explained. "but he said he had an important message for you."

"It was important. To Milo Potter," smiled Lincoln. "No harm done, Johnny."

"Your son is waiting, sir. Shall I send him in?"

"Must be Bob. Tad would have already been in."

Robert came in, took a chair, and folded his hands, his young mouth sober. "I had to know, sir," he began, "have they been making attempts to kill you?"

"Bob, there are several million people who think that the man who kills me should wear a hero's crown. And there are a lot of people who yearn to be heroes," Lincoln said calmly.

"You should be better protected. You shouldn't take risks!"

"They're trying to protect me now, Bob, till I can't hardly draw my own breath."

"That fellow who just went out. Did you even know him?" persisted the boy.

"He was harmless. I reckon Johnny even took

Christmas for Tad

his jackknife away from him. I have to see 'em, son. I have to hear their story. That's why they put me here," declared his father.

"About the Army, Papa—I'm deadly serious."

"The trouble is, Bob, that your mother is deadly serious, too. She's lost two boys," Lincoln reminded him.

"So have other women."

"I know. Give her a little more time, Bob. Till the end of this year anyway. The war isn't going to end before New Years' Day."

"I shan't wait much longer, I promise you," threatened Robert, standing tall.

"Just promise me to the end of this school year. Then we'll talk about it again."

"And you'll talk to Mama? Make her see that it's something I have to do?"

"I'll talk to Mama," agreed Abraham Lincoln. "I'll do my best, son."

But when, he was thinking wearily after the boy had gone, had his best ever been good enough to prevail against Mary's ready tears?

“BOB,” Abraham Lincoln said, when he went back to the family rooms, “I need some help. Your mother has very graciously provided some little Christmas cheer for those boys out there of Company K. The things are all here in this big box. I’ll need you to help pass ’em out.”

He bent and shouldered the heavy box that Mary had packed with small, paper-wrapped bundles.

“Oh, Papa, let me call somebody! You shouldn’t carry that,” protested Robert.

“Little enough to do for those boys.” Lincoln bent under the burden. “It will mean more to them if I fetch it to them personally.”

“Ridiculous!” fumed Mary “It’s beneath your dignity to lug that heavy box.”

“Put my hat on, Mary, and put it on tight so I won’t knock it off.” He ignored her protest calmly.

Christmas for Tad

She jammed the high hat down over his rough hair, the bony knobs of his head. "You—the President of the United States!" she exploded. "With a house full of help and you lug that heavy thing!"

"He who would be greatest among you, let him seek out the lowest place," quoted Lincoln, solemnly and a bit inaccurately. "Not near so heavy as a good stout oak rail and I've shouldered many of them in my day. Come along, Bob."

"At least let me help carry, sir," argued Robert as they went down the stairs.

"Don't touch it or you'll get it unbalanced and spill all Company K's Christmas. Little enough, but I had John Hay fetch me a roll of greenbacks. I'll give every man a dollar. A dollar is a right substantial present, Bob, when you're marching and fighting for thirteen dollars a month and what you can eat, when you get a chance to eat."

"I would do it gladly," insisted Robert. "All I ask is a chance."

"I know, son. Maybe we can talk your mother around by spring. I did some better in the Black Hawk War." Lincoln went on, stepping

Christmas for Tad

heavily down the outer steps and across the rutted yard. "They paid me eighty-five dollars for ninety days fighting in that war but part of the time I ranked a captain. We had to shoot hogs to eat, though, and then fight the farmers that owned 'em. Swampy country, too. Like Grant's army fought over around Vicksburg."

"But you captured Black Hawk."

"The regular Army said they did that. I got put in the guardhouse for two days for firing a pistol in camp and they made me carry a wooden sword after that. Discipline. You couldn't make any worse record in the army, Bob, than your father did before you."

"You couldn't call that a real war, Papa," Robert said.

"It was real enough to the men who got their scalps peeled off. I helped bury twelve of them. Now, look at that lieutenant! Sending an escort up here on the double and putting all those boys in line at attention, when I just came out here on a friendly visit."

"Even Tad!" laughed Robert. "Even the confounded goat!"

The goat wore his military hat and Tad was

Christmas for Tad

holding him grimly into line by his horns. Lincoln let the two soldiers who came trotting up help him ease the box down to the ground.

"At ease, men," he ordered. "This is old Father Christmas, not the commander in chief. File by, one at a time, and get your Christmas cheer."

Robert passed out the packages one by one while Lincoln stood thumbing bills off a roll of money, stopping to wet his thumb occasionally, saying, "Here, son, spend this on some foolishness next time you get a pass into town."

There were yells of thanks and a lined-up cheer for the President, the goat blatting an obligato. But Tad, who had straggled at the end of the line and received nothing, glared down into the empty box, whimpering.

"I'm a soldier. I didn't get any present," he complained.

"You got plenty of presents at the house, Tad," said his father. "You've got candy there, too. Don't you go bumming off these boys now. You have more Christmas than any of them."

"But I want a soldier Christmas," persisted Tad, "and I want my nanny goat back!"

"You've got a goat," scolded Robert, "a

Christmas for Tad

blamed nuisance of a goat. You're getting so you even smell like him."

"He's clean," fumed Tad. "Joe washed him and curried him and the corporal even put hair oil on his whiskers. Can I take Billy in the house, Papa? Can I? I want him to have some candy."

"No, Tad, no more goats in the house. That's your mother's order. Last time," Lincoln explained to Robert, "Tad drove two of them, hitched to a chair, right through the middle of one of your mother's social shindigs. Upset a couple of ladies and spilled claret punch on their dresses. Disgraced the whole Lincoln family and busted some good crockery too."

"It's cold out here! Billy's cold." Tad hung to his father's coattail but refused to let go the goat. "Billy will catch cold."

"Private Bullitt," ordered Lincoln, "will you tie up this goat in a sheltered place? Tad, you come along inside. You'll get the sniffles and your mother will scold all of us. Corporal, if you must provide escort for this family to their door, line 'em up. We're ready to march." Lincoln took a military stance, between two privates, who were very rigid with importance. Tad

Christmas for Tad

pulled back till Robert gave him a gentle, brotherly cuff.

“You act more like a baby than a colonel,” he said. “If you want to cry, hand over that sword. You’ll disgrace the army, bawling on the march.”

“Let loose of me!” shrilled Tad, jerking away. Turning he ran pelting back to the circle of tents, dove into one and vanished.

“You’d better go after him, Bob,” worried the President. “Your Mama will worry if he’s out in this cold too long.”

“Yes, sir,” said Robert, unenthusiastically, “but If I may make a suggestion, sir, that boy needs discipline. He’s getting out of hand.”

“Yes, sir, I stand reprovèd, sir,” said Lincoln meekly. “Just fetch him along in. I’ll wait here,” he told the escorting privates. “Stand at ease.”

“Mr. President, I hope Tad don’t run off again,” worried one soldier. “We try not to take our eyes off him when he’s out here with us. Could be some Rebel sympathizers hangin’ round that would think it was a smart move to catch up Tad and hold him. Know you’d be

Christmas for Tad

mighty near be willing to surrender Washington to get that boy back, your pardon, sir, for speaking so bold."

Panic stiffened Abraham Lincoln's long body. He broke into a long-legged trot back toward the tents, the escort panting after him. Robert emerged, pale-faced, from one tent and, with a dozen soldiers charging after him, hurried into another. He came out again, his hands outspread, helplessly.

"He's hiding somewhere, Papa," he said. "We can't find him."

"Spread out, men!" shouted the lieutenant. "Comb the area. Six of you guard the President. Corporal Barnes, form a guard detail."

The corporal hustled Robert into the middle of the protecting group, who faced outward bayonets alerted. Robert was angry and full of expostulations.

"I don't have to be guarded like a prisoner," he protested. "I want to go and help search for Tad."

"Private Bullitt, here, has just made a rather startling suggestion, Bob," said Lincoln worriedly. "He thinks that if some Rebel sympathizer should catch up Tad and hold him I

Christmas for Tad

might be pressured into surrendering Washington to get the boy back. And it might be," he added sadly, "that I would be weak enough to do it!"

"You never would! You couldn't—with honor!" explained Robert. "But it would be a mighty tough decision, sir. Is that," he asked sharply, "why you won't let me go into the Army? For fear I might be captured and held as a hostage to force some concessions out of you? I want to tell you, sir, that if I can get into the Army—and no matter how I'm treated there or what happens to me, I'll be a United States soldier, Mr. Lincoln—you can forget that I ever was your son."

"Very nobly said, son," Lincoln patted his shoulder. "I'll try to abide by your decision if the occasion ever arises. But Tad is my son. A little helpless boy. A boy I'm mighty fond of, and they know it!"

"If I may speak plainly again, sir," said Robert, "he needs his breeches tanned. And you are the one who ought to do it."

"He couldn't have gone far," fretted Lincoln. "It's beginning to snow again." He moved across the yard, his escort keeping rigidly in

Christmas for Tad

formation on either side. "Tad!" he shouted. "You, Tad—come back here!"

"He wanted to be a soldier, Mr. President," put in one of the soldiers. "Tad was bound he was a soldier."

"All my boys," said Lincoln, "wanting to be soldiers!"

There was a shout presently from beyond the fenced in confines of the yard. Men started running.

"They've seen him," cried Robert relieved. "The ornery little devil!" He began to run himself, and Lincoln trotted too, almost outstripping his guards.

"There he is!" exclaimed a soldier. "Up on that scaffolding again!"

"They're going after him. They'll get him down." Lincoln almost forgot to breathe. The little figure looked so small against the loom of that great half-finished monument—a tiny, struggling shape swarmed over by half a dozen men in blue who clung precariously to the spidery trestles, caught him and passed him down slowly, kicking and fighting, from one to another.

They brought him up in a few minutes, a

Christmas for Tad

pathetic, disheveled sight, tear-stained, dragging his feet, still kicking at the shins of the men who restrained him. His military cap was over one eye, his belt half off, the toy sword dragging.

“Fetch him here!” sternly ordered the President of the United States.

Tad stumbled close, held tight by the elbows by two privates. His chin was shaking, sobs shook him.

“Oh, Papa—Oh, Papa—” he gasped, trying to fling himself at the tall man with the suddenly grim and forbidding face.

But Lincoln was unrelenting. “Thomas Lincoln! Give me that sword!” he ordered in a terrible voice.

Trembling Tad jerked the sword loose, handed it over.

“Present the hilt, in proper military order!” snapped his father.

Tad reversed the sword, his hand shaking so that almost it fell to the ground.

“Yes, sir!” His voice was very thin and small.

Solemnly Lincoln broke the sword over his knee, tossed it to one side.

“You are now reduced to the rank of private,

Christmas for Tad

Thomas Lincoln," he stated, "until such time as you can conduct yourself in the proper manner and discipline of an officer of the Army of the United States. Strip off his epaulets, Corporal."

The corporal obeyed, looking unhappy and ill at ease, handing the gold-fringed boards into the hands of the commander in chief.

"Private Thomas Lincoln, you will now escort the President of the United States back to the White House," ordered Abraham Lincoln. "Forward march!"

Every man of Company K fell in, marched in grave formation, eyes straight ahead, chins set, weapons held ready, to the side door of the house. Lincoln entered first, turned on the doorstep, and soberly saluted the ranks.

"My deepest gratitude, men of Company K," he said, "for labor beyond the call of duty."

Tad marched in stiffly; then, with a frightened look backward at this stranger who had been his adored and indulgent father, flew through the hall and up the stairs. His mother came hurrying out of the sitting room but he ignored her, flying past her to the room with

Christmas for Tad

the great high-topped bed. There Private Thomas Lincoln dived under the bed.

When the dinner gong sounded, he refused to come out, even at his father's stern order.

"All right," dismissed Abraham Lincoln. "Since you're such a craven and a coward, Private Lincoln, you may remain in durance there. I can eat two drumsticks."

Tad rolled out, swiftly, covered with dust and lint.

"I am not a coward!" he sobbed. "I climbed most to the top of that silly ole monument!"

"You are still a disgrace to the uniform," declared his father. "A soldier who ran away. Now go and wash yourself before your mother comes in here and scolds both of us."

"Yes, Papa dear!" whimpered Tad, hugging the long legs and snuffling. "And you can have both drumsticks."

THE Christmas party was in full swing. Abraham Lincoln had shaken hands till his knuckles ached. Mary Todd Lincoln's coral-colored satin and turbaned headdress with jaunty flowers and feathers had swished and bowed and rustled, and her round face was all aglow with pleasure and excitement. She was always vivacious at parties, and, if at time she was a bit too garrulous, Lincoln overlooked that indulgently. He had not given Mary much of happiness, and she had had her share of frustration and sorrow. Now, if she could find pleasure in the dull round of an official affair, he was content.

Some of the senators and other officials had had a few too many parties already. One judge was already asleep on a padded sofa in the hall,

Christmas for Tad

his gaited ankles sprawling, his mouth open. The musicians from the Marine Band played on doggedly and quietly in the screened corner of the East Room. Here and there stood men of Company K and White House guards, stony-faced, rigidly alerted. Abraham Lincoln felt his legs begin to sag a bit under him, found himself wishing wearily that this company would all go home. But at least Mary was enjoying herself.

It was nearly midnight when an aide came through the crowd, and touched the arm of the President.

“Some men of Company K at the rear door, Mr. President,” he said in a low voice. “They insist on seeing you. An officer is with them. They say they have brought a Christmas present for your son, Thomas.”

Lincoln looked about him. Mary was the animated center of a group. Servants were collecting empty glasses and picking up shattered remnants of flowers from the carpet. Secretary Seward stood in the midst of a dozen men who were arguing a trifle too loudly the question of amnesty for North Carolina. The band was playing slowly, with a few sour notes indicating

Christmas for Tad

that the musicians were wearying after five hours of patient tootling.

“Dismiss those Marine players,” ordered Lincoln. “They’re tired. I’ll see what those boys at the back door want.”

“Not alone, Mr. President!” protested the aide.

“Company K won’t let anything happen to me,” argued Lincoln. “How many are out there?”

“Quite a number, sir. A lieutenant is with them.”

“I’ll fetch Tad. If they’ve brought something for him it will sort of make up for this sorry Christmas he had.” Lincoln strode off up the stairs. All day since disciplining Tad his heart had ached in dull, heavy fashion. It was not easy, he was thinking, to be the son of a president. It was not even easy to be a president. He thought again wistfully of that white house in Springfield, of turkey wishbones hung to dry there above the kitchen stove when Tad and Willie were small. Honors came dear. Almost, he decided, a man could pay too much for them.

Tad was still awake, lying hunched down in

Christmas for Tad

the middle of the huge, high bed. A candle burned on a stand, and the flickering light made his eyes enormous and somehow lost in the round paleness of his face.

"I couldn't get to sleep, Papa," he explained, scrabbling into his father's lap when Lincoln sat on the edge of the bed. "It was the drum. I could hear it all the time—bum, bum. When it stopped I waited for it to start again."

"It's stopped now, Tad. For good. And the boys are downstairs. Our boys. They brought you something. Come on, I'll carry you down. Put this wrapper around you so you won't take cold."

"Maybe a new sword. Would you let me wear it, Papa?" asked Tad eagerly.

"I'll see—we'll see how you behave."

They went down the rear stairway stealthily, through a chilly hall to the back door. But even here was an aide who sprang to open the door and two soldiers appeared out of nowhere, one desperately swallowing some thing he had been chewing on.

On the steps outside huddled a crowd of blue-clad men. Snow sifted thinly over their bent shoulders, their drawn-down caps. Every

Christmas for Tad

face came up, but to a man they seemed to be holding something, holding tight to a bulk that struggled a little, something that was hairy and odorous and staccato of feet and alive.

“Mr. President,” the lieutenant jerked erect, saluted anxiously, “we brought this—for Private Thomas Lincoln—for his Christmas, sir. It’s not the same one. Some of the boys chipped in and bought it off a Negro, sir—but we thought might be it would do—for the boy for his Christmas.”

Like a fish Tad was out of his father’s arms, nightshirt flying, bare feet oblivious of the cold stone step.

“A nanny goat!” he shrieked in delight. “Papa, it’s a nanny goat! My very own nanny goat!”

“Mr. President, your pardon sir, it’s kind of dirty, sir, but we’ll wash it good in the morning. And though it ain’t the same one,” pleaded the corporal, “we thought maybe it would do—for Christmas.”

“She licked my hand. She likes me!” Tad squirmed in ecstasy. “Most of anything I wanted me a nanny goat!”

“It appears,” stated Abraham Lincoln, “to be

Christmas for Tad

a very superior goat. Thank the boys, Tad, and let them take your nanny down to the stables and feed her. She looks a bit gaunt to me. See that she gets a good feed, Corporal, if you please. Now, back to bed, Private Lincoln. Your nanny will still be here, all cleaned up and beautiful for you, in the morning.”

Very reluctantly, with many farewell pats and hand lickings, Tad was at last persuaded to mount the stairs again in his father's arms.

Down below, the drums had ceased but Abraham Lincoln thought wearily of all the hands he must shake again before he could lie down to rest in this wide bed.

He tucked the covers tenderly over the happy child. Tad's eyes were starry. No more tears. All sadness forgotten. Wonderful, to be a child. Abraham Lincoln sighed as he closed the door.

“Papa!” called Tad.

Lincoln opened the door again. “Yes, son.”

“It's the nicest Christmas I ever had!” stated young Thomas Lincoln.



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