

THE GHOSTS OF MARY LINCOLN

A ONE-WOMAN THRILLER

BY

TOM DUGAN

THE GHOSTS OF MARY LINCOLN

2025 by Tom Dugan

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THE GHOSTS OF MARY LINCOLN

This play is dedicated to my dear friend and favorite director, Jenny Sullivan, whose unfailing support, steady hand, and thoughtful guidance have lifted my work and brought so many of my plays to life - from Los Angeles to 42nd Street.

THE GHOSTS OF MARY LINCOLN

NOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

The greatest trap for an actor portraying Mary Lincoln is to play only the “sadness” or “madness.” While Mary battled melancholia, she remained determined to persevere in a world completely dominated by men. Throughout her troubled life, she managed to keep her intelligence, wicked sense of humor, and deep love for her family intact.

When it comes to historical accuracy, if certain events don’t seem to line up precisely, please keep in mind: people remember, people forget, people lie.

“/” indicates an interruption of thought.

Regarding the handbell and water glass effects: these can easily be achieved with duplicate props (*a handbell with no clapper, and a water glass with blue food coloring at the bottom.*) hidden behind Mary’s chair.

Additional sound effects may be added at the director’s discretion.

A final note: if done well, this play should feel like an emotional roller coaster ride. In other words - hurry up, pace is everything!

THE GHOSTS OF MARY LINCOLN

THE GHOSTS OF MARY LINCOLN by Tom Dugan premiered at The Townsend Center in Carrollton, GA, on October 17, 2013. It was directed by Jenny Sullivan. The lighting and set designs were by David Manuel. The sound design was by Richard Allan. The costume design was by Michele Tauber, and the production stage manager was Katherine Barrett. The cast was as follows:

Mary Lincoln.....Michele Tauber

THE GHOSTS OF MARY LINCOLN was subsequently produced by The Alliance Repertory Company in Los Angeles, CA, on April 17, 2021. It was directed by Shelby Sykes. The role of Mary was portrayed by the playwright. The set design was by Christopher Petersen. The lighting design was by Rebecca Petersen. The sound design was by Steven Shaw. The costume design was by Polly Gregory. The production stage managers were Tricia and Rebecca Petersen. The press representative was Philip Sokoloff.

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A Full-Length Thriller for One Actor

Characters

Mary Todd Lincoln (*50s-70s, White, petite*) Former First Lady of the United States. A devoted wife to President Abraham Lincoln and loving mother to their four children. Born into an aristocratic Southern family, Mary is highly educated, articulate, and compassionate - with an imperious manner and a wicked sense of humor. After enduring the premature deaths of her husband and three of her four children, she succumbed to dementia, likely exacerbated by what would now be diagnosed as bipolar disorder and the excessive use of painkillers. She spent her final years as a recluse in the attic of her sister Elizabeth's home in Springfield, Illinois. Mary Lincoln remains one of the most controversial and misunderstood figures in American history.

Time

After midnight, July 16, 1882

Place

The third-floor attic of Elizabeth Edwards' home in Springfield, Illinois.

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The setting may be designed as elaborately or as simply - as abstract or as realistic - as desired.

Original Production Design: At center stage, a wingback wicker chair sits upon an old floral-patterned rug. Beside it, a small end table holds a pitcher of water, a drinking glass, a candle, a music box, and a small framed photograph of Abraham Lincoln.

At far right, beside a banister and stairs leading down to the second floor, sits an old steamer trunk. At far left, a wooden Saratoga trunk rests beside a stool and coat rack. Scattered throughout the attic are pieces of old furniture draped in dusty white sheets. Upstage, behind tattered gauze hanging from the rafters at odd angles, is a boarded-up attic window.

In subsequent productions: The stage has often been left essentially bare, furnished only with a wingback chair, small table, water pitcher, drinking glass, a music box, and a large wooden trunk, all placed upon a faded floral rug.

The overall effect should evoke a cramped, claustrophobic atmosphere.

SOUND CUE - A severe thunder and lightning storm. Rain falls in torrents, violent gusts of wind pound the windows; the old house creaks as dead branches claw the attic roof.

At rise - the stage is awash in dim blue light. A middle-aged woman, dressed in black, sits center, lights a match, then lights a single candle. The stage lights come up to half, slowly.

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(SOUND CUE - out.)

MARY. Death came to my home for the first time when I was only seven years old. The doctor had arrived to deliver my brother. I was so excited, I slept with a little wind chime in my hand, a gift I'd made for when I met the baby the next morning. But something went wrong... buried under my pillow I can still hear the chaos in the next room. Muffled moaning, coughing, retching, the doctor shouts orders, my father's rhythmic pacing on the floorboards. Just before sunrise, which should be such a happy time of the day, a savage howl pierces the darkness. Then silence, footsteps fade down the stairs. I slip out of bed; quietly I pad down the long hall to my parent's door. The room is bathed in the dim dawn light. I make out the figure of a pale blue body lying naked on the sheets. Blood stains the lower half of the mattress, the mouth hangs open unevenly, eyes stare blankly to the ceiling. I focus on a single undulating leech on the neck, drinking my mother's dead blood. Suddenly the body begins to sit up. Her face slowly rising to meet my face, lifeless eyes gaze into mine, as a burst of stale air hisses from her blue lips I hear "They're coming." The wind chime falls from my hand as I faint to the floor. *(Laughing.)* But don't get me started, that is but only one of the many ghosts of Mary Lincoln.

(SOUND CUE - Thunder clap.)

(Stage lights up full, Mary speaks directly to the audience.) Thank you for coming out on such a dreadful evening, but time is of the essence. I hope you're comfortable. Please put your wet things by the stove. Oh darn, I should have had tea. In the White House I used to serve tea; well, that was a long time ago, and this certainly isn't the White House! I'm almost sure of it. Yes, yes, I've been living up here in my sister Elizabeth's attic, for two years now/ but tea would have been nice, wouldn't it? Oh well, I forgot! My memory fails me often. That's the reason you've been invited tonight. Whom do we have here? The Journal, The Tribune, The Herald? Do I recognize you? Oh, who am I kidding? I'm almost completely blind/ can barely see my hands in front of my face! I haven't been able to read a

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newspaper in years. I used to love reading. The president and I would read poetry to each other; Burns, and Shakespeare, but not Poe - too depressing.

I hope you understand that I rarely grant interviews, but you see it's time to reach out to my eldest son Robert. We've been estranged these past few years. After his unforgivable treatment of me in '75 I cut him out of my life completely. "Spare the rod, spoil the child," that's what I say. He needed to learn that there are consequences for betraying your mother. Batavia? Ha! Oh, he has tried to make amends, but I have refused to see him or read even one of his weekly letters. I simply sent them back unopened. However, I believe that enough time has now passed, and he's learned his lesson, so I've finally decided to communicate with him through your newspapers before it's too late. I may be sixty-three, but I feel twice that. I'm lucky if I can remember what day it is. Well, I wish that were true, I am painfully aware of the date; July 15, 1882. Eleven years ago today "They" took away my youngest. Tad. My calendar is chock full of these treacherous anniversaries, counting off the ever-widening distance between me and happiness. Death presided over my childhood... I grew up during the cholera epidemic in Lexington, Kentucky. Death was everywhere. Before victims succumb, their skin turned blue. Afraid the sickness would spread, families would quickly drop loved ones from windows into the street for the collection... blue people falling from the sky. The death carts came twice a day. Hooded figures stacking carcasses onto a mule-drawn wagon for burning. I was terrified of those macabre hooded figures. Not wanting to frighten me, the grown-ups spoke in code, rather than "Death Cart" my parents would say...

"Mrs. Davis was taken by 'Them' this morning" or "'They' will soon be here for the Anderson boy."

Yes, "They" presided over my youth and have remained my constant companion. My husband and three of my boys were stolen by "Them." They haven't found Robert yet, but They will. It's hard to believe it's been seven years since we've spoken. Well, it's been thirty-two years since I've held hands with Little Eddie. He was born after Robert, not yet four years old

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when They took him... oh those chubby little hands must be all rotted away by now. Then 12-year-old Willie and 18-year-old Tad - all gone, “ashes to ashes dust to dust.”

But not their father, no, the president remains/ well his remains, remain, anyway. Back in the White House, “the morning after,” upstairs as doctors try to hold me together, downstairs, they tear my husband to pieces. Performing some ghastly procedure called an autopsy, the doctor drains the president’s blood into bottles; forcing chemicals into his dead veins, to preserve his body, for God knows what. He actually cuts the brain out of his skull, just to weigh it; a tiny little bullet falls from between the doctor’s fingers... A few years ago, right up the road here, Oak Ridge Cemetery, some grave robbers were caught trying to steal his body, hold it for ransom or something/ wanting to make sure he’s still in there, the caretaker cracks open the coffin... a harsh, choking smell arises. Clad in his moldering Brooks Brothers suit, my husband’s kind face remains unchanged, with one notable exception, his skin has turned an unearthly blue... lovely, I could have done without that gruesome little tidbit. Something for a widow to dwell upon at bedtime. I am forever being informed of things I’d rather not know. But this is interesting - to protect his remains from the morbidly curious, the caretaker hides the coffin in the tomb’s basement. Resting on a couple of old sawhorses - inconspicuously covered with a dusty tarp. To this day upstairs tourists solemnly pay their respects to an empty tomb. *(Laughing.)* Serves them right, bunch of ghouls.

(Mary stands and begins packing.) Oh, let’s cheer up, shall we? You’ll forgive my packing while I speak to you? I’m preparing for another trip to... um, Paris, Paris is it? Do you like my new Saratoga trunk, well not exactly new. I just bought it. At long last I’m in a financial position to exercise some freedom. I’m sure you’ve all read about the battle for my government pension... No? Well, gather round children.

Lucretia Garfield, widow of the twentieth president of the United States, spent most of her whopping two hundred days in the White House stricken with “malaria” *(Mary mimes taking a shot of alcohol.)* and could do

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nothing. Her husband was far too worried about her to work, and so he too did nothing. When she finally sobered herself up, the president was shot in the back and thereafter could do nothing. When he died, a grief-stricken America donated half a million dollars, assuring that for the rest of her life Lucretia would have to do (*encouraging the audience to answer.*) nothing!

Julia Tyler: you'll love this, widow of the tenth president/ after his first wife died, poor old Johnny Tyler grieved and grieved, for about ten minutes, and then secretly married Julia, who was five years younger... than his own daughter, believe that? Young Julia, who always wanted to be of "service" to her country, "serviced" the president a measly eight months!

Both of these already wealthy women, to this day, they're both still alive. Julia Tyler must be three hundred years old. I suspect she did die a few years back, but no one has had the heart to tell the poor old thing to lie down. Both of these already wealthy women, to this day, receive a pension from your government of five thousand dollars per year! Oh, and that annoying Mary Todd, the only wife of "what's his name," three thousand dollars per year! That's right, that's right, the widow of our greatest president gets about half of what these other drunkards and streetwalkers get! I'm a cripple living in my sister's attic, can't even afford my doctor's bills! Oh no, no, no, no, I think not. I arranged through a friend in Washington/ I do still have some friends, to have a long list of my medical problems read aloud each and every day before the U.S. Congress...

(*Mary bangs three times with her hand on a table or chair, calling the meeting to order.*) "Let it be included into the public record of the pension committee, that the widow Lincoln suffers from the following debilitations... Chronic Intestinal Expulsions, Intermittent Bladder Malfunctions, and my personal favorite... Pustulant Rupturing Boils!

They surrendered immediately! Not only did I get my pension raised, I got fifteen thousand dollars in back payments! Hallelujah! Those other freeloaders didn't get that! Ha! (*She winces in pain.*) Pardon me; I've

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recently developed a talent for falling down. A footstool, a ladder, staircase, I never pass up the opportunity to fling myself to the ground, and it always happens on a Thursday/ make a note of that “next Thursday - stay in bed.”

Ugh, I wish I could, but Elizabeth won't allow it. Here's how she gets me up. “Wakie, wakie, Mary!” (*Mary rings a loud handbell.*) I have to peel myself off the ceiling every morning! She's my older sister but has always been more like a mother to me. Deaf as a post and as irritating as hemorrhoids, but I love her. This attic suits me just fine, no familiar furniture! Oh, familiar furniture/ too damned talkative, memories, memories, memories, memories! I had an ottoman once, couldn't keep its mouth shut/ I finally had to light the thing on fire and heave it through that window. My brother-in-law was furious. How was I to know he was in the backyard?

Elizabeth understands me she takes good care of me... I like my attic. (*Mary taps her head.*) I've spent my whole life either in the attic or the cellar. As the sands of time slip away toward my heavenly reward I don't need much. Still, I'll accept no handouts. I pay rent, plus three dollars a month for the storage of my trunks. I have sixty-three, one for every year of my life. They call me a “pack rat” but I prefer the term “hoarder.” Living here with Elizabeth, and her husband, “The Democrat,” has been all right, except of course for “Dragon Wagon.” Oh, you must think me out of my mind... (*Mary regrets her awkward choice of words.*) What I mean to say is that my sister has hired a nurse from the hospital to look after me. She's got some very German name like Dragonvolgen or something, so I just call her “Dragon Wagon.” No sense of whimsy at all, the Germans are like that, all business, if she ever smiled, I think her face might crack. Well, she went and blabbed to “The Democrat” that the deliveryman listed my trunks as weighing eight thousand pounds. So, I've lived an interesting life, it comes with a little baggage! Now Dragon Wagon is afraid to sleep in her own bed downstairs, for fear the ceiling will cave in. Last week she wakes up the whole house screaming “Ceiling falling, ceiling falling!” The ceiling wasn't falling! It was only me falling out of bed. What can I say, it was Thursday.

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All right, all right, so perhaps you'd like some background information? My childhood? Desolate. We weren't poor, or anything like that, far from it, and my mother loved me, but she had no time. My original name was Mary Ann, which I loved, but my parents had so many children, I guess they ran out of ideas, and re-used "Ann" for my younger sister, so half of my name was stolen, and I became just plain old Mary. It's ironic how alone you can feel in a crowd. One July 4th, I was little - at the parade in Lexington, my father is a member of the state legislature, and so our family is walking in the parade, but I am so small I can't keep up. No matter how hard I try, I will never keep up. The parade moves on. In a frozen panic, I think to myself...

"Do I matter enough to come back for, or will they just name the next baby 'Mary' and move on?"

I stay in one spot hoping I matter enough. My mother finds me in the street, tears pouring down my little cheeks, whispering to myself...

"Mary matters, Mary matters, Mary matters."

She died giving birth to my brother. Secretly, I was jealous of the new baby, so They took her away to punish me. She was only thirty-one years old. A premature death is so brutal because it robs you of a chance at redemption... My father remarried, by the time they were done I had sixteen siblings! It was like a rabbit farm. I mean really, couldn't he find something else to do at night? A game of checkers or something? My stepmother hated me, called me "Satan's Claw," awful woman. I was frightened one night during a thunder and lightning storm, like this one, tried to climb into bed with them. Well, she dragged me down the stairs and pushed me off the porch into the rain to "toughen me up," the worst part was that my father let her do it! As my slippers filled with icy mud, instead of tightening up against the cold, I just gave in to it and let that awful chill sink deep into my bones.

"Mary matters, Mary matters, Mary matters."

A few years ago, though, I did visit my stepmother's grave... and danced

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on it. I did. Nothing elaborate mind you, just a simple jig, made my day.

Oh, enough about me, let's talk about my husband a little. Please don't make me bore you with the information you already know, born in a log cabin, self-educated, rail splitter. If you have been living under a rock and don't know the story, go open a book, it won't kill you. *(Mary opens a music box.)*

(SOUND CUE - A simple waltz plays.)

Our relationship began at a party here in Springfield, in 1839. He was the law partner of my cousin. This giant of a man approaches and asks me to dance.

“Well, well, well, Mr. Lincoln, I don't mind if I do.”

(They dance.)

He said, “Mary, I've wanted to dance with you in the worst way.”

“Well, Mr. Lincoln,” I answered, “you are succeeding.” *(Mary closes the music box.)*

(SOUND CUE - Music stops.)

You know, I don't really remember that actually happening, just remember telling the story over and over.

No man in the history of the world needed a woman's touch more than Abraham Lincoln; he was a walking, talking unmade bed. Insecure, emotional, scattered. There was just something about him, an unquestionable sincerity. We made quite a pair, I was an educated, beautiful socialite and he was Ichabod Crane. He was nine feet tall, and I was three feet nothing. He would do this thing where he would spin me on the dance floor, then pretend to lose me in the crowd.

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Here's what I want you to know about Abraham Lincoln, his breath smelled of apples, he was an excellent handball player, um, he didn't snore... Oh, on our wedding night, this I remember: that little twelve-by-twelve-foot rented room of a boarding house, the rest of the world be damned, we were rich in each other's arms. He was just so much fun to be with. He could impersonate anything, a coffee pot, a windmill, bacon frying! I think it's difficult for people to picture him that way... lounging in bed, reading Shakespeare to each other. Sharing our secrets. I told him about my stepmother; he told me about his father - a brutal, sadistic man. How any parent could be anything but nurturing to that sweet soul just baffles me.

(Cuddling with her husband.) "Come, let's hold hands, my love. Nice and tight. Our childhoods may have left us a little broken, but if we stick together, we'll be strong."

Arms and legs wrapped around each other, so tight, we made a solemn vow to be good parents. That was the night Robert was conceived. I miss my husband every single day. That is why I have remained in mourning all of these many years, because "Love is eternal," that's just what my husband inscribed on our wedding bands... My wedding band! My ring, where is it? *(Mary's mood darkens.)* My wedding ring has been stolen! *(Reprimanding the audience.)* Which one of you filthy sons of bitches has stolen my wedding ring? I knew I couldn't trust reporters... Wait, wait, wait a moment. Give me a moment here. This afternoon, after my headache came on, my fingers began to swell, so I gave the ring to my sister Elizabeth for safekeeping. What a relief! *(Mary's mood lightens.)* Where was I? Oh, there I go again, well if you'd stop interrupting me... the election, was it the election? Well anyway after the election in '61 we left Springfield for the last time. A bittersweet day, it was a joyous occasion, but Springfield was our home, all of our children were born here, one was buried here, they loved us here. Oh, but no matter, now the whole country will love us, right? Wrong.

It was a twelve-day train trip from Illinois to the inauguration in

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Washington. Dozens of cities to give speeches in. Crowds of hundreds grew to thousands, thousands grew to ten thousand. In Albany, we were waving from the back of the train, when my husband's eyes grew dark, and he said...

"There are just too many people here. This isn't celebration, Mary, it's panic. The country is sinking, and they're fighting for the lifeboats."

He pulls our family back into the train just as someone hurls a whiskey bottle.

(SOUND CUE - Bottle crash, and rioting crowd.)

The cavalry charges into the mob, stabbing with bayonets, women and children scream to find each other; after watching a man trampled by a horse, Willie and Tad say that they want to go home now. Somewhere between Baltimore and Washington I hear of a Confederate plot to derail our train and slaughter every man, woman, and child aboard. But I'm told not to worry, because last night the president-elect was put on a secret train to Washington... So, my children and I were left on the train as decoys!

(SOUND CUE – Train rolling at half speed.)

(Mary splits her attention between the window and her son.) "Robert, look for the flagmen along the tracks, a white flag means all clear, red means trouble... white flag... Robert, your father is gone, and so you'll have to be the man... *(Growing increasingly impatient.)* I don't think you understand the gravity of the situation. Perhaps you'd like to help make sure your mother and brothers make it to Washington without having their throats slit! Promise that you'll protect us, promise, say it/ say it!!... Thank you, Robert, thank you... white flag... Oh, Robert, if you ever, ever betray me, I will never speak to you again as long as I live, white flag..." I have hated trains ever since. Yes, yes, yes, nothing worse than trains, and marzipan...

(SOUND CUE - The storm picks up again.)

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... and thunder! Oh, this terrible storm! Reminds me of the day my son Robert died. Oops/ no, no, no! I didn't say that! I did not just say that!! *(Mary's mood darkens.)* Don't you dare write that down! You filthy sons of bitches! *(Mary's mood lightens.)* I sometimes get confused, it was my son Eddie who died the day of the storm. My son Robert is still very much alive, in fact he is the current Secretary of War. He's had enough pain in his life without you reporters stirring that mess up again. Spreading rumors that I had hired someone to kill my own son. Ridiculous! All I did was make a few inquiries... way too expensive. Honestly, please don't print what I said about Robert being dead, I don't want him to think I'm still blaming him for Batavia.

I realize that it's late, but I hope you won't miss tomorrow's deadline, it's only a matter of time, I know They're coming, for me. I can almost hear Their breathing. I need to patch things up with Robert before it's too late... I don't want anyone dancing on my grave. So please don't print that other part, all right? Thank you so much. It was Eddie I was thinking about, my second son Eddie. They came for Eddie in 1850, just before his fourth birthday, I still have his unopened gift somewhere, trunk thirty-two I believe. Ugh, I am at war with my mind, and it is an insidious enemy. My little Eddie has been gone more than thirty years. Some days I start to think he was only a figment of my imagination... and thus my mind begins dismantling my heart. *(Mary frantically searches through a cabinet or a trunk.)* If I forget him, stop believing in him, he truly is dead, isn't he? Or even worse, Little Eddie becomes a mockery taunting me! *(Mary finds what she's looking for and buries her face in a baby blanket.)* He was real, is real. As real as the bones of my body. My heart is true; my mind just tricked it for a while... pardon me, I'm not feeling quite myself tonight. *(She puts the blanket away and pours herself a glass of water.)* Mama's cure all, whether it's a skinned knee or a lost kite, a glass of water helps ease the pain. I'd know something was wrong with the kids when I'd hear... "Mama, I need water!!"

The first thing I did when moving to the Executive Mansion was to have fresh drinking water pumped in from the Potomac River. Wasn't cheap,

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but do you suppose Queen Victoria relies on well water? I think not. When we settled in Washington, the presidential residence was rat infested! Like the country itself, President Buchanan had left the Executive Mansion in shambles. Good luck impressing the French ambassador with peeling wallpaper and chipped china! “Honest Abe, The Rail Splitter” was all very effective in getting us elected, but now the world needed to know that the United States of America was not being run by country bumpkins. So, I went about transforming the president’s home into someplace to be proud of. There was a war on, and we were all doing our part. Generals planned, soldiers marched, and I shopped! “Shopping for victory” I called it. Trailing me through the showrooms of Washington, Philadelphia, and New York, journalists reported on my exquisite taste. (*While speaking to “reporters,” Mary rummages through a trunk.*) I’m particularly fond of the flatware... (*She can’t find the flatware; Mary’s mood darkens.*) My gold flatware! My flatware’s been stolen!! Which one of you filthy sons of bitches has stolen my flatware?! I knew I couldn’t trust reporters! Wait, wait, wait a moment... give me a moment here... I don’t live there anymore, I live here. (*Mary’s mood lightens.*) What a relief... Time tends to get confusing... it’s just a testament to my passion, that’s all... I was telling the *story* of my flatware... In any event... (*Reprimanding the audience.*) and I wish you’d stop interrupting me! In any event, my husband said he would “rather vomit than have the American public pay for my flubdubs.” After two weeks of my tireless work, this was his appraisal of my war effort? Congress had allotted only twenty thousand dollars for my White House project and I was already ten thousand over that. Well, he’ll change his tune when he understands the favorable impression these “flubdubs” make.

Our first State Dinner, February ’62, was my... coming out party. I’ll show them, I’ll show them what “The First Lady” is really made of; the British press coined that title just for me “The First Lady.” I quite like it, don’t you? Of course, now every president’s wife is called “The First Lady”! But remember I was the first “First Lady.” You might want to write that down, that’s capital “F” capital “L.” Well, everything seems to happen at once, doesn’t it? Wouldn’t you know, both of my boys, Tad and Willie, took sick

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just before the reception. Willie bore the worst of it. (*Mary enters “Willie’s bedroom.”*)

(*SOUND CUE – Party sounds in the background, then fading.*)

(*Mary sits on the edge of “Willie’s bed.”*) “And how is my favorite patient this evening? Have you been resting and drinking plenty of water? Things are going relatively well so far, knock on wood. Oh Willie, I’m so sorry that you have to miss all of the fun. I could use you by my side; you’re always so good at these things. Tell me a joke that I can remember (*She listens.*) ... but why would a zebra walk into a bar? Oh, never mind, it never comes out right when I say it. Everyone is asking about you.”

“Would you believe that we have five hundred happy people downstairs? Even General McClellan is laughing, the big phony. The key to a successful party is to make sure the guests feel beautiful. Soft lighting, good music, and alcohol, plenty of alcohol! As long as you keep refilling the punch bowl everyone stays beautiful. The trick is kicking them out before they get ugly again.

Oh, you haven’t touched your dinner! Now look here, the tan stuff is pheasant, the brown stuff is venison steak, and the pink stuff is Virginia ham. And for dessert/ look at that/ it’s a water nymph made of (*She takes a bite.*) ... marzipan/ yuck! Not hungry?”

(*SOUND CUE – The United States Marine Band plays in the distance.*)

“The kitchen is a disaster. The cook hurled a bottle of wine at one of the waiters. Thank God no one heard the commotion over the music... the music! Oh, do you hear that, Willie? They’re playing ‘The Mary Lincoln Polka’! What a wonderful surprise! Of course, I commissioned it myself, but don’t tell your father. (*Mary stands.*) Come dance with me! (*He doesn’t.*) Oh, Willie, it’s all going just as I had planned! We’ll see what your father says about my ‘flubdubs’ tomorrow when the newspapers rave about me. Good night, my angel!”

THE GHOSTS OF MARY LINCOLN

The Sunday Morning Chronicle pronounced the evening “a glorious success!” A few days later, they announced that my son Willie was dead. (*Mary’s mood sinks like a stone.*) When I buy a pair of silk gloves and put them away, I know that I’ll never wear them, but they will always be there for me. I’ll never disappoint them, they’ll never get sick, and they will never, ever die. (*She picks up her glass of water.*) I had replaced our old well water with fresh drinking water from the Potomac, at a cost of four thousand four hundred and twenty dollars, it was contaminated with typhoid. (*Mary’s mood turns angry.*) A few days after the funeral my husband came home with a woman’s makeup on his lips. I threw a cup of scalding tea in his face.

“Hurts like Hell, doesn’t it? That’s nothing compared to the Hell in my heart! How dare you seek comfort in the arms of another woman with our dear son freshly planted in his tomb! Don’t deny it, her powder is still on your lips!”

As blisters bubble up on his cheek, the president explains that he had asked soldiers to lift the lid of Willie’s coffin, so that he could kiss his son goodnight. It was the mortician’s powder on his lips... he should have told me, what else was I supposed to think?

(*Almost indifferent.*) The doctor was able to save Tad. He was frightened and he’d beg for me at night, but I didn’t possess the strength to even lift my head from the pillow... I’m sure Taddie understood. After a few... weeks... I did go to him. (*Annoyed.*) He was hiding under his bed... why would he do a ridiculous thing like that?

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