The Bust of Lincoln

by James Francis Dwyer, 1874-1952

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Illustration:
For forty years he could not remember feeling a thrill of joy or sorrow over the happenings of another… God had flashed before his mental eyes a picture of his own soul.

THIS is the story of a Manhattan miracle. It concerns a Boy and a Maid, the Miser of Greeley Square, and a little plaster bust of Abraham Lincoln. The three persons and the bust came together in a place of boarding-houses in New York City, and it was there that Providence worked the wonder.

The story opens in April, which is the proper month in which to lay the foundation for a New York love story. In those crisp days of budding Spring when the frolicking breezes that charge up from the Line are filled with all sorts of delicious odours, strange longings stir the hearts of youths and maidens. For them the whine of the trolley car is changed to a merry chanson; the elevated trains grind out Homeric chants to the Red Gods as they race along the skyline; and the ferryboats hooting in the soft, velvety nights arouse fancies that have been slumbering through the days of snow and slush.

So it was in April that the Boy and the Maid fell in love. Theirs were two of the first hearts that responded to the witchery of the winds that came cavorting out of the South, those scouting, reckless, musk-laden winds who lead the advance army of the Spring Maiden, and who fall desperately upon the flanks of Winter the moment he turns tail. The Boy's name was John, and the Maid's name was Lulu, and they lived in boarding-houses on opposite sides of Thirty-fifth Street. John had a little room on the third floor of his boarding-house, Lulu had the same kind of a room on the third floor of hers. John had a little window opening out on the thoroughfare, so had Lulu. Between the two was the width of Thirty-fifth Street, but what is Thirty-fifth Street when hearts are young and Spring has come to Manhattan?

John was a clerk in a shipping office on Broadway, Lulu was a stenographer in the office of Welsher and Hawksbill, legal lights who hid their somewhat watery refulgence in a dingy suite on Liberty Street. And, strange as it may appear, it was the blear-eyed Welsher who discovered Lulu's secret. On the twenty-second day of April the lawyer brought a legal conveyance to the girl and pointed with a stubby forefinger to a word on the first typed sheet.

"This man's name is not John," he said sternly. "It is Jean, yet you have typed it John in three different places."

Lulu blushed and seized the sheet with trembling hands. Hurriedly she erased the first "Jean," with the bewhiskered face of Welsher peering over her shoulder, then she tapped the keys with her dainty fingers, and, lo and behold! the word John appeared again where it should not have appeared!

Welsher whistled softly as Lulu, with flaming cheeks, sprang from her chair and rushed into the outer office. The lawyer was a shrewd person. He stared out of the window for a few moments, sniffed the aromatic breezes that frolicked up the canyons made by the tall office buildings, then retreated slowly to his own office. Welsher had sniffed the Spring in the air, and he let the conveyance wait till Lulu had recovered her composure.

John rode home with Lulu on the afternoon of the day when she persisted in placing his name in the place that was intended for another. They rode uptown in a trolley car through an atmosphere that seemed as if it had been dyed a golden tint in the magic vats of Samarkand. The sun was setting in a tangle of crimson cloud that looked like a ravelled piece of Tyrian tapestry. Velvety puffs of air, balm-drenched, thuriferous, intoxicating, touched their faces like rollers of satin. Back along the supporting lines to the tropics the scouting breezes had sent news of the retreat of Winter, and Spring, like a wild, barbaric queen, was surging over the city in all the glory of her wondrous vestments.

Lulu spoke of Mr. Welsher's idiosyncrasies. She told of his little fits of melancholy and temper when the dollars dodged from the stubby fingers that looked as if they had been worn blunt in groping for coins on the board of the god of chance. And John found imperfections in his superior to suit the girl's critical mood.

"My boss is bad-tempered too," he said. "His name is Crabbe."

"C-r-a-b?" asked Lulu, and John thrilled at the manner in which the little red lips had spelled the word.

They laughed at each other's simple witticisms. When Cupid is interlocutor it doesn't require a scintillating *jeu d'esprit* to bring a smile. But the Boy spared no efforts to make Lulu smile. When she laughed she displayed a set of teeth that were sweeter than any string of baby pearls from Bahrein or Condatchy.

An old man, sitting opposite the pair, neglected his paper to sun himself in their reflected happiness. He clawed away years choked with stock-jobbing and trading, and for one ecstatic moment he caught the perfume of a magnolia-scented night that was buried under forty years of sordid trade battles. It is wonderful to contemplate the influence of love. It is the wand by which Nature works her mysteries.

Thirty-fifth Street was transformed to Lulu and John when they alighted from the car. The weather-faded houses had been peppered with gold from the setting sun till they shone like the Ca d'Oro on the Grand Canal. A Neapolitan with a wheezy organ played sweeter music than Pierre Vidal, Prince of Troubadours. All the clangour of the big city, from the screeching of the junk-man's cart to the infernal tat tat of a pneumatic riveter, was welded into a mighty symphony with which their own heart-beats were in cadence.

"And you will come out after dinner?" asked John as they neared their boarding-houses.

Lulu blushed and nodded her little head. The Spring breezes had kissed her cheeks to a glowing pink, and her eyes shone brightly.

"And where will we go?" asked the Boy.

"Anywhere," murmured the Maid.

"Very good," said John. "*Anywhere* it is. I hope your landlady doesn't serve for dinner the dish you hate more than any other dish. Mine generally plays that trick on me when I am in a particularly good humour. Don't forget. Seven-thirty at your door."

John sprang up the stairs to his little room on the third floor. The room contained a bed and a chair, a cheap bureau, an oleograph and a small plaster bust of Abraham Lincoln. Although the bust is mentioned last it was more important than any of the other articles. The bed, chair, bureau, and oleograph belonged to the landlady, the bust of Lincoln belonged to John. Outside his wardrobe it was the one article he possessed. It stood on a shelf near his bed, and when John marched into the room on that Spring afternoon the calm, wise face of Lincoln was turned toward him.

"Well, Mr. President," said the boy merrily, "the plot thickens. We are going out this evening. This evening, mind you! Where to? you ask. She said *Anywhere*, Mr. President. Anywhere I like. We'll wander to the Fields of Arcady and the Land

Beyond the Sunset. We'll tie a swing on the Milky Way and find out where the moon sleeps. Mr. Lincoln, I can't tell you how happy I am."

The bust always smiled at John's confidences. The long-dead sculptor who had moulded the head had stamped a strange, whimsical expression on the lean face, an expression that invited secrets. Grandfather Robert, who had presented the bust to John, had a habit of addressing all his remarks to it when the loneliness of old age came upon him, and the habit took a grip upon John when he came to New York. Jungle-dwellers, when afflicted by the god of lonely places, tell their secrets to trees, and a country boy in New York is lonelier than a trapper in the *kaladang* forests of Borneo.

Grandfather Robert, who had followed Grant from Galena to Appomattox, had presented the little bust to John when he was dying. John was his favourite grandchild, and the bust of Lincoln was all that Grandfather Robert had to leave. A few minutes before he died he picked up the treasured possession and placed it in his grandson's hands.

"Keep him," he whispered. "Talk to him when you have no one else to talk to. I've had a lot of comfort from him."

Of course there was a story about the bust. Grandfather Robert happened to be on guard duty when Lincoln visited Grant at Richmond, and when the President was passing grandfather, John's relative, in a burst of emotion, forgot himself so much that he changed his rifle from his right hand to his left, and thrust out his dirty right hand to Lincoln.

"Danged if I know what happened to me that day," Grandfather Robert would mumble in the dream-days of old age. "Something happened to my blamed right hand. I've been thinkin' about it for forty years, an' I ain't no wiser yet. Not one bit wiser. It's lucky I warn't court-martialed for it! There I was, standin' stiff as a five-year-old hickory; an' jest as the President came along I jerked the old gun from one hand to the other an' put out a dirty paw to Lincoln! Warn't I the blamed idjut to do a fool thing like that? There was the President right in front of me, an' there was the General lookin' at me like a Kansas farmer lookin' at a brigade of grasshoppers that has got into his alfalfy, an' my durned spine got as wobbly as a bit of biled macaroni. Gee whiz, didn't I wilt!

"'I beg pardon, Mr. President,' I ups an' says. 'I beg pardon,' says I. 'I jest couldn't help it, sir. It was this blamed arm of mine that done it. I was jest standin' stiff an' quiet, an' my danged arm stuck itself out without askin' by your leave or anything else.' That's what I says to Mr. Lincoln, jest like that.

"General Grant took his cigar out of his mouth an' looked at me like as if he was goin' to say somethin' hotter than red pepper, but jest then old Abe looked at the General kind o' smiling, an' then, gosh dang it all! the President put out his hand an' gripped mine till the jints cracked in my fingers. 'I'm pleased to meet you,' says the President, 'I know you are a good soldier an' fightin' for your country,' he says, an' when he said that an' kept that grip on my fingers, why I clean forgot about the General's black looks. I forgot about everything jest then. I forgot the army an' every other durned thing I had in my head. I only saw those calm, good eyes of Abe Lincoln, eyes that were fuller o' goodness than an egg is of meat, an' I didn't see them as long as I wanted to. No, I didn't! Some blamed tears got right across my own peepers, and when I sort of came to myself, Mr. Lincoln was walkin' away

with the General, an' I was snifflin' like old Gabby Connors when she's tellin' about the four husbands she buried.

"I guess I was back from the war about five or six weeks when that little plaster bust came along. There warn't a word of writin' with it. Jest Abe himself, packed up with excelsy an' shavin's, an' I don't know to this day who sent it. I don't think the President ordered it to be sent to me. I guess he clean forgot me the moment he turned his back, although I don't know, he warn't one to forget things, was Abe Lincoln. Old Cy Wiggins reckons as how the President or General Grant might have told some one about that stunt of mine when my old right hand played a trick on me, an' that the feller they told might have sent along the little bust. Cy might be right. Anyhow, there's the bust an' there's the story. Gosh dang me! didn't old Grant give me a look for luck when I stuck out my paw, an' didn't Abe make my finger jints crack when he squeezed my hand! He was some big man was Abraham Lincoln, you jest bet he was!"

And that is how it came about that the little plaster bust of Lincoln came to New York from Galena, Illinois. The bust was a sacred possession. Its intrinsic value was small, but its sentimental value could not be gauged. And to the bust John confided his joys and sorrows. The Rock Caves of Elephanta are lonely, but the brick caves of New York City are lonelier by far to the country boy who comes to the big town to make his fortune. So Lincoln was the first to hear of Lulu, and the Boy chattered about her as he made himself ready for the meeting.

"She's as sweet as clover," he said, turning toward the bust. "She is everything that you could wish for. Golly, yes! And she is all alone in the city like I am, Mr. President. I see her coming out of the front door now. Good-bye."

Lulu, in assenting to the Boy's proposal, had remarked that they would go "anywhere," and it is possible to go "anywhere" in New York on a Spring night. That is if you have Youth and Love to carry you. Byzantium or Babylon, Tyre or Carthage was never more wonderful than Manhattan. It seemed so to John and Lulu on that evening. They rode uptown on an elevated train that sang the Song of the Zinganis that can only be heard by lovers whose hearts are pure. An argent moon, circled with a ring of amber haze, was swinging in the eastern sky, and it played hide-and-seek with the lovers as the car rolled on through the night. There was magic in the air. The stars peeped at them like the bright eyes of angels watching at spyholes in the dome of cloud-flecked pearl.

At One Hundred and Fortieth Street they alighted, climbed the steps and stairs to the hill on which the City College stands like a great baronial castle, and from this point they looked down on the big apartment houses that shouldered each other down to Riverside Drive. In the distance they caught a glimpse of the mighty Hudson that looked like a gigantic insertion of ivory satin between light-spangled Manhattan and the dark Jersey shore.

"Let us explore," said John.

"Oh, do!" cried Lulu excitedly. "I have never been up here before."

With the pure spirit of adventure in their hearts, the spirit that makes palaces out of paupers' huts and princes out of peanut venders, they wandered past the illuminated entrances of large apartment houses, speculating upon their own chances of ever holding at beck the uniformed attendants at the doors. They were two little lonely hall-roomers turning the night into one of enchantment by the

very intensity of their craving for Romance. They had a desire to chant songs—strange songs that sprang to their lips unbidden. They felt near to the little stars that winked curiously when the dawdling clouds dragged their ragged fringe-lengths across the sky.

They came out upon Riverside Drive, and clasping each other's hands they stood to drink in the beauty of the place.

"It is lovely!" cried Lulu.

"It is fine!" said John.

From a white yacht moored near the Manhattan shore, the notes of a violin went up into the soft night like subtle threads that enmeshed the senses, and it seemed to the two watchers that the ghostly shapes of schooner and barge, battered scow and lowly punt, were moving to the delicious strains that came from the illuminated fairy ship. The silent, shadowy river-craft bobbed and curtsied and circled while the glittering yacht poured forth its song.

The Boy and the Maid walked on with the tireless feet of true adventurers. The Drive was a magic vat in which the mystery and intoxication of the night was stirred and blended, and they quaffed like thirsty things. They pitied the poor foolish people who were sitting in music-halls and nickelodeans. The night called to the two hall-roomers. It put its soft arms around them and caressed them till they were delirious with the joy of it all. The place was as strange to them as the Kayman's Gate at Colombo or the camelia-bordered road to Nikko.

"If it was always Spring!" cried the Boy, walking with head erect, and open nostrils drinking in the night air. "If it was always Spring, what a glorious time we'd have!"

"Wouldn't we?" murmured the Maid. "There'd be no snow or slush. Look, John, look at the big glowworms climbing up the hill on the other side of the river!"

"The big glowworms" were the Fort Lee cars climbing up from the ferry, and the two adventurers stood and watched them follow one another in slow procession. What a wonderful place it was. On the big viaduct they leaned over and waved to the cars that whizzed up and down far beneath them. Along the moon-washed Drive an occasional auto dashed like a bright-eyed goblin that had been lured out by the beauty of the night.

The water called the two, as it calls to all adventurers. The river sang a song that lured them down to it. They took tickets on one of the old red ferryboats that swish from shore to shore, like important duchesses, leaving a train of lacy foam in their wake. To Spuyten Duyvil and beyond was a stretch of silver. Up stream the white yacht was still spraying the night with golden music, and still the ghostly shapes of tug and brick barge danced a rigadoon to the strains.

On the Jersey shore the two consumed ice-cream sodas—Romance doesn't shudder at the consumption of ice-cream sodas by those who seek her—and on another matronly ferryboat they recrossed the river to the city. John thought of Grandfather Robert and President Lincoln at that moment. As they stood on the upper deck as the old ferryboat butted its way across the Hudson, Grant's Tomb stood up majestic and inspiring in the moonlight, and the picture brought to the mind of the boy that other picture which the story of his grandfather had etched within his brain. It was then that he told Lulu the history of the little bust, and

how Grandfather Robert, after thrusting out his dirty hand to the President, was afraid that Grant was going to say "somethin' hotter than red pepper."

They rode downtown on the elevated, the moon now high above the tallest buildings, and their souls were drenched with the magic of the night.

"How long is it since we left here?" asked John, as they neared their dingy boarding-houses in Thirty-fifth Street.

"I am doubtful if we ever lived here," said Lulu gently. "I am wondering if there is really such a man as Welsher, a man with stubby fingers and a skrimpy beard. Good-night. *Oh, good-night!*"

John looked at the little bust of Lincoln when he climbed to his room. "I've had a grand evening, Mr. President," he said gravely. "I've had a wonderful evening, and she is more wonderful than anything I can think of. I bet you would say the same if you could see her. I'm sure you would."

This may seem a very prosaic description of an evening's pleasure if read to your tired and very blasé friend who has seen Montmartre in the sickly dawn, who has bought midnight suppers at Ciro's at Monte Carlo, or found his enjoyment in racing home from Coney with a bicycle-policeman at his auto wheel, but John and Lulu had clean hearts. To them the Adirondacks in Springtime would be more beautiful than all the tinsel palaces that were ever built for jaded voluptuaries. They had all the passionate purity of youth, and that wonder night was the first of many excursions. They detested the hot picture shows where the endless fluttering films brought on a species of mental torpor. They longed for the open places and the cool nights—the nights that wrapped them round like fairy godmothers. They made nickels do the work of magic carpets, and Love, pure Love, bound them together in their loneliness.

And every evening when John reached his little room on the third floor of his boarding-house, he would tell his happiness to the smiling bust of Lincoln. He would relate the wonders of each trip, and tell of the hopes and ambitions that had flared up during the outing.

"She is wonderful," he would say over and over again. "I don't know what I would do in this town if it wasn't for her friendship, Mr. President. I couldn't mope about the streets or go into poolrooms. But you wait till I hit this city a whack! You wait! Wait till they begin to speak of the Boy from Galena. Galena, Mr. Lincoln! Your fighting bulldog knew that spot, didn't he?"

The wonder nights continued through the days of early Summer, through the sun-smitten months of July and August, when the city sweltered in a dead atmosphere. Autumn slipped over the Jersey shore and flung her yellow shawls over the treetops. Winter was close. Little flurries came down from the north and shook the park elms like invisible hands. Leaves fell on the sidewalks and huddled in clusters like frightened things.

John and Lulu shuddered as the hoarse notes of the Snow King's bugle came out of the north. Who ever stops to think of the boarding-house lovers in Winter time? Where can they go on nights of snow and slush? The Boy and the Maid were engaged. They were dreaming of a little flat in Harlem where the bust of Lincoln would have the position of importance on the dresser of bird's-eye maple. John had proposed a place on the *bric-à-brac* shelf in the dining room, but Lulu had objected.

"No, no," she cried. "He must be by himself. You know, John, I think it was the President who sent the bust to your grandfather. Mr. Lincoln would have done it if he thought your dear old grandfather would have got one tenth the pleasure from the gift that he really did get."

John gripped the girl's little hand and kissed it gently. "You're right, Lulu," he said. "You're always right. Mr. Lincoln would have sent the bust, or ten thousand busts, if he thought the gift would bring happiness to the person receiving it. You just bet he would. He was that sort. He understood what happened to grandfather's right arm, and that showed that his heart was in the right place."

And then one day came Winter. It sprang upon the city like a pawing, snorting terror of the air. Mad blasts went scurrying up and down the streets, clashed with one another at the corners, and clutched! the throats of pedestrians with frigid fingers. And in that first onslaught of the Snow King's Cossacks John fell a victim. He went home spirit-frozen, and when the landlady peeped into his room next morning he was suffering the tortures of the damned.

O you brick caves of New York City! O you poor, pinched-souled landladies! You know from long experience the amount of sentiment there is in shipping companies whose clerks fall sick. John's landlady knew. She had the prevision of her class. In the weary weeks that followed that first day's sickness she guessed how things would go. The shipping-office forgot him, the clerks forgot him, the office boys forgot him, only Lulu remembered—Lulu and the bust of Abraham Lincoln. And it was to Lincoln that John, with throbbing head and smarting eyes, turned for comfort.

"It's mighty hard, but I'm not kicking, Mr. President," he would whisper. "I'm not kicking, but this is tough, mighty tough. You weren't one to grumble about hard knocks though, so I suppose you think I ought to battle through. Well, I will."

It is awkward for a girl to do anything for a sick man in a different boarding-house, even if she is engaged to marry him. John's landlady wore the cap of Mother Grundy and the suspicion-breeding eye of Sheridan's Mrs. Candor. She would permit Lulu to be in the room with John only while she, poor acrid soul, was there to act as chaperon, and when John's purse ran low those few minutes were given grudgingly.

"It will do him no good for you to sit chatterin' to him," she said sharply to Lulu on the first evening that John failed to hand over the week's board money. "It only does him harm. What he wants is quiet an' good food, an' he's gettin' that!" And Lulu, with her knowledge of the cheerless abodes of the unattached, wept as the acrid one escorted her down the stairs where the red roses of the carpet had faded 'neath the tread of the army of top-floor Fronts and Backs.

"Thinkin' o' marriage," said the landlady to her best Permanent, as the girl crossed the street, "an' here he is sick an' with precious few dimes behind him I'm thinkin'. He couldn't come up with the board money to-day an' things going higher an' higher in the food line every day."

So John was left alone with the bust of Lincoln for hours uncountable. They were hours that split his heart with the wedge of loneliness. Grandfather Robert's habit of talking to the bust gripped him hard in those hours. The god of lonely places grinned at him from the enamel-chipped bed rail, and he found sometimes that he had been chattering to the bust without being aware of the fact.

"I can't help it, Mr. Lincoln," he would cry, as the bust smiled down upon him with the same old, whimsical smile that had delighted Grandfather Robert. "I can't help growling. I know you stood some hard knocks, Mr. President, but you were in the country. Gee! if I was only in the country instead of being in this rabbit warren."

The Winter tore along with rain and snow, and stifling radiators that groaned like souls in pain. The devils imprisoned in the radiators battered John's aching brain with their clanging hammers. They whistled and shrieked at him, waking him from fitful slumber with mad pounding on their iron prison. He spoke to Lincoln of them in moments of semi-delirium, and Lincoln smiled the quiet, tired smile that had soothed Grandfather Robert.

Lulu paid the doctor. John didn't know of this, but doctors must live. Out of the scant remains of the small salary she received from Welsher, the girl bought fruit for the sick boy, and the landlady sniffed disdainfully.

"He doesn't want fruit," she would growl. "He should eat up the good food I bring up to him, an' he would get well quick." But John, in the moments when he could forget the devils in the radiator, would eat the fruit that Lulu brought and leave the uninviting messes of the landlady untouched. When a "Top Front" is ill there is a likelihood that he will get his meals half an hour after they are cooked, and the veneer of grease that forms during the wait does not make the dishes inviting.

John got worse. He craved to get away from the odour of the boarding-house carpets that rose to torment him on damp days. Is there anything more horrible than the odour of boarding-house carpets on wet days? He wanted to escape the fiends in the radiator that tormented him with their everlasting pounding. Lulu wept. The doctor shook his head. The landlady spoke about something overdue, a record of which, in Thibetan-like characters, was preserved in a greasy notebook hanging over the kitchen sink.

"I can't bring you sunshine!" she cried irritably, once when the boy had expressed a longing for the return of Spring. "I can't buy it for you either. You owe me enough already!"

We must not blame the landlady. Landladies have hard times in Manhattan, but the thrust was a cruel one. The god of lonely places danced a jig on the bent rail of the bed, and the boy looked at Lincoln with moist eyes.

"I guess I'll pull through, Mr. Lincoln," he said, "but I'm glad that I have you here in the room."

The landlady consulted with her best Permanent. Poor devil of a landlady! The Permanent, thinking to do John a favour, advised her to keep the boy in the house instead of sending him to a hospital, but the Permanent knew nothing of the cold food or the bitter words that hurt like bludgeon blows. If John had gone to a hospital—but then the miracle would not have happened.

The boy's increasing indebtedness made the landlady more acidulous to Lulu. She made caustic remarks to the unhappy little girl, and when Lulu informed her that she did not need her advice, the landlady retaliated savagely. She slammed the door in the girl's face when she came across on the following evening, and even refused to open it again to take the basket of fruit that the little stenographer carried.

Lulu took the fruit back to the corner shop, ordered the greengrocer's boy to take it to the boarding-house on the following morning, then went home and penned a letter to John. She avoided wetting the letter with her tears by holding her head away from the bureau as she wrote. She was all real girl, was Lulu.

John read and reread her letter as the radiator fiends whistled at him next morning. He looked at Lincoln and smiled bravely, then he painfully scribbled a note in reply to the girl's message. As he sealed the envelope he addressed the plaster bust on the shelf above the bed.

"Mr. President, I have a position of great trust for you," he said. "I am writing Lulu to tell her that you will convey to her the news of my daily condition. You don't understand how you will do it, but I have fixed it all. I have told her in this letter that I will put you at the window, and that you will tell her how I am from day to day. It's a great scheme, Mr. Lincoln. The landlady will not let Lulu in to see me, so I am going to turn your smiling face to the street when I am feeling better; turn you side on when I am not feeling so good, and turn your back to the street when I am—when I am any old how. What do you think of that idea, eh? I hate to think of turning your back to Lulu, Mr. President, but when I am very bad I will want your face turned this way to comfort me. If you are gone from the window altogether, I guess that she will conclude that I have died peacefully, and that my very estimable landlady has thrown you out. Now, when I get that same landlady to post this letter, I will put you at your new duties, old friend."

John's plan was a great success. Lulu, looking out of her window before rushing down to the office of Welsher, could tell John's condition from the position of the little bust of Lincoln in the window opposite. When the face of Abraham was turned squarely to the street she laughed and clapped her hands in glee, and in the days that followed the inauguration of the plan, Lincoln was always turned toward her. But if the bust could have moved it would, in its desire to let her know the truth, have turned right about face so that she would have begged the landlady on her knees to allow her to come to the sick boy's bedside. O you brick caves of New York City! What tragedies you could tell if you had tongues to speak! You could tell of the country boys that lie on the mean beds while the landladies confer with the best Permanents as to whether it is better to lose the unpaid board by sending them to the hospital, or chance another week to see if they will recover and pay up. And John's indebtedness to the landlady was like a sandbag that she used each time she came into the room to hammer his aching brain.

"He wants sunshine and heat," said the doctor. "He'll die in this atmosphere. Can't you find any of his friends?"

"Friends?" sniffed the landlady. "All the friends he has is the little girl that pays your bills. He signals to her with that plaster statoo in the window. I went to move the thing away yesterday, an' he nearly took the roof off the place with the yell he let out of himself."

The doctor sighed and went away. The stuffiness of the room was unbearable that morning. The air in the chamber was heavy, although the window-panes were snow-encrusted on the outside.

John got out of his bed after the doctor left the room, and he dragged himself to the window. The effort pained him, but he knew that the coating on the panes made it impossible for Lulu to see the bust. And Lincoln was the only means of

communication. With weak, trembling hands he lifted the sash about nine inches, pushed Abraham forward, turned him squarely and bravely to the front, and then crawled back to bed.

"We're not squeaking, are we, Mr. President?" he said with a grim smile. "You never let any one know when you got an upper-cut, did you? And, by golly! I won't own up to Lulu that I am inclined to take the count. I've been too long with you to show the white feather. You've taught me to be game, Mr. Lincoln."

John went back to bed and dreamed of that first night in early Spring when he had wandered with Lulu along the moon-washed Drive and listened to the strains from the white yacht. It was a wonderful dream. He dreamed that Lulu and President Lincoln and himself were riding on one of "the big glowworms"—Lulu's name for the Fort Lee cars—and behind them a million radiator devils screamed in hot pursuit.

The dream car had distanced the devils, and the President was just explaining matters to Lulu when John was awakened. The landlady was speaking outside the door of his room, and her loud voice echoed through the little chamber. She was addressing some one, and John's aching brain caught scraps of the conversation.

"He's sick, you know"—the harsh voice grated on the boy's ears—"and he insists on puttin' that thing there, no matter what I say to him. Yes, sir, that's what I say. The danger of it, yes! ... I'm sorry it happened from my house, but I'd like you to tell him yourself of the foolishness of it... These young men don't like being spoken to. No, no, you won't disturb him. Come right in."

John's brain tried hard to solve the enigma constructed by her words. What had he insisted on doing? How had he annoyed any one? Who was the person with the landlady? He attempted to lift himself upon his elbow, but the effort was too great. The long weeks of illness had sapped his strength, and he fell back upon the mattress at the moment that the landlady stalked into the room, beckoning vigorously to a tall man in a shabby overcoat, who followed nervously in the rear.

"Here's a nice thing yer tricks 'as gone an' done for you!" cried the shrewish woman. "This gentleman was walkin' down the street, an' that old bust of yours tumbled out o' the winder an' nearly brained him!"

"No, no," protested the shabby one; "it fell on my shoulder, not on my head. I gathered up the pieces and——"

John interrupted with a scream of agony. It was a scream that was wrenched from the inmost recesses of the boy's heart. In the thin, claw-like hands of the man were a dozen pieces of shattered plaster, and the sick youth thrust his face into the pillow and sobbed wildly. His companion had left him! The smiling, comforting face of Lincoln had gone forever! In his anxiety to give Lulu a free view of the plaster bust he had forgotten the snapping window curtain, and the treasure had been dashed to the sidewalk!

The landlady folded her arms and stared at the sobbing figure on the bed. "It would suit you better to apologize to the gentleman instead of cryin'," she said sternly. "That thing fallin' from a height like that might have brained him, so it might. I knew a little boy that was killed by a milk bottle fallin' from a top winder. P'raps the gentleman—"

The thin, shabby man lifted his hand and the garrulous woman stopped. "Don't bother him," he said quietly. "Let him cry. I don't need an apology—really I don't."

He sat down upon the solitary chair and stared at the sobbing boy, and the landlady was not pleased by the look upon his face. The landlady loved a fight. She had wasted time to bring the stranger upstairs after he had explained the happening at the street door, and now he didn't seem to be half as indignant as she hoped he would. The boy's tears seemed to have swept away the slight show of temper that was noticeable when he climbed the stairs to reproach the careless boarder.

The landlady ruminated over the peculiarities of mankind, and thought of the luncheon which she had to prepare for her hungry boarders. If there was to be no explosion on the part of the shabby man she could not afford to waste time on the top floor. And the shabby man showed no desire to attack or retreat. He sat studying the youth, who was weeping bitterly as he contemplated the broken pieces of the bust of Lincoln.

The woman stood up and moved toward the door. She waited for the shabby man to accompany her downstairs, but he showed a desire to stay. His stupidity annoyed her.

"Well, you can find yer own way out if yer want to wait till he finishes his cryin' fit," she said sharply. "As for me, I've got to prepare a lunch for seven people with only an idjut of a girl to help me."

She flounced away, and the ill-dressed stranger drew his chair closer to the bed. John had managed to claw himself into a sitting position, and now, still sobbing, he was making an attempt to put the pieces of plaster together. He looked at his visitor and tried in a halting way to express the cause of his emotion.

"It was Lincoln, sir," he said quietly.

The shabby one started slightly, then peered at the piece of plaster which was the detached brow of the great man. A look of wonder crept over his shrivelled face, and he wet his thin lips on hearing the boy's simple explanation.

"Lincoln?" he stammered. "Abraham Lincoln?"

"Yes, sir," answered John. "He's been—Oh, you wouldn't understand, but he's been a sort of companion to me for months. It's been—been——"

"Been what?" questioned the other. The little eyes that had a look of vague surprise within them were fastened upon the boy.

"It's been lonely," said John.

"Lonely?" cried the man. "Haven't you any friends?"

"Only one, and the landlady doesn't like her to come here."

The shabby one moved closer and fingered the bits of plaster. "But this bust," he said. "The landlady told me when we were coming up the stairs that you persisted in putting it in the window."

"I—I—" stammered the boy, "I used it as a—as a signal to her. You see, sir, she lives just across the street. The friend, I mean."

A look of wonder and comprehension appeared in the small eyes of the visitor. The chatter of the landlady as she dragged him up the stairs was becoming plain. When he had reported the happening at the door, she had loudly asserted that it was the fault of a boarder who would insist on putting a plaster bust upon his window-sill.

"So you used the bust as a signal?" said the shabby man softly.

"Yes," murmured the boy. "I would turn him—Mr. Lincoln, I mean—face to the street when I was feeling better, side on when I was only middling, and back to the street when I was feeling very bad."

"And—and what position—I mean how was he facing when he fell out?" asked the visitor.

"Facing the street," said John. "You see, I haven't been really bad since I put him there."

The stranger's eyes grew large with surprise. He looked at the hollow cheeks and the thin, white hands of the sick boy, glanced around the miserable room, and twisted his lips up as if he felt inclined to whistle in an effort to show his astonishment. The boy had stated that he was not really sick, but the keen eyes of the other pictured Death waiting at the bedside.

"And was it your bust?" he asked. "I mean, did you own it, or was it the property of the landlady?"

"It was mine!" cried the boy proudly. "It was grandfather's once, and—and grandfather gave it to me when he was dying. It was sent to him. He—Grandfather Robert, I mean—he shook the President's hand, and some one sent him the bust."

The tragedy represented by the fall of the treasured memento came to John with full force as he thought of the many times that Grandfather Robert had told of the happening at Richmond when the great President had gripped his hand "till the j'ints cracked." The picture of the old soldier telling how his love for Lincoln had forced him against his will to thrust out his hand as the President came down the line, sprang up before his eyes, and he wept with his head upon his knees.

The shabby man waited patiently till the fit had passed, then he renewed his cross-examination.

"And your grandfather shook Lincoln's hand," he said. "Did he know him personally?"

"No, sir, he was a soldier under General Grant," answered John, and then, in a desire to sing the praises of the President with the heart of gold, he told the story of the handshake as Grandfather Robert had told it a thousand times, and the visitor listened like a man in a dream.

"And he helped you to fight your sickness?" he asked gently. "I mean, the bust and the memory of Lincoln helped you?"

"Helped me?" sobbed the boy. "Why, he was everything to me. Only for him—only for Lulu and him, I—I—"

The door of the little room was thrust open at that moment, and the white, frightened face of a girl appeared at the opening. The shabby man pushed back his chair as she sprang forward with a half-choked cry and clasped the thin hands of the boy.

"Oh, John, dear John!" she cried hysterically. "I came home at lunch-time, and—and—oh, John, I couldn't see the bust at the window! I didn't know what to think! I thought something might have happened, John. Your front door was open, and I—I rushed right up without asking permission. Oh, John, your poor, thin hands! Oh, what can I do? What can I do?" She burst into tears and flung herself on her knees at the side of the mean bed.

The shabby man stood up and turned his back upon the two. From the tail of his torn overcoat he brought a scrap of discoloured linen and rubbed vigorously at his nose.

The girl controlled herself with an effort and endeavoured to apologize for her intrusion. "I—I didn't see the bust, John," she gasped. "I looked for it when I got to my room. Why did you take it away? I thought that—that something—"

Her eyes fell upon the shattered pieces of plaster that lay upon the shabby coverlet, and she knew what had happened. "Oh, poor John," she sobbed. "Oh, poor, poor John!"

The shabby man snuffled openly as the girl and the boy wept over the shattered remnants of Lincoln's bust. The shabby man was experiencing sensations that were new and terrible. For forty years he could not remember feeling a thrill of joy or sorrow over the happenings of another. He was a man of flint. The men that he had overthrown in the realms of finance had said that he was a devil in granite. They shuddered when he came near. They thought of him as an octopus with tentacles ever ready to squeeze the life blood out of any one who stood in his path.

But in the few brief moments when the tears of the two lonely hall-roomers were flowing over the fragments of Lincoln's bust, God had flashed before his mental eyes a picture of his own soul. He cowered before that picture. For one fear-fledged moment he saw his own soul, stripped and naked, a wizened, devilish thing, wrapped in a cyst of greed and avarice, of hate and selfishness! He saw himself as a niggardly skinflint, an extortioner, a miser who would be remembered with curses, and with a cry of pain he staggered toward the bed.

"I—I forgot something!" he shouted hoarsely. "When the bust fell on the sidewalk—excuse me for forgetting, but I am an old man—when it fell on the stones this—this little scrap of paper fell out of it. I don't know what it is. I haven't opened it, see. It was curled up like this, like a pipelight. I forgot it, boy, listening to your story. It's yours, it's yours."

He flung the piece of paper upon the pillow, and stood with wet eyes watching the two lovers.

"Take it, boy!" he shouted. "Take it, it's your property."

John took the scrap of paper with trembling fingers. As the shabby one said, it had been rolled so tight that it resembled a pipelight. Slowly, very slowly, the boy unwound it, smoothed it out upon the pillow; then, in a silence that one could feel, he turned his white, pinched face up to the girl and the man. *The piece of paper was a thousand-dollar bill!*

It was the sobbing girl that broke the silence. "Oh, my God!" she cried. "Oh, my dear, sweet God! John, John, it is yours! The President must have sent it to your grandfather in the bust. He must have! Oh, the dear, brave, good Mr. Lincoln! You will be able to go away in the sunshine and get well, John! You will get nice food and warmth. Oh, I wish that Mr. Lincoln was here for me to hug! John, say that you will get well! You must, John, you must! And when the spring comes again we'll walk along the Drive and look at the Fort Lee cars, and—and—*Oh, God bless Mr. Lincoln!*"

The shabby man wept openly. Tears seemed to be a solvent for the cyst of greed and cunning that gripped his heart. He sat upon the bed, took the boy's thin hands in his own claw-like fingers and fondled them.

"It is your money, boy," he stammered. "You'll get well now, won't you?"

John looked at the bill and then at Lulu. "If I could pay the landlady I—I think I'd get well quick," he gasped. "She tells me what I owe her, Lulu, and—and there are the noises in the radiator and the smell of the carpets and—change the bill into small money, Lulu, change it, *please!*"

The shabby man wiped away his tears and clawed for his wallet. "If you would permit me I think I could change it," he spluttered. "I was just going to the bank when the little bust struck me, and I have with me two thousand dollars in small bills."

He pulled out a bursting pouch and started to count out the bills. Lulu crowed and John laughed hysterically. The Boy and the Maid had never seen so much money. And it was theirs! Twenties and tens, fives and singles, they covered the worn coverlet, and the colour came into John's face as he fingered them. They belonged to him, so the stranger said, and, of course, that meant that they belonged to Lulu as well. He gave little cries of joy, and the man in the shabby overcoat tried to whoop as he laid the last bill upon the bed. It was a glorious display of wealth.

They counted them three times to make sure that the stranger had neither defrauded John nor himself, then the shabby man, still weeping tears of joy, reached for his hat and prepared to depart.

"I must be going now," he said, "but I'm coming to see you again."

John gripped the claw-like hands and thanked him over and over again. "Oh, I'm thankful to you!" cried the boy. "It seems as if Providence sent you at the moment the bust fell. If any one else had found the money I might not have got it. I'll never forget you, Mr.— Mr.—"

"My name is Nixon," stammered the shabby one, "but the papers—the humorous papers, call me the Miser of Greeley Square. Good-bye! Good-bye!"

Like a drunken man he staggered down the stairs. The shrewish landlady met him in the hall, but he did not see her. He saw nothing. Through the open door he went like a man in a trance, but in a dark doorway some distance down the street he stopped and held his skinny hands high above his head.

"Oh, God! God! God!" he cried. "What a contemptible life I have lived! I thank you, Almighty God, for letting me do that little deed in his name. In *his* name, God! Book it to *him*, not to me! I changed the thousand-dollar bill so that they will never know but what he sent it. Forgive me, God, forgive me!"

With clasped hands he staggered forward, his dry lips moving in prayer. Passersby turned and stared at him. A policeman touched his helmet, but the salute went unanswered. The Miser of Greeley Square, the man who had crushed thousands to satisfy his greed, the man who had never thrilled at the story of a great act, the man who had scraped together a million dollars by fraud and extortion, was looking at his own wizened soul.

"Book it to him, God!" he mumbled. "Book it to him. He shamed me. Yes, he did! Oh, Lincoln, Lincoln! Help me, dear God, help me to live a better life; help me to make good, to make some one love me. Oh, God! let me do something that will make a lonely heart sorrow for me when I am gone."