

## Mary Lincoln

### *Letter to Francis B. Carpenter*

Despite her grief-stricken seclusion in the White House in the weeks following the assassination, Mary Lincoln (1818–1882) had been able to successfully exert her will in a dispute over her husband's burial. As the funeral train neared Illinois, a committee of prominent Springfield citizens pressed to have Lincoln interred in a specially built tomb in the middle of the city. She refused, insisting that he be buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery and threatening to have his body moved to Chicago if her wishes were ignored. Mary Lincoln finally left the White House on May 22. Unable to bear the prospect of returning to her home in Springfield, she moved into a series of Chicago hotels with her sons Robert and Tad. In November 1865, she wrote to the artist Francis B. Carpenter, who had been commissioned by a New York publisher to paint a portrait of the Lincoln family in 1861, before the death of Willie Lincoln. She sent Carpenter a picture along with a surprisingly intimate recollection of her last carriage ride with her husband. Although Mary Lincoln would later praise Carpenter's family portrait, in 1867 she became angry when his memoir *Six Months at the White House* was retitled *The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln* and dismissed him as "this *stranger*," a "silly adventurer" who had "scarcely" known the President at all.

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Chicago Nov 15th

My Dear Sir:

Your last letter, has been received—It would be utterly impossible for me, in my present nervous state, to sit for a photograph—although, I should like to oblige you, very much. There is an excellent painted likeness of me, at Brady's in N. Y. taken in 1861—have you, ever seen it? I am sure you will like it & I believe, it was taken, in a black velvet. I enclose you one of my precious, sainted Willie. You have doubtless heard, how *very* handsome a boy, he was considered—with a pure, gentle nature, always unearthly & in intellect *far, far* beyond his years—When I reflect, as I am always doing, upon the overwhelming loss, of that, *most* idolized boy, and the crushing blow, that deprived me, of my *all in all*, in this life, I wonder that I retain my reason & live. There are hours of each day, that my mind, cannot be brought to realize, that *He*, who is considered, so great and good, a God, has *thus* seen fit to afflict us! How difficult it is to be reconciled to such a bereavement, how much sooner, each one, of our

stricken family, if the choice had been left to us, would have preferred "passing away," ourselves.

It strikes me strangely, how such a rumor, should be circulated—that Robert is in Europe. The thought of leaving home, I am sure, has never *once*, entered his mind. He is diligently applying himself, to his law studies—a most devoted Son & brother. Every thing is *so fabulously high here*, that his third of the estate, an income of \$1800 apiece—with taxes deducted—It requires the most rigid economy, with Robert & the rest of us to clothe ourselves, plainly & weekly settle our board-bills. Is not this, a sad change for us! As a matter of course living, every where, *now* in the U.S. is high—Yet I cannot express to you, how painful to me, it is, to have *no* quiet home, where I can freely indulge my sorrows—*this, is* yet another of the crosses, appointed unto me. With my beloved husband, I should have had, a heart, for any fate, if "need be." Dear little Taddie! was named, for my husband's father, Thomas Lincoln—no *T*—for a middle name—was *nicknamed, Taddie*, by his loving Father. Taddie—is learning to be as diligent in his studies, as he used to be *at play* in the W. H. he appears to be rapidly making up, for the great amount of time, he lost in W— As you are aware, *he* was always a *marked character*. Two or three weeks since, a lady in an adjoining room, gave him, a copy of Mr Raymond's life of the President, for me to read & return to her. After reading it, I remarked to Robert, in Taddie's presence, that it was *the most* correct history, of his Father, that has been written—Taddie immediately spoke up & said, "Mother, I am going to save, all the little money, you give me and get one of them." R. told him, he need not, as he would buy, a copy. I press the poor little fellow closer, *if possible*, to my heart, in memory of the sainted Father, who loved *him, so very dearly*, as well as the rest of us—How I wish you could have seen my dear husband, the last three weeks of his life! Having a realizing sense, that the unnatural rebellion, was near its close, & being most of the time, *away* from W, where he had endured such conflicts of mind, within the last four years, feeling *so encouraged*, he freely gave vent to his cheerfulness. Down the Potomac, he was almost boyish, in his mirth & reminded me, of his original nature, what I had always remembered of him, in our own home—free from care, surrounded by those he loved so well & *by whom*, he was so idolized. *The Friday*, I never saw him so supremely cheerful—his manner was even playful. At three o'clock, in the afternoon, he drove out with

me in the open carriage, in starting, I asked him, if any one, should accompany us, he immediately replied—"No—I prefer to ride by ourselves to day." During the drive he was so gay, that I said to him, laughingly, "Dear Husband, you almost startle me by your great cheerfulness," he replied, "and well I may feel so, Mary, I consider *this day*, the war, has come to a close—and then added, "We must *both*, be more cheerful in the future—between the war & the loss of our darling Willie—we have both, been very miserable." Every word, then uttered, is deeply engraven, on my poor broken heart. In the evening, his mind, was fixed upon having some relaxation & bent on the theater. Yet I firmly believe, that if he had remained, at the W. H. on that night of darkness, when the fiends prevailed, he would have been horribly *cut to pieces*—Those fiends, had too long contemplated, this inhuman murder, to have allowed, *him*, to escape. Robert informs me, that the best likeness of himself, is at Goldin's, in Washington, taken last spring. We have none, unframed. The attitude in the one, you sent me, of myself, is very good, my hands are always *made in them*, very large and I look too stern. The drapery of the dress, was *not* sufficiently flowing—and my hair, should not be so low down, on the forehead & so much dressed. I am sending you a long & most hastily written letter, which I pray you excuse. My sons desire to be remembered to you. Whilst I remain

Very Sincerely  
Mary Lincoln