CHAPTER FOUR

I MET President Lincoln many times after we were under fire together at City Point. He spent several days with father at the army headquarters before Petersburg, and I often accompanied father to the White House. I remember this, although no recollection comes to me of any particular or impressive incident of any of these meetings.

But I saw President Lincoln the last time upon the day of his assassination, and the memory of that morning remains. I had accompanied father to the White House, where he remained for a long time, in consultation first with the President, and then with many others. Serious matters were evidently under consideration that day, the particulars of which I have never understood.

I remember that Mr. Lincoln smiled and spoke to me when we first came in, and then he and father were immediately absorbed in earnest, low-voiced talk while I wandered aimlessly about the room. A photographic impression of the appearance of many men I saw that morning remains with me now, but I cannot recall their names, if I ever knew them. And then I remember that I grew tired, and considerably perplexed and resentful that no attention was paid to me, which was contrary to my usual experience.

Evidently no one had time this day to consider the seven-year-old boy who wandered about, tired and disconsolate.

We were stopping at the Willard Hotel, father and mother and I, and we were expecting to go to Burlington that night, where my brothers and Nellie were at school. I was anxious to see them, longing for the time to come when we should leave. Yet I have no recollection of when that interminable session at the White House ended, how I got back to the hotel, or spent the rest of the day until dinner.

But I remember that mother and I were at dinner when father came in and joined us.

"I am afraid I shall be unable to leave Washington to-night," he said, as he seated himself.

I was bitterly disappointed. And my disappointment was augmented by father's further explanation that he had, conditionally, accepted the President's invitation for mother and himself to accompany the presidential party to the theater that evening.

Mother objected to this arrangement. She was anxious to rejoin the other children in Burlington. They were expecting us. In addition to this, she was worried by the sudden and inexplicable loss of appetite displayed by me. I had made no complaint, but mother was fearful that I was, or was about to become, ill.

Then a lady who had been dining at an adjoining table came to us, smiling.

"Do not be disturbed about your small boy's ap-

parent loss of appetite, Mrs. Grant. He came in before you, and consumed two orders of hard-boiled eggs and ice-cream."

This information relieved mother's immediate anxiety about me, but in no degree affected her determination to proceed to Burlington that night. Her trunks were packed, the other children were waiting for her. So father bade us good-by, promising to follow us to Burlington on the morrow.

Two men at a near-by table, who had been watching us so intently as to attract our attention, at once left the room.

I remember clearly the drive down Pennsylvania Avenue to the depot, the iron-tired wheels of our carriage rattling and bumping over the cobblestones. It was in the early evening, but the Avenue was deserted and quiet as midnight.

We were nearing the railway station when a man on horseback overtook us, drew alongside, and, leaning down, peered into our carriage. Then he wheeled his horse and rode furiously away.

To our surprise and joy, father came into the car just as the train drew out of the station. He was carrying a great bundle of papers, and after but a brief word of greeting he moved to a seat at the front end of the car and became at once engrossed in his documents.

It was an ordinary day coach of that period and the lamp at the forward end of the car happened to be burning brightest. Sitting where he did, father

was hidden from one peering through the door from the front platform. This probably saved his life.

At Baltimore our car was detached from the train and drawn through the city by horses. At the other side of town a fresh engine was waiting, and we proceeded northward, running as a special. No stop was made until we reached Philadelphia.

At Philadelphia a crowd of excited people surged about our car. Father opened the door and found a belligerent brakeman guarding the steps from an agitated deputation of state, city, and railway officials. The brakeman was declaring loudly that his orders were to admit no one, that he had thrown a man off at the Relay House, and he didn't care who they were, they couldn't come in.

Father brought them in and we received the tragic news of President Lincoln's assassination.

Burlington was only an hour away. While another special was being made up, father accompanied us to Burlington. He returned to Philadelphia by the same train and the fresh special rushed him back to Washington.

It was nearly noon upon that Good Friday before President Lincoln sent his acceptance of the box for the performance of "Our American Cousin." It was then expected that father and mother would accompany the President, and the evening papers contained the announcement that the President and

Mrs. Lincoln and General and Mrs. Grant would attend the play at Ford's Theater that evening.

When mother declined the invitation, and father learned that it would be possible for him to accompany us to Burlington, Mrs. Lincoln invited, in their stead, Miss Harris, the daughter of Senator Ira Harris, and her *fiancé*, Major Rathbone.

The change of program could not have been known to the conspirators until the evening, unless the men at the adjoining table in the Willard Hotel overheard mother's positive declination. Who were those two men, and who was the man who rode beside and peered into our carriage? It could have been neither Arnold, O'Laughlin, Dr. Mudd, Spangler, nor John Surratt. The whereabouts of each was fully accounted for at that time.

The movements of John Wilkes Booth between five and eight o'clock of that Friday evening have never been accounted for. Harold engaged a horse at Naylor's stable and rode away at about four-fifteen. At half past six Atzerodt also rode away and was gone until seven-fifteen. Atzerodt testified that he met with Booth and Payne, in Payne's room in the Herndon House, at eight o'clock, and at that time Booth gave the final orders. Booth was to murder President Lincoln and General Grant; Payne was to take Mr. Seward; and Atzerodt, Vice-President Johnson—which Atzerodt refused to do.

Atzerodt's testimony was plainly unreliable. But it appears that either Booth, Payne, Harold, or

Atzerodt might have been the man who rode beside our carriage.

But there is something else that has never been told. Many years later mother received an unsigned letter in which the writer expressed his deep thankfulness that he had failed in the mission assigned to him. The unknown writer went on to say that he had sat near to us that evening in the Willard Hotel, that he had examined our carriage as we drove to the station, that he had peered through the door of our car as the train drew out, and that, while certain father had not left his office, he would have entered the car if a brakeman had not opposed him. Convinced that the man he sought was still in Washington, he made no great effort to overcome the brakeman. And then, at the Relay House, he had fallen from the train and broken his leg.

It does not seem that any other, save the man who was there, could have known of those details and written that letter. It could not have been written by Booth, Harold, Atzerodt, Payne, or O'Loughlin, for all were then dead. The movements, on that evening, of all the other conspirators brought to trial, were fully accounted for. If the writer of that letter told the truth, he was an unsuspected conspirator. It remains one of the unsolved mysteries of that fateful time. How many conspirators were there? Perhaps it is better that we do not know.

Through the horror, uncertainty, and suspense of the period immediately following upon the assassina-

tion of President Lincoln, mother remained in Burlington with us children, and father was continuously in Washington. All that I know of the happenings of those momentous days, until I again returned to Washington, comes from the understanding of later years and has no place here.

IN THE DAYS OF MY FATHER GENERAL GRANT

Jesse R Grant