

### Mrs. Lincoln Enters Hell

Abraham, he snickered at Vespers and at beardless dawn lies on a shield, his deadman's bones haunt the East Room. I wait in the jaws of iron maiden, feudal engine of death which spits women out on the widow's plank. Our bedchamber reeks of spies, copperheads who hiss in darkness, "Until death and distance you do part." Dr. Minstrel, you call me a leper who needs second skin and you invoke Lazarus, who comes alive after death. My dreams are butchered by daggers and derringers while sly players unhook my eyestrings. Blinded, I writhe in the snake pit.

Lizzie portends sunny in evil tiaras, her voodoo sibilance quells and crushes serpents underfoot. Rain beats against the lead panes ajar a sorrowful, white donjon north of the Potomac hennaed in yankee gore. Superstitious carpenters refuse to hammer spikes and crown the catafalque? Boy-warriors, do the work. Is he, Dr. Minstrel, gamer in coffin than in boots? I catch the yammer from a multitude below, slashing clinkant robes, the simpleton relics of a slain saint. Let them flint the damn candelabras! License what's inside me—all of a madwoman's Hell.

*Edward C. Lynskey*

(Acknowledgement: *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters*. Justin G. and Linda Levitt Turner. New York: Knopf, 1972.

("Dr. Minstrel" is a pseudonym created to portray Dr. Anson G. Henry, a long-time family friend from Springfield who kindly consoled Mrs. Lincoln in the dark, difficult days after her husband's death. "Lizzie" is how Mrs. Lincoln addressed her black seamstress and confidante Elizabeth Keckley whom she later disowned for publishing an exposé about the Lincoln White House years.)