



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A TRUE AMERICAN

ONE OF THE GREATEST OF ALL AMERICANS was the rugged, gentle, sensitive soul who knew few comforts but many trials and hardships, and who triumphed over every obstacle through sheer depth of character—Abraham Lincoln. He was born on February 12, 1809, in a little log cabin in the wilderness of Kentucky. In the all too brief span of fifty-six years, he arose from poverty, overcame a lack of education, and made his very name a symbol of courage, honesty and high resolve. Today he is almost a legendary figure. But long be-

fore he became President, he was known as plain "Abe," a young boy who, in his thirst for knowledge, borrowed every book within fifty miles of his home. One such book was the prized possession of a neighboring farmer, Mr. Crawford, and one day, young Lincoln rode over to the Crawford place to see the book's owner. He met Mrs. Crawford in the barnyard feeding her chickens. . . .

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Morning, Mrs. Crawford!

MRS. CRAWFORD: Well, land sakes! If it isn't Abraham.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Is Mr. Crawford about the place?

MRS. CRAWFORD: You'll find him out to the barn. There he is now . . . comin' out of the cow pen. . . .

(calling)

Oh, Pa! . . . Young Abe Lincoln's come to see you.

MR. CRAWFORD: (off) Good morning to you, Abraham!

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Good morning, Mr. Crawford. I rode over to see you about the book you loaned me.

MR. CRAWFORD: (coming up) Well, well. Don't be sayin' you've finished the readin' of it! Why, it weren't more'n a fortnight ago that you borrowed it.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Well . . . not quite, sir, but. . .

MR. CRAWFORD: No hurry . . . no hurry at all. I

won't have time to read it again till winter. The missus and me are mighty proud to have a book like that . . . it's the only one in the state, I figger.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: I know, sir. That's why it's kind of hard—

MR. CRAWFORD: Hard? Yes, any kinda readin' comes hard . . . 'specially for us folks without schoolin'. But it's a comfort. That book of the Reverend Weems on the life of Washington and the Holy Bible is all the readin' matter we have.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: (*desperately*) Mr. Crawford . . . I . . . I ruined your book, sir! It was that bad storm we had yesterday. The rain blew in through the cracks in the logs of our cabin and got the book soaking wet . . . I dried it out but . . . it's ruined, sir.

MR. CRAWFORD: Hmmm . . . that's too bad. I kinda set a big store on that book. Books is kinda scarce in these parts. . . .

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Crawford . . . and . . . and I haven't any money to pay for it . . . Haven't you got some chore I could do, sir? Some plowing or helping you with your winter's wood?

MR. CRAWFORD: (*slowly*) Nope . . . but I'll tell you what you can do to pay for that book. I don't want to be hard on you. . . . Suppose you give me three good days of 'corn fodder pullin'.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Yes, sir! . . . when can I start?

MR. CRAWFORD: Well, suppose'n you come over bright'n early tomorrow mornin'.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Yes, sir. I'll be here before sun-up!

Young Abraham Lincoln tried his hand at many things as he grew to manhood. He clerked in store, he soldiered in the Black Hawk War, he tried surveying, and for a time, he was postmaster of New Salem, Illinois. But his love of books and reading never diminished. In 1834, he and William Berry were partners in a general store in New Salem. One afternoon they were sitting outside their place of business—young Lincoln was reading. . . .

BERRY: Might as well set here in the sun as set inside the store and wait for customers that don't come. Can't you never stop readin', Abe?

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Why stop reading? There's lots of it to do, and we aren't here long to do it.

BERRY: But readin' don't help none, runnin' a store, Abe.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Nothing seems to help. We've got so deep in debt here, Berry, I think I'll have to change to something else to pay off.

BERRY: You're always talkin' about payin' off our debt. No wonder I hear them callin' you "Honest Abe." What would you change to?

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Sometimes, I think I'd like to be a lawyer.

BERRY: Lawyer! Say, it'll take a sight of readin' to be that. What's that book you have there?

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: It's a law book I got over at Springfield. I walked over to get it.

BERRY: Say, that's forty mile, over and back!

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Yes, I read quite a part of it walking home. And I don't think I got the right book. I need something that gets down to fundamentals.

BERRY: Hello! Here comes another mover down the road. Seems as if the world's moving west.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: It is, Berry. He seems to have his family with him.

MOVER: (*off*) Whoa there! Hey, strangers! Want to buy something off this load for your store?

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: We've got more *now* than we can sell.

MOVER: Well, I ain't stickin' on price. I can't hold this load no longer. Got to get rid of some of it. How about that barrel back there—that one tied on with a surcingle—say a dollar?

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: No. I reckon not.

MOVER: How about half a dollar?

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Well, stranger, if you need a half a dollar, here—catch it. And keep your barrel.

MOVER: Consarn it, can't you see I don't *want* that barrel?

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: All right, I'll take it.

WOMAN: Say, he's strong! That barrel must have weighed two hundred!

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: There we are! I have it—but I don't know what I'm going to do with it.

MOVER: Thanks, stranger! I hope you won't regret your trade. Giddap!

BERRY: Well, Abe, what you got?

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Old iron, I reckon—Hello! What are these? "Commentaries on the Laws of England," by William Blackstone. Say, this is just what I want! Apparently I've got to be a lawyer now. These books are fundamental!

Young Lincoln read and studied law diligently and was finally able to start in practicing in Springfield, the capital of Illinois. But he always seemed anxious to use his talent in behalf of those who found themselves in undeserved distress. A wandering theatrical troupe came to Springfield. With the leader, Joseph Jefferson II, and his handsome wife, was their ten-year old son, Joseph Jefferson III, who was later to immortalize himself as Rip Van Winkle. The troupe was busily engaged in constructing a crude theater. . . .

MRS. JEFFERSON: Joe, it looks beautiful.

MR. JEFFERSON: Yes, for rough work on rough lumber, it makes a pretty good theater. What do you think of it, son?

LITTLE JOE: I think it's grand, father. I'm glad you and mother won't have to play in a barn in *this* place.

MRS. JEFFERSON: But hasn't it cost a great deal, Joe?

MR. JEFFERSON: It has—every cent we've saved on the tour. But I see that we are attracting more and more attention. Here comes another group of townspeople now.

AN ACTOR: That man ahead, Mr. Jefferson, has been around here several times.

MR. JEFFERSON: Good. We are glad to welcome our future patrons.

(to the leader of the townspeople)

Good morning, sir!

CONSTABLE: Are you the head man of these showmen?

MR. JEFFERSON: I am the manager and leader of a company of distinguished players, sir, who are bringing to this fair city the masterpieces of the immortal bard. Tomorrow night, we shall delight you with Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.

CONSTABLE: Mebbe, and mebbe not.

MR. JEFFERSON: I am at a loss, sir, to understand your doubts.

CONSTABLE: Mister, this is a religious town, and we don't hold with no play-acting.

MR. JEFFERSON: Why, I'm sure that by all law

and order we have a right to present these great plays without interference or molestation.

CONSTABLE: Mebbe, and mebbe not. The town's been watching you a-hammering up this new building and we don't like it. It's a den of vice and sin you're a-setting up here. I'm an officer of the law, and unless you pay the license tax now, we'll run you out.

MR. JEFFERSON: Why, there is no license tax! We inquired about that when we came four days ago.

CONSTABLE: So there wasn't *then*. But the Council of Springfield—good righteous and God-fearing men—met yesterday and passed one. And a pretty considerable one too. I reckon there won't be any Princes of Denmark around here when you've heard it. Here on this paper it says, by the authority of the Council: "No actor or association of actors shall present a stage-play within the bounds of Springfield without payment of five hundred dollars for each performance."

MR. JEFFERSON: Five hundred dollars! Why, that's more money than we could possibly clear in a whole summer season!

CONSTABLE: Well, then, perhaps you'd better pack up and go back where you came from.

MRS. JEFFERSON: Every cent of our savings gone!

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: *(coming up)* I beg your pardon, sir, are you in trouble?

MR. JEFFERSON: Great trouble, sir. This officer is virtually ordering us out of town and confiscating our playhouse.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: I've heard about this new ordinance. Perhaps I can help you. My name is Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln. I'm a lawyer—not much of one, perhaps, but ready to take a case like this.

CONSTABLE: You're interfering with the law, Lincoln.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: I reckon that's what lawyers are for sometimes.

MRS. JEFFERSON: Oh, sir, how can we thank you?

MR. JEFFERSON: Mr. Lincoln, we can't find words to thank you. We'll pay you any fee you say—if you will wait for it—and if we can earn it.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Well, now's to the fee—as to the fee—perhaps you'll think I'm asking too much. If it is, don't hesitate to say so. Well, money is rather scarce with us just now, and if you could manage it I would appreciate a ticket to your play—if it isn't asking too much.

The next morning Abraham Lincoln appeared before the Court of Springfield and his eloquent plea for the theatrical profession won the repeal of the unjust License Tax. Love of Justice was the keynote of Lincoln's character. Many examples of this trait were found in his legal career. He would not defend a guilty person or press an unjust claim, but to those

he believed unjustly oppressed or innocent of a crime he was always willing to give what aid he could. One such case came to him while he was still in Springfield practicing with William Herndon. Hannah Armstrong came timidly to Lincoln's office. . . .

HANNAH ARMSTRONG: (*hesitantly*) Abe? . . . Mr. Lincoln, I mean. . . .

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Why . . . Why, Hannah! Hannah Armstrong!

HANNAH ARMSTRONG: Oh! You do remember me! I was afraid. . . .

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Remember you? It isn't likely I'll ever forget the days in New Salem. How's that husband of yours? Does he still think he could outwrasse me if it came to a pinch?

HANNAH ARMSTRONG: Oh, you haven't changed a bit! You're older of course and you look kinda peaked like you ain't been eatin' or sleepin' regular.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Oh, I'm all right. But tell me about yourself, Hannah. Sit down. You look kind of tired. . . .

HANNAH ARMSTRONG: I am tired, Abe . . . and worried. That's why I've come all the way here to see you. I knew if anyone could help, it'd be you. They say you've come to be a right fine lawyer.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Now, Hannah, don't tell me Jack's gone and got himself tangled up with the law at his age!

HANNAH ARMSTRONG: No . . . it ain't Jack . . . it's Will, my boy. You remember Will.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Of course I remember. He used to play horse on my feet. He must be almost a grown man now, Hannah.

HANNAH ARMSTRONG: He is, Abe . . . and he's in trouble . . . terrible trouble . . . Oh, Abe!

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Now, now, Hannah. Maybe it isn't as bad as you think . . . most troubles aren't.

HANNAH ARMSTRONG: But he's been accused of *murder!*

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Murder?

HANNAH ARMSTRONG: Yes . . . they're going to try him over to Beardstown in just a couple of weeks. Everybody thinks he's going to be convicted. They're saying he hasn't a chance, but he's innocent, Abe . . . I know he didn't do it . . . I know it! . . .

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Now, now, Hannah. This is no time for tears. Suppose you tell me just what happened.

HANNAH ARMSTRONG: Well, it happened at a camp meetin' near home . . . Oh, it's horrible, Abe!

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Just take your time, Hannah . . . tell me everything you know.

HANNAH ARMSTRONG: Well . . . it was last summer. A man named Metzgar was killed, and they've arrested Will 'cause he had some trouble with him, and the court has somebody that swears he saw Will hit Metzgar over the head . . . Oh, Abe . . . I've

talked to Will and he's sworn to me he didn't do it . . . Will wouldn't lie to me.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: No, I don't think he would, Hannah.

HANNAH ARMSTRONG: But the jury won't believe him, Abe! They won't . . . will they?

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: If it's just his word against another man's, they probably won't.

HANNAH ARMSTRONG: Then . . . what are we going to do?

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Well . . . to start with, you straighten up your bonnet, Hannah. We're going to Beardstown and find some way of making that jury believe Will's story. . . .

Even up to the day of the trial there seemed to be little chance that the son of Lincoln's old friend would ever go free. And as the trial progressed, Lincoln seemed to do nothing but sit beside his client and stare out the window. But when the prosecutor finished with his star witness, Lincoln got slowly to his feet and addressed the witness. . . .

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Young man . . . do you realize that you are under oath?

WITNESS: Yes, sir . . . I do.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: And that to lie is to commit perjury?

WITNESS: Yes, sir.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Yet you claim that on the *night* of the murder you were standing 30 yards from the scene of the crime.

WITNESS: Yes, sir.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Would you mind repeating just how you were able to be so certain that the perpetrator of this foul crime was the defendant, William Armstrong?

WITNESS: Well, sir. It was a full moon. It was almost as bright as day and I saw young Will Armstrong and Metzgar having an argument, and pushin' each other around. All of a sudden Will picked up a piece of iron and hit Metzgar over the head with it . . . then he ran. . . .

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: And it was only because of the brightness of the full moon, high in the sky, that you were able to see so well from a distance of twenty or thirty yards.

WITNESS: Yes, sir. That's it.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: In other words, if there had been no moon, or if there had been a young moon, you wouldn't have been able to see what happened. Isn't that true?

WITNESS: Well . . . Yes, sir . . . That's true.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Just as I thought! You have perjured yourself before this court! Your honor. . . . Gentlemen of the jury, I submit that this witness has lied!

PROSECUTOR: I object! Mr. Lincoln must prove that statement!

JUDGE: (*raps gavel*) Order . . . Order in this court! Upon what evidence and authority do you make this unusual charge, Mr. Lincoln?

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Upon the evidence and the authority of this book I hold in my hand! The *Almanac!* In which it is clearly shown that on the night of the crime, at the time the witness says the crime was committed, there was only a half moon, and instead of riding high in the sky, the moon was setting!

William Armstrong was found innocent and was acquitted.

Lincoln's years of struggle and failure before his election to the presidency and the trying days of his administration are recorded in the very heart of the nation to which he gave his life. At the height of his career, the country mourned his tragic death. But perhaps more than any other, his passing brought sorrow to his devoted step-mother, Sally Brush Lincoln. One evening, shortly after the President's untimely death, William Herndon, Lincoln's one-time law partner, visited the home of that kindly woman who perhaps more than any one else guided and counselled young Abraham in his formative years. . . .

WILLIAM HERNDON: My dear Mrs. Lincoln. I wish my visit might be on a happier occasion. But I felt I must come . . .

MRS. LINCOLN: It was kind of you to come. Won't you sit down, Mr. Herndon. Abraham spoke of you . . . on his last visit.

WILLIAM HERNDON: Of me, Mrs. Lincoln? Surely in the troubled years that have passed and with the cares of the Presidency he must have had little time to think of those of us who knew him in happier days.

MRS. LINCOLN: The Presidency didn't change him, Mr. Herndon. He even found time to come here—to visit me.

WILLIAM HERNDON: But that was only natural—his mother.

MRS. LINCOLN: You forget—I was only his step-mother—not his own flesh and blood.

WILLIAM HERNDON: No woman could have been more of a true mother to him. Many times I have heard him say those very words. You were never far from his thoughts.

MRS. LINCOLN: Abraham was always a good son to me—even when he grew to manhood, he didn't forget. I remember the last time he came—it was snowing hard, and it was terribly cold. But it was my birthday—he didn't want to disappoint me—he came and sat just where you are sitting now—he looked so tired. He seemed to have some strange feel-

ing that he had not long to live. I didn't understand, but when he left me, he took my hands in his, and said, "This may be the last time we will see each other."

WILLIAM HERNDON: I've set myself the task of writing the story of his life. I think folks will want to know . . . in the years to come. It's the least I can do to acknowledge—a fine friendship.

MRS. LINCOLN: Abe was a good boy. I can say what not one mother in a thousand can say. Abe never gave me a cross word.

To many of us, Abraham Lincoln stands as the last great hero of pioneer America. After him—and because of him—America marched on to a new day of increased opportunity for one and all.