

Emilie Remembers “The Giant”

The white family stood near the front door with welcoming arms and, in the true patriarchal style, our colored contingent filled the rear of the hall to shake hands with the long-absent [Mary Todd] and “make a’ miration” over the babies. Mary came in first with little Eddie, the baby, in her arms. To my mind she was lovely; clear, sparkling blue eyes, lovely smooth white skin with a faint, wild rose color in her cheeks, and glossy, light brown hair, which fell in soft short curls behind each ear. She was then about twenty-nine years of age.

Mr. Lincoln followed her into the hall with his little son, Robert Todd, in his arms. He put the little fellow on the floor, and as he arose, I remember thinking of “Jack and the Bean Stalk,” and feared he might be the hungry giant of the story—he was so tall and looked so big with a long, full, black cloak over his shoulders, and he wore a fur cap with ear straps which allowed but little of his face to be seen. Expecting to hear the “fe, fi, fo, fum,” I shrank closer to my mother, and tried to hide behind her voluminous skirts. After shaking hands with all the grownups, he turned and, lifting me in his arms, said “So this is Little Sister.” His voice and smile banished my fear of the giant.

From The True Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln: Containing the Recollections of Mary Lincoln's Sister Emilie (Mrs. Ben Hardin Helm), Extracts of Her War-Time Diary, Numerous Letters and Other Documents (by Katherine Helm, 1928)