

Abraham Lincoln's Sister Sarah*

MAX EHRMANN

The summer moon and sun have watched her sleep
Now fourscore years and eight. To him this place
Was ever dear with twilight's tender memories;
For here her laughing lips cried out, "Halloo!"
As up the path he came at close of day.
A thousand times he bore her on his back,
With boyish strength abused her lovingly,
Provoked by playful taunts, by many jests.
Then she, returning to her tasks indoors,
Left him alone to brood upon the night.
The sunset built famed cities in his brain,
Forced from his breast the sigh for surging men,
Welling up, like wind-tossed rivers, one great hope,
To force from life the promises of dream.
One round of toiling days, of peaceful nights.
He stood here once, a saddened boy, forlorn,
And saw her form descend into the earth.
Thus early came the gloaming to his soul,
Into his boyish eyes the far-off look
That, yearning, seeks to see where death has trod.
He wandered forth, through darkened wilderness;
Yet somehow ever wandered toward the light,
Until he held a nation in his hand.
He was a rock in storm; in milder days
A pliant branch bent down with mellow fruit.
He was as tender as the yellow leaves
That autumn winds toss o'er her grave.
Through leaden days, through fevered flaming nights,
Through hate and horror of a blood-smeared land,
This early sorrow made for love in him.
Here, then, was sorrow garnished, grief made great.
Here bloomed the balm that soothed a nation's wounds.
And his dead self still makes for love and peace.

* February 10, 1941, was the one hundred thirty-fourth anniversary of Sarah Lincoln's birth. She was Abraham Lincoln's sister, a tragic little figure lifted from oblivion by the fame of her brother. She was born on February 10, 1807. She married Aaron Grigsby. She died on January 20, 1828. About thirty years ago, her grave was discovered after being unmarked for probably fifty years. On June 20, 1916, the state of Indiana completed the erection of a monument over her grave at Pigeon Creek Baptist Cemetery, about a mile from the grave of her mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln. At the dedication of this monument, Fred Van Nuys of Indianapolis, now United States Senator from Indiana, delivered the oration; Jesse W. Weik of Greencastle, a biographer of Lincoln, gave the history; and Max Ehrmann of Terre Haute, read the above poem which Governor Samuel M. Ralston had requested him to write for the occasion.—*Editor*.