GERRY MARGARITA SPALDING

THE TOY SHOP: A ROMANTIC STORY OF LINCOLN THE MAN

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The child is eternal, and so are toys and tears and laughter. When the house is put in order by strange men, when the clothes that were worn and the tools that were used are put away, there will be found an upper room full of toys. These remain.

THE Man was leaving his own front door. On the steps he paused and looked sombrely back. The white pillars of the facade rose before him in stately fashion. They reminded him of the care he was evading for the moment, and he sighed. Though he shut his eyes determinedly, he knew that another grim building just beyond, the usual end of his journeying, demanded him, and he sighed again. This time there was something more than weariness in the sound.

From around the corner of the house, which almost hid from view the white tents of the Home Guard, ran a child. He was bright-faced, and magnificent in a miniature officer's uniform.

"Oh, papa-day!" he cried. "Never mind the curtains for my stage. You are always too busy now to see my plays, anyway – !" He interrupted himself to fling this in petulantly: "But get lots of soldiers – and one company of cavalry. I can't get him surrounded

without two more companies – and six cannon!"

The child lisped so in his eagerness that no one but his father could have understood him, and his father was so lost in his gloomy thought that he did not know the child had spoken. When the expected reply did not come, the boy looked his wonder.

"Papa-day – papa-day!" he cried, giving the man a little push. "I want some soldiers!"

Startled out of his sadness, the father looked at the child.

"Soldiers? All right, son; I'm off for a walk now. I saw a shop the other day."

He walked off. It was not a beautiful street down which he turned. Even the fine width of it suggested an inflated sense of its own importance. There were some good lines in the structure at the first corner, but the building was unfinished, and drooped sadly, like an eagle without its wings. Beyond that corner the paving of the street ended. Looking at the mud, the Man wished vaguely that he had worn his boots.

He swung down the row of dingy business houses, his eye on the ragged sky-line. His ungainly strides covered the ground rapidly, even though in abstraction he stumbled over the uneven brick sidewalk. The Man's face fell again into lines of melancholy thought.

"There is no hope for it," he told himself. "I will have to sign the warrant. I can't find the shadow of an excuse. It is a clear case of desertion." His thoughts drifted to the armies facing each other in the cheerless, raw December weather – his army sodden

with fogs, sullen with inaction. "The poor young fellow must be punished." The Man's heart ached with comprehension. He understood so well the wave of homesickness, for which he had the more tender sympathy because of the absence of it in his own cheerless boyhood. "After all, he is a soldier, and he must be punished for the good of the others. And that boy – like so many other boys – would have been a hero, not a deserter, at another turn of the wheel. It is idleness that makes traitors of them. Where can I find a man who will end all this?"

He passed the comfortable portico of a church which carried with it a breath of thrifty village life. He had been there the Sunday before, and the minister had prayed for peace. "Peace!" The word smote him, for he had ordained war. "Peace! How can I compass it? Somewhere in the Eternal Consciousness must rest the knowledge. But how can I discover it? 'Such knowledge is too high; I cannot attain to it,'" groaned the Man.

With the thought he raised his eyes. He was opposite a young ladies' boarding-school. It was a decorous place, sedately retired on a terrace. A group of young women in billowing crinolines were returning from the daily walk. There was a lively ripple of subdued comment as he looked up.

"Did you ever see such awkwardness?" asked of her companion a girl from Virginia. "And the creases in his coat!" There was much mirth, in the midst of which a young lady from Maryland laughed out:

"Did you ever see him try to bow to a lady?"

Quite ignorant of these girlish strictures, the Man caught the eye of the youngest boarder, who, kept in the house with a sore throat, was flattening her nose hopelessly against the window-pane. Something in the face of the sad-looking man made her throw him a shy little appeal for sympathy from two red and swollen eyes. He answered it. Then:

"That child, too, I may have made fatherless even now," he thought, and shuddered.

"How to end it?" His mind kept him remorselessly at work. "I have failed. Another man might know – so many claim to know. If a better man were in my place, perhaps he could stop the killing and the sorrow."

He was approaching a poorer part of the city, where modest homes and small industries bound about the lives of simple folk, quite apart from the square, dignified old houses where the aristocrats lived. The houses seemed to press in upon him like the sorrows of the world. He thought of those who had gone out from them.

"My hand sent them out – the bright youth, North and South – to kill and to be killed. And my hand cannot bring them back. Had I the right to do it? How could I have thought that any good could come from such as I? I thought I saw clearly – I, sprung out of such darkness – having seen such sin. What right had I to think that I could lead? It was a crime!"

He came to a group of tiny two-story shops – cobblers' rooms, dingy groceries.

"Would it not be less a sin to end it all – to make way for some man who was not cursed before he was born? Surely it would not be a sin to lay it all down – no matter the way – to end it all – to make way – "

A little child, turning to go into one of the shops, brushed lightly against him, and he started. When he looked up his face was tragic. Through the daze came a recollection. Surely it was here, the fifth door from the corner, that he was going. It was a toy-shop he was looking for. Yes, that was the name – Schotz. For the son had said he wanted toys. The father entered the shop, though he saw but dimly. His mind was turned in on its own sorrows, and he went in, muttering to his own ears: "To end it all – to make way."

He had to wait for a moment while the mite who had ushered him in made a purchase. It was a girl child. She was too awe-struck by the glories laid before her to talk; but she managed to point with a fat forefinger to the penny doll she desired. The gesture with which she seized it brought – strangely enough – a smile to the deep-set eyes of the stranger who stood watching her. His face was quite different when he smiled. Lines which had seemed nothing but deep-graven channels for sorrow became paths for tenderness. Outside he heard her break into excited, high-voiced triumph, which was mingled with the chatter of her mates.

The little shop was a modest place. On one side was a counter where, safe under glass, were home-made candies and cakes,

with a rosy-cheeked apple or two. But, lining the walls, tumbling over shelves, crowded into old-fashioned presses, were the toys. There were dolls, of course, patrician wax dolls with delicate eyebrows of real hair, hearty, wooden-jointed dolls that were a real comfort to little mothers. There were wheels of fortune where one could see a steeple-chase if he spun hard enough to make the horses vault the hurdles. There was a fascinating confusion of supplejacks, house furniture, houses of Oriental magnificence, little imported German toys – horses, trees, dogs. As the Man's melancholy eyes comprehended all that the place contained to minister to childish delight, something of the bitterness left them. In its place was a curious inertness. One would have said that the man's being was paralyzed with doubt.

The next instant he had seen something that brought grief back again – something that reminded him of his burden. For, marching valiantly over the shelves, storming wooden boxes flanked with cannon, were toy soldiers. There were, too, all the necessary trappings of combat – swords, guns, soldier suits, arrayed in which youthful generals could marshal their forces and sweep the enemy's army before them – while their fathers elsewhere learned the tragedy of war.

Behind the counter was a pretty, young-faced woman, who looked her fifty years only from the softness sometimes brought by the records of many days. She smiled at him in friendly fashion and, unhurried, waited his request. While she reached for the toys the son had asked for, the Man, bent over the counter,

fingered the dolls left lying there from the last small purchaser with clumsy, gentle fingers.

"Who makes that 'dolly' furniture?" he asked, idly. "I wish I could get any one to work for me one-half so well. Carved, too. I didn't know there were tools fine enough to make those tiny wreaths."

Mrs. Schotz shook her head at him good-humoredly.

"My man, he speak English. I – not – can." Following her gesture, the stranger saw, in the back part of the shop, a patient figure at work.

Joseph Schotz was sitting in an invalid-chair, a table littered with tools and bits of wood by his side. One leg, bandaged and swathed, rested on a cushion. His strong peasant face was seamed and drawn with pain.

The Man was beside him in an instant.

"Yes, I make the dolls' houses and carve the furniture – great work, that, for a man, sir? I used to be a cabinet-maker at Annapolis – before my leg got so bad. No, sir, I did not learn my trade there. I was apprenticed to Cadieux, who was cabinet-maker to Napoleon. Yes, the Emperor. Who else could it have been? But that was after those pigs of Russians shot me in the leg. It was their ball that brought me here," with a contemptuous glance at his bandaged leg. "I was color-bearer – you see, I was too young to go in any other way. I was sixteen when I was wounded."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.