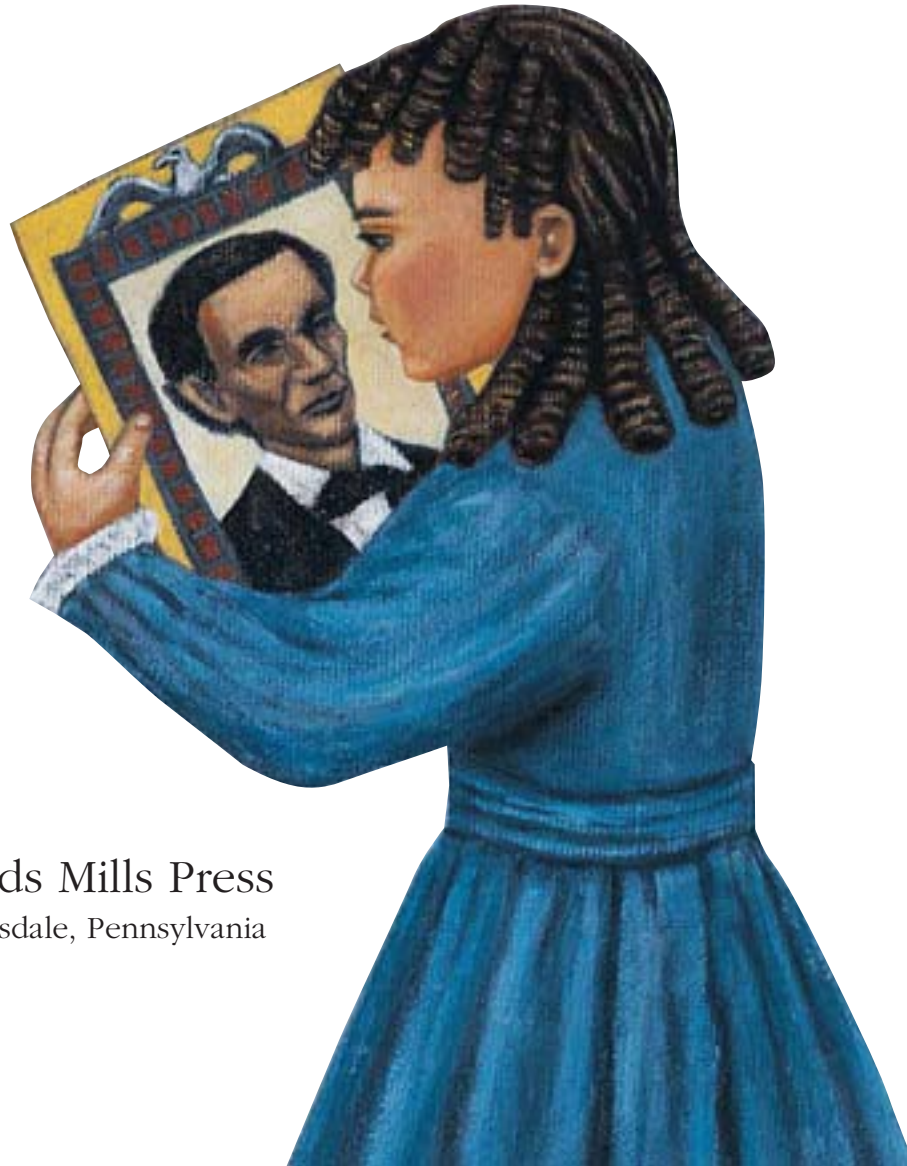


MR LINCOLN'S WHISKERS

Written and Illustrated by Karen Winnick



Boys Mills Press
Honesdale, Pennsylvania



*For my family, Gary, Adam, Alex, Matt, and my mom.
And for my friends, Sue Alexander, Ann Paul, and Erica Silverman.*

—K. W.

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Boyds Mills Press, Inc.
815 Church Street
Honesdale, Pennsylvania 18431
Printed in China

First edition
Book designed by Karen B. Winnick
The text of this book is set in 15-point Times.
The illustrations are done in oils.

Photo of Grace Bedell's letter to Abraham
Lincoln on page 32 © 1995 by Tom Sherry.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Winnick, Karen B.

Mr. Lincoln's whiskers / by Karen B. Winnick.—1st ed.
[32]p. : col. ill. ; cm.

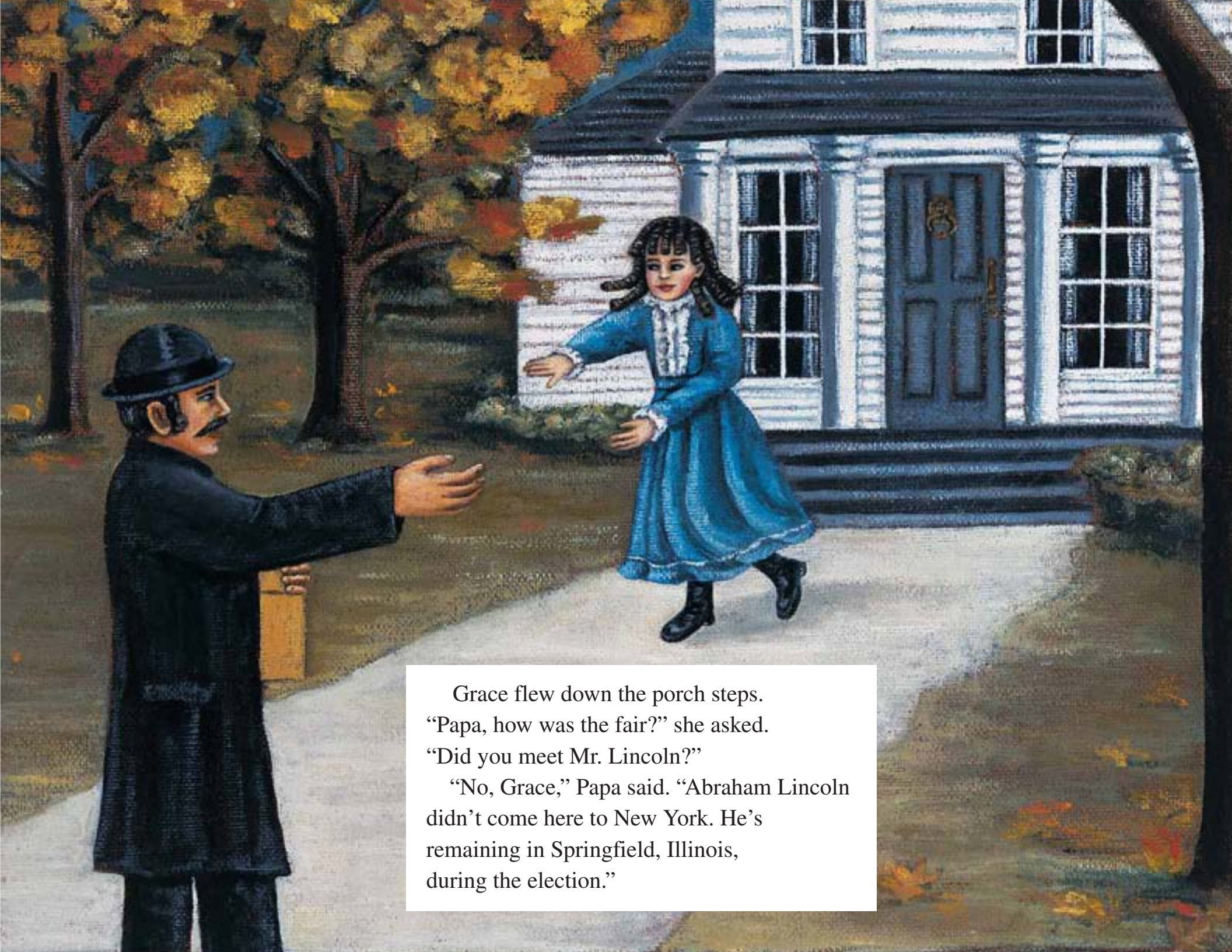
Summary : The true story of Grace Bedell, who suggested that Abraham Lincoln grow a beard.
ISBN-13: 978-1-56397-485-4
ISBN-10: 1-56397-485-1

1. Lincoln, Abraham, 1809–1865—Juvenile literature. 2. Bedell, Grace—Juvenile literature.
[1. Lincoln, Abraham, 1809–1865. 2. Bedell, Grace.]

I. Title.

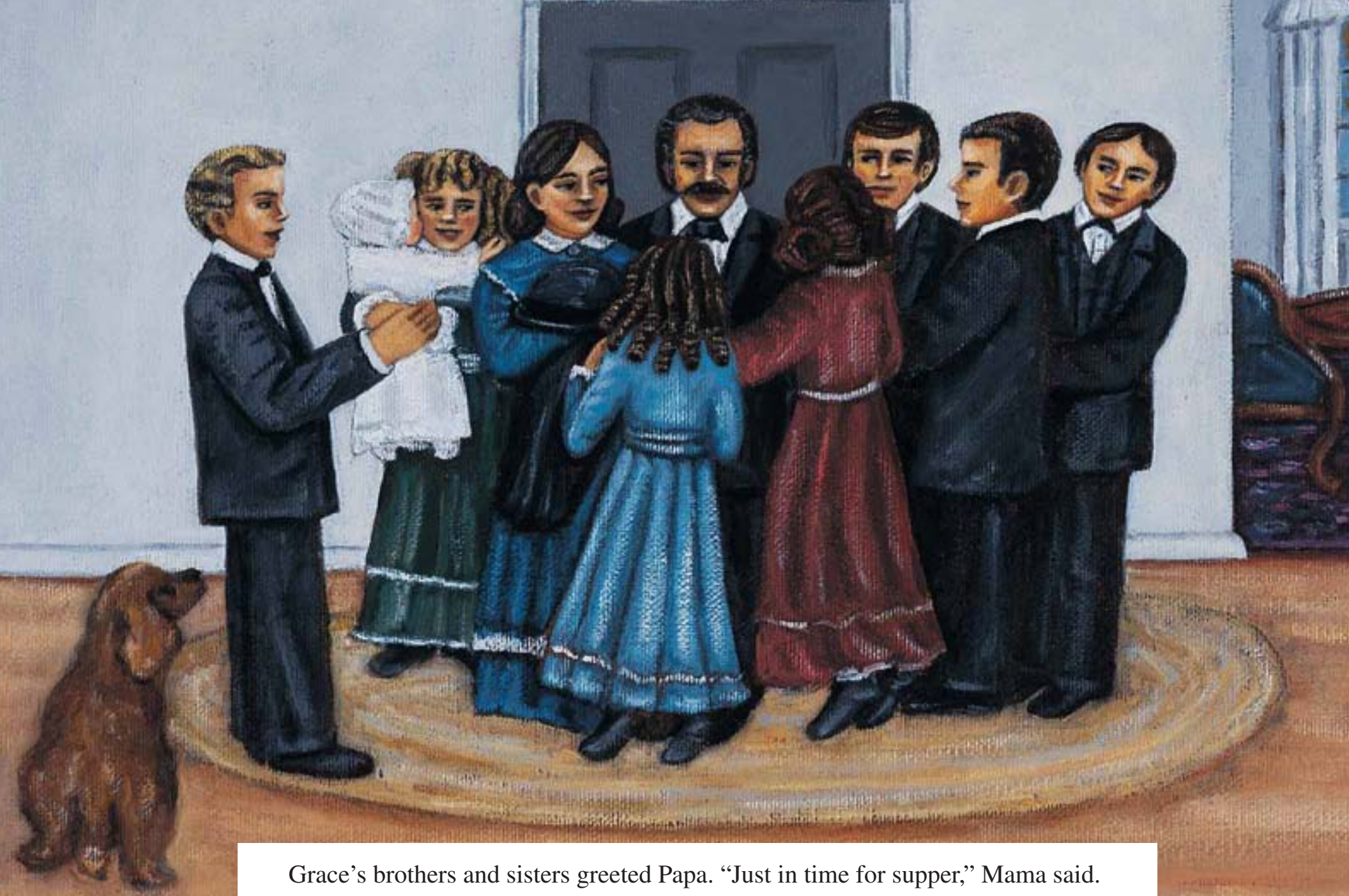
[B]—dc20 1996 AC CIP
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 95-83973

20 19 18 17 16 15 14



Grace flew down the porch steps.
“Papa, how was the fair?” she asked.
“Did you meet Mr. Lincoln?”

“No, Grace,” Papa said. “Abraham Lincoln didn’t come here to New York. He’s remaining in Springfield, Illinois, during the election.”



Grace's brothers and sisters greeted Papa. "Just in time for supper," Mama said. Papa had presents for everyone. "Levant, Helen, Alice, these are for you. George, Stephen, Frank, and here's one for baby Una. And this, Grace, is for you."

“A poster of Mr. Lincoln!
Oh Papa, thank you!” She
held it up. Mr. Lincoln’s face
stared back at her.

“He looks kind,” Grace
thought. “Though his face
seems sad.”



Her brother Levant snickered. “He looks like a railsplitter, not a president.”

“That’s your opinion!” Grace said. “Mr. Lincoln’s got a good heart. I can see it in his face. He doesn’t like slavery, does he, Papa?”

“That’s right,” Papa said.

George, Grace’s oldest brother, spoke up. “But if Lincoln’s elected, our country will be split in two.”

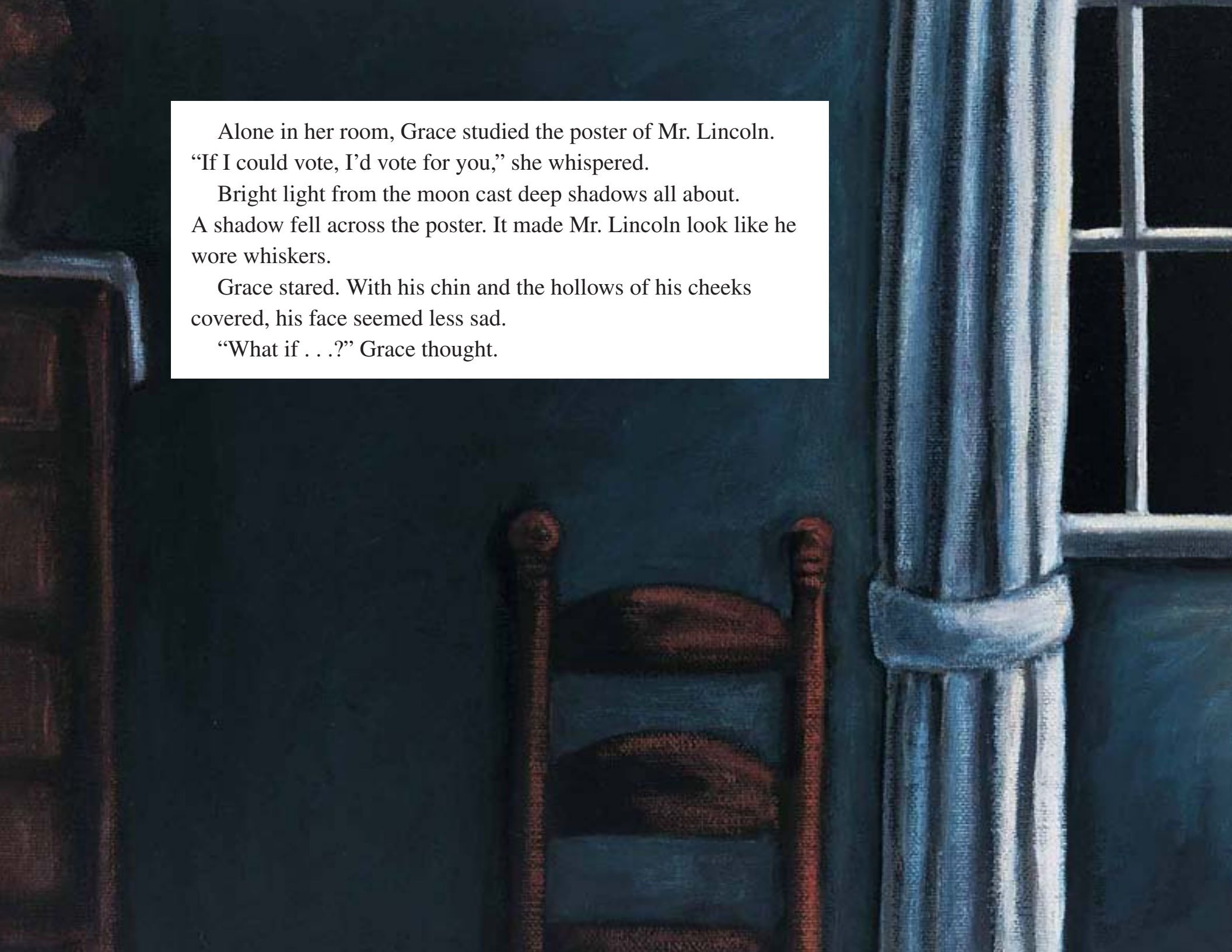
Her brother Stephen shook his head. “How’s it fair for one man to own another?”



“It isn’t,” Grace said. “People are mean to slaves. I know about it from a book. If I could, I’d vote for Mr. Lincoln.”

“It’s a good thing girls can’t vote,” said Levant. Grace pushed back her chair and ran out.





Alone in her room, Grace studied the poster of Mr. Lincoln.
“If I could vote, I’d vote for you,” she whispered.

Bright light from the moon cast deep shadows all about.
A shadow fell across the poster. It made Mr. Lincoln look like he
wore whiskers.

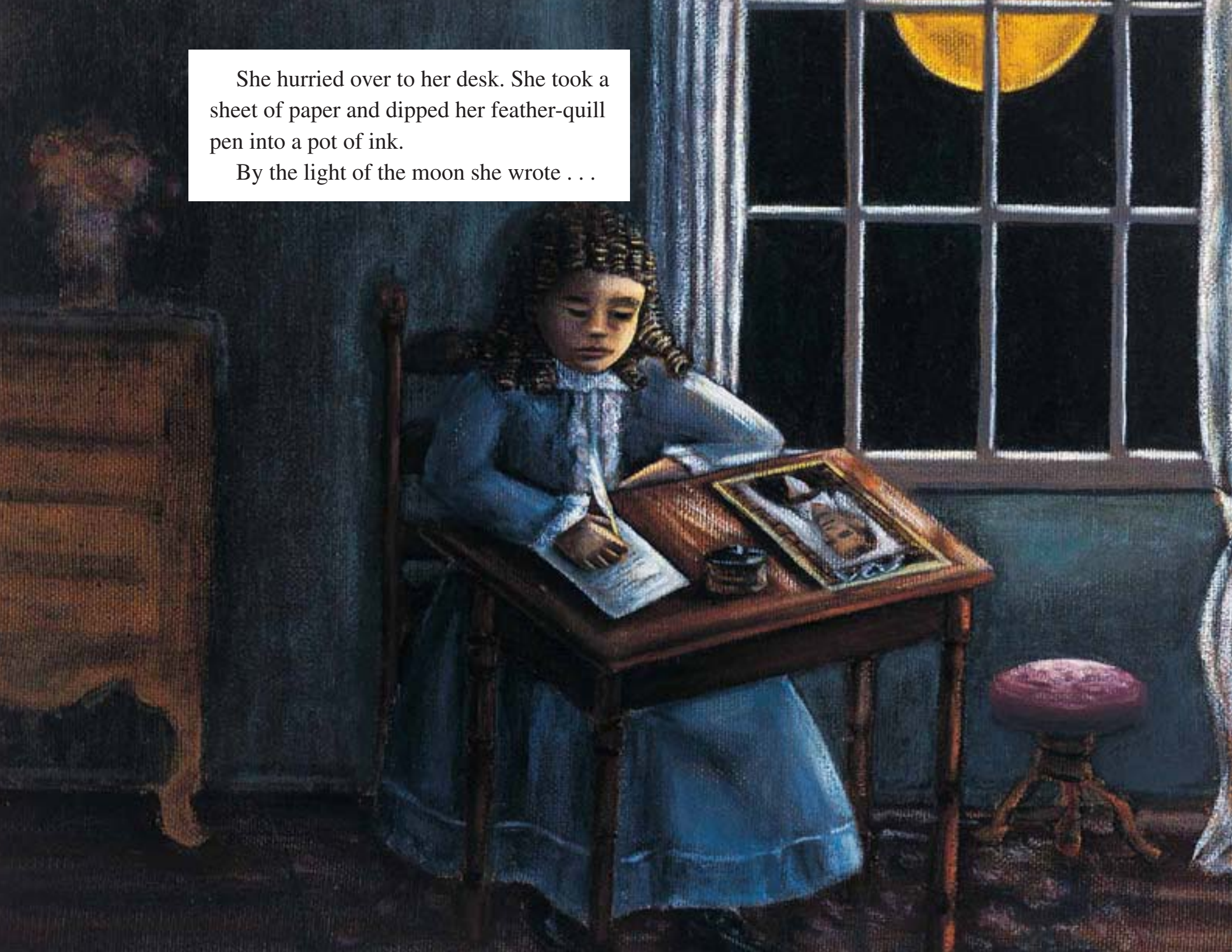
Grace stared. With his chin and the hollows of his cheeks
covered, his face seemed less sad.

“What if . . .?” Grace thought.



She hurried over to her desk. She took a sheet of paper and dipped her feather-quill pen into a pot of ink.

By the light of the moon she wrote . . .



An illustration of two hands, one on the left and one on the right, holding a white rectangular piece of paper. The hands are rendered in a realistic style with warm skin tones. The fingers are curled around the edges of the paper. At the bottom of each hand, a small portion of a blue sleeve with a white lace cuff is visible. The background is a solid dark blue.

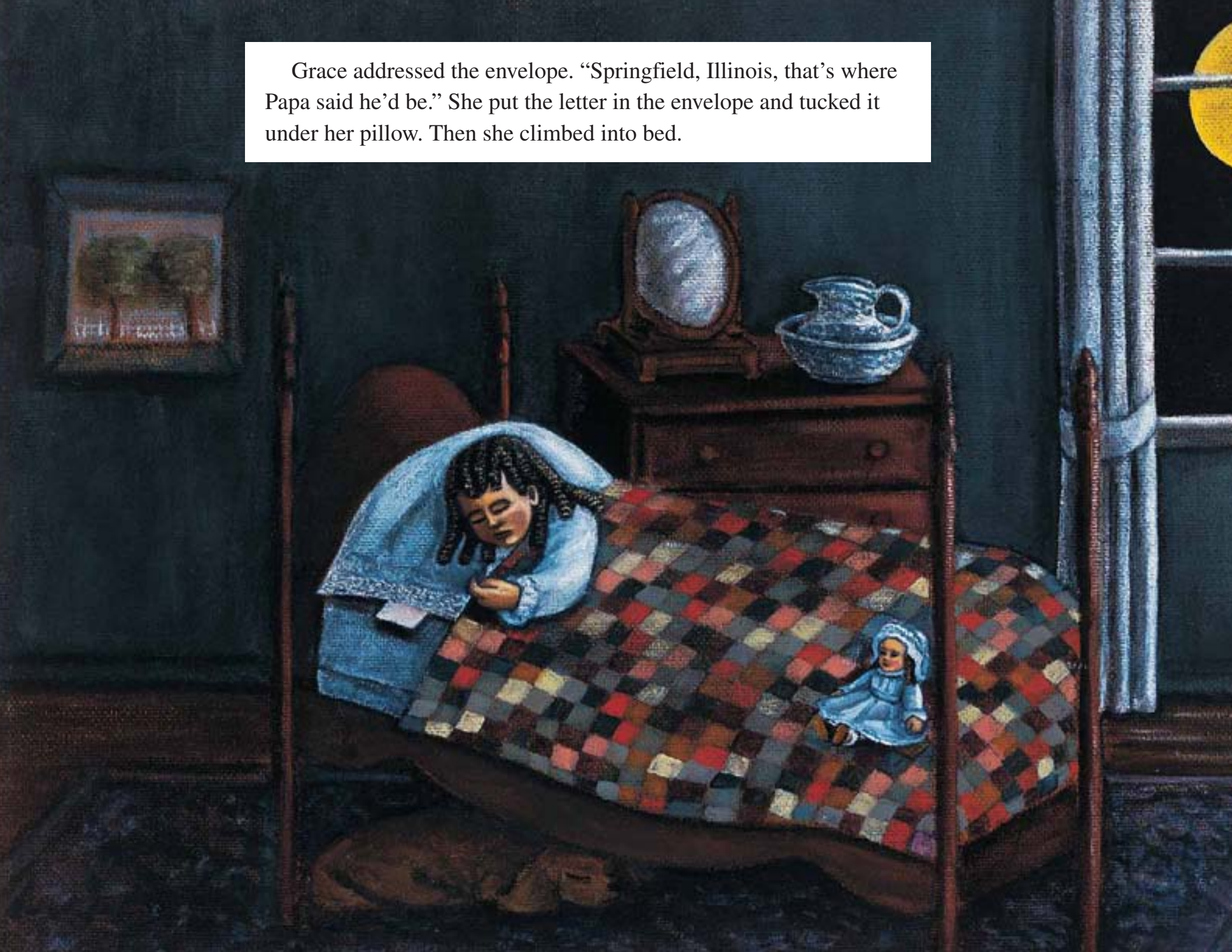
Hon. A. B. Lincoln

Dear Sir:

My father has just come from the fair and brought home your picture . . . I am a little girl only eleven years old, but want you should be President of the United States very much so I hope you won't think me very bold to write to such a great man as you are. Have you any little girls about as large as I am if so give them my love and tell her to write to me if you cannot answer this letter. I have got 4 brothers and part of them will vote for you anyway and if you will let your whiskers grow I will try and get the rest of them to vote for you. You would look a great deal better for your face is so thin. All the ladies like whiskers and they would tease their husbands to vote for you and then you would be President. My father is going to vote for you and if I was a man I would vote for you too but I will try and get every one to vote for you that I can . . . I must not write any more. Answer this letter write off. Good-bye

Grace Bedell

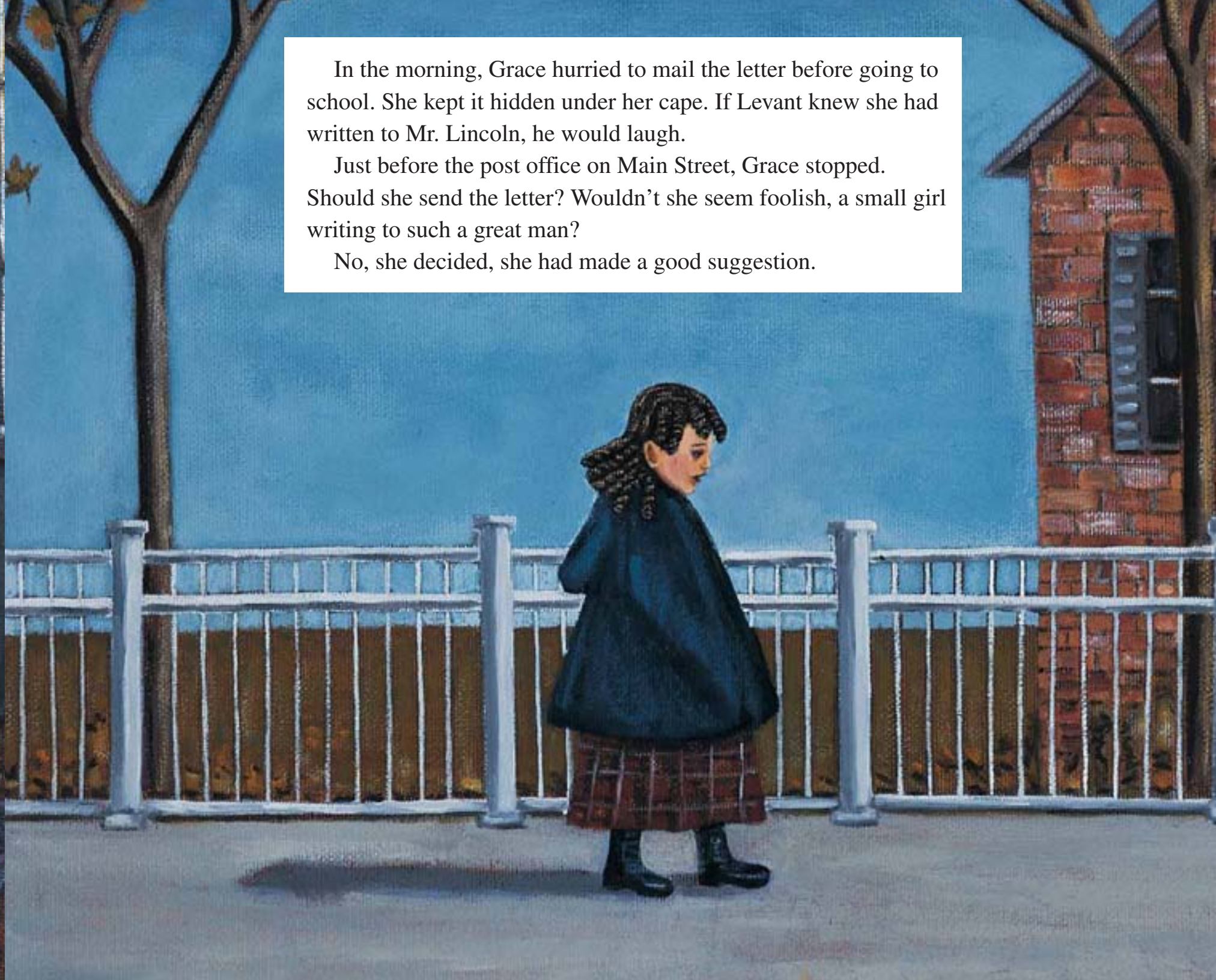
Grace addressed the envelope. "Springfield, Illinois, that's where Papa said he'd be." She put the letter in the envelope and tucked it under her pillow. Then she climbed into bed.



In the morning, Grace hurried to mail the letter before going to school. She kept it hidden under her cape. If Levant knew she had written to Mr. Lincoln, he would laugh.

Just before the post office on Main Street, Grace stopped. Should she send the letter? Wouldn't she seem foolish, a small girl writing to such a great man?

No, she decided, she had made a good suggestion.



She went inside the post office. “May I have a stamp, Mr. Mann?” She handed the postmaster a penny and her letter.

“To Mr. Abraham Lincoln?” Mr. Mann exclaimed. “Why, Grace Bedell, did you write this yourself?”

She blushed and nodded.

“Well,” he said, “I wouldn’t expect an answer. Mr. Lincoln’s a busy man.”



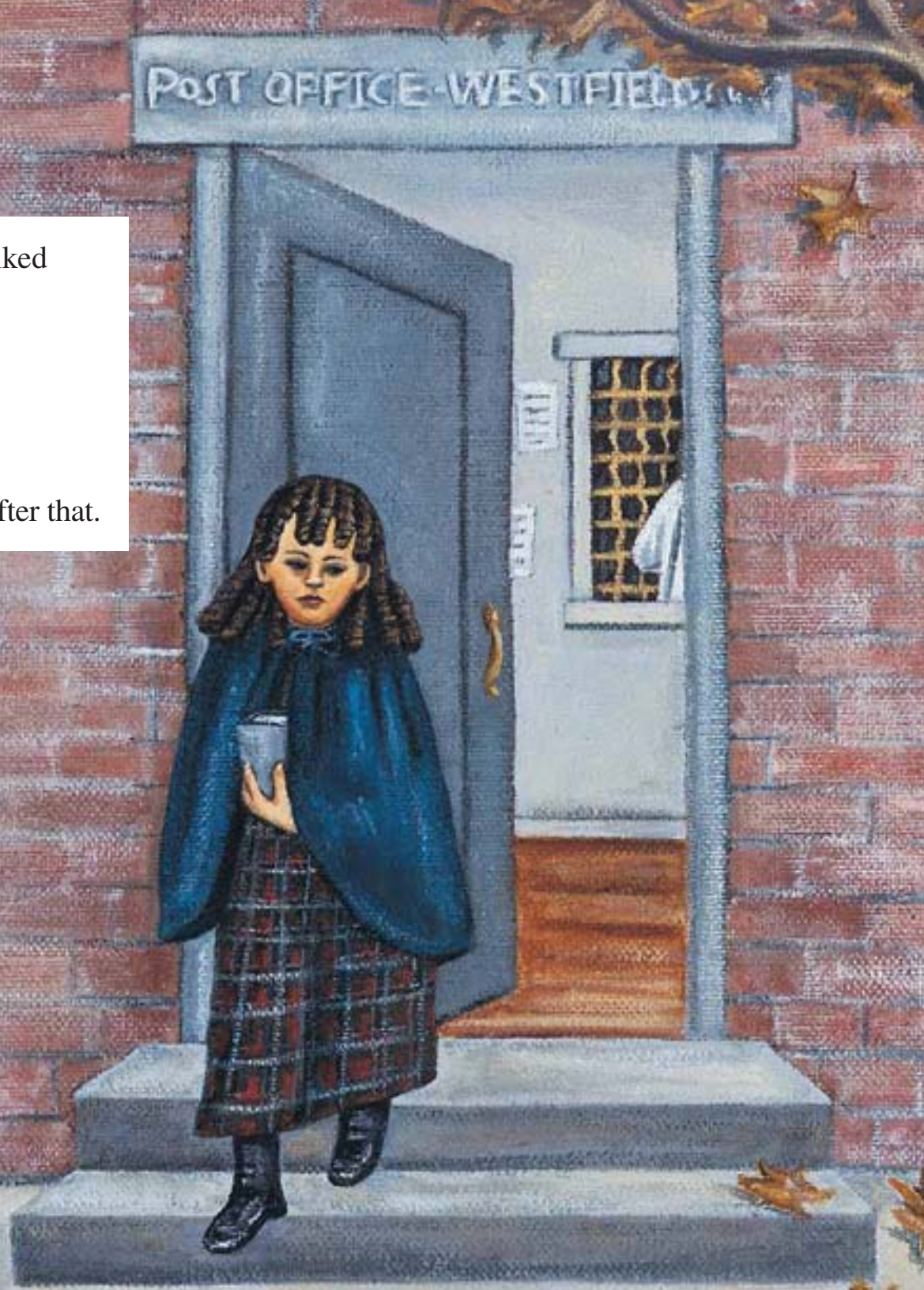
Grace's shoulders drooped. She turned and walked slowly out of the post office.

A few days later she returned.

"Is there anything for me?"

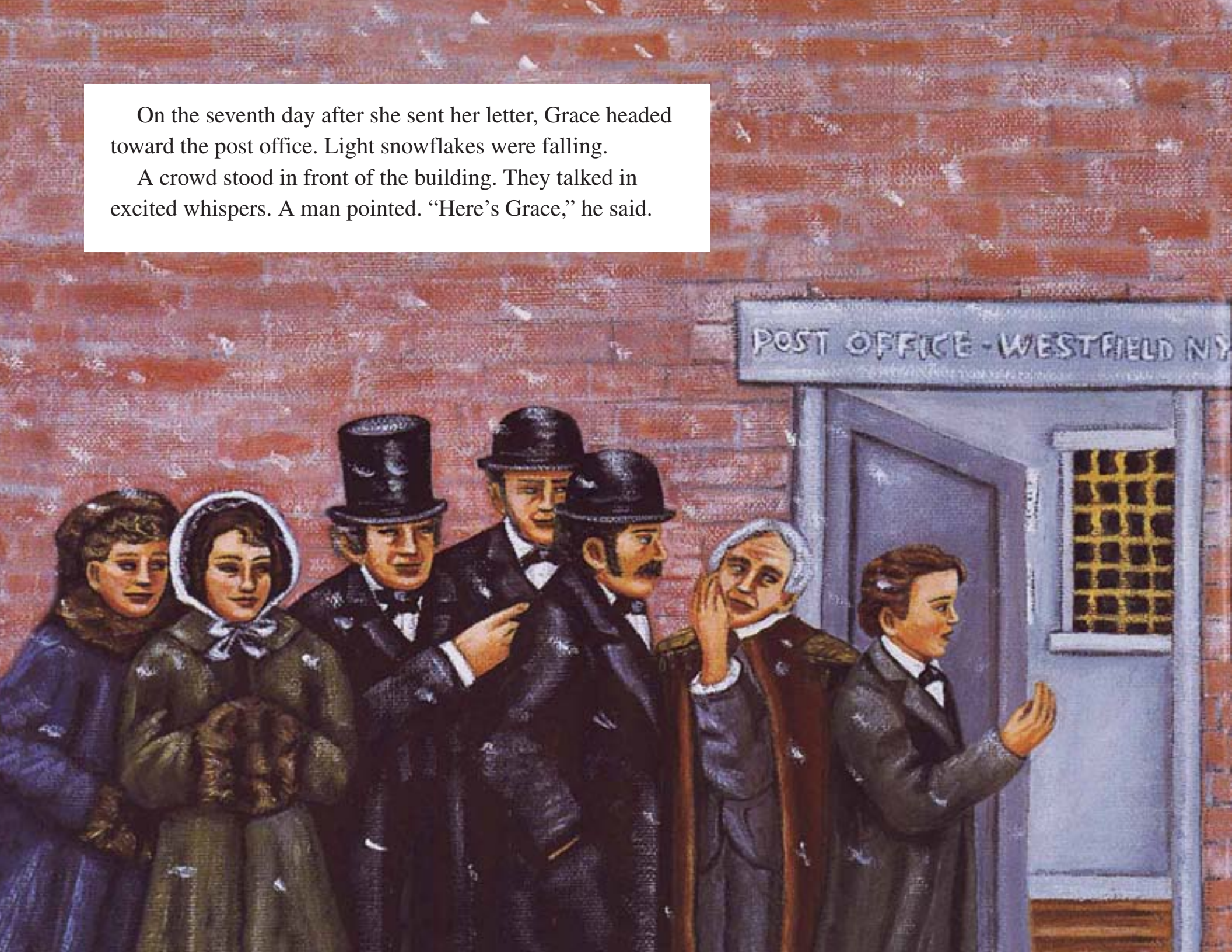
"No," said Mr. Mann. "I told you Mr. Lincoln was very busy."

But the next day she trudged back and the day after that.

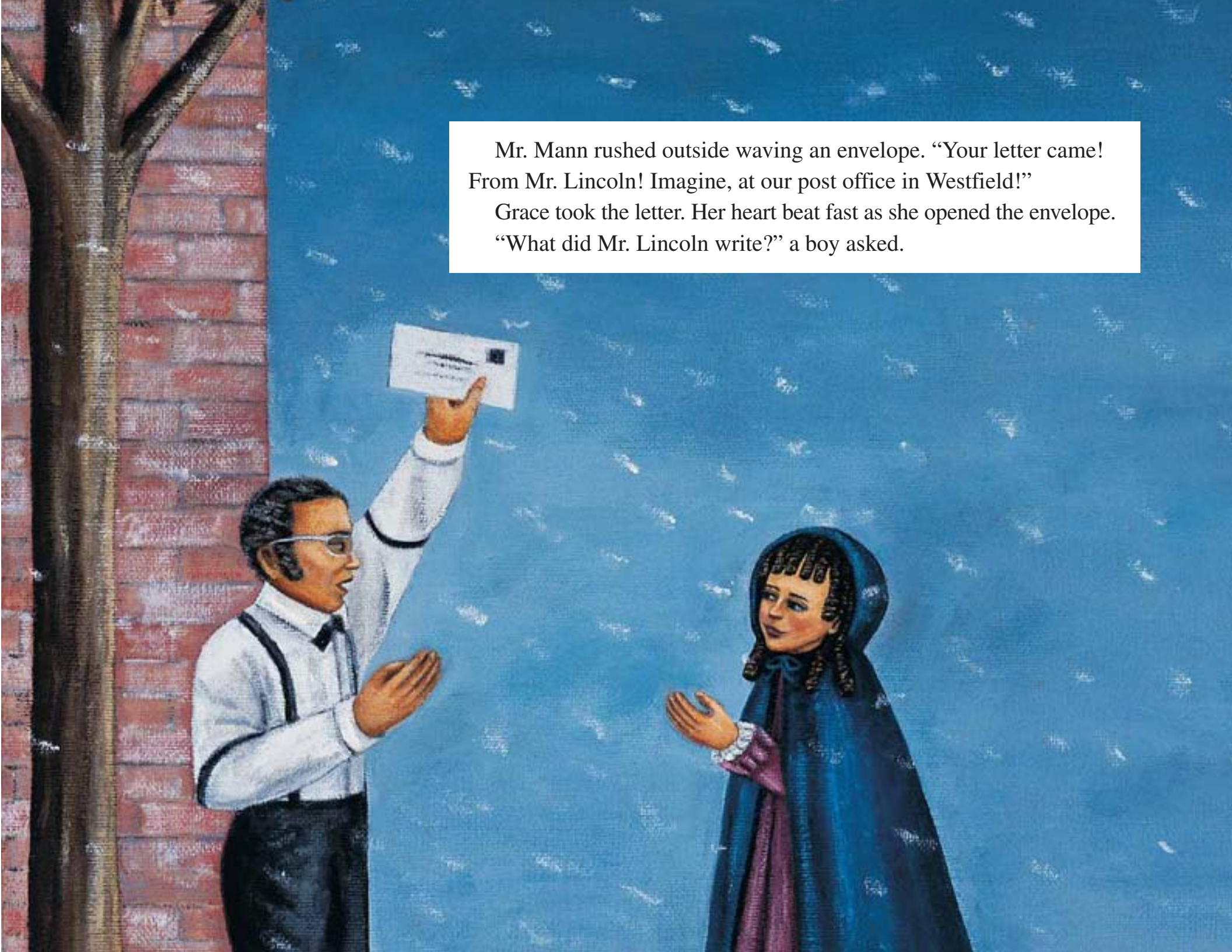


On the seventh day after she sent her letter, Grace headed toward the post office. Light snowflakes were falling.

A crowd stood in front of the building. They talked in excited whispers. A man pointed. "Here's Grace," he said.



Mr. Mann rushed outside waving an envelope. "Your letter came! From Mr. Lincoln! Imagine, at our post office in Westfield!"
Grace took the letter. Her heart beat fast as she opened the envelope.
"What did Mr. Lincoln write?" a boy asked.



But Grace was already hurrying home, reading her letter.





She burst into the parlor. “Mr. Lincoln answered my letter!”

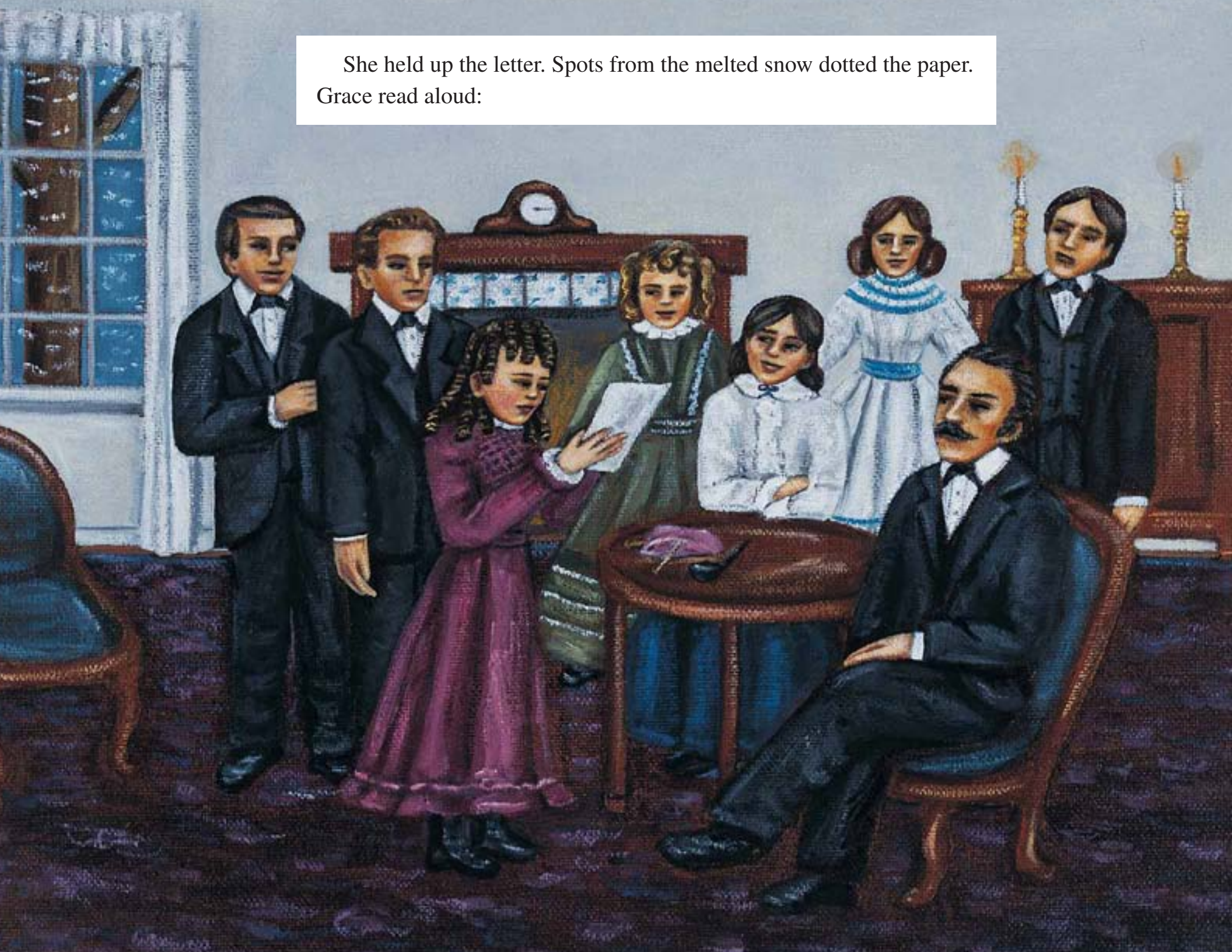
Mama looked up. “You wrote to Mr. Lincoln?”

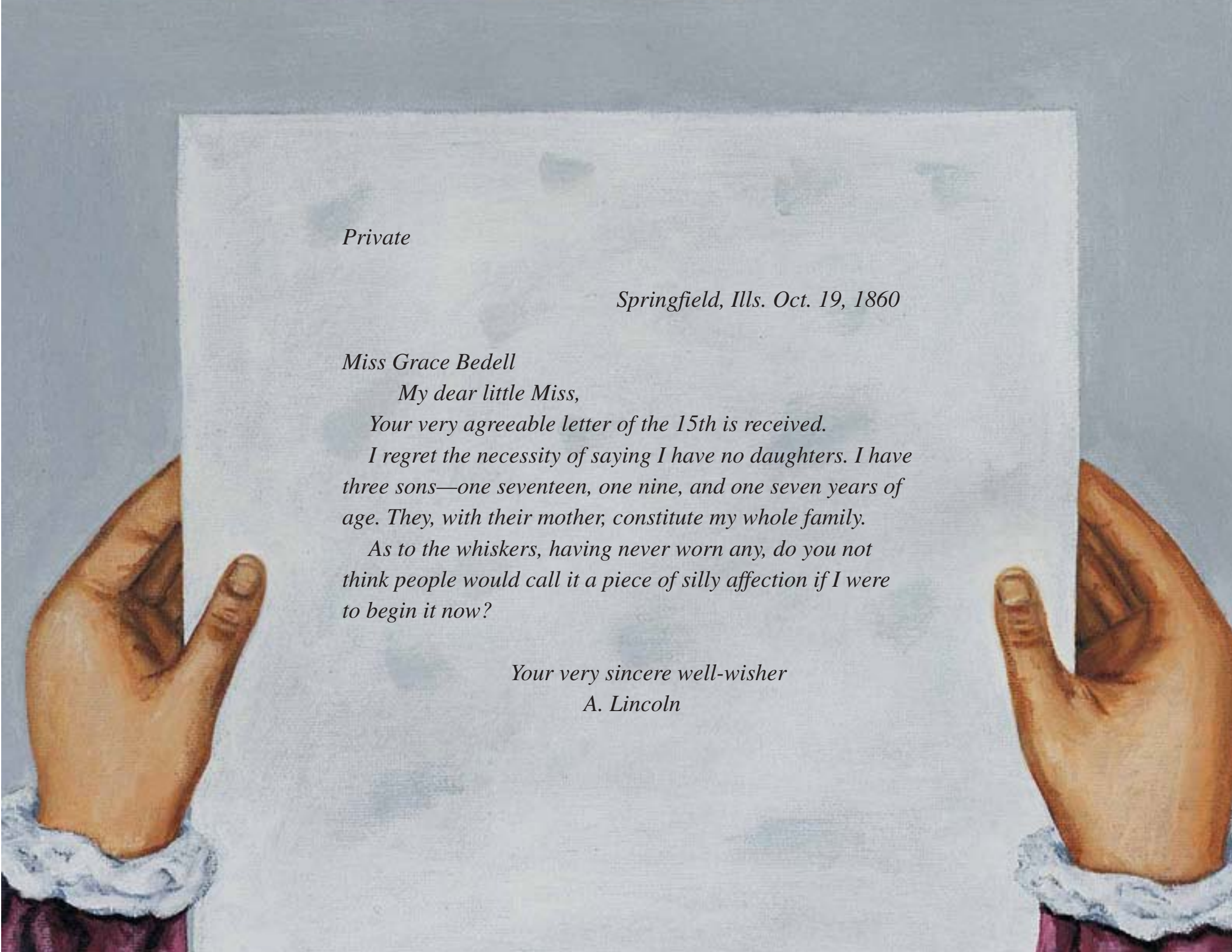
Her brothers and sisters gathered around.

“What did you say?” “Where did you send it?”

Papa put down his pipe. “Read us what he wrote, Grace.”

She held up the letter. Spots from the melted snow dotted the paper.
Grace read aloud:



An illustration of two hands, one on the left and one on the right, holding a white rectangular piece of paper. The hands are rendered in a realistic style with warm skin tones. The left hand is on the left side of the paper, and the right hand is on the right side. Both hands have fingers slightly curled around the edges of the paper. The wrists are visible, showing a white lace cuff and a glimpse of a dark red garment. The background is a solid light blue-grey color.

Private

Springfield, Ills. Oct. 19, 1860

Miss Grace Bedell

My dear little Miss,

Your very agreeable letter of the 15th is received.

I regret the necessity of saying I have no daughters. I have three sons—one seventeen, one nine, and one seven years of age. They, with their mother, constitute my whole family.

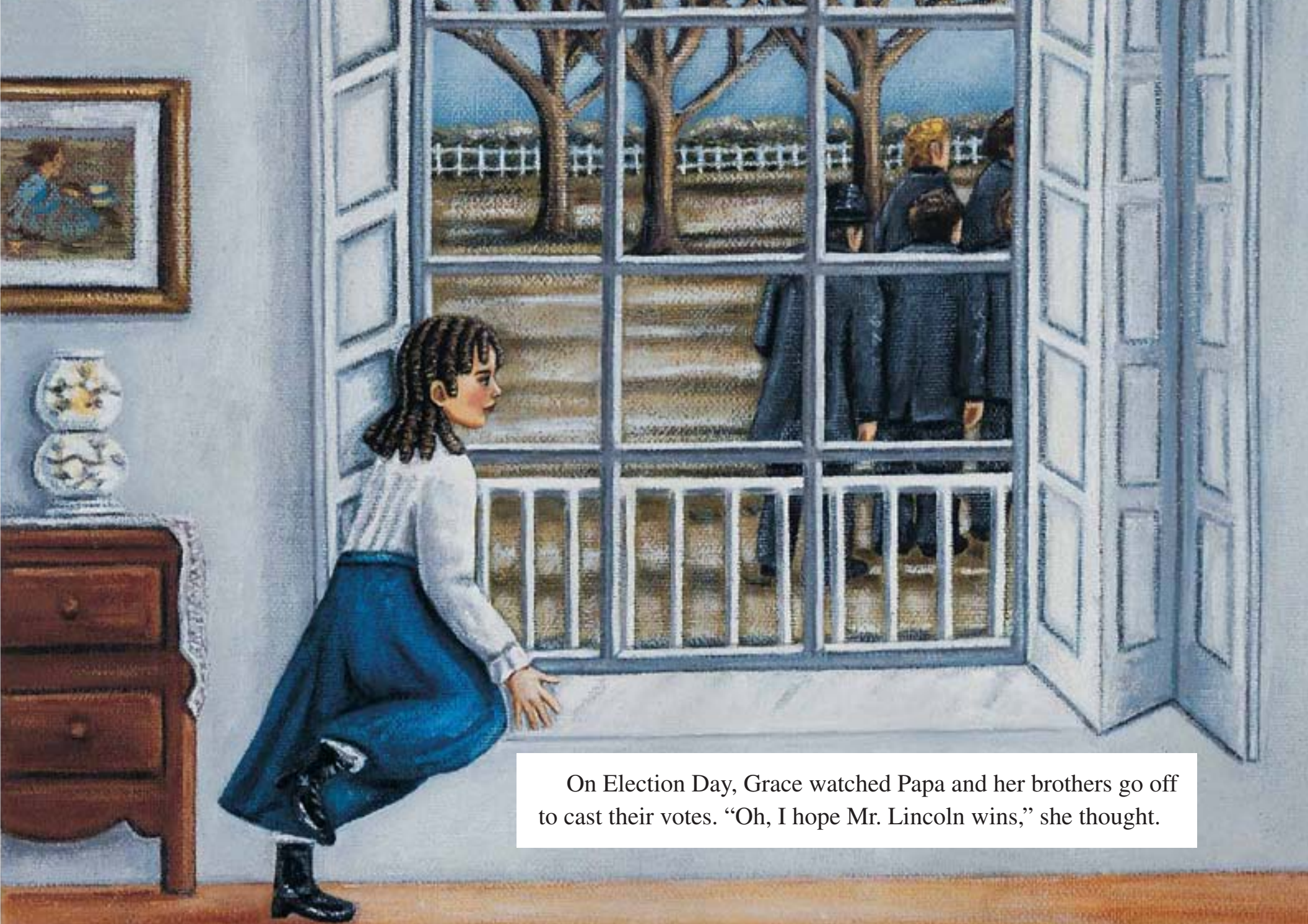
As to the whiskers, having never worn any, do you not think people would call it a piece of silly affection if I were to begin it now?

Your very sincere well-wisher

A. Lincoln

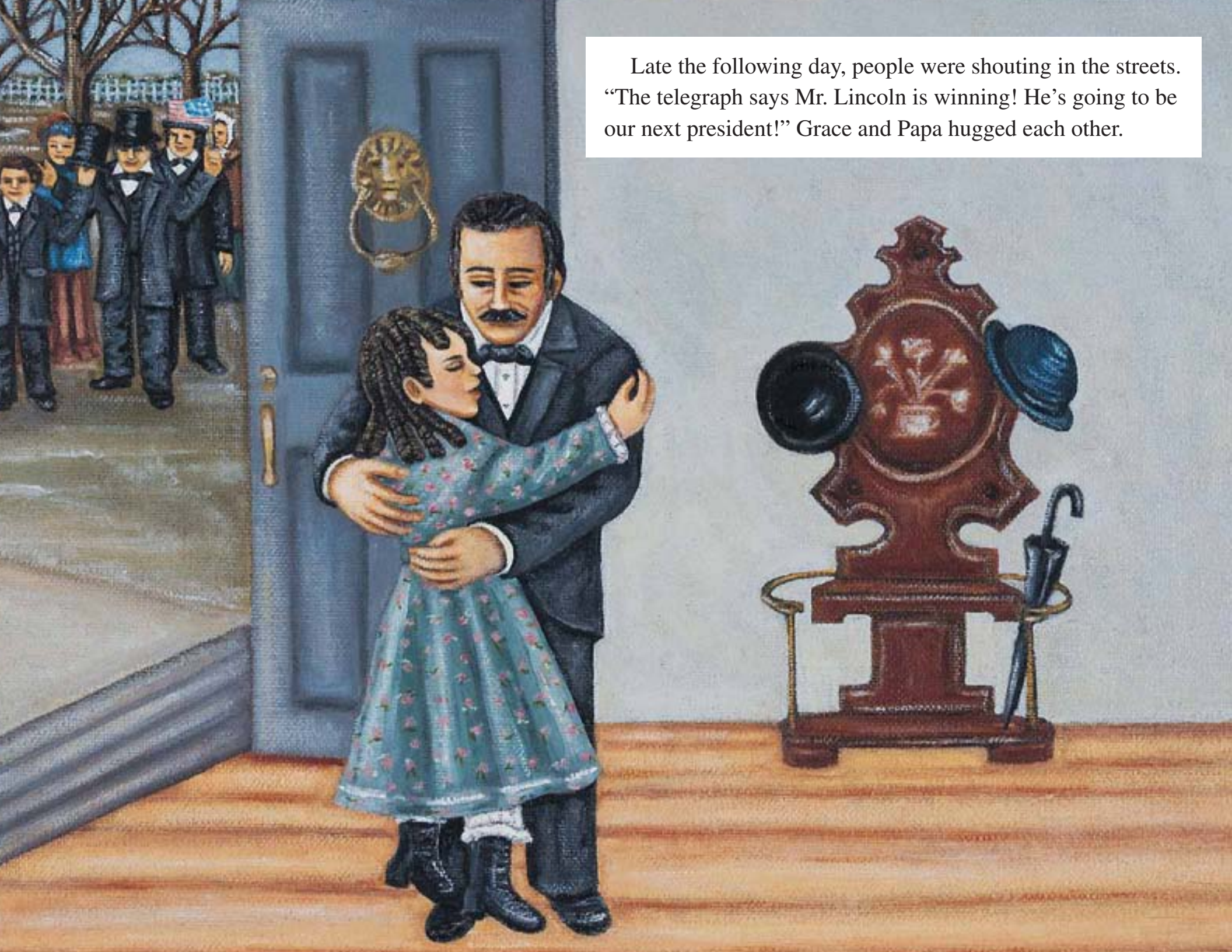
Levant made a face. “You wrote him about growing whiskers?”
“I can’t believe it!” Mama said. “Mr. Lincoln wrote to our Grace.”
“You should be very proud,” Papa said.

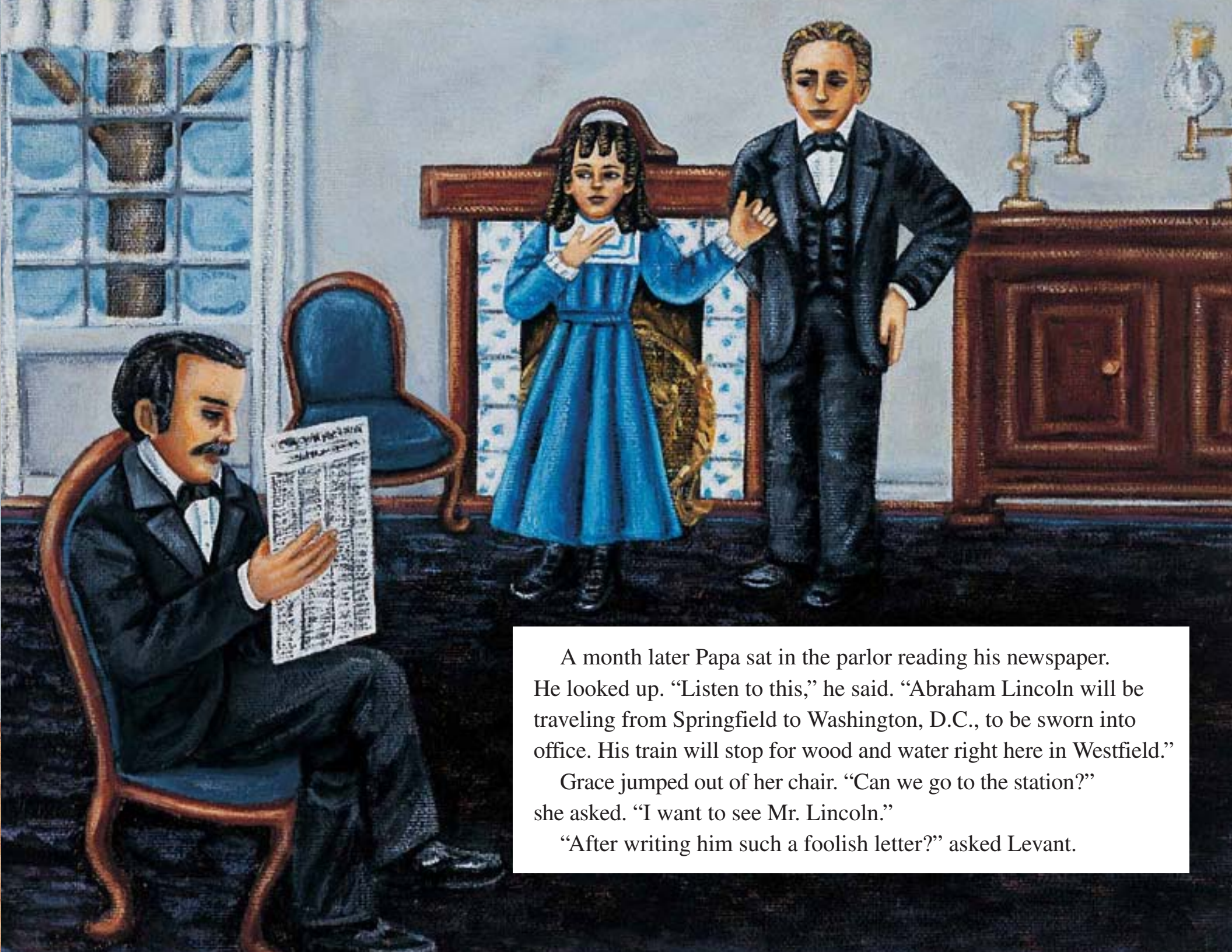




On Election Day, Grace watched Papa and her brothers go off to cast their votes. "Oh, I hope Mr. Lincoln wins," she thought.

Late the following day, people were shouting in the streets. "The telegraph says Mr. Lincoln is winning! He's going to be our next president!" Grace and Papa hugged each other.





A month later Papa sat in the parlor reading his newspaper. He looked up. "Listen to this," he said. "Abraham Lincoln will be traveling from Springfield to Washington, D.C., to be sworn into office. His train will stop for wood and water right here in Westfield."

Grace jumped out of her chair. "Can we go to the station?" she asked. "I want to see Mr. Lincoln."

"After writing him such a foolish letter?" asked Levant.

The wind whistled across the tracks. Grace pushed her hands into her muff. She blew out a stream of air.

There was a faint chug-a-chug.

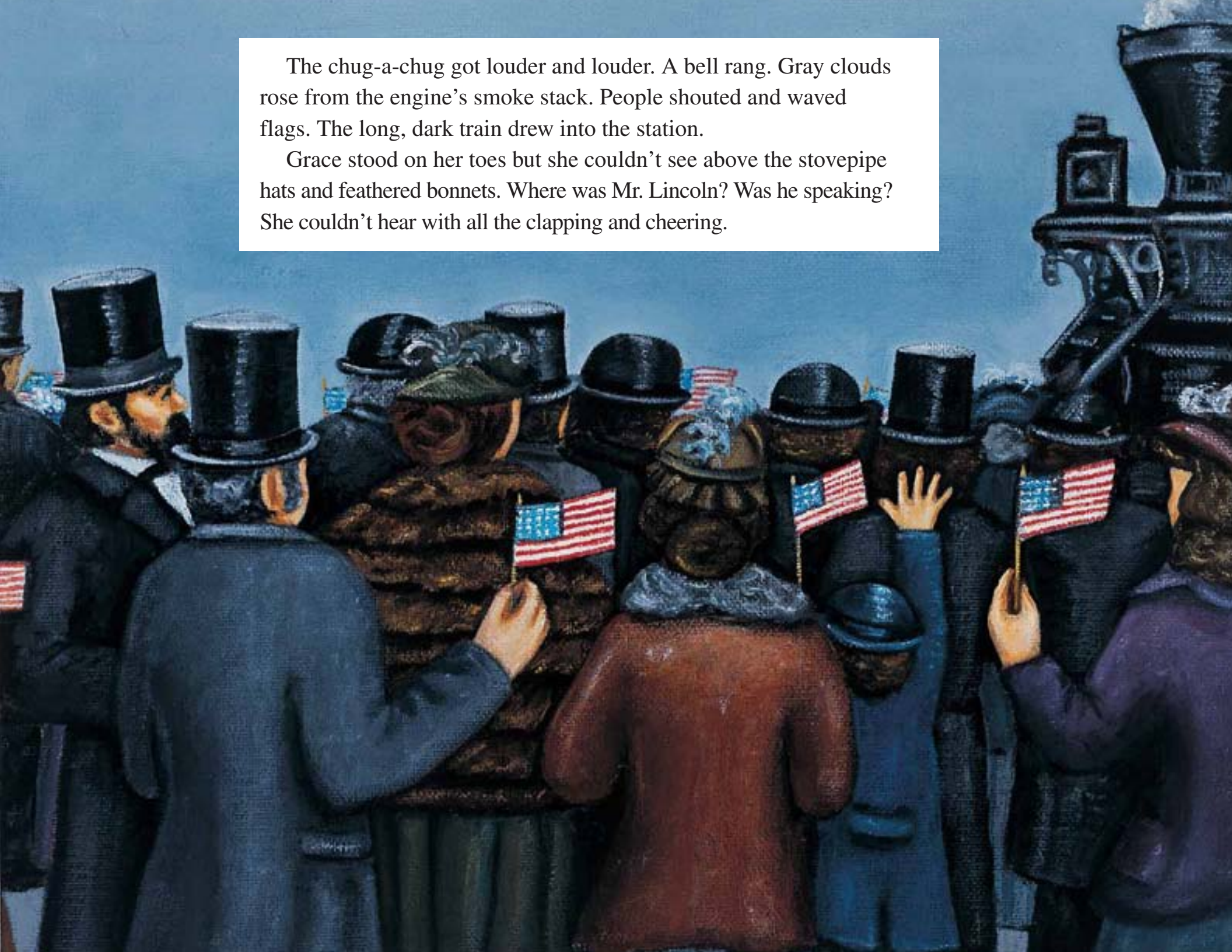
Grace squeezed forward. Mama touched her shoulder and pulled her back. "Stay close."

"But I want to see Mr. Lincoln," Grace said.



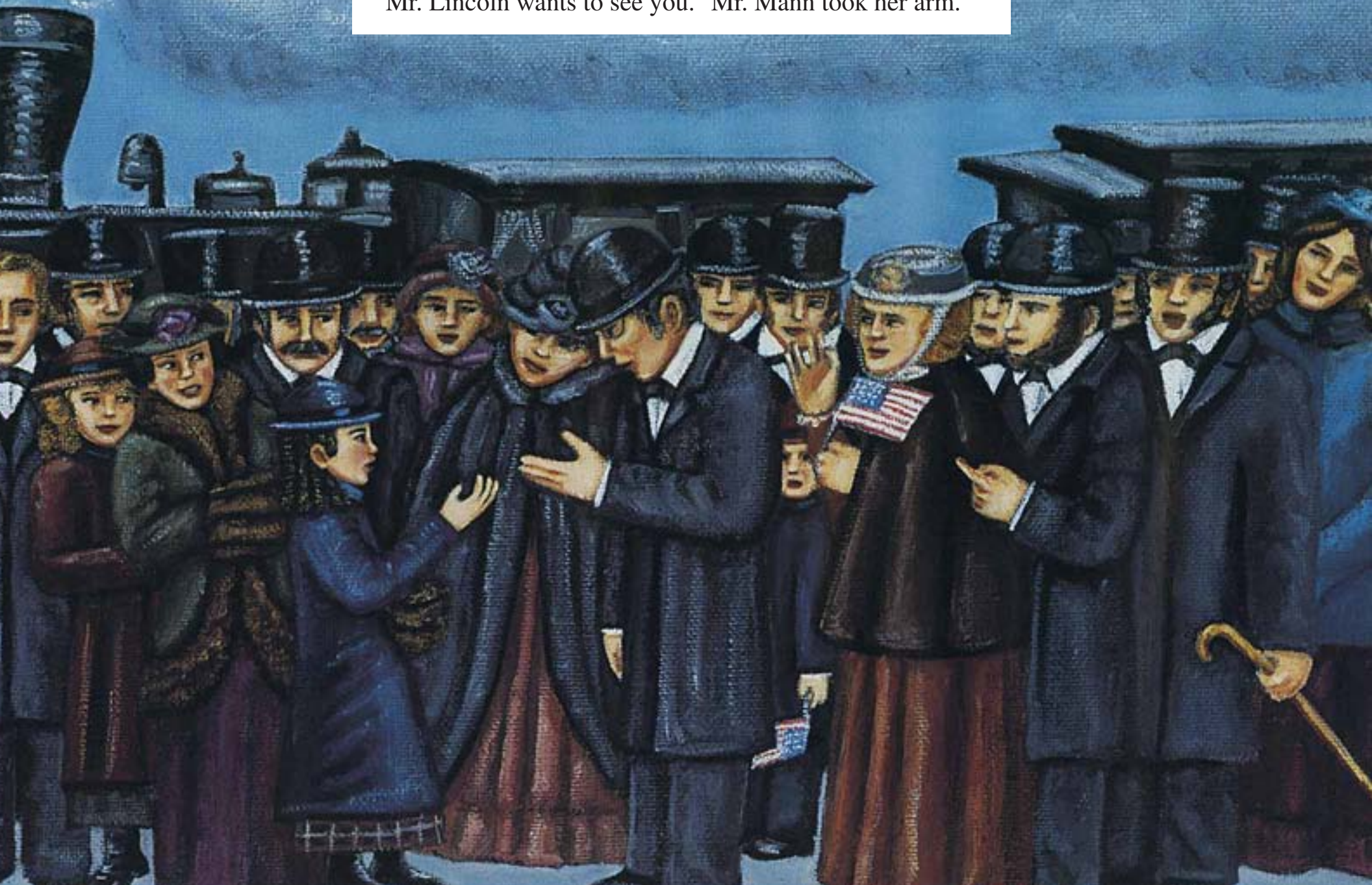
The chug-a-chug got louder and louder. A bell rang. Gray clouds rose from the engine's smoke stack. People shouted and waved flags. The long, dark train drew into the station.

Grace stood on her toes but she couldn't see above the stovepipe hats and feathered bonnets. Where was Mr. Lincoln? Was he speaking? She couldn't hear with all the clapping and cheering.



Suddenly, people began to turn around. “Where is she?”
“Where is she?” Grace heard them murmur.

“Grace! Grace!” Mr. Mann pushed through the crowd.
“Mr. Lincoln wants to see you.” Mr. Mann took her arm.



Everyone hurried to move out of her way. Grace could hear their whispering as she went past. Mr. Mann led her to the front of the platform.

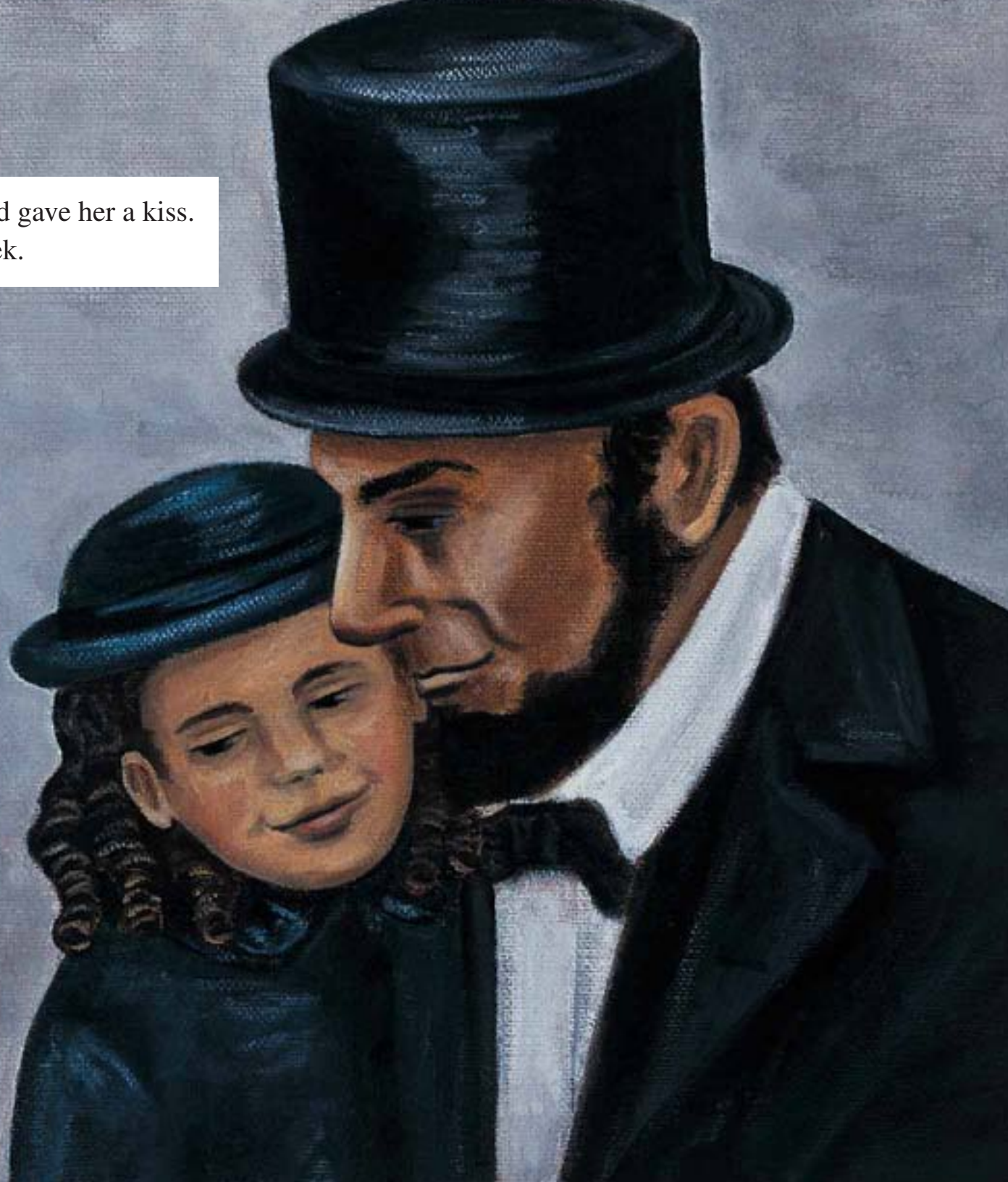


Abraham Lincoln stood before her.

“Hello, Grace,” he said. “How do you like the improvement you advised me to make?”



Mr. Lincoln bent down and gave her a kiss.
His whiskers tickled her cheek.



In October, 1860, Grace Bedell of Westfield, New York wrote to Abraham Lincoln advising him to grow a beard. These are reproductions of the letters they exchanged.

Grace Bedell
Westfield, N.Y.
Oct 14/60

Hon A. B. Lincoln
Washington

My father has just come from the war and brought home your picture and Mrs. Stanton's. I am a little girl only eleven years old, but want you should be President of this United States very much and I hope you won't think me very bold to write to such a great man as you are. Have you any little girls about as large as I am if so give them my love and tell her to write to me if you cannot answer this letter. I have got 4 brothers and part of them will vote for you any way and if you will let your wishes go and let my dad get the rest of them to vote for you you would look a deal better for your face is so thin till the ladies like whiskers and they would love

their husbands to vote for you and then you would be President. My father is a going to vote for you and if I was as man I would vote for you to let I don't try and get every one to vote for you that I can. I think that veil drawn around your picture makes it look very pretty. I have just got a little baby sister who is three weeks old and is just as cunning as can be. When you write your letter direct to Grace Bedell Westfield New York. I cannot write any more now. This is right off. Good bye.
Grace Bedell

Private

Springfield, Ill. Oct 19. 1860

Miss Liza and Bruce
My dear little ones.

Yours very affectionate letters of the 15th were received.

I regret the necessity of saying I have no daughters. I have three sons - one sixteen, one nine, and one seven years of age. They with their mother constitute my whole family.

As to the whiskers, having mentioned any, do you not think people would call it a piece of pique, affection if I was to begin to wear them?

Yours very sincerely
Abraham Lincoln

Courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection of the Detroit Public Library.