

The Untitled Abraham Lincoln Novel
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New York City, NY

Those gathered at the party danced and drank, talked and laughed, carried on without realizing that one of their number had slipped away. Nobody could really say that they knew her, but she acted as if she knew everyone, and instead of seeming rude or forgetful, they nodded and smiled their way through conversations with her. The men who met her immediately found her enchanting and impossible to resist. The women noticed but understood. Instead of feeling jealousy, they were impressed. They wanted to *be* her. However, when she needed to – and currently, she needed to – she could become almost invisible. She had a natural ability to blend into a crowd, become unnoticeable, unremarkable. It was an amazing transformation from dazzling beauty to just another face.

The young woman stole down the hallway outside the ballroom, keeping her head low, her hair neat, and her appearance unruffled. She wore a simple and efficient outfit – a man’s shirt and trousers, a duster – but somehow looked just as good as she had in the formal dress she’d discarded in the bathroom. She exuded an air of grace, strength, beauty, and disarming and deadly charm. Executing a swift roll to her left, she came to a stop behind a large potted plant. She paused there for a moment, observing her surroundings at the same time that she recalled her memory of the building’s plans that she been shown. If she wasn’t mistaken – and Kate Warne was very rarely mistaken – she needed to turn right, proceed to a staircase, take the stairs to the third floor, and go to the first door on the left. There she would find what she had come for. She had no idea what it was, only that her contact – Mr. Nathaniel Polrink, an odd man, with strange taste in clothing, unfortunate facial hair, and a high squeaky voice – had said that she would know it when she saw it.

According to the notes Polrink had sent her, there were three guards on stations between her and her objective, along with at least two roamers who patrolled the hallways. She’d observed some of their patrol patterns and, assuming they stuck to their paths – and what security guards didn’t? – she should be ok, make her objective without any interference. Polrink had expressed to her that it was of the utmost importance that she not be detected. If she raised any alarms, the contract would be cancelled and she would not be paid. She hoped his information was accurate.

At the stairs stood one of the guards. He stood straight and tall, at full attention, staring straight ahead. While some might see this as fierce determination and unwavering dedication to one’s job, Kate knew immediately that the man’s tunnel vision was a weakness that she could easily exploit. The man’s focus limited his vision to that which was directly before him. Kate snuck up the hallway, keeping to the shadows on the right side. She crept forward, pulling a handful of pebbles from a pouch concealed beneath her jacket. She waited until the musicians in the ballroom adjacent to the hallway had paused

for a moment and then tossed the stones past the stairs. The guard immediately turned towards the sound and left his post, further confirming Kate's suspicion that the man was an amateur. The guard's inexperience caused Kate to wonder about how much importance the man's employers put on that which he was guarding. It was likely that he was just a houseboy forced into guard duty for the evening's event and that the upstairs guards were actual professionals. Still, Kate thought, if they were settling for rookies like him, there was either a global drought of quality security, or else there was little of value upstairs.

She put these thoughts aside and shot forward from the shadows, moving swiftly but silently to the stairs and up them to the second floor. At the landing, she stopped, aware of two guards standing with their backs to the stairs.

One of the guards stood stiffly, obviously the man assigned to guard this area. The other man appeared to be one of the roamers, stopping for a moment to chat with his friend. The two discussed matters of no importance, paying no attention to their surroundings. Again Kate was forced to wonder if anybody really cared about the security of the building. She might have simply walked in and up the stairs without any opposition. *Don't let your guard down*, she thought.

She moved past the men, an innate ability keeping her feet from pressing on unstable floorboards that might make a noise to betray her presence. She naturally shifted her weight, moving with a catlike grace and balance. She could have easily tied their shoes together or given the men a hotfoot. She resisted the temptation and continued on her mission.

At the third floor, the stairs opened on a wide hallway with two doors on each side. A single guard stood at attention in front of the door on the left: her target. This guard seemed more alert, not overly focused, undistracted and most likely undistractable. *Finally*, Kate thought, *a professional*. Weighing her options, Kate decided the only option was direct confrontation. It wasn't the way she wanted to play it, but she realized she had little choice.

She moved as close as she could, staying crouched and low. When she had traveled within twenty feet of the man, she coiled her body, and without a further thought, sprang forward. She covered the distance in two long strides and a strong and well-timed leap. Just as the guard noticed her, and was about to cry out, Kate was upon him. She gripped him by the shoulders and slammed his head against the door, knocking him out with a minimal amount of noise.

Kate quickly searched the man's pockets and found a key which she used to unlock the door. She pushed it open and then dragged the guard's unconscious body into the room, closing the door behind her.

She found herself in a small anteroom, dark except for a sliver of light coming from the crack at the bottom of the door to the room beyond. After pausing a moment to allow her eyes to adjust to the darkness, Kate rolled the guard's body into a corner, confident that a cursory glance wouldn't reveal him. She leaned her ear against the inner door and, hearing nothing, slowly opened it.

The door opened to a large study. To the right, next to a door that Kate knew led to the other room on this side of the hallway, was a large fireplace, in which a fire burned. Facing the fireplace were two large, comfortable-looking chairs. Bookshelves filled with leather-bound volumes lined the walls. In the center of the room stood a large,

circular case filled with antique trinkets, each, thought Kate, worth more money than she had ever had. The far side of the room was dominated by a large antique desk, intricately carved and impressive. *They must have built that thing in this room*, Kate thought. Behind the desk sat an enormous leather chair, its back facing her, and behind the chair was a wall of windows, curtains drawn back to reveal a balcony which overlooked the front of the house.

She approached the bookshelves and ran her fingers across the spines of the books. Most of the titles were unfamiliar to her, though she considered herself well-read. The subjects of the books seemed to cover all manner of topics, ranging from agriculture to zoology and covering everything in between. She pulled one book from the shelf and opened it, noting that it opened stiffly, as if it had never been read.

She turned from the shelves and crossed the room to the curio case. As she'd first observed, the cabinet was filled with priceless artifacts: Faberge eggs of every size and color; Oriental snuff bottles carved with detail and care; coins from ancient civilizations. Kate stared at the objects, awestruck in spite of her professional nature and her desire to finish the job as expected.

"Beautiful, are they not?" said a voice. "Each object in that case is worth a small fortune."

Startled, Kate turned toward the source of the voice. It came from behind the large desk. The chair rotated to face her, revealing a man.

He seemed a short man; even seated Kate could tell that he probably only stood an inch taller than she. His face was round and plump though he did not appear to be large in the stomach.

"Look all you like," the man said, gesturing towards the case. "But please do not open it. Doing so without the appropriate foreknowledge of the intricate mechanism located within would cause an alarm to sound, and I would rather that you and I were not disturbed."

Kate warily backed away, reaching behind herself for the door, ready to turn and run if she felt it necessary, thinking she might somehow escape the room, arrest, prosecution. *I could probably take him down*, she thought, *if it comes to that*.

"Please don't be afraid. I would very much like to speak with you," the man said. After a pause, he added, "Kate Warne."

"How?" Kate asked. "How do you know my name?"

"You have not yet figured it out?" the man asked. "Why, it was I who contacted you in the first place. Do you not recognize me?"

Kate shook her head. This man looked and sounded nothing like the man she had met. It wasn't possible.

"Perhaps you would know me," said the man, "if I had a pencil-thin moustache, eyeglasses, a top hat, stood three inches taller, wore a Scottish dancing costume, and spoke like this." The man's voice raised to a high-pitched squeak.

Kate gasped, "Mr. Polrink!"

The man smiled. "Of course, Polrink is not my real name, just as that was not my voice, costume, height, hat, glasses, or moustache. Just as Kate Warne is not your true name. Disguises and aliases are a natural and frequent occurrence in our line of work."

"And what exactly is your line of work, Mr....?"

The man stood and extended his hand. "Pinkerton," he said. "My name is Allan Pinkerton."

Pinkerton had ushered Kate into one of the chairs in front of the fireplace and had poured her a snifter of brandy. The two continued their conversation.

"I have long been a fan of your work, Miss Warne," Pinkerton said.

"You have been observing me?" Kate asked.

"Of course," said the detective. "Observation is my greatest skill. I had heard your name from several of my associates and became intrigued. A woman of your skill and," he paused, looking for the right word, "disposition, shall we say, is a rare thing indeed. I began to follow your movements with great interest. The job you did in Philadelphia last year was most impressive. You are a skilled thief, saboteur, infiltrator, and on at least one occasion, assassin."

Kate put the snifter down on the side table between the two chairs, thinking once again of escape. "Am I to be turned over to the authorities then? Did you lure me here as a trap?"

"Certainly not, my dear," laughed Pinkerton. "I lured you here as a test!"

"A test!" exclaimed Kate.

"Yes, Miss Warne, a test. I apologize for the subterfuge and any inconvenience, but I needed to see your abilities firsthand. I had to see if you lived up to the hype, so to speak."

Annoyed, Kate said, "It wasn't much of a test, Mr. Pinkerton. Your men are ill-trained, unmotivated and unprofessional."

The detective laughed again. "Oh, but those are not my men," he said.

"Not your men? But is this not your house?"

"Whatever gave you that idea?" Pinkerton asked.

"Well naturally, I assumed..." Kate started. "Whose house is this?"

"Do you know of Magistrate Perkins?"

Kate felt a chill run down her spine. "I'm familiar with the name," she said, icily.

"I believe you are more than familiar with the man's name," Pinkerton said. "You have had a run in with him on more than one occasion, if I'm not mistaken."

"No, Mr. Pinkerton, you are not mistaken."

"In fact, you blame him for the death of your husband. How long were you married before he was taken from you?"

Kate gritted her teeth and clenched her eyes shut to fight back the tears that always came too easily any time this still unhealed wound was prodded. She hated that her weakness was so easily betrayed, her emotions too close to the surface. "It was two months and five days," she said.

"I am sorry to broach the topic," Pinkerton said honestly. He stood and crossed the room. From her seat, Kate watched as he walked to the curio cabinet. "I want you to come work for me, Kate," he said. "I want you to come work *with* me. I believe you are uniquely suited to perform tasks that my male agents are unable, and ill-equipped to perform."

Regaining her composure, Kate said, "I prefer to be a contract player, Mr. Pinkerton. I'm not looking for a permanent position."

Turning from the display case, Pinkerton said, "I can provide you with incontrovertible proof that Perkins was behind your husband's untimely demise."

Kate jumped up from her chair. "What sort of proof?" she asked hastily.

"One thing at a time, young lady." Pinkerton pulled open the cabinet door. Kate could hear a bell ringing elsewhere in the house.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I told you that I had lured you here for a test," Pinkerton said. He removed a Faberge egg from the case and tossed it to Kate. She caught it deftly. "Now your real test begins. Bring that to me at my office in Chicago and we will discuss the terms of your employment."

For a moment, Kate considered telling Pinkerton to go to Hell. She had no love for law enforcement and felt that the man had made a fool of her. Furthermore, she relished the freedom that working as a freelancer afforded her. However, his promise of evidence concerning her husband's death intrigued her. Though she wouldn't admit it to anyone, in her heart she knew that she needed proof of her suspicions. The heavy stomping of boot-clad feet down the hall heralded the imminent arrival of guards, and no matter their level of skill or dedication, Kate knew that now that they were alerted to the presence of a thief, it wouldn't much matter. She slipped the egg into a pocket in the recesses of her jacket.

Moments later, the door flew open. Three armed guards stormed into the room, followed closely by a man who was obviously unaccustomed to running – or moving much at all – and completely out of breath.

"Hold it right there!" shouted the lead guard, his pistol drawn and aimed at Pinkerton's back.

"Good evening, gentlemen!" said the detective, his hands raised in the air as he slowly turned to face the guards.

Nearly doubled over, the large man flailed his arms, attempting to catch his breath. After a moment he was able to say, "Lower your weapons, men." A few moments later, he managed, "Pinkerton! What are you doing in here?"

"Hello, Magistrate Perkins," Pinkerton said. "I was touring your lovely home when I happened to hear a noise from this home which shortly preceded the ringing of that alarm bell. My overly curious nature forced me to investigate. I entered the room, and spied a man fleeing through that door." Pinkerton indicated the connecting door. "If you hurry, perhaps you will catch him."

Perkins shouted at his men to give chase, and followed, coughing and gasping behind them. "Stay here, Pinkerton!" he shouted over his shoulder.

"Certainly, Magistrate! Wonderful party, sir!" Pinkerton said, smiling broadly. Behind him, curtains flapped as wind blew through the open window.

One week after her escape from their meeting at Magistrate Perkin's house, Kate arrived at the Pinkerton offices in Chicago, the Faberge egg carefully tucked into a suitcase. After convincing the guard at the entrance that she was not the new secretary and that she was there to see Mr. Pinkerton, she was escorted to his office.

Pinkerton's office was much less impressive than the office where she had found him in New York. Cluttered and cramped, the office barely contained the desk behind

which he sat. Photographs and files lay scattered on every surface. Wigs and other disguise pieces hung from hooks on the walls. Pinkerton looked up from the book he was reading and smiled.

“Miss Warne!” he said, warmly. He stood up to shake her hand. “I’m so glad you could join us. I was beginning to wonder.”

Kate blushed. “I had some trouble securing transport from New York,” she admitted. She pulled the egg from her case. “I brought this.”

Pinkerton took the egg from her, seemingly not recognizing it. Finally, it dawned upon him what it was. “Ah yes!” he smiled. “This little thing.” He tossed the egg over his shoulder. It shattered against the wall. He laughed at the shocked expression on Kate’s face. “Don’t worry, my dear. It was nothing but a worthless forgery. I have been investigating the appearance of several dozen inauthentic Faberge eggs.”

“Does Perkins know?” Kate asked.

“Well, he does now. In the course of ‘investigating’ for him the theft of one of his precious trinkets, I ‘discovered’ that several other of his baubles were forgeries as well. He was most displeased indeed,” Pinkerton laughed. “Of course, that did nothing to alleviate his anger with you – well, not you specifically, but, you know, ‘Whosoever hath violated the sanctity of my inner sanctum’ and all that. Not even the gold from the bank which underwrote insurance on his transactions to obtain the eggs could appease him.”

“I care nothing for his appeasement.”

“Yes, dear. I get it. You are angry with the man.”

“Angry?” Kate wondered. “Anger does not come close to describing how I feel about this man. I would tear the very flesh from his bones, given the chance.”

“My my my!” exclaimed Pinkerton. “Let us take a deep breath and calm down before we proceed. All this ire in the air is liable to give me a headache. And this is no place to receive a lady anyhow. Will you walk outside with me?”

Kate accompanied Pinkerton on a walk through the city. He seemed reluctant to discuss matters of employment, or to speak more about Perkins, but Kate was possessed of incredible patience. She knew that sooner or later, he would come around to talk about business. Instead they spoke of unrelated topics: trivialities such as the weather and the city, Pinkerton’s travels, and Kate’s love of music. She found herself enjoying the time she spent with Pinkerton in spite of the fact that her instincts told her not to trust him. He was a good conversationalist, and a naturally easygoing and charming man. Kate suspected that he could turn that around in the blink of an eye. She sensed a boiling temper lurking just below the surface of the man’s personality.

They had stopped in a large park, where hundreds of people were enjoying an unseasonably warm spring day. As they walked, Kate’s eyes darted all around, trying to take it all in. She had spent most of her life living near, but not in, New York City, and while she had made the occasional trip to the urban center, she had never passed much time there. She enjoyed watching as people frolicked and laughed, picnicked under trees, and read books on park benches.

“This pleases you?” Pinkerton asked. Kate glanced at her walking companion and realized that she had been smiling broadly.

“Yes,” she admitted. “I enjoy seeing people enjoy themselves. This is not the environment to which I am accustomed, but perhaps I was made for it.”

“That is good. Under my employ, you will have to spend much time amongst many people. You will have to be able to lose yourself in a crowd, but never lose your faculties.”

“I think I am capable of that,” Kate replied.

“Good, good. You know, my associates think I have lost *my* faculties, hiring a woman to do what is commonly considered a man’s work.”

“You said yourself that I am capable of doing things that many men cannot.”

“Yes, and that is what I tell them. Men often forget themselves when in the presence of a woman, especially one as charming as you. They will say things to you that they would not tell their closest confidante or their co-conspirators, as the case may be. You will be able to go places and do things without raising the slightest suspicion. You will be able to learn things that even I myself could not.”

“We have not yet discussed the terms or nature of my employment, Mr. Pinkerton,” Kate said.

“Tut tut, we will come to that,” Pinkerton said. “Let us sit and enjoy the day for a moment.”

He showed her to a nearby park bench, situated just off the main pathway through the park. They sat in silence and watched as – Kate felt – the whole world passed them by. Men and women on lunch dates strolled arm in arm; nannies wheeling baby carriages walked by, cooing to the tiny bundles inside; children scurried about playing games of tag and hide-and-go-seek while their custodians frantically tried to keep them in line. Presently, two men walked towards where Kate and Pinkerton sat. Kate could hear their voices raised in angry debate well before she saw them approach. They appeared to be arguing about a financial matter.

Turning to watch the men, she saw that they were both of average height and description. They were dressed similarly, in suits and hats of decent cloth and cut. Their loud voices caused conversations and activities all around to stop as they passed. Kate looked over at Pinkerton, but the detective appeared not to be paying attention at all.

When they had gone, he turned to Kate and asked, “What can you tell me about those two men?”

Kate thought about the question, then said, “By their clothing, they seemed well-to-do. Their suits looked European. One man wore Italian leather shoes. I would venture that both of them are in their middle-thirties. Their speech indicated that they had formal education, perhaps had even attended university. Only one of the men wore a wedding band. They were obviously agitated, though the source of their anger is not each other, but rather a moneylender who they believe has wronged them. I imagine they are in business together and this loan was used as seed money to get started.”

Pinkerton nodded. “That is very good, Kate. You managed to make several key observations in a short period of time. Granted, you missed some things, such as the fact that one man is Jewish and the other Catholic; that one man recently sprained his ankle – probably three weeks ago, judging by the slight hitch in his stride; and that there will undoubtedly be violence in the future for these two gentlemen.”

“Violence?” Kate asked. “They aim to do harm to this moneylender?”

“Ay, they do,” Pinkerton said. “But I believe that the harm will come to them. This is not – how did you put it? – the environment to which they are accustomed.”

“Should we not do something then? Dissuade them from their actions? Call the police?”

“And tell them what? These are nothing but the observations and musings of a single man. I am not an oracle nor a soothsayer. I may be entirely wrong. They may come to their senses and leave well enough alone.” Pinkerton paused. “Or, they may spend the evening in a local tavern, imbibe too many spirits, and drunkenly decide that violence is their only recourse.”

August 10th, 1860
Chicago, IL

A letter from Kate Warne, to her mother, Isabel Hampton, never signed or mailed.

Dear Mother,

I hope this letter finds you well. I know it has been ages since we last spoke and I know that I am to blame for that long interval and you have my apologies a thousand times. I have changed so completely since then and every time I think to write to you, I come to the conclusion that I am no longer the girl you knew, and think that there is little point. But recently, I've come to realize that there is no excuse for pushing away family, not even the death of one's husband and child. I know you only ever wanted to support me and that I rejected that offer coldly.

I am in Chicago now and I am in the employ of Allan Pinkerton's National Detective Agency. I know it is not what you wanted for me, and I daresay it is not what I envisioned for myself, but I have found something that I am truly good at and it is helping me to have steady work. Mister Pinkerton is a kind and good man and he has taught me a great deal about the world and about myself. “These are strange times, Miss Warne,” he says, “and there is much you have to offer your country.” My country! How little I think about this being *my* country. But with the secessionists clattering their swords, the government has need of people such as we to learn things that they cannot learn.

I know you will find this hard to believe, but I am quite capable of passing myself off as a vivacious Southern belle! The transformation is not that difficult. It merely takes a few more ruffles here; a touch more rouge there; a slight change in accent. The key to my success has been the almost imperceptible change in attitude. Some women might put on the dress, put up their hair, do the voice, but they would still be missing something. Something your average Northern gentleman wouldn't notice but which would tip off a Southern gentleman in a heartbeat. And then her cover is blown, and she am sunk, stuck stammering and stuttering in an upstairs bedroom at the back of an Atlantan or Louisvillian mansion with security guards asking just what she's doing there, and the mascara running down her face because she thinks that maybe if she cried, they would have pity on her. But they don't, because, just like you, they are professionals, and nothing is going to sway them but the truth. Or maybe, just maybe, one more well-crafted lie.

I am sure that this letter is doing more to worry you than to reassure you that I am doing well, but trust me, mother, I *excel* at this work. I am naturally suited for it. I feel at

home for the first time since Robert and James were taken from me. I did not think it possible again, but I actually feel happy.

Know that I love you,

February 3, 1861
Baltimore, MD

A light snow fell as the 10:15 train from Richmond pulled into the station, its brakes hissing and steaming, the cars shuddering to a halt. Porters rushed to meet the passengers and help them with their luggage. Kate Warne, emerging from a luxury sleeper car near the middle of the train refused any assistance.

“I carried my own bags my whole life,” she said, her voice dripping with charm. “I see no reason to stop now.” The porter tipped his cap at her, grateful for one less burden to bear and ran off to help someone else.

The tags on her luggage identified her as Mary Barley, a name Pinkerton had chosen for from a collection of female aliases and identities. Fabricating these was a relatively easy task as there were few methods for quickly confirming their validity. Short of doing lengthy research into genealogy and family history, the only method of doing a background check on a person was by word of mouth. Pinkerton had assured Kate that any check would come back with nothing but glowing reviews.

Kate had taken a train from Chicago to Richmond where she had spent a weekend getting into the role. She had played the Southern belle on more than one occasion, Pinkerton’s agency having been hired to infiltrate secessionist movement meetings and activities. Almost as soon as she put on a brightly colored dress, she was in character and ready to go. Still, Pinkerton wanted her to take her time with it.

And so it was Mary Barley who boarded the train from Richmond to Baltimore. Mary Barley: witty, charming, flirtatious, kind. Miss Barley had grown up on a plantation near Charleston, and was traveling to visit her dear cousin William Roth – another Pinkerton agent, already deeply entrenched in Baltimore – whose poor mother was ill.

Pinkerton had been commissioned by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company to provide security during President-Elect Lincoln’s journey from Springfield to Washington for his inauguration. Credible sources had turned up plots to damage railroad equipment during the trip, and an advance team of Pinkerton’s agents had discovered that these plots were just a small part of a plan to assassinate Lincoln. The details were spotty and the agents had exhausted every lead without turning up enough evidence to halt the scheme. Kate had been sent to Baltimore in order to do an investigation independent of the other agents. She was to have as little contact with them as possible, operating on her own in case any of the men had been compromised. Her only support would come from Roth who operated an anonymous Pinkerton safe house on the edge of the city.

She spotted Roth now, recognizing him from a photograph Pinkerton had shown her. He was a heavysset man, ten years Kate’s senior. A leering grin was plastered across his face.

“Miss Barley!” he exclaimed. “Cousin Mary!”

“Ah, Cousin William,” Kate said. “It is wonderful to see you again. How long has it been? Two years?”

“Far too long in any case!” said Roth, spreading his arms. “Come, let me embrace you.”

“I do not think that would be appropriate,” Kate said coldly, an instant and intense dislike for the man forming already. The thought of sharing a house with the man caused her to shudder. She hoped that her bedroom door was secured with a lock.

“Well then, give your cousin at least,” Roth said, leaning towards Kate.

She swallowed hard and steeled herself. She quickly leaned towards Roth and kissed his fleshy cheek.

“You are simply a vision!” Roth said, stepping back to admire Kate.

“And you are too, too much, William,” Kate said, struggling to stay in character in light of the revulsion she felt for this leering, unprofessional grotesque. “Perhaps we should be going? Certainly there will be time for small talk in the carriage.”

“But of course. Let us be off.” Roth looked around quickly. “Only, where is the man with your bags?”

“I have my bags right here. I will carry them myself. I am quite capable.”

“As you wish, my dear. I would offer to help, but,” with a grimace, he reached for the small of his back, “I am afraid I have been having lumbar issues once again.”

“Oh my dear cousin!” Kate said. “I am so sorry to hear that. Please, do not trouble yourself. I am more than able to manage without aid.”

“You certainly appear to be,” said Roth suggestively, again eyeing every inch of Kate’s body.

Kate rolled her eyes in disgust. Though she was used to this sort of treatment from the men of the agency, it never failed to annoy her. Without fail, they devolved into childish fools, spouting obvious and lewd double-entendres. Only Pinkerton himself showed her any respect, but none of the other agents followed his lead. When Kate complained about the treatment she received, he did nothing about it.

“It is the nature of the business, Kate,” he said. “And it is this sort of reaction from men which makes you so effective.”

So, she had learned to shrug it off, even smiling and going along with it when she had to. But, she had had a long day of traveling and was in no mood for such a disrespectful fool.

They reached Roth’s carriage and Kate secured her bag upon the luggage rack. The driver held the door open for the two of them and Kate ascended into the coach. As Roth followed her, Kate knew that he was undoubtedly trying to catch a glimpse of her undergarments. Seated and alone, Kate hissed at the man.

“You and I are to work together. For that to be possible, you are going to need to show me some respect. I realize you are not used to working with women and that it may be hard for you, but I need you to get it through your thick skull that I am not some object to be poked, or prodded, or leered at.

A stunned silence followed. “Why, Miss Barley, I am simply playing a role, just as you are. I have the utmost respect for women.” Roth paused, and then added, “Both in bed and out of it” He burst into laughter which was cut short abruptly by the sting of Kate’s hand slapping his face.

“If you think that you are being witty or, God forbid, charming, then you are sorely mistaken. Also, if you believe that I have not heard these ‘jokes’ of your before,

you are dead wrong. Rest assured that reports of your behavior will be included when next I speak with Mr. Pinkerton.”

“Going to tell on me to the big bad boss man, are you?” asked Roth. His voice, which up to now had been simply vile and reprehensible, turned threatening. “Go ahead. If Pinkerton thinks he can send a *woman*,” he spat the word out, “to do my job, then perhaps he no longer needs my services at all.”

“I have no intention of replacing you, Mr. Roth,” Kate said. “I am only here to investigate some angles which Mr. Pinkerton deemed it important to investigate. Angles which you and your men are unable to exploit.”

“I daresay you’ve exploited some angles in your time.”

A second blow left Roth stunned and reeling.

“I understand the idea takes some getting used to, but I will not be insulted. Not again. You have been given two warnings. You will not get a third. You may think that I am of the weaker sex but be quite sure that I am more than able to hurt you.”

“We’ll see about that,” Roth said, rubbing his cheek.

“I pray that you do not give me reason to show you.”

Later, in her room at the safe house, Kate sat on the bed, repeatedly loading and unloading the small Derringer pistol she kept strapped to her thigh, imagining how it would feel to hold the gun to Roth’s head and pull the trigger.

February 5th, 1861
Baltimore, MD

Dear Mr. Pinkerton,

Having arrived in Baltimore and being met by your man, William Roth, I have installed myself at the house which he operates for the agency. I will not now discuss the many unpleasant things that man said to me, for I am sure that you, in your wisdom, know what type of man he is. Even considering that I am a pioneer in this field of detective work and that I am as foreign to him as an Arab, he is a ridiculous and obscene man. It is only because of my deep respect for you that I have not killed him. I can make no promises, however, that I can hold out. I assure you that I do not say this in jest. I have given him several rebukes, presented as warnings against grievous bodily harm. They seem to have worked as he is no longer speaking to me, save for when it is absolutely necessary.

But you know me to be a professional operative, sir, and that I would never let a man – even one as offensive as he – delay or impede me in the execution of my duties, and it is my mission here that is the true subject of this letter.

My work proceeds apace. The introduction that you arranged with Bonita Lassiter went well. She greeted me as if I were an old friend she had not seen for years. Some day you will have to tell me how you manage such miracles. If it is a trade secret, I understand, but know that I am incredibly curious.

I have been invited to a party at the home of Mr. Clayton Abernathy, as Mrs. Lassiter’s guest. If Abernathy is who you think he is, and his associates are of a similar mind, I should be able to learn much. I understand that until I hear from you, I am not to

engage in any suspicious or illegal activities, but will instead utilize your so-called “societal engineering” to extract as much information as I possible can. Mary Barley will be the belle of the ball. I will write again when I know more.

Yours,
Kate

Bonita Lassiter had taken to Kate immediately, insisting that they dispense with “silly formalities” and call each other by their Christian names. The woman was pleasant enough, but Kate detected something under her cheerful exterior that she could not quite place. It was a current of something – distrust, perhaps, or snobbery. It may have just been Kate’s professional paranoia flaring up. She was always overanalytical while on a job. It kept her safe when it wasn’t getting in her way. *Just keep your eyes open, and you’ll be fine*, she thought.

It had only taken a few minutes of conversation before Lassiter had told her that she simply had to join her and her husband at a party the coming Friday evening. Mary Barley responded that she would be pleased to attend. Kate could scarcely believe it had been that easy.

Clayton Abernathy was known to the Pinkerton agency as a Southern agitator and an advocate of secession. The other agents had been unsuccessful in all their attempts to get closer to the man, but with one conversation, Kate had been invited into his home.

The house, set at the top of a large hill was formidable. A three-story, twenty-room mansion, it commanded an impressive view of the city which spread out below. Kate stepped out of the carriage that Mrs. Lassiter had sent to collect her and whistled appreciatively. She knew that Abernathy had somehow married into his money. Mrs. Abernathy’s family hailed from Sussex, England – landowners and gentry, they had been amongst the first to settle Baltimore. Charles William Gault, Dora Gault Abernathy’s great-grandfather had come to the colonies, tired of being a little fish in the big pond of England. He decided to try his hand at conquering new lands, albeit financially, rather than from any trailblazing spirit. By all accounts, he had done quite well. Now Abernathy was reaping the benefits. His ability to meet, woo, and marry Miss Gault was something of a mystery amongst his fellows, but it was the culmination of years of practicing and honing his charm and wit. Being suited for little else, it was his most outstanding accomplishment. Now, he could truly afford to relax and enjoy the fruits of his “labor.” Kate was greeted by a houseboy – a servant, rather than a slave, Kate noted. She was surprised that such a vociferous proponent of slavery and secession did not appear to own slaves himself. Whether these servants were indentured or hired outright, Kate did not know. She imagined it was the latter, but whether this thought came from educated guess or prejudice against the man who employed them, she did not know.

Inside, the house was just as lovely as outside. The foyer opened onto a large receiving room which functioned solely as a location for Mr. and Mrs. Abernathy to greet their guests. Kate stepped in line hoping for an introduction. Before she could make it to the front, however, Mrs. Lassiter spotted her and pulled her away to the parlor.

“I am so delighted you could make it, Mary,” she gushed.

“Thank you ever so much for the invitation,” Kate replied. “This is a lovely party.”

“Isn’t it just? Mr. and Mrs. Abernathy do know how to throw a party.” She lowered her voice conspiratorially, “Well, he does, anyhow. She doesn’t bring much to the table except for the money.”

Kate giggled, “Mrs. Lassiter, you are too much!”

Lassiter laughed along with Kate, “I do so enjoy your company, Mary. I find so many members of our sex are too worried about being prim and proper to have any fun!”

The party was a lavish affair. Baltimore’s best and brightest were in attendance. At least one hundred people milled about in the Abernathy home, sampling appetizers, sipping wine and chattering endlessly. Most of the conversation topics surrounded the weather and the economy, though Kate did overhear some grumbling about the new president and the state of the union and secession. Mrs. Lassiter didn’t allow Kate to linger long enough at any particular conversation, having taken Kate by the arm and sweeping her around the house, introducing her to many of Baltimore’s elite. Kate made small talk with them all, repeating her cover story to anyone who asked, listening when she was able, but learning little.

Seated in the parlor amongst a group of gossiping Southern women, Kate was finally introduced to her host, Clayton Abernathy.

“Mr. Abernathy,” Kate said. “It is a pleasure to meet you.”

Abernathy took Kate’s hand and kissed it lightly. He smiled. “The pleasure is all mine, Miss Barley, I assure you. What brings you to our fair city?”

“My aunt – my mother’s sister – is ill. My mother herself is too weak to travel. I came to Baltimore to help my cousin, William.”

“I am terribly sorry to hear about your family troubles. But, are they were able to spare you for one evening just to attend my party?”

“I admit it seems strange. I am certainly not in Baltimore for recreation, but Mrs. Lassiter insisted and my cousin said it would be a mistake to pass up the opportunity to attend. He assured me that he would be able to manage without me for one night.”

“I am pleased that he did. It would have been a shame not to make your acquaintance.”

“I feel the same way, Mr. Abernathy,” Kate said, smiling.

The group of women had dispersed, leaving Kate and Abernathy uncomfortably alone and awkwardly silent. Finally, Kate said, “You have a lovely home.”

“Thank you. It was built by Mrs. Abernathy’s great-grandfather, one of the founders of Baltimore.”

“He certainly chose a prime location,” Kate commented. “The view of the city is marvelous.”

“Have you seen it from the upstairs balcony yet? That is the best place from which to view it.”

“I have not yet had the chance, but I would certainly love to see it,” Kate replied.

Abernathy led her around the side of the house to a servant’s entrance. From there, they proceeded into the kitchen where the house staff was busy preparing the evening’s meal of roast goose, turkey confit, grilled asparagus, glazed yams, Western omelet fritters, and pulled polenta with radicchio-gorgonzola bruchetta. The food all looked and smelled delicious.

“Such delicacies!” exclaimed Kate.

Abernathy showed Kate to the back stairs, leading her up them, past the second floor and to the third. They traveled down a wide hallway and into a beautifully appointed bedroom at the front of the house. Kate knew that it was against every custom of the time for a married man to be in a bedroom with a single woman, and unaccompanied. She felt it wise to put up a fight, however feebly, just for show.

“Mr. Abernathy, I do not feel that it is entirely appropriate for us to be here alone!” Kate said.

“Oh dear, I had not even thought – I am sorry. If you are uncomfortable, we will withdraw to the party at once. I had merely wanted to show you the view from here.” Abernathy indicated the large French doors that opened onto a wide balcony.

“I suppose it is okay then,” Kate said. She added, “I did not mean to intend that you had wicked intentions, sir.”

Abernathy smiled. “Sometimes I find the restraints of our society to be *too* restrictive. Do you not?”

“I would tend to agree, Mr. Abernathy.”

“Such as that! Why must I call you ‘Miss Barley’ and you must call me ‘Mr. Abernathy?’ Are we not friends? I am not your employer, and you are certainly no schoolmarm ready to rap my knuckles for being unruly!”

“Certainly not!”

“Well then, why not, for now, call me Clayton?” Abernathy asked.

“Then you may, for now, call me Mary.”

“I am glad that is settled,” Abernathy said. The two stood, smiling at each other for a moment longer than was appropriate. Abernathy finally turned away, cleared his throat and said, “Come, let me show you the balcony.”

He opened the doors wide and ushered Kate out onto the balcony. Indeed, the view was breathtaking. The city, which was beginning to light up as night fell, spread out before them. Beyond the city, Kate could see Brooklyn-Curtis Bay and the recently constructed Light Street Bridge.

“I’ve never seen anything so beautiful,” Kate said.

“Nor have I,” said Abernathy, looking at Kate.

“Mr. Abernathy!” exclaimed Kate.

“Ah ah,” said Abernathy. “Remember? It is Clayton.”

“Clayton, I....”

Abernathy looked back out at the city and proceeded to point out various landmarks still visible in the twilight. Baltimore was a large and crowded city, even bigger than Chicago, and despite the fact that she was playing the role of the awestruck Mary Barley, Kate felt a little awestruck herself.

“It’s more than you are used to, isn’t it, Mary?” Abernathy asked.

“I had thought that Richmond was a big city, but it is nothing compared to this,” Kate replied.

Abernathy suddenly moved closer to Kate, his hand on the small of her back, his voice very close to her ear. She felt a jolt run up her spine at his touch. “And I thought I had known beauty, but it was nothing compared to yours.”

“Oh Clayton,” Kate said, her knees trembling slightly. *Dammit*, she thought, *stay focused*. She was ashamed of herself for allowing Abernathy’s charm to work upon her. She collected herself, “Clayton! Mr. Abernathy, what would your wife think?”

“I don’t want to talk about my wife right now, Mary. Not when I am here with you.”

“I am very cold, Mr. Abernathy. I should like to return inside.”

“Very well, my dear,” Abernathy said, ushering her back into the bedroom. Kate started for the door, but Abernathy stopped her. “Please, don’t go. I find you utterly fascinating. You aren’t like any other women I have ever known.”

“But we’ve only just met, Mr. Abernathy. You don’t know me at all.”

“Ah, but I feel that I do know you. I feel I have known you for ages.”

“That is certainly the wine speaking, Mr. Abernathy,” Kate insisted.

“I have not touched a drop of the stuff all evening. I am sober,” Abernathy said. “No wait, that is not true. Your beauty and charm have made me drunker than any spirit ever could.”

“Clayton, you are a silver tongued devil!” exclaimed Kate.

Abernathy drew closer to her, took her in his arms, and whispered, “I am glad to hear you call me Clayton again.”

Kate sighed, “And I am glad to—” She was interrupted by a knock at the door. Abernathy was prepared to ignore it, however, it persisted and grew louder.

“Mary, dear,” he said, “please, excuse me. If you wouldn’t mind standing over here.” Abernathy gently guided her to a location so that when he opened the door, she would be standing behind it.

Abernathy opened the door slightly. “What is it?” he asked angrily.

Kate peered through the crack between the door and its frame. She spied an older gentleman, with thinning white hair, a thick white mustache, and wire-framed glasses. She did not recognize him from the party, nor from any photographs Pinkerton had shown her prior to her departure. When he spoke, it was with a heavy Italian accent.

“Mr. Abernathy,” said the man, hurriedly. “I need to speak with you immediately.”

“Mr Ferrandini! I was not informed that you had arrived,” Abernathy said. “Sir, I am indisposed at the moment. Could it not wait?”

“No, it can not, Mr. Abernathy. It regards the matter of the trains. I am uncertain that you will—” Abernathy cut the man off with a gesture.

“Fine, fine. Wait one moment. I will meet you in the foyer.”

Abernathy closed the door and turned to Kate.

“I am afraid that I must excuse myself, my dear. I must attend to this business. It is a trifling matter, but one that demands my personal attention. If you would just wait here, I shall return in a moment.”

Kate watched the man leave, waited a few minutes and then slipped out the door. She had no intention of waiting for Abernathy. She had some research to do and had no time to wait around. Without saying goodbye to her hosts, she left the party, hailed a coach and returned to the safe house.

Roth was waiting for her in the sitting room, a nearly empty bottle of whiskey in his hand.

“How was your party?” he asked bitterly.

“It was a delightful affair,” Kate said sarcastically. “What do you know about an Italian man named Ferrandini?”

“Never heard of ‘im. He looking to get in your knickers too? Hah!”

“I haven’t met him yet, but once I do, I’m sure he’ll want to,” Kate said. She grabbed the liquor bottle from Roth, wiped off the mouth, and took a long pull. Roth feebly attempted to grab it back but in his drunken state was unable to do more than flail wildly in Kate’s direction.

“Gimme that back.”

“I think you’ve had enough of this for one night. I’ll take my leave of you now, Mr. Roth. Good night.”

Kate retired to her room where she locked the door and finished off the remaining whiskey.

February 8th, 1861

Dear Mr. Pinkerton,

I certainly wish that circumstances allowed for use of telegraphy as it would greatly expedite the conveyance of information between us. However, I understand your desire to avoid the involvement of an outside source. Your excessive caution – which some have described as paranoia – is appreciated as I know it only serves to better ensure the success of this mission, and in turn, my safety. Still, there is a need for swift communication. Perhaps you will consider installing telegraph machines with trusted individuals until such a device that allows for instant and private communication without the use of an intermediary is invented. (Yes, I realize that this idea is a flight of fancy, but I have had much time to think of matters such as this and how delightfully convenient it would be. Just imagine if I were able to somehow instantaneously and directly transmit this very message to you!) Barring that, perhaps we should establish some sort of code, incoherent to uninformed eyes but perfectly legible to you or I.

Since that is not the case and we are relegated to using the age-old art of the written word, and since I have not yet heard a reply to my previous letter, I have proceeded in my investigation. I attended the party previously mentioned, hopeful of a chance to meet Mr. Abernathy. It did not take long before I gained that chance and was cornered by that man. He seemingly has no scruples, lavishing most inappropriate praise upon me both in public and in private. Thankfully, Mary Barley is not the most timid – or dare I say, chaste – cover you have created for me in my endeavors and I was not forced to run off in a huff, aghast and unwilling to speak to the man again. I must admit that I was very nearly swayed by the man’s charm – and he is quite charming – but I remained strong and dedicated to my task.

It was almost by accident that I was able to learn anything. If not for the interruption by a certain Mr. Ferrandini, I might have left that house no more enlightened (and much more disheveled) than I had entered it. Fortunately, I was able to put myself in the right place at the right time (one of your key points of detective work; I have been paying attention to your lessons, thank you very much) and eavesdrop upon Abernathy and this man. From the tone of the conversation, it became obvious that Abernathy is just a player in this plot and that Ferrandini is the true quarry.

Finding Roth to be no help (what *does* he do for you, anyhow?) I set out the next day to see if I could discover anything about this man’s identity. I called upon the Department of Records within the Baltimore City Hall and was given access to census records under the guise of doing research into family history for the purpose of settling an

inheritance dispute. The staff was most friendly and helpful. It did not take long to discover the man I was seeking as there are only two Ferrandinis within the city of Baltimore and they are father and son. I learned that they hail from Corsica, have lived here ten years, and little else. I was not even able to discover a current address.

Not wanting to set out on foot and accost random passers-by, asking them if they knew this man (except as last resort) I decided to call upon Mrs. Lassiter. She received me warmly, and after asking after my Aunt's health and my cousin's well-being, she informed me, with a hushed voice, that it appeared I had made quite an impression upon Mr. Abernathy the previous evening. I feigned mortification knowing that my "flirty Southern vixen" might play well with the men, but probably wouldn't impress any proper lady. She assured me that there was no need to be coy; she had seen the admiration in my eyes. It turns out that you are not the only keenly observant soul in this country. The woman is a natural, and were she not a clear supporter of the Confederacy (and therefore an enemy of the Union) I would recommend that you offer her employment.

I was able to guide the subject of our conversation to less dangerous waters, saying that there was a man at the party that I had seen, but not had the pleasure of being introduced to, namely Mr. Ferrandini.

"Oh! You would like to get your hair done?" she asked. "Just between you and me, I wouldn't recommend Mr. Ferrandini. While he is very exotic, there are...locally grown stylists who are much better at their trade."

I insisted that I had heard many good things about Ferrandini's skills and that I would only see him. It turns out that Cipriano Ferrandini has installed himself as a hairdresser in the basement of the Barnum City Hotel. I have made an appointment to be seen by him. When next you see me, I shall have a new hairstyle. Do be sure to compliment me for it.

Yours,
KW

Kate made her way to the Barnum City Hotel the next day, finding the building easily. The hotel took up an entire block at the corners of Fayette and Calvert Streets. It had become to be widely known as the most luxurious and comfortable hotel in the country. Kate lingered at the front desk, sneaking a peek at the hotel register and saw the names of Samuel Morse, Eli Whitney, and Charles Dickens. The lobby was crowded and bustling, with rooms undoubtedly filling up as Lincoln's stop in the city drew closer.

Kate proceeded through the lobby, past two formal restaurants and a ballroom until she found the wide stairs leading down into the basement. Beyond a string of shops, including a pharmacist, a newsstand, a small women's boutique and a tobacconist, lay Ferrandini's salon. It was a tiny, dimly-lit room, but well-appointed and comfortable. He had a small waiting area and a single styling chair, occupied, when Kate arrived, by a handsome young man who was receiving both a haircut and a tongue lashing from Ferrandini.

"That will never work!" Ferrandini was saying. "You are too young and impetuous. When you have been around as long as I have, you will learn that only fools rush in in matters such as these."

"You are too cautious, old man. If it were up to you, we would do nothing at all."

“You forget to whom you are speaking. This is my plan. This is my....” Ferrandini trailed off as he noticed Kate standing in the waiting room.

“Hello,” he said coldly. “May I help you, Miss...?”

“Barley,” said Kate. “I am Miss Mary Barley. I have an appointment.”

“Yes,” said Ferrandini. “You are early.”

“I’m terribly sorry. I don’t know Baltimore very well at all and I overestimated the time it would take for me to get here. I’ve heard so many wonderful things about you and your salon, I did not want to risk being late. If you’d like, I could wait somewhere else and come back later.”

Ferrandini suddenly remembered his manners and was instantly smiling and cheerful. “No, no, no, Miss Barley. It is I who should apologize. I’ve been terribly rude. Please, make yourself comfortable. I’m almost done with young Julian here.” He returned to cutting the young man’s hair. The iciness returned to his voice as he harshly whispered into his customer’s ear, “We will finish our conversation later.”

Kate hung her coat upon a hook and sat on a small sofa in the waiting room. While she waited, she pretended to peruse the morning edition of the Baltimore *Sentinel* while she strained to hear any further talk between Ferrandini and the young man. However, the rest of the haircut proceeded in silence.

When Ferrandini had finished, the young man stood from the chair and seemed at a loss for what to do. Ferrandini gestured toward a door at the back of the salon.

“Wait for me back there with the rest of them,” he said impatiently. “I won’t be long.”

The young man nodded and walked to the door. He opened it, allowing a cloud of tobacco smoke to billow out from a back room. Loud conversation escaped as well.

“And tell them to keep quiet,” the barber called.

Julian disappeared into the back room, shutting the door behind him, shutting out the noise from within.

“Just a moment, just a moment,” Ferrandini said. He brushed off the chair and quickly and efficiently swept the floor. Finally, he turned to Kate and said with a smile, “I am ready for you now, Miss Barley.”

Kate stood and followed Ferrandini back to the barber chair where she sat. Ferrandini swept a cape over her shoulders and fingered her long chestnut tresses.

“Might I say, you have very lovely hair,” he said.

“Thank you, Mr. Ferrandini. Is that your professional opinion?” Kate asked.

“It is,” Ferrandini said. “Professional, and personal. It is thick, but not heavy. Very healthy. You were blessed with wonderful hair.”

“You are too kind. I will be sure to thank my parents for their generosity.”

“Oh no, be sure to thank God.”

“I will not forget to include it in my prayers this evening. I shall mention it along with my hopes for the continued good health of my family, friends, and,” Kate tried a gambit, “our President-elect.”

Ferrandini abruptly dropped Kate’s hair and turned away, setting about preparing his instruments. Kate could see his expression in a large mirror on the wall. The smile had left his face and had been replaced by an ugly scowl.

“I’m sorry, sir. Did I say something inappropriate?” Kate asked.

Ferrandini whirled again. The smile had returned to his lips, but it was thinner, tighter, and he held a pair of scissors rather menacingly.

“No, not at all,” said Ferrandini somewhat unconvincingly. He began to cut Kate’s hair and said nothing more.

“I’m sorry if I interrupted your conversation earlier,” Kate offered.

“Don’t be silly, Miss Barley.”

“It’s just that it seemed urgent. I felt that I was intruding.”

“Of course you weren’t. In addition to my career as a hairdresser, I earn some extra income on the side as a financial advisor,” Ferrandini explained. “I was just discussing an investment opportunity with young Julian. He is a foolish young man who refuses to listen to me. He would rush into a financial obligation without first knowing all the risks. Sometimes I lose my head when discussing money.”

“You’d best be careful then, with clients in your chair, lest they lose *their* heads.”

Ferrandini laughed uproariously. “Oh, dear, Miss Barley. That is too funny. I shall have to remember that.”

Kate smiled. “You have my permission to repeat it,” she said.

“You are too kind, Miss Barley.”

Minutes more passed in silence. As Ferrandini came close to finishing with the haircut, Kate knew she needed to pursue the topic of Ferrandini’s conversation with Julian.

“May I ask – I know I’m terribly curious, sometimes, I’m told, tediously so – what you were discussing? It’s just that I may come into some money soon and have been seeking some opportunity for its investment.”

“I am sorry,” Ferrandini said, “but I cannot. It is a matter of confidentiality. I am sure you understand.”

“I do,” Kate said. “I wouldn’t dare ask you to betray the confidence of a client.”

“Thank you, Miss Barley.”

“Could you instead consider my case? Independent of his, I mean.”

“Would that I could,” Ferrandini said. He gave the chair a spin so that Kate faced the mirror. “But we are finished here.”

“Oh,” said Kate, studying her reflection. The results were not spectacular. “Very nice,” she lied.

“I am glad you like it,” Ferrandini said. He helped Kate to her feet, and led her to the front of the salon. He quoted a price, which Kate paid, adding a tip she didn’t feel was deserved. Ferrandini left her to gather her things and set about tidying the salon. Kate took her time putting on her coat, hoping to discover something – anything that would confirm her suspicions about the hairdresser. Unfortunately, nothing came of it. Ferrandini seemed determined to outwait her, taking his time as well. Finally, Kate realized that any further dawdling would seem suspicious.

“Good day, Mr. Ferrandini,” she said with a wave.

“Good day, Miss Barley,” Ferrandini said. While the man had not seemed particularly out of sorts while Kate was there, she could sense palpable relief in his voice upon her departure.

Dear Mr. Pinkerton,

I have returned from my appointment with Mr. Ferrandini. Rest assured that you are absolved from commenting upon my new hairstyle; I would prefer that nobody notice it or mention it, if at all possible. Ferrandini may be a celebrated hairdresser, but I am certain that it is only amongst Southerners who have no concept of what true style is. Forgive me for sounding catty, but a woman's confidence in her hair is of the utmost importance to her. That I have given mine in service to my country is small consolation. I expect full reimbursement, not only for this appointment, but for subsequent appointments necessary for recovery and repair.

I have learned little more in terms of actual details of a plot against President Lincoln's life and well-being, but I am ever more certain that there *is* a plot. The locals whom I have met here act strangely. As the President's journey brings him ever closer to Baltimore, tensions are rising. Everyone is jumpy, apprehensive. They are waiting for him, I am sure of it. I know you expect me to obtain detailed plans and these I have yet to procure. However, there is a gala in the City Hotel this Saturday, the 16th, and I feel certain that I will be able to obtain an invitation. You must think that all I do is attend parties and have hair appointments, but you know me to be better than that.

Yours,
Kate

February 16th, 1861

For the second time during her stay in Baltimore, Kate was dressed for a party. Also, for the second time during her stay, she crossed the threshold of Barnum's City Hotel. What had been impressive during her midday visit earlier in the week was now doubly so as the hotel had been decorated extensively for the affair. Bunting hung from balconies, strings of lights ran from floor to ceiling, flowers seemed to cover every available surface. *If nothing else*, Kate thought, *these Southerners certainly know how to throw a party*. A waiter passed by with a tray of champagne glasses. Kate stopped him and took one for herself.

The lobby was bustling, full of individuals all dressed sharply for the evening. Kate recognized many individuals she had met at the Abernathy party, but none of them appeared to remember her. She wondered about the sort of impression she was making.

Kate was determined to make this evening a fruitful one. She planned to attempt further social engineering, and if that didn't pan out, she would, despite Pinkerton's instructions to the contrary, "engage in illegal and/or suspicious behavior." A quick detour to the basement confirmed that the lower level of the hotel, including Ferrandini's salon was abandoned.

Back at the party, Kate noticed strange couple completely out of place at the affair. The gentleman wore a fedora, a long cape, short pants and jackboots, while the woman wore a Chinese robe and her feet were wrapped in dirty gray bandages. Rather than being ostracized, however, they were surrounded by a captive audience. Intrigued, Kate approached the group.

The man was speaking loudly, while the woman danced in circles around him. The crowd that had gathered were clapping along, cheering whenever the man said something that they found particularly poignant.

“...and I say that is bupkis!” shouted the man. “If we are not free to choose our own destiny, why then did our forefathers gather this collective of colonies into a nation in the first place? Would we not at be better off still under British rule? At least then, our tea would not be so expensive!”

The crowd burst into applause. Kate turned to one observer and asked, “Who is that man?”

“That is Mr. Hutcheson,” replied the man. “He is a great speaker, is he not?”

“He’s a great something, alright,” Kate said under her breath. The man was ridiculous, garish, and far too overt in his disdain for the Union to be genuine, Kate thought. But still, it was the strongest lead she had and she would be remiss if she didn’t pursue it. So, she lingered at the edge of the crowd, half-listening to Hutcheson’s rantings while she scanned the crowd for signs of Abernathy and Ferrandini, neither of whom she had seen thus far.

Hutcheson’s speech eventually trailed off, having invoked the wrath of God, good Southerners everywhere, and common decency upon any man, institution or entity who tried to take away his given rights to own another man, drink as much whiskey as he wanted to or dance on Sunday mornings. The crowd dispersed, and Kate was left standing, facing Hutcheson and the dancing woman who was now busy gathering up a handful of coins that the crowd had thrown at their feet. Kate shook her head, wondering what other entertainment the evening would have to offer. She was turning to leave when the Hutcheson stopped her with a piercing gaze, filled with uncomfortable familiarity.

“I don’t believe we’ve had the pleasure of meeting,” Hutcheson said.

“We have not,” Kate replied.

“Ah, yes, well. Allow me to rectify that. I am Mr. John Hutcheson, and this,” he gestured towards the robe-clad woman, “is my associate, Miss Hattie Lewis.”

“Pleasure to meet you,” Kate said automatically. “My name is Barley.”

Hutcheson crossed the ten feet of floor that separated them and asked, “*Miss Barley?*”

Kate sighed. “Yes, Miss Barley. Miss Mary Barley.”

Hutcheson took Kate’s hand and kissed it delicately, though he looked as if he were considering more. “It is a pleasure to meet you.”

Kate took her hand back distastefully. “Indeed. If you’ll excuse me....” She searched for an excuse to leave Hutcheson’s company.

Hutcheson leaned in more closely and whispered, “I think your cover may have been compromised.”

Kate recoiled in shock. “Who are you?” she demanded.

“Why have you never heard of John H. Hutcheson? Southern loyalist? Performer extraordinaire? Gadfly, layabout, ne’er-do-well? Or perhaps, John H. Hutcheson, comedian, sharpshooter and master chef? No?”

Kate shook her head. Hutcheson lowered his voice again, “Perhaps you have heard of” and his voice changed to one very familiar to Kate “Mr. Allan Pinkerton, detective, loyal Unionist, friend to honesty, foe to crime?”

“Mr. Pinkerton!” Kate hissed.

“Quiet, Kate,” Pinkerton said. “It wouldn’t do to be overheard.”

“When did you arrive? What are you doing here?”

“I arrived this morning, and I’m doing the same thing you’re doing: attempting to serve our country’s good by protecting the life of its leader-to-be.”

Kate gazed past Pinkerton at the dancing woman who was now making a circuit around the room, holding Pinkerton’s hat and asking each man she passed for a donation of any change they could spare.

“Who is *she*?” Kate asked.

Pinkerton glanced over his shoulder. “Ah, that is Miss Hattie Lawton – she’s going by Lewis on this mission – another fine addition to the Pinkerton Woman’s Detective Agency.”

“The what now?” Kate asked.

“Oh, I neglected to inform you. I’ve decided that my success with you could be duplicated, so I’ve established – much to my sons’ displeasure, mind you – a division within the agency made up of female agents. I know you were proud to be the only woman amongst us, but take heart in knowing that you will always have been the first. And besides, now you’ll have someone to talk to.”

Kate wrinkled her nose in disgust. “I’m not sure that we’d have that much in common.”

“Oh come now,” Pinkerton said. “She’s quite charming, in her own way. She does tend to get lost in her roles, though. I told her to play eccentric, but she’s taken it well beyond there and all the way to flat out crazy.” Pinkerton sighed. “Still, she’s amusing. And very convincing.”

“Speaking of convincing,” Kate said, “that was quite a show you put on there.”

“Did you enjoy it? I was quite proud. Wrote it on the train from Chicago.”

“It was hardly subtle.”

“Subtlety, I’ve found, is not an art that these people have much appreciation for. No, better to go over the top, let people have no doubts about where your loyalties lay.”

“If anyone believed that act, they’ll have no doubts about yours.”

“Exactly.”

“You said that you think my cover may be blown?” Kate asked.

“Indeed. I noticed a distinct chill exhibited towards you by many of those in the crowd. Either they suspect you are a Unionist, or else you did something, in your few days here, to anger them.”

“I did attempt to provoke Ferrandini – you received my letters, didn’t you? – with a prayer for Lincoln’s health,” Kate admitted.

“And why, pray tell, did you do that?”

“I’m not sure. I supposed I had tried everything else.”

“So instead of the subtle approach, you took a blunter tactic,” Pinkerton suggested.

“I imagine I took the wrong approach.”

Lawton returned, Pinkerton’s hat almost filled with coins. Taking the hat from her, Pinkerton asked, “How much, do you think?”

“About twenty-five dollars, all told,” Lawton said.

“This will make a fine donation to someone’s cause,” Pinkerton mused.

“Hello Miss Warne,” Lawton said. “It’s a pleasure to meet you. Allan has told me so much about you.”

Allan? thought Kate. *She calls him Allan?*

“I wish I could say the same about you,” Kate replied. “I’ve heard next to nothing about you.”

“Well,” Lawton said, “I’ve only just come on board. But Allan says I’m a natural. That I have a great future ahead of me in the business.”

“That’s splendid. Will you excuse *Allan* and me for a moment?”

Lawton looked at Pinkerton who, with the slightest movement of his eyes, told her to leave them in private.

“Are you sleeping with her?” Kate demanded.

For the first time in their association, Pinkerton appeared not to have anticipated Kate’s question. “What?” He laughed nervously. “Of course not! Miss Warne, don’t be ridiculous. You sound just like my sons.”

“Well, your sons are as observant as you, sometimes. The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. They figured us out rather quickly.”

Pinkerton put his hands on Kate’s shoulders. “I think you have been undercover too long. The stress of this investigation is getting to you and causing your thoughts to be cloudy.”

“I’ve been in situations more stressful than this, *Allan*,” Kate said, pushing Pinkerton’s hands away. “Just tell me the truth.”

“I’ve always been truthful with you, Kate,” Pinkerton said.

“Then why won’t you tell me about Magistrate Perkins?”

Pinkerton sighed. “I had hoped that you would have forgotten about that by now.”

“How could I have forgotten about the man who killed my husband? And my child? How could any woman forget about that?”

“Living for revenge is unhealthy. While seeking it, the thought consumes everything that you are, so that once you attain it, you are rendered empty.”

“I want *justice*,” Kate said forcefully.

“You know, just as well as I do, that there is no such thing as justice for men such as Magistrate Perkins. Being of the law, he is above the law. There is nothing that could touch him. Confront him, and he will deny everything. Expose him, and he will destroy you. I had hoped that by giving you honest and consistent employment, I could help you to move on with your life, which up until now, you appeared to be doing.”

“Do you have evidence on him or no?”

Pinkerton nodded. “I do,” he said sadly. “Upon our return to Chicago, I will be glad to give it to you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Pinkerton,” Kate said. “Do you have further instructions for me?”

“Yes. Return to your room, pack your things, and leave for Chicago, by way of Richmond.”

“Are you serious? You’re pulling me off the investigation?”

“I believe that you have done all you can do here,” Pinkerton said. “Lawton and I will take it from here.”

“I won’t go!” Kate insisted. “This is my case.”

Pinkerton corrected her, “It is *my* case, Miss Warne. It is my duty to see to the safety and wellbeing of the President, along with the security of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad property. I feel that your current state of mind can only jeopardize that mission

and therefore I insist that you depart Baltimore at once. Report to Robert at the office. Undoubtedly he will have some work of a clerical nature for you to do until I return.”

“*Clerical work?*” Kate asked, insulted. “I’ll have you know that I will do no such thing.”

At that moment, two Southern gentlemen approached Pinkerton. The men introduced themselves and shook Pinkerton’s hand heartily, expressing their pleasure and delight at his performance. Pinkerton immediately resumed his role as John Hutcheson and began speaking animatedly with the men. Kate slunk away. As she left, Pinkerton called to her.

“Miss Barley, it was a pleasure to meet you,” he said loudly. “I do hope you’ll heed the little advice I gave you. God save the Confederate States of America.”

Kate returned to her room in Roth’s house, both glad and disappointed that the man was nowhere to be found. It would take much now, in her current frame of mind, to follow through on her promises to hurt him. It wouldn’t solve anything; would only make things worse. But when not thinking about the bigger picture, Kate could only think about hurting someone. Regardless, the man was out.

Kate began packing her things and started to cry. She realized she’d been fighting the tears until now, but as she carelessly threw her clothing into her suitcase, her tough girl exterior left completely. She hated to be rebuked so by Allan – by Mr. Pinkerton – but she hated even more leaving the investigation prior to its completion. She had little doubt that Pinkerton would manage to close it on his own – or with the help of this Hattie Lawton. But she also knew that, given a chance, she could have closed it herself. Frantically, she tossed item after item of clothing into the bag, blind with anger and tears until she came across what Pinkerton called her “sneaking suit.” Over the years the outfit had evolved into an all-black ensemble: tight-fitting trousers; a simple blouse; soft-soled shoes Pinkerton had procured from the Orient; a black knit cap. Wearing this outfit, she could effectively move silently and unnoticed into and out of any situation. She fingered the trousers contemplatively.

One clothing change and an hour later, Kate returned to the hotel. The party was still in full swing. The band played a waltz and the ballroom was full of dancing couples. Kate spied Pinkerton engaged in an animated discussion with several Southern men. Lawton seemed engaged in an animated discussion with a Southern potted plant.

Kate hastily went downstairs. As before, the lower level was devoid of people. She made her way back to Ferrandini’s salon. The wood-framed doors were locked, but proved no obstacle to Kate’s nimble fingers. She picked the lock and slipped inside. The salon was dark, but easily navigated; the light from the hallway was sufficient enough to make her way to the door to the back room. She stood at the door, listening for any presence within, but heard nothing. Slowly, she opened the door.

The back room was completely dark. Little of the light from the front was able to penetrate the blackness. The room stank of stale tobacco and whiskey, telltale signs of years of unventilated smoking and heavy drinking. Kate stifled a cough.

She removed a candle from an inside pocket and lit it with a Swiss safety match. The flickering light revealed a room roughly the same size as the front, salon and waiting room combined. The only noticeable feature of the room was a large wooden table

covered in papers, and empty liquor bottles and surrounded by cheap, battered, mismatched chairs. The room felt like a young men's clubhouse and was out of place compared to the opulence of the hotel. There wasn't as much to search as Kate had hoped there'd be. She didn't know what she'd expected, but she was looking, at least, for a filing cabinet where, under the letter 'L' she'd find a file for "Lincoln Assassination." There was no such luck in that regard. Instead, there were ash-covered, liquor stained, burnt and wrinkled papers, although some looked promising. Kate found a copy of Lincoln's itinerary for his inaugural journey, typed on official Baltimore & Ohio letterhead, along with dozens of newspapers, lists of names, scraps of paper with jotted notes, doodles, and strange strings of seven digit numbers. All of it was evidence suggestive of a Secessionist plot to kill the President-elect, but all of it merely circumstantial and none of it actionable. Kate searched for anything more damning but was unsuccessful. She was about to give up when she heard a noise from the front of the salon. She extinguished her candle and quietly moved behind the open door. Peering around it, saw that three men had entered the salon. Even in the dim light, she recognized Ferrandini and the chief of the Baltimore Police, whom she had met at Abernathy's house; the third man was unknown to her. Kate hoped they would remain in the salon area. There certainly weren't any good hiding places that she could see from where she stood and being discovered in Ferrandini's back room wasn't exactly the best thing for her, especially after having been ordered by Pinkerton to stand down. For the moment, at least, the men appeared to be content to converse in the front of the shop.

"We are set then, for the 21st?" Ferrandini asked the police chief.

"I don't know how many times I have to reassure you, Cipriano. Yes, we are set. All is in readiness."

"This is bigger than all of us. You will reassure me until I no longer ask you to. Yes, the two of you have much to lose if we are discovered, but my life is at risk as well."

"I grow tired of these meetings. The more often we get together, the more likely we are to be discovered."

The third man spoke, "You are right, Chief Kane. We are risking exposure by meeting, especially in the midst of an affair such as tonight's. My people tell me there are private investigators in Baltimore and some of them may well be upstairs as we speak. The day draws near and we have laid out all the details. Are you not yet satisfied, Mr. Ferrandini?"

"I say again that when I am satisfied, you will know it!" Ferrandini barked.

The police chief stepped between Ferrandini and the third man, facing the barber angrily. "You will *not* speak to the mayor in that tone of voice," he said, a threat implicit in his voice.

Kate gasped. *The mayor?* He was in on this plot as well? That the chief of Baltimore's police force was involved was bad enough, but the city's leader? It was unfathomable. The situation was much more dire than Kate had thought. In her shock, she lost her balance and stumbled against the door.

"Did you hear something?" Ferrandini asked, looking toward the back room.

"You're paranoid, Cipriano," said Chief Kane.

Kate stood with her back to the wall, holding her breath. She could hear foot steps approaching the door. A new voice came from the salon.

"Chief? Excuse me for interrupting."

“Dear God, Officer McCarthy, you scared me nearly half to death. Cipriano, it was just McCarthy you heard.”

“I’m sure it was from back here,” Ferrandini said.

“What do you need, McCarthy?” Kane asked.

“The mayor’s presence is required upstairs,” McCarthy said. He added, “Yours as well, chief.”

“Thank you, McCarthy. That will be all.”

“I could swear I closed this door,” Ferrandini said to himself, standing very close to Kate. She could see the outline of his head as he leaned into the room, looking around in the darkness. Kate willed herself to be as small and quiet as possible.

“Looks like it’s time for your speech, Mr. Mayor,” Kane said.

“Yes, let’s go,” the Mayor replied.

“Come along, Cipriano,” Kane called. “You won’t want to miss this.”

Ferrandini still lingered in the back room, contemplating lighting a candle and investigating further. After what seemed an eternity, he appeared to decide it wasn’t worth the effort it would take and shut and locked the door. Kate waited until the footsteps and voices faded and then let out her breath. *That was a close one*, she thought. But now, she finally had what she wanted.

By the time she emerged from the salon, having further perused the papers on the table, Kate found the hotel had emptied out. Hotel employees were sweeping the ballroom, the band was packing their things, and waiters were clearing the remnants of the food. Pinkerton and Lawton were nowhere in site. Kate imagined ruefully that they must have returned to their own – Kate hoped separate – rooms. She slipped out of the building unnoticed.

She could hardly wait for morning to come to report to Pinkerton about what she had learned. She doubted he’d had anywhere near as much luck as she had. While she knew he would be upset with her for disobeying orders, she also knew that his love for the country and desire to protect Lincoln would outweigh any anger he might feel. Let him fire her for being insubordinate; at least she would have proven to him that she was capable of seeing this job through to the end. She returned – once again – to the safe house and laid in bed, exhausted, but much too excited to sleep.

When morning came, Kate found herself awoken by Pinkerton himself.

“Sir, what are you doing in my room?” she asked, taken aback.

“I apologize for invading your private chambers, Miss Warne, but I needed to speak with you,” replied the great detective.

“And I with you.” Kate realized that in the night, her covers had been thrown aside. She hastily pulled them back over her body.

“I imagine we wish to discuss the same things,” Pinkerton said, sitting at the edge of Kate’s bed. “What did you learn when you returned to the hotel last night?”

Not for the first time since she met Pinkerton, Kate found herself simply amazed at the man’s natural intuition. She usually just went with it, not even bothering to ask anymore how he knew what he knew. This time she couldn’t help herself.

“Honestly, Mr. Pinkerton. I must know how you do it. Nobody saw me enter or leave the hotel last night.”

“You are correct. Until now, even I was not completely sure that you had returned. I merely suspected that you had, and you confirmed it. I had a feeling that our talk would have that effect upon you.”

“You could simply have asked me to break into Ferrandini’s salon,” Kate said.

“And where would be the fun in that?” asked Pinkerton, a smile on his face.

Kate groaned. “You are the most frustrating, exasperating, childish man I have ever known.”

“I believe that is true, Kate. I apologize for the tone I took with you last evening. Hattie Lawton causes me to lose my tongue sometimes.”

“You are forgiven, *Allan*.”

“Now then,” Pinkerton said, standing from the bed and opening the curtains to let in the morning light, “tell me. What did you find in the Corsican’s hair salon?”

Kate related the conversation she overheard, and mentioned the Lincoln itinerary along with some of the other papers she had found. Pinkerton didn’t appear surprised by any of it.

“Yes, that all lines up with the things I learned last night.”

“You managed to gather information less than twenty-four hours after your arrival?”

“Of course!” Pinkerton replied. “Last night I made the acquaintance of one Mr. Luckett, member of a Southern Rights group. It took me merely a few well-crafted cries of dedication to his cause, along with a \$25 donation, to be invited out for drinks with him and his fellows. Ferrandini was there, along with a Captain Turner, and several others. Ferrandini was most paranoid, constantly worried about government agents in the area, and feeling that there were men listening at all times.”

“That sounds like the Ferrandini I met,” Kate agreed.

“Despite his paranoia, he wanted to go over ‘the plan’ again, but the other men quieted him, noting my presence as an unknown factor. I took no offense to this, I assured them. Indeed I insisted they be careful about speaking around unknown persons, lest the plan be undermined. I offered to leave so that they might continue their conversation, but Ferrandini himself insisted that I stay, wanting to be amongst good Southern men who vow to fight for South Rights.”

“You’re simply amazing.”

“Thank you, my dear. Eventually, after a few drinks, Ferrandini began to rant about Lincoln. It was the usual stuff, until he vowed, ‘If Lincoln attempts to pass through Baltimore, he will never make it to Washington,’ to which all present agreed heartily.”

“What do we do now?” Kate asked.

“Since you already appear to be packed, I would ask you to travel to New York,” Pinkerton said.

“New York? Why there?”

“That is where Mister Lincoln will be.”

February 19th, 1861

Kate arrived in New York at 4:00 AM and took a carriage to the Astor House, the hotel where Lincoln was scheduled to stay. At the front desk, the manager told Kate there were no rooms available.

“The entire hotel is booked,” he explained, “for the President’s arrival later today.”

Kate didn’t want to reveal the true purpose behind her visit, but knew that she needed somewhere to lay her head for the day. After some back and forth, Kate turned on the charm, flashed some cleavage and slipped the man a twenty-dollar bill. That combination never failed to get her what she wanted and this time was no exception. A bellboy led her to the third floor.

The room the manager got for her was certainly not the best that Astor House had to offer, but Kate had seen much worse in her travels. Exhausted from her day of travels, she lay down on the bed. She had expected to be so relieved from having left William Roth’s lecherous presence, that she would be able to fall right to sleep, secure at night for the first time during her journey. However, she found that she was unable to sleep. Tossing and turning in bed, her mind dwelt upon the events of the past week, her relationship with Pinkerton, the details of the plot on Lincoln’s life.

Finally, at 7:30 AM, she gave up on sleep, rose, dressed and had breakfast. Pinkerton had instructed her to get in touch with, and deliver a letter to Norman Judd. Judd was a former Illinois Senator, advisor to Lincoln, and expected to receive an appointment in Lincoln’s administration. Kate sent a note to the man, asking him to come meet her at the hotel.

Later that afternoon, Judd appeared at Kate’s door, frantic and out of breath. Harried from arranging Lincoln’s cross-country trip, Judd had found himself somewhat over his head. Receiving an urgent note to meet an unknown woman at the request of Allan Pinkerton had added another item to his already long list of tasks he had to complete that day.

However, Judd was pleasant enough, and cordial to Kate, who introduced herself still as M. Barley, at Pinkerton’s request. Judd silently read the letter from Pinkerton with which Kate presented him. He nodded and hummed, then put the letter down and looked up at Kate.

“And you expect me to believe this?” he asked.

It wasn’t the reaction Kate had expected. “Why, of course I do. Every word written is the truth!”

“An Italian hairdresser is behind a plot to assassinate the new President? He is backed by both the police chief *and* the Mayor of Baltimore?”

“I heard it with my own ears.”

“And why should I trust that?”

“Sir, I work for Mr. Pinkerton who was hired by the B&O Railroad to oversee and protect their interests. In the course of executing our duties, we uncovered this evidence which illustrates a most dire plot against the life of a man that I know you admire and at least hope to work for.”

“Why should I think that you did not make this up?”

“That letter is from Mr. Pinkerton himself!” Kate exclaimed.

“A man that I do not know, nor do I know of.”

“Perhaps you should exercise due diligence, then, sir, and ask some of your associates. I assure you that he is known to them at least.”

“If you think I have time to investigate every suggestion of a plot against the President’s life then you have a poor estimation of my duties, Miss Barley.”

“And if you think that investigating every suggestion of a plot against the President’s life isn’t a *part* of your duties, then you are very much mistaken, sir.”

“Miss Barley, I came here to meet you despite an overwhelming list of tasks I have to run, partly out of curiosity, but mostly because I heard you were fetching and not the most moral of women. Fortunately for you, this latter has proven to be true, otherwise I would be most displeased and might have you thrown in jail for spreading such rumors. Unless you have anything else,” he said suggestively, “I will bid you good day.”

“Get out of my room,” Kate said crossly.

At four o’clock, Kate sat in a café across the street from Astor House, drinking a cup of tea. She’d sent a telegram to Pinkerton and was awaiting his reply. She’d paid a boy a half-dollar to find her wherever she was when the response came in. She had thought the hard part of this investigation was over, but hadn’t realized that convincing the President’s people that his life was in danger was going to be such a task. She turned over the newspaper she was reading when she heard a ruckus in the street.

Peering out the window, she saw a large coach approach Astor House. The carriage was followed by a large crowd of people. Many carried flowers, all were cheering. The carriage pulled up in front of the hotel and before it had even come to a complete stop, a door flew open and a large man ejected himself from within. He immediately began moving the crowd away from the carriage working as much with his voice as he did with his intimidating size.

“Come now, you rabble, leave some room. The man is tired. There’s no time for autographs or personal blessings. He’ll talk to you all in a half hour’s time. Give way!” he cried.

Kate put down her teacup and left the café. She stood against the front wall as the other carriage door opened and out stepped none other than Abraham Lincoln. She had never seen the man in person and was impressed by his height, but otherwise found him rather homely. He looked tired and haggard, as if the weight of the troubled nation had already been placed squarely upon his shoulders. *It’s going to get a lot worse before it gets better*, Kate thought. She wondered how he’d feel upon learning of the assassination plot – *if* he ever learned of the assassination plot.

Lincoln disappeared into Astor House, followed closely by his bodyguard. Moments later, Judd exited the carriage as well, casting a nervous glance up and down the street. He caught sight of Kate and gave her a look that was angry glare and lustful leer combined into one. He noticed the crowd beginning to close in again and fled into the hotel. The carriage drove away down the street.

Kate chuckled to herself and followed the party into Astor House. The lobby was filled with people, all converging on Lincoln. His bodyguard was barely managing, obviously flustered by the large numbers of people and unsure what to do. Lincoln appeared to be quite used to it and was unphased, shaking hands, smiling and talking briefly with each person that he saw. Kate pushed through the crowd, and upon reaching the President-elect, managed to say above the din, “Mr. President, it is urgent that I speak with you.”

Lincoln looked around until he found the source of the voice. Seeing Kate, he smiled and said, “Thank you for your support.”

“Mr. President, you don’t understand – this is a matter of life and death,” she said.

“Please forward all inquiries to my traveling secretary, Norman Judd,” Lincoln said. He sounded as if he were speaking automatically. Kate imagined the stresses of his journey and the new office had flipped a switch in the man’s brain causing him to longer hear what he or anyone else was saying.

“Honestly!” said Kate, exasperated. She caught hold of Judd’s jacket. “Mr. Judd, you must get me a private meeting with the President.”

Judd whirled around, facing Kate. “Oh, must I? And why is that?”

“You know exactly why,” Kate said. “You might not believe me, but you have to let the man decide for himself. It is *his* life, after all.”

“And how much do you think he would appreciate me if I allowed everyone who had some shred of information about a plot on his life have a private meeting with him? My job is to keep the man from being inundated with requests such as this from people such as you.”

Ahead of them, Lincoln was smiling and waving dumbly, repeating the same tired phrases. His bodyguard cut a swath through the crowd.

“What’s *wrong* with him?” Kate asked Judd.

Judd’s face turned pale. “*Nothing*. Quiet yourself.”

“That’s obviously not true. Something is amiss.”

“Keep your voice down, Miss Barley,” Judd warned.

“I’ll keep talking until you let me speak with him.”

Judd relented. “Fine! I’ll send for you this evening.”

Kate allowed Judd to rejoin Lincoln and his entourage. She watched as they sped up the stairs and out of sight. All around her, the crowd was nearly in hysterics, many weeping openly at the joy of having touched – or, failing that, having been near; or seeing someone touch; or most pathetically, seeing someone who saw someone who very nearly touched – the President. She had never witnessed such a strange phenomenon. What could one man offer that caused so many to lose hold of their senses? Kate, of course, had never voted, and thus had never really paid much attention to politics. From what she could tell, one candidate was basically the same as any of the others. What did it matter if his name was Lincoln or Douglas or Bell? But people seemed to sense something special in Lincoln. They acted as if they had had an audience with the Pope. Or, with God himself.

She remained in the lobby, waiting as the crowd thinned. People seemed loathe to leave, as if by remaining, they could somehow absorb some essence that Lincoln had left behind. It was absurd, and yet Kate couldn’t say that she didn’t feel it as well. Lincoln, though nothing to write home about in the looks department, did have a presence that couldn’t be denied. There was something in the man’s face that spoke of honesty, courage, and dedication. But there was something else there as well. Kate had seen it in the faces of many men – most recently, in the face of William Roth – but never in the face of one so revered or as powerful as Lincoln. It was fear. The way his eyes darted around the room undermined his appearance of calm and confidence. Kate wondered what he was afraid of.

She retired to her room and awaited Judd’s call. At 5:30, it came, in the form of Judd himself. Rather than let him into her room, lest he get any improper ideas in his head, Kate stepped out into the hallway with him. Sure enough, he was disappointed.

“I thought we might speak for a moment in there, Miss Barley.”

“I am quite happy to converse with you in the hallway,” Kate replied.

“But this is a matter best not heard by anyone else,” Judd looked up and down the hall furtively. “The walls have ears, you know.”

“No way, Judd.”

“But we would be far more comfortable,” Judd suggested.

Kate struggled to remain civil, but felt her resolve slipping. “Why is it that men like you always feel the need – the right even – to act so inappropriately? Do you think I am your plaything to be toyed with and tossed aside when you are bored? Why can’t we conduct this business above board without your lurid suggestions coming into play?”

“And why is it, Miss Barley, that women such as yourself,” Judd paused, his eyes traveling the length of Kate’s body, lingering inappropriately in several places (why was he staring at her elbows?), “will use your feminine charms and wiles when it suits you but balk at the suggestion of it from another? You go around flashing your tits to get what you want, but if I even make the slightest hint at something, *I am the villain.*”

“I do no such thing!” Kate protested.

“You act so prim and proper, but I spoke with the hotel manager. I was quite curious how someone whose name appeared on none of the reservation lists we received was able to secure a room the day of the President’s arrival. You would flash your bosom to get a room; what will you do to speak with the President?”

Stunned into silence by Judd’s statement, Kate could only turn and open the door to her room. Judd grinned widely. “That’s what I thought,” he said.

Kate followed him into the room. As Judd approached the bed, she rushed behind him, taking his left arm, and with her free hand she shoved him forcefully into the far wall. His breath was knocked from his lungs, his arm pulled back painfully. He gasped for breath. Kate kept him pinned to the wall.

“I’ve been patient with you thus far,” she said. “You have no idea how much bullshit I’ve endured in this past month, nor how many men have assumed they have license to speak to me as if I were their property. God gave me this body to use as I wish and in no other way shall it be used. You *will* take me to Lincoln now.”

Judd finally caught his breath, though he had trouble speaking. He managed to say, “I like it rough, Miss Barley. But this is *too* rough.”

Kate pulled Judd’s left arm even further, pressing harder on his back as she did. The man cried out in pain, “You’re breaking my arm!”

“You will take me to Lincoln now,” Kate repeated. “And you will not say another word while you do so, or I *will* break your arm. And as upset as I am right now, I can not promise that I will stop there. Am I understood?”

Judd nodded weakly.

“Are you certain? You seem incapable of keeping your mouth shut.”

“Yes, I understand,” Judd said.

Kate yanked his arm again. “I told you to keep quiet.”

She released Judd, who slumped against the wall. Kate stepped back and straightened her blouse. “Let’s go,” she said.

Judd struggled to his feet. He warily passed Kate and left the room. He led her down the hall to the stairs. Kate walked a safe distance behind him in case he got it in his head to try something further. She assumed that he knew it wouldn’t do him any good, but Kate knew that it was likely he wasn’t thinking entirely rationally. *Better safe than*

sorry, she thought. They walked down the stairs to the second floor and to the doors of a suite of rooms. Judd knocked on the door.

“Yeah?” asked a deep voice from inside.”

Judd looked to Kate for permission to speak. She nodded toward the door. Judd replied, “It’s me. Judd. And...a friend.”

“One minute.” Heavy footsteps sounded inside the room.

The door swung open. The doorway was filled by the large form of Lincoln’s bodyguard, Ward Hill Lamon. Kate had thought him big when she’d seen him from across the street. Up close, he was enormous. Kate took a step backwards.

“Who’s this then?” he asked Judd.

“My I present the lovely, vivacious, and mannishly strong Miss Mary Barley?”

Kate cut Judd down with a glare. “I’m here to see the President.”

“The President isn’t receiving visitors at the moment,” Lamon said.

“I tried to tell her, Ward,” Judd said, rubbing his sore shoulder.

“It’s of the utmost importance,” Kate said. “I’m here on behalf of Allan Pinkerton’s agency.”

“Pinkerton, eh?” Lamon said. “I know that bloke. He helped me out of a spot of trouble in Mexico back in ’57.”

“Well, then you know he can be trusted,” Kate said.

“I don’t know about all that.”

“Regardless, we’ve discovered evidence of a threat on the President’s life.”

“Oh yeah, we get a lot of threats. Get ‘em every day.”

“This one is no idle threat or macabre prank, Mr. Lamon. These men are serious, well-organized, and ready to act. They lie in wait in Baltimore for the President’s arrival.”

“Oh, Baltimore, yeah?” asked Lamon. “Yeah, we’ve got a report on that. Some poncey dago hairdresser? Named Cappuccino Ferraridino?”

Kate corrected him: “Cipriano Ferrandini.”

Lamon nodded, “That’s the one.”

“Wait a second, you mean to tell me that you *know* about the Baltimore Plot?” Kate turned angrily to Judd and shoved him roughly. “Why didn’t you tell me, you weasel?”

“I don’t know anything about it. I swear!” Judd whimpered. “What are you talking about, Ward? Why wasn’t I informed?”

“Didn’t want you to worry your pretty head, Judd. But, now that it’s out, Governor Seward sent some of his blokes down to Baltimore to look into it after we heard some rumors about railway tampering.”

Kate was livid. “There were other operatives in Baltimore? Those must be the ones that Ferrandini and his cronies sniffed out. Those fools almost cost me the investigation! They could have gotten me killed!”

“Sorry about that one, Miss,” Lamon said, “but you’ll have to take it up with the Governor. His men probably aren’t as good at the undercover thing as you are.”

A smirk crossed Judd’s lips, and he opened his mouth to say something, but, remembering Kate’s threats, thought better of it.

“I can’t believe they sent amateurs when the President’s life is at stake. And I can’t believe neither of you will take me or Mr. Pinkerton seriously.”

“Well, that’s the way it is,” Lamon said. A silence followed. The large man asked, “Is there anything else I can help you with today?”

“That’s *it*? What are you doing about this plot?”

“We’ve got it under control.”

“But you haven’t changed his itinerary. Mr. Pinkerton feels it would be foolish to even go through Baltimore.”

“The President won’t be swayed by threats, Miss,” said Judd.

“You stay out of this,” Kate snapped. “They obviously don’t trust you enough to tell you the whole story. You have nothing to add to this conversation.”

Judd again was about to speak but this time it was Lamon who cut him off. “The young lady is right, Judd. Stay out of this.”

Judd shrugged, apparently used to being swept aside. “Can I at least go to my room then, Ward? I’d like to lie down.”

“Go on in,” Lamon said, stepping aside. “Just don’t bother *him*.”

“I know better than that,” Judd said. Kate wondered if he did. Judd squeezed between Lamon and the doorframe. “This isn’t my first day on the job.”

Lamon shook his head after Judd. When he’d gone, Lamon said, “Old Abe’s regretting appointing Judd in charge of this trip. Had planned on putting him in the cabinet. Now that he’s spent all this time with the twat, he’s regretting ever suggesting it. Probably going to make him ambassador to Berlin just to get him out of the country.”

“Mr. Lamon, please. My employer has tasked me with warning you of the assassination plot and to help prepare alternate travel plans to assure his safety.”

“I understand, little missy. Pinkerton gives you a job to do; you want to get it done. Well consider us warned, and consider the Prezzy safe. You’re a true patriot and your country owes you a debt of gratitude.” He made the sign of the cross over Kate.

“Did you just *bless* me?” Kate asked.

“Yeah, I suppose I did. Couldn’t say why. Look, we’ve got everything under control.”

“Are you sure about that? What exactly are your plans?”

Lamon chuckled. “I’d be a pretty bad security chief if I just laid out our plans to some lady who came in off the street, wouldn’t I?”

“I’ve shown you my credentials,” Kate said. “If you don’t believe me, send a wire to Mr. Pinkerton. He’s in Baltimore now.”

“Oh, I’ve already confirmed your identity, as much as that’s possible. I know that you aren’t Mary Barley. Your name is Kate Warne – at least that’s the name you normally go by – and you are indeed in the employ of Allan Pinkerton.”

“If you know all that, why won’t you cooperate with me?” Kate asked.

“Because, as I’ve already told you, we have this under control. There’s nothing to worry about.”

“If I’ve learned anything during my time working with Mr. Pinkerton, Mr. Lamon,” Kate said, “it’s that there’s always something to worry about.”

“Wise words, Miss,” Lamon agreed. “You aren’t going to take no for an answer, are you?” Kate shook her head. Lamon sighed. “Figures. Look, I really shouldn’t be doing this, but what the hell? You seem like a fine lady, and you knocked Judd around, which is something I’ve wanted to do for three weeks now. You can come inside under one condition.”

“Which is?” Kate asked.

“Do not, under any circumstances, mention the details of what you know.”

“I can’t promise that.”

“Trust me, Miss,” Lamon said. “You’ll understand.”

Kate shrugged. “Fine, Mr. Lamon. I agree.”

Lamon retreated into the suite and beckoned Kate to enter. She stepped inside after him. Lamon shut the door.

The entryway opened onto a large sitting room with bedroom doors off to each side. At the far end, doors opened to a balcony which overlooked the street below. Kate could hear that there was still a crowd gathered outside. They still refused to leave the presence of their new President.

The man himself stood with his back to Kate, looking out at the crowd. Seeing this, Lamon barked, “I told you a million times to stay away from the windows.”

“I can’t help it,” he said in a quiet voice. “I can’t believe all these people are here to see me.”

“They’re not here to see you, you fool. They’re here to see Lincoln. But they aren’t going to, now, are they?”

“What are you talking about?” Kate asked.

Lamon sighed again and, addressing the man at the window, said, “Turn around. We have company. Come be introduced.”

When the man turned, Kate instantly knew why she had seen fear in his eyes in the lobby; why something had seemed decidedly off. It wasn’t Lincoln at all.

“Miss Barley,” Lamon said, “allow me to introduce you to Mr. Booth.”

Kate couldn’t believe her ears. She and Lamon had returned to her bedroom – Kate was certain that even if the large Aussie was no gentleman, he was more of a gentleman than she had encountered recently – to speak. She had made a pot of tea and the two sat – Kate at the writing table, Lamon on her bed – as Lamon filled her in.

“We realized that taking this trip was going to be dangerous. Originally, Lincoln wanted to go through Louisiana, Alabama, South Carolina. It took us ages to convince him that setting foot in any of those states was tantamount to suicide. We couldn’t talk him out of Maryland, though. Too close to D.C. to be a problem, he said. A great state of loyalists, he said. I think he knows it’s bullshit – pardon me – but he refused to back down.”

“So how did you get him to agree to a double?”

Lamon chuckled. “I wouldn’t necessarily call it ‘agreeing.’ Every president has a double – it’s a part of the job. You’d be surprised at how many assassination attempts have been thwarted because of the doubles. Some poor bloke thinks he just killed the president until it’s revealed that it was just some fool who *looked* like the president.”

“That’s actually happened?” Kate asked, astonished. “How come I’ve never heard anything about that?”

“It’s not something they go blabbing about, you know. They keep it all hushed up. Wouldn’t want the public to panic, or it to be general knowledge about the backups, you know.”

“So where is Lincoln now?”

“That would be telling, and that’s not something I’m going to do. I’m sure you’ll understand. But, trust me when I say that he is safe and out of harm’s way. And while he’s pretty pissed off at me and the rest of the staff for putting him on – shall we say – house arrest for this leg of the journey, but really, his safety is my prime concern. Like I’ve been saying all along.”

Kate paused thoughtfully and sipped her tea. The fact that it wasn’t Lincoln shed new light on her up-close perception of him. While he still managed to embody the man, and look, more or less like him, Pinkerton’s training had given Kate keen observation skills and she had been able to tell that something was off. When she’d seen him in the suite, he’d been caught out of character. He quickly became Lincoln again, but in that fleeting moment, Kate had seen that it simply wasn’t Lincoln. It explained the fear in his eyes. Certainly the man knew he was simply being used as bait.

“Who is *he*?” Kate asked.

“He who?” Lamon said, confused.

Kate jerked her head in the direction of the Presidential suite. “*Him*. The double.”

“He’s an actor we found in D.C. He fit the physical and psychological profiles and was looking for work. He’s a bit young to play Lincoln, so it’s been hell on our makeup people, but it works, for the most part, wouldn’t you say?”

“It’s quite impressive,” Kate agreed. “You should tell him to stop looking so damn scared all the time, though.”

Lamon nodded. “I know. I see it too. It’s in his eyes. They never stop moving, even when he seems to be looking right at you. He’s twitchy.”

“He doesn’t exactly scream confidence,” Kate said. “You say his name is Booth?”

“John Booth. Comes from a family of actors. His brothers and father are more accomplished than he is. Thought he could continue the tradition, but turns out he has trouble taking direction. Hasn’t quite made it yet. When we approached him, he was deep in debt and struggling to find work. Didn’t take long to convince him that this was decent work. Now he keeps calling it ‘the role of a lifetime.’”

“You don’t like him very much, do you?” Kate laughed.

“Does it show?” Lamon chuckled as well, shaking his head. “He’s not a bad bloke, I guess, but he can be pompous, and it’s true what they said about him taking direction. He’s nearly been exposed three times already. It’s cost us a small fortune in hush money. I have to treat him like a child. I feel more like a babysitter than a bodyguard.”

“It might be easier just to escort the real president,” Kate suggested.

“Ah, now Lincoln’s a fine fellow. A true statesman. Actually believes the words coming out of his mouth which isn’t something you’ll find in many of the politicians you meet. Going to be a real asset to this country.”

“Do you think he can prevent a war?”

“Not even for a second. No, Kate, this country’s headed for a real battle. Gonna be a bloody mess. But Abe will run it the right way. Knows how to surround himself with good people – Judd notwithstanding, and he’ll get his due – that will get the Union back on the path to righteousness.”

“You really believe that?”

“I do indeed,” Lamon affirmed.

Again, there was silence in the room as Kate considered this. Everything she'd read or heard of Lincoln had been lofty talk of him preserving the Union and she hadn't been able to buy into it. She knew that people caught in the thrall of some celebrity couldn't possibly have a clear perspective on that man's actual assets. But Lamon didn't appear to be in Lincoln's thrall. He wasn't convinced that the new president was perfect, or the second coming of the Savior. Rather, he knew that he was just a good man; exactly what the country needed.

"One more thing," Kate said. "What's going to happen to Booth?"

"I'm not sure I know what you mean."

"You know the report I've brought you to be credible, backed up as it is by Seward's own investigation. You know there to be a group of men planning to sabotage the trains and attempt to take the President's life. That it's not the actual President doesn't make it less true."

"It makes it a non issue. If Lincoln goes into Baltimore and is killed, all is lost. If Lincoln skirts around Baltimore and it is exposed, his credibility is shot. If a double goes into Baltimore and is 'assassinated' in Lincoln's place, then the plan is exposed; Lincoln gains incredible sympathy; many people who are leaning towards the Confederacy are, perhaps, swayed back to our side."

"It's just one city. Why is it so important that the train goes through Baltimore?"

"It's the third largest city in this country. If the President can't travel through Baltimore, how does that look?"

"Who gives a damn about appearances?" Kate asked. "This is a man's life I'm talking about."

"Booth knew what he was getting into when he signed up for the job."

"So did Lincoln," Kate countered.

"Touché. But surely you'd agree that Lincoln's life is worth far more than Booth's, right?"

"I didn't come here for a philosophical debate on the value of the life of an individual. I will grant you that Lincoln will do more for the health and prosperity of the Union than Booth will. However, we're not talking about saving lives here. We're talking about potentially throwing away one man's life to preserve the reputation of another."

"That reputation is highly valued. If it is destroyed, he will not be able to accomplish half the things that he should."

"Just don't go to Baltimore. It's that simple. Lincoln's a politician, surely he can find a way to get out of it."

"I'm sorry, but it's just not going to happen," Lamon said. "Even if I wanted to, there's no way I could stop Lincoln – or Booth – from going down to Baltimore."

"Then I guess we're finished here," Kate said sadly. She stood from the chair. Lamon took the hint and rose from the bed. He handed her his almost full cup of tea.

"I guess that's it, then. It was a pleasure to meet you, Miss Barley, or Miss Warne, or whoever you are. You are a singular woman, that much is true."

Kate shut the door behind Lamon and without hesitation strode across the room to her suitcase.

At midnight, Kate was ready. The halls were deserted, the parties long over. She approached the Presidential Suite silently. Kate bypassed the lock on the door and slipped

into the sitting room which was also empty. It seemed Lamon was not even trying to put on a show of extra security for the fake President. There was no man posted outside, and inside, everyone was asleep. She heard heavy snoring coming from a door to the right; that had to be the huge bodyguard making all that racket. That left the two doors on the left. She chose one at random, opened it, and went inside.

The light from the street outside that filtered in through the windows was not enough for Kate to easily see who lay in the bed. She approached carefully, not wanting to wake up the wrong person. The man lay with his face buried in several pillows. Kate shook him gently by the shoulder.

“Wha? Whozit?” the man mumbled sleepily, turning over. It was Judd.

“Ah, hell,” said Kate.

“You! I knew you wanted –“ a quick forearm blow to Judd’s head finished his thought for him.

“Nighty night, asshole.”

“Booth, wake up,” Kate whispered.

The actor stirred and then quickly leapt from his bed, ready to fight or flee at a moment’s notice. Kate covered his mouth with one hand and put the index finger of the other to her lips.

“Shhh,” Kate said. Booth’s eyes did the darting thing, fear transformed his otherwise handsome features into a grim mask. “I’m here to help you. You have to trust me.”

Booth’s face softened. Kate removed her hand from his face.

“What’s going on?” Booth asked.

“There’s a plan to kill the President in Baltimore. Your handlers are going to send you there anyway, without additional security.”

“They’re just going to send me to be slaughtered?”

“I wouldn’t put it that way,” Kate said. “I’m sure they wouldn’t just let you die. That wouldn’t look good for anybody. On the other hand, they don’t seem to be taking any precautions.”

“I knew I shouldn’t have taken this job,” Booth said ruefully. “Still, it’s better than playing Brasco in *Polkies Troubles With the Indians*.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Sorry. Theatre humor.”

“I’m sure in the right circles, it’s hilarious,” Kate said sarcastically. “Look, we don’t have a lot of time. I want to get you out of here. I’ve made all the arrangements.”

“Why are you helping me?” Booth asked.

“I’ve worked too hard on this investigation just to get turned away at the last minute because of some actor. No offense.”

“None taken.”

“Usually when we’re hired to do something, our clients take great interest in the results. This time, we find a plot against the leader of the country and nobody seems to care. I couldn’t let it stand.”

This seemed to satisfy Booth. “What’s the plan?”

“Grab whatever you need, but make it fast. We’re on a midnight train to Georgia.”

“Isn’t it past midnight?”

“Then we’ll take the 1 o’clock. Just hurry.”

The streets were empty as the halls. Tired out from their celebration of the President’s arrival, the New Yorkers had retired to their homes. A few inches of snow had fallen in the late evening and it still continued to come down. The air was crisp and cold, and the world was silent. Kate started to head down the street but saw that Booth had stopped at the hotel entrance.

“What the hell are you waiting for?” Kate asked.

“Never seen snow before,” Booth replied, his arms outstretched, his face turned up toward the sky.

“Never seen snow?” Kate wondered. She grabbed Booth’s arm. “Come on, we don’t have time for this!”

Kate looked up at the hotel and saw that lamps had been lit in the suite they had just vacated. Shadows moved behind the curtains. Kate and Booth ran down the street, the crunch of the snow under their feet the only sound. Kate looked over her shoulder and saw that a large figure had stepped out onto the balcony and was frantically scanning the street. He spotted the pair and locked eyes with Kate. She turned and shoved Booth ahead, running without looking back. They sped around the corner, where a carriage awaited them. Kate shoved Booth into the door. “Go!” she hissed.

They leapt into the carriage. Kate urged the driver to get the vehicle moving. He spurred his horses on and they all went cruising off into the night.

“I don’t know how they’re going to take this,” Kate said when she and Booth arrived at the station. Earlier in the day she had secured two tickets and had her bags delivered to the depot. “But they may well send men after us. We need to be disguised.”

“I could go as Lincoln,” Booth joked.

“Very funny,” Kate said. “Do you have any experience with cross-dressing?”

Booth eyed Kate’s outfit. If she put up her hair, with her trousers and tight-fitting shirt, she could pass for a man. “I assume you do,” Booth said.

“Yes, I do. It comes in handy from time to time. Come on,” Kate said, leading Booth into a bathroom. “I have clothes for you.”

When the New York police arrived at the station, they found nobody fitting the description Lamson had given them. Amongst the small group of people waiting for the 1 o’clock to Richmond (and points beyond) there was no young, quick-witted, strikingly beautiful woman. Nor was there a young, decent-looking, pompous, wanna-be actor. The police did meet (and were delighted by) a young, well-dressed man who was escorting his decrepit, stooped grandmother back to her home in Virginia. Staunch Unionists, the boy and his grandmother said they had come all the way from Richmond just to catch sight of the President as he made his way across the country.

“Thrill of my long long life,” said the grandmother. “Just to see that man, and his handsome face, and that beautiful hat! It was almost too much for my old heart to bear.”

“Grandma,” chided the young man. “Let’s not waste these nice gentlemen’s time. They have more important things to do, I am sure.”

“It’s our pleasure, ma’am. It’s always nice to know there are still people down South who support the sanctity of the Union,” said one officer.

“Oh do we ever,” said the grandmother. “You have no idea how much!”

The young man took his grandmother’s arm. “Grandmother, it’s time we boarded the train.”

“Yes, dear, you’re right.” The grandmother patted her grandson’s arm, then turned back to the police officer. “Thank you for the wonderful job you’re doing, officer. I hope you catch whoever you’re looking for!”

“Don’t worry, ma’am. We always get our man.”

In their sleeping berth, Kate glared at Booth. “Well, now I see why you’re an out-of-work actor,” she said.

“What in heaven’s name are you talking about?” Booth asked, mortified.

“What was all that talk back there with the officers? All you needed to do was say ‘good day’ and get on the train.”

“I didn’t want to seem suspicious, or like we were running away from the law.”

“It would have seemed like we were just getting on a train,” Kate said through gritted teeth. “That’s it. Now there are people who will remember us and that’s the last thing we need.”

“You weren’t that great yourself, ‘grandson.’” Booth said. “You were practically undressing that one officer with your eyes. I was surprised you didn’t jump upon him right then and there.”

“Why do you feel the need to make things up, Booth?” Kate asked. “You know that’s not true.”

“I’m sorry,” Booth said. “I don’t take criticism well.”

“Well take this: you’re a terrible actor, nowhere near as good as your father or your brothers. But with my help, you might be able to get better.”

“Do you mean it?” Booth asked. “You’ll teach me?”

“It’s a long train ride,” Kate said, “and I forgot to bring a book.”

Kate left Booth in Baltimore, where he said he had family. She had no desire to spend any time in the city, especially considering that Pinkerton was there and he undoubtedly had caught wind of her little escapade by now. She wasn’t sure what she was going to do but she could recognize a burned bridge when she saw one. Pinkerton wasn’t the most forgiving man she had ever met and she didn’t think she would be able to get back in his good graces any time soon.

Not that it mattered much to her. Before she had gotten it into her head to save Booth’s life, she was already considering leaving the agency. During the train ride, when she wasn’t giving Booth pointers on acting, she had plenty of time to think about it. The cloak and dagger lifestyle had simply grown tiresome. What was a young widower, aged 29, doing running around, breaking into houses, pretending to be someone else? It was not the life she had envisioned for herself.

Furthermore, the thirst for revenge on Perkins had faded. Pinkerton had been right that the years that had passed since her husband and son’s deaths had caused her to heal, made her whole again. The more time that went by, the less she thought of them. She no

longer felt the burning desire to see justice – or whatever passed for justice – done. Nor did she dream of hurting the man as he had hurt her.

May 10th 1848
Bel Air, Maryland

John Wilkes Booth – his mother called him John Wilkes; his father (when he was around), J.W.; his sister “Wilkie” (when she was trying to cajole him into doing something for her); and his brothers picked from a slew of derogatory nicknames – loved to be alone. He had found a small cave on the creek that ran a mile from his family’s home. It wasn’t much of a cave, really. The erosion exposed roots of strong old birchwoods had curved around an outcropping of rocks that had tumbled down from the rise above forming a crevice that when Booth was younger, held him quite easily with room to spare. Now, at 10 years of age, it was a tight fit.

Still, it was his special secret place. It was where he would go when his brothers’ tormenting was too much to bear, or when he wanted to avoid some particularly irksome chore. It was far enough out of the way of the family farm and in a different direction from the oft beaten path that most of the other children went exploring. Booth could usually count on being alone. Occasionally, another child or group of children would come across the cave and find Booth. Most were scared of the strange boy – rumors held him responsible for the sickly mutilated corpses of local cats and dogs that had been found in and around the town. Upon discovering Booth’s hiding spot, these frightened children would slowly back away, nervously apologizing for having disturbed him. They would then run to find their friends and tell made-up stories of seeing Booth do the most outlandish and unnatural deeds, further adding to Booth’s already considerable legend.

Those who didn’t believe, or hadn’t heard, the stories about the boy didn’t back off. Many of these children actively sought Booth out assuming the strange boy would make for easy and amusing sport. He was anything but. Whether the abuse was physical or verbal, Booth presented a stoic and calm exterior. He did not respond to their jibes, nor did he fight back when they beat him. He rarely even tried to defend himself. His tormentors would soon grow tired of their games and would leave him alone, often badly bruised and bleeding, but never ever (thought Booth) broken. After these attacks he might stay in his cave for as long as two days, curled up and in pain but still stoic; still silent.

His mother had learned after years of experience that when he finally did come home, it was best to just leave John Wilkes alone. Any prying into the cause of his injuries or the identity of his attackers would only result in further disappearances which would sometimes last for days. At least, if she was quiet about it, let her youngest son do his own thing, she could count on him to stay around the house for a few days. Perhaps he would even attend school (the headmaster described Booth as “not deficient in intelligence, but disinclined to take advantage of the educational opportunities offered him”) or answer a question about the quality of his day with more than a nod or a grunt.

In this way – if in no others – Booth took after his father. Junius Brutus Booth was an actor, having appeared in over 50 productions on 30 stages in 20 cities in the United States and Europe. He was particularly loved in New Orleans due to his ability to perform in French. This led to him not being around very often. He was rarely to be

found in the farmhouse which he had purchased (and remodeled and renamed “Tudor Hall”) for his family, but apparently not for himself. Mary Ann Holmes often felt as though she were living with (but not married to, Junius was still technically married to a woman still living in England) a ghost who flitted in and out of her life with little to no recognizable pattern or regularity. Junius, returning from a touring production, would haunt Mary Ann and the children for a few days, doing little other than drinking, speaking only when spoken to, and even then, only reluctantly.

Whether young John Wilkes’s behavior was a direct result of his father’s long absences and taciturn and surly disposition, Mary Ann did not know. She had her suspicions, but neither of her other sons, nor her daughter, exhibited any of the same mannerisms or moodiness. Junius Jr. and Edwin, though often in trouble, as boys often are, were well-adjusted and friendly. Junius Jr. had already become a decent actor of his own and Edwin expressed interest in the stage as well. Her daughter, Asia, was often at Mary Ann’s side, helping with the housework or sewing, and always cheerful. Why then was John so sullen and withdrawn? So often times so very sensitive?

Mary Ann had often thought of leaving Junius. Beyond the detrimental effects his lifestyle was having on their youngest son, she was, quite simply, lonely. Though Asia’s company was a comfort, and important to her, it wasn’t nearly enough. At first she found herself merely missing Junius while he was away. That quickly turned into resentment for the man with whom she’d built a life and had four children. Every attempt at confronting Junius had failed miserably, had been met with more silence and stares that chilled Mary Ann to the core. After such a conversation, Junius would become even more distant from the family, and more prone to drinking to excess.

On his tenth birthday, Booth found himself not surrounded by family (who seemed not to care) or by friends (he had none that he could speak of) but alone, as he liked it, at his cave. He’d fled there early in the morning, before anyone else had awoken. His father was in Baltimore, staying in the city residence he kept there for times when his management of The Players theatre company required him to remain in the city for an extended time. His mother was, as usual, keeping her distance. His siblings just forgot.

Booth sat in the cave, scraping two rocks against each other, lost in deep thought. *Ten years old today!* He felt amazed to have lasted so long in a world that seemed constantly trying to destroy him, trying to destroy everything. *It’s so easy to die.* He studied his skin. It was such a thin and fragile membrane, keeping all his vital organs inside; protecting them from the dangers without. So many people died each day, it was a wonder to him that more did not. *How do we continue to survive?* Loping along, unwise and unguided in the world, it seemed to Booth that people did more to destroy the world than to preserve it and that everything one did was, of necessity, at the expense of another.

During the few times that Booth had stayed in the Baltimore house, he would sit on the front porch and marvel at the city around him. *So many structures!* The entire city seemed a blight on the landscape. How had man developed to be able to build these *things?* It wasn’t just the architectural ingenuity (which was an affront to Booth) or the sheer mass of the constructions everywhere the eye could see (though these offended him) but the political and social structures that bound everyone to unwritten laws which were only in place to depress a man.

Why am I here? he thought. *How, even?* The simple act of existing was perplexing. When inside, the ceiling of the house gave Booth a headache, just knowing that man's hands had put it together, seemingly only to personally pen Booth in. At least out in his cave, with the only roof the twisted roots of the trees and a shelf of rock, Booth could rest easily, knowing that nothing man made was involved. The only reason he had shelter there was because of random chance and the unceasing actions of wind, water, and time.

He watched as a spider bounced at the center of a large web that it had woven between a long tree root and the rocks above. A fly had landed at the edge of the web and struggled to free itself. Booth imagined himself as the spider: gigantic; intimidating; a terrifying and masterful predator. He smiled thinly. "Come into my parlour," he whispered. As the fly continued to thrash about in vain, the spider attacked, streaking across the web to sink two venom-filled fangs into its prey's neck. The fly's movements became more erratic, though no less frantic. Finally it was still. The spider spun some silk which it used to wrap the fly up. Its work complete, it returned to the center of the web and resumed waiting.

At first, Booth had been amused, fascinated, impressed with the power the spider exhibited. Now he was sickened. He found himself unwillingly identifying with the fly. The ease with which the spider had slaughtered the fly only served to further enforce his belief that life was truly tenuous. He felt so fragile; so on the verge of falling into an abyss that would swallow him whole.

Part 2?

November 6th, 1860

Columbus, Ohio

A dark figure crept silently outside the post office in the middle of town. The light from the moon was unable to penetrate the shadows in which he hid. His natural ability to blend into hidden corners served him well as the town square, not 25 yards distant, was filled with all manner of people waiting for news from the election. As the man made his way to the rear of the building, he made no sound, nor left any evidence that he even existed. Reaching the back door, he removed a skeleton key from a pouch at his belt. Quietly, he slipped it into the lock, turned it, and opening the door, he stole inside.

He found himself in the back room of the building, a simple two-room affair. He rolled deftly to his right, leaving him kneeling behind a large wooden cabinet. He peeked around the front edge of this and watched the activity in the adjacent room.

Two men sat at a large desk, wearing blinders and working by lamplight. On the floor between the men lay two large satchels, filled with election ballots from which they drew, one at a time. They worked with professional swiftness and detachment, counting each slip of paper and then destroying it. They did not speak to each other, nor did they give any indication that they were aware of the other's existence. If they felt any particular emotions about the numbers they wrote, they made no sign.

Assured that the ballot counters were completely focused upon their task, the shadowy man left his hiding place, creeping forward and staying low until he was no less than 10 feet from the desk at which the men worked. From underneath his coat, he

produced a satchel, a duplicate of those that lay on the floor. Almost crawling now, he stealthily slid this bag into place at the same time that he removed one of the two original bags. Still undetected, he retreated from the room, and from the building, his mission accomplished.

He stole back around the side of the building. As he walked, a change came over his demeanor and presence. He gradually lost his stealth and invisibility, which in the middle of a public square, such as the one he now found himself standing in, would actually attract attention. He blended in a different manner now, appearing as mundane as the next person, approachable, yet completely forgettable.

Like the men counting the ballots, he was completely impartial to the task he had just performed. That it would change the path of the country in which he resided (he did not call it home; not *his* country) did not matter to him. It was a job, no more and no less. One man or another would become president, and some men with large sums of money wanted to ensure that their man won the contest, no matter what it took.

The man stepped inside the telegraph office and handed a prewritten telegraph form to the operator. The message contained inside would appear to be an innocuous note concerning the illness of a beloved family member, but to the intended recipients, it would speak volumes more: the deed was done. He put a few coins on the counter and stepped back outside.

And then he disappeared.

Sacramento, California

I'm not meant for this sort of work, Dixby thought as he pulled another ballot from a bag to his right, noted the party the ticket indicated, tore it in half, and deposited it in a bin to his left. Several months before, Dixby had found himself in increasing debt with no hope for reprieve. He'd then taken to skimming off the top of several firms for which he did the books and changing the numbers so nobody was the wiser. Though he did this artfully, and with a deft touch, he was left with a constant sour feeling in his stomach which affected his mood and his sleep. His wife, with whom he was normally sweet and kind, noticed that he had become short-tempered.

Then, one day, with the arrival of a parcel from an unnamed party, everything changed. The letter contained within outlined the existence of clear and damning evidence of his crimes. But it also offered hope. If Bixby altered the nature of a few election ballots not only would the evidence of his misdeeds be destroyed, but so would his debt. And in the grand scheme of things, what could a few hundred ballots alter? Nothing of importance was ever swayed by so few pieces of paper, and he had made larger changes on much smaller scales than this.

Still, though, as he waited for an opportunity, that sour feeling in his stomach lingered, his mouth was dry, his palms damp. His left foot tapped out a nervous beat on the wooden floor. He didn't know how much more he could take. They were very nearly done counting the ballots and by then, he would have missed his chance. Already, a runner from the telegraph office had come and gone three times, sending early results back east.

Bixby's partner, an older man named Johnson that Bixby had just met earlier in the afternoon had not left his post since they'd started. The man had the bladder and

willpower of a man one third his age and it was beginning to become infuriating. Meanwhile, Bixby had used the facilities three times, splashing cold water on his face on each occasion, reassuring his reflection in the mirror that it would soon be over.

Now he sat, occasionally stealing glances at Johnson, mentally willing the man to leave the room, if only for a minute or two, so that Bixby could perform his task. His palms sweated profusely, his heart seemed to be beating hard against his chest, and his hands began to shake so that he had to focus intently on the simple task of removing each ballot from the bag. If it didn't happen soon, he might not be able to continue at all.

Presently, however, Johnson stirred from his chair. Stretching his cramped muscles, he smiled down at Bixby. "We're making good time on these," he said. "I reckon we'll be the first of the western counties to come in with results."

Bixby laughed nervously and smiled thinly. "That sure would beat all," he said.

"I'm headin' to the loo," Johnson said. He gently punched Bixby's shoulder. "Don't slack off while I'm gone."

"You don't have to worry about me," Bixby said, repressing a sigh. Johnson left the room.

Bixby waited until he heard the back door shut and then leapt from his chair, disturbing the record book on the desk. He paused for a moment to take a deep breath, and then, finding that it did nothing to calm his nerves, took another. Realizing that nothing would help, save for getting this one task completed, he picked up the remaining ballot bag, which he carried to the back of the building. There, hidden amongst several bags of outgoing mail, was a satchel filled with ballots exactly the same as the one he now carried. He swapped the bags, making sure to leave everything as he had found it, and returned to his seat at the desk moments before Johnson returned.

"Everything alright?" Johnson asked, resuming his position.

"Everything's fine," Bixby lied. He hoped to God that it would soon be true, yet the sour feeling in his stomach remained, and showed no sign of dissipating.

Trenton, New Jersey

"And this is the very spot where the patriot, George Washington, led his men in a Boxing Day raid against the vile German mercenaries hired by the British to take this land from us," slurred the drunk man to Konigmacher's right.

Konigmacher nodded thoughtfully, and then spoke quietly, his words slightly accented with a New England tinge. "You speak of the Hessians. But they were not mercenaries." He sipped his beer.

"What'd'ya mean they weren't mercenaries?" the drunk replied. "They weren't British. Murderous fucks."

Konigmacher sighed softly. "In some cases, they actually were. King George was the Elector of Hanover and thus, many of them were his direct subjects. In any event, most of the Hessians were merely conscripts – debtors, impressments, and crooks. Many got nothing more than their daily rations."

The drunk said nothing, unable to accept a change in his recollection of history.

"But such soldiers are often easy to defeat. They were not fighting for their land; not for their homes; not even for money. Such men can be swayed to desert rather easily,

and many did. Large numbers of the Hessians were bought with fifty acres of land and stayed here to make their way.”

“Blasted Germans,” the drunk said. “Filthy bastards are all over the place.”

Konigmacher finished his beer and placed the stein on the bar. He leaned over to the drunk. “You are very lucky, my friend,” he said.

The drunk laughed derisively, “Lucky am I? And why is that?”

Konigmacher allowed his natural German accent to return to his voice, a long-bladed knife appeared in his right hand. The drunk’s eyes widened, the sight of the knife enough to penetrate his intoxication. “You are lucky because I have other business to attend to this evening and have no time to exchange further *pleasantries* with you.” The knife disappeared into Konigmacher’s sleeve. He reached down to retrieve the satchel laying at his feet and left the tavern.

Later that night, in a dimly-lit office, Konigmacher stood over the bleeding body of an election official and performed another switch. His contact had told him that there should be no blood this evening, but Konigmacher didn’t care. The job was done.

“‘Murderous fuck’, indeed,” he said. He cleaned off his knife and set about cleaning up the mess he’d made.

Springfield, Illinois

The offices of the Illinois & Mississippi Telegraph Company were crowded that evening. A growing knot of onlookers had steadily filled the room throughout the night. Their focus was divided between the activity of the telegraph operators and their machines and the exceedingly calm man who sat on a sofa nearby. He was tall and lanky; awkward-looking and thin; all elbows and knees. And yet, he exuded a cool confidence and capability that was unmatched in the room. As each telegram was received the operators translated the code into English, and transcribed it onto a yellow form. The papers then passed from hand to hand to the man on the sofa, each man attempting to glean as much meaning as he could from a quick glance. After the tall man read a message, he would hand it to someone else, reacting as if the telegrams had as much significance as a trivial bit of family news.

The rest of the men in room were not nearly as placid. Each telegram had the power to change the atmosphere drastically. Good news caused the men to cheer, so loudly that the throngs on the street out knew what was happening before the enthusiastic runners sent from the office had even opened the door. Still, they would take the opportunity to shout out the results and be met with louder, wilder cheers.

Bad news -- and there was some of it that night -- sucked the air out of the room. Instead of cheers, there were low murmurs, the men discussing the implications of the latest missives, what victories had to be gained in order to set off the defeats. Through it all, the tall man’s demeanor did not change.

At midnight, they withdrew from the telegraph office and proceeded through the large crowd outside to an ice cream parlor. As they made their way across the square, cheers and shouts from the throng filled their ears. Everyone wanted to shake the tall man’s hand, pat his shoulder, touch his hat.

In the parlor, a table of oysters, sandwiches, and coffee had been set out by local women. The mood in the parlor was jovial and friendly. Removed from the telegraph

office, the tall man kept his air of cool and shared jokes and stories with his friends. His wife joined him, sitting at his side, picking delicacies for him to eat and occasionally whispering encouraging words in his ear.

Runners continued to come from the telegraph office, breathless with excitement and the effort of pushing through the increasing crowds outside. News of victories was greeted with earth-shaking cheers, or if they bore news of losses – not many of significance, but losses nonetheless – with quiet, anxious glances. Through it all, the tall man seemed nonplussed, content to snack upon the smoked herring on the plate in front of him and distract the group with another tale from his days in the state legislature.

Presently, a telegram from Philadelphia was brought forth, handed directly to the man himself who stood and read it aloud. Philadelphia, and the entire state of Pennsylvania had voted for him, giving him that state's 27 electoral votes. Soon thereafter, a telegram from New York arrived with the news that he would win that state's 35 votes, and with it the presidency.

If the crowd of onlookers and well-wishers had been merry before, it was nothing compared to their reaction to this news. Throughout Springfield cheers and shouts of triumph could be heard through the night. Everyone in the town was united in ecstatic joy: clapping each other on the back; dancing silly, childish dances; throwing their hats into the air. To the delight of the crowd, one man repeatedly performed back flips on the State House lawn.

Through it all, the tall man remained calm, ever calm. He excused himself from the table and crossed the square again to return to the telegraph office. His closest friends swiftly followed him at once protecting him from the excited crowd, and becoming of the excited crowd themselves. They made it to the office, the tiny room now filled to bursting with excited revelers. He steeled himself and went back inside.

It was all but over. With Pennsylvania and New York firmly in hand, as well as Ohio, and Massachusetts, and of course, Illinois, it was a certainty. A final telegram from New York stated, "We tender you our congratulations upon this magnificent victory." And so, it was done, and Abraham Lincoln became the president-elect of the United States of America.

"Are you satisfied now, 'Uncle' Abe?" asked a friend at his side.

"Well, the agony is most over," Lincoln replied quietly. "Soon you will all be able to go to bed."

He stood from the sofa and thanked his friends, and the telegraph operator. Those not busy cheering and reveling noticed that a change had come over the man. He did not shout for joy or give any indication that he was pleased by the results of the election. Rather, he seemed deflated. Most wrote it off to relief and exhaustion from the day's proceedings but to others, it looked as if Lincoln had just cast off a role that he had been playing all day; perhaps for months. It lasted but a moment; his quiet confidence resumed almost immediately. He walked towards the door, but paused as he opened it. He turned back to the room, a small smile on his face.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I thank you for your support this day, and the days preceding the election, and my entire career. Truly, this victory would not have been possible were it not for you. You are supporters and colleagues, but most importantly, you are all my friends."

The men erupted in applause again, shouting huzzahs. As one, they rushed forward to congratulate Lincoln anew; to shake his hand. Then, seeing that Lincoln was tired and nearly overwhelmed by their exuberance, they pulled back and gave the man some room.

“Thank you,” Lincoln said. “I truly thank you. Now, if you will please excuse me. It is about time that I went home and told the news to a tired woman who is sitting up for me.”

At this the men laughed and said their goodbyes. “Good night, Abe!” “Good night, Mr. Lincoln!” “Good night, Mr. President!” New cheers arose.

It was 2:30 in the morning, and though the general crowd in the square had thinned somewhat, the revelry across the city continued as strong as ever. It would not fully cease until well after dawn broke. People still danced in the streets; fired pistols and rifles into the air; some had rolled out the cannon that had fired in the morning to announce the coming election and were firing it again, this time in celebration of its end, and of the favorable result. The entire city was alive. On the steps of the telegraph office, Lincoln stood and surveyed the scene. His demeanor had returned to that of the defeated man.

As Lincoln descended the steps, some in the crowd took notice of him, and rushed in his direction. But they too saw that the man was not himself, and certainly did not have the look of a victorious presidential candidate and even through the haze of their revelry they realized that perhaps the man had had enough for one day. Though they still cheered him and wished him well, they mostly left him alone and did not impede his way as he walked home, disappearing down the street and into the night. For that, he was grateful.

Arriving at his house, he took some moments to be alone, for the first time that day. Looking up at his house, he could scarcely believe that this morning – the previous morning now – he had been a mere lawyer, and now he was the President-Elect of the United States. For a moment, he allowed himself to feel some amount of joy and pride at the feat. Perhaps he could actually change things; perhaps he could manage to salvage the Union. As is the case with every election, those of the losing party threaten to “move to Canada” or some such, and several states in the South had promised to secede were Lincoln elected. They had done their best to stop him, not even putting him on the ballot in nine states, and hardly voting for him in any of the others. But, perhaps it was possible.

It was a brief reverie, standing there, his hand on the picket fence that surrounded his home. It did not last long. The reality – the deeply troubling reality – of the situation sank back in. He tapped the fence twice, gathered himself and went indoors.

Inside, the house was quiet. Willie and Tad were somehow asleep, despite the noise outside. Indeed, Mary, the tired woman he thought would be sitting up for him, was asleep in her room. Lincoln knelt on the floor at the side of her bed.

“Mary,” he whispered. She did not stir. He touched her arm and spoke her name again, louder this time. Her eyes slowly opened.

“Abe?” she asked, sleepily. “What is it?”

“We’re elected, Mary,” he said.

She looked into his eyes, somehow, even in that dark room able to see the solemnity that her husband felt, thinking it was grave reverence for the job or apprehension of the task before him, she clasped his hand in hers, but made no sound.

“We’re elected,” he repeated. “And God help me.”

Washington, D.C.

March 5th, 1861

Mary insisted that they remodel the entire White House. Little had been done in terms of decoration since the War of 1812 when the British had razed the building during their raids on Washington. Portions of the White House still smelled like soot and damp wood. The presidents in the interval – Madison, Monroe, Adams, Jackson, Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler, Polk, Taylor, Fillmore, Pierce, and Buchanan; had there really been that many? – hadn’t done much to the house – nor, Mary thought, with their presidencies. She didn’t know how Jane Pierce had managed, nor any of the other women. She couldn’t spend four years with her house in this state – or eight, or twelve – she thought. Eight should be enough, shouldn’t it? That should be plenty to get everything done, both for her and for Abraham.

Worse still was the state in which Buchanan had left the building. “Bachelor” Buchanan, single his entire life, had felt no need to keep a nice house and certainly hadn’t bothered to clean up after himself when he left. He had entertained visitors exactly once during his tenure. That had been a reception for the incoming president and his family. Mary had gasped upon entering the house for the first time and seeing its shabby state. The current president mistook her sudden intake of breath for awe.

“It is quite beautiful, isn’t it?” he asked, sweeping his hands wide in a flourish that was out of place, both for the man, and for the house.

“Yes, it’s magnificent,” she said politely, eyeing the threadbare chairs that flanked the entrance to one hallway.

As they walked through the building to the dining room, she whispered into her husband’s ear, “Forgive me, but we are going to have to do something about this ‘magnificent’ home, or I will not be able to stay here an entire term.” Lincoln stifled a laugh. He knew full well that Mary’s joke had a sliver of truth. When they were first married, Mary had endlessly chided him for his bachelor lifestyle. Lincoln was, by nature, an orderly and tidy man, but nothing, it seemed, was enough for his young wife. He’d somehow managed to keep her happy enough, without changing too much of his ways, but it had been a chore. “We’ll have a full staff,” he whispered back.

“He doesn’t have one,” Mary realized aloud.

“Yes, it’s quite obvious that it’s a luxury he’s forgone in the name of the American people,” Lincoln said. “It’s a luxury that we will not forgo.”

Still, now that she was in the building as a resident and as the country’s First Lady, Mary began to realize just how much work there was to do.

Springfield, Illinois

August 23rd, 1859

It had been unusually dry and hot that summer, across southern Illinois. Usually there was no lack of rain but this year, the spring rains hadn’t come, leaving the roads dusty, the creeks low, and farmers worried about their crops. Wells ran dry.

Lincoln left his office around one in the afternoon, intending to take his midday meal at an eatery near the State House. As he crossed the causeway, a carriage stopped suddenly before him, impeding his way. Lincoln stopped, staring at the side of the vehicle, uncharacteristic ire at the rudeness of the driver rising in his mind. It passed quickly, and he was turning to walk around the carriage when the door opened revealing the dark interior.

“Get in,” said a voice with a heavy German accent.

Lincoln squinted, trying to make out any details of the indistinct shapes within. He could see two people – two men – but the sun was at such an angle that it reflected off a building across the street, and contrasting with the dark interior of the carriage, it was impossible to glean anything more.

“I would rather not,” Lincoln said, turning to walk away again.

“I think you should,” said the voice. “Your country needs you, and I’m not a man who you want to refuse.”

Although Lincoln had an innate distrust of strangers, especially those who attempted to gather him into a dark coach, he was intrigued. His failed candidacies for both the Vice Presidential nomination in 1856 and for the House of Representatives just two years prior had left him without a means to pursue his political aspirations.

“Come, Mister Lincoln,” said another voice – a familiar voice. “We mean you no ill will. We just want to take a little ride.”

His curiosity getting the better of him, Lincoln pulled himself into the carriage and sat opposite the two men.

The carriage door closed behind him and with window curtains drawn, the interior was as dark as it had appeared from outside. As his eyes adjusted, Lincoln felt the plush velvet covered seat beneath him, smelled stale tobacco and whiskey, signs of opulence and comfortable living. He coughed involuntarily. The carriage began to move down the street.

“What’s all this about then?” he asked. His eyes had adjusted sufficiently to make out that he was seated across from two men, one younger than he, one older. The man on the right – the younger of the two – was smartly dressed in a European-cut suit, and had a slightly menacing air to him.

The man on the right, Lincoln recognized. It was John Bell, former Secretary of War, former Speaker of the House, and current Senator from Tennessee. Lincoln didn’t know the man well, but knew of him.

“Do you recognize me, son?” Bell asked, his southern drawl tempered by years of mingling with the Washington elite.

“You are John Bell,” Lincoln replied. “Yes, I recognize you. How do you do, sir?”

“I am well,” Bell said. He indicated the man to his left. “This is my man, Albert Konigmacher.”

“How do you do, Mr. Lincoln?” Konigmacher asked.

“How do you do?”

Bell continued. “I apologize that I was forced to implement such underhanded tactics. I assure you that under other circumstances, I would have called upon you as a gentleman would.”

“Under what circumstances do we find ourselves?” Lincoln asked.

“These are trying times, Mr. Lincoln. Our nation is at a crossroads. We stand divided, and we all know that a nation divided can not stand.”

“Things do look grave indeed,” Lincoln said.

“Grave!” Bell shouted. “A grave is what we shall all lie in if these troubles are not ended. The South speaks of secession but will not compromise. Those in the North can’t get their heads out of their asses – pardon my language, sir – can’t get their heads out of their asses for long enough to see it.” He paused a moment. “Excuse my outburst, sir.”

“Think nothing of it,” Lincoln said. “I understand and share your passion, Mr. Bell, but what would you have me do?”

“You debated Douglas well. I regret I did not personally witness the speeches, but my agents reported to me favorably on your efforts.”

“Little good they did me. I failed election,” Lincoln said glumly.

“Perhaps you failed in that so that you might claim a larger prize,” Bell said.

“Of what do you speak?”

“I’m talking about the Presidency, son,” Bell said. “The *Presidency*.”

Lincoln shook his head. “One doesn’t go from failure to failure to succeeding at the greatest office.”

“One can. You can. You *will*.”

“And what makes you so sure?”

“There will be four candidates. You will be the Republicans’ representative. The Southern Dems will choose Breck – who is an ass, by the way – and the Northerners will take Mr. Douglas.”

“How do you know all this?”

“I am quite adept at reading between the lines. And also at reading lines that others would rather I hadn’t access to.”

Lincoln considered this. “You said there would be four candidates.”

“Yes, that fourth is me.”

“You, sir?”

“Yes, me,” Bell replied. “The Whigs are desperate to stay relevant, and they will choose me to lead the charge. I have been around for long enough that they know that I know what I am doing. I have enough friends in Washington to make it happen.”

“Then why would you have me run against you? Why would you have me win?”

“Because he can’t,” Konigmacher interjected.

“Sir?” Lincoln asked, surprised at the blunt response.

“It’s true, Mr. Lincoln,” Bell said. “I simply won’t be able to carry enough of the country in order to win. Without a fourth candidate to split the vote, Douglas will win. Breckenridge will carry the South, have no doubt about that, but these days, that simply does not mean shit – pardon my language again. It is the North that elects presidents. It is Pennsylvania and New York and Ohio that chooses our leaders.”

“And Douglas would win those versus you?”

“Without question.”

Lincoln sat back, digesting this. He lifted the curtain slightly, letting a modicum of light into the carriage. He saw that their route had been a circuitous one and that they were scarcely as far from their origin as he might have walked in the same amount of time.

“Mr. Lincoln,” Konigmacher started. “Douglas can not win. He is a hypocrite and a liar. The worst kind of politician.”

“I thought that was the only kind of politician,” Lincoln replied.

Bell laughed. “You’re far too young to be so jaded, Mr. Lincoln. You are a good man, and you are a good politician. You know me to be the same, or so I hope.”

“I know that you were one of two Southern Senators to vote against Kansas-Nebraska.”

“And you know that Douglas supported the measure; that he *wrote* that measure. And you know that he cares not about the abolition of slavery, that he would put it to the people of each Territory to decide upon the future of slavery. He would have us be a country united in name only, but with thirty-three nation-states each left to their own devices, deciding upon slavery this week, the consumption of alcohol the next and the right to carry a pistol in public the week after that.” Bell took a deep breath and continued. “If a man was unhappy with the laws in his state, he could simply leave and move to his neighbor. I say, if they are unhappy with the laws in this *nation*, let them leave and move to another. What then, is the point of this country we have created, if nothing else but to awkwardly carry this bundle of disjointed states from one place to the next? We are too young, sir. We are too young – not yet one hundred now – and too weak to allow this division to continue.”

“You know me to be an abolitionist,” Lincoln said. “Does it not bother you as a Southern gentleman to put me forward as President?”

“I will be honest, sir: I do not care for abolitionists. Yet, it is more important to me that we decide this issue as a nation. Put forward the notion of abolishing slavery and let us all decide upon it. I shall not have the Independent Nation of Kansas, or of Nebraska, or Washington standing apart, spending their own currency and speaking their own damnable national language!” He pounded his fist on the sidewall of the carriage.

“And you believe me to be the one who can keep this nation from falling apart?”

Bell chuckled. “Not at all, son. But there’s not a man on this planet who could do that.”

“Then why?” Lincoln asked.

“Because I believe that you’re the one who can put the damn thing back together.”

After Lincoln left the carriage – the driver had circled the block one last time and dropped him but a few feet from where he’d embarked – Bell and Konigmacher prepared for their long journey back to Washington. The German man slid across to the opposite seat, relieved to not be squashed next to the large, foul-smelling American. Once they were outside Springfield proper, he opened the curtain and the window, hoping a little fresh air, dry and dusty though it was, might alleviate the stuffiness inside. Bell shrank back, worried that he might be observed.

“What if someone sees us together?” he asked.

“Do not worry,” Konigmacher said. “We are outside the city now.”

Bell relaxed. “Do you think we convinced him?”

“I think you were very convincing. I think he has always wanted to be president and though his recent defeats fill his head with doubt about his ability to win the people

to him, your appeal to his love of this nation will bring him to the convention. My people will make sure he receives the nomination.”

“And you are sure that he will lose? That his presence will split the votes enough to give me an electoral majority?”

Konigsmacher glanced from the window at Bell. “My people will make sure of that too.”

That night, Lincoln excused himself from the dinner table, put on his jacket and stovepipe hat and walked three doors down the road to the house of his friend, Jesse K. Dubois. Having served on the State Legislature together, Hat in hand, he knocked on the door. It was answered by Dubois’ wife, Mary, and the two exchanged pleasantries for a moment before Mary went off to retrieve her husband.

Arriving at the front door, Dubois found his friend to be in a somber mood; not his usual self.

“What’s the matter, Abe? Come in. Sit down,” he said.

“No, I’d rather you walked with me, if you can spare a moment for an old friend,” Lincoln replied.

“Of course. Of course I can.” Dubois retrieved his own hat and jacket from their pegs on the wall and ushered Lincoln from his home.

They set off down the road, walking in the general direction of the Town Square and the State House. They walked in silence for a few moments, Dubois allowing his friend to find the words he wanted to say, knowing that prodding him would do no good.

It was a lovely night. A cool breeze had found the town, for the first time, it seemed, in the entire summer and many people had come outside to enjoy the break in the heat. Couples walked hand in hand, trailed closely by their chaperons. Children played made up games in the waning light. As they passed, many of them tipped their hats and said hello to Lincoln and while he responded in his usual kind and friendly manner, Dubois could tell that his friend was deeply lost in his thoughts.

It wasn’t until they reached the center of the town square, looking up at the State House, that Lincoln spoke.

“They want me to run for president, Jesse,” he said, studying the legislature’s home.

“Who they?” Dubois asked.

Lincoln went on as if he hadn’t heard his friend’s question. “It just feels so dirty. So underhanded. And yet, I did always want to be president, didn’t I? I told you that from the time I was but 12 years old that I wanted to be president. That I could a better job than old James Monroe?”

“You did say these things, Abe,” Dubois allowed. “Then Monroe went and wrote that doctrine of his. You told me you liked that one pretty well.”

Lincoln laughed and looked at his friend for the first time during their walk. “Monroe’s doctrine is a fine piece of work. But could he have done as well in this modern day? With the Union at risk such as it is, with the threat of secession, we are more at odds with ourselves than with Europe. His doctrine won’t keep the nation together.”

“Cut the man some slack, Abe,” Dubois said. “That was more than thirty years ago.”

“Certainly, but the actions of Monroe and men like him led us to where we are today.”

“Just as your actions, and my actions, shall shape the lives of our children and our childrens’ children. There’s no getting around the cause and effect, the dominos, the butterfly in Fiji that causes a storm on the plains. Don’t blame Monroe simply because he existed.”

“Jesse, Jesse. You’re right. I didn’t mean to – I’m not blaming Monroe for anything. And that is beside the point entirely. I was just saying.... What was I saying?”

Such absent-mindedness in his old friend was completely foreign to Dubois. Usually an easy speaker, clear-headed and focused, this was a brand new experience. He couldn’t help but laugh.

“Abe, what is going on? You’re positively out of your gourd this evening. Did you spend too much time in the sun this afternoon?”

“Actually, I spent a portion of my midday completely in the dark,” Lincoln mused.

“Which is where you’re leaving me now. I am in the dark,” Dubois swept his hands towards the moonless sky, “and in the dark.”

“I feel I know as little as you, old friend,” Lincoln said. “Certain parties – I will not name them for now, perhaps – wish me to run for the office of president.”

Dubois scoffed. “Certain parties? Mary and the children? Kane? Speed?”

“No,” Lincoln decided. “I will not name them now, for though they did not explicitly demand discretion, the very nature of our meeting implied it.”

“Fine then. I accept their implied discretion and your most peculiar meeting. What of the meat of the matter?”

“The meat of the matter is this: there are parties who would have me run for president, and would see me win it. For the good of the Union, they said.”

“A Republican and an abolitionist in office for the good of the Union? Forgive me, Abraham, you know that I agree with you on every point about the needs of our country, but your election would further drive the wedge into the Mason-Dixon. The election of someone such as yourself would inevitably lead to the South’s secession. They have said as much already.”

“This man – these parties, rather – feel that such a thing is inevitable regardless of who sits in the Office.”

“Then what does he – or, I shall play along, I will: what do *these parties* – want with you?”

“They feel that I would be singularly capable of reuniting the country after the split.”

“By what means? Your dulcet tone? Will you beg with each of the states in turn? Apologize and cajole them into returning to the fold? Welcome them back with open arms after such an act of treason? Secession is a finality. When one becomes two, the reverse does not often happen.”

Lincoln thought on this. “If the South secedes, there would be war we would have to go to war.”

“War? You would invade this new country?”

“Jesse, they would not be a new country. They would be a collection – a confederacy – of conspirators. Rebel states, breaking the law of their nation. It can not be allowed to stand.”

“Well, I admit, that is true,” Dubois said. “But, that would mean *civil war*, Abe.”

“Call it what you will. When a child misbehaves, do you not discipline him?”

The two men were silent, each thinking his own thoughts. The sun had fully set, the gaslights set burning. The lamplighters (Jacob and Anthony) tipped their caps to Lincoln and Dubois as they passed. Neither man took notice, each lost in their musings. Finally, Dubois broke the silence.

“So, will you make me Secretary of the Treasury?”

So taken aback at this, Lincoln burst into a fit of laughter. Dubois, a longtime banker and State Auditor had not been entirely joking, but was happy enough to lighten his friend’s mood. Lincoln clapped Dubois on the back and the two turned back towards their houses.

“So, it sounds like you are planning on doing this,” Dubois ventured.

“It is tempting, Jesse. It truly is,” Lincoln admitted. “And yet, we all know about temptation.”

“Yes, temptation often comes from the Devil.” Dubois looked at his friend and joked, “Was it the Devil that proposed you run for president, ‘Uncle’ Abe?”

“That is the trouble with this, Jesse,” Lincoln said seriously. “I’m not quite sure.”

“Thank you for lending me your ear, Jesse,” Lincoln said as they reached Dubois’ door. “You are a good friend.”

“It’s my pleasure, Abe,” said Dubois. “I just hope you remember how good a friend I am when you’re far away in Washington.”

Lincoln chuckled again and then placed his hands on his friend’s shoulders. “I may move to Washington. Indeed I may. But trust me when I say that I will never be far away from my home; from my friends.”

“I believe that to be true, Abe. That is why you *are* my friend.”

Lincoln held Dubois’ head in his hand for a moment, smacked him lightly on the cheek and then said, “Okay, my friend. I must get back home before it is too dark to find it. It seems the lamplighters have neglected this stretch of road.”

“Those two are troublesome indeed. Friendly enough, and reliable to a point, but too taken with drinking spirits to be able to pay attention to every lamp in town.”

“Indeed. Alas, they have such job security, being the only ones who know where the equipment is kept.”

Dubois laughed. “Go, Abe, lest you stub your toe in the dark and blame me for keeping you.”

“Please, do not speak of this to anyone, Jesse,” Lincoln said. “I know I can trust your discretion.”

“Implicitly.”

“Good night, ‘Uncle’ Jesse.”

“Good night, ‘Uncle’ Abe.”

Lincoln returned to his own house, all but certain that he would accept Bell’s offer, or at the very least, participate in his plan. He was sure that Bell had not been

entirely honest with him – he was a politician after all, was he not? – but that did not overly concern him. He felt sure that with the help of his friends – such as Jesse Dubois here in Springfield and Joshua Speed in Kentucky and his numerous other friends around the country, that whatever Bell had actually planned, he would be more than ready to see through it.

He entered the house, the nurse attending to the children’s bedtime needs, Mary attending to her own in her bedroom. He entered without knocking, finding her in a state of half-undress.

“Mr. Lincoln!” she shouted. “What is the meaning of this?”

“Mrs. Lincoln, how would you like to be the First Lady of the United States?”

“Why, I’m not sure that President Buchanan is looking for a wife, but I suppose I would find it agreeable,” Mary joked.

Lincoln laughed uproariously, nearly shaking the house. He suddenly took his wife into his arms and kissed her. “Oh, Mary, that is why I love you!” he said.

“Because I would leave you for the President of the United States if I thought that he’d take me?” Mary smiled and pressed her forehead against her husband’s. “Honestly, Abe, what is this all about?”

“Would you be too upset if we had to move from here to Washington?”

“It’s an awfully long journey,” Mary said. “I’m not sure my constitution is strong enough for it.”

Lincoln playfully swatted Mary’s rear. “I’d say your constitution is plenty strong enough for that and more.”

“You are a naughty man, Mr. Lincoln,” Mary said coquettishly. “But really, what’s this all about? Stop beating around the bush.”

“I’ll do more than beat around....” Lincoln stopped at a look from his wife. “My apologies, lady. I ask you these questions because I would like to know your thoughts on my putting my hat in the ring for the presidency.”

“For the coming election?” Mary asked.

“Indeed, a mere fifteen months from now, the people will choose a new president. I would have them choose me.”

Mary smiled. “I could think of no better man for them to choose.”

May 16, 1860
Springfield, IL

Lincoln walked into his office, too nervous for words. Today, in Chicago, in a newly-built convention center dubbed “The Wigwam”, the bigwigs of the young Republican party would nominate their candidate for president. Though there were many potential candidates, the front runners were Edward Bates, Simon Cameron, Salmon Chase, William Seward and Lincoln, and he figured he didn’t have a chance, assurances of Bell and Konigsmacher notwithstanding. Lincoln had only met with the two men once more in the intervening months and that meeting had not gone well. Bell seemed on edge and nervous and it was only Konigsmacher’s calming influence that had kept Lincoln from calling the whole deal off. The German seemed preternaturally calm, exhibiting wisdom beyond his years. He could (and would) turn his German accent on and off at will, which Lincoln found exceedingly disturbing, but the fact that he was able to keep

Bell in check and was so confident in Lincoln's success both convinced Lincoln to stick it out.

So Lincoln had thrown his hat into the ring, which proved to be a simple task. All he had to do was say "Yes" when asked if he was serious by Edwin Morgan, Chairman of the Republican National Committee; say "Yes" when asked if he was really serious by Norman Judd, the delegate from Illinois; and say "Yes" when asked if he was absolutely quite positive that he was serious when asked by the numerous reporters that had taken to following him around the town. After that, it was easy. Time seemed to move very quickly, almost too quickly, until this day in May when Lincoln knew that everything was happening.

Two ballots had already been cast with no candidate receiving enough of the delegates' votes. As predicted, Bates, Cameron, Chase, Seward, and Lincoln received the majority of the votes in the first ballot. When the second ballot was counted, it turned out to be a dead heat between Seward and Lincoln, with Seward leading Lincoln by only four-and-one-half votes. It would all come down to today.

Friends had assured him that if it wasn't decided by the first ballot, then he was sure to win, and he held onto that assurance like it was gold. He could scarcely believe that he, a (relatively) young, uneducated man from the backwoods of Kentucky was on the cusp of becoming a major political party's candidate for the presidency. He knew his mother would be proud. He also knew that she wouldn't have believed it either.

Lincoln paced in his office, unable to sit still for even a moment.

"Whether or not you believe me, what I am telling you is true," said Ward Hill Lamon to the guard at the Wigwam. "I won a contest at the the newspaper for, how many was it?"

John Jay, standing next to Lamon thought for a second and replied, "Seventy-eight, I believe."

"Yes, seventy-eight tickets to this event. And so, sir, I insist that you allow I and my friends to enter. To refuse us is to deny the very base beliefs that brings all of us here today, namely the cause of Democracy and the right for a man to be heard in the choosing process of the man who will lead him. We aim to do that, sir. You will not deny us." Lamon's friends (all seventy-seven of them) burst into spontaneous applause. Some who knew not what the trouble was even began clapping.

"These tickets," said the guard (whose name was Worthington Lincoln [no relation]), "are obviously counterfeit. They're on the wrong colored paper, they're square-shaped instead of rectangular; they appear to have been printed on top of invitations to a child's birthday party; they have the wrong date, time, location, and event name; and to top it all off, they've already been torn in half. Plus, there's no official Republican National Committee hologram."

"Oh, all of that is easily explained. You see, I left them on my windowsill atop the invitations to my son's birthday party. Subsequently, it rained causing the tickets and the invitations to bleed together."

"Your son's name is Lupita?" the guard asked.

"It's a family name. We call him Looper," Lamon said. "The weight of the water weakened the tickets to the point that they ripped in half. What else? The color bled, ink

ran, and I can't be held responsible for the RNC misprinting dates, times, and event names."

"What about the holograms?"

"What the hell is a hologram?"

"It's a three dimensional image created by a technique that allows the light scattered from an object to be recorded and later reconstructed so that it appears as if the object is in the same position relative to the recording medium as it was when recorded," the guard explained.

"That sounds really fucking cool," Lamon admitted. "But are you sure that exists? I've never heard of such a thing."

"Of course it exists," the guard said. "Do you think I would make something like that up for my own amusement? It is as real as this digital watch I am wearing and my personal digital music player."

"Where did you get such wonderful toys?"

"People with *legitimate* tickets received a goodie bag as well. The RNC was quite generous this year. They also included a laptop computer."

"A what what whowhoter?" Lamon asked.

"A laptop computer. It is a personal computing device. It allows one to literally carry one's office from place to place and stay in touch no matter where one goes. I can play games of chance, watch motion picture animations, keep my accounts, maintain my correspondence, and much much more, all in the convenience of a device that weighs no more than sixty-two pounds."

Lamon whistled appreciatively. "That sounds like one hell of a device."

"You'd know all about this stuff if you held actual tickets to this event."

"The way I see it, there are seventy-eight of us and only one of you."

"Oh my goodness," said the guard, his hand lowering instinctively to the pistol he wore on his belt. "Are you *threatening* me?"

"Not at all," Lamon lied.

"Good, because if there's one thing I absolutely hate more than anything else, it's being threatened."

"I hear you on that, brother. Being threatened is the absolute worst."

"I'm glad we agree there. Look, I think you gentlemen should just leave."

"And I think you should know better than to fuck with a native Virginian,"

Lamon said.

"What are you talking about?"

"Nothing." He punched the guard in the face, knocking him out. He slipped the guard's brand new watch off his wrist. "Come on boys, let's go. John, see if you can figure this thing out."

The men (all seventy-eight of them) entered the Wigwam along with a few stragglers, vagrants and other hangers-on who, upon seeing that the guard had been dealt with decided they had little better to do besides attend a political convention, and maybe get a goodie bag of their own. Though some were frightened of the strange gadgetry and wizardry and various members of the Committee who were seen working on their laptops were derided as witches and Devil worshipers. Regardless, Lamon was pleased that the hard part was behind them.

“The hard part is behind us, boys,” he said, addressing his compatriots. “And let me add that I am pleased.”

“We too are pleased, Hill,” said John Jay.

“Excellent. Now, you know why we’re here. Our good and intimate friend, Abraham Lincoln, languishes in Springfield, anxiously awaiting good news from these quarters. It is our duty to outscreech all the other delegates here, crying nothing but Lincoln’s good name, letting it be known that he is the man, the only man, fit for the job of President of the United States. Are you with me, boys?”

The boys cried as one, “Yes we are!”

They filed into the meeting hall and took their seats.

Konigsmacher, in Chicago for the convention ostensibly at the request of John Bell, but really for his own nefarious purposes, smiled to himself. The first ballot had been cast and the announced results pleased him greatly. With no candidate having a majority, it was anyone’s game. No doubt the second ballot would display a coalescing of delegates, sheepish men flocking toward the more popular politicians. How many flocked to Lincoln remained to be seen, but the buzz on the floor was filled with a current of “Lincoln.” *This might be even easier than I thought it would*, he thought.

He had expected to (and planned upon) buy off delegates. He knew it wouldn’t require too many, for once some jumped to Lincoln, many of the rest would follow suit. That was the beautiful thing about these ridiculous public ballots. The vote could be swayed in the middle of the polling. It was even more effective than any sort of campaigning done by a candidate.

When the second ballot had come and gone and, as expected, the votes had moved to Lincoln and Seward, Konigsmacher knew it was in the bag. The undercurrent of murmurs of Lincoln’s name had become shouts, screams, chants. The people actually *wanted* Lincoln to represent the party. It hadn’t cost him a dime.

He’d submit some expense reports anyway.

March 4th, 1861
Washington, D.C.

Jesse K. Dubois attended the inauguration, but not at the request of the President-elect. Indeed, Lincoln had hardly said a word to him since that night three months prior. Dubois knew he had been busy and for a time excused his friend’s behavior due to the pressing matters. Immediately following the election, the talk of secession had grown to more than just idle chatter. The following day, the *Washington Constitution* had published – and presented as news rather than opinion – an article stating that Lincoln’s election would bring “gloom and storm and much to chill the heart of every patriot in the land” and going on to call for every Southern man to consider whether to submit to the new president or to “struggle to defend his rights, his inheritance, and his honor.” *A heap of rubbish*, Dubois thought.

But not everyone agreed with his assessment. Before the end of 1860, South Carolina had seceded from the Union. On January 9th of 1861, Mississippi joined them, and after that it was as if dominoes were falling. Within 20 days, Florida, Alabama,

Georgia, Louisiana and Texas had all quit the nation as well. The only positive result stemming from this, as far as Dubois could tell, was that Congress no longer had to pander to the whims of the Southern states and could actually get some work done. He imagined that the Capitol building must feel empty now, especially with the recent expansion having been completed.

Lincoln's speech that day focused on one thing: the issue of slavery. He took an interesting approach, thought Dubois. Instead of speaking on the abolition of slavery, he spoke directly to the concerns of the Southern States. He repeated again and again that he had no intention of taking away their property, or impinging upon their rights granted by the Constitution. To Dubois, it seemed like a case of too little too late. The cows were already out of the barn and Lincoln stood there at the doors chiding them for doing what came to them naturally.

Still, it was a nice speech, and Dubois thought his friend handled himself well enough. He knew Lincoln wasn't nervous about speaking before a crowd. That was when the man truly shined. Where he might be shy and reserved one on one with people that he did not know, when faced with talking to a large group, he opened up, became a different man, was naturally charming and funny. The crowd outside the East Front portico of the Capitol Building obviously had great love and respect for their new president.

Lincoln fervently stated that he would uphold and enforce the Fugitive Slave Law which provided for the return of any escaped slave found even in slave states. This had been a most controversial law, one to which Lincoln had been opposed. But Lincoln was a man who did things by the book and respected the law and, until it was deemed unconstitutional, he would execute it as part of the duty of the office, no matter how it pained him. He did pledge to find a way to better uphold this law, and this was an important point. Many tales were told about free men in the North who had been wrongly transported to the South as slaves based solely on the claims of a white man. As black men had no rights to trial, there was nothing they could do to prevent this.

And then Lincoln went on a tangent of logic so convoluted that it cause Dubois to furrow his brow and rub his temples in confusion. When he was finally able to untangle some sense from the statements, he understood Lincoln to have said that because the Constitution held no provision for its own destruction, that secession wasn't illegal, but rather, it was impossible. Then had not the Southern states no seceded? Dubois wasn't sure that was true.

Lincoln also promised that no blood would be shed in the effort to fix their mistake unless it became absolutely necessary, something that Dubois was certain to come to pass. There were federal troops stationed in the South – it was still part of the Federation, of course, according to the Federation itself – and while they had every right to be there, they seemed like something of an occupying force. Newspapers were already reporting on tensions between the troops and the local populace. It was like 1776 all over again in some senses. Dubois knew that it wouldn't take much of a spark to ignite a flame that would consume the fragile peace that existed there. One false move would result in another Boston Massacre.

Lincoln was now winding up his remarks, saying, "I am loath to close, my friends – for we are all friends and must remain friends" and Dubois couldn't agree more. He began to fight his way through the crowd, hoping to reach Lincoln, to congratulate him, to perhaps get an invitation to join the new president at a luncheon or party.

He found that he was matched in his efforts to reach the dais whose face he recognized but could not place. The man seemed even more anxious than Dubois to reach the President. He looked nervous, damp and flushed even on this cool spring day. As the man passed Dubois, he realized that the man was an actor of some talent and renown though he still could not remember the man's name. Dubois recalled seeing him in a production of Romeo and Juliet the last time he had visited Washington. What was he doing here and why was he in such a desperate state to reach Lincoln?

The question – and both the actor's and Dubois' attempts to approach the stand – proved to be moot as before they could make it half the distance to the platform, Lincoln and his family, and the rest of the dignitaries, had departed – gone into the Capitol.

The crowd departed as well, surging away from the platform and sweeping around Dubois and the actor, and soon they found themselves standing a few feet from each other at the edge of the stand.

“Good day, sir,” Dubois said, tipping his hat to the man.

“It is anything but,” the man replied brusquely, turning to leave.

“But wait, sir,” Dubois called. “I recognize you from the theatre. I saw you in Romeo and Juliet. You were splendid.”

The man turned back to face Dubois. Jesse noticed that the actor, though calm in speech and manner, still had about him an air of anxiety. “I appreciate your praise, sir, and thank you for it. Truly it is a blessing to be able to bring joy and entertainment to the masses.”

Dubois found the actor's affectations – for surely this was one of those actors so embroiled in that which they called their craft that everything becomes a role and discerning fact from fiction becomes a chore – amusing but ultimately, annoying. He had little time for such put ons and chose not to pursue the conversation further. “I am sorry to have kept you.” He then turned to go.

This time it was the actor's turn to call Dubois back. “Sir, I apologize for my manners. I spoke without thinking.” Dubois doubted this very much. “I merely am displeased by the day's proceedings.”

Dubois raised an eyebrow questioningly. “Oh? You did not find the new president's address to be agreeable?”

“Not agreeable at all!” exclaimed the man. “Indeed, it was as far from agreeable as any address could be. The man is a liar and will soon prove to be a thief as well; of both property and rights!”

“Sir, I believe I will take my leave of you now. I respect your right to speak your mind – it is the most important principle, I believe, that our nation is founded upon – but I will not have my friend abused so harshly. I am afraid I would be forced, by the needs of honor and dignity, to defend him and I fear you would have me at a distinct advantage in that regard.”

Again, Booth called Dubois back, “Sir! Sir! Allow me to apologize again – it is all that I seem able to do today. My deepest regrets. I forgot myself in my agitation. I am so easily affected by the fears and doubts in the air around me that sometimes I am forced to terrible and ungentlemanly utterances such as you have just had the misfortune to witness.”

Dubois paused, and then nodded. “I accept your apology, sir, and now I will go, lest it become necessary to hear another. Again, I bid you good day.”

“And good day to you,” said the man, offering a slight bow. Dubois imagined it was an automatic gesture carried over from the man’s life on stage. “But, I bid you wait one moment more, if you please. Did I hear you say you were the man’s friend? Was that said as a figure of speech such as one might call a man unrelated by blood his “brother”? Or do you really count.....” He trailed off as if unable to even speak the man’s name. Finally, he appeared to steel himself enough to speak it. “...Mr. Lincoln amongst your friends?” Dubois began to find the man even more disagreeable and condescending. “It was no turn of phrase,” he said. “Mr. Lincoln – the President – is indeed one of my closest friends.”

“Indeed!” the actor exclaimed. “And what is your name, sir?”
”I am Jesse K. Dubois, of Springfield, Illinois.”

“Well, it is a pleasure to meet you.” The actor held out his hand for Dubois to shake.

Still not properly introduced, there was a long pause as Dubois gave the man a meaningful look, thinking perhaps a nonverbal rebuke might avoid another long-winded apology.

“Sir?” asked the actor.

“I’m sorry. I still don’t know your name.”

“You don’t know – oh dear! How dreadfully impolite of me! I had assumed that since you knew me from the theatre that naturally, you would know my name.”

“Of course you would,” said Dubois. “I suppose it is my turn, somehow, to apologize for not remembering.”

“Not at all. Not at all. Allow me to introduce myself. I am John Wilkes Booth, of the family Booth, at your service.”

“Ah, and now I do remember your name.”

“For that, I am most grateful, for that is of utmost importance to those of my ilk. Actors, I mean.”

“As a politician, I understand the need for name recognition.”

“Oh? You are a politician as well?” Booth asked.

“I am, sir.”

“And amongst Lincoln’s friends,” Booth said. He paused thoughtfully. “And yet you were not amongst the dignitaries and friends on the dais with Mr. Lincoln just now. It was crowded on that stand but I daresay there was plenty enough room for one more.”

“He did not choose to bring along any of his friends from Illinois,” Dubois admitted.

“Surely it was an oversight. I am glad to see that you are not ruffled by the omission. You did seem overly anxious to reach the platform following the speech.”

“I could say the same about you,” Dubois said. “Why were you in such a hurry? By your own admission, you feel no love for the President. What was your purpose and intent?”

“I admit, it must look unseemly, rushing the way I was, but I would much rather talk about you.”

“An obvious attempt at changing the subject, sir. I won’t have it.”

“But you are the original subject, Mr....what was it again? Dubois. Why would your close friend and colleague not even extend an invitation to you for the inaugural celebrations? Surely you are on the short list for some secretarial position in his cabinet,

are you not? Isn't that why you undoubtedly fought so hard to make him President? Why you supported him for all this time?"

"I am not interested in a patronage position, Mr. Booth. Your accusations and assumptions do you little credit. You may keep stabbing away in the dark as you please, but I will not stand here any longer to witness it."

With that, Dubois walked away, leaving Booth behind. The actor watched as he left, a small smile crossing his lips.

November 7th, 1860

The President-Elect woke from a fitful sleep. He'd finally managed to doze off at around 5 in the morning but it hadn't lasted and what little he'd gotten wasn't of a quality to leave him feeling well-rested. His pocket-watch told him it was a little after 9 A.M. and it seemed as if the revelers of the night before had finally given up. Rising from bed, he dressed and then went downstairs to greet his family.

Breakfast was on the table and the two boys had eaten and gone to school. Mary rushed over to her husband and kissed him.

"Good morning, Mr. President," she said.

"That's Mr. President-Elect, for now," Lincoln replied.

"Well, then, Mr. President-Elect. Have some breakfast. You have a long day ahead of you."

"I have a long week ahead of me," Lincoln said, sitting at the table. "A long month. A long year."

"Well, let's just take it one day at a time, shall we?"

"Sage words, my dear." He paused. "I'll have to go to Washington tomorrow."

"I'll arrange your travel if you wish."

"I think I have people who do that for me now, don't I?"

"You have a person who does that for you," Mary admonished him. "And that person is me."

"I'm just saying that you could relinquish that position if you liked. Find something more suitable for a First Lady of the United States."

"And what is more suitable than caring for the 'First Man' of the United States? Perhaps I should plan a ball? Or pose for a painting? Which would you prefer?"

Lincoln chuckled. "You will do whatever you wish, I am sure. You always do."

"I will do whatever is best for you, Abraham. And whatever is best for the country. You know that to be true. Now eat your breakfast. The Johnny cakes are getting cold."

Later that day, on his way to his office building, Lincoln was intercepted by a messenger riding a fast horse and accompanied by two Federal guards.

"Mr. President-elect," the messenger said. "I have for you your Presidential Daily Briefing."

"Already? But how on Earth could you have gotten here so quickly?"

"We rode fast, sir," said the messenger dismounting awkwardly, obviously sore and cramped from the long ride.

“Take it easy there now, son,” Lincoln said, helping the young man retain his balance.

“Thank you, sir. I do appreciate it.” He took from his saddlebag a small parcel which he handed to Lincoln. “This is for your eyes only, sir.”

“I understand. Thank you, young man,” said Lincoln.

“If I could just get you to sign for receipt of the PDB, sir, we could be on our way.”

“Don’t you gentlemen think you should get some rest before your long return trip?” Lincoln asked, signing and dating the receipt the messenger had handed him.

“As much as we might enjoy that, sir, we have to be back in Washington in time to receive tomorrow’s PDB and deliver it to you.”

“You must be kidding, son. Besides, tomorrow I’ll be on a train to Washington. There’s no need for you to deliver to me.”

“We’ll find you, sir. Don’t worry.”

Lincoln waited until he was alone in his office to open the parcel. It contained a letter written on a single sheet by the Director of Intelligence, Warren Samuel. Its contents outlined the current threats to the nation which were The South; Europe; and dresses with hemlines above the ankle. Lincoln tossed the sheet into his fireplace and grumbled. *I knew all that already*, he thought.

February 15, 1861
Baltimore, MD

The Presidential Daily Briefing this day focused on the same things it had the previous four months, namely the secession of the South, various Southern agitators, and issues with European aggression. There was one notable addition, however: the plot to assassinate the President.

That’s new, thought Lincoln.

Waking in his sleeping car aboard the train, Lincoln had struggled to remember where they were. His whistle-stop tour, while ultimately taking him to Washington, D.C. and the inauguration, was taking a most circuitous route. From Springfield, they had gone to St. Louis, then east through Kentucky, back up to Indiana, across Ohio with a quick jaunt into Michigan and so on. Before speaking at each stop, Lincoln would have to ask an aide what city they currently occupied so as not to offend the locals when he opened his remarks. It simply wouldn’t do to say, “Hello Louisvillians!” while speaking in Indianapolis. There were enough problems already.

But this assassination plot was the icing upon the cake for Lincoln.

April 12, 1861
Washington, D.C.

Herbert “Humberto” Pelton, a White House aide knocked quietly but urgently on the bedroom door. He hated when momentous things took place at odd hours; was loathe to wake the President of the United States up with terrible news. Though it had been

scarcely more than a month since he took the office, already his health appeared to be declining; his once handsome face was becoming noticeably thinner, his lankiness exaggerated, his movements more awkward. However, the business of war waited for no man, and the aide was certain that the President would not fault him for disturbing his sleep.

Finally, the door opened. The President's footman, Edward Stinson, clothes rumpled and stifling a yawn, peered out.

"Eddy, I need the President," the aide said.

"Berto," Stinson said, "Do you know what time it is?"

"Yes, Eddy, of course I do. It's a little after five in the morning."

"Come back in a coupla hours, alright, kid?"

"Eddy, are you serious? You do realize that he's the President of the United States, right? That there are issues that are more important than his sleep?"

"Oh yeah? Issues like what?"

"Jesus Christ, Eddy. Just get the man up. Beauregard fired on Sumter."

Over the past few days, tensions at Fort Sumter, one of the few remaining occupied Federal military posts in the South, had been rising. An attempt to resupply the fort with provisions (with a promise not to add more men or munitions) had made the Southerners nervous to the point that they had mobilized troops to Charleston who had taken positions near the fort. After several nervous days of staring at each other, the Southerners had opened fire on Fort Sumter. After a single shot was fired, a message was dispatched to Washington.

"Have they fully opened fire?" asked Lincoln. Having been roused from his sleep, he now gathered in a meeting room with several advisors, including William Seward, Secretary of State; Simon Cameron, Secretary of War; and Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy.

"They have, Mr. President," said Cameron. "Their order of battle shows 12 cannon, and nearly 500 men. I believe they are now bombarding the fort at full strength. The fort can withstand it, but of course you are already aware that Anderson is short on supplies."

"If Beauregard doesn't take the building down around our men, he will be able to simply starve them out," mused Seward.

"Indeed he will," said Welles. "The *Cumberland* is on its way as of yesterday evening, at full sail from Norfolk."

"The *Cumberland*?" asked Cameron incredulously. "You sent a 50-gun frigate on a resupply mission to a fort where tension is high enough already? What do you expect the Rebels to do when they see that?"

"I certainly couldn't send an unarmed freighter down there. Besides, the *Cumberland* can now easily support the battle."

"You would send a single ship to attack one of our forts? Beauregard's men occupy Fort Moultrie now and could direct fire to *Cumberland* while they continued to rain shells upon Sumter."

"There is to be no battle," Lincoln said decisively. "Sumter was built to defend from naval attacks; not to withstand a ground-based shelling. You chose well, Gideon,

however the *Cumberland* and her men are needed elsewhere. See to it that she returns to Norfolk. There will be evacuation and destruction operations to undertake there.”

Both Cameron and Welles turned to look at their President.

“We’re abandoning Norfolk?” asked Welles.

“We have reason to believe that Virginia will soon secede as well, leaving our men there in a precarious situation,” said Seward. “We need to make sure that our assets in Norfolk do not fall into enemy hands.”

“That’s news to me,” said Cameron. “How did you come by this information?”

“Part of my job,” replied Seward.

Welles capitulated. “We will send word to *Cumberland*. There is a transport convoy that can be on station in a day’s time. I insist on sending some escort, however.”

“Of course,” said Lincoln. “Only make it subtle. We don’t want to make anybody nervous.”

“Sir,” Cameron started, “correct me if I am wrong, but hasn’t the Confederacy just started a war? They’ve attacked Federal property. Is that not a treasonous and rebellious act?”

“We’ve been waiting for them to strike the first blow. We can not be seen to be the aggressor. Yes, Mr. Cameron, it is time to mobilize. You are prepared, are you not?”

“Well sir, the Federal Army has lost a lot of men over the past months, due to the secession. Some of our best leaders have gone back to their homes in the South and joined the Confederate Army. I suggest calling for volunteers from each state.”

“Untrained militias,” Lincoln mused.

“It worked during the War with Britain.”

“Those men were fighting for a cause in which they deeply believed – our nation’s freedom and independence. At the very least, they had a rallying cry. They would not be taxed without representation. Can we rally men around the cause of keeping the country together? Will the average man in Maine care whether or not Florida is part of the Union?”

“We could put forth that it is a war to end slavery,” suggested Seward.

“But that is not the aim of this war,” replied Lincoln. “As much as I personally would like to see the cries of the Declaration upheld – that all men are indeed created equally, and yes, that the Negroes are indeed *men* and not *property* – it has never been my aim to reach out and quash the institution directly.”

“We had hoped that by disallowing slavery in new territories and states that it would eventually die out in the rest of the country.”

“Like everything else in life, that which can not expand and grow will eventually wither and die,” Lincoln said. “An indirect, and perhaps too slow approach, but the only legal and just approach.”

“Now we are presented with an opportunity, sir.”

“We will fight a war against the South,” said Lincoln. “And we will win. And what? We will punish the unruly child by taking away his toys? We will welcome our rebellious brothers back into the fold but tell them that they can no longer have their property once guaranteed them by our Constitution?”

“When they capitulate – and they will – they will have no choice,” said Cameron, “we will rightfully impose upon them any rule that we want. We will keep them out of the Congress, keep them from owning slaves, keep them from pissing if it pleases us.”

“Have you read *their* Constitution?” asked Seward. “They don’t even want to expand slavery. For some reason, all of the ideas which they say lead to secession in the first place made their way into that document. They ban outside slave acquisition, won’t allow slavery in new States. It’s everything we offered them before. Somehow what wasn’t good enough to keep them from leaving the Union is good enough to keep them going now. I think they were just looking for any excuse to leave.”

“There are some who would say good riddance and let them go,” put forth Cameron.

“They are now in possession, illegally, of government property. Half of our land is gone, and the revenue that we would make off that land is now going into their coffers. You would let that pass?”

“I did not say that *I* would say good riddance and let them go,” countered Cameron. “Just that some would. You know me, I’m all about going down there, kicking ass, and taking names.”

“I know I am naïve to think that there may be some amicable end to this matter,” sighed Lincoln, “but I can not help but be reminded that these are our brothers and fathers that we are going to fight. There will be deep wounds that may never heal.”

“Gentlemen, I suggest we leave the larger esoteric questions for later, or for other men to discuss,” Seward interjected. “There will be a war; there is no avoiding it now. We have been attacked. The South has laid the challenge at our doorstep and we must answer in kind.”

“You are right, of course, William,” said the President. “Let us go fight our war. Gentlemen, I trust you know what to do. Keep me informed.”

At Fort Sumter, Private J.K. Wheeler was huddled under a table with his longtime friend, Private Addleborough G. Kamloops as the shelling continued unabated.

“This is fucking ridiculous,” Wheeler shouted over the booming explosions.

“It’s pretty goddamned ironic, if you ask me,” replied Kamloop.

“I’m not quite sure that it approaches irony as it’s so far wedged into the land of suck that it hasn’t time to be anywhere else.”

“Think about it, though,” insisted Kamloops. “Here we are in a coastal fort, being attacked from the fucking ground.”

“That’s exactly why it fucking sucks!” shouted Wheeler. “Their cannon are lobbing shells over the damned walls and our guns can’t point down far enough to even hit them. Anything that can traverse down to be effective is up at the top of the fort and you know what happened to the last guys who went up there to try to fire one.”

“Actually, I didn’t hear about that. What happened?”

“Well, you remember Jimmy Alton?”

“Sure, that kid from New York. Claimed he was gonna make it big as a musician or some shit, right?”

“Yeah, that’s the one.” Wheeler paused as a shell exploded nearby. “Jesus Fuck, that was close. Anyhow, so Major Anderson sends Jimmy with Weatherly and Townsend up there to see if they can’t start getting some fire trained on their cannon, only the second they get up there a shell lands damn near in Jimmy’s lap.”

“Holy shit!” exclaimed Kamloops.

“Yeah, exactly! So he’s bouncing it around in his hands not knowing what to do, right? And Weatherly is screaming at him to throw the fuckin’ thing back over the side and Townsend dives for cover except he falls through the ladder hatch.”

“Woah – is he alright?”

“Is he alright? That poor bastard fell three stories! He broke both his wrists! But you know what they say --”

“Coulda been worse. Right, right.”

“Exactly,” said Wheeler. “So Jimmy is hot potatoing this goddamn shell around and finally tosses it to Weatherly and Weatherly gets so pissed off that he drops the fucking thing on the ground and goes after Jimmy. Starts beating the blessed snot out of the poor kid. Meanwhile, the shell is just sitting there next to the powder magazine hissing and smoking, looking for an excuse to go off. But Jimmy and Weatherly are rolling around next to it, completely oblivious.”

“Jesus Christ. So does the shell go off?”

“Shit, man, if it had, we’d still be picking bits of Jimmy and Weatherly out of our hair. No, fuckin’ thing was a dud.”

“Those guys are seriously lucky bastards,” said Kamloops. “What are the odds?”

Another nearby explosion caused the two men to jump.

“Can’t we just fucking surrender?” asked Wheeler. “We should just surrender.”

“That’s the spirit, J.K.” Kamloops said, sarcastically.

“Oh come on. I mean, look at it this way – after this we’re going to be at war, right? No way Abe’s going to let them get away with this, even if they apologize real sweet. Secession was one thing. Yeah it was ‘legally void’ or whatever he called it, and sure it pissed him off, but you’ve got to think that at this point, they’ve crossed the fucking line. They’re attacking United States property. You think you can do that and get away with a slap on the wrist? Fuck no.”

“Fuck no, hoo-rah,” Kamloops grunted.

“Yeah, yeah, hoo-rah. U.S.A. U.S.A. My point is this: we are now well behind enemy lines. There are hundreds of Confed troops out there and thousands more all around us. How many guys do we have here, Addleborough?”

“Dunno. Eighty?”

“Eighty-six all told. Eighty fucking six. Cut off from the country we so dearly love and which holds us close to her heaving bosom. All alone in the wilderness and chaos of the Deep South which is full of backwards-thinking lunatics who can’t decide if they’re super tough or super nice. Right now, Southern Hospitality is going to be a stack of Johnny cakes followed by a musket ball in the throat.”

“Still, I hate to just surrender,” Kamloops said.

“You know what you’d hate even more than that?” asked Wheeler.

“What’s that? Being forced to pick fucking cotton every day?”

“Well, yeah, but also being dead. Think about just how much that would suck.”

Kamloops considered it. “You’re right. I’d fucking hate being dead.”

“Damn right you would, buddy. You’d hate it the most, I just know it.”

“I always said that I was born to be alive, man.”

“Hell yeah. Hell fucking yeah. My buddy Addleborough G. Kamloops was born to be alive.”

“You know what we should do?” asked Kamloops.

“What’s that A.G.?”

“We should totally lower the flag in the center of the fort and raise a white one.”

“Call a surrender on our own? That’s not a bad idea. Might end up dead anyway – a firing squad is just as bad as a Con-fed musket ball.”

“That’s true. You think they’d call that treason?”

“Acting against orders at the very least.

“Still, nobody’s looking. They’d never know who it was.”

“Alright, I’m in,” Wheeler said.

The two were extracting themselves from their cover positions when they heard another shell whistling overhead. Wheeler sighed. “Back under,” he said. They returned to the relative safety of the table. Wheeler tracked the path of the shell and watched in awe as it landed square at the base of the flagpole and exploded. Sheared in half, the pole tumbled to the ground.

“There goes that idea,” he said.

“Those bastards took down our flag!” exclaimed Kamloops.

“You wanna go out there and yell at them?” asked Wheeler.

“Not really,” admitted Kamloops. “What are we supposed to be doing right now anyway?”

“I haven’t the slightest. I think Sarge is playing poker in the barracks.”

“No shit? He owes me \$20 and he’s playing cards?”

“Probably trying to win enough money to pay you back.”

“I hope he’s getting good cards,” Kamloops said.

“Me too,” agreed Wheeler.

Suddenly, the shelling stopped. An eerie silence filled the air – unusual for an after-battle silence in that it wasn’t filled with the screams and cries of the dying.

“Huh,” said Kamloops.

“Yeah – pretty quiet.”

There was a gentle rapping at the front gate of the fort.

“Are you *kidding* me?” asked Wheeler.

“What should I do?” asked Kamloops.

“Do I look like I know? Ask who it is.

“Uh, who is it?”

“Captain Gregory T. Lansdown, Third Company Fourth Division South Carolina Mounted Force.”

“Oh yeah? If that’s true, what’s the 3C4DSC motto?” asked Wheeler.

“Fighting for the future of the flock!” shouted Lansdown proudly.

“Is that right?” whispered Kamloops.

“How the hell should I know?” Wheeler said. He shouted at the door, “What do you want?”

“Well look, we were looking at the fort, right? And we saw you guys had taken your flag down? And we were wondering if you were surrendering.”

“Took our flag down?” Wheeler asked. “We didn’t take our flag down, you guys...” He looked over at Kamloops. “What do you think?” he whispered.

“Go for it,” said Kamloops.

“Yeah, totally, man. We totally want to discuss the terms of our surrender. How’s...4 o’clock work for you?”

“Sounds great. There’s a great coffeehouse in Charleston, ok? Head down Main St. towards Third Avenue, turn left, go half a block. It’s on your right. We’ll see you there.”

“You got it,” Wheeler said. Quietly: “What a chump.”

“Well, that’s that,” said Kamloops. “You really think we’ll be back here though?”

“Without a doubt. Look, A.G., I’ll bet you that Old Abe’s already organizing militias back home. He and the brass are planning out their strategies and I don’t know what they are but I’m certain that we are going to sweep through the South with the fury and force of the entire – well, half of it, anyway – United States Armed Forces. We will shock and awe the shit out of these fools until they are so scared they’ll shit their grits.”

“Hoo-rah!” Kamloops said.

“Hoo-rah,” sighed Wheeler. He rushed off to find his commanding officer to inform him of his coffee date.

A day later, as Kamloops and Wheeler stood in formation to march from the fort under the terms of their surrender, they grinned at each other.

“Fuckin’ made it through, A.G.,” said Wheeler.

“Damn right we did,” said Kamloops.

“And we’ll be back, goddammit. All you motherfuckers better get ready for us,” Wheeler said raising his voice as though he were addressing the Southern troops, “because we will motherfuckin be back.”

Jesse Dubois sat angrily at his desk. It had been three months since his close friend had taken office and still he was stuck as State Auditor of Illinois. An overqualified, glorified accountant. Nothing he had done had elicited a response from Lincoln who had already filled his cabinet with Washington insiders. He even had Stephen Douglas, his longtime rival, making Unionist speeches across the Midwest.

He began writing a letter.

“Dear Mr. President,

I would address you as my friend if I felt you still considered me as such but your recent actions – or perhaps I should say inactions – lead me to believe otherwise. As close as we have been and I believe we have been close, one would think that I have caused some offense that might cause you to omit me from your inner circle. You might recall that evening we walked in the Town Square and you confided in me the shady dealings that brought you to where you are today. I say shady though you never described them as such because I call into question everything you confided in me and wonder if there was even more that you neglected to tell me. You have not appointed to office of importance any man who was originally your friend in Illinois. Instead you surround yourself with soreheads and grumblers who doubtlessly speak ill of you behind your back. Was this some part of an agreement necessary to elevate you to your present position?

Hoping still you have a successful administration,
Jesse K. Dubois.”

In Washington, John Wilkes Booth sat at his own desk, writing a letter.

“My esteemed Mr. Dubois,

I hope you find it acceptable that I am writing to you. Following our meeting this past March in Washington, I found myself researching you & your esteemed career. A State Auditor! A former Legislator! And a family man to boot. How are Mary and little Abraham? (You named your son after your close friend! Touching!)

More importantly (no slight upon your wonderful family of course) how are you faring? I scan the newspapers daily with hopes of seeing the announcement of your triumphant appointment to some office or another within our President's inner circle, and daily I have been (thus far) disappointed. But perhaps not as disappointed as you are? Or should I say, 'unappointed'? Forgive me a chuckle at that. as an actor, I am constantly seeking out every opportunity for a witty rejoinder. A verbal puzzle. Do these tickle you as they do me? I imagine that they do not. You, sir, are undoubtedly of such a stature as to be above such childish things. Or perhaps, as your life has kept you buried in the ledger books of your great state, you speak better with numbers; are better acquainted with figures; feel more at home amongst the calculations. Regardless, even a man such as yourself will have to admit that such a remark – calling a man hoping for a Federal position who has yet to receive one from his dear, dear friend, the President, 'unappointed' – has its merits in the world of humor, and it must strike close to the target.

Do you find yourself disappointed as you remain unappointed? Have you simply accepted the fact that you are to remain in Lincoln's past, forgotten by history as your friend (the President) makes his own? Do you feel that if he would just answer your letters and heed your cries that you could add your considerable weight to the matters at hand? Has word traveled back to quaint Springfield (I adore your little town, having traveled through it on journeys to bigger, more civilized places) that we are now at war? Forgive me if that comes as a shock, but it is true, sir. The United States is at war with herself, and threatens to tear apart at the seams. But, this last is neither here nor there. What is important is your own state of mind. I simply *must* know it.

Most admirably,
John Wilkes Booth

P.S. If you ever find yourself vacationing in Washington, D.C., just tell the gentleman at the box office of the Ford Theater your name. You will find that I have left you two standing tickets, good for any performance, at any time."

July 7th 1861
Washington, D.C.

"These are dangerous times, Mary," Lincoln said to his wife as they lay in bed.

"Wartime is always dangerous, Abraham," she replied sleepily.

"Of course, but what I mean to say is that these are dark times. These are times where there is a looming air of darkness; of bleakness; of despair. As if everything were presented in black and white instead of the vivid colors that we see before us. And yet, I was elected as the first Republican president of the United States in hope that all this would change. And what has changed, Mary? Nothing at all."

"It has scarcely been four months since you took office. What needs to be done may not be completed in one year or one term, much less in four months. You must have patience."

“I have patience, Mary. I do and I always have. You know that. But do the American people have patience? Can they afford to have patience now that they are sending their sons, brothers, and husbands off to war? Off to a war where they are often fighting against their friends and neighbors? There is no time for patience then. This must be decided and done with swiftly.”

“This will not be a short war,” Mary said. “The South can afford to remain where they are, entrenched and defensive. You will have to send the entirety of your forces to root them out and they will be able to outwait you, if not outlast you.”

“But I have at my disposal the technology and might of the United States Army. We may yet be a fledgling nation but compared to them, we are a superpower to be reckoned with,” Lincoln protested.

“We are a superpower that has been cut in half, my dear. They have taken with them many of your best leaders, and much of your materiel. You must be careful. Be cautious.”

November 19th, 1861
Washington, D.C.

Dubois approached the window in the box office at the Ford Theater. After receiving the first letter from Booth, the two had exchanged several more letters. While each further missive from the actor had done more to incense Dubois than any action (or inaction) by Lincoln, Dubois found that he enjoyed reading (and replying to) Booth’s letters. Having business in the capital, Dubois had an evening free and decided to take Booth up on his offer of a free night of theater.

“I believe you have a ticket for me. My name is Dubois. Jesse Dubois.”

The man behind the window looked at a list and found Dubois’ name. “Excellent sir,” he said. “Mr. Booth has left two tickets for you for this evening’s performance.”

“I shall only need the one,” said Dubois.

“Of course, sir. Here you are.”

November 9th, 1861
Gettysburg, PA

Lincoln thought he could still detect an aroma of gunpowder in the air, and atop of that, death. It had been four months since the great battle at Gettysburg had turned the tide of the war; the bodies had been buried, the guns were long gone, but still the scent lingered, and Lincoln wondered if it would ever truly fade from existence. He doubted it.

Seated on a dais amidst numerous dignitaries, local officials, military personnel and other people of importance, Lincoln turned to Ward Hill Lamon and said, “I really do not want to be here.”

“I don’t either, Mr. President, but I suppose we have little choice now, do we?”

“No, I suppose we don’t,” Lincoln allowed. “Still, they only asked me a few days ago. I hate appearing on a bill as an afterthought.”

“As do I, sir. It’s disrespectful, if you ask me.”

“Yes, well, Hill, sometimes we have to do what we don’t want to do, right?”

“That’s the burden of being President, sir,” Lamon agreed.

“What’s Everett doing here?” Lincoln asked. He pointed towards Edward Everett, former legislator, Harvard President, and vice-Presidential candidate on the Constitutional Union ticket with John Bell in the 1860 election.

“You didn’t know he’d be here?”

“I didn’t know *I* would be here,” Lincoln said. “I had no idea of the other guests’ identities.”

“Wills invited him as the main speaker, sir.”

“Wills.” Lincoln shook his head. Everett had caught Lincoln’s eye and waved hello. Lincoln gave a noncommittal smile in response. “Puts me on a bill with Everett. Haven’t seen him since the election. Imagine he’s still sore.”

“From what I hear, sir, he’s actually a staunch supporter of your administration. Strong and loyal Unionist as well.”

“That’s good to know.”

“Bell’s sore as hell though, sir. He’s sworn up and down the country that he’ll destroy you any way he can.”

“Yes, I know, Hill. Not sure what got that man so riled up. He put me into this office. Guess he got a hankerin for the chair himself.”

“I’ve told him it’s not the most comfortable seat in the world to occupy. Guess he’s got no place else to sit.”

“Well, we can let him stew down in.... Where is he spending his days lately?”

“I believe he’s retired home to Kentucky, sir.”

Everett turned to Lincoln and whispered, “I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes.”

Lincoln nodded somberly. “I’m glad to know that it was not a total failure,” he said.

April 14th, 1865

Washington, D.C.

Two weeks prior, Kate had received a letter:

Dear Miss Barley,

It has been some time since last we exchanged letters. Please do not believe for a moment that I have forgotten you or what you did for me in New York some five years ago. That I am still in your debt for that is constantly at the forefront of my thoughts. Furthermore, your instruction in the arts of pretending and deception has been most applicable to my acting craft. I have never been, nor will I ever be, able to thank you properly for all you have done. I hope that life has at least somehow rewarded you for the kindness that you showed me, and doubtless continue to show other people. Regardless, I have enclosed two tickets to the upcoming production of *Our American Cousin*

performing at Ford's Theater in Washington this April. I hope that you will consider attending. I will appear briefly in the lobby in hope of gazing upon your beautiful face once more.

Sincerely,
John Wilkes Booth

Ford's Theater had hosted many dignitaries before, and had even hosted this particular dignity before. Located in a prime spot in Washington D.C. and being one of the very few entertainment options in town, the theatre enjoyed a popular following. Photographs of the many celebrities that had seen productions at the theatre were proudly displayed on the walls at the entrance. Such luminaries included every previous President and Vice President of the United States since the Ford Theater was built; famous authors; merchants and foreign leaders; and all the best and brightest minds in the realm of the sciences and invention. Celebrities were slim pickings in the 1860s, what with a lack of media outlets to produce the sort of fame that would lead to mass recognition. The most famous men and women were the most infamous – outlaws and criminals held the imaginations of the people most of the time. It was a dark and primitive era. Googy foogy.

Kate marveled at the crowds in the theater. She wasn't much of a theater enthusiast, having never really had much of an opportunity to attend plays during her childhood or adult life, but Pinkerton spoke endlessly about the brilliance of various productions and performances and she was eager to see what it was all about. As she entered the building, she looked with awe at the photos of all the famous people that had been there. She came into the lobby and immediately spotted Booth.

He was standing off to one side, away from the crowds, trying his hardest to look inconspicuous. Kate had tried to teach him the best ways to blend in with crowds, but obviously the lessons hadn't taken. He was standing, pretending to read a newspaper, but looking around nervously the entire time. He didn't mingle, and though he was people watching, he was not doing it in such a way that made him seem curious and interested in people, but rather looked haunted and frightened. Also, his fake moustache was falling off, titled down to one side, covering his lips. Short of whistling a "doo doo doo doo doo" tune, Booth couldn't have been more obvious.

Kate approached him, laughing to herself. She smiled largely at him and said, "Hi, John."

"Shhh!" he grabbed Kate's hand and pulled her into a small alcove. "I'm trying to be inconspicuous, don't use my real name."

"I could tell you were trying," Kate said, still laughing. She reached to Booth's face and straightened his moustache for him. "It's quite obvious. You need some more spirit gum for that moustache. By the way, what should I call you?"

"I'm going by Arthur K. Wrigglefield these days."

"Well, Mr. Wrigglefield, it is a pleasure to meet you. My name is Paulina Weston Hirshfield Gongoria Toulouse Pasteur Nonnadonna IV. My friends call me Willie."

Booth was in no mood for amusement. "Nice to meet you, Willie," he said somewhat coldly. He paused, looked Kate in the eyes and softened. "I'm glad you could make it."

Kate smiled warmly at Booth and said, "I am too."

"I'm sorry for all the subterfuge and the false names and such, but I'm trying to be incognito these days."

"What for?" Kate asked.

"Well," he started, "my star is rising, you know. I'm sure you've read all about me in the newspapers." Booth paused, expectantly. Kate lied with a nod. Booth continued, "It's gotten to be tremendously difficult to go out in public without being mobbed both by reporters and photographers and by my adoring public."

Booth was just as pompous as Kate remembered. She hadn't heard or read a single mention of the actor in the intervening years between their train ride and their current meeting. The only reviews or praise she had come across had been in Booth's own letters which were never short on praise, claims of greatness, and the strangest and most peculiar (and weirdest and oddest, and also the most bizarre) statements that he was becoming the most well-recognized, most beloved and adored man, not just on the stage, but in any field anywhere at any time. He had once written that he knew that when the Lord and savior Jesus Christ came back from whatever planet he was currently vacationing upon, heralding the end of days, that Jesus would ask to visit him personally, and ask him for his opinion on whether he should allow time to continue or rather wipe the Earth clean of human existence and then retire to heaven with a high class hooker and a nice bottle of wine. Kate was impressed with the scope of Booth's delusions, a little scared, but incredibly amused. She always had been a sucker for a lunatic. She didn't know if he expected the second coming in the next several years or if Booth planned on living for a long long time. She guessed that it was the latter.

"I imagine it's been hard on you, Arthur," Kate said. "The burden of fame is a heavy cross to bear."

"You have no idea!" Booth exclaimed. "The other day I was leaving my house to go to the market to buy some eggs when a young boy who couldn't have been older than six approached me. The little devil was wearing a threadbare jacket, pants that were five sizes too large and obviously meant to be worn on a polo field and not in the street and a woman's hat. He said, 'Mr. Booth! Mr. Booth! Please sir, my family is starving. My mother and father are dead and my six brothers and sisters are all crippled or retarded. I have a big deadline at my job tomorrow and my boss is being an absolute asshole about it. Plus, he has not paid me for my services for the past six months. We've been getting by eating buttons and grass clippings but I'm certain that we won't last another fortnight without some help.' The urchin paused, tears sprang to his eyes. As disturbing as it was and as annoyed as you can imagine being interrupted in my private time made me, curiosity drove me to listen to the remainder of his story. 'Out with it, you dirty heathen,' I said. The boy sobbed and sniffled, trying to choke back his cries. Finally he managed to say, 'Sir, if you could just give me your autograph, it would make everything better. It would allow me to spring forth from my bed in the morning and go to work, ignoring the abuse my employer slings upon me. It would let me look past the grotesque deformities and handicaps of my brothers and sisters and let me begin to treat them like human beings. It would help me to get past the tragic deaths of my mother and father and the hands of tap-dancing Swedish road agents. I would finally get over my crippling fear of all things related to the purchasing, processing and sale of tea. Please, Mr. Booth. Just one scrawl of a pen in your hand across a scrap of paper would do all this and more.'"

“What did you say to the young lad?” Kate asked.

“Well of course I said no to him. What do you expect? I found the closest constable and immediately had the boy thrown in chains. Such disrespect should be punishable by death, if you ask me. The nerve of the youth of today is galling. I tell you, the current generation is simply maddening! They are constantly sitting around, doing nothing. They have this indecipherable slang. They are always playing ‘marbles.’ Do you know that studies have shown a direct link between youth marble playing and the rise in violence in urban centers? I feel that marbles should not be sold to children under the age of eighteen, and even then only with parental approval. Also, parents should constantly monitor the use of marbles and limit the amount of time that children spend playing with marbles. It just makes good sense.”

“I understand where you’re coming from,” Kate said.

“I’m glad to hear you say that... what did you say your name was again?”

“I don’t remember,” Kate admitted. “How about Miss Higgins?”

“I’m glad to hear you say that, Miss Higgins,” Booth repeated. “You would be surprised to know that not many people agree with my ideas. Most people find that they are too radical in their conservativity.”

“They *are* quite radical, Arthur,” Kate agreed. “Only, and you’ll forgive me for asking this, but did any of this actually happen?”

“Did it actually happen? Why of course it actually happened. I remember it like it was yesterday. It *was* yesterday, as a matter of fact.” Booth held up a box tied up in string. “These are the eggs I purchased immediately following my encounter with the boy. I bought them for you. It is a gift.”

Kate didn’t know what to say so she said what she said whenever she didn’t know what to say. “I don’t know what to say,” she said. She took the box from Booth and opened it. Expecting some eggs, she was surprised to find, instead, a revolver. She reclosed the box in a hurry. “What the hell is this?” she asked.

“Eggs,” Booth said quickly. “Just eggs.”

“It’s a gun, ‘Arthur,’” Kate whispered.

“Oh, a gun? That’s very strange indeed. Why would a gun be in a box that I thought contained eggs? That is completely unexpected, much like the Spanish Inquisition.”

“The Spanish Inquisition?” Kate asked, now completely confused.

Booth took the box from Kate and handed her another. “I got the boxes mixed up. It’s an honest mistake, one that could happen to anybody. Even the best actor in the universe. That’s me, by the way.”

“I gathered that,” Kate said.

“Say, do you know any Latin?”

“Latin? No, not really.”

“Which do you think sounds better? ‘Sic semper tyrannis? Or ego amo essum piscis piscis?’”

“The first one, I suppose. What do they mean?”

“One of them is ‘thus always to tyrants’ and the other is ‘I like to eat fish.’ They both have a nice ring to them, don’t you think?”

“I don’t understand either of them,” Kate said. “What’s this all about? Is it a line from this play?”

“Oh, no, I’m not in this play. Although I will be putting on a performance that you and the rest of the world will remember for the rest of your lives! Your short, pathetic, meaningless lives! Your worthless lives!” Booth laughed maniacally.

“I do believe you’ve lost your grip, Arthur,” Kate said. “If you’re not in the play, then why did you want me to come see it?”

“I wanted you to have a front row (well, not front row – I couldn’t quite swing front row; but those tickets are very good) seat to my greatest act!” Booth said.

“What are you going to do?”

“That’s for me to know and for you to find out,” Booth taunted.

“John. John, I think you should tell me what you’re planning.”

“And I think it’s time for you to take your seat,” Booth said. Kate looked around and saw that the crowd in the lobby had thinned. A house manager began flashing the lobby lights.

“Aren’t you joining me?” Kate asked. She turned back to Booth, but he was gone.

Kate approached an usher at the door to the theater. As she did so, she saw President Lincoln and his wife and a few other of his friends striding up the stairs towards the balcony. So the rumors are true, she thought. Lincoln was attending this evening’s performance. She handed her ticket to the usher and was shown to her seat.

The show (*Our American Cousin*) started right on time, but minutes into the performance, the actors stopped. A spotlight was turned to a box in the balcony revealing President and Mrs. Lincoln as they took their seats. The audience applauded; Kate joined in. The performance resumed.

Kate enjoyed the play, which mainly concerned the adventures of an American who travels to England to reclaim his family estate. Midway through the third act, the main character said, “Don’t know the manners of good society, eh? Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal; you sockdologizing old man-trap!” The crowd roared, though Kate was confused as to why everyone thought it was so funny. She didn’t understand it, and who can blame her?

Under the laughter, Kate heard something else. It was a sound that she had heard before, and she knew that it meant nothing good. It was the sound of gunfire. She looked towards the source: the President’s box. Booth stood on the railing, pumping his hands in victory, and then jumped to the stage. Frightened and confused actors leapt aside. The audience, apparently thinking this was part of the performance, erupted in applause.

“Sic semper piscis!” Booth shouted, and then limped off stage.

“Dear God,” Kate murmured, shaking her head. “’Thus always to fish?’”

Kate rode south in a hurry. By the time she had found a horse to borrow, she knew that Booth had a good head start on her, but she figured that her tracking skills would allow her to catch up with him in no time. It appeared that Booth had fled with three other men, all on horseback, all wearing dungarees and wide novelty ties that espoused the negative qualities of Mondays. She wondered who Booth’s coconspirators were; if any of the men from Baltimore had remained as opposed to the President during the past five years. And she wondered what Booth’s problem was. Certainly, the man had

delusions of grandeur. His megalomania might have lead him to the terrible deed he had performed. Perhaps something of reality had gotten through and he realized that he wasn't the great man he thought he was. Then, in his usual misguided way of thinking, he decided that the only logical course of action was to kill the greatest man alive.

Kate *had* come around to that line of thinking. During the past five years, as she'd followed the President's actions and his administration, she began to understand the fervor that had surrounded his election to the presidency. His management of the war had been impeccable and even the few things he'd done which were regarded as mistakes were handled incredibly well. Kate marveled at the fact that an uneducated country lawyer had somehow landed himself in the top political office in the country at the time when his country needed him most. The other men who had been up for the job certainly had more qualifications; more experience; more powerful friends; and much more money. They had all come from prestigious backgrounds, growing up comfortably and without the hardships that Lincoln had had to endure. His candidacy had been a million to one shot and he had managed to pull it off. And lo and behold, he was the exact right man for the job. Kate wondered what state the country would currently be in had he not been elected, had he not even run. Surely, some of the men would have done a decent job, perhaps would even have lead the United States to victory. It's even possible that had someone else – Breckenridge, for example – been elected, that the war might not even have happened.

But that would just have been like putting a small bandage on a gaping head wound: a temporary measure, at best. The rift at that point was far too wide to be bridged by anything but a split and a subsequent war, Kate thought. There was nothing that could have been done to prevent the inevitable. Slavery, as an institution, could not be allowed to spread across the United States. Not if, as some, including Kate, the United States was to take a position as a global leader in the world at large. It was embarrassing to be part of a nation that endorsed slavery as part of its economic future.

In '63, when Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation, Kate had rejoiced. She'd been in a tavern in Boston when the news spread and suddenly everyone present behaved as if they were the best of friends. It was a scene similar to that of Lincoln's election and inauguration. The Negro seated next to her leapt from his seat and took Kate up in his arms and danced her around the room. Kate had no choice but to dance along, but she did not care. The streets were filled with crowds of celebrants, black and white alike.

There were those who grumbled – those on both sides of the slavery issue, even. Many abolitionists felt that the proclamation was merely an empty shell of a document that did nothing more than the bare minimum in order to prevent a war with Britain and France, and to force them into supporting the Union cause. Those people, Kate thought, had no realistic vision. While the Emancipation Proclamation certainly would force Europe's hands and did strike a blow to the war machine and economy of the Confederacy, she knew that at his heart, Lincoln was a good man. Though he wasn't a strict abolitionist and wasn't as radical as many would like him to be, he was an enlightened man. He knew that slavery was wrong, but his legal background prevented him from taking illegal measures. He attacked slavery from a legal standpoint. It was the only way that he could stop slavery in good conscience. Perhaps he didn't go far enough then, but his championing of the thirteenth amendment which made slavery illegal in

every state certainly changed that. He was a hero, and only the most cynical of creatures could find something to say about that.

And of course they did, for people love to talk. And they love to wag their fingers and find faults because without it, they have nothing to talk about. Fools who needed to hear their own voices in order to know they still lived on, to have any self-worth, even though they had nothing of value to say, spoke on anyway. Their voices filled Kate's head with hatred and lies everywhere she went. She grew angrier and angrier until it came out in a fit of rage one day in Philadelphia when she badly beat a man who made the merest suggestion that Lincoln might have done a little more for the slaves. As she was pulled off the man, she continued to try to pummel him, all the while screaming, "You don't know him! You don't know him like I do!"

The following day, Bell called Konigmacher to his office.

"What the hell was that?" he asked the German.

"I'm not sure I know to what you refer," replied Konigmacher in impeccable English.

"You know exactly to what I refer, you damned Kraut," Bell raged. "I'm talking about the Goddamned election. The one that I was supposed to win and that self-righteous do-gooder from Illinois – here I refer to Abraham Lincoln, in case you are confused – was supposed to help me win. I hope I've made it all quite clear to you."

"Mr. Bell, I can see that you are quite angry, sir, and understandably so. However, I would warn you that greater men than yourself have died at my hand for saying less than you just did."

"Are you threatening me, son?" Bell asked.

"It is a simple warning, sir. No more, no less."

"Sounded like a threat to me."

"Take it as you will, then. Did you have anything more you needed from me?"

"Anything more?" Bell was enraged. Despite the German's warning, the urge to heap more curses upon the man was almost irresistible. Somehow he managed to restrain himself. "I want to know what happened!"

"What happened is that there was a higher bidder," Konigmacher explained.

"A higher bidder? What are you? Some kind of mercenary?"

"In the truest sense of the word, I suppose I am. But then, aren't we all? Do we not all seek out those who place the most value on our particular talents? Do we not try to see the highest price in compensation for our time?"

"Who is this 'higher bidder?' I demand to know!"

"I'm sorry, but he expressed the utmost desire to remain anonymous. I'm sure you understand his reasoning."

"You won't say because you don't know who it is, do you?" Bell said. "And you don't even care, do you? It could have been some petty tyrant, some rich idiot, anybody. And you just take their money and ask no questions. You may well have damned this country into its own destruction. Lincoln is President and the Union will crumble. Already the newspapers are calling for secession. The wheels are turning. That young fool doesn't have what it takes to put it all together again."

"So you believed none of what you said to him?"

“Of course I didn’t. You were there. You knew that I just said all that to get him to think about running. And it worked. Did it work on you as well?”

“I think you convinced him that he is the man for the job. And I don’t think that you were wrong. I sensed in Lincoln a dedication that I have never sensed in you, or the other candidates. You all – you and Douglas and Breckenridge – wanted to be President because you wanted the power. You craved having people do what you say. You feed off the servitude of others. You know that slavery is inevitably going to die and you need to find some way to keep others in thrall to you. But Lincoln never felt that. He felt the legislative duties because he knows he has something to offer to the world. He doesn’t want to do it because the world has something to offer to him. And he didn’t want to be President. He thought that it was a burden that he couldn’t bear.”

“And he’s right! It’s not the job that a man with doubts can do. If he can’t bear the burden, he shouldn’t take the office.”

“But he’s wrong. And so are you. He *can* bear the burden. He *can* take the responsibility. His shoulders may be narrow, but his heart is as wide as a million suns. His passion burns brighter than...well, than a million suns. And that’s more than I can say about you who merely wants the eyes of the nation turned to him. Lincoln will upset people. He will make unpopular decisions. I believe that you are correct when you say that his ascension to office will cause the Union to bend. But it will not break. This Union will not break. The Constitution that binds these states together is stronger than...stronger than a million suns.”

“What is it with you and the million suns thing?” Bell asked.

“We Germans are not so good with metaphors,” Konigmacher admitted. “When I find one, I tend to stick with it.”

“Admirable quality, loyalty to a metaphor. It’s a shame that you are not so steadfast in your loyalty to your employers.”

“I can’t believe we’re fighting a war to free these people,” Jack Klasky said, looking down on a stream of freed slaves who were eagerly making their way north through the littered battlefield. The Battle of Five Forks had ended the night before and Klasky and his friend and comrade Wilton Pinklebarnes were on security duty, overlooking one of the “five forks”: Dinwiddie County Courthouse Road.

“Dinwiddie,” said Pinklebarnes, savoring the sound of the word. “Dinwiddie Dinwiddie Dinwiddie.”

“Would you shut up with that already, Wil?” Klasky asked, exasperated. His friend had been saying nothing but Dinwiddie ever since Sergeant Poe had assigned them to watch the road.

“Dinwiddie,” Pinklebarnes said again. “We’re not fighting a war to free ‘these people,’ Jack. That’s a popular misconception.”

“How is it a misconception? How is this war about anything other than freeing the slaves? Lincoln is elected on a platform of abolitionism, skillfully manipulates the South into seceding from the nation, and then starts a war so that he can follow through on his anti-slavery ways and appease his anti-slavery friends.”

“First of all, that’s not how it happened. Secondly, what’s wrong with following through on campaign promises? Nobody follows through on campaign promises. Thirdly, *you’re* anti-slavery, aren’t you?”

Klasky nodded. “Of course I am. Slavery is totally stupid. How could we evolve to be the highest, most advanced lifeform on the planet and then spend our days keeping others of our kind in servitude?”

“Don’t you think that’s the right sort of thing to be fighting for? To stop the ownership of man by man?” asked Pinklebarnes.

“Well, on paper, sure it is. But by me? Fuck that. I have my principles and my beliefs, but I’m not going to die fighting for them.”

“You’re an amazing human being. You make me doubt that bit about us being the highest lifeform on the planet. You lower the bell curve considerably.”

Klasky punched Pinklebarnes in the arm. “Very funny, asshole.”

“Besides, like I said, that’s not what we are fighting for here. We’re fighting to maintain the sanctity of the Union. We’re fighting to prove that the Constitution is infallible and can not be broken.”

“If it’s so infallible, why are there amendments?”

“The Constitution creates a more perfect union, right? It’s in the first line. What the Confederacy has done is to try to bust up that more perfect union. Here we are, putting it all back together.”

“That’s not what this is about.”

“Yes it is. The Confederated States of America are an illegal organization occupying American soil. That’s all there is to it.”

“We should just place them all under arrest.”

“They have guns. And an *army*.”

Klasky nodded. He spotted a gray-uniformed Confederate soldier crawling towards their position. “Hold on.” He raised his rifle, peered through the sights and pulled the trigger. The man stopped moving. “Got ‘im. What were you saying?”

“Nice shot,” Pinklebarnes said. “Anyway, the long and the short of it is that the Confederates are all about – and I mean *all* about – the rights of the individual states, whereas the Union is all about, obviously, a strong, centralized government. That’s what this war is about: imposing the will of the central government upon the disparate states and people in those states.”

“Well *fuck that*,” Klasky said. “I’m even less into that as a *causus belli* than the whole slavery thing. That does not sit well with me *at all*.”

“Sorry to hear that, brother,” Pinklebarnes said. “That’s just the way it is.”

Klasky considered this for a moment and then said, “But wait a second. Isn’t Lincoln a Republican?”

“He is.”

“Aren’t Republicans more interested in states rights than strong centralized governments? That seems like it’s completely against the basic tenets of the party.”

Pinklebarnes smiled like he did whenever he knew something someone else didn’t. “Bingo bango, Bongo. You hit the nail on the head. The Republican party today is nothing like what it will become years from now. Republicans of the future – for the most part – are going to be assholes that you’d like even less than the ones we’ve got now. Over the years, the Democrats and Republicans will swap ideologies, much like the Earth as the magnetic poles gradually switch places over time.”

“They do what now?”

“It’s true. Anyway, while the Republicans in the future will constantly claim Lincoln as one of their own and will remind anyone who says anything against them that they are of the party that ‘freed the slaves’ and all that bullshit, the fact is that Lincoln-of-the-future will be a Democrat. Undoubtedly. But that’s not even the worst part.”

“What’s the worst part?”

“There will be people – lunatic Republicans – that will decry any attempt by peace-loving people everywhere to protest wars they feel are unjust by citing Lincoln’s going to war to free the slaves. ‘War doesn’t work?’ they will ask. ‘It is a good thing that Lincoln didn’t feel that way when he started a war to free the slaves.’”

“Just like I did.”

“Yeah, Jack. Just like you did. Now, you’re going to have to trust me on this when I say that these guys are complete dickheads and you don’t want to be associated with them. They’re even more obnoxious than you are.”

“Wait a second,” Klasky said.

“What is it?”

“How do you know all this?”

“I read about it.”

“Where?”

“On the internet.”

“The interwhat?”

It was widely known that Lincoln loved to tell stories. In everyday life, the man could seem taciturn, downcast, even depressed. But when he started spinning a yarn, his face would light up; his plain features became handsome; even his overlong arms which were so often a detriment to his appearance, when animated in the telling of a story, wildly gesticulating to emphasize this point or that, seemed more naturally a part of the man’s body rather than the slapped on limbs like which they often looked.

While it transformed the man, it also transformed those around him who heard the stories. Not only did Lincoln love to tell tales, but he was exceedingly good at it as well. As a storyteller, Lincoln was naturally gifted, knowing when to pause for dramatic effect, when to raise his voice to a shout to startle his listeners, or lower it to a whisper to draw them in. He could be funny, dramatic, thrilling, romantic, or scary. He was, when in the proper mood, a nearly limitless source of entertainment. People came from miles around just to hear him speak when he debated Stephen Douglas during the 1858 debates, but they stayed afterwards for more stories and tales from the man. Douglas may have won the election, but Lincoln won the hearts and minds of all the people that he met, and that proved to be more important in the long run. They well remembered Lincoln’s ability to entertain when he competed in the first American Idol contest, and after that, it was a simple run to the presidency.

In the Spring of 1863, while touring various battlefields, surveying damage, speaking with the soldiers, and attempting to improve morale, Lincoln told the following story at an impromptu gathering of men. Among these were captains and lieutenants and simple privates. Even the drummer boy listened in.

“I’d like to tell you a story about me. I know, I know – it seems quite egotistical perhaps for me to speak of myself. Perhaps someone else should tell the story – Hill?” Lincoln turned to Lamon who vehemently shook his head and waved his arms.

Storytelling was not Lamon's forte (being sour is Lamon's forte). "Fine then. Since Hill here is the only other person present who knows this story and he obviously is not of a mind to give you gentlemen an account, I suppose it falls to me to tell it. I apologize then, for my inexcusable rudeness and hope that you will forgive me as I am about to expound upon my own virtues for an extended period of time."

The gathered men chuckled appreciatively. One soldier shouted, "We talk about ourselves all the damn time! It ain't rude! Go to it, Mr. President!" Lincoln nodded.

"Well, it was the summer of 1832, and I was serving in Governor Reynolds' militia during the Blackhawk War. We were bivouacked just outside of Crete, Illinois receiving some much needed rifle training. I might add that I wasn't at the time, nor am I now, the sharpest shooter in the world. These long arms of mine," Lincoln displayed his arms for all to see, "put a musket too far away from my eyes to be comfortable or accurate. My commanding officers were constantly drilling it into me to 'Bend your arms more, Lincoln! Bend them more!' and I was always left wondering how a man could bend his arms any more than in half, for that was how much I had bent mine!"

The men laughed. Lincoln continued: "As we slept one night in and amongst the trees of Westfield Forest, I remember thinking to myself, 'I don't much care for camping though the stars do burn brightly and pretty at that.' You see, I grew up on an endless succession of dirt farms, working the soil, harvesting crops, barely making enough money to get by. My father was a simple man who never seemed to be able to get ahead. Where I would rather read any book I could come across, he never acquired the skill, only ever being able to write his own name, and poorly at that. He looked down upon my love for reading, thinking it a waste of time to read words that had been written long ago and hadn't done anybody a lick of good. Still, it was from him that I learned my love of storytelling. As we lived on a trade route between the East and the West, we were often visited by traveling merchants and pioneers heading out for greener pastures. Though we were poor and could scarcely afford it, my father insisted on showing them generous hospitality and would invite these men to dine with us. After the meals, there would be drinking and music and raucous laughter accompanied by the grandest storytelling ever. I would sit in the corner and absorb all these stories the best I could, repeating them in my head until I had memorized every detail. Since I was so young – no more than ten or eleven years of age – many of the stories were quite beyond my ability to understand. I would go over every detail, attempting to cipher them as much as possible until I gained comprehension. I would then translate the stories into terms that my friends might be able to understand as well.

"One such story, that I remember quite well, was told by a traveling fur salesman who was on his way from his traps in Kansas to New York City to sell his wares. He was a bear of a man, as tall as an ox, as big as a lion and as high as a rhinoceros. His eyes burned bright as a million suns, his voice as loud as the explosions of a million dying suns, and his face as red as a million suns, red on the horizon at sunset. When he spoke, his voice boomed, shaking the house to the very foundation. I nearly had to cover my ears to keep them from imploding, but I weathered the pain, so much did I want to hear his tale. Earlier in the day, when he arrived, he had taken me aside and told me a little of his life as a fur salesman and had interested me greatly in his experiences. His life was not an easy one, with danger lurking at every corner in the form of bears, and lions, and rhinoceroses. One can imagine that it would be a tense life, not knowing, upon going out

to the traps, if one would ever come back. He had seen many a friend killed in the line of duty, mauled by the very animals I mentioned before, never to return to their homes, their wives, their families. Though he mourned their deaths, and feared for his own safety, he continued on with his trade as he felt it was his duty to honor their lives by carrying on with the work.

“So, armed with this foreknowledge of this formidable man, you can easily understand why I lingered at the edge of the evening’s party, amidst the cries and cheers, the binge drinking and purging, the crass and lewd behavior from every corner of the room, even though it assaulted my senses to the point of causing me considerable pain. I simply had to know the tales this man might tell, and then recount them the following morning as I met with my fellows. I shall now tell you his tale.”

“Bring it, Lincoln!” shouted one soldier. Lincoln smiled and nodded in the man’s direction.

“Stop blowing sunshine up the man’s ass,” whispered another soldier.

Lincoln continued: “Back in the winter of 1822,’ he began, ‘I was but a young pup, wet behind the ears, barely sprung forth from my mother’s womb, no older than 25 years of age, and eager to leave my family home and find my way out in the world. Back in those days, my family owned a small farm, much like this one (although much more prosperous, from the looks of it) and my father had wanted me to continue on in the family tradition of accumulating an inordinate amount of debt, defaulting upon it, becoming indentured, being forced to leave home and travel to a strange new land, work almost to death on another’s farm, barely eking out a meager existence, subsisting on a diet of beets and bread made from gravel and gunpowder. Do not get me wrong: I adored my father and found a prospect of a life such as he had lead to be extremely attractive. Everything I did was in some way aimed towards making the man proud of me to the point that I dressed, spoke, and acted as much like him as I possibly could. However, I felt a calling to the woods, and to the wild. My fondest memories as a boy were of sneaking off to the forest that ringed our little plot of land and spending my days pretending I had been involved in some sort of horrible carriage accident that left me stranded without much in the way of food, water, or hope of rescue. I recruited other children to play the parts of other survivors of the accident, forcing them to form alliances with me and others, insisting that they had been killed off in various gruesome manners and making them to lie in the fields once they had died in the game. Once the other local children grew tired of playing with me, I would invent others, until I had an entire cast of imaginary characters working with or against me. By the time I was twelve, I had created an elaborate back story of scientific and psychological experiments, bizarre smoky monsters, shadowy conspiracies, and a strange device into which numbers had to be entered every hundred and twenty minutes or so, thus saving the world from destruction.

“It was during this time that I fabricated my first fur traps. At the beginning, they were crude devices: nothing more than a box propped up by a stick to which I had tied a length of string which I had fashioned from the tall grasses that grew at the edge of the forest. On the box, I had scrawled “Here fuzzy fuzzy!” in hopes of luring one of the local foxes or wolves into my trap. Regrettably, these traps did not work, but soon I learned how to fashion much more complicated and effective snares. Unfortunately, the first one that achieved any sort of success only managed to capture my younger sister who

immediately ran to my father and told him what I had been up to. Needless to say, my father was not well pleased by my choice of abandoning our family's life and lifestyle. He said I was shirking tradition and embarrassing the family name. I assured him that I intended to make him proud. He told me that he could not see how it was possible. He sat me down upon his knee and told me a story about his childhood in England.

“”Son,” he said, “when I was but a lad, growing up in Willinghamtownsendforthamtrankashire, I too thought of abandoning the family tradition of indentured servitude. I felt, much like I imagine you feel, that I was not up to the task of living up to the great expectations that society put upon me simply because I shared a last name with some of the greatest indentured servants that had ever walked the face of the planet. Though my father constantly reassured me that I was just as good a debtor as he had been and that the ability to accrue debt and default upon it ran in my blood, I doubted him. It is a difficult thing to have such demands thrust upon you from birth. Don't think that I am unaware of this. We were remarkably poor, and almost all our work went directly into the pockets of the lord who owned the land upon which we worked. It was a hard life as I'm sure you can imagine. There wasn't a day that passed that I didn't fret about how I would live up to the name. Each day, I considered running away dreaming of a simpler life in which I would educate myself, learning to read, write, and cipher and teach myself a trade. Perhaps I would apprentice myself to a carpenter, or a lawyer, or a physician. I sometimes even thought of learning enough so that I could teach others how to do these things as well. But at the end of the day, I stayed, because I knew that to run away from my fears of carrying on the family tradition wouldn't solve anything. In fact, I figured that it would only make things worse. Still, when I awoke the following morning, the same foolish dreams would awake with me, rising again to the forefront of my mind and causing me to consider ignoring my noble heritage. No amount of persuasion or cajoling would force these thoughts to permanently vacate my mind and every day it was an effort to perform the otherwise enjoyable task of working my fingers to the bone for the benefit of another man.””

Lincoln paused for a moment, allowing the weight of his retelling of the fur trapper's story about his father's tale to sink in for his audience. They looked at him appreciatively, waiting for him to go on. The President took a drink of water.

“Though I did not comprehend the import of the trapper's story immediately,” Lincoln said, “I knew this to be a great story. At this point in his tale, he had paused, allowing the weight of his words to sink in for us, his appreciative audience. We urged him to continue, and after a swallow of water, he did:

“My father then told me a story that his father's father had told his father who then passed it down to my father:

“”Son, I know that you have been told a great many stories about our family, all of which include racking up enormous amounts of debt which was left unpaid, becoming indentured to creditors and working for no personal benefit. But you have not heard the entire story. The truth is that we have not always been indentured servants. I know this will come as a shock and surprise to you as you have been told of nothing but this life, but the fact remains that our proud line comes from much humbler roots. The tale I am about to tell you must not leave this room. Nobody can know about our shameful origins. I would not tell you if I did not trust you. Do you understand?”

“””I assured him that I would be discrete and that the family secret was safe with me. Little did I know how difficult a promise that would be to keep. If I had known then the import of the words he was about to speak to me, I would have stopped him before he could toss aside my blissful, youthful ignorance and replace it with the hard reality of mature knowledge. I look upon that day as the single most important and tragic day of my life. It is the day that I learned the most embarrassing things about our family name and lineage. In the interest of further reducing the needs and complexities of punctuation, I will allow you, upon retelling this story, to indirectly quote me so as to prevent eyestrain and needless headaches.””””

“And so,” said Lincoln, “I shall do the same, and pick up this story from here, and tell you it as if it were I who experienced these things, and not the family of the father of the father of a fur trapper who happened upon the house in which I lived with my father during my youth.”

“Thank fucking Christ,” said one soldier.

“Our name has not always been Debiteur,” Lincoln said, altering his voice to sound as he imagined the father of the father of the fur trapper would sound. “Once, a long time ago, our family name was Créancier, and we owned nearly all of what will one day be known as *France*. Through shrewd business practices and a skilled marketing team, we were able to acquire 90% of the land and were the richest family in the kingdom. Only the Queen herself had more power and respect than our family. This must be incredibly shocking to you, and I see that your eyes are wide with fear and loathing. Do not hate our ancestors for their folly. They knew not what they did. Further, do not hate yourself for this tainted blood which even now, several generations later, still courses in your veins, feeding your lungs with life-giving oxygen. The urge to tear your heart from your very chest must be overwhelming, as it was when I heard this tale. You must resist this, for the ripping of your heart from your chest will result in your untimely demise, and though it might be painful to live on with the terrible burden of this knowledge, to expire now would not solve any of your problems. This weight will follow you beyond your death, into the afterlife, and will continue to press upon you for all eternity, causing you to be unable to fully enjoy the whims and pleasures that should come as you sit at God’s right hand. Only through living on and carrying on in the tradition that your ancestors established will you be able to expunge the sins of your ancestor’s ancestors.

“The fur trapper’s father’s father then asked how it was that his ancestors had escaped the life of plenty and comfort and had managed to sink themselves into ever increasing debtitude and destitution. His father’s father’s father said that it was a story for another time. Unfortunately, he died the next day and the man never knew the entire tale. Following his father’s father’s father’s death, in his grief, the fur trapper’s father’s father went out, and on credit, arranged the most expensive funeral he could imagine. He acquired a casket fashioned from the finest mahogany with details of gold and diamonds. He commissioned, at great expense, a sixty foot statue of his father to be used as a headstone. He hired a bard whose name and songs were known the whole world over and had him sing songs of praise about his father’s name. He had the event catered, serving the most delectable and expensive dishes of the time. He hired armed guards to stand watch at his father’s grave around the clock. They still watch over the grave to this very day and are still waiting to be paid for their services. The act of creating this loving

tribute to the memory of his father had a strange effect on the fur trader's father's father. After four days of feasts, celebrations, and mourning, the fur trader's father's father no longer felt any urge to leave the life of the debtor behind and pledged then and there to carry on his family's proud tradition.

"I was transfixed by this story. Having no true family history of my own, I found myself jealous of the fur trapper and his ability to trace back his lineage so far, even though he was embarrassed by his forefathers and loathe to recall them, it still must have been a great comfort to him to be able to know from whence he came. My family had no tradition of oral history. Our stories all concerned jumping frogs, paddleboats, or rock candy and though amusing, contained nothing about our roots. And so, I vowed then and there that I would never forget where I came from, so that perhaps my children's children's children would be able to tell a similar story someday."

"And so, when I found myself, amongst all the men in my company, sleeping under the stars outside Peoria, Illinois, undergoing rigorous military training, and was asked by a drill sergeant, 'Who are you, son? Where do you come from?' I proudly replied, 'My name is Abraham Lincoln and I come from Kentucky.'"

Lincoln, finished with the story, took a bow. One soldier, and then another, began applauding, until all the gathered men were standing and cheering for their president. A man who had fallen asleep during the lengthy tale startled by the noise and in a half-waking, half-dreaming state, yelped, "There's a dancing cow!"

Klasky turned to Pinklebottom and said, "He's a really good storyteller."

"I've heard better," Pinklebottom said. "But that wasn't half-bad."

Lincoln didn't often remember his dreams. He put little stock into the stories that played in his head at night, and the ones he did remember he rarely thought about very much. However, this morning he awoke troubled and sweating, the sheets drenched and twisted. His heart raced. He felt exhausted, as if he had been running the whole night through. He rolled over onto his back, not ready to face the day, but hesitant to return to sleep lest he resume the nightmare he'd just had.

In his dream, he had returned to his childhood. He was eight years old, living in Indiana on his father's farm. It was a sunny summer day and he was out working in the field. His sister worked at his side and was teasing Lincoln that she was a harder worker than he was.

"Abe you wouldn't know how to work a garden if it was written in a book," she said.

"Maybe it is written in a book. Maybe it's written how I could learn to enjoy this, and eat all my vegetables and make better apple sauce than you."

Sarah was aghast. "My apple sauce has won awards around the globe, Abe! You take it back."

"Never. I could write an apple sauce making book and hit you in the head with it and you'd die and never lick another stamp again."

The two began fighting, at first playfully, laughing, two siblings who cared deeply for each other. The fight grew more intense, however and Sarah was soon atop Lincoln, had him pinned to the ground and was rubbing dirt in his face.

"Stop it, Sarah!" Lincoln cried.

"Say uncle!" Sarah said. "Say Uncle Sam!"

“Uncle Sam!”

Lincoln then found himself in a long tunnel deep underground. The darkness was interrupted by lamps which punctuated the walls at 50-foot intervals. There was just enough light to see the outlines of human forms blocking his way. People were everywhere, all around. Lincoln could feel their heat, hear their breathing, but they made no other sounds. He tried to press through them; he knew where he needed to go but was unable to get there. He felt the onset of a panic attack and didn't know what to do. His breathing grew heavy, his heart pounding in his chest.

“Let me out of here!” he cried. His voice echoed off the walls. He shoved people aside but more just took their place. He felt them begin to close in upon him, blocking out all light, all oxygen.

And that was when he woke up. When he closed his eyes, he could still see the flickering light of the lamps, the shadows of the people, almost feel their breath on his face. He kept his eyes open.