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ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S GREATEST STORY

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He sat in his dingy Springfield office alone at night, ~~his~~ <sup>his</sup> arms folded along the back of a chair, head dropped, wrestling with a decision from which his whole being shrank.

Should he turn from the path of life he had after so long a struggle chosen, give up its promised security and rewards, to follow the uncharted way to which he had been called? It was a call of that he had no doubt but one his mysterious clairvoyance warned him, was beset with direful pitfalls *for union and for the nation*

More territory for slavery - territory the law had made free - that was the demand he was called to fight. An old story, one long evaded or compromised but this time ~~to~~ Abraham Lincoln's clear understanding told him ~~it~~ <sup>to</sup> must be settled one way or the other - the Nation become all slave or all free.

But who was he to challenge the sponsor of this new argument for extending slavery? This man was one of the greatest in the Nation, more he was the pride of Illinois, their long-time pet United States Senator - their "Little Giant" Stephen A. Douglas.

"And who am I?" he asked aloud, all the humiliation of his unimportance in his sorrowful voice. "Nobody ever heard of me outside of Illinois. If Douglas hadn't started this thing

here, at home I'd never have been thought of. And even here  
~~they're~~ <sup>they're</sup> half ashamed of me, ~~company~~ <sup>refuse me</sup> with with him.

"What was it that man from Vermillion stopped me on  
 the street to say the other day? 'Over our way we're pretty  
 anxious about you're debating this question with Douglas,  
 Mr. Lincoln. Douglas is a big man.'

"Don't I know it. He's a big man and I'm a little  
 one, little, poor, shambling, lean, ugly. He's had all the  
 successes since we started out together, both in the law, both  
 in politics, and I all the failures."

"What does this thing mean for me but ridicule,  
 contempt, suspicion, defeat - and for him it will be victory,  
 perhaps the presidency?"

"But I've got it right. Douglas is wrong, we've  
 got to stop this ~~thought~~ <sup>thing</sup> or we'll have an America all slave.  
 If I can make a few more people see that, it's something - worth  
 all it costs. The fight will go on then and it won't matter  
 what becomes of me."

"But if we defeat Douglas, keep slavery where the  
 law has put it, stop its spread, why the South will never  
 stand for that. They'll do what they're threatening - break  
 the Union, or try to. That means war. How can I go into a  
 thing which may bring war, not that - Oh, God, not that."

The ~~tormented~~ <sup>brooding</sup> man wearily lifted his head. On the  
 table beside him lay the old office Bible. He opened it and  
 dropping to his knees read slowly and aloud the most poignant  
 of all narrations <sup>yes</sup> of human agony - Matthew's story of Christ's  
 last night in the Garden of Gethsemane.



"Not as I will but as thou wilt," he repeated.

Here was his answer.

Months later, when they were hurling taunts of ambition at him he was to write, —

"God knows how sincerely I prayed from the first this field of ambition might not be opened."

The man was long on his knees, but when he rose his drooping shoulders were squared, his face calm. His decision was taken. He would make the fight, make it though he saw in it as in a glass — night <sup>of</sup> despair — a dark uncertain future for himself — agony for the Nation.

What he did not see was that from this night's decision was to come to him the patience and the wisdom to wage the war which was to save the Union, the courage to sign the proclamation of Emancipation which was to save it "all free."