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ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S GREAT STORY

The significant stories of a man's life hinge on his decisions. The story becomes momentous when the decision means long-continued sacrifices, when the end is doubtful, possibly tragic.

Out of such a decision the Great Story of Abraham Lincoln's life unfolds.

He was a man of forty five, settled into the law - politics put away, but a citizen, one who could not evade the citizen's obligation to make up and speak his mind on public questions. A direful one now faced him - not a new one. Was slavery to be kept within the boundaries law had set, remain sectional where it might die a natural death, or must it become a national institution?

In 1854 the battle over its extension centered in Illinois - Lincoln's home. He spoke his mind, spoke it in an argument so bold and unanswerable that those who saw with him demanded he become their leader.

But what did it mean to lead a corporal's guard in an unpopular fight against one of the greatest men of the Day? It meant breaking valued established relations - social, political, professional built up laboriously from his meagre beginnings.

It meant neglect of the profession on which now for the first time he had a firm hold. Should he do that, he with a family - boys to educate?

More serious it meant a return to politics - ridicule, calumny, certain defeat. That for him, but what for the Union? Refuse to extend slavery and the old threat of disunion would surely be heard. He smelt war in it. Was he willing to face war to end the spread of human bondage? He made his decision on his knees, doom in his heart.

For four years he fought, came out defeated, "bespattered with every imaginable odious epitaph" - without money to pay household expenses. But he had his reward - more people in Illinois saying, "Lincoln has got it right. We must stop this thing or it will spread all over the country." It was not only in Illinois - North, East, West, you heard it.

He went back to work but the story was not ended. These people into whose mouths he had put new words now made their decision - elected him president and a new chapter began.

He went to his task outwardly serene. It was only when he said goodbye that his sense of fatality found words. "I leave not knowing when or whether ever I may return."

The issue came quickly - war or a broken union. He chose war and the Great Story now ran on and on to the beat of drums, the fury of a tortured country, the agony of the wounded and dying. It ran for four years before the end came - a glorious end - the Union saved - the black man free.

Abraham Lincoln gaunt and smiling still lived. The sword hanging over his head so long had not fallen. Was it still there? Why should that dream he had learned to be the forerunner of tremendous things return now that people cheered the end of War? Why that vessel moving swiftly to a dark and indefinite shore sail across his sleep? And one still stranger - the great East room, a weeping crowd, a draped bier and when he asked the meaning he was told, "The President is Dead."

Why should he still be haunted? Was not the story finished - a happy ending?

No, an epilogue must be written - the inevitable logic of his decision, one brief, cruel, final word - Death. A word which brought him peace and made of his Greatest Story a Nation's Holiest Tragedy.