

Final draft.

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S GREATEST 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.

The greatest story of Abraham Lincoln's life is of such a decision.

He sat in his dingy Springfield office alone at night, head dropped on arms folded along the back of a chair, long legs out-stretched.

"How can I do it - How can I do it," he was asking himself over and over.

He had been called - no mistake ^{about} ~~out~~ it - called to lead a revolting minority in the most fateful political struggle Illinois had ever faced. Should she consent that the boundaries the Nation had fixed for slavery ~~should~~ be again enlarged, territory set aside to be free made slave? An old question repeatedly raised since the making of the Constitution, never answered, always evaded or compromised. But this time Lincoln's mysterious clairvoyance warned him ⁴ it must be settled for good and all - the Nation become all

one thing or all the other - all slave or all free.

The fight for extension was on led by Illinois' favorite Senator, their "Little Grant" - Stephen A. Douglas. Lincoln had challenged his arguments so boldly and arrestingly that ^a Corporal's guard of a party calling itself Republican, organized to oppose Douglas' scheme, demanded his help - demanded he "run" against Douglas on their ticket.

What did it mean for him to go into such a venture?

"Here I am," he told himself, "in the middle life only just settled down to the law, politics put aside, practice beginning to pay - should I give up my first real chance, ^{and} with a family, boys to educate?"

"This means politics - and such politics. How they'll ridicule me, say I want a nigger wife, say I'm trying to break up the Union - are saying it already.

"And how they'll pity me, talking against the ideas of a great man like Douglas - me a nobody. They won't see any cabbages sprouting in my poor lean face," he muttered with a wry smile.

"And I can't win. Douglas is too strong. All I can do is try to make more people see what this means, that it means an America all slave - Oh, God, not that! The men who started this Union never meant that."

"And if we up North refuse to open free land to slaves - what then? The South will break the Union, or try to. That means war - war."

The tormented man sprang from his chair. Was he willing to face war - stand for war to end the spread of human bondage?

Up and down, up and down he paced - a soul in agony. Then his eyes fell on the old black Bible he always kept at hand on his office table, picking it up he opened to Matthew's story of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, his disciples sleeping while he wrestled with his coming doom.

"And he fell on his face," read Lincoln aloud, "and prayed saying, 'Oh, my father if it be possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will but as thou wilt!'"

Here was the answer; there was no escape for him, and dropping on his knees Abraham Lincoln prayed, prayed long and until his torment was still.

Months later when they were hurling taunts of ambition at him he wrote in memory of this night - "God knows how sincerely I prayed from the first that this field of ambition might not be opened."

His decision was made; he would make the fight. He rose from his knees, a new look of calm on his face, put out the dim light and went down the narrow stairs - time to go home. As he stepped into the street an old friend from a near

by county passed, stopped, hesitated, then said solemnly.

"Mr. Lincoln, over in Vermilion we're a good deal worried about this idea of your going against Douglas - Douglas is a big man."

That was it. They didn't believe he could answer this "big man." He squared his shoulders and looking ~~at~~ his friend full in the eyes, said:

"If this fight comes off I'll lick Douglas or die a-trying. Good night."

And down the street he went strongly, swiftly - head up.

Billy Brown who kept the drug store where Lincoln and his cronies gathered nights to talk over things and swap stories was putting up the blinds at the window - closing up. His eye fell on Mr. Lincoln's upright striding figure and he stopped short.

"Now what's come over Mr. Lincoln," he asked himself. "In here two hours ago the picture of despair, wouldn't talk, went off without a word - boys said, 'too bad - he's got the blues again.'"

"Look at him now. Haven't seen him walk like that for weeks - somethings happened to him. Wonder what it is?"

Something had happened. Abraham Lincoln had lived that night the greatest story of his life ~~before~~^{and} had made his greatest decision.