

# The Final Edition

A Novel

By

LAWRENCE MEYER

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Also by Lawrence Meyer

**A Capitol Crime**

**False Front**

**Israel Now: Portrait of a Troubled Land**

For Dorothy

*Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.*

Thomas Jefferson, 1787

*Here is the living disproof of the old adage that nothing is as dead as yesterday's newspaper... This is what really happened, reported by a free press to a free people. It is the raw material of history; it is the story of our own times.*

Henry Steel Commager, preface to a history of the *New York Times*, 1951

*The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*

Isaiah 1 18:22

## PROLOGUE

The day began—officially at least—at five a.m., when Walt Morgan showed up in the newsroom. Walt had been the early man for eleven years, and his routine was the same. Winter or summer, he took off his coat, rolled up his shirtsleeves to mid-forearm, and then poured himself a cup of coffee, black, no sugar, from the thermos he had brought from home. He reached into his shirt pocket, removed a pair of horn-rimmed reading glasses—something he had not had to do when he started this duty eleven years before—and scanned the wire stories that Ernie Black, the night wire clerk, had arranged neatly on his desk in three distinct news groups—local, national, and international.

Walt scanned each story, writing a reporter's name on some, pushing others aside into a separate pile, and impaling still others on a thin eight-inch steel projection with a sharp point mounted on a lead base in front of him. These stories were “spiked,” rejected, not to be used.

It took the better part of an hour, and three cups of coffee, for Walt to complete this process. At six a.m., he greeted Jack Thompson, the news editor. Thompson was in charge of placing stories in the paper, keeping track of space, and overseeing the paper's layout. Being the news editor on a morning paper, with its longer lead-time from story to press, was hard enough. The news editor on an afternoon paper like the *Washington Sentinel* was a battlefield commander under fire, constantly adapting to changing conditions—moving stories, killing some of them, adding more space to others, and cutting back to accommodate the stories that had suddenly grown—all the while keeping one eye on how much space was left in the paper for the next edition and where the stories were placed, while the other eye was fixed on the clock to make sure the stories were sent to the composing room by the deadline. Deadlines were key—a minute here, five minutes there, and the presses would be late getting started; the trucks would be late delivering papers; that would cost the *Sentinel* street sales, and that result would be bad because circulation was everything.

By six thirty, the desk editors were in their chairs, looking at the wire stories that Walt Morgan had given to a copy aide to distribute. Those stories in turn were given to a

reporter, or spiked. Most of the reporters were also at their desks now, drinking coffee, looking at wire stories they had been given, going through that morning's *Washington Post* or *New York Times*. A thin layer of acrid cigarette smoke began to drift across the room as work began in earnest. Some reporters were already pounding away on their typewriters. Phones were ringing, and the room came to life with the clickety-clack of the typewriter keys, the bells of typewriter carriages, voices on the phone, phones ringing, and editors and reporters crying, "Copy!" bringing copy aides scurrying to pick up the latest page to emerge from a typewriter and carry it to the desk or down to the composing room.

Every story had a name or "slug," so that it could be identified. A story about the White House might be "Pres," a diplomatic story could be "state," a Supreme Court decision could be "court," and a murder would receive the classic slug, the one that sent a surge of excitement through any new reporter, especially the first time he was given the instruction by an editor: "Slug it 'slay.'"

As it happened there had been a murder in the early morning hours, a particularly gruesome one, out in Prince George's County, a Washington suburb; not to mention a three-car accident on the Shirley Highway coming into Washington from Virginia had snarled morning traffic, President Kennedy had given an important speech the night before, the Justice Department was filing a civil rights suit in federal court that morning, and police had found an eighty-six-year-old woman in Northeast Washington living with more than thirty cats in her house. Thompson liked to put one lighter story on the front page. The cat story, as all animal stories did, would attract readers. Maybe he'd even play it above the fold.

As the clock ticked, desk editors were working on stories their reporters had turned in, sometimes page—or take—by take. If the story was growing too long, the desk editor might warn the reporter that he or she was reaching the limit. Or the editor might call to the news editor, "Jack, 'Pres' is going to grow to twenty inches."

"Twenty more inches for 'Pres,'" Thompson would acknowledge, then examine the page layout to see how he could accommodate the added length.

Reporters had to have their stories in by eight thirty a.m. for the first edition. Desk editors had to have the stories to the copy desk by nine. Once a desk editor—whether

local, national, or international—had edited the stories for content, they were copy edited: checked for grammar, punctuation, clarity, and accuracy. Did the numbers add up? Was the reference to a date or a quote correct? Were any words misspelled? The copy desk, the last stop in the newsroom process, had to have the stories completed and sent down to the composing room by nine thirty. With that deadline pressure, no one could afford to wait for the entire story before beginning to work on it. If the story went through the whole process with a major—or minor—hole, it would have to be corrected in the next edition unless the problem was caught in time to correct it.

Down in the composing room, fifteen Mergenthaler Linotype machines were lined up, vapor curling up from melted lead in an attached heating pot, waiting for copy to be made into lines of type by the operators who were poised to work. As the stories came down from the newsroom via a pneumatic tube, the foreman distributed them. The Linotype operators began pounding away at the oversized keys—much like those on a typewriter, only larger. As they typed, brass forms dropped into a slot. Each form represented the letter the operator had typed. When a line was finished, the operator pushed a lever, causing molten lead to flow into the forms and producing a line of type that then came down a small slide where it was collected, line by line, into a tray. The trays were picked up and taken to a heavy steel cart with a rectangular flat top that had a four-sided adjustable steel device on it. Screws on each side of the device could be tightened to lock the type in place when it filled the device. This was the chase. The lines of type were arranged in the chase according to the layout sheet that the news desk had drawn, showing the placement of the stories on a page. More than thirty of these carts stood on the floor waiting. Each chase represented a separate page in the newspaper.

Under deadline pressure, the stories were often set into type by more than one Linotype operator, making it essential that the slug and “take” number be included so that the person composing the page in the chase could keep the type in the right order. The composer, among other talents, had the ability to read type upside down. Spacers made of lead or steel were placed between the stories horizontally and vertically to provide a small measured distance between them.

As each chase was filled, the compositor tightened the sides of the chase, took a board and mallet, and pounded the board on top of the type to make sure it was flat and even. Then the page was “locked,” and the chase became a “form.”

The forms were taken to a huge, heavy piece of machinery that was actually a press. A rectangular piece of heavy paper, thinner but stiffer than cardboard, was placed on top of the form. The press then rolled over it using thousands of pounds of pressure, producing a negative impression of the type in the form. This matrix, or “matte,” was placed into a semicircular drum. Hot lead was poured into the drum, producing a lead plate that was placed on a conveyor belt, which took it down to the pressroom below where it was placed in its proper location on the press.

Some plates were already on the press. These contained advertising pages that might have been placed on the presses following the final run the afternoon before, or early that morning. Other plates might have comic strips, the editorial page, food articles and recipes, horoscopes, crossword puzzles, or advice to the lovelorn. They were joined in time by the financial pages with reports about national, international and local businesses, financial conditions and stocks, the sports pages with the latest news about the Washington Senators or the Redskins, ball scores from the previous day or night, tables with sports data—batting averages, runs batted in, home runs, league-leaders in pitching and base-stealing. Some pages had news from Kazakhstan or Anacostia, Paris or Baltimore. News from all over about everything, something of interest to almost everyone—a fire, a lost dog or cat, a murder, a heroic event, a tax increase, a new law, a court decision, a death, a birth, a marriage. It was all there—one day in the life of a community that happened to be the capital of the richest, most powerful nation on earth.

When all the plates had been mounted, a bell sounded and the presses started rolling—slowly at first, then faster and faster so that the woven web of newsprint going from one giant roller to the next was a gray blur. The presses roared, so loud that one person could speak to another only by shouting or by making hand gestures. The pressmen monitored the presses from catwalks above. Some rushed to the end of a bank of presses to adjust gauges, to increase or decrease the amount of ink to a particular page. The air in the pressroom was sweet with the smell of ink, water, and wet paper. Bells rang, huge rolls of papers, each weighing a couple of tons surrendered their newsprint to

the presses. Tens of thousands of copies rolled off the presses each hour and were bundled and placed in waiting trucks that took them all over the metropolitan area. A subscriber could depend on it landing on his doorstep at the same time every day. Or he or she could pick one up at the corner newsstand on the way home from work.

This process wasn't an annual event, or even monthly or weekly. It happened every single day of the year, rain or shine, work days and holidays, good news or bad.

So dependable and reliable had it become that few readers realized how much work and creativity went into the production of their daily newspaper; they had no appreciation of the carefully choreographed cooperation and coordination that occurred among people all over the world and right there in that building to bring information to them every single day. Nor did they know how much reporters and editors had to learn, had to know, had to remember; how informants tried to manipulate and misinform; how difficult it was to know anything and to tell what they knew with the relatively small number of words they were given to write their story; and how those who knew the truth often resisted having it revealed. Sometimes the men and women who worked to bring that information to readers of the *Washington Sentinel* risked injury or death to do their jobs.

One person *did* know. He was the short, stocky man standing at the entrance to the newsroom. Charles Hopkins "Cubby" Baker was the fourth generation of his family to be the publisher of the *Washington Sentinel*. He knew. He knew all of it. He knew what a miracle it was that each and every day the *Sentinel* could assemble the information it presented, how many opportunities there were for the system to break down, how much the process depended on all of them working, as he told them over and over again, as a team.

He loved it all. He loved the clutter of the newsroom, the scruffy, disheveled appearance of some reporters and the fastidious elegance of others. He loved their profanity and irreverence, the apparent cynicism that cloaked idealism and romantic sentimentality, the offended sensitivity they so often showed when someone ascribed noble purpose to their dedication, their single-mindedness in pursuit of a story. He loved the sense of superiority his salesmen and -women showed toward the newsroom, as though the reporters and editors were providing the mere icing on a cake that the business

staff produced. He loved the electricity of the newsroom when a big story was breaking on deadline and everyone was focused on getting it into the paper. The smell of the pressroom when the presses were rolling was like perfume in his nostrils.

He had always loved it, since he was a small child and found it amazing that adults were getting paid to carry on, behave not like any grown-ups he had ever seen before, lounge about for hours, and then frantically produce poetry.

It was a community closed to outsiders, fiercely loyal to their profession and yet suspicious of any other profession's code of ethics. There were no angels. They smoked, they drank, they made love and committed adultery; they harbored their own secrets while pursuing the most intimate details of others. They were an odd yet comfortable mix of the conventional and idiosyncratic, devout and profane, as predictable as Haley's comet and as capricious as a tornado.

Cubby Baker had been born into this community. His father, grandfather and great grandfather had run the *Sentinel*. His family had owned the paper for almost a hundred years, since the Civil War. As he stood there on November 1, 1963, Cubby also knew that the *Sentinel*, Washington's preeminent newspaper since the dawn of the twentieth century was in danger. The presses that printed it were old and needed to be replaced. The building where all of this activity took place had been dedicated by President Teddy Roosevelt, and it was showing its age. Urban growth was pushing readers farther and farther out from the city; television was luring them away, and the *Washington Post* was aggressive and growing. The *Washington Sentinel* had a long and proud, but not unblemished, tradition. Every president since Abraham Lincoln had read it. The *Sentinel* had reported history. *Sentinel* reporters roamed the world, filing stories from London, Berlin, Moscow, Buenos Aires, Lagos, Peking, and Tokyo. A *Sentinel* reporter witnessed—and described—the awful mushroom cloud at Hiroshima from the first atomic bomb dropped on a civilian population.

The *Washington Sentinel* was as much a monument as the marble tributes to Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. Babe Ruth, John Wayne, Eleanor Roosevelt, Elvis Presley, and the Queen of England were among the famous and powerful who had visited it to pay their respects.

Then there was the family—the Bakers, the Hopkinses, and so many others, aunts, uncles, and cousins, each with a share and a stake. The family was much the same as any, loving and contentious, close and distant, but focused on and held together by what this building produced. The *Sentinel*'s dividends enabled survival for some of them and the high life for others. Some were proud of the connection of the family to the paper; others were indifferent and cared only about the money it produced.

At forty-two, Cubby Baker was in the prime of life. He already had seen the paper through trying times, but he understood, as perhaps few others did, that powerful forces were gathering, forces that were out of the control of any man or family. A storm was waiting out there in the *Sentinel*'s future. He knew that. He was certain of it. What he didn't know was when or where it would happen.

Nor did he know if the *Sentinel* or its family would survive it.

BOOK ONE—BREWSTER

## CHAPTER 1

At ten o'clock on the morning of March 2, 1865, a young man crossed Pennsylvania Avenue at Sixth Street in the nation's capital. He cursed quietly to himself as he saw that he had muddied his boots in crossing.

He was a relative stranger, having arrived only ten days before. He was a good-sized young man, muscular, twenty-eight years old, six feet two, and about two hundred pounds. His face had a ruddy, weathered look to it. His suit, though clean and well pressed, did not seem to fit him well. It had the appearance of belonging or having belonged to someone else—as indeed it had.

His most distinguishing characteristic was a leonine mane of golden blond hair that made him handsome and fearsome at the same time. At the moment, he had an intent look on his face. He was on a mission.

The young man, Brewster Adams Hopkins by name, had come to Washington after having spent the past eleven years wandering—first the world, then his own country. He had left his native Cape Cod and, over his father's objections, shipped out on a merchant vessel from Boston. He had intended to be at sea for a year, two at most. But, as it will, one thing led to another, and young Brewster spent nine full years at sea. He had seen the palace where Queen Victoria lived, as well as Versailles in Paris and the Coliseum in Rome. He had climbed the pyramids in Egypt and visited the splendid ruins of Karnak, as well as the Holy Land. His travels had taken him to China, Japan, and Siam; and he had also seen the mighty Amazon.

Though his formal education had stopped at seventeen, he had an acute, inquisitive mind that was seldom satisfied with facts alone. He wanted to know reasons, why things were as they were, how they had become that way, and what might make them change. He had read while at sea—the great philosophers, history, even such contemporaries as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

When he returned from abroad, it had been to the western coast of the United States. He had seen California, enjoyed the earthly pleasures of San Francisco as he had

so many other ports on his travels, and then had made his way across the country, seeing the Rocky Mountains, the Great Plains, and Chicago along the way.

His long absence and his travels had caused him to miss service in the Union Army. He had arrived in Washington, DC, just as the Civil War was drawing to a close. Signs of the war were everywhere. Soldiers filled the streets. Horse-drawn ambulances carried the wounded from the battles south of the city where the Army of the Potomac was pressing General Lee and his tattered forces. For a year or more, the capital had been anticipating victory. Now, despite setbacks, victory at long last seemed to be within the Union's grasp.

Brewster Hopkins had decided to come to Washington for a number of reasons. First, he had no interest in going back to Cape Cod and working on his father's farm, or of working on a boat and harvesting fish. Second, with the war ending, he sensed that great changes were about to take place in his country, and he wanted to see that change as it occurred, be a part of it. What better place than his nation's capital? Finally, he wanted to see the tall man dressed in black, self-educated like himself, so eloquent, so firm and so seemingly gentle at the same time, so adored by some as the savior of the Union and hated by others as a tyrant. He wanted to see President Lincoln up close and, if possible, to meet him.

Brewster had saved some money, not much, but enough to keep himself fed, clothed, and housed—for a time. He did need a job, and in the several days that he had been in Washington he had spent hours talking to people he met—in hotels, in taverns, even in church. He had gone from place to place, introducing himself, asking for work. Now he was on his way to the *Washington Sentinel* where he had heard work might be available.

He knew nothing about newspapers, but he knew he could learn as he had learned so many other things in his life. He was intelligent and quick-witted, although a natural reticence concealed the sharpness of his mind from many if they failed to probe beneath the surface. He was a walking example of a book more interesting than its cover.

Because he had a ready smile and a seemingly easygoing manner, some mistook his friendliness as a sign of softness or irresolution. If so, they were mistaken. In all things large and small he was purposeful and, when the matter was of consequence,

determined. He did not think in terms of success or failure, winning or losing; he thought only of accomplishing what he had made up his mind to do. And until he had done it, he remained unsatisfied.

His given name, Brewster, was an old family name. Indeed, he could trace his lineage back to the Mayflower on both sides. His family had lived in New England for hundreds of years. Brewster Hopkins was as Yankee as one could be.

Having cleaned the mud from his boots and ill-fitting suit, he now stood on the corner waiting while a handsome carriage passed. The passengers were two women, well dressed, one a dour-looking older matron and the other a beautiful young woman of twenty or so with radiant auburn hair. The carriage was pulled by two matched black horses and driven by a man in livery. Brewster was totally captivated by the young woman, although she didn't seem to notice him at all.

His reverie was rudely interrupted by mud splashing on his suit as the carriage passed too closely and he neglected to step back. The women, lost in conversation, paid him no attention.

He cursed silently to himself again. He had no time to lose, however. He crossed the street and then paused to brush off the mud and water from his trousers as best he could before proceeding to his appointment.

He found the address in an old barn behind a two-story federal brick house on Fifth Street. The barn had been altered to contain two rooms—one with some desks and a ceiling about seven feet above the wooden floor, and another behind it with an old rotary press. A man was seated at a desk, writing something on a piece of paper. His coat was hanging on a rack behind his desk, a rolltop affair bursting with sheets and scraps of paper. He had a ruddy complexion and a stylish drooping mustache that obscured the upper part of his mouth. A thin cigar that had burned out was poised on the edge of the desk next to him. His fingers were brown and black, stained with tobacco and ink.

He did not look up when Brewster entered. Brewster stood quietly for a minute or so and then cleared his throat.

Without looking up, the man said, "Yes?"

"Excuse me. I'm looking for Walter Jameson. I was told there might be a position available."

“I’m Jameson,” the man said. “What sort of position?”

“I’m not sure I can say,” Brewster replied. “I was told only that you might have work for a bright young man.” His face flushed, fearing that he might be presumptuous in presenting himself for such a position.

“A bright young man with experience reporting, writing, and printing news,” Jameson corrected him. “Do you fit that description?”

“I’m afraid that I’m only the bright young man,” Brewster said. “I can read. I write, quite legibly, and I have an inquisitive mind. I’m sure I can learn the rest. I’m told I have a quick way about me.”

“Well, you might,” Jameson said. “But I don’t see why you should be learning at my expense. Where are you living?”

“I have a room at Mrs. Farmer’s house on Seventh Street.”

“Mrs. Farmer,” Jameson repeated without any sign of recognition.

Brewster stood, waiting, not sure how to proceed. “Perhaps I might tell you something about myself?”

“Perhaps,” Jameson repeated gruffly. “Right now, why don’t you grab a broom and sweep up. You can straighten things a bit as long as you don’t move anything from one place to another so that I can’t find it later. And under no circumstances touch my desk. At all. And don’t read anything while you’re straightening.”

“Then I have the job?”

“That I don’t know. Let’s see how well you can sweep, and then we’ll see if you have it or not.”

“I’m not in the habit of working for another man without pay,” Brewster said, his tone suddenly less casual. “If I don’t have the job, I’ll be on my way. I won’t take up more of your time.”

Jameson looked back up from his desk. “How the hell can I know what sort of man you are, how competent, how trustworthy?”

“You can hire me on a trial basis,” Brewster said. “If my work isn’t to your liking, you can discharge me.”

“You’ve got a lot of brass,” Jameson said. “What if I’m not looking for an insubordinate subordinate? And suppose I hired you, asked you to sweep, and then told you your work isn’t satisfactory? What will you have gained?”

“In the first place, I’ll have learned something about you. I take you for an honorable man. In that I may be mistaken, but I assume the best about people until I learn otherwise. If it turns out that my trust in your honesty and good will was misplaced, I’ll be sadder but wiser.”

Jameson leaned back in his chair and considered the young man standing in front of him. He closed his eyes for a moment, opened them, and stood up, extending his hand. “Very well,” he said, gripping the calloused hand that Brewster offered in return. “We’re both taking a chance then. I like the proposition. If you had experience, I would have offered you four dollars a week. As it is, I’ll pay you a dollar fifty.”

“Two dollars,” Brewster said.

“A dollar seventy-five,” Jameson replied.

“Two dollars,” Brewster repeated emphatically, “and worth more than four.”

Jameson smiled. “Two dollars then. And you’ll earn every penny. You may start by sweeping the floor and straightening up.”

## CHAPTER 2

On April 9, 1865—Palm Sunday—two men met in the parlor of Wilmer McLean’s home in Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia, about two hundred miles southwest of Washington, DC. One man, six feet tall, erect with a well-trimmed gray beard and proud bearing, was resplendent in a brand new gray dress uniform of a full general with sash and bejeweled sword. The other man was scruffy, his beard not trimmed. He wore the mud-spattered blue uniform of a Union Army private.

In their brief meeting, the scruffy man in the blue uniform—Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, general in chief of the Union Army—accepted the surrender of General Robert E. Lee, general in chief of the Confederate Army.

On that day, in that place, the two men agreed on terms ending America’s bloodiest war—more than 620,000 soldiers alone dead, more than all other American wars combined. Lee and his men, after laying down their arms, were permitted to return to their homes, keeping their horses and mules, as Lee had requested, so that they could plant crops to feed their families.

In Washington, the fall of Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital, six days before on April 3 had resulted in a nine-hundred-gun salute. Lee’s surrender prompted another salute of five hundred guns. Flags were everywhere on Pennsylvania Avenue. Joyous crowds filled the streets. Men embraced and spontaneously broke out in song. The city seemed to be in perpetual celebration.

As Brewster Hopkins walked to work the next morning, he could see evidence of the continuing revelry. Discarded bottles lay about, as did soldiers sleeping it off. It was only nine a.m., but the bars were already open and filling up. He stopped at the corner of Seventh Street to allow a carriage to pass. He glanced up and noticed the same beautiful young woman with auburn hair he had noticed weeks before. Their eyes met for an instant. She smiled at him, and he felt his stomach churn. But there was no point in wasting his time thinking about her. She was beyond his reach, and he had to get to work. Nevertheless, he followed the carriage with his eyes as it turned on to Pennsylvania Avenue away from the Capitol. He took a deep breath of resignation and continued in the opposite direction.

Brewster Hopkins, hard at work at his new job, could not afford to be distracted by the revelry or by a beautiful woman. He found Jameson a temperamental and demanding taskmaster. If Brewster was performing satisfactorily, he wouldn't have known it from anything Jameson said or did. When Brewster finished a task, Jameson simply gave him another, keeping him busy for the twelve or fourteen hours daily that he expected Brewster to work. With the war's end, the amount of work seemed only to increase.

Used to hard labor and long hours from his time at sea, Brewster said nothing. His experience as a sailor also stood him in good stead in his performance as a porter and houseman. Over a matter of days, Brewster brought order out of the chaos of Jameson's cramped, cluttered office, although it was a constant struggle to keep the office neat and clean with Jameson's habits being as careless as they were.

Additionally, another employee, Harold Ferguson, a reporter for the *Sentinel*, was even more slovenly and disorganized than Jameson. He discarded paper on the floor when he was dissatisfied with something he had written. Other newspapers, along with cigars—smoked or chewed—wound up on the floor. He often missed the spittoon next to his desk. He tracked mud into the office, ignoring the opportunity to scrape and wipe his feet before entering. He seldom bathed. His suits were dirty, as were his shirts. His mustache often contained particles of food that had not made it into his mouth. All in all, Brewster found him disgusting.

Yet the man could write. His reports were rich in detail and description, with flashes of wit. To read his account was to feel as though one had been present at the scene. Ferguson had a wonderful ear for speech and dialogue, quoting just enough to capture the spirit of the remarks, omitting excess verbiage.

Brewster looked forward to reading Ferguson's accounts of proceedings in Congress, studying the way he presented the story, sprinkling enough descriptive detail to bring them alive without getting in the way of the event itself. If the paper's deadline was approaching, Ferguson would hand his reports to Brewster one page at a time, and Brewster would carry them into the other room where Jameson edited them and then started setting the type for the next issue of the paper, which was published daily except for Sunday and Monday.

Brewster was not the only person in Washington who read Ferguson's accounts closely. Members of Congress, people doing business with the government, and, it was rumored, Mr. Lincoln himself read Ferguson with interest and regularity to find out what was happening in the city.

Ferguson, in fact, had accompanied Lincoln when he had visited Petersburg, Virginia, and then Richmond the week before. He had described in vivid detail how newly freed slaves had come forward to kiss Lincoln's hand and kneel before their emancipator, and how Lincoln had told them to get up, not to bow to him. "You must kneel to God only," Lincoln had told them, "and thank Him for the liberty you will enjoy hereafter."

Brewster appreciated the opportunity to observe a master up close, but he was growing impatient. He had been sweeping and straightening for more than a month—menial labor, and not at all what he had in mind for himself.

Brewster arrived at work that morning resolved to clarify his situation once and for all. He was earlier than usual. No one was at the *Sentinel* when he arrived. He picked up his broom and swept the floor. He did his best to straighten Jameson's desk without disturbing the order of it, smiling as he did it at the notion of "order" to describe the desk. He took the type out of the forms and returned each letter to its box to be used again.

He spent the next hour doing that, rehearsing in his mind what he would say to Jameson. Jameson showed up after ten, looking haggard after what must have been a long night. "I could've used you here last night," he said grumpily.

"I would have gladly stayed," Brewster said. "I offered."

"I know. I know. Things came up. I had my hands full. Ferguson was slow with his story. I couldn't do it all. I can't. I need to get some help."

"I have been meaning to talk to you about that," Brewster said. "I've been here almost six weeks. I didn't sign up to be a domestic."

"You have no experience," Jameson said.

"And I'm not likely to get any if you don't give me the opportunity."

Jameson took a deep breath. He said nothing, absentmindedly playing with his mustache as he pondered the situation. "I'll...think about it," he said finally. "I make no promises. Now I have to get busy putting together the paper for tomorrow."

Brewster started to reply and then decided to say nothing. He had perhaps won a concession. Only time would tell.

The day went as usual. Jameson was busy setting type. He had shown Brewster how to do it, but he was much slower at it than Jameson, who could finish three columns in the time that it took Brewster to do one.

Jameson periodically stopped to check his watch, pulling it out of his vest pocket and shaking his head. "Where is Ferguson?" he would mutter. "I need him here. Too much happening for him to be out of touch."

Brewster kept at his work. He was hungry and getting tired, standing on his feet, but he was determined to say nothing until Jameson sent him to get something to eat. That would be the time for him as well.

At four thirty in the afternoon, a young boy burst into the office. "The president is to speak from the White House balcony!" he shouted.

Jameson looked up. "How's that?"

"The president is going to give a speech," the boy repeated.

Jameson pulled out his watch again. "When?"

"Very soon," the boy replied, waiting expectantly. Jameson dug in his pocket and handed the boy a coin. "Much obliged, sir," the boy said and ran out as quickly as he had come in.

"Where is Ferguson?" he demanded. "I need him here—now! I can't go. I have to finish getting ready for press. And I can't ignore this blasted speech! Too much going on. Lincoln could say anything. Dad blast it!"

Brewster cleared his throat. "I could go," he said.

Jameson wheeled around and looked at him. His mouth started to curl up into a strange smile. Then his face flushed and became angry. "You? What would you do?"

"Why, write down what the president says and then come back here and prepare a story for tomorrow's edition."

"Which you've never done in your entire life!" Jameson shouted at him.

"Do you have another choice at this moment?" Brewster asked him calmly.

"Another choice?" Jameson thundered. "Another choice!" He stopped. "No," he said quietly. "I don't. We'll just have to do the best we can."

Suddenly Jameson was a whirlwind of activity, rushing around the office. He grabbed several pencils and writing paper. He thrust them at Brewster. “Here,” he said. “Take this. Write down as much of the sense of what he says as possible. Don’t try to get every word; you may miss something if you fall behind. If Lincoln says something particularly poignant, take that down verbatim.

“Watch the crowd. Describe it if you can. Notice the reaction to what he says. Leave immediately when it is over and get right back here. We have no time to lose. Be thinking about the structure of your story as you run back. I’ll be here waiting. Come back immediately!”

Brewster gathered up the paper and a pencil and set out for the White House. When he reached Pennsylvania Avenue, he saw a horse-drawn streetcar half a block ahead of him and ran to catch it. Breathless, he jumped on, paid the penny fare, and collected himself.

In five minutes he was at the White House, where an enormous crowd was gathering in front, anticipating the president’s speech. Brewster saw a band to one side. Many in the crowd carried banners. He worked his way through the crowd, wanting to be as close to the entrance as he could be. Armed soldiers kept the crowd back.

The crowd that had gathered was jubilant. The war was all but over. Everyone seemed to be speaking at once. Brewster still had not become accustomed to crowds after his years at sea, and he was sweating from his run to catch the streetcar. But at least he was there and had not missed anything. He looked about as Jameson had told him to do, studying faces in the crowd. The women, for the most part, seemed to be prepared for the occasion in their long, brightly colored dresses with their hair covered by bonnets. Some carried parasols against the sun, which was now setting. The men wore dark suits. Many had top hats.

Brewster turned slowly and glanced behind him. His eye caught a scowling man about six feet away in a black suit with black satin trim around the edge of his lapel. The man was slender, shorter than Brewster by five or six inches, with a high forehead. His appearance was dramatic—black hair, black eyes. His apparent ill mood coupled with his heavy, drooping mustache gave him a sinister appearance. He was speaking to the man next to him, who was taller, pale, and slender. The shorter man spoke, turning his head

slightly toward his companion without taking his eyes off of the scene in front of him as they all waited for the president's appearance. Brewster could not quite hear what the man was saying, and he thought little of it, knowing that in the capital the president had many detractors as well as supporters.

His observation of the crowd was interrupted at that moment by the appearance of more soldiers at the entrance to the White House. A moment later, the president appeared in a window on the second floor, wearing his customary black suit with his long coat, looking somewhat haggard and disheveled. When the crowd applauded and cheered, Mr. Lincoln responded with an attempt at a smile, but his obvious fatigue deprived the gesture of any enthusiasm. He stood a moment, towering over the soldiers at his side, and then slowly raised his hands to gesture to the crowd to stop cheering.

When the crowd did not comply, the president raised his hands again, and quietly said, "Thank you. Thank you, my friends. Thank you."

After another moment, the crowd grew quiet. "We meet this evening," Lincoln began, his voice curiously high, nasal, and sharp, "not in sorrow but in gladness of heart. The evacuation of Petersburg and Richmond, and the surrender of the principal insurgent army, give hope of a righteous and speedy peace whose joyous expression cannot be restrained. In the midst of this, however, He, from Whom all blessings flow, must not be forgotten."

Brewster, mesmerized at first, had to remind himself that he was not there as a mere spectator. He began feverishly taking notes. Suddenly he was aware of nothing but the tall man speaking above him.

Lincoln said there would be a national thanksgiving. He praised General Grant and his soldiers for their victory. He said attention must now turn to "reconstruction," restoring the secessionist states to the Union.

Brewster was grateful that he had been reading the newspaper daily and listening to discussions on the street and in saloons. Otherwise he was not sure that he would have understood what Lincoln was saying because it was a complicated discussion of the situation in the state of Louisiana. Lincoln made it clear that Louisiana's return to the Union, however imperfect in its form and procedure, was preferable to the consequences of not accepting it.

“Some twelve thousand voters in the heretofore slave-state of Louisiana have sworn allegiance to the Union, assumed to be the rightful political power of the State; held elections; organized a state government; adopted a free-state constitution, giving the benefit of public schools equally to black and white; and empowered the legislature to confer the elective franchise upon the colored man. Their legislature has already voted to ratify the constitutional amendment recently passed by Congress, abolishing slavery throughout the nation. These twelve thousand persons are thus fully committed to the Union, and to perpetual freedom in the state—committed to the very things, and nearly all the things the nation wants—and they ask the nation’s recognition and its assistance to make good their committal. Now, if we reject and spurn them, we do our utmost to disorganize and disperse them. We in effect say to the white men, ‘You are worthless, or worse—we will neither help you, nor be helped by you.’ To the blacks we say, ‘This cup of liberty which these, your old masters, hold to your lips, we will dash from you, and leave you to the chances of gathering the spilled and scattered contents in some vague and undefined when, where, and how.’”

As Lincoln concluded, the crowd again erupted with cheers. Brewster turned to leave, passing directly the sinister man who he had observed earlier. As he passed, Brewster heard the man tell his companion, “That means nigger citizenship. Now, by God, I’ll put him through. That is the last speech he will ever make.”

Brewster turned, continuing his way through the crowd, making brief eye contact with the man who had criticized Lincoln, but he had neither time nor the inclination to speak to the man. He knew he had little time to waste.

In fifteen minutes Brewster was back at the *Sentinel*. Breathless from his run up from the avenue, he recounted the speech to Jameson. After a moment or so, Jameson interrupted. “It does no good to *tell* me,” he said. “Write it!”

Brewster sat himself down at a table, dipped a pen in the nearby inkwell, and began writing. As he finished a page, Jameson snatched it from him to read, chewing on his half-lit cigar as he did so. Brewster paid no attention to Jameson’s grunts and mumbling as he continued writing.

“Hurry, Mr. Hopkins,” Jameson kept urging him. “The deadline is approaching. We must go to press.” In between these outbursts, Jameson continued his editing. After a

furious forty-five minutes or so, Brewster laid down his pen. Good, bad, or indifferent, he had made his report. He handed the last page to Jameson, who grabbed it and continued his work.

When he had finished the last page, he turned to Brewster. “That will have to do,” he grunted. “No more time. Help me set the type.”

It was only later, when it was too late to do anything about it, that Brewster realized he had forgotten to tell Jameson about the sinister man in the crowd.

## CHAPTER 3

Brewster waited a day for Jameson to comment on his story about the president's speech. By Thursday, when Jameson had said nothing to him, Brewster was growing impatient. When Jameson arrived around ten a.m., removed his coat, and turned to his desk without saying more than "Good morning," Brewster stood next to his boss's desk, keeping a silent vigil that he knew annoyed the other man. Jameson made a show of ignoring him but finally put down his cigar and looked at Brewster, looming over him.

"Oh, all right!" he said, clearly vexed. "You will continue sweeping and other tasks that I give you to perform. I will, as the situation requires, call on you from time to time to perform journalistic duties." He turned to his desk again, but Brewster said nothing and did not move.

After a moment, without looking up or acknowledging Brewster in any way, Jameson grumbled, "Your pay will be raised one dollar a week."

Brewster allowed himself the barest smile. "I'm obliged," he said. "You won't regret this decision."

As he went about his work that day, Brewster smiled to himself. He was on his way, he told himself. His work would improve, and eventually he would be able to stop sweeping and be a correspondent full time—if not for the *Sentinel*, then for some other paper.

In the early afternoon, when it was time for lunch, Brewster asked Jameson for permission to leave the premises for an hour. Jameson mumbled his approval and Brewster set out at a brisk walk for the boardinghouse where he lived, four blocks away.

When he reached the house where he lived, he found the landlady, Alice Farmer, struggling with a sack of potatoes out in front. Brewster offered to help, and Mrs. Farmer accepted, blushing.

The truth of the matter was that Brewster was only too happy to help. Alice was an attractive woman of about thirty-five, a widow, and childless. Her husband had been killed at the battle of Bull Run. One way or another she had been left with little but a small house on Seventh Street in the northwest part of the city. Besides Brewster, she had three other boarders and she was obligated to feed them breakfast and dinner. She rose

every morning at five, washed her face and hands, dressed quickly, and hurried down to the kitchen to begin breakfast for her boarders. Before retiring for the night, she prepared dough for biscuits in the morning, leaving it to rise in a covered bowl. In the morning, she cut strips of bacon from a chunk she removed from her icebox and took out eggs that she had bought at the market the day before. She lit a fire in the wood stove and put on a pot for coffee.

Since her husband had died, she had had time for nothing but work, seventeen hours a day, with no opportunity for pleasure. Her husband had been a blacksmith, a big, strong man who was surprisingly gentle. He had worked hard shoeing horses, repairing ironwork, and whatever tasks people had given him. He had made a good living, and despite their inability to have children, which both had desperately wanted, they had been happy in the fifteen years they had been married.

They were not childless for want of trying. Three or four nights a week, after retiring to their big, canopied bed, her husband would make love to her—or she to him. She missed feeling him inside while he held her in his powerful arms. Sometimes she sat astride him while he was on his back, gently cupping her breasts in his big hands, caressing her as she rested her hands on his brawny chest and slowly rocked back and forth, watching the expression on his face, getting pleasure out of seeing and feeling his pleasure, feeling him grow inside of her.

She missed him, missed being with a man. She had not been with a man in four years—not since her husband had gone off to war. The truth was, until recently, she had not met a man she had wanted to be with. At least, not until Brewster had knocked on her door.

Of course, she noticed his good looks immediately, but it was not only those that drew her to him. His looks and his apparent strength were appealing, but more than that it was his quiet manner. He seemed assured and confident of himself without being aggressive or brash. He seemed to have an inner strength that allowed to him to defer to others without seeming to feel diminished in the process. Her husband had been like that, too. She liked that in a man.

She tried not to let Brewster or anyone else notice that she was attracted to him. She was polite and proper with him, engaging in small talk when it was appropriate but not giving anyone cause to think that she was the least bit interested beyond that.

And yet she *was* interested in him. When she served him at the table, she felt a sense of excitement at being near him. Too busy during the day to do much besides her work, she found her thoughts wandering as she brushed her lustrous brown hair before going to bed at night. In the few minutes she had before falling asleep, she realized how much she missed having a man next to her. Gradually she came to realize that she would like having Brewster be that man.

Brewster, for his part, had noticed Mrs. Farmer.

Although he had been with women, he had never had a proper relationship with one. He had met a young woman while he had been in California, but as he had no intention of staying there, he had not become too ardent and had not given her cause to believe that he would marry her. Nonetheless, she had found him attractive, and they had had their moments together.

In Washington, however, Brewster knew few people outside of those he worked with and the other men in the boardinghouse. He thought those were pleasant enough but no one he cared to cultivate. He knew that in Washington, of all places, if he had wanted a woman's company, he could purchase it. Especially during the war, but even now, prostitution flourished. But Brewster had no interest in prostitutes.

Over the time he had lived in Mrs. Farmer's boardinghouse, however, he had found himself drawn to her. He found his passions aroused when she was near him. He inhaled the air when they passed in the hallway, drawing in her scent, which he found enticing. They would smile politely at each other. Although she dressed plainly, he thought she was pretty—a buxom woman with a narrow waist who kept her brown hair in a tight bun. From time to time, as he daydreamed, he wondered what her hair would be like if she let it down.

Now, as he found her struggling with the sack of potatoes, he welcomed the opportunity to help her.

“They go down in the cellar,” she said, leading him down into a narrow space under the house. He followed her and suddenly they found themselves pressed together in

a narrow, dark room. “Here,” she said. “You can put them down here.” Her heart was racing, not from exertion but from the excitement of being so close to him. He took a deep breath, in close proximity finding her fragrance especially intoxicating.

“Thank you,” she said softly.

“Not at all,” he replied, “It was my pleasure.”

She turned to go and stumbled over a sack of onions that she had not seen in the dimly lit room. He caught her with both hands at her waist, keeping her from falling. He held her that way for a moment longer than was necessary for her to right herself.

“I’m obliged to you again,” she said, feeling the blood rushing to her cheeks.

“Not at all,” he repeated with a smile. “It was again my pleasure.” His hands were still at her waist, but she did nothing to remove them or to escape his grasp. She put her hands on top of his and he, thinking she was trying to remove them, started to do so. But she pressed his hands against her, firmly, just for a moment. When he understood what she wanted, he complied without taking advantage of the situation, but holding her firmly nonetheless.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I don’t mean to be forward. It’s been a long time since a man has touched me. I do miss it.” He started to reply, but she cut him off. “Now I must return to my chores and not waste more of your time.”

And with that, she scampered up the narrow stairs.

He followed her, more slowly. Aroused, he found it awkward to move at the moment. He went to his room to retrieve what he had come home to get and departed, feeling agitated and frustrated at the same time. He wanted this woman, and he sensed that she wanted him as well.

Brewster took his time getting back to work, feeling satisfied with himself and looking forward to his future in Washington. With the war over, he sensed that the capital would be more important than ever. The city was already much larger than it had been before the war, more prosperous if not more beautiful. There would be opportunities for an energetic young man like himself who kept his eyes and ears open.

It was a beautiful spring day—warm and clear. The bright yellow forsythia were everywhere in bloom, and blossoms were exploding on tulip trees, with their white petals tinted with pink. Daffodils and crocuses had sprung out of the ground, their yellow

blossoms proudly sunning themselves. Leaves were beginning to open on elm and beech trees.

Brewster was feeling his own prosperity. He had just gotten a raise of one dollar a week! He made up his mind to celebrate. He would do something different, he decided. Friday night, with no work on Saturday, he would go to a play if he could manage a ticket. Passing by Ford's Theater on Tenth Street a few evenings before, he had overheard theatergoers laughing as they emerged from the performance.

He still had a little time left for his lunch, so he took a small detour to go by the theater. He went inside and stepped up to the window.

"Any left for Friday night?" he asked.

"You mean this Friday, the fourteenth?" the man behind the window said. He wore no coat but had a white shirt and a black silk scarf around his neck.

"That's correct," Brewster said.

"No seats," the man said. "You'll have to stand."

Without hesitating, Brewster agreed. "How much?"

"One dollar."

"One dollar to stand?" Brewster asked indignantly.

"That's right. It's a very popular play. Otherwise it wouldn't still be here."

"All right," Brewster said. "I suppose just this once."

He pushed a paper bill under the window bars.

"Prefer coin," the man said.

"You'll have to settle for paper," Brewster said.

The man pushed the ticket across. "One standing ticket for Friday night, April fourteen," he said. "Enjoy the play."

Brewster had to hurry now. He half walked, half ran the six blocks back to the *Sentinel*. Crossing the street, he had to dodge his way around horse manure that had not yet been picked up. And the wind had shifted so that it was blowing from the south, bringing the foul odor of decaying animal carcasses and garbage from the vacant land near the Potomac that had become a dumping ground.

He found Jameson at his desk, sitting in a cloud of cigar smoke. "Sit down," Jameson told him. "I want to go over your story with you. If you're going to be a writer, you need to learn a thing or two."

For the next hour, Jameson went through the story Brewster had written Tuesday evening, showing him where it could have been shorter, where it had not been detailed enough, where he could have provided more background for the reader.

"Don't you want to take notes?" Jameson asked him.

"No need," Brewster said. "I'll remember everything you say."

Jameson raised his eyebrows as if to say, "All right. We'll see how much you remember." But he said nothing more about it.

That night, after Brewster finished work and went home for supper, he decided to do something different for a change. At the end of the meal, when the boarders had finished eating, including the apple crumb pie that Mrs. Farmer had baked, everyone rose from the table. Brewster stood as well, but then picked up his plate and others to help her clear the table.

"It isn't necessary, Mr. Hopkins," she said, blushing slightly.

"I did it at home," he said. "It makes me feel more at home here. If you don't mind, that is."

"I don't mind at all," she said, conscious that she was blushing. "I was simply saying that as a boarder who pays his rent, it isn't necessary for you to help me with my chores."

"At the moment, I have nothing better to do. Helping you will be a pleasure." He smiled as he said it.

She looked at him and felt her mouth turn upward in an attempt to return the smile, but she was too overwhelmed to accept his help graciously. She wanted nothing more than to be near this man, but at the same time she felt her emotions becoming chaotic. "Just to remove the plates," she said. "I like to have the kitchen to myself when I'm in it."

"As you wish," Brewster said, trying to conceal his disappointment.

When he finished clearing the table, he excused himself and went for a walk. The night was cool but not cold, and he set out for the Capitol, where the dome glowed under

the new illumination that had been inaugurated two nights before. He walked slowly, thinking about how far he had come and how much he had seen since leaving Cape Cod. He thought about the open water and the sense of freedom he had felt, despite the rigors and discipline. He recalled the many times he had stood near the top of the main mast and looked out across the water at the vastness of the sea. He had felt small and insignificant at the same moment that he felt a surge of power at the awesome, stark beauty that surrounded him. He had read and found especially intriguing a book by a man named Herman Melville. Brewster found Melville's description of the sea and life aboard ship especially compelling, the loneliness that seemed to sum up man's place in the universe.

Brewster felt lonesome, not so much in a cosmic way at the moment, but unconnected to anyone. He felt he had misread Mrs. Farmer's feelings toward him and that she had spurned his offer to help. He had retreated, not wanting to force himself on someone if she did not wish to be the object of his attention and desire. He sat on the lawn on the Capitol grounds, letting his mind wander. He sat that way for an hour or so, then roused himself from his reverie and made his way slowly back home.

It was past nine when he returned home, but the door wasn't locked as it usually was. Brewster put away his key and entered. A light was on in the parlor. Mrs. Farmer, a shawl around her shoulders, was sitting by an oil lamp, reading. She was alone in the room.

She put down her book as he came through the door and rose from her chair. "I," she started haltingly, "I have been waiting for you. I wanted to apologize for not being more gracious earlier. It was very considerate of you to offer to help. I don't want you to think that I didn't appreciate your offer—or your attention." She smiled at him. "Both were most welcome. As I told you earlier, I've lost my ability to deal with men in a social manner. I hope you can forgive me."

"I understand," he said quietly. "I wasn't offended. In fact, I thought perhaps you felt I was being inappropriate."

"No," she said. "Not at all. You've done nothing inappropriate in any way today or this evening. I simply wanted to tell you that. And now, I will say good night. I don't wish to keep you any longer."

"Good night," he said. "I'm glad we cleared up this misunderstanding."

“As am I,” she said, turning her head as she passed him.

He waited until she had climbed the stairs and he heard the door to her room close before locking the front door and blowing out the lamp, then made his way quietly up the stairs and down the hall to his own room in the rear.

He brushed his teeth quickly, undressed, and slipped into bed. He thought about his day, his exchange with Alice Farmer, and suppressed the desire he felt. He was tired. He would think about her another time. He fell asleep within minutes.

Half an hour later, Brewster did not hear the footsteps in the hall outside his room. The door opened slowly, and a figure crossed to where he lay sleeping and stood over his bed.

Brewster was awakened from a sound sleep gradually, feeling the covers being pulled back and a warm body slipping in next to him. He started to speak but a soft hand covered his mouth.

“Sh,” a woman said. “It’s Alice. It’s all right.” She pressed against him. “Please let me lie here with you. I haven’t been with a man in three years. Please.”

She removed her hand from his mouth. “All right,” he whispered. He closed his eyes. She put her hand on him and realized he had nothing on. She moved her hand up his arm, feeling its firmness. Slowly she moved her hand to his chest. It was muscular and hairy. She slowly moved her hand down and felt the tautness of his stomach.

Brewster gripped her wrist, firmly but gently.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s all right,” he repeated, loosening his grip without relinquishing it. Then he moved his hand on top of hers, interlacing his fingers between hers. She exhaled softly, reassured.

He waited a moment and then slowly moved her hand down. She let her hand be guided by him. Slowly, deliberately, he moved their joined hands down so she could feel the heat of his passion responding to her presence. She grasped him, feeling his hardness, gently stroking him. Her breathing quickened and became shallower. After a moment, she stopped caressing him.

He was fully aroused, not sure what to do. She stirred and got out of the bed. He started to speak, to apologize, but she hushed him again. He looked up at her. She crossed

her arms, grasped her nightgown, and pulled it over her head, revealing her firm, full breasts. She had a narrow waist that flared at her hips. He started to sit up, but she pushed him back. "You don't have to do anything," she said, putting her left knee on the bed as she swung her right leg across his supine body to straddle him.

She grasped him with her right hand and guided him into her. She eased her body down on top of him, engulfing him in her wet, silky warmth. She rocked back and forth, leaning forward briefly to caress his face with her breasts. She could feel him tensing. "Do it!" she commanded him. "Let it happen." He grasped her hips and pulled her down on him as firmly as he could. And then, with a rush, it was over.

She left him at four thirty in the morning. They had slept for a time, and then, aroused again, he had kissed her back, her neck, and when she turned to him, her breasts. After a moment she put her arm around his head and pulled it toward hers. When he kissed her, she drew his tongue into her mouth and pressed herself against him. He had knelt above her and with her help glided inside her. She murmured softly as he gently moved in and out. He kissed her again, her lips parting as she inserted her tongue into his mouth.

After a few minutes, her hands tightened on his back. He lowered his head to her breast and gently drew on her nipple. She tensed, then cried out and pulled him in closer.

They climaxed together.

## CHAPTER 4

At breakfast, Alice gave no sign that anything out of the ordinary had happened during the night. She served the breakfast of eggs, bacon, and biscuits efficiently, saying no more and no less than she had any other morning, greeting each of her boarders with a simple, “Good morning.”

Brewster returned the greeting, as he had every other morning, but with no special emphasis or change in tone. To all outward appearances, nothing out of the ordinary *had* occurred.

Brewster, despite not getting his normal amount of sleep, was feeling energized. He desperately wanted to say something to Alice but knew that he could not. He glanced at her as she sat at the head of the table, but she paid no attention to him. He determined to write her a note, and then focused on his breakfast.

Despite his resolve to concentrate on his work, Brewster found his mind wandering throughout the day back to the previous night. He had made love to a woman he barely knew—or she had made love to him. He didn’t know what to make of the experience, or of her. What sort of a person was she behind that quiet reserve? Had she told him the truth earlier, or was this not the first time she had entered the bed of a boarder? He saw no familiarity on the part of other boarders toward her, and she certainly showed none toward any of them.

Still, he didn’t know what to make of it. He had been more than willing to participate with her, but he had no idea what it meant. Would there be another visit, and if so, when?

He finished his work by six and went home to dress for the theater. He put on his only suit and wiped off the dust from his boots. With time to spare, he decided to walk the four blocks to the theater.

He arrived around seven thirty. The play was not due to start until eight, so he walked up the brick sidewalk past the gray clapboard building with a sign announcing that it was a “Dye House.” A few doors up, a three-story brick building with a large display window advertised “Legs” and featured samples of prostheses, another grim reminder of the war’s damage.

He turned back and walked down toward the theater and past it, glancing through the window at the men crowded around the bar at Taltaval's saloon, an establishment frequented by actors. Brewster thought about going in for a closer look, perhaps having a drink, but the bar was filled with cigar smoke and he really could not afford to waste money on drink.

The crowd outside the theater had been animated by the news that President Lincoln and General Grant would be attending the performance. Brewster shared the sense of excitement. Perhaps, he thought, he would have the opportunity to write something about the occasion for the *Sentinel*. Despite his gruff manner, Jameson had seemed pleased with Brewster's coverage of the president's speech three days earlier. The criticisms Jameson had made of the story Brewster had written hadn't been severe, and in fact had been instructive.

The crowd was now moving into the theater. Brewster joined those entering. When he came into the theater from the lobby, he noticed festive bunting in red, white, and blue on a box to the right of the stage. Guessing that that must be the presidential box, Brewster moved to the left to afford himself a better view.

The play began shortly after eight, although the president and his party had not yet arrived. The president, Brewster understood, had been invited by John Ford, owner of the theater, to hear the debut of "Honor to Our Soldiers," which would be sung by the actress Laura Keene, star of the play being performed, *Our American Cousin*. Keene was expected to lead the song in tribute to Mr. Lincoln.

Brewster was well absorbed by the play, which was quite entertaining and humorous. He joined the audience in laughter several times and didn't at all mind standing. At 8:35, the play suddenly stopped. There was a commotion, and Brewster looked to see people in the balcony stand and applaud. Laura Keene looked up and also started to applaud. It was the presidential party. From where he was standing, under the balcony on the left side, Brewster was able to see Mr. Lincoln and his party as they made their way down the aisle toward the presidential box on the opposite side. When he reached it, Mr. Lincoln stepped to the front to wave to the crowd. From that perspective he looked especially tall and gaunt. Though clearly tired, the president smiled and waved as the audience applauded him. The orchestra struck up "Hail to the Chief," and when

that was over, the audience applauded and cheered some more, not stopping until the president motioned for everyone to be seated and he himself took his seat, behind Mrs. Lincoln and out of view of the audience.

The first act ended, and the audience moved outside for an intermission. Brewster stayed where he was, still hoping to see the president, who stayed in his box with his wife and another couple. General Grant and his wife apparently had not come.

The second act drew Brewster back into the play. He glanced up from time to time at the president, able to see only a shadowy figure. Although he had heard that Miss Keene was to perform the song at the end of the first act, she did not do so. Nor did she sing it at the end of the second act.

The third act found the audience rapt, waiting to see how the story would be resolved. Brewster had turned his attention to the play and was concentrating on it quite intently when suddenly something caught his attention. He heard a loud report, like a gunshot, and observed a commotion in the presidential box. Someone screamed. A man in a dark suit half jumped, half fell from the box to the stage, about nine feet below. The other man in the presidential box had unsuccessfully tried to grab the man in the dark suit; he had escaped, but the struggle had thrown the man off balance, and he landed badly on the stage. He turned to the audience and said something that Brewster did not understand. But Brewster recognized the man. It was the sinister man he had seen outside the White House three nights before.

Dragging his leg, the man moved across the stage and out of Brewster's view. "The president's been shot!" someone yelled. There was more screaming and pandemonium. People were shouting. The aisles were jammed, as were the stairs. Some in the audience were attempting to get on the stage. Amidst the shouting, Brewster could hear someone in the balcony repeatedly crying out for water. When the gaslights were turned up, the faces in the crowd reflected fear and anger.

Brewster moved with the crowd. In the lobby, he took the winding staircase to the balcony, struggling against the people coming down. Once at the top, he had an easier time making his way around toward the presidential box. Nothing other than instinct told him that this was what he needed to do. He found his way barred by soldiers. From time

to time, the doors opened, however, and Brewster could see in the dimly lit space three men kneeling over a prostrate figure. It was President Lincoln.

Nothing more could be done there. Brewster made his way outside where people were milling around. More shouting and anger. One man said, "I'm glad it happened." In an instant the crowd turned on the man, tearing his clothes and beating him. Three policemen with drawn revolvers fought their way through the crowd to rescue him.

The street was jammed with people talking, shouting, weeping. No one seemed to know what to do or where to go, so they stood about. If they had had a purpose, they would have been a mob. As it was, they were simply a throng, a huge collection of shocked, angry, and fearful people whose lives had been suddenly and horribly disrupted.

After a few minutes, a double column of soldiers led by a captain with his sword drawn emerged from the theater. Behind them, four soldiers were carrying the wounded president. Mr. Lincoln was on his back, limp and listless. A man—a physician, Brewster believed—followed directly behind the president, holding a bandage under his head. Brewster could see that the bandage was red with blood. The president's face was pale, swollen and distorted.

The captain pushed at the crowd, trying to clear a path. He swung his sword from side to side. "Out of the way, you sons of bitches!" he hollered. The crowd slowly made way, and the procession went forward at a snail's pace. Across the street, at 435 Tenth Street, a man with a lighted candle stood in his doorway motioning toward the soldiers. They carried Mr. Lincoln up the stairs and into the house.

Brewster stood and watched the house for some time, trying to decide what to do next. He decided to try to enter the house but was turned back by a soldier when he approached. It was now close to eleven p.m. If he could not enter the house, he had only one alternative.

As fast as he could, running and walking, he made his way to the *Sentinel* office. He arrived, sweating and panting, but he had no time to think about that. He let himself in, sat at a desk, and began writing as fast as he could a first-person account of what he had seen and heard that evening.

After he had been writing for some forty-five minutes, Jameson burst into the office. "The president's been shot! I need you to find Ferguson immediately."

“I have to finish what I’m doing,” Brewster said.

“No time for that. I’m telling you to find Ferguson. The President’s been shot. Don’t you understand?”

“I do,” Brewster said. “I was there. I saw it. I’m trying to write what I saw and heard.”

Jameson froze and stared at Brewster. “You were there? You...?”

“Yes,” Brewster said quietly. “I saw everything. I know the man who shot him. It was the actor—John Wilkes Booth. I saw Mr. Lincoln carried to a house across the street. I don’t think he’ll survive. Now,” he said, pausing, “may I finish what I’m doing?”

“I’ll find Ferguson,” Jameson said. “If I can’t, I’ll return. We’ll publish an extra edition, as many as we can print. Go on writing. You have until one a.m. to finish. Then we’ll have to start setting type. I’ll have to edit as we set the type. No time,” he said. “No time.”

Jameson rushed out. Painstakingly, Brewster tried to recall what he had seen and heard in detail, sifting through the pictures in his mind, casting aside irrelevant details while keeping whatever seemed pertinent or gave added richness to his account. He didn’t need to be told that what he was writing was an eyewitness account of a historic event.

He saw only the paper in front of him as he replayed the scene in his mind—the play stopping, Lincoln waving to the audience, the sudden report, Booth jumping from the box to the stage, and then the gut-wrenching realization that something terrible had just happened.

Brewster’s concentration was total, so much so that he didn’t hear the door open. It was Ferguson.

“Where’s Jameson?” he asked.

Brewster looked up from the table. “Out looking for you. You know what’s happened?”

“Lincoln’s been shot. I heard it while I was in McGuffy’s. What are you doing here?”

“I was at the theater,” Brewster said. “I witnessed it.”

“Where is Lincoln now?”

“They took him to a house across the street from Ford’s. The doctor said the White House was too far to carry him.”

“I’ll go there. When do I need to return?”

“Jameson said I have to finish by one a.m.”

Ferguson turned and left. Brewster went back to his account, remembering as he wrote Booth’s words outside the White House. He would work that incident into the story. He continued writing feverishly, paying no attention to the clamor in the street.

He pushed himself to finish before the deadline Jameson had set so that he could go over what he had written before giving it up. Ferguson returned after an hour and sat down to write his own story. When Jameson returned, around twelve forty-five, he found Brewster and Ferguson hard at work. There was no time for questions or recriminations. “Brewster,” Jameson said in a rare moment of calling him by his given name, “let me have what you can so I can get started. Ferguson, what are you writing?”

“Secretary of State Seward was also attacked, by a man with a knife. They believe it was a conspiracy to paralyze our government.”

“What is Seward’s condition?” Jameson asked.

“Badly cut, but he’ll survive,” Ferguson said. “His son was in the house and came to his aid. Fred Seward was also wounded, but he’ll recover.”

“Keep checking on that, and of course, on the president. For now, we’ll treat him as alive but mortally wounded. If he dies, we’ll make the change.”

Jameson took the pages Brewster handed him and went into the small composing room. He put on the ink-stained apron he wore when setting type and went about his task, first setting the headline, “President Lincoln Shot!” in very large type with a black border around it, then proceeding to the story that Brewster had written.

Although Jameson would not say so aloud, he found Brewster’s story surprisingly good, just as his account of Lincoln’s last speech three days earlier had been. He would not tell Brewster so—it might mean having to pay him more money. Yet he was pleased that fortune had smiled on him and that one of his employees had been present when the tragic incident had occurred. And why not be pleased? He had not caused it to happen, nor was he exploiting the event. Better that people should know from an eyewitness what

had happened than to hear rumors and third-hand accounts. That was what a newspaper was for, to tell people what had happened.

They worked through the night. Ferguson finished his story and then helped Brewster and Jameson set type. At six, while type was still being set, Jameson went to wake Tommy Reilly, the twelve-year-old boy who sold papers on the street for him. He told him to get three friends and to come immediately to the *Sentinel* office so they could get their edition on the street and into the hands of readers.

By the time Jameson returned, the type was set. Brewster and Ferguson had pulled a proof and were correcting errors and typos. In thirty minutes, working feverishly, they were ready to start printing in earnest. Just at the moment they were prepared to start, however, Tommy Reilly came running in. He was panting from his run. His trousers were patched, as was the shirt he wore and his shoes, if inspected, would show holes in the soles.

“The president is dead!” he shouted.

“When?” Jameson asked calmly.

“About seven twenty.”

“Very well,” Jameson said, still calm. “I’ll change the headline: ‘President Lincoln Assassinated!’ It’s longer, but there’s still room for it at the top. Ferguson, Brewster. Read over the stories again to see what other changes need to be made.”

By eight, they were finished. “Any more changes, and we’ll put out a later edition,” Jameson said. “Time to begin.”

All fifteen thousand copies of the editions the *Sentinel* printed on April 15 sold. Jameson, Brewster, and Ferguson worked through the entire day, first putting out later editions as they had more details of the attempt on Seward’s life, preparations for Lincoln’s funeral, the swearing-in of Andrew Johnson as the seventeenth president of the United States, the hunt for the conspirators—especially John Wilkes Booth—and speculation about the future.

The city was somber. Most saloons were closed. The streets were quiet with few carriages on them. Where flags were displayed, they were at half-staff. Some houses draped black crepe over their doors. People on the street walked quietly, with little more than a nod to acknowledge each other.

The three men went about their business in the same quiet, sober manner. Whatever need Ferguson might have had for a drink, he showed no sign of it and said nothing. He and Jameson treated Brewster as an equal, with respect and regard for what he had done in the preceding hours.

All three were exhausted by the end of their second day of labor. They printed the paper and left it for distribution the next morning before closing at two a.m. It was Easter Sunday.