Chapter 1: Four Men Waiting

On May 18, 1860, the day when the Republican Party would nominate its candidate for president, Abraham Lincoln was up early. As he climbed the stairs to his plainly furnished law office on the west side of the public square in Springfield, Illinois, breakfast was being served at the 130-room Chenery House on Fourth Street. Fresh butter, flour, lard, and eggs were being put out for sale at the City Grocery Store on North Sixth Street. And in the morning newspaper, the proprietors at Smith, Wickersham & Company had announced the arrival of a large spring stock of silks, calicos, ginghams, and linens, along with a new supply of the latest styles of hosiery and gloves.

The Republicans had chosen to meet in Chicago. A new convention hall called the "Wigwam" had been constructed for the occasion. The first ballot was not due to be called until 10 a.m. and Lincoln, although patient by nature, was visibly "nervous, fidgety, and intensely excited." With an outside chance to secure the Republican nomination for the highest office of the land, he was unable to focus on his work. Even under ordinary circumstances many would have found concentration difficult in the untidy office Lincoln shared with his younger partner, William Herndon. Two worktables, piled high with papers and correspondence, formed a T in the center of the room. Additional documents and letters spilled out from the drawers and pigeonholes of an outmoded secretary in the corner. When he needed a particular piece of correspondence, Lincoln had to rifle through disorderly stacks of paper, rummaging, as a last resort, in the lining of his old plug hat, where he often put stray letters or notes.

Restlessly descending to the street, he passed the state capitol building, set back from the road, and the open lot where he played handball with his friends, and climbed a short set of stairs to the office of the *Illinois State Journal*, the local Republican newspaper. The editorial room on the second floor, with a central large wood-burning stove, was a gathering place for the exchange of news and gossip.

He wandered over to the telegraph office on the north side of the square to see if any new dispatches had come in. There were few outward signs that this was a day of special moment and expectation in the history of Springfield, scant record of any celebration or festivity planned should Lincoln, long their fellow townsman, actually secure the nomination. That he had garnered the support of the Illinois delegation at the state convention at Decatur earlier that month was widely understood to be a "complimentary" gesture. Yet if there were no firm plans to celebrate his dark horse bid, Lincoln knew well the ardor of his staunch circle of friends already at work on his behalf on the floor of the Wigwam.

The hands of the town clock on the steeple of the Baptist church on Adams Street must have seemed not to move. When Lincoln learned that his longtime friend James Conkling had returned unexpectedly from the convention the previous evening, he walked over to Conkling's office above Chatterton's jewelry store. Told that his friend was expected within the hour, he returned to his own quarters, intending to come back as soon as Conkling arrived.

Lincoln's shock of black hair, brown furrowed face, and deep-set eyes made him look older than his fifty-one years. He was a familiar figure to almost everyone in Springfield, as was his singular way of walking, which gave the impression that his long, gaunt frame needed oiling. He plodded forward in an awkward manner, hands hanging at his sides or folded behind his back. His step had no spring, his partner William Herndon recalled. He lifted his whole foot at once rather than lifting from the toes and then thrust the whole foot down on the ground rather than landing on his heel. "His legs," another observer noted, "seemed to drag from the knees down, like those of a laborer going home after a hard day's work."

His features, even supporters conceded, were not such "as belong to a handsome man." In repose, his face was "so overspread with sadness," the reporter Horace White noted, that it seemed as if

"Shakespeare's melancholy Jacques had been translated from the forest of Arden to the capital of Illinois." Yet, when Lincoln began to speak, White observed, "this expression of sorrow dropped from him instantly. His face lighted up with a winning smile, and where I had a moment before seen only leaden sorrow I now beheld keen intelligence, genuine kindness of heart, and the promise of true friendship." If his appearance seemed somewhat odd, what captivated admirers, another contemporary observed, was "his winning manner, his ready good humor, and his unaffected kindness and gentleness." Five minutes in his presence, and "you cease to think that he is either homely or awkward."

Springfield had been Lincoln's home for nearly a quarter of a century. He had arrived in the young city to practice law at twenty-eight years old, riding into town, his great friend Joshua Speed recalled, "on a borrowed horse, with no earthly property save a pair of saddle-bags containing a few clothes." The city had grown rapidly, particularly after 1839, when it became the capital of Illinois. By 1860, Springfield boasted nearly ten thousand residents, though its business district, designed to accommodate the expanding population that arrived in town when the legislature was in session, housed thousands more. Ten hotels radiated from the public square where the capitol building stood. In addition, there were multiple saloons and restaurants, seven newspapers, three billiard halls, dozens of retail stores, three military armories, and two railroad depots.

Here in Springfield, in the Edwards mansion on the hill, Lincoln had courted and married "the belle of the town," young Mary Todd, who had come to live with her married sister, Elizabeth, wife of Ninian Edwards, the well-to-do son of the former governor of Illinois. Raised in a prominent Lexington, Kentucky, family, Mary had received an education far superior to most girls her age. For four years she had studied languages and literature in an exclusive boarding school and then spent two additional years in what was considered graduate study. The story is told of Lincoln's first meeting with Mary at a festive party. Captivated by her lively manner, intelligent face, clear blue eyes, and dimpled smile, Lincoln reportedly said, "I want to dance with you in the worst way." And, Mary laughingly told her cousin later that night, "he certainly did." In Springfield, all their children were born, and one was buried. In that spring of 1860, Mary was forty-two, Robert sixteen, William nine, and Thomas seven. Edward, the second son, had died at the age of three.

Their home, described at the time as a modest "two-story frame house, having a wide hall running through the centre, with parlors on both sides," stood close to the street and boasted few trees and no garden. "The adornments were few, but chastely appropriate," one contemporary observer noted. In the center hall stood "the customary little table with a white marble top," on which were arranged flowers, a silver-plated ice-water pitcher, and family photographs. Along the walls were positioned some chairs and a sofa. "Everything," a journalist observed, "tended to represent the home of a man who has battled hard with the fortunes of life, and whose hard experience had taught him to enjoy whatever of success belongs to him, rather in solid substance than in showy display."

During his years in Springfield, Lincoln had forged an unusually loyal circle of friends. They had worked with him in the state legislature, helped him in his campaigns for Congress and the Senate, and now, at this very moment, were guiding his efforts at the Chicago convention, "moving heaven & Earth," they assured him, in an attempt to secure him the nomination. These steadfast companions included David Davis, the Circuit Court judge for the Eighth District, whose three-hundred-pound body was matched by "a big brain and a big heart"; Norman Judd, an attorney for the railroads and chairman of the Illinois Republican state central committee; Leonard Swett, a lawyer from Bloomington who believed he knew Lincoln "as intimately as I have ever known any man in my life"; and Stephen Logan, Lincoln's law partner for three years in the early forties.

Many of these friendships had been forged during the shared experience of the "circuit," the eight weeks each spring and fall when Lincoln and his fellow lawyers journeyed together throughout the state. They shared rooms and sometimes beds in dusty village inns and taverns, spending long evenings gathered together around a blazing fire. The economics of the legal profession in sparsely populated Illinois were such that lawyers had to move about the state in the company of

the circuit judge, trying thousands of small cases in order to make a living. The arrival of the traveling bar brought life and vitality to the county seats, fellow rider Henry Whitney recalled. Villagers congregated on the courthouse steps. When the court sessions were complete, everyone would gather in the local tavern from dusk to dawn, sharing drinks, stories, and good cheer.

In these convivial settings, Lincoln was invariably the center of attention. No one could equal his never-ending stream of stories nor his ability to reproduce them with such contagious mirth. As his winding tales became more famous, crowds of villagers awaited his arrival at every stop for the chance to hear a master storyteller. Everywhere he went, he won devoted followers, friendships that later emboldened his quest for office. Political life in these years, the historian Robert Wiebe has observed, "broke down into clusters of men who were bound together by mutual trust." And no political circle was more loyally bound than the band of compatriots working for Lincoln in Chicago.

The prospects for his candidacy had taken wing in 1858 after his brilliant campaign against the formidable Democratic leader, Stephen Douglas, in a dramatic senate race in Illinois that had attracted national attention. Though Douglas had won a narrow victory, Lincoln managed to unite the disparate elements of his state's fledgling Republican Party -- that curious amalgamation of former Whigs, antislavery Democrats, nativists, foreigners, radicals, and conservatives. In the mid-1850s, the Republican Party had come together in state after state in the North with the common goal of preventing the spread of slavery to the territories. "Of *strange, discordant,* and even, *hostile* elements," Lincoln proudly claimed, "we gathered from the four winds, and *formed* and fought the battle through." The story of Lincoln's rise to power was inextricably linked to the increasing intensity of the antislavery cause. Public feeling on the slavery issue had become so flammable that Lincoln's seven debates with Douglas were carried in newspapers across the land, proving the prairie lawyer from Springfield more than a match for the most likely Democratic nominee for the presidency.

Furthermore, in an age when speech-making prowess was central to political success, when the spoken word filled the air "from sun-up til sun-down," Lincoln's stirring oratory had earned the admiration of a far-flung audience who had either heard him speak or read his speeches in the paper. As his reputation grew, the invitations to speak multiplied. In the year before the convention, he had appeared before tens of thousands of people in Ohio, Iowa, Indiana, Wisconsin, Kentucky, New York, and New England. The pinnacle of his success was reached at Cooper Union in New York, where, on the evening of February 27, 1860, before a zealous crowd of more than fifteen hundred people, Lincoln delivered what the *New York Tribune* called "one of the happiest and most convincing political arguments ever made in this City" in defense of Republican principles and the need to confine slavery to the places where it already existed. "The vast assemblage frequently rang with cheers and shouts of applause, which were prolonged and intensified at the close. No man ever before made such an impression on his first appeal to a New-York audience."

Lincoln's success in the East bolstered his supporters at home. On May 10, the fired-up Republican state convention at Decatur nominated him for president, labeling him "the Rail Candidate for President" after two fence rails he had supposedly split in his youth were ceremoniously carried into the hall. The following week, the powerful Chicago *Press and Tribune* formally endorsed Lincoln, arguing that his moderate politics represented the thinking of most people, that he would come into the contest "with no clogs, no embarrassment," an "honest man" who represented all the "fundamentals of Republicanism," with "due respect for the rights of the South."

Still, Lincoln clearly understood that he was "new in the field," that outside of Illinois he was not "the first choice of a very great many." His only political experience on the national level consisted of two failed Senate races and a single term in Congress that had come to an end nearly a dozen years earlier. By contrast, the three other contenders for the nomination were household names in Republican circles. William Henry Seward had been a celebrated senator from New York for more than a decade and governor of his state for two terms before he went to

Washington. Ohio's Salmon P. Chase, too, had been both senator and governor, and had played a central role in the formation of the national Republican Party. Edward Bates was a widely respected elder statesman, a delegate to the convention that had framed the Missouri Constitution, and a former congressman whose opinions on national matters were still widely sought.

Recognizing that Seward held a commanding lead at the start, followed by Chase and Bates, Lincoln's strategy was to give offense to no one. He wanted to leave the delegates "in a mood to come to us, if they shall be compelled to give up their first love." This was clearly understood by Lincoln's team in Chicago and by all the delegates whom Judge Davis had commandeered to join the fight. "We are laboring to make you the second choice of all the Delegations we can, where we can't make you first choice," Scott County delegate Nathan Knapp told Lincoln when he first arrived in Chicago. "Keep a good nerve," Knapp advised, "be not surprised at any result -- but I tell you that your chances are not the worst...brace your nerves for any result." Knapp's message was followed by one from Davis himself on the second day of the convention. "Am very hopeful," he warned Lincoln, but "dont be Excited."

The warnings were unnecessary -- Lincoln was, above all, a realist who fully understood that he faced an uphill climb against his better-known rivals. Anxious to get a clearer picture of the situation, he headed back to Conkling's office, hoping that his old friend had returned. This time he was not disappointed. As Conkling later told the story, Lincoln stretched himself upon an old settee that stood by the front window, "his head on a cushion and his feet over the end," while Conkling related all he had seen and heard in the previous two days before leaving the Wigwam. Conkling told Lincoln that Seward was in trouble, that he had enemies not only in other states but at home in New York. If Seward was not nominated on the first ballot, Conkling predicted, Lincoln would be the nominee.

Lincoln replied that "he hardly thought this could be possible and that in case Mr. Seward was not nominated on the first ballot, it was his judgment that Mr. Chase of Ohio or Mr. Bates of Missouri would be the nominee." Conkling disagreed, citing reasons why each of those two candidates would have difficulty securing the nomination. Assessing the situation with his characteristic clearheadedness, Lincoln could not fail to perceive some truth in what his friend was saying; yet having tasted so many disappointments, he saw no benefit in letting his hopes run wild. "Well, Conkling," he said slowly, pulling his long frame up from the settee, "I believe I will go back to my office and practice law."

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While Lincoln struggled to sustain his hopes against the likelihood of failure, William Henry Seward was in the best of spirits. He had left Washington three days earlier to repair to his hometown of Auburn, New York, situated in the Finger Lakes Region of the most populous state of the Union, to share the anticipated Republican nomination in the company of family and friends.

Nearly sixty years old, with the vitality and appearance of a man half his age, Seward typically rose at 6 a.m. when first light slanted into the bedroom window of his twenty-room country home. Rising early allowed him time to complete his morning constitutional through his beloved garden before the breakfast bell was rung. Situated on better than five acres of land, the Seward mansion was surrounded by manicured lawns, elaborate gardens, and walking paths that wound beneath elms, mountain ash, evergreens, and fruit trees. Decades earlier, Seward had supervised the planting of every one of these trees, which now numbered in the hundreds. He had spent thousands of hours fertilizing and cultivating his flowering shrubs. With what he called "a lover's interest," he inspected them daily. His horticultural passion was in sharp contrast to Lincoln's lack of interest in planting trees or growing flowers at his Springfield home. Having spent his childhood laboring long hours on his father's struggling farm, Lincoln found little that was romantic or recreational about tilling the soil.

When Seward "came in to the table," his son Frederick recalled, "he would announce that the hyacinths were in bloom, or that the bluebirds had come, or whatever other change the morning had brought." After breakfast, he typically retired to his book-lined study to enjoy the precious hours of uninterrupted work before his doors opened to the outer world. The chair on which he sat was the same one he had used in the Governor's Mansion in Albany, designed specially for him so that everything he needed could be right at hand. It was, he joked, his "complete office," equipped not only with a writing arm that swiveled back and forth but also with a candleholder and secret drawers to keep his inkwells, pens, treasured snuff box, and the ashes of the half-dozen or more cigars he smoked every day. "He usually lighted a cigar when he sat down to write," Fred recalled, "slowly consuming it as his pen ran rapidly over the page, and lighted a fresh one when that was exhausted."

Midmorning of the day of the nomination, a large cannon was hauled from the Auburn Armory into the park. "The cannoneers were stationed at their posts," the local paper reported, "the fire lighted, the ammunition ready, and all waiting for the signal, to make the city and county echo to the joyful news" that was expected to unleash the most spectacular public celebration the city had ever known. People began gathering in front of Seward's house. As the hours passed, the crowds grew denser, spilling over into all the main streets of Auburn. The revelers were drawn from their homes in anticipation of the grand occasion and by the lovely spring weather, welcome after the severe, snowy winters Auburn endured that often isolated the small towns and cities of the region for days at a time. Visitors had come by horse and carriage from the surrounding villages, from Seneca Falls and Waterloo to the west, from Skaneateles to the east, from Weedsport to the north. Local restaurants had stocked up with food. Banners were being prepared, flags were set to be raised, and in the basement of the chief hotel, hundreds of bottles of champagne stood ready to be uncorked.

A festive air pervaded Auburn, for the vigorous senator was admired by almost everyone in the region, not only for his political courage, unquestioned integrity, and impressive intellect but even more for his good nature and his genial disposition. A natural politician, Seward was genuinely interested in people, curious about their families and the smallest details of their lives, anxious to help with their problems. As a public man he possessed unusual resilience, enabling him to accept criticism with good-humored serenity.

Even the Democratic paper, the *New York Herald*, conceded that probably fewer than a hundred of Auburn's ten thousand residents would vote against Seward if he received the nomination. "He is beloved by all classes of people, irrespective of partisan predilections," the *Herald* observed. "No philanthropic or benevolent movement is suggested without receiving his liberal and thoughtful assistance....As a landlord he is kind and lenient; as an advisor he is frank and reliable; as a citizen he is enterprising and patriotic; as a champion of what he considers to be right he is dauntless and intrepid."

Seward customarily greeted personal friends at the door and was fond of walking them through his tree-lined garden to his white summerhouse. Though he stood only five feet six inches tall, with a slender frame that young Henry Adams likened to that of a scarecrow, he was nonetheless, Adams marveled, a commanding figure, an outsize personality, a "most glorious original" against whom larger men seemed smaller. People were drawn to this vital figure with the large, hawklike nose, bushy eyebrows, enormous ears; his hair, once bright red, had faded now to the color of straw. His step, in contrast to Lincoln's slow and laborious manner of walking, had a "school-boy elasticity" as he moved from his garden to his house and back again with what one reporter described as a "slashing swagger."

Every room of his palatial home contained associations from earlier days, mementos of previous triumphs. The slim Sheraton desk in the hallway had belonged to a member of the First Constitutional Congress in 1789. The fireplace in the parlor had been crafted by the young carpenter Brigham Young, later prophet of the Mormon Church. The large Thomas Cole painting in the drawing room depicting *Portage Falls* had been presented to Seward in commemoration of his early efforts to extend the canal system in New York State. Every inch of wall space was filled

with curios and family portraits executed by the most famous artists of the day -- Thomas Sully, Chester Harding, Henry Inman. Even the ivy that grew along the pathways and up the garden trellises had an anecdotal legacy, having been cultivated at Sir Walter Scott's home in Scotland and presented to Seward by Washington Irving.

As he perused the stack of telegrams and newspaper articles arriving from Chicago for the past week, Seward had every reason to be confident. Both Republican and Democratic papers agreed that "the honor in question was [to be] awarded by common expectation to the distinguished Senator from the State of New York, who, more than any other, was held to be the representative man of his party, and who, by his commanding talents and eminent public services, has so largely contributed to the development of its principles." The local Democratic paper, the Albany *Atlas and Argus*, was forced to concede: "No press has opposed more consistently and more unreservedly than ours the political principles of Mr. Seward....But we have recognised the genius and the leadership of the man."

So certain was Seward of receiving the nomination that the weekend before the convention opened he had already composed a first draft of the valedictory speech he expected to make to the Senate, assuming that he would resign his position as soon as the decision in Chicago was made. Taking leave of his Senate colleagues, with whom he had labored through the tumultuous fifties, he had returned to Auburn, the place, he once said, he loved and admired more than any other -- more than Albany, where he had served four years in the state senate and two terms as governor as a member of the Whig Party; more than the U.S. Senate chamber, where he had represented the leading state of the Union for nearly twelve years; more than any city in any of the four continents in which he had traveled extensively.

Auburn was the only place, he claimed, where he was left "free to act in an individual and not in a representative and public character," the only place where he felt "content to live, and content, when life's fitful fever shall be over, to die." Auburn was a prosperous community in the 1860s, with six schoolhouses, thirteen churches, seven banks, eleven newspapers, a woolen mill, a candle factory, a state prison, a fine hotel, and more than two hundred stores. Living on the northern shore of Owasco Lake, seventy-eight miles east of Rochester, the citizens took pride in the orderly layout of its streets, adorned by handsome rows of maples, elms, poplars, and sycamores.

Seward had arrived in Auburn as a graduate of Union College in Schenectady, New York. Having completed his degree with highest honors and finished his training for the bar, he had come to practice law with Judge Elijah Miller, the leading citizen of Cayuga County. It was in Judge Miller's country house that Seward had courted and married Frances Miller, the judge's intelligent, well-educated daughter. Frances was a tall, slender, comely woman, with large black eyes, an elegant neck, and a passionate commitment to women's rights and the antislavery cause. She was Seward's intellectual equal, a devoted wife and mother, a calming presence in his stormy life. In this same house, where he and Frances had lived since their marriage, five children were born -- Augustus, a graduate of West Point who was now serving in the military; Frederick, who had embarked on a career in journalism and served as his father's private secretary in Washington; Will Junior, who was just starting out in business; and Fanny, a serious-minded girl on the threshold of womanhood, who loved poetry, read widely, kept a daily journal, and hoped someday to be a writer. A second daughter, Cornelia, had died in 1837 at four months.

Seward had been slow to take up the Republican banner, finding it difficult to abandon his beloved Whig Party. His national prominence ensured that he became the new party's chief spokesman the moment he joined its ranks. Seward, Henry Adams wrote, "would inspire a cow with statesmanship if she understood our language." The young Republican leader Carl Schurz later recalled that he and his friends idealized Seward and considered him the "leader of the political anti-slavery movement. From him we received the battle-cry in the turmoil of the contest, for he was one of those spirits who sometimes will go ahead of public opinion instead of tamely following its footprints."

In a time when words, communicated directly and then repeated in newspapers, were the primary means of communication between a political leader and the public, Seward's ability to "compress into a single sentence, a single word, the whole issue of a controversy" would irrevocably, and often dangerously, create a political identity. Over the years, his ringing phrases, calling upon a "higher law" than the Constitution that commanded men to freedom, or the assertion that the collision between the North and South was "an irrepressible conflict," became, as the young Schurz noted, "the inscriptions on our banners, the pass-words of our combatants." But those same phrases had also alarmed Republican moderates, especially in the West. It was rhetoric, more than substance, that had stamped Seward as a radical -- for his actual positions in 1860 were not far from the center of the Republican Party.

Whenever Seward delivered a major speech in the Senate, the galleries were full, for audiences were invariably transfixed not only by the power of his arguments but by his exuberant personality and, not least, the striking peculiarity of his appearance. Forgoing the simpler style of men's clothing that prevailed in the 1850s, Seward preferred pantaloons and a long-tailed frock coat, the tip of a handkerchief poking out its back pocket. This jaunty touch figured in his oratorical style, which included dramatic pauses for him to dip into his snuff box and blow his enormous nose into the outsize yellow silk handkerchief that matched his yellow pantaloons. Such flamboyance and celebrity almost lent an aura of inevitability to his nomination.

If Seward remained serene as the hours passed to afternoon, secure in the belief that he was about to realize the goal toward which he had bent his formidable powers for so many years, the chief reason for his tranquillity lay in the knowledge that his campaign at the convention was in the hands of the most powerful political boss in the country: Thurlow Weed. Dictator of New York State for nearly half a century, the handsome, white-haired Weed was Seward's closest friend and ally. "Men might love and respect [him], might hate and despise him," Weed's biographer Glyndon Van Deusen wrote, "but no one who took any interest in the politics and government of the country could ignore him." Over the years, it was Weed who managed every one of Seward's successful campaigns -- for the state senate, the governorship, and the senatorship of New York -- guarding his career at every step along the way "as a hen does its chicks."

They made an exceptional team. Seward was more visionary, more idealistic, better equipped to arouse the emotions of a crowd; Weed was more practical, more realistic, more skilled in winning elections and getting things done. While Seward conceived party platforms and articulated broad principles, Weed built the party organization, dispensed patronage, rewarded loyalists, punished defectors, developed poll lists, and carried voters to the polls, spreading the influence of the boss over the entire state. So closely did people identify the two men that they spoke of Seward-Weed as a single political person: "Seward is Weed and Weed is Seward."

Thurlow Weed certainly understood that Seward would face a host of problems at the convention. There were many delegates who considered the New Yorker too radical; others disdained him as an opportunist, shifting ground to strengthen his own ambition. Furthermore, complaints of corruption had surfaced in the Weed-controlled legislature. And the very fact that Seward had been the most conspicuous Northern politician for nearly a decade inevitably created jealousy among many of his colleagues. Despite these problems, Seward nonetheless appeared to be the overwhelming choice of Republican voters and politicians.

Moreover, since Weed believed the opposition lacked the power to consolidate its strength, he was convinced that Seward would eventually emerge the victor. Members of the vital New York State delegation confirmed Weed's assessment. On May 16, the day the convention opened, the former Whig editor, now a Republican, James Watson Webb assured Seward that there was "no *cause* for doubting. It is only a question of time....And I tell you, and stake my judgment upon it entirely, that nothing has, or can occur...to shake my convictions in regard to the result." The next day, Congressman Eldridge Spaulding telegraphed Seward: "Your friends are firm and confident that you will be nominated after a few ballots." And on the morning of the 18th, just before the balloting was set to begin, William Evarts, chairman of the New York delegation, sent an

optimistic message: "All right. Everything indicates your nomination today sure." The dream that had powered Seward and Weed for three decades seemed within reach at last.

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While friends and supporters gathered about Seward on the morning of the 18th, Ohio's governor, Salmon Chase, awaited the balloting results in characteristic solitude. History records no visitors that day to the majestic Gothic mansion bristling with towers, turrets, and chimneys at the corner of State and Sixth Streets in Columbus, Ohio, where the handsome fifty-two-year-old widower lived with his two daughters, nineteen-year-old Kate and her half sister, eleven-year-old Nettie.

There are no reports of crowds gathering spontaneously in the streets as the hours passed, though preparations had been made for a great celebration that evening should Ohio's favorite son receive the nomination he passionately believed he had a right to expect. Brass bands stood at the ready. Fireworks had been purchased, and a dray procured to drag an enormous cannon to the statehouse, where its thunder might roll over the city once the hoped-for results were revealed. Until that announcement, the citizens of Columbus apparently went about their business, in keeping with the reserved, even austere, demeanor of their governor.

Chase stood over six feet in height. His wide shoulders, massive chest, and dignified bearing all contributed to Carl Schurz's assessment that Chase "looked as you would wish a statesman to look." One reporter observed that "he is one of the finest specimens of a perfect man that we have ever seen; a large, well formed head, set upon a frame of herculean proportions," with "an eye of unrivaled splendor and brilliancy." Yet where Lincoln's features became more warm and compelling as one drew near him, the closer one studied Chase's good-looking face, the more one noticed the unattractive droop of the lid of his right eye, creating "an arresting duality, as if two men, rather than one, looked out upon the world."

Fully aware of the positive first impression he created, Chase dressed with meticulous care. In contrast to Seward or Lincoln, who were known to greet visitors clad in slippers with their shirttails hanging out, the dignified Chase was rarely seen without a waistcoat. Nor was he willing to wear his glasses in public, though he was so nearsighted that he would often pass friends on the street without displaying the slightest recognition.

An intensely religious man of unbending routine, Chase likely began that day, as he began every day, gathering his two daughters and all the members of his household staff around him for a solemn reading of Scripture. The morning meal done, he and his elder daughter, Kate, would repair to the library to read and discuss the morning papers, searching together for signs that people across the country regarded Chase as highly as he regarded himself -- signs that would bolster their hope for the Republican nomination.

During his years as governor, he kept to a rigid schedule, setting out at the same time each morning for the three-block walk to the statehouse, which was usually his only exercise of the day. Never late for appointments, he had no patience with the sin of tardiness, which robbed precious minutes of life from the person who was kept waiting. On those evenings when he had no public functions to attend, he would sequester himself in his library at home to answer letters, consult the statute books, memorize lines of poetry, study a foreign language, or practice the jokes that, however hard he tried, he could never gracefully deliver.

On the rare nights when he indulged in a game of backgammon or chess with Kate, he would invariably return to work at his fastidiously arranged drop-leaf desk, where everything was always in its "proper place" with not a single pen or piece of paper out of order. There he would sit for hours, long after every window on his street was dark, recording his thoughts in the introspective diary he had kept since he was twenty years old. Then, as the candle began to sink, he would turn to his Bible to close the day as it had begun, with prayer.

Unlike Seward's Auburn estate, which he and Frances had furnished over the decades with objects that marked different stages of their lives, Chase had filled his palatial house with exquisite carpets, carved parlor chairs, elegant mirrors, and rich draperies that important people of his time *ought* to display to prove their eminence to the world at large. He had moved frequently during his life, and this Columbus dwelling was the first home he had really tried to make his own. Yet everything was chosen for effect: even the dogs, it was said, seemed "designed and posed."

Columbus was a bustling capital city in 1860, with a population of just under twenty thousand and a reputation for gracious living and hospitable entertainment. The city's early settlers had hailed largely from New England, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, but in recent decades German and Irish immigrants had moved in, along with a thousand free blacks who lived primarily in the Long Street district near the Irish settlement. It was a time of steady growth and prosperity. Spacious blocks with wide shade trees were laid out in the heart of the city, where, the writer William Dean Howells recalled, beautiful young women, dressed in great hoopskirts, floated by "as silken balloons walking in the streets." Fashionable districts developed along High and State Streets, and a new Capitol, nearly as big as the United States Capitol, opened its doors in January 1857. Built in Greek Revival style, with tall Doric columns defining each of the entrances and a large cupola on top, the magnificent structure, which housed the governor's office as well as the legislative chambers, was proclaimed to be "the greatest State capitol building" in the country.

Unlike Seward, who frequently attended theater, loved reading novels, and found nothing more agreeable than an evening of cards, fine cigars, and a bottle of port, Chase neither drank nor smoked. He considered both theater and novels a foolish waste of time and recoiled from all games of chance, believing that they unwholesomely excited the mind. Nor was he likely to regale his friends with intricate stories told for pure fun, as did Lincoln. As one contemporary noted, "he seldom told a story without spoiling it." Even those who knew him well, except perhaps his beloved Kate, rarely recalled his laughing aloud.

Kate Chase, beautiful and ambitious, filled the emotional void in her father's heart created by the almost incomprehensible loss of three wives, all having died at a young age, including Kate's mother when Kate was five years old. Left on his own, Chase had molded and shaped his brilliant daughter, watching over her growth and cultivation with a boundless ardor. When she was seven, he sent her to an expensive boarding school in Gramercy Park, New York, where she remained for ten years, studying Latin, French, history, and the classics, in addition to elocution, deportment, and the social graces. "In a few years you will necessarily go into society," he had told her when she was thirteen. "I desire that you may be qualified to ornament any society in our own country or elsewhere into which I may have occasion to take you. It is for this reason that I care more for your improvement in your studies, the cultivation of your manners, and the establishment of your moral & religious principles, than for anything else."

After Kate graduated from boarding school and returned to Columbus, she blossomed as Ohio's first lady. Her father's ambitions and dreams became the ruling passions of her life. She gradually made herself absolutely essential to him, helping with his correspondence, editing his speeches, discussing political strategy, entertaining his friends and colleagues. While other girls her age focused on the social calendar of balls and soirees, she concentrated all her energies on furthering her father's political career. "She did everything in her power," her biographers suggest, "to fill the gaps in his life so that he would not in his loneliness seek another Mrs. Chase." She sat beside him at lyceum lectures and political debates. She presided over his dinners and receptions. She became his surrogate wife.

Though Chase treated his sweet, unassuming younger daughter, Janette (Nettie), with warmth and affection, his love for Kate was powerfully intertwined with his desire for political advancement. He had cultivated her in his own image, and she possessed an ease of conversation far more relaxed than his own. Now he could depend on her to assist him every step along the way as, day after day, year after year, he moved steadily toward his goal of becoming president. From the moment when the high office appeared possible to Chase, with his stunning election in 1855 as the first Republican governor of a major state, it had become the consuming passion of both father

and daughter that he reach the White House -- a passion that would endure even after the Civil War was over. Seward was no less ambitious, but he was far more at ease with diverse people, and more capable of discarding the burdens of office at the end of the day.

Yet if Chase was somewhat priggish and more self-righteous than Seward, he was more inflexibly attached to his guiding principles, which, for more than a quarter of a century, had encompassed an unflagging commitment to the cause of the black man. Whereas the more accommodating Seward could have been a successful politician in almost any age, Chase functioned best in an era when dramatic moral issues prevailed. The slavery debate of the antebellum period allowed Chase to argue his antislavery principles in biblical terms of right and wrong. Chase was actually more radical than Seward on the slavery issue, but because his speeches were not studded with memorable turns of phrase, his positions were not as notorious in the country at large, and, therefore, not as damaging in more moderate circles.

"There may have been abler statesmen than Chase, and there certainly were more agreeable companions," his biographer Albert Hart has asserted, "but none of them contributed so much to the stock of American political ideas as he." In his study of the origins of the Republican Party, William Gienapp underscores this judgment. "In the long run," he concludes, referring both to Chase's intellectual leadership of the antislavery movement and to his organizational abilities, "no individual made a more significant contribution to the formation of the Republican party than did Chase."

And no individual felt he *deserved* the presidency as a natural result of his past contributions more than Chase himself. Writing to his longtime friend the abolitionist Gamaliel Bailey, he claimed: "A very large body of the people -- embracing not a few who would hardly vote for any man other than myself as a Republican nominee -- seem to desire that I shall be a candidate in 1860. No effort of mine, and so far as I know none of my immediate personal friends has produced this feeling. It seems to be of spontaneous growth."

A vivid testimony to the power of the governor's wishful thinking is provided by Carl Schurz, Seward's avid supporter, who was invited to stay with Chase while lecturing in Ohio in March 1860. "I arrived early in the morning," Schurz recalled in his memoirs, "and was, to my great surprise, received at the uncomfortable hour by the Governor himself, and taken to the breakfast room." Kate entered, greeted him, "and then let herself down upon her chair with the graceful lightness of a bird that, folding its wings, perches upon the branch of a tree....She had something imperial in the pose of the head, and all her movements possessed an exquisite natural charm. No wonder that she came to be admired as a great beauty and broke many hearts."

The conversation, in which "Miss Kate took a lively and remarkably intelligent part, soon turned upon politics," as Chase revealed to Schurz with surprising candor his "ardent desire to be President of the United States." Aware that Schurz would be a delegate at the convention, Chase sounded him on his own candidacy. "It would have given me a moment of sincerest happiness could I have answered that question with a note of encouragement, for nothing could have appeared to me more legitimate than the high ambition of that man," Schurz recalled. Chagrined, he nonetheless felt compelled to give an honest judgment, predicting that if the delegates were willing to nominate "an advanced anti-slavery man," they would take Seward before Chase.

Chase was taken aback, "as if he had heard something unexpected." A look of sadness came over his face. Quickly he regained control and proceeded to deliver a powerful brief demonstrating why he, rather than Seward, deserved to be considered the true leader of the antislavery forces. Schurz remained unconvinced, but he listened politely, certain that he had never before met a public man with such a serious case of "presidential fever," to the extent of "honestly believing that he owed it to the country and that the country owed it to him that he should be President." For his part, Chase remained hopeful that by his own unwavering self-confidence he had cast a spell on Schurz. The following day, Chase told his friend Robert Hosea about the visit, suggesting that in the hours they spent together Schurz had seemed to alter his opinion of Chase's chance at winning, making it

"desirable to have him brought in contact with our best men." Despite Chase's best efforts Schurz remained loyal to Seward.

In the weeks before the convention, the Chase candidacy received almost daily encouragement in the *Ohio State Journal,* the Republican newspaper in Columbus. "No man in the country is more worthy, no one is more competent," the *Journal* declared. By "steady devotion to the principles of popular freedom, through a long political career," he "has won the confidence and attachment of the people in regions far beyond the State."

Certain that his cause would ultimately triumph, Chase refused to engage in the practical methods by which nominations are won. He had virtually no campaign. He had not conciliated his many enemies in Ohio itself, and as a result, he alone among the candidates would not come to the convention with the united support of his own state. Remaining in his Columbus mansion with Kate by his side, he preferred to make inroads by reminding his supporters in dozens of letters that he was the best man for the job. Listening only to what he wanted to hear, discounting troubling signs, Chase believed that "if the most cherished wishes of the people could prevail," he would be the nominee.

"Now is the time," one supporter told him. "You will ride triumphantly on the topmost wave." On the eve of the convention, he remained buoyant. "There is reason to hope," he told James Briggs, a lawyer from Cleveland -- reason to hope that he and Kate would soon take their place as the president and first lady of the United States.

* * *

Judge Edward Bates awaited news from the convention at Grape Hill, his large country estate four miles from the city of St. Louis. Julia Coalter, his wife of thirty-seven years, was by his side. She was an attractive, sturdy woman who had borne him seventeen children, eight of whom survived to adulthood. Their extended family of six sons, two daughters, and nearly a dozen grandchildren remained unusually close. As the children married and raised families of their own, they continued to consider Grape Hill their primary home.

The judge's orderly life was steeped in solid rituals based on the seasons, the land, and his beloved family. He bathed in cold water every morning. A supper bell called him to eat every night. In the first week of April, he "substituted cotton for wollen socks, and a single breasted satin waistcoat for a double-breasted velvet." In July and August, he would monitor the progress of his potatoes, cabbage, squash, beets, and sweet corn. In the fall he would harvest his grape arbors. On New Year's Day, the Bates family followed an old country custom whereby the women remained home all day greeting visitors, while the men rode together from one house or farm to the next, paying calls on friends.

At sixty-six, Bates was among the oldest and best-loved citizens of St. Louis. In 1814, when he first ventured to the thriving city, it was a small fur trading village with a scattering of primitive cabins and a single ramshackle church. Four decades later, St. Louis boasted a population of 160,000 residents, and its infrastructure had boomed to include multiple churches, an extensive private and public educational system, numerous hospitals, and a variety of cultural facilities. The ever-increasing prosperity of the city, writes a historian of St. Louis, "led to the building of massive, ornate private homes equipped with libraries, ballrooms, conservatories, European paintings and sculpture."

Over the years, Bates had held a variety of respected offices -- delegate to the convention that had drafted the first constitution of the state, member of the state legislature, representative to the U.S. congress, and judge of the St. Louis Land Court. His ambitions for political success, however, had been gradually displaced by love for his wife and large family. Though he had been asked repeatedly during the previous twenty years since his withdrawal from public life to run or once again accept high government posts, he consistently declined the offers.

Described by the portrait artist Alban Jasper Conant as "the quaintest looking character that walked the streets," Bates still wore "the old-fashioned Quaker clothes that had never varied in cut since he left his Virginia birthplace as a youth of twenty." He stood five feet seven inches tall, with a strong chin, heavy brows, thick hair that remained black until the end of his life, and a full white beard. In later years, Lincoln noted the striking contrast between Bates's black hair and white beard and teasingly suggested it was because Bates talked more than he thought, using "his chin more than his head." Julia Bates was also plain in her dress, "unaffected by the crinolines and other extravagances of the day, preferring a clinging skirt, a deep-pointed fichu called a Van Dyck, and a close-fitting little bonnet."

"How happy is my lot!" Bates recorded in his diary in the 1850s. "Blessed with a wife & children who spontaneously do all they can to make me comfortable, anticipating my wishes, even in the little matter of personal convenience, as if their happiness wholly depended on mine. O! it is a pleasure to work for such a family, to enjoy with them the blessings that God so freely gives." He found his legal work rewarding and intellectually stimulating, reveled in his position as an elder in the Presbyterian Church, and loved nothing more than to while away the long winter nights in his treasured library.

In contrast to Seward, whose restless energy found insufficient outlet in the bosom of his family, and to Chase, plagued all his days by unattained ambition, Bates experienced a passionate joy in the present, content to call himself "a very domestic, home, man." He had come briefly to national attention in 1847, when he delivered a spellbinding speech at the great River and Harbor Convention in Chicago, organized to protest President Polk's veto of a Whig-sponsored bill to provide federal appropriations for the internal improvement of rivers and harbors, especially needed in the fast-growing West. For a short time after the convention, newspapers across the country heralded Bates as a leading prospect for high political office, but he refused to take the bait. Thus, as the 1860 election neared, he assumed that, like his youth and early manhood, his old ambitions for political office had long since passed him by.

In this assumption, he was mistaken. Thirteen months before the Chicago convention, at a dinner hosted by Missouri congressman Frank Blair, Bates was approached to run for president by a formidable political group spearheaded by Frank's father, Francis Preston Blair, Sr. At sixty-six, the elder Blair had been a powerful player in Washington for decades. A Democrat most of his life, he had arrived in Washington from Kentucky during Andrew Jackson's first presidential term to publish the Democratic organ, the Globe newspaper. Blair soon became one of Jackson's most trusted advisers, a member of the famous "kitchen cabinet." Meetings were often held in the "Blair House," the stately brick mansion opposite the White House where Blair lived with his wife and four children. (Still known as the Blair House, the elegant dwelling is now owned by the government, serving as the president's official guesthouse.) To the lonely Jackson, whose wife had recently died, the Blairs became a surrogate family. The three Blair boys -- James, Montgomery, and Frank Junior -- had the run of the White House, while Elizabeth, the only girl, actually lived in the family quarters for months at a time and Jackson doted on her as if she were his own child. Indeed, decades later, when Jackson neared death, he called Elizabeth to his home in Tennessee and gave her his wife's wedding ring, which he had worn on his watch chain from the day of her death.

Blair Senior had broken with the Democrats after the Mexican War over the extension of slavery into the territories. Although born and bred in the South, and still a slaveowner himself, he had become convinced that slavery must not be extended beyond where it already existed. He was one of the first important political figures to call for the founding of the Republican Party. At a Christmas dinner on his country estate in Silver Spring, Maryland, in 1855, he instigated plans for the first Republican Convention in Philadelphia that following summer.

Over the years, Blair's Silver Spring estate, just across the District of Columbia boundary, had become a natural gathering place for politicians and journalists. The house was situated amid hundreds of rolling acres surrounded by orchards, brooks, even a series of grottoes. From the "Big Gate" at the entrance, the carriage roadway passed through a forest of pine and poplar, opening to

reveal a long driveway winding between two rows of chestnut trees and over a rustic bridge to the main house. In the years ahead, the Blairs' Silver Spring estate would become one of Lincoln's favorite places to relax.

The group that Blair convened included his two accomplished sons, Montgomery and Frank; an Indiana congressman, Schuyler Colfax, who would later become vice president under Ulysses Grant; and Charles Gibson, one of Bates's oldest friends in Missouri. Montgomery Blair, tall, thin, and scholarly, had graduated from West Point before studying law and moving to Missouri. In the 1850s he had returned to Washington to be closer to his parents. He took up residence in his family's city mansion on Pennsylvania Avenue. In the nation's capital, Monty Blair developed a successful legal practice and achieved national fame when he represented the slave Dred Scott in his bid for freedom.

Monty's charismatic younger brother Frank, recently elected to Congress, was a natural politician. Strikingly good-looking, with reddish-brown hair, a long red mustache, high cheekbones, and bright gray eyes, Frank was the one on whom the Blair family's burning ambitions rested. Both his father and older brother harbored dreams that Frank would one day become president. But in 1860, Frank was only in his thirties, and in the meantime, the Blair family turned its powerful gaze on Edward Bates.

The Blairs had settled on the widely respected judge, a longtime Whig and former slaveholder who had emancipated his slaves and become a Free-Soiler, as the ideal candidate for a conservative national ticket opposed to both the radical abolitionists in the North and the proslavery fanatics in the South. Though he had never officially joined the Republican Party, Bates held fast to the cardinal principle of Republicanism: that slavery must be restricted to the states where it already existed, and that it must be prevented from expanding into the territories.

As a man of the West and a peacemaker by nature, Bates was just the person, Blair Senior believed, to unite old-line Whigs, antislavery Democrats, and liberal nativists in a victorious fight against the Southern Democratic slaveocracy. The fact that Bates had receded from the political scene for decades was an advantage, leaving him untainted by the contentious battles of the fifties. He alone, his supporters believed, could quell the threats of secession and civil war and return the nation to peace, progress, and prosperity.

Unsurprisingly, Bates was initially reluctant to allow his name to be put forward as a candidate for president. "I feel, tho' in perfect bodily health, an indolence and indecision not common with me," he conceded in July 1859. "The cause, I fear, is the mixing up of my name in Politics....A large section of the Republican party, who think that Mr. Seward's nomination would ensure defeat, are anxious to take me up, thinking that I could carry the Whigs and Americans generally....I must try to resist the temptation, and not allow my thoughts to be drawn off from the common channels of business and domestic cares. Ambition is a passion, at once strong and insidious, and is very apt to cheet a man out of his happiness and his true respectability of character."

Gradually, however, as letters and newspaper editorials advocating his candidacy crowded in upon him, a desire for the highest office in the land took command of his nature. The office to which he heard the call was not, as he had once disdained, "a mere seat in Congress as a subaltern member," but the presidency of the United States. Six months after the would-be kingmakers had approached him, Frank Blair, Jr., noted approvingly that "the mania has bitten old Bates very seriously," and predicted he would "play out more boldly for it than he has heretofore done."

By the dawn of the new year, 1860, thoughts of the White House monopolized the entries Bates penned in his diary, crowding out his previous observations on the phases of the moon and the state of his garden. "My nomination for the Presidency, which at first struck me with mere wonder, has become familiar, and now I begin to think my prospects very fair," he recorded on January 9, 1860. "Circumstances seem to be remarkably concurrent in my favor, and there is now great probability that the Opposition of all classes will unite upon me: And that will be equivalent

to election....Can it be reserved for me to defeat and put down that corrupt and dangerous party [the Democratic Party]? Truly, if I can do my country that much good, I will rejoice in the belief that I have not lived in vain."

In the weeks that followed, his days were increasingly taken up with politics. Though he did not enjoy formal dinner parties, preferring intimate suppers with his family and a few close friends, Bates now spent more time than ever before entertaining political friends, educators, and newspaper editors. Although still tending to his garden, he immersed himself in periodicals on politics, economics, and public affairs. He felt he should prepare himself intellectually for the task of presidential leadership by reading historical accounts of Europe's most powerful monarchs, as well as theoretical works on government. He sought guidance for his role as chief executive in Carlyle's *Frederick the Great* and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations.* Evenings once devoted to family were now committed to public speeches and correspondence with supporters. Politics had fastened a powerful hold upon him, disrupting his previous existence.

The chance for his nomination depended, as was true for Chase and Lincoln as well, on Seward's failure to achieve a first ballot victory at the convention. "I have many strong assurances that I stand second," Bates confided in his diary, "first in the Northwest and in some states in New England, second in New York, Pa." To be sure, there were pockets of opposition, particularly among the more passionate Republicans, who argued that the party must nominate one of its own, and among the German-Americans, who recalled that Bates had endorsed Millard Fillmore when he ran for president on the anti-immigrant American Party four years earlier. As the convention approached, however, his supporters were increasingly optimistic.

"There is no question," the *New York Tribune* predicted, "as there has been none for these three months past, that [Bates] will have more votes in the Convention than any other candidate presented by those who think it wiser to nominate a man of moderate and conservative antecedents." As the delegates gathered in Chicago, Francis Blair, Sr., prophesied that Bates would triumph in Chicago.

Though Bates acknowledged he had never officially joined the Republican Party, he understood that many Republicans, including "some of the most moderate and patriotic" men, believed that his nomination "would tend to soften the tone of the Republican party, without any abandonment of its principles," thus winning "the friendship and support of many, especially in the border States." His chances of success looked good. How strangely it had all turned out, for surely he understood that he had followed an unusual public path, a path that had curved swiftly upward when he was young, then leveled off, even sloped downward for many years. But now, as he positioned himself to reenter politics, he sighted what appeared to be a relatively clear trail all the way to the very top.

* * *

On that morning of May 18, 1860, Bates's chief objective was simply to stop Seward on the first ballot. Chase, too, had his eye on the front-runner, while Seward worried about Chase. Bates had become convinced that the convention would turn to him as the only real moderate. Neither Seward nor Chase nor Bates seriously considered Lincoln an obstacle to their great ambition.

Lincoln was not a complete unknown to his rivals. By 1860, his path had crossed with each of them in different ways. Seward had met Lincoln twelve years before at a political meeting. The two shared lodging that night, and Seward encouraged Lincoln to clarify and intensify his moderate position on slavery. Lincoln had met Bates briefly, and had sat in the audience in 1847 when Bates delivered his mesmerizing speech at the River and Harbor Convention. Chase had campaigned for Lincoln and the Republicans in Illinois in 1858, though the two men had never met.

There was little to lead one to suppose that Abraham Lincoln, nervously rambling the streets of Springfield that May morning, who scarcely had a national reputation, certainly nothing to equal any of the other three, who had served but a single term in Congress, twice lost bids for the Senate, and had no administrative experience whatsoever, would become the greatest historical figure of the nineteenth century.