

# Chasing Lincoln's Killer



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES L. SWANSON

James L. Swanson was born to a family of storytellers. His grandfather worked in the Chicago police department and regaled the family with stories of gangsters during the prohibition era and protesters against the Vietnam War. His grandmother, who worked at tabloid newspapers in Chicago, bought him an engraving of the Deringer pistol that Booth used to shoot Lincoln for his tenth birthday, beginning a lifelong fascination with the sixteenth president and with his assassination. He has a law degree from UCLA and has been a special assistant in the Office of Legal Counsel at the Department of Justice. Swanson has also written books about the manhunt for Confederate President Jefferson Davis and about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Chasing Lincoln's Killer* begins as the four-year Civil War was coming to an end. President Abraham Lincoln led the Union in the war against the eleven states of the South, which wished to secede and form a new country, the Confederate States of America, where the system of slavery would be continued. Lincoln had been reelected in a landslide victory in November 1864, although the states that had seceded to form the Confederacy did not vote. Lincoln was inaugurated for his second term on March 4, 1865. By early 1865, the Confederacy was in an inferior position to fight the war. A naval blockade disrupted trade, runaway inflation reduced the value of Southern currency, agriculture had been decimated and many Southerners had fled their homes for safety deeper in the South, sometimes bringing their slaves with them. On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia at the Appomattox court house. The end of the war was not officially declared for more than a year however, when the final scattered pockets of Confederate resistance were put down. But before that happened, and just five days after Lee's surrender, John Wilkes Booth assassinated Lincoln.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Swanson adapted *Chasing Lincoln's Killer* from his work of adult history *Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer*. He asked young readers to read his book for adults and comment on which parts they thought would be most interesting to people of their age. They told him to be sure to leave in all of the gory details, which he did.

## KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Chasing Lincoln's Killer*
- **Where Written:** Washington, DC
- **When Published:** 2008
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Biography, History
- **Setting:** Washington, DC, Maryland and Virginia
- **Climax:** John Wilkes Booth is discovered hiding in a tobacco barn in Virginia.
- **Antagonist:** John Wilkes Booth

## EXTRA CREDIT

**February 12.** James L. Swanson and Abraham Lincoln share a birthday.

**Change of heart.** Thomas Jones, the Confederate spy who arguably did the most to help Booth and Herold during their twelve-days on the run, wrote a memoir in 1893 describing his role in Booth's escape. Jones wrote that over time he had come to realize that the assassination of Lincoln was a terrible crime. He did not, however, say that he regretted helping Lincoln's killer.



## PLOT SUMMARY

*Chasing Lincoln's Killer* begins in 1865 at the end of the four-year Civil War. President Abraham Lincoln had led the Union forces against the Confederacy, which sought to secede from the Union. After Confederate General Robert E. Lee's surrender at the Appomattox Court House on April 9, it seemed the war would soon be at an end. Lincoln, finally feeling a lightening of his presidential responsibilities, decided to take his wife Mary Todd Lincoln to the theater on April 14, which was Good Friday. Mary Todd had been depressed since the death of their son in 1862 and Lincoln wanted to spend quality time with her.

Meanwhile, one of the most celebrated actors in the country, John Wilkes Booth, was devastated by the Confederacy's impending loss. Booth had plotted in late 1864 to kidnap president Lincoln and then use this hostage to affect the outcome of the war. He had travelled to Canada to meet with Confederate sympathizers and forge connections. He then made contact with the co-conspirators who would eventually be involved in the assassination: David Herold, Lewis Powell, George Atzerodt, the Surratt family and Dr. Samuel Mudd. The kidnapping plot had come to nothing, however, when the

President changed his plans at the last minute. On March 4, 1865 and April 11, 1865, Booth watched Lincoln give his second inaugural address and a speech about voting rights for freed blacks. In each instance, he could have shot the president, but did not take the opportunity.

On April 14, 1865, however, Booth seized a chance. Visiting the Ford Theatre to pick up his mail, he heard the news that the president and Mrs. Lincoln would be attending the evening performance. He quickly contacted his co-conspirators from the 1864 plot. Booth planned for coordinated attacks against several members of the executive branch. Lewis Powell and David Herold would target Secretary of State Seward for assassination; George Atzerodt would kill Vice President Johnson; and Booth himself would kill President Lincoln in his box at the theater. Atzerodt said he did not want to go through with it, but agreed to the killing after Booth threatened him. Booth also contacted Mary Surratt, who rode from her Washington boardinghouse to another inn she owned in Maryland to prepare supplies that Booth planned to pick up later that night after killing the president.

That night at the theater, everything went according to Booth's plans. He knew the layout of the theater and the action of the play, so he was able to smoothly navigate to the president's box and enter it. He timed the shot of his pistol for a moment when the audience would laugh uproariously at a joke made by the leading actor. With a one-shot Deringer pistol, he shot Abraham Lincoln in the back of the head, sending a large bullet into his brain and mortally wounding him. Major Henry Rathbone, who was the president's guest at the theater that night, was the first to react. He lunged toward Booth and was stabbed viciously as the assailant made his escape. Booth jumped off the side of the presidential box onto the stage. Because Rathbone was trying to seize him, Booth landed on the stage awkwardly, breaking his leg a couple inches above the ankle. Ignoring the pain, he yelled "*sic semper tyrannis*," the Latin motto of the state of Virginia, meaning "thus always to tyrants." He also shouted, "the South is avenged," before fleeing out the back of Ford's Theatre, menacing everyone in his way with his knife. Only one man tried to chase him, but Booth escaped on a horse he had waiting in the back alley. He rode quickly to a bridge leading across the river to Maryland and convinced the guard there to let him cross, despite a 9 PM curfew.

Confusion reigned in the theater, but a young doctor named Charles Leale rushed to the president's booth. At first, seeing the stab wounds Major Rathbone had sustained, he assumed the president had also been stabbed. When he found no stab wounds on Lincoln's body, he opened the president's eyelids and could see from his pupils that there was a brain injury. Although he immediately concluded that the president would not survive, he managed to stabilize Lincoln's condition. Oddly, he allowed an actress named Laura Keane to cradle the wounded president's head in her lap. Leale then oversaw men

carrying the president out of the theater; it would not be appropriate for Lincoln to die in a place of entertainment, especially not on a holy day for Christians like Good Friday. They found a room in a boardinghouse across the street.

Meanwhile, at the Seward mansion, Lewis Powell and David Herold came up with a plan to gain entry to the secretary of state's house. Seward had been severely injured the week before in a carriage accident and was bedridden, so he would be vulnerable to attack. Powell carried a small package and told William Bell, the servant who answered the door, that it contained medicine which Seward's doctor had asked him to deliver personally to the secretary. Bell refused to let Powell see the secretary, but eventually he discovered where the sick man was lying. Powell fought viciously with Seward's two sons, Frederick and Augustus, as well as the army nurse who was sitting by Seward's bedside and even his daughter Fanny. He slashed the secretary's face with the knife, but failed to kill him. At the moment when he could have killed the army nurse, Sergeant Robinson, Powell suddenly felt mercy and merely hit him, declared that he was mad, and fled.

David Herold had been terrified by the screams coming from the Seward house and had run off, escaping along the same route taken by Booth and meeting up with his leader in Maryland. Powell, who did not know the city well, hid in a tree for two nights, unsure what his next move should be.

Atzerodt did not attempt to go through with the assassination of the Vice President. Foolishly, he did not realize that he would be implicated in the conspiracy anyway by materials found in Booth's room.

The news of the two attacks spread from Ford's Theatre and the Seward mansion by word of mouth. There was confusion in the streets as mobs of people told one another conflicting stories. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton was notified by messenger of the attack on Seward and only heard that Lincoln had been attacked once he arrived at the Seward house to confirm the truth of this report. He immediately suspected that the Confederate authorities were behind the attacks and feared that other cabinet members were in danger. Seward went to the Petersen house and took control of the situation, securing the space around the president and launching an investigation into the two attacks. He heard from a number of sources at Ford's that the famous, handsome actor John Wilkes Booth had been Lincoln's attacker.

Meanwhile in Maryland, Booth was relieved to meet with Herold, a much better outdoorsman than he was. The two men picked up weapons from the inn in Surrattsville that Mary Surratt had arranged to have ready, then headed to the house of Dr. Samuel Mudd. Mudd had been involved in the earlier conspiracy to kidnap Lincoln, but Booth and Herold did not tell him now that they had just committed a much more serious crime. Mudd treated Booth's injury and the two men decided to shelter at Mudd's until the next night. The next day, Herold and

Mudd went into the nearby town of Bryantown, where Herold hoped to secure a buggy to continue travelling south. Herold, however, saw the Thirteenth New York Cavalry, which was setting up the headquarters for the manhunt in Bryantown. He told Mudd he had changed his mind about getting the buggy and rushed back to Mudd's farm to warn Booth. While going about his business in Bryantown, Mudd learned that Booth had killed the president, but he did not turn Booth in. Instead, he returned to his farm and prepared Booth to continue his escape. He sent the two fugitives to a man named Captain Cox, who he said would help them.

Captain Cox told Booth and Herold to hide in a pine thicket and secured the help of an experienced Confederate spy named Thomas Jones. Jones advised that the men wait in the thicket until the manhunters gave up searching the area and moved further south in pursuit of them. For four days, he brought them food and news. Booth was angry and disappointed at the reaction to his crime in the newspapers that Jones brought him. He had entrusted a letter in which he explained his motives to a friend, who he asked to deliver it to the newspapers. This explanation appeared nowhere; the friend had been too terrified to deliver Booth's letter and had decided to burn it instead.

Back in Washington, investigators suspected Mary Surratt's son John Surratt of committing the attack on secretary Seward. They were at the house questioning the occupants on April 17, when Lewis Powell knocked on Surratt's boardinghouse door seeking refuge. Powell was arrested, as was Mary Surratt. Also arrested that day were Michael O'Laughlen and Samuel Arnold, two men who had been involved in the kidnapping plot and were implicated in a letter found in Booth's hotel room. Then on April 20, George Atzerodt was tracked down at his cousin's house. He gave a confession which implicated Dr. Samuel Mudd and Mary Surratt in the plot.

Stanton had to focus on the final battles of the war and could not dedicate all his attention to the manhunt. He recruited a trusted friend, Colonel Lafayette Baker, to come down from New York to help lead the investigation. Baker was an egotistical man who rubbed many of the other investigators the wrong way with his obvious attempts to take all the credit for Booth's capture. After April 20, when Stanton announced a \$100,000 reward for the capture of Booth, Herold, and John Surratt, Colonel Baker was also interested in getting all the credit for the capture to cash in on the reward money.

On April 20, Thomas Jones saw the cavalry ride out of town and decided that tonight was the night for Booth and Herold to attempt to cross the Potomac into Virginia. Virginia, unlike Maryland, was Confederate territory. Although manhunters would be looking for them there too, the further they could get into the South, the safer they would be.

Jones supplied Booth and Herold with a boat and told them which way to row. They tried to pay him for all that he had done

for them, but he refused to profit for aiding them. He finally accepted payment for the boat. Booth and Herold rowed on the river through the dark night, but eventually realized they were going the wrong way: they were still in Maryland. Luckily for them, Herold recognized their landing spot. The two men went to stay with nearby friends. They then wasted a full day before finally making the river crossing into Virginia on the night of April 22.

Across the river, they were helped by a woman named Elizabeth Quesenberry, who supplied them with horses. They then stopped at the farm of a man named Dr. Richard Stuart, whom Dr. Mudd had recommended they visit. Dr. Stuart disappointed Booth's ideas of proper Southern hospitality, by feeding them but refusing to let them stay the night. With threats of violence, Booth forced one of Stuart's neighbors to allow them to spend the night. The next day, the man's son drove them to Port Conway. There they met three Confederate soldiers who pledged to help them, and they received a ride across the Rappahannock River deeper in Virginia from a fisherman named William Rollins.

The Confederate soldier Willie Jett took Booth and Herold to the farm of the Garretts, where they enjoyed a comfortable meal and bed. The next day, however, they sparked the Garretts' suspicions by acting panicked at the sight of cavalry officers riding by. That night, the Garretts refused to let them sleep in the house, instead allowing them to stay in the tobacco barn. Unbeknownst to Booth and Herold, the Garretts locked them in the tobacco barn out of a fear that they would steal their horses.

Colonel Baker had heard a tip about the fugitives' possible location and sent his cousin Luther Byron Baker to investigate along with Colonel Everton Conger and Lieutenant Edward P. Doherty. These manhunters spoke to William Rollins, who told them where they might find Willie Jett, who told the investigators where to find Booth.

Booth and Herold heard the sounds of the cavalry arriving, but were unable to escape the locked barn. Herold surrendered himself, but Booth refused to come out. The manhunters wanted to take Booth alive so that he could stand trial and be executed. They decided to force him to come out by burning down the tobacco barn. As the flames surrounded him, Booth prepared to shoot as many of the manhunters as he could. Instead, Sergeant Boston Corbett shot him. Corbett said he had acted to defend his comrades. Booth died on the farm, while Herold was taken to Washington for trial.

Mary Surratt, David Herold, Lewis Powell and George Atzerodt were sentenced to death and executed on July 6, 1865, while other conspirators received prison sentences. Today, visitors come to see Ford's Theatre and remember John Wilkes Booth's crime, but also to memorialize the principles for which Abraham Lincoln lived and died.



## CHARACTERS

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Abraham Lincoln** – The president of the United States who had led the Union forces throughout the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln was a loving husband, a strong leader, and a gifted public speaker. At the start to his second term in office, Lincoln was filled with relief at seeing the war's end in sight. He was shot in the back of the head by John Wilkes Booth while watching a play performed at Ford's Theatre on the night of April 14, 1865. He died the next morning. After his death, he would be transformed in the public eye from a controversial president to a martyr who died for the cause of abolishing slavery and preserving the unity of the United States.

**John Wilkes Booth** – One of America's most famous and celebrated actors, John Wilkes Booth was a handsome, fashionable, well-mannered, and well-dressed man about town. He could win people over easily with his charm and good looks. He was also deeply invested in the Confederate cause and hated Abraham Lincoln and all he stood for. He first plotted in 1864 to kidnap the president in a plan to influence the outcome of the war. Depressed at the war's end, Booth was thrilled when he learned that the president would be visiting Ford's Theatre, a space he knew well. He contacted accomplices and set in motion a plot to kill the president, the vice president, and the secretary of state. Only Booth was successful, however, in killing his target. Injured in the escape from the theater, Booth hid in rural Maryland and Virginia with his trusted friend David Herold for twelve days before being discovered on the Garrett farm. He was shot dead by Sergeant Boston Corbett.

**David Herold** – One of John Wilkes Booth's most loyal co-conspirators, David Herold was knowledgeable about both the geography of Washington and of the surrounding countryside. He also had better skills as an outdoorsman than Booth, and Booth relied on his help during their twelve-day attempt to evade capture. On the night of Lincoln's assassination, Herold was supposed to wait outside of the Seward mansion for Lewis Powell and then guide him to safety. Scared off by the cries for help of Fanny Seward and William Bell, Herold fled, leaving Powell to face the unfamiliar city on his own.

**Lewis Powell** – A physically imposing and loyal co-conspirator of Booth's, Powell was tasked with killing Secretary of State Seward. He gained entry to the Seward mansion by claiming to be a messenger from the injured secretary's doctor. Once he learned the secretary's location in the house he rushed into the room. He then had to fight Frederick Seward, Sergeant Robinson, Augustus Seward, and Fanny Seward. He brutally beat them, but at the last moment decided against killing Sergeant Robinson. He also told Augustus that he was insane. A couple days later, he sought a safe haven at Mary Surratt's boardinghouse, but was instead arrested there.

**George Atzerodt** – A German immigrant, Atzerodt was involved in Booth's 1864 plot to kidnap Lincoln. On April 14, 1865, when Booth charged him with assassinating Vice President Andrew Johnson, Atzerodt refused. Booth threatened to turn him in if he did not comply. Atzerodt did not go through with the assassination, but was incriminated by letters found in Booth's room. He was eventually executed for his involvement in the assassination plot.

**Secretary of State William H. Seward** – An important member of Lincoln's cabinet, Seward had been seriously injured in a carriage accident a week before April 14. While recuperating he was visited by President Lincoln and by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. He was confined to his bed when Lewis Powell came to try to assassinate him. Despite being gruesomely slashed across the face by Powell, Seward was not killed. This did not stop rumors about his death from spreading like wildfire.

**John Harrison Surratt** – A friend of Booth's from the plot to kidnap Lincoln, John Surratt was suspected of having attacked Secretary of State Seward. Although he was out of Washington on April 14th, he fled, was pursued across the world and brought back to America to stand trial. He was then freed when the trial failed to come to a verdict.

**Dr. Samuel A. Mudd** – One of Booth's co-conspirators in the failed plot to kidnap Lincoln, his house was the first place where Booth and Herold rode. Once there, he treated Booth's injury. Although he did not know Booth had assassinated Lincoln when he first provided him with shelter, Mudd continued to aid Booth and cover for him even after he discovered the actor's crime. He was eventually caught in his lies by investigators and sentenced to time in prison.

**Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton** – The tough and practical Secretary of War, Stanton had a great organizational mind and was responsible for whipping the Union Army into shape. On the night that Lincoln was shot, Stanton took charge of the situation, securing the house where the president lay dying from the mobs outside and issuing orders to protect other important members of the government. He led the first phases of the manhunt, then recruited Lafayette Baker and others to help share this responsibility, while he continued to pursue the final battles of the war.

**Colonel Lafayette Baker** – Stanton's trusted second-hand, Colonel Lafayette Baker came down from New York to assist with the investigation into the president's assassination. He rubbed many other manhunters the wrong way with his egotistical and sneaky behavior. He sent his cousin Luther Byron Baker an important tip leading to Booth and Herold's eventual capture. He received \$3,750 in reward money and wrote a book in which he took undue credit for his role in the fugitives' capture.

**Thomas Jones** – An experienced Confederate spy with a deep

knowledge of the terrain and waterways of rural Maryland, Thomas Jones had lost most of his money for the Confederate cause and served time in a Union jail when his Confederate sympathies were suspected. He was recruited by Captain Samuel Cox to help Booth and Herold and took responsibility for getting them across the Potomac River to Virginia. He first cautioned them to stay put in a pine thicket, where he brought them food and news daily for four days. Although he was suspected of aiding the assassins, his involvement could not be proved. He only told the story of his role in Booth and Herold's escape decades later, in conversations with a journalist and in his own autobiographical book.

**Dr. Charles A. Leale** – A twenty-three-year-old Union Army soldier and doctor, Leale attended the play at Ford's after hearing that General Grant would attend. He was the first doctor to reach Lincoln after the president was shot. He at first assumed the president was stabbed, but then ascertained that he had been shot in the head and would not recover. He supervised the transportation of the president across the street to the Petersen house and stayed with him until his death, at one point trying to remove the bullet from within the dying man's skull with the Nelaton probe.

**Colonel Everton Conger** – A commander, along with Luther Byron Baker and Edward P. Doherty, of the forces which eventually discovered Booth and Herold. He ordered the tobacco barn burned to force Booth to come out, and was infuriated when Boston Corbett shot Booth. Conger received the largest sum from the reward money – \$15,000 – after he rode quickly to Stanton to claim credit for the deed before all others.

**Fanny Seward** – Secretary of State William Seward's daughter and favorite child, Fanny Seward was an intelligent and sensitive young woman of twenty. She kept a detailed diary of all she saw in wartime Washington. On the night her father was attacked, she was sitting in the room with him and inadvertently put him in danger when she revealed to Lewis Powell where he lay. During the attack and afterwards, she screamed murder, scaring David Herold away from where he lurked in the shadows outside the Seward mansion.

**William Bell** – A black servant of the Seward family, Bell answered the door on the night when Lewis Powell attacked Secretary Seward. Once the attack was underway, he ran into the street, screaming for help. During Powell's escape on horseback from the Seward mansion, Bell chased him on foot until he could no longer keep up.

**Willie Jett** – A Confederate soldier and friend of Ruggles and Bainbridge, Willie Jett accompanied Booth and Herold across the Rappahannock River. Willie Jett was courting a girl whose father owned a hotel in Bowling Green, and William Rollins tipped the manhunters to track him there. Once confronted, Jett gave up Booth's location and led manhunters to the Garrett farm where Booth and Herold were hiding.

**Richard Garrett** – The owner of a farm in Virginia, Richard Garrett initially welcomed Booth and Herold into his family's home, but later grew suspicious of their behavior. Still, when the manhunters arrived at his farm, he did not tell them where Booth and Herold were. He never received any compensation for his tobacco barn, which the manhunters burned down in order to try to force Booth to surrender.

**John Garrett** – Richard Garrett's son, John Garrett was left in charge of the farm on the night that manhunters tracked Booth and Herold to his farm. He suspected that Booth and Herold might try to steal his father's horses, so he locked them in the tobacco barn. When the manhunters arrived, they forced John Garrett to go into the tobacco barn and tell Booth to surrender. When Booth threatened to kill him, John Garrett fled.

**Sergeant Boston Corbett** – A noncommissioned officer in the party of manhunters that ultimately found the fugitives, Boston Corbett shot and fatally wounded John Wilkes Booth. He was chastised for doing so by his commanders, but said that he had acted to defend his fellow soldiers. He was never punished for this action and received \$1,653 in reward money.

**Vice President Andrew Johnson** The vice president to Lincoln. Wilke's plan called for George Atzerodt to assassinate him, but Atzerodt could not work up the courage to act and Johnson survived. He became president upon Lincoln's death. Though uncovered in the book, Johnson's presidency was largely a failure, marked by battles with Congress. He was the first president ever to be impeached, though the impeachment proceedings did not in the end produce enough votes to remove him from office.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Mary Surratt** – The owner of two boardinghouses, Mary Surratt was a Confederate sympathizer who provided material support to Booth on the day of the killing. She lied to investigators about what she knew and was eventually executed for her involvement in the assassination.

**Frederick Seward** – The son of Secretary of State Seward, Frederick was the first family member to try to stop Powell's attack. Powell nearly shot him but his gun misfired. Instead Powell savagely bludgeoned Frederick with the pistol, crushing his skull.

**Augustus Seward** – The son of Secretary of State Seward, Augustus was awoken by the sounds of fighting. He entered his father's room and wrestled with Powell along with Sergeant Robinson. He was stabbed in the fight with Powell, who told him that he was mad.

**Sergeant Robinson** – A wounded Union veteran, Sergeant Robinson was serving as a nurse for Seward on the night of Powell's attack. Although Powell stabbed him multiple times to the bone, Robinson continued fighting, doing everything in his power to protect the Secretary of State.

**Sam Arnold** – A conspirator in Booth's failed 1864 plot to kidnap Lincoln, Arnold had nothing to do with the presidential assassination but was implicated in a letter found in Booth's room. He was arrested and sentenced to prison.

**Edman Spangler** – An employee at Ford's Theatre, Spangler briefly held Booth's horse in the alley outside the theater. He was suspected of having aided the actor and arrested, but later freed when no evidence of his guilt emerged.

**George Mudd** – Samuel Mudd's cousin and a loyal Unionist, George Mudd made a vague report to the authorities about strangers who had visited Samuel's farm. Samuel hoped in this way to keep the authorities from discovering the true extent of his involvement with Booth and Herold.

**William Rollins** – A farmer and fisherman in Port Conway, Rollins ferried Booth, Herold, Willie Jett, Ruggles, and Bainbridge across the Rappahannock River. He was not aware that he was transporting fugitives and confessed all he knew to investigators, giving them an important tip on where to search for Booth and Herold.

**Ruggles** – A Confederate soldier and friend of Willie Jett's, Ruggles accompanied Booth on Willie Rollins's boat across the Rappahannock River. He also rode to the Garrett farm to warn Booth and Herold that cavalry had arrived in nearby Bowling Green.

**Bainbridge** – A Confederate soldier and friend of Willie Jett's, Bainbridge accompanied Booth on Willie Rollins' boat across the Rappahannock River. He also rode to the Garrett farm to warn Booth and Herold that cavalry had arrived in nearby Bowling Green.

**Mary Todd Lincoln** – The First Lady, Abraham Lincoln's wife Mary Todd was a sensitive woman, often criticized in the press. She had struggled to recover from her grief after the death of her son Willie in 1862.

**Robert Todd Lincoln** – The Lincolns' eldest son, Robert had been present at General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, which he described to his father on the day the president would be shot. He delivered the news to his mother that his father had passed away.

**Willie Lincoln** – The Lincolns' son who died in 1862 at the age of eleven. Mary Todd Lincoln struggled to get over his death, while Abraham Lincoln buried his sorrow in work.

**Thomas "Tad" Lincoln** – The Lincolns' younger son, Tad stood by his father and lit Lincoln's face with a light on the night that the president announced voting rights for emancipated blacks.

**Major Henry Rathbone** – A friend of the Lincolns, Rathbone was in the presidential box at Ford's Theatre when John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln. He tried to halt Booth and received severe stab wounds in his shoulder.

**Clara Harris** – The fiancée to Major Henry Rathbone, Clara Harris was also watching the play at Ford's in the presidential

booth during the assassination.

**Harry Hawk** – The lead actor in the play at Ford's Theatre, Booth timed his shot for the moment when Hawk would deliver a comedic line that elicited laughter from the audience.

**Laura Keane** – An actress in the play at Ford's Theatre, Keane mounted to the presidential box and asked Dr. Leale's permission to cradle the mortally wounded Lincoln's head in her lap. She later gave away pieces of her blood soaked dress as **mementos**.

**John Peanut** – An employee at Ford's Theatre, Peanut held Booth's horse for him briefly on the night of the assassination.

**Joseph Stewart** – The only person in Ford's Theatre to try to chase Booth as he escaped.

**Sergeant Silas T. Cobb** – Charged with enforcing a 9 PM curfew at the bridge out of the city, Cobb nonetheless allowed both Booth and Herold to cross the bridge into Maryland.

**Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles** – An important part of president's cabinet, Welles initially suspected that the Confederate authorities were responsible for the attacks of April 14, 1865. He rode with Stanton to the Petersen house that night, pushing through the crazed mob to reach the dying president.

**Mary Jane Welles** – A close friend of Mrs. Lincoln's, Mary Jane Welles had nursed Willie Lincoln before his death and then comforted Mrs. Lincoln on her child's loss. She then lost her own young son to illness the same year, bringing the two women even closer as friends.

**Reverend Dr. Phineas T. Gurley** – The Lincolns' family pastor, Gurley came to Lincoln's deathbed and said a prayer after the president passed away.

**Surgeon General Joseph K. Barnes** – The Lincolns' family physician and the chief doctor of the United States, Barnes arrived at Lincoln's bedside in the Petersen house. There was little he could do to help the president but monitor the signs of Lincoln's approaching death.

**Army Major General Halleck** – Halleck was in charge of imprisoning captured conspirators.

**Jefferson Davis** – The Confederate President, Jefferson Davis was on the run from manhunters at the time when Lincoln was shot. He was revered by Confederate sympathizers like Mary Surratt, who kept a picture of him in her house.

**Hezekiah Metz** – A friend of George Atzerodt's.

**Hartmann Richter** – George Atzerodt's cousin.

**Anna Surratt** – The daughter of Mary Surratt, Anna Surratt was also interrogated and arrested during the investigation.

**Lewis Weichmann** – A boarder at Mary Surratt's boardinghouse, Lewis Weichmann accompanied Mrs. Surratt to Surrattsville to prepare John Lloyd for a nighttime visit from Booth. He was also arrested and interrogated during the

investigation.

**Michael O'Laughlen** – A conspirator in Booth's failed 1864 plot to kidnap Lincoln, O'Laughlen had nothing to do with the presidential assassination but was implicated in a letter found in Booth's room. He was arrested and sentenced to prison.

**Captain Samuel Cox** – A farmer and loyal Confederate, Cox showed Booth and Herold the thicket where they could hide from cavalry and summoned Thomas Jones to give them further help. Booth was sent to Cox by Dr. Samuel Mudd.

**Dr. Richard Stuart** – A Virginia farmer who denied Booth and Herold hospitality. Booth later sent him **payment** for the meal he begrudgingly fed them, as an insult to Stuart for his failure to extend his home to them willingly.

**Lucas** – A black man in Maryland who was forced to give Booth and Herold shelter. He then rented them a wagon driven by his son.

**Charlie Lucas** – The man who drove Booth and Herold from his father's farm in a wagon.

**Elizabeth Quesenberry** – A Confederate agent in Virginia, Elizabeth Quesenberry helped Booth and Herold to find transportation deeper into the South. She was a contact of Thomas Jones'.

**Lieutenant Edward P. Doherty** – One of the commanders in the party of manhunters who found Booth and Herold at Garrett's farm. He was awarded \$5,250 for his role in locating the fugitives.

**Luther Byron Baker** – The cousin of Colonel Lafayette Baker and one of the commanders in the final party of manhunters who found Booth and Herold. He received \$3,000 in reward **money**.

**Lieutenant David Dana** – The head of the 13th New York Cavalry, which pursued Booth and Herold without success throughout Maryland.

**General Robert E. Lee** – A defeated Confederate General and leader of the Army of Northern Virginia.

**General Ulysses S. Grant** – A victorious and respected Union general, Grant was invited to go with the Lincolns to Ford's Theatre on the night of the assassination. He would become President of the United States in 1869, after Andrew Johnson.

**Edward P. Doherty** One of the manhunters searching for Booth.

**Colonel Wells** An interrogator working to identify Lincoln's killer after Lincoln was assassinated.

**Elizabeth Keckley** A free black woman and Mrs. Lincoln's dressmaker, she attended the performance at which Lincoln was shot.



## THEMES

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### NEWS, INFORMATION, AND MISINFORMATION

Lincoln's assassination occurred at a time of flux and uncertainty. The Civil War was a close one, and by early April 1865, it seemed possible either that Union victory was at hand or that the Confederacy was secretly planning a march on Washington. Everyone had a deep desire for the latest news, but accepted interpretations of how events might develop were few and far between. There was a sense that anything could happen. With the assassination on April 14th, this uncertainty intensified.

To make things more complex, the Civil War took place in the early years of a communication revolution. Up until the mid-19th century, the fastest way to send a message a long distance was to send a messenger galloping on horseback. By the mid-1860s, though, new technologies like the telegram were making it possible to send information much more quickly. Still, these technologies were so new that people were not used to them and sometimes relied on older ways of communicating. Important news was often still communicated by word of mouth, with neighbors knocking on one another's doors to let them know the latest news, or by reading newspapers which took hours to be printed.

At first, misinformation and lack of information reigned after Booth shot Lincoln, and Booth was able to literally outrun the news that the president had been shot on his galloping horse. The lack of authoritative sources led to deep confusion the night Lincoln was killed, as two groups of people, one coming from Seward's house and the other spreading outwards from Ford Theater, argued about the target of the attack, not realizing that both Seward and Lincoln had nearly simultaneously been attacked. They also mistakenly said that Seward was dead. It took several days for the general public to come to understand what had actually transpired. The prevalence of misinformation early on had an impact on how quickly the manhunters were able to home in on their targets.

Eventually, however, the situation began to clarify. The first step was for Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to begin to use the technology of the telegram to clarify the situation and communicate with manhunters in far-flung states. Then, once the newspapers had printed their accounts of the killing and word of mouth had been circulating for several days, the picture became clearer. By the end of the manhunt, the

authorities marshalled the evidence they had collected to home in on the killers by spreading good, correct information to the public and the many well-informed manhunters spreading out across the country.

Indeed, something much more important became clear during the manhunt than just the location and identities of the assassin and his co-conspirators. The news of Lincoln's death and the coverage of him as a martyr for the cause of national unity had the effect of making the final conclusion of the four-year war seem more apparent. The North became determined to finish the job that Lincoln had started, while the disturbing accounts of the assassin's action in the newspapers more fully demoralized Confederate sympathizers. Although the final battles of the war would take another six months to wrap up, the understanding that Lincoln's death meant something had a unifying effect on many in the country.



### PLANNING, CONSPIRACY, AND THE UNEXPECTED

*Chasing Lincoln's Killer* describes a successful conspiracy to kill the president, but it also shows

that important historical events are often the result of unpredictable circumstances and luck. For example, John Wilkes Booth could have harmed Lincoln on two other occasions. During the President's inauguration speech, if Booth had taken the opportunity presented to him by chance, he easily could have shot the president from the crowd. And a year earlier, Booth planned with a group of conspirators to kidnap the president to try to change the course of the war. Yet this carefully hatched plan came to nothing, demonstrating that it is important not only to plan, but also to take opportunities as they present themselves.

In the end, Booth was able to carry out his dream to assassinate the president and impact the country's future as the result of an unexpected stroke of luck. It was only because Booth unexpectedly discovered that Lincoln would be watching a play at Ford's Theater that he could carry out a plan to assassinate the president. He was then able to use his knowledge of the theater and his trusted position as a well-known actor among the theater's staff to gain the access he needed to quickly plan an assassination for that very night. His co-conspirators, on the other hand, who were tasked with killing other important figures in the government, did not have a lucky circumstance fall into their lap, and they all failed in carrying out their murderous missions.

Booth was not the only one to assume that a conspiracy would be necessary to achieve a great crime like the murder of the president. When they learned about the assassination of Lincoln and the attack on Secretary of State Seward, the authorities in Washington assumed that these acts were part of a conspiracy directed by the Confederate authorities. While

they were right that Booth had planned his actions and directed a group of his followers, the assassination was not part of a larger conspiracy planned by the leadership of the Confederacy.

As both Booth and the Union authorities were to learn, however, events that change the course of history are not necessarily the result of carefully hatched schemes, but can come about as a result of planning, chance, or both.



### THE THEATRICAL AND THE REAL

John Wilkes Booth was one of the most famous actors of his day, known for his attractiveness and charm. Swanson emphasizes that Booth's inflated view of himself led him to overestimate his ability to survive during his escape and the help he could count on convincing others to provide him.

The confidence Booth gained from his successful performances on the stage led him to believe that he could use the force of his personality to alter history. But although this belief did lend him the courage necessary to carry out the assassination, he was not able to shape the way his act was interpreted by the rest of America, or the way it would affect the course of history. This confidence also meant that Booth failed to think through what could happen during his escape, like the fact that he might need to hide out in the woods and would soon become dirty and bedraggled. Since he depended so much on his good looks to convince people to help him, this presented a problem.

The blurry line between the imagined world of a play and the real world is not only a feature of Booth's fertile imagination, though. Throughout his escape, Booth's skills as an actor would often prove inadequate to the task of surviving on the run. But in the event of assassinating Lincoln, being an actor gave him the practical knowledge of the layout of Ford's theater and the timing of the play that led to his success. His knowledge of the theater allowed him to perfectly time the moment when he shot Lincoln. He waited for a moment when the audience would be laughing loudly at a joke in the play, so that many would not hear the gunshot. And, while escaping from the theater, Booth continued to benefit from the confusion in the audience about what was really happening and what had been staged as part of the play.

The blur between the real and the theatrical continued after the killer's escape, when the lead actress in the play that Lincoln had come to watch visited the box where he had been shot. Wanting to be a part of the real, historic scene playing out in front of her, Laura Keane left the stage and went to the president's box, where she asked the doctor treating Lincoln for permission to cradle the wounded president's head in her lap.

*Chasing Lincoln's Killer* shows that the skills needed in the real world and in the theater sometimes overlap, but with a crucial



difference. Booth is able to accomplish a murder and to escape capture for twelve days, using the self-confidence and skill that he gained as an actor. But even though Booth was able to make the world his stage and become a larger-than-life character who would go down in history, he could only be an actor in the play of history, not its director or playwright. An actor in a play knows how the audience will view him because he knows the script and the stage directions. In the real world, Booth played his own part, but did not alter the way others would act and react to him, and ultimately did not change the outcome of the war as he wished.



### SURVIVAL VS PRINCIPLES

Lincoln's assassination occurred during the last month of the four-year American Civil War (1861-1865), in which 600,000 people died. It was an extremely violent time. People across the country had fought to uphold the principles of the North or South, but often had to fight for their lives as a result, either on the battlefield or to recover from sickness or injury. There had also been enormous economic devastation, which made gaining money or resources a matter of survival. Throughout *Chasing Lincoln's Killer*, the way people seek to use violence to prove their principles often goes astray. Violence, the threat of violence, or danger often fails to have the effect of supporting the principles that those committing the acts of violence hope to serve.

Whether Booth got caught or escaped, it was unlikely that he could ever continue his profitable career as a touring actor, and so he saw assassinating Lincoln as an honorable sacrifice of his happy life and career for his principles. The death of Lincoln and the rest of his cabinet was meant to spur the Confederacy to continue fighting to preserve the South as he saw it: a land of honor, defined by codes of conduct that called for hospitality to strangers and a willingness to sacrifice your life to defend your principles. Yet Booth's act had the opposite effect: he turned Abraham Lincoln into a martyr and demoralized the South.

Lincoln was shot in the back of the head while relaxing at the theater, so he was not aware of the principle for which he died. Still, as *Chasing Lincoln's Killer* emphasizes, the fact that his body fought a strong battle to hold onto life became part of the way that his death was recast in the public imagination. His death was seen as a martyrdom for the principles of freedom that he had led the nation in war to uphold.

The attack on Seward was also interpreted differently from the way Booth and his co-conspirators had hoped. Because Powell attacked innocent members of the Seward family, his attempt to kill for a principle (to take down the government of the North) was mainly viewed as the act of a terrifying madman.

The manhunts hoped to capture Booth alive and force him to stand trial, undergo months of scrutiny by the press, and face

execution by hanging. This, they believed, would have created a clear connection between his death and the defeat of the Confederate principles he fought for in the public imagination. But once again, the attempt to control life and death in order to prove a principle came up short. Boston Corbett shot Booth to protect the other nearby soldiers, placing the survival of his comrades above the principles the authorities sought to emphasize through Booth's public trial and execution.

The book describes combat, injury and death in detail, putting a magnifying glass up to a few acts of violence. In each case, the fight for life or survival itself becomes the most important thing during the moment of combat, while the principles that someone may think he is killing or dying for are not necessarily the ones that history or public opinion will keep in mind when remembering the violence.



### SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### MENTOS

Mementos of the dead were an important part of nineteenth century grieving culture. Throughout *Chasing Lincoln's Killer*, the living gather mementos of those who have died to remember them by. The constant presence of death during the Civil War era, when a catastrophic number of people died both on the battlefield and from disease, led people to gather physical reminders of those they had lost. Physical relics taken from the dead (including President Lincoln, in the book) are used to hold onto memories of the dead and what they stood for.



### MONEY

The tension between what people were willing to do for principles and what they would do for money is ever present in *Chasing Lincoln's Killer*. John Wilkes Booth and other Southern men believed that money should not motivate one's actions, especially in matters of principle. On the other hand, at the end of the war, when the country was economically devastated, most could not be as cavalier about money as the wealthy actor Booth, who supported many of his co-conspirators financially. Similarly, while the manhunts were supposed to be motivated by a desire for justice, interest in the reward money that Seward offered may have been just as important.



### QUOTES



Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the

Scholastic Press edition of *Chasing Lincoln's Killer* published in 2009.

## Prologue Quotes

☛ "Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away....With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

**Related Characters:** Abraham Lincoln (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 2

### Explanation and Analysis

Lincoln spoke these words during his Inauguration on March 4, 1865, a month before the fall of the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia. Although it was still uncertain that the Union forces would win the war and reunite the country, the tide seemed to be turning in that direction. Lincoln wished to project certainty about the war's outcome, but not to gloat or shame those who had supported the Confederate cause. His goal was to show Americans that one of the principles that he had fought for was the unity of the country. To live up to that principle Americans would need to forgive and forget, showing compassion to their former enemies.

☛ As Lincoln spoke, one observer, Mrs. Lincoln's dressmaker, Elizabeth Keckley, a free black woman, standing a few steps from the president, remarked that the lamplight made him "stand out boldly in the darkness." The perfect target. "What an easy matter would it be to kill the president as he stands there! He could be shot down from the crowd," she whispered, "and no one would be able to tell who fired the shot."

**Related Characters:** Elizabeth Keckley (speaker), Abraham Lincoln

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 7-8

### Explanation and Analysis

Elizabeth Keckley was listening in the audience on April 11,

1865 when Lincoln gave a speech saying that he wanted black Americans to be given the right to vote. As a free black woman, she was uniquely positioned to understand all the violent hatred that this proposal would stir, especially among those in the South who were still fighting to secede from the Union and live in a country where they could continue to hold slaves. She realized that this principled stance of Lincoln's might put his life in danger and she fretted to see his physical vulnerability at the very minute he made the announcement. Obviously, her comment is perceptive, as John Wilkes Booth—the very type of Confederate she feared—was in the audience making the same observation about the president's vulnerability.

## Chapter 1 Quotes

☛ Twenty-six years old, impossibly vain, an extremely talented actor, and a star member of a celebrated theatrical family, John Wilkes Booth was willing to throw away fame, wealth, and a promising future for the cause of the Confederacy. [...] Handsome and appealing, he was instantly recognizable to thousands of fans in both the North and South. His physical beauty astonished all who saw him. A fellow actor described his eyes as being "like living jewels." Booth's passions included fine clothing, Southern honor, good manners, beautiful women, and the romance of lost causes.

**Related Characters:** John Wilkes Booth

**Related Themes:** 



**Page Number:** 10

### Explanation and Analysis

John Wilkes Booth had a successful career and bright future ahead as an actor. He was more interested, however, in the political drama of his era than in the fictional dramas in which he acted for wealth and fame. He felt that he could put his personal magnetism and good looks to better use by trying to impact the real world than by creating compelling fictional worlds as an actor. He was attracted to the Southern cause partially out of a sense that its culture of honor and hospitality represented an aristocratic, elevated way of life. Importantly, this type of culture—one built on honor and social hierarchy—was also dramatically tinged with violence.

●● At this supreme moment, the people cheered the man who, after a shaky start in office, learned how to command armies, brought down slavery, and became a most eloquent and moving speaker. And as he promised he would, he had saved the Union. Lincoln stood in the box and bowed to the audience.

**Related Characters:** Abraham Lincoln

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 31


### Explanation and Analysis

Lincoln had arrived late to the play at Ford's Theatre and the action on stage had been stopped in order to play the traditional song of a presidential entrance, "Hail to the Chief." In this large hall full of spectators, some of whom had come to the theater that night expressly to get a glimpse of the president and his guests, the sense of uncertainty that reigned throughout the country was not to be found. To see the president doing something as normal as going to the theater gave people the sense that the war was really nearing its conclusion. Although Lincoln had been at times a controversial president, the audience at Ford's Theatre recognized that he had been guided by his principles and had succeeded in winning a war for those principles.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

●● The comic line spoken by Harry Hawk, "You sockdologizing old mantrap," was followed by an explosion of laughter from the audience. The black powder charge exploded and spit the bullet toward Lincoln's head. The muzzle flash lighted the box for a moment like a miniature lightning bolt. Had Booth succeeded?

**Related Characters:** Harry Hawk (speaker), Abraham Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 39


### Explanation and Analysis

Booth perfectly timed the moment when he would shoot Lincoln. He used his knowledge of the theater's layout to reach Lincoln's box at the right moment, then he waited until the line that he knew received the loudest laugh from the audience before shooting his pistol. In this way, he hoped to create confusion about what was and what wasn't part of the experience of the play. The blurred line between the real and the theatrical at this moment is emphasized

through Swanson's description of both the audience's laughter and the powder charge of Booth's gun as an "explosion."

●● Booth scrambled to center stage, turned to the audience, and stood up straight. Though every second was precious to his escape, he knew that this was his last appearance on the American stage. This would be the performance he would be remembered for. All eyes were on him. He stood still, paused to build suspense, and thrust his bloody dagger victoriously into the air. The gas stage lights shone on the shiny blade now stained with blood. "Sic semper tyrannis!" he thundered. It was the state motto of Virginia: "Thus always to tyrants." Then Booth shouted, "The South is avenged!"

**Related Characters:** John Wilkes Booth (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 43

### Explanation and Analysis

Booth jumped from the presidential box onto the stage, injuring his leg. He was too caught up in the moment to fully register the pain, however, and instead he put all of his focus into making a dramatic statement of the principles that he believed he was serving by shooting Lincoln. At this moment, his career as a dramatic actor and his decision to make a dramatic impact on history converged. He used the skills of an actor—dramatic language, timing, gesture, and presence—to try to inspire admiration and draw support for the Southern cause. Perhaps he believed that his dramatic delivery would impact the audience politically, just as his acting had impacted his audiences emotionally in the past.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

●● The sergeant and Augustus wrestled Powell into the hall and into the bright gaslight. Powell and Augustus, their faces inches apart, fixed their eyes on each other. Then Powell spoke. In an intense but calm voice, the assassin confided to Augustus, as though trying to persuade him, the strangest thing: "I'm mad. I'm mad!"

**Related Characters:** Lewis Powell (speaker), Augustus Seward, Sergeant Robinson

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 57-58

### Explanation and Analysis

Powell had hoped to murder Secretary of State Seward as part of Booth's plan to weaken the government of the North and support the Confederate cause. However, Lewis Powell was only able to assault four members of the Seward family—some of these assaults were quite brutal, but Seward, his target, lived. There was no indication that Powell was actually mad. Instead, the violent acts he was then committing made him feel that he was being driven mad. At the moment when he rolled out of the dark bedroom and into the light, Powell came face to face with the violence that he had committed in order to advance his principles. In the context of this violent battle for survival between Powell and the Seward family, Powell's principles may have seemed almost irrelevant to the bloodshed in front of him at that moment. Those who learned of his violent crime later felt similarly, struggling to connect any kind of noble or principled action with the brutal violence Powell had carried out.



or he might have been scared of committing a murder. Either way, despite having ample opportunity to kill Johnson, Atzerodt did not take the chance. This raises a parallel to the several occasions in which Booth had an opportunity to kill Lincoln but was not able to follow through, and this is also an instance of Booth believing (falsely) that everyone who even nominally shares his beliefs must also share his willingness to sacrifice everything for those beliefs. Booth will make this mistake several more times.

☝☝ Laura Keene knelt beside Lincoln, lifted his head, and rested it in her lap. Bloodstains and tiny bits of gray matter from Lincoln's brain oozed on to the cream-colored silk fabric, spreading and adding color to the frock's bright and festive red, yellow, green, and blue floral pattern. Laura Keene cherished the blood-and-brain speckled dress she wore this terrible night. In the days ahead, people begged to see the dress, to handle it and marvel at the stains on it. The dress vanished long ago, but miraculously a few small pieces—five treasured swatches—survived. Long ago the stains, once red, faded to a rust-colored pale brown.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ All Atzerodt had to do was knock on his door and the moment Johnson opened it, plunge the knife into his chest or shoot him dead. Compared with the challenges that faced Booth and Powell, Atzerodt had the easiest job of all. But that night, Johnson escaped death. Atzerodt could not do it. He drank in the hotel lobby, and the more he drank, the worse the plan sounded. He did not knock on Andrew Johnson's door. He left the bar and walked out. Abandoning his mission, Atzerodt got on his horse and rode away. He wasn't sure what to do next.

**Related Characters:** Vice President Andrew Johnson, George Atzerodt

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 69

### Explanation and Analysis

George Atzerodt had been tasked with killing the new vice president, Andrew Johnson. When Booth initially told Atzerodt to murder Johnson, Atzerodt had refused. Only after Booth threatened to turn him in to the authorities did Atzerodt agree to the killing. Despite the ease of his target, Atzerodt either lacked the conviction or the courage to take the opportunity. Atzerodt may never have been as fully invested in the Southern cause as Booth believed him to be,

**Related Characters:** Abraham Lincoln, Laura Keane

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 72

### Explanation and Analysis

Laura Keene, an actress in the play that the Lincolns had come to see at Ford's Theatre, made her way to the presidential box after the shooting and asked Dr. Leale's permission to cradle the wounded president's head in her lap. Keene, like Booth, was an actor who wanted to play a part in the dramatic events unfolding in the real world. It was a shocking request, given that Lincoln was the president, that he was unconscious and could not give his consent, and that Keene's action could not help him in any way. It is hard to say why Leale allowed it, but he may also have been caught up in the drama of the moment, when what was real and what was theater blurred together.

After the fact, Keene turned her blood-spattered dress into a memento of the historic moment. Instead of reflecting on the inappropriateness of Keene's behavior, Americans were eager to see an object physically involved in Lincoln's historic and tragic death. The dress was cut up so that a greater number of people could have a tiny part of Lincoln's death. Holding onto mementos like this one helped those people feel that they were close to the president and

supportive of his principles.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ Within a few minutes of the assassination, the news began spreading, first by word of mouth from Ford's, then by messenger. It traveled no faster than a man could run on foot or ride on horseback. Between 10:30 and 11:00 P.M., more than fifteen hundred people spilled out from the theater onto the streets. They fanned out in all directions, like an unpaid army of newsboys shouting, "Extra!"

**Related Characters:** Abraham Lincoln

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 78


### Explanation and Analysis


In the first day or so after Lincoln was shot, the news spread mainly by word of mouth. The telegram was a new technology, and only a select few (including government officials like Secretary of War Stanton) had access to it. Because of this, the audience members emanating from Ford's Theatre served the function of an army of newsboys, letting the residents of Washington D.C. know what happened. However, because the news was spread by word of mouth, an ever-increasing number of different stories about what had happened emerged. Certain people embellished the facts, others misremembered them, and others changed them to fit their own agenda. Until official versions of the facts could circulate in newspapers, this state of affairs created confusion, uncertainty, and fear about what would happen next.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

☞ Stanton knew that if any person in Washington deserved a precious lock of the martyr's hair, it was Mary Jane Welles. She later framed the cherished relic with dried flowers that had decorated Abraham Lincoln's coffin at the White House funeral. Stanton gazed down at his fallen chief and wept.

**Related Characters:** Abraham Lincoln, Mary Jane Welles, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 


**Page Number:** 105


### Explanation and Analysis

After the others who had sat by Lincoln's deathbed had left, Stanton spent a private moment in the room where Lincoln's body lay. Although Stanton, with Lincoln dead, saw himself as being responsible for the nation's security, he was also affected on a personal level by the death of the president. During the years of the war, the cabinet members had forged close, almost familial ties. Looking at Lincoln's corpse, Stanton thought back on other losses that top government officials and their families had suffered. Mary Jane Welles had nursed Mary Todd Lincoln through the loss of her son Willie. At this moment, Stanton's grief gave him sympathy for Mary Jane's experience. Stanton was compelled to reward the woman who had taken it upon herself to comfort the Lincoln family during another period of grief with a lock of Lincoln's hair that would serve as a memento. This passage is also a reminder of the extent to which Lincoln sacrificed his family life in order to save the country and defend its principles.

☞ The nation could hardly bury its martyred Father Abraham with a lead ball lodged in his brain. They cut it out, marked it as evidence, and preserved it for history. His blood, according to a newspaper report, was drained from his corpse by an embalmer, transferred to glass jars, and preserved. When they were finished, Mary Todd Lincoln sent a request: Please cut off a lock of his hair for her.

**Related Characters:** Mary Todd Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 109-110

### Explanation and Analysis


After Lincoln died but before he was buried, doctors and coroners examined his body and an embalmer prepared it for burial. It was common in the nineteenth century to collect mementos of the dead, such as locks of hair. At such an uncertain time for the nation, and with the hunt for Lincoln's killers only in its beginning stages, the professionals tasked with the care of Lincoln's body went farther in collecting mementos that might usually occur. Because of the gravity of the situation and the uncertainty of what was to come, they not only collected the bullet


which could be used as evidence but also went so far as to preserve his blood. This also reflects the extent to which the president had been beloved by Union sympathizers. Even strangers felt devastated by Lincoln's death and they desired mementoes that would make this historic event seem as personal to them as it felt.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

☛ When Jones went to the Confederate capital, Richmond, at the beginning of April 1865 to collect the money owed him by the Confederacy, he discovered that the army had evacuated the city and he went unpaid. He lost \$2,300 owed to him for three years of service, along with all the money he had invested in Confederate bonds at the beginning of the war. All this meant Jones needed as much money as he could lay his hands on.

**Related Characters:** Thomas Jones

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 119


### Explanation and Analysis

After telling Booth and Herold to hide in the pine thicket, Captain Cox turned to fellow Confederate sympathizer Thomas Jones for assistance. Jones had already been impoverished because of his support for the Confederacy, which, for Cox, Booth and other believers in the principles of Southern honor, was proof of his character. Cox was confident that Jones would be willing to continue to risk his life for his principles. Although Jones needed as much money as he could get, it was key to his identity as a man of honor to be guided only by his principles and never by his wallet. While men like this did exist, Booth was tricked by these encounters into thinking that all good Confederates in the South were like Jones. Of course, people's actions are based on many different factors, and it proved naïve to think that a defining feature of the South (and one that made Booth willing to die for the Confederate cause) was that everyone acted based on honor.

## Chapter 9 Quotes

☛ Traveling light had served him well in the first part of his escape, but left him unprepared for this unanticipated phase of his journey. He left Washington wearing the equivalent of a modern-day business suit, unsuitable for camping out. Without a change of clothing, his garments quickly became dirty, ruining a key element of Booth's trademark, winning style—his beautifully dressed, well-groomed appearance. He and Herold could not bathe or wash clothes and, unshaven, they looked and smelled worse each day. They looked like the fugitives they were. Their looks might even jeopardize their ability to receive a proper reception at the fine Virginia households they planned to call on across the river.

**Related Characters:** David Herold, John Wilkes Booth

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 137

### Explanation and Analysis

Booth and Herold had been waiting in the pine thicket for days, and, without a bath or change of clothes, they had begun to look like fugitives. Booth had made few preparations for his escape. The crux of his plan was to move rapidly to the Deep South where he would be able to use his polished good looks, fame and dramatic charm to win the support and friendship of those he met. Without his good looks, this plan would only work if Booth's persuasive powers were enough to overcome the prejudice his dirty appearance would inspire in the Southerners he would meet. This is another example of Booth's background as an actor damaging his ability to make plans commensurate with the reality he was facing as a fugitive. Booth had thought his new life would be somewhat similar to his old one; he didn't realize that, by dramatically changing the course of history, he was also making himself vulnerable to situations in which his old tricks wouldn't work.

☛ Whatever papers Booth read, they all condemned him for his heinous act. Even worse, Booth saw the beginning of a change in how Abraham Lincoln was viewed by America. Lincoln was transformed from a controversial and often unpopular war leader into a martyr and hero. Stories reported in the papers condemned Booth by name in the most unforgiving, vicious language.

**Related Characters:** Abraham Lincoln, Secretary of State William H. Seward, Lewis Powell, John Wilkes Booth

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 139

### Explanation and Analysis


Thomas Jones brought Booth newspapers each day the fugitive was stuck hiding in the pine thicket. Booth had envisioned that his assassination of Lincoln would be something akin to what he did on the stage as an actor, though, this time, instead of being only the actor, he would be playwright and director, too. Nothing in his experience as an actor led him to foresee that his actions could be interpreted differently from how he meant them. Booth believed that once Lincoln's critics learned of the attack they would celebrate Booth's bold action. He believed that killing Lincoln would be a strike against Lincoln's principles and he was shocked to see the president's popularity soar posthumously as the nation rallied around the causes that the deceased president had supported.

## Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ As Jones grabbed the stern of the boat and shoved it off, a grateful Booth thrust a fistful of Union greenbacks at Jones. Jones refused the gesture, saying that he had not helped him for money. Under protest, he agreed to accept just eighteen dollars, the price he had paid for the boat.

**Related Characters:** John Wilkes Booth, Thomas Jones

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 



**Page Number:** 146

### Explanation and Analysis

Jones had advised and fed the two fugitives for days while they waited in the pine thicket. Now, having seen the cavalry ride out of town, Jones advised the two men that the time was right to cross the river into safer territory in Virginia. Although Jones had been impoverished by his service to the Confederacy, he felt bound by his principles to refuse money offered to him for helping Booth and Herold. To accept money for this help would have gone against his sense of himself as a Southern gentleman who always did the right thing, whether or not he could profit materially by it. Jones's attitude was in contrast with the attitude of many of Booth's co-conspirators who had allowed him to buy them things.

☝☝ While Booth and Herold tarried, the government pursued them with new energy. The evidence gathered at Mudd's farm, plus alleged sightings of the fugitives southwest of his farm, suggested that the assassins were making for Virginia. They knew Booth was lame, on crutches. They knew he had shaven off his mustache. Horse-mounted couriers and telegraph wires were alive all day with instructions to troops to enlist the help of fishermen and others on the river to capture the fugitives.

**Related Characters:** David Herold, John Wilkes Booth

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 150



### Explanation and Analysis


Booth and Herold attempted to cross the Potomac River in a rowboat, but they went in the wrong direction. When they arrived back in Maryland after this failed expedition, they decided to spend a full day resting at the house of a contact of Herold's. Biding their time and sheltering in place had served Booth and Herold well when they had the expert intuition of Thomas Jones to guide them. Although it had taken the authorities a few days to begin to effectively use technology to spread information about the fugitives, the poorly-executed period of the manhunt was ending. Booth and Herold heard how coordinated the manhunters were becoming, but this did not spur them to move quickly to reattempt the river crossing. Booth and Herold had hoped to already be in Virginia by this point, but they failed to quickly react with a new plan once the previous plan was scuttled. Perhaps they failed to set off again across the Potomac that night because they were exhausted or disappointed; regardless, this amounted to a failure to deal with new circumstances as they arose.

## Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ Young John Garrett, back from an errand at a neighboring farm, reported that the U.S. government was offering a \$140,000 reward for Abraham Lincoln's assassin. The family discussed the assassination with Booth, speculating on why the murderer did it. The actor, still masquerading as a Confederate soldier commented on his own crime and analyzed for the Garretts the motives of Lincoln's killer!

**Related Characters:** Abraham Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth, John Garrett

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 159

### Explanation and Analysis

On his first day at the Garrett farm, Booth enjoyed hospitality and a warm welcome. He had told the Garretts that he was a Confederate soldier heading South, and they treated him as they would have wanted their own sons (who had also served as Confederate soldiers) to be treated. In this comfortable setting, Booth began to enjoy acting the part of the bystander. Booth wished to control the world's reactions to his actions and change the direction of history, just as if history were a play. In this moment, he was able to act a supporting role in this play. In that role, he could not only shape the world through his own actions, but also do the impossible: shape the way other people understood what he had done. The act of Booth pretending to be someone else in order to shape the narrative of his own actions is a clear (and somewhat perverse) illustration of the blending of the theatrical and real.

☛ He had already committed the most daring public murder in American history. Indeed, he had performed it, fully staged before an audience at Ford's Theatre. Tonight he would script his own end with a performance that equaled his triumph at Ford's.

**Related Characters:** John Wilkes Booth

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 170

### Explanation and Analysis

The cavalry arrived at the Garretts' barn and asked the two fugitives to surrender themselves. Herold decided to turn himself in, but Booth was determined not to be taken alive. Although he was likely to die in the coming minutes, Booth still saw himself as acting out a part that he was writing for himself. This view of himself seemed to keep him from feeling the desperateness of his situation and it held at bay his despair at what he had already learned about the public's reaction to his crime. Instead, he continued to stick to the script in his own mind and to believe that the interpretation would be as he willed it to be. There's a strange symmetry to the way that Booth scripted Lincoln's

death and then scripted his own death just days later.

☛ Booth decided it was better to die than be taken back to Washington to face justice. He did not wish to bear the spectacle of a trial that would put him on public display for the amusement of the press and curiosity seekers. Nor did he wish to endure the rituals of a hanging: being bound and blindfolded, parading past his own coffin and open grave, climbing the steps of the scaffold. The shameful death of a common criminal was not for him. It was far better to perish here.

**Related Characters:** John Wilkes Booth

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 171

### Explanation and Analysis


Booth had been cornered. He was in the Garretts' barn and the manhunters standing outside had set the barn on fire in an attempt to force him to come out. Under this circumstance, Booth's priority was simply to not get captured. As an actor, he was deeply familiar with the power of spectacle. He knew that the court case that would be brought against him would be maximally public and that the authorities would seek to humiliate him. They would not only do this out of a sense of justice, but also in an attempt to undermine Booth's principles by publicly killing him. Booth loved to be a part of riveting story that drew public attention, but only if he felt he could control the message the public would receive. In this context, it seemed most dramatic and effective for his message if he died in a struggle with the authorities.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

☛ Another hunt, the one for reward money, began before Booth's corpse had even cooled. With Booth dead, and his chief accomplices under arrest, awaiting trial, it was time to cash in. Hundreds of manhunters rushed to claim a portion of the \$100,000 reward offered by the War Department. Tipsters with the slightest connection to the twelve-day search for Lincoln's killer tried to get their piece of the reward.

**Related Characters:** Abraham Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 



**Page Number:** 182

**Explanation and Analysis**

In the hopes of capturing Booth and putting him on trial, Stanton advertised a monetary reward for anyone who could aid in the capture of Booth and his accomplices. Although Booth had been killed, depriving Stanton of a public trial, those who had contributed to tracking the assassin down still had to be paid. At a time when both the

Northern and Southern economies had been decimated by war, it was no surprise that many Americans were eager to cash in. In particular, however, the chief investigator Lafayette Baker inspired antipathy by trying to control the investigation so that he could stake a claim to the reward money. Although Lincoln's death had brought some unity to Americans as they grieved for the president, it was still a time when many were struggling and could not pay attention only to principles.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

### FRONT MATTER

The book begins with several notes on its content and inspiration. First, it notes that all the quotes used in the book are drawn from primary sources. James Swanson, the author, then adds a biographical note, explaining that his interest in John Wilkes Booth sprang from a gift his grandmother gave him for his tenth birthday: a picture of the Deringer pistol Booth used to shoot the president, along with an incomplete newspaper article from the day after the assassination. From that time on, Swanson wanted to learn and tell this history.

Next, the book gives a brief overview of the Civil War. The North and South were at war from 1861 until 1865. The North had a more industrial economy and was against slavery, while the Southern economy depended upon slavery. Southerners thought that they should either be allowed to own slaves or be allowed to form their own new country. After 600,000 deaths, the war seemed at an end when Southern General Robert E. Lee surrendered at the Appomattox Court House. Many soldiers began to return home. Other soldiers continued to fight, however, and many Southerners still hoped to win the war. In this climate, Washington, D.C., the capital of the Union forces, was full of people of different allegiances and backgrounds, some of them spies and Southern sympathizers.

### PROLOGUE

On March 4, 1865, a gray day in Washington, Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated in front of the recently constructed Capitol dome. Photographers captured both the president and honored government leaders, but also the crowd, where John Wilkes Booth stood among many other citizens listening to the president's address. At the moment Abraham Lincoln gave his Inaugural Address, the sun came out. The speech addressed a nation that he hoped would soon be fully reunited by the end of the war, delivering a message of healing and forgiveness. On April 3, 1865, the capital of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia, surrendered to Union forces. Across the North and throughout the capital, people rejoiced at the news that the Civil War would soon end.

*The author of Chasing Lincoln's Killer, James L. Swanson, was inspired to tell the story of John Wilkes Booth when he was still a child and received an incomplete newspaper account of the assassination from the time of Lincoln's death. This gift gave the author a sense of the uncertainty surrounding Lincoln's killing at the time and prompted his interest in getting to the bottom of the story.*



*This overview of the situation in the United States at the time of Lincoln's killing emphasizes the uncertainty that gripped the country as the war slowly came to an end. People were moving from place to place and there was little way of knowing who was an enemy and who was a friend. There were many who were not ready to accept Southern defeat and might, as John Wilkes Booth did, still seek to change the outcome of the war.*



*The climate in America at the start of the book is weary but hopeful. The situation throughout the country has yet to be resolved, but everyone is looking for signs of what the future may hold. When the cloudy sky cleared at the moment that Lincoln began his inaugural speech, even the weather was seen as potentially a positive sign of what was to come. Although many in the crowd watched Lincoln's speech and found his message a hopeful one, others in the crowd considered him an enemy and his message an unwelcome one.*



On April 7, 1865, John Wilkes Booth drank in a saloon in New York City and complained to a friend that he ought to have killed the president on Inauguration Day, when he had such a good opportunity to do so.

Booth returned to Washington on April 8, and learned that Robert E. Lee had surrendered with his Army of Northern Virginia. Booth observed the giddy mood in the capital. Abraham Lincoln gave a speech on April 10, in which he asked the band to play the Confederacy's anthem, "Dixie," saying that they would take the song back along with the states that had seceded.

The following night, Lincoln gave a more serious speech to a torchlit parade about the coming challenges the country would face in rebuilding the South, and expressed his desire that black people be given the right to vote. When someone shouted that he could not see the president, Lincoln's young son Tad lifted a light that shone on the president. A free black woman who made dresses for the president's wife remarked how clearly the president was outlined in the darkness, and how easily he could have been shot. John Wilkes Booth was in the crowd. He threatened to kill Lincoln to his companion David Herold and swore that that was the last speech Lincoln would ever give. On April 13, the candles glowed in windows throughout D.C., and fireworks were set off in a "grand illumination." The spectacle of people rejoicing at the Confederacy's fall sickened Booth.

## CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 begins on Good Friday morning, April 14, 1865. Booth awoke and assumed the day would be another in a series of days that each seemed worse than the last. On April 9th, General Robert E. Lee had surrendered. On the 11th, Lincoln had called for blacks to be given the right to vote, and on the 13th the city had celebrated with its grand illumination.

Booth came from a theatrical family, and had a bright and profitable future as a handsome actor with fans all over the country, in both the North and South. Although he was vain and cared about his reputation, he was willing to sacrifice his life for the lost cause of the South.

*It is beginning to occur to Booth that, if he wants to impact history, he will not be able to rely on plans, but must also take opportunities as they present themselves.*



*Referencing the song that had become the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy, Lincoln was trying to show how he would reintegrate the states that had sought to secede, reunify the country and end the uncertainty about the war's outcome.*



*Lincoln continued to try to show that he could lead the country out of a time of war and uncertainty, while also giving voice to the principles of equality for which the war had been fought. While a free black person noticed how vulnerable Lincoln was to being shot, he seemed to give no thought to his personal safety. For Booth, who disagreed with and hated Lincoln's principles, the new idea of voting rights for blacks was so enraging that it prompted him to begin thinking of a new line of attack on the president. Instead of coming up with a detailed plan for an attack, Booth was learning he would need to act when the chance presented itself.*



*Booth's despair and anger is tied explicitly to the chain of events that seem to be leading to the end of the war. He is angry at the Northern signs of celebration at the news and desperate to see any sign that the South might still have a chance to win.*



*Although Booth was successful and had a great deal to lose by attacking the president, he still felt that the principles for which the South fought the war were more important than his own personal success and career.*



On April 14, after eating breakfast at the National Hotel where he was staying, Booth went to Ford's Theatre to collect his mail. He found a letter waiting for him and heard the news that had come from the president's messenger earlier that morning: Lincoln and his wife Mary Todd would be attending the evening performance at the theater that night, in less than eight hours, with General Ulysses S. Grant in tow. The theater's owners were going to prepare a special, expanded presidential box.

Booth knew everything about the layout of Ford's Theatre and how Lincoln would move through it that night. He also knew all the different ways of accessing the president's box, which hung directly above the stage. And although Booth had never played a role in the play *Our American Cousin*, which Lincoln would watch that evening, he knew everything about the play's timing and action. It was the perfect situation: instead of having to hunt the president down, Lincoln would fall into his lap. Booth had eight hours to prepare, which he thought was probably just enough time to get ready.

On the same day, Abraham Lincoln ate breakfast with his family and discussed the details of the surrender at Appomattox with his eldest son Robert, who was home from the war and had been present at the historic moment. Later, Lincoln conducted a meeting with his cabinet, including Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles. Welles wrote in his diary that Lincoln had dreamt that he was on the water in an indescribable vessel, speeding towards a shore. Lincoln took his dreams seriously; the dream about the vessel recurred to him before each important battle of the war. After a dream about his son, he had sent a telegram to Mary Todd telling her to take away Tad's pistol. Lincoln spent the rest of the day in a routine way, taking meetings, reading mail, going through paperwork. He wanted to finish his government business by 3:00 PM, when he planned to speak to his wife about something.

At the Ford Theater, preparations were underway. A notice was published in the newspaper announcing that Grant and Lincoln would attend the play that night, and the theater borrowed flags to decorate the president's box from the nearby treasury department. Booth saw one of the theater's owners returning with the flags, confirming to him that the president was coming to Ford's. Meanwhile, a young army surgeon named Dr. Charles A. Leale decided to attend the performance, eager to catch a glimpse of the hero Grant.

*Booth's privileged position as an actor meant he could have mail sent to Ford's Theatre. Because of this perk, Booth was in the right place at the right time. This unexpected piece of information was a stroke of luck. It was also one of the first instances when being an actor would help Booth to carry out the assassination.*



*Booth's understanding of the world of the theater, which led him to be able to assassinate the president, had fictional and real components: he knew the physical layout of the theater, and he was also familiar with the fictional action of the play that the Lincolns would be seeing. The fact that Booth's grasp of reality and of fiction came together to lead to his historic action foreshadows the blurring of reality and fiction that will propel Booth for the remainder of the novel.*



*Lincoln has a sense that the country has reached a momentous juncture; the war is likely to soon be over. In his conversations on his final day as president, Lincoln seeks to relish this moment while looking ahead to the future. In the cabinet meeting, he conveys his dream to his closest aides and advisors; it's a dream that has, in the past, signaled the approach of an important moment. While Lincoln believes the dream to be a premonition of an important battle, the dream was, in retrospect, a sign of a very different kind of historical turning point: the murder of a president.*



*Booth took note of the planning and preparations undertaken by the theater's owners as he started to think through his own plan for that evening. Others like Dr. Leale, were also planning their evenings around the exciting news that the political elite would be attending the theater that night. The elaborate planning for the president's visit sets up a contrast with Booth's somewhat last-minute decision to throw together a plan for attacking the president. Booth's plan succeeds because it is a combination of seizing an unexpected opportunity and planning for it the best he can.*



Booth went to the Kirkwood House, the hotel where the new Vice President Andrew Johnson was staying, and left a letter with the desk clerk to be given to Johnson. The message read, "Don't wish to disturb you. Are you at home? J. Wilkes Booth." He then went to the boarding house owned by Mary Surratt, the mother of Booth's friend John Harrison Surratt, where he gave Mary a package to bring to her other inn, located south of Washington in Surrattsville, Maryland. Booth also asked Mary to tell the tavern keeper John Lloyd to prepare the guns, ammunition and other supplies he and her son had hidden there, because he would come to pick these things up in Maryland that evening. Accompanied by one of her boarders, Lewis Weichmann, Mary soon left for Surrattsville.

Booth made his final preparations. He selected a Deringer pistol that could be easily concealed as his weapon. The pistol only fired a single shot, but it was a large, solid ball weighing almost a full ounce, that was deadly if it hit its target. Reloading was time consuming, and Booth knew that he would not have that time to spare. There was a risk that the pistol would misfire. Swanson speculates that perhaps this risk added to the thrill Booth wanted to take in his adventurous act. Perhaps he thought it more heroic or honorable to kill with a single shot. Or perhaps he simply thought the gun was better looking and more stylish than a big six-shooter. As his backup weapon, Booth brought an elegant-looking bowie knife. He took few other supplies: some **money**, a compass in a velvet case, and pictures of five of his girlfriends.

In Surrattsville, Mary Surratt told the tavern keeper, John Lloyd, to expect callers that evening who would come for the hidden shooting irons, or fire arms. Lloyd took the shooting irons from their hiding spot between the walls and put them, with the binoculars he had found in the package, in his bedroom.

Back in Washington, Booth gathered the conspirators he had recruited to strike against the president. The year before, these men had failed in a harebrained plan to kidnap Lincoln. There had been a number of threats to Lincoln's life over the course of his presidency—he received death threats and jars of poisoned fruit from angry people who supported the South. On the way to his first inauguration in 1861, Lincoln had travelled in disguise through the city of Baltimore, where rebels were planning to assassinate him. But although many such plots on the president's life circulated throughout the war, none of them resulted in serious action.

*As Booth went about town making his plans for the night, some of his actions made more practical sense than others. The note to Vice President Andrew Johnson was cryptic and served little purpose. Booth may have meant it to create a dramatic effect, but it could have created some suspicion. It certainly would not help him in carrying out his mission. His visit to Mary Surratt, on the other hand, made a great deal of sense. He was beginning to recruit help in setting up supplies that he would need during his escape, after he committed the deed.*



*The newspaper clipping that drew James L. Swanson to the story of Lincoln's murder included a picture of the Deringer pistol Booth used. The pistol was an impractical choice for Booth, but perhaps it seemed to the actor like the perfect weapon for the most dramatic moment of his life. Swanson sees Booth's choice of weapon as a reflection of his theatrical mindset, thinking much more about how the act of assassinating the president would be portrayed than about the practical difficulties that could come up.*



*Mary Surratt carried out Booth's wishes, preparing the things he believed he would need as a fugitive. Again, choosing a gun and a binocular may have been the result of the actor's dramatic notion of what a fugitive would need; they were not the most practical items to have prepared.*



*Lincoln's life had been under threat many times during his presidency, but he rarely made any changes to his behavior out of a need to protect himself. Only when a specific plot was uncovered did the president take steps to thwart it. This tendency left Lincoln vulnerable to a spontaneous or quickly-planned attack like Booth's, but it also showed his belief that the principles he stood for were destined to triumph with or without him as president.*



Booth himself had organized a plan to kidnap Lincoln in late 1864. He paid for things for his coconspirators and allowed them to enjoy the perks of his fame, hoping to guarantee their loyalty to his plan. But on March 17, 1865, the night when the conspirators planned to ambush Lincoln's carriage, Lincoln did not appear as planned. In fact, he was giving a speech in the National, the very hotel where Booth stayed when in Washington. After that, events moved quickly, as Richmond fell and General Lee surrendered. Yet presidential security was so weak that all Booth would have had to do, if he was determined to give his life to kill the president, was go to the Executive Mansion, request a meeting with Lincoln, and shoot him.

Now, on April 14, 1865, Booth called on George Atzerodt and Lewis Powell to help him murder Lincoln, Vice President Andrew Johnson, and Secretary of State William Seward. David Herold would accompany Lewis Powell to Seward's home, where the Secretary was lying in bed recovering from a serious carriage crash. Atzerodt tried to refuse his assignment to murder Johnson, but Booth threatened to turn him in to the authorities if he refused. What none of Booth's co-conspirators knew was that Booth had given a friend a letter to be sent to a newspaper the following day. In this letter, he justified the assassinations and incriminated his co-conspirators, by signing their names to the letter as well.

Earlier that afternoon, Lincoln had gone on a carriage ride alone with his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln. She had been devastated by the 1862 death of their eleven-year-old son Willie. Now, Lincoln was relieved by the coming end of the war, and told Mary that they must both turn a corner and put the distressing years of the war behind them. Perhaps they could visit the Pacific Ocean or return to Chicago.

This carriage ride had forced other important business to be delayed, and the Lincolns were late arriving at the theater. General Ulysses Grant and his wife had not accepted the Lincolns' invitation to the theater, so Lincoln and Mary Todd brought their friends Major Rathbone and his fiancée Clara Harris. When the presidential party arrived, the action on stage stopped, and the orchestra played "Hail to the Chief," the traditional music for a presidential entrance. The audience rose and cheered for the president who had brought down slavery and saved the country from breaking in two.

*Booth had previously believed that to affect the outcome of the war he needed a complicated plan and coconspirators. But in a stroke of bad luck for Booth and good luck for Lincoln, Lincoln changed his plans the night when Booth hoped to kidnap him. Booth's plan had been too complicated, perhaps, and too reliant on everything working out the way he thought it would. In reality, presidential security was so weak that no plan was needed at all; Booth, though, would have had to be willing to be immediately captured or killed himself after killing the president, and it seems that he wanted to survive.*



*Not satisfied to merely take the chance presented to him, Booth was determined to expand his attack on Lincoln into a full-blown attack on the entire Union cabinet. Perhaps this instinct to pursue a grand conspiracy came from his ideas about the proper components to a dramatic action that would shape the course of history. Booth did not only wish to kill the president; it was important to him that his intentions for the assassination would be understood and his political ideas disseminated.*



*Lincoln was concerned about being a good husband and looking after his wife who had suffered during the years in which he had to put his responsibilities as president before his family. Although the Union principles were important to Lincoln, he did not wish to sacrifice his personal happiness or that of his loved ones for these principles, if possible.*



*During Lincoln's time at Ford's, the blurring of distinctions between the theatrical and the real would create confusion among those present about what was really happening. At first, however, the theatrical was put aside for the act of respect towards the president. For the entire audience, the war outside was still a pressing concern, and the arrival of the president who led that war could not go unrecognized.*



## CHAPTER 2

Booth likely watched from nearby as the Lincolns and their guests entered Ford's Theatre. He went into the theater at 9:00 PM and listened to a few lines of dialogue to understand how far along the play was. Then he exited the theater and moved his horse from a stable to the back door of the theater, where an employee named John Peanut held the horse for him. Booth crossed the theater by climbing through a trapdoor and walking underneath the stage, and then exited onto Tenth Street. He went to the Star Saloon and drank whiskey, then returned to the theater. Booth followed the same path through the theater that the Lincolns had traversed, climbing a staircase up to the balcony. At the door of their box, he noticed with surprise that there was no guard, only a servant. Booth showed this servant something – perhaps a calling card with the famous actor's name on it – and was allowed to enter the vestibule. Once inside, he saw that there was no guard outside the entrance to the president's box.

Inside the box, the Lincolns were enjoying a romantic moment. It was their happiest week in Washington. Lincoln took Mary Todd's hand, and she pretended to be embarrassed; "what will Miss Harris think of my hanging on to you so?" she asked him teasingly, in the last exchange they would have while he was alive. "She won't think anything about it," her husband said.

Booth entered the vestibule that led to the box and got into position. He found a piece of a music stand that he had stashed there earlier and wedged it between the wall and door so no one could enter the box after him. Inside the vestibule, he allowed his eyes to adjust to the darkness, peeking through a small hole bored in the door, which he may have created himself, when he visited the theater earlier that day to make his preparations. Inside the box, he saw that the president was seated closest to the door of the box. To Lincoln's right sat Mrs. Lincoln, then Clara Harris and Major Rathbone. Booth readied his weapons as he awaited the moment when the actor Harry Hawk would speak the line that Booth knew elicited a loud burst of laughter from the audience. He hoped this laughter would drown out the sound of his pistol firing.

*Booth prepared for his attack on the president by first walking through the theater and getting a sense of what was going on. He assessed both the physical space of the theater and how far along the play was. He also made sure that the president was, in fact, in attendance. Instead of creating a grand plan to kidnap the president (like he had before), Booth was now seizing the opportunity that chance provided him. He was also using his privileged position as an actor and the deep knowledge he had of the way the theater operated to his advantage. Booth also likely used his status as a famous actor to get Lincoln's servant to allow him access to the presidential box.*



*After years in which he had sent many men to die for principles, Lincoln was, for the first time, relaxing. On his last day alive, as the pressures of being a wartime president began to ease, Lincoln took the opportunity to draw closer to his wife and family.*



*Booth's total access to the theater had given him the opportunity to quickly make important preparations for his attack on the president. No one in the theater thought anything of seeing Booth coming and going. This freedom to maneuver meant he could carefully stage the scene of the murder, getting his props ready in advance, just as an actor does before he steps onto stage. Booth's knowledge of the play would allow him to try to shoot Lincoln at a moment when the loud sounds of the audience might cover the sound of a gun firing, blurring the distinction between the real and the theatrical.*



No one heard Booth enter the box; the Lincolns and their guests watched the play. Booth squeezed the trigger, and with an explosion of black powder charge and a flash of light from the muzzle, the bullet flew from Booth's gun toward Lincoln's head. Although Lincoln's face was greatly aged by all the worry he had borne during the years of the war, had he only been wounded, he might have fought back against Booth. The president's body was lean and strong. But instead, the bullet pierced the lower left of Lincoln's skull and came to rest deep within his brain behind his right eye. Lincoln slumped forward. The sound of the shot hung in the box for a second, then traveled around the theater. Some in the audience were startled, others thought the shot was part of the play, and still others heard nothing at all.

Major Rathbone rose from his seat at the sound of the shot, stepping towards the president. He saw a man with a pale face, dressed in black, who sprang at him. Rathbone grabbed Booth's coat, but Booth broke free, yelling "freedom!" and raising the knife in the air to stab Rathbone. Rathbone shielded himself in defense and the knife went deep into his arm, which gushed blood.

Booth swung his leg out of the box, but Rathbone grabbed him by the coattail. Tangled in a portrait of George Washington and with one of his riding spurs stuck in a flag, Booth struggled to leap from the box. He finally jumped and landed on the stage, but felt that something was wrong with his left leg. Center stage for the last time in his acting career, Booth shouted the state motto of Virginia, "*Sic semper tyrannis!*" or "thus always to tyrants," and then, "the South is avenged!" The actor Harry Hawk was in Booth's path, but fled as Booth bolted from the stage, slashing the air with his knife at everyone in his way. Major Rathbone screamed from the box for someone to stop Booth, and Clara Harris shouted, "he has shot the president!"

## CHAPTER 3

Across town, Secretary of State William H. Seward was recuperating from a terrible carriage accident. Only a few days before, the president had walked to Seward's house to visit his good friend and check on his recovery. Now, Seward was lying in bed, while his favorite child, the slender twenty-year-old Fanny sat nearby. For six years, Fanny had kept a detailed diary of all she observed among the Washington elite.

*Booth's plan to blur the theatrical and the real worked well. The president and his companions were focused on the action of the play and did not notice Booth's entrance. After Booth shot the gun, the audience had difficulty discerning whether the loud sound was part of the play or not. At the same time, Lincoln's body began its final struggle to hold onto life. Despite the president's physical strength, which was hidden from many by the haggard look of his face, he had no chance of surviving the bullet wound to his brain.*



*Lincoln was unable to fight to protect himself, but Major Rathbone fought against Lincoln's enemy, putting his own life in danger to stand up to whomever would attack the president. From this moment on, Booth became the primary target for all those who wished to defend the Union and Lincoln's principles.*



*While he fought off Rathbone trying to escape Ford's Theater, Booth was literally stopped in his tracks by the symbols of American history and tradition: the flag and the portrait of America's first president. He was also stopped by Rathbone, who acted as the living defender of these symbols and the principles they represented. When Booth finally escaped, it was onto the stage, where he used this familiar ground to shout out the principles motivating his actions.*



*After years serving together during wartime, Lincoln had become close to members of his cabinet like Secretary of State Seward. He was attentive to Seward during his convalescence, which reflected the strong personal bonds between the two men, who had competed to lead the Republican ticket in 1860.*





Outside the house, Lewis Powell and David Herold watched the street. They saw no guards and knew that Seward should be an easy target, weak and sure to be in bed after the serious accident that had been reported in the newspapers. The difficulties would be in entering the Seward mansion, discovering which room was the Secretary of State's, and dealing with an unknown number of other occupants. Powell and Herold came up with a plan: Powell would tell the house's occupants that he was there to deliver medicine sent by Seward's doctor. He would carry a small package as a prop for this deception. Herold would wait outside, holding Powell's horse and waiting for him.

Powell's ring at the bell was answered by a black servant named William Bell. Bell believed Powell's story, but argued with Powell when he said the doctor had told him he must deliver the medicine personally to the secretary of state and give him instructions for how to take the medicine. Powell insisted that he needed to see the secretary, but Bell did not back down. Powell backed Bell up the stairs, arguing all the way. At the top of the staircase, Seward's son Frederick halted Powell. Powell told Frederick the same story, and Frederick told him he could not see the secretary.

Fanny Seward then poked her head out into the hall to tell Frederick that their father was awake. Powell tried to peer into the room behind Fanny, who held the door slightly ajar. Powell demanded to know if the secretary was asleep, and Fanny, in a terrible error, looked back at her father and replied, "almost." Unwittingly, Fanny had shown Powell where his target lay. Powell likely assumed that Seward was lying there defenseless, only watched over by his daughter, but a wounded Union army veteran named Sergeant Robinson was also in the room with Seward.

Powell pretended to give up in his argument with Frederick and Bell and walked down the stairs, led by William Bell. Frederick walked back towards his room. Suddenly, Powell ran up the stairs. By the time Frederick had turned, there was a revolver pointed in his face. Powell squeezed the trigger, but the gun misfired. Although he had five more rounds in the gun, Powell raised the gun and broke the pistol over Frederick's head, making it impossible to fire again. He then bludgeoned Frederick with the broken gun. Bell ran outside into the street, screaming, "murder!"

*While Booth had an intimate knowledge of Ford's Theatre, Powell and Herold lacked any knowledge of Seward's house. They could not predict what obstacles they would face or what would be going on in the house when Powell entered. They used the knowledge that they did have about Seward's injuries from the carriage accident to craft a plan to gain entrance to the home, but they knew that there could be any number of other difficulties that they could not predict in advance.*



*Here Powell's disadvantages also contrast to Booth's advantages. Booth was able to convince Lincoln's servant to give him access to the presidential box, possibly using his status as a celebrity, but perhaps merely by using the charm he had cultivated as an actor. Powell, on the other hand, could not use charm or ingenuity to get his way, but rather continued to repeat the same story over and over rudely.*



*Until Fanny spoke to her brother about their father, it had seemed that Powell would not be able to find out where the secretary was. Now it would be up to Powell to take advantage of this stroke of luck to get into that room. It may also have seemed to Powell that Fanny's emergence gave him an answer to the other question he and Herold had puzzled over: how many other people were nearby to defend the secretary.*



*Unable to talk himself into the secretary's room, Powell turned to brute force. The need to act spontaneously but intelligently was too much for Powell, however, who instead began to make error after error. Instead of going directly into the sick room where the secretary lay, he instead rushed at Frederick, who was not his target. When the gun misfired, he did not use his other shots, but instead ruined his weapon.*



Fanny heard the noise in the hallway and opened the door to see Frederick beaten and bloody. Powell pushed past her and straight up to Sergeant Robinson, whom he hit in the forehead with a knife. Fanny tried to block Powell, but he ran to the secretary's bed, pinned him to the bed, then tried twice to stab him, missing each time. The third time, he hit Seward, slicing his cheek so that the skin hung from a flap and his teeth were exposed. Sergeant Robinson recovered and charged at Powell and they fought one another in a life-or-death struggle. David Herold heard Fanny screaming, took fright, and fled the scene, abandoning Powell to his fate.

Augustus Seward, the secretary's other son, then rushed in. At first, he thought his father had deliriously begun to struggle with the night nurse, but quickly realized the man was not his father. The three men then fought, and Powell stabbed Robinson twice deeply before he was wrestled out into the hall where the gaslight illuminated the three men's faces. There, Powell made an odd confession to Augustus: "I'm mad. I'm mad!" he said. Powell had Robinson in a choke hold and could have killed him, but in a last-minute act of mercy, he instead punched him with his fist. Powell then fled the house, mounted his horse, and rode off, chased for a bit by Bell.

Fanny ran to her father's bedroom. Seward had rolled out of bed to escape Powell, and was on the floor. Sergeant Robinson, who was severely wounded, lifted Seward into his bed. In unimaginable pain, Seward told his daughter, "I am not dead; send for a doctor, send for the police, close the house."

## CHAPTER 4

Back at Ford's Theatre, one audience member gave chase. Joseph Stewart, who was six foot five, jumped across the orchestra pit and chased Booth into the wings and out into the alley, where Booth found his waiting horse. Booth mounted his horse, and although Stewart reached for the reins, Booth was able to steer the horse to run away and escape.

Booth rode quickly through the streets of Washington, avoiding Pennsylvania Avenue where the crowds celebrated. He hoped to outrun the news of his deed on his horse and escape across the river to Maryland.

*In this detailed account of the bloody fight between Powell and the Seward family, violence brings out both courage and cowardice. Like Major Rathbone in Lincoln's box, Sergeant Robinson was able to ignore his own terrible injuries in order to fight to protect Seward. For Robinson, the battle to protect Seward was another battle in the Civil War, with Seward's body representing the Union and all the principles it stood for. Meanwhile, David Herold fled at the sounds of violence, failing to stand with Powell and the principles he fought for.*



*Having brutally attacked five people, Powell began to seem terrified by the magnitude of his own crimes. He could no longer feel connected to the principles that led him to undertake the attack and instead felt like a madman. At this moment, he decided against killing Robinson and trying to make sure that he had definitely achieved his goal to kill Seward. Instead, he abandoned the scene of the violence in fear and horror.*



*Although the Sewards had been badly wounded in the fight for their survival, they had collectively won the battle against Powell. It would turn out that they had also struck a blow to the principles Powell sought to attack when he attacked Seward.*



*For most of the audience members, the situation was confusing and terrifying. Only a single audience member was both clearheaded and brave enough to recognize that the president had really been attacked, that it was not a part of the play, and that he should try to stop the attacker.*



*Since telegram use did not allow for the immediate spread of news, Booth was correct to think that his horse could outrun the news of his deed, so long as a messenger on another horse did not pursue and overtake him.*



At the river, Sergeant Silas T. Cobb told Booth that no one was supposed to cross the river after a 9 PM curfew, and he interrogated him about where he was going. Booth used his skills as an actor to convince the men to let him cross. Had Booth been forced to return to Washington, he surely would have been taken prisoner. If he had tried to force his way across the river, the guards would have shot and killed him. He was lucky to escape across the river.

Back in Washington, Fanny Seward and Sergeant Robinson used cloths and water to stop Seward's bleeding. Doctors soon arrived, confirmed that Seward would survive despite his ghastly wounds, and treated the other four whom Powell had attacked: Sergeant Robinson, Fanny, Augustus, and Frederick. Terrified that Powell might return or that other assassins were hiding in the house, Fanny prowled the rooms of her house, drenched in blood. Despite his weakness, her father tried to reassure her.

Back in Ford's Theatre, there was a chaotic scene as the fifteen hundred people in the audience tried to make sense of what had just happened. Confusion reigned as Booth made his escape.

Dr. Charles Leale rushed to the president's box, and quickly determined that Major Rathbone was in no immediate danger from his stab wounds. He reassured Mrs. Lincoln that he would do all he could and began to examine the president. The president was unconscious and looked dead. Having seen Rathbone's wounds, Leale at first assumed the president had also been stabbed. He cut open Lincoln's clothes in search of a stab wound. When he found none, he lifted Lincoln's eyelids and understood from the president's pupils that there was a brain injury. He found the blood clot plugging the hole in Lincoln's skull and pulled it out to relieve pressure on the president's brain. Leale opened an airway and massaged the president's heart, getting his heart to beat and his lungs to begin to suck in air. He had stabilized the president's condition, but pronounced that there was no way Lincoln could recover.

At the Kirkwood House, George Atzerodt drank in the hotel lobby, unable to work up the courage to follow through on the plan to murder Vice President Andrew Johnson, who was staying in a room a floor below Atzerodt's. He left the bar and rode away on his horse, unsure of what to do next.

*Although Booth had not planned on having to argue his way across the river, this was exactly the kind of obstacle that his skills as an actor prepared him for. Despite the enormous stress he was under, Booth was able to persuasively lie about his reasons for needing to cross the river late at night.*



*Once again, despite his own injuries, Sergeant Robinson continued to put the health and recovery of Secretary Seward above his own. At the same time, despite her father's attempts to calm her, Fanny Seward was troubled and terrified by the sudden appearance of the terrible violence of the battlefield in her own home.*



*For the entire audience, the aftermath of the shooting was a time of panic and confusion. As it became clear that the shooting was not part of the play, it also became less certain what would happen next, either in the theater that night or in the course of the war at large.*



*As a doctor, Leale rushed to the president's box to see if he could be of help. Both his profession and his support for the Union cause led him to try to save the president. Perhaps his dedication to the Union cause also led him to optimistically assume that Lincoln was unconscious because of stab wounds, despite the sound of the gunshot that had been fired. Once he discovered the bullet hole in Lincoln's skull, however, his professional understanding took over. He knew that there was nothing he could do for Lincoln except to keep him alive for a few more hours and ensure him a dignified death.*



*Despite the plan and the relative ease with which he could have carried it out, Atzerodt turned out not to be capable of murdering a man for the sake of the Southern cause, which already seemed to be lost.*



Riding away from the scene of the Seward attack, David Herold regretted abandoning Powell, but was relieved to be safe and outside of suspicion for any crime. He followed Booth's path, convincing Sergeant Cobb and his guards to allow him to cross the river to Maryland.

Lewis Powell, meanwhile, did not know Washington, D.C. well. Lost in a strange city and drenched in blood, he somehow managed to also lose his horse. For the next two nights, he slept in a tree. Eventually he recalled a boardinghouse that Booth had mentioned. He thought he would be safe there if he could find it.

In Ford's Theatre, Dr. Leale was considering how to move the president. It would be undignified for Lincoln to die in a theater, a place of amusement, and all the more so on Good Friday. At the same time, the actress Laura Keene navigated the theater. She left the stage and moved towards the new center of drama in the president's box. She asked Dr. Leale to allow her to cradle the president's head in her lap, and despite the inappropriateness of this request, Leale allowed it. Keane's dress was soaked in Lincoln's blood and brain matter, and in the days afterwards people would beg to see this **memento** from the historic night. Meanwhile, Leale prepared to move the president, although he did not know where to take him.

Booth was now across the river in Maryland, a state which had not seceded but was filled with Southern sympathizers. Indeed, if Maryland *had* seceded, the war might have gone differently. This was safe ground for Booth, but he had none of the skills he needed to live in the wilderness and his leg injury was causing him pain. He planned to depend on Herold for aid. In the darkness, he struggled to find Soper's Hill, the place he and Herold had chosen to meet. Finally, the sounds of hoofbeats reached Booth. He wondered if it was a cavalry pursuing him, and was relieved when Herold rode up.

Booth and Herold exchanged information. Herold knew nothing about Atzerodt's mission, but he reported on how Powell's trick with the package of medicine had worked to gain him entry and how the house's inhabitants had begun to scream for help. Booth felt that this was evidence that Powell had succeeded in killing Seward. Booth may have been angry with Herold for abandoning Powell, who was a loyal follower of Booth's and an excellent fighter, and who would be utterly lost now that he was left alone in the capital. However, Booth would have proudly regaled Herold with the story of his successful attack on Lincoln at Ford's Theatre.

*Herold believed that because he had not attacked or killed anyone, he was exempt from punishment. He did not realize that by failing to report to the authorities and by going to join Booth in Maryland, he committed crimes.*



*Likely in shock after the terrible crimes he had just committed, Powell was unable to adjust to his abandonment by Herold and he came up with a new plan to save himself. He lacked the knowledge of his surroundings that had been so essential to Booth's own escape.*



*Having realized that the president would not survive, Leale shifted his concern. He wanted to make sure that the president would die in an environment suitable to the dignity of the office and with a dignity befitting the principles he'd lived for. Strangely, given this concern for the president's dignity, he allowed the actress Laura Keene to hold the president's head in her lap, creating a morbid memento of her ruined dress and indulging her sense that this historic moment was like a play come to life.*



*Herold's decision to join Booth and his ability to reach him by crossing the river were both uncertain. It was a stroke of luck for the two men that they managed to find one another in the dark of the night. Had Booth failed to find Herold quickly, his injured leg and lack of skills for surviving outside might have led to his being captured much more quickly.*



*Neither Booth nor Herold knew at this point if any of their targets had been successfully killed. Cut off from any new information, they could only speculate about the fates of the other two conspirators and their targets. They also had no idea how quickly news of the two attacks would spread. If Powell were captured, it was possible that their plans would be revealed quickly. The two men were likely relieved to have each other as they faced the uncertain results of their actions.*



Back at Ford's, Leale and others carried the unconscious Lincoln out onto the street. Leale demanded that a soldier find a place to bring the president, and the soldiers banged on doors across the street, but got no answer. Stranded in the middle of the street, in front of a mob of witnesses, Leale pulled another blood clot from the hole in Lincoln's head. Suddenly, a door opened across the street. Someone at William Petersen's boardinghouse had stepped outside to investigate the hullabaloo. Lincoln was carried into the boardinghouse.

*In this chaotic moment, mobs of ordinary Americans learned that the president was gravely injured. Many saw his condition with their own eyes. They would rush off to tell all their near and dear about the president's condition as they had seen it outside Ford's theater. Just as the president had led the nation through years of bloodshed, his own bloody end was seen by many of his fellow citizens that night.*



## CHAPTER 5

Booth and Herold rode through open country towards their safe house at Mary Surratt's inn. They had outrun the spread of news; no one in Maryland yet knew that Lincoln had been shot. The news was spreading out from the theater as the fifteen hundred audience members spread out across Washington, notifying those in the government and people of their acquaintance. From near Seward's mansion, meanwhile, the news began to spread about another assassination. Those who believed that Seward had been killed argued with those who had heard Lincoln was the victim, until eventually it emerged that both men had been attacked.

*In the first hours after the two attacks, news moved only as quickly as it had been able to for thousands of years: as fast as people walking and riding could convey it. With none of the details of what had happened confirmed, already people were spreading the news. As stories seemed to contradict one another, the uncertainty gave rise to the sense of impending disaster in Washington, D.C..*



The news reached Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, a man Lincoln had entrusted through the war to shape the Union Army into an efficient fighting force. Earlier that evening, Stanton had visited Seward's bedside. Only a couple hours later, messengers reached his house with the erroneous news that Seward had been murdered. Stanton was skeptical, but decided to ride to Seward's house to investigate. Stanton arrived just after Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles. The two cabinet members heard the false news that Seward and his son Frederick had been killed and the true information that Lincoln had been shot at Ford's. Welles immediately cursed the Confederates, saying they must be the ones behind the attacks. Stanton ordered that military guards be dispatched immediately to guard the homes of all other cabinet members and Vice President Johnson's hotel.

*With so much inaccurate news flying around, both Cabinet members headed directly to Seward's house to see for themselves. This need to verify rumors likely led to even more congestion throughout the streets of Washington, as people flooded to the scenes of the crimes. In this moment, it seemed that the rising panic was a sign that some new and still unknown cataclysm might be coming. This may have increased the cabinet secretaries' sense that a Southern conspiracy was likely behind the two attacks.*



Welles and Stanton then rode a carriage towards Ford's Theatre to learn whether the stories they were hearing about the president were true. As they approached, people ran in all directions through the streets. Near the theater, a big angry mob swarmed the street. A crowd watched as Dr. Leale instructed those carrying Lincoln to bring him outside. It was the last time the American public would ever see Lincoln alive.

*The crowds likely heightened the feeling of panic and the sense of foreboding. At this moment when everyone in Washington was uncertain of what exactly was going on, it seemed possible that something much bigger than an attack on Lincoln and Seward might be at hand.*



Thirteen miles away, Booth and Herold arrived at the Surratts' tavern. In 1864, after her husband's loyalty to the Union was questioned, Mary Surratt had rented the tavern, which served as an inn, saloon, and post office, to John Lloyd and moved her family to Washington. Herold dismounted and banged on the door, rousing Lloyd, who gave him the binoculars and shooting irons. Booth bragged to Lloyd that he was "pretty certain that we have assassinated the president and Secretary Seward." The two men rode off towards a doctor to treat Booth's injured left leg.

At the Petersen house, as other doctors arrived, Leale situated the wounded president in the room of a boarder who was out celebrating the war's end. He ordered the gas in the room turned up, which lit the scene. Mary Todd Lincoln, grief-stricken, asked again and again, "where is my husband?" Eventually, Leale convinced her and the others to leave the room and give the assembled doctors space to do their work. But without a guard at the door, strangers seeking to see the wounded president entered the house and milled around, creating a chaotic situation.

Unable to move through the crowd in their carriage, Stanton and Welles, despite the possible danger, got out and walked through the crowd, pushing towards the theater.

Lincoln's eyelids were filled with blood, making him look as if he had been punched in the face. His feet were getting cold; his breathing was regular but heavy. The doctors placed a small chair by his bed and summoned Mrs. Lincoln. She begged her husband to live and to speak to her and their children, but he was unconscious and heard nothing. Leale sent for the president's oldest son, for Lincoln's family doctor, and the president's pastor, Reverend Dr. Phineas T. Gurley. He also sent for a Nelaton probe, which would allow him to access the bullet in Lincoln's brain.

Stanton arrived at the Petersen house and took charge of the situation. He could see that Lincoln would die. Now his goal was to protect the Union from what he assumed was a Confederate plot to kill Union leaders and then send a rebel army marching towards Washington. He made the Petersen house his temporary headquarters. He sent a telegram summoning General Grant back to Washington and ordered soldiers to clear the crowds away from the entrance to the house.

*The arrangement for this smooth handoff at Lloyd's was one of the few successful preparations for his escape that Booth was able to make in the eight hours between his discovery that Lincoln would be coming to Ford's and his carrying out the murder. Had he thought more practically about what a fugitive might need, he might have thought to also bring some supplies for surviving outdoors and a change of clothes.*



*Mary Todd's shocked state reflected the chaotic scene outside the Petersen house and in the country at large. As the news spread through the streets that the president and Secretary Seward had been shot, many felt deep personal curiosity to know what was happening to their leader. They knew that Lincoln's fate would directly impact their own and sought information desperately.*



*If an attack were planned against the entire cabinet, Stanton and Welles would have been marked men, with assassins hunting for them at that moment. Although they recognized this danger, they ignored it.*



*The truth of her husband's condition had not yet hit Mary Todd, but for all the others it was clear that they were assembling around the president's deathbed. Lincoln could no longer speak either to those he loved or in defense of the causes he believed in. Those around him now needed to assure him a dignified death that would help to enshrine the principles for which he had lived.*



*Stanton's concern immediately became to ensure security both for the house where the president lay dying and for the North. He assumed that the assassinations were part of a well-planned out conspiracy and that the president's assassination was only the first stage. He needed to both clear the crowds seeking information from around the house and to inform General Grant of the situation as quickly as possible.*



Stanton then launched a criminal investigation into the attack. He would take the lead in this, while Vice President Andrew Johnson hung back. Stanton heard witnesses from the Ford Theatre; they all testified to that the shooter was John Wilkes Booth. Stanton then sent telegrams throughout Virginia, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. Bridges were to be guarded and cavalry were to stop anyone trying to cross rivers by boat. Stanton also sent word to New York, requesting that detectives be sent to Washington.

Army Major General Halleck made plans for the imprisonment of the assassins. Since vigilante mobs would be likely to storm the Old Capital Prison, prisoners would be kept on a warship on the river in the Washington Navy Yard.

The manhunt began while Lincoln was still alive. The murder weapon was retrieved from Ford's, and Booth's belongings were searched. Detectives found a letter to Booth from someone named "Sam," which described a conspiracy against the Union.

Detectives who had heard about the connection between Booth and Mary Surratt went to her Washington boardinghouse in search of Booth and her son, John Surratt. A detective told the innkeeper the half-truth that Booth had killed the president and that Surratt had killed the secretary of state. Mary Surratt claimed not to know where her son was, while her boarder Lewis Weichmann told detectives that John Surratt was in Canada.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Lincoln wailed that she wished their young son Tad could see his father again before his death, and then she fell on the floor in a faint. Stanton cruelly sent her from the room.

*As the Secretary of War, Stanton had more experience than most with the telegram's potential to help in a complicated mission. He now began to harness this power to communicate with people across the country, giving them information they might need and orders to carry out. He also used telegrams to quickly recruit the help he would need.*



*Even before the assassins were caught, the authorities had begun to consider the need to keep them safe until they could be brought to trial. This trial would be used to shape the public understanding of the crime and to shape the perception of Lincoln's death as a martyrdom for principles.*



*The letter found in Booth's possessions described an earlier conspiracy, but the letter suggested to authorities that they were dealing with a larger plan involving Confederate authorities.*



*Given the suspicion that a larger conspiracy was underway, the authorities immediately began to come up with theories that included a wide net of conspirators and a good deal of advance planning. This uncertainty led them to treat suspects like John Surratt as guilty until proven innocent.*



*Although at his life's end Lincoln had hoped to turn his attention away from the principles that had consumed him in order to spend more time with his family, this opportunity was snatched from him and his family. Stanton, seeking to preserve a dignified atmosphere befitting the president's office, was not sensitive to Mrs. Lincoln's more personal concerns.*



Booth and Herold reached an isolated farmhouse where Dr. Samuel Mudd lived. It was distant enough from Washington that Booth and Herold could rest there. Booth and Mudd knew one another from when Booth was hatching his plan to kidnap the president, whom Booth had hoped to take to Richmond and either trade for Confederate prisoners of war or use as a bargaining chip for the South in peace negotiations. In 1864, Booth had been given a letter by an operative he met in Canada introducing him to Mudd. Mudd had then introduced Booth to a neighbor who sold the actor a horse that he would need for his kidnapping scheme. Mudd went with Booth to Washington and introduced him to John Surratt. Mudd had then gone back to Maryland and awaited word from Booth about the kidnapping scheme, but word had not come. Mudd assumed that with the war at an end, Booth had ceased plotting against Lincoln.

Dr. Mudd now recognized Booth and set about to treat him. Booth's leg had swelled, and his thigh-high boot could not be pulled off without causing him pain, so Mudd carefully cut the boot and removed it. Mudd then diagnosed Booth: he had broken the bone two inches above the ankle. Mudd made Booth a splint. Booth decided to spend the next day resting and recuperating at Mudd's farm, knowing that he was still ahead of the news of his crime. Mudd had no idea that he was giving shelter to the president's assassin. Booth himself still did not know the fate of the rest of his accomplices and their victims, or if the gunshot had succeeded in killing Lincoln. Nor did he know that he would be condemned in the morning newspapers for his act. As Booth and Herold slept, a cavalry patrol rode from Washington in pursuit of the killer.

## CHAPTER 6

Stanton was gathering clues. Based on the letter found in Booth's hotel room, he believed that Booth had at least two co-conspirators named Sam and Mike and that the assassination was premeditated. He also still believed the Confederacy to be involved.

At the Petersen house, three doctors holding watches awaited the moment when Lincoln's heart would stop. Lincoln died at 7:22 AM on April 15, 1865. Reverend Gurley said a prayer, and Stanton wrote a telegram to spread the news of the president's death to all Americans. Lincoln's oldest son Robert told Mary Todd Lincoln that her husband had died. She could not bear to look at his corpse.

*Although the authorities were mistaken in their belief that Lincoln's assassination had been part of a larger conspiracy, in making his escape Booth was relying on the contacts he had made while conspiring to kidnap Lincoln. Booth's earlier conspiracy, however, had been rather unrealistic and those who joined him in planning it may not have been skilled or canny in the ways that would have been necessary to make it work. Nonetheless, until he got to the Deep South, Booth hoped to rely on these contacts.*



*Mudd had been a conspirator in Booth's earlier plan to kidnap Lincoln, but he had never consented to be part of a plan to assassinate the president. Because Booth was riding ahead of the news of what he had done, Booth could rely on this old connection without explaining the magnitude of his crime. Booth would show a callous disregard for the fate of co-conspirators throughout the periods before and after the assassination. He did not care about getting the informed consent of those who helped him; he only cared that his own ends were served.*



*Finding clues related to the earlier kidnapping conspiracy, Stanton's hypothesis that there was a larger plan at work seemed to be confirmed.*



*Lincoln's death occurred in a dignified atmosphere, with extreme attention paid to each detail so that it could be recorded for posterity. For those like Mary Todd who were personally affected by the tragedy of his death, the fact that he died as a martyr for his principles was little consolation.*





Once the room where Lincoln had died emptied out, Stanton cut a lock of Lincoln's hair as a **memento**. He put the lock of hair in an envelope addressed to Mary Jane Welles, the Secretary of the Navy's wife. Mary Jane had helped nurse Willie Lincoln and had consoled Mrs. Lincoln after Willie died. When the Welleses' own son died soon after, the tragedy brought Mrs. Welles and Mrs. Lincoln even closer together. Mrs. Welles later framed the lock of Lincoln's hair along with flowers that decorated his coffin as a memento. Having cut the lock of hair for Mary Jane Welles, Stanton looked at Lincoln's corpse and wept. Lincoln's body was then wrapped in an American flag and placed in a plain pine box. Lincoln was a man of simple tastes, and would have approved of this plain coffin. Soldiers loaded the box onto a wagon and Lincoln was driven to the White House, accompanied by a small group of soldiers, who had taken their hats off in a solemn show of respect.

Vice President Andrew Johnson was sworn in without pomp and circumstance in his hotel room at the Kirkwood House at 11 AM on April 15, 1865. In consideration of the tragedy which had brought him to power, he gave no public inaugural address.

John Surratt, whom Stanton suspected of killing Seward, was in upstate New York on the day of the attacks. He realized he was likely suspected, however, and fled to Canada and then to Europe. In Rome, he joined an army and was not captured until a year later.

In Maryland, the Thirteenth New York Cavalry led by Lieutenant David Dana was following up on leads received from informants. As would occur over and over throughout the manhunt, many of these leads were false.

Other than Lincoln, the executive branch of the government was still intact and no rebel army had stormed the capital. Now Stanton's focus was on capturing Booth and his co-conspirators before they made it into the Deep South, where they would find protection.

*Although Stanton had worked hard through Lincoln's last hours to create a dignified death chamber, he too was personally affected by Lincoln's death. He also realized that other people had suffered personally throughout Lincoln's presidency: Mary Jane Welles comforted Lincoln's wife after their son died so that Lincoln could focus on running the country. Unlike mementos meant to hold onto a piece of an important historical moment, the lock of hair for Mary Jane Welles was a testament to her personal contributions to the Lincoln family.*



*Johnson, who had not been Vice President during Lincoln's first term, hung back and allowed others with more experience in the Lincoln government to shape the public narrative about Lincoln's assassination and the approaching end of the war.*



*Although Surratt was part of the initial conspiracy, he did not happen to be in Washington on April 14, 1865. This saved him from being implicated in Booth's crime, but it meant that his mother was implicated in his place.*



*In the initial confusion, many citizens rushed to tell the authorities what they knew. Much of this information was untrue, irrelevant or misleading.*



*Once it became clear that there was not going to be an attempt to invade the North or otherwise dramatically change the course of the war in the aftermath of Lincoln's death, Stanton began to see that Booth may have not been backed by a larger Confederate conspiracy.*



At Mudd's farm, David Herold made casual conversation with the Mudds over breakfast. He gave no hint that he was afraid or in danger. Booth ate breakfast in bed.

At the Executive Mansion, doctors cut open Lincoln's body. This was unnecessary, but they claimed it was done for the sake of scientific investigation. They then removed the bullet from inside Lincoln's skull and preserved it. An embalmer then drained and preserved his blood in jars. Finally, they cut a lock of his hair off; his widow had requested it.

Mudd and Herold rode into the nearby town of Bryantown, where Herold hoped to find a buggy or carriage for Booth to ride in as they made their way South. Suddenly, Herold spotted Yankee cavalry. He told Mudd that he no longer needed the buggy and beat a hasty retreat to the farm. He had spotted the Thirteenth New York Cavalry, which was setting up a base of operations for the manhunt in Bryantown. This made Mudd suspicious.

Mudd went about his business, buying provisions for the farm and greeting neighbors. But then someone blurted out the news: the president had been assassinated by John Wilkes Booth the preceding night! Mudd kept mum, not telling the detectives and soldiers milling about everywhere that the wanted man was back at his farm in bed.

Back at the farm, Booth and Herold decided to trust that Mudd would not betray them. They waited for his return. Mudd returned and ordered Booth and Herold to leave the farm immediately. Booth was more preoccupied with the news that Mudd brought: he had succeeded in killing the president! Mudd had agreed to the kidnapping of Lincoln, but he did not want to be involved in this murder. Although he was angry to be involved in Booth's crime without his consent, he decided to help the assassin. He would not turn Booth and Herold in, and he explained how they ought to travel to avoid the cavalry in Bryantown. He told them of two farms where they could find shelter and receive help, one close to the Potomac River, which they would need to cross to enter Virginia.

Booth and Herold rode off, but despite Mudd's directions they got lost. They ran into Oswell Swann, a man who was half black and half Piscataway, and paid him seven dollars to guide them safely through a snaky swamp to the home of Captain Samuel Cox.

*The news of the president's murder had still not reached Mudd's isolated farm, so the fugitives continued to rely on the Mudds' hospitality without letting them know that this hospitality made them accomplices to murder.*



*Swept up in Lincoln's importance for the history of the country, the doctors tried to preserve as much as possible of Lincoln's body, turning it into mementos for sentimental reasons and medical specimens for dubious scientific ones.*



*The news of the assassination had now caught up with the assassins. From here on out, all their movements would need to be carefully planned to avoid the manhunters looking for them. They would be especially vulnerable to any Union soldiers, who could be identified by their gray uniform.*



*Mudd made a split-second decision to risk his entire life and future by continuing to shelter Booth and Herold. Although they had not been honest with him, their shared anti-Lincoln sentiments meant that Mudd would remain loyal to them anyway.*



*For the first time since committing the crime, the news had now spread far enough to let Booth know he had killed the president. Meanwhile, Dr. Samuel Mudd realized that he could not take back the crime he had committed by sheltering the fugitives after learning of their crimes. He decided to place the two fugitives' survival above his own interest, feeling that this was the right thing to do given the principles that the three men shared.*



*For the first time, Booth and Herold ran into trouble because of their unpreparedness to navigate a part of the country that was unfamiliar to them. In this case, they got lucky and found a guide who had not yet heard the news.*



## CHAPTER 7

Back at Ford's Theatre, Stanton ordered one of Lincoln's regular photographers to document the scene of the president's assassination. That Easter would be known throughout the country as Black Easter by all those who lived through it. Those rejoicing because of the war's end now mourned the president's death. Ministers across the country gave sermons addressing the tragic killing.

Booth and Herold arrived at Cox's home in the wee hours of the morning. Although it is unknown what Booth said to Cox, he must have confessed everything and used his skill as an actor to win Cox's support. Cox decided to help Booth and Herold. He told them it was too dangerous for them to travel on or for them to stay at his farm. He showed them a pine thicket nearby where they could hide and told them to only answer if they were approached by someone who gave a specific three-note whistle. The two men went to the thicket, lay down on blankets and slept under the stars. They were awoken by the chirping of birds a few hours later. There was nothing to do but wait.

Cox knew of a man who could help the two fugitives get across the Potomac. He sent his son to summon Thomas Jones. Jones was a veteran Confederate spy who had lost everything supporting the Southern cause. He had spent time in the Old Capitol Prison when he was suspected in the North of his pro-Confederate activities. He had also lost a great deal of **money** by buying Confederate bonds at the start of the war, and because his salary from the Confederate authorities went unpaid. Jones was unparalleled in his knowledge of rural Maryland and had helped ferry hundreds of spies across the river during the war. He knew exactly when to time a river crossing to escape notice. As soon as Jones heard that Cox wanted to see him, he wondered if it had something to do with Lincoln's assassin. When Cox affirmed this suspicion, Jones weighed what to do. The war, after all, was over. Jones decided he wanted to see Booth and Herold before he decided whether to risk his life again for the South.

*The process of coming together as a nation to address the killing of Lincoln was beginning. It was important to those Lincoln had left behind that his legacy be preserved, along with a record of his assassination that would show that he had died for his principles.*



*Booth was persuasive to Cox not only because he was an actor, but also because Cox was receptive to his message. Nevertheless, it was becoming more and more dangerous for the fugitives and for anyone who helped them. Cox could not risk having them stay in his house and he knew that if they were caught nearby he would be suspected. He took it upon himself to help them in crafting a strategy to evade manhunters. Booth and Herold had believed that they would need to move quickly to escape; now they were finding that this logic was incorrect. They would need to shelter in place.*



*Thomas Jones was a man whom John Wilkes Booth could admire. Booth wished to become a hero with a dramatic and consequential life, but he lacked Jones's real-world skills and ability to survive in the wild. Jones was also uncompromising in his support of the Southern cause, despite having already sacrificed his freedom for a period of time and lost much of his savings. Unlike Booth, who had never had to suffer poverty for the causes he believed in, Jones had been willing to be impoverished in the name of his principles. Booth had expected that all Southern gentlemen would have these attributes he so admired.*



Jones rode to the edge of the thicket and whistled the three notes. Herold stepped forward, aiming his gun at Jones and demanding to know who was there. Jones told Herold that Cox had sent him, and Herold led Jones to where Booth was concealed deep in the undergrowth. Booth, his face twisted by the pain in his ankle, told Jones that he had killed the president and was determined to escape or die trying. More than anything else, he did not want to be taken into custody. Jones instructed the two men to wait in the thicket. They would have to stay there for a few days, until the manhunters had moved further South, before they attempted to cross the Potomac. In the meantime, he would bring them food. Booth, filled with curiosity about how Lincoln's death was being portrayed, also requested that Jones bring them newspapers. Jones' simple plan would work to foil the thousands of men pursuing John Wilkes Booth.

Meanwhile, George Atzerodt visited a friend named Hezekiah Metz in Maryland. Another guest of Metz's asked jokingly if Atzerodt had killed the president. Atzerodt laughingly said yes. He also talked about the attack on Seward and his sons. Atzerodt left Metz's for his cousin's house, but unbeknownst to him, he had aroused one of Metz's guest's suspicions. This man would report Atzerodt to the local authorities.

Meanwhile, Samuel Mudd was worried. He did not want to turn Booth in, but he knew that other people had seen Booth at his farm and that he would eventually be suspected. He came up with a plan. He would send his cousin George, who was not a Confederate sympathizer, to make a vague report to the authorities. George would report that two strangers had come to visit his cousin Samuel. In a stroke of luck, George delayed carrying out this task, giving Booth additional time without the authorities on his trail.

In Washington, the manhunters were frustrated that they had no leads on Booth, only information on his accomplices. They had evidence that Booth was the killer and that Atzerodt had been supposed to kill the Vice President, but no idea how Booth had meant to escape. Although a man had given the name "Booth" to Sergeant Cobb at the bridge to Maryland, they had no idea where the killer had disappeared to after that. As time elapsed, the failure to catch Booth became an embarrassment for the government.

On Monday, April 17, Thomas Jones brought food and newspapers to where Booth and Herold hid in the thicket. He also carried corn with him; if he was stopped by Union cavalry he planned to say he was just going to feed his wild hogs in the woods.

*Now that the news of what Booth had done was circulating throughout the country, travelling during the daytime was too dangerous. This was especially the case in Maryland, which had not seceded from the Union. Once they crossed the Potomac into Virginia, they would be in Confederate territory. There, they thought that they would be able to depend on vetted contacts and sympathetic strangers for help. This new plan would depend on Jones to figure out the moment when it would be safe for them to seize the opportunity to try to move deeper into the South.*



*Now that the news of Lincoln's assassination had spread throughout the country, ordinary citizens were on high alert and eager to report any possible clues to the authorities. In some cases, this created false leads that distracted the manhunters, but in other cases it helped the manhunters find conspirators.*



*Samuel Mudd hoped to take advantage of the confusing atmosphere at the start of the manhunt. From the atmosphere in town, he understood that rumors were swirling around and that if he could create a lead that would not be very interesting to investigators, his true involvement might get lost in the fray.*



*Booth's capture was becoming an important matter of principle for the government. The authorities needed to bring Booth to court, try him publicly, and then execute him. This act of violence sanctioned by the state would counter Booth's rogue assassination of the president. It would also, they believed, deal a blow to the Confederate cause that Booth meant to support by killing Lincoln.*



*Jones, as a Confederate spy, had some of the same talents for deceiving people that Booth did as an actor.*



Booth, despite the worsening condition of his leg, was happy to finally read about himself in the newspaper, relishing the reading as if it were a review of his performance in a play.

*Booth had surely read about himself in the newspaper before, when reviews of his performances as an actor appeared, so seeing his name in print was not an entirely unfamiliar experience for him.*



At that moment, the three men heard the familiar sound of cavalry horses. There was no time to escape. They were outnumbered, Herold had never been in a battle before, and Booth was injured, so there was no way they could have fought if discovered. Lucky for them, the cavalry did not explore the thicket, but rode by, passing only two hundred yards from the fugitives' hiding place. Jones told Booth that this was all the more sign that Booth and Herold should stay put. Booth agreed, placing his full trust in Jones.

*This close call demonstrated how much the danger of the fugitives' situation was increasing as time passed. Although no dramatic confrontation with the cavalry occurred at that moment, Booth and Herold recognized that they would need to wait for the right chance to cross the river.*



Also on the morning of the 17th, Dr. Mudd waited for troops to come investigate his cousin George's report on the visit by two strangers. But George did not make that report until the next afternoon. Lucky for Booth and Mudd, Lieutenant Dana considered this lead old and irrelevant. He continued following other false leads. Mudd thought that the manhunters would soon leave Bryantown and the area around his farm, and perhaps his involvement would go undiscovered after all.

*To Mudd, it seemed like his plan to slip under the manhunters' radar was working and that he might escape discovery. This was true for the time being, but it seemed unlikely to last as larger and larger numbers of investigators joined the manhunt and as other clues began to suggest more about the trail the assassins had taken.*



In the thicket, Thomas Jones told Booth and Herold that it was too dangerous for him to carry horse feed when he came to see them the next day. Herold led the horses to a quicksand pit a mile away, shot them, and watched their bodies get swallowed up. Herold and Booth prepared for another night in the thicket, even more vulnerable and dependent on Thomas Jones for help than before.

*Once again, Booth and Herold faced the limitations of their preparations for their get-away. They had planned to move quickly on their horses to safety in the Deep South. Instead, feeding the horses while staying still in the thicket had become an unacceptable additional burden.*



## CHAPTER 8

Back in Washington, the authorities returned to Mary Surratt's boardinghouse. John Surratt was still suspected of being Seward's attacker, and the authorities wanted to arrest Mary and her daughter Anna to put pressure on them to talk.

*Still largely without clues about Booth's whereabouts, the authorities centered their focus on the Surratt family. Although John Surratt had had nothing to do with Lincoln's killing, his absence seemed suspicious.*



At the very moment when the women were being questioned, Lewis Powell showed up at the boardinghouse. Instead of Mary Surratt, a soldier answered the door and immediately began questioning Powell, who carried a pickax. Powell claimed Mary Surratt had hired him to dig a gutter for her. The soldier asked Mrs. Surratt for confirmation of the man's story. Although she recognized Lewis Powell, Mrs. Surratt denied ever having seen him before. Caught in a lie, Powell did not fight against the soldiers, but allowed himself to be arrested. Soon, the servant identified Powell as the man who had attacked Seward.

*Had David Herold not abandoned Powell at the Seward mansion, Powell would likely not have wandered straight into the arms of the authorities. Powell had lost the will to fight violently for his principles. The barbarity of his own actions when attacking the Swards had been too much for him. Two days spent hiding in a tree, uncertain of what to do next, had also softened his resolve to kill for Southern principles. Despite being armed, he let himself be taken in.*



Photographs of Confederate generals, Confederate President Jefferson Davis, and John Wilkes Booth found in her boardinghouse proved that Mary Surratt was a Confederate sympathizer. But under questioning, Surratt was careful not to reveal anything that investigator Colonel Wells did not already know. She gave nothing away about Booth's visit to her the day of the killing or about her ride to Surrattsville to prepare the shooting irons for the killer to pick up. Still, the investigator sent her to Old Capital Prison. She would never return to her boardinghouse again.

*Mary Surratt remained loyal to Booth. Through him she hoped to aid the Confederate cause, which she believed in. By prolonging the uncertainty surrounding the case and failing to disclose what she knew, however, she became a symbol of treachery against the Union. This failure to disclose what she knew made her an unapologetic enemy of the Union, and a prime candidate to receive the death sentence for her involvement.*



Also on April 17, the authorities arrested Michael O'Laughlen and Sam Arnold, who were mentioned in the letter found in Booth's room and who had been involved in the earlier failed kidnapping plot. They also arrested Edman Spangler, who had done nothing more than briefly hold Booth's horse in the alley outside Ford's Theatre. The Fords themselves and other theater employees were also arrested, under the suspicion that they had helped Booth to escape. In fact, more than a hundred people were arrested under suspicion of aiding Booth. But despite his fame, the authorities had no leads on Booth's whereabouts.

*Given the seriousness of Booth's crime, in the absence of any clue to his whereabouts, the authorities focused on arresting as many people as possible. They hoped to get maximal information out of all those who had dealt with Booth, whether they had known about his earlier plan to kidnap Lincoln or not. The authorities underestimated how much Booth's own expertise about the theater had allowed him to act independently on the night of the crime; they suspected the theater owners and staff of helping him.*



Edwin Stanton had already spent too much of his energy on the manhunt. After all, the war was not yet over, with Confederate armies still fighting in some places and Confederate President Jefferson Davis also being sought by manhunters. Stanton decided to delegate authority in the manhunt to Colonel Lafayette Baker, who had arrived from New York.

*Although a tipping point in the war had been reached, the forces of the North still had to deal with Southerners who would not give up fighting. The manhunt for Booth was only one element in the ever-changing political and military picture of the country in mid-April 1865.*



## CHAPTER 9

In the woods, Booth and Herold looked like the dirty, hunted fugitives that they were. They had planned to travel light and move quickly, not to camp out for an extended period in the woods. After crossing the river, Booth had planned to charm people into sheltering him in their Virginia households—but this would be dependent on his good looks and fine clothing, and these assets were slipping away with each day passed in the woods.

Booth was also shocked and disappointed by the coverage of the assassination in the newspapers that Jones brought him on his third visit to the thicket. He was roundly condemned for killing the president. Worse, whereas Lincoln had been a controversial president while he was alive, in death he was hailed as a martyr. Booth was also horrified by the details he read about Powell's savage attack on the members of the Seward family.

Booth found no sign of the letter he had entrusted to a friend to be delivered to the newspapers. He believed that the newspapers were suppressing this letter, but, in fact, his friend had feared being implicated in Booth's crime and had burned the letter instead of giving it to the papers. Booth opened a small notebook and began to write his own personal account of why and how he had killed Lincoln.

On Tuesday, April 18, the manhunters finally followed up on the tip they had received from George Mudd. George Mudd had already told them all he knew, so the manhunters took him with them to see Samuel Mudd. At the farm, the soldiers interrogated Mudd and his wife. Mudd gave vague answers, saying he had not known the identity of the man with the broken leg. He then told the manhunters that the strangers had gone west, sending them in a wrong direction. Although the investigator could not yet prove it, he suspected Mudd was guilty of something and planned to arrest him later.

In Washington, the presidential funeral procession created a solemn spectacle. Every building on Pennsylvania Avenue was wrapped in black crepe, and thousands came to see the president's open casket in the Capitol dome. At day's end, Lincoln's remains were loaded onto a special train bound for his hometown of Springfield.

*Booth had believed that his polished manners and appearance, along with his charms as an actor, would allow him to persuade people to help him. Being injured and dirty was a new experience to him, which might have shaken his confidence in his ability to gain people's trust.*



*A consensus was emerging around the nation about how to understand the killing of the president. The consensus was that Lincoln had been killed for what he believed in and that the country should rally around those beliefs in the name of the slaughtered president. Meanwhile, the savageness of Powell's attack further enhanced the popular impression that Booth and his co-conspirators were monstrous villains. Instead of inspiring the South to fight on, Booth's crime was inspiring the North to rally around its victories.*



*As would happen throughout the manhunt, Booth overestimated the willingness of others to put themselves in danger for him. He believed that everyone ought either to share his principles or be won over by his personal charisma, and he was furious when these calculations proved incorrect. Booth now wished to set the record straight for posterity.*



*Mudd sought to continue to feed the authorities misinformation in order to throw them off Booth's trail, but he was no practiced actor and something about his story rubbed the investigators the wrong way. As he tried to conceal the extent of his involvement with Booth, Mudd's story had odd and implausible holes in it. For instance, it would seem strange to anyone that Mudd had not discovered the identity of the man with the broken leg whom he had treated.*



*Along with newspaper coverage that defined the president's death as a martyrdom, the funeral procession through Washington was another moment that unified Americans around a single interpretation of the meaning of Lincoln's death.*



On April 20, 1865, detectives arrived at the house of George Atzerodt's cousin Hartmann Richter. Atzerodt should have realized that his room at the Kirkwood would have been searched and his connection to Booth uncovered. Instead he had spent time at his cousin's house in Maryland, unaware that he was in danger of being arrested. Richter at first told the detectives that Atzerodt was not there, but when they said they would search the house, he confessed that his cousin was upstairs. Atzerodt made a full confession. He gave details about the kidnapping plot and the conspirators' meeting on April 14. He also described Mary Surratt and Samuel Mudd's involvement in the scheme.

With two of the four central conspirators in captivity, Stanton issued a proclamation. He would pay \$100,000 for Lincoln's killers: Booth, Herold, and John Surratt. Posters with the men's photographs and the amount of reward **money** went up across the country.

## CHAPTER 10

On Thursday, April 20, Thomas Jones saw the cavalry ride away. The manhunters had heard that the assassins were spotted in a different county. Jones brought the news directly to Booth and Herold, telling them it was now time to attempt the river crossing. Jones led Herold and Booth to his house. Booth rode a horse while the other two men walked. Jones brought them food and then immediately headed to the river. Jones had arranged for a servant to leave on the river. Jones waded into the river and found the boat, and then he and Herold helped Booth in. Herold sat in the bow to row, while Booth would steer. Jones showed Booth which direction to go on his compass, and warned the two men to hide the light from the candle he gave them so that they would not be noticed by patrol boats. Jones then told Booth the name of a contact across the river.

As Jones pushed the boat off, Booth tried to give him a handful of Union bills. Jones refused the **money**, saying he had not helped them in order to profit. At last, he accepted eighteen dollars for the cost of the boat.

Jones returned to his farm, reassured to think that Booth and Herold would soon be in Virginia. He would never see the two men again. And little did he know, they were rowing in the wrong direction!

*Although Atzerodt had not gone through with his part of the conspiracy, he had still failed to turn his co-conspirators in. It was an oversight on Booth's part, however, to think that he could bully Atzerodt into murdering the Vice President. Booth did not have Atzerodt's full loyalty, and the details that Atzerodt would give in his testimony to the authorities would help them figure out Booth's whereabouts.*



*With the manhunt already five days along, Stanton was impatient to capture Lincoln's killer. He now sought to appeal not only to Americans' desire for justice against Lincoln's killer, but also to their desire for personal enrichment.*



*Jones had waited for the right opportunity to guide Booth and Herold on to the next stage in their escape. Now that the cavalry had ridden out of town, he thought that they would have a better chance of safely crossing the river. It might have aroused the authorities' suspicions if it had been found out that Jones had crossed the river that night, so he could not escort them. But Jones brought them food and a boat, in addition to providing them with his deep expertise as a Confederate spy who had often smuggled people across the river. It was up to Booth to follow his directions and steer the boat.*



*Once again, by refusing to accept any money despite having been impoverished during the war, Jones lived up to all of Booth's ideals about the behavior of principled man who supported the Confederate cause.*



*Once again, Booth's skills proved to be too impractical to help him in the task he had undertaken. In the context of the theater, Booth could have acted the part of a fugitive killer beautifully, but to actually navigate a river at night was a different matter.*





In Bryantown on April 20, investigators re-questioned Samuel Mudd. This time, Mudd said that the stranger had worn a false beard. Mudd also revealed that he had met John Wilkes Booth before, the preceding fall. This admission made Mudd's story sound less convincing to the investigators: how could Mudd have failed to recognize Booth if he had already met the famous actor before and had even hosted him at his farm in the past. After hours of questioning, Mudd was shown a picture of John Wilkes Booth and said that, now that he thought about it more, the stranger had been John Wilkes Booth. After he agreed to sign a statement the next day, the exhausted Mudd was allowed to ride home. In the end, Mudd's lies ended by delaying the investigators long enough to give Booth time to reach Virginia.

Thomas Jones and Captain Cox were both eventually questioned and arrested because of their known Confederate sympathies. But the two men did not incriminate themselves, and the authorities had no witnesses to prove their involvement. They were both released. It was not until decades later, when Thomas Jones told his story to a journalist, that the part he played in Booth's escape would become known.

Herold relished being on the move again as he rowed on the Potomac River. Booth checked the compass and saw that they were rowing the wrong direction. They had rowed north, instead of west and then south along the riverbank on the Virginia side of the river. They were still in Maryland and, what was worse, farther north, in a more dangerous area than they had been before their boat journey. It was the early morning. Herold recognized the area and knew of people who lived nearby with whom they could shelter. There, they received news and were fed.

What Herold and Booth learned was not comforting. There were manhunters swarming the area. The reward offered by the War Department had brought out droves of troops and detectives. There was no way to escape except back across the river. Yet instead of moving to recross the river into Virginia that night, the two fugitives inexplicably waited another night in Maryland.

Government forces were closing in on the fugitives. The knowledge that Booth and Herold had left from Mudd's farm helped the manhunters narrow their search. It was also known that Booth was on crutches and that he had shaved his mustache. Information was spread quickly by couriers on horses and telegraphs. Soldiers were told to enlist the help of fishermen and others on the river to be on the lookout.

*Mudd sought to stay loyal to Booth and the principles they shared, but he did not have the ability to lie convincingly to investigators. His lies became more complicated, tipping detectives off to the fact that he was feeding them bad information. Mudd began to cave under the pressure, unsuited as he was to lying to authorities. But although he was not a good liar, the time it took investigators to get a clear answer from Mudd turned out to be enough time to give Booth the opportunity to make it across the Potomac to Virginia.*



*The role played by two of the men who helped Booth the most during the manhunt was not exposed until decades after the fact. This suggests that there might be other accomplices to Booth's escape whose role was never uncovered and whose story has been entirely lost to history.*



*Booth's confidence in his own abilities, derived from his success on the stage, did not translate into practical skills that he needed for his real-world escape from manhunters. Luck was on the two fugitives' sides once again, however, as they were able to find a place to shelter, despite still being in Maryland.*



*The uncertainty of the early days of the investigation had given way to much more organized teams of manhunters. Booth and Herold's delayed departure may have happened at Booth's request. Unused to the rigors of living outdoors, Booth would go on to convince Herold to shelter in place again.*



*During this delay, the manhunt for the fugitives was getting more and more organized. New information was helping the manhunters, while the increasing number of manhunters increased the likelihood that the fugitives would be caught soon.*



## CHAPTER 11

On the night of April 22, Booth and Herold finally made the river crossing and stepped foot on Virginia soil. Herold left Booth by the boat and walked half an hour to their contact, an ex-Confederate spy named Elizabeth Quesenberry. Once Herold told Mrs. Quesenberry that he had been sent by Thomas Jones and that he was travelling with an injured companion, she may have guessed who that companion was. She decided it was too big a responsibility to shoulder alone, and got the help of other operatives to secure horses for the two men so that they could journey south as quickly as possible.

Booth and Herold rode to the house of Dr. Richard Stuart. Even though Mudd had sent them, Dr. Stuart was suspicious of the ridiculous cover story Herold told him and did not want to help them. Reluctantly, he fed them. By the end of the meal, Dr. Stuart understood that the dirty, desperate men in front of him were the fugitive killers of Abraham Lincoln. He ordered them to leave. Booth was disappointed in Stuart and later sent him a critical letter with **money** enclosed to pay for the meal that he had given them so unwillingly. This money was an insult to Stuart, whom Booth felt had failed to show proper Southern hospitality.

Expelled from Dr. Stuart's, Booth and Herold sought help and a place to stay at a nearby house owned by a man of color named Lucas. Only after Booth threatened Lucas with violence did Lucas allow them to stay the night. The next day, for twenty **dollars**, Lucas's son Charlie drove the two men to Port Conway in a wagon. Booth and Herold were dropped off at the house of William Rollins, who they asked to take them across the Rappahannock River to Port Royal, where there was a railroad station.

At that moment, Booth and Herold saw three soldiers. They got ready for a fight, but were soon reassured to see that the men were Confederate soldiers. At first, Herold pretended that they were also Confederate soldiers who wanted to travel South and continue fighting. But when one of the soldiers, Willie Jett, asked Herold who they really were, Herold confessed: "we are the assassins of the president!" The three soldiers decided to accompany Booth and Herold across the river and help them in any way they could on the other side. The successful crossing of the river and the newfound support of Confederate strangers inspired joy in Booth, who yelled, "I'm safe in glorious old Virginia, thank God!"

*Once again, Booth and Herold were lucky enough to benefit from the experience of a more experienced Confederate operative. In this case, Elizabeth Quesenberry knew her own limitations and reached out to her fellow Confederate sympathizers for additional help. This realistic attitude towards her own capacities can be contrasted to Booth's belief in his own abilities to survive in the wild, despite his experience being mostly limited to the stage.*



*Booth's experience with Dr. Stuart was, perhaps, his sharpest disappointment in his expectations for Southerners to stand by him in upholding Southern principles. In the first place where he sought shelter in the South, he did not receive the Southern hospitality he expected to encounter wherever he went in the South. By sending Stuart money in the mail, Booth meant to suggest that Stuart was incapable of doing anything selfless out of principle, and that he would instead only act for his own gain.*



*Booth would not have expected a black man to treat him with hospitality, nor did he show that man any of the respect he felt was owed to white men. As a flipside of this, he saw it as natural that he would pay for a service from someone whom he thought could not be his equal.*



*Having found sympathetic support from Confederate soldiers, Booth felt that he was finally going to begin getting the support for his escape and respect for his deed that he deserved. Booth feared the negative publicity of the trial that would inevitably follow his capture, but he eagerly desired the positive attention that he thought he would get among Southerners who considered him to be a hero. Meeting Jett and his friends felt to him like the beginning of a new chapter in his story.*



In Virginia, Willie Jett brought Booth and Herold to the farm owned by Richard Garrett. He presented Booth as a wounded Confederate soldier and asked Garrett for shelter. Garrett, whose sons had fought in the Confederate army, agreed to take them in. Booth told Garrett that he had been wounded in battle and was now on the run from Union cavalry.

Meanwhile, the investigation was changing course. Lafayette Baker, a favorite of Stanton's, was deceitful and egotistical in his approach to the manhunt. He wanted to capture the killers and get the credit and reward **money** for it. He was even willing to steal other detectives' tips for this reason. While snooping around a telegraph office, he heard a tip that two men had crossed the Potomac. Baker contacted his cousin, Luther Byron Baker, and told him to ride out to pursue this lead.

Word was sent by telegram to Lieutenant Edward P. Doherty to report to Luther Byron Baker. Baker showed Doherty a freshly printed photograph of Booth and two other men. Colonel Baker would stay behind in Washington, but Edward Doherty, Luther Baker, and Everton Conger went by steamboat to Virginia. It was April 24, and the manhunters rode on horseback with the troops they commanded. They were now on the right trail and would reach the place where Booth had crossed the Rappahannock the next afternoon.

At the Garrett farm, Booth enjoyed a pleasant evening with the Garretts and slept in a proper bed. Herold rode with Willie Jett and his two comrades, Ruggles and Bainbridge, into Bowling Green to buy a new pair of shoes. He would return to Garrett's the next day.

Meanwhile, the cavalry divided forces to search Virginia farmhouses more quickly, with Everton Conger leading one column and Edward Doherty the other. It had taken Booth ten days to reach Port Conway from Washington. The cavalry, relying on fresh information transmitted by telegraph and traveling by steamboat, traversed the same distance in one day.

At Garrett's farm, Booth spent a leisurely day with the Garrett family, who did not know his true identity. John Garrett reported that there was now a \$140,000 reward placed on the heads of Lincoln's killers. Booth joined the family in speculating as to the assassins' motivations for killing the president. Booth said he would try to get a horse and then ride south to join a Confederate army that was still fighting. But at this point, Booth was becoming too comfortable. He ought to have left sooner and continued south, placing more distance between himself and the Union troops.

*Although Booth felt more confident now that he was in Virginia, he followed Jett's lead and kept his identity as Lincoln's killer a secret. Garrett took Booth in based on a shared principle, but there was no certainty that he would take Booth in if he knew who Booth was.*



*Stanton had led the investigation out of a sense of his duty to Lincoln and to the Union cause. Lafayette Baker, in contrast, was much more interested in rewards and fame than in catching Booth out of principle. For this reason, he made sure to give the tips he found to his relative, so that he could keep credit for the capture of Booth in the family.*



*The manhunters now had good information and ample resources. Unlike the earlier confusion, when cavalry spread out across Maryland, searching for Booth in every town, there was now a specific tip about Booth's whereabouts and dedicated officers assigned to follow that tip and see if it would produce the fugitives.*



*Booth and Herold felt that they needed to improve their appearances in order to win over the acquaintances that they would make in the South.*



*Now that the authorities had good information, they were able to use the recent technological innovations of the telegraph and steamboat to move quickly in pursuit of Booth and Herold. The fugitives had, for many days, relied on more antiquated travel methods (rowboat and horse) for their escape.*



*Surrounded by comfort and people to talk to, Booth began to rest on his laurels. Instead of doing the practical thing, which would have been to continue further South as quickly as possible, he enjoyed exercising his skills as an actor, pretending to be another man speculating at Booth's motivations.*



On the Garretts' porch, Booth spotted men on horses riding past the gate and panicked. This reaction alarmed Richard Garrett. Then, when a man approached the house, Booth asked Garrett's eleven-year-old son to run upstairs and get him his pistols. It was only David Herold returning from town, and no gun battle broke out. Booth's reactions, however, had startled the Garretts.

Booth told Herold he wanted to spend another night at the Garretts'. Herold thought this was a mistake. The fugitives were surprised, however, when John Garrett, who was overseeing the farm while his father was away on business, refused to let them stay another night.

On April 25, the Sixteenth New York Cavalry rode into Port Conway. Luther Baker questioned William Rollins, who told him he had brought a man with a broken leg and three Confederate soldiers across the river the day before. Rollins also helpfully told Luther Baker that Willie Jett was courting a young woman whose father owned a hotel in Bowling Green. The soldiers followed this lead in search of Jett.

At 4:00 PM on April 25, Ruggles and Bainbridge rode to Garrett's farm with a warning for Booth: the Union cavalry had crossed the Rappahannock and would likely be there soon. Having delivered this warning, Ruggles and Bainbridge rode off. Booth and Herold ran and hid in the woods behind Garrett's house.

This new bout of strange behavior from his guests worried John Garrett even more. He ordered them to leave, saying he would help them find transportation, but Booth and Herold said they would not leave until the next morning. That night's dinner was nothing like the friendly dinner of the day before. As the fugitives discussed how to find transportation, John Garrett grew suspicious that Booth and Herold intended to steal his father's horses. After dinner, John Garrett told the two men that they could not sleep in the house. He would allow them to shelter in a tobacco barn. Booth and Herold settled in for the night, and they did not notice when the Garrett brothers locked them into the tobacco barn. The two brothers camped out outside the tobacco barn, suspicious that the fugitives would steal their horses.

In Bowling Green, Doherty, Baker, and Conger found Willie Jett at the Star Hotel, just where William Rollins had said he might be. They interrogated him harshly, trying to frighten him. Jett gave in: he agreed to show the soldiers where Booth and Herold were.

*Once again, Booth failed to realize the limitations of his own charm. Although he had spent a pleasant day with the Garretts, his odd reaction to the sight of horsemen passing by and to a man approaching the farm tipped them off that there was something he was not telling them. They began to suspect that they were being taken in.*



*Booth believed that the Garretts shared his principles and would therefore continue to show him the Southern hospitality he expected.*



*Rollins had not known that he was helping Lincoln's killer and he felt no loyalty toward Booth. He immediately gave the most crucial information of the entire manhunt, giving the investigators the key to finding the fugitives.*



*Booth and Herold's ability to get information from contacts was being badly outstripped by the coordinated efforts of the government. This was the last piece of information they would receive before their capture.*



*It seems odd that the Garretts were unaware that Booth and Herold were Lincoln's killers, as Swanson's account suggests. Surely, if the Garretts had seen the posters advertising the \$100,000 reward for Lincoln's killer, they would have recognized the famous face of John Wilkes Booth. More likely, the Garretts knew who Booth was and were scared that Booth would steal their horses in order to escape. In this case, it suggests that the Garretts might have been willing to shelter Booth out of shared principles, but not to allow him to take their property.*



*Instead of protecting Booth out of shared principles or personal loyalty (as Booth would have expected), Jett gave in when faced with the prospect of likely execution for supporting Booth.*



As the cavalry arrived at Garrett's farm, the barking of dogs and the clanking metal sounds of the horse riders woke Booth. He and Herold tried to escape the barn and were stunned to find themselves locked in. With Booth's injury, the two men did not have the combined strength necessary to break a board in the wall and climb out.

At the farmhouse, the cavalry demanded that Richard Garrett take them to the killers. He was reluctant to do so. Doherty grabbed John Garrett and put a gun to his head, demanding that he give up the assassin's location. Reluctantly, Garrett told the manhunters that Booth and Herold were in the tobacco barn. Baker then ordered John Garrett to enter the tobacco barn and take the fugitives' weapons from them. John Garrett refused, unwilling to risk his life. Baker told him he would have to do it, or see all the Garrett property burned.

Baker unlocked the barn door and pushed John Garrett inside. Garrett told Booth that he was caught and should give himself up. Booth damned Garrett for betraying him and threatened to shoot him. Garrett fled. Swanson speculates: why had the twenty-six armed soldiers sent an unarmed civilian in to confront Booth? Surely a few casualties would have been worth the honor of capturing the assassin.

Booth spoke to the manhunters, buying time and refusing to leave the barn. Herold, on the other hand, wanted to turn himself in. In his mind, he was not guilty of anything. He had only accompanied Booth, not killed anyone. Booth at first refused to let Herold turn himself in, but then he called him a "damned coward," and let him leave. Herold stuck his hands out of the barn door and was grabbed and whisked off by the soldiers.

Booth knew that this moment would go down in history. He was keen to script the perfect ending to the dramatic performance begun the night he killed Lincoln in Ford's Theatre.

Baker and Conger argued over what to do next. If they waited until morning, Booth would be able to see the manhunters and pick them off one by one with his weapons. A sergeant named Boston Corbett offered three times to go into the barn and fight Booth one-on-one, but Doherty ordered him back to his position. Conger and Baker decided to burn the barn to force Booth to come out.

*At this point, the two fugitives' luck had turned. They were not prepared to make an escape, even if they had been able to get out of the barn. Their options for action had run out.*



*Garrett's refusal to show the cavalrymen where Booth was hiding was a further suggestion that he knew who Booth was and wished to protect him out of their shared principles. Only once his son and his farm were threatened (which placed his survival on the line) was he willing to give up those principles. Next, the manhunters sought to force the son to risk his life for their principles.*



*At the moment of confrontation, the cavalrymen proved reluctant to fight for their principles. They first tried to make an innocent bystander take on this task for them and Booth took this bait and blamed Garrett for treachery he had not committed.*



*Herold failed to grasp how culpable he was in the eyes of the law for having aided Booth during his escape. Booth, on the other hand, turned on Herold at the last moment, giving Herold no credit for all that Herold had already done for him. Booth's uncompromising sense of how principles should guide behavior allowed no exceptions, even for such a close comrade.*



*Although he was about to be killed or captured, Booth was so thoroughly an actor that he focused on the part he was to play and not on his own emotions.*



*Once again, the manhunters were not operating under the same set of assumptions as Booth. They did not want to risk their lives in order to capture him and defend their principles. Nor did they want to give him the chance to honorably die in a duel, as Corbett offered.*



Conger ordered the Garrett sons to pile straw on the side of the barn. Hearing the noise, Booth threatened to shoot the Garretts. They retreated. Then Booth challenged the twenty-nine manhunters to fight him honorably in a duel. Baker declined. Conger lit the kindling. As the barn burned the manhunters could see Booth inside.

Booth could either burn to death, shoot himself, or come out and try to fight the manhunters. More than anything else, Booth did not want to be captured and brought back to Washington for a very public trial and hanging. He decided to fight the manhunters. Encumbered by weapons and crutches, Booth hopped forward, readying himself to do battle with the assembled men.

Meanwhile, Boston Corbett walked to the side of the barn and spotted Booth through one of the gaps in the barn walls. As he saw Booth preparing to bring a carbine into firing position, Corbett shot Booth with his revolver. Booth crumpled to the ground.

Baker and Conger rushed into the barn to retrieve Booth. Booth was paralyzed and unable to speak as they brought him out of the barn and laid him on the grass. The bullet had passed through his neck and spinal column. Eventually, he managed to speak, saying “tell mother, I die for my country.” The soldiers brought Booth to the Garretts’ porch and tied David Herold to a tree nearby. He would have to watch, powerless, as his friend died.

Booth begged to be put out of his misery, but Conger told him they wanted him to get well. Back in Washington, Stanton wanted to interrogate Booth, whom he thought was only a pawn in a larger Confederate conspiracy involving Jefferson Davis.

Conger angrily demanded to know who had shot Booth. Boston Corbett stepped forward, saying he had shot Booth to protect his comrades. Since Conger, Baker, and Doherty had failed to explicitly tell their men to hold their fire, Corbett’s action was not against protocol.

*To the end, Booth wanted to fight in a matter that aligned with his principles. Duels were an important part of the Southern culture of honor; being burned alive while cowering in a barn was not.*



*Booth was not only remaining loyal to his principles at this moment, but also to his instincts for what would make the most striking conclusion to the drama he was spinning with himself as a central character. By trying to fight twenty-nine men while injured, he hoped to be remembered for incredible bravery.*



*Booth expected to face gunmen coming from the front but not the side. Like Abraham Lincoln, he was struck unexpectedly and went down without a fight.*



*At this moment, which Booth had hoped would cement his image as a brave hero, he did not get to engage the manhunters in a battle, nor did he get to give a moving final speech. Instead, the actor, who was so used to filling a full room with the sound of his own voice, could barely get a single word out.*



*Stanton wanted to find out from Booth who else had been involved in Lincoln’s killing, and he also wanted to give Booth a very public trial and execution. By executing Booth, Stanton hoped also to strike a death blow to the principles Booth had lived for.*



*In the moment of true danger, Boston Corbett had killed Booth. The lives of his comrades were more important than the principle that the authorities hoped to prove by putting Booth on trial and executing him publicly.*



A doctor arrived and determined that Booth was dying. “My hands,” Booth whispered as he died. Baker raised Booth’s hands so that the dying man could see them. “Useless, useless,” Booth said. As the sun came up, John Wilkes Booth died.

*As he faced death, Booth’s last words expressed despair, but in a very dramatic and memorable way. It is difficult to say if, as he died, he finally faced his limitations as a human being, or if he continued to act the part of a hero and defender of a lost cause until the very end.*



## CHAPTER 12

Lieutenant Doherty sewed Booth’s corpse into a blanket and put it into a wagon for transfer back to Washington. Conger rode ahead, hoping to be the first to tell Stanton the news that Booth was dead. In Washington, Conger and Baker presented Stanton with Booth’s compass and diary. Stanton made sure the body was Booth’s. He ordered an autopsy and an inquest. He also had a few people identify the corpse.

*Although Booth was dead, investigators would still seek to learn as much as possible from his personal affects, especially his diary. They wanted to make sure all of Booth’s accomplices were punished.*



Newspapers were filled with detailed stories about the climactic moments at Garrett’s farm. Reporters also sought to cover the story of Booth’s burial, but Luther Baker prevented this. He staged a fake “burial at sea,” then buried Booth in a plain crate at Old Arsenal Penitentiary. The grave was unmarked.

*To keep Booth from being seen as a martyr, the authorities prevented people from attending the burial. Otherwise, Confederate sympathizers might have used mementos of Booth’s life to preserve his memory just as Lincoln’s supporters did.*



## CHAPTER 13

Stanton put eight defendants on trial: Mary Surratt, Lewis Powell, David Herold, George Atzerodt, Samuel Arnold, Michael O’Laughlen, Edman Spangler and Samuel Mudd. Mudd was the only person who helped Booth during his escape to stand trial. Captain Cox and Thomas Jones were never punished for the aid they gave the president’s killer.

*Several accomplices from the earlier conspiracy to kidnap Lincoln were tried for Lincoln’s death, despite having killed no one, while those who were most instrumental to Booth and Herold went unpunished.*



Hundreds of manhunters sought to claim a piece of the reward **money**. In the end, sums ranging from \$500 to \$15,000 were awarded to Conger, Doherty, Lafayette Baker, Luther Baker, and to the noncommissioned officers at the barn, including Boston Corbett, and to Colonel Wells and other interrogators. Nineteen other men received smaller awards for their help capturing George Atzerodt and Lewis Powell. Richard Garrett made a claim against the government for compensation for his burned barn, which was rejected. Boston Corbett was never punished for killing Booth. He enjoyed a period of fame, then went insane and disappeared.

*Some of the manhunters may have been more interested in receiving the reward money for capturing Lincoln’s killers than in defending the principles Lincoln stood for. For soldiers like these, who had been through four long years of war, this money would help them to build new lives and provide for their families. This desire was one that Booth might have disdained as being lacking in principle, but the loving father and husband Abraham Lincoln would certainly have understood.*



## CHAPTER 14

After a rapid trial in May and June, Mary Surratt, David Herold, George Atzerodt, and Lewis Powell received death warrants on July 6, 1865. They would be hung the next day. Since Booth was already dead, his co-conspirators were now the focus of the attention. They were paraded to the scaffold, with their arms bound and their faces covered by hoods. Nooses were slipped over their necks and they were hung simultaneously at 1:26 PM on July 7.

*During the months of the trial, the war was still slowly coming to an end. This made it all the more important that the authorities make an example of some, but show leniency to others. Samuel Mudd, who helped Booth, was not executed, while Mary Surratt was. The authorities may have wished to show the public that, because Mudd had eventually confessed, he was to be forgiven. Through this act of mercy, the authorities could suggest to Southerners that they would not punish them harshly for what had happened during the war.*



## EPILOGUE

President Andrew Johnson released John Wilkes Booth's body to his family in 1869. He was buried in a family plot in Baltimore, Maryland, although no headstone marks the grave.

*To counter the principles that Booth stood for, the authorities sought to prevent making his grave a shrine to those principles. In contrast, the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. stands to immortalize the principles Lincoln lived for.*



Today at Ford's Theatre, a museum preserves the **mementos** collected after the assassination: including Booth's keys, his photos of his girlfriends, his Deringer pistol and his compass. The museum serves as a memorial both to Lincoln and to Booth. But although Booth has gone down in history, the causes he gave his life for all failed. He failed to prolong the war or to preserve a system of slavery. Lincoln became the true hero of the story that Booth set in motion with his plot to assassinate the president. Across the street from Ford's, there is another museum at the Petersen house. There, visitors can stand where Lincoln's friends and family did as they watched him die and vowed to continue to fight for the causes he believed in.

*By killing Lincoln, Booth created a role for himself in history that would far exceed the fame he earned as an actor. But his intention was to be the hero of the story and to change the course of history, and in this he failed. He overestimated his own ability to reshape history at one stroke, using personal charm and skills learned on the stage. Booth also underestimated the legacy that Lincoln had already built by the time of his death.*







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