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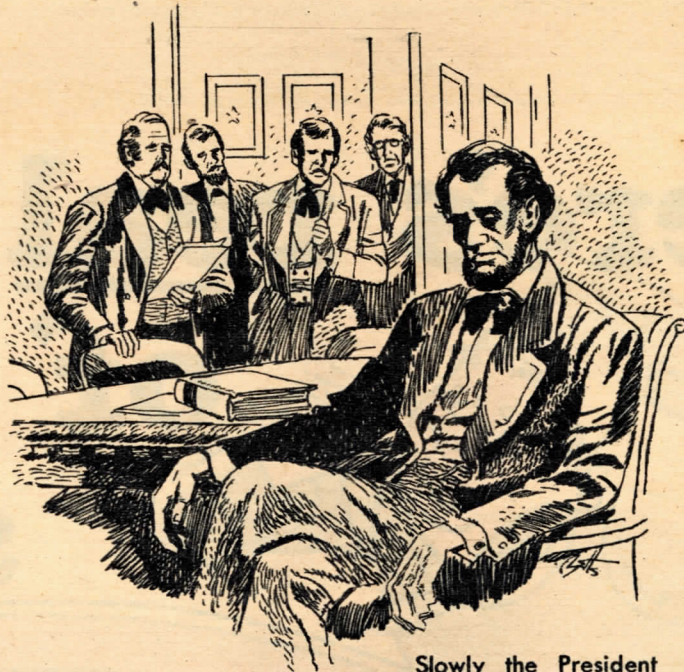
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Slowly the President raised his weary head

## The Night Of April 14

BY SIDNEY CARROLL

Historians are still baffled by the strange events leading up to the death of Lincoln

THERE are superstitious scholars who can find an evil eye for you in every historical fact. But when it comes to the facts concerning the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, even hard-headed historians start believing in omens, portents, curses.

There were several mysteries connected with the assassination. For example, on the afternoon of April 14, 1865, Mr. Lincoln called a meeting of various high officials of the government. Those gentlemen walked into the conference room, saw the President seated at one end of the long conference table with his eyes closed. They were shocked by the "grave and worn" expression on his face.

As they came closer, the Presi-

dent slowly raised his head, said, "Gentlemen, before long you will have important news." Somebody asked him, "What, sir? Have you had bad news? Is it anything serious?"

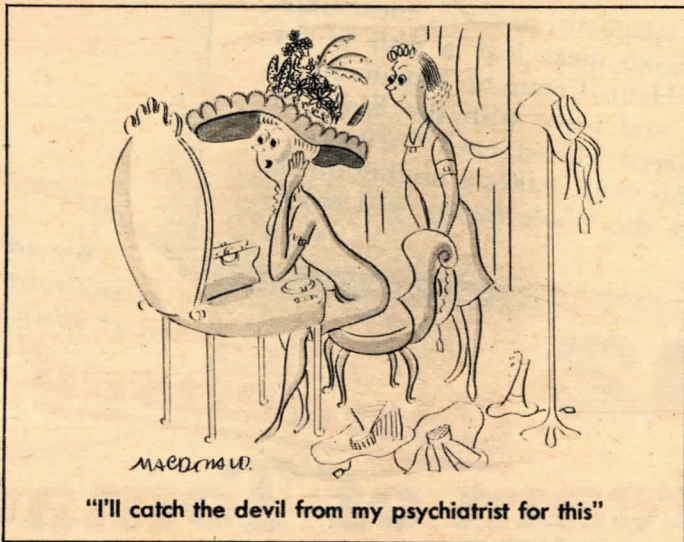
The President answered, "I have heard nothing; I have had no bad news; but you will hear tomorrow." They asked for details.

### A Portentous Dream

THE President explained, "I have had a dream; I have dreamed that dream three times — once before the Battle of Bull Run, once on another occasion, and again last night. I am in a boat, alone on a boundless ocean. I have no oars, no rudder — I am helpless. I drift! I drift! I drift!"

Five hours later, at approximately 10 o'clock that evening, John Wilkes Booth put a bullet into the President's brain.

That is one reason why so many sober observers and his-



"I'll catch the devil from my psychiatrist for this!"



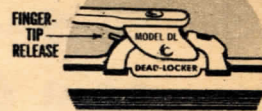
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torians insist that April 14, 1865, was a night on which witches flew over Washington. Surely, they whisper, there were more things in heaven and earth that day and night than are dreamt of in any historian's philosophy.

As another example, consider the people in the box with the President and Mrs. Lincoln that night.

Miss Clara Harris was the daughter of the Senator from New York. Major Henry R. Rathbone was the stepson of the same Senator. Miss Harris and Major Rathbone, guests of Abraham Lincoln at the theater that night, were soon to be married. They and Mrs. Lincoln flanked the President when Booth entered the box in Ford's Theater.

He came in, a shadowy presence, quietly closed and barred the door behind him. He had a pistol in one hand and a dagger in the other. He walked straight up to the President, placed the pistol to the massive dark head, and fired.

#### The Major Was Occupied

Now, had Major Rathbone been paying less attention to the comedy on the stage and to his pretty fiancée, he could have prevented the crime of the century. But he was sitting next to his sweetheart and looking down at the stage. Who can blame him if his thoughts were too carefully divided between love and laughter to be spared for the sudden appearance of shadowy strangers?

Immediately after the shot, he jumped up. Though a "slight, smallish man," as the history books say, Rathbone had courage. He "threw himself upon Booth." The two men, actor and soldier, fought in the space behind Lincoln's crumpled figure. Booth, still armed with a dagger, slashed at Rathbone and cut his arm. **Rathbone fell to the ground, and Booth escaped by vaulting over the box, jumping a dozen feet onto the stage.**

History has paid very little attention to Major Rathbone. Though he was not eight feet from the President when the shot was fired, though he was the man closest to one of the great American catastrophes, his subsequent history is almost forgotten. So is that

of his fiancée, the "young and lovely" Miss Harris. Historians can only assume that the Major was haunted for the rest of his days by the knowledge that he was the man who might have saved Lincoln's life. For in later years the short and smallish Major shot and killed the lovely Clara Harris, and ended his own days in an insane asylum.

Omens? Dire portents? A black curse on all concerned?

#### An Accomplished Jumper

OTHER peculiar things happened that night, but one in particular merits the skeptic's close attention: In jumping from the box to the stage, Booth broke his leg.

It was quite a jump to the stage — for ordinary people. But Booth, in terms of stage experience, was an accomplished "jumper." He was one of the hellfire-and-calisthenic school of acting, a kind of Douglas Fairbanks of his day. In "Macbeth," the agile Booth used to leap to the stage from a rock 12 feet high. What then, to such a man, was a drop of a dozen feet from the box to the stage?

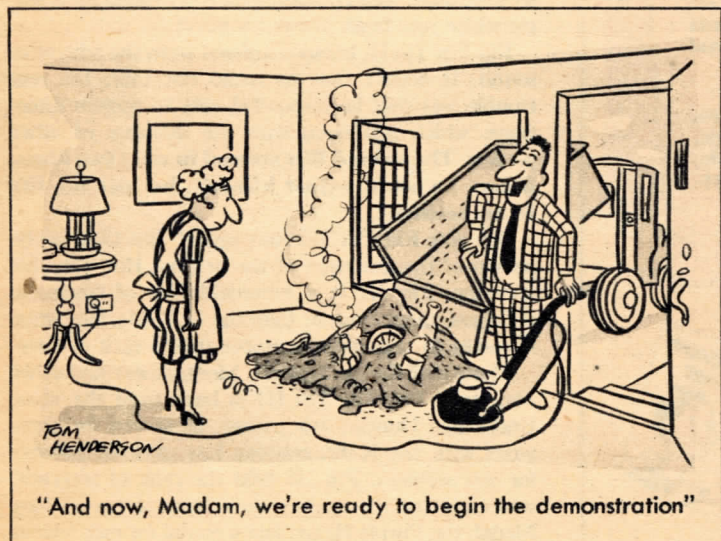
It was nothing. Booth could have done it any day in the week, blindfolded. He knew it, and it was an integral part of his plan.

What he didn't grasp was that April 14, 1865, was not just any night of the week. It was the night on which the President and Mrs. Lincoln honored Ford's Theater with a visit, and the management had gratefully decorated the Presidential box with bunting.

#### Tripped by a Flag

Booth was wearing spurs, for he was to rush through the theater, leap on his waiting horse and ride to safety. But when he vaulted from the box, one of his spurs caught in the bunting. And that is why Booth, the experienced jumper, fell so clumsily to the stage and broke his leg. And it was because of the broken leg that he was eventually trapped in a barn, and killed.

Booth, the perfect planner, hadn't figured on bunting — and on the strange forces that were at work that night. He hadn't figured on being tripped up by an American flag. *The End*



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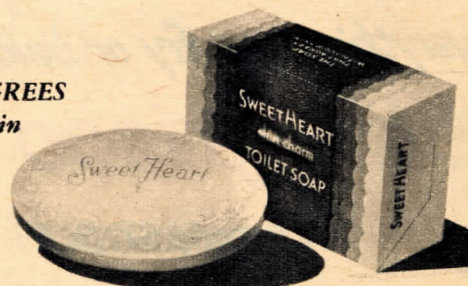
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