

Excerpt from: **The Diary**

Secretary of War Edwin McMasters Stanton gazed at the items on his office desk. They had belonged to John Wilkes Booth, the dead murderer of the now-sainted President Abraham Lincoln. One of the articles drew his particular attention. It was a small pocket-sized notebook, the kind carried by businessmen to record appointments and such. As the Secretary picked it up, he reflected on where the United States found itself this April 27, 1865--just eighteen days after the surrender of General Robert E. Lee's Confederate army and thirteen days after the foul murder of the President at a play in Ford's Theater.

Stanton had permanently closed down Ford's--that evil den of traitors, as he saw it--and arrested its whole staff, managers and players alike, as suspected collaborators of Booth. It would never open its doors as a playhouse again, if the Secretary had his way--and he would. Stanton, as head of the vast Union war machine, was now virtually the leader of the Union government by default. The new President, Andrew Johnson, was still getting familiar with the executive branch and continually incapacitated from the flu. Some suspected that he might have been poisoned as a part of the diabolical plot to destroy the Union government.

The most experienced cabinet member who could aid Johnson, Secretary of State William H. Seward, was himself a victim of attempted assassination at the same hour as Lincoln. Besides having his throat cut, Seward still suffered from the deleterious effects a serious carriage accident, ten days earlier. It was later realized that had Seward not been cut up by Louis Paine, one of Booth's henchmen, his carriage injuries might have killed him. Paine's knife relieved the pressure of a hematoma that doctors at the time of the accident were afraid to lance for fear he would bleed to death. The upshot of all this was that Stanton, graciously and deservedly, at least in his own mind, would step into the breach and run down and try the Lincoln assassins. The country would expect no less, he assured himself. He could already hear the band playing "Hail to the Chief" in 1869. At odd intervals, Stanton's smugness could be overbearing. This was one of those times.

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