Frederic Hunter
**Abe and Molly:
The Lincoln Courtship**

**A novel with extensive historical notes about this true story.**

**"A wonderful book" -- James M. McPherson, Historian and Pulitzer Prize winner for *Battle Cry Of Freedom***

Excerpts from chapters 1, 2, and 4

From Chapter One:

By herself while a waltz played in the ballroom, she quite unexpectedly found herself thinking of the scarecrow Lincoln. Fanny had dared her. Should she talk with him?

Downstairs, she found Elizabeth and said, "Present me to Abraham Lincoln, will you, please? He must be miserable. He's been standing all evening like a stork at the edge of a pond, afraid to get his feet wet."
"He's awkward around women. And does not dance," said Elizabeth.

"For religious reasons? Is he one of those?"

"Mr. Lincoln is not religious," said Elizabeth. Then she whispered, "I am quite sure Mr. Lincoln does not dance because he does not know how to dance."

"Does he smile?" Molly asked. "I want to get him to smile. Surely he smiles."

"Tells stories not fit for a lady's ears, so Ninian says. And cackles while he tells them."

"Perhaps I can get him to tell one to me," said Molly.

"I declare, Molly," said Elizabeth, smiling and shaking her head. "You are that limb of Satan Miss Betsey always contends you are."

"Present me to him. He's just across the room."

The two sisters circled the dance floor and approached Lincoln. He glanced at them, gave them a half-smile and moved back beneath a candle sconce to let them pass. They stopped be-fore him. "Mr. Lincoln," said Elizabeth, "I don't know that you've had a chance to talk with my sister Molly. She's a new arrival from Lexington. She thinks our prairie countryside suits her taste."

Having provided these bits of information, Elizabeth smiled at Lincoln expecting him to take the cue, ask a question or make a comment. He only nodded, a look of mild apprehension on his face, and held his hands more tightly behind his back. Elizabeth turned to Molly, a smile frozen on her lips, and waited for her sister's Lexington social graces, well learned at the knee of Madame Mentelle from Paris, to come to the rescue.

"Are you a preacher, Mr. Lincoln?" Molly chirped brightly.

Lincoln looked surprised at this suggestion and shook his head.
"Excuse me," Elizabeth said. "A hostess must never be still." She moved off, leaving Molly to cope with this fellow famous for his gawkiness, odd clothes and black hair that seemed always to escape the discipline of a comb.

"I ask," said Molly, "because the evening I ar-rived here I saw you baptizing."

"Baptizing, ma'am?"

"In a horse trough." Lincoln smiled sheepishly. "You must be a very fine Christian yourself."

Lincoln watched her, leaning back, smiling quizzically as if uncertain what was happening. Molly supposed no woman had ever talked to him this way.

She continued, "I believe you're one of the famous young men of this community."

Lincoln looked surprised at these words coming from this vivacious young woman with soft brown hair and flashing eyes. He, a famous man of the town?

"Are you not famous, Mr. Lincoln?" Molly teased. "Did you not get a murderer acquitted because he was threatened by a deadly chair?"

Lincoln gave a guilty half-smile and said nothing.

Molly appraised him. "You are so tall, Mr. Lincoln!" she burbled. "Longest of the 'Long Nine,' I've heard. Is that so?"

Lincoln shrugged as if his tongue were tied in knots.

The "Long Nine" were a group of legislators from Sangamon County, all standing over six feet tall. The group's signal achievement had been to lead the wheeling, dealing and conniving needed to get the state capital moved from Vandalia to Sangamon County's own Springfield, an effort consuming several years.

Molly leaned back exaggeratedly, mocking Lincoln, setting her small hand across her brow. "Well, you must be the tallest of them. You're seven or eight feet, I daresay. I can hardly see your brow. How's the weather up there?"

Lincoln smiled, but was still too uncertain of himself to speak.
"You mustn't be discombobulated that I called you famous. Fame comes and goes."

"Does it? I haven't made its acquaintance."

"You will, Mr. Lincoln. I assure you. I have a sense about these things and I'm never wrong."

Lincoln shrugged, pleased with this flattery, and stole a look at Molly.
"You're the partner of my cousin, Congressman Stuart, are you not?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You served together in the Black Hawk War, I believe I heard. And chased those Injuns right across the Mississippi River. And became a hero. Am I right?"

Lincoln grinned sheepishly and stared at his feet. Molly leaned backwards exaggeratedly, her fingertips at the middle of her back as if to keep her erect.

"I hardly know what to say, Miss Molly." His voice was strangely high-pitched for a man with such a long throat in which his sound could resonate.

"You're not a war hero?" Molly asked.

"We did have a fine time soldiering. Maybe 'cause we hardly saw an Injun."

"Really?" Molly grinned at him flirtatiously. It was always amusing to see how men reacted to flirting. Douglas reveled in it; this one seemed hardly to know what to do. She chirped on, "All these Kentucky cousins of mine who served with you tell me the fighting got as hot as the Revolutionary War."

Lincoln looked uncertain of what to say. She was so bright, so full of wit, that if he were not careful he would say the wrong thing. Certainly he must not contradict the boasts of those Kentucky cousins.

"Maybe it was the sun that was hot," Molly suggested, "and not the fighting." She appraised him. "You serve on the Town Board, do you not?"

"Yes, ma'am, I do."

"And in the Legislature?"

"I do."

"Why, Mr. Lincoln! We've only met and you're already saying 'I do' to me!"
Lincoln laughed and blushed.

"Is that all you have to say for yourself?"

"I could say this, Miss Molly. I want to dance with you in the worst way."

From Chapter Two:

Brilliant sunlight spilled from the window. Molly smelled the aroma of fresh-baked bread rising from the kitchen; the Irish girls would have already returned from mass. Molly stretched, wondering whom she'd been dancing with when she woke earlier, and was grateful to Elizabeth for not badgering her to attend church. She lay with her eyes closed, feeling a breeze stirring through the open window. When she heard the carriage leave the yard, she sat up in bed, took pencil and paper from the bedside table and, resting against the pillows, began to list the potential beaux she had danced with. She wrote the first name . . .

Stephen Douglas. Never had she seen such an enormous personality crammed inside so diminutive a package. Still, there was something magnetic about him: the sparkle in his eyes, his easy laughter, the resonance of his deep voice. He exuded self-confidence in a way that drew people to him. She had felt drawn to him herself-like a willing subject to a mesmerist. Hmm. She stared across the room at the spring sunlight flooding through the window. She would be careful about Douglas. She laughed: he was so tiny! Why, any one of the Long Nine could toss him half way to Lexington! She smiled at the idea of his flying through the air, trying to regain his self-possession. Then she realized, of course, that he would not have lost his self-possession. He would turn that flight to his political advantage.

She wrote: James Shields. The blarneying, hand-squeezing Irishman. Hard to tell if there was any heft of personal qualities. Shields claimed to have taught French to farmers' sons in Kaskaskia. She giggled, shuddering to think of quelle sorte de français it was, effroyable, probably. At least she'd been smart enough not to start chattering away to him in the society French Mme. Mentelle had taught her.

She wrote: \_\_\_\_\_\_ Webb. She couldn't remem-ber the first name. A widower. Also small. Much too old. With children. That tempted her to cross him off. Around the Long Nine it was hard to be impressed by small, wispy men.

James Shields was good-looking. Too bad he was so aware of the fact.
She wrote: Joshua Speed. The truly good-looking man was Speed. Also very personable. Think of having him across the breakfast table for thirty years! There'd never been a spark between them. Too bad. But then he was a storekeeper. Without the intellectual weight or mental cunning of the lawyers.

She wrote: Elias Merryman. Anson Henry. Both doctors. She barely remembered them.

She wrote: Abraham Lincoln. The so very tall Mr. Lincoln. She stared at the ceiling. Surely it was a mistake: boasting to him about all the geometry she knew. Certainly Fanny was right. Not a good idea to remind men on the edge of a frontier that was still being settled that she was smarter and better educated than they were.

From Chapter Four:

Renting a horse at the livery stable, Abraham Lincoln threw across his saddle the large leather bags that carried legal papers and texts. He rode out of town on Jefferson Street, headed toward Carthage, some one hundred fifteen miles distant. On Monday the Hancock Circuit Court would convene there. On Tuesday he and Lyle Dickey would defend Billy Fraim on a charge of murder. Riding along, he thought fleetingly of Molly Todd, of her vivacity and wit. Most of the time he thought about Billy Fraim. The young man had worked as a laborer on steamboats until the night fourteen months before when, drunk, he had stabbed a man to death. It would not be easy, Lincoln knew, to convince the Carthage jury that a young drunk with a long-bladed knife was acting in self-defense.

If he had appeared at Elizabeth Edwards's ball in a satin waistcoat and silk tie, this Saturday morning he wore pantaloons that rode well up his calves when he sat in the saddle. His coat and vest were too loose. His coarse black hair, customarily in rebellion against whatever comb he had recently pulled through it, was hidden by a rust-colored hat. The hat itself looked as if its owner had sat on it continually since its purchase. His expression was melancholy. Fraim's case worried him.

Leaving the town, Lincoln noticed a haze of green enveloping the trees. Buds were beginning to open on twigs. Grass shoots obscured the dead gray-brown vegetation that had lain across the prairie all winter. A hint of coming warmth was in the air, a taste of spring, but only hints and tastes of it this early in the day. Barely two months beyond his thirtieth birthday, Lincoln huddled into his coat and pulled the woolen muffler tighter around his neck.

Seven years before when he had captained volunteers from the village of New Salem in the Black Hawk War, the prairie had seemed wilderness. Peopled by savages. Hostile in its silence, in its deceptive emptiness. It had harbored un-knowns, all the dangers and threats of violence that people who had lived in wilderness knew from their struggles, victories, failures.

It was no longer wilderness now, no longer si-lent. It was purged of savages. Now its grasses sang. Its birds and insects gave forth music. Its emptiness was only illusion, for the prairie had been surveyed. Lincoln himself had done some of the surveying. Lines that no one could see, but were nonetheless real, divided the prairie into counties; they platted parts of the counties into town lots.

Lincoln looked across the prairie. Its dark loam, black as a man's hat after rain, lay a foot and a half thick beneath him. Sometimes it was three feet thick. The soil seemed to cry out: "Buy my plots. Make me farms. Lay roads across me. My soil is the richest in the world. It will give you food; it will give you fortune!"