1920
The Year of the Six Presidents

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A MEMBER OF THE PERSEUS BOOKS GROUP
NEW YORK

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The Players in Our Drama

Nan Britton—A small-town girl with a big crush; she's taken a shine to the next president of the United States, United States Senator Warren G. Harding—and she will bear his child.

Heywood Broun—The Republican *New York Tribune*'s in-house radical. Trenchantly brilliant observer of the 1920 Democratic and Republican conventions.

William Jennings Bryan—The "Silver-Tongued Orator of the Platte." Legendary voice of the old agrarian-based populism. Three-time Democratic presidential nominee. Woodrow Wilson's disgruntled pacifist Secretary of State. Waiting in the wings in 1920, but the times have passed him by.

Carrie Chapman Catt—Prohibitionist. President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. In August 1920, her battle for women's votes races to its conclusion.

Professor William Estabrook Chancellor—The obsessively racist Ohio college professor whose accusations that Warren Harding is part black tosses the election into last-minute turmoil.

Calvin Coolidge—Silent Cal. The taciturn Vermonter who became Massachusetts's coldly efficient governor. His words following the September 1919 Boston police strike ("There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, anytime") transform him into presidential timber. In Chicago, the GOP convention stampedes to anoint him its vice-presidential candidate.

Grace Goodhue Coolidge—Calvin's charming and ever-patient wife. Her husband writes: "She has borne with my infirmities, and I have rejoiced in her graces." No one disagreed with the assessment.

Governor James Middleton Cox—Warren Harding's feisty Democratic twin, a small-town Ohio newspaper editor who dabbles in state politics, has his own marital troubles, and, when no other candidate proves suitable, wins a presidential nomination of dubious value.

Josephus Daniels—The North Carolina segregationist and prohibitionist newspaper baron. Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of the Navy and FDR's long-suffering boss.

Harry Micajah Daugherty—The unsavory Ohio politico and lobbyist who attaches himself to Warren Harding and rides him all the way to the Attorney Generalship—and ultimately to disgrace.

Eugene Victor Debs—Imprisoned anti-war Socialist Party ideologue and editor. "Federal Prisoner 9653" campaigns for the presidency from his Atlanta Penitentiary jail cell—and garners nearly a million votes.

Henry Ford—Hero of the American industrial revolution, father of the burgeoning auto industry, pacifist, politician, and, as publisher of the *Dearborn Independent*, the nation's premier anti-Semite.

Marcus Garvey—Jamaican-born founder of the mass-movement Universal Negro Improvement Association. Self-proclaimed Provisional President of Africa. Garvey launches a black-owned steamship company, numerous other black businesses—and the back-to-Africa movement.

Admiral Cary Grayson—Woodrow Wilson's personal physician. With Edith Wilson, Grayson hides President Wilson's crippling infirmities from the American people.

Florence Kling DeWolfe Harding—"The Duchess." Warren Harding's strong-willed older wife. The brains behind his modest newspaper empire. The Duchess prophesizes: "I can see but one word written above his head if they make [Warren] President, and that word is Tragedy."

Senator Warren Gamaliel Harding—Ohio small-town newspaper editor, Republican politician, and serial adulterer. His strengths: He looks like a president, sounds like a president (if you don't listen too carefully), and is sufficiently vague on most issues to be nominated. "America's present need," he intones, "is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy." America agrees.

Colonel George B. Harvey—Publisher of *Harper's Weekly* and *The North American Review*. Wilson's earliest political backer. Wilson openly repays Harvey with ingratitude and scorn. At the 1920 Republican convention, Harvey will demand to know if Harding's record contains anything to disqualify him from the presidency. Harding will lie.

Will Hays—Indiana-born chairman of the Republican national committee. The nation's savviest political operative. Presidential timber.

William Randolph Hearst—America's most controversial press baron. Still a radical Democrat, he opposes the League of Nations and toys with third-party presidential schemes.

Herbert Hoover—The Great Engineer. International gold-mining adventurer. Multimillionaire. Savior of war-ravaged Europe's starving masses. Political progressive. A key member of the Wilson administration. A national hero. In 1920, Hoover covets the presidency but has one big problem: He can't decide if he's a Republican or a Democrat.

J. Edgar Hoover—The ambitious young Justice Department lawyer who orchestrates Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's anti-radical crusade.

Colonel Edward Mandell House—The brilliant, manipulative little Texan who flatters his way into Woodrow Wilson's heart. Wilson loved him—until he dumped him.

Senator Hiram W. Johnson—Theodore Roosevelt's 1912 running mate hopes to inherit TR's progressive mantle. Johnson's liberalism alienates the right. His "irreconcilable" isolationism alienates the left. His personality alienates everybody. Johnson looked, said one historian, "like a bad-tempered baby."

John T. King—Bridgeport, Connecticut's Republican boss. He manages TR's campaign, then Leonard Wood's. "John supplies the efficiency," says TR, "and I supply the morals."

Albert D. Lasker—The Texas-born Chicago advertising genius who—despite isolationist misgivings—helps fuel Warren Harding's 1920 campaign steamroller.

Senator Henry Cabot Lodge—The quintessential Boston Brahmin. Author. Classical scholar. Intellectual. Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Lodge's loathing of Woodrow Wilson ("I never expected to hate anyone in politics with the hatred I feel toward Wilson") helps fuel his vendetta against Wilson's League of Nations.

Alice Roosevelt Longworth—TR's daughter, wife of House Speaker Nicholas Longworth, lover of progressive Idaho Senator William E. Borah. The most deliciously acerbic observer of Washington's social scene—and of Warren Harding.

Governor Frank O. Lowden—Illinois's capable, middle-of-the-road Republican reform governor. A prime contender for the nomination. His presidential ambitions founder on charges of campaign irregularities.

Dudley Field Malone—The trusted Wilson crony who quits his lucrative patronage position to protest the imprisonment of suffragettes. Later, he seeks the presidency on a radical third-party ticket.

William Gibbs McAdoo—Wall Street lawyer and financier. Secretary of the Treasury. Woodrow Wilson's son-in-law. McAdoo plans to succeed his father-in-law in the White House. His problem: Wilson has no intention of leaving.

H. L. Mencken—The Baltimore *Sun*'s dyspeptic observer of both major conventions, nearly laid low during the Democratic convention by San Francisco's creature comforts. The "creator of a new and distinct style of journalism . . . 'big-city smartass.'"

Lucy Mercer—Eleanor Roosevelt's social secretary. In 1917, Eleanor discovers that Lucy has become too social with Franklin. The affair permanently damages the Roosevelt marriage, but some excuse it. "He deserved a good time," TR's sharp-tongued daughter Alice observes; "he was married to Eleanor."

A. Mitchell Palmer—Wilson's ambitious Attorney General. After an anarchist bomb destroys Palmer's home, Palmer transforms himself from Quaker progressive to fierce Red-hunter, jailing 10,000 radicals, deporting 556, and warning of a Red uprising—all while gearing up for a presidential run. His chances evaporate when the uprising never occurs.

Alice Stokes Paul—Anti-war activist. Hunger-striker. Suffragette leader. Founder of the National Women's Party. Vengeful forces bar her from enjoying suffrage's triumph.

Mary Allen Hulbert Peck—Engaging, artistically inclined New England widow. Was she Woodrow Wilson's correspondent, friend, and Bermuda-vacation chum? Or his lover?

Senator Boies Penrose—Boss of the Pennsylvania Republican Party and unofficial leader of the national GOP's stand-pat wing. Is he

manipulating the Republican National Convention from his Philadelphia sickbed?

Carrie Fulton Phillips—Marion, Ohio, housewife and friend of Warren and Florence Harding who became Warren's most dangerous mistress. German sympathizer. She successfully blackmails her lover during the 1920 presidential campaign.

William Cooper Procter—Millionaire Ivory Soap manufacturer. Early adversary of Woodrow Wilson. In 1920, Procter manages Leonard Wood's campaign. His soap floats. His candidate sinks.

John R. Rathom—The controversial, rotund, Australian-born *Providence Journal* publisher who exposes FDR's scandalously inept handling of an explosive homosexual scandal at the Newport Navy base.

Eleanor Roosevelt—TR's niece. FDR's fifth cousin and wife. By 1920, their marriage is already seriously frayed from his infidelities. A sheltered child of privilege, her social conscience is just beginning to emerge.

Franklin D. Roosevelt—The handsome, jaunty, Harvard-educated dilettante who hopes to parlay his Roosevelt pedigree and charm into the presidency. He's already retraced TR's steps as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Is he mature enough to go farther?

Theodore Roosevelt—The Rough Rider himself. President. Historian. Cowboy. Police commissioner. Trust-buster. Explorer. Naturalist. Big-game hunter. Nobel Prize-winner. He has been president once—and wants the job again. Only the hand of God can keep him from the White House in 1920.

Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti—Italian immigrant anarchists accused of murder and robbery. Their case explodes into an international cause célèbre.

Colonel William J. Simmons—Inspired by D. W. Griffith's *The Birth*

of a Nation, this failed ex-preacher creates "The World's Greatest Secret, Social, Patriotic, Fraternal, Beneficiary Order" of them all—the infamous Ku Klux Klan.

Mark Sullivan—America's foremost political journalist. Republican.

William Howard Taft—The seventh president on the scene for the election of 1920. Taft has learned his lesson and wants no part of the White House. Once derided as a hide-bound conservative, Big Bill Taft now personifies moderation: pro–League of Nations and anti-Wilson.

Joseph P. Tumulty—The savvy New Jersey Irish Catholic politico who serves as Wilson's loyal and efficient personal secretary.

Wayne B. Wheeler—Wily boss of the Anti-Saloon League. He bestows prohibition upon a thirsty nation.

Edith Bolling Galt Wilson—"America's First Female President." The Washington, D.C., jeweler's widow who became Woodrow Wilson's second wife. Their whirlwind courtship provokes scandalous Washington whispers. With her husband incapacitated, she rules the nation.

Woodrow Wilson—Brilliant, eloquent, progressive, and self-confident. But also bigoted, self-centered, stubborn, and messianic. He grandly envisions a League of Nations to prevent future wars, but can't sell the idea, either at home or abroad. Compromising article after article of his Fourteen Points, he sows the seeds of another war. "Woodrow Wilson is an exile from the hearts of his people," says Gene Debs. "The betrayal of his ideals makes him the most pathetic figure in the world." An October 1919 stroke leaves him too crippled to lead the nation, but the nation is never told. Fantastically, he hopes for an unprecedented third term.

General Leonard Wood—A law-and-order Man on Horseback. Heir to TR's "Rough Rider" traditions. Early favorite for the 1920 Republican nomination.

Chapter 1

"Discover a Common Hate"

The President of the United States lay bleeding on the bathroom floor.

He could not move.

He could not speak.

He lay abed for weeks, an unshaven, listless old man, never to recover.

Less than a year before, the world was his, the nation he led victorious in war, the world's peoples begging him to fashion the peace, create a new world order, end the killing.

Their cheers had been loud. They had not been long. Plans lay ruined, dreams shattered.

Woodrow Wilson lay bleeding on the bathroom floor—thirteen months to the day before the 1920 presidential election.

Woodrow Wilson thought thirteen his lucky number.

His very name contained thirteen letters.

He taught at Princeton for thirteen years.

As the thirteenth president of Princeton, he presided over thirteen hundred students.

When an influential backer first boomed him for president, the man listed thirteen of Wilson's qualifications.

Thirteen miles measured the distance from his home to his first campaign office.

The Electoral College formally elected him on January 13, 1913.

Thirteen governors and thirteen state militias marched in his inaugural parade. Princeton students marched thirteen abreast.

When he landed in Europe to make peace, it was on Friday, the 13th—by design.

When he returned to Europe to finalize that peace, it was the 13th—again by design.

Woodrow Wilson lay bleeding on the bathroom floor—thirteen months to the day before the 1920 presidential election.

Six presidents—Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, Franklin Roosevelt—would compete in that election, men whose rule spanned five defining decades of American history, whose eras and personas ranged from Normalcy to New Deal, from Trust-Buster to Silent Cal, from Great War to Great Depression, all six vying in a single contest.

Never before, and never again, had so many presidents jostled so closely, in a battle marked by tradition and by innovation, influenced by old bosses and by new voters, by high principle and low scandal, by fear and by hope.

1920—the year of the six presidents, the election that witnessed the birth of modern America.

But of all the six presidents in our drama, merely one *actually* was president in 1920—and he lay bleeding on the bathroom floor on October 2, 1919, exactly thirteen months before election day, 1920.

And so we start with him.

Three accidents of birth had fashioned Woodrow Wilson. His Scotch blood made him "canny, tenacious, cold, and perhaps a little exclusive"—

as he himself confessed. His Southern roots bestowed fierce loyalty to the Democratic Party and a deep, powerful dose of Anglo-Saxon racism. His religious background provided a profoundly moral outlook, and though there is no evil in righteousness, there is in self-righteousness, which Wilson possessed in abundance. As his press secretary, Ray Stannard Baker, once phrased it, "He is a good hater."

Born in Staunton, Virginia, on December 28, 1856, Thomas Woodrow Wilson grew up in Augusta, Georgia. His parents, Presbyterian minister Dr. Joseph Ruggles Wilson and Janet "Jessie" Woodrow, came from clerical families. Thoroughly Southern in sympathy, they bequeathed their loyalties to a son who never forgot hearing with dread the news of Lincoln's election and later of seeing a defeated Jefferson Davis paraded in handcuffs.

Dyslexic, Woodrow initially displayed little brilliance. But he persisted, taught himself shorthand, and attended Charlotte, North Carolina's Davidson College before graduating from Princeton in 1879. He studied law at the University of Virginia, then enrolled at Johns Hopkins where, in 1886, he obtained a doctorate in political science. His dissertation, "Congressional Government," earned him a publishing contract and a reputation as a rising author and scholar.

He taught at Bryn Mawr and Wesleyan before returning to Princeton in 1890 as a professor of jurisprudence and political science, establishing himself as the university's most popular and influential lecturer. If academicians can be stars, Professor Wilson was a star.

He was a charismatic instructor and great orator. To look at him, you would think his voice thin, reedy, prissy. It was not. It was a rich baritone, manly and forceful. Its very sound convinced audiences as much as his high-flown ideas and ideals. It convinced them and made them say: *This* was a leader. *This* was the sound of the future.

In June 1902, university trustees unanimously elected him university president, Princeton's first without formal theological training. Wilson modernized and reformed the once-sleepy campus, improving its academic standing and democratizing its aristocratic institutions. Yet he remained a political conservative, as his biographer Arthur Link noted, "a foe of Bryanism, governmental regulation, and the restrictive practices of labor unions."

He had already established a solid imperious streak, so focused on the importance of his ideals (and of their guardian—himself) that he ignored the feelings of even his closest supporters. Once, he summoned his staunchest admirers—from New York, from Philadelphia, from Baltimore, from Chicago—and, for two full hours, proceeded to lecture them on his plans for the university. No conversation. No questions. No answers. And no thanks for interrupting their schedules and traveling to Princeton. Finished, he bade them a terse good morning and showed them the door. It was the same when he was president. To a group of senators and congressmen, he delivered an hour-long lecture. Again, there was no dialogue. They were there to hear, admire, and obey. Even Mississippi Senator John Sharp Williams, an ardent Wilson loyalist, snorted "And he calls that a conference."

At Princeton, Wilson lost two bitter battles. The first involved his plan to integrate undergraduates and resident faculty on an English "quad" model. Opposed by faculty and alumni, compromise was in order. Wilson didn't and wouldn't. When his best friend among the faculty, John Grier Hibben, urged negotiation, Wilson cut him finally and irretrievably dead, a pattern he repeated ceaselessly—a stubborn refusal to compromise followed by the jettisoning of old disciples who failed to blindly obey their master.

Wilson's second major altercation involved Graduate School Dean Andrew F. West. West wanted a new residential graduate campus built somewhat distant from the main campus. Wilson wanted it at Princeton's center and somehow managed to transform this petty academic squabble into a national moral concern. "Will America tolerate the seclusion of graduate students?" he thundered. "Will America tolerate the idea of having graduate students set apart?"

One doubts if America cared then—or ever—about such issues, but the controversy accelerated Wilson's transition from hidebound conservative to idealistic progressive. Wilson won the war of high-flown rhetoric, but West trumped him in the donation department. First, he secured $500,000 from Procter and Gamble's William Cooper Procter (Procter's wife had been West's student at a Cincinnati high school), the offer hinging on *not* using Wilson's site. Then, West received an $800,000 bequest from the estate of alumnus Isaac C. Wyman, whose will stipulated

that the money be used to build the school near where his father fought in the Revolutionary War Battle of Princeton. These massive cash infusions tipped the scales. "We have beaten the living," Wilson admitted, "but we cannot fight the dead. The game is up."

Enter Colonel George Harvey, the conservative Democratic publisher of both the *North American Review* and *Harper's Weekly*. Harvey had grown rich under the tutelage of Wall Street financiers William Whitney and Thomas Fortune Ryan. Present at Wilson's inaugural as university president, he departed Princeton, convinced that Wilson was a great man, the embodiment of the leadership Democrats needed to recapture the White House. He ordered that each front page of *Harper's Weekly* run the banner headline FOR PRESIDENT—WOODROW WILSON, helping elevate the only hitherto moderately well-known academic to a position as a reasonably viable presidential possibility. On January 18, 1908, the *New York World* front-paged that same message. Anonymously, Harvey had written that too.

But first, Wilson needed to win some other elective office, and the New Jersey governorship would do just fine. In 1910, Harvey persuaded James Smith Jr., the state's most powerful Democratic boss (he controlled Newark's Essex County), to nominate Wilson.

Both Harvey and Smith thought Wilson still to be conservative, and Smith thought Wilson could be trusted not to attack his machine. Wilson vowed that he would not, providing he remained "absolutely free in the matters of measures of men."

Wilson won comfortably. Democrats captured the traditionally Republican state legislature. Here lay great opportunities and pitfalls. Would Wilson prove conservative or progressive? How strong would he push for a reform agenda against the Machine Democrats in the legislature? Wilson, however, faced an even more dangerous dilemma. State legislators still elected United States senators at that time—the Sixteenth Amendment, providing for their direct popular election, was not yet in force—but New Jersey had just held its first advisory primary on the subject. No one—particularly Democrats, who thought the legislature would remain Republican—took the vote seriously. Accordingly, few people voted, and the "people's choice" was Democrat James E. Martine, a longtime political joke alternately known as "Farmer Jim," "The Sage of

Cedar Brook," and "The Farmer Orator." Smith, who had served in the United States Senate in the 1890s, now saw an opportunity to return to Washington. He asked Wilson for support. Wilson said no, writing Colonel Harvey:

> I have learned to have a very high opinion of Senator Smith. But his election would be intolerable to the very people who elected me and gave us a majority in the legislature. It was no Democratic victory. It was a victory of the "Progressives" of both parties, who are determined to live no longer under either of the political organizations that have controlled the two parties of the State. . . .

The bewhiskered, bespectacled Martine became a United States Senator, but the bigger winner was Wilson. His high-profile break with the bosses made progressives forget (or at least forgive) his conservative, boss-ridden origins. Next came a flurry of progressive reforms—the initiative and referendum (both derided in Wilson's academic days), a corrupt-practices act, regulation of public utilities, and direct primaries. Wilson earned even more antipathy from the state's Democratic machines. On July 25, 1911, State Democratic Chairman James R. Nugent—Jim Smith's nephew—publicly raised a toast: "To the Governor of New Jersey, the commander-in-chief of the Militia, an ingrate and a liar. I mean Woodrow Wilson. I repeat, he's an ingrate and a liar." Wilson got Nugent fired, but Nugent and Smith soon had their revenge, sandbagging their own candidates to hand the legislature back to the GOP. Better the Republicans, they thought, than the Honorable Woodrow Wilson.

Wilson had now established (albeit rather late) solid progressive credentials and an image as the bookish but manly professor valiantly combating the bosses. He also had some problems. Losing his legislative majority was one. The impending end of his gubernatorial career was another: New Jersey law limited him to a single three-year term. He now focused on the biggest prize of all: the White House.

Moving leftward, Wilson quickly distanced himself from Colonel Harvey, whose conservative politics now embarrassed him. Wilson—as he had cast off Senator Smith and Jim Nugent—now jettisoned not only Harvey but also another conservative Democratic press baron and ally,

Louisville Courier-Journal publisher Colonel Henry "Marse Henry" Watterson. As Wilson's brother-in-law, Stockton Axson, later observed:

> Those who have loved Mr. Wilson without cessation have often wished, for his own sake as well as for the sake of former friends, that he could extend the olive branch or accept [one]. They have seen him torn, bleeding, and writhing under a severed friendship, and have wished, and sometimes even advised, that he go to the estranged friend with open hands and say: never mind the past; never mind how we have differed; let's forget all that; let's be friends again and happy. But Woodrow Wilson would never do that. Perhaps he could not. In time the pain would pass and it would be as if the former friend were dead. He did not hate him; he simply ignored him in his mind and consciousness. Occasionally he might refer to him, seldom with bitterness, but with what was worse—that impersonality of fate, like the thunder cloud from which the bolt of lightning has stricken a man dead and then passed on, with neither anger nor remorse.

As Harvey and Watterson exited, the shadowy but talented Colonel Edward Mandell House entered. House had money, brains, breeding, an English education, and a talent for politics, having helped elect four separate Texas governors. Recognizing his own limitations of personality and health, he never ran for office himself. Still, House possessed a powerful ego and lofty objections. "My ambition," he once explained, "has been so great that it has never seemed to me worthwhile to strive to satisfy it."

He grew bored with electing Texas governors. Longing to elect a Democratic president, he reasoned that the ideal candidate would be of Southern birth, yet sufficiently progressive to suit the rest of the nation. Wilson fit the bill. In November 1911, House arranged a meeting, thus beginning, in his overblown description, "the strangest and most fruitful personal alliance in human history."

They seemed more like friends than political allies, more like brothers than friends. House could offer excellent advice, arrange meetings, forge alliances, and clear any path for his new front man. But more important,

House generated enough trust (almost unlimited at first) in the normally aloof Wilson for the schoolmaster–politician to take the little colonel's counsel, to let House work his magic: to make him president.

House capitalized on Wilson's vanity, but also on his more sinister traits, his pettiness, his vindictiveness, his ability to hold a grudge and never let go. "Never begin by arguing [with Wilson]," House once explained. "Discover a common hate, exploit it, get the president warmed up, and then start your business."

President-maker was a great ambition. But in 1912, House hinted at even higher, darker—or at least more bizarre—dreams. Anonymously, he published a rather badly written novel, *Philip Dru: Administrator*. House's character Dru, a West Point graduate-turned-social-worker, busted trusts, reformed the tariff, overhauled the national banking system, and enacted a federal income tax (still not yet constitutional in 1912). There was nothing particularly remarkable about any of these things (they, in fact, matched Wilson's New Freedom very nicely) except that Philip Dru was not merely the president, he was a military dictator. "He comes," wrote House, "panoplied in justice and with the light of reason in his eyes. He comes as the advocate of equal opportunity, and he comes with the power to enforce his will." And after enforcing that will domestically, Dru turned to foreign affairs to work his weal there as well.

Pretty heady stuff, and even headier in November 1912, when vacationing President-elect Wilson brought *Philip Dru* along for light reading. In the interim, however, Wilson's presidential path was by no means assured. The 1896, 1900, 1904, and 1908 elections had proven uniformly disastrous for Democrats. They had tried and failed with William Jennings Bryan's prairie populism. They stumbled even more miserably with Judge Alton Parker's Eastern conservatism. The year 1912, however, promised success. The bitter personal rift between William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt had split the Republican Party. Whoever the Democrats nominated would have an excellent shot at the White House.

There was nothing inevitable about its being Wilson, however. Speaker of the House Champ Clark of Missouri enjoyed the support of many old Bryanites. Also running were two relative conservatives, sixty-six-year-old Ohio Governor Judson Harmon (formerly Grover Cleveland's Attorney General) and pudgy, greasy-haired House Majority

Leader Oscar W. Underwood of Alabama, a tenacious low-tariff man, along with dark horse Indiana Governor Thomas R. Marshall ("Bitterness may induce the Democrats to nominate a dark horse, and my enemies will tell you I am the blackest one you ever saw"). None seemed particularly inspiring, which only encouraged Bryan to hope that the party might yet turn to him again.

Wilson had begun running almost immediately upon becoming governor, undertaking a well-received three-week Western speaking tour in May 1911. Newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst offered support, but Hearst was too controversial and too radical. "Tell Mr. Hearst to go to hell," sneered Wilson. Hearst threw his support to Clark ("a man's man"), spewing editorial venom on Wilson, dismissing him as an overrated intellect and a pro-English snob. Clark crushed Wilson nearly three to one in Illinois's key primary and entered the July 1912 Baltimore convention with a formidable delegate lead: Clark 413, Wilson 274, Underwood 91, Harmon 57, Marshall 30.

But two thirds of the delegates—724—were needed to nominate. A simple majority of the 1,085 delegates (which Clark reached only on the tenth ballot) wasn't enough. Eventually Clark peaked, and on the thirtieth ballot Wilson passed him. On the forty-sixth, he won. For vice-president, the convention selected Thomas Marshall, who proved as realistic regarding the vice-presidency as he did about the presidential nomination. "Once there were two brothers," he observed. "One ran away to sea, the other was elected vice president. Neither one of them was heard of again."

Wilson was less modest. During the campaign, he curtly informed an aide, "I wish it to be clearly understood that I owe you nothing. Remember that God ordained that I should be the next president of the United States. Neither you nor any other mortal could have prevented that."

The general election proved far easier than the nomination, though Theodore Roosevelt still overshadowed Wilson. "I do not [excite the public imagination]," Wilson explained. "He [TR] is a real, vivid person . . . I am a vague, conjectural personality, more made up of opinions and academic prepossessions than of human traits and red corpuscles." Wilson received just 41.8 percent of the popular vote, less than Bryan's

lowest total; but with Roosevelt and Taft ripping each other to pieces, Wilson garnered 435 electoral votes to TR's 88 and Taft's pathetic 8.

As president, erstwhile conservative Wilson now implemented much of the progressive agenda: the Underwood Tariff and the Federal Farm Loan Act, a Federal Reserve System, the Federal Trade Commission, a workmen's compensation system, the banning of child labor, and improved conditions and wages for railroad workers.

In August 1914 his life came crashing to the ground. On the first day of the month, Germany declared war on Imperial Russia . . . and World War I began. On August 6, Woodrow Wilson's wife, Ellen Axson Wilson, died of Bright's disease. But there was more to it than that. As she lay dying, White House physician Dr. Cary Grayson wrote: "The chief cause of Mrs. Wilson's present critical condition is a chronic kidney disease . . . developed as one of the results of a nervous breakdown."

The Axsons had a history of mental illness. Ellen's father had undergone a similar breakdown. Her brother, Stockton, suffered from depression. The White House had proven too much for this gentle Southern lady. By May 1914, she was a wreck. By June, she no longer retained food. Ellen Wilson was just 50 years old; she and her husband had been married for 29 years.

Her death crushed him. "Oh my God," he cried, "what am I going to do? What am I going to do?" Many of his associates feared a collapse. Wilson survived. His Scotch–Irish sense of duty pulled him through. The Progressive agenda remained unfulfilled. Europe, engulfed in war, threatened to drag America into the morass. Wilson *had* to get through it.

He would not be alone for long. In March 1915—through Dr. Grayson and through Wilson's cousin, Helen Bones—he met a local widow, a Mrs. Edith Bolling Galt. Edith and Helen were at the White House one day, when Dr. Grayson and the president returned, muddy and disheveled, from golf. After they tidied up, everyone took tea in the Oval Room. "I can't say I foresaw in the first minute what was going to happen," Helen Bones recalled. "It may have taken ten minutes."

A whirlwind courtship followed—as whirlwind as possible when the suitor is virtually a prisoner of the White House and his office. The couple met when they could. Two months later, he told Edith he loved

her. She professed shock. "Oh, you can't love me," she protested; "you don't really know me. And it is less than a year since your wife died."

"I know you feel that," he replied. "But, little girl, in this place time is not measured by weeks, or months, or years, but by deep human experience; and since her death I have lived a lifetime of loneliness and heartache. I was afraid, knowing you, I would shock you; but I would be less than a gentleman if I continued to make opportunities to see you without telling you what I have told my daughters and Helen: that I want you to be my wife."

The relationship intensified. Presidential depression shifted to schoolboy giddiness. The general public remained ignorant of it all. Wilson's closest advisers did not. They were not pleased. White House Chief Usher Irwin "Ike" Hoover wrote in his memoirs:

> The President was simply obsessed. He put aside practically everything, dealing only with the most important matters of state. Requests for appointments were put off with the explanation that he had important business to attend to. Cabinet officers, Senators, officials generally were all treated the same. It had always been difficult to get appointments with him; it was now harder than ever, and important state matters were held in abeyance while he wrote to the lady of his choice. When one realizes that at this time there was a war raging in Europe, not to mention a Presidential campaign approaching, one can imagine how preoccupied he must have been. There was much anxiety among his political friends, who just had to accept the inevitable, but who began to look about for a way to postpone it until after the election, for fear lest the people would not approve.

Many did *not* approve—or, at least, they scoffed. "What did the new Mrs. Wilson do when the President proposed?" joked British Embassy attaché Major Charles Crauford-Stuart.

The ribald answer: "She fell out of bed with surprise."

Colonel House and Treasury Secretary William Gibbs McAdoo had not reached the pinnacles of power only to tumble downward because of a president acting like a lovesick swain. McAdoo, a wealthy railroad

executive, was not only a member of Wilson's cabinet; he was his son-in-law, having married the president's youngest daughter Eleanor in May 1914. McAdoo, along with House, plotted to prevent any Wilson remarriage—and went about it as irresponsibly as possible.

Woodrow and Ellen Wilson had been a devoted couple—some might say a passionate couple—as witnessed by this letter from Wilson in 1902 to his wife of 17 years:

> How do you expect me to keep *my* head, you dear thing . . . when you lavish upon me such delicious praise? Surely there was never such a lover before, and even after all these years it seems almost too good to be true that you are my lover. All I can say in return is that I love you as you deserve to be loved—as much as you can possibly *want* to be loved.

Then, in 1906, a period of "marked depression" debilitated Ellen. The following January, her husband, vacationing—alone—in Bermuda, made the acquaintance of forty-four-year-old Mary Allen Hulbert Peck, wife of a Pittsfield, Massachusetts, woolen manufacturer. Mrs. Peck was artistic and intellectual enough to fascinate Wilson and enough of a good listener to provide the support and comfort he needed. "She was," wrote Wilson's daughter Eleanor, "a charming woman, with great intelligence and humor." She was also a woman whose own marriage was unraveling.

Whether Wilson and Mary Peck became lovers remains unknown. Some say yes; some say no. For years, they exchanged correspondence (227 letters survive). And considering that he lived either in New Jersey or Washington and she in New England or New York, they met in person a significant number of times—ninety times. Ellen Wilson knew of their relationship, or, at least, knew what Woodrow told her of it. She did not particularly care for it—or for Mary Peck, whom she met on several occasions—and termed the episode the one unhappiness in her marriage.

Ellen was not the only one in the know. In 1912, the Wilson–Peck friendship threatened to derail Wilson's presidential effort. Supposedly, during Mary's recent divorce proceedings, a judge had seen one of Wilson's letters to her and had not liked what he read. In Chicago, in April 1912, unknown persons broke into Wilson's Hotel Sherman suite and stole his valise,

allegedly to purloin incriminating correspondence from Mrs. Peck. Theodore Roosevelt, always the nineteenth-century gentleman, refused to profit from the issue. "What's more," he rationalized, "it won't work. You can't cast a man as Romeo who looks and acts like the apothecary's clerk."

To frighten his father-in-law into abandoning his burgeoning love affair with Edith Galt, McAdoo fabricated a story that he had received anonymous correspondence from Los Angeles alleging that Mrs. Peck was circulating Wilson's letters to her. The news *frightened the hell* out of Wilson. On Saturday morning, September 18, 1915, he wrote Edith begging to see her at her Twentieth Street home that night at eight—an unprecedented request, since they always met at the White House. Wilson arrived. They talked. Correspondence flew back and forth for the next twenty-four hours. Edith pledged to stand by her skittish president, "not for duty, not for pity, not for honor—but for love—trusting protecting, comprehending love."

Edith provided Wilson with the courage he desperately needed, and cemented his love for her. McAdoo's strategy had backfired miserably. On Sunday, September 19, 1915, Wilson wrote:

> My noble, incomparable Edith,
>
> I do not know how to express or analyze the conflicting emotions that have surged like a storm through my heart all night long. I only know that first and foremost in all my thoughts has been the glorious confirmation you gave me last night—without effort, unconsciously, as of course—of all I have ever thought of your mind and heart.
>
> You have the greatest soul, the noblest nature, the sweetest, most loving heart I have ever known, and my love, my reverence, my admiration for you, have increased in one evening as I should have thought only a lifetime of intimate, loving association could have increased them.
>
> You are more wonderful and lovely in my eyes than you ever were before; and my pride and joy and gratitude that you should love me with such a perfect love are beyond all expression, except in some great poem which I cannot write.
>
> Your own,
> Woodrow

Yet Wilson's spirit remained troubled. On Monday, September 20, he composed a partly enigmatic, partly damning document—a series of notes or talking points—that he, no doubt, hoped would never be made public, but that he must have feared very likely would be if the Peck letters were made public:

> **Analysis of the Statement**
> *Admission*
>
> Even while it lasted I knew and made explicit what it *did not* mean.
>
> It did not last, but friendship and genuine admiration ensued. . . .
>
> These letters disclose a passage of folly and gross impertinence in my life. I am deeply ashamed and repentant. Neither in act nor even in thought was the purity or honor of the lady concerned touched or sullied, and my offense she has generously forgiven. Neither was my utter allegiance to my incomparable wife in anyway by the least jot abated. She, too, knew and understood and has forgiven, little as I deserved the generous indulgence. But none of this lessens the blame or the deep humiliating grief and shame I suffer, that I should have so erred and forgotten the standards of honorable behavior by which I should have been bound.
>
> These letters are genuine, and I am now ashamed of them—not because the lady to whom they are addressed was not worthy of the most sincere admiration and affection, but because I did not have the moral right to offer her ardent affection which they express. I am happy to remember that the only thing that at all relieves the pain and shame with which this correspondence could ever in the least degree affect is the honor of the noble lady to whom I then had the distinction and happiness to be married.

His letters to Peck were *not* made public. Wilson announced his engagement to Edith on October 6, 1915. They wed at the bride's home at 8:30 P.M., Saturday, December 18, 1915. The public did not seem to care.

Of course, they might have been concerned with bigger events—say, world wars.

"It would be an irony of fate," Wilson had remarked, "if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs." In fact, it did. In 1916,

Wilson ran for re-election on a platform of peace, uniting his normally fractious party about him. "I agree with the American people," said William Jennings Bryan, who had quit as Wilson's Secretary of State when Wilson seemed too aggressive toward Germany, "in thanking God we have a President who has *kept—who will keep—us* out of war."

Democrats knew where they stood. Republicans did not. Roosevelt and the Progressives had returned to the Republican Party, but only grudgingly. The Rough Rider wanted war. Many in his party did not. The Republican candidate in 1916 was Charles Evans Hughes, former Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court and previously a reform governor of New York. Sometimes he echoed Roosevelt. Other times (particularly before German audiences), he advocated peace and neutrality. Critics dubbed him "Charles Evasive Hughes."

Hughes looked like a winner. On Sunday, November 5, two days before the election, Wilson sent Secretary of State Robert Lansing a fantastic proposal for a quick abdication of the Oval Office, allowing Hughes four extra months in office. If Hughes won, Lansing should resign; Wilson would then appoint Hughes as Lansing's successor. Then, Vice President Marshall would resign, placing Hughes next in line for the White House (the secretary of state was next in the order of succession at the time). Finally, Wilson would quit, giving Hughes the four months. It was wartime. The country could ill afford a powerless lame-duck president and a lengthy transition period. But, Wilson being Wilson, he would not have concocted such a stratagem without inviting another inescapable conclusion: the Lord of Princeton was picking up his marbles and going home.

On Election Night, Hughes seized the lead, even carrying New Jersey. The West, however, remained solidly Democratic. Whoever won Republican stronghold California would be president, and early returns favored Hughes. The *New York Times* headlined "THE PRESIDENT-ELECT—CHARLES EVANS HUGHES." Instead, Hughes, who had alienated California's progressive Republican Senator Hiram Johnson, lost the Golden State by 3,800 votes.

"'Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door," twanged Vice President Marshall, "but 'tis enough. 'Twill serve."

Marshall and Wilson were safe, but a key member of Wilson's inner

circle wasn't: his secretary, Joseph P. Tumulty. At Jim Nugent's request, Tumulty, a Jersey City attorney, had joined Wilson's 1910 gubernatorial campaign. An academician like Wilson needed someone like Tumulty to guide him through New Jersey's often-fractious politics. Tumulty performed so skillfully that Wilson retained him as his private secretary (i.e., his chief of staff) both as governor and as president. Educated, mildly progressive, and intensely loyal, Tumulty possessed one major problem: he was Catholic.

At first, this was an advantage. When Wilson knifed New Jersey's urban Catholic bosses, he needed a Papist at his side to defuse suspicions of anti-Catholicism. And Wilson, perhaps from sheer orneriness, seemed to relish having a close Catholic adviser, boasting in 1910 that he would "ram" Tumulty's appointment down opponents' throats. By 1916, however, national anti-Catholic sentiment was on the rise. Tumulty had become a political liability. Additionally, the new Mrs. Wilson, jealous of her husband's old guard, wanted Tumulty banished. Wilson turned on Tumulty, as he had on Smith and Harvey and Watterson, planning to mothball him to the obscure Board of General Appraisers. You "could not know what this means to me and to mine," Tumulty begged. "I am grateful for having been associated so closely with so great a man. I am heart-sick that the end should be like this." Wilson, for once repaying loyalty with loyalty, let Tumulty stay.

Edith Wilson failed to engineer Tumulty's exile, but her influence remained in the ascent. Wilson shared the most secret conversations and documents with this jeweler's widow, a woman completely inexperienced and uneducated in affairs of state and politics, soliciting and valuing her advice on the most sensitive and complex issues. Even Colonel House was being shunted aside. To his diary in November 1915, House complained: "No one can see him to explain matters or get his advice. Therefore they come to me and I have to do it at long-range which is difficult and unsatisfactory. The President lacks executive ability and does not get the best results from his Cabinet or those around him."

"Wilson," journalist William Allen White once explained, "in his gayest hours, in his times of greatest happiness, stood always aloof, distrusting men instinctively. It was this suspicion of men, founded upon ignorance

of men, which led Wilson always to question the strong, to fraternize with the meek, and to break ruthlessly and irrevocably, without defense or explanation, any friendship which threatened his own prestige."

Or, as White phrased it most succinctly, "Wilson trusted only errand boys."

War was fast approaching. November 1916 had seen Wilson re-elected on the slogan "He kept us out of war." In January 1917, Berlin resumed unrestricted submarine warfare. In February, the British released the "Zimmermann Note," revealing Germany's plan to incite Mexican and Japanese attacks on the United States. Inaugurated again in March, the next month Wilson asked for a declaration of war on Germany, "to make the world safe for democracy."

The nation was not particularly prepared for war. Not until June did the first American troops land on French soil; not until November (i.e., not until after the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia and pulled out of the war) did doughboys see combat.

Nevertheless, the Central Powers were being bled white, and the hundreds of thousands of fresh American troops tipped the balance. So did Wilson's rhetoric, his idealism, his vision of a post-war democratic world—his Fourteen Points, a heady stew of self-determination, disarmament, and international cooperation that helped bring Germany to the peace table. On November 9, 1918, the Kaiser abdicated. At 11:11 A.M. on November 11, 1918, the killing stopped.

Woodrow Wilson's crusade was just beginning.