

JOHN WILKES BOOTH.

GRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THE PURSUIT AND

CAPTURE OF THE ASSASSIN

HOW THE MURDERER WAS TRACKED FROM

THE CAPITAL

HOW THE CONFESSION OF THE ASSASSIN'S

WHEREABOUTS WAS OBTAINED

LAST HOURS OF HIS LIFE

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From the New York World

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A hard and grizzly face overlooks me as I write. Its inconsiderable forehead is crowned with turning sandy hair, and the deep concave of its long insatiate jaws is almost hidden by a dense red beard, which cannot still abate the terrible decision of the large mouth, so well sustained by searching eyes of spotted gray, which roll and rivet one. This is the face of Lafayette Baker, colonel and chief of the secret service. He has played the most perilous parts of the war, and is the capturer of the late President's murderer. The story that I am to tell you, as he and his trusty dependents told it to me, will be aptly commenced here, where the net was woven which took the dying life of Wilkes Booth.

#### THE START

When the murder occurred Colonel Baker was absent from Washington. He returned on the third morning, and was at once brought by Secretary Stanton to join the hue and cry against the escaped Booth. The sagacious detective found that nearly ten thousand cavalry, and one-fourth as many policemen, had been meantime scouring without plan or compass, the whole territory of Southern Maryland. They were treading on each other's heels, and mixing up the thing so confoundedly, that the best place for the culprits to have gone would have been in the very midst of their pursuers. Baker at once possessed himself of the little the War Department had learned, and started immediately to take the usual detective measures, till then neglected, of offering a reward and getting

out photographs of the suspected ones. He then despatched a few chosen detectives to certain vital points, and awaited results.

#### ATZEROTH CAPTURED

The first of these was the capture of Atzeroth. Others, like the taking of Doctor Mudge, simultaneously occurred. But the district suspected being remote from the railway routes, and broken by no telegraph station, the Colonel, to place himself nearer the theatre of events, ordered an operator, with the necessary instrument, to tap the wire running to Point Lookout, near Chappell's Point, and send him prompt messages.

#### A CLUE

The same steamer which took down the operator and two detectives brought back one of the same detectives and a negro. This negro, taken to Colonel Baker's office, stated so positively that he had seen Booth and another man cross the Potomac in a fishing boat, while he was looking down upon them from a bank, that the Colonel was at first skeptical; but when examined the negro answered so readily and intelligently, recognizing the men from the photographs, that Baker knew at last that he had the true scent.

#### ORGANIZED PURSUIT

Straightway he sent to General Hancock for twenty-five men, and while the order was going, drew down his coast survey-maps with that quick detective intuition amounting almost to inspiration. He cast upon the probable route and destination of the refugees, as well as the point where he would soonest strike them. Booth, he knew, would not keep along the coast, with frequent deep rivers to cross, nor, indeed, in any direction east of Richmond, where he was liable at any time to cross our lines of occupation; nor, being lame, could he ride on horseback, so as to place himself very far westward of his point of debarkation in Virginia. But he would travel in a direct course from Bluff Point, where he crossed to Eastern Maryland, and this would take him through Port Royal, on the Rappahannock river, in time to be intercepted there by the outgoing cavalymen.

#### FOLLOWING UP THE SCENT

When, therefore, twenty-five men, under one Lieutenant Dougherty, arrived at his office-door, Baker placed the whole under control of his former lieutenant colonel E J Conger, and of his cousin, Lieutenant L B Baker -- the first of Ohio, the last of N Y -- and bade them go with all despatch to Belle Plain, on the Lower Potomac,

there to disembark and scour the country faithfully around Port Royal, but not to return unless they captured their men.

#### CONGER

Conger is a short, decided, indomitable, courageous fellow, provincial in his manners, but fully understanding his business, and collected as a housewife on Sunday.

#### BAKER

Young Baker is a large and fine-looking fellow -- a soldier, but no policeman -- and he deferred to Conger, very properly, during most of the events succeeding.

#### TO BELLE PLAIN

Quitting Washington at 2 o'clock P.M. on Monday, the detectives and cavalrymen disembarked at Belle Plain, on the border of Stafford county, at 10 o'clock, in the darkness. Belle Plain is simply the nearest landing to Fredericksburg, seventy miles from Washington city, and located on Potomac creek. It is a wharf and warehouse merely, and here the steamer John S. Ide stopped and made fast while the party galloped off in the darkness. Conger and Baker kept ahead, riding up to farm-houses and questioning the inmates, pretending to be in search of the Maryland gentlemen belonging to the party. But nobody had seen the parties described, and after a futile ride on the Fredericksburg road, they turned shortly to the east, and kept up their baffled inquiries all the way to Port Conway, on the Rappahannock.

#### AT PORT ROYAL

On Tuesday morning they presented themselves at the Port Royal ferry, and inquired of the ferryman, while he was taking them over in squads of seven at a time, if he had seen any two such men. Continuing their inquiries at Port Royal, they found one Rollins, a fisherman, who referred them to a negro named Lucas, as having driven two men a short distance toward Bowling Green in a wagon. It was found that these men answered to the description, Booth having a crutch, as previously ascertained.

#### HOW THE ASSASSINS CROSSED

The day before Booth and Harold had applied at Port Conway for the general ferryboat, but the ferryman was then fishing and would not desist for the inconsider-

able fare of two persons, but to their supposed good fortune a lot of Confederate cavalrymen just then came along, who threatened the ferryman with a shot in the head if he did not instantly bring across his craft and transport the entire party. These cavalrymen were of Mosby's disbanded command, returning from Fairfax Court-House to their homes in Caroline county. Their captain was on his way to visit a sweetheart at Bowling Green, and he had so far taken Booth under his patronage that when the latter was haggling with Lucas for a team, he offered both Booth and Harold the use of his horse to ride and walk alternately.

#### THEIR JOURNEY TO BOWLING GREEN

In this way Lucas was providentially done out of the job, and Booth rode off toward Bowling Green behind the Confederate captain on one and the same horse.

#### THE PURSUERS AGAIN

So much learned, the detectives, with Rollins for a guide, dashed off in the bright daylight of Tuesday, moving southwestward through the level plains of Caroline, seldom stopping to ask questions, save at a certain half-way house, where a woman told them that a cavalry party of yesterday had returned minus one man. As this was far from circumstantial, the party rode along in the twilight and reached Bowling Green at 11 o'clock in the night.

#### BOWLING GREEN

This is the court-house town of Caroline county -- a small and scattered place, having within it an ancient tavern, no longer used for other than lodging purposes; but here they hauled from his bed the captain aforesaid, and bade him dress himself. As soon as he comprehended the matter he became pallid and eagerly narrated all the facts in his possession. Booth, to his knowledge, was then lying at the house of one Garrett, which they had passed, and Harold had departed the existing day with the intention of rejoining him.

#### THE HIDING PLACE

Taking this captain along for a guide, the worn-out horsemen retraced, though some of the men were so haggard and wasted with travel that they had to be kicked into intelligence before they could climb to their saddles. The objects of the chase thus at hand, the detectives, full of sanguine purpose, hurried the cortege so well along that by 2 o'clock early morning, all halted at Garrett's gate.

THE HOUSE SURROUNDED

In the dead stillness, Baker dismounted and forced the outer gate; Conger kept close behind him, and the horsemen followed cautiously. They made no noise in the soft clay, nor broke the all-foreboding silence anywhere, till the second gate swung open gratingly; yet even then nor hoarse nor shrill response came back, save distant croaking, as of frogs or owls, or the whizz of some passing night-hawk. So they surrounded the pleasant old homestead, each horseman, carbine in poise, adjusted under the grove of locusts, so as to enclose the dwelling with a circle of fire. After a pause, Baker rode to the kitchen door on the side, and dismounting, rapped and halloed lustily. An old man, in drawers and night-shirt, hastily undrew the bolts and stood on the threshold, peering shiveringly into the darkness.

QUERIES

Baker seized him by the throat at once, and held a pistol to his ear. "Who -- who is it that calls me?" cried the old man. "Where are the men who stay with you?" challenged Baker. "If you prevaricate you are a dead man!" The old fellow, who proved to be the head of the family, was so overawed and paralyzed that he stammered and shook, and said not a word. "Go light a candle," cried Baker, sternly, "and be quick about it." The trembling old man obeyed, and in a moment the imperfect rays flared upon his whitening hairs and bluishly pallid face. Then the question was repeated, backed up by the glimmering pistol, "where are those men?" The old man held to the wall, and his knees smote each other. "They are gone," he said. "We haven't got them in the house; I assure you that they are gone." Here there were sounds and whisperings in the main building adjoining, and the lieutenant strode toward the door. A ludicrous instant intervened. The old man's modesty outran his terror. "Don' go in there," he said, feebly; "there are women undressed in there."

THE TRUTH AT LAST

In the interim Conger had also entered, and while the household and its invaders were thus in tableaux, a young man appeared as if he had risen from the ground. The muzzles of everybody turned upon him in a second; but while he blanched, he did not lose loquacity. "Father," he said, "we had better tell the truth about the matter. Those men whom you seek, gentlemen, are in the barn, I know. They want there to sleep." Leaving one soldier to guard the old man -- and the soldier was very glad of the job, as it relieved him of personal hazard in the approaching combat -- all the rest, with cocked pistols at the

young man's head, followed on to the barn. It lay a hundred yards from the house, the front barndoor facing the west gable, and was an old and spacious structure, with floors only a trifle above the ground level.

#### ON GUARD

The troops, dismounted, were stationed at regular intervals around it, and ten yards distant at every point four special guards placed to command the door, and all with weapons in supple preparation, while Baker and Conger went direct to the door. It had a padlock upon it and the key of this Baker secured at once. In the interval of silence that ensued the rustling of planks and straw was heard inside, as of persons rising from sleep.

#### A PARLEY

At the same moment Baker hailed:

"To the persons in the barn. I have a proposal to make; we are about to send into you the son of the man in whose custody you are found. Either surrender to him your arms and then give yourselves up, or we'll set fire to the place. We mean to take you both, or to have a bonfire and a shooting match."

No answer came to this of any kind. The lad, John M Garrett, who was in deadly fear, was here pushed through the door by a sudden opening of it, and immediately Lieutenant Baker locked the door on the outside. The boy was heard to state his appeal in under tone. Booth replied: "Damn you. Get out of here. You have betrayed me."

At the same time he placed his hand in his pocket as for a pistol. A remonstrance followed, but the boy slipped out and over the reopened portal, reporting that his errand had failed, and that he dared not enter again. All this time the candle brought from the house to the barn was burning close beside the two detectives, rendering it easy for anyone within to have shot them dead. This observed, the light was cautiously removed, and everybody took care to keep out of its reflection. By this time the crisis of the position was at hand; the cavalry exhibited very variable inclinations, some to run away, others to shoot Booth without a summons, but all excited and fitfully silent. At the house nearby the female folks were seen collected in the doorway, and the necessities of the case provoked prompt conclusions. The boy was placed at a remote point, and the summons repeated by Baker:

"You must surrender inside there. Give up your arms and appear. There is no chance for escape. We give you five minutes to make up your mind."

A bold, clarion reply came from within, so strong as to be heard at the house door:

"Who are you, and what do you want with us?"

Baker again urged: "We want you to deliver up your arms and become our prisoners."

"But who are you?" halloed the same strong voice.

Baker. -- That makes no difference. We know who you are, and we want you. We have here fifty men, armed with carbines and pistols. You cannot escape.

There was a long pause, and then Booth said: "Captain, this is a hard case, I swear. Perhaps I am being taken by my own friends." No reply from the detectives.

Booth. -- Well, give us a little time to consider.

Baker. -- Very well. Take time.

Here ensued a long and eventful pause. What thronging memories it brought to Booth we can only guess. In this little interval he made the resolve to die; but he was cool and steady to the end. Baker, after a lapse, hailed for the last time:

"Well, we have waited long enough. Surrender your arms and come out, or we'll fire the barn."

Booth answered thus: "I am but a cripple, a one-legged man. Withdraw your forces one hundred yards from the door, and I will come. Give me a chance for my life, captain. I will never be taken alive."

Baker. -- We did not come here to fight, but to capture you. I say again, appear, or the barn shall be fired.

Then, with a long breath, which could be heard outside, Booth cried, in sudden calmness, still invisible, as we were to him, his enemies:

"Well, then, my brave boys, prepare a stretcher for me."

There was a pause repeated, broken by low discussions within between Booth and his associate, the former saying, as if in answer to some remonstrance or appeal, "Get away from me. You are a damned coward, and mean to leave me in my distress; but go, go. I don't want you to stay. I won't have you stay." Then he shouted aloud: "There's a man inside who wants to surrender."

Baker. -- Let him come, if he will bring his arms.

Here Harold, rattling at the door, said: "Let me out; open the door; I want to surrender."

Baker. -- Hand out your arms, then.

Harold. -- I have not got any.

Baker. -- You are the man who carried the carbine yesterday; bring it out.

Harold. -- I haven't got any.

This was said in a whining tone, and with an almost visible shiver.

Booth cried aloud, at this hesitation, He hasn't got any arms; they are mine, and I have kept them.

Baker. -- Well, he carried the carbine, and must bring it out.

Booth. -- On the word and honor of a gentleman, he has no arms with him. They are mine, and I have got them.

At this time Harold was quite up to the door, within whispering distance of Baker. The latter told him to put out his hands to be handcuffed, at the same time drawing open the door a little distance. Harold thrust forth his hands, when Baker, seizing him, jerked him into the night and straightway delivered him over to a deputation of cavalymen. The fellow began to talk of his innocence and plead so noisily that Conger threatened to gag him unless he ceased. Then Booth made his last appeal in the same clear, unbroken voice:

"Captain, give me a chance. Draw off your men and I will fight them singly. I could have killed you six times tonight, but I believe you to be a brave man, and would not murder you. Give a lame man a show."

It was too late for parley. All this time Booth's voice had sounded from the middle of the barn.

#### THE BARN FIRED

Ere he ceased speaking, Colonel Conger, slipping around to the rear, drew some loose straws through a crack, and lit a match upon them. They were dry and blazed up in an instant, carrying a sheet of smoke and flame through the parted planks, and heaving in a twinkling a world of light and heat upon the magazine within. The blaze lit up the black recesses of the great barn till every wasp's nest and cobweb in the roof was luminous,



flinging streaks of red and violet across the tumbled farm gear in the corner, ploughs, harrows, hoes, rakes, sugar mills, and making every separate grain in the high bin adjacent gleam like a mote of precious gold. The tinged the beams, the upright columns, the barricades, where clover and timothy, piled high, held toward the hot incendiary their separate straw for the funeral pile. They bathed the murderer's retreat in a beautiful illumination, and while in bold outline his figure stood revealed, they rose like an impenetrable wall to guard from sight the hated enemy who lit them. Behind the blaze, with his eye to a crack, Conger saw Wilkes Booth standing upright upon a crutch. He likens him at this instant to his brother Edwin, whom he says he so much resembled that he half believed, for the moment, the whole pursuit to have been a mistake. At the gleam of the fire, Wilkes dropped his crutch and carbine, and on both hands crept up to the spot to espy the incendiary and shoot him dead. His eyes were lustrous like fever, and swelled and rolled in terrible beauty, while his teeth were fixed, and he wore the expression of one in the calmness before frenzy. In vain he peered with vengeance in his look; the blaze that made him visible concealed his enemy. A second he turned glaring at the fire, as if to leap upon it and extinguish it, but it had made such headway that this was a futile impulse and he dismissed it. As calmly as upon the battlefield a veteran stands amidst the hail of ball and shell, and plunging iron, Booth turned at a man's stride, and pushed for the door, carbine in poise, and the last resolve of death, which we name despair, set on his high, bloodless forehead.

#### DEATH

As so he dashed, intent to expire not unaccompanied a disobedient sergeant at an eye-hole drew upon him the fatal bead. The barn was all glorious with conflagration and in the beautiful ruin this outlawed man strode like all that we know of wicked valor, stern in the face of death. A shock, a shout, a gathering up of his splendid figure as if to overslip the stature God gave him, and John Wilkes Booth fell headlong to the floor, lying there in a heap, a little life remaining. But no.

"He has shot himself," cried Baker, unaware of the source of the report, and rushing in, he grasped his arms to guard against any feint or strategy. A moment convinced him that further struggle with the prone flesh was useless. Booth did not move, nor breathe, nor gasp. Conger and two sergeants now entered, and taking up the body, they bore it in haste from the advancing flames and laid it without upon the grass, all fresh

with heavenly dew. "Water," cried Conger, "bring water."

When this was dashed into his face he revived a moment, and stirred his lips. Baker put his ear close down and heard him say:

"Tell mother -- I die -- for my country."

They lifted him again, the fire encroaching in hotness upon them, and placed him on the porch before the dwelling.

#### THE DYING MURDERER.

A mattress was brought down, on which they placed him and propped his head, and gave him water and brandy. The women of the household, joined meantime by another son, who had been found in one of the corn cribs, watching, as he said, to see that Booth and Herrold did not steal the horses, were nervous, but prompt to do the dying man all kindness, although waved sternly back by the detectives. They dipped a rag in brandy and water, and this being put between Booth's teeth he sucked it greedily. When he was able to articulate again, he muttered to Mr. Baker the same words, with an addenda. "Tell mother I died for my country. I thought I did for the best." Baker repeated this, saying, at the same time, "Booth, do I repeat it correctly." Booth nodded his head. By this time the grayness of dawn was approaching; moving figures inquisitively coming near were to be seen distinctly, and the cocks began to crow gutturally, though the barn by this time was a hulk of blaze and ashes, sending toward the zenith a spiral line of dense smoke. The women became importunate at this time that the troops might be ordered to extinguish the fire, which was spreading toward their precious corn-cribs. Not even death could banish the call of interest. Soldiers were sent to put out the fire, and Booth, relieved of the bustle around him, drew near to death apace. Twice he was heard to say, "kill me, kill me." His lips often moved, but could complete no appreciable sound. He made once a motion which the quick eye of Conger understood to mean that his throat pained him. Conger put his finger there, when the dying man attempted to cough, but only caused the blood at his perforated neck to flow more lively. He bled very little, although shot quite through, beneath and behind the ears, his collar being severed on both sides.

A soldier had been meanwhile despatched for a doctor, but the route and return was quite six miles, and the sinner was sinking fast. Still, the women made efforts to

get to see him, but were always rebuffed, and all the brandy they could find was demanded by the assassin, who motioned for strong drink every two minutes. He made frequent desires to be turned over, not by speech, but by gesture, and he was alternately placed upon his back, belly, and side. His tremendous vitality evidenced itself almost miraculously. Now and then his heart would cease to throb, and his pulses would be as cold as a dead man's. Directly life would begin anew, the face would flush up effulgently, the eyes open and brighten, and soon relapsing, stillness reasserted, would again be dispossessed by the same magnificent triumph of man over mortality. Finally, the fussy little doctor arrived, in time to be useless. He probed the wound to see if the ball were not in it, and shook his head sagely, and talked learnedly.

#### A LAST REQUEST

Just at his coming Booth had asked to have his hands raised and shown him. They were so paralyzed that he did not know their location. When they were displayed he muttered, with a sad lethargy, "Useless, useless." These were the last words he ever uttered. As he began to die the sun rose and threw beams into all the tree-tops. It was of a man's height when the struggle of death twitched and fingered in the fading bravo's face. His jaw drew spasmodically and obliquely downward; his eyeballs rolled toward his feet, and began to swell; lividness, like a horrible shadow, fastened upon him, and, with a sort of gurgle and sudden check, he stretched his feet and threw his head back and gave up the ghost.

#### BACKWARD

They sewed him up in a saddle blanket. This was his shroud; too like a soldier's. Herold, meantime, had been tied to a tree, but was now released for the march. Col. Conger pushed on immediately for Washington; the cortege was to follow. Booth's only arms were his carbine, knife, and two revolvers. They found about him bills of exchange, Canada money, and a diary. A venerable old negro living in the vicinity had the misfortune to possess a horse. This horse was a relic of former generations, and showed by his protruding ribs the general leanness of the land. He moved in an eccentric amble, and when put upon his speed was generally run backward. To this old negro's horse was harnessed a very shaky and absurd wagon, which rattled like approaching dissolution, and each part of it ran

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without any connection or correspondence with any other part. It had no tail-board, and its shafts were sharp as famine; and into this mimicry of a vehicle the murderer was to be sent to the Potomac river, while the man he had murdered was moving in state across the mourning continent. The old negro geared up the wagon by means of a set of fossil harness, and when it was backed to Garrett's porch they laid within it the discolored corpse. The corpse was tied with ropes around the legs and made fast to the wagon sides. Herold's legs were tied to stirrups, and he was placed in the centre of four murderous-looking cavalrymen. The two sons of Garrett were also taken along, despite the sobs and petitions of the old folks and women, but the rebel captain who had given Booth a lift got off amidst the night's agitations, and was not re-arrested. So moved the cavalcade of retribution, with death in its midst, along the road to Port Royal.

When the wagon started, Booth's wound, till now scarcely dribbling, began to run anew. It fell through the crack of the wagon, and fell dripping upon the axle, and spotting the road with terrible wafers. It stained the planks, and soaked the blankets; and the old negro, at a stoppage, dabbled his hands in it by mistake; he drew back instantly, with a shudder and stifled expletive, "Gor-r-r, dat'll never come off in de world; its murderer's blood." He wrung his hands, and looked imploringly at the officers, and shuddered again: "Gor-r-r, I wouldn't have dat on me fur tousand, tousand dollars." The progress of the team was slow, with frequent danger of shipwreck altogether, but toward noon the cortege filed through Port Royal, where the citizens came out to ask the matter, and why a man's body, covered with somber blankets, was going by with so great escort. They were told that it was a wounded Confederate, and so held their tongues. The little ferry, again in requisition, took them over by squads, and they pushed from Port Conway to Belle Plain, which they reached in the middle of the afternoon. All the way the blood dribbled from the corpse in a slow, incessant, sanguine exudation. The old negro was niggardly dismissed with two paper dollars; the dead man untied and cast upon the vessel's deck, steam gotten up in a little while, and the broad Potomac shores saw this skeleton ship flit by, as the bloody sun threw gashes and blots of unhealthy light along the silver surface.

#### HEROLD

All the way associated with the carcass went Herold, shuddering in so grim companionship, and in the awakened fears of his own approaching ordeal, beyond which it

loomed already, the gossamer fabric of a scaffold. He tried to talk for his own exoneration, saying he had ridden, as was his wont, beyond the East Branch, and returning, found Booth wounded, who begged him to be his companion. Of his crime he knew nothing, so help him God, &. But nobody listened to him. All interest of crime, courage, and retribution centred in the dead flesh at his feet. At Washington, high and low, turned out to look on Booth. Only a few were permitted to see his corpse for purposes of recognition. It was fairly preserved, though on one side of the face distorted, and looking blue like death, and wildly bandit-like, as if beaten by avenging winds.

#### WHERE BOOTH LIES

Yesterday the Secretary of War, without instructions of any kind, committed to Colonel Lafayette C Baker, of the secret service, the stark corpse of J Wilkes Booth. The secret service never fulfilled its volition more secretively. "What have you done with the body?" said I to Baker. "That is known", he answered, "to only one man living besides myself. It is gone. I will not tell you where. The only man who knows is sworn to silence. Never till the great trumpeter comes shall the grave of Booth be discovered." And this is true. Last night, the 27th of April, a small row boat received the carcass of the murderer; two men were in it; they carried the body off into the darkness; and out of that darkness it will never return. In the darkness, like his great crime, may it remain forever, unpalpable, invisible, nondescript, condemned to that worse than damnation, annihilation. The river-bottom may ooze about it, laden with great shot and drowning manacles. The earth may have opened to give it that silence and forgiveness which man will never give its memory. The fishes may swim around it, or the daisies grow white above it; but we shall never know. Mysterious, incomprehensible, unattainable, like the dim times through which we live and think upon as if we only dreamed them in perturbing fever, the assassin of a nation's head rests somewhere in the elements, and that is all; but if the indignant seas or the profaned turf shall ever vomit this corpse from their recesses, and it receives humane or Christian burial from some who do not recognize it, let the last words those decaying lips ever uttered be carved above them with a dagger, to tell the history of a young and once promising life -- useless! useless!