

MOUNTAINS OF SHAME

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Chapter 12

1
"Mountains of Shame"
FATE OF THE CONSPIRATORS

One of the questions agitating the public mind after the assassination was whether other members of the Booth family were implicated in the death of Lincoln. Due to the stage prominence attained by John Wilkes' father, Junius Brutus Booth, by the two brothers, Junius Brutus and Edwin, and by a brother-in-law, John Sleeper Clark, the family already ^{was} ~~were~~ internationally known and naturally each member ~~of it~~ became subject to much newspaper comment during the days immediately following the assassination.

Edwin Booth, toward whom the finger of suspicion never pointed, for some time before the assassination had been playing an engagement in Boston under the management of Henry C. Jarrett. On Friday the 14th he had reached the last night but one of a three weeks' engagement, and the bill was "Don Caesar de Bazan" and "The Iron Chest," the latter the story of a man who had committed a murder and was continually haunted by remorse and terror of the possible punishment for his crime.

The late Harry McGlenen, then business manager of the Boston theatre, according to The Boston Globe April 15, 1905, used to recall the curious fact that at just about 10 o'clock, the hour when John Wilkes sped the fatal bullet into the brain of Lincoln, Edwin, in "The Iron Chest," was crying out in simulated, but too prophetic agony:

"Mountains of shame are piled upon me-me
Who have made fame my idol,
I have labored for name
As white as mountain snow, dazzling and
speckless;
Shame on't, 'tis blurred with blots."

Edwin Booth was awakened the next morning by his colored valet, who almost whispered, with suppressed excitement:

"Has you heerd de news, Massa Ned?"

"What news?" asked his master indifferently,

"De President was shot last night."

"Who could do such a terrible thing as that?" asked Mr. Booth,

"Dey say 'twas Massa John, sah," replied the valet.

Mr. Booth, it was said, was so overcome ^{that his friends} ~~it was~~ feared he would lose his

reason. ~~(The Boston Globe, April 15, 1905)~~

That morning Mr. Jarrett wrote Edwin as follows:

"Edwin Booth, Esq.

" My Dear Sir: A fearful calamity is upon us. The President of the United States has fallen by the hand of an assassin, and I am shocked to say suspicion points to one nearly related to you as the perpetrator of this horrid deed. God grant it may not prove so! With this knowledge, and out of respect to the anguish which will fill the public mind as soon as the appalling fact shall be fully revealed, I have concluded to close the Boston theatre until further notice. Please signify to me your co-operation in this matter.

" In great sorrow, and in haste,

" I remain, yours very truly, "

Edwin Booth's answer indicates the shock and grief that the brother's crime brought to the whole family.

"Henry C Jarrett, Esq.

" My Dear Sir: With deepest sorrow and great agitation I thank you for relieving me from my engagement with yourself and the public. The news of the morning has made me wretched indeed, not only because I have received the unhappy tidings of the suspicions of a brother's crime, but because a good man, and a most justly honoured and patriotic ruler, has fallen, in an hour of national joy, by the hand of an assassin. The memory of the thousands who have fallen in the field, in our country's defence, during this struggle, cannot be forgotten by me, even in this, the most distressing day of my life. And I most sincerely pray that the victories we have already won may stay the brand of war and the tide of loyal blood. While mourning, in common with all other loyal hearts, the death of the President, I am oppressed by a private woe not to be expressed in words. But whatever calamity may befall me and mine, my country, one and indivisible, has my warmest devotion.

"Edwin Booth. " (2)

(2)
 (Life and Art of Edwin Booth by William Winter)
 (Macmillan & Company, 1893 - pp 271, 272.)

On the next day, Sunday, the sixteenth, Edwin Booth wrote the following tragic letter to General Adam Badeau, a personal friend:-

" My dear Ad

"For the first time since the damnable intelligance stunned me * * * * * am I able to write and hasten to acquaint you of my existence as it has been so long a time since I last wrote you, making me afraid (sic) my silence. You know Ad, how I have labored since dear Mary was called from me to establish a name that my child and all my friends wd be proud of; you know how I have always toiled for the comfort & welfare of my family-though in vain, as well you know how loyal I have been from the first moment of this damned rebellion, and you must feel deeply the agony I bear in being thus blasted in all my hopes * * * * *

"Alas! how frightful is the spectacle, what shall become of me * * * * * Poor Mother! I go to New York today-expecting to find her either dead or dying. I've remained here thus long at the advice of friends who thought it necessary that I shd be set right before the public of Boston to whom I owe so much of all that is dear to me-You know our friends who loved & appreciated my Mary so well and as many who have ever been-even in this most awful hour my firm and staunch friends. Abraham Lincoln was my President for in pure admiration of his noble career & Christian principles I did what I never did before-I voted & FOR HIM! I was two days ago one of the happiest men alive-Grant's magnificent work accomplished,* * * & sweet Peace turning her radiant face again upon our country--

Now what am I? Oh! how little did I dream my boy, when on Friday night I was as Sir Edward Mortimer exclaiming "Where is my honor now?" "Mountains of shame are piled upon me!" that I was not acting but uttering the fearful truth. I have a great deal to tell you of myself & the beautiful plans I had for the future-all blasted now, but must wait until my mind is more settled. I am half crazy now- You will be pleased to know that the deepest sympathy is expressed for me here-and none more sincerely than dear old Gov. Andrew.

God bless you,

Ned--" 3

~~(The following page is illegible)~~

On the day that the above letter was written, according to the Boston Globe, Mr. Tompkins with whom Edwin was staying, called on Capt. Albert A. Folsom, then superintendent of the Providence railroad, and arranged

with him to transport Mr. Booth to New York with as much privacy as possible by the Shoreline train that afternoon. Capt. Folsom had a sleeping car provided in the old Providence station on Pleasant St., and before any of the other passengers arrived that afternoon he met the Booth party at the station entrance.

Mr. Booth, this story declares, was so prostrated he could scarcely walk, and looked like a dead man. It was necessary to assist him and from the carriage then half carry him to the sleeping car, where he was at once put to bed and there remained till he reached New York, where he went to the house of his mother and sisters in East 19th St., Mr. Tompkins accompany^{ing} him. (4)

(4) ~~The Boston Globe, April 15, 1905~~

Mrs. Thomas Bailey Aldrich, a friend of the Booth family, vividly describes in "Crowding Memories" the scenes at the home of John Wilkes' mother following the assassination. "On Saturday morning the 15th breakfast was hurriedly served," says Mrs. Aldrich, "and then through the crowded streets, where already over the gay decorations of victory black trappings of woe were being hung, we came to the somber household within whose walls a mother and sister sat stricken and stunned with grief, like Rachel of old refusing to be comforted. Outside the newsboys, with strident voice, were calling, "The President's death and the arrest of John Wilkes Booth". While in answer to these words the mother moaned, "O God, if this be true, let him shoot himself, let him not live to be hung! Spare him, spare us, spare the name that dreadful disgrace!" Then came the sound of the postman's whistle, and with the ring of the doorbell a letter was handed to Mrs. Booth. It was from John Wilkes Booth, written in the afternoon before the tragedy. (5)

(5) ("Crowding Memories" by Mrs. Thos. Bailey Aldrich)
p.72

Mrs. Aldrich then tells of Edwin's arrival at his mother's home. "In the sad days following this home-coming" she says, "Mr. Aldrich was Mr. Booth's constant companion, a vigil that was not without threatening danger,

as daily letters, notes, and messages came to the house addressed to Mr. Booth warning him that the name of Booth should be exterminated. "None should bear it and live. "Bullets were marked for him and his household." "His house would be burnt." Cries for justice and vengeance, and every other indignity that hot indignation and wrathful words could indite.⁽⁶⁾

~~"Crowding Memories" by Mrs. Thomas Bailey Aldrich p.74)~~

"On the tenth day of waiting in this bereaved and unhappy household", according to Mrs. Aldrich, "a telegram came from Philadelphia to Mrs. Booth asking that she would come there at once, as Mrs. Clarke, her daughter, was seriously ill.

"Mr. Aldrich and Mr. Thompson were with Mr. Booth when the telegram came. Mr. Thompson offered to take Mrs. Booth to the train for Philadelphia, which unfortunately started from Jersey City, and entailed the long drive through the crowded streets. When Mr. Thompson had his charge in the carriage he was startled by the loud call of a newsboy crying, 'Death of John Wilkes Booth. Capture of his companion'. Mr. Thompson made some trivial excuse which enabled him to close the windows and draw down the curtains, and all through the endless way to the ferry was the accompaniment of this shrill and tragic cry, which Mr. Thompson struggled by loud and incessant talk to smother, that it might not reach the ears of the broken-hearted mother until he had an opportunity to buy a paper and know if the news was true. On the arrival at the boat he hurried the shrouded figure in his charge to a secluded corner of the deck, where he hoped she might escape, both in sight and hearing, the excitement that was seething about her.

"When he had found a seat in the crowded train for Mrs. Booth, he left her for a moment and bought a newspaper, and had time only to put it in her hand, and to say: "You will need now all your courage. The paper in your hand will tell you what, unhappily, we must all wish to hear. John Wilkes is dead";

and as he spoke the car slowly started, leaving Mr. Thompson only time to spring to the platform. On the moving train, surrounded by strangers, the poor mother sat alone in her misery, while everyone about her, unconscious of her presence, was reading and talking, with burning indignation, of her son, the assassin of the President. Before the train had reached its journey's end, Mrs. Booth, with wonderful fortitude and self-restraint, had read the pitiful story of her misguided boy's wanderings, capture, and death. And alone in her wall of silence read - "Tell my mother that I died for my country".⁷

~~("Crowding Memories" by Mrs. Thomas Bailey Aldrich - pp. 75-76).~~

At the time of the assassination of the President, according to the press dispatches from Cincinnati, Junius Brutus Booth was playing at Pike's Opera House in that city. He has been up late the night of the murder,

left his room and went direct to Pike's Opera House Saturday morning to attend rehearsal, totally unaware of what had transpired. An excited crowd had already clamored at the door for him, torn down the bill in which he was announced, and had only left on assurance that he would not play, and that no performance would be had that evening. When he appeared on the stage, Mr. Simmons, acting manager, drew him to one side and cautioned him against too much publicity. He inquired why, and, on being told the news, exclaimed, "My God! can it be possible!" swooned away, and

was conveyed from the stage in an insensible condition. (8)

John Sleeper Clarke, an actor, had married Asia Booth, a sister of John Wilkes, and at the time of the assassination resided in West Philadelphia. John Wilkes when visiting that city made his home with the Clarkes.

On the morning of the 15th of April, while Clarke was shaving, according to A. K. McClure in The Boston Herald, December 9th, 1901, he was shocked by a terrible scream from his wife, who had the morning paper brought up to her before she left her bed. When Clarke rushed to his wife and inquired the cause of her disturbance she pointed to the terrible headlines in the paper announcing that J. Wilkes Booth had murdered the President. She was not in vigorous health, and while vainly trying to calm her hysterical agony a United States marshal knocked for admittance, placed a guard about the house, and permitted none to enter or leave it. The house was carefully searched, but nothing was found to indicate that the murder had been considered there.

Washington dispatches of April 22nd stated that a letter received at Ford's theater, directed to J. Wilkes Booth, had been handed to the police. It was in the handwriting of Junius Brutus Booth, and was simply signed "Jun." "The writer," the newspapers said, "speaks significantly of the oil business, and advises young Booth to abandon it now that Richmond has been given up and Lee has surrendered, as his friends believe it will not be profitable." A postscript sign^{ed} "Alice" ^{was} appended, giving Booth similar advice." (N.Y. Tribune, Monday, April 24th 1865) This was sufficient to bring a charge against Junius of cognizance of John Wilkes' assassination intentions, and on the day John Wilkes died at the Garrett Place, Junius was arrested at the home of Mrs. Clarke, their sister in Philadelphia, where he had gone from Cincinnati. ^{Booth} He and ~~the~~ Clarke were taken to Washington and incarcerated in the old Capitol Prison, and held there for several weeks.

The Washington Star stated early in May, 1865, that among the many witnesses confined in the Capitol military prison in Washington was "Mr. J.S. Clark, the celebrated comedian." ~~It is but justice to that gentleman to state~~ He was unconditionally released last Friday, (May 5th), ^{"the story ran,} by the direction of Secretary

Stanton, without even any examination or the smallest taint upon his loyalty and devotion to his country. At his own request, before leaving he was permitted by the Secretary of War to make the following affidavit, which was witnessed by Judge Turner:

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 May 5, 1865, - I did not see John Wilkes Booth after February, 1865. I have no recollection of receiving but one letter from him in four years, which was purely on theatrical matters. I had no conversation with him upon political subjects for at least two years. I am, and always have been, in every way loyal to the United States Government. I have repeatedly volunteered my professional services and acted gratuitously in aid of the United States Sanitary Commission, and have made many private contributions beneficial to the Federal cause. I do believe, and have always thought the Booth family (save John Wilkes) to be in their sentiments and feelings entirely loyal to the United States Government. John Wilkes Booth, during the past few years, occasionally left at my house, in Philadelphia, large envelopes, in care of his sister (my wife); these he invariably said contained "stocks, etc." and were left for safe-keeping, as he was obliged to travel in the far West, to meet his professional engagements. These envelopes have remained sometimes for months, and he has taken them away. I think ^{while I was from home acting in New York,} during the latter part of November, 1864, he left an envelope in this way at my house, sealed and directed to himself as they all were. *[This contained the "address" printed in the notes of chapter IV]* During January he again visited my house, and asked for it, returning it or a similar one, which was, as usual, placed in my safe. On the Saturday afternoon after the assassination of the President - April 15 - Mrs. Booth, the mother, came to my house from New York. On Sunday we thought of the envelope. The whole family was of course much depressed and excited. We determined to open it. We found therein an address to the people of the North, and a letter for his mother, three thousand dollars in five-twenty bonds, one thousand dollars in Philadelphia city sixes, and for his

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AFFIDAVIT OF MR. J. S. CLARKE, THE COMEDIAN.

brother Junius an assignment of some oil lands in Pennsylvania, and nothing more. Thinking the authorities would inquire at the residence of his family for articles belonging to him, I kept the papers during Monday. On Tuesday I took them to United States Marshal Milward, suggesting that, as an act of justice to the distressed family,

I should like him to cause to be published the letter for his mother, as in that he exonerated his relatives from any sympathy with his secession propensities. I was surprised the next morning to find the address published instead of the letter for his mother. I had no idea the address would appear in the newspapers, the publication of which being a discretionary act of the government officer into whose hands, as a duty, I had delivered it. Upon the arrival of Junius B. Booth at my residence, April 19, on his way to his home in New York, he suggested that I should make known his whereabouts to the authorities, as he would do likewise in New York, as he might be required to testify to any knowledge they might suppose him to possess regarding J. Wilkes Booth, whereupon I introduced him to the United States Marshal on the 20th of April. On the 26th of April Mr. Booth was arrested.

J.S. Clarke.

(Sworn to, and subscribed before Judge Turner, Military Magistrate, Washington, May 6, 1865. (Lincoln Scrap Book P.59))

There were newspaper stories at the time which claimed that Edwin Booth was taken to Washington under arrest. This was denied, *but*

Ivory M. Blood, the detective who declares he made the arrest, related his story to the New York Sun in September, 1896, with such wealth of detail that one must conclude there was some basis in fact for ^{his} Mr. Blood's claim. (Note Following)

This story of the affair is related by ~~Ivory M. Blood:~~ ^{the detective,}

"At that time, Mr. Booth resided on East Fourteenth street, near Broadway.

I was in the United States secret service of the War Department, and had been detailed by Chief Baker to take Mr. Booth into custody. It was after the assassination of President Lincoln, and Mr. Booth's brother, John Wilkes Booth, the assassin, had been apprehended by Baker's men, and mortally wounded by Sergeant Boston Corbett, in Mr. Garrett's barn, in Virginia.

"Secretary of War Stanton and Judge Advocate-General Holt, under whose instructions I acted, wished to question Mr. Booth in regard to his knowledge, if any,

of the movements and conversations of his brother, John Wilkes Booth. Upon my going to Mr. Booth's residence, the door bell was answered by a colored servant. I told him that I wished to see Mr. Booth. He went up stairs and upon returning said that Mr. Booth wished to know if I would not tell him the nature of my business.

"No," I replied, 'I must see him in person,' and I sent up my card.

"The servant returned to Mr. Booth's room, and shortly afterward that gentleman came down and invited me into the parlor. I shall never forget his appearance. He was pale and haggard, greatly agitated and trembling from head to foot. He had apparently an intuition that something serious was to happen to him. When seated, I opened the conversation by saying to Mr. Booth:

"You see by my card that I am in the secret service, and am obliged to take you to Washington, D.C. If you wish to see any other authority I have my papers in my pocket."

"With a tremulous voice he replied: 'No, I do not care about seeing them.' Several times during our conversation he said: 'It is an awful thing.' 'It has distressed me greatly.' 'I feel as if I was going to die.' 'I cannot understand why my brother did the terrible deed.'

"Mr. Booth wished to know if he could give bonds, and I replied in the negative. Then he asked if he could consult counsel and I told him he could under the following conditions: That he must not leave my presence: that he could not have any conversation with any person, including his counsel, except in my hearing, and that all such conversation would be strictly confidential on my part, giving him a reason that the Habeas Corpus act was then suspended and that the Government did not allow any private conversation where parties were under arrest.

"Mr. Booth at the time had on his dressing gown. He returned to his room and came down wearing a black suit and silk hat, and said he was ready to accompany me to his lawyer on Wall street, whose name I do not at present recollect. Before leaving the house I said to him that I would not, as was customary, put the handcuffs on him, and that no one on the street would know that he was under arrest, adding, 'You cannot

get away from me, because I am armed.'

"'I pledge myself as a gentleman,' replied Mr. Booth, 'that I will not try to get away.'"

"I asked him if he had a pistol, and he answered,"

"'I have not.'

"The servant was dispatched for a carriage, and upon its arrival we were driven to the office of Mr. Booth's counsel, on Wall street. Mr. Booth asked me if there was much excitement in Washington, what I thought they would do with him, and if any one thought that he had any connection whatever with the tragedy.

"'I would rather die than go to Washington,' he said."

"I replied that I know of no one who had intimated in the least that he had been in any way connected with the affair.

"On introducing me to his counsel he said to him:

"'Mr. Blood will tell you his business with me.'

"I told the lawyer that I was going to take Mr. Booth to Washington, by order of the Washington authorities.

"The lawyer declared that I had no right to take Mr. Booth from the city, and if there were any charges against him he ought to be tried by the United States court here."

"'The Government has authority,' I replied, 'to send any person to Washington, and Mr. Booth is not the first person that I have taken there.'"

"'I don't care what you have done with other people,' the lawyer exclaimed in angry tone, punctuated with an occasional oath. 'I am here to defend the rights of Mr. Booth.'

"'No one objects to your doing that,' I responded, 'but I shall obey the orders of the Government.'"

"'I want,' continued the lawyer, 'to see Mr. Booth alone.'"

"'You cannot do it,' was my answer."

"What are the charges against, and what does the Government want with him?" asked the lawyer.

"To examine him as to when he saw his brother last, and if his brother had ever intimated to him anything about the assassination. The Government is not going to spare any pains or expense to get at the bottom facts of the affair."

"If I should set forth Mr. Booth's rights as a citizen under the Constitution, you could not take him to Washington," said the lawyer, with much asperity of language and a show of impudence in his manner.

"I replied that I would take Mr. Booth, and the lawyer, too, if he interfered with the orders of the Government, if it took all the soldiers at Governor's Island to do it."

"Well, Mr. Booth," said the irate counsel, turning to him as he sat in a chair in the office, without taking part whatever in the foregoing dialogue, 'you had better go with this man to Washington and if you need my services you can telegraph me.'

"On being driven back to Mr. Booth's residence, luncheon was served to us, after which he changed his costume and had some things put into a sachel. We went in the carriage direct to Desbrosses street ferry, and took a train for Washington.

"Upon arriving in Washington early the next morning I turned Mr. Booth over to Col. Baker, after we had breakfasted at an all-night restaurant, and after we had waited several hours at Willard's Hotel. He was put through a course of examination by Col. Baker and afterward taken before the Judge Advocate-General. There were no discrepancies in his two statements. After he had been examined by the Judge Advocate-General he was discharged. There was nothing whatever in his statements to show that he knew anything at all about his brother's terrible act before it had been perpetrated."

For nearly a year after the assassination, Edwin Booth was practically a recluse, shunning all appearance in public and seeing only a few of his devoted friends. He was naturally of quiet, sober temperament, and the fearful calamity had brought him continued melancholy. His friends finally urged him to resume his profession, but he

(New York Sun Sept 22, 1896)

at first vehemently refused it.

After repeated and earnest appeals to him to resume his life work for his own sake, with the assurance that the public would welcome him with generous sympathy because of his unspeakable suffering, he finally reappeared in "Hamlet" at the Winter Garden Theatre of New York in 1866, and was received with boundless enthusiasm. He then continued his great career as a dramatic artist, and with the highest measure of success, not only at home but abroad. He played in nearly all of the leading cities of the country, with the single exception of Washington, where he always refused to appear. (Boston Herald Sun. Dec. 9, 1901).

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A tragic coincidence is that on the day of Edwin Booth's funeral, (?) June 9th, 1893, the floors of the old Ford theater, then being used for Government offices, and the ~~Medical~~ ^z museum caved in and killed between thirty and forty clerks and injured many more.

It was to this building, the scene of John Wilkes Booth's crime, that the vertebrae removed from his neck at the autopsy had been brought.

The Fords had attempted to reopen the theater sometime after the assassination, but the Government prohibited its further use as a theater and subsequently purchased the building.

MOUNTAINS OF SHAME

NOTES

- (1) The Boston Globe, April 15, 1905
- (2) Life and Art of Edwin Booth by William Winter, Macmillan & Company, 1893 pp. 271, 272.
- (3) The Century Magazine, April 1909
- (4) The Boston Globe, April 15, 1905.
- (5) "Crowding Memories" by Mrs Thos. Bailey Aldrich p. 72.
- (6) "Crowding Memories" by Mrs Thomas Bailey Aldrich p. 74
- (7) "Crowding Memories" by Mrs Thomas Bailey Aldrich, pp. 75-76
- (8) The Boston Globe, April 15, 1905.
- (9) Sworn to, and subscribed before Judge Turner, Military Magistrate, Washington, May 6, 1865. (Lincoln Scrap Book p. 59)