Washington, D.C.
April 16th, 65

My dear brother,

Beck has not come from the office yet and I have not received your letter but as I have a good deal to write - I will begin now - I suppose by tomorrow the mail will go out from Wash. No trains left yesterday - What I have to write is with reference to the great tragedy which has caused a nation to weep - I had the privilege to be at Ford's Theatre on Friday evening & hear the shot which defined us of a President. It was given out during the day that some Lincoln had engaged a "tad" for the President. Genl Grant and having a deed not only to see them but to see the "American Carol" performed.
we determined to go. Before we went, Beech knew that the tent would not be there as he was to have for his home in the evening. We went a few moments before the time and waited some time for the President to arrive, as he did not come until late. The performance commenced and we thought we were the last to arrive, but not being there in the midst of the 2nd scene there was a great applause and cheering and our attention was directed from the stage to the dress circle close to the wall—walked Mr. Harris—Irene Lincoln. Major Rathbone—2 gentlemen behind him. These two gentlemen were watchmen in citizen’s dress who have always accompanied the President since the fracas commenced. He followed him within the circle until he entered the box.
Thinking we were looking for the last time at him—The last looking on the stage but his back tour and out of our right behind the flag so as occasionally when he would lean forward—Mr. Lincoln was in front of him and we only saw him occasionally. We saw his smile and turn towards them several times.

It was while every one's attention was centered upon the stage that a pistol shot was heard causing every one to jump (as an unexpected shot will) and look up at the President box merely because that was the direction of the sound and suggesting it to be part of the performance we all looked again on the stage when a man suddenly vaulted over the railing of the box turned back and then leaped to the stage striking on his heels a falling backward.
but recovered himself in an instant and started across the stage to behind the scene flourishing a knife—the blade of which appeared in the reflection of the bright light to be half as long as a man's arm—and making use of the expression you have seen in the papers. He had nearly disappeared before we could understand what it was or what had happened—The first thought was a crazy man—When he jumped on to the stage we all jumped to our feet and yelled and as he crossed the stage some few started toward the stage crying—Our President! our President is shot! Catch him—hang him! If Mr. Harris was our slave and the railing for water—that was all that broke the stillness in that Log—if the watch had called out at once.
as the man jumped to give us an idea of what had happened he could have been caught as he stepped from himself after the fall. There was not a soul to see in the box and perfect stillness was there which all added to our bewilderment. One man got up on a chair on hearing that the man was caught and said “take out the ladies & hang him here on the post.” Beck, seeing a knot hurried me out leaving the audience still standing and & speechless. We waited outside until a young man came out & said “He is dead. No doubt about it!”

Before we got out of the door came one said “It was J. Wilkes Booth.” and before I got out the idea that our Chief was gone—almost our sole dependence—I could not control myself & sobbed aloud.
We met several outside the door just coming in asking "For God's sake tell me is it true?" as they had heard already rumors of the great tragedy. The reason that we could not suddenly realize what had occurred was because we could not anticipate that an assassin could be in the box with the President. The only danger seemed to be from a shot fired by one of the audience.

Booth entered the front door and asked some one there if Gen. Grant was there that night. Then went along to the door of the box just where we had seen the President enter. Knocked at the door to the watch who opened it, said he wished to speak to the President. That he had a communication for him showing an Official envelope giving him a card with the name of a Senator written on it. The
watch stepped aside - the assassin extended a fist immediately while Mr. Lincoln was looking on the stage.

The excitement that night was intense of a mob of about 2,000 went to the Old Capitol Prison to turn it & they called upon the people to come out & see the rebel there - the Police & troops were out as a step to it or it would have been done - the assassin at Edwards' first stabbed the back more through the lungs & killed him I believe - knocked in the skull of Fred Ward with a butt of a pistol & stabbed another man - all had approached his entrance and the old man hearing the scuffle at the door - thinking it was some one after him, rolled out of bed on the floor and the assassin had to lean over the bed to make stab him so he only
had two cuts on his neck and face which will not prove serious if he has strength after his former sickness. There is no doubt that it was Booth who killed the President. James A. Garfield says he can testify that it was his plan. The secessionists here have all draped their houses in crape and acknowledge that it was the worst thing for the South that ever happened. Their best friend is gone. And I will be more Burke than ever. Lincoln was — Andy Johnson joined the Temperance Society after the Inauguration and every one who saw him at his own Inauguration were much pleased with his manner as he received the presses before him.

There are rumored changes to be made in the Cabinet already.
There was a strange coincidence at the theatre this evening. In the play, the American Conte won the prize at Archery and on receiving the medal, he was congratulated. He said he had done nothing; all he required was a steady eye, hand, a clear eye to pull the trigger. The mark was hit as he said it. He looked right up at the President that was in the play. He looked there merely because he was the principal person present but afterwards struck everyone as a strange coincidence.

On Friday, Beck received a letter from Duane, who is a prisoner at Point Lookout, begging him to forget the Past and to find out for him if he would be allowed to take the Oath of Allegiance to the U.S. That he
was sick enough of the Confederacy and very sorry he had ever had any thing to do with it — That afternoon Beck went to the court but of prisoners but he was out — and of course after the awful tragedy Beck did not feel like interesting for a rebel. I do not know what he will do now — the way may go to Genl Grant if Hoffman won’t do anything don’t say anything about it. I suppose you have read all I have told you, in the papers but being there myself I supposed you would like to hear it me just as I saw it — the authorities think that there is no chance for the attempting to escape that I think it is like hunting for a needle in a haystack. Good letter and when
Dear [Name],

ever it does not come by Saturday it is because you have left it to tell the latest news of Adie and when you wrote last she was a little troubled with her throat I had a letter from Maggie too I will read this letter today before getting yours. If you send me the word how much cloth it takes for Adie's rague I can buy it here to make it if I had the pattern. I have forgotten how wide the material that Mrs. Foster bought but if I know the length of her rague or the width of the half at the bottom I can tell how much it would take when I see Mrs. Foster about the width of the material. We are well and love with kisses to Adie.

Yours aff[ectionately],

Helen D. [Signature]