Leaf the Twenty-Second
The Walker Street Tragedy
by John Williams

A FEW years ago there might be seen in Walker Street, in the City of New York, two old houses remarkable for their peculiar style of architecture. They were built entirely of red brick, and their pointed gables and Gothic windows immediately carried the mind of the observer back to the days of good queen Bess, when that peculiar style of building was in vogue. No one knew when they were built, but it must have been long, long time ago, before even Walker Street was in existence, and when the ground around them was a verdant meadow. In all probability they were originally the country residences of some staunch Dutch yeomen, who lived on their own land, a pleasant ride from town. Perhaps they were originally built by two brothers, for they were close together, a narrow alley-way only dividing them.

The strange history I have to relate in connection with one of these houses is, however, of a much more modern date. It was when every vestige of country was removed far away, and when, as I have before said, these dwellings attracted universal attention from their strange appearance in the midst of more modern buildings that the house nearest West Broadway became the theatre of a fearful tragedy, which caused it to become one of the lions of New York, until it was demolished some two years since.

In the year 1844, this dwelling was occupied by a Mr. Stephen Alford, a gentleman of means, who had purchased the property some years before. Mr. Alford was a widower without any family. His establishment was under the superintendence of a niece, who had lived with him ever since his wife's death, and for whom he appeared to have the greatest affection. And she well deserved his love; for, according to all appearances, she returned his fatherly attachment with the devotion and obedience of a dutiful child. For many years nothing transpired to disturb the calm tranquility of their lives. They seemed to be perfectly happy and contented, and saw little company. Clara Alford was, at the time this history opens, twenty years of age. She was very beautiful; her features were regular, her hair a glossy auburn, her skin dazzlingly white, and her large deep blue eyes, fringed with long eyelashes, gave a peculiar dreamy expression to her face which could not fail to arrest the attention of every beholder.

In the summer of 1843, I had worked very hard investigating a forgery case. I had to give my entire attention to it, for the case was a very important one, involving immense interests. I worked at it day and night for six weeks, taking very little sleep during the whole of that time. At last, after tremendous mental exertion, I succeeded in discovering the guilty party—but I was so utterly worn out that I became seriously ill. The excitement of the case had kept me up during my investigation, but, the end attained, my nervous system entirely gave way. In this condition I was ordered by my physician to go into the country for a change of air. I resolved to go to Niagara.

It was here I became acquainted with Mr. Alford and his niece. I was completely fascinated by the latter. I do not wish the reader to make a mistake. I was by no means in love: I was fascinated by her intellect and superior attainments—with respect to her beauty, I regarded her as a beautiful piece of statuary, realizing all the poets have sung in praise of woman's loveliness.

I shall never forget the first time I saw her. It was in the drawing room of the Clifton House. It was evening at the time, and the apartment was filled with guests. There was that continual hum of conversation always prevalent in large assemblies. Seated apart from the rest, I noticed an old gentleman and a lovely girl engaged in earnest conversation. Her beauty attracted numerous eyes towards this couple, but no one seemed to be acquainted with them. Suddenly she rose from her seat, evidently in obedience to the request of the old gentleman, and sat down at the piano. She nimbly ran her fingers along the keys as trying its tone, and then commenced to play the Prayer from Moses. She performed so exquisitely, and with so much taste, that suddenly every voice was hushed, and the most miraculous silence fell over that large assembly. She appeared to have the power of making music enter the souls of people.—l looked around me to see the effect of the *chef d'oevre* of Rossini on the assembled guests, and was not surprised to see the eyes of many of them filled with tears. It was a great musical treat for the boarders of the Clifton House that night. She played for more than an hour. Her execution was perfectly marvelous, and when she left the piano there was not a single person who had the slightest "music in his soul," who did not regret.

The next day I had the good fortune to render her some trivial service while viewing the Horseshoe Fall, which dispensed with the necessity of a formal introduction, and for the next two weeks I had the gratification of enjoying her society every day. I found her, as I have before intimated, charming in the extreme. She was well read, and could converse on almost every subject. Mr. Alford made no objection to our intimacy. I had good opportunities to read her uncle's character during this time. There could be no doubt he loved his niece. While to others he was touchy and irritable, with her he was all gentleness. Yet with all this he watched narrowly. He seemed jealous of every young man who sought to become acquainted with her. Many, attracted by Clara's loveliness, made the effort; but they were always repulsed by her Argus-eyed uncle. Mr. Alford was anything but an amiable man. The least thing would cause him to fly into a passion; and there were moments when it was dangerous to speak to him at all, unless a person did not mind to run the risk of being insulted. Clara, at this unpropitious time, always had the power to calm and soothe him. I have seen his face, distorted with rage, at a word from her become smooth and placid as a sleeping infant's.

My stay at Niagara completely restored my health, and we all three returned to New York together. Here our intimacy did not end. I frequently spent an evening at Mr. Alford's house in Walker street.

This continued for about a year, when one evening I visited my friends, and was as usual cordially received. But still I could see there was something wrong. There was a gloom hanging over both uncle and niece.—Instead of Clara being full of life and spirits as was usually the case, she was constrained and silent. Mr. Alford, too, was in a worse humor than I had ever seen him. He abused everybody and everything, and to my great surprise, Clara made no attempt to sooth him.

Miss Alford soon excused herself under the plea of a headache, and left her uncle and myself alone together. There was a pause of a minute or two after she had gone. Mr. Alford appeared to be debating with himself, if he should confide something to me which weighed on his mind. I am

an acute observer of countenance, and I noticed that several times he was about to speak, and then checked himself. At last he said:

“Brampton, I have been very much annoyed today.”

“Indeed,” I returned. “I am sorry to hear it. What has occurred?”

“Clara and I have had a quarrel for the first time in our lives.”

“You and Miss Alford quarreled,” I replied, in the greatest astonishment; “impossible!”

“I would have said so too, if anyone had asked me this morning, but it is nevertheless true.”

“I can even now scarcely believe it.”

There was a pause. Mr. Alford hesitated to continue.

“Do you know a young man named Albert Seyton?” he asked.

“I know him well,” I replied, “a young physician.”

“Yes,” he returned, bitterly, “a physician without patients.”

“I believe he has only lately commenced practice. It takes some time for a physician to establish a name.”

“Well, sir, what do you suppose this beggarly young doctor has had the impudence to do?”

“I am sure I cannot guess,” I returned smiling at the old man’s vehemence.

“He has had the impudence to fall in love with my niece.”

“Indeed,” I returned, “not such a very great crime after all—perhaps the poor fellow could not help it.”

“Don’t tell me he could not help it,” cried the old man, getting more and more excited. “I should like to know what the miserable pill-prescribing beggar means by his impudence.”

“Does Miss Alford know of his passion?” I asked.

“Aye, sir,” he returned, striking the table with his fist—“she not only knows it—but, by heavens? she is in love with him too.”

“If they were really fond of each other, why should you object? It is true Doctor Seyton is poor, but he is one of the most honorable, good-hearted young men I ever knew.”

“Don’t speak to me about his honor or his good heart, and as for his poverty—I care nothing about that. Were he as rich as Croesus he would never marry my niece.”

“I suppose you would object to anyone marrying her.”

“You are right—I would. Mr. Brampton, you have no idea how much I love that girl. I can never, never part with her.”

The poor old gentleman’s eyes filled with tears as he spoke.

“How did Miss Alford become acquainted with him?”

“I only discovered today. It seems some two months ago, Clara was crossing Broadway, when she was in danger of being run over by an omnibus. This young man rushed forward, and seized the horses by their bridles, and by backing them, Clara reached the sidewalk in safety. Of course Clara felt very grateful to her preserver. He saw her home, but she did not dare to ask him in, for she knew I would send him off in double quick time. But since then they have frequently met stealthily, and have corresponded together. I intercepted a letter of his this morning, when the whole truth came out. Of course there was a scene—a violent one, too, I forbade her ever to think of this young Æsculapian again. She wept, I stormed—in short, as I before said, we had a violent quarrel, although I must do the poor girl the justice to say, all the quarreling was on my side. All that she did was to entreat and shed tears.”

“But, my dear, sir,” I ventured to suggest—“You cannot surely expect that she will never get married.”

“Not while I live, not while I live.” repeated the old man with energy. “At my death I shall leave her rich—she can then please herself.”

I said it was no use to urge the matter any further, and after extending the conversation a little longer, I took my leave. On my way home, my mind was filled with what I had heard. I sincerely pitied the young couple, for I knew it was utterly useless to attempt to soften the uncle. If they married secretly, there was no possible hope of extracting a cent from Mr. Alford. He was obstinate in the extreme, and although he sincerely loved his niece, if she once disobeyed him, I verily believe his pride would prevent him assisting her, even if she were dying of starvation. I wished to assist them, and turned over every possible method in my own mind—I could not come to any satisfactory conclusion. I retired to bed that night utterly undecided as to the best course to be pursued under the circumstances.

The next day business called me away to a distant State. It was a very important matter, and engrossed all my attention, so that I had no time to think about the love affair of Clara and the young physician. In about a week my business was finished, and I returned home.

The day following my return, I rose early, and while seated at breakfast, I took up the morning papers to read, as was my custom. I believe it was the *New York Tribune* which first claimed my

attention. The moment my eyes fell on the paper they were attracted by a paragraph which made my blood recede from my veins, and which sent an icy chill to my heart.

It ran as follows:

"SHOCKING MURDER.—The inhabitants of Walker street, yesterday, were horrified by the discovery of one of the most horrible murders it has ever been the lot of humanity to witness. The old-fashioned house in Walker Street, situated near West Broadway, was the scene of the tragedy. This house has been occupied for some years past by Mr. Alford, a wealthy gentleman who lived on his means. It appears that a Mr. Merrill had some private business with the proprietor, and went early yesterday morning by appointment, to call on Mr. Alford. He was surprised to find the house was fastened up. This was specially remarked, as it is known Mr. Alford always rose very early in the morning. He knocked at the door some time, but not being able to obtain admission, he became alarmed, and calling the aid of two policemen, the door was forced, and a number of persons entered the house. There was nothing on the ground floor to indicate that anything unusual had occurred. But when they entered Mr. Alford's room, a fearful spectacle met their gaze. Mr. Alford was discovered on the floor stone dead.

The wound was in the region of the heart and had evidently pierced the great artery known as the aorta. Death must have been instantaneous, the victim not being able to utter a single cry. It is satisfactory to know that the person whom suspicion points out as the perpetrator of this fearful deed is arrested. "We refrain from giving more particulars, as it is supposed there may be accomplices, and the ends of justice might be defeated. A coroner's inquest will be held today, when it is expected some important revelations will he made, the particulars of which will be given in tomorrow's issue."

When I read this paragraph I was utterly astounded. I did not know what to think or what to do. I mechanically seized my hat, determined to visit the scene of the tragedy, and had already made a step towards the door when my servant entered.

"If you please, sir," said she, "there's a gentleman below wants to speak with you."

"Tell him I can't see him now—that I am engaged, and he must call again."

"He says his business is most important."

"Did he give his name?"

"Yes, he told me to tell you his name was Doctor Seyton."

"Doctor Seyton!" I almost shrieked, much to the surprise of my domestic, who I verily believe thought I was mad. "Admit him directly."

The servant left the room, and almost immediately afterwards the young physician entered the apartment. He looked fearfully haggard and pale, and trembled in every limb. He staggered up to me and shook me by the hand, and then fell exhausted into a chair.

“My dear Doctor, compose yourself,” I cried, the sight of his excitement restoring me to my self-possession.

“Oh, Mr. Brampton,” he exclaimed, “you have heard the fearful news.”

“Yes,” I returned, “I suppose you allude to the Walker Street tragedy.”

He bowed his head, but seemed too much overpowered to speak. His conduct appeared very strange to me. I could not understand the intense feeling he manifested. It was true it was a fearful murder, and one sufficient to horrify anyone. But it was evidently not this feeling which caused him to act as he did. He appeared like one completely overwhelmed by some astounding misfortune. So far from Mr. Alford’s death being a misfortune to him it would, in all probability, advance his interest, for it removed the only obstruction to his marriage with Clara.

“It is indeed a fearful deed,” I added; “it is satisfactory to know, however, that the person who committed the deed is in custody.”

The young man gazed at me with the utmost wonderment expressed in his countenance; and then letting his face fall between his hands he wept like a child.

“Oh God!” he exclaimed in the utmost anguish of voice, “my last hope has failed.”

“What do you mean?” I cried, astonished more and more at this extraordinary conduct. “Has not a person been arrested who is suspected of having [committed] this murder?”

“Alas, it is only too true.”

“For the life of me I cannot understand what all this means—is not the party arrested, guilty?”

“Do you—can you believe it?”

“I know nothing more about the matter than is stated in this paragraph,” I returned, handing him the *Tribune*, and pointing out to him the item in question. He eagerly perused it.

“What!” cried he, when he had finished, “do you not know whom the police have arrested on suspicion of having committed this murder?”

“No, indeed; who is it?”

“Clara Alford, the murdered man’s niece!”

“Who?” I cried, starting on my feet, and supposing that I had not heard correctly.

“I repeat,” said he slowly, “that the police have arrested Miss Clara Alford on suspicion of having murdered her uncle.”

Again I asked the question, and again I received the same answer. I could not believe my senses. Had a thunderbolt fallen through the roof at my feet my astonishment could not have been greater. “What!” thought I to myself, “she, the gentle and confiding girl who would not harm a worm, murder her uncle in the dead of night—impossible! absurd! there must be some mistake.” I glanced at Doctor Seyton, and saw that he was watching my face with the utmost eagerness. The sight of his pale anxious countenance calm and collected.

“My dear Doctor,” said I, “I now understand your excitement and anxiety—but this charge must be frivolous in the extreme. I suppose the police thought they must arrest someone, and so took the first person they happened to meet.”

“Thank God that you hold such an opinion!” exclaimed the physician. “I was afraid, at first, that you, like everyone else, was convinced of her guilt.”

“Do you mean to tell me that anyone has expressed an opinion that she is guilty?”

“Oh yes, everybody that I have heard speak about the matter; but, of course, they are entire strangers to her.”

“I should think so, indeed,” I replied; “but come, tell me what you know about it.”

“I know no more than the paper states; the inquest is to be held today. My motive for coming here is to ask you to attend it.”

“That I shall do as a matter of course. But tell me, when did you see Miss Alford last?”

“Only yesterday. I called to see Mr. Alford. Clara begged me not to do it, but I was determined to know the worst. I should tell you I am a suitor for Miss Alford’s hand.”

“I am aware of that,” I replied; “tell me what passed in your interview with Clara’s uncle.”

“When I called I found them both in the drawing room. Mr. Alford appeared very much surprised to see me, and received me very coldly. The moment I mentioned my business to him he broke out into a most violent passion. He heaped every opprobrious epithet on my head, and ordered me out of his house. It was a violent scene. I left, utterly confounded and dismayed.”

“What did Clara do during this scene with her uncle?”

“She wept, and entreated her uncle to calm himself.”

“Nothing more passed than this?”

“Nothing.”

I looked at my watch, and found it only wanted a quarter of an hour to the time appointed for the inquest. I informed Doctor Seyton that such was the case, and we both left the house together for Walker Street. When we reached our destination the jury had already assembled, and when they had viewed the body they proceeded at once to their investigations.

Clara Alford was not present.

The first witness called was Martha Donovan.

"Martha," said the coroner, "you were a servant in the employment of the late Mr. Alford?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you in Mr. Alford's house the night before last?"

"No, sir."

"How was that? Did you not usually sleep there?"

"Yes, sir; I had never slept out before ever since I had been there."

"How came you to be absent on this particular night?"

"My young Missus told me that evening that if I liked to go and see my friends I might, but to be sure and come back the next day."

"Where do your friends live?"

"At Harlem."

"Did you ask for leave to go and see your friends?"

"I asked a week or two ago; Miss Clara then said she would see about it, but as she did not refer to it again I thought she did not wish me to go."

"I believe you were the only servant in the house?"

"The only one, sir."

"Now, Martha," said the Coroner impressively, "listen to me. On the day that you left for Harlem did you hear any quarrel between Miss Alford and her uncle?"

"Well sir, I can't exactly say there was a quarrel, but I heard high words in the drawing room. Doctor Seyton came to see Mr. Alford, and there was a great noise. I heard Master abuse the Doctor."

“Did you hear Miss Alford say anything?”

“Yes, sir. I heard her say to her uncle that he would live to repent his conduct.”

“That will do, Martha. You may stand down.”

I saw in a moment, from the course of examination, that the Coroner was fully persuaded of Clara’s guilt, and that he shaped all his questions to make the chain of evidence complete.

Doctor Seyton, to his own great surprise, was the next witness called. The Coroner interrogated him as to his recent visit to Mr. Alford, and drew from him his motive for going there, and the whole particulars of the reception he met with.

“And now, Doctor,” said the Coroner, as he was about concluding with this witness, “answer me one more question. Did you hear Miss Alford say to her uncle that he would live to repent his conduct?”

Before replying the poor fellow glanced, at me. I made him a sign to tell the truth.

“I believe she did make some such remark,” he [stammered] out.

“That will do, Doctor,” said the Coroner; “just sign your deposition.”

Mr. Merrill was next called. He deposed that he had gone to see Mr. Alford, by appointment, on the morning the murder was discovered. That he found the door fastened, and having knocked sometime without obtaining admission he became alarmed. He then procured the assistance of some policemen, and they broke open the door. He then gave the same statement as to the discovery of the body, &c., which had appeared in the newspapers.

Nicholas Crouch, a police officer, was next called.

“You are the policeman who forced the door of Mr. Alford’s house?” asked the Coroner.

“I am, sir.”

“State what you found.”

“I found Mr. Alford dead on the floor of his chamber.”

“Who was in the house at the time of this discovery besides those who had entered with you?”

“No one but Miss Alford.”

“Was there any evidence of anyone having broken into the house?”

"None at all, sir. The fact is, *all the doors and windows, with the exception of one attic through which it would be impossible anyone could enter, were securely fastened on the inside*."

When this answer was made, I could see the jury look at each other with that peculiar kind of glance which told me that their minds were already made up.

"Did you discover any traces of blood on the floors of the house?"

"There were no traces of blood on the second story, excepting those on the bed. On the upper story, however, there were distinct traces of blood on the floor which led to the door of one particular chamber."

"Who occupied that chamber?"

"Miss Alford."

The jury again glanced knowingly at each other.

"Did you examine Miss Alford's chamber?"

"I did, sir."

"Did you find anything there?"

"*I found this dagger concealed under the carpet*," replied the policeman, handing the weapon to the Coroner.

I glanced eagerly at it. It was a small ivory handled dagger, evidently of foreign manufacture. It was stained with blood. I must confess when this terrible proof was adduced I was confounded. I knew not what to think, the evidence appeared so overwhelming. The answer to the next question did not tend to enlighten me.

"When you first went to Miss Alford's room was the door fastened or not?"

"*It was fastened on the inside*."

A physician was next called, who testified that he had made a cursory examination of the body, and was of opinion that the deceased came to his death from a wound in the region of the heart. He further testified that the dagger found in Miss Alford's chamber exactly fitted the wound—in fact, that there could be no doubt whatever that it was the weapon with which the murder had been committed.

The investigation here ended, and the Coroner here summed up the evidence. He began by stating the important character of the evidence they had heard. The first point to be established was that the deceased had died by violence. Of this there could be no possible doubt. The next point to be settled was, who did the deed. He thought that the evidence they had heard settled this

point also. He dwelt particularly on the facts of the servant girl having been sent away the night of the murder, the doors and windows being all fastened on the inside, and lastly, the discovery of the murderous weapon under the carpet in Miss Alford's room, while the door was fastened on the inside, thus precluding the possibility of anyone having entered and placed it there. He then dwelt on the motive for the deed. He showed that Miss Alford was engaged against her uncle's consent to the young physician, Doctor Seyton. That there had been a quarrel the day previous to the murder, in which the niece of the deceased had used something like a threat. After enlarging on these points he left the case to the jury.

I was not surprised, after all I had heard, to see the jury, after deliberating a minute or two, turn round and deliver a verdict to the effect that "Stephen Alford had met his death by a dagger wound, inflicted on him by the hands of his niece, Clara Alford."

She was immediately committed to the Tombs for trial on the charge of willful murder.

The developments made by the coroner's inquest completely bewildered me. On one side was the most damning evidence—circumstantial—it is true—but there was not a single link wanting in the chain. On the other side there was my own knowledge of her character, temper and disposition; and I must confess when I recalled all I knew about her to my mind, the idea that she could commit the crime of which she was accused seemed preposterous and absurd in the extreme.

I determined in the first place to examine narrowly the theatre of the tragedy. I thought perhaps that I might find something there that would give me a clue.

I soon found myself in the old house where I had before paid so many friendly visits. I do not know why, but the extreme old-fashioned character of the rooms appeared to strike me more forcibly than ever. The large hall, the wide staircase, the immense lofty rooms, the small windows, and the air of solidity in everything, called my mind insensibly back to times long gone by. For some time I discovered nothing to give me the least enlightenment. A cursory glance at the doors and windows convinced me that no one could possibly have entered by them.

It will be remembered that when the policeman entered the house, he had found only one window unfastened—namely, that of the attic. After having thoroughly searched the lower part of the house, I made my way to this apartment, and examined the window in question. I found that it looked into the alley-way situated between the two old houses. Just underneath the window was a beam or support, the extremities of which rested on the gable-end of each house, evidently for the purpose of support. When I gazed from the dizzy height into the narrow alley, it seemed utterly impossible anyone could have entered by that means. The window was far too much elevated for any ladder to have reached it, and as for anyone climbing up the sides of the house, that was entirely out of the question.

My heart sunk within me when I saw my last hope fail me. I was almost tempted to leave the house in utter despair. Still after a little reflection I determined to finish my search.

My next visit was to Miss Alford's bedroom. I had not been three minutes in that chamber before my countenance cleared up, and the discovery I made served to dissipate all my gloomy forebodings. I was now certain that someone had entered the house by some means as yet undiscovered, and committed the crime.

It will be remembered that the most damning proof against Miss Alford was the discovery of the bloody dagger concealed under the carpet in her bedroom. Yet this very fact now proved to me beyond doubt that she was entirely innocent. This may appear a paradox, but the explanation is very simple.

The reader will bear in mind that the house was a very old one, and consequently the doors had shrunk a good deal. This was specially the case with the one opening into Miss Alford's room. In fact a piece of list had been nailed along the bottom of it to keep out the cold air. I was first attracted by a single spot of blood on the *outside* of the piece of list. I thought it very strange it should be there, and stooping down I turned it up. I found there was a space of more than an inch between the bottom of the door and the floor. I then turned up the carpet in the room, and found a long scratch on the boards, extending from the door to where the dagger was found concealed. The whole truth flashed on me in a moment; the murderer after committing the deed *had thrust the dagger under the door and pushed it with a stick as far as he could under the carpet*.

This discovery, as far as it went, was very satisfactory, and stimulated me to fresh exertions. I next proceeded to visit the body of the deceased. I found him lying just as he had been discovered by the police. I am something of an anatomist, having studied medicine when young. When I saw the wound I was convinced that the blow had been struck by someone who had a profound knowledge of the human frame. It was impossible such a wound as that could have been given by chance. It was directly over the arch of the aorta, and must have cut into the artery, producing instantaneous death.

I was about leaving the apartment when I noticed in a desk, which I opened, a packet of letters, yellow and worn by time. I picked them up and glanced curiously through them, but finding they referred only to private matters I replaced them from where I had taken them.

I could discover nothing more and left the house.

I had gone a block or two on my way home when the thought struck me I had not examined the alley. I was half inclined not to go back, but something prompted me to do so. The search was soon made and not entirely without success. In the middle of the alley I found a single sleeve stud. It was a peculiar one, being made of blood stone with a forget-me-not raised in gold in the center.

I put it into my pocket, thinking it might lead to something by and by, and had just entered the street again when I was accosted by an old friend of mine whom I had not seen for some years.

"Brampton, how are you?" exclaimed Mr. Duvall, for such was his name; "why it's an age since I saw you."

“I have lost sight of you for some time, and did not know you were in the city. Where do you live?”

“Why, I live here,” he returned, pointing to the house adjoining the one where the murder had been committed. In fact it was the other old fashioned dwelling referred to in the commencement of this story.

“Indeed!” I returned; “then you are the very man I wanted to see. Did you hear any noise on the night that Mr. Alford was murdered?”

“Not a sound.”

“Did anyone in your house?”

“No one that I am aware of.”

“Did anyone beside your own family sleep in your house that night?”

I asked this question on the impulse of the moment—a sudden thought having struck me.

“Let me see,” returned Duvall. “Yes, I remember now; a Dr. Seroque, a dentist, and distant relative of my wife, slept in the house that night.”

“Seroque, Seroque,” I muttered to myself; “where have I seen that name. Oh, I remember now,” and hastily bidding my friend adieu, I again entered the house I had just quitted.

The fact is, in running my eye over the letters which I found in Mr. Alford’s chamber the name of Seroque had struck me. I now hastened to take possession of these letters.

I seated myself in the drawing room and perused them all. I found them to be old letters from Mr. Alford’s late wife addressed to her husband. In them she complained of the persecutions of a Frenchman named Seroque, and afterwards gathered from other letters that Mr. Alford had taken summary vengeance on the persecutor by chastising him publicly.

I now began to see my way clear, and putting the letters in my pocket I again left the house. This time, however, I walked directly to the front door of the house occupied by Mr. Duvall and rung the bell violently. The master of the establishment opened the door himself.

“What, back again, Brampton?” said he. “I am delighted to see you—walk in.”

“Mr. Duvall,” said I, “I want you to do me a favor.”

“You may command me, what is it?”

“Just to let me see the room which was occupied by that Dr. Seroque you mentioned just now.”

"With all the pleasure in life," he returned, "but I tell you, you will have to walk up a good many steps, for our house was full that night, and we had to put him in the attic."

The light grew brighter and brighter.

Without further parley, Mr. Duvall led the way, and we mounted to the top of the house. As I expected, the attic was the exact counterpart of the one in which the window had been left unfastened in Mr. Alford's house.

The moment I glanced out of the window my mind was made up. I had discovered this *Dr. Seroque was Mr. Alford's murderer*.

"Where does Dr. Seroque live?" I asked.

"He practices as a dentist, and lives at No. 51 Canal street," replied Mr. Duvall, evidently not knowing what to make of all this. "But come," he continued, "now your curiosity is satisfied—for it can be nothing else that brought you up these stairs—let us go down and smoke a cigar together, and have a talk about old times."

"Thank you," I returned, "you must excuse me—the fact is I have got a bad toothache, and must go and see a dentist. I think your friend, Dr. Seroque, will do for me."

"Well, he's a good dentist—another time you must promise me to come."

I made the required promise, and having procured the assistance of two brother detectives, soon found myself in Canal Street. Directing the officers to wait outside, I entered the French dentist's establishment.

I was received by a dark looking foreigner somewhat advanced in years, with a bushy black beard, which had evidently been dyed.

"Dr. Seroque, I believe?" I observed.

"Yes, sir," he returned, with a very slight foreign accent.

"I have a tooth which troubles me, and wish your opinion as to whether it had better come out."

"Let me see, sir," he returned, turning up his coat sleeves after having placed me in the operating chair. I did not wait for anything more, but rising hurriedly from my seat, to the intense surprise of the dentist. I went to the door and called in my friends. When they entered I said:

"Secure that man—I charge him with the willful murder of Mr. Alford!"

They gazed first at me and then at the dentist. Dr. Seroque turned ghastly white, but he recovered himself in a moment.

“What do you mean, sir,” he said, “by this extraordinary conduct?”

“I simply mean that you are the murderer of the unfortunate gentleman who lived in Walker Street. To show you that everything is known, I will detail to you how you committed the deed. Some years ago Mr. Alford publicly chastised you. Since that time you have been burning to be revenged.”

“How do you know that?” exclaimed Seroque, gazing on me with the utmost astonishment.

“Never mind how I know it, such is the fact. At last an opportunity presented itself. On the night of the murder you stayed in Mr. Duvall’s house. Sometime in the course of that night you rose from your couch, and opening the window of the attic in which you slept, you cautiously let yourself down on the beam which forms the gable-end of Mr. Duvall’s residence to that of Mr. Alford. You cautiously crept along this beam until you reached the opposite window. Through this window—you entered Mr. Alford’s house. You then descended to your victim’s chamber and committed the fearful murder. The deed done, you went to the door of Miss Alford’s room and pushed the dagger with which you had committed the deed underneath it—in all probability using this very cane for the purpose,” I continued, going to one corner of the apartment, and taking from it a thin walking cane.

The Frenchman’s countenance was now piteous to behold. He was pale as a corpse—his face was perfectly livid—he muttered something.

“Allow me to finish,” said I, interrupting him. “After you had as you supposed, fastened the blame on an innocent person, you departed the same way that you came. But during your passage across the beam you lost something. See—this is what you lost; and see—here is the place where it is wanting.”

So saying I held up the sleeve stud I had found—and then pointed to one of his shirt sleeves, in which there was no button—and then to the other cuff, where the exact fellow to the one I had found was to be seen,

This overwhelming proof was too much for the Frenchman. He threw up his arms and murmured:

“Guilty! guilty! Yes, I did the deed—I did the deed.”

After taking the precaution of putting the hand-cuffs on him, I immediately conveyed him before a magistrate, where he made a full confession.

I lost no time in procuring an order for the release of my fair acquaintance. It was the happiest day of my life when I opened the prison door for her. I conveyed her to my own house, where I had arranged a pleasing little tableau. I then opened the door of my drawing room, and who should be sitting there but Doctor Seyton. The moment Clara saw him her joy was so great that, throwing all prudishness on one side, she rushed into his arms, which were stretched out to receive her.

I no sooner saw them locked in each other's embrace than I thought it prudent to leave them together.

It may be asked how I came to the conclusion that Seroque was guilty of the murder. The simple truth is that when I visited the chamber in which he had slept, I noticed on the outside of the window sill the bloody marks of four fingers, where the murderer had evidently placed his hand as he got in the window.

Two months after Seroque was hanged—and one year after I witnessed the wedding of Doctor Seyton and Miss Clara Alford.

Leaves from the Note-Book of a New York Detective: The Private Record of J. B. Ed. John Williams. Hartford: J. B. Burr, 1865.