

Leaf the Twenty-Ninth
A Story of a Pack of Cards
by John Williams

IN the beginning of the month of June, 18—, I left New York in pursuit of a criminal among the Alleghany Mountains. The weather was very beautiful and all nature decked in her complete spring apparel, offered a thousand charms to a traveller's gaze.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was not completed at that time, and I made my journey from Baltimore on horseback. After a few days' journey I reached the foot of the Alleghanies, and commenced my ascent. The scenery through which I passed was wild, and grand. Here I saw immense forests in which perhaps, the foot of man had never trod, and mountain streams forcing their way through precipitous gorges next attracted my attention.

One day I rode five miles without meeting a living soul. Towards evening I reached the hut of a wood-cutter. He received me cordially enough, and offered me a bed, but he knew so little of the country that he could not direct me where to find a shelter for the next night.

The next morning I started at hazard, keeping beside a mountain river as long as I could. At last I left its banks, and after continuing my journey for some hours I fancied I entered into a less wild-looking country.

Already the day began to decline, the setting sun was enveloped in a cloud of gray vapor, and I felt one of those melancholy moods stealing over me which a solitary traveller at the close of day frequently experiences.

Every now and then I cast uneasy glances around me, for I had no idea where I was going. At last I perceived a path before me. My heart beat with hope. It was doubtless one of those paths that are often to be seen through the mountains—paths which always lead the traveller to some hospitable roof.

Soon the lowing of a cow changed my hope into a certainty, and a turn in the path brought to my view a wreath of smoke, and another turn brought me in front of a charming dwelling, surrounded by a carefully kept garden, and with well cultivated fields all around it.

It was a much superior habitation to what is generally met with in the mountains, and although it had evidently been built for many years, it was the very perfection of neatness. The front of it was entirely covered with honeysuckle, through which the little Gothic windows peeped. The interior was in harmony with the exterior. Everything bespoke cleanliness and care; it is true the furniture was old-fashioned, but it was none the worse for wear.

In the sitting-room two muskets were suspended against the wall, some powder flasks and some game bags, and above these, as if it were the only object worthy of that honor, was a pack of cards fastened to the wall. This singular ornament was fixed there by a large nail which penetrated the entire pack, and the black head of which rested on the ace of hearts.

Before the door of the house sat an old man about eighty years of age; his white hair fell in curls around his shoulders, and his whole exterior revealed health and strength. His face was nearly free from wrinkles, and the natural gaiety of his disposition was reflected in his blue eyes as well as in every movement of his lips. He was one of those men, the winter of whose life is so blessed by heaven that it is calm and serene.

The old man's family consisted of three persons—his only son, a man of forty years of age, his son's wife and their child. The latter about ten years of age, resembling neither his father nor his grandfather. Instead of their blue eyes, his were black; his hair was long, silky, and very dark.

I was received at the door by the old man, who bade me welcome, and invited me to enter. I accepted his invitation without any ceremony, but with that easy nonchalance which a sense of superiority always imparts; but my pride received a great reproof when, having entered the cozy sitting-room of the family I found myself in the presence of the mistress of the house.

She resembled so little the woman I expected to see in such a place, that I bowed to her quite timidly. Instead of a coarse country woman, with red cheeks and homely garments, there stood before me a lady, in every sense of the word. Her face was pale, her eyes black, and she was excessively beautiful, not so much from the regularity of her features, as from a nameless grace which ornamented every action.

The old man's son presented her to me as his wife, and I learned that her name was Rachael. She spoke but little, but followed with interest the conversation entered into by her father-in-law, her husband and myself. Every word that fell from her lips revealed a superior education. Her husband listened to her with evident respect, often interrogating her with a look, and then changing the common place expression which he had uttered into a more delicate and agreeable phrase.

The child sat on a stool at its mother's feet. He was eagerly reading a book, every now and then raising his eyes to his mother's face with a look beaming with love and affection. There was something touching in the picture. The two men evidently watched him with emotion. It is scarcely necessary for me to state that such a strange spectacle vividly excited my curiosity. I suspected there was some mysterious history concealed in all this, and I was very anxious to have my host tell it me.

After supper we gathered round the hearth on which a bright hickory fire was burning. I endeavored to amuse the company by recounting my traveling adventures, and while doing so my eyes wandered about from one object to another, and fell by chance on the pack of cards, I have referred to above. I thought at first it was a painting, but rising to satisfy myself, I saw it was really a pack of cards, and the nail which fixed them to the wall was a real nail. The discoloration of the edges of the cards by smoke was a sufficient proof that they had been there for a long time.

“You have a singular ornament there on the wall,” said I, smiling on my host.

No one replied to my question, nor my smile; a cloud of melancholy on the contrary spread over all their countenances, and a moment afterwards the young wife disappeared. When she had gone her husband approached me.

“It is in truth,” said he, “a singular ornament. I will tell you the history of it after prayers.”

Rachael returned with a Bible in her hand, which she placed on the table before the old man. Such was the daily custom of the house. The old man opened the book at the page marked by his spectacles, then put on the latter and read a chapter. After which they all kneeled down, and he prayed in a loud voice. A few moments afterwards, in the midst of a deep silence, Rachael rose, took her son by the hand, and having wished us goodnight, returned to her chamber. The old man soon followed her example, and I was left alone with my host, James Carew, for such was his name.

Without any preamble whatever, he pointed to the cards, and told me the following history, which I give in his own language:

There is a history attached to those cards (he commenced) which I like to tell to every young man who is about entering the world. You may think it strange, but I look upon them in the light of a Bible, for when I see them it recalls to my mind all the events connected with them, and I fancy I hear a chapter from that holy book which my father read a few minutes ago.

It is twelve years ago since those cards had such a marked influence on my existence, I must therefore, go back to that period. I was not much different then than I am today, for I have changed but very little. Perhaps I had more life and vivacity at that time, for the truth is my spirits were always good, rivaling in this respect my dear old father.

We lived in the same house that we do now, without, however, enjoying the same easy circumstances. I was alone with my father, hunting, fishing, and the culture of our farm was sufficient for our wants. An honest laborer, with his wife and two sons, assisted us on the farm. They lived, and still live, near us. We worked hard, and certainly made but little, but our expenses never exceeded our resources, and we enjoyed such robust health that the visit of a physician under our roof was an unknown event. In short, we had every reason to be happy, and to thank Providence for its kindness to us.

One hot July day I mounted horse and proceeded to the little town of Grafton, for the purpose of making some necessary purchases. I executed my commissions, and was returning home, when plaintive and distant cries reached my ears. I pushed on my horse towards the spot from which they proceeded.

About three or four hundred yards off I perceived, in the midst of some low shrubbery, a man calling for help. His horse was extended on the ground, and he was on his knees near the animal, rubbing one of its legs with his hand. Not far off lay a dead rattlesnake. I understood in a moment what had occurred. I leapt from my horse and approached the stranger, to assist him if it

were possible. But the poison had already conquered, and in spite of all our effort the poor beast expired.

At that moment I examined the stranger attentively. He was a man passed the middle age, with very strongly marked features, and, with very black hair; his eyes were full of fire, and they had such a piercing look about them that I felt myself transfixed by his gaze. His face was pale, and his dress in the height of fashion; he carried a gold watch fastened to his vest by an expensive chain. In his hand was a gold snuff-box, fashioned in the form of a shell. The loss of his horse did not appear to affect him much, and he received my expressions of condolence very coolly.

“Pshaw!” said he, with a half smile, “it is not worth mentioning. You have a good horse there, and you will give it up to me; you appear to be an excellent young man.”

The proposition was by no means to my liking. I cast my eyes over my horse, which was in fact a superb beast, and felt by no means disposed to part with him. Having confidence in my own strength, I did not fear that he would attempt to take him from me by force, but still I looked upon the stranger with suspicion; he remarked my perplexity, and explained himself more clearly.

“Young man,” said he, “I repeat that your horse is a very fine one. Will you sell him to me? I will pay you what he is worth.”

This proposition gave the affair entirely another aspect. It was a simple sale that he proposed. I was willing to accede to this, for although the horse coveted by the stranger really deserved the praise he bestowed upon it, we had others in the stable sufficient for our business, and yet I felt that it would cost me a good deal to separate myself from my faithful companion, and if I had not taken into consideration the stranger’s embarrassed condition, an embarrassment I could easily remedy by selling him a superfluous horse, if I had not reflected that we required another cart and other materials for the farm, the bargain would certainly have never been concluded.

“You find my horse to your liking?” said I, hesitatingly.

“Perfectly so, and I am ready to pay you a good price for it.”

“What will you give me?”

“Fix the price yourself; you are old enough to know what it is worth.”

“Well, then, I ask a hundred and thirty dollars for it.”

“That is not enough; I will give you a hundred and fifty. Are you satisfied?”

“Quite so.”

“I will give you my dead horse in the bargain. He is a superb animal, and deserves to be stuffed for a model.”

So saying the stranger drew from his purse a hundred and fifty dollars and placed them in my hands. I bit them to see that they were good, almost blushing at my suspicions. In fact the appearance of this man should have inspired me with contrary sentiments. A rogue would not have been dressed so elegantly, he would not have worn such handsome jewelry, and he would not have been mounted on such a handsome horse. The stranger watched me attentively.

“Have you ever,” said he, “possessed as much money as that at one time before?”

“Never.”

“I thought so by the way you looked at it. You seem to me to be very frank and honest. Your horse, I suppose, is sound?”

“I will answer for it with my life; but to be frank with you, I think I do wrong in taking more money than my horse is worth.”

“Ah, your conscience is hurt, my honest lad? But I will find a way to satisfy it.”

So saying, the stranger drew from his pocket a pack of cards, the same that you see nailed to the wall.

“We will play,” said he, “for the twenty dollars which you think you have received too much.”

And throwing that sum on the dead horse, which was thus transformed into a gaming table, he began shuffle the cards. Although I felt remorse, I could not resist this man, and placed my twenty dollars by the side of his. He showed himself so firm and resolute in all his movements that all contradiction was impossible.

“What game do you play?” said he.

And he named some fifteen, of which I had never heard before. My ignorance appeared to embarrass him.

“You know no game, then?”

“None.”

“Very well, we will play at ‘Old Sledge,’ and I will teach it to you.”

The stranger gave me two or three lessons, and I soon comprehended it. He passed the cards to me.

“You begin,” said he.

I played and won.

“I double the stake,” cried the stranger.

And before I understood what he meant he had already placed forty-nine on the horse. I felt a sinking at my heart and did not wish to play. I wanted to lose, but did not know how to resist the piercing glance he bent on me.

In spite of myself I picked up the cards. I won again, and continued to win. I was a prey to real despair. I trembled in every limb. My adversary, on the contrary, was as calm as possible; he drew from his purse all that was left of his money.

“Play,” said he, giving me the cards.

Fortune favored me again.

“You are a favorite child of the fickle goddess,” said he: “the money is yours. Here,” he added, throwing on the heap of notes and gold his purse, “take this to put your winnings in.”

I refused, and leaving the enormous sum I had gained, took only twenty dollars, the amount of my first stake, and rose up to leave.

“Remain,” said the stranger, “and sit down.”

I obeyed.

“I cannot take back what you have won,” said he, “for according to all law and right it is yours. There only remains one way for me to regain possession of it. I will play you for my horse.”

My heart beat violently—not that I desired to win back the horse that I had sold; but I felt pity and sympathy for him.

“You are very lucky,” said he, “and you appear to be a very steady young man. I do not see why I should not make you my heir. You are not married!”

“No, indeed.”

“But you have probably a sweetheart, that is allowable at your age.”

“Not yet. In the deserted region in which we live there are but few girls, and among those that I have seen there is none that I should like to make my wife.”

“The fault is perhaps in your own self-esteem. You think too highly of yourself to bestow your hand on a poor girl.”

“Nothing can be further from the truth; but it seems to me that to marry, one should be in love, and I have not experienced that passion yet.”

“You must be difficult to please. So much the better; I approve of it. A marriage made in haste is repented at leisure. But there do exist young girls—”

The stranger did not finish his sentence. The cards were dealt and we began to play. How shall I say it? I won again. I cannot picture to you my despair. I rose convulsively.

“Sir,” said I, energetically, “do not think that I intend to despoil you of your horse and your money. Keep the latter and give me back the former; or if it please you better, keep the horse and give me the hundred and thirty dollars I asked for it. I will not take a cent more.”

“You are a singular personage, my dear James. Do you know that a such a proposition from anyone else would be an insult? Debts of play are debts of honor, and no one can avoid paying them. There is your horse and your money, but do not think that our game is finished. I have already declared that you are a good and steady young man, and that is why I love you, and intend to make you my heir. In the meantime, I hope to win back my horse and my money. If my purse is empty, my resources are not entirely exhausted. I possess, among other things, a brooch and a diamond ring, which are worth double what you have won. I will stake them.”

“No,” I replied, quickly, “I will stake the money, but not the horse, or if I stake the horse and money, I withdraw a hundred and thirty dollars of the latter.”

“As you please; only, my young friend, I have not the ring and brooch with me, and although it appears scarcely fair to play for an object the existence of which my adversary has no certainty, I can act in no other manner; but I give you my word of honor that if you win the diamonds they shall be faithfully transmitted to you.”

I did not believe this, but it gave me no uneasiness, for I wanted my adversary to win back his property. I had never played for money in my life before, and what I had won burned my fingers as if it had been stolen. The stranger took a gold pencil-case from his pocket, and wrote on a piece of paper the following words:

“Good for two diamonds—a ring and a brooch—worth eight hundred dollars.”

He signed it with two initials. The stranger then showed me what he had written. I asked myself, when I had read it, if the man was not crazy? I was certain of it when I heard him add:

“There is an important condition attached to the possession of these diamonds,” said he.
“What is it?”

“If you win them, you will also win a wife.”

I could not help smiling.

“Do not laugh, I speak seriously. You are a bachelor, and no doubt some time or other intend to marry.”

“Certainly, if I meet a woman whom I can love. “

“You are a good fellow James and you deserve a good wife. The person I refer to is worthy of you.”

“But will she prove to my liking?”

“I hope so—I believe so. She possesses every virtue that can charm a young man. She has mind, a good heart; she is well educated, and sings like an angel, and plays the piano and guitar.”

“A piano and guitar—what do I know about such instruments? I have no wish to marry a musician.”

I said this in an ironical tone. I was persuaded more than ever that the stranger was a madman escaped from some lunatic asylum. But where did he get all his money from?

“Yes, she plays the piano and guitar,” he continued, “besides which she draws and paints. Nothing has been neglected in Rachael’s education.”

“Her name is Rachael, then?”

“Yes.”

“And her surname?”

“You shall know it when you win the diamonds.”

“But what is her age? What is her appearance? Is she young, and handsome? I do not wish for an ugly woman, be she ever so well educated. I have heard it stated that talented women are almost always ugly.”

“You are wrong, my dear James. Rachael is young and handsome. She is nineteen years of age. I wish you well, and that is the reason I play against you. My loss will be your gain, and you shall be my heir.”

“I thank you. May I ask if she is your daughter?”

A cloud came over the stranger’s features. He replied in a grave tone:

“My daughter! Do I look like a man whom Heaven has blessed with children, and especially with a girl as Rachael is?”

“Here is a lucid interval,” thought I to myself. “I must profit by it.” And I looked around me to seek for a means of escape.

“No, James,” he resumed, “Rachael is not my daughter. She is the issue of respectable and virtuous parents. Have you any other questions to ask me?”

“No.”

“You consent, then, after what I have said of Rachael, to take her for your wife, or rather you promise me to marry her if you win her?”

I looked at him with an irresolute air; but he fixed on me his piercing eyes, so that I was compelled, in spite of myself, to lower mine. Reflecting that the man was certainly a madman, I thought it better to humor him, and replied in the affirmative. He shook me cordially by the hand; and we commenced our game. Fortune again favored me. I won the diamonds and Rachael.

“I congratulate you, James Carew,” said the stranger. “You are really worthy of your reputation. I have found in you the man I have been seeking for a long time. Everything I possess now belongs to you. Lend me your horse so that I can go to Harper’s Ferry and fetch your wife.”

“My horse is at your service,” I replied, “as also is the money I have won. I have resolved not to take a single cent of it. Such an acquisition, obtained by such means, would weigh heavily on my conscience.”

“You are crazy,” he replied, putting the cards in his pocket. “I will borrow your horse and twenty dollars.”

“Take all,” said I, and left the whole of the money, with the exception of a hundred and thirty dollars, on the dead horse.

“You are my heir, James, consider yourself as such. Between two persons so closely connected there should be no secrets.”

He stretched out his hand to take the money. I turned away my head, that I should not see him. When I turned round again he was already on the saddle, and had galloped off. To my great astonishment, with the exception of twenty dollars he had left all the money on the dead horse. I still thought that he was mad, but I gathered together the notes and gold, and slowly proceeded home.

When I reached the house I told my father that I had sold the horse; but I did not say a word of my gambling exploit, for he held gambling in the greatest horror. I showed him only the hundred and thirty dollars and concealed the rest. I was at first very much distressed about the possession of so much money; but our harvest followed. It was our busy season, and in three weeks time I had almost forgotten my adventure, and recovered my tranquility.

One evening, however, just as the sun was setting, I was seated beside the door of the house, after a hard day’s work. I was in my shirt sleeves, I had no coat on, and my face was bathed in perspiration. Suddenly the stranger appeared on horseback, coming directly towards the house. I

recognized him at a glance, and my heart beat quickly, for riding beside him was a young girl on a brown pony. I turned towards my father, who noticed my emotion; but he had not time to question me, for the two strangers had already arrived. In spite of my confusion I could not help looking at the young girl with the greatest curiosity. She was exquisitely formed and sat on her horse like a queen; but her face was veiled. The stranger helped her off her pony.

In my whole life before I had never felt so much troubled. The sight of the stranger was in itself a great surprise; but to see him with the girl I had won at play, put a climax to my agony. I arose to welcome them, and began by making apologies for the negligence of my toilet.

“You need make no excuse, Mr. Carew,” replied the stranger, abruptly, “labor is honorable. How are you? Ah, this is your father, I suppose?”

I introduced him to my father as the gentleman who had bought our horse, and then ushered, them into the house.

“My ward, of whom I spoke to you,” said he, as he entered.

At these words the young girl threw her veil back. I do not know why, but I actually trembled at the sight of her. I shall say nothing to you of her beauty; words are powerless to express what I thought, and what I still think of it.

The stranger fixed on me and on my father an interrogative look. I thought I remarked in his features doubt and uneasiness; but the impression were soon dissipated. I saw his countenance after he had examined my father’s face, beam with cordiality and kindness which solicited sympathy and confidence.

“Mr. Carew,” said he, to my father, “I am sure I can appeal to your hospitality to give a chamber to my ward?”

“Our house is simple and homely,” replied my father, “but it is entirely at your service.”

“I thank you; you are a man after my own heart. My name is Alfred Denver. My ward is the daughter of dear friends of mine. Her name is Rachael Herder. Rachael will be very grateful to you if you will conduct her at once to the chamber you design for her. She requires to make her toilet after her journey.”

We immediately carried out his wish. Rachael was installed into our best chamber. Mr. Denver unfastened the portmanteau which was fastened behind the saddle and conveyed it to Rachael’s room. I took the horse to the stable. When I returned my father and the stranger were seated side by side, and conversing as confidently as if they had lived all their lives together.

You can fancy my condition of mind. I was like one intoxicated. I did not know if I were asleep or awake. The sight of my horse gave me real pleasure. But these diamonds and that young girl! My pride revolted I could, not allow myself to be made the plaything of a stranger. After a short time I took courage.

“Although I am only a countryman, without much education,” said I to myself, “I have, nevertheless my heart in the right place. No woman ought to make an honest man blush, even although she wears silks and velvet.”

These reflections did not prevent me making a change in my clothes before rejoining our guests. When I re-entered the room where I had left Mr. Denver with my father, I noticed that the former surveyed me with pleasure. Supper was announced, and Rachael entered. If she appeared handsome to me in her travel stained garments, you can judge of the effect she produced on me in her present modest and fresh attire. Once I remarked she cast her eyes on me. I endeavored to interrogate her look. She turned her eyes away without the slightest embarrassment, and then paid no more attention to me. This wounded me; I concluded that Mr. Denver had said nothing to his ward of what had passed between us. Was I then, seriously, to be that man’s dupe? “I will wait,” said I to myself.

The supper was simple and frugal. The young girl scarcely touched it, and I had lost my appetite. After supper Mr. Denver proposed that we should take a short walk, while Rachael, who had completely captivated my father, continued to converse with him. We entered a neighboring wood. The stranger suddenly stopped.

“Well, my dear James,” said he, “you have seen the young girl I spoke to you about. Does she please you?”

“This is an embarrassing question,” I returned. “She is certainly the most handsome girl I have ever seen; but beauty alone is not sufficient in a wife, and to pronounce a final judgement it requires time.”

“How long do you ask?”

“I do not know.”

“Is two weeks long enough?”

“That depends on circumstances. There are characters that show themselves in the first hour—such is mine—there are others on the contrary, that are enveloped in an eternal mystery.”

“I trust Rachael’s is not one of that kind,” replied Denver. “Rachael is easy to read. I will leave her here for two weeks; when I return I am sure your mind will be made up, for your dispositions are the same.”

“Then are you serious in this matter?”

“Quite serious; but your question is natural, and I understand it. You regard my conduct as very strange, and so it is, judged from an ordinary point of view. I have reflected long and seriously upon this matter. I am the young girl’s guardian; her parents, as I have already told you, were my oldest and dearest friends; when they died they left her to my care. I have treated her with the

tenderness of a father, my sole desire is to leave her in the hands of a noble and worthy husband, who can supply my place. I am old, and already on the brink of the grave. In you, dear Carew, I have found the man who can make my beloved child happy. As you said just now, your character is easily read. With my experience of the world I recognized those qualities which distinguish you, and which made me resolve that you should marry Rachael. As yet she knows nothing of my project, and from what I have gathered, I have discovered that you have equally concealed them from your father. Perhaps you have acted right, although as a general thing I do not approve of secrets between parents and children. I shall go, then, and I hope when I return that all difficulties will be smoothed over.”

Such was our conversation. I could not help, however, when we were returning to the house, expressing my astonishment that he had not chosen in some city a husband more suitable in worldly position and education for his ward. Mr. Denver replied to this observation in a manner so determined and resolute that, although I was by no means satisfied, I was silent.

“Yes,” said he, “your remark is a just one, and any other than myself, perhaps, would have sought for Rachael a rich citizen. But I know her heart; her desires are simple and innocent. I therefore seek for her an honest and virtuous husband.”

On the evening of the same day, when Rachael had retired to rest, Mr. Denver asked permission of my father to confide his ward to his care for two weeks, while he went to Baltimore, where he had important business to transact. He pretended that he dared not expose her person to the fatigues and dangers of so long a journey. He presented the matter in so simple a light that my father could do nothing else but consent. And yet, the next morning, when Mr. Denver had started, my father said to me:

“James, when I reflect upon it, it seems very extraordinary that Mr. Denver, who is a stranger to us, should leave this young girl in our care, and in a house where the only woman is an old servant.”

“But, father, is she not as safe here as if she were with her own relations?”

“Certainly, James. But she will soon grow tired of this deserted place. She is one of the most charming creatures I ever saw, full of grace and innocence.”

I was of the same opinion as my father, but I said nothing, although my heart beat violently, and my secret trouble made the blood ascend to my cheeks; for although my own fate, as it were, seemed to be in my own hands, I foresaw that I should have to surmount terrible difficulties. At breakfast my father announced to Rachael that Mr. Denver had gone. At first she seemed much affected, but by degrees she grew calmer, and appeared to take pleasure in our society.

This intercourse every day, under the same roof, at the same table, soon dissipated the extraordinary timidity I had felt in the young girl’s presence; her amiability gave me courage, and when I dared to speak freely, I had so much to say, and she listened to me so willingly, that we might have been taken as friends from childhood. She was so good, and appeared to interest herself in all that I showed her. We took long walks, morning and evening. My father often

accompanied us, but he could not go very far and soon left us to ourselves. Thus hours and days slipped away in Rachael's company, and my work was neglected.

I need scarcely add that all my remorse on the subject of my gambling with the stranger had entirely disappeared. I understood marvelously well now what he meant by saying that his loss would be my gain. I do not speak here of the diamonds, I had not as yet seen them, and they gave me no uneasiness; I speak of an object more precious in my eyes than all the treasures of the earth.

I awaited Mr. Denver's return with impatience equal to the fear which his reappearance had before inspired me with. But his absence was prolonged a week over the time agreed upon. He arrived at last. At the first glance he penetrated my secret.

"Well, Carew," said he to me when, we were alone, "I see that all has gone on well. You have convinced yourself by this time. I suppose that I told you the truth about Rachael. There only remains for us to see what she thinks about you. You have been often with her?"

"Often, that is not the word; I have occupied myself with nothing else but Rachael."

"What! you have neglected your work, your cattle, your horses?"

"They have enjoyed perfect liberty."

"That is bad news for the prosperity of the farm, but good as showing your love. When you are married you will repair the time lost."

"Alas! I fear that will never happen, for how can a girl so gifted and endowed as Rachael love a poor rustic like me?"

Mr. Denver examined me attentively for a few moments. This silent examination was torture to me. My heart beat ready to burst from my chest.

"Rachael," at last said this singular man, "has always followed my advice, for she knows I love her as a father. You, James, possess all the necessary qualities to inspire a woman's love and devotion. You are young, you have an agreeable exterior, and you have that courage and strength which only country life gives. You are good, and you have a delicacy of feeling and thought, which must certainly recommend you in Rachael's eyes. I will not say that you have already won her heart—that is a slow operation, and does not sometimes occur until after marriage. But I hope my efforts, my influence, and especially my love, will hasten the denouement we hope for, and which will be followed by such happy consequences for Rachael."

My mind was so full of thoughts of Rachael that I scarcely listened to what Mr. Denver said. I thought I detected in his voice and attitude a sort of melancholy gravity which had escaped me before. This gravity dissipated the idea that he was merely jesting with a simple countryman.

He shook my father cordially by the hand, and having kissed Rachael on the forehead, he offered her his arm and took her on one side.

“What strange people,” said my father, “and yet they have excellent hearts. The girl is an angel, but it is easy to see that he is very melancholy.”

I could make no reply—my heart was too full.

“How is it,” continued my father, “that he could leave her so long with us? There are few fathers who could so abandon their child to strangers in such a wild country as this.”

“But you know she is not his daughter.”

“But he loves her as his child; and in all probability she has never known any other father. How I pity that poor creature, and how much wish she could remain always with us.”

My father’s last words decided me to speak. I then told him what had passed between Denver and myself, our gambling transactions, the money I had won and Rachael’s diamonds. I did not omit a single fact. I then told him that the young girl’s departure would be a mortal blow for me, and related my last conversation with Denver, and my hopes and fears.

My father shook his head; the passion for play which I had revealed as existing in Denver opened his mind to suspicion. But it did not alter the good opinion he entertained of Rachael. He only pitied her that she was so closely allied to a gambler.

We were interrupted in our conversation by Denver himself. This man, so sombre, so mysterious, had a talent of making himself agreeable in the most eminent degree. He took me by the arm, and said:

“Go and find Rachael, she is expecting you.”

I flew to the house, but when I arrived on the threshold, I suddenly stopped. I fancied I heard a deep sigh. I was prey to a violent emotion. I asked myself if it was not a crime to force the inclination of this poor young girl. I felt humiliated that I had not won her love; but this very humiliation remained my resolution and courage.

“Yes,” said I to myself, “if I cannot succeed in pleasing Rachael, she shall at least know that I am not a coward, and that it is not my intention to abuse her state of dependence on her guardian.”

I entered the chamber, I stood before her, I seized her trembling hand; what I said I do not know. My heart spoke from its most secret recesses, and my lips murmured the words. I only remember that Rachael, her eyes filled with tears, blushed. She told me with a sweet smile, that she acceded to Mr. Denver’s wishes, and that they were in accordance with the desires of her own heart.

Denver joined us; he found Rachael in my arms, I pressed her to my heart. He appeared to have had a satisfactory conversation with my father, but in spite of his apparent joy, I saw there was

something strange about him. Since his journey to Baltimore, his eyes had lost their brightness, the furrows in his face had become more distinctly marked, and a great change had taken place in his appearance.

“Dear James,” said he, “my desire is that you be united as soon as possible. Tomorrow morning we will go to the clergyman’s, and the nuptials shall be celebrated.”

Everything was done as he wished. And we were married. The day after the wedding, after breakfast, Mr. Denver was to take leave of us.

“Rachael, my child,” said he, addressing his ward, “I must now leave you for a long time, perhaps, for at my age we may never meet again. I have fulfilled the promise I made your father, and you are now the wife of a noble and worthy young man. I hope and believe that you will always live happily together, and that you will be as good to him as he is to you. Give me a kiss my dear child; it is perhaps the last.”

“O, no, no, father!” cried Rachael, throwing her arms around his neck.

It was a moving picture, of which neither my father nor I understood the true signification. The poor child clung convulsively to the old man; at last overcome by grief, she fainted. Mr. Denver carried her into her chamber and placed her on the bed.

“She will soon come to herself. I will profit by the opportunity to get away. You will join me by-and-by James, I will wait for you.”

He left the house before Rachael had regained her consciousness. In my agony and despair I did not know of whom to ask counselor assistance. At last she came to herself, and seeing that Denver was already gone, she pressed me tenderly in her arms.

“O, James!” said she, in a broken voice, “you are now my only support—all that I have to live for in the world!”

I told her that I should have to leave her for an hour while I went to bid adieu to our old friend. She made no objection.

When I rejoined Denver I remarked that he was still on foot, and had made no preparation for his journey.

“Where is your horse?” said I, very much astonished.

“I have no need of it,” he replied. “Besides, I have done. Have you forgotten that you won it at cards?”

“But can you believe that I will take it away from you, my dear benefactor?”

He interrupted me by putting his hand over my mouth.

“Not a word more, James, on this matter,” said he. “The horse belongs to you, and you may regard it either as having won it at cards or as a present from me. I have already told you that you should be my heir.”

I did not know, in the midst of my trouble, what to reply.

“Will you leave us in this manner?” said I, at last.

“I must.”

“But how are you going? Are you going to descend the river in a boat?”

“Perhaps. It is difficult to choose a means of transport when one wishes to leave the world; for such is my design. Life at the best is but a delusion and a snare, and yet most men cling to it. It is not the case with me; a long experience has enlightened me. I am useless in the world, and I leave it. I have prepared everything to this end; my career is finished, and as I have already promised you, you shall be my heir.”

I cried out.

“Do not interrupt me. My time is short—let me enjoy it. When I am no more, you can think what you please. But do you not understand what I mean?”

“Great God? you would not commit suicide?”

“Yes, James. But you turn pale; you tremble as if it were you that were about to die,” said he, smiling.

I remained mute and felt that I was almost crazy. At last I asked Denver what reason he had to form such a terrible resolution.

“It is a long, very long history,” he replied, “but let it suffice for you to know that I am tired of life. Every moment that I live serves to humiliate me more. I have enjoyed an almost princely fortune. I had intelligence, friends and talents. But in the different countries I have visited, I had not strength of mind enough to avoid frivolous company; and above all, I have not strength enough to resist the attractions of a passion, the most powerful and the most terrible of all passions. O! if I alone had been the victim—but this poor girl—your wife, the child whom a dying friend confided to my care, I have dragged her with me to perdition and misery. Do not let these words frighten you. Rachael is as pure as an angel in heaven—I only speak of her fortune which I dissipated with mine. It is true that Rachael is not entirely without an inheritance, but this absorbing passion menaced it without ceasing—it was the fear and torment of my life. Now she is yours, and I have nothing more to fear. She is saved, and I know she will be as happy with you as you will be with her. Do not imagine, my dear James, that I have ever been embarrassed to find her a husband. Many rich and distinguished men have asked her hand in marriage, and an alliance with any of these men would have satisfied the self-love of most mothers. But I knew

Rachael's heart, and was determined to do nothing except for her own happiness. In you, my dear son, I have found the man I sought, and my mission is fulfilled. There only remains for me to address one more prayer to you."

And Denver drew from his pocket a pack of cards.

"You see these cards," he continued, "they have been my ruin, my curse—no, it is my own weakness that has ruined me; the cards in my hand were only an instrument without conscience, and is as innocent as the dagger and pistol in the hands of a murderer—a dangerous instrument, and against which I wish to warn you. Take these cards—keep them—but not for use, but to serve for you and your children as a talisman against gambling. Now leave me, adieu, my dear friend—adieu!"

He handed me the pack of cards, while I endeavored to dissuade him from his terrible resolution, but he turned from me and ran in the direction of the river. I seized him and endeavored to retain him, but he disengaged himself by a sudden effort. We reached the bank of the stream, he regarded me fixedly, and cried out in a loud voice:

"I repeat to you, leave me. Return to your wife who is expecting you. She will give you the diamonds you have won, and the book of deposit for twenty thousand dollars, which is placed in your name and hers in a bank in Baltimore."

"No," I returned, "I will not leave you."

Without listening to me, he ran in the direction of the water. I ran across him to intercept his flight, but at the moment when I was about to seize him, he pointed the barrel of a pistol at me which had not perceived before. I instinctively recoiled.

"You are a good and noble hearted young man," said he, "but you shall not prevent me from taking my last journey."

At these words, he threw the pistol from him and leaped from the rocks into the river.

I rushed in after him. I could swim well. I sought a long time for him in the water, but all in vain. The current had borne him away and left no trace.

I returned to the house, trembling. What despair welcomed my return! During my absence, Rachael had found on the table of the room occupied by Mr. Denver a purse full of gold, and a letter revealing his terrible design.

Here, my dear guest, my recital must finish. You have seen my wife. Denver did not deceive me when he stated that she would be happy with me. She has repeated it to me every day for the last twelve years. I am also the happiest of men. Only when she looks on the cards does Rachael become sad, but when she reflects that it conveys an eloquent lesson by which our son will one day profit, she becomes calm and serene again. What will a mother not do for her child?

My host here finished his story. I passed a day or two with him, and then resumed my journey, reflecting on what had been told me, and admitting that they were the happiest family I had ever seen in my life.

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