

Leaf The Fifteenth

A Satanic Compact

by John Williams

In the course of my professional life I had passed through some very strange scenes, and met with some very strange personages. It is my intention, in the present number, to relate an adventure which occurred to me some years ago while on professional business in the Northern States.

It was a dark November day, and the thick heavy clouds overhead seemed as if they must soon relieve themselves, by pouring on the already saturated earth, the accumulation of waters contained within their bosom. At length the wind began to rise, gently at first, but it was not long before it increased in violence until it blew a perfect hurricane. Large drops of rain commenced to fall, and in a short period a most fearful storm raged. There were two of us tracking a dishonest clerk, who had robbed his employer of a large amount of money. At the time the storm came up we were about a mile from the village of Castleton, in Vermont. We made the best of our way to the village in question, and with some difficulty reached it, not, however, without being drenched to the skin. This misfortune was easily remedied by a change of clothes, and by the bright fire burning in the principal room of the chief hotel in the place.

There was only one other guest in this apartment besides ourselves. When we entered he was seated in front of the stove with his elbows resting on his knees, and his face buried in his hands. For a moment he did not appear to be aware anyone had come into the room, for he remained in the same position without looking up. My companion, however, addressed some remark to him, he then raised his head, and I had an opportunity to notice his appearance.

There was something very strange about him; not so much in any single feature as in his whole appearance. His face was deathly pale, and his eyes and hair were intensely black. His white teeth, black moustache, and white face, formed such a contrast that it could not fail of being remarked by everyone who saw him. He was clothed in deep black, but he was evidently not in mourning, for his hat, which was placed on a chair beside him, was destitute of crape. He did not seem to be more than five and twenty, but an expression of melancholy, ill-suited to his years, was plainly to be traced on his features.

He courteously replied to my companion's remark, and made room for us beside the stove. We endeavored to draw the stranger into conversation but found it a very difficult task; it was evident he was naturally very taciturn.

The storm continued to rage until the night was far advanced. After we had partaken of an excellent dinner we resumed our places in the sitting room, and heaping fresh wood on the fire, took pleasure in listening to the howling wind, and the beating of the rain against the windows. I

do not know how long we sat there but I was aroused from a kind of reverie, by the lamp, which lighted the apartment, suddenly going out. My companion was asleep but the stranger sat there gazing intently on the sparks as they fell from the grate into the ashes.

“*Sic est vitu,*” said the stranger, moralizing— “We burn brilliantly for a moment and then are extinguished forever.”

“You are a philosopher, sir,” I replied, feeling called upon to say something.

“Every man who thinks must be a philosopher,” replied the stranger.

“Eh! eh! what’s that,” said my companion suddenly waking up. “What is that about philosophy? philosophy is all humbug, humbug, sir,” continued he rubbing his eyes and yawning.

I should here say my friend was a very practical man, shrewd enough in business matters, but without a particle of imagination. He believed in none of the *isms* of the day, and utterly scouted everything apart from the routine of everyday life.

There was a pause in the conversation after my friend’s remark. The stranger gave him one look and shrugged his shoulders and that was all.

“Philosophy!” continued my practical friend, in a sneering tone. “Who believes in philosophy? It is a fine thing to talk about, but a hard one to practice. Why I would as soon believe a man could sell his soul to Satan as that a man can be a philosopher.”

The stranger’s eyes glistened, and he moved his chair a short distance from stove.

“And do you suppose a man cannot sell his soul to Satan?” said he, in a hollow voice. “Let me assure you to the contrary.”

“Hum—,” my practical friend was about to reply, but he only uttered half the word; the remainder of it, died away on his lips, as he gazed on the stranger’s countenance.

In truth, there was something very extraordinary in his features at that moment. From some cause or other his face was contorted, and as the flickering light fell upon it, it was rendered hideous. After a moment or two it subsided into its natural expression.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “listen to my story. I promise not to detain you long, and you will then learn there are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

We put a fresh log of wood on the fire, each of us lighted a fresh cigar, and my friend and myself put ourselves in listening attitudes. The stranger glanced cunningly around him, as if looking for someone, and then commenced as follows:

“I am a physician by profession, and have been in practice five years in New York City. I soon obtained a reputation, and I can safely say without any egotism, that whilst I devoted myself to my profession, no one obtained a larger share of public support.

“One night, after an arduous day’s work, I had returned home in the evening thoroughly tired. I put on my dressing gown and slippers, seated myself by the fire-side, and delivered myself up to all the luxury of repose after the great fatigue I had undergone. I was soon plunged into a reverie. I was suddenly aroused from it by the loud ringing of my office bell and almost immediately afterwards I was informed by my domestic that I was wanted by a person in the hall.

“I obeyed the summons, and found a servant girl who informed me that her mistress was sick and wanted to see me immediately.

“Your mistress’ name!” said I.

“Miss Morill, [No.] 79 Lexington avenue,” was the reply.

“I did not know her, but of course I had no option but to go, however much disinclined I felt to leave my comfortable fire-side. I hurriedly put on my coat and boots, and followed the messenger. My patient’s residence was not a long distance from my office. In ten minutes I was before the door. The house was a magnificent one, in short, a perfect palace. Massive stone steps, which glistened in the moonlight, led up to the entrance. In answer to my summons, the door was noiselessly opened by a footman in livery and I was shown into a gorgeously furnished drawing-room. It might truly be called the abode of luxury, for everything the heart could desire was to be found in that apartment. I seated myself on a velvet-covered sofa and waited until I should be summoned to see my patient. I was not detained long, for in a few minutes the same messenger who had fetched me appeared and requested me to follow her. I did so, ascending a massive flight of stairs after my guide. In another minute I was in my patient’s bedroom. It is impossible for me to convey any idea of the splendor of that apartment. A delicious perfume stole through the room, and a gilded lamp hanging from the ceiling shed a subdued light around. A thick tapestry carpet covered the floor, and the whole appearance of the chamber conveyed the idea that it was the dwelling of some goddess rather than that of a human being. I entered noiselessly, for the floor was too thickly covered to allow the slightest sounds from footstep, and glanced towards the bed. Great Heavens! what a magnificent sight I beheld! How shall I attempt to describe it? I feel it is beyond my powers to convey the slightest idea of the reality of that scene.

“In the midst of a mass of lace reclined my patient. But her beauty was not human, it was divine. Imagine to yourself the sweetest countenance in the world. Eyes of the deepest blue, a skin so dazzling white that it could compete with the purest alabaster, teeth chiseled from the whitest ivory, lips red as the carnation and a form so beautiful and so voluptuous, that when I gazed on her I felt the blood dancing through my veins. Her night dress was partially open in front, revealing the contour of her swelling bosom. No statuary, however subtle the hand which executes it, could give the slightest representation to the divine beauty of her whole form. I approached the bed and seated myself in a *fauteuil* placed conveniently by its side. The beautiful girl extended a small snowy hand to me and I felt her pulse. I found it to be slightly accelerated, but there evidently was not much the matter.

“ ‘Doctor,’ said she, in a sweetly musical voice, ‘I am not very well. I experience a general feeling of *malaise*. I have no doubt, however, you can soon cure me, for I have heard much of your skill.’ ”

“I made a suitable reply and wrote some simple prescription, at the same time giving her some directions as to diet. In about a quarter of an hour I took my leave.

“When I returned home I could, think of nothing else but the beautiful girl I had just visited. I could not sleep that night, I was restless, feverish and uneasy, and I rose in the morning as unrefreshed as when I laid down at night. I anxiously awaited the hour when I could with decency again call upon my patient. I sat watching the clock, and each minute appeared an age. At length the time arrived, and I actually ran to the house in Lexington avenue. I was immediately admitted, and found my patient sitting up in her bed-room, looking even more beautiful in her morning negligee. She received me cordially and I saw that she was much better. She conversed with me long and freely, and I discovered her mind to be very much cultivated. I retired from her presence with her image engraven on my heart. Yes! I was hopelessly in love.

“From, this time she became the star of my destiny. I could think only of her. Her image was constantly before me and I only lived for her. I visited her every day for a month, although she no longer required my professional services, but still received my visits in good part, and I had not strength of mind to tear myself from her.

“One evening I paid her a visit as usual. The moment I entered the room I saw there was something on her mind which she wished to say to me. After the courtesies of the day, she addressed me as follows:

“ ‘Doctor, I have some news to impart to you. I feel that we are old friends now, and I can freely tell you anything. Well, then, I am to be married in a week!’ ”

“ ‘Married!’ ” I exclaimed in a voice of anguish, and turning pale as death.

“ ‘Yes, is there anything very extraordinary in that?’ ” she returned laughing. “ ‘One would suppose from your tone, that it was the last thing in the world likely to take place.’ ”

“My brain was on fire. I reeled from my chair and prostrated myself at her feet.

“Oh, Eleanor! divine, beauteous Eleanor!’ ” I frantically exclaimed, “ ‘recall those words—do you not see that I love, worship and adore you—do you I not see that I live only on your smiles—do you not see that I exist only in you! Angel of brightness, spurn me not from you! No one can love you as I love you—no one can worship and adore you as I do.—You are my God, my Heaven, my Eternity!’ ”

“My passionate words appeared to have some effect upon her, for she covered her face with her hands and murmured: “ ‘Too late!’ ”

“I dragged myself at her feet. I seized her knees. I pulled her hands from her face and impressed a thousand kisses upon them.

“ ‘Hear me, Eleanor!’ ” I almost shrieked, “ ‘By the Almighty Power above, if you are not mine I must die without I you, the world would be a hell to me. Oh! say you will be mine.’ ” Again her voice murmured, “ ‘Too late.’ ”—

“Again I entreated her—again I prayed to her—but all to no purpose— “ ‘Too late.’ ” was all the reply I received. I left her home in a state of mind bordering on madness. I remember my domestics when I entered my own dwelling, looked at me, curiously, and seemed half-frightened at my appearance. They even shrank from me. I felt that I was going mad—Yes, I felt madness seething in my blood. I felt it mount my brain. At last it came! I was delirious—I danced—I foamed at the mouth—My brain was on fire. They put me to bed and fastened me down to it. Oh! how I glared at them!—how I clinched my fist at them! How I cursed them! I grew worse. Doctors came to see me; great professors; but they could do nothing. With all their skill they could not drive the madness from my blood. They endeavored to let it out and for that purpose they leeches, bled and cupped me, but it was no use, I was so thoroughly saturated with madness that it set them at defiance. I continued to grow rapidly worse, my breath began to fail me, my extremities grew cold, the death rattle was heard in my throat, and that night I died!”

My companion and I gave a violent start at these words and gazed wonderingly on the monster.

“Died!” we exclaimed simultaneously.

“Yes, died!” returned the stranger in an almost peremptory voice. “They laid me out and an old woman watched by my body. I took pleasure in watching all the preparations of the funeral. How noiselessly they trod about the house, as if afraid of awaking the dead! The next day I heard a strange step on the stairs and *she* entered the room. Great Heavens, how beautiful she looked! She bent over me and tears fell from her eyes on my cold cheek. She was left alone with me!

“ ‘Oh, Eustace!’ ” she exclaimed, “ ‘why did I not know you before? God preserve your soul, Eustace, and, may we meet in another world.’ ”

“I heard that, and, yet I lay cold and motionless in my coffin. She bent down and pressed her warm lips against my icy cheek and bade me adieu.

“I was buried that evening. What a grand funeral it was! How everybody discussed my character and merits—thank God! after all, there is some goodness in the world, for people are generally charitable to the dead. They lowered me into the dark vault destined for my reception, and I was left alone. It was then that the agony of devotions came over me. It was then that my soul wept tears of blood. It was then that I thought of all that I had left behind. Her matchless form was continually before my eyes. Oh! how I struggled to break the bonds of death that I might again behold her, converse with her, and worship her. ‘Oh, spirit of evil,’ ” I inwardly exclaimed; ‘come to my assistance. Grant me but the earthly possession of that divinity for a limited time, and my soul is thine for all eternity.’ ” I had no sooner given utterance to this thought, than I

heard a sound like the flapping of wings, and roaring of a mighty wind. I felt a current of cold air blow on my cheek, and almost immediately afterwards a voice reached my ear:—

“ ‘I am here, mortal, at your bidding. What would you?’ ”

“I repeated my wish.

“ ‘I will give you two years of life, and the gratification of all your desires, replied Satan; “on the condition that after that time you become mine for ever.’ ”

“ ‘Agreed! agreed!’ I eagerly exclaimed. I again heard the flapping of wings and the roaring of a mighty wind, and I felt I was alive again. Yes, the blood again began to circulate in my veins. My chest began to heave, and my heart to beat. The coffin opened and I stood erect. I soon scaled the vault, and reached the open air.

“It was fortunately midnight when I was released from the grave, and it was quite dark. The cemetery where I had been buried was not removed a very long distance from my dwelling. I managed to reach it without being discovered, and gained my own chamber unseen by the domestics. I dressed myself, and immediately bent my steps to Lexington avenue. By this time it was two o’clock in the morning. I tried the door of the house in which my divinity lived, and to my supreme joy found it open. I penetrated into the house, and was about to open the drawing room door, when the sound of voices suddenly reached my ears. I stooped down and looked through a small crevice in the panel. A fearful spectacle met my gaze, which made the blood recede from my heart, and caused it to stop beating.

“Eleanor was seated on a sofa, and beside her was a young man, gazing with a look of rapture on her countenance. I heard him address the most passionate language to her. She replied to him in a subdued tone, and her countenance bore traces of sorrow. I could scarcely refrain myself from rushing into the apartment, and wreaking my vengeance on the intruder, who, I had no doubt, was her intended husband. But I restrained myself, and determined to wait patiently. They conversed long together, the conversation, however, was mostly sustained by him. Her attention appeared to be absorbed by her own thoughts, and the answers she returned to him were, for the most part, only monosyllables. The thought entered my heart, ‘could she be thinking of me?’ A few minutes after that, I distinctly heard her murmur, as if to herself—‘Poor Eustace!’

“Oh! why did I not then snatch her in my arms? Why did I not then bear her away? Some irresistible power held me back, and I still waited. Her lover soon after took his leave. I followed him stealthily; I never lost sight of him for a moment. He reached Broadway, and turned down that thoroughfare. It was entirely deserted and as silent as the grave. I could hear his footsteps resound on the pavement, while mine were inaudible. When he had gained White street, he paused for a moment, and then slowly turned off from the main thoroughfare into it. Now was my time, I hastened my steps and soon reached him. He did not know me—in another moment I had his throat in my grasp. I could feel it crinch between my fingers. He made desperate efforts to escape, but all to no purpose; I had hold of him too tightly for that: I appeared to have superhuman power bestowed on me.

“I could feel him growing weaker and weaker; at last I felt something warm issuing from his mouth on my hand. I looked down, and by the moonlight I saw it was blood. I then knew all was over—in fact, he was dead! I threw his body from me, and hurried back again into Broadway. I had not gone far up the street when I heard the City Hall alarm bell ring; it was followed by twenty others, and suddenly the whole aspect of the street was changed. From being deserted it became teeming with life. The words, ‘fire!’ ‘fire!’ were echoed on all sides, and before me I saw the heavens lighted up with a livid glare. I commenced to run with the rest, and, oh! God of Heavens! how shall I describe the agony I felt when I discovered it was the house in which my divinity lived that was in flames! I scarcely know what passed. I have a distinct recollection of seeing a black, charred corpse on the pavement which they said was my angelic girl. Then there was a long dreary blank. When I regained my senses I found myself in a large house. They treated me harshly. I supposed it was on account of the murder I committed. Satan did not keep his compact with me, and I had great hopes I should be able to set him at defiance at last. Two weeks ago I escaped from the large house, and I have wandered miles upon miles. All my desire now is to escape the penalty of my compact. I would freely die a second, time if I were sure of eluding Satan’s clutch. But—”

The stranger was here interrupted in his narration by the sudden opening of the door and the entrance of two men. The latter leisurely walked up to the stranger and exclaimed!

“Lo! Doctor, we have found you at last!”

“So it appears,” said the doctor in a resigned tone.

“Well, gentlemen,” said one of them, “we hope he has entertained you.”

“He has told us a wonderful story,” I replied.

“Oh! yes, we know about it. It was about a beautiful patient, and about his being dead and coming to life again; about him selling himself to the devil; about him committing murder, and lastly about the body of his ‘divinity’ being burnt to a cinder.”

“Exactly his story,” I replied. “I need not ask you if it is true.”

“No, not a word of it. His history can be summed up in two or three words; he is, as he states, a doctor, and has practiced in New York city. But he has studied too much and it turned his brain—in short he is deranged, and has been confined in the State Lunatic Asylum for four years. He must either have read or imagined the wonderful story he relates—at all events he implicitly believes in its truth and repeats it to everyone who will listen to it. Two weeks ago he escaped from the asylum, and a pretty chase we have had after him I tell you, but, thank heavens! we have found him at last. Come, doctor,” continued the keeper addressing the stranger who sat with his arms folded, scowling at the fire, “I have got a carriage waiting for you outside; let us be moving.”

The doctor rose without saying a word, and allowed him to be conducted away.

“There!” said my friend after they had all left the room, “did I not tell you it was all hum—”
I prevented him from finishing the word by pushing a fresh cigar into his mouth.

Leaves from the Note-Book of a New York Detective: The Private Record of J. B. Ed. John B. Williams, M.D. New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1865.