

**ЛЕОНИД
АНДРЕЕВ**

SATAN'S
DIARY

Леонид Николаевич Андреев
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http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24172308

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Leonid Andreyev

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PREFACE

SATAN'S DIARY," Leonid Andreyev's last work, was completed by the great Russian a few days before he died in Finland, in September, 1919. But a few years ago the most popular and successful of Russian writers, Andreyev died almost penniless, a sad, tragic figure, disillusioned, broken-hearted over the tragedy of Russia.

A year ago Leonid Andreyev wrote me that he was eager to come to America, to study this country and familiarize Americans with the fate of his unfortunate countrymen. I arranged for his visit to this country and informed him of this by cable. But on the very day I sent my cable the sad news came from Finland announcing that Leonid Andreyev died of heart failure.

In "Satan's Diary" Andreyev summed up his boundless disillusionment in an absorbing satire on human life. Fearlessly and mercilessly he hurled the falsehoods and hypocrisies into the face of life. He portrayed Satan coming to this earth to amuse himself and play. Having assumed the form of an American multi-millionaire, Satan set out on a tour through Europe in quest of amusement and adventure. Before him passed various forms

of spurious virtues, hypocrisies, the ruthless cruelty of man and the often deceptive innocence of woman. Within a short time Satan finds himself outwitted, deceived, relieved of his millions, mocked, humiliated, beaten by man in his own devilish devices.

The story of Andreyev's beginning as a writer is best told in his autobiography which he gave me in 1908.

“I was born,” he said, “in Oryol, in 1871, and studied there at the gymnasium. I studied poorly; while in the seventh class I was for a whole year known as the worst student, and my mark for conduct was never higher than 4, sometimes 3. The most pleasant time I spent at school, which I recall to this day with pleasure, was recess time between lessons, and also the rare occasions when I was sent out from the classroom... The sunbeams, the free sunbeams, which penetrated some cleft and which played with the dust in the hallway – all this was so mysterious, so interesting, so full of a peculiar, hidden meaning.

“When I studied at the gymnasium my father, an engineer, died. As a university student I was in dire need. During my first course in St. Petersburg I even starved – not so much out of real necessity as because of my youth, inexperience, and my inability to utilize the unnecessary parts of my costume. I am to this day ashamed to think that I went two days without food at a time when I had two or three pairs of trousers and two overcoats which I could have sold.

“It was then that I wrote my first story – about a starving student. I cried when I wrote it, and the editor, who returned

my manuscript, laughed. That story of mine remained unpublished... In 1894, in January, I made an unsuccessful attempt to kill myself by shooting. As a result of this unsuccessful attempt I was forced by the authorities into religious penitence, and I contracted heart trouble, though not of a serious nature, yet very annoying. During this time I made one or two unsuccessful attempts at writing; I devoted myself with greater pleasure and success to painting, which I loved from childhood on. I made portraits to order at 3 and 5 rubles a piece.

“In 1897 I received my diploma and became an assistant attorney, but I was at the very outset sidetracked. I was offered a position on *The Courier*, for which I was to report court proceedings. I did not succeed in getting any practice as a lawyer. I had only one case and lost it at every point.

“In 1898 I wrote my first story – for the Easter number – and since that time I have devoted myself exclusively to literature. Maxim Gorky helped me considerably in my literary work by his always practical advice and suggestions.”

Andreyev's first steps in literature, his first short stories, attracted but little attention at the time of their appearance. It was only when Countess Tolstoy, the wife of Leo Tolstoy, in a letter to the *Novoye Vremya*, came out in “defense of artistic purity and moral power in contemporary literature,” declaring that Russian society, instead of buying, reading and making famous the works of the Andreyevs, should “rise against such filth with indignation,” that almost everybody who knew how to

read in Russia turned to the little volume of the young writer.

In her attack upon Andreyev, Countess Tolstoy said as follows:

“The poor new writers, like Andreyev, succeeded only in concentrating their attention on the filthy point of human degradation and uttered a cry to the undeveloped, half-intelligent reading public, inviting them to see and to examine the decomposed corpse of human degradation and to close their eyes to God’s wonderful, vast world, with the beauties of nature, with the majesty of art, with the lofty yearnings of the human soul, with the religious and moral struggles and the great ideals of goodness – even with the downfall, misfortunes and weaknesses of such people as Dostoyevsky depicted... In describing all these every true artist should illumine clearly before humanity not the side of filth and vice, but should struggle against them by illumining the highest ideals of good, truth, and the triumph over evil, weakness, and the vices of mankind... I should like to cry out loudly to the whole world in order to help those unfortunate people whose wings, given to each of them for high flights toward the understanding of the spiritual light, beauty, kindness, and God, are clipped by these Andreyevs.”

This letter of Countess Tolstoy called forth a storm of protest in the Russian press, and, strange to say, the representatives of the fair sex were among the warmest defenders of the young author. Answering the attack, many women, in their letters to the press, pointed out that the author of “Anna Karenina” had been

abused in almost the same manner for his “Kreutzer Sonata,” and that Tolstoy himself had been accused of exerting just such an influence as the Countess attributed to Andreyev over the youth of Russia. Since the publication of Countess Tolstoy’s condemnation, Andreyev has produced a series of masterpieces, such as “The Life of Father Vassily,” a powerful psychological study; “Red Laughter,” a war story, “written with the blood of Russia;” “The Life of Man,” a striking morality presentation in five acts; “Anathema,” his greatest drama; and “The Seven Who Were Hanged,” in which the horrors of Russian life under the Tsar were delineated with such beautiful simplicity and power that Turgenev, or Tolstoy himself, would have signed his name to this masterpiece.

Thus the first accusations against Andreyev were disarmed by his artistic productions, permeated with sincere, profound love for all that is pure in life. Dostoyevsky and Maupassant depicted more subjects, such as that treated in “The Abyss,” than Andreyev. But with them these stories are lost in the great mass of their other works, while in Andreyev, who at that time had as yet produced but a few short stories, works like “The Abyss” stood out in bold relief.

I recall my first meeting with Leonid Andreyev in 1908, two weeks after my visit to Count Leo Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana. At that time he had already become the most popular Russian writer, his popularity having overshadowed even that of Maxim Gorky.

As I drove from Terioki to Andreyev's house, along the dust-covered road, the stern and taciturn little Finnish driver suddenly broke the silence by saying to me in broken Russian:

"Andreyev is a good writer. . . . Although he is a Russian, he is a very good man. He is building a beautiful house here in Finland, and he gives employment to many of our people."

We were soon at the gate of Andreyev's beautiful villa – a fantastic structure, weird-looking, original in design, something like the conception of the architect in the "Life of Man."

"My son is out rowing with his wife in the Gulf of Finland," Andreyev's mother told me. "They will be back in half an hour."

As I waited I watched the seething activity everywhere on Andreyev's estate. In Yasnaya Polyana, the home of Count Tolstoy, everything seemed long established, fixed, well-regulated, serenely beautiful. Andreyev's estate was astir with vigorous life. Young, strong men were building the House of Man. More than thirty of them were working on the roof and in the yard, and a little distance away, in the meadows, young women and girls, bright-eyed and red faced, were haying. Youth, strength, vigor everywhere, and above all the ringing laughter of little children at play. I could see from the window the "Black Little River," which sparkled in the sun hundreds of feet below. The constant noise of the workmen's axes and hammers was so loud that I did not notice when Leonid Andreyev entered the room where I was waiting for him.

"Pardon my manner of dressing," he said, as we shook hands.

“In the summer I lead a lazy life, and do not write a line. I am afraid I am forgetting even to sign my name.”

I had seen numerous photographs of Leonid Andreyev, but he did not look like any of them. Instead of a pale-faced, sickly-looking young man, there stood before me a strong, handsome, well-built man, with wonderful eyes. He wore a grayish blouse, black, wide pantaloons up to his knees, and no shoes or stockings.

We soon spoke of Russian literature at the time, particularly of the drama.

“We have no real drama in Russia,” said Andreyev. “Russia has not yet produced anything that could justly be called a great drama. Perhaps ‘The Storm,’ by Ostrovsky, is the only Russian play that may be classed as a drama. Tolstoy’s plays cannot be placed in this category. Of the later writers, Anton Chekhov came nearest to giving real dramas to Russia, but, unfortunately, he was taken from us in the prime of his life.”

“What do you consider your own ‘Life of Man’ and ‘To the Stars’?” I asked.

“They are not dramas; they are merely presentations in so many acts,” answered Andreyev, and, after some hesitation, added: “I have not written any dramas, but it is possible that I will write one.” At this point Andreyev’s wife came in, dressed in a Russian blouse. The conversation turned to America, and to the treatment accorded to Maxim Gorky in New York.

“When I was a child I loved America,” remarked Andreyev. “Perhaps Cooper and Mayne Reid, my favorite authors in my

childhood days, were responsible for this. I was always planning to run away to America. I am anxious even now to visit America, but I am afraid – I may get as bad a reception as my friend Gorky got.”

He laughed as he glanced at his wife. After a brief pause, he said:

“The most remarkable thing about the Gorky incident is that while in his stories and articles about America Gorky wrote nothing but the very worst that could be said about that country he never told me anything but the very best about America. Some day he will probably describe his impressions of America as he related them to me.”

It was a very warm day. The sun was burning mercilessly in the large room. Mme. Andreyev suggested that it would be more pleasant to go down to a shady place near the Black Little River.

On the way down the hill Andreyev inquired about Tolstoy’s health and was eager to know his views on contemporary matters.

“If Tolstoy were young now he would have been with us,” he said.

We stepped into a boat, Mme. Andreyev took up the oars and began to row. We resumed our conversation.

“The decadent movement in Russian literature,” said Andreyev, “started to make itself felt about ten or fifteen years ago. At first it was looked upon as mere child’s play, as a curiosity. Now it is regarded more seriously. Although I do not belong to that school, I do not consider it worthless. The fault

with it is that it has but few talented people in its ranks, and these few direct the criticism of the decadent school. They are the writers and also the critics. And they praise whatever they write. Of the younger men, Alexander Blok is perhaps the most gifted. But in Russia our clothes change quickly nowadays, and it is hard to tell what the future will tell us – in our literature and our life.

“How do I picture to myself this future?” continued Andreyev, in answer to a question of mine. “I cannot know even the fate and future of my own child; how can I foretell the future of such a great country as Russia? But I believe that the Russian people have a great future before them – in life and in literature – for they are a great people, rich in talents, kind and freedom-loving. Savage as yet, it is true, very ignorant, but on the whole they do not differ so much from other European nations.”

Suddenly the author of “Red Laughter” looked upon me intently, and asked: “How is it that the European and the American press has ceased to interest itself in our struggle for emancipation? Is it possible that the reaction in Russia appeals to them more than our people’s yearnings for freedom, simply because the reaction happens to be stronger at the present time? In that event, they are probably sympathizing with the Shah of Persia! Russia to-day is a lunatic asylum. The people who are hanged are not the people who should be hanged. Everywhere else honest people are at large and only criminals are in prison. In Russia the honest people are in prison and the criminals are

at large. The Russian Government is composed of a band of criminals, and Nicholas II is not the greatest of them. There are still greater ones. I do not hold that the Russian Government alone is guilty of these horrors. The European nations and the Americans are just as much to blame, for they look on in silence while the most despicable crimes are committed. The murderer usually has at least courage, while he who looks on silently when murder is committed is a contemptible weakling. England and France, who have become so friendly to our Government, are surely watching with compassion the poor Shah, who hangs the constitutional leaders. Perhaps I do not know international law. Perhaps I am not speaking as a practical man. One nation must not interfere with the internal affairs of another nation. But why do they interfere with our movement for freedom? France helped the Russian Government in its war against the people by giving money to Russia. Germany also helped – secretly. In well-regulated countries each individual must behave decently. When a man murders, robs, dishonors women he is thrown into prison. But when the Russian Government is murdering helpless men and women and children the other Governments look on indifferently. And yet they speak of God. If this had happened in the Middle Ages a crusade would have been started by civilized peoples who would have marched to Russia to free the women and the children from the claws of the Government.”

Andreyev became silent. His wife kept rowing for some time slowly, without saying a word. We soon reached the shore and

returned silently to the house. That was twelve years ago.

I met him several times after that. The last time I visited him in Petrograd during the July riots in 1917.

A literary friend thus describes the funeral of Leonid Andreyev, which gives a picture of the tragedy of Russia:

“In the morning a decision had to be reached as to the day of the funeral. It was necessary to see to the purchase and the delivery of the coffin from Viborg, and to undertake all those unavoidable, hard duties which are so painful to the family.

“It appeared that the Russian exiles living in our village had no permits from the Finnish Government to go to Viborg, nor the money for that expense. It further appeared that the family of Leonid Andreyev had left at their disposal only one hundred marks (about 6 dollars), which the doctor who had come from the station after Andreyev’s death declined to take from the widow for his visit.

“This was all the family possessed. It was necessary to charge a Russian exile living in a neighboring village, who had a pass for Viborg, with the sad commission of finding among some wealthy people in Viborg who had known Andreyev the means required for the funeral.

“On the following day mass was read. Floral tributes and wreaths from Viborg, with black inscriptions made hastily in ink on white ribbons, began to arrive. They were all from private individuals. The local refugees brought garlands of autumn foliage, bouquets of late flowers. Their children laid their

carefully woven, simple and touching little childish wreaths at the foot of the coffin. Leonid Andreyev's widow did not wish to inter the body in foreign soil and it was decided, temporarily, until burial in native ground, to leave his body in the little mortuary in the park on the estate of a local woman landowner.

“The day of the funeral was not widely known. The need for special permits to travel deprived many of the opportunity to attend. In this way it happened that only a very small group of people followed the body from the house to the mortuary. None of his close friends was there. They, like his brothers, sister, one of his sons, were in Russia. Neighbors, refugees, acquaintances of the last two years with whom his exile had accidentally thrown him into contact, people who had no connection with Russian literature, – almost all alien in spirit – such was the little group of Russians that followed the coffin of Leonid Andreyev to its temporary resting place.

“It was a tragic funeral, this funeral in exile, of a writer who is so dearly loved by the whole intellectual class of Russia; whom the younger generation of Russia acclaimed with such enthusiasm.

“Meanwhile he rests in a foreign land, waiting – waiting for Free Russia to demand back his ashes, and pay tribute to his genius.”

Among his last notes, breathing deep anguish and despair, found on his desk, were the following lines:

“Revolution is just as unsatisfactory a means of settling

disputes as is war. If it be impossible to vanquish a hostile idea except by smashing the skull in which it is contained; if it be impossible to appease a hostile heart except by piercing it with a bayonet, then, of course, fight...”

Leonid Andreyev died of a broken heart. But the spirit of his genius is deathless.

Herman Bernstein.

New York, September.

January 18.

On board the Atlantic.

This is exactly the tenth day since I have become human and am leading this earthly life.

My loneliness is very great. I am not in need of friends, but I must speak of Myself and I have no one to speak to. Thoughts alone are not sufficient, and they will not become quite clear, precise and exact until I express them in words. It is necessary to arrange them in a row, like soldiers or telephone poles, to lay them out like a railway track, to throw across bridges and viaducts, to construct barrows and enclosures, to indicate stations in certain places – and only then will everything become clear. This laborious engineering work, I think, they call logic and consistency, and is essential to those who desire to be wise. It is not essential to all others. They may wander about as they please.

The work is slow, difficult and repulsive for one who is accustomed to – I do not know what to call it – to embracing all

in one breath and expressing all in a single breath. It is not in vain that men respect their thinkers so much, and it is not in vain that these unfortunate thinkers, if they are honest and conscientious in this process of construction, as ordinary engineers, end in insane asylums. I am but a few days on this earth and more than once have the yellow walls of the insane asylum and its luring open door flashed before my eyes.

Yes, it is extremely difficult and irritates one's "nerves." I have just now wasted so much of the ship's fine stationery to express a little ordinary thought on the inadequacy of man's words and logic. What will it be necessary to waste to give expression to the great and the unusual? I want to warn you, my earthly reader, at the very outset, not to gape in astonishment. The *extraordinary cannot be expressed* in the language of your grumbling. If you do not believe me, go to the nearest insane asylum and listen to the inmates: they have all realized *Something* and wanted to give expression to it. And now you can hear the roar and rumble of these wrecked engines, their wheels revolving and hissing in the air, and you can see with what difficulty they manage to hold intact the rapidly dissolving features of their astonished faces!

I see you are all ready to ply me with questions, now that you learned that I am Satan in human form: it is so fascinating! Whence did I come? What are the ways of Hell? Is there immortality there, and, also, what is the price of coal at the stock exchange of Hell? Unfortunately, my dear reader, despite my desire to the contrary, if I had such a desire, I am powerless to

satisfy your very proper curiosity. I could have composed for your benefit one of those funny little stories about horny and hairy devils, which appeal so much to your meagre imagination, but you have had enough of them already and I do not want to lie so rudely and ungracefully. I will lie to you elsewhere, when you least expect it, and that will be far more interesting for both of us.

And the truth – how am I to tell it when even my Name cannot be expressed in your tongue? You have called me Satan and I accept the name, just as I would have accepted any other: Be it so – I am Satan. But my real name sounds quite different, quite different! It has an extraordinary sound and try as I may I cannot force it into your narrow ear without tearing it open together with your brain: Be it so – I am Satan. And nothing more.

And you yourself are to blame for this, my friend: why is there so little understanding in your reason? Your reason is like a beggar's sack, containing only crusts of stale bread, while it is necessary to have something more than bread. You have but two conceptions of existence: life and death. How, then, can I reveal to you the *third*? All your existence is an absurdity only because you do not have this *third conception*. And where can I get it for you? To-day I am human, even as you. In my skull is your brain. In my mouth are your cubic words, jostling one another about with their sharp corners, and I cannot tell you of the Extraordinary.

If I were to tell you that there are no devils I would lie. But if I say that such creatures do exist I also deceive you. You see how

difficult it is, how absurd, my friend!

I can also tell you but little that you would understand of how I assumed the human form, with which I began my earthly life ten days ago. First of all, forget about your favorite, hairy, horny, winged devils, who breathe fire, transform fragments of earthenware into gold and change old men into fascinating youths, and having done all this and prattled much nonsense, they disappear suddenly through a wall. Remember: when *we* want to visit your earth *we* must always become human. Why this is so you will learn after your death. Meanwhile remember: I am a human being now like yourself. There is not the foul smell of a goat about me but the fragrance of perfume, and you need not fear to shake My hand lest I may scratch you with my nails: I manicure them just as you do.

But how did it all happen? Very simply. When I first conceived the desire to visit this earth I selected as the most satisfactory lodging a 38-year-old American billionaire, Mr. Henry Wondergood. I killed him at night, – of course, not in the presence of witnesses. But you cannot bring me to court despite this confession, because the American is **ALIVE**, and we both greet you with one respectful bow: I and Wondergood. He simply rented his empty place to me. You understand? And not all of it either, the devil take him! And, to my great regret I can *return* only through the same door which leads you too to liberty: through death.

This is the most important thing. You may understand

something of what I may have to say later on, although to speak to you of such matters in your language is like trying to conceal a mountain in a vest pocket or to empty Niagara with a thimble. Imagine, for example, that you, my dear King of Nature, should want to come closer to the ants, and that by some miracle you became a real little ant, – then you may have some conception of that gulf which separates Me now from what I was. No, still more! Imagine that you were a sound and have become a mere symbol – a musical mark on paper... No, still worse! – No comparisons can make clear to you that terrible gulf whose bottom even I do not see as yet. Or, perhaps, there is no bottom there at all.

Think of it: for two days, after leaving New York, I suffered from seasickness! This sounds queer to you, who are accustomed to wallow in your own dirt? Well, I – I have also wallowed in it but it was not queer at all. I only smiled once in thinking that *it* was not I, but Wondergood, and said:

“Roll on, Wondergood, roll on!”

There is another question to which you probably want an answer: Why did I come to this earth and accept such an unprofitable exchange: to be transformed from Satan, “the mighty, immortal chieftain and ruler” into you? I am tired of seeking words that cannot be found. I will answer you in English, French, Italian or German – languages we both understand well. I have grown lonesome in Hell and I have come upon the earth to lie and play.

You know what ennui is. And as for falsehood, you know it well too. And as for *play* – you can judge it to a certain extent by your own theaters and celebrated actors. Perhaps you yourself are playing a little rôle in Parliament, at home, or in your church. If you are, you may understand something of the *satisfaction* of play. And, if in addition, you are familiar with the multiplication table, then multiply the delight and joy of play into any considerable figure and you will get an idea of My enjoyment, of My play. No, imagine that you are an ocean wave, which plays eternally and lives only in play – take this wave, for example, which I see outside the porthole now and which wants to lift our “Atlantic”...but, here I am again seeking words and comparisons!

I simply want to play. At present I am still an unknown actor, a modest *débutante*, but I hope to become no less a celebrity than your own Garrick or Aldrich, after I have played what I please. I am proud, selfish and even, if you please, vain and boastful. You know what vanity is, when you crave the praise and plaudits even of a fool? Then I entertain the brazen idea that I am a genius. Satan is known for his brazenness. And so, imagine, that I have grown weary of Hell where all these hairy and horny rogues play and lie no worse than I do, and that I am no longer satisfied with the laurels of Hell, in which I but perceive no small measure of base flattery and downright stupidity. But I have heard of you, my earthly friend; I have heard that you are wise, tolerably honest, properly incredulous, responsive to the

problems of eternal art and that you yourself play and lie so badly that you might appreciate the playing of others: not in vain have you so many *great actors*. And so I have come. You understand?

My stage is the earth and the nearest scene for which I am now bound is Rome, the Eternal City, as it is called here, in your profound conception of eternity and other simple matters. I have not yet selected my company (would you not like to join it?). But I believe that *Fate* and *Chance*, to whom I am now subservient, like all your earthly things, will realize my unselfish motives and will send me worthy partners. Old Europe is so rich in talents! I believe that I shall find a keen and appreciative audience in Europe, too. I confess that I first thought of going to the East, which some of my compatriots made their scene of activity some time ago with no small measure of success, but the East is too credulous and is inclined too much to poison and the ballet. Its gods are ludicrous. The East still reeks too much of hairy animals. Its lights and shadows are barbarously crude and too bright to make it worth while for a refined artist as I am to go into that crowded, foul circus tent. Ah, my friend, I am so vain that I even begin this Diary not without the secret intention of impressing you with my modesty in the rôle of *seeker* of words and comparisons. I hope you will not take advantage of my frankness and cease believing me.

Are there any other questions? Of the play itself I have no clear idea yet. It will be composed by the same impresario who will assemble the actors — *Fate*. My modest rôle, as a beginning,

will be that of a man who so loves his fellow beings that he is willing to give them everything, his soul and his money. Of course, you have not forgotten that I am a billionaire? I have three billion dollars. Sufficient – is it not? – for one spectacular performance. One more detail before I conclude this page.

I have with me, sharing my fate, a certain Irwin Toppi, my secretary, – a most worthy person in his black frock coat and silk top hat, his long nose resembling an unripened pear and his smoothly shaven, pastor-like face. I would not be surprised to find a prayer book in his pocket. My Toppi came upon this earth from *there*, i.e. from Hell and by the same means as mine: he, too, assumed the human form and, it seems, quite successfully – the rogue is entirely immune from seasickness. However to be seasick one must have some brains and my Toppi is unusually stupid – even for this earth. Besides, he is impolite and ventures to offer advice. I am rather sorry that out of our entire wealth of material I did not select some one better, but I was impressed by his honesty and partial familiarity with the earth: it seemed more pleasant to enter upon this little jaunt with an experienced comrade. Quite a long time ago he once before assumed the human form and was so taken by religious sentiments that – think of it! – he entered a Franciscan monastery, lived there to a ripe old age and died peacefully under the name of Brother Vincent. His ashes became the object of veneration for believers – not a bad career for a fool of a devil. No sooner did he enter upon this trip with Me than he began to sniff about for incense – an

incurable habit! You will probably like him.

And now enough. Get thee hence, my friend. I wish to be alone. Your shallow reflection upon this wall wears upon me. I wish to be alone or only with this Wondergood who has leased his abode to Me and seems to have gotten the best of Me somehow or other. The sea is calm. I am no longer nauseated but I am afraid of something. I am afraid! I fear this darkness which they call night and descends upon the ocean: here, in the cabin there is still some light, but there, on deck, there is terrible darkness, and My eyes are quite helpless. These silly reflectors – they are worthless. They are able to reflect things by day but in the darkness they lose even this miserable power. Of course I shall get used to the darkness. I have already grown used to many things. But just now I am ill at ease and it is horrible to think that the mere turn of a key obsesses me with this blind ever present darkness. Whence does it come?

And how brave men are with their dim reflectors: they see nothing and simply say: it is dark here, we must make a light! Then they themselves put it out and go to sleep. I regard these braves with a kind of cold wonder and I am seized with admiration. Or must one possess a great mind to appreciate horror, like Mine? You are not such a coward, Wondergood. You always bore the reputation of being a hardened man and a man of experience!

There is one moment in the process of my assumption of the human form that I cannot recollect without horror. That

was when for the first time I heard the beating of My heart. This regular, loud, metronome-like sound, which speaks as much of death as of life, filled me with the hitherto inexperienced sensation of horror. Men are always quarrelling about accounts, but how can they carry in their breasts *this* counting machine, registering with the speed of a magician the fleeting seconds of life?

At first I wanted to shout and to run back *below*, before I could grow accustomed to life, but here I looked at Toppi: this newborn fool was calmly brushing his top hat with the sleeve of his frock coat. I broke out into laughter and cried:

“Toppi, the brush!”

We both brushed ourselves while the counting machine in my breast was computing the seconds and, it seemed to me, adding on a few for good measure. Finally, hearing its brazen beating, I thought I might not have time enough to finish my toilette. I have been in a great hurry for some time. Just what it was I would not be able to complete I did not know, but for two days I was in a mad rush to eat and drink and even sleep: the counting machine was beating away while I lay in slumber!

But I never rush now. I know that I will manage to get through and my moments seem inexhaustible. But the little machine keeps on beating just the same, like a drunken soldier at a drum. And how about the very moments it is using up now. Are they to be counted as equal to the great ones? Then I say it is all a fraud and I protest as a honest citizen of the United States and

as a merchant.

I do not feel well. Yet I would not repulse even a friend at this moment. Ah! In all the universe I am alone!

February 7, 1914.

Rome, Hotel "Internationale."

I am driven mad whenever I am compelled to seize the club of a policeman to bring order in my brain: facts, to the right! thoughts, to the left! moods, to the rear – clear the road for His Highness, Conscience, which barely moves about upon its stilts. I am compelled to do this: otherwise there would be a riot, an abrecadebra, chaos. And so I call you to order, gentleman – facts and lady-thoughts. I begin.

Night. Darkness. The air is balmy. There is a pleasant fragrance. Toppi is enchanted. We are in Italy. Our speeding train is approaching Rome. We are enjoying our soft couches when, suddenly, crash! Everything flies to the devil: the train has gone out of its mind. It is wrecked. I confess without shame that I am not very brave, that I was seized with terror and seemed to have lost consciousness. The lights were extinguished and with much labor I crawled out of the corner into which I had been hurled. I seemed to have forgotten the exit. There were only walls and corners. I felt something stinging and beating at Me, and all about nothing but darkness. Suddenly I felt a body beneath my feet. I stepped right upon the face. Only afterwards did I discover that the body was that of George, my lackey, killed outright. I shouted and my obliging Toppi came to my aid: he seized me by

the arm and led me to an open window, as both exits had been barricaded by fragments of the car and baggage. I leaped out, but Toppi lingered behind. My knees were trembling. I was groaning but still he failed to appear. I shouted. Suddenly he reappeared at the window and shouted back:

“What are you crying about? I am looking for our hats and your portfolio.”

A few moments later he returned and handed me my hat. He himself had his silk top hat on and carried the portfolio. I shook with laughter and said:

“Young man, you have forgotten the umbrella!”

But the old buffoon has no sense of humor. He replied seriously:

“I do not carry an umbrella. And do you know, our George is dead and so is the chef.”

So, this fallen carcass which has no feelings and upon whose face one steps with impunity is our George! I was again seized with terror and suddenly my ears were pierced with groans, wild shrieks, whistlings and cries! All the sounds wherewith these braves wail when they are crushed. At first I was deafened. I heard nothing. The cars caught fire. The flames and smoke shot up into the air. The wounded began to groan and, without waiting for the flesh to roast, I darted like a flash into the field. What a leap!

Fortunately the low hills of the Roman Campagna are very convenient for this kind of sport and I was no means behind in

the line of runners. When, out of breath, I hurled myself upon the ground, it was no longer possible to hear or see anything. Only Toppi was approaching. But what a terrible thing this heart is! My face touched the earth. The earth was cool, firm, calm and here I liked it. It seemed as if it had restored my breath and put my heart back into its place. I felt easier. The stars above were calm. There was nothing for them to get excited about. They were not concerned with things below. They merely shine in triumph. That is their eternal ball. And at this brilliant ball the earth, clothed in darkness, appeared as an enchanting stranger in a black mask. (Not at all badly expressed? I trust that you, my reader, will be pleased: my style and my manners are improving!)

I kissed Toppi in the darkness. I always kiss those I like in the darkness. And I said:

“You are carrying your human form, Toppi, very well. I respect you. But what are we to do now? Those lights yonder in the sky – they are the lights of Rome. But they are too far away!”

“Yes, it is Rome,” affirmed Toppi, and raised his hand: “do you hear whistling?”

From somewhere in the distance came the long-drawn, piercing, shrieking of locomotives. They were sounding the alarm.

“Yes, they are whistling,” I said and laughed.

“They are whistling!” repeated Toppi smiling. He never laughs.

But here again I began to feel uncomfortable. I was cold,

lonely, quivering. In my feet there was still the sensation of treading upon corpses. I wanted to shake myself like a dog after a bath. You must understand me: it was the first time that I had seen and felt your corpse, my dear reader, and if you pardon me, it did not appeal to me at all. Why did it not protest when I walked over its face? George had such a beautiful young face and he carried himself with much dignity. Remember your face, too, may be trod upon. And will you, too, remain submissive?

We did not proceed to Rome but went instead in search of the nearest night lodging. We walked long. We grew tired. We longed to drink, oh, how we longed to drink! And now, permit me to present to you my new friend, Signor Thomas Magnus and his beautiful daughter, Maria.

At first we observed the faint flicker of a light. As we approached nearer we found a little house, its white walls gleaming through a thicket of dark cypress trees and shrubbery. There was a light in one of the windows, the rest were barricaded with shutters. The house had a stone fence, an iron gate, strong doors. And – silence. At first glance it all looked suspicious. Toppi knocked. Again silence. I knocked. Still silence. Finally there came a gruff voice, asking from behind the iron door:

“Who are you? What do you want?”

Hardly mumbling with his parched tongue, my brave Toppi narrated the story of the catastrophe and our escape. He spoke at length and then came the click of a lock and the door was opened. Following behind our austere and silent stranger we

entered the house, passed through several dark and silent rooms, walked up a flight of creaking stairs into a brightly lighted room, apparently the stranger's workroom. There was much light, many books, with one open beneath a low lamp shaded by a simple, green globe. We had not noticed this light in the field. But what astonished me was the silence of the house. Despite the rather early hour not a move, not a sound, not a voice was to be heard.

“Have a seat.”

We sat down and Toppi, now almost in pain, began again to narrate his story. But the strange host interrupted him:

“Yes, a catastrophe. They often occur on our roads. Were there many victims?”

Toppi continued his prattle and the host, while listening to him, took a revolver out of his pocket and hid it in a table drawer, adding carelessly:

“This is not – a particularly quiet neighborhood. Well, please, remain here.”

For the first time he raised his dark eyebrows and his large dim eyes and studied us intently as if he were gazing upon something savage in a museum. It was an impolite and brazen stare. I arose and said:

“I fear that we are not welcome here, Signor, and – ”

He stopped Me with an impatient and slightly sarcastic gesture.

“Nonsense, you remain here. I will get you some wine and food. My servant is here in the daytime only, so allow me to wait

on you. You will find the bathroom behind this door. Go wash and freshen up while I get the wine. Make yourself at home.”

While we ate and drank – with savage relish, I confess – this unsympathetic gentleman kept on reading a book as if there were no one else in the room, undisturbed by Toppi’s munching and the dog’s struggle with a bone. I studied my host carefully. Almost my height, his pale face bore an expression of weariness. He had a black, oily, bandit-like beard. But his brow was high and his nose betrayed good sense. How would you describe it? Well, here again I seek comparisons. Imagine the nose betraying the story of a great, passionate, extraordinary, secret life. It is beautiful and seems to have been made not out of muscle and cartilage, but out of – what do you call it? – out of thoughts and brazen desires. He seems quite brave too. But I was particularly attracted by his hands: very big, very white and giving the impression of self-control. I do not know why his hands attracted me so much. But suddenly I thought: how beautifully exact the number of fingers, exactly ten of them, ten thin, evil, wise, crooked fingers!

I said politely:

“Thank you, signor – ”

He replied:

“My name is Magnus. Thomas Magnus. Have some wine? Americans?”

I waited for Toppi to introduce me, according to the English custom, and I looked toward Magnus. One had to be an ignorant,

illiterate animal not to know me.

Toppi broke in:

“Mr. Henry Wondergood of Illinois. His secretary, Irwin Toppi, your obedient servant. Yes, citizens of the United States.”

The old buffoon blurted out his tirade, evincing a thorough lack of pride, and Magnus – yes, he was a little startled. Billions, my friend, billions. He gazed at Me long and intently:

“Mr. Wondergood? Henry Wondergood? Are you not, sir, that American billionaire who seeks to bestow upon humanity the benefits of his billions?”

I modestly shook my head in the affirmative.

“Yes, I am the gentleman.”

Toppi shook his head in affirmation – the ass:

“Yes, we are the gentlemen.”

Magnus bowed and said with a tinge of irony in his voice:

“Humanity is awaiting you, Mr. Wondergood. Judging by the Roman newspapers it is extremely impatient. But I must crave your pardon for this very modest meal: I did not know...”

I seized his large, strangely warm hand and shaking it violently, in American fashion, I said:

“Nonsense, Signor Magnus. I was a swine-herd before I became a billionaire, while you are a straightforward, honest and noble gentleman, whose hand I press with the utmost respect. The devil take it, not a single human face has yet aroused in me as much sympathy as yours!”

Magnus said...

Magnus said nothing! I cannot continue this: "I said," "he said," – This cursed consistency is deadly to my inspiration. It transforms me into a silly romanticist of a boulevard sheet and makes me lie like a mediocrity. I have five senses. I am a complete human being and yet I speak only of the hearing. And how about the sight? I assure you it did not remain idle. And this sensation of the earth, of Italy, of My existence which I now perceive with a new and sweet strength! You imagine that all I did was to listen to wise Thomas Magnus. He speaks and I gaze, understand, answer, while I think: what a beautiful earth, what a beautiful Campagna di Roma! I persisted in penetrating the recesses of the house, into its locked silent rooms. With every moment my joy mounted at the thought that I am alive, that I can speak and play and, suddenly, I rather liked the idea of being human.

I remember that I held out my card to Magnus. "Henry Wondergood." He was surprised, but laid the card politely on the table. I felt like implanting a kiss on his brow for this politeness, for the fact that he too was human. I, too, am human. I was particularly proud of my foot encased in a fine, tan leather shoe and I persisted in swinging it: swing on beautiful, human, American foot! I was extremely emotional that evening! I even wanted to weep: to look my host straight in the eyes and to squeeze out of my own eyes, so full of love and goodness, two little tears. I actually did it, for at that moment I felt a little pleasant sting in my nose, as if it had been hit by a spurt of

lemonade. I observed that my two little tears made an impression upon Magnus.

But Toppi! – While I experienced this wondrous poem of feeling human and even of weeping, – he slept like a dead one at the very same table. I was rather angered. This was really going too far. I wanted to shout at him, but Magnus restrained me:

“He has had a good deal of excitement and is weary, Mr. Wondergood.”

The hour had really grown late. We had been talking and arguing with Magnus for two hours when Toppi fell asleep. I sent him off to bed while we continued to talk and drink for quite a while. I drank more wine, but Magnus restrained himself. There was a dimness about his face. I was beginning to develop an admiration for his grim and, at times, evil, secretive countenance. He said:

“I believe in your altruistic passion, Mr. Wondergood. But I do not believe that you, a man of wisdom and of action, and, it seems to me, somewhat cold, could place any serious hopes upon your money – ”

“Three billion dollars – that is a mighty power, Magnus!”

“Yes, three billion dollars, a mighty power, indeed,” he agreed, rather unwillingly – “but what will you do with it?”

I laughed.

“You probably want to say what can this ignoramus of an American, this erstwhile swine-herd, who knows swine better than he knows men, do with the money?”

“The first business helps the other,” said Magnus.

“I dare say you have but a slight opinion of this foolish philanthropist whose head has been turned by his gold,” said I. “Yes, to be sure, what can I do? I can open another university in Chicago, or another maternity hospital in San Francisco, or another humanitarian reformatory in New York.”

“The latter would be a distinct work of mercy,” quoth Magnus. “Do not gaze at me with such reproach, Mr. Wondergood: I am not jesting. You will find in me the same pure love for humanity which burns so fiercely in you.”

He was laughing at me and I felt pity for him: not to love people! Miserable, unfortunate Magnus. I could kiss his brow with great pleasure! Not to love people!

“Yes, I do not love them,” affirmed Magnus, “but I am glad that you do not intend to travel the conventional road of all American philanthropists. Your billions – ”

“Three billions, Magnus! One could build a nation on this money – ”

“Yes? – ”

“Or destroy a nation,” said I. “With this gold, Magnus, one can start a war or a revolution – ”

“Yes? – ”

I actually succeeded in arousing his interest: his large white hands trembled slightly and in his eyes there gleamed for a moment a look of respect: “You, Wondergood, are not as foolish as I thought!” He arose, paced up and down the room, and halting

before me asked sneeringly:

“And you know exactly what your humanity needs most: the creation of a new or the destruction of the old state? War or peace? Rest or revolution? Who are you, Mr. Wondergood of Illinois, that you essay to solve *these* problems? You had better keep on building your maternity hospitals and universities. That is far less dangerous work.”

I liked the man's hauteur. I bowed my head modestly and said: “You are right, Signor Magnus. Who am I, Henry Wondergood, to undertake the solution of these problems? But I do not intend to solve them. I merely indicate them. I indicate them and I seek the solution. I seek the solution and the man who can give it to me. I have never read a serious book carefully. I see you have quite a supply of books here. You are a misanthrope, Magnus. You are too much of a European not to be easily disillusioned in things, while we, young America, believe in humanity. A man must be created. You in Europe are bad craftsmen and have created a bad man. We shall create a better one. I beg your pardon for my frankness. As long as I was merely Henry Wondergood I devoted myself only to the creation of pigs – and my pigs, let me say to you, have been awarded no fewer medals and decorations than Field Marshal Moltke. But now I desire to create people.”

Magnus smiled:

“You are an alchemist, Wondergood: you would transform lead into gold!”

“Yes, I want to create gold and I seek the philosopher’s stone. But has it not already been found? It has been found, only you do not know how to use it: It is love. Ah, Magnus, I do not know yet what I will do, but my plans are heroic and magnificent. If not for that misanthropic smile of yours I might go further. Believe in Man, Magnus, and give me your aid. You know what Man needs most.”

He said coldly and with sadness:

“He needs prisons and gallows.”

I exclaimed in anger (I am particularly adept in feigning anger):

“You are slandering me, Magnus! I see that you must have experienced some very great misfortune, perhaps treachery and —”

“Hold on, Wondergood! I never speak of myself and do not like to hear others speak of me. Let it be sufficient for you to know that you are the first man in four years to break in upon my solitude and this only due to chance. I do not like people.”

“Oh, pardon. But I do not believe it.”

Magnus went over to the bookcase and with an expression of supreme contempt he seized the first volume he laid his hands upon.

“And you who have read no books,” he said, “do you know what these books are about? Only about evil, about the mistakes and sufferings of humanity. They are filled with tears and blood, Wondergood. Look: in this thin little book which I clasp between

two fingers is contained a whole ocean of human blood, and if you should take all of them together – . And who has spilled this blood? The devil?”

I felt flattered and wanted to bow in acknowledgment, but he threw the book aside and shouted:

“No, sir: Man! Man has spilled this blood! Yes, I do read books but only for one purpose; to learn how to hate man and to hold him in contempt. You, Wondergood, have transformed your pigs into gold, yes? And I can see how your gold is being transformed back again into pigs. They will devour you, Wondergood. But I do not wish either to prattle or to lie: Throw your money into the sea or – build some new prisons and gallows. You are vain like all men. Then go on building gallows. You will be respected by serious people, while the flock in general will call you great. Or, don’t you, American from Illinois, want to get into the Pantheon?”

“No, Magnus! – ”

“Blood!” cried Magnus. “Can’t you see that it is everywhere? Here it is on your boot now – ”

I confess that at the moment Magnus appeared to be insane. I jerked my foot in sudden fear and only then did I perceive a dark, reddish spot on my shoe – how dastardly!

Magnus smiled and immediately regaining his composure continued calmly and without emotion:

“I have unwittingly startled you, Mr. Wondergood? Nonsense! You probably stepped on something inadvertently. A mere trifle.

But this conversation, a conversation I have not conducted for a number of years, makes me uneasy and – good night, Mr. Wondergood. To-morrow I shall have the honor of presenting you to my daughter, and now you will permit me – ”

And so on. In short, this gentleman conducted me to my room in a most impolite manner and well nigh put me to bed. I offered no resistance: why should I? I must say that I did not like him at this moment. I was even pleased when he turned to go but, suddenly, he turned at the very threshold and stepping forward, stretched out his large white hands. And murmured:

“Do you see these hands? There is blood on them! Let it be the blood of a scoundrel, a torturer, a tyrant, but it is the same, red human blood. Good night!”

– He spoiled my night for me. I swear by eternal salvation that on that night I felt great pleasure in being a man, and I made myself thoroughly at home in his narrow human skin. It made me feel uncomfortable in the armpits. You see, I bought it ready made and thought that it would be as comfortable as if it had been made to measure! I was highly emotional. I was extremely good and affable. I was very eager to play, but I was not inclined to tragedy! Blood! How can any person of good breeding thrust his white hands under the nose of a stranger – Hangmen have very white hands!

Do not think I am jesting. I did not feel well. In the daytime I still manage to subdue Wondergood but at night he lays his hands upon me. It is he who fills me with his silly dreams and

shakes within me his entire dusty archive – And how godlessly silly and meaningless are his dreams! He fusses about within me all night long like a returned master, seems to be looking about for something, grumbles about losses and wear and tear and sneezes and cavorts about like a dog lying uncomfortable on its bed. It is he who draws me in at night like a mass of wet lime into the depths of miserable humanity, where I nearly choke to death. When I awake in the morning I feel that Wondergood has infused ten more degrees of human into me – Think of it: He may soon eject me all together and leave me standing outside – he, the miserable owner of an empty barn into which I brought breath and soul!

Like a hurried thief I crawled into a stranger's clothes, the pockets of which are bulging with forged promissory notes – no, still worse!

It is not only uncomfortable attire. It is a low, dark and stifling jail, wherein I occupy less space than a ring might in the stomach of Wondergood. You, my dear reader, have been hidden in your prison from childhood and you even seem to like it, but I – I come from the kingdom of liberty. And I refuse to be Wondergood's tape worm: one swallow of poison and I am free again. What will you say then, scoundrel Wondergood? Without me you will be devoured by the worms. You will crack open at the seams – Miserable carcass! touch me not!

On this night however I was in the absolute power of Wondergood. What is human blood to Me? What do I care about

the troubles of *their* life! But Wondergood was quite aroused by the crazy Magnus. Suddenly I felt – just think of it – ! That I am filled with blood, like the bladder of an ox, and the bladder is very thin and weak, so that it would be dangerous to prick it. Prick it and out spurts the blood! I was terrified at the idea that I might be killed in this house: That some one might cut my throat and turning me upside down, hanging by the legs, would let the blood run out upon the floor.

I lay in the darkness and strained my ears to hear whether or not Magnus was approaching with his white hands. And the greater the silence in this cursed house the more terrified I grew. Even Toppi failed to snore as usual. This made me angry. Then my body began to ache. Perhaps I was injured in the wreck, or was it weariness brought on by the flight? Then my body began to itch in the most ordinary way and I even began to move the feet: it was the appearance of the jovial clown in the tragedy!

Suddenly a dream seized Me by the feet and dragged me rapidly below. I hardly had time enough to shout. And what nonsense arose before me! Do you ever have such dreams? I felt that I was a bottle of champagne, with a thin neck and sealed, but filled not with wine but with blood! And it seemed that not only I but all people had become bottles with sealed tops and all of us were arranged in a row on a seashore. And, Someone horrible was approaching from Somewhere and wanted to smash us all. And I saw how foolish it would be to do so and wanted to shout: “Don’t smash them. Get a corkscrew!” But I had no voice.

I was a bottle. Suddenly the dead lackey George approached. In his hands was a huge sharp corkscrew. He said something and seized me by the throat – Ah, ah, by the throat! —

I awoke in pain. Apparently he did try to open me up. My wrath was so great that I neither sighed nor smiled nor moved. I simply killed Wondergood again. I gnashed my teeth, straightened out my eyes, closed them calmly, stretched out at full length and lay peacefully in the full consciousness of the greatness of my Ego. Had the ocean itself moved up on me I would not have batted an eye! Get thee hence, my friend, I wish to be alone.

And the body grew silent, colorless, airy and empty again. With light step I left it and before my eyes there arose a vision of the *extraordinary*, that which cannot be expressed in your language, my poor friend! Satisfy your curiosity with the dream I have just confided to you and ask no more! Or does not the “huge, sharp corkscrew” suit you? But it is so – artistic!

In the morning I was well again, refreshed and beautiful. I yearned for the play, like an actor who has just left his dressing room. Of course I did not forget to shave. This canaille Wondergood gets overgrown with hair as quickly as his golden skinned pigs. I complained about this to Toppi with whom, while waiting for Magnus, I was walking in the garden. And Toppi, thinking a while, replied philosophically:

“Yes, man sleeps and his beard grows. This is as it should be – for the barbers!”

Magnus appeared. He was no more hospitable than yesterday and his pale face carried unmistakable indications of weariness. But he was calm and polite. How black his beard is in the daytime! He pressed my hand in cold politeness and said: (we were perched on a wall.)

“You are enjoying the Roman Campagna, Mr. Wondergood? A magnificent sight! It is said that the Campagna is noted for its fevers, but there is but one fever it produces in me – the fever of thought!”

Apparently Wondergood did not have much of a liking for nature, and I have not yet managed to develop a taste for earthly landscape: an empty field for me. I cast my eyes politely over the countryside before us and said:

“People interest me more, Signor Magnus.”

He gazed at me intently with his dark eyes and lowering his voice said dryly and with apparent reluctance:

“Just two words about people, Mr. Wondergood. You will soon see my daughter, Maria. She is my three billions. You understand?”

I nodded my head in approval.

“But your California does not produce such gold. Neither does any other country on this dirty earth. It is the gold of the heavens. I am not a believer, Mr. Wondergood, but even I experience some doubts when I meet the gaze of my Maria. Hers are the only hands into which you might without the slightest misgiving place your billions – ”

I am an old bachelor and I was overcome with fear, but Magnus continued sternly with a ring of triumph in his voice:

“But she will not accept them, Sir! Her gentle hands must never touch this golden dirt. Her clean eyes will never behold any sight but that of this endless, godless Campagna. Here is her monastery, Mr. Wondergood, and there is but one exit for her from here: into the Kingdom of Heaven, if it does exist!”

“I beg your pardon but I cannot understand this, my dear Magnus!” I protested in great joy. “Life and people – ”

The face of Thomas Magnus grew angry, as it did yesterday, and in stern ridicule, he interrupted me:

“And I beg you to grasp, *dear* Wondergood, that life and people are not for Maria. It is enough that I know them. My duty was to *warn* you. And now” – he again assumed the attitude of cold politeness – “I ask you to come to my table. You too, Mr. Toppi!”

We had begun to eat, and were chattering of small matters, when *Maria* entered. The door through which she entered was behind my back. I mistook her soft step for those of the maid carrying the dishes, but I was astonished by the long-nosed Toppi, sitting opposite me. His eyes grew round like circles, his face red, as if he were choking. His Adam’s apple seemed to be lifted above his neck as if driven by a wave, and to disappear again somewhere behind his narrow, ministerial collar. Of course, I thought he was choking to death with a fishbone and shouted:

“Toppi! What is the matter with you? Take some water.”
But Magnus was already on his feet, announcing coldly:
“My daughter, Maria. Mr. Henry Wondergood!”

I turned about quickly and – how can I express the extraordinary when it is inexpressible? It was something more than beautiful. It was terrible in its beauty. I do not want to seek comparisons. I shall leave that to you. Take all that you have ever seen or ever known of the beautiful on earth: the lily, the stars, the sun, but add, add still more. But not this was the awful aspect of it: There was something else: the elusive yet astonishing similarity – to whom? Whom have I met upon this earth who was so beautiful – so beautiful and awe-inspiring – awe-inspiring and unapproachable. I have learned by this time your entire archive, Wondergood, and I do not believe that it comes from your modest gallery!

“Madonna!” mumbled Toppi in a hoarse voice, scared out of his wits.

So that is it! Yes, Madonna. The fool was right, and I, Satan, could understand his terror. Madonna, whom people see only in churches, in paintings, in the imagination of artists. Maria, the name which rings only in hymns and prayer books, heavenly beauty, mercy, forgiveness and love! Star of the Seas! Do you like that name: Star of the Seas?

It was really devilishly funny. I made a deep bow and almost blurted out:

“Madam, I beg pardon for my unbidden intrusion, but I really

did not expect to meet you *here*. I most humbly beg your pardon, but I could not imagine that this black bearded fellow has the honor of having you for his daughter. A thousand times I crave your pardon for – ”

But enough. I said something else.

“How do you do, Signorina. It is indeed a pleasure.”

And she really did not indicate in any way that she was *already* acquainted with Me. One must respect an incognito if one would remain a gentleman and only a scoundrel would dare to tear a mask from a lady’s face! This would have been all the more impossible, because her father, Thomas Magnus, continued to urge us with a chuckle:

“Do eat, please, Mr. Toppi. Why do you not drink, Mr. Wondergood? The wine is splendid.”

In the course of what followed:

1. She breathed —
2. She blinked —
3. She ate —

and she was a beautiful girl, about eighteen years of age, and her dress was white and her throat bare. It was really laughable. I gazed at her bare neck and – believe me, my earthly friend: I am not easily seduced, I am not a romantic youth, but I am not old by any means, I am not at all bad looking, I enjoy an independent position in the world and – don’t you like the combination: Satan and *Maria*? *Maria* and Satan! In evidence of the seriousness of my intentions I can submit at that moment I thought more of *our*

descendants and sought a name for *our* first-born than indulged in frivolity.

Suddenly Toppi's Adam's apple gave a jerk and he inquired hoarsely:

“Has any one ever painted your portrait, Signorina?”

“Maria never poses for painters!” broke in Magnus sternly. I felt like laughing at the fool Toppi. I had already opened wide my mouth, filled with a set of first-class American teeth, when Maria's pure gaze pierced my eyes and everything flew to the devil, – as in that moment of the railway catastrophe! You understand: she turned me inside out, like a stocking – or how shall I put it? My fine Parisian costume was driven inside of me and my still finer thoughts which, however, I would not have wanted to convey to the lady, suddenly appeared upon the surface. With all my secrecy I was left no more sealed than a room in a fifteen cent lodging house.

But she *forgave* me, said nothing and threw her gaze like a projector in the direction of Toppi, illumining his entire body. You, too, would have laughed had you seen how this poor old devil was set aglow and aflame by this gaze – clear from the prayer book to the fishbone with which he nearly choked to death.

Fortunately for both of us Magnus arose and invited us to follow him into the garden.

“Come, let us go into the garden,” said he. “Maria will show you her favorite flowers.”

Yes, Maria! But seek no songs of praise from me, oh poet! I was mad! I was as provoked as a man whose closet has just been ransacked by a burglar. I wanted to gaze at Maria but was compelled to look upon the foolish flowers – because I dared not lift my eyes. I am a gentleman and cannot appear before a lady without a necktie. I was seized by a curious humility. Do you like to feel humble? I do not.

I do not know what Maria said. But I swear by eternal salvation – her gaze, and her entire uncanny countenance was the embodiment of an all-embracing meaning so that any wise word I might have uttered would have sounded meaningless. The wisdom of words is necessary only for those poor in spirit. The right are silent. Take note of that, little poet, sage and eternal chatterbox, wherever you may be. Let it be sufficient for you that I have humbled myself to speak.

Ah, but I have forgotten my humility! She walked and I and Toppi crawled after her. I detested myself and this broad-backed Toppi because of his hanging nose and large, pale ears. What was needed here was an Apollo and not a pair of ordinary Americans.

We felt quite relieved when she had gone and we were left alone with Magnus. It was all so sweet and simple! Toppi abandoned his religious airs and I crossed my legs comfortably, lit a cigar, and fixed my steel-sharp gaze upon the whites of Magnus's eyes.

“You must be off to Rome, Mr. Wondergood. They are probably worrying about you,” said our host in a tone of loving

concern.

“I can send Toppi,” I replied. He smiled and added ironically: “I hardly think that would be sufficient, Mr. Wondergood!”

I sought to clasp his great white hand but it did not seem to move closer. But I caught it just the same, pressed it warmly and he was compelled to return the pressure!

“Very well, Signor Magnus! I am off at once!” I said.

“I have already sent for the carriage,” he replied. “Is not the Campagna beautiful in the morning?”

I again took a polite look at the country-side and said with emotion:

“Yes, it is beautiful! Irwin, my friend, leave us for a moment. I have a few words to say to Signor Magnus – ”

Toppi left and Signor Magnus opened wide his big sad eyes. I again tried my steel on him, and bending forward closer to his dark face, I asked:

“Have you ever observed *dear* Magnus, the very striking resemblance between your daughter, the Signorina Maria, and a certain – celebrated personage? Don’t you think she resembles the Madonna?”

“Madonna?” drawled out Magnus. “No, *dear* Wondergood, I haven’t noticed that. I never go to church. But I fear you will be late. The Roman fever – ”

I again seized his white hand and shook it vigorously. No, I did not tear it off. And from my eyes there burst forth again *those* two tears:

“Let us speak plainly, Signor Magnus,” said I. “I am a straightforward man and have grown to love you. Do you want to come along with me and be the lord of my billions?”

Magnus was silent. His hand lay motionless in mine. His eyes were lowered and something dark seemed to pass over his face, then immediately to disappear. Finally he said, seriously and simply:

“I understand you, Mr. Wondergood – but I must refuse. No, I will not go with you. I have failed to tell you one thing, but your frankness and confidence in me compels me to say that I must, to a certain extent, steer clear of the police.”

“The Roman police,” I asked, betraying a slight excitement. “Nonsense, we shall buy it.”

“No, the international,” he replied. “I hope you do not think that I have committed some base crime. The trouble is not with police which can be bought. You are right, Mr. Wondergood, when you say that one can buy almost any one. The truth is that I can be of no use to you. What do you want me for? You love humanity and I detest it. At best I am indifferent to it. Let it live and not interfere with me. Leave me my Maria, leave me the right and strength to detest people as I read the history of their life. Leave me my Campagna and that is all I want and all of which I am capable. All the oil within me has burned out, Wondergood. You see before you an extinguished lamp hanging on a wall, a lamp which once – Goodbye.”

“I do not ask your confidence, Magnus,” I interjected.

“Pardon me, you will never receive it, Mr. Wondergood. My name is an invention but it is the only one I can offer to my friends.”

To tell the truth: I liked “Thomas Magnus” at that moment. He spoke bravely and simply. In his face one could read stubbornness and will. This man knew the value of human life and had the mien of one condemned to death. But it was the mien of a proud, uncompromising criminal, who will never accept the ministrations of a priest! For a moment I thought: My Father had many bastard children, deprived of legacy and wandering about the world. Perhaps Thomas Magnus is one of these wanderers? And is it possible that I have met a *brother* on this earth? Very interesting. But from a purely human, business point of view, one cannot help but respect a man whose hands are steeped in blood!

I saluted, changed my position, and in the humblest possible manner, asked Magnus’s permission to visit him occasionally and seek his advice. He hesitated but finally looked me straight in the face and agreed.

“Very well, Mr. Wondergood. You may come. I hope to hear from you things that may supplement the knowledge I glean from my books. And, by the way, Mr. Toppi has made an excellent impression upon my Maria” —

“Toppi?”

“Yes. She has found a striking resemblance between him and one of her favorite saints. She goes to church frequently.”

Toppi a saint! Or has his prayer book overbalanced his huge

back and the fishbone in his throat. Magnus gazed at me almost gently and only his thin nose seemed to tremble slightly with restrained laughter. – It is very pleasant to know that behind this austere exterior there is so much quiet and restrained merriment!

It was twilight when we left. Magnus followed us to the threshold, but Maria remained in seclusion. The little white house surrounded by the cypress trees was as quiet and silent as we found it yesterday, but the silence was of a different character: the silence was the soul of Maria.

I confess that I felt rather sad at this departure but very soon came a new series of impressions, which dispelled this feeling. We were approaching Rome. We entered the brightly illuminated, densely populated streets through some opening in the city wall and the first thing we saw in the Eternal City was a creaking trolley car, trying to make its way through the same hole in the wall. Toppi, who was acquainted with Rome, revelled in the familiar atmosphere of the churches we were passing and indicated with his long finger the *remnants* of ancient Rome which seemed to be clinging to the huge wall of the new structures: just as if the latter had been bombarded with the shells of old and fragments of the missiles had clung to the bricks.

Here and there we came upon additional heaps of this old rubbish. Above a low parapet of stone, we observed a dark shallow ditch and a large triumphal gate, half sunk in the earth. “The Forum!” exclaimed Toppi, majestically. Our coachman nodded his head in affirmation. With every new pile of old stone

and brick the fellow swelled with pride, while I longed for my New York and its skyscrapers, and tried to calculate the number of trucks that would be necessary to clear these heaps of rubbish called ancient Rome away before morning. When I mentioned this to Toppi he was insulted and replied:

“You don’t understand anything: better close your eyes and just reflect that you are in Rome.”

I did so and was again convinced that sight is as much of an impediment to the mind as sound: not without reason are all wise folk on the earth blind and all good musicians deaf.

Like Toppi I began to sniff the air and through my sense of smell I gathered more of Rome and its horribly long and highly entertaining history than hitherto: thus a decaying leaf in the woods smells stronger than the young and green foliage. Will you believe me when I say that I sensed the odor of blood and Nero? But when I opened my eyes expectantly I observed a plain, everyday kiosk and a lemonade stand.

“Well, how do you like it?” growled Toppi, still dissatisfied.

“It smells – ”

“Well, certainly it smells! It will smell stronger with every hour: these are old, strong aromas, Mr. Wondergood.”

And so it really was: the odor grew in strength. I cannot find comparisons to make it clear to you. All the sections of my brain began to move and buzz like bees aroused by smoke. It is strange, but it seems that Rome is included in the archive of the silly Wondergood. Perhaps this is his native town? When we

approached a certain populous square I sensed the clear odor of some blood relatives, which was soon followed by the conviction that I, too, have walked these streets before. Have I, like Toppi, previously donned the human form? Ever louder buzzed the bees. My entire beehive buzzed and suddenly thousands of faces, dim and white, beautiful and horrible, began to dance before me; thousands upon thousands of voices, noises, cries, laughs and sighs nearly set me deaf. No, this was no longer a beehive: it was a huge, fiery smithy, where firearms were being forged with the red sparks flying all about. Iron!

Of course, if I had lived in Rome before, I must have been one of its emperors: I *remember* the expression of my face. I remember the movement of my bare neck as I turn my head. I remember the touch of golden laurels upon my bald head – Iron! Ah, I hear the steps of the iron legions of Rome. I hear the iron voices: “Vivat Cæsar!”

I am hot. I am burning. Or was I not an emperor but simply one of the “victims” when Rome burned down in accordance with the magnificent plan of Nero? No, this is not a fire. This is a funeral pyre on which I am forcibly esconsced. I hear the snake-like hissing of the tongues of flame beneath my feet. I strain my neck, all lined with blue veins, and in my throat there rises the final curse – or blessing? Think of it: I even remember that Roman face in the front row of spectators, which even then gave me no rest because of its idiotic expression and sleepy eyes: I am being burned and it sleeps!

“Hotel ‘Internationale’” – cried Toppi, and I opened my eyes.

We were going up a hill along a quiet street, at the end of which there glowed a large structure, worthy even of New York: it was the hotel where we had previously wired for reservations. They probably thought we had perished in the wreck. My funeral pyre was extinguished. I grew as merry as a darkey who has just escaped from hard labor and I whispered to Toppi:

“Well, Toppi, and how about the Madonna?”

“Y-yes, interesting. I was frightened at first and nearly choked to death – ”

“With a bone? You are silly, Toppi: she is polite and did not recognize you. She simply took you for one of her saints. It is a pity, old boy, that we have chosen for ourselves these solemn, American faces: had we looked around more carefully we might have found some more beautiful.”

“I am quite satisfied with mine,” said Toppi sadly, and turned away. A glow of secret self-satisfaction appeared upon his long, shiny nose. Ah, Toppi, Ah, the saint!

But we were already being accorded a triumphal reception.

February 14.

Rome, Hotel “Internationale.”

I do not want to go to Magnus. I am thinking too much of his Madonna of flesh and bone. I have come here to lie and to play merrily and I am not at all taken by the prospect of being a mediocre actor, who weeps behind the scenes and appears on the stage with his eyes perfectly dry. Moreover, I have no time

to gad about the fields catching butterflies with a net like a boy.

The whole of Rome is buzzing about me. I am an extraordinary man, who loves his fellow beings and I am celebrated. The mobs who flock to worship Me are no less numerous than those who worship the Vicar of Christ himself, two Popes all at once. – Yes, happy Rome cannot consider itself an orphan!

I am now living at the hotel, where all is aquiver with ecstasy when I put my shoes outside my door for the night, but they are renovating a palace for me: the historic Villa Orsini. Painters, sculptors and poets are kept busy. One brush-pusher is already painting my portrait, assuring me that I remind him of one of the Medicis. The other brush-pushers are sharpening their knives for him.

I ask him:

“And can you paint a Madonna?”

Certainly he can. It was he, if the signor recollects, who painted the famous Turk on the cigarette boxes, the Turk whose fame is known even in America. And now three brush-pushers are painting Madonnas for me. The rest are running about Rome seeking models. I said to one, in my barbarous, American ignorance of the higher arts:

“But if you find such a model, Signor, just bring her to me. Why waste paint and canvas?”

He was evidently pained and mumbled:

“Ah, Signor – a model?”

I think he took me for a merchant in “live stock.” But, fool, why do I need your aid for which I must pay a commission, when my ante-chamber is filled with a flock of beauties? They all worship me. I remind them of Savanarola, and they seek to transform every dark corner in my drawing room, and every soft couch into a confessional. I am so glad that these society ladies, like the painters, know so well the history of their country and realize who I am.

The joy of the Roman papers on finding that I did not perish in the wreck and lost neither my legs nor my billions, was equal to the joy of the papers of Jerusalem on the day of the resurrection of Christ – in reality there was little cause for satisfaction on the part of the latter, as far as I am able to read history. I feared that I might remind the journalists of J. Cæsar, but fortunately they think little of the past and confined themselves to pointing out my resemblance to President Wilson. Scoundrels! They were simply flattering my American patriotism. To the majority, however, I recall a Prophet, but they do not know which one. On this point they are modestly silent. At any rate it is not Mahomet: my opposition to marriage is well known at all telegraph stations.

It is difficult to imagine the filth on which I fed my hungry interviewers. Like an experienced swine-herd, I gaze with horror on the mess they feed upon. They eat and yet they live. Although, I must admit, I do not see them growing fat! Yesterday morning I flew in an aeroplane over Rome and the Campagna. You will probably ask whether I saw Maria’s home? No. I did not find it:

how can one find a grain of sand among a myriad of other grains
– But I really did not look for it: I felt horror-stricken at the great
altitude.

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