

Marie Corelli

THE SORROWS
OF SATAN

Original English edition

МИОО

Maria Corelli
The Sorrows of Satan
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Аннотация

Роман «Скорбь сатаны» стал хитом своего времени. За пару месяцев после выхода в 1895 году был и проданы десятки тысяч экземпляров. А когда его впервые публиковали на русском, издатели допустили ошибку: перепутали автора и приписали книгу Брэму Стокеру.

Одаренный, но бедный писатель Джеффри Темпест неожиданно получает огромное наследство и влиятельного покровителя – загадочного князя Лючио Риманеца. Деньги, слава, власть – все оказывается в его руках. Но Джеффри понимает, что постепенно теряет свой талант. Что он выберет: богатство или гениальность? И кто скрывается за личностью его нового друга?

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The Sorrows of Satan

Original title:

THE SORROWS OF SATAN

OR THE STRANGE EXPERIENCE OF ONE

GEOFFREY TEMPEST, MILLIONAIRE

Marie Corelli

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I



Do you know what it is to be poor? Not poor with the arrogant poverty complained of by certain people who have five or six thousand a year to live upon, and who yet swear they can hardly manage to make both ends meet, but really poor – downright, cruelly, hideously poor, with a poverty that is graceless, sordid and miserable? Poverty that compels you to dress in your one suit of clothes till it is worn threadbare – that denies you clean linen on account of the ruinous charges of washerwomen – that robs you of your own self-respect, and causes you to slink along the streets vaguely abashed, instead of walking erect among your fellow-men in independent ease – this is the sort of poverty I mean. This is the grinding curse that keeps down noble aspiration under a load of ignoble care; this is the moral cancer that eats into the heart of an otherwise well-intentioned human creature and makes him envious and malignant, and inclined to the use of dynamite. When he sees the fat idle woman of society passing by in her luxurious carriage, lolling back lazily, her face mottled with the purple and red

signs of superfluous eating – when he observes the brainless and sensual man of fashion smoking and dawdling away the hours in the Park, as if all the world and its millions of honest hard workers were created solely for the casual diversion of the so-called 'upper' classes – then the good blood in him turns to gall, and his suffering spirit rises in fierce rebellion, crying out – 'Why in God's name, should this injustice be? Why should a worthless lounge have his pockets full of gold by mere chance and heritage, while I, toiling wearily from morn till midnight, can scarce afford myself a satisfying meal?'

Why indeed! Why should the wicked flourish like a green bay-tree? I have often thought about it. Now however I believe I could help to solve the problem out of my own personal experience. But... such an experience! Who will credit it? Who will believe that anything so strange and terrific ever chanced to the lot of a mortal man? No one. Yet it is true; – truer than much so-called truth. Moreover I know that many men are living through many such incidents as have occurred to me, under precisely the same influence, conscious perhaps at times, that they are in the tangles of sin, but too weak of will to break the net in which they have become voluntarily imprisoned. Will they be taught, I wonder, the lesson I have learned? In the same bitter school, under the same formidable taskmaster? Will they realize as I have been forced to do – aye, to the very fibres of my intellectual perception – the vast, individual, active Mind, which behind all matter, works unceasingly, though silently, a very

eternal and positive God? If so, then dark problems will become clear to them, and what seems injustice in the world will prove pure equity! But I do not write with any hope of either persuading or enlightening my fellow-men. I know their obstinacy too well; – I can gauge it by my own. My proud belief in myself was, at one time, not to be outdone by any human unit on the face of the globe. And I am aware that others are in similar case. I merely intend to relate the various incidents of my career in due order exactly as they happened, – leaving to more confident heads the business of propounding and answering the riddles of human existence as best they may.

During a certain bitter winter, long remembered for its arctic severity, when a great wave of intense cold spread freezing influences not alone over the happy isles of Britain, but throughout all Europe, I, Geoffrey Tempest, was alone in London and well-nigh starving. Now a starving man seldom gets the sympathy he merits – so few can be persuaded to believe in him. Worthy folks who have just fed to repletion are the most incredulous, some of them being even moved to smile when told of existing hungry people, much as if these were occasional jests invented for after-dinner amusement. Or, with that irritating vagueness of attention which characterizes fashionable folk to such an extent that when asking a question they neither wait for the answer nor understand it when given, the well-dined groups, hearing of someone starved to death, will idly murmur 'How dreadful!' and at once turn to the discussion of the latest 'fad' for

killing time, ere it takes to killing them with sheer *ennui*. The pronounced fact of being hungry sounds coarse and common, and is not a topic for polite society, which always eats more than sufficient for its needs. At the period I am speaking of however, I, who have since been one of the most envied of men, knew the cruel meaning of the word hunger, too well – the gnawing pain, the sick faintness, the deadly stupor, the insatiable animal craving for mere food, all of which sensations are frightful enough to those who are, unhappily, daily inured to them, but which when they afflict one who has been tenderly reared and brought up to consider himself a 'gentleman' – God save the mark! are perhaps still more painful to bear. And I felt that I had not deserved to suffer the wretchedness in which I found myself. I had worked hard. From the time my father died, leaving me to discover that every penny of the fortune I imagined he possessed was due to swarming creditors, and that nothing of all our house and estate was left to me except a jewelled miniature of my mother who had lost her own life in giving me birth – from that time I say, I had put my shoulder to the wheel and toiled late and early. I had turned my University education to the only use for which it or I seemed fitted – literature. I had sought for employment on almost every journal in London – refused by many, taken on trial by some, but getting steady pay from none. Whoever seeks to live by brain and pen alone is, at the beginning of such a career, treated as a sort of social pariah. Nobody wants him – everybody despises him. His efforts are derided, his manuscripts

are flung back to him unread, and he is less cared for than the condemned murderer in gaol. The murderer is at least fed and clothed – a worthy clergyman visits him, and his gaoler will occasionally condescend to play cards with him. But a man gifted with original thoughts and the power of expressing them, appears to be regarded by everyone in authority as much worse than the worst criminal, and all the 'jacks-in-office' unite to kick him to death if they can. I took both kicks and blows in sullen silence and lived on – not for the love of life, but simply because I scorned the cowardice of self-destruction. I was young enough not to part with hope too easily; – the vague idea I had that my turn would come, – that the ever-circling wheel of Fortune would perchance lift me up some day as it now crushed me down, kept me just wearily capable of continuing existence – though it was merely a continuance and no more. For about six months I got some reviewing work on a well-known literary journal. Thirty novels a week were sent to me to 'criticize' – I made a habit of glancing hastily at about eight or ten of them, and writing one column of rattling abuse concerning these thus casually selected – the remainder were never noticed at all. I found that this mode of action was considered 'smart', and I managed for a time to please my editor who paid me the munificent sum of fifteen shillings for my weekly labour. But on one fatal occasion I happened to change my tactics and warmly praised a work which my own conscience told me was both original and excellent. The author of it happened to be an old enemy of the proprietor of the journal

on which I was employed; – my eulogistic review of the hated individual, unfortunately for me, appeared, with the result that private spite outweighed public justice, and I was immediately dismissed.

After this I dragged on in a sufficiently miserable way, doing 'hack work' for the dailies, and living on promises that never became realities, till, as I have said, in the early January of the bitter winter alluded to, I found myself literally penniless and face to face with starvation, owing a month's rent besides for the poor lodging I occupied in a back street not far from the British Museum. I had been out all day trudging from one newspaper office to another, seeking for work and finding none. Every available post was filled. I had also tried, unsuccessfully, to dispose of a manuscript of my own – a work of fiction which I knew had some merit, but which all the 'readers' in the publishing offices appeared to find exceptionally worthless. These 'readers' I learned, were most of them novelists themselves, who read other people's productions in their spare moments and passed judgement on them. I have always failed to see the justice of this arrangement; to me it seems merely the way to foster mediocrities and suppress originality. Common sense points out the fact that the novelist 'reader' who has a place to maintain for himself in literature would naturally rather encourage work that is likely to prove ephemeral, than that which might possibly take a higher footing than his own. Be this as it may, and however good or bad the

system, it was entirely prejudicial to me and my literary offspring. The last publisher I tried was a kindly man who looked at my shabby clothes and gaunt face with some commiseration.

'I'm sorry' said he, 'very sorry, but my readers are quite unanimous. From what I can learn, it seems to me you have been too earnest. And also, rather sarcastic in certain strictures against society. My dear fellow, that won't do. Never blame society – it buys books! Now if you could write a smart love-story, slightly *risqué* – even a little more than *risqué* for that matter; that is the sort of thing that suits the present age.'

'Pardon me', I interposed somewhat wearily – 'but are you sure you judge the public taste correctly?'

He smiled a bland smile of indulgent amusement at what he no doubt considered my ignorance in putting such a query.

'Of course I am sure' – he replied – 'It is my business to know the public taste as thoroughly as I know my own pocket. Understand me – I don't suggest that you should write a book on any positively indecent subject – that can be safely left to the "New" woman' – and he laughed – 'but I assure you high-class fiction doesn't sell. The critics don't like it, to begin with. What goes down with them and with the public is a bit of sensational realism told in terse newspaper English. Literary English – Addisonian English – is a mistake.'

'And I am also a mistake I think', I said with a forced smile – 'At any rate if what you say be true, I must lay down the pen and try another trade. I am old-fashioned enough to consider

Literature as the highest of all professions, and I would rather not join in with those who voluntarily degrade it.’

He gave me a quick side-glance of mingled incredulity and depreciation.

‘Well, well!’ he finally observed – ‘you are a little quixotic. That will wear off. Will you come on to my club and dine with me?’

I refused this invitation promptly. I knew the man saw and recognized my wretched plight, – and pride – false pride if you will – rose up to my rescue. I bade him a hurried good-day, and started back to my lodging, carrying my rejected manuscript with me. Arrived there, my landlady met me as I was about to ascend the stairs, and asked me whether I would ‘kindly settle accounts’ the next day. She spoke civilly enough, poor soul, and not without a certain compassionate hesitation in her manner. Her evident pity for me galled my spirit as much as the publisher’s offer of a dinner had wounded my pride – and with a perfectly audacious air of certainty I at once promised her the money at the time she herself appointed, though I had not the least idea where or how I should get the required sum. Once past her, and shut in my own room, I flung my useless manuscript on the floor and myself into a chair, and – swore. It refreshed me to swear, and it seemed natural – for though temporarily weakened by lack of food, I was not yet so weak as to shed tears – and a fierce formidable oath was to me the same sort of physical relief which I imagine a fit of weeping may be to an excitable

woman. Just as I could not shed tears, so was I incapable of apostrophizing God in my despair. To speak frankly, I did not believe in any God – *then*. I was to myself an all-sufficing mortal, scorning the time-worn superstitions of so-called religion. Of course I had been brought up in the Christian faith; but that creed had become worse than useless to me since I had intellectually realized the utter inefficiency of Christian ministers to deal with difficult life-problems. Spiritually I was adrift in chaos – mentally I was hindered both in thought and achievement – bodily, I was reduced to want. My case was desperate – I myself was desperate. It was a moment when if ever good and evil angels play a game of chance for a man's soul, they were surely throwing the dice on the last wager for mine. And yet, with it all, I felt I had done my best. I was driven into a corner by my fellow-men who grudged me space to live in, but I had fought against it. I had worked honestly and patiently; – all to no purpose. I knew of rogues who gained plenty of money; and of knaves who were amassing large fortunes. Their prosperity appeared to prove that honesty after all was *not* the best policy. What should I do then? How should I begin the jesuitical business of committing evil that good, personal good, might come of it? So I thought, dully, if such stray half-stupefied fancies as I was capable of, deserved the name of thought.

The night was bitter cold. My hands were numbed, and I tried to warm them at the oil-lamp my landlady was good enough to still allow me the use of, in spite of delayed cash-payments.

As I did so, I noticed three letters on the table – one in a long blue envelope suggestive of either a summons or a returned manuscript, one bearing the Melbourne postmark, and the third a thick square missive coroneted in red and gold at the back. I turned over all three indifferently, and selecting the one from Australia, balanced it in my hand a moment before opening it. I knew from whom it came, and idly wondered what news it brought me. Some months previously I had written a detailed account of my increasing debts and difficulties to an old college chum, who finding England too narrow for his ambition had gone out to the wider New World on a speculative quest of gold mining. He was getting on well, so I understood, and had secured a fairly substantial position; and I had therefore ventured to ask him point-blank for the loan of fifty pounds. Here, no doubt, was his reply, and I hesitated before breaking the seal.

‘Of course it will be a refusal’, I said half-aloud – ‘However kindly a friend may otherwise be, he soon turns crusty if asked to lend money. He will express many regrets, accuse trade and the general bad times and hope I will soon “tide over”. I know the sort of thing. Well – after all, why should I expect him to be different to other men? I’ve no claim on him beyond the memory of a few sentimental arm-in-arm days at Oxford.’

A sigh escaped me in spite of myself, and a mist blurred my sight for the moment. Again I saw the grey towers of peaceful Magdalen, and the fair green trees shading the walks in and around the dear old University town where we – I and the man

whose letter I now held in my hand – strolled about together as happy youths, fancying that we were young geniuses born to regenerate the world. We were both fond of classics – we were brimful of Homer and the thoughts and maxims of all the immortal Greeks and Latins – and I verily believe, in those imaginative days, we thought we had in us such stuff as heroes are made of. But our entrance into the social arena soon robbed us of our sublime conceit – we were common working units, no more – the grind and prose of daily life put Homer into the background, and we soon discovered that society was more interested in the latest unsavoury scandal than in the tragedies of Sophocles or the wisdom of Plato. Well! it was no doubt extremely foolish of us to dream that we might help to regenerate a world in which both Plato and Christ appear to have failed – yet the most hardened cynic will scarcely deny that it is pleasant to look back to the days of his youth if he can think that at least then, if only once in his life, he had noble impulses.

The lamp burned badly, and I had to re-trim it before I could settle down to read my friend's letter. Next door someone was playing a violin, and playing it well. Tenderly and yet with a certain amount of *brío* the notes came dancing from the bow, and I listened, vaguely pleased. Being faint with hunger I was somewhat in a listless state bordering on stupor, – and the penetrating sweetness of the music appealing to the sensuous and æsthetic part of me, drowned for the moment mere animal craving.

'There you go!' I murmured, apostrophizing the unseen musician – 'practising away on that friendly fiddle of yours – no doubt for a mere pittance which barely keeps you alive. Possibly you are some poor wretch in a cheap orchestra – or you might even be a street-player and be able to live in this neighbourhood of the élite starving – you can have no hope whatever of being the "fashion" and making your bow before Royalty – or if you have that hope, it is wildly misplaced. Play on, my friend, play on! – the sounds you make are very agreeable, and seem to imply that you are happy. I wonder if you are? – or if, like me, you are going rapidly to the devil!'

The music grew softer and more plaintive, and was now accompanied by the rattle of hailstones against the window-panes. A gusty wind whistled under the door and roared down the chimney – a wind cold as the grasp of death and searching as a probing knife. I shivered – and bending close over the smoky lamp, prepared to read my Australian news. As I opened the envelope, a bill for fifty pounds, payable to me at a well-known London banker's, fell out upon the table. My heart gave a quick bound of mingled relief and gratitude.

'Why Jack, old fellow, I wronged you!' I exclaimed – 'Your heart is in the right place after all.'

And profoundly touched by my friend's ready generosity, I eagerly perused his letter. It was not very long, and had evidently been written off in haste.

Dear Geoff,

I'm sorry to hear you are down on your luck; it shows what a crop of fools are still flourishing in London, when a man of your capability cannot gain his proper place in the world of letters, and be fittingly acknowledged. I believe it's all a question of wire-pulling, and money is the only thing that will pull the wires. Here's the fifty you ask for and welcome – don't hurry about paying it back. I am doing you a good turn this year by sending you a friend – a real friend, mind you! – no sham. He brings you a letter of introduction from me, and between ourselves, old man, you cannot do better than put yourself and your literary affairs entirely in his hands. He knows everybody, and is up to all the dodges of editorial management and newspaper cliques. He is a great philanthropist besides – and seems particularly fond of the society of the clergy. Rather a queer taste you will say, but his reason for such preference is, as he explained to me quite frankly, that he is so enormously wealthy that he does not quite know what to do with his money, and the reverend gentlemen of the church are generally ready to show him how to spend some of it. He is always glad to know of some quarter where his money and influence (he is very influential) may be useful to others. He has helped me out of a very serious hobble, and I owe him a big debt of gratitude. I've told him all about you – what a smart fellow you are, and what a lot dear old Alma Mater thought of you, and he has promised to give you a lift up. He can do anything he likes; very naturally, seeing that the whole world of morals, civilization and the rest is subservient to the power of money – and *his* stock of cash appears to be

limitless. *Use him*; he is willing and ready to be used – and write and let me know how you get on. Don't bother about the fifty till you feel you have tided over the storm.

Ever yours

Boffles.

I laughed as I read the absurd signature, though my eyes were dim with something like tears. 'Boffles' was the nickname given to my friend by several of our college companions, and neither he nor I knew how it first arose. But no one except the dons ever addressed him by his proper name, which was John Carrington – he was simply 'Boffles', and Boffles he remained even now for all those who had been his intimates. I refolded and put by his letter and the draft for the fifty pounds, and with a passing vague wonder as to what manner of man the 'philanthropist' might be who had more money than he knew what to do with, I turned to the consideration of my other two correspondents, relieved to feel that now, whatever happened, I could settle up arrears with my landlady the next day as I had promised. Moreover I could order some supper, and have a fire lit to cheer my chilly room. Before attending to these creature comforts however, I opened the long blue envelope that looked so like a threat of legal proceedings, and unfolding the paper within, stared at it amazedly. What was it all about? The written characters danced before my eyes – puzzled and bewildered, I found myself reading the thing over and over again without any clear comprehension of it. Presently a glimmer of meaning flashed upon me, startling my senses like

an electric shock... no – no! – impossible! Fortune never could be so mad as this! – never so wildly capricious and grotesque of humour! It was some senseless hoax that was being practised upon me... and yet... if it were a joke, it was a very elaborate and remarkable one! Weighted with the majesty of the law too!.. Upon my word and by all the fantastical freakish destinies that govern human affairs, the news seemed actually positive and genuine!

II



Steadying my thoughts with an effort, I read every word of the document over again deliberately, and the stupefaction of my wonder increased. Was I going mad, or sickening for a fever? Or could this startling, this stupendous piece of information be really true? Because – if indeed it were true... good heavens! – I turned giddy to think of it – and it was only by sheer force of will that I kept myself from swooning with the agitation of such sudden surprise and ecstasy. If it were true – why then the world was mine! – I was king instead of beggar – I was everything I chose to be! The letter, – the amazing letter, bore the printed name of a noted firm of London solicitors, and stated in measured and precise terms that a distant relative of my father's, of whom I had scarcely heard, except remotely now and then during my boyhood, had died suddenly in South America, leaving me his sole heir.

The real and personal estate now amounting to something over Five Millions of Pounds Sterling, we should esteem it a favour if you could make it convenient to call upon us

any day this week in order that we may go through the necessary formalities together. The larger bulk of the cash is lodged in the Bank of England, and a considerable amount is placed in French government securities. We should prefer going into further details with you personally rather than by letter. Trusting you will call on us without delay, we are, Sir, yours obediently...

Five millions! I, the starving literary hack – the friendless, hopeless, almost reckless haunter of low newspaper dens – I, the possessor of 'over Five Millions of Pounds Sterling'! I tried to grasp the astounding fact – for fact it evidently was – but could not. It seemed to me a wild delusion, born of the dizzy vagueness which lack of food engendered in my brain. I stared round the room – the mean miserable furniture – the fireless grate – the dirty lamp – the low truckle bedstead – the evidences of penury and want on every side; – and then – then the overwhelming contrast between the poverty that environed me and the news I had just received, struck me as the wildest, most ridiculous incongruity I had ever heard of or imagined – and I gave vent to a shout of laughter.

'Was there ever such a caprice of mad Fortune!' I cried aloud – 'Who would have imagined it! Good God! I! I, of all men in the world to be suddenly chosen out for this luck! By Heaven! – If it is all true, I'll make society spin round like a top on my hand before I am many months older!'

And I laughed loudly again; laughed just as I had previously

sworn, simply by way of relief to my feelings. Some one laughed in answer – a laugh that seemed to echo mine. I checked myself abruptly, somewhat startled, and listened. Rain poured outside, and the wind shrieked like a petulant shrew – the violinist next door was practising a brilliant roulade up and down his instrument – but there were no other sounds than these. Yet I could have sworn I heard a man's deep-chested laughter close behind me where I stood.

'It must have been my fancy', I murmured, turning the flame of the lamp up higher in order to obtain more light in the room – 'I am nervous I suppose – no wonder! Poor Boffles! – good old chap!' I continued, remembering my friend's draft for fifty pounds, which had seemed such a godsend a few minutes since – 'What a surprise is in store for you! You shall have your loan back as promptly as you sent it, with an extra fifty added by way of interest for your generosity. And as for the new Mæcenas you are sending to help me over my difficulties – well, he may be a very excellent old gentleman, but he will find himself quite out of his element this time. I want neither assistance nor advice nor patronage – I can buy them all! Titles, honours, possessions – they are all purchasable – love, friendship, position – they are all for sale in this admirably commercial age and go to the highest bidder! By my soul! – the wealthy 'philanthropist' will find it difficult to match me in power! He will scarcely have more than five millions to waste, I warrant! And now for supper – I shall have to live on credit till I get some ready cash – and there is no

reason why I should not leave this wretched hole at once, and go to one of the best hotels and swagger it!”

I was about to leave the room on the swift impulse of excitement and joy, when a fresh and violent gust of wind roared down the chimney, bringing with it a shower of soot which fell in a black heap on my rejected manuscript where it lay forgotten on the floor, as I had despairingly thrown it. I hastily picked it up and shook it free from the noisome dirt, wondering as I did so, what would be its fate now? – now, when I could afford to publish it myself, and not only publish it but advertise it, and not only advertise it, but ‘push’ it, in all the crafty and cautious ways known to the inner circles of ‘booming’! I smiled as I thought of the vengeance I would take on all those who had scorned and slighted me and my labour – how they should cower before me! – how they should fawn at my feet like whipt curs, and whine their fulsome adulation! Every stiff and stubborn neck should bend before me – this I resolved upon; for though money does not always conquer everything, it only fails when it is money apart from brains. Brains and money together can move the world – brains can very frequently do this alone without money, of which serious and proved fact those who have no brains should beware!

Full of ambitious thought, I now and then caught wild sounds from the violin that was being played next door – notes like sobbing cries of pain, and anon rippling runs like a careless woman’s laughter – and all at once I remembered I had not yet opened the third letter addressed to me – the one coroneted in

scarlet and gold, which had remained where it was on the table almost unnoticed till now. I took it up and turned it over with an odd sense of reluctance in my fingers, which were slow at the work of tearing the thick envelope asunder. Drawing out an equally thick small sheet of notepaper also coroneted, I read the following lines written in an admirably legible, small and picturesque hand.

Dear Sir,

I am the bearer of a letter of introduction to you from your former college companion Mr John Carrington, now of Melbourne, who has been good enough to thus give me the means of making the acquaintance of one, who, I understand, is more than exceptionally endowed with the gift of literary genius. I shall call upon you this evening between eight and nine o'clock, trusting to find you at home and disengaged. I enclose my card, and present address, and beg to remain,

Very faithfully yours

Lucio Rimânez.

The card mentioned dropped on the table as I finished reading the note. It bore a small, exquisitely engraved coronet and the words

Prince Lucio Rimânez.

while, scribbled lightly in pencil underneath was the address

'Grand Hotel'.

I read the brief letter through again – it was simple enough, – expressed with clearness and civility. There was nothing remarkable about it, – nothing whatever; yet it seemed to me surcharged with meaning. Why, I could not imagine. A curious fascination kept my eyes fastened on the characteristic bold handwriting, and made me fancy I should like the man who penned it. How the wind roared! – and how that violin next door wailed like the restless spirit of some forgotten musician in torment! My brain swam and my heart ached heavily – the drip drip of the rain outside sounded like the stealthy footfall of some secret spy upon my movements. I grew irritable and nervous – a foreboding of evil somehow darkened the bright consciousness of my sudden good fortune. Then an impulse of shame possessed me – shame that this foreign prince, if such he were, with limitless wealth at his back, should be coming to visit me – *me*, now a millionaire – in my present wretched lodging. Already, before I had touched my riches, I was tainted by the miserable vulgarity of seeking to pretend I had never been really poor, but only embarrassed by a little temporary difficulty! If I had had a sixpence about me (which I had not) I should have sent a telegram to my approaching visitor to put him off.

'But in any case', I said aloud, addressing myself to the empty room and the storm-echoes – 'I will not meet him tonight. I'll go out and leave no message – and if he comes he will think I have not yet had his letter. I can make an appointment to see him when

I am better lodged, and dressed more in keeping with my present position – in the meantime, nothing is easier than to keep out of this would-be benefactor’s way.’

As I spoke, the flickering lamp gave a dismal crackle and went out, leaving me in pitch darkness. With an exclamation more strong than reverent, I groped about the room for matches, or failing them, for my hat and coat – and I was still engaged in a fruitless and annoying search, when I caught a sound of galloping horses’ hoofs coming to an abrupt stop in the street below. Surrounded by black gloom, I paused and listened. There was a slight commotion in the basement – I heard my landlady’s accents attuned to nervous civility, mingling with the mellow tones of a deep masculine voice – then steps, firm and even, ascended the stairs to my landing.

‘The devil is in it!’ I muttered vexedly – ‘Just like my wayward luck! – here comes the very man I meant to avoid!’

III



The door opened, – and from the dense obscurity enshrouding me I could just perceive a tall shadowy figure standing on the threshold. I remember well the curious impression the mere outline of this scarcely discerned Form made upon me even then, – suggesting at the first glance such a stately majesty of height and bearing as at once riveted my attention – so much so indeed that I scarcely heard my landlady’s introductory words ‘A gentleman to see you sir’ – words that were quickly interrupted by a murmur of dismay at finding the room in total darkness. ‘Well to be sure! The lamp must have gone out!’ she exclaimed – then addressing the personage she had ushered thus far, she added – ‘I’m afraid Mr Tempest isn’t in after all, sir, though I certainly saw him about half-an-hour ago. If you don’t mind waiting here a minute I’ll fetch a light and see if he has left any message on his table.’

She hurried away, and though I knew that of course I ought to speak, a singular and quite inexplicable perversity of humour kept me silent and unwilling to declare my presence. Meanwhile

the tall stranger advanced a pace or two, and a rich voice with a ring of ironical amusement in it called me by my name —

‘Geoffrey Tempest, are you there?’

Why could I not answer? The strangest and most unnatural obstinacy stiffened my tongue – and, concealed in the gloom of my forlorn literary den I still held my peace. The majestic figure drew nearer, till in height and breadth it seemed to suddenly overshadow me; and once again the voice called —

‘Geoffrey Tempest, are you there?’

For very shame’s sake I could hold out no longer – and with a determined effort I broke the extraordinary dumb spell that had held me like a coward in silent hiding, and came forward boldly to confront my visitor.

‘Yes I *am* here’, I said – ‘And being here I am ashamed to give you such a welcome as this. You are Prince Rimânez of course – I have just read your note which prepared me for your visit, but I was hoping that my landlady, finding the room in darkness, would conclude I was out, and show you downstairs again. You see I am perfectly frank!’

‘You are indeed!’ returned the stranger, his deep tones still vibrating with the silvery clang of veiled satire – ‘So frank that I cannot fail to understand you. Briefly, and without courtesy, you resent my visit this evening and wish I had not come!’

This open declaration of my mood sounded so brusque that I made haste to deny it, though I knew it to be true. Truth, even in trifles, always seems unpleasant!

'Pray do not think me so churlish' – I said – 'The fact is, I only opened your letter a few minutes ago, and before I could make any arrangements to receive you, the lamp went out, with the awkward result that I am forced to greet you in this unsociable darkness, which is almost too dense to shake hands in.'

'Shall we try?' my visitor enquired, with a sudden softening of accent that gave his words a singular charm; 'Here is my hand – if yours has any friendly instinct in it the twain will meet – quite blindly and without guidance!'

I at once extended my hand, and it was instantly clasped in a warm and somewhat masterful manner. At that moment a light flashed on the scene – my landlady entered, bearing what she called 'her best lamp' alit, and set it on the table. I believe she uttered some exclamation of surprise at seeing me – she may have said anything or nothing – I did not hear or heed, so entirely was I amazed and fascinated by the appearance of the man whose long, slender hand still held mine. I am myself an average good height, but he was fully half a head taller than I, if not more than that – and as I looked straightly at him, I thought I had never seen so much beauty and intellectuality combined in the outward personality of any human being. The finely shaped head denoted both power and wisdom, and was nobly poised on such shoulders as might have befitted a Hercules – the countenance was a pure oval, and singularly pale, this complexion intensifying the almost fiery brilliancy of the full dark eyes, which had in them a curious and wonderfully attractive look of mingled

mirth and misery. The mouth was perhaps the most telling feature in this remarkable face – set in the perfect curve of beauty, it was yet firm, determined, and not too small, thus escaping effeminacy – and I noted that in repose it expressed bitterness, disdain, and even cruelty. But with the light of a smile upon it, it signified, or seemed to signify, something more subtle than any passion to which we can give a name, and already with the rapidity of a lightning flash, I caught myself wondering what that mystic undeclared something might be. At a glance I comprehended these primary details of my new acquaintance's eminently prepossessing appearance, and when my hand dropped from his close grasp I felt as if I had known him all my life! And now face to face with him in the bright lamplight, I remembered my actual surroundings – the bare cold room, the lack of fire, the black soot that sprinkled the nearly carpetless floor – my own shabby clothes and deplorable aspect, as compared with this regal-looking individual, who carried the visible evidence of wealth upon him in the superb Russian sables that lined and bordered his long overcoat which he now partially unfastened and threw open with a carelessly imperial air, the while he regarded me, smiling.

'I know I have come at an awkward moment', he said – I always do! It is my peculiar misfortune. Well-bred people never intrude where they are not wanted – and in this particular I'm afraid my manners leave much to be desired. Try to forgive me if you can, for the sake of this' – and he held out a letter addressed to me in

my friend Carrington's familiar handwriting. 'And permit me to sit down while you read my credentials.'

He took a chair and seated himself. I observed his handsome face and easy attitude with renewed admiration.

'No credentials are necessary', I said with all the cordiality I now really felt – 'I have already had a letter from Carrington in which he speaks of you in the highest and most grateful terms. But the fact is – well! – really, prince, you must excuse me if I seem confused or astonished... I had expected to see quite an old man...'

And I broke off, somewhat embarrassed by the keen glance of the brilliant eyes that met mine so fixedly.

'No one is old, my dear sir, nowadays!' he declared lightly – 'even the grandmothers and grandfathers are friskier at fifty than they were at fifteen. One does not talk of age at all now in polite society – it is ill-bred, even coarse. Indecent things are unmentionable – age has become an indecent thing. It is therefore avoided in conversation. You expected to see an old man you say? Well, you are not disappointed – I *am* old. In fact you have no idea how very old I am!'

I laughed at this piece of absurdity.

'Why, you are younger than I' – I said – 'or if not, you look it.'

'Ah, my looks belie me!' he returned gaily – 'I am like several of the most noted fashionable beauties – much riper than I seem. But come, read the introductory missive I have brought you – I shall not be satisfied till you do.'

Thus requested, and wishing to prove myself as courteous as I had hitherto been brusque, I at once opened my friend's note and read as follows —

Dear Geoffrey,

The bearer of this, Prince Rimânez, is a very distinguished scholar and gentleman, allied by descent to one of the oldest families in Europe, or for that matter, in the world. You, as a student and lover of ancient history, will be interested to know that his ancestors were originally princes of Chaldea, who afterwards settled in Tyre — from thence they went to Etruria and there continued through many centuries, the last scion of the house being the very gifted and genial personage who, as my good friend, I have the pleasure of commending to your kindest regard. Certain troublous and overpowering circumstances have forced him into exile from his native province, and deprived him of a great part of his possessions, so that he is to a considerable extent a wanderer on the face of the earth, and has travelled far and seen much, and has a wide experience of men and things. He is a poet and musician of great skill, and though he occupies himself with the arts solely for his own amusement, I think you will find his practical knowledge of literary matters eminently useful to you in your difficult career. I must not forget to add that in all matters scientific he is an absolute master. Wishing you both a cordial friendship, I am, dear Geoffrey,

Yours sincerely

John Carrington.

The signature of 'Boffles' had evidently been deemed out of place this time and somehow I was foolishly vexed at its omission. There seemed to be something formal and stiff in the letter, almost as if it had been written to dictation, and under pressure. What gave me this idea I know not. I glanced furtively at my silent companion – he caught my stray look and returned it with a curiously grave fixity. Fearing lest my momentary vague distrust of him had been reflected in my eyes I made haste to speak —

'This letter, prince, adds to my shame and regret that I should have greeted you in so churlish a manner this evening. No apology can condone my rudeness – but you cannot imagine how mortified I felt and still feel, to be compelled to receive you in this miserable den – it is not at all the sort of place in which I should have liked to welcome you...' And I broke off with a renewed sense of irritation, remembering how actually rich I now was, and that in spite of this, I was obliged to seem poor. Meanwhile the prince waved aside my remarks with a light gesture of his hand.

'Why be mortified?' he demanded. 'Rather be proud that you can dispense with the vulgar appurtenances of luxury. Genius thrives in a garret and dies in a palace – is not that the generally accepted theory?'

'Rather a worn-out and mistaken one I consider' – I replied; 'Genius might like to try the effect of a palace for once – it usually dies of starvation.'

'True! – but in thus dying, think how many fools it afterwards fattens! There is an all-wise Providence in this, my dear sir!

Schubert perished of want – but see what large profits all the music publishers have made since out of his compositions! It is a most beautiful dispensation of nature – that honest folk should be sacrificed in order to provide for the sustenance of knaves!

He laughed, and I looked at him in a little surprise. His remark touched so near my own opinions that I wondered whether he were in jest or earnest.

‘You speak sarcastically of course?’ I said – ‘You do not really believe what you say?’

‘Oh, do I not!’ he returned, with a flash of his fine eyes that was almost lightning-like in its intensity – ‘If I could not believe the teaching of my own experience, what would be left to me? I always realize the “*needs must*” of things – how does the old maxim go – “needs must when the devil drives”. There is really no possible contradiction to offer to the accuracy of that statement. The devil drives the world, whip in hand – and oddly enough (considering that some belated folk still fancy there is a God somewhere) succeeds in managing his team with extraordinary ease!’ His brow clouded and the bitter lines about his mouth deepened and hardened – anon he laughed again lightly and continued – ‘But let us not moralize – morals sicken the soul both in church and out of it – every sensible man hates to be told what he *could* be and what he *won't* be. I am here to make friends with you if you permit – and to put an end to ceremony, will you accompany me back to my hotel where I have ordered supper?’

By this time I had become indescribably fascinated by his easy

manner, handsome presence, and mellifluous voice – the satirical turn of his humour suited mine – I felt we should get on well together – and my first annoyance at being discovered by him in such poverty-stricken circumstances somewhat abated.

‘With pleasure!’ I replied – ‘But first of all, you must allow me to explain matters a little. You have heard a good deal about my affairs from my friend John Carrington, and I know from his private letter to me that you have come here out of pure kindness and goodwill. For that generous intention I thank you! I know you expected to find a poor wretch of a literary man struggling with the direst circumstances of disappointment and poverty – and a couple of hours ago you would have amply fulfilled that expectation. But now, things have changed – I have received news which completely alters my position – in fact I have had a very great and remarkable surprise this evening...’

‘An agreeable one I trust?’ interposed my companion suavely. I smiled.

‘Judge for yourself!’ And I handed him the lawyer’s letter which informed me of my suddenly acquired fortune.

He glanced it through rapidly – then folded and returned it to me with a courteous bow.

‘I suppose I should congratulate you’, – he said, – ‘And I do. Though of course this wealth which seems to content you, to me appears a mere trifle. It can be quite conveniently run through and exhausted in about eight years or less, therefore it does not provide absolute immunity from care. To be rich, really rich, in

my sense of the word, one should have about a million a year. Then one might reasonably hope to escape the workhouse!’

He laughed – and I stared at him stupidly, not knowing how to take his words, whether as truth or idle boasting. Five millions of money a mere trifle! He went on without apparently noticing my amazement —

’The inexhaustible greed of a man, my dear sir, can never be satisfied. If he is not consumed by desire for one thing, he is for another, and his tastes are generally expensive. A few pretty and unscrupulous women for example, would soon relieve you of your five millions in the purchase of jewels alone. Horse-racing would do it still more quickly. No, no – you are not rich – you are still poor – only your needs are no longer so pressing as they were. And in this I confess myself somewhat disappointed – for I came to you hoping to do a good turn to some one for once in my life, and to play the foster-father to a rising genius – and here I am – forestalled – as usual! It is a singular thing, do you know, but nevertheless a fact, that whenever I have had any particular intentions towards a man I am always forestalled! It is really rather hard upon me!’ He broke off and raised his head in a listening attitude.

’What is that?’ he asked.

It was the violinist next door playing a well-known ’Ave Maria’. I told him so.

’Dismal – very dismal!’ he said with a contemptuous shrug. ’I hate all that kind of mawkish devotional stuff. Well! – millionaire

as you are, and acknowledged lion of society as you shortly will be, there is no objection I hope, to the proposed supper? And perhaps a music-hall afterwards if you feel inclined – what do you say?’

He clapped me on the shoulder cordially and looked straight into my face – those wonderful eyes of his, suggestive of both tears and fire, fixed me with a clear masterful gaze that completely dominated me. I made no attempt to resist the singular attraction which now possessed me for this man whom I had but just met – the sensation was too strong and too pleasant to be combated. Only for one moment more I hesitated, looking down at my shabby attire.

‘I am not fit to accompany you, prince’, I said – ‘I look more like a tramp than a millionaire.’

He glanced at me and smiled.

‘Upon my life, so you do!’ he averred. – ‘But be satisfied! – you are in this respect very like many another Croesus. It is only the poor and proud who take the trouble to dress well – they and the dear “naughty” ladies, generally monopolize tasteful and becoming attire. An ill-fitting coat often adorns the back of a Prime Minister – and if you see a woman clad in clothes vilely cut and coloured, you may be sure she is eminently virtuous, renowned for good works, and probably a duchess!’ He rose, drawing his sables about him.

‘What matter the coat if the purse be full!’ he continued gaily. – ‘Let it once be properly paragraphed in the papers that

you are a millionaire, and doubtless some enterprising tailor will invent a “Tempest” ulster coloured softly like your present garb, an artistic mildewy green! And now come along – your solicitor’s communication should have given you a good appetite, or it is not so valuable as it seems – and I want you to do justice to my supper. I have my own chef with me, and he is not without skill. I hope, by the way, you will at least do me this much service – that pending legal discussion and settlement of your affairs, you will let me be your banker?”

This offer was made with such an air of courteous delicacy and friendship, that I could do no more than accept it gratefully, as it relieved me from all temporary embarrassment. I hastily wrote a few lines to my landlady, telling her she would receive the money owing to her by post next day – then, thrusting my rejected manuscript, my only worldly possession, into my coat pocket, I extinguished the lamp, and with the new friend I had so suddenly gained, I left my dismal lodgings and all its miserable associations for ever. I little thought the time would come when I should look back to the time spent in that small, mean room as the best period of my life – when I should regard the bitter poverty I then endured, as the stern but holy angel meant to guide me to the highest and noblest attainment – when I should pray desperately with wild tears to be as I was then, rather than as I am now! Is it well or ill for us I wonder, that the future is hidden from our knowledge? Should we steer our ways clearer from evil if we knew its result? It is a doubtful question – at

any rate my ignorance for the moment was indeed bliss. I went joyfully out of the dreary house where I had lived so long among disappointments and difficulties, turning my back upon it with such a sense of relief as could never be expressed in words – and the last thing I heard as I passed into the street with my companion, was a plaintive long-drawn wail of minor melody, which seemed to be sent after me like a parting cry, by the unknown and invisible player of the violin.

IV



Outside, the prince's carriage waited, drawn by two spirited black horses caparisoned in silver; magnificent thoroughbreds, which pawed the ground and champed their bits impatient of delay – at sight of his master the smart footman in attendance threw the door open, touching his hat respectfully. We stepped in, I preceding my companion at his expressed desire; and as I sank back among the easy cushions, I felt the complacent consciousness of luxury and power to such an extent that it seemed as if I had left my days of adversity already a long way behind me. Hunger and happiness disputed my sensations between them, and I was in that vague light-headed condition common to long fasting, in which nothing seems absolutely tangible or real. I knew I should not properly grasp the solid truth of my wonderful good luck till my physical needs were satisfied and I was, so to speak, once more in a naturally balanced bodily condition. At present my brain was in a whirl – my thoughts were all dim and disconnected – and I appeared to myself to be in some whimsical dream from which I should wake up directly.

The carriage rolled on rubber-tyred wheels and made no noise as it went – one could only hear the even, rapid trot of the horses. By and by I saw in the semi-darkness my new friend's brilliant dark eyes fixed upon me with a curiously intent expression.

'Do you not feel the world already at your feet?' he queried half playfully, half ironically – 'Like a football, waiting to be kicked? It is such an absurd world, you know – so easily moved. Wise men in all ages have done their best to make it less ridiculous – with no result, inasmuch as it continues to prefer folly to wisdom. A football, or let us say a shuttlecock among worlds, ready to be tossed up anyhow and anywhere, provided the battledore be of gold!'

'You speak a trifle bitterly, prince', – I said – 'But no doubt you have had a wide experience among men?'

'I have', he returned with emphasis – 'My kingdom is a vast one.'

'You are a ruling power then?' I exclaimed with some astonishment – 'Yours is not a title of honour only?'

'Oh, as your rules of aristocracy go, it *is* a mere title of honour' – he replied quickly – 'When I say that my kingdom is a vast one, I mean that I rule wherever men obey the influence of wealth. From this point of view, am I wrong in calling my kingdom vast? – is it not almost boundless?'

'I perceive you are a cynic', – I said – 'Yet surely you believe that there are some things wealth cannot buy – honour and virtue for example?'

He surveyed me with a whimsical smile.

'I suppose honour and virtue *do* exist', – he answered – 'And when they are existent of course they cannot be bought. But my experience has taught me that I can always buy everything. The sentiments called honour and virtue by the majority of men are the most shifty things imaginable – set sufficient cash down, and they become bribery and corruption in the twinkling of an eye! Curious – very curious. I confess I found a case of unpurchaseable integrity once, but only once. I may find it again, though I consider the chance a very doubtful one. Now to revert to myself, pray do not imagine I am playing the humbug with you or passing myself off under a *bogus* title. I am a bona-fide prince, believe me, and of such descent as none of your oldest families can boast – but my dominions are long since broken up and my former subjects dispersed among all nations – anarchy, nihilism, disruption and political troubles generally, compel me to be rather reticent concerning my affairs. Money I fortunately have in plenty – and with that I pave my way. Some day when we are better acquainted, you shall know more of my private history. I have various other names and titles besides that on my card – but I keep to the simplest of them, because most people are such bunglers at the pronunciation of foreign names. My intimate friends generally drop my title, and call me Lucio simply.'

'That is your christian name – ?' I began.

'Not at all – I have no "christian" name,' – he interrupted swiftly and with anger – 'There is no such thing as "christian" in

my composition!’

He spoke with such impatience that for a moment I was at a loss for a reply. At last —

’Indeed!’ I murmured vaguely.

He burst out laughing.

“Indeed!” That is all you can find to say! Indeed and again indeed the word “christian” vexes me. There is no such creature alive. *You* are not a Christian — no one is really — people pretend to be — and in so damnable an act of feigning are more blasphemous than any fallen fiend! Now I make no pretences of the kind — I have only one faith — ’

’And that is?’

’A profound and awful one!’ he said in thrilling tones — ’And the worst of it is that it is true — as true as the workings of the Universe. But of that hereafter — it will do to talk of when we feel low-spirited and wish to converse of things grim and ghastly — at present here we are at our destination, and the chief consideration of our lives (it is the chief consideration of most men’s lives) must be the excellence or non-excellence of our food.’

The carriage stopped and we descended. At first sight of the black horses and silver trappings, the porter of the hotel and two or three other servants rushed out to attend upon us; but the prince passed into the hall without noticing any of them and addressed himself to a sober-looking individual in black, his own private valet, who came forward to meet him with a profound salutation. I murmured something about wishing to engage a

room for myself in the hotel.

'Oh, my man will see to that for you' – he said lightly – 'The house is not full – at any rate all the best rooms are not taken; and of course you want one of the best.'

A staring waiter, who up to that moment, had been noting my shabby clothes with that peculiar air of contempt commonly displayed by insolent menials to those whom they imagine are poor, overheard these words, and suddenly changing the derisive expression of his foxy face, bowed obsequiously as I passed. A thrill of disgust ran through me, mingled with a certain angry triumph – the hypocritical reflex of this low fellow's countenance was, I knew, a true epitome of what I should find similarly reflected in the manner and attitude of all 'polite' society. For there the estimate of worth is no higher than a common servant's estimate, and is taken solely from the money standard – if you are poor and dress shabbily you are thrust aside and ignored, – but if you are rich, you may wear shabby clothes as much as you like, you are still courted and flattered, and invited everywhere, though you may be the greatest fool alive or the worst blackguard unhung. With vague thoughts such as these flitting over my mind, I followed my host to his rooms. He occupied nearly a whole wing of the hotel, having a large drawing-room, dining-room, and study *en suite*, fitted up in the most luxurious manner, besides bedroom, bathroom, and dressing-room, with other rooms adjoining, for his valet and two extra personal attendants. The table was laid for supper,

and glittered with the costliest glass, silver, and china, being furthermore adorned by baskets of the most exquisite fruit and flowers, and in a few moments we were seated. The prince's valet acted as head waiter, and I noticed that now this man's face, seen in the full light of the electric lamps, seemed very dark and unpleasant, even sinister in expression – but in the performance of his duties he was unexceptionable, being quick, attentive, and deferential, so much so that I inwardly reproached myself for taking an instinctive dislike to him. His name was Amiel, and I found myself involuntarily watching his movements, they were so noiseless – his very step suggesting the stealthy gliding of a cat or a tiger. He was assisted in his work by the two other attendants who served as his subordinates, and who were equally active and well trained – and presently I found myself enjoying the choicest meal I had tasted for many and many a long day, flavoured with such wine as connoisseurs might be apt to dream of, but never succeed in finding. I began to feel perfectly at my ease, and talked with freedom and confidence, the strong attraction I had for my new friend deepening with every moment I passed in his company.

'Will you continue your literary career now you have this little fortune left you?' he enquired, when at the close of supper Amiel set the choicest cognac and cigars before us, and respectfully withdrew – 'Do you think you will care to go on with it?'

'Certainly I shall', – I replied – 'if only for the fun of the thing. You see, with money I can force my name into notice

whether the public like it or not. No newspaper refuses paying advertisements.’

’True! – but may not inspiration refuse to flow from a full purse and an empty head?’

This remark provoked me not a little.

’Do you consider me empty-headed?’ I asked with some vexation.

’Not at present. My dear Tempest, do not let either the Tokay we have been drinking, or the cognac we are going to drink, speak for you in such haste! I assure you I do not think you empty-headed – on the contrary, your head, I believe from what I have heard, has been and is full of ideas – excellent ideas, original ideas, which the world of conventional criticism does not want. But whether these ideas will continue to germinate in your brain, or whether, with the full purse, they will cease, is now the question. Great originality and inspiration, strange to say, seldom endow the millionaire. Inspiration is supposed to come from above – money from below! In your case however both originality and inspiration may continue to flourish and bring forth fruit – I trust they may. It often happens, nevertheless that when bags of money fall to the lot of aspiring genius, God departs and the devil walks in. Have you never heard that?’

’Never!’ I answered, smiling.

’Well, of course the saying is foolish, and sounds doubly ridiculous in this age when people believe in neither God nor devil. It implies however that one must choose an up or a down –

genius is the Up, money is the Down. You cannot fly and grovel at the same instant.’

’The possession of money is not likely to cause a man to grovel’, – I said – ’It is the one thing necessary to strengthen his soaring powers and lift him to the greatest heights.’

’You think so?’ and my host lit his cigar with a grave and preoccupied air – ’Then I’m afraid you don’t know much about what I shall call natural psychics. What belongs to the earth tends earthwards – surely you realize that? Gold most strictly belongs to the earth – you dig it out of the ground – you handle it and dispose of it in solid wedges or bars – it is a substantial metal enough. Genius belongs to nobody knows where – you cannot dig it up or pass it on, or do anything with it except stand and marvel – it is a rare visitant and capricious as the wind, and generally makes sad havoc among the conventionalities of men. It is as I said an “upper” thing, beyond earthly smells and savours – and those who have it always live in unknown high latitudes. But money is a perfectly level commodity – level with the ground; – when you have much of it, you come down solidly on your flat soles and down you stay!

I laughed.

’Upon my word you preach very eloquently against wealth!’ I said – ’You yourself are unusually rich – are you sorry for it?’

’No, I am not sorry, because being sorry would be no use’, – he returned – ’And I never waste my time. But I am telling you the truth – Genius and great riches hardly ever pull together. Now I,

for example – you cannot imagine what great capabilities I had once! – a long time ago – before I became my own master!’

’And you have them still I am sure’ – I averred, looking expressively at his noble head and fine eyes.

The strange, subtle smile I had noticed once or twice before lightened his face. ’Ah, you mean to compliment me!’ he said – ’You like my looks – many people do. Yet after all there is nothing so deceptive as one’s outward appearance. The reason of this is that as soon as childhood is past, we are always pretending to be what we are not – and thus, with constant practice from our youth up, we manage to make our physical frames complete disguises for our actual selves. It is really wise and clever of us – for hence each individual is so much flesh-wall through which neither friend nor enemy can spy. Every man is a solitary soul imprisoned in a self-made den – when he is quite alone he knows and frequently hates himself – sometimes he even gets afraid of the gaunt and murderous monster he keeps hidden behind his outwardly pleasant body-mask, and hastens to forget its frightful existence in drink and debauchery. That is what I do occasionally – you would not think it of me, would you?’

’Never!’ I replied quickly, for something in his voice and aspect moved me strangely – ’You belie yourself, and wrong your own nature.’

He laughed softly.

’Perhaps I do!’ he said carelessly – ’This much you may believe of me – that I am no worse than most men! Now to return to

the subject of your literary career – you have written a book, you say – well, publish it and see the result – if you only make one “hit” that is something. And there are ways of arranging that the “hit” shall be made. What is your story about? I hope it is improper?

‘It certainly is not’, – I replied warmly – ‘It is a romance dealing with the noblest forms of life and highest ambitions – I wrote it with the intention of elevating and purifying the thoughts of my readers, and wished if I could, to comfort those who had suffered loss or sorrow – ’

Rimânez smiled compassionately.

‘Ah, it won’t do!’ he interrupted – ‘I assure you it won’t – it doesn’t fit the age. It might go down, possibly, if you could give a “first night” of it as it were to the critics, like one of my most intimate friends, Henry Irving – a “first night” combined with an excellent supper and any amount of good drinks going. Otherwise it’s no use. If it is to succeed by itself, it must not attempt to be literature – it must simply be indecent. As indecent as you can make it without offending advanced women – that is giving you a good wide margin. Put in as much as you can about sexual matters and the bearing of children – in brief, discourse of men and women simply as cattle who exist merely for breeding purposes, and your success will be enormous. There’s not a critic living who won’t applaud you – there’s not a schoolgirl of fifteen who will not gloat over your pages in the silence of her virginal bedroom!’

Such a flash of withering derision darted from his eyes as startled me – I could find no words to answer him for the moment, and he went on —

‘What put it into your head, my dear Tempest, to write a book dealing with, as you say, “the noblest forms of life”? There are no noble forms of life left on this planet – it is all low and commercial – man is a pygmy, and his aims are pygmy like himself. For noble forms of life seek other worlds! – there *are* others. Then again, people don’t want their thoughts raised or purified in the novels they read for amusement – they go to church for that, and get very bored during the process. And why should you wish to comfort folks who, out of their own sheer stupidity generally, get into trouble? They wouldn’t comfort *you* – they would not give you sixpence to save you from starvation. My good fellow, leave your quixotism behind you with your poverty. Live your life to yourself – if you do anything for others they will only treat you with the blackest ingratitude – so take my advice, and don’t sacrifice your own personal interests for any consideration whatever.’

He rose from the table as he spoke and stood with his back to the bright fire, smoking his cigar tranquilly – and I gazed at his handsome figure and face with just the faintest thrill of pained doubt darkening my admiration.

‘If you were not so good-looking I should call you heartless’ – I said at last – ‘But your features are a direct contradiction to your words. You have not really that indifference to human

nature which you strive to assume – your whole aspect betokens a generosity of spirit which you cannot conquer if you would. Besides, are you not always trying to do good?’

He smiled.

‘Always! That is, I am always at work endeavouring to gratify every man’s desire. Whether that is good of me, or bad, remains to be proved. Men’s wants are almost illimitable – the only thing none of them ever seem to wish, so far as I am concerned, is to cut my acquaintance!’

‘Why, of course not! After once meeting you, how could they!’ I said, laughing at the absurdity of the suggestion.

He gave me a whimsical side-look.

‘Their desires are not always virtuous’, he remarked, turning to flick off the ash of his cigar into the grate.

‘But of course you do not gratify them in their vices!’ I rejoined, still laughing – ‘That would be playing the part of a benefactor somewhat too thoroughly!’

‘Ah now I see we shall flounder in the quicksands of theory if we go any further’, he said – ‘You forget, my dear fellow, that nobody can decide as to what *is* vice, or what *is* virtue. These things are chameleon-like, and take different colours in different countries. Abraham had two or three wives and several concubines, and he was the very soul of virtue according to sacred lore – whereas my Lord Tom-Noddy in London today has one wife and several concubines, and is really very much like Abraham in other particulars, yet he is considered a very dreadful

person. "Who shall decide when doctors disagree!" Let's drop the subject, as we shall never settle it. What shall we do with the rest of the evening? There is a stout-limbed, shrewd wench at the Tivoli, dancing her way into the affections of a rickety little Duke – shall we go and watch the admirable contortions with which she is wriggling into a fixed position among the English aristocracy? Or are you tired, and would you prefer a long night's rest?"

To tell the truth I was thoroughly fatigued, and mentally as well as physically worn out with the excitements of the day – my head too was heavy with the wine to which I had so long been unaccustomed.

'Upon my word I think I would rather go to bed than anything', – I confessed – 'But what about my room?'

'Oh, Amiel will have attended to that for you – we'll ask him.' And he touched the bell. His valet instantly appeared.

'Have you got a room for Mr Tempest?'

'Yes, your Excellency. An apartment in this corridor almost facing your Excellency's suite. It is not as well furnished as it might be, but I have made it as comfortable as I can for the night.'

'Thanks very much!' I said – 'I am greatly obliged to you.'

Amiel bowed deferentially.

'Thank *you*, sir.'

He retired, and I moved to bid my host good-night. He took my proffered hand and held it in his, looking at me curiously the while.

'I like you, Geoffrey Tempest', he said – 'And because I like you, and because I think there are the makings of something higher than mere earthy brute in you, I am going to make you what you may perhaps consider rather a singular proposition. It is this – that if you don't like *me*, say so at once, and we will part now, before we have time to know anything more of each other, and I will endeavour not to cross your path again unless you seek me out. But if on the contrary, you do like me – if you find something in my humour or turn of mind congenial to your own disposition, give me your promise that you will be my friend and comrade for a while, say for a few months at any rate. I can take you into the best society, and introduce you to the prettiest women in Europe as well as the most brilliant men. I know them all, and I believe I can be useful to you. But if there is the smallest aversion to me lurking in the depths of your nature' – here he paused – then resumed with extraordinary solemnity – 'in God's name give it full way and let me go – because I swear to you in all sober earnest that I am not what I seem!'

Strongly impressed by his strange look and stranger manner, I hesitated one moment – and on that moment, had I but known it, hung my future. It was true – I had felt a passing shadow of distrust and repulsion for this fascinating yet cynical man, and he seemed to have guessed it. But now every suspicion of him vanished from my mind, and I clasped his hand with renewed heartiness.

'My dear fellow, your warning comes too late!' I said

mirthfully – “Whatever you are, or whatever you choose to think you are, I find you most sympathetic to my disposition, and I consider myself most fortunate in knowing you. My old friend Carrington has indeed done me a good turn in bringing us together, and I assure you I shall be proud of your companionship. You seem to take a perverse delight in running yourself down! – but you know the old adage, “the devil is not so black as he is painted”?”

‘And that is true!’ he murmured dreamily – ‘Poor devil! His faults are no doubt much exaggerated by the clergy! And so we are to be friends?’

‘I hope so! I shall not be the first to break the compact!’

His dark eyes rested upon me thoughtfully, yet there seemed to be a lurking smile in them as well.

‘Compact is a good word’, – he said – ‘So – a compact we will consider it. I meant to improve your material fortunes – you can dispense with that aid now; but I think I can still be of service in pushing you on in society. And love – of course you will fall in love if you have not already done so – have you?’

‘Not I!’ I answered quickly, and with truth – ‘I have seen no woman yet who perfectly fulfils my notions of beauty.’

He burst out laughing violently.

‘Upon my word you are not wanting in audacity!’ he said – ‘Nothing but perfect beauty will suit you, eh? But consider, my friend, you, though a good-looking well-built man, are not yourself quite a Phoebus Apollo!’

'That has nothing to do with the matter', – I rejoined, – 'A man should choose a wife with a careful eye to his own personal gratification, in the same way that he chooses horses or wine – perfection or nothing.'

'And the woman?' – Rimânez demanded, his eyes twinkling.

'The woman has really no right of choice', – I responded – for this was my pet argument and I took pleasure in setting it forth – 'She must mate wherever she has the chance of being properly maintained. A man is always a man – a woman is only a man's appendage, and without beauty she cannot put forth any just claim to his admiration or his support.'

'Right! – very right, and logically argued!' – he exclaimed, becoming preternaturally serious in a moment – 'I myself have no sympathy with the new ideas that are in vogue concerning the intellectuality of woman. She is simply the female of man – she has no real soul save that which is a reflex of his, and being destitute of logic, she is incapable of forming a correct opinion on any subject. All the imposture of religion is kept up by this unmathematical hysterical creature – and it is curious, considering how inferior a being she is, what mischief she has contrived to make in the world, upsetting the plans of the wisest kings and counsellors, who as mere men, should undoubtedly have mastered her! And in the present age she is becoming more than ever unmanageable.'

'It is only a passing phase' – I returned carelessly – 'A fad got up by a few unloved and unlovable types of the feminine sex.'

I care very little for women – I doubt whether I shall ever marry.’

‘Well you have plenty of time to consider, and amuse yourself with the fair ones, *en passant*,’ – he said watching me narrowly – ‘And in the meantime I can take you round the different marriage-markets of the world if you choose, though the largest one of them all is of course this very metropolis. Splendid bargains to be had, my dear friend! – wonderful blonde and brunette specimens going really very cheap. We’ll examine them at our leisure. I’m glad you have yourself decided that we are to be comrades – for I am proud – I may say damnably proud – and never stay in any man’s company when he expresses the slightest wish to be rid of me. Good-night!’

‘Good-night!’ I responded. We clasped hands again and they were still interlocked, when a sudden flash of lightning blazed vividly across the room, followed instantaneously by a terrific clap of thunder. The electric lights went out, and only the glow of the fire illumined our faces. I was a little startled and confused – the prince stood still, quite unconcerned, his eyes shining like those of a cat in the darkness.

‘What a storm!’ he remarked lightly – ‘Such thunder in winter is rather unusual. Amiel!’

The valet entered, his sinister countenance resembling a white mask made visible in the gloom.

‘These lamps have gone out’, – said his master – ‘It’s very odd that civilized humanity has not yet learned the complete management of the electric light. Can you put them in order,

Amiel?

'Yes, your excellency.' And in a few moments, by some dextrous manipulation which I did not understand and could not see, the crystal-cased jets shone forth again with renewed brilliancy. Another peal of thunder crashed overhead, followed by a downpour of rain.

'Really remarkable weather for January', – said Rimânez, again giving me his hand – 'Good-night my friend! Sleep well.'

'If the anger of the elements will permit!' I returned, smiling.

'Oh, never mind the elements. Man has nearly mastered them or soon will do so, now that he is getting gradually convinced there is no Deity to interfere in his business. Amiel, show Mr Tempest to his room.'

Amiel obeyed, and crossing the corridor, ushered me into a large, luxurious apartment, richly furnished, and lit up by the blaze of a bright fire. The comforting warmth shone welcome upon me as I entered, and I, who had not experienced such personal luxury since my boyhood's days, felt more than ever overpowered by the jubilant sense of my sudden extraordinary good fortune. Amiel waited respectfully, now and then furtively glancing at me with an expression which to my fancy had something derisive in it.

'Is there anything I can do for you sir?' he enquired.

'No thank you', – I answered, endeavouring to throw an accent of careless condescension into my voice – for somehow I felt this man must be kept strictly in his place – 'you have been very

attentive – I shall not forget it.’

A slight smile flickered over his features.

’Much obliged to you, sir. Good-night.’

And he retired, leaving me alone. I paced the room up and down more dreamily than consciously, trying to think – trying to set in order the amazing events of the day, but my brain was still dazed and confused, and the only image of actual prominence in my mind was the striking and remarkable personality of my new friend Rimânez. His extraordinary good looks, his attractive manner, his curious cynicism which was so oddly mixed with some deeper sentiment to which I could not give a name, all the trifling yet uncommon peculiarities of his bearing and humour haunted me and became indissolubly mingled as it were with myself and all the circumstances concerning me. I undressed before the fire, listening drowsily to the rain, and the thunder which was now dying off into sullen echoes.

’Geoffrey Tempest, the world is before you’ – I said, apostrophizing myself indolently – ’you are a young man – you have health, a good appearance, and brains – added to these you now have five millions of money, and a wealthy prince for your friend. What more do you want of Fate or Fortune? Nothing – except fame! And that you will get easily, for nowadays even fame is purchasable – like love. Your star is in the ascendant – no more literary drudgery for you my boy! – pleasure and profit and ease are yours to enjoy for the rest of your life. You are a lucky dog! – at last you have your day!’

I flung myself upon the soft bed, and settled myself to sleep – and as I dozed off, I still heard the rumble of heavy thunder in the distance. Once I fancied I heard the prince’s voice calling ‘Amiel! Amiel!’ with a wildness resembling the shriek of an angry wind – and at another moment I started violently from a profound slumber under the impression that someone had approached and was looking fixedly at me. I sat up in bed, peering into the darkness, for the fire had gone out – then I turned on a small electric night-lamp at my side which fully illumined the room – there was no one there. Yet my imagination played me such tricks before I could rest again that I thought I heard a hissing whisper near me that said —

’Peace! Trouble him not. Let the fool in his folly sleep!’

V



The next morning on rising I learned that 'his excellency' as Prince Rimânez was called by his own servants and the employees of the 'Grand', had gone out riding in the Park, leaving me to breakfast alone. I therefore took that meal in the public room of the hotel, where I was waited upon with the utmost obsequiousness, in spite of my shabby clothes, which I was of course still compelled to wear, having no change. When would I be pleased to lunch? At what hour would I dine? Should my present apartment be retained? – or was it not satisfactory? Would I prefer a 'suite' similar to that occupied by his excellency? All these deferential questions first astonished and then amused me – some mysterious agency had evidently conveyed the rumour of my wealth among those best fitted to receive it, and here was the first result. In reply I said my movements were uncertain – I should be able to give definite instructions in the course of a few hours, and that in the meantime I retained my room. The breakfast over I sallied forth to go to my lawyers, and was just about to order a hansom when I saw my new friend coming back

from his ride. He bestrode a magnificent chestnut mare, whose wild eyes and strained quivering limbs showed she was fresh from a hard gallop and was scarcely yet satisfied to be under close control. She curveted and danced among the carts and cabs in a somewhat risky fashion, but she had her master in Rimânez, who if he had looked handsome by night looked still more so by day, with a slight colour warming the natural pallor of his complexion and his eyes sparkling with all the zest of exercise and enjoyment. I waited for his approach, as did also Amiel, who as usual timed his appearance in the hotel corridor in exact accordance with the moment of his master's arrival. Rimânez smiled as he caught sight of me, touching his hat with the handle of his whip by way of salutation.

'You slept late, Tempest' – he said, as he dismounted and threw the reins to a groom who had cantered up after him – 'Tomorrow you must come with me and join what they call in fashionable slang parlance the Liver Brigade. Once upon a time it was considered the height of indelicacy and low breeding to mention the "liver" or any other portion of one's internal machinery – but we have done with all that now, and we find a peculiar satisfaction in discoursing of disease and unsavoury medical matters generally. And in the Liver Brigade you see at a glance all those interesting fellows who have sold themselves to the devil for the sake of the fleshpots of Egypt – men who eat till they are well-nigh bursting, and then prance up and down on good horses – much too respectable beasts by the way to bear

such bestial burdens – in the hope of getting out of their poisoned blood the evil they have themselves put in. They think me one of them, but I am not.’

He patted his mare and the groom led her away, the foam of her hard ride still flecking her glossy chest and forelegs.

‘Why do you join the procession then?’ I asked him, laughing and glancing at him with undisguised approval as I spoke, for he seemed more admirably built than ever in his well-fitting riding gear – ‘You are a fraud!’

‘I am!’ he responded lightly – ‘And do you know I am not the only one in London! Where are you off to?’

‘To those lawyers who wrote to me last night – Bentham and Ellis is the name of the firm. The sooner I interview them the better – don’t you think so?’

‘Yes – but see here’ – and he drew me aside – ‘You must have some ready cash. It doesn’t look well to apply at once for advances – and there is really no necessity to explain to these legal men that you were on the verge of starvation when their letter arrived. Take this pocket-book – remember you promised to let me be your banker – and on your way you might go to some well-reputed tailor and get properly rigged out. Ta-ta!’

He moved off at a rapid pace – I hurried after him, touched to the quick by his kindness.

‘But wait – I say – Lucio!’ And I called him thus by his familiar name for the first time. He stopped at once and stood quite still.

‘Well?’ he said, regarding me with an attentive smile.

'You don't give me time to speak' – I answered in a low voice, for we were standing in one of the public corridors of the hotel – 'The fact is I have some money, or rather I can get it directly – Carrington sent me a draft for fifty pounds in his letter – I forgot to tell you about it. It was very good of him to lend it to me – you had better have it as security for this pocket-book – by the by, how much is there inside it?'

'Five hundred, in bank notes of tens and twenties', – he responded with business-like brevity.

'Five hundred! My dear fellow, I don't want all that. It's too much!'

'Better have too much than too little nowadays', – he retorted with a laugh – 'My dear Tempest, don't make such a business of it. Five hundred pounds is really nothing. You can spend it all on a dressing-case for example. Better send back John Carrington's draft – I don't think much of his generosity considering that he came into a mine worth a hundred thousand pounds sterling, a few days before I left Australia.'

I heard this with great surprise, and, I must admit with a slight feeling of resentment too. The frank and generous character of my old chum 'Boffles' seemed to darken suddenly in my eyes – why could he not have told me of his good fortune in his letter? Was he afraid I might trouble him for further loans? I suppose my looks expressed my thoughts, for Rimânez, who had observed me intently, presently added —

'Did he not tell you of his luck? That was not very friendly of

him – but as I remarked last night, money often spoils a man.’

‘Oh I daresay he meant no slight by the omission’, I said hurriedly, forcing a smile – ‘No doubt he will make it the subject of his next letter. Now as to this five hundred’ —

‘Keep it, man, keep it’ – he interposed impatiently – ‘What do you talk about security for? Haven’t I got *you* as security?’

I laughed. ‘Well, I am fairly reliable now’ – I said – ‘And I’m not going to run away.’

‘From *me*?’ he queried, with a half cold half kind glance; ‘No – I fancy not!’

He waved his hand lightly and left me, and I, putting the leather case of notes in my inner breast-pocket, hailed a hansom and was driven off rapidly to Basinghall Street where my solicitors awaited me.

Arrived at my destination I sent up my name, and was received at once with the utmost respect by two small chips of men in rusty black who represented ‘the firm’. At my request they sent down their clerk to pay and dismiss my cab, while I, opening Lucio’s pocket book, asked them to change me a ten-pound note into gold and silver which they did with ready goodwill. Then we went into business together. My deceased relative, whom I had never seen as far as I myself remembered, but who had seen me as a motherless baby in my nurse’s arms, had left me everything he possessed unconditionally, including several rare collections of pictures, jewels, and curios. His will was so concisely and clearly worded that there were no possibilities of any legal hair-splitting

over it – and I was informed that in a week or ten days at the utmost everything would be in order and at my sole disposition.

‘You are a very fortunate man Mr Tempest’, – said the senior partner Mr Bentham, as he folded up the last of the papers we had been looking through and put it by – ‘At your age this princely inheritance may be either a great boon to you or a great curse – one never knows. The possession of such enormous wealth involves great responsibilities.’

I was amused at what I considered the impertinence of this mere servant of the law in presuming to moralize on my luck.

‘Many people would be glad to accept such responsibilities and change places with me’ – I said with a flippant air – ‘You yourself, for example?’

I knew this remark was not in good taste, but I made it wilfully, feeling that he had no business to preach to me as it were on the responsibilities of wealth. He took no offence however – he merely gave me an observant side-glance like that of some meditative crow.

‘No Mr Tempest, no’ – he said drily – ‘I do not think I should at all be disposed to change places with you. I feel very well satisfied as I am. My brain is my bank, and brings me in quite sufficient interest to live upon, which is all that I desire. To be comfortable, and pay one’s way honestly is enough for me. I have never envied the wealthy.’

‘Mr Bentham is a philosopher’ – interposed his partner, Mr Ellis smiling – ‘In our profession Mr Tempest, we see so many

ups and downs of life, that in watching the variable fortunes of our clients, we ourselves learn the lesson of content.'

'Ah, it is a lesson that I have never mastered till now!' I responded merrily – 'But at the present moment I confess myself satisfied.'

They each gave me a formal little bow, and Mr Bentham shook hands.

'Business being concluded, allow me to congratulate you', he said politely – 'Of course, if you should wish at any time to entrust your legal affairs to other hands, my partner and myself are perfectly willing to withdraw. Your deceased relative had the highest confidence in us...'

'As I have also, I assure you' – I interrupted quickly – 'Pray do me the favour to continue managing things for me as you did for my relative, and be assured of my gratitude in advance.'

Both little men bowed again, and this time Mr Ellis shook hands.

'We shall do our best for you, Mr Tempest, shall we not Bentham?' Bentham nodded gravely. 'And now what do you say – shall we mention it Bentham? – or shall we not mention it?'

'Perhaps', responded Bentham sententiously – 'it would be as well to mention it.'

I glanced from one to the other, not understanding what they meant. Mr Ellis rubbed his hands and smiled deprecatingly.

'The fact is Mr Tempest, your deceased relative had one very curious idea – he was a shrewd man and a clever one,

but he certainly had one very curious idea – and perhaps if he had followed it up to any extent, it might – yes, it might have landed him in a lunatic asylum and prevented his disposing of his extensive fortune in the – er – the very just and reasonable manner he has done. Happily for himself and – er – for you, he did not follow it up, and to the last he retained his admirable business qualities and high sense of rectitude. But I do not think he ever quite dispossessed himself of the idea itself, did he Bentham?’

Bentham gazed meditatively at the round black mark of the gas-burner where it darkened the ceiling.

‘I think not – no, I think not’, he answered – ‘I believe he was perfectly convinced of it.’

‘And what was it?’ I asked, getting impatient – ‘Did he want to bring out some patent? – a new notion for a flying-machine, and get rid of his money in that way?’

‘No, no, no!’ and Mr Ellis laughed a soft pleasant little laugh over my suggestion – ‘No, my dear sir – nothing of a purely mechanical or commercial turn captivated his imagination. He was too – er – yes, I think I may say too profoundly opposed to what is called “progress” in the world to aid it by any new invention or other means whatever. You see it is a little awkward for me to explain to you what really seems to be the most absurd and fantastic notion – but – to begin with, we never really knew how he made his money, did we Bentham?’

Bentham shook his head and pursed his lips closely together.

'We had to take charge of large sums, and advise as to investments and other matters – but it was not our business to enquire where the cash came from in the first place, was it, Bentham?'

Again Bentham shook his head solemnly.

'We were entrusted with it' – went on his partner, pressing the tips of his fingers together caressingly as he spoke – 'and we did our best to fulfil that trust – with – er – with discretion and fidelity. And it was only after we had been for many years connected in business that our client mentioned – er – his idea – a most erratic and extraordinary one, which was briefly this – that he had sold himself to the devil, and that his large fortune was one result of the bargain!'

I burst out laughing heartily.

'What a ridiculous notion!' I exclaimed – 'Poor man! – a weak spot in his brain somewhere evidently – or perhaps he used the expression as a mere figure of speech?'

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