

LEONID ANDREYEV

SATAN'S DIARY



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January 18.
On board the *Atlantic*.

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

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

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

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

I see you are all ready to ply me with questions, now that you learned that I am Satan in human form: it is so fascinating! Whence did I come? What are the ways of Hell? Is there immortality there, and, also, what is the price of coal at the stock exchange of Hell? Unfortunately, my dear reader, despite my desire to the contrary, if I had such a desire, I am powerless to satisfy your very proper curiosity. I could have composed for your benefit one of those funny little stories about horny and hairy devils, which appeal so much to your meagre imagination, but you have had enough of them already and I do not want to lie so rudely and ungracefully. I will lie to you elsewhere, when you least expect it, and that will be far more interesting for both of us.

And the truth—how am I to tell it when even my Name cannot be expressed in your tongue? You have called me

Satan and I accept the name, just as I would have accepted any other: Be it so—I am Satan. But my real name sounds quite different, quite different! It has an extraordinary sound and try as I may I cannot force it into your narrow ear without tearing it open together with your brain: Be it so—I am Satan. And nothing more.

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

If I were to tell you that there are no devils I would lie. But if I say that such creatures do exist I also deceive you. You see how difficult it is, how absurd, my friend!

I can also tell you but little that you would understand of how I assumed the human form, with which I began my earthly life ten days ago. First of all, forget about your favorite, hairy, horny, winged devils, who breathe fire, transform fragments of earthenware into gold and change old men into fascinating youths, and having done all this and prattled much nonsense, they disappear suddenly through a wall. Remember: when *we* want to visit your earth *we* must always become human. Why this is so you will learn after your death. Meanwhile remember: I am a human

being now like yourself. There is not the foul smell of a goat about me but the fragrance of perfume, and you need not fear to shake My hand lest I may scratch you with my nails: I manicure them just as you do.

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

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

Think of it: for two days, after leaving New York, I suffered from seasickness! This sounds queer to you, who

are accustomed to wallow in your own dirt? Well, I—I have also wallowed in it but it was not queer at all. I only smiled once in thinking that *it* was not I, but Wondergood, and said:

“Roll on, Wondergood, roll on!”

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

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

I simply want to play. At present I am still an unknown actor, a modest débutante, but I hope to become no less a celebrity than your own Garrick or Aldrich, after I have played what I please. I am proud, selfish and even, if you

please, vain and boastful. You know what vanity is, when you crave the praise and plaudits even of a fool? Then I entertain the brazen idea that I am a genius. Satan is known for his brazenness. And so, imagine, that I have grown weary of Hell where all these hairy and horny rogues play and lie no worse than I do, and that I am no longer satisfied with the laurels of Hell, in which I but perceive no small measure of base flattery and downright stupidity. But I have heard of you, my earthly friend; I have heard that you are wise, tolerably honest, properly incredulous, responsive to the problems of eternal art and that you yourself play and lie so badly that you might appreciate the playing of others: not in vain have you so many *great actors*. And so I have come. You understand?

My stage is the earth and the nearest scene for which I am now bound is Rome, the Eternal City, as it is called here, in your profound conception of eternity and other simple matters. I have not yet selected my company (would you not like to join it?). But I believe that *Fate* and *Chance*, to whom I am now subservient, like all your earthly things, will realize my unselfish motives and will send me worthy partners. Old Europe is so rich in talents! I believe that I shall find a keen and appreciative audience in Europe, too. I confess that I first thought of going to the East, which some of my compatriots made their scene of activity some time ago with no small measure of success, but the East is too credulous and is inclined too much to poison and the ballet. Its gods are ludicrous. The East still reeks too much of hairy animals. Its lights and shadows are barbarously crude and too bright to make it worth while for a refined artist as I am

to go into that crowded, foul circus tent. Ah, my friend, I am so vain that I even begin this Diary not without the secret intention of impressing you with my modesty in the rôle of *seeker* of words and comparisons. I hope you will not take advantage of my frankness and cease believing me.

Are there any other questions? Of the play itself I have no clear idea yet. It will be composed by the same impresario who will assemble the actors—*Fate*. My modest rôle, as a beginning, will be that of a man who so loves his fellow beings that he is willing to give them everything, his soul and his money. Of course, you have not forgotten that I am a billionaire? I have three billion dollars. Sufficient—is it not?—for one spectacular performance. One more detail before I conclude this page.

I have with me, sharing my fate, a certain Irwin Toppi, my secretary,—a most worthy person in his black frock coat and silk top hat, his long nose resembling an unripened pear and his smoothly shaven, pastor-like face. I would not be surprised to find a prayer book in his pocket. My Toppi came upon this earth from *there*, i.e. from Hell and by the same means as mine: he, too, assumed the human form and, it seems, quite successfully—the rogue is entirely immune from seasickness. However to be seasick one must have some brains and my Toppi is unusually stupid—even for this earth. Besides, he is impolite and ventures to offer advice. I am rather sorry that out of our entire wealth of material I did not select some one better, but I was impressed by his honesty and partial familiarity with the earth: it seemed more pleasant to enter upon this little jaunt with an experienced comrade. Quite a long time ago he once before

assumed the human form and was so taken by religious sentiments that—think of it!—he entered a Franciscan monastery, lived there to a ripe old age and died peacefully under the name of Brother Vincent. His ashes became the object of veneration for believers—not a bad career for a fool of a devil. No sooner did he enter upon this trip with Me than he began to sniff about for incense—an incurable habit! You will probably like him.

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

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

Wondergood. You always bore the reputation of being a hardened man and a man of experience!

There is one moment in the process of my assumption of the human form that I cannot recollect without horror. That was when for the first time I heard the beating of My heart. This regular, loud, metronome-like sound, which speaks as much of death as of life, filled me with the hitherto inexperienced sensation of horror. Men are always quarrelling about accounts, but how can they carry in their breasts *this* counting machine, registering with the speed of a magician the fleeting seconds of life?

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

“Toppi, the brush!”

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

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

ones? Then I say it is all a fraud and I protest as a honest citizen of the United States and as a merchant.

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

February 7, 1914.
Rome, Hotel "Internationale."

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

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

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

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

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

“Young man, you have forgotten the umbrella!”

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

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

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

Fortunately the low hills of the Roman Campagna are very convenient for this kind of sport and I was no means behind in the line of runners. When, out of breath, I hurled myself upon the ground, it was no longer possible to hear or see anything. Only Toppi was approaching. But what a

terrible thing this heart is! My face touched the earth. The earth was cool, firm, calm and here I liked it. It seemed as if it had restored my breath and put my heart back into its place. I felt easier. The stars above were calm. There was nothing for them to get excited about. They were not concerned with things below. They merely shine in triumph. That is their eternal ball. And at this brilliant ball the earth, clothed in darkness, appeared as an enchanting stranger in a black mask. (Not at all badly expressed? I trust that you, my reader, will be pleased: my style and my manners are improving!)

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

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

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

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

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

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

But here again I began to feel uncomfortable. I was cold, lonely, quivering. In my feet there was still the sensation of treading upon corpses. I wanted to shake myself like a dog after a bath. You must understand me: it was the first time that I had seen and felt your corpse, my dear reader, and if

you pardon me, it did not appeal to me at all. Why did it not protest when I walked over its face? George had such a beautiful young face and he carried himself with much dignity. Remember your face, too, may be trod upon. And will you, too, remain submissive?

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

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

“Who are you? What do you want?”

Hardly mumbling with his parched tongue, my brave Toppi narrated the story of the catastrophe and our escape. He spoke at length and then came the click of a lock and the door was opened. Following behind our austere and silent stranger we entered the house, passed through several dark and silent rooms, walked up a flight of creaking stairs into a brightly lighted room, apparently the stranger’s workroom. There was much light, many books, with one open beneath a low lamp shaded by a simple, green globe. We had not noticed this light in the field. But what astonished me was

the silence of the house. Despite the rather early hour not a move, not a sound, not a voice was to be heard.

“Have a seat.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

He stopped me with an impatient and slightly sarcastic gesture.

“Nonsense, you remain here. I will get you some wine and food. My servant is here in the daytime only, so allow me to wait on you. You will find the bathroom behind this door. Go wash and freshen up while I get the wine. Make yourself at home.”

While we ate and drank—with savage relish, I confess—this unsympathetic gentleman kept on reading a book as if there were no one else in the room, undisturbed by Toppi’s munching and the dog’s struggle with a bone. I studied my host carefully. Almost my height, his pale face bore an expression of weariness. He had a black, oily, bandit-like

beard. But his brow was high and his nose betrayed good sense. How would you describe it? Well, here again I seek comparisons. Imagine the nose betraying the story of a great, passionate, extraordinary, secret life. It is beautiful and seems to have been made not out of muscle and cartilage, but out of—what do you call it?—out of thoughts and brazen desires. He seems quite brave too. But I was particularly attracted by his hands: very big, very white and giving the impression of self-control. I do not know why his hands attracted me so much. But suddenly I thought: how beautifully exact the number of fingers, exactly ten of them, ten thin, evil, wise, crooked fingers!

I said politely:

“Thank you, signor——”

He replied:

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

I waited for Toppi to introduce me, according to the English custom, and I looked toward Magnus. One had to be an ignorant, illiterate animal not to know me.

Toppi broke in:

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

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

“Mr. Wondergood? Henry Wondergood? Are you not, sir, that American billionaire who seeks to bestow upon

humanity the benefits of his billions?"

I modestly shook my head in the affirmative.

"Yes, I am the gentleman."

Toppi shook his head in affirmation—the ass:

"Yes, we are the gentlemen."

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

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

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

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

Magnus said....

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

of the house, into its locked silent rooms. With every moment my joy mounted at the thought that I am alive, that I can speak and play and, suddenly, I rather liked the idea of being human.

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

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

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

The hour had really grown late. We had been talking and arguing with Magnus for two hours when Toppi fell asleep. I sent him off to bed while we continued to talk and drink for quite a while. I drank more wine, but Magnus restrained himself. There was a dimness about his face. I was