

# Madam Lucifer

By Richard Garnett

Lucifer sat playing chess with Man for his soul.

The game was evidently going ill for Man. He had but pawns left, few and straggling. Lucifer had rooks, knights, and, of course, bishops.

It was but natural under such circumstances that Man should be in no great hurry to move. Lucifer grew impatient.

"It is a pity," said he at last, "that we did not fix some period within which the player must move, or resign."

"Oh, Lucifer," returned the young man, in heartrending accents, "it is not the impending loss of my soul that thus unmans me, but the loss of my betrothed. When I think of the grief of the Lady Adeliza, that paragon of terrestrial loveliness!" Tears choked his utterance; Lucifer was touched.

"Is the Lady Adeliza's loveliness in sooth so transcendent?" he inquired.

"She is a rose, a lily, a diamond, a morning star!"

"If that is the case," rejoined Lucifer, "thou mayest reassure thyself. The Lady Adeliza shall not want for consolation. I will assume thy shape and woo her in thy stead."

The young man hardly seemed to receive all the comfort from this promise which Lucifer no doubt designed. He made a desperate move. In an instant the Devil checkmated him, and he disappeared.

"Upon my word, if I had known what a business this was going to be, I don't think I should have gone in for it," soliloquised the Devil, as, wearing his captive's semblance and installed in his apartments, he surveyed the effects to which he now had to administer. They included coats, shirts, collars, neckties, foils, cigars, and the like *ad libitum*; and very little else except three challenges, ten writs, and seventy-four unpaid bills, elegantly disposed around the looking-glass. To the poor youth's praise be it said, there were no billets-doux, except from the Lady Adeliza herself.

Noting the address of these carefully, the Devil sallied forth, and nothing but his ignorance of the topography of the hotel, which made him take the back stairs, saved him from the clutches of two bailiffs lurking on the principal staircase. Leaping into a cab, he thus escaped a perfumer and a bootmaker, and shortly found himself at the Lady Adeliza's feet.

The truth had not been half told him. Such beauty, such wit, such correctness of principle! Lucifer went forth from her presence a love-sick fiend. Not Merlin's mother had produced half the impression upon him; and Adeliza on her part had never found her lover one-hundredth part so interesting as he seemed that morning.

Lucifer proceeded at once to the City, where, assuming his proper shape for the occasion, he negotiated a loan without the smallest difficulty. All debts were promptly discharged, and Adeliza was astonished at her splendour and variety of the presents she was constantly receiving.

Lucifer had all but brought her to name the day, when he was informed that a gentleman of clerical appearance desired to wait upon him.

"Wants money for a new church or mission, I suppose," said he. "Show him up."

But when the visitor was ushered in, Lucifer found with discomposure that he was no earthly clergyman, but a celestial saint; a saint, too, with whom Lucifer had never been able to get on. He had served in the army while on earth, and his address was curt, precise, and peremptory.

“I have called,” he said, “to notify to you my appointment as Inspector of Devils.”

“What!” exclaimed Lucifer, in consternation. “To the post of my old friend Michael!”

“Too old,” said the Saint laconically. “Millions of years older than the world. About your age, I think?”

Lucifer winced, remembering the particular business he was then about. The Saint continued:

“I am a new broom, and am expected to sweep clean. I warn you that I mean to be strict, and there is one little matter which I must set right immediately. You are going to marry that poor young fellow’s betrothed, are you? Now you know you cannot take his wife, unless you give him yours.”

“Oh, my dear friend,” exclaimed Lucifer, “what an inexpressibly blissful prospect you do open unto me!”

“I don’t know that,” said the Saint. “I must remind you that the dominion of the infernal regions is unalterably attached to the person of the present Queen thereof. If you part with her you immediately lose all your authority and possessions. I don’t care a brass button which you do, but you must understand that you cannot eat your cake and have it too. Good morning!”

Who shall describe the conflict in Lucifer’s bosom? If any stronger passion existed therein at that moment than attachment to Adeliza, it was aversion to his consort, and the two combined were well-nigh irresistible. But to disenthroned himself, to descend to the condition of a poor devil!

Feeling himself incapable of coming to a decision, he sent for Belial, unfolded the matter, and requested his advice.

“What a shame that our new inspector will not let you marry Adeliza!” lamented his counsellor. “If you did, my private opinion is that forty-eight hours afterwards you would care just as much for her as you do now for Madam Lucifer, neither more nor less. Are your intentions really honourable?”

“Yes,” replied Lucifer, “it is to be a Lucifer match.”

“The more fool you,” rejoined Belial. “If you tempted her to commit a sin, she would be yours without any conditions at all.”

“Oh, Belial,” said Lucifer, “I cannot bring myself to be a tempter of so much innocence and loveliness.”

And he meant what he said.

“Well then, let me try,” proposed Belial.

“You?” replied Lucifer contemptuously; “do you imagine that Adeliza would look at *you*?”

“Why not?” asked Belial, surveying himself complacently in the glass.

He was humpbacked, squinting, and lame, and his horns stood up under his wig.

The discussion ended in a wager: after which there was no retreat for Lucifer.

The infernal Iachimo was introduced to Adeliza as a distinguished foreigner, and was soon prosecuting his suit with all the success which Lucifer had predicted. One thing protected while it baffled him—the entire inability of Adeliza to understand what he meant. At length he was constrained to make the matter clear by producing an enormous treasure, which he offered Adeliza in exchange for the abandonment of her lover.

The tempest of indignation which ensued would have swept away any ordinary demon, but Belial listened unmoved. When Adeliza had exhausted herself he smilingly rallied her upon her

affection for an unworthy lover, of whose infidelity he undertook to give her proof. Frantic with jealousy, Adeliza consented, and in a trice found herself in the infernal regions.

Adeliza's arrival in Pandemonium, as Belial had planned, occurred immediately after the receipt of a message from Lucifer, in whose bosom love had finally gained the victory, and who had telegraphed his abdication and resignation of Madam Lucifer to Adeliza's betrothed. The poor young man had just been hauled up from the lower depths, and was beset by legions of demons obsequiously pressing all manner of treasures upon his acceptance. He stared, helpless and bewildered, unable to realise his position in the smallest degree. In the background grave and serious demons, the princes of the infernal realm, discussed the new departure, and consulted especially how to break it to Madam Lucifer—a commission of which no one seemed ambitious.

"Stay where you are," whispered Belial to Adeliza; "stir not: you shall put his constancy to proof within five minutes."

Not all the hustling, mowing, and gibbering of the fiends would under ordinary circumstances have kept Adeliza from her lover's side: but what is all hell to jealousy?

In even less time than he had promised Belial returned, accompanied by Madam Lucifer. This lady's black robe, dripping with blood, contrasted agreeably with her complexion of sulphurous yellow; the absence of hair was compensated by the exceptional length of her nails; she was a thousand million years old, and, but for her remarkable muscular vigour, looked every one of them. The rage into which Belial's communication had thrown her was something indescribable; but, as her eye fell on the handsome youth, a different order of thoughts seemed to take possession of her mind.

"Let the monster go!" she exclaimed; "who cares? Come, my love, ascend the throne with me, and share the empire and the treasures of thy fond Luciferetta."

"If you don't, back you go," interjected Belial.

What might have been the young man's decision if Madam Lucifer had borne more resemblance to Madam Vulcan, it would be wholly impertinent to inquire, for the question never arose.

"Take me away!" he screamed, "take me away, anywhere! anywhere out of her reach! Oh, Adeliza!" With a bound Adeliza stood by his side. She was darting a triumphant glance at the discomfited Queen of Hell, when suddenly her expression changed, and she screamed loudly. Two adorers stood before her, alike in every lineament and every detail of costume, utterly indistinguishable, even by the eye of Love.

Lucifer, in fact, hastening to throw himself at Adeliza's feet and pray her to defer his bliss no longer, had been thunderstruck by the tidings of her elopement with Belial. Fearing to lose his wife and his dominions along with his sweetheart, he had sped to the nether regions with such expedition that he had had no time to change his costume. Hence the equivocation which confounded Adeliza, but at the same time preserved her from being torn to pieces by the no less mystified Madam Lucifer.

Perceiving the state of the case, Lucifer with true gentlemanly feeling resumed his proper semblance, and Madam Lucifer's talons were immediately inserted into his whiskers.

"My dear! my love!" he gasped, as audibly as she would let him, "is this the way it welcomes its own Lucy-pucy?"

"Who is that person?" demanded Madam Lucifer.

"I don't know her," screamed the wretched Lucifer. "I never saw her before. Take her away; shut her up in the deepest dungeon!"

“Not if I know it,” sharply replied Madam Lucifer. “You can’t bear to part with her, can you? You would intrigue with her under my nose, would you? Take that! and that! Turn them both out, I say! turn them both out!”

“Certainly, my dearest love, most certainly,” responded Lucifer.

“Oh, Sire,” cried Moloch and Beelzebub together, “for Heaven’s sake, let your Majesty consider what he is doing. The Inspector—”

“Bother the Inspector!” screeched Lucifer. “D’ye think I’m not a thousand times more afraid of your mistress than of all the saints in the calendar? There,” addressing Adeliza and her betrothed, “be off! You’ll find all debts paid, and a nice balance in the bank. Cut! Run!”

They did not wait to be told twice. Earth yawned. The gates of Tartarus stood wide. They found themselves on the side of a steep mountain, down which they scoured madly, hand linked in hand. But fast as they ran, it was long ere they ceased to hear the tongue of Madam Lucifer.