

The Fallen

“May I touch you for a few centimes?”

Cognitive dissonance assailed my mind. The timbre, the eloquence, the manner of his speech was light years divorced from the unkempt hair and wild beard.

“Of course.”

He took the proffered twenty Franc note, “Most generous, thank you.”

“My pleasure. May I ask a favour in return?”

“Certainly.”

Indicating the pavement bistro across the way, “Would you care to join my wife and me for dinner tonight?”

“Thank you, yes. Time?”

“Seven?”

“Yes.”

He made as if to touch a non-existent brim, smiled and turned away.

Slipping her hand around my arm my wife mused, “I wonder what story lies behind those piercing eyes - they frighten me”

“Don’t be so judgemental. We may find out tonight. He’s extremely well educated and appears to have all his faculties intact. I was curious about him from the moment our eyes met.”

Seated at our bistro table we watched him expertly dodge the traffic.

“Good evening, I trust I’ve not kept you waiting?”

“Indeed not.”

As he settled in his chair I wondered if our waiter disapproved of our dinner companion but he addressed him as he would any other patron.

Waiting for our drinks I plunged right into the deep end, “Tell me about yourself.”

He smiled, “Roger Whittaker brought out a long player entitled *Images*. In it he asked, ‘If things come so easy to a man, that all he has to do is reach out and pluck it from the tree of life, is he blessed or cursed by God?’ You familiar with it?”

“We know it well.”

“Well, I didn’t even have to pluck, everything simply fell into my lap. My father was – never mind, it’s not important. Suffice to say that money was no object. We simply had everything in excess. My sister and I had our own tutors and governesses. Anything that our hearts desired was immediately made available. Apart from love and familial warmth... those were at a premium. In fact, they were non-existent.”

“My mother regarded her duty over the moment she popped us out into the world. She had no maternal feelings and merely provided an heir to the family fortune. Had I arrived before my sister I would surely have been an only child.”

“Were your parents close?”

“No. My father steadily worked his way through dozens of women.

“And your mother?”

“Cold.”

I left for the Sorbonne at the precocious age of fifteen.

“What did you study?”

“I was not content, or perhaps my father was not content, to let the Sorbonne provide a law degree, I had to get a doctorate before doing articles. I got the highest marks ever recorded in that hallowed establishment.”

“My legal career was somewhat meteoric. I soon made my name with coruscating cross examination and showed no pity to the hapless defendants or their witnesses. It was my joy to completely crush them.”

I was perplexed, “So, how... why... did you land up bumming on the street?”

“Some background. One of my top clients was a Mafia Don and through him, I hired one of the globe’s top assassins to remove troublesome people from my life. This guy was brilliant. He was reputedly one of the three hired by a conglomerate of the French Secret Service, Mossad, the Mob and the CIA to take out Kennedy.”

My wife’s eyes widened, “I thought Oswald did it?”

He smiled. “No, Oswald was a CIA operative and was used as the fall guy, the decoy. When the CIA thought he might crack, they used Ruby – who owed the mob big time - to take Oswald out.”

I asked, “Did you have no qualms in ordering hits?”

“None at all. A school friend who became a noted psychologist had me complete a psychopathic questionnaire. When the results showed that I had displayed 19 out of the 20 characteristics he confirmed that I am a psychopath. A potential serial killer. I kept this part of me at bay with those cruel cross examinations, F1 racing, and cocaine.”

“But I digress. After a horrific week of battling clients, defendants, the legal system and being tipped off that I was a person of interest in some deaths I arrived home to a string of demands from my wife and children.”

“I rebelled and walked straight out the door.”

“After a few lines of cocaine, I weighed up my options. Did I want to put up with all that encumbrance in my life? I could, for a start, pass along an instruction to get rid of my wife and kids - as well as the investigating officers.”

“And that one thought of the twenty that came to me must have struck the one bit of human decency left in me. Perhaps that’s what prompted me to walk out of my life as it was and enter the world of the forgotten tramps of Paris.”

I could sense a mixture of pity and loathing in my wife. She made as if to speak but no words came out.

Watching her face, he smiled, stood up, thanked us for listening, and walked briskly back the way he’d come.

I watched him. I thought he had a lighter tread than before.

At the kerb he hesitated for a moment, letting a few cars pass, before coolly stepping in front of the bus.

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