

Undercover Agent

with a bow to Hawthorne, Denet, C. S. Lewis and all who deal with both worlds.) Today as the Devil was teaching a class of his more promising little devils, he was approached by one of his special undercover agents who seemed to be what worried.

"Scratch," said the agent, "my name is Dr. Deceiver and I am a respected deacon in one of the larger churches in my town. My assignment is to lead unsuspecting souls away from the wide and narrow path and turn them onto the sensual and irresponsible road that eventually leads to damnation."

"I hope you have been successful in your task," said the devil as he rubbed the sharp points of his horns and glanced at the white pitchfork.

"I am very successful, very much so," the young protege hastily replied. "Remember that lawyer I bribed last year? It was quite easy to tempt him to bribe a member of the jury; and by the way, I think the juryman ended up here also, didn't he?"

"Yes, I remember them," said the devil. "They were the ones who freed that lunatic, weren't they?"

"That's right," said the agent, relaxing. "I also was the one who bribed that real estate dealer to give me that worthless land. I allowed Mr. Beck get his start with the labor unions. Here is a list of people in whose life I have had that convenient stumbling block that started them on that downward fall to your reception area."

"So saying, the young agent pulled out a list which reached down to his feet and half an hour later he was back again and which was covered with the names of some of the most important people in his community."

"Very good, excellent, splendid," beamed the Devil, and his face glowed with a bright light as he was reminded of the time when Arnold turned traitor. "Thank you, Mr. Scratch, I'm

glad you approve. However, there is one problem which has given me considerable trouble." Here the agent pulled out a small piece of paper with only one name written on it. The name was Mr. Upright Goodman.

"What seems to be the trouble with this Mr Goodman? Won't he follow your suggestions?"

"Absolutely not. He refuses every opportunity to stray away from his saintly path, and what is more discouraging, he seems to gain strength with every refusal."

"Hmmm. Have you tried tempting him with offers of money?" asked the Devil.

"Yes, that was the first attempt," sighed the young agent.

"And what happened?" asked the Head of Hades.

"He had the nerve to refuse all my wonderfully shady propositions to make a fortune on the irrelevant and immaterial grounds that a clear conscience and peace of mind were more important than money."

"Disturbing, very disturbing," muttered the Devil, "but did you

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think of using any of my talented array of women?"

"That was my third unfortunate attempt. I tried, in the subtlest sort of way, to get Mr. Upright to fall for one of the women in your employment and follow her to a permanent abode in our warm sanctuary."

"Cut out the flowery language and tell me what happened," snapped the Devil.

"Well, Mr. Goodman said the woman of his dreams must be sweet, gentle and kind. Since none of your women had any of these qualities the scheme was a miserable failure."

"What about the old stand-by of turning a person to drinking by having a few social drinks with

him. That always worked before," stated the Devil very confidently.

"I know, but it didn't in this case. Mr. Goodman refused to have even one little drink with me because he said he had heard liquor had the ability to impair one's faculties and his were bad enough sober. He also said that it was too expensive for a poor man like him to afford."

"This is a highly irregular case. Give me a day to think it over and then come back and I will give you the answer," said the Satan.

The agent left and the Devil began to think. He thought through the evening and into the night. At last he came up with an idea. If the agent could get Mr. Goodman to begin to think that he (Goodman) was so righteous that he could do no wrong, then they would have him where they could handle him easily.

When the agent returned, the Devil outlined his plan and wished him luck. The agent was given two months in which to carry out the plan. At the end of this time he was to report on his success or failure.

The Devil busied himself with other projects and did not notice that the flow of "customers" was slowing up from Mr. Deceiver's section, but when they completely stopped he began to worry. Then when the agent failed to keep his own appointment, the Devil really became worried. After waiting for some time, he sent one of his pupils to investigate. The pupil returned and reported that he could not find Mr. Deceiver, but that a person who called himself Mr. Reformed had given him a message to give to Satan. The Devil opened the letter which read simply:

Dear Devil,

Your plan failed, my plan failed, so if you can't beat them, join them.

Your Ex-agent