



The Gentleman

Forrest Leo

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A funny, fantastically entertaining debut novel, in the spirit of Wodehouse and Monty Python, about a famous poet who inadvertently sells his wife to the devil--then recruits a band of adventurers to rescue her.

When Lionel Savage, a popular poet in Victorian London, learns from his butler that they're broke, he marries the beautiful Vivien Lancaster for her money, only to find that his muse has abandoned him.

Distraught and contemplating suicide, Savage accidentally conjures the Devil -- the polite "Gentleman" of the title -- who appears at one of the society parties Savage abhors. The two hit it off: the Devil talks about his home, where he employs Dante as a gardener; Savage lends him a volume of Tennyson. But when the party's over and Vivien has disappeared, the poet concludes in horror that he must have inadvertently sold his wife to the dark lord.

Newly in love with Vivien, Savage plans a rescue mission to Hell that includes Simmons, the butler; Tompkins, the bookseller; Ashley Lancaster, swashbuckling Buddhist; Will Kensington, inventor of a flying machine; and Savage's spirited kid sister, Lizzie, freshly booted from boarding school for a "dalliance." Throughout, his cousin's quibbling footnotes to the text push the story into comedy nirvana.

Lionel and his friends encounter trapdoors, duels, anarchist-fearing bobbies, the social pressure of not knowing enough about art history, and the poisonous wit of his poetical archenemy. Fresh, action-packed and very, very funny, *The Gentleman* is a giddy farce that recalls the masterful confections of P.G. Wodehouse and Hergé's beautifully detailed Tintin adventures.

The Gentleman Details

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Author : Forrest Leo

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From Reader Review The Gentleman for online ebook

Heidi The Hippie Reader says

Imagine, for a moment, that you're unhappily married and you meet the Devil, who isn't a hoofed, fiery horror but a "gentleman". You strike up a conversation with him in which you mention that you're absolutely depressed and unable to continue on because of your marital situation. The Devil sympathizes with you for a time, then when he's gone, you discover that your wife has disappeared as well. Time to freak out... or celebrate? This happens to Lionel at the beginning of this tale and it just gets better from there.

The Gentleman is written in Victorian England but with a slightly steampunk twist. The style is very silly- as if Terry Pratchett had written a historical fiction in our world instead of Discworld. The author utilizes footnotes, just like Pratchett, to add layers to the tale and an outside narrative. I enjoyed it a lot.

First of all, Lionel spent a great deal of his fortune on books. Who could fault a hero for that? *"I don't buy anything except books. You cannot possibly tell me I've squandered my fortune upon books." "Squander is not the word I would have used, sir. But it was the books that did it, I believe." Well, there it was. We were paupers."* pg 2. So, like any self-respecting Victorian gentleman, Lionel sets about to find a rich wife.

Though successful, then he finds that he can't write a word worth reading. *"...I'm a poet, and poets aren't meant to marry! Poets are meant to dream and dance in the moonlight and love hopelessly!"* pg 57.

Simmons, the long suffering butler, is my favorite character. Throughout the madness and hijinks of the main characters, he is a voice of reason and calm. Take this moment, after Lionel's initial meeting with the Gentleman: *"Do you consider me morally reprehensible for inadvertently selling my wife to the devil?" "I do, sir," (Simmons) says. I had feared as much. I was feeling morally deficient, but wondered if that was only because of my weariness."* pg 91.

The dialogue is snappy, the characters are great, and the whole thing is just silly fun. *The Gentleman* would be a great book to read if you've been into a bunch of serious novels lately or just need an escape from daily woes.

If you enjoyed this book, you may also like Terry Pratchett's hugely popular series of books or Triumph: Her Majesty's Hero.

Cian O hAnnrachainn says

Some books are read for the plot. *THE GENTLEMAN* is a book you read to enjoy the voice.

There is a plot, of course. It centers on young Lionel Savage, a proper gentleman who runs out of money and so must marry it. While hiding from one of his wife's society parties (he does not love his wife, as he makes plain. He is the narrator, by the way) his solitude is broken by a visit from *THE GENTLEMAN*, none other than the devil himself.

The next thing Mr. Savage knows, his wife is gone and he's quite sure that he inadvertently sold her to the Devil (of Dev'l as he prefers to say it. He is a poet and only needs the one syllable). He wants to get her back,

and in league with his brother-in-law he attempts to organize an adventure to Hell to rescue his wife, whom he suddenly realizes he loves.

Silly? Silly indeed, but told with such over-the-top dialogue and absurd humour that you will thoroughly enjoy this madness. The creativity is striking, as Mr. Savage and his coterie try to figure out how one gets to Hell. Some have compared this novel to the work of P.G. Wodehouse, and that is perhaps the best way to put it.

I highly recommend this book to all who need a break from a world too filled with harsh reality. Take a small vacation and get lost in some witty prose.

With thanks to Penguin Random House for the early review copy.

Amy says

LOVE LOVE LOVE! What a weird, hilarious, wonderful novel. A frustrated poet inadvertently sells his wife's soul to the devil, and mayhem ensues.

A little P. G. Wodehouse, a little Oscar Wilde, entirely madcap. I highly recommend reading in paper rather than ebook form, because the design is so charming, with bizarre illustrations and quarrelsome footnote from the (fictional) editor.

I'll be pushing this book on everyone I know this year, including you! Go read it!

Virginia says

Hilarious! You know Murphy's Law (Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong)? That's exactly what happens to poor Lionel Savage after an encounter with the Devil occurs at the same time his wife goes missing. At the same time, his younger sister gets kicked out of school for performing indecent activities. The story takes off from there with an introduction to a quirky cast of characters that join Lionel on his adventure to save his wife from the Devil he thinks he sold her to by accident. You'll be laughing the whole way through from the quick-fire banter to the ridiculous imagination that "plagues" our un-lovable protagonist.

Filled with anything but Gentlemen (except for the Devil of course), this is a fun romp through Victorian England that you will want to take again and again.

Karen says

This is a decent debut and quick read about a young poet named Lionel Savage who unwittingly sells his wife to the Devil, soon has feelings of regret and so he puts together a rescue mission to Hell that includes a quirky cast of characters. The author does a good job with the characters, some of whom I loved, some I hated. Madcap and farcical, I enjoyed the book but found myself skimming a few times when the story got repetitious. In the version of the book I had (kindle), it was not easy to coordinate the numerous footnotes to the associated story references so I recommend in hard copy if you want to spend the time reading the

footnotes. I bypassed most of them and I felt that it did not take away from the story.

Emily says

4.5 stars

This book had me laughing out loud from the start.

Lionel Savage is a ridiculous character, and the combination of his narrative and the footnotes added by his "editor" is delightful.

I guess this was a play originally. I would love to see it performed. I wonder if the footnote gag was added once he decided to adapt it into a novel. The footnotes, and Savage's obsession with following iambic pentameter, were my favorite things about the book.

Great fun. I hope to see more by this author.

Melki says

'Do you mean to tell me, Simmons, that we haven't any money left?'

'I'm afraid not, sir.'

'Where on earth has it gone?'

'I don't mean to be critical, sir, but you tend toward profligacy.'

'Nonsense, Simmons. I don't buy anything except books. You cannot possibly tell me I've squandered my fortune upon books.'

'Squander is not the word I would have used, sir. But it was the books that did it, I believe.'

Well, at least Lionel Savage has his priorities straight. I certainly can't think of a better thing to "squander" one's fortune upon.

Poor, Lionel. The meager (as in *nonexistent*) earnings from his poetry are no longer keeping him in food and clothing books. His newly destitute status leaves him with no choice but to find a wealthy wife. That accomplished, he is solvent but artistically impotent - he can't write a word. He is miserable. Then, one night, at yet another dreadful society party thrown by his new bride, Lionel meets a Mysterious Stranger.

'Yes,' he says. 'I've tarried too long already. Your kindness tonight will not be forgotten, Mr. Savage. I wish you a very pleasant night.'

'You forget that I am married,' I reply, gloomy once more.

The Gentleman looks at me queerly, with a sort of half-smile playing across his face. 'Chin up, old boy,' he says. 'These things have a way of working themselves out.'

Suddenly, Lionel's wife has vanished - POOF! No one can find her! And Lionel . . . he's left with that old familiar *did-I-just-accidentally-sell-my-wife-to-the-Dev'l?* feeling.

This is just a fun, FUN book with a sweet, old-fashioned feel to it. I was not surprised to learn this novel began its life as a play; there is very much the air of a drawing room comedy to it. True, the cast of characters are clichéd - the nerdy poet, the brawny outdoorsman, the befuddled inventor, the sassy, irreverent kid sister, and the wise butler who solves everyone's problems - but this really only adds to the charm. We've all met these people before and this time, it's okay not to take them seriously.

Besides . . . I could never hate characters who believe the answers to all life's problems may be found within the confines of a bookshop.

*Normally I don't comment on an author's looks, but . . .

Forrest Leo

AH-OOOGA!!!

My face just did this Tex Avery thing,

and I'm having trouble putting my tongue back in my mouth.

PattyMacDotComma says

5★

Would that one might combine the fantastical flights of fancy of Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life*, P.G. Wodehouse, Terry Pratchett, Flann O'Brien – never mind. Forrest Leo has it all under (loose) control. It is far-fetched and funny. In a word (or two) A HOOT! Love it!

The introduction explains that this is

“Set Down by Mr Lionel Lupus Savage & Edited with Objections by Mr Hubert Lancaster, Esq, Containing Nothing Either Allegorical or Metaphorical in Nature & Never Deviating from the Truth.”

This “editor” (H.L.) is a cousin of Lionel’s wife. He adds a running commentary in footnotes to show us what a dill the author really is.

Lionel is a published poet who seems to have hit his prime in his teens and it’s been downhill ever since. He blames his writer’s block on his recent marital status.

Lionel married for money—not to some old harridan, no. He picked a beautiful, rich young woman and decided to marry her. He also decided he didn’t love her. Well, how could he? He married her for money, so

it stands to reason he doesn't love her, doesn't it?

Simmons has been the family butler forever, and he's the only sane, cool head. He has managed the family's affairs since Lionel and his younger sister Lizzie were little, so when Lionel announces he'd like to buy a boat to sail the seven seas, Simmons is the one who has to tell him there is no money left. Why?

“ ‘I don't mean to be critical sir, but you tend toward profligacy.’

‘Nonsense, Simmons. I don't buy anything except books. You cannot possibly tell me I've squandered my fortune upon books.’

‘Squander is not the word I would have used, sir. But it was the books that did it, I believe.’”

Hence, the need to find a wealthy bride, Vivian. Vivian holds parties galore, while Lionel closets himself away to avoid her, until who should appear at his study door, but the Devil! He has come to thank Lionel for sticking up for him in a conversation with a priest (only to say don't blame the Devil for everything).

Unsurprisingly the Devil has no friends, nor does Lionel, hence, a friendship is established to their mutual surprise. (Lionel keeps planning to kill himself, and this new friendship has interrupted him. Something always interrupts him. Life's full of problems.)

Lionel thinks if his wife were out of the picture, he'd find his muse again, so perhaps the Devil could help. But the Devil is a kindly fellow who says he doesn't need more souls, and in fact, to make where he lives sound more pleasant than “Hell”, he calls it Essex Grove. He's not a bad chap, really. Just a gentleman from Essex Grove.

“‘There are times when I feel as though humanity misunderstands me.’

‘Sir,’ I tell him wryly, ‘you suffer the plight of a poet.’

‘You're too kind,’ he says.

‘No, but truly.’

‘Do you know,’ he muses, ‘Alighieri once told me the same thing.’

I must have misheard. It is too extraordinary. ‘Excuse me?’

‘Oh,’ he says off-handedly, ‘the fellow who takes care of my flowers. Something Alighieri. Don, Donald, something. He once told me I understand poets better than most poets understand themselves.’

‘Dante?’ I say in shock. I was only just thinking of the man. ‘Dante Alighieri?’

‘Yes, that's it,’ says he.

‘Dante the poet?’

‘Yes. Wonderful with the roses. Less so with the rhododendron.’

I can only repeat the name like an idiot. 'Dante Alighieri—is your gardener?'"

After dropping some more names, the Devil takes his leave, and once the party is over, it seems Vivian has disappeared as well. Vanished. Nary a trace!

Lionel thinks he's sold her to the Devil to regain his poetic muse and he's now overcome with guilt. Enter his wild 16-year-old sister Lizzie, who's just been thrown out of school for dallying with a boy. Lizzie is the mistress of all she surveys. Nobody dares cross her – and she's cute, funny, impetuous and fun. A dare-devil to Lionel's cowardly (poetically suicidal) nature.

There's also an explorer, a magic bookshop, an inventor, a flying machine . . . enough.

I think you can tell I thoroughly enjoyed the writing, the style, the humour . . . what else? Oh, I forgot – illustrations. They were fun, too. An old-fashioned, new-fashioned ridiculous romp.

Thanks to NetGalley and the Penguin Group for a copy for review.

Linda says

3.5 stars

This was a completely fun read and had me chuckling throughout to the end. The banter back and forth between the characters, along with the humorous footnotes which inserted bits of wit from the "editor" of the story, were what made me love this book. I was on track to give this a 4 star, and even possibly 5 star, rating halfway through the book. However, the characters and banter are what held up the story, but besides that, everything else was a little flat and cliché. Also, the direction the story ended up not going where I expected (view spoiler).

All in all, I had fun with this book as a light popcorn read.

Clare says

OVERALL AVERAGE RATING: 3.9

Characters: 4/5

This book has such an interesting, lively cast of characters, who are each unique and quirky in their own way. The protagonist, Lionel, is hard to love but his arrogant nature seems essential to the story. Lionel's inner monologue and the dialogues between characters were some of the highlights for me.

Plot: 3.5/5

The plot was actually quite simple. With the exception of an ironic little plot twist at the end, everything that happens in the story is already laid out for the reader in the summary. The plot isn't driven by thrilling action sequences, but rather by the dramatic dialogue between the characters. It's different than what I'm used to but for this story it works.

Writing style: 4/5

This book definitely reads like a play. Funny enough, after finishing it, I discovered that the story was indeed inspired by a play. The book is written from protagonist's point of view, but is combined with comical footnotes from a fictional editor, which made the story more immersive and engaging. Overall, I really enjoyed the writing style.

Entertainment: 4/5

This is probably hands-down the funniest book I've read this year. I've tried describing the plot to friends and I always get the same reaction: "That's so messed up!" It's just one of those stories that you have to read to understand its charm. Definitely a fun book to add to any personal library.

Sid Nuncius says

I don't like writing wholly critical reviews, but I'm afraid I hated *The Gentleman*. I had expected to enjoy it as a clever comic romp, but – very unusually for me – I abandoned it in sheer annoyance after a few chapters.

The premise is good: it purports to be a first person account (edited by a friend) of the unwilling adventures of a Victorian Gentleman who is idle, profligate and vain, but entirely self-deluded as to his own prowess as a writer (and most other things). I was hoping for wit and a clever parody of Victorian style and mores. I'm afraid what I got was a lazy, careless pastiche of Victorian style by yet another US author who thinks that Victorian gentlemen said things like "which boggled the mind" or "has gotten worse" or "I can't figure out..." (all this in just the first few pages), or that an aristocratic Victorian young lady of sixteen would respond to unexpected news with "Oh my God. Oh my *God*." It was at this point that I really began to lose patience, and I bailed out a little while later – not just because she continually spoke like a present-day Californian teenager but because the whole thing is sloppy, unconvincing and nothing like as funny as it thinks it is.

I'm sorry to be so harsh, and it's unusual for me to dislike a book so vehemently, but I really don't think this should be foisted on a British audience. In order to work, even as a comic novel, it needs to have some degree of accuracy and verisimilitude. It's as though I had written an action thriller about a daring US Marine sortie into present-day Syria, say, where the commander says things like, "I say, you chaps – buck up!"

Enough. Personally I'd recommend giving this one a wide berth.

(I received an ARC via Netgalley.)

Julie Daniels says

The Gentleman was everything I'd hoped it would be and so much more! I haven't read many comic novels but I definitely will be reading more after this one! I enjoyed every last page of *The Gentleman*. I have never laughed so much, so loud, or so hard while reading a book! It really is a hard thing for an author to make the reader laugh just using written words on a page- there is so much to it- they have to set the scene, bring the characters to life, and work humor into the story in a way that feels natural and not at all contrived or forced.

And for it to work the author has to be able to make everything come to life and play out in the reader's mind. Forrest Leo did all of that and so much more with *The Gentleman*! Everything came together in this book to make it so much more than just an enjoyable read for me- it's a lifetime favorite with characters that I love and cherish. The kind of characters I find myself eager to follow on any adventure and I'm eagerly awaiting more from Mr. Leo! I would recommend this to everyone!

I received an advance copy of this book from Penguin Press+

Roy says

This is exactly what I needed. Something light, doesn't take itself seriously and very very funny. In a nutshell, a poet who doesn't like his wife, accidentally sells her to the devil, then the fun continues. The writing is great, the author's wit is amazing, the characters superb (especially Simmons), the dialogue snappy/funny and the use of footnotes works in this case. I sometimes find footnotes a little distracting, but in this comedy fantasy Victorian steampunk setting it works well. The pace wasn't overly quick and I think that's my only negative. Otherwise can't wait to read more from this author.

D. McLaughlin says

Fun is an odd word for this book, but amid mystery, hijinx, the devil as a gentleman, and a bumbling adventure, I found myself chuckling a great deal at a self-involved poet who discovers love in the most unusual way, while trying to find hell with his outrageous sister, her bigger than life brother, and their unassuming butler. It puts me in the middle of that old Stallone movie "Oscar" or the Julianne Moore movie "An Ideal Husband" in its style.

Truly classic in the most unexpected way.

Coleen (The Book Ramblings) says

The Gentleman is Forrest Leo's debut novel, about a husband who conjures the Devil, and accidentally sells his wife, which results in planning a rescue mission to Hell. A variety of personas come along for the quest, and a whole lot of over-the-top encounters happen along the way that will have you laughing out loud. I have been talking about this novel to anyone willing to listen, and I think I will for a while even now that I finished reading it.

There was so much about this novel that I enjoyed, especially the writing style—it was one of those stories that captured me from the first page and brought me along on the ridiculous adventure that took place. The novel itself is beautiful with the dust-jacket's vivid colors, the hardcover is red with a gold spine, and the author's initials are engraved into the cover. Throughout the book, there are illustrations and footnotes that I really enjoyed while reading because it brought another experience to the reader. While it is a short read, I took my time to cherish how exquisite the novel is as a whole. It was hysterical and delightful.

I would not mind seeing this as a play, or possibly a movie, as long as it sticks to the story-line because there wasn't an aspect in this that I didn't find entertaining. It is a charming, enjoyable story that is full of madness and humor that is crafted so brilliantly. Between the story and the characters, it was a memorable read that I

will continue to come back to, and recommend to anyone looking for a fun and lighthearted novel. It is an absurd, action-packed, and witty read, and I cannot wait to read more of Leo's novels in the future.

I received a copy in exchange for an unbiased review from the publisher. All opinions are my own.
