

Devil Take the Hindmost

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Rated: PG

Submitted: May 2020

Summary: For some, the idea of looking out for themselves comes as their only nature.

Story Size: 1,949 words (11Kb as text)

Disclaimer: I own nothing. I make nothing. All characters, plot points, and recognizable dialogue belong to DC comics, Warner Bros., December 3rd Productions and anyone else with a stake in the Superman franchise. I don't own the lyrics to "Devil Take The Hindmost" either. That belongs to Andrew Lloyd Webber and anyone else with a stake in the Phantom of the Opera/Love Never Dies franchise.

Author's Note: This is in response to Kerth Challenge #2, which required that the next song you hear become the title of your next fic. I just watched *Love Never Dies*, the sequel to *The Phantom of the Opera*, and one particular song really stuck out and stuck with me. Special thanks to Val, who beta'ed this for me. You definitely helped take the creepy vibe up a notch!

So, what does "devil take the hindmost" mean? I'd never heard the term before, but I was intrigued, so I looked into it. Basically, it's another way of saying "every man for himself" - that everyone should (or does) look after their own interests and works independently toward their own success, without regard for the fate of others.

All my life, I've been misunderstood. Maligned by those who are jealous of me. Worshipped from afar. Envied by those who wish they could *be* me. Thought to be a fool who could be easily swindled out of his hard-won fortune. Though, I'm proud to say I've always set those thoughts to rights straight away. I've made innumerable fair-weather friends and just as many bitter enemies. I've been chased by every gold-digger known to man and hounded by every self-important reporter clamoring for my precious time seeking an interview they would never receive. I've been touted as a success, an inspiration, a philanthropist of the highest sort, a role model to aspire to. I've been branded a thief, a cheat, a playboy of the worst sort, a scoundrel...a *criminal*.

I've never really stopped to listen to such prattling. It's been nothing more than an annoying buzzing about my ears, like a swarm of mosquitos. Their words, their accusations have been inconsequential, meaningless, harming me neither directly nor indirectly. I've still risen to the very top of the world; a god amongst kings as my empire has stretched to lengths I could only day dream about reaching when I took my first company over by force.

No, I've never cared what labels have been pinned to me. I'm no saint, it's true. But I'm no devil either. I'm just a man, doing what comes naturally to me: namely, looking out for my own best interests.

Oh, that's not to say those peasants might not be right, to a degree.

Maybe being this close to my undoing has cleared my vision some. The walls are closing in; the police are defiling my home with their raid. Someone - likely that damnable Kent - must have found something; some shred of evidence to link me to some unsavory deed that he intends to use to tear both myself and my

empire down with. No matter. I will die before I let that simpering milksop get his way.

Still...I wonder...

Perhaps I've deserved most or maybe even all of the above descriptors. My wealth, my influence, my power, hasn't always been achieved through the most morally conventional means. I'm no stranger to getting my hands dirty, in a manner of speaking. I've never once needed to resort to any unseemly acts myself. There are plenty of men and women who have rushed to sell me their souls for a few petty coins. Everyone has a price. It was one of the few, but most important, lessons I learned early on as a child. The stupid ones will take whatever lowball offer you throw their way and think you're generous for doing so. The more cunning will know that, depending on what they have to offer, the sky's the limit for their demands. I'll admit to having paid out more than I would have liked to on more occasions than I care to count, but, in the end, it was a mere drop in the bucket compared to what I have and what I gained in return.

Some would call what they tried to pull extortion. I call it a business deal.

After all, ruthless backroom deals are my playground. I live for the thrill of making my opponents cave to my every whim. I excel at manipulating my rivals into thinking they've somehow gotten a good deal out of me. There is *no one* more skilled at making others waver - and waver they always do, never suspecting that they are getting the short end of the stick. In the beginning, it was a way of life, a very much needed survival skill. A quiet pay off here to obtain insider tips in the stock market. A bribe there to get information on a rival CEO's business plans. A greased palm every now and again to ensure that I had what I needed to blackmail others so I could snatch up their companies. A hired hitman once in a while to terminate my business dealings with those who I knew could - and would - seek to destroy me if they ever spoke to the authorities or to the press. A quietly passed wad of cash to look the other way while my people bent often too-rigid laws or hacked shortcuts through the jungles of red tape that seem to plague any businessman.

Eventually, it became a game. One based on life and death, to be sure, but never one in which I was in danger or at a disadvantage. I would never allow any kind of threat to remain whilst I had the means to end it. Even if that threat was an alien pest who stuck his too-righteous nose into my affairs. His very presence in the world, let alone Metropolis, meant that I was in danger of being exposed for the man I really am. His powers put me at a distinct disadvantage - I can neither fly, nor move at the speed he does, nor am I invincible. I knew from the beginning that I had to wage war against this menace to my livelihood. I tested him. I tried to destroy him. And when I heard about a strange substance that might just be his weakness, I pounced like a panther on a fat little mouse.

A few million dollars for a handful of green rocks would seem astronomical to most. They would call me an eccentric fool at best for paying that price, or question my grip on reality at worst. But the millions meant nothing compared to the peace of mind I received in securing the only known weapon against my great enemy. And now, at this very moment, the price I paid seems ridiculously low as Superman lays dead or dying in my wine cellar.

Was it worth it?

The death of my nemesis?

Could I have used those riches in other ways? Could I have used them to muddy the trails in the hopes that it would make me immune from his accusations and thinly veiled threats to tear me down?

No. It was worth it.

Everything comes with a price.

My security came with a price. And looking back, those

millions I handed over without batting an eye were, perhaps, far too low a sum to pay for that peace of mind.

After all, he's surely dead by now and has taken whatever suspicions he had with him to the grave. My only enemies now are of the *human* variety, and therefore easier to evade.

But the caped freak's death isn't the only thing I have paid dearly for, while receiving a benefit that went far beyond any pittance of a few crisp bills slipped into the right, unquestioning hands.

Some would call my methods unethical, at best. At worst, I would be considered a criminal for the things I've done. But I've never felt that way. I'm simply doing what I need to survive as a capitalist. I have the means to do it, so why shouldn't I? After all, if I don't, others *will*, leaving me behind. I can't let that happen. I am Lex Luthor. I don't lose. *Ever*. No good businessman does. If we see an opening, we *must* do what needs to be done to take it, lest someone else profit from our stumbling.

I learned early, at the knee of my smart, but short-sighted father that no one builds an empire with compassion. No one becomes a billionaire by playing fairly. It takes a willingness to do what needs to be done, an aggressiveness to step over those who get in the way, a hardness of heart to ignore those who fall by the wayside. Every single fellow business tycoon and multi-million or billionaire I've ever met has shared those traits with me. A thirst to win. A mindset of helping only himself. A carefully cultivated apathy for the lesser men around them. Which isn't to say that some of them haven't been genuine philanthropists who have donated small portions of their vast fortunes to public works that have benefited the rest of the poorer masses. Oh, to the pitifully average person, a million dollars here and there certainly *seems* like a lot, but, in reality, it's never more than a drop in the bucket for us. Even *I* have given up some of my well-won spoils of corporate warfare in order to maintain a certain public identity, but it's never been more than mere pocket change in the long run. I could donate far more than what I have and still maintain a lifestyle even millionaires can only dream of.

In most cases, I've gained far more than I've lost. The medical breakthroughs at Lex Labs alone have saved millions of lives around the globe, and have netted me untold billions over the years. Those struggling, amateur athletes I invested in only *thought* I was interested in giving a poor kid a chance to make something of himself. In fact, the money I made from the exclusive Pay-Per-View fees was more than they could ever dream of making themselves, not to mention all the merchandise – the jerseys, coffee mugs, posters, jackets, shoes, and all the rest that people are willing to pay a premium for, simply because they are enamored with the athletes.

No. No one in my position truly acts for the good of society. Everyone acts for their own self-interests, their own self-gain, the fattening of their own wallets. If the rest of the world is aided in such endeavors, so be it; we can - and will – find a way to profit from it. But if people are crushed in the process, it's no great loss, so long as it doesn't impact our bottom line. The fate of others has never been their concern, just as it has never been mine, so long as they can't use their position to harm me. I will never allow the common riff-raff, or even another wealthy tycoon, to take me down. These bumbling policemen will never put Lex Luthor behind bars.

It's me against the world. I will always fight tooth and nail to stay on top, even if it means dying for my cause. I am Lex Luthor; I am the god of this wretched, stinking city. I look out only for myself.

And devil take the hindmost.

THE END