

A PACT

By

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FADE IN

EXT TOWN SQUARE NIGHT

Rain falls silvery through the light from streetlights on a small town square, deserted at this time of night.

Through the light strides a man in a yellow slicker, DANIEL.

An interstate bus splashes past, and Daniel ducks beneath the awning of a jewelry store.

He pushes back his hood to reveal a 40's, plain looking man with a tinge of insomnia. Staring into the night, he lights a cigarette with gold lighter.

The courthouse clock CHIMES and TOLLS the hour-11:00.

Behind him, the door opens, and the store owner, BIXBY, 60's steps out, locking up behind.

BIXBY
Evening, Daniel.

DANIEL
More like night.

BIXBY
So it is. Restless?

DANIEL
You know how it is.

BIXBY
If it's any consolation, everyone knows she had no cause to run away.

DANIEL
No cause to stay either, I suppose.

BIXBY
Let me be subtle, she was a tramp.

DANIEL

Why didn't you tell me that before I
married her?

BIXBY

I hoped you would redeem her.

Daniel laughs.

BIXBY

Go home, Daniel. She's not worth the
pain.

DANIEL

Home is where the memories are.

Nodding, Bixby pulls up his umbrella and heads into the rain.

Daniel smokes, watching.

A woman, BELLE, in yellow slicker, hood up, appears in the yellow
circle of a streetlight. She looks around and heads for Daniel
who watches her step under the awning.

She leaves her hood up as she pulls a cigarette from her purse.

BELLE

Got a light?

Daniel flicks his gold lighter, brings it up to her cigarette.
He sees her face, but we don't, and he gasps.

DANIEL

My god.

BELLE

(blowing out lighter)

Seen enough?

DANIEL

My god.

(waving lighter)

May I?

BELLE

Maybe later. Maybe not ever.

(beat)

I'll save you the trouble. I know what I look like. How could I not? I couldn't bear that bus any more, and I don't care what town this is, or who you are. It's time. You'll help me, won't you?

DANIEL

Yes.

BELLE

Use your lighter. You will anyway.

He flicks the lighter and stares at her face, studying her.

DANIEL

You're incredible.

The lighter grows hot, and he drops it to the pavement.

BELLE

You're wondering what it's like to be so beautiful. Let me tell you. It's incredible, everything you ever dreamed it could be.

He studies the darkness beneath her hood.

BELLE

I've had every kind of man, from king to peasant, and they've all worshiped me. They would do anything for me. But fifty years is enough.

DANIEL

You're not that old. I'm a doctor, I know.

FLASHBACK

INT CHURCH DAY

Belle, pretty but not stunning in her wedding dress, sits on steps leading to the altar. Veil askew, she swigs directly from a bottle of champagne.

BELLE (V.O.)

I can't begin to describe what the jilting did to me. But I swore I would get even.

INT LIBRARY STACKS NIGHT

In the bowels of an ancient library, amidst shelves of books so old they've been forgotten, Belle pulls a huge, dusty tome off a shelf.

BELLE (V.O.)

I searched for years, looking for a way.

She sets the volume on a table and opens it. On one page, Satan, in medieval form, facing handwritten Latin.

BELLE (V.O.)

If god wouldn't serve, perhaps Satan would.

INT BEDROOM NIGHT

Candles burn throughout the room.

Belle, naked, sits on the floor, in the middle of a large pentagram.

She looks at the tome open at her feet and begins to chant the words.

BELLE (V.O.)

Pacts are surprisingly easy, provided you're prepared to open the door.

She grabs a knife and carefully slices open her palm, letting her blood drip into a silver bowl.

END FLASHBACK

EXT TOWN SQUARE NIGHT

Belle and Daniel under the awning.

BELLE

You want to use the lighter again,
don't you?

DANIEL

Yes.

BELLE

Because I'm beautiful?

DANIEL

Because I feel an incredible desire
to see your face.

BELLE

The spell always works. It's the same
with all men. They see me, they want
me. No, they need me. That was the
bargain. I would have the face they
most desired, the face that would
haunt their dreams.

(laughs)

It's been that way for fifty years.
They give me anything and everything,
and I leave them to their fevered
nights and painful tears. They beg,
I laugh. Use your lighter.

In his haste to retrieve the lighter, Daniel seems almost comic.
He finally gets it lit and holds it so he can peer under her
hood.

Clock CHIMES quarter hour.

BELLE

Fifteen minutes.

DANIEL

What?

BELLE

The devil drives a hard bargain. Fifty years of revenge will cost me one hundred years of agony. You see, at midnight, I transform from angel to troll. My face will become hideous, incredibly ugly, a nightmare. You won't be able to look at me.

DANIEL

I...I can't...

BELLE

I thought it fair when I agreed. The devil made it sound so equitable. But now, but now, I don't think I can go through with my end of the bargain.

She grabs his hand and strokes it.

BELLE

Can you imagine scaring children after looking like this?

He shakes his head, unable to speak.

BELLE

One hundred years of women fainting and men spitting on me, of being chased down the street and pelted with rocks and garbage. A century of hiding by day and sneaking by night. Oh god, you'll help me cheat him, won't you?

He nods, mesmerized by her face.

She opens her purse and removes an automatic pistol that she slips into this hand.

BELLE

I can't do it myself. That's against the rules. But you, you can free me. You can end my misery. You can save me. Don't you want me to be free?

He nods stupidly. She turns his wrist to look at his watch.

BELLE

Two minutes. You can be strong for two minutes, can't you?

DANIEL

Y...yes.

She pulls his hand inside her hood to kiss it.

DANIEL

You're so...incredible.

BELLE

Until midnight. After midnight, you'll loathe me. You'll sic your dogs on me and drive me into the wilderness. Do you think I could bear that?

DANIEL

You, we can do something, can't we? It's not certain, is it? I'm a doctor. We can do something.

BELLE

You must help me. Please, I beg you.

Clock CHIMES the hour. She blows out his lighter and moves toward the door.

BELLE

Oh, god, midnight. It's over.

He stares at her, the gun in his hand.

BELLE

Do it. Shoot. Don't let me change.

DANIEL

I, I...

BELLE

I can feel it! I'm changing! Oh god,
my face. Shoot, shoot! For the love
of me, shoot!

He shakes as the bell tolls, weapon wavering in his hand.

BELLE

PLEASE?!! OH GOD, PLEASE?!! FOR ALL
THAT'S HOLY, SHOOT!

Daniel fires.

The bullet slams her into the door.

He fires again and again.

A bullet misses and explodes the glass in the door.

An alarm CLANGS.

He fires into her still form until the gun is empty.

He stares, chest heaving, before he drops the weapon.

Slowly, he inches forward.

Bends down and flicks on the lighter. Slowly he moves the light
over the blood to look at her face hidden in the hood.

He drops the lighter and SCREAMS.

Backing away from her, his SCREAMS seem louder than the clanging
alarm.

FADE OUT