

## **The contract**

*di Roberta Cornwall*

It happened on a nice day. Contrary to one's beliefs, you don't make a pact with the Devil at night, in a winter month.

Contrary to one's beliefs, the Devil, or Satan, or Lucifer, or whatever you want to call him doesn't wear horns, or smells like sulfur. Contrary to one's beliefs, he doesn't want you to kill a young virgin and present him with her still warm heart to show your devotion.

No, this is how it happened to me.

As I am telling you my story, standing in front of a mirror, naked in front of all of you, with my scars visible and still raw, my feet cold on the marble floor of my bedroom, I see myself, and him, and the images of us create a distorted one. I can see what I once was and what I have become.

I am still the same, handsome, with few wrinkles on my face, and all my hair still on my head (even if I now have a few grays). My body still looks in decent shape, probably thanks to the many mornings spent working out to impress the girls.

I am still the same, yet I am so different. My eyes, my eyes are deeper; they can look into your eyes and stare at your soul, and know what you are thinking. And you are now thinking I might have gone mad. You are thinking I am recounting this adventure after reading a Lovecraft story. I had never read Lovecraft before I met him. I can't really say his name, I am bound to secrecy. I can't describe him; all I can say is that he looks like you, and me. All I can say is that he is magnetic, mesmerizing, charming.

I was looking for something to believe in. I was looking for a prophet, and he came to me. I summoned him in my dreams. I asked for someone to trust. He came on a nice spring day, when flowers start blooming, and the birds are in love. He came on a sunny day, with a blue sky and not a cloud in sight. And I knew. He was there for me. He was waiting for me.

I followed him, without saying a word. There was nothing he needed to explain. I had nothing to lose, anyway.

I took him home with me. I asked him what he wanted. He replied he wanted my soul.

It was pure and simple. He wanted my soul. I was ready to give it to him.

The contract wasn't written in blood. He didn't require for me to sign it. The contract explained in a few words that I was his, and that from the moment I said yes, my life was going to be in symbiosis with his life. I didn't know much about him, I didn't know how old he was, and he looked like he might have been my age. I didn't know much about him, but I felt I could trust him with my life. After all, I was going to give him my soul.

I never killed for him, he wasn't interested in that. I never offered him my blood to quench his thirst. He wasn't, after all, a vampire. His heart was beating like any other person; he was warm to the touch. But he was the Devil. He told me: "I am the Devil, and all I want is your soul".

I asked him: "What do I get in return?" He replied: "My soul, and with it, all my power". He never said exactly what his power was, but I soon found out. I could guess people's thoughts, I could tell in advance if someone was going to trick me, or was honest. I could see people looking at me with a sort of reverence, as if I were a prince. I always had a discreet success in my business, and never complained about money, so I didn't notice the difference in that field. Not that I cared, by the way. What I wanted was to know the secrets of people. I wanted to be able to look them in the eyes and capture their most inner thoughts.

I never felt the burden of knowing so much about the human souls, it never bothered me. I could tell that you don't need to sell your life to the Devil to live in hell. Some people, seemingly quiet and nice, were so rotten within that if I told you, you would never believe me. After all, you still don't believe me. I don't care.

Yes, I do not care, because if I was now able to read into people's minds, I lost my ability to have feelings. Joy, fear, sadness, compassion, pain, they all disappeared the moment I read the contract. They disappeared the moment I agreed to give my

soul to the Devil, and I accepted his soul into my heart.

Those scars you see on my chest are my attempt to feel something. I started cutting myself. It was strange to see all the blood gushing out of my wounds, to feel its texture and warmth in my hands, yet I could not feel the blade piercing my skin, sinking in my flesh. I wasn't trying to commit suicide. This was the last thing he wanted from me. He wanted to keep me alive as long as possible to keep himself alive.

I gave up the idea of having a family. Well, I didn't care anymore. I didn't care if a woman loved me or not. I actually felt quite silly thinking of all the things I had once done for a girl. I even cried (I faked it, I must admit).

I don't miss the absence of feelings. I don't have that feeling anymore. I don't miss things, I don't miss people. I don't believe in anything. I was looking for something to believe in, and now I found it. I found the absence of believing. I can't say I am relieved, because I have lost that feeling, too.

What is in my heart now is darkness. He took my soul, and gave me his. He is living my life. He is falling in love with the women I used to fall in love with. He is feeling the pain every time I cut myself, though he doesn't see the blood. I know this drives him crazy. But I don't care. So, when he comes in my nightmares (I am not afraid anymore), and shows me all of his fury, I laugh at his face. It is an empty laugh, but I know it makes him even angrier. I don't enjoy seeing him like that, but I don't dislike it. I play with him, like a cat with a mouse. I could only have a glimpse of a feeling by seeing people angry. I was satisfied. However, I wasn't the Devil, even though I had his soul. I was careless enough to provoke him.

I never thought that he could seek revenge. After all, I gave him a pretty good life. So, if I was paying my consequences by living an emotionless life, it wasn't going to be such a big deal if he felt the sting of the blades on his chest. The Devil is powerful. He can deal with that. Or so I thought.

Today is the day. Today is the day in which I, standing naked in front of the mirror I see reflected all the secrets I learned throughout these past years. I see the woman who, while kissing her husband, plots another way to attempt to kill him. I

see the child who, during a temper tantrum, prays for his parents to die. I see the man who thinks to bring his gun in the office and kill everyone, starting with the woman who once made fun of him. I see the rage, the tears, the desperation, the fears, the hopelessness, and suddenly I feel all of these feelings tearing me apart. I feel those feelings ten times more than what they originally were. I feel the scars burning like never before, while the owner of my soul comes back claiming its reward. This was his ultimate punishment. He took my soul, and it wasn't forever. He wanted me to live my hell here, in front of this mirror. The scars are opening again, I see my flesh, I see the nerves pulsing, and I can't stand the pain anymore. This is what he must have felt. Only I was feeling it more. I was suffering, in one instant, all the pain I inflicted upon myself in all these years.

I can't control my tears, I can't control my voice, I am screaming, as I hear the sound of a siren approaching. My now former brother, my former twin, my former friend is whispering in my ears that the siren is for me...

...This is the one who took a man's soul. This is the one who gave a man his soul back. I am now the one standing in front of the mirror. The man (I never even asked his name, I didn't need to know) has been taken away in a straight jacket. He is going to move to a hospital, they think he is mentally ill. They think he is insane. I know he is not, but I am not going to do anything to save him. I simply don't care.