

The Contract

by

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Scene: A graveyard late at night. A full moon is shining. A well-dressed man in his late thirties is walking back and forth apparently waiting for someone to arrive. A sound is heard. Someone is approaching softly humming "That Old Black Magic" slightly off tune. A man in his fifties walks on stage smiling broadly. He is dressed in a old fashioned suit, patent leather shoes, and a fedora hat worn at a rakish angle and is carrying a pearl handled walking stick which he swings back and forth. He strokes his goatee lovingly.

Younger Man: (apprehensively) Are you He?

Older Man: (good naturedly) Yes, of course, dear boy! Were you expecting someone else?

Younger Man: But I expected someone different. I expected . . .

Older Man: Of course, you did, old chap! That's only natural. Most people have stereotypical ideas of what I should look like that have no relation to reality.

Younger Man: (in an accusing tone.) You're late.

Older Man: (bowing low with sweeping moving of arm) I humbly apologize!

Pressing business below unavoidably detained me.

Younger Man: (disdainfully) You were off tune in the song you were humming when you approached.

Older Man: (annoyed) You state the obvious! I never claimed to be musical. And in any case I was testing your powers of musical discernment. This is all about musical ability is it not? Let us get down to business. What exactly do you want?

Younger Man: All right. Put in its simplest terms I want to give a recital – a glorious recital—where my voice will surpass all of the great baritones of the past. I want everyone present at the recital to acknowledge my greatness!

Older Man: Bravo, old boy! Well said! A worthy ambition!

Younger Man: (excitedly) Can you help me?

Older Man: Of course, of course. But do you understand what I will want in return?

Younger Man: (softly) My soul.

Older Man: Precisely!

Younger Man: To have my moment of glory will be worth it.

Older Man: Of course, it will. Worth every minute of it.

Younger Man: I have come prepared. I had a lawyer draw up a contract specifying the details. My recital will take place in Boston's Symphony Hall and I will sing the great aria "Di Provenza il mar; il suol" from La Traviata.

Older Man: Excellent choice, dear boy! . . . That has always been one of my favorites!

Younger Man: (pulling a paper from his pocket) Here is the contract! . . .
(smiling) Should it be signed in blood?

Older Man: (laughing heartily) No. That will not be necessary, dear chap!

Younger Man: (about to sign) Fine!

Older Man: (carelessly) Don't you think you should read the contract before you sign it?

Younger Man: No, I don't think so. I read it over dozens of times this morning.

Older Man: You're sure? Very well!

(Both sign the contract on the top of a gravestone. The older man puts a copy in his pocket.)

Younger Man: So I guess that concludes our business until the recital is arranged.

Older Man: (coolly) "The recital has been arranged. It will take place almost immediately. Here. In a few seconds.

Younger Man: (alarm in his voice) What? I don't understand!

Older Man: You really should read contracts before you sign them.

Younger Man: (quickly reading the contract and shaking his head in disbelief) It says it will take place at midnight in this grave-yard. But that is not what it said this morning.

Older Man: (smiling) Are you sure? How could it change?

Younger Man: You tricked me!

Older Man: Not at all. The essentials are still intact. When you sing your voice will indeed surpass all of the greats. Everyone present will acknowledge your greatness. Unfortunately, only I, your humble servant, will be present.

Younger Man: But what about the orchestra?

Older Man: "Leave that to me, dear boy! . . . Are you ready? It is nearly midnight.

Younger Man: (with resignation) Yes.

The younger man steps dramatically onto a low gravestone facing the audience and clears his throat. The old man steps onto another gravestone behind and to the left facing the gravestones. He pulls a baton from his pocket and calls an invisible orchestra to attention. He moves his arms with musical precision and the glorious strains of "Di Provenza il mar; il suol" fill the graveyard.

Note: This play need not be wedded to La Traviata or to a male singer. The person who is taken in by the Devil could be a popular singer who wants to sing, for instance, "Send in the Clowns." Moreover, the soul seller could be a female vocalist. In this case, instead of saying "Dear Boy" the Devil could say "Dear Girl," and so on.

