

# *The Knight's Gift to Me*

*By Richard Paul*

A thousand years ago I spied a wandering hero,  
Handsome and bold and unready for woe.

By moonlight on horseback 'twixt Cambridge and Gloucester,  
He saw, on a palfrey, a maid all in red  
And two pursuing louts come to accost her,  
He bade them begone or else stay to be bled.

My Cambion sons all know their duties,  
They turned and they fled and they left the boy to me.

Such a noble young soul for my claws to snatch whole,  
So vital he looked on that night on the knoll.

From his first bow onwards, striving 'gainst human pride,  
Swearing to see me returned safely home;  
So dutiful, until I bade that duty to die,  
It's unwise to be with me in the dark, all alone.

The young knight's desire I cultivated,  
And there, 'neath the moon, his young flesh I sated.

We awoke with the dawn and his lust turned to scorn  
With cherished celibacy so blithely shorn.

But what he took for oaths betrayed, for loss of honour,  
Paled and faded when he beheld my claws.  
Lunacy grew from a rage swift-spawned by horror,  
He screamed not 'Demon', not 'Monster'... only 'whore'.

I laughed as I left him, though I never quite did,  
For parts of my presence within him e're hid.

For the rest of his days, he hunted for me; insane,  
Over some brief years, his body and wits waned.

He seemed to believe he could set his life aright,  
That acts his world said brought the soul defeat  
Could be so completely put evermore to flight,  
His misdeeds slain, if he drove a sword through me.

Dreams of me never left him, he woke with screams,  
My scent, my taste and more lingered as I pleased.

The thing I laid low at the last was no hero,  
I had unleashed his worst, the good was forever stowed.

A soul so consumed by its bitterness and hate  
May easily be bound to the world through it,  
Consigned by its faults to a fittingly wretched fate,  
Almost never do such souls escape from it.

Every year on the date of his death, from out his grave  
He rises, for even now, my death is all he craves.

And yet, as you might know, he cannot hunt me alone,  
Not without flesh to wear over living bones.

He must choose a champion and take their body,  
He entices wayfarers to come to his call,  
Their skin he takes and dons and bears clumsily to me,  
I drive him out, then his gifts I take, I make them fall.

A thousand years have seen a thousand lives come to me.  
To repay one night's cheer, this is the knight's gift to me.

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