

THE DAEMON BLADE

Hear now this tale Of ancient ages
Of heroes stalwart Through Fortune's rages
Warriors stout And dragon slayings
Of princely hoards And lovely damsels
Here was one His seat by Princes
Lord of Men and Man of Honor
One night it was As men were drinking
Honeyed mead And toasts were ringing
This dark one spoke And hushed the throng
With bitter tale And woe in telling
And since that night This tale is told
Where ever Princes Drink and gather
To speak of Power Gold and sorrow
This be what he spake:

My forefathers were mighty men, and Kings were there among them.
My father's lands were richly set, with drink and food full plenty.
One Whitsun Eve, upon the feast, held in the castle yearly,
Op'd to all who chanced our hall -- for mead was there and cheer,
There came a stranger, of curse'd name, which by your leave I'll say not;
Entered our hall and 'neath the door-tree, drew his sword
And called to combat, naming these his terms:

"Hear now ye Lords and Ladies And e'en hear ye, ye commons,
"For he whom to me must yield His soul to me I'll bind,
"But he who vanquishes my blade My Arms and Proof be gained,
"My Quest to him be sworn."

Hearing this, the music stopped, and all sat there dumbfounded.
All save I, just dubb'd knight, who thought ne'er aught of danger;
Hot with insult to our hall, and to our Hearthstone rendered.
For here was Law within the Land that under sacre'd roof,
Scribed with power, blest by God, raised in honored labor,
Shall ne'er be drawn a naked blade, and lives be rent asunder.
Hotter yet with Greed inflamed, for armed was he full well;
Hi blade was kin to those who claime'd line with Arthur's,
Cousin to Excalibur, with Runes of Ruin wreath'd.
It shone as Gold, but nobler yet, and hilted, fiery jewel'd.
His breastplate strong, yet lightly borne, as feathers 'round him claspe'd.
So up I sprang, and loudly called, and cursed him to his face:

"Hear ye, thou carrion bird of lies, Foul deliverer of mouthings!
"Know ye not that here is peace And honor highly valued?
"Have ye no thought on Whitsun Eve Of holiness within thee?
"Thy blade I'll take, and armor too Thy life will wash this insult.
"So shrive thee, shrive thee, living corpse This is thy blood upon thee!"

No more spake he, nor in the hall, did whisper fall so gently.
The ladies white, the lords wan pale, my father not excepted;
Yet he is was who to me brought, a blade and armor virgin,
Unsullied yet by human blood, blest by our priest that morning;
And whilst he it around me girt, with tear in eye to me he spoke:

"My beloved son, heed ye right well, this man who now before thee,

"This dark one who with proof and blade will with thy life play wagers,
"He is the one, the dreade'd one, who in his time did so,
"Who rose as you, but failed the test, and now forever wanders,
"Until he finds one, young and rash, to take his quest and free him.
"God speed my son, for none do know the daemon that drives him onward,
"That neither victory nor death will sate; I fear, I fear, I fear."

Undaunted still, and yet full wroth, swiftly answered I,
Flushing in the face as if the Queen had caught me napping:

"Is honor now so little worth, that it 'fore death grows pale?
"This be not the way of Knights, as it was to me taught.
"My strength is sure, my blade is strong, the cause is just,
"The insult great -- where is there nobler battle?"

No more spake he, wise father that; silence cloaked him, blackness seeing.
So out I strode and proud with power, faced this one who silent stood,
Save now he seemed to weep, not fearing,
racked by the nobler heart of Love.
The tables cleared, the benches back, and we fell to our labor,
Swaggered blades 'till it neared dawn, and bloody sweat did bathe us.
Many a rent in my armor showed, red gore from my shoulder,
His armor took my every stroke, but never dulled its polish.
"Till by rage my point I drove straight for his evil eye;
And wonder came that moment then -- he parried not the blow.
My sword grated within his helm and split his skull asunder;
"Praise God" he cried out through the blood
that smoked and thundered from him.

Upon the stones he lay at last, and trembling I turned him over
To see my blade vanish like the driven mist, his corpse to ashes tumbling.
No blood upon the flagstones stayed, merely his armor lying.
"Rejoice" cried I, and seized his sword -- alas my youthful speed;
Then felt my soul tear from me swift, and come to a land of darkness bare.
No more the hall about me stood, no place e'er seen by waking eye,
A wizard's vale in sooth it seemed, the elements unchained, set free.
Fire flowed across the sky, and water rose from out the land
To battle flame in tortured air, on twisted earth
in raging fury, blazing hell.

Upon my ears there shrieked such sound as never heard
But by the guardians of the gates to Hell and the judges of the Damned.
Five hundred voices clamored there, five hundred souls did wail and moan,
Five hundred lives the blade had drunk, five hundred by cold iron chained,
Five hundred corpses had no rest, 'though laid in sacred ground and blest.
Within that cold and wretche'd land, a naked mother's son, alone,
The sword still gripped within my fist, I seemed to fly across the ground
Towards a tall and darkling hulk, rotted wreck of glory past,
A castle wall, of noble mien, tumbled by the hand of time.
Before its gate stood a figure bare, whose visage chilled with empty glare;
No eyes within that skull were set, no legs did hold that body tall,
Flame tumbled beneath those brows, smoke about that head wave_'d
Chains about his loins were girt, a serpent's body coiled beneath,
A soulless creature, this Satan's spawn, who spoke with me that evil dawn.

Words fell harsh within my Mind, although no sound to mine ears came;
Greetings gave he and laughing still, reached to touch with slime'd hand,

Gripped me as a vise of steel, raised his lips towards my face.
Horror bound and helpless held, I felt his mouth upon mine own
Drawing hot and shrieking forth, the soul of him whom to me fell,
That sought within my virgin heart, vain refuge from his jailor's clutch.
Near faint I fell from out his arms, and could scarce see before my eyes
As the evil thing there swiftly forged -- another link of bloody chain
Made of the cries of a soul's fell pain and of the spark of godly fire,
Added to his loin-girt hoard, forever bound to feed his thirst,
Ease his exile, fuel his ire, against the day of his return.

At last my spirit again me stirred, I felt a rage against him fly,
My soul mine own, not claime'd yet, held by free will to this father's get.
Forgot my sickness at the obscene kiss, heard once more that poor soul's cry.
Five hundred and one would be the end, five hundred
and two would ne'er be bound!
The sword I raised against its master, the blade shrieked protest in the air,
Felt it pass through smokey bone, but still the creature stood unharmed
Unmoved by paltry human touch, and with disdain he bound my will.
Command gave he, enthralled my heart, and filled mine eyes with agony.
"Go," quothe he, "into the Worlde; souls find ye to seek respite;
"Mercy give ye unto none; with death all things to me requite!"
Upraised his arms and banished me; from out his land I flew and fell.

I saw my mother's face before me, felt the satin on me laid,
Heard her cry as mine eyes opened, her gentle heart the Hell-flame feared.
Up I rose, and none could bar me; the priest in pious horror knelt.
Down to the hall once more I came, lifted arms that none could move,
Laid about me feathers silver, bound about a belt of gold,
Sheathed the sword that held my power, strode forth from the hall alone.

Standing in the courtyard bare, an old and ragge'd, weathere'd mare;
Glared at me with baleful eye, but stood rock still as I drew nigh.
Suffered me to mount in peace, wheeled and moved to my command,
And so rode out, unhappy pair, o'er a blaste'd, withere'd land.

Of many years I will not speak, of many lives my sword drank deep,
My Mind cries out, and cowers still, as weirding winds about me fared;
Shuddering at my Master's call, to yield to him those souls in thrall,
To feel each time his ancient strength, unwilling lover, raped anew,
Till I, at last, in numbness -- silent grew.

One day, or night, I know not which; I saw as well by either light;
All was grey, the colors fled, the stench of death within my head;
I chanced beside a field of hay, beside a hill of grapes for wine.
I saw a thing, all made of wood, near tumbled down and wreathed with vines.
A roof that could shelter, perhaps a mouse, but a color there,
And -- sooth -- a light, as these dimmed eyes had not been graced
In all their life to see!

Heaviness fastened all my limbs, a terror filled my heart from far,
An eldritch scream within my ears rang from that sword of netherworlde.
"Strike, strike!" its master called to me, "Destroy that which beckons unto thee,"
"My geas now your will shall bend, and She who lives I'll yet condemn!"

The sword crept out its oile'd sheath, a putrid ravisher of Life,
Unwilling though the hand that held to strike such beauty now unveiled.

A Lady pale in that shrine was set, Her feet upon a crescent moon.
A vagrant rooster puffed with pride, guardian stood, in defiance mailed.
And, crying in that lonely place, a child in fear of flaming steel,
Flowers clasped within his hand, a prayer unuttered, his lips sealed.
I watched as helpless as that babe, while blackened blade dipped to its task
To be met halfway by a Rooster's claw, blooded by a Rooster's comb;
Its soul filled that maw of hell, its soul witches winds did pull,
Its soul, and mine, together stood, and faced our captor's smoking skull.

Darkness in that land held sway, colors there were long forsworn,
Renewed I saw the Daemon's face, his Name my heart knew without cause,
Foreign now again I was, a slave no more, but virgin bright,
My strength unsullied, my grace renewed, reborn upon that Easter light.
A Champion Beast beside me reared, rampant in the face of doom,
A Drathon tall of fearsome mien, of iron strength and fire sheen;
To challenge battle he had come; to Satan's son we brought the sun,
Brilliant in that castle dread, burning walls dripped bloody red.
A thousand souls silent stood, to watch as captive as was I
As the light of Stars and the light of Hell
Strove for mastery of the light of God.

Lightning blasted, hills writhed and coiled,
Their master calling forth his toil,
Water fell and fire rose to crush the Faerie charm and power.
Serpent and Drathon, wounded, shrieking, Darkness through the land came leaking,
My own spirit came to me speaking; the strength of Man and God was meeting;
Each man created, free and choosing; Hell itself can only daunt
Those whose heart is already losing to hungry ghosts doomed to haunt.
Once more the sword that held my life, cried in pain and sweet release,
Into its master at the height of strife, I plunged the blade
The battle ceased –

Silence fell, and all drew back, to wait what one man's power sowed;
The links of chain, by fire hacked, fell from the serpent's body -- bowed.
The sky cracked open, the mountains moved, the sea fell tumbling into the deep.
The sun shone free upon a land that now man's heart was free to keep.
Liberated souls like birds flew on, at last to Heaven to find their rest.
The daemon's blade my hands held up; a blackened hilt was at my breast.

So I returned to the land of Men, found my home long laid to waste,
Mine eyes which saw both Heaven and Hell, were shunned by all
Who in horror placed their hands to form a charm 'gainst ill,
And turned me back from hearth and hall;
And thus I wander, deathless still,
'Till God in mercy, me, at last, shall call.

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