

A GIFT OF LOVE:

How long I searched for you I do not know. I heard your voice in the storm tossed winds and the breakers crashing upon wild rugged coastlines; the cool sunset valleys and vast open plains, or the fragrant mountain forests where no man's questing foot had yet trod. It seemed that you were always there to shelter me at night when I lay listening to the thunder and rain. In my restless sleep you drifted wraith-like, riding wild and free upon a white pony, whose spirit had never been tamed. In times of sickness and doubt, your hand touched my sweated brow as you murmured words of comfort.

And yet the more I tried to reach for you the more you eluded my outstretched arms and thirsting heart. I despaired in the end of ever finding you. Every time I reached out for you, it was as if you had never been. It was only when I had come to the end of myself that I turned around and there you were. So small and fragile in the moonlight that at first I was afraid you would take fright and run the other way, and so to put your mind at ease, I sat there and watched you for a while.

You seemed so familiar to me. Almost as if I had known you for years and yet you were a stranger to me, someone I had never met. I memorised every part of you and committed to memory all that I was witnessing, for I was so sure that this was the closest we would ever come.

I looked deep into your eyes as you told me your story, a tale of woe and tragedy, missed opportunities and wasted youth. My heart grew large within me and I desired only to put my arms around you and shelter you from a world that had done you wrong. What vile acts had been committed against your person and why would people do such things?

Every fibre of my being ached for you and I wanted to act out dire acts of vengeance against the perpetrators of such violence. But you stayed my hand from the executioner's blade. You told me revenge was for those who had never experienced forgiveness and my blood boiled when I heard those words. All my life I had searched for you, totally unaware of your suffering and torment, only to be told that I must lay aside the sword of anger. It was through gritted teeth that I decided to obey your request.

You showed me a world where I wouldn't have to run from the shadow of death, where I would always be free from shame, and faith would sustain me always. Such ideas were foreign to my nature and I questioned you as to where this fantastic world was. It was with a smile and a wave that you invited me into yourself. With halting steps and a trembling heart, I followed you inside. Within the castle of your heart, I finally found the source of all my being. My hopes and dreams were all there under your sheltering wings. Such love I had never known ebbed from your innermost being and with wild abandon I followed you to the water's edge; where you invited me to bathe in love's cleansing stream.

You unveiled yourself to me at that point in time and I saw those who had persecuted and despised you. Gently, yet firmly, you asked me to look at them through your eyes and see their distress and pain and how twisted and crippled inside they were. Striking out at all who came near them, they were like animals caught in a cage. The greatest tragedy about their distress, was that their enclosures had been fashioned by their own hands, and pain formed their chains. Inspired by illusion and nurtured by pride, they struck out at people such as you who couldn't fight back and made you weep. But I could see that your pain had made you strong, so much stronger than

them. I saw after a while what they became and I understood why you had asked me to stay by your side. To have done the same things as them, would only have made me as they were.

These events, although tragic and hard, have been an important part of your life. They have made you what you are today. Your strength of character has come from those hard times, and it gave me courage to face the difficult days ahead when my faith in myself will be put to the test.

The image in the mirror is always the hardest to love.

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