

Flight of The Damned

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By J B Angell

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I still remember that night as I lay in my bed. The recent evenings had been humid and warm, so I kept the window of my bedroom open. I wonder now if things would have been different had I decided, instead, to shut the outside world away. The sounds of the night drifted in on the cool, gentle breeze, slowly lulling me to sleep. I could feel the heavy, relaxed euphoria that one experiences as the waking world drifts away and I surrendered myself to it. The sounds from outside became increasingly distant, fading to nothing.

That is when it happened, when I heard that damnable noise that would signal my transition. It was like the terrible neighing of a suddenly startled horse; yet carried with it a malice that goes beyond description.

My mind became suddenly sharpened at this new, alien noise. Without knowing exactly how and when I got there, I found myself at my window, looking down onto the street below my modest apartment. The streetlights were flickering rhythmically. I did not notice at first, but I came to realize there was something

Flight of The Damned

almost musical about their motions. Indeed, I fancied that I could hear the distant sound of some unnamed and unheard-of tune. It was then that I noticed a figure walking on the opposite side of the road. They were dressed in brown tattered clothes and walked with a slow, dragging gait. I watched until they were stood directly opposite my window whereupon they stopped. With deliberate slowness, the figure turned its head towards me. Their head was covered by a shabby and ragged cloth hood. I was unable to see their features; yet I could feel their eyes burning into me.

I stood transfixed, as this bedraggled character raised an arm and beckoned me to come down. I had no desire to get close to this being, for I was now certain that nothing human would be found underneath those torn and tattered robes. Yet, just as with my arrival at the window, I found myself down on the street with no idea how or when I left my room. We stood for a while, staring across the deserted street, an understanding forming between us without a single word being uttered. Our silent accord was suddenly interrupted by that same horrific sound which had disturbed me from my slumber. That call of some terrible steed sent from the very depths of hell. My newfound companion and I both looked in the direction of the noise.

Flight of The Damned

Without warning they began moving down the street beckoning me to follow. I hesitated for a moment, a part of me refusing to believe what my instincts were screaming. That terrible braying was getting louder. No, not louder; closer! My robed friend hastened me to follow with more urgency and I finally relented, my curiosity about the source of the noise being outweighed by a primal need for survival.

We made our way along the deserted street, the lights now pulsing with a rhythm that matched the ever-increasing beat of my own heart. I felt myself starting to falter. My companion sensed this also and reached out, grabbing hold of my arm, pulling me along with them. Another of those damnable cries echoed around us, much closer this time. I wanted to turn, to look at our pursuer. Just as I thought I could bare it no longer I was pulled into an alleyway. Panting, we crouched low and pressed ourselves against the damp brick wall of some ancient building. I dared not move, fear getting the better of my curiosity. My companion was still holding onto my arm and I could feel them starting to tense. A new sound was closing in on us. I strained to hear what soon became obvious to me as the clip clop of horseshoes. We were suddenly engulfed by an odour of the vilest intensity. I gagged as the acrid smell of rotten flesh and

Flight of The Damned

sulphurous gas assailed my nostrils. I pulled the top of my night shirt up to cover my mouth and nose in a vain attempt to fight off the foul stench. The footfalls of that damned creature were now upon us. I heard them slow as they neared the entrance to the alleyway which sheltered us until finally, and to my horror, they stopped.

I was frozen, not daring to so much as breath. The feeling of utter, hopeless terror was overwhelming. I think it was then that a fleeting madness came over me. An undeniable urge that if I were to die, I would look my killer in the eye. With deliberate slowness I turned to look back the way we had come. I wish to all heaven that I had not. Standing before the entrance of the alleyway stood the terrible, decomposing form of a great black stallion. Chunks of flesh had been torn away exposing gnarled bone beneath and a foul, greenish yellow ichor dripped from the creatures' mouth, hissing as it hit the pavement below. The disgust I had at the sight of this creature was almost unbearable and I thought I would never lay my eyes again upon anything as foul. That is until my eyes wandered upwards, and I caught sight of the rider.

The black hood only partially covered that terrible face, devoid of the flesh of anything living. It was the face upon which all men must

Flight of The Damned

gaze, and which men fear the most; The face of death itself. This could not be my time, not yet I was not ready. I wanted to scream, to get up on my feet and run as far away as I could. The sum of my horror emerged as nothing more than a muffled whimper. My companion placed a gloved hand over my mouth to silence any further outbursts that might give away our presence. I could feel them trembling and found a strange comfort in the sensation. For a while, the reaper and his abomination stood in the opening to the alleyway. Neither moved, neither made a sound. They just stood there, waiting, and watching. The unbearable silence was suddenly broken by the distant clatter of something metallic. With deliberate slowness our pursuer backed away from the alley, the mounts hooves clattering and hissing on the pavement beneath. They paused and looked back down in our direction with that dead eyed stare that burrowed to my very marrow. The moment lasted an eternity before, finally, the rider and its demonic steed moved away from us.

Not until the clip clop of the horse's hooves had almost vanished, I allow my body to sink. My mind was in turmoil at what I had just witnessed, the full horror not yet having been processed. I felt my companion slump against me as they too

Flight of The Damned

succumb to the relief of our escape. We sat there for several moments; my mind spinning from what I had just witnessed.

“This has to be a dream,” I quietly panted “but I have never felt one so real.”

My new friend turned to me. I felt as if they were about to speak when. Suddenly, they heard something in the distance. They stood and stared back for a moment towards the entrance of the alley. Then, without warning, they reached down and hauled me to my feet. My companion gestured for me to be silent as we pressed ourselves against the brick wall and moved along towards what I was sure was a dead end. Although I had not heard what my companion had, my instincts were urging me to follow. As we neared the end of the alley and the solid wall that I had known was there, I noticed a change in the strange being whom I was so blindly following. Gone were the slow dragging gait and slumping posture. They now moved with a greater ease; a cat like fluidity was becoming more apparent with each step. When we finally came to a halt, they looked again back on the path we had just come along. I strained to try and hear what they could, but still I was unable to discern anything from the normal night-time sounds. My friend carefully stepped

into the centre of the alley, never taking their eyes from the direction we had just come. I followed their gaze and found myself staring as intently as they were. So much so that I almost did not notice the strange chant that was being uttered by my fellow traveller. It was not the chant itself that caught my attention but the unexpected feminine quality to the voice that made it.

They were facing the wall now, their focus fully on the strange chant and the obstacle that stood in our way. It was then that I heard a faint and now horribly familiar sound. It was that same clip clop we had heard before; only this time it had a more hurried pace. The beast and its foul rider were coming back. Fear shot through me like a bolt of lightning. The need to escape was overwhelming. I turned to my companion, ready to grab them and drag them away with me when I halted in my tracks. The bricks, the solid bricks, in the wall ahead of us were starting to...melt and swirl before my very eyes. I let out a little chuckle at the absurdity of what I was seeing. The very fabric of matter was being changed in front of my eyes; something I knew to be impossible.

“How...” I managed to stutter out. I turned to look at my friend and stopped in amazement. A glow was emanating from them. An ethereal,

purple fire danced around their outline. It rippled in unison with the chanting as if the two were joined. The swirling bricks were starting take a new form. At first it was just a random scatter of angles and joints. Then a more solid and familiar shape began to appear. Eventually the swirling chaos solidified into...a door. A simple, solid, four panelled oak door now stood where before there had been only brick. I stood transfixed, unaware of what had entered the alleyway behind us. It was not until that terrible neighing echoed around us that we realized our pursuer had returned.

We both turned to see the black beast charging towards us, flames spewed from its eyes. The damned Reaper on its back let out a cry that froze me to the spot. Every fear I had ever had, every regret, every missed opportunity suddenly filled my body. This was the power of the Reaper; the reason you could never escape death. The seconds seemed to drag into minutes as I finally succumbed to what would be my inevitable fate. I watched, powerless as that black demon drew his scythe and raised it above his head. The world around me fell silent

“Will it hurt?” I muttered aloud, my voice suddenly sounding like that of a child's.

Flight of The Damned

Those would not have been the final words that I would have chosen under different circumstances. I closed my eyes and waited for the final blow. It never came.

A hand grabbed my arm and pulled me back just as the Reaper swung at me. I felt the rush of air as the creatures' weapon whooshed passed, mere inches from my head. I opened my eyes, disbelief keeping me momentarily stunned. The cry of the Reapers monstrous steed snapped me back to what was happening. The shock of missing its quarry had taken the Reaper by surprise as well. We had scant moments and my companion took advantage of them. Still holding my arm, they dragged me towards the now open door in the wall. It had already begun to shrink in size and looked in danger of collapsing at any moment. Our attacker was already upon us as we reached our target. I turned and came face to face with the creature. The stench of an eternity of corruption filled my nostrils as it once again raised its shining blade, ready to cast the final blow.

The creature howled with all the fury of the pit, its eyeless sockets blazing with an unholy flame. I felt a final, mighty tug on my person just as the scythe came crashing down upon me. A dazzling flash of light erupted around me...and in

Flight of The Damned

that instant, my world and everything I had ever known, vanished.