



*"Born Of The Night" Painting by Joseph Vargo*

Madness incarnate giggles outside my chamber door.  
Madness has a form. Twisted and deranged with a harlequin smile.  
I find my pen trembling as I write this. I know not why I bother to put these words to paper. For the benefit of what soul do I perform this act?  
... Ah ...  
The tapping again.  
And the giggling. Maniacal, terrifying giggling ...  
Yes ... That is why I write this. To stave off my own insanity.  
There is a tapestry in this place which has haunted me since the night I discovered it. And moments ago, I discovered a tome in the library which must describe the origin of the tapestry. No other explanation can account for the strange tale the tome told.

*For countless ages, Night longed for the Moon. All loved passion as a fever. The heat of spinning dreams and illusions. Wander then from the jester's grin and wondered wherein the insane do slumber.*

*Night gazed to the Moon, smitten of her seduction. In the heaven's she laid, her silver glow the canopy of a succubus bed.*

*Devils and the dead and wraiths of the darkest dread surrounded him. The Night turned about, longing for the embrace of her icy hands. A single touch. The lightest whisper of her flesh upon his. So shadowed is her skin. As if her body itself were etched from the very*

*sound of forbidden lusts and carnal deviance. Sculpted of starlight and ivory, her perfection paralyzes him. Frosted wings were a crescent of moonglow across the darkness and no creature of shades could ignore her moans of passion.*

*Her enchantment weakened him. Falling to his knees, he would question his own power. As though the Night itself were robbed of his own identity by her ability to consume all which his mind was able to fathom. So completely consumed by her was he, that he began to doubt all he was. Every authority, every strength he possessed, seemed to fade when he was in her presence.*

*Was he Night and darkness?...*

*Or was she?*

*No. Perhaps he was not Night at all. Perhaps he possessed no dark magics. Perhaps he was as weak as any mortal man, seduced by demoness beguile. And if so, what if she was everything? Moon. Shadow. And Night itself as well. . .*

*And if he were mortal and she were indeed Night, then the Night summons like an unquenched love, beckoning with the promise of dark desire.*

*Looking upon her, he felt rage and pain and passion with depth he could not fully comprehend. To be denied her is anguish.*

*Night could bear it no longer.*

*For aeons he was confined to shadows and caves while the light of Day and Sun held the Moon.*

*No more.*

*Through sheer will alone, he had to fly to her. Cursing or vowing to worship any god or devil. By the fate and will of any evil or light, it did not matter.*

*And so, from the pure conviction of his longing, the Night took to dark wings and soared to her. Night rose from the caverns and darkened forests and drove the Day from the sky for every hour that the Moon shone there.*

*No words could be spoken.*

*No words were required.*

*None but she could seduce the Night. None but he could charm her. And of none but each other would either ever dream.*

*The satin of their bed, soft as owlfeathers and the cloudglows of midnight. Together they touched tenderness. Softly. Gently. Sinister and sincere were their seductions. Lovemaking which bore them the darkest of beautiful and bad things.*

*So the dark ones watch over them. Protecting the lovers in the shadowed skies across the four corners of the earth. Serpentine medusas, cursed of vain beauty and love. Coil-horned devils watch with hollow, black eyes. Warrior legions of the dead stand guard in centurion helms. Ferocious demons with lion-fanged roars, rip through the darkness.*

*All these shadows stood guard in the dark as Moon and Night become one. The fire of their passions*

*bringing a hush to the evening light. Bad things in the gloom danced to the sounds of their silent desires. Shadows as children of the Moon. Children fathered and born of the Night.*

Reading those words triggered an odd memory. A memory of a dream.

Strange dreams have come to me since my first night. Dreams which lay think over my waking mind. Visages cover my days in a haze of vague memories and images which I am not entirely certain are dreams at all.

A night or two past, I dream that I am in the ballroom. There is a masquerade ball happening at early dusk. Hundreds of guests are in attendance and the revelries stretch down into the gardens outdoors. In the dream, I know that I live in the village of Vasaria. I have a wife there and a child, but for some reason, they are not at the ball.

The Dark Tower looks so different in this dream.

There is a warmth to it. An atmosphere of comfort and of loveliness.

Except for one door . . .

Back in the furthest rooms, I find a door that I dare not to open. A servant in a strange mask motions me away and ushers me back to the ball.

I know something evil is behind that door. Something terrible.

And simply having been near it seems to permeate my clothing with a dread which brings a dark, ominous and shadowy aura to the party which was so light and joyous.

One of the guests is a beautiful young woman. She is costumed in an elegant, flowing dress with huge, owlfeather wings folded across her back. Two others are with her, dressed in similar clothes.

The first one introduces herself to me. I do not recall their names. They sounded very similar. Sanshi, Sevin and . . . no . . . that is not right.

Something very different?

"Ranna," perhaps?

. . . No. That name is wrong too. . .

I do not remember.

But, the first one asks me to dance with her. For a moment, I am about to decline. She is so beautiful and I feel my simple garments would reflect poorly upon her and show that I am below her class. Then I look down and see I am dressed in my armor, but it is far more beautiful and intricate than any suit I have truly owned.

We dance.

My angelic-partner keeps addressing me as "Brom of the Knights," although I do not recall introducing myself to her.

Each time she says my name, the others whisper something I can not understand.

Everything stops.

Without warning, I find myself before the door again. Alone.

Every instinct tells me not to open it. Yet every impulse demands that I do.

Slowly, I lift the latch.

Parts of the dream vary each time I have it. But not this part. . . And for some reason. . .

For some reason, I often wonder if it is a dream.

I can never remember.

When I look back upon it, have I seen this door for real? I know exactly what the handle feels like. The chill of the metal in my palm. The textures and hues of the wood and the exact mark of knots and veins. The weight of it, slipping open on blackened iron hinges.

So real.

. . . And yet not.

And so I can not say for certain if I have merely dreamed of this door or if it is a thing which I have truly seen.

With a begrudging creak, it edges open. And what lies within is not something I expected at all.

Behind it leads a dank, stone stairwell into. . . nothing.

A dozen and one steps slink down into the gloom and stop at a stone wall.

. . . A wall with something scratching on the other side.

That sound alone terrifies me more than any ghoul I could have envisioned. Because, somehow, the claws resonate as if scratching within my skull instead of behind the wall.

Suddenly, I am back in the ballroom again.

But everything has changed. There are fewer guests. Night has fallen. The Tower itself is in ruins. Dust and filth cover everything and yet the oddly-masked souls continue to dance to silence.

I have changed as well. My knightly garb has gone and I am left standing unclothed. Spotting my hazy reflection in a mirror, I see horns atop my head and black, feathered wings sprouted from my back.

For some reason, this frightens me more now to write down than it does when I see the vision in my dream.

The angel who danced with me is still there. But she looks different too.

Her garments are less detailed and more sheer. A misty cloak drapes light as fog over her shoulders. Barely covered at all, her dress is translucent as spider-strings, loosely fitting over

voluptuous breasts and long, ivory legs. The wings upon her back are now thinner and more sleek. Her entire body is more defined. Seductive. Dark.

Her two friends have been replaced by a group of four more hideously costumed things. Each of the four possesses demonic wings and unsettling masks. Masks which seem to change and blend from plaster into their true faces and then back again.

They do not look like costumes.

An impossibly muscular, lion-like demon with leathery wings moves aside as the beautiful woman approaches me.

Two of the other creatures join hands; a horned, bearded devil with falcon wings and a bat-winged medusa. They walk to the center of the ballroom and begin their eerie, musicless dance.

The fourth fallen angel, a skeletal warrior with ratty, pigeon wings, seems to grin at me as the beautiful woman leads me to dance.

For a moment, I hesitate. I fear touching her. So perfect and flawless is her beauty that it is almost grotesque. Like a porcelain statue come to life. And yet I go with her, despite my apprehension. For she does own all the charms of night. The night summons like an unquenched love, beckoning with the promise of dark desire.

As we dance, her cloak twirls and arcs through the air, framing her in a crescent of glowing white like the moon. With every step, I feel I am floating above her - held aloft by the seduction of her slightest touch.

Every movement is dreamy and light. Like the fading sensation one feels as when moments from awakening. Things are so dark and unclear that I am unable to focus on any of my senses. Every color, every sound, every touch feels dulled somehow. Blurred and muted.

She too calls my name.

"Born of the Knights. . ."

Only this time, I hear the whispers of the evil entourage of beings. Words sighing so lightly, they could be the sound of my own breath - "Born of the night. . . Born of the night. . . Born of the night. . ."

\* \* \*

The momentum of my fall is stopped by my face slamming into the wall. The stone beneath my hands is rough and solid. Cold. Damp. Completely real. I can smell the mildew and feel the sandy grit on my cheek.

I turn around; my breath steaming on the chill air in the shrinking shaft of light. I find myself

at the bottom of a flight of thirteen steps. . . as the beautifully seductive demoness closes the door above me.

That is when I awaken.

Each time I do, my first thoughts are shameful; I imagine the woman I loved in Vasaria discovering my affair with the demoness. . . and I laugh.

. . . But is she the woman in a dream or one I have known for real?

Yes. I do think it was more than a dream.

I loved a woman in Vasaria too. A woman of the sweetest tenderness and compassion. A beautiful woman.

Oh, no. . .

No.

. . . Usually I can recall her name when I am awake. . . And now, I can not remember!

Am I asleep again?!

Has madness taken me this far, that I no longer know what is dream and what is not?

Day. Night. Darkness. Shadow. The hours of dusk and black pitch all blend together in this tomb.

There have been times when I know sunlight has touched this land. Days of glorious beauty like those I had seen when I was a child . . . But now such memories seem like a cruel torture. Visions of an imaginary time in a promised land which never truly existed at all. Now, when sunlight touches Vasaria, I move within the deepest confines of this dread place; continually masked in shadow and gloom.

Light, it seems, is a dream for me born of dismay. And it seems that I was born to be of the night.

Noctem aternus . . . indeed.

So it was written.

So this place has become for me.

Has madness truly come to take me? And if I already be mad, how would I be able to know it?

And . . . why . . . won't . . . the . . . giggling . . . STOP!?

But wait. . .

It has stopped.

And now instead. . . What is this? . . .

Behind my bedchamber wall, I hear scraping. . . Clawing which resonates as if scratching within my skull, instead of behind the stones. . .