

FLYER

She does not understand flying. She does not know that there is method in hunting or a word for eating. Yet for her, there is nothing more to life. She would not have it otherwise.

To others of her kind, she is an anomaly. They make their homes and stay in them, defend them from outsiders. But urges within her compel her to wander.

Breeze moves over her. She knows she must push it underneath her. What she does not know, rising with the contour of the land, is what it is to know the breeze. She breathes the clouds. They cool her throat, bringing pleasure that she will never contemplate.

She crests a mountain, leaving no marks in its snow-mantle. The sun is close enough to blind any other living being. But her eyes adjust, wide open. Below her is a herd of six-legged mountain beasts, full of succulent life. Yet she ascends, accelerates, spears and sears the sky. She draws in her limbs, wraps her neck around her belly. Her wings envelop her body. Magic ignites in her blood.

Others of her kind would select a destination, manipulate the winds that are not winds. But she lets them carry her as though she were a butterfly and they were springtime zephyrs.

Any other creature would have plummeted to death. She merely leaves the world.

She comes upon another, passing less than a moment in the non-place between. The winds that are not winds deposit her in a warm night, near to an ocean.

But for the whisper of the waves, all is quiet. Nothing moves onshore. She circles, hungry. Only with the sun do edibles emerge from their dens.

They are slow. They use only two legs and they do not run as a herd. They scatter. They trip over one another. Their screeching is cacophonous and their skins promise indigestion, being somehow dead. Yet they themselves are living, even after she stuns them with Magic and swallows them.

She spends the day in feast, learning that the edibles' only defenses are their dens. Certain dens scurry on peculiar, rolling feet. They emit sour gases in clumsy escape-attempts. But they are delicate, like seashells. She has only to break them and extract the morsels within.

And they are plentiful. Their little dens litter every corner of the land. Grass squeezes into cramped spaces between the dens and rivers of black stone. Seeking living trees on which to suck and swallow whole, to annul the taste of dead, cottony skin, she finds three flaccid saplings growing in the stone.

She does not understand this world. She feels the magnetic draw of curiosity. She flies inland to explore, following a tributary of the black river, which is crowded with dens scurrying back and forth in shiny colors. The dens scamper to larger dens, some as large as hills and others like mountains eroded to the shapes of giant tree trunks. She knows they are dens by the smell of life within, even as the smaller dens' dead fumes threaten to smother the living fragrances. The creatures wail when her shadow envelops them in night.

If she only knew that there are such things as words and understood them. She might have learned that to bring fear upon a certain species is to cast oneself into peril.

"Luftwaffe!"

"The Germans! The Cape Cod flyer!"

"They're here!"

Among the morsels, she could distinguish individuals if she so chose. She differentiates between the fat and the sickly, the spiritually wilted and the vivacious. Yet she rises too quickly to note the man in gray sweeping a massive stoop. He utters not a sound as she passes over. His eyes run the length of her from snout to tail. His broom ceases to move but does not fall. There is no edible like him in all the world.

She climbs for a breath of cleaner air. In the clouds, they are waiting.

She hears their lifeless buzzing when she clears the tallest den. It startles her. It is at her back.

There are four and they match her in size. They fly in formation like migrating birds. They bear down on her with claws dangling at the tips of their wings. The claws are spinning fast; it is they which make the buzzing. She screeches to warn the beasts away, but they keep coming. She warns them again and still they come. Never has she fled a challenge, so she turns. She sees not their maws but horrible rotating fangs.

Instinct drives her to alarm, confusion to anger. They are dead and yet they fly - she beats her wings at them and roars. They cluck at her, they taunt her; and though she bellows they advance and she must turn and flee; she must, or be dismembered by their whirling talons. She launches into the clouds.

The predators keep pace with her. One drops below a cloud, surfaces not far from the tip of her snout. She snarls and starts to turn but another beast is at her rear, another alongside each of her wings. They cluck.

"Unidentified aircraft, are you out of your mind? I say again: this is the United States Air Force, and we have you surrounded! Repeat: we have you surrounded! We will escort you the hell out of our airspace whether you like it or not! Now, you will follow me to the nearest airbase or my flyers will shoot you down. Once again, the coordinates..."

Their clucking enrages her, leaving her no choice. Fury feeds the flame that sheathes her heart. She breathes the clouds, her rage ignites them; and within her breast, air turns to fire - flame out of her maw. She sets the clucking beast aflame, then the one at her

snout. With her tail she slams the creature at her right, while at her left its companion chirrups, "Fire!" And when the last of them regroups, she sets its shining hide to burning. They plummet to death, all four. With a roar, she dares them to return.

Nothing answers but the silent sky. She dives, and for a few short miles she skims the undersurface of the clouds, following the scent of water. She comes upon a sluggish stream with dens on either side. A mouthful of the pungent water clears her throat. Then up. The smell of scalded flesh leads her back to the site of the airborne ambush.

Those predators fought like territorial pack-hunters. Now that she has vanquished them, whatever they defended as their own belongs to her. But the sky is empty except for the beasts' dead smoke. She descends to make a closer survey of the dens. Periodically she rises for a peek above the clouds, bent on preempting further assaults. Her senses are alert, her temper hot, her talons at the ready.

Why does she not leave this hostile rancid world replete with dead things? Hers is a vengeful species. But she also has a keen, agile sense of value, which draws her to the shiny as well as the edible. Much of what is dead in this world shines: the rolling dens, the predators, and the square orifices in the walls of larger dwellings. And among the living, all are edible. Perhaps she has found her paradise.

Though she does not know glass, she investigates it when the sun incites it to glimmer. Sometimes there is a face behind it: the

terrified visage of a morsel who, seeing her great, curious eye, squeals and scurries into hiding. Sometimes there are sounds.

"The mysterious aircraft may be new technology developed by the German..."

"...well known that Hitler has a team of first-rate scientists..."

"...rampage that destroyed four US military planes before vanishing..."

"...Massachusetts residents are urged to remain indoors."

She understands none of this. She lingers above a vast and silent den with a sprawling red roof and parades of shiny panels along the cliff-like walls. She draws near to scrutinize how sun and stone conspire in sparkle. And in a panel in a high corner: a face.

This one does not withdraw. A sniff tells her that the morsel is aged and male. He wears a dead gray outer skin. His broom is with him, idle and near as tall as he.

She flies to the den's far corner and around. A square of green grass laps against the den's front steps. The steps lead to heavy doors inscribed above with names (Plato, Rembrandt...) and "Dedicated To The Advancement Of Learning". These markings have no meaning to her, but they are life itself to the man who, with his broom, watches for her from a third-story window: "Public Library Of The City of Boston". She flies elsewhere to explore.

The smell at dusk is like nothing she has ever smelled before. It is the wild fragrance of silver-pinkish smoke. Wafting by her nostrils to her eyes, it takes on shapes: a wispy bird, a giant fish

with gaseous fins. This smoke is alive in ways that are more and less than organic. It lives as thoughts live. Thoughts are its blood. But its heart, and the rhythm with which thoughts breathe through it, exist differently.

At the heart of the smoke, she smells Magic. She would never name it, but she senses its difference from everything else that lives. Since she cannot conceptualize, she does not note its distant relationship to thought. But its familiar scent excites her. Curiosity and the smoke's faint sparkle and the thoughts within the smoke - "Come" - compel her to seek its source.

Midair, near the sea, she turns and flies in the direction whence she came, no longer leisurely but purposeful.

The smoke spirals before her like the tail of feline prey. It leads her back into the thick of the forest of dens. She nears the grassy square shadowed by the name of Plato. There she descends. The smoke slips through a crack in the library's front door beneath the stone gaze of Minerva. She hovers, evaluates the entrances.

Something grabs her. Something without claws, teeth, or limbs with which to grab, seizes her where her wings meet her shoulders. She shrieks in alarm. Another thing snatches her tail: invisible like the thing that tries to stop her wings. Such creatures are always invisible unless they choose otherwise. They are not of any realm of morsels and hunters, nor are they ghosts, although some call them Daimons. Neither dead nor living, they are palpable to her only as forces, sensible only in their natural unnaturalness. They smell of Magic; they wield it on behalf of another. And their strength is

enormous. The more she resists, the greater their number. She writhes in the air, she twists, she roars, confused because she cannot see her enemies - she panics. She bellows at the sky, enflames the clouds. The formless creatures pin her wings, bend back her claws, seize her around the throat. They rend her out of the sky, not downward but away.

For an instant, she is nowhere: her captors live not in a place but between states of existence. In their non-realm she smells nothing. She cannot feel her own body. Nothing has ever dared to rob her in this way. None has ever tried to confine her. Never in her life has she known fear until this moment.

And never have the Daimons tangled with a creature of her size, structure, and power. Never has a soul resisted them so mightily. When they bring her back to the material dimension, set her down before the one who sent them, they too are shaken.

She can feel again. She can smell and see. She is on her back on something hard and cold. And it is dark despite the fact that when the things took her, twilight persisted. The unseen hunters keep her on the ground by swarming her and shrieking. She smells a place from which the open air is barred, as are the sun, the rain, the freedom of the clouds. They have brought her to a dead cavern.

"For the love of God." Another voice. A living voice.

And yet another. "Charles, it is a sign. Bring the smoke, man! Daimons, hold your positions!"

"Told you this was bloody stupid. Now what?"

"Get her out of harm's way. Bring the smoke, so my thoughts may speak to her. Charles, she understands value. Therefore she understands respect."

"You read that somewhere, I suppose."

"That I did. But I also tested the hypothesis when last I met one of her kind. I did not find it wanting."

"Nor was your doublet inappropriate at the time."

To her all this is nothing but the noise of prey. The absence of fear in one of the chirruping voices and her helplessness before it bring rage and fire to her throat.

But then: the fragrance of Magic. Hesitant pinkish-silver tendrils creep up to her rolling eyes. With the smoke come the thoughts.

Thoughts of safety, calm, the urgent, vital need for quiet. They are in mortal danger, she and the invisibles and the impudent morsels.

There is not a beast that crawls, paddles, or flies without a sense of danger. She listens. The smoke and the clear, coherent thoughts of the one who commands the Daimons bring her to understand.

They are hiding, all of them, from a threat too great to name. If she is quiet, they will remain undiscovered. And there is food, just for her.

It is a lot to communicate to a creature unburdened by concepts. It is a lot to say without speaking, while one's voice makes soothing and respectful sounds. But such is the nature of the smoke that renders words redundant. Such is the nature of the man who bargains with Daimons, often without speaking and always to his own advantage.

She will never learn his name, being too grand and inexplicable for names. Nonetheless he says, "They call me George. Daimons, begone!" And with the smoke, his thoughts mollify her rage into curiosity.

The unseen ones retreat, dazed and indignant, to their purgatory. Relieved of their weight and clawing, she stands upright. She tests her wings, her neck, her tail. The edible that reasoned away her instinctive wrath watches in awe.

He is before her with a potted sapling. When he draws himself to his full height, his face is level with her ankle. His outer skin is satin, crimson, spattered with silver swirls. It cascades from his shoulders to the ground, no longer gray and without form.

Yes, she recognizes him. His scent, his face, and his vivacity are those of the creature that peeked at her, unflinching, from behind the shiny panel in the red-roofed den. She tilts her head to scrutinize. Unusual he is indeed, unafraid to watch her eyes.

He says, "What wonder, Charles!"

"Wonder at being eaten alive, Herr Hexenmeister."

Behind the crimson morsel stands another. This aged one has dead, gray skin. A dust-cloth hangs out of his waistband. He holds a golden bowl from which the silver-pink smoke rises. But unlike the other, this man smells of fear. Because fear is his only thought, his thoughts cannot reach her through the smoke, though it was he who conjured it. One must try, by way of thinking, to blend one's thoughts with the vapor. George achieves this. Thus, though his thoughts are overly complex, she discerns that he will not challenge

her because, in a complex way, he desires her existence because, in a very peculiar way, she is shiny.

"This living tree is yours, beautiful creature," says George. He bows before her.

She knows the gesture as that of the wolf who lowers his head and backs away, defeated. But George does not smell of defeat. And unlike the wolf, whose only gift is his departure, the man pushes the sapling towards her. She smells that it is alive and free of poison. Thus it is edible - but he who offers it is fascinating.

With his change of color, gray to red, it seems that he has changed himself, his foundations, as the sky's shifting hue signals the world's various states of being, night and day. His crimson skin is no longer dead, for there is Magic in the shiny swirls that decorate his chest and arms. Never has she seen a dead thing come alive.

"You are Magic come to life," he says, rising. "You are legend, history, and wonder - here and now, before us! Breathing!"

"I'd make no sudden moves if I were you," says Charles.

"We cannot let them murder her!"

George moves nearer to her, just a step. She puffs at him in warning. She does not yet know trust, this lifelong outcast. And experience has taught her to be wary of bipedal morsels that know the touch of Magic. George in his ornate robe is one such creature. There is power in the wooden staff that has replaced his broom.

Yet he is different from others likewise blessed or cursed: he does not try to steal any of her blood, slivers of her hide, her teeth or claws. The smoke conveys his promise not to harm her.

She sniffs the top of his head. A nudge from her snout flattens him onto his back. He emits small grunts but he lies still.

"Well then," says Charles.

"We have saved her from the wrath of the barbarians!" says George, from the vantage point of tiles.

"We're going to hide a bloody dragon among the rare books? Is that your plan?"

"It is a sign, Smokemaster! Now, this tree is less than an hors d'oeuvre for her. She must have meat. Go down to the deli. Put it on my bill."

"Bloody Germans. Think you can order everyone about and expect them to enjoy it."

Charles' voice is feeble on account of the uncanny pair of eyes, each the size of his own head, trained inquisitively upon him.

"I would go myself but I am, you might say, engaged," says George. A large, green toe, tipped with a golden talon, settles on his chest.

Charles puts down the bowl. She snorts at him as he inches by. The old man gives a little cry and scurries forth.

"Bloody English," mutters George. "Think they've every claim on every empire, no matter how small. If you ask me, the Americans will be just as bad one day, just you wait. Well, wondrous beauty, we must

keep up your strength, although we cannot guarantee the sort of fare you're used to."

Why does he cluck like the others when he smells of much more knowing? She examines his shiny skin more closely. She tests the silver swirls with her talon.

"Had to earn those," whispers George. "Symbols of an Adept of High Magic and Master-Charmer of Daimons. Much good have they done anyone of late. This wretched war," he sighs. "I hadn't cast a spell in months, you know, before I sent the Daimons for you. Spooks can detect that kind of thing. They've already got Wizards in their ranks. Still, they want better ones.

"And now you," breathes the old Mage. "Come from nowhere."

Her golden eyes, the emerald crown that is simply part of her structure, her wings, their undersides painted like the sunrise. Magnificence and love of wonder sweep him away.

"And no one else can learn of you. No one."

His words mean less to her than the sigh of the wind. It is the shininess, the Magic, the instincts of her kind, and perhaps the novelty of it all - a wanderer is without possessions - that lead her to consider claiming him as her first treasure. She occupies herself with him, amid the calming fragrance of the smoke, until Charles' return.

"By Jove, you're still alive," says Charles.

Despite that George is spiritually complex and therefore tastier, she has eaten the tree. Charles brings meat. All of it is dead.

"It's too late for the deli, they've gone home. I had to try that pub for some of their roast beef. All of it, in fact. So sorry, madam; the pub was fresh out of live prey."

"You didn't say anything, did you?" George is still quite prone.

"We're having an impromptu get-together for exiled Germans. Funny, no one tried to get invited. Dead quiet out there tonight. Not a soul along the road. Doesn't mean they're not watching. Two days, maximum, before they figure out where all the spells came from."

To eat the dead is better than not to eat at all. She turns to the beef that Charles has laid out on the floor.

"They're too busy to bother about us," says George, vertical at last.

"Didn't you hear the radio this afternoon?"

"Calling her the Cape Cod Flyer. Secret military project. Numbskulls."

"If they learn what she really is and realize we're involved, they'll think one of us has control of her."

"I don't see why they should. She has her own mind."

"They'll assume, George. They'll hunt us down. Nazis and Allies both. Whoever captures us will add us to their arsenal."

"Which is only what they've wanted all along."

"For God's sake, man! The prospect of her entering the war will drive them all to panic or worse: enthusiasm! They'll triple their efforts to find us - "

"Keep your head, Lord Wizard, my companion in exile!" says George. "This miserable war has consumed our entire world. It will

not touch what lies beyond, not with any help from me. May I remind you of the reasons why we hide from our own people?"

"Mein Herr, you need hardly remind me that I'm in exile because I refuse to use my smoke to brainwash people, least of all any Germans who might be Magically convinced to turn on one another."

"Nor will I command the Daimons to rise against the Allies, despite that all have done their best to deny the existence of my friends-between-worlds. I know well what they might do to our sorry realm."

"Well, I for one refuse to be haggled over. As a matter of fact, I resent having my power commandeered after being told for centuries that it doesn't exist," says Charles.

"And I will not be made a weapon! Nor will she!" says George.

Fear and conviction give this discussion the timbres of a quarrel, although it is the opposite of a disagreement. It is outside her understanding and far beyond her sphere of interest.

She surveys the den. It is spacious with a high ceiling and still air, no trace of an occupant. To her the smell of paint on frescoed ceilings is alien but tolerable, and the only true tenants, the ancient books, are just dead leaves. Otherwise she smells stone, metal, and age. When they tire of bellowing, George and Charles watch her explore.

George whispers, "According to all recorded histories, no such creature has been seen in this world in fifteen hundred years. Think, Charles. Here we are in a hostile time and place from which, at

almost any cost, Magic must be hidden, locked away and forgotten - yet here in this time, this place, a Magical beast appears."

"She could bring the war over the Atlantic. Singlehandedly," says Charles. "The Germans will take advantage of the confusion she's causing the Americans. Or they'll battle for control of her."

George does not hear a word. "A dragoness appears to the chancellors-in-exile of two minuscule but potent Magical assemblies. Have you come at last to bring us out of hiding, glorious one?"

"Are you mad? Besides the fact that the world would be completely devastated, if Wizards enter the war then those who don't know any Magic won't trust our kind again. They won't even tolerate us any longer. Anyone who shows the slightest interest in Magic will be ostracized and persecuted. George, we've discussed this. We agreed!"

She peers at the spines of priceless books. She sees no words but, in places, golden filigree.

"Innocence and magnificence in a single soul," says George. "It would rend my heart to see your kind return to our world only to face enslavement. Nor have you any right to be wronged like Wizards and Daimons, branded a child of Satan."

"Why did she not leave, I wonder, when the airplanes shot at her?"

"That we can never know. Why did we not leave before they barred the Gates?"

"They'll torture her if they get her. They'll raid the other realms, capture a squadron's worth of others," sighs Charles.

As she takes wing to see the skylights, he takes to a chair.

"To think it's come to this," he says. "Years of study, smoke, and Daimons, gaining eminence - and thanks to all that hard work, there isn't any place for us except myth. Or as someone's deadly weapon."

"Her choices are no better."

George reaches out to her with gentle thoughts. The smoke brings her a vague, diluted sense of his regard. She descends and looks at him.

Though he is small and far below, his eyes meet hers. He believes they are alike somehow, that they share something. That is the most she can discern. She returns to the frescoes, distracted along the way by the imprisoned, flameless glow of the overhead lights.

"Hypothetically, how would we get her out and keep her hidden?"

This problem engages the old Wizards for the rest of the night. If she were on her own, she might have eaten. But she does not touch her living treasure. Rather she explores the windowpanes, the tiles, the bookends, the light bulbs in the lamps on the desks. George delights in turning lamps on and off, watching her tilt her head or give a chirp.

Charles tries to converse on practical matters. The nearest Gate to other worlds is not far; but it is guarded by those who suspect coveted Magical weaponry to have taken refuge among the Americans.

"The next nearest is in New York, I understand."

"We could find a freight train going that way."

"Then what? 'I say, gov'nor, would you be so good as to give us and our dragon a lift into Times Square?' Suppose he's balmy and says yes. Suppose she's hungry when we get there."

Morning brings no solution. Having not slept a wink, Charles shuffles off to the apartment that he shares with George in the library's hidden attic: the cramped asylum granted them by sympathetic Bostonian intellectuals. He intends to return with tea. But it is less than a moment before he reappears empty-handed.

"It's Peggy!" he whispers. "I saw her in the hall. She says Michaels came in early for a bit of cataloging, and there were spooks waiting on the doorstep! He's got them in his office. He sent Peggy ostensibly for coffee, but actually to warn us."

George is pale. "Then it was with tremendous foresight that you had us bring her to Rare Books. A sign indeed. Into the wall!"

Their alarm is obvious to her; but even so, she feels no obligation. She sees no reason, not even in the smoke, to follow the morsels to the back office of the rarities archivist, then into a secret chamber shielded by a sliding bookcase. By her warrant, it is for her to place her treasures where she would, not the other way around.

She follows nonetheless. She makes hardly a sound except to sneeze inside the dusty cave. George lights the candles left for him and Charles in a corner. Charles brings the bowl of smoke, George's broom and gray coveralls. "Soft as you can, exquisite one!" says George, drawing the bookcase into place.

Does she heed his thoughts, her proprietary regard for her first treasure, or the call of fate? She is silent as the walls themselves, still as the dark. Her only allies in the world huddle at her feet, great men from either side of a hate-driven war. George believes, he knows it as he knows of his own power: there must be a reason. These sudden, powerful alliances must have some purpose. Through the smoke he asks of her, straining to see her face: Why did you come? Why now? What do you wish me to know? But these thoughts are obscure to her. She does not return his pleading gaze but listens to discern the chamber's size. It is long but low. She must crouch. Following the instincts of her kind, she herds her treasure and the other morsel to the rear of the cavern. She packs them into a corner, curls up on the floor between them and the entranceway.

George cannot help himself: he laughs. "Charles, do you see? In this smelly little office she has found a lair! We are jewels, the beginning of her horde!"

"Brilliant," says Charles. "We're to end our days at a dragon's derrière. Let us suffocate in silence, if you please."

They pass the time with their thoughts. Hers are of rest, for this driven wanderer has not set herself down in a proper den since her infancy. Nonetheless, she does not sleep. The morsels' fearful stench prevents it. And where she sees a den in just another eccentric world, they see oceans' worth of consequences and, in George's case, the hand of destiny. That disparity of mindset makes all the difference.

The afternoon lapses before the rarities archivist takes three books from the case, one by one, and replaces them.

Soft, deliberate thuds against the front wall of the hideaway. The archivist removes the books again and puts them back.

Three discreet thuds.

George squeezes by, slides the bookcase aside, just a crack, slips out into the light.

Seeing him brings a shock that wrests a chirrup from her. His skin is gray and dead, everything that made it alive and precious vanished. The smell of dirty floors and fireplaces ousts his scent of Magic.

She has never had a treasure of her own, never known treasure to simply lose its shine - or hide it, as is in fact the case with George. Not knowing what to do, she puts her head on the ground. She does not understand betrayal or disappointment.

George speaks with the archivist. The man has no idea that he harbors three fugitives instead of two. George slips in again and seals the entrance with a sigh.

"They've gone. They searched the whole building. Asked about a German and an Englishman. They knew our false names, this 'Charles' and this 'George'."

"We'll have to move. We can't endanger those who've helped us."

"Peggy said they asked if anyone had seen the thing that wrecked Cape Cod, the mystery flyer. They asked people what they thought: if they believed that it is German or otherwise."

"What are you doing now?"

"Getting back into my robe," says George. "She seems to prefer me that way."

"Has she suggested marriage, or is that your idea?"

"So very droll, you English. Well, now, there you are. Much better, yes?"

She lifts her head. Her treasure is restored: the crimson, the Magic, and the silver swirls. She understands. This is a singular treasure. Not only is he shiny, not only living - a tiny animal - but a being that changes color with the nighttime sky. She inhales his ephemeral scent. Her breath tickles George's skin, and he laughs.

"We ought to move soon," says Charles.

She is close enough to touch but George resists. Her eyes gleam like lanterns, seemingly at will.

"I believe she would fight to protect us," says George.

"Don't be absurd."

"She is the freest of the free creatures. She is Magic: unknowable and thus the most sovereign of all sovereign things. And yet she put herself between us and possible intruders. Providence sent her to us, Charles! To remind us how splendid life can be when there is Magic in it. You know that you have never seen anything as beautiful as she. Such beauty is peculiar to Magical creatures. If we let those people get wind of it, they would snuff it out and set the world aflame while they were at it. And yet, Charles, and yet," sighs George, "such beauty, such wonder, is precisely what the world needs, don't you agree?"

They stand in mournful contemplation of this paradox.

"What shall we do?" says Charles. "Make some sort of stand against the whole world's armies?"

George makes no reply. He sits on the floor where she rests her head. He watches her eyes and her scales sparkling.

She does not know ambition. She has no sense of the greater good.

The evening shivers with the Wizards' tense and silent thoughts. At midnight Charles still wrings his hands, George painfully assesses the nature of humanity. She wants food and lifts her head.

"So it is time," says George.

"Time for what, you stubborn sauerkraut?"

"Come, my friends!"

George strides from the chamber, leaving Charles to observe: "You ridiculous old fool, your heart is too young for your own good."

"Pack some things, Charles. Take your books. Take any of mine that you desire."

"What are you - "

"You say we must move and you are right."

"Now?"

"We will take her to the nearest Gate. For her own sake, Charles. For her wondrous life!"

"But the gate is guarded, George, how can - "

"Now Charles, I've never asked you to trust a German except in this moment. Step lively!"

Since Charles discerns no other options, George is alone with her for a few minutes. Those precious moments cinch his resolve.

"You may not know this," he says to her, "but we have responsibilities, you and I. We humans, we need hope. And if every legend just denied itself, then hope would have very drab features, very gray."

She must hunt. She is hungry. She pushes George behind her.

"We must wait for Charles, my beauty!"

But she eases from the cavern into the archivist's office. All is silent and dark.

Her vision does not depend on light. She squeezes through the open door into the rare book room, whence she seeks an opening in the stone walls. George scurries after her, clucking at her back. She finds a wooden panel. A swat of her tail demolishes the door.

George cries out to her; Charles scurries toward them along the outer hall, bearing a suitcase.

"We cannot let her get airborne!" cries George. "The Air Force will take her down!"

He slips in front of her with the bowl of smoke.

Follow me. "One last time, my beloved." I know the way out.

Lacking such knowledge, she follows. Down the hall and a vast staircase. She crashes through the front door at the bottom.

"Oh, George, what will Michaels say when he sees - "

"Blame the war! Silence, beautiful one, that's good..."

He warns her to keep to the ground. He fears the flying predators and their rotating teeth. The air bears traces of their fumes, but there is no other sign. There are no dens rolling about, no morsels on the street but those who have become familiar. The old

men are wheezing, their ancient bones flagging as they run to keep up with her. Yet they persist. She follows their smoke over two blocks, around a corner to a subway station. It is closed tonight: Boston fears the return of the Luftwaffe.

Opposite the subway entrance is a square building painted with a mural. The mural portrays a domed basilica with numerous doors and windows that give on painted darkness. One such opening, between two simulated pillars, is particularly wide. But trellises of barbed wire blockade every painted crevasse, each more hazardous indeed than any ordinary door.

George stops in the shadow of the decorated building, concealed from those who skulk about the trellises in trench coats and fedoras. She crouches at his side but she looks up. It is a clear night, ideal for flying. George's voice is like the whisper of breeze in tall grass.

"Listen now. There is no time to plan, no time to gather reinforcements. The longer she stays, the harder it will be for all of us. Charles, you are going to take her through the Gate. Make sure she arrives somewhere safe. Don't let her look back."

"And you?"

"I will bargain with the guards for your passage."

"Bargain with what, you fool?"

"With myself."

The men take measure of each other.

"You really are balmy," Charles concludes.

"It's the only way, my friend. I'll keep our agreement: I won't give them anything. Probably I'll even get away. But Charles, even if you never hear from me again, you must ensure that there is always Magic in our world - Magic, not supernatural weaponry. You must ensure that someone, as many as possible, will know and do what is right if any such as she enters our midst again. Promise me this, and in return you will be free of this hopeless war."

Charles is fearful though his heart is true. But nothing moves men so much as sacrifice. Perhaps its influence is even greater than that of wonder - for Charles, who has seen every wonder, finds himself moved to courage.

"I never wished to turn my back on our world."

"I know, old boy. But there are even fewer Smokemasters than Daimon-Charmers these days. And we must give in order to preserve."

George places the golden bowl in Charles' hands. To her the gesture and the morsels' hissing is without significance. But in this night pungent with fear, with senses unique to her kind, she discerns that her first treasure shines from within.

"All who know me, even those who don't, will understand," says Charles.

"Then farewell and good luck." A pat on Charles' arm, a long look over his shoulder and up, at glowing eyes, and George is gone.

Ambling past the subway entrance, he calls out, "Guten Abend, meinen Freunden! Do you know who I am?" And the fedoras turn.

Charles clutches the bowl, too affrighted to think. It is George's thoughts that convey how critical it is that she remain in

the shadows. She is reluctant. Beyond George and the edibles approaching him, a fragrance resembles that of the non-world between all worlds.

"I understand you've been looking for me," says George.

"What're you doing out in your dressing gown, gramps? What's the big idea?"

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen! This is the mantle of an Adept of High Magic and Master-Charmer of Daimons."

"You're the guy in that sketch they passed around. The German Demonworker."

"We prefer 'Daimon-Charmer', but no matter. I congratulate you on your superior powers of memory," says George.

"Comes with the badge: FBI. And you're coming with us. So's you don't get no ideas about defecting back."

"My son, I have no country. However, I am, as you've discerned, here to place myself in your capable hands on one condition. You must allow my friends to pass through the Gate unhindered. No one will follow them, and you will forget you saw them."

The FBI hesitates. "Who's your friends?"

"None of your concern. Give your word and let them pass, or I will disappear before your very eyes."

She listens to the air. Her vision pierces the shadows. It is the between-worlds, that tantalizing scent. A soft growl escapes her.

"Yes or no, my brothers?" says George.

"Well of course it's yes. A bird in the hand, they say."

"Your word then."

"Sure."

"Draw back the fence. The large one at the bottom, please."

She has never used a Gate before, never needed to. The Gate is therefore new and she is eager. It promises clean air, open space, and hunting. She is hungry. She leaps the distance to the fence, heedless of Charles' cry.

Upon her landing, the FBI says, "Holy mother."

"The fence! Now!" says George.

She considers the trellis before the widest, blackest door. The scent of the between is strong. She could tear the wire with her talons or ram it with her body.

"You imbeciles! Don't just stand there! You gave your word!" George bellows. "Remove the fence or she will harm herself! Daimons, take us from this place!"

"No!" barks the FBI. "Men, we want the Kraut! Alive, you understand me? Open the Gate!"

A spook lifts his arm. A trellis slides away.

In the heart of the wanderer, no treasure will ever displace adventure. Charles leaves his suitcase, scurries after her. George cries out as he passes, "Somewhere safe, Charles! Not a place like this!"

But not a moment later, when she steps through the paint and the between into a hot afternoon, she forgets Charles. She emerges in a hall lined with doors, crowded with morsels in shiny, ornate skins. Magic fills the air, along with laughter and perfume. She stuns a

horse and rider and swallows them both. She bursts through a window into the sun, unmindful of the cries.

Charles covers the golden bowl with his dust-cloth. He lets the smoke dissipate. It has told him enough: only chance saved him the horse-rider's fate. Free of the bonds of meaning, she has forgotten George.

Her wings must stretch. That and food are in her mind. Mild updrafts incite her to adjust the position of her tail.

THE END