

# **Deli Witch**

by

David Watkins

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## Up in the Air

The exhausted eagle soars high among the peaks of the Sierra Nevada mountains of Eastern California. Blown off course by strong winds it desperately searches for food and a place to rest.

Movement on one of the jagged peaks catches its eye. Curving its wings slightly the eagle angles toward the flattened top of an isolated and rugged summit. Hoping the movement belongs to something edible the eagle gently glides toward a large open area surrounded by a jumble of rocks. The tired eagle does not realize that the open area is actually a courtyard belonging to a well hidden and almost inaccessible restaurant. The eagle sees three large creatures moving about on two legs. Before they disappear under a rock ledge the eagle recognizes them. They are the same creatures who captured it a few months ago and placed that annoying shiny object around its leg. The eagle quickly changes course to avoid further interaction with these creatures. Flapping its wings, it struggles to regain enough height to fly over the nearby peaks.

“Oh wow,” an elderly woman with shockingly white hair says. “Look at that, Minerva.”

The woman wears a light weight and fashionable dress that is entirely inappropriate for the cold temperatures at this altitude. Yet sitting next to the restaurant's open courtyard she is more than comfortable. She points at the rapidly disappearing eagle. “I don't think I've ever seen a bird this high before.”

A similarly dressed woman, glancing through the wide opening and across the courtyard, sees the eagle flying away. Shaking her head Minerva Damaris says, “I haven't either. It must have been blown off course by that storm that came through earlier. Ambrogio placed his restaurant up here to keep it away from prying eyes. You don't think that the eagle was able to spot it, do you?”

“It sure looked like it was headed here before abruptly turning away.” Kaianne Hagly says. “I know Ambrogio was worried enough to place all manners of spells and enchantments on his restaurant to keep it hidden in plain sight. He says the spells are good enough to hide it from those silly spy satellites flying overhead.”

“Still, we may want to let him know about the eagle. Either the spells don't work on our fine feathered friends or something has slipped.”

They take sips from their drinks and place them back on the table. Minerva's brilliant red drink seems to swirl without her touching it, moving in one direction before suddenly reversing itself. A bright blue fog flows from the top of Kaianne's twinkling blue drink, down the sides of the glass and then drifts across the table top before spilling over the edge. A slight breeze causes some of the fog to waft toward Minerva. She catches a faint hint of coconut over the strawberry aroma from her own drink.

The two women relax as guitar music drifts from the other side of the restaurant. There, a trio of guitars sit on a thick pedestal, spread apart and resembling a peacock's tail. Several sheets of music rest on the stand on the leading edge of the pedestal. However, no humans play the instruments. Instead, long mechanical fingers rise out of the pedestal and gently and expertly pluck at the strings. As the song ends a soft glow surrounds the music as it slowly disappears. A new set of music appears. After a short pause the guitars resume playing.

As the Minerva and Kaianne savor their drinks, they do not notice a slight shimmer appear in the air above the center of the courtyard. A few seconds later the shimmer becomes a translucent oval eight feet wide and seven feet tall. With a faint pop an image appears within the oval. Instead of the magnificent view of the Sierra Nevada mountains the oval contains an entirely different view of what appears to be the exterior of an extravagant looking building. Two middle-aged women stand in front of the building, dressed casually in short dresses and low-heeled sandals. The oval looks like a life sized picture, that is until the two women step out of the oval and onto the courtyard. With a slight pop the

oval disappears.

An important part of a wizard's training is to always maintain a personal reservoir of magical energy. When traveling by magical means a wizard's first thought upon arrival is to replenish any energy used by the effort. Though magic energy is always present to some degree or another, a wizard always tries to locate a magical ley line. Magical ley lines are flowing concentrations of magic, like fields surrounding a magnet. Ley lines allow wizards to more quickly replenish their energy.

All thoughts about replenishing magical energy are driven from their minds as the bitter cold sucks the heat from their bodies. Not dressed for the high mountain air the two women shiver uncontrollably. Fog from their breath billows around their heads as they quickly walk, in a dignified manner, toward the entrance. As they enter the restaurant they feel a slight resistance from the enchantment at the opening that prevents the warm air from escaping. Once inside the restaurant the two women give a sigh of relief as the warm air enfolds them.

One says to the other through still chattering teeth, "would it hurt Ambrogio to allow portals to open WITHIN his restaurant?"

The restaurant's hostess, an attractive young woman with long dark hair held behind a pair of slightly pointed ears, approaches them.

"Welcome to the Maison du Faucon, ladies. So glad you decided to visit us. Will it be two for lunch?" The women nod. The hostess notices how the women still shiver from the cold. "Perhaps a table close to one of our crackling fireplaces?" The two women nod vigorously. "Wonderful. Please, this way."

The hostess leads them to a table on the far side of the room near a large fireplace. Both ladies admire the elegant French décor better suited for the streets of Paris than a cold mountain top. They pass several exotic plants hanging from the ceiling or growing from strategically placed planters. As they walk past one planter the hostess swats at one vine that seems to be reaching for her.

Wagging her finger she warns, "Remember what Mr. Ambrogio said he would do the next time you tried to cop a feel?" The vine quickly retreats into its planter.

As the two women follow the hostess one of them glances back at the Tentacle Ivy to make sure it behaves. As she does she sees the two women near the restaurant's opening.

"Oh, Gwendolyn, there's Minerva Damaris. I haven't seen her in ages. Go ahead and sit down and order me something spicy. I'll be right there." She glances up at the bar in the back and sees the very fit-looking male bartender. He looks human, almost. She thinks to herself, "*No, he's probably too spicy.*" She giggles at that thought, causing Gwendolyn to wonder why, until she see's her friend staring at the bartender. She sighs when she sees how well his shirt conforms to his very fit-looking torso.

"Yoo hooo, Minerva!" The woman calls out and waves. She quickly walks toward Minerva and her friend Kaianne. Minerva looks up as she hears her name being called. She takes a sip as the woman approaches the table. She groans, "oh great, Anoyia Petit, a virtual font of useless information."

Kaianne smiles as she whispers, "steady, girl."

Anoyia bubbles with excitement. "Minerva! What a pleasant surprise. Hi Kaianne." Kaianne raises her drink in greeting.

Minerva says, "Hi, Anoyia. Yes it is, isn't it. It has been a long time. I'd ask you to join us but it looks like you are here with, who is that? Gwendolyn? It's a shame we just have the two chairs at our table."

The sarcasm goes unnoticed. Kaianne takes another drink and smiles, savoring the tropical flavors that she hopes will take the edge off the conversation with Anoyia.

"Oh thank you but no. I didn't know you knew Gwendolyn Mathis. She's been a good friend since way before she married Emile. He's the head of some Council Department, the name of which eludes me at the moment."

Minerva nods. "Yes, my Willem has done some work with her husband."

Ignoring Minerva's comment, Anoyia says, "she and I are going to have a nice lunch and catch up on all of the latest happenings."

Minerva smiles. "Oh, I understand completely," she says, hoping she is not included in Anoyia's latest happenings discussion.

"I just wanted to stop by and say how great it is to see you again. How are you doing? I don't think you've aged a bit since the last time I saw you."

Minerva smiles. "If I didn't know better I would think you are trying to butter me up for something."

Anoyia laughs loudly. "Not this time, you crafty witch. How is Willem? Is he still traipsing around the physical and meta-physical worlds?"

Minerva rolls her eyes and sighs. "Oh yes, it never seems to end. It's a great job, he really loves it, but I am constantly amazed at what he tells me."

At the hint of scandal Anoyia lights up, only to have her hopes dashed.

"Of course," Minerva whispers, "most of it is hush hush, so unfortunately I can't pass on any of the juicy details like names. Especially since he won't give any to me."

"Oh, that's too bad. If you did we could compare notes." Anoyia laughs as she says that.

Minerva agrees. "We magic folks are always putting ourselves above the boorish behavior of mortals and other beings. And yet, too many of us seem more than happy to behave just like them."

Anoyia asks, "Witches and Warlocks behaving badly?"

Minerva laughs. "Yes, all the time it seems. So much has to be kept confidential, but they sure keep Willem and the Council busy.

Anoyia makes a few 'tsk tsk' sounds. "One would think wizards would learn. I guess that is why we have such an expensive judicial system and so many," she pauses, looks around, and whispers, "lawyers around."

Minerva laughs. "Yes, someone has to deal with the troubles they cause. Too many let their magical power go to their head."

"True. Who was it said 'power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely?'"

Minerva thinks for a moment. "I believe it was a Lord Acton. Though, there was someone else who said something like, 'power corrupts, but it's perhaps more true that power attracts the corruptible.' That seems to be more of the case nowadays."

Anoyia nods, "so true. So tell me, how is the rest of your family? Is Calliope doing well?"

"Oh yes. She just went back to work at the Apothecary in Boston. Her new born is just as cute as a baby can be."

Minerva mumbles a few words and moves her right arm in a flourish. An image of a newborn appears in mid air, dressed in a sailor's suit.

Both Anoyia and Kaianne ooo and ahhh at the cute infant. Kaianne looks at Minerva with a questioning look. "A sailor's suit?"

"I know." Minerva laughs. "I don't know what possessed Callie to dress him like that. To be honest, I think she did that for when Caelix becomes a teenager."

The Anoyia seems puzzled. "When he becomes a teenager? I don't understand."

"Well, when he starts misbehaving, as most teenagers do, all she has to do is threaten to show that picture to his friends. That should make him fall in line."

Kaianne laughs. "Oh, that is funny. I wish I had thought of that. Might have prevented a few of these." She touches her head, causing all three to laugh.

Anoyia becomes serious. "What about Cassandra? How is the poor dear doing? Is she still not able to make it in the magical world?"

Kaianne takes a quick sip of her drink to hide her intake of breath. Minerva stiffens a little. She

knew the subject of her younger daughter would come up, but still. She forms her response carefully.

“Still struggling. Been out of school for four years and still ...” She shakes her head. “She is so smart. All of her professors told me how knowledgeable she is. Give her a spell and she can tell you how to create it and what variations can be added for additional impact. She just can't seem to do it. Simple spells are a chore. Forget about the complex ones. She can't even create a portal between her apartment and her job.”

“An apartment? Around other mortals? How dreadful,” both Anoyia and Kaianne say.

Minerva nods. “I think so, but she seems to enjoy it. Anextiomarus, her familiar, has stayed with her, so the potential must still be there. We are struggling to find a way to bring it out.”

Anoyia says, “she must be such a disappointment to you and your husband.”

Minerva almost has to bite her tongue. “Not at all. It is disheartening. She tries so hard. She's tutored a few students who were really struggling with their work. After working with her they pass with flying colors. Yet, because she can't do it herself her career choices are very limited. Currently she is working as assistant manager at a delicatessen in San Francisco.”

Anoyia is incredulous. “Oh dear, really? That's a bit of a let down. Say, didn't I hear that her name had been put in for a position at that magic school over in England?”

“Yes. Even though she can't cast spells very well she is an expert with potions and elixirs. I'd put her skills up against anyone.”

“Did she get it?”

Minerva shakes her head. “I don't know. I hope so. She was supposed to hear something before the weekend, since the new school term starts in a few months. Regardless, I just wish something would happen that would break through whatever it is that prevents her from casting spells.”

There is a slight pause. Minerva hopes Anoyia has had enough. Unfortunately Anoyia continues the conversation. “Well, what about your son. I don't think I've heard any recent news about him. The last I heard was ....”