

Unquenchable

by Fawkes_07

Fawkes is sent on an errand at a critical time.

a one-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

Fawkes is sent on an errand at a critical time.

My story has never been told.

I can speak, in a fashion, if I so choose, but I have not done so in centuries. Words distract me and frustrate me. They crush reality into inadequate little boxes and fit those together like so many bricks, constructing a ramshackle representation and calling it "truth."

When I was young, I spoke often. Then I learned that there is no truth in words. I had to unlearn the confining ways of language, restore myself into the realm of knowledge itself. It took more than a thousand years to free myself from the suffocating realm of words and names. I was fortunate. I have that kind of time at my disposal.

Mortals, however, do not.

Their lives are perpetually rushed. They invent shortcuts at every opportunity--language is just one example. They cannot bear to spend a year studying a single flower in order to truly know it; therefore they give it a name, perhaps several. They reduce it to a fraction of itself, one which they can simply snatch up as they pass without even slowing down. Flower, friend, brother: infinite concepts stuffed into tiny packages for easy access.

It is no wonder mortals instinctively gather and hoard meaningless things. They crave the truth desperately, yet dare not slow themselves enough to attain it. "Gold" and "power" and other such nonsense are a poor substitute, but apparently they suffice.

I crave nothing. I own nothing. And I am sublimely satisfied with my circumstances.

Right now, a certain mortal is in need. He seeks something greater than mundane possessions or influences. I could not bring those to him, for I have forgotten how. But I can help him attain that which he needs, and I will, because I love him.

I am loathe to part from him, because I love him. He is fragile, mortal; his life can be forfeit within the blink of an eye. I protect him, but I am not an infinite being; my body and my senses have their limits. I leave him vulnerable when I travel afar, and this is painful for me.

But I do it. I must. I have to accept that he is mortal. He must seek the truth during his tiny life, and I must help him. It would be selfish of me to insist on remaining at his side, guarding him, keeping him safe and ignorant so that I may continue to revel in his presence.

Thus I find myself underground, in a place valued only by mortals, gliding down a gloomy, airless hallway. I come to a plain black door, an object created to impede my passage into the next room. But it is only a thing with a name, not Reality; I do not even feel it as I pass through it in a puff of flame.

The room beyond contains more doors, though these are more substantial than the first. Some hide matters of actual Importance. They begin to spin around me, a bit of magic designed to disorient intruders, but this is of no consequence. I Understand this place, and I know where I must go. I wait only for them to rumble to a halt before I proceed.

I pass into this room in another puff of flame. The light from my fire illuminates nothing and snuffs out immediately. Blindness. This is a terrible place: wrong, unhealthy, suffocating. Though I am immortal, I still fear death, or more precisely, the pain of a deadly onslaught. I survive such things in the way of my kind, but they hurt me.

I dare not move, as I cannot see. I round my wings and beat against the heavy air to brake my glide, hoping it is safe to land and that door did not end in a cliff. The ground is not where I expect to find it, but soon the currents from my wings are reflected back to me, and I allow myself to settle into a landing.

Nothing attacks my clawed feet. So far, so good.

Though blind, my eyes automatically dart in every direction. Nothing. This is a dreadful place. My feathers rise instinctively as fear infiltrates me. I am glad to ponder this distraction. Birds fluff their feathers to make themselves appear larger to a potential threat. I am not a bird, yet somehow I have this same defense mechanism. Strange that I have not noticed this before. Perhaps it comes to my attention because in this room, nothing can see me, so the illusion is pointless.

When my beak begins to click like the chattering of human teeth, I plunge my head beneath my wing and force myself to catch my breath. Bird imitations are bad enough; no need to go anthropomorphic!

I am here to find something for him. I must calm down. It will be difficult enough to stumble through darkness without being overwhelmed by fear.

I am not alone.

My reaction to the sound is so strong that it surprises me. I haven't jumped when startled since... good grief, I can't recall the last time I've been startled. My entire tail flared out like a peacock's!

Knowing that there is another here is somehow comforting. I know not whether this is friend or foe, a prisoner or a jailer, but at least I am certain that the room itself is not deadly. I may be able to leave it as safely as I arrive.

I suppose that will depend in part upon this stranger.

I turn toward the delicate rustle. A few cautious steps, but I encounter nothing. Strange. Perhaps the sound was but a trick of my mind. But who knows what acoustical properties there are in this place, perhaps it was further away. I take a few more steps, carefully holding my tail aloft, lest the sound of it dragging mask any more sounds. This is a bit of a challenge, as my tail is long and full, and despite my display a moment ago, I am no peacock.

The rustling is now directly behind me. I begin to appreciate the concept of swear words.

My senses are suspect in this dreadful place, for the sound is coming right from where I just walked, yet I struck nothing. Ah, but that is a fallacy--I may not have felt or seen or even heard it, but something must be there. I turn and slowly retrace my steps, dragging my feet and even the tips of my wings along the ground.

Nothing. But at last the mystery is solved: as I glide my feathers over the ground, I hear it again, directly overhead. I stretch my long neck upward, immediately striking a wooden panel with a hollow thump. A flicker of light as the panel rises from the blow, then darkness again.

I was told to begin my search in this room, and this exit is all I have found. Perhaps that was the point, perhaps not, but I think I would prefer to take that chance. At least I can continue my quest in the light.

Another jab with my sharp beak and the panel dislodges, shifting to one side. I can see the crack of light around the panel, but it does not illuminate the inside of this chamber.

I wedge my beak into the opening and shove the panel aside. I realize too late that I should have peeked cautiously over the edge, but the attraction of fresh air and light is irresistible. It is of no matter, fortunately; I am alone in a tunnel of some sort. Looking down, I cannot see any further than the middle of my neck; it is as though my head has emerged from a vat of black paint.

A few more shoves, and one beat of my wings is enough to launch me from the darkness. The tunnel is short and straight, and leads to a large, open room, but it is too narrow to fly comfortably. On the side of caution, I drag the panel back over the dark pit, then walk the length of the tunnel.

My feet normally grip a perch, or are tucked in a curl behind me. They are starting to cramp from all this walking, and I look forward to taking flight once the tunnel is behind me.

Ugh. I have seen this room before, but never from this perspective. I need to roost a minute. For I seem to be standing on the ceiling of the Wizengamot, looking up into the terraced seats of the courtroom floor far overhead.

I generally cooperate fully with gravity, and leave views such as this to bats and insects.

I suppose diving raptors, or perhaps underwater fowl like penguins, might not be upset to find themselves upside down in mid-air. They undoubtedly roll and twist in mid-flight (or mid-swim), and know how to right themselves properly. I, however, am strictly an upright flier.

I haven't been in a pickle like this in at least 500 centuries.

One of my beloved ones, a brilliant Squib named Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci, explained to me the principles of lift and airflow that give me flight. The words and symbols he used were reductionist and oversimplified, but I listened politely to his tremendous effort. He came very close to Understanding; I have not met many mortals like that one. I distinctly recall his explanation that the curved upper surface of my wings was the part that opposed gravity.

The upper surface, which is now facing what I typically think of as the ground.

Can I fly like this? The bricks beneath my feet feel just like ground, and my weight is drawn to them like ground. Yet the floor of the courtroom surely feels like ground as well. Is there a point between them where gravity changes directions? What will happen when I hit that point? Would I become weightless, suspended between the two floors which are also two ceilings? Or will the transition be abrupt, such that I find myself suddenly plummeting out of control?

I sigh and preen absently at the feathers in the center of my back. There is always a way out of every situation, but this one requires some thought.

It has been some time since I last molted, and my feathers are in disarray. The simple, repetitive task is comforting and relaxing; by the time I snap out of my light trance, too much time has passed by. However, it was not wasted--the solution has come to me.

The torches upon the walls are burning "upside down" from my perspective. Flames flicker away from the source of gravity, because hot fumes are less dense than the surrounding air. There must be some point along the wall where gravity changes direction--and I can use the thermals to find it.

We phoenixes have an innate Understanding of flames.

I make a tedious trek to the wall until I am right "under" a torch. There is no hint of a thermal updraft. I lodge my beak firmly into the mortared gap between two stones and cautiously raise one, then both feet. It is uncomfortable, but as soon as both feet touch the "wall", my suspicion is confirmed. The "wall" also partakes of this rogue gravity, and it has now become the floor!

I creep cautiously along this new "floor," directly toward the torch. My neck is stretched, mouth open, feeling with tongue and feather for the first hint of heat. I find it not two meters from the torch. Putting my head low to the "floor," I lunge forward but a step, getting a good grip on the stones with my trailing foot.

Now my bottom is sitting, but my head is upside down. I am not usually one to suffer vertigo, but all of these shifting frames of reference are enough to curl my toes!

Knowing the location of the turning point, I wriggle myself to gravity's edge and get into position for a glide. I close my eyes as I shove off, trusting that my wings and strength will guide me as my head spins.

One stomach-wrenching flip of the world, and I am once again in my customary space. I pull out of a steep dive, having misjudged the optimal direction to aim my wings, but I have no desire to accidentally re-encounter any rogue gravity. I've had quite enough of this room, and soar right through the open door.

With a puff of air, the door slams shut, and I realize that was not the Wizengamot, nor am I in the Level Ten corridor. I am in a new room, smaller than the last, but no less strange. For as soon as the door clicked into its jamb, the walls and ceiling slide toward me.

Whirling around, I have only enough time to see the outline of the door glimmer and wink out.

This grows tiresome. Albus had better appreciate all I'm doing for him.

I am not fooled by this petty illusion. Walls are made of matter, and subject to certain laws. Had the architect of this "trap" considered this fact, either one pair of walls would advance, or the ceiling would crush down to the floor. A sphere can be made, under strictly controlled circumstances, to collapse independently upon itself, but a cube cannot. This is the principle behind a Shrinking Spell, after all--that the space within the boundary must collapse as well as the "box" that contains it.

If the walls and ceiling were truly collapsing, I would be forced to shrink correspondingly with them, and indeed, I would not even notice the change until I emerged from the cube as a Lilliputian in a Brobdingnagian world.

Amateurs. I close my eyes and use my will and and my magic to Command the illusion to cease.

I am actually standing in an unassuming drawing room, the walls lined with bookcases made of a dark, polished wood. The mantel of the black marble fireplace also houses a row of books, most of them oversized. I have never seen this room before, but it is quite beautiful. I love the look and smell of books, though I do not read and cannot open them with my taloned feet.

Books are mortals' only hope of finding either Truth or immortality.

The thick Persian rug feels pleasant on my tired feet. I grip branches for hours, even literally in my sleep, but keeping my feet open and flat is much work. I flap up to the rounded back of a green leather armchair just for a moment's rest. The arms of it are sturdy, wide planks, suitable for resting one's teacup or crossword puzzle. A clever design for human occupants, but useless as a perch. At least the backrest will allow me to sit a moment with my toes flexed more naturally.

Ahhhhhhhh.

I knew the man who invented the overstuffed leather armchair. If I drank wine, I would toast his memory.

As it is, I think I shall have to tuck my beak under my wing for just a moment and have a smidgeon of a nap.

I awaken with a start. I would curse if such words had any special impact in my mind. I came here with a task, not to slumber! There is indeed powerful magic trapped in this room, to make me forget myself. As for the idiot mortals who have contained it, I hope they have not deluded themselves that they have tamed it as well.

I fly to the ornate oaken door and tug at the latch with my talons, leery of attempting to pass through it magically. If it had a knob, I would have no choice; the turning of knobs is a cumbersome task that I leave to creatures with thumbs. Fortunately, I can lift the latch, and the door flies open with a good gust of air from a flap of my wings. Thus I part this strange chamber in the conventional way.

For a moment, I suspect I have left the same way I came in, for at first glance, this resembles the false Wizengamot. But this too is strange. The air feels heavy, oppressive; shadows seem to move in the periphery of my vision, though when I turn my head, there is nothing amiss. Even the color seems wrong, toned with sepia as though the whole room were an aging photograph.

Then I spot the veiled archway. It seems crooked, slanted rather than strictly upright, which further lends the illusion that it might crumble at any moment. I know this is not the case. It is ancient, but no more likely to fall apart than I am. The forces that shape it only grow stronger with each passing moment, not weaker.

I can hear its Siren song, inviting, beckoning. "Your dreams live within. Come to us. Pass through the arch, Lithpelos, Phoenix, Immortal. Take your place beside the throne."

All true, and yet all deceptive. I know what you are, and though I may be the last to resist your call, I will resist it now. I wonder if you have led me on this strange journey, disoriented me with fear and vertigo, not to mention exhaustion, in order to distract me from my task and lure me within.

I glide to the dais and stand before the crooked arch, wondering if my flames are bright enough to burn away that curtain that keeps your secrets hidden.

Enough. I have wasted too much time in this absurd place. I glide through a door, no longer certain what to expect. True to form, the next room is not part of the row of cubicles adjacent to the Veil Chamber; instead, I find myself soaring high over a glassy surface.

I am fairly certain it is water below me, though it could easily be a shimmering ward bisecting the room. Though I just berated myself for pointless delays, I find it an irresistible mystery. A brief dive brings me near the interface, and a quick beat of my wings solves the puzzle. A ring of ripples mars the smoothness, but more importantly, I can feel from the way the air deflects that this is water, not magic, scant inches below my wings.

Instantly I feel foolish for investigating a matter so irrelevant. What is wrong with me? I am not impulsive by nature, yet I have yielded to countless distractions in this place. I was frightened (of the dark, no less); I was disoriented by a mere adjustment of the laws of physics. I took a NAP! Clearly there are forces here that I have underestimated--which in itself is uncharacteristic of me. I feel a budding kernel of resentment that my beloved would send me into such a place. He of all people knows how much power it takes to overwhelm my magic, and the danger of doing so...

He does know...

No.

As though struck by lightning, every muscle, every feather springs to life. He sent me here, knowing I would become lost within. He meant it to happen just this way, meant for me to become dazed. He undoubtedly intended me to become so befuddled that it would take this long to reason out what he was up to.

My clarity of purpose restored by raw adrenaline, I throw aside the magicks that these arrogant wizards have constructed, and once again I Understand this place, this building. I know precisely where I am, and more importantly, how to escape.

With a surge of blue flame, I am out of the Ministry of Magic and high over London.

I must find him. It will take all my strength to "Apparate" all the way to Hogwarts, and I have no doubt I will need it when I arrive. I can combine flight with my form of "Apparation;" it will take a few more seconds to arrive, but my strength will be near full.

I leave a burning trail across the heavens. The Muggles will mistake me for a "shooting star." Perhaps one of their satellites will spot my wings with its keen eye, and they will have a new mystery to ponder. I care not; let them guess my existence, as long as I can find him in time.

The grounds of Hogwarts always glisten with wards, but even though they are little more than a haze on the horizon, terror floods my heart anew. The Morsmordre appears above the tallest tower.

I should be able to feel him by now, but I cannot. That, more than anything tonight, makes me panic.

There has been a fire. The sickening green residue of Dark magic permeates the entire castle. Despite the hour, every window is aglow. And my heart beats so fast, I fear it must explode.

No. He has gone somewhere, another of his many trips of late. He never studied Divination, but he has marvelous instincts. He would not send me away on a fool's errand if he were in danger tonight.

He would NOT.

I circle the tower again and again, dissipating the foul Mark with the toroidal current from my wings; he'll be back, he will, any moment, as soon as he realizes there has been a disaster at his school.

On my seventh pass, I spot his body at the base of the tower. My beloved.

It is time to weep.

A/N: This was my response to a challenge on another site, and I like how it turned out.