

# Tidbit

by Katrina Dessavre

By dawn, she is ready to hunt. He watches from horseback, wrinkled brown hills stretching ahead, into a valley streaked with snow; she circles above, jesses trailing behind, higher, until her wings are a sliver against the cloudless blue sky. She sees every patch of snow, every tuft of grass, even the fur on his hat moving with the wind. Then, she folds her wings and drops, like a stone, aiming for the fox skin he ties to the back of his horse and drags across the flat plain.

Before he comes to a full stop, she opens her wings a few meters off the ground, steadying herself before she rips open the fox skin and sends bits of fur and straw stuffing flying. Soon, her feathers will be streaked with the gore of live prey. But even in this riot of dismemberment she is efficient, neat almost, in the way she finds her reward and leaves the rest untouched.

As he watches her gulp back the tidbit of meat hidden inside the straw, he sees a shadow pass over the rising sun and a hint of gold in an otherwise dull landscape. No, he thinks, eagles answer to no one. They remember no one. They look down in search of their dinner, not those who, for a time, helped them find it. And yet all week has been a test in proving the opposite: sleepless nights spent whispering to his new charge, trying to tame her with the sound of his voice, so that now, when he offers his arm again, she hops on willingly, silent and content.

Later, he will say, "She flew well today." She shifts her weight with each sway of the horse, her talons making slight impressions through the cowhide glove. They are tired; the sun moves towards midday and they ride back to the winter camp filled with the bittersweet tang of coal smoke and curd cooking.

Tomorrow they will hunt again, but for now he must not tempt her with flight. He slips on a leather hood encrusted with gold braiding. Only he would notice the few gold threads missing. He looks up, hoping to see them woven into the wings of another eagle, released

one night last spring after a few day's famine and a butchered sheep  
left on top of a lonely mountain.

