

In Search of a Witch's Soul by D. Lieber
Excerpt:

People crowded the streets on their routes to work. Huddled in their dark winter coats with their hatted heads tucked in to keep their necks warm, they looked like a waddle of penguins as they shuffled along. The enjoyable crisp air of autumn had given way to the blades of winter wind. It hadn't yet snowed, but I looked hopefully at the clouds overhead.

I loved the first snowfall. Everything was so fresh, and the pure white flakes covered the filthy, scarred face of the city. I knew the grime was still there, but it was nice to pretend. My one vain belief in life was that if you pretended long enough, you could convince even yourself.

Holiday decorations already sparkled in the shop windows though Thanksgiving had only been the week before. Even in light of that, everyone seemed more excited than usual. I stopped at a newsstand.

"What's happening, Mac?" I asked the man next to a shrinking stack of newspapers.

"Ford released the new Model A. Want to see the photographs?" He held out a paper to me.

"No, thanks."

I continued down Huntington Street until I hit Wilbur Avenue. As expected, the squawkers were gathered on the corner. Their leader stood on a soapbox, preaching to anyone who'd listen.

"The Devil's got his claws in you, but you don't have to be a witch. Come toward the light and let Jesus Christ save you. This magic you practice corrupts God's plan for you. It tempts you away from his path..."

The tirade went on as usual, and I tried to pass as quickly as I could. They're born witches, you imbeciles. You already got magic banned for humans. What more could you possibly want?

I knew I shouldn't let them irritate me every time I saw them, but then I thought of how long witches had lived in the shadows and how far we'd thought society had come. Of course, while the revelation that magic exists had delighted many, others quaked in fear and felt the need to squash what they didn't understand and could never possess.

After turning on Wilbur Avenue, I went into a large house with an unimposing sign in the window, which read, "Clinic for Internal Medicine."

The reception area was like any other physician's home. There were uncomfortable looking chairs for waiting clients and a commanding nurse, who doubled as a secretary. The white walls were severe against the dark, hardwood floor.

The clinic couldn't have been open for long because there was only one patient waiting, a woman round with child.

My heels clicked on the floor as I ankled to the nurse's desk.

"I'm here to see Dr. Zodiac."

Though the nurse had seen me many times, including the day prior, she stared at me hard to determine my purpose. Finally, she nodded. "The doctor is available at the moment. Go to the door at the end of the hall."

I thanked her and went through the closed door behind her. I passed a legitimate exam and surgery room before I reached the end. After entering an inconspicuous door, I climbed down a flight of stairs, dimly lit by a naked bulb overhead. A thick carpet muffled the sound of my descent.

When I reached the solid, iron door at the bottom, I knocked in three groups of three. A slot at eye level slid open.

"The archer can never shoot the flame because it's within him," I whispered to the eyes.

Metal scraped, and the door opened. I entered the tunnel of Starlight Avenue. Though the tunnel was raw earth, it was smooth and well-lit by electric lights every few feet. At various points, it branched off into other tunnels, all of which led to different destinations that could fulfill any magical need.