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It was a moonless night, which was *good* for the purposes of Solid Jackson.

He fished for Curious Squid, so called because, as well as being squid, they were curious. That is to say, their curiosity was the curious thing about them.

Shortly after they got curious about the lantern that Solid had hung over the stern of his boat, they started to become curious about the way in which various of their number suddenly vanished skywards with a splash.

Some of them even became curious – *verybriefly* curious about the sharp barbed thing that was coming very quickly towards them.

The Curious Squid were extremely curious. Unfortunately, they weren't very good at making connections.

It was a very long way to this fishing ground, but for Solid the trip was usually well worth it. The Curious Squid were very small, harmless, difficult to find and reckoned by connoisseurs to have the foulest taste of any creature in the world. This made them very much in demand in a certain kind of restaurant where highly skilled chefs made, with great care, dishes containing *no trace of the squid whatsoever* .

Solid Jackson's problem was that tonight, a moonless night in the spawning season, when the squid were especially curious about everything, the chef seemed to have been at work on the sea itself.

There was not a single interested eyeball to be seen. There weren't any other fish either, and usually there were a few attracted to the light. He'd caught sight of one. It had been making through the water extremely fast in a straight line.

He laid down his trident and walked to the other end of the boat, where his son Les was also gazing intently at the torchlit sea.

'Not a thing in half an hour,' said Solid.

'You sure we're in the right spot, Dad?'

Solid squinted at the horizon. There was a faint glow in the sky that indicated the city of Al-Khali, on the Klatchian coast. He turned round. The other horizon glowed, too, with the lights of AnkhMorpork. The boat bobbed gently halfway between the two.

'Course we are,' he said, but certainty edged away from his words.

Because there was a hush on the sea. It didn't look right. The boat rocked a little, but that was with their movement, not from any motion of the waves.

It *felt* as if there was going to be a storm. But the stars twinkled softly and there was not a cloud in the sky.

The stars twinkled on the surface of the water, too. Now *that* was something you didn't often see.

'I reckon we ought to be getting out of here,' Solid said.

Les pointed at the slack sail. 'What're we going to use for wind, Dad?'

It was then that they heard the splash of oars,

Solid, squinting hard, could just make out the shape

of another boat, heading towards him. He grabbed his boathook.

'I knows that's you, you thieving foreign bastard!'

The oars stopped. A voice sang over the water.

'May you be consumed by a thousand devils, you damned person!'

The other boat glided closer. It looked foreign, with eyes painted on the prow,

'Fished 'ern all out, have you? I'll take my trident to you, you bottom-feedin' scum that y'are!'

'My curvy sword at your neck, you unclean son of a dog of the female persuasion!'

Les looked over the side. Little bubbles fizzed on the surface of the sea.

'Dad?' he said.

'That's Greasy Arif out there!' snapped his father, 'You take a good look at him! He's been coming out here for years, stealing *our* squid, the evil lying little devil!'

'Dad, there's—'

'You get on them oars and I'll knock his black teeth out!'

Les could hear a voice saying from the other boat, '—see, my son, how the underhanded fish thief—'

'Row!' his father shouted.

'To the oars!' shouted someone in the other boat.

'Whose squid *are* they, Dad?' said Les.

'*Ours!*'

'What, even before we've caught them?'

'Just you shut up and row!'

'I can't move the boat, Dad, we're stuck on something!'

'It's a hundred fathoms deep here, boy! What's there to stick on?'

Les tried to disentangle an oar from the thing rising slowly out of the fizzing sea.

'Looks like a... a chicken, Dad!'

There was a sound from below the surface. It sounded like sonic bell or gong, slowly swinging.

'Chickens can't swim!'

'It's made of iron, Dad!'

Solid scrambled to the rear of the boat.

It was a chicken, made of iron. Seaweed and shells covered it and water dripped off it as it rose against the stars.

It stood on a cross-shaped perch.

There seemed to be a letter on each of the four ends of the cross.

Solid held the torch closer.

'What the—'

Then he pulled the oar free and sat down beside his son.

'Row like the blazes, Les!'

'What's happening, Dad?'

'Shut up and row! Get us away from it!'

'Is it a monster, –Dad?'

'It's worse than a monster, son!' shouted Solid, as the oars bit into the water.

The thing was quite high now, standing on some kind of tower...

'What is it, Dad! *What is it ?*'

'It's a damned weathercock!'

There was not, on the whole, a lot of geological excitement. The *sinking* of continents is usually accompanied by volcanoes, earthquakes and armadas of little boats containing old men anxious to build pyramids and mystic stone circles in sonic new land where

being the possessor of genuine ancient occult wisdom might be expected to attract girls. But the rising of this one caused barely a ripple in the purely physical scheme of things. It more or less sidled back, like a cat who's been away for a few days and knows you've been worrying.

Around the shores of the Circle Sea a large wave, only five or six feet high by the time it reached them, caused some comment. And in some of the very low-lying swamp areas the water swamped some villages of people that no-one else cared about very much. But in a purely geological sense, nothing very much happened.

In a purely geological sense.

'It's *acity*, Dad! Look, you can see all the windows and—'

'I told you to shut up and keep rowing!'

The seawater surged down the streets. On either side, huge, weed-encrusted buildings boiled slowly out of the surf.

Father and son fought to keep some way on the boat as it was dragged along. And, since lesson one in the art of rowing is that you do it while looking the wrong way, they didn't see the other boat...

'You lunatic!'

'Foolish man!'

'Don't you touch that building! This country belongs to Ankh-Morpork!'

The two boats spun in a temporary whirlpool.

'I claim this land in the name of the Seriph of Al-Khali!'

'We saw it first! Les, you tell him we saw it first!'

'We saw it first before you saw it first!'

'Les, you saw him, he tried to hit me with that oar!'

'But Dad, you're waving that trident—'

'See the untrustworthy way he attacks us, Akhan!'

There was a grinding noise from under the keel of both boats and they began to tip as they settled into the sea-bottom ooze.

'Look, Father, there is an interesting statue—'

'He has set his foot on Klatchian soil! The squid thief!'

'Get those filthy sandals off Ankh-Morporkian territory!'

'Oh, *Dad* —'

The two fishermen stopped screaming at each other, mainly in order to get their breath back. Crabs

scuttled away. Water drained between the patches of weed, carving runnels in the grey silt.

'Father, look, there's still coloured tiles on the—'

'Mine!'

'*Mine!*'

Les caught Akhan's eye. They exchanged a very brief glance which was nevertheless modulated with a considerable amount of information, beginning with the sheer galactic-sized embarrassment of having parents and working up from there.

'Dad, we don't*have* to—' Les began.

'You shut up! It's your future fro thinking about, my lad—'

'Yes, but who*cares* who saw it first, Dad? We're both hundreds of miles from home! I mean, who's going to*know* , Dad?'

The two squid fishermen glared at one another.

The dripping buildings rose above them. There were holes that might well have been doorways, and glassless apertures that could have been windows, but

all was darkness within. Now and again, Les fancied he could hear something slithering.

Solid Jackson coughed. 'The lad's right,' he muttered. 'Daft to argue. just the four of us.'

'Indeed,' said Arif.

They backed away, each man carefully watching the other. Then, so closely that it was a chorus, they both yelled: 'Grab the boat!'

There was a confused couple of moments and then each pair, boat carried over their heads, ran and slithered along the muddy streets.

They had to stop and come back, with mutual cries of 'A kidnapper as*well* , eh?', to get the right sons.

As every student of exploration knows, the prize goes not to the explorer who first sets foot upon the virgin soil but to the one who gets that foot home first. If it is still attached to his leg, this is a bonus.

The weathercocks of Ankh–Morpork creaked around in the wind.

Very few of them were in fact representations of *Avis domestica* . There were various dragons, fish and miscellaneous animals. On the roof of the Assassins' Guild a silhouette of one of the members squeaked into a new position, cloak and dagger at the ready. On the Beggars' Guild a tin beggar's hand asked the wind for a quarter. On the Butchers' Guild a copper pig sniffed the air. On the roof of the Thieves' Guild a real if rather decreased unlicensed thief turned gently, which shows what you are capable of if you try, or at least if you try stealing without a licence.

The one on the library dome of Unseen University was running slow and wouldn't show the change for half an hour yet, but the smell of the sea drifted over the city.

There was a tradition of soap-box public speaking in Sator Square. 'Speaking' was stretching a point to cover the ranters, haranguers and occasional self-absorbed mumblers that spaced themselves at intervals amongst the crowds. And, traditionally, people said whatever was on their minds and at the top of their voices. The Patrician, it was said, looked kindly on the custom. He did. And very closely, too. He probably had someone make notes.

So did the Watch.

It wasn't spying Commander Vimes told himself. Spying was when you crept around peeking in windows. It wasn't spying when you had to stand back a bit so that you weren't deafened.

He reached out without paying attention and struck a match on Sergeant Detritus.

'Dat was me, sir,' said the troll reproachfully.

'Sorry, sergeant,' said Vimes, lighting his cigar.

'It not a problem.'

They returned their attention to the speakers.

It's the wind, thought Vimes. It's bringing something new...

Usually the speakers dealt with all kinds of subjects, many of them on the cusp of sanity or somewhere in the peaceful valleys on the other side. But now they were all monomaniacs.

'-time they were taught a lesson!' screamed the nearest one. 'Why don't our so-called masters listen to the voice of the people? Ankh-Morpork has had enough of these swaggering brigands! They steal our fish, they steal our trade and now they're stealing our land!'

It would have been better if people had cheered, Vimes thought. People generally cheered the speakers indiscriminately, to egg them on. But the crowd around this man just seemed to nod approval. He thought: they're actually *thinking* about what he said...

'They stole my merchandise!' shouted a speaker opposite him. 'It's a pirate bloody empire! I was boarded! In Ankh-Morpork waters!'

There was a general self-righteous muttering.

'What did they steal, Mr Jenkins?' said a voice from the crowd.

'A cargo of fine silks!'

The crowd hissed.

'Ah? Not dried fish offal and condemned meat, then? That's your normal cargo, I believe.'

Mr Jenkins strained to look for the speaker.

'Fine silks!' he said. 'And what does the city care about that? Nothing!'

There were shouts of 'Shame!'

'Has the city been told?' said the enquiring voice.

People started to crane their heads. And then the crowd opened a little, to reveal the figure of Commander Vimes of the City Watch.

'Well, it's... I... ' Jenkins began. 'Er... I... '

'I care,' said Vimes calmly. 'Shouldn't be too hard to track down a cargo of fine silks that stink of fish guts.' There was laughter. Ankh-Morpork people always like some variety in their street theatre.

Vimes apparently spoke to Sergeant Detritus, while keeping his gaze locked on Jenkins. 'Detritus, just you go along with Mr Jenkins here, will you? His ship is the *Milka*, I believe. He'll show you all the lading bills and manifests and receipts and things, and then we can sort him out in jig time.'

There was a clang as Detritus's huge hand came to rest against his helmet.

'Yessir!'

'Er... er... you can't,' said Jenkins quickly. 'They... er... stole the paperwork as well...'

'Really? So they can take the stuff back to the shop if it doesn't fit?'

'Er... anyway, the ship's sailed. Yes! Sailed! Got to try and recoup my losses, you know!'

'Sailed? Without its captain?' said Vimes. 'So Mr Scoplett is in charge? Your first officer?'

'Yes, yes—'

'Damn!' said Vimes, snapping his fingers theatrically. 'That man we've got in the cells on a charge of being Naughtily Drunk last night... we're going to have to charge him with impersonation as well, then? I don't know, more blasted paperwork, the stuff just piles up...'

Mr Jenkins tried to look away but Vimes's stare kept pulling him back. The occasional tremble of a lip suggested that he was preparing a riposte, but he was bright enough to spot that Vimes's grin was as funny as the one that moves very fast towards drowning men. And has a fin on top.

Mr Jenkins made a wise decision, and got down. 'I'll... er... I'll go and sort... I'd better go and... er...' he said, and pushed his Way through the mob, which waited a little while to see if anything interesting was going to happen and then, disappointed, sought out other entertainment.

'You want I should go ad have a look at his boat?' said Detritus.

'No, sergeant. There won't be any silk, and there won't be any paperwork. There won't be anything

except a lingering aroma of fish guts.'

'Wow, dem damn Klatchians steals everything that ain't nailed down, right?'

Vimes shook his head and strolled on. 'They don't have trolls in Klatch, do they?' he said.

'Nossir. It's der heat. Troll brains don't work in der heat. If I was to go to Klatch,' said Detritus, his knuckles making little bink–bink noises as he dragged them over the cobbles, 'I'd be really *stupid*.'

'Detritus?'

'Yessir?'

'Never go to Klatch.'

'Nossir.'

Another speaker was attracting a much larger crowd. He stood in front of a large banner that proclaimed: GREASY FORANE HANDS OFF LESHIP.

'Leship,' said Detritus. 'Now *dere's* a name that ain't got its teef in.'

'It's the land that came back up from under the sea last week,' said Vimes despondently. . .

They listened while the speaker proclaimed that Ankh–Morpork had a duty to protect its kith and kin on the new land. Detritus looked puzzled.

'How come dere's dese kiff and kin on dere when it only just come up from under der water?' he said.

'Good question,' said Vimes.

'Dey been holding dere breath?'

'I doubt it.'

There was more in the air than the salt of the sea, Vimes thought. There was some other current. He could sense it. Suddenly, the problem was Klatch.

Ankh–Morpork had been at peace with Klatch, or at least in a state of non–war, for almost a century. It was, after all, the neighbouring country.

Neighbours... hah! But what did that mean? The Watch could tell you a thing or two about neighbours. So could lawyers, especially the real rich ones to whom 'neighbour' meant a man who'd sue for twenty

years over a strip of garden two inches wide. Peopled live for ages side by side, nodding at one another amicably on their way to work every day, and then some trivial thing would happen and someone would be having a garden fork removed from their ear.

And now some damn rock had risen up out of the sea and everyone was acting as if Klatch had let its dog bark all night.

'Aagraaah,' said Detritus, mournfully.

'Don't mind me, just don't spit it on my boot,' said Vimes.

'It mean—' Detritus waved a huge hand, 'like... dem things, what only comes in...' he paused and looked at his fingers, while his lips moved'... fours. Aagraaah. It mean lit'rally der time when you see dem little pebbles and you jus'*know* dere's gonna be a great big landslide on toppa you and it already too late to run. Dat moment, dat's aagraaah.'

Vimes's own lips moved. '*Forebodings*'?

'Dat's der bunny.'

'Where does the word come from?'

Detritus shrugged. 'Maybe it named after der soun' you make just as a t'ousand ton of rock hit you.'

'Forebodings...' Vimes rubbed his chin. 'Yeah. Well, I've got plenty of them...'

Landslides and avalanches, he thought. All the little snowflakes land, light as a feather – and suddenly the whole side of a mountain is moving...

Detritus looked at him slyly. 'I know everyone say "Dem two short planks, dey're as fick as Detritus",' he said, 'but I know which way der wind is blowin'.'

Vimes looked at his sergeant with a new respect.

'You can spot it, can you?'

The troll's finger tapped his helmet twice, knowingly.

'It pretty obvious,' he said. 'You see up on der roofs dem little chickies and dragons and stuff? And dat poor buggar on der Fieves' Guild? You just has to watch 'em.*Dey* know. Beats me how dey always pointin' der right way.'

Vimes relaxed a little. Detritus's intelligence wasn't too bad for a troll, falling somewhere between a cuttlefish and a linedancer, but you could rely on him not to let it slow him down.

Detritus winked. 'An' it look to me like dat time when you go an' find a big club and listen to grandad tellin' you how he beat up all dem dwarfs when he was a boy,' he said. 'Somethin' in der wind, right?'

'Er... yes...' said Vimes.

There was a fluttering above him. He sighed. A message was coming in.

On a pigeon.

But they'd tried everything else, hadn't they? Swamp dragons tended to explode in the air, imps ate the messages and the semaphore helmets had not been a success, especially in high winds. And then Corporal Littlebottom had pointed out that Ankh–Morpork's pigeons were, because of many centuries of depredation by the city's gargoyle population, considerably more intelligent than most pigeons,

although Vimes considered that this was not difficult because there were things growing on old damp bread that were more intelligent than most pigeons.

He took a handful of corn out of his pocket. The pigeon, obedient to its careful training, settled on his shoulder. In obedience to internal pressures, it relieved itself.

'You know, we've got to find something better,' said Vimes, as he unwrapped the message. 'Every time we send a message to Constable Downspout he eats it.'

'Well, *heare* a gargoyle,' said Detritus. 'He fink it lunch arriving.'

'Oh,' said Vimes, 'his lordship requires my attendance. How nice.'

Lord Vetinari looked attentive, because he'd always found that listening keenly to people tended to put them off.

And at meetings like this, when he was advised by the leaders of the city, he listened with great care because what people said was what they wanted him to hear. He paid a lot of attention to the spaces outside the words, though. That's where the things were that they hoped he didn't know and didn't want him to find out.

Currently he was paying attention to the things that Lord Downey of the Assassins' Guild was failing to say in a lengthy exposition of the Guild's high level of training and value to the city. The voice, eventually, came to a stop in the face of Vetinari's aggressive listening.

'Thank you, Lord Downey,' he said. 'I'm sure we shall all be able to sleep a lot more uneasily for knowing all that. just one minor point... I believe the word "assassin" actually comes from Klatch?'

'Well... indeed...'

'And I believe also that many of your students are, as it turns out, from Klatch and its neighbouring countries?'

'The unrivalled quality of our education. .

'Quite so. What you are telling me, in point of fact, is that their assassins have been doing it longer, know their way around our city and have had their traditional skills honed by you?'

'Er...'

The Patrician turned to Mr Burleigh.

'We surely have superiority in weapons, Mr Burleigh?'

'Oh, yes. Say what you like about dwarfs, but we've been turning out some superb stuff lately,' said the President of the Guild of Armourers.

'Ah. That at least is some comfort.'

'Yes,' said Burleigh. He looked wretched. 'However, the thing about weapons manufacture... the important thing...'

'I believe you are about to say that the important thing about the business of weaponry is that it is a business,' said the Patrician.

Burleigh looked as though he'd been let off the hook on to a bigger hook.

'Er... yes.'

'That, in fact, the weapons are for selling.'

'Er... exactly.'

'To anyone who wishes to buy them.'

'Er... yes.'

'Regardless of the use to which they are going to be put?'

The armaments manufacturer looked affronted.

'Pardon me? *Of course* . They're *weapons* .'

'And I suspect that in recent years a very lucrative market has been Klatch?'

'Well, yes... the Seriph needs them to pacify the outlying regions...'

The Patrician held up his hand. Drumknott, his clerk, gave him a piece of paper.

'The "Great Leveller" Cart-Mounted Ten-Bank 500-pound Crossbow?' he said. 'And, let me see... the

"Meteor" Automated Throwing Star Hurler, Decapitates at Twenty Paces, Money Back If Not Completely Decapitated?'

'Have you ever heard of the D'regs, my lord?' said Burleigh. 'They say the only way to pacify one of *them* is to hit him repeatedly with an axe and bury what's left under a rock. And even then, choose a heavy rock.'

The Patrician seemed to be staring at a large drawing of the 'Dervish` Mk III Razor-Wire Bolas. There was a painful silence. Burleigh tried to fill it up, always a bad mistake.

'Besides, we provide much-needed jobs in AnkhMorpork,' he murmured.

'Exporting these weapons to other countries,' said Lord Vetinari. He handed the paper back and fixed Burleigh with a friendly smile.

'I'm very pleased to see that the industry has done so well,' he said. 'I will bear this particularly in mind.'

He placed his hands together carefully. 'The situation is grave, gentlemen.'

'Whose?' said Mr Burleigh.

'I'm sorry?'

'What? Oh... I was thinking about something else, my lord...'

'I was referring to the fact that a number of our citizens have gone out to this wretched island. As have, I understand, a number of Klatchians.'

'Why are our people going out there?' said Mr Boggis of the Thieves' Guild.

'Because they are showing a brisk pioneering spirit and seeking wealth and... additional wealth in a new land,' said Lord Vetinari.

'What's in it for the Klatchians?' said Lord Downey.

'Oh, they've gone out there because they are a

bunch of unprincipled opportunists always ready to grab something for nothing,' said Lord Vetinari.

'A masterly summation, if I may say so, my lord,' said Mr Burleigh, who felt he had some ground to make up.

The Patrician looked down again at his notes. 'Oh, I do beg your pardon,' he said, 'I seem to have read those last two sentences in the wrong order... Mr Slant, I believe you have something to say here?'

The president of the Guild of Lawyers cleared his throat. The sound was like a death rattle and technically it was, since the man had been a zombie for several hundred years although historical accounts suggested that the only difference dying had made to W Slant was that he'd started to work through his lunch break.

'Yes, indeed,' he said, opening a large legal tome. 'The history of the city of Leshp and its surrounding country is a little obscure. It is known to have been above the sea almost a thousand years ago, however, when records suggest that it was considered part of the Ankh-Morpork empire—'

'What is the nature of these records and do they tell us who was doing the considering?' said the Patrician. The door opened and Vimes stepped in. 'Ah, commander, do take a seat. Continue, Mr Slant.'

The zombie did not like interruptions. He coughed again. 'The records relating to the lost country date back several hundred years, my lord. And they are of course *our* records.'

'Only ours?'

'I hardly see how any others could apply,' said Mr Slant severely.

'Klatchian ones, for example?' said Vimes, from the far end of the table.

'Sir Samuel, the Klatchian language does not even have a word for lawyer,' said Mr Slant.

'Doesn't it?' said Vimes. 'Good for them.'

'It is our view,' said Slant, turning his chair slightly so that he did not have to look at Vimes, 'that the new land is ours by Eminent Domain, Extra-Territoriality and, most importantly, *Acquiris Quodcumque Rapis*. I am given to understand that it was one of our fishermen who first set foot on it this time.'

'I hear the Klatchians claim that it was one of *their* fishermen,' said Vetinari.

At the end of the table Vimes's lips were moving. *Let's see, Acquiris ...* "You get what you grab"?' he said aloud.

'We're not going to take their word for it, are we?' said Slant, pointedly ignoring him. 'Excuse me, my lord, but I don't believe that proud Ankh-Morpork is told what to do by a bunch of thieves with towels on their heads.'

'No, indeed! It's about time Johnny Klatchian was taught a lesson,' said Lord Selachii. 'Remember all that business last year with the cabbages? Ten damn boatloads they wouldn't accept!'

'And everyone knows caterpillars *add* to the flavour,' said Vimes, more or less to himself.

The Patrician shot him a glance,

'That's right!' said Selachii. 'Good honest protein! And you remember all that trouble Captain Jenkins had over that cargo of mutton? They were going to *imprison* him! In a *Klatchian* jail!'

'Surely not? Meat is at its best when it's going green,' said Vimes.

'It's not as if it'd taste any different under all that curry,' said Burleigh. 'I was at a dinner in their embassy once, and do you know what they

made me eat? It was a sheep's—'

'Excuse me, gentlemen,' said Vimes, standing up. 'There are some urgent matters I must deal with.'

He nodded to the Patrician and hurried out of the room. He shut the door behind him and took a breath of fresh air, although right now he'd have happily inhaled deeply in a tannery.

Corporal Littlebottom stood up and looked at him expectantly. She had been sitting next to a box, which cooed peacefully.

'Something's up. Run down to... I mean, send a pigeon down to the Yard,' said Vimes.

'Yes, sir?'

'All leave is cancelled as of now and I want to see every officer, and I *mean* every officer, at the Yard at, oh, let's say six o'clock.'

'Right, sir. That might mean an extra pigeon unless I can write small enough.'

Littlebottom hurried off.

Vimes glanced out of the window. There was always a certain amount of activity outside the palace but today there was... not so much a crowd as, just, rather more people than you normally saw, hanging around. As if they were waiting for something.

Klatch!

Everyone *knows* it.

Old Detritus was right. You could hear the little pebbles bouncing. It's not just a few fishermen having a scrap, it's a hundred years of... well, like two big men trying to fit in one small room, trying to be polite about it, and then one day one of them just has to stretch and pretty soon they're both smashing the furniture.

But it couldn't really happen, could it? From what he'd heard, the present Seriph was a competent man

who was mostly concerned with pacifying the rowdy edges of his empire. And there were Klatchians living in AnkhMorpork, for heaven's sake! There were Klatchians born in Ankh–Morpork. You saw some lad with a face that'd got camels written all over it, and when he opened his mouth it'd turn out he had an Ankhian accent so thick you could float rocks. Oh, there's all the jokes about funny food and foreigners, but surely...

Not very funny jokes, come to think of it.

When you hear the bang, there's no time to wonder how long the little fuse has been fizzing.

There were raised voices when he went back into the Rats Chamber.

'Because, Lord Selachii; the Patrician was saying, 'these are *not* the old days. It is no longer considered... *nice* ... to send a warship over there to, as you put it, show Johnny Foreigner the error of his ways. For one thing, we haven't had any warships since the *Mary –Jane* sank four hundred years ago. And times have changed. These days, the whole world watches. And, my lord, you are no longer allowed to say "What're you lookin' at?" and black their eyes.' He leaned back. 'There's Chimeria, and Khanli, and Ephebe, and Tsort. And Muntab, these days, too. And Omnia. Some of these are powerful nations, gentlemen. Many of them don't like Klatch's current expansionist outlook, but they don't Eke us much, either.'

'Whyever not?' said Lord Selachii.

'Well, because during our history those we haven't occupied we've tended to wage war on,' said Lord Vetinari. 'For some reason the slaughter of thousands of people tends to stick in the memory.'

'Oh, *history* ,' said Lord Selachii. 'That's all in the past!'

'A good place for history, agreed,' said the Patrician solemnly.

'I meant: why don't they like us now? Do we owe them money?'

'No. Mostly they owe *us* money. Which is, of course, a far better reason for their dislike.'

'How about Sto Lat and Pseudopolis and the other cities?' said Lord Downey.

'They don't like us much, either.'

'Why not? I mean t'say, we do share a common heritage,' said Lord Selachii.

'Yes, my lord, but that common heritage largely consists of having had wars with one another,' said the Patrician. 'I can't see much support there. Which is a little unfortunate because we do not, in fact, have an army. I am not, of course, a military man but I believe that one of those is generally considered vital to the successful prosecution of a war.'

.He looked along the table.

'The *factis* " he went on, 'that Ankh–Morpork has been violently against a standing army.'

'We all know *why* people don't trust an army,' said Lord Downey. 'A lot of armed men, standing around with nothing to do... they start to get ideas . .

Vimes saw the heads turn towards him.

'My word,' he said, with glassy brightness, 'can this be a reference to "Old Stoneface" Vimes, who led the city's militia in a revolt against the rule of a tyrannical monarch in an effort to bring some sort of freedom and justice to the place? I do believe it is! And was he Commander of the Watch at the time? Good heavens, yes, as a matter of fact he was! Was he hanged and dismembered and buried in five graves? And is he a distant ancestor of the current Commander? My word, the coincidences just *pile* up, don't they?' His voice went from manic cheerfulness to a growl. 'Right! That's got *that* over with. Now – has anyone got any point they wish to make?'

There was a general shifting of position and a group clearing of throats.

'What about mercenaries?' said Boggis.

'The problem with mercenaries' ' said the Patrician, 'is that they need to be paid to start fighting. And, unless you are very lucky, you end up paying them even more to stop—'

Selachii thumped the table.

'Very well, then, by jingo!' he snarled. 'Alone!'

'We could certainly do with one,' said Lord Vetinari. 'We need the money. I was about to say that we cannot *afford* mercenaries.'

'How can this be?' said Lord Downey. 'Don't we pay our taxes?'

'Ah, I thought we might come to that,' said Lord Vetinari. He raised his hand and, on cue again, his clerk placed a piece of paper in it.

'Let me see now... ah yes. Guild of Assassins... Gross earnings in the last year: AM\$13,207,048. Taxes paid in the last year: forty–seven dollars, twenty–two pence and what on examination turned out to be a Hershebian half–*dong*, worth one–eighth of a penny.'

'That's all perfectly legal! The Guild of Accountants—'

'Ah yes. Guild of Accountants: gross earnings AM\$7,999,011. Taxes paid: nil. But, ah yes, I see they applied for a rebate of AM\$200,000.'

'And what we received, I may say, included a Hershebian half-*dong*,' said Mr Frostrip of the Guild of Accountants.

'What goes around comes around" said Vetinari calmly.

He tossed the paper aside. 'Taxation, gentlemen, is very much like dairy farming. The task is to extract the maximum amount of milk with the minimum of moo. And I am afraid to say that these days all I get is moo.'

'Are you telling us that Ankh-Morpork is *bankrupt*?' said Downey.

'Of course. While, at the same time, full of rich people. I trust they have been spending their good fortune on swords.'

'And you have *allowed* this wholesale tax avoidance?' said Lord Selachii.

'Oh, the taxes haven't been avoided,' said Lord Vetinari. 'Or even evaded. They just haven't been paid.'

'That is a disgusting state of affairs!'

The Patrician raised his eyebrows. 'Commander Vimes?'

'Yes, sir?'

'Would you be so good as to assemble a squad of your most experienced men, liaise with the tax gatherers and obtain the accumulated back taxes, please? My clerk here will give you a list of the prime defaulters.'

'Right, sir. And if they resist, sir?' said Vimes, smiling nastily.

'Oh, how can they resist, commander? This is the will of our civic leaders.' He took the paper his clerk proffered. 'Let me see, now. Top of the list—'

Lord Selachii coughed hurriedly. 'Far too late for that sort of nonsense now,' he said.

'Water under the bridge,' said Lord Downey.

'Dead and buried,' said Mr Slant.

'I paid mine,' said Vimes.

'So let me recap, then,' said Vetinari. 'I don't think anyone wants to see two grown nations scrapping over a piece of rock. We don't want to fight, but—'

'By jingo, if we do, we'll show those—' Lord Selachii began.

'We have no ships. We have no men. We have no money, too,' said Lord Vetinari. 'Of course, we have the art of diplomacy. It is amazing what you can do with the right words.'

'Unfortunately, the right words are more readily listened to if you also have a sharp stick,' said Lord Downey.

'Lord Selachii slapped the table. 'We don't have *totalk* to these people! My lords... gentlemen... it's up to us to show them we won't be pushed around! We must re-form the regiments!'

'Oh, *private* armies?' said Vimes. 'Under the command of someone whose fitness for it lies in the fact that he can afford to pay for a thousand funny hats?'

Someone leaned forward, halfway along the table. Up to that moment Vimes had thought he was asleep, and when Lord Rust spoke it was, indeed, in a sort of yawn.

'Whose *fitness* , Mister Vimes, lies in a thousand years of breeding for leadership,' he said.

The 'Mister' twisted in Vimes's chest. He knew he was a mister would always be a mister, was probably a blueprint for mistership, but he'd be damned if he wouldn't be Sit Samuel to someone who pronounced years as 'hyahs'.

'Ah, good breeding,' he said. 'No, sorry, don't have any of *that* , if that's what you need to get your own men killed by sheer—'

'Gentlemen, please,' said the Patrician. He shook his head. 'Let's have no fighting, please. This is, after all, a council of war. As for re-forming the regiments, well, this is of course your ancient right. The supplying of armed men in times of need is one of the duties of a

gentleman. History is on your side. The precedents are dear enough, I can't go against them. I have to say I cannot afford to.'

'You're going to let them play soldiers?' said Vimes.

'Oh, Commander Vimes,' said Mr Burleigh, smiling. 'As a military man yourself, you must—.,

Sometimes people can attract attention by shouting. They might opt for thumping a table, or even take a swing at someone else. But Vimes achieved the effect by freezing, by simply doing nothing. The chill radiated off him. Lines in his face locked like a statue.

'*I am not a military man.*'

And then Burleigh made the mistake of trying to grin disarmingly.

'Well, commander, the helmet and armour and everything... It's really all the same in the end, isn't it?'

'*No. It's not.*'

'Gentlemen. ..' Lord Vetinari put his hands flat on

the table, a sign that the meeting had ended. 'I can only repeat that tomorrow I shall be discussing the matter with Prince Khufurah—'

'I've heard good reports of him,' said Lord Rust. 'Strict but fair. One can only admire what he's doing in

some of those backward regions. A most—'

'No, sir. You are thinking of Prince Cadram,' said Lord Vetinari 'Khufurah is the younger brother. He is arriving here as his brother's special envoy.'

'Him?*That* one? The man's a wastrel! A cheat! A liar! They say he takes bri—'

'Thank you for your diplomatic input, Lord Rust,' said the Patrician. 'We must deal with facts as they are. There is always a way. Our nations have many interests in common. And of course it says a lot for the seriousness with which Cadram is treating this matter

that he is sending his own brother to deal with it. It's a nod towards the international community.'

'A Klatchian bigwig is coming*here* ?' said Vimes. 'No one told me!'

'Strange as it may seem, Sir Samuel, I am occasionally capable of governing this city for minutes at a time without seeking your advice and guidance.'

'I meant there's a lot of anti-Klatchian feeling around—'

'*A really greasy piece of work—*' Lord Rust whispered to Mr Boggis, in that special aristocratic whisper that carries to the rafters. '*It's an insult to send him here!*'

'I am sure that you will see to it that the streets are safe to walk, Vimes,' said the Patrician sharply. 'I know you pride yourself on that sort of thing. Officially he's here because the wizards have invited him to their big award ceremony. An honorary doctorate, that sort of thing. And one of their lunches afterwards. I do like negotiating with people after the faculty of Unseen University have entertained them to lunch. They tend not to move about much and they'll agree to practically anything if they think there's a chance of a stomach powder and a small glass of water. And now, gentlemen... if you will excuse me.. '

The lords and leaders departed in ones and twos, talking quietly as they walked out into the hall.

The Patrician shuffled his papers into order, running a thin finger along each edge of the pile, and then looked up.

'You appear to be casting a shadow, commander.'

'You're not*really* going to allow them to re-form the regiments, are you?' said Vimes.

'There is absolutely no law against it, Vimes. And it

will keep them occupied. Every official gentleman is entitled, in fact I believe used to be*required* , to raise men when the city required it. And, of course, any citizen has the right to bear arms. Bear that in mind, please.'

'Arms is one thing. Holding weapons in 'em and playing soldiers is another.' Vimes put his knuckles on the table and leaned forward.

'You see, sir,' he said, 'I can't help but think that over there in Klatch a bunch of idiots are doing the same thing. They're saying to the Seriph "It's time to sort out those devils in Ankh-Morpork, offendi". And when a lot of people are running around with weapons and talking daft stuff about war, accidents

happen. Have you ever been in a pub when everyone goes armed? Oh, things are a little polite at first, I'll grant you, and then some twerp drinks out of the wrong mug or picks up someone else's change by mistake and five minutes later you're picking noses out of the beer nuts—'

The Patrician looked down at Vimes's knuckles and stared fixedly until Vimes removed them.

'Vimes, you will be at the wizards' Convivium tomorrow. I sent you a memo about it.'

'I never—' A vision of the piles of unread paperwork on Vimes's desk loomed treacherously in his mind. 'Ah,' he said.

'The Commander of the Watch leads the procession in full dress uniform. It's an ancient custom.'

'Me? Walk in front of everyone?'

'Indeed. Very... civic. As I'm sure you recall. It demonstrates the friendly alliance between the University and the civil government which, I may say, seems to consist of their promising to do anything we ask provided we promise not to ask them to do

anything. Anyway, it is your duty. Tradition decrees it. And Lady Sybil has agreed to see to it that you are there with a crisp bright shining morning face.'

Vimes took a deep breath. 'You asked my *wife* ?'

'Certainly. She is very proud of you. She believes you are capable of great things, Vimes. She must be a great comfort to you.'

'Well, I... I mean, I... yes...'

'Excellent. Oh, just one other thing, Vimes. I do have the Assassins and the Thieves in agreement on this, but to cover *all* eventualities... I would consider it a favour if you could see to it that no-one throws eggs or something at the Prince. That sort of thing always upsets people.'

The two sides watched each other carefully. They were old enemies. They had tested strengths many a time, had tasted defeat and victory, had contested turf. But this time it would go all the way.

Knuckles whitened. Boots scraped impatiently.

Captain Carrot bounced the ball once or twice.

'All right, lads, one more try, eh? And this time, no horseplay. William, what are you eating?'

The Artful Nudger scowled. *No-one* knew his name. Kids he'd grown up with didn't know his name. His mother, if he ever found out who she was, probably didn't know his name. But Carrot had found out somehow. If anyone else had called him 'William' they'd be looking for their ear. In their mouth.

'Chewing gum, mister.'

'Have you brought enough for everybody?'

'No, mister.'

'Then put it away, there's a good chap. Now, let's— Gavin, what's that up your sleeve?'

The one known as Scumbag Gav didn't bother to argue.

' 's a knife, Mr Carrot.'

'And *I bet* you brought enough for everybody, eh?'

' 'sright, mister.' Scumbag grinned. He was ten.

'Go on, put them on the heap with the others. .

Constable Shoe looked over the wall in horror. There were about fifty youths in the wide alleyway. Average age in years, about eleven. Average age in cynicism and malevolent evil: about 163. Although Ankh–Morpork football doesn't usually have goals in the normal sense, two had been nevertheless made at each end of the alley using the time–honoured method of piling up things to mark where the posts would be.

Two piles: one of knives, one of blunt instruments.

In the middle of the boys, who were wearing the colours of some of the nastier street gangs, Captain Carrot was bouncing an inflated pig's bladder.

Constable Shoe wondered if he ought to go and get help, but the man seemed quite at ease.

'Er, captain?' he ventured.

'Oh, hello, Reg. We were just having a friendly game of football. This is Constable Shoe, lads.'

Fifty pairs of eyes said: We'll remember your face, copper.

Rag edged around the wall and the eyes noted the arrow which had gone straight through his breastplate and protruded several inches from his back.

'There's been a bit of trouble, sir,' said Reg. 'I thought I'd better fetch you. It's a hostage situation...'

'I'll come right away. OK, lads, sorry about this. Play amongst yourselves, will you? And I hope I'll see you all on Tuesday for the sing–song and sausage sizzle.,

'Yeah, mister,' said the Artful Nudger.

'And Corporal Argue will see if she can teach you the campfire howl.'

'Yeah, right,' said Scumbag.

'But what do we do before we part?' said Carrot expectantly.

The bloods of the Skats and the Mohocks looked bashfully at one another. Usually they were nervous of nothing, it being a banishment matter to show fear in any circumstances. But when they'd variously drawn up the clan rules, no-one had ever thought there'd be someone like Carrot.

Glaring at one another with I'll-kill-you-if-you-ever-mention-this expressions, they all raised the index fingers of both hands to the level of their ears and chorused: 'Wib wib wib.'

'Wob wob wob,' Carrot replied heartily. 'OK Reg, let's go.'

'How'd you do that, captain?' said Constable Shoe, as the watchmen hurried off.

'Oh, you just raise both fingers like *this* ,' said Carrot. 'But I'd be obliged if you don't tell anyone, because it's meant to be a secret sig-'

'But they're thugs, captain! Young killers! Villains!'

'Oh, they're a bit cheeky, but nice enough boys underneath, when you take the time to understand-'

'I heard they never give anyone enough *time* to understand! Does Mr Vimes know you're doing this?'

'He sort of knows, yes. I said I'd like to start a club for the street kids and he said it was fine provided I took them camping on the edge of some really sheer cliff somewhere in a high wind. But he always says things like that. And I'm sure we wouldn't have him

any other way. Now, where are these hostages?'

'It's at Vortin's again, captain. But it's... sort of worse than that...'

Behind them, the Skats and the Mohocks looked at one another warily. Then they picked up their weapons and edged away with care. It's not that we don't want to fight, their manner said. It's just that we've got better things to do right now, and so we're going to go away and find out what they are.

Unusually for the docks, there was not a great deal of shouting and general conversation. People were too busy thinking about money.

Sergeant Colon and Corporal Nobbs leaned against a stack of timber and watched a man very carefully painting the name *Pride of Ankh -Morpork* on the prow of a ship. At some point he'd realize that he'd left out the 'c', and they were idly looking forward to this modest entertainment.

'You ever been to sea, sarge?' said Nobby.

'Hah, not me!' said the sergeant. 'Don't go flogging the oggin, lad.'

'I don't,' said Nobby. 'I have never flogged any oggin. Never in my entire life have I flogged oggin.'

'Right.'

'I've always been very clean in that respect.'

'Except you don't know what flogging the oggin means, do you?'

'No, sarge.'

'It means going to sea. You can't bloody trust the sea. When I was a little lad I had this book about this little kid, he turned into a mermaid, sort of thing, and he lived down the bottom of the sea—'

'—the oggin—'

'Right, and it was all nice talking fishes and pink seashells and stuff, and then I went on my holidays to Quirm and I saw the sea, and I thought: here goes, and if our ma hadn't been quick on her feet I don't know what would have happened. I mean, the kid in the book could breathe under the sea, so how was I to know? It's all bloody *lies* about the sea. It's just all yuk with lobsters in it.'

'My mum's uncle was a sailor" said Nobby. 'But after the big plague he got press-ganged. Bunch of farmers got him drunk, he woke up next morning tied to a plough.'

They lounged some more.

'Looks like we're going to be in a fight, sarge,' said Nobby, as the painter very carefully started on the final 'k'.

'Won't last long. Lots of cowards, the Klatchians,' said Colon. 'The moment they taste a bit of cold steel they're legging it away over the sand.'

Sergeant Colon had had a broad education. He'd been to the School of My Dad Always Said, the College of It Stands to Reason, and was now a postgraduate student at the University of What Some Bloke In the Pub Told Me.

'Shouldn't be any trouble to sort out, then?' said Nobby.

'And o'course, they're not the same colour as what we are,' said Colon. 'Well... as me, anyway,' he added, in view of the various hues of Corporal Nobbs. There was probably no-one alive who was the same colour as Corporal Nobbs.

'Constable Visit's pretty brown' ' said Nobby. 'I never seen him run away. if there's a chance of giving someone a religious pamphlet ole Washpot's after them like a terrier.'

'Ah, but Omnians are more like us,' said Colon. 'Bit weird but, basic'ly, just the same as us underneath. No, the way you can tell a Klatchian is, you look an' see if he uses a lot of words beginning with "al", right? 'Cos that's a dead giveaway. They invented all the words starting with "al". That's how you can tell they're Klatchian. Like al-cohol, see?'

'They invented beer?'

'Yeah.'

'That's clever.'

'I wouldn't call it clever,' said Sergeant Colon, realizing too late that he'd made a tactical error. 'More, luck, I'd say.'

'What else did they do?'

'Well, there's...' Colon racked his brains. 'There's al–gebra. That's like sums with letters. For... for people whose brains aren't clever enough for numbers, see?'

'Is that a fact?'

'Right,' said Colon. 'In fact,' he went on, a little more assertively now he could see a way ahead, 'I heard this wizard down the University say that the Klatchians invented nothing. That was their great contribution to maffs, he said. I said "What?" an' he said, they come up with zero.'

'Dun't sound that clever to me,' said Nobby. 'Anyone could invent nothing. I ain't invented anything.'

'My point exactly,' said Colon. 'I told him, it was people who invented numbers like four and, and–'

'–seven–'

'–right, who were the geniuses. *Nothing* didn't need inventing. It was just there. They probably just found it.'

'It's having all that desert,' said Nobby.

'Right! Good point. Desert. Which, as everyone

knows, is basically nothing. Nothing's a natural resource to them. It stands to reason. Whereas we're more civilized, see, and we got a lot more stuff around to count, so we invented numbers. It's like... well, they say the Klatchians invented astronomy–'

'Al–tronomy,' said Nobby helpfully.

'No, no... no, Nobby, I reckon they'd discovered esses by then, probably nicked' em off' us... anyway, they were *bound* to invent astronomy, 'cos there's bugger all else for them to look at but the sky. Anyone can look at the stars and give 'em names. 's going it a bit to call it *inventing*, in any case. We don't go around saying we've *invented* something just because we had a quick dekko at it.'

'I heard where they've got a lot of odd gods,' said Nobby.

'Yeah, *and* mad priests,' said Colon. 'Foaming at the mouth, half of 'em. Believe all kinds of loony things.'

They watched the painter in silence for a moment. Colon was dreading the question that came.

'So how *exactly* are they different from ours, then?' said Nobby. 'I mean, some of *our* priests are–'

'I hope you ain't being *unpatriotic*,' said Colon severely.

'No, of course not. I was just asking. I can see where they'd be a lot worse than ours, being foreign and everything.'

'And of course they're all mad for fighting,' said Colon. 'Vicious buggers with all those curvy swords of theirs.'

'You mean, like they viciously attack you while cowardly running away after tasting cold steel?' said Nobby, who sometimes had a treacherously good memory for detail.

'You can't trust 'em, like I said. And they burp hugely after meals.'

'Well... so do you, sarge.'

'Yes, but I don't pretend it's *polite*, Nobby.'

'Well, it's certainly a good job there's you around to explain things, sarge,' said Nobby. 'It's amazing the stuff you know.'

'I surprise myself, sometimes,' said Colon modestly. The painter of the ship leaned back to admire his work. They heard him give a heartfelt little groan, and both of them nodded in satisfaction.

Hostage negotiations were always tricky, Carrot had learned. It paid not to rush things. Let the other man talk when he was ready.

So he was whiling away the time sitting behind the upturned cart they were using as a shield from the occasional random arrow and writing his letter home. The exercise was carried out with much frowning, sucking of the pencil and what Commander Vimes called a ballistic approach to spelling and punctuation.

Dere Mum and Dade,

I hope this letter finds you in good health as I am

also. Thank you for the big parcel of dwarf bread you

sent me I have sharred it with the other dwarfs on

the Watch and they say it is better even than

Ironcrufts ('t'Bread Wi' T'Edge') and you carn't

beat the taste of a home-forged loaf, so well done

mum.

Things are going well with the Wolf Pack that I

have told you about but Cmdr. Vimes is not happy, I

told him they were good lads at heart and it would

help them to learn the ways of Natchure and the

Wilderness and he said hah they know them already  
that is the trouble. But he gave me \$5 to buy a  
football which proves he cares deep down.

We have more new faeces in the Watch which is  
just as well with this truble with Klatch, it is all  
looking very Grave, I feel it is the Clam before the  
Storm and no mistake.

I must brake off now because some robbers have  
broke into Vortin's Dimond Warehouse and  
have taken Corporal Angua hostage. I fear there  
may be terrible bloodshed so,

I remain,

Yr. Loving Son,

Carrot Ironfoundersson (Captain)

ps I will write again tomorrow

Carrot folded the letter carefully and slipped it under his breastplate.

'I think they have had long enough to consider our suggestion, constable. What's next on the list?'

Constable Shoe leafed through a file of grubby paper and pulled out another sheet

'Well, we're down to offences of stealing pennies off blind beggars now,' he said. 'Oh, no, this is a good one...'

Carrot took the sheet in one hand and megaphone in the other and raised his head carefully over the edge of the cart.

'Good morning again!' he said brightly. 'We've found another one. Theft of jewellery from—'

'Yes! Yes! We did it!' shouted a voice from the building.

'Really? I haven't even said what it was yet,' said Carrot.

'Never mind, *wedid* it! Now can we come out, please?' There was another sound behind the voice. It

sounded like a low, continuous growl.

'I think you ought to be able to tell me what you stole,' said Carrot.

'Er... rings? Cold rings?'

'Sorry, no rings mentioned.'

'Pearl necklace? Yes, that's what—'

'Getting warmer, but no.'

'Earrings?'

'Ooo, you're so close,' said Carrot encouragingly.

'A crown, was it? Maybe a coronet?'

Carrot leaned down to the constable. 'Says here a tiara, Reg, can we let—?' He stood up. 'We're prepared to accept "coronet". Well done!'

He looked down at Constable Shoe again.

'This is all right, isn't it, Reg? It's not coercion, is it?'

'Can't see how it can be, captain. I mean, they broke in, they took a hostage...'

'I suppose you're right—'

*'Please! No! Good boy! Down!'*

'Seems to be about it, sir,' said Reg Shoe, peering around the edge of the cart. 'We've got them down for everything but the Hide Park Flasher—'

'We did that!' screamed someone.

'—and that was a woman...'

*'We did it!'* This time the voice was a lot higher. *'Now please can we come out?'*

Carrot stood up and raised the megaphone. 'If you gentlemen would care to step out with your hands up?'

'Are you joking?' whimpered someone, against the background of another growl.

'Well, at least with your hands where I can see them.'

'You bet, mister!'

Four men stumbled out into the street. Their tom clothing fluttered in the breeze. The apparent leader pointed an angry finger back at the doorway as Carrot walked towards them.

'The owner of that place ought to be prosecuted!' he shouted. 'Keeping a wild animal like that in his strongroom, it's disgraceful! We broke in perfectly peacefully and it just attacked us for no reason at all!'

'You shot at Constable Shoe here,' said Carrot.

'Only to miss! Only to miss!'

Constable Shoe pointed at the arrow sticking into his breastplate.

'Right where it shows!' he complained. 'It's a welding job and we have to pay for our own armour repairs and there'll always be a mark, you know, no matter what I do.'

Their horrified gaze took in the stitch marks around his neck and on his hands, and it dawned on them that although the human race came in a variety of colours, very few living people were grey with a hint of green.

'Here, you're *azombie* !'

'That's right, kick a man when he's dead,' said Constable Shoe sharply.

'And you took Corporal Angua hostage. A lady,' said Carrot, in the same level voice. It was very polite. But it simply suggested that somewhere a fuse was burning, and it would be a good idea not to wait for it to reach the barrel.

'Yes... sort of... but she must've got away when that *creature* turned up...'

'So you left her in there?' said Carrot, still very calm.

The men dropped to their knees. The leader raised his hand imploringly.

'Please! We're just robbers and thieves! We're not bad men!'

Carrot nodded to Constable Shoe. 'Take them down to the Yard, constable.'

'Right!' said Reg. There was a mean look in his eye as he cocked his crossbow. 'I'm down ten dollars thanks to you. So you'd better not try to escape.'

'No, sir. Not us.'

Carrot wandered into the gloom of the building. Fearful faces peered out of doorways. He gave them a reassuring smile as he walked towards the strongroom.

Corporal Angua was adjusting her uniform.

'I didn't bite anyone, before you start,' she said, as he appeared in the doorway. 'Not even flesh wounds. I just tore at their trousers. And that was no bed of roses, I might add.'

A frightened face appeared round the door.

'Ah, Mr Vortin,' said Carrot. 'I think you will find that all is in order. They seem to have dropped

everything.'

The diamond merchant looked at him in amazement.

'But they had a hostage—'

'They saw the error of their ways,' said Carrot.

'And... and there were snarling noises... sounded like a wolf...'

'Ah, yes,' said Carrot. 'Well, you know, when thieves fall out...' Which was no kind of explanation, but because the tone of voice suggested that it *was*, Mr Vortin accepted it as such for fully five minutes after Carrot and Angua had left.

'Well, that's a nice start to the day,' said Carrot.

'Thank you, yes, I wasn't hurt,' said Angua.

'It makes it all seem worthwhile, somehow.'

'Just my hair messed up and another shirt ruined.'

'Well done.'

'Sometimes I might suspect that you don't listen to anything I say,' said Angua.

'Glad to hear it,' said Carrot.

The entire Watch was mustering. Vimes looked down at the sea of faces.

My gods, he thought. How many have we got now? A few years ago you could count the Watch on the fingers of a blind butcher's hand, and now...

There's *more* coming in!

He leaned sideways to Captain Carrot. 'Who're all these people?'

'Watchmen, sir. You appointed them.'

'Did I? I haven't even *met* some of them!'

'You signed the paperwork, sir. And you sign the wage bill every month. Eventually.'

There was a hint of criticism in his voice. Vimes's approach to paperwork was not to touch it until someone was shouting, and then at least there would be someone to help him sort through the stacks.

'But how did they join?'

'Usual way, sir. Swore them in, gave them each a helmet—'

'Hey, that's Reg Shoe! He's a zombie! He falls to bits all the time!'

'Very big man in the undead community, sir,' said Carrot.

'How come *he* joined?'

'He came round last week to complain about the Watch harassing some bogeymen, sir. He was very, er, vehement, sir. So I persuaded him that what the Watch needed was some expertise, and so he joined up, sir.'

'No more complaints?'

'Twice as many, sir. All from undead, sir, and all against Mr Shoe. Funny, that.'

Vimes gave his captain a sideways look.

'He's very hurt about it, sir. He says he's found that the undead just don't understand the difficulties of policing in a multi-vital society, sir.'

Good gods, thought Vimes, that's just what I would have done. But I'd have done it because I'm not a nice person. Carrot is a nice person, he's practically got medals for it, surely he wouldn't have...

And he knew that he would never know. Somewhere behind Carrot's innocent stare was a steel door.

'You enrolled him, did you?'

'No sir. You did, sir. You signed his joining orders and his kit chitty and his posting orders, sir.'

Vimes had another vision of too many documents, hurriedly signed. But *he must* have signed them and they needed the men, true enough. It was just that it ought to be *him* who—

'And anyone of sergeant rank or above can recruit, sir,' said Carrot, as if reading his mind. 'It's in the General Orders. Page twenty-two, sir. just below the tea stain.'

'And you've recruited... how many?'

'Oh, just one or two. We're still very short-handed, sir.'

'We are with Reg. His arms keep falling off.'

'Aren't you going to talk to the men, sir?'

Vimes looked at the assembled... well, multitude. There was no other word. Well, there were plenty, but none that it would be fair to use.

Big ones, short ones, fat ones, troll ones with the lichen still on, bearded dwarf ones, the looming pottery presence of the golem Constable Dorfl, undead ones... and even now he wasn't certain if that term should include Corporal Angua, an intelligent girl and a very useful wolf when she had to be. Waifs and strays, Colon had said once. Waifs and bloody strays, because normal people wouldn't be coppers.

Technically they were all in uniform, too, except that mostly they weren't wearing the same uniform as anyone else. Everyone had just been sent down to the armoury to collect whatever fitted, and the result was a walking historical exhibit: Funny-Shaped Helmets Through the Ages.

'Er... ladies and gentlemen-' he began.

'Be quiet, please, and listen to Commander Vimes!' bellowed Carrot.

Vimes found himself meeting the gaze of Angua, who was leaning against the wall. She rolled her eyes helplessly.

'Yes, yes, thank you, captain,' said Vimes. He turned back to the massed array of Ankh-Morpork's finest. He opened his mouth. He stared. And then he shut his mouth, all but a corner of it. And said out of that corner: 'What's that little lump on Constable Flint's head?'

'That's Probationary Constable Buggy Swires, sir. He likes to get a good view.'

'He's *agnome* !'

'Well done, sir.'

'Another one of yours?'

'Ours, sir,' said Carrot, using his reproachful voice again. 'Yes, sir. Attached to the Chitterling Street Station since last week, sir.'

'Oh my gods...' murmured Vimes.

Buggy Swires saw his stare and saluted. He was five inches tall.

Vimes regathered his mental balance. The long and the short and the tall... waifs and strays, all of us.

'I'm not going to keep you long,' he said. 'You all know me... well, *most* of you know me,' he added, with a sidelong glance at Carrot, 'and I don't make speeches. But I'm sure all of you have noticed the way this Leshp business has got people all stirred up. There's a lot of loose talk about war. Well, war isn't our business. War is soldiers' business. Our business, I think, is to keep the peace. Let me show you this—'

He stood back and pulled something out of his pocket with a flourish. At least, that was the intention. There was a rip as something ceased to be entangled in the lining.

'Damn... ah...'

He produced a length of shiny black wood from the ragged pocket. There was a large silver knob on the end. The watchmen craned to look.

'This... er... this...' Vimes groped. 'This old man turned up from the palace a couple of weeks ago. Cave me this damn thing. Got a label saying "*Regalia of the Watch Commandr., Citie of Ankh-Morporke*". You know they never throw anything away up at the palace.'

He waved it vaguely. The wood was surprisingly heavy.

'It's got the coat of arms on the knob, look.' Thirty watchmen tried to see.

'And I thought... I thought, good grief, *this* is what I'm supposed to carry? And I thought about it, and then I thought, no, that's right, just once someone got it right. It's not even a weapon, it's just *athing*. It ain't for using, it's just for having. That's what it's all about.

Same thing with uniforms. You see, a soldier's uniform, it's to turn him into part of a crowd of other parts all in the same uniform, but a copper's uniform is there to—'

Vimes stopped. Perplexed expressions in front of him told him that he was building a house of cards with too few cards on the bottom.

He coughed.

'Anyway,' he went on, with a glare to indicate that everyone should forget the previous twenty seconds, 'our job is to *stop* people fighting. There's a lot happening on the street. You've probably heard that they're starting up the regiments again. Well, people can recruit if they like. But we're not going to have any mobs. There's a nasty mood around. I don't know what's going to happen, but we've got to be there when it does.' He looked around the room. 'Another thing. This new Klatchian envoy or whatever he's called is arriving tomorrow. I don't think the Assassins' Guild has anything planned but *tonight* we're going to check the route the wizards' procession will be taking. A nice little job for the night shift. And tonight we're *all* on the night shift.'

There was a groan from the Watch.

'As my old sergeant used to say, if you can't take a joke you shouldn't have joined,' said Vimes. 'A nice gentle door-to-door inspection, shaking hands with doorknobs, giving the uniform a bit of an airing. Good old-fashioned policing. Any questions? Good. Thank you very much.'

There was a general rustling and relaxing among the squad as it dawned on them that they were free to go.

Carrot started to clap.

It wasn't the clap used by middlings to encourage

underlings to applaud overlings.[1]It had genuine enthusiasm behind it which was, somehow, worse. A couple of the more impressionable new constables picked it up and then, in the same way that little pebbles lead the avalanche, the sound of humanoids banging their hands together filled the room.

Vimes glowered.

'Very inspiring, sir!' said Carrot, as the clapping rose to a storm.

Rain poured on Ankh-Morpork. It filled the gutters and overflowed and was then flung away by the wind. It tasted of salt.

The gargoyles had crept out of their daytime shadows and were perched on every cornice and tower,

ears and wings outstretched to sieve anything edible out of the water. It was amazing what could fall on Ankh–Morpork. Rains of small fish and frogs were common enough, although bedsteads caused comment.

A broken gutter poured a sheet of water down the window of Ossie Brunt, who was sitting on his bed because there were no chairs or, indeed, any other furniture. He didn't mind at the moment. In a minute or two he might be very angry. And, then again, possibly not.

It was not that Ossie was insane in any way. Friends would have called him a quiet sort who kept himself to himself, but they didn't because he didn't have any friends. There *was* a group of men who went to practise at the archery butts on Tuesday nights, and he sometimes went to a pub with them afterwards and sat and listened to them talk, and he'd saved up once and bought a round of drinks, although they probably wouldn't remember or maybe they'd say, 'Oh... yeah... Ossie.' People said that. People tended to put him out of their minds, in the same way that you didn't pay much attention to empty space.

He wasn't stupid. He thought a lot about things. Sometimes he'd sit and think for hours, just staring at the opposite wall where the rain came in on damp nights and made a map of Klatch.

Someone hammered on the door. 'Mr Brunt? Are you decent?'

'I'm a bit busy, Mrs Spent' he said, putting his bow under the bed with his magazines.

'It's about the rent!'

'Yes, Mrs Spent?'

'You know my rules!'

'I shall pay you tomorrow, Mrs Spent,' said Ossie, looking towards the window.

'Cash in my hand by noon or it's out you go!'

'Yes, Mrs Spent.'

He heard her stamp downstairs again.

He counted to fifty, very carefully, and then reached down and pulled out his bow again.

Angua was on patrol with Nobby Nobbs. This was not an ideal arrangement, but Carrot was on swing patrol and on a night like this Fred Colon, who kept the roster, had an uncanny knack of being on desk duty in

the warm. So the spare partners had been thrown together. It was a terrible thought.

'Can I have a word, miss?' said Nobby, as they rattled doorknobs and waved their lanterns into alleyways.

'Yes, Nobby?'

'It's pers'nal.'

'Oh.'

'Only I'd ask Fred, but he wouldn't understand, and I fink you *would* understand on account of you being a woman. Most of the time, anyway. No offence meant.'

'What do you *want* , Nobby?'

'It's about my... sexual nature, miss.'

Angua said nothing. Rain banged off Nobby's illfitting helmet.

'I think it's time I looked it full in the face, miss.'

Angua cursed her graphic imagination again.

'And, er... how were you thinking of doing that, Nobby?'

'I mean, I sent off for stuff, miss, Creams an' that.'

'Creams,' said Angua flatly.

'That you rub on,' said Nobby helpfully.

'Rub on.'

'And a thing you do exercises with—'

'Oh gods...'

'Sorry, miss?'

'What? Oh... I was just thinking of something else. Do go on. Exercises?'

'Yeah. To build up my biceps and that.'

'Oh, *exercises* . Really?' Nobby did not appear to have any biceps to speak of. There wasn't really anything for them to be – on. Technically he had arms, because his hands were attached to his shoulders, but that was about all you could say.

Horrified interest got the better of her.

'Why, Nobby?'

He looked down, sheepishly.

'Well... I mean... you know... girls an' that... ' To her amazement, Nobby was blushing.

'You mean you... ' she began. 'You want to... you're looking for... '

'Oh, I'm not just after... I mean, if you want a thing done properly then... I mean, no,' said Nobby reproachfully. 'What I'm saying is, as you get older, you know, you think about settlin' down, findin' someone who'll go with you hand in hand down life's bumpy highway— Why's your mouth open?'

Angua shut it abruptly.

'But I just don't seem to *meet* girls,' Nobby said. 'Well, I mean, I meet girls, and then they rush off.'

'Despite the cream.'

'Right.'

'And the exercises.'

'Yes.'

'Well, you've covered all the angles, I can see that,' said Angua. 'Beats me where you're going wrong.' She sighed. 'What about Stamina Thrum, in Elm Street?'

'She's got a wooden leg.'

'Well, then... Verity Pushpram, nice girl, she runs the clam and cockle barrow in Rime Street?'

'Hammerhead? Stinks of fish all the time. And she's got a squint.'

'She's got her own business, though. Does wonderful chowder, too.'

'And a squint.'

'Not exactly a squint, Nobby.'

'Yes, but you know what I mean.'

Angua had to admit that she did. Verity had the *opposite* of a squint. Both eyes appeared to be endeavouring to see the adjacent ear. When you talked to her, you had to suppress a feeling that she was about to walk off in two directions. But she could gut fish like a champion.

She sighed again. She was familiar with the syndrome. They *said* they wanted a soulmate and helpmeet but sooner or later the list would include a skin like silk and a chest fit for a herd of cows.

Except for Carrot. That was almost... almost one of the *annoying* things about him. She suspected he wouldn't mind if she shaved her head or grew a beard. It wasn't that he wouldn't notice, he just wouldn't *mind*, and for some reason that was very aggravating.

'The only thing I can suggest,' she said, 'is that women are quite often attracted to men who can make them laugh.'

Nobby brightened. 'Really?' he said. 'I ought to be well in there, then.'

'Good.'

'People laugh at me all the time.'

High above, quite oblivious of the rain that had already soaked him to the skin, Ossie Brunt checked the oilskin cover round his bow and settled down for the long wait.

Rain was a copper's friend. Tonight people were making do with indoor crime.

Vimes stood in the lee of one of the fountains in Sator Square. The fountain hadn't worked for years, but he was getting just as wet as if it were in full flow. He'd never experienced truly horizontal rain before.

There was no-one around. The rain marched across the square like... like an army...

Now *there* was an image from his youth. Funny how they hung around in the dark alleys of your brain and suddenly jumped out on you.

Rain falling on water...

Ah, yes... When he was a little lad he'd pretended that the raindrops splashing in the running gutters were soldiers. Millions of soldiers. And the bubbles that sometimes went floating by were men on horseback.

Right now he couldn't remember what the occasional dead dog had been. Some kind of siege weapon, possibly.

Water swirled around his boots and dripped off his cape. When he tried to light a cigar the wind blew the match out and the rain poured off his helmet and soaked the cigar in any case.

He grinned in the night.

He was, temporarily, a happy man. He was cold, wet and alone, hying to keep out of the worst of the weather at three o'clock on a ferocious morning. He'd spent some of the best nights of his life like this. At such times you could just... sort of hunch your shoulders like *this* and let your head pull in like *this* and you became a little hutch of warmth and peace, the rain banging on your helmet, the mind just ticking over, sorting out the world...

It was like this in the old days, when no-one cared about the Watch and all you really had to do was keep out of trouble. Those were the days when there wasn't as much to do.

But there *was* as much to do, said an inner voice. You just didn't do it.

He could feel the official truncheon hanging heavily in the special pocket that Sybil herself had sewn in his breeches. Why is it just a bit of wood? he'd asked himself when he'd unwrapped it. Why not a sword? *That's* the symbol of power. And then he'd realized why it couldn't ever be a sword

'Ho there, good citizen! May I ask your business this brisk morning?'

He sighed. There was a lantern appearing through the murk, surrounded by a halo of water.

Ho there, good citizen... There was only one person in the city who would say something like that and mean it.

'It's me, captain.'

The halo drew nearer and illuminated the damp face of Captain Carrot. The young man ripped off a salute – at godsdam three in the morning, Vimes thought – that would have brought a happy tear to the eye of the most psychotic drill sergeant.

'What're you doing out, sir?'

'I just wanted to... check up on things,' said Vimes.

'You could have left it all to me, sir,' said Carrot. 'delegation is the key to successful command.'

'Really? Is it?' said Vimes sourly. 'My word, we live and learn, don't we.' And you certainly learn, he added in the privacy of his head. And he was *almost* sure he was being mean and stupid.

'We've just about finished, sir. We've checked all the empty buildings. And there will be an extra squad of constables on the route. And the gargoyles will be up as high as they can. You know how good they are at watching, sir.'

'Gargoyles? I thought we just had Constable Downspout...'

'And Constable Pediment now, sir.'

'One of yours?'

'One of ours, sir. You signed–'

'Yes, yes, I'm sure I did. Damn!'

A gust of wind caught the water pouring from an overloaded gutter and dumped it down Vimes's neck.

'They say this new island's upset the air streams' said Carrot.

'Not just the air,' said Vimes. 'A lot of damn fuss over a few square miles of silt and some old ruins! Who cares?'

'They say it's strategically very important,' said Carrot, falling into step beside him.

'What for? We're not at war with anyone. Hah! But we might go to war to keep some damn island that's only useful in case we have to go to war, right?'

'Oh, his lordship will have it all sorted out today. I'm sure that when moderate-mannered men of goodwill can get round a table there's no problem that can't be resolved,' said Carrot cheerfully.

He is, thought Vimes glumly. He really is sure. 'Know much about Klatch?' he said.

'I've read a little, sir.'

'Very sandy place, they say.'

'Yes, sir. Apparently.'

There was a crash somewhere ahead of them, and a scream. Coppers learned to be good at screams. There was to the connoisseur a world of difference between 'I'm drunk and I've just trodden on my fingers and I can't get up!' and 'Look out! He's got a knife!'

Both men started to run.

Light blazed out in a narrow street. Heavy footsteps vanished into the darkness.

The light flickered beyond a shop's broken window. Vimes stumbled through the doorway pulled off his sodden cape and threw it over the fire in the middle of the floor.

There was a hiss, and a smell of hot leather.

Then Vimes stood back and tried to work out where the hell he was.

People were staring at him. Dimly, his mind assembled clues: the turban, the beard, the woman's jewellery...

'Where did he come from? Who is this man?'

'Er . good morning?' he said. 'Looks like there's been a bit of an accident?' He raised the cape gingerly.

A broken bottle lay in a pool of sizzling oil.

Vimes looked up at the broken window. 'Oh...'

The other two people were a boy almost as tall as his father and a small girl trying to hide behind her mother.

Vimes felt his stomach turn to lead.

Carrot arrived in the doorway.

'I lost them,' he panted. 'There were three of them, I think. Can't see anything in this rain...Oh, it's you Mr Goriff. Whathappenedhere?'

*'Captain Carrot! Someone threw a burning bottle through out window and then this beggar man rushed in and put it out!'*

'What'd he say? What didyou say?' said Vimes. 'Youspeak Klatchian?'

'Not very well,' said Carrot modestly. 'I just can't get the backof-the-throat sound to—'

'But... you can understand what he said?'

'Oh, yes. He just thanked you very much, by the way. It's all right, Mr Goriff, He's a watchman.'

'But you speak—'

Carrot knelt down and looked at the broken bottle.

'Oh, you know how it is. You come in here on night shift for a hot caraway bun and you just get chatting. You must have picked up the odd word, sir.'

'Well... vindaloo maybe, but... '

'This is a firebomb, sir.'

'I know, captain.'

'This is very bad. Who would do a thing like this?'

'Right now?' said Vimes. 'Half the city, I should think.'

He looked helplessly at Goriff. He vaguely recognized the face. He vaguely recognized Mrs Goriff's face. They were... faces. They were usually at the other end of some arms holding a portion of carry or a kebab. Sometimes the boy ran the place. The shop opened very early in the morning and very late at night, when the streets were owned by bakers, thieves and watchmen.

Vimes knew the place as Mundane Meals. Nobby Nobbs had said that Goriff had wanted a word that meant ordinary, everyday, straight-forward, and had asked around until he found one he liked the sound of.

'Er... tell him... tell him you're staying here, and I'll go back to the Watch House and send someone out to relieve you,' said Vimes.

'Thank you,' said Goriff.

'Oh, you underst—' Vimes felt like an idiot. 'Of course you do, you must have been here, what, five, six years?'

'Ten years, sir.'

'Really?' said Vimes manically. 'That long? Really? My word... well, I'd better get along... Good morning to you—'

He hurried out into the rain.

I must have been going in there for *years*, he thought, as he splashed through the darkness. And I know how to say 'vindaloo'. And... 'korma'... ? Carrot's hardly been here five minutes and he gargles the language like a native.

Good grief, I can get by in dwarfish and I can at least say, 'cut down that rock, you're under arrest,' in troll, but...

He stamped into the Watch House, water pooling off him. Prod Colon was dozing quietly at the desk. In deference to the fact that he'd known Fwd. all these years, Vimes was extra noisy about taking off his cape.

When he officially turned round, the sergeant was sitting at attention.

'I didn't know you were on tonight, Mr Vimes...'

'This is unofficial, Fred,' said Vimes. He accepted 'Me from certain people. In an odd way, they'd earned it. 'Send someone along to Mundane Meals in Scandal Alley, will you? A bit of trouble there.'

He reached the stairs.

'You stopping, sir?' said Fred.

'Oh, yes,' said Vimes grimly. 'I've got to catch up on the paperwork.'

The rain fell on Leshp so hard it probably hadn't been worth the island's bother of rising from the bottom of the sea.

Most of the explorers slept in their boats now. There *were* buildings on the risen island, but...

... the buildings weren't quite right.

Solid Jackson peered out from the tarpaulin he'd rigged up on deck. Mist was rising off the soaking ground and was made luminous by the occasional flash of lightning.

The city, by storm light, looked far too malevolent. There *were* things he could recognize – columns and steps and archways and so on – but there were others... he shuddered. It looked as if people had once tried to add human touches to structures that were already ancient...

It was because of his son that everyone was staying in the boats.

A party of Ankh–Morpork fishermen had gone ashore that morning to search for the heaps of treasure that everyone knew littered the ocean bottom and had found a tiled floor, washed clean by the rain. Pretty blue and white squares showed a pattern of waves and shells, and, in the middle, a squid.

And Les had said, 'That looks pretty big, Dad.'

And everyone had looked around at the weedcovered buildings and had shared the Thought, which remained unspoken but was made up of a lot of little thoughts like the occasional ripples in the pools, and the little splashes in the dark water of cellars that made the mind think of claws, winnowing the deeps, and the odd things that sometimes got washed up on beaches or tamed up in nets. Sometimes you pulled things over the side that'd put a man off fish for life.

And suddenly no–one wanted to explore any more, just in case they found something.

Solid Jackson pulled his head back under the cover.

'Why'n't we going home, Dad?' said his son. 'You said this place gives you the willies.'

'All right, but they're *Ankh –Morpork* willies, see? And no foreigner's going to get his hands on them.'

'Dad?'

'Yes, lad?'

'Who was Mr Hong?'

'How should I know?'

'Only, when we was all heading back for the boats one of the other men said, 'We all know what happened to Mr Hong when he opened the Three Jolly Luck Take–Away Fish Bar on the site of the old fish–god temple in Dagon Street on the night of the full moon, don't we... ?' Well, *I* don't know.'

'Ah...!' Solid Jackson hesitated. Still, Les was a big lad now...

'He... closed up and left in a bit of a hurry, lad. So quick he had to leave some things behind.'

'Like what?'

'If you must know... half an earhole and one kidney.'

'Cool!'

The boat rocked, and wood splintered. Jackson jerked the cover up. Spray washed over him. Somewhere close in the wet darkness a voice shouted: 'Why you not carrying lights, you second cousin of a jackal?'

Jackson pulled out the lantern and held it up.

'What're you doing in Ankh–Morpork territorial waters, you camel–eating devil?'

'These waters belong to us!'

'We were here first!'

'Yeah? *We* were here first!'

'We were here first *first* !'

'You damaged my boat! That's *piracy* , that is!'

There were other shouts around them. In the darkness the two flotillas had collided. Bowsprits tore away rigging. Hulls boomed. The controlled panic that is normal sailing became the frantic panic composed of darkness, spray and too much rigging coming unrigged.

At times like this the ancient traditions of the sea that unite all mariners should come to the fore and see them combine in the face of their common foe, the hungry and relentless ocean.

However, at this point Mr Arif hit Mr Jackson over the head with an oar.

'Hnh? Wuh?'

Vimes opened the only eye that appeared to respond. A horrible sight met it.

*...I read him his rites, whereupon, he said up, yours copper. Sgnt Detritus then, cautioned him, upon which he said, ouch...*

There may be a lot of things I'm not good at, thought Vimes, but at least I don't treat tile punctuation of a sentence like a game of Pin the Tail on the Donkey...

He rolled his head away from Carrot's fractured grammar. The pile of paper shifted under him.

Vimes's desk was becoming famous. Once there were piles, but they had slipped as piles do, forming this dense compacted layer that was now turning into something like peat. It was said there were plates and unfinished meals somewhere down there. No-one wanted to check. Some people said they'd heard movement.

There was a genteel cough. Vimes rolled his head again and looked up into the big pink face of Willikins, Lady Sybil's butler. *His* butler too, technically, although Vimes hated to think of him like that.

'I think we had better proceed with alacrity, Sir Samuel. I have brought your dress uniform, and your shaving things are by the basin.'

'What? What?'

'You are due at the University in half an hour. Lady Sybil has vouchsafed to me that if you are not there she will utilize your intestines for hosiery accessories, sir.'

'Was she smiling?' said Vimes, staggering to his feet and making his way to the steaming basin on the wash stand.

'Only slightly, sir.'

'Oh gods...'

'Yes, sir.'

Vimes made an attempt at shaving while, behind him, Willikins brushed and polished. Outside, the city's clocks began to strike ten.

It must've been almost four when I sat down Vimes thought. I know I heard the shift change at eight, and then I had to sort out Nobby's expenses, that's advanced mathematics if ever there was some...

He tried to yawn and shave at the same time, which is never a good idea.

'Damn!'

'I shall fetch some tissue paper directly, sir,' said Willikins, without looking round. As Vimes dabbed at his chin, the butler went on: 'I should like to take this opportunity to raise a matter of some import, sir...'

'Yes?' Vimes shared blearily at the red tights that seemed to be a major item of his dress uniform.

'Regretfully, I am afraid I must ask leave to give in my notice, sir. I wish to join the Colours.'

'Which colours are these, Willikins?' said Vimes, holding up a shirt with puffed sleeves. Then his brain caught up with his ears. 'You want to become a *soldier* ?'

'They say Klatch needs to be taught a sharp lesson, sir. A Willikins has never been found wanting when his country calls. I thought that Lord Venturi's Heavy Infantry would do for me. They have a particularly attractive uniform of red and white, sir. With gold frogging.'

Vimes pulled his boots on. 'You've had military experience, have you?'

'Oh, no, sir. But I am a quick learner, sir, and I believe I have some prowess with the carving knife.' The butler's face showed a patriotic alertness.

'On turkeys and on...' said Vimes.

'Yes, sir; said Willikins, buffing up the ceremonial helmet.

'And you're off to fight the screaming hordes in Klatch, are you?'

'If it should come to that, sir,' said Willikins. 'I think this is adequately polished now, sir.'

'A very sandy place, so they say.'

'Indeed, sir,' said Willikins, adjusting the helmet under Vimes's chin.

'And rocky. Very rocky. Lots of rocks. Dusty, too.'

'Very parched in parts, sir, I believe you are correct.'

'And so into this land of sand-coloured dust and sandcoloured rocks and sand-coloured sand you, Willikins, will march with your expertise in cutlery and your red and white uniform?'

'With the gold frogging, sir.' Willikins thrust out his jaw. 'Yes, sir. If the need arises.'

'You don't see anything wrong with this picture?'

'Sir?'

'Oh, never mind.' Vimes yawned. 'Well, we shall miss you, Willikins.' Others may not, he thought. Especially if they have time for a second shot.

'Oh, Lord Venturi says it'll all be over by Hogswatch, sir.'

'Really? I didn't know it had started.'

Vimes ran down the stairs and into a smell of curry.

'We saved you some, sir,' said Sergeant Colon. 'You was asleep when the lad brought it round.'

'It was Goriff's kid,' said Nobby, chasing a bit of rice around his tin plate. 'Enough for half the shift.'

'The rewards of duty,' said Vimes, hurrying towards the door.

'Bread and mango pickle and everything,' said Colon happily. 'I've always said old Goriff isn't that bad for a rag'ead.'

A pool of sizzling oil... Vimes stopped at the door. *The family, huddling together ...* He took out his watch. It was twenty past ten. If he ran—

'Fred, could you just step up to my office?' he said. 'It won't take a moment.'

'Right, sir.'

Vimes ushered the sergeant up the stairs and closed the door.

Nobby and the other watchmen strained to listen, but there was no sound except for a low murmuring which went on for some time.

The door opened again. Vimes came down the stairs.

'Nobby, come up to the University in five minutes, will you? I want to stay in touch and I'm damned if I'm taking a pigeon with this uniform on.'

'Right, sir.'

Vimes left.

A few moments later Sergeant Colon walked carefully down to the main office. He had a slightly glassy look and walked back to his desk with the nonchalance that only the extremely worried try to achieve. He toyed with some paper for a while and then said:

'You don't mind what people call *you* , do you, Nobby?'

'I'd be minding the whole time if I minded that, sarge,' said Corporal Nobbs cheerfully.

'Right. Right! And I don't mind what people call me, neither.' Colon scratched his head. 'Don't make sense, really. I reckon Sir Sam is missing too much sleep.'

'He's a very busy man, Fred.'

'Trying to do everything, that's his trouble. And... Nobby?'

'Yes?'

'It's Sergeant Colon, thanks.'

There was sherry. There was always sherry at these occasions. Seam Vimes could regard it

dispassionately, since he always drank fruit juice these days. He'd heard they made sherry by letting wine go rotten. He couldn't see the *point* of sherry.

'And you will *try* to look dignified, won't you?' said Lady Sybil, adjusting his cloak.

'Yes, dear.'

'What will you try to look?'

'Dignified, dear.'

'And *please* try to be diplomatic.'

'Yes, dear.'

'What will you try to be?'

'Diplomatic, dear.'

'You're using your "henpecked" voice, Sam.'

'Yes, dear.'

'You know that's not fair.'

'No, dear.' Vimes raised a hand in a theatrical gesture of submission. 'All right, all *right*. It's just these feathers. And these tights,' He winced and tried to do some surreptitious rearranging in an effort to prevent himself becoming the city's first hunchgroin. 'I mean, supposing people *see* me?'

'Of course they'll see you, Sam. You're leading the procession. And I'm *very* proud of you.'

She brushed some lint off his shoulder. [2]

Feathers in my hat, Vimes thought glumly. And fancy tights. And a shiny breastplate. A breastplate shouldn't be shiny. It should be too denied to take a decent polish. And diplomatic talk? How should I know how to talk diplomatically?

'And now I must go and have a word with Lady Selachii,' said Lady Broil. 'You'll be all right, will you? You keep yawning.'

'Of course. Didn't get much sleep last night, that's all.'

'You promise not to run away?'

'Me? *Inever* run—'

'You ran away before the big soiree for the Genuan ambassador. Everyone saw you.'

'I'd just got news that the De Bris gang were robbing Vortin's strongroom!'

'But *you* don't have to chase everyone, Sam. You employ people for that now.'

'We got 'em, though,' said Vimes, with satisfaction.

He'd enjoyed it immensely, too. It wasn't just the pursuit that was so invigorating, with his velvet cloak left behind on a tree and his hat in a puddle somewhere, it was the knowledge that while he was doing this he wasn't eating very small sandwiches and making even smaller talk. It wasn't proper police work, Vimes considered, unless you were doing something that someone somewhere would much rather you weren't doing.

When Sybil had disappeared into the crowd he found a handy shadow and lurked in it. It enabled him to see almost the whole of the University's Great Hall.

He quite liked the wizards. They didn't commit crimes. Not Vimes's type of crimes, anyway. The occult wasn't Vimes's beat. The wizards might well mess up the very fabric of time and space but they

didn't lead to paperwork, and that was fine by Vimes. There were a lot of them in the hall, in all their glory. And there was nothing finer than a wizard dressed up formally, until someone could find a way of inflating a Bird of Paradise, possibly by using an elastic band and some kind of gas. But the wizards were getting a run for their money, because the rest of the guests were either nobles or guild leaders or both, and an occasion like the Convivium brought out the peacock in everyone.

His gaze went from face to chatting face, and he wondered idly what each person was guilty of.[3]

Quite a few of the ambassadors were there, too. They were easy to pick out. They wore their national costumes, but since by and large their national costumes were what the average peasant wore they looked slightly out of place in them. Their bodies wore feathers and silks, but their minds persistently wore suits.

They chatted in small groups. One or two nodded and smiled to him as they passed.

The world is watching, Vimes thought. If something went wrong and this stupid Leshp business started a war, it's men like these who'd be working out exactly how to deal with the winner, whoever it was. Never mind who started it, never mind how it was fought, they'd want to know how to deal with things *now*. They represented what people called the 'international community'. And like all uses of the world 'community', you were never quite sure what or who it was.

He shrugged. It wasn't his world, thank goodness.

He sidled over to Corporal Nobbs, who was standing by the main doors in the sort of lopsided slouch which was the closest a living Nobbs could come to attention.

'All quiet, Nobby?' he said, out of the corner of his mouth.

'Yessir.'

'Nothing going *on at all* ?'

'Nossir. Not a pigeon anywhere, sir.'

'What, nowhere? Nothing?'

'Nossir.'

'There was trouble all over the place yesterday!'

'Yessir.'

'You did *tell* Fred he was to send a bird if there was anything at all?'

'Yessir.'

'The Shades? There's *always* something—'

'Dead quiet, sir.'

'Damn!'

Vimes shook his head at the sheer untrustworthiness of Ankh-Morpork's criminal fraternity.

'I suppose you couldn't take a brick and—'

'Lady Sybil was very *speffic* about how you was to stop here" said Corporal Nobbs, staring straight ahead.

'*Speffic*?'

'Yeah, sir. She come and have a word with me. Cave me a dollar,' said Nobby.

'Ah, Sir Samuel!' said a booming voice behind him, 'I don't think you've met Prince Khufurah yet, have you?'

He turned. Archchancellor Ridcully was bearing down on him, towing a couple of swarthy men. Vimes hurriedly put on his official face.

'This is Commander Vimes, gentlemen. Sam... no, I'm doing this the wrong way round, aren't I, got the protocol all wrong – so much to sort out, the Bursar's locked himself in the safe again, we don't know how he manages to get the key in there with him, I mean, it's not even as if it's got a keyhole on the inside...'

The first man held out a hand as Ridcully bustled off again. 'Prince Khufurah,' he said. 'My carpet got in only two hours ago.'

'Carpet? Oh... yes... you flew . .

'Yes, very chilly and of course you just can't get a good meal. And did you get your man, Sir Samuel?'

'What? Pardon?'

'I believe our ambasssador told me you had to leave the reception last week...?' The Prince was a tall man who had probably once been quite athletic until the big dinners had finally weighed him down. And he had a beard. All Klatchians had beards. This Klatchian had intelligent eyes, too. Disconcertingly

intelligent. You looked into them and several layers of person looked back at you.

'What? Oh. Yes. Yes, we got 'em all right,' said Vimes.

'Well done. He put up a fight, I see.'

Vimes looked surprised. The Prince tapped his jaw thoughtfully. Vimes's hand flew up and encountered a little bit of tissue on his own chin.

'Ah... er... yes...'

'Commander Vimes *always* gets his man,' said the Prince.

'Well, I wouldn't say I—'

'Vetinari's terrier, I've heard them call you,' the Prince went on. 'Always hot on the chase, they say, and he won't let go.'

Vimes stared into the calm, knowing gaze.

'I suppose, at the end of the day, we're all someone's dog,' he said, weakly.

'In fact it is fortuitous I have met you, commander.' lit is?'

'I was just wondering about the meaning of the word shouted at me as we were on our way down here. Would you be so kind?'

'Er... if I...'

'I believe it was... let me see now... oh, yes... *towelhead*.'

The Prince's eyes stayed locked on Vimes's face.

Vimes was conscious of his own thoughts moving very fast, and they seemed to reach their own decision. We'll explain later, they said. You're too tired for explanations. Right now, with this man, it's oh so much better to be honest...

'It... refers to your headdress,' he said.

'Oh. Is it some kind of obscure joke?'

*Of course* he knows, thought Vimes. And he knows I know...

'No. It's an insult,' he said eventually.

'Ah? Well, we certainly cannot be held responsible for the ramblings of idiots, commander.' The Prince flashed a smile. 'I must commend you, incidentally.'

'I'm sorry?'

'For your breadth of knowledge. I must have asked a dozen people that question *this morning* and, do

you know? Not *one* of them knew what it meant. And they *all* seemed to have caught a cough.'

There was a diplomatic pause but, in it, someone sniggered.

Vimes let his glance drift sideways to the other man, who had not been introduced. He was shorter and skinnier than the Prince and, under his black headdress, had the most crowded face Vimes had ever seen. A network of scars surrounded a nose like an eagle's beak. There was a sort of beard and moustache, but the scars had affected the hair growth so much that they stuck out in strange bunches and at odd angles. The man looked as though he had been hit in the mouth by a hedgehog. He could have been any age. Some of the scars looked fresh.

All in all, the man had a face that any policeman would arrest on sight. There was no possible way it could be innocent of *anything* .

He caught Vimes's expression and grinned, and Vimes had never seen so much gold in one mouth. He'd never seen so much gold in one *place* .

Vimes realized he was staring when he ought to have been making polite diplomatic conversation.

'So,' he said, 'are we going to have a scrap over this Leshp business or what?'

The Prince gave a dismissive shrug.

'Pfui,' he said. 'A few square miles of uninhabited fertile ground with superb anchorage in an unsurpassed strategic position? What sort of inconsequence is that for civilized people to war over?'

Once again Vimes felt the gaze on him, *reading* him. Well, the hell with it. He said, 'Sorry, I'm not good at this diplomacy business. Did you mean what you just said then?'

There was another snigger. Vimes turned and looked at the leering bearded face again. And was aware of a smell, no, *astench* of cloves.

Good grief, he chews the stinking things...

'Ah,' said the Prince, 'you haven't met 71-hour Ahmed?'

Ahmed grinned again and bowed. 'Offendi,' he said, in a voice like a gravel path.

And that seemed to be it. Not 'This is 71-hour Ahmed, Cultural Attache' or 71-hour Ahmed, my bodyguard' or even '71-hour Ahmed, walking strongroom and moth killer'. It was clear that the next move was up to Vimes.

'That's... er... that's an unusual name' he said.

'Not at all,' said the Prince smoothly. 'Ahmed is a very common name in my country.'

He leaned forward again. Vimes recognized this as the prelude to a confidential aside. 'Incidentally, was that beautiful lady I saw just now your first wife?'

'Er... all my wives,' said Vimes. 'That is—'

'Could I offer you twenty camels for her?'

Vimes looked back into the dark eyes for a moment, glanced at 71-hour Ahmed's 24-carat grin, and said:

'This is another test, isn't it... ?'

The Prince straightened up, looking pleased.

'Well done, Sir Samuel. You're *good* at this. Do you know, Mr Boggis of the Thieves' Guild was prepared to accept fifteen?'

'For Mrs Boos?' Vimes wagged a hand dismissively. 'Nah... four camels, maybe four camels and a goat in a good light. And when she's had a shave.'

The milling guests turned at the sound of the Prince's explosion of laughter.

'Very good! Very good! I am afraid, commander, that some of *your* fellow citizens feel that just because *my* people invented advanced mathematics and all-day camping we are complete barbarians who'd try to buy their wives at the drop of, shall we say, a turban. I am surprised they're giving me an honorary degree, considering how incredibly backward I am.'

'Oh? What degree is that?' said Vimes. No wonder this man was a diplomat. You couldn't trust him an inch, he thought in loops, and you couldn't help liking him despite it.

The Prince pulled a letter out of his robe.

'Apparently it's a *Doctorum Adamus cum Flabello Dulci* – Is there something wrong, Sir Samuel?'

Vimes managed to turn the treacherous laugh into a coughing fit. 'No, no, nothing,' he said. 'No.'

He desperately wanted to change the subject. And fortunately there was something here to provide just the opportunity.

'Why has Mr Ahmed got such a big curved sword slung on his back?' he said.

'Ah, you are a policeman, you notice such things—'

'It's hardly a concealed weapon, is it? It's nearly bigger than him. He's practically a concealed owner!'

'It's ceremonial,' said the Prince. 'And he does fret so if he has to leave it behind.'

'And what exactly is his—'

'Ah, there you are,' said Ridcully. 'I think we're just about ready. You know you go right at the front, Sam—'

'Yes, I know,' said Vimes. 'I was just asking His Highness what'

'—and if you, Your Highness, and you, Mr... my word, what a big sword, and you come back here and take your place among the honoured guests, and we'll be ready in a brace of sheikhs...'

What a thing it is to have a copper's mind, Vimes thought, as the great file of wizards and guests tried to form a dignified and orderly line behind him. Just because someone makes himself pleasant and likeable you start to be suspicious of him, for no other reason than the fact that anyone who goes out of their way to be nice to a copper has got something on their mind. Of course, he's a diplomat, but still... I just hope he never studied ancient languages, and that's a fact.

Someone tapped Vimes on the shoulder. He turned and looked right into the grin of 71-hour Ahmed.

'If you're changing your mind, offendi, I give you twenty-five camels, no problem,' he said, pulling a clove from his teeth. 'May your lions be full of fruit.'

He winked. It was the most suggestive gesture Vimes had ever seen. 'Is this another-' he began, but the man had vanished into the crowd.

'My loins be full of fruit?' he repeated to himself. 'Good grief!'

71-hour Ahmed reappeared at his other elbow in a gust of cloves. 'I go, I come back,' he growled happily. 'The Prince says the degree is Doctor of Sweet Fanny Adams. Ah wizard Wheeze, yes? Oh, how we are laughing.'

And then he was gone.

The Convivium was Unseen University's Big Day. Originally it had just been the degree ceremony, but over the years it had developed into a kind of celebration of the amicable relationship between the University and the city, in particular celebrating the fact that people were hardly ever turned to clams any more. In the absence of anything resembling a Lord Mayor's Show or a state opening of Parliament, it was one of the few formal opportunities the citizens had of jeering at their social superiors, or at least at people wearing tights and ridiculous costumes.

It had grown so big that it was now held in the city's Opera House. Distrustful people – that is to say, people like Vimes considered that this was so there could be a procession. There was nothing like the massed ranks of wizardry walking sedately through the city in a spirit of civic amicability to subtly remind the more thoughtful kind of person that it hadn't always been this way. Look at us, the wizards seemed to be saying. We used to rule this city. Look at our big staffs with the knobs on the end. Any one of these could do some very serious damage in the wrong hands so it's a good thing, isn't it, that they're in the right hands at the moment? Isn't it nice that we all get along so well?

And someone, once, had decided that the Commander of the Watch should walk in front, for symbolic reasons. That hadn't mattered for years because there hadn't been a Commander of the Watch, but now there was, and he was Sam Vimes. In a red shirt with silly baggy sleeves, red tights, some kind of puffed shorts in a style that went out of fashion, by the lock of it, at the time when flint was at the cutting edge of cutting-edge technology, a tiny shiny breastplate and a helmet with feathers in it.

And he really did need some sleep.

And he had to carry the truncheon.

He kept his eyes fixed on the damn thing as he walked out of the University's main gate. Last night's rain

had cleaned the sky. The city steamed.

If he stared at the truncheon he didn't have to see who was giggling at him.

The downside was that he had to keep staring at the thing.

It said, on a little tarnished shield that he'd had to clean before reading it, *Protector of thee Kinge's Piece* .

That had brightened the occasion slightly.

Feathers and antiques, gold braid and fur...

Perhaps it was because he was tired, or just because he was trying to shut out the world, but Vimes found himself slowing down into the traditional watchman's walk and the traditional idling thought process.

It was an almost Pavlovian response. [4] The legs swung, the feet moved, the mind began to work in a certain way. It wasn't a dream state, exactly. It was just that the ears, nose and eyeballs wired themselves straight into the ancient 'suspicious bastard' node of his brain, leaving his higher brain centre free to freewheel.

... Fur and tights... what kind of wear was that for a watchman? Bashed-in armour, greasy leather breeches and a tatty shirt with bloodstains on it, someone else's for preference... that was the stuff... nice feel of the cobbles through his boots, it was really comforting...

Behind him, confusion running up and down the ranks, the procession slowed down to keep in step.

... Hah, *Protector of thee Kinge's Piece* indeed... he'd said to the old man who'd delivered it, 'Which piece did you have in mind?' but that had fallen on stony cars... damn silly thing anyway, he'd thought, a short length of wood with a lump of silver on the end... even a constable got a decent sword, what was he supposed to do, *wave* it at people?... ye gods, it was months since he'd had a good walk through the streets... lot of people about today... some parade on, wasn't there... ?

'Oh dear,' said Captain Carrot, in the crowd. 'What's he doing?'

Next to him an Agatean tourist was industriously pulling the lever of his iconograph.

Commander Vimes stopped and, with a faraway look in his eyes, tucked his truncheon under one arm and reached up to his helmet.

The tourist locked up at Carrot and tugged his shirt politely.

'Please, what is he doing now?' he said.

'Er... he's... he's taking out. .

'Oh, no...' said Angua.

'... he's taking the ceremonial packet of cigars out of his helmet,' said Carrot. 'Oh... and he's, he's lighting one...'

The tourist pulled the lever a few times.

'Very historic tradition?'

'Memorable,' murmured Angua.

The crowd had fallen silent. No one wanted to break Vimes's concentration. There was the big gusty silence of a thousand people holding their breath.

'What's he doing now?' said Carrot.

'Can't you see?' said Angua.

'Not with my hands over my eyes. Oh, the poor man...'

'He's... he's just blown a smoke ring... '

'...first one of the day, *healways* does that...'

'...and now he's set off again... and now he's pulled out the truncheon and he's tossing it up in the air and catching it again, you know the way he does with his sword when he's thinking... He looks quite happy...'

'I think he's going to really *treasure* this moment of happiness,' said Carrot.

Then the murmur started. The procession had halted behind Vimes. Some of the more impressionable people who weren't sure what they should be doing, and those who had partaken too heavily of the University's rather good sherry, started to fumble

around on their person for something to throw up in the air and catch. After all, this was a Traditional Ceremony. If you took the view that you were not going to do things because they were apparently ridiculous, you might as well go home right now.

'He's tired, that's what it is,' said Carrot. 'He's been running around overseeing things for days. Night *and* day watches. You know what a hands-on person he is.'

'Let's hope the Patrician will agree to let him stay that way.'

'Oh, his lordship wouldn't... He wouldn't, would he?'

Laughter was starting. Vimes had started to toss the truncheon from one hand to the other.

'He can make his sword spin three times and still catch it—'

Vimes's head turned. He looked up. His truncheon clattered on to the cobbles and rolled into a puddle, unheeded.

Then he started to run.

Carrot stared at him and then tried to see what the man had been looking at.

'On top of the Barbican...' he said. 'In that window... isn't that someone up there? Excuse me, excuse me, sorry, excuse me-' He began to push his way through the crowd.

Vimes was already a small figure in the distance, his red cloak flying out after him.

'Well? There's lots of people watching the parade from high places,' said Angua. 'What's so special about-'

'No one should be up there!' said Carrot, starting to run now he was free of the crowd. 'It's all sealed up!'

Angua looked around. Every face was turned towards the street theatre, and there was a cart near by. She sighed and strolled behind it wearing an expression of suspicious nonchalance. There was a gasp, a faint but distinctly organic sound, a muffled yelp and then the clank of armour hitting the ground.

Vimes didn't know why he ran. It was a sixth sense. It was when the back of the brain picked up out of the ether that something bad was going to happen, and didn't have time to rationalize, and just took over the spinal cord.

No one could get to the top of the Barbican. The Barbican had been the fortified gateway in the days when Ankh-Morpork didn't regard an attacking army as a marvellous commercial opportunity. Some parts were still in use, but the bulk of it was six or seven storeys of ruin, without stairs that any sensible man would trust. For years it had been used as an unofficial source of masonry for the rest of the city. Bits of it fell off on windy nights. Even gargoyles avoided it.

He was aware that far behind him the noise of the crowd became a lot of shouting. One or two people screamed. He didn't turn round. Whatever was going on, Carrot could take care of it.

Something overtook him. It looked like a wolf would look if one of its ancestors had been a longhaired Klatchistan hunting dog, one of those graceful things that were all nose and hair.

It bounded ahead and through the crumbling gateway.

The creature was nowhere to be seen when Vimes arrived. But the absence was not a matter that grabbed at his attention, because of the more pressing presence of the corpse, lying in a mess of fallen masonry.

One of the things Vimes had always said – that is to say, one of the things he said he always said, and no one disagrees with the commanding officer – was that sometimes small details, tiny little details, things that no one would notice in ordinary circumstances, grab your senses by the throat and scream, 'See me!'

There was a lingering, spicy scent in the air. And in the gap between a couple of cobblestones was a clove.

It was five o'clock. Vimes and Carrot sat in the Patrician's outer office, in silence except for the irregular ticking of the dock.

After a while Vimes said: 'Let me have a look at that again.'

Carrot obediently pulled out the small square of paper. Vimes looked at it. There was no mistaking what it showed. He tucked it into his own pocket.

'Er... why do you want to keep it, sir?'

'Keep what?' said Vimes.

'The iconograph I borrowed from the tourist.'

'I don't know what you're talking about,' said Vimes.

'But you—'

'I can't see you going very far in the Watch, captain, if you go around seeing things that aren't there.'

'Oh.'

The clock seemed to tick louder.

'You're thinking something, sir. Aren't you?'

'It is a use to which I occasionally put my brain, captain. Strange as it may seem.'

'What are you thinking, sir?'

'What they want me to think,' said Vimes.

'Who's *they* ?'

'I don't know yet. One step at a time.'

A bell tinkled.

Vimes stood up. 'You know what I always say,' he said.

Carrot removed his helmet and polished it with his sleeve. 'Yes, sir. "Everyone's guilty of something, especially the ones that aren't," sir.'

'No, not that one...'

'Er... "Always take into consideration the fact that you might be dead wrong," sir?'

'No, nor that one either.'

'Er... "How come Nobby ever got a job as a watchman?", sir? You say that a lot.'

'No! I meant "Alwaysact stupid," Carrot.'

'Ah, right, sir. From now on I shall remember that you always said that, sir.'

They put their helmets under their arms. Vimes knocked at the door.

'Come,' said a voice.

The Patrician was standing at the window.

Sitting or standing around the office were Lord Rust and the others. Vimes never quite understood how the civic leaders were chosen. They just seemed to turn up, like a tack on the sole of your shoe.

'Ah, Vimes,' said Vetinari.

'Sir.'

'Let us not beat about the bush, Vimes. How did the man get up there when your people had so thoroughly checked everything last night? Magic?'

'Couldn't say, sir.'

Carrot, still staring straight ahead, blinked.

'Your people *did* check the Barbican, I assume?'

'No, sir.'

'They *didn't* ?'

'No, sir. I did that myself.'

'You physically checked it yourself, Vimes?' said Boggis of the Thieves' Guild.

Captain Carrot could *feel* Vimes's thoughts at this point.

'That is correct... Boggis,' said Vimes, without turning his head. 'But... we think someone got in where the windows are boarded up and pulled the boards back after him. Dust has been disturbed and—'

'And you didn't spot this, Vimes?'

Vimes sighed. 'It'd be hard enough to spot the nailed-back boards in daylight, Boggis, let alone in the middle of the night.' Not that we did, he added to himself. Angua smelled the scent on them.

Lord Vetinari sat down at his desk. 'The situation is grave, Vimes.'

'Yes, sir?'

'His Highness is very seriously injured. And Prince Cadram, we understand, is beside himself with rage.'

'They *insist* on keeping his brother in the embassy,' said Lord Rust. 'A studied insult. As if we haven't good surgeons in this city.'

'That's right, of course,' said Vimes. 'And many of them could give him a decent shave and a haircut too.'

'Are you making fun of me, Vimes?'

'Certainly not, my lord,' said Vimes. 'In my opinion, no surgeons anywhere have cleaner sawdust on their floors than the ones in this city.'

Rust glared at him.

The Patrician coughed.

'You have identified the assassin?' said the Patrician.

Carrot was expecting Vimes to say, 'Alleged assassin, sir,' but instead he said:

'Yes. He is— He *was* called Ossie Brunt, sir. No other name that we know. Lived in Market Street. Did odd jobs from time to time. Bit of a loner. No relatives or friends that we can find. We are making enquiries.' 'And that's all you fellows know?' said Lord Downey.

'It took some time to identify him sir,' said Vimes stolidly.

'Oh? Why should that be?'

'Couldn't give you the technical answer, sir, but it looked to me like they wouldn't need to make him a coffin, they could just have posted him between two barn doors.'

'Was he acting alone?'

'We only found the one body, sir. And a lot of recently fallen masonry, so it looks as—'

'*I meant* does he belong to any organization? Any suggestion that he's anti-Klatchian?'

'Apart from him trying to kill one? Enquiries are continuing.'

'Are you taking this *seriously*, Vimes?'

'I have put my best men on the job, sir.' *Who's looking worried?* 'Sergeant Colon and Corporal Nobbs.' *Who's looking relieved?* 'Very experienced men. The keystones of the Watch.'

'Colon and Nobbs?' said the Patrician. 'Really?'

'Yes, sir.'

Their gazes met, very briefly.

'We're getting some very threatening noises, Vimes,' said Vetinari.

'What can I say, sir? I saw someone up on the tower, I ran, someone shot the Prince with an arrow and then I found the man at the bottom of the tower very obviously dead, with a broken bow and a lot of rock beside him. The storm last night probably loosened things up. I can't make up facts that don't exist, sir.'

Carrot watched the faces round the table. The general expression was one of relief.

'A lone bowman,' said Vetinari. 'An idiot with some kind of mad grudge. Who died in the execution of the, uh, attempted execution. And, of course, valiant action by our watchmen probably at least prevented an immediately fatal shot.'

'Valiant action?' said Downey. 'I know Captain Carrot here ran towards the VIPs and Vimes headed for the tower, but frankly, Vimes, your strange behaviour beforehand—'

'Somewhat immaterial now,' said Lord Vetinari. Once again he adopted a slightly faraway voice, as if reporting to somebody else. 'If Commander Vimes had not slowed down the procession, the wretch would undoubtedly have got a much better shot. As it was, the man panicked. Yes... the Prince, possibly, would accept that.'

'Prince?' said Vimes. 'But the poor devil—'

'His brother,' said the Patrician.

'Ah. The nice one?'

'Thank you, commander,' said the Patrician. 'Thank you, gentlemen. Do not let me detain you. Oh, Vimes... just a brief word, if you would be so good. Not you, Captain Carrot. I'm sure someone is committing some crime somewhere.'

Vimes remained staring at the far wall while the room emptied. Vetinari left his chair and went over to the window.

'Strange days indeed, commander,' he said.

'Sir.'

'For example, I gather that this afternoon Captain Carrot was on the roof of the Opera House firing arrows down towards the archery butts.'

'Very keen lad, sir.'

'It could well be that the distance between the Opera House and the targets is about the same, you know, as the distance between the top of the Barbican and the spot where the Prince was hit.'

'Just fancy that, sir.'

Vetinari sighed. 'And why was he doing this?'

'It's a funny thing, sir, but he was telling me the other day that in fact it is still law that every citizen should do one hour's archery practice every day. Apparently the law was made in 1356 and it's never been—'

'Do you know why I sent Captain Carrot away just now, Vimes?'

'Couldn't say, sir.'

'Captain Carrot is an honest young man, Vimes.'

'Yes, sir.'

'And did you know that he winces when he hears you tell a direct lie?'

'Really, sir?' *Damn* .

'I can't stand to see his poor face twitch all the time, Vimes.'

'Very thoughtful of you, sir.'

'Where was the second bowman, Vimes?'

Damn! 'Second bowman, sir?'

'Have you ever had a hankering to go on the stage, Vimes?'

Yes, at the moment I'd leap on it wherever it's heading, thought Vimes.

'No, sir.'

'Pity. I am certain you're a great loss to the acting profession. I believe you said the man had put the boards back after him.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Nailed them back?'

Blast. 'Yes, sir.'

'From the outside.'

Damn. 'Yes, sir.'

'A Particularly *resourceful* lone bowman, then.'

Vimes didn't bother to comment. Vetinari sat down at his desk, raised his steepled fingers to his lips and stared at Vimes over the top of them.

'Colon and Nobbs are investigating this? Really?'

'Yes, sir.'

'If I were to ask you why, you'd pretend not to understand?'

Vimes let his forehead wrinkle in honest perplexity 'Sir?'

'If you say "Sir?" again in that stupid voice, Vimes, I swear there will be trouble.'

'They're good men, sir.'

'However, some people might consider them to be unimaginative, stolid and... how can I put this?... possessed of an inbuilt disposition to accept the first explanation that presents itself and then bunk off somewhere for a quiet smoke? A certain lack of imagination? An ability to get out of their depth on a wet pavement? A tendency to rush to judgement?'

'I hope you are not impugning my men, sir.'

'Vimes, Sergeant Colon and Corporal Nobbs have*never* been pugn'd in their entire lives.'

'Sir?'

'And yet... in fact, we do not*need* complications, Vimes. An ingenious lone madman... well, there are many madmen. A regrettable incident.'

'Yes, sir.' The man was looking harassed and Vimes felt there was room for a pinch of sympathy.

'Fred and Nobby don't like complications either, sir.'

'We need simple answers, Vimes.'

'Sir. Fred and Nobby are*good* at simple.'

The Patrician turned away and looked out over the city.

'Ah,' he said, in a quieter voice. 'Simple men to see the simple truth.'

'This is a fact, sir.'

'You are learning fast, Vimes.'

'Couldn't say about that, sir.'

'And when they have found the simple truth, Vimes?'

'Can't argue with the truth, sir.'

'In my experience, Vimes, you can argue with anything.'

When Vimes had gone Lord Vetinari sat at his desk for a while, staring at nothing. Then he took a key from a drawer and walked across to a wall, where he pressed a particular area.

There was a rattle of a counterweight. The wall swung back.

The Patrician walked softly through the narrow passageway beyond. Here and there it was illuminated by a very faint glow from around the edges of the little panels which, if gently slid back, would allow someone to look out through the eyesockets of a handy portrait.

They were a relic of a previous ruler. Vetinari never bothered with them. Looking out of someone else's

eyes wasn't the trick.

There was a certain amount of travel up dark stairways and along musty corridors. Occasionally he'd make movements the meaning of which might not be readily apparent. He'd touch a wall *here* and *here*, apparently without thinking, as he passed. Along one stone-flagged passage, lit only by the grey light from a window forgotten by everyone except the most optimistic flies, he appeared to play a game of hopscotch, robes flying around him and calves twinkling as he skipped from stone to stone.

These various activities did not seem to cause anything to happen. Eventually he reached a door, which he unlocked. He did this with some caution.

The air beyond was full of acrid smoke, and the steady *pop-pop* sound which he had begun to hear further back along the passage was now quite loud. It faltered for a moment, was followed by a much louder bang, and then a piece of hot metal whirled past the Patrician's car and buried itself in the wall.

In the smoke a voice said, 'Oh dear.'

It didn't seem unhappy, but sounded rather like the voice one might use to a sweet and ingratiating little puppy which, despite one's best efforts, is sitting next to a spreading damp patch on the carpet.

As the billows cleared the indistinct shape of the speaker turned to Vetinari with a wan little smile and said, 'Fully fifteen seconds this time, my lord! There is no doubt that the *principle* is sound.'

That was one of Leonard of Quirm's traits: he picked up conversations out of the air, he assumed everyone was an interested friend, and he took it for granted that you were as intelligent as he was.

Vetinari peered at a small heap of bent and twisted metal.

'What was it, Leonard?' he said.

'An experimental device for turning chemical energy into rotary motion,' said Leonard. 'The problem, you see, is getting the little pellets of black powder into the combustion chamber at exactly the right speed and one at a time. If two ignite together, well, what we have is the *external* combustion engine.'

'And, er, what would be the purpose of it?' said the Patrician.

'I believe it could replace the horse,' said Leonard proudly.

They looked at the stricken thing.

'One of the advantages of horses that people often point out,' said Vetinari, after some thought, 'is that they very seldom explode. Almost never, in my experience, apart from that unfortunate occurrence in the hot summer a few years ago.' With fastidious fingers he pulled something out of the mess. It was a pair of cubes, made out of some soft white fur and linked together by a piece of string. There were dots on them.

'Dice?' he said.

Leonard smiled in an embarrassed fashion. 'Yes. I can't think why I thought they'd help it go better. It was just, well, an idea. You know how it is.'

Lord Vetinari nodded. He knew how it was. Be knew how it was far more than Leonard of Quirm did, which was why there was one key to the door and he had it. Not that the man was a prisoner, except by dull, humdrum standards. He appeared rather grateful to be confined in this light, airy attic with as much wood, paper, sticks of charcoal and paint as he desired and no rent or food bills to pay.

In any case, you couldn't really imprison someone like Leonard of Quirm. The most you could do was lock up his body. The gods alone knew where his mind went. And, although he had so much cleverness it leaked continually, he couldn't tell you which way the political wind was blowing even if you fitted him with sails.

Leonard's incredible brain sizzled away alarmingly, an overloaded chip pan on the Stove of Life. It was impossible to know what he would think of next, because he was constantly reprogrammed by the whole universe. The sight of a waterfall or a soaring bird would send him spinning down some new path of practical speculation that invariably ended in a heap of wire and springs and a cry of 'I think I know what I did wrong.' He'd been a member of most of the craft guilds in the city but had been thrown out for getting impossibly high marks in the exams or, in some cases, correcting the questions. It was said that he'd accidentally blown up the Alchemists' Guild using nothing more than a glass of water, a spoonful of acid, two lengths of wire and a pingpong ball.

Any sensible ruler would have killed off Leonard, and Lord Vetinari was extremely sensible and often wondered why he had not done so. He'd decided that it was because, imprisoned in the priceless, enquiring amber of Leonard's massive mind, underneath A that bright investigative genius was a kind of wilful innocence that might in lesser men be called stupidity. It was the seat and soul of that force which, down the millennia, had caused mankind to stick its fingers in the electric light socket of the Universe and play with the switch to see what happened – and then be very surprised when it did.

It was, in short, something useful. And if the Patrician was anything, he was the political equivalent of the old lady who saves bits of string because you never know when they might come in handy.

After all, you couldn't plan for every eventuality, because that would involve knowing what was going to happen, and if you *knew* what was going to happen, you could probably see to it that it didn't, or at least happened to someone else. So the Patrician never planned. Plans often got in the way.

And, finally, he kept Leonard around because the man was easy to talk to. He never understood what Lord Vetinari was talking about, he had a world view about as complex as that of a concussed duckling and, above all, never really paid attention. This made him an excellent confidant. After all, when you seek advice from someone it's certainly not because you want them to give it. You just want them to be there while you talk to yourself.

'I've just made some tea.' said Leonard. 'Will you join me?'

He followed the Patrician's gaze to a brown stain all up one wall, which ended in a star of molten metal in the plaster.

'I'm afraid the automatical tea engine went wrong,' he said. 'I shall have to make it by hand.'

'So kind,' said Lord Vetinari.

He sat down amidst the easels and, while Leonard busied himself at the fireplace, leafed through the latest sketches. Leonard sketched as automatically as other people scratched; genius – a certain *kind* of genius – fell off him like dandruff.

There was a picture of a man drawing, the lines catching the figure so accurately it appeared to stand out of the paper. And around it, because Leonard never wasted white space, were *other* sketches, scattered aimlessly. A thumb. A bowl of flowers. A device, apparently, for sharpening pencils by water power...

Vetinari found what he was looking for in the bottom lefthand corner, sandwiched between a sketch for a new type of screw and a tool for opening oysters. It, or something very much like it, was always there somewhere.

One of the things that made Leonard such a rare prize, and kept him under such secure lock and key, was that he really didn't see any difference between the thumb and the roses and the pencil-sharpener and *this* .

'Ah, the self-portrait,' said Leonard, returning with two cups.

'Yes, indeed,' said Vetinari. 'But my eye was drawn to this little sketch here. The war machine...'

'Oh, that? A mere nothing. Have you ever noticed the way in which the dew on roses—'

'This bit here... what is it for?' said Vetinari, pointing persistently.

'Oh, that? That's just the throwing arm for the balls of molten sulphur,' said Leonard, picking up a plate of small cakes. 'I calculate that one should get a range of almost half a mile, if one detaches the endless belt from the driving wheels and uses the oxen to wind the windlass.'

'Really?' said Vetinari, taking in the carefully numbered parts. 'And it could be built?'

'What? Oh, yes. Macaroon? In theory.'

'In theory?'

'No—one would ever actually do it. Raining unquenchable fire down upon fellow humans? Hah!' Leonard sprayed macaroon crumbs. 'You'd never find an artisan to build it, or a soldier who would pull the lever... That's part 3(b) on the plan, just here, look. ...'

'Ah, yes,' said Vetinari. 'Anyway,' he added, 'I imagine these huge power arms here couldn't possibly be operated without them breaking . . .'

'Seasoned ash and yew, laminated and held together by special steel bolts,' said Leonard promptly. 'I made a few calculations, just there below the sketch of light on a raindrop. As an intellectual exercise, obviously.'

Vetinari ran his eye along several lines of Leonard's spidery mirror-writing.

'Oh, yes,' he said glumly. He put the paper aside.

'Have I told you that the Klatchian situation is intensely political? Prince Cadram is trying to do a great deal very fast. He needs to consolidate his position. He is depending on support that is somewhat volatile. There are many plotting against him, I understand.'

'Really? Well, this is the sort of thing people do,' said Leonard. 'Incidentally, I've recently been

examining cobwebs and, I know this will interest you, their strength in relation to their weight is much greater even than our best steel wire. Isn't that fascinating?'

'What kind of weapon do you intend to make out of them?' said the Patrician.

'Sorry?'

'Oh, nothing. I was just thinking aloud.'

'And you haven't touched your tea,' said Leonard.

Vetinari looked around the room. It was full of...*things*. Tubes and odd paper kites and things that looked like the skeletons of ancient beasts. One of Leonard's saving graces, in a very *real* sense from Vetinari's point of view, was his strange attention span. It wasn't that he soon got bored with things. He didn't seem to get bored with *anything*. But since he was interested in everything in the universe all the time the end result tended to be that an experimental device for disembowelling people at a distance then became a string-weaving machine and ended up as an instrument for ascertaining the specific gravity of cheese.

He was as easily distracted as a kitten. All that business with the flying machine, for example. Giant bat wings hung from the ceiling even now. The Patrician had been more than happy to let him waste his time on that idea, because it was obvious to anyone that no human being would ever be able to flap the wings hard enough.

He needn't have worried. Leonard was his own distraction. He had ended up spending ages designing a special tray so that people could eat their meals in the air.

A truly innocent man. And yet always, always, some little part of him would sketch these wretchedly beguiling engines, with their clouds of smoke and carefully numbered engineering diagrams...

'What's this?' Vetinari said, pointing to yet another doodle. It showed a man holding a large metal sphere.

'That? Oh, something of a toy, really. Makes use of the strange properties of some otherwise quite useless metals. They don't like being *squeezed*. So they go bang. With extreme alacrity.'

'Another weapon...'

'Certainly not, my lord! It would be no possible use as a weapon! I did think it might have a place in the mining industries, though.'

'Really...'

'For when they need to move mountains out of the way.'

'Tell me,' Vetinari said, putting this paper aside as well, 'you don't have any relatives in Klatch, do you?'

'I don't believe so. My family lived in Quirm for generations.'

'Oh. Good. But... very clever people in Klatch, are they?'

'Oh, in many disciplines they practically wrote the scroll. Fine metalwork, for example.'

'Metalwork.. .' The Patrician sighed.

'And Alchemy, of course. Affir Al-chema's *PrincipiaExplosia* has been *the* seminal work for more than a hundred years.'

'Alchemy,' said the Patrician, glumly. 'Sulphur and so forth...'

'Yes, indeed.'

'But the way you put it, these major achievements were some considerable time ago...' Lord Vetinari sounded like a man straining to see a light at the end of the tunnel.

'Certainly! I would be astonished if they haven't made considerable progress!' said Leonard of Quirm happily.

'Ah?' The Patrician sank a little in his chair. It had turned out that the end of the tunnel was on fire.

'A splendid people with much to recommend them,' said Leonard. 'I always thought it was the presence of the desert. It leads to an urgency of thought. It makes you aware of the briefness of life.'

The Patrician glanced at another page. Between a sketch of a bird's wing and a careful drawing of a ball-joint was a little doodle of something with spiked wheels and spinning blades. And then there was the device for moving mountains aside...

'The desert is not required,' he said. He sighed again and pushed the pages aside. 'Have you heard about the lost continent of Leshp?' he said.

'Oh, yes. I did some sketches there a few years ago,' said Leonard. 'Some interesting aspects, I recall. More tea? I fear you've let that one get cold. Was there anything you particularly wanted?'

The Patrician pinched the bridge of his nose.

'I'm not sure. There is a small problem developing. I thought perhaps you could help. Unfortunately,' the Patrician glanced at the sketches again, 'I suspect that you can.' He stood up, straightened his robe and forced a smile. 'You have everything you require?'

'Some more wire would be nice,' said Leonard. 'And I have run out of Burnt Umber.'

'I shall have some sent along directly,' said Vetinari. 'And now, if you will excuse me—'

He let himself out.

Leonard nodded happily as he cleared away the teacups. The infernal combustion engine was carried to the heap of scrap metal beside the small forge, and he fetched a ladder and removed the piston from the ceiling.

He'd just opened out his easel to start work on a new design when he was aware of a distant pattering. It sounded like someone running but also occasionally pausing to hop sideways on one leg.

Then there was a pause, such as might be made by someone adjusting their clothing and getting their breath back.

The door opened and the Patrician returned. He sat down and looked carefully at Leonard of Quirm.

'You did *what*?' he said.

Vimes turned the clove over and over under the magnifying glass.

'I see tooth marks,' he said.

'Yes sir,' said Littlebottom, who represented in her entirety the watch's forensic department. 'Looks like someone was chewing it like a toothpick.'

Vimes sat back. 'I would say,' he said, 'that this was last touched by a swarthy man of about my height. He had several gold teeth. And a beard. And a slight cast in one eye. Scarred. He was carrying a large weapon. Curved, I'd say. And you'd have to call what he was wearing a turban because it wasn't moving fast enough to be a badger.'

Littlebottom looked astonished.

'Detectoring is like gambling,' said Vimes, putting down the dove. 'The secret is to know the winner in advance. Thank you, corporal. Write down that description and make sure everyone gets a copy, please. He goes by the name of 71-hour Ahmed, heaven knows why. And then go and get some rest.'

Vimes turned to face Carrot and Angua, who had crammed into the tiny little room, and nodded at the girl.

'I followed the clove smell all the way down to the docks,' she said.

'And then?'

'Then I lost it, sir.' Angua looked embarrassed. 'I didn't have any trouble through the fish market, sir. Or in the slaughterhouse district. And then it went into the spice market—'

'Ah. I see. And didn't come out again?'

'In a way, sir. Or came out going fifty different ways. Sorry.'

'Can't be helped. Carrot?'

'I did what you said, sir. The top of the Opera House is about the right distance from our archery butts. I used a bow just like the one he used, sir—'

Vimes raised a finger. Carrot stared, and then said slowly: like the one you found next to him.. '

'Right. And?'

'It's a Burleigh and Stronginthearm "Shureshotte Five", sir. A bow for the expert. I'm not a great

bowman but I could at least hit the target at that elevation. But...'

'I'm ahead of you,' said Vimes. 'You're, a big lad, Carrot. Our late Ossie had arms like Nobby. I could put my hand round them.'

'Yes, sir. It's a hundred-pound draw. I doubt if he could even pull the string back.'

'I'd hate to watch him try. Good grief... the only thing he could be sure of hitting with a bow like that would be his foot. By the way, do you think anyone saw you up there?'

'I doubt it, sir. I was right in among the chimneys and the air vents.'

Vimes sighed. 'Captain, I expect if you'd done it in a cellar at midnight his lordship would have said "Wasn't it rather dark down there?" next morning.'

He took out the by now rather creased picture. There was Carrot – or at least Carrot's arm and ear – as he ran towards the procession. And there, among the people in the procession turning to look at him, was the face of the Prince. There was no sign of 71-hour Ahmed. He'd been at the soiree, hadn't he? But then there'd been all that milling around at the door, people changing places, treading on one another's robes, nipping back to the privy, walking into one another... He could have gone *anywhere* .

'And the Prince fell as you got to him? With the arrow in his back? He was still facing you?'

'Yes, sir. I'm sure of that. Everyone else was milling around, of course.. .'

'So he was shot in the back by a man in front of him who could not possibly have used the bow that he didn't shoot him with from the wrong direction. .

There was a tapping at the window.

'That'll be Downspout,' said Vimes, without looking round. 'I sent him on an errand...'

Downspout never quite fitted in. It wasn't that he didn't get on with people, because he hardly ever *met* people, except those whose activities took them above, say, second-floor level. Constable

Downspout's beat was the rooftops. Very slowly. He'd come down for the Watch's Hogswatch party and had poured gravy in his ears to show Willing, but gargoyles got very nervy indoors at ground level and he had soon exited via the chimney and his paper squeaker had echoed out forlornly amongst the snowy rooftops all night.

But gargoyles were good at watching, and good at remembering, and very, very good at being patient.

Vimes opened the window. Moving jerkily, Downspout unfolded himself into the room and then quickly scrambled up on to a corner of Vimes's desk, for the comfort that it brought.

Angua and Carrot stared at the arrow the gargoyle held in his hand.

'Ah, well done,' said Vimes, in the same even voice. 'Where did you find it, Downspout?'

Downspout spluttered a series of guttural syllables only pronounceable by someone with a mouth shaped like a pipe.

'In the wall on the second floor of the dress shop in the Plaza of Broken Moons,' Carrot translated.

'eshk,' said Downspout.

'That's barely halfway to Sator Square, sir.'

'Yes,' said Vimes. 'A small weak man trying to pull a heavy bow, the arrow wobbling all over the place... Thank you very much, Downspout. There will be an extra pigeon for you this week.'

'nkorr,' said Downspout, and clambered back out of the window.

'Excuse me, sir?' said Angua. She took the arrow from Vimes and, closing her eyes, sniffed at it gingerly.

'Oh, yes... Ossie,' she said. 'All over it . .

'Thank you, corporal. It's as well to be sure.'

Carrot took the arrow from the werewolf and looked at it critically. 'Huh. Peacock feathers and a plated point. It's the sort of thing an amateur buys because he thinks it'll magically improve his shot. Showy.'

'Right,' said Vimes. 'You, Carrot, and you, Angua... you're on the case.'

'Sir, I don't understand,' said Carrot. 'I am perplexed. I thought you said Fred and Nobby were investigating this?'

'Yes,' said Vimes.

'But—'

'Sergeant Colon and Corporal Nobbs are investigating why the late Ossie tried to kill the Prince. And do you know what? They're going to find lots of clues. I just know it. I can feel it in my water.'

'But we know he *couldn't* —' said Carrot.

'Isn't this fun?' said Vimes. 'I don't want you to get in Fred's way. Just... ask around. Try Done It Duncan, Or Sidney Lopsides, hah, there's a man with his ear to the ground all right. Or the Agony Aunts, or Lily Goodtime. Or Mr Slider, haven't seen him around for a while, but—'

'He's dead, sir,' said Carrot.

'What, Smelly Slider? When?'

'Last month, sir. He got hit by a falling bedstead. Freak accident, sir.'

'No—one told *me* .'

'You were busy, sir. But you put some money in the envelope when Fred brought it round, sir. Ten dollars, which Fred remarked was very generous.'

Vimes sighed. Oh, yes, the envelopes. Fred was always wandering around with an envelope these days.

Someone was always leaving, or some friend of the Watch was in trouble, or there was a raffle, or the tea money was low again, or some complicated explanation... so Vimes just put some money in. Simplest way.

Old Smelly Slider...

'You should've mentioned it,' he said reproachfully.

'You've been working hard, sir.'

'Any other street news you haven't mentioned, captain?'

'Not that I can think of, sir.'

'All right. Well... see which way the wind is blowing. Very carefully. And – trust no-one.'

Carrot looked worried.

'Er... I can trust Angua, can't I?' he said.

'Well, of *course* you—'

'And you, presumably.'

'Me, well, obviously. That goes without say—'

'Corporal Littlebottom? She can be very helpful—'

'Cheery, yes, certainly you can trust—'

'Sergeant Detritus? I always thought he was very trust—'

'Detritus, oh yes, he—'

'Nobby? Should I—'

'Carrot, I understand what he *means* ,' said Angua, tugging his arm.

Carrot looked a little crestfallen. 'I've never liked... you know, underhand things,' he mumbled.

'I don't want any written reports,' said Vimes, grateful for that small mercy. 'This is... unofficial. But *officially* unofficial, if you see what I mean.'

Angua nodded. Carrot just stayed looking dismal.

She's a werewolf, thought Vimes, *of course* she understands. And you'd think a man who is technically a dwarf'd be able to fold his head around the idea of subterfuge.

'Look, just... listen to the streets,' said Vimes. 'The

streets know everything. Talk to... Blind Hugh—'

'I'm afraid he passed away last month,' said Carrot.

'Did he? No—one told me!'

'I thought I sent you a memo, sir.'

Vimes glanced guiltily at his overloaded desk, and then shrugged.

'Have a quiet look at things. Get to the bottom of things. And trust no— Trust practically no—one. All right? Except trustworthy people.'

'Come on, open up! Watch business!'

Corporal Nobbs pulled at Sergeant Colon's sleeve and whispered in his ear.

'Not Watch business!' said Colon, pounding the door again. 'Nothing to do with the Watch at all! We are just civilians, all right?'

The door opened a crack.

'Yes?' said a voice that counted its small change.

'We have to ask you some questions, missus.'

'Are you the Watch?' said the voice.

'No! I think I just made that clear—'

'Piss off, copper!'

The door slammed.

'You sure this is the right place, sarge?'

'Harry Chestnuts said he saw Ossie going in here. Come on, open up!'

'Everyone's looking at us, sarge,' said Nobby. Doors and windows had opened all along the street.

'And don't call me sarge when we're in plain clothes!'

'Right you are, Fred.'

'That's—' Colon hesitated in an agony of status. 'Well, that's *Frederick* to you, Nobby.'

'And they're giggling Fred... er... crick.'

'We don't want to make a cock—up of this, Nobby.'

'Right, Frederick. And that's Cecil, thank you.'

'Cecil?'

'That is my name,' said Nobby coldly.

'Have it your way,' said Colon. 'Just remember who's the superior civilian around here, all right?'

He hammered on the door again.

'We hear you've got a room to let, missus!' he yelled.

'Brilliant, Frederick,' said Nobby. 'That was bloody *brilliant* !'

'Well, *I am* the sergeant, right?' Colon whispered.

'No.'

'Er... yeah... right... well, just you remember that, right?'

The door snapped open.

The woman within had one of those faces that had settled over the years, as though it had been made of butter and then left in the sun. But age hadn't been able to do much with her hair. It was a violent ginger and piled up like a threatening thunderhead.

'Room? You shoulda said,' she said. 'Two dollars a week, no pets, no cookin', no wimmin after 6 a.m., if you don't want it thousands do, are you with the circus? You look like you're with the circus.'[5]

'We're-' Colon began, and then stopped. There were undoubtedly a large number of things to be apart from policemen, but there and then he couldn't think of any of them.

'-actors,' said Nobby.

'Then it's payment a week in advance,' said the woman. 'And no filthy foreign habits. This is a respectable house, she added, in defiance of evidence so far.

'We ought to see the room first,' said Colon.

'Oh, the choosy sort, eh?'

She led them upstairs.

The room vacated so terminally by Ossie was small and bare. A few items of clothing hung on nails in the wall. and a heap of wrappers and greasy bags indicated that Ossie had been a man who ate, as it were, off the street.

'Whose is this stuff?' said Sergeant Colon.

'Oh, he's gone now. *Itold* him he'd be out if he didn't pay up. I'll throw it out afore you settle in.'

'We'll get rid of it for you,' said Sergeant Colon. He fumbled in his pouch and produced a couple of dollars. 'Here you are, Miss--?'

'Mrs Spent,' said Mrs Spent. She gave them a lopsided look. 'Are you both stopping here or what?'

'Nah, I've just come along as his chaperon,' said Colon, giving her a friendly grin. 'He has to fight women off when they find out about his sexual magnetism.'

Mrs Spent gave the shocked Nobby a sharp look and bustled out of the room.

'What'd you go and say that for?' said Nobby.

'It's got rid of her, hasn't it?'

'You were having a go at me, don't deny it! just because I'm going through a bit of an emotional wosname, eh?'

'It was just a joke, Nobby. Just a joke.'

Nobby peered under the narrow bed.

'Wow!' he said, all emotional wosnames forgotten.

'What is it? What is it?' said Colon.

'It looks like a complete run of *Bows and Ammo* ! And...' Nobby pulled another stack of badly engraved magazines out into the light, 'here's *Warrior of Fortune* , look! And *Practical Siege Weapons* ...'

Colon leafed through page after page of very similar looking people holding very similar weapons of personal destruction.

'You got to be a bit odd to sit around all day reading this kind of thing,' he said.

'Yeah,' said Nobby. 'Here, don't put that one back, that's last August's issue, I ain't got that one. Hang on, there's a box right at the back...'

He wriggled out, towing a small box with him. It was locked, but the cheap metal gave way when he accidentally levered at the lid.

Silver coins gleamed. Lots and lots of them.

'Whoops...' he muttered. 'We're in trouble now...'

'That's *Klatchian* money, that is!' said Colon. 'Sometimes people slip you one instead of a half-dollar in your change. Look, there's all curly writing on them!'

'We're in *big* trouble,' said Nobby.

'No, no, no, this is a Clue what we have found by patient detectoring,' said Sergeant Colon. 'And it's going to be a feather in our caps and no mistake when Mr Vimes hears about it!'

'How much do you reckon there is?'

'Got to be hundreds and hundreds of dollars' worth,' said Colon. 'And that's a lot of money to a Klatchian. You can probably live like a king for a year on a dollar, in Klatch.'

'It wasn't very patient detectoring,' said Nobby doubtfully. 'All I did was look under the bed.'

'Ah, but that's because you is trained,' said Colon. 'Your basic *civilian* wouldn't think of that, right? Ah, it all begins to make sense!'

'Does it? Why would the Klatchians give him money to shoot a Klatchian?' said Nobby. .

Colon tapped the side of his nose. '*Politics* ,' he said.

'Ah, politics,' said Nobby. 'Ah, well, politics. I see. *Politics* . Right. So why?'

'Aha,' said Colon again, tapping the other side of his nose.

'Why're you picking your nose, sarge?'

'I'm tapping it,' said Colon severely. 'That's to show I'm in the know.'

'In the nose,' said Nobby cheerfully.

'It's just the sort of underhand cunning thing they'd do,' said Colon.

'Payin' us to kill them?' said Nobby.

'Ah, you see, some Klatchian nob gets topped *here* , and then *they* can send a snotty note saying, "You killed our big nob, you foreign nephews of dogs, this means war!" see? A perfect excuse.'

'Do you *need* an excuse to have a war?' said Nobby. 'I mean, who for? Can't you just say, "You got lots of cash and land but I've got a big sword so divvy up right now, chop chop?" That's what *I'd* do,' said Corporal Nobbs, military strategist. 'And I wouldn't even say *that* until after I'd attacked.'

'Ah, but that's 'cos you don't know about politics,' said Colon. 'You can't do that stuff any more. Mark my words, this case has got politics written all over it. That's why old Vimes put me on it, depend upon it. Politics. Young Carrot's all very well, but you need a hexperienced man of the world in these delicate political situations.'

'You've certainly got the nose-tapping just right,' said Nobby. 'I generally miss.'

But he felt troubled, if not in his nose then in whatever small organ propelled his blood around his body. This didn't feel right. Nothing much in Nobby's life had ever felt right, so he knew very well how the feeling felt.

He looked up at the bare walls and down at the rough floorboards.

'There's a bit of sand on the floor,' he said.

'Another Clue, then,' said Colon happily. 'A Klatchian has been here. Bugger all else but sand in Klatch. Still got some in his sandals.'

Nobby opened the window. It gave on to a gently sloping roof. Someone could get through it easily and be away over the tiles and into the maze of chimneys.

'He could've gone in and out this way, sarge,' he volunteered.

'Good point, Nobby. Write that down. Evidence of conniving and sneaking around.'

Nobby peered down. 'Here, there's glass outside, Fred...'

Sergeant Colon joined him at the stricken window. One of the panes had been smashed. Outside, glass glittered on the tiles.

'That could be a clue, eh?' said Nobby, hopefully.

'It certainly is,' said Sergeant Colon. 'See the glass fell *outside* the window? Everyone knows you look at which way the glass fails. I reckon he was just testing his bow and it went off while it was loaded.'

'That's clever, sarge,' said Nobby.

'That's *detecting*,' said Colon. 'It's no good just *looking* at things, Nobby. You got to *think* straight, too.'

'Cecil, sarge.'

'That's Frederick, Cecil. Come on, I think we've wrapped this up nicely. Old Vimes says he wants a report toot sweet.'

Nobby looked out of the broken window. The roof abutted the end wall of a much larger warehouse. For a moment he found himself thinking bendy rather than straight, but he reasoned that his thinking was only a corporal's thinking, and worth far less per thought than a sergeant's thinking, so he kept his private thoughts to himself.

As they went downstairs Mrs Spent watched them suspiciously through a barely opened doorway at the far end of the hall, clearly ready to slam it shut at the first suggestion of any sexual magnetism.

'It's not as if I even know where to *get* a sexual magnet,' Nobby muttered. 'And she didn't even laugh.'

*...Also, we went to the bow shops in the Street of Cunning Artificers and showed the iconograph to the man in Burleigh and Stronginthearm, who vouchsafed, that is him, e.g., he was referring to the Diseased ...*

'Oh, my...' Vimes's lips moved slightly as his gaze went back up the page.

*...also in addition to the Klatchian money you could tell one of them had been there because of, e.g., the sand on the floor ...*

'He'd still got sand in his sandals?' murmured Vimes. 'Good grief.'

'Sam?'

Vimes looked up from his reading.

'Your soup will be cold,' said Lady Sybil from the far end of the table. 'You've been holding that spoonful in the air for the last five minutes by the clock.'

'Sorry, dear.'

'What are you reading?'

'Oh, just a little masterpiece,' said Vimes, pushing Fred Colon's report aside.

'Interesting, is it?' said Lady Sybil a little sourly.

'Practically unparalleled,' said Vimes. 'The only things they haven't found are the bunch of dates and the camel hidden under the pillow...'

Belatedly, his nuptial radar detected a certain chilliness from the far side of the cruet.

'Is, er, there something wrong, dear?' he said.

'Can you remember when we last had dinner together, Sam?'

'Tuesday, wasn't it?'

'That was the Guild of Merchants' annual dinner, Sam.'

Vimes's brow wrinkled. 'But you were there too, weren't you?'

A further subtle change in the dragonhouse quotient told him that this was not a well chosen answer.

'And then you rushed off afterwards because of that business with the barber in Gleam Street.'

'Sweeney Jones,' said Vimes. 'Well, he *was* killing people, Sybil. The best you could say is that he didn't mean to. He was just very bad at shaving—'

'But you didn't have to go, I'm sure.'

'Policing's a twenty-four-hour job, dear.'

'Only for you! Your constables do their ten hours and that's it. But you're *always* working. It's not good for you. You're always running around during the day, and when I wake up in the middle of the night there's always a cold space beside me.. .'

The dots hung in the air, the ghosts of words unsaid. Little things, thought Vimes. That's how a war starts.

'There's so much to do, Sybil,' he said, as patiently as he could.

'There's always been a lot to do. And the bigger the Watch gets *themore* there is to do, have you noticed that?'

Vimes nodded. That was true. Rotas, receipts, notebooks, reports... the Watch might or might not be making a difference in the city, but it was certainly frightening a lot of trees.

'You ought to delegate,' said Lady Sybil.

'So he tells me,' muttered Vimes.

'Pardon?'

'Just thinking aloud, dear.' Vimes pushed the paperwork away. 'I'll tell you what... let's have an evening in,' he said. 'There's a nice fire in the drawing room—'

'Er... no, Sam, there isn't.'

'Hasn't young Forthright lit it?' Forthright was the Boy; it came as news to Vimes that this was an official servant position, but the Boy's job was to light the fires, clean the privies, help the gardener and take the blame.

'He's gone off to be a drummer boy in the Duke of Eorle's regiment,' said Lady Sybil.

'Him too? He seemed a bright lad! Isn't he too young?'

'He said he was going to lie about his age.'

'I hope he lies about his musical ability. I've heard him whistling.' Vimes shook his head. 'Whatever possessed him to do such a daft thing?'

'He thinks the uniform will impress the girls.'

Sybil gave him a gentle smile. An evening at home suddenly began to seem very inviting.

'Well, it won't take a genius to find the woodshed,'

said Vimes. 'And then we can bolt the doors and—'

One of the aforesaid doors shook to the sound of frantic knocking.

Vimes caught Sybil's gaze.

'Go on, then. Answer it,' she sighed, and sat down.

The door admitted Corporal Littlebottom, seriously out of breath.

'You... got to come quick, sir... it's... murder this... time!'

Vimes looked helplessly at his wife.

'Of course you must go,' she said.

Angua brushed out her hair in front of the mirror.

'I don't like this,' said Carrot. 'It's not a proper way to behave.'

She patted him on the shoulder. 'Don't *worry*,' she said. 'Vimes explained it all. You're acting as though we're doing something *wrong*.'

'I like being a watchman,' said Carrot, still in the mournful depths. 'And you've got to wear a uniform. If you *don't* wear a uniform it's like spying on people. He *knows* I think that.'

Angua looked at his short red hair and honest ears.

'I've taken a lot of the work off his shoulders,' Carrot went on. 'He doesn't have to go on patrol *at all*, but he still tries to do everything.'

'Perhaps he doesn't want you to be quite so helpful?' said Angua, as tactfully as possible.

'It's not as if he's getting any younger, either. I've tried to point that out.'

'That was kind of you.'

'And I've never *worn* plain clothes.'

'On you they'll never be very plain,' said Angua, pulling on her coat. It was a relief to be out of that armour. As for Carrot, there was no disguising him. The size, the ears, the red hair, the expression of muscular good-naturedness...

'I suppose a werewolf is in plain clothes all the time, when you think about it,' said Carrot.

'Thank you, Carrot. And you are absolutely right.'

'I just don't feel comfortable, living a lie.'

'Walk a mile on these paws.'

'Pardon?'

'Oh... nothing.'

Goriff's son Janil had been angry. He didn't know why. The anger was built up of a lot of things. The firebomb last night was a big part. So were some of the words he'd been hearing in the street. He'd had an argument with his father about sending that food round to the Watch House this morning. They were an official part of the city. They had those stupid badges. They had uniforms. He was angry about a lot of

things, including the fact that he was thirteen.

So when, at nine in the evening while his father was baking bread, the door had slammed back and a man had rushed in, Janil had pulled his father's elderly crossbow from under the counter and aimed it where he thought the heart was and pulled the trigger.

Carrot stamped his feet once or twice and looked around.

'Here,' he said. 'I was standing here. And the Prince was... in that direction.'

Angua obediently walked across the square. Several people turned to look curiously at Carrot.

'All right... stop... no, on a bit... stop... turn a

little bit to the left... I mean my left... back a bit... now throw your arms up...'

He walked over to her and followed her gaze.

'He was shot from the University?'

'Looks like the library building,' said Angua. 'But a wizard wouldn't do it, surely? They keep out of that sort of thing.'

'Oh, it's not too hard to get in there, even when the gates are shut,' said Carrot. 'Let's try the unofficial way, shall we?'

'OK Carrot?'

'Yes?'

'The false moustache... it's not you, you know. And the nose is far too pink'

'Doesn't it make me look inconspicuous?'

'No. And the hat... I should lose the hat, too' It is a *good* hat,' she added quickly. 'But a brown bowler... it's not your style. It doesn't suit you.'

'Exactly!' said Carrot. 'If *it was* my style, people would know it's me, right?'

'I mean it makes you look like a twerp, Carrot.'

'Do I normally look like a twerp?'

'No, not—'

'Aha!' Carrot fumbled in the pocket of his large brown overcoat. 'I got this book of disguises from the joke shop in Phedre Road, look. Funny thing, Nobby was in there buying stuff too. I asked him why and he said it was desperate measures. What d'you think he meant by that?'

'I can't imagine,' said Angua.

'It's just amazing the stuff they've got. False hair, false noses, false beards, even false...' He hesitated, and began to blush. 'Even false... you know, chests. For ladies. But I can't imagine for the life of me why they'd want to disguise those.'

He probably couldn't, Angua thought. She took the very small book from Carrot and glanced through it. She sighed.

'Carrot, these disguises are meant for a potato.'

'Are they?'

'Look, they're all on potatoes, see?'

'I thought that was just for display.'

'Carrot, it's got "Mr Spuddy Face" on it.'

Behind his thick black moustache Carrot looked hurt and perplexed. 'What does a potato want a disguise for?' he said.

They'd reached the alley alongside the University that had been known informally as Scholars' Entry for so many centuries that this was now on a nameplate at one end. A couple of student wizards went past.

The unofficial entrance to the University has always been known only to students. What most students failed to remember was that the senior members of the faculty had also been students once, and also liked to get out and about after the official shutting of the gates. This naturally led to a certain amount of embarrassment and diplomacy on dark evenings.

Carrot and Angua waited patiently as a few more students climbed over, followed by the Dean.

'Good evening, sir,' said Carrot, politely.

'Good evening to you, Spuddy,' said the Dean, and ambled off into the night.

'You see?'

'Ah, but he didn't call me Carrot,' said Carrot. 'The *principle* is sound.'

They dropped down on to lawns of academia and headed for the library.

'It'll be shut,' said Angua.

'Remember, we have a man on the inside,' said Carrot, and knocked.

The door opened a little way. 'Ook?'

Carrot raised his horrible little round hat.

'Good evening, sir, I wonder if we could come in? It's Watch business.'

'Ook eek ook?'

'Er...,

'What did he say?' said Angua.

'If you must know, he said, "My goodness me, a walking potato,"' said Carrot.

The Librarian wrinkled his nose at Angua. He did not like the smell of werewolves. But he beckoned them inside and then left them waiting while he knuckled back to his desk and rummaged in a drawer. He produced a Watch Special Constable's badge on a string, which he hung around the general area where his neck should have been, and then stood as much to attention as an orang-utan can, which is not a great deal. The central ape gets the idea but outlying areas are slow to catch on.

'Ook ook!'

'Was that "How may I be of assistance, Captain Tuber?"' said Angua.

'We need to have a look on the fifth floor, overlooking the square,' said Carrot, a shade coldly.

'Ook ook – ook.'

'He says that's just old storerooms,' said Carrot.

'And that last "ook"?' said Angua.

' "Mr Horrible Hat", ' said Carrot.

'Still, he hasn't worked out who you are, eh?' said Angua.

The fifth floor was a corridor of airless rooms, smelling sadly of old, unwanted books. They were stacked not on shelves but on wide racks, bundled up with string. A lot of them were battered and missing their covers. Judging by what remained, though, they were old textbooks that not even the most ardent bibliophile could treasure.

Carrot picked up a torn copy of Woddeley's *Occult Primer*. Several loose pages fell out. Angua picked one up.

'"Chapter Fifteen, Elementary Necromancy",' she read aloud. 'Lesson One: Correct Use of Shovel...'

She put it down again and sniffed the air. The presence of the Librarian filled the nasal room like an elephant in a matchbox, but—

'Someone else has been in here,' she said. 'In the last couple of days. Could you leave us, sir? When it comes to odours, you're a bit... forthright...'

'Ook?'

The Librarian nodded at Carrot, shrugged at Angua and ambled out.

'Don't move,' said Angua. 'Stay right where you are, Carrot. Don't disturb the air . .

She inched forward carefully.

Her ears told her the Librarian was down the corridor, because she could hear the floorboards creaking. But her nose told her that he was still here. He was a little fuzzy, but

'I'm going to have to change,' she said. 'I can't get a proper picture this way. It's too strange.'

Carrot obediently shut his eyes. She'd forbidden him to watch her en route from a human to a wolf, because of the unpleasant nature of the shapes in between. Back in Uberwald people went from one shape to the other as naturally as ordinary humans would put on a different coat, but even there it was considered polite to do it behind a bush.

When he re-opened them Angua was slinking forward, her whole being concentrated in her nose.

The olfactory presence of the Librarian was a complex shape, a mere purple blur where he had been moving but almost a solid figure where he'd been standing still. Hands, face, lips... they'd be just the centre of an expanding cloud in a few hours' time, but now she could still smell them out.

There must be only the tiniest air currents in here. There weren't even any flies buzzing in the dead air to cause a ripple of disturbance.

She edged nearer to the window. Vision was a mere shadowy presence, providing a charcoal sketch of a room over which the scents painted their glorious colours.

By the window... by the window...

Yes! A man had stood there, and by the scent of it he hadn't moved for some time. The smell wavered in the air, on the edge of her nasal skill. The curling, billowing traces said that the window had been opened and closed again, and was there just the merest, tiniest suggestion that he'd held an arm out in front of him?

Her nose raced, trying to form original shapes from the patterns hanging in the room like dead smoke...

When she'd finished, Angua went back to her pile of clothes and coughed politely while she was pulling on her boots.

'There *was* a man standing by the window,' she said. 'Long hair, a bit dry, stinks of expensive shampoo. He was the man who nailed the boards back after Ossie got into the Barbican.'

'Are you sure?'

'Is this nose ever wrong?'

'Sorry. Go on.'

'I'd say he was heavy-set, a bit bulky for his height. He doesn't wash a lot, but when he does he uses Windpike's Soap, the cheap brand. But expensive shampoo, which is odd. Quite new boots. And a green coat.'

'You can smell the colour?'

'No. The dye. It comes from Sto Lat, I think. And... *I think* he shot a bow. *An expensive* bow. There's a hint of silk in the air, and that's what the strongest bowstrings are made of, isn't it? And you wouldn't put one of those on a cheap bow.'

Carrot stood by the window. 'He got a good view,' he said, and looked down at the floor. And then at the sill. And on the shelves nearby.

'How long was he here?'

'Two or three hours, I'd say.'

'He didn't move around much.'

'No.'

'Or smoke, or spit He just stood and waited. A professional. Mr Vimes was *right*.'

'A lot more professional than Ossie,' said Angua.

'Green coat,' said Carrot, as if thinking aloud. 'Green coat, green coat...'

'Oh. .. and bad dandruff,' said Angua, standing up.

'Snowy *Slopes*?!' shouted Carrot.

'What?'

'Really bad dandruff?'

'Oh, yes, it—'

'That's why they call him Snowy,' said Carrot. 'Daceyville Slopes, the man with the reinforced comb. But I'd heard he'd moved to Sto Lat—'

In unison they said: '—where the dye comes from—' 'Is he good with a bow?' said Angua.

'Very good. He's good at killing people he never met, too.'

'He's an Assassin, is he?'

'Oh, no. He just kills people for money. No style. Snowy can't read and write.'

Carrot scratched his head in sympathetic recollection. 'He doesn't even look at complicated pictures. We'd have got him last year, but he shook his head fast and got away while we were trying to dig out Nobby. Well, well. I wonder where he's staying?'

'Don't ask me to follow him in these streets. Thousands of people will have walked over the trail.'

'Oh, there's people who will know. Someone sees everything in this town.'

MR SLOPES?

Snowy Slopes gingerly felt his neck, or at least the neck of his soul. The human soul tends to keep to the shape of the original body for some time after death. Habit is a wonderful thing.

'Who the *hell* was he?' he said.

NOT SOMEONE YOU KNOW? said Death.

'Well, no! I don't know many people who cut my head off!'

Snowy Slopes's body had knocked against the table as it fell. Several bottles of medicated shampoo now dripped and mixed their contents into the other more intimate fluids from the Slopes corpse.

'That stuff with the special oil in it cost me nearly four dollars,' said Snowy. Yet, somehow, it all seemed slightly... irrelevant now. Death happens to other people. The other person in this case had been him. That is, the one down there. Not the one standing here looking at it. In life, Snowy hadn't even been able to *spell* 'metaphysical', but he was already beginning to view life in a different way. From the outside, for a start.

'Four dollars,' he repeated. 'I never even had time to try it!'

IT WOULDN'T HAVE WORKED, said Death, patting the man on a fading shoulder. BUT, IF I MIGHT SUGGEST

THAT YOU LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, IT WILL NO

LONGER BE NECESSARY.

'No more dandruff?' said Snowy, now quite transparent and fading fast.

EVER, said Death. TRUST ME ON THIS.

Commander Vimes ran down darkened streets, trying to buckle on his breastplate as he ran.

'All right, Cheery, what's happening?'

'They say a Klatchian killed someone, sir. There's a mob up in Scandal Alley and it's looking bad. I was on the desk and I thought you ought to be told, sir.'

'Right!'

'And anyway I couldn't find Captain Carrot, sir.'

A little bit of acid ink scribbled its subtle entry on the ledger of Vimes's soul.

'Oh, gods... so who's the officer in charge?'

'Sergeant Detritus, sir.'

It seemed to the dwarf that she was suddenly standing still. Commander Vimes had become a rapidly disappearing blur.

With the calm expression of someone who was methodically doing his duty, Detritus picked up a man and used him to hit some other men. When he had a clear area around him and a groaning heap of former rioters, he climbed the heap and cupped his hands round his mouth.

'Listen to me, youse people!'

A troll shouting at the top of his voice could easily be heard above a riot. When he seemed to have their attention he pulled a scroll out of his breastplate and waved it over his head.

'Dis is der Riot Act,' he said. 'You know what dat means? It means if'n I reads it out and youse don't disb... disp... go away, der Watch can use deadly force, you unnerstand?'

'What did you just use, then?' moaned someone from underneath his feet.

'Dat was you helpin' der Watch,' said Detritus, shifting his weight.

He unrolled the scroll.

Although there was some scuffling in alleyways and shouts from the next street, a ring of silence expanded outwards from the troll. An almost genetic component of the citizens of Ankh-Morpork was their ability to spot an opportunity for amusement.

Detritus held the document at arm's length. And then a few inches from his face. He tried turning it round. a few times.

His lips moved uneasily.

Finally, he leaned down and showed it to Constable Visit.

'What dis word?'

'That's "Whereby", sergeant.'

'I knew dat.'

He straightened up again.

""Whereby... it is..." ' Beads of the troll equivalent of sweat began to form on Detritus's forehead.  
'Whereby it is... ack-no-legg-ed. .."

'Acknowledged,' whispered Constable Visit.

'I knew dat.' Detritus stared at the paper again, and then gave up. 'Youse don't want to stand here listenin' to me all day!' he bellowed. 'Dis is der Riot Act and you've all got to read it, right? Pass it round.'

'What if we don't read it?' said a voice in the crowd.

'You got to read it. It *legal*.'

'And then what happens?'

'Den I shoot you,' said Detritus.

'That's not allowed!' said another voice. 'You've got to shout "Stop! Armed Watchman!" first.'

'Sure, dat suits me,' said Detritus. He shrugged one huge shoulder to bring his crossbow under his arm. It was a siege bow, intended to be mounted on the cart. The bolt was six feet long. 'It harder to hit runnin' targets.'

He released the safety catch.

'Anyone finishing readin' dat thing yet?'

'Sergeant!'

Vimes pushed his way through the crowd. And it *was* a crowd now. Ankh–Morpork was always a good audience.

There was a clang as Detritus saluted.

'Were you proposing to shoot these people in cold blood, sergeant?'

'Nossir. just a warning shot inna head, sir.'

'Really? Just give me a moment to talk to them, then.'

Vimes looked at the man next to him. He was holding a flaming torch in one hand and a long length of wood in the other. He gave Vimes the nervously defiant stare of someone who has just felt the ground shift under his feet.

Vimes pulled the torch towards him and lit a cigar. 'What's happening here, friend?'

'The Klatchians have been shooting people, Mr Vimes! Unprovoked attack!'

'Really?'

'People have been killed!'

'Who?'

'I... there were... everyone *knows* they've been killing people!' The man's mental footsteps found safer ground. 'Who do they think they are, coming over—'

'That's enough,' said Vimes. He stood back and raised his voice.

'I recognize a lot of you,' he said. 'And I know you've got homes to go to. See this?' He pulled his baton of office out of his pocket. 'This says I've got to keep the peace. So in ten seconds I'm going somewhere else to find some peace to keep, but Detritus is going to stay here. And I just hope he doesn't do anything to disgrace the uniform. Or get it very dirty, at least.'

irony was not a degree-level subject among the listeners, but the brighter ones recognized Vimes's expression. It said that here was a man hanging on to his patience by his teeth.

The mob dispersed, going ragged at the edges as people legged it down side alleys, threw away their makeshift weapons and emerged at the other end walking the grave, thoughtful walk of honest citizens.

'All right, what *happened*?' said Vimes, turning to the troll.

'We're hearing where dis boy shot dis man,' said Detritus. 'We got here, next minute it rainin' people from everywhere, shoutin'.'

'He smote him as Hudrun smote the fleshpots of Ur,' said Constable Visit. [6]

'Smote?' said Vimes, bewildered. 'He killed someone?'

'Not by der way der man was cussing, sir,' said Detritus. 'Hit him in der arm. His friends brought him round der Watch House to complain. He a baker on der night shift. He said he was late for work, he come runnin' in to pick up his dinner, next minute he flat on der floor.'

Vimes walked across the street and tried the door of the shop. It opened a little way, and then fetched up against what seemed to be a barricade. Furniture had been piled up against the window as well.

'How many people were there, constable?'

'A multitude thereof, sir.'

And four people in here, thought Vimes. A family. The door moved a fraction and Vimes realized he was ducking even before the crossbow protruded.

There was the *thung* of the string. The bolt tumbled rather than sped. It corkscrewed wildly across the alley and was almost moving sideways when it hit the opposite wall.

'Look,' said Vimes, keeping his body down but raising his voice. 'Anyone who got hit with *that*, it must have been an accident. This is the Watch. Open the door. Otherwise Detritus will open it. And when he opens a door, it stays open. You know what I mean?'

There was no reply.

'All right. Detritus, just step over here—'

There was a hissed argument inside, and then the sound of scraping as furniture was moved.

He tried the door. It swung inwards.

The family were at the far end of the room. Vimes felt eight eyes on him. The atmosphere had a hot, worrying feel, spiced with the smell of burnt food.

Mr Goriff was holding the crossbow gingerly, and the expression on his son's face told Vimes a lot of what he needed to know.

'*Allright* ,' he said. 'Now you all listen to me. I'm not arresting anyone right now, you hear? This sounds like one of those things that make his lordship yawn. But you'd do better spending the rest of the night in the Watch House. I can't spare the men to stand guard here. Do you understand? I could arrest you. But this is just a request.'

Mr Goriff cleared his throat.

'The man I shot-' he began, and left the question and the lie hanging in the air.

Vimes forced himself not to glance at the boy. 'Not badly hurt,' he said.

'He... ran in,' said Mr Goriff. 'And after last night-'

'You thought you were being attacked again and grabbed the crossbow?'

'Yes,' said the boy, defiantly, before his father could speak.

There was a brief argument in Klatchian. Then Mr Goriff said:

'We must leave the house?'

'For your own good. We'll try to have someone watch it. Now, get something together and go off with the sergeant. And give me that crossbow.'

Goriff handed it over with a look of relief. It was a typical Saturday Night Special, so badly made and erratic that the only safe place to be when it was fired would be directly behind it, and even then you would be running a risk. And then no-one had told its owner that under the counter in a steamy shop and a perpetual rain of grease wasn't the best place to keep it strung. The string sagged. Probably the only way you

could reliably hurt someone with it was to beat them over the head.

Vimes waited until they'd been ushered out and took a last look around the room. It wasn't large. In the kitchen behind the shop something spicy in a pot was boiling dry. After burning his fingers a couple of times he managed to tip the pot on to the fire to put it out and then, vaguely remembering his mother doing something like this, put the pot under the pump to soak

Then he barricaded the windows as best he could and went out, locking the door behind him. A discreetly obvious brass Thieves' Guild plaque over the door told the world that Mr Goriff had conscientiously paid his annual fee,[7]but the world had plenty of less formal dangers and so Vimes took a piece of chalk out of his pocket and wrote on the door:

As an afterthought he signed it:

## SGTDETRITUS

In the imaginations of the less civically minded the majesty of the rule of law didn't carry anything like as much weight as the dread of Detritus.

The Riot Act! Where *the hell* had he dredged that from? Carrot, probably. It hadn't been used for as long as Vimes could remember, and that was no wonder when you knew what it really did. Even Vetinari would hesitate to use it. Now it was nothing more than a phrase. Thank goodness for trollish illiteracy...

It was when Vimes stood back to admire his handiwork that he saw the glow in the sky over Park Lane, almost at the same time as he heard the clatter of iron boots on the street.

'Oh, hello, Littlebottom,' he said. 'What now? Don't tell me – someone's set fire to the Klatchian embassy.'

'All right, sir,' said the dwarf. She stood uncertainly in the middle of the alley, looking worried.

'Well?' said Vimes.

'Er... you said—'

With a sinking feeling Vimes remembered that the generic dwarfish skill with iron was matched only by the fumblefingered grasp of irony.

'The Klatchian embassy is *really* on fire?'

'Yes, sir!'

Mrs Spent opened the door a crack.

'Yes?'

'I'm a friend of...'

Carrot hesitated, wondering if Fred would have given his real name. 'Er... big fat man, suit doesn't fit—'

'The one who goes around with the sex maniac?'

'Pardon?'

'Skinny little twerp, dresses like a clown?'

'They said you'd have a room,' said Carrot desperately.

'They've got it,' said Mrs Spent, trying to shut the door.

'They said I could use it—'

'No sub—lettin!'

'They said I should pay you two dollars!'

The pressure of the door was released a little.

'On top of what they paid?' said Mrs Spent.

'Of course.'

'Well...' She looked Carrot up and down and sniffed. 'All right. What shift are you on?'

'Sorry?'

'You're a watchman, right?'

'Er...' Carrot hesitated, and then raised his voice. 'No, I am not a watchman. Haha, you think I'm a watchman? Do I look like a watchman?'

'Yes, you do,' said Mrs Spent. 'You're Captain Carrot. I *seen* you walking about the town. Still, I suppose even coppers have to sleep somewhere.'

On the roof, Angua rolled her eyes.

'No wimmin, no cookin', no music, no pets,' said Mrs Spent, as she led the way up the creaking stairs.

Angua waited in the dark until she heard the window open.

'She's gone,' Carrot hissed.

'There's glass on the tiles out here, just like Fred reported,' said Angua, as she swung herself over the sill. Inside the room she took a deep breath and shut her eyes.

First she had to forget the smell of Carrot – anxious sweat, soap, the lingering hints of armour polish...

*...and Fred Colon, all perspiration with a hint of beer, and then the odd ointment Nobby used for his skin condition, and the smells of feet, bodies, clothes, polish, fingernails...*

After an hour it was possible for the eye of the nose to see someone walk across the room, frozen in time by their smell. But after a day smells criss-crossed and entangled. You had to take them apart, remove the familiar pieces, and what you had left

'They're so mixed up!'

'All right, all right,' said Carrot soothingly.

'At least three people! But I think one of them is Ossie... It's stronger round the bed... and. ..'

She opened her eyes wide and looked down at the floor. 'Somewhere here!'

'What? What is?'

Angua crouched down with her nose just above the floorboards.

'I can smell it but I can't see it!'

A knife appeared in front of her. Carrot got down on his knees and ran the blade along the dust-filled crack between the floorboards.

Something splintery and brown popped up. It had been trodden on and rolled underfoot, but at this distance even Carrot could pick up traces of the clove smell. 'Do you think Ossie made a lot of apple pies?' he whispered.

'No cookin', remember?' said Angua, and grinned.

'There's something else...'

Carrot levered out more dirt and dust. In it, something glittered. 'Fred said all the glass was outside, didn't he?'

'Yes.'

'Well, supposing we assume that someone didn't pick up *all* the bits when they broke in?'

'For someone that doesn't like lying, Carrot, you can be quite devious, you know?'

'Just logical. There's glass outside the window, but all that means is that there is glass outside the window. Commander Vimes always says there're no such things as dues. It's how you look at them.'

'You think someone broke in and then carefully put the glass outside?'

'Could be.'

'Carrot? Why are we whispering?'

'No wimmin, remember?'

'And no pets,' said Angua. 'So she's got me coming *and* going. Don't look like that,' she added, when she saw his face. 'It's only bad taste if someone else says it. *I'm* allowed.'

Carrot scratched up some more glass fragments. Angua looked under the bed and pulled out the battered magazines.

'Ye gods, do people really read this stuff?' she said, flicking through *Bows and Ammo*. ' "Testing the Locksley Reflex 7: A Whole Lotta Bow" ... "Footsore! We test the Ten Best Caltrops!" ... and what's this

magazine... ?*WarriorofFortune* ?'

'There's always little wars somewhere,' said Carrot, pulling out the box of money.

'But will you look at the size of this axe here? "Get A Head, Get A Burleigh and Stronginthearm Streetsweeper' and Win By A Neck!" Well, it must be true what they say about men who like big weapons...'

'And that is?' said carrot, lifting the lid of the box.

She looked at the top of his head. As always, Carrot radiated innocence like a small sun. But he'd... They'd...*Surely* he...

'They, er... they're rather small,' she said.

'Oh, that's true,' said Carrot, picking up some of the Klatchian coins. 'Look at dwarfs. Never happier than with a chopper the same size as them. And Nobby's*fascinated* by weapons and he's practically dwarfsized.'

'Er... '

Technically, Angua was sure she knew Carrot better than anyone else. She was pretty sure he cared a lot for her. He seldom said so, he just assumed that she knew. She'd known other men, although turning into a wolf for part of the month was one of those little flaws that could put any*normal* man off and, up until Carrot, always had. And she knew the sort of things men said in what might be called the heat of the moment and then forgot. But when Carrot said things, you knew that he felt that everything was now settled until further notice, so if she made any comment he'd be genuinely surprised that she'd forgotten what it was he had said and would probably quote date and time.

And yet all the time there was this feeling that the greater part of him was always deep, deep inside, looking out. Noone could be so simple, no-one could be so creatively*dumb* , without being very intelligent. It was like being an actor. Only a very good actor was any good at being a bad actor.

'Rather a lonely person, our Nobby,' said Carrot.

'Well, yes...'

'But Im sure he'll find the right person for him,' Carrot added, cheerfully.

Probably in a bottle, said Angua to herself. She remembered the conversation with him. It was a terrible thing to think, but there was somethin itchy about the thought of Nobby being allowed in

pool, even at the shallow end.

'You know, these coins are odd,' said Carrot.

'How do you mean?' said Angua, grateful for the distraction.

'Why would he be paid in Klatchian*wols* ? He wouldn't be able to spend them here, and the money changers don't give very good rates.' Carrot tossed a coin in the air and caught it. 'When we were leaving, Mr Vimes said to me, "Make sure you find the bunch of dates and the camel hidden under the

pillow." I think I know what he meant.'

'Sand on the floor,' said Angua. 'Now, isn't that an *obvious* clue? You can tell they were Klatchian because of the sand in their sandals!'

'But these cloves...' Carrot prodded the little bud. 'It's not as if it's a common habit, even among Klatchians. *That's* not a very obvious clue, is it?'

'It smells newer,' said Angua. 'I'd say he was here last night.'

'After Ossie was dead?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'How should I know? What kind of name is 71-hour Ahmed?' said Angua.

Carrot shrugged. 'I don't know. I think Mr Vimes thinks that someone in Ankh-Morpork wants us to believe that Klatchians paid to have the Prince killed. That sounds... nasty but logical. But I don't understand why *areal* Klatchian would get involved...'

Their eyes met.

'Politics?' they said together.

'For enough money, a lot of people would do *anything* ,' said Angua.

There was a sudden and ferocious knocking at the door.

'Have you got someone in there?' said Mrs Spent.

'Out of the window!' said Carrot.

'Why don't I just stay and rip her throat out?' said Angua. 'All right, all right, it was a *joke* , all right?' she said, swinging her legs over the sill.

Ankh-Morpork no longer had a fire brigade. The citizens had a rather disturbingly direct way of thinking at times, and it did not take long for people to see the rather obvious flaw in paying a group of people by the number of fires they put out. The penny really dropped shortly after Charcoal Tuesday.

Since then they had relied on the good old principle of enlightened self-interest. People living close to a burning building did their best to douse the fire, because the thatch they saved might be their own.

But the crowd watching the burning embassy were doing so in a hollow-eyed, distant way, as if it was all taking place on some distant planet.

They moved aside automatically as Vimes elbowed his way through to the space in front of the gates.

Flames were already licking from every groundfloor window, and they could make out scurrying silhouettes in the flickering light.

He turned to the crowd. 'Come on! What's up with you? Get a bucket chain going!'

'It's their bloody embassy,' said a voice.

'Yeah. 's Klatchian soil, right?'

'Can't go on Klatchian soil.'

'That'd be an *invasion*, that would.'

'They wouldn't let us,' said a small boy holding a bucket.

Vimes looked at the embassy gateway. There were a couple of guards. Their worried glances kept going back from the fire behind them to the crowd in front. They were nervous men, but it was much worse than that, because they were nervous men holding big swords.

He advanced on them, trying to smile and holding his badge out in front of him. It had a shield on it. It was not a very big shield.

'Commander Vimes, Ankh–Morpork City Watch,' he said, in what he hoped was a helpful and friendly voice.

A guard waved him away. 'Hyou be off!'

'Ah...' said Vimes. He looked down at the cobbles of the gateway and then back up at the guard. Somewhere in the flames someone was screaming.

'You! Come here! You see this?' he shouted at the guard, pointing down. The man took a hesitant step forward.

'That's Ankh–Morpork soil down there, my friend,' said Vimes. 'And you're standing on it and you're obstructing me in my–' he rammèd his fist as hard as he could into the guard's stomach '–duty!'

He was already kicking out as the other guard rushed him. He caught him on the knee. Something went click. It felt like Vimes's own ankle.

Cursing and limping slightly, he ran on into the embassy and caught a scurrying man by his robe.

'Are there people still in there? Are there *people* in there?'

The man gave Vimes a panicky look. The armfuls of paper he'd been carrying spilled on to the ground.

Someone else grabbed his shoulder. 'Can you climb, Mr Vimes?'

'Who're–'

The newcomer turned to the cowering paper–carrier and struck him heavily across the face. 'Rescuer of paper!'

As the man fell back his turban was snatched from his head.

'This way!' The figure plunged off through the smoke. Vimes hurried after him until they reached a wall, with a drainpipe attached.

'How did you—?'

'Up! Up!'

Vimes put one foot in the man's cupped hands, managed to get the other one on a bracket, and forced himself upwards.

'Hurry!'

He managed to half climb, half pull himself up the pipe, little fireworks of pain exploding tip and down his legs as he reached a parapet and hauled himself over. The other man rose behind him as if he'd run up the wall.

There was a strip of cloth hiding the lower half of his face. He thrust another strip towards Vimes.

'Across your nose and mouth!' he commanded. 'For the smoke!'

It was boiling across the roof. Beside Vimes a chimneypot gushed a roaring tongue of flame.

The rest of the unwound turban was thrust into his hands.

'You take this side, I'll take the other,' said the apparition, and darted away again into the smoke.

'But wh—'

Vimes could feel the heat through his boots. He edged away across the roof, and heard the shouting coming from below.

When he leaned over the edge here he could see the window some way below him. Someone had smashed a pane, because a hand was waving.

There was more commotion down in the courtyard. Amid a press of figures he could make out the huge shape of Constable Dorfl, a golem and quite definitely fireproof. But Dorfl was bad enough at stairs as it was. There weren't many that could take the weight.

The hand in the smoke stopped waving.

Vimes looked down again.

Can you fly, Mr Vimes?

He looked at the chimney, belching flame.

He looked at the unwound turban.

A lot of Sam Vimes's brain had shut down, although the bits relaying the twinges of pain from his legs were operating with distressing efficiency. But there were still some thoughts operating down around the core, and they delivered for his consideration the insight:

*...tough-looking cloth ...*

He looked back at the chimney. It looked stout enough.

The window was about six feet below.

Vimes began to move automatically.

So, purely theoretically, if a man were to wrap one end of the cloth round the belching stack like *this* and pay it out like *this* and lower himself over the parapet like *this* and kick himself away from the wall like *this*, then when he swung back again his feet ought to be able to smash his way through the other panes of the window, like *this* ...

A cart squeaked along the wet street. Its progress was erratic because no two of its wheels were the same size, so it rocked and wobbled and skidded and probably involved more effort to pull than it saved overall, especially since its contents appeared to be rubbish. But then, so did its owner.

Who was about the size of a man, but bent almost double, and was covered with hair or rags or quite possibly a matted mixture of both that was so felted and unwashed that small plants had taken root on it. If the thing had stopped walking and crouched down, it would have given an astonishingly good impression of a long-neglected compost heap. As it walked along, it snuffled.

A foot was stuck out to impede its progress.

'Good evening, Stoolie,' said Carrot as the cart halted.

The heap stopped. Part of it tilted upwards.

'Geroff,' it muttered, from somewhere in the thatch.

'Now, now, Stoolie, let's help one another, shall we? You help me, and I'll help you.'

'B'g'r'ff, c'p'r.'

'Well, you tell *me* things I want to know,' said Carrot, 'and I won't search your cart.'

'I hate gnolls,' said Angua. 'They smell *awful*.'

'Oh, that's hardly fair. The stressed be a lot dirtier without you and yours, eh, Stoolie?' said Carrot, still speaking quite pleasantly. 'You pick up this, you pick up that, maybe bash it against a wall until it stops struggling—'

's a vile acur'cy,' said the gnom. There was a bubbling noise that might have been a chuckle.

'So I'm hearing you might know where Snowy Slopes is these days,' said Carrot.

'D'nno n'thin'.'

'Fine.' Carrot produced a three-tined garden fork and walked round to the cart, which dripped.

'D'nno n'thin'*ab't* –' said the gnoll quickly.

'Yes?' said Carrot, fork poised.

'D'nno n'thin' ab't t' sweetsp'p'n M'ney Tr'p L'ne.'

'The one with the Rooms To Let sign?'

'R't.'

'Well done. Thank you for being a good citizen,' said Carrot. 'Incidentally, we passed a dead seagull the way here. Its in Brewer Street. I bet if you hurried you could beat the rush.'

'H't d'gg'ty,' snuffled the gnoll. The cart started to judder forward. The watchmen watched it lurch and scrape around the corner.

'They're good fellows at heart,' said Carrot. 'I think it says a lot for the spirit of tolerance in this city that even gnolls can call it home.'

'They turn my stomach,' said Angua, as they set off again. ['.That one had plants growing on him!'

'Mr Vimes says we ought to do something for them,' said Carrot.

'All heart, that man.'

'With a flamethrower, he says.'

'Wouldn't work. Too soggy. Has anyone ever*really* found out what they eat?'

'It's better to think of them as... cleaners. You certainly don't see as much rubbish and dead animals on the streets as you used to.'

'Yes, but have you ever seen a gnoll with a brush and shovel?'

'Well, that's society for you, I'm afraid,' said Carrot. 'Everything is dumped on the people below until you find someone who's prepared to eat it. That's what Mr Vimes says.'

'Yes,' said Angua. They walked in silence for a while, and then she said. 'You care a lot about what Mr Vimes says, don't you... ?'

'He is a fine officer and an example to us all.'

'And... you've never thought of getting a job in Quirm or somewhere, have you? The other cities are headhunting Ankh–Morpork watchmen now.'

'What, leave Ankh–Morpork?' The tone of voice included the answer.

'No... I suppose not,' said Angua sadly.

'Anyway, I don't know what Mr Vimes would do without me running around all the time.'

'It's a point of view, certainly,' said Angua.

It wasn't far to Money Trap Lane. It was in a ghetto of what Lord Rust would probably call 'skilled artisans', the people too low down the social scale to be movers and shakers but slightly too high to be easily moved or shook. The sanders and polishers, generally.

The people who hadn't got very much but were proud even of that. There were little clues. Shiny house numbers, for a start. And, on the walls of houses that were effectively just one long continuous row, after centuries of building and inbuilding, very careful boundaries in the paint where people had brushed up to the very border of their property and not a gnat's blink to each side. Carrot always said it showed the people were the kind who instinctively realized that civilization was based on a shared respect for ownership; Angua thought they were just tight little bastards who'd sell you the time of day.

Carrot walked noiselessly down the alley beside the sweetshop. There was a rough wooden staircase going up to the first floor. He pointed silently to the midden below it.

It seemed to consist almost entirely of bottles.

'Big drinker?' Angua mouthed. Carrot shook his head.

She crouched down and looked at the labels, but her nose was already giving her a hint. *Dibbler's Homeopathic Shampoo. Mere and Stingbat's Herbal Wash – with Herbs! Rinse 'n' Run Scalp Tonic – with Extra Herbs! ...*

There were others. Herbs, she thought. Chuck a handful of weeds in the pot and you've got herbs...

Carrot was starting up the stairs when she put her hand on his shoulder. There was another smell. It was one that drove through all the other scents of the streets like a spear. It was one that a werewolf's nose is particularly attuned to.

He nodded and went carefully to the door. Then he pointed down. There was a stain under the gap.

Carrot drew his sword and kicked the door open.

Daceyville Slopes hadn't taken his condition lightly.

Bottles of all shapes and colours occupied most flat surfaces, giving testimony to the alchemist's art and humanity's optimism.

The suds of his latest experiment were still in a bowl on the table, and his body on the floor had a towel around his neck. The watchmen looked down at it. Snowy had cleaned, washed and gone.

'I think we can say life is extinct,' said Carrot.

'Yuk,' said Angua. She grabbed the open shampoo bottle and sniffed deeply. The sickly scent of marinated herbs assailed her sinuses, but anything was better than the sharp, beguiling smell of blood.

'I wonder where his head is at?' said Carrot, in a determinedly matter-of-fact voice. 'Oh, it's rolled over there... What's the horrible smell?'

'This!' Angua flourished the shampoo. 'Four dollars a bottle, it says. Sheesh!'

Angua took another deep sniff at the herbal goo, to drown out the call of the wolf.

'Doesn't look as if they stole anything,' said Carrot. 'Unless they were very neat– What's the matter?'

'Don't ask!'

She managed to get a window open and sucked down great draughts of comparatively fresh air, while Carrot went through the corpse's pockets.

'Er... you can't tell if there's a clove around, can you?' he said.

'Carrot! Please! This is a room with blood all over the floor! Have you *anyidea* ? Excuse me...'

She rushed out and down the steps. The alley had the generic smell of all alleys everywhere, overlaid on the basic all-embracing smell of the city. But at least it didn't make your hair grow and your teeth try to lengthen. She leaned against the wall and fought for control. Shampoo? She could have saved Snowy a hell of a lot of money with just one careful bite. Then he'd know all about *areally* bad hair day...

Carrot came down a couple of minutes later, locking the door behind him.

'Are you feeling better?'

'A bit. ...'

'There was something else,' said Carrot, looking thoughtful. 'I think he wrote a note before he died. But it's all rather odd.' He waved in the air what looked like a cheap notepad. 'This needs careful looking at.' He shook his head. 'Poor old Snowy.'

'He was a killer!'

'Yes, but that's a nasty way to die.'

'Decapitation? With a very sharp sword, by the look of it. I can think of worse.'

'Yes, but I can't help thinking that if only the chap had better hair or had found the right shampoo at an early age he'd have led a different life...'

'Well, at least he won't have to worry about dandruff any more.'

'That was a little tasteless.'

'Sorry, but you know how blood makes me, tense.'

'Your hair always looks amazing,' said Carrot, changing the subject with, Angua thought, unusual tact. 'I don't know what you use, but it's a shame he never tried it.'

'I doubt if he went to the right shop,' said Angua. 'It says "For a Glossy Coat" on the bottles I usually buy— What's the matter?'

'Can you smell smoke?' said Carrot.

'Carrot, it's going to be five minutes before I can smell *anything* except—'

But he was staring past her, at the big red glow in the sky.

Vimes coughed. And then coughed some more. And eventually opened his streaming eyes in the confident expectation of seeing his own lungs in front of him.

'Class of water, Mr Vimes?'

Vimes peered through the tears at the shifting shape of Fred Colon.

'Thanks, Fred. What's the horrible burning smell?'

'It's you, sir.'

Vimes was sitting on a low wall outside the wreck of the embassy. Cool air washed around him. He felt like underdone beef. The heat was *radiating* off him.

'You was passed on for a while there, sir,' said Sergeant Colon helpfully. 'But everyone saw you swing in that window, sir! *And* you threw that woman out for Detritus to catch! That'll be a feather in your cap and no mistake, sir! I bet the ragh— I bet the Klatchians'll be giving you the Order of the Camel or something for *this* night's work, sir!' Colon beamed, bursting with pride by association.

'A feather in my cap...' murmured Vimes. He undid his helmet and with a certain amount of exhausted delight saw that every single plume had been burned to a stub.

He blinked slowly.

'What about the man, Fred? Did he get out?'

'What man?'

'There was...' Vimes blinked again. Various parts of his body, aware that he hadn't been taking calls, were ringing in to complain.

*There had been...some man? Vimes had landed on a bed of something, and there was a woman clutching at him, and he had smashed out what was left of the window, seen the big, broad and above all strong arms of Detritus down below, and had thrown her out as politely as the circumstances allowed. Then the man from the roof had come out of the smoke again, carrying another figure over his shoulder, screamed something at him and beckoned him to follow and ...*

*...then the floor had given way...*

'There were... two other people in there,' he said, coughing again.

'They didn't get out the front way, then,' said Colon.

'How did *I* get out?' said Vimes.

'Oh, Dorfl was stamping on the fire down below, sir. Very handy, a ceramic constable. You landed right on him, so of course he stopped what he was doing and brought you out. 's gonna be handshakes and buns all round in the morning, sir!'

There weren't any right now, Vimes noted There were still plenty of people around, carrying bundles, putting out small fires, arguing with one another... but there was a big hole where congratulating—the-hero-of-the-hour should have been.

'Oh, everyone's always a bit preoccupied after something like this, sir,' said Colon, as if reading his thoughts.

'I think I'll have a nice cold bath,' said Vimes, to the world in general. 'And then some sleep. Sybil's got some wonderful ointment for burns... Ah, hello, you two.'

'We saw the fire—' Carrot began, running up. 'Is it all over?'

'Mr Vimes saved the day!' said Sergeant Colon excitedly. 'Just went straight in and saved everyone, in the finest tradition of the Watch!'

'Fred?' said Vimes, wearily.

'Yessir?'

'Fred, the finest tradition of the Watch is having a quiet smoke somewhere out of the wind at 3 a.m. Let's not get carried away, eh?'

Colon looked crestfallen. 'Well—' He began.

Vimes staggered to his feet and patted his sergeant on the back

'Oh, all right, it's a tradition,' he conceded. 'You can do the next one, Fred. And now,' he steadied himself as he stood up, 'I'm going down to the Yard to write my report.'

'You're covered in ash and you're swaying,' said Carrot. 'I should just get on home, sir.'

'Oh no,' said Vimes. 'Got to do the paperwork. Anyone know the time?'

'Bingeley—bingeley beep!' said a cheerful voice from his pocket.

'Damn!' said Vimes, but it was too late.

'It is,' said the voice, which had the squeaky friendly quality that begs to be strangled, 'about... nineish.'

'Nineish?'

'Yep. Nineish. Precisely about nineish.'

Vimes rolled his eyes. '*Precisely* about nineish?' he said, pulling a small box out of his pocket and opening the lid. The demon inside gave him an angry look.

'Yesterday you *said* ,' it said, 'that if I, and I quote, Didn't Stop all that Eight Fifty–Six and Six Seconds Precisely business I Would Be Looking at a Hammer From Below. And when I said, Mr Insert Name Here, that this would invalidate my warranty, you said that I could take my warranty and—'

'I thought you'd lost that thing,' said Carrot.

'Hah,' said the Dis–organizer, 'really? You thought he did? I don't call putting something in your trouser pockets just before they go into the wash *losing* it.'

'That was an accident,' muttered Vimes.

'Oh? Oh? And dropping me in the dragon's feeding bowl, that was accidental too, was it?' The demon mumbled to itself for a moment and then said, 'Anyway, do you want to know your appointments for this evening?'

Vimes looked at the smouldering wreckage of the embassy.

'Do tell,' he said.

'You don't have any,' said the demon sulkily. 'You haven't told me any.'

'You see?' said Vimes. '*That's* what drives me lived! Why should I have to tell you? Why didn't you tell me, 'Eightish: break up riot at Mundane Meals and stop Detritus shooting people," eh?'

'You didn't tell me to tell you!'

'I didn't *know* ! And that's how real life works! How can I tell you to warn me about things that no–one knows are going to happen? If you were any good, that'd be your job!'

'He writes in the manual,' said the demon nastily. 'Did you know that, everybody? *He writes in the manual* .'

'Well, of course I make notes—'

'He's actually sneakily trying to keep his diary in the manual so his wife won't find out he's never bothered to learn how to use me,' said the demon.

'What about the *Vimes* manual, then?' snapped Vimes. 'I notice you've never bothered to learn how to use me!'

The demon hesitated. 'Humans come with a manual?' it said.

'It'd be a damn good idea!' said Vimes.

'True,' murmured Angua.

'It could say things like "Chapter One: Bingeley–bingeley beep and other damn fool things to spring on people at six in the morning," ' said Vimes, his eyes wild. 'And "Toubleshooting: my owner keeps trying to drop me in the privy, what am I doing wrong?" And—'

Carrot patted him gently on the back. 'I should sign off now, sir,' he said gently. 'It's been a busy few days.'

Vimes rubbed his forehead. 'I daresay *I could* do with a rest,' he said. 'Come on, there's nothing more to see here. Let's go home.'

'I thought you said you weren't going—' Carrot began, but Vimes's mind was already scolding him.

'I meant the Yard, of course,' he said. 'I'll go *home* afterwards.'

A ball of lamplight floated through the Ramkin library, drifting across the shelves of huge, leatherbound books.

Many of them had never been read, Sybil knew. Various ancestors had simply ordered them from the engravers and put them on the shelves, because a library was something you had to have, don'tcherknow, like a stableyard and a servants' wing and some ghastly landscaping mistake created by 'Bloody Stupid' Johnson, although in the latter case her grandfather had shot the man before he could do any real damage.

She held the lamp higher.

Ramkins looked down their noses at her from their frames, through the brown varnish of the centuries. Portraits were another thing that had been collected out of unregarded habit.

Most of them were of men. They were invariably in armour and always on horseback. And every single one of them had fought the sworn enemies of AnkhMorpork.

In recent times this had been quite difficult and her grandfather, for example, had to lead an expedition all the way to Howondaland in order to find some sworn enemies, although there was an adequate supply and a lot of swearing by the time he left. Earlier, of course, it had been a lot easier. Ramkin regiments had fought the city's enemies all over the Sto Plains and had inflicted heroic casualties, quite often on people in the opposing armies.[8]