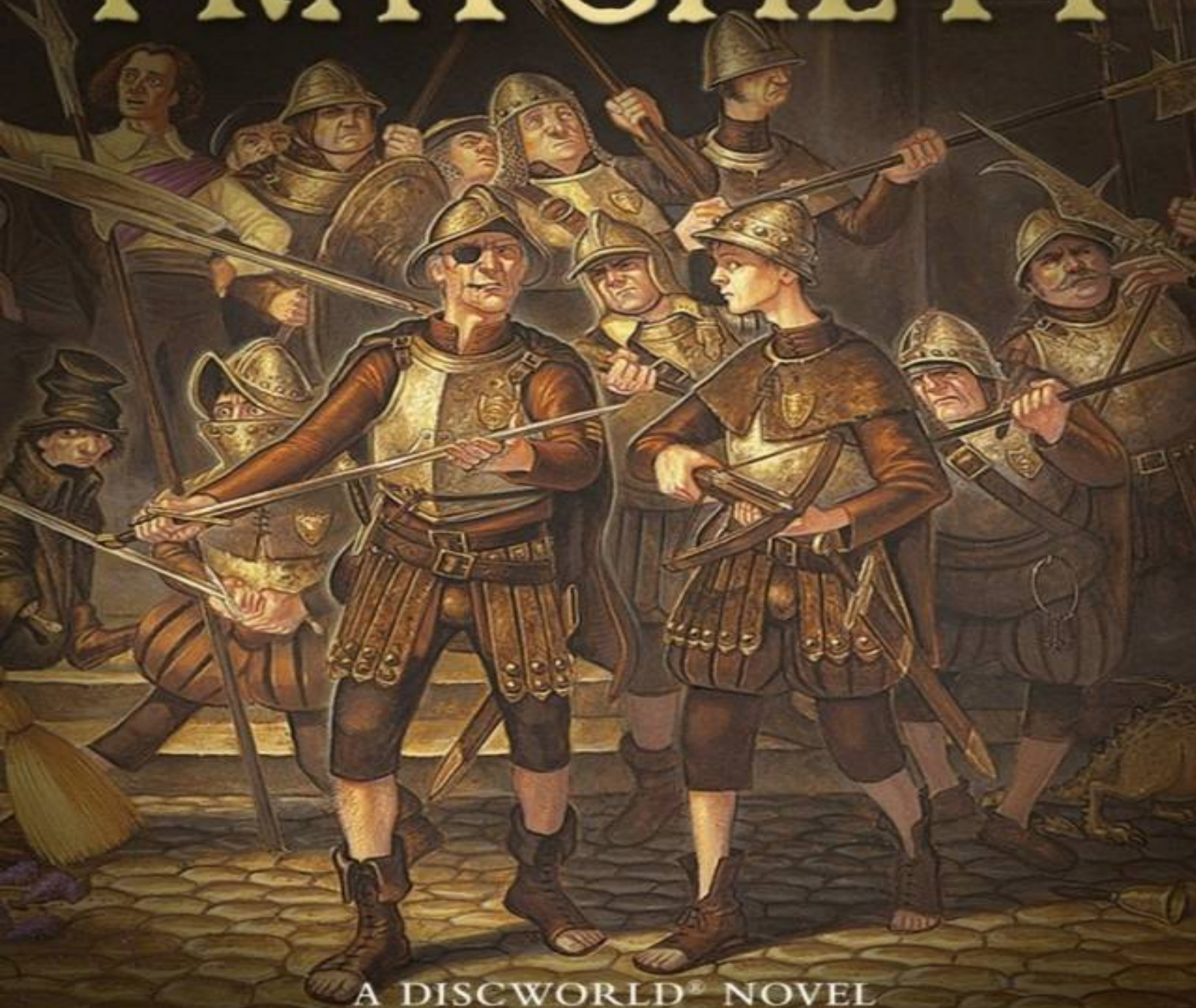


TERRY PRATCHETT



A DISCWORLD® NOVEL

NIGHT WATCH

Terry Pratchett

Night Watch

A Novel of Discworld[®]

 HarperCollins e-books

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Begin Reading

Sam Vimes sighed when he heard the scream, but he finished shaving before he did anything about it.

Then he put his jacket on and strolled out into the wonderful late spring morning. Birds sang in the trees, bees buzzed in the blossom. The sky was hazy though, and thunderheads on the horizon threatened rain later. But for now, the air was hot and heavy. And in the old cesspit behind the gardener's shed, a young man was treading water.

Well...treading, anyway.

Vimes stood back a little way and lit a cigar. It probably wouldn't be a good idea to employ a naked flame any nearer to the pit. The fall from the shed roof had broken the crust.

"Good morning!" he said cheerfully.

"Good morning, Your Grace," said the industrious treadler.

The voice was higher pitched than Vimes expected and he realized that, most unusually, the young man in the pit was in fact a young woman. It wasn't *entirely* unexpected—the Assassins' Guild was aware that women were at least equal to their brothers when it came to inventive killing—but it nevertheless changed the situation somewhat.

"I don't believe we've met?" said Vimes. "Although I see you know who I am. You are...?"

"Wiggs, sir," said the swimmer. "Jocasta Wiggs. Honored to meet you, Your Grace."

"Wiggs, eh?" said Vimes. "Famous family in the Guild. 'Sir' will do, by the way. I think I once broke your father's leg?"

"Yes, sir. He asked to be remembered to you," said Jocasta.

"You're a bit young to be sent on this contract, aren't you?" said Vimes.

"Not a contract, sir," said Jocasta, still paddling.

"Come now, Miss Wiggs. The price on my head is at least—"

"The Guild council put it in abeyance, sir," said the patient swimmer. "You're off the register. They're not accepting contracts on you at present."

"Good grief, why not?"

"Couldn't say, sir," said Miss Wiggs. Her patient struggles had brought her to the edge of the pit, and now she was finding that the brickwork was in very good repair, quite slippery, and offered no handholds. Vimes knew this, because he'd spent several hours one afternoon carefully arranging that this should be so.

"So why were you sent, then?"

"Miss Band sent me as an exercise," said Jocasta. "I say, these bricks really are jolly tricky, aren't they?"

"Yes," said Vimes, "they are. Have you been *rude* to Miss Band lately? Upset her in any way?"

"Oh, no, Your Grace. But she did say I was getting overconfident and would benefit from some advanced field work."

“Ah. I see.” Vimes tried to recall Miss Alice Band, one of the Assassins’ Guild’s stricter teachers. She was, he’d heard, very hot on practical lessons.

“So...she sent you to kill me, then?” he said.

“No, sir! It’s an exercise! I don’t even have any crossbow bolts! I just had to find a spot where I could get you in my sights and then report back!”

“She’d believe you?”

“Of course, sir,” said Jocasta, looking rather hurt. “Guild honor, sir.”

Vimes took a deep breath. “You see, Miss Wiggs, quite a few of your chums have tried to kill me at home in recent years. As you might expect, I take a dim view of this.”

“Easy to see why, sir,” said Jocasta, in the voice of one who knows that their only hope of escaping from their present predicament is reliant on the goodwill of another person, who has no pressing reason to have any.

“And so you’d be *amazed* at the booby traps there are around the place,” Vimes went on. “Some of them are pretty cunning, even if I say so myself.”

“I certainly never expected the tiles on the shed to shift like that, sir.”

“They’re on greased rails,” said Vimes.

“Well done, sir!”

“And quite a few of the traps drop you into something deadly,” said Vimes.

“Lucky for me that I fell into this one, eh, sir?”

“Oh, that one’s deadly too,” said Vimes. “*Eventually* deadly.” He sighed. He really wanted to discourage this sort of thing but...they’d put him off the register? It wasn’t that he’d *liked* being shot at by hooded figures in the temporary employ of his many and varied enemies, but he’d always looked at it as some kind of vote of confidence. It showed that he was annoying the rich and arrogant people who ought to be annoyed.

Besides, the Assassins’ Guild was easy to outwit. They had strict rules, which they followed quite honorably, and this was fine by Vimes, who, in certain practical areas, had no rules whatsoever.

Off the register, eh? The only other person not on it anymore, it was rumored, was Lord Vetinari, the Patrician. The Assassins understood the political game in the city better than anyone, and if they took you off the register it was because they felt your departure would not only spoil the game but also smash the board...

“I’d be jolly grateful if you could pull me out, sir,” said Jocasta.

“What? Oh, yes. Sorry, got clean clothes on,” said Vimes. “But when I get back to the house I’ll tell the butler to come down here with a ladder. How about that?”

“Thank you very much, sir. Nice to have met you, sir.”

Vimes strolled back to the house. Off the register? Was he allowed to appeal? Perhaps they thought—

The scent rolled over him.

He looked up.

Overhead, a lilac tree was in bloom.

He stared.

Damn! Damn! *Damn!* Every year he forgot. Well, no. He never forgot. He just put the memories away, like old silverware that you didn't want to tarnish. And every year they came back, sharp and sparkling, and stabbed him in the heart. And today, of all days...

He reached up, and his hand trembled as he grasped a bloom and gently broke the stem. He sniffed at it. He stood for a moment, staring at nothing. And then he carried the sprig of lilac carefully back up to his dressing room.

Willikins had prepared the *official* uniform for today. Sam Vimes stared at it blankly, and then remembered. Watch Committee. Right. The battered old breastplate wouldn't do, would it...Not for His Grace the Duke of Ankh, Commander of the City Watch, Sir Samuel Vimes. Lord Vetinari had been very *definite* about that, blast it.

Blast it all the more because, unfortunately, Sam Vimes could see the point. He hated the official uniform, but he represented a bit more than just himself these days. Sam Vimes had been able to turn up for meetings with grubby armor, and even Sir Samuel Vimes could generally contrive to find a way to stay in street uniform at all times, but a duke...well, a duke needed a bit of polish. A duke couldn't have the arse hanging out of his trousers when meeting foreign diplomats. Actually, even plain old Sam Vimes never had the arse hanging out of his trousers, either, but no one would have actually started a war if he had.

The plain old Sam Vimes had fought back. He got rid of most of the plumes and the stupid tights, and ended up with a dress uniform that at least looked as though its owner was male. But the helmet had gold decoration, and the bespoke armorers had made a new, gleaming breastplate with useless gold ornamentation on it. Sam Vimes felt like a class traitor every time he wore it. He hated being thought of as one of those people that wore stupid ornamental armor. It was guilt by association.

He twirled the sprig of lilac in his fingers, and smelled again the heady smell. Yes...it hadn't always been like this...

Someone had just spoken to him. He looked up.

"What?" he barked.

"I enquired if her ladyship is well, Your Grace?" said the butler, looking startled. "Are you feeling all right, Your Grace?"

"What? Oh, yes. No. I'm fine. So is her ladyship, yes, thank you. I popped in before I went outside. Mrs. Content is with her. She says it won't be for a while."

"I have advised the kitchen to have plenty of hot water ready, Your Grace, nevertheless," said Willikins, helping Vimes on with the gilt breastplate.

"Yes. Why do they need all that water, do you think?"

"I couldn't say, Your Grace," said Willikins. "Probably best not to inquire."

Vimes nodded. Sybil had already made it quite clear, with gentle tact, that his services were not required on this particular case. It had been, he had to admit, a bit of a relief.

He handed Willikins the sprig of lilac. The butler took it without comment, inserted it into a little silver tube of water that would keep it fresh for hours, and fixed it onto one of the breastplate straps.

"Time moves on, doesn't it, Your Grace," he said, dusting Vimes down with a small brush.

Vimes took out his watch. "It certainly does. Look, I'll drop in at the Yard on my way to the

palace, sign what needs signing, and I'll be back as soon as possible, all right?"

Willikins gave him a look of almost unbutlerly concern.

"I'm sure her ladyship will be fine, Your Grace," he said. "Of course she is not, not—"

"—young," said Vimes.

"I would say she is richer in years than many other primagravida," said Willikins smoothly. "But she is a well-built lady, if you don't mind me saying so, and her family have traditionally had very little trouble in the childbirth department—"

"Prima what?"

"New mothers, Your Grace. I'm sure her ladyship would much rather know that you were running after miscreants than wearing a hole in the library carpet."

"I expect you're right, Willikins. Er...oh, yes, there's a young lady dogpaddling in the old cesspit, Willikins."

"Very good, Your Grace. I shall send the kitchen boy down there with a ladder directly. And a message to the Assassins' Guild?"

"Good idea. She'll need clean clothes and a bath."

"I think, perhaps, the hose in the old scullery might be more appropriate, Your Grace? To start with, at least?"

"Good point. See to it. And now I must be off."

In the crowded main office of the Pseudopolis Yard Watch House, Sergeant Colon absentmindedly adjusted the sprig of lilac that he'd stuck into his helmet like a plume.

"They go very strange, Nobby," he said, leafing listlessly through the morning's paperwork. "It's a copper thing. Happened to me when I had kids. You get tough."

"What do you mean, tough?" said Corporal Nobbs, possibly the best living demonstration that there was some smooth evolution between humans and animals.

"We-ell," said Colon, leaning back in his chair. "It's like...well, when you're our age..." he looked at Nobby and hesitated. Nobby had been giving his age as "probably thirty-four" for years; the Nobbs family were not good at keeping count.

"I mean, when a man reaches...a certain age," he tried again, "he knows the world is never going to be perfect. He's got used to it being a bit, a bit..."

"Manky?" Nobby suggested. Tucked behind his ear, in the place usually reserved for his cigarette, was another wilting lilac flower.

"Exactly," said Colon. "Like, it's never going to be perfect, so you just do the best you can, right? But when there's a kid on the way, well, suddenly a man sees it different. He thinks: my kid's going to have to *grow up* in this mess. Time to clean it up. Time to make it a Better World. He gets a bit...keen. Full of ginger. When he hears about Stronginthearm it's going to be very hot around here for—morning, Mister Vimes!"

"Talking about me, eh?" said Vimes, striding past them as they jerked to attention. He had not, in fact, heard any of the conversation, but Sergeant Colon's face could be read like a book and Vimes had learned it by heart years ago.

"Just wondering if the happy event—" Colon began, trailing after Vimes as he took the

stairs two at a time.

“It hasn’t,” said Vimes shortly. He pushed open the door to his office. “Morning, Carrot!” Captain Carrot sprang to his feet and saluted.

“Morning, sir! Has Lady—”

“No, Carrot. She has not. What’s been happening overnight?”

Carrot’s gaze went to the sprig of lilac and back to Vimes’s face.

“Nothing good, sir,” he said. “Another officer killed.”

Vimes stopped.

“Who?” he demanded.

“Sergeant Stronginthearm, sir. Killed in Treacle Mine Road. Carcer again.”

Vimes glanced at his watch. They had ten minutes to get to the Palace. But time suddenly wasn’t important anymore.

He sat down at his desk.

“Witnesses?”

“Three this time, sir.”

“That many?”

“All dwarfs. Stronginthearm wasn’t even on duty, sir. He’d signed off and was picking up a rat pie and chips from a shop and walked out straight into Carcer. The devil stabbed him in the neck and ran for it. He must’ve thought we’d found him.”

“We’ve been looking for the man for *weeks!* And he bumped into poor old Stronginthearm when all the dwarf was thinking of was his breakfast? Is Angua on the trail?”

“Up to a point, sir,” said Carrot awkwardly.

“Why only up to a point?”

“He...well, we assume it was Carcer...dropped an aniseed bomb in Sator Square. Almost pure oil.”

Vimes sighed. It was amazing how people adapted. The Watch had a werewolf. That news had got around, in an underground kind of way. And so the criminals had mutated, to survive in a society where the law had a very sensitive nose. Scent bombs were the solution. They didn’t have to be *that* dramatic. You just poured pure peppermint or aniseed in the street where a lot of people would walk over it, and suddenly Sergeant Angua was facing a hundred, a *thousand* crisscrossing trails, and went to bed with a nasty headache.

He listened glumly as Carrot reported on men brought off leave or put on double shift, on informers pumped, pigeons stooled, grasses rustled, fingers held to the wind, ears put on the street. And he knew how little it all added up to. They still had fewer than a hundred men in the Watch, and that was including the canteen lady. There were a million people in the city, and a billion places to hide. Ankh-Morpork was *built* of bolt-holes. Besides, Carcer was a nightmare.

Vimes was used to the other kinds of nut jobs, the ones that acted quite normally right up to the point where they hauled off and smashed someone with a poker for blowing their nose noisily. But Carcer was different. He was of two minds, but instead of being in conflict, they were in competition. He had demons on *both* shoulders, urging one another on.

And yet...he smiled all the time, in a cheerful chirpy sort of way, and he acted like the kind

of rascal who made a dodgy living selling gold watches that go green after a week. And he appeared to be convinced, utterly convinced, that he never did anything really wrong. He'd stand there amid the carnage, blood on his hands and stolen jewelry in his pocket, and, with an expression of injured innocence, declare: "Me? What did *I* do?"

And it was believable right up until you looked into those cheeky, smiling eyes, and saw, deep down, the demons looking back...

...but don't spend too much time looking at those eyes, because that'd mean you've taken *your* eyes off his hands, and by now one of them would hold a knife.

It was hard for the average copper to deal with people like that. They expected people, when heavily outnumbered, to give in, or try to deal, or at least just *stop moving*. They didn't expect people to kill for a five-dollar watch (a hundred-dollar watch, now, that'd be different. This was Ankh-Morpork, after all).

"Was Stronginthearm married?" Vimes said.

"No, sir. Lived in New Cobblers with his parents."

Parents, thought Vimes. That made it worse.

"Anyone been to tell them?" he asked. "And don't say it was Nobby. We don't want any repeat of that bet-you-a-dollar-you're-the-widow-Jackson nonsense."

"I went, sir. As soon as we got the news."

"Thank you. They took it badly?"

"They took it...solemnly, sir."

Vimes groaned. He could imagine the expressions.

"I'll write them the official letter," he said, pulling open his desk drawers. "Get someone to take it round, will you? And say I'll be over later. Perhaps this isn't the time to—" No, hold on, they were dwarfs, dwarfs weren't bashful about money "—forget that...say we'll have all the details of his pension and so on. Died on duty, too. That's extra. It all adds up. That'll be theirs." He rummaged in his desk. "Where's his file?"

"Here, sir," said Carrot, handing it over smoothly. "We are due at the Palace at ten, sir. Watch Committee. But I'm sure they'll understand," he added, seeing Vimes's face. "I'll go and clean out Stronginthearm's locker, sir, and I expect the lads'll have a whip-round for flowers and everything..."

Vimes pondered over a sheet of headed paper after the captain had gone. A file, he had to refer to a damn *file*. But there were so many coppers these days...

A whip-round for flowers. And a coffin. You look after your own. Sergeant Dickins had said that, a long time ago...

He wasn't good with words, least of all ones written down, but after a few glances at the file to refresh his memory, he wrote down the best he could think of.

And they were all good words and, more or less, they were the right ones. Yet, in truth, Stronginthearm was just a decent dwarf who was paid to be a copper. He'd joined up because, these days, joining the Watch was quite a good career choice. The pay was good, there was a decent pension, there was a wonderful medical plan if you had the nerve to submit to Igor's ministrations in the cellar, and, after a year or so, an Ankh-Morpork-trained copper could leave the city and get a job in the Watches of the other cities on the plain with instant promotion. That

was happening all the time. Sammies, they were called, even in towns that had never heard of Sam Vimes. He was just a little proud of that. “They” meant watchmen who could think without moving their lips, who didn’t take bribes—much, and then only at the level of beer and doughnuts, which even Vimes recognized as the grease that helps the wheels run smoothly—and were, on the whole, trustworthy. For a given value of “trust,” at least.

The sound of running feet indicated that Sergeant Detritus was bringing some of the latest trainees back from their morning run. He could hear the jody Detritus had taught them. Somehow, you could tell it was made up by a troll:

*“Now we sing dis stupid song!
Sing it as we run along!
Why we sing dis we don’t know!
We can’t make der words rhyme prop’ly!”*
“Sound off!”
“One! Two!”
“Sound off!”
“Many! Lots!”
“Sound off!”
“Er...what?”

It still irked Vimes that the little training school in the old lemonade factory was turning out so many coppers who quit the city the moment their probation was up. But it had its advantages. There were Sammies almost as far as Uberwald now, all speeding up the local promotion ladder. It helped, knowing names and knowing that those names had been taught to salute him. The ebb and flow of politics often meant that the local rulers weren’t talking to one another, but, via the semaphore towers, the Sammies talked *all the time*.

He realized he was humming a different song under his breath. It was a tune he’d forgotten for years. It went with the lilac, scent and song together. He stopped, feeling guilty.

He was finishing the letter when there was a knock at the door.

“Nearly done!” he shouted.

“It’th me, thur,” said Constable Igor, pushing his head around the door, and then he added, “Igor, sir.”

“Yes, Igor?” said Vimes, wondering not for the first time why anyone with stitches all around his head needed to tell anyone who he was.*

“I would just like to thay, sir, that I could have got young Thronginthearm back on his feet, thur,” said Igor, a shade reproachfully.

Vimes sighed. Igor’s face was full of concern tinged with disappointment. He had been prevented from plying his...craft. He was naturally disappointed.

“We’ve been through this, Igor. It’s not like sewing a leg back on. And dwarfs are dead set against that sort of thing.”

“There’s nothing thupernatural about it, thur. I am a man of Natural Philothophy! And he was still warm when they brought him in—”

“Those are the rules, Igor. Thanks all the same. We know your heart is in the right place—”

“*They* are in the right *places*, sir,” said Igor reproachfully.

“That’s what I meant,” Vimes said without missing a beat, just as Igor never did.

“Oh, very well, sir,” said Igor, giving up. He paused, and then said: “How is her ladyship, sir?”

Vimes had been expecting this. It was a terrible thing for a mind to do, but his had already presented him with the idea of Igor and Sybil in the same sentence. Not that he disliked Igor. Quite the reverse. There were watchmen walking around the streets right now who wouldn’t have legs if it wasn’t for Igor’s genius with a needle. But—

“Fine. She’s fine,” he said abruptly.

“Only I heard that Mrs. Content was a bit worr—”

“Igor, there are some areas where...look, do you know *anything* about...women and babies?”

“Not in so many wordth, sir, but I find that once I’ve got someone on the slab and had a good, you know, rummage around, I can thort out most thingth—”

Vimes’s imagination actually shut down at this point.

“Thank you, Igor,” he managed without his voice trembling, “but Mrs. Content is a very experienced midwife.”

“Jutht as you say, sir,” said Igor, but doubt rode on the words.

“And now I’ve got to go,” said Vimes. “It’s going to be a long day.”

He ran down the stairs, tossed the letter to Sergeant Colon, nodded to Carrot, and set off at a fast walk for the Palace.

After the door had shut one of the watchmen looked up from the desk where he’d been wrestling with a report and the effort of writing down, as policemen do, what ought to have happened.

“Sarge?”

“Yes, Corporal Ping?”

“Why’re some of you wearing purple flowers, Sarge?”

There was a subtle change in the atmosphere, a suction of sound caused by many pairs of ears listening intently. All the officers in the room had stopped writing.

“I mean, I saw you and Reg and Nobby wearing ’em this time last year, and I wondered if we were all supposed to...” Ping faltered. Sergeant Colon’s normally amiable eyes had narrowed and the message they were sending was: you’re on thin ice, lad, and it’s starting to creak...

“I mean, my landlady’s got a garden and I could easily go and cut a—” Ping went on in an uncharacteristic attempt at suicide.

“You’d wear the lilac today, would you?” said Colon quietly.

“I just meant that if you wanted me to I could go and—”

“Were *you* there?” said Colon, getting to his feet so fast that his chair fell over.

“Steady, Fred,” murmured Nobby.

“I didn’t mean...” Ping began. “I mean...was I where, Sarge?”

Colon leaned on the desk, bringing his round red face an inch away from Ping’s nose.

“If you don’t know where *there* was, you weren’t there,” he said in the same quiet voice. He stood up straight again.

“Now me an’ Nobby has got a job to do,” he said. “At ease, Ping. We are going *out*.”

“Er...”

This was not being a good day for Corporal Ping.

“Yes?” said Colon.

“Er...standing orders, Sarge...you’re the ranking officer, you see, and I’m orderly officer for the day, I wouldn’t ask otherwise but...if you’re going out, Sarge, you’ve got to tell me where you’re going. Just in case anyone has to contact you, see? I got to write it down in the book. In pen and everything,” he added.

“You know what day it is, Ping?” said Colon.

“Er...25th of May, Sarge.”

“And you know what that means, Ping?”

“Er...”

“It means,” said Nobby, “that anyone important enough to ask where we’re going—”

“—knows where we’ve gone,” said Fred Colon.

The door slammed behind them.

This cemetery of Small Gods was for the people who didn’t know what happened next. They didn’t know what they believed in or if there was life after death and, often, they didn’t know what hit them. They’d gone through life being amiably uncertain, until the ultimate certainty had claimed them at the last. Among the city’s bone orchards, the cemetery was the equivalent of the drawer marked MISC, where people were interred in the glorious expectation of nothing very much.

Most of the Watch got buried there. Policemen, after a few years, found it hard enough to believe in people, let alone anyone they couldn’t see.

For once, it wasn’t raining. The breeze shook the sooty poplars around the wall, making them rustle.

“We ought to have brought some flowers,” said Colon, as they made their way through the long grass.

“I could nick a few off some of the fresh graves, Sarge,” Nobby volunteered.

“Not the kind of thing I want to hear you saying at this time, Nobby,” said Colon severely.

“Sorry, Sarge.”

“At a time like this a man ought to be thinking of his immortal soul viz ah viz the endless mighty river that is History. I should do that if I was you, Nobby.”

Up against one wall, lilac trees were growing. That is, at some point in the past a lilac had been planted there, and had given rise, as lilac will, to hundreds of whippy suckers, so that what had once been one stem was now a thicket. Every branch was covered in pale mauve blooms.

The graves were still just visible in the tangled vegetation. In front of them stood Cut-Me-Own-Throat Dibbler, Ankh-Morpork’s least successful businessman, with a sprig of lilac in his hat.

He caught sight of the watchmen and nodded to them. They nodded back. All three stood looking down at the seven graves. Only one had been maintained. The marble headstone on that one was shiny and moss-free, the turf was clipped, the stone border was sparkling.

Moss had grown over the wooden markers of the other six, but it had been scraped off the central one, revealing the name:

John Keel

And carved underneath, by someone who had taken some pains, was:

How Do They Rise Up

A huge wreath of lilac flowers, bound with purple ribbon, had been placed on the grave. On top of it, tied around with another piece of purple ribbon, was an egg.

“Mrs. Palm and Mrs. Battye and some of the girls were up here earlier,” said Dibbler. “And, of course, Madam always makes sure there’s the egg.”

“It’s nice, the way they always remember,” said Sergeant Colon.

The three stood in silence. They were not, on the whole, men with a vocabulary designed for times like this. After a while, though, Nobby felt moved to speak.

“He gave me a spoon once,” he said to the air in general.

“Yeah, I know,” said Colon.

“My dad pinched it off me when he come out of prison, but it was my spoon,” said Nobby persistently. “That means a lot to a kid, your own spoon.”

“Come to that, he was the first person to make me a sergeant,” said Colon. “Got busted again, of course, but I knew I could do it again then. He was a good copper.”

“He bought a pie off me, first week I was starting out,” said Dibbler. “Ate it *all*. Didn’t spit out *anything*.”

There was more silence.

After a while Sergeant Colon cleared his throat, a general signal to indicate that some sort of appropriate moment was now over. There was a relaxation of muscles all around.

“Y’know, we ought to come up here one day with a billhook and clear this lot up a bit,” said the sergeant.

“You always say that, Sarge, every year,” said Nobby as they walked away. “And we never do.”

“If I had a dollar for every copper’s funeral I’ve attended up here,” said Colon, “I’d have... nineteen dollars and fifty pence.”

“Fifty pence?” said Nobby.

“That was when Corporal Hildebiddle woke up just in time and banged on the lid,” said Colon. “That was before your time, o’course. Everyone said it was an amazin’ recovery.”

“*Mr. Sergeant?*”

The three men turned. Coming toward them in a high-speed sidle was the black-clad, skinny figure of Legitimate First, the cemetery’s resident gravedigger.

Colon sighed. “Yes, Leggie?” he said.

“Good morrow, sweet—” the gravedigger began, but Sergeant Colon waved a finger at him.

“Stop that right now,” he said. “You know you’ve been warned before. None of that ‘comic gravedigger’ stuff. It’s not funny and it’s not clever. Just say what you’ve got to say. No silly bits.”

Leggie looked crestfallen.

“Well, good sirs—”

“Leggie, I’ve known you for years,” said Colon wearily. “Just *try*, will you?”

“The deacon wants them graves dug up, Fred,” said Leggie, in a sulky voice. “It’s more’n been thirty years. Long past time they was in the crypts—”

“No,” said Fred Colon.

“But I’ve got a nice shelf for ’em down there, Fred,” Leggie pleaded. “Right up near the front. We need the *space*, Fred! It’s standing room only in here, and that’s the truth! Even the worms have to go in single file! Right up near the front, Fred, where I can chat to ’em when I’m having my tea. How about that?”

The Watchmen and Dibbler shared a glance. Most people in the city had been into Leggie’s crypts, if only for a dare. And it had come as a shock to most of them to realize that solemn burial was not for eternity but only for a handful of years, so that, in Leggie’s words, “my little wriggly helpers” could do their work. After that, the *last* last resting place was the crypts and an entry in the huge ledgers.

Leggie lived down there in the crypts. As he said, he was the only one who did, and he liked the company.

Leggie was generally considered weird, but conscientiously so.

“This isn’t your idea, right?” said Fred Colon.

Leggie looked down at his feet.

“The new deacon’s a bit, well, new,” he said. “You know...keen. Making changes.”

“You told him *why* they’re not being dug up?” said Nobby.

“He said that’s just ancient history,” said Leggie. “He says we all have to put the past behind us.”

“An’ did you tell him he should take it up with Vetinari?” said Nobby.

“Yes, and he said he was sure his lordship was a forward-thinking man who wouldn’t cling to relics of the past,” said Leggie.

“Sounds like he *is* new,” said Dibbler.

“Yeah,” said Nobby. “An’ not likely to get old. It’s okay, Leggie, you can say you’ve asked us.”

The gravedigger looked relieved.

“Thanks, Nobby,” he said. “And I’d just like to say that when your time comes, gents, you’ll be on a good shelf with a view. I’ve put your names down in my ledger for them as comes after me.”

“Well, that’s, er, very kind of you, Leggie,” said Colon, wondering if it was. Because of pressures of space, bones in the crypt were stored by size, not by owner. There were rooms of ribs. There were avenues of femurs. And shelf after shelf of skulls up near the entrance, of course, because a crypt without a lot of skulls wasn’t a proper crypt at all. If some of the

religions were right and there really was bodily resurrection one day, Fred mused, there was going to be an awful lot of confusion and general milling about.

“I’ve got just the spot—” Leggie began, and then stopped. He pointed angrily toward the entrance. “You *know* what I said about him coming up here!”

They turned. Corporal Reg Shoe, a whole bouquet of lilac tied to his helmet, was walking solemnly up the gravel path. He had a long-handled shovel over his shoulder.

“It’s only Reg,” said Fred. “He’s got a right to be here, Leggie. You know that.”

“He’s a dead man! I’m not havin’ a dead man in my cemetery!”

“It’s full of ’em, Leggie,” said Dibbler, trying to calm the man down.

“Yeah, but the rest of ’em don’t walk in and out!”

“Come on, Leggie, you act like this every year,” said Fred Colon. “He can’t help the way he was killed. Just because you’re a zombie doesn’t mean you’re a bad person. He’s a useful lad, Reg. Plus it’d be a lot neater up here if everyone looked after their plots like he does. Morning, Reg.”

Reg Shoe, gray-faced but smiling, nodded at the four of them and strolled on.

“And bringing his own shovel, too,” muttered Leggie. “It’s disgustin’!”

“I’ve always thought it was rather, you know, nice of him to do what he does,” said Fred. “You let him alone, Leggie. If you start throwing stones at him like you did the year before last, Commander Vimes’ll get to hear about it and there’ll be trouble. Be told. You’re a good man with a, a—”

“—cadaver,” said Nobby.

“—but...well, Leggie, you weren’t there,” said Colon. “That’s the start and finish of it. Reg was. That’s all there is to it, Leggie. If you weren’t there, you don’t understand. Now you just run along and count the skulls again, I know you like that. Cheerio, Leggie.”

Legitimate First watched them go as they walked away. Sergeant Colon felt he was being measured up.

“I’ve always wondered about his name,” said Nobby, turning and waving. “I mean... Legitimate?”

“Can’t blame a mother for being proud, Nobby,” said Colon.

“What else should I know today?” said Vimes, as he and Carrot shouldered their way through the streets.

“We’ve had a letter from the Black Ribboners,* sir, suggesting that it would be a great step forward for species’ harmony in the city if you’d see your way clear to—”

“They want a vampire in the Watch?”

“Yes, sir. I believe many members of the Watch Committee think that despite your stated reservations it would be a good—”

“Does it look to you as if my body is dead?”

“No, sir.”

“Then the answer’s no. What else?”

Carrot riffled through a stuffed clipboard as he half-ran to keep up.

“*The Times* says Borogravia has invaded Mouldavia,” he announced.

“Is that good? I can’t remember where it is.”

“Both formerly part of the Dark Empire, sir. Right next door to Uberwald.”

“Whose side are we on?”

“*The Times* said we should be supporting little Mouldavia against the aggressor, sir.”

“I like Borogravia already,” snapped Vimes. *The Times* had printed a particularly unflattering, in his opinion, cartoon of him the previous week, and to make matters worse, Sybil had requested the original and had it framed. “And what does this all mean to us?”

“Probably more refugees, sir.”

“Ye gods, we’ve got no more room! Why do they keep coming here?”

“In search of a better life, sir, I think.”

“A *better* life?” said Vimes. “*Here?*”

“I think things are worse where they come from, sir,” said Carrot.

“What kind of refugees are we talking about here?”

“Mostly human, sir.”

“Do you mean that most of them will be human, or that each individual will be *mostly* human?” said Vimes. After a while in Ankh-Morpork, you learned to phrase that kind of question.

“Er, apart from humans the only species I’d heard of there in any numbers are the kvetch, sir. They live in the deep woods and are covered in hair.”

“Really? Well, we’ll probably find out more about them when we’re asked to employ one in the Watch,” said Vimes sourly. “What else?”

“Rather hopeful news, sir,” said Carrot, smiling. “You know the Hooms? The street gang?”

“What about them?”

“They initiated their first troll member.”

“What? I thought they went around beating up trolls! I thought that was the whole *point!*”

“Well, apparently young Calcite likes beating up trolls, too.”

“And that’s good?”

“In a way, sir, I suppose it’s a step forward.”

“United in hatred, you mean?”

“I suppose so, sir,” said Carrot. He flicked papers back and forth on his clipboard. “Now, what else have I got? Oh, yes, the river-patrol boat has sunk again—”

Where did I go wrong? thought Vimes as the litany went on. I was a copper once. A real copper. I chased people. I was a hunter. It was what I did best. I knew where I was anywhere in the city by the feel of the street under my boots. And now look at me! A duke! Commander of the Watch! A political animal! I have to know about who’s fighting who a thousand miles away, just in case that’s going to mean riots here!

When did I last go on patrol? Last week? Last month? And it’s never a proper point patrol, ’cos the sergeants make damn sure everyone knows I’ve left the building and every damn

constable reeks of armor polish and has had a shave by the time I get there, even if I nip down the back streets (and that thought, at least, was freighted with a little pride, because it showed he didn't employ *stupid* sergeants). I never stand all night in the rain, or fight for my life rolling in the gutter with some thug, and I never move above a walk. That's all been taken away. And for what?

Comfort, power, money, and a wonderful wife.....er.....which was a *good* thing, of course, but...even so...

Damn. But I'm not a copper anymore, I'm a, a manager. I have to talk to the damn committee as if they're children. I go to receptions and wear damn stupid toy armor. It's all politics and paperwork. It's all got *too big*.

What had happened to the days when it was all so simple?

Faded like the lilac, he thought.

They entered the Palace and went up the main stairs to the Oblong Office.

The Patrician of Ankh-Morpork was standing looking out of the window when they entered. The room was otherwise deserted.

"Ah, Vimes," he said without turning around. "I thought you might be late. In the circumstances, I dismissed the committee. They were sorry, as indeed was I, sorry to hear about Stronginthearm. No doubt you have been writing the official letter."

Vimes flashed a questioning expression at Carrot, who rolled his eyes and shrugged. Vetinari found out things *very* quickly.

"Yes, that's right," said Vimes.

"And on such a beautiful day as this, too," said Vetinari. "Although there's a storm heading our way, I see." He turned. He had a sprig of lilac pinned to his robe.

"Lady Sybil is doing well?" he said, sitting down.

"You tell me," said Vimes.

"Some things can't be hurried, no doubt," said Vetinari smoothly, shuffling the papers. "Let me see now, let me see, there were just a few points that I should deal with...ah, the regular letter from our religious friends at the Temple of Small Gods." He carefully removed it from the pile and set it to one side. "I think I shall invite the new deacon to tea and explain matters to him. Now, where was I...ah, the political situation in—yes?"

The door opened. Drumknot, the chief clerk, came in.

"Message for His Grace," he said, although he handed it to Lord Vetinari. The Patrician passed it, very politely, across the desk. Vimes unfolded it.

"It's off the clacks!" he yelled. "We've got Carcer cornered in New Hall! I've got to get down there *now!*"

"How exciting," said Lord Vetinari, standing up suddenly. "The call to the chase. But is it necessary for you to attend personally, Your Grace?"

Vimes gave him a gray look. "Yes," he said. "Because if I don't, y'see, some poor sod who's been trained by me to do the right thing is going to try to *arrest* the bugger." He turned to Carrot. "Captain, get on it right now! Clacks, pigeons, runners, whatever. I want *everyone* answering this shout, okay? But no one, I repeat, *no one* is to try to tackle him without a lot of backup! Understood? And get Swires airborne! Oh, *damn...*"

“What’s wrong, sir?” said Carrot.

“This message is from Littlebottom. She sent it straight here. What’s she doing there? She’s Forensic. She’s not Street! She’ll do it by the book!”

“Shouldn’t she?” said Vetinari.

“No. Carcer needs an arrow in his leg just to get his attention. You shoot first—”

“—and ask questions later?” said Vetinari.

Vimes paused at the door and said: “There’s nothing I want to ask him.”

Vimes had to slow down for breath in Sator Square, and that was disgusting. A few years ago he’d only really be getting into his stride by now! But the storm rolling over the plains was driving the heat before it, and it wouldn’t do for the commander to turn up wheezing. As it was, even after pausing behind a street-market stall for a few gulps of air, he doubted if he had enough wind left for a lengthy sentence.

To his tremendous relief, an entirely unwounded Corporal Cheery Littlebottom was waiting by the University walls. She saluted.

“Reporting, sir,” she said.

“Mm,” murmured Vimes.

“I spotted a couple of trolls on traffic duty, sir,” said Cheery, “so I’ve sent them around to the Water Bridge. Then Sergeant Detritus turned up and I told—I *advised* him to go into the University via the main gate and get up high. Sergeant Colon and Nobby arrived and I sent them along to the Bridge of Size—”

“Why?” said Vimes.

“Because I doubt if he’s really going to try going that way,” said Cheery, her face a picture of innocence. Vimes had to stop himself from nodding. “And then as more people come along I’m putting them around the perimeter. But I think he’s gone up and he’s staying high.”

“Why?”

“Because how’s he going to fight his way out through a lot of wizards, sir? His best chance is to sneak around on the roofs and drop down somewhere quiet. There’s lots of hiding places and he can get all the way to Peach Pie Street without coming down.”

Forensic, thought Vimes. Hah. And with any luck he doesn’t know about Buggy.

“Well thought out,” he said.

“Thank you, sir. Would you mind standing a bit closer to this wall, sir?”

“What for?”

Something shattered on the cobbles. Vimes was suddenly flat against the wall.

“He’s got a crossbow, sir,” said Cheery. “We think he stole it from Stronginthearm. But he’s not very good with it.”

“Well done, Corporal,” said Vimes weakly. “Good job.” He glanced around the square behind him. The wind was whipping at the awnings of the market stalls and the traders, with occasional looks at the sky, were covering their wares.

“But we can’t just let him hang around up there,” he went on. “He’ll start taking potshots and he’s bound to hit *someone*.”