

Feet of Clay
Terry Pratchett

It was a warm spring night when a fist knocked at the door so hard that the hinges bent. A man opened it and peered out into the street. There was mist coming off the river and it was a cloudy night. He might as well have tried to see through white velvet. But he thought afterwards that there had been shapes out there, just beyond the light spilling out into the road. A lot of shapes, watching him carefully. He thought maybe there'd been very faint points of light . . .

There was no mistaking the shape right in front of him, though. It was big and dark red and looked like a child's clay model of a man. Its eyes were two embers.

'Well? What do you want at this time of night?'

The golem handed him a slate, on which was written:

WE HEAR YOU WANT A GOLEM.

Of course, golems couldn't speak, could they?

'Hah. *Want*, yes. *Afford*, no. I've been asking around but it's wickered the prices you're going for these days . . .'

The golem rubbed the words off the slate and wrote:

TO YOU, ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS.

'You're for sale?'

NO.

The golem lurched aside. Another one stepped into the light.

It was also a golem, the man could see that. But it wasn't like the usual lumpen clay things that you occasionally saw. This one gleamed like a newly polished statue, perfect down to the detailing of the clothes. It reminded him of one of the old pictures of the city's kings, all haughty stance and imperious haircut. In fact, it even had a small coronet moulded on to its head.

'A hundred dollars?' the man said suspiciously. 'What's wrong with it? Who's selling it?'

NOTHING IS WRONG. PERFECT IN ALL DETAIL. NINETY DOLLARS.

'Sounds like someone wants to get rid of it in a hurry . . .'

GOLEM MUST WORK. GOLEM MUST HAVE A MASTER.

'Yeah, right, but you hear stories . . . Going mad and making too many things, and that.'

NOT MAD. EIGHTY DOLLARS.

'It looks . . . new,' said the man, tapping the gleaming chest. 'But no one's making golems any more, that's what's keeping the price up beyond the purse of the small business—' He stopped. 'Is someone making them again?'

EIGHTY DOLLARS.

'I heard the priests banned making 'em years ago. A man could get in a *lot* of trouble.'

SEVENTY DOLLARS.

'Who's doing it?'

SIXTY DOLLARS.

'Is he selling them to Albertson? Or Spadger and Williams? It's hard enough competing as it

is, and they've got the money to invest in new plant—'

FIFTY DOLLARS.

The man walked around the golem. 'A man can't sit by and watch his company collapse under him because of unfair price cutting, I mean to say . . .'

FORTY DOLLARS.

'Religion is all very well, but what do prophets know about profits, eh? Hmm . . .'

He looked up at the shapeless golem in the shadows. 'Was that "thirty dollars" I just saw you write?'

YES.

'I've always liked dealing wholesale. Wait one moment.' He went back inside and returned with a handful of coins. 'Will you be selling any to them other bastards?'

NO.

'Good. Tell your boss it's a pleasure to do business with him. Get along inside, Sunny Jim.'

The white golem walked into the factory. The man, glancing from side to side, trotted in after it and shut the door.

Deeper shadows moved in the dark. There was a faint hissing. Then, rocking slightly, the big heavy shapes moved away.

Shortly afterwards, and around the corner, a beggar holding out a hopeful hand for alms was amazed to find himself suddenly richer by a whole thirty dollars.[1]

The Discworld turned against the glittering backdrop of space, spinning very gently on the backs of the four giant elephants that perched on the shell of Great A'Tuin the star turtle. Continents drifted slowly past, topped by weather systems that themselves turned gently against the flow, like waltzers spinning counter to the whirl of the dance. A billion tons of geography rolled slowly through the sky.

People look down on stuff like geography and meteorology, and not only because they're standing on one and being soaked by the other. They don't look quite like real science,[2] But geography is only physics slowed down and with a few trees stuck on it, and meteorology is full of excitingly fashionable chaos and complexity. And summer isn't a time. It's a place as well. Summer is a moving creature and likes to go south for the winter.

Even on the Discworld, with its tiny orbiting sun tilting over the turning world, the seasons moved. In Ankh-Morpork, greatest of its cities, spring was nudged aside by summer, and summer was prodded in the back by autumn.

Geographically speaking, there was not a lot of difference within the city itself, although in late spring the scum on the river was often a nice emerald green. The mist of spring became the fog of autumn, which mixed with fumes and smoke from the magical quarter and the workshops of the alchemists until it seemed to have a thick, choking life of its own.

And time moved on.

Autumn fog pressed itself against the midnight window-panes.

Blood ran in a trickle across the pages of a rare volume of religious essays, which had been torn in half.

There had been no need for that, thought Father Tubelcek.

A further thought suggested that there had been no need to hit him either. But Father Tubelcek had never been very concerned about that sort of thing. People healed, books didn't.

He reached out shakily and tried to gather up the pages, but slumped back again.
The room was spinning.
The door swung open. Heavy footsteps creaked across the floor - one footstep at least, and one dragging noise.
Step. Drag. Step. Drag.
Father Tubelcek tried to focus.' *You?*' he croaked.
Nod.
'Pick ... up the ... books.'
The old priest watched as the books were retrieved and piled carefully with fingers not well suited to the task.
The newcomer took a quill pen from the debris, carefully wrote something on a scrap of paper, then rolled it up and placed it delicately between Father Tubelcek's lips.
The dying priest tried to smile.
'We don't work like that,' he mumbled, the little cylinder wobbling like a last cigarette. 'We . . . make . . . our . . . own . . . w . . .'
The kneeling figure watched him for a while and then, taking great care, leaned forward slowly and closed his eyes.

Commander Sir Samuel Vimes, Ankh-Morpork City Guard, frowned at himself in the mirror and began to shave.
The razor was a sword of freedom. Shaving was an act of rebellion.
These days, someone ran his bath (every day! -you wouldn't think the human skin could stand it). And someone laid out his clothes (such clothes!). And someone cooked his meals (what meals! — he was putting on weight, he knew). And someone even polislied his boots (and such boots! - no cardboard-soled wrecks but big, well-fitting boots of genuine shiny leather). There was someone to do nearly everything for him, but there were some things a man ought to do for himself, and one of them was shaving.
He knew that Lady Sybil mildly disapproved. Her father had never shaved himself in his life. He had a man for it. Vimes had protested that he'd spent too many years trudging the night-time streets to be happy about anyone else wielding a blade anywhere near his neck, but the *real* reason, the unspoken reason, was that he hated the very idea of the world being divided into the shaved and the shavers. Or those who wore the shiny boots and those who cleaned the mud off them. Every time he saw Willikins the butler fold his, Vimes's, clothes, he suppressed a terrible urge to kick the butler's shiny backside as an affront to the dignity of man. The razor moved calmly over the stubble of the night.
Yesterday there had been some official dinner. He couldn't recall now what it had been for. He seemed to spend his whole life at the things. Arch, giggling women and braying young men who'd been at the back of the line when the chins were handed out. And, as usual, he'd come back through the fog-bound city in a filthy temper with himself. He'd noticed a light under the kitchen door and heard conversation and laughter, and had gone in. Willikins was there, with the old man who stoked the boiler, and the head gardener, and the boy who cleaned the spoons and lit the fires. They were playing cards. There were bottles of beer on the table.
He'd pulled up a chair, and cracked a few jokes and asked to be dealt in. They'd been . . . welcoming. In a way. But as the game progressed Vimes had been aware of the universe crystallizing around him. It was like becoming a cogwheel in a glass clock. There was no laughter. They'd called him 'sir' and kept clearing their throats. Everything was very . . .

careful.

Finally he'd mumbled an excuse and stumbled out. Halfway along the passage he'd thought he'd heard a comment followed by ... well, maybe it was only a chuckle. But it *might* have been a snigger.

The razor carefully circumnavigated the nose.

Hah. A couple of years ago a man like Willikins would have allowed him into the kitchen only on sufferance. And would have made him take his boots off.

So that's your life now, Commander Sir Samuel Vimes. A jumped-up copper to the nobs and a nob to the rest, eh?

He frowned at the reflection in the mirror.

He'd started out in the gutter, true enough. And now he was on three meat meals a day, good boots, a warm bed at night and, come to that, a wife too. Good old Sybil- although she did tend to talk about curtains these days, but Sergeant Colon had said this happened to wives and was a biological thing and perfectly normal.

He'd actually been rather attached to his old cheap boots. He could read the street in them, the soles were so thin. It'd got so that he could tell where he was on a pitch-dark night just by the feel of the cobbles. Ah, well . . .

There was something mildly strange about Sam Vimes's shaving mirror. It was slightly convex, so that it reflected more of the room than a flat mirror would do, and it gave a very good view of the outbuildings and gardens beyond the window.

Hmm. Going thin on top. Definitely a receding scalp there. Less hair to comb but, on the other hand, more face to wash . . . There was a flicker in the glass. He moved sideways and ducked. The mirror smashed.

There was the sound of feet somewhere beyond the broken window, and then a crash and a scream. Vimes straightened up. He fished the largest piece of mirror out of the shaving bowl and propped it up on the black crossbow bolt that had buried itself in the wall. He finished shaving.

Then he rang the bell for the butler. Willikins materialized. 'Sir?'

Vimes rinsed the razor. 'Get the boy to nip along to the glazier, will you?'

The butler's eyes flickered to the window and then to the shattered mirror. 'Yes, sir. And the bill to go to the Assassins' Guild again, sir?'

'With my compliments. And while he's out he's to call in at that shop in Five And Seven Yard and get me another shaving mirror. The dwarf there knows the kind I like.'

'Yes, sir. And I shall fetch a dustpan and brush directly, sir. Shall I inform her ladyship of this eventuality, sir?'

'No. She always says it's my fault for encouraging them.'

'Very good, sir,' said Willikins.

He dematerialized.

Sam Vimes dried himself off and went downstairs to the morning-room, where he opened the cabinet and took out the new crossbow Sybil had given to him as a wedding present. Sam Vimes was used to the old guard crossbows, which had a nasty habit of firing backwards in a tight corner, but this was a Burleigh and Stronginthearm made-to-measure job with the oiled walnut stock. There was none finer, it was said.

Then he selected a thin cigar and strolled out into the garden.

There was a commotion coming from the dragon house. Vimes entered, and shut the door behind him. He rested the crossbow against the door.

The yammering and squeaking increased. Little goutts of flame puffed above the thick walls of the hatching pens.

Vimes leaned over the nearest one. He picked up a newly hatched dragonette and tickled it under the chin. As it flamed excitedly he lit his cigar and savoured the smoke.

He blew a smoke ring at the figure hanging from the ceiling. 'Good morning,' he said. The figure twisted frantically. By an amazing feat of muscle control it had managed to catch a foot around a beam as it fell, but it couldn't quite pull itself up. Dropping was not to be thought of. A dozen baby dragons were underneath it, jumping up and down excitedly and flaming.

'Er . . . good morning,' said the hanging figure.

Turned out nice again,' said Vimes, picking up a bucket of coal. 'Although the fog will be back later, I expect.'

He took a small nugget and tossed it to the dragons. They squabbled for it.

Vimes gripped another lump. The young dragon that had caught the coal already had a distinctly longer and hotter flame.

'I suppose,' said the young man, 'that I could not prevail upon you to let me down?'

Another dragon caught some coal and belched a fireball. The young man swung desperately to avoid it.

'Guess,' said Vimes.

'I suspect, on reflection, that it was foolish of me to choose the roof,' said the assassin.

'Probably,' said Vimes. He'd spent several hours a few weeks ago sawing through joists and carefully balancing the roof tiles.

'I should have dropped off the wall and used the shrubbery.'

'Possibly,' said Vimes. He'd set a bear-trap in the shrubbery.

He took some more coal. 'I suppose you wouldn't tell me who hired you?'

'I'm afraid not, sir. You know the rules.'

Vimes nodded gravely. 'We had Lady Selachii's son up before the Patrician last week,' said Vimes. 'Now, *there's* a lad who needs to learn that "no" doesn't mean "y^{es}> please".'

'Could be, sir.'

'And then there was that business with Lord Rust's boy. You can't shoot servants for putting your shoes the wrong way round, you know. It's too messy. He'll have to learn right from left like the rest of us. And right from wrong, too.' 'I hear what you say, sir.' 'We seem to have reached an impasse,' said Vimes.

'It seems so, sir.'

Vimes aimed a lump at a small bronze and green dragon, which caught it expertly. The heat was getting intense.

'What I don't understand,' he said, 'is why you fellows mainly try it here or at the office. I mean, I walk around a lot, don't I? You could shoot me down in the street, couldn't you?'

'What? Like some common murderer, sir?' Vimes nodded. It was black and twisted, but the Assassins' Guild had honour of a sort. 'How much was I worth?'

'Twenty thousand, sir.' 'It should be higher,' said Vimes. 'I agree.' If the assassin got back to the guild it would be, Vimes thought. Assassins valued their own lives quite highly.

'Let me see now,' said Vimes, examining the end of his cigar. 'Guild takes fifty per cent. That leaves ten thousand dollars.'

The assassin seemed to consider this, and then reached up to his belt and tossed a bag rather clumsily towards Vimes, who caught it.

Vimes picked up his crossbow. 'It seems to me,' he said, 'that if a man were to be let go he might well make it to the door with no more than superficial burns. If he were fast. How fast are you?'

There was no answer.

'Of course, he'd have to be desperate,' said Vimes, wedging the crossbow on the feed table and taking a piece of cord out of his pocket. He lashed the cord to a nail and fastened the other end to the crossbow's string. Then, standing carefully to one side, he eased the trigger. The string moved very slightly.

The assassin, watching him upside down, seemed to have stopped breathing. Vimes puffed at his cigar until the end was an inferno. Then he took it out of his mouth and leaned it against the restraining cord so that it would have just a fraction of an inch to burn before the string began to smoulder.

'I'll leave the door unlocked,' he said. 'I've never been an unreasonable man. I shall watch your career with interest.'

He tossed the rest of the coals to the dragons, and stepped outside. It looked like being another eventful day in Ankh-Morpork, and it had only just begun. As Vimes reached the house he heard a whoosh, a click, and the sound of someone running very fast towards the ornamental lake. He smiled.

Willikins was waiting with his coat. 'Remember you have an appointment with his lordship at eleven, Sir Samuel.'

'Yes, yes,' said Vimes.

'And you are to go and see the Heralds at ten. Her ladyship was very explicit, sir. Her exact words were, "Tell him he's not to try to wriggle out of it again," sir.'

'Oh, very well.'

'And her ladyship said please to try not to upset anyone.'

'Tell her I'll try.'

'And your sedan chair is outside, sir.'

Vimes sighed. 'Thank you. There's a man in the ornamental lake. Fish him out and give him a cup of tea, will you? Promising lad, I thought.'

'Certainly, sir.'

The chair. Oh, yes, the chair. It had been a wedding present from the Patrician. Lord Vetinari knew that Vimes loved walking the streets of the city, and so it was very typical of the man that he presented him with something that did not allow him to do so.

It was waiting outside. The two bearers straightened up expectantly.

Sir Samuel Vimes, Commander of the City Watch, rebelled again. Perhaps he *did* have to use the damn thing, but . . .

He looked at the front man and motioned with a thumb to the chair's door. 'Get in,' he commanded.

'But sir—'

'It's a nice morning,' said Vimes, taking off his coat again. 'I'll drive myself.'

'Dearest Mumm & Dad

Captain Carrot of the Ankh-Morpork City Watch was on his day off. He had a routine. First he had breakfast in some handy cafe. Then he wrote his letter home. Letters home always gave him some trouble. Letters *from* his parents were always interesting, being full of mining statistics and exciting news about new shafts and promising seams. All *he* had to write about were murders and such things as that.

He chewed the end of his pencil for a moment.

Well, it has been an intresting week again [he wrote]. I am running around like a flye with a blue bottom and No Mistake! We are opening another Watch House at Chittling Street which is handy for the Shades, so now we have no Less than 4 including Dolly Sisters and Long

Wall, and I am the only Captain so I am around at all hours. Personally I sometimes miss the camaraderie of the old days when it was just me and Nobby and Sergeant Colon but this is the Century of the Fruitbat. Sergeant Colon is going to retire at the end of the month, he says Mrs Colon wants him to buy a farm, he says he is looking forward to the peace of the country and being Close to Nature, I'm sure you would wish him well. My friend Nobby is still Nobby only more than he was.

Carrot absent-mindedly took a half-eaten mutton chop from his breakfast plate and held it out below the table. There was an *unk*.

Anyway, back to the job, also I am sure I have told you about the Cable Street Particulars, although they are still based in Pseudopolis Yard, people do not like it when Watchmen do not wear uniforms but Commander Vimes says criminals don't wear uniforms either so be d*mned to the lot of them.

Carrot paused. It said a lot about Captain Carrot that, even after almost two years in Ankh-Morpork, he was still uneasy about 'd*mned'.

Commander Vimes says you have to have secret policemen because there are secret crimes . . .

Carrot paused again. He loved his uniform. He didn't have any other clothes. The idea of Watchmen in disguise *was* . . . well, it was unthinkable. It was like those pirates who sailed under false colours. It was like spies. However, he went on dutifully:

. . . and Commander Vimes knows what he is talking about I am sure. He says it's not like old fashioned police work which was catching the poor devils too stupid to run away!! Anyhow it all means a lot more work and new faces in the Watch.

While he waited for a new sentence to form, Carrot took a sausage from his plate and lowered it. There was another *unk*. The waiter bustled up.

'Another helping, Mr Carrot? On the house.' Every restaurant and eatery in Ankh-Morpork offered free food to Carrot, in the certain and happy knowledge that he would always insist on paying. 'No, indeed, that was very good. Here we are . . . twenty pence and keep the change,' said Carrot.

'How's your young lady? Haven't seen her today.'

'Angua? Oh, she's . . . around and about, you know. I shall definitely tell her you asked after her, though.'

The dwarf nodded happily, and bustled off. Carrot wrote another few dutiful lines and then said, very softly, 'Is that horse and cart still outside Ironcrust's bakery?'

There was a whine from under the table. 'Really? That's odd. All the deliveries were over hours ago and the flour and grit doesn't usually arrive until the afternoon. Driver still sitting there?' Something barked, quietly. 'And that looks quite a good horse for a delivery cart. And,

you know, normally you'd expect the driver to put a nosebag on. And it's the last Thursday in the month. Which is payday at Ironcrust's.' Carrot laid down his pencil and waved a hand politely to catch the waiter's eye. 'Cup of acorn coffee, Mr Gimlet? To take away?'

In the Dwarf Bread Museum, in Whirligig Alley, Mr Hopkinson the curator was somewhat excited. Apart from other considerations, he'd just been murdered. But at the moment he was choosing to consider this as an annoying background detail.

He'd been beaten to death with a loaf of bread. This is unlikely even in the worst of human bakeries, but dwarf bread has amazing properties as a weapon of offence. Dwarfs regard baking as part of the art of warfare. When they make rock cakes, no simile is intended.

'Look at this dent here,' said Hopkinson. 'It's quite *ruined* the crust!'

AND YOUR SKULL TOO, said Death.

'Oh, yes,' said Hopkinson, in the voice of one who regards skulls as ten a penny but is well aware of the rarity value of a good bread exhibit. 'But what was wrong with a simple cosh? Or even a hammer? I could have provided one if asked.'

Death, who was by nature an obsessive personality himself, realized that he was in the presence of a master. The late Mr Hopkinson had a squeaky voice and wore his spectacles on a length of black tape - his ghost now wore their spiritual counterpart - and these were always the signs of a mind that polished the undersides of furniture and stored paperclips by size.

'It really is too bad,' said Mr Hopkinson. 'And ungrateful, too, after the help I gave them with the oven. I really feel I shall have to complain.'

MR HOPKINSON, ARE YOU FULLY AWARE THAT YOU ARE DEAD?

'Dead?' trilled the curator. 'Oh, no. I can't possibly be dead. Not at the moment. It's simply not convenient. I haven't even catalogued the combat muffins.'

NEVERTHELESS.

'No, no. I'm sorry, but it just won't do. You will have to wait. I really cannot be bothered with that sort of nonsense.'

Death was nonplussed. Most people were, after the initial confusion, somewhat relieved when they died. A subconscious weight had been removed. The other cosmic shoe had dropped. The worst had happened and they could, metaphorically, get on with their lives. Few people treated it as a simple annoyance that might go away if you complained enough. Mr Hopkinson's hand went through a tabletop. 'Oh.'

YOU SEE?

'This is most uncalled-for. Couldn't you have arranged a less awkward time?'

ONLY BY CONSULTATION WITH YOUR MURDERER.

'It all seems very badly organized. I wish to make a complaint. I pay my taxes, after all.'

I AM DEATH, NOT TAXES. I TURN UP ONLY ONCE.

The shade of Mr Hopkinson began to fade. 'It's simply that I've always tried to plan ahead in a sensible way . . .'

I FIND THE BEST APPROACH IS TO TAKE LIFE AS IT COMES.

'That seems very irresponsible . . .'

IT'S ALWAYS WORKED FOR ME.

The sedan chair came to a halt outside Pseudopolis Yard. Vimes left the runners to park it and

strode in, putting his coat back on.

There had been a time, and it seemed like only yesterday, when the Watch House had been almost empty. There'd be old Sergeant Colon dozing in his chair, and Corporal Nobbs's washing drying in front of the stove. And then suddenly it had all changed . . .

Sergeant Colon was waiting for him with a clipboard. 'Got the reports from the other Watch Houses, sir,' he said, trotting along beside Vimes.

'Anything special?'

'Bin a bit of an odd murder, sir. Down in one of them old houses on Misbegot Bridge. Some old priest. Dunno much about it. The patrol just said it ought to be looked at.'

'Who found him?'

'Constable Visit sir.'

'Oh, gods.'

'Yessir.'

'I'll try to get along there this morning. Anything else?'

'Corporal Nobbs is sick, sir.'

'Oh, *I know that.*'

'I mean *off* sick, sir.'

'Not his granny's funeral this time?'

'Nossir.'

'How many's he had this year, by the way?'

'Seven, sir.'

'Very odd family, the Nobbses.'

'Yessir.'

'Fred, you don't have to keep calling me "sir".'

'Got comp'ny, sir,' said the sergeant, glancing meaningfully towards a bench in the main office. 'Come for that alchemy job.'

A dwarf smiled nervously at Vimes.

'All right,' said Vimes. 'I'll see him in my office.' He reached into his coat and took out the assassin's money pouch. 'Put it in the Widows and Orphans Fund, will you, Fred?'

'Right. Oh, well done, sir. Any more windfalls like this and we'll soon be able to afford some more widows.'

Sergeant Colon went back to his desk, surreptitiously opened his drawer and pulled out the book he was reading. It was called *Animal Husbandry*. He'd been a bit worried about the title - you heard stories about strange folk in the country — but it turned out to be nothing more than a book about how cattle and pigs and sheep should breed.

Now he was wondering where to get a book that taught them how to read.

Upstairs, Vimes pushed open his office door carefully. The Assassins' Guild played to rules. You could say that about the bastards. It was terribly bad form to kill a bystander. Apart from anything else, you wouldn't get paid. So traps in his office were out of the question, because too many people were in and out of it every day. Even so, it paid to be careful. Vimes *was* good at making the kind of rich enemies who could afford to employ assassins. The assassins had to be lucky only once, but Vimes had to be lucky all the time.

He slipped into the room and glanced out of the window. He liked to work with it open, even in cold weather. He liked to hear the sounds of the city. But anyone trying to climb up or down to it would run into everything in the way of loose tiles, shifting handholds and treacherous drainpipes that Vimes's ingenuity could contrive. And Vimes had installed spiked railings down below. They were nice and ornamental but they were, above all, spiky.

So far, Vimes was winning.

There was a tentative knock at the door.

It had issued from the knuckles of the dwarf applicant. Vimes ushered him into the office,

shut the door, and sat down at his desk.

'So,' he said. 'You're an alchemist. Acid stains on your hands and no eyebrows.'

'That's right, sir.'

'Not usual to find a dwarf in that line of work. You people always seem to toil in your uncle's foundry or something.'

You people, the dwarf noted. 'Can't get the hang of metal,' he said.

'A dwarf who can't get the hang of metal? That must be unique.'

'Pretty rare, sir. But I was quite good at alchemy.'

'Guild member?'

'Not any more, sir.'

'Oh? How did you leave the guild?' 'Through the roof, sir. But I'm pretty certain I know what I did wrong.'

Vimes leaned back. The alchemists are always blowing things up. I never heard of them getting sacked for it.'

'That's because no one's ever blown up the Guild Council, sir.' 'What, *all* of it?'

'Most of it, sir. All the easily detachable bits, at least.'

Vimes found he was automatically opening the bottom drawer of his desk. He pushed it shut again and, instead, shuffled the papers in front of him. 'What's your name, lad?'

The dwarf swallowed. This was clearly the bit he'd been dreading. 'Littlebottom, sir.' Vimes didn't even look up. 'Ah, yes. It says here. That means you're from the Uberwald mountain area, yes?'

'Why . . . yes, sir,' said Littlebottom, mildly surprised. Humans generally couldn't distinguish between dwarf clans.

'Our Constable Angua comes from there,' said Vimes. 'Now . . . it says here your first name is . . . can't read Fred's handwriting . . . er . . .'

There was nothing for it. 'Cheery, sir,' said Cheery Littlebottom.

'Cheery, eh? Good to see the old naming traditions kept up. Cheery Littlebottom. Fine.'

Littlebottom watched carefully. Not the faintest glimmer of amusement had crossed Vimes's face.

'Yes, sir. Cheery Littlebottom,' he said. And there still wasn't as much as an extra wrinkle there. 'My father was Jolly. Jolly Littlebottom,' he added, as one might prod at a bad tooth to see when the pain will come.

'Really?'

'And . . . *his* father was Beaky Littlebottom.'

Not a trace, not a smidgeon of a grin twitched anywhere. Vimes merely pushed the paper aside.

'Well, we work for a living here, Littlebottom.'

'Yes, sir.'

'We don't blow things up, Littlebottom.'

'No, sir. I don't blow *everything* up, sir. Somejust melts.'

Vimes drummed his fingers on the desk. 'Know anything about dead bodies?'

'They were only mildly concussed, sir.'

Vimes sighed. 'Listen. I know about how to be a copper. It's mainly walking and talking. But there's lots of things I don't know. You find the scene of a crime and there's some grey powder on the floor. What is it? *I* don't know. But you fellows know how to mix things up in bowls and can find out. And maybe the dead person doesn't seem to have a mark on them.

Were they poisoned? It seems we need someone who knows what colour a liver is supposed to be. I want someone who can look at the ashtray and tell me what kind of cigars I smoke.'

'Pantweed's Slim Panatellas,' said Littlebottom automatically.

'Good gods!'

'You've left the packet on the table, sir.'

Vimes looked down. 'All right,' he said. 'So sometimes it's an easy answer. But sometimes it isn't. Sometimes we don't even know if it was the right question.'

He stood up. 'I can't say I like dwarfs much, Littlebottom. But I don't like trolls or humans either, so I suppose that's okay. Well, you're the only applicant. Thirty dollars a month, five dollars living-out allowance, I expect you to work to the job not the clock, there's some mythical creature called "overtime", only no one's even seen its footprints, if troll officers call you a gritsucker they're out, and if you call them rocks *you're* out, we're just one big family and, when you've been to a few domestic disputes, Littlebottom, I can assure you that you'll see the resemblance, we work as a team and we're pretty much making it up as we go along, and half the time we're not even certain what the law is, so it can get interesting, technically you'll rank as a corporal, only don't go giving orders to real policemen, you're on a month's trial, we'll give you some training just as soon as there's time, now, find an iconograph and meet me on Misbegot Bridge in. . . damn. . . better make it an hour. I've got to see about this blasted coat of arms. Still, dead bodies seldom get deader. Sergeant Detritus!'

There was a series of creaks as something heavy moved along the corridor outside and a troll opened the door.

'Yessir?'

'This is Corporal Littlebottom. Corporal Cheery Littlebottom, whose father was Jolly Littlebottom.

Give him his badge, swear him in, show him where everything is. Very good, Corporal?'

'I shall try to be a credit to the uniform, sir,' said Littlebottom.

'Good,' said Vimes briskly. He looked at Detritus. 'Incidentally, Sergeant, I've got a report here that a troll in uniform nailed one of Chrysopraxe's henchmen to a wall by his ears last night. Know anything about that?'

The troll wrinkled its enormous forehead. 'Does it say anything 'bout him selling bags of Slab to troll kids?'

'No. It says he was going to read spiritual literature to his dear old mother,' said Vimes.

'Did Hardcore say he saw dis troll's badge?'

'No, but he says the troll threatened to ram it where the sun doesn't shine,' said Vimes.

Detritus nodded gravely. 'Dat's a long way to go just to ruin a good badge,' he said.

'By the way,' said Vimes, 'that was a lucky guess of yours, guessing that it was Hardcore.'

'It come to me in a flash, sir,' said Detritus. 'I fort: what bastard who sells Slab to kids deserves bein' nailed up by his ears, sir, and . . . bingo. Dis idea just formed in my head.'

'That's what I thought.'

Cheery Littlebottom looked from one impassive face to the other. The Watchmen's eyes never left each other's face, but the words seemed to come from a little distance, as though both of them were reading an invisible script.

Then Detritus shook his head slowly. 'Musta been a impostor, sir. 'S easy to get helmets like ours. None of my trolls'd do anything like dat. Dat would be police brutality, sir.'

'Glad to hear it. Just for the look of the thing, though, I want you to check the trolls' lockers. The Silicon Anti-Defamation League are on to this one.'

'Yes, sir. An' if I find out it was one of my trolls I will be down on dat troll like a ton of rectang'lar buildin' things, sir.'

'Fine. Well, off you go, Littlebottom. Detritus will look after you.'

Littlebottom hesitated. This was uncanny. The man hadn't mentioned axes, or gold. He hadn't even said anything like 'You can make it big in the Watch'. Littlebottom felt really unbalanced.

'Er . . . I *did* tell you my name, didn't I, sir?'

'Yes. Got it down here,' said Vimes. 'Cheery Littlebottom. Yes?'

'Er . . . yes. That's right. Well, thank you, sir.'

Vimes listened to them go down the passage. Then he carefully shut the door and put his coat over his head so that no one would hear him laughing.

'Cheery Littlebottom!'

Cheery ran after the troll called Detritus. The Watch House was beginning to fill up. And it was clear that the Watch dealt with all *sorts* of things, and that many of them involved shouting.

Two uniformed trolls were standing in front of Sergeant Colon's high desk, with a slightly smaller troll between them. This troll was wearing a downcast expression. It was also wearing a tutu and had a small pair of gauze wings glued to its back.

'—happen to know that trolls don't have *any* tradition of a Tooth Fairy,' Colon was saying.

'Especially not one called' - he looked down - 'Clinkerbell. So how about it we just call it breaking and entering without a Thieves' Guild licence?'

'Is racial prejudice, not letting trolls have a Tooth Fairy,' Clinker bell muttered.

One of the troll guards upended a sack on the desk. Various items of silverware cascaded over the paperwork.

'And this is what you found under their pillows, was it?' said Colon.

'Bless dere little hearts,' said Clinkerbell.

At the next desk a tired dwarf was arguing with a vampire. 'Look,' he said, 'it's *not* murder. You're dead already, right?'

'He stuck them right in me!'

'Well, I've been down to interview the manager and he said it was an accident. He said he's got nothing against vampires at all. He says he was merely carrying three boxes of HB Eraser Tips and tripped over the edge of your cloak.'

'I don't see why I can't work where I like!'

'Yes, but... in a pencil factory?'

Detritus looked down at Littlebottom and grinned. 'Welcome to life in der big city, Littlebottom,' he said. 'Dat's an int'restin' name.'

'Is it?'

'Most dwarfs have names like Rockheaver or Stronginthearm.'

'Do they?'

Detritus was not one for the fine detail of relationships, but the edge in Littlebottom's voice got through to him. 'S a good name, though,' he said.

'What's Slab?' said Cheery.

'It are chloric ammonium an' radium mixed up. It give your head a tingle but melts troll brains. Big problem in der mountains and some buggers are makin' it here in der city and we tryin' to find how it get up dere, Mr Vimes is lettin' me run a' - Detritus concentrated - 'pub-lie a-ware-ness campaign tellin' people what happens to buggers who sells it to kids . . .', He waved a hand at a large and rather crudely done poster on the wall. It said:

Slab: Jus' say 'Aarrghaarrghpleeassennono-noUGH'.

He pushed open a door.

'Dis is der ole privy wot we don't use no more, you can use it for mixin' up stuff, it the only

place we got now, you have to clean it up first 'cos it smells like a toilet in here.'

He opened another door. 'And this der locker room,' he said. 'You got your own peg and dat, and dere's dese panels for getting changed behind 'cos we knows you dwarfs is modest. It a good life if you don't weaken. Mr Vimes is okay but he a bit weird about some stuff, he keepin' on sayin' stuff like dis city is a meltin' pot an' all der scum floats to der top, and stuff like dat. I'll give you your helmet an' badge in a minute but first' — he opened a rather larger locker on the other side of the room, which had 'DTRiTUS' painted on it - 'I got to go and hide dis hammer.'

Two figures hurried out of Ironcrust's Dwarf Bakery (T'Bread Wi' T'Edge'), threw themselves on to the cart and shouted at the driver to leave urgently.

He turned a pale face towards them and pointed to the road ahead.

There was a wolf there.

Not a usual kind of wolf. It had a blond coat, which around its ears was almost long enough to be a mane. And wolves did not normally sit calmly on their haunches in the middle of a street.

This one was growling. A long, low growl. It was the audible equivalent of a shortening fuse. The horse was transfixed, too frightened to stay where it was but far too terrified to move. One of the men carefully reached for a crossbow. The growl rose slightly. He even more carefully took his hand away. The growl subsided again.

'What is it?'

'It's a wolf!'

'In a city? What does it find to eat?'

'Oh, *why* did you have to ask that?'

'*Good* morning, gentlemen!' said Carrot, as he stopped leaning against the wall. 'Looks like the fog's rising again. Thieves' Guild licences, please?'

They turned. Carrot gave them a happy smile and nodded encouragingly.

One of the men patted his coat in a theatrical display of absentmindedness.

'Ah. Well. Er. Left the house in a bit of a hurry this morning, must've forgotten—'

'Section Two, Rule One of the Thieves' Guild Charter says that members must carry their cards on all professional occasions,' said Carrot.

'He's not even drawn his sword!' hissed the most stupid of the three-strong gang.

'He doesn't need to, he's got a loaded wolf.'

Someone was writing in the gloom, the scritch of their pen the only sound.

Until a door creaked open.

The writer turned as quick as a bird. 'You? I told you never to come back here!'

'I know, I know, but it's that damn *thing*! The production line stopped and it got out and it's killed that priest!'

'Did anyone see it?'

'In the fog we had last night? I shouldn't think so. But—'

'Then it is not, ah-ha, a matter of significance.'

'No? They're not supposed to *kill* people. Well . . . that is,' the speaker conceded, 'not by smashing them on the head, anyway.'

'They will if so instructed.'
'I never told it to! Anyway, what if it turns on me?'
'On its master? It can't disobey the words in its head, man.'
The visitor sat down, shaking his head. 'Yeah, but which words? I don't know, I don't know, this is getting too much, that damn thing around all the time—'
'Making you a fat profit—'
'All right, all right, but this other stuff, the poison, I never—'
'Shut up! I'll see you again tonight. You can tell the others that I certainly do have a candidate. And if you dare come here again . . .'

The Ankh-Morpork Royal College of Heralds turned out to be a green gate in a wall in Mollymog Street. Vimes tugged on the bell-pull. Something clanged on the other side of the wall and immediately the place erupted in a cacophony of hoots, growls, whistles and trumpeting.

A voice shouted, 'Down, boy! Couchant! I said couchant! No! *Not* rampant! And thee shall have a sugar lump like a good boy. William! Stop that at once! Put him down! Mildred, let go of Graham!'

The animal noises subsided a bit and footsteps approached. A wicket gate in the main door opened a fraction.

Vimes saw an inch-wide segment of a very short man.

'Yes? Are you the meat man?'

'Commander Vimes,' said Vimes. 'I have an appointment.'

The animal noises started up again.

'Eh?'

'*Commander Vimes!*' Vimes shouted.

'Oh. I suppose thee'd better come in.'

The door swung open. Vimes stepped through.

Silence fell. Several dozen pairs of eyes regarded Vimes with acute suspicion. Some of the eyes were small and red. Several were big and poked just above the surface of the scummy pond that occupied a lot of space in the yard. Some were on perches.

The yard was *fullof* animals, but even they were crowded out by the *smell* of a yard full of animals. And most of them were clearly very old, which didn't do anything for the smell.

A toothless lion yawned at Vimes. A lion running, or at least lounging around loose was amazing in itself, but not so amazing as the fact that it was being used as a cushion by an elderly gryphon, which was asleep with all four claws in the air.

There were hedgehogs, and a greying leopard, and moulting pelicans. Green water surged in the pond and a couple of hippos surfaced and yawned. Nothing was in a cage, and nothing was trying to eat anything else.

'Ah, it takes people like that, first time,' said the old man. He had a wooden leg. 'We're quite a happy little family.'

Vimes turned and found himself looking at a small owl. 'My gods,' he said. 'That's a morpork, isn't it?'

The old man's face broke into a happy smile. 'Ah, I can see thee knows thy heraldry,' he cackled. 'Daphne's ancestors came all the way from some islands on the other side of the Hub, so they did.'

Vimes took out his City Watch badge and stared at the coat of arms embossed thereon.

The old man looked over his shoulder. 'That's not her, o'course,' he said, indicating the owl

perched on the Ankh. 'That was her great-grandma, Olive. A morpork on an ankh, see? That is a pun or play on words. Laugh? I nearly started. That's about as funny as you gets round here. We could do with a mate for her, tell you the truth. And a female hippo. I mean, his lordship says we've got two hippos, which is right enough, I'm just saying it's not natural for Roderick and Keith, I ain't passing judgement, it's just not right, that's all I'm saying. What was thy name again?'

'Vimes. Sir Samuel Vimes. My wife made the appointment.'

The old man cackled again. 'Ah, 'tis usually so.'

Moving quite fast despite his wooden leg, the old man led the way through the steaming mounds of multi-species dung to the building on the other side of the yard.

'I expect this is good for the garden, anyway,' said Vimes, trying to make conversation.

'I tried it on my rhubarb,' said the old man, pushing open the door. 'But it grew to twenty feet tall, sir, and then spontaneously caught fire. Mind where the wyvern's been, sir, he's been ill - oh, what a shame. Never mind, it'll scrape off beautiful when it dries. In thee goes, sir.'

The hall inside was as quiet and dark as the yard had been full of light and noise. There was the dry, tombstone smell of old books and church towers.

Above him, when his eyes got used to the darkness, Vimes could make out hanging flags and banners. There were a few windows, but cobwebs and dead flies meant that the light they allowed in was merely grey.

The old man had shut the door and left him alone. Vimes watched through the window as he limped back to continue what he had been doing before Vimes's appearance.

What he had been doing was setting up a living coat of arms.

There was a large shield. Cabbages, actual cabbages, had been nailed to it. The old man said something that Vimes couldn't hear. The little owl fluttered from its perch and landed on a large ankh that had been glued to the top of the shield. The two hippos flopped out of their pool and took up station on either side.

The old man unfolded an easel in front of the scene, placed a canvas on it, picked up a palette and brush, and shouted, 'Hup-la!'

The hippos reared, rather arthritically. The owl spread its wings.

'Good gods,' murmured Vimes. 'I always thought they just made it up!'

'Made it up, sir? Made it up?' said a voice behind him. 'We'd soon be in trouble if we made things up, oh dear me, yes.'

Vimes turned. Another little old man had appeared behind him, blinking happily through thick glasses. He had several scrolls under one arm.

'I'm sorry I couldn't meet you at the gate but we're very busy at the moment,' he said, holding out his spare hand. 'Croissant Rouge Pursuivant.'

'Er . . . you're a small red breakfast roll?' said Vimes, nonplussed.

'No, no. No. It means Red Crescent. It's my title, you see. Very ancient title. I'm a Herald. You'd be Sir Samuel Vimes, yes?'

'Yes/

Red Crescent consulted a scroll. 'Good. Good. How do you feel about weasels?' he said.

'Weasels?'

'We have got some weasels, you see. I know they're not *strictly* a heraldic animal, but we seem to have some on the strength and frankly I think I'm going to have to let them go unless we can persuade someone to adopt them, and that'd upset Pardessus Chatain Pursuivant. He always locks himself in his shed when he's upset . . .'

'Pardessus . . . you mean the old man out there?' said Vimes. 'I mean. . . why's he. . . I thought you . . . I mean, a coat of arms is just a design. You don't have to paint it from life!'

Red Crescent looked shocked. 'Well, I suppose if you want to make a complete mockery of the whole thing, yes, you could just *make it up*. You could do that,' he said. 'Anyway . . . not

weasels, then?'

'Personally I'd just as soon not bother,' said Vimes. 'And certainly not with a weasel. My wife said that dragons would—'

'Happily, the occasion will not arise,' said a voice in the shadows.

It wasn't the right sort of voice to hear in any kind of light. It was dust-dry. It sounded as if it came from a mouth that had never known the pleasures of spittle. It sounded dead.

It was.

The bakery thieves considered their options.

'I've got my hand on my crossbow,' said the most enterprising of the three.

The most realistic said, 'Have you? Well, I've got my heart in my mouth.'

'Ooo,' said the third. 'I've got a weak heart, me . . .'

'Yeah, but what I mean is ... he's not even *wearing* a sword. If I take the wolf, the two of you should be able to deal with him with *no* trouble, right?'

The one clear thinker looked at Captain Carrot. His armour shone. So did the muscles on his bare arms. Even his *knees* gleamed.

'It seems to me that we have a bit of an impasse, or stand-off,' said Captain Carrot.

'How about if we throw down the money?' said the clear thinker.

'That would certainly help matters,'

'And you'd let us go?'

'No. But it would definitely count in your favour and I would certainly speak up on your behalf.'

The bold one with the crossbow licked his lips and glanced from Carrot to the wolf. 'If you set it on us, I warn you, someone's going to get killed!' he warned.

'Yes, it could happen,' said Carrot, sadly. 'I'd prefer to avoid that, if at all possible.'

He raised his hands. There was something flat and round and about six inches across in each one. 'This,' he said, 'is dwarf bread. Some of Mr Ironcrust's best. It's not classic battle bread, of course, but it's probably good enough for slicing . . .'

Carrot's arm blurred. There was a brief flurry of sawdust, and the flat loaf spun to a stop half-way through the thick timbers of the cart and about half an inch away from the man with the weak heart and, as it turned out, a fragile bladder, too.

The man with the crossbow tore his attention away from the bread only when he felt a slight, damp pressure on his wrist.

There was no way that an animal could have moved that fast, but there it was, and the wolf's expression contrived to indicate very calmly that if the animal so desired the pressure could be increased more or less indefinitely.

'Call it off!' he said, flinging the bow away with his free hand. 'Tell it to let go!'

'Oh, I never tell her anything,' said Carrot. 'She makes up her own mind.'

There was a clatter of iron-shod boots and half a dozen axe-bearing dwarfs raced out of the bakery gates, kicking up sparks as they skidded to a halt beside Carrot.

'Get them!' shouted Mr Ironcrust. Carrot dropped a hand on top of the dwarfs helmet and turned him around.

'It's me, Mr Ironcrust,' he said. 'I believe these are the men?'

'Right you are, Captain Carrot!' said the dwarf baker. 'C'mon, lads! Let's hang 'em up by the *bura'zak-ka!*[3]'

'Ooo,' murmured the weak of heart, damply.

'Now, now, Mr Ironcrust,' said Carrot patiently. 'We don't practise that punishment in Ankh-Morpork.'
