

Dr. Lawn painstakingly wiped down each tool with rubbing alcohol and a clean towel before quietly laying them back in the loops sewn into the piece of black felt. It had been one of the oddest births he had ever dealt with, no doubt about it. *Certainly the best attended by the public, at any rate*, he told himself, listening the the murmur of voices and shuffle of boots out in the hall. And downstairs. If it weren't bad enough that you had to wade through half the City Watch, there were even a few senior wizards milling around down there, too. Still, it had come in handy. He hadn't had to peel the father up off the carpet by himself, he had sent one of the Lance-Constables back to Twinkle Street to prevent the turkey from turning into charcoal, a second snifter of extremely fine, extremely old brandy hadn't exactly been hard to come by, most of the cleaning up had been done before he had even been required to nag about it and if he needed or wanted anything, all he would have to do was stick his head out of the bedroom door and shout. You could barely move for hovering household servants and officers out there.

Thankfully, none of them had seen fit to shove a siege weapon in his face after the regrettable incident with the shrubbery in the front garden. They had even heard that thing up here, and hadn't *that* been fun, explaining why he was soaking? *The good news is, you're definitely not going to be bothered by any unexpected guests while I'm attempting to make sure you don't die in childbirth. The bad news is, I hope you weren't attached to the front garden...* It was enough to put you off your work, at least until you had a proper shout at a few people.

At least, he could just shout if he had the heart to, he considered, glancing over toward the bed again. The baby, a healthy, sturdy boy, was already tucked down the hall in the nursery cot. The newly minted mother was sleeping soundly, pale with dark circles under her eyes, exhausted, weak, but doing remarkably well otherwise. The too-long hours of labor had worn her down and she had lost a lot of blood, but she was definitely tougher than average. His jaw had nearly hit the floor when she had asked if she could be propped up for a little while. She had even been capable of sitting up like that for a few minutes and outlasted the new father on staying conscious. And *there* was the niggling little item that didn't want to leave him alone. The father.

Oh, he had seen a few fathers in a fine state in his time. This wouldn't even be the first time he had been fetched by one who had forgotten to dress completely, or the first time one had arrived barely capable of staying upright. It would certainly be the first time he had seen the trifecta of naked, hardly able to stand up, and covered with mud and blood, but that was just a matter of time and odds. It was damned sure the first time he'd ever been fetched to a childbirth by a dead man, one he had pronounced dead himself about thirty years ago, not that there had been any challenge there. He rolled up the piece of felt and tied it with a leather strap, tucking it into the bag.

He slipped out of the bedroom door and clicked it shut as quietly as possible. He picked out the anxious face of one of the women... Mrs. Towering... the cook, probably... that had ferried endless streams of clean towels and basins a few hours earlier. "Bleeding's definitely under control, she's resting, let her sleep as much as she can, get her to eat and drink something again as soon as she's able. You said you had children, I expect you know what's normal. Call me if the bleeding gets heavy again, I'll be back by tomorrow morning to check on her." Dr. Lawn waited for the nod, picked his way through the crowded house and made his way back to Twinkle Street with a fine warm feeling of accomplishment that came with a job well done. And a generous celebratory brandy.

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The second time he opened the door to the dead man, at least the dead man had the decency to ring the bell instead of attempting to hammer the door down and to dress for the occasion. "I'm here to make good on my promise. And to have a talk." The narrowed eyes on the last sentence gave the words the same air as "I'm here in the hopes that you can help us with our inquiries. Or else."

"What promise would that be? And look, who are you, *really*? You've got John Keel's face and voice. Even have his scar over your eye. I should know, I stitched it, bandaged it and put a patch on it. About thirty years ago. Almost to the day. I've a very serviceable memory."

"I told you, can't be. They *buried* John Keel. You know who I am, now that you've been to the house. Mrs. Towering says you and Sybil worked all that out about who everyone was in between you shouting at people about boiling or fetching things and having a row with Mrs. Content about whether or not duchesses and seamstresses have babies the same way."

"I'd like to hear you say it, though." Lawn insisted.

"Fine. Commander Sam Vimes, City Watch. John Keel was my Sergeant. For a few days when I was a knock-kneed, big-eared rookie without the common sense the gods gave a flea. Could I come in, or are we going to keep talking through a crack in the door like I'm trying to hand off tracts about Om? I'm trying to thank you here," the man said, sounding exasperated.

"And you're a duke," Lawn said flatly, letting him in, walking to the table and taking a seat, gesturing to the watchman to do the same. "What's a duke doing coming down to this part of town and getting a lowly pox doctor to see to his wife?" Not that he hadn't been discreetly called upon by a few anonymous, richly appointed carriages in his time, but they generally didn't invite him across the river and in the back door, much less the front door.

"A cat can look at a king, can't it?" Vimes said, pulling a cigar from a silver case and lighting it without asking. He sat, paused and rubbed a thumb speculatively over the closed latch, staring at it for a few moments as though staring at something miles away before tucking it back into a pocket. The gesture was a little awkward thanks to the armor he wore. Not a fancy officer's uniform, Lawn noted, unless you counted the obviously well-soled leather boots. It looked like something most Sergeants would sport on the street. The sort of Sergeants that didn't go in for frippery in armor, but went in for the armor taking the brunt of it in a fight. Sergeants like John Keel. With a roll-up replacing the cheroot, there wasn't much difference in the picture before him right now and the one in his mind from just before a very different 25th of May.

"With all due respect, your grace, I don't think the cat would be looking at the king in anything like the same place." A thick, white eyebrow arched like a caterpillar. "Mrs. Content seems to have thoroughly clung to the idea that a lady or a duchess would sooner die than let the likes of me look at her below the corset, much less go rummaging around in there with my heathen tools and even worse, my heathen ideas. Even to save a woman from bleeding to death and a baby being stillborn."

Commander Sam Vimes winced. “Don’t even say that. Heard you knew about midwifing. Had all the tools and knew what to do when it went bad. Keel rented rooms here, didn’t he?”

*Yes, you bloody well did. Stood feet away and offered me five dollars a month. Said you wouldn’t be needing it for long.* “Your old sergeant just *happened* to mention all of this to you in the lulls between the attacks on the barricades and training you on the off chance your purely speculative future wife might have a bit of bother in the birthing department, did he?” Lawn said, relentless.

“Men can be a lot alike. And memories can be *faulty*,” Vimes insisted, not blinking. He said it as though saying it hard enough, with enough conviction, could make it true. He folded his arms like a barricade against further challenge.

“Mine’s pretty good. Even if it was thirty years ago. Especially when I recognize my own stitching. Scar’s going to fade pretty nicely. I do excellent work. *Did* excellent work. Whoever you are. And you can thank me for getting absolutely no sleep for months on end and still having a wife, too. You may want a refund on the bill after a few nights of yowling, though.” Lawn crossed his own arms. “Yes. Men can be a lot alike. Funny, you know. Rosie Palm said Keel was a married man. Didn’t wear a ring, never mentioned her name, but most definitely a married man. Went looking for her, even, soon as he got out of my surgery and got his bearings, and oddly enough, in the better parts of the city. Only, he wasn’t, according to the Pseudopolis Watch. I know. I wrote a letter. Asked if he had any next of kin to be notified since I had pronounced him dead. I was told he didn’t. I don’t think he had enough time to find a wife and wed in between building barricades and annoying the Particulars.” Lawn leveled a stare across the table.

Vimes stared right back. Didn’t even blink. “Mrs. Palm? And how would she know?” There was an edge of tension to the voice, though, no matter how hard he was trying to keep it even. However, he was a damned good starrer. He was a champion starrer, truth be told.

Lawn dragged a finger over the tabletop, tracing an idle pattern on the worn wood, following it with his eyes. “Oh, Rosie was very good at telling a thing like that. Still is. I’ll tell you how she knew if you just tell me who you are.”

Vimes sighed and crossed his arms tighter. “Look, it’s... all too complicated to explain. Let’s just leave it at this. I’m plain old Sam Vimes. Never been anyone or anything else. Wouldn’t know how to be anyone else. I’m not even very good at that. You remember what you want to remember, but if you forget how much I put you in mind of Sergeant John Keel, it would be a lot better for everyone. I said I would make you the richest doctor that ever lived.”

Lawn stilled his finger and looked over the top of his glasses. “Panicked fathers say all sorts of things in the heat of the moment. I won’t hold you to that,” he said kindly. “Just pay my usual bill and I’ll be thrilled. Worth a world of advertising just to say I did midwifing work for a duchess and they both came through it fine, I suppose. The word of mouth should be payment enough. Most people that side of the river won’t admit needing my services and the midwives... well, usually they only call me when it’s already far too late. They think it’s men meddling where they shouldn’t be.” He raised an appraising, bushy white eyebrow above the rim of his spectacles. “Maybe I should borrow your wife’s argument. A man had to be involved

to get them into that predicament, might as well have one help get them out of it. And vain propriety is a silly thing to value more than a life. Two lives, really.”

“I meant every word of what I said. I would have given you the gods-damned moon if that’s what you had wanted to come. You saved my wife’s life. And my son’s. Neither one of them would be alive right now, if not for you...”

“I just did the job in front of me,” Lawn protested, shrugging. “I didn’t get into medicine to get rich. Good thing, too, or I would be a bit of a failure,” he added, looking around the small room.

The eyes narrowed again, as though he were trying to see straight through into Lawn’s mind, clear through the back of his skull. “Then what did you get into medicine for? What’s your wildest dream in that department? A big office? Equipment? More time to develop those clever tools you said worked so well?”

“To help people...” Lawn floundered, a little taken aback at the doggedness.

The hard gaze pinned him again, even more firmly. “You did the job in front of you. That’s not all it was to me. To me it was... *everything*. Everything that matters. Everything *important*. What would have happened? If you hadn’t gotten on that broom?”

“I can’t say... but... she wouldn’t have lasted another hour. She would have bled to death or just died of exhaustion.”

“How can you help the most people, then? I’ll make it happen. We’ve got property lying around all over the city, doing nothing but sitting there. Money. You can make anything happen with enough money. Name your price. I haven’t got all day.”

“I wanted... I want... a free hospital. For Ankh-Morpork. I’ll need someplace to put it and some seed money to get things rolling.” On a whim, before he really knew his mouth was forming the words, he also threw in, “And a straight answer. Doesn’t have to be a word. I don’t need to know why or how. I just need to know I’m not going mad. A nod or a shake of the head will do. That’s my bill. Reasonable? Who am I going to tell, after all? Even Rosie Palm would probably think I’m mad if I tell her you’re Keel. Were Keel. Pretended you were Keel. And if she were going to realize it, she already would have, wouldn’t she? Hasn’t she seen you face to face dozens of times since? Doesn’t she go to society things these days? Guild meetings and such. She won’t want to remind people she was once a working girl on the streets, even if she does realize. Even if she already has. She’s respectable these days. Very. Very expensively respectable. She pays people to slap cheeky men for her now and doesn’t talk to the likes of pox doctors like me. We don’t have a Guild, you see. Maybe that could change. I’ll throw that in free of charge, maybe, though your support with the Patrician might be welcome. That’s not part of the bill, that’s just your civic duty.” There was a deep, yawning silence. “At least Sandra still speaks to me when we meet in the streets. You said *anything* I wanted, your grace. A hospital, and an answer to whether or not you were John Keel.”

The man in the chair opposite uncoiled, relaxed like a spring gently unwinding, giving in. “Commander’s fine. Chuck the ‘your grace’ business.” The Commander stared at him long and hard, letting the cigar smolder while he tapped a finger on the table, as though weighing

the doctor up very carefully. Finally, he reached up and removed the cigar from his lips. Slowly and deliberately, he nodded, bobbing his chin down toward his chest just once, never taking his eyes off the doctor's. "Damn it," he swore softly, "how did Rosie know I was married? She didn't hear me say a word about that. I don't wear a ring. And she still said any woman could tell. She pegged it inside five minutes. How?"

"Good grief. Rosie was right. You really don't know much about women, do you? Working girls like Rosie had to be sure of where they stood back then, especially when it came to identifying a potential customer and making a sale. Rosie was extremely good at that. You would just be wasting your time trying to sell it to someone who isn't looking for it. She said you didn't even look at what was on offer, even when she damned near waved it under your nose with an 'everything must go' sign. Even when it's not for sale, most men at least look at and appreciate what's on the shelves. You weren't even aware there was a shop and you didn't read as a man who looks for the other type of companionship. She was quite good at picking those out, too. Never mind that you also turned down a perfectly good," Lawn coughed politely, "tuppenny upright, the currency that is generally accepted everywhere, even among many married men who would protest they're quite happily married. She knew you loved her even before you went haring off away from the Agony Aunts, barging in and looking for your wife in places almost guaranteed to get your teeth kicked in. She mentioned you said you weren't in trouble with Lord Ramkin. Lived up in Scoone Avenue, didn't he?" The questioning eyebrow went up again.

"Never met the man," Vimes avowed. He cleared his throat. "I did, however, marry his daughter. I expect he wouldn't have liked that at all if he hadn't died before I met her," he added quietly. "He might still be revolving in his grave over it."

"Oh, I don't know. You would be surprised how the arrival of a healthy grandchild tends to improve a son-in-law's standing with even the most disapproving father-in-law," Lawn said wryly. "He could have done far worse in the son-in-law department than a man who was willing to put dignity aside despite being a duke and run through the city in the altogether for his wife when he's on his last legs. Most men would have handed it off to an underling. It appears Rosie had you pegged quite accurately, there. And now, curiosity satisfied, I suspect I'm about to contract a quite expensive case of amnesia, am I? Which I'll be naming after a wealthy patron?" He extended a hand over the table, proffering it for a handshake.

"Forgetfulness can be very profitable, Dr. Lawn. And I have one further condition. If you put my name on the damned hospital, I will put you in it," Vimes replied cheerfully, putting his hand toward the middle of the table as well.

"I think, then, that it might be just as well that the Lady Sybil Free Hospital sounds a hell of a lot better than the Commander Samuel Vimes Free Hospital. Do we have a deal?"

"Sounds perfect," Vimes agreed, finally taking his hand and shaking it, grinning around the cigar. "Come on, go with me to the bank. Have to catch them before they go home for the night."

They arrived at the bank perhaps five minutes too late. Or at least, what would have been five minutes too late for the average customer. Lawn stood well back, breathing a little heavily from trailing the man on a mission through the streets, watching him pound the thick, locked door. For good measure, when the knocking brought no one, he gave the wood a couple of healthy, jarring kicks, an apparent prelude to simply kicking it in if it was left unanswered too long. A junior teller finally cracked the door slightly, obviously prepared to tell someone off and threaten to call the Watch, at least until he recognized the man at the door essentially was the Watch. This took a few moments, as the boot-clad foot jammed inside the door was a bit of an attention-grabber as well. There was a pause as the teller ripped his mental gears into full reverse and recomposed his face back into bland obsequiousness, widening the opening slightly. "Oh, Commander... I'm afraid we've just clos-

"Get Bent," Vimes interrupted. "You can reopen for five minutes."

"Really, Commander, that seems a bit harsh. We could come back in the morning," Lawn put in, moving closer.

"What? No, I mean Mavolio Bent. The head cashier. Get him. I need to do some paperwork. Moving some money out to another account for Lawn, here. Signing over a freehold. It's important," Vimes insisted. A second, older teller appeared in the crack of the door and whispered frantically into the junior teller's ear. Lawn imagined he could make out the words "duke" and "one of our biggest accounts". The slightly anxious glances at the boot still planted firmly in the doorway and the scuff marks from the kicking only served as punctuation.

"Of course, your gr... er... Commander, sir, anything, come right in, Mr. Bent can be fetched right away," the second teller said, swinging the door wide. Within minutes, they were seated at a glossy, polished wooden desk in an echoing room that fairly exuded the smell of money, with Vimes scratching a signature on a couple of pieces of very official looking vellum with an abundance of gold seals. One granted Dr. J. "Mossy" Lawn access to one hundred thousand Ankh-Morpork dollars in an account at the Royal Bank of Ankh-Morpork. The other granted a large freehold in the corner of Goose Gate for the establishment of a free hospital. It was growing darker and cooler outside, the early evening setting in by the time Bent had finished looking over the documents and adding the finishing touches to them. Even though he was clearly annoyed at the imposition and the insistence on keeping the cigar lit, he was obviously overriding this by reminding himself that this was the richest man in the city and very likely one of the biggest accounts at the bank. The fact that the newly split off account was *also* probably one of the biggest accounts at the bank didn't hurt, either. The man tottered off with his funny little walk for his office and the copies of the rules and regulations banks counted on customers completely misunderstanding.

"Now, Dr. Lawn, if you don't mind, I'll leave you to go over the rest of the account terms with Mr. Bent. I need to make another stop before I go home," Vimes said, pushing his chair back from the desk and rising.

"Have another closed business establishment you need to break into after hours in order to thank someone, Commander? A flower shop or a confectioner's or jeweler's for something for the wife, maybe?" Lawn asked.

“No. I have another debt to make good on. In Small Gods,” Vimes said. “I still owe him that. He *did* teach me to be a good copper, once. Then I had to take over from there, hah, more ways than one! He was just about the closest thing I had to... well, I was lucky he was around is all,” The Commander started toward the door.

“So there was a John Keel? A real one, I mean,” The Commander stopped and his shoulders tensed slightly.

“Yes. John Keel was a damned good copper, that’s all he ever wanted to be. Not anyone’s hero. Just a good copper,” Vimes said simply, before walking away.