Havelock Vetinari and Margolotta von Uberwald rekindle an old flame, in several different ways.

Notes

This was originally two separate stories, but I've rolled the first one into the second as a prologue. The prologue is set sometime around Equal Rites; the story itself was written at some point after Night Watch, but before Thud.
"Hmm? Oh, she was a very...unusual lady but, alas, rather older than me," said Vetinari. "Much older, I have to say. But it was a long time ago. Life teaches us its small lessons and we move on." - The Fifth Elephant

It is very hard to surprise an Igor.

One reason for this is that, while any individual Igor might be old or young, the parts he is made of might be antique, or so new that the shine* has barely worn off. Some organs, handed down through the years, could be quite old. Even if you hadn't seen everything, your eyes had.

* Or, as Igors were wont to say, the glisten**.
** Well. The glithen, actually.

Another is that, generally, they take jobs with certain expectations. Igors are great fans of The Way Things Are Done. After all, it worked, didn't it? An Igor almost always survived the waving pitchforks or sudden shaft of sunlight. And in Uberwald -- at least, this Uberwald -- their employers stuck to certain conventions. 'Zer Castle' (crash of lightning) was always well marked and, as Otto Chriek liked to say, not all of zem scream.

Otto had, in fact, just left zer castle. He'd been up to lend a book to milady, and had stayed for -- ahem -- dinner, but then it began to rain really rather hard, and Otto did so like a good gothic carriage ride in the rain.

When the deep, resonant iron door-knocker was thumped hard on the old oak door, Igor thought that the vampire had probably left something behind. When he opened it, his hearts nearly failed.

"Stay right where you are. Our carriage is broken down but I'm not having any of this children-of-the-night rubbish, and I'm quite well armed," said a tall, youngish man sharply. He was drenched, black hair plastered to his scalp, coat hanging off of bony shoulders. One hand was extended in a warning gesture.

Igor, recovering from the initial shock, blinked owlishly.

"All I need is a spanner," the man continued. "If you do not have a spanner, a sledgehammer will be sufficient."

"Thall I thee if Mithtreth ith in?" Igor asked hopefully. This was not according to the script.

"Does Mistress have a spanner?" the young man asked.

"We have roomth for the night, if you are tired travelerth in thearch of thuccor," Igor continued.

"None of that now!" the man said sharply. "I know all about Uberwaldean hospitality. I don't want any trouble. I merely want some tools to repair the carriage with."

"It'th raining out. Do come inthide."

"No."

They stared at each other for a moment. There was an impatient noise from behind the young man.
"It's pissing down, Havelock. Can't hurt to go in. Just for a few minutes," a whining, nasal voice said. A second young man emerged from the damp gloom. "Charles Selachii," he said, holding out his hand before he'd fully seen who he was speaking to. Igor regarded it professionally.

"Oh yeth. Quite nithe fingerth," he said. "Good writht boneth, too."

"Gods give me strength," the dark-haired young man -- apparently called Havelock -- murmured. "Have you learned nothing about Uberwald, Selachii?"

"I know this is a nice warm castle and you're being a stubborn fool," Selachii replied. Havelock favored him with an icy scowl. Igor could now see a huddle of people behind the two men; four more, at least. Havelock turned back to Igor.

"Look, do you have the spanner or don't you?" he asked.

"I don't think we do, thur. Perhaps the gardener doeth, but he'th --"


"I don't see who died and made you Patrician," Selachii said. "I'm the eldest."

"And I am the one who did not burst into tears because we were stranded in the middle of nowhere with a broken cart-wheel," Havelock replied calmly. "Do watch your step, Alice."

This to a horse-faced young woman who gaped, touched her breast theatrically, and nearly fainted when she saw Igor.

"What is it?" one of the others asked.

"Igor, madam," Igor replied calmly. "I'll fetch the mithtreth. Thith way, gentlemen, ladieth."

What a crew, Havelock thought to himself, as the others shed their coats and began to spread out around the tastefully decorated drawing room. Well, not really 'spread out'; more like 'hunch up'. The women settled on the couch in front of the fireplace, where a small flame crackled merrily; the men took up nonchalant posts on either side of it, leaning on the mantle, trying to pretend they weren't just as desperate for the warmth.

Havelock preferred to stay by the bookcase, across the room. He had seen copper piping running up the outside of the castle as they trooped up to it and assumed, correctly, that this meant that the rooms were heated centrally by thermal springs underneath it. He had found the warm draft and was now standing in it, drying quickly.

Of all the people Aunt Roberta could have picked for him to travel with, he wondered why she'd picked these five. Charles Selachii was supposed to be the chaperone on their Grand Sneer, but he was causing more trouble than he was worth, since he tended to assume that Foreign equals Stupid and liked to steal the towels from their lodgings. Havelock knew that there was no bigger petty criminal than a rich young man, but this was taking things a bit far.

Cyril de Worde was an arrogant, speciesist bastard who was taking the 'sneer' part of their tour rather seriously. Alice Venturi and Sara* Selachii were on opposite sides of an inter-family feud, and therefore took every opportunity to be coldly polite to each other. Sybil Ramkin wasn't too bad, as people went, but Havelock couldn't look at her without being reminded of the moment when old
Lord Ramkin pulled him aside and offered to murder him painfully if any harm came to his little girl. Harm, according to Ramkin, included the attentions of That Bastard Selachii or de Worde The Weasel. Apparently, Havelock was the least of the three evils.

* There's always a Sara. Nobody really knows why.

It couldn't be more than a mile to Bonk, where they were supposed to lodge for the night with Serafine von Uberwald and her new husband, the Baron. The girls had been at school with Serafine, and apparently Cyril had courted her until he found out she was a werewolf. Havelock could not wait for the experience of dinner with the Baron.

If they ever got out of this castle.

He took down one of the books and opened it, searching for information. Near the fire, the others made quiet conversation. He saw that dependable, sensible Sybil had hung her coat by the fire, instead of tossing it on the coat-rack like the others.

He didn't move when Igor suddenly stood at his elbow; it was more difficult than one might think. Igors prided themselves on their ability to appear suddenly from nowhere.

"Tea, thurs and madamth?" Igor asked, passing him and setting a tray down near the others. "I can provide bithcuiith. There ith brandy, if you prefer, or Uberwaldian vodka."

"What's in that, then?" Selachii asked.


"I could go a spot of brandy," Selachii said thoughtfully, pouring from the decanter on Igor's tray once he'd served the women with tea. "Cyril? Havelock?"

"None for me, thank you," Havelock answered. He put the book away and joined the others around the fire.

Cyril was looking in fascinated disgust at Igor. At least he had better sense than to speak; Charles would have asked 'what are you?', as his sister Sara had, but Cyril merely stared. Le mot juste was the de Worde motto; 'the right word in the right place' was how Cyril translated it, choosing circumspection over inquiry.

Havelock, who had done rather better in languages than Cyril, thought it ironic that the real translation referred to fairness in no small way.

"Mithtreth will be down thortly," Igor said. When he pronounced 'Mithtreth', there was a flash of lightning through the windows. High, small windows, Havelock noticed, with heavy curtains, easily drawn.

"I say, these biscuits are rather good," Alice announced. "Do try one, Havelock."

Alice was looking for a potential husband, and she'd apparently settled on him until something better came along. Havelock gave her a withering stare. It was a good stare, one he'd practiced on several Ankh- Morpork street cats. He was only really getting into it when there was a discreet cough from the direction of the hallway.

The Mistress of the castle was still many years from beetotalism and the grandmotherly getup which it inspired. Now she stood, tall and pale and beautiful, in the doorway. She had long dark hair, braided elegantly, and her dress was...well, calling it 'revealing' would have cheapened the
experience, but Cyril could have told you that 'respectable' was definitely not the *mot justé*. It was the way the deep black fabric clung to her hips. And other parts.

"Good evening," she said, inclining her head regally as the women rose to curtsey, and the men bowed. Her Morporkian was excellent. "I apologise I could not greet you sooner. I am -- "

"Lady Margolotta Amaya Katerina Assumpta Crassina von Uberwald," Havelock said. "In the short form. I believe."

The Mistress -- as well as the rest of the castaways -- regarded him curiously.

"I prefer simply 'Lady Margolotta'," she said. "So much more elegant. And you are...?"

"Havelock Vetinari."

"Vot an unusual name."

Havelock raised an eyebrow. "It's ancestral."

"No doubt. Vill you introduce me then, Havelock Vetinari, to your travelink companions?"

"Charles Selachii and Cyril de Worde, you see there; Charles' sister Sara, Sybil Ramkin, and Alice Venturi," he said. Alice would take issue with being last, but he would deal with that later.

"You muszt be from Ankh-Morpork," Lady Margolotta said with a smile. Havelock noticed she didn't show her teeth. "Travelers on the Grand Smeer, perhaps?"

"Only our carriage broke down, and the driver ran off -- " Alice began. Lady Margolotta held up a hand.

"Yes, I have heard this story before. Many times, I have told Igor to patch zer hole in zer road, but vot can you do? It's this blasted rain ve get," she said. Havelock detected the touch of a master liar. "Ve are vell used to bedraggled visitors, here at zer castle. I am sure that even as ve speak, Igor is preparing rooms for you all."

"That won't be necessary," said Havelock sharply. "If you can provide us with -- "

"Do lay off the spanner, Havelock," Cyril said. "I for one don't want to troop back down to the carriage in the rain. Besides, it's not as though it's ours. And hard luck to the driver, if he runs off at the first little sign of trouble, he doesn't deserve to keep it."

"Our luggage is down there," Sybil pointed out.

"Igor has dispatched a man to fetch it," Margolotta said smoothly. "He iz such a treasure. I think you should listen to your friends, Mister Vetinari."

Havelock was a smart enough man to know when to retire gracefully. He looked to the women; Sara and Alice -- and Charles, for that matter -- looked frightened. Sybil's jaw was set, but he could see that she was indecisive. Cyril was watching him.

"We will reimburse you for the expense," he said finally. "Regular inn rates."

Margolotta smiled. "I wouldn't dream of taking your money," she said. Havelock lowered his voice so that the others, several feet away, couldn't hear.

"What exactly _would_ you dream of taking?" he asked.
Margolotta laughed. "You are a joker, Mister Vetinari! I treasure a person who can make me laugh. Come in to dinner."

Havelock thought that the invitation could have been phrased better. He caught Sybil's arm as she passed. The others continued on, led by Lady Margolotta, who was explaining the origin of some object d'art in the hallway.

"Sybil, I want you to keep an eye on the other two," he said, in an urgent, low voice. "If we stay here tonight, she's going to put the women in one wing and the men in another. You keep an eye on Alice and Sara, all right?"

"Yes, of course, but..." Sybil was a woman who believed the best of everyone. He'd nearly forgotten.

"Let's just say I don't trust her ladyship. Please, Sybil."

"All right, Havelock. Don't worry so much," she said. "Besides, I think you've scared her. How'd you know her name?"

"She's got bookplates," he said. Sybil stifled a laugh.

***

The meal was obviously assembled in haste, from what happened to be about. There was sclott, which seemed to be bread, and elderly butter; a strange sort of soup with sausages in it; cold mutton, and liver, served by Igor, which nobody touched.

Lady Margolotta was a good hostess, as far as entertainment went. She kept them talking about themselves, their travels and their home; she urged them to visit several interesting historical sites in Bonk, and offered them the use of her carriage for the trip into town the next day. Havelock kept quiet, picking at his food -- he never ate much, even at home -- and listening to the way Lady Margolotta spoke, rather than what she said.

There was a disturbing frankness about her. She told them exactly what they thought she was thinking. Havelock had seen Guild masters at school pull this trick on an errant student before. He'd never seen it done with such deftness among adults, however. Youngsters, true, none older than twenty, but the children of nobility, for whom suspicion and mistrust were natural survival traits.

She was charming, and attractive enough -- indeed, there was something about the cut of the dress that made Havelock think unusual thoughts -- but she didn't seem particularly interested in any of them as a snack. Oh, she showed interest, but not the sort Havelock was watching for. Although that could simply mean that she knew he was watching.

No; she was intelligent, and he'd made no secret of his suspicions, but he could tell from the indolence in her conversation that she was not acting for his benefit. She didn't bother to check and see if he was listening, or address specifically disinterested comments to his neighbors.

They might, if they were careful, just get out of this alive.

Havelock was still quite young, and had years of education in politics ahead of him before he would assume the Patricianship. Despite his considerable intellect, it did not occur to him that she was ignoring his companions because her interests lay elsewhere.

After the meal, they returned to the drawing room, taking up various entertainments to put off the
moment of going upstairs and facing the possibility of sleeping in the same house as an Igor. Cyril and Selachii became involved in a chess game, using a carved antique set that Margolotta provided; Alice and Sybil were keeping travel journals. Sara watched the chess game languidly, while Havelock watched Margolotta, under the guise of exploring the volumes in the bookcase.

He was also calculating how long he could have toyed with Cyril before defeating him utterly at chess, but this did not take much thought; Cyril had provided endless hours of this sort of entertainment in the past, fumbling through the game like a wizard trying to undo a brassiere*. The challenge was not to defeat your opponent, which was easy, but confuse him into defeating himself. Perhaps when Cyril had beaten Selachii, in four...no, six now...all right, yes, good man, de Worde, only two moves to go.

* Someone else's, of course. And not that a wizard would do, or rather undo, that sort of thing; everyone knew that wizards were celibate. My word, yes.

He wondered what it would be like to play chess with the Lady Margolotta. What happened if you got a vampire who was a sore loser?

The chess set didn't have white pieces. They were pale wood, stained red.

Maybe that.

He applied himself, as his mother had taught him, to the intellectual exercise of Discovering the Levers, a game which had most put out his father, a rather fun-loving man who thought young Havelock ought to play more rugby. It wasn't that Havelock didn't enjoy rugby (though he didn't); it was just that he was a small, slim boy, destined to forever be smaller and slimmer than many of his companions who had sacrificed brainpower for an absurd amount of muscle.

The Assassins' Guild had given Havelock all the physical strength he needed, as an agile climber and fighter. It had not done too terribly much to further his education. He'd been forced to do that himself. Discovering The Levers was a great help, in that regard.

Give me a lever and a solid place to stand, said the philosopher Legibus, and I can move the world.

Vetinari preferred the version he'd read in the Omnian Book of Brutha, which quoted a man named Simony as saying: give me a lever and a place to stand, and I'd smash that place like an egg.

The game was quite simple. Consider what you knew about the person in question, and consider where and in what fashion you would apply pressure in a way that moved the subject in the desired direction. It was people -- wonderfully complicated, brutal, intelligent, reasoning people -- which made the game fun. People do not have one motivation at a time; they are constantly assaulted by their own conflicting desires and insecurities. So not only do you have to find the right combination of influences, but you must have a care not to accidentally ram one lever into another, snapping both off and possibly resulting in grievous bodily harm.

What were Lady Margolotta's levers?

She was a vampire. Obviously, sunlight, religious symbols -- garlic? -- and blood.

She was a noble woman. She almost surely subscribed to the Assassins' Guild credo that required the victim to be given a fighting chance.

She liked her books; they were well-used, and had nameplates in. She had suggested, and was now watching, the chess game. Young men?
Of course, young men. She's a vampire.

_She's a woman._

Yes. Indubitably, a woman.

So, if Sybil held up her end of the bargain, the ladies need not worry. That was something.

Vetinari allowed himself the brief luxury of pleasure in the thought of Cyril de Worde and Charles Selachii, killed by a vampire. Alas, however, though he was an Assassin, he was averse to unnecessary death, and he was responsible for these people.

Another short pleasure, in the rebellious thought. _Why must I be responsible? Why does it fall to me?_

_Because you're competent, of course_, came the immediate reprimand.

And that was the end of that.

He caught Margolotta looking at him, and nodded at her, over the book. Cyril hadn't yet noticed that he was two moves away from checkmate.

"You are a great reader, Mister Vetinari?" she asked. "I shall send a book onvard vith you. No, it is my pleasure; books should be shared. But you must let me szelect vhich von you take."

"I would not dream of taking anything more from you, your Ladyship," he said shortly. "The meal and shelter are quite enough of a debt."

Lady Margolotta drew closer. Attuned as Assassins were to the different shades of the dark spectrum, he could see red highlights in her black hair.

"Zer payment need not be prompt," she said quietly. Havelock felt the book pulled from his nerveless fingers. He had never been so close to a woman so enthralling.

A glamour. It must be. But that was faeries, wasn't it?

Did it matter? She was doing it to everyone. As long as he kept his wits about him, he'd be fine.

"And of course, it is not always odious, repaying a debt."

_Find the levers_, he thought frantically. _Find the levers --_

"Indeed. There is a satisfaction in having a clean slate," he heard himself say. "To go on one's way with the knowledge that one has done all the good one can do."

Margolotta looked at him in surprise. "Is zat so? I had no idea Ankh-Morpork raised such virtuous young men."

"Well, there is virtue, and there is honesty. The two are sometimes mutually exclusive, I've found. Which do you favor, Ladyship?"

Now she was outright shocked, and a little inner Havelock, the one who felt everything that a Vetinari didn't show outwardly, grinned.

"I favor truth, in votever light you may see it," she said slowly.
"Ah yes. Subjectivity. Cyril's very interested in truth, aren't you, Cyril?" he asked. Cyril held up a finger, finally checkmated Selachii, and turned in his seat.

"I'm a student of truth," Cyril said. "I don't believe in lies. Even the sort we tell every day -- you know, the harmless ones."

"Telling your aunt how much you like the birthday present," Havelock prompted.

"Yes. Or making up excuses. That's even worse, you see. Because it's trying to make lies interesting. A lie can run round the world before the truth has got its boots on, you know," he added. Selachii rolled his eyes, and began re-setting the chessboard. "I believe that humanity can only advance if the utmost truth is told on every occasion."

"Vell, zere are of course those of us who believe humanity's advancement may not be all it's cracked up to be," Margolotta said. Cyril stared at her.

"Sybil, what do you think?" Havelock asked. Sybil looked up from her journal.

"About what?"

"Truth."

"Dragons," she said succinctly. Everyone looked at her.

"Dragons, Sybil?" Cyril asked.

"Yes. When you breed for show quality in dragons, you see, you can't be concerned about everything. You have to go slowly. You breed out a tendency towards floppy ears, and then you breed out the, well, the nerves -- otherwise they explode all the time. Truth's like dragons. You can't force all of it all at once, or it just explodes."

"Bang," said Havelock gravely. "Do you agree, ladyship?"

"I'm afraid I'm not very partial to dragons," Margolotta said. She gave him a sharklike smile.

"Hm. The judges say it's fair. Havelock Vetinari, 2; Lady Margolotta, 1."

"No, they're thin-blooded, aren't they?" Havelock asked. Rebound; the score is 3 to 1.

This was better than creaming Cyril at chess. Loads better.

He was moving more carefully now, because Margolotta was beginning to get lost in the conversation; she didn't understand what he was doing, and when that happens, people tend to lash out. Find the lever.

"A moot point, I suppose, at any rate," he continued. If he could scare her into leaving them alone, it would be better for all concerned. "At least when speaking of debt. Cyril and Charlie and I, you know, graduated from a school whose motto is 'No death without payment'. Very big on keeping ledgers, the Assassins."
"Not much on ethics, though," Cyril agreed. *Aha, and the civilian takes the field for himself. That was almost a point for you, Cyril. Good lad.*

"No. But then, ethics are not traditionally part of the worries of the ruling class. After all, if we do it, it must be all right. Chess, Cyril?" he asked. Cyril yawned.

"No thanks, Havelock, we're too evenly matched. It always takes hours to play. I'm for bed."

The others began to make their excuses as well, and Havelock followed Cyril and Selachii up a creaking set of stairs, to a tower with a rimwards view of the land below Uberwald. Igor'd left a candle in his room.

*And the competition is called to a halt on account of darkness. Ball still in play; it's still anybody's game, Ladyship...*

He did some few small chores, and then composed himself to read; he customarily retired later than the others. His trunk had been left at the foot of the rather large, ornate, nightmarishly decorated bed, and before he moved it, he retrieved his own book. It wasn't as expensive as some of Lady Margolotta's, but it was newer. 'Thoughts Upon Quite Nearly Everything' by Leonard da Quirm. Vetinari thought he would like to meet Leonard, someday.

He'd broken off a spar from the inside of his trunk, and now laid it on the table where he was reading.

Sometimes a lever is nothing more than a sharp bit of wood.

***

It was two hours later, nearing midnight, when Havelock looked up from his book. There was a quiet scratching at the window, and a mild curse. He smiled.

Ten minutes afterward, the candle blew out, and one of the wooden panels behind the tapestries which covered the walls gave a very suspicious thump. He had matches in his trunk, but he might as well try to sleep; he marked his place, closed the book, and crossed to the bed. He'd barely settled himself on it when there was a noise like a loose guitar string being plucked, or possibly a spring going awry somewhere in some complicated mechanism.

Finally, there was a knock at the door. He sat up, and tilted his head.

"Come in," he said.

Margolotta opened the door. She was slightly damp; otherwise she seemed perfectly at ease, though he noted a trace of dust on the hem of her dress.

"Zis is not according to zer vay things are done," she said, mildly.

"I'm sorry, I'm foreign, and we seem to have come to a cultural crossroads," he answered. "In the big city, your Ladyship, a gentleman locks his window before he goes to bed at night."

"There vas no lock on zer window."

"But there is now," said Havelock. "And my trunk, you will notice, has been stored under the bed. Unfortunately on top of the trap-door, but I'm sure those things aren't in use anymore."

"You...you barbarian Morporkian!" snarled Margolotta.
"Ladyship, please. My companions are asleep nearby, and I'm sure I wouldn't want them to think I had a woman in my room."

"They don't think at all," she snapped.

"Quite. I notice their windows are unlocked, their secret-corridor entrances un-barred by heavy writing desks. Of course, both men will wake tomorrow morning rather surprised to find cloves of garlic in their bedclothes -- it's a little trick of mine."

"You're not supposed to reason about it," she said. "It wouldn't kill you to show a little willing."

"If by 'willing' you mean 'neck', then I beg to differ."

"How old are you, Mister Vetinari?" she asked suddenly. He looked at her.

"How old are you?"

"Old enough to know how z'er game is played," answered Margolotta.

"Aha, but are we playing the same game, Ladyship? I'm playing the one where I prevent you from snacking upon my traveling companions. What game are you playing?"

She set her jaw. He nodded.

"I'm nineteen. And it's Lord Vetinari."

"So young, to be so world-veary," she said.

_Hmmm. Apparently the Ladyship has a secret weapon. The score is three to two, with six hours left before dawn._

"I don't think I've seen enough of the world to be weary of it," said Havelock cautiously. "Though I must say the bits I have seen thus far --"

"I haff been under zer impression that things vere not as they are," Margolotta continued. "I don't normally get anyone bright enough to outsmart me, even when they think they vant to."

"The bright ones, Ladyship, know how to repair a carriage wheel --"

He stopped, because she'd held up a hand, and waved it theatrically; a spanner appeared in it. She tossed it on the bed.

"I could have sent you packink," she said. "Igor could easily repair z'er carriage. But I thought you vere vone of zer...curious."

"Curious."

"Oh, ve get them all the time. They practically have to back up and run over zer pothole three or four times to break down. Then zer handsome man comes up to zer castle, and ve have our little game. I get vot I vant, and the others have an interesting sztory to tell, and possibly a fun scar."

"People expect this?" Havelock asked. When he was older and wiser, he would look back on this exact moment and, if not laugh, then be really quite amused.

"Yes, yes. But I can see I haff mistaken the case." She moved closer, snapping her fingers. The candle flared to life. "You would be a match for even a very determined predator, Lord Vetinari."
Havelock felt light-headed. People did this for fun? Trooped through the rain for the chance to be vampire-bait?

She really was a very beautiful woman.

"I think ve could teach each other quite a lot," Lady Margolotta said. "Nineteen, my vord. You vill be an interesting man."

_Ladyship scores! Tie game --_

Havelock bridled silently. It wasn't as though he was completely a babe in the woods. He was a qualified Assassin who'd fought in the rebellion not four years ago, and -- well, it was true that technically he'd never had what you might call _romance_ in his life, he was well-versed in the various facades of it required of one by society.

"Were you an interesting woman?" he asked, and saw his bolt hit home. Four to three, but the edge was slipping now.

"What I vas does not concern us. Ve are discussing vot ve are. How did you gain so much power over your companions? And myself? I vant to know. I have never seen anyzing like zat."

He couldn't help himself; it was born-in, this thing. "Power? Any thug has power." He waved a hand, demonstrating with long, pale, precise fingers. "Power is never in short supply. If you don't have it, you can hire it. I closed up all your options, and forced you to knock on my door. That made this my room, and you a visitor here only by my permission. That's not power; it's control."

She regarded him for a moment; she appeared to be thinking entirely new thoughts, which he imagined for a vampire was rather unusual.

"And vot vould it take to lose zat fine sense of control, Lord Havelock Vetinari?" she asked.

"More than you can provide, I'm afraid," he answered, with all the arrogance of the young.

"Is it so?" said Margolotta. "Are you szure?"

Her dress slipped from her shoulders, seemingly of its own accord. It had clung to her hips, but it did not stop now when it reached them.

_Ah yes_, said a small, detached voice inside him, while the rest of his brain was busily crossing its signals. _Aunt told you about this. It's the one thing a woman almost always has over a man, if she chooses to use it._

_Score's tied again. The lad's making a valiant effort..._

It was weakness, he knew that, he understood that; but in typical Vetinari fashion, he embraced the weakness, made it his own, and gained some little modicum of control back with it.

"I think," he said, as she moved closer to the bed, "You've learned your first lesson, Ladyship."

***

_Vimes's eyes narrowed. "You've met him, haven't you?"
"Yes.""
"And taught him all he knows, right?"
She blew smoke down her nostrils and gave him a radiant smile. "I'm sorry? You think _I_ taught..._
Charlie Selachii was not, by any stretch of the imagination, an observant man, but even he couldn't help notice that Lady Margolotta had a particular affinity for thick, dark curtains. None of the windows in the dining room were open enough to let more than a sliver of light in, and it was obvious that Igor was well-used to the situation.

"I say, couldn't we have some light in here?" he asked, as Igor wheeled several covered dishes into the room. "I think it's probably a nice day out..."

"Mithtreth doethn't believe in thunlight in the morning. Bad for the eyeth," Igor replied. "Will thur have thautageth?"

Selachii wiped his cheek. "Eggs for me, thank you. Good morning, Cyril!"

"Morning, Selachii," came Cyril's surly reply. He was not a morning person. "Is it me, or are the Uberwaldean beds --"

"Carved by a mad cuckoo-clock maker? I think so."


Sybil, who had quietly accepted a plateful of sausages from Igor, noted to herself that there were several areas of Ankh-Morpork where Cyril would not have a terrifically long life-expectancy, either. Alice seemed to be thinking the same thing. Sara was staring vacantly at a point on the wall while she ate; Sara was also not a morning person.

Havelock was nowhere to be seen.

"Good morning, ladies, gentlemen. I hope your night vos restful," said Lady Margolotta, appearing in the doorway.

"The view was..." Sybil pondered how to put it. "There was an awful lot of it," she said finally.

"Yes, von of the advantages of livink on a cliff," Margolotta said graciously. "I'm afraid I have already eaten, but I do hope you vill enjoy your breakfast. I shall see you in the drawing room after breakfast, and ve can arrange for the carriage to take you into Bonk."

"Here, do you know where Havelock's got to?" Selachii called after her. She stopped in the doorway.

"Perhaps he is sleepink in," she said, and vanished into the hallway's shadows.

"Havelock never sleeps in," Selachii said thoughtfully.

"Shouldn't think he ever sleeps," Cyril added.

"Must be the soft Uberwaldean beds," Sybil murmured. Alice shot her a grin.

"Does it occur to you, Cyril, that Havelock's a bit of a nut job?" Selachii asked. Cyril snorted.

"I wouldn't call him a nut job. That would be passing up the perfect opportunity to use the phrase"
'marbles-rolling bonkers'."

"I don't think he's insane," Alice said stoutly.

"You wouldn't," Selachii said nastily.

"Now then," Sybil murmured, in gentle remonstration.

***

Havelock was not sleeping in; Havelock had slept very little, the night before, even without Margolotta's...distractions. At sunrise, he'd left the castle, and walked out to see the countryside. What he saw was, mainly, vertical.

He'd always been good at climbing. It was the one thing at the Guild that he'd truly been passionate about, the one thing where he'd taken his masters seriously and not simply paid lip service while going about the business of learning more on their subjects than they would ever know.

Now he was putting his education to work. True, he'd been an urban edificeer, but really, was there that much difference between the dissolving brickwork of the Tower of Art and the tattery cliffs of Uberwald?

Thin, deft fingers hooked themselves around a rock and he pulled himself up, legs scrambling for purchase on the sheer cliff. There was a ledge, here; you could see almost all the way to Ankh-Morpork. All you had to do was follow the roads which, obeying the landscape, began to distort into straight, direct lines about twenty miles outside the city.

He put his arms around his legs and sat, looking and thinking.

Margolotta was a vampire. Vampires adhered to tradition. She'd made that clear last night. It was expected, in Uberwald, that certain traditions be upheld. Havelock was all in favor of tradition if it contributed to the stability of life; this was simply a silly way to pass the years, playing tourist attraction to curious lads like himself from Ankh-Morpork.

Margolotta told him he was different. He was keenly, bitterly aware of that. He didn't need telling. She'd also told him he was the cleverest man she'd met in centuries, which was something of a compliment, but Havelock was wary of compliments.

Clever. Hah. Clever got you put in charge of five other brats on a trip you didn't want to take, away from the city you loved and missed, so that you could be seduced by a vampiress who thought you were only in it for the thrill in the first place.

She'd been curious, though. About what he thought. He couldn't remember the last time anyone gave two shillings for what Havelock Vetinari thought. Possibly because what he thought would send most people screaming for the comfort of drunken unconsciousness, but that was neither here nor there.

Margolotta was worth spending time on. She fascinated him. A woman like her ought to be able to break free of tradition. With a little tutelage, she could rule this part of Uberwald.

Oh, how arrogant. He was nineteen, what could he have learned in nineteen years that she hadn't learned in two hundred?

A lot, apparently, said a dark little voice inside him. Although he didn't know it yet, it was the voice of the man he was going to be, the Patrician, and it was already growing. He'd learned to
listen to it. It was arrogant and manipulative and never, ever wrong.

He could stay here. Margolotta was worth exploration. It would break up the monotony of the trip, and distract him from his companions. He could stay here with her, and they could pick him up on their way out of Bonk. He decided he could live without meeting Serafine von Uberwald and her husband.

Perhaps, he thought idly, remembering the evening before, Margolotta could teach him a few things, too. Wasn't it one of the first Patricians who'd said 'I am always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught'?

* Lord Winstan Fabbergat, who learned quite quickly that it doesn't pay to ignore current events, and was taught a new appreciation of the afterlife.

His lips curled upward. Some things he enjoyed being taught.

Most of the common-wisdom that Havelock had learned in life -- it won't get better if you pick it, a stitch in time saves nine, or the ever popular 'because' -- he'd picked up at the Guild, where he'd spent three-quarters of his life. The History Master had been fond of a phrase about this kind of thing: All we can do is sing as we go.

About time he learned how to sing, he supposed.

He could see the others, trooping out to a waiting coach, with Igor perched on top. Margolotta wouldn't see them off, of course. Not in the daylight.

He dropped down over the edge of the cliff, and began the descent back to the castle.

***

"You're what?" Cyril asked, blinking in the early morning sunlight. Havelock flicked the last little speck of evidence of his climbing expedition off of his sleeve.

"I'm not going to Bonk. I'm going to stay here for a few days," he said, his icy blue eyes daring any of them to object. "Lady Margolotta has an interesting library, and I'd like to learn more about the castle."

"Library," Cyril repeated, in a tone so expressionless that it went through blank implication and out the other side into innuendo. "Oh, of course, the library."

"You've got to pass by Ladyship's castle on your way out of Bonk at any rate. You can pick me up then. It's not as though I'm the chaperone," he added, more for his own reassurance than the others'. He was not afraid of staying at the castle, but he did worry that Selachii might inadvertently get himself killed in Bonk -- possibly by the Baron, who did enjoy playing with his food -- and then Aunt would have Words on the subject with him.

"But you'll miss all the sights," Alice pointed out. "We're going to go to the embassy, and the Chocolate Museum, and meet the Baron -- "

"Sounds tiring," Havelock said with a small smile. "I feel I need a...a break from all this touring."

The other five exchanged worried looks. Havelock had never taken a break in his life.

"Now look here, Vetinari, I am the chaperone, and I say you've got to come along," said Selachii.
"I'm not leaving you in some stranger's castle to make a fool of yourself."

"A fool of myself?" Havelock asked, raising one eyebrow. "How, pray?"

"Well, it's obvious why you're staying!"

"The library? I hardly see how sitting and reading quietly would make me any more a fool than tromping around some back-country village in the hills. Well, I admit, it won't be all reading. I may play a game of chess, if I can stand the excitement."

"Your aunt'll hold me responsible if anything happens to you," Selachii said, as a last desperate appeal.

"Oh, Aunt knows better than to hold you responsible for anything," Havelock replied sweetly. His point flew over every single head*, as he'd intended. "My mind is made up, Charlie. I shall see you in a week. Enjoy yourselves."

* Except maybe Igor's, and then only because of the magnetic metal plate in his.

And with a bow, he began to walk back towards the house. Cyril and Selachii started after him, but didn't go far.

"Let him go, tiresome boy," he heard Sara say. "'He'll only sulk if you make him come along, Charlie."

No, Havelock thought, You would sulk if you were forced to, but I wouldn't. And that's the difference between you and I, Sara Selachii.

Margolotta was in the garden when he found her. Not the outside garden, of course, which was somewhat overgrown, but the garden in the cool, damp basement, where she was growing Black Scolpani in a dark-room and various nocturnal plants in a dim one. Pure, glowing white blossoms bloomed in the darkness. There was only one area that could be seen clearly; a shaft of sunlight fell into one of the planter boxes from a hole in the stone ceiling. A carefully cultivated red tulip grew in the little illuminated box.

Margolotta had changed out of the just-let-me-see-your-neck evening-wear, and into an old tatty jumper and dungarees. She had gardening gloves on, and, ironically, a sun-hat.

"What are they called?" he asked, leaning against the doorframe. She froze, her back to him, in the process of tending one of the plants.

"I thought you vould go vith the others," she said.

"That's a funny name for a flower."

"Szo you are stayink?" she asked, turning and rising. She held one of the white flowers in her hand.

"For a little while. I thought we could be...mutually informative to each other."

"You zink you have a lot to teach me."

"I think we have a lot to teach each other. Don't you? I could name a few places to start."

"Oh yes?"

"Sara Selachii just tried to shame me into going along with them to Bonk, to see some ridiculous
museum. But because she aimed for my pride -- "

"And you have no pride?"

"Aha, you see? I have plenty of pride. I have reason to be proud. But I control it, rather than letting it control me. The trick is not to rid yourself of bad habits. Bad habits can be quite useful, but -- " he had to stop talking; she'd kissed him, and it's difficult to talk into someone else's mouth.

"And vot do I have to teach you, Havelock?" she asked, when she was finished. He tried to catch his breath.

"That'd be a good start," he managed. She laughed, and handed him the flower. "Teach me about tradition, Margolotta."

"Vot vould you vant to know about that?"

"How to use it. How to shape it. How it becomes law. Why it's been allowed to rule Uberwald for so many years. Teach me about history."

"Hah!"

"Teach me how history changes things. It's difficult to learn, when you've got less than two decades to fall back on."

"Ah yes. I szee," she said. "Vell, don't just sztand there. There's spare gloves in the corner box. Ve vill work as ve talk."

He nodded, and set the brilliant white blossom on the soil, gently.

***

"It'll end in trouble, my lord," said Ridcully. He'd found it a good general comment in practically any debate. Besides, it was so often true.

Lord Vetinari sighed. "In my experience, practically everything does," he said. "That is the nature of things. All we can do is sing as we go." --The Truth

***

Extracts: The Patrician's Papers, by Havelock Vetinari, published postumously.

Chapter Two: Dialogues

Editor's note: The contents of chapter two make up apparent dialogues between a young Havelock Vetinari and an older mentor of some kind. Although scholarly research suggests that this may have been a woman from Uberwald with whom Lord Vetinari had an affair -- possibly the 'Dark Lady' mentioned in the dedication -- theories abound as to her identity. It is also a widely-held belief that the dialogues are nothing more than a literary device, intended to educate the reader through debate. Although every other aspect of the manuscript was perfectly edited for publishing, it is obvious that chapter two was only hesitantly included, and has not been thoroughly polished. We can only provide conjecture as to why...

First Extract: From 'Dialogue Upon Society'

*Explain to me manners. What are they?*
The social conventions we follow so that we can communicate. A structure of rituals, yes? Things which are expected.

*Things without which we are not admitted into polite society.*

Which is where everything worth doing gets done. So control must be relinquished, to some extent.

*Yes, but not to any one person. To a social ideal. One must never let oneself be manipulated by what another person thinks of one's manners. Therefore, one must always be better mannered than those one interacts with.*

Is that really possible, Havelock?

*No, of course not. Achieve perfect manners and we would cease to be human. Plus it would be terribly boring, I imagine.*

Rudeness is a human condition?

*It is the first human condition. To be rude is to behave as if one was untutored by society. From the Latin rudis, unwrought, uncivilized. Rudeness is the only natural state. But we do not live naturally. We are tutored by society, whether we like it or not.*

Oh?

*Well, do you live in a tree and eat only fruit and raw meat?*

No...

*And I do not possess a tail. But to return to the matter at hand. It is possible to make the attempt, or to give the impression, of better manners. My companions know this. They act as though they are never wrong, and lo and behold, they never are.*

At least in polite society.

*Yes. If they were to descend to street level, things might perhaps be different. But they aren't.*

We must never deal with things except as they are?

*Yes.*

***

**Second Extract: From 'Dialogue upon Desire'**

Vot is it that people really vant, Havelock?

*If I knew the answer to that, I could rule the world.*

Think about it.

*Men or women?*

Both.

*Sex?*

That is a young man's answer. Other than that?
Depends on which people.

Not as much as you would think. Consider what social institution has survived longest. Not manners. Before manners. At some point between descending from the trees and living in draughty castles on distant cliffs.

I don't know.

When you do know, you will never want for purpose. When people look for a leader, what does he promise them?

A new regime.

Why do they want a new regime?

Because the old one is wrong.

Why?

Unexpected things happen. Things are never safe.

They are unstable.

Yes. Oh. Oh...

You see it now?

Tradition. Tradition is what people want. Of course. Of course. That's why Uberwald never changes. Too much tradition. And Ankh-Morpork lost its tradition when the king lost his head --

They think they want good government and justice for all, yet what is it they really crave, deep in their hearts?

Only that things go on as normal and tomorrow is pretty much like today.

Good boy.

***

Lady Margolotta didn't have a bed. She had a coffin. It was a nicely-padded coffin with the finest silk lining that money could buy, but it was still a coffin, and it gave Havelock nerves. So they'd agreed that he ought to stay in the high guest room, although he took the lock off the window and unbarred the secret entrance. Margolotta still came in that way, for the look of the thing, but it was acknowledged that this wasn't, strictly speaking, necessary.

Now he lay, staring up at the terrifyingly fancy canopy, arms behind his head, once again...thinking.

Margolotta had asked him about that. She'd caught him staring off into space, waiting for her to make a move in the chess game that'd been going on for three days now, between meals and other activities. She'd asked him why he spent so much time inside his own head. Because there was so much to think about, he'd answered, and she'd seemed satisfied.

He hadn't been. Of all the questions she'd asked him -- both as student and teacher -- in the days since his companions left for Bonk, that one bothered him the most. Obviously not everyone thought like him. As far as he could tell, nobody did. But surely there were others who preferred
thoughts to mindless chatter? Margolotta seemed to. This da Quirm fellow, now, he must think a mile a minute. The wizards, too, they spent all their time in the University, that must inspire thought. *

* Which just goes to show that Havelock had a lot to learn about wizards.

The point was, if you stopped thinking, you got into trouble. If you weren't one step ahead of the crowd, what good were you?

It was all right for Selachii and Cyril and Sara and Alice and Sybil not to think, because they seemed to amble through life never really causing trouble, or getting into it, or having to get others out of it. They were constantly on the knife's edge of chaos, as was indeed the entire city of Ankh-Morpork, but it didn't seem to matter to them.

It mattered to Havelock. Perhaps because he saw how easily one little shove could knock everything over. Or perhaps because he had a mind that was always hunting for that little shove, a mind that said it would be so easy to say this and do this and everything will be at your feet.

*If I knew the answer to that question, Margolotta, I could rule the world.*

And she'd told him! What kind of fool --

Not a fool. No. She was many things, but not a fool.

Igor'd gone into town today. He'd asked about the others. They were nearly done. They'd be here in a few hours to pick him up, and then the newly rented carriage would take them, and him, down past Borogravia and into the valley that led to Genua, where his aunt was waiting for them.

*It's too soon. I'm not done yet.*

And then a thought so shocking that he froze.

*I don't want to leave.*

Not leave Uberwald? Not go back to Ankh-Morpork? He couldn't remember a time when he'd thought of the city as anything other than his home. All through the tour, which was a good two months already, he'd thought with longing of going home. He had learned a great deal and seen at least four of the eight wonders of the Disc, but the whole time, while he baited Cyril and ignored Alice and conspired with Sybil, he'd been counting the hours until they were back in Ankh-Morpork.

He slid out of bed, carefully, and glanced back to make sure he hadn't woken Margolotta. She'd be up soon enough anyway.

Trousers...shirt...cuff-links...

He wished, not for the first time, that there was one single mirror in this blasted castle. He had no idea if he was shaving his entire face or just bits of it. He sighed, and ambled down to the drawing room.

It was his move at the chessboard. He'd spent the first day -- well, night, really, since Margolotta slept when the daylight was strongest -- the first night of the game testing, circling, trying to understand her strategies. He didn't realize until he was almost asleep that night -- day -- that she was doing the same.
She was a match for him. It was unprecedented in his experience.

Now he picked up one of the bishops and considered it. He liked bishops. They moved obliquely. They had subtlety. Most people, when they look at a checkered board, can only think in straight lines -- up, down, left, right. They tend to forget about bishops.

He touched the square where the bishop had been, and drew a diagonal up the board to one of Margolotta's knights. The bishop clicked when he set it down.

He left it a square away from taking the other piece. Sometimes it is better to show what you could have done, than to actually do it.

Margolotta would notice he'd moved. She always did.

"I cannot bear chess before breakvast."

He blinked. How long had he been standing at the chess board?

Margolotta was standing behind one of the low couches, a wine-glass in her hand. It was tacitly understood that Havelock, being her companion, was not an entree, and so she'd resorted to other methods that he didn't inquire too deeply about.

"Hunger makes you sharp," he said.

"Assassins' Guild saying?"

"Their excuse for small portions in the dining hall."

She came to look at the chess-board, and laughed.

"Very good, Havelock. I like that. It has sztyle."

"We won't finish the game."

"Oh no?"

"I'm leaving in a few hours. Selachii and the rest are coming to get me."

"Sztay here. At least until the game is finished."

He felt her hands on his shoulders, her cheek between his shoulderblades.

"You haven't taught me everything you know," she said quietly.

"Neither have you."

"Pretty vell nearly." He let himself be turned to face her. "Stay until zer game is done. You can follow your friends in a veek or two."

"It wouldn't be fair."

"To whom?"

"Either of us. I'd play for a draw."

"Vould that be so bad?"
"I never play for draws, Margolotta. If I don't leave now, I won't ever. I have to leave. I wouldn't be happy like this. You wouldn't be happy with me."

Margolotta laughed, but she was nervous now. "Vhy? Vhy wouldn't you be happy?"

"The same reason I couldn't have let you in through the window on the first night we came here. I can't respect tradition, not when it's like this."

"Like what?"

"Like...like an excuse for not doing anything! Don't you see? I've been trying to explain it for a week."

"Vell, I'm sorry if I'm being stupid," she said angrily.

"Are you, Margolotta?" he asked, well aware that it was anger talking now and not good sense, but he couldn't seem to stop. "I don't think you really wanted to learn. I think you enjoy the stupid life."

"Vot?" asked Margolotta, in a dangerously low voice.

"I think you like being a...a roadside attraction!" said Havelock. "I think it's easy. You talk about feeding off people, making them docile, but it makes you tame too, doesn't it? It's the easy road. Be The Vampire. Embrace The Night. It's a mindless way to live, Margolotta, and you're smart enough to choose the better option."

"Vot, like you? Bearing the veight of the Disc on my shoulders because I can?"

"Yes! Because if we don't, who will? Uberwald's just a little assortment of fifedoms constantly at war with each other over who gets the biggest bowl of fatsup -- "

"Und Ankh-Morpork is so very civilised? I hear zey have secret police, und political killings, und -- "

"But we don't pretend that it's the right way to do it because it's the way things have always been done. People protest."

"Until they cut out their tongues."

"At least they used them. Listen to me, Margolotta! Right now I've been sent out of the city because it's dangerous to be a nobleman under Snapcase. The others have families to protect them, none of them are titled lords or ladies yet. My parents died when I was a very young man. From the moment I became Lord Vetinari it was my job to protect the city. Twelve years old! Twelve years old and I thought I ought to be on the walls, defending Ankh-Morpork against invaders. But the poison's coming from inside the city, and I can't defend against that. So here I am. In Uberwald. I know about uselessness, Margolotta, but you have power in this place. You could -- "

"I am not villing to take that risk."

"Of course not. You're not really alive."

He was sorry as soon as he'd said it; the hurt that crossed her face was quickly hidden, but it was all too real.

"Look at that, Margolotta," he said quietly. "You did make me lose control. Well done. I think your training is complete. You won't ever have the courage to use it, but at least it'll be something to
think about on the long Uberwald nights."

And he left. Out into the sunlight, where she couldn't follow. By the time he came back for his trunk, she was gone. Igor said she was down in the garden.

There was a single white flower, like a delicate reproach, on the bed.

When he arrived home, he found a book in his trunk, as well. *A History of Uberwald*, by Antoni Zhalien.

Well, she had promised to give him a book when he left.

***

The next time he heard from Margolotta, it was an official document of congratulations; he didn't know how word had got back to Uberwald so quickly, but he was sure she had her sources. Everything about it was formalised -- the neat, copperplate writing, heavy official paper, dead ceremonal words. *Lady Margolotta begs to congratulate his Lordship on his appointment to the office of Patrician of Ankh-Morpork...*

Even then, it meant more to him than all the letters from the guilds combined*. He wasn't a great man for keeping things, but he put it in the *History of Uberwald*, and it was still in his bookshelf, next to his desk in the Oblong Office.

* Even the one from the Assassins' guild, about how proud he'd made them all and how they hoped this would be a boon for the school, up Viper House!

Now, twenty-five years later, here he was. Patrician, sitting in the Palace, with the power he'd talked about -- yelled about, really -- during the last dialogue with Margolotta.

"We were all glad to see you safely back in Ankh-Morpork," he said. The Commander of the Watch, standing before his desk, nodded. "I understand things were quite...eventful, in Uberwald."

"You could say that, sir," Vimes answered.

"Still, you managed to come out on top, Vimes, as usual. I've ratified the trade agreement, and the fat should, very soon, be rolling in. Quite a keen negotiator, your Lady Sybil. And I hear the dwarves were most impressed by her operatic abilities."

"She's a woman of many talents."

"I agree. How is her health?"

He waited to see if Vimes would catch it. Sometimes he was surprisingly keen. Word had got around about Sybil's pregnancy, though Vetinari was almost positive that she'd told Vimes before his own sources had informed him of it.

There was a glint in Vimes' eye. Yes, he'd caught it.

"She's well. The holiday did us both good."

"Excellent. Now, I assume Carrot's been briefing you on the situation in the city, so I shan't waste your time. I have your report on your Uberwaldean activities...most amusing, I'm sure. You seem to have single-handedly upset hundreds of years of tradition in about three and a half days. Even for you, Commander, that is most likely a record."
"Couldn't speak to that, sir. I wasn't the only one playing Silly Buggers up there."

"I'm sure you never are," Vetinari said gravely. "I think that's all, Commander."

Vimes was almost to the door by the time Vetinari decided that yes, he did want to ask the question.

"Vimes..."

"Yes, sir?"

"I'm told you...had some dealings with the Lady Margolotta, while in the old country."

Now Vimes smiled, a smile that Vetinari, who usually had the upper hand in conversations like this, had never seen before.

"Yes, sir."

Vetinari waited patiently. Even a copper, when faced with such a suckingly silent listener, tends to want to fill the void.

"She's a Black Ribboner now, sir."

"How interesting." Vetinari fought another losing battle; yes, Margolotta was the one person who could break his famous control. He continued to stare at Vimes, while the young Havelock from long ago begged the Duke not to make him ask.

"She did mention you, sir," said Vimes, finally.

"Oh yes?"

"Asked after your health. She said you wouldn't have sent a fool to Uberwald. And that politics is more interesting than blood."

Vetinari nodded. "Thank you, Commander. You may go."
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

An Historio-Political Treatise Disguised As A Romance.

Chapter Notes

As a note, despite the opening prologue, Vetinari is not dead, nor does he die, anywhere in this fanfiction. The Editor's commentaries upon his death are solely for the sake of continuity.

THE PATRICIAN'S PAPERS
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Never in the history of Ankh-Morpork has there been a ruler quite like Havelock Vetinari. If I had not with my own eyes witnessed his burial, I would not describe him as a cold, calculating, heartless, ruthless ruler. But, since I have, I can. He is dead. Really. We're sure this time.

In his decades of service to the city, Vetinari never hesitated to eliminate any threat, destroy any rival to Ankh-Morpork's power, and arrest and imprison any street mime unlucky enough to draw his attention. His relationship with his city was precarious at best; he survived being arrested for treason and attempted murder, attacked by a dragon, and at least two meals, that we know of, cooked by C.M.O.T. Dibbler.

He was a man of few vices, if any, and even fewer virtues. His great accomplishment was the transformation of Ankh-Morpork into the Disc's major political power. His encouragement of open guild activity, his calm acceptance of a multi-species society within the city, and his political negotiations both at home and abroad have set the standard Ankh-Morpork looks for in any potential Patrician.

The job is open, by the way. Apply to the City Council, Rats Chamber, Patrician's Palace, or send vitae c/o Commander Samuel Vimes, AMCW, Pseudopolis Yard, Ankh-Morpork.

After his death, the volume you are reading was discovered in notebook form in the Patrician's private effects. It has obviously been ready for publication for some time; indeed, the title of 'editor' is hardly more than a formality in this case. Some annotations have been made to explain apparent mysteries in the text, and some explanations have been added when necessary, but otherwise this is more or less an exact copy of the Patrician's manuscript version.

Apparently, The Patrician's Papers is not merely a political treatise, but also a journal of sorts; the progression of the writing from that of a young trainee Assassin through to a seasoned statesman is quite clear. Whether this is intentional or whether the Papers were simply written in his spare time is less definite.

Let me end, gentle readers, on a somewhat amusing note: If the Patrician were alive today, he
would never allow such a work to be published in his city.

-- Editor

***

Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins
Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own
Capricious monotone
That is at least one definite "false note."
-- TS Eliot

ONE: THE WATCHMAN AND THE BOY

Editor's Note: Chapter One of The Patrician's Papers is the only chapter which bears a date; it claims to have been written on the twenty-ninth of May, in the same year as the revolution which put Mad Lord Snapcase into office. There are two theories about the first chapter, which is told in parable format; one claims that Vetinari is himself the Watchman, already wishing for order in a chaotic city, and that the Boy is merely a distant way of looking at himself. The other holds that he is the Boy, taking full advantage of the riots to assassinate Lord Winder.

Obviously the second theory is ridiculous. At the time of the revolution, Havelock Vetinari was not older than seventeen. There is no reason to doubt the date; the parable reads like a young man's slightly romanticised version of events. Therefore, we can only assume that Vetinari had poured his desire for stability in the city into the character of the Watchman.

***

There was once, in the City of Ankh-Morpork, a Boy who liked to climb. He wore the city like a glove, and if he did not want to be seen, the city swallowed him into its shadows as effortlessly as a snake swallows an egg. Though with far less digestion involved.

This Boy climbed buildings, and spent his nights in the shadows, watching and learning from all that went on below. It was dangerous to be out, at night; the only men who took to the streets were the revolutionaries, or the Seamstresses. There were police on the street, because a curfew had been enacted, and those caught out in the curfew who could not bribe their way to freedom were often taken to the house of pain.

The Boy did not like this. Neither did his guardian, a Genuan lady of some repute, who said to him that when the time was right, he and no other should be the hand of the city and kill the mad ruler.

But then one night into the city came a man from Pseudopolis, a Watchman with a single sharp eye. With him he brought good sense and order for those that would listen (which were few) and he denied the men in the house of pain their nightly prey.

Which was bloody brilliant, thought the Boy, and from that day forward the man had two shadows.

This Watchman and bringer-of-order was not a bright man, not as clever as his enemies, but he moved in straight lines while the rest of the world moved in curves, and the Boy admired his ability to continually survive while doing so. In a time of riots, the Watchman lit the lamp over the Watch House and walked amongst the people as if he had not been the great general they rumoured him to be. The Boy watched and listened and learned, and shot a man who would kill the Watchman.

(This paragraph was apparently added later; it is in a separate sheet tucked between two notebook
The Boy would remember, in later years, that he might soon have been sent to kill the Watchman, for he was too ready to lead men and too good at the leading to be safe in the city. The Watchman could have told him that no such thing occupied his mind, but the Boy was young and impatient, and the Watchman could turn hearts to great works.

In the revolution, while the Boy awaited his chance to rid Ankh-Morpork of a madman, the Watchman held a barricade across a quarter of the city, pushing the rule of law further and further into the heart of the town and incidentally snapping up all the useful bits like the cattle market on his way.

And the Boy, no doubt, did his own duty as well, in the knowledge that the Watchman's order must someday prevail in his city.

But when?

***

Things had changed for Sam Vimes.

Oh, there was young Sam, of course, and a baby changes even the most solidly set of men, through a cunning strategy of sleep deprivation and emotional abuse.* There was Sybil to care for, because one does not simply bounce back from bearing an entirely new life and bringing it into the world. He had to run the house and make sure the dragons were fed and a million other things that Sybil had done without his even noticing it. He couldn't be at the Yard as often and wouldn't even if he could, an entirely new sensation in his experience.

* Because nothing gives you an inferiority complex like not being able to stop your own child crying at two in the morning.

But there were other changes which touched on his life outside of the house on Scoone Avenue, changes in the way he held himself, in the way others treated him.

Vetinari, for example. It wasn't anything you could actually see, and it wasn't really anything you could point at as evidence. But there was...not a deference, exactly, but a respect in the Patrician's eyes. Because Vetinari had been sixteen and had seen what John Keel could do. In that time and that place, yes; the Patrician never forgot the power of John Keel's rhetoric. Nevertheless, it was always difficult to tell what the Patrician was thinking.

He had an expression, learned young, that was as close to expressionless as you could get while still possessing a face. Vimes had never been able to crack through it when it appeared, but he had grown used to what might, in Vetinari, be considered moods. In other men they would be considered pauses, or possibly hesitations. Vetinari, for his part, was less likely to hide them. They understood each other too well.

There was no doubt that the Patrician was in a filthy mood this morning. He'd actually scowled. His voice hadn't changed at all from its normal low tone, but Vimes had definitely seen a scowl and now he was staring out the window at the city, which he always did when he was irritated. Pretty soon, he was probably going to use a metaphor.

*If he uses more than one, Vimes decided, I'm going to duck and cover.*
"Okraippenschet," said the Patrician. Vimes blinked.

"Okrai...?"

"It's an Uberwaldean word. It means the moment before everything goes all to hell."

"Aagraagaah."

"I'm sure I have a throat sweet -- "

"It's Trollish. Means about the same thing. Forbodeings."

"How appropriate." Vetinari turned, and put his hands flat on his desk. His left hand strayed to a pile of letters nearby. "I believe, Commander, that I am indeed having forbodeings."

This was unnerving. Vetinari having forbodeings meant that something was going to happen and the Patrician didn't actually know it was going to happen. When Vetinari had a gut feeling, Vimes got a pain in the neck.

"Could do a street survey," Vimes suggested. "Haul in some suspects, shake down some stools, dig out a few moles. Andre hasn't heard anything unusual, or he'd have told me."

"I do not think city scuttlebutt will be of much use in this matter. You may ask Sergeant Angua if she has heard anything on the howl. You have agents in the Sto Plains, do you not?"

"Officers," Vimes corrected. "Like to give me a clue what to ask them, or shall I try for the riddle of the week?"

Vetinari raised one eyebrow, slightly.

"Be on the watch," he said. "That is all. No pun intended. Aha."

"Hah," Vimes barked, hooking his thumbs in his belt. "Sto Plains means travelers. From Uberwald?"

"If you wish to act upon assumptions, Sir Samuel, I cannot stop you," Vetinari said briskly. "That is all, I believe. Good day."

Vimes would have pushed, if he thought it would do any good, but Vetinari's face had closed itself off when he mentioned Uberwald. Which, in itself, was more information than the Patrician generally betrayed.

***

My dear Havelock,

It is difficult for a woman of advanced years to consider anyone younger than, say, a dozen decades, as a fully grown man. I had thought to leave you to your own devices for a few years to see whether you prospered or perished, though I had no doubt you should thrive. I forget that decades pass quickly for the mortal.

Perhaps you received my letter of congratulation on your ascension to the Patricianship; though the mail was highly untrustworthy such a short time ago, I shall not doubt that this one, at any rate, will find you quite quickly. I suppose you, with your stability and control, have only yourself to blame for the speed of its delivery. If the original did not reach you, allow me to extend my congratulations now.
The recent ambassadorial visit from your Sir Samuel reminded me that I have interests in Ankh-Morpork, just as I'm sure my rather unsubtle inquiries brought me to your attention after so many years. I hope it did not stir up unpleasant memories for you.

Tell me, Havelock, do you suppose we could speak like civil people once more? After all, we did manage it for the better part of a week, once. True, we were much younger then. But as we say in the Temperance League, everything is taken one day at a time.

You were so wise, Havelock, so many years ago. I would dread to think what you could do with the power you have achieved, but I know that power is, for you, merely a side-effect. Do you still rule because it is your duty, Havelock, or do you take any pleasure from it, in these times? I think you must. I think you would not have sent the Duke of Ankh to Uberwald if you had not cultivated quite a subtle sense of humour. You see, I do know you still. I wonder if, as you taught me, I could find your levers even now. I wonder if you would allow me.

I hope you are well, Havelock. I do not doubt it. Well and clever and wedded to the city you cried out for in your sleep, so long ago, like a homesick boy.

Margolotta.

***

Office of the Patrician

To: Margolotta von Uberwald
Zer Castle
Bonk, Uberwald

If you would speak to me, Lady Margolotta, you should not write letters; I cannot hear you in them. You surprise me yet, as you always could, but I do not think you would come to Ankh-Morpork. So we must remain as we are.

I was a homesick boy. Now I sleep quite well.

Havelock Vetinari
Patrician

***

My dear Havelock,

Why shouldn't you come to Uberwald, if you are so desperate for my voice? The coaching roads hold no fear for you. I am sure there must be business you could attend to, in the mountains; the Low King has invited you to visit, has...he...not? I imagine a few weeks of your diplomatic mediation and the intertribal wars between the trolls and dwarves would stop, if only out of sheer terror.

Your letter reads rather like a lover's, you know. One hopes you trusted it to be delivered securely. Ah yes; the addresses, how very clever. Who indeed would open a package from Corporal Igor of the Watch, to a fellow Igor in Uberwald? I wonder, did you commission the removal of that hand to send to him, or did you merely take advantage of the moment?

I hear you have been injured and walk with a limp. Strange to imagine you an old man. You are old, now? But then you were always old. I think you would laugh to see me. Perhaps Commander Vimes has mentioned our little talks.
My friend Otto lives in the city now, and I hear he is gaining quite a reputation as an iconographer. He always was the obsessive type. He would, if asked, accept a letter in return for this one. I say this merely as an item of interest; even public figures such as yourself should not have to stuff letters into other peoples' packages to ensure their privacy.

Why not come to Uberwald, Havelock?

Margolotta.

***

Office of the Patrician

To: Margolotta von Uberwald
Zer Castle
Bonk, Uberwald

Mr. Chriek...such an interesting man. I do believe you are right, and that he has not read your letter or mine. I wonder what is wrong with him.

I cannot come to Uberwald. I will not leave my city. If you doubt this, I suggest that you remember our first night in the high bedroom.

Havelock Vetinari
Patrician

***

My dear Havelock,

Such a short letter, to travel such a long distance.

I remember that you did not make me come to you -- you merely made me knock first. I came of my own accord. Remember, Havelock, it was I who chose you, not the other way around. You may control the way in which we meet, but you will never control whether or not we do.

Now, Havelock, what do you remember of the time we spent teaching each other? Do you look back fondly, or do you try to put it from your mind? Perhaps you do not care enough to do either. Perhaps, though I doubt it, there have been other, brighter flames. Have no fear, I have no use for rummaging around in your past and shan't bother.

I remember when you told me my lessons were finished, but I should never have the courage to use them. I think you already know that you were wrong. But then, as you said, you had less than two decades behind you. One mistake might be allowed.

And now they mint coins with your likeness, and you rule the greatest city on the Disc and send men to Uberwald to disrupt our quiet way of life. You said I would not come to Ankh-Morpork; I think you would not dare to come here, either. I think you know that your survival would be slim, with only the weak protection of the Lore.

Margolotta.

***

Office of the Patrician
To: Margolotta von Uberwald
Zer Castle
Bonk, Uberwald

If you asked me to come to Uberwald for your sake, not for politics or for mere curiosity, I do not know how I should answer. Does not that frighten you?

I have no regrets.

Havelock Vetinari
Patrician

***

Ankh-Morpork was bustling its way through the morning: doing business, running scams, stealing, chasing, shouting. It was a Watchman's paradise, but Vimes was too distracted to notice any of it.

What made Vetinari anxious about the old country? Trade was fine. The Low King wouldn't be leaving so soon after taking power, and no other countries nearby were powerful enough to worry Vetinari.

Yet.

Wolfgang's militia might have reorganized, but Angua would have heard. Some power-mad little king coming to gain Ankh-Morpork's allegiance? Probably not.

He stopped dead in the middle of the street and nearly got run over by a cart full of vegetables.

No.

It couldn't be.

Could it? She wouldn't. There wasn't any reason for her to come to Ankh-Morpork.

Except that the Uberwaldean Temperance League had an awfully large following in the city. Margolotta was a black-ribboner and, knowing her, she wasn't just a one-meeting-a-week kind of woman. She was an organiser of things.

Oh, bloody hell.

Margolotta von Uberwald was coming to Ankh-Morpork.

Damn, double-damn all vampires!

Vimes began chewing his cigar, a certain sign that someone was going to be in a world of pain by the end of the day. There was a clacks office a few streets down, and he could have messages out to the Sto Lat Sammies in less than an hour. He could put Downspout and Cornice on the roof of the little building where the Ankh-Morpork black-ribboners met. He could double the guard on the Pa --

The Palace?

Now why had he thought that?

Because Margolotta knew Vetinari. She'd admitted that much. Because she thought like him. Vimes suspected, though he had no solid evidence to back it up, that Vetinari had been a much
younger man when they met. Still Vetinari, though...

* As though this had ever stopped him before.

***

Havelock Vetinari, in his office high above the city, let his hand pick up the last letter from Margolotta -- let himself open it and read it again. He rested two fingers of his right hand against his chin, thoughtfully.

Politics was a dangerous game, even more so when it was tied up with personal history. He'd never faced this particular situation before and while he had long ago examined and laid to rest any...misgivings, about leaving Uberwald, he had not been able to resist replying to Margolotta's taunts and questions, even in his own cryptic fashion. But it was safe, wasn't it? She would not leave Uberwald, and he certainly couldn't leave Ankh-Morpork.

But she had left Uberwald. Else why hadn't she written? And his...hah, as Vimes put it, his 'officers' in the mountains had confirmed it.

Oh bloody hell.

His eyes -- the same cool, blank blue as always -- scanned the delicate writing.

*Do you look back fondly, or do you try to put it from your mind? Perhaps you do not care enough to do either.*

He stopped reading and set the letter down, folding it with care.

You are not nineteen, Havelock, however ageless she may be. You are the ruler of the most powerful city on the Discworld -- which, by the way, you should be getting back to ruling, since you know Drumknott is waiting in the anteroom to be summoned. There are four Guild representatives you have to frighten into submission by the end of the day and countless little reports to read...orders to give to keep the mechanism running smoothly.

You've wound up Vimes. He'll do as he usually does. Keeps him from making trouble, at any rate.

Get on with things.

So he did, as he always had.

*And now they mint coins with your likeness...*

***

*For more of Chapter Two, including the Editor's Note, see 'Room With a View' part 3.*

*And four wax candles in the darkened room,*

*Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead,*

*An atmosphere of Juliet's tomb*

*Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid.*

--TS Eliot

CHAPTER TWO: DIALOGUES

'Dialogue Upon Control'
Tell me how you have so much power, Havelock Vetinari.

*Power?*

You have power over your companions, you tell them *not* to do and they do it.

*Not always.*

Often enough. And when they don't, you have arranged things to compensate. Or to force them to do it.

*Dark Lady, you make it sound as though I were a blackmailer.*

Are you not?

*No. I am an arranger of conveniences. Blackmail, you see, is a crime of opportunity; only petty people who have stumbled upon accidental evidence are blackmailers. I am a tactician. One day I will be a politician.*

Vot is the difference between the two?

*One thinks ahead for himself. From the Latatian root *Tactitus*, a single-minded general. One thinks ahead for others, from the Latatian, *Polis*, not merely settlement or village, but 'city'.*

You know your language very well.

*One must understand what words mean, before one can understand what people mean.*

So you think ahead. How far ahead do you think?

*You have heard of people making five-year plans?*

Yes...

*Multiply by ten.*

You have not answered my question, however -- how do you gain so much power?

*Because I do not consider it power. Any thug has power. Power is a toy, to be hired and used and stolen. What you call Power, I call Control.*

I don't understand.

*Control is mastery of the situation. It is analysis before action. Control does not require strength of body.*

Vot does it require?

*Strength of mind. Knowledge of where the balance lies. Knowledge of the other man's levers, and how to pull them. Control begins and ends with the self. Control results in power, but power will not always result in control. And that is the secret that kings die for.*

***

Sun had set on the city by the time the last of the day's appointments left the Oblong Office with the sensation many people had that he'd only just escaped with his life.
Vetinari rarely had to actually threaten anyone anymore and it had been months, if not years, since the scorpion pit had been put to use. Reputation was enough, encouraged occasionally by the imprisonment or execution of some well-deserving criminal. It was the way that he had of looking at a person which indicated that, whether or not it was in use, the scorpion pit was well-stocked and needed only a wave of the hand to be...re-activated.

There was absolute honesty in the look. He had long ago given up middle-class morality in favour of political survival. Torture was a distasteful option, but it was quite clearly always an option.

That was the thing about reputation; you got it really very easily, but you had to work to maintain it.

He finished his perusal of the day's last report, signed it and added a few orders, and passed it to Drumknott.

"Will that be all, sir?" the clerk asked.

"For tonight," Vetinari replied. "I shall take dinner in my rooms, I think. Thank you, Drumknott, you may go."

The young man hesitated, and Vetinari, in no mood to answer Drumknott's questions, looked up sharply.

"Sir..." the clerk began.

"What is it?"

Drumknott, normally unflappable and nearly as unreadable as the Patrician himself, winced.

"Nothing, sir. Thank you."

He bowed and left through the door that lead to the clerk's anteroom where he would distribute the orders to the night-secretaries, who would in turn go about their business of keeping the city in order for the few hours that Vetinari was, in fact, a human being who had to eat and sleep like any other. He spent remarkably little time at it, on the whole.

Many past Patricians had chosen not to move into the Palace but rather to maintain houses or flats in the more stylish parts of the city, using the imposing central building of Ankh-Morpork's government as a sort of office-with-ballroom-attached. Vetinari, who even before his appointment to Patrician rarely went home except to sleep, saw no point in this. The Palace was enormous and for the most part unused*. He had a suitably arranged suite of rooms, including his plain bedroom, a small and selective library, a workroom that would put even the most well-equipped of the Assassins' laboratories to shame, and a corner room, really not more than a closet, which -- once the renovators and glaziers had finished -- afforded a stunning panoramic view of his city.

* Or had been, before Vetinari. Now it was inhabited by legions of clerks, staff who fed and cared for them, sub-clerks who followed their orders, agents in need of a rest (who were never there long) and the occasional spouse or child, because even bureaucrats breed.

It was in this room that he normally dined, if he wasn't working. The view was one of the few luxuries he allowed himself along with good-quality ink and quills, and steak for his dog, who ate rather better than Master Vetinari did. It wasn't that he could see anything in particular going on, down in the streets, which was probably just as well; but he could see at least half of the city, with its lighted streetlamps and crowded buildings, ticking away.

He sipped his water and allowed his mind to wander. This was the only time, the only place he
ever did.

When had he decided to become Patrician? Certainly by the time he took the Grand Sneer. When he had graduated the Guild school? When he had killed Winder? Good lord, before even that? What man chooses his destiny at the age of sixteen?

He could remember Winder's death with crystal clarity -- the actual event, at any rate. He'd told the old man he was his future. He could not remember, however, whether he'd meant that he was going to have Winder's job, or just that he brought the future with him, and the future had no place in it for a paranoid despot who couldn't rule a straight line, let alone a city.

Probably the latter. He'd been a bit of a romantic, as a boy. A mischief-maker, as well. He hadn't had a city's worth of troubles to keep him busy, and so had spent his time on more trivial matters, such as subtle, anonymous torments of Prefect Downey, or endlessly entertaining rounds of Confuse Cyril de Worde -- a game which he'd declared himself Grand Master of, eventually.

All of which had come to a screeching halt after his return home from the Grand Sneer. Hadn't it? He'd had no more time for games across the rooftops or his beloved edificeering. He'd had politics to think about, and staying alive in politics during Snapcase's reign had been training enough for his first years in office, when nobody trusted him, everyone wanted him dead, and the only reason anyone obeyed him was, indeed, the metaphorical* scorpion pit.

* Metaphorical in the sense that it was not in the room when people discussed it. Not in the sense of it being nonexistent. In those days, it had been very much extant: blatantly, even rudely, the exact opposite of metaphorical.

Was it politics, though? It wasn't as if he was new to that game, even young as he was. Or, was it that he was fighting with a new intensity, because he'd made the first true sacrifice of his life, for the city? And it had to be worth it? If he'd given something up, he'd better damn well reach the goal.

Sacrifice!

Not hardly. It'd been barely a week. A childish moment of infatuation with a much older woman because they'd seen eye-to-eye on a few things and had a few more things to teach each other. One didn't form grand passions in a week and certainly, being no more than an acquaintance, one couldn't consider it a sacrifice. Hardly a twinge.

The fact that it was still 'hardly a twinge' even after twenty-five years, did not occur to him, oddly enough.

He stood almost absently and walked back into the Oblong office, retrieving a book from the small shelf near his desk. *A History of Uberwald,* by Antoni Zhalien. A gift from Margolotta, after their last disastrous dialogue before he left. A warning, of sorts; Zhalien had been the last man to try to vanquish the vampire and had ended up in several graves.

Inside the book, a single letter -- her letter of congratulations when he was appointed Patrician -- and the remains of a pressed white flower blossom, one of the nocturnal sort that grew in Margolotta's underground garden. He wasn't sure why he'd kept any of it. He was not a normally sentimental man. But there'd been no point in throwing them out, either.

Now, compared to the single formal letter tucked in the book before him, a wealth of correspondence. Three letters, comparatively long, each more taunting than the last -- though really, calling him an old man at the age of forty-seven was a bit ridiculous, especially coming from a vampire who was centuries old.
It was as if she thought that now, especially now, she could goad him into some foolish action. What would it serve him?

Perhaps more importantly, what would it serve her?

He recalled the drift of her hands across his skin, and clearer, the sound of her voice, their conversations, the teacher-and-student dialogue that changed every so often from one to the other -- he would ask her about tradition, or she would ask him about power. Compared to those times, compared to the intimacy of brilliant minds meeting, sex -- even with Margolotta -- was a dull biological function, like washing one's hair.

He had learned as much from her as she had learned from him, but up until now, he'd put it to better use.

He put the book back, between the end of the shelf and his copy of Tacticus' *A Soldier's Life*.

Vetinari, in private, did not bother with his walking-stick, especially over short distances, but he always carried it with him. For one thing it was a heavy hardwood stick with a weighted brass handle, good for fighting with. For another, he was never truly in private and he would be hard-pressed to explain why he was walking without the stick if someone came upon him suddenly.

So it was that, when he reached the back-entrance to his rooms, he gripped the stick tightly. Someone was moving about in his library.

None of the doors but this one were ever oiled, and all had developed a warning creak that Vetinari was quite pleased with. This door, which led directly to his office, was for his own personal use, and therefore swung silently open when he pushed it with the tip of his cane.

Margolotta von Uberwald was standing in his library, examining one of his books intently.

He studied her, aware that she could probably hear and smell him, damnable vampire senses. She was as tall as he remembered, but gone were the children-of-the-night evening dresses and carefully done up hair, replaced with a sensible, conservative, summery dress, appropriate for early Sektober in Ankh-Morpork. She looked about as old as she had when they'd met -- a well-preserved early middle age. Younger than him, now. It was as though she'd stepped directly from his adolescence to here. Her black hair, still with its red highlights, glinted in the rising moonlight. Her eyes were shadowed, her body outlined perfectly.

What he had forgotten was how beautiful she was. The glamour she carried with her whether she wanted to use it or not.

"This is going to be awkward," he said aloud. She turned, as if he had indeed startled her. "I've had Vimes begin watching for you on the coach roads. What's he going to think of me when he finds you already here?"

"You did say I had the power to surprise you, Havelock," replied Margolotta quietly. "I didn't vant to disappoint. I am still, technically speaking, twenty miles outside Ankh-Morpork. I merely vanted to...arrive early."

"And in my rooms. Most visitors prefer to speak to my secretary before making an appointment," he observed. There was a pause, while she invited him to consider the appropriateness of calling her a visitor.

"Not even a rap at the window for old times' sake?" he asked, almost lightly.
"You weren't here when I arrived," she said, with an impatient wave of her hand. "Come out of the shadows, Havelock, and let me have a proper look at you."

"Your night-vision is excellent," he answered, but he did step out into the library — being careful to use his stick.

She was quite good at containing herself. Her eyes barely flickered as she took in the changes in him. The dark trousers and shirts that he'd worn in Uberwald gone, replaced by shabby black robes of office; his hair just beginning to show a few threads of grey. Lines in his face, and a goatee that was, it had to be said, showing more than a few threads. A limp, a cane. But still Havelock Vetinari. Wiser and older, but still him.

"How do you find an old man?" he asked.

"Not as old as I had imagined," she replied.

"Not a boy of nineteen anymore."

"You were never a boy, Havelock. And how do you find me?" she asked. "Have I changed, in your mind, over the years?"

"Not so very much."

She smiled. "Will you kiss me hello?"

"No, Margolotta, I think not," he said, slowly. "Let us not presume too much upon nostalgia."

If she was hurt, she'd learned to hide it better than in the past. She nodded.

"You've been quite a bother in recent months," he continued, seating himself in one of the library's hard wooden chairs. "I've had to watch my communications with Uberwald most carefully. You tipped your hand too soon, inquiring after Vimes before I'd decided to appoint him ambassador."

"I did not come to Ankh-Morpork to speak to you of politics," Margolotta said evenly.

"Then why did you come?" he asked, in the same quiet tone she'd used to greet him. "Why are you in my city, Margolotta?"

Her face changed in an instant, to a brilliant, charming smile.

"You invited me, Havelock."

And then she did walk to the window, and undid the latch with a flick of her fingers, and stepped out into the gloom, vanishing from sight.

He very carefully did not run as he went to the window to look out. There was a distant purple glow over the Tower of Art, and that was all.
"And so you are going abroad; and when do you return?
But that's a useless question.
You hardly know when you are coming back,
You will find so much to learn."
--TS Eliot

THREE: PATRIOTISM AND PRIVATE LIFE

Editor's note: Chapter Three, the first traditionally styled section of the Papers, begins to read more like the politically-minded, manipulative Vetinari of later years. Apparently, on writing this, he has completed his education and begun "private life" as the chapter title suggests.

***

Upon entering into private life and service to the city, be it honest charitable service or the less rewarding civil employment, a man may find himself at a loss for how best to present his unique skills for consideration. It is therefore advisable, though not particularly enjoyable, for a young man of means to arrange gatherings and salons for the edification and enjoyment of his comrades. In this way, a measure of the competition may be taken, and with some little arrangements, particularly involving alcohol or arsenic, a reduction of competition is certainly possible.

When a young man finds himself outstanding amongst colleagues, it is a natural occurrence for them to wish to bring him to their level. This is inadvisable, as mediocrity is as certain a death as poisoning and far less brief. Wisdom dictates that the capable, intelligent man have a care not to appear too capable, or indeed too intelligent. A certain amount of boyish indiscretion may cover a multitude of ills.

For example, should a man of twenty-one take to studying statesmanship, it is advisable that he study it under the watchful eye of a senior Seamstress. It is far more acceptable for a man of twenty-one to pay such visits for personal pleasure than for education and acquisition of his political skills. In addition, many a woman knows secrets she would never tell a man who shared her bed, but will easily tell a man who uses her writing desk.

If kept up long enough, it may be assumed that the young man in fact suffers from a particular vice and his enemies, of which there are always a multitude, may become relaxed, believing that they may have him by the brevi crini* at any time.

* Editor's Note: Thought to translate as "virtuous actions" and possibly ironic.

For the youth preparing to embark upon a career in the political arena, however, there are cautions to put forward. Arenas often contain dangerous creatures; it is the reason they are enclosed and separate. Patriotism in moderation is a fine thing and a true ruler derives his motivation solely from love of city, but beware the man who is willing to die for the city's safety. Such men are only half-hearted patriots. Death is far easier than a life of servitude and possibly even humiliation in the best interests of the city. All else is romanticism or idealism, neither of which have any place in politics except as the emotions of a man who is soon to lose his head.

When one meets a true romantic, one should retreat as quickly as possible to a more defensible position -- or force him to.
As children, we mock those who are different: the smart, the stupid, the ugly, and the unlucky. But there is always one child who has, in the past, done something so horrific that no child will touch him. Envy this child, for his has learned that one desperate act ensures a lifetime of safety.

Of course, when we grow to adulthood we sensibly and logically outgrow the irrational fear of the different. My word, yes. But we always recall reputation, and if we know a dog has bitten our hand once, we hesitate to strike it a second time. Soon enough, the dog will be left to its devices with hardly a thought for when, or how hard, the original bite was.

Reputation, it would appear, is nine-tenths of the law*. In life, especially the life of society, what is said about one becomes the truth instantly and immediately.

* The other tenth being a sharp, pointed stick with which one makes the reputation in the first place.

It is best to cultivate one dangerous habit, as a politician; it proves to the populace that ruthlessness may extend to them, if they are not careful. A small foible, such as an intense, burning hatred of street performers, can frighten even the most deadly of adversaries into hesitation.

Hesitation is all a true master of the game needs, in order to defeat his opponent.

***

Drumknott, who prided himself on having a butler's discretion as well as a secretary's literary sense and a clerk's organisation, was always the first person in the Patrician's rooms in the morning. As Lord Vetinari did not require a fire to be set in his bedroom, there was no need for a scullery maid and Drumknott brought his Lordship's breakfast up personally. He always arrived sharply at eight o'clock and generally found the Patrician awake with a pile of the day's first paperwork for him. On occasion, Vetinari had actually returned from his office to his rooms to greet Drumknott. The secretary didn't ask, and Vetinari never said, how often he slept. He had never, in better than five years' service, found his employer asleep.

And he did not find him so now. Quite the opposite. Vetinari was in his library, still in his robes from the night before*, pacing, occasionally stopping to touch the spine of a book before turning to pace again. When he saw Drumknott, his eyes strayed to the clock, and his face took on a look of intense, interested self-analysis.

* Black, of course, but the black with the mildly frayed trim as opposed to the black with the dagger-concealing cuffs or the black with the Assassins' Guild insignia on the breast, or the extra-black black for formal occasions. Vetinari was not a man who changed a good thing. Especially if it was black.

Drumknott, who in addition to his other qualities had a copper's instinct for self-preservation, set the tray down carefully.

"Morning, your Lordship," he said.

"Good morning," the Patrician replied. He stopped pacing but still appeared...indecisive.

"Brought your breakfast, sir," Drumknott continued, to cover his nerves. "Water and dry toast, hardboiled egg. And, er..."

One of the Patrician's eyebrows raised slightly.

"Cook thought you might like blueberry pancakes," said the clerk, miserably. "I try to tell him, sir, but he gets so despondent if I don't at least bring it up -- "
"A trustworthy cook is worth the occasional...personality quirk," Vetinari replied. He looked down at the pancakes -- swimming in syrup and butter -- with mild distaste. "You like blueberries, don't you, Drumknot?"

"Yes, sir, I suppose so..."

"Good. Sit." Vetinari waved him into one of the uncomfortable library chairs and took another one. He began to eat with his usual quick grace -- spills and crumbs were things that happened to other people. Drumknot sat, slowly, with the air of one who is trying to think what he's done wrong, and consider how badly he'll be yelled at for it. He could not recall Vetinari spontaneously inviting anyone to dine with him before, and certainly not a clerk.

"You've eaten?" Vetinari asked, after a moment. Drumknot toyed with the fork.

"No, sir."

"Then do you intend to?"

"If it's all the same to you, sir, I'd rather -- "

"I will be expecting official visitors from Uberwald, either late this evening or early tomorrow morning," Vetinari said briskly. "Commander Vimes will, no doubt, notify you. He'll probably be rather angry about it so I suggest you fortify yourself."

Drumknot took a bite of the pancakes. Very, very carefully, he swallowed.

"I think perhaps a party must be arranged. One of those tiresome political ones, with the dreadful small appetizers and warm punch."

The clerk was on firmer ground here. Being asked the impossible was par for the course; it was being asked to sit and eat with Vetinari that he'd had difficulty with. "Of course, sir," he replied, around another very small bite of food. "In the Palace hall?"

Vetinari gave him a mild, cynical smile. "Do ask Lady Ramkin if she would be willing to host it, would you? Tell her we shall make all the arrangements. All she need do is provide the space. I recall the mansion on Scoone Avenue has a particularly fine ballroom."

"Yes, sir."

Vetinari drew a notebook towards him, and began to write with one hand while he sliced the top off his boiled egg with the other*. "Send these to our agent in Uberwald," he said. "The first in the breakable code. The second in Leonard's Code."

* Anyone who has attempted this will go some way towards understanding the sort of man Ankh-Morpork required as a ruler.

Drumknot took the paper, read it, thought about it for a moment, and smiled inwardly.

"Pseudopolis will double its candle orders from the city if it thinks our fat supply is going to die out," he said.

"Will it? How droll," Vetinari replied. "Pre-emptive economics is a wonderful thing, Drumknot. That will be all. Do not forget your pancakes."

***
If you could break the Patrician's thought process down into its component parts, which is not something to be attempted lightly, they might go something like this:

1. People want reasons for things to happen.

2. People want there to be a reason that a diplomat from Uberwald is visiting the Patrician.

3. Such as, trade negotiation.

3a. Or a long-dead romantic attachment, which is rather less acceptable.

4. We have a very good trade agreement with the Low King, which could easily go south.

5. One coded message to the Ankh-Morpork ambassador in Uberwald, to be delivered to the Low King, indicates new negotiations in the works.

5a. While the unbreakable coded message indicates that the first should be ignored and not delivered to the Low King at all.

6. Assumption made by the general public, when given access to the breakably coded message: The Patrician's going to lose the good trade agreement.

7. Resultant thought: Let's buy while it's cheap.

8. Continuation: Let's buy a lot while it's cheap.

All his actions really did were improve business, deflect curiosity from Vetinari's rather mysterious personal life, and give Margolotta a perfect excuse to pay him a visit.

Vimes' process was much less complicated:

1. That damn vampire's coming to my city.

2. Angry.

3. Need a drink.

But since he couldn't have a drink, he chewed his cigar and waited, in the early evening gloom, for the coach to arrive.

Vetinari's clerk had been very polite through all the shouting. Especially the very loud shouting about Vetinari using his own damn ballroom, which had come to an abrupt end when Sybil cleared her throat in a certain way. It was a way he'd grown to recognise, his husbanding circuitry indicating that he ought to stop shouting now and let her handle it or he'd wake the baby and then he, that is to say, Commander Samuel Vimes, would be sleeping in the dragon house.

Now there were clerks and decorators all over the damn place, and a new cook had already invaded the kitchen, putting the Vimes-Ramkin family cook into mild hysterics -- which had admittedly been entertaining to watch -- all so that tomorrow, Vimes could have a party for a vampire.

Whereas tonight, he got to stand at the city gates and wait and watch for her to arrive.

He'd toyed with the idea of putting her through customs checks and baggage searches, as she'd tried to do to him when his party arrived in Bonk, but he decided against it. He just wanted to see if she really was coming into the city. Besides, in Ankh-Morpork the Law was...well, it wasn't exactly respected, but it was at least acknowledged, and he had no need to assert himself as Margolotta'd
had to do in a place where Lore prevailed.

So here he was, hunched down in his greatcoat, helmet plonked on his head, eyes and cigar-ember showing, in the chill of the early autumn evening, waiting for a vampire to roll into his city and start making a mess.

There was no way Margolotta was not going to make a mess. She was that sort of person. The question was how big a mess, and who would have to clean it up.

The answer to the second part was, depressingly and invariably, Sam Vimes.

He didn't move, didn't even blink as the black carriage approached. Blended down into the shadows.

It was the same one she used in Uberwald, though there was an actual driver holding the reins now*. The same black horses.

* One of the many Igors who served the noble families of the mountains; you could tell this was Margolotta's because of the scar patterns, and the third eyebrow.

He'd known she was coming, he'd talked to his officers in the Sto Plains and had Angua pick up the news from the howl. But until he saw the carriage pull past, he hadn't wanted to believe it.

Godsdamned vampires!

***

Uberwald didn't really have a reigning government, nothing so formal as the Patricianship in Ankh-Morpork, but then Uberwald was quite a bit larger, and the rule of succession could sometimes get a little dicey when you stabbed your predecessor and then twenty minutes later he rose from the grave.

The big ruling families had, however, gotten together and managed to arrange for embassies in some of the plains cities nearby. Genua had one, and Ankh-Morpork hosted one for most of the Sto Plains. As an acknowledged goodwill ambassador from Uberwald -- though perhaps stretching the 'goodwill' part of the term just a touch -- Margolotta would stay in the embassy with Igor. The humans who ran the embassy had not been warned of this, and so had not been given time to make judicious purchases of holy water or garlic to carry about their person.

They all agreed that Milady was nice enough. She didn't have obscene amounts of luggage, she brought her own valet, and she didn't shout at anyone.

Twenty minutes after her arrival, a slightly nervous-looking young man arrived on the embassy doorstep bearing a gold-edged invitation. Margolotta accepted it and opened it, reading carefully. Her eyes darted up to the unlucky delivery man, over the edge of the card.

"Lordship says I was to wait for a reply," the man said promptly. Margolotta smiled, displaying even white teeth.

"Tell his Lordship I vill accept zer invitation und I look forward to seeing him at the reception," she said easily. The man nodded sharply and very nearly bolted from the room.

"I see my reputation precedes me," she murmured. Igor appeared from the shadows.

"Mithtreth, we're being watched," he said, opening a small carrying case and removing
Margolotta's dinner, which it was wise not to examine too closely.

"The Commander? Oh yes. I wouldn't call it 'vatched'. We're being brooded upon. Let him have his fun," she said with a wave of the hand. "The poor man has to have something to occupy him. Now. Tomorrow evening there is to be a formal reception. I shall have a dress made here, in Ankh-Morpork; find me a fast seamstress and provide her with the necessary information. While you're at it, call in at the clacks tower and collect any messages. In the meantime..." she stretched, languidly, and grinned. "I have a dinner date."

***

In the office of the Times, people were panicking.

This was not an unusual occurrence. William de Worde, who had once valued his boring indoor job quite highly, now found himself living on a razor's edge of nerves that were fueled by coffee, terrible food, and over-work in large amounts. Somewhere, news was happening, and people were trying to mobilise to get out and capture it before it got away.

Otto, who had begun training other iconographers and was rather better at taking days off than his employer, was working busily in the basement office, arranging and re-arranging several sheets of iconographs for his first Ankh-Morpork show. It was soothing and, more importantly, it was out of the way of the running feet up above.

"My word, what a busy place," someone said. A face appeared over his shoulder. "Oh, that von of the troll, that's very good, Otto."

"Margolotta!" Otto cried, turning to greet her with a broad grin. Two vampires, smiling at each other, is more teeth than ever ought to be in one place at one time. "I didn't know you were in the city! Straazti villeben!"

"Vangoi, Otto. Straazti bigun smela."

Otto laughed, and gave her a brief hug of welcome. "Vot brings you to Ankh-Morpork? No vait -- " he held up a finger. "Diplomacy!"

"Some of us take pictures, some of us are in them," Margolotta answered. "I came at the kind invitation of the Patrician."

"Politics," Otto said delightedly. "You muszt let me take your picture -- "

"Oh, wait for tomorrow," she replied. "There is to be a big reception for the ambassadress from Ubervald. At the home of the Duke of Ankh."

Otto's grin, if it was possible, widened. "Zere never is!"

"Oh yes. Come, darling, we must have dinner und discuss it. I hear zed kosher butcher's in Long Hogsmeet has wondervul atmosphere."

Otto laid down what he was doing and led the way up the stairs. "It iz our first ethnic restaurant!" he declared proudly, over the noise of the press. "Zough ve have much trouble gettink anyvon else to appreciate Ubervald delicacies!"

***

And so the conversation slips
Among velleities and carefully caught regrets
Mingled with remote cornets
And begins.
--TS Eliot

FOUR: ASSASSINS

Editor’s Note: One would expect that this chapter, written by a man trained by the Assassins' Guild, would come rather earlier in the treatise-cum-journal that the Patrician's Papers appears to be. However, as Lord Vetinari never apparently took contracts after graduation, it may be that his first encounter with true professional assassination did not occur until he was well invested in the politics of city life. If we take his age at the time of chapter three to be around twenty-one, it is logical to assume that "Assassins" falls somewhere between then and his ascension to the Patricianship at the surprisingly young age of thirty-two.

***

In the upper echelons of society, there is no room for pity or mercy and precious little for kindness. A boy raised from childhood to regard his school friends as potential competition, and who is encouraged to eliminate the competition through the most honourable way the Assassins' Guild teaches, is the sort of vicious predator which a politician must constantly guard against.

Fortunately, with education come ideals of honour and truth, and these are very useful tools if one manipulates them responsibly. For those who do not choose to follow the path of Guild Honour, the world can be a very interesting place and will probably remain so for far longer.

There are, in essence, two types of Assassins, excluding common murderers and brigands. There is the Idealist Assassin, and there is the Effective Assassin.

The Idealist Assassin is the ultimate creation of society. He is well-bred, well-spoken, he dances gracefully and plays at least one musical instrument. He speaks several languages, and is at home in any company. He moves silently, he anticipates his enemies' actions; he keeps abreast of local politics, though we may be rather overly charitable in assuming that he understands their significance.

The Effective Assassin is all of these things, but he differs from the Idealist in that he is not bounded by certain conventions which make the Idealist the social creature that he is.

At the Assassins' Guild -- and this is not a secret to anyone with eyes and anything resembling a brain -- boys are taught not only to fight and kill, but also to do it with honour. They are taught Rules, and they are taught them young enough that even if they wanted to, they could not break these rules later in life.

It behooves a parent who wishes their young child to have a thorough education to teach them before their early schooling that there are, contrary to popular belief, no Rules that cannot be broken. Law only works as long as the people allow it to work, and honour is only valid in novels and sagas. Very rarely, you will note, do honourable men survive their own romantic stories.

The Guild has a very strict code, which says that victims must be inhumed at close range, must be given a fighting chance, and must, if time allows, know the name of the Assassin and who has sent them.

With these three laws in mind, it is ridiculously easy for a thoughtful man to defend his own life.
Without these three laws, there would be chaos. Hence the scarcity of the Effective Assassin, for he is a dangerous man. In addition to disobeying the code, he must have been trained highly in the politics of his actions, which is what passes for morality amongst men who have rejected the morality of society. You cannot care that you have killed a father; you must care that you have killed a man whose son may someday come for you. You cannot care that you have killed a Patrician, but you must care about why.

The Effective Assassin holds himself to a stricter code than any the Guild could write, but it is his own and if he has honour, it is only the most truthful and painful honour of selflessness -- that he does not kill for his own gain, or if he does, it is because his gain helps the cause he has chosen. Protection of the city, say, or the end to a war, or the prevention of one. The Effective Assassin must, if he is to be more than a bloodthirsty tyrant, care only for something greater than himself. He would willingly sacrifice not only his life but his dignity, pride, and comfort should it be asked.

***

The grand ballroom of the Scoone Avenue Mansion had not been used, at least not often, since Sybil was a young girl and her father held hunting parties there. Old Lord Ramkin had been a sensible if rather boisterous man -- the Ramkins bred for intelligence and good health, unlike most of the nobility, who bred for power or money* -- and he had ensured that the grand ballroom was airy, well-lit, and opened onto the best possible view of the mansion grounds. Vetinari decided, idly, that he would have to ask Lady Sybil to host this sort of thing more often. Besides, Vimes' reaction to having the people he most despised gathered under his own roof was quite entertaining, and Lord Rust had already lost a good pair of shoes to one of Sybil's dragons, which in Vetinari's mind was days' worth of amusement.

* Oddly enough, however, the Ramkins remained the most powerful and richest family in the city; there is something to be said for being smart enough to manage your money, and healthy enough to be powerful by sheer force of size.

He was just about to murmur a word of political caution into Lord Venturi's ear -- something about not announcing his dislike of dwarvish food when several well-armed dwarves of the City Watch were in the room -- when Vimes' butler, Willikins, announced "Her Ladyship, ambassador Margolotta Amaya Katerina Assumpta Crassina von Uberwald, of Bonk."

The Patrician noted with an inner smile that Willikins pronounced it "Beyonk".

Then Margolotta swept into the room, and it was difficult to notice anything else.

After several humorous encounters with the Seamstresses, Igor had finally given up and begun asking for Drethmakerth, which was marginally easier for him to pronounce, at any rate. When he finally found one that satisfied him, he'd given Margolotta's orders and measurements exactly, and the result was stunning.

**It's pink, thought Vetinari. It's so very pink.**

It was pink. It had a dark-red trim of bats around the bodice. She was wearing sensible flat dancing slippers, which were also pink. The dress itself was of the latest fashion, and flattered her immensely -- there were few things which didn't -- but its unnatural pinkness overwhelmed the senses.

Otto Chriek, who would normally have been taking iconos like mad, was on her arm. He'd joyfully donned traditional eveningwear for the occasion, but still wore the little smoked-lens glasses and had an iconograph-bag slung on one shoulder. Her dress actually gave his black suit pink highlights.
Vimes, for whom pinkness was immaterial, greeted her formally and sullenly after a gentle prod from his wife. Margolotta accepted the greeting and made her way into the crowds of people, most of whom were watching her. Otto gave her a pat on the hand and broke away, off to a corner to unpack and assemble his iconograph.

Vetinari lurked his way into a corner as well. He wanted to watch for a while longer before he spoke to Margolotta in public for...

For the first time ever.

He knew that people had carried rumours back to Ankh-Morpork about him and an Uberwald vampire -- first Rust and the Selachiis, all those years ago, and then the Watchmen who'd gone to Uberwald for the crowning of the Low King had revived them. Not many people bothered with names, but some of the assembled nobles had been watching him like hawks all night and had either bothered very much indeed with names or made shrewd guesses.

Why should I care? he thought. I'm the Patrician of the bloody city. I can do as I please.

Won't be Patrician much longer, if you think like that. Or if you're involved with a vampire. People aren't much fond of them, even now.

Involved? That's ages past. I should think I would be able to say hello to an old acquaintance and political ambassador without starting rumours.

Nothing you do is that safe. Everything you do starts rumours. That's why you do half of it.

That's why you'll do this, he thought. And set his drink down on a passing server's tray, and moved through the crowds.

"Lady Margolotta," he said, his voice entirely even. She turned from her conversation with Captain Ironfoundersson, and smiled. "So good to see you again. Let me be the first to welcome you to Ankh-Morpork."

"Lord Vetinari! It has been too long," she answered graciously. "I'm afraid Mr. Chriek has already beaten you to the velcome, but your thought is appreciated. Vot a fine city it is, too. As ve say in Ubervald, schmeltzen lakier privvi*."

* Loosely translated, "It has an interesting odour."

Vetinari fought down a wry smile. "Yes, indeed. A poetic way to put it, I must say. Have you been to see many of the sights, yet?"

"Ach no, ve only arrived last night, und I vas quite exhausted from the journey. Tomorrow I plan many things. Otto isz to give me a tour of zer Times office, und then the nice Captain Carrot has offered to show me the Colossus of Morpork. I understand it is qvite the accomplishment."

Carrot, behind them, saluted. Vetinari nodded gravely.

"I hope you may find time to tour the Palace tomorrow, as well? The grounds are..." he searched momentarily for a word to describe the landscaping of Bloody Stupid Johnson. "...unparalleled. And the Palace itself has a small museum, and quite a lot of interesting architecture."

"You must be very proud of it."

"I did not build it, my Lady," he said calmly.
"No, but it is your home, is it not? All the city, really, is the home of the Patrician. And I am grateful that you have invited me into it so graciously."

He was about to reply with something appropriately inane, when the music began.

"Vill you dance, Lord Vetinari? Or should I ask zer gallant Captain?" she asked. His hesitation was microscopic; the dance was slow enough that he could plausibly get by without his cane, and the last thing he wanted was Margolotta spending any more time than necessary with Carrot. He wasn't sure who would win a battle of wits like that, but he was certain that he didn't want to find out.

"Do you think I've made an impression?" she asked, once they were weaving slowly in and out of the other dancers. He considered things.

"That depends on what sort of impression you wanted to make," he said. "It's a very...interesting dress, Margolotta. Made in the city?"

"Oh, yes. I know it is rather bright, but black and red are so expected of von. And you cannot say that it is a dress in which I could be inconspicuous."

"Certainly not. One might say it is alarmingly conspicuous." He tried not to concentrate on the familiarity of this feeling, even across the years -- Margolotta in his arms, her keen intellect digging into his own, exploring thoughts even he hadn't known he possessed. Either one, alone, would have been tolerable; the physical and mental combined would be dangerous, if he let them.

"It vas certainly alarmingly expensive," she continued.

"Ankh-Morpork makes the best, and we charge for it."

"Do you now?" she asked, with a small smile on her lips. They danced silently for a few moments.

"Why have you come to my city, Margolotta?" he asked quietly. "You can't run away from the question this time."

"I did not run away last time. I answered truthfully. You invited me, so I came."

"You would not leave Uberwald, not right now, not because a man you once met invited you to."

"Vhen he is zer Patrician -- "

"No, Margolotta. Tell me. I will not be denied."

Margolotta's eyes danced. "You never would be, as I recall."

"Let us leave history out of it, shall we?"

"But history is a part of it, Havelock," she said, and he felt her hand, on his shoulder, grip him in a strong, iron grasp. "Do not forget vot I am."

"Have you forgotten what I am?" he asked. "It is in your best interest, Margolotta, to recall that I have ruled this city for years, without help or guidance, and I know how to handle a woman."

Margolotta laughed, the laugh of a woman at a political gathering who's heard a relatively funny joke. "You certainly do know that," she replied. "But if ve both recall, I vos the von who taught you."

"Do you expect me to blush?"
"I rather hoped you would. There's a first time for everything, after all."

"I will find out why you are here, through you or through other channels. It is easier for all concerned if I know. As long as it does not harm my city, I won't interfere."

"You've grown too used to city politics, Havelock. You are unable to take anyvon seriously when they tell the truth. I wrote to you because I vas reminded of you by zer Duke. I came here because you asked me to in your letters. If you didn't vant me here, you szhouldn't have asked."

"I have not said you were not welcome."

"No, you distinctly have not. At any rate, improving relations between Ankh-Morpork and Ubervald is merely a pleasant coincidence. I note that you have already put your own spin on things, ith your little rumour about the Schmaltzberg trade agreement going bitter."

"Sour," he corrected.

"Ach, forgive, I am not a native speaker," she said.

He looked at her, intently, while his mind cast back. They'd often spoken Uberwaldean to each other; he was fluent, and some ideas were more easily expressed in that language. He had tried, in his stupid naievete, to call her by some obscure endearment, but the translation had been rather awkward, and she'd laughed. Forgive, he'd said, I am not a native speaker...

I forgive, she'd said, and kissed him, and the conversation had come to a rather abrupt end.

"Zhraoi," he answered, before he could stop himself. *I forgive.*

The music ended, and she backed away, quickly, suddenly frightened by something in his eyes. He bowed, calmly.

"Thank you for the dance, Lady Margolotta," he said formally. "I look forward to seeing you at the Palace, tomorrow. Give your name to any guard, and they will make sure you are well looked-after."

***

Margolotta avoided him for the rest of the evening; she spent her time charming the other nobles, discussing politics, or dancing with one after another of the men of the upper-class, which did not gain her any points amongst the wives, but Margolotta didn't really have to care about wives, did she?

Vetinari, not to be outdone, spent most of his time in private conversations with various people, managing the city in ways that he could not achieve by sitting behind a desk and sorting papers. A tip here, a nod there, a rumour started or passed along to the right people...it all added up. He did it almost instinctively, after this long in office.

The carriage left him in the Palace courtyard, once the reception was over, and he nodded to the guards as he climbed the stairs up to his chambers. He almost expected Margolotta would be there waiting for him again, all things considered, but when he opened the door, only Wuffles sat patiently in the middle of the floor, and wagged his raggedy tail when he saw his master enter. Vetinari knelt and scratched the ill-tempered little terrier behind the ears.

A late dinner had been left for him on the table in the library, and he read through a fresh stack of reports as he ate, slipping Cook's gratuitous plate of sliced roast beef to Wuffles, who harried them
energetically with the few teeth he had left. Nothing too dangerous in the evening reports; one or two political matters that would have to be attended to, possibly employing the Metaphorical Scorpion Pit, but he did so enjoy threatening people without actually making threats. He left a note for the guards to be informed that Lady Margolotta would be visiting the Palace on the following day; he answered a brief letter from the king of Pseudopolis, including his next move in the chess game they were carrying on by correspondence (checkmate to Vetinari in twelve moves, but the lad was improving). He pondered whether or not Wuffles would eat the letter from the Thieves' Guild, asking for a rise in crime, if it was soaked in enough au jus.

He spent several minutes staring out the windows, letting the day's events -- both at the reception, and in the city at large -- tumble around in his mind.

Long ago, when he was younger, his mother had taught him a game called Find the Levers. It was a systematic way of understanding an opponent and deciding how best to deal with said opponent. Over time, it had become such second-nature that he rarely called it that anymore; he simply did it without a thought. These days, he played it not just against people, but against a collective city, and he didn't bother to keep score because if he was losing, he was out of a job, and very possibly a life.

It hadn't worked very well on Margolotta.

It still didn't.

Oh, dear...

***

"I am always sure that you understand
My feelings, always sure that you feel,
Sure that across the gulf you reach your hand.
You are invulnerable, you have no Achilles' heel.
You will go on, and when you have prevailed
You can say: at this point many a one has failed."
--TS Eliot

FIVE: CONTROL

Editor's Note: There are many rumours surrounding Vetinari's appointment to Patrician. Whether or not he did indeed arrange for it, it is almost certain that he expected it to occur, sooner or later.

In Chapter Five we see the fully-developed literary voice of still-young Havelock Vetinari, an intellectual voice devoid of its earlier romanticism and yet, at the same time, showing a thorough understanding of it. There is no doubt in the Editor's mind that this chapter was written either during or shortly after Vetinari's rise.

There is one apocryphal anecdote that states he spent his first night as Patrician writing, after which he destroyed the papers he had written. Certain singed scraps have appeared, over the years, claiming to be the Patrician's lost writing; none have ever even had their claims acknowledged by the Palace. Perhaps, undestroyed, Chapter Five may be considered the lost writings that were supposedly burnt so long ago.

***

But wait.

Why read about control?
When one has the power to read about so much more.

Burn it? His first writings in office? Not unless he had to...

There is a book, on Lord Havelock Vetinari's bookshelf -- one of many in his private library. A dreary volume on civic planning in Quirm. And inside, an envelope still addressed though never sent, with the dual wax seals of the Patrician and the family Vetinari. Heavy paper, the kind he still uses for personal correspondences -- not that he's had many, in recent years. Nor is this a recent letter. It has been pressed flat by too much time between pages, and the ink has begun to fade, but it is still oh, so legible.

Its existence has been all but forgotten. It was a long time ago, after all, and he was a different man.***

Lord Havelock Vetinari, Patrician
On the eve of his ascension to office

To Margolotta von Uberwald
Zer Castle
Bonk, Uberwald

My own Margolotta:

Is it not shocking? Will you not be surprised? No, you of all people will not be, though my acquaintances in the city most certainly will. Havelock Vetinari? That timid, quiet young man? Patrician? Surely not, why would they appoint such a wet blanket as Vetinari? Or perhaps they will call me a nutter. I would think the two would be mutually exclusive, but I have learned never to underestimate the general population.

The answer is, of course, that I have been appointed because those doing the appointing think they can control me, which is an illusion I have quite carefully maintained as I pulled their own highly visible strings. They think I will make an elegant, scandal-less figurehead. After all, am I not an ascetic? I eat little, I sleep little, I do not have a whisper of rumour about me -- except the carefully concealed ones they keep as blackmail, about my visits to Rosemary Palm's house of...oh, what a quaint phrase she has! Negotiable affection. If they knew that I go only in search of a quiet place to study, if they knew Rosie was an ally, they might be slightly more afraid. In the morning, they will see.

I have never known a time when I did not love my city. I have planned for this day all my years, it seems to me, but now that it is here, I come to understand that I have been playing at a game of soldiers, that my ambitions and plans have been an entertainment. Like my adolescent pastimes of tormenting Cyril de Worde (surely you remember Cyril? Tall boy, ridiculously obsessed with truth-telling? He has two sons now. I fear they will be either painfully honest or extremely good liars).

It has all been nothing more than a pastime. Some men breed horses, but I couldn't be a normal man, could I? I had to breed the perfect coup instead. Can I now live up to the ideals of the man I pretended to be?

I do not complain, I have taken this on myself. In ten years, mark you, we will be a force to be reckoned with, across the Disc. I know how I shall do this. The delicious anticipation is in actually accomplishing it. It is as taking a test, when you know you will pass; there is an enjoyment about it. But there is also a great fear, a great longing for a life in which nothing is more important than
what cravat I should wear to the next dance.

Joyous day, I shall never have to wear a cravat again. The robes of office are quite severe, and do not allow for much decoration. They look rather like something that belongs to a wizard too cheap to buy proper robes and -- once they have been fitted to me -- I suspect too cheap to feed himself properly, either.

I could write to you all night. With you there need not be an order to my thoughts. With you, I need not explain unless I wish to. How can it be that a vampire in Uberwald who has never set foot in Ankh-Morpork is the only one who could ever keep step with me? How can it be that you, who sacrificed the life worth living for Tradition, still understand me better than the keenest political rival I have in the city? In nearly ten years I have never found a woman worthy of competition with you. Some may be favourably compared, but none have surpassed your wit and intellect. But your flaw, Margolotta, is that you refuse the life I embrace. So until one of us falters...

Perish the thought.

I remain in some part, yours,

Havelock Vetinari
Patrician

***

For any other man, the morning's work might have been difficult; some of it might have seemed trifling. The anticipation of Margolotta's arrival at the Palace would have thrown our hypothetical Otherman into fits of impatience. But Havelock Vetinari, who had calmly waited through a war for the right time to strike, who had spent hours attempting to hold coherent conversations with Leonard of Quirm, and who on a daily basis read more useless information than the Times' Society Page editor, was not Otherman.

It was a fine day, only a trifle too hot, but the Oblong Office remained cool and dim as he attended to the duties of the morning. There were complaints, always of course, and reports from spies, and petitions for various laws to be enacted. He set one or two of the petitions aside for Drumknott, who had begun a wall in the clerks' anteroom devoted to the choicest suggestions, among them the Seagull Ban from last Tuesday and the Regulation Of Rain Act from sometime last year -- that one had actually been quite popular, and several hundred people had damply signed it, Sir Samuel Vimes amongst them (though he was sure Vimes' signature had a sarcastic air about it).

Only a man as attuned to his masters' moods as Drumknott might have noticed that the Patrician grew increasingly brusque as the day wore on. But Drumknott was busy, and the other clerks were far too afraid of Vetinari's sarcasm at the best of times, to notice an increase in it on this particular day.

By evening, he was downright sharp. It went very hard for the prisoners at the afternoon's sentencings; they'd still have gotten the same punishments, more or less, but, as they say, it's all in the delivery.

Sentencing had traditionally required the Patrician to wear a blindfold, to prove that justice was blind; several past Patricians, quicker on the uptake than their much more short-lived fellows, had been quite imaginative in their methods of concealing eyeholes in the blindfolds. Vetinari, who knew that justice was never blind but understood the human need for symbols, had chosen to do away with the blindfold, and instead wore a close-fitting black cap. He removed it as he stepped back into the Oblong office, smoothing down his hair and picking up his pen. The sun had already
set, and candles had been lit at his desk.

And Margolotta had not come to the Palace.

"I believe I shall work late this evening, Drumknott," he said, as the clerk followed him into the office. "Have dinner brought in around nine, if you would."

"I'm afraid there's one more appointment today," Drumknott said. He tried to appear as small as possible.

"I am not interested in any more appointments," Vetinari snapped, uncharacteristically.

"Yes, sir, but you did say Lady Margolotta was to be shown up, if she came," Drumknott answered carefully*. "She was very insistent, sir."

* It was one of those little moments when the correct phraseology meant the difference between a comfortable life as Vetinari's head clerk, and a comfortable but rather shorter life as a marksmanship target.

Vetinari froze.

One finger tapped idly on his desk.

"It would not do to ruin diplomatic relations," he muttered. "Show her in, then."

It wasn't pink, but Margolotta had certainly embraced the concept of 'tourist'. She wore a brightly decorated straw sun-hat, which she removed when she walked into the office. Her dress was vividly patterned with large flowers*. In deference to her Uberwaldean heritage, they were red and black.

* What appeared to be flowers, anyhow. It was best not to examine them too closely.

Somehow, though, she pulled it off. The flowers, the sun-hat, the pink, all of it. He'd give quite a lot of money to know how.

"Good evening, Lord Vetinari," she said. Drumknott accepted the hat, bowed, and left the room.

"Good evening, Lady Margolotta," he replied. "Have you had an entertaining day?"

"Oh, it vos all right. There are certainly lots of things to see. I vill have to acquire some gargoyles for zer castle, I think; they do add such a decorative touch to any building. I shall have Igor locate some who vould like the chance to travel." She seated herself across the desk from him, and folded her hands in her lap complacently. "Und how goes the ruling of the city?"

"It has not fallen into chaos. One might call it a good day," he replied. "We had expected you rather earlier than this."

"Yes, I know. I had to spend all day vith that walking Guide Book to Ankh-Morpork, in order to time this right," Margolotta said. His expression did not change. She tried again. "Vill you not at least invite me to dinner for my trouble?"

"Dinner?" he asked, raising an eyebrow. "I seem to recall once being asked to show Willing, and responding that "willing" did not translate to "neck" in Morporkian..."

"Shocking!" she laughed. "Surely you have some blutvurst about the place?"

"I imagine so. And certainly, since night has now fallen and Ankh-Morpork can be dangerous for a
woman alone in the city, one ought to extend every courtesy," he said thoughtfully. "Lady Margolotta, will you stay to dinner? I understand an underdone roast might be arranged."

"I vould be charmed, Lord Vetinari," she replied, graciously. He rose, and offered her his arm. He was perfectly composed when she took it. Perfectly composed.

There was a flurry of movement down the hall, as they began a leisurely walk toward the State Dining Room, which was used for formal occasions, and had one of those ridiculously long tables, with an ornate throne-like chair at the head. He knew, though he could not see, that the clerks were rushing to lay linens and silver for them. Undoubtedly someone had been sent down to tell cook to prepare something appropriate for Lady Margolotta. It had taken some little time, to organise the household this efficiently, but any man who could not run a Palace and set a decent table on short notice didn't deserve to be given the responsibility for a city. By the time they reached the dining room, it was laid with dinner service for two and several candelabras.

"Dinner will be ready shortly, sir," said an impeccably-dressed clerk, appearing at his elbow as he pulled Lady Margolotta's chair out for her on one side of the enormous head throne, then seated himself across from her. "A course of soup, steak tartare for the lady, and the usual for yourself, sir?"

"Yes, thank you," Vetinari said dismissively. The clerk vanished, politely.

"And vot is your usual?" Margolotta asked. "Roast pheasant? Stalled ox?"

"I'm afraid you have a romantic idea of what a Patrician ought to eat," he answered. "It is Thursday, is it not? I believe the entree for tonight is sliced fresh bread, with marmalade, and perhaps some walnuts if I am particularly hungry."

"Valnuts? That's all?"

"I like walnuts," he replied, unconcerned. "And the soup, of course, because there is company. Tomato, I believe."

There was a salad, too, as it turned out. Vetinari picked at it. Food which was green made him vaguely suspicious.

He was, however, past master at the art of meaningless conversation. He heard Margolotta's account of the Colossus of Morpork and the Dwarf Bread Museum, with its 'splendid replica of the Scone of Stone -- von might almost think it was the real thing'. He told her some of the history of the Palace, when she asked. She was quite good at small talk, too. He wondered why they bothered. Surely, if they were going to fill the room with nothing of worth, it would be more pleasant to eat in silence?

Perhaps not, he thought, as she laughed at some meaningless little joke he'd made.

"Now, it is far too dark to sze the gardens, but you must show me -- you mentioned there is a museum in the Palace?" said Margolotta, daintily finishing her meal. "I am sure it vould be most edifying."

"Certainly," he said, and again took her arm, and again led her through the Palace, his Palace, down the steps and through the throne room.

The museum of the Palace was small, and devoted mostly to portraits, sculptures, and important documents of previous Patricians. Margolotta was particularly interested in a painting of The Death Of Lord Winder; it took her but two minutes to find the dark black shadow, sword-in-hand, which
Vetinari had asked Leonard to "add" to the painting recently. There was a striking bust of Mad Lord Snapcase; it was unnerving how one eye appeared to follow you around the room, while the other appeared to turn crazily in its socket.

There were several framed letters, behind the bust. Margolotta looked at them with interest.

"Snapcase's correspondence. Some of it, at any rate. I find it instructional. He was a master at the art of the casual letter," Vetinari said, standing behind her. "You would never think, to read some of them, that he was stark raving mad."

"Yes...letters rarely betray our true feelings," she said. "They are so...orderly."

"Do you find them so? It is far more difficult to retract or twist a statement, once it has been written and sent. Not, perhaps, a pure honesty, but of a sort -- one can hold a man to the words he's written."

He wondered what he'd said that made her tense; after a moment, she sighed. "Is that why you never wrote, Havelock?"

The question badly disarmed him. It had been a long time since someone asked him a question he wasn't expecting.

Or didn't know the answer to.

"I...no. No, that was not the reason. I had not thought of the honesty of the written word, when we first...met," he said. "Or if I had, I was not conscious of it."

"That would have been an acceptable reason, though," she said, still staring at the maniacally even handwriting of the late Lord Snapcase. "I could have been happy if I had thought it."

"I am sorry I did not lie to you, then."

"Oh, don't be petty, Havelock." Margolotta turned to face him.

"Petty?" he asked, in a low tone.

"I did not ask you to lie to me. I merely said that it would have pleased me to know. It would have been better than thinking that you did not write because you did not want to."

He gave her a rare smile. "Why I did or did not -- "

"Do not say it is not important. It is important. Why did you not write me?"

Anger overrode caution, and oh gods! When had that last happened? "What more was there to say?" he asked. "I was nineteen years old, Margolotta. I was and am quite human, you know. I have not had three hundred years in which to learn not to -- "

He was ready for the swing, when it came, but not for the unearthly strength behind it. He could have ducked, but that would have endangered the Bust of Snapcase, and he hated it when people destroyed art. The ringing slap of her open hand hitting his defensively raised arm echoed in the tiny room.

For a second, he thought she might have broken his wrist.

"How dare you!" she demanded. "How dare you stand zere in your black robes und your smug grin and szay zat because I vos older zan you I felt nozzing!"
"You hurt me," he said, calmly, moving his hand and rubbing the heel of his palm. "Imagine what
you could have done to my jaw with a slap like that."

"You really believe that is true, Havelock? Zat I did not feel anyzing for you?" she asked, heedless
of his tacit warning that this was venturing into uncharted waters, and it was best to return to the
mundane.

"Come now, Margolotta. I know that you have a gothic sensibility, and it is charming in its place,
but it was one week. Only a little over five days."

"Und yet you can say to me zat you know vot I vos feeling?"

He hesitated. She had a point. He had simply assumed, she'd had so many more years than he in
which to...well, to do what she did best, which was be a vampire. She'd told him, back then, that
the Uberwald vampires were known for their hospitality, a very specific brand that did indeed
interest the sort of young explorer that Havelock Vetinari was not.

"I had never met a man like you in centuries of life," she hissed. "For you I controlled my hungers
and listened to your voice, I told you anyzing I knew about anyzing you asked. Nineteen! No
vonder you rule Ankh-Morpork now! Vhen you vere a boy you could have had vot you vanted
from anyone."

"I have what I wanted," he said coldly, because her words were beginning to frighten him. "I have
my city."

"Your city hasz you!" cried Margolotta. "You have nozzink, Havelock! A few books, a dog, a nice
office, that'z not a life. That'z juszt an existence. Control is fine in its place, but it's just as much -- "

"-- an addiction," he answered, suddenly gripping her elbow and pulling her close. "You think I
don't know that? You think I, who have sacrificed you and everything else for the city, don't know
that? But I don't regret it! Not one bloody minute of it!"

A small portion of his mind registered that he was shouting, and in this palace someone almost
certainly could hear him. Another small portion registered that it was ridiculous to have a lovers'
quarrel under the watchful eyes of several mad former Patricians, and this ought to be taken up
elsewhere, and at another time.

He ignored both.

"Damn you, Margolotta! You come here after all this time and you do this to me? I had excuses
then! I was young, I was stupid -- "

"You vere attracted to me. You sztill are," she answered, and suddenly he saw the calm that he
normally had, in her eyes. He froze.

This is how they feel, he thought. Everyone who's looked across the desk at me since I became
Patrician. This is how all of them feel. Like a thunderstorm that's suddenly come face to face with
the black apocalypse. Like an ant on a battlefield. When you feel the rage well up in you and you
look into those eyes and they're desperately, terrifyingly calm and knowing...

"You veren't stupid. You've never been young. You vere in love, Havelock. Zese things do
happen," she said softly. "It's not my fault ve only had a veek together. Another month or two and
you'd have figured it out."

He closed his eyes, rested his forehead against hers. "Then why didn't you write to me,
Margolotta? The roads go both ways."

"I didn't know it either, you arrogant bastard," she answered. He could feel her breath on his cheeks. "How vas I to know I loved you? You barely gave me time to think. And then there vere the years, there vos the politics, there vos too much to do. For both of us."

"I belong to the city. You know that. You wouldn't be happy. Neither of us would."

"You said that twenty-five years ago. You vere frightened then, too."

"Frightened? You talk to me about frightened, Margolo -- " he had to stop. She used to try that trick on him when he was getting pompous...

He had to stop because she was kissing him.

And then he was glad he'd stopped, because he was drowning in her kiss.

And then he didn't want to stop at all. For anything.

Even for his city.

He felt her sharp incisors graze his lips, and her body press itself to him, oh so familiar. She felt so small when he put his arms around her like this -- a woman composed entirely of curves and soft surfaces, but solid as rock underneath.

"Havelock," Margolotta murmured, into his mouth. "Vot vere you sayink?"

"I don't recall," he answered, distracted by the feeling of her hands on his chest, his jaw. "It can't have been very important..."
Chapter 4

Now that the lilacs are in bloom
She has a bowl of lilacs in her room
And twists one in her fingers while she talks.
"Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know
What life is, you who hold it in your hands";
(slowly twisting the lilac stalks)
--TS Eliot

SIX: ON SERVITUDE

Editor's Note: It is well known that Vetinari, who may at the best of times have been considered an iconoclast, did not keep servants in his private home during the years before his rise to power. Such things are not entirely unknown. Many lords have depended entirely on the loyalty of a single retainer, or the secrecy of an elderly family servant. To have none at all, however, may be considered slightly strange.

In this case, it is doubtful that this is, as some have suggested, an unusual form of paranoia. Once installed in the Oblong Office, Vetinari often depended implicitly on servants, agents, and spies. He never appeared to be suspicious of the impressively large staff at the Palace, and rarely fired a clerk or servant without sufficient cause.*

* A highly subjective term, of course, but applying in this case to thieves and saboteurs, rather than a maid who's spilled the milk.

This chapter seems to indicate that Vetinari looked on his staff not only as an integral part of his ruling power, but as a sort of experiment in social order.

***

It is in the nature of humanity to form structures. We invariably begin to create hierarchies and organisations, when more than three or four gather together. This is the urge of Civilisation, and if conducted properly, it is a just and commendable thing. A division of labour; a prioritisation of those things which are most important to us, such as food and shelter; a rule of law.

Eventually, with these structures, comes the rule of Tradition as well, and the largest slave to the Traditional life is the nobleman. One who is well-provided for begins to develop slight quirks to assure himself that he need not worry about his overabundance of wealth in the face of the less fortunate. Soon these quirks become habits, and then crippling requirements, of the noble classes.

One to be addressed here is the keeping of servants. Even a small family, with no need for a legion of people to care for them, would rather have useless employees than be looked down upon for keeping only one upstairs maid. Households do not discern the good servants from the bad, and the results are often of great interest to a student of human nature.

The good servant is at once admiring and disdainful; until a man's judgement is questioned, he has no reason to defend it and no methodology for examining if it is sound. The good servant is loyal but not foolish, has little care for his pay, and works for the love of work. Such men are rare and invaluable, and should be cultivated when found. Discretion, of course, is a desirable trait, but an indiscreet servant may do much good, if his master is careful about what he reveals.
To serve is a pleasurable thing, when one serves properly; we are all employed in the household of the human race, and while many may serve badly, there are some few who are worth the time taken to find them. They cannot be paid highly enough, and therefore, generally, are not paid at all. Such is the tragedy of human existence.

***

Drumknott was not a drinking man. He admired Vetinari greatly, and strove to be like him, in his own little ways; he therefore did not drink, though he liked other people to.

Which was why the kitchen staff were terrified. The clerk had gone up to bring the Patrician his breakfast -- dry toast and some sliced cheese, garnished with a pile of sausages because Cook believed that one day he would eventually try them, out of sheer desperation. He'd returned not five minutes later, made up another tray with tea, a couple of muffins, and some jam, and taken that up, too. Then he'd come back down, sat down in a corner, and calmly poured himself a small glass of brandy.

One of the scullery maids, who'd lost the draw, sidled up to him.

"That's Lord Vetinari's brandy, that is," she said, somewhat reproachfully. Drumknott gave her a weary look.

"I know," he said.

She scurried back to the other side of the room, where the staff were watching the Patrician's secretary anxiously.

"Erm..." said Cook, hesitantly crossing the floor. "Drumknott old man..."

"Yes?" Drumknott asked, through dazed eyes.

"His Lordship all right?"

"Hm?"

"Is his Lordship all right?" Cook repeated.

"Ye...well..." Drumknott swallowed. "The Patrician is...that is..."

He was a man for whom words were stock-in-trade. Having run out of them, he panicked. Fortunately, his Clerking instincts overrode the clangings in his brain.

"The Patrician is not to be disturbed!" he said defiantly. "No one is to go into his office or chambers until further notice. He's...he's ill," he finished lamely. People were staring. "Nothing serious. A...a headache."

The maids looked at each other worriedly. Drumknott drained his glass and stood up. He caught the eye of Ellen, who oversaw the domestic side of the Palace -- something of his counterpart, outside of politics. She was a discreet woman (she had to be) and he had to tell someone.

"Just a word with you, Ellen, please..." he said, taking her by the arm and hauling her out into the hallway. He led her along until he was sure they were alone, then dropped his voice to almost a whisper.

"The Patrician's still in bed!" he hissed.
"Well, you said he was --"

"With a woman!"

Ellen gaped. "But he's never --"

"I know!"

"What did you do?"

"I put his breakfast on the table and went and got some for her, what was I supposed to do?"

"You went in twice?"

"I had to! It'd've been rude not to!"

Ellen giggled. "Ruder than walking in on the ruler of Ankh-Morpork after he's spent the night making passionate --"

"Stop it!" Drumknott cried. "Don't talk like that!"

"Who is she?"

"I think it's...Ellen, I'm sure it's Lady Margolotta."

"The vampire?"

"Yes!"

She laughed again. Ellen was somewhat older than Drumknott; she'd worked in other great houses before the Palace, and had grown used to the fact that even the Patrician might at some point desire a private life.

"She's not going to want much breakfast then, is she?" Ellen asked.

Drumknott looked crushed.

"I don't know, you try to do the polite thing, you work hard and take his breakfast up to him for nearly six years and then one day there's a woman in his bed."

Ellen patted his shoulder. "You did just fine, Rufus. You did exactly what I would have done. It was very considerate of you." Curiosity, bred into her Ankh-Morpork soul, got the better of her.

"Rufus..."

"What is it?"

"Were they...well, I mean..."

"I didn't look," he answered primly. "They had blankets." He paused. He was also an Ankh-Morpork native. "He looked rather happy," he said.

"Did she?"

"Ellen!"

"I'm only asking."
"I couldn't tell."

"Oh really."

"Listen, we can't let anyone know."

"Why not? Lordship obviously doesn't seem to mind word getting out -- all right, Rufus, it was only a joke. Listen, you clear his schedule and I'll make sure you're told when he does wake up. About time he had a little fun. If he'd asked me, I'd have -- " she broke off, because now was obviously not the time to tease Rufus Drumknott any further. "You run along and handle his morning appointments. I'm sure he'll call for you when he's ready for you, he always does."

Drumknott, brightened considerably by this thought, wandered off towards the Oblong Office.

***

Havelock Vetinari overslept.

He knew it as soon as he woke up, knew in the way that compulsive early-risers always do. It wasn't much longer before he knew that he was not alone in his bed.

His right hand was free, dangling over the edge of the mattress. He raised it, quite slowly, and covered his face with it.

When he looked out through a crack between his fingers, the world was still there, still real.

Damn.

He was lying on his back, so he took advantage of the position to stare up at the ceiling while he gathered his thoughts. It had been a long time since it had been necessary to actually gather them. Usually they were just there, all the time. Thoughts. Lying around in his head, waiting to be used. Now they were scattered. Several of them were devoting themselves entirely to self-congratulation, while several more were throwing rocks at the others. Tribal wars were beginning in his subconscious.

He was not wearing any clothing.

Vetinari thought in corkscrews, and this was a little one, but it was still a big step towards re-organising his life around a few recent events. It is much easier to refer to oneself as "not wearing clothing" than to call oneself "naked". He wasn't sure why this was so, but it was.

Margolotta, who was also not-wearing-clothing, was asleep, curled against him, her face pressed into the hollow of his neck. One of her arms rested on his chest, fingers touching his collarbone. His left arm was crooked behind her, wrapped around her shoulders.

All right, then. This wasn't so unusual. People woke up this way every day. Well, not with Margolotta, obviously, but with someone or other. And it wasn't as though it was the first time he and Margolotta had woken up this way. The first time in decades, but not the first time ever.

He turned his head, squinting a little. There was a breakfast tray -- two breakfast trays -- one with tea things on it. Drumknott had been here, then. But Drumknott was circumspect. He would arrange things. At least the blankets on the bed preserved some amount of decency.

He ought to...he ought to be doing something. He had a city to run. But it was so difficult to get out of this bed...
All right then. Just untangle yourself.

He slowly slid his arm out from under the sleeping Margolotta, and gently lifted her head onto the pillow with the deftness of an Assassin*. So strange, how her face hadn’t really changed at all, even in his memory.

* Though with considerably less murderous intent.

Good, now, let’s find that dressing gown...

Dangling from a hook on the wall, where it usually was. He crept out of the bed entirely, and pulled it on. At some point, possibly, he ought to locate actual clothing, but that could wait.

Tea.

His hands were steady as he removed the cover from the pot of hot water, dropped the infuser into it, swirled gently. Margolotta gave a sleepy sigh while he was inspecting the rest of the tray.

Poor Drumknott. He’d brought up enough food for both of them. He really would have to see about getting the man a raise.

"Tea?" he asked, without turning round. He poured two cups, and spooned sugar into one of them, adding a little milk to the other to cool it.

"Please," came Margolotta’s drowsy reply.

When he turned, he almost dropped the cups. She was propped up on one elbow, looking at him through loose tendrils of hair, a small smile on her face, blankets rumpled around her hips. She was, in fact, the most beautiful thing he could ever remember seeing.

Unfamiliar thoughts began to race through his head, setting fire to the huts of the thoughts he’d so carefully gathered a few minutes previous. She shifted to sit upright, pulling some of the bedclothes with her, and accepted the sweetened tea calmly.

"Did you sleep well?" he asked, as she tried the tea.

"Very. Have you been awake long?"

"Not at all." He sipped contemplatively. She smiled, and reached out to touch his cheek. He fought the urge to draw back; he was unused to caresses. When her fingers finally did stroke his face, he leaned into it, momentarily.

"Ve must never deal with things except as they are, remember?" she said gently.

"Very well," he murmured. "You actually took away my control, Margolotta. Do you know the last time it happened? The last time I didn't want to give it up and someone came and took it anyway?"

"Too long, I think," she said, with another laugh.

"And now," said Vetinari, between sips of tea, "Will you tell me why you came to Ankh-Morpork? No," he held up a hand, calmly, when she opened her mouth to protest. "I have been remarkably even-handed in our dealings, Margolotta. I expect nothing less from you."

"Iz everyzing to be about politics?" she asked plaintively.

"Everything is about politics, whether we like it or not."
She was silent for a moment. Then, finally, "There vos...a man."

He lifted an eyebrow.

"Antonei Zhalien."

"A man you killed."

She gave him a feral smile. "One of zem. To be fair, he did try to kill me first."

"Some people have no sense of timing," he said.

"Vos that a joke?"

"Very nearly. Go on."

"He had an infant son. I did not know zis, or I should have killed the child too. Not anymore," she said contemplatively, "but dead mens' children should not be allowed to survive."

"Oh dear."

"Yes. Zis grown infant son -- he vould not try anyzing in Ubervalld, I am too powerful there. Und in Ankh-Morpork I vould have some protection. I had hoped he vould attempt somezing here, and ve could end it. The law is a bit more formal about zis sort of thing than the Lore."

"You hoped to depend upon the Watch?"

"Ach, Vimes dislikes me, but he vould be personally offended if I vere killed in his city."

"That does not, however," he pointed out, "do you much good."

"No. But he iz not the only one who iz...defensive of his city."

They looked at each other for a long minute.

"I've overslept. I have business to attend to," Vetinari announced. He didn't move.

"Ah yes. The running of the city. Ve politicians, Havelock, ve understand each other. Ve vill talk later. Go."

"I don't want to," he said, half rebellious, half apologetic. "Not right now."

"I know. But you must. I shall sleep, I think, a while longer," she added.

He forced himself not to think as he washed and dressed, forced his mind to focus only on the little mundane duties of the morning routine. It had the desired effect; he did not brood, nor did he linger. Before he knew it, he found himself in the Oblong Office, sifting through a pile of paper that had been laid down on his desk sometime in the night. He was rather proud of this.

After about ten minutes, a rather harassed-looking Drumknott entered, carrying another pile.

"Good morning, sir," he said, remarkably evenly. "Glad to see the headache's gone away."

"The headache, Drumknott, is still asleep. I imagine she'll find her own way out, however."

Drumknott looked shocked. "Sir, I didn't mean to call -- "
Vetinari waved his hand. "Neither did I. A turn of phrase, nothing more. I see the city has not crumbled to dust, despite my...headache."

"No, sir. I've cleared your morning schedule, except for Commander Vimes. He's been waiting about ten minutes."

"Excellent. Keep him five more, and then I shall be ready to see him."

Drumknott nodded. "My lord...I would like to say, sir..."

Vetinari looked at him. He Looked at him, really.

"The staff don't know, sir. But we all like Lady Margolotta," Drumknott blurted. He looked horrified at himself, but plunged onward. "Will you be having Lady Margolotta to dinner again tonight, my lord?"

The Look remained. Finally, a small smile crept over his face.

"I'm afraid I don't know, Drumknott. Lady Margolotta may have other plans. Please send someone round to the embassy with an invitation, however. Perhaps a bit...later in the day."

"Yes sir," Drumknott said. And fled.

***

Vimes, when he was shown in, saluted, and looked vaguely worried. And a little more than vaguely angry.

"Good morning, Commander. Sorry to have kept you waiting," Vetinari said, indicating that he was not, in fact, sorry in the slightest. "Our weekly meeting is not scheduled for today, is it? I was sure it was on Monday."

"Thought I'd best bring the news up," Vimes said. "Lady Margolotta's gone missing."

"Has she?"

"Almost twelve hours now, sir."

"You don't seem too concerned, Commander."

"She's a vampire," Vimes said simply. "You don't seem too concerned, either."

"I am sure Lady Margolotta can take care of herself, as you say."

"We'd like to question the Palace staff. Last person who saw her was Carrot, leaving her off at the front gate. She didn't come out again," Vimes added. "I've got Detritus down in the scullery asking questions now, but nobody wants to say anything."

"Perhaps there is nothing to say."

"When did you see her last?"

"We had dinner together, which ended around eight-thirty or so," Vetinari said, hoping that Vimes - who was unused to the Patrician lying about women, though well accustomed to him lying about anything else -- wouldn't notice that her leaving the Palace was implied, rather than announced. "Have you been keeping tabs on her, Vimes?"
"She's a diplomatic ambassador in a foreign city."

"That does not answer my question."

"Sir?"

"Are you spying on the Uberwaldean vampire?"

"There's a lot of them here, now."

"Lady Margolotta."

"Sir."

Vetinari sighed. "You know, it is not easy for a man to carry on a one-sided conversation, but I believe, with your help, I may have finally mastered it. If I were ever to be locked away without intellectual stimulation, I should simply pretend you were there, and I am sure I could entertain myself for hours." He met Vimes' eyes. "Lady Margolotta has her own bodyguards -- "

"An Igor and a couple of -- "

"She has her own bodyguards, and she is under my personal protection. Leave her alone, Vimes. Do not have her followed, do not have the gargoyles keep an eye on her, and do not have the Uberwaldean embassy watched. It is a waste of your time."

"Did you hear what I said? She's missing!"

"Good morning, gentlemen!"

Vimes whirled as Margolotta entered, through the anteroom doorway. "Such a promisingly pleasant day, Lord Vetinari! I thought I would come see the grounds today. Sir Samuel, always a pleasure to see you."

"We've been looking for you all night!" Vimes snarled.

"I wish you'd found me," Margolotta answered. "I got terribly lost. I ended up in some ghastly tavern when I couldn't find my way home. I spent zero night, too, and I can tell you, paying anyzing for von of those beds is paying too much."

Vimes turned back to Vetinari, who spread his hands in an innocent gesture.

"Good to know the city Vatch is so diligent, however. I shall certainly call upon you in the future if I lose my purse," Margolotta continued. Vimes looked like he was ready to either slap her or accuse her of something, so Vetinari took the floor.

"Was there anything else, Sir Samuel? No? Then I think you had best call off the search. Good day."

Vimes saluted, scowled, and stalked out.

"Ah, Lady Margolotta, I -- " he broke off abruptly. The door had closed, and Margolotta had moved with unerring and uncanny speed to kiss him. It was not a pleasant kiss of greeting. It threatened him with suffocation.

"Good morning," she said, when they'd finished.
"Yes, quite --"

She didn't really let him get much in edgewise before the second kiss. Or the third. Around about the fifth he registered that this was probably not something that ought to be happening in the Oblong Office.

"Margo --" he said. "Margolotta, I have work --"

Hands on his jaw, in his hair.

"I...work...the city --"

Warm curves in his arms.

"Listen to me --"

The collar of his robes undone.

"No -- oh..."

Tongue, a tongue in quite an inappropriate place --

"I can't...just..." he finally managed to pull back enough to grasp her by the shoulders. "I..." he waved a hand at the papers on his desk. "I can't, I have...work to do..."

She reached around him, pressing close as she did so, and he closed his eyes in an effort to keep some modicum of self-restraint. When he opened them, she was holding a tedious report from one of the under-clerks between her thumb and third finger. Still holding it, she snapped the fingers. It burst into flames.

He smiled, and pressed his palms around the burning paper, putting out the fire.

I'm not the one who goes up like a thatched roof around fire, he thought. Remember that, Margolotta...

"Damn the paperwork," she said softly.

"One hour, Margolotta. Just give me an hour and I'll be finished here. I'll meet you in the garden -- " sudden silence while she kissed him again. "I promise, only give me an hour."

"Von hour," she said, agreeably. "Und if I find you still here, I shall be forced to use feminine viles."

"What have you been using up until now?" he asked. She laughed.

"Von hour," she repeated. She was gone before he felt he could conceivably catch his breath.

***

I keep my countenance,
I remain self-possessed
Except when a street piano, mechanical and tired
Reiterates some worn-out common song
With the smell of hyacinths across the garden
Recalling things that other people have desired.
--TS Eliot
SEVEN: METAPHORS

Editor's Note: Havelock Vetinari, as a man, was particularly fond of metaphors, and quite imaginative when it came to their use. He has variously referred to the city of Ankh-Morpork as a clock, a machine, a topiary, a gyroscope, and a Great Rolling Sea of Evil. He has spoken of Clacks technology in terms of prawns, and the City Watch, before its expansion, as an appendix. He has been heard to remark that one must handle a metaphor carefully; they can kill a man if used improperly.

In chapter seven he seems to have succumbed to the temptation to employ metaphoric devices to his heart's content; rather, one single metaphoric device, the Dragon. It is somewhat taken as a given that this chapter was written during his tenure in the Palace dungeon, at the time of the brief and busy rule of the only dragon ever to be crowned king.

***

Dragons, as a colleague once had reason to remark, are a metaphor of human existence. And as if that wasn't enough, they are also a great big hot blowing flapping thing.

Of course, we are speaking here of Draco Nobilis, the noble dragon that no longer inhabits our sphere of existence. But let us consider, as long as we find ourselves upon the subject, the Vulgaris breed also, or common swamp dragon.

The noble dragon bears many likenesses to the human romantic mind, and indeed, if one were to summon a dragon, one might say that it would be a dragon of the mind -- of the fantasy. A dragon with all the petty ambition, or dangerous honesty, of the man who summoned it, wrapped in scales and claws and flame ducts. A large, beautiful thing, but without regard for law, either of common physics or of human civilisation. A viciously merciless predator, sleeping on a bed of greed.

The swamp dragon, on the other hand, is a sad case. Domesticated, they are entirely dependent upon humans; even the most stable of breeds has a tendency to defensive explosion.*

* Editor's Note: Vetinari obviously assumes that the reader understands the evolutionary physiology of the swamp dragon; ie, its tendency to self-destruction is a defence mechanism on behalf of the species, and not the dragon currently laminated to your ceiling.

They amble through the world trying not to eat anything that might cause premature expiration; their life is spent avoiding the opportunity to experience anything more than pleasant boredom and, every few months, the opportunity to breed.

Draw your own conclusions.

It seems strange to think that a dragon of fantasy should also be more cunning and vicious than a sensible, real, domestic swamp dragon. And indeed, why any intelligent, almost political creature should devote its entire existence to the acquisition of gold and beautiful young women -- however briefly, in the latter case -- is something of a mystery.

It would be an intriguing experiment, would it not, to mold the cunning and fantasy of the noble dragon with the sensible, domestic, and one might say explosively selfless attitudes of the swamp dragon. Although it may be said that a twenty-ton dragon, exploding in any civilised area, is probably not the best of ideas. Still, to temper a vicious sensibility with the more common desires for stability and peace is a difficult thing, and for a human, a constant struggle.

It would be much easier if there were only two breeds of people, and one could tell them apart at a
glance.

Still, such is not the world we live in.

***

Margolotta had probably needed the hour as much as he had; she'd gone back to the Embassy, and changed out of the dreadfully flowered dress, into a far more sensible one for a walk in the gardens. She had, however, retained the sun-hat; it was probably a necessity, for her.

Surely the city could survive an hour without his supervision. After all, it'd survived centuries without him. Not very well, it was true, and probably not for much longer, but he had a firm grasp on it now, and could afford sixty minutes of freedom from office.

Couldn't he?

She gave him a bright, cheerful smile when he appeared on the grounds, and tactfully took his arm. There were guards about the place, after all, and servants, and all kinds of concealed eyes. She understood the need, at least for now, for discretion. He was the ruler of the city, and his life was not his own.

We politicians, she'd said. Yes; she understood. Curse her, she understood.

They didn't speak much; both sensed that, unlike yesterday, there was no need to fill the world with noise today. The things they'd been covering with meaningless conversation were no longer very well covered. Memory, and a sort of yearning for the old feeling of being students of one another, and the idea that perhaps rather than being students, they could now be equals without fear of the other's power. He would occasionally point out some especially depressing aspect of the landscaping, and caught her by the arm before she slipped into the hoho; in a split second, both were floating about six inches above the ground.

"Put us down, Margolotta," he said quietly. She smiled, and kissed him, and he felt his feet on solid ground again. That was probably allegorical, he thought. Metaphoric, at any rate.

"Do you know," she said, when they were walking again, "Ve have been discovering some very interesting things about beetotal vampires?"

"Oh yes?"

"Yes! As you can see, ve are able to tolerate sunlight rather better than before. Though of course, stronk light still hurts us."

"I've seen Mr. Chriek's vanishing act," he said absently.

"Indeed. Und while ve still retain various...manipulative talents, of course, other problems have arisen. Vampires who do not drink human blood, they can...vell, they can die."

"Die? Do you mean, they age?" he asked. He had not had reports of this.

"No, no. But it is possible to...to vish to die, und to die. From things other than zer usual," she added. "Ve've lost two so far. They just didn't have the vill to survive. A carriage accident, very tragic. They could have healed up, but they weren't very interested. People get bored vith life, apparently."

"Do they?"
"So I'm told."

"Interesting," he said. He felt a vague concern for the direction this conversation was taking.

"You, also, vill die," Margolotta murmured. "Perhaps when you do...I vill come to see zer monument they vill raise..."

"Margolotta, stop this instant."

"I could szimply sztand zere...und die," she added.

"I asked you -- "

"Fade avay into dust. It would be very...gothic, as you say."

"Why are you telling me this?"

She gave him another sunny smile. "Oh, just letting my mind vander."

"Don't," he said shortly. They came around a curve in the path, and began making their way back towards the entrance to the grounds, following the ornamental trout pond. "Perhaps we should discuss our situation," he continued, after a while.

"Vot is there to discuss?" she asked.

"You know what there is to discuss. I'd like to know how long you will be staying in the city. And, incidentally, if you are planning on accepting my dinner invitation. If you expect me to return your visit, I'm afraid you're rather out of luck. I suppose, in a year or two, I could arrange things so that the city temporarily did not explode into disaster in my absence -- "

"Are you really that important to the city, Havelock?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, without pride. "I am. The problem with taking a wild city and taming it, is that you take an object balancing on the blade of a knife, and balance it on the point. Stability requires more risk than chaos, and therefore it is more dangerous to leave a stabilised city than a chaotic one. It has further to fall."

"All too true. But have no fear, I have no desire for you to come to Uberwald. As for how long I am to stay in the city...I do not know, yet. Uberwald, unlike Ankh-Morpork, does not require a fine controlled touch. Subtlety is lost on most verevolves, I'm afraid. And most vampires, for that matter." Her hand, resting on his arm, slid down to cover his fingers. "As for your invitation, I would invite you to the Embassy insztead. Ve can't have your staff constantly in uproar. I'm sure ve could rustle up some valnuts."

"Don't you think -- " he began, then stopped. There were guards standing at the entrance to the grounds. More than there ought to have been. He could see Vimes, and another officer holding someone by the arm.

Oh, dear. It had happened, then.

"Morning, sir," Vimes called, as Vetinari disentangled his arm from Margolotta's, and walked up the slight incline to reach the knot of City Watch officers. "You were right."

Drumknott and an under-clerk stood behind him, hovering anxiously. Vimes put his hands on his belt. Next to him, Corporal Ping tightened his grip on Margolotta's Igor.
"Margolotta von Uberwald, you are under arrest for conspiracy to commit robbery, abetment of theft, abetment of criminal trespass, and espionage," Vimes said, his tone entirely even and, Vetinari noticed, conspicuously free of smugness. Guards moved to stand on either side of the vampire.

"I don't understand," she said. "Vot is going on? Igor, vot have you told zem?"

"All he needs to, I'm afraid," Drumknott said. "We put a clerk on guard in your office like you said, sir, and sent a message down to the Yard. He showed up not ten minutes after you'd left. Through one of the...less-used passages," he added. Vetinari examined Igor.

"Yes, Igors are very good at...less-used passages," he replied. "I'm very sorry, Margolotta. I don't like deceiving people*. But I like being deceived even less."

* This was, technically speaking, a little white lie; it wasn't that he enjoyed deception, but he would admit that occasionally it was greatly satisfying.

"Havelock, vot are you talking about?" Margolotta asked. The guards weren't touching her; they were sensible men, and knew exactly what their job was worth.

"You'd come to Ankh-Morpork because the Patrician asked?" Vetinari said. "Because you needed defending? I am many things, Margolotta, but a fool I am not. A good opportunity for you, wasn't it?"

"Probably wanted to lay hold of the Sto Plains trade route plans," Vimes said. "They'll cut right through Uberwald. Or maybe get a peek at some of those Genuan diplomatic letters that I happen to know you don't have."

"We caught Igor going through your desk," Drumknott added. He looked as though his faith in the world had been restored.

"It's not true! Havelock, tell zem! I vould not do zomezing like zis!" Margolotta said, managing not to shout.

"Tell them? Who do you think told them to set the trap in the first place?" Vetinari asked. "I am not a man who is lightly toyed with, Margolotta. Vampires work by subterfuge. Whether it is blood or diplomatic secrets that you steal."

"I've got a couple of Uberwaldeans on the force," Vimes said. "One of 'em's got a saying -- I think the phrase is Kvealin bostrovaki kre kvea* -- "

* Literally translated, "you are stepping on my eagle", but if Vimes' pronunciation had been better, it would have been "A well-dressed whore is still a whore". The spirit was willing, at any rate.

Vetinari was in front of him faster than anyone could blink, far too close for anyone's comfort, eyes inches from the Commander's.

"If you say that again, Vimes," he said, in the same low, even, cultured tones he always used. "With regard to Lady Margolotta, I will personally ensure that the brief remainder of your life is filled with interesting and painful incident. She is a diplomat, not a common street thief."

Several Watchmen put hands on their swords. Vimes' eyes widened in surprise, but he kept his head.

"I hadn't noticed much difference between the two," he said. Vetinari moved a few inches closer,
then, and against his will, Vimes stumbled backwards. He'd heard the Patrician make many threats, some more oblique than others, but he'd never seen anything other than icy cold in the man's blue eyes. Now they flared like a gas fire.

Vetinari turned to Margolotta, who was staring -- whether at Vimes' rudeness or his own threat, he couldn't tell.

"Igor will be taken to the cells. Lady Margolotta, I realise that if you choose to leave the city there is very little we can do to restrain you, but I would ask that you remain in your rooms at the Embassy," he said, each word like the crack of an iceberg breaking apart.

"I didn't do zis!"

"Investigations will proceed. The innocent have nothing to fear," Vetinari said coldly. Margolotta looked at him, pleading.

Nothing. A dead wall behind those eyes.

"I am not a monster," she said softly. "Ve don't do zat, ve of the Temperance League. I vill sztay. You vill see. I vill make sure you sze." She held out her arms, and the guards took them, very gingerly. "I would like to szpeak to Otto, pleaze," she added. "He is zer only friend I have in zer city," she added, looking at Igor, who looked away.

"Very convincing," Vetinari added. "I will see that he is allowed to visit you. We are not barbarians."

"Oh?" she asked. He stepped forward.

"We do not trade love for power, Margolotta," he said softly. Only anyone observing him very closely indeed would see the small flicker of regret in his closed expression, or the sudden stillness in Margolotta's body.

***

While Otto was bringing a carton of fresh -- best to think of it as 'ethnic food' -- to Lady Margolotta, as well as a comforting shoulder and sympathetic ear*, her Igor also had a visitor. It surprised Vimes; he didn't think that Igor knew anyone other than the Watch's Igor, in the city.

* His own, unfortunately; he couldn't scare up any loose ones at short notice.

Vimes hated surprises. He was still angry he'd missed a perfect opportunity to punch Vetinari in the nose, when the man swept down on him during Margolotta's arrest.

The dark-haired visitor spoke with an Uberwaldean accent, and so Vimes assumed that he had probably been an acquaintance from the Old Country. He let the man into the cells, and left them alone; because he wasn't a stupid cop, and hated narrative convenience except when it ran his way, he left them 'alone' with Buggy Swires lurking behind a table leg, across the room.

If Swires had been the sort of copper who was particularly observant, rather than the sort who was able to lift a man off his feet and slam him into a wall, he might have noticed that one of the empty shadows in the cells seemed more shadowy and empty than it ought to.

"I told you Vetinari's not a fool," the young man said. "Not ven it comes to espionage, anyhow."

"But enough of a fool...?"
"Lady Margolotta is a weakness. I'm doing him a favour, really," the young man said. "It does him no real harm, and me a world of good."

"I thee. And what about me?" Igor asked.

"Oh, you're just a pawn, they'll give you a slap on the wrists and send you on your way. I imagine Vetinari’s enraged enough to do a whole lot more against Margolotta. He might be Patrician, but he's a man, and men don't like being tricked in the bedroom."

"Tho you're pleathed."

"Very," the man said. "Sit tight and stick to your story, Igor. Uberwald is being taken care of. I've got to pay a few visits, and then I'll be off. Don't worry. What goes around comes around."

"That's what worrieth me," Igor said despondently.

As the man left, a shadow seemed to detach itself and move across the floor. Swires, while not the most observant of coppers, knew a suspiciously mobile shadow when he saw one. He kept still.

A grey-clad and surprisingly muscular arm reached through the bars, picked Igor off his feet, and pulled him against the cold iron.

"If you scream, you will only scream once," said a calm voice. "I want his name."

Igor considered matters. There was an iron bar pressing into his nose, which would crunch quite loudly, with another few inches of pressure.

"Edvard Zhalien," he said, very cautiously, distinctly not looking at the man's face. Swires watched in fascination.

"Where is he staying?"

"I don't -- "

"Deny me again and you will be sewing your liver back in. With your toes."

"It's true. Thomewhere in the Thades," Igor added, his terror ratcheting up a notch.

"He's a son of the Zhalien clan?"

"Yeth!"

The man sighed. Igor, wisely, said nothing. A moment later, he found himself dropped into a heap on the cell floor.

"If you tell the Watch about this conversation, I will come for you," the man said. And vanished. Igor gibbered.

Swires waited until a good count of three hundred before leaving the cells.

***

Havelock Vetinari, Patrician of Ankh-Morpork, stood on the roof of the Watch House, and let himself pause for thought. Up until then, everything he had done had been done on Assassins' Guild instinct.
He didn't often go out over the rooftops these days. He didn't have the time, and he wasn't young anymore. Besides, it is much harder to be unnoticed when you are the Patrician of the city. After ten years of cultivating a habit of invisibility at school and during his early political days, he'd finally had to start building a presence. He'd been very good at it. It was difficult to put that presence away.

But he remembered the emperor Chordian, during the time of Ankh-Morpork's military expansion, who was one of his personal heroes as a child*. Choridan had spent one day every year, dressed as a beggar, walking the streets of the Forum, where Sator Square now stood, with another man as his guide. Unusually, he hadn't decreed that he would do it, either; people apparently hadn't known until he died, and his companion revealed it. Vetinari knew the value of walking among the people. So he still did occasionally venture out.

* His mother had decided a boy ought to get a good solid education in the important things before he went off to school, and hence young Havelock had a very unusual childhood indeed.

Never like this, though. Never with such purpose. Never with such unusual anger inside him.

Seduced and betrayed, what did they take him for? It was the oldest diplomatic game in the books, and he knew those books by heart. He'd written some of them.

He had not intended for some things to happen, of course; had not intended to give in to Margolotta so soon, nor had he intended to...to feel the things he'd felt. But his rational mind ruled him, had done since he was old enough to be conscious of it, and his rational mind said that when you take a walk in the garden with a beautiful foreign diplomat, odds are your desk is being rifled.

Really now. Not a fool, but that foolish? Edvard Zhalien had no idea who he was tangling with. The boy could hardly be twenty-five.

He'd find out, however. Terminally. Of that, Vetinari was quite certain.

Still, there were one or two things to investigate first.

He knew the roof was booby-trapped in several places, as were the pipes and tiles below, leading on a direct path to the Commander's office window. Still, there were ways to get around that. He let himself down to ground level, circled, and climbed the decidedly spiky decorative railings on the floor below. A tall man, if he put his foot here...and here...and balanced very carefully, would not be able to actually reach the ledge -- or if he did, for balance, he would find himself unceremoniously dumped into the shrubbery. But he could hear the office's occupants perfectly. Vimes never closed his window.

He listened to Swires give his report. The gnome, like most humans, had not really paid attention to his face; he'd been too shocked at his presence to do so.

He listened delightedly to Vimes' reaction.

He listened to the orders being given.

Vimes would scour the city for Edvard Zhalien. He would also look for the grey-clad man who abused Igor so terribly, but he wouldn't find him. Most importantly, his investigation of Margolotta herself would come to a screeching halt until he found Zhalien and the grey man.

Vetinari would find Zhalien first. He would consider options then, but the most appealing one was beating the young man within an inch of his life.
And then he'd let Vimes have a go.

He smiled grimly to himself, dropped down silently, and made his way back to the Palace.

***

The October night comes down; returning as before
Except for a slight sensation of being ill at ease,
I mount the stairs and turn the handle of the door
And feel as if I had mounted on my hands and knees.
--TS Eliot

EIGHT: THE RITES OF MAN

Editor's Note: Chapters Eight and Nine are the most difficult to place in time; coming somewhere between the brief rule of the dragon and Vetinari's death, they are the fully-realised writings of a mature statesman, and apparently, considering the goodly length of time over which they were written, are the cautious and well-measured thoughts of a man uninclined to hurry.

Chapter Eight has been tentatively linked to the period right before the Assassins' Guild put Vetinari's contract into abeyance, and some scholars have determined that parts may have been written during his Lordship's brief illness from arsenic poisoning. Although his writing is as keen and intellectual as ever, there is a certain dramatic quality about some of it which has not been seen since his earliest chapters.

***

Concerning Truth, that which may be spoken as events dictate, but should be heard on every occasion:

Man is raised in our free society to believe that he has certain rights; the right to make his own decisions, the right to trade with whom he wishes and for what, the right to worship as he pleases, to marry and procreate. But no right does he hold in as high regard as the right to be told the truth. If his version of the truth is betrayed, he will leave his wife, forswear his gods, part with his business associates, or make rash, foolish choices.

A man will accept that he has been told a half-truth, a literal truth, or a lie of omission, if the end result justifies the deception; he will snarl about honour and honesty, but he will not forsake the human race because of them. Half-truths are, at any rate, preferable to lies, because they hold parts of the truth and are therefore easier to remember. But a man who believes he has a right to know the truth is a dangerous man.

Because Truth is not immutable. It is not entirely knowable. And the rights of man, unfortunately, do not exist outside man's small sphere of influence. Rights are products of civilisation. The only natural right a man has is the right to an attempt at survival. And death, of course. But every living creature has the right to death.

So why this born-in yearning for truth? Why do we seek to quantify the world? Without mystery, would not this be a dull, colourless life? But then some people prefer the extraordinary boredom of the known.

That is one true, uncorrupting privilege of political gamesmanship; it is never boring.

We yearn for the truth because we think the truth will comfort us, but what we really want is to find a comforting statement and call it truth. The two are very different. A man well-used to
understanding the way things work is never truly betrayed, because he has come to expect the essential ill-will of the world. It is a dour existence, though punctuated by the occasional surprise when a man, expected to do things typical of baser human nature, rises above to do something noble and good.

The tincture of night suffuses civilisation, and we light candles to keep it at bay. We never consider that to embrace the night is to control it.

***

Havelock Vetinari was not a man given to chasing after people, tracking them down, or locating them through investigation. He had the City Watch for that. If he wished to speak to someone, Vetinari preferred that they come to him. It seemed less...desperate, somehow. And quite a bit less time-consuming.

When he returned to the Palace he gave orders. It was what he did. Within twenty minutes, three under-clerks, all of them what he would consider "scholarship boys" -- clever youngsters from the poorer parts of the city, who could incidentally spell correctly and keep their mouths shut -- were in his office.

They were used to taking orders that they didn't understand. They nodded, and looked at each other, and each made their own individual way out of the Palace, down to the Shades. There was no particular hurry. If the rumour did not spread until evening, that was fine; Zhalien could hardly expect to make a move before then, at any rate.

He arranged for someone to pester Vimes, every hour or so, about the case and what he was doing about it. He took reports on how the Times was covering the scandal. Apparently they'd dubbed it "Gardengate" because Margolotta had been arrested at the gates to the grounds. Vetinari thought it was mildly dramatic, but then he was not Sacharissa's copyeditor.

And then he went back to his job.

Very calmly.

It had been years since anyone was really in earnest about trying to kill him. Poisoned candles, that was showy, and gones, well, that was bloodlust. It was a long time since anyone had thoughtfully and entirely selflessly wanted him dead for the sheer joy of seeing him dead, rather than for some greater political ideal. Vimes was right. It made one feel quite alive.

If a man wants you dead badly enough, of course, there is no defence in the world which is effective. The only way to defend against a murderer is to discover who he is. In this case, Vetinari had the advantage of already knowing. That was something.

A really determined man would get past the guards with no trouble, and into the Palace with very little. If he was clever, he'd make it as far as the fifth floor, where the Oblong Office and his chambers were, with smooth sailing. And even an Assassin-trained politician was probably not much of a match, after all these years, for a determined young Uberwaldean. The forest bred stern souls; to survive being human in Uberwald, you had to be strong.

If Edvard Zhalien knew himself -- and Vetinari doubted greatly that he did -- he would know that even though he was determined to kill the Patrician, the person he really passionately wanted dead was Margolotta von Uberwald. Not just dead, but dishonourably dead, and eternally so. He wanted there to be no possibility that she would rise, and a betrayed Patrician would make very sure that his enemies, no matter how resilient, did not get a second chance to betray.
Pity, really. Edvard could have been of use.

The sun had set, and Vetinari was standing at the window, back to the door, when it burst open. It was a bit of drama, he knew, but sometimes drama was irresistible. Edvard Zhalien came for him with a hunter's speed and accuracy.

The long, heavy walking-stick whipped out from Vetinari's side as he turned. Who needed a sword inside a stick, when you had the stick? Just as effective and far less messy. It smacked against the boy's chest, stopping him in mid-leap. There was a sudden crunch, a sound like a drowning man's gasp for air, and a thump.

The head of the cane swung around and connected neatly with Zhalien's.

"Igor is in the cells, and Margolotta is secure in the Embassy. You have no allies," Vetinari said calmly. Edvard Zhalien, glassy-eyed, stared up at him. "I'd call it a day, if I were you."

He leapt again.

This time Vetinari did not use the merciful edge-on approach; the brass cane-head slammed into the boy's neck, knocking him sideways.

"You are not a spy or a patriot, Edvard, no matter how much the Baroness has paid you," Vetinari continued. "You're just a boy, and you're after the wrong man. If you stop now, you probably won't get hurt. Much."

He had expected a knife at some point, but he was not quite fast enough to stop it. It cut through robe, shirt, and shoulder, cleanly, before he brought the cane up and shoved Edvard back.

Yes; twenty-five was about right. An infant still when Antoni Zhalien, his father, had been killed. A thick shock of black hair, dark eyes. Standing, panting, still in a hunter's crouch, though one eye was bloodshot and bruises were beginning to form.

Vetinari felt the blood flow down his arm, and realised that he was enjoying himself. This was worrying. He should have incapacitated the boy with the first blow. Instead he had let him have his go, and had...well, he'd sneered at him.

He was enjoying making a wreck of the youngster. At his own personal risk.

First beat him within an inch of his life...and then let Vimes have a go...

This was not the Vetinari way.

He shook his head and moved quickly when Edvard sliced again -- dodging, throwing the cane, and grasping both wrists with his hands. He pushed Edvard against the window. The knife clattered to the floor.

"Tell me," he said, in Edvard's ear as the boy struggled to free himself. "Look out the window and tell me what you see, boy."

"Your end," the boy replied, and tried to butt his head backwards. Vetinari dodged.

"One day," he said agreeably. "But not today. A personal vendetta, Zhalien? Supported by the good Baroness and her fortune?"

"That vampire murdered my father."
"Your father was a vampire hunter -- "

"A historian!"

"As a hobby, perhaps. He came after her in cold blood. She gave me his book, you know. Antonei Zhalién, the last man who tried to kill her. As a warning to me."

"Son of a bitch!"

"Easy, boy. You waited a remarkably long time to have your try. She has too many allies in Uberwald, eh? But in Ankh-Morpork, especially after setting her up as a spy...she has no one."

Vetinari considered things. "Well. Almost no one."

"I'll kill you, old man."

"Oh, I very much doubt that. I'm sure you wanted to, when you heard the rumour. Margolotta von Uberwald, spy and seductress, pardoned because of diplomatic immunity? You must have seen red. You should have simply killed her, if you were suicidally bent. Strategy never works at times like this, and not against me. You certainly should have gone after her before you came for me."

"I did," said Zhalién. And laughed.

Havelock Vetinari had a moment of temporal uncertainty.

His body, acting without instructions from his brain, slammed Zhalién's face directly through the glass window, and snapped his neck.

At least, that was what he was sure had happened. He was therefore mildly surprised to discover that, after a few confused seconds, instead he had neatly applied pressure to a very important vein in the back of the head, which caused unconsciousness fairly rapidly.

All control begins with the self.

He walked swiftly to the doorway. He never put guards on his office door, and no-one had been about. He picked up the speaking tube, and made a few requests.

Drumknott arrived, carrying a crossbow, around the same time Ellen did, carrying bandages.

"Ah. Good." Vetinari said. He was back in his chair; he didn't feel that was the dramatic thing to do, but the blood loss convinced him it was rather the wise thing to do. "Ellen, my arm, if you would be so kind. Drumknott, summon the Watch, would you? I'm sure they'll want to meet Mr. Zhalién."

Drumknott, for the second time that day, had the sensation that perhaps life would have been easier if he'd been a priest like his mother wanted.

***

Night had well and truly fallen. There was no moon.

This was, Vetinari thought, appropriate, though also mildly worrying; perhaps the influx of UberwAleans into the city was causing Ankh-Morpork, also, to develop a psychotropic landscape. He was not having with lightning flashes every time someone did something maniacally evil; for one thing, it'd never stop.

No doubt Zhalién had wanted Vetinari to kill him. That would be scandal at the least and murder at
the most. Vicious murder, too. But now Zhalien was going to live to tell his story to the Watch. Sooner or later. Vimes had a way of making even the most reluctant, honour-bound wretch talk. And Igor was certainly not all that honour-bound.

He hadn't spoken of Zhalien's promise that he'd gone for Margolotta first.

He didn't really believe it.

But he'd vanished from the office, nonetheless, as soon as Ellen was finished with the bandage. And come here.

The Uberwaldean embassy was a stark, imposing building, which seemed taller than it actually was. Only one window was lit -- that would be the guards on Margolotta's room. They gave him no trouble. If he did not want to be seen, he was not seen; even if he was, he was the Patrician.

Margolotta's room was pitch black, too dark; the darkness that is conspicuous for its absence of light. He closed the door behind him, locking in the gloom.

"Margolotta," he said quietly.

No answer.

"I am sorry, Margolotta," he continued, moving forward. Forward, but slowly. "It was necessary to say what I said. Else how could we have drawn Zhalien out?"

Still silence? Or the whisper of breath, indrawn to speak? Too quiet to tell.

"I know you understood me. Love for power -- oh, such a dramatic phrase. You know me better than that. Even now."

His stick clicked against something -- the wood of a chair, or perhaps the leg of a bed. Yes; he could feel the bedpost, if he reached out.

"Edvard said he came for you first. No doubt he did a thorough job, if so. But I think he lied."

Yes, now he was sure there was movement, somewhere in the room.

"When he said that, I nearly broke his neck with my bare hands."

"You should have."

Relief flooded through him. "Margo -- "

"Do not speak to me, Havelock Vetinari," came the voice. Two yellow pinpricks of light glowed, far off and slightly to his left. "How long had you known? Since I arrived? Since before? You invited me into your confidences, into your -- "

"I invited you? Only to my city."

"You were waiting even then?"

"Not so."

"When, then?"

"Does it matter?"
"It does to me."

"Since a little before our dinner together. I knew I was going to be robbed. Whether it was you or someone else."

"You believed it vos me."

"Yes."

"I vos a fool."

"Not so very much." The glowing yellow eyes hadn't moved. "Let us have some light, Margolotta."

"I prefer zer darkness."

"We certainly pick our times, don't we?" he asked. "Easier to fight than to say goodbye, eh?"

"I vos not zer von who picked zer fight last time. Nor did I lie zis time."

"Do you expect me to feel guilty that I lied to help you? Is not embarrassment better than death at the hands of a clever young man?"

There was a long pause.

"Margolotta?"

A candle flared to life.

Two yellow pinpricks of light, far off and slightly to his left, turned out to be a cat sitting on a far window ledge.

Margolotta stood about three inches in front of him.

"Zere is a first time for everyzing," she said sadly.

She was wearing pajamas, with a bunny on the pocket. It had fangs, and red eyes, and a little cape.

"Do you know something strange, Margolotta?" he asked.

"I know many strange things," she replied.

"I believe I do love you." He gave her a small smile. "I certainly hope I should not lose my temper, risk my life, and beat a man nearly to death for anything less. As you say. A first time for everything." And then, in Uberwaldean: "Forgive."

She nodded. "Zat vos all I vos vaiting for," she said.

A leaden pause.

"Zhraoi."

_I forgive._

***

Not knowing what to feel or if I understand
Or whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon...
Would she not have the advantage, after all?
This music is successful, with a "dying fall"
Now that we talk of dying --
And should I have the right to smile?
--TS Eliot

NINE: THE SECOND PARABLE

Editor's Note: This final chapter comes out of a much longer one, but obvious edits and margin notations have indicated that the Patrician, a man who knew the value of words, wished only this part to be made public. His other, more private musings, at his own request, have been given into the care of a colleague for safekeeping.

***

It is as with all things that men understand stories better than they do plain speech; is it not strange? A symbol is instinctively comprehended, while a plain fact is often thrust aside as being "untrue", either because the witness does not, or cannot, bear to face its truth. It was wise to begin with a parable; it was the instinct of a child, a most natural instinct.

In the city of Ankh-Morpork there was a Man who took to traveling, so that he might see the world and the wonders that were in it. Of all the art and culture to be offered outside of his beloved city, there was only one place he was sorry to leave. He did not dwell upon it, as the years passed, but it was never very far from his thoughts.

Power was the Man's for the taking, but he did not want power; riches were offered, but he did not want riches. He took control, whether it was for the taking or not, but control was not what he sought.

The Man loved the city more than any other thing. So he sought to make it a city worthy of the love that every man must feel for the place he was born.

He was very good at it.

He learned his lessons quickly and well, and survived and thrived upon change, but never uproar -- good, orderly, progressional change, the acceptance of ideas whose time has come.

Men who would rule, know this: there is no tide against which one can stand with impunity. Every battle takes its toll, and some will pull the sand from beneath your feet. Choose the ones worth fighting, or you find yourself drenched to the bone.

First the city, then the people, then one's servants, then oneself.

It is the only sensible way to live.

But the man forgot, as time went on, that all four must be served. The self, lastly, yes; but serve it all the same, otherwise it is not life, but merely existence.

That is all the knowledge that I have to give. If the reader has learned all he could, the world is a better place. If the reader has learned nothing, at least take this advice:

Be kind to dogs.

And the world will still be a better place.
Vetinari was already sitting at his little table in the corner room, writing, when Drumknott brought up his dinner, and a few late letters. It was soup night; on a little plate, next to the clear broth and the correspondence, were a few buttery, iced pastries, because Cook was an eternal optimist.

The Patrician ate as he wrote, spilling not a drop of ink or soup. The past four months had been busy ones; Drumknott knew that his master was planning something out of the ordinary, but he hadn't seen enough of any one part of the plan to discover just what. If it had been anyone other than Vetinari, he might have thought war, but he knew that the Patrician was very much against war; it was simply too expensive to be practical.

One never really mastered how to read Vetinari. Even Sir Samuel, who seemed to understand the man, was just as much in the dark as Drumknott. But it was obvious, since the Zhaliens scandal had broken, that Vetinari was...different. He didn't actually smile more, but he seemed to have an especial zeal for his duties. It was as though, for years, he'd been doing them because someone had to; now he was doing them because it was...

Drumknott's mind rebelled at the thought of "Havelock Vetinari" and "fun" in the same sentence.

He was simply grateful that the Lady Margolotta's stay in Ankh-Morpork had been mercifully brief. He could adjust himself to many things, but he did not think he would ever have adapted to serving her breakfast in bed. Especially Vetinari's bed.

Headache, indeed.

His Lordship seemed to spend a lot more time on correspondences, too. Odd, that, what with the clacks going further and faster every day.

Vetinari handed him a stack of papers, absently eating with his other hand, and dismissed him. Drumknott smiled.

Yes. Good to be back to normal.

My dear Havelock,

I did not think, at the time, that you could possibly be right. For that you must have some tolerance; I am a woman long used to the idea that romance is something held at close quarters. But you know this.

Perhaps for us it is more than romance. If you had tried to teach me, when you were nineteen, that an affair of the mind could satisfy more than affairs of a more physical nature, I should not have respected your intellect in the slightest. You must, at the moment, have rather little respect for mine. To write to you is the most satisfying hour of my week, and to read your letters almost as good. I do not feel I miss anything; there is pragmatism and poetry to be had, and what more could either of us desire?

You protest that love is a weakness, and as such must be defended. I disagree. I think it is your strength. For me you lied and fought; your life would be far less exciting without me in it, is that not true? In Uberwald, where one stands a good chance of being staked even now, my life was rather more dull when I did not have your letters to look forward to.

Now, as to our discussions of politics. Do you believe that to foster an existing system of
governance is always correct? Granted that the system is functional on a majority level, but if it is an oppression to some measure of the population --

There was a rap at the window.

Vetinari looked up from the letter he was reading. Smiled. Stood up, and walked to the floor-to-ceiling glass panes, five stories in the air.

"I thought you didn't do this sort of thing anymore," he said.

Margolotta, on the other side, shrugged. "For old times' sake," she said, slightly muffled by the glass.

"The letters were not enough?"

"They were enough. But I do so love a holiday."

"I am planning a holiday."

"You are not."

"I am indeed. In a year's time, I will take a short diplomatic trip to visit the Low King."

"Ah, I see she has seduced you."

"Very amusing, Margolotta. I wonder, should I let you in?"

"I wish you would, it's rather cold out."

He flicked a latch on the window, and pulled it inward. Margolotta stepped gracefully out of the air, and into the little room.

"Wait," he said, putting a hand up before she could move too close. He walked swiftly into the main entrance-room of his chambers, and pulled a bolt across the door. Drumknott, if he found a locked door, would know better -- this time, at any rate -- than to go any further.

Margolotta had shut the window, and was trying one of the pastries, when he returned. She put it down and dusted off her fingers daintily. And smiled at him.

"Now," the Patrician said, moving forward, "About your theories of governance..."

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!