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Making Money

Terry Pratchett

CHAPTER 1

Waiting in darkness – A bargain sealed – The hanging man – Golem with a blue dress – Crime and punishment – A chance to make real money – The chain of gold-ish – No unkindness to bears – Mr Bent keeps time

THEY LAY IN THE DARK, guarding. There was no way of measuring the passage of time, nor any inclination to measure it. There was a time when they had not been here, and there would be a time, presumably, when they would, once more, not be here. They would be somewhere else. This time in between was immaterial.

But some had shattered and some, the younger ones, had gone silent.

The weight was increasing.

Something must be done.

One of them raised his mind in song.

It was a hard bargain, but hard on whom? That was the question. And Mr Blister the lawyer wasn't getting an answer. He would have liked an answer. When parties are interested in unprepossessing land, it might pay for smaller parties to buy up any neighbouring plots, just in case the party of the first part had heard something, possibly at a party.

But it was hard to see what there was to know.

He gave the woman on the other side of his desk a suitably concerned smile.

'You understand,Miss Dearheart, that this area is subject to dwarf mining law? That means all metals and metal ore are owned by the Low King of the dwarfs. You will have to pay him a considerable royalty on any that you remove. Not that there will be any, I'm bound to say. It is said to be sand and silt all the way down, and apparently it is a very long way down.'

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He waited for any kind of reaction from the woman opposite, but she just stared at him. Blue smoke from her cigarette spiralled towards the office ceiling.

'Then there is the matter of antiquities,' said the lawyer, watching as much of her expression as could be seen through the haze. 'The Low King has decreed that all jewellery, armour, ancient items classified as Devices, weaponry, pots, scrolls or bones extracted by you from the land in question will also be subject to a tax or confiscation.'

Miss Dearheart paused as if to compare the litany against an internal list, stubbed out her cigarette and said: 'Is there any reason to believe that there are any of these things there?'

'None whatsoever,' said the lawyer, with a wry smile. 'Everyone knows that we are dealing with a barren waste, but the King is insuring against "what everyone knows" being wrong. It so often is.'

'He is asking a lot of money for a very short lease!'

'Which you are willing to pay. This makes dwarfs nervous, you see. It's very unusual for a dwarf to part with land, even for a few years. I gather he needs the money because of all this Koom Valley business.'

'I'm paying the sum demanded!'

'Quite so, quite so. But I—'

'Will he honour the contract?'

'To the letter. That at least is certain. Dwarfs are sticklers in such matters. All you need to do is sign and, regrettably, pay.'

Miss Dearheart reached into her bag and placed a thick sheet of paper on the table. 'This is a banker's note for five thousand dollars, drawn on the Royal Bank of Ankh-Morpork.'

The lawyer smiled. 'A name to trust,' he said, and added: 'traditionally, at least. Do sign where I've put the crosses, will you?'

He watched carefully as she signed, and she got the impression he was holding his breath.

'There,' she said, pushing the contract across the desk.

'Perhaps you could assuage my curiosity, madam?' he said. 'Since the ink is drying on the lease?'

Miss Dearheart glanced around the room, as if the heavy old bookcases concealed a multitude of ears. 'Can you keep a secret, Mr Blister?'

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'Oh, indeed, madam. Indeed!'

She looked around conspiratorially. 'Even so, this should be said quietly,' she hissed.

He nodded hopefully, leaned forward, and for the first time for many years felt a woman's breath in his ear:

'So can I,' she said.

That was nearly three weeks ago . . .

Some of the things you could learn up a drainpipe at night were surprising. For example, people paid attention to small sounds – the click of a window catch, the clink of a lockpick – more than they did to big sounds, like a brick falling into the street or even (for this was, after all, Ankh-Morpork) a scream.

These were loud sounds which were therefore public sounds, which in turn meant they were everyone's problem and, therefore, not mine. But small sounds were nearby and suggested such things as stealth betrayed, and so were pressing and personal.

Therefore, he tried not to make little noises.

Below him the coach yard of the Central Post Office buzzed like an overturned hive. They'd got the turntable working really well now. The overnight coaches were arriving and the new Uberwald Flyer was gleaming in the lamplight. Everything was going right, which was, to the night-time climber, why everything was going wrong.

The climber thrust a brick key into soft mortar, shifted his weight, moved his foo—

Damn pigeon! It flew up in panic, his other foot slipped, his fingers lost their grip on the drainpipe, and when the world had stopped churning he was owing the postponement of his meeting with the distant cobbles to his hold on a brick key which was, let's face it, nothing more than a long flat nail with a t-piece grip.

And you can't bluff a wall, he thought. If you swing you might Making Money get your hand and foot on the pipe, or the key might come out.

Oh . . . kay . . .

He had more keys and a small hammer. Could he knock one in without losing his grip on the other?

Above him the pigeon joined its colleagues on a higher ledge.

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The climber thrust the nail into the mortar with as much force as he dared, pulled the hammer out of his pocket and, as the Flyer departed below with a clattering and jingling, hit the nail one massive blow.

It went in. He dropped the hammer, hoping the sound of its impact would be masked by the general bustle, and grabbed the new hold before the hammer had hit the ground.

Oh . . . kay. And now I am . . . stuck?

The pipe was less than three feet away. Fine. This would work. Move both hands on to the new hold, swing gently, get his left hand around the pipe, and he could drag himself across the gap. Then it would be just—

The pigeon was nervous. For pigeons, it's the ground state of being. It chose this point to lighten the load.

Oh . . . kay. Correction: two hands were now gripping the suddenly very slippery nail.

Damn.

And at this point, because nervousness runs through pigeons faster than a streaker through a convent, a gentle patter began.

There are times when 'It does not get any better than this' does not spring to mind.

And then a voice from below said: 'Who's up there?'

Thank you, hammer. They can't possibly see me, he thought. People look up from the well-lit yard with their night vision in shreds. But so what? They know I'm here now.

Oh . . . kay.

'All right, it's a fair cop, guv,' he called down.

'A thief, eh?' said the voice below.

'Haven't touched a thing, guv. Could do with a hand up, guv.'

'Are you Thieves' Guild? You're using their lingo.'

'Not me, guv. I always use the word guv, guv.'

He wasn't able to look down very easily now, but sounds below indicated that ostlers and off-duty coachmen were strolling over. That was not going to be helpful. Coachmen met most of their thieves out on lonely roads, where the highwaymen seldom bothered to ask sissy questions like 'Your money or

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your life?' When one was caught, justice and vengeance were happily combined by means of a handy length of lead pipe.

There was a muttering beneath him, and it appeared that a consensus had been reached.

'Right, Mister Post Office Robber,' a cheery voice bellowed. 'Here's what we're gonna do, okay? We're gonna go into the building, right, and lower you a rope. Can't say fairer'n that, right?'

'Right, guv.'

It had been the wrong kind of cheery. It had been the cheery of the word 'pal' as in 'You lookin' at me, pal?' The Guild of Thieves paid a twenty-dollar bounty fee for a non-accredited thief brought in alive, and there were oh, so many ways of still being alive when you were dragged in and poured out on the floor.

He looked up. The window of the Postmaster General's apartment was right above him.

Oh . . . kay.

His hands and arms were numb and yet painful at the same time. He heard the rattle of the big freight elevator inside the building, the thud of a hatch being slapped back, the footsteps across the roof, felt the rope hit his arm.

'Grab it or drop,' said a voice as he flailed to grasp it. 'It's all the same in the long run.' There was laughter in the dark.

The men heaved hard at the rope. The figure dangled in the air, then kicked out and swung back. Glass shattered, just below the guttering, and the rope came up empty.

The rescue party turned to one another.

'All right, you two, front and back doors right now!' said a aking Money coachman who was faster on the uptake. 'Head him off! Go down in the elevator! The rest of you, we'll squeeze him out, floor by floor!'

As they clattered back down the stairs and ran along the corridor a man in a dressing gown poked his head out of one of the rooms, stared at them in amazement, and then snapped: 'Who the hell are you lot? Go on, get after him!'

'Oh yeah? And who are you?' said an ostler, slowing down and glaring at him.

'He's Mr Moist von Lipwick, he is!' said a coachman at the back. 'He's the Postmaster General!'

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‘Someone came crashing through the window, landed right between— I mean, nearly landed on me!’ shouted the man in the dressing gown. ‘He ran off down the corridor! Ten dollars a man if you catch him! And it’s Lipwig, actually!’

That would have re-started the stampede, but the ostler said, in a suspicious voice: ‘Here, say the word “guv”, will you?’

‘What are you on about?’ said the coachman.

‘He doesn’t half sound like that bloke,’ said the ostler. ‘And he’s out of breath!’

‘Are you stupid?’ said the coachman. ‘He’s the Postmaster! He’s got a bloody key! He’s got all the keys! Why the hell would he want to break into his own Post Office?’

‘I reckon we ought to take a look in that room,’ said the ostler.

‘Really? Well, I reckon what Mr Lipwig does to get out of breath in his own room is his own affair,’ said the coachman, giving Moist a huge wink. ‘An’ I reckon ten dollars a man is running away from me ’cos of you being a tit. Sorry about this, sir,’ he said to Lipwig, ‘he’s new and he ain’t got no manners. We will now be leaving you, sir,’ he added, touching where he thought his forelock was, ‘with further apologies for any inconvenience which may have been caused. Now get cracking, you bastards!’

When they were out of sight Moist went back into his room and carefully bolted the door behind him.

Well, at least he had some skills. The slight hint that there was a woman in his room had definitely swung it. Anyway, he was the Postmaster General and he did have all the keys.

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