

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.’

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?’

‘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* 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.

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 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 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!’

‘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.

It was only an hour before dawn. He'd never get to sleep again. He might as well rise formally, and enhance a reputation for keenness.

They might have shot him right off the wall, he thought, as he sorted out a shirt. They could have left him to hang there and taken bets on how long it'd be before he lost his grip; that would be the Ankh-Morpork way. It was just his good luck that they'd decided to give him a righteous smack or two before posting him through the guild letter box. And luck came to those who left a space for it—

There was a heavy yet somehow still polite knock on the door.

'Are You Decent, Mr Lipwig?' a voice boomed.

Regrettably yes, thought Moist, but said aloud: 'Come in, Gladys.'

The floorboards creaked and furniture rattled on the other side of the room as Gladys entered.

Gladys was a golem, a clay man (or, for the sake of not having an argument, a clay woman) who was nearly seven feet tall. She – well, with a name like Gladys 'it' was unthinkable and 'he' just didn't do the job – wore a very large blue dress.

Moist shook his head. The whole silly business had

been a matter of etiquette, really. Miss Maccalariat, who ruled the Post Office counters with a rod of steel and lungs of brass, had objected to a male golem cleaning the ladies' privies. How Miss Maccalariat had arrived at the conclusion that they were male by nature rather than custom was a fascinating mystery, but there was no profit in arguing with such as her.

And thus, with the addition of one extremely large cotton print dress, a golem became female enough for Miss Maccalariat. The odd thing was that Gladys *was* female now, somehow. It wasn't just the dress. She tended to spend time around the counter girls, who seemed to accept her into the sisterhood despite the fact that she weighed half a ton. They even passed on their fashion magazines to her, although it was hard to imagine what winter skincare tips would mean to someone a thousand years old with eyes that glowed like holes into a furnace.

And now she was asking him if he was decent. How would she tell?

She'd brought him a cup of tea and the City edition of the *Times*, still damp from the press. Both were placed, with care, on the table.

And . . . Oh gods, they'd printed his picture. His actual picture! Him and Vetinari and various notables last night, all looking up at the new chandelier! He'd managed to move slightly so that the picture blurred a little, but it was still the face that looked out at him from the shaving mirror every morning. All the way to Genua there were people who'd been duped, fooled, swindled and cheated by that face. The only

thing he hadn't done was hornswoggle, and that was only because he hadn't found out how to.

Okay, he did have the kind of all-purpose face that reminded you of lots of other faces, but it was a terrible thing to see it nailed down in print. Some people thought that pictures could steal your soul, but it was liberty that was on Moist's mind.

Moist von Lipwig, pillar of the community. Hah . . .

Something made him look closer. Who was that man behind him? He seemed to be staring over Moist's shoulder. Fat face, small beard which looked like Lord Vetinari's, but whereas the Patrician's was a goatee, the same style on the other man looked like the result of haphazard shaving. Someone from the bank, right? There'd been so many faces, so many hands to shake, and everyone wanted to get into the picture. The man looked hypnotized, but having your picture taken often did that to people. Just another guest at just another function . . .

And they'd only used the picture on page one because someone had decided that the main story, which was about another bank going bust and a mob of angry customers trying to hang the manager in the street, did not merit illustration. Did the editor have the common decency to print a picture of that and put a sparkle in everyone's day? Oh no, it had to be a picture of Moist von bloody Lipwig!

And the gods, once they've got a man against the ropes, can't resist one more thunderbolt. There, lower down the front page, was the headline **STAMP FORGER WILL HANG**. They were going to execute Owlswick

Jenkins. And for what? For murder? For being a notorious banker? No, just for knocking out a few hundred sheets of stamps. Quality work, too; the Watch would never have had a case if they hadn't burst into his attic and found half a dozen sheets of halfpenny reds hanging up to dry.

And Moist had testified, right there in the court. He'd had to. It was his civic duty. Forging stamps was held to be as bad as forging coins, and he couldn't dodge. He was the Postmaster General, after all, a respected figure in the community. He'd have felt a tiny bit better if the man had sworn or glared at him, but he'd just stood in the dock, a little figure with a wispy beard, looking lost and bewildered.

He'd forged halfpenny stamps, he really had. It broke your heart, it really did. Oh, he'd done higher values too, but what kind of person takes all that trouble for half a penny? Owlswick Jenkins had, and now he was in one of the condemned cells down in the Tanty, with a few days to ponder on the nature of cruel fate before he was taken out to dance on air.

Been there, done that, Moist thought. It all went black – and then I got a whole new life. But I never thought being an upstanding citizen was going to be this bad.

'Er . . . thank you, Gladys,' he said to the figure looming genteelly over him.

'You Have An Appointment Now With Lord Vetinari,' said the golem.

'I'm sure I don't.'

'There Are Two Guards Outside Who Are Sure You Do, Mr Lipwig,' Gladys rumbled.

Oh, Moist thought. One of *those* appointments.

‘And the time of this appointment would be right now, would it?’

‘Yes, Mr Lipwig.’

Moist grabbed his trousers, and some relic of his decent upbringing made him hesitate. He looked at the mountain of blue cotton in front of him.

‘Do you mind?’ he said.

Gladys turned away.

She’s half a ton of clay, Moist thought glumly, as he struggled into his clothes. And insanity is catching.

He finished dressing and hurried down the back stairs and out into the coach yard that had so recently threatened to be his penultimate resting place. The Quirm Shuttle was pulling out, but he leapt up beside the coachman, gave the man a nod, and rode in splendour down Widdershins Broadway until he jumped down outside the palace’s main entrance.

It would be nice, he reflected as he ran up the steps, if his lordship would entertain the idea that an appointment was something made by more than one person. But he was a tyrant, after all. They had to have *some* fun.

Drumknott, the Patrician’s secretary, was waiting by the door of the Oblong Office, and quickly ushered him into the seat in front of his lordship’s desk.

After nine seconds of industrious writing, Lord Vetinari looked up from his paperwork.

‘Ah, Mr Lipwig,’ he said. ‘Not in your golden suit?’

‘It’s being cleaned, sir.’

‘I trust the day goes well with you? Up until now, that is?’

Moist looked around, sorting hastily through the Post Office’s recent little problems. Apart from Drumknott, who was standing by his master with an attitude of deferential alertness, they were alone.

‘Look, I can explain,’ he said.

Lord Vetinari lifted an eyebrow with the care of one who, having found a piece of caterpillar in his salad, raises the rest of the lettuce.

‘Pray do,’ he said, leaning back.

‘We got a bit carried away,’ said Moist. ‘We were a bit too creative in our thinking. We encouraged mongooses to breed in the posting boxes to keep down the snakes . . .’

Lord Vetinari said nothing.

‘Er . . . which, admittedly, we introduced into the posting boxes to reduce the numbers of toads . . .’

Lord Vetinari repeated himself.

‘Er . . . which, it’s true, staff put in the posting boxes to keep down the snails . . .’

Lord Vetinari remained unvocal.

‘Er . . . These, I must in fairness point out, got into the boxes of their own accord, in order to eat the glue on the stamps,’ said Moist, aware that he was beginning to burble.

‘Well, at least you were saved the trouble of having to introduce them yourselves,’ said Lord Vetinari cheerfully. ‘As you indicate, this may well have been a case where chilly logic should have been replaced by the common sense of, perhaps, the average chicken.’

But that is not the reason I asked you to come here today.'

'If it's about the cabbage-flavoured stamp glue—' Moist began.

Vetinari waved a hand. 'An amusing incident,' he said, 'and I believe nobody actually died.'

'Er, the Second Issue 50p stamp?' Moist ventured.

'The one they call the "Lovers"?' said Vetinari. 'The League of Decency did complain to me, yes, but—'

'Our artist didn't realize what he was sketching! He doesn't know much about agriculture! He thought the young couple were sowing seeds!'

'Ahem,' said Vetinari. 'But I understand that the offending affair can only be seen in any detail with quite a large magnifying glass, and so the offence, if such it be, is largely self-inflicted.' He gave one of his slightly frightening little smiles. 'I understand the few copies in circulation among the stamp collectors are affixed *to* a plain brown envelope.' He looked at Moist's blank face and sighed. 'Tell me, Mr Lipwig, would you like to make some *real* money?'

Moist gave this some thought and then said, very carefully: 'What will happen to me if I say yes?'

'You will start a new career of challenge and adventure, Mr Lipwig.'

Moist shifted uneasily. He didn't need to look round to know that, by now, someone would be standing by the door. Someone heavily but not grotesquely built, in a cheap black suit, and with absolutely no sense of humour.

‘And, just for the sake of argument, what will happen if I say no?’

‘You may walk out of that door over there and the matter will not be raised again.’

It was a door in a different wall. He had not come in by it.

‘That door over there?’ Moist stood up and pointed.

‘Indeed so, Mr Lipwig.’

Moist turned to Drumknott. ‘May I borrow your pencil, Mr Drumknott? Thank you.’ He walked over to the door and opened it. Then he cupped one hand to his ear, theatrically, and dropped the pencil.

‘Let’s see how dee—’

Clik! The pencil bounced and rolled on some quite solid-looking floorboards. Moist picked it up and stared at it, and then walked slowly back to his chair.

‘Didn’t there use to be a deep pit full of spikes down there?’ he said.

‘I can’t imagine why you would think that,’ said Lord Vetinari.

‘I’m sure there was,’ Moist insisted.

‘Can you recall, Drumknott, why our Mr Lipwig should think that there used to be a deep pit full of spikes behind that door?’ said Vetinari.

‘I can’t imagine why he would think that, my lord,’ Drumknott murmured.

‘I’m very happy at the Post Office, you know,’ said Moist, and realized that he sounded defensive.

‘I’m sure you are. You make a superb Postmaster General,’ said Vetinari. He turned to Drumknott.

‘Now I’ve finished this I’d better deal with the overnights from Genua,’ he said, and carefully folded the letter into an envelope.

‘Yes, my lord,’ said Drumknott.

The tyrant of Ankh-Morpork bent to his work. Moist watched blankly as Vetinari took a small but heavy-looking box from a desk drawer, removed a stick of black sealing wax from it and melted a small puddle of the wax on to the envelope with an air of absorption that Moist found infuriating.

‘Is that all?’ he said.

Vetinari looked up and appeared surprised to see him still there. ‘Why, yes, Mr Lipwig. You may go.’ He laid aside the stick of wax and took a black signet ring out of the box.

‘I mean, there’s not some kind of problem, is there?’

‘No, not at all. You have become an exemplary citizen, Mr Lipwig,’ said Vetinari, carefully stamping a **V** into the cooling wax. ‘You rise each morning at eight, you are at your desk at thirty minutes past. You have turned the Post Office from a calamity into a smoothly running machine. You pay your taxes and a little bird tells me that you are tipped to be next year’s Chairman of the Merchants’ Guild. Well *done*, Mr Lipwig!’

Moist stood up to leave, but hesitated. ‘What’s wrong with being Chairman of the Merchants’ Guild, then?’ he said.

With slow and ostentatious patience, Lord Vetinari slipped the ring back into its box and the box back into the drawer. ‘I beg your pardon, Mr Lipwig?’

‘It’s just that you said it as though there was something wrong with it,’ said Moist.

‘I don’t believe I did,’ said Vetinari, looking up at his secretary. ‘Did I utter a derogatory inflection, Drumknott?’

‘No, my lord. You have often remarked that the traders and shopkeepers of the guild are the backbone of the city,’ said Drumknott, handing him a thick file.

‘I shall get a very nearly gold chain,’ said Moist.

‘He will get a very nearly gold chain, Drumknott,’ observed Vetinari, paying attention to a new letter.

‘And what’s so bad about that?’ Moist demanded.

Vetinari looked up again with an expression of genuinely contrived puzzlement. ‘Are you quite well, Mr Lipwig? You appear to have something wrong with your hearing. Now run along, do. The Central Post Office opens in ten minutes and I’m sure you would wish, as ever, to set a good example to your staff.’

When Moist had departed, the secretary quietly laid a folder in front of Vetinari. It was labelled ‘Albert Spangler/Moist von Lipwig’.

‘Thank you, Drumknott, but why?’

‘The death warrant on Albert Spangler is still extant, my lord,’ Drumknott murmured.

‘Ah. I understand,’ said Lord Vetinari. ‘You think that I will point out to Mr Lipwig that under his *nomme de felonie* of Albert Spangler he could still be hanged? You think that I might suggest to him that all I would need to do is inform the newspapers of my shock at finding that our honourable Mr Lipwig is none other than the master thief, forger and

confidence trickster who over the years has stolen many hundreds of thousands of dollars, breaking banks and forcing honest businesses into penury? You think I will threaten to send in some of my most trusted clerks to audit the Post Office's accounts and, I am *certain*, uncover evidence of the most flagrant embezzlement? Do you think that they will find, for example, that the entirety of the Post Office Pension Fund has gone missing? You think I will express to the world my horror at how the wretch Lipwig escaped the hangman's noose with the aid of persons unknown? Do you think, in short, that I will explain to him how easily I can bring a man so low that his former friends will have to kneel down to spit on him? Is that what you assumed, Drumknott?

The secretary stared up at the ceiling. His lips moved for twenty seconds or so while Lord Vetinari got on with the paperwork. Then he looked down and said: 'Yes, my lord. That about covers it, I believe.'

'Ah, but there is more than one way of racking a man, Drumknott.'

'Face up or face down, my lord?'

'Thank you, Drumknott. I value your cultivated lack of imagination, as you know.'

'Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.'

'In fact, Drumknott, you get him to build his own rack, and let him turn the screw all by himself.'

'I'm not sure I'm with you there, my lord.'

Lord Vetinari laid his pen aside. 'You have to consider the psychology of the individual, Drumknott. Every man may be considered as a sort of lock, to

which there is a key. I have great hopes for Mr Lipwig in the coming skirmish. Even now, he still has the instincts of a criminal.'

'How can you tell, my lord?'

'Oh, there are all sorts of little clues, Drumknott. But I think a most persuasive one is that he has just walked off with your pencil.'

There were meetings. There were always meetings. And they were dull, which is part of the reason they were meetings. Dull likes company.

The Post Office wasn't going places any more. It had gone to places. It had arrived at places. Now those places required staff, and staff rotas, and wages, and pensions, and building maintenance, and cleaning staff to come in at night, and collection schedules, and discipline and investment and on, and on . . .

Moist stared disconsolately at a letter from a Ms Estressa Partleigh of the Campaign for Equal Heights. The Post Office, apparently, was not employing enough dwarfs. Moist had pointed out, very reasonably, he thought, that one in three of the staff were dwarfs. She had replied that this was not the point. The point was that since dwarfs were on average two-thirds the height of humans, the Post Office, as a responsible authority, should employ one and a half dwarfs for every human employed. The Post Office must reach out to the dwarf community, said Ms Partleigh.

Moist picked up the letter between thumb and forefinger and dropped it on the floor. It's reach *down*, Ms Partleigh, reach *down*.

There had also been something about core values. He sighed. It had come to this. He was a responsible authority, and people could use terms like ‘core values’ at him with impunity.

Nevertheless, Moist was prepared to believe that there were people who found a quiet contentment in contemplating columns of figures. Their number did not include him.

It had been *weeks* since he’d last designed a stamp! And much longer since he’d had that tingle, that buzz, that feeling of flying that meant a scam was cooking gently and he was getting the better of someone who thought they were getting the better of him.

Everything was all so . . . worthy. And it was stifling.

Then he thought about this morning, and smiled. Okay, he’d got stuck, but the shadowy night-time climbing fraternity reckoned the Post Office to be particularly challenging. And he’d talked his way out of the problem. All in all, it was a win. For a while there, in between the moments of terror, he’d felt alive and flying.

A heavy tread in the corridor indicated that Gladys was on the way with his mid-morning tea. She entered with her head bent down to avoid the lintel and, with the skill of something massive yet possessed of incredible coordination, put the cup and saucer down without a ripple. She said: ‘Lord Vetinari’s Carriage Is Waiting Outside, Sir.’

Moist was sure there was more treble in Gladys’s voice these days.

‘But I saw him an hour ago! Waiting for what?’ he said.

'You, Sir.' Gladys dropped a curtsy, and when a golem drops a curtsy you can *hear* it.

Moist looked out of his window. A black coach was outside the Post Office. The coachman was standing next to it, having a quiet smoke.

'Does he *say* I have an appointment?' he said.

'The Coachman Said He Was Told To Wait,' said Gladys.

'Ha!'

Gladys curtsied again before she left.

When the door had shut behind her, Moist returned his attention to the pile of paperwork in his in-tray. The top sheaf was headed 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Sub Post Offices Committee', but they looked more like hours.

He picked up the cup of tea. On it was printed: **YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE MAD TO WORK HERE BUT IT HELPS!** He stared at it, and then absent-mindedly picked up a thick black pen and drew a comma between 'Here' and 'But'. He also crossed out the exclamation mark. He hated that exclamation mark, hated its manic, desperate cheeriness. It meant: You Don't Have to be Mad to Work Here. *We'll See to That!*

He forced himself to read the minutes, realizing that his eye was skipping whole paragraphs in self-defence.

Then he started on the District Offices' Weekly Reports. After that, the Accidents and Medical Committee sprawled its acres of words.

Occasionally Moist glanced at the cup.

At twenty-nine minutes past eleven the alarm on his desk clock went ‘bing’. Moist got up, put his chair under the desk, walked to the door, counted to three, opened it, said ‘Hello, Tiddles’ as the Post Office’s antique cat padded in, counted to nineteen as the cat did its circuit of the room, said ‘Goodbye, Tiddles’ as it plodded back into the corridor, shut the door and went back to his desk.

You just opened the door for an elderly cat who’s lost hold of the concept of walking around things, he told himself, as he rewound the alarm. You do it every day. Do you think that’s the action of a sane man? Okay, it’s sad to see him standing for hours with his head up against a chair until someone moves it, but now *you* get up every day to move the chair for him. This is what honest work does to a person.

Yes, but dishonest work nearly got me hanged! he protested.

So? Hanging only lasts a couple of minutes. The Pension Fund Committee lasts a lifetime! It’s all so *boring! You’re trapped in chains of gold-ish!*

Moist had ended up near the window. The coachman was eating a biscuit. When he caught sight of Moist he gave him a friendly wave.

Moist almost jumped back from the window. He sat down hurriedly and countersigned FG/2 requisition forms for fifteen minutes straight. Then he went out into the corridor, which on its far side was open to the big hall, and looked down.

He’d promised to get the big chandeliers back, and now they both hung there glittering like private star

systems. The big shiny counter gleamed in its polished splendour. There was the hum of purposeful and largely efficient activity.

He'd done it. It all worked. It was the Post Office. And it wasn't fun any more.

He went down into the sorting rooms, he dropped into the postmen's locker room to have a convivial cup of tar-like tea, he wandered around the coach yard and got in the way of people who were trying to do their jobs, and at last he plodded back to his office, bowed under the weight of the humdrum.

He just happened to glance out of the window, as anyone might. The coachman was eating his lunch! His damn lunch! He had a little folding chair on the pavement, with his meal on a little folding table! It was a large pork pie and a bottle of beer! There was even a white tablecloth!

Moist went down the main stairs like a maddened tapdancer and ran out through the big double doors. In one crowded moment, as he hurried towards the coach, the meal, table, cloth and chair were stowed in some unnoticeable compartment, and the man was standing by the invitingly open door.

'Look, what is this about?' Moist demanded, panting for breath. 'I don't have all—'

'Ah, Mr Lipwig,' said Lord Vetinari's voice from within, 'do step inside. Thank you, Houseman, Mrs Lavish will be waiting. Hurry *up*, Mr Lipwig, I am not going to eat you. I have just had an acceptable cheese sandwich.'

What harm can it do to find out? It's a question that

has left bruises down the centuries, even more than ‘It can’t hurt if I only take one’ and ‘It’s all right if you only do it standing up’.

Moist climbed into the shadows. The door clicked behind him, and he turned suddenly.

‘Oh, really,’ said Lord Vetinari. ‘It’s just shut, it isn’t *locked*, Mr Lipwig. Do compose yourself!’ Beside him, Drumknott sat primly with a large leather satchel on his lap.

‘What is it you want?’ said Moist.

Lord Vetinari raised an eyebrow. ‘I? Nothing. What do *you* want?’

‘What?’

‘Well, you got into my coach, Mr Lipwig.’

‘Yes, but I was told it was outside!’

‘And if you had been told it was black, would you have found it necessary to do anything about it? There is the door, Mr Lipwig.’

‘But you’ve been parked out here all morning!’

‘It is a public street, sir,’ said Lord Vetinari. ‘Now sit *down*. Good.’

The coach jerked into motion.

‘You are restless, Mr Lipwig,’ said Vetinari. ‘You are careless of your safety. Life has lost its flavour, has it not?’

Moist didn’t reply.

‘Let us talk about angels,’ said Lord Vetinari.

‘Oh yes, I know that one,’ said Moist bitterly. ‘I’ve heard that one. That’s the one you got me with after I was hanged—’

Vetinari raised an eyebrow again. ‘Only *mostly*

hanged, I think you'll find. To within an inch of your life.'

'Whatever! I was hanged! And the worst part of that was finding out I only got two paragraphs in the *Tanty Bugle!** Two paragraphs, may I say, for a life of ingenious, inventive and strictly non-violent crime? I could have been an example to youngsters! Page one got hogged by the Dyslectic Alphabet Killer, and he only managed A and W!

'I confess the editor does appear to believe that it is not a proper crime unless someone is found in three alleys at once, but that is the price of a free Press. And it suits us both, does it not, that Albert Spangler's passage from this world was . . . unmemorable?'

'Yes, but I wasn't expecting an afterlife like this! I have to do what I'm told for the rest of my life?'

'Correction, your new life. That is a crude summary, yes,' said Vetinari. 'Let me rephrase things, however. Ahead of you, Mr Lipwig, is a life of respectable quiet contentment, of civic dignity and, of course, in the fullness of time a pension. Not to mention the proud gold-ish chain.'

Moist winced at this. 'And if I *don't* do what you say?'

'Hmm? Oh, you misunderstand me, Mr Lipwig. That is what will happen to you if you *decline* my offer. If you accept it, you will survive on your wits

* A periodical published throughout the Plains, noted for its coverage of murders (preferably 'orrible), trials, prison escapes, and the world that in general is surrounded by a chalk outline. Very popular.

against powerful and dangerous enemies, with every day presenting fresh challenges. Someone may even try to kill you.'

'What? Why?'

'You annoy people. A hat goes with the job, incidentally.'

'And this job makes real money?'

'Nothing but money, Mr Lipwig. It is in fact that of Master of the Royal Mint.'

'What? Banging out pennies all day?'

'In short, yes. But it is traditionally attached to a senior post at the Royal Bank of Ankh-Morpork, which will occupy most of your attention. You can make money, as it were, in your spare time.'

'A *banker*? Me?'

'Yes, Mr Lipwig.'

'But I don't know anything about running a bank!'

'Good. No preconceived ideas.'

'I've *robbed* banks!'

'Capital! Just reverse your thinking,' said Lord Vetinari, beaming. 'The money should be on the *inside*.'

The coach slowed to a stop.

'What is this about?' said Moist. 'Actually about?'

'When you took over the Post Office, Mr Lipwig, it was a disgrace. Now it works quite efficiently. Efficiently enough to be boring, in fact. Why, a young man might find himself climbing by night, perhaps, or picking locks for the thrill of it, or even flirting with Extreme Sneezing. How are you finding the lock-picks, by the way?'

It had been a poky little shop in a poky alley, and there had been no one in there but the little old lady who'd sold him the picks. He still didn't know exactly why he'd bought them. They were only geographically illegal, but it gave him a little thrill to know they were in his jacket. It was sad, like those businessmen who come to work in serious clothes but wear colourful ties in a mad despairing attempt to show there is a free spirit in there somewhere.

Oh gods, I've become one of them. But at least he doesn't seem to know about the blackjack.

'I'm not too bad,' he said.

'And the blackjack? You, who have never struck another man? You clamber on rooftops and pick the locks on your own desks. You're like a caged animal, dreaming of the jungle! I'd like to give you what you long for. I'd like to throw you to the lions.'

Moist began to protest, but Vetinari held up a hand.

'You took our joke of a Post Office, Mr Lipwig, and made it a solemn undertaking. But the banks of Ankh-Morpork, sir, are very serious indeed. They are serious donkeys, Mr Lipwig. There have been too many failures. They're stuck in the mud, they live in the past, they are hypnotized by class and wealth, they think gold is important.'

'Er . . . isn't it?'

'No. And thief and swindler that you are, pardon me, once *were*, you know it, deep down. For you, it was just a way of keeping score,' said Vetinari. 'What does gold know of true worth? Look out of the window and tell me what you see.'

‘Um, a small scruffy dog watching a man taking a piss in an alley,’ said Moist. ‘Sorry, but you chose the wrong time.’

‘Had I been taken *less literally*,’ said Lord Vetinari, giving him a Look, ‘you would have seen a large, bustling city, full of ingenious people spinning wealth out of the common clay of the world. They construct, build, carve, bake, cast, mould, forge and devise strange and inventive crimes. But they keep their money in old socks. They trust their socks more than they trust banks. Coinage is in artificially short supply, which is why your postage stamps are now a *de facto* currency. Our serious banking system is a mess. A joke, in fact.’

‘It’ll be a bigger joke if you put *me* in charge,’ said Moist.

Vetinari gave him a brief little smile. ‘Will it?’ he said. ‘Well, we all need a chuckle sometimes.’

The coachman opened the door, and they stepped out.

Why temples? thought Moist, as he gazed up at the façade of the Royal Bank of Ankh-Morpork. Why do they always build banks to look like temples, despite the fact that several major religions a) are canonically against what they do inside and b) bank there.

He’d looked at it before, of course, but had never really bothered to *see* it until now. As temples of money went, this one wasn’t bad. The architect at least knew how to design a decent column, and also knew when to stop. He had set his face like flint against any prospect of cherubs, although above the

columns was a high-minded frieze showing something allegorical involving maidens and urns. Most of the urns, and, Moist noticed, some of the young women, had birds nesting in them. An angry pigeon looked down at Moist from a stony bosom.

Moist had walked past the place many times. It never looked very busy. And behind it was the Royal Mint, which never showed any signs of life at all.

It would be hard to imagine an uglier building that hadn't won a major architectural award. The Mint was a gaunt brick and stone block, its windows high, small, many and barred, its doors protected by portcullises, its whole construction saying to the world: Don't Even Think About It.

Up until now Moist hadn't even thought about it. It was a mint. That sort of place held you upside down over a bucket and shook you hard before they let you out. They had guards, and doors with spikes.

And Vetinari wanted to make him the boss of it. There was going to have to be a *huge* razor blade in a stick of candyfloss this big.

'Tell me, my lord,' he said carefully. 'What happened to the man who used to occupy the post?'

'I thought you would ask, so I looked it up. He died aged ninety, of a schism of the heart.'

That didn't sound too bad, but Moist knew enough to probe further. 'Anyone else died lately?'

'Sir Joshua Lavish, the chairman of the bank. He died six months ago in his own bed, aged eighty.'

'A man can die in some very unpleasant ways in his own bed,' Moist pointed out.

‘So I believe,’ said Lord Vetinari. ‘In this case, however, it was in the arms of a young woman called Honey after a very large meal of devilled oysters. How unpleasant that was I suppose we shall never know.’

‘She was his wife? You said it was his own—’

‘He had an apartment in the bank,’ said Lord Vetinari. ‘A traditional perk that was useful when he was’ – here Vetinari paused for a fraction of a second – ‘working late. Mrs Lavish was not present at the time.’

‘If he was a Sir, shouldn’t she be a Lady?’ said Moist.

‘It is rather characteristic of Mrs Lavish that she does not like being a Lady,’ said Lord Vetinari. ‘And I bow to her wishes.’

‘Did he often “work” late?’ said Moist, carefully quoting.

‘With astonishing regularity for his age, I understand,’ said Vetinari.

‘Oh, really?’ said Moist. ‘You know, I think I recall the obituary in the *Times*. But I don’t remember any of *that* sort of detail.’

‘Yes, what *is* the Press coming to, one wonders.’

Vetinari turned and surveyed the building. ‘Of the two, I prefer the honesty of the Mint,’ he said. ‘It growls at the world. What do you think, Mr Lipwig?’

‘What’s that round thing I always see poking out of the roof?’ said Moist. ‘It makes it look like a money box with a big coin stuck in the slot!’

‘Oddly enough, it did use to be known as the Bad Penny,’ said Vetinari. ‘It is a large treadmill to provide power for the coin stamping and so forth. Powered by

prisoners once upon a time, when “community service” wasn’t just a word. Or even two. It was considered cruel and unusual punishment, however, which does rather suggest a lack of imagination. Shall we go in?’

‘Look, sir, what is it you would want me to *do*?’ said Moist, as they climbed the marble steps. ‘I know a bit about banking, but how do I run a mint?’

Vetinari shrugged. ‘I have no idea. People turn handles, I assume. Someone tells them how often, and when to stop.’

‘And why will anyone want to kill me?’

‘I couldn’t say, Mr Lipwig. But there was at least one attempt on your life when you were innocently delivering letters, so I expect your career in banking will be an exciting one.’

They reached the top of the steps. An elderly man in what might have been the uniform of a general in one of the more unstable kinds of armies held open the door for them.

Lord Vetinari gestured for Moist to enter first.

‘I’m just going to have a look around, all right?’ said Moist, stumbling through the doorway. ‘I really haven’t had time to think about this.’

‘That is understood,’ said Vetinari.

‘I’m committing myself to nothing by it, right?’

‘Nothing,’ said Vetinari. He strolled to a leather sofa and sat down, beckoning Moist to sit beside him. Drumknott, ever attentive, hovered behind them.

‘The smell of banks is always pleasing, don’t you

think?’ said Vetinari. ‘A mix of polish and ink and wealth.’

‘And ursery,’ said Moist.

‘That would be cruelty to bears. You mean usury, I suspect. The churches don’t seem to be so much against it these days. Incidentally, only the current chairman of the bank knows my intentions. To everyone else here today, you are merely carrying out a brief inspection on my behalf. It is just as well you are not wearing the famous gold suit.’

There was a hush in the bank, mostly because the ceiling was so high that sounds were just lost, but partly because people lower their voices in the presence of large sums of money. Red velvet and brass were much in evidence. There were pictures everywhere, of serious men in frock coats. Sometimes footsteps echoed briefly on the white marble floor and were suddenly swallowed when their owner stepped on to an island of carpet. And the big desks were covered with sage-green leather. Ever since he was small, a sage-green leather desktop had been Wealth to Moist. Red leather? Pah! That was for parvenus and wannabes. Sage green meant that you’d got there, and that your ancestors had got there too. It should be a little bit worn, for the best effect.

On the wall above the counter a big clock, supported by cherubs, ticked away. Lord Vetinari was having an effect on the bank. Staff were nudging one another and pointing with their expressions.

In truth, Moist realized, they were not a readily noticeable pair. Nature had blessed him with the

ability to be a face in the background, even when he was standing only a few feet away. He wasn't ugly, he wasn't handsome, he was just so forgettable he sometimes surprised himself whilst shaving. And Vetinari wore black, not a forward colour at all, but nevertheless his presence was like a lead weight on a rubber sheet. It distorted the space around it. People didn't immediately see him, but they sensed his presence.

Now people were whispering into speaking tubes. The Patrician was here and no one was formally greeting him! There would be trouble!

'How is Miss Dearheart?' said Vetinari, apparently oblivious of the growing stir.

'She's away,' said Moist bluntly.

'Ah, the Trust has located another buried golem, no doubt.'

'Yes.'

'Still trying to carry out orders given to it thousands of years ago?'

'Probably. It's out in the wilderness somewhere.'

'She is indefatigable,' said Vetinari happily. 'Those people are resurrected from darkness to turn the wheels of commerce, for the general good. Just like you, Mr Lipwig. She is doing the city a great service. And the Golem Trust, too.'

'Yes,' said Moist, letting the whole resurrection thing pass.

'But your tone says otherwise.'

'Well . . .' Moist knew he was squirming, but squam anyway. 'She's always rushing off because they've traced another golem in some ancient sewer or something—'

‘And not rushing off after you, as it were?’

‘And she’s been away for weeks on this one,’ said Moist, ignoring the comment because it was probably accurate, ‘and she won’t tell me what it’s about. She just says it’s very important. Something new.’

‘I think she’s mining,’ said Vetinari. He began to tap his cane on the marble, slowly. It made a ringing sound. ‘I have heard that golems appear to be mining on dwarf land this side of Chimeria, near the coach road. Much to the interest of the dwarfs, I might add. The King leased the land to the Trust and wants to make certain he gets a look at what is dug up.’

‘Is she in trouble?’

‘Miss Dearheart? No. Knowing her, the king of the dwarfs might be. She’s a very . . . composed young lady, I’ve noticed.’

‘Hah! You don’t know the half of it.’

Moist made a mental note to send Adora Belle a message as soon as this was over. The whole situation with golems was heating up once more, what with the guilds complaining about them taking jobs. She was needed in the city – by the golems, obviously.

He became aware of a subtle noise. It came from below, and sounded very much like air bubbling through liquid, or maybe water being poured out of a bottle with the familiar blomp-blomp sound.

‘Can you hear that?’ he said.

‘Yes.’

‘Do you know what it is?’

‘The future of economic planning, I understand.’ Lord Vetinari looked, if not worried, then at least

unaccustomedly puzzled. ‘Something must have happened,’ he said. ‘Mr Bent is normally oiling his way across the floor within seconds of my entrance. I hope nothing unamusing has happened to him.’

A pair of big elevator doors opened at the far end of the hall, and a man stepped through. For just a moment, probably unnoticed by anyone who had never had to read faces for a living, he was anxious and upset, but it passed with speed as he adjusted his cuffs and set his face in the warm, benevolent smile of someone who is about to take some money off you.

Mr Bent was in every way smooth and uncreased. Moist had been expecting a traditional banker’s frock coat, but instead there was a very well cut black jacket above pinstripe trousers. Mr Bent was also silent. His feet, soundless even on the marble, were unusually large for such a dapper man, but the shoes, black and polished, mirror-shiny, were well made. Perhaps he wanted to show them off, because he walked like a dressage horse, lifting each foot very deliberately off the ground before setting it down again. Apart from that incongruity, Mr Bent had the air about him of one who stands quietly in a cupboard when not in use.

‘Lord Vetinari, I am *so* sorry!’ he began. ‘I’m afraid there was unfinished business—’

Lord Vetinari got to his feet. ‘Mr Mavolio Bent, allow me to present Mr Moist von Lipwig,’ he said. ‘Mr Bent is the chief cashier here.’

‘Ah, the inventor of the revolutionary unsecured One Penny note?’ said Bent, extending a thin hand.

‘Such audacity! I’m very pleased to meet you, Mr Lipwig.’

‘One penny note?’ said Moist, mystified. Mr Bent, despite his protestation, did not look pleased at all.

‘Did you not listen to what I was saying?’ said Vetinari. ‘Your *stamps*, Mr Lipwig.’

‘A *de facto* currency,’ said Bent and light dawned on Moist. Well, it was true, he knew it. He’d meant stamps to be stuck to letters, but people had decided, in their untutored way, that a penny stamp was nothing more than a very light, government-guaranteed penny and, moreover, *one that you could put in an envelope*. The advertising pages were full of the businesses that had sprouted on the back of the beguilingly transferable postage stamps: ‘Learn The Uttermost Secrets Of The Cosmos! Send 8 penny Stamps for booklet!’ A lot of stamps wore out as currency without ever seeing the inside of a posting box.

Something in Bent’s smile annoyed Moist, though. It was not quite as kind when seen close to. ‘What do you mean by “unsecured”?’ he said.

‘How do you validate its claim to be worth a penny?’

‘Er, if you stick it on a letter you get a penny’s worth of travel?’ said Moist. ‘I don’t see what you’re getting at—’

‘Mr Bent is one of those who believe in the pre-eminence of gold, Mr Lipwig,’ said Vetinari. ‘I’m sure you’ll get along exactly like a house on fire. I shall leave you now, and await your decision with, ah,

compound interest. Come, Drumknott. Perhaps you will drop in to see me tomorrow, Mr Lipwig?’

Moist and Bent watched them go. Then Bent glared at Moist. ‘I suppose I must show you around . . . sir,’ he said.

‘I have a feeling that we haven’t quite hit it off, Mr Bent,’ said Moist.

Bent shrugged, an impressive manoeuvre on that gaunt frame. It was like watching an ironing-board threatening to unfold.

‘I know nothing to your discredit, Mr Lipwig. But I believe the chairman and Lord Vetinari have a dangerous scheme in mind, and you are their catspaw, Mr Lipwig, you are their implement.’

‘This would be the new chairman?’

‘That is correct.’

‘I don’t particularly want or intend to be an implement,’ said Moist.

‘Good for you, sir. But events are eventuating—’

There was a crash of broken glass from below, and a faint muffled voice shouted: ‘Damn! There goes the Balance of Payments!’

‘Let’s have that tour, shall we?’ said Moist brightly. ‘Starting with what that was?’

‘That abomination?’ Bent gave a little shudder. ‘I think we should leave *that* until Hubert has cleaned up. Oh, will you look at that? It really is terrible . . .’

Mr Bent strode across the floor until he was under the big, solemn clock. He glared at it as if it had mortally offended him, and snapped his fingers, but a junior clerk was already hurrying across the floor

with a small stepladder. Mr Bent mounted the steps, opened the clock, and moved the second hand forward by two seconds. The clock was slammed shut, the steps dismantled, and the accountant returned to Moist, adjusting his cuffs.

He looked Moist up and down. 'It loses almost a minute a week. Am I the only person who finds this offensive? It would appear so, alas. Let's start with the gold, shall we?'

'Ooo, yes,' said Moist. 'Let's!'

Chapter 2

*The promise of gold – The Men of the Sheds – The cost of a penny and the usefulness of widows – Overheads underfoot – Security, the importance thereof – A fascination with transactions – A son of many fathers – Alleged untrustworthiness in a case of flaming underwear – The Panopticon of the World and the blindness of Mr Bent –
An Arch Comment*

‘SOMEHOW I WAS expecting something . . . bigger,’ said Moist, looking through the steel bars into the little room that held the gold. The metal, in open bags and boxes, gleamed dully in the torchlight.

‘That is almost ten tons of gold,’ said Bent reproachfully. ‘It does not have to look big.’

‘But all the ingots and bags put together aren’t much bigger than the desks out there!’

‘It is very heavy, Mr Lipwig. It is the one true metal, pure and unsullied,’ said Bent. His left eye twitched. ‘It is the metal that never fell from grace.’

‘Really?’ said Moist, checking that the door out of there was still open.

‘And it is also the only basis of a sound financial system,’ Mr Bent went on, while the torchlight reflected off the bullion and gilded his face. ‘There is Value! There is Worth! Without the anchor of gold, all would be chaos.’

‘Why?’

‘Who would set the value of the dollar?’

‘Our dollars are not pure gold, though, are they?’

‘Aha, yes. Gold-coloured, Mr Lipwig,’ said Bent. ‘Less gold than seawater, gold-ish. We adulterated our own currency! Infamy! There can be no greater crime!’ His eye twitched again.

‘Er . . . murder?’ Moist ventured. Yep, the door was still open.

Mr Bent waved a hand. ‘Murder only happens once,’ he said, ‘but when the trust in gold breaks down, chaos rules. But it had to be done. The abominable coins are, admittedly, only gold-ish, but they are at least a solid token of the true gold in the reserves. In their wretchedness, they nevertheless acknowledge the primacy of gold and our independence from the machinations of government! We ourselves have more gold than any other bank in the city, and only I have a key to that door! And the chairman has one too, of course,’ he added, very much as a grudging and unwelcome afterthought.

‘I read somewhere that the coin represents a promise to hand over a dollar’s worth of gold,’ said Moist helpfully.

Mr Bent steepled his hands in front of his face and turned his eyes upwards, as though praying.

‘In theory, yes,’ he said after a few moments. ‘I would prefer to say that it is a tacit understanding that we *will* honour our promise to exchange it for a dollar’s worth of gold provided we are not, in point of fact, asked to.’