

Sam Vimes would be the first to admit that he was not exactly sensitive. Or perceptive, for that matter, at least when it came to being a husband. He had often counted himself lucky that, at least when all else failed, Sybil tended to just speak up plainly rather than fume and pout at him and expect him to figure it out. It didn't hurt that she generally got her way and he was usually glad to give it to her, but on the odd occasions where they didn't agree and both of them felt strongly enough about it to argue, it all still typically worked out in the end easily enough. Even if he did still put up a fight about things like dress uniforms and receptions, because if he didn't, he wouldn't be Sam Vimes, he actually saw why she put her foot down about such things. He would sooner die than actually admit it, and Sybil probably already knew that, but at least she wasn't *smug* about it.

Lucky for him, too, that she had an easy going and generous and forgiving nature about most things. She didn't often have days where she was in A Mood. But the last few days... *Well*. He couldn't say he hadn't been warned. Mind, he had been warned before. Fred had made a big production of having it said over a lunch, a long while back, that wives sometimes had Funny Little Moods. There had been a command performance over a different lunch when it had started filtering through the Watch that there was a baby in the offing. He had mostly ignored it the second time around, one, because Sybil rarely had Funny Little Moods and two, because he was too busy being mortified by being given advice like that, about expectant wives, by *Fred*.

It had gone smoothly enough until just recently. Sybil had, like usual, simply gotten on with things efficiently. Plans got organized, preparations were made, provisions got purchased or hauled down from the attics, new paint and wallpaper happened, a nursery and all the supplies that evidently went in it came together. Mrs. Content came and went on a regular basis. The household fussed over her, but Sybil, for the most part, had soldiered on with little evidence that she needed fussing over, except for the fact that she was steadily getting rounder in spots.

And the whole while, Sam had held his breath. Not so much because he was bracing for any Funny Little Moods, but mostly because it all seemed too easy. Too perfect. And then, Mrs. Content said the baby could be coming almost any time now, though it might not be until June. And it wasn't so easy any more. There was the impossibility of finding a comfortable position in which to lie down and sleep, then to sit. The baby kicking hard enough to rattle ribs just when she finally fell into an exhausted sleep, usually in the small hours of the morning. Perpetual heartburn. Headaches. Fatigue. Swollen fingers and ankles. An aching back and legs. Hormones. Even then, Sybil had borne it with the usual good grace until the last three days.

He had chalked it up to a Bad Day the first day, when she had snapped at him about not wiping his boots when he had come in. And another Bad Day when she had given him a sharp, five minute scolding about not remembering that he was supposed to be at a reception the next afternoon and bit off shorter than usual answers the rest of the evening. She had even apologized for that when they went to bed. Yesterday, she had been in an unapologetic foul mood that morning and snappish again in the evening. Nothing he said suited, so he had mostly quietly hidden behind the paper and reminded himself that it was just the hormones and... *everything else*... she wasn't herself lately, and it would all be over soon. This morning, she had been too tired to be in a mood of any kind and he had actually managed to convince her to have a lie in. Well, she had been too nearly unconscious to argue, for one thing, she had barely roused when he got up or when he looked in on her before leaving. He had crept out of the bedroom with her sleeping more soundly than she had done in more than a week, at least.

It didn't exactly take being husband of the year to figure out that this had been another Bad Day. For one thing, she was in the overstuffed chair in the Ghastly Pink Drawing Room with her feet up, looking equal parts uncomfortable and miserable, and she was glowering at the skein of yarn she was untangling and rewinding into a tidy ball with the sort of ferocity he generally associated with bar fights. The kind where all it took was for someone to look at someone else the wrong way for the broken bottles and broken chairs and, quite possibly, noses, to start flying. Anything he said would probably be the wrong thing, so he commented on the least controversial subject he could come up with on short notice. "Came down in

buckets most of the day. Coming a pretty good drizzle now. At least it looks like it's going to clear off a little for the evening. That's early May for you," When that earned him nothing more than a noncommittal sort of back of the throat noise, he ventured, "Mrs. Content make it by today?" She had started making weekly visits, now, instead of monthly ones. "Everything okay?" he prompted when there was no immediate answer.

"Of course, she did. Everything's *fine*," Sybil said. There was definitely tension in her voice.

"Came in through the kitchen." *And wiped my boots. Very well, thank you. Could probably eat dinner off my soles.* "Dinner is going to be a while... Well, you know that, you told them to hold it for me, but maybe you want to go have a rest first?" It had been exactly the wrong thing to say. Watching her slam the ball of yarn back into the basket beside the chair and get heavily to her feet, he decided he probably couldn't have found anything more wrong to say at that exact moment if he had taken special classes.

"Contrary to popular belief around here, I am not some kind of invalid! And I am perfectly capable of deciding what I can and cannot handle and when I do or do not need a rest! I don't need someone telling me I can't even go out when it's rain-" Sybil broke off abruptly, and to Sam's astonishment, burst into tears before hurrying past him and up the stairs.

Sam managed a shaky "Hormones..." a moment after the door closed upstairs. There was a butlerly little cough behind him.

"Excuse me, sir, I couldn't help but... I don't think that's the entire explanation, Your Grace," Willikins said smoothly.

"Oh... I know... I mean, she's not sleeping and she doesn't feel well, either," Sam said wearily. "At. *All*."

"If you don't mind my taking the liberty of saying so, I think her ladyship's present mood has more to do with a certain... anniversary."

"Anniversary? I know I haven't forgotten our wedding anniversary. That's August in any case."

"Not a wedding anniversary, sir. I can't help but note that she usually makes a trip to the crypt on the anniversary of her father's passing." There was a lengthy pause. "I gather Mrs. Content felt taking a carriage ride across the city in mid-day traffic and being in a damp cemetery in today's weather was not particularly advisable and her ladyship disagreed. But the other ladies of the house rather *agreed* with the midwife and her ladyship relented." There was another meaningful pause. "Her ladyship was quite close to her father. I don't believe she's missed a year since he passed on."

"Relented," Sam repeated. "Gave up in the face of getting ganged up on by everyone else, you mean?" Willikins said nothing. "Willikins, go get the carriage ready. I think we might be taking a ride before dinner."

It was damned stupid to stand outside your own bedroom door and stare at it, wondering how best to go in, but Sam found himself doing it anyway. Feeling ridiculous, he put an ear close to the wood and listened. His reward was a great big heaping pool of apparent silence. There was the option of knocking and asking to be let in, but that also left the return option of being told "no". There was also the option of just going in, unannounced. That left the answering option of getting something hurled at his head. Not that Sybil had, ever, actually threatened to hurl something at his head, but Fred had said... He finally settled on more or less combining the two, knocking smartly a couple of times and immediately opening the door. Cautiously. "Sybil?" She was curled up on her side in bed, a touch damp, but not actually crying at the moment. He went and sat on the edge of the bed behind her. "Look... if you feel up to it, I've got Willikins getting the carriage ready. I don't see why you couldn't go now. It's just a little rain." He gave her shoulder an awkward pat. "Not too cold. We could both ride over there."

"The gates will be locked," Sybil said flatly.

"I know where the caretaker lives. He's right there. I could have a word," Sam insisted, laying a hand lightly on her belly. "It's important to you, isn't it? Look, I know you don't like people fussing, but I'm sure they don't mean... don't mean to... they just worry, that's all." *I worry.* She bit her lip. He moved his hand in small, nervous circles.

"I'll... get a shawl or-"

"Better make it the coat you usually wear out to the pens. And boots. It's sloppy out. Come down when you're ready?"

Sybil nodded, almost imperceptibly. Sam stood up and slunk out to go collect his own coat and wait by the door. Within five minutes, Sybil met him, face still a bit too pink but freshly washed, wearing the oversized, heavy leather greatcoat and even heavier leather boots that would have normally done regular duty out in the dragon pens in cold or wet weather, at least if there hadn't been a very good reason to stay out of there as much as possible. It even buttoned near the middle. At least one button did. Barely.

In the evening, traffic wasn't nearly as thick toward that side of the city, so the ride was shorter, and the caretaker was amenable enough about leaving his dinner to come out in the rain and unlock the pedestrian gate. It was hard to turn down what was probably two weeks wages for a few minutes of work, even if he did insist upon passing comment on how expectant mothers got Funny Little Notions. And sharing. The whole way there. If there was one thing Sam Vimes was learning, it was that pending parenthood earned you all the stories you could stand and then some. It was almost like joining some secret society and being forced to learn the lore all at once. "Your missus wants to visit the crypts, this time of night, weather like this? Well, different strokes and all, I suppose. My missus had a thing about Klatchian food. Swore it was about all she could taste. More'n my life was worth to tell her that all the restaurants were closed, I can tell you. Lucky for us, we were living in Attic Bee Street and there was a little old Klatchian lady renting rooms just across the way. Couldn't understand a word she said when she started gabbling at you in their lingo, but she took quite a shine to the missus when she found out she was having a little one and-"

"Er... we'll just make sure it closes and locks when we leave, then?" Sam interrupted desperately.

"Right. Just pull it together and make sure it latches. Tell your missus to take care around the crypts if you get off the path. Rained a treat earlier and the grass just won't take around them where the water stands. You and your missus will be losing a boot if you put a foot wrong in this slop."

"I'm to tell my missus not to be getting too far off the path and losing a boot in this slop," Sam said woodenly a few minutes later, swinging the door of the parked carriage open.

"I'll try to keep that in mind, but they're pretty firmly tied on," Sybil replied, slipping off of the seat and out of the carriage while Sam steadied her by the elbow.

"We'll be back when we're back," Sam said with a vague shrug at Willikins. The rain was pattering down lightly as he followed Sybil through the side gate and along one of the paths. He trailed along in her wake, not really sure where she was headed, until they reached an enormous white marble crypt near the center, on a small rise. Sam couldn't suppress the thought that a dozen Cockbill Street families could probably live, never mind die, in there, comfortably.

"It's not too bad around it," Sybil said, rounding the corner and easing herself down onto the top step. "It's not raining that hard, this side is out of the rain and I've got the coat. I'll be fine here for a few minutes,"

she added, looking at him expectantly. Sam got the distinct feeling that he was currently somewhat surplus to requirements.

"I'll just be... I'll go... I'll just go. I won't go far," he amended.

"You could go back to the carriage and sit," Sybil suggested. "I'm fine, really. I'll be along when I'm finished." She pressed her shoulders back against the cool marble and waited a full minute. "Well. Where to begin? It has been quite the year. Especially since fall. Found out we were going to have a baby, went to Überwald... Less said about that, the better, probably. The trip, not the baby. Except for the fact that it's not every day you meet a king. Managed to have a bit of a holiday, too, on the way back. Had a nice, quiet Hogswatch. I suppose we had better enjoy that, it's probably going to be the last one where we don't have to get up at the crack of dawn." Sybil took a deep breath and paused to gather her thoughts. "Most of the new year has been taken up with getting ready for the baby. Seems like there are a million things to do. Had the nursery redone, of course, and brought some things down from the attics. Put the old oak rocking chair back in there. The room's actually looking fit to put a baby in, these days. Good thing, too, since Mrs. Content says it could be practically any day now."

Sybil sighed and rested a hand on the topic of conversation. "I bet you would be insufferably proud if you were around for this. Probably buy up every cigar from here to Pseudopolis and buy half the city a drink. It's a shame you didn't get to enjoy this. No living grandparents on either side, actually. I suppose we'll have to make do with stories, mostly. Ought to be a fair few of those. Although I might need to edit some of the language in *your* case, especially the ones that involve being *annoyed*," she amended with a short laugh. "I've missed you a lot, lately." There was a long pause. "But next year, I can bring some company. Well, I expect I've brought company *this* year, but it's not like I had any choice in the case of the baby," she added, smoothing her blouse. "Suppose there's much difference in being woken up by crying at three in the morning and being woken up by kicking? I think the baby's solidly on the night shift right now. Seems to be pretty lively just about the time I get to sleep." There was another gap filled with nothing but the low hiss of rain. "And they'll probably be hard headed and stubborn and ask a million questions and drag in every bedraggled animal within ten miles. Probably get some of my own back just like you used to threaten and... it serves me right."

She sat and listened to the rain pick up and pelt into the path for a few moments, then smiled softly. "I can hardly wait." After another moment, she pushed herself up off the step, a little awkwardly, making her way slowly back down the path toward the pedestrian gate with her hands in her pockets. Sam was leaning against the lee side of another of the crypts about half the distance back, shielding the glowing end of a cigar from the rain with a curled hand when not puffing on it industriously. He hastily stubbed it out on the sole of a boot and fell into step beside her when she drew even. "Better?" he hazarded after a few feet, giving her a sidelong look and tentatively putting a hand to the small of her back.

"Better," she conceded. "I'm sorry I've been such a bear to live with the last few days."

"Nah. We all have our bad days," Sam allowed.

"I've been awful. I've just been... so *grouchy* and-

"At least you have a good excuse. What's mine?" Sam interrupted with a snort.

"I'm sorry anyway."

"Apology accepted. How about dinner?"

Sybil heaved a sigh. "For two pence, I would almost rather go straight to bed than wait on it. I'm hungry but I'm tired. I'm not sure which is winning out right now."

"You need to eat something," Sam said, tugging the gate shut. "Don't suppose you feel up to eating out, then, if you're tired."

"I could do takeaway," Sybil said as he held the door of the carriage open.

"About the only quick options this time of night are Harga's and Mundane Meals," Sam pointed out, clambering in after her.

"I could eat curry. It's not as though I have to worry particularly about it giving me indigestion. Everything does," she observed, smiling, starting to unbutton the wet coat.

"Right, I'll tell Willikins," Sam said. He leaned out the window and relayed this to the man patiently perched on the driver's seat while Sybil finished wrestling the button free and shook some of the rain off. He studied her a little while, wondering why he hadn't noticed which side the buttons were on before now. *Well, there was never any particular reason to take notice before, was there?* "Pretty good old coat for the rain," Sam commented, dropping his arm around her shoulders and giving them a light squeeze. "How long have you had that thing, anyway?"

"Ever since my father died," Sybil explained quietly.

"I thought maybe you had," Sam said, pressing his lips against her temple, knowing that was really all that needed to be said.

And nothing new had been passed on either subject an hour later, either. Sam Vimes lay in bed and studied the ceiling while chewing thoughtfully on an unlit cigar that he had no intention of lighting any time soon. The silence was finally comfortable. Takeaway containers and utensils lay abandoned on the bedside tables and the warm, sweetish, thick scent of curry still hung in the air.

Well, not *quite* silence. Not exactly *silence*. Sybil snored steadily from somewhere in the vicinity of his chest. And the near-silence might be comfortable enough, but nothing else was. He had a sharp crick in his neck from the awkward way he was propped up against the pillows. His right arm, tucked under and around his sleeping wife, had gone blessedly stone dead ten minutes ago. The right foot had begun to prickle from the knee bent oddly to avoid the extra pillow tucked under Sybil's ankles. Sybil's rounded belly pressed hard, strangely solid and heavy, into his side, and from the feel of things, small limbs were already limbering up and practicing for the wee hours of the morning. Sam reached his free hand slowly over Sybil's right arm, flung haphazardly and limply across him, and removed the cigar, slipping it over to the bedside table, careful to watch it out of the corner of his eye best he could without moving his head and make sure it didn't roll when he let go. He curled his fingers lightly around Sybil's right wrist and briefly considered trying to move her hand away from his ear, then reconsidered, letting his own hand rest there. He shut his eyes. His last thought before finally drifting off for the time being was surprisingly definite. *Today was a Good Day.*