The banquet was in full swing, the clatter of dining guests, and chatter of their voices easily heard a little ways down the wood-lined hallways of the Inquisitorius keep on Arx. The plump velveteen rug underfoot helped to deaden the sound of his approach but did little to help his anxiety. Each step, it seemed, felt like stepping on a slippery fish, so unnatural and uncomfortable to feel was to him. Archangel Palpatine was far more used to the durasteel plates of an Imperial-class Star Destroyer or the mud and dirt of a battlefield.

But today he was fighting a different war, one which had raged for almost a dozen years. From time immemorial, because traumatic brain injuries had made such abilities as long-term memory to be fickle at best, Archangel had been in a clandestine struggle for his very being. Each year it seemed to get worse, with one side gaining a foothold, before the other regained their ground the next time around. This prank war, he had decided, would end tonight.

Idris Adenn was hosting his annual Sithmas gathering with all of his highest Inquisitors in attendance. Archangel had, of course, begged off, blaming his new Quaestor position and all the new work involved. Even now he could hear Idris prophesizing from his seat at the head of the grand table, probably talking about some new torture device his slicers had created. He hadn’t even looked at Archangel’s blueprints!

Well, enough was enough. Just down the hallway through the keep, around the servants’ quarters and past the armory is the main secure vault. Anyone who wanted to steal the secrets of the Voice, the Dark Brotherhood, or Idris Adenn himself, that is exactly where they would need to go. A dozen or so guards, with at least two force users, patrolled the area, inside and out. The security system alone rivals that of the Justicar’s cells.

Which is exactly why Archangel was headed for Idris’ quarters. Anything of real significance would be tucked away there, near where Idris would be on a regular basis. He was a stickler for keeping an eye on everything, and certainly he had become even more paranoid since his elevation to the hallowed position of Voice. While not necessarily jumping at shadows, he had made significant changes to the guard rotation and configuration, as well as upgrading the security systems.

Idris was old school though, preferring simple subterfuge to brute force padlocking. The little cabinet next to his bed, for example, would be the spot. Archangel crouched down, gingerly tugging at the cabinet door. It opened with a poorly oiled creak, and the large man winced. He stopped moving, his eyes closed, his ears strained to hear the expected alarm and clammer of guards. None arose, and he let out the breath he had been holding.

He reached into the cabinet and pulled out the small package. Wrapped in red paper, featuring tiny white polka dots, and festooned with a satin bow, the present felt heavy in his hands. A small tag had been tied to the bow, with the word “To: Evant, From: Idris” written in flowing script. A grin spread across Archangel’s face, as he replaced the present with a small, folded note.

The note read…

You must know of the man with the plan,

With studied hand, with a yearlong span,

He crept in and stole it away, the one gift therein,

And here it lies, your last goodbye, Idris Adenn!