

WARPSTONE

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THE LONE JOURNEY

A Short Story by Francis Plunder

Travelling ain't easy, boy. Each day a different place, different faces. All of them strangers. The Empire's a big place but sometimes you meet an old acquaintance, talk for an evening and then they are gone. That's what I hated most, people leaving. They always did it. Even the ones that said they wouldn't, left me. I hated travelling alone but sometimes I was lucky and there were companions. But in the end they went too. Where did it all start? I killed my first man in the house where I was born. I was eight or nine at the time. Never was sure, my mother wouldn't tell me, don't think she knew. I heard a noise one night and went downstairs in the dark. I always liked the dark 'cause no-one would stare at me. I carried my fathers hand-and-a-half sword with me. Some folks call it a bastard sword, but I call it a hand-and-a-half sword. Don't like the word bastard. That's what the other kids would call me in the street. The worst was an evil kid called Hans. Said he had a Beastman's eye in a bag. Said it might kill you if you looked at it. Never did. He and the others sometimes beat me up. He left one day and they never touched me, not once he had gone. Didn't miss him. Some you don't. I was face to face with this man. Didn't know him. A stranger in my house, so I hit him across the head. Sword got stuck in his skull. I never knew that would happen. Blood gushed everywhere as he fell. I wrenched it out and then I heard my mother screaming. I was proud because I knew my father would have done the same thing to defend my mother.

He was a hero, my father. He died saving the Emperor but they could never tell anyone because it was a plot by the other Electors. He was one of the finest warriors in the Empire, loyal and strong. I'm named after him. My mother loved him so much, she couldn't bear to talk about him. He looks after me. I knew that the moment I saw his sword in a shop. The shopkeeper gave it to me as he was leaving soon after. Wrapped in oiled leather, I took it home and hid it under my bed. They won't let me have it any more.

My mother cried for days and then she left. Without a word she betrayed me. She had gone to the Watch to report me but I got out before they came. With a purse of gold I found on the dead man I travelled to Carroburg and then onto the Capital. I liked travelling on the road, staying nights in inns where I could listen to stories the old men told of the old days. Sometimes they told tales of my father, although he sometimes changed his name for protection. I never told them he was my father. It was a secret. Each town held a different face and each face a different tale. In most places I would go on my way, ready to visit the next. Nobody could leave me, because I left first. I was on my own, and happier than I had been before.

One day I met Claudius and the others. The four of them were adventurers, like my father, and they wanted a hired sword. Our journey to Talabheim was treacherous. Problems with the Roadwardens had resulted in the over-running of the roads by Beastman and bandits, and by the time we reached Talabheim we were firm friends. I spent five years with them and we saw things you would not believe. I learnt to kill in those years, but the deaths of chaos worshipers and crawling Goblinoid scum means nothing, does it. The group was my family and it didn't matter that others would go -

they were always there. That was until Claudius died. We had been tracking down a necromancer from town to town. It was hard going, travelling the road in winter. When we cornered him, we were tired and got careless. Werner was cut down by two skeletons but we easily finished off the rest. Claudius knelt down to examine the body, but already it was one of the Undead. Claudius was dead before he hit the ground. After that things fell apart and the others wanted to go their own way. It's as I said, nobody sticks with me. Everyone, even those you think you can trust, lets you down. Tells you lies and then runs away. I was angry when they went. Angry because they had gone and angry because I remembered loneliness again. I couldn't stand to go back on the road, knowing people for only a day. Not knowing them at all. Over the years, I had been saving the money I made. I had buried it in a chest over at the foot of the Grey Mountains, down near Dunkelberg. One day, the old landlord said to me, he hoped to sell. I named a price and he took it. The Blunderbuss and Coachhorn was mine. I served the best food for miles and people came from across the land. I didn't mind that they went on their way the next day, there would be others the next night.

But sometimes I met a friend and though I didn't want them to leave me, they would go. I made them stay, but soon they would no longer talk to me or look at me. Like before, they then left. It wasn't fair they went away, I wanted them to stay. At least in my inn, the memory of them was there. Just to talk to me, be my friend. Everyone's the same, everything they say is a lie. Not like in my fathers time, when friendship was the strongest chain.

Nobodies understands, they lie and cheat. That girl of Ruy Guppen, Anna, she ran away from me. She was so pretty and her laugh made me smile so much, that I wanted her to stay. She told lies about me, that I tried to harm her. All I wanted was her company for a while. The wardens came and pulled my home down around me. They even found the memories of those that had left. How dare they take those, it was all I had to remind me.

My dear friend Mikhail,

I send this manuscript to you as I believe you will find it a useful aid to your studies. It is the final words of Klaus Krimer, a local inn keeper, as transcribed by me in the hour before his death. They say he killed at least thirty travellers over a twenty year period. Strangled them in their beds and rumours are he killed his mother years ago.

I examined the body afterwards and there was no sign of Chaos. I wish there had been. It shows that the corruption can be hidden from us all too easily. That scares me.

May Sigmar look over you,

Jan