

WARPSTONE

The independent magazine for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay



TRAITOR

A short story by Francis Plunder

Eric tried hard not to let his nervousness show. He knew he was in no danger, but the three-armed men around him, hands on swords, and the bellowing voice from through the door, unnerved him. To get this far he had already been searched twice and had been let through three barred doors. The man searching him yanked his tunic, adorned with the black griffin (showing he was a herald for the wealthy de Roelef family), and he heard it rip. Eric groaned. That would come out of his pay.

"All right," the barely human guard said as he stepped back. His comrade lazily pulled a bell-cord, and he was pushed through a heavy door. He found himself inside a small room, empty of any furniture or decoration. The door opposite had a peep-hole, and for a second he glimpsed light through it. Seconds later, bolts were pulled back and he entered the richly adorned parlour.

"Who in Manann's name are you?" Kasper shouted from behind the desk, jabbing his stubby fingers at the quivering boy.

"A... a mess... a messenger from Madame de Roelef, sire," he stuttered.

"I can see that! Out with it then!" Eric coughed and began, "You and your fiancée are cordially invited to the birthday party of Clara de Roelef, to be held on the third day of Brauzzeit, at the home of Madam de Roelef."

Kasper began to shake with anger. "That cow! That bloody cow..." He began to cough violently and, while his brother Jakob handed him the snow-water, Albertus showed the poor boy out. "Tell Madame de Roelef he shall attend". Calming himself, Kasper began to bellow again. "How dare she, how dare she do this to me! She knows that if I step foot outside, The League will have my head." Jakob nodded violently, but as usual Albertus injected some sense into the discussion.

"And if you don't go she'll cut off your allowance."

"That cow! That cow!"

Across town, on the edge of the Suiddock, Arno, one of Kasper's few trusted men, pulled himself out of bed. Looking down at the sleeping Celeste he smiled, congratulating himself on the good choice he had made. Not only was she beautiful, but the information she was coming up with was excellent. What she had just told him would get him into Kasper's good books. So, Eva was in pay of The League now. He wasn't surprised. She always had been a bit mercenary. Making sure his scabbard sat right, he silently left the room.

Without a movement, Celeste watched him go.

Peter drank deep from the glass and sighed. As Kasper sat behind his desk, Jakob waited at his shoulder, nodding at his brother's every word. Albertus sat in the chair

opposite. Albertus had been Kasper's right hand man for years and he was the only man the big man would listen to. They had been arguing for three days on the same subject. Peter had been one of Kasper's lieutenants throughout much. Staying loyal to him throughout the war with The League of Gentlemen Entrepreneurs; Marienburg's primary group of criminals. Of course, the war had been Kasper's fault, but as he said, "You've got to have loyalty and ethics." It had been years since Kasper had tried to break away from The League, massacring Marcus de Strouda and his family, and inadvertently starting a month of violent recriminations. Things had calmed down since then, but The League still wanted Kasper's hide, as much as an example as for revenge. He had been lucky that his aunt was so rich. Indeed, she was a member of the Directorate. Her money was essential to Kasper's operation, and as much as he argued, he had no choice but to attend the party of Clara de Roelef, the heir to the de Roelef fortune. Kasper knew full well how precarious his position with his aunt was. He was the bastard offspring of her younger sister, but apart from the money, it was always clear to observers he was on his own. Indeed, it was held by many that she would be glad to be rid of this potential embarrassment.

The situation was made all the more complicated by Eva's betrayal. Eva had been his protectress, a bodyguard whom Kasper had long been passing off as his fiancée. However, as he hadn't been out of the house in so long, they had let her go. However, Arno's tip-off that she was in The League's pay had turned out to be true, which left a problem. Kasper needed to turn up with a fiancée on his arm to keep his Aunt happy. He would also need a bodyguard.

"Hey, Peter. Your woman, what does she do?"

"What?" He never did like the way Albertus thought.

"What's her name? Annet? Didn't you say she was a bodyguard to some old merchant?"

"Yeah, sure."

Annet waited in the shadow of the doorway, the cat rubbing against her legs, her breath fogging in the cold night air. The door opposite opened, casting a rectangle of light across her, and she sank back into the darkness. She watched as the woman pulled the hood of her cloak up, and headed past her.

"Eva?" The woman turned, her sword half drawn. Too slow. Annet sliced her wrist open, and Eva screamed briefly.

The only sounds were the dripping of blood and the creak of leather armour as the two women stared at each other. "This is your reward for betraying Kasper."

"But I never....!" Eva whispered desperately. "I don't even work for him, you've got to believe me!"

"I do." The blade struck out once more. Only once.

The smoke-filled back room of The Marienburg Gentlemen's Club was quiet for a moment as the girl put down the drinks and left. Toumas looked down at the calm water as Cleft spoke, and he listened carefully. "I agree with der Zevlt, this is our best chance not only to get Kasper but also to stop any resulting carnage from a break-up on his ground."

Many of the other League members present murmured their agreement.

"I disagree," said Leof, spitting out the chew-weed. "You act like a bunch of Halflings. Let them fight, let the best take the prize. Toumas, you're with me, aren't you?"

All the members in the room looked at Toumas as he turned away from the window. "I say we let our friend in Kasper's camp bring him to us for his just desserts. We then let him take over his operations. After all, we should reward loyalty. And we can always shut him down later."

"Ugh! Why in Ranald's name did you bring that here?" Kasper said, stumbling back from the bloody head.

"Well, you said you wanted her head." Peter shifted uncomfortably while Kasper, sweating and breathing hard, stared at her. Through the silence came Jakob's voice.

"You did, Kasper. You said you wanted her head." With a thump, the crime boss collapsed in his chair. Then slowly, like waves washing up on the beach, he began to laugh. He laughed so hard that tears came rolling down his cheeks. When he had finished, he looked up at Annet, standing stock still.

"It's true, you should always listen to your brother." As Jakob beamed happily, Kasper carried on. "You know, with a bit of effort, we can make you look enough like Eva to fool my dumb aunt. Albertus, remember to give Arno a few extra Guilders."

The windows of the coach had been boarded up and the escort was ready. Albertus checked that all the servants were out of the coach-house and then sent Jakob to get his brother. Moments later, Kasper appeared dressed in his finest clothes, hair slicked back. He was followed by Jakob, weighed down with an expensive gift for Clara. Next was Annet, and she took his breath away. She was dressed in a red gown, as fine as any he had ever seen, her hair spiralling upwards. She looked like Eva, but was more beautiful and elegant than she had ever been. However, in spite of all this, he could not forget that she was armed and certainly dangerous.

Helping Kasper and Annet into the carriage, Jakob passed the present in before clambering up onto the driver's seat himself. Albertus was about to climb in when Peter rushed through the door.

"Boss! Boss! It's Arno - he's dead!" Kasper looked like he'd seen a ghost.

"The damned League. It's a warning. They're out to get me. We've got to stay here." Half-crawling over Annet, he began to get out of the carriage. A worried Albertus put his hand on his boss' shoulder.

"Kasper, we can't not go." Looking like he wished the seat would swallow him, Kasper sat back.

"Peter, get up with Jakob, and let's get this over with."

As dusk washed over the houses and waterways of the city, the coach raced home from the de Roelef mansion. Inside, Kasper, his belt open, a visible sign that he had eaten too much at the party, was annoyed.

"That damned cousin of mine. What does she know about family? That's what I want to know." He patted Annet on the knee, "You did well. We'll have to make it a permanent position."

The coach pulled to a stop and the doors were shut. From up front Jakob called out, "We're home. We're safe." Kasper sighed with relief as Albertus got to his feet, opened the door, and was abruptly pulled outside. A second later the door was barred by with two crossbows. "Outside! Both of you." Through the coach door it could be seen they were not in the safety of the house, but the unfriendly ground of a warehouse. A gambling man wouldn't have place money against it belonging to The League.

"We won't ask again. Now, Outside!" Annet got out, but Kasper just sat in the seat shaking until the two men pulled him out into the light, where he dropped to his knees.

"Don't kill me, don't kill me! I'll pay your percentage! I'll double it! Why aren't you protecting me, Annet? Help me!"

The armed men laughed. Six surrounded Kasper, two more had knives to the throats of Jakob and Peter, and others stood around the warehouse. Annet's eyes marked out each one and she quietly twisted each of her rings around. Toumas stood forward. "Long time no see. I won't pretend this is a social call, as you just don't drop in any more." As Kasper blubbered, Toumas nodded and the throats of Jakob and Peter were slit. Annet, seeing Peter killed, collapsed to the ground in a heap, while Kasper whined. "I'm sorry,

just let me go. Please!"

"In Ranald's name, shut up!" Albertus spat out.

"But they're going to kill us!"

"No, they're going to kill you." Comprehension flooded into Kasper's face as Toumas spoke out. "It's true Kasper, only you are due to die. Albertus had the sense to throw himself in with us - and what better gift to pave the way for him than you? You've had this coming for a long time." Without turning to Albertus, he barked at him, "Get out of here, and take that stupid woman with you."

While two men grabbed Kasper, Albertus picked Annet from the ground. "You bastard..." she muttered, and slapped him. Putting his hand to his face, he found he was bleeding. Shocked, he punched her and she fell back to be caught by one of the laughing thugs. "I would have let you live as well."

"Sadly you won't have the chance to correct your mistake. My rings were poisoned." As Albertus fell over, Annet twisted around with the man's knife in her hand and stabbed him in the throat, grabbing his crossbow as he collapsed. It was pointing at Toumas before the other's had moved. Only the sound of Albertus' coughing filled the warehouse.

"Kasper, get into the coach now. You, into the driver's seat." As Toumas walked to the coach she stayed parallel with him and then followed him up. Kasper, not believing it, was shouting abuse at the men. "Kasper, get a move on. Now move!" The overweight criminal had to run and jump for the door as the coach drove out of the warehouse.

Annet pulled the horses to a stop on the edge of Deedsveld Graveyard and climbed down. She had thrown Toumas off a while back, and nobody would look for them here. Opening the door, Kasper laughed.

"We showed them, didn't we! They won't mess with me again. What did you do with..?" Silently he looked down at the dagger sticking out of his stomach, "What?" He tried to move but he just sank further into the seat. Annet made herself comfortable opposite him.

"Comfortable? Good. I'd say you'll be dead by morning and it will be painful, and probably messy. But, I've waited along time for this and I intend to sit here and watch you die. Now, I'm sure your asking yourself, why? A good question. Let me introduce myself, my name is really Annet de Strouda." Saliva dribbled on a wide-eyed Kasper's chin as he tried to speak, but all to no avail "Yes, that's right. You had my whole family killed just so you could make a few extra guilders to feed your fat gut. I swore I would watch you die and here I am. I suppose I should tell you that Eva was innocent. Of working for The League, anyway. Yes, hands up, I told Arno that and then killed him. Had to sleep with Peter too, but then sacrifices have to be made. Albertus' little scheme threw me, but then it gave me this chance earlier than expected, so I can't complain." Staring with cold blue eyes at Kasper, she knew that something was lost to her. Something he had taken away when he murdered her family. She fought back the despair, once more, and smiled, "Oh! in case you're wondering, yes, I will collect The League's bounty on you. I'd rather I had it than them. After all they're really no better than you. I may have roughed up one of them but they won't dare not give me your bounty. As I'm sure they'll understand, this was personal, but then that's no reason not to be professional about it."