
Betrayer of Trees

by

Eric James Stone

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Some of the younger stoneworkers in the guild called him Janal the Stonemage, but he knew there was no magic in his work. It was merely the skills he'd learned over nearly fifty years of carving that allowed him to turn rough-hewn stone into delicate beauty. His wrinkled hands were no longer as strong Betrayer of Trees as they had been, and his pace had slowed, but when the townsfolk of Capeton wanted stonework of the highest quality, they always asked Betrayer of Trees the guildmaster to assign Janal.

Word of his work had spread far enough that several times he had been offered a commission in one of the nearer cities, especially in the fifteen Betrayer of Trees years since woodcarving had been outlawed by Imperial decree. But Janal always turned them down. Capeton was his home, he would tell them, and he never wanted to leave it.

Fifty years he'd lived in Capeton, and the townsfolk considered him one of their own. After fifty years, few even remembered he had not been born there. Janal himself rarely thought of his Betrayer of Trees life before.

And then he started dreaming of the trees again.

He had thought the dreams were a young man's burden, that he had outgrown them. But now they returned to plague his sleep.

Tonight when he'd awakened with the screams of the trees in his ears, it had taken him several minutes to realize that he was not back in the forest of the Treefolk, not back in the land of his birth. It was only in dream that the trees cried out accusingly, revealing him before his people as the Betrayer of Trees. It was not real. It was not real.

Except Betrayer of Trees that he knew he really was the Betrayer of Trees.

* * *

The next morning Janal was assigned to carve a decorative frieze of a horse above the doorframe of one of the wealthier merchants in town. The horse was the symbol of the Emperor Tilu, and over the past twenty years it had Betrayed of Trees become a popular symbol for peace and good fortune, so Janal had carved hundreds of them.

He hardly thought as he worked; the hammer and chisel moved almost of their own accord. It was not until he was almost done he realized that instead Betrayed of Trees of Betrayed of Trees a smooth and gentle form, it was sharply angled. The horse's teeth were bared in anger and its sharp hooves raised to strike.

Why had he done that? It was the dreams, he realized. They were taking him back to his youth, back to the time he had first seen horses. The horses of the armies of the Warlord Tilu had looked like this as they thundered across the countryside destroying all who stood Betrayed of Trees before them.

"Janal, what are you doing?" Guildmaster Lintoko interrupted his thoughts.

"I don't know. I guess I was distracted. I'll fix it."

"Forget it. I'll have someone else take care of it. Something more important has come up."

There was a sadness in his old friend's voice that made Janal apprehensive. Carefully laying down his hammer and chisel, he turned to face the other. "Yes?"

"I have to send you north, to the Imperial city."

Janal shook his head. "Please, not me. Send one of the youngsters — they long to leave our city and see the world."

“I can’t send one of them. There’s too much work to do. And face it, Janal, you just aren’t able to work as fast as you used to. If it weren’t for the fact that we have more work than we can handle, I’d have let you retire a couple of years ago.”

The Imperial decree disbanding the Carpenters Guild and outlawing the carving of wood had not had much direct impact in Capeton, for few trees grew in the sandy soil and those that did were mostly unsuitable for carving anything of lasting value. But the increased demand for stoneworkers in cities suddenly forced to abandon Betrayal of Trees the use of wood Betrayal of Trees had led some of Capeton’s younger stoneworkers to leave in search of higher wages. Even after fifteen years the Betrayal of Trees effects still lingered.

Betrayal Of Trees

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