

*Fontan*  
A Death in Tar Mira

by Tony Graham

Her eyes were unmistakable, even in death. He brushed the hair from Felicia's face, tucking it behind her ear as she had habitually done. Gray now, it had once been gold as a sunrise. The wrinkles and creases of age were laid into the skin but the laugh-lines and high cheekbones of her youth remained. Neither time nor life had been cruel to her, but death had.

Someone had decorated the Plaza of the Blue Fountain with Felicia's corpse. Someone hung the body from a lamppost, like some macabre trophy, after the late night entertainments and before the bustle of the coming day.



Ifor Fontan, Magistrate for the Blue Fountain District of the City-State of Tar Mira, laid a blanket over her face and straightened. Morys, one of his Watchmen, had found the body shortly before sunrise when the first vendors had arrived to set up their stalls. Already, the Plaza was filling with the sights, sounds and commotion of the daily market.

“People hereabouts don't know any troubles she had. Seems like everyone liked her. Friendly sort of woman. Nothing but kind words. The old girl was probably killed in a fight over nothing. No witnesses.” Morys rubbed his bald head as he spoke. A sign of careful thought on his part. “The stench. Crime o' passion.” Crime of Passion was a great favorite of Watchman Morys. Once he heard Ifor use the term in his court, Morys had instantly become enamored with it to explain crimes with no apparent motive.

The stench from the Lagoon was overwhelming the typical stink of the city, borne on the hot winds from the south. When the southern winds blew for days on end, the tides of the Inner Sea could not reach the vast Lagoon south of the city-state. Without that regular flushing



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effect, the Lagoon grew increasingly odious with each passing day. Tempers flared during the weeks of the southern winds. The number of disturbances, fights, and murders increased.

Ifor Fontan suspected Felicia's death had nothing to do with temper, passion or the southern wind. It was too deliberate. Too orchestrated. That she would be murdered and her body hung in the middle of his district seemed too much for coincidence.

Felicia had been his first love. She, a commoner, was the girl that had almost cost him his birthright, his fortune and his place within Tar Miran society. She had been full of life with a constant, mischievous smile, few pretensions, and a body that still gave him night-sweats on those rare occasions when he dreamt of her. Thirty-six years later and even his waking memories of her were strong: the scent of her hair, the taste of her skin, the feel of her body beneath his hands. It was surprisingly easy to match those memories with the corpse at his feet. Her eyes.

His family strenuously objected. A bastard was acceptable, but his marriage to a daughter of another noble house was needed to maintain the Fontan bloodline. Ifor had not cared what his family threatened. In the end, the choice was not his. Felicia would not have him. She feared her affection for him would sour as the years went by and she aged while he did not.

Ifor looked down at the blanket-covered figure lying on the paving stones of the Plaza. A commoner, Felicia had died an old woman. Ifor knew himself to be a man in his early prime. Long life was one of the gifts of his noble blood, along with sorcery.

Despite the best efforts of his family, Ifor had not married, had not sired an heir. When Felicia would not have him, he had taken ship and traveled the Inner Sea. A year of study with an Adept from the Illuminated Peaks had provided him the skills for his chosen occupation. Returning to Tar Mira, he had sold his inheritance. With the money, he had purchased the office of Magistrate. With the title came the right to dispense justice, both high and low, for crimes committed within his district.

“Should we take the body to Doctor Awen? They be wanting to run streamers and such for the festival tonight.”

Ifor looked around himself, noticing the people watching. He nodded to Morys.

Morys gently lifted Felicia's body into the dogcart. A violent man, Morys was always surprisingly respectful of the dead. Save for the ones he killed himself. With a quick bow of his





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head, Morys led the cart away through the growing crowd.

People set about decorating their chosen areas of the Plaza for tonight's festival to celebrate the coronation of a missing Emperor. Already the thirteenth Emperor Gallidon was being referred to as 'the Lost.' Bad enough his father, the twelfth Emperor, was called 'the Weak,' this Emperor had disappeared altogether, throwing the Empire, and Tar Mira, into disarray.

The threat of Imperial involvement had traditionally held the volatile lower noble houses of Tar Mira in check. In centuries past, the Emperor's appointed Administrator was the supreme power in the city-state, overseeing the collection of tribute and settling disputes at the highest levels of society. In recent generations, as the greater noble houses and the Emperor himself turned their attention elsewhere, the power of the Imperial Administrator waned. As the authority of the Administrator diminished and the influence of Magistrates had grown, so too, had the list of offended nobles.

Ifor Fontan had made enemies. His sorcerous ability to perceive the truth gained him a reputation for fair dealing no matter the victim's status within society. His focus was justice. His judgments sometimes resulted in nobles of Tar Miran houses being punished.

Yes, Ifor had enemies. One of them had struck back at him through Felicia. Someone with knowledge of his past. Cyr Santee.

Felicia had not died in a crime of passion. She had been murdered. He could not let it pass. He would not let it pass. Justice would be executed.



Illustration *Death in Tar Mira* by Andy Underwood.

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