

Kytun Iye Release

by Tony Graham

People of the village followed the Guardsman to the very doors of the Hidden Fortress. The Guardsman wore no special armor, bore no legendary weapon, carried no special seal. But all knew he was of the Imperial Guard. It wasn't the long, dark hair, the height, the width of his shoulders, the heavy wrists and scarred hands. It was the presence. The same presence shared by the Imperial Guardsmen who had always stood before the doors of the fortress.

This strange Guardsman approached the two who stood before the doors. The stranger stopped, bowed to them. The two Imperial Guardsmen in their black hauberks bowed back. The villagers waited. No words were spoken.

The two Guardsmen stepped aside. The stranger entered. The two who had been standing guard followed him inside. The doors were closed.

The villagers looked at the empty space. Two Imperial Guardsmen had always stood before the doors. In the village's memory, it had always been so. They would speak of it, wondering at its meaning, for many nights to come.

Within the fortress, Kytun Iye traded embraces with his two fellow Guardsman. Four other Guardsmen joined them. Six total Guardsmen, who had served at this remote place, this Emperor's Table of the High Hills, for too long.

"Young Kytun. I was sure you would finish the training." Ingvar had been one of Kytun's instructors a decade earlier.

"I finished the training, but I was not embraced by the Emperor. The Destruction... it began days before my ceremony."





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“It is only a ceremony. You are a Guardsman.” Kytun did not know the name of the speaker, but he suspected the Emperor’s embrace was more than ceremony.

Ingvar stopped the speculation. “Do you bring word from the Emperor?”

“I bring orders from Commander Telar Muhrun. His last orders.”

Ingvar sat down at the table. “The Emperor Gallidon?”

“I do not know his fate. If Telar knows, he will not speak of it.”

The other Guardsmen sat, leaving Kytun standing.

“Telar orders that all members of the Imperial Guard are to scatter. They are not to travel or gather in great numbers. They are to beware being used by those who would claim power. They are to remember their oath: to protect the Emperor, protect the Emperor’s people, protect the Empire. The Emperor’s fate remains unknown. The Empire falters. But the people remain. Protect the people. Those are the words of Telar Muhrun.”

The six Guardsmen sat in silence. Ingvar looked up at Kytun. “Telar? What is he doing?”

“The Commander has accepted the hospitality of the Ishi, high atop one of their border mountains. A monastery. He speaks to few and accepts no visitors.”

“And you, Kytun Iye?”

Kytun looked around the simple room that had served as barracks and living quarters to these six men for so long. He found no answers.

“I do not know where I will go or what I will do.”



Illustration *Release* by Andy Underwood.

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