

Kytun Iye Lessons

by Tony Graham



He felt the touch of death when she laid the coins over his eyes.

For more than a decade Kytun Iye had trained. Many of the other boys had left, a few had died. He was among those who remained. For more than a decade he had learned the art of the empty hand, the blade, the bow and the staff. He had been taught to watch, to listen, to see beyond the obvious, to hear what lay beneath the words. He had been taught to understand truth, to discern falsehood. All these things had been a part of the seemingly endless lessons.

He had known the sickness that came after the Imperial Rune-weavers had engraved the Emperor's bindings, strengths and

protections upon his flesh. He had endured and learned patience. Lessons of self-control and awareness of that which lay around him had always been hidden within all the other training. Even as the Emperor's runes were etched upon his skin.

Always had he mastered fear. Not banished it, but mastered it as he had been taught.

Now he felt the touch of fear. The touch of death. She was a woman with old eyes set in a young face, this Lady of House Vanth. He feared her. She laid the coins upon his eyes, stroked his brow, whispered words he could not understand. He examined his fear, turning it about within his mind until it held no secrets. Then he put it away.

The coins were lifted from his eyes. The Lady helped him stand. He felt no sickness, no weakness. He felt no different from what she had done. He had no real understanding of what she had done. Until he entered the Grand Courtyard.

The Grand Courtyard was a place of beauty, like all gardens of the Imperial City. In this



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wide courtyard of dwarf trees, fountains, stones and streams, petitioners would often wait.

At this hour of the night, it should have been empty.

First he noticed the girl lying in the fountain. The fan of black hair around her head. The fan of red around her wrists.

Then the warrior of the Peaks, kneeling, bent slightly over the short sword he had thrust into his own belly. The warrior muttered to himself. A plea of forgiveness.

Kytun had no answer for him. He realized the girl in the fountain and the warrior of the Peaks were ghosts. Petitioners that had received no answer and never would.

It was when he saw the ghost of the Imperial Guardsman standing at the side of the gate that he began to understand. It was a new lesson.

Kytun Iye had truly learned a new lesson in what it was to be a member of the Imperial Guard.



Illustration *The Fare* by Andy Underwood.

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