

The Coward

Gary Khan

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The Coward is an intriguing fantasy novel whose quest emphasizes personal transformation and atonement.

Gary Khan's exciting tale of adventure and redemption, *The Coward*, is an epic fantasy novel. In it, a young man is spurred on a journey across his homeland that challenges his core beliefs about himself and the world around him. With each new conflict comes an inevitable decision, forcing him to tread a delicate line between dreams and reality.

Talon lives a simple, comfortable life in his small village. He spends the majority of his time daydreaming about becoming a knight and marrying his childhood sweetheart, Kat. Optimistic and passionate, he is filled with high hopes for his future and that of his people. All of this is shattered when he receives startling news, forcing him to question everything he knows. Talon embarks on a harrowing quest to redeem himself as a man worthy of knighthood.

Talon is poor; though his social rank is low, he feels an intense desire for a better life, and his decision to take it upon himself to pursue his own fortune holds interest. His adjustments to his aspirations in the face of setbacks are realistic. Likewise, Kat has an intriguing playfulness and sense of rebellion that complements Talon's more restrained personality.

Talon's connection to his village is described in eloquent terms, establishing a deep sense of the place. Descriptions of his favorite spot in a nearby field are clean and intimate, capturing the significance that the area has on Talon's well-being, even after he decides to leave. Although his parents are deceased, there is a strong sense of conflict upon his departure; he feels that he is somehow betraying their memory: "A overwhelming emptiness pressed at his insides. This often happened if he thought about his parents too long."

The book's pervasive sense of grimness is enhanced by its direct, non-fussy writing style. Battles are portrayed in tight sentences without embellishments, conveying the mood well. A sense of danger lingers in its action scenes, which get straight to the point without buildup. Sometimes, the violence is too graphic, especially in the battle scenes with the Barbarians, but elsewhere, it's essential to the book's realism. Plot twists come at just the right times, moving the story along and building upon previous events.

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TARA MCNABB (April 29, 2020)

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