

Wise Man's Fear

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An excerpt for Case Study 1: Expectancy Violations Theory

This selection from Wise Man's Fear is narrated by Kvothe, an educated young man who is travelling the world. He encounters Tempi, from the nation Ademre, who is different in various ways from what Kvothe has come to expect. To bridge this gap, he attempts to learn Ademic, Tempi's native tongue, and to teach Tempi Aturan, Kvothe's own language.

Tempi caught my eye first and held it the longest, as he was the first Adem mercenary I'd ever met. Far from being the imposing, hard-eyed killer I'd expected, Tempi was rather nondescript, neither particularly tall nor heavily built. He was fair-skinned with light hair and pale grey eyes. His expression was blank as fresh paper. Strangely blank. *Studiously* blank.

I knew Adem mercenaries wore blood-red clothing as a sort of badge. But Tempi's outfit was different than I'd expected. His shirt was held tight against his body with a dozen soft leather straps. His pants, too, were belted tightly at the thigh and calf and knee. Everything was dyed the same bright and bloody red, and it fit him snugly as a gentleman's glove.

I decided to make an active attempt to draw Tempi into a conversation. If I was going to be in charge of this little group, I needed to know more about him. Most importantly, I needed to know if he could speak more than five words in a row.

So I approached the Adem mercenary when we stopped for our midday meal. He was sitting slightly apart from the rest of us. He wasn't standoffish. It's just that the rest of us would sit and talk while we ate. Tempi, on the other hand, simply ate.

But today I made a point of sitting down next to him with my lunch: a chunk of hard sausage and some cold potatoes. "Hello, Tempi."

He looked up and nodded. For a second I caught a glimpse of his pale grey eyes. Then he looked away, shifting restlessly. He ran his hand through his hair, and for a second he reminded me of Simmon. They both had the same slender build and sandy hair. Simmon wasn't this quiet though. Sometimes I could barely get a word in edgewise with Sim.

I'd tried to talk to Tempi before, of course. Ordinary small talk: the weather, sore feet after a long day's walk, the food. These had all come to nothing. At best a word or two. More often a nod or a shrug. But most common was a blank look followed by fidgeting and a stubborn refusal to do so much as look me in the eye.

So today I had a conversational gambit. "I have heard stories about the Lethani," I said. "I would like to know more. Would you tell me about it?"

Tempi's pale eyes touched mine briefly, his expression still blank. Then he looked away again. He tugged one of the red leather straps that held his shirt close to his body and fidgeted with his sleeve. "No. I will not speak on Lethani. It is not for you. Do not ask."

He looked away from me again, down at the ground.

I counted in my head. Sixteen words. That answered one of my questions at least.

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The next day, I started gathering extra firewood. Tempi disassembled his sword, meticulously cleaning and oiling all the pieces. He didn't look bored, but then again, he never looked like anything.

I would have chatted with Tempi, but trying to have a conversation with him was like playing catch with a well.

Still, it seemed to be my only option. I walked over to where Tempi sat. He had finished cleaning his sword and was making small adjustments to the leather grip. "Tempi?"

Tempi lay aside his sword and came to his feet. He stood uncomfortably close to me, with barely more than eight inches of space between us. Then he hesitated and frowned. It wasn't much of a frown, barely a thinning of the lips and a slight line between his eyebrows, but on Tempi's blank sheet of a face, it stood out like a word written in red ink.

He backed away from me by two good paces, then eyed the ground between us and stepped forward slightly.

Understanding dawned on me. "Tempi, how close do Adem stand?"

Tempi looked at me blankly for a second, then burst out laughing. A shy smile flickered onto his face, making him look very young. It left his mouth quickly but lingered around his eyes. "Smart. Yes. Different in Adem. For you, close." He stepped uncomfortably close, then backed away.

"For me?" I asked. "Is it different for different people?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"How close for Dedan?"

He fidgeted. "Complicated."

I felt a familiar curiosity flicker up inside me. "Tempi," I asked. "Would you teach me these things? Teach me your language?"

"Yes," he said. And though his face betrayed none of it, I could hear a great weight of relief in his voice. "Yes. Please. Yes."

His blank expression and refusal to make eye contact were the main problems. How could I make intelligent conversation with a person when I had no idea how he felt? It was like trying to walk blindfolded through an unfamiliar house.

So, I took the safer road and simply asked for more words as we worked. Objects, for the most part, as we were both too busy with our hands to pantomime.

Best of all, Tempi got to practice his Aturan while I built up my Ademic vocabulary. I noticed the more mistakes I made in his language, the more comfortable he grew in his own attempts at expressing himself.

This meant, of course, that I made many mistakes. In fact, I was occasionally so thickheaded that Tempi was forced to explain himself several times in several different ways. All in Aturan of course.

Later, Tempi told me he was going to bathe.

When Tempi returned from his bath he was naked as a new baby. Years of stage training allowed me to keep a calm expression, but just barely.

After spreading his wet clothing over a nearby branch to dry, Tempi walked over to me without showing the least embarrassment or modesty.

He held out his right hand, thumb and forefinger pinched together. "What is this?" He spread his fingers slightly for me to see.

I looked closely, glad to have something to focus my attention on. "That's a tick."

Tempi stared at the thing between his fingers. "It bites. On me. Bites and stays." His expression was blank as always, but his tone was tinged with disgust. His left hand fidgeted.

"There are no ticks in Ademre?"

"No." He made a point of trying to pinch it between his fingers. "It not break."

I gestured, showing him how to crush it between his fingernails, which he did with a certain amount of relish. He threw it away and stalked back to his bedroll. Then, still naked, he proceeded to pull out all of his clothing and give it a vigorous shaking.

Shirtless, he walked back to where I sat. "I hate tick," he declared.

When he spoke, his left hand made a sharp gesture, as if he were brushing crumbs off the front of his shirt near his hip. Except he wasn't wearing a shirt, and there was nothing on his bare skin to brush away. What's more, I realized he'd made the same gesture earlier.

In fact, now that I thought of it, I'd seen him make that gesture a half-dozen times in the last several days, though never so violently.

I had a sudden suspicion. "Tempi? What does this mean?" I mimicked the brushing away gesture.

He nodded. "It is this." He scrunched his face up in an exaggerated expression of disgust.

My mind went spinning back over the last span of days, thinking of how many times I had seen Tempi fidgeting restlessly while we talked. I reeled at the thought of it.

"Tempi," I asked. "Is all of this?" I made a gesture to my face, then smiled, frowned, rolled my eyes. "Does all this happen with hands in Ademic?"

He nodded and made a gesture at the same time.

"That!" I pointed at his hand. "What is that?"

He hesitated, then gave a forced, awkward-looking smile.

I copied the gesture, splaying my hand slightly and pressing my thumb to the inside of my middle finger.

"No," he said. "Other hand. Left."

"Why?"

He reached out and thumped on my chest, just left of the breastbone: *Tum-tump. Tum-tump*. Then he ran a finger down to my left hand. I nodded to show I understood. It was closest to the heart. He held up his right hand and made a fist. "This hand is strong." He held up his left. "This hand is clever."

It made sense. That is why most lutists chord with the left hand and strum with their right. The left hand is more nimble, as a rule.

I made the gesture with my left hand, fingers splayed. Tempi shook his head. "That is this." He quirked half of his mouth up into a smirk.

The expression seemed so out of place on his face that it was all I could do to keep from gawking. I looked more closely at his hand and adjusted the position of my fingers slightly.

He nodded approval. His face was expressionless, but for the first time I understood why.

In the hours that followed, I learned that Ademic hand gestures did not actually represent facial expressions. It was nothing so simple as that. For example, a smile can mean you're amused, happy, grateful, or satisfied. You can smile to comfort someone. You can smile because you're content or because you're in love. A grimace or a grin look similar to a smile, but they mean entirely different things.

Imagine trying to teach someone how to smile. Imagine trying to describe what different smiles mean and when, precisely, to use them in conversation. It's harder than learning to walk.

Suddenly so many things made sense. Of course Tempi wouldn't look me in the eye. There was nothing to be gained by looking at the face of the person you were talking to. You listen to the voice, but you watch the hand.

I spent the next several hours attempting to learn the basics, but it was maddeningly difficult. Words are fairly simple things. You can point to a stone. You can act out running or jumping. But have you ever tried to pantomime compliance? Respect? Sarcasm? I doubt even my father could have accomplished such a thing.

Because of this my progress was frustratingly slow, but I couldn't help but be fascinated. It was like suddenly being given a second tongue.