

PREFACE

“Sorrow is the future tense of love.”

—Leonard Levinson

Sorrow, a most piquant emotion. Not the ebullience of grief, nor the pleasing tang of regret, sorrow is resignation to what must be in the midst of longing for what might have been.

We of the Kargatane dine on the sorrows of the night. A man kills his lover in a jealous rage, then collapses under the weight of what he has done. A mother puts her children to bed and walks out of town, never to return, never looking back. A boy raises his blade,

takes one last look at his beloved yet rabid pet, and strikes down.

Ravenloft is about sorrow made manifest: From the sorrow of Strahd, as he stands on the battlements and contemplates his lost love, to the sorrow of Rudolph van Richten as he slays the unliving body of his son, the Demiplane of Dread thrives on sorrow. Feeds on sorrow. Lives on sorrow.

Here you have shared your sorrows with us, and we now return them to you, for each man’s sorrow is truly only his own to bear.

Turn the pages carefully, friend, for they are wet with
the tears of those who have read them before
you, and those tears will burn your soul.

Andrew Hackard, *Kargatane*

BOOK OF SORROWS: INTRODUCTION

October 31st, 752.

MORDENTSHIRE.



The Sea of Sorrows lashed itself against the rocky shores, as flashes of lightning in the stormy skies above caused the looming cliffs to dance like flickering ghosts. As the heavy tears of rain trampled the sodden earth, a dark figure approached the simple house which stood at the meeting of Heather Way and Farmer's Walk.

The ebon rider reined his sable steed to a halt at the intersection and dismounted, keeping his eyes trained on the warm lights in the windows of the humble abode. Neither the coal-black horse nor the two massive hounds which accompanied the rider seemed to acknowledge the autumn storm which beat down mercilessly upon them, and the rider stayed his beasts with a word and a simple gesture.

The inky figure stood in the darkness for several minutes, unmoving, as oblivious to the storm as his beasts. As the rider silently observed the house, his thick hand squeezed the hilt of the sword at his side. Finally, the dark figure let out a deep breath and strode forward. A simple wooden sign swayed in the wailing winds; as the dark rider passed under the sign, he offered it one quick glance before opening the door.

"Herbalist, Dr. Rudolph van Richten."

Inside, a slender young woman sat behind the counter, intently studying a scattered collection of papers. As the bell above the door chimed, the young lady's pale blue eyes darted up from their study to take in the new visitor to the shop. The visitor slipped into the doorway like a patch of living darkness, his flowing black cloak masking his shape, but not quite hiding the weapon on his belt. Water dripped from the wide, black rim of the visitor's hat, which veiled his face in shadows. The dark visitor and the young woman remained still for several moments, staring at each other in stunned silence. Just as recognition began to creep into the young woman's face, the visitor finally spoke.

"You... you look so much like your mother."

As the visitor removed his hat, the woman reflexively rose to her feet and brushed the long, dark brown hair from a face suddenly beaming more brightly than the lanterns which lit the room.

"Uncle George?" she declared, with equal measures joy and disbelief.

George Weathermay let his gaze fall to the floor as he smiled awkwardly, but he looked up again a moment later as a second figure burst into view, darting in from the door behind the counter. The second young lady was identical to the first in all respects; the same dark hair, the same ice-blue eyes, the same delicate features and upturned nose.

"Did I hear you say," she asked as she stepped into the room and suddenly saw the visitor, "Uncle George!"

George smiled at the new arrival as both women ran around the counter to greet him, their long skirts rustling. "Hello Laurie." He turned back to the woman who had first greeted him. "Hello Gennifer."

The twins both smiled knowingly as they darted up to him. "You always could tell us apart, couldn't you," teased Laurie.

"We could even fool father sometimes, but never you!" chuckled Gennifer.

Without further delay, both girls fell upon their towering uncle, hugging him tight despite his sodden clothes. George froze, his arms held out like the limbs of a tortured tree. When he did awkwardly return the girls' affections, his squeezes were hesitant and delicate, as if he feared his nieces might crack like eggshells. Finally the girls released George from their grip, and stepped back to take him in, a hint of sadness apparent in their features.

"It's been so long," started Gennifer.

"So very long," finished Laurie.

George forced a smile. "And you've both changed so very much. You were still children when I last saw you."

Laurie grinned wryly. "You've changed a bit too," she said, running her fingers through George's gray hairs. The twins shot each other a momentary, worried glance, and the specters in George's eyes went unmentioned.

"Why haven't you visited us?" asked Laurie.

"We've missed you so much. Grandfather does too."

George's eyes withdrew, and his response was quiet, almost whispered. "I... I... I've been very... There's

INTRODUCTION

been a lot I needed to... Something very important that..." He trailed off, his mind racing, the explanation unfinished.

Gennifer frowned at Laurie, who winced in reply. "What's important now," offered Gennifer, "is that you're finally home with us again."

"Yes," said Laurie. "That's all that matters." She took a long look at her uncle, taking him in from head to toe. "Oh, but just look at you! You're soaked to the bone! Here, give me that wet cloak." She snapped her fingers, gesturing for George to hand it over with all haste. George surrendered the cloak, and Laurie folded it over her arm. "I'll go put this by the fire to dry." She grinned impishly. "And wait right here. There's something I want to show you." Without further explanation, she hurried out of the room.

As Laurie disappeared from view, Gennifer turned back to her uncle.

"You didn't have to stay away." Her voice was quiet and gentle, but George's gaze fell to the floor again. She delicately put a hand on his arm. "It wasn't your fault."

George flinched as though he'd been struck, but Gennifer would not release him from her grip. "It was eleven years ago, and it was *not* your fault. I know that. Laurie knows that. Even father knows that." Gennifer saw George's gaze turn in upon itself, but she continued all the more urgently, tugging her collar away from her pale throat.

"There's no scars. See?" George's frightened eyes flickered to her smooth skin, but would not linger. She let her collar slip back into place and cupped George's face with both hands, forcing him to meet her gaze.

"There's *no* scars." Her voice was hushed but firm.

George's eyes sank downward again, unable to bear looking into Gennifer's gaze. "All right," he murmured, with a voice full of surrender. Suddenly, his eyes darted up again, curious.

"By... by the way, what? What *are* you two doing here?" George asked, as his hands fumbled for something tucked in an inside pocket. A moment later, he produced a tiny bundle wrapped in a handkerchief, and Gennifer grinned.

"Is that a present for us, Uncle George?" she asked, with coy amusement. The response was not what she'd hoped for. George seemed to freeze solid, his eyes wide and searching for an answer.

"No... no. It's something I brought to..." George paused, as if giving himself time to make up the rest. "...Something I brought to show Dr. van Richten. It's... it's a flower."