

SAGA OF THE SENTENIAL BOOK THREE
THE HOUSE OF SILMARIN
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Bereavement

How much tragedy can one life bear? Some dark souls are better left buried and forgotten. Some could not remain so when the darkness required retribution, fuelled from the contempt of a soul that had never known anything but the harm it had caused in life, or the far-reaching implications of raw malice that had driven it to damnation. *Denial*. There was a price to be paid for any perception of redemption when none could be offered. Rising from the mire of ruin could not be taken as testament to any modicum of salvation. *Arrogance*. There was no virtue in deceit, especially in self-deception. When the night had fallen on a land that was now under the yoke of darkness, the possibility for the malign to rise intensified. However, not everything that came back had such a singular motivation. Not everything that pushed through the fragile curtain between a living and dead existence had any perception of who or what it had once been. Hatred was an overwhelming impetus when the balance between life and death no longer had any meaning. Such emotion was enough to permit even an infinitesimal fragment of a dead essence to endure beyond the erosion of an age. *Emotion*. All the bitterness of regret coiled about the *dead heart* of something that had set the seed of malignancy in motion, though that heart too was nothing but a perception in the essence of a *dark soul* that no longer had the physical manifestation of anything akin to its former self. *Evil and bitterness*. A malevolent spirit that had been driven mad by the endless retribution of penance inflicted long after the loss of a corporeal presence – long after life had been expended in a final act of spite. Something that had resigned itself to its own demise in the solace that harm had been perpetrated only out of sympathy for a future that it could not endure in the knowledge that *she* would survive.

Time had been fleeting within the *Tunnel of Weir*. *Dark regret* noticed the absence with all of the brooding vehemence of the spitefulness that had brought about its end, an absence that had been contrived by a mistake. *Hope*. A possibility that should not have been offered. A truly wicked soul did not look for deliverance. A really malevolent spirit did not offer hope. It wanted only that which had given it pleasure. The corpse stirred but it was a long time before it could even manage to sit upright or had any awareness of how the physical had been achieved in the absence of that which had long turned to dust in a past that was equally obscure. *Evil reigned*. The call of something fiendishly malevolent drew it forth, lending solidity to dead dust that congealed in stagnant fluids drawn forth from the decay and depravations of centuries in captivity. There was no respite for the fallen effigy of malignant madness eroding flesh once mortal but evermore corrupt. The seed had always been bad. *Rotten to the core*. Soon, the fragile frame invited desiccated flesh to provide more than just a skeleton for this awful manifestation from the past. The form was churlishly imprecise. Nothing of what it had once been remained, except for the faintest fragments that marked its demise in an age that could not now be measured. Everything else was borrowed to provide the semblance in shape only. The aesthetic was denied. More would require remuneration in blood. Consciousness had become evident but there were significant gaps that had not yet permitted recognition of who this *dark soul* had once been in a time that few remembered. The dead man did not recall a name, or even if he ever had one. He knew only that there was an absence here in this forlorn place. Something was missing. Something that was – important. The muddled thoughts invoked such strong emotions. *A deep and bitter hatred lingered with a tenacity that consumed all reason*. She had escaped. *Loathing*. She? *Resentment*. She? *Anger that burned hot enough to liquefy this fragile effigy of a lost age*. Something was calling him forth but he resisted the lure. He was overwhelmed with hateful thoughts that transcended any possibility of succumbing to the will of this powerful entity. The bitterness that had brought the dead man forth also served to stave off the whispers of the daemon. As his mind drew vivacity from the dark fluids infusing awareness into his being, flashes of the past with threads of a twisted history offered maddening glimpses to add layers of confusion to the dead man's already troubled mind.

Sensations were added to the emotional turmoil. The reek of the damned permeated the air. Not just from this evil place, but from his very essence. The odour transcended all others that might have offered relief to the senses that chose this awful moment to return. Better that he had remained oblivious. In time he became accustomed to the smell until the taint did not diminish but it did less to affect any restoration of a mortal outrage. Every reconnection to the past only served as a means to an end and assured that this horrible restoration, which had begun with the infinitesimal notice of an emotion, now had a physical hold – one that soon fused muscle into the corporeal creation and lent the will to motion. The dead man stood up. He was a patchwork frame of every awful fibre, fragments of flesh, bone, with traces of stagnant fluids, globules of regurgitated blood and harvested members of the things unfortunate enough to crawl into its proximity. Still,

other than these signs that the reincarnation of a lost soul had not wavered or stagnated, the dead man remained unmoved beyond the initial impulse. Only time passed away, oblivious to the growing malignancy of the one within as if the effort of rising had been too much of a strain for now. The mind recoiled against the stark horror of this transition, but when each facet of recognition caused an abhorrence or self-loathing, the malign purpose endured to refocus the mental awareness of the one to that which had called the *dark soul* back. *The loneliness. The emptiness.* The absence of a presence that maintained the balance of retribution paid for in blood. Weir was vacant.

The voice called out again. *Stronger than before.* The dead man ignored the daemon's summons. *Mastk.* The name had little meaning now. He could not be swayed. *Trisha.* She who was no longer here. *Silmarin.* The name was familiar. The cries of wolves filled his mind. *Pain.* Not wolves. *Were-creatures.* Men who had embraced darkness. *Lycanthropes.* High Lord...he had ruled...Torinuin. *She was gone.* He had worked with the dark arts. *The cauldron.* The arcane vessel had promised him and the others immortality. The child had not been his... *she had betrayed him.* The dead were rising everywhere. They would bring her back to him. His loathing continued to consume all reason. *Brooding contempt.*

While the daemon fought a war against the *Elves*, the dead man mustered the damned to find the one who had dwelled in the darkness of Weir. All the bitterness, angst and unbridled hatred urged the dead to rise – a single determined thought invoking reprisal. *The lies converged.* The truth had no place in practiced obscurity. *She had betrayed him.* The full measure of retribution had not yet been endured. *Eternity.* The promise had been finite. The weakness lay in the offer of salvation. It could not be denied. The need was part of the invocation.

The dead man's mind laboured in periods of agony against a retreating dullwittedness, clinging tenaciously to an absence of reason and full awareness. *The House of Silmarin had fallen.* Everything that he had been or aspired to be had been lost. *Treachery.* She had indulged in unfaithfulness and dared to live. He had died to punish her. *Escaped.* Trisha DeMarrage...Sian Silmarin! She was the one. The dead would find her. The daemon would not rule him while this hateful purpose remained. He resisted the lure. Days and nights had passed. Seasons changed. *Unmoved.* The dead man waited in the sombre gloom of Weir. The damned gathered far away. They were already motivated by a single thought. The incantation was simple, the rhyme merely a chant to solidify the arcane lore. The command was paramount, the elements a product of his focus. *Bring her back to Weir!*

*All the dead play together,
All the dead lie together,
All the dead rise together,
All the dead die.
All the dead walk together,
All the dead climb together,
All the dead kill together,
All the dead sigh.*

The dead man whispered words that were rhyme without rationale. Still he did not move. The sound was as coarse as gravel. The utterance transpired to more than simple words. The power derived from the essence of malevolence. As much as the simplicity of the thought motivated the dead, they were nothing more than automatons. The true spite now resided here with this dark twisted soul. The damned fuelled his restoration. All the time the pain twisted in his borrowed guts like searing needles of unbridled malignancy. Awkwardly, feeling returned long before the transition had been made to any degree of wholeness. The intense pain seemed almost like a symptom of the dead man's animosity. The more he fought the emotion, the more it caused him to swell with the agony of his own contempt. The more it became the only thing that remained as all other sentiments of a living soul evaporated into oblivion. Lies were forged into denial and then belief. The fractured remembrance of a past that could not be sustained in the truth washed away before any contradiction could be formed. Only the essence of malignancy endured. As the dead man's eyes opened to this existence, the urgings of the daemon had fallen away some time ago. The dead who had been but a reflection of the rise of darkness and the attentions of one who had less thought of control had already diminished. They had inflicted harm without focus only to return to the ground as fodder for the worms and things that crawled in the earth when they were no

longer needed or the daemon's attention strayed. The damned that came forth in the aftermath did not rise to the call of the one known as Mastk. They clawed forth from their graves and amassed to the dead man's will. As the eyes burned with the intensity of this dark soul's hatred, a name formed in its borrowed flesh-crafted mind – a name that offered clarity only in the diminished view of a transformation inspired by all of the negativity of a land that shuddered to a single strained utterance. *Julius*. As the word escaped the cracked lips of this twisted effigy, the dead began to move again...