

SURCEASE OF SORROW



THE HUMAN SPIRIT IS IMMORTAL. IT INHABITS MORTAL FLESH FOR A SPAN WITHIN THE WORLD BEFORE BEING LIBERATED AGAIN, HAVING GAINED KNOWLEDGE AND ENLIGHTENMENT. IT TRAVERSES THE LABYRINTH OF AGES BEFORE RETURNING TO MORTAL LIFE THROUGH NEW BIRTH.

LIFE DEATH AND ENDINGS

DEATH AND ENDINGS ARE TWO OF THE STRONGEST RESONANCES OF THE WINTER REALM. TO THE IGNORANT, THEY ARE THE SAME THING. THE WISE KNOW THAT THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE TWO CONCEPTS HOWEVER. FOR MORTALS, DEATH IS NOT THE END. LIVING THINGS MAY CEASE TO BE ALIVE, BUT WE KNOW THAT SOME SPIRITUAL ELEMENT PERSISTS BEYOND THE DEATH OF THE BODY. THERE IS NO "ENDING" TO LIFE AS SUCH – IT IS A CYCLE. A WHEEL.

ALMOST ALL MORTAL FAITHS TEACH THAT THERE IS SOME SUBTLE ELEMENT TO HUMANITY THAT PERSISTS BEYOND THE DEATH AND DISSOLUTION OF THE BODY. SUCH MORTAL CONCEPTS ARE ALIEN TO THE WINTER REALM. FOR THE BEINGS OF WINTER, DEATH IS AN ENDING. AN IRREVOCABLE LINE DRAWN UNDERNEATH A LIFE.

ENDING, BY ITS NATURE, IS ABSOLUTE AND FINAL. LIVING THINGS CAN DIE, BUT INLIVING THINGS CANNOT. ONLY THINGS THAT ARE ALIVE CAN DIE, BUT ANYTHING, UP TO AND INCLUDING THE ENTIRETY OF CREATION, CAN (AND ULTIMATELY WILL) COME TO AN ENDING. THINGS EITHER ARE, OR THEY ARE NOT. THE LIVING CAN ALSO END, WE BELIEVE, ALTHOUGH THE ABSOLUTE ABNEGATION THAT REPRESENTS IS SOMETHING WE CAN BARELY CONCEIVE OF.

THE ENTITIES OF THE WINTER REALM DO NOT SEE THINGS THE SAME WAY THAT MORTALS DO. TO THE WINTER REALM, DEATH AS MORTALS UNDERSTAND IT IS JUST A CHANGE. THE BODY REMAINS, AND THE BEING MAY LINGER ON AS A GHOST. TO THE CREATURES OF WINTER THE GHOST IS THE MORTAL TRANSFORMED TO A NEW STATE. NOT ENDED, MERELY CHANGED. WHEN THE GHOST FADES AT LAST, HOWEVER, OR WHEN IT PASSES OUT OF THE MORTAL REALM THROUGH THE CEREMONIES OF A PRIEST, OR THE SLOW GRINDING OF YEARS, OR THE RESOLUTION OF ITS UNRESOLVED BUSINESS... AT THIS POINT THE WINTER REALM BELIEVES THAT THE MORTAL IS TRULY GONE. ENDED.

I DO NOT AGREE WITH THIS BELIEF, HOWEVER. I HAVE SPOKEN TO MANY GHOSTS, AND I DO NOT ACCEPT THE CONSENSUS BELIEF THAT A GHOST AS THE SAME ENTITY AS THE BEING FROM WHICH IT AROSE. IT IS NOT A TRANSFORMATION, BUT AN ECHO. A SHADOW THROWN BY THE LIVING AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF CREATION THAT TAKES A LITTLE LONGER TO FADE THAN THE LIGHT IN THE EYES OR THE BEAT OF THE HEART.

THE CREATURES OF WINTER CONSIDER DEATH AN INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCE OF LIFE – WHAT DOES NOT LIVE, CANNOT DIE. WHAT LIVES, MUST DIE. WHAT EXISTS, MUST END. WITHOUT ENDING, THERE IS NO EXISTENCE. WITHOUT DEATH, THERE CAN BE NO TRUE LIFE. I HAVE SPOKEN WITH

ETERNALS OF WINTER ABOUT THE NATURE OF IMMORTALITY, AND WHILE THEIR ATTITUDES VARY THEY AGREE THAT IF SOMETHING CANNOT DIE IT CANNOT LIVE. THE ABILITY TO CHANGE REQUIRES ACCEPTANCE OF THE ULTIMATE CHANGE, FROM LIVING TO DEAD, AND FROM DEAD TO ENDED.

ALL OF THIS SEEMS TO COUNTER THE WELL-KNOWN RESONANCE OF SURVIVAL. YET THE WINTER ETERNALS AND THE MAGIC THEY ARE SO ASSOCIATE WITH ADMIT NO PARADOX. LIVING THINGS LIVE ONLY SO LONG AS THEY STRIVE TO LIVE. DEATH, LIKE ENDING, IS INEVITABLE, BUT IT IS NOT NECESSARILY TO BE EMBRACED. TO ACCEPT THE INEVITABLE IS WISE – TO DENY THAT ONE WILL END OR DIE IS TO RISK MADNESS. YET THE LIVING CANNOT TRULY EMBRACE DEATH WITHOUT BEING CONSUMED BY IT.

IF IT BE NOT NOW, THEN IT BE TO COME. IF IT BE NOT TO COME, THEN IT IS NOW.

UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, THE LIVING MUST DO EVERYTHING THEY CAN TO ENSURE THAT IT IS NOT *THIS DAY*. IN THE WINTER REALM, THAT MOMENT OF DEATH IS THE EMBRACE OF THE ABSOLUTE END OF YOUR EXISTENCE. YOU NO LONGER HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO ACHIEVE ANYTHING, TO GAIN WISDOM. YOUR EXISTENCE ENDS AT THE MOMENT OF YOUR DEATH AND EVERYTHING SHOULD STRIVE TO DELAY THAT MOMENT AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.

YET SOMETIMES DEATH IS NOT TO BE AVOIDED. SOMETIMES, THROUGH GRIEF OR CIRCUMSTANCE, DEATH IS LESS CRUEL THAN CONTINUED LIFE. IN ACCEPTING THIS THE WINTER REALM CAN BE UNCHARACTERISTICALLY GENTLE, PERHAPS EVEN MERCIFUL.

THE DOOR OF DUST

SOMETIMES, DEATH COMES NOT AS THE THIEF OF LIFE BUT AS A FRIEND LONG LOOKED FOR. IT IS POSSIBLE, IN TIME, FOR THE HABIT OF LIFE TO BECOME TOO MUCH. GREAT AGE BRINGS WITH IT THE SLOW FAILURE OF THE BODY AND THE MIND. SICKNESS OR INJURIES THAT CANNOT BE HEALED CAN MAKE EVERY MINUTE A LIVING NIGHTMARE. GRIEF THAT CANNOT BE OVERCOME, SORROW THAT CANNOT BE ENDURED. THESE ARE THE SIGNS THAT DEATH WILL COME NOT AS A LOSS, BUT AS A RELIEF.

FOR THE PILGRIM, SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THERE IS AN EXISTENCE BEYOND THE LIFE OF THE BODY WILL PERHAPS FEAR THE EMBRACE OF THE LABYRINTH LESS THAN THEY FEAR THE PAIN OF LETTING GO OF LIFE.

THERE ARE ALSO THOSE WHO FEAR THAT THE DEATH OF THE BODY WILL CONDEMN THE SPIRIT TO WANDER AS A LOST SHADE. PERHAPS A CURSE, OF A DARK TAIN, OR THE VIRUS LUNARAE HAVE BEEN EMPLOYED. PERHAPS THE BODY HAS BEEN INFESTED BY THE VILENESS OF THE VALLORN. THERE ARE ANY NUMBER OF REASONS WHY A MORTAL MIGHT DESIRE DEATH, OR ENDING, AND YET BE UNABLE TO EMBRACE IT.

THIS RITUAL, THEN, WIELDS THE POWER OF WINTER TO BRING PAINLESS DEATH AND DISSOLUTION TO A SINGLE INDIVIDUAL WHO CHOOSES TO ACCEPT IT.

THE RITUAL WILL NOT HAVE ANY EFFECT ON SOMEONE WHO IS NOT READY TO DIE. IF THEY CLING TO LIFE – EVEN IF THEY ARE NOT CONSCIOUS OF THE IR DESIRE TO LIVE – THEN THE RITUAL WILL FAIL.

SURCEASE OF SORROW OPENS THE DOOR THAT LEADS OUT OF LIFE, BUT IT IS THE BUSINESS OF THE SUBJECT WHETHER THEY STEP THROUGH IT ONCE THEY ARE AWARE OF IT.

IF THE RECIPIENT DOES CHOOSE TO PASS THROUGH THE DOOR OF DEATH, THEY INSTANTLY PASS BEYON LIFE BETWEEN ONE HEARTBEAT AND THE NEXT, BETWEEN ONE BREATH AN THE NEXT.

THERE IS NO PAIN – THEIR LIFE SIMPLY ENDS IN THE MANNER OF A CANDLE BEING BLOWN OUT.

WITH THEIR SPIRIT FREED FROM THE SHACKLES THAT CHAIN THEM TO THEIR FLESH, THEIR BODY BEGINS TO DISSOLVE LIKE ASH, OR SAND THROUGH AN HOURGLASS. OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL MINUTES EVERYTHING DESSICATES – IT IS AS IF THEY ARE TRANSFORMED INTO A STATUE OF THEMSELVES IN A SIMILAR MANNER TO THE RITUAL MARK THE FLESH UNCORRUPTIBLE – BUT RATHER THAN HAVING THE ENDURING QUALITIES OF STONE IT HAS THE ABSOLUTELY TRANSIENT QUALITY OF DUST.

THE SLIGHTEST TOUCH OR BREATH OF AIR CAUSES THE BODY TO BEGIN CRUMBLING UNTIL NAUGHT BUT A SCATTERING OF DUST REMAINS.

IN THIS WAY, SURCEASE OF SORROW IS THE ANTITHESIS OF MARK THE FLESH INCORRUPTIBLE. IT ABSOLUTELY PREVENTS THE USE OF SPELLS SUCH AS VOICE FOR THE DEAD, OR RITUALS SUCH AS AN ECHO OF LIFE REMAINS.

MORE, BECAUSE IT BRINGS WITH IT A SENSATION OF ABSOLUTE PEACE WHEN IT IS INVOKED, IT PREVENTS THE DEAD RETURNING AS A GHOSTLY PRESENCE OF ANY KIND. THIS INCLUDES THE KIND OF SPIRIT CALLED FORTH BY WHISPERS THROUGH THE BLACK GATE. FOR WHATEVER REASON, THE PROFOUND ENDING BROUGHT BY THIS RITUAL GRANTS THE SPIRIT OF THE SUBJECT A REST THAT CANNOT BE DISTURBED BY MAGIC.

THE RITUAL CANNOT BE USED AS A WEAPON, NOR IS IT INTENDED AS SUCH. IT OPENS THE DOOR, BUT IT IS THE CHOICE OF THE SUBJECT WHETHER THEY USE THAT DOOR. IT SEEMS TO HAVE NO POWER OVER ANIMALS, OR TREES, OR ROCKS. SUCH THINGS DO NOT - OR CANNOT - CHOOSE TO PASS BEYOND LIFE.

WORKING THE RITUAL

IN MANY WAYS, THIS RITUAL IS LIKE A FUNERAL AND SO SHOULD BE PERFORMED WITH GREAT CEREMONY. SOLEMN MUSIC, QUIET VOICES, AND THE TRAPPINGS OF MORTAL PASSING ARE ALL APPROPRIATE. WHEREVER POSSIBLE, I WOULD SEEK TO PERFORM THIS RITUAL ALONE, IN PRIVATE, RATHER THAN WITH GREAT POMP AND CEREMONY BUT THAT IS LARGELY A MATTER OF PERSONAL TASTE.

LOOK TO THE SUBJECT IN THESE REGARDS. IT IS EASY TO IMAGINE THAT A FREEBORN SUBJECT MAY WISH TO BE SURROUNDED BY FRIENDS AND FAMILY, WITH TRAPPINGS OF CELEBRATION, FOR EXAMPLE. I HAVE PERFORMED THE RITUAL ONCE AFTER A GRAND AND JOYOUS PARTY, A WAKE AT WHICH THE SUBJECT WAS THE GUEST OF HONOUR. YET ONCE THE SUBJECT HAD SAID THEIR GOODBYES, WE SLIPPED AWAY FROM THE FESTIVITIES TO A CERTAIN PEACEFUL GARDEN AND I PERFORMED THE RITUAL THERE, LETTING THE SUBJECT'S ASHES FALL ACROSS THE FLOWERS THAT THEY LOVED.

UNLIKE A MORE USUAL FUNERAL HOWEVER, THE SUBJECT CAN BE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT – INDEED THEY MUST BE ABSOLUTELY WILLING FOR SURCEASE OF SORROW TO HAVE ANY EFFECT AT ALL. I WOULD ADVISE THAT EACH PERFORMANCE BEGIN WITH A FORMAL REQUEST OF THE SUBJECT, ENSURING THAT THEY UNDERSTAND WHAT IS TO HAPPEN. THEY MAY HAVE REGRETS, OR EXPRESS SORROW, BUT THEY MUST BE TRULY WILLING TO PASS OUT OF LIFE OR THE RITUAL WILL GO AWRY.

YOU MAY WISH TO HAVE THE SUBJECT LIGHT A CANDLE, WHICH CAN THEN BE SNUFFED OUT ONCE THE RITUAL IS COMPLETE. THE BRIEF LIFE OF THE CANDLEFLAME BECOMES A SYMBOL OF THE PARTICIPANT'S LIFE FORCE, AND ANOTHER SIGN THAT THE SUBJECT TRULY IS A WILLING PARTICIPANT IN THE RITUAL.

THE RITUALISTS MAY WISH TO EVOKE A SYMBOLIC DOOR; PERHAPS THE CONSTELLATION OF THE DOOR ITSELF WHICH REPRESENTS (AMONG OTHER THINGS) THE TRANSITION FROM ONE STATE TO ANOTHER. I WOULD NOT CHOOSE TO EVOKE THE DROWNED MAN IN THIS RITUAL – THE CONNOTATIONS AND SYMBOLISM IS TOO HARSH.

RATHER, I MIGHT CALL ON THE SOROSTIS SUSPIRE, ONE OF THE THREE SISTERS, WHO REPRESENTS SORROW. ANY PASSING IS A SADNESS, EVEN ONE THAT IS WITHOUT PAIN AND SOUGHT OUT. THE ORIGINAL TEXT SPOKE OF THE SOROSTIS SUSPIRE AS THE "MOTHER OF SIGHS" – AS NEAR AS I CAN TELL THIS IS A TULPA OF THE THREE SISTERS SPECIFICALLY ASSOCIATED WITH ELEMENTS OF SORROW AND GENTLE PASSING. I HAVE EXPERIMENTED IN THIS REGARD MYSELF AND CAN SAY WITH SOME CAUTION THAT THE RITUAL

CERTAINLY WORKS IF THIS FIGURE IS EVOKED. INDEED IT SEEMED TO ME THAT THE GENTLE NATURE OF THE RITUAL WAS GREATLY ENHANCED WITH THIS BEING'S NAME BUT I WOULD STILL URGE CAUTION. THIS FIGURE IS ASSOCIATED WITH TWO MUCH DARKER VERSIONS OF THE THREE SISTERS IN THE ORIGINAL TEXT, AFTER ALL.

THE RUNE OF ENDING ALSO RESONATES WITH THIS RITUAL. THE SHEARS REPRESENT THE END OF A JOURNEY, THE POINT AT WHICH THERE ARE NO MORE CHOICES TO BE MADE. NOTHING NOW CAN BE CHANGED AND ALL HAS TAKEN ITS COURSE; THE THREAD MUST NOW BE CUT AND AN ENDING MADE. THIS IS OF COURSE PARTICULARLY APPROPRIATE TO THIS RITUAL, AND ESPECIALLY FOR THE PEOPLE OF WINTERMARK. TRACING OR DRAWING THE RUNE IS AN APPROPRIATE ACT IN SUCH CASES.

A THEURGE MIGHT CONSIDER EVOKING PSYCHOPOMPS, ESPECIALLY BIRDS. WHEN DEALING WITH A VARUSHKAN SUBJECT, THE VIRTUOUS ANIMALS MAKE AN EXCELLENT CHOICE OF PSYCHOPOMP. IN BOTH CASES, THE EVOKED CREATURES GUIDE THE SPIRIT FROM LIFE TO THE LABYRINTH. A THEURGE MIGHT ALSO WISH TO REMIND THE SUBJECT OF THE FIRST AND LAST DOCTRINES OF THE FAITH – REINCARNATION AND THE LABYRINTH.

I WOULD NOT USE BLOOD MAGIC TO PERFORM THIS RITUAL. IT IS PERSONAL PREFERENCE, BUT I AM CONCERNED ABOUT THE SYMBOLISM OF BLOODLETTING WHEN ASSOCIATED WITH A RITUAL THAT IS ENTIRELY CONCERNED WITH PAINLESS TRANSITION FROM ONE STATE TO ANOTHER.

FOR A DRAMATURGE, I WOULD BE CAUTIOUS WITH THIS RITUAL. THE BISHOP OR THE DOCTOR BOTH HAVE RESONANCE, BUT THE PERFORMANCE NATURE OF DRAMATURGY RUNS THE RISK OF MAKING THE QUIET SOLEMNITY OF THE RITUAL INTO SOMETHING FARFICAL. PERHAPS A SIMPLE PERFORMANCE USING STYLISED MASKS AND LANGUAGE MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE, BUT MOST LIKELY ONLY FOR A SUBJECT WHO IS THEMSELVES FROM THE LEAGUE.

REGARDLESS OF THE METHOD, AT THE END, I WOULD ASK THE SUBJECT IF THEY ARE READY TO PASS THROUGH THE DOOR AND WHEN THEY ANSWER IN AFFIRMATIVELY, CLOSE THEIR EYES WITH MY HAND. IF THE SUBJECT TRULY WISHES TO PASS BEYOND LIFE, THEY WILL PAINLESSLY DIE AND WITHIN A MINUTE OR AT MOST TWO BE REDUCED TO DUST.

ENDING THE UNENDING

THIS RITUAL IS NOT DIFFICULT TO PERFORM, BUT IT EMPLOYS THE POWER OF WILLING, KNOWING CONSENT TO POWERFUL EFFECT. THERE IS SOME MINOR EVIDENCE THAT THIS RITUAL MIGHT ALLOW A CHANGE TO ESSENTIAL NATURE THAT IS BEYOND THAT WHICH CAN NORMALLY BE ACHIEVED WITH RITUAL MAGIC.

THE ORIGINAL RESEARCHER OF THIS RITUAL WROTE EXTENSIVELY ABOUT A NUMBER OF CORRUPT STATES THAT MORTALS MAY PASS INTO THAT PREVENT OR INDEFINATELY DELAY THE ENDING OF LIFE. WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THESE STATES ARE PRISONS. THE DOCTRINE OF THE WAY MAKES IT CLEAR THAT IT IS THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT TO PASS INTO THE LABYRINTH, AND BE REBORN, SO THAT THEY MAY EMBRACE THE CYCLE OF LIVING AND GAIN ENLIGHTENMENT THEREBY.

THIS RITUAL POTENTIALLY PROVIDES A KEY TO THE DOOR OF THE CELL WHERE THE UNDYING ARE ENTRAPPED. IF THE CREATURE IS CAPABLE OF CONSENTING, AND GIVES ITS CONSENT, THEN THE RITUAL SHOULD BE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO DESTROY THE BODY AND GRANT PEACE TO THE TORMENTED SPIRIT THAT INHABITS IT.

IT IS OF LITTLE USE WITH GHOSTS AND OTHER SPIRITS THAT HAVE NO TRUE BODY, SADLY. YET FOR THESE CREATURES, THE POWER OF THE PRIEST IS SUFFICIENT. THIS RITUAL MIGHT PROVE INVALUABLE IN DEALING WITH SAPIENT CREATURES UNABLE TO ESCAPE THE TORMENT OF UNENDING LIFE.

OBVIOUSLY IT IS DIFFICULT TO TEST THIS HYPOTHESIS. THERE ARE FEW ENOUGH TRUE IMMORTALS IN THE WORLD AS IT IS. ATTEMPTS TO USE THE RITUALS ON HUSKS, WHETHER CREATED WITH WINTER MAGIC, OR HERBS, OR THE TAIN OF THE VALLORN, HAS PROVED UNTENABLE. THESE THREE CREATURES SEEM TO BE UNABLE TO COMPREHEN THE HORROR OF THEIR EXISTANCE, AND THUS UNABLE TO GIVE THEIR CONSENT – UNABLE TO SEE THE DOOR MUCH LESS PASS THROUGH IT.

WITHOUT THE COOPERATION OF A THULE DRAGON, OR ONE OF THE WICKED VOLODNY OF VARUSHKA, OR THE BLASPHEMOUS UNLIVING WARRIORS OF AXOS, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW WE MIGHT PERFORM ANY EXPERIMENTS TO DETERMINE THE TRUTH OF THIS MATTER. FOR NOW IT MUST REMAIN UNCERTAIN – BEYOND THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WHATEVER ELSE IT MIGHT DO WINTER MAGIC BRINGS AN END TO THING AND NOTHING – NOT EVEN CREATION ITSELF – IS UNENDING.



THE SHEARS, RUNE OF ENDING

DARK COUNTERPART TO EVROM, RUNE OF BEGINNING, THE SHEARS REPRESENT THE END OF THE JOURNEY. IT IS THE POINT AT WHICH ALL DECISIONS HAVE BEEN TAKEN, ALL PLANS MADE HAVE COME TO FRUITION AND VICTORY OR LOSS ARE COMPLETE. NOTHING NOW CAN BE CHANGED AND ALL HAS TAKEN ITS COURSE; THE THREAD MUST NOW BE CUT AND AN ENDING MADE.

ALTHOUGH ENDING CAN BE A TIME FOR SORROW, YOORN URGES US TO LOOK BACK AND REFLECT ON WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED. OFTEN USED TOGETHER WITH IRREMAIS, YOORN ALLOWS US TO LEARN FROM WHAT WE HAVE DONE, AND IN THAT CAN ALSO BE A RUNE OF FULFILLMENT AND COMPLETION. NOW THAT AN END HAS BEEN MADE, WE ARE READY TO BE RENEWED AND MOVE ON, READY FOR TRANSFORMATION AND A FRESH START.

SOMETIMES CALLED THE RUNE OF SEVERANCE, IT IS OFTEN MENTIONED DURING THE FORMAL ENDING OF RELATIONSHIPS, ASSOCIATIONS OR AGREEMENTS. THE SCRIVENERS OF THE BRASS COAST SOMETIMES STAMP IT ONTO A CONTRACT THAT IS CONSIDERED TO HAVE BEEN COMPLETED, OR VOIDED IN SOME WAY. LOVERS OCCASIONALLY GIVE A GIFT WITH THE RUNE INSCRIBED ON IT TO DISCREETLY DRAW A ROMANTIC AFFAIR TO AN END – THIS IS MOST COMMON IN DAWN AND THE LEAGUE.

YOORN IS COMBINED WITH THE RUNE OF BEGINNINGS TO REPRESENT THE IDEA OF BIRTH – AS THE BABY ENTERS THE WORLD, THE TIME OF PREGNANCY IS AT AN END. SO TOO AS THE SHEARS CUT THE THREAD OF LIFE THE SOUL PASSES FROM ONE WORLD INTO THE NEXT, READY TO CONTINUE ITS JOURNEY, YOORN REPRESENTS DEATH. WHEN USED ALONE, IT REPRESENTS OBLIVION; WHEN COMBINED WITH BEGINNINGS, IT REPRESENTS THE HOPE OF REINCARNATION.



HERE IS SHOWN THE **MOTHER-OF-SIGHS.**

HER QUIET VOICE IS FULL OF **SORROW,**

SHE SPEAKS OF THE **GENTLE END,**

AND OF A FINAL **REST.**

SHE IS THE SIGIL OF THE **LAST MYSTERY.**

THE MOTHER OF SIGHS

SHE IS A WOMAN OF MIDDLE-YEARS, PLUMP YET NOT FAT. HER FACE IS KIND, BUT HER EYES ARE BOTTOMLESS WELLS THAT SEEM FULL OF COMPASSION BUT TRUTHFULLY – TRUTHFULLY THEY ARE FULL OF GRIEF. HER DRESS MATTERS NOT, BUT IT IS ALWAYS IN GENTLE COLOURS OF THE EARTH AND THE LATE AUTUMNAL LEAVES. HER HANDS ARE CALLOUSED. SHE LEANS UPON A GNARLED STAFF, OR KNEELS IN THE EARTH TENDING TO A GARDEN OR TO SIMPLE CROPS. IN TRUTH, HER GARDEN IS A CEMETERY AND THE SOIL IS SOUR. SOMETIMES, SHE SINGS FOR THE DEAD AND HER SONGS ARE HEARTBREAKING.

SHE SIGHS FOR WHAT IS GONE, AND FOR THE INEVITABLE DECLINE THAT ATTENDS ALL THINGS. HER VOICE IS ALWAYS QUIET, NEVER RAISED IN ANGER – SHE IS DISAPPOINTED BY DISRESPECT, NOT WRATHFUL. SHE TALKS QUIETLY OF WHAT IS LOST, OF THE PAIN AND SORROW OF LIFE, OF THE REST AND SUCCOUR THAT LIES BEYOND LIFE. LET NONE SPEAK TO HER FOR TOO LONG, FOR THE PRETERNATURAL SADNESS SHE BRINGS MAKES THE IDEA OF SELF-DESTRUCTION SEEM APPEALING AND WILL LEAD TO TRAGEDY.

TRAGEDY, ALL ENDS, ALL COMES TO TEARS, IN SIGHS, IN DARKNESS. LIFE IS EXHAUSTION, AND STRUGGLE. BETTER TO GIVE IN, SHE SAYS IN HER QUIET, GENTLE VOICE. BETTER TO PASS INTO DARKNESS WITH DIGNITY THAN TO STRUGGLE AND BELLOW AGAINST THE NIGHT – BECAUSE IN THE END IT WILL STILL CLAIM YOU. SHE IS THE MOTHER OF THE WEEPING WOMAN, AND THE DAUGHTER OF THE NIGHT HAG.

HER SIGNS ARE SIGHS, QUIET VOICES, DUST, COLD ASH ONCE A FIRE HAS BURNT OUT, DRY EARTH, HER STAFF, THINGS GONE TO RUST, GRAVE MARKERS, AND DIRGES FOR THE DEAD.

EVOKE HER NAME WITH RITUALS THAT KILL, PROVIDED THEY DO SO GENTLY. THERE IS NO WRATH IN THE MOTHER OF SIGHS; LET NO VIOLENCE BE DONE IN HER NAME LEST SHE DEPART AND ANOTHER ARRIVE, FOR SHE IS LOVER TO THE FURY. HER BREATH BRINGS SLOW DECLINE, CRUMBLING, RUSTING, FAILING, WEAKNESS, SENILITY. BREATHE ON THE WALLS OF THE CITADEL AND THE WIND WILL RUIN IT WITHIN A WEEK.

SEND HER FORTH IN HER TERRIBLE, GENTLE STRENGTH TO TAKE THE LIFE FROM AN ENTIRE LAND AND WITHER ALL THE SEED THEREON. EVOKE HER WITH HER SISTER-DAUGHTER AND HER SISTER-MOTHER TO STAND WATCH OVER THE BLACK GATE. CALL ON HER TO STILL THE BROKEN HEART, AND OPEN THE DOOR TO PEACE.

Surcease of Sorrow

Winter Magnitude 6

Performing the Ritual

Performing this ritual takes at least 2 minutes of roleplaying. This ritual targets a character, who must be present throughout.

The target must be willing. If they are unwilling or unaware of the purpose of the ritual, it fails.

Effects

At the completion of the ritual, the target dies and slowly turns to dust; even their bones crumble away. Within one minute, their body is entirely gone, replaced instead with a pile of dust and ash that is easily scattered with a few seconds and will scatter naturally if left in an open place.

The ritual only works on a willing character who must be aware of what is happening. In the event that the target is unaware that the ritual will kill them, it fails but the target is left in no doubt as to the fact that an attempt was made to kill them.

The ritual also has no effect on characters who are already dead (although it will work on characters who are terminal), nor on creatures who are not capable of consenting to the effect.

It may or may not be powerful enough to kill a target who cannot otherwise die, or who is in some state apart from life but is still capable of giving assent. In any case, the target must still be willing, and the outcome depends on the nature of their curse. In general, at the very least it will have the same effect as the target's death count expiring and the body being physically destroyed.

OOO note

This item is a ritual text.

Any character with the Winter Ritual Lore skill can master this ritual. You must have a free slot or experience point to master a new ritual. After an appropriate period of roleplaying spent studying these pages, it should then be brought to a referee who will add the ritual to those you have mastered. Doing this does not 'use up' the ritual text.

This ritual cannot be learned by other means; it cannot be taught by a character who knows it unless the ritual is added to the body of Imperial Lore by the Conclave.

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