

THE
RAVEN
KING

BOOK IV OF
THE RAVEN CYCLE

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*For Sarah,
who gallantly took the Seat Perilous*

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To sleep, to swim, and to dream, for ever.

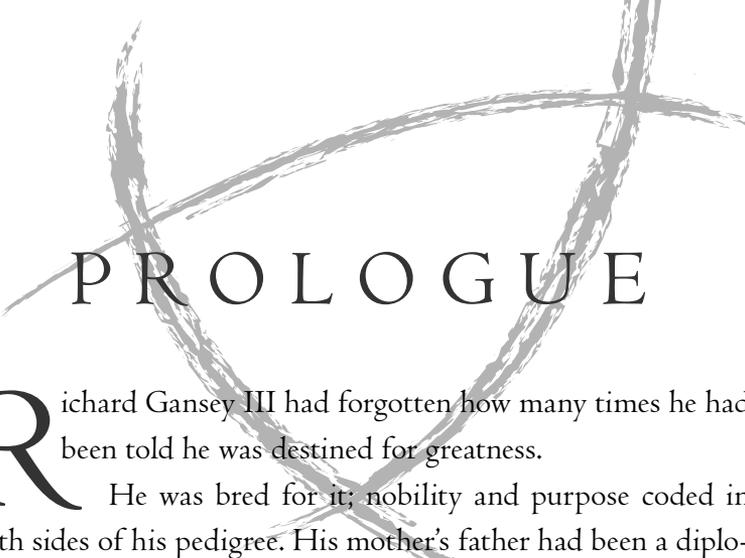
— ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE,
“A SWIMMER’S DREAM”

*These signs have mark’d me extraordinary;
And all the courses of my life do show
I am not in the roll of common men.*

— WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
HENRY IV

Darling, the composer has stepped into fire.

— ANNE SEXTON,
“THE KISS”



PROLOGUE

Richard Gansey III had forgotten how many times he had been told he was destined for greatness.

He was bred for it; nobility and purpose coded in both sides of his pedigree. His mother's father had been a diplomat, an architect of fortunes; his father's father had been an architect, a diplomat of styles. His mother's mother had tutored the children of European princesses. His father's mother had built a girls' school with her own inheritance. The Ganseys were courtiers and kings, and when there was no castle to invite them, they built one.

He was a king.

Once upon a time, the youngest Gansey had been stung to death by hornets. In all things, he had been given every advantage, and mortality was no different. A voice had whispered in his ear: *You will live because of Glendower. Someone else on the ley line is dying when they should not, and so you will live when you should not.*

He'd died, but failed to stay dead.

He was a king.

His mother, royalty herself, tossed her hat into the Virginia congressional ring, and unsurprisingly she'd ascended elegantly to the top of the polls. Onward and upward. Had there ever been any doubt? Yes, actually, always, ever, because the Ganseys did

not demand favors. Often they didn't even ask. They did unto others and silently hoped others would rise to do it unto them.

Doubt — all a Gansey did was doubt. A Gansey reached bravely into the night-blind water, fate uncertain until the hilt of a sword pressed into a hopeful palm.

Except — only a few months before, this Gansey had reached into the dark uncertainty of the future, stretching for the promise of a sword, and had instead pulled out a mirror.

Justice — in an inside-out way, it felt fair.

It was April 25, St. Mark's Eve. Years before, Gansey had read *The Grand Mystery: Ley Lines of the World* by Roger Malory. In it, Malory explained ponderously that a St. Mark's Eve vigil on the ley line would reveal the spirits of those who were to die within the next year. By this point, Gansey had seen all sorts of wonders performed near or on the ley lines — a girl who could read a book in full dark so long as she was on the line, an old woman who could lift a crate of fruit with only her mind, a trio of dusky-skinned triplets born on the line who cried tears of blood and bled salt water — but none of it had involved him. Required him. Explained him.

He didn't know why he'd been saved.

He needed to know why he'd been saved.

So he held a nightlong vigil on the ley line that had become his maze, shivering alone in the parking lot of the Holy Redeemer. He saw nothing, heard nothing. The following morning he crouched beside his Camaro, tired to the point of nonsense, and played back the night's audio.

On the recording, his own voice whispered, "Gansey." A pause. "That's all there is."

Finally, it was happening. He was no longer merely an observer in this world; he was a participant.

Even then, a small part of Gansey suspected what hearing his own name really meant. He knew it, probably, by the time his friends came to his car's rescue an hour later. He knew it, probably, when the psychics at 300 Fox Way read a tarot card for him. He knew it, probably, when he retold the entire story to Roger Malory in person.

Gansey knew whose voices whispered along the ley line on St. Mark's Eve. But he had spent several years chaining his fears and wasn't ready to unhook their leashes just yet.

It wasn't until one of the psychics at 300 Fox Way died, until death became a real thing once more, that Gansey couldn't deny the truth any longer.

The hounds of the Aglionby Hunt Club howled it that fall:
away, away, away.

He was a king.

This was the year he was going to die.