

# A Silent Oath

Black

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Kael Varn stood in the rain-soaked courtyard of Thorn Key, his eyes fixed on the figure before him. Lady Everia Veylan, a member of House Veylan, spoke with her back to him, addressing the silhouette of her brother, Knight Sir Maric. Kael's presence was a secret, known only to the Nightforge Curators who had assigned him to this task.

"Brother, I implore you," Lady Everia said, her words carrying across the courtyard, "consider your decision to abandon our Order. We've lost many brothers and sisters in these wars; do not leave us to face them alone."

Sir Maric's voice was low and even. "I have sworn an oath to protect Melosdra and its people. If that means leaving the Order, then so be it."

Kael's gaze narrowed as he absorbed this exchange. A Silent Oath was a solemn vow between siblings, one that could not be broken without consequence. The weight of his mission hung in the balance. As he watched, a flicker of unease crept across Lady Everia's face.

The rain intensified, drumming against the stone walls as Kael stepped closer, his presence unspoken but undeniable. He'd been sent to persuade Sir Maric to remain in the Order, not to leave it. The Curators were concerned about the implications of a respected Knight defecting; the Order's balance was already precarious.

"I have something to show you," Lady Everia said, her hand on Sir Maric's arm. "Come, see what our scholars have discovered in the Broken Writ."

As they turned towards the castle, Kael fell into step behind them. They walked through the darkening halls, the sound of rain echoing off the stone walls. The air was heavy with the scent of old books and smoke.

In a cramped, dimly lit chamber deep within Thorn Key, they found the Broken Writ—a collection of ancient texts, their pages worn by time and use. Scholars hunched over wooden desks, pouring over the pages as they deciphered the words of the ancients. Lady Everia guided Sir Maric to a particular text, its pages yellowed with age.

As Kael watched, a scholar pointed out passages that spoke of the weight of loyalty and restraint. The text was an excerpt from the Nightforge's own ancient lore, a reminder that even in the pursuit of balance, there were consequences to every

action.

Sir Maric's eyes narrowed as he read, his fingers tracing the lines on the page. Lady Everia stood beside him, her hand still on his arm. "See, brother? This is why we need you here. You have a role in maintaining our balance."

Kael observed, his presence a calculated silence. He'd witnessed this play before; loyalty and duty were powerful motivators. Yet, something within him sensed that Sir Maric's decision was not so easily swayed.

"I will consider it," Sir Maric said finally, "but I must think on my own terms."

A cost had been exacted: the scholar who spoke aloud about the passage felt a sudden weakness in her eyes, as if memories of the past had seeped into her vision. She rubbed them, wincing.

Kael's eyes met Lady Everia's; they shared a moment of understanding. This was not over yet. As he turned to leave, he nodded to himself. His part in this drama was done for now, but he knew he'd be back. The Silent Oath that bound the siblings together would continue to guide their actions, and Kael would ensure balance was maintained.

In the rain-soaked courtyard, as Kael vanished into the shadows, Lady Everia's eyes never wavered from her brother's face.

As Kael returned to his hiding place within the castle walls, he lit a small candle and sat on a narrow bed, his eyes fixed on the darkness beyond the flame's reach. He'd been a part of the Nightforge Curators for nearly two decades, ever since he'd joined their ranks after a stint in the city guard. During that time, he'd learned to navigate the intricate web of allegiances within and between factions, but the task at hand tested even his expertise.

He pulled out a small, intricately carved wooden box from beneath his tunic and opened it, revealing a collection of tiny, crystal vials filled with dried petals of nightshade. Kael's fingers closed around one vial; the crystal shard within felt cool against his skin as he recalled the Nightforge scholar who'd gifted it to him. "For when the balance tips too far," she'd said, her eyes serious. He'd never used it before, but a subtle unease had taken hold of him since witnessing Sir Maric's Silent Oath.

In the next room, within the dimly lit chamber where he'd been hiding, the Nightforge scholar who'd spoken aloud in the library groggily stood up from her desk. The text still clutched in her hand slipped to the floor as she stumbled backwards. Her pupils constricted as if a curtain had dropped across them, obstructing her vision. She blinked repeatedly but saw nothing except the faint outlines of old parchment and dusty shelves.

She felt her way back to her chair, the wooden legs creaking beneath her weight. "What's wrong with me?" she muttered to herself, but the words were lost in a sudden silence as her mind became mired in memories long past: memories she'd never experienced before.

As Kael sat in darkness, his fingers continued to turn the crystal vial in his hand. The weight of Sir Maric's decision hung like a specter over Thorn Key, a reminder that even the most carefully laid plans could unravel at any moment. He recalled the words of the Nightforge scholar who'd given him the vial: "For when the balance tips too far." Her words echoed in his mind as he tried to still the unease spreading within him.

A faint scratching noise drifted from the adjacent room, drawing Kael's attention. He rose and stepped into the dimly lit chamber where the scholar had stumbled earlier. The room was small and cramped, the air heavy with the scent of old books and a hint of something else: nightshade, carried on his skin, no doubt. The scholar hunched over her desk, her face bathed in a faint, flickering glow from a nearby candle.

The scratching noise grew louder, and Kael approached cautiously, his footsteps echoing off the stone walls. The scholar's eyes were closed, her fingers moving with jerky precision as if they'd taken on a life of their own. On the parchment before her, a message began to take shape: a single word, scrawled in hasty, uneven letters - "Wait." Kael's instincts whispered that he should intervene, but something about this scene felt deliberate, almost... calculated.

He watched, transfixed, as the scholar's hand continued its dance across the parchment. The scratching grew more frenzied, and a shiver ran down his spine. He knew that look in her eyes - it was not just the memory of an old text seeping into her vision. She was drawing something out, pulling from a place where memories weren't hers to recall. The scholar's hand slowed, then froze over the parchment, leaving behind a crude, blocky script that seemed almost...otherworldly.

Tags: Thorn Key, Loyalty, Discipline