

Blood Oaths and Forgotten Lore, Redemption's Weight, Kael Varn

Black

Blood Oaths and Forgotten Lore

Kael Varn slipped through the shadows of Ashen Roads, a whispered promise to himself the only sound in the deserted thoroughfare. He'd been summoned by the Curators of House Veylan, tasked with resolving a delicate matter of balance that had gone unaddressed for years. The weight of his duty hung heavy on him like a physical chain, one he'd worn since boyhood.

As he entered the curators' chambers, the soft glow of luminescent crystals lit the faces of three senior Veylan officials: Eira, Lyra, and Kaelin. Their expressions were as stern as ever, but their eyes betrayed a hint of desperation. "Kael, we've received word from Queen Arachne herself," Lyra began. "The balance in the realm is... precarious. A forgotten lore, one tied to an ancient oath, threatens to unravel our carefully crafted order."

Veylan's Curators handed Kael an intricately bound tome, its cover worn and adorned with symbols he didn't recognize. As he opened it, a shiver ran down his spine. This was no ordinary text; the pages were yellowed, the ink faded, but the words themselves seemed to writhe like living things.

"This is a piece of The Broken Writ," Eira explained, her voice barely above a whisper. "It's said to hold the secrets of Melosdra's own oaths, sworn long ago in the Age of Order. We need you to find the source of this disturbance and—"

Kael's eyes scanned the pages, searching for any hint of how this ancient lore might be tied to their current troubles. The words on the page began to blur as his fingers brushed against a strange symbol etched into the margin. A jolt of cold shot through him, as if the very fabric of time had snagged. He winced, the cost of this momentary connection already clear: a dull ache in his left eye.

"Lyra," he said, closing the tome with a measured tone, "I think I see what we're facing. This is more than just an unbalanced oath; it's a memory, one that refuses to stay buried."

He took a slow breath, focusing on the task ahead. A memory from his own past began to surface: a fragment of The Broken Writ he'd stumbled upon during his own

training, hidden away in the forgotten reaches of Nightforge's archives. That was where he needed to go now.

Under the cover of darkness, Kael made his way back to Nightforge, the towering fortress on the outskirts of Ashen Roads. He navigated its labyrinthine corridors with practiced ease, his footsteps echoing off stone walls as he approached the section sealed off from the public. Here, in this hidden part of the stronghold, he found what he sought: an ancient text, partially consumed by time and forgotten lore.

The silence was oppressive, weighing upon him like a physical presence. Kael's fingers danced across the text's pages, coaxing out memories long locked away. He uncovered fragments of an old oath, one sworn in a time before his own birth, when Melosdra had walked among mortals as one of their own. The words were laced with a deep sadness, a longing for balance that echoed down through centuries.

As he delved deeper into the text, Kael's connection to this forgotten lore began to unravel threads within himself. Memories he'd thought long buried resurfaced: his mother's face, her gentle voice, the look in her eyes when she told him of The Broken Writ. For a moment, the weight of the task ahead threatened to crush him.

"Enough," he whispered, pushing away from the ancient text. "It's time to right this balance."

Back in Ashen Roads, Kael stood before the Veylan Curators once more. He held up the tome, its cover now empty and still. The air was heavy with anticipation as he spoke of his findings: the forgotten oath, tied to Melosdra's own heartache; the memory he'd uncovered, a thread from his past that needed mending.

The silence that followed was palpable. Eira, Lyra, and Kaelin exchanged glances, their expressions grave. "You've found the source," Lyra said finally. "But what of the cost?"

A heavy breath escaped Kael's chest as he handed back the tome. He'd paid his share already: a memory lost, like sand slipping through his fingers, leaving behind only an ache in its place.

"You know the answer to that," he replied, his voice low. "I'll need time to... reconnect with my own balance."

The Curators nodded solemnly, their decision made before he'd finished speaking. Kael knew they understood; after all, had he not taught them well?

As the weight of this new balance settled upon him, Kael walked back into the shadows of Ashen Roads, the city's darkness swallowing him whole once more. This time, however, it held a different kind of silence— one born from the cost he'd paid, and the memories now laid to rest.

The silence of Ashen Roads was a living thing, its darkness punctuated only by the faint glow of luminescent crystals embedded in the buildings. Kael walked, his footsteps weaving through the deserted streets like a ghostly apparition. He had no particular destination in mind, only a need to clear his thoughts and reconnect with the balance he'd disturbed.

As he turned down a narrow alley, the stench of rancid meat hit him like a slap. A small food stall, usually quiet at this hour, was now bustling with activity. Kael's stomach growled at the aroma wafting from sizzling pans, and for a moment, he forgot about the weight bearing down on him. He slid onto a stool, ordering a plate of roasted meats without thinking.

The vendor, a gruff old man named Gorvoth, handed him a steaming hot meal with a knowing glint in his eye. "You look like you've lost your last copper piece," he said, voice low and rough as the stone walls that surrounded them. Kael ate, savoring the flavors and textures as the vendor watched him with an air of curiosity.

The plate was clean by the time Gorvoth spoke up again. "You're one of those Silent Guard types, aren't you? Always moving in the shadows, never seen until it's done." His voice turned serious, his eyes narrowing. "Be careful, Kael Varn. The balance you're trying to restore... it's not the only thing that's shifting."

Kael finished his meal, feeling a small weight lift from his shoulders. Gorvoth's words echoed in his mind as he rose to leave, the city's shadows swallowing him once more. He had no intention of ignoring the vendor's warning; the threads he'd uncovered in The Broken Writ were already unraveling deeper within himself, and he knew he needed guidance.

With a newfound sense of purpose, Kael made his way back to Nightforge, this time seeking out a specific individual: Arin Vexar, master forger and alchemist. He found her in the depths of Nightforge's archives, surrounded by shelves of dusty texts and scattered papers. The air was heavy with the scent of burning metal and sandalwood.

Arin looked up as he approached, her eyes narrowing behind wire-rimmed spectacles. "Kael Varn. I expected you sooner." Her words were laced with a hint of disapproval, but Kael sensed a deeper concern beneath her tone. "The balance... it's a delicate thing, isn't it?" She set aside her work, her hands clasped together as if waiting for him to speak.

Kael took a moment, collecting his thoughts before explaining the situation in Nightforge's hidden archives. Arin listened intently, her expression darkening with each word. "I see," she said when he finished, her voice barely above a whisper. "You've disturbed something that should remain buried." Her eyes locked onto his, filled with an unspoken warning. "Come, Kael Varn. Let us discuss the cost of your actions... and what you must do next."

Arin led Kael deeper into the archives, navigating narrow aisles between shelves that seemed to stretch up to the darkened ceiling. The air was thick with the scent of old parchment and the faint tang of burning metal. They stopped in front of a small, unassuming door hidden behind a tapestry depicting a long-forgotten battle.

"The cost," Arin began, her voice barely above a whisper as she turned to face him, "is always immediate, isn't it? A thread pulled loose, and the entire fabric begins to unravel." She pushed open the door, revealing a small, dimly lit chamber filled with rows of ancient texts and strange, glowing orbs that seemed to pulse with an otherworldly energy.

Kael felt a shiver run down his spine as he entered, the weight of the room settling upon him like a physical presence. The air inside was heavy with the scent of decay and forgotten knowledge. "This is where we keep... items that cannot be kept elsewhere," Arin explained, her voice low and serious. "The Silent Guard's secrets, hidden from prying eyes."

Arin reached for a small, leather-bound book on a nearby shelf, its cover embossed with an intricate symbol that seemed to shift and writhe like a living thing. "This is one of the few remaining copies of *The Broken Writ*," she said, handing it to Kael. "I'm afraid it's too late for you to avoid paying the price any longer."

As Kael took the book, a shiver ran down his spine. The weight of the leather binding was heavy in his hands, like a physical manifestation of the burden he'd carried since uncovering the forgotten oath. He felt Arin's eyes on him, searching for something, but he avoided her gaze, unable to meet it.

The air inside the chamber seemed to thicken, as if the weight of the room itself was bearing down upon him. Kael opened the book, and a faint hum filled his ears, like the quiet buzzing of a thousand bees. The pages were yellowed and crackling with age, but as he touched them, the ink began to shimmer, revealing hidden symbols that seemed to writhe across the page. A chill ran down his spine as he realized the writing was not just letters – it was a map, etched in blood and shadow.

"Arin," Kael said, his voice barely above a whisper, "what have I done?" He felt the memories resurfacing again, threads from his past weaving together with the echoes of Melosdra's pain. The weight of the forgotten oath settled upon him, crushing his chest like an iron fist.

Arin's face was pale, her eyes filled with a deep sadness. "You've disturbed the balance," she repeated, her voice heavy with sorrow. "The ripples are already spreading. I'm afraid it will only get worse before it gets better." She reached out and took Kael's arm, her grip tight but gentle. "We need to move quickly. We have to find a way to repair the damage – and yourself."

Kael nodded, his mind racing with the implications. He knew what he had to do: reconnect with his own balance, restore the forgotten oath, and mend the memory that had been lost. But how? The weight of the task was crushing him, threatening to consume him whole. He looked at Arin, seeking guidance, but she seemed uncertain, her eyes darting between him and the book as if searching for answers that weren't there.

"We need... something more," Kael said, his voice barely above a whisper. "I don't have enough." He glanced at the book, and the hum of the symbols grew louder, like a chorus of whispers urging him on. Arin's grip on his arm tightened, her eyes searching for a solution that seemed to slip through her fingers.

"We need more threads," she said finally, her voice barely audible over the growing din in Kael's mind. "The forgotten oath is not just a memory – it's a bridge. If we can find another thread from Melosdra, one that still resonates with the pain of her loss, maybe... maybe we can repair what you've broken."

Kael's eyes snapped back to Arin, a spark of hope igniting within him. "You think another thread can fix this?" he asked, his voice a little stronger now. Arin nodded, her expression resolute. "We have to try."

She led Kael out of the dimly lit chamber, the air thickening with the scent of old parchment as they navigated the narrow aisles once more. The rows of shelves seemed to blur together as Kael's mind reeled with the implications. Another thread, one that still resonated with Melosdra's pain... it sounded like a desperate gamble, but he was willing to try anything.

As they emerged into the main archives, Arin turned to him, her eyes locking onto his with an air of determination. "We need to find a way to locate another thread from Melosdra," she repeated. "But we can't risk searching the open markets or seeking out old records. The Shadowhand is watching, and they'll stop at nothing to claim the forgotten oath for themselves."

Kael nodded, his mind racing with the consequences of failure. The Shadowhand, a mysterious organization rumored to move unseen and strike without mercy... he had never imagined they were this deeply entangled in the mystery of the forgotten oath. Arin's grip on his arm tightened as she guided him through the winding corridors of Nightforge, her words barely above a whisper.

"We have one lead," she said finally, her voice full of a mixture of hope and trepidation. "A former member of the Silent Guard, someone who may be willing to help us... but we'll need to be careful. The Shadowhand has eyes everywhere, and this individual's loyalty is... complicated." Kael's eyes narrowed as he processed Arin's words, his thoughts turning to the web of secrets and allegiances that seemed to ensnare him at every turn.

"We're heading to the Drowned Lady," Arin continued, her voice steady. "She's an old acquaintance of mine... one who may be willing to help us find what we need." The name sent a shiver down Kael's spine; the Drowned Lady was a whispered rumor, a ghostly figure said to inhabit the city's seedier underworld. He had heard stories of her ability to navigate the hidden paths and dark corners of Nightforge, but he never thought he'd be seeking her out for help.

As they made their way through the winding streets, the darkness seemed to thicken around them, the shadows deepening into an almost palpable presence. Kael felt the weight of his oath bearing down upon him, the memories of Melosdra's pain echoing in his mind like a mournful sigh. He pushed the thoughts aside, focusing on the task ahead: find another thread from Melosdra, and perhaps, just perhaps, he could begin to repair the damage that had been done.

The Drowned Lady's quarters were hidden deep within the city's labyrinthine undercroft, a maze of narrow tunnels and cramped spaces that seemed to defy the light. Kael's hand instinctively went to the knife at his belt as they made their way deeper into the undercroft, Arin leading the way with an air of quiet confidence. The air grew thick with the scent of damp earth and decay, and Kael's skin prickled with unease. He had a feeling that they were being watched, that unblinking eyes were trained upon them from the shadows.

As they turned a corner, a dimly lit chamber came into view. The Drowned Lady herself sat at a small wooden table, her features illuminated by a single, flickering candle. Her face was a map of deep lines and creases, etched by years of living in the city's underbelly. Kael felt a shiver run down his spine as their eyes met; there was something unsettling about her, a presence that seemed to draw the light out of the air.

"Arin Vexar," she said, her voice low and husky, like the rustle of dry leaves. "I've been expecting you. And... Kael Varn, I see." Her eyes flicked to him, and for an instant, he thought he saw a glimmer of recognition, as if she knew more about him than she was letting on.

The Drowned Lady's gaze lingered on Kael, her eyes seeming to bore into his very soul before she looked away, her expression enigmatic as ever. Arin nodded in response to her greeting, a hint of deference in her voice as she began to explain their quest. The Drowned Lady listened intently, her eyes never leaving Kael's face, even when her gaze flicked back to him.

As they spoke, Kael couldn't shake the feeling that he was being sized up, weighed and measured like a commodity to be bought or sold. He shifted uncomfortably under her scrutiny, his hand tightening on the hilt of his knife. Arin seemed oblivious to his tension, continuing to speak with an air of quiet authority as she presented their plea

for help. The Drowned Lady's expression remained inscrutable, but Kael caught a flicker of interest in her eyes when Arin mentioned Melosdra's name.

When Arin finished speaking, the Drowned Lady leaned back in her chair, steeping her fingers together as she regarded them. "I can help you," she said finally, her voice like the soft lapping of water against stone. "But I'll need something from you, Kael Varn." Her eyes locked onto his once more, and for an instant, he thought he saw a glimmer of calculation in their depths. "A piece of yourself, perhaps. A memory, a thread of your own to trade."

Kael's instincts recoiled at the suggestion, but Arin's grip on his arm tightened, urging him forward. He hesitated, weighing the risks against the potential reward. What did the Drowned Lady have in mind? And what would be the cost? The air seemed to grow heavier, as if the very shadows themselves were waiting for his decision.

The Drowned Lady's words hung in the air like a challenge, her eyes never leaving Kael's face as she waited for his response. Arin's grip on his arm tightened, her voice a gentle reminder of their precarious position. "We don't have anything to give," Kael said finally, his tone firm but cautious. The Drowned Lady's smile was like a crack in the stone wall, a small, calculated movement that sent a shiver down Kael's spine.

"Ah, but you do," she said, her voice dripping with an unspoken meaning. "You have something to lose, don't you, Kael Varn? Something precious, hidden deep within your own mind." Her gaze seemed to bore into his very soul, as if she could see the threads of memory that wove through his thoughts like a tapestry. Arin's hand slipped from his arm, and he felt a jolt of unease at her sudden absence. "What do you want in return?" he asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

The Drowned Lady leaned forward, her eyes glinting with a hint of mischief. "A memory, as I said," she repeated, her voice low and husky. "One thread from your past, one recollection that holds the weight of Melosdra's pain. In exchange, I'll give you what you seek: another thread from the forgotten oath, one that might be strong enough to repair the damage." Her words dripped with an air of promise, but Kael felt a creeping sense of unease at her request.

"What kind of memory?" he asked, his voice barely above a whisper. The Drowned Lady's smile grew wider, a tiny, cruel curve of her lips. "Ah, anything will do," she said, her eyes glinting with an unspoken challenge. Kael felt the air thicken around him, heavy with the weight of her words. He glanced at Arin, but she seemed lost in thought, her eyes fixed on some distant point beyond the Drowned Lady's shoulders.

"I don't know if I can," he said finally, his voice laced with a hint of desperation. The Drowned Lady leaned back in her chair, steeping her fingers together once more. "You'll have to try, Kael Varn," she said, her voice dripping with a mixture of curiosity and calculation. "The memory I seek is one of loss, one that will set free the echoes of

Melosdra's pain."

Tags: The Silent Guard, Echoes of Old, Dimming Age