

# Redemption in the Broken Writ

Black

## Redemption in Ashen Roads

The cart rattled over the dirt road, its wooden slats creaking in protest as Eira Vex stepped out. Her boots left the only prints on the deserted stretch of Ashen Road 132-B, which traversed the heart of the Dimming Age's most forsaken regions. Night hung heavy, like a dirty shroud over Veylan lands. She navigated the cart through the darkness with practiced ease, its wheels rumbling in counterpoint to her own measured tread.

Eira had walked this road often; more so since she'd been tasked by House Veylan with... 'correction'. Kael Varn's words echoed inside her: 'balance demands silence as much as blood.' Her specialty was subtlety, making those corrections where armies couldn't or wouldn't tread. In the city of Blackhaven, rumors whispered about a man who'd been wronged – and the price exacted for that transgression. She recognized the stench of corruption from her years on Ashen Roads; it reeked of desperation and hopelessness.

Eira had stopped at a dingy tavern hours before dawn, gathering whispers and crumbs from broken conversations: whispers about a man named Erebus who'd been using his station as Thalos's administrator to bleed dry the locals. His practices were so egregious that even the Order, ever vigilant, would be forced to intervene if House Veylan didn't handle it discreetly first. The Order required its agents in the field to maintain balance by themselves whenever possible; it spared unnecessary spectacle.

When she arrived at Blackhaven, Eira sought Erebus from within the city's heart: Nightforge's central square. She navigated its cobblestone paths, sidestepping people hurrying for their daily tasks as if nothing was amiss – which suited her intentions. Erebus's office was situated in an unassuming building near one of the city's main fountains. His presence was felt in every step: every transaction, every coin clinked into his coffers. He'd have known better, Eira thought, watching him oversee a group of workers unloading grain sacks from a merchant's cart.

Her approach went unnoticed until she stepped inside the office and let the door close behind her. Erebus turned around, an edge on his smile hinting at recognition. She leaned against the doorframe, arms crossed, as if strolling by chance. Her right boot tapped in measured pace; its steady rhythm served notice that this was no chance

encounter.

"You have a problem," Eira stated, unwinding her arm from her chest to gesture towards a nearby chair beside his massive desk. "With your methods and with those who report them."

Erebus laughed – brief, tight, and mirthless. The only response she'd expected. He leaned forward on the edge of his chair. A gleam had appeared in his eyes: this was going to be difficult.

"Ah, you're here for me?" His voice, smooth as polished stone, took a moment to unravel its intent. She could almost see the calculation, weighing each word like a master balancing scales.

"Sit down," Eira said softly, moving forward with her left foot as she'd taken her first step into Ashen Roads years ago – when balance demanded blood.

Erebus settled into his chair, a calculated motion that told her he'd anticipated this meeting, if not the specifics. The room's dim light accentuated his features – angular face, piercing eyes, and sharp jawline – but couldn't quite reach the fine lines of exhaustion etched around them.

"You're from House Veylan," he stated, fingers interlaced on the armrests as he leaned back into his chair. "I've heard stories about their... particular kind of balance."

Eira stepped closer, boots making soft creaking sounds against the floorboards. She halted by the edge of his desk, a hand resting on its surface where a faint ring was engraved: a symbol of his allegiance to Thalos. Her gaze locked onto Erebus's.

"What do you think I'm here for?" she asked, voice even, devoid of any inflection.

He chuckled softly, eyes glinting in the dim light. "You've come to correct me, correct? To bring some measure of balance to Blackhaven?"

The sound from his laughter still echoed when Eira's hand moved over the ring on his desk, a single finger tracing the fine details as if committing it to memory.

"Your methods are well known," she said, voice low, eyes still locked onto Erebus. "A handful of complaints and allegations against you have reached House Veylan. They... wanted me to speak with you first."

"I'm sure they did," he muttered, running a hand over his face, as if rubbing away fatigue rather than pain.

The silence that followed hung heavy in the room like a challenge or an invitation – Eira wasn't certain which, but it made her move closer still. She rested both hands on the desk now, thumbs brushing against the engraved symbol.

"You bleed Blackhaven dry," she said, voice soft as the first light of dawn creeping over Nightforge's walls.

Erebus's fingers stilled against his face, a small, almost imperceptible twitch in response to her words. He'd been prepared for this moment, but Eira could see the faintest glimmer of uncertainty in his eyes – a flicker that vanished behind his carefully crafted mask.

"You want me to understand," he said finally, voice dripping with an oily smoothness, "that House Veylan is dissatisfied with my methods. Methods that have kept Blackhaven's economy afloat during... difficult times." He leaned forward, hands clasped together, fingers intertwining like the roots of an old tree. "I assure you, I'm not taking more than the system allows."

Eira's gaze never wavered from his face, her expression unreadable. She studied him as one might a patient: observing, waiting for the cracks to show themselves. Erebus's eyes flickered towards her hands still resting on the desk, where they'd touched the symbol of Thalos. For an instant, he seemed drawn to it – perhaps, Eira thought, it was a gesture of submission.

"I don't want to know what your methods are," she said, voice even, unyielding. "I want you to understand this: House Veylan will not tolerate abuses in our territory. Not anymore than they will allow the shadows to consume us all." Her words hung between them like a cold breeze on a winter night – and Erebus's gaze snapped back to hers, a spark of defiance igniting within those piercing eyes.

"I'm beginning to understand," he said, voice dripping with an insincere politeness. He leaned forward further, hands spread on his desk as if embracing it. "Tell me, what House Veylan proposes I do differently? I assure you, they won't be disappointed." The tension in the room grew thicker, a coiled spring waiting to unleash its force.

Eira's face remained impassive, but her fingers tightened around the edge of the desk – a subtle sign that she wasn't as serene as she appeared. "I'm here to give you a choice," she said, voice low and even, each word carefully chosen. "Leave Blackhaven. Today. Or I make sure you understand what House Veylan's 'balance' truly means."

The air in the office seemed to thicken, heavy with the weight of unspoken threats. Erebus's smile never wavered, but his eyes flickered towards the small table beside his chair, where a nearly empty flask sat alongside a stack of parchments and quills. He reached for the flask, his hand closing around it like a vice.

"Tell me, what makes you think I'll leave Blackhaven?" he asked, voice dripping with amusement as he raised the flask to his lips. The liquid within glinted in the faint light, a golden hue that seemed almost otherworldly. Eira's gaze lingered on the vessel

before returning to Erebus's face.

He took a long drag from the flask, the tension in his shoulders easing ever so slightly as he exhaled. "I know what I've heard about House Veylan's methods," he said, the words slurred ever so slightly, "and I can almost respect it. The way you operate – silently, efficiently... I'm intrigued." His eyes locked onto hers, a glint of challenge dancing in their depths.

Eira's hand on the desk tightened further, her knuckles whitening around the edge as she leaned forward. "This isn't about respect or intrigue," she said, voice low and even. "It's about balance. And I've seen what happens when you disrupt it." She paused, her gaze never leaving Erebus's face. "You'll leave Blackhaven today, or... or I make sure the Order sees to it."

The flask slipped from Erebus's fingers, forgotten on his lap as he leaned forward, elbows braced on his desk. The dim light caught the sharp angles of his face, emphasizing the lines etched into his skin – lines that spoke of late nights, hard choices, and the weight of power. "You're a hard woman," he said, voice still slurred but with a hint of something else: calculation, perhaps. "I almost admire you."

Eira's expression remained impassive, her eyes never leaving Erebus's face. She could see the faintest glimmer of uncertainty beneath his mask – a vulnerability that made her wonder if he was more than just a corrupt administrator. The thought was a fleeting one; she pushed it aside as she leaned back, hand still resting on the desk.

"I've seen what you're capable of," she said, voice softening ever so slightly. "I'll see to it that the Order... understands your capabilities." Erebus's eyes narrowed at the threat, but Eira continued before he could respond. "You have a family in Blackhaven, I believe? A wife and child?"

Erebus's expression darkened at the mention of his family, a hint of defensiveness creeping into his voice. "How do you know about them?"

"I've done my research," Eira replied, her eyes still fixed on him, but her tone not accusatory. She let the silence hang between them for a moment before continuing. "They're well taken care of, I'm sure. But think of them now. Think of what would happen if... if things were to change here in Blackhaven." Erebus's eyes flashed with anger, and for an instant, Eira thought she saw something else there too – fear.

The tension in the room seemed to grow thicker, heavier, as Erebus's face twisted into a snarl. "You're using my family against me," he spat, his words venomous. Eira remained still, her expression unreadable, but her eyes never left his. The air was thick with unspoken threats and counter-threats, each one building upon the other like layers of stone.

For an instant, it seemed as though Erebus would lunge at her, or perhaps lunge out of his chair – but then something within him seemed to snap back into place, and he sat still, his breathing deep and even. "I'll leave Blackhaven," he said finally, the words dripping with reluctance. "Not because you've threatened me, but because... I think it's time for me to move on." Eira's face remained impassive, but a tiny flicker of surprise danced in her eyes at his words.

She stood then, her movements economical and precise, as if she'd been waiting for this moment all along. "I'll have a carriage ready for you," she said, turning towards the door. "You'll leave Blackhaven within the hour." Erebus didn't move, his gaze fixed on hers, a mixture of anger and calculation churning in his eyes.

As Eira reached the doorway, she paused, her hand on the latch. "Remember what I said about House Veylan's balance," she said softly, her voice carrying back into the room like a whispered warning. Erebus's expression was a mask now – but for an instant, Eira thought she saw something there, hidden deep within his eyes: a glimmer of the man he might have been before Blackhaven claimed him.

With that, she closed the door behind her, leaving Erebus alone in the dimly lit office. The silence that followed was oppressive, heavy with the weight of unspoken threats and promises – and as Erebus stood, slowly gathering his belongings, he couldn't shake the feeling that this was far from over.

As Erebus gathered his belongings, his mind whirled with thoughts of what had just transpired. The mention of his family had shaken him, but more than that, Eira's words had planted a seed of doubt in his mind – a notion that perhaps Blackhaven wasn't the only place where balance existed, and maybe there was more to this mysterious House Veylan than he'd assumed.

The carriage waited for him outside, its doors open like a dark mouth, ready to swallow him whole. Erebus approached it with a sense of resignation, his eyes scanning the surrounding area as if searching for some hidden danger. But Eira's men were nowhere to be seen – they'd probably been dismissed as soon as he agreed to leave.

The carriage creaked to life as he stepped inside, its curtains closing behind him like a veil. Erebus settled into the leather seat, trying to make sense of his thoughts. He'd left Blackhaven once before, when his wife had first come to him – full of fire and passion, with dreams of building something new in this forsaken place. But it was different now. Now he knew what it took to keep their family safe.

The carriage rumbled on, carrying Erebus through the winding streets of Blackhaven. He watched as the city receded into the distance, its towers and spires dwindling like sentinels guarding a forgotten realm. A strange feeling crept over him – it was almost... freedom. Not in the sense that he'd escaped his duties or responsibilities,

but in the realization that he had choices now. And with those choices came consequences.

As the carriage continued on its winding path, Erebus's thoughts turned to his family. His wife, Althaea, and their young daughter, Lyra. They deserved better than Blackhaven – a place where the very air reeked of corruption, and where a man had to make deals with devils just to keep his family alive. He remembered Eira's words: "They're well taken care of, I'm sure." A bitter taste rose in his mouth as he wondered what exactly that meant.

The carriage finally came to a halt, its wheels crunching on gravel. Erebus gathered his belongings and stepped out into the bright sunlight, squinting against the glare. He found himself at the edge of a dense forest, the trees towering above like sentinels guarding some hidden truth. A figure stood waiting for him, cloaked in shadows.

"Welcome, Lord Erebus," the figure said, voice low and gravelly. Erebus recognized the sound, though he'd never seen the speaker before – it was one of Eira's men, a tall, gaunt man with eyes that seemed to see right through him. "House Veylan has prepared something for you."

The gaunt man gestured for Erebus to follow, leading him deeper into the forest. The trees seemed to close in around them, casting long shadows that stretched and twisted in the fading light of day. Erebus's eyes adjusted slowly, and he began to notice details: the way the leaves rustled in the gentle breeze, the sound of running water in the distance, and the faint scent of wildflowers carried on the air.

They walked for what felt like hours, the silence between them oppressive and heavy. Erebus couldn't shake the feeling that he was being led deeper into a trap, but every instinct told him to press on. The gaunt man seemed to sense his unease, glancing back over his shoulder as if ensuring they were still unobserved.

Finally, they emerged from the trees into a clearing. A small cottage stood at its center, smoke drifting lazily from its chimney. Erebus recognized the sign of a modest but well-tended home. The gaunt man approached the door, rapping twice before pushing it open with a worn hand. "Come in, Lord Erebus," he said, gesturing for Erebus to enter.

Inside, a warm fire crackled and spat in the hearth, casting flickering shadows on the walls. A figure stood at the fire, her back to them as she stirred something in a pot. Erebus's eyes narrowed as he took in the scene – it was a small, humble space, but there was an air of... comfort here, a sense that this was a home.

The woman turned, revealing a face he hadn't expected: Eira herself, her hair tied back in a simple knot and her hands stained with dirt. She smiled, a rare sight, and held out a steaming bowl towards him. "Welcome to the Blackhaven of House Veylan,"

she said, her voice warm and without guile for once. "I'm glad you could make it."

Erebus hesitated, his mind reeling as he took in this unexpected scene. He accepted the bowl from her, the steam rising like a misty veil to obscure his thoughts. The smell of soup wafted up, rich and savory, and for an instant, he forgot his doubts and his fears. For an instant, all he could think about was the warmth and comfort of this small cottage, the safety it represented.

But that moment passed as Eira's words cut through his reverie: "We have a lot to discuss, Lord Erebus." Her eyes seemed to bore into him, searching for something – anything. He felt a shiver run down his spine as he took his first sip of the soup, the flavors exploding on his tongue like a spark of fire.

Erebus swallowed the soup in silence, the flavors lingering on his tongue like a challenge. Eira stood by the fire, her eyes fixed on him as if waiting for some sign of understanding. The gaunt man moved away from the doorway, disappearing into the shadows as if he'd become one with the darkness itself.

"I suppose you want to explain what this is all about," Erebus said finally, his voice a little rougher than intended. Eira's smile was like a thin slice of moonlight – it illuminated nothing and revealed everything. "We've been watching you for some time now," she said, her voice as calm as the forest outside. "Your... association with Blackhaven has become a liability, Lord Erebus."

Erebus shifted uncomfortably, the soup's warmth spreading through him like a slow-moving flame. He could feel Eira's words cutting deep, though he'd expected this. "What do you propose to do about it?" he asked, his tone laced with a mixture of curiosity and wariness. Eira walked towards him, her movements fluid as the shadows themselves.

She halted in front of him, her eyes seeming to bore into his very soul. "I think we can help each other," she said, her voice taking on a persuasive edge. "You want out of Blackhaven, don't you?" Erebus's silence was his only response – though he knew it was pointless to deny the truth. Eira's smile grew, thin and calculated as she reached for something behind him. A small wooden box emerged from the shadows, adorned with intricate carvings that seemed to match the pattern on Eira's locket.

Erebus watched warily as Eira opened the box, revealing a collection of small objects that glinted in the firelight – a set of fine silver keys, a silver-tipped dagger, and a note sealed in black wax. "These were left for you," she said, handing him the box. Erebus hesitated before taking it, his mind racing with possibilities – though he knew better than to let hope take hold.

Erebus opened the box, his fingers brushing against the small objects inside. The keys felt heavy with a weight that wasn't quite metal, and the dagger's blade shone with

an otherworldly sheen. He recognized the style as belonging to House Veylan, but the craftsmanship was unlike anything he'd seen before. The note sealed in black wax seemed to absorb the firelight around it, its surface unyielding.

He pulled out the note and broke the seal, the wax crumbling into dust on his fingers. Unfurling the parchment revealed a message scrawled in elegant script: "For the Lord of Blackhaven's burdened heart, a path unfolds." Erebus's gaze returned to Eira, who watched him with an unreadable expression. He tucked the note back into the box, the silver objects clinking softly against each other.

"What do you want from me?" he asked, his voice firm despite the growing unease in his gut. Eira leaned forward, her eyes locked on his. "We have a proposal, Lord Erebus," she said, her words measured as she continued. "Leave Blackhaven and its entanglements behind. Use these... gifts to find new purpose, somewhere we've been watching for some time now - House Eldrida." She smiled again, this time like the moon breaking through a veil of clouds: soft and insistent.

Erebus's mind reeled as he took in Eira's words. Eldrida? He'd heard whispers of a distant, isolated place where nobles with troubled pasts sought refuge - a sanctuary hidden from the world's prying eyes. "And what's the price?" he asked, though already knowing the answer. A price always came due.

Tags: Corruption, Sins, Repaid