

Shadows on the Wall

Black

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As Kael Varn descended into the dimly lit chambers of House Veylan, a soft whisper from an unseen sentinel preceded him: "You have come, Kael." The air inside clung to the scent of aged parchment and the faint tang of old blood.

Kael navigated through the narrow corridors, guided by flickering torches that cast eerie shadows on the walls. His footsteps echoed off the stone as he made his way toward the throne room. Within its heart lay the source of his visit: Lady Arachne Veylan, mistress of House Veylan and a woman whose favor was both coveted and feared.

Upon entering the throne room, Kael's gaze met Lady Arachne's, her eyes narrowing as he approached. Her chair sat elevated behind her, a testament to the power she wielded in this fortress of stone and secrets. A faint tremor ran through his fingers as he made the traditional sign of respect with his hand.

"Kael Varn, what brings you to our chambers tonight?" her voice was measured, not unkind, but it carried an edge that brooked no mistake.

He bowed, a practiced gesture that allowed him to gauge her mood. "Lady Arachne, I've come on behalf of the Order of the Black Rose. Rumors have reached me of...disturbances within your walls."

A flicker of curiosity crossed Lady Arachne's face before she nodded for Kael to proceed.

"In the lower levels, an unknown force seems at work," he continued, "disrupting the balance. I've been asked to investigate and rectify the situation."

Lady Arachne leaned forward, her eyes sharpening. "What do you propose, Kael Varn?"

Kael drew a deep breath before speaking of his intentions: to walk in darkness, unseen and unheard, gathering secrets like shadows on the wall. The idea was simple yet perilous, for it entailed crossing the very boundaries that defined his specialty. It was a risk he knew he must take, for the sake of balance, and perhaps, in doing so, prove himself worthy of the faith placed in him.

The weight of Lady Arachne's gaze told Kael she understood what was at stake: the fine line between justice and vengeance, where blood and silence often danced. With a nod, she authorized his entry into the depths of House Veylan, to walk among the shadows.

And so, Kael descended, his footsteps silent as he navigated the paths of secrets, seeking out whispers of truths hidden from sight. The darkness swallowed him whole, but his purpose remained clear: to restore balance to this house, where shadows had grown too long on the wall.

In those places where shadows whispered secrets and night's silence was a currency, Kael moved unseen. He discovered a series of subtle manipulations: altered texts in ancient tomes, whispers in the walls, faint symbols etched into cold stone. The echoes of these actions resonated within him, weighing on his heart like the promise of dawn.

As he uncovered each piece, his sense of purpose deepened. His steps turned more deliberate, his hearing attuned to the subtleties of the night. A thread of truth began to weave itself through his understanding: a small group within House Veylan sought to disrupt the balance for their own gain.

Kael's path led him to a hidden chamber deep in the fortress. The air inside was heavy with the scent of smoke, a stark contrast to the musty smell that permeated the rest of the house. A figure huddled over a low flame, pouring over ancient texts as if searching for something within their yellowed pages.

"Vorin," Kael said softly, his voice barely audible above the crackling flames.

The young scholar looked up, startled, and met Kael's gaze with fear in his eyes. He was a member of House Veylan's Curators, tasked with safeguarding the knowledge contained within their libraries.

"What—how did you get here?" Vorin stammered, but before he could continue, Kael stepped closer, his presence filling the small space.

The flames danced brighter as if reacting to the sudden tension. Kael's hand rose, not in threat, but to indicate a truth he sought from Vorin: "Speak now, and speak the truth."

Vorin swallowed hard before answering, the words spilling out in a hasty torrent. He confessed to altering texts, using the subtle magic of the Broken Writ to alter the interpretations within the ancient tomes. The aim was to shift the balance in their favor, to bend the interpretation of the Balance itself.

As Vorin spoke, Kael's face remained expressionless, but his grip on his dagger tightened, a reminder of the gravity he had promised Lady Arachne and the Order.

Kael knew what he had to do: a silent correction that would cut deep. With each word Vorin confessed, a weight settled heavier within Kael, weighing on his heart like an eternity without dawn.

And so, with measured deliberation, Kael reached for the fire. His hand closed around a chunk of burning wood from the flame. He lifted it, and as the flames danced in his palm, he felt the weight of the Broken Writ settle into him, exacting its cost. A searing heat coursed through his veins like a pulse of red pain.

With this power, Kael carefully marked Vorin's hands with the symbol of the Balance, a stark reminder of the corrections that had to be made. "This will not go unrecorded," he said softly, his voice burning in his throat from the exertion. "You have left me no choice but to acknowledge your transgression. The Order will note this act."

Vorin's eyes dropped as Kael continued, his words carrying an unmistakable weight. "And if it had been my duty to see you dead for what you've done...it would have been easier."

With these words, a silent reckoning hung in the air. It was not vengeance but correction, the price of which would be paid by both Kael and Vorin. In this silence, as they stood there amidst the smoke and shadows, balance had been restored, even if at the cost of loyalty and the deep understanding that in such actions, there is no redemption without consequence.

The faint tang of burning wood clung to Kael's fingers as he stood there, the weight of what he'd done settling heavy on his shoulders. Vorin, too, was quiet, his gaze fixed on the symbol etched into his own skin. The flame had died down, leaving behind a charred and silent space.

With a curt nod, Kael spoke, "Your confession will be recorded and relayed to the Order." He tucked his dagger back into its sheath, the weight of it settling against his thigh. "Leave this place now, Vorin. Your duty as Curator remains unchanged."

Vorin didn't move immediately, as if frozen by the memory of flames and burning wood on his own skin. The symbol, though painful to make, served as a reminder of what he'd attempted to alter. Slowly, he rose from his stool, the movement stiff, like an old man's. Without a word, he turned and left the chamber, disappearing into the darkness.

Kael watched him go before turning back to the texts scattered across the floor. The pages were scorched but legible. He recognized some of the texts as belonging to the ancient chronicles of the Balance. A sense of unease crept over him as he began to gather the books, a growing conviction that this wasn't an isolated incident, but part of something larger.

He tucked the texts into his pack and left the chamber, making his way back through the winding corridors. The silence was broken only by the echo of his footsteps, a stark contrast to the whispers and murmurs he'd grown accustomed to in the lower levels. As he ascended higher within House Veylan's walls, the air grew thick with an unspoken unease, like a storm brewing outside, waiting to unleash its fury.

Reaching the grand hall where Lady Arachne had granted him permission to investigate, Kael spotted a figure cloaked and hooded, lingering near the tapestries. There was something familiar in their stance, something that made his hand tighten around the hilt of his dagger. He moved towards them with caution, the weight of the Broken Writ's cost still simmering within him.

As he drew closer, the figure didn't turn towards him, lost in contemplation of a tapestry depicting the great battles of the past. The intricate weave seemed to hold their attention, the colors muted by the dim light, yet Kael sensed an intensity emanating from them. He slowed his approach, allowing the silence to build between them. A faint memory sparked within him – the same stance, the same focus on a scene from the ancient chronicles – but he couldn't quite place it.

The air in the grand hall seemed heavy with anticipation, as if the shadows themselves were waiting for something to unfold. Kael's hand on his dagger remained tight, a habitual gesture of caution. The figure slowly turned towards him, their hood casting a dark shadow across their face. Their eyes met, and Kael recognized the features beneath – Commander Althor, a member of House Veylan's elite guard, and one he'd considered a friend. Yet, in this moment, there was something unrecognizable about him.

Althor's gaze lingered on Kael before dropping to the dagger at his side, and for an instant, Kael thought he saw a flicker of approval, but it vanished quickly. "Kael," Althor said, his voice low and rough, like sandpaper worn smooth by years of use. The name hung between them like a challenge, or perhaps a plea for understanding.

Without breaking stride, Kael approached him, sensing that this encounter was as much about timing as it was about words. "What's this, Althor?" he asked, his voice just above a whisper, as if the silence in the hall could be disturbed by anything more.

Althor's gaze drifted back to the tapestry, and for an instant, Kael wondered if he'd imagined the recognition in their eyes. "The same questions plague me," Althor said finally, turning towards him with a measured pace, as if choosing each step carefully. "What lies at the heart of this house? What we thought was one truth is unraveling before our eyes."

As they spoke, Kael noticed a subtle change in Althor's stance – a shift that hinted at hidden intent, or perhaps the beginnings of a plan. The air between them vibrated with an unspoken understanding, a silent agreement that what had been done could

not be undone.

Lady Arachne stood before them, a vision of poise amidst the turmoil she sensed within House Veylan's walls. Her presence was as much a shield as it was a beacon, calling forth balance where chaos reigned.

"Commander Althor," she said, her voice steady and measured, "I see you've found Brother Kael." Her gaze flicked to Kael, then back to Althor, the scrutiny in her eyes like a sharp blade cutting through deceit. "And yet, I sense unease emanating from both of you. What has transpired that requires my attention?"

Althor's hands remained clenched into fists at his sides, as if struggling for control over the storm brewing within him. "Kael," he began, his voice low and deliberate, "it seems we've unearthed more than a simple case of texts with altered interpretations." His eyes drifted back to Kael, searching for understanding or perhaps reassurance.

"The symbol on Vorin's hands," Althor continued, his words spilling out like the measured release of pent-up breath. "It's not just any mark, but one tied to the Balance itself. And the texts...Kael, they're part of a collection that suggests a deliberate attempt to alter history." His eyes narrowed, suspicion writ large across his features. "We've seen similar attempts before, in our archives, hidden away and covered up."

Lady Arachne's expression remained inscrutable, but her voice held an undertone of concern. "A pattern, Commander? I fear we may be facing something more sinister than we initially thought." Her eyes flicked to Kael, then back to Althor. "Tell me, what do you propose we do next?"

Althor's jaw clenched as if weighing his words carefully. "We need to find the source of these alterations," he said finally, determination burning in his voice like a fire lit deep within him. "And I think it begins with Vorin, though not in the way we might expect." He paused, collecting his thoughts before continuing, "I propose we interrogate Vorin further, but under the guise of seeking answers about his own knowledge and loyalty. We need to tread carefully, lest we alert those responsible."

The air was heavy with anticipation as the three of them stood there, each lost in their own thoughts, the shadows on the walls seeming to deepen, as if darkness itself was a living entity feeding off their uncertainty.

Kael nodded, his mind racing with the implications of what Althor had revealed. The deliberate alteration of historical texts suggested a deeper rot within House Veylan's walls, one that could spread like a contagion if not addressed immediately. He glanced at Lady Arachne, who stood tall and still as a statue, her eyes fixed on the Commander.

"Agreed," she said finally, her voice measured. "Interrogate Vorin, but with caution. We must be certain of our steps, lest we walk into a trap set by those responsible." She turned to Althor. "I want Brother Thrain in the room as well. His...perspective may prove invaluable."

Althor nodded, his jaw still clenched in determination. "I'll arrange it, my lady." He glanced at Kael before turning towards the stairway that led deeper into the house, where Vorin was likely being held. The shadows in the grand hall seemed to shift and twist as he moved away from Lady Arachne, leaving Kael with a sense of disquiet.

Lady Arachne's gaze lingered on Althor's departing back before turning to Kael. "Brother," she said, her voice softening slightly. "I must speak with you privately about the Broken Writ. Your...reaction earlier, it was more than just concern for a colleague." Her eyes searched his face as if seeking answers to questions he hadn't yet asked himself.

Kael felt a flush rise to his cheeks, but before he could respond, Lady Arachne's expression turned grave. "Come," she said abruptly, moving towards the stairway that led to her chambers, away from prying ears and curious eyes.

The grand hall seemed to empty around him as they walked, the silence thick with unspoken words and the weight of secrets. Kael followed Lady Arachne up the winding stairs, his thoughts torn between the mystery unfolding in House Veylan's lower levels and the personal turmoil he'd yet to confront.

They reached the upper chambers, a section of the house reserved for its most trusted members. Lady Arachne's quarters were smaller than expected, with walls adorned by intricately woven tapestries that depicted scenes of balance and harmony. In the center of the room, a small brazier held a dying flame, casting flickering shadows on the walls.

"Sit," Lady Arachne said, indicating a chair beside her desk. The space was dimly lit, but Kael noticed the faint scent of sandalwood and myrrh lingering in the air, reminiscent of his own personal devotions. He sat, feeling a sense of trepidation as she closed the door behind them, sealing their conversation from prying ears.

"Tell me about the Broken Writ," Lady Arachne said, her voice low and gentle, but laced with an undercurrent of steel. "What memories came flooding back when you saw Vorin's mark?"

Lady Arachne's eyes searched his face, a piercing gaze that made Kael squirm in his seat. He'd never been one for introspection, but her scrutiny drew out emotions he'd long suppressed. Memories of the Broken Writ flooded back, like a tide rising from the depths. The words, once etched in his mind with precision, now seemed hazy and worn, as if the ink had faded over time.

He recalled standing before the Writ, its surface reflecting the dim light of the candles surrounding it. The intricate script had seemed to shift, revealing the hidden truth behind the symbols. The memory felt both familiar and alien, like a piece of himself he'd kept locked away. Kael's thoughts stumbled as he tried to articulate the connection between the Broken Writ and Vorin's mark.

"We...I think it's connected," he said finally, the words feeling inadequate against the weight of his memories. "The mark on Vorin's hands, it's a reflection of something from my past." He hesitated, unsure how much more to reveal. Lady Arachne's expression remained unreadable, but her eyes seemed to hold a deep understanding, as if she'd been waiting for him to remember.

Lady Arachne leaned forward, her elbows resting on the arms of her chair. "Tell me everything," she said, her voice low and urgent, as if time itself was running out. Kael's gaze drifted from hers, his mind racing with memories he thought long buried. He recalled standing before the Writ, feeling a sense of belonging, of understanding something profound.

The room around him began to fade away, replaced by the musty smell of old parchment and the faint scent of sandalwood wafting through the air. He remembered the words etched on the surface, how they seemed to shift and change as he watched, revealing secrets he'd never known existed. Kael's breath caught in his throat as the memories coalesced, a key piece falling into place.

"The Writ spoke of balance," he said, the words tumbling out as if compelled by an unseen force. "A balance between light and darkness, order and chaos." He paused, his eyes snapping back to Lady Arachne's. "And Vorin's mark, it's a part of that, isn't it? A symbol of what's been torn apart."

Lady Arachne nodded slowly, her expression grave. "Yes, Brother Kael. The symbol is indeed connected to the Writ and the balance it spoke of." She leaned back in her chair, steepling her fingers together as if collecting her thoughts. "But there's more to understand here. A great deal more."

The dim light in the room seemed to deepen, as if the very shadows themselves were thickening with each passing moment. Lady Arachne's words hung in the air like a challenge, leaving Kael to pick apart the tangled threads of his memories. He felt a sense of restlessness growing within him, a need to understand the connections he'd only begun to grasp.

"What do you know?" Kael asked finally, his voice firm despite the turmoil brewing inside him. Lady Arachne's eyes never left his as she began to speak, her words measured and deliberate. "The Broken Writ was created by our founders," she said. "A text of knowledge and wisdom, meant to guide us towards balance and harmony within ourselves and with the world around us." Her gaze seemed to bore into his very

soul as she continued, "But there's more to it than just a simple moral compass. The Writ is a key, Kael. A key to understanding the very fabric of our reality."

Kael's mind reeled as he tried to comprehend the magnitude of what Lady Arachne was saying. A key to reality? He'd never heard anything so absurd in his life. But the memory of the Writ's words came flooding back, the sense of wonder and awe that had gripped him as a novice. It wasn't just a moral lesson; it was something more. Something deeper.

"Go on," Kael urged, his voice barely above a whisper. Lady Arachne nodded, her eyes gleaming with an intensity that made his skin prickle. "The Writ speaks of three aspects: the light of knowledge, the darkness of power, and the balance between them. Each aspect has its own symbol, its own mark." Her gaze drifted to Kael's hands, and he felt a shiver run down his spine as she continued, "Vorin's mark is one of those symbols, a sign of the darkness that has taken hold within our Order."

Kael's mind was racing now, connecting the dots between the Broken Writ, Vorin's mark, and the altered texts. He recalled Althor's words about Vorin being involved, but not in the way they thought. It was all coming together, like pieces of a puzzle he'd never seen before. "What does it mean?" he asked finally, his voice barely above a whisper.

"It means that we have been living a lie," Lady Arachne said, her words cutting through the din in Kael's mind. "A lie perpetuated by those who claim to serve the Order. The truth is, Brother Kael, our founders did not create the Writ as a guide for balance and harmony. They used it to hide the true nature of their power."

Tags: The Broken Writ, Justice, Loyalty