

# THE HEART OF THE BROKEN WRIT

Black

## The Weight of the Writ

I stepped off the mist-shrouded carriage and onto the slick stones of Nightforge's central square. The air reeked of coal smoke, sweat, and something faintly metallic, like the tang of wet earth after a storm. People flowed around me like water, but I kept to the fringes, my gaze fixed on the imposing figure waiting at the edge of the crowd.

A hood cast his face in shadow, save for piercing blue eyes that seemed to bore into mine as I approached. The man's presence was always like this – an unspoken statement: you should be intimidated, but a whisper away from forgetting why.

"Kael Varn," he said, voice low and gravelly, the only hint of recognition in those unnerving eyes.

I offered a nod, my left hand resting on the grip of my dagger. "Sir Maric."

"You've received word from the Curators, I presume?"

The hood didn't lift or fall, but its presence seemed to shift ever so slightly as I spoke. I'd worked with Sir Maric before; he was one of the few who trusted me, and yet, that's precisely what made this visit unsettling.

"What business do you have in Nightforge?" I asked.

"A delicate matter," he replied. "Concerning an individual who requires... correction."

I kept my expression even as my gut clenched. Correction wasn't something I'd grown accustomed to handling; the Broken Writ usually called upon me for more subtle tasks – a whispered word, a forgotten clue, or a well-placed disappearance.

"This person," Sir Maric continued, "has made a grave mistake. They require guidance in understanding the weight of their choices."

As we spoke, I noticed a commotion near the city gate. A group of Knights, their emblem on their armor gleaming with an unsettling silver light, had surrounded someone. Panic rippled through the crowd as people tried to push forward, curious or fearful.

A faint hum filled my left ear – Thalos' reminder that my magic came at a cost: fatigue, in this case. The hum was never loud enough to be jarring but always there, an annoyance that persisted until I recharged with sleep and quiet contemplation. Thalos whispered its approval of Sir Maric's words as well, though it usually stayed silent during conversations.

I pushed the thought aside and focused on Sir Maric. "What's the matter this time?"

"The Black Rose Order has received a... delicate report," he said. "Regarding one Lady Eira Veylan, scion of House Veylan."

I'd heard whispers about Lady Eira – her beauty, ambition, and power were all spoken of with reverence by some, caution by others. But I'd never met her.

"What's the nature of this report?" I pressed.

Sir Maric handed me a small, rolled parchment sealed in wax. "Enough. Read it when you're ready. You'll know what to do."

He turned and vanished into the crowd as I stood there, the parchment tucked into my belt. The commotion near the gate had subsided; Knights were leading the now-calm Lady Eira away.

For a moment, I simply watched her – a flash of determination in those eyes amidst the silver light on the Knights' armor. A weight settled within me, one that would only grow heavier as I walked this path.

As I entered Nightforge's winding streets, I knew the price Thalos would exact from me soon.

I navigated Nightforge's narrow alleys, the sounds of the central square fading into the murmur of distant hammering on metal and the stench of coal smoke thickening with each step. The parchment rolled in my belt seemed to press against my leg, a tangible reminder of Sir Maric's request. I made my way to the Black Rose Order's local lodgings, tucked away in a cramped courtyard off the main thoroughfare.

Upon arrival, I slipped inside and found Aethera, the Order's Nightforge representative, waiting for me by the fire. Her dark hair was tied back, revealing high cheekbones that seemed chiseled from the very stone of Nightforge. She listened intently as I explained my meeting with Sir Maric, her gaze never wavering. When I finished, she leaned forward, eyes gleaming with a hint of curiosity.

"What's this 'delicate report' about Lady Eira Veylan?" Aethera asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

I produced the parchment and handed it to her. She unrolled it, scanning its contents before raising an eyebrow. "This appears to be an anonymous tip – one of House Veylan's own people claims Lady Eira is secretly consorting with the Shadowhand, in

direct defiance of the Accord."

The words seemed to carry a weight that belied their simplicity. The Shadowhand was a guild of smugglers and thieves, notorious for their ruthlessness and disdain for authority. The fact that Lady Eira might be involved sent a shiver through my veins.

"You want me to investigate?" I asked, though I already knew the answer.

Aethera's expression remained neutral. "The Order is... concerned. You'd be wise to tread carefully."

I tucked the parchment back into my belt, knowing the path I would choose. The Broken Writ hung over me like a specter – the weight of the Writ, and what it demanded of me in return for my... redemption. A promise I'd made long ago, when all seemed lost.

As I stepped out of the Black Rose Order's lodgings, Aethera's parting words echoed in my mind: tread carefully. The streets of Nightforge seemed to have grown darker since our conversation, as if shadows had lengthened with every passing moment. I navigated the alleys with a practiced sense of caution, avoiding the central square where the commotion earlier still lingered.

The city's taverns and inns were hubs for gossip and information, but also places where rumors grew like weeds. I made my way to the Silver Stag, one such establishment that catered to the city's lower echelons – Nightforgers who'd lost their place in society or fled the watchful eyes of the ruling houses. Inside, the air reeked of ale and sweat, patrons laughing loudly as they played dice games or sang bawdy songs.

I spotted a figure hunched over a mug in the corner, an unassuming man with a face like worn leather. He'd worked as a messenger for the local guilds; his loyalty was for sale, but his information often came cheap. I approached him, weaving through the crowd to avoid drawing attention. "Gorm," I said, using the name that suited him.

The old man raised his head, eyes squinting as he took in my features before nodding. "Kael Varn. Heard you're looking for something." He signaled to the barkeep, who brought us another mug of ale without being asked. I sat beside Gorm, my back against the wall, and watched as he sipped his drink.

"What's the story with Lady Eira Veylan?" I asked, keeping my voice low. "Anything you've heard?"

Gorm's expression turned thoughtful, his eyes darting about the room as if searching for an unseen listener. "Whispers of a meeting, that's all I have. A high-stakes game of chance, between Lady Eira and someone from the Shadowhand. They were careful, but... there are those who talk."

He leaned in closer, voice barely above a whisper. "Rumor has it, the meeting took place three nights ago, at an old windmill on the outskirts. Some say they saw Lady Eira enter with a hooded figure, while others claim she left alone. The windmill's been abandoned since the miller died last autumn."

I nodded, committing the details to memory. "What else?"

Gorm hesitated, taking another sip of his ale before setting the mug down. "Some of the locals have gone quiet since this came out. Fear of retribution from House Veylan, or worse, the Knights who've been watching Lady Eira." He glanced around the tavern once more, his eyes lingering on a group of burly men near the fire.

I stood up, pushing away from the wall. "You're done talking?"

Gorm nodded, relief washing over him as he watched me leave. Outside, I lit a lantern and led it into the alleys, heading toward the abandoned windmill. Nightforge's streets grew increasingly narrow as I walked, the buildings seeming to close in around me like sentinels. The windmill loomed ahead, its sails torn and still. I approached cautiously, my senses on high alert for any signs of recent occupation.

Upon reaching the mill, I noticed faint scratches on the door – a hasty attempt to clean up evidence, perhaps? – and an open window that seemed recently disturbed. Thalos whispered in my ear, cautioning against proceeding without more concrete evidence or backup. But something about this place felt... wrong. The energy here didn't quite mesh with the night's weight, its presence a gentle hum rather than the expected stillness.

I stepped inside, my dagger drawn as I navigated the creaky wooden floorboards. Dust coated everything in a fine layer, but a clear path had been made through it – by someone or something moving recently. A figure, huddled on the far side of the room, slowly stood up from a makeshift bed of straw and hay. In that instant, I recognized Lady Eira Veylan, her eyes fixed intently on me as if daring me to come closer.

She didn't flinch when I drew near, her gaze instead seeming to bore into mine with an unspoken challenge.

Lady Eira's eyes, a shade darker than the night outside, held mine in an unnerving silence as I halted beside her makeshift bed of straw and hay. Her gaze didn't waver, but her fingers, still grasping a half-eaten loaf of bread, trembled ever so slightly. A faint scent of lye and grain wafted from her hands, mixing with the dusty air inside the windmill.

I sheathed my dagger, trying not to make any sudden movements that might spook her further. "What are you doing here, Lady Eira?" I asked, attempting to keep my tone even, but my words seemed to hang in the air like a challenge.

Her eyes never left mine as she carefully wrapped the remaining bread in a piece of torn cloth and tucked it into her belt. A slow, deliberate movement that didn't betray any panic or fear. "Waiting for you, Kael Varn," she said finally, her voice husky from disuse, but laced with an undercurrent of steel. She took a step forward, hands clasped behind her back, and the shadows around us seemed to darken in response.

"You've been sent by Sir Maric, I presume?" Her gaze narrowed as if testing my words. "Or perhaps it's Aethera who's finally grown tired of being strung along?"

I chose not to answer directly, instead studying the windmill more closely. The scratches on the door seemed superficial; whoever had cleaned up evidence hadn't done a thorough job. "You know why I'm here," I said instead.

Lady Eira nodded once, her eyes flashing with an unspoken defiance. "Yes. The report. It's true, isn't it?" Her voice dropped to a whisper as she added, "I have no choice."

The windmill creaked and groaned around us, the silence between Lady Eira's words like a slow-building storm. I knew I had to tread carefully; one misstep could unravel this thread of secrets before I even understood them.

I took a cautious step back, eyes locked on hers, as she continued to speak in hushed tones. "Whatever information I may hold, it's bound by my loyalty – a promise made long ago, like yours, Kael Varn. You know as well as I do that secrets have a price." Her gaze never wavered from mine, yet her voice carried an undercurrent of fear, like the quiet tremble of a leaf in autumn winds.

The air inside the windmill grew thick with unspoken tension as we stood there, two people bound by secrets and obligations. Lady Eira's words hung like a challenge, daring me to press for more, but I hesitated, weighing the risks. I'd seen how easily promises could unravel; it was my experience that governed my every move in this game of cat and mouse.

"You're afraid," I said finally, breaking the silence, as much to test her reaction as to clarify my own thoughts. Lady Eira's eyes flickered for an instant, a fleeting sign of vulnerability before she regained her composure. "I'm worried about what might happen if the wrong people learn what you know," she corrected herself with a quiet strength I found unexpected in one so obviously desperate.

"I see." I nodded slowly, my gaze drifting around the windmill once more, searching for any sign of an ambush or hidden observers. The shadows seemed to deepen, as if darkness itself had grown more substantial with each passing moment. "You're prepared to talk?" I asked Lady Eira, my voice still low but measured now, as if every word might hold a new significance.

She nodded once, twice, the second movement almost imperceptible. "To you," she said, her eyes never leaving mine, "but that's as far as it goes." Her hands, still

wrapped behind her back, seemed to be making a slow, involuntary movement, like a bird straining against its cage.

The windmill creaked and groaned once more, the sound sending shivers down my spine. I glanced out of the open window, my senses on high alert for any sign of watchers or hidden threats. The alleys seemed quiet now, but I knew that could change in an instant. "What's your choice?" I asked Lady Eira, my words chosen with care, to keep her talking without spooking her further.

Her gaze darted around the room as if she expected someone to burst in at any moment, and for an instant, I thought of Aethera's warning: tread carefully. But this was different; this was a test, one where Lady Eira's willingness to speak could tip the balance of power.

Lady Eira's eyes snapped back to mine, a fleeting flash of defiance lingering in their depths before she spoke again. "I'll tell you what I know," she said, her voice steady now, but with an undercurrent of tension that made me wonder how much longer this fragile facade would hold. "But first, you have to understand...the report. It's not just about the Writ." Her words hung in the air like a challenge, daring me to ask more.

I hesitated, weighing my next move carefully, but my curiosity got the better of me. "What do you mean?" I asked, trying to keep my tone neutral despite the growing sense of unease within me. Lady Eira's gaze drifted away from mine, her eyes tracing the lines of the windmill's stone walls as if searching for hidden answers.

"House Veylan...we're not what we seem," she said finally, her voice barely above a whisper. The words sent a shiver down my spine, and I found myself reaching for my dagger, though it was still sheathed at my side. Lady Eira's eyes flashed to mine, a warning in their depths that told me to tread carefully. "It's not just about the Writ," she repeated, her voice growing stronger now. "It's about what we've been hiding from the Order all these years."

The windmill creaked and groaned around us, the sound sending a jolt of tension through my body. I took a step forward, trying to keep Lady Eira talking while also scanning the shadows for any sign of an ambush. "What have you been hiding?" I asked, my voice even now, though my mind was racing with possibilities.

Lady Eira's eyes never left mine as she took a step closer, her voice dropping to a whisper. "The truth about our family's past...about what we're trying to protect." The words hung in the air like a challenge, daring me to press for more. I took another cautious step forward, my senses on high alert for any sign of danger. Lady Eira's gaze darted around the room once more, as if searching for hidden observers before her eyes locked back onto mine.

"We're not who we seem," she repeated, her voice laced with a growing desperation that sent shivers down my spine. "And you need to know why." The windmill creaked and groaned again, the sound sending a wave of unease through me. I knew I was playing a delicate game, one where a misstep could unravel everything we'd worked for. But Lady Eira's words were like a beacon, drawing me in with their promise of secrets and hidden truths.

As I stood there, frozen in indecision, Lady Eira took another step closer, her eyes blazing with an unspoken intensity that made my heart pound in my chest. "Will you help me?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper now, but with a quiet determination that sent a shiver down my spine.

I hesitated, my mind racing with the implications of her words. The Veylan family's reputation was built on honor and integrity, or so I'd always been told. But Lady Eira's expression spoke of a different truth, one that made me wonder how much of what I thought I knew was lies. "What do you mean, we're not who we seem?" I asked, trying to keep my tone neutral despite the growing sense of unease.

Lady Eira's eyes locked onto mine, and for an instant, I thought she'd reveal everything. But then her gaze faltered, as if she was checking herself, remembering something that made her pause. "Come with me," she said finally, turning to make her way towards a small door at the back of the windmill, hidden behind a stack of grain sacks.

I followed her, my senses on high alert for any sign of danger. The door creaked as she pushed it open, revealing a narrow stairway leading down into darkness. Lady Eira descended first, her footsteps echoing off the cold stone walls. I followed close behind, finding myself in a cramped, dimly lit room that seemed to be some sort of storage space.

The air inside was stale and musty, filled with the scent of old parchment and dust. Shelves lined the walls, packed tightly with leather-bound books and scrolls, their covers worn and weathered. I recognized the insignia on the spine of one scroll as belonging to an ancient text from the Order's library – a rare and valuable find. Lady Eira gestured for me to wait, disappearing into the stacks to retrieve something.

She returned holding a small, leather-bound book adorned with a symbol I didn't recognize. "This is it," she said, her voice barely above a whisper. "The truth about our family's past, and why we've been hiding from the Order all these years." She opened the cover, revealing yellowed pages filled with handwritten text that seemed to shimmer in the dim light.

I took a step closer, feeling a shiver run down my spine as I recognized the script – it was an ancient dialect, one that only a handful of scholars were said to understand. Lady Eira's eyes met mine, her expression serious. "It's not just about the Writ," she

repeated, her voice firm now. "But about something much bigger."

I reached out, hesitantly taking the book from Lady Eira's hand as if handling something precious and fragile. The leather binding felt warm beneath my fingers, and I could smell the scent of old parchment and a hint of sandalwood wafting from its pages. Lady Eira's eyes never left mine as I opened the cover, revealing the yellowed text within.

The script was indeed an ancient dialect, one that sent a shiver down my spine as I recognized the symbols and patterns etched into the parchment. It was said that only a handful of scholars could decipher this language, and I wasn't among them. Yet, something about the words seemed to resonate deep within me, like a whispered secret from a childhood memory. Lady Eira's gaze met mine, her eyes searching for something in my expression.

"Where did you find this?" I asked, my voice barely above a whisper, as if speaking too loudly would shatter the delicate web of secrets that bound us together. Lady Eira's fingers brushed against mine, and I felt a jolt of electricity at the touch. "In the depths of our family's estate," she said, her voice low and steady now. "Hidden away, where only a few have seen it." Her eyes seemed to bore into my soul as if daring me to ask more.

I hesitated, my mind racing with the implications of what I was holding. The text within these pages could be the key to unraveling the mysteries surrounding the Broken Writ, and perhaps even more – secrets that had been hidden for decades, protected by a family sworn to honor and integrity. Lady Eira's eyes never wavered from mine as if willing me to understand the gravity of what I was about to uncover.

I cleared my throat, taking a deep breath before speaking in a voice that trembled slightly. "What does it say?" The words spilled out like confession, betraying my own reservations and doubts. Lady Eira's expression turned grave, her eyes clouding over with a mixture of fear and regret. For an instant, I wondered if she was about to reveal something I wasn't prepared to hear.

"It speaks of our family's true purpose," she began, her voice barely above a whisper. "A pact, one that binds us to...to something much greater than ourselves." The words hung in the air like a challenge, leaving me breathless and wanting more.

Tags: The Broken Writ, Redemption in Absolution, Weight of Consequence