

The House Veylan Reckoning

Black

The Silent Reckoning

Kael Varn stepped into the shadowed courtyard, his eyes locked on the unassuming door marked with a small, worn plaque bearing the emblem of House Veylan. The evening air clung to him like a shroud, heavy with secrets and the weight of past decisions.

As he entered the house, Kael was greeted by the silent figure of a young man, hood up, who nodded in reverence before handing him a small, intricately carved wooden box. "The Curator awaits, sir."

Inside, the dimly lit chamber reeked of old parchment and dust. The air vibrated with the soft murmur of hushed conversations, punctuated by the flickering light of candles and the quiet scratch of quills on parchment. At the far end of the room, a figure sat shrouded in shadows, back to Kael.

"The Curator," Kael said softly, his voice a gentle reminder that he was there.

The figure slowly turned, revealing the stern features of a woman with eyes that seemed to bore into his very soul. "Kael Varn, we have received word of your recent... corrections." Her gaze narrowed, scrutinizing him. "You are aware of the implications?"

Kael nodded, his jaw set in a practiced stillness. He had long ago learned the value of silence and restraint.

The Curator's eyes flicked to the box, still clutched in his hand. "That contains the details of House Veylan's latest accountancy. Your... services have come at a cost, as they always do."

As he opened the box, a faint, shimmering glow emanated from within. Kael felt the familiar weight of the Order's ledger binding itself to his mind, insidiously probing for balance and consequence. His thoughts swirled with the past: whispered confessions, midnight meetings, the hushed whispers of those who'd paid him to correct wrongs that might otherwise go unaddressed.

The Curator's voice cut through his reverie. "We cannot afford more mistakes, Kael. The Queen is growing... anxious. You have been remiss in your duties."

Kael closed his eyes, letting the ledger's weight settle onto his shoulders. He recalled the cost of his last correction: a painful memory loss, a faint scarring on his palm that still ached when he touched certain metals. This would be no different.

"I will correct it," Kael said, his voice measured and calm. "I have always corrected it."

The Curator's gaze turned cold. "You've been warned, Kael Varn. We cannot sustain your... talents indefinitely."

In the dim light of the chamber, Kael's face seemed to mirror the shadows outside, unyielding and unmoving as stone.

Outside, in the Ashen Roads, a young woman with eyes like moonlit water watched him leave, her own secrets hidden behind an enigmatic smile. The Broken Writ whispered its silence, echoing off the buildings as Kael vanished into the night, bound by his oaths, weighed down by his ledger.

Kael navigated the narrow streets of Ashen, his eyes scanning for any sign of the woman who had been watching him leave House Veylan's courtyard. The evening air clung to him like a damp shroud, heavy with secrets he couldn't quite grasp. He had grown accustomed to being watched, but this was different – there was something in her gaze that didn't feel quite right.

He ducked into the crowded tavern on Ember's Way, the smell of roasting meat and spilled ale enveloping him like a warm blanket. Kael slid onto a stool at the bar, his eyes scanning the room for any sign of the mysterious woman. The patrons seemed to be in a lively mood tonight, their laughter and chatter carrying across the wooden tables. He ordered a mug of ale from the bartender, a burly man with a thick beard and a watchful eye.

As he waited for his drink to arrive, Kael's gaze wandered to a group of hooded figures huddled in the corner, their faces obscured by shadows. They seemed out of place among the rowdy patrons – their air was one of quiet intensity, as if they were waiting for something or someone. A shiver ran down Kael's spine; this felt like more than just a chance gathering.

The bartender slid his ale down the bar, its foamy head rising above the rim of the mug. Kael sipped it slowly, his eyes never leaving the hooded group. One of them shifted in their seat, their gaze flicking towards him before darting back to their companion. The air seemed to vibrate with tension – something was building, and Kael's instincts were screaming that he should be paying closer attention.

Outside, the woman stood patiently across the street from House Veylan, her eyes fixed on Kael's back as he disappeared into the tavern. She pulled out a small notebook, jotting down a few cryptic symbols before tucking it away into her cloak. The flickering torches of Ember's Way cast eerie shadows on her face, but she seemed

lost in thought – her gaze was distant, preoccupied with something only she could see.

Inside the tavern, Kael pushed his mug back, his hand straying to the small pouch at his belt. He felt a faint hum of energy emanating from it, a lingering echo of the Order's ledger still resonating within him. It was a reminder that he had work to do – and soon.

He set his eyes back on the hooded group, their faces still obscured by shadows. The air seemed to grow heavier, as if anticipation was a palpable thing. One of them, a woman with an angular jawline, pushed her chair back from the table and stood up, her movements economical and precise. She nodded to her companions before stepping into the crowded room.

The patrons parted for her, their faces agog at her piercing gaze and confident stride. Kael's instincts told him she was trouble – a force of nature that could knock over trees with a single glance. The woman swept across the tavern, her eyes locking onto Kael like a key fitting into a lock. A quiet hush fell over the room as she approached his table.

"Kael Varn," she said, her voice husky and confident. "I've been looking for you." She slid into the chair opposite him, her movements fluid and practiced. The flickering candlelight danced across her face, illuminating sharp cheekbones and an unwavering gaze. Kael's hand tightened around his mug, the weight of it a small comfort in the face of this sudden intrusion.

"You're...?" he said, his voice low and even. He'd learned to keep his tone neutral, but his eyes told a different story – they narrowed, wary of this newcomer. The woman smiled, her lips curving upwards with an unnerving sweetness. "I'm someone who's interested in your line of work," she said, her words dripping with an undercurrent of tension. Kael's instincts prickled at the edges, warning him that he was walking into a trap.

A flicker of movement from across the tavern caught his attention – one of the hooded figures stood up, their eyes locked on the newcomer with an expression that was almost... eager. The woman followed Kael's gaze, her smile faltering for a moment before she turned back to him. "We need to talk," she said, her voice low and urgent.

She slid a small, ornate box across the table, its surface etched with symbols that seemed to shimmer in the firelight. "I think you'll find this... interesting," she said, her voice measured and detached. Kael's fingers hovered above the box, his mind racing with possibilities. He'd dealt with plenty of clients who'd brought him offers or propositions, but there was something about this woman that set her apart.

The box seemed to pulse with a soft, blue light, a gentle vibration humming from its core. Kael's hand closed around it, and the sensation intensified – he felt a shiver run down his spine as the Order's ledger stirred within him, recognizing the binding on the box as one of its own. He opened it, releasing a faint scent of sandalwood and myrrh into the air. Inside lay a small, crystal vial filled with a liquid that seemed to glow from within.

The woman leaned in, her voice barely above a whisper. "That's a memory of the past – one that we believe can be... corrected." Kael's eyes widened as he picked up the vial, feeling the weight of the Order's ledger settle more heavily onto his shoulders. He recalled the cost of correcting memories: the pain in his palm, the faint scarring, the hazy patches in his mind where details had been deliberately erased.

The woman's gaze locked onto his, her eyes an unsettling shade of gray that seemed to draw him in. "We're willing to pay top coin for this correction," she said, her voice dripping with an undercurrent of urgency. Kael's thoughts reeled as he turned the vial over in his hand, the memories contained within it like a ticking time bomb waiting to be triggered.

The hooded figure from across the tavern stood up once more, their eyes fixed on the woman with an intensity that bordered on desperation. The patrons nearby began to murmur among themselves, sensing something was about to unfold. Kael's instincts screamed at him to refuse, but his gaze remained trapped in the woman's – he was drawn to her like a moth to flame.

"Who is she?" Kael asked, his voice barely above a whisper, as if not wanting to break the spell that had been cast over him. The woman smiled again, this time with a hint of sadness creeping into her eyes. "Her name is Elara," she said, her voice low and husky. "And I think you'll find our proposal... intriguing."

The patrons of the tavern had grown restless, their whispers and murmurs rising to a gentle hum as they sensed the tension at Kael's table. Elara's eyes flicked towards them, her gaze softening for an instant before refocusing on him. "Let us speak elsewhere," she said, her voice low and urgent.

The woman gestured towards the rear of the tavern, where a narrow door led out into a dark alleyway. Kael's instincts protested, but his curiosity was piqued – he rose from his stool, the vial still clutched in his hand, as Elara stood up beside him. The hooded figure from across the table followed, their eyes never leaving Elara's face.

The alleyway reeked of rot and mold, the stench clinging to Kael's skin like a damp shroud. Elara led him deeper into the darkness, the flickering torches of Ember's Way casting eerie shadows on the walls. They stopped at a point where the buildings loomed overhead, their windows like empty eyes staring back.

Elara turned to face him, her gaze piercing in the dim light. "You're a man of few words," she said, her voice barely above a whisper. "I suppose that's one reason you've lasted this long." Kael raised an eyebrow, his hand tightening around the vial as he searched for answers. "What do you want?" he asked, his tone even.

Elara's smile crept back into place, like a sun breaking through clouds. "We have... information," she said, her eyes glinting in the dim light. "A job that requires your particular set of skills." Kael's mind whirled as he processed the implications - this mysterious woman and her hooded companion were offering him a job, one tied to the Order's ledger and its secrets. He felt a shiver run down his spine at the thought.

"What kind of information?" he asked, his hand still cradling the vial like a fragile egg. Elara leaned in closer, her voice dropping to a whisper. "Something about the past," she said, her eyes glinting with an unnerving intensity. "A memory that needs correction."

Elara's words hung in the air, heavy with meaning, as she studied him intently. Kael's mind reeled, trying to piece together the fragments of her proposal. He'd dealt with clients who wanted memories altered or erased before, but this felt different - there was an undercurrent of desperation in Elara's tone that unsettled him.

The hooded figure from across the tavern lingered just out of earshot, their eyes fixed on Kael with an unnerving intensity. The air seemed to vibrate with anticipation, as if the very outcome hung in the balance. Kael's hand tightened around the vial, feeling the weight of the memories within it like a living thing.

"What kind of memory?" he asked again, his voice low and cautious. Elara's gaze flicked towards the hooded figure before refocusing on him, her eyes glinting with a hint of wariness. "One that affects someone close to us," she said, her voice barely above a whisper. The words sent a shiver down Kael's spine - he had no love for getting entangled in other people's affairs.

A faint rustling sound came from the alleyway behind them, and Elara's eyes flicked towards the noise before refocusing on him. "We'll talk more about this inside," she said, her voice low and urgent. She turned to lead him back through the narrow door, but Kael hesitated, feeling the weight of the vial in his hand like a trap waiting to be sprung.

The hooded figure moved to block their path, its eyes locked onto Elara with an unnerving intensity. For a moment, the air seemed to thicken, as if the very shadows themselves were watching and waiting. Kael's instincts screamed at him to take a step back, but his legs felt rooted to the spot.

Elara raised a hand, her fingers extended in a calm gesture. "Arin," she said, her voice low and soothing. The hooded figure hesitated for an instant before parting to let

them through, its eyes never leaving Elara's face. As they moved back into the tavern, Kael felt a shiver run down his spine – he sensed that he was walking into something far deeper than a simple job or memory correction.

A discreet hand on his arm steered him towards the rear of the room, where a door led to a private chamber tucked away from prying eyes. Elara gestured for him to precede her, and Kael felt a twinge of unease as he stepped into the dimly lit room.

The door closed behind them, enveloping Kael in a heavy silence broken only by the faint hum of a single candle flame casting flickering shadows on the walls. Elara moved to sit in one of the two chairs set up before a low-burning fire, her eyes never leaving his face. Kael hesitated, feeling like an animal in a trap, before taking the remaining chair with a cautious movement.

"I see you're hesitant," she said, her voice measured and smooth as silk. "We understand that our proposal may seem... complicated." Complicated didn't begin to cover it – it was like trying to swallow a snake whole. Kael's thoughts tumbled through the vial, the memories contained within it burning with an intensity he couldn't quite comprehend. Elara leaned forward, her eyes glinting in the dim light, and picked up the conversation where they'd left off. "We're willing to pay top coin for this correction," she said again.

He set the vial on the low table between them, his hand lingering on it as if clinging to a lifeline. What secrets lay hidden in those memories? And what was the true cost of altering them? Kael's gaze locked onto Elara, searching for any hint of deceit or manipulation – but her face revealed nothing, only an unwavering intensity that made him feel like a leaf caught in a whirlwind.

She leaned back in her chair, her eyes never leaving his. "We've heard you're... resourceful," she said, the word dancing on the edge of courtesy and threat. Kael's grip on the vial tightened involuntarily as he recalled the countless times he'd walked out of situations like this one with more questions than answers, but also a few less scars to show for it.

Elara's eyes flicked towards the fire, which cast eerie shadows on her face. "The memory we want you to correct... belongs to our employer," she said, the word 'employer' dripping with a respect that bordered on reverence. Kael sensed a story buried beneath this – of secrets and loyalties he couldn't even begin to fathom.

His mind racing, Kael leaned forward, his elbows braced on his knees as he studied Elara's profile, searching for any hint of the underlying truth. The hooded figure waited outside, watching and listening with an unnerving intensity that raised more questions than answers.

Elara's eyes met his, a flicker of something like amusement dancing in their depths before she refocused on him. "We've been told you have a... particular talent for navigating the shadows," she said, her voice smooth as honey. Kael's gut twisted at the memory of his last few encounters with those who employed his skills - every time it ended with more scars, less coin, and a nagging sense that he'd compromised something fundamental to himself.

"You're willing to pay top coin for this correction," he repeated, his voice even but laced with wariness. Elara nodded, her dark hair bobbing in the dim light. "Yes. Our employer is... willing to pay dearly for this memory's alteration." Kael's grip on the vial tightened - this felt like a bad idea from every angle he turned it. The memory contained within was still burning with an intensity that left him breathless, and he sensed there were depths to Elara's proposal that she hadn't yet revealed.

As if to underscore her words, the fire in the corner of the room died down, plunging the small space into a deeper darkness. Kael blinked away the sudden dimness, his eyes adjusting slowly. Elara's form remained clear against the shadows, her features illuminated by the faint glow of the single candle. "We understand you're hesitant," she said again, as if sensing his unease. "But we assure you - this memory is... crucial."

Kael snorted softly, a dry, humorless sound. Crucial? He doubted that, considering what he'd seen from Elara's hooded companion and the air of desperation clinging to her like a shroud. This felt more complicated than any job he'd taken on before - every instinct screamed at him to walk away, but his mind reeled with the promise of top coin and the vial still clutched in his hand like a lifeline.

Kael's gaze lingered on Elara, searching for any hint of deception, but her expression remained calm and enigmatic. He shifted his attention to the vial in his hand, weighing the pros and cons. The memory within was a burning fire that threatened to consume him whole, but the promise of top coin and the thrill of the unknown were potent lures. He had walked out of worse deals before, but this one...this one felt different.

"What's the memory?" he asked again, his voice firm, though his mind was racing with possibilities. Elara's eyes flickered towards the hooded figure waiting outside, as if checking for permission to reveal more information. A faint nod seemed to be given, and she leaned forward, her elbows braced on her knees.

"It involves a person close to our employer," she said, her voice barely above a whisper. "Someone dear to them, but... compromised." Kael's gut twisted at the phrase, his mind conjuring images of loss and pain. He'd seen enough in his line of work to know that memories were currency, and people would pay top coin for any chance to alter their past. But there was something more here, something Elara

wasn't telling him.

He studied her face, searching for any hint of the underlying truth. Her eyes seemed genuine, but he'd learned to trust his instincts over years in the shadows. They usually told him when someone was hiding something, and now they were screaming at him to get out while he still could. But his curiosity got the better of him - what secrets lay hidden in that vial? And what was the true cost of altering them?

The fire in the corner of the room seemed to have reignited, casting flickering shadows on the walls as Elara's eyes met his. "We'll need to see it first," she said, her voice low and measured. "The memory." Kael's grip on the vial tightened involuntarily, a spark of unease igniting within him. He'd never shared a memory with anyone before - not even with the Order's leaders, who had access to his memories as a part of his contract. The thought sent a shiver down his spine.

He set the vial on the low table between them, feeling a sense of trepidation building in his chest. What would Elara and her employer see when they looked into its depths? And what would be the cost of altering it?

Tags: Secrecy, Consequence, Paid