

# When Justice is Done in the Dark

Black

## The Night's Balance

As I walked through the Ashen Roads, the city's darkness swallowed me whole. Only a handful of torches flickered along the walls, casting eerie shadows that danced like restless spirits. My boots scuffed against the stone pavement, the sound echoing off the buildings as I made my way to the appointed meeting place.

I had been summoned by an unmarked figure within House Veylan, those enigmatic masters of politics and shadow. Their business often blurred into the darkness, a whispered rumor one moment, a sudden silence the next. They spoke of balance and the scales that tipped with every decision, every action. I'd found myself drawn to their creed, a morass of intrigue where allegiances were tested by fire.

At the designated crossroads, a lone figure awaited me – his face shrouded in darkness like the rest of the city. He didn't need words, nor did he offer them as we clasped hands in a silent acknowledgment. The Veylan man handed me a small package, sealed and unmarked, with a whispered warning: "Deliver this to the Queen's Curator without question."

With that, he vanished into the night, leaving me to navigate the winding streets of Everia's capital. I knew the city like a second skin – from the labyrinthine alleys to the grand halls of the Nightforge. My business was discreet, as always; the streets were mine to traverse, if only for tonight.

Before me now lay the sprawling estate of House Veylan, an oasis in the heart of darkness, where intrigue reigned over truth. I entered through a service door and made my way into the labyrinthine corridors. The walls seemed to press in around me, heavy with secrets as thick as the shadows. I knew every step, every corner – but tonight, even my practiced steps felt like an intrusion.

I reached the Curator's chambers without incident, the package secure in my hand. A soft voice called out from within, and I entered. The room was a sanctuary of shadows and light, candles and incense mingling in a delicate balance. In the center, the Curator stood, her features softened by candlelight.

"What is this?" she asked, eyes fixed on the package, but her tone spoke of something else – concern for me, or perhaps something more.

I handed it over with no explanation. She accepted it with a nod, opening the seal. Within was a small crystal vial filled with an iridescent liquid that glowed softly in her hands.

"The Black Rose's gift," she said, her voice barely above a whisper. "It seems your work is done tonight."

With those words, the Curator took a step back, the candlelight dancing across her face like shadows on the wall. The room had grown colder; I felt it as palpably as the weariness that crept up my spine. This was not the usual gift of balance; there was something more at play here.

I turned to leave, but her words stayed me: "Be cautious, Kael. There is more in this vial than meets the eye."

And with that warning, our encounter was over – its true purpose still shrouded in darkness, like the night itself.

The Curator's words hung in the air like a challenge, as if daring me to uncover what lay hidden within the vial. I turned back to her, but her gaze had returned to the contents of the package, her expression unreadable. "There's more," she said, her voice still low, but with an undercurrent of urgency.

I hesitated for a moment before making my decision. The Curator knew me; she'd watched me navigate the shadows long enough to know I wouldn't take her warning lightly. The weight of that knowledge settled heavy on my shoulders as I leaned against the doorframe, a familiar silence falling between us like a curtain.

The Curator finally looked up, our eyes locking for a fleeting moment before hers dropped back to the vial. "You have questions," she said, not asking. Her voice was smooth as silk, but beneath it, I sensed a hint of something else – perhaps wariness or even fear? The thought sent a flicker of curiosity through me.

"I do," I replied, pushing off from the doorframe, the decision made. She nodded, her eyes never leaving mine, and gestured toward the chair beside her desk. I took it without another word, dropping into the seat with an air of quiet expectation.

The room was heavy now, weighed down by unspoken things, secrets that hung between us like a challenge. The Curator's hands were steady as she set the vial on the edge of her desk, her eyes never leaving mine. In this rarefied space, our conversation had shifted from transactional to intimate – every nuance, every movement, felt freighted with meaning.

"The Rose has been...unsettled," she said, breaking the silence, her voice still low, but carrying a new depth. "They've received something from one of their...acolytes." Her words trailed off, and I sensed she was choosing her words carefully, weighing the

impact on our fragile bond. The implications were vast: if the Black Rose had been unsettled, it could mean war – or worse.

The Night's Balance had shifted; the scales now weighed heavy in favor of chaos.

The Curator's gaze drifted back to the vial, her eyes tracing the shape of it as if searching for answers within its curves. "An acolyte," she repeated softly, her voice a threadbare warning that something had gone wrong within the heart of the Black Rose Order. My mind was racing; I'd heard whispers of such individuals, those chosen to serve the Rose, but never with any concrete details. The idea that one might be involved in their downfall sent a shiver down my spine.

"What's been received?" I asked, my voice steady despite the turmoil inside me. Her eyes snapped back to mine, and for a moment, I thought she'd refuse to answer, but then her expression smoothed out into its usual tranquil mask. "A...message," she said finally, her words dripping with reluctance. "From one of their own, suggesting the Rose's power has been compromised." The implication was stark – if true, it would send shockwaves through the balance, plunging our world into chaos.

I leaned forward, elbows on my knees, hands clasped together as I tried to grasp the full extent of what this meant. "Compromised?" I repeated, the word hanging in the air like a challenge. The Curator's eyes flickered again to the vial, and for a moment, I thought she'd say something else, but her gaze returned to mine, steady. "It seems one of their own has turned against them," she said finally, the words laced with a sorrow that didn't sit well with the steel-hard reputation of House Veylan.

I felt a cold dread creeping up my spine as I pieced together the implications – this wasn't just about power; it was personal. The Black Rose Order's influence wove deep into the fabric of our world, their threads tangled in every aspect of life from politics to trade and even war. If they were compromised...I pushed the thought aside for now, focusing on what I could do with this knowledge. "What's the message?" I asked again, my voice firm.

The Curator hesitated, her hands hovering over the vial as if deciding whether to reveal more. I leaned back, letting her see that I was not one to push for answers uninvited. She seemed to accept this, her shoulders easing slightly before she nodded. "It speaks of a betrayal, Kael," she said, her voice barely above a whisper. "A secret kept hidden in the heart of the Rose itself."

The Curator's words hung in the air like a challenge, as if daring me to uncover what lay hidden within the vial. I leaned forward, elbows on my knees, hands clasped together as I tried to grasp the full extent of what this meant.

"What kind of betrayal?" I asked, my voice steady despite the turmoil inside me. The Curator's eyes flickered again to the vial, and for a moment, I thought she'd say

something else, but her gaze returned to mine, steady. "It speaks of a secret kept hidden in the heart of the Rose itself," she repeated, her words dripping with reluctance.

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"What does it say?" I asked again, my voice firm, but this time with a hint of impatience. The Curator's eyes seemed to bore into mine, searching for something – reassurance, perhaps, or permission to share more. Whatever it was, she found it, because her hands returned to the vial, and she opened it, revealing the glowing liquid within.

The room seemed to darken slightly as if the very light itself had been drained away, leaving only a faint hum of anticipation in its wake. The Curator's eyes locked onto mine, hers filled with an unspoken warning – this was the moment when everything changed. I felt it in my bones, a creeping sense of foreboding that settled heavy on my shoulders.

"The message reads," she began, her voice barely above a whisper, "that there is one among them who has walked the line between light and darkness for too long, and now stands on the precipice, torn between two loyalties." Her words dripped with sorrow, but beneath that, I sensed a hint of fear – not for herself, but for the world. The Black Rose Order's influence was far-reaching; if one of their own had turned against them...

The thought sent a shiver down my spine as I pieced together the implications. Who among the Black Roses might be so torn? And what would it mean if they broke free from their vows to stand on the side of darkness? The room seemed to shrink in around me, the shadows deepening into an abyss that threatened to swallow us all.

I leaned forward, my mind racing with possibilities. "Who is it?" I asked, my voice firm, but laced with a thread of uncertainty.

The Curator's eyes flickered once more to the vial, her face a mask of calm, but I sensed a wariness beneath. "I don't know," she said finally, her voice measured. "The message doesn't specify. But it does mention...a name." Her gaze drifted back to mine, hers searching for something – reassurance, perhaps, or understanding.

"Who?" I asked, my voice steady despite the turmoil brewing inside me. The Curator's eyes narrowed, as if weighing her next words carefully. "Aldric Valtor," she said, the name hanging in the air like a challenge. My mind went blank for a moment; Aldric

was a name from my past, one associated with the Black Rose Order but not directly involved in its inner workings. I pushed back against the memory of our last meeting – Aldric's words had been laced with doubt, but his conviction was never in question.

A cold dread crept up my spine as I pieced together the implications. If Aldric, a man I'd considered a friend, was walking the line between light and darkness...I shook my head, clearing it of the thoughts that threatened to overwhelm me. The Curator's words still lingered – this wasn't just about power; it was personal.

"What does the message say?" I asked again, my voice firm, but laced with a growing unease. The Curator's hands hovered over the vial, her eyes locked onto mine as if searching for permission to share more. Whatever it was, she found it, because her words tumbled out in a rush: "It speaks of a decision made in secret, one that will have far-reaching consequences...and a price paid in darkness."

I felt the room darken around me, the shadows deepening into an abyss that threatened to swallow us all. The message was cryptic, but its meaning hung heavy in the air like a threat – this wasn't just about Aldric; it was about something much larger, something that could unravel the very fabric of our world. I leaned forward, my mind racing with possibilities.

The Curator's eyes seemed to bore into mine, hers filled with an unspoken warning – be careful what you do next. But I'd already crossed a line, and there was no going back now. "I need to see this message," I said finally, my voice firm. The Curator's face twisted into a mixture of fear and determination as she opened the vial once more, revealing the glowing liquid within.

As I leaned forward, my hand reached out to touch the glass, but it was not just curiosity that drove me – it was something deeper, a sense of responsibility that weighed heavy on my shoulders. What lay hidden in those words could change everything.

The liquid within the vial seemed to pulse with a life of its own, as if it were a heartbeat in my palm. I felt its power coursing through me, making my fingers tingle, and a shiver run down my spine. The Curator's hands hovered over mine, her eyes locked onto mine with an unspoken warning – don't touch the glass, but also don't let go of the chance to learn what lies within. I hesitated for a moment, weighing the risks against the potential reward.

"What's in it?" I asked finally, my voice low and even, trying to keep the urgency from creeping into my tone. The Curator's face was a mask of calm, but her hands flexed once, as if urging caution. "Ink," she said finally, her voice barely above a whisper. "A message penned in ink that refuses to fade – the memories of those who wrote it, however." I nodded, my mind racing with implications. Ink that held memories? That was no simple text; it was a doorway into the past, a key to understanding what

secrets lay hidden within the Black Rose Order.

I leaned back, my hand still extended, feeling the weight of the decision hanging in the balance. The Curator's eyes never left mine, her gaze searching for something – reassurance, perhaps, or permission to share more. I nodded, a small movement, and she let go of the vial. It fell into my palm, the glass cool against my skin. The liquid within seemed to pulse in time with my heartbeat now, its power calling to me like a siren's song.

As soon as my skin made contact with the glass, memories burst forth, images flashing through my mind like pages turned in a book. I saw Aldric standing on a hill overlooking the Black Rose Order's compound, his face twisted in doubt and fear. He was speaking to someone – a figure shrouded in shadows, their features indistinct. The voice whispered secrets, words that seemed to cut deep into Aldric's soul. "What do you want me for?" he asked, his voice shaking, but the figure only laughed – a cold, mirthless sound.

The memories shifted, and I was standing with him now, Aldric, as we walked through the Order's halls, our footsteps echoing off the stone walls. He spoke of secrets kept hidden, of vows broken, and the weight of guilt crushing him down. "I'll find a way," he said finally, his voice firm, but laced with desperation. "I won't let it consume me." The memories shifted again, showing me standing alone in a dark alleyway, Aldric's face appearing beside me – or was I just remembering? The world blurred, and the vision dissipated.

I sat back, the vial still clutched in my hand, feeling the weight of what I'd seen. Secrets kept hidden, vows broken – it sounded like the story of a man torn between two worlds, caught between loyalty to the Black Rose Order and something else. Something darker. "What does it mean?" I asked finally, my voice barely above a whisper, as if speaking too loudly might shatter the fragile silence.

The Curator's eyes seemed to bore into mine once more, her gaze searching for something – understanding, perhaps, or permission to share what lay hidden within her own heart. "It means Aldric Valtor walks the line," she said finally, her voice heavy with weight. "But it also means...there may be others." Her words hung in the air like a challenge, daring me to uncover the truth behind them.

The weight of the vial still clutched in my hand, I sat back against the stone wall, trying to make sense of what I'd seen. Memories swirled through my mind like a maelstrom – Aldric's face twisted in doubt, his words laced with fear and desperation. The world outside receded into the background as I focused on the fragments of his past, searching for answers. But questions only multiplied: why was he involved with this figure shrouded in shadows? What vows had been broken, and by whom?

The Curator's voice pierced my reverie, her words a gentle nudge back to reality. "You should know, brother," she said softly, as if speaking of a shared secret. "Aldric Valtor is...involved with the Eternals." I felt a jolt run through me like electricity - the Eternals were an order within our own, one shrouded in mystery and rumor. They walked the line between light and darkness, their motives hidden behind a veil of intrigue. My mind racing, I pieced together the connections: Aldric's involvement with the Eternals, his words laced with fear, and the message speaking of decisions made in secret.

The Curator's eyes seemed to cloud over, her face twisted into a mixture of pain and regret. "He's been acting on behalf of the Eternals," she continued, her voice barely above a whisper. "Using his position within the Black Rose Order to further their interests." I felt a cold dread creeping up my spine as the implications sank in - Aldric, a man I'd considered a friend, was secretly working against us. The Curator's words hung in the air like a challenge, daring me to confront the truth.

I pushed myself up from the wall, the vial still clutched in my hand, and began pacing across the room. "What does this mean?" I asked finally, my voice tight with urgency. "Does it mean Aldric's been working against us all along?" The Curator's face was a mask of calm, but her eyes seemed to bore into mine, hers filled with an unspoken warning - tread carefully, for the path ahead is treacherous.

Her words were measured as she continued, each one hanging in the air like a stone dropped into a still pond. "He was approached by the Eternals," she said finally. "They offered him...a deal." My mind racing with possibilities, I pieced together the fragments of his past, Aldric's fear and desperation making sense now - he'd been coerced into working against us, forced to make decisions in secret, with far-reaching consequences.

A cold calculation crept into my thoughts as I weighed the implications. If Aldric had indeed worked for the Eternals, it meant our entire organization was compromised. The Curator's eyes seemed to follow mine, hers filled with a deep sadness and regret. "You should be careful," she said softly, her words barely audible over the pounding of my heart. "Aldric Valtor is not the only one with secrets." Her gaze lingered on me, as if searching for something - reassurance, perhaps, or permission to share more.

I stopped pacing, my hand still clenched around the vial. A new question formed in my mind, one that pierced the darkness like a shaft of light. "What's the price paid in darkness?" I asked finally, my voice firm. The Curator's face twisted into a mixture of pain and regret, her eyes clouding over as if memories long buried were surfacing once more.

Tags: Secrecy, Mercy, Justice