

A WALK OF PENANCE

- LEGENDS STEEPED IN RED -
PART II



WRITTEN BY SARAH ERIKSSON

YEAR 394

As the gavel fell and the judge gave the sentence, an upsetting knot tied in Cidron's stomach. This moment was important, grave even. . . Despite it all, he couldn't help but make way for a smile across his busted lips. His parents' troubled gasp and the guards' heavy footfalls approaching reminded him of the severity of the sentence, yet his smile widened.

Standing feet away, Cidron's friend Silas, a scrawny and timid boy only twelve years old, shivered as fright swallowed him whole. Twelve long years awaited them in Nedox and the mines known as the Beast's Gate. A steep price to pay for participating in a brawl. At their arrival at the glistening white halls of the Precedent's Court of Levent, Cidron did what he could to lighten the mood. He could've sworn it worked, but tears streamed down Silas' swollen and beaten mug at the sentence. Again, Cidron's smile widened to hide his horror.

A small firepit standing in front of Cidron and Silas had stolen Cidron's attention more than once during the trial. It was quite intriguing watching the fire lick long iron brands that poked out like pikes. By the sound of the gavel, a guard withdrew a brand that glowed from the fierce heat.

Hands grabbed Cidron by the base of his neck, and they kicked his legs from under him, causing him to collapse on the shiny marble floor.

"Don't let this cruel world change you, boy," his mother said the night before as Cidron washed a noblewoman's blood from his knuckles. "Remember, our fates and roles have been determined by the Almighty. We shouldn't question their decisions solely for our own greed and ambitions. Birds don't question their purpose: sparrows will always fall prey to the hawk. You will always be the son of merchants, and one day, you will carry on our role once we are by the Wanderer's side."

No. That didn't ring true then, and it certainly didn't ring true when a scalding iron bit into his neckline. He was an unwanted middle-class youngster in a magnificent hall surrounded by the better sort of men and women. People born with power. Disgust flooded

his chest. Hot embers traveled up and down his throat with his hurried breath when the numbers, representing his sentence, etched into his skin. They branded him like a tamed animal, and the criminal they decided to label him.

Against Cidron's will, his scream shot out to the crowd, signifying the inception of the sentence. Soon after, Silas' shout rang clear in Cidron's ear. *Not to worry, brother. We'll make them pay*, Cidron thought to push through the burning pain.

What more could they do? What did it matter if he'd speak his mind to the pompous crowd so powerful to change the lives and destinies of lesser standing people? Not all sparrows fell prey to hawks, and he was going to prove it.

"You know what, judge?" Cidron's voice carried far for all to hear. "I'm gonna show you and the likes of you that I'm in control of my own life. I'll show you all what true power is when I return. You'll recognize me and regret getting in my way."

The judge, noticeably attractive with long tan hair curling down her exposed copper-colored shoulder, shook her head at his outburst, a testament of her attention.

"I'm glad, pleased even that Riverview has one less nobleman to care for today. If I could, I'd bash that fuckers' skull in myself for attacking and killing my friend. I don't see anyone standing trial for that crime! It only matters to you lot when you've got a last name and a rich family paying off judges."

"Doesn't matter that the asshole swung at us first, does it? It doesn't matter that he tried to take things not belonging to him? What matters is who his whore-mother and bastard-father are. Had my parents been wealthy, you'd sweep this under the rug and carry on."

Cidron felt his parents' scorn and revulsion wash over him in a tidal wave. They'd put up with anything. He knew that. It wouldn't matter if a nobleman tore down their shop to the studs or if they'd use them as toys for pleasure. They would accept it as the way it was. If last night was proof, Cidron was nothing like his pathetic parents.

What their reactions to his statements were, he couldn't tell as a burlap sack covered his bruised face. His hands tied at his back followed a vicious tug, and he understood an infamous Crimson Wight shepherd Cidron and Silas from the court.

The Crimson Wight, in its' white pearl mask, shoved them to the grand hall's double doors. The famed ten-day "Walk of Penance" from Levent to Nedox began with a couple of determined steps fueled by the howling of his mother and father, whom he would outlive. His journey would take him a world away because of a lapse in judgment. Even with his father's harsh words the day before, Cidron would have done it all over again, without question.

And he would. No matter when. No matter how he'd find a way to bury the crowd's glee. He would prove to them all that he would stand twice as tall and pass judgment on all of them. He would change his destiny. He would change lives.