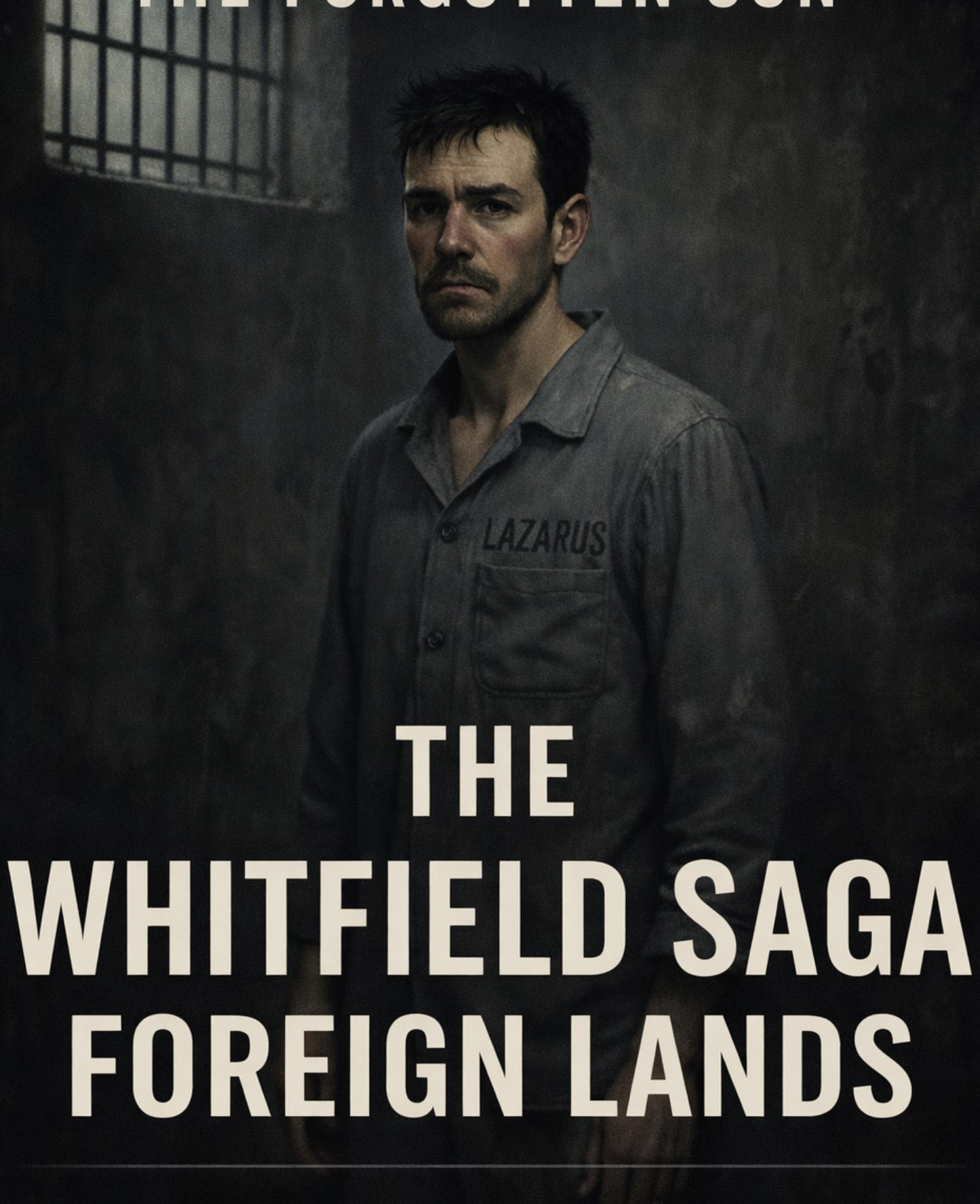


THE FORGOTTEN SON



THE

WHITFIELD SAGA
FOREIGN LANDS

WAYNE PHILIP ADAMS

THE WHITFIELD SAGA

Lazarus' Book...Foreign Lands

Chapter One – Arrival

Krashnov Central

The train hissed as it slowed to a halt at the edge of Krashnov Central.

Lazarus stepped down onto the platform with a soft thud, the air colder than he remembered. Grey clouds hung low above the city, pressing close to the rooftops as if the sky itself had grown weary. Around him, the crowd disembarked quietly—no chatter, no urgency. Just the shuffle of boots on wet stone.

He adjusted the collar of his coat and kept his head down. No insignia. No titles. No assumptions. In Phoenix, his face might've earned fear or fury. Here, it would invite questions. He couldn't afford either.

The station was functional rather than welcoming—iron beams, mechanical joints, exposed piping, steam valves hissing in erratic bursts. Security cameras clicked as they rotated. A broken loudspeaker buzzed faintly overhead. A woman brushed into him hard as she passed, muttering under her breath without looking back. A second man glanced at him briefly, suspicion sharp before he turned away again.

Unfriendly. Efficient. Watchful.
Exactly what he expected.

Near the exits, shuttered stalls lined the wall—one boarded, one half-open. A pair of children sat on a crate nearby, sharing a packet of bread ends, eyes flicking up briefly as he walked past. Their stare lingered, wary but curious, before retreating again.

The station opened into a wide street flanked by solemn buildings—concrete facades with aging columns, frost gathering in the corners of the windows. A statue of a mounted figure loomed above the square, its features worn by years of wind and political neglect. The nameplate had been partially scratched away. Only two letters remained: “AR”.

Krashnov bore the scars of a city that had aged with its dignity intact—but bruised.

He crossed the square slowly. Citizens passed him without pause. Most wore dark coats and avoided eye contact. A boy swept the steps of a silent post office. An old man sat beneath a heat vent, coat buttoned to the throat, reading a newspaper with deliberate stillness. A bakery on the corner leaked the faint smell of burnt rye; a woman locked its shutters just as he walked by, giving him a single cold glance before slipping inside.

There were no street banners. No slogans. No loudspeakers blaring orders. But beneath the quiet routine, there was tension—an orderliness too sharp to be natural.

He approached a small open kiosk at the edge of the square and waited until the man behind it looked up.

“Excuse me,” Lazarus said, voice even. “I’m looking for the Romanov estate.”

The man gave him a quick once-over.

“That’s a good walk. West end of the upper district—past the old brass yard. Left at the clocktower.”

“And is it... open to visitors?”

A pause—measured, cautious.

“Only if you’ve been invited,” the man said. “But I suppose you wouldn’t ask if you had.”

Lazarus nodded once and moved on.

He made his way westward.

The streets grew narrower and steeper as he climbed toward the higher districts. Rows of shuttered windows watched him in silence. Chimneys spat weak plumes of smoke into the grey sky. In one alley, a pair of militia patrolmen stomped past, long rifles slung over their backs, not sparing him more than a glance.

Signs of the Romanovs were faint but present: a faded crest on a rusted delivery truck... the battered remains of an old propaganda board... the outline of a removed mural still visible on the brickwork.

Relics of nobler days.

The industrial haze thickened as he rose higher. Factory spires in the distance pulsed with dark smoke, painting the horizon in smudged charcoal. The cold made his breath sting. His boots slipped once on iced stone. The city seemed determined to test him—physically, mentally, quietly.

Eventually, the road curved upward toward the hills.

There, above the haze, above the cramped streets, above all of Krashnov’s struggle—stood the Romanov estate.

Stone towers. Steep rooftops. Frost-rimmed windows glowing dimly with amber light. The central spire rose like a watchtower, observing the entire city below. Smoke from distant factories drifted behind it, mixing into the heavy sky.

He reached the outer boundary.

A tall stone wall stretched across the hillside, crowned with iron spikes. Snow had gathered along its base. At its centre stood a set of gated iron bars—tall, cold, unwelcoming. Two armed guards flanked the entrance, rifles held across their chests, breath fogging in the freezing air.

They watched him immediately.

He stopped a dozen paces back. Not close enough to provoke. Not far enough to look afraid.

The estate loomed beyond the gate—grand, imposing, almost haunted in the winter gloom. Its entrance porch glowed faintly, a single light burning behind the frosted glass. No movement inside. No invitation. No warmth.

Just a fortress of stone and memory.

Lazarus paused at the top of the hill, breath forming a thin mist in the cold air. The weight of the journey pressed against him—Phoenix, the trench, the exile, all converging into this single, silent threshold.

“What am I doing here...” he muttered under his breath, the words slipping out before he could stop them.

The wind cut across the road, carrying no answer.

He drew his coat tighter and forced himself forward, one step at a time, toward whatever waited behind those gates.

Chapter Two – Recognition

Romanov Estate Gates

The morning mist clung low to the ground, drifting in slow shrouds across the hillside as Lazarus approached the Romanov estate. The palace walls rose stark and black against the pale light, their stonework frost-bitten and severe. No trees, no gardens—just iron, cold masonry, and the echo of distant factory horns drifting up from the city below.

Two guards stood at the main gate, rifles slung across their chests. They noticed him long before he reached them.

Lazarus kept his hands visible as he approached, fatigue heavy in his limbs, his coat torn and travel-worn. The guards raised their weapons before he was even within ten paces.

“That’s close enough,” one barked. The man’s accent was thick Krashnov. Rough, clipped. “State your business.”

Lazarus lifted his chin. “I need to speak with Tatiana Romanov.”

Both guards exchanged a look.

“And who are you meant to be?” the second asked.

He drew a breath. “Lazarus Whitfield.”

Silence.

Then both guards burst into laughter—sharp, derisive, echoing across the stone.

“You?” the first guard said. “Whitfield? Right. And I’m the bloody Tsar.”

The other smirked, rifle rising another inch. “You’re dressed like a beggar. You smell worse. Try another lie.”

Lazarus didn’t move. “I am who I said I am.”

“No, you’re some rat from the freight line, thinking you’ll charm your way into the estate for a warm bed.”

The guard stepped closer, eyes narrowing. “Turn around and get back down the hill before we—”

“I said,” Lazarus interrupted quietly, “I need Tatiana.”

The first guard rolled his eyes and lifted his radio. “Fine. Let’s humour him.”

He pressed the call button.

“Base, this is Gate Two. We’ve got... uh... some bloke here claiming he’s ‘Lazarus Whitfield.’ Looks half-starved, half-frozen, and fully delusional. Orders? Over.”

Static.

The guard snorted, lowering the radio. “There. No answer. Imagine our surpris—”

A sharp voice crackled through the speaker.

“Gate Two, repeat that,” a woman said. Cold. Controlled. Dangerous.

The guards stiffened.

The man swallowed. “Uh—copy. We have an individual claiming to be Lazarus Whitfield.”

A long pause.

“Put him on.”

The guard looked Lazarus up and down, grimaced, and shoved the radio into his hand.

Lazarus hesitated only a second before speaking.

“...Tatiana. It’s me. I’m sorry I didn’t call.”

Dead silence.

Then the line clicked off.

The guard pulled the radio back, frowning. “Brilliant. She hung up. Right—enough of this.” He grabbed Lazarus by the arm. “Off the property. Now.”

The other guard raised his rifle. “Walk.”

Before Lazarus could move, the heavy wooden doors of the Romanov porch burst open.

Tatiana Romanov sprinted down the steps, coat flying behind her, boots cracking sharply against the frozen stone. Her eyes were locked onto the guards—and they widened the moment she saw Lazarus.

“Get your hands off him!”

Both guards turned.

Too late.

Tatiana reached them in a flash, smacking the first across the face with the back of her hand. The second tried to bring up his rifle, but she drove her elbow into his chest with enough force to knock the wind out of him.

“You idiots,” she snapped, grabbing Lazarus by the wrist. “Inside. Now.”

The guards scrambled upright, stammering apologies. Tatiana didn’t even glance at them.

The moment Lazarus crossed the threshold, warmth hit him—polished floors, high ceilings, the faint smell of burning cedar. Servants halted mid-step as Tatiana pulled him through the foyer and into a quieter corridor.

“You look terrible,” she muttered, not slowing. “What happened to you?”

“Later,” Lazarus said softly.

Her grip tightened.

She led him into a small parlour room where two figures waited: Andrew Romanov, straight-backed in a fur-lined coat, and Olesia, hands folded, eyes sharp and searching.

Tatiana shut the door behind them.

Andrew stood. “So it really is you...”

Lazarus nodded once, breath steadyng. “I didn’t expect you to remember me.”

“We remember everything,” Olesia said quietly. “Especially from Phoenix.”

Tatiana pushed Lazarus gently into a chair, then sat beside him.

Andrew's expression shifted—firm, almost paternal, but heavy with something deeper.

“Lazarus,” he said. “Before anything else... there is something you must hear.”

Olesia's voice softened. “Your father. Wayne Whitfield...”

Lazarus lifted his gaze.

Andrew did not delay. “He's gone.”

The words cut cleanly through the air.

No embellishment. No softening. Just truth, laid bare.

Lazarus did not speak.

He didn't move.

He sat frozen, staring past the fireplace, the sound of crackling wood hollow against the sudden stillness in his chest.

Tatiana rested a hand lightly on his shoulder—but said nothing.

Olesia lowered her eyes.

Andrew exhaled, long and muted.

And Lazarus remained there in stunned silence, the weight of the news settling over him like fresh snowfall.

CHAPTER THREE — The Romanov Court

Romanov Estate

Warmth should have been comforting.

It wasn't.

Lazarus sat on the edge of an ornate walnut chair, elbows resting on his knees, his thoughts trapped somewhere between the gate, Tatiana's voice on the radio, and the words Andrew Romanov had spoken only minutes earlier.

Your father... he's gone.

The shock had not faded. It had settled behind his ribs like a cold, immovable stone, making each breath feel deliberate.

Tatiana stood near him with her arms folded tightly across her chest. Protective. Watchful. She held the room with a quiet, unspoken authority that warned anyone approaching to reconsider. Every so often she glanced down at him, checking that he remained steady, present, breathing.

“You should sit properly,” she murmured. “You’re shaking.”

“I’m fine.”

“You’re not.”

He said nothing. The fire crackled in the marble hearth, yet the warmth seemed to stop several feet short of him, pooling uselessly against the polished floor.

Across the room, Andrew and Olesia spoke in low tones near the tall window, their voices a hushed thread beneath the constant whisper of the

estate. They did not raise their heads, but Lazarus could feel them evaluating him, measuring the cost of sheltering a Whitfield.

The palace reflected their tension.

The Romanov estate was the opposite of Phoenix grandeur. No marble spires. No gilded archways. It was disciplined and severe, built from dark stone and unyielding precision. Tall doors framed stark corridors. Narrow windows channelled pale winter light into thin, cold beams. Every footstep echoed with military clarity. Even the portraits of Romanov ancestors, their uniforms crisp and their eyes pitiless, watched with silent judgement.

Servants moved through the hall outside with rigid posture. Guards stood at each doorway, their hands near their rifles, their gazes returning to Lazarus more often than they should.

Whispers had already begun across the corridor.

Whitfield.

A Whitfield is here.

Tatiana knelt beside him suddenly, her voice softer, her expression gentler than her posture suggested.

“Lazarus, look at me.”

He lifted his head.

“You’re safe here.”

He managed a small nod, although safety felt like a luxury that no longer applied to him.

Andrew stepped forward at last. His posture remained formal, his expression controlled. Olesia followed with her hands clasped before her, her eyes measuring him with quiet consideration.

“We were invited to your father’s funeral,” Andrew said. His voice was steady but carried an undertone of restrained grief. “We knew he died. We knew Phoenix was starting to fracture. But we did not expect you to appear at our gate.”

Tatiana added, “Or to see you walking alone, half-frozen.”

Lazarus exhaled slowly. “I came because I had nowhere left. Lionel won’t stop until all of us are gone.”

Andrew’s jaw tightened. A shadow crossed his features, as though Lionel’s name had reopened an old wound. “Lionel Brady has become a problem beyond your borders.”

“His reach spreads farther than Phoenix,” Olesia agreed. “And that makes you a very dangerous person to shelter.”

Lazarus looked up, eyes hollow yet unwavering. “If you want me gone, say it plainly.”

Tatiana’s shoulders tensed. “Don’t talk like that.”

Andrew raised his hand, silencing both of them.

“You will stay,” he said. “For now. But quietly. Discreetly. No one beyond these walls is to know you’re here.”

Olesia added, “Petr is returning from his inspection tour. If he learns of your presence before we speak to him, he will react unpredictably.”

That pulled Lazarus upright. “Petr is coming back?”

Tatiana nodded once.

“He wasn’t supposed to return for another week,” Olesia continued. “His early arrival means one thing. Something has shifted in the city.”

Andrew drew breath to continue until Tatiana stepped between them with absolute certainty, placing herself squarely in front of Lazarus.

“He stays in my wing,” she said firmly.

Andrew hesitated. “Tatiana...”

“Petr won’t set foot there. He knows better.”

She sliced her hand across her throat in a sharp, unambiguous gesture.

The air in the room tightened. Even the guards looked away. Tatiana Romanov did not make idle claims.

Andrew relented with a short nod.

Olesia stepped beside him, her voice gentle. “Eat. Rest. There will be time to speak more once the situation is stable.”

She withdrew.

Andrew drew a slow breath, then nodded once. “Right. Tatiana, take him to get cleaned up. Find him some clothes. We will meet again in the grand dining room later. Dinner, nothing formal.”

Tatiana touched Lazarus’s shoulder. “Come on. You need warmth and a bath before anything else.”

She led him toward the corridor, her pace brisk and purposeful.

As they stepped out, Andrew turned toward the tall windows overlooking the main drive.

His posture shifted at once.

A black limousine was climbing the frost-lined hill toward the estate, its headlights cutting through the rising mist, flanked by two escort vehicles that moved with deliberate precision.

Petr.

Andrew's expression tightened, the weight of responsibility settling across his face.

He turned sharply to Olesia and murmured in a low, urgent tone, "Go. Hurry them. He cannot see Lazarus, not yet."

Olesia nodded and moved swiftly down the corridor after Tatiana and Lazarus.

Andrew remained for a heartbeat longer, his eyes locked onto the approaching convoy.

Then he straightened his coat, squared his shoulders, and walked toward the entrance hall to meet his brother.