

HOPE SURVIVES IN THE SHADOWS



THE
WHITFIELD SAGA
UNDER SIEGE

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THE WHITFIELD SAGA

Shannon's Book... Under Siege

CHAPTER ONE – The Light Above

Citadel Cells

The light above her never turned off.

Its faint electric buzz filled the cell, colouring the silence, blurring the hours until they were indistinguishable. Shannon lay on the cold floor beside the cot, cheek pressed to stone, breath shallow against the bruises that wrapped her ribs. Her clothes were torn, fabric hanging loose where hands had forced it. Her legs ached, her wrists ached, her jaw throbbed where a blow had landed.

Nothing needed to be spoken aloud. The room already told the truth.

She kept her eyes half closed, not from sleep but from exhaustion, the kind that sank into the bones and smothered thought until the only thing left was the small space inside her where she still existed.

She focused on that.

Not the torn seams at her collar.

Not the discoloured marks along her thighs.

Not the dull pain filling each breath.

Just the space inside her that Lionel had not taken, James had not broken, and the cell could not silence.

Her fingers curled weakly at her side, nails pressing into her palm. The chain around her ankle lay slack, enough to remind her she was not free but not

tight enough to cut. Its cold weight nudged against her skin whenever she moved, pulling her thoughts unwillingly toward the cage of stone around her.

A sound drifted from the corridor, distant boots and a guard's muffled cough, and she flinched before she could stop herself. Her breath stalled, then steadied. She pressed her forehead briefly to the floor.

The children.

Leo's stubborn little chin as he tried not to cry.

Marin gripping her sleeve so tightly she had to pry her fingers free.

She had whispered that Flint would take them. That they would be safe. That she would follow. Even then her heart had clenched, knowing the promise was too thin to hide the truth of what waited behind her.

She hoped they had made it to Greentown. She hoped the Walkers had taken them in. She hoped the academy refugees were sheltering them. That they were warm and fed and sleeping. That they did not think she had abandoned them.

A tremor moved through her chest, soft and thin as breath. She folded her arms tighter around her ribs, forcing the feeling down. She could not break here. She would not.

She looked upward.

The buzzing light blurred at the edges. The ceiling swam slightly in her vision. Another memory rose, uninvited and sharp.

Her father in the palace corridor, stopping her with a hand on her shoulder. His voice low and steady, hiding the urgency beneath it.

Take Leo and Marin to the FLAME Academy. Do not argue. Go now.

She had wanted to say something. Ask why. Tell him she was not leaving him alone. Promise she would return as soon as he was safe. But none of the words reached her mouth. He had already turned away, moving toward the danger she never saw him return from.

That was the last moment she had with him.

Just orders.

Just responsibility.

No goodbye.

Regret tightened beneath her ribs, heavier than any bruise.

Her throat dried.

Her thoughts pressed next to her brothers. Lazarus first, as they always did. She pictured him in the palace courtyard, that final moment before he left after she thanked him for bringing the children back. He had not said where he was going. He never did. Yet she hoped he had reached Krashnov. She hoped he was not facing it alone. If he and David had still been together, perhaps the world would have unfolded differently. But now they were scattered. Lost.

Her thoughts shifted toward David, her chest tightening again. Poor David. She pictured him bloodied from the siege, with Pyro dragging him through smoke and ruin. She did not know if they had escaped Phoenix. She did not know if they were alive. She prayed only that they were somewhere beyond Lionel's reach.

The electric hum grew louder.

Lionel had taken the throne. Taken Parliament. Taken the palace. And now he held her here in the dark, believing he had taken everything else as well.

But he had not taken her mind.
He had not taken her memories.
He had not taken her family.

Shannon pushed herself upright slowly, every muscle protesting. Her torn clothes slipped against bruised skin, the movement sending a fresh ripple of pain along her side, but she ignored it.

The chain slid across the floor with a soft metallic hiss.

The light above her buzzed on, steady and blind to what had been done beneath it.

She steadied her breathing, lifted her chin, and let the cold stone remind her she was still alive.

He had not broken her.
Not yet.

And whether the world remembered her or not, Phoenix would.

CHAPTER TWO – The Captive *Citadel Cells*

The cell was still again.

Shannon sat against the wall, arms folded tight around her ribs, the light above her buzzing in its thin, ceaseless hum. It washed the room in a pallid glow, indifferent to anything that happened beneath it. She tried to steady her thoughts, force them into order, keep them from drifting toward fear.

The lock turned.

James Adams stepped inside, filling the doorway with his broad frame. He did not speak. He simply looked at her—slowly, deliberately—until the air felt heavy enough to choke.

“Stand,” he said.

She pushed herself upright, breath catching once in her bruised ribs. He closed the distance in two strides. The door swung shut behind him. The light flickered once, then held.

What followed needed no description.

Only the silence told the truth.

When it ended, Shannon lay on the cold stone, vision blurring at the edges. Her hands shook despite her effort to keep them still. James fastened his gloves with mechanical calm, as though her presence were nothing more than an inconvenience.

He crouched, voice low.

“Lionel commands this city,” he said. “And I enforce it. Your family is gone. Your father dead. Your brothers scattered. Your sister lost. You have no one.”

Shannon did not lift her gaze. Her jaw tightened, nothing more.

He reached, tilted her chin with a single finger.

“You are alone now.”

He let her face fall. He stood, walked to the door, and left without looking back. The metal slammed shut with finality.

She remained where she was, breath thin, ribs trembling beneath her arms. The light hummed on, relentless.

A softer movement followed—the sound of careful footsteps.

“Ma’am...” a guard said from the doorway, voice tight with remorse. “I am... I am truly sorry.”

Shannon drew a slow, controlled breath and lifted herself enough to sit. The guard’s eyes stayed lowered, his helmet held against his chest as if he could not bear to meet her gaze.

“I should have stopped him,” he said quietly. “I should have done more.”

Her answer was steady, formal. “This is not on you. Return to your post.”

He hesitated, throat working. “If there is anything—”

“There is nothing,” she said, firm but without cruelty.

Shannon eased her head against the wall, steadying her breath as the cold room settled around her. The cell and its bruises did not define her; they never would. She lifted her chin toward the light, gathering what strength remained. He had not broken her. He would not. Her will endured, her mind

remained her own, and while both held, she could not be undone — though in the stillness she wondered, as she often did, whether staying behind had been the right choice after all.

CHAPTER THREE – The Stand Off

Council Chamber

The Council Chamber held a tense quiet as evening light filtered through the panoramic glass walls. The glass floor beneath the semicircle of seats reflected the city below, its shimmer giving the impression that every person in the room hovered above Phoenix, suspended and exposed.

Lionel stood at the central dais, immaculate in a dark suit, hands loosely clasped behind him. His expression was the picture of calm authority. Only those who knew him well — and few in the chamber did — would notice the faint stiffness in his posture, the subtle tightening at the corner of his jaw. Hussain stood just behind him, tablet clutched tight, shoulders drawn in.

Speaker Morrell adjusted the digital display before him. “This session is convened. Chancellor Varrin, the Council grants you the floor.”

Varrin rose slowly, smoothing the front of his suit, allowing the silence to settle before he spoke. His gaze travelled slowly across the semicircle, acknowledging the assembled councillors before returning to Lionel.

“Prime Steward,” he began, tone courteous but firm, “the Council requests clarity regarding several pressing matters.”

Lionel inclined his head in acknowledgement, his smile restrained. “Then let us ensure the Council is well informed, Chancellor. Proceed.”

Varrin’s eyes narrowed just slightly — a flicker, but enough to note. “We begin with the assault on the FLAME Academy. A Phoenix institution. Its surrounding districts suffered extensive damage during your operation.”

Several councillors shifted, the soft scrape of chairs carrying across the chamber.

Lionel answered with practiced ease. “An unfortunate consequence of necessary action. The Academy had become a nexus of instability.”

Lord Ravich rose next, slow and deliberate, adjusting his cufflinks before speaking. “Instability, or an overreach of force? Entire neighbourhoods were caught in the crossfire. Heavy PMc deployment against civilian infrastructure is a questionable path to restoring stability.”

Lionel’s smile thinned, though he maintained composure. “Optics are rarely pleasant when decisive action must be taken.”

Ravich exchanged a glance with Varrin — a subtle message: there, a crack in the mask.

Before Lionel could divert, Councillor Harvik stood, sliding his chair back with careful precision. “And yet, Prime Steward, this decisive action coincides with an expanded PMc footprint along the southern provinces and the trench line.” He gestured toward a tactical display. “Checkpoints have tripled. Civilian movement is restricted.”

A hum ran through the unnamed councillors — not agreement, but unease. Fear made them quiet.

Lionel’s reply came smooth, almost soothing. “We are stabilising a continent in mourning. Temporary measures reassure the public.”

Harvik’s brows drew together. “The public feels monitored, not reassured.”

Lionel did not respond immediately. His eyes flicked — just for a breath — toward the seats of the unnamed councillors. A small slip. The first sign he was measuring the room more carefully than before.

Minister Torrin rose next with a steady hand on the desk. “Prime Steward, our traditions rely on transparency. Yet before His Majesty’s

funeral, riots erupted across several sectors. The people demand answers. Answers we ourselves have not received.”

Lionel shifted his weight slightly — a near-invisible tell. His hands clasped more tightly behind his back.

Councillor Avery stood from her seat, posture straight, voice composed. “And the severing of ties with Greentown was enacted without parliamentary review. A unilateral action of that scale breaches established protocol.”

The line landed.

Several unnamed councillors glanced between Avery and Lionel, uncertain which direction offered safety.

Now Reed stood.

Councilman Reed rose, pulling a data slate from his suit pocket but not reading from it. His voice was measured, deliberate.

“Taken together — the Academy, the PMc expansion, the southern deployments, the unrest before the funeral, and the break with Greentown — the Council sees a pattern. A tightening of control without legislative oversight. Oversight that was the backbone of your reappointment during your suspension.”

He let the words settle before continuing.

“You have much to explain, Prime Steward, and we await answers on these. However, what cannot wait is the matter surrounding His Majesty’s death. Many of us find it difficult to accept that David Whitfield killed his own father. What truly happened that night, Prime Steward?”

A heavy silence followed.

Speaker Morrell broke it, his tone strictly procedural. “Prime Steward, the Council formally requests a full, unabridged account of His Majesty’s death. The detail previously provided was incomplete.”

For the first time, Lionel paused.

A fraction too long.

His fingers tightened behind his back; Hussain noticed and shifted uncomfortably.

“I have already provided my account,” Lionel answered quietly.

Varrin stepped forward by half a pace — respectful, not confrontational. “You have provided fragments, Prime Steward. The Council requires the full truth.”

Ravich added in a measured tone, “Truth withstands scrutiny. Always.”

Lionel’s eyes narrowed. Not in anger — in calculation. His control remained, but his patience had thinned.

“I caution the Council,” Lionel said, each word carefully modulated, “not to mistake necessary action for deception.”

Avery replied calmly, “And I caution the Steward not to mistake authority for absolution.”

The unnamed councillors exchanged nervous glances — some toward Lionel, some toward Varrin, unable to determine where safety lay.

Speaker Morrell tapped the console gently. “The Council’s request stands. A full briefing is expected.”

Another silence.

Lionel breathed in quietly through his nose, the faintest tension visible in his shoulders as he exhaled.

“In due course,” he said. “The matter will be addressed.”

A glance passed between Varrin and Ravich: He is delaying.

Another between Avery and Harvik: We press again.

Lionel saw all of it.

And for a moment — just a moment — the mask slipped enough for the chamber to sense the steel beneath his smile.

The session lights dimmed for adjournment.

No one moved at first.

Fault lines had formed.

And every councillor could feel them widening beneath their feet.