



AUREFOLD

—◆— THE BELL OF SILENCE —◆—

Every truth has a keeper. Every silence has a cost.

READ THE OPENING · BOOK ONE

Prologue — The Question in the Margin

Crown-watch, seat of House Blackcrest, year 396 A.U.

Wren of Blackthorn reads a sealed record; Aldous of Blackcrest and a herald named Perrin watch.



Crown-watch had a room for disputed records and a smaller room for the people who disputed them. Wren had been in the smaller room since noon.

The record on the table was from House Whitehart. It was forty-three pages long, copied in a hand so even that the letters looked less written than agreed upon. Every page had been witnessed. Every witness had been witnessed. The cord had three seals in white wax and one in black, and the black one was Crown-watch's, put there when the packet arrived so that everyone would know no one had opened it before the people who were now opening it.

Wren had always thought this was the sort of reassurance that creates a new question without answering the old one.

She turned the last page back and read the final sentence again.

No supporting matter survives outside the entered judgment.

Across from her, Aldous aligned the packet's lower edge with the edge of the table. He had done this each time she moved it. He had not complained. She had not apologized. Their acquaintance had lasted three hours and had achieved a stable form.

"Is it complete?" he asked.

"Yes."

The third man in the room looked up from the window.

He had introduced himself as Perrin, of Blackcrest, and had then spent most of the afternoon behaving as though introductions were something other people required. He wore a traveling coat indoors and had found out the copying clerk's name before Wren had. The clerk had brought him tea without being asked and had brought Wren none, which she did not hold against either of them and noticed about both.

"That sounded ominous," Perrin said.

"It was an answer."

"Those are often the same thing here."

Aldous did not look at him. "Complete in what sense?"

Wren put one finger on the final sentence. "In theirs."

The room was very quiet. Crown-watch was built to keep paper dry and voices from traveling. The walls were lined with felt behind the boards; Wren had checked when she came in, because rooms explain institutions more honestly than mottos do.

Aldous said, "Explain."

"The packet contains every judgment Whitehart chose to enter for the period requested. Names where names are permitted. Dates where dates survive. The name of the tester. The conclusion. Corrections witnessed and sealed."

"And the trials?"

"Burned."

"The notes of the trials."

"If you burn the only observation from which a judgment was made, the distinction becomes devotional."

— the prologue continues in the book. —

Chapter One — The Trial of the Goatherd

House Whitehart, the Bell of Silence, year 396 A.U.

Brother Tomas prepares the listening room. Mother Elaine watches.



By the time Sela arrived, Tomas had failed the lamp twice.

The first wick had drowned. He pinched it out, drew it up with the point of his char knife, and cut it shorter than he meant to. His hand gave one small tremor against the copper hood. He noticed it before anyone else could and steadied the lamp with his other hand. The second flame burned blue at the root and smoked whenever the valley wind found the arch. Soot gathered beneath the little copper hood.

He moved the lamp half a handspan to the left.

The flame leaned harder.

"Leave it," Mother Alaine said.

She had entered while he was trimming the wick and taken the chair furthest inside, where the back wall met the long row of griffes. The dead faced the valley. Alaine faced the room. She sat with both hands resting on the head of her walking stick and her shoulders clear of the stone, though Tomas knew the cold would reach them before the hour was done.

"It will smoke in her eyes," he said.

"Then she will move."

"I would rather know what she does before she has reason."

Alaine looked at the black crescent forming under the hood. "The lamp has given her reason."

Tomas wiped his thumb on the rag at his belt. It left a dark mark beside three older ones. He had meant to begin with clean hands.

He put the lamp back where it had been. Alaine had not ordered him. That was not how her authority worked. She named the thing she believed should happen and left other people to discover that they had already obeyed.

The arch admitted a rush of colder air and the smell of goat hair. Sela came in with a coil of narrow cloth over one shoulder and something pale caught in her braid. Straw, Tomas thought. No—burdock. A dark crescent had dried beneath one thumbnail, blood or hoof dirt or both. She had left her work knife by the door; its sheath hung empty at her belt.

She stopped just inside.

"How long?"

Not *good evening*. Not *Mother*. She looked first at Tomas, then at the smoking lamp, then back through the arch toward the yard.

— *read the rest when the book is published.* —

The book is written. The road to publication is open.

The Bell of Silence is a completed manuscript of approximately 86,000 words.

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