

Celestial Blade Of The Fallen Knight

#Chapter 3: The Choosing Ground - Read Celestial Blade Of The Fallen Knight Chapter 3: The Choosing Ground

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By the third day, the city had learned to avert its eyes from the living and look only to the cold drama of the street.

Soren noticed it first in the way the bread hawkers sang their prices: not at the passersby, but up to the walls, as if hoping the stones themselves might buy a loaf or two.

Then in the bruise black flags gone limp over the watchtower, and in how the wasters and half-orphans, boys like Soren, once began to drift to the margins of the market, never gathering in groups of more than three, never still for longer than a coin's toss.

He kept his hands in his pockets, head bowed like he was counting puddles.

It was the oldest camouflage, learn the city's rhythm, sync up, never get caught tapping out of time.

Usually, it worked. But today, people weren't just ignoring Soren; half the faces he recognized now looked away too quickly, while others lingered a fraction too long, as if debating the price of a word.

Some even crossed themselves, fingers twitching a spiral at the brow. That was never a compliment.

At the old char-pit, Soren waited for the vendor to finish a spit-curse at one of the city's crows before sidling in.

The woman was large, shoulders wide as ship beams, and her arms were inked where the sleeves had burned away.

She didn't bother with the usual banter, just weighed out his two hunks of coal and a fistful of split char, then raked his scarred knuckles with a look.

"Half copper," she said, but her attention wasn't on the coins. Instead: "You seen the Iron Church banners today?"

Soren shook his head, handed over the battered script. "Didn't know there was a festival."

"Not for you or me," she grunted. "The Inquisition's come through the north gate. They pulled a wagon off the river road last night, emptied it. Set fire to the lot, even the bodies. Was all anyone talked of, until the ash settled."

She leaned in, voice all smoke and wet stone. "You best keep your head lower than usual. Or leave, if the gods give you a choice."

He took his parcel and retreated, but the words trailed him, heavy as the reek of boiled tar.

Soren's mind circled back to the sword, the shard sleeping beneath his floorboard, not just a memory of a thing but a presence, warm even when he tried to forget it.

'If they find it...'

He slipped down Knacker's Row, face to the wind, until the tannery stink faded.

The city changed here; storefronts gave way to shuttered shanties, the paint on the signs scored off by years of weather and threat.

Soren ducked into a squat, where Kaelrin and three others nursed thin soup by an oil-lamp.

Kaelrin's eyes flicked to Soren, then away. "You going to the Choosing?" he asked, lips barely moving.

Soren made a show of wiping his hands on his coat. "Why would I?"

"The Ashgards opened it early. Word is, ten sons dead on the frontier last month. They're desperate." Kaelrin's laugh was brittle enough to snap. "Desperate enough they'll take even the likes of us."

The oldest boy in the corner spat into the soup. "That's how they get rid of us, you know. Line us up and watch half die in test brawls. Other half die on the walls, soon as the real siege starts. Some fix."

Soren shrugged, feigning indifference. But his mind ticked: the ash-woman's warning, the bannered wagons, the attention in every glance, he could feel the circle tightening.

He'd planned to ride out the winter, stashing food and waiting for the sweepers to move on... but the sword had other plans.

Each night since he'd taken it, the thing seemed to hum not a song, but a call, just subtle enough to undermine his own resolve.

He left the squat before midday, crossed the square, and headed for the western wall, toward the barracks, and the scribe's post where the Choosing ledger was kept.

On the way, he passed the alley where the Remnant-bonded had died. Someone had painted over the blood, but the patch of stone was lighter, rawer, as if the city itself still remembered.

There were no flowers, no coins left for luck, only a playing card, waterlogged and curling, wedged into a crack. Soren plucked it out. Ace of swords.

Most of the other hopefuls waited in a line that stretched down the steps, each boy standing rigid and alone.

Some were city scum, others farmstock pressed into service by the promise of bread, a few minor noble sons slumming it for sport. Soren slid into place, avoided eye contact.

He noticed a girl with her hair in a neat braid working the ledger table, too clean for the square, hands quick and sure, face pointed and bloodless as an old icon. She looked up as he approached, eyes skipping over his coat, then lingering on the satchel at his side.

She said, "Name?"

He almost gave a false one, but her gaze made it pointless. "Soren. Just Soren."

She dipped her pen, wrote with crisp strokes. "You'll need to report an hour before dawn. Dress for cold, not for running. Is that clear?"

Her voice was matter-of-fact, but he caught the faint lift at the end, an invitation to ask a question. He said nothing.

She studied him a moment longer, as if certain there was more beneath his silence. Then she dismissed him with a tilt of her head.

Outside, Soren sat at the rim of the square and watched the light fade from the windows.

He thumbed the card absently, tracing the sword. He wondered if the Remnant had ever been a person, or if it had always been a lonely thing, waiting for a hand to lift it out of the gutter.

He felt the warmth of the shard even now, pressed against his ribs.

He walked home under cover of the first real snow, the flakes silent as breath.

In the loft, he unwrapped the hilt and held it, willing the voice to come back, to offer something, curse, warning, joke, anything. He waited for hours, eyes on the warped beams above.

It didn't speak.

But it didn't quite sleep, either.