

FIRES THAT FORGE

LORDS OF ORDER & CHAOS - BOOK I

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CHAPTER ONE

PROLOGUE

WHO TO TRUST?

The sky was the color of old bruises. The damp, cold air of the fall morning was the sort that made its way into the muscles and joints of those who'd seen too much labor or war. It was the month of Tetobier in the year 1648 of the era of Restored Great Man Kings.

Far to the south, near the small town of Fordir, a young Great Man trained feverishly with his twin axes. Soon he would take the first steps of an adventure that would change his life, and the lives of nations, forever. However, that is a story for another time.

In the northern city of Moras in the kingdom of Lethanor, young physician Silas of the House Morosse forced himself to a steady, calm pace. He pulled his cloak tight against the chill of the nearby harbor air. His bare feet trod along the cold black stones of the street. On any other day, the bone chilling damp that surrounded and penetrated him would have caused him much discomfort. However, this morning his mind was on murder.

Two murders, in fact. His father, Killian of House Morosse, and his mother, Helena, both lay cold in the absolute inertia that is the chief characteristic of death. Each chilling footfall took him further from that scene of finality and closer to what he hoped would be an ally.

Silas arranged his thoughts meticulously, as was his habit. He was already choosing his words with care before even arriving at the inquisitors' barracks.

"Hold there," came from one of the two guards posted at the iron gate of Blackstone Hall. "What's this about?"

The guards wore the fine steel breastplates and keenly honed blades marked by the seal of Lady Evalynne, Lady of this vast city and these rich lands.

"I am Silas of House Morosse," Silas said in his customary, measured tones. "I am here to speak with Inquisitor Dunewell. I have no appointment."

The mention of House Morosse, one of the greatest merchant houses, if not of dubious reputation, had the intended effect. Furthermore, upon the mention of the name, one guard recognized the young physician. Although one could hardly blame him for his tardiness of positive identification. He had never seen the handsome Doctor Morosse with a curly lock of his hair out of place or a silver buckle unpolished and now he stood before him, barefoot and unkempt.

"Of course, Doctor Morosse," the guard said. "Please, allow me to escort you." With a nod from Silas, the guard turned abruptly, bound for Blackstone Hall. "Sorry I didn't recognize you, sir," the guard said, looking over his shoulder at the young doctor. "I'm Tennes, you treated my son for the Vile Twitch some months ago."

"How is Tanis?" Silas asked. He had been taught since birth to keep a careful record of names and associations. Killian had insisted upon it and tested him often.

"He's doing quite well, thanks to you," Tennes said. "My wife and I... we owe you. We owe you a debt we could never repay."

"You owe me nothing," Silas said, his tone betraying no emotion.

"Not to argue, sir, but I do," Tennes said. "If there's ever anything the likes of me could do for the likes of you, please just say so, and I'll be happy to oblige. When the priests couldn't help him...we thought...I owe you, sir. Here we are."

Tennes, burly even among the elite guard of Blackstone Hall, pulled the bell of Inquisitor Dunewell's iron-bound door and stood to the side. His large frame, made even greater by the presence of the armor, shield, and heavy cloak, made Silas seem even smaller in his wet and tightly wrapped house cloak.

Silas enjoyed the title of the Great Man race, and time would tell if he possessed their longevity, however he was not distinguished by the physical traits that usually defined them. His stature, six feet in height and weighing almost one hundred and eighty stone, was more akin to his father's common blood rather than the more robust nature of his mother's Great Woman heritage. His hair, as black as the wet stones he stood upon, was also of his father's line.

The only visible mark of his mother present in his visage was his green eyes, which bore the dark shade of bearberry leaves in the spring.

The door opened to reveal a tall, broad man, undoubtedly of the Great Man bloodlines. Inquisitor Dunewell, appearing to be perhaps a year or two older than Silas, was actually beyond his fortieth year. He stood half a foot taller than Silas and weighed at least one hundred stone more. His dark blond hair was cut very short in the style of the Silver Helms, for he was among their number, and his eyes, also of green, reflected an insight that made most uncomfortable in their gaze.

Dunewell looked to Silas who, in turn, looked at the guard to his left.

“That will be all, Tennes,” Dunewell said.

Tennes offered a brief nod and stepped away smartly.

Inquisitor Dunewell stepped to the side and Doctor Morosse shuffled past him, tracking moisture from the morning dew across the polished black-and-white marble floor of the inquisitor’s quarters. Dunewell noted that, despite the walk from Morosse House to Blackstone, Silas’s feet also stained the marble with traces of blood.

“Dune, they’re... they’re dead...both of them...murdered,” Silas finally managed as Dunewell closed the door. “She... mother... and my father, they’re both dead.”

Dunewell knew Silas well, perhaps better than anyone else did, and had not seen him shake or heard him stammer since his childhood. He felt the flash of contagious panic and hysteria burst in his breast, but muzzled that wild beast quickly.

“Killian and Helena?”

“Yes,” Silas said as he downed his head. “I didn’t know...I hope... I hope I was right to come to you first.”