

reckoning, of a fragile order poised on the knife's edge of ruin. Eryndor felt the shift in its bones: the stars had spoken, and their message was clear. Shadows were gathering, and destiny, once steady and predictable, was about to erupt into chaos.

This was the night Eryndor's future was born. Above the snow-capped peaks and the sprawling, ancient forests of the kingdom, the moon had bled. It hung in the obsidian sky, a swollen, crimson orb, its light painting the world in hues of rust and apprehension. This was no ordinary lunar phase; it was the Blood-Red Moon, a phenomenon whispered about in hushed tones by mothers to frighten disobedient children, a celestial omen whose every prior appearance had been etched into history by the blood of kings and the ashes of empires. And it was on this night, under its baleful, unholy glow, that Princess Eveline and Princess Aelina drew their first breaths.

The grand hall of Eryndor Castle flickered with candlelight, shadows dancing across tapestries that whispered of a proud lineage now threatened by a single, ancient verse. King Theron stood by the hearth, the flames throwing harsh lines across his weary face. His boots scraped the marble as he paced the same path for the hundredth time that night. By the throne, Queen Isolde sat rigid, hands clasped so tightly her knuckles turned white. The hush of the hall was broken only by the low crackle of burning logs and the tick-tock of the grandfather clock in the corner, each second a hammer blow against their fragile hope.

Above the fire, an ancient parchment lay unrolled on a carved desk. The ink, faded and curling at the edges, spoke of twins born under a crimson moon, two souls from one heart, bound by blood destined to divide a crown. The air hung heavy with unspoken fears.

Their twins, Eveline and Aelina, had been born under a star deemed ill-omened by the court astrologer, a celestial event that sent ripples of unease through the usually placid kingdom. The prophecy, scrawled on ancient parchment in a language almost lost to time, spoke of twins, a divided crown, and a sacrifice that would either save Eryndor or condemn it to ruin. Its cryptic nature allowed for various interpretations, each more terrifying than the last. Some whispered of the twins destroying each other, a fratricidal war that would engulf the land in flames. Others feared a greater, more insidious evil awakened by their shared destiny.

Theron raked a hand through his graying hair. "The court whispers nonsense," he muttered, more to the hearth than to his wife. "They twist old words into nightmares."

"Two daughters. Born under a blood moon. Cursed before they even drew breath," Isolde said quietly, mumbling the words over and over. Her eyes didn't leave the parchment. "They whisper because they fear. And they fear because they believe," she said, her voice barely above the fire's hiss.

A sudden shuffle of robes broke the tension. The court magician stepped forward from the shadows, the flickering light catching the gold thread of his cuffs. "Your Majesty," he began, bowing low, "this prophecy... it does not speak of their reign. It speaks of what may break it."

Theron's head snapped up. "Speak plainly, Magister. There is no time for speaking a cryptic language."

The magician's voice dropped to a grave hush. "The twins are bound. If they stand together, they may save Eryndor. Or they may ruin it for good." He paused, letting the words sink in like a dagger turned slow. "The final verse revealed itself only days ago: one heart, two souls. Divided to mend, or united to break."

Isolde flinched, but forced steel into her voice. "Then we do what must be done. They must never meet."

The words fell like a stone in a silent pond. Theron stopped pacing. He turned to face her, pain carved deep into every line of his face. "Do you hear yourself, Isolde? Never? They are our own daughters."

Isolde's eyes glistened, but she held his gaze. "And if they stay together, they may burn this kingdom to ash. I will not lose them both, Theron. I will not lose them both."

The magician's head dipped low, pointing at the mechanical clock. "There is still time, your majesties. But not much. The stars will align again soon."

Theron closed his eyes, shoulders sagging under a weight no crown could carry. "So we tear our family apart to keep it whole," he whispered.

Isolde rose so quickly her throne scraped the dais. She crossed the hall in three sharp steps, staring at the moonlit window. The glass blurred with tears she refused to let fall. Her voice came soft, edged with iron. "If we do this, we do not speak of her again."

Theron bowed his head. "If that's the price." Behind them, the magician's words cut the hush like a blade. "They will meet again. Fate doesn't break. It only bends."

Isolde turned, eyes glistening. "Then let it bend around us for once." She glanced at Theron, and for a heartbeat, he saw the girl he had fallen for fearless, defiant. He reached for her hand again. This time, she let him take it. "They will hate us for it," he whispered.

"They'll live to hate us," Isolde murmured. She pressed her forehead to his, their crowns nearly touching. "And that's all that matters." Outside the grand hall, the wind howled through the castle towers, a warning neither dared to welcome. The decision was made behind locked doors, under flickering torchlight and hushed prayers. Outside, the castle slept. Inside, two parents gave up pieces of their hearts.