



It is said that the stars shine brighter on the princesses' birthday, but the princesses themselves think that is balderdash. The stars look the same as they always do, and this year, on the night before the three of them leave their home and one another for the first time in their lives, everything—the stars included—seems far darker.

The sounds from the party drift through the palace as the clock nears midnight, but the princesses have abandoned the celebration, Daphne plucking a bottle of champagne from an ice bucket while Beatriz bats her eyes at the server and Sophronia keeps a lookout to ensure that their mother doesn't see them. They have done their duty, danced and toasted, shaken hands and kissed cheeks, smiled until their faces ached, but they want to spend their last few minutes of girlhood the same way they came into the world sixteen years ago: together.

Their childhood rooms haven't changed much since they were moved there from the nursery—still three identical white rooms connected to a shared parlor, each with the same white canopied bed piled high with silk pillows, the same birch desk and armoire, inlaid with gold in a pattern of vines and flowers, and the same plush rose-colored rug stretching across the floor. The shared parlor is full of overstuffed velvet seating and a grand marble fireplace carved to represent the constellations that moved across the sky at the

time of their birth—a full moon of inlaid opal at the center, surrounded by the constellations: the Thorned Rose, the Hungry Hawk, the Lonely Heart, the Crown of Flames, and, of course, the Sisters Three.

Rumor has it that Empress Margaraux had tasked the royal empyrea, Nigellus, to use magic to ensure they were born when the Sisters Three crossed overhead, but others say that’s ridiculous—after all, why would she have wished for three girls when a single boy would have been far more helpful?

Others whisper that the Sisters Three was the constellation that Nigellus had pulled a star down from to grant the empress’s wish for children, though none appear to be missing. But she must have wished, on that everyone agrees. How else could the emperor have suddenly fathered three daughters, at the age of seventy, when his last wife and his countless mistresses had never fallen pregnant?

And then there is the matter of the princesses’ eyes—not their mother’s brown or their father’s blue but the star-touched silver that only graced those conceived with magic. Those with stardust running through their veins.