



*In the ancient days when gods still walked among mortals and the empire of valdros stretched across seven seas, there lived a noble family whose destiny would shake the very foundations of the realm. The house of alexios, descended from the legendary storm kings of old, ruled over the magnificent city of thalarion with wisdom and strength.*



*Andrew Alexios, heir to the Crimson Throne, stood upon the marble balcony of his father's palace, gazing out at the blood-red banners that fluttered in the morning wind. At twenty-five summers, he possessed the bearing of a true prince—tall and broad-shouldered, with the piercing gray eyes of his lineage and hair dark as a raven's wing. Yet beneath his noble exterior burned a restless spirit, for he had dreamed strange dreams of late, visions of five ancient symbols blazing in the sky like fallen stars.*



***His father, Lord Marcus Alexios, the Lion of Thalarion, had ruled justly for three decades. His mother, Lady Helena Alexios, known throughout the empire for her beauty and wisdom, had borne four children to secure the royal line. Andrew was the eldest, followed by his fierce brother Robert Alexios, a warrior without equal who commanded the Iron Legion; his sister Katherine Alexios, whose gift for strategy and diplomacy made her invaluable to the court; and young Antonio Alexios, barely sixteen but already showing promise as a scholar of ancient lore.***



*The morning peace was shattered when a messenger arrived bearing grave news.*

*The Oracle of Moon Haven had spoken a prophecy that would change everything:*

*"When storm clouds gather over the Crown of Gold,  
And five cities tremble at shadows untold,  
The blood of Alexios shall rise or fall,  
As ancient enemies answer the call.  
The wolf, the owl, the gem, and the flame—  
All shall bow or none shall remain."*



*Andrew's blood ran cold as he recognized the symbols from his dreams.*

*The prophecy spoke of the five great cities of Valdros: Thalarion with its crown and flame, Moon Haven with its white owl, Iron Hold with its precious gems, Miraleth with its golden scorpion, and Storm Watch with its howling wolf.*



*Even as dark omens gathered, love bloomed in the most unexpected place.*

*Rachel Flowerton, daughter of Lord Edmund Flowerton, the Master of Coin, had captured Andrew's heart with her quick wit and fierce independence.*

*Her father served as one of Marcus's most trusted advisors, while her mother, Lady Vivienne, maintained the palace gardens with their legendary healing herbs. Rachel's younger brother, Marcus Flowerton, served as Andrew's personal squire and closest friend.*



*In the northern city of Storm Watch, a different tale was unfolding. Andy Hugh, son of Jarl Thorvald Hugh, had grown bitter watching his father bow to the distant Crown of Thalarion.*

*Unlike his younger siblings, Gary Hugh and Susan Hugh, who still believed in the old oaths of loyalty, Andy had begun to question why the proud warriors of the north should serve southern kings.*

*Gary Hugh, barely eighteen but already a formidable warrior, followed his older brother with unwavering loyalty.*

*Susan Hugh, the only daughter of the Jarl, possessed a sharp mind for politics and a talent for gathering information that made her invaluable to Andy's growing rebellion.*

*The Hugh siblings had discovered something terrible in the ancient archives of Storm Watch—evidence that the Alexios line had stolen the throne generations ago through treachery and murder. Andy vowed to restore what he believed was the rightful order, even if it meant tearing the empire apart.*



*Meanwhile, in the scholarly halls of Moon Haven, Florence Hugh (Andy's cousin who had married into the prestigious Marcellus family) worked tirelessly in the Great Library alongside her husband, Master Aurelius Marcellus. Their son, Andy Marcellus, had inherited both his mother's northern blood and his father's love of ancient knowledge. The younger Gary Marcellus Hugh and Susan Marcellus Hugh spent their days learning the mystical arts and uncovering secrets that had been buried for centuries. Meanwhile, in the scholarly halls of Moon Haven, Florence Hugh (Andy's cousin who had married into the prestigious Marcellus family) worked tirelessly in the Great Library alongside her husband, Master Aurelius Marcellus. Their son, Andy Marcellus, had inherited both his mother's northern blood and his father's love of ancient knowledge. The younger Gary Marcellus Hugh and Susan Marcellus Hugh spent their days learning the mystical arts and uncovering secrets that had been buried for centuries.*

*Florence had discovered disturbing texts that spoke of an ancient darkness, sealed away long ago by the combined power of all five cities. The seals were weakening, and if the cities fell to war with one another, nothing would stand against the return of the Shadow That Devours.*

*As winter approached, tensions exploded across the empire. Andy Hugh's rebellion began in earnest when he refused to send the annual tribute to Thalarion.*

*Instead, he declared Storm Watch's independence and called upon the other cities to throw off what he called "the southern yoke."*

*Andrew Alexios, now fully crowned as the new emperor after his father's sudden death from a mysterious illness, faced his greatest challenge. Robert Alexios wanted to march north immediately with the full might of the Iron Legion, while Katherine Alexios urged diplomatic solutions. Young Antonio Alexios, meanwhile, had begun having the same prophetic dreams as his brother.*



*War erupted across Valdros as the cities chose sides.  
Iron Hold, bound by ancient oaths, sided with Thalarion.*

*Miraleth's merchant princes calculated that their profits lay with whoever won, but initially supported the established order.  
Moon Haven tried to remain neutral, but Florence's warnings about the approaching darkness fell on deaf ears.*



*The first great battle took place at Crimson Ford, where Robert Alexios led ten thousand legionnaires against Andy Hugh's northern berserkers.*

*The clash was brutal and decisive—Robert fell to Andy's enchanted war-axe, but not before dealing his enemy a mortal wound. Both commanders died as heroes, their blood mingling in the red waters of the ford.*