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## A Crown

Chelsea DeTorres

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# A Crown

## Chelsea DeTorres

If you are looking for an easy adventure, one with victories and spoils, a handsome prince or two and treasure the likes of which your grandfathers never saw, this is not the quest for you.

If you are willing to take a journey, however, in a forest farther away than you can imagine, across mountain ranges no one has ever crossed, dark trees stand guard around a coffin, a glass one to be specific. It has no lid; you will not have to open it. Inside rests a woman of immense beauty with flowing raven locks and pale white skin. Her lips, like two cherries so ripe and dark, are plastered in a smile on her face. Her eyes could be any color beneath her closed lids, her eyelashes delicately kissing her skin.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this woman is her crown, made of thorns and rosebuds, the same deep blush red as her dress. It is a prickly thing if you were to touch it. But the one wearing it does not complain; instead, she sleeps peacefully, a whisper of a smile on her face. If you want to know why she rests there, you will simply have to go to her.

If you do choose to do so, you must journey across rivers filled with water trolls that would love to suck your marrow. Boats are easily overturned and a swimmer could be snatched from the surface without a final breath.

But, if you make it across the rivers, you must cross those mountains lined with giants and ogres. You must find the paths lost under centuries of blizzards before those creatures rip your skin from you like paper; they like to fry it up and serve it over tomatoes, a rare delicacy in their cold home. You can use a map if you find one in the lost library of Alexandria.

There are two ways to get there if you make it out of the mountains. If you take the desert road, you will have to bring a mirror. The basilisks will hunt you at every turn, seeking to turn you to stone. The sphinxes will trick you with riddles without answers, not interested in your knowledge but only in the taste of your lower intestine.

If you choose the other path instead, you will be sent deep underground, where gnarled goblins and beleaguered dwarves await you. They will want the iron in your veins, your teeth for their necklaces, your toes to munch like candy. They will lick the sweat from your skin if they catch you but you might find a tunnel they have yet to discover, one they know nothing of. You will have to worry about dragons then.

You must next beg your way through trees that seek your bones to nurture their roots, plucking your skin with twigs to peel back its layers. Thorns will snag you and low-lying limbs trip you at every turn; they will take chunks of your hair and your eyeballs if you'd let them. You will fall and stumble. You might want to turn back. Now would be as good a time as any if you find the journey too difficult.

If you had left fifty years ago or even a hundred, there would have been someone there to challenge you, to deter you with swords and wands, injuries and spells. But they are gone now.

Instead, if you get there, tired and torn, scratched and beaten, the clearing itself won't be kind. There will be naught to drink there and the grass will sting and snap at your toes, your boots lost to some yetis ages ago.

If you get there, you can walk to the coffin and press your hands to its edges. You can lift the crown from her head.

You can whisper, "Get up. It is time." She will open her eyes and go, without a word. You can lie there then, in her place, your own hair spread out like a great blanket. You can place the crown on your own head, amazed at its cool caress, the thorns circling your forehead with the utmost care. You can let others wonder why you lay there, dreaming your own dreams, no hardships to battle or glory to earn.

You can stay there, if you're tired. And wait for the next person who comes looking for a crown.