



The Winter Charlatan

Victoria McCombs

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In Victoria McCombs's *The Winter Charlatan*, a desperate but determined princess works to save her kingdom and break her curse.

Rowan was born with a curse: that on the last day of her eighteenth year, she would prick her finger on a spindle and fall asleep for a hundred years. In order to protect the royal succession, her parents, the king and queen of Elenvérs, convinced a friend of the court to switch baby Rowan with their newborn baby boy, Cassian, who was raised as the heir to the throne.

While Rowan grows up to wield swords, act as a double agent, and live in a castle made of ice, she is humanized via the obstacles that she faces in her interpersonal relationships. She yearns for her birth parents' affection and is jealous of Cassian's relationship with her father. Forced to watch someone else live her life, Rowan goes to great lengths to break her curse, including in battles with dragons, mountain trolls, and a magic white bear. All of her efforts are unsuccessful, though. That is: until an adventure involving a witch rewards her with a magical wish. Rowan hopes to use it to take her rightful place as heir.

But before Rowan has a chance to use her wish, Elenvérs's safety is threatened by a neighboring kingdom. To protect her home and family, Rowan teams up with her nemesis, Cassian, to spy on the enemy court. Her work to overcome the curse that defined her life and relationships is thrilling, resulting in a twisting, tender adventure that includes a chilling betrayal.

A reimagination of Sleeping Beauty's fairy tale story, *The Winter Charlatan* focuses on an unconventional princess who's determined to be her own knight in shining armor.

JENNA JAUREGUY (November / December 2021)

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