

★ **Thorn**

Anna Burke

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It is said that “the Huntress rides out when the sun is at its farthest and Winter has her jaws buried deep in the heart of the warm, green world,” but Rowan is skeptical about this—and everything else about village life. Her mother is dead, her father is on the run from his creditors, and Rowan is powerless to do anything but assent.

When the Huntress arrives on the heels of her father’s hunting party demanding a rose for a rose, what’s monstrous suddenly looks like freedom. But in Anna Burke’s *Thorn*, freedom isn’t the same as mercy, and Rowan must learn to bear its weight.

Burke is adept at imbuing a deep fairy tale with social relevance. Building on the tradition of *Beauty and the Beast*, *Thorn* gives young women all the leading roles: heroes, villains, and lovers. The story delves into clothing as self-presentation, the release from bearing children, the work of self-reliance, reckoning with a family or past that no longer fits, the give and take of true partnership, and the interlinked importance of self-knowledge and love. It does all of this within a framework of castles, rugged landscapes, and forbidding enchantments.

Rowan is a tonic. Her sharpness, anger, and pride have a depth that’s uniquely teenaged and completely human. The Huntress, Isolde, is Rowan’s opposite. Her inhuman inscrutability, power, and cruelty are explored with nuance, showing the fine, almost invisible lines between a person’s greatest strengths and their personal corruption. Their totality holds so much potential that it’s easy to root for both—each a thorn in the other’s side.

Thoroughly gratifying, *Thorn* is a perennial escape fantasy tangled up with a call to adventure. Burke turns one young woman’s release from drudgery into a beguiling disruption of conventional social roles, expected dichotomies, and personal power.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (January/February 2019)

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