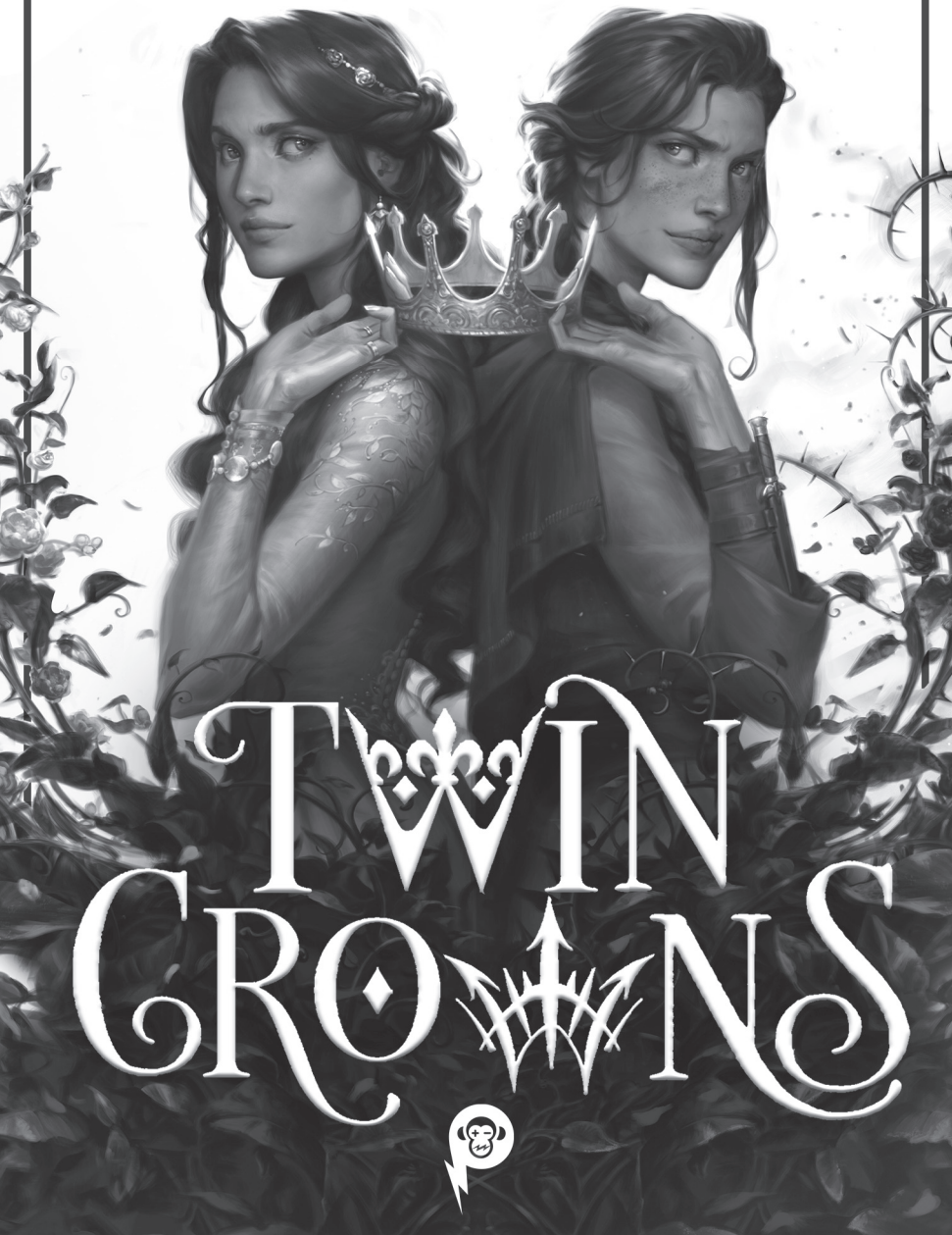
CATHERINE DOYLE & KATHERINE WEBBER



TWIN CROWNS

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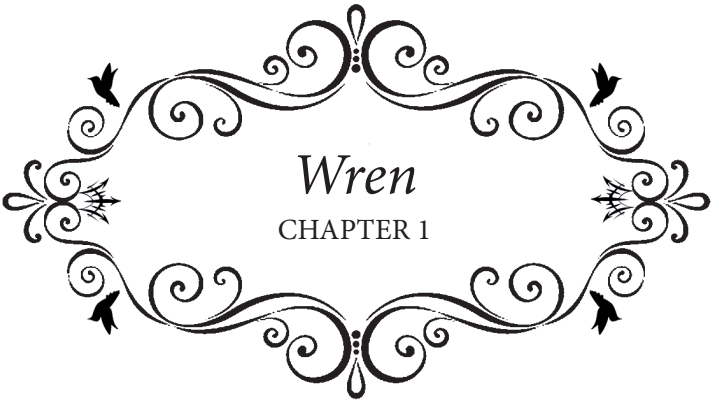
For Jane,

The best sister in every way

N
W
E
S
THE ERRINWILDE
LAKE MEALA
THE FAIRGLOW VALLEY
The Fane River
FERN HILL
MISHNICK MOUNTAINS
GALLANTH
GANYEVE
The Whisperwind Cliffs
THE WEEPING FOREST
Balor's Eye
The Golden Caves
DEARG
The Ortha Sea
ORTHA
ERRIL HILLS
Leatherbend River
BRIDGE END
HOLLYFORT
GEVRA
The Gray Deep
NORTHERN CONTINENT
POISONWEED VALLEY
AMARACH
EANA
The Sunless Sea
GOLDER'S GLEN
The Azure Straits
SOUTHERN CONTINENT
CARO
The Infinite Expanse
DEMARRE

NORBROOK
THE ATHELL MOUNTAINS
Glenlock
DESERT
Wishbone Bay
CANADAWN PALACE
Lake Carranam
ESHLINN WOODS
Silverrangue River
THORNHAVEN
FOXFORD
ESHLINN
The Poddle River
GLENBROOK
ELLENDALE
MILLS
HORSELEAP
EANA

Fly away safe, little Wren.
Rose, grow strong and true.



Wren

CHAPTER 1

The golden gates of Anadawn Palace glittered in the setting sun, each spike as sharp as a dagger. The sight made Wren Greenrock's stomach churn. Even from a distance, they were taller than she had imagined, their heavy chains clanging faintly in the wind.

She sank into a crouch at the edge of the forest that surrounded the palace grounds. It was too bright to leave the safety of the trees; she would have to wait for the cover of nightfall to venture any closer. A branch snapped underfoot. Wren winced.

'Careful,' hissed a voice from behind her. Shen Lo appeared at her side. Dressed all in black, and with his face partially covered, he moved as swiftly and soundlessly as an adder. 'Eyes on your feet, Greenrock. Remember what I taught you.'

'If I keep my eyes on my feet, how will I count all the scary-looking palace guards who will kill us on sight, Shen?'

Shen's dark eyes moved back and forth, tracking the guards. There were twelve in the lower courtyard alone, and

six more guarding the gates, all of them dressed in pristine green uniforms, their swords fastened at their hips. 'I could take them.'

Wren blew out a breath. 'Since we're trying to *avoid* suspicion on our way in, I'd rather not leave eighteen dead bodies behind us.'

'A diversion, then? We could catch an elk and set it loose in the courtyard.'

Wren glanced sidelong at him. 'Remind me why I decided to bring you with me?'

'Because your grandmother told you to,' said Shen, smugly. 'And without me, you would never have made it through the desert.'

Absentmindedly, Wren brushed the sand from her tunic. She was glad to be out of the blistering desert sun, even if her task still lay ahead of her. She inhaled a lungful of crisp air, trying to settle the nerves swilling in her stomach.

In her mind's eye, she pictured her grandmother, Banba, standing stout and sure back on the west coast of Eana, her strong hands squeezing Wren's shoulders.

'*When you break open the stone heart of Anadawn Palace and seize your rightful place on its throne, all the winds of Eana will sing your name. May the courage of the witches go with you, my little bird.*'

Wren set her eyes on the topmost window of the east tower of Anadawn, and tried to summon a morsel of that courage now. But there was only her heart, fluttering like a hummingbird in her chest.

‘Does it look like home yet?’ said Shen.

She shook her head, grimly. ‘It looks like a fortress.’

‘Well, you’ve always loved a challenge.’

‘I’m beginning to think I might be getting in over my head with this one,’ said Wren, uneasily. But it was Banba who had devised this plan, and they both knew Wren had to follow it.

Shen sank to the ground and propped himself against a tree. ‘When night falls, we’ll go south to the river and make our way up through the reeds. The walls are older there; the footholds should be easier. We can slip in between patrols.’

Wren’s hand came to the drawstring pouch at her waist. It had been given to her by her grandmother on the morning of their departure from Ortha, pressed into Wren’s hand like a talisman. *‘Keep your magic close at hand, but out of sight. At Anadawn, suspected witches are executed first, and interrogated later.’*

‘I can enchant the guards,’ said Wren, confidently. ‘My sleep spells are lightning-fast now.’

‘I know,’ said Shen. ‘Don’t forget who you practised on.’

Wren kicked her legs out and leaned against his shoulder. Above the trill of birdsong, they listened for the distant sounds of palace life, watched servants milling to and fro and the guards standing stiff-backed at their posts, while the last of the sun melted from the sky in coral brushstrokes.

Wren’s gaze came to rest on a marble statue protruding from the centre of a beautiful rose garden. She curled her lip. It was the famous Protector of Eana, an obsessive man

with ravenous ambition, who had invaded these shores a thousand years ago with the sole intent of stamping out every last vestige of magic. In a brutal war that had left few survivors, the Protector had succeeded in deposing Ortha Starcrest, the last witch queen of Eana, and stealing the kingdom for his own. And even though he had failed to destroy the population of witches entirely – for how can you cut out the beating heart of a kingdom? – the Protector was still worshipped to this day. And his hatred of the witches lived on.

Shen followed her gaze. 'What will you do with that hideous statue when you become Queen?' he asked. 'Smash it into smithereens? Replace it with a statue of me?'

'I'll break it into little pieces,' said Wren. 'And then I'll feed them to whoever commissioned that eyesore in the first place. One spoonful at a time.'

At that moment she spotted someone wandering among the roses. It was a girl about Wren's age. Her dark hair was arranged in loose curls that tumbled all the way to her waist, and she was wearing a fine pink dress with a full skirt. Her dainty chin was tipped to the sky, as though she was lost in thought.

Wren stood up without meaning to.

Shen tugged on the end of her cloak. 'Get down.'

She pointed towards the distant trellises. 'Do you see that girl?'

Shen squinted. 'What about her?'

'That's her. That's my sister.' Wren felt a strange pull in

her heart, like a thread going taut. For a maddening second, she wanted to go barrelling towards those golden gates. 'That's Rose.'

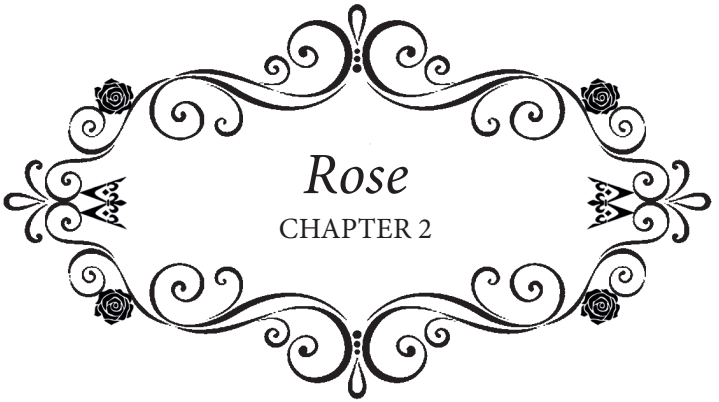
Shen stood up, slowly. 'Princess Rose wandering in her rose garden,' he said, with a low chuckle. 'I'd say that's as sure a sign as any . . . well, that and the fact she appears to have your face.'

Wren was staring so hard she wasn't blinking. She had grown up knowing she had a twin sister half a world away, but seeing her here in the flesh had rendered her speechless for the first time in her life.

Shen turned to her. 'Don't tell me you're having second thoughts about the plan?'

In the back of Wren's mind, her grandmother's face hardened. '*When you get to Anadawn, leave your heart in the forest. A moment of weakness will set us all to ruin.*'

She set her jaw, her gaze still trained on Rose. 'Never.'



Rose

CHAPTER 2

Princess Rose Valhart was used to having eyes on her.

The palace guards were never far away, the gold buttons on their uniforms flashing in the sunlight. The servants watched her just as keenly, often anticipating her needs before she voiced them. Then there was Chapman, the palace steward, who was always flittering around her like a moth. He knew where she was every moment of every day, and made sure Rose was never late, despite her tendency to dawdle and daydream.

Her subjects watched her, too, of course. On the rare occasions she ventured into the capital city of Eshlinn, they would line the streets to catch a glimpse of her. She was their beloved princess, after all, as fair as the flower after which she was named, and as sweet and pure as its scent.

At least Rose *assumed* that was what they thought of her. She wasn't allowed to speak to any of them, only flutter her lashes and waggle her fingers from afar. But that would all change when she became Queen. She was determined to visit the far-flung lands of her kingdom, and to meet the

people who lived there. To speak to them and know them . . . to let them know her.

Sometimes Rose swore that even the starcrest birds watched her more closely than they should. But then, she'd always had a fanciful imagination. Chapman blamed Rose's best friend, Celeste, for that. They enjoyed trading silly tales, making each one more outlandish than the last, until they collapsed into laughter. Sometimes, they would write their deepest desires on a piece of parchment and burn it by candlelight, casting the ashes of their wishes out into the night sky.

Rose always wished for love, while Celeste chose adventure. Sometimes, Rose wondered if she could have both. But a life of adventure was not fit for a queen. She would have to make do with the thrill of her daydreams and the wild beauty of her gardens. She smiled as she plucked a pink rose from her flower bed and cut it neatly at its stem. She reached for another . . . and then froze.

She suddenly had the distinctly unsettling feeling that someone was watching her. Someone *new*. She snapped her chin up, straining to see past the guards at the golden gates and into the shadowy woods beyond, where the setting sun had set the canopies ablaze.

An ache bloomed in her chest. She pressed her palm against it. Had she indulged in too many sugar buns this afternoon? Or perhaps it was simply nerves. With her coronation just around the corner, she did have *quite* a lot coming up.

‘Rose!’ A familiar voice cut through the quiet garden, startling her. ‘What are you doing out here all by yourself?’

Of all the people in her life, nobody watched Rose more carefully than the Kingsbreath. Willem Rathborne, the man who had saved her life when she was only minutes old, had been her guardian for almost eighteen years, and he certainly had enough grey hairs to show for it. He scowled as he stalked towards her now, his grimace so deep, it aged him awfully.

Rose dipped into a perfect curtsy on instinct, her pink dress billowing around her. ‘I was just collecting some fresh flowers for my bedroom.’

Willem’s sigh whistled through his nose. ‘That’s a servant’s job. You shouldn’t be out here in the dark.’

Rose laughed lightly, to set him at ease. ‘The sun has only just begun to set. And I’m hardly off gallivanting in the streets of Eshlinn. I’m perfectly safe in my gardens.’

Despite Willem being the closest thing she had to a father, there had always been a distance between them. All her life, Rose had craved his approval, and now more than ever, she wanted to show him that she was ready to be Queen. That she could be trusted with the kingdom, the future.

She reached for another flower. ‘You worry too much, dear Willem.’

The Kingsbreath regarded her sternly. ‘How many times do I have to tell you to pull your head from the clouds, Rose? You *must* be alert at all times. Danger is lurking—’

‘Everywhere, and nobody can be trusted,’ Rose finished

the sentence for him, with a sigh. Willem had been obsessive about her safety her entire life but now that her coronation was looming, he'd become positively paranoid.

She reminded herself it was only because he cared about her that he worried so much. She rested a gentle hand on his arm. 'Willem, you know no harm can come to Anadawn under the Great Protector's eye.'

They were standing under his statue, after all, the marbled gaze of Rose's noble ancestor silently watching over the palace. Watching over her. Privately, Rose had always found the sculpture a bit overbearing. It blocked the light in her gardens, and the roses in its shadow never grew as tall as the others, but she would rather have it close by than not have it at all. It reminded her that she was blessed, that—

'Come. Now.' Willem curled his fingers around her wrist. 'I'll have flowers sent to your room.'

Rose wilted as she trailed after him, away from the heady evening air and all thoughts of romance and adventure, and into the reaching shadows of the palace.

When I am Queen, everything will be better, she promised herself as she climbed the stairs in her tower, winding round and round and round. *I will dance all night if I want to, and no one will tell me what to do.*

She smiled at the guard in the stairwell as she pushed open the door to her bedroom. It was only when she glimpsed the blood on the doorknob that she realized she had pricked her fingers on the thorns.