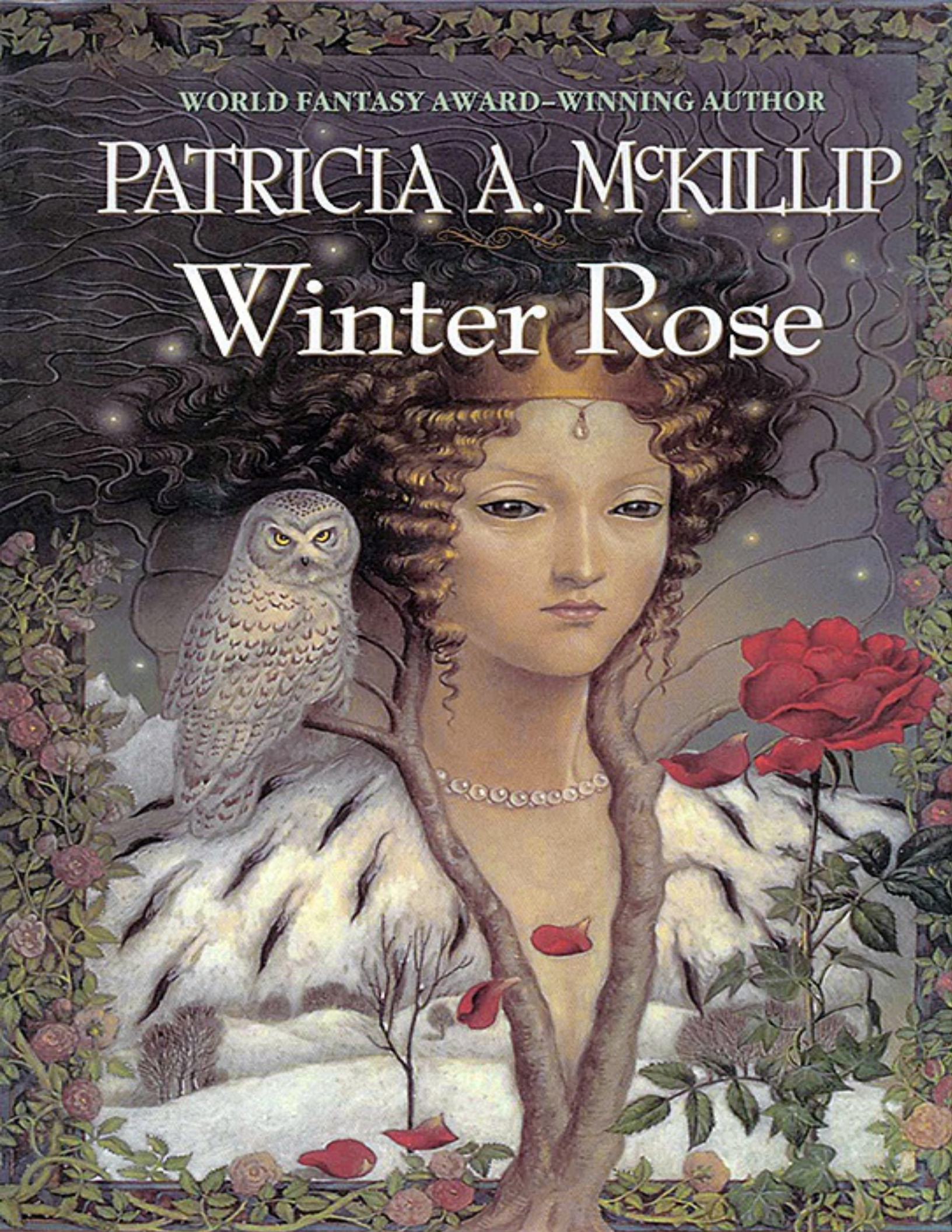


WORLD FANTASY AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

PATRICIA A. MCKILLIP

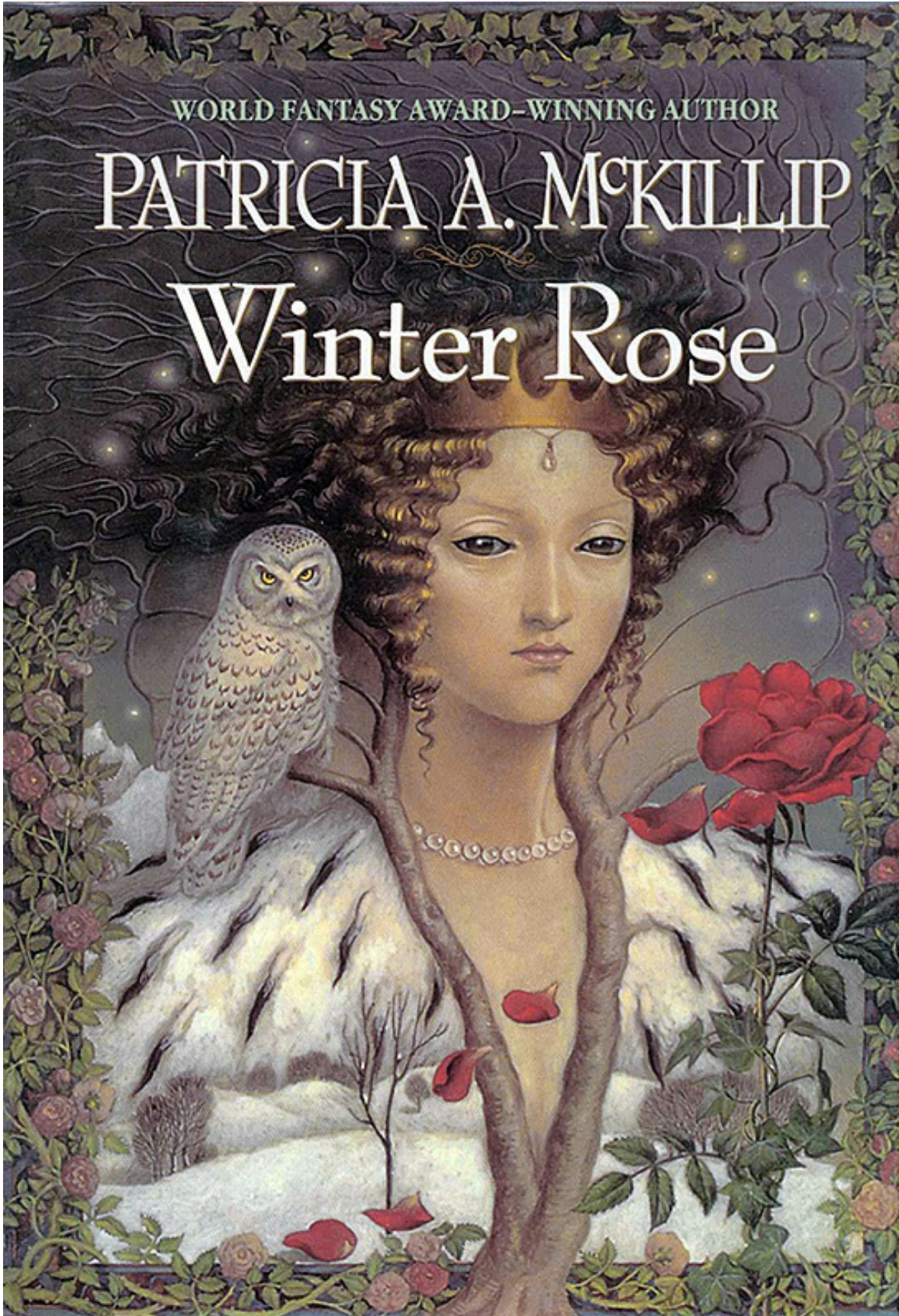
Winter Rose



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 *Winter  
Rose*—

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*for us all*

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## *One*

They said later that he rode into the village on a horse the color of buttermilk, but I saw him walk out of the wood.

I was kneeling at the well; I had just lifted water to my lips. The well was one of the wood's secrets: a deep spring as clear as light, hidden under an overhang of dark stones down which the brier roses fall, white as snow, red as blood, all summer long. The vines hide the water unless you know to look. I found it one hot afternoon when I stopped to smell the roses. Beneath their sweet scent lay something shadowy, mysterious: the smell of earth, water, wet stone. I moved the cascading briars and looked down at my own reflection.

Corbet, he called himself to the villagers. But I saw him before he had any name at all.

My name is Rois, and I look nothing like a rose. The water told me that. Water never lies. I look more like a blackbird, with my flighty black hair and eyes more amber than the blackbird's sunny yellow. My skin is not fit for fairy tales, since I liked to stand in light, with my eyes closed, my face turned upward toward the sun. That's how I saw him at first: as a fall of light, and then something shaping out of the light. So it seemed. I did not move; I let the water stream silently down my wrist. There was a blur of gold: his hair. And then I blinked, and saw his face more clearly.

I must have made some noise then. Perhaps I shifted among the wild fern. Perhaps I sighed. He looked toward me, but there was too much light; I must have been a blur of shadow in his eyes.

Then he walked out of the light.

Of course I thought about him, at first the way you think about