

# UPON YOUR HEADS

IVY SUDWEEKS

*A king finds himself a ruler of a kingdom at peace and a people very discontent to find it that way.*

**H**e reigned in the time when all the world breathed out. Gone were the snakes, the poisons, the wars, and all their contentions, their kings with their leaden crowns, and he was born with hair of purer gold than any of their crowns and eyes as green as holly.

He walked among them, they said, an Arthur in his own right, except he knew what he was without accidentally fetching his birthright. His boots were soft, his muscles firm. He was tall and slender and lithe and flexible in judgment. His sword was at this side, but there was no armor on the man as he walked from house to house as his people patched holes left from those men who had ravaged their land. For in this land, now, there was no need for armor, because peace was the expectation and he was the man who demanded it. He fetched the hearts of all his people.

For a time. And that time flew quickly.

See, there is nothing so flighty as a heart at rest. Time has a way of greying hair and the splendor of peace. Gone were the men who had known the danger of kings with helms instead of crowns. The people looked upon this man, with a thin circle of silver around his head, the crown of his head exposed, and they wondered how they could ever follow a man so weak.

“Who is this man, that we should know him?” The people asked as he sat on his chair made from a barrel. They crafted him a throne, which cost more than all their cattle put together. When they presented it to him, he said that he could not accept, and so the throne lay empty with a people hungry to fill it.

More time passed, and with it, a traveling party of royal women passed through the king’s land, and the people saw in the party, a woman who was fairer than any.

“A match, a match, if there ever was a match to be made,” the people pleaded, but the king brought his own wife forward in the clothes she made herself. She and the fair lady passed time together and the fair lady left the land far more radiant because of the time spent with the King’s wife. “Surely you have missed your chance!” The people howled. “Look at the kings around, with their beautiful wives and their golden chairs and tell us that you are not lacking.”

The king thought and thought on their words, pacing the halls of his castle, for the good of his people was always first on his mind. Finally, he ordered the golden chair to be brought to him and he had it installed in his chamber where he gave judgment. On it, he had installed three thorns, and next to it, he kept his old wooden barrel chair. He sat upon that throne through the years and gave his judgment with his sword upon his knees.

The suns of days rose and fell, and with them rose up a man; a man skilled in metal who had made the crowns of the kings in lands about, but never for himself, to his greatest sorrow. He was the kind of man that, with a word, could break a horse; not through inspiration, but through sheer trickery. And so, he spun his words; should not a king have a crown? Should not their king have a crown to match, no, exceed the crowns of the kings in the lands roundabout?

“Yes,” the people said, and so was forged a crown in the shape of a helm and it was presented to the king as he sat upon that golden throne.

The years that he had sat upon that bright throne had reflected the light of the sun into his green eyes the way his simple wooden one never

had. Erased were the lines worn by smiling. Instead, his eyes had receded into his face to escape from—and all the duller because of—that ever-present light. The people brought the helm to the golden-haired king.

“Here, King,” said the people, and the man who had forged all the crowns brought the helm forward and laid it upon the king’s knee. It sat there with a leaden weight. The golden-headed king looked at that crown with the same weight in his greying eyes, and when he finally rose, he placed the helm, not upon his head but upon his simple wooden chair that always sat so close. The weight of the helm crushed that little wooden chair.

Sparing a single glance at his people, and another to his wooden chair, he uttered only a few words.

“Upon your head, be your crown.”

The king was buried in his simple circlet, his hair still golden after all those years.

When he died, a new king was raised in his place—that same man who had built the crowns of so many kings and, finally, one for himself. When the people saw his mighty helm, they breathed in and dreamed of a man whose crown had been that part of his head where his golden hair had never greyed.