

ROSEMARY & THYME

CHAPTER 1

VICTORIAN FAERIE TALES

BOOK TWO



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STARWATCH
PRESS

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CHAPTER 1



It was nine o' clock on a Friday morning when a faerie walked into Clarimonde's perfume shop in Marylebone and ruined everything.

Technically, of course, it was not *Clarimonde's* perfume shop. The quiet, dignified little building belonged to Mr Aloysius Beagle, who was in turn a quiet, dignified little man. As with many craftsmen, Mr Beagle took great joy in his work and no joy at all in the company of his clients—in consequence of which, he had hired several charming, personable ladies to handle the sordid business of actually *speaking* with the people who hoped to buy his perfumes.

Clarimonde, it must be said, had never been accused of being either charming *or* personable. But perhaps Mr Beagle had seen in her a sort of kindred spirit—for he had hired her regardless. In fact, he often deigned to talk with her when she walked back into the compounding room to take her lunch and watch him work.

Mr Beagle had not protested on the day that Clarimonde attempted a concoction of her own. Rather, he had calmly

informed her that she ought to add less violet to her perfume, as it was likely to overpower her other ingredients.

Bless his soul, but Mr Beagle had clearly never heard the prevailing wisdom that women had no head for chemistry. *Try not to use the jasmine when you're fiddling about*, he'd told Clarimonde. *It's terribly dear*. Apart from this, he'd mostly let her do as she pleased.

Clarimonde was very fond of Mr Beagle. She had realised, very early on, that it would only distress his craftsman's sensibilities to know that she was adding magic to her own perfumes—and so, she did not mention her proclivity for sorcery.

Which was why the faerie in Mr Beagle's perfume shop was so *deeply* vexing.

The gentleman who had entered the perfume shop was tall and willowy, with all the grace of a gazelle and none of its soulfulness. His chestnut hair was long and glossy, pulled back into a tail that nearly reached the back of his knees. This, on its own, would not have announced his vanity—but his narrow features seemed frozen into a perpetually sly expression, and his morning coat was patterned in some monstrously intricate brocade.

Though admittedly eccentric, the man was not *strictly* out of place; the shop was well-regarded, and it regularly drew interest from London's upper-crust. But the gentleman carried with him an intangible air of careless whimsy that tickled at the back of one's neck like the wings of a buzzing fly. It would have been impossible to ignore him.

The offputting fellow turned his glacial blue gaze unerringly to Clarimonde—and smiled.

Clarimonde was not a diviner. As a rule, she left such things as cartomancy to her adoptive sister, Winifred. Even

so, some deep-seated instinct in her stomach informed her that she was about to have a truly *terrible* afternoon.

The gentleman strode directly for the counter, whistling softly to himself. That ridiculous tail of hair swayed idly behind him as he walked. It could not possibly be practical to keep one's hair so long, Clarimonde thought silently. Her own hair—a far less glossy shade of brown—reached just below her shoulders when she didn't have it pinned up into a severe-looking updo. Such length already required far more maintenance than she preferred.

He was not strictly human, Clarimonde decided. It was an abrupt decision, as so many of her decisions often were. Though she did not know which detail had specifically alerted her to the idea, Clarimonde trusted her instincts on the matter implicitly. Most people were very good at overlooking things that they did not expect to see—but Clarimonde had not had that problem since well before her adolescence. Though faeries had not been seen in England for years and years, she was already nearly certain that the man in front of her was one of them.

"I would like one of the magical perfumes you keep behind the counter," the man announced.

Clarimonde's nerves flared with sudden alertness at the statement. Danger tingled on her skin, keen and hot. She glanced swiftly about the shop, reassuring herself that it was otherwise empty of clients.

"Are you *mad*?" Clarimonde hissed at him.

The man smiled at her again, entirely unperturbed. "I have been accused of such before," he said. "But madness is a point of view, I often say."

Clarimonde drew herself up behind the counter. "Mr... whatever-your-name-is—" she began.

"Foxglove," the man interrupted her helpfully. "And it is Lord Foxglove, of course—though you had no way to know that. I forgive you, madam, for the oversight."

Clarimonde pressed her lips together. Each successive word that dripped from his lips only stoked the alarm in her stomach to greater heights. "Of *course* you'd be a lord," she muttered tightly. She didn't bother to examine that idea too closely, however, given the exigency of the situation in which she'd found herself.

"Perhaps you have been gone from England for too long," Clarimonde continued bluntly. "The current Lord Sorcier has outlawed most forms of folk magic—or rather, he has made it criminal for any commoner to practice magic, when one reads between the lines. I cannot sell you any magical perfumes. I would be called a black magician; they would drag me to the gaol."

Lord Foxglove laughed. It was a lovely, pleasant laugh that would have warmed her blood if she had been anyone else. That beautiful laugh only heightened Clarimonde's unease. In her experience, beautiful people rarely meant her well.

"I did not say that I wished to *purchase* a magical perfume," Foxglove assured her. "What foolishness. I said that I would like one of the magical perfumes behind your counter; I will not pay for it. Well... not with *money*." His cold blue eyes were merry with amusement. "As I flew here, I saw a dark shape heading down Oxford Street. Even now, it slouches its way towards your shop. Give me the perfume that I seek, and I will see you away from here before it arrives."

Clarimonde pressed her lips together. Faeries could not lie, she knew—and all of her instincts still assured her that Lord Foxglove was a faerie. But something about his manner continued to trouble her in a way that she could not ignore.

He was... *deceptive*, she decided. Somewhere in his offer, he had lied to her by telling her the truth.

If I give him the perfume, Clarimonde realised, he will have proof that I am a magician. He could do any number of terrible things with that proof.

And what dark shape was headed towards the shop? Perhaps Lord Foxglove had seen an old man in a black coat. He hadn't told Clarimonde that the shape was *dangerous*. Certainly, it could not be any more dangerous than asking a faerie to 'see her away' from the shop.

Clarimonde calmed her heartbeat forcibly, curling her fingers against her palms behind the counter. "I fear that you have wasted your time, such as it is," she told Foxglove. "I cannot give you any magical perfume, Your Lordship."

Foxglove frowned at her. The merriment in his blue eyes dimmed into consternation. "We really do not have time for these games, Clarimonde Betony," he said slowly. "I do not wish to meet what hunts you—"

For the second time that morning, the shop's door opened.

The shape that entered was indeed both dark and foreboding. At first, Clarimonde mistook it for a living shadow, given the way that it blotted out the daylight. After a moment, however, her eyes adjusted, and she understood that it was a man—or else, at the very least, shaped *like* a man. Dark-haired, deathly pale, and ever-so-slightly unkempt, Clarimonde's newest client was nearly as tall as Lord Foxglove, though broader by far in the shoulders. His sombre gentleman's attire seemed subtly ill-fitting, as though the clothing had trouble containing him.

The newcomer smiled tightly at Clarimonde, showing off his very white teeth. "I would like to speak with the person who makes this shop's perfume," he said. His voice was

sonorous and deep, with some intangible quality that made her skin crawl.

Clarimonde glanced instinctively towards Lord Foxglove—but of course, the faerie had entirely disappeared. She internally cursed both herself and the missing creature, before raising her eyes to the new arrival once again.

“Mr Beagle does not generally speak with clients himself,” Clarimonde said. “If it suits you, sir, I could take down a message for him.” Even as she spoke, she started silently calculating her best means of escape. What this man was, precisely, she had little idea—but Lord Foxglove had admitted far too late that he had no wish to meet him, and Clarimonde had detected no deception in *that* statement.

Thankfully, Clarimonde had always been very practised at paranoia. Every morning lately, she had risen with the knowledge that today might be the day that she was finally taken into custody. Even now, there was a sturdy leather valise behind the counter which contained her most useful perfumes, along with a small pile of pence and shillings—certainly enough to purchase a train ticket out of London.

“Mr Beagle will be pleased to hear that I am not a client, then,” the man informed her. “My name is Mr Gabriel Brand. I serve at the pleasure of the Lord Sorcier, under whose authority I must insist on asking him some questions.”

Clarimonde’s body went cold; all thought of escape abruptly fled her mind, as she realised the implications of this statement. Somehow, she had been careless enough to draw attention to the shop. If she left now, it was entirely possible that poor, distracted Mr Beagle would be branded a black magician in her place.

Clarimonde was not fond of very many people—nor were very many people terribly fond of *her*. Mr Beagle had long

been a glaring exception to this rule in both respects. She could not possibly bring herself to leave him in such dire circumstances.

“Ah, well.” Mr Beagle’s high, nasally voice sounded just behind Clarimonde, startling her out of her thoughts. “I knew this day would come. Let’s not belabour the matter, sir. I am the black magician you are searching for, of course.”

Clarimonde whirled in place, staring at her employer. Mr Beagle had roused himself from his compounding room to look in on the store. He spoke mildly from behind his over-large spectacles, pulling off his gloves and tucking them into his apron as though he were preparing to go for a stroll outside.

Horror rose within Clarimonde as she absorbed Mr Beagle’s claim. “Absolutely not!” she burst out. “Shame on you, Mr Beagle. We both know you haven’t a drop of magic to your name.” She glanced back at Mr Brand quickly. “I am the magician you’re searching for. I will prove it in a heartbeat.”

Mr Brand arched an eyebrow at them both. “I will admit,” he said, “I expected far more trouble extracting a confession. I cannot say that I have ever before had too *many* confessions. This promises to be an interesting morning—”

Whatever Mr Brand *intended* to say next was interrupted, as a small white fox streaked out from behind the counter to close its jaws upon his leg.

Mr Brand let out a low sound of surprise. Though dark blood dribbled from the injury, however, he seemed less pained than Clarimonde would have expected. Nevertheless, the sudden appearance of the white fox had certainly *distracted* him; he lashed out quickly with his other foot, grazing the animal across the ribs as it darted away again. A tiny yelp resulted, and Clarimonde nearly launched herself across the

counter with indignation—but Mr Beagle had caught her firmly by the elbow and begun to usher her towards the compounding room.

“Lord Foxglove assured me that he could handle himself,” Mr Beagle told Clarimonde calmly. “He said there is a carriage waiting in the mews, out back.”

Clarimonde lunged to grab her leather valise. As she did, she saw that Mr Brand had recovered himself with unnatural speed. He rounded the counter far too quickly, closing his fingers painfully in her hair. His eyes were just as black and terrible as the shadow that he cast behind him. Clarimonde might have expected to see anger in his expression as he hauled her back—but there was *nothing* in those eyes but placid darkness, and that was somehow even worse.

Clarimonde shoved her elbow into Mr Brand’s midsection. Normally, this would have sufficed to dissuade a man of his stature—she had been told that her elbow was unusually sharp and bony. But Mr Brand merely let out a soft grunt, maintaining his grip on her hair.

Clarimonde fumbled desperately within her valise, searching for one of her perfumes. Her fingers closed upon a vial, even as an impossibly large, snowy white serpent wound its way around Mr Brand’s neck.

Mr Brand released her, reaching up to claw at the snake. It quickly became apparent that no strength of his could pry it loose; instead, he stumbled against the counter, gasping uselessly for breath. His pale face remained unnervingly calm for a man in danger of death.

Part of Clarimonde wanted to protest, to demand that Foxglove relent before he murdered the man—for surely, both the fox and the serpent were merely faerie forms. But again, her instincts told her that Mr Brand was far too dangerous to

treat with kid gloves. If even a lord of faerie was afraid of him, then maybe it was best he died before he could properly fight back.

Instead, Clarimonde pulled the vial from her valise and upended it onto Mr Brand's head.

Thankfully, it was the vial she had thought it was. The awful, garlicky scent of asafoetida instantly overwhelmed the store. Though Mr Beagle kept a bottle of the oil on hand, it was his least favourite ingredient by far—Clarimonde had therefore heard no protests when she'd used a sizeable amount of it to craft a banishing perfume.

This bit of magic finally broke through Mr Brand's strange indifference. His pale skin erupted into crimson streaks where the perfume dripped down his face. He forgot the serpent twined about his neck, opting instead to claw at his eyes. Soon, he had tumbled to the floor; a moment later, Clarimonde heard his screams begin, as the white serpent slithered quickly away.

An instant later, Lord Foxglove was beside her, taking her other arm in his. His long brown tail of hair had bleached to perfect white; his narrow features were even more vulpine and inhuman, and his very fine waistcoat now glowed like silver moonlight. Between the faerie and Mr Beagle, Clarimonde found herself neatly propelled along towards the back room.

"Goodness," Lord Foxglove said cheerfully. "I should like one of *those* perfumes, I think. Have you another one on hand?"

Clarimonde picked up her pace between the two men, trying to ignore the agonised screams still echoing in her ears. "I will find you something equally impressive," she told Lord Foxglove breathlessly. "I dare say you have earned it."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Olivia Atwater writes whimsical historical fantasy with a hint of satire. She lives in Montreal, Quebec with her fantastic, prose-inspiring husband and her two cats. When she told her second-grade history teacher that she wanted to work with history someday, she is fairly certain this isn't what either party had in mind. She has been, at various times, a historical re-enactor, a professional witch at a metaphysical supply store, a web developer, and a vending machine repairperson.



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