

ROSEMARY & THYME

CHAPTERS 1-3

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."

CHAPTER 2



There was indeed a carriage waiting in the mews behind the perfume shop. The sight of it made Clarimonde instinctively drag her feet.

Swathed entirely in black, the carriage was far too long and thin—though it looked as though it could still seat several people comfortably. Dark curtains fell across its oblong windows, obscuring everything inside. A strange and terrible foreboding emanated from the vehicle, touching Clarimonde’s heart with dread.

“Is that a *hearse*?” she demanded.

“Oh, technically yes,” Lord Foxglove said casually, continuing to tug her forwards. “I won it in a wager with a sluagh, several years ago. She hasn’t yet forgiven me.”

Mr Beagle released Clarimonde’s arm, stepping back from her in order to adjust his spectacles. “It hasn’t any horses,” he observed.

Clarimonde glanced at the front of the hearse. Indeed, there were no horses currently attached to it—nor even a visible method of attaching one.

"Of course there are no horses," Lord Foxglove retorted. "Why would there be horses? This is a faerie carriage; it makes its own decisions. Horses would merely get in the way." He finally let Clarimonde go in order to pull out a set of stairs at the back of the hearse. As he reached for them, the carriage shifted; the stairs snapped closed again, and Foxglove snatched his hand back, watching the hearse with sudden wariness. The strange feeling of existential dread surrounding it increased.

"I don't think your hearse wants us as passengers," Clarimonde said faintly.

Lord Foxglove straightened himself with annoyance. "Of course it doesn't," he said. "Would *you* enjoy dragging several heavy people about?" The faerie reached out carefully to place his palm against the side of the hearse. "Darling," he said, in a soothing tone, "I know you've had a hard day. London is so wretchedly loud and dirty, isn't it?"

The carriage shifted and settled beneath his hand, as though silently grumbling. Black curtains twitched, however, which suggested that it was listening.

"I would *love* for you to take us all away from here, as fast as you can manage," Lord Foxglove coaxed the hearse. "I know you'd like that too. Why—we can take off the very *moment* that we are all inside, and leave this city far behind us."

Gradually, the sense of dread began to ease. The carriage steps descended slowly, and Foxglove patted the hearse approvingly. "I knew you would come through for me," he said.

Clarimonde took a step towards the hearse—but when she noticed that Mr Beagle had not moved, she turned to face him urgently.

"You must come with us, Mr Beagle," she told him. "What if you are arrested for helping me escape?"

Mr Beagle shook his head mildly. "I will handle my own affairs, Miss Betony," he replied. "I can hail a carriage of my own. It is an excellent time, I think, to go on holiday."

Lord Foxglove cleared his throat pointedly, still lingering next to the carriage steps. "Not that I would ever dictate a lady's business," he said, "but that wretched hound will recover himself eventually. It would be best if we have left before he does."

It was clear from the way that Foxglove spoke the word 'hound' that he had chosen it for a reason. But Clarimonde did not immediately ask him to elaborate upon it. She was far too consumed with Mr Beagle, who had set his features into a familiar, slightly pinched expression which meant that he was already irritated with the length of their conversation.

Clarimonde shot her employer one last helpless look. Finally, she reached out to squeeze his hand. "Thank you," she said softly. "For everything. I am terribly sad that I might not see you again, Mr Beagle."

Mr Beagle did not smile—but Clarimonde thought, perhaps, that he had squeezed her hand a little in return. "You are not a terribly effective salesgirl, Miss Betony," he informed her. "But you are an *excellent* chemist. Wherever you are going, I do hope that you continue your work."

Mr Beagle released her hand. And then, with a severe, long-suffering expression, he shooed her towards the hearse, where Lord Foxglove offered out his hand to help her up the steps.

Clarimonde took the faerie's hand and clambered up the stairs. Lord Foxglove's grip was unnervingly light, such that she could not help the feeling that his support might evapo-

rate at any moment. Nevertheless, she slid herself into the hearse, which had been outfitted with long, black velvet seats—at which point she discovered that someone else was already seated across from her.

The woman in question was dressed as though she'd come directly from a funeral. Her dull black hair had been tightly pinned atop her head, though wisps of it escaped in places to frame her face. Dramatic widow's weeds spilled across the seats on her side of the carriage, drowning her entire form in black crepe. Despite this grim spectacle, her expression was bountifully cheerful.

Clarimonde blinked at her in surprise. "Bellamira?" she said. "What are *you* doing here?"

"A good morning to you too, Clarimonde!" Bellamira enthused. "Oh, isn't this exciting? I do believe that we are going on an adventure." Clarimonde's youngest adoptive sister waved a black silk handkerchief in one hand as she spoke, gesturing with it emphatically. "And as to what has happened—"

One of Bellamira's dramatic flourishes nearly caught Lord Foxglove across the face as he joined them in the carriage. The faerie jerked back from her flailing hand with an alarmed twitch of his narrow nose. "Madam," he sighed. "*Please*. I have already been attacked once today."

Bellamira offered him a winning smile. "Ah, our hero!" she greeted him. "Do join us, Mr Fox! I was about to explain the situation."

Lord Foxglove's nose twitched again—perhaps even more violently—at the suggestion of this ill-distinguished nickname. But he smoothed his features into a generally friendly expression as he settled into the seat beside Clarimonde and

pulled the carriage door closed. A moment later, the vehicle shuddered oddly and began to move.

“As I was saying before,” Bellamira continued blithely, “dear old Winnie has sent another letter. It came first to Mrs Lowe, who brought it then to Hugh, who passed it on to *me*. It is so very full of dangerous things that I wouldn’t know where to begin! I was just about to die for a little bit so I could ask Winifred a few more questions, in fact... but Mr Fox arrived first in his very fine carriage and said that he was here to spirit us both away to Witchwood Manor.”

Clarimonde glanced sharply at Lord Foxglove, who had leaned back heavily into the seat to rub at his ribs. Sympathy flickered through her as she remembered the way that Mr Brand had caught the snowy fox with his foot. She leaned down to open up her leather valise and started searching through its contents. “Winnie sent you to retrieve us, then,” Clairmonde observed quietly. “You should have simply told me that.”

She pulled another vial from the valise—a small, squat bottle with a brass-coloured cap—and offered it out to the faerie. “This is mainly blue violet, with a few other additives. It should help with the pain. You’ll only need a little bit; you may keep the rest, if it suits you. I did promise you a magical perfume.”

Lord Foxglove accepted the vial with a slight inclination of his head. He loosened the cap in order to give the perfume a tentative sniff. A surprised and deeply mollified expression followed. “Lovely,” said the faerie. “I thought it might be stronger, like the formula you used before. But this is wonderfully delicate.”

His tone had warmed with obvious approval—in fact, it was the same tone he had used to mollify the hearse. Though

Clarimonde knew better, she could not help being reluctantly affected by the praise. Her skill with perfumes was a point of pride; though she had worked endlessly to perfect it, she so rarely had a chance to put it on display.

“All scents should be tailored for their use,” said Clarimonde. “Asafoetida is an assault on the senses, which is why I used it on Mr Brand. But easing someone’s pain ought to be gentle and comforting.” She studied Foxglove’s narrow features more intently. “Besides... I have an inkling that strong smells would overwhelm you. You are a puca, are you not? You could be any sort of shapeshifter, I suppose—but you are very fond of animal forms.”

Lord Foxglove had just dabbed a hint of the perfume onto the inside of his wrist. At this, however, he offered Clarimonde another smile of surprise. “I am a puca,” he confirmed. “How very clever you are, Miss Betony. But that is common in your family, of course.”

It was odd, Clarimonde thought, how easily Lord Foxglove charmed her, even as she noted tiny signs of insincerity in his manner. There was a method to his flattery; he had already recognised that she preferred to be complimented on her mind, and that her sisters were important to her. This, she thought, must be his own particular well-honed skill. The overall effect was irresistibly pleasant—rather like a properly mixed perfume.

She did her best to let the words pass through her, refocussing herself on the situation at hand.

“Winnie awaits us at Witchwood Manor, then,” Clarimonde observed. “But will we truly be safe there?”

Lord Foxglove tilted his head at her, and Clarimonde realised that she had changed the subject rather bluntly. Nevertheless, the faerie followed her lead. “I doubt that

anywhere is truly *safe* from the Lord Sorcier and his hound," he said. "But Miss Winifred has made powerful alliances which might extend to you—and that is something, I suppose."

Though Lord Foxglove's manner was still easy and approachable, something subtle in his phrasing made Clarimonde frown. "You don't approve of those alliances?" she asked him slowly.

Lord Foxglove blinked once. "Oh, my opinion seems irrelevant," he said. "Miss Winifred has always done as she sees fit. Do you know, I knew her when she was a child? I often visited Hollowvale, where her sleeping spirit dreamed. She really has not changed a bit—though she is taller now, I must admit."

Clarimonde's frown deepened at the attempted deflection. "Mr Fox," she addressed him, with a deliberate edge of frostiness, "I am becoming increasingly cross with your insistence on dancing around the truth—"

The hearse swerved abruptly, knocking all of them askew. Clarimonde struggled to sit up again, spitting out a bit of black crepe from Bellamira's voluminous skirts.

"Oh dear," said Bellamira. "We are being hunted."

Lord Foxglove knitted his brow at her as he pushed himself back up in his seat. "We needn't leap to conclusions," he said. "The hearse is somewhat jumpy today."

Bellamira shook her head, pressing her lips together. Her hands twisted in her skirts. "I heard a dog howling on the breeze," she said. "It was signalling its master. The sound is plain as day to me—but I suppose it is not pitched for living ears."

Clarimonde drew in a soft breath. Bellamira had always been a sickly child in the workhouses; even now, her heart

was weak and prone to wavering, such that their brother Hugh had kept her under careful medication. Bellamira's resulting nearness to death had granted her an unusual sense for the spirit world that very few people shared.

Lord Foxglove studied Bellamira intently, measuring the sincerity in her manner. "The hound pursues us, then," he said reluctantly. His icy blue eyes flickered over to Clarimonde, beside him. "He caught you briefly, Miss Betony—I remember it. He must have stolen a strand of your hair and given it to his black dog."

Clarimonde let out a frustrated sound. "I take it his black dog can chase us anywhere?" she guessed.

"Anywhere at all," Lord Foxglove said grimly. "In this world or in faerie... as long as the object of its search is with us." His gaze sharpened on Clarimonde—and suddenly, she had the impression that he was considering whether he might get away with tossing her out of the carriage entirely.

Clarimonde lifted her eyes to his in a direct challenge, reaching for her bag. Perhaps Foxglove was beyond her power, as a lord of faerie—but he was not currently within his realm, whatever it was, and she was certain that she could make him badly regret the decision currently solidifying behind his eyes.

"I know very little about black dogs," Bellamira said, clearly unaware of the sudden tension in the air. "But I know much of magic, and of Mr Brand himself. We have crossed paths many times. I believe that I can handle this."

Her confident declaration interrupted the silent pressure brewing between Clarimonde and Foxglove. The faerie reached up to adjust his neckcloth. "And what do you propose, exactly?" he asked.

Bellamira did not answer him directly. Instead, she shifted

forwards with an awkward rustle of skirts, as though to switch places with Lord Foxglove. "Take down your hair, Clarimonde," she said. "Quickly, please. I'll need to braid it."

Lord Foxglove held up his hand. "I am quite capable with braids," he assured Bellamira. "I can handle the task." He tilted his head in order to display his long white-blond tail of hair. Bellamira settled back into her seat with a mollified nod of her head.

Clarimonde did not bother arguing with her sister. Instead, she began removing the pins that kept her updo in place. A moment later, Foxglove joined her in the work, flicking hairpins free with admirable facility. His long fingers were so exacting, in fact, that she barely felt them at all. His touch ghosted past her skin like a lazy breeze; where it passed, hair seemed to tumble free of its own accord. For some reason, Clarimonde's breath hitched at the sensation with irritating awareness.

That awareness only sharpened further as Foxglove gathered up her hair in his hands. It was, Clarimonde realised, a bizarrely intimate feeling, having a man touch her hair—even for such exigent reasons. Faeries had such strange standards of conduct, though, that Lord Foxglove probably felt nothing odd about it. Had she done something so banal as to ask his full name, however, she might have mortally insulted him.

"Oh, just a *small* braid," Bellamira interjected, as Foxglove began to weave Clarimonde's hair together. "I'll be cutting it off, after all." Clarimonde's sister had begun to pull down her rough black hair as well, sticking pins between her lips.

Foxglove swiftly backtracked his progress, taking a much smaller band of Clarimonde's hair between his fingers. "Split ends," he sighed as he worked. "I take it you don't oil your hair?"

Clarimonde bristled beneath his touch. "My hair has never been my first priority," she said tightly.

"I meant no insult," the faerie told her mildly. "I simply wondered if you knew it was an option. Your hair is dry, but just a bit of oil would do wonders. It would tangle less, as well."

The practical advice left Clarimonde feeling oddly off-balance. "I have... other things to worry about," she mumbled self-consciously. "My ongoing presence in this carriage, for instance."

Lord Foxglove did not answer—but Clarimonde thought she felt him stiffen for just an instant, as she voiced the observation aloud.

"I always end up putting on too *much* oil," Bellamira sighed, still comfortably oblivious to the tension between the other two people in the carriage. "I have given up entirely on my hair, unless I am dressing up for a seance." Clarimonde's sister finished off her own tiny braid, before tugging at a silver chain around her neck. This produced a small knife from within her corsetry, which she used to snip the braid away from her scalp. Bellamira knotted the hair at both ends and offered it out to Clarimonde, along with her little knife.

Clarimonde took Bellamira's braid uneasily. "What am I to do with this?" she asked her sister. Foxglove reached past her to pluck the knife from Bellamira—and just a moment later, Clarimonde felt a shiver of air against her neck, where her own braid had been cut away.

"Well, you are going to pin my hair against your own, of course," Bellamira told her matter-of-factly. "And I will wear *your* braid, Clarimonde. With just a bit of magic, I can make the black dog think that you are me and I am you. I will lead it on a merry chase."

Clarimonde sat up straighter in her seat. "Absolutely not!" she burst out sharply. "Mr Brand will catch you, Bellamira. I shudder to think what he might do to you. You are a black magician too, as far as the Lord Sorcier is concerned."

Bellamira waved a hand, as though this very reasonable concern was actually quite silly. "I told you earlier," she said. "I have crossed paths with Mr Brand before. I have no doubt that he would harm you if he caught you, Clarimonde... but he will never lay a hand on *me*. He has had ample opportunity to do so, many times already."

She snatched Clarimonde's dark brown braid from Lord Foxglove's hand and started winding it through her hair, slowly replacing her pins as she went.

Clarimonde did not share her sister's casual optimism on the matter. "And what if you are wrong, Bellamira?" she demanded. "Mr Brand is not a human being; he is something far more terrible, if *asafoetida* affects him as it does."

Bellamira paused, partway through sticking a hairpin into her updo. She lifted her dark eyes to Clarimonde's face with a serene, familiar calm upon her features. "If I am wrong," she said, "then I will die. But I am due for that, regardless. I feel it coming, Clarimonde. Hugh has done his best—but my heart has only so much strength remaining. If Mr Brand attempts to terrify or torment me, he will only kill me sooner. I think somehow he knows that. It is why he has not bothered to pursue me; I am a problem that will solve itself."

Horrible silence settled into the carriage at this revelation. Clarimonde felt the words sink into her chest, sick and terribly suffocating. She opened her mouth to speak—but realised belatedly that she did not know what she intended to say. Instead, her throat closed up, and the silence deepened further.

Bellamira offered her sister an oddly sympathetic look. It was clear that the idea of her death bothered her far less than the effects that it might have on her family. “I have lived far longer than I should have done,” she told Clarimonde gently. “I am grateful for that, Clarimonde. I value my own life; I do not rush off to my death with eagerness. But I have only so much time left—and this is how I choose to spend it.”

Clarimonde fought back a surge of panicked grief, as hot tears stung at her eyes. For so long, she had known that Bellamira was dying—it was her natural state. But Hugh had made such strides in her care, improving her ability to flit about as though nothing was the matter at all. Somehow, Clarimonde had managed to convince herself that Bellamira would not *really* die.

“I don’t want to lose you,” Clarimonde rasped. It was the only thing that she could think to say. It was the deepest truth she had to offer, in the moment.

Bellamira smiled. “I know,” she said softly. “So long ago, I asked you what you wished to do with the time that *you* have been given... and you chose to spend it with me. I cannot express how happy that made me.” She reached out to close her hand around Clarimonde’s, threading their fingers together gently. “You gave me your time, Clarimonde—and now, I will give you mine. I love you so very dearly... and Winnie, too. Please tell her that.”

Lord Foxglove closed his hand on Clarimonde’s shoulder. A jolt of alarm leapt through her, as she remembered that she was on guard against being tossed out of the hearse—but the faerie only tightened his grip briefly, as though to offer comfort.

“You should take the train to Wellington,” Bellamira

addressed Lord Foxglove briskly. "I will take the hearse, if you don't mind. I can lead Mr Brand on a longer chase that way."

Lord Foxglove retracted his hand from Clarimonde's shoulder. "The carriage might not *listen* to you," he pointed out. "And I would hate to see anything happen to it."

Bellamira stroked the velvet next to her affectionately. "We are already friends," she told him. "I met this carriage long ago, when Black Catastrophe was its owner. I always wondered where it had gone off to." She offered him a reassuring expression. "I will not let anything happen to your hearse. Once I am caught, it will know its way home."

Clarimonde drew in a shuddering breath, trying to stabilise herself. Emotions still whirled within her, insisting that there had to be a different way—one that somehow fixed her sister's heart and kept them all together. "Don't be silly, Bellamira," she said. "We must find a better solution. In any case, what will the two of us do without a carriage of our own?"

Bellamira raised her eyebrows at Lord Foxglove, with a mischievous sparkle in her dark eyes. "Goodness," she said. "I thought the answer to *that* was perfectly obvious."

Lord Foxglove stiffened in his seat. "Absolutely not," he declared.

The hearse swerved again. This time, it elicited panicked shouts as Marylebone's morning visitors leapt out of its way.

Bellamira offered Lord Foxglove a mild look as she pulled herself up from the floor of the hearse. "I am open to alternative suggestions," she said.

Lord Foxglove did not answer.

CHAPTER 3



Clarimonde considered herself to be a woman of many talents. She was, of course, a chemist of perfumes; she knew a great deal about plants and their magical properties; she was enough of a seamstress to keep her clothing in good working order; she was even, secretly, quite dangerous with a parasol.

Tragically, she had not ever learned to ride a horse.

“Oh, God!” Clarimonde whimpered, as the magnificent white horse beneath her narrowly dodged a soot-covered curricule. “Please, *please* slow down!” Her knees ached with the effort of holding her in place; each clattering stride came with another awkward, bruising jolt that rattled every bone in her body.

Lord Foxglove did *not* slow down. Instead, the faerie-turned-horse careened around the corner of Marylebone Road with unnatural speed, dancing briefly off the road in order to avoid another carriage. A knot of women scattered before him, dropping their laundry. A pair of white linen drawers snagged upon Clarimonde’s boot and stuck there,

flapping madly behind her like a flag. She didn't dare reach down to pluck them free, and so they stayed where they were.

"Do you even *know* where Euston station is?" she yelled over the wind.

Lord Foxglove did not answer her. It hardly mattered; Clarimonde was far too absorbed in trying to stay on his back to make any further demands of him.

As streets blurred past, it occurred to her that puca were well known for violently disposing of people who dared to ride them. Surely, though, Foxglove would not toss Clarimonde into the street? He had told Bellamira that he was there to take them back to Witchwood Manor—and that could not have been a direct lie.

But did he make a promise to that effect? Clarimonde wondered fretfully. Or is it simply his intention? He is so slippery with the truth. What if there are technicalities involved?

The longer that Clarimonde reflected on this thought, and the more her muscles began to burn with the effort of staying on the horse, the more her fear began to rise. Lord Foxglove had fully intended to throw her from the carriage in order to save himself, she knew—and now, he had her entirely at his mercy, unable to reach for her perfumes in order to defend herself. Perhaps he intended to ride until Clarimonde lost her grip and split her head open? In which case, he could claim it was an accident—

Just as this terrible idea seized her, however, Clarimonde became aware of the Euston Arch rising up ahead of them. The archway's grand columns struck her with instant relief, and she let out a heavy breath against Foxglove's white mane. Dimly, she noticed that he did not smell of horse at all—instead, there was only the faintest scent of violets, from the perfume she had given him before.

Lord Foxglove eased his pace as they approached the Arch. Clarimonde loosened her grip on him in turn—but the burning in her legs informed her that she would be *very* sore for several days to come.

Finally, he came to a complete stop next to one of the towering columns. Passers-by stared openly at Clarimonde as she eased herself timidly from the back of a white, other-worldly faerie steed, kicking halfheartedly at the pair of drawers still stuck to her foot. Her hair, she knew, was in shambles, and her legs still shook as they tried to hold her up.

Foxglove let out a single sharp breath—and then suddenly, Clarimonde found herself clinging to his arm, as he dusted off the glimmering threads of moonlight in his waistcoat. Once again, the faerie was a tall, effervescent man, with white hair spilling down his back; obviously strange, and decidedly impossible to miss.

Clarimonde swallowed, reaching up to shove her disheveled hair out of her face. A melancholy spike of relief struck her as her fingers encountered Bellamira's tiny black braid, still firmly pinned there.

"I do, in fact, know where Euston station is," Lord Foxglove told her mildly. He tucked her hand into his arm, and started for the courtyard. "It is hardly new to me. I used to visit London all of the time, before this nasty business with Secundus started up again."

Clarimonde followed his lead in a daze. Later, she would be embarrassed to realise how tightly she had clung to the faerie's arm. "You mean... Lord *Cassius* Secundus?" she asked dimly. "Our new Lord Sorcier?"

"Yes, him," Lord Foxglove murmured. "He whose hound you met this morning. He has many names, of course. He would not use his true name here in England."

Clarimonde turned her head to stare at him. “You mean to say that... the Lord Sorcier is a *faerie*?” she asked incredulously. “We were convinced that all of the faeries had left England! But he was right in front of us, all along?”

Lord Foxglove frowned distantly. “Oh no,” he said. “Secundus is something far darker than a faerie. I do not know the term that you might use—but we have always called his kind the *fómóraiğ*. And he is royalty among them.”

Clarimonde stiffened. “Winnie mentioned that word before in her letters,” she said. “It has something to do with Witchwood Manor.”

Lord Foxglove kept his icy gaze ahead of them. The slight smile on his face was far too pleasant; Clarimonde could not tell whether it was hiding fear or pain or fury. “Secundus is the creature who trapped me at Witchwood Manor, along with many other faeries,” he informed her. “Miss Winifred released us from his curse—which is how I stand before you now.”

Clarimonde’s lips parted with understanding. “Then you are here because you owe her for your freedom,” she said. “You are paying off that debt.”

Lord Foxglove shrugged eloquently, as though to agree with her. But Clarimonde noted instantly that he had not actually *answered* the question.

“You are... *not* paying off that debt,” she corrected herself. “But you would like for me to believe that you are.”

The faerie tensed subtly against her hand—and Clarimonde knew that she had guessed correctly. As they reached the station’s entrance, she pulled her hand away from him in order to cross her arms, watching him expectantly.

After a very long silence, the faerie sighed.

“I know you not at all, Miss Betony,” he told her bluntly. “I

have no reason to believe that you are any friend of mine. I do not *owe* you the entire truth about... any of this, really. Nor will I give it to you freely."

Clarimonde narrowed her eyes at him. "I don't know you very well, either," she replied. "Yet I am forced to trust you, either way."

Lord Foxglove chuckled to himself. "Life is terribly unfair, isn't it?" he said. "Now then—are we taking the train to Wellington, or no?"

Clarimonde stifled a sound of deep frustration. There was no point in arguing the matter with him, though; Lord Foxglove held almost all of the cards in this particular situation.

"Answer me just one question, then, directly," Clarimonde said, "and you may evade the rest as you see fit. Have you promised to protect me until I have safely reached Witchwood Manor?"

Lord Foxglove considered this question visibly, picking it apart in his head. Finally, he said: "I have made that promise, yes."

Clarimonde nodded slowly. *There are clearly exceptions to that promise*, she thought. *But it is helpful enough that I will keep him with me. I need not trust him implicitly.*

"Then yes," she said. "We are still taking the train to Wellington. But..." A sheepish expression crossed her face. "I don't suppose that you could turn into something small, and travel in my pocket?"

Lord Foxglove raised his eyebrows incredulously. "I have already carried you on my back, like some tawdry faerie servant," he said. "If anyone ever hears of that, I will not live it down. Why *precisely* should I demean myself further?"

Clarimonde winced. "Well, I... don't have very much

money with me," she admitted. "I was only expecting to need enough to pay for my own train ticket, if I had to flee London. I *could* buy two tickets, but I would be worried about having enough money left to hire a carriage, once we reach Wellington."

A deeply pained expression came over Foxglove's features, tugging at his brow. Silence fell between them, as outrage warred with practicality in his posture.

"I swear that I will never tell a soul," Clarimonde assured him hastily. "I will mention neither the ride here, nor the means of your train travel. It is the very least that I can do."

Lord Foxglove fought with himself for several more seconds. His long fingers slipped up to fiddle with his neck cloth, with obvious agitation. Finally, however, he shook his head. "Not a *single* soul," he warned her. "I will make a misery of your existence if you do—you know that I can."

Clarimonde nodded with mute relief.

She blinked—and then, the faerie that had been standing next to her was gone. In his place was a tiny white mouse, sitting regally on its haunches. Somehow, the little faerie creature managed to maintain a stately, patronising air, even as Clarimonde reached down to take it into her hands.

Foxglove's tiny pink nose twitched with irritation. Briefly, she thought that he might bite her—but he refrained, thankfully, and she slipped him very delicately into the pocket of her chequered cotton skirt.

Though Clarimonde knew perfectly well how to get to Euston station, she had never actually entered it before. As she walked inside, she was struck with a sort of surprised awe which she normally reserved for grand churches. The Great Hall was nearly as tall and broad as a cathedral, in fact, with the same echoing vastness. Several columns fenced in the

space, reaching up towards huge windows. Despite the clear morning sunlight that streamed inside, gaslamps littered the interior, casting cheerful illumination across the seating there. An overlarge statue of a sober-looking gentleman stood just before a set of diamond stairs near the back, looking over the place as though it were his personal kingdom.

Though there were several passengers waiting in the Hall, the place was surprisingly quiet. Perhaps, Clarimonde thought, the church-like atmosphere had convinced those present that speaking too loudly would offend the mighty statue at the back of the room. She found herself particularly conscious of the clip that her walking boots made against the floor as she headed for the booking hall to her left.

"One passenger to Wellington," she mumbled at the window there. Her voice came out unusually hushed.

"One passenger to Wellington," repeated the man behind the wicket. "That will be sixty-nine pence, please."

Clarimonde rummaged for the coins in her valise, biting back a grimace. The cost was manageable—but it was far more than she normally preferred to spend. *You're fleeing the city*, she reminded herself, *not buying yourself a holiday*.

She snatched up her paper ticket and followed the man's directions to the departure platform. Thankfully, the ten o' clock train was already sitting in the station waiting to leave; sitting too long in that large, open hall would have unnerved her terribly.

Clarimonde flashed her ticket as she made her way onto one of the second-class carriages, picking her way down the hallway. Passengers were sparse on a Thursday morning, such that she soon found herself an entirely empty shed near the back of the car.

She sat down on one of the leather seats near the window

and set her valise on the floor next to her feet, carefully arranging her skirts in order to offer the mouse in her pocket plenty of breathing room.

Clarimonde leaned her forehead against the window of the train as it departed, watching as the station slowly slipped past.

She'd thought herself prepared to leave the city. In the last month, especially, she had pared down her belongings as much as she could manage and left instructions with Hugh for disposal of the rest, in case she was unable to return. Her leather valise held all of the most crucial necessities to see her through the next few days. All of these precautions had turned out to be perfectly sensible—even prescient—now that she'd been forced to execute her worst-case plans.

But in that moment, Clarimonde did not feel proud of herself. Instead, there was only a terrible emptiness inside of her where normal emotions should have been.

I am on a train heading out of London, she thought hollowly. I may not ever return here again. I will certainly never see my room again. I am leaving Hugh behind. Bellamira may be dead already.

What use was there in escaping at all, Clarimonde wondered, if it required her to leave behind so many things she cared about?

Probably, she ought to cry. A long, miserable cry would undoubtedly help. But though she felt the possibility of tears rising up inside of her, she had no desire to cry while the mouse in her pocket could hear it. Just because Lord Foxglove had promised to protect her did not mean that she felt inclined to trust him with her emotions.

Clarimonde's palm brushed against cool metal—whereupon she realised that her hand had slipped into the pocket opposite of the one where Foxglove currently hid. An old,

shameful instinct often led her to seek comfort from the lovely silver pill box that had once been there; but Clarimonde had long since given up that box to Bellamira. In its place was a brass pocket watch that quietly ticked against her fingers.

Clarimonde's heart clenched in her chest. Nevertheless, she pulled out the pocket watch and clicked it open, in order to read the words on the inside of the lid:

Here is your time.

Once, Clarimonde had been so terrified that she would forget Bellamira's words to her that she'd paid to have a version of them engraved upon the watch out of her own salary.

Normally, the sight of the watch was a reminder of every reason she'd had to throw away her pill box. Today, however, it seemed to hold an awful double-meaning. Even now, Bellamira's tiny bit of time was ticking away. Perhaps, in fact, it had already run out.

"Plenty of room in here, it seems!" a man's voice observed cheerfully. "And the view is excellent, as well."

Clarimonde glanced up sharply, shoving the pocket watch back into her pocket. A man in a striped linen suit and a dark wool jacket had strolled into the shed with her. Despite being inside, he'd left his boiler hat noticeably perched atop his head. His too-thin tie seemed to gesture at his pointed leather shoes, and his overly curled moustache surrounded him with the nauseatingly strong miasma of far too much pomade.

Despite the obvious empty seats, the newcomer soon threw himself down directly next to Clarimonde, grinning over at her with an enthusiasm that she did not share. As his leg brushed the edge of her skirts, she jerked back from him with obvious offence. "I did not ask for company," she told

him sharply. "There is at least one other empty shed, if you would like one to yourself."

Mr Moustache blinked his watery brown eyes—now offended in turn at her tone. "Good God!" he said. "Is that how you greet *every* man you meet?"

Clarimonde pressed her lips together. Long ago, she now remembered, Winnie had warned her never to travel alone on trains; 'always sit down with another woman,' she'd advised. Clarimonde had never bothered to ask her why—but given the number of times she'd swatted off insistent men with her parasol on the way to work, the reason *should* have been obvious to her.

"I left my parasol in the compounding room at work today," Clarimonde informed the man flatly.

His brow wrinkled with confusion now. "What on earth is that supposed to mean?" he asked. His moustache twitched, and Clarimonde was forced to cover her nose as she caught another hideous whiff of his pomade.

"It *means*," she informed him, in a faintly nasal tone, "that I cannot swat you off as I would normally do. Which means, in turn, that I will be forced to use a perfume upon you. And while that *might* be something of a service to the rest of the people in second class, I guarantee that you would not enjoy the experience."

The man's eyes widened with outrage. He leaned in closer, pressing Clarimonde flat against the window. The scent of pomade was now so overwhelming that bile had started to sting at the back of her throat. "Now see *here*, old girl—" he began.

A small white shape darted up from Clarimonde's pocket, winding its way around her neck with a loud hiss.

The man with the pomade moustache leapt back with a

strangled shriek, stumbling up to his feet. "You brought a *reptile* on board the ten o' clock train?" he demanded, in a high-pitched tone. "Is it *poisonous*?"

Clarimonde craned her neck to glance down at the tiny white viper that had wrapped itself partway around her high collar. "Goodness, I don't know," she said honestly. "I would love to find out."

"You mad harridan!" Mr Moustache edged back further into the hallway, with his eyes carefully fixed upon Foxglove. "They'll throw you off for this!"

Clarimonde sighed heavily. "Lord, how I miss my parasol," she muttered. Then, more loudly, she said: "Are we done, sir?"

Foxglove hissed again—and this time, Mr Moustache fled the vicinity entirely, disappearing down the hallway.

Clarimonde leaned her head against the window, as a piercing headache started up behind her eyes. "I do appreciate the assistance," she mumbled, "but I could have handled that myself."

A soft voice hissed into her ear, in reply. "Perhapssss," Lord Foxglove agreed. "But we might yet require your perfumessss."

Clarimonde grimaced. "Well... that is true," she admitted. "I only have so many."

The snake slithered down from her neck onto the leather seat, coiling itself into a loose pile. When next Clarimonde glanced over, she saw Lord Foxglove sitting beside her as a man once again, fretting over a tangle in his long white hair. "You are *terrible* at dealing with people, by the way," he observed. "How ever did you become a shop girl?"

Clarimonde narrowed her eyes at him. "Just because I don't smile when I am treated badly does not make me *terrible* with people," she shot back at him. In truth, she'd often called

herself unsocial—but her knee-jerk wariness around the faerie impelled her to disagree with him on principle.

Lord Foxglove shook his head with exasperation, tossing his hair back behind him. “I didn’t suggest you should *smile*,” he said. “You might have *coughed* at him. Big, hacking coughs. He’d have fled in an instant.”

Clarimonde blinked. “Well, I...” She paused briefly, stumped by the suggestion. “That probably would have been easier,” she admitted finally.

Lord Foxglove fixed a severe look upon her. “He’s likely gone to complain to someone official-looking now,” he said. “Would you like my advice on how to handle *that*?”

Clarimonde stifled a groan. “I suppose I ought to take you up on that,” she said reluctantly.

A few minutes later, the man with the moustache returned, hiding defiantly behind a uniformed employee.

“I’m told you have a *snake* on board, madam?” the employee said, with more than a hint of astonishment.

Clarimonde—now alone in the shed—offered him a deeply puzzled expression. “You were told *what*?” she asked. “By *whom*?”

“She’s lying!” Mr Moustache declared furiously. “I saw it myself! She had it around her neck!”

Clarimonde offered him a look that fell partway between pity and disgust. “Oh, *him*,” she sighed. “I fear I told this gentleman—somewhat indelicately—that his pomade was making me ill. I asked him to leave, and he took terrible offence. He did mention something about a snake, but I couldn’t understand what he was on about.” She raised her eyebrows at both men. “Has he perhaps been drinking?”

The railroad employee turned to consider the man behind him. “Sir,” he said firmly, “*have* you been drinking?”

Mr Moustache blinked several times, caught off guard by the sudden reversal in his situation. "I have *not*!" he said furiously. "This woman is lying! I *swear* to you, there was a snake around her neck!"

Clarimonde tilted her head to show off her high collar, where there was—of course—no snake. "I do hope you don't intend to search for snakes beneath my *gown*," she told the employee disapprovingly. "If so, you may be certain that my brother will have words with everyone involved."

The railroad employee reached up to pinch at the bridge of his nose. Clarimonde managed a brief moment of sympathy for him, given the headache she'd begun to nurse, herself.

"I'm going to take you to another carriage, sir," the employee said. "After that, I'll stay in *this* carriage, in order to watch for... snakes." He leaned into the shed and lowered his voice. "I am so very sorry, madam. Please enjoy the rest of your trip."

Clarimonde watched as the railroad employee led Mr Moustache down the hall, sputtering the entire way. Once the sound of their steps had fully retreated, a white mouse wriggled free of her pocket in order to sniff up at her.

"Passable," it squeaked. "We'll make a dishonest woman of you yet."

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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