

The Doctor's Redemption
Ella Kern

Corvin recoiled as the dirty water was slung at his face, drenching his clothes and sliding down his mask. "We don't want you here," spat the peasant woman. "Go drain someone else's pockets."

Corvin wiped his mask with a rag and sighed, "As I told you before, I'm not here for money, I would just like to run some tests on the sick." The woman's skin showed early stages of the plague with buboes and hazy breathing, but she clearly wasn't dampened in spirit.

The woman scoffed, "You are going to harm us, then demand all our money, like the rest of your kind does. I'd rather die in peace and be able to provide for my children than leave them penniless." She slammed the wooden door in his face and the knocker on the door banged loudly. Corvin sighed again and grabbed his bag, skulking away. He had developed a new topical treatment for the buboes to ease the pain, but none were eager to test. He walked down the dirt path through the village, avoiding the angry stares and hostile comments of the townsfolk. While his profession had once been held in high regard, they had now fallen off their pedestal and were treated as scum.

The outbreak began in a small port town, spreading quicker than a wildfire. It caused painful buboes, fever, chills, shortness of breath, and other horrible symptoms, till finally, the victim's skin turned black and they died. Doctors rose to aid at the outbreak, wearing thick robes and a ventilation mask shaped like a bird, helping the people in any way they could. Unfortunately, greed took a hold of some doctor's hearts, and they took more money than required, and ultimately hurt the people more than helped. Most didn't know this fact though, unless you lived in one of the unfortunate towns that had already been exploited, like Corvin did. He arrived after the town's pockets had already been drained by another doctor, and now no one trusted him.

Corvin had made a promise to help the victims of the Black Plague, so that no more would have to suffer. But currently, he was having trouble finding someone who would accept his help. He took the backroads home to his cottage in the woods, avoiding the people who hated him so much. He cursed those who had tarnished the reputation of the doctors as he walked in his house, ducking beneath the hanging herbs. Rosemary, thyme, lavender, and burdock all hung from his ceiling. Jars filled with plants and books lined his walls. He shrugged off his cloak and hat, hanging them on the hooks, and removed his birdlike mask, setting it on the mantle.

Corvin laid back in his threadbare recliner in front of the blazing fire, eyes drooping. His long nights of studying and experimenting were catching up to him, and he slowly drifted off. A slight tapping on his window jerked him awake, like a tiny tip-tap. He yawned and dragged a hand down his weary face. He got up and trudged over to the window to inspect. The sky was dark now, and clouds drifted across the gleaming full moon. He peeked outside the window from every angle, but he saw nothing. He turned to go back to his chair, when his eye caught on a small bundle resting on the windowsill. Intrigued, he lifted the window and grabbed the bunch of

strange herbs, twisted together with a piece of twine. It was tiny, only the size of his finger, and smelled peculiar, like honey and moonlight.

Corvin shrugged and placed it on his workbench, for further investigation in the morning. He yawned again and walked towards his bed resting in the corner of the small cottage. As he laid down and pulled his blankets over himself, something glinted in the dark. It was his hand, and on it was a sprinkling of gold dust that sparkled and shined. Strange. He looked at the bundle on his bench and narrowed his eyes. It, too, sparkled like specks of sunlight. He sat up, walked over to the bench, and sat on the stool, lighting the oil lamp. He grabbed his magnifying glass and brought it to his eye and observed the sparkling purple herbs. They looked reminiscent of lavender, with the same shape, but a brighter hue, and of course, the gold dust.

Corvin grabbed one of the books that lined the shelf and flipped open its weather-worn pages. He had read about gold glitter before, but only in fantasy and mythological books. He turned through the dusty and yellowed pages frantically, till he fell upon the page he was looking for. *Faeries*. It read:

Faeries - known for their butterfly-like wings and small stature. Often hide in woods and unpopulated places, and release a bright gold dust.

Corvin shook his head. There was no way a faerie came to him, if he even believed they existed. Besides, why would a faerie give him a handful of mysterious herbs? He must be sleep-deprived. He put the book down on the shelf and shoved the plants into a jar, setting it too on the shelf. He shook his head again and went to bed. He would think straight in the morning.

↔

When Corvin awoke in the morning, his nose tingled and he sneezed, blowing something across his bed. He opened his eyes groggily, but snapped awake at the sight of his bed. On his blanket were hundreds of strands of the strange flower from the night before, completely covering his bed.

“What the-” he sat up and they slid off, falling onto the floor and powdering it gold. He whipped his head wildly around, till his eyes landed on a small girl with wings sitting on his windowsill. She yelped and hid behind the flower pot on the sill. Corvin yelped too and fell onto the floor with a *THUMP!* He groaned and rubbed his back, peering up at the small girl. She peeked shyly from behind the pot and slowly walked out, hands behind her back.

“Hello,” she said bashfully, looking down at the man on the floor. She was barely the size of a leaf, with short and curly auburn hair. She wore a dress of wildflowers, and had wings the color of a peony, bordered with a bright green.

“Hello,” Corvin replied shakily, propping himself up on the bed. “Are you real? Or am I having a fatigue induced hallucination?” Or perhaps the sickness had finally caught up to him. Whatever it was, his head spun and his fingers shook.

The girl laughed, like the twitter of a bird, “Of course not. Haven’t you ever seen a faerie before, silly?” She fluttered down and landed on his bed post, grinning timidly. “I’m Cerise. I already know you though, Mr. Doctor.”

Corvin nodded, in a daze, “A real faerie, huh. That explains the gold dust.” Cerise blushed and brushed excess dust off her dress. Corvin smiled, “Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you Cerise. My name is Corvin. May ask what you are doing here, and what is with all the herbs?”

She cocked her head and looked at him quizzically, “You’re a doctor aren’t you Mr. Corvin? This plant is called *Medicia*, and it has healing properties. I thought you would recognize it.”

He shook his head, “I’ve never heard of it before. Why did you bring it to me?”

She kicked her feet and fidgeted with her fingers, “I’ve been watching you, Mr. Corvin, and I know that you are one of the good doctors. It makes me sad to see people be mean to you, so I brought you a special flower to help people feel better! And then everyone will like you!” She smiled enthusiastically and fluttered her wings. She couldn’t have been older than seven or eight, at least in human years.

Corvin began collecting the herbs off his bed and tossing them on his workbench. Its stench was overwhelmingly sweet, and choked his nostrils. “So what does this plant do again?”

Cerise put her hands on her hips and looked at him with a pouty face, “I told you, it helps people feel better! Everyone in my village ate some when we all got those icky bumps and black spots. Then they all went away! I thought you could use it to help the people here!”

Corvin froze, and the *Medicia* in his arms all slid to the floor. He turned slowly to face the young faerie and whispered, “A cure?” He stormed towards her quickly and bent down to look her in the eyes. She yelped, but stayed where she was, shaking slightly. “Are you saying that this herb can cure the Black Plague?”

Cerise’s voice quivered, “Well, yes. That’s why I brought it to you. I thought it might help the humans, like it helped the faeries.” Her almond brown eyes were filled with an innocent kind of fear, but a quiet wonder at the same time. “I can help you, if you’d like. Mama wouldn’t approve of me helping a human, but seeing everyone sick is sad. I want to help!”

This was the opportunity Corvin had been praying for for the past two years, this was his chance to help the people he had vowed to save. “Do you know how to make the medicine?”

She nodded, “Yes! I’ve seen Mama make it for everyone in the village.” She stood proudly and put her hand on her chest, “I’m pretty much an expert now! I can teach you Mr. Corvin!” She flapped her wings excitedly and fluttered over to his workbench, pointing to his grindstone, “First you have to grind it up in this thingy.”

“Hold on,” Corvin stumbled over the uneven floorplanks and ran over to the desk, pulling out some rare paper and ink. He scribbled down Cerise’s instructions as she explained the long and arduous process of making the medicine. By the time he finished, after many trials and errors, it was dark out once again. He held the small jar of antidote, and his hands trembled. He had finally made the cure, with the help of a small faerie child. All that was left was to test it.

“You’re sure this works?” Corvin asked, slightly skeptical. He wasn’t so convinced that this supposedly “magical” plant could cure this horrible disease.

“Of course it works! I’ve seen it work before on all of Mama’s patients,” Cerise grumped. She stretched her arms and blinked slowly, flapping her wings at a slower pace. Corvin smiled

and held out his palm for Cerise to land on. She fluttered down and sat on his hand, yawning adorably. He chuckled as she closed her eyes and flopped over, fast asleep. Corvin laid her on the windowsill and covered her with his handkerchief. He walked back to his workbench and sifted through his notes. Tomorrow, he would test the cure.

↔

Corvin rose early and threw on his cloak and mask, stuffing his workbag with the Medicia medicine, and his various notes and topical treatments. He turned to the windowsill to see that Cerise had already left, back to wherever she came from. Corvin was surprised to admit he was a little sad to see her go. He shrugged away feelings of sorrow and tramped out the door, beginning his campaign. He decided to go to the local hospital on the outskirts of town. This would probably be the best place to start. As he approached, he heard sounds of misery wailing from the open windows, and nuns in white robes ran hurriedly around the compound. He walked up to the door and yanked the handle down. He shuffled into the foul-smelling building and walked up to the nearest nun. She stood at a washbin in the corner of a room, wringing out a bloody rag that stained the water pink.

Corvin came up behind her and placed a hand on her shoulder, "Excuse me, Sister." She jumped slightly and turned around. Her eyes were wide, but they narrowed once she recognized his mask.

"Excuse me sir, may I ask what you are doing here? This is a place for helping the sick, not hurting them. I must ask you to please leave, these poor souls have already been through enough." She gestured to the door and turned back to her washbin, squeezing the rags with more vigor than before.

Corvin bowed his head, "I am sorry to disrupt you, Sister, but I mean no harm. I only wish to help these people as you do. I have developed a new medicine, and I wish to test it."

The nun turned around and clasped her hands together and said sternly; "I have no doubt that you wish to help yourself, but I must demand you leave the premises. You are not welcome here." She swung around and picked up the washbin, walking over to a patient's bed. Corvin stumbled over and grabbed her wrist, stopping her. She looked up at him with a disgusted look, "Unhand me!"

"Please just hear me out! I can help!" Corvin pleaded. The nun scoffed and yanked her hand free, storming away. Corvin stood there dejectedly; he wasn't sure what to do now. He left the building and crouched against the wall. No one trusted him. What should he do now?

He sat against the wall, lost in thought, when a quiet pitter-patter of feet running along a path broke him out of his haze. A small, dirty girl in rags ran up to him, panting, "Please help!" she cried, "Mama is sick and her skin is turning black." She sniveled and wiped her nose on her arm, tugging on Corvin's coat.

Corvin stood, this was his chance. He bent over and gently patted the child's head, "Will you show me the way to your mother?" The girl sniffed and nodded, grabbing Corvin's hand and leading him to the village. As they came upon the house, Corvin realized it was the same one he had visited two days ago, with the angry woman. They barged into the small hut, and in the

corner on a bed lay a very sick woman, who was barely breathing. Her fingers had turned a dark hue, and her skin was a grey pallor. Corvin set to work immediately, giving the woman fresh water and rubbing ointment on her buboes that riddled her skin.

“What’s going on here?” A small voice squeaked.

Corvin whipped around and grinned, “Cerise! You’re back!” The faerie giggled and sat on his shoulder. Corvin removed the Medicia cure from his bag and held the vial in his hands. The purple liquid swirled around, and Corvin looked over at Cerise, “Here we go.” He tilted back the woman’s head and poured the medicine down her throat. She sputtered a little, but choked it down. Corvin sighed, “Now all that’s left to do is wait. How long does it take to be in effect?”

Cerise shrugged, “Only a couple of hours. She’ll be all better by dinner.” She smiled sweetly and flew around Corvin’s head, “Let’s go back and make more!”

Corvin shook his head, “I want to make sure it works before making more.” He gathered his things and turned to the woman’s small children. They gazed in awe at the faerie and pointed at Cerise. “Listen children,” he said, and they turned towards him, “I will be back soon to check on your mother. Until then, if anything happens, come and find me in the forest. Just go down the dirt path and you’ll find my house.” He walked out the door and nodded, “Good day.”

He strode out the door, with Cerise flying close behind him. “Now, we wait.”

↔

Corvin wiled the hours away in his cottage, studying the Medicia in more depth, but he was finding it hard to focus. Cerise chattered advice to him and flew around, singing and playing in his herb collection. Corvin sat in his chair, bouncing his leg, and stared at the plant in his hand. He jumped as the clock on his mantle chimed, three in the afternoon. Time to go check on the woman. “Come, Cerise,” he waved. She smiled and sat on his shoulder as they walked back to the run-down hut. As they approached, Corvin the sound of a soft voice, followed by joyous laughter. His heart pounded, could it really be?

He opened the door to see the woman sitting up in her bed, smiling at her children. She faltered when she saw Corvin, but smiled warmly at his presence. Corvin couldn’t believe his eyes. The woman’s black spots had disappeared and her skin was no longer a grey wanness.

She spoke softly, her voice a quiet hum, “My children tell me you are the one who saved my life. Is this true?” Corvin nodded slowly, still in shock. Cerise giggled and zipped around the room in jubilation. The woman dipped her head, “Then I must thank you with all I have. You saved me, and now I can care for my children. What can I do to repay you?”

Corvin shook his head, “That won’t be necessary, I only ask that you allow me to run a few tests, so I can make sure you are truly cured.” The woman agreed and he ran his tests. She was on the mend, but he found no traces of the disease. It worked. “Madam, it seems you will live yet another day. Now if you will excuse me, there is much work to be done.” He walked away, back to his home, and Cerise fluttered behind him. It was time to cure the people.