



### **Riga and the Rose Elf**

“There was, there was, and yet there was not...”

Riga stared across the desk at the elf, perched like a doll on the leather swivel chair. “If you’re going to speak in riddles,” she said, “you can take your elf self straight out of here.”

On the fireplace mantel, the stone gargoyle craned her neck. “It is not wise to anger elves, Riga.” Her voice was gravel rolling down a rocky hillside.

Riga sighed and looked through the window at the great, sapphire-colored lake. Her clients were often the most challenging part of being a metaphysical detective. “Have you got a case for me or not?” she asked the elf.

He sighed, a tiny exhalation, like the mew of a newborn kitten. “Ah, detective, I live in a garden with the loveliest rose for a home. Ah, how fragrant each bedroom is, how transparent the walls—”

“Let me guess,” Riga said. “It was stolen?”

His opalescent wings fluttered. “Nay, mistress. When I returned home late one night, after a day dancing with the butterflies, my rose was closed. I could not gain entrance.”

“Hm.” Riga raised a brow. “And then?”

“And then the night turned very cold.”

“And then?”

“And then I went in search of a place to lay my head. At the other end of my garden stands an arbor of honeysuckle. I flew there and found a lovely young woman and a handsome young man, whispering sweet nothings to each other.”

Riga shifted, her office chair squeaking beneath her. “So, you stayed to watch.”

“I could not help watching. They were beneath the arbor.”

The gargoyle’s claws clenched and unclenched, scoring the mantel’s soft wood.

“I’m afraid to ask,” Riga said. “What happened next?”

“The young man said he had to leave, for the woman’s brother did not like him. He told her he had to go far away, and many tears were shed. The young woman gave him a rose to remember her by. But before she gave it to him, she kissed it, and the warmth of her lips caused the petals to unfold.”

“So you went inside it.”

“Naturally, for I was quite sleepy. The young man laid the rose against his heart, and I could hear his heart beating.”

“Must have kept you awake,” Riga said.

“It did! But not for long.” The tiny elf’s voice lowered.

“Ah.” Riga rested her elbows on the desk and leaned forward, her eyes narrowing. “What happened?”

“The young man left the lady and walked through a dark wood. Suddenly, another man appeared and drew a long, wicked looking knife. And while the young man, unaware, was kissing his rose—”

“Humans really should pay more attention,” the gargoyle said.

“He stabbed him! Then he cut off the handsome young man’s head and buried it beneath a linden tree.”

The detective rose from her executive chair. “You did right to tell me immediately.”

“But I didn’t,” the elf said. “I whispered the truth in the sleeping girl’s ear. Her brother is a fiend. For it was her brother who murdered the young man!”

Riga sat back down, and the chair squeaked beneath her. “And?”

“And she went to the tree and cried.”

“And?”

“And she dug up the head and put it in a flowerpot, together with a sprig of the jasmine bush.”

“As one does,” Riga said.

“I thought one usually called the police in such matters?” the gargoyle asked.

Riga waved away the question. “Go on, elf.”

“She spent her days weeping over the flowerpot, where the jasmine grew. The lady died of grief. Her brother thought she was always quite foolish to cry so over a pot of jasmine, but when he saw how beautiful the jasmine was, how sweet the scent of its big white bells, he took it for himself.”

“And you want it back?”

“No. That night, as the murderous brother slept beside the jasmine, the flowers opened. Out of each blossom arose an invisible spirit armed with a poisoned spear. They crept inside his ears and whispered wicked dreams to him, then flew into his mouth and pierced his tongue with poisoned darts.”

“Then justice was done,” Riga said. “I’m not sure what—”

“Justice?” The tiny elf leapt to his feet on the chair. “Justice! I wanted to kill the brother. I had amassed an army of bees to destroy the murderer. We swept in the next morning only to find him already dead.”

“I can see how that would be a letdown,” Riga said.

“The queen bee was furious! I want justice.”

“On?” Riga asked.

“On the jasmine, of course.”

The detective blinked. “The jasmine.”

“It ruined all my plans!” The elf’s tiny hands fisted. He hissed. “The jasmine must pay.”

“I think I can help you.” She stood. “Show me the house where the jasmine is kept.”

The metaphysical detective and the elf went to the house. (The gargoyle came too, flying high over head and staying out of sight, because most humans react poorly to the site of a flying gargoyle). Riga found the jasmine and ripped out the plant.

While the rose elf danced on the corpses of the white flowers, Riga gently uncovered the skull of the murdered lover. Then the police saw the whitened skull and knew the dead brother was a murderer.

The queen bee sang of vengeance, and so did the rose elf, for the gargoyle was quite correct. It is not wise to anger elves.

### **Note from Kirsten**

There is a grand old tradition of reworking fairy tales. This story is based on the Hans Christian Andersen tale, *The Rose Elf*. You can read the original tale here: [https://andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheRoseElf\\_e.html](https://andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheRoseElf_e.html).

The first line of my version, however, is a classic fairy tale beginning from the Georgian tradition (the country, not the state).

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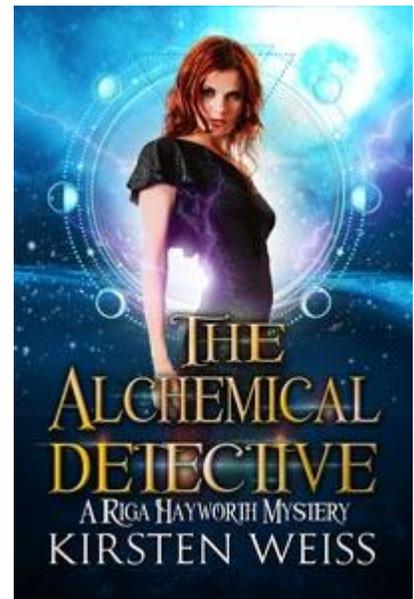
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