

# Love's Elixir

By J. Davidson Hero

The heat from the calcinary furnace was dissipating and the world was growing dim. Rosamund da Carmo lowered the diopter, a hand-held mask that protected her face, a merry attempt to double her own striking Mediterranean features in ceramic. She stared into the crucible at the golden calx, calcined from the heart of the flying dragon, and sighed.

“Bi Thosimos and craftes wel lerned it is shynynge as gold both good and trewe,” she said. A smile crept across her beautiful face. The heat, still potent, drew beads of sweat on her brow. She was exhausted but excited.

She snatched the crucible crab-like with tongs and stole back to her table which was covered with the apparatus of her craft: ceramic pots containing the likes of aqua fortis, vitriol, and sal ammoniac; vessels for digestion: pelicans, jubilans, tripudianters, and double retort columbissanters; flasks; alembics; ampullae; mortars and pestles. The middle of the table was spread with lavish texts, *The Secret Book of Artephius* and *De mineralibus*. But resting in the very center of the table, next to a large dripping candle, was the apple-sized, red stone, the heart of the flying dragon, holey with cavities like an Emmentaler cheese and embedded with flecks of gold. Reaching her stool, she rested the crucible on a metal ring, and nearly swooned.

“Ah! The feums and hellesmoc... min heed aken,” she said, rubbing her temples.

Then, well cooled, she collected the calx into a Cristallo phial. A panacea for the wealthy Count who would keep her well forever, once his wife was dead. She admired the product of her work in the wasting candlelight.

As she did, across the stone floor, near the chamber door, a shimmer caught her eye. At first she thought it was a trick of tired sight, or shards of stray moonlight, but as she watched, the shimmer became larger and evolved into a smoky swirl first a few inches long, then expanding until it was fully six feet high. Finally it flattened and the smoke solidified into a flat disk, lustrous like the surface of a mirror. And through that mirror a man stepped as if through a door.

He was tall, and thin and dressed all in black: a double breasted paletot, vest, cravat about his neck and a bowler hat on his head. He paused when through the strange portal, stood upright and straightened his coat. In his right hand he held an umbrella, which he then used as a cane. Looking about he noticed Rosamund. She could just make out his face framed by auburn hair: eyes nearly hidden by bushy eyebrows over a prominent nose, ruddy cheeks, a handlebar moustache, a gap-toothed grin. He started towards her.

“Ah, Lady Carmot, you sweet mollisher. Let’s have a look at you four hundred years younger.” he said, walking with great confidence, his umbrella tapping the stone floor as he went.

If not his means of arrival, then his strange speech set Rosamund on edge. She pillaged through the dishes on her table, finding the two she sought, took them in hand and throwing the contents together into the air towards the approaching man, intoned: “By helle-fir the devel sleeth, but tarie nat to bryngen hym deeth.”

A blinding stream of sparks lit the room and engulfed the man but just as he managed to open his umbrella and hold it like a shield. The spray lasted thirty seconds. But when it subsided the man still stood, and then laughed.

“That was quite the penny gaff. You can do better, I’m sure,” he said.

Rosamund was shocked. Her spell should have left him nothing but smoldering boots. She quickly grabbed some more components from the table, this time pouring the contents of one flask into another then throwing it to the floor in front of him.

“Brek hym, bothe bak and every boon. Styngge hym from cursed heed to toon,” she screamed.

A thick green cloud rose from the remains of the flask. But he simply chuckled while quickly opening and closing his umbrella. The cloud dissipated.

“Ha ha. That was a jolly. Like a London particular. But enough now.” And with that he took two long strides and stood with the tip of his umbrella pointing at her heart. She felt an oppressive force that seemed to surround her and prevent all movement.

“What werk of wicchecraft...” she started, outraged, which made him laugh again with his gap-toothed grin.

“I’m sorry dear. I hardly understand a word you’re saying,” he said.

“Why fare ye thus with me?” she asked, fear and confusion curdling her beautiful features.

“Oh don’t get bloody teary. I can’t stand up to that,” he said staring into her eyes to try to calm her. “I wouldn’t be here at all if not for you... the you of 1850 that is. You gave me this witch’s barrier,” he said, jiggling the umbrella. “You sent me back, to retrieve something.” He looked about the table until he found the Cristallo phial and the elixir of immortality meant for the Count. “There,” he said, snatching it up and looking at it. The candle was almost completely burned out, but its dim light still made the powder in the phial sparkle; it matched the glint in the man’s eyes. He secreted it in an inner pocket and then searching in another pocket brought out a similar phial.

“For the Count,” he said very slowly, enunciating with the hope that she would understand. “The Count will be expecting an elixir. This laudanum will act the snide.” He set it on the table.

“The Count doesn’t deserve you, and proves so soon. But you meant this elixir for your soul’s true mate, and he has it now.” And then he leaned in, kissed her hard on the lips and then jogged off toward the shrinking black portal.

“You’ll be happy to know,” he yelled back as he stepped through, “in four hundred years, you don’t age a day.”

The End