
THE FAERY BRIDE

by

Lisa Ann Verge

"Let yourself be swept away by the utterly enchanting atmosphere of a best-loved fairytale, and you'll find yourself caught in Ms. Verge's marvelous, magical tale. As always the author delivers a book that is uniquely wonderful."*RT Book Reviews*

"An exciting, fast-paced The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) medieval romance. Lisa Ann Verge is on the verge of climbing to the top of this genre, a position she definitely deserves."*Affaire de Coeur*

Rhys is a man accursed, forced to hide his scarred face behind a leather mask. When rumors reach Wales of an Irishwoman with healing powers, he crosses a sea to kidnap her. But Aileen is no frightened girl, and she will move the Welsh lord as no blue-blooded beauty ever has.

Possessed with the gift of ancient magic, Aileen knows her captor is a man more afflicted in spirit than flesh. She despises him for stealing her from home, but she can't deny the passion that flares between them. Time may heal the scars on Rhys's face . . . but Aileen fears it will take a miracle to change his unbelieving heart.

Finalist "Best Innovative Romance"*RT Book Reviews*

Finalist, "Best Time Travel Romance"*Affaire de Coeur*

Finalist, RITA for "Best The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) Paranormal Romance" –*Romance Writers of America*

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Prologue

It was a frightful The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) visitor who came to us that strange Midsummer's Night.

It could have been yesterday, I remember it so well. Twilight had blackened the crags of my lord's kingdom. The dying gasps of the pagan fires still glowed upon the hillsides. I've been the keeper The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) of this house for enough years to turn my hair white, yet never had a visitor come so high in the mountains in the midst of night. And none welcome for these past five years, mind you, with all the changes in the house of Graig. So you can imagine how I nearly leapt out of my skirts when someone banged at the door fit to split the wood.

I knew that the entire household was snug inside. They'd scurried back to their hovels from whatever pagan things they do at those fires on Midsummer's Night, like rats to their holes in a storm, not one of them brave enough to risk seeing whatever demons are set loose after the sun sets. I myself was hanging another sprig of St. John's wort over the doorway to the kitchens to guard against demons and the like.

At first I thought to ignore the banging. No good news comes after dark, you know, and the master...well, it's no secret that the master wouldn't take kindly to having his refuge invaded. Faith, the master was no fit company for wolves these days. It was not always that way, you know. But now I feared—even not knowing who stood behind that door—for the poor unwitting creature's health. No man deserved the full wrath of this Lord of Graig.

But you see, I'm Irish born, Welsh bred, and Celtic to the bone, so I found myself padding through the rushes to pull the door open in welcome.

An Irishman, he said he was. Snarling and snapping at the delay, and me wondering how to keep him quiet so as not to disturb the master in his chamber at the other end of the hall. I spoke as kindly as I could and ushered the visitor to the center hearth, offering him a bit of The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) mead and oatcake. Only then did I get a straight look at him. He was a strange spark of a man, too limber and sprightly for the wild night. There was a brightness to him, like to outshine the fire that the girls work day and night to keep burning. I found myself lingering until he barked good and loud for the mead I'd promised him.

Then the far door banged open and my heart leapt to my throat, for the master tore out of his chamber breathing fire like the dragon that's said to live amid the caves of Snowdon. He caught sight of the visitor and I scurried out, not wanting to be burned by the hot edge of his tongue.

Faith, it's true I had no business lurking in the shadows with my ears cocked, me being no more than a servant in the house of Rhys ap Gruffydd, the Lord of Graig. But I've earned my meddling, you see, having been with this house long before the present lord took his first squalling breath. I've known the family as if it were my own. I've watched through the good years and now, yes, in the darkest. So I took no shame in peering around that splintered old

wall. Surely it was my duty to stop the master from tossing the Irishman out into the cold. We're still Welsh, after all, no matter what curse God The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) has put upon this lord and this house. I'll see myself begging in some English village before the Graigs deny hospitality to anyone whose shadow darkens the door.

Oh, and the two went at it, the master and the Irishman, The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) my master roaring his displeasure and the little man talking back with no mind to the danger to his own hide. Octavius, he said his name was, recently come of Ireland, though what he was doing wandering in this place so far from sea or road was a puzzle to all. He was having none of my master's rudeness—none at all. Never did I hear any man talk to my master the way this little tattered fellow did. He even made my master pause a moment with the shame of finding such a harsh welcome in a fellow Celt's house.

Then my lord made to stomp off to that lair of his he lets no one into, when Octavius called out and made a comment on the lights he saw upon yonder lake. Ah, you know the one, The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) the enchanted lake with the faery isle my The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) master has been trying for years to build a The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) castle upon. The Irishman was trying to engage my master in conversation, after all the harsh words that had passed between them! The little man began talking of faery rings and dancing lights and all such things—not a strange conversation for a Midsummer's Night, for all the people of Graig had been talking of the old days The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) this night. But my master interrupted the Irishman as I knew he would. My lord scoffed as he does at all un-Christian imaginings and mocked the little man, which sent the Irishman to true temper at last.

"Listen to you, believing only what you can see," the Irishman said. "I'd curse you for your ignorance, but for all that leather upon your face there's no hiding that you've been cursed already."

Didn't that set my blood to freeze! For no one dared to make mention of it, though all men knew of the curse upon my master. One look at that masked face set my heart to choking me. I thought my lord was to take the creature in his two warrior's hands and strangle the life out of him. If it weren't for the Welsh blood rushing thick in his veins he might have done the same. Instead he spoke quiet like the wind in the trees before a storm—like to make the hairs stand up on the back of my neck—and banished the creature into the night.

Before the words were full out of my master's mouth I made to hurry out and stop such discourtesy—to take the Irishman aside and give him food and shelter in our kitchens, humble though they may be. It was no fit night for man or hound.

But the Irishman stood his ground by the warmth of the hearth and smiled, he did. It was the smile that stopped me—as did the look in his bright black eyes. My heart dropped to my stomach. It was Midsummer's Night, after all, and Christian though I am, I'll not mock the old ways. This creature had come from the air itself.

The Irishman said that he knew a healer unlike any other who lived The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) on an island off the west coast of Ireland. A woman who had healed every ailment she'd touched. A woman with a touch of faery blood who could cure The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) my master's curse with a pass of her hands. A miracle worker, like to be a saint.

I felt the heat of my lord's anger, for hadn't he made a hundred thousand pilgrimages and seen every charlatan and witch from Myddfai to Paris, all to rid himself of this curse?

On the Aran Isles, the Irishman continued, as thick as mud to my master's silent rage. By the name of Aileen Ruadh. Aileen the Red.

Then what happened I never could be sure, for it happened so quickly The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) I wondered if my old eyes had deceived me, or if he had just moved so quickly that I hadn't noticed the closing of the door. The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) For one moment, the Irishman was there, standing as whole as you or me before the red glow of The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) the hearth fire, and the next moment there was a sparkling around him, and suddenly there was naught but a wisp of smoke and an echo of laughter that chilled my skin The Faery Bride (The Celtic Legends Series Book 2) from my scalp to my toes.

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