

A Rose by That Name

a *Carnival Row* fanfic

by Rodo

for *firecat*

“AFISSA, YOU’RE AN angel.”

Mr. Spurnrose called her that every so often, always with a kind smile on his face. Afissa had been skeptical at first – back in those days, most of the servants had been human. Very few gentlemen in The Burgue employed fauns in a visible way. Most of the others delivered coal or collected refuse, while others still found employment in the factories. Afissa had been one of the first – not the very first, of course, but she had started working for Mr. Spurnrose when that had been considered an oddity. She’d really only taken the position because her uncle’s cousin already worked there as a cook.

“Afissa, you’re an angel.”

He’d said it first when Afissa had helped the poor fallen fae singer with more kindness than others would say she deserved. Pregnant by some man, scared and all alone in the world. Women weren’t supposed to fall pregnant while unmarried. Many would worry that the sin would rub off on them, but not Mr. Spurnrose, who had taken her in and offered her a fine room, all without a second thought as to the consequences. He was an odd one, Afissa had thought. She’d still been wary of him then – The Burgue had taught her that much when it came to humans who were nice to her kind. Eventually, they all showed their true face, and it was not a pretty one. Until she’d met Mr. Spurnrose.

“Afissa, you’re an angel.”

He’d said it when he’d had an appointment with the young woman of his heart and ruined his shirt right before.

Mr. Spurnrose had been the kind of man who forgot the world around him when he was working, and he had also been the kind of man whom she had spotted more than once in his workshop as he repaired watches while wearing his finest shirts. It was no wonder he got oil on it: Afissa had predicted it and prepared a second shirt, just in case. He was out of the door in a new shirt, with the brightest smile she’d ever seen on his face.

The young woman had married him, of course, and they had had two wonderful children, until a fever took her mistress far too soon. Mr. Spurnrose had been distraught and Afissa had been only too glad to help fill the hole her death had left in all their lives.

It had been she who taught young Miss Imogen how to embroider and it had been she who gently corrected young Master Ezra when he'd made an error with his sums. Afissa had never expected it, but in the Spurnrose household, she'd finally found a place to belong. She had a family of sorts, even after her own had died or moved away.

"Afissa, stay, please," Mr. Spurnrose said one evening. He was old and grey by then. Humans aged so fast and died so early. Living among them had taught her just how fragile life was, how thankful she should be for her long, healthy life.

"Of course," she answered. Miss Imogen was in bed already, dreaming of the day not so far away when suitors might call on her. And Master Ezra was out, meeting with friends. The children had grown up so fast. They were almost adults now.

With a sigh, Mr. Spurnrose moved away from the window he'd been staring out of, walking towards his favourite armchair. His joints cracked like old branches and he smelled... old. It hurt to see him like this, but his hands were as quick and precise as ever. All his watches lasted forever, and no customers came to complain about their purchases. He was still the best watchmaker in all of The Burgue.

"I met with Doctor Morange today," he told her. He needn't have said it, of course. She knew all about his appointments. "I'm afraid the news isn't good."

Afissa's heart skipped a beat. No, it was too early to lose such a good and kind man. "Sir?"

"He thinks I have a year, maybe. If I'm lucky." He chuckled a bit, but it sounded hollow to her ears. "I suppose I am lucky, in a way. Most people don't get the chance to get their affairs in order. I'll tell the children of course, but later. I thought you should know first. I'll need your help in the weeks and months to come. I've already arranged for a meeting with the solicitor, but there's so much... Who would have thought dying could be so much work?"

"Of course I'll help where I can," she promised him. Now that she concentrated on it, she could tell the faint notes to his smell didn't just mean he had grown old; they meant his body was failing him.

"Thank you, Afissa. They'll need you, you know. The children. They're the most important thing."

Afissa nodded. She thought about Miss Imogen, who was far too young to understand the ways of the world, and Master Ezra, who was naive and maybe – if she was being unkind – too lazy by nature. She wondered what he would do without his father

providing for him, what match Miss Imogen might hope to make without her father to approve her suitor. She had known the two of them since they were born. Others might say she was as good as their mother, but Afissa knew better. She'd never forgotten what she was: a faun and a servant. But she cared for both of them, and she cared for what Mr. Spurnrose cared about the most. He had taught her that there was good in the world. She would do anything to protect his legacy.

“Don't you worry about them, sir. I'll take care of them.”

She'd said the same when his wife died. She wondered if he remembered when she saw the melancholy note in his smile. Such was life with humans – they burned bright, but their lives were oh so short. In the following months, she would watch as the human she loved best withered before her eyes, like a flower freshly cut. She'd console Miss Imogen when she cried over their impending loss. She'd try and fail to guide Master Ezra to make wise decisions when it came to his investments, but the young always thought they knew better than their elders. For now, she took a seat next to him when Mr. Spurnrose offered it to her – a rebel even into his old age – and she listened to him reminisce about the good old days.

“Afissa, you're an angel,” he told her again, with fondness in his tired eyes. She was not, but she loved him for seeing the best in her.

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