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## CHAPTER 1

# *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme: Country Life*



The countryside and rural life were particularly popular themes with Victorian song collectors, who travelled the country to record lyrics and research local traditions, although some of the songs actually originated in towns where idealized pictures of a pastoral idyll appealed to industrial communities. This interest in folk songs from a bygone era, never before written down, continued into the twentieth century, throughout the British Isles and North America.

☞ SCARBOROUGH FAIR ☞

Are you going to Scarborough Fair?  
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme.  
Remember me to one who lives there,  
She once was a true love of mine.

Have her to make me a cambric shirt,  
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme.  
Without no seams, nor fine needle work,  
Then she'll be a true love of mine.

Tell her to weave it in a sycamore wood lane,  
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme.  
Gather it up in a basket of flowers,  
Then she'll be a true love of mine.

Have her wash it in yonder dry well,  
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme.  
Where water ne'er sprung, nor drop of rain fell,  
Then she'll be a true love of mine.

Tell her to find me an acre of land,  
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme.  
Between the sea foam and over the sand,  
Then she'll be a true love of mine.

Plow the land with the horn of a lamb,  
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme.  
Then sow some seeds from north of the dam,  
Then she'll be a true love of mine.



Have her reap it with a sickle of leather,  
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme.  
Gather it up in a bunch of heather,  
Then she'll be a true love of mine.

If she tells me she can't, then I'll reply,  
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme.  
Let me know, that at least she will try,  
Then she'll be a true love of mine.

Love imposes impossible tasks,  
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme.  
Though not more than any heart asks,  
And I must know she's a true love of mine.

When thou has finished thy task,  
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme.  
Come to me my hand for to ask,  
For then you'll be a true love of mine.

Parsley for comfort, sage for strength, rosemary love and thyme courage. These herbs could be the ingredients of a medieval love charm, or the line may be nothing more than a romantic-sounding nineteenth-century addition. The fair in Scarborough was an annual event, lasting some weeks, and dated back to the thirteenth century, but it is not clear exactly how old this well-known folk song really is. Some versions refer to other towns or fairs, and the lyrics possibly have their roots in an older Celtic or Scottish song called 'The Elfin Knight'. The wording varies but always includes impossible tasks set as a riddle for a man's former lover, to prove her true love.