

# Nightwarder

She had heard the names the children called her. One of their favourite labels was fiadrytch: demon. If that's what they thought then she would begin to behave like one - chase them away whenever they come near. Yet they kept coming back, daring each other to steal into her home, or to take her property. She was angry at them, but most of all it made her sad. Her whole life had been spent protecting them and when she'd returned to her home clan to live out her last, she had first been ignored and subsequently abused by the children.

She was now thoroughly settled back in the home where she had been born. It had been in a total state of disrepair tucked into a corner of the Empty Quarter but that suited her fine. If the clan didn't want anything to do with her, then she would keep herself to herself, no neighbours, no friends, nothing. She had yearned for peace and quiet - and there was no doubt that she was now getting it - so not everything was bad. But she couldn't deny that it rankled her to be treated this way.

She gazed out the window and was surprised to see a young woman sat on the ancient cobbled street. It was the first person, over the age of twelve, she'd seen in the lane since her return. She watched the woman fiddle with something and then place the object on the cobbles.

"Grandma," the woman said, "will you come and speak with me?"

She ducked back into the shadows of the house so that the woman wouldn't see her. 'Why should I speak to you when you've treated me with disdain,' she thought.

"Please Grandma, will you not come and speak with me?" the woman's voice was respectful, calm and inviting.

She found her bitterness waning and moved closer to the window.

"Grandma, I'm sorry I didn't come before. Please, forgive me. I'm here now. Please, come and talk to me."

The apology placated her and curious now, she decided to find out what the woman wanted. She left the house and with her head held high walked over to where the woman sat. The woman smiled up at her.

"Thank you, Grandma," the woman said, "my name is Chaecychi. Will you not sit?"

She sat down and studied her visitor carefully. Chaecychi was pretty, with vivid green eyes and a lustre to the red-brown fur of her face that would have the opposite sex queuing up. There was nothing but kindness in her eyes.

They exchanged the customary greetings and then Chaecychi asked, "why do you stay here, Grandma?"

"I was born here."

"Grandma," Chaecychi's voice remained calm, "you are more than welcome to live amongst us again, but not like this."

She was confused by Chaecychi's statement. "What do you mean?"

"Do you remember why you came back?"

"Of course I do. It was because I wanted to spend the last of my days here."

"But why did you decide that now? Did something happen?"

"What does that have to do with it?"

"Please, Grandma. Why did you decide now?"

She looked at Chaecychi and there was something in her voice, manner and eyes that made her want to tell her. Chaecychi smiled at her and the smile was genuinely friendly. The questions confused her slightly but she decided to tell Chaecychi what she wanted to know. "I was in a fight," she began, "we were outnumbered at least two to one." Her voice took on a monotonous tone. "It was brutal and fierce and I was slow. For the first time I felt my age. I felt tired and weak. I was no match for the enemy and I don't know how I got out alive. But I knew I couldn't go on. I'd only be a burden to the others and if I wasn't killed myself I'd only end up getting someone else killed. So it was time to leave and time to come home."

"I understand." Chaecychi paused before continuing. "Tell me, Grandma, how long ago was this?"

"Several months."

"Please, Grandma, can you remember exactly how long ago?"

She thought for a while, counting the days, weeks and months. "It was two months and twelve days ago."

"What time of day was it?"

"It was early in the morning. The sun was only halfway up in the sky."

"And can you remember where this fight was? I mean, can you see it in your mind?"

"All too vividly."

"And can you remember who was with you? Can you picture them?"

"Yes."

"And can you see the person you were fighting?"

"Yes, he carried a large shield and a spear."

"Tell me what happened."

"We fought hard. Like him I had a shield and spear, but he was faster. I spent most of the time ducking behind my shield and moving. I was trying to find an opening, but he was good. He wouldn't tire and kept stabbing with his spear until there was no respite from the relentless offence. I fought with my friends but we hadn't formed a shield wall. But we kept together and defended each other's flanks as best we could. We'd been fighting for a while when Hilmeve on my left stabbed out at the Dzaa in front of me and forced him to defend on that side. It opened up his left and allowed me to strike, and then..., and then..."

"What happened then?"

"And then," she continued, slowly, "then he brought his shield down on my spear, trapping it and then..., then he stabbed forward and..., and his spear caught me right in the chest."

She remembered it all. The pain as the point punctured through her leather armour and sunk deep into her body. The sucking sound as the spear was tugged out. Feet trampling over her as she lay dying. The noise of the battle fading away. Her last breath.

"Grandma?"

The truth slowly dawned on her. "Then I was killed, Chaecychi. I died."

"It's okay, Grandma."

"Can you help me Chaecychi?"

"That's why I'm here."