

Rayna sat in the rocking chair on the porch next to Grandmother. She shelled peas for Grandmother's dinner while the ancient one slept in her rocking chair.

Rayna looked out across the land that surrounded the small cabin she shared with Grandmother. For five years she'd tended the old woman without seeing another living soul. She missed the city of Augeas and being part of the guard that watched over Lady Lavenna. She had been close to her lady before she was banished. She also missed the gambling and drinking in her off hours. Many of the lord's guard had added to her coin in a game of clottie.

Today, if she didn't die of boredom, she'd boil peas and add some chicken broth to the mixture after she mashed the peas. Grandmother didn't have a tooth left in her head to chew her food. They would wash the meal down with water since there wasn't any ale.

Rayna popped a pea shell into her mouth and chewed. The lake was inviting. She wondered if she had time to take a bath before Grandmother awoke from her nap. The ancient one wouldn't miss her if she remained asleep. If she awoke, she would be calling for her. Whenever Grandmother couldn't see Rayna, she panicked and started screaming, but the water was so inviting and the afternoon so hot.

She glanced over at Grandmother. The ancient one seemed awfully still. Usually her snores rattled the eaves while she slept. Rayna should count the few blessings she had. This silence was one of them.

Then she smelled urine. She dropped her chin to her chest. She would have to clean up Grandmother before dinner. Should I wake her or wait? It was tempting to wait, a burden put off until later, but she did try to be kind to Grandmother. It wasn't the ancient one's fault Rayna had to tend her. If she hadn't crossed the wrong person, she wouldn't be stuck in the middle of nowhere tending this ancient one. Of course, it would have been nice if her punishment had been to tend an ancient one who liked people instead of Grandmother.

She sighed. She needed to wake the ancient one and tend to her. Setting the peas aside, she rose and put her hand on Grandmother's shoulder. "Wake up, Grandmother." The old woman didn't respond. She shook her gently and got no response. She stared into the ancient one's face. She didn't seem to be breathing. She shook Grandmother harder and

Grandmother's head lolled to the side, then she started to glow.

Rayna stepped back. The ancient one had gone to meet her maker after over three hundred years upon this earth. Rayna stared for a moment, then a heaviness rose from her. Her exile was over.

She pulled the coverlet up and tucked it around Grandmother's shoulders. "Goodbye, old woman." She turned and went into the cabin to get the bar of soap. She would have her bath and leave this dreadful cabin. The roof looked ready to cave in at any moment. The walls had chinks in them that no longer kept out the winter wind or the summer heat. Rayna had patched them as best she could and suggested to Grandmother that they return to the castle in Augeas, but the ancient one wouldn't hear of it. She had been born in this cabin and here she would die. And so she had.