

In Each Darkness

by Cynthia Rucryst

Gretchen had been living in the woods for a long time, ever since Robin died. She tended to her greenhouse and all of her plant ‘children’, like the fabled old woman who lived in a shoe, she had so many children (plants) she didn’t know what to do. She refused to stay in a society that did not support old “spinster” ladies, especially old spinster witches.

There was no one to complain about what she was doing and how she was doing them. She could ignore the rest of the world because they just weren’t doing things right, anyway. She didn’t have to depend on the rest of the world for anything, which suited her just fine.

Her life was peaceful. Gretchen was far enough out she couldn’t hear any sounds of civilization, and there were no signs of it encroaching on her territory. She had saved up enough money to buy this land, some 200 acres, before Robin died. In their 15 years together they had planned their retreat to this land, but like the winds, things changed direction very quickly. Death hastened the process. Gretchen spread Robin’s ashes, “In each corner of the land you shall lie”. She talked to herself frequently, oftentimes calling herself by her first name. “I’m sure you’d be considered a dotty old witch, Gretch, if anyone were around to hear you. Ha!”

Gretchen had created a self-sufficient little “farm”, as she called it, for herself, in the woods near Sequim, Washington. It took a few years to do it, but she knew she had to if she were to survive. Civilization had gotten to the point where little old spinster ladies were living in abject poverty. Gretchen was not about to accept that fate. So she just said, “fuck you!” to the rest of the world and struck out on her own. It hadn’t been easy at 65, but she had kept herself strong and healthy. She’d known she could do it, loved the idea of doing it and most importantly, that she must do it. Eleven years later, she was still going strong. Gretchen was an attractive older woman, about 5’8” with a strong, wiry frame. She had long graying hair pulled back into a braid, most of the time. Her slightly disheveled look did not detract from her stately composure and she exuded a confidence that stemmed from knowing at the “get go” who she was, where she was and where she was going. Gretchen had never cared about her appearance, preferring to wear what was comfortable and practical, rather than following the latest fashions. Her intelligence was reflected in her gold-green eyes that could look into your soul and make the strongest person weak in the knees. In her younger days, her most rebellious days, she had kept her hair cropped very short and even had shaved her head, at one point in time. Now, though, she did like the feel of her hair – she felt closer to the Goddess, somehow.

This particular day she was in her greenhouse tending to her vegetables, getting all of the beds ready for winter. She looked out the window to the sky and the trees, musing aloud, to herself, “If I don’t know if winter’s coming early, then I don’t know who does besides us animals. Gretchen took a big whiff of air and shook her head, chuckling, “Yep, it’s on its way, all right.” She yelled out to all her animal companions, “Get your winter coats out and have ‘em handy, my little friends, it’s almost time!” A few of her “little friends” who were hanging around nearby lazily opened an eye or perked an ear. The sky was clouding over for the usual afternoon shower, but this wasn’t the reason she thought winter was coming early. I’ve got a sixth or seventh sense in me and I can feel it like my animal friends do,” she said to herself.

She grew her favorite vegetables and the medicinal herbs she would use either for healing or for cooking. She didn’t have the time or the space to be growing for other people although she shared extra veggies with her good friend Roberta at the General Store down the road. She suspected Roberta of giving a lot of it away to some of the needier folks in town, and that was just fine by her, although she did have a hard time understanding why some folks just couldn’t seem to make it on their own. “After all, I’ve done it!” she thought aloud. “Guess there are some folks who just don’t have what it takes. They get the stuffin’ knocked out of them and they just can’t seem to put it back in.” She sighed and shook her head in compassion.

Gretchen finished her gardening, took off her gloves, and left the greenhouse, looking at the sky and smelling the fall air, “Yep, winter’s on its way.” Chuckling to herself, she thought about the last five years since Robin died, how she’d done everything she and Robin talked about doing together, and then some. She was proud of what she’d accomplished, and now it was just a matter of maintaining it all. Gretchen didn’t have to depend on anyone for anything, but there were those times when she felt “soft”, as she called it. Gretchen was as stubborn and independent as they come, but when she felt “soft” and in need of intellectual conversation, and company, she would walk up to the General Store with Sophie, her Lab/Dobie mix and spend the afternoon gabbing with Roberta. They had known each other for a very long time, since before she and Robin had gotten together, and she enjoyed her friendship.