

Gift or Curse

Raognnailt

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LEVITTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

The Scottish Highlands have a way of revealing the truth, and those with *An Dà Shealladh*—the gift of two sights—were revered and feared equally. This gift had been passed down to Raognnailt through generations of her Scottish lineage. Tonight, it called to her once more, slipping into her dreams, weaving seamlessly into the fabric of her slumber.

She stood in a modest bedroom, a silent observer. A frail woman lay in a rented hospital bed at home, barely able to move, her teenage son tenderly feeding her. But each bite was a monumental effort; chewing was a battle against fatigue, every swallow an agonizing ordeal.

“One more bite, Ma. Please?” The boy’s voice cracked, eyes filled with desperation.

The woman shook her head weakly. “I’m so tired, honey... I miss your father. He’s waiting for me.”

“Shhh...,” he whispered. “You promised we wouldn’t give up.”

Raognnailt’s heart ached for him. She was a mother now, too—her daughter, Rainey, just a few months old—and the

thought of leaving her behind was unbearable. This lad was too young to carry such a burden. His shoulders sagged under the weight of it all—his mother’s illness, the empty house, the loss of his father. He was barely holding on.

Raohnailt saw his eyes glisten with unshed tears as he set the tray aside and adjusted her blankets and pillows with the quiet efficiency of someone who had done it countless times. He lowered the bed’s headrest, unaware of the tiny spark that flickered from the electrical socket behind it.

“I’ll be in my room studying, Ma. I’ve got finals tomorrow. Here’s the bell where you can reach it.”

He bent to kiss her goodnight and whispered, “I love you, Ma.”

But the woman was already slumbering.

Raohnailt moved closer, feeling the weight of death settle over the room. She gently touched the woman’s forehead, whispering a Gaelic blessing to ease her pain. The woman wouldn’t make it through the night. Her son—he should be by her side when she drew her last breath.

As she turned to leave, something—a flash of light—caught the corner of her eye. Embers had dropped onto the carpet and ignited into low flames within seconds.

Raohnailt cried out. She ran through the house, searching for the boy, calling out for him.

Where are ye, lad? Yer Mama is in trouble. Hurry!

Her voice echoed, hollow and powerless. She was only an observer. No one could hear her. Raohnailt tried one more time to use her voice.

“FIRE!”

She shrieked and jolted awake in her husband’s arms, flailing in panic. Tono cupped her face gently.

“Rae, look at me,” he whispered. “You’re safe.”

She blinked, still shaking. This vision was different—too real, too vivid.

“No, my love. There is no fire. There, there...” Tono comforted, holding his wife tightly while caressing her hair. “We are all fine, Rae. Everything is just fine.”

“Rainey. Where’s Rainey?”

“She’s in her room sleeping, sweetheart. Shhh... hush now, or you’ll wake her.”

Raognnailt clung fiercely to her husband, wanting to believe it wasn’t real. But she knew.

“’Twas a vision, Tono,” she sobbed. “I dinna ken the mother and her lad in the dream. She burnt tae death, *duine-cèile*. An’ the lad saw t’all. Something will happen to Rainey.”

“Shhh...” He comforted her shaking body, coaxing his wife to go back to sleep. “Nothing will happen, love. I’m right here. We can talk about your dream in the morning, alright?”

Having had a late night at their restaurant, Raognnailt persuaded Tono to go back to sleep. She then quietly rose and tiptoed to her baby’s room.

Chubby four-month-old Rainey was sound asleep in her crib, her pouty mouth parted, breathing quietly. Raognnailt reached down to pick her up, cradling her warm, cuddly body. Then, she settled into the nearby rocking chair to croon a lullaby in Gaelic.

Raognnailt thought of her prophetic dream, its vividness and haunting scene. She had never been sent a vision of someone she didn’t know or recognize, nor a place she had never been, and never about suffering or tragedy happening in the present.

She was aware her *An Da Shealladh* revealed not only the future but also the present. As she glanced at the small electric clock on her baby’s dressing table, its second arm sweeping past midnight, she knew the tragedy was still unfolding. And with each ticking second, she felt herself pulled back into the vision, the scene growing clearer—the young man she’d seen in her dream, rescued from the flames. Third-degree burns

covered his arms, chest, and parts of his face, where the skin had turned a sickly, waxy gray in places. He let out a howl that pierced the air, not from the pain of his injuries but from seeing his mother's form lying on a gurney covered beneath a white sheet from head to toe, emerging from the charred remains of their home.

From the edges of her vision, she glimpsed a young reporter furiously scribbling every detail as the chaos unfolded. His pen raced to capture it all. Every tortured detail, from the acrid smoke burning his throat to the boy's agonizing wail that split the night. This was his moment, his first major story, the one that would launch his career and carve his name into the pages of the big city newspapers. But no triumph could erase the memory of this night, the night when a son's tortured eyes watched his mother ascend in flames.

A cold shiver crept up Raoghnail's spine, shaking herself back to the present. She pulled her baby tighter to her chest as if shielding her from an unseen menace. The boy. The reporter. Two strangers she had never known now seemed tethered to her child's fate, their paths winding toward her daughter's future in ways she could barely begin to understand.