



The Handfasting is an epic tale of a family's struggle to survive on an alien planet. In Book 1 – A Year And A Day, A witch from the right side of the tracks finds herself paired with a hard-bitten soldier handpicked by a computer program. In Book 2 – Forever And A Day, A marriage of convenience between two determined, strong willed people sparks a planetary war and puts at risk everyone they love. In the Final Chapter, All Our Tomorrows, a warrior/priestess teams up with a Bard from another world and genetically created children to defeat a deadly enemy and save their

planet from destruction.

Start reading Chapters 7 A New Home & 8 A New family

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Check in next Friday for the next chapter of A Year And A Day – book 1 of The Handfasting

Chapter 7 - A New Home

ARRIVAL day on Vensoog was chaos. The Dancing Gryphon only boasted three shuttles and two of them had already been re-fitted by the crew as cargo carriers.

"We drew lots," Katherine explained to her frustrated family. "Captain Heidelberg only made one shuttle available to us for unloading people. The other three shuttles are going to be busy unloading cargo. We won't have them available until the cargo has been unloaded. The Clans are going to alternate shuttle usage for landing our new members. Yang will go down first, then the DeMedici's and then us. I arranged for the fifteen of us and three more families with children to be in the first shuttle we've been allotted. I wanted families with children to have a chance to settle them into O'Teague Manor before the ceremony this afternoon, so they will be first down."

"What about our stuff," Jayla asked gesturing at the pile of luggage

they had needed during the trip.

"There is a cargo lift outside. If you boys will put all of that stuff on it, one of the crew is going to take it down to the loading area. From there it will be taken on one of the cargo shuttles down to the port. Once it's down on the planet, it will be taken over to the barge we're going to ride out to our Glass Manor."

Chapter 8 - A New Family

PORT recovery's spaceport was a series of plain utilitarian domes. The first building on the site had been a tower that had blown over during the colonists first storm season. Next to it was a larger secondary dome with partitions where colonists could store trade goods while they waited for a ship.

Several of the clans had reception committees waiting for the new arrivals. Clan O'Teagues' consisted of Genevieve, Drusilla and three women who were in charge of handling the transition of both cargo and new immigrants. After freeing herself from strangling hugs from Genevieve and Drusilla, Katherine turned to Margie, a medium sized, brown haired woman accompanied by two very large shorthaired dogs.

"Are these them?" she inquired.

Margie nodded, stroking their heads. "This is Ulnae and Karton, the best in our kennels, Just and you requested."

Katherine gestured Jayne forward. "Jayne, I'd like for you and your boys to meet Margie. She will be instructing you on handling your new Nanny Dogs, Ulnae and Karton."

Jayne looked puzzled. "Nanny Dogs?"

Katherine nodded. "Your boys are both too young to recognize dangerous plants or animals. On Vensoog, we use Nanny Dogs to keep very young children safe from things in their environment that might hurt them. Ulnae and Karton will help keep them from doing things like accidentally falling in the water, tasting poison plants, handling venomous insects, stuff like that."

"They're quite safe," Margie assured her. "Let's step over here shall we, so we're out of the way while I introduce you. Hold out your hand so they can get your scent."

Margie, Jayne and her boys moved over by the open windows while she made the

introductions and explained to Jayne and the boys about the dog's duties.

Katherine turned to the waiting men. "Genevieve, may I present Colonel Gideon Michaels, his son Lucas and his daughter Jayla?"

Genevieve held out her hand and Gideon bowed over it, brushing it with a kiss. "Lady Genevieve, I am honored to meet you," he said.

She smiled back at him. "Just Genevieve, please. Since we are to be Handfasted, I suggest we start with first names instead of titles." She turned to Lucas and Jayla. "These are your wards?"

"Yes, this is Lucas and Jayla." Lucas had been staring dumbstruck at Drusilla ever since he laid eyes on her and had apparently not heard the introduction.

Gideon kicked Lucas sharply in the ankle to get his attention, and the boy jumped. "What? Oh, pleased to meet you ma'am," Lucas said, bowing also, but his eyes went straight back to Drusilla.

Seeing what had drawn his gaze, Genevieve's lips twitched, but she turned her attention to Jayla. "Welcome to Vensoog, Lady Jayla," she said as the girl, having been coached by Katherine on the trip out, dropped a curtsy. "Lord Lucas, I am pleased to meet you. I can see you will be a welcome addition to the Clan."

She gestured Drusilla forward. "Gideon, this is my youngest sister, Lady Drusilla who has been largely responsible for organizing the ceremony this afternoon and the journey back to Glass City we will take later this week."

"Please to meet you," Drusilla said shyly, blushing when she met Lucas's openly admiring eyes.

"Excuse me," Genevieve murmured to Gideon. "Protocol," as she moved back over to Katherine.

"Lady Genevieve, Lady Drusilla," Katherine said formally. "This is my fiancée Zackery Jackson and his wards, the Ladies Violet and Lucinda, and his nephews Lord Rupert and Lord Roderick. And this," she added standing behind Juliette and putting her hands on both her shoulders, "is my First Daughter, Lady Juliette O'Teague'ni Jones. Everyone, this is your new Laird, the Lady Genevieve O'Teague, and my sister Lady Drusilla."

Genevieve's eyebrows rose, but she held out both hands to Juliette and said, "Welcome to our family, First Daughter. I am so pleased to meet all of you."

She and Katherine then moved off to the waiting new clansmen so they could be formally presented to their new Laird.

Katherine stood at the rail of the large paddlewheel boat with Zack and the children and looked out over the smoothly flowing channel of water as they threaded the gate of the inlet leading out into the main waterway. The water was a translucent green, clear enough to see the bottom, in spite of the plants coating the shore and drifting across the expanse of water. A warm breeze laden with aromas of drying algae and scented plants warmed her skin as the boat moved slowly along. In the distance, a family of Nessies lifted their heads to watch the boat.

"How far to the Manor?" Zack inquired. "Is it large enough to hold us all?"

"It's not just the manor," Katherine said. "When we first landed, the entire clan stayed there until we moved onto Glass Isle. There is a manor house, outbuildings and an outdoor meeting hall. Drusilla told me we would be staying in the main house. Normally we would stay there anyway, but because there are so many of us, it's going to be crowded. She assigned all the children beds in the dormitory so that as many of the newly married couples as could fit would have a room to themselves. Of course some of the women have brought their own pop up domes with them."

"How long will it take to get there?" asked Juliette.

"O'Teague Manor is about a half hour from the city," Katherine answered. "We're lucky our land extends down to the edge of the water so we reach it by river boat."

"Do all the Clans have land around the spaceport?" Zack asked curiously.

"Yes. It was agreed that for the first year all the clans would set up a permanent base around the spaceport. We had a limited amount of materials and equipment that had to be shared. O'Teague and most of the others didn't move onto our assigned territories until the third year after landfall."

As she spoke, the barge was carefully sliding by with about eight feet clearance from another paddlewheel barge going against the current toward the spaceport. At last they rounded the final curve of the channel and angled in toward a plastacrete dock.

“Look,” Katherine exclaimed. “Isn’t it beautiful?”

Several smaller colorful dome roofs had been put together to form a large area for the temporary hall. The domes were held up with poles wrapped in colorful ribbons and left open to take advantage of the breeze coming in off the water. Decorated tables of food with stasis shielding were laid out, and chairs were placed around other tables set up for dining. A leaf-covered bower for the Handfasting ceremonies had been erected under the dome. Behind it and a little to the right were three smaller tables one holding red and silver braided ribbons, the second a stack of small crystal boxes and the third several decanters each with two pouring spouts and sets of glasses.

Up the hill from the temporary hall were a series of larger domes including the main house and dormitories. Extensive and fragrant gardens marked with stone pathways led up from the temporary hall toward the main house. Twenty or thirty smaller, colorful temporary domes dotted the gardens as well.

It took most of the morning for all the new clan members to arrive. Katherine and Zack spent most of it making sure the children and Jayne were comfortable in the space Drusilla had assigned them. She had also made sure that each couple had an opportunity to meet their handfasting partner before the actual ceremony.

