



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 book 3 - 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. From This Day Forward, Book 4 – When she finds the body of a retired shopkeeper on the beach, a series of mysterious events draw the new owner into a web of passion, terror and murder. She must find the killer and discover what he wants before he gets her too. **(still in production. Expected release date April 2017)**

Serial Chapters are posted on Fridays

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

Chapter 9 - The Handfasting

A CRYSTAL GONG sounded a single clear note and everyone quieted, directing their eyes towards the tiny woman who would officiate at the Handfasting ceremony. She stood under a canopy of green, sunlight filtering down through the leaves. The woman was dressed in shades of blue, purple and orange, making her eyes seem an even more vivid green than the arbor. Her white hair was braided in a coronet around her face. A large multi-colored crystal pendant rested on her breast, and large drops of the same crystal hung from her ears and were braided into her hair; she was attended by two slim teenagers with the colors in their garments a much paler hue.

“Good Afternoon,” her voice had a deep bell-like quality. “For those who do not know me, I am High Priestess Arella. I will perform the Handfasting ceremony. Since we have quite a few couples to unite this

afternoon, each ceremony will be brief. I will ask each couple to come forward and join me under the Greenleaf, we will perform the ceremony, and then you will be free to enjoy the festivities until it is time for the brides to leave for the wedding bower. If there are any here who wish for the Forever and A Day handfasting, please let me know when you come forward." Arella consulted the infopad next to her.

"Genevieve and Gideon, please join me."

When the Laird and her new husband to be joined her, Arella said, "Please turn and face one another. Each of you cross your arms and take the others hands."

She picked up a thin, braided red and silver cord and laid it over their wrists, allowing the ends to dangle.

"Genevieve, Gideon, your crossed arms and joined hands create the symbol for Infinity. Today, we ask that the Light Of The Divine shine upon this union for a year and a day. In that spirit, I offer a blessing to this handfasting.

Blessed be this Handfasting with the offerings from the East — new beginnings that come each day with the dawn, junction of the heart, soul, body and mind.

Blessed be this handfasting with the offerings of the South — the untroubled heart, the heat of passion, and the tenderness of a loving home.

Blessed be this handfasting with the offerings of the West — the hastening eagerness of a raging river, the softness and pure cleansing of a rainstorm, and faithfulness as deep as the ocean.

Blessed be this handfasting with the offerings of the North — a solid footing on which to build your lives, richness and growth of your home, and the strength to be found by embracing one another at the end of the day."

She wrapped the dangling ends of the cord around the wrists of the bride and groom, binding them together loosely and tying a knot.

"The bonds of this Handfasting are not formed by these ribbons, or even by the knots connecting them. They are formed instead by your vows, by your pledge, to love and honor each other for a year and a day, at which time these vows may be renewed or dissolved each according to their lights. Genevieve, Gideon do you each agree with the terms of this Handfasting?"

"We do," they said in unison and then Genevieve and Gideon stepped forward, hands still clasped, and kissed. Arella touched the cord and it slid off their hands, still tied. The acolyte a slim teenager in a pale robe stepped forward with a tray holding one of the glass boxes. Arella placed the cord inside the box and gestured for Gideon and Genevieve to each hold opposite sides of the box. The acolyte stepped back returning the tray to the table.

"By blood this oath is taken, on this day and this hour," Arella intoned, touching the box with a small gold wand. Everyone felt the small surge of power. Even Forewarned ahead of time, Gideon winced when a sharp prick on his thumb caused a drop of blood to form on either ends of the box, but he didn't drop his end of it. The edges of the box disappeared as it sealed, and their names and the date scrolled across the top of the box in red.

"This Knot is a symbol of your union. Hold it fast and give it an honored place in your home."

Genevieve slipped the box into a ready pocket of her wedding dress and Arella gestured the acolyte to step forward again, this time holding a tray with one decanter and two glasses. "For love and fertility," Arella said, pouring a small amount of golden syrup into the glasses. The two spouts of the decanter enabled both glasses to be filled at once with the same amount of liquid. Genevieve and Gideon each held the glass to the others lips as they drank, then set the glasses back on the tray for the acolyte to take back to the table.

"Thank you Arella." Genevieve motioned for Lucas and Jayla to join them. Holding Gideon's hand, she stepped up beside them.

"The O'Teague presents her new family, my husband Lord Gideon ni'Warlord of the Clan, his son Lucas and niece Jayla." She announced and led the way from the arbor to make room for the next couple.

Corrine and Vernal while not officially taking part in the Matchmaking program, opted to become handfasted, choosing the more involved Forever and A Day ceremony. As expected, the individual handfasting ceremonies took most of the afternoon and some of the evening, and then new single clan members were presented to the Clan.

When Zack and Katherine had returned to their table to watch the rest of the ceremonies, Gideon asked Zack what had been in the syrup they drank during the ceremony.

Zack shrugged. "The name of it is Payome; Katherine said it's just a mild aphrodisiac with a touch of soother. Katherine tells me it's traditional when the bride and groom aren't well acquainted. She says the effects usually last four to five hours so it won't wear off before the wedding night." He grinned, "Since Katherine and I are pretty well acquainted, I don't think we will need it—Vernal and Corrine either, but you might," he teased Gideon, who snorted and cuffed him affectionately on the shoulder.

Katherine had been concerned that during the celebration that some of the newly married pairs might get too enthusiastic about their union where the children could see them. She soon found she had underestimated Drusilla's organizing skills. Her baby sister had set up dancing for the adults and games for the older children that involved a lot of running and jumping; virtually guaranteed to tire them out early. For the younger ones, like Jaynes boys, she had arranged milder forms of the same inside the dormitory recreation rooms and assembled a few older men and women who weren't being matched to watch them.

Katherine and Zack bade their children good night as they headed up to the children's dormitories.

About an hour after the ceremonies had been concluded and the children sent to their rooms, a soft chime sounded. As one, all the brides rose, each handing their groom a small crystal which projected a map to their quarters (more of Drusilla's efficiency, Katherine thought). "Give me about twenty minutes," she murmured to Zack.

She and Zack had been allotted one of the larger rooms with a small sitting room and attached bath.

"Drusilla missed her calling," Katherine remarked aloud to herself when she saw the candles and iced wine bucket and a few delicacies set out on a table on the terrace. Drusilla had also laid out a filmy negligee on the bed, which Katherine nervously fingered. She spent some time undressing and brushing out her hair before she donned the gown. She gasped when she first saw herself in the mirror. The negligee was of the finest spun dragon nest silk and had been designed to arouse desire, being cut almost to her navel in both the front and back, and even with the matching robe, it was almost transparent. Whatever had possessed her innocent baby sister to design something like this, she wondered. Zack had been frustrated enough at their lack of privacy on the journey; she could only imagine the effect this would have. Zack opened the door before she had time to panic herself into changing out of it. The pocket door slid back into the wall and he stood stock still in the doorway at his first sight of her. "Wow," was all he said.

"Whoops," echoed Vernal, hastily turning his head away. Since their rooms had all been on the same floor, Gideon, Zack and Vernal had left the party in a group and come upstairs together. Katherine hastily turned her back, not wanting to give her new brother-in-law and uncle-by-marriage any more of an eyeful than she already had. Vernal thoughtfully pushed the close button on the pocket door. Zack never even noticed the door closing. "You look beautiful," he said.

"If I'd known you were bringing company, I wouldn't have been in front of the door—"Katherine began.

"Mmmn," Zack slipped his arms around her from behind. He lifted her hair out of the way, sliding his lips down her neck and Katherine shivered.

"I guess I should have told you before, but I've never—I mean I don't know how—"

He partially turned her so he had a better purchase for his mouth and ran his tongue across her lips. His hand slid up to cup her breast through the thin fabric. She could feel the hardness of his swollen shaft against her buttocks. Heat built between her legs and she turned to press her body against him.

"Mmmn," he murmured between kisses, "You worry too much. We'll just do what comes naturally."

He had been right, she thought afterwards, resting her head against the hard muscles of his chest. True, it had been a little painful the first time, but she had been taught that it would get easier as her body got used to accommodating him. She hadn't worn the pretty nightgown Drusilla had provided very long either she thought ruefully. Along with Zack's wedding clothes, it was in a crumpled heap on the floor.

After a few minutes, she felt him stir beside her. "I bet the ice in the wine bucket isn't cold anymore," he said. "Want to try some anyway?"

"It should still be cold," she replied, admiring his muscled wiry back as he walked toward the terrace. He didn't seem at all embarrassed by the fact that he was naked.. "I think I saw a stasis cube next to it."

While his back was turned, Katherine quickly sat up and reached for the robe that had come with the gown. Donning it, she took a quick look in the mirror and caught her breath. To her eyes, she looked a mess. Her mouth was a little swollen from being kissed and her hair, which she had brushed so carefully, was in wild disorder. She shrugged to herself as she

donned the mostly transparent bedrobe and discovered that she was practically falling out of it. Zack had already seen all there was to see, and if he was comfortable enough to run around naked, why should she care about showing some skin?

"Relax, you look beautiful." Zack said smugly obviously admiring his work. He had come up behind her with two glasses of wine. He handed her one and set the other down on the dresser, running his hands possessively over her.

At that inopportune moment there was a knock on the door. Zack growled, stalked over to the door and yanked it open. "What?" he barked.

After a scandalized glance at his naked state, the older woman who had interrupted them looked past him to Katherine. "I beg your pardon Milady but two of your children—"

"Are having nightmares," Katherine finished, resigned. She set down her glass and started toward the door. Zack caught her arm.

"Just where do you think you're going, dressed like that?"

Katherine fisted her hands on her hips. "At least I'm wearing a robe! You open doors bare assed naked—"

"Well you can't parade around the place half-dressed. I'd just as soon nobody but me gets to see how tempting you look in that," he stated firmly.

Katherine made a rude noise and grabbed her trousers and shirt off the floor. "If I can't go out like that you can't either," she snapped. "At least put your pants on," she added, throwing his clothes at him.

By the time they reached the children's rooms, both Rupert and Violet had progressed to full-blown screaming nightmares. Drusilla had set up separate rooms for the boys and girls. Katherine went to quiet Violet while Zack attended to Rupert.

By the time they returned to their room several hours later, the wine had gotten warm. Both of them tumbled into bed and fell immediately asleep, already comforted by the others presence.

While the new immigrants were sorted into their various new professions and everyone worked at becoming better acquainted with their new spouses the clan stayed three more days at Glass Manor. Both Katherine and Corrine were a little too pre-occupied with their new wifely duties and Genevieve too busy, to notice that Drusilla was spending a great deal of time with Lucas. Partly it was the fact he took every excuse to seek her company and she didn't object; he was young, good looking and the first young man her age to pay her the attention a man pays to an attractive woman.

Drusilla, Lucas and Jayla traveled back and forth to Port Recovery several times to make sure the materials and supplies brought in by the Dancing Gryphon were loaded on to the barges. She also met with Captain Heidelberg about the trade goods he was taking with him from Vensoog. Lucas stuck closely to her side, but Jayla soon became bored with the negotiations and Drusilla saw no harm in letting the girl explore the shops around the spaceport.