



## Chapter 1

### JAHNA AD 82 November

*I will die when I choose to die.*

*And as I die, my thoughts will be of Lovern, the Fox, a man who taught me to live, to talk to the gods, and to love. We failed to change the future, and now I beg the goddess Morrigna to allow my daughter a safe journey. I have only time for one more passage dream to tell our story. Then, I shall die.*

### AD 72 October

Peat smoke darkened the room and firelight struggled to glint off the weapons behind Uncle Beathan, our clan chieftain. I kept my eyes on the weapons so I did not have to look at him. A bronze shield, two spears and two swords -- one short, and one long -- were balanced against the wall. The sword hilts showed our smith's interpretations of animals, trees and the spirals of life. If I squinted just right, the bear, Uncle Beathan's name sign, shrugged its shoulders as if alive. When he was in a better mood than today, he let me touch them. I wished I had worked with my cousin to create this art.

We stood in front of my uncle's table like thieves as he ate goat cheese and bread, crumbs falling into his beard. My hands were sweating. I held them behind me. I jumped when he spoke. "Jahna, you will marry Harailt."

He had sent Braden to summon my mother and Harailt, as well as me. Harailt's father, Cerdic, was there, too. No good ever came from being summoned. Beathan would usually send the girl who did his cooking, Drista, to ask us to join him for family discussions. Drista, a farmer's daughter honored to be chosen by Beathan to serve at his table, was almost at the marrying age and would leave Beathan's home soon. He would pick another and another to come to him, until he married.

When our chieftain sent his warrior, Braden, we knew he wanted to discuss important clan matters.

I did not want to be in his lodge that afternoon. Uncle Beathan's dogs chewed on old pork bones under his table. The smell made my stomach churn.

Mother did not look upset when she glanced down at me. I wondered how we could be mother and daughter. As a small girl, I held up our polished bronze and compared our faces. She told me I was vain. I told her she was beautiful. I felt like a young goat next to her. Mother's hair was long and straight, the colors of autumn, amber laced with gold and red. Her brother Beathan's hair was similar. Hers smelled of herbs when she washed it. She wore it loose. Mine was black as a

raven's-wing and never where I wanted it. I wore mine tied back. Her eyes were blue as clear snow water, mine the color of mistletoe leaves with oak splinters. She reached Beathan's chin, and my head came to his lower chest. Smiles were rare on her solemn face, and I seemed not to know how to be serious. She blended into our family, the village, the clan. I was like none of them. She told me I was like my father, a trader from the south. I wished I had known my father.

Beathan sliced another large piece of cheese and stuffed it into his mouth. My stomach groaned. Chewing, he continued. "However, Cerdic. You do have a rich farm. You will be able to provide your son with sheep and pigs to start his own family. And he will inherit your land one day, goddess willing." He drank long from his cup of mead.

Cerdic was a small man with arms strong enough to lift one of his sheep out of a ravine and shoulders broad enough to carry lambs. Harailt, like his mother, grew tall, thin and quiet. His shorter father looked up to him but Harailt heeded his father's wishes.

Blankets and pieces of clothing were strewn all over my uncle's home. Bridles and parts of his chariot lay on the table in the midst of repair. His hunting dogs laid asleep on his bed, or at his feet, gnawing on the remnants of last night's dinner. In the gloom of the room, we had to be careful not to trip over whatever was on the floor. My aunt used to straighten after him, but she died two planting seasons ago.

"And Jahna."

I looked straight at him. Shards of light reflected in his sky blue eyes. I shivered.

"You have seen sixteen harvests," he said.

I knew I was past the age of marrying. Most girls younger than me were married and had several children hanging onto their skirts. I had foolishly thought Uncle and Mother would let me choose my mate.

"It is time for you to start having babies of your own. You will marry. I will hand-fast you to Harailt at Samhainn, to be blessed by the gods. Now go! I am still hungry. Girl! Mead!" He belched. Drista dashed in, balancing an overflowing mug and more cheese.

Stunned, I hung on to my mother's arm. As we left his lodge, Uncle Beathan's words rang in my ears.

"But Mother," I said. "I have watched Braden for a long time. It was him I hoped to marry. I was waiting for him to ask Uncle for our hand-fasting. Now, I have to marry that—that—farmer."

"Shush, girl," my mother said.

I did not care if Harailt heard me. I had known him all my life; we played as children, but I had never thought of marrying him.

I did not know if the tears in my eyes were caused by the sun or disappointment.

I overheard Cerdic as Harailt and his father walked away.

"It is too bad you could not have married Sileas. Her hands are callused from hard work. Her father taught her well. Jahna does not know how to work the land. She has lived with her mother, weaving, and her hands are soft. She will not like to work outside in the fields."

Yes, I thought, *I weave cloth*. My hands did not have the grime of the fields on them, but they were still strong hands. Would Harailt only want to marry someone with dirty hands?

"We must do what Beathan decrees," my mother said. "He is the *ceann-cinnidh*."

I glanced over and saw Harailt's shoulders slump.

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The moon, full then, was now a sliver. I stayed angry and sullen most days. I spilled water and half swept the floor. My mother finally lost her patience with me one day and grasped me by my shoulders.

Turning me to face her, she said, "You will be married to Harailt. And you will be happy."

Beathan has said you will marry so you—will—marry. Stop behaving as if you were a lost puppy.”

My dream of Braden faded and I accepted my fate. I supposed I liked Harailt. His ear-length, rust colored hair, swept back with lime-wash, looked comely. His face though not as handsome as the warrior’s face I had admired for so long, was not ugly. He kept his red beard trim, and his hands were large enough to catch a baby lamb being born. He was a good farmer who smelled of harvest grain. I could marry worse.

The day before Samhainn, the day our hand-fasting would be officially announced, Mother asked me to go to the drying rack in our yard and bring in the last of our blue yarn. I stood in the sun, thinking of the upcoming ceremony. Would Harailt kiss me after the announcement? Only my uncle and cousins had ever kissed me, and then only on my cheek. I touched my lips and wondered if I would know what to do.

“Jahna!”

I sighed, not wanting to go back to the loom. The sun was high and white clouds floated in the bright sky. I had been cold in these days of rain, and felt the golden warmth as a gift from the goddess. I hoped for the same weather tomorrow. It would be nice to be warm and dry on the day of my hand-fasting.

I waved my hand to show I heard. “One moment, Mother.” I saw Harailt coming from our smithy. He walked toward our house from Finlay’s work-hut, carrying a repaired plow on one shoulder. “Harailt is coming. I wish to speak to him about the giving fires.”

He passed me and did not stop, though I thought I had seen him look my way.

“Harailt,” I called.

He stopped walking but did not look at me.

“Come with us to the ceremony,” I said. “Come early so we may talk. I would like to arrive at the fires with you.”

He sighed and looked at me as if speaking to his little sister.

“I will ask my father,” he said. “He may need help with the animals. Maybe my sisters will be enough help. If he says I may come, I will be here in time to walk with you and your mother.” He started down the hill.

“May the gods protect you from evil tonight,” I called.

He answered, “And you,” without looking back.

I hoped he would come to take me to the festival. He had been busy with the harvest, and I, making cloth for winter cloaks, so our visits had been few and hurried. We would need to learn to live together quickly, and I was ready to try. We would not have the usual full season to live together before marriage. My uncle had shortened our hand-fasting time. Maybe he worried one of us would protest the marriage.

I wrenched the bitter-smelling blue wool off the rack and ran to my mother, my hair flying free from its tie again.

“Jahna, do not run,” she scolded. “You are old enough to be respectable. We still have good sunlight so we can weave more before we go to Beathan’s.”

I added the wool to the overflowing baskets next to our loom, which stood on the other side of the room. A window cut into the stone and mud wall just above it let in the afternoon light. It would be hard to leave Mother and this home I had known all my life.

Taking a deep breath, I inhaled the scent of the wool and dyes, a mixture of herbs and trees, bitter and sweet. A smell I grew up with. I learned to weave and spin with these smells as I learned to walk. My fingers were soft from the wool grease and stained from the dye. We had finished dyeing until next spring and my hands would soon lose their blue tint. I did not mind.

I loved the color and patterns we designed with the dyed yarn. I had created the clan plaid we wove by using woad blue to represent our sky and red from the alder tree to portray the blood

of our clan. Uncle Beathan had declared it the colors of his warriors.

I had other pictures in my head filled with color and wished I could bring them to life, but mother did not approve of spending my sunlight hours doing anything other than weaving after the shearing of the sheep. We traded cloth for food, and pictures had never fed anyone in her family. So I wove, both cloth and dreams.

“Mother. Will you miss me when I am married?”

“That is a silly question. You have lived here longer than I had hoped. Beathan was good to me and let you stay longer than I expected. Now it is your time to become an adult. I am proud that you are going. You will give up your childish ways and act as a young woman. Now hand me that yarn and ask no more questions.”

The shuttle flew in my mother’s fingers like a bird through the leaves of an oak tree as she lifted the yarn and created the pattern. As I watched, my life memories played through my mind, especially my travels into other bodies -- my passage dreams. I had visited two other people in my mind and prayed to the goddesses daily to allow me to continue to have those dreams after my marriage. I hoped they were not one of the childish things my mother told me I would have to give up.

I was much younger, about ten harvests, when I had my first passage dream. At dusk, the peat smoke lay harsh in our lodge and I longed for fresh air. I sat on a stool, watching the spindle and whorl twist my wool. In no more than a blink and a small dizzy spell, my heart told me that I looked out of another person’s eyes. My mind said it was impossible.

I glanced around, afraid and breathless. I was in a small enclosure with strange things around me. Something looked like our polished bronze, but much more reflective. I did not understand what was happening, but I heard the goddess whispering, telling me not to be afraid.

A hand that belonged to the body lifted the bronze-like thing, and the face of a girl my age was reflected back at me. *Us*. Her large eyes, color same as my own, looked frightened. She wore her black hair like mine, but her face was not mine. The Goddess Morrigna whispered into her ear, too, that all was well. I felt her shoulders lose their tension. Questioning brows raised over our eyes.

I heard wind blowing and we turned to a hole in a wall to watch trees bend and sway. A skin did not cover the opening, yet the cold wind did not blow in.

The Goddess Morrigna said, “You are together, yet separate. You are connected through the wisps of time. This is a gift of life. Accept and learn.”

I whispered my name, “Jahna.”

She said, “Aine.”

The picture was gone. I was still balanced on the stool, watching the spindle, and surprised that I was not on the floor asleep. Morrigna whispered the name in my ear again. “Aine.”

When I asked if others had passage dreams, Uncle Beathan shook his head. “No. But if I could travel unseen, I would spy on other clans to make sure they had peaceful thoughts about us. Imagine, being able to listen to war plans, unknown to others!” He laughed. “Let me know if you hear about horses faster than ours. We need to look for new stock, and I want to know where it is best to go.” He pushed me out of his way and continued on to his lodge.

Mother did not laugh but looked at me with suspicion, so I kept my dreams secret from everyone except Ogil hinn, our druid priest. Just before he died, he had assured me my dreams were god given.

The noise of mother’s shuttle brought me out of my reverie. “Girl, the work will not get done on its own. There is much wool to spin and you stand with your mouth open like a chick waiting to be fed. Now we must go to Beathan’s. Get our cloaks. I will take my light one but you should wear your hooded one. You may need to go outside and bring in firewood.” She stood and