

Chapter 1

"You can't go! You are now the *rix* of the Bituriges!"

Donnotarvos turned around to look at his brother Ariotorcos, who was five winters younger than himself.

"That is all the more reason to go," Donnotarvos said with pride in his voice. "It is my duty to ensure that every member of the tribe is safe – whether they be the child of the poorest farmer or the richest noble. Can you not see that?"

Donnotarvos turned back around to retrieve his sword from the chest he kept it in and fastened it onto his right side. He picked up his shield and spear and turned back around to face his brother. Donnotarvos' hair was limed blonde and spiked back – adding fierceness to his appearance – as many of the warriors of the tribe did to their hair when going into battle. His blue eyes had a fixed and determined look as he waited for his brother to reply.

"Yes," Ariotorcos replied hesitantly, "but let the other warriors go after the women that the Senones stole. You should stay here."

An invading party of warriors from the neighboring tribe of the Senones had found some of the women of the Bituriges down on the banks of the Liger River and had kidnapped them – probably to take as wives. When news had reached Donnotarvos, he immediately called for his warriors and began to prepare to lead them into battle himself. Ariotorcos had come straight to the home of his brother hoping to persuade him not to go.

"Enough!" Donnotarvos bellowed, driving the shaft of his spear onto the ground. "My mind is made up!"

Ariotorcos looked at his brother. *So much like our father*, he thought to himself, *he is as stubborn as our father was*. Ariotorcos knew that once his brother set his mind on something that there was no changing it.

Donnotarvos had been elected *rix* of the Bituriges less than six moons ago, but he conducted himself like he was still just one of the warriors of the tribe. A *rix* had certain restrictions placed upon him to ensure his safety and well-being, including not fighting in a battle. Instead, a *vertamos* substituted for him in battle, acting as the champion of the *rix*. But ever since becoming *rix* of the Bituriges, Donnotarvos had ignored this custom. Before he was *rix*, he had been the strongest and bravest warrior of the tribe, and, as such, he thought that no harm could come to him. But Ariotorcos still tried to make his brother see reason.

"What about Tana and your unborn child?" Ariotorcos asked. "At least think about what would become of them if something were to happen to you."

Donnotarvos walked over to Ariotorcos and put his hand on his shoulder. "Nothing is going to happen to me, *bratir*. I will come back – leading our women back home with our enemies' heads tied to our chariots."

Ariotorcos finally gave up trying to convince his brother not to go. He could never resist his brother's confidence in himself, even when they had been children.

"I hope you are right, *bratir*," Ariotorcos said as he hugged his brother in farewell.

Donnotarvos walked outside to find his wife, Tana, waiting for him beside his chariot. She was eight moons with child, and Donnotarvos thought that she was as beautiful as the first day that he had seen her. Her red hair blazed like fire in the sunlight.

"You are going?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"I knew you would."

There was a moment of silence between them. Tana looked into the eyes of the man that had been her husband for less than two turnings of the cycle of the seasons. Their marriage had been

arranged, but she had loved him from the moment that she had seen him. If Tana had to pick one quality about her husband that had made her fall in love with him, it was his sense of honor. All of the Celts held honor in the highest regard; but for Donnotarvos, honor was more than just a way of life – it was his life.

She held out her hands to him. Donnotarvos took the hands of the woman that he loved more than anything in this world. There was nothing he wouldn't do for this woman. It was truly the love between the two of them that had made him take her as his wife rather than his father arranging for him to marry her because of her familial connections.

"Surely, you, more than anyone else, know why I have to do this," Donnotarvos said as he raised her hands up to his lips and kissed them.

"Yes, I do," Tana answered. She knew that, even though her husband was now *rix* of the Bituriges, he was first and foremost a warrior and nothing would change that. "I know that you feel you must go to bring the women back. But will you promise me something?"

Donnotarvos was silent for a few moments as he looked into the eyes of Tana. "If it is in my power, I will promise you," he finally said.

"Promise me," she said, as she held on tightly to his hands and locked his gaze with hers, "that you will do what you need to do as long as it doesn't endanger your life." She paused for a moment as she made sure that he fully understood what she was trying to say. "Lead our warriors into battle as only a warrior as great as yourself can to ensure that the women that the Senones stole are brought back home. But remember, my dear *donus*, that you are now the *rix* of the Bituriges...and that means that, although you lead them into battle, it is more imperative to all of us that you come back alive. Let the other warriors slaughter the cowardly Senones and take their heads in battle...it will be enough for you to lead them into battle to ensure that we are victorious and our women come home safe. Promise me, please, that you will not fight in the battle...for the sake of our unborn child?"

"I promise you, Tana," Donnotarvos said as he gazed into Tana's eyes. "I will lead our warriors into battle and that is all."

"Good," Tana said, with relief in her voice. "Then go, and may the gods watch over you and bring you safely back to me."

Donnotarvos let go of his wife's hands and kissed her, and then placed his hands on her stomach.

"I will come back to you and our unborn son," he said.

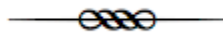
"And what makes you so sure that it will be a son?" Tana asked, laughing.

"I know it is," Donnotarvos said, and then he got into his chariot with his charioteer. "I will see you in no more than two days time."

As Donnotarvos and the other warriors were leaving, Ariotorcos walked up to Tana. He placed his hand reassuringly around her shoulder.

"Do you think that he will listen to your advice and stay out of the fighting of the battle?"

"I hope so," Tana said, as she watched Donnotarvos ride off across the plain. "I do not know what I would do if I lost him."



Tana had been standing in front of her home since the sun had risen on the second day since Donnotarvos and the others had left. She stared across the field in front of her, looking for any sign of the return of Donnotarvos. The longer that she stood there, the more uneasy and worried she began to feel. Finally, she began to do some minor chores in an effort to make the time pass by quicker. But her eyes were continually scanning the horizon looking for a sign of Donnotarvos' return.

Around mid-day, she saw a group of men leading a cart pulled by a pair of oxen come up over the hill that led down to their home. An immediate sense of fear overcame her as her hands went protectively to her stomach and the unborn child inside her womb. As the group got closer, she noticed that Ariotorcos and Verorgetos, the best friend of Donnotarvos, were in front of the cart leading the oxen, while the other two men were behind it – one carrying a spear and shield and the other carrying a sword. All of the men had their heads hung down as they approached Tana.

When they were close enough, Tana walked over to the cart and looked down inside it. The body of Donnotarvos was lying inside. Tana just stood there and stared at the body of her husband in disbelief.

After a few moments, she finally asked, "What happened?"

"Let's go inside," Ariotorcos said to her as he placed his hand on her arm. As he led Tana inside, Verorgetos followed after them.

Ariotorcos sat Tana down, and then poured himself and Verorgetos a cup of mead. He handed the cup to Verorgetos, and the two of them sat down across from Tana.

Tana looked back and forth from the face of Ariotorcos to Verorgetos, waiting for one of them to break the silence and tell her what had happened. But both men remained silent, neither of them wanting to speak.

"Well?" she asked them with impatience in her voice.

Finally, Verorgetos cleared his throat and began to tell her how Donnotarvos had died.

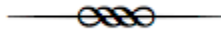
"We found the Senones about a day's journey from here," he began. He spoke slowly because the shock of what had happened still haunted him. "We spotted them moving across a plain...we were just coming out of a forest...Donnotarvos stayed behind while the rest of us charged across the plain and overtook the Senones. The fighting was fierce. It was my duty and a small band of warriors to get to the women, lead them away from the fighting, and protect them. But a group of the warriors of the Senones started to attack us as we were protecting the women. The warriors that were with me began to fight back against the Senones, while I led our women towards the forest. Donnotarvos saw what was happening and rode down to us. He told the women to go into the woods, while he and I followed after them to protect them from being attacked from behind. Just as we were going into the woods, a warrior of the Senones rode up to us and threw a spear at Donnotarvos. It pierced him in the back and threw him out of his chariot. The women came out of the woods and took the body of Donnotarvos back into the woods with them while I went after the warrior that had thrown the spear. I killed him...and our warriors slew the rest of the Senones without any of our warriors being slain...except for Donnotarvos."

Verorgetos stopped and looked at Tana. She was sitting with her head down and her hands placed on her stomach.

"When I got back to the woods after killing the warrior that threw the spear, Donnotarvos was on the verge of death. The women could do nothing for his wound...the spear had pierced his lung. I went over to him and he said, 'Tell Tana that I kept my promise to her,' and then he died."

Tana looked up at the words of Verorgetos as tears began to fall down her cheeks.

"Yes, he did," she said in a trembling whisper. "He was a man of honor."



The body of Donnotarvos was watched over for nine days and nine nights while preparations for his funeral were made. Ariotorcos, Verorgetos, and a warrior named Eporoudios watched over the body – three being a powerful and sacred number among the Celts. During this time, Tana was not allowed in the presence of the body of her husband. She was weaving the shroud that would cover Donnotarvos' body.

At dawn on the day of the funeral, the body of Donnotarvos was led to his grave in a funeral wagon. His body was wrapped in the shroud Tana had woven and was placed on a bronze couch in the timber-lined grave. He was dressed in his finest tunic and *bracae*, and he wore gold bracelets around his wrists. Around his throat, he wore a gold torque with bulls heads on the terminals. Like the other Celtic tribes, the torque was the symbol of the position of the *rix* of the tribe. All the warriors of the tribe wore a torque, but their torques were not as elaborate and were usually made of bronze. Only the torque of the *rix* was made of gold.

Donnotarvos also wore a dagger around his waist, and his hunting weapons – a bow, a quiver of arrows, and a spear – were hanging on the wall beside him for the hunting he would do in the Otherworld. Around him were placed the implements needed for the feast that would be given for him when he was received by the Ancestors in the Otherworld. There was a large Etruscan cauldron of mead, nine drinking

horns that were hanging on the wall, and a feast for nine that was spread out on the funeral wagon, which was placed inside the grave intact.

After everything had been placed in the grave, Tana walked up to the edge, fell down to her knees, and began to sing a dirge:

No longer will our home be warm,
For the fire has been extinguished.
No longer will our home be loud,
For the songs have been silenced.
No longer will our home be joyous,
For the feasts have been ended.
No longer will our home be a comfort,
For the lord of the house is gone.

The great bull of battle has been slain!

The chariot-warrior that took the heads
Of hundreds of bronze-torqued warriors,
The spear-famed warrior that broke
The shields of his enemies in battle,
The great giver of feasts that never
Refused to dispense the honey-sweet mead,
Is now gone – never to see his unborn son.

For me, countless tears fall for my Donnotarvos
And memories and dreams are all that remains.

After the grave was covered, the Bituriges then held funeral games and a funeral feast that night to celebrate Donnotarvos' return to the Otherworld. The Celts mourned the loss of the dead, but death was also a joyous occasion and was celebrated because it meant that the person was being reborn in the Otherworld. Tana, however, did not attend the feast because she was too overcome with grief.

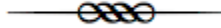
The day after the burial of Donnotarvos, the council of nobles and elders held a meeting to choose the next *rix* of the tribe. Because Donnotarvos had a living male relative, the choice was an easy decision and the council elected Ariotorcos as the next *rix*. However, this did not mean that Ariotorcos was automatically the *rix* now. It merely meant that the council favored Ariotorcos as the next *rix*. He still had to pass the three-fold test and receive sanction from the Otherworld. The three-fold test consisted of trials put forth by the druids, the intermediaries of the Otherworld. Each test embodied the three qualities that a *rix* must possess: he must be a just ruler, a strong warrior, and a virile man.

After Ariotorcos passed the three-fold test, the druids performed the *tarvobriptom* to determine if the gods and the Otherworld favored Ariotorcos as the next *rix*. For the *tarvobriptom*, a bull was slaughtered and one of the druids feasted on the meat and drank the broth of the bull. When he had eaten and drank all that he could, four druids chanted him to sleep. In his dream, he would see whom the gods chose as the next *rix*. When he awoke, he would tell the other four druids.

During the *tarvobriptom*, it was revealed that Ariotorcos should indeed be the next *rix* of the Bituriges.

The next day, Ariotorcos went through the *epomeduom* and was ritually married to Epona, the Horse Goddess, and then he was given a drink of mead from a cup, which conferred *ulatis* upon him, by a priestess who was a representative of Rosmerta, the Lady with the Mead Cup. The druids then recited to Ariotorcos the seven things that would be a sign that the Territorial Goddess had withdrawn her favor from him: being without truth, without law, defeat in battle, famine during his reign, dryness of cows,

ruination of fruit, and dearth of crops. Afterwards, a feast was held to celebrate the position of Ariotorcos as *rix* of the Bituriges.



About two weeks later, Tana had her child. The loss and hopelessness that had plagued her since the death of Donnotarvos was now replaced by a determination to care for her child. Three days after the child's birth, Nantos and a vates performed the naming ceremony for the child. Nantos had been the chief druid for Donnotarvos and was now the chief druid for Ariotorcos as well. The vates sacrificed a sheep and ascertained the future of the child from the entrails. He then told Nantos what he had seen.

"The child's name will be Cunolugus – the Hound of Lugus," Nantos told Tana.

Lugus was the God of Many Skills and was the chief of the gods. He was one of the three gods that received human sacrifice, and his victims were hung from a tree. The other two gods were Taranis, whose victims were burned, and Toutates, whose victims were drowned. Lugus was the patron deity of many warriors, and was one-eyed because he was strongly associated with battle magic. He was accompanied by ravens and wolves and his weapon was the spear.

"He will be a strong and fierce warrior – his fame and deeds surpassing even those of his father, Donnotarvos," Nantos continued. "But even though he will have great glory, he will have a short life."

Tana looked up fearfully into the eyes of Nantos. "How short of a life?" she asked hesitantly.

"I do not know," Nantos replied.

Tana thought back to the time that she and Donnotarvos had been given. Although their time together had been cut short by his death and they had only been given a few cycles of the seasons together, the two of them had been happy.

"Tell no one of this," she said to Nantos and the vates. "If it is my child's fate that he have a short life, then I want it to be a full and happy life."

Nantos and the vates nodded their heads in assent.

"Cuno," Tana whispered to her son as she held him in her arms. "My little hound."