

# THE RETURN

Once upon a time in a land we now call *Érieann*, a fleet of ships approached from the north. Though they had sails, they were not ordinary ships sailing upon the sea. They were magical ships sailing upon great dark clouds, high above the sea, silently drifting toward the mount of *Conmaicne Réin*. Once they arrived, those aboard took three days and nights to unload their vessels, remaining hidden as they were in the grey clouds upon which their ships floated. On the morning of the fourth day, the rising sun dissolved both the clouds and the ships themselves, for the spell that created them was at an end.

Though some might call them invaders, they were no such thing. They were merely a lost tribe returning home. Once, a long, long time ago, their ancestors first strode the shores of *Érieann* and through its fields of lush green grass.

Back then they were the Nemedians, arriving long ago from Greek Scythia in but one ship, with only thirty of their number left. Led by King Nemed, they finally settled in *Érieann*. However, they were soon attacked by the fierce seafaring nation known as the Fomorians. These were a hideously misshapen dark-skinned people; some of their men had but one eye, one foot and one arm, and some of their women walked around with four eyes on the back of their heads. They were said by some to be from Africa, and by others from the far-off east, and by still others from the far-off west. Some even swore that the Fomorians were from the Otherworld<sup>1</sup>. We only know that they were not from the far-off north, for that was the origin of the magical ships that floated upon the dark-grey clouds.

The Fomorians were a raider nation, with a magical crystal tower called Conann's Tower. It was located on *Inishtoraigh*, which is today Tory Island, not far off the shores of Donegal. From that stronghold, they would swoop down and extract tribute from all others in the form of milk, corn, cattle and children. And so they soon swooped down upon the Nemedians and extracted as tribute fully a two-thirds share of the Nemedians' milk, corn, cattle and children on each *Samhain*, which is today the first day of November.

After much suffering, the Nemedians grew strong enough to resist and attacked the Fomorians in their very stronghold. Conann, their leader, was killed by brave Fergus, king of the Nemedian tribe, and the magical crystal tower itself was about to fall when Morc

arrived from far across the sea with thousands of more Fomorians. They all but destroyed the Nemedians. Not more than thirty of their number survived. And so they fled *Érieann*, wandering the world a homeless tribe.

Some went back to Greek Scythia, where they were enslaved and forced to carry mud in leather bags from the riverbanks up to the fields above. It was a cruel existence, one they endured for nearly three hundred years. Finally they rebelled and overthrew their cruel masters long enough to escape. Some stole ships and many sailed away to the west, back to the land their poets and sages sang about

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1. Although modern science has finally realized that there could be many parallel universes connected by “worm holes”, the ancients not only knew of them but also traveled readily from universe to universe through portals, which are akin to “worm holes”. These portals could be located anywhere – in the sky, in land, or even underwater. Those in land usually developed a cave to it, which led to the many myths about sacred caves and how a particular people “arose” from the cave. In fact, they merely used the cave’s portal to migrate from some other universe, or “Otherworld”.

Because there are many parallel universes, many different forms of mankind arose, each particular to its native universe. Thus came into existence not only humans of several kinds, but also human-like beings such as hobbits, elves, fairies, and perhaps the Fomorians. As each race discovered the portals to other universes, they began to travel much like modern man travels from continent to continent in airplanes. Some worlds that were particularly pleasant often attracted the migration of several races, much like Tolkien’s Middle Earth which was populated by humans, elves, dwarfs, orcs and other races of mankind, who lived together more or less in peace.

The nature of the portal is not known to us, but they could be permanent or temporary. Some open and closed in a cyclic manner. Others were enchanted so that only a particular kind of traveler could enter. Some peoples, particularly the elves, became masters of navigating through portals so that they could travel from one side of a particular world to another by moving through one or more parallel universes and re-entering their current world through a different portal.

Over time, many of the parallel universes collapsed, leaving fewer and fewer portals through which one can travel. Yet they still exist as witnessed by the strange happenings in the Bermuda Triangle. And in the past, it is clear that dragons used portals to arrive in Europe long ago from their home universe. And even today, it is likely the Loch Ness Monster is an occasional visitor to the loch from its home world via an underwater portal hidden in one of the many underwater caves lining the loch.

over the evening fire, back to the land we call *Érieann*. Others took to their feet and headed north, to the far-off lands.

It is said the second group wandered for nearly three hundred years. They moved from place to place, staying where they received hospitality, learning the ways of their hosts before traveling on. Thus they crossed Europe, climbing tall snow-capped mountains that touched the sky above and crossing dangerous deep ravines that had no bottom.

Finally, they reached the land of the four northern cities, the Four Cities of Dana, Mother Goddess of all Knowledge, as she was known.

However, these are not cities for any and all to behold. Only the pure of heart might see them, for without a pure heart, you would see nothing and would feel nothing and could walk completely through all four without knowing, for they are in their own realm, a magic land called the Otherworld.

The Four Cities of Dana were: Falias, in which lived the Druid sage Morfesa; Gorias, in which resided the Druid sage Esras; Findias, in which dwelled the Druid sage Uscias, and Murias, which was home of the Druid sage Semias.

The traveling band learned of Dana and her great knowledge, and they adored her and so became her people, the Tuatha Dé Danaan. And so they entered the four cities, and were taught by the four Druid sages for many a year. They learned the lore, the art, the sorcery, as well as the science and the knowledge of every kind, until they could learn no more for they had mastered it all.

The Dagda, said by some the son of Dana and by others her husband, was elected in her place, and became the Father God of all Knowledge. The Tuatha Dé Danaan, remembering the tales of their own sages, longed to return to *Érieann* – though it was not call by that name by them. The Tuatha Dé Danaan called the land *an Inishfáil* or Land of Destiny.

The tales of green fields and fast flowing streams, with salmon leaping up every spring time resounded through their hearts until Nuada, the king of the Tuatha Dé Danaan begged the Dagda for permission to return to *Érieann*, from whence they originally came.

The Dagda smiled and said, “We long expected you to beg to return to that lovely land, for it is your destiny. We will help you with magical ships, and great gifts, and even come with you to that land known to us as *an Inishfáil*, the Island of Destiny. For it is our destiny as well, indeed.”

So the Dagda, with the help of his many sons and daughters, built

for the Tuatha Dé Danaan thrice fifty magical ships upon which they sailed to *Érieann* upon dark grey clouds to avoid the Fomorians, who still resided in Conann's Tower and still swooped down on ships and towns alike and extracted sorrowful tribute. And it was good they built so many, for not only did the Tuatha Dé Danaan travel in them to the misty isle, but so did the Dagda with his many sons and daughters as well as many other gods of the four cities.

And four great gifts were given to them as well, one from each city of Dana.

First, from Falias came the *Lia Fáil*, the Stone of Destiny, which cries out when stepped upon by a true king of *Érieann*.

Second, Gorias gave them *Slea Bua*, the Spear of Victory, with which mighty Lugh would defeat the Fomorians one day many years hence. *Slea Bua* allowed no one to escape once thrown at him, nor permitted he who carried it to suffer defeat.

Third, Findias gave King Nuada *Cliamh Solais*, the Sword of Light, which slew whomever it was drawn against.

And Murias gave them the Cauldron of the Dagda, from which no one left hungry, for it never emptied and could feed the entire nation, indeed.

Thus equipped, the Tuatha Dé Danaan sailed from the Four Cities of Dana to distant *an Inishfáil*, as *Érieann* was then called.

They arrived on *Beltane* that was the first day of May. As the first ship bumped against the hills of *an Inishfáil*, Fionnuala, first wife of King Nuada, gave birth to the first child, a girl, born to the Tuatha Dé Danaan there. Overjoyed was the company and the Dagda ran to where the mother and babe lay, and carrying *Uaithne* – his magical harp – he began playing a sweet beautiful lullaby which he sang for all.

Fionnuala who smiled while suckling her babe as he sang, looked up at him and asked, “By what name will she be known? And what is her destiny?”

The Dagda paused from his music and answered, “Her name is *Derfáil*, daughter of Destiny, for she is the first born and thus the destiny of this lovely land. And rejoice, for she will have a happy life and will be the most beautiful of all maidens, she will.”

And so *Derfáil* became the first born of the Tuatha Dé Danaan in *an Inishfáil* on *Beltane* day, and she is known today as Dearbháil [DER-vahl], the name we will use.

# THE FIR BOLG

“What do you make of the grey cloud upon the mount?” asked Eochaid, king of the Fir Bolg, the Men of the Bag. They came to *Érieann* many years ago, which they called *an Inishalga*, or the Noble Island. Now masters of all the island, they divided it into the five provinces we know today and ruled from a sacred hill, *Druim Cain*, or Beautiful Hill, which is now called Tara, as we will call it.

The three chief Druids of the Fir Bolg glanced nervously at one another. They were ancient men dressed in robes, each had a long grey beard, a deeply wrinkled face and bushy white hair.

“It is magic,” Cesarn answered with a knowing nod.

“It is a danger,” Gnathach warned as he waved a finger in the air.

“It is of the Dana,” Ingnathach hissed as he shook his head. The others looked at him.

“Only the Dana of the North possess such knowledge,” Ingnathach added as he glanced first at the other two Druids and then King Eochaid.

He paused before explaining, “Once, many, many years ago, I traveled to the Four Cities of the Dana, a far-away place. I stayed in it only thrice fifty days, but I still learned much. Only the Dana, Goddess of all Knowledge, could conjure such a cloud. It came from the north until it reached *Conmaicne Réin*. There it stopped and stayed like a harbored ship for two days now. For it is not *fé fiadha* – magical fog – it is more, for ships can sail through the air in it. It will be gone with the fourth sunrise, and so we will see what it conceals; but I am sure that it is an enemy army that lies within.”

“We must attack, now!” Eochaid cried anxiously as he rose from his throne.

“Would that be wise?” asked Cesarn. The ancient sage stared at the king with hollow eyes, for he saw in ways unknown by other men. He saw things none other could.

“Then send a spy?” Eochaid suggested as he glanced between Cesarn and Ingnathach.

“And not see anything at all?” Gnathach sneered. Tall and gaunt, with a long flowing beard, he shook his head in disdain. “Spies are timorous. All would be afraid to enter an enchanted cloud.”

“What then?”

“Send a single warrior,” Ingnathach replied nodding his head knowingly. “Your bravest champion.”

King Eochaid glanced around at the council, they were all nodding their heads. Only a brave champion could possibly succeed.

“Then call for Sreng!” declared the king.



Sreng, the bravest of the Fir Bolg, took up his shield, his sword and two mighty spears called *craisech*. Thick and stout, they would smash through the thickest enemy shield, indeed. And finally, with his helm upon his head, he began his long journey. Being the strongest of the Fir Bolg he was also the fastest on foot or on horse, for he could outrun any horse on even a flat dale. On steep hillsides, none could match him for he took two strides for everyone else's one, including any horse.

And so he traveled across the land but was soon seen by the Tuatha Dé Danaan, who had with them the Dagda's magical *Scáthán na Achar*, or Mirror of Distance, that could see far, far away. Though not fearful of just one warrior no matter how brave, they took counsel and decided to send their bravest warrior to meet him. So they sent noble Breas.

Breas waited for the stranger on a mountaintop where he could be easily seen. Sreng looked up and saw him.

“Who are you?” he called up to Breas.

“I am Breas, of the Tuatha Dé Danaan!” Breas called back.

“You speak my tongue!” Sreng cried out in surprise.

“And you mine,” Breas answered as he looked down at Sreng in the valley below. “Come up and we will parley.”

Soon Sreng also stood on the mountaintop at a distance from Breas so that they could be safe from one another.

“Of what tribe are you?” Breas inquired as he stood holding his shield in one hand and his two spears in the other, his feet apart, ready to fight. “For you have not given your name.”

“I am Sreng of the Fir Bolg.”

“I do not know that tribe.”

“We came to this fair land many years ago after escaping from cruel masters on ships. We call ourselves the Men of the Bag because we once carried fertile mud in leather bags from the rivers and spread it on the fields.”

“I know the tale,” Breas said with a nod of his head. “For we were once your brothers. You went by ship, we by foot – a very long time

ago.”

Sreng looked at Breas and nodded as well. He remembered a similar tale – how most of the Fir Bolg took to ships but some were forced to walk because there was not enough room for all of them aboard.

“So, your journey is now finished?” asked Sreng, studying Breas carefully.

“On yesterday morn,” Breas answered firmly. “This is *an Inish-fáil*, the island of our destiny.”

“And this is *an Inishalga*, the Noble Island, and it is our land,” Sreng replied defiantly.

“We were once brothers,” Breas commented in a conciliatory tone. “Should we not share this island equally?”

“We are here first, and it is ours,” Sreng declared stridently. “If we give you half, you will soon take it all.”

“Then we must fight,” Breas warned. “And by the looks of your spear, it is deadly. I never seen such spears as the two you are carrying.”

Sreng looked down at his *craisech* and smiled. “They are bone crushers and will go through any shield yet devised.”

Then he saw the two spears that Breas was carrying. Slender and graceful, with long metal tips, and they are today called javelins.

“What manner of spear do you carry?” Sreng inquired as he eyed the weapons.

“We call them *lámh-fada*, longed arm, for they can be thrown nearly a league.” With that, Breas took aim at a distant tree and threw one of his spears. The long iron head sliced completely through the stout oak.

“That is more than twice the distance I can hurl a *craisech*!” Sreng exclaimed in wonderment. “However, I will free your wondrous spear for you!”

Then, with a blood-curdling war cry, Sreng charged the hapless oak and once in reach, hurled his mighty spear at it. The *craisech* smashed into the tree and shattered it. Sreng walked up to the wreckage and picked up both spears, handing his, the *craisech*, to Breas.

“Let us exchange spears so that the other side will know what they are facing in the battle,” Sreng suggested as he offered his spear. “Let us return to our people and prepare for the battle for one-quarter year. It is the only honorable way for us to do battle. We

each need time for forging new spears, sharpening our swords and polishing our armor.”

“But even still, you will outnumber us many to one,” Breas replied dubiously. “You are many and we are but few. Let the battle be between equal numbers.”

“Agreed,” Sreng said firmly as he handed Breas his *craisech*. “And until then we are brothers and will not fight one another.”



So began the truce of noble Breas and Sreng. For one-quarter year, each people forged new spears, sharpened their swords, and polished their armor. And on *Lughnasadh*, Midsummer’s day, the two armies met on *Magh Tuireadh*, the Plain of the Tower, and for three days they struggled, evenly matched. Finally, on the fourth day, King Eochaid, together with fifty of the Fir Bolg were trapped and killed by the Tuatha Dé Danaan and a rout began. Noble Sreng, the bravest Fir Bolg of all, took command and led a counter-attack that nearly pushed the Tuatha Dé Danaan back. But the attack failed and the Fir Bolg were defeated.

King Nuada, whose arm was cut off by Sreng, magnanimously offered the remaining Fir Bolg peace and the west of *Érieann* as their own. And noble Sreng, now king, agreed.

But peace would not come to the land. For King Nuada, being maimed, could no longer be king.

Thus the kingship was passed to Breas, the most beautiful of all the Tuatha Dé Danaan men. Although of noble Tuatha Dé Danaan birth for his mother was Eri, his father was Elatha, king of the Fomorians. However, as the most beautiful male, he was also married to Brigit, the goddess of fertility and daughter to the Dagda himself, and so claimed the crown.

Many of the Tuatha Dé Danaan opposed Breas becoming king, but many of their wives who were Fomorians themselves cried out that making Breas king would forge an alliance between the Fomorians and Tuatha Dé Danaan. And so Breas became king, and a terrible one he was. He sorely taxed his people and gave them nothing in return. It is said no Tuatha Dé Danaan ever returned from the king’s palace with their knife greased on meat served them at the king’s table, or with the smell of the king’s ale up on their breath.

And so for seven long years, no joy, or laughter, or song was heard on Tara, where Breas kept his court.

However, many leagues to the west in present-day Co Donegal, the Dagda built Nuada *sídhe Aileach*, a magical fairy palace where

he could be with his family and recover from his wound.

For seven long years, Dian Cécht, the god of medicine, strove to cure him and conjured a magical arm of silver, which gave Nuada the name of *Airget Lámh* or Silver Arm. Finally, Dian Cécht's son, Miach, conjured up an arm of flesh and blood, making Nuada whole again.

And the Tuatha Dé Danaan, sorely tired of Breas, drove him and his mother off to the land of the Fomorians, where they would stay for nearly ten years and once again made Nuada their king.

So joy returned to Tara, and with it came Dearbháil, Nuada's little daughter.

# DEARBHÁIL SINGS

Though Dearbháil was only of seven years when she arrived at Tara, her fame was long known to all, indeed. Some said it was the magic caused by the Dagda singing her a lullaby with his magical harp when she was born. Others said it was her destiny, but she sang sweeter than any bird, and she played the Dagda's magical harp even better than the Dagda himself. And both were true since she said her first word or could first strum the harp. But surely hers was a magical talent.

For years, while exiled in the western *sídhe* with her father, she practiced each day on *Uaithne* – the Dagda's magical harp, which he lent to her – so now she could make it sing sweeter than honey. Then she would sing as well and all the birds would fly to her window, line up shoulder-to-shoulder and listen. Even the angels in heaven would slip from their perches high above, and drift down to her window so to hear her the better. And even those that could not fly would come, for the deer, and rabbits, and foxes, and even the boar in the wood would slip silently out of the forest and sit in the field beneath her window to listen. And indeed, even the fish in the ocean paused from their toils and stuck their heads out of the water to listen to her sweet voice as it drifted over.

And at night, when her father was in pain, little Dearbháil sang a lullaby that eased it and so he slept the better.

It was no wonder that when King Nuada returned to Tara all the people lined the way to catch a glimpse of his magically gifted child. They cried and cheered with happiness for beauty, song and merriment were at last returned to Tara. And that night they feasted at the king's table, and all their knives were greased by the fat of the king's roasted oxen, and all have the wonderful smell of the king's ale upon their breath.

Peace was upon the land, at last.



And so the years passed. In time, as they all do, the little girl grew to maidenhood. And she became the most beautiful maiden of all, with long silky auburn hair, skin white as milk and as soft as the morning dew. It was time for her to marry, but whom?

Many years before, Good King Nuada agreed that she would choose her own husband, and all knew. Each month, with the full

moon risen, all the eligible young men would arrive and line up at the gate of Tara. Then with the rising sun, the gate was opened, and they heard her sing. She sat upon the peak of Tara in a shimmering golden house built by Credné Cred, the god of goldsmithing. With her fair skin protected from the morning sun by a screen of finely pierced gold, she sang a beautiful song as each suitor marched by in the ritual of *ag Máirseáil*, at March. Some were kings, others princes. Many were brave warriors, and some even gods, but none were pleasing to her, none at all.

And when asked why none pleased her, her answer was always the same. “Remember Breas, the Beautiful, indeed. He was the fairest skinned and most noble of body, but his heart was as black as the darkest night. I care not for their beauty, for it is only the pure of heart that will win mine. I see into their hearts, and none is pure. I see ambition, greed and lust, but not love, none at all.”

And so for many years the ritual was repeated. Some tried to march a second time, but fair Dearbháil would pause from her song and greet them aloud. “Good sir, you are back! I remember you well!”



Then one month, the day after the *ag Máirseáil* was complete, a brave young warrior arrived at Tara’s gate.

“What brings you to Tara’s gate?” challenged Gamal, son of Fígal, and keeper of the gate.

“I will be the king’s champion!” the warrior declared.

“We have enough champions, and Ogma is the best!” laughed Camel, son of Riagall and also a keeper of the gate.

“Then call him, I will prove my worth!” the young man demanded.

“Ogma is writing poetry,” Gamal grumbled, now a little angry. “He has no time for fools.”

“I am no fool! I am Cassmail<sup>2</sup>, son of Sreng, King of the Fir Bolg,” the young warrior shouted angrily.

The two gatekeepers stared at him, then each other.

“You are too late for this month’s *ag Máirseáil*, for it occurred yesterday. Come back with the next full moon,” Gamal said, dismissing him with a wave of his hand.

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2. The traditional spelling is “Casmael”, we are using the modern spelling as in the case of Dearbháil.

"*Ag Máirseáil?*" Cassmail questioned with a confused expression. "What march?"

"March of the suitors," Camel explained in an exasperated voice. "Those who would ask for Princess Dearbháil's hand in marriage."

"I am not looking for a wife," Cassmail scorned. "My father sent me as pledge of the peace between our two people. Many years ago, he horribly maimed brave Nuada in single combat, and though he later defeated my father, Nuada generously gave him his life, his kingship and his kingdom. And he asked for nothing in return save peace between our people. Now that I am of age, my father sends me to serve Nuada, the Good, for the next nine years and so become his champion."

"I will inform the king, young Cassmail," Gamal grouched finally. "And we will let him decide."



"The son of Sreng?" Nuada repeated with a puzzled look. "I remember no pledge asked or made."

"Sreng is a man of great honor," the Dagda said quietly. "He was the one who asked for a fair battle and so suggested the truce to Breas and exchanged their spears."

"And he also nearly killed me, he did!" Nuada grumbled as he glanced at his arm.

"It is true," the Dagda agreed. "But once you defeated him and his host, you generously gave them their freedom and choice of province. until this day you are known as Nuada, the Good, among the Fir Bolg. And they never troubled us. Young Cassmail may be of great service to both our people."

"Then bid him enter Tara," spoke the king.



Cassmail stood unafraid in front of the king's throne in the great council chamber that the Dagda built with the help of Garbhan and Imheall. It lay within the *sídhe* of Tara, or *Teamuir*, as it was then known. Deep underground where only the pure of heart could find it for it lay in the Otherworld, the chamber could hold thrice fifty easily. And in the center of the round chamber was the throne, upon which sat Nuada.

"How is your father?" Nuada asked kindly.

"You are not angry about your hand?" the young man questioned tentatively.

"I am not angry at all," laughed the king. "Not since Miach healed

it.” He held out his arm for the lad to see.

“My father and people are well, though pestered by the accursed Fomorians,” Cassmail replied confidently. “They are like fleas, gnawing on your hide.”

“But peace reigns between our two people?”

“It does, my King,” Cassmail confirmed. “And it is why I was sent to you, to serve you and bind the peace ever tighter.”

“And how would you serve me?” Nuada inquired as he eyed the young man.

“As your champion.”

Laughter interrupted the lad. Spinning he saw a giant of a warrior, dressed in leather armor and a bronze helm, standing behind him. But instead of a sword, he held a scroll.

“I am Ogma,” the warrior snarled. “I am brother to the king and his champion. If you want the honor, you must take it from me.”

“Hold!” the king declared, getting up from his throne. “I will decide, for I need many champions. However, young Cassmail, you must defeat me.”

“D-d-defeat you?” the lad stammered.

“Indeed,” the king insisted as he climbed down from the throne. “How can you be my champion if you are not better than me? Bring my sword! Bring *Cliamh Solais*, the Sword of Light!”

A page ran out and soon returned with the magnificent blade still in its scabbard. King Nuada examined the scabbard and smiled, for it was the one he wanted – a copy forged by Giobhniu and not the true *Cliamh Solais*, for he desired to not hurt the lad.

Drawing the blade, he declared as he raised his sword, “Now, let us see if you are your father’s son!”

Cassmail, having no choice, drew his own sword, and defended himself. He parried the first blow and danced out from under the second. Then he struck back and steel clanged upon steel and echoed throughout the *sídhe*. For an hour they fought and then another, and finally a third. At the end of that, Nuada threw the sword to the Dagda, and cried, “Give him a try!”

Though fat and old, the Dagda battled Cassmail for nearly as long, fighting skillfully. Then when his time was done, the Dagda threw the sword to Ogma, who caught it by the hilt and sliced down on the young warrior.

“You fight well, for a Fir Bolg,” he muttered as Cassmail parried the blow. “Though I think your father is better. Still, maybe we can

make something out of you, given a year or two." And so the two fought for another three hours.

At the end of which, Ogma threw the sword back to his brother, King Nuada, who caught it by the hilt, and paused.

"You fight well, young Cassmail," the king commented as he studied the lad, "but you are no champion, for I could kill you with a single stroke." With that, he sliced down on Cassmail's fine sword and shattered it.

"Kill me now!" the lad begged as he held out his arms in submission. "For I cannot return to my father disgraced!"

"You will not die, nor return to your father in disgrace, my son," the king answered kindly as he handed his sword to a page. "For I will make you a champion, as my foster son. Though he never said it to you nor asked it of me, your father sent you to be my son for nine years, and at the end of that time, you will return to him and lead your people. That is how he plans to bind our people together."

Cassmail stared in disbelief. "But I am already of the age of decision."

"True," the king agreed, for fostering ends at that age, not begins. "However, I will treat you as a son, if I become your father."

"I accept," the lad replied quietly, "though I do not understand your reason."

"You were tested, young Cassmail," the king explained kindly as he placed one hand on the lad's shoulder, "not for skill or strength, but for heart and courage. That you have, like your father. You are your father's son and welcomed in Tara. Soon you will possess both the skill and strength you lack, for Ogma will teach you well. And then you can return to your people, and rule them wisely."

He turned to the assembled audience who were crowded into the chamber watching the combat.

"Welcome young Cassmail as my son! Now find him bath and cot for he traveled far."



When all were gone from the chamber, except for the king and a few, beautiful Dearbháil came up to her father.

"Who is the young man who fought so well?" she asked demurely.

"He is Cassmail, son of noble Sreng. He was sent to me to make of him a king."

"But Sreng was the one who – cut your arm and caused you great

pain!" she cried in anguish, holding a hand to her mouth.

"It is true, my sweet daughter, but he is a wise man and an honorable king. He nearly defeated me, but he lost. He fought for what was his bravely and valiantly, with great courage and heart. His son is the same."

"I know," Dearbháil agreed. "I can see into his heart, and it is pure."

She paused and held her delicate hand to her mouth afraid of speaking, but finally she did.

"Father," she whispered. "It is him."

"It is him?"

"It is him, Father," she repeated softly. "I choose Cassmail, for he is pure of heart. It is only with him that I will possess true happiness."

"And what says he?" her father asked.

"Says he?" Dearbháil held her long slender fingers to her mouth in confusion.

"Just as I cannot speak for you, dear Daughter, I cannot speak for him. Does his heart belong to you or another?"

Dearbháil stared at her father in disbelief. She had never spoke to Cassmail, let alone received a proposal of marriage. The thought that he might belong to another never entered her mind.

"But he will, of course," she answered as confidently as she could.

"Best ask the lad," her father suggested delicately as he looked into her eyes. "The Fir Bolg are a strange race, and hold to strange customs, though they were once our brothers."



Now worried that her father knew something he didn't tell her, Dearbháil rushed from the chamber seeking the Dagda, the wisest person she knew, and who treated her as a favorite niece.

"*Uncail* Eochaid!" she cried when she saw him in the hall, for his personal name was Eochaid O Uathair, and she called him "Uncle Eochaid" in private.

"Dearbháil," the Dagda answered, concerned at her expression, for he had never seen her so worried before.

"You must help me! Please!" she pleaded as she ran up to him and wrapped her arms around his thick body.

"If I can," he promised, patting the back of her head gently.

"My heart belongs to young beautiful Cassmail," she cried

distraughtly. "But his may belong to another."

"You choose young Cassmail, do you?" the Dagda exclaimed, surprise on his face.

"But will he choose me?" she worried. "I never saw him in the *ag Máirseáil*, especially yesterday for I would remember. His heart may belong to another."

As the Dagda held her he could feel her body tremble. For all these many years, she searched for her one true love. And at long last, she believed that she found him and so gave her heart. But if rejected, he worried that she may never do so again. Then remembering what Gamal told him, that Cassmail said that he was not in search of a wife, dark thoughts furrowed his brow.

"But how can that be?" the Dagda questioned, trying to reassure her. "You are the fairest in all the land, the most beautiful maiden by far, and have with you a voice that makes the birds listen in awe. How can he not want you?"

Reconciled at least a little, Dearbháil wiped her tears. "Thank you, *Uncail Eochaid*, thank you."

"It is late, my dear, it is best you be in bed. Now go and sleep. We will see how things are on the morrow."

And so Dearbháil went to her chamber, open the window and sang a love song. Sweet and pure, it drifted up to heaven, and all the angels were happy, for they knew that at last she found her one true love. And one by one, they slipped from their perches and drifted down to listen the better.