

## A mystical story of The Voyage of Bran



Bran son of Ferbal was taking the air one fine afternoon when suddenly he heard lilting sweet music behind him. No matter where he turned or how he looked, the music always seemed to be at his back, and yet it was so melodious that he fell into a deep sleep, almost a trance. Awakening after a long time he found a silver branch with white apple blossoms close by his hand. Having

never seen its like, he decided to bring it to his family so they could marvel at its perfection too.

Before he made it home however he encountered a mysterious and beautiful woman sitting on a hazel, who sang to him a song of Emain Ablach, the Isle of Women. On this isle nobody ever grew sick or old, she sang, there was always food aplenty and grief was unknown. The water ran sweet and pure and sadness was a tale of a foreign land.

Taking the branch from Bran she bade him seek out the isle for himself, to see the truth of her verse with his own eyes.

Inspired by her beauty and her music, Bran readied himself to voyage across the ocean the very next day. He organised three boats and three men in each, the sacred number nine, and set off across the oceans of the world as his vision had told him. After only two days he was astonished to see a man racing across the ocean in a chariot, drawn by a team of golden horses. This was none other than Manannan mac Lir, the Tuatha de Dannan lord of the oceans.

Manannan hailed the boats and told them that they sailed across a field of flowers, not the sea, and that there were many other men in chariots racing nearby, all invisible. The sealord whispered to Bran that he would become the father of the mighty warrior Mongan by sleeping with Caintigern, the wife of Fiachna. He sang also of the isle of women, before riding off in a spray of silvery foam.

The ships sailed on, encountering other strange islands such as the land of the holy trees, where all the birds sang with one voice, and the isle of laughter, where they had to leave a man behind after he went to find out what was so funny.

After sailing on from the Isle of Joy they came at last to the Isle of Women, Emain Ablach, and Bran started having second thoughts. Seeing this the Queen of the island cast forth a ball of yarn to where his ship waited in the harbour, and picking it up he was snared! She easily pulled him and his ship to shore, and they were warmly welcomed. Each man was paired off with a maiden and Bran himself stayed with the Queen. As his dream had foretold, it was a place of bliss and warmth, with nothing to do all day but lounge about happily enjoying themselves.

But all good things must come to an end, and Nechtan, the son of Collbran started to become homesick. He told Bran he wanted to go back to Ireland to see again his family, but the Queen warned them that it wasn't the best idea in the world. Bran put his foot down and they were let go, although in her parting words the Queen told them never to set one foot on dry land.

Coming back to Ireland, although stopping along the way to rope their companion on the Isle of Joy into their boats, they reached at last the sandy shores of the west. A man was fixing his nets there and hailed the boats, asking who they

were. Bran told him his name and from whence he had come but the man was mystified, claiming that he knew of no Bran except in legends of misty antiquity. Nechtan had had enough and leapt to the strand, but the very instant his foot touched the green earth, he turned to dust and blew away in the wind. Long years had passed since their departure, and they would feel every century if they walked on the green earth.

So Bran told the waiting villagers on the shore his tale, and then turned his ships about, sailing back into the endless ocean, never to be seen again. Some say Bran left Ireland for the farthest west by the small port below.