



## **Kiara**

Padraig Doherty sat on his favorite stump, the one most comfortable in that spot of green between his family's cottage and the woods just behind it. The stump was just the right height and not too far from the back door making it easy to reach, an important consideration with one of his legs not as sturdy as the other. Though he'd never be able to run a race, his hearing was far superior to anyone his age studying at the Village Academy of Boys and Girls Learning Together. Just then, he made out the faint trill coming from a cloud of butterflies lofted by papery red wings lined with yellow and black.

Padraig shared the cottage with his father Michael and his sister Lyric, his snug cubbyhole of a room barely large enough for a narrow bed. He didn't mind it was small. There was still enough room for his bookcase filled with books, gifts from both his father and his sister. Lyric often passed down her favorite books that she believed he would like.

Sometimes, just after dusk, if his father didn't come for him or Lyric failed to call him to evening meal from her upstairs window, Padraig ignored his empty stomach and waited with his eyes closed, his curls of brown hair touched lightly by a soft breeze. And if he waited long enough, fingers of mist would wind around the trees and brush against his face.

And so it was that late afternoon. He often wondered about the mists, if they came from someplace or someone who might do him harm. Nothing had ever happened to him. But something was different. Something moved against his dangling legs. Something brushed from one side to the other. His eyes popped open. He saw nothing but the gauzy cloud extending from the woods.

The cloud thinned, and Padraig looked down. A small cat sat just at his feet, looking up at him as if she'd always been there, as if she were exactly where she belonged. The tiny cat, not really a kitten he realized when she jumped into his lap, pressed her gray head marked by black lines against his cheek as if wiping away the remnants of the mist.

“What's this?!” Lyric approached them both and picked up the cat.

“She came from the woods, Lyric.” Padraig stood and gave the cat a few welcome pets while Lyric rubbed the top of her head.

“How do you know she's a girl cat, Padraig?”

“I don't know. I just know... somehow.”

“Sounds like she found us, don’t you think?”

Padraig could see the worry lines on Lyric’s forehead. “I think so.”

“But I don’t know if Dad will let us keep her at all.” She put the little cat down, but the creature didn’t move very far.

“Why not?”

“Well, she’s another mouth to feed. And the people of Na Crainn don’t really like cats at all. I do.”

“And I do, too. We should call her Kiara.”

“Why’s that?” Lyric leaned over to again stroke the cat at her feet.

“Because if we give her a name, Dad will have to let us keep her, no matter what people think.”

Lyric smiled. “Kiara. I like that name. And it does seem to suit her. Let’s go inside then, and if she stays at the door, we’ll know she’s intended to be here.”

“Especially if we both tell Dad together that our house needs a cat.” He took Lyric’s outstretched hand.

“Because she’ll keep down the rats, for sure.” She smiled as she walked toward the back door, Padraig and the cat Kiara just behind her.

After dinner and much convincing and several days when she proved her skill at rat catching, Kiara joined the Doherty household. Only later would they all come to know just how important it was to have her there.