

The Wooing of Etain

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I. Here Begins the Wooing of Etain

There was a famous king of Ireland of the race of the Tuatha De, Eochaid Ollathair his name. He was also named the Dagda [i.e. good god], for it was he that used to work wonders for them and control the weather and the crops. Wherefore men said he was called the Dagda. Elcmar of the Brug had a wife whose name was Eithne and another name for her was Boand. The Dagda desired her in carnal union. The woman would have yielded to the Dagda had it not been for fear of Elcmar, so great was his power. Thereupon the Dagda sent Elcmar away on a journey to Bres son of Elatha in Mag nInis, and the Dagda worked great spells upon Elcmar as he set out, that he might not returns betimes (that is, early) and he dispelled the darkness of night for him, and he kept hunger and thirst from him. He sent him on long errands, so that nine months went by as one day, for he had said that he would return home again between day and night. Meanwhile the Dagda went in upon Elcmar's wife, and she bore him a son, even Aengus, and the woman was whole of her sickness when Elcmar returned, and he perceived not her offense, that is, that she had lain with the Dagda.

2. The Dagda meanwhile brought his son to Midir's house in Bri Leith in Tethba, to be fostered. There Aengus was reared for the space of nine years. Midir had a great playing-field in Bri Leith. Thrice fifty lads of the young nobles of Ireland were there and thrice fifty maidens of the land of Ireland. Aengus was the leader of them all, because of Midir's great love for him, and the beauty of his form and the nobility of his race. He was also called in Mac Oc (the Young Son), for his mother said: "Young is the son who was begotten at the break of day and born betwixt it and evening."

3. Now Aengus quarreled with Triath son of Febal (or Gobor) of the Fir Bolg, who was one of the two leaders in the game, and a fosterling of Midir. It was no matter of pride with Aengus that Triath should speak to him, and he said: "It irks me that the son of a serf should hold speech with me," for Aengus had believed until then that Midir was his father, and the kingship of Bri Leith his heritage, and he knew not of his kinship with the Dagda.

4. Triath made answer and said: "I take it no less ill that a hireling whose mother and father are unknown should hold speech with me." Thereupon Aengus went to Midir weeping and sorrowful at having been put to shame by Triath. "What is this?" said Midir. "Triath has defamed me and cast in my face that I have neither mother nor father." "Tis false," said Midir. "Who is my mother, from whence is my father" "No hard matter. Thy father is Eochaid Ollathair," said Midir, "and Eithne, wife of Elcmar of the Brug, is thy mother. It is I that have reared thee unknown to Elcmar, lest it should cause him pain that thou wast begotten in his despite." "Come thou with me," said Aengus, "that my father may acknowledge me, and that I may no longer be kept hidden away under the insults of the Fir Bolg."

5. Then Midir set out with his fosterling to have speech with Eochaid, and they came to Uisnech of Meath in the center of Ireland, for 'tis there that was Eochaid's house, Ireland stretching equally far from on every side, south and north, to east and west. "Before them in the assembly they found Eochaid. Midir called the king aside to have speech with the lad. "What does he desire, this youth who has not come until now?" "His desire is to be acknowledged by his father, and for land to be given to him," said Midir, "for it is not meet that thy son should be landless while thou art king of Ireland." "He is welcome," said the Eochaid, "he is my son. But the land I wish him to have is not yet vacant." "What land is that?" said Midir. "The Brug, to the north of the Boyne," said Eochaid. "Who is there?" said Midir. "Elcmar," said Eochaid, "is the man who is there I have no wish to annoy him further."

6. "Pray, what counsel dost thou give this lad?" said Midir. "I have this for him," said Eochaid. "On the day of Samain let him go into the Brug, and let him go armed. That is a day of peace and amity among the men of Ireland, on which none is at enmity with his fellow. And Elcmar will be in Cnoc Side in Borga unarmed save for a fork of white hazel in his hand, his cloak folded around him and a gold brooch in his cloak, and three fifties playing before him in the playing-field; and let Aengus go to him and threaten to kill him. But it is meet that he slay him not, provided he promise him his will. And let this be the will of Aengus, that he be king for a day and a night in the Brug; and see that thou not yield the land to Elcmar till he submit himself to my decision; and when he comes let Aengus plea be that the land has fallen to him, and that he in fee simple for sparing Elcmar and not slaying him, and that what he had asked for is kingship of day and night, and" said he, "it is in days and nights that the world is spent."

7. Then Midir sets out for his land, and his foster-son along with him, and on the Samain following, Aengus having armed himself came into the Brug and made a feint at Elcmar, so that he promised him in return for his life kingship of day and night in his land. The Mac Oc straightway abode there that day and night as king of the land, Elcmar's household being subject to him. On the morrow Elcmar came to claim his land from the Mac Oc, and therewith threatened him mightily. The Mac Oc said that he would not yield up his land until he should put it to the decision of the Dagda in the presence of the men of Ireland.

8. Then they appeal to the Dagda, who adjudged each man's contract in accordance with his undertaking. "So then this land accordingly belongs henceforth to this youth," said Elcmar. "It is fitting," said the Dagda. "Thou was taken unawares on a day of peace and amity. Thou gavest thy land for mercy shown thee, for thy life was dearer to thee than thy land, yet thou shalt have land from me that will be no less profitable to thee than the Brug." "Where is that?" said Elcmar. "Cleitech," said the Dagda, "with the three lands that are round about it, thy youths playing before thee every day in the Brug, and thou shalt enjoy the fruits of the Boyne from this land." "It is well," said Elcmar; "so shall it be accomplished." And he made a flitting to Cleitech, and built a stronghold there, and Mac Oc abode in the Brug in his land.

9. Then Mider came on that day year to the Brug on a visit to his fosterling, and he found the Mac Oc on the mound of Sid in Broga on the day of Samain, with two companies of youth at play before him in the Brug, and Elcmar on the mound of Cleitech to the south, watching them. A quarrel broke out among the youths in the Brug. "Do not stir," said Midir to the Mac Oc, "because of Elcmar, lest he come down to the plain. I will go myself to make peace between them." Thereupon Midir went,

and it was not easy for him to part them. A split of holly was thrown at Midir as he was intervening, and it knocked one of his eyes out. Midir came to the Mac Oc with his eye in his hand and said to him: "Would that I had not come on a visit to thee, to be put to shame, for with this blemish I cannot behold the land I have come to, and the land I have left, I cannot return to it now.

10. "It shall in no wise be so," said the Mac Oc. "I shall go to Dian Cecht that he may come and heal thee, and thine own land shall be thine and this land shall be thine, and thine eye shall be whole again without shame or blemish because of it." The Mac Oc went to Dian Cecht. [...] that thou mayest go with me," said he, "to save my foster-father who has been hurt in the Burgh on the day of the Samain." Dian Cecht came and healed Midir, so that he was whole again. "Good is my journeying now," said Midir, "since I am healed." "It shall surely be so," said the Mac Oc. "Do thou abide here for a year that thou mayest see my host and my folk, my household and my land."

11. I will not stay," said Midir, "unless I have a reward therefore." "What reward?" said the Mac Oc. "Easy to say. A chariot worth seven cumals,"³ said Midir, "and a mantle befitting me, and the fairest maiden in Ireland." "I have," said the Mac Oc, "the chariot, and the mantle befitting thee." "There is moreover," said Midir, "the maiden that surpasses all the maidens in Ireland in form." "Where is she?" said the Mac Oc. "She is in Ulster," said Midir, "Ailill's daughter Etain Echraide daughter of the king of the north-eastern part of Ireland. She is the dearest and gentlest and loveliest in Ireland."

12. The Mac Oc went to seek her until he came to Ailill's house in Mag nInis. He was made welcome, and he abode three nights there. He told his mission and announced his name and race. He said that it was in quest of Etain that he had come. "I will not give her to thee," said Ailill, "for I can in no way profit by thee, because of the nobility of thy family, and the greatness of thy power and that of thy father. If thou put any shame on my daughter, no redress whatsoever can be had of thee." "It shall not be so," said the Mac Oc. "I will buy her from thee straightway." "Thou shalt have that," said Ailill. "State thy demand," said the Mac Oc. "No hard matter," said Ailill. "Thou shalt clear for me twelve plains in my land that are under waste and wood, so that they may be at all times for grazing cattle and for habitation to me, for games, assemblies, gatherings, and strongholds."

13. "It shall be done," said the Mac Oc. He returns home and bewailed to the Dagda the strait he was in. The latter caused twelve plains to be cleared in a single night in Ailill's land. These are the names of the plains: Mag Macha, Mag Lemna, Mag nItha, Mag Tochair, Mag nDula, Mag Techt, Mag Li, Mag Line, Mag Murthemne. Now when that work had been accomplished by the Mac Oc he went to Ailill to demand Etain. "Thou shalt not obtain her," said Ailill, "until thou draw out of this land to the sea twelve great rivers that are in wells and bogs and moors, so that they may bring produce from the sea to peoples and kindreds, and drain the earth and the land."

14. He came again to the Dagda to bewail the strait he was in. Thereupon the latter caused twelve great waters to course towards the sea in a single night. They had not been seen there until then. These are the names of the waters: Find and Modornn and Slena and Nas and Amnas and Oichen and Or and Banda and Samair and Loche. Now when these works were accomplished the Mac Oc came to have speech with Ailill in order to claim Etain. "Thou shalt not get her till thou purchase her, for after thou hast taken her, I shall have no profit of the maiden beyond what I shall obtain

forthwith." "What dost thou require of me now?" said the Mac Oc. "I require," said Ailill, "the maiden's weight in gold and silver, for that is my portion of their price; all that thou has done up to now, the profit of it goes to her folk and her kindred." "It shall be done," said the Mac Oc. She was placed on the floor of Ailill's house, and her weight of gold and silver was given for her. That wealth was left with Ailill, and the Mac Oc brought Etain home with him.

15. Midir made that company welcome. That night Etain sleeps with Midir, and on the morrow a mantle befitting him and a chariot were given to him, and he was pleased with his foster-son. After that he abode a full year in the Brug with Aengus. On that day year Midir went to his own land, to Bri Leith, and he brought Etain with him. On that day he went from him the Mac Oc said to Midir, "Give heed to the woman thou takest with thee, because of the dreadful cunning woman that awaits thee, with all the knowledge and skill and craft that belongs to her race," said Aengus, "also she has my word and my safeguard before the Tuatha De Danann," that is, Fuamnach wife of Midir, of the progeny of Beothach son of Iardanel. She was wise and prudent and skilled in the knowledge and magic power of the Tuatha De Danann, for the druid Bresal had reared her until she was betrothed to Midir.

16. She made her husband welcome, that is Midir, and the woman spoke much of... to them. "Come, O Midir," said Fuamnach, "that I may show thee my house and thy meed of land... Midir went round his land with Fuamnach, and she showed his seizin to him and... to Etain. And after that she brought Etain again to Fuamnach. Fuamnach went before them into the sleeping chamber where she slept, and she said to Etain: "The seat of a good woman hast thou come into." When Etain sat down in the chair in the middle of the house, Fuamnach struck her with a rod of scarlet quicken tree, and she turned into a pool of water in the middle of the house; and Fuamach comes to her foster-father Bresal, and Midir left the house to the water into which Etain had turned. After that Midir was without a wife.

17. The heat of the fire and the air and the seething of the ground aided the water so that the pool that was in the middle of the house turned into a worm, and after that the worm became a purple fly. It was as big as a man's head, the comeliest in the land. Sweeter than pipes and harps and horns was the sound of her voice and the hum of her wings. Her eyes would shine like precious stones in the dark. The fragrance and the bloom of her would turn away hunger and thirst from any one around whom she would go. The spray of the drops she shed from her wings would cure all sickness and disease and plague in any one round whom she go. She used to attend Midir and go round about his land with him, as he went. To listen to her and gaze upon her would nourish hosts in gatherings and assemblies in camps. Midir knew that it was Etain that was in that shape, and so long as that fly was attended upon him, he never took to himself a wife, and the sight of her would nourish him. He would fall asleep with her humming, and whenever any one approached who did not love him, she would awaken him.

18. After a time Fuamnach came on a visit to Midir, and along with her as sureties came the three gods of Dana, namely Lug and the Dagda, and Ogma. Midir reproached Fuamnach exceedingly and said to her that she should not go from him were it not for the power of the sureties that had brought her. Fuamnach said that she did not repent of the deed she had done, for that she would rather do good for herself than to another, and that in whatsoever part of Ireland she might be she would do naught but harm to Etain so long as she lived, and in whatsoever shape she might be.

She brought powerful incantations and... spells from Bresal Etarlam the wizard to banish and warn off Etain from Midir, for she knew that the purple fly that was delighting Midir was Etain herself, for wherever he saw the scarlet fly, Midir loved no other woman, and he found no pleasure in music or in drinking or eating when he did not see her and hear the music of her and her voice. Fuamnach stirred up a wind of assault and magic so that Etain was wafted from Bri Leith, and for seven years she could not find a summit or a tree or a hill or a height in Ireland on which she could settle, but only rocks of the sea and the ocean waves, and (she was) floating through the air until seven years from that day when she lighted on the fringe on the breast of the Mac Oc as he was on the mound of the Brug.

19. There it was that the Mac Oc said "Welcome, Etain,"wanderer careworn, thou that hast encountered great dangers through the cunning of Fuamnach. Not yet have you found, your side secure in alliance with Mider. As for me, he has found me capable of actions with hosts, the slaughter of a multitude, the clearing of wildernesses, the world's abundance for Ailill's daughter. An idle task, for your wretched ruin has followed."

20. The Mac Oc made the girl welcome, that is, the purple fly, and gathered her in his bosom in the fleece of his cloak. He brought her to his house and his sun-bower with its bright windows for passing out and in, and purple raiment was put on her; and wherever he went that sun-bower was carried by the Mac Oc, and there he used to sleep every night by her side, comforting her, until her gladness and colour came to her again. And that sun-bower was filled with fragrant and wondrous herbs, and she throve on the fragrance and bloom of those goodly precious herbs.

21. Fuamnach was told of the love and honour that was bestowed by the Mac Oc on Etain. Said Fuamnach to Midir, "Let thy fosterling be summoned that I may make peace between you both, while I myself go in guest of Etain." A messenger comes to the Mac Oc from Midir, and he went to speak to him. Meanwhile Fuamnach came by a circuitous way until she was in the Brug, and she sent the same blast on Etain, which carried her out of her sun-bower on the very flight she had been on before for the space of seven years throughout Ireland. The blast of wind drove her along in misery and weakness until she alit on the rooftree of a house in Ulster where folk were drinking, and she fell into the golden beaker that was before the wife of Etar, the champion from Inber Cichmaine, in the province of Conchobar, so that she swallowed her with the liquid that was in the beaker, and in this wise she was conceived in her womb and became afterwards her daughter. She was called Etain daughter of Etar. Now it was a thousand and twelve years from the first begetting of Etain by Ailill until her last begetting by Etar.

22. After that Etain was brought up at Inber Cichmaine by Etar, and fifty daughters of chieftains along with her, and he it was that fed and clothed them to be in attendance on Etain always. day it befell that all the maidens were bathing in the estuary when they saw from the water a horseman entering the plain towards them. He was mounted on a broad brown steed, curvetting and prancing, with curly mane and curly tail. Around him a green mantle in folds, and a red-embroidered tunic, and in his mantle a golden brooch which reached to his shoulder on either side. A silvern shield with rim of gold slung over his back, and a silver strap to it and boss of gold thereon. In his hand a five pronged spear in bands of gold round about it from haft to socket. Bright yellow hair he had reaching to his forehead. A fillet of gold against his forehead so that his hair would not fall over his face. He halted a while on the bank gazing at the maiden, and all the maidens loved

him. Thereupon he uttered this lay:

23. This is Etain here to-day
at Sid Ban Find west of Ailbe,
among little boys is she
on the brink of Inber Cichmaine.

She it is who healed the King's eye
from the well of Loch Da Lig:
she it is that was swallowed in a drink
from a beaker by Etar's wife.

Because of her the King shall chase
the birds from Tethba,
and drown his two steeds
in the pool of Loch Da Airbrech.

Full many a war shall be
on Eochaid of Meath because of thee:
there shall be destruction of elfmounds,
and battle against many thousands.

'Tis she that was sung of (?) in the land;
'tis she that strives to win the King;
'tis she... Be Find,
She is our Etain afterwards.

The warrior departed from them after that and they knew not whence he had come or whither he had gone.

24. When the Mac Oc came to confer with Midir, he did not find Fuamnach there, and he (Midir) said to him: "The woman has played us false, and if she be told that Etain is in Ireland and she will go to do her ill." "Methinks 'tis likely so," said the Mac Oc. "Etain has been at my house in the Brug since a little while in the shape in which she was wafted from thee, and perhaps it is she that the woman is making for."

25. The Mac Oc returns home and finds the crystal sun-bower without Etain in it. The Mac Oc turns upon Fuamnach's traces and came up on her at Aenech Bodbigna at the house of Bresal Eterlam. The Mac Oc attacked her and shore off her head, and he brought that head with him until he was on the brink of the Brug.

26. Howbeit, this is the version elsewhere, that they were both slain by Manannan, namely Fuamnach and Midir, in Bri Leith, whereof was said:

Fuamnach the foolish one was Midir's wife,
Sigmall, a hill with ancient trees,

in Bri Leith 'twas a faultless arrangement,
they were burned by Manannan.

II. The Wooing of Etain

Eochaid Airem took the kingship of Ireland. The five Fifth of Ireland submitted to him, that is a king of each Fifth. These were their kings at that time: Conchobar son of Nesa and Mess Gegra and Tigernach Tetbannach and Cu Rui and Ailill son of Mata Murisc. Eochaid's strongholds were Dun Fremainn in Meath and Dun Fremainn in Tethba. Fremainn in Tethba was the one most dear to him of the strongholds of Ireland.

2. Eochaid, the year after he became king, commanded the men of Ireland to hold the Festival of Tara, in order to assess their tributes and taxes for five years. The men of Ireland made the same reply to Eochaid, that they would not convene the Festival of Tara for a king that had no queen; for Eochaid had no queen when he took the kingship. Thereupon Eochaid dispatched envoys to every Fifth throughout Ireland so to seek out for him the fairest (woman or) maiden in Ireland. For he said that none should be his wife save a woman that none of the men of Ireland had known before him. There was found for him at Inber Cichmaine, Etain daughter of Etar, and Eochaid wedded her then, for she was his match in beauty and form and lineage, in splendour and youth and fame.

3. The three sons of Find son of Findlug, the queen's sons, were Eochaid Feidlech and Eochaid Airem and Ailill Anguba. Ailill Anguba came to love Etain at the Festival of Tara, after she had lain with Eochaid, for it was his wont to gaze at her continually, and such gazing is a token of love. His heart reproached Ailill for the deed that he had wrought, but it availed him in no wise. Desire was stronger than character. Ailill fell into a decline lest his honour should be strained, nor had he spoken of it to the woman herself.

4. When he expected death, Fachtna, Eochaid's physician, was brought to see him. the physician said to him, "One of the two pains thou has that kill man and no physician can heal, the pain of love and the pain of jealousy." Ailill did not confess to him, for he was ashamed. Then Ailill was left in Fremainn Tethba dying, and Eochaid went out on a circuit of Ireland. And Etain was left with Ailill that his last rites might be paid by her--that is, his grave dug, his lamentation made, his cattle slain.

5. Every day Etain used to come to the house wherein Ailill lay sick to speak with him, and thus his sickness was alleviated, and as long as Etain remained there he would be gazing at her. Etain observed this, and pondered the matter. One day as they were together in her house, Etain asked him what was the cause of his sickness. "It is from love of thee," said Ailill. "Pity that thou has been so long without telling it," said she. Had we but known thou shouldst have been healed a while ago." "Even this day I shall be whole again if thou be willing." "I am willing indeed," said she.

6. Every day then she would come to bathe his head and to carve his meat and to pour water on his hands. After thrice nine days Ailill was healed. He said to Etain: and when shall I have from thee what is still lacking to cure me?" "Thou shalt have it to-morrow," said she; "but not in the prince's dwelling shall he be put to shame. Come to me to-morrow on the hill above the court."

7. Ailill watched through the night. But at the hour of his tryst he fell asleep, and did not wake until the third hour on the morrow. Etain went to meet him, and saw a man awaiting her like unto Ailill in appearance, and he lamented his weakness due to his ailment. The speech that Ailill would have wished is that is what he spoke. At the hour of tierce Ailill awoke. He began to be sorrowful for a long while when Etain came into the house "Why are thou sad?" said she. "That I should have sent thee to a tryst with me and was not there to meet thee. For sleep fell upon me, and I am only now arisen It is manifest that I have not yet attained my cure." "That matters not," said Etain, "one day follows another." He watched that night with a huge fire in front of him and water by his side for bathing his eyes.

8. At the hour of her tryst Etain come to meet him and saw the same man like unto Ailill. Etain returned home. Ailill fell to weeping. Three times Etain came and Ailill did not keep his tryst. She found ever the same man. "Tis not with thee that I have trysted," said she. "Who art thou that hast come to meet me? The man with whom I have made a tryst, 'tis not for sin or hurt that the tryst has been made with him, but that one fit to be king of Ireland might be saved from the sickness that has fallen upon him." "Twere more fitting for thee to come to me, for thou wast Etain Echraide, daughter of Ailill, tis I that was thy husband. I have paid thy huge brideprice in great plains and rivers of Ireland, and had left in place of thee thy weight of gold and silver." "Tell me," said she, "what is thy name?" "No hard matter, Midir of Bri Leith," said he. "Tell me," said she, "What was it that parted us?" "No hard matter, the sorcery of Fuamnach and the spells of Bresal Etarlam." Midir said to Etain, "Wilt thou go with me." "Nay," said she, "I will not barter the king of Ireland for a man whose kindred or race I know not." "It was I," said Midir, "that put love for thee into Ailill's mind, so that his flesh and blood fell away from him. And it was I that took from him all carnal desire, so that thine honour might not suffer therein. But come to my land with me if Eochaid bids thee." "Willingly," said Etain.

9. Then she comes to her house. "We are well met," said Ailill. "Now am I healed, and yet thine honour had not suffered." "It is well thus," said Etain. After that Eochaid returned from his circuit, and rejoiced that his brother was still alive, and Etain received thanks for what she had done until he had come again.

III. The Wooing of Etain

Another time on a lovely summer day Eochaid Airem king of Tara arose and climbed the terrace of Tara to gaze over Mag Berg. It was radiant with bloom of every hue. As Eochaid looked round him he saw a strange warrior on the terrace before him. A purple tunic about him, and golden yellow hair on him to the edge of his shoulders. A shining blue eye in his head. A five-pointed spear in one hand, a white-bossed shield in the other, with golden gems thereon. Eochaid was silent, for he was unaware of his being in Tara the night before, and the courts had not been opened at that hour.

2. Thereupon he came up to Eochaid. Then Eochaid said, "Welcome to the warrior whom we do not know." "Tis for that we have come," said the Warrior. "We know thee not," said Eochaid. "I know thee, however," replied the warrior. "What is thy name?" said Eochaid. "Not famous," said he, "Midir of Bri Leith." "What has brought thee?" said Eochaid. "To play chess¹ with thee," said he. "Of a truth I am good at chess," said Eochaid. "Let us make trial of it," said Midir. "The queen is asleep," said Eochaid, "and it is in her house that the chess-board is." "I have here," said Midir, "a chess-board that is not inferior." That was true: a silver board and golden men, and each corner there lit up by precious stone, and a bag for the men of plaited links of bronze.

3. Thereupon Midir arranges the board. "Do thou play," said Midir. "I will not play save for a stake," said Eochaid. "What shall the wager be?" said Midir. "It is all one to me," said Eochaid. "Thou shalt have from me," said Midir, "if thou win my stake, fifty dark grey steeds with dappled blood-red heads, pointed-ears, broad-chested, with distended nostrils, slender limbs, mighty, keen ..., huge, swift, steady easily yoked, with their fifty enamelled reins. They shall be here at the hour of tierce to-morrow." Eochaid said the same to him. Thereupon they play. Midir's stake is taken. He goes off taking his chess-board with him. When Eochaid arose on the morrow he came on the terrace of Tara as sunrise, and he saw his opponent also by coming towards him along the terrace. He knew not whither he had gone or whence he had come, and he saw the fifty dark grey steeds with their enamelled reins. "This is honourable," said Eochaid. "What is promised is due," said Midir.

4. "Shall we play at chess?" said Midir. "Willingly," said Eochaid, "so it be for a stake." "Thou shalt have from me," said Midir, "fifty young boars, curly-motted, grey-bellied, blue-backed, with horses hooves to them, together with a vat of blackthorn into which they all will fit. Further, fifty gold-hilted swords, and again fifty red-eared cows with white red-eared calves with a bronze spangle on each calf. Further, fifty grey wethers with red heads, three-headed, three-horned. Further, fifty ivory-hilted swords. Further, fifty speckled cloaks, but each fifty of them on its own day."

5. Eochaid's fosterfather questioned him, and asked him whence he had brought his great wealth. He said to him, "That is indeed fit to relate." "Verily Indeed. Thou must take heed of him; it is a man of magic power that has come to thee, my son, lay heavy burdens on him." After that his opponent came to him, and Eochaid laid upon him the famous great tasks, namely to clear Meath of stone, to put rushes over Tethba, a causeway over Moin Lamraige, and a wood over Breifne. Concerning which the poet uttered the followings staves:

These are the four things
that Eochaid Airem imposed
on many a manly-visaged throng
with many a shield and spear:

A causeway over Moin Lamraige,
a wood over Breifne, without difficulty,
a clearing of stone from the hillocks of great Meath,
and rushes over Tethba.

6. These then are the pledges and the hardships that were imposed. "Thou layest too much upon me," said Midir. "I do not indeed," said Eochaid. "Then do thou grant me a request and a boon. As far as thou holdest sway let no man or woman be out of doors until sunrise to-morrow." "It shall be done," said Eochaid. No one had ever trodden that bog before.

7. Then Eochaid commanded his steward to watch the effort they put forth in making the causeway. The steward went into the bog. It seemed to him as though all the men in the world from sunrise to sunset had come to the bog. They all made one mound of their clothes, and Midir went up to that mound. Into the bottom of the causeway they kept putting a forest with its trunks and roots, Midir standing and urging on the host on every side. One would think that below him all the men of the world were raising a tumult.

8. After that, clay and gravel and stones were place upon the bog. Now until that night the men of Ireland used to put the strain on the foreheads of oxen, (but) it was seen that the folk of the elfmounds were putting it on their shoulders. Eochaid did the same, hence he is called Eochaid Airem [i.e. ploughman], for he was the first of the men of Ireland to put a yoke upon the necks of oxen. And these were the words that were on the lips of the host as they were making the causeway: "Put in hand, throw in hand, excellent oxen, in the hours after sundown; overhard is the exaction; none knoweth whose is the gain, whose the loss, from the causeway over Moin Lamraige."

There had been no better causeway in the world, had not a watch been set on them. Defects were left in them. There after the steward came to Eochaid and brings tidings of the vast work he had witnessed, and he said there was not on the ridge of the world a magic power that surpassed it.

9. While they were speaking they saw Midir coming towards them, his loins girt and an evil look on him. Eochaid was afraid, but bade him welcome. "Tis for that we have come," said Midir. "It is fierce and unreasonable of thee to lay such hardship and infliction upon me. I would have wrought something else to please thee, but my mind is inflamed against thee." "Thou shalt not get wrath in return for thy rage: thy mind shall be set at ease," said Eochaid. "It shall be accepted then," said Midir; "Shall we play at chess?" said Midir. "What shall the stake be?" said Eochaid. The stake that either of us shall wish," said Midir. That day Eochaid's stake was taken. "Thou has taken my stake," said Eochaid. "Had I wished I could have taken it before now," said Midir. "What wouldst thou from me?" said Eochaid. "My arms around Etain and a kiss from her," said Midir. Eochaid was silent. "Come a month from to-day and that shall be given thee."

10. The year before Midir came to play chess with Eochaid he was wooing Etain, but he could not

win her, the name by which Midir called her was Be Find [Fair Lady], and he spake to her:

O Be Find, wilt thou come with me
to the wondrous land wherein harmony is,
hair is like the crown of the primrose there.
and the body smooth and white as snow.

There, is neither mine or thine,
white are teeth there, dark the brows.
A delight of the eye the number of our hosts,
every cheek there is of the hue of the foxglove.

A gillyflower is each one's neck,
a delight of the eye are blackbirds' eggs.
Though fair the prospect of Mag Fail,
'tis desolate after frequenting Mag Mar.

Though choice you deem the ale of Inis Fail,
more intoxicating is the ale of Tir Mar.
A wondrous land is the land I tell of;
youth departs not there before old.

Warm sweet streams flow through the land,
the choice of mead and wine.
Stately folk without blemish,
conception without sin, without lust.

We see everyone on every side,
and no one sees us.
It is the darkness of Adam's transgression
that hath prevented us from being counted.

O woman, if thou come to my proud folk,
a crown of gold shall be upon thy head
honey, wine, ale, fresh milk, and drink,
thou shalt have with me there, O Be Find.

"I will go with thee" said Etain, "if thou obtain me from my husband, if thou obtain me not, I will not go."

11. After that Midir came to Eochaid, and he yielded his stake at once in order that he might have a ground of quarrel with Eochaid. Therefore it was that he fulfilled the onerous conditions, and it was for that reason he stipulated the unnamed pledge, so that it afterwards it was named.¹⁰ When Midir and his people were carrying out the terms of the night, i.e. the causeway over Moin Lamraige, and the clearing away the stones from Meath and putting rushes over Tethba, and the wood over Breifne, these are the words people were saying, according to the Book of Druim Snechta:

12. [Cuirthe i iland toche i iland airderg damrudh trom an coidben cluinotar fir ferdi buidne balethruim crandchuir forderg saire fedhar sechuib slimprib snithib sciathu lama indrochad cloena fo bith oenmna duib in digail duib an tromdam tairthrim flatho fer ban fomnis in fer mbraine cerpai fomnis diadh dergage fer arfeidh solaid fri ais estild fer bron fort ier techta in delmnad o luachair for di Teithbi dictlochad Midi indracht coich les coich aimles.]

13. Midir made a tryst of a month from that day. But Eochaid mustered the flower of the warriors of Ireland to Tara, and the best of the war-bands of Ireland, each encircling the other around Tara, in the midst, without and within, and the king and queen in the middle of the house, and the courts locked, for they knew that a man of great magic power would come. Etain was serving the lords on that night, for the serving of drink was a special gift of hers.

14. Thereafter as they were speaking they saw Midir coming towards them in the midst of the royal house. He was fair at all times, but on that night he was fairer. The hosts were astonished. Then silence fell upon them, and the king bade him welcome. "'Tis that we have come for," said Midir; "what has been pledged to me," said he, "let it be given to me. What is promised is due. What was promised, I have given thee." "I have not thought further of that until now," said Eochaid. "Etain herself promised me that she would come away from thee," said Midir. Thereupon Etain blushes. "Do not blush, O Etain," said Midir. "It is not unwomanly for thee. I have been a year," said he, "seeking thee with gifts and treasures the most beautiful in Ireland, nor did I take thee until I had Eochaid's leave. It is not through any... though I should win thee?" "I have told thee," said she, "that I will not go to thee until Eochaid sell me. As for me, thou mayst take me if Eochaid sell me."

15. "I will not sell thee indeed," said Eochaid, "but let him put his arms round thee in the middle of the house as thou art." "It shall be done," said Midir. He takes his weapons in his left hand, and the woman he took under his right arm, and bore her away through the skylight of the house. The hosts rose up in shame around the king. They beheld two swans in flight round Tara.

And the way they went was to Sid ar Femuin, and Eochaid went with flower of men of Ireland around him to Sid ar Femuin, that is Sid Ban Find. And this was the counsel of the men of Ireland, to dig up dig up every elfmound in Ireland until his wife came thereout to him.

16. They dug up Sid Ban Find, and a certain person comes forth and told them that the woman was not there. "The king of the elfmounds of Ireland, he is the man who came to you. He is in his royal stronghold with the young woman. Set out thither until ye come to it." They go northwards. They began to dig up the elfmound. They were a year and three months at it. What they would dig up one day would be restored on the morrow. Two white ravens went forth from the mound to them, and there came two hounds, Schleth and Samair. They went south again to Sid Ban Find. They began to dig the elfmound. One comes forth to them and said to them, "What hast thou against us, O Eochaid?" said he. "We have not taken thy wife. No injury had been done thee. Beware of saying aught that may be harmful to a king." "I will not go hence," said Eochaid, "till ye tell me how I may attain my wife." "Take blind welps with thee, and blind cats, and leave them. That is the work thou must do every day." They turn away, and that is done by them. And in this manner they set about it.

17. As they were razing Sid Bri Leith they beheld Midir coming towards them. "What has thou against me," said Midir. "Thou dost me wrong. Thou hast put great tribulations upon me. Thou didst

sell thy wife to me. Injure me no more," said he. "She shall not be with thee," said Eochaid. "She shall not," said Midir. "Get thee home, Thy wife shall reach thee at the third hour to-morrow..." said Midir. "Injure me not again if thou are contented with me this time." "I accept," said Eochaid. Midir bound his covenants and departs from them. As they were there at the third hour on the morrow, they saw fifty women all of like form and raiment as Etain. Silence fell on the hosts. There was a grey slut before them. They say to Eochaid, "Choose thy wife now, or bid one of the women to abide with thee. It is meet that we set out for home."

18. "What will ye do," said Eochaid to the men of Ireland, "because of the doubt that has come upon you?" "We have no resolve as to what we shall do," said the men of Ireland. "I have," said Eochaid. "My wife is the best at serving drink in Ireland. I shall recognize her by her serving." Twenty-five were placed at the side of the house and twenty five at this, and still he did not find Etain. It came at last to two women. One of them poured out first. Said Eochaid, "This is Etain, and it is not herself." Then they all took counsel. "Truly it is Etain, but it is not her serving." The rest of the women departed. That deed which he did was a great satisfaction to the men of Ireland, and the high feat the oxen had done, and the rescue of the woman from the men of the elfmounds.

19. One fine day Eochaid arose, and he and his queen were conversing in the middle of the court, they saw Midir coming towards them. "Well, Eochaid," said Midir. "Well," said Eochaid. "Thou has not played me fair with the hardships thou has inflicted on me, considering the backing thou hadst and all that... to demand from me. There was naught that thou didst not suspect me of." "I did not sell thee my wife," said Eochaid. "Answer, dost thou consider thy conscience in regard to me?" said Midir. "Until thou proffer another pledge, I will not consider it," said Eochaid. "Answer, is thy mind at ease?" said Midir. "It is," said Eochaid. "So also is mine," said Midir. "Thy wife was pregnant when she was taken from thee, and she bore a daughter, and it is she who is with thee. Thy wife, moreover, is with me and it had befallen thee to let her go a second time." Thereupon he departs.

20. After that Eochaid did not dare to dig again an elfmound of Midir's, for there was a bond against him. It grieved Eochaid that his wife had eloped, and that his own daughter had lain with him. And she was with child by him and bore him a daughter. "O ye gods," said Eochaid, "I and my daughter's daughter shall never look on one another," Two of his household go to throw her into a pit among beasts. They visit the house of Findlam the herdsman of Tara in Slaib Fuait, in the midst of a wilderness. There was no one in the house. They ate the food with in. Then they threw the girl to the bitch and her welps that was in the kennel in the house. They go away again. The herdsman and his wife return home and saw within the fair infant in the kennel. They were amazed at that. They take her out of the kennel. They brought her up without knowing whence she had come, and she waxed strong, moreover, being the daughter of a king and queen. She surpassed all women at embroidery. Her eyes saw nothing that her hands could not embroider. In that wise then she was reared by Findlam and his wife, until one day Etarscel's people saw her and told the king, and she was taken away forcibly by Etarscel, and was with him after that as his wife. So she is the mother of Conaire son of Etarscel.

21. And after that Eochaid Airem was in Fremain of Tethba, after he had lost Etain, and his mind was troubled. Sigmall Cael, grandson of Midir, that is, the son of Midir's daughter, Oicnis was her name, came and burned Eochaid's Dun Fremainn, and Eochaid fell by him and his head was brought by Sigmall to Sid Nennta in revenge for the honour of his grandfather, even Midir.

This is not so, however, for Sigmall and Fuamnach the wife of Midir had fallen at the hands of Manannan in Bri Leith long before that in the reign of the Tuatha De Danann: whereof the poet said:

R. Fumnach the foolish one, was Midir's wife,
Sigmall, a hill with ancient trees
in Bri Leith, twas a faultless arrangement,
they were burned by Manannan.

22. It is this wise however that the death of Eochaid Airem came about, as the learned in ancient lore say:

Eochaid was in Fremainn of Tethba, as we have said, and it is there was his mansion and his ancestral domain towards the end. Hense there arose hard tribute of service beyond telling on the people of the district and the land, because the sustenance of the king usually fell on them, wherefore Tethba is called the seventh part of Ireland, for the seventh part of the tribute and the maintenance of the king fell on them. The Fir Chul of the Luigne of Tara were in Tara at this time, and on them that the tribute was laid. Normael was king of the Fir Chul then and he was the steward in Fremainn. His mother's son was Sigmall of Brestine son of Midir king of Bentraige. A plot was then hatched by them, and what they resolved on was the slaying of Eochaid.

23. Then they both set out, the Bentraige under Sigmall and the Fir Chul under Mormael, and they took Dun Fremainn, Eochaid's stronghold, and burned it, and slew him there. After that they went to Connacht with their spoils, and bore Eochaid's head along with them to Sid Nennta iar nUsicu (west of the water), so that commemorate that deed the historian uttered the following:

Eochaid Airem, noble, fair and graceful,
eminent high-king of Ireland,
extended his bold hard tribute,
it spread through Banda of of the brown cloaks.

The folk of Tethba of the stubborn fights
got the tribute of the king of Ireland.
The lawgiving king who...them, put
the seventh (part) on them alone.

Heavy sorrow of the host came
because of the monstrous unjust law,
anger was kindled among because of it,
until Eochaid Airem was slain.

The folk of Tethba, mighty of yore,
slew Eochaid of Fremaind
'Twas not strength with cause on their part,
because of the monstrous unjust law.

Mormael was the name of the king at first

by whom the great deed was done,
Fir Chul the name of the men of Tethba in the east
when Dun Fremainn was overpowered.

Though 'tis said that Sigmal of the spears
slew Eochaid Airem,
he died himself prior to Eochaid of Fremaind
in the succession of leaders.

Sigmall of the battling spears died
by the smooth bright face of Manannan;
a vast long time in the east, without weakness,
before Eochaid met his death.

The two Sigmalls of Sid Nennta,
intrepid their feet, mighty their prowess,
Sigmall son of Coirpre of the battles,
Sigmall who was at Eochaid's death.

Sigmall son of Brestine of lasting [memory],
king of Bentraige with great triumph,
and great Mormael from the plain,
by them Eochaid perished.