

II. The Wooing of Etain

Eochaid Airem took the kingship of Ireland. The five Fifths 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 Freamainn in Meath and Dun Freamainn in Tethba. Freamainn 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 Freamainn 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.

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