

The death of Etarcomol and the terms offered by the men of Ireland as told to Cú Chulainn by Fergus:

Then Fergus went on that mission. Etarcomol, the son of Ed and Leithrinn, fosterson of Ailill and Medb, followed Fergus. 'I do not wish you to go,' said Fergus, 'and it is not out of hatred of you that I say so, but I dislike the thought of a fight between you and Cú Chulainn because of your pride and insolence and because of the fierceness and violence, the boldness and fury of your opponent, Cú Chulainn. No good will come of your encounter.' 'Can you not protect me from him?' said Etarcomol. 'I can,' said Fergus, 'provided that you do not provoke a quarrel.'

They set off then for Delga in two chariots. At that time Cú Chulainn was playing draughts with Láeg: the back of his head was towards them and Láeg was facing them. 'I see two chariots coming towards us,' said Láeg. 'There is a tall dark man in the first chariot. He has dark bushy hair. He wears a purple cloak in which is a golden brooch, and a hooded tunic with red insertion. He carries a curved shield with a scalloped rim of white gold. In his hand he holds a broad spear with perforations from point to upper shaft (?). Across his thighs a sword as long as a boat's rudder.' 'That great rudder carried by my master Fergus is empty,' said Cú Chulainn, 'for there is no sword in the scabbard, only a sword of wood. I have been told,' said Cú Chulainn, 'that Ailill came unawares upon Fergus and Medb as they slept, and he took away Fergus's sword and gave it into the keeping of his charioteer, and a wooden sword was put into its scabbard.' At that point Fergus arrived.

'Welcome, master Fergus,' said Cú Chulainn. 'If fish swim into the estuaries you shall have a salmon and a half; or else if a flock of birds fly over the plain you shall have a barnacle goose and the half of another; or you shall have a handful of cress or seaweed, a handful of laver, a drink from the sand. I shall go the ford to encounter an opponent if he challenge (you) and you shall be guarded until you shall have slept.' 'I trust your welcome,' said Fergus, 'but it is not for food that I have come. I know what provisions you have here.' Then Cú Chulainn received the message from Fergus, and Fergus departed.

Etarcomol remained behind gazing at Cú Chulainn. 'What are you looking at?' said Cú Chulainn.

'You,' said Etarcomol. 'An eye can soon glance over that,' said Cú Chulainn. 'So I see,' answered Etarcomol. 'I see no reason why anyone should fear you. I see in you no horror or fearfulness or

superiority in numbers. You are merely a handsome youth with wooden weapons and fine feats of arms.' 'Though you revile me' said Cú Chulainn, 'I will not kill you because of Fergus. But for your being under his protection, I would have sent back your distended loins and your dismembered body behind your chariot to the encampment.' 'Do not threaten me thus,' said Etarcomol. 'As for the wonderful agreement you made, namely, to engage in single combat, it is I who will be the first of the men of Ireland to fight with you tomorrow.' Then he went away, but he turned back again from Méithe and Ceithe, saying to his charioteer: 'I boasted in the presence of Fergus that I would encounter Cú Chulainn tomorrow. It is not easy for me, however, to wait until then. Turn the horses back again from the hill.'

Láeg saw what was happening and said to Cú Chulainn 'The chariot is coming again and has turned its left side to us.' 'That is a challenge which must be met,' said Cú Chulainn. 'Let us go down to meet him at the ford and find out (what he wants).'

'I do not wish to do what you ask,' said Cú Chulainn (to Etarcomol). 'You must do it, however,' said Etarcomol. Cú Chulainn struck the sod beneath his feet and he fell prostrate with the sod on his belly. 'Begone!' said Cú Chulainn. 'I am loath to dip my hands in your blood. I should have cut you into pieces just now but for Fergus.' 'We shall not part like this,' said Etarcomol, 'until I carry off your head or until I leave my head with you.' 'The latter is what will happen,' said Cú Chulainn. Then Cú Chulainn struck him with his sword under his armpits so that his garments fell off him, but he did not cut his skin. 'Begone then!' said Cú Chulainn. 'No,' said Etarcomol. Cú Chulainn touched him then with the edge of his sword and cut his hair off as cleanly as if it had been shaved off with a razor. He did not even scratch his skin. Then since the fellow was troublesome and pertinacious, he struck him on the crown of his head and clove him down to the navel.

Fergus saw the chariot go past with only one man in it. He turned back to scold Cú Chulainn. 'It was wicked of you, you whippersnapper,' said he, 'to violate my protection (of Etarcomol). You think my club is short.' 'Do not be angry with me, master Fergus,' said Cú Chulainn, '...Do not reproach me, master Fergus.' He bowed down and let Fergus's chariot go past him three times. 'Ask his charioteer if I was the one who instigated the fight.' 'Indeed it was not you,' said Etarcomol's charioteer. 'He said,' went on Cú Chulainn, 'that he would not go away till he carried off my head or left his own head with me. Which would you prefer, master Fergus?' 'Indeed I prefer what has been done,' said Fergus, 'for it is he who was insolent.'

Then Fergus put a spangling band through Etarcomol's heels and dragged him behind his own chariot to the camp. Whenever Etarcomol's body went over rocks, one half would part from the other; when the path was smooth, the two parts would come together again. Medb looked at him. 'That was not kind treatment for a young hound, Fergus,' said Medb. 'It is no source of annoyance to me,' said Fergus, 'that the mongrel should have waged battle with the great hound for whom he was no match.'

Then Etarcomol's grave was dug and his headstone was planted in the ground; his name was written in ogam and he was mourned. That night Cú Chulainn did not attack them with his sling.