

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 Bodbгна 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.

