

“The Wooing of Étaín”, or the Romance of Midir and Étaín

A Version by Marie Heaney (1999)

The Wooing of Étaín is one of the two chief tales of the **Mythological Cycle**. The other is **The Battle of Moytura** from the **Book of the Dun Cow**. Owing to loss of leaves from that book, many sections of the text were missing until discovered in 1935 in a gathering of leaves held in the Phillipps Collection at Cheltenham which proved to be lost parts of the **Yellow Book of Lecan** – another copy of the earlier original of both which is lost forever. The discovered pages, which are now held in the National Library of Ireland, contain the complete text of **The Wooing of Étaín** – acknowledged to be the extant earliest romance in European history. (Myles Dillon, Radio Talk of 1959.) [Note: I have added condensed Myles Dillon’s remarks and added section-breaks and titles to Marie Heaney’s narrative which follows here. BS.]

Étaín and Midir

Midir the Proud, a prince of the Tuatha De Danaan, was famous for his beauty and the magnificence of his clothes. He lived in great splendour with his wife, Fuamnach, in his underground fort called a *sidhe*, at Bri Leith.

Aengus Og, the son of the Dagda, had spent his youth in Midir’s underground palace in Bri Leith, and Midir loved him like a son. When Aengus Og grew up, he returned to his own *sidhe*, Brugh na Boinne, beside the River Boyne, the most important one in the land.

Midir was lonely without his foster son’s company so one autumn day, just before the feast of Samhain, Midir set off to visit Aengus Og. He left his wife, Fuamnach, at Bri Leith. On the way he met a king’s daughter called Étaín. Étaín’s beauty was legendary. Indeed she was so beautiful that there was a saying: ‘Nothing can be called beautiful unless tested against Étaín.’ Midir had heard of Étaín’s beauty and as soon as he saw her he fell deeply in love with her and carried her off with him to Aengus Og’s house at the Boyne. They lived in Brugh na Boinne for a year and Midir was so enthralled by Étaín that he forgot everyone else when he was with her.

In Bri Leith, Fuamnach learnt of Midir’s love for Étaín through the powers of her foster father, a druid called Bresal. As the months passed and Midir did not return to her, she became more and more jealous and she begged Bresal to help her banish Étaín from Midir’s mind. The druid consented and taught her some of his magic arts, and Fuamnach plotted to get rid of her rival.

When a year was up, Midir decided to return to his own house at Bri Leith. He brought Étaín with him and when they arrived Fuamnach welcomed them warmly.

‘It is a great honour for us to have a royal guest in the house,’ she said. Then she turned to Midir. ‘Show your wealth to the king’s daughter!’

Étaín and Midir wandered round Bri Leith looking at its fine halls, rooms and playing fields and when they had seen all that was to be seen, they returned to Fuamnach.

‘Now let me show you to your room,’ Fuamnach said to Étaín and went ahead of her into the bedchamber. A big fire was burning there and the room was warm and welcoming. In the middle of the chamber stood a chair and Fuamnach invited Étaín to sit on it. As soon as Étaín was seated she hissed at her, ‘You occupy the chair of a good woman!’ and struck her with a wand of scarlet rowan berries.

Instantly Étaín disappeared, but on the floor beside the chair there lay a little pool of water. Fuamnach ran out of the room and fled from Bri Leith to seek refuge with Bresal, for she was afraid of Midir’s anger.

After a while Midir went to Étaín’s quarters to find her, for he couldn’t bear to be parted from her for long. He went into the bedchamber and found it was empty. He searched the house from top to bottom, becoming more alarmed with each passing minute. He called Étaín’s name and Fuamnach’s name again and again. He hurried to the gates of Bri Leith and out to the playing fields but there was no sign of either woman. In a flash Midir realized that something terrible had happened to Étaín and that Fuamnach, and her jealousy, were responsible. He went back to the bedchamber but there was still no sign of Étaín. Distracted with grief he left the room without even noticing the pool of water on the floor.

When he had gone the fire grew hotter and the floor began to tremble and the water began to seethe and solidify. Slowly it took on the shape of a worm that lay coiled on the floor where the water had been. But the heat and the agitation in the room grew more and more intense until, in the midst of this turmoil, the worm turned into a crimson fly, a large, beautiful fly with jewelled eyes and enamelled wings. As the creature struggled from the floor and slowly began to beat her wings, a music sweeter than the sound of the harp or horn or pipe filled the room. In the darkness and in daylight the fly shone like a jewel and wherever she went she filled the space with a sweet fragrance. Dew fell from her wings and anyone touched by this moisture was soothed and healed. Though she now had the shape of a fly, Etain still retained the nature of a woman and she flew out of the window to search for her beloved Midir.

She found him asleep and flew round the room where he lay. As Etain's fragrance filled the room, Midir woke up and saw the beautiful creature on the windowsill. He knew at once that it was Etain. As the crimson fly moved round the room the music from her wings and the scattering of dew soothed him. His loneliness faded and peace and happiness took its place. Together Etain and Midir travelled through Ireland visiting feasts and assemblies where Etain's exquisite appearance and fragrance brought joy to all who saw her. Etain watched over Midir, warning him of any danger that came close to him and comforting him with the music of her wings. Once again Midir was happy and thought of no one but Etain, and they returned to live in Bri Leith.

In Bresal's house, where she had taken refuge, Fuamnach became more jealous than ever. She had heard about the beautiful crimson fly that lived in a bower in Bri Leith and she knew it was Etain and that Midir loved her as much as ever. At last she could bear it no longer and she went to Midir's house to see what harm she could do to Etain. When she arrived at Bri Leith Midir upbraided her for her jealous deed. Far from being repentant, Fuamnach told him that what she had done she would do again, and that as long as Etain was alive, in whatever shape, she would try to hurt her. And with that she began to chant a spell so strong that all Midir's love for Etain and all his magic was powerless against it. Fuamnach called up a great wind to blow through Bri Leith. It shrieked through the house carrying Etain helplessly before it. She was tossed up over the ramparts and across the open countryside, battered and terrified.

Etain and Aengus Og

At last Etain was blown to Brugh na Boinne, the fort of Aengus Og and the same house where she had first joined Midir. Aengus was walking outside his liss [fort] and the fly landed on his cloak. At once Aengus knew that the weary wanderer was Etain, so he carried her tenderly into his house and set her down. He built a little glass room for her, full of sunlight and flowers, and there Etain felt safe. Aengus Og loved her too, and she brought as much happiness to him as she had to Midir. Knowing this, Fuamnach's anger and rage knew no bounds. She knew she would not be able to get close enough to Etain to harm her whilst either Midir or Aengus Og was at her side, so she arranged a meeting between herself and the two men a little distance away from Brugh na Boinne.

When Aengus left home to meet Midir, Fuamnach circled round the mound and crept inside when no one was looking. She found Etain in her crystal sun bower and she conjured up the same druid's wind as she had done before, and Etain was swept out of Aengus's fort.

Aengus and Midir waited for Fuamnach to join them and when a long time passed and she didn't arrive, they became uneasy. Aengus ran back to his underground palace and when he saw Etain's empty room he knew Fuamnach had been at her jealous work. He was filled with anger and sorrow and determined to punish her, He found her hiding in another part of the house with Bresal beside her, and in a rage he cut off her head there and then.

For seven years the wind lashed Etain about the length and breadth of Ireland. She could not rest in any high place, not trees or roofs, or cliffs or mountains. She could find peace only in the crevices of rocks, on the seashore or on the crests of the waves. At last, wretched and exhausted, the fly was

blown inland towards a great hall and through an open door. Up, up towards the rafters she was tossed and she landed there half dead. Below her a feast was in progress. Etar, the Ulster champion who lived there, was giving a feast for his household. The table was set with gold and silver and the noise of the feast rose around the weary fly. She clung to the beams with the last of her strength but she was so faint with exhaustion that she could cling no more and she fell from the roof into a golden goblet full of wine that Etar's wife was holding. Not noticing what had happened, the woman brought the cup to her lips and swallowed the fly in a mouthful of wine. Nine months later Etar's wife gave birth to a beautiful baby girl and they called the child Etain.

Etar and his wife loved the girl and showered her with riches of all kinds, everything that a king's daughter could wish for. Sixty chieftain's daughters were brought to Etar's house and he kept them, feeding and clothing them, so that Etain would have company at all times. They attended to her every need and she grew up as beautiful as before.

Etain and Eochai Airem

When Etain was twenty years of age, Eochai Airem became High King of Ireland. In the first year of his reign Eochai sent for the kings of the provinces of Ireland and the Chieftains and their people, to come to Tara to celebrate the feast of Samhain, our Hallowe'en, one of the most important feasts of the year.

Word came back to Eochai that the kings and chieftains could not come to Tara to celebrate the feast until the king had a wife. It was the custom, they said, that no man came to Tara without his wife for this feast, and no woman came without her husband. The High King, too, must observe this rule.

In great haste the king sent out messengers to find him a fitting queen. She must be a nobleman's daughter and she must never have been married before. The messenger found Etain suitable in every way and told the king about her. Eochai Airem set out with his followers to visit Etar's house and ask for his daughter's hand in marriage.

As the High King and his retinue approached Etar's house they saw a beautiful girl washing herself beside a well. The basin that held the water was made of gold, with purple gemstones set in the rim. Four golden birds perched on the edge of the bowl as if they were drinking from the water. The woman was dressed in a green tunic of lustrous silk, hooded and embroidered with golden thread. On her breast, catching the light, were two brooches made out of gold and silver in the shape of fabulous animals. Round her shoulders lay a rich purple cloak with a silver fringe. As the sun's rays fell on the golden threads in the green silk and on the rich jewellery and on her golden hair Etain shone as brightly as the sun itself. To Eochai Airem she seemed like a creature from another world. Her hair was bound in long golden plaits decorated with golden threads and with a little golden bauble on the end of each plait. As the king watched, she raised her arms to let down her hair and loosen it so that she could wash it and her sleeves fell back revealing her beautiful slender arms and narrow waist. The king stared, speechless at such beauty, Etain's skin was as white as snow in the morning or the white caps of the waves. Her eyebrows were dark and lustrous as a beetle's shell. Her eyes were as blue as wild hyacinths and her cheeks as pink as foxgloves. As he watched, a happy smile lit up her eyes and dimpled her smooth cheeks. She combed her shining hair with a comb of silver inlaid with gold which she held in her delicate hand. Her gestures were graceful and elegant and she moved with the stately bearing of a queen.

The king gestured to his retinue to stay where they were and then alone and gently he approached the girl. She was not alarmed and when the king asked her what her name was, she answered with assurance.

'I am Etain, daughter of Etar, a chieftain and a champion of Ulster.'

'And I am Eochai Airem, High King of Ireland, and I am looking for a wife,' Eochai said. 'I have fallen in love with you at first sight and will look no further if you'll consent to marry me and come with me to Tara.'

‘I know who you are,’ Etain replied, ‘for I have heard about you and loved you since I was a child. I have been waiting for you, and for your sake I’ve refused all offers of marriage from the young men at my father’s house.’

Eochai Airem could hardly believe his ears, and he was overjoyed by this reply. They got married immediately and Etain returned to Tara with the High King.

Etain and Aillil

Now that Eochai had a wife the kings of Ireland were willing to come to Tara for the feast, and so the great feast of Samhain began. Etain was so happy she looked more beautiful than ever and as she poured out the wine, a special skill of hers, all eyes were on her. But one man, Aillil, brother of Eochai, fell instantly in love with her as the king himself had done, and could not drag his eyes away from her all through the meal. A woman near him noticed this and chided him. Aillil felt ashamed and did not look at Etain again while the rest of the feast was in progress. But his obsession with her grew and he began to waste away with longing. For a year he grew more and more ill without any apparent cause and he could not disclose his secret to anyone.

Eochai Airem came to see his brother to find out what the cause of the mysterious illness might be, but Aillil could not tell him, above all others, what ailed him, and the king left none the wiser. He was anxious about Aillil so he sent his own physician, Fachtna, to try to cure him. Fachtna put his hand on Aillil’s chest and Aillil sighed.

‘One of two things is wrong with you,’ Fachtna said. ‘You’re suffering from the pain of jealousy or the pain of a secret love.’

Aillil knew the physician spoke the truth but he could not confess it to anyone, for he was guilty and ashamed to be in love with his brother’s wife. And so he became weaker and weaker each day.

The time came round when the High King had to make his royal circuit of Ireland and Eochai was afraid that his brother would die while he was away, so he asked Etain to attend to him and see that he got a proper burial if this happened. Etain began to nurse Aillil and under her care he improved. She noticed how happy he was when she was near and began to wonder about it. She decided to ask him the cause of his illness, and promised to help him if it lay within her power.

‘It is love that has made me sick for a year,’ Aillil said. ‘And though my love is as deep as the sea and endless as the sky, it is like living with a shadow or listening to an echo, for it can never be fulfilled. Etain, I am in love with my brother’s wife!’

Etain stared at him in great dismay; she had loved her husband since she was a child and loved only him, but for her sake his brother lay dying. She left Aillil’s bedside in distress, her heart full of pity for his plight.

Aillil grew worse and worse now, wasting away with longing. He begged Etain to become his lover because that was the only thing that could save him. Etain did not want to be unfaithful to her husband by giving her love to Aillil, but she saw that her brother-in-law was dying. In desperation she consented to meet him outside Eochai’s house the next morning at daybreak.

All night long Aillil lay awake, waiting for the dawn to break when his longing would be appeased, but just before the appointed hour, he fell into a deep sleep. Etain went to the hill where they were meant to meet and waited sadly for Aillil to come and claim her love. A man suddenly appeared climbing towards her up the hill. He looked like Aillil but as he came closer Etain realized that though he had Aillil’s shape, it was not he. She turned away from him and did not speak or look in his direction and the strange man went away.

When Aillil woke from his sleep and realized he had missed the meeting he longed for so much, he was heartbroken and became iller than ever. So Etain sadly agreed to meet him in the same place at the same hour the next morning. Afraid that he would sleep again, Aillil kept himself awake by splashing water over his face all night long. But just when the first streak of light appeared in the sky, in spite of all his efforts to stay awake, he fell fast asleep. Once more Etain waited for him on the hill

and once more the man who looked like Aillil, but was not he, approached her. Once more Etain turned away.

For the third time Etain took pity on Aillil and again a meeting was arranged. On the third morning the same thing happened but this time Etain, waiting on the hill, spoke to the man who looked like Aillil. 'Who are you,' she said, 'and why have you come here?'

'I have come to meet you,' said the man, 'as you promised.'

'I did not promise to meet you,' cried Etain, 'I promised to meet Aillil and you are not Aillil, though you have taken on his shape! I came to meet Aillil to save him. It is my husband whom I love.'

'Then it is right that you should come to meet me and not Aillil,' said the man, 'for I am your husband.'

Etain stared at him. 'What do you mean? My husband is Eochai Airem, High King of Ireland, whom I have loved since I was a child. Who are you, and how can you say such a thing!'

'I am Midir of Bri Leith, a king of the Tuatha De Danaan whose dwellings are underground, and long, long ago you were once my wife. I have always loved you and it was my love for you that Aillil felt. I put that desire in his heart so that through him you would remember my love and return it once more.'

Etain was astonished at these words but she knew in her heart that Midir spoke the truth. 'If this is so,' she said, 'and you loved me, why were we separated?'

'Through the jealousy of Fuamnach and her druid's spells,' said Midir. 'And now I am asking you to leave your human husband and come with me to join your own people. It will not be disloyal for you to leave an earthly king for a king of the Otherworld. I love you, Etain. For your sake I sent that sleep on Aillil to prevent him claiming your love. I have cured him of his illness and he no longer wants you. Come with me to Bri Leith, Etain, where you belong, and we 'will live happily for ever.'

'My love for Eochai is for ever,' said Etain, 'and I will never leave him!' And with that she went back to the fort where Aillil was. He met her at the door, happy and in good health, and the love-sickness that Midir had put on him was gone. Etain told him about her encounter with the man of the Sidhe, Midir of Bri Leith, and when Eochai returned from his journey round Ireland he heard the whole story too. They rejoiced together that things had turned out as they had and that their difficulties were at an end. Both brothers were grateful to Etain for her kindness to them and Eochai Airem loved her more than ever.

The Return of Midir

Etain now lived happily in Tara with Eochai Airem, her beauty and grace a byword and her hospitality acknowledged to be the most generous and accomplished of all.

One sunny day during a festival she was outside the terraces of the fort watching the chariot races and the games when a beautiful young man came towards her. He was as beautiful as she was, and his dress was just as splendid. His tunic was red silk that glowed like gold and was embroidered with golden thread. Over it he wore a long green cloak held in place with a magnificent golden brooch that crossed from shoulder to shoulder. His curly hair was kept in place by a fillet of gold the same colour as his hair. Slung over his shoulder was a five-pronged silver spear with a golden rim and a golden boss, fretted in gold from butt to point. Etain gasped when she saw him and turned towards her companions but they were looking at the games and Etain realized that she alone could see him. He came closer and closer, past the other women who were cheering on the champions completely unaware of his presence. When he reached Etain, he began to speak to her. No one turned a head at the sound of his voice and Etain knew his message was for her alone.

'Golden-haired Etain, will you come with me to a country that is full of music? A place where everyone is as beautiful as you, with hair as yellow as the wild iris, and skin like snow, cheeks with the foxglove's bloom and eyes like a blackbird's egg. Our people move among mortals, but they

cannot see us for we are not mortal. We have no worry or sorrow and we stay young forever. The rivers in our land run full of mead and wine, and the land's abundance I shared freely among us all. Lovely Etain, leave Ireland, beautiful as it is, for a fairer land awaits you. And in that land of the Ever Young you will be a queen.'

Etain said she would not go, but the young man pleaded with her and said, 'If your husband gives you to me, Etain, will you come with me to my kingdom?'

'If my husband gives me to you,' said Etain, for she was sure it would never happen, 'I will go with you.'

The young man smiled and disappeared.

Not long after this, on a beautiful summer's morning, Eochai got up early and climbed on to the ramparts of Tara to look across the Plain of Breg. It stretched out below him, wet with dew, green and fertile and bright with scarlet poppies and ox-eye daisies. The king felt a presence beside him and he turned round quickly to see who it might be. Beside him, on the high ground was the most beautiful man he had ever seen. His purple tunic and golden brooch shone in the sun and he held a silver shield with a golden boss in one hand and a five-pointed gold-mounted spear in the other. Eochai felt a moment's fear for he knew that the gates of the fort had not yet opened and this young man had not been among his company the night before. 'Who are you?' he said at last. 'I don't recognize you?'

'I am Midir of Bri Leith,' said the warrior, 'and I know well who you are.'

'Why have you come to Tara?' said the High King.

'To play a game of chess with you,' Midir replied.

'I hope you're a good chess player,' said Eochai, 'if you want to play with me!'

'We won't know that till we play,' said Midir.

Eochai began to feel uneasy. 'Unfortunately the chessboard is in the queen's chamber,' he said, 'and she is still asleep, so we cannot play.'

'I have a chessboard with me,' said Midir, 'as fine as yours!' And with that he took from his shoulder a bag woven of golden thread. Out of it he took a chessboard, inlaid with silver, and precious stones, and the shining jewels that were set in the four corners threw light across the board. The chessmen were made of gold.

Midir set up the chessboard and waited for the king to make the first move, but Eochai was still reluctant to play.

'I will not play where there is no stake,' he said.

'What stake will you accept?' said Midir.

'It's all the same to me!' said Eochai.

So Midir offered a fabulous stake of fifty of the finest dappled horses and fifty enamelled bridles with them.

They played the game of chess and Eochai won. Midir slipped away and the king didn't see how or where he had gone.

The next morning, before the gates were opened, Eochai went to the ramparts and there, beside him, was Midir. Cropping the grass were fifty magnificent horses, their enamelled bridles glowing in the sun.

Eochai was delighted at such a prize and when Midir challenged him to another game he accepted gladly. This time the stake Midir offered was richer again: fifty boars, fifty cattle and fifty sheep. Eochai played with great intensity and again he won. The next morning, on the pastures outside his fort, all the animals that Midir had promised were herded together.

When Midir appeared for the third time, ready for a game, Eochai told the visitor that this time he would set the stakes himself.

He set Midir three stupendous tasks. The first was to clear the land of stones and with them to lay a causeway over the Bog of Tethbae; the second to make fertile the rushy ground around his fort; and

the third to clothe the bare hills of the district with trees. Midir agreed to do these things if he lost the game, impossible though they seemed, but on the condition that neither Eochai nor any of his household should look out over the terraces that night.

They played and Midir lost this game as well. Eochai was full of jubilation and Midir slipped away as mysteriously as ever.

That night when the gates were shut and the whole household was in bed, Eochai went to the quarters where his chief steward slept. He woke the man and told him to go to the ramparts and look out over the wall. 'Watch carefully and above all remain hidden. In the morning come and tell me what you saw,' he told him.

The steward crept stealthily to the fortifications and looked over. In the moonlight there was a crowd of men so vast that it looked as if all the men in the world were gathered on the Plain of Breg. Crowds milled around like ants, stooping and rising, lifting stones, digging and building, while Midir directed the work from the top of a hill. Then the steward realized that the hill Midir was standing on was made up of a vast heap of clothes that the labourers had discarded while they worked. Before his amazed eyes the familiar landscape was transformed. As Eochai had directed, a bridge was being built across the bog, using the stones from the cleared pastures, and oak and hazel woods clothed the hills.

Next morning, as the steward was telling the king about the marvellous things he had seen, Midir appeared beside them. His face was white with anger, his eyes were blazing and Eochai knew at once that Midir had discovered that he had been betrayed.

'You have treated me dishonourably, High King,' he said, 'though I treated you fairly!'

Eochai was ashamed that he had been caught in his deception and he was frightened of Midir's anger. He tried to placate him and make amends.

'I will not return anger for anger,' he said. 'Whatever you want, I will do.'

'We will play this game for an open stake,' Midir said. 'Whoever wins will then name his prize.'

Eochai was confounded by these terms. He dreaded what stakes Midir would set and the prize he would claim if he won the game but he had to agree to them for he had given his word. They sat down to play at the beautiful chessboard and Eochai played as if his life depended on it, but this time Midir won.

'What is your stake?' the king asked in a low voice, fearing the worst.

'To take your wife, Etain, in my arms,' said Midir, 'and to give her a kiss!'

When Eochai heard this, fear made him speechless but in a short time he composed himself and said to Midir, 'Come back at the end of a month and your stake will be honoured.'

Throughout the month Eochai sent messages to the kings and chiefs of Ireland to come to Tara with their warriors. When the time was up a great army had assembled there. They surrounded the ramparts outside, row upon row, and inside the walls they made the same formation.

At the hour Midir was due to appear, Eochai and Etain sat in the centre of the house surrounded by chiefs and warriors. The doors were locked and barred and the fort encircled by armed soldiers. As Etain bent forward to pour out the wine for the king a sudden hush fell on the crowd. She looked up and there was the young man who had appeared to her on the playing fields standing in their midst. Midir was always handsome but this time his beauty was such that everyone who looked at him fell silent.

'I have come to claim my reward,' he said.

'I have not considered your request long enough,' said the king, playing for time.

'What is due, is due,' Midir replied. 'You have staked Etain herself to me, and she has promised that if you give her to me she will come back to Bri Leith.'

Remembering the careless promise, Etain blushed.

‘You don’t need to be ashamed, Etain,’ Midir told her gently. ‘You have not been disloyal to your husband. In spite of my offer of beautiful gifts and riches beyond compare you would not listen to me. So I will take you only if Eochai gives you to me. This was the stake we played for.’

‘Then let it be like that!’ said Etain. ‘If my husband permits it, I will go with you.’

‘I will not let you go!’ Eochai assured Etain. Then he turned to Midir. ‘Your wager will be honoured, so I give you leave to put your arms round Etain and claim your kiss.’

Midir put his shield and spear in one hand and with the other he circled Etain’s waist. As he bent his head to kiss her, he rose into the air, clasping Etain closely, and they escaped out of the house through the skylight of the hall. The warriors rushed out along with the king to try to stop Midir and Etain leaving Tara, but there was no sign of them and the guards outside had seen nothing. Then the crowd heard the beating of wings and there, high above them, they saw two swans flying close together. They circled Tara once and then flew off in the direction of Bri Leith.

Eochai was furious at the trick Midir had played on him and was determined to get his wife back again. Calling together the champions of his household and the army he had gathered around Tara, he set off immediately to storm Bri Leith. They arrived at the mound and the warriors began to dig. They dug all day long but the next morning the earth that had been taken away the day before was back in place, and the *sidhe* was intact again. Day after day, week after week the same thing happened, but Eochai would not give up. For nine years he and his armies circled and attacked every earthwork in Ireland, digging down through the mounds, trying to reach the dwellings at the centre. In the end, having laid waste to most of them, Eochai returned to the tumulus at Bri Leith. Just as he was making his final assault on it, Midir called a truce. From inside his underground dwelling, he shouted out to Eochai, ‘You can have Etain back if you can find her and point her out to me!’

At that instant, sixty women appeared outside the broken walls of Bri Leith. Eochai stared at them first in amazement, and then in bewilderment, for each one looked exactly like Etain. ‘Let them serve wine!’ Eochai called out at last, for he knew that Etain had a special way of doing that.

The women took it in turns to pour wine, until only two were left, and still Eochai had not found Etain. Then the second-last woman took the jug and started to pour. She looked like Etain and poured the wine in Etain’s special way, so the king thought it must be his wife. But he was uneasy. ‘It looks like Etain, but it is not Etain!’ he cried out in puzzlement as he stretched out his hand to her. But since he had chosen her, the woman came to him and together they went back to Tara.

Before long Eochai discovered that it was Etain’s daughter, and his own, that he had chosen instead of Etain herself. He returned to Bri Leith to sack the *sidhe* and punish Midir for his trick, but before he had time to attack the dwelling Etain made herself known to him in unmistakable ways. Eochai seized his wife and carried her away from Bri Leith and back to Tara. And so for the second time Midir lost his beloved Etain.