

## READING 1

*Before you read: In this abridgement, we see the hero Cuchulain in his childhood, making foolish decisions, earning himself the name Cuchulain, kicking butt, and all-around ridiculousness. It is framed as a story told by Cuchulain's foster father to the invading Queen Maeve as a way to suggest, perhaps, that she might not want to invade a country defended by such a one, especially now that he's an adult. Enjoy.*

### Chapter 2. BOY DEEDS OF CUCHULAIN

IT chanced one day, when Setanta was about seven years old, that he heard some of the people of his mother's house talking about King Conchubar's court at Emain Macha, and of the sons of kings and nobles that lived there, and that spent a great part of their time at games and at hurling. "Let me go and play with them there," he said to his mother. "It is too soon for you to do that," she said, "but wait till such time as you are able to travel so far, and till I can put you in charge of some one going to the court, that will put you under Conchubar's protection." "It would be too long for me to wait for that," he said, "but I will go there by myself if you will tell me the road." "It is too far for you," said Dechtire, "for it is beyond Slieve Fuad, Emain Macha is." "Is it east or west of Slieve Fuad?" he asked. And when she had answered him that, he set out there and then, and nothing with him but his hurling stick, and his silver ball, and his little dart and spear; and to shorten the road for himself he would give a blow to the ball and drive it from him, and then he would throw his hurling stick after it, and the dart after that again, and then he would make a run and catch the mall in his hand before one of them would have reached the ground.

So he went on until he came to the lawn at Emain Macha, and there he saw three fifties of king's sons hurling and learning feats of war. He went in among them, and when the ball came near him he got it between his feet, and drove it along in spite of them till he had sent it beyond the goal. There was great surprise and anger on them when they saw what he had done, and Follaman, King Conchubar's son, that was chief among them, cried out to them to come together and drive out this stranger and make an end of him. "For he has no right," he said, "to come into our

game without asking leave, and without putting his life under our protection. And you may be sure," he said, "that he is the son of some common fighting man, and it is not for him to come into our game at all" With that they all made an attack on him, and began to throw their hurling sticks at him, and their balls and darts, but he escaped them all, and then he rushed at them, and began to throw some of them to the ground. Fergus came out just then from the palace, and when he saw

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what a good defence the little lad was making, he brought him in to where Conchubar was playing chess, and told him all that had happened. "This is no gentle game you have been playing," he said. "It is on themselves the fault is," said the boy; "I came as a stranger, and I did not get a stranger's welcome." "You did not know then," said Conchubar, "that no one can play among the boy troop of Emain unless he gets their leave and their protection." "I did not know that, or I would have asked it of them," he said. "What is your name and your family?" said Conchubar. "My name is Setanta, son of Sualtim and of Dechtire," he said. When Conchubar knew that he was his sister's son, he gave him a great welcome, and he bade the boy troop to let him go safe among them. "We will do that," they said. But when they went out to play, Setanta began to break through them, and to overthrow them, so that they could not stand against him. "What are you wanting of them now?" said Conchubar. "I swear by the gods my people swear by," said the boy, "I will not lighten my hand off them till they have come under my protection the same way I have come under theirs." Then they all agreed to give in to this; and Setanta stayed in the king's house at Emain Macha, and all the chief men of Ulster had a hand in bringing him up.

There was a great smith in Ulster of the name of Culain, who made a feast at that time for Conchubar and for his people. When Conchubar was setting out to the feast, he passed by the lawn where the boy troop were at their games, and he watched them awhile, and he saw how the son of Dechtire was winning the goal from them all. "That little lad will serve Ulster yet," said Conchubar; "and call him to me now," he said, "and let him come with me to the smith's feast." "I cannot go with you now," said Setanta, when they had called to him, "for these boys have not had enough of play yet." "It would be too long for me to wait for you," said the king. "There is no need for you to wait; I will follow the track of the chariots," said Setanta.

So Conchubar went on to the smith's house, and there was a welcome before him, and fresh rushes were laid down, and there were poems and songs and recitals of laws, and the feast was brought in, and they began to be merry. And then Culain said to the king: "Will there be any one else of your people coming after you to-night?" "There will not," said Conchubar, for he forgot that he had told the little lad to follow him. "But why do you ask me that?" he said. "I have a great fierce hound," said the

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smith, "and when I take the chain off him, he lets no one come into the one district with himself, and he will obey no one but myself, and he has in him the strength of a hundred." "Loose him out," said Conchubar, "until he keeps a watch on the place." So Culain loosed him out, and the dog made a course round the whole district, and then he came back to the place where he was used to lie and to watch the house, and every one was in dread of him, he was so fierce and so cruel and so savage. Now, as to the boys at Emain, when they were done playing, every one went to his father's house, or to whoever was in charge of him. But Setanta set out on the track of the chariots, shortening the way for himself as he was used to do with his hurling stick and his ball. When he came to the lawn before the smith's house, the hound heard him coming, and began such a fierce yelling that he might have been heard through all Ulster, and he sprang at him as if he had a mind not to stop and tear him up at all, but to swallow him at the one mouthful. The little fellow had no weapon but his stick and his ball, but when he saw the hound coming at him, he struck the ball with such force that it went down his throat, and through his body. Then he seized him by the hind legs and dashed him against a rock until there was no life left in him.

When the men feasting within heard the outcry of the hound, Conchubar started up and said: "It is no good luck brought us on this journey, for that is surely my sister's son that was coming after me, and that has got his death by the hound." On that all the men rushed out, not waiting to go through the door, but over walls and barriers as they could. But Fergus was the first to get to where the boy was, and he took him up and lifted him on his shoulder, and brought him in safe and sound to Conchubar, and there was great joy on them all.

But Culain the smith went out with them, and when he saw his great hound lying dead and broken there was great grief in his heart, and he came in and said to Setanta: "There is no good welcome for you here." "What have you against the little lad?" said Conchubar. "It was no good

luck that brought him here, or that made me prepare this feast for yourself, King," he said; "for from this out, my hound being gone, my substance will be wasted, and my way of living will be gone astray. And, little boy," he said, "that was a good member of my family you took from me, for he was the protector of my goods and my flocks and my herds

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and of all that I had." "Do not be vexed on account of that," said the boy, "and I myself will make up to you for what I have done." "How will you do that?" said Conchubar. "This is how I will do it: if there is a whelp of the same breed to be had in Ireland, I will rear him and train him until he is as good a hound as the one killed; and until that time, Culain," he said, "I myself will be your watchdog, to guard your goods and your cattle and your house." "You have made a fair offer," said Conchubar. "I could have given no better award myself," said Cathbad the Druid. "And from this out," he said, "your name will be Cuchulain, the Hound of Culain." "I am better pleased with my own name of Setanta, son of Sualtim," said the boy. "Do not say that," said Cathbad, "for all the men in the whole world will some day have the name of Cuchulain in their mouths." "If that is so, I am content to keep it," said the boy. And this is how he came by the name Cuchulain.

It was a good while after that, Cathbad the Druid was one day teaching the pupils in his house to the north-east of Emain. There were eight boys along with him that day, and one of them asked him: "Do your signs tell of any special thing this day is good or bad for?" "If any young man should take arms to-day," said Cathbad, "his name will be greater than any other name in Ireland. But his span of life will be short," he said. Cuchulain was outside at play, but he heard what Cathbad said, and there and then he put off his playing suit, and he went straight to Conchubar's sleeping-room and said: "All good be with you, King!" "What is it you are wanting?" said Conchubar. "What I want is to take arms to-day." "Who put that into your head?" "Cathbad the Druid," said Cuchulain. "If that is so, I will not deny you," said Conchubar. Then he gave him his choice of aims, and the boy tried his strength on them, and there were none that pleased him or that were strong enough for him but Conchubar's own. So he gave him his own two spears, and his sword and his shield.

Just then Cathbad the Druid came in, and there was wonder on him, and he said. "Is it taking arms this young boy is?" "He is indeed," said the king. "It is sorry I would be to see his mother's son take arms on this

day," said Cathbad. "Was it not yourself bade him do it?" said the king. "I did not surely," he said. "Then you have lied to me, boy," said Conchubar. "I told no lie, King," said Cuchulain, "for it was he indeed put

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it in my mind when he was teaching the others, for when one of them asked him if there was any special virtue in this day, he said that whoever would for the first time take arms to-day, his name would be greater than any other in Ireland, and he did not say any harm would come on him, but that his life would be short." "And what I said is true," said Cathbad, "there will be fame on you and a great name, but your lifetime will not be long." "It is little I would care," said Cuchulain, "if my life were to last one day and one night only, so long as my name and the story of what I had done would live after me." Then Cathbad said: "Well, get into a chariot now, and let us see if it was the truth I spoke."

Then Cuchulain got into a chariot and tried its strength, and broke it to pieces, and he broke in the same way the seventeen chariots that Conchubar kept for the boy troop at Emain, and he said: "These chariots are no use, Conchubar, they are not worthy of me." "Where is Ibar, son of Rianganabra?" said Conchubar. "Here I am," he answered. "Make ready my own chariot, and yoke my own horses to it for this boy to try," said Conchubar. So he tried the king's chariot and shook it and strained it, and it bore him. "This is the chariot that suits me," he said. "Now, little one," said Ibar, "let us take out the horses and turn them out to graze." "It is too early for that, Ibar; let us drive on to where the boy troop are, that they may wish me good luck on the day of my taking arms." So they drove on, and all the lads shouted when they saw him--"Have you taken arms?" "I have indeed," said Cuchulain. "That you may do well in wounding and in first killing and in spoil-winning," they said; "but it is a pity for us, you to have left playing."

"Let the horses go graze now," said Ibar. "It is too soon yet," said Cuchulain, "and tell me where does that great road that goes by Emain lead to?" "It leads to Ath-an-Foraire, the watchers' ford in Slieve Fuad," said Ibar. "Why is it called the watchers' ford?" "It is easy to tell that; it is because some choice champion of the men of Ulster keeps watch there every day to do battle for the province with any stranger that might come to the boundary with a challenge." "Do you know who is in it to-day?" said Cuchulain. "I know well it is Conall Cearnach, the Victorious, the chief champion of the young men of Ulster and of all Ireland." "We will go on then to the ford," said Cuchulain. So they went on across the plain,

and at the water's edge they found Conall, and he said: "And are those arms you have taken to-day, little boy?" "They are indeed," said Ibar for

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him. "May they bring him triumph and victory and shedding of first blood," said Conall. "But I think, little Hound," he said, "that you axe too ready to take them; for you are not fit as yet to do a champion's work." "What is it you are doing here, Conall?" said the boy. "I am keeping watch and guard for the province." "Rise out of it, Conall," he said, "and for this one day let me keep the watch." "Do not ask that, little one," said Conall; "for you are not able yet to stand against trained fighting men." "Then I will go down to the shallows of Loch Echtra and see if I can redden my arms on either friend or enemy." "Then I will go with you myself," said Conall, "to take care of you and to protect you, that no harm may happen you." "Do not," said Cuchulain. "I will indeed," said Conall, "for if I let you go into a strange country alone, all Ulster would avenge it on me."

So Conall's horses were yoked to his chariot, and he set out to follow Cuchulain, for he had waited for no leave, but had set out by himself. When Cuchulain saw Conall coming up with him he thought to himself, "If I get a chance of doing some great thing, Conall will never let me do it." So he picked up a stone, the size of his fist, from the ground, and made a good cast at the yoke of Conall's chariot, so that he broke it, and the chariot came down, and Conall himself was thrown to the ground sideways. "What did you do that for?" he said. "It was to see could I throw straight, and if there was the making of a good champion in me." "Bad luck on your throwing and on yourself," said Conall. "And any one that likes may strike your head off now, for I will go with you no farther." "That is just what I wanted," said Cuchulain. And with that, Conall went back to his place at the ford.

As for the lad, he went on towards Lough Echtra in the south. Then Ibar said: "If you will listen to me, little one, I would like that we would go back now to Emain; for at this time the carving of the food is beginning there, and it is all very well for you that have your place kept for you between Conchubar's knees. But as to myself," he said, "it is among the chariot-drivers and the jesters and the messengers I am, and I must find a place and fight for myself where I can." "What is that mountain before us?" said Cuchulain. "That is Slieve Mourne, and that is Finncairn, the white cairn on its top." "Let us go to it," said Cuchulain. "We would be too long going there," said Ibar. "You are a lazy fellow," said Cuchulain;

'and this my first adventure, and the first journey you have made with  
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me." "And that it may be my last," said Ibar, "if I ever get back to Emain again." They went on then to the cairn. "Good Ibar," said the boy, "show me now all that we can see of Ulster, for I do not know my way about the country yet." So Ibar showed him from the cairn all there was to see of Ulster, the hills and the plains and the duns on every side. "What is that sloping square plain before us to the south?" "That is Magh Breagh, the fine meadow." "Show me the duns and strong places of that plain." So Ibar showed him Teamhair and Tailte, Cleathra and Cnobhach and the Brugh of Angus on the Boyne, and the dun of Nechtan Sceine's sons. "Are those the sons of Nechtan that say in their boasting they have killed as many Ulstermen as there are living in Ulster to-day?" "They are the same," said Ibar. "On with us then to that dun," said Cuchulain. "No good will come to you through saying that," said Ibar; "and whoever may go there I will not go," he said. "Alive or dead, you must go there for all that," said Cuchulain. "Then if so, it is alive I will go there," said Ibar, "and it is dead I will be before I leave it."

They went on then to the dun of Nechtan's sons, and when they came to the green lawn, Cuchulain got out of the chariot, and there was a pillarstone on the lawn, and an iron collar about it, and there was Ogham writing on it that said no man came there, and he carrying arms, should leave the place without giving a challenge to some one of the people of the dun. When Cuchulain had read the Ogham, he put his arms around the stone and threw it into the water that was there at hand. "I don't see it is any better there than where it was before," said Ibar; "and it is likely this time you will get what you are looking for, and that is a quick death." "Good Ibar," said the boy, "spread out the covering of the chariot now for me, until I sleep for a while." "It is no good thing you are going to do," said Ibar, "to be going to sleep in an enemy's country." He put out the coverings then, and Cuchulain lay down and fell asleep.

It was just at that time, Foil, son of Nechtan Sceine, came out, and when he saw the chariot, he called out to Ibar, "Let you not unyoke those horses." "I was not going to unyoke them," said Ibar; "the reins are in my hands yet." "What horses are they?" "They are Conchubar's two speckled horses." "So I thought when I saw them," said Foill. "And who is it has brought them across our boundaries?" "A young little lad," said Ibar, "that has taken arms to-day for luck, and it is to show himself off he has come across Magh Breagh." "May he never have good luck," said Foil,

"and if he were a fighting man, it is not alive but dead he would go back to Emain to-day." "Indeed he is not able to fight or it could not be expected of him," said Ibar, "and he but a child that should be in his father's house." At that the boy lifted his head from the ground, and it is red his face was, and his whole body, at hearing so great an insult put on him, and he said: "I am indeed well able to fight" But Foill said: "I am more inclined to think you are not." "You will soon know what to think," said the boy, "and let us go down now to the ford. But go first and get your armour," he said, "for I would not like to kill an unarmed man." There was anger on Foill then, and he went running to get his arms. "You must have a care now," said Ibar, "for that is Foill, son of Nechtan, and neither point of spear or edge of sword can harm him." "That suits me very well," said the boy. With that out came Foill again, and Cuchulain stood up to him, and took his iron ball in his hand, and hurled it at his head, and it went through the forehead and out at the back of the head, and his brains along with it, so that the air could pass through the hole it made. And then Cuchulain struck off his head.

Then Tuachel, the second son of Nechtan, came out on the lawn. "It is likely you are making a great boast of what you are doing," he said. "I see nothing to boast of in that," said Cuchulain, "a single man to have fallen by me." "You will not have long to boast of it," said Tuachel, "for I myself am going to make an end of you on the moment." "Then go back and bring your arms," said Cuchulain, "for it is only a coward would come out without arms." He went back into the house then, and Ibar said: "You must have a care now, for that is Tuachel, son of Nechtan, and if he is not killed by the first stroke, or the first cast, or the first thrust, he cannot be killed at all, for there is no way of getting at him after that." "You need not be telling me that, Ibar," said Cuchulain, "for it is Conchubar's great spear, the Venomous, I will take in my hand, and that is the last thrust that will be made at him, for after that, there is no physician will heal his wounds for ever."

Then Tuachel came out on the lawn, and Cuchulain took hold of the great spear, and made a cast at him, that went through his shield, and broke three of his ribs, and made a hole through his heart. And then he struck his head off, before the body reached the ground.

Then Fainnle, the youngest of the three sons of Nechtan, came out.



"Those were foolish fellows," he said, "to come at you the way they did. But come out now, after me," he said, "into the water where your feet will not touch the bottom," and with that he made a plunge into the water. "Mind yourself well now," said Ibar, "for that is Fainnle, the Swallow, and it is why that name was put on him, he travels across water with the swiftness of a swallow, and there is not one of the swimmers of the whole world can come near him." "It is not to me you should be saying that," said Cuchulain, "for you know the river Callan that runs through Emain, and it is what I used to do," he said, "when the boy troop would break off from their games and plunge into the river to swim, I used to take a boy of them on each shoulder and a boy on each hand, and I would bring them through the river without so much as to wet my back." With that he made a leap into the water, where it was very deep, and himself and Fainnle wrestled together, and then he got a grip of him, and gave him a blow of Conchubar's sword, and struck his head off, and he let his body go away down the stream.

Then he and Ibar went into the house and destroyed what was in it, and they set fire to it, and left it burning, and turned back towards Slieve Fuad, and they brought the heads of the three sons of Nechtan along with them.

Presently they saw a herd of wild deer before them. "What sort of cattle are those?" said the boy. "They are not cattle, but the wild deer of the dark places of Slieve Fuad." "Make the horses go faster," said Cuchulain, "until we can see them better." But with all their galloping the horses could not come up with the wild deer. Then Cuchulain got down from the chariot and raced and ran after them until two stags lay moaning and panting from the hardness of their run through the wet bog, and he bound them to the back of the chariot with the thongs of it. Then they went on till they came to the plain of Emain, and there they saw a flock of white swans that were whiter than the swans of Conchubar's lake, and Cuchulain asked where they came from. "They are wild swans," said Ibar, "that are come from the rocks and the islands of the great sea to feed on the low levels of the country." "Would it be best to take them alive or kill them?" "It would be best to take them alive," said Ibar, "for many a one kills them, and many a one makes casts at them, but you would hardly find any one at all would bring them in alive." With that, Cuchulain put a

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little stone in his sling and made a cast, and brought down eight birds of them, and then he put a bigger stone in, and with it he brought down

sixteen more. "Get out now, Ibar," he said, "and bring me the birds here." "I will no;" said Ibar, "for it would not be easy to stop the horses the way they are going now, and if I leap out, the iron wheels of the chariot will cut through me, or the horns of the stags will make a hole in me." "You are no good of a warrior, Ibar: but give me the reins and I will quiet the horses and the stags." So then Ibar went and brought in the swans, and tied them, and they alive, to the chariot, and the harness. And it is like that they went on till they came to Emain.

It was Levarcham, daughter of Aedh, the conversation woman and messenger to the king, that was there at that time, and was sometimes away in the hills, was the first to see them coming. "There is a chariotfighter coming, Conchubar," she said, "and he is coming in anger. He has the bleeding heads of his enemies with him in the chariot, and wild stags are bound to it, and white birds are bearing him company. By the oath of my people!" she said, "if he comes on us with his anger still upon him, the best men of Ulster will fall by his hand." "I know that chariotfighter," said Conchubar. "It is the young lad, son of Dechtire, that went over the boundaries this very day. He has surely reddened his hand, and if his anger cannot be cooled, the young men of Emain will be in danger from him," he said.

Then they all consulted together, and it is what they agreed, to send out three fifties of the women of Emain red-naked to meet him. When the boy saw the women coming, there was shame on him, and he leaned down his head into the cushions of the chariot, and hid his face from them. And the wildness went out of him, and his feasting clothes were brought, and water for washing; and there was a great welcome before him.

This is the story of the boy deeds of Cuchulain, as it was told by Fergus to Ailell and to Maeve at the time of the war for the Brown Bull of Cuailgne.

## READING 2

*Before you read: In this abridgement, we see the hero Cuchulain a bit older and looking for a wife. The prospective wife's father in law does not like him, and therefore sets him on an impossible task as a bride price, in order to get rid of him: Train with the spear-champion Scathach on the Isle of Skye. Cuchulain does just this, and returns, only to have to fight off his bride-to-be's father-in-law, who proves untrue to his word. Enjoy.*

### Chapter 3. COURTING OF EMER

WHEN Cuchulain was growing out of his boyhood at Emain Macha, all the women of Ulster loved him for his skill in feats, for the lightness of his leap, for the weight of his wisdom, for the sweetness of his speech, for the beauty of his face, for the loveliness of his looks, for all his gifts. He had the gift of caution in fighting, until such time as his anger would come on him, and the hero light would shine about his head; the gift of feats, the gift of chess-playing, the gift of draught-playing, the gift of counting, the gift of divining, the gift of right judgment, the gift of beauty. And all the faults they could find in him were three, that he was too young and smooth-faced, so that young men who did not know him would be laughing at him, that he was too daring, and that he was too beautiful.

The men of Ulster took counsel together then about Cuchulain, for their women and their maidens loved him greatly, and it is what they settled among themselves, that they would seek out a young girl that would be a fitting wife for him, the way that their own wives and their daughters would not be making so much of him. And besides that they were afraid he might die young, and leave no heir after him.

So Conchubar sent out nine men into each of the provinces of Ireland to look for a wife for Cuchulain, to see if in any dun or in any chief place, they could find the daughter of a king or of an owner of land or a householder, who would be pleasing to him, that he might ask her in marriage. All the messengers came back at the end of a year, but not one of them had found a young girl that would please Cuchulain. And then he

himself went out to court a young girl he knew in Luglochta Loga, the Garden of Lugh, Emer, the daughter of Forgall Manach, the Wily. He set out in his chariot, that all the chariots of Ulster could not follow by reason of its swiftness, and of the chariot chief who sat in it. And he found the young girl on her playing field, with her companions about her, daughters of the landowners that lived near Forgall's dun, and they learning needlework and fine embroidery from Emer. And of all the young girls of Ireland, she was the one Cuchulain thought worth

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courting; for she had the six gifts--the gift of beauty, the gift of voice, the gift of sweet speech, the gift of needlework, the gift of wisdom, the gift of chastity. And Cuchulain had said that no woman should marry him but one that was his equal in age, in appearance, and in race, in skill and handiness; and one who was the best worker with her needle of the young girls of Ireland, for that would be the only one would be a fitting wife for him. And that is why it was Emer he went to ask above all others. And it was in his rich clothes he went out that day, his crimson fivefolded tunic, and his brooch of inlaid gold, and his white hooded shirt, that was embroidered with red gold. And as the young girls were sitting together on their bench on the lawn, they heard coming towards them the clatter of hoofs, the creaking of a chariot, the cracking of straps, the grating of wheels, the rushing of horses, the clanking of arms. "Let one of you see," said Emer, "what is it that is coming towards us." And Fiall, daughter of Forgall, went out and met him, and he came with her to the place where Emer and her companions were, and he wished a blessing to them. Then Emer lifted up her lovely face and saw Cuchulain, and she said, "May the gods make smooth the path before you." "And you," he said, "may you be safe from every harm."

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*(Herein, Cuchulain and Emer flirt in very riddling speech so her attendants cannot understand. Emer approves of Cuchulain's courtship, and he leaves. Then, her father, Forgall, returns and hears what has happened. He does \*not\* approve, and aims to set Cuchulain on an impossible task, to get rid of him). – Mr. Valentine's abridgment.*

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When Forgall came back to his dun, and his lords of land with him, their daughters were telling them of the young man that had come in a splendid chariot, and how himself and Emer had been talking together, and they could not understand their talk with one another. The lords of

land told this to Forgall, and it is what he said, "You may be sure it is the mad boy from Emain Macha has been here, and he and the girl have fallen in love with one another. But they will gain nothing by that," he said; "for it is I will hinder them."

With that Forgall went out to Emain, with the appearance of a foreigner on him, and he gave out that he was sent by the king of the Gall, to speak with Conchubar, and to bring him a present of golden treasures, and wine of the Gall, and many other things. And he brought some of his men with him, and there was a great welcome before them.

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And on the third day, Cuchulain and Conall and other chariot chiefs of Ulster were praised before him, and he said it was right for them to be praised, and that they did wonderful feats, and Cuchulain above them all. But he said that if Cuchulain would go to Scathach, the womanwarrior that lived in the east of Alban, his skill would be more wonderful still, for he could not have perfect knowledge of the feats of a warrior without that.

But his reason for saying this was that he thought if Cuchulain set out, he would never come back again, through the dangers he would put around him on the journey, and through the wildness and the fierceness of the people about Scathach.

So then Forgall went home, and Cuchulain rose up in the morning, and made ready to set out for Alban, and Laegaire Buadach, the Battle Winner, and Conall Cearnach said they would go with him. But first Cuchulain went across the plain of Bregia to visit Emer, and to talk with her before going in the ship. And she told him how it was Forgall had gone to Emain, and had advised him to go and learn warriors' feats, the way they two might not meet again. Then each of them promised to be true to the other till they would meet again, unless death should come between them, and they said farewell to one another, and Cuchulain turned towards Alban.

When they came there, they stopped for a while at the forge of Donall, the smith, and then they set out to go to the east of Alban. But before they had gone far, a vision came before their eyes of Emain Macha, and Laegaire and Conall were not able to pass by it, and they turned back. It was Forgall raised that vision, to draw them away from Cuchulain, that he might be in the more danger, being alone. Then Cuchulain went on by himself on a strange road, and he was sad and tired and down-hearted for the loss of his comrades, but he held to his word that he would not go

back to Emain without finding Scathach, even if he should die in the attempt.

But now he was astray and ignorant, and not knowing which way to take, and he saw a terrible great beast like a lion coming towards him, and it watching him, but it did not try to harm him. Whatever way he went, the beast went before him, and then it stopped and turned its side to him. So he made a leap and was on its back, and he did not guide it, but went

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whatever way it chose. They travelled like that through four days, till they came to the end of the bounds of men, and to an island where lads were rowing in a small loch; and the lads began to laugh when they saw a beast of that sort, and a man riding it. And then Cuchulain leaped off, and the beast left him, and he bade it farewell.

He passed on till he came to a large house in a deep valley, and a comely young girl in it, and she spoke to him, and bade him welcome. "A welcome before you, Cuchulain," she said. He asked her how did she know him, and she said, "I was a foster-child of Wulfkin, the Saxon, the time you came there to learn sweet speech from him." And she gave him meat and drink, and he went away from her. Then he met with a young man, and he gave him the same welcome, and he said his name was Eochu, and they talked together, and Cuchulain asked him what was the way to Scathach's dun. The young man told him the way, across the Plain of Ill-Luck, that lay before him, and he said that on the near side of the plain the feet of men would stick fast, and on the far side every blade of grass would rise and hold them fast on its points. And he gave him a wheel, and bade him to follow its track across the one half of the plain. And he gave him an apple along with that, and bade him to throw it, and to follow the way it went, till he would reach the end of the plain. And he told him many other things that would happen him, and how he would win a great name at the last. And then each of them wished a blessing to the other, and Cuchulain did as he bade him, and so he got across the plain and went on his journey. And then, as the young man had told him, he came to a valley, and it full of monsters, sent there by Forgall to destroy him, and only one narrow path through it, but he went through it safely. And after that his road led through a terrible, wild mountain. Then he came to the place where Scathach's scholars were, and among them he saw Ferdiad, son of Daman, and Naoise, Ainnle, and Ardan, the three Sons of Usnach, and when they knew that he was from Ireland they welcomed him with kisses, and asked for news of their own country. He

asked them where was Scathach. "In that island beyond," they said. "What way must I take to reach her?" he asked. "By the bridge of the cliff," they said, "and no man can cross it till he has proved himself a champion, and many a king's son has got his death there." And this is the way the bridge was: the two ends of it were low, and the middle was high, and whenever any one would leap on it, the first time it

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would narrow till it was as narrow as the hair of a man's head, and the second time it would shorten till it was as short as an inch, and the third time it would get slippery till it was as slippery as an eel of the river, and the fourth time it would rise up on high against you till it was as tall as the mast of a ship.

All the warriors and people on the lawn came down to see Cuchulain making his attempt to cross the bridge, and he tried three times to do it, and he could not, and the others were laughing at him, that he should think he could cross it, and he so young. Then his anger came on him, and the hero light shone round his head, and it was not the appearance of a man that was on him, but the appearance of a god; and he leaped upon the end of the bridge and made the hero's salmon leap, so that he landed on the middle of it, and he reached the other end of the bridge before it could raise itself fully up, and threw himself from it, and was on the ground of the island where Scathach's sunny house was, and it having seven great doors, and seven great windows between every two doors, and three times fifty couches between every two windows, and three times fifty young girls, with scarlet cloaks and beautiful blue clothing on them, waiting on Scathach.

And Scathach's daughter, Uathach, was sitting by a window, and when she saw the young man, and he a stranger, and comeliest of the men of Ireland, making his attempt to cross the bridge, she loved him, and her face and her colour began to change continually, so that now she would be as white as a little flower, and then again she would grow crimson red. And in her needlework that she was doing, she would put the gold thread where the silver thread should be, and the silver thread in the place where the gold thread should be. And when Scathach saw that, she said: "I think this young man has pleased you." And Uathach said: "There would be great grief on me indeed, were he not to return alive to his own people, in whatever part of the world they may be, for I know there is surely some one to whom it would be great anguish to know the way he is now."

Then, when Cuchulain had crossed the bridge, he went up to the house, and struck the door with the shaft of his spear, so that it went through it. And when Scathach was told that, she said, "Truly this must be some one who has finished his training in some other place." Then Uathach

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opened the door for him, and he asked for Scathach, and Uathach told him where she was, and what he had best do when he found her. So he went out to the place where she was teaching her two sons, Cuar and Cett, under the great yew-tree; and he took his sword and put its point between her breasts, and he threatened her with a dreadful death if she would not take him as her pupil, and if she would not teach him all her own skill in arms. So she promised him she would do that. Now it was while Cuchulain was with Scathach that a great king in Munster, Lugaid, son of Ros, went northward with twelve chariot chiefs to look for a wife among the daughters of the men of Mac Rossa, but they had all been promised before.

And when Forgall Manach heard this, he went to Emain, and he told Lugaid that the best of the maidens of Ireland, both as to form and behaviour and handiwork, was in his house unwed. Lugaid said he was well pleased to hear that, and Forgall promised him his daughter Emer in marriage. And to the twelve chariot chiefs that were with him, he promised twelve daughters of twelve lords of land in Bregia, and Lugaid went back with him to his dun for the wedding.

But when Emer was brought to Lugaid to sit by his side, she laid one of her hands on each side of his face, and she said on the truth of her good name and of her life, that it was Cuchulain she loved, although her father was against him, and that no one that was an honourable man should force her to be his wife.

Then Lugaid did not dare take her, for he was in dread of Cuchulain, and so he returned home again.

As to Cuchulain, after he had been a good time with Scathach, a war began between herself and Aoife, queen of the tribes that were round about. The armies were going out to fight, but Cuchulain was not with them, for Scathach had given him a sleeping-drink that would keep him safe and quiet till the fight would be over, for she was afraid some harm would come to him if he met Aoife, for she was the greatest womanwarrior in the world, and she understood enchantments and witchcraft. But after one hour, Cuchulain started up out of his sleep, for the sleeping-drink that



would have held any other man for a day and a night, held him for only that length of time. And he followed after the army,

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and he met with the two sons of Scathach, and they three went against the three sons of Ilsuanach, three of the best warriors of Aoife, and it was by Cuchulain they were killed, one after the other.

On the morning of the morrow the fight was begun again, and the two sons of Scathach were going up the path of feats to fight against three others of the best champions of Aoife, Cire, Bire, and Blaicne, sons of Ess Enchenn. When Scathach saw them going up she gave a sigh, for she was afraid for her two sons, but just then Cuchulain came up with them, and he leaped before them on to the path of feats, and met the three champions, and all three fell by him.

When Aoife saw that her best champions were after being killed, she challenged Scathach to fight against herself, but Cuchulain went out in her place. And before he went, he asked Scathach, "What things does Aoife think most of in all the world?" "Her two horses and her chariot and her chariot-driver," said Scathach.

So then Cuchulain and Aoife attacked one another and began a fierce fight, and she broke Cuchulain's spear in pieces, and his sword she broke off at the hilt. Then Cuchulain called out, "Look, the chariot and the horses and the driver of Aoife are fallen down into the valley and are lost!" At that Aoife looked about her, and Cuchulain took a sudden hold of her, and lifted her on his shoulders, and brought her down to where the army was, and laid her on the ground, and held his sword to her breast, and she begged for her life, and he gave it to her. And after that she made peace with Scathach, and bound herself by sureties not to go against her again. And she gave her love to Cuchulain; and out of that love great sorrow came afterwards.

And as Cuchulain was going home by the narrow path, he met an old hag, and she blind of the left eye. She asked him to leave room for her to pass by, but he said there was no room on that path, unless he would throw himself down the great sea-cliff that was on the one side of it. But she asked him again to leave the road to her, and he would not refuse, and he dropped down the cliff, with only his one hand keeping a hold of the path. Then she came up, and as she passed him, she gave a hit of her foot at his hand, the way he would leave his hold and drop into the sea. But at that, he gave a leap up again on the path, and struck off the hag's head. For she was Ess Enchenn, the mother of the last three warriors

that had fallen by him, and it was to destroy him she had come out to meet him, for she knew that under his rules of championship, he would make way for her when she asked it.

After that, he stayed for another while with Scathach, until he had learned all the arts of war and all the feats of a champion; and then a message came to him to come back to his own country, and he bade her farewell. And Scathach told him what would happen him in the time to come, for she had the Druid gift; and she told him there were great dangers before him, and that he would have to fight against great armies, and he alone; and that he would scatter his enemies, so that his name would come again to Alban; but that his life would not be long, for he would die in his full strength.

Then Cuchulain went on board his ship to set out for Ireland, and in the same ship with him were Lugaid and Luan, the two sons of Loch, and Ferbaeth and Larin and Ferdiad, and Durst, son of Derb.

On the night of Samhain they came to the island of Rechrainn, and Cuchulain left his ship and came to the strand. And there he heard a sound of crying, and he saw a beautiful young girl, and she sitting there alone. He asked her who was she, and what ailed her, and she said she was Devorgill, daughter of the king of Rechrainn, and that every year he was forced to pay a heavy tax to the Fomor, and this year, when he could not pay it, they made him leave her there near the sea, till they would come and bring her away in place of it.

"Where do these men come from?" said Cuchulain. "From that far country over there," she said, "and let you not stop here or they will see you when they come." But Cuchulain would not leave her, and presently three fierce men of the Fomor landed in the bay, and made straight for the spot where the girl was. But before they had time to lay a hand on her, Cuchulain leaped on them and he killed the three of them, one after the other. The last man wounded him in the arm, and the girl tore a strip from her dress, and gave it to him to bind round the wound. And then she ran to her father's house and told him all that had happened. After that Cuchulain came to the king's house, like any other guest, and his companions with him, and Conall Cearnach and Laegaire Buadach were there before them, where they had been sent from Emain Macha to

collect tribute. For at that time a tribute was paid to Ulster from the islands of the Gall.

And they were all talking about the escape Devorgill had, and some were boasting that it was they themselves had saved her, for she could not be sure who it was had come to her, because of the dusk of the evening. Then there was water brought for them all to wash before they would go to the feast; and when it came to Cuchulain's turn to bare his arms, she knew by the strip of her dress that was bound about it, that it was he had saved her. "I will give the girl to you as your wife," said the king, "and I myself will pay her wedding portion." "Not so," said Cuchulain, "for I must make no delay in going back to Ireland."

So then he made his way back to Emain Macha, and he told his whole story and all that had happened him. And as soon as he had rested from the journey, he set out to look for Emer at her father's house. But Forgall and his sons had heard he was come home again, and they had made the place so strong, and they kept so good a watch round it, that for the whole length of a year he could not get so much as a sight of her. It was one day at that time he went down to the shore of Lough Cuan with Laeg, his chariot-driver, and with Lugaid. And when they were there, they saw two birds coming over the sea. Cuchulain put a stone in his sling, and made a cast at the birds, and hit one of them. And when they came to where the birds were, they found in their place two women, and one of them the most beautiful in the world, and they were Devorgill, daughter of the king of Rechrainn, that had come from her own country to find Cuchulain, and her serving-maid along with her; and it was Devorgill that Cuchulain had hit with the stone. "It is a bad thing you have done, Cuchulain," she said, "for it was to find you I came, and now you have wounded me." Then Cuchulain put his mouth to the wound and sucked out the stone and the blood along with it. And he said, "You cannot be my wife, for I have drunk your blood. But I will give you to my comrade," he said, "to Lugaid of the Red Stripes." And so it was done, and Lugaid gave her his love all through her life, and when she died he died of the grief that was on him after her.

After that, Cuchulain got his scythe chariot made ready, and he set out again for Forgall's dun. And when he got there, he leaped with his hero leap over the three walls, so that he was inside the court, and there he

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made three attacks, so that eight men fell from each attack, but one escaped in every troop of nine; that is the three brothers of Emer, Seibur and Ibur and Catt. And Forgall made a leap from the wall of the court to escape Cuchulain and he fell in the leap and got his death from the fall.

And then Cuchulain went out again, and brought Emer with him and her foster-sister, and their two loads of gold and silver.

And then they heard cries all around them, and Scenmend, Forgall's sister, came following them with her men, and came up with them at the ford; and Cuchulain killed her in the fight, and it is from that it is called the Ford of Scenmend. And her men came up with them again at the next ford, and he killed a hundred of them there. "It is a great thing you have done," said Emer. "You have killed a hundred strong armed men; and Glondath, the Ford of Deeds, is the name that shall be on it for ever." Then they came to Raeban, the white field, and he gave three great angry blows to his enemies there, so that streams of blood went over it on every side. "This white hill is a hill of red sods to-day, through your work, Cuchulain," said Emer. And from that time it has been called the Ford of the Sods.

Then they were overtaken again at another ford on the Boinne, and Emer quitted the chariot, and Cuchulain followed his enemies along the banks, so that the sods were flying from the feet of the horses across the ford northward; and then he turned and followed them northward, so that the sods flew over the ford southward. And from that it is called Ath na Imfuait, the Ford of the Two Clods. And at each of these fords Cuchulain killed a hundred, and so he kept his word to Emer, and he came safely out of it all, and they came to Emain Macha, toward the fall of night. And then Cuchulain was given the headship of the young men of Ulster, of the warriors, the poets, the trumpeters, the musicians, the three pipers, the three jesters to say sharp words; the three distributors of fame. It is of them the poet spoke, and set out their names, and it is what he said:-- "The young men of Ireland, when they were in the Red Branch, it is they were the fairest of all hosts." And of Cuchulain he said, 'He is as hard as steel and as bright, Cuchulain, the victorious son of Dechtire.' And then Cuchulain took Emer for his wife, after that long courting, and all the hardships he had gone through. And he brought her into the

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House of the Red Branch, and Conchubar and all the chief men of Ulster gave her a great welcome.

## READING 3

*Before you read: In this abridgement, we see the hero Cuchulain's dalliance with Scathach's sister have dire results: His own son is sent to challenge him without first announcing his name. The mother, Aoife, really held a grudge against Cuchulain for leaving her behind, and pregnant at that. However, while this does not go quite as planned, it is quite the tragedy, and a good example of Cuchulain's recklessness in battle having consequences. Enjoy.*

### Chapter 18. THE ONLY SON OF AOIFE

THE time Cuchulain came back from Alban, after he had learned the use of arms under Scathach, he left Aoife, the queen he had overcome in battle, with child.

And when he was leaving her, he told her what name to give the child, and he gave her a gold ring, and bade her keep it safe till the child grew to be a lad, and till his thumb would fill it; and he bade her to give it to him then, and to send him to Ireland, and he would know he was his son by that token. She promised to do so, and with that Cuchulain went back to Ireland.

It was not long after the child was born, word came to Aoife that Cuchulain had taken Emer to be his wife in Ireland. When she heard that, great jealousy came on her, and great anger, and her love for Cuchulain was turned to hatred; and she remembered her three champions that he had killed, and how he had overcome herself, and she determined in her mind that when her son would come to have the strength of a man, she would get her revenge through him. She told Conlaoch her son nothing of this, but brought him up like any king's son; and when he was come to sensible years, she put him under the teaching of Scathach, to be taught the use of arms and the art of war. He turned out as apt a scholar as his father, and it was not long before he had learnt all Scathach had to teach.

Then Aoife gave him the arms of a champion, and bade him go to Ireland, but first she laid three commands on him: the first never to give way to any living person, but to die sooner than be made turn back; the second, not to refuse a challenge from the greatest champion alive, but to fight him at all risks, even if he was sure to lose his life; the third, not to tell his name on any account, though he might be threatened with death for hiding it. She put him under *geasa*, that is, under bonds, not to do these things.

Then the young man, Conlaoch, set out, and it was not long before his ship brought him to Ireland, and the place he landed at was Baile's Strand, near Dundevalgan.

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It chanced that at that time Conchubar, the High King, was holding court there, for it was a convenient gathering-place for his chief men, and they were settling some business that belonged to the government of that district.

When word was brought to Conchubar that there was a ship come to the strand, and a young lad in it armed as if for fighting, and armed men with him, he sent one of the chief men of his household to ask his name, and on what business he was come.

The messenger's name was Cuinaire, and he went down to the strand, and when he saw the young man he said: "A welcome to you, young hero from the east, with the merry face. It is likely, seeing you come armed as if for fighting, you are gone astray on your journey; but as you are come to Ireland, tell me your name and what your deeds have been, and your victories in the eastern bounds of the world."

"As to my name," said Conlaoch, "it is of no great account; but whatever it is, I am under bonds not to tell it to the stoutest man living."

"It is best for you to tell it at the king's desire," said Cuinaire, "before you get your death through refusing it, as many a champion from Alban and from Britain has done before now." "If that is the order you put on us when we land here, it is I will break it," said Conlaoch, "and no one will obey it any longer from this out."

So Cuinaire went back and told the king what the young lad had said.

Then Conchubar said to his people: "Who will go out into the field, and drag the name and the story out of this young man?" "I will go," said Conall, for his hand was never slow in fighting. And he went out, and found the lad angry and destroying, handling his arms, and they attacked one another with a great noise of swords and shouts, and they were

gripped together, and fought for a while, and then Conall was overcome, and the great name and the praise that was on Conall, it was on the head of Conlaoch it was now.

Word was sent then to where Cuchulain was, in pleasant, bright-faced Dundevalgan. And the messenger told him the whole story, and he said: "Conall is lying humbled, and it is slow the help is in coming; it is a welcome there would be before the Hound."

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Cuchulain rose up then and went to where Conlaoch was, and he still handling his arms. And Cuchulain asked him his name and said: "It would be well for you, young hero of unknown name, to loosen yourself from this knot, and not to bring down my hand upon you, for it will be hard for you to escape death." But Conlaoch said: "If I put you down in the fight, the way I put down your comrade, there will be a great name on me; but if I draw back now, there will be mockery on me, and it will be said I was afraid of the fight. I will never give in to any man to tell the name, or to give an account of myself. But if I was not held with a command," he said, "there is no man in the world I would sooner give it to than to yourself, since I saw your face. But do not think, brave champion of Ireland, that I will let you take away the fame I have won, for nothing."

With that they fought together, and it is seldom such a battle was seen, and all wondered that the young lad could stand so well against Cuchulain.

So they fought a long while, neither getting the better of the other, but at last Cuchulain was charged so hotly by the lad that he was forced to give way, and although he had fought so many good fights, and killed so many great champions, and understood the use of arms better than any man living, he was pressed very hard.

And he called for the Gae Bulg, and his anger came on him, and the flames of the hero-light began to shine about his head, and by that sign Conlaoch knew him to be Cuchulain, his father. And just at that time he was aiming his spear at him, and when he knew it was Cuchulain, he threw his spear crooked that it might pass beside him. But Cuchulain threw his spear, the Gae Bulg, at him with all his might, and it struck the lad in the side and went into his body, so that he fell to the ground. And Cuchulain said: "Now, boy, tell your name and what you are, for it is short your life will be, for you will not live after that wound."

And Conlaoch showed the ring that was on his hand, and he said: "Come here where I am lying on the field, let my men from the east come round me. I am suffering for revenge. I am Conlaoch, son of the Hound, heir of dear Dundéalgan; I was bound to this secret in Dun Scathach, the secret in which I have found my grief."

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And Cuchulain said: "It is a pity your mother not to be here to see you brought down. She might have stretched out her hand to stop the spear that wounded you." And Conlaoch said: "My curse be on my mother, for it was she put me under bonds; it was she sent me here to try my strength against yours." And Cuchulain said: "My curse be on your mother, the woman that is full of treachery; it is through her harmful thoughts these tears have been brought on us." And Conlaoch said: "My name was never forced from my mouth till now; I never gave an account of myself to any man under the sun. But, O Cuchulain of the sharp sword, it was a pity you not to know me the time I threw the slanting spear behind you in the fight."

And then the sorrow of death came upon Conlaoch, and Cuchulain took his sword and put it through him, sooner than leave him in the pain and the punishment he was in.

And then great trouble and anguish came on Cuchulain, and he made this complaint:

"It is a pity it is, O son of Aoife, that ever you came into the province of Ulster, that you ever met with the Hound of Cuailgne.



## READING 4

*Before you read: In this abridgement, we see the hero Cuchulain in his most famous role – defending Cuailgne against Queen Maeve, who really, really wants their cattle and is willing to kill for it (remember, cattle back then, in Ireland, was a measure of wealth, much like gold). Cuchulain will have no human help at that, for due to the men of Cuailgne angering the Morrigan long, long ago, they are cursed with labor pains whenever their strength is most needed. Cuchulain is the only man unaffected and thus, must defend the kingdom single handedly. In these three excerpts from Chapter 11, he fights off Maeve’s challengers, meets two gods – the Morrigan and Lugh, and is forced to fight a friend he learned spear-craft with under Scathach. In such circumstances, even winning can be tragic. Enjoy.*

### Chapter 11. THE WAR FOR THE BULL OF CUAILGNE

While this fight was going on, Maeve, having a third part of the army with her, set out Northward to Dun-Sobairce, to look for the Brown Bull. And Cuchulain followed after her for a while; but then he turned back to defend his own country. And he saw before him Buac, son of Bainblai, that was the man Maeve trusted better than any other, and twenty-four men along with him, and they driving the Brown Bull before them and fifteen of his heifers, that they had brought out of Glen-na-masc in Slieve Cuilinn. "Where are you bringing these cattle from?" said Cuchulain. "Out of that mountain beyond." "What is your name?" he said. "If I tell it, it is not either through love of you or through fear of you," he said. "I am Buac, son of Bainblai, from Ailell's country and Maeve's." "Take this from me, then," said Cuchulain, and with that he threw his spear at him so that it went through his body, and he fell dead. But while he was doing this, the rest of the men drove away the Bull with great haste to the camp

of the men of Ireland; and this was the greatest affront that was put on Cuchulain through the whole of the war for the Brown Bull of Cuailgne. Then the men of Ireland began saying to one another that Cuchulain would not have the mastery over them but for the bronze spear he had, and that there must be enchantment on it, for none of them could stand against it. And they said to Maeve that she should send Rae, the satirist, to ask it of him, for he could not refuse a satirist; so Rae went and asked it of him. "Give me your spear," he said. "I will not give you that indeed," said Cuchulain, "but I will give you other things." "I will not take any other thing," said Rae, "and I will put a bad name on you, if you refuse me the spear." "Take it, then," said Cuchulain, and with that he threw it with all his force at his head. "That is a weighty present," said the satirist, and he dropped dead.

Then Cur, son of Daltach, was sent out, for the men of Ireland thought he would be able to rid them of Cuchulain. But it was hard to persuade Cur, because he thought it was not worth his while to go and fight with a young beardless boy. And when he went out in the morning, Cuchulain was practising all his feats that he had learned, and Cur was for a while trying to get near enough to come at him with his weapons, but he could not; and Cuchulain was so taken up with doing his feats that he never

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noticed him at all. Then Laeg saw him and said: "Have a care, Cuchulain; there is an armed man making ready to attack you." Cuchulain was doing his apple feat at that time, keeping nine apples, and his shield, and his sword in the air, that none of them fell to the ground. And when he saw Cur, he threw the apple that was in his hand straight at his forehead, and it went through, and brought out a share of his brains the size of itself, at the other side.

And after that, other fighting men were sent out every day through a week, and he killed them all. And one day he said: "Go, Laeg, to the camp, to my friends, Lugaid and Ferbaeth and Ferdiad, and say you are come from me, and ask them which of the men of Ireland is to be sent against me tomorrow." So Laeg went, and when he came back he said: "It is your own comrade and fellow-pupil with Scathach, Ferbaeth, your blood-friend, is coming against you; for he has only lately joined the army, and he has brought four-fifths of his men with him, and Maeve has promised him her daughter Findabair, and he has drunk from her cup, and been fed by her hand. And it is not to every one Maeve gives the ale that she gave out for Ferbaeth." "I am sorry to hear that," said Cuchulain,

"for I think worse of a comrade of my own coming against me, than of any other man." And when Ferbaeth came out to fight against him in the morning, Cuchulain did his best to make him give up the fight, for the sake of their old friendship, but Ferbaeth would not listen. Cuchulain turned from him then in anger, and to loosen the blood-bond between them, he struck the sole of his own foot with a spear, that it drew blood, and then he threw his spear at Ferbaeth, but he did not look to see did it hit him or not. But the spear went through his head and out of his mouth, and this is the way Ferbaeth came to his death.

Then Ailell made up a plan by which he thought to make Cuchulain give up the stand he was making against the army, and his plan was to offer Findabair to him if he would give his word to leave off attacking the men of Ireland, and he sent Lugaid to make the offer to him. Cuchulain was not very well pleased with the message, and he thought there might be some treachery in it, but he agreed that he would meet Ailell and Findabair, and speak with them. But when the time came, Ailell made his fool put on his clothes, and wear his gold circle on his head, and go with Findabair; and he bade him stop as far back as he could, the way Cuchulain would not know it was not the king that was in it; and then

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Findabair was to bind him over to their side, not to fight any more against the men of Ireland, and when that was done, she herself and the fool were to hurry back to the camp together. But when Cuchulain saw them, he knew the fool, and he sent a stone out of his sling and killed him. And because Findabair had taken a share in the treachery, he cut off her two plaits of hair and took them away. And after a while Ailell and Maeve came to see what had happened them, and there they found Findabair beside the dead body of the fool. And they brought her home and said nothing of it, but all the same the story was talked of in the camp.

Then Cuchulain sent Laeg into the camp again to ask news of Lugaid. And it is what Lugaid told him that the next to be sent against him was his own brother Larine, that Maeve had persuaded with wine, and with the promise of Findabair, to go against him. "And it is what they think," said Lugaid, "that if Cuchulain should kill my brother, I myself would have to go and get satisfaction for his death; and tell Cuchulain," he said, "not to make an end of Larine, but only to give him some punishment he will not forget." So when Larine came out, at the breaking of the day, Cuchulain struck the weapons out of his hands as one might strike toys

out of the hands of a child, and he took him in his two hands and shook him, and left him there with the life still in him. But he was never the better of the shaking he got to the end of his life.

As Cuchulain lay in his sleep one night a great cry from the North came to him, so that he started up and fell from his bed to the ground like a sack. He went out of his tent, and there he saw Laeg yoking the horses to the chariot. "Why are you doing that?" he said. "Because of a great cry I heard from the plain to the northwest," said Laeg. "Let us go there then," said Cuchulain. So they went on till they met with a chariot, and a red horse yoked to it, and a woman sitting in it, with red eyebrows, and a red dress on her, and a long red cloak that fell on to the ground between the two wheels of the chariot, and on her back she had a grey spear. "What is your name, and what is it you are wanting?" said Cuchulain. "I am the daughter of King Buan," she said, "and what I am come for is to find you and to offer you my love, for I have heard of all the great deeds you have done." "It is a bad time you have chosen for coming," said Cuchulain, "for I am wasted and worn out with the hardship of the war, and I have no mind to be speaking with women." "You will have my help in

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everything you do," she said, "and it is protecting you I was up to this, and I will protect you from this out." "It is not trusting to a woman's protection I am in this work I have in my hands," said Cuchulain. "Then if you will not take my help," she said, "I will turn it against you; and at the time when you will be fighting with some man as good as yourself, I will come against you in all shapes, by water and by land, till you are beaten." There was anger on Cuchulain then, and he took his sword, and made a leap at the chariot. But on the moment, the chariot and the horse and the woman had disappeared, and all he saw was a black crow, and it sitting on a branch; and by that he knew it was the Morrighu had been talking with him.

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When Cuchulain heard what Maeve had said, he smeared his face, the way he would have the appearance of a beard, and then he came out on the hill and showed himself to the men of Ireland. When Loch, son of Mofebis, saw him, he said: "Is that a beard on Cuchulain?" "That is certainly what I see," said Maeve. "Then I will go out and meet him," said

Loch. So they met beside the ford, where Long had got his death. "Come to the ford that is higher up," said Loch, for he would not fight at the ford where his brother died. So they fought at the upper ford, and while they were fighting, the Morrighu came against Cuchulain with the appearance of a white, red-eared heifer, and fifty other heifers along with her, and a chain of white bronze between every two of them, and they made a rush into the ford. But Cuchulain made a cast at her, and wounded one of her

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eyes. Then she came down the stream in the shape of a black eel, and wound herself about Cuchulain's legs in the water; and while he was getting himself free of her, and bruising her against a green stone of the ford, Loch wounded his body. Then she took the appearance of a grey wolf, and took hold of his right arm, and while he was getting free of her, Loch wounded him again. Then great anger came on him, and he took the spear Aoife had given him, the Gae Bulg, and gave him a deadly wound. "I ask one thing for the sake of your great name, Cuchulain," he called out. "What thing is that?" "It is not to spare my life I am asking you," said Loch, "but let me rise up, the way I may fall on my face, and not backwards towards the men of Ireland, so that none of them can say it was in running away or in going backward I fell." "I will surely give that leave," said Cuchulain, "for the thing you ask is a right gift for a fighting man." And after that he went back to his own camping-place.

Now, on that day above any other, a very downhearted feeling came on Cuchulain, he to be fighting alone against the four provinces of Ireland. And he bade Laeg to go to Conchubar and to the men of Ulster, and to say to them that he, the son of Dechtire, was tired with fighting every day, and with the wounds he had got, and not one of his people or his friends coming to help him.

After that Maeve sent out six all together against him, three men and three women that understood enchantments; but he destroyed than all. And now that Maeve had broken her agreement with him, not to send more than one against him at a time, he did not spare her men any longer, but from where he was he used his sling so well that in the whole army there was neither dog, horse, or man, that dared turn his face towards Cuchulain.

It was one day at that time the Morrighu came to try and get healing of her wounds from him, for it was only by his own hand the wounds he gave could be healed. She took the appearance of an old woman on her, and she milking a cow with three teats. Cuchulain was passing by, and there

was thirst on him, and he asked a drink, and she gave him the milk of one teat. "May this be to the good of the giver," he said, and with that her eye that was wounded was healed. Then she gave him milk from another teat, and he said the same words; then she gave him the milk from the third teat. "The full blessing of the gods, and of the people of the plough,

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on you," he said. And with that, all the wounds of the Great Queen were healed.

Then the men of the four great provinces of Ireland made their camp, and put up walls at the place called the Great Breach, on the plain of Muirthemne; but they sent the cattle they had with them southward. And Cuchulain took his place on a mound; and in the evening Laeg made a fire for him there, and the flame flashed on the bright shining weapons of the man of Ireland. And when Cuchulain saw so many of them, and they so near him, great anger came on him, and he took his spears and his shield and his sword and shook them, and he gave out his loud hero cry, and it was such a treat cry he gave that the Bocanachs and Bananachs and the Witches of the valley answered it from all parts. And when the men in the camp heard these great cries, they thought it was an attack that was being made upon them, and they ran against one another, and fought one another in their fright, so that a hundred of them were killed in that night.

Then Laeg saw a man coming through the camp from the northeast.

"There is a man coming towards us, little Hound," he said. "What is the appearance on him?" said Cuchulain. "He is very tall and handsome and shining, and he has a green cloak about him, fastened with a silver brooch; a shirt of silk that is embroidered with red gold, falling to his knees; a black shield in his hand, with a border of white bronze, and a spear with five prongs. And it is a strange thing," he said, "that no one in the whole camp seems to see him or to take any heed of him." "That is so," said Cuchulain; "and the men of Ireland take no heed of him because they cannot see him; and I know well it is one of my friends among the Sidhe that is coming to give me help and relief; for they know it is hard for me to be standing alone against the four provinces of Ireland."

Then the man of the Sidhe, that was Lugh of the Long Hand, came and spoke with Cuchulain, and it is what he said, that he knew he was tired out and in want of sleep. "And sleep now, Cuchulain," he said, "by the grave in the Lerga, and I myself will keep watch over you till the end of three days and three nights." So Cuchulain fell asleep there and then by the grave that is in the Lerga, and no wonder in that, for he had been

fighting since before the feast of Samhain without sleep, but all the while killing and attacking and destroying the men of Ireland--unless he might

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sleep a little while beside his spear in the middle of the day, his head on his hand, and his hand on his spear, and his spear on his knee. And while he was lying in his heavy sleep, the man of the Sidhe put Druid herbs on his wounds, so that they were all healed. So he slept for three days and three nights, and at the end of that time he rose up and passed his hand over his face, and he blushed red from head to foot with the strengthening of his courage that he felt in him, and he would have been ready to go there and then into any great gathering or feasting hall in all Ireland. "How long have I been in my sleep?" he asked the man. "Three days and three nights." "Then you have done me a bad turn indeed," he said, "for the men of Ireland have been left in quiet all that time." "They were not indeed," said the man. "Who was it stood up to them then?" said Cuchulain. "It was the boy troop came from the North, from Emain Macha," he said; "three times fifty sons of the chief men of Ulster, and they attacked the army three times, and they killed three times their own number, but they themselves were all killed in the end. And Follaman, son of Conchubar, was leading them, and he had made a boast that he would never go home again unless he could bring Ailell's head along with him, and the gold crown that was on it. But two foster-sons of Ailell, the two sons of Betchach, son of Baen, fell on him and wounded him, so that he got his death" "My grief, and oh! my grief that I was not there," said Cuchulain, "for if I had been in it, the boy troop would never have been destroyed, and Conchubar's son would not have come to his death." "Do not be fretting, little Hound," said the strange man, "there is no reproach on your name by it." "Stop here with me to-night," said Cuchulain, "and the two of us together will avenge the boy troop." "I will not indeed," said he; "but let you yourself play the game out now with the men of Ireland, for it is not they that have power over your life at this time."

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And it is what Maeve said: "It is a great reward I am giving you, Ferdiad, and why would you not accept it?" And Ferdiad was making excuses. "I will not take your reward without good pledges," he said, "for it is a heavy fight is before me; he that has the name of Cuchulain is surely a good Hound." "I will give you a champion's pledge," said Maeve; "you will not be bound to come to our gatherings, you will get horses and bridles; I will call you my friend above all other men." "I will not go to this fight," said Ferdiad, "without some other securities, for this is a fight will be heard of till the end of life and time." "Take all you want," said Maeve. "There is no delay except with yourself. Bind us till you are satisfied by the right hand of kings and of princes; there is nothing I will refuse you." "I must have six securities and no less," said Ferdiad, "before I will go out and be destroyed by Cuchulain, and all the whole army looking on." "I will give you whatever securities you want," said Maeve, "however hard it may be to come at them; Domnall in his chariot; Niaman of the Slaughter, both of them protectors of bards; bind Morann if you want sure payment; bind Carpre Min of Manand, he that has a string of knowledge in his harp; bind our own two sons." "O Maeve, it is a bitter woman you are," said Ferdiad. "And it is not a gentle wife to a husband you are, but it is a fit queen you are for Cruachan of the Swords, with your high talk and your fierce strength. But in spite of all the words you are stirring me up with," he said, "if you would offer me the land and the sea, I would not take them, without the sun and the moon along with

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them." "You need not wait longer than to-day and to-morrow," said Maeve, "before you will get your fill of all sorts of the jewels of the earth. And here is my brooch with its hooked pin," she said; "and more than all that, Ferdiad, so soon as you have killed this Hound of feats, I will give you Findabair of the champions, queen of the west of Elga."

Then every one was saying what great rewards those were. "But however great they are," said Ferdiad, "it is with Maeve herself they will stay and not with myself; and I will not take them to go into battle with my fellow and my dear friend, that is Cuchulain." And it is what he said: "A pity indeed a woman to have come between myself and himself! The half of my heart is Cuchulain's without fault, and I am the half of his own heart. "By my shield! If Cuchulain were killed from Ath Cliath, it is I would thrust my sword through my heart, through my side, through my breast.



"By my sword! If Cuchulain were killed from Glen Bolg, I would kill no man after him till I had leaped over the edge of the well.

"By my hand! If the Hound were killed from Glen an Scail, I would make an end of Maeve and her army and of no one else of the men of Ireland.

"By my spear! If it were from Ath Cro the Hound was killed, it is I would be buried in his grave; the one grave would be for the two of us. "Say to him, the Hound without blemish, that Scathach without fear made a prophecy I would be put down by him at a ford.

"Misfortune on Maeve, misfortune on Maeve, that put her face between us! Sending us one against the other, myself and strong Cuchulain."

Then Maeve said to her people, the way she would stir him up: "It is a true word Cuchulain spoke." "What word was that?" said Ferdiad. "He said it would be no great wonder if you would fall by him in the first trial of arms in this country." "He had no right to say that," said Ferdiad; "for it is not fear or want of skill he learned of me up to this time. And I swear by my arms if it is true he said this thing, that I will be the first to fight with him to-morrow before the men of Ireland." "May good be with you for saying that," said Maeve; "and this is better to me than to see you show fear or weakness, for every man cares for his own country, and why

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has he a right to do more for the profit of Ulster than you would do for the profit of Connaught?"

Ferdiad gave in to her then, and he bound her on the sureties of the aforesaid six for the fulfillment of her promises of the reward; and she bound him to fight with Cuchulain on the morrow.

Then Fergus got his horses harnessed and his chariot yoked, and he went out to where Cuchulain was, to tell him of all that had happened. "My welcome before you, my master Fergus," said Cuchulain. "I am glad of that welcome, my pupil," said Fergus. "But what I am come for is to tell you who it is that is coming to fight at the early hour of the morning of to-morrow." "I will listen to that," said Cuchulain. "Your own friend and companion, and fellow-pupil, the man that learned the use of arms with you, Ferdiad, son of Daire, the hero of the men of Domnand." "I give my word," said Cuchulain, "it is not my wish, my friend to come out against me." "And now," said Fergus, "you must be careful and ready more than any other time, for there was not the like of Ferdiad among any of the men who have fought you up to this." "I am here," said Cuchulain, "hindering and delaying the four great provinces of Ireland, from the beginning of the winter to the beginning of spring, and I have not drawn

back one foot before any man in that time, and I think it likely I will not draw back before him." "Neither has Ferdiad any fear on him before you, now his anger is stirred up," said Fergus, "and besides that, he has good armour to protect him." "Be quiet now, Fergus, and do not let me hear any more of that story," said Cuchulain. "I was always well able to stand against him in any place, or on any ground." "It is not easy to get the better of him," said Fergus, "for he is fierce in fighting, and he has the strength of a hundred." "There will be a sharp fight when myself and Ferdiad come to the ford," said Cuchulain; "it will not be without being told in stories." "O Cuchulain of the red sword," said Fergus, "it would be better to me than a great reward, you to carry proud Ferdiad's purple cloak eastward." "I give my word and my oath," said Cuchulain, "it is I myself will get the victory over Ferdiad." Then Fergus went back to the encampment.

At the same time Ferdiad went to his tent and to his people, and told them how he was bound by Maeve to fight with Cuchulain on the

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morrow, and he told how he had bound Maeve by six sureties for the fulfilment of her promises, if Cuchulain should fall by him. It is not happy in their minds the people of Ferdiad's tent were that night, but gloomy and heavy-hearted; for they were sure that wherever Cuchulain and Ferdiad would meet, it was there one of them would get his death, and they were sure that one would be their own master; for no one at all had been able to stand against Cuchulain since the beginning of the war. Ferdiad slept through the early part of the night very heavily, and when the latter end of the night came, his sleep went from him, and his drunkenness had passed away, and the thought of the fight was pressing on him. And he bade his driver to harness the horses, and to yoke his chariot. But the driver tried to turn him from it. "It would be better for you to stop here than to go," he said, "for my liking of it is not more than my disliking."

"Be silent, boy," said Ferdiad, "for I will not be turned from this journey by any young lad; but I will go to the ford, a ford the ravens will be croaking over; I will fight with Cuchulain till I wound his strong body, till I crush the courage out of him the way that he will die."

"It would be better for you to stop here," said the driver, "for it is not gentle your threats are; your parting will be sorrowful; there is one to whom it will be a sickness; grief will come of that meeting with Cuchulain; it is long it will be remembered; it is a pity for him who goes

that journey." "It is not right what you are saying," said Ferdiad; "it is not for a brave man to refuse--it is not in our race. I will delay no longer, courage is better than fear; let us set out now to the ford."

Then Ferdiad's horses were harnessed, and his chariot was yoked, and he went forward to the ford, and the day with its full light came upon him there. "Now, boy," he said, "spread out the skins and the cushions of my chariot under me here, until I get some sleep and rest, for I got no sleep at the end of the night, with the care of the fight upon me." So his servant unharnessed the horses, and settled the skins and cushions of the chariot under him, and the heavy rest of sleep came upon him.

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But as to Cuchulain, he did not rise up at all till the day had come with its full light, the way the men of Ireland would not say it was fear that was on him that made him rise. And when the day came: "It would be as well, Laeg," he said, "to yoke the chariot, for it is an early-rising man that is coming to meet us to-day."

"The horses are harnessed, and the chariot is yoked," said Laeg; "let you get into it, and there will be no hindrance to your courage."

With that the ready-handed, battle-winning son of Sualtim leaped into the chariot, and there shouted around him the Bocanachs and Bananachs, and witches of the valley. For the Tuatha de Danaan were used to set up their shouts around him, the way the fear and the wonder would be great before him in every fight he would go into.

And it was not long until Ferdiad's driver heard the noise coming near, the straining of the harness, the creaking of the chariot, the ringing of the armour and of the shield, the trampling of the horses, the joyful coming of Cuchulain to the ford.

The driver came and laid his hand on his master. "Good Ferdiad," he said, "rise up; here they are coming.

For I hear," he said, "the creaking of a chariot; it has come over Breg Ross, over Braine; it has come over the highway by the foot of Baile-in-Bile; he is a mighty Hound that urges it; he is a good driver that yokes it; he is a free hawk that hurries his horses towards the south. It is not he that will be slow in the fight. It is a pity for him that is on the height waiting for the Hound of valour. It is a year ago I foretold there would come a Hound, the Hound of Emain, a Hound with all colours about him--the Hound of Ulster, the Hound of Battle; I hear him--I have heard him coming."

"Good servant," said Ferdiad, "why is it you have been praising that man ever since you came out from the house? It is likely you are not without wages for your great praise of him. Yet it has been foretold to me by Ailell and by Maeve, it is he that will fall by me. And it is a time to help me," he said; "and let you be silent, and give up praising him, that your foretelling may not come true. It is not for you to give up on the brink of the fight; surely I will soon have the reward."

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And the driver said: "He is coming, not slowly, but quick as the wind, or as water from a high cliff, or like swift thunder." "Surely you have taken wages for these great praises you put upon him," said Ferdiad; "it is not against him you are, but praising him, and putting a great name on him." It was not long then until Ferdiad saw Cuchulain coming to towards him in his chariot, and it is how his two horses were going, a hawk sweeping from a cliff on a day of hard wind, or like a sweeping gust of the spring wind on a March day over a smooth plain, or like the swiftness of a wild stag when he is first started by the hounds in his first field; as if they were on fiery flagstones, so that the earth was shaking and trembling with the quickness of their going.

So Cuchulain reached the ford, and Ferdiad came to the south side, and Cuchulain drew up on the north side, and Ferdiad bade Cuchulain welcome. "I am happy at your coming, Cuchulain," he said. "I would have been glad of that welcome up to this time," said Cuchulain, "but today I do not take it as the welcome of a friend. And, Ferdiad," he said, "it would be fitter for me to welcome you than for you to welcome me, for it is you have come to me in the country and province where I am, and it is not right for you to come to fight with me, but it is I should go to fight with you, for it is out before you are the women and the children, the young men and the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the cattle of the province of Ulster."

"Good Cuchulain," said Ferdiad, "what has brought you to fight with me at all? For when we were with Scathach and with Uathach and with Aoife, you were my serving-boy, to tie up my spears and to make ready my bed." "That is true indeed," said Cuchulain; "but it was as less in age than you I was used to do so; but that is not the story that will be told of us after this day, for there is not a man in the whole world I would not fight to-day."

And it is then each of them spoke sharp, unfriendly words against the other; and it is what Ferdiad said: "What has brought you, O Hound, to

fight with a strong fighter? It is red your blood will be, flowing over the harness of your horses; it is a pity for your journey; it is long it will be spoken of; you will be in much want of healing if you ever get back to your own house," he said.

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"I have fought with heroes, with chiefs of armies, with troops, with hundreds before now," said Cuchulain, "and what I have to do to-day is to make an end of you, to bring you down in our first path of battle."

"You have met now with a man that will put reproach on you," said Ferdiad, "for it is I myself will do that. It is well the loss of the men of Ulster will be remembered," he said, "their champion to be put down, and they looking on."

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*And so, Cuchulain and Ferdiad fight for days, with different weapons each day, neck and neck, until the final day of their fight... (Abridgment by Mr. Valentine)*

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They were using the edge of their swords through that time; and it was then Ferdiad found a time when Cuchulain was off his guard, and he gave him a stroke of the sword, and hid it in his body, and the ford was reddened with Cuchulain's blood, and Ferdiad kept on making great strokes at him. And Cuchulain could not bear with this, and he called to Laeg for the Gae Bulg, and it was sent down the stream to him, and he caught it with his foot. And when Ferdiad heard the name of the Gae Bulg, he made a stroke of his shield down to protect his body. But Cuchulain made a straight cast of the spear, the Gae Bulg, off the middle of his hand, over the rim of the shield, and it passed through his armour and went out through his body, so that its sharp end could be seen. Ferdiad gave a stroke of his shield up to protect the upper part of his body, though it was "the relief after danger," as the saying is. "That is enough," said Ferdiad; "I die by that. And I may say, indeed, you have left me sick after you, and it was not right that I should fall by your hand. O Hound of the beautiful feats, it was not right, you to kill me; the fault of my death is yours, it is on you my blood is. A foolish man does not escape when he goes into the gap of danger; my grief! I am going away, my end is come. My ribs will not hold my heart, my heart is all turned to blood. I have not done well in the battle; you have killed me, Cuchulain." Cuchulain ran towards him after that, and put his two arms about him,

and lifted him across the ford northwards, so that his body should be by the ford on the north, and not on the west of the ford with the men of Ireland.

He laid him down then, and a cloud and a weakness came on as he stood over Ferdiad. Laeg saw that, and he saw that all the men of Ireland were rising up to come towards him. "Good Cuchulain," said Laeg, "rise up now, for the men of Ireland are coming towards us, and it is not one man they will put to fight against us now that Ferdiad has fallen by you."

"What use is it to me to rise up now, and he after falling by me?" said Cuchulain. But Laeg said: "Rise up, O chained Hound of Emain; it is glad and shouting you have a right to be now, since Ferdiad of the hosts has fallen by you." "What are joy and shouting to me now?" said Cuchulain; "it is to madness and to grief I am driven after the thing I have done, and the body I wounded so hard." "It is not right for you to be lamenting him," said Laeg. "It is making rejoicings over him you should be. It was

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at you he aimed his spears." But Cuchulain said: "Even if he had cut one arm and one leg from me, it is my grief Ferdiad not to be riding his horses through the long days of his lifetime." And Laeg said: "It is better pleased the women of the Red Branch will be, he to have died and you to be living. They know it is not few but many you have sent away for ever; for from the day you came out of Cuailgne to meet Maeve of the great name, it is a grief to her all you have killed of her people and of her fighting men. You have not taken quiet sleep since the spoiling of your country began; though there were few along with you, many were the mornings you rose up early."

Then Cuchulain began to keen and to lament for Ferdiad there, and it is what he said: "Well, Ferdiad, it is a pity for you it was not one of the men that knew my courage you asked an advice of before you came to meet me in the fight that was too hard for you. It is a pity it was not Laeg, son of Rianganabra, you asked how we stood one to another. It is a pity you did not ask a true advice of Fergus. It is a pity it was not pleasant comely Conall you asked which of us would put down the other. "And these men know well," he said, "there will never be born one among the men of Connaught who will do deeds equal to yours, to the end of life and time. And they know that if they looked among the places, the gatherings, the swearings, the false promises of the fair-haired women of Connaught, or in the playing with targets and shields, the playing with shields and swords, the playing backgammon and chess, the playing with horses and

chariots, there will not be found the hand of a man that will wound like Ferdiad's hand, or a man to bring the redmouthed birds croaking over the speckled battle, nor one that will fight for Cruachan, that will be your equal to the end of life and time, O redcheeked son of Daman." And then he rose up and stood over Ferdiad.

"Well, Ferdiad," he said, "it is great wrong and treachery was played on you by the men of Ireland, to bring you out to fight with me. For it has not been easy to stand against me in the war for the Bull of Cuailgne." And he made this complaint:--

"O Ferdiad, you were betrayed to your death; your last end was sorrowful; you to die, I to be living; our parting for ever is a grief for ever. "When we were far away, with Scathach the victorious, we gave our word that to the end of time we would never go against one another.

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"Dear to me was your beautiful ruddiness; dear to me your comely form; dear to me your clear grey eyes; dear to me your wisdom and your talk. "There has not come to the battle, there has not been made in the fight, there has not held up shield on the field of spears the like of you, O red son of Daman.

"Findabair, the daughter of Maeve, with all her great beauty, it was putting a gad on the sand, or on the sun, for you to think to get her, Ferdiad."

## READING 5

*Before you read: In this abridgement, we see the hero Cuchulain finally meet his end, as all heroes must, someday. His enemies finally learn his true weakness. In his culture, heroes take on gaeses, sacred oaths or restrictions, the following of which gives them great power. Cuchulain's oath is to never eat dog meat, relating to his earlier youthful misdeed of killing the guard dog of Chulain. Cuchulain's enemies trick him into breaking his gaes, leading to his demise. However, even in death, Cuchulain proves a bloody opponent. Enjoy.*

### Chapter 20. DEATH OF CUCHULAIN

CUCHULAIN went on then to the house of his mother, Dechtire, to bid her farewell. And she came out on the lawn to meet him, for she knew well he was going out to face the men of Ireland, and she brought out wine in a vessel to him, as her custom was when he passed that way. But when he took the vessel in his hand, it was red blood that was in it. "My grief!" he said, "my mother Dechtire, it is no wonder others to forsake me, when you yourself offer me a drink of blood." Then she filled the vessel a second, and a third time, and each time when she gave it to him, there was nothing in it but blood.

Then anger came on Cuchulain, and he dashed the vessel against a rock, and broke it, and he said: "The fault is not in yourself, my mother Dechtire, but my luck is turned against me, and my life is near its end, and I will not come back alive this time from facing the men of Ireland." Then Dechtire tried hard to persuade him to go back and to wait till he would have the help of Conall. "I will not wait," he said, "for anything you can say; for I would not give up my great name and my courage for all the riches of the world. And from the day I first took arms till this day, I have never drawn back from a fight or a battle. And it is not now I will begin to draw back," he said, "for a great name outlasts life."



Then he went on his way, and Cathbad, that had followed him, went with him. And presently they came to a ford, and there they saw a young girl, thin and white-skinned and having yellow hair, washing and ever washing, and wringing out clothing that was stained crimson red, and she crying and keening all the time. "Little Hound," said Cathbad, "do you see what it is that young girl is doing? It is your red clothes she is washing, and crying as she washes, because she knows you are going to your death against Maeve's great army. And take the warning now and turn back again." "Dear master," said Cuchulain, "you have followed me far enough; for I will not turn back from my vengeance on the men of Ireland that are come to burn and to destroy my house and my country. And what is it to me, the woman of the Sidhe to be washing red clothing for me? It is not long till there will be clothing enough, and armour and aims, lying soaked in pools of blood, by my own sword and my spear.

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And if you are sorry and loth to let me go into the fight, I am glad and ready enough myself to go into it, though I know as well as you yourself I must fall in it. Do not be hindering me any more, then," he said, "for, if I stay or if I go, death will meet me all the same. But go now to Emain, to Conchubar and to Emer, and bring them life and health from me, for I will never go back to meet them again. It is my grief and my wound, I to part from them! And O Laeg!" he said, "we are going away under trouble and under darkness from Emer now, as it is often we came back to her with gladness out of strange places and far countries."

Then Cathbad left him, and he went on his way. And after a while he saw three hags, and they blind of the left eye, before him in the mad, and they having a venomous hound they were cooking with charms on rods of the rowan tree. And he was going by them, for he knew it was not for his good they were there.

But one of the hags called to him: "Stop a while with us, Cuchulain." "I will not stop with you," said Cuchulain. "That is because we have nothing better than a dog to give you," said the hag. "If we had a grand, big cooking-hearth, you would stop and visit us; but because it is only a little we have to offer you, you will not stop. But he that will not show respect for the small, though he is great, he will get no respect himself." Then he went over to her, and she gave him the shoulder-blade of the hound out of her left hand, and he ate it out of his left hand. And he put it down on his left thigh, and the hand that took it was struck down, and the thigh he

put it on was struck through and through, so that the strength that was in them before left them.

Then he went down the road of Meadhon-Luachair, by Slieve Fuad, and his enemy, Erc, son of Cairbre, saw him in the chariot, and his sword shining red in his hand, and the light of his courage plain upon him, and his hair spread out like threads of gold that change their colour on the edge of the anvil under the smith's band, and the Crow of Battle in the air over his head.

"Cuchulain is coming at us," said Erc to the men of Ireland, "and let us be ready for him." So they made a fence of shields linked together, and Erc put a couple of the men that were strongest here and there, to let on to be fighting one another, that they might call Cuchulain to them; and

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he put a Druid with every couple of them, and he bid the Druid to ask Cuchulain's spears of him, for it would be hard for him to refuse a Druid. For it was in the prophecy of the children of Calatin that a king would be killed by each one of those spears in that battle.

And he bid the men of Ireland to give out shouts, and Cuchulain came against them in his chariot, doing his three thunder feats, and he used his spear and his sword in such a way, that their heads, and their hands, and their feet, and their bones, were scattered through the plain of Muirthemne; like the sands on the shore, like the stars in the sky, like the dew in May, like snow-flakes and hailstones, like leaves of the trees, like buttercups in a meadow, like grass under the feet of cattle on a fine summer day. It is red that plain was with the slaughter Cuchulain made when he came crashing over it.

Then he saw one of the men that was put to quarrel with the other, and the Druid called to him to come and hinder them, and Cuchulain leaped towards them. "Your spear to me," cried the Druid. "I swear by the oath of my people," said Cuchulain, "you are not so much in want of it as I am in want of it myself. The men of Ireland are upon me," he said, "and I am upon them." "I will put a bad name on you if you refuse it to me," said the Druid. "There was never a bad name put on me yet, on account of any refusal of mine," said Cuchulain, and with that he threw the spear at him, and it went through his head, and it killed the men that were on the other side of him.

Then Cuchulain drove through the host, and Lugaid, son of Curoi, got the spear. "Who is it will fall by this spear, children of Calatin?" said Lugaid. "A king will fall by it," said they. Then Lugaid threw the spear at

Cuchulain's chariot, and it went through and hit the driver, Laeg, son of Rianganabra, and he fell back, and his bowels came out on the cushions of the chariot "My grief!" said Laeg, "it is hard I am wounded." Then Cuchulain drew the spear out, and Laeg said his farewell to him, and Cuchulain said: "To-day I will be a fighter and a chariot-driver as well." Then he saw the other two men that were put to quarrel with one another, and one of them called out it would be a great shame for him not to give him his help. Then Cuchulain leaped towards them. "Your spear to me, Cuchulain," said the Druid. "I swear by the oath my people swear by," said he, "you are not in such want of the spear as I am myself,

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for it is by my courage, and by my arms, that I have to drive out the four provinces of Ireland that are sweeping over Muirthemne to-day." "I will put a bad name upon you," said the Druid. "I am not bound to give more than one gift in the day, and I have paid what is due to my name already," said Cuchulain. Then the Druid said: "I will put a bad name on the province of Ulster, because of your refusal."

"Ulster was never dispraised yet for any refusal of mine," said Cuchulain, "or for anything I did unworthily. Though little of my life should be left to me, Ulster will not be reproached for me to-day." With that he threw his spear at him, and it went through his head, and through the heads of the nine men that were behind him, and Cuchulain went through the host as he did before.

Then Erc, son of Cairbre Niafer, took up his spear. "Who will fall by this?" he asked the children of Calatin. "A king will fall by it," they said. "I heard you say the same thing of the spear that Lugaid threw a while ago," said Erc. "That is true," said they, "and the king of the chariotdrivers of Ireland fell by it, Cuchulain's driver Laeg, son of Rianganabra." With that, Erc threw the spear, and it went through the Grey of Macha. Cuchulain drew the spear out, and they said farewell to one another. And then the Grey went away from him, with half his harness hanging from his neck, and he went into Glas-linn, the grey pool in Slieve Fuad. Then Cuchulain drove through the host, and he saw the third couple disputing together, and he went between them as he did before. And the Druid asked his spear of him, but he refused him. "I will put a bad name on you," said the Druid. "I have paid what is due to my name to-day," said he; "my honour does not bind me to give more than one request in a day." "I will put a bad name upon Ulster because of your refusal" "I have paid what is due for the honour of Ulster," said Cuchulain. "Then I will put a bad name on

your kindred," said the Druid. "The news that I have been given a bad name shall never go back to that place I am never to go back to myself; for it is little of my life that is left to me," said Cuchulain. With that he threw his spear at him, and it went through him, and through the heads of the men that were along with him.

"You do your kindness unkindly, Cuchulain," said the Druid, as he fell. Then Cuchulain drove for the last time through the host, and Lugaid

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took the spear, and he said: "Who will fall by this spear, children of Calatin?" "A king will fall by it," said they. "I heard you saying that a king would fall by the spear Erc threw a while ago." "That is true," they said, "and the Grey of Macha fell by it, that was the king of the horses of Ireland".

Then Lugaid threw the spear, and it went through and through Cuchulain's body, and he knew he had got his deadly wound; and his bowels came out on the cushions of the chariot, and his only horse went away from him, the Black Sainglain, with half the harness hanging from his neck, and left his master, the king of the heroes of Ireland, to die upon the plain of Muirthemne.

Then Cuchulain said: "There is great desire on me to go to that lake beyond, and to get a drink from it."

"We will give you leave to do that," they said, "if you will come back to us after."

"I will bid you come for me if I am not able to come back myself," said Cuchulain.

Then he gathered up his bowels into his body, and he went down to the lake. He drank a drink and he washed himself, and he returned back again to his death, and he called to his enemies to come and meet him. There was a pillar-stone west of the lake, and his eye lit on it, and he went to the pillar-stone, and he tied himself to it with his breast-belt, the way he would not meet his death lying down, but would meet it standing up. Then his enemies came round about him, but they were in dread of going close to him, for they were not sure but he might be still alive. "It is a great shame for you," said Erc, son of Cairbre, "not to strike the head off that man, in revenge for his striking the head off my father." Then the Grey of Macha came back to defend Cuchulain as long as there was life in him, and the hero-light was shining above him. And the Grey of Macha made three attacks against them, and he killed fifty men with his teeth, and thirty with each of his hoofs. So there is a saying: "It is not

sharper work than this was done by the Grey of Macha, the time of Cuchulain's death."

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Then a bird came and settled on his shoulder. "It is not on that pillar birds were used to settle," said Erc.

Then Lugaid came and lifted up Cuchulain's hair from his shoulders, and struck his head off, and the men of Ireland gave three heavy shouts, and the sword fell from Cuchulain's hand, and as it fell, it struck off Lugaid's right hand, so that it fell to the ground. Then they cut off Cuchulain's hand, in satisfaction for it, and then the light faded away from about Cuchulain's head, and left it as pale as the snow of a single night. Then all the men of Ireland said that as it was Maeve had gathered the army, it would be right for her to bring away the head to Cruachan. "I will not bring it with me; it is for Lugaid that struck it off to bring it with him," said Maeve. And then Lugaid and his men went away, and they brought away Cuchulain's head and his right hand with them, and they went south, towards the Lifé river.

At that time the army of Ulster was gathering to attack its enemies, and Conall was out before them, and he met the Grey of Macha, and his share of blood dripping from him. And then he knew that Cuchulain was dead, and himself and the Grey of Macha went looking for Cuchulain's body. And when they saw his body at the pillar-stone, the Grey of Macha went and laid his head in Cuchulain's breast: "That body is a heavy care to the Grey of Macha," said Conall.

Then Conall went after the army, thinking in his own mind what way he could get satisfaction for Cuchulain's death. For it was a promise between himself and Cuchulain that whichever of them would be killed the first, the other would get satisfaction for his death.

"And if I am the first that is killed," said Cuchulain at that time, "how long will it be before you get satisfaction for me?"

"Before the evening of the same day," said Conall, "I will have got satisfaction for you. And if it is I that will die before you," he said, "how long will it be before you get satisfaction for me?"

"Your share of blood will not be cold on the ground," said Cuchulain, "when I will have got satisfaction for you." So Conall followed after Lugaid to the river Lifé.

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Lugaid was going down to bathe in the water, but he said to his chariotdriver:

"Look out there over the plain, for fear would any one come at us unknown."

The chariot-driver looked around him. "There is a man coming on us," he said, "and it is in a great hurry he is coming; and you would think he has all the ravens in Ireland flying over his head, and there are flakes of snow speckling the ground before him."

"It is not in friendship the man comes that is coming like that," said Lugaid. "It is Conall Cearnach it is, with Dub-dearg, and the birds that you see after him, they are the sods the horse has scattered in the air from his hoofs, and the flakes of snow that are speckling the ground before him, they are the froth that he scatters from his mouth and from the bit of his bridle. Look again," said Lugaid, "and see what way is he coming." "It is to the ford he is coming, the same way the army passed over," said the chariot-driver. "Let him pass by us," said Lugaid, "for I have no mind to fight with him."

But when Conall came to the middle of the ford, he saw Lugaid and his chariot-driver, and he went over to them. "Welcome is the sight of a debtor's face," said Conall. "The man you owe a debt to is asking payment of you now, and I myself am that man," he said, "for the sake of my comrade, Cuchulain, that you killed. And I am standing here now, to get that debt paid."

They agreed then to fight it out on the plain of Magh Argetnas, and in the fight Conall wounded Lugaid with his spear. From that they went to a place called Ferta Lugdac. "I would like that you would give me fair play," said Lugaid. "What fair play?" said Conall Cearnach.

"That you and I should fight with one hand," said he, "for I have the use of but one hand."

"I will do that," said Conan. Then Conall's hand was bound to his side with a cord, and then they fought for a long time, and one did not get the better of the other. And when Conall was not gaining on him, his horse, Dub-dearg, that was near by, came up to Lugaid, and took a bite out of his side.

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"Misfortune on me," said Lugaid, "it is not right or fair that is of you, Conall."

"It was for myself to do what is right and fair," said Conall. "I made no promise for a beast, that is without training and without sense."

"It is well I know you will not leave me till you take my head, as I took Cuchulain's head from him," said Lugaid. "Take it, then, along with your

own head. Put my kingdom with your kingdom, and my courage with your courage; for I would like that you would be the best champion in Ireland."

Then Conall made an end of him, and he went back, bringing Cuchulain's head along with him to the pillar stone where his body was.

And by that time Emer had get word of all that had happened, and that her husband had got his death by the men of Ireland, and by the powers of the children of Calatin. And it was Levarcham brought her the story, for Conall Cearnach had met her on his way, and had bade her go and bring the news to Emain Macha; and there she found Emer, and she sitting in her upper room, looking over the plain for some word from the battle.

And all the women came out to meet Levarcham, and when they heard her story, they made an outcry of grief and sharp cries, with loud weeping and burning tears; and there were long dismal sounds going through Emain, and the whole country round was filled with crying. And Emer and her women went to the place where Cuchulain's body was, and they gathered round it there, and gave themselves to crying and keening. And when Conall came back to the place, he laid the head with the body of Cuchulain, and he began to lament along with them, and it is what he said: "It is Cuchulain had prosperity on him, a root of valour from the time he was but a soft child; there never fell a better hero than the hero that fell by Lugaid of the Lands. And there are many are in want of you," he said, "and until all the chief men of Ireland have fallen by me, it is not fitting there should ever be peace.