**From *The Battle of Cuailgne* by Lady Gregory -- Old Irish Folktale**

The following passage is from a collection of tales in prose, titled *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, based on the Irish folk hero, Cuchulain. Herein, Queen Maeve of Connacht goes to war with King Conchubar of Ulster. The cause? She wanted to steal a famous bull from his cattle herd. The hero, Cuchulain, fights to defend Conchubar and the people of Ulster from Maeve’s forces. Maeve sends one warrior after another to challenge Cuchulain in single combat, and even thinks to offer her own daughter, Findabair, in marriage to dissuade him. Read and find out what happens:

**An excerpt from "The Battle of Cuailgne," from *Cuchulain of Muirthemne***

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 SlieveCuilinn. "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," be 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 featsthat he never 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 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.