**Reading – An Excerpt from the Boy Deeds of Cuchulain**

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 pillar-stone 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 Foil 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 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 chariot-fighter 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 byhis hand." "I know that chariot-fighter," 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 timeof the war for the Brown Bull of Cuailgne.