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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IN THE SEVEN WOODS: BEING
POEMS CHIEFLY OF THE IRISH HEROIC AGE ***

IN THE SEVEN WOODS

BY THE SAME WRITER



THE SECRET ROSE

THE CELTIC TWILIGHT

POEMS

THE WIND AMONG THE REEDS

THE SHADOWY WATERS

IDEAS OF GOOD AND EVIL

IN THE SEVEN WOODS

**Being Poems Chiefly of the
Irish Heroic Age**

BY

W. B. YEATS

New York

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1903

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IN THE SEVEN WOODS

IN THE SEVEN WOODS: BEING POEMS CHIEFLY OF THE IRISH HEROIC AGE.

1

IN THE SEVEN WOODS.

I have heard the pigeons of the Seven Woods
Make their faint thunder, and the garden bees
Hum in the lime tree flowers; and put away
The unavailing outcries and the old bitterness
That empty the heart. I have forgot awhile
Tara uprooted, and new commonness
Upon the throne and crying about the streets
And hanging its paper flowers from post to post,
Because it is alone of all things happy.
I am contented for I know that Quiet
Wanders laughing and eating her wild heart
Among pigeons and bees, while that Great Archer,
Who but awaits His hour to shoot, still hangs
A cloudy quiver over Parc-na-Lee.
August, 1902.

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE.

2

Maeve the great queen was pacing to and fro,
Between the walls covered with beaten bronze,
In her high house at Cruachan; the long hearth,
Flickering with ash and hazel, but half showed
Where the tired horse-boys lay upon the rushes,
Or on the benches underneath the walls,
In comfortable sleep; all living slept
But that great queen, who more than half the night
Had paced from door to fire and fire to door.
Though now in her old age, in her young age
She had been beautiful in that old way
That's all but gone; for the proud heart is gone
And the fool heart of the counting-house fears all
But soft beauty and indolent desire.
She could have called over the rim of the world
Whatever woman's lover had hit her fancy,
And yet had been great bodied and great limbed,
Fashioned to be the mother of strong children;
And she'd had lucky eyes and a high heart,
And wisdom that caught fire like the dried flax,
At need, and made her beautiful and fierce,
Sudden and laughing.

3

O unquiet heart,
Why do you praise another, praising her,
As if there were no tale but your own tale
Worth knitting to a measure of sweet sound?
Have I not bid you tell of that great queen
Who has been buried some two thousand years?

When night was at its deepest, a wild goose
Cried from the porter's lodge, and with long clamour
Shook the ale horns and shields upon their hooks;
But the horse-boys slept on, as though some power
Had filled the house with Druid heaviness;
And wondering who of the many changing Sidhe
Had come as in the old times to counsel her,
Maeve walked, yet with slow footfall being old,
To that small chamber by the outer gate.
The porter slept although he sat upright
With still and stony limbs and open eyes.
Maeve waited, and when that ear-piercing noise
Broke from his parted lips and broke again,
She laid a hand on either of his shoulders,
And shook him wide awake, and bid him say
Who of the wandering many-changing ones
Had troubled his sleep. But all he had to say
Was that, the air being heavy and the dogs
More still than they had been for a good month,
He had fallen asleep, and, though he had dreamed nothing,
He could remember when he had had fine dreams.
It was before the time of the great war
Over the White-Horned Bull, and the Brown Bull.

4

She turned away; he turned again to sleep
That no god troubled now, and, wondering
What matters were afoot among the Sidhe,
Maeve walked through that great hall, and with a sigh
Lifted the curtain of her sleeping room,
Remembering that she too had seemed divine
To many thousand eyes, and to her own
One that the generations had long waited
That work too difficult for mortal hands
Might be accomplished. Bunching the curtain up
She saw her husband Ailell sleeping there,
And thought of days when he'd had a straight body,
And of that famous Fergus, Nessa's husband,
Who had been the lover of her middle life.

5

Suddenly Ailell spoke out of his sleep,
And not with his own voice or a man's voice,
But with the burning, live, unshaken voice
Of those that it may be can never age.
He said, 'High Queen of Cruachan and Mag Ai
A king of the Great Plain would speak with you.'

And with glad voice Maeve answered him, 'What King
Of the far wandering shadows has come to me?
As in the old days when they would come and go
About my threshold to counsel and to help.'
The parted lips replied, 'I seek your help,
For I am Aengus and I am crossed in love.'

6

'How may a mortal whose life gutters out
Help them that wander with hand clasping hand
By rivers where nor rain nor hail has dimmed
Their haughty images, that cannot fade
Although their beauty's like a hollow dream.'

'I come from the undimmed rivers to bid you call
The children of the Maines out of sleep,
And set them digging into Anbual's hill.
We shadows, while they uproot his earthy house,
Will overthrow his shadows and carry off
Caer, his blue eyed daughter that I love.
I helped your fathers when they built these walls
And I would have your help in my great need,
Queen of high Cruachan.'

'I obey your will
With speedy feet and a most thankful heart:
For you have been, O Aengus of the birds,
Our giver of good counsel and good luck.'
And with a groan, as if the mortal breath
Could but awaken sadly upon lips
That happier breath had moved, her husband turned
Face downward, tossing in a troubled sleep;
But Maeve, and not with a slow feeble foot,
Came to the threshold of the painted house,
Where her grandchildren slept, and cried aloud,
Until the pillared dark began to stir
With shouting and the clang of unhooked arms.

7

She told them of the many-changing ones;
And all that night, and all through the next day
To middle night, they dug into the hill.
At middle night great cats with silver claws,
Bodies of shadow and blind eyes like pearls,
Came up out of the hole, and red-eared hounds
With long white bodies came out of the air
Suddenly, and ran at them and harried them.

The Maines' children dropped their spades, and stood
With quaking joints and terror stricken faces,
Till Maeve called out, 'These are but common men.
The Maines' children have not dropped their spades
Because Earth crazy for its broken power
Casts up a show and the winds answer it
With holy shadows.' Her high heart was glad,
And when the uproar ran along the grass
She followed with light footfall in the midst,
Till it died out where an old thorn tree stood.

8

Friend of these many years, you too had stood
With equal courage in that whirling rout;
For you, although you've not her wandering heart,
Have all that greatness, and not hers alone.
For there is no high story about queens
In any ancient book but tells of you,
And when I've heard how they grew old and died
Or fell into unhappiness I've said;
'She will grow old and die and she has wept!'
And when I'd write it out anew, the words,
Half crazy with the thought, She too has wept!
Outrun the measure.

I'd tell of that great queen
Who stood amid a silence by the thorn
Until two lovers came out of the air
With bodies made out of soft fire. The one
About whose face birds wagged their fiery wings

9

Said, 'Aengus and his sweetheart give their thanks
To Maeve and to Maeve's household, owing all
In owing them the bride-bed that gives peace.'
Then Maeve, 'O Aengus, Master of all lovers,
A thousand years ago you held high talk
With the first kings of many pillared Cruachan.
O when will you grow weary.'

They had vanished,
But out of the dark air over her head there came
A murmur of soft words and meeting lips.

BAILE AND AILLINN.

Argument. Baile and Aillinn were lovers, but
Aengus, the Master of Love, wishing them to be
happy in his own land among the dead, told to
each a story of the other's death, so that their
hearts were broken and they died.

I hardly hear the curlew cry,
Nor the grey rush when wind is high,
Before my thoughts begin to run
On the heir of Ulad, Buan's son,
Baile who had the honey mouth,
And that mild woman of the south,
Aillinn, who was King Lugaid's heir.
Their love was never drowned in care
Of this or that thing, nor grew cold
Because their bodies had grown old;
Being forbid to marry on earth
They blossomed to immortal mirth.

10

About the time when Christ was born,
When the long wars for the White Horn
And the Brown Bull had not yet come,
Young Baile Honey-Mouth, whom some
Called rather Baile Little-Land,
Rode out of Emain with a band
Of harpers and young men, and they
Imagined, as they struck the way
To many pastured Muirthemne,
That all things fell out happily
And there, for all that fools had said,
Baile and Aillinn would be wed.

11

They found an old man running there,
He had ragged long grass-yellow hair;
He had knees that stuck out of his hose;
He had puddle water in his shoes;
He had half a cloak to keep him dry;
Although he had a squirrel's eye.

O wandering birds and rushy beds
You put such folly in our heads
With all this crying in the wind
No common love is to our mind,
And our poor Kate or Nan is less
Than any whose unhappiness
Awoke the harp strings long ago.
Yet they that know all things but know
That all life had to give us is
A child's laughter, a woman's kiss.

12

Who was it put so great a scorn
In the grey reeds that night and morn
Are trodden and broken by the herds,
And in the light bodies of birds
That north wind tumbles to and fro
And pinches among hail and snow?

That runner said, 'I am from the south;
I run to Baile Honey-Mouth
To tell him how the girl Aillinn
Rode from the country of her kin
And old and young men rode with her:
For all that country had been astir
If anybody half as fair
Had chosen a husband anywhere
But where it could see her every day.
When they had ridden a little way
An old man caught the horse's head
With "You must home again and wed
With somebody in your own land."
A young man cried and kissed her hand
"O lady, wed with one of us;"
And when no face grew piteous
For any gentle thing she spake
She fell and died of the heart-break.'

13

Because a lover's heart's worn out
Being tumbled and blown about
By its own blind imagining,
And will believe that anything
That is bad enough to be true, is true,
Baile's heart was broken in two;
And he being laid upon green boughs
Was carried to the goodly house
Where the Hound of Ulad sat before
The brazen pillars of his door;
His face bowed low to weep the end
Of the harper's daughter and her friend;
For although years had passed away
He always wept them on that day,
For on that day they had been betrayed;
And now that Honey-Mouth is laid
Under a cairn of sleepy stone
Before his eyes, he has tears for none,
Although he is carrying stone, but two
For whom the cairn's but heaped anew.

14

We hold because our memory is
So full of that thing and of this
That out of sight is out of mind.
But the grey rush under the wind
And the grey bird with crooked bill
Have such long memories that they still
Remember Deirdre and her man,
And when we walk with Kate or Nan
About the windy water side
Our heart can hear the voices chide.
How could we be so soon content
Who know the way that Naoise went?
And they have news of Deirdre's eyes
Who being lovely was so wise,
Ah wise, my heart knows well how wise.

Now had that old gaunt crafty one,
Gathering his cloak about him, run
Where Aillinn rode with waiting maids
Who amid leafy lights and shades
Dreamed of the hands that would unlace
Their bodices in some dim place
When they had come to the marriage bed;
And harpers pondering with bowed head
A music that had thought enough
Of the ebb of all things to make love
Grow gentle without sorrowings;
And leather-coated men with slings
Who peered about on every side;
And amid leafy light he cried,
'He is well out of wind and wave,
They have heaped the stones above his grave
In Muirthemne and over it
In changeless Ogham letters writ

15

Baile that was of Rury's seed.
But the gods long ago decreed
No waiting maid should ever spread
Baile and Aillinn's marriage bed,
For they should clip and clip again
Where wild bees hive on the Great Plain.
Therefore it is but little news
That put this hurry in my shoes.'
And hurrying to the south he came
To that high hill the herdsmen name
The Hill Seat of Leighin, because
Some god or king had made the laws
That held the land together there,
In old times among the clouds of the air.

16

That old man climbed; the day grew dim;
Two swans came flying up to him
Linked by a gold chain each to each
And with low murmuring laughing speech
Alighted on the windy grass.
They knew him: his changed body was
Tall, proud and ruddy, and light wings
Were hovering over the harp strings
That Etain, Midhir's wife, had wove
In the hid place, being crazed by love.

What shall I call them? fish that swim
Scale rubbing scale where light is dim
By a broad water-lily leaf;
Or mice in the one wheaten sheaf
Forgotten at the threshing place;
Or birds lost in the one clear space
Of morning light in a dim sky;
Or it may be, the eyelids of one eye
Or the door pillars of one house,
Or two sweet blossoming apple boughs
That have one shadow on the ground;
Or the two strings that made one sound
Where that wise harper's finger ran;
For this young girl and this young man
Have happiness without an end
Because they have made so good a friend.

17

They know all wonders, for they pass
The towery gates of Gorias
And Findrias and Falias
And long-forgotten Murias,
Among the giant kings whose hoard
Cauldron and spear and stone and sword
Was robbed before Earth gave the wheat;
Wandering from broken street to street
They come where some huge watcher is
And tremble with their love and kiss.
They know undying things, for they
Wander where earth withers away,
Though nothing troubles the great streams
But light from the pale stars, and gleams
From the holy orchards, where there is none
But fruit that is of precious stone,
Or apples of the sun and moon.

18

What were our praise to them: they eat
Quiet's wild heart, like daily meat,
Who when night thickens are afloat
On dappled skins in a glass boat
Far out under a windless sky,
While over them birds of Aengus fly,
And over the tiller and the prow
And waving white wings to and fro
Awaken wanderings of light air
To stir their coverlet and their hair.

And poets found, old writers say,

A yew tree where his body lay,
But a wild apple hid the grass
With its sweet blossom where hers was;
And being in good heart, because
A better time had come again
After the deaths of many men,
And that long fighting at the ford,
They wrote on tablets of thin board,
Made of the apple and the yew,
All the love stories that they knew.

19

Let rush and bird cry out their fill
Of the harper's daughter if they will,
Beloved, I am not afraid of her
She is not wiser nor lovelier,
And you are more high of heart than she
For all her wanderings over-sea;
But I'd have bird and rush forget
Those other two, for never yet
Has lover lived but longed to wive
Like them that are no more alive.

THE ARROW.

20

I thought of your beauty and this arrow
Made out of a wild thought is in my marrow.
There's no man may look upon her, no man,
As when newly grown to be a woman,
Blossom pale, she pulled down the pale blossom
At the moth hour and hid it in her bosom.
This beauty's kinder yet for a reason
I could weep that the old is out of season.

THE FOLLY OF BEING COMFORTED.

One that is ever kind said yesterday:
'Your well beloved's hair has threads of grey
And little shadows come about her eyes;
Time can but make it easier to be wise
Though now it's hard, till trouble is at an end;
And so be patient, be wise and patient, friend.'
But heart, there is no comfort, not a grain.
Time can but make her beauty over again
Because of that great nobleness of hers;
The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs
Burns but more clearly; O she had not these ways
When all the wild summer was in her gaze.
O heart, O heart, if she'd but turn her head,
You'd know the folly of being comforted.

21

THE WITHERING OF THE BOUGHS.

I cried when the moon was murmuring to the birds,
'Let peewit call and curlew cry where they will,
I long for your merry and tender and pitiful words,
For the roads are unending and there is no place to my mind.'
The honey-pale moon lay low on the sleepy hill
And I fell asleep upon lonely Eichtge of streams;
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind,
The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.

I know of the leafy paths that the witches take,
Who come with their crowns of pearl and their spindles of wool,
And their secret smile, out of the depths of the lake;
And of apple islands where the Danaan kind
Wind and unwind their dances when the light grows cool
On the island lawns, their feet where the pale foam gleams;
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind,
The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.

22

I know of the sleepy country, where swans fly round
Coupled with golden chains and sing as they fly,
A king and a queen are wandering there, and the sound
Has made them so happy and hopeless, so deaf and so blind
With wisdom, they wander till all the years have gone by;
I know, and the curlew and peewit on Eichtge of streams;
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind,
The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.

23

ADAM'S CURSE.

We sat together at one summer's end
That beautiful mild woman your close friend
And you and I, and talked of poetry.

I said 'a line will take us hours maybe,
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
Better go down upon your marrow bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world.'

24

That woman then
Murmured with her young voice, for whose mild sake
There's many a one shall find out all heartache
In finding that it's young and mild and low.
'There is one thing that all we women know
Although we never heard of it at school,
That we must labour to be beautiful.'

I said, 'It's certain there is no fine thing
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.
There have been lovers who thought love should be
So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
Precedents out of beautiful old books;
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough.'

We sat grown quiet at the name of love.
We saw the last embers of daylight die
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell
About the stars and broke in days and years.

25

I had a thought for no one's but your ears;
That you were beautiful and that I strove
To love you in the old high way of love;
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
As weary hearted as that hollow moon.

THE SONG OF RED HANRAHAN.

The old brown thorn trees break in two high over Cummen Strand
Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left hand,
Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind and dies;
But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the eyes
Of Cathleen the daughter of Houlihan.

The wind has bundled up the clouds high over Knocknarea
And thrown the thunder on the stones for all that Maeve can say. 26
Angers that are like noisy clouds have set our hearts abeat;
But we have all bent low and low and kissed the quiet feet
Of Cathleen the daughter of Houlihan.

The yellow pool has overflowed high up on Clooth-na-Bare,
For the wet winds are blowing out of the clinging air;
Like heavy flooded waters our bodies and our blood;
But purer than a tall candle before the Holy Rood
Is Cathleen the daughter of Houlihan.

THE OLD MEN ADMIRING THEMSELVES IN THE WATER.

I heard the old, old men say
'Everything alters,
And one by one we drop away.'
They had hands like claws, and their knees 27
Were twisted like the old thorn trees
By the waters.
I heard the old, old men say
'All that's beautiful drifts away
Like the waters.'

UNDER THE MOON.

I have no happiness in dreaming of Brycelinde;
Nor Avalon the grass green hollow, nor Joyous Isle,
Where one found Lancelot crazed and hid him for a while,
Nor Ulad when Naoise had thrown a sail upon the wind,
Nor lands that seem too dim to be burdens on the heart,
Land-under-Wave, where out of the moon's light and the sun's
Seven old sisters wind the threads of the long lived ones,
Land-of-the-Tower, where Aengus has thrown the gates apart, 28
And Wood-of-Wonders, where one kills an ox at dawn
To find it when night falls laid on a golden bier:
Therein are many queens like Branwen, and Guinivere;
And Niam, and Laban, and Fand, who could change to an otter or fawn
And the wood-woman whose lover was changed to a blue-eyed hawk;
And whether I go in my dreams by woodland, or dun, or shore,
Or on the unpeopled waves with kings to pull at the oar,
I hear the harp string praise them or hear their mournful talk.
Because of a story I heard under the thin horn
Of the third moon, that hung between the night and the day,
To dream of women whose beauty was folded in dismay,
Even in an old story, is a burden not to be borne.

THE PLAYERS ASK FOR A BLESSING ON THE PSALTERIES AND THEMSELVES.

Three Voices together

Hurry to bless the hands that play,
The mouths that speak, the notes and strings,
O masters of the glittering town!
O! lay the shrilly trumpet down,
Though drunken with the flags that sway
Over the ramparts and the towers,
And with the waving of your wings.

First Voice

Maybe they linger by the way;
One gathers up his purple gown;
One leans and mutters by the wall;
He dreads the weight of mortal hours.

Second Voice

O no, O no, they hurry down
Like plovers that have heard the call.

Third Voice

O, kinsmen of the Three in One,
O, kinsmen bless the hands that play.
The notes they waken shall live on
When all this heavy history's done.
Our hands, our hands must ebb away.

Three Voices together

The proud and careless notes live on
But bless our hands that ebb away.

30

THE RIDER FROM THE NORTH.

From the play of The Country of the Young.

There's many a strong farmer
Whose heart would break in two
If he could see the townland
That we are riding to;
Boughs have their fruit and blossom,
At all times of the year,
Rivers are running over
With red beer and brown beer.
An old man plays the bagpipes
In a golden and silver wood,
Queens, their eyes blue like the ice,
Are dancing in a crowd.
The little fox he murmured,
'O what is the world's bane?'
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
'O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane.'

31

When their hearts are so high,
That they would come to blows,
They unhook their heavy swords
From golden and silver boughs;
But all that are killed in battle
Awaken to life again;
It is lucky that their story
Is not known among men.
For O the strong farmers
That would let the spade lie,
For their hearts would be like a cup
That somebody had drunk dry.
The little fox he murmured,
'O what is the world's bane?'
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
'O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane.'

32

Michael will unhook his trumpet
From a bough overhead,
And blow a little noise
When the supper has been spread.
Gabriel will come from the water
With a fish tail, and talk
Of wonders that have happened
On wet roads where men walk,
And lift up an old horn
Of hammered silver, and drink
Till he has fallen asleep
Upon the starry brink.
The little fox he murmured,
'O what is the world's bane?'
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
'O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland,
That is the world's bane.'

33

I made some of these poems walking about among the Seven Woods, before the big wind of nineteen hundred and three blew down so many trees, & troubled the wild creatures, & changed the look of things; and I thought out there a good part of the play which follows. The first shape of it came to me in a dream, but it changed much in the making, foreshadowing, it may be, a change that may bring a less dream-burdened will into my verses. I never re-wrote anything so many times; for at first I could not make these wills that stream into mere life poetical. But now I hope to do easily much more of the kind, and that our new Irish players will find the buskin and the sock.

34

ON BAILE'S STRAND: A PLAY.

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

CUCHULLAIN, the King of Muirthemne.

CONCOBAR, the High King of Ullad.

DAIRE, a King.

FINTAIN, a blind man.

BARACH, a fool.

A Young Man.

Young Kings and Old Kings.

SCENE: A great hall by the sea close to Dundalغان. There are two great chairs on either side of the hall, each raised a little from the ground, and on the back of the one chair is carved and painted a woman with a fish's tail, and on the back of the other a hound. There are smaller chairs and benches raised in tiers round the walls. There is a great ale vat at one side near a small door, & a large door at the back through which one can see the sea. Barach, a tall thin man with long ragged hair, dressed in skins, comes in at the side door. He is leading Fintain, a fat blind man, who is somewhat older.

35

BARACH.

I will shut the door, for this wind out of the sea gets into my bones, and if I leave but an inch for the wind there is one like a flake of sea-frost that might come into the house.

FINTAIN.

What is his name, fool?

BARACH.

It's a woman from among the Riders of the Sidhe. It's Boann herself from the river. She has left the Dagda's bed, and gone through the salt of the sea & up here to the strand of Baile, and all for love of me. Let her keep her husband's bed, for she'll have none of me. Nobody knows how lecherous these goddesses are. I see her in every kind of shape but oftener than not she's in the wind and cries 'give a kiss and put your arms about me.' But no, she'll have no more of me. Yesterday when I put out my lips to kiss her, there was nothing there but the wind. She's bad, Fintain. O, she's bad. I had better shut the big door too. (He is going towards the big door but turns hearing Fintain's voice.)

36

FINTAIN.

(Who has been feeling about with his stick.) What's this and this?

BARACH.

They are chairs.

FINTAIN.

And this?

BARACH.

Why, that's a bench.

FINTAIN.

And this?

BARACH.

A big chair.

FINTAIN.

(Feeling the back of the chair.) There is a sea-woman carved upon it.

BARACH.

And there is another big chair on the other side of the hall.

37

FINTAIN.

Lead me to it. (He mutters while the fool is leading him.) That is what the High King Concoibar has on his shield. The High King will be coming. They have brought out his chair. (He begins feeling the back of the other chair.) And there is a dog's head on this. They have brought out our master's chair. Now I know what the horse-boys were talking about. We must not stay here. The Kings are going to meet here. Now that Concoibar and our master, that is his chief man, have put down all the enemies of Ullad, they are going to build up Emain again. They are going to talk over their plans for building it. Were you ever in Concoibar's town before it was burnt? O, he is a great King, for though Emain was burnt down, every war had made him richer. He has gold and silver dishes, and chessboards and candle-sticks made of precious stones. Fool, have they taken the top from

BARACH.

They have.

FINTAIN.

Then bring me a horn of ale quickly, for the Kings will be here in a minute. Now I can listen. Tell me what you saw this morning?

BARACH.

About the young man and the fighting?

FINTAIN.

Yes.

BARACH.

And after that we can go and eat the fowl, for I am hungry.

FINTAIN.

Time enough, time enough. You're in as great a hurry as when you brought me to Aine's Seat, where the mad dogs gather when the moon's at the full. Go on with your story.

BARACH.

I was creeping under a ditch, with the fowl in my leather bag, keeping to the shore where the farmer could not see me, when I came upon a ship drawn up upon the sands, a great red ship with a woman's head upon it.

FINTAIN.

A ship out of Aoife's country. They have all a woman's head on the bow.

BARACH.

There was a young man with a pale face and red hair standing beside it. Some of our people came up whose turn it was to guard the shore. I heard them ask the young man his name. He said he was under bonds not to tell it. Then words came between them, and they fought, & the young man killed half of them, and the others ran away.

FINTAIN.

It matters nothing to us, but he has come at last.

BARACH.

Who has come?

FINTAIN.

I know who that young man is. There is not another like him in the world. I saw him when I had my eyesight.

BARACH.

You saw him?

FINTAIN.

I used to be in Aoife's country when I had my eyesight.

BARACH.

That was before you went on shipboard and were blinded for putting a curse on the wind?

FINTAIN.

Queen Aoife had a son that was red haired and pale faced like herself, and everyone said that he would kill Cuchullain some day, but I would not have that spoken of.

BARACH.

Nobody could do that. Who was his father?

41

FINTAIN.

Nobody but Aoife knew that, not even he himself.

BARACH.

Not even he himself! Was Aoife a goddess & lecherous?

FINTAIN.

I overheard her telling that she never had but one lover, and that he was the only man who overcame her in battle. There were some who thought him one of the Riders of the Sidhe, because the child was great of limb and strong beyond others. The child was begotten over the mountains; but come nearer and I will tell you something.

BARACH.

You have thought something?

FINTAIN.

When I hear the young girls talking about the colour of Cuchullain's eyes, & how they have seven colours, I have thought about it. That young man has Aoife's face and hair, but he has Cuchullain's eyes.

42

BARACH.

How can he have Cuchullain's eyes?

FINTAIN.

He is Cuchullain's son.

BARACH.

And his mother has sent him hither to fight his father.

FINTAIN.

It is all quite plain. Cuchullain went into Aoife's country when he was a young man that he might learn skill in arms, and there he became Aoife's lover.

BARACH.

And now she hates him because he went away, and has sent the son to kill the father. I knew she was a goddess.

FINTAIN.

And she never told him who his father was, that he might do it. I have thought it all out, fool. I know a great many things because I listen when nobody is noticing and I keep my wits awake. What ails you now?

43

BARACH.

I have remembered that I am hungry.

FINTAIN.

Well, forget it again, and I will tell you about Aoife's country. It is full of wonders. There are a great many Queens there who can change themselves into wolves and into swine and into white hares, and when they are in their own shapes they are stronger than almost any man; and there are young men there who have cat's eyes and if a bird chirrup or a mouse squeak they cannot keep them shut even though it is bedtime and they sleepy; and listen, for this is a great wonder, a very great wonder, there is a long narrow bridge, and when anybody goes to cross it, that the Queens do not like, it flies up as this bench would if you were to sit on the end of it. Everybody who goes there to learn skill in arms has to cross it. It was in that country too that Cuchullain got his spear made out of dragon bones. There were two dragons fighting in the foam of the sea, & their grandam was the moon, and six Queens came along the shore.

44

BARACH.

I won't listen to your story.

FINTAIN.

It is a very wonderful story. Wait till you hear what the six Queens did. Their right hands were all made of silver.

BARACH.

No, I will have my dinner first. You have eaten the fowl I left in front of the fire. The last time you sent me to steal something you made me forget all about it till you had eaten it up.

FINTAIN.

No, there is plenty for us both.

BARACH.

Come with me where it is.

45

FINTAIN.

(Who is being led towards the door at the back by Barach.) O, it is all

right, it is in a safe place.

BARACH.

It is a fine fowl. It was the biggest in the yard.

FINTAIN.

It had a good smell, but I hope that the wild dogs have not smelt it. (Voices are heard outside the door at the side.) Here is our master. Let us stay and talk with him. Perhaps Cuchullain will give you a new cap with a feather. He told me that he would give you a new cap with a feather, a feather with an eye that looks at you, a peacock's feather.

BARACH.

No, no. (He begins pulling Fintain towards the door.)

FINTAIN.

If you do not get it now, you may never get it, for the young man may kill him.

46

BARACH.

No, no, I am hungry. What a head you have, blind man. Who but you would have remembered that the hen-wife slept for a little at noon every day.

FINTAIN.

(Who is being led along very slowly and unwillingly.)

Yes, I have a good head. The fowl should be done just right, but one never knows when a wild dog may come out of the woods.

(They go out through the big door at the back. As they go out Cuchullain & certain young Kings come in at the side door. Cuchullain though still young is a good deal older than the others. They are all very gaily dressed, and have their hair fastened with balls of gold. The young men crowd about Cuchullain with wondering attention.)

FIRST YOUNG KING.

You have hurled that stone beyond our utmost mark
Time after time, but yet you are not weary.

47

SECOND YOUNG KING.

He has slept on the bare ground of Fuad's Hill
This week past, waiting for the bulls and the deer.

CUCHULLAIN.

Well, why should I be weary?

FIRST YOUNG KING.

It is certain
His father was the god who wheels the sun,
And not king Sualtam.

THIRD YOUNG KING.

(To a young King who is beside him.) He came in the dawn,
And folded Delectara in a sudden fire.

FOURTH YOUNG KING.

And yet the mother's half might well grow weary,
And it new come from labours over sea.

THIRD YOUNG KING.

He has been on islands walled about with silver,
And fought with giants.

(They gather about the ale vat and begin to drink.)

48

CUCHULLAIN.

Who was it that went out?

THIRD YOUNG KING.

As we came in?

CUCHULLAIN.

Yes.

THIRD YOUNG KING.

Barach and blind Fintain.

CUCHULLAIN.

They always flock together; the blind man
Has need of the fool's eyesight and strong body,
While the poor fool has need of the other's wit,
And night and day is up to his ears in mischief
That the blind man imagines. There's no hen-yard
But clucks and cackles when he passes by
As if he'd been a fox. If I'd that ball
That's in your hair and the big stone again,
I'd keep them tossing, though the one is heavy
And the other light in the hand. A trick I learnt
When I was learning arms in Aoife's country.

49

FIRST YOUNG KING.

What kind of woman was that Aoife?

CUCHULLAIN.

Comely.

FIRST YOUNG KING.

But I have heard that she was never married,
And yet that's natural, for I have never known
A fighting woman, but made her favours cheap,
Or mocked at love till she grew sandy dry.

CUCHULLAIN.

What manner of woman do you like the best?
A gentle or a fierce.

FIRST YOUNG KING.

A gentle surely.

CUCHULLAIN.

I think that a fierce woman's better, a woman
That breaks away when you have thought her won,
For I'd be fed and hungry at one time.
I think that all deep passion is but a kiss
In the mid battle, and a difficult peace
'Twixt oil and water, candles and dark night,
Hill-side and hollow, the hot-footed sun,
And the cold sliding slippery-footed moon,
A brief forgiveness between opposites
That have been hatreds for three times the age
Of his long 'stablished ground. Here's Concoibar;
So I'll be done, but keep beside me still,
For while he talks of hammered bronze and asks
What wood is best for building, we can talk
Of a fierce woman.

50

(Concoibar, a man much older than Cuchullain, has come in through the great door at the back. He has many Kings about him. One of these Kings, Daire, a stout old man, is somewhat drunk.)

CONCOBAR.

(To one of those about him.) Has the ship gone yet? We have need of more bronze workers and that ship I sent to Africa for gold is late.

51

CUCHULLAIN.

I knew their talk.

CONCOBAR.

(Seeing Cuchullain.) You are before us, King.

CUCHULLAIN.

So much the better, for I welcome you
Into my Muirthemne.

CONCOBAR.

But who are these?
The odour from their garments when they stir
Is like a wind out of an apple garden.

CUCHULLAIN.

My swordsmen and harp players and fine dancers,
My bosom friends.

CONCOBAR.

I should have thought, Cuchullain,
My graver company would better match

Your greatness and your years; but I waste breath
In harping on that tale.

52

CUCHULLAIN.

You do, great King.
Because their youth is the kind wandering wave
That carries me about the world; and if it sank,
My sword would lose its lightness.

CONCOBAR.

Yet, Cuchullain,
Emain should be the foremost town of the world.

CUCHULLAIN.

It is the foremost town.

CONCOBAR.

No, no, it's not.
Nothing but men can make towns great, and he,
The one over-topping man that's in the world,
Keeps far away.

DAIRE.

He will not hear you, King,
And we old men had best keep company
With one another. I'll fill the horn for you.

53

CONCOBAR.

I will not drink, old fool. You have drunk a horn
At every door we came to.

DAIRE.

You'd better drink,
For old men light upon their youth again
In the brown ale. When I have drunk enough,
I am like Cuchullain as one pea another,
And live like a bird's flight from tree to tree.

CONCOBAR.

We'll to our chairs for we have much to talk of,
And we have Ullad and Muirthemne, and here
Is Conall Muirthemne in the nick of time.

(He goes to the back of stage to welcome a company of Kings who come in through the great door. The other Kings gradually get into their places. Cuchullain sits in his great chair with certain of the young men standing around him. Others of the young men, however, remain with Daire at the ale vat. Daire holds out the horn of ale to one or two of the older Kings as they pass him going to their places. They pass him by, most of them silently refusing.)

54

DAIRE.

Will you not drink?

AN OLD KING.

Not till the council's over.

A YOUNG KING.

But I'll drink, Daire.

ANOTHER YOUNG KING.

Fill me a horn too, Daire.

ANOTHER YOUNG KING.

If I'd drunk half that you have drunk to-day,
I'd be upon all fours.

DAIRE.

That would be natural
When Mother Earth had given you this good milk
From her great breasts.

55

CUCHULLAIN.

(To one of the young Kings beside him)

One is content awhile
With a soft warm woman who folds up our lives
In silky network. Then, one knows not why,
But one's away after a flinty heart.

THE YOUNG KING.

How long can the net keep us?

CUCHULLAIN.

All our lives
If there are children, and a dozen moons
If there are none, because a growing child
Has so much need of watching it can make
A passion that's as changeable as the sea
Change till it holds the wide earth to its heart.
At least I have heard a father say it, but I
Being childless do not know it. Come nearer yet;
Though he is ringing that old silver rod
We'll have our own talk out. They cannot hear us.

(Conobar who is now seated in his great chair, opposite Cuchullain, beats upon the pillar of the house that is nearest to him with a rod of silver, till the Kings have become silent. Cuchullain alone continues to talk in a low voice to those about him, but not so loud as to disturb the silence. Conobar rises and speaks standing.)

56

CONCOBAR.

I have called you hither, Kings of Ullad, and Kings
Of Muirthemne and Connall Muirthemne,
And tributary Kings, for now there is peace—
It's time to build up Emain that was burned
At the outset of these wars; for we,
Being the foremost men, should have high chairs
And be much stared at and wondered at, and speak
Out of more laughing overflowing hearts
Than common men. It is the art of kings

To make what's noble nobler in men's eyes
 By wide uplifted roofs, where beaten gold,
 That's ruddy with desire, marries pale silver
 Among the shadowing beams; and many a time
 I would have called you hither to this work,
 But always, when I'd all but summoned you,
 Some war or some rebellion would break out.

DAIRE.

Where's Maine Morgor and old Usnach's children,
 And that high-headed even-walking Queen,
 And many near as great that got their death
 Because you hated peace. I can remember
 The people crying out when Deirdre passed
 And Maine Morgor had a cold grey eye.
 Well, well, I'll throw this heel-tap on the ground,
 For it may be they are thirsty.

A KING.

Be silent, fool.

ANOTHER KING.

Be silent, Daire.

CONCOBAR.

Let him speak his mind.
 I have no need to be afraid of ghosts,
 For I have made but necessary wars.
 I warred to strengthen Emain, or because
 When wars are out they marry and beget
 And have their generations like mankind
 And there's no help for it; but I'm well content
 That they have ended and left the town so great,
 That its mere name shall be in times to come
 Like a great ale vat where the men of the world
 Shall drink no common ale but the hard will,
 The unquenchable hope, the friendliness of the sword.

(He takes thin boards on which plans have been carved by those about him.)

Give me the building plans, and have you written
 That we—Cuchullain is looking in his shield;
 It may be the pale riders of the wind
 Throw pictures on it, or that Mananan,
 His father's friend and sometime fosterer,
 Foreknower of all things, has cast a vision,
 Out of the cold dark of the rich sea,
 Foretelling Emain's greatness.

CUCHULLAIN.

No, great King,
 I looked on this out of mere idleness,
 Imagining a woman that I loved.

(The sound of a trumpet without.)

CONCOBAR.

Open the door, for that is a herald's trumpet.

(The great door at the back is flung open; a young man who is fully armed and carries a shield with a woman's head painted on it, stands upon the threshold. Behind him are trumpeters. He walks into the centre of the

hall, the trumpeting ceases.)

What is your message?

YOUNG MAN.

I am of Aoife's army.

FIRST KING.

Queen Aoife and her army have fallen upon us.

60

SECOND KING.

Out swords! Out swords!

THIRD KING.

They are about the house.

FOURTH KING.

Rush out! Rush out! Before they have fired the thatch.

YOUNG MAN.

Aoife is far away. I am alone.
I have come alone in the midst of you
To weigh this sword against Cuchullain's sword.

(There is a murmur amongst the Kings.)

CONCOBAR.

And are you noble? for if of common seed
You cannot weigh your sword against his sword
But in mixed battle.

YOUNG MAN.

I am under bonds
To tell my name to no man, but it's noble.

61

CONCOBAR.

But I would know your name and not your bonds.
You cannot speak in the Assembly House
If you are not noble.

A KING.

Answer the High King.

YOUNG MAN.

(Drawing his sword.)

I will give no other proof than the hawk gives
That it's no sparrow.

(He is silent a moment then speaks to all.)

Yet look upon me, Kings;

I too am of that ancient seed and carry
The signs about this body and in these bones.

CUCHULLAIN.

To have shown the hawk's grey feather is enough
And you speak highly too.

(Cuchullain comes down from his great chair. He remains standing on the steps of the chair. The young Kings gather about him and begin to arm him.)

Give me that helmet!

I'd thought they had grown weary sending champions.
That coat will do. I'd half forgotten, boy,
How all those great kings came into the mouse-trap
That had been baited with Maeve's pretty daughter.
How Findabair, that blue-eyed Findabair—
But the tale is worthy of a winter's night.
That buckle should be tighter. Give me your shield.
There is good level ground at Baile's Yew-tree
Some dozen yards from here, and it's but truth
That I am sad to-day and this fight welcome.

62

(He looks hard at the Young Man, and then steps down on to the floor of the Assembly House. He grasps the Young Man by the shoulder.)

Hither into the light.

(Turning to one of the young Kings)

That's the very tint
Of her that I was speaking of but now:
Not a pin's difference.

63

(To the Young Man)

You are from the North
Where there are many that have that tint of hair
Red brown, the light red brown. Come nearer, boy!
For I would have another look at you.
There's more likeness, a pale, a stone pale cheek.
What brought you, boy? Have you no fear of death?

YOUNG MAN.

Whether I live or die is in the Gods' hands.

CUCHULLAIN.

That is all words, all words, a young man's talk;
I am their plough, their harrow, their very strength,
For he that's in the sun begot this body
Upon a mortal woman, and I have heard tell
It seemed as if he had outrun the moon,
That he must always follow through waste heaven,
He loved so happily. He'll be but slow
To break a tree that was so sweetly planted.
Let's see that arm; I'll see it if I like.
That arm had a good father and a good mother
But it is not like this.

64

YOUNG MAN.

You are mocking me.
You think I am not worthy to be fought,
But I'll not wrangle but with this talkative knife.

CUCHULLAIN.

Put up your sword, I am not mocking you.

I'd have you for my friend, but if it's not
Because you have a hot heart and a cold eye
I cannot tell the reason. You've got her fierceness,
And nobody is as fierce as those pale women.

(To the young Kings)

We'll keep him here in Muirthemne awhile.

A YOUNG KING.

You are the leader of our pack and therefore
May cry what you will.

65

CUCHULLAIN.

You'll stop with us
And we will hunt the deer and the wild bulls
And, when we have grown weary, light our fires
In sandy places where the wool-white foam
Is murmuring and breaking, and it may be
That long-haired women will come out of the dunes
To dance in the yellow fire-light. You hang your head,
Young man, as if it was not a good life;
And yet what's better than to hurl the spear,
And hear the long-remembering harp, and dance;
Friendship grows quicker in the murmuring dark;
But I can see there's no more need for words
And that you'll be my friend now.

FIRST OLD KING.

Concobar,
Forbid their friendship, for it will get twisted
To a reproach against us.

66

CONCOBAR.

Until now
I'd never need to cry Cuchullain on
And would not now.

FIRST OLD KING.

They'll say his manhood's quenched.

CUCHULLAIN.

I'll give you gifts, but I'll have something too,
An arm-ring or the like, and if you will
We'll fight it out when you are older, boy.

AN OLD KING.

Aoife will make some story out of this.

CUCHULLAIN.

Well, well, what matter, I'll have that arm-ring, boy.

YOUNG MAN.

There is no man I'd sooner have my friend
Than you whose name has gone about the world

As if it had been the wind, but Aoife'd say
I had turned coward.

67

CUCHULLAIN.

I'll give you gifts
That Aoife'll know and all her people know
To have been my gifts. Mananan son of the sea
Gave me this heavy purple cloak. Nine Queens
Of the Land-under-Wave had woven it
Out of the fleeces of the sea. O! tell her
I was afraid, or tell her what you will.
No! tell her that I heard a raven croak
On the north side of the house and was afraid.

AN OLD KING.

Some witch of the air has troubled Cuchullain's mind.

CUCHULLAIN.

No witchcraft, his head is like a woman's head
I had a fancy for.

SECOND OLD KING.

A witch of the air
Can make a leaf confound us with memories.
They have gone to school to learn the trick of it.

68

CUCHULLAIN.

But there's no trick in this. That arm-ring, boy.

THIRD OLD KING.

He shall not go unfought, I'll fight with him.

FOURTH OLD KING.

No! I will fight with him.

FIRST OLD KING.

I claim the fight,
For when we sent an army to her land—

SECOND OLD KING.

I claim the fight, for one of Aoife's galleys
Stole my great cauldron and a herd of pigs.

THIRD OLD KING.

No, no, I claim it, for at Lammas' time—

CUCHULLAIN.

Back! Back! Put up your swords! Put up your swords!
There's none alive that shall accept a challenge
I have refused. Laegaire, put up your sword.

No, let them come, let any three together.
If they've a mind to, I'll try it out with four.

CUCHULLAIN.

That's spoken as I'd spoken it at your age,
But you are in my house. Whatever man
Would fight with you shall fight it out with me.
They're dumb. They're dumb. How many of you would meet (drawing his
sword)

This mutterer, this old whistler, this sand-piper,
This edge that's greyer than the tide, this mouse
That's gnawing at the timbers of the world,
This, this—Boy, I would meet them all in arms
If I'd a son like you. He would avenge me
When I have withstood for the last time the men
Whose fathers, brothers, sons, and friends I have killed
Upholding Ullad; when the four provinces
Have gathered with the ravens over them.
But I'd need no avenger. You and I
Would scatter them like water from a dish.

70

YOUNG MAN.

We'll stand by one another from this out.
Here is the ring.

CUCHULLAIN.

No, turn and turn about
But my turn is first, because I am the older.
Cliodna embroidered these bird wings, but Fand
Made all these little golden eyes with the hairs
That she had stolen out of Aengus' beard,
And therefore none that has this cloak about him
Is crossed in love. The heavy inlaid brooch
That Buan hammered has a merit too.

(He begins spreading the cloak out on a bench, showing it to the Young Man. Suddenly Concoibar beats with his silver rod on a pillar beside his chair. All turn towards him.)

CONCOBAR.

(In a loud voice.) No more of that, I will not have this friendship.
Cuchullain is my man and I forbid it;
He shall not go unfought for I myself—

71

CUCHULLAIN.

(Seizing Concoibar.) You shall not stir, High King, I'll hold you there.

CONCOBAR.

Witchcraft has maddened you.

THE KINGS.

(Shouting.) Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft.

A KING.

You saw another's head upon his shoulders
All of a sudden, a woman's head, Cuchullain,

Then raised your hand against the King of Ullad.

CUCHULLAIN.

(Letting Concohar go, and looking wildly about him.)

Yes, yes, all of a sudden, all of a sudden.

DAIRE.

Why, there's no witchcraft in it, I myself
Have made a hundred of these sudden friendships
And fought it out next day. But that was folly,
For now that I am old I know it is best
To live in comfort.

72

A KING.

Pull the fool away.

DAIRE.

I'll throw a heel-tap to the one that dies.

CONCOBAR.

Some witch is floating in the air above us.

CUCHULLAIN.

Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft and the power of witchcraft.

(To the Young Man)

Why did you do it? was it Calatin's daughters?
Out, out, I say, for now it's sword on sword.

YOUNG MAN.

But, but, I did not.

CUCHULLAIN.

Out, I say, out, out!
Sword upon sword.

(He goes towards the door at back, followed by Young Man. He turns on the threshold and cries out, looking at the Young Man.)

That hair my hands were drowned in!

(He goes out, followed by Young Man. The other Kings begin to follow them out.)

73

A KING.

I saw him fight with Ferdiad.

SECOND KING.

We'll be too late
They're such a long time getting through the door.

THIRD KING.

Run quicker, quicker.

DAIRE.

I was at the Smith's
When he that was the boy Setanta then—

(Sound of fighting outside.)

THIRD KING.

He will have killed him. They have begun the fight!

(They all go out, leaving the house silent and empty. There is a pause during which one hears the clashing of the swords. Barach and Fintain come in from side door. Barach is dragging Fintain.)

74

BARACH.

You have eaten it, you have eaten it, you have left me nothing but the bones.

FINTAIN.

O, that I should have to endure such a plague.
O, I ache all over. O, I am pulled in pieces.
This is the way you pay me all the good I have done you!

BARACH.

You have eaten it, you have told me lies about a wild dog. Nobody has seen a wild dog about the place this twelve month. Lie there till the Kings come. O, I will tell Concohar and Cuchullain and all the Kings about you!

FINTAIN.

What would have happened to you but for me, and you without your wits. If I did not take care of you what would you do for food and warmth!

75

BARACH.

You take care of me? You stay safe and send me into every kind of danger. You sent me down the cliff for gull's eggs while you warmed your blind eyes in the sun. And then you ate all that were good for food. You left me the eggs that were neither egg nor bird. (The blind man tries to rise. Barach makes him lie down again.)

Keep quiet now till I shut the door. There is some noise outside. There are swords crossing; a high vexing noise so that I can't be listening to myself. (He goes to the big door at the back and shuts it.) Why can't they be quiet, why can't they be quiet. Ah, you would get away, would you? (He follows the blind man who has been crawling along the wall and makes him lie down close to the King's chair.) Lie there, lie there. No, you won't get away. Lie there till the Kings come, I'll tell them all about you. I shall tell it all. How you sit warming yourself, when you have made me light a fire of sticks, while I sit blowing it with my mouth. Do you not always make me take the windy side of the bush when it blows and the rainy side when it rains?

76

FINTAIN.

O good fool, listen to me. Think of the care I have taken of you. I have brought you to many a warm hearth, where there was a good welcome for you, but you would not stay there, you were always wandering about.

BARACH.

The last time you brought me in, it was not I who wandered away, but you that got put out because you took the crubeen out of the pot, when you thought nobody was looking. Keep quiet now, keep quiet till I shut the door. Here is Cuchullain, now you will be beaten. I am going to tell him everything.

77

CUCHULLAIN.

(Comes in and says to the fool) Give me that horn.

(The fool gives him a horn which Cuchullain fills with ale and drinks.)

FINTAIN.

Do not listen to him, listen to me.

CUCHULLAIN.

What are you wrangling over?

BARACH.

He is fat and good for nothing. He has left me the bones and the feathers.

CUCHULLAIN.

What feathers?

BARACH.

I left him turning a fowl at the fire. He ate it all. He left me nothing but the bones and feathers.

FINTAIN.

Do not believe him. You do not know how vain this fool is. I gave him the feathers, because I thought he would like nothing so well.

(Barach is sitting on a bench playing with a heap of feathers which he has taken out of the breast of his coat.)

78

BARACH.

(Singing) When you were an acorn on the tree top—

FINTAIN.

Where would he be but for me? I must be always thinking, thinking to get food for the two of us, and when we've got it, if the moon's at the full or the tide on the turn, he'll leave the rabbit in its snare till it is full of maggots, or let the trout slip through his hands back into the water.

BARACH.

(Singing) When you were an acorn on the tree top,
Then was I an eagle cock;
Now that you are a withered old block,
Still am I an eagle cock!

FINTAIN.

Listen to him now! That's the sort of talk I have to put up with day out day in. (The fool is putting the feathers into his hair. Cuchullain takes a handful of feathers out of the heap and out of the fool's hair and begins to wipe the blood from his sword with them.)

BARACH.

He has taken my feathers to wipe his sword. It is blood that he is wiping from his sword!

FINTAIN.

Whose blood? Whose blood?

CUCHULLAIN.

That young champion's.

FINTAIN.

He that came out of Aoife's country?

CUCHULLAIN.

The Kings are standing round his body.

FINTAIN.

Did he fight long?

CUCHULLAIN.

He thought to have saved himself with witchcraft.

BARACH.

That blind man there said he would kill you. He came from Aoife's country to kill you. That blind man said they had taught him every kind of weapon that he might do it. But I always knew that you would kill him.

CUCHULLAIN.

(To the blind man.) You knew him, then?

FINTAIN.

I saw him when I had my eyes, in Aoife's country.

CUCHULLAIN.

You were in Aoife's country?

FINTAIN.

I knew him and his mother there.

CUCHULLAIN.

He was about to speak of her when he died.

FINTAIN.

He was a Queen's son.

81

CUCHULLAIN.

What Queen, what Queen? (He seizes the blind man.)
Was it Scathach? There were many Queens.
All the rulers there were Queens.

FINTAIN.

No, not Scathach.

CUCHULLAIN.

It was Uathach then. Speak, speak!

FINTAIN.

I cannot speak, you are clutching me too tightly. (Cuchullain lets him go.)
I cannot remember who it was. I am not certain. It was some Queen.

BARACH.

He said a while ago that the young man was Aoife's son.

CUCHULLAIN.

She? No, no, she had no son when I was there.

82

BARACH.

That blind man there said that she owned him for her son.

CUCHULLAIN.

I had rather he had been some other woman's son. What father had he? A soldier out of Alba? She was an amorous woman, a proud pale amorous woman.

FINTAIN.

None knew whose son he was.

CUCHULLAIN.

None knew? Did you know, old listener at doors?

FINTAIN.

No, no, I knew nothing.

BARACH.

He said a while ago that he heard Aoife boast that she'd never but the one lover, and he the only man that had overcome her in battle. (A pause.)

83

FINTAIN.

Somebody is trembling. Why are you trembling, fool? the bench is shaking, why are you trembling? Is Cuchullain going to hurt us? It was not I who told you, Cuchullain.

BARACH.

It is Cuchullain who is trembling. He is shaking the bench with his knees.

CUCHULLAIN.

He was my son, and I have killed my son.

(A pause.)

'Twas they that did it, the pale windy people,
Where, where, where? My sword against the thunder.
But no, for they have always been my friends;
And though they love to blow a smoking coal
Till it's all flame, the wars they blow aflame
Are full of glory, and heart uplifting pride,
And not like this; the wars they love awaken
Old fingers and the sleepy strings of harps.
Who did it then? Are you afraid; speak out,
For I have put you under my protection
And will reward you well. Dubthach the Chafer.
He had an old grudge. No, for he is with Maeve.
Laegaire did it. Why do you not speak?
What is this house?

(A pause.)

Now I remember all.

FINTAIN.

He will kill us. O, I am afraid!

CUCHULLAIN.

(Who is before Concoabar's chair.)

'Twas you who did it, you who sat up there
With that old branch of silver, like a magpie
Nursing a stolen spoon. Magpie, Magpie,
A maggot that is eating up the earth!

(Begins hacking at the chair with his sword.)

No, but a magpie for he's flown away.
Where did he fly to?

FINTAIN.

He is outside the door.

CUCHULLAIN.

Outside the door?

FINTAIN.

He is under Baile's yew-tree.

CUCHULLAIN.

Concoabar, Concoabar, the sword into your heart.

(He goes out. A pause. The fool goes to the great door at back and looks

out after him.)

BARACH.

He is going up to King Concobar; they are all under the tree. No, no, he is standing still. There is a great wave going to break and he is looking at it. Ah! now he is running down to the sea, but he is holding up his sword as if he were going into a fight. (A pause.) Well struck, well struck!

FINTAIN.

What is he doing now?

BARACH.

O! he is fighting the waves.

86

FINTAIN.

He sees King Concobar's crown on every one of them.

BARACH.

There, he has struck at a big one. He has struck the crown off it, he has made the foam fly. There again another big one. (Shouting without.)

FINTAIN.

Where are the Kings? What are the Kings doing?

BARACH.

They are shouting and running down to the shore, and the people are running out of the houses, they are all running.

FINTAIN.

You say they are running out of the houses, there will be nobody left in the houses. Listen, fool.

BARACH.

There, he is down! He is up again! He is going out into the deep water.

87

FINTAIN.

Come here, fool; come here, I say.

BARACH.

(Coming towards him but looking backward towards the door.) What is it?

FINTAIN.

There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way, come quickly; the ovens will be full; we will put our hands into the ovens. (They go out.)

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