



IN THE SEVEN WOODS

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

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IN THE SEVEN WOODS

BEING POEMS CHIEFLY OF THE
IRISH HEROIC AGE

BY
W. B. YEATS

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In The Seven Woods By W. B. Yeats.

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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.'

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.'

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.'

COMMENT BY YEATS

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.

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 Dundalgan. 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.

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.)

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.

FINTAIN.

Lead me to it. (He mutters while the fool is leading him.) That is what the High King Concohar 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

Concobar 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 Concobar'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 the ale vat?

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?

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.

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 in-to 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?

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.

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 for get all about it till you had eaten it up.

FINTAIN.

No, there is plenty for us both.

BARACH.

Come with me where it is.

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 out side 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.

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.

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.)

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.

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 Concoabar;
 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.

(Concoabar, 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.

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.

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.

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.)

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.

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.

(Concobar 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. Concobar rises and speaks standing.)

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.

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.

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.

(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. (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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

YOUNG MAN.

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.

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 Concoabar 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--

CUCHULLAIN.

(Seizing Concoabar.) 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.

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.)

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.

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.

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.)

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 Concobar'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.

Concobar, Concobar, 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.

FINTAIN.

He sees King Concohar'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.

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.)
