

The Feast Of Bricriu

translated by George Henderson

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Here beginneth the Feast of Bricriu, and the Champion's Portion of Emain, and the Ulster Women's War-of-Words, and the Hosting of the Men of Ulster to Cruachan, and the Champion's Wager in Emain.

Chapter I

Bricriu of the Evil Tongue held a great feast for Conchobar mac Nessa and for all the Ultonians. The preparation of the feast took a whole year. For the entertainment of the guests a spacious house was built by him. He erected it in Dun Rudraige after the likeness [of the palace] of the Red Branch in Emain. Yet it surpassed the buildings of that period entirely for material and for artistic design, for beauty of architecture its pillars and frontings splendid and costly, its carving and lintel-work famed for magnificence.

The House was made on this wise: on the plan of Tara's Mead-Hall, having nine compartments from fire to wall, each fronting of bronze thirty feet high, overlaid with gold. In the fore part of the palace a royal couch was erected for Conchobar high above those of the whole house. It was set with carbuncles and other precious stones which shone with a lustre of gold and of silver, radiant with every hue, making night like unto day. Around it were placed the twelve couches of the twelve heroes of Ulster. The nature of the workmanship was on a par with the material of the edifice. It took a waggon team to carry each beam, and the strength of seven Ulster men to fix each pole, while thirty of the chief artificers of Erin were employed on its erection and arrangement.

Then a balcony was made by Bricriu on a level with the couch of Conchobar [and as high as those] of the heroes of valour. The decorations of its fittings were magnificent. Windows of glass were placed on each side of it, and one of these was above Bricriu's couch, so that he could view the hall from his seat, as he knew the Ulster men would not suffer him within.

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When Bricriu had finished building the hall and balcony, supplying it both with quilts and blankets, beds and pillows, providing meat and drink, so that nothing was lacking, neither furnishings nor food, he straightway went to Emain to meet Conchobar and the nobles of Ulster.

It fell upon a day there was in Emain a gathering of the Ulster men. He was anon made welcome, and was seated by the shoulder of Conchobar. Bricriu addressed himself to him as well as to the body of the Ulster men. "Come with me," quoth Bricriu, "to partake of a banquet with me." "Gladly," rejoined Conchobar, "if that please the men of Ulster." Fergus mac Roig and the nobles of Ulster also made answer:

"No; for if we go our dead will outnumber our living, when Bricriu has incensed us against each other."

"If ye come not, worse shall ye fare," quoth Bricriu. "What then," asked Conchobar, "if the Ulster men go not with thee?" "I will stir up strife," quoth Bricriu, "between the kings, the leaders, the heroes of valour, and the yeomen, till they slay one another, man for man, if they do not come with me to share my feast." "That we shall not do to please thee," quoth Conchobar. "I will stir up enmity between father and son so that it will come to mutual slaughter. If I do not succeed in doing so, I will make a quarrel between mother and daughter. If that does not succeed, I will set each of the Ulster women at variance, so that they come to deadly blows till their breasts become loathsome and putrid."

"Sure 'tis better to come," quoth Fergus. "Do ye straightway take counsel with the chief Ultonians," said Sencha, son of Ailill. "Unless we take counsel against this Bricriu, mischief will be the consequence," quoth Conchobar.

Thereupon all the Ulster nobles assembled in council. In discussing the matter Sencha counselled them thus: "Take hostages from Bricriu, since ye have to go with him, and set eight swordsmen about him so as to compel him to retire from the house as soon as he has laid out the feast." Furbaide Ferbenn, son of Conchobar, brought Bricriu reply, and showed him the whole matter. "It is happily arranged," quoth Bricriu. The men of Ulster straightway set out from Emain, host, battalion and company, under king, chieftain and leader. Excellent and admirable the march of the brave and valiant heroes to the palace.

Chapter II

The hostages of the braves had gone security on his behalf, and Bricriu accordingly bethought him how he should manage to set the Ulster men at variance. His deliberation and self-scrutiny being ended, he betook himself to the company of Loigaire the Triumphant, son of Connad mac Illnach. "Hail now, Loigaire the Triumphant, thou mighty mallet of Bregia, thou hot hammer of Meath, flame-red thunderbolt, thou victorious warrior of Ulster, what hinders the championship of Emain being thine alway?" "If I so choose, it shall be mine," quoth Loigaire. "Be thine the sovranty of the braves of Erin," quoth Bricriu, "if only thou act as I advise." "I will indeed," quoth Loigaire.

"Sooth, if the champion's portion of my house be thine, the championship of Emain is thine for ever. The champion's portion of my house is worth contesting, for it is not the portion of a fool's house," quoth Bricriu. "Belonging to it is a caldron full of generous wine, with room enough for three of the valiant braves of Ulster; furthermore, a seven-year-old boar; nought has entered its lips since it was little save fresh milk and fine meal in springtime, curds and sweet milk in summer, the kernel of nuts and wheat in autumn, beef and broth in winter; a cow-lord full seven-year-old; since it was a little calf neither heather nor twig-tops have entered its lips, nought but sweet milk and herbs, meadow hay and corn. [Add to this] fivescore cakes of wheat, cooked in honey withal. Five-and-twenty bushels, that is what was supplied for these fivescore cakes four cakes from each bushel. Such is the champion's portion of my house. And since thou art the best hero among the men of Ulster, it is but just to give it thee, and I so wish it. By the end of the day, when the feast is spread out, let thy charioteer get up, and it is to him the champion's portion will be given." "Among them shall be dead men if it is not done so," quoth

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Loigaire. Bricriu laughed at that, for it liked him well.

When he had done inciting Loigaire the Triumphant to enmity, Bricriu betook himself into the company of Conall the Victorious. "Hail to thee, Conall the Victorious, thou art the hero of victories and of combats; great are the victories thou hast already scored over the heroes of Ulster. By the time the Ulster men go into foreign bounds thou art a distance of three days and three nights in advance over many a ford; thou protectest their rear when returning, so that [an assailant] may not spring past thee, nor through thee nor over thee; what then should hinder the champion's portion of Emain being thine alway?" Though great his treachery with regard to Loigaire, he showed twice as much in the case of Conall the Victorious.

When he had satisfied himself with inciting Conall the Victorious to quarrel, he hied to the presence of Cuchulainn. "Hail to thee, Cuchulainn, thou victor of Bregia (ie. Bray), thou bright banner of the Liffey, darling of Emain, belov'd of wives and of maidens, for thee to-day Cuchulainn is no nickname, for thou art the champion of the Ulster men, thou wardest off their great feuds and frays, thou seekest justice for each man of them; thou attainest alone to what all the Ulster men fail in; all the men of Ulster acknowledge thy bravery, thy valour and thine achievements surpassing theirs. What meaneth therefore thy leaving of the champion's portion for some one else of the men of Ulster, since no one of the men of Erin is capable of contesting it against thee?"

"By the god of my tribe," quoth Cuchulainn, "his head shall he lose whoso comes to contest it with me." Thereafter Bricriu severed himself from them and followed the host as if no contention had been made among the heroes.

Whereupon they entered the palace, and each one occupied his couch therein, king, prince, noble, yeoman, and young brave. The half of the palace was set apart for Conchobar and his retinue of valiant Ulster heroes; the other half [was reserved] for the ladies of Ulster attending on Mugan, daughter of Eochaid Fedlech, wife of King Conchobar. The following were those who attended upon Conchobar in the fore-part of the palace, namely, Fergus mac Roig, Celtchar son of Uthechar, Eogan son of Durthact, and the two sons of the king, namely, Fiacha and Flaachaig, Fergna son of Findchoim, Fergus son of Leti, Cuscraid the-stuttering-of-Macha, son of Conchobar, Sencha son of Ailill, the three sons of Fiachach, namely, Rus and Dare and Imchad, Muinremur son of Geirrgind, Errge Echbel, Amorgene son of Ecit, Mend son of Salchad, Dubtach Doel Ulad, Feradach Find Fectnach, Fedelmid mac Ilair Chetaig, Furbaide Ferbend, Rochad son of Fathemon, Loigaire (Leary) the Triumphant, Conall the Victorious, Cuchulainn, Connad son of Mornai, Erc son of Fedelmid, Illand son of Fergus, Fintan son of Nial, Ceternd son of Fintan, Factna son of Sencad, Conla the False, Ailill the Honey-tongued, Bricriu himself, the chief Ultonian warriors, with the body of youths and artistes.

While the feast was being spread for them, the musicians and players performed. The moment Bricriu spread the feast with its savouries, he was ordered by the hostages to leave the hall. They straightway got up with drawn swords in their hands to expel him.

Whereupon Bricriu and his followers went out to the balcony. Arrived at the threshold of the palace, he called out, "That Champion's Portion, such as it is, is not the portion of a fool's house; do ye give it to the Ulster hero ye prefer for valour." He thereupon left them.

Anon the spencers rose up to serve the food. The charioteer of Loigaire the Triumphant, to wit, Sedlang mac Rianganbra, then rose up and said to the distributors: "Do ye assign to Loigaire the Triumphant the Champion's Portion which is by you, for he alone is entitled to it before the other young braves of Ulster." Then Id mac Rianganbra, charioteer to Conall the Victorious, got up and spake to the like effect.

And Loig mac Rianganbra spake thus: "Do ye bring that to Cuchulainn; it is no disgrace for all the Ulster men to give it to him; it is he who is most valiant among you." "That's not true," quoth Conall the Victorious and Loigaire the Triumphant.

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They then got up upon the floor and donned their shields and seized their swords. At one another they hewed till the half of the palace was an atmosphere of fire with the [clash of] sword– and spear–edge, the other half one white sheet from the enamel of the shields. Great alarm gat hold upon the palace; the valiant heroes shook; Conchobar himself and Fergus mac Roig got furious on seeing the injury and the injustice of two men surrounding one, namely, Conall the Victorious and Loigaire the Triumphant attacking Cuchulainn. There was no one among the Ultonians who dared separate them till Sencha spake to Conchobar: "Part the men," quoth he. [For at that period, among the Ultonians, Conchobar was a god upon earth.] Thereupon Conchobar and Fergus intervened, [the combatants] immediately let drop their hands to their sides. "Execute my wish," quoth Sencha. "Your will shall be obeyed," they responded. "My wish, then," quoth Sencha, "is to–night to divide the Champion's Portion there among all the host, and after that to decide with reference to it according to the will of Ailill mac Magach, for it is accounted unlucky among the men of Ulster to close this assembly unless the matter be adjudged in Cruachan." The feasting was then resumed; they made a circle round the fire and got 'jovial' and made merry.

Chapter III

Bricriu, however, and his queen were in their sollar. From his couch the condition of the palace was observable to him, and how things were going on withal. He exercised his mind as to how he should contrive to get the women to quarrel as he had likewise incited the men.

When Bricriu had done examining his mind, it just chanced as he could have wished that Fedelm–of–the–fresh–heart came from the palace with fifty women in her train, in mood hilarious. Bricriu observed her coming past him. "Hail to thee to–night, wife of Loigaire the Triumphant!

Fedelm–of–the–fresh–heart is no nickname for thee with respect to thine excellency of form and of wisdom and of lineage. Conchobar, king of a province of Erin, is thy father, Loigaire the Triumphant thy husband; I should deem it but small honour to thee that any of the Ulster women should take precedence of thee in entering the banqueting hall; only at thy heel should all Ultonian women tread. If thou comest first into the hall to–night, the sovranity of queenship shalt thou enjoy for ever over all the ladies of Ulster." Fedelm anon takes a leap over three ridges from the hall.

Thereafter came Lendabair, daughter of Eogan mac Derthacht, wife of Conall the Victorious. Bricriu addressed her and spake: "Hail to thee, Lendabair; for thee that is no nickname; thou art the darling and pet of all mankind on account of thy splendour and of thy lustre. As far as thy spouse hath surpassed all the heroes of mankind in valour and in comeliness, so far hast thou distinguished thyself above the women of Ulster." Though great the deceit he applied in the case of Fedelm, he applied twice as much in the case of Lendabair.

Emer came out anon with half–a–hundred women [in her train].

"Greeting and hail to thee, Emer, daughter of Forgall Manach (F. the tricky or shifty), wife of the best wight in Erin! Emer of the Fair Hair is for thee no nickname; Erin's kings and princes contend for thee in jealous rivalry. As the sun surpasseth the stars of heaven, so far dost thou outshine the women of the whole world in form and shape and lineage, in youth and beauty and elegance, in good name and wisdom and address." Though great his deceit in the case of the other ladies, in that of Emer he applied thrice as much.

The three companies thereupon went out till they met at one spot, to wit, three ridges from the hall. None of them wot that Bricriu had incited them one against another. To the hall they straightway return. Even and graceful and easy their carriage on the first ridge; scarcely did one of them raise a foot before the other. But on the ridge following, their steps were shorter and quicker. Moreover, on the ridge next the house it was with difficulty each kept up with the other; so they raised their robes to the rounds of their limbs to compete in the attempt to go first

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into the hall. For what Bricriu said to each of them regarding the other was, that whosoever should first enter should be queen of the whole province. The amount of confusion then occasioned by the competition to enter the hall first was as it were the noise of fifty chariots approaching. The whole palace shook and the warriors sprang to their arms and made essay to kill one another within.

"Stay," quoth Sencha, "they are not enemies who have come; it is Bricriu who has set a-quarrelling the women who have gone out. By the god of my tribe, unless the hall be closed against them our dead will outnumber our living." Thereupon the doorkeepers close the doors.

Emer, daughter of Forgall the Wily, wife of Cuchulainn, by reason of her speed, outran the others and put her back against the door, and straightway called upon the doorkeepers ere the other ladies [came], so that the men within got up, each of them to open for his own wife that she might be the first to come within. "Bad [look-out] to-night," quoth Conchobar. He struck the silver sceptre that was in his hand against the bronze pillar of the couch and the folks gat seated. "Stay," quoth Sencha, "'tis not a warfare of arms that shall be held here; it will be a warfare of words." Each woman went out under the protection of her spouse, and then followed the Ulster women's war-of-words.

The Women's War of Words.

Fedelm of the fresh heart, wife of Loigaire the Triumphant, made speech:

"Born of a mother in freedom, one in rank and in race mine elders; Sprung from loins that are royal, in the beauty of peerless breeding; Lovely in form I am reckoned, and noted for figure and comely, Fostered in warrior virtues, in the sphere of goodly demeanour:

Loigaire's hand, all-noble, what triumphs it scoreth for Ulster!

Ulster's marches from foemen, ever equal in strength, ever hostile

All by himself were they holden: from wounds a defence and protection, Loigair(e), more famous than heroes, in number of victories greater, Why should not Fedelm the lovely step first in the mead-hall so festive, Shapelier than all other women, triumphant and jealous of conquest?"

Thereupon spake Lendabair, daughter of Eogan mac Derthacht, wife of Conall Cernach, son of Amorgen:

"Mine is a mien too of beauty, of reason, with grace of deportment, Finely and fairly stepping in front of the women of Ulster, See me step to the mead-hall, my spouse and my darling the Conall.

Big is his shield and triumphant, majestic his gait and commanding, Up to the spears of the conflict, in front of them all as he strideth:

Back to me comes he proudly, with heads in his hands as his trophies; Swords he getteth together for the clashing in conflict of Ulster; Guardian of every ford-way, he destroyeth them too at his pleasure; Fords he defendeth from foemen, the wrongful attack he avengeth, Holdeth himself as a hero upon whom shall be raised a tombstone:

Son of Amorgen noble, his is the courage that speaketh; Many the arts of the Conall and therefore he leadeth the heroes.

Lendabair, great is her glory, in every one's eye is her splendour; Why not the first when she enters the hall of a king so queenly?"

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Emer, daughter of Forgall the tricky, wife of Cuchulainn, made speech:

I am the standard of women, in figure, in grace and in wisdom; None mine equal in beauty, for I am a picture of graces.

Mien full noble and goodly, mine eye like a jewel that flasheth; Figure, or grace, or beauty, or wisdom, or bounty, or chasteness, Joy of sense, or of loving, unto mine has never been likened.

Sighing for me is Ultonia, a nut of the heart I am clearly

(Now were I welcoming wanton, no husband were yours to-morrow.) My spouse is the hound of Culann, and not a hound that is feeble; Blood from his spear is spurting, with life-blood his sword is dripping; Finely his body is fashioned, but his skin is gaping with gashes, Wounds on his thigh there are many, but nobly his eye looks westward; Bright is the dome he supporteth and ever red are his eyes, Red are the frames of his chariot, and red are also the cushions; Fighting from ears of horses and over the breaths of men-folk, Springing in air like a salmon when he springeth the spring of the heroes, Rarest of feats he performeth, the leap that is birdlike he leapeth, Bounding o'er pools of water, he performeth the feat cless nonbair; Battles of bloody battalions, the world's proud armies he heweth, Beating down kings in their fury, mowing the hosts of the foemen.

Others to cron I liken, shamming the travail of women, Ulster's precious heroes compared with my spouse Cuchulainn.

He unto blood may be likened, to blood that is clear and noble, They to the scum and the garbage, as cron their value I reckon; Shackled and shaped like cattle, as kine and oxen and horses, Thus did the men in the hall behave on having heard the laudatory addresses of the women to wit, Loigaire and Conall; each sprang into his hero's light, and broke a stave of the palace at a like level with themselves, so that in this way their wives came in. Moreover, Cuchulainn upheaved the palace just over against his bed, till the stars of heaven were to be seen from underneath the wattle. By that opening came his own wife with half a hundred women attendants in her train, as also half a hundred in waiting upon the other twain. Other ladies could not be compared with Emer, while no one at all was to be likened unto her spouse. Thereupon Cuchulainn let the palace down till seven feet of the wattle entered the ground; the whole dun shook, and Bricriu's balcony was laid flat to the earth, in such wise that Bricriu and his queen toppled down till they fell into the fosse in the middle of the courtyard among the dogs. "Woe is me," cried Bricriu, as he hastily got up, "enemies have come into the palace." He took a turn round and perceived how it was lop-sided and inclined entirely to one side. He wrung his hands, then betook himself within, so bespattered that none of the Ulster folk could recognise him. From his manner of speech only did they do so.

Then from off the floor of the house Bricriu made speech: "Alas! that I have prepared you a feast, O Ultonians. My house is more to me than all my other possessions. Upon you, therefore, it is geis to drink, or to eat, or to sleep till ye leave my house as ye found it on your arrival."

Thereupon all the valiant Ulstermen went out of the house and tried to tug it, but they did not raise it so much as that even the wind could pass between it and the earth. That matter was a difficulty for the Ulstermen.

"I have no suggestion for you," quoth Sencha, "save that ye entreat of him who has left it lop-sided to set it upright."

Whereupon the men of Ulster told Cuchulainn to restore the house to its upright position, and Bricriu made speech withal: "Oh king of the heroes of Erin, if thou set it not straight and erect, none in the world can do so." All the Ulstermen then entreated of Cuchulainn to solve the matter. That the banqueters might not be lacking for food or for ale, Cuchulainn got up and anon tried to lift the house at a tug and failed. A distortion thereupon gat hold of him, whilst a drop of blood was at the root of each single hair, and he absorbed his hair into his head, so

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that, looked on from above, his dark–yellow curls seemed as if they had been shorn by scissors, and taking upon him the motion of a millstone he strained himself till a warrior's foot could find room between each pair of ribs.

His natural resources and fiery vigour returned to him, and he then heaved the house aloft and set it so that it reached its former level.

Thereafter the consumption of the feast was pleasant to them, with the kings and the chieftains on the one side round about Conchobar the illustrious, the noble, high–king of Ulster. Moreover, the queens were on the other side: Mugain Aitenaetrech, daughter of Eochaid Fedlech, wife of Conchobar mac Nessa, Fedelm of the nine–shapes, daughter of Conchobar, nine "shapes" she could assume, and each shape more lovely than the other; also Fedelm of the Fair Hair, another daughter of Conchobar, wife of Loigaire the Triumphant; Findbec, daughter of Eochaid, wife of Cethirnd, son of Fintan; Brltg Brethach, wife of Celtchar, son of Uthichar; Findige, daughter of Eochaid, wife of Eogan mac Durthacht; Findchaem, daughter of Cathbad, wife of Amargin of the Iron Jaw, and Derborcall (Devorgilla), wife of Lugad of the Red Stripes, son of Tri Find Emna; Emer of the Fair Hair, daughter of Forcall Manach, wife of Cuchulainn, son of Sualdam; Lendabair, daughter of Eogan mac Durthacht, wife of Conall the Victorious; Niab, daughter of Celtchar mac Uthechar, wife of Cormac Condlongus, son of Conchobar. It would be overmuch to recount and to declare who of noble dames besides.

Chapter V

Once more the hall became a babel of words, the women lauding their men. Then essayed Conall and Loigaire and Cuchulainn to stir up dissension. Sencha, son of Ailill, got up and shook his sceptre. To him the Ultonians gave ear, and then to restrain the ladies he made speech:

"I restrain ye, ladies of Ulster, noble in name and in glory; Cease ye your words of contention, lest the mien of men folk be paler, In keenness of conflict striving, amid vainglorious combat; Through guile of women, meseemeth, men's shields are wont to be splintered, In frays the hosts of the heroes are oft contending in anger; To woman's whims it is owing this use and wont among men folk

They bruise what there's no upbiding, and attack what they have not attained to:

Heroines gallant and glorious, and noble ones, I restrain ye."

Then Emer spake and made answer:

"Fitting for me, meseemeth, to speak as the wife of a hero Who combineth in natural union graces of mind and of body, Since ever his teaching was finished and learning to him came easy."

None will be found who will equal his age, his growth, and his splendour:

Of a line that is long descended, he speaketh with grace and with order; A brave and a valiant hero, like a fury he fights in the tumult, Dexterous of aim and so agile, and quick and sure at the hunting; And find ye a man among men folk, a mould that may match with Cuchulainn!"

"Sooth, lady," quoth Conall the Victorious, "let that famous fellow (lit. gillie of feats) come here that we may inquire of him." "No," quoth Cuchulainn. "I am to–day weary and done up. I will not hold a duel till after I have had food and sleep." In sooth that was really so, inasmuch as it was the day on which he had fallen in with [his steed] the Grey of Macha by the side of the Grey Linn at Sliav Fuait. On its having come out of the loch, Cuchulainn crept up to it and put his two hands around the steed's neck till they twain got a–wrestling, and on that wise they made a circuit of Erin, until on that night Cuchulainn came chasing with his steed (lit. driving horse) to

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Emain. He got the Black Sainglenn in like wise from Lough Dubh Sainglenn.

It was then Cuchulainn spake thus: "To-day have the Grey and I visited the great plains of Erin, namely, Bregia of Meath, the seashore marsh of Muirthemne Macha, Moy Medba, Currech Cleitech Cerna, Lia of Linn Locharn, Fea Femen Fergna, Urros Domnand, Ros Roigne (? ...) Eo. And to sleep and to eat it liketh me better than everything. By the god of my folk I swear 'twould be but fun and frolic for me to fight a duel had I my fill of food and of sleep." ["Well," quoth Bricriu, "this has lasted long enough. The Feast of Bricriu has to be celebrated; let meat and drink (lit. food and ale) be got at once, and let the women's warfare be put a stop to till the feast be over." This was done, and it was a pleasant (time) for them till the end of three days and three nights.]

Chapter VI

Again it was their hap to quarrel about the Champion's Portion.

Conchobar with the nobles of Ulster interposed with the view of settling upon the adjudication of the heroes. "Go to Curoi mac Dairi, the man who will undertake to intervene," quoth Conchobar. It was then he spake:

"Entreat ye of him the hardy; in the rede which he dealeth for all men Curoi mac Dairi surpasseth; and true the judgment he giveth.

He is fair, not given to falsehood, but good and a lover of justice, Noble in mind and a guest-friend, skilful of hand like a hero, And like to a high king in leading; he will adjudge ye truly.

To ask him demandeth courage."

Chapter VII

"I accept that then," quoth Cuchulainn. "I agree (lit. I allow it) then," quoth Loigaire. "Let us go then," quoth Conall the Victorious.

"Let horses be brought us and thy chariot yoked, O Conall," quoth Cuchulainn. "Woe is me!" cried Conall. "Every one," quoth Cuchulainn, "knows well the clumsiness of thy horses and the unsteadiness of thy going and of thy turnout; thy chariot's movement is most heavy; each of the two wheels raiseth turf every way thy big chariot careers, so that for the space of a year there is a well-marked track easily recognised by the warriors of Ulster."

"Dost thou hear that, Loigaire?" said Conall. "Woe is me," quoth Loigaire. "But I am not to blame or to reproach. I am nimble at crossing fords, and more, to breast the storm of spears, outstripping the warriors of Ulster. Put not on me the precedence of kings till I practise faring before kings and champions against single chariots in strait and difficult places, in woods and on confines, till the champion of a single chariot essay not to career before me."

Thereupon Loigaire had his chariot yoked and he leapt therein.

He drove over the Plain-of-the-Two-Forks, over the Gap-of-the-Watch, over the Ford of Carpat Fergus, over the Ford-of-the-Morrigan to the Rowan Meadow of the Two Oxen in the Fews of Armagh (Clithar Fidbaidi), by the Meeting of the Four Ways past Dundalk, across Mag Slicech, westwards to the slope of Bregia. A dim, dark, heavy mist overtook him, confusing him in such wise that it was impossible for him to fare farther on the way. "Let us stay here," quoth Loigaire to his charioteer, until the mist clear up." Loigaire alighted from his chariot, and his gillie put the horses into the meadow that was near at hand.

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While there, the gillie saw a huge giant approaching him. Not beautiful his appearance: broad (of shoulder) and fat of mouth, with sack eyes and a bristly face; ugly, wrinkled, with bushy eyebrows; hideous and horrible and strong; stubborn, violent and haughty; fat and puffing; with big sinews and strong forearm, bold and audacious and uncouth. A shorn black patch of hair on him, a dun covering about him, a tunic over it to the ball of his rump; on his feet old tattered brogues, on his back a ponderous club like unto the wheel-shaft of a mill.

"Whose horses are these, gillie?" he asked, as he gazed furiously at him. "The horses of Loigaire the Triumphant." "Yes! a fine fellow he!"

And as he thus spake he brought down his club on the gillie and gave him a blow from top to toe. The gillie gave a cry, whereupon Loigaire came up. "What is this you are doing to the lad?" asked Loigaire. "'Tis by way of penalty for damage to the meadow," quoth the giant. "I will come myself then," quoth Loigaire. They struggle together ... Loigaire anon fled till he reached Emain, after having left his horses and gillie and arms.

Not long thereafter Conall the Victorious took the same way and arrived at the plain where the druidical mist overtook Loigaire.

The like hideous black, dark cloud overtook Conall the Victorious, so that he was unable to see either heaven or earth. Conall thereon leapt out and the gillie unharnessed the horses in the same meadow. Not long thereafter he saw the same giant [coming] towards him. He asked him whose servant he was. "I am servant to Conall the Victorious," he quoth.

"A good man he," quoth the giant, as he raised his hands till they gave a blow to the gillie from top to toe. The fellow yelled. Anon came Conall.

He and the giant got to close quarters. Stronger were the wrestling turns of the giant. Conall fled, as Loigaire had done, having left behind his charioteer and his horses and came to Emain.

Cuchulainn then went by the same way till he came to the same stead. The like dark mist overtook him as fell upon the twain preceding.

Cuchulainn sprang down, and Laig brought the horses into the meadow.

He had not long to wait till he saw the same man coming towards him.

The giant asked him whose servant he was. "Servant (companion) to Cuchulainn." "A good man he," quoth the giant, plying him with the club. Laig yelled. Anon Cuchulainn arrived. He and the giant came to close quarters and either pounded the other. The giant got worsted. He forfeited horses and charioteer, and Cuchulainn brought along with him his fellows' horses, charioteers and accoutrements, till he reached Emain in triumph. He gave them to their rightful owners.

"Thine is the Champion's Portion," quoth Bricriu to Cuchulainn.

"Well I wot from your deeds ye are not a whit on a par with Cuchulainn." "Not true, Bricriu," quoth they, "for we know it is one of his friends from Faery that came to him to play us mischief and deal with us perforce as to the championship. We shall not forego our claim on that account." The men of Ulster, with Conchobar and Fergus, failed to effect a settlement. They sent them either to go to Curoi mac Dairi, or else to go to Cruachan, to Ailill and to Meve.

Chapter VIII

[Thus to the one stead the men of Ulster assembled in council concerning the heroes. The three alike haughty and overweening. The conclusion the Ulster nobles in Conchobar's following arrived at was, to accompany the heroes and have the difficulty adjudged at the abode of Ailill mac Magach and of Meve of Cruachan Ai] with reference to the Champion's Portion and the mutual rivalry of the women. Fine and lovely and majestic the march of the Ultonians to Cruachan. Cuchulainn, however, remained behind the host entertaining the Ulster ladies, [performing] nine feats with apples, nine with javelins and nine with knives, in such wise that one did not interfere with the other.

Loig mac Riangabra then went to speak with him to the feat—stead and said: "You sorry simpleton (squinter?), your valour and bravery have passed away, the Champion's Portion has gone from ye; the Ultonians have reached Cruachan long since." "Forsooth we have not at all perceived it, my Loig. Yoke us the chariot then," quoth Cuchulainn.

Loig accordingly yoked it and off they started on their march. By that time the Ulstermen had reached Magh Breg. Cuchulainn having been incited by his charioteer, marched with such speed from Dun Rudraige, the Grey of Macha and the Black Sainglenn racing in such wise with his chariot across the whole province of Conchobar, across Sliav Fuait (the country around the Fews) and across the Plain of Bregia, that the third chariot arrived first in Cruachan.

In virtue then of the swiftness and the impetuous speed with which all the valiant Ultonians reached Cruachan under [the lead of] Conchobar and the body of princes, a great shaking seized Cruachan, till the war—arms fell from the partitions to the ground, seizing likewise the entire host of the hold, till the men in the royal keep were like unto rushes in a stream. Meve thereupon spake: "Since the day I took up home in Cruachan I have not until now heard thunder, there being no clouds."

Thereupon Findabair, daughter of Ailill and of Meve, went to the sollar over the high porch of the hold. "Mother dear," she said, "I see a chariot coming along the plain." "Describe it," quoth Meve, "its form, appearance and style; the colour of the horses; how the hero looks and how the chariot courses."

"Truly, I see," quoth Findabair, "the two horses that are in the chariot. Two fiery dappled greys, alike in colour, shape and excellence, alike in speed and swiftness, prancing side by side. Ears pricked, head erect, of high mettle and strangely bounding pace. Nostril fine, mane flowing, forehead broad, full dappled; full slim of girth and broad of chest, manes and tails curled, they career along. A chariot of fine wood with wicker—work, having two black revolving wheels [and two beautiful pliant reins.] Its ferts hard and straight as a sword. Its body of wicker—work new and freshly polished, its curved yoke silver—mounted.

Two rich yellow looped reins. In the chariot a fair man with long curling hair; his tresses tri—coloured: brown at the skin, blood—red at the middle, as a diadem of yellow gold the hair at the tips. Three halos encircle his upturned head, each merging into the other. About him a soft crimson tunic, having five stripes of glittering gold. A shield spotted and indented, with a bright edge of bronze. A barbed five—pronged javelin flames at his wrist. An awning of the rare plumage of birds over his chariot's frame."

"We recognise that man," quoth Meve, "from his description."

"Compeer of kings, an old disposer of conquest, A fury of war, a fire of judgment, A flame of vengeance; in mien a hero, In face a champion, in heart a dragon; The long knife of proud victories which will hew us to pieces; The all—noble, red—handed Loigaire; His the vigour that cuts the leek with the sword—edge

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The back–stroke of the wave to the land."

"By the god of my people," quoth Meve, "I swear if it be with fury of hostile feeling Loigaire the Triumphant comes to us, that like as leeks are cut to the ground by a sharp knife, such will be the nicety of the slaughter he will inflict on us, whatever our number at Cruachan Ai, unless his glowing fury, wrath and high–dudgeon are guarded against and assuaged in accordance with his very wish."

"Mother dear," quoth the daughter, "I see anon another chariot coming along the plain, not a whit inferior to the first." "Describe it," said Meve. "Sooth I see," she quoth, "in the chariot, on the one hand, a roan spirited steed, swift, fiery and bounding, with broad hoof and expanded chest, taking strong vigorous strides across fords and estuaries, over obstacles and winding roads, scouring plains and vales, raging with triumph. Judge it from the likenesses of soaring birds, among which my very quick eye gets lost from their most smooth careering in emulous course. On the other a bay horse, with broad forehead, heavy locks and wavy tresses; of light and long dashing pace; of great strength; full swiftly he courses the bounds of the plain, between stone enclosures and fastnesses. He finds no obstacle in the land of oaks, careering on the way. A chariot of fine wood with wicker–work, on two bright wheels of bronze; its pole bright with silver mounting; its frame very high and creaking, having a curved, firmly mounted yoke with two rich yellow looped reins. In the chariot a fair man with wavy hanging hair. His countenance white and red, his jerkin (fuamain) clean and white, his mantle (brat) of blue and crimson red. His shield (sciath) brown with yellow bosses, its edge veined with bronze. In his hand flames a fiery, furious spear. And an awning of the rare plumage of birds over the wicker frame of his chariot."

"We recognise the man from his description," quoth Meve.

"A lion that groaneth, a flame of Lug, that diamonds can pierce; A wolf among cattle; battle on battle, Exploit on exploit, head upon head he heaps; As a trout on red sandstone is cut Would the son of Findchoimi cut us; should he rage against us, no peace!

By my people's god, as a speckled fish is cut upon a shining red stone with flails of iron, such I swear will be the minuteness of the slaughter Conall the Victorious will execute on us should he rage against us."

"I see another chariot coming along the plain." Give us its description," quoth Meve. "I see, in sooth," the daughter quoth, "two steeds, alike for size and beauty, fierceness and speed, bounding together, with ears pricked, head erect, spirited and powerful ... with fine nostril, long tresses and broad foreheads, full dappled, with girth full slim and chest expanded, mane and tail curled, dashing along. Yoked in the chariot, the one, a grey steed, with broad thighs, eager, swift and fleet, wildly impetuous, with long mane and broad haunches, thundering and trampling, mane curled, head on high, breast broadly expanded. From out the hard course he fiercely casts up clods of earth from his four hard hoofs, a flock of swift birds in pursuit. As he gallops on the way a flash of hot breath darts from him; from his curbed jaws gleams a blast of flame–red fire.

"The other horse, dark–grey, head firmly knit, compact, fleet, broad–hoofed and slender. Firm, swift, and of high mettle, with curl and plait and tress, broad of back and sure of foot, lusty, spirited and fiery, he fiercely bounds and fiercely strides the ground. Mane and tail long and flying, heavy locks adown his forehead broad. Grandly he careers the country after winning the horse race. Soon he bounds the straths, casts off languor, traverses the plains of the Mid Glen, finding no obstacle in the land of oak, coursing the way. A chariot of fine wood with wicker–work, having two yellowish ... iron wheels and a bright silver pole with bright bronze mounting. A frame very high and creaking, with metal fastenings. A curved yoke richly gilt, two rich yellow looped reins. The fertsi hard and straight as sword–blades.

"In the chariot a sad, melancholy man, comeliest of the men of Erin. Around him a soft crimson pleasing tunic (fuan), fastened across the breast, where it stands open, with a salmon–brooch of inlaid gold, against which his bosom heaves, beating in full strokes. A long–sleeved linen kirtle with a white hood, embroidered red with

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flaming gold. Set in each of his eyes eight red dragon gemstones. His two cheeks blue–white and blood–red. He emits sparks of fire and burning breath, [with a ray of love in his look. A shower of pearls, me thinketh, has fallen into his mouth. Each of his two eyebrows as black as the side of a black spit. On his two thighs rests a golden–hilted sword (claideb), and fastened to the copper frame of the chariot is a blood–red spear (gai) with a sharp mettlesome blade on a shaft of wood well fitted to his hand. Over both his shoulders a crimson shield (sciath) with a rim of silver, chased with figures of animals in gold. He leaps the hero's salmon–leap into the air and does many like swift feats besides. Such is the chief of a chariot–royal.] Before him in that chariot there is a charioteer, a very slender, tall, much freckled man. On his head very curly bright–red hair, with a fillet of bronze upon his brow which prevents the hair from falling over his face. On both sides of his head patins (or cups) of gold confine the hair. A shoulder–mantle about him with sleeves opening at the two elbows, and in his hand a goad of red gold with which he guides the horses."

"Truly, it is a drop before a shower; we recognise the man from his description," quoth Meve.

"An ocean fury, a whale that rageth, a fragment of flame and fire; A bear majestic, a grandly moving billow, A beast in maddening ire:

In the crash of glorious battle Through the hostile foe he leaps, His shout the fury of doom; A terrible bear, he is death to the herd–of–cattle, Feat upon feat, head upon head he heaps:

Laud ye the hearty one, he who is victor fully.

As fresh malt is ground in the mill shall we be ground by Cuchulainn."

"By the god of my people," said Meve, "I swear if it be with fury Cuchulainn comes to us, like as a mill of ten spokes grinds very hard malt, so he alone will grind us to mould and gravel, should the whole province attend on us in Cruachan, unless his fury and violence are subdued."

"How do they come this time?" quoth Meve.

"Wrist to wrist and palm to palm, Tunic to tunic they stand, Shield to shield and frame to frame, A shoulder–to–shoulder band, Wood to wood and car to car, Thus they all, fond mother, are."

"As thunder on the roof when breaking, With speed the chargers dash; As heavy seas which storms are shaking, The earth in turn they crash; Anon it vibrates as they strike, Their strength and weight are like and like.

High their name, No ill fame!"

Then Meve made speech:

"Women to meet them, and mony, in deshabelle, Full–breasted and bare and bonnie, in number weel; Bring vats of cold water where wanting, beds ready for rest, Fine food bring ye forth, and not scanty, but of the best, Strong ale and sound and well malted, warriors' keep; Let the gates of the burg be set slanting, open the liss.

Hail! the battalion that's cantering won't kill us, ywis!"

Thereupon Meve went out by the high door of the palace into the court, thrice fifty maidens in her train, with three vats of cold water for the three valiant heroes in front of the hosts, in order to alleviate their thirst (lit. heat). Choice was straightway given them so as to ascertain whether a house a–piece should be allotted them or one house among the three. "To each a house apart," quoth Cuchulainn. Thereafter such as they preferred of the 150 girls are brought into the house, fitted up with beds of surpassing magnificence. Findabair in preference to any

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other was brought by Cuchulainn into the apartment where he himself was. On the arrival of the Ultonians, Ailill and Meve with their whole household went and bade them welcome. "We are pleased," quoth Sencha, son of Ailill, responding.

Thereupon the Ultonians come into the fort and the palace is left to them as recounted, viz., seven "circles" and seven compartments from fire to partition, with bronze frontings and carvings of red yew. Three stripes of bronze in the arching of the house, which was of oak, with a covering of shingles. It had twelve windows with glass in the openings.

The dais of Ailill and of Meve in the centre of the house, with silver frontings and stripes of bronze round it, with a silver wand by the fronting facing Ailill, that would reach the mid "hips" of the house so as to check the inmates unceasingly. The Ulster heroes went round from one door of the palace to the other, and the musicians played while the guests were being prepared for. Such was the spaciousness of the house that it had room for the hosts of valiant heroes of the whole province in the suite of Conchobar. Moreover, Conchobar and Fergus mac Roich were in Ailill's compartment with nine valiant Ulster heroes besides.

Great feasts were then prepared for them and they were there until the end of three days and of three nights.

Thereafter Ailill inquired of Conchobar with his Ultonian following what was the purport of his march. Sencha narrated the matter on account of which they had come, viz., the three heroes' rivalry as to the Champion's Portion, and the ladies' rivalry as to precedence at feasts "They could not stand being judged anywhere else than here by thee."

At that Ailill was silent and was not in a happy mood. "Indeed," quoth he, "it is not to me this decision should be given as to the Champion's Portion, unless it be done from hatred." "There is really no better judge."

"Well," said Ailill, "I require time to consider." "We really require our heroes," quoth Sencha, "for great to timid folks is their value." "For that then three days and three nights suffice for me," quoth Ailill. "That would not forfeit friendship," answered Sencha. The Ultonians straightway bade farewell; being satisfied, they left their blessing with Ailill and Meve and their curse with Bricriu, for it was he who had incited them to strife. They then departed from the territory of Meve, having left Loigaire and Conall and Cuchulainn to be judged by Ailill.

The like supper as before was given to each of these heroes every night.

Chapter IX

One night as their portion was assigned them, three cats from the Cave of Cruachan were let loose to attack them, i.e. three beasts of magic. Conall and Loigaire made for the rafters, having left their food with the beasts. In that wise they slept till the morrow. Cuchulainn fled not from his place from the beast which attacked him. But when it stretched its neck out for eating, Cuchulainn gave a blow with his sword on the beast's head, but [the blade] glided off as 'twere from stone. Then the cat set itself down. In the circumstances Cuchulainn neither ate nor slept. As soon as it was early morning the cats were gone. In such condition were the three heroes found (lit. seen) on the morrow. "Does not that trial suffice for adjudging ye?" asked Ailill. "By no means," quoth Conall and Loigaire, "it is not against beasts we are striving, but against men."

Chapter X

Ailill having gone to his chamber, set his back against the wall.

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He was disquieted in mind, for he took the difficulty that faced him to be fraught with danger. He neither ate nor slept till the end of three days and three nights. "Coward!" Meve then called him, "if you don't decide, I will." "Difficult for me to adjudge them," Ailill said; "it is a misfortune for one to have to do it." "There is no difficulty," quoth Meve, "for Loigaire and Conall Cernach are as different as bronze and findruini; Conall Cernach and Cuchulainn as different as findruini and red gold."

It was then, after she had pondered her advice, that Loigaire the Triumphant was summoned to Meve. "Welcome, O Loigaire the Triumphant," she quoth; "it is meet to give thee a Champion's Portion.

We assign to thee the sovranity of the heroes of Erin from this time forth, and the Champion's Portion, and a cup of bronze with a bird chased in white metal on its bottom. In preference to every one else, take it with thee as a token of award. No one else is to see it till, at the day's end, thou hast come to the Red Branch of Conchobar. On the Champion's Portion being exhibited among you, then shalt thou bring forth thy cup in the presence of all the Ultonian nobles. Moreover, the Champion's Portion is therein. None of the valiant Ultonian heroes will dispute it further with thee. For the thing thou art to take away with thee shall be a token of genuineness in the estimation of all the Ultonians." Thereupon the cup with its full of luscious wine was given to Loigaire the Triumphant. There and then he quaffs the contents at a draught. "Now you have the feast of a champion," quoth Meve. "I wish you may enjoy it a hundred hundred years at the head of all Ulster."

Loigaire thereupon bade farewell. Then Conall Cernach in like wise was summoned into the royal presence. "Welcome," quoth Meve, "O Conall Cernach; meet it is to give thee a Champion's Portion, with a cup of white-metal besides, having a bird on the bottom of it chased in gold." Thereafter the cup was given to Conall with its full of luscious wine.

Conall bade farewell. A herald was then sent to fetch Cuchulainn. "Come to speak with the king and queen," quoth the messenger. Cuchulainn at the time was busy playing chess with Loig, son of Rianganabair, his own charioteer. "No mocking," he quoth; "you might try your lies on some other fool." Having hurled one of the chessmen, it pierced the centre of the herald's brain. He got his death-blow therefrom, and fell between Ailill and Meve. "Woe is me," quoth Meve; "sorely doth Cuchulainn work on us his fury when his fit of rage is upon him." Thereupon Meve got up and came to Cuchulainn, and put her two arms round his neck. "Try a lie upon another," quoth Cuchulainn.

"Glorious son of the Ultonians and flame of the heroes of Erin, 'tis no lie that is to our liking where thou art concerned. Were all Erin's heroes to come, to thee by preference would we grant the quest, for, in regard to fame, bravery and valour, to distinction, youth and glory, the men of Erin acknowledge thy superiority."

Cuchulainn got up. He accompanied Meve into the palace, and Ailill bade him warm welcome. A cup of gold was given him full of luscious wine, and having on the bottom of it birds chased in precious stone. With it, and in preference to every one else, there was given him a lump, as big as his eyes twain, of dragon-stone. "Now you have the feast of a champion," quoth Meve. "I wish you may enjoy it a hundred hundred years at the head of all the Ultonian heroes." "Moreover, it is our verdict," quoth Ailill and Meve, "inasmuch as thou thyself art not to be compared with the Ultonian warriors, neither is thy wife to be compared with their women. Nor is it too much, we think, that she should always precede all the Ultonian ladies when entering the Mead Hall." At that Cuchulainn quaffed at one draught the full of the cup, and then bade farewell to the king, queen, and household all.

Chapter XI

[Thereafter he followed his charioteer. "My plan," quoth Meve to Ailill, "is to keep those three heroes with us again to-night, and to further test them." "Do as thou deemest right," quoth Ailill. The men were then detained and brought to Cruachan and their horses unyoked.] Their choice of food was given them for their horses. Conall

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and Loigaire told them to give oats two years old to theirs. But Cuchulainn chose barley grains for his. They slept there that night. The women were apportioned among them. Findabair, with a train of fifty damsels, was brought into the stead of Cuchulainn. Sav the Eloquent (Sadb Sulbair), another daughter of Ailill and of Meve, with fifty maids in attendance, was ushered into the presence of Conall Cernach. Conchend, daughter of Ceit mac Magach, with fifty damsels along with her, was brought into the presence of Loigaire the Triumphant. Moreover, Meve herself was wont to resort to the stead of Cuchulainn. They slept there that night.

On the morrow they arose early in the morning and went into the house where the youths were performing the wheel-feat. Then Loigaire seized the wheel and tossed it till it reached half up the side wall. Upon that the youths laughed and cheered him. It was in reality a jeer, but it seemed to Loigaire a shout of applause. Conall then took the wheel; it was on the ground. He tossed it as high as the ridge-pole of the palace. The youths raised a shout at that. It seemed to Conall it was a shout of applause and of victory. To the youths it was a shout of scorn.

Then Cuchulainn took the wheel it was in mid-air he caught it. He hurled it aloft till it cast the ridge-pole from off the place; the wheel went a man's cubit into the ground in the outside enclosure. The youths raised a shout of applause and of triumph in Cuchulainn's case. It seemed to Cuchulainn, however, it was a laugh of scorn and of ridicule they then gave vent to.

Cuchulainn anon sought out the womenfolk, and took thrice fifty needles from them. These he tossed up one after the other. Each needle went into the eye of the other, till in that wise they were joined together. He returned to the women, and gave each her own needle into her hand. The young braves praised Cuchulainn. Whereupon they bade farewell to the king, the queen, and household as well.

Chapter XII.

"Go to the abode of my foster-father and to that of my stepmother," quoth Meve viz., Ercol and Garmna "and there put up as guests to-night." They kept on their way, and after running a race at the Cruachan Gathering, thrice did Cuchulainn win the victory of the games.

They then went to the abode of Garmna and of Ercol, who bade them welcome. "For what are ye come?" asked Ercol. "To be adjudged by thee," they quoth. "Go to the abode of Samera; he will adjudge ye." They went accordingly and guides were sent with them. They were welcomed by Samera, whose daughter Buan fell in love with Cuchulainn. They told Samera it was in order to be judged they had come to him. Samera despatched them as they were (lit. in their order) to the Amazons of the Glen.

Loigaire went first, but left his accoutrements (arms) and clothing with them. Conall also went, and left his spears with them, but took his chief weapon, to wit, his sword, away with him. On the third night Cuchulainn went. The Amazons shrieked at him. He and they fought each other till his spear was splintered, his shield broken, his raiment torn off. The Amazons were beating and overpowering him. "O Cuchulainn," said Loig, "you sorry coward, you squinting savage! gone are your valour and your bravery when it is sprites that beat you." Then Cuchulainn was enraged at the sprites. He turned back upon the Horrors, and cut and gashed them till the glen was filled with their blood. He brought off his company's brave banner with him and turned back in triumph to the seat of Samera, the place where his companions were.

Samera bade him welcome; 'twas then he made speech:

"Not right to share the champion's fare of the cooking pit, Fatted kine, well-fed swine, honey and bread; Through ladies' cunning take not his share From Culann's Hound, of name and fame.

Cleaver of shields, raven of prey, That bravery wields, eager for fray boar of battle.

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As wood takes fire, strikes his ire Emain's foes; Of victory—loving women belov'd plague of death.

A judge in deeming, not in seeming, eye flashing far

Hostile ports where ships resort his tributes know; His chariot rides the mountain—side, Pride of his clan, he leads the van, an eagle of war.

Why to Loigaire, lion of fences, liken him?

Why unto Conall, rider of fame?

Why should not Emer, of mantle shining it is our pleasure through grace divining

Of Ultonian ladies high—born and all, enter first the merry Mead—Hall.

Cuchulainn's share, well I wot, It is not just [elsewhere] to allot.

"My verdict to ye then: the Champion's Portion to Cuchulainn, and to his wife the precedence of the ladies of Ultonia Cuchulainn's valour to rank above that of every one else, Conchobar's excepted."

After that they went to the abode of Ercol, who bade them welcome. They slept there that night. Ercol challenged them to combat with himself and with his horse. Whereupon Loigaire and his horse went against them. The gelding of Ercol killed the horse of Loigaire, who was himself overcome by Ercol, before whom he fled. He took his way to Emain across Assaroe, and brought tidings with him of his comrades having been killed by Ercol. Conall likewise fled, his horse having been killed by Ercol's; the way he went was across Snam Rathaind (Rathand's Pool) on the route to Emain. Moreover, Conall's gillie, Rathand, was drowned in the river there, and after him Snam Rathaind takes its name since.

The grey of Macha, however, killed the horse of Ercol, and Cuchulainn took Ercol himself bound behind his chariot along with him to Emain. Buan, daughter of Samera, went on the track of the three chariots. She recognised the track of Cuchulainn's framed chariot, inasmuch as it was no narrow track it used to take, but undermining walls, either enlarging or else leaping over breaches. The girl at last leapt a fearful leap, following him behind in his chariot's track till she struck her forehead on a rock, whereof she died. From this is named Buan's Grave. When Conall and Cuchulainn reached Emain, they found the Ultonians holding a keen for them, inasmuch as they felt certain they were killed. Such the report Loigaire brought. They then related their adventures and told their news to Conchobar and to the Ultonian nobles generally. But the chiefs of chariots and the men of valour as a body were reproaching Loigaire for the lying story he told concerning his fellows.

Then Cathbath made speech to this effect:

"A tale inglorious! Base
Outlaw, black and false,
For shame! thy face from sight!

Ultonia's Champion's Portion
Unhappily didst thou dispute,
Nor won it by right,
Thy lying upset

Cuchulainn with Ercol has coped,
Victor in battle-fight;
Tied at the tail of his car,
Hercules strong he held;

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Nor do men conceal his feats,
His great havoc they tell.

A champion glorious, battle-victorious,
When rageth the fray,
Slaughter-head of the hosts,
A lord that careers in might,
Zealous of valour and stout;
With him to dispute
The Champion's Portion,
Unworthy a hero's repute."

Chapter XIII

The heroes ceased their discussions and their babblings and fell to eating and enjoying themselves. It was Sualtam mac Roig, father of Cuchulainn himself, who that night attended upon the Ultonians.

Moreover, Conchobar's ladder-vat was filled for them. Their portion having been brought to their presence, the spencers came to serve, but at the outset they withheld the Champion's Portion from distribution.

"Why not give the Champion's Portion," quoth Duach of the Chafer Tongue, "to some one of the heroes; those three have not returned from the King of Cruachan, having no sure token with them, whereby the Champion's Portion may be assigned to one of them?"

Thereupon Loigaire the Triumphant got up and lifted on high the bronze cup having the silver bird [chased] on the bottom. "The Champion's Portion is mine," he quoth, "and none may contest it with me." "It is not," quoth Conall Cernach. "Not alike are the tokens we brought off with us. Yours is a cup of bronze, whereas mine is a cup of white metal (findruini). From the difference between them the Champion's Portion clearly belongs to me." "It belongs to neither of you," quoth Cuchulainn as he got up and spoke. "Ye have brought no token that procures you the Champion's Portion. Yet the king and queen whom ye visited were loath in the thick of distress to intensify the strife.

But no less than your deserts have ye received at their hands. The Champion's Portion remains with me, seeing I brought a token distinguished above the rest."

He then lifted on high a cup of red gold having a bird chased on the bottom of it in precious dragon-stone, the size of his eyes twain. All the Ultonian nobles in the suite of Conchobar mac Nessa saw it.

"Therefore it is I," he quoth, "who deserve the Champion's Portion, provided I have fair play." "To thee we all award it," quoth Conchobar and Fergus and the Ulster nobles as well. By the verdict of Ailill and of Meve the Champion's Portion is yours." "I swear by my people's god," said Loigaire and Conall the Victorious, "that the cup you have brought is purchased. Of the jewels and of the treasures in your possession have you given to Ailill and to Meve for it in order that a defeat might not be on record against you, and that the Champion's Portion might be given to no one else in preference. By my people's god, that judgment shall not stand; the Champion's Portion shall not be yours." They then sprang up one after the other, their swords drawn. Straightway Conchobar and Fergus intervened, whereupon they let down their hands and sheathed their swords. "Hold!" quoth Sencha, "do as I bid." "We will," they quoth.

Chapter XIV

"Go forth to the ford of Yellow, son of Fair. He will adjudge ye." Accordingly the three heroes went to the abode of Yellow (Budi).

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They told their wants and the rivalries which brought them. "Was not judgment given you in Cruachan by Ailill and by Meve?" said Yellow. "In sooth there was," quoth Cuchulainn, "but those fellows don't stand by it." "Stand by it," quoth the other men, "we will not; what has been given us is no decision at all." "It is not easy for another to adjudge ye then," quoth Yellow, "seeing ye did not abide by Meve and Ailill's arrangement. I know," he continued, "one who will venture it, viz., Terror, son of Great Fear (Uath mac Imomain), at yonder loch. Off then in quest of him; he will adjudge ye." A big powerful fellow was Terror, son of Great Fear. He used to shift his form into what shape he pleased, was wont to do tricks of magic and such like arts. He in sooth was the wizard from whom Muni, the Wizard's Pass, is named. He used to be called "wizard" from the extent to which he changed his divers shapes.

To Terror at his loch they accordingly went. Yellow had given them a guide. To Terror they told the cause for which they had sought him out. He said he should venture on adjudgment provided only they would adhere to it. "We will adhere to it," they quoth; whereupon he solemnly pledges them. I have a covenant to make with you," he quoth, and whoever of you fulfils it with me, he is the man who wins the Champion's Portion." "What is the covenant?" they said. "I have an axe, and the man into whose hands it shall be put is to cut off my head to-day, I to cut off his to-morrow."

Thereupon Conall and Loigaire said they would not agree to that arrangement, for it would be impossible for them to live after having been beheaded, although he might. Therefore they declined (shirked) that: [although other books narrate that they agreed to the bargain, to wit, Loigaire to, cut off Terror's (Uath's) head the first day, and (on the giant's returning) that Loigaire shirked his part of the bargain and that Conall likewise behaved unfairly]. Cuchulainn, however, said he would agree to the covenant (bargain) were the Champion's Portion given to him. Conall and Loigaire said they would allow him that if he agreed to a wager with Terror. Cuchulainn solemnly pledged them not to contest the Champion's Portion if he made covenant with Terror. And they then pledged him to ratify it. Terror, having put spells on the edge of the axe, lays his head upon the stone for Cuchulainn. Cuchulainn with his own axe gives the giant a blow and cuts off his head. He then went off from them into the loch, his axe and his head on his breast.

. On the morrow he comes back on his quest. Cuchulainn stretches himself out for him on the stone. The axe with its edge reversed he draws down thrice on Cuchulainn's neck. "Get up," quoth Terror; "the sovranty of the heroes of Erin to Cuchulainn, and the Champion's Portion without contest." The three heroes then hied them to Emain. But Loigaire and Conall disputed the verdict given in favour of Cuchulainn and the original contest as to the Champion's Portion continued. The Ultonians advised them to go for judgement unto Curoi. To that too they agreed.

Chapter XV.

On the morning of the morrow the three heroes, Cuchulainn, Conall and Loigaire, then set off to Fort Curoi. They unyoked their chariot at the gate of the hold, then entered the court. Whereupon Blathnat, Mind's daughter, wife of Curoi mac Dairi, bade them warm welcome. That night on their arrival Curoi was not at home. But knowing they would come, he counselled his wife regarding the heroes until he should return from his oriental expedition into Scythian territory. From the age of seven years, when he took up arms, until his demise, Curoi had not reddened his sword in Erin, nor ever had the food of Erin passed his lips. Nor could Erin contain him for his haughtiness, renown and rank, overbearing fury, strength and gallantry.

His wife acted according to his wish in the matter of bathing and of washing, providing them with refreshing drinks and beds most excellent.

And it liked them well.

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When bedtime was come, she told them that each was to take his night watching the fort until Curoi should return. "And, moreover, thus said Curoi that ye take your turn watching according to seniority."

In what airt soever of the globe Curoi should happen to be, every night o'er the fort he chaunted a spell, till the fort revolved as swiftly as a mill–stone. The entrance was never to be found after sunset.

The first night, Loigaire the Triumphant took the sentry, inasmuch as he was the eldest of the three. As he kept watch into the later part of the night, he saw a giant (Scath) approaching him far as his eyes could see from the sea westwards. Exceeding huge and ugly and horrible he thought him, for in height, it seemed to him, he reached unto the sky, and the sheen (broad expanse) of the sea was visible between his legs. Thus did he come, his hands full of stripped oaks, each of which would form a burden for a waggon–team of six, at whose root not a stroke had been repeated after the single sword–stroke. One of the stakes he cast at Loigaire, who let it pass him. Twice or thrice he repeated it, but the stake reached neither the skin nor the shield of Loigaire. Then Loigaire hurled a spear at him and it hit him not.

The giant stretched his hand towards Loigaire. Such its length that it reached across the three ridges that were between them as they were throwing at each other, and thus in his grasp he seized him.

Though Loigaire was big and imposing, he fitted like a year old into the clutch of his opponent, who then ground him in his grasp as a chessman is turned in a groove. In that state, half–dead, the giant tossed him out over the fort, till he fell into the mire of the fosse at the palace–gate. The fort had no opening there, and the other men and inmates of the hold thought he had leapt outside over the fort, as a challenge for the other men to do likewise.

There they were until the day's end. When the night–watch began, Conall went out on sentry, for he was older than Cuchulainn.

Everything occurred as it did to Loigaire the first night. The third night Cuchulainn went on sentry (lit. into the seat of watch). That night the three Goblins (Greys) of Sescind Uairbeoil, the three Ox–feeders (?) of Bregia and the three sons of Big–Fist the Siren met by appointment to plunder the hold. This too was the night of which it was foretold, that the Spirit of the Lake by the fort would devour the whole host of the hold, man and beast.

Cuchulainn while watching through the night had many uneasy forebodings. When midnight was come he heard a terrific noise drawing nigh to him. "Holloa, Holloa, Cuchulainn shouted, "who is there? If friends they be, let them not stir; if foes, let them flee." Then they raised a terrific shout at him. Whereupon Cuchulainn sprang upon them, so that the nine of them fell dead to the earth. He heaped their heads in disorder into the seat of watching and resumed sentry. Another nine shouted at him. In like manner he killed the three nines, making one cairn of them, heads and accoutrements.

While he was there far on into the night, tired and sad and weary, he heard the rising of the loch on high, as it were the booming of a very heavy sea. How deep soever his dejection, his spirit could not brook his not going to see what caused the great noise he heard. He then perceived the upheaving monster, and it seemed to him to be thirty cubits in curvature above the loch. It raised itself on high into the air, sprang towards the fort, opened its mouth so that one of the palaces could go into its gullet.

Then he called to mind his swooping feat, sprang on high, and was as swift as a winnowing riddle right round the monster. He entwined his two arms about its neck, stretched his hand till it reached into its gullet, tore out the monster's heart, and cast it from him on the ground. Then the beast fell from the air till it rested on the earth, having sustained a blow on the shoulder. Cuchulainn then plied it with his sword, hacked it to atoms, and took the head with him into the sentry–seat along with the other heap of skulls.

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While there, depressed and miserable in the morning dawn, he saw the giant approaching him westwards from the sea. "Bad night," says he. "'Twill be worse for you, you uncouth fellow," quoth Cuchulainn. Then the giant cast one of the branches at Cuchulainn, who let it pass him. He repeated it two or three times, but it reached neither the skin nor the shield of Cuchulainn. Cuchulainn then hurled his spear at the giant, but it reached him not.

Whereupon the giant stretched his hand towards Cuchulainn to grip him as he did the others. Cuchulainn leapt the hero's "salmon leap," and called to mind his swooping-feat, with his drawn sword over the monster's head. As swift as a hare he was, and in mid-air circling round the monster, till he confused it by making it giddy (lit. till he made a water wheel of him). "Life for life, O Cuchulainn," he quoth. "Give me my triad of wishes," quoth Cuchulainn.

At a breath they are thine," he said.

"The Sovranty of Erin's Heroes be henceforth mine
The Champion's Portion without dispute
The Precedence to my wife o'er Ultonia's ladies forever."

"It shall be thine, he at once quoth. Then he who had been conversing with him vanished he knew not whither.

He then mused within himself as to the leap his fellows leapt over the fort, for their leap was big and broad and high. Moreover, it seemed to him it was by leaping it that the valiant heroes had gone over it. He essayed it twice and failed. "Alas!" Cuchulainn quoth, "my exertions hitherto about the Champion's Portion have exhausted me, and now I lose it through being unable to take the leap the others took." As he thus mused, he essayed the following feats: He would keep springing backwards in mid-air a shot's distance from the fort, and then he would rebound from there until his forehead would strike the fort. Anon he would spring on high till all that was within the fort was visible to him, while again he would sink up to his knees in the earth owing to the pressure of his vehemence and violence. At another time he would not take the dew from off the tip of the grass by reason of his buoyancy of mood, vehemence of nature, and heroic valour. What with the fit and fury that raged upon him he stepped over the fort outside and alighted in the middle at the door of the palace. His two footprints are in the flag on the floor of the hold at the spot where was the royal entrance. He thereafter entered the house and heaved a sigh.

Then Mind's daughter, Blathnat, wife of Curoi, made speech:

"Truly, not the sigh of one dishonoured, but a victor's sigh of triumph."

The daughter of the king of the Isle of the Men of Falga knew full well of Cuchulainn's evil plight that night. They were not long there when they beheld Curoi coming towards them, carrying into the house with him the standard of the "three nines" slain by Cuchulainn, along with their heads and that of the monster. He put the heads from off his breast on to the floor of the stead, and spoke: "The gillie whose one night's trophies are these is a fit lad to watch a king's keep for aye. The Champion's Portion, over which you have fallen out with the gallant youths of Erin, truly belongs to Cuchulainn. The bravest of them, were he here, could not match him in number of trophies." Curoi's verdict upon them was:

"The Champion's Portion to be Cuchulainn's.

With the sovranty of valour o'er all the Gael.

And to his wife the precedence on entering the Mead Hall before all the ladies of Ultonia."

And seven cumals of gold and of silver he gave him in reward for his one night's performance.

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They straightway bade Curoi farewell and kept on till they gat seated in Emain ere the day closed. When the spencers came to deal and to divide, they took the Champion's Portion with its share of ale out of the distribution that they might have it apart. "Sooth, sure are we," quoth Duach of the Chafer Tongue, "ye think not to-night of contending as to the Champion's Portion? The man ye sought out mayhap has undertaken your adjudging." Whereupon quoth the other folk to Cuchulainn: "The Champion's Portion was not assigned to one of you in preference to the other. As to Curoi's judgment also upon those three, not a whit did he concede to Cuchulainn upon their arriving at Emain."

Cuchulainn then declared he by no means coveted the winning of it. For the loss thence resulting to the winner would be on a par with the profit got from it. The championship was therefore not fully assigned until the advent of the Champion's Covenant in Emain.

Chapter XVI

The Champion's Covenant.

Once upon a time as the Ultonians were in Emain, fatigued after the gathering and the games, Conchobar and Fergus mac Roig, with Ultonia's nobles as well, proceeded from the sporting field outside and gat seated in the Royal Court (lit. Red Branch) of Conchobar. Neither Cuchulainn nor Conall the Victorious nor Loigaire the Triumphant were there that night. But the hosts of Ultonia's valiant heroes were there. As they were seated, it being eventide, and the day drawing towards the close, they saw a big uncouth fellow of exceeding ugliness drawing nigh them into the hall. To them it seemed as if none of the Ultonians would reach half his height. Horrible and ugly was the carle's guise. Next his skin he wore an old hide with a dark dun mantle around him, and over him a great spreading club-tree (branch) the size of a winter-shed, under which thirty bullocks could find shelter. Ravenous yellow eyes he had, protruding from his head, each of the twain the size of an ox-vat. Each finger as thick as another person's wrist. In his left hand a stock, a burden for twenty yoke of oxen. In his right hand an axe weighing thrice fifty glowing molten masses [of metal]. Its handle would require a plough-team (a yoke of six) to move it. Its sharpness such that it would lop off hairs, the wind blowing them against its edge.

In that guise he went and stood by the fork-beam beside the fire. "Is the hall lacking in room for you," quoth Duach of the Chafer Tongue to the uncouth clodhopper, "that ye find no other place than by the fork-beam, unless ye wish to be domestic luminary? only sooner will a blaze be to the house than brightness to the household." "What property soever may be mine, sooth ye will agree, no matter how big I am, that the household as a whole will be enlightened, while the hall will not be burnt.

"That, however, is not my sole function; I have others as well.

But neither in Erin nor in Alba nor in Europe nor in Africa nor in Asia, including Greece, Scythia, the Isles of Gades, the Pillars of Hercules, and Bregon's Tower (Brigantium), have I found the quest on which I have come, nor a man to do me fairplay regarding it. Since ye Ultonians have excelled all the folks of those lands in strength, prowess, valour; in rank, magnanimity, dignity; in truth, generosity and worth, get ye one among you to give me the boon I crave."

"In sooth it is not just that the honour of a province be carried off," quoth Fergus mac Roich, "because of one man who fails in keeping his word of honour. Death, certainly, is not a whit nearer to him than to you." "Not that I shun it," quoth he. "Make thy quest known to us then," quoth Fergus mac Roich. "If but fairplay be vouchsafed me, I will tell it."

"It is right also to give fairplay," quoth Sencha, son of Ailill, "for it beseemeth not a great clannish folk to break a mutual covenant over any unknown individual. To us too it seemeth likely, if at long last you find such a person,

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you will find here one worthy of you." "Conchobar I put aside," he quoth, "for sake of his sovranty, and Fergus mac Roich also on account of his like privilege. These two excepted, come whosoever of you that may venture, that I may cut off his head to-night, he mine to-morrow night."

"Sure then there is no warrior here," quoth Duach, "after these two." "By my troth there will be this moment," quoth Fat-Neck, son of Short Head, as he sprang on to the floor of the hall. The strength then of yon Fat Neck was as the strength of a hundred warriors, each arm having the might of a hundred "centaurs." "Bend down, bachlach," quoth Fat-Neck, "that I may cut your head off to night, you to cut off mine to-morrow night." "Were that my quest, I could have got it anywhere," quoth the bachlach. "Let us act according to our covenant," he quoth, "I to cut off your head to-night, you to avenge it to morrow night." "By my people's god," quoth Duach of the Chafer Tongue, "death is thus for thee no pleasant prospect should the man killed to-night attack thee on the morrow. It is given to you alone if you have the power, being killed night after night (lit. to be killed every night), to avenge it next day." "Truly I will carry out what you all as a body agree upon by way of counsel, strange as it may seem to you," quoth the bachlach. He then pledged the other to keep his troth in this contention as to fulfilling his tryst on the morrow.

With that Fat-Neck took the axe from out of the bachlach's hand.

Seven feet apart were its two angles. Then did the bachlach put his neck across the block. Fat-Neck dealt a blow across it with the axe till it stuck in the block underneath, cutting off the head till it lay by the base of the fork-beam, the house being filled with the blood. Straightway the bachlach rose, recovered himself, clasped his head, block and axe to his breast, thus made his exit from the hall with blood streaming from his neck. It filled the Red Branch on every side. Great was the folk's horror, wondering at the marvel that had appeared to them. "By my people's god," quoth Duach of the Chafer Tongue, "if the bachlach, having been killed to-night, come back tomorrow, he will not leave a man alive in Ultonia." The following night, however, he returned, and Fat-Neck shirked him. Then began the bachlach to urge his pact with Fat-Neck.

"Sooth it is not right for Fat-Neck not to fulfil his covenant with me."

That night, however, Loigaire the Triumphant was present.

"Who of the warriors that contest Ultonia's Champion's Portion will carry out a covenant to-night with me? Where is Loigaire the Triumphant?" quoth he. "Here," said Loigaire. He pledged him too, yet Loigaire kept not his tryst. The bachlach returned on the morrow and similarly pledged Conall Cernach, who came not as he had sworn.

The fourth night the bachlach returned, and fierce and furious was he. All the ladies of Ultonia came that night to see the strange marvel that had come into the Red Branch. That night Cuchulainn was there also. Then the fellow began to upbraid them. "Ye men of Ultonia, your valour and your prowess are gone. Your warriors greatly covet the Champion's Portion, yet are unable to contest it. Where is yon poor mad wight that is hight Cuchulainn? Fain would I know if his word be better than the others'." "No covenant do I desire with you," quoth Cuchulainn.

"Likely is that, you wretched fly ; greatly thou dost fear to die."

Whereupon Cuchulainn sprang towards him and dealt him a blow with the axe, hurling his head to the top rafter of the Red Branch till the whole hall shook. Cuchulainn again caught up the head and gave it a blow with the axe and smashed it. Thereafter the bachlach rose up.

On the morrow the Ultonians were watching Cuchulainn to see whether he would shirk the bachlach as the other heroes had done. As Cuchulainn was awaiting the bachlach, they saw that great dejection seized him. It had been fitting had they sung his dirge. They felt sure his life would last only till the bachlach came. Then quoth

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Cuchulainn with shame to Conchobar: "Thou shall not go until my pledge to the bachlach is fulfilled; for death awaits me, and I would rather have death with honour."

They were there as the day was closing when they saw the bachlach approaching. "Where is Cuchulainn?" he quoth. "Here am I," he answered. "You're dull of speech to-night, unhappy one; greatly you fear to die. Yet, though great your fear, death you have not shirked."

Thereafter Cuchulainn went up to him and stretched his neck across the block, which was of such size that his neck reached but half-way. "Stretch out your neck, you wretch," the bachlach quoth. "You keep me in torment," quoth Cuchulainn. "Despatch me quickly; last night, by my troth, I tormented you not. Verily I swear if you torment me, I shall make myself as long as a crane above you." "I cannot slay you," quoth the bachlach, "what with the size of the block and the shortness of your neck and of your side" (sic!).

Then Cuchulainn stretched out his neck so that a warrior's full-grown foot would have fitted between any two of his ribs; his neck he distended till it reached the other side of the block. The bachlach raised his axe till it reached the roof-tree of the hall. The creaking of the old hide that was about the fellow and the crashing of the axe both his arms being raised aloft with all his might were as the loud noise of a wood tempest-tossed in a night of storm. Down it came then ... on his neck, its blunt side below, all the nobles of Ultonia gazing upon them.

"O Cuchulainn, arise! ... Of the warriors of Ultonia and Erin, no matter their mettle, none is found to be compared with thee in valour, bravery and truthfulness. The sovranity of the heroes of Erin to thee from this hour forth and the Champion's Portion undisputed, and to thy lady the precedence alway of the ladies of Ultonia in the Mead Hall. And whosoever shall lay wager against thee from now, as my folks swear I swear, while on life he will be in [sore scathe]." Then the bachlach vanished. It was Curoi mac Dairi who in that guise had come to fulfil the promise he had given to Cuchulainn.

And thus henceforth the Champion's Portion of Emain
And the Ulster Women's War of Words
And the Champion's Wager in Emain
And the Hosting of the Ultonians
To Cruachan.

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