

# Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea

A man came slowly from the setting sun,  
To Emer, raddling raiment in her dun,  
And said, 'I am that swineherd whom you bid  
Go watch the road between the wood and tide,  
But now I have no need to watch it more.'

Then Emer cast the web upon the floor,  
And raising arms all raddled with the dye,  
Parted her lips with a loud sudden cry.

That swineherd stared upon her face and said,  
'No man alive, no man among the dead,  
Has won the gold his cars of battle bring.'

'But if your master comes home triumphing  
Why must you blench and shake from foot to crown?'

Thereon he shook the more and cast him down  
Upon the web-heaped floor, and cried his word:  
'With him is one sweet-throated like a bird.'

'You dare me to my face,' and thereupon  
She smote with raddled fist, and where her son  
Herded cattle came with stumbling feet,

## CUCHULAIN'S FIGHT WITH THE SEA

And cried with angry voice, 'It is not meet  
To idle life away, a common herd.'

'I have long waited, mother, for that word:  
But wherefore now?'

                  'There is a man to die;  
You have the heaviest arm under the sky.'

'Whether under its daylight or its stars  
My father stands amid his battle-cars.'

'But you have grown to be the taller man.'

'Yet somewhere under starlight or the sun  
My father stands.'

                  'Aged, worn out with wars  
On foot, on horseback or in battle-cars.'

'I only ask what way my journey lies,  
For He who made you bitter made you wise.'

'The Red Branch camp in a great company  
Between wood's rim and the horses of the sea.  
Go there, and light a camp-fire at wood's rim;  
But tell your name and lineage to him  
Whose blade compels, and wait till they have found  
Some feasting man that the same oath has bound.'

## CUCHULAIN'S FIGHT WITH THE SEA

Among those feasting men Cuchulain dwelt,  
And his young sweetheart close beside him knelt,  
Stared on the mournful wonder of his eyes,  
Even as Spring upon the ancient skies,  
And pondered on the glory of his days;  
And all around the harp-string told his praise,  
And Conchubar, the Red Branch king of kings,  
With his own fingers touched the brazen strings.

At last Cuchulain spake, 'Some man has made  
His evening fire amid the leafy shade.  
I have often heard him singing to and fro,  
I have often heard the sweet sound of his bow.  
Seek out what man he is.'

One went and came.

'He bade me let all know he gives his name  
At the sword-point, and waits till we have found  
Some feasting man that the same oath has bound.'

Cuchulain cried, 'I am the only man  
Of all this host so bound from childhood on.'

After short fighting in the leafy shade,  
He spake to the young man, 'Is there no maid  
Who loves you, no white arms to wrap you round,  
Or do you long for the dim sleepy ground,  
That you have come and dared me to my face?'

## CUCHULAIN'S FIGHT WITH THE SEA

'The dooms of men are in God's hidden place.'

'Your head a while seemed like a woman's head  
That I loved once.'

Again the fighting sped,  
But now the war-rage in Cuchulain's woke,  
And through that new blade's guard the old blade broke,  
And pierced him.

'Speak before your breath is done.'

'Cuchulain I, mighty Cuchulain's son.'

'I put you from your pain, I can no more.'

While day its burden on to evening bore,  
With head bowed on his knees Cuchulain stayed;  
Then Conchubar sent that sweet-throated maid,  
And she, to win him, his grey hair caressed;  
In vain her arms, in vain her soft white breast.  
Then Conchubar, the subtlest of all men,  
Ranking his Druids round him ten by ten,  
Spake thus: 'Cuchulain will dwell there and brood  
For three days more in dreadful quietude,  
And then arise, and raving slay us all.  
Chaunt in his ear delusions magical,  
That he may fight the horses of the sea.'  
The Druids took them to their mystery,  
And chaunted for three days.

## CUCHULAIN'S FIGHT WITH THE SEA

Cuchulain stirred,  
Stared on the horses of the sea, and heard  
The cards of battle and his own name cried;  
And fought with the invulnerable tide.