

Chapter II

§ 8. 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 Ilíach. "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 sovrantry of the braves of Erin," quoth Bricriu, "if only thou act as I advise." I will indeed," quoth Loigaire.

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

§ 10. 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.

§ 11. 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.

§ 12. 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 Rôig, Celtchar son of Uthechar, Eogan son of Durthact, and the two sons of the king, namely, Fiacha and Fâchaig, Fergna son of Findchôim, Fergus son of Leti, Cûscraid the-stuttering-of-Macha, son of Conchobar, Sencha son of Ailill, the three sons of Fiachach, namely, Rus and Dâre and Imchad, Muinremur son of Geirrgind, Errge Echbêl, Amorgene son of Ecit, Mend son of Salchad, Dubtach Dôel Ulad, Feradach Find Fectnach, Fedelmid mac Ilair Chêtaig, 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.

§ 13. 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.

§ 14. Anon the spencers rose up to serve the food. The charioteer of Loigaire the Triumphant, to wit, Sedlang mac Riagabra, 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 Riagabra,

charioteer to Conall the Victorious, got up and spake to the like effect. And Loig mac Rianganabra 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.

§ 15. 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 Rôig 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.][2]

§ 16. 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 Mâgach, 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.

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