

Chapter VIII

§ 42. [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 Mève of Cruachan Ai] [12] 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.

§ 43. Loig mac Riagabra 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.

§ 44. 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. Mève 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 Mève, 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 Mève, "its form, appearance and style; the colour of the horses; how the hero looks and how the chariot courses."

§ 45. "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.[13]] Its
ferti 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."

§ 46. "We recognise that man," quoth Mève, "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—
The back-stroke of the wave to the land."

"By the god of my people," quoth Mève, "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."

§ 47. "Mother dear," quoth the daughter, "I see anon another chariot
coming along the plain, not a whit inferior to the first." "Describe it,"
said Mève. "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
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 Mève 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 Rôich 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.

§ 56. 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 Mève and their curse with Bricriu, for it was he who had incited them to strife. They then departed from the territory of Mève, 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

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