

The Death of Lóch Mac Mo Femis

Then Lóch mac Emonis was summoned like the others and he was promised the extent of Mag Muirthemne in the arable land of Mag nAí, the equipment of twelve men, and a chariot worth seven cumala. But he scorned to encounter a mere lad. He had a brother, namely Long mac Ebonis. The same payment was offered to him, the maiden, the raiment, chariot and land.

Long went to meet Cú Chulainn. Cú Chulainn killed him and he was brought back dead and set down before his brother Lóch. Then Lóch said that if he knew that it was a bearded man who killed his brother he would himself kill him in revenge. 'Attack him vigorously,' said Medb to her men, 'over the ford from the west, so that ye may cross the river, and let terms of fair play be broken against him.'

The seven Maines, the warriors, went first and saw him on the brink of the ford to the west. That day Cú Chulainn put on his festive apparel. The women kept climbing on the men's shoulders to get a glimpse of him. 'I am grieved,' said Medb, 'that I do not see the lad around whom they gather there.' 'You would be no more joyful for seeing him,' said Lethrend, Ailill's groom. She came then to the ford where he was.

'Who is that man yonder, Fergus?' asked Medb. 'A lad who defends with sword and shield ... if it be Cú Chulainn.' So Medb too climbed on the men to get a look at him. Then the women told Cú Chulainn that he was jeered at in the camp since he was beardless and goodly warriors did not oppose him, only mere boys. It were better for him to put on a beard of blackberry juice. So this he did in order to seek combat with a grown man, that is, with Lóch. Then Cú Chulainn took a handful of grass and chanted a spell over it and they all thought that he had a beard. 'Yes,' said the women, 'Cú Chulainn is bearded. It is fitting that a warrior should fight with him.' This they said in order to goad Lóch. 'I shall not fight with him until the end of seven days from today,' said Lóch. 'It is not right for us to leave him unattacked for that length of time,' said Medb. 'Let us send a band of warriors to seek him out every night in the hope of catching him unawares.'

It was done thus. Every night a band of warriors would go looking for him and he used to kill them all. These are the names of those that fell there: seven called Conall, seven called Óengus, seven called Úargus, seven called Celtre, eight called Fiac, ten called Ailill, ten called Delbaeth, ten called Tasach. Those were his deeds during that week at Áth nGrencha.

Medb sought counsel as to what she would do against Cú Chulainn, for she was sorely perturbed by the number of her army that was slain by him. The plan she decided on was to send brave and arrogant men to attack him all together when he should come to a rendez-vous with her to parley

with her. For she had made a tryst with Cú Chulainn for the next day to make a mock peace with him and so capture him. She sent a messenger to him asking him to come and meet her, and stipulated that he should come unarmed for she herself would come to him accompanied only by her women attendants.

The messenger, Traightrén, went to where Cú Chulainn was and gave him Medb's message. Cú Chulainn promised that he would do as she asked. 'How do you intend to go and meet Medb tomorrow, Cú Chulainn,' asked Láeg. 'As Medb asked me,' said Cú Chulainn. 'Many are Medb's treacherous deeds,' said the charioteer. 'I fear that she has help behind the scenes.' 'What should we do then?' said he. 'Gird your sword at your waist,' said the charioteer, 'so that you may not be taken unawares. For if a warrior is without his weapons, he has no right to his honour-price, but in that case he is entitled only to the legal due of one who does not bear arms.' 'Let it be done so then,' said Cú Chulainn.

The meeting was in Ard Aignech, which is today called Fochaird. Then Medb came to the meeting and she set in ambush for Cú Chulainn fourteen men, the most valorous of her own household. These are they: two called Glas Sinna, sons of Briccride, two called Ardán, sons of Licc, two called Glas Ogha, sons of Crond, Drúcht and Delt and Dathen, Téa and Tascur and Tualang, Taur and Glese. Then Cú Chulainn came to meet her. The men rose up to attack him and all together they threw fourteen spears at him. Cú Chulainn took shelter from them and not a spear touched his skin or surface. Then he attacked them and killed the fourteen men. Those are the fourteen men of Fochaird, and they are (also) the men of Crónech for they were killed in Crónech at Fochaird.

Of this deed Cú Chulainn said

1. Splendid is my heroic deed. I strike fearsome blows against a brilliant spectral army. I wage battle against many hosts to destroy valiant warriors together with Ailill and Medb ... There comes treachery, coldly impetuous, to strike against valiant warriors who take wise well-judged counsel from one who can well advise them to perform heroic deeds.

So it was from that exploit that Focherd remained as the name of the place, that is, fó cerd, good was the feat of arms which Cú Chulainn performed there. Then Cú Chulainn came and found them pitching camp and he killed two men called Daigre, two called Ánle and four Dúngais Imlich among them. So Medb began to incite Lóch. 'It is a great shame for you,' said she, 'that the man who killed your brother should be destroying our army and that you do not go to do battle with him. For we are sure that a sharp, boastful lad like yonder fellow will not stand out against the rage and fury of such as you, and anyway it was the same fostermother and teacher who taught you both the arts of war.'

So Lóch, since he saw that Cú Chulainn had a beard, came to attack him to avenge his brother's death. 'Come to the upper ford,' said Lóch. 'We shall not meet in the polluted ford where Long fell.' When Cú Chulainn came to the ford, the men drove the cattle across. 'There will be lack of water here today,' said Gabrán, the poet. Hence the names Áth Dartesc and Tír Mór Dartesc ever since for that place. Then when the combatants met on the ford and began to fight and to strike one

another and when each began to belabour the other, the eel twined itself in three coils round Cú Chulainn's feet so that he fell prostrate athwart the ford. Lóch attacked him with the sword until the ford was blood-red with his gore. 'That is indeed a wretched performance in the presence of the enemy!' said Fergus. 'Let one of you taunt the man, my men,' said he to his people, 'lest he fall in vain.'

Bricriu Nemthenga mac Carbada rose up and began to incite Cú Chulainn. 'Your strength is exhausted,' said he, 'if a puny opponent overthrows you now that the Ulstermen are on their way to you, recovered from their torpor. It is hard for you to undertake a hero's deed in the presence of the men of Ireland and to ward off a formidable opponent with your weapons in that way.' Whereupon Cú Chulainn arose and struck the eel and its ribs were broken within it, and the cattle rushed eastwards over the army, carrying off the tents on their horns, so great was the thunder-feat of the two warriors in the ford. The she-wolf attacked him and drove the cattle on him westwards. He threw a stone from his sling and her eye broke in her head. Then she went in the guise of a red hornless heifer and the cattle stampeded into the streams and fords. Cú Chulainn said then: 'I cannot see the fords for the streams.' He cast a stone at the red hornless heifer and her leg broke. Thereupon Cú Chulainn chanted:

1. I am here all alone, guarding the flocks. I neither hold them back nor let them go. In the cold hours I stand alone to oppose many peoples.
2. Let some one tell Conchobar that it is time for him to come to my aid. The sons of Mágu have carried off their cows and shared them out amongst them.
3. One man alone may be defended but a single log will not catch fire. If there were two or three, then their firebrands would blaze up.
4. My enemies have almost overcome me, so many single combats have I fought. I cannot now wage battle against splendid warriors as I stand here alone.

Then it was that Cú Chulainn did against the Mórrígan the three things that he had threatened her with in the Táin Bó Regamna. And he overcame Lóch in the ford with the gáe bolga which the charioteer threw to him downstream. He attacked him with it and it entered his body through the anus, for Lóch had a hornskin when he was fighting with an opponent. 'Retreat a step from me,' said Lóch. Cú Chulainn did so, so that it was on the other side (of the ford) that Lóch fell. Hence the place-name Áth Traiged in Tír Mór.

Then the terms of fair play were violated against Cú Chulainn on that day when five men came simultaneously to attack him, namely, two called Crúaid, two called Calad and one named Derothor. Single-handed Cú Chulainn slew them. The place is called Cóicsius Focherda and Cóicer Óengoirt. Or else it is because Cú Chulainn was fifteen days in Focherd that the name Cóicsius Focherda comes in the Tain. Cú Chulainn pelted them (with sling-stones) from Delga so that no living creature, neither man nor beast, could get past him to the south between Delga and the sea.

The Healing of the Mórrígan

While Cú Chulainn lay thus in great weariness, the Mórrígan came to him in the guise of an old crone, one-eyed and half-blind and engaged in milking a cow with three teats. He asked her for a

drink. She gave him the milk of one teat. ‘She who gave it will at once be whole,’ said Cú Chulainn. ‘The blessing of gods and of non-gods be on you!’ —The magicians were their gods but the husbandmen were their non- gods.— Thereupon her head was made whole. Then she gave him the milk of the second teat, and her eye was healed. She gave him the milk of the third teat, and her leg was cured.

—And it is suggested that on each occasion he said: ‘The judgment of blessing be on you!’— ‘But you told me,’ said the Mórrígan, ‘that I should never get healing from you.’ ‘Had I known that it was you,’ said Cú Chulainn, ‘I should never have healed you.’ —In another version the name of this tale in the Táin is Ríamdrong Con Culainn for Tarthesc.—

Then Fergus demanded of his sureties that Cú Chulainn should get fair play. So they came to oppose him in single combat, and he killed the five men of Cend Coriss or of Dún Chind Coross which is now called Delgu Murthemne. Then Cú Chulainn killed Fota in his field; Bó Mailce on his ford; Salach in his marsh, Muinne in his stronghold; Lúar in Lethbera and Fer Toíthle in Toíthle. Wherever any one of those men fell their names have remained for ever in those districts.

Cú Chulainn also killed Traig and Dorna and Derna, Col and Mebal and Eraise at Méthe and Cethe on this side of Áth Tíre Móir. These were three druids and their wives. Then Medb sent out a hundred men of her household to kill Cú Chulainn but he slew them all at Áth Chéit Chúile. Whereupon Medb said: ‘Indeed we deem it a crime that our people should be slain!’ Whence the place-names Glais Chró and Cuillenn Cind Dúin and Áth Chéit Chúile.

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