

The Combat of Láiríne mac Nóis

‘Let one of you go speedily tomorrow to meet your opponent,’ said Lugaid. ‘No one will be got,’ said Ailill, ‘unless ye employ some trickery in this matter. Give wine to every man that comes to you until he is gladdened in mind, and tell him: ‘That is all that is left of the wine that was brought from Crúachain. We are grieved that you should have only water to drink in the camp.’—and let Finnabair be placed at his right hand, and tell him: ‘You shall have her if you bring back to us the head of the distorted one.’”

A message was sent to each warrior on his night, and he was told that. But Cú Chulainn killed each of them in turn. At last no one could be got to oppose him.

Láiríne mac Nóis, brother of Lugaid King of Munster, was summoned to them. His pride was overweening. He was plied with wine and Finnabair was placed at his right hand. Medb looked at the two. ‘I think that couple well matched,’ said she. ‘A marriage between them would be fitting.’ ‘I shall not oppose you,’ said Ailill. ‘He shall have her if he bring me the head of the distorted one.’ ‘I shall do so indeed,’ said Láiríne. Thereupon Lugaid arrived.

‘What man have ye got to send to the ford tomorrow?’ ‘Láiríne is going,’ said Ailill. Then Lugaid went to speak with Cú Chulainn. They met in Glend Fir Báith. Each greeted the other in friendly fashion. ‘This is why I have come to speak with you,’ said Lugaid. ‘There is a boorish fellow, foolish and arrogant, yonder, my brother who is called Láiríne. He is being tricked about the same girl. By our friendship do not kill him, do not leave me without my brother, for he is being sent to you in order that we two may quarrel. But I am willing for you to give him a sound thrashing, for it is against my wishes he goes.’

On the morrow Láiríne came to meet Cú Chulainn and the maiden came with him to encourage him. Cú Chulainn came unarmed to attack him, and forcibly took his weapons from Láiríne. Then he seized him with both hands and squeezed him and shook him until he drove his excrement out of him and the water of the ford was turbid with his dung and the air of the firmament was polluted with his stench.

Then Cú Chulainn threw him into Lugaid's arms. As long as Láiríne lived, his inward parts never recovered. He was never without chest-disease; he never ate without pain. Yet he is the only man of all those who met Cú Chulainn on the Táin who escaped from him, even though it was a poor escape.