



THE WARNING OF CUCULAIN

I

CUCULAIN tossed on his lonely bed,
Laeg couched across the door—
The hero heard the heavenly steed,
Fair Macha's grey, the North wind's seed,
Neigh to her yoke-fellow, as in need,
And stamp on the stone-flagged floor.

II

Laeg slept unmoved, while down below
Th' immortal war-horse stirred,
And ever it seemed to the wondering king
That he heard a harp at the casement ring
And a spirit chant to the chiming string,
Sweet-voiced as a magic bird.

III

The hero arose and searched the night
—A glory against the gloom—
Orphid MacManar before him sate,
Dark God, who but to the brave and great
May pour the presage of evil fate:
The dolorous burthen of doom.

IV

Sad spake the seer—'Cuculain, lo!
 Thou art set on the black grave's brink.
 Thy doom, alone 'mid the Southron hordes,
 To strew the plain with their smitten lords,
 And at length o'erwhelmed by a sea of swords,
 Like a storm-swept rock to sink.'

V

The God, like a dream, from his startled gaze,
 Sank into the outer night;
 Cuculain has wakened his charioteer,
 And softly speaks in his listening ear,
 'I have seen the Death-God, be of good cheer,
 Together we fall in the fight.'

VI

'Our comrades battle across the foam,
 Seizing the strangers' strands;
 For us, old friend, more glorious far
 To reap the ranks of the Southron war,
 With the whirlwind rush of our scythe-set car,
 The sweep of our flaming brands.'

VII

'Master,' answered his charioteer,
 'Thy foster brother am I.
 Since death-doomed by the God thou art,
 By my sword, I swear, that the fatal dart
 Must pass through mine, 'ere it reach thy heart—
 With thee, as I've lived, I die.'

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