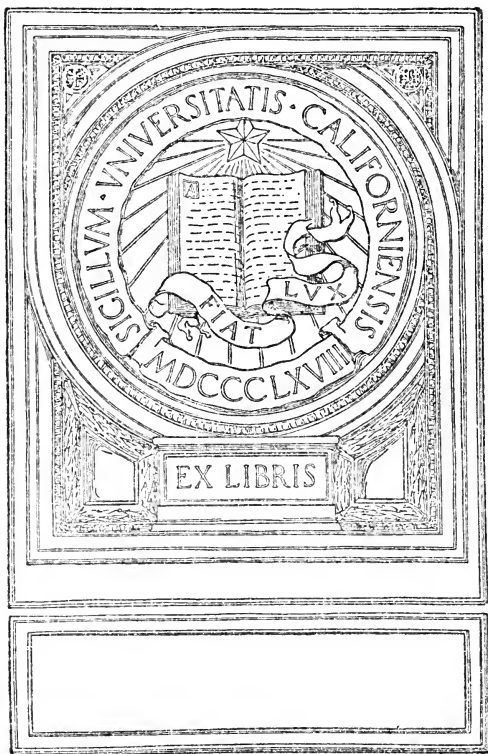


**THE GREEN HELMET AND OTHER
POEMS BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS**



*This book is
now published by
Mitchell Kennerley*



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THE GREEN HELMET AND OTHER
POEMS BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS



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RAYMOND JULY AND HIS WIFE

PAVILL A

THE GARDEN

A

The

The

A

King

Paris

Agnes

HOME

The

A

The

The

The

A

Clara

The

The

A

Alfred

The

The

AN ERROR

By a slip of the pen when I was writing out the heading for the first group of poems, I put Raymond Lully's name in the room of the later Alchemist, Nicolas Flamel.

W. B. Yeats.

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PHYSICS

RAYMOND LULLY AND HIS WIFE PERNELLA

HIS DREAM

I swayed upon the gaudy stern
The butt end of a steering oar,
And everywhere that I could turn
Men ran upon the shore.

And though I would have hushed the crowd
There was no mother's son, but said,
'What is the figure in a shroud
Upon a gaudy bed?'

And fishes bubbling to the brim
Cried out upon that thing beneath,
It had such dignity of limb,
By the sweet name of Death.

Though I'd my finger on my lip,
What could I but take up the song?
And fish and crowd and gaudy ship
Cried out the whole night long,

Crying amid the glittering sea,
Naming it with ecstatic breath,
Because it had such dignity
By the sweet name of Death.

RAYMOND LULLY AND HIS WIFE PERNELLA

A WOMAN HOMER SUNG

If any man drew near
When I was young,
I thought 'he holds her dear'
And shook with hate and fear.
But oh, 'twas bitter wrong,
If he could pass her by
With an indifferent eye.

Whereon I wrote and wrought
And now being grey,
I dream that I have brought
To such a pitch my thought
That coming time can say,
'He shadowed in a glass
What thing her body was.'

For she had fiery blood
When I was young,
And trod so sweetly proud
As 'twere upon a cloud,
A woman Homer sung,
That life and letters seem
But an heroic dream.

RAYMOND LULLY AND HIS WIFE PERNELLA

THE CONSOLATION

I had this thought awhile ago,
My darling cannot understand
What I have done, or what would do
In this blind bitter land;

And I grew weary of the sun
Until my thoughts cleared up again,
Remembering that the best I have done
Was done to make it plain;

That every year I have cried at length
My darling understands it all,
Because I have come into my strength,
And words obey my call;

That had she done so who can say
What would have shaken from the sieve?
I might have thrown poor words away
And been content to live.

RAYMOND LULLY AND HIS WIFE PERNELLA

NO SECOND TROY

Why should I blame her that she filled my days
With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire?
What could have made her peaceful with a mind
That nobleness made simple as a fire,
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern?
Why, what could she have done being what she is?
Was there another Troy for her to burn?

RECONCILIATION

Some may have blamed you that you took away
The verses that they cared for on the day
When, the ears being deafened, the sight of the eyes blind
With lightning you went from me, and I could find
Nothing to make a song about but kings,
Helmets, and swords, and half-forgotten things
That were like memories of you — but now
We'll out for the world lives as long ago;
And while we're in our laughing, weeping fit,
Hurl helmets, crowns, and swords into the pit.
But, dear, cling close to me; since you were gone,
My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone.

RAYMOND LULLY AND HIS WIFE PERNELLA

KING AND NO KING

‘Would it were anything but merely voice’
The NO King cried who after that was King,
Because he had not heard of anything
That balanced with a word is more than noise;
Yet Old Romance being kind, let him prevail
Somewhere or somehow that I have forgot,
Though he’d but cannon— Whereas we that had thought
To have lit upon as clean and sweet a tale
Have been defeated by that pledge you gave
In momentary anger long ago;
And I that have not your faith, how shall I know
That in the blinding light beyond the grave
We’ll find so good a thing as that we have lost?
The hourly kindness, the day’s common speech,
The habitual content of each with each
When neither soul nor body has been crossed.

PEACE

Ah, that Time could touch a form
That could show what Homer’s age
Bred to be a hero’s wage.
‘Were not all her life but storm,
Would not painters paint a form
Of such noble lines I said?
Such a delicate high head,
So much sternness and such charm.’
Ah, but peace that comes at length,
Came when Time had touched her form.

RAYMOND LULLY AND HIS WIFE PERNELLA

AGAINST UNWORTHY PRAISE

Oh, heart, be at peace, because
Nor knave nor dolt can break
What's not for their applause,
Being for a woman's sake.
Enough if the work has seemed,
So did she your strength renew,
A dream that a lion had dreamed
Till the wilderness cried aloud,
A secret between you two,
Between the proud and the proud.

What, still, you would have their praise !
But here's a haughtier text,
The labyrinth of her days
That her own strangeness perplexed.
And how what her dreaming gave
Earned slander ingratitude
From self-same dolt and knave;
Ay, and worse wrong than these.
Yet she, singing upon her road,
Half lion, half child, is at peace.

MOMENTARY THOUGHTS

THE FASCINATION OF WHAT'S DIFFICULT

The fascination of what's difficult
Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent
Spontaneous joy and natural content
Out of my heart. There's something ails our colt
That must, as if it had not holy blood,
Nor on an Olympus leaped from cloud to cloud,
Shiver under the lash, strain, sweat, and jolt
As though it dragged road metal. My curse on plays
That have to be set up in fifty ways,
On the day's war with every knave and dolt,
Theatre business, management of men.
I swear before the dawn comes round again
I'll find the stable and pull out the bolt.

A DRINKING SONG

Wine comes in at the mouth
And love comes in at the eye;
That's all we shall know for truth
Before we grow old and die.
I lift the glass to my mouth,
I look at you, and I sigh.

THE COMING OF WISDOM WITH TIME

Though leaves are many, the root is one;
Through all the lying days of my youth
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;
Now I may wither into the truth.

MOMENTARY THOUGHTS

TO A POET, WHO WOULD HAVE ME
PRAISE CERTAIN BAD POETS, IMITA-
TORS OF HIS AND OF MINE

You say as I have often given tongue
In praise of what another's said or sung
'Twere politic to do the like by these,
But where's the wild dog that has praised his fleas?

A LYRIC FROM AN UNPUBLISHED PLAY

'Put off that mask of burning gold
With emerald eyes.'

'O no, my dear, you make so bold
To find if hearts be wild and wise,
And yet not cold.'

'I would but find what's there to find,
Love or deceit.'

'It was the mask engaged your mind,
And after set your heart to beat,
Not what's behind.'

'But lest you are my enemy,
I must enquire.'

'O no, my dear, let all that be,
What matter, so there is but fire
In you, in me?'

MOMENTARY THOUGHTS

UPON A THREATENED HOUSE

How should the world be luckier if this house,
Where passion and precision have been one
Time out of mind, became too ruinous
To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun?
And the sweet laughing eagle thoughts that grow
Where wings have memory of wings, and all
That comes of the best knit to the best? although
Mean roof-trees were the sturdier for its fall.
How should their luck run high enough to reach
The gifts that govern men, and after these
To gradual Time's last gift, a written speech
Wrought of high laughter, loveliness and ease?

THESE ARE THE CLOUDS

These are the clouds about the fallen sun,
The majesty that shuts his burning eye;
The weak lay hand on what the strong has done,
Till that be tumbled that was lifted high
And discord follow upon unison,
And all things at one common level lie.
And therefore, friend, if your great race were run
And these things came, so much the more thereby
Have you made greatness your companion,
Although it be for children that you sigh:
These are the clouds about the fallen sun,
The majesty that shuts his burning eye.

MOMENTARY THOUGHTS

AT GALWAY RACES

Out yonder, where the Race Course is,
Delight makes all of the one mind,
The riders upon the swift horses,
The field that closes in behind:
We too, had good attendance once,
Hearers and hearteners of the work;
Aye, horsemen for companions,
Before the merchant and the clerk
Breathed on the world with timid breath.
Sing on: sometime, and at some new moon
We'll learn that sleeping is not death,
Hearing the whole earth change its tune,
Its flesh being wild, and it again
Crying aloud as the race course is,
And we find hearteners among men
That ride upon horses.

A FRIEND'S ILLNESS

Sickness brought me this
Thought, in that scale of his:
Why should I be dismayed
Though flame had burned the whole
World, as it were a coal,
Now I have seen it weighed
Against a soul?

MOMENTARY THOUGHTS

ALL THINGS CAN TEMPT ME

All things can tempt me from this craft of verse,
One time it was a woman's face, or worse
The seeming needs of my fool-driven land;
Now nothing but comes readier to the hand
Than this accustomed toil. When I was young,
I had not given a penny for a song
Did not the poet sing it with such airs,
That one believed he had a sword upstairs,
Yet would be now, could I but have my wish,
Colder and dumber and deafer than a fish.

THE YOUNG MAN'S SONG

I whispered 'I am too young,'
And then, 'I am old enough,'
Wherefore I threw a penny
To find out if I might love;
'Go and love, go and love young man,
If the lady be young and fair,'
Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,
I am looped in the loops of her hair.

Oh love is the crooked thing,
There is nobody wise enough
To find out all that is in it,
For he would be thinking of love
Till the stars had run away,
And the shadows eaten the moon;
Ah penny, brown penny, brown penny,
One cannot begin it too soon.

THE GREEN HELMET
An Heroic Farce

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

LAEGAIRE

CONALL

CUCHULAIN

RED MAN, a Spirit

EMER

CONALL'S WIFE

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

LAEG, Cuchulain's chariot-driver

HORSE BOYS AND SCULLIONS

BLACK MEN, etc.

SCENE: A house made of logs. There are two windows at the back and a door which cuts off one of the corners of the room. Through the door, one can see low rocks which make the ground outside higher than it is within, and beyond the rocks a misty moon-lit sea. Through the windows one can see nothing but the sea. There is a great chair at the opposite side to the door, and in front of it a table with cups and a flagon of ale. Here and there are stools. At the Abbey Theatre the house is orange red and the chairs and tables and flagons black, with a slight purple tinge which is not clearly distinguishable from the black. The rocks are black with a few green touches. The sea is green and luminous and all the characters except the Red Man and the Black Men are dressed in various shades of green, one or two with touches of purple which look nearly black. The Black Men all wear dark purple and have eared caps, and at the end their eyes should look green from the reflected light of the sea. The Red Man is altogether in red. He is very tall, and his height increased by horns on the Green Helmet. The effect is intentionally violent and startling.

THE GREEN HELMET

LAEGAIRE

What is that? I had thought that I saw, though but in the wink
of an eye?

A cat-headed man out of Connaught go pacing and spitting by;
But that could not be.

CONALL

You have dreamed it — there's nothing out there
I killed them all before daybreak — I hoked them out of their lair;
I cut off a hundred heads with a single stroke of my sword,
And then I danced on their graves and carried away their hoard.

LAEGAIRE

Does anything stir on the sea?

CONALL

Not even a fish or a gull

I can see for a mile or two, now that the moon's at the full. (a dis-
tant shout)

LAEGAIRE

Ah — there — there is some one who calls us.

CONALL

But from the landward side,
And we have nothing to fear that has not come up from the tide;
The rocks and the bushes cover whoever made that noise,
But the land will do us no harm,

LAEGAIRE

It was like Cuchulain's voice.

CONALL

But that's an impossible thing.

LAEGAIRE

An impossible thing indeed.

THE GREEN HELMET

CONALL

For he never will come home, he has all that he could need
In that high windy Scotland— good luck in all that he does,
Here neighbour wars on neighbour and why there is no man knows
And if a man is lucky all wish his luck away,
And take his good name from him between a day and a day.

LAEGAIRE

I would he'd come for all that, and make his young wife know
That though she may be his wife, she has no right to go
Before your wife and my wife, as she would have gone last night
Had they not caught at her dress, and pulled her as was right;
And she makes light of us though our wives do all that they can.
She spreads her tail like a peacock and praises none but her man.

CONALL

A man in a long green cloak that covers him up to the chin
Comes down through the rocks and hazels,

LAEGAIRE

Cry out that he cannot come in.

CONALL

He must look for his dinner elsewhere, for no one alive shall stop
Where a shame must alight on us two before the dawn is up.

LAEGAIRE

No man on the ridge of the world must ever know that but us two.

CONALL

(outside door) Go away, go away, go away.

YOUNG MAN

(outside door) I will go when the night is through
And I have eaten and slept and drunk to my heart's delight.

THE GREEN HELMET

CONALL

A law has been made that none shall sleep in this house to-night.

YOUNG MAN

Who made that law?

CONALL

We made it, and who has so good a right
Who else has to keep the house from the Shape-Changeers till day?

YOUNG MAN

Then I will unmake the law, so get you out of the way.
(He pushes past Conall and goes into house)

CONALL

I thought that no living man could have pushed me from the door
Nor could any living man do it but for the dip in the floor;
And had I been rightly ready there's no man living could do it,
Dip or no dip.

LAEGAIRE

Go out — if you have your wits, go out,
A stone's throw further on you will find a big house where
Our wives will give you supper, and you'll sleep sounder there,
For it's a luckier house.

YOUNG MAN

I'll eat and sleep where I will.

LAEGAIRE

Go out or I will make you.

YOUNG MAN

(forcing up Laegaire's arm, passing him and putting his shield on
the wall over the chair) Not till I have drunk my fill,
But may some dog defend me for a cat of wonders up.
Laegaire and Conall are here, the flagon full to the top,
And the cups.

THE GREEN HELMET

LAEGAIRE

It is Cuchulain.

CUCHULAIN

The cups are dry as a bone. (he sits on chair and drinks)

CONALL

Go into Scotland again, or where you will, but begone
From this unlucky country that was made when the devil spat.

CUCHULAIN

If I lived here a hundred years, could a worse thing come than that,
Laegaire and Conall should know me and bid me begone to my face?

CONALL

We bid you begone from a house that has fallen on shame and dis-
grace.

CUCHULAIN

I am losing patience, Conall — I find you stuffed with pride,
The flagon full to the brim, the front door standing wide;
You'd put me off with words, but the whole thing's plain enough,
You are waiting for some message to bring you to war or love
In that old secret country beyond the wool-white waves,
Or it may be down beneath them in foam-bewildered caves
Where nine forsaken sea queens fling shuttles to and fro;
But beyond them, or beneath them, whether you will or no,
I am going too.

LAEGAIRE

Better tell it all out to the end;
He was born to luck in the cradle, his good luck may amend
The bad luck we were born to.

CONALL

I'll lay the whole thing bare.

THE GREEN HELMET

You saw the luck that he had when he pushed in past me there.
Does anything stir on the sea?

LAEGAIRE

Not even a fish or a gull.

CONALL

You were gone but a little while. We were there and the ale-cup full.
We were half drunk and merry, and midnight on the stroke
When a wide high man came in with a red foxy cloak,
With half shut foxy eyes and a great laughing mouth,
And he said when we bid him drink, that he had so great a drouth
He could drink the sea.

CUCHULAIN

I thought he had come for one of you
Out of some Connaught rath, and would lap up milk and mew.
But if he so loved water I have the tale awry.

CONALL

You would not be so merry if he were standing by,
For when we had sung or danced as he were our next of kin
He promised to show us a game, the best that ever had been;
And when we had asked what game, he answered, 'why whip off my
head,

Then one of you two stoop down, and I'll whip off his,' he said.
'A head for a head,' he said, 'that is the game that I play.'

CUCHULAIN

How could he whip off a head when his own had been whipped
away?

CONALL

We told him it over and over, and that ale had fuddled his wit,
But he stood and laughed at us there, as though his sides would split
Till I could stand it no longer, and whipped off his head at a blow,

THE GREEN HELMET

Being mad that he did not answer, and more at his laughing so,
And there on the ground where it fell it went on laughing at me.

LAEGAIRE

Till he took it up in his hands.

CONALL

And splashed himself into the sea.

CUCHULAIN

I have imagined as good when I have been as deep in the cup.

LAEGAIRE

You never did.

CUCHULAIN

And believed it.

CONALL

Cuchulain, when will you stop

Boasting of your great deeds, and weighing yourself with us two,
And crying out to the world whatever we say or do,

That you have said or done a better — nor is it a drunkard's tale?

Though we said to ourselves at first that it all came out of ale,

And thinking that if we told it we should be a laughing stock

Swore we should keep it secret.

LAEGAIRE

But twelve months upon the clock.

CONALL

A twelve month from the first time.

LAEGAIRE

And the jug full up to the brim.

For we had been put from our drinking by the very thought of him.

CONALL

We stood as we're standing now.

THE GREEN HELMET

LAEGAIRE

The horns were as empty.

CONALL

When

He ran up out of the sea with his head on his shoulders again.

CUCHULAIN

Why, this is a tale worth telling.

CONALL

And he called for his debt and his right

And said that the land was disgraced, because of us two from that
night,

If we did not pay him his debt.

LAEGAIRE

What is there to be said

When a man with a right to get it has come to ask for your head?

CONALL

If you had been sitting there you had been silent like us.

LAEGAIRE

He said that in twelve months more he would come again to this
house

And ask his debt again. Twelve months are up to-day.

CONALL

He would have followed after if we had run away.

LAEGAIRE

Will he tell every mother's son that we have broken our word?

CUCHULAIN

Whether he does or does not we'll drive him out with the sword,
And take his life in the bargain if he but dare to scoff.

THE GREEN HELMET

CONALL

How can you fight with a head that laughs when you've whipped it off?

LAEGAIRE

Or a man that can pick it up and carry it out in his hand?

CONALL

He is coming now, there's a splash and a rumble along the strand
As when he came last.

CUCHULAIN

Come, and put all your backs to the door.

(a tall red-headed red-cloaked man stands upon the threshold against the misty green of the sea, the ground higher without than within the house, makes him seem taller even than he is. He leans upon a great two-handled sword)

LAEGAIRE

It is too late to shut it, for there he stands once more
And laughs like the sea.

CUCHULAIN

Old herring — You whip off heads? Why then

Whip off your own, for it seems you can clap it on again.

Or else go down in the sea, go down in the sea I say,

Find that old juggler Manannan and whip his head away;

Or the Red Man of the Boynes' for they are of your own sort,

Or if the waves have vexed you and you would find a sport

Of a more Irish fashion, go fight without a rest

A caterwauling phantom among the winds of the west.

But what are you waiting for, into the water I say?

If there's no sword can harm you, I've an older trick to play,

An old five-fingered trick to tumble you out of the place;

THE GREEN HELMET

I am Sualtim's son Cuchulain— what, do you laugh in my face?

RED MAN

So you too think me in earnest is wagering poll for poll,
A drinking joke and a gibe and a juggler's feat that is all,
To make the time go quickly— for I am the drinker's friend,
The kindest of all Shape-Changers from here to the world's end.
The best of all tipsy companions, and now I bring you a gift,
I will lay it there on the ground for the best of you all to lift, (he lays
his helmet on the ground)
And wear upon his own head, and choose for yourselves the best.
O! Laegaire and Conall are brave, but they were afraid of my jest.
Well, maybe I jest too grimly when the ale is in the cup.
There, I'm forgiven now— (then in a more solemn voice as he goes
out)

Let the bravest take it up.

(Conall takes up Helmet and gazes at it with delight)

LAEGAIRE

(singing, with a swaggering stride)

Laegaire is best;
Between water and hill,
He fought in the west
With cat heads, until
At the break of day
All fell by his sword,
And he carried away
Their hidden hoard. (he seizes the Helmet)

CONALL

Give it me, for what did you find in the bag

THE GREEN HELMET

But the straw and the broken delf and the bits of dirty rag
You'd taken for good money?

CUCHULAIN

No, no, but give it me. (he takes Helmet)

CONALL

The Helmet's mine or Laegaire's— you are the youngest of us
three.

CUCHULAIN

(filling Helmet with ale)

I did not take it to keep it— the Red Man gave it for one,
But I shall give it to all— to all of us three or to none;
That is as you look upon it— we will pass it to and fro,
And time and time about, drink out of it and so
Stroke into peace this cat that has come to take our lives.
Now it is purring again and now I drink to your wives,
And I drink to Emer, my wife.

(a great noise without and shouting)

Why what in God's name is that noise?

CONALL

What else but the Charioteers and the kitchen and stable boys
Shouting against each other, and the worst of all is your own
That chariot-driver, Laeg, and they'll keep it up till the dawn,
And there's not a man in the house that will close his eyes to-night,
Or be able to keep them from it, or know what set them to fight. (a
noise of horns without)

There do you hear them now? such hatred has each for each
They have taken the hunting horns to drown one another's speech
For fear the truth may prevail—here's your good health and long life
And though she be quarrelsome good health to Emer, your wife.

THE GREEN HELMET

(The Charioteers, stable boys and kitchen boys come running in. They carry great horns, ladles and the like.)

LAEG

I am Laeg, Cuchulain's driver, and my master's cock of the yard.

ANOTHER

Conall would scatter his feathers. (confused murmurs)

LAEGAIRE

(to Cuchulain) No use, they won't hear a word.

CONALL

They'll keep it up till the dawn.

ANOTHER

It is Laegaire that is the best

For he fought with cats in Connaught while Conall took his rest
And drained his ale pot.

ANOTHER

Laegaire— what does a man of his sort
Care for the like of us? he did it for his own sport.

ANOTHER

It was all mere luck at the best.

ANOTHER

But Conall, I say.

ANOTHER

Let me speak.

LAEG

You'd be dumb if the cock of the yard would but open his beak.

ANOTHER

Before your cock was born, my master was in the fight.

LAEG

Go home and praise your grand-dad. They took to the horns for
spite,

THE GREEN HELMET

For I said that no cock of your sort had been born since the fight began.

ANOTHER

Conall has got it, the best man has got it, and I am his man.

CUCHULAIN

Who started this quarrel?

A STABLE BOY

It was Laeg.

ANOTHER

It was Laeg done it all.

LAEG

A high wide foxy man came where we sat in the hall,
Getting our supper ready, with a great voice like the wind,
And cried that there was a helmet or something of the kind
That was for the foremost man upon the ridge of the earth.
So I cried your name through the hall (the others cry out and blow
horns partly drowning the rest of his speech)

But they denied its worth

Preferring Laegaire or Conall and they cried to drown my voice;
But I have so strong a throat that I drowned all their noise
Till they took to the hunting horns and blew them into my face,
And as neither side would give in — we would settle it in this place.
Let the Helmet be taken from Conall.

A STABLE BOY

No, Conall is the best man here.

ANOTHER

Give it to Laegaire that made the murderous cats pay dear.

CUCHULAIN

It has been given to none — that our rivalry might cease,

THE GREEN HELMET

We have turned that murderous cat into a cup of peace,
I drank the first; and then Conall; give it to Laegaire now
(Conall gives horn to Laegaire)

That it may purr in his hand and all of our servants know
That since the ale went in its claws went out of sight.

A SERVANT

That's well— I will stop my shouting.

ANOTHER

Cuchulain is in the right;
I am tired of this big horn that has made me hoarse as a rook.

LAEG

Cuchulain, you drink the first.

ANOTHER

By drinking the first he took
The whole of the honours himself.

LAEG

Cuchulain, you drank the first.

ANOTHER

If Laegaire drink from it now he claims to be last and worst.

ANOTHER

Cuchulain and Conall have drunk.

ANOTHER

He is lost if he taste a drop.

LAEGAIRE

(laying horn on table)

Did you claim to be better than us by drinking first from the cup?

CUCHULAIN

(His words are partly drowned by the murmurs of the crowd though
he speaks very loud)

THE GREEN HELMET

That juggler from the sea, that old red herring it is
Who has set us all by the ears— he brought the Helmet for this,
And because we would not quarrel he ran elsewhere to shout
That Conall and Laegaire wronged me, till all had fallen out.
(the murmur grows less so that his words are heard)
Who knows where he is now or who he is spurring to fight?
So get you gone, and whatever may cry aloud in the night,
Or show itself in the air, be silent until morn.

A SERVANT

Cuchulain is in the right— I am tired of this big horn.

CUCHULAIN

Go. (the servants turn towards the door but stop on hearing the
voices of women outside)

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

(without) Mine is the better to look at.

CONALL'S WIFE

(without) But mine is better born.

EMER

(without) My man is the pithier man.

CUCHULAIN

Old hurricane, well done

You've set our wives to the game that they may egg us on;

We are to kill each other that you may sport with us.

Ah, now, they've begun to wrestle as to who'll be first at the house.

(The women come to the door struggling)

EMER

No, I have the right of place for I married the better man.

CONALL'S WIFE

(pulling Emer back) My nails in your neck and shoulder.

THE GREEN HELMET

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

And go before me if you can.

My husband fought in the West.

CONALL'S WIFE

(kneeling in the door so as to keep the others out who pull at her)

But what did he fight with there

But sidelong and spitting and helpless shadows of the dim air?

And what did he carry away but straw and broken delf?

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

Your own man made up that tale trembling alone by himself

Drowning his terror.

EMER

(forcing herself in front) I am Emer, it is I go first through the door.

No one shall walk before me, or praise any man before

My man has been praised.

CUCHULAIN

(spreading his arms across the door so as to close it)

Come, put an end to their quarrelling

One is as fair as the other and each one the wife of a king.

Break down the painted boards between the sill and the floor

That they come in together, each one at her own door.

(Laegaire and Conall begin to break out the bottoms of the windows, then their wives go to the windows, each to the window where her husband is. Emer stands at the door and sings while the boards are being broken out)

EMER

Nothing that he has done,

His mind that is fire,

His body that is sun,

THE GREEN HELMET

Have set my head higher,
Than all the world's wives.
Himself on the wind
Is the gift that he gives,
Therefore women kind,
When their eyes have met mine,
Grow cold and grow hot
Troubled as with wine
By a secret thought,
Preyed upon, fed upon
By jealousy and desire,
For I am moon to that sun,
I am steel to that fire.

(The windows are now broken down to floor. Cuchulain takes his spear from the door, and the three women come in at the same moment)

EMER

Cuchulain, put off this sloth and awake,
I will sing till I've stiffened your lip against every knave that would
take
A share of our honour.

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

You lie, for your man would take from my man.

CONALL'S WIFE

(to Laegaire's wife) You say that, you double-face, and your own
husband began.

CUCHULAIN

(taking up Helmet from table)

THE GREEN HELMET

Town land may rail at town land till all have gone to wrack,
The very straws may wrangle till they've thrown down the stack.
The very door-posts bicker till they've pulled in the door,
The very ale jars jostle till the ale is on the floor,
But this shall help no further. (he throws Helmet into the sea)

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

It was not for your head
And so you would let none wear it but fling it away instead.

CONALL'S WIFE

But you shall answer for it, for you've robbed my man by this.

CONALL

You have robbed us both, Cuchulain.

LAEGAIRE

The greatest wrong there is
On the wide ridge of the world has been done to us two this day.

EMER

(drawing her dagger) Who is for Cuchulain?

CUCHULAIN

Silence.

EMER

Who is for Cuchulain, I say?

(she sings the same words as before, flourishing her dagger about.
While she is singing, Conall's wife and Laegaire's wife draw their
daggers and run at her, but Cuchulain forces them back. Laegaire
and Conall draw their swords to strike Cuchulain)

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

(crying out so as to be heard through Emer's singing)

Deafen her singing with horns.

THE GREEN HELMET

CONALL'S WIFE

Cry aloud ! blow horns ! make a noise !

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

Blow horns, clap hands, or shout, so that you smother her voice. (The horse boys and scullions blow their horns or fight among themselves. There is a deafening noise and a confused fight. Suddenly, three black hands come through the windows and put out the torches. It is now pitch dark, but for a faint light outside the house which merely shows that there are moving forms, but not who or what they are, and in the darkness one can hear low terrified voices)

A VOICE

Coal black, and headed like cats. They came up over the strand.

ANOTHER VOICE

And I saw one stretch to a torch and cover it with his hand.

ANOTHER VOICE

Another sooty fellow has plucked the moon from the air. (A light gradually coming into the house from the sea, on which the moon begins to show once more. There is no light within the house, and the great beams of the walls are dark and full of shadows, and the persons of the play dark too against the light. The Red Man is seen standing in the midst of the house. The black cat-headed men crouch and stand about the door. One carries the Helmet, one the great sword)

RED MAN

I demand the debt that's owing. Let some man kneel down there
That I may cut his head off or all shall go to wrack.

CUCHULAIN

He played and paid with his head and it's right that we pay him
back,

THE GREEN HELMET

And give him more than he gave, for he comes in here as a guest,
So I will give him my head.

(Emer begins to keen) Little wife, little wife, be at rest.
Alive I have been far off in all lands under sun,
And been no faithful man, but when my story is done
My fame shall spring up and laugh, and set you high above all.

EMER

(putting her arms about him) It is you not your fame that I love.

CUCHULAIN

(tries to put her from him)

You are young, you are wise, you can call
Some kinder and comlier man that will sit at home in the house.

EMER

Live, and be faithless still.

CUCHULAIN

(throwing her from him) Would you stay the great barnacle-goose
When its eyes are turned to the sea and its beak to the salt of the air?

EMER

(lifting her dagger to stab herself) I, too, on the grey winds path.

CUCHULAIN

(seizing dagger) Do you dare, do you dare, do you dare.
Bear children and sweep the house. (forcing his way through the
servants who gather round)

Wail, but keep from the road (he kneels before Red Man. There is
a pause)

Quick to your work old Radish, you will fade when the cocks have
crowed.

(A black cat-headed man holds out the Helmet. The Red Man takes
it)

THE GREEN HELMET

RED MAN

I have not come for your hurt, I am the Rector of this land,
And with my spitting-cat heads, my frenzied moon-bred band,
Age after age I sift it, and choose for its champion-ship
The man who hits my fancy. (he places the Helmet on Cuchulain's
head)

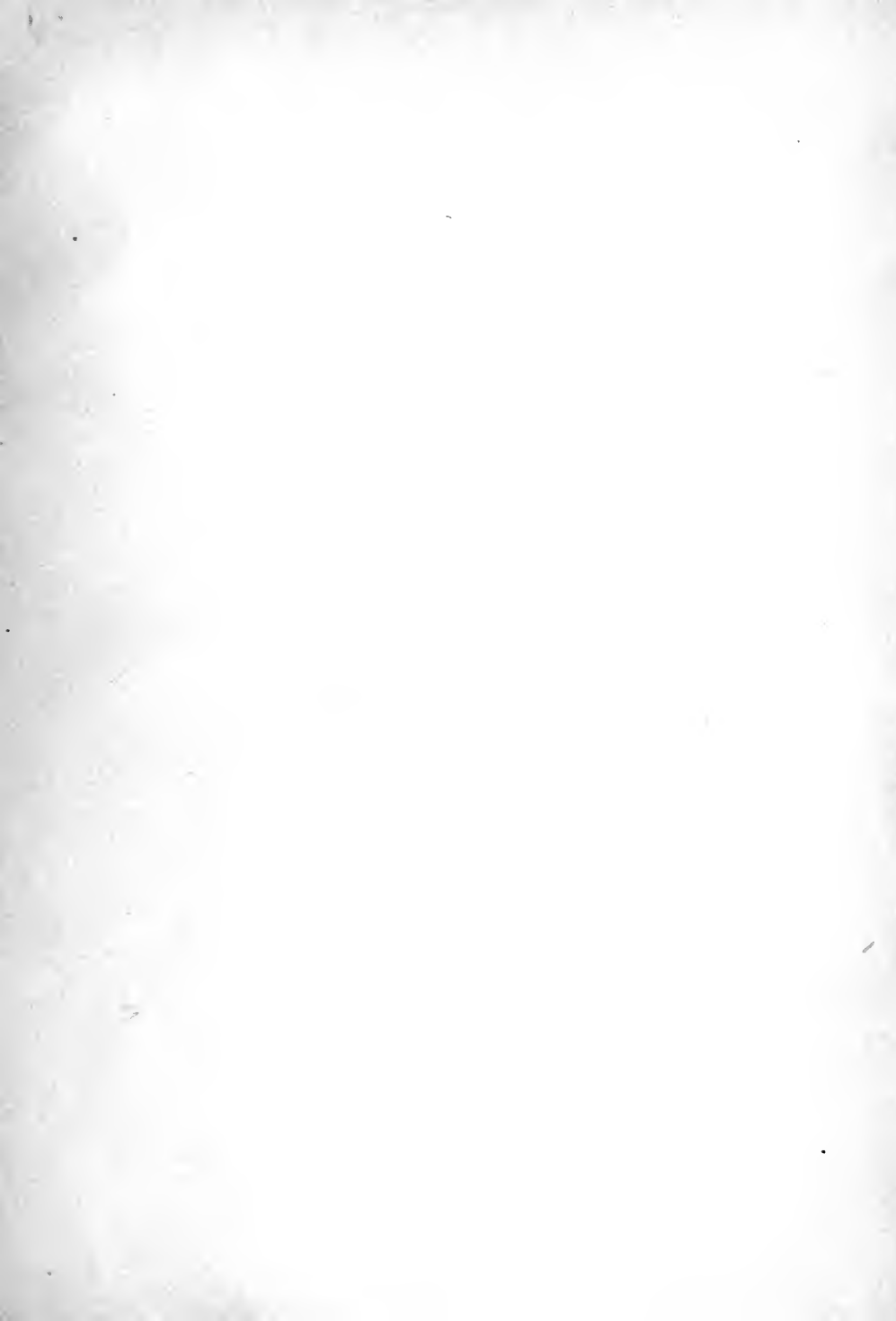
And I chose the laughing lip
That shall not turn from laughing whatever rise or fall,
The heart that grows no bitterer although betrayed by all,
The hand that loves to scatter, the life like a gambler's throw;
And these things I make prosper, till a day come that I know,
When heart and mind shall darken that the weak may end the strong,
And the long remembering harpers have matter for their song.

HERE END THE GREEN HELMET
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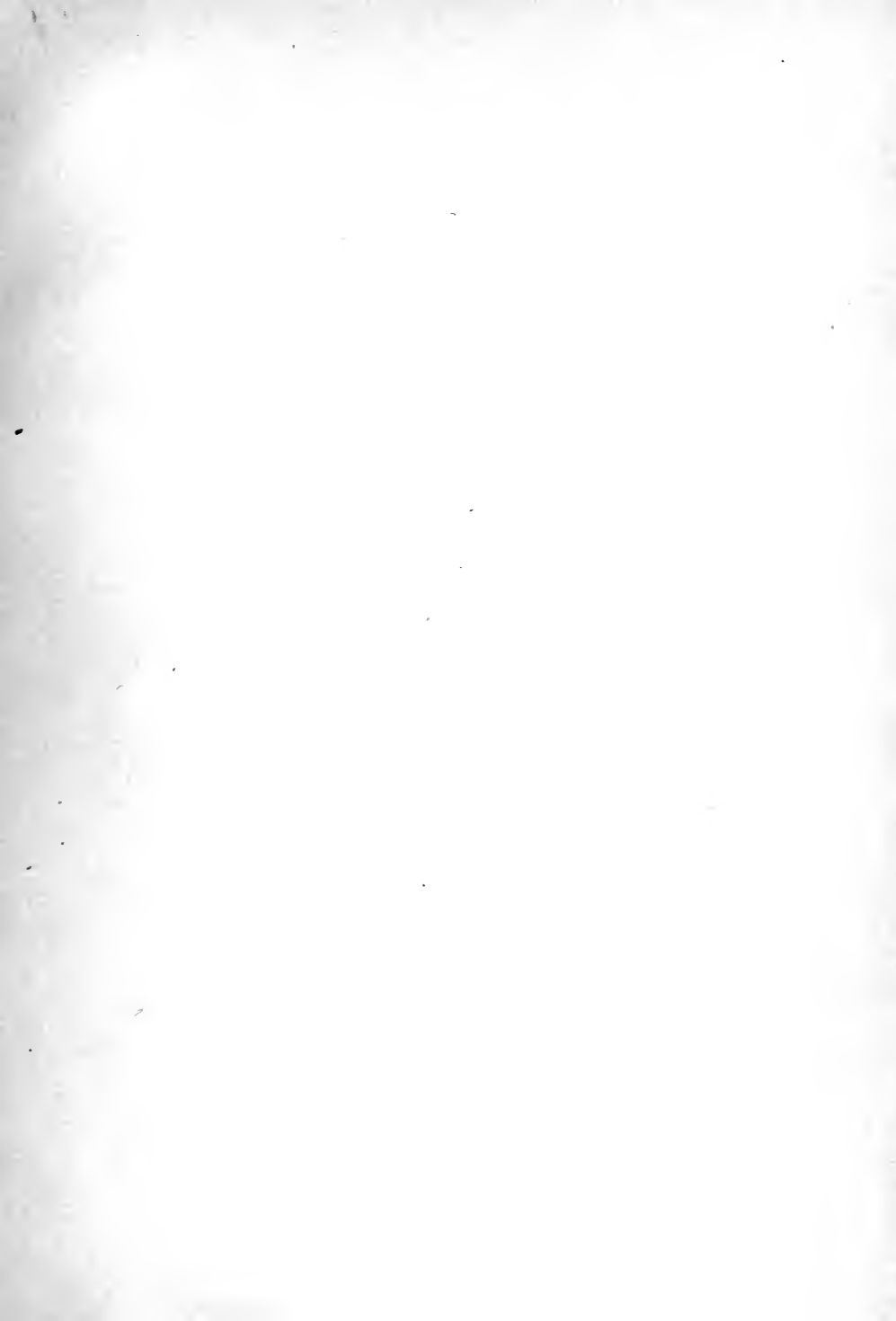
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