

**DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS:
A PLAY BY JOHN M. SYNGE.**

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DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS: A PLAY
BY JOHN M. SYNGE



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PREFACE

It was Synge's practice to write many complete versions of a play, distinguishing them with letters, and running half through the alphabet before he finished. He read me a version of this play the year before his death, and would have made several more always altering and enriching. He felt that the story, as he had told it, required a grotesque element mixed into its lyrical melancholy to give contrast and create an impression of solidity, and had begun this mixing with the character of Owen, who would have had some part in the first act also, where he was to have entered Lavarcham's cottage with Conchubor. Conchubor would have taken a knife from his belt to cut himself free from threads of silk that caught in brooch or pin as he leant over Deirdre's embroidery frame, and forgotten this knife behind him. Owen was to have found it and stolen it. Synge asked that either I or Lady Gregory should write some few words to make this possible, but after writing in a passage we were little satisfied and thought it better to have the play performed, as it is printed here, with no word of ours. When Owen killed himself in the second act, he was to have done it with Conchubor's knife. He did not speak to me of any other alteration, but it is probable that he would have altered till the structure had become as strong and varied as

in his other plays; and had he lived to do that, 'Deirdre of the Sorrows' would have been his master-work, so much beauty is there in its course, and such wild nobleness in its end, and so poignant is an emotion and wisdom that were his own preparation for death.

W. B. Yeats. April, 1910.

Two hundred and fifty copies
of this book have been printed.

OLD WOMAN

She hasn't come yet is it, and it falling to the night?

LAVARCHAM

She has not.

It's dark with the clouds are coming from the West and South, but it isn't later than the common.

OLD WOMAN

It's later surely, and I hear tell the Sons of Usna, Naisi and his brothers, are above chasing hares for two days or three, and the same a while since when the moon was full.

LAVARCHAM

The gods send they don't set eyes on her; yet if they do it-
self, it wasn't my wish brought them or could send them away.

OLD WOMAN

If it wasn't, you'd do well to keep a check on her, and she turning a woman that was meant to be a queen.

LAVARCHAM

Who'd check her like was made to have her pleasure only, the way if there were no warnings told about her you'd see troubles coming when an old king is taking her, and she without a thought but for her beauty and to be straying the hills.

OLD WOMAN

The gods help the lot of us . . . Shouldn't she be well pleased getting the like of Conchubor, and he middling settled in his years itself? I don't know what he wanted putting her this wild place to be breaking her in, or putting myself to be roasting her supper and she with no patience for her food at all.

LAVARCHAM

Is she coming from the Glen?

OLD WOMAN

She is not. But whist—there's two men leaving the furze— it's Conchubor and Fergus along with him. Conchubor 'll be in a blue stew this night and herself abroad.

LAVARCHAM

Are they close by?

OLD WOMAN

Crossing the stream, and there's herself on the hill-side with a load of twigs. Will I run out and put her in order before they'll set eyes on her at all?

LAVARCHAM

You will not. Would you have him see you, and he a man would be jealous of a hawk would fly between her and the rising sun. Go up to the hearth and be as busy as if you hadn't seen them at all.

OLD WOMAN

There'll be trouble this night, for he should be in his tempers from the way he's stepping out, and he swinging his hands.

LAVARCHAM

It'd be the best of all maybe if he got in tempers with herself, and made an end quickly, for I'm in a poor way between the pair of them. —

There they are now at the door.

CONCHUBOR AND FERGUS

The gods save you.

LAVARCHAM

The gods save and keep you kindly, and stand between you and all harm for ever.

CONCHUBOR

Where is Deirdre?

LAVARCHAM

Abroad upon
Slieve Fuadh. She does be all times straying around
picking flowers or nuts, or sticks itself; but so long
as she's gathering new life I've a right not to heed
her, I'm thinking, and she taking her will.

CONCHUBOR

A night with thunder coming is no night to
be abroad.

LAVARCHAM

She's used to every track and path-
way and the lightning itself wouldn't let down its
flame to singe the beauty of her like.

FERGUS

She's right, Conchubor, and let you sit
down and take your ease;
and I'll count out what we've brought,
and put it in the presses within.

CONCHUBOR

Where are the
mats and hangings and the silver skillets I sent up for
Deirdre?

LAVARCHAM

The mats and hangings are in this press, Conchubor.

She wouldn't wish to be soiling them, she said, running out and in with mud and grasses on her feet, and it raining since the night of Samhain. The silver skillets and the golden cups we have beyond locked in the chest.

CONCHUBOR

Bring them out and use them from this day.

LAVARCHAM

We'll do it, Conchubor.

CONCHUBOR

Is this hers?

LAVARCHAM

It is, Conchubor. All say there isn't her match at fancying figures and throwing purple upon crimson, and she edging them all times with her greens and gold.

CONCHUBOR

Is she keeping wise and busy since I passed before and growing ready for her life in Emain?

LAVARCHAM

That is a question will give small pleasure to yourself or me; and if it's the truth I'll tell you, she's growing too wise to marry a big king and she a score only. Let you not be taking it bad, Conchubor, but you'll get little good seeing her this night, for with all my talking it's wilfuler she's growing these two months or three.

CONCHUBOR

Isn't it a poor thing you're doing so little to school her to meet what is to come?

LAVARCHAM

I'm after serving you two score of years, and I'll tell you this night, Conchubor, she's little call to mind an old woman when she has the birds to school her, and the pools in the rivers where she goes bathing in the sun. I'll tell you if you seen her that time, with her white skin, and her red lips and the blue water and the ferns about her, you'd know maybe, and you greedy itself, it wasn't for your like she was born at all.

CONCHUBOR

It's little I heed for what she was born; she'll be my comrade surely.

LAVARCHAM

I'm in dread so they were right saying she'd bring destruction on the world; for it's a poor thing when you see a settled man putting the love he has for a young child and the love he has for a full woman on a girl the like of her; and it's a poor thing, Conchubor, to see a high king the way you are this day, prying after her needles and numbering her lines of thread.

CONCHUBOR

Let you not be talking too far and you

old itself.—

Does she

know the troubles are foretold?

LAVARCHAM

I'm after telling her one time and another, but I'd do as well speaking to a lamb of ten weeks and it racing the hills. It's not the dread of death or troubles that would tame her like.

CONCHUBOR

She's coming now and let you walk in and keep Fergus, till I speak with her a while.

LAVARCHAM

If I'm after vexing you itself, it'd be best you wern't taking her hasty or scolding her at all.

CONCHUBOR

I've no call to. I'm well pleased she's light and airy.

LAVARCHAM

Well pleased is it?

It's a queer thing the way the likes of me do be telling the truth, and the wise are lying all times.

CONCHUBOR

The gods save you, Deirdre. I have come up bringing you rings and jewels from Emain Macha.

DEIRDRE

The gods save you.

CONCHUBOR

What have you brought from the hills?

DEIRDRE

A bag of nuts, and twigs for our fires at the dawn of day.

CONCHUBOR

And it's that way you're picking up the manners will fit you to be Queen of Ulster?

DEIRDRE

I have no wish to be a queen.

CONCHUBOR

You'd wish to be dressing in your duns and grey, and you herding your geese or driving your calves to their shed . . . like the common lot scattered in the glens.

DEIRDRE

I would not, Conchubor.

A girl born the way I'm born is more likely to wish for a mate who'd be her

likeness . . . A man with his hair like the raven maybe and his skin like the snow and his lips like blood spilt on it.

CONCHUBOR

Whatever you wish, there's no queen but would be well pleased to have your skill at choosing colours and making pictures on the cloth. What is it you're figuring?

DEIRDRE

Three young men and they chasing in the green gap of a wood.

CONCHUBOR

It's soon you'll have dogs with silver chains to be chasing in the woods of Emain, for I have white hounds rearing up for you, and grey horses, that I've chosen from the finest in Ulster and Britain and Gaul.

DEIRDRE

I've heard tell, in Ulster and Britain and Gaul Naisi and his brothers have no match and they chasing in the woods.

CONCHUBOR

Isn't it a strange thing you'd be talking of Naisi and his brothers, or figuring them either, when you know the things that are foretold about themselves and you? Yet you've little knowledge,

and I'd do wrong taking it bad when it'll be my share from this out to keep you the way you'll have little call to trouble for knowledge, or its want either.

DEIRDRE

Yourself should be wise surely?

CONCHUBOR

The like of me has a store of knowledge that's a weight and terror. It's for that we do choose out the like of yourself that are young and glad only I'm thinking you are gay and lively each day in the year?

DEIRDRE

There are lonesome days and bad nights in this place like another.

CONCHUBOR

You should have as few sad days I'm thinking, as I have glad and good ones.

DEIRDRE

What is it has you that way ever coming this place, when you'd hear the old woman saying a good child's as happy as a king?

CONCHUBOR

How would I be happy seeing age coming on me each year, when the dry leaves are blowing back and forward at the gate of Emain? And yet this last while I'm saying out, when I see the furze breaking and the daws sitting two and two on ash-trees by the Duns of Emain, Deirdre's a year nearer her full age

when she'll be my mate and comrade, and then I'm glad surely.

DEIRDRE

I will not be your mate in Emain.

CONCHUBOR

It's there you'll be proud and happy and you'll learn that, if young men are great hunters, yet it's with the like of myself you'll find a knowledge of what is priceless in your own like. What we all need is a place is safe and splendid, and it's that you'll get in Emain in two days or three.

DEIRDRE

Two days!

CONCHUBOR

I've the rooms ready, and in a little while you'll be brought down there, to be my queen and queen of the five parts of Ireland.

DEIRDRE

I'd liefer stay this place, Conchubor . . . Leave me this place where I'm well used to the tracks and pathways and the people of the glens . . . It's for this life I'm born surely.

CONCHUBOR

You'll be happier and greater with myself in Emain. It is I will be your comrade and will stand between you and the great troubles are foretold.

DEIRDRE

I will not be your queen in Emain when it's my pleasure to be having my freedom on the edges of the hills.

CONCHUBOR

It's my wish to have you quickly; I'm sick and weary thinking of the day you'll be brought down to me, and seeing you walking into my big empty halls. I've made all sure to have you, and yet all said there's a fear in the back of my mind I'd miss you and have great troubles in the end. It's for that, Deirdre, I'm praying that you'll come quickly, and you may take the word of a man has no lies. You'll not find with any other the like of what I'm bringing you in wildness and confusion in my own mind.

DEIRDRE

I cannot go, Conchubor.

CONCHUBOR

It is my pleasure to have you and I a man is waiting a long while on the throne of Ulster. Wouldn't you liefer be my comrade, growing up the like of Emer and Maeve, than to be in this place and you a child always?

DEIRDRE

You don't know me and you'd have little joy taking me, Conchubor . . . I'm a long while watching the days getting a great speed passing me by. I'm too

long taking my will, and it's that way I'll be living always.

CONCHUBOR

Call Fergus to come with me. This is your last night upon Slieve Fuadh.

DEIRDRE

Leave me a short space longer, Conchubor. Isn't it a poor thing I should be hastened away, when all these troubles are foretold? Leave me a year, Conchubor, it isn't much I'm asking.

CONCHUBOR

It's much to have me two score and two weeks waiting for your voice in Emain, and you in this place growing lonesome and shy. I'm a ripe man and in great love, and yet Deirdre I'm the King of Ulster.

I'll call Fergus and we'll make Emain ready in the morning.

DEIRDRE

Do not call him, Conchubor. Promise me a year of quiet . . . It's the one year I'm asking only.

CONCHUBOR

You'd be asking a year next year, and the years that follow.

Fergus! Fergus!

Young girls are slow always; it is their lovers that must say the word—

Fergus!

CONCHUBOR

There is a storm coming and we'd best be going to our people when the night is young.

FERGUS

The godssshield you, Deirdre.

We're late already, and it's no work the High King to be slipping on stepping stones and hilly pathways when the floods are rising with the rain.

CONCHUBOR

Keep your rules a few days longer and you'll be brought down to Emain, you and Deirdre with you.

LAVARCHAM

Your rules are kept always.

CONCHUBOR

The gods shield you.

LAVARCHAM

Wasn't I saying you'd do it? You've brought your marriage a sight near in not heeding those are wiser than yourself.

DEIRDRE

It wasn't I did it. Will you take me from this place, Lavarcham, and keep me safe in the hills?

LAVARCHAM

He'd have us tracked in the half of a day, and then you'd be his queen in spite of you, and I and mine would be destroyed forever.

DEIRDRE

Are

there none can go against Conchubor?

LAVARCHAM

Maeve of Connaught only and those that are like her.

DEIRDRE

Would Fergus go against him?

LAVARCHAM

He would maybe and his temper roused.

DEIRDRE

Would

Naisi and his brothers?

LAVARCHAM

Let you not be dwelling on Naisi and his brothers . . . In the end of all there is none can go against Conchubor, and it's folly that we're talking, for if any went against Conchubor it's sorrows he'd earn and the shortening of his day of life.

DEIRDRE

Are the stepping stones flooding, Lavarcham? Will the night be stormy in the hills?

LAVARCHAM

The stepping stones are flooding surely, and the night will be the worst I'm thinking we've seen these years gone by.

DEIRDRE

Lay these mats and hangings by the windows, and at the tables for our feet, and take out the skillets of silver, and the golden cups we have, and our two flasks of wine.

LAVARCHAM

What ails you?

DEIRDRE

Lay them out quickly, Lavarcham, we've no call dawdling this night. Lay them out quickly. I'm going into the room to put on the rich dresses and jewels have been sent from Emain.

LAVARCHAM

Putting on dresses at this hour, and it dark and drenching with the weight of rain! Are you away in your head?

DEIRDRE

I will dress like Emer in Dundéalgan or Maeve in her House in Connaught. If Conchubor'll make me a queen, I'll have the right of a queen who is a master, taking her own choice and making a stir

to the edges of the seas. Lay out your mats and hangings where I can stand this night and look about me. Lay out the skins of the rams of Connaught and of the goats of the West. I will not be a child or plaything, I'll put on my robes that are the richest, for I will not be brought down to Emain as Cuchulain brings his horse to the yoke, or Conall Cearneach puts his shield upon his arm; and maybe from this day I will turn the men of Ireland like a wind blowing on the heath.

OLD WOMAN

She's thrown off the rags she had about her, and there she is in her skin; she's putting her hair in shiny twists. Is she raving, Lavarcham, or has she a good right turning to a queen like Maeve?

LAVARCHAM

It's more than raving's in her mind, or I'm the more astray, and yet she's as good a right as another, maybe, having her pleasure, though she'd spoil the world.

OLD WOMAN

Be quick before she'll come back . . .
Who'd have thought we'd run before her and she so

quiet till to-night. Will the High King get the better of her, Lavarcham? If I was Conchubor, I wouldn't marry with her like at all.

LAVARCHAM

Hang that by the window. That should please her surely. When all's said, it's her like will be the master till the end of time.

OLD WOMAN

There is a mountain of blackness in the sky, and the greatest rain falling has been these long years on the earth. The gods help Conchubor. He'll be a sorry man this night, reaching his Dun, and he with all his spirits, thinking to himself he'll be putting his arms around her in two days or three.

LAVARCHAM

It's more than Conchubor'll be sick and sorry, I'm thinking, before this story is told to the end.

LAVARCHAM

Who is that?

NAISI

Naisi, and his brothers.

LAVARCHAM

We are lonely women. What is it you're wanting in the blackness of the night?

NAISI

We met a young girl in the woods

who told us we might shelter this place if the rivers rose on the pathways and the floods gathered from the butt of the hills.

LAVARCHAM

You cannot come in. There is no one let in here, and no young girl with us.

NAISI

Let us in from the great storm. Let us in and we will go further when the cloud will rise.

LAVARCHAM

Go round east to the shed and you'll have shelter. You cannot come in.

NAISI

Open the door or we will burst it.

OLD WOMAN

Let them in and keep Deirdre in her room to-night.

AINNLE AND ARDAN

Open ! Open !

LAVARCHAM

Go in and keep her.

OLD WOMAN

I couldn't keep her. I've no hold on her. Go in yourself and I will free the door.

LAVARCHAM

I must stay and turn them out.

Go in and keep her.

OLD WOMAN

The gods help us.

VOICES

Open !

LAVARCHAM

Come in then and ill-luck if
you'll have it so.

NAISI

It's a rich man has this place, and no herd at all.

LAVARCHAM

and you'd best be going quickly.

It is not,

NAISI

When
we've had the pick of luck finding princely comfort
in the darkness of the night. Some rich man of Ul-
ster should come here and he chasing in the woods.
May we drink ? Whose wine is
this that we may drink his health ?

LAVARCHAM

It's no one's that you've call to know.

NAISI

Your own health then and length of life.

LAVARCHAM

You're great boys taking a welcome

where it isn't given, and asking questions where you've no call to . . . If you'd a quiet place settled up to be playing yourself maybe with a gentle queen, what'd you think of young men prying around and carrying tales? When I was a bit of a girl the big men of Ulster had better manners, and they the like of your threeselves, in the top folly of youth. That'll be a story to tell out in Tara that Naisi is a tippler and stealer, and Ainnle the drawer of a stranger's cork.

NAISI

At your age you should know there are nights when a king like Conchubor would spit upon his arm ring, and queens will stick their tongues out at the rising moon. We're that way this night, and it's not wine we're wanting only. Where is the young girl told us we might shelter here?

LAVARCHAM

Asking me you'd be . . . We're decent people, and I wouldn't put you tracking a young girl, not if you gave me the gold clasp you have hanging on your coat.

NAISI

Where is she?

LAVARCHAM

Let you walk back into the hills and turn up by the second cnuceen where there are three together.

You'll see a path running on the rocks and then you'll hear the dogs barking in the houses, and their noise will guide you till you come to a bit of cabin at the foot of an ash-tree. It's there, there is a young and flighty girl that I'm thinking is the one you've seen.

NAISI

Here's health to herself and you.

ARDAN

Here's to the years when you were young as she !

AINNLE

Naisi!

NAISI

This is the High King's — I see his mark on the rim. Does Conchubor come lodging here ?

LAVARCHAM

Who says it's Conchubor's ? How dare young fools the like of you — come prying around, running the world into troubles for some slip of a girl? What brings you this place straying from Emain? Though you think, maybe, young men can do their fill of foolery and there is none to blame them.

NAISI

Is the rain easing ?

ARDAN

The clouds are breaking. I can see Orion in the gap of the glen.

NAISI

Open the door and we'll go forward to the little cabin between the ash-tree and the rocks. Lift the bolt and pull it.

DEIRDRE

Naisi ! Do not leave me, Naisi. I am Deirdre of the Sorrows.

NAISI

And it is you who go around in the woods making the thrushes bear a grudge against the heavens for the sweetness of your voice singing.

DEIRDRE

It is with me you've spoken surely.

Take Ainnle and Ardan, these two princes, into the little hut where we eat, and serve them with what is best and sweetest. I have many things for Naisi only.

LAVARCHAM

I will do it, and I ask their pardon. I have fooled them here.

DEIRDRE

Do not take it badly that I

am asking you to walk into our hut for a little. You will have a supper that is cooked by the cook of Conchubor, and Lavarcham will tell you stories of Maeve and Nessa and Rogh.

AINNLE

We'll ask Lavarcham to tell us stories of yourself, and with that we'll be well pleased to be doing your wish.

DEIRDRE

stool, Naisi. Come to this
If it's low itself
the High King would sooner be on it this night than
on the throne of Emain Macha.

NAISI

You are Fedlimid's daughter that
Conchubor has walled up from all the men of Ulster.

DEIRDRE

Do many know what is foretold, that Deirdre will
be the ruin of the Sons of Usna, and have a little
grave by herself, and a story will be told forever?

NAISI

It's a long while men have been talking of Deirdre,
the child who had all gifts, and the beauty that has
no equal, there are many know it; and there are kings
would give a great price to be in my place this night
and you grown to a queen.

DEIRDRE

It isn't many I'd call, Naisi . . I was in the woods at

the full moon and I heard a voice singing. Then I gathered up my skirts, and I ran on a little path I have to the verge of a rock, and I saw you pass by underneath, in your crimson cloak, singing a song, and you standing out beyond your brothers are called the Flower of Ireland.

NAISI

It's for that you called us in the dusk?

DEIRDRE

Since that, Naisi, I have been one time the like of a ewe looking for a lamb that had been taken away from her, and one time seeing new gold on the stars, and a new face on the moon, and all times dreading Emain.

NAISI

Yet it should be a lonesome thing to be in this place and you born for great company.

DEIRDRE

This night I have the best company in the whole world.

NAISI

It is I who have the best company, for when you're queen in Emain, you will have none to be your match or fellow.

DEIRDRE

I will not be queen in Emain.

NAISI

Conchubor has made an oath you will surely.

DEIRDRE

It's for that maybe I'm called Deirdre, the girl of many sorrows . . . for it's a sweet life you and I could have, Naisi. It should be a sweet thing to have what is best and richest, if it's for a short space only.

NAISI

And we've a short space only, to be triumphant and brave.

DEIRDRE

You must not go, Naisi, and leave me to the High King, a man is ageing in his Dun, with his crowds round him, and his silver and gold.

I will not live to be shut up in Emain, and wouldn't we do well paying, Naisi, with silence and a near death.

I'm a long while in the woods with my own self, and I'm in little dread of death, and it earned with riches would make the sun red with envy, and he going up the heavens, and the moon, pale and lonesome, and she wasting away.

Isn't it a small thing is foretold about the ruin of ourselves, Naisi, when all men have age coming and great ruin in the end?

NAISI

Yet it's a poor thing it's I should bring you to a tale of blood and broken bodies, and the filth of the

grave. Wouldn't we do well to wait, Deirdre, and I each twilight meeting you on the sides of the hills.

DEIRDRE

His messengers are coming.

NAISI

Messengers are coming?

DEIRDRE

To-morrow morning or the next surely.

NAISI

Then we'll go away. It isn't I will give your like to Conchubor, not if the grave was dug to be my lodging when a week was by. The stars are

out, Deirdre, and let you come with me quickly, for it is the stars will be our lamps many nights and we abroad in Alban and taking our journeys among the little islands in the sea. There has never been the like of the joy we'll have, Deirdre, you and I, having our fill of love at the evening and the morning till the sun is high.

DEIRDRE

And yet I'm indread leaving this place where I have lived always. Won't I be lonesome and I thinking on the little hill beyond, and the apple trees do be budding in the spring-time by the post of the door?

Won't I be in great dread to bring you to destruction, Naisi, and you so happy and young?

NAISI

And you thinking I'd go on living after this night, Deirdre, and you with Conchubor in Emain. Are you thinking I'd go out after hares when I've had your lips in my sight?

LAVARCHAM

Are you raving, Deirdre? Are you choosing this night to destroy the world?

DEIRDRE

It's Conchubor has chosen this night calling me to Emain. Bring in Ainle and Ardan, and take me from this place, where I'm in dread from this out of the footsteps of a hare passing

DEIRDRE

Do not take it bad I'm going, Lavarcham. It's you have been a good friend and given me great freedom and joy, and I living on Slieve Fuadh; and maybe you'll be well pleased one day saying you have nursed Deirdre.

LAVARCHAM

It isn't I'll be well pleased and I far away from you. Isn't it a hard thing you're doing, but who can help it? Birds go mating in the spring of the year, and ewes at the leaves falling, but a young girl must have her lover in all the courses of the sun and moon.

DEIRDRE

Will you go to Emain in the morning?

LAVARCHAM

I will not. I'll go to Brandon in the South; and in the course of a piece, maybe, I'll be sailing back and forward on the seas to be looking on your face and the little ways you have that none can equal.

DEIRDRE

My two brothers, I am going with Naisi to Alban and the North to face the troubles are foretold. Will you take word to Conchubor in Emain?

AINNLE

We will go with you.

ARDAN

We will be your servants and your huntsmen, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE

It isn't one brother only of you three is brave and courageous. Will you wed us, Lavarcham, you have the words and customs?

LAVARCHAM

I will not then. What would I want meddling in the ruin you will earn?

NAISI

Let Ainnle wed us . . . He has been with wise men and he knows their ways.

AINNLE

By the sun and moon and the whole earth, I wed Deirdre to Naisi.

May the air bless you, and water and the wind, the sea, and all the hours of the sun and moon.

LAVARCHAM

Deirdre . . . Deirdre . . .

DEIRDRE

My welcome, Lavarcham . . . Whose curragh is rowing from Ulster? I saw the oars through the tops of the trees, and I thought it was you were coming towards us.

LAVARCHAM

I came in the shower was before the dawn.

DEIRDRE

And who is coming?

LAVARCHAM

Let you not be startled or taking it bad, Deirdre. It's Fergus bringing messages of peace from Conchubor to take Naisi and his brother back to Emain.

DEIRDRE

Naisi and his brothers are well pleased with

this place; and what would take them back to Conchubor in Ulster?

LAVARCHAM

Their like would go any place where they'd see death standing. I'm in dread
Conchubor wants to have yourself and to kill Naisi, and that that'll be the ruin of the sons of Usna. I'm silly maybe to be dreading the like, but those have a great love for yourself have a right to be in dread always.

DEIRDRE

Emain should be no safe place for myself and Naisi. And isn't it a hard thing they'll leave us no peace, Lavarcham, and we so quiet in the woods?

LAVARCHAM

It's a hard thing surely; but let you take my word and swear Naisi, by the earth and the sun over it and the four quarters of the moon, he'll not go back to Emain for good faith or bad faith, the time Conchubor's keeping the high Throne of Ireland. It's that would save him surely.

DEIRDRE

There's little power in oaths to stop what's coming and little power in what I'd do, Lavarcham, to change the story of Conchubor and Naisi and the things old men foretold.

LAVARCHAM

Was there little power in what you

did the night you dressed in your finery and ran Naisi off along with you in spite of Conchubor and the big nobles did dread the blackness of your luck? It was power enough you had that night to bring distress & anguish; and now I'm pointing you a way to save Naisi you'll not stir stick or straw to aid me.

DEIRDRE

Let you not raise your voice against me, Lavarcham, if you have will itself to guard Naisi.

LAVARCHAM

Naisi is it? I didn't care if the crows were stripping his thigh-bones at the dawn of day. It's to stop your own despair and wailing, and you waking up in a cold bed, without the man you have your heart on, I am raging now.

Yet there is more men than Naisi in it; and maybe I was a big fool thinking his dangers, and this day, would fill you up with dread.

DEIRDRE

Let you end: such talking is a fool's only, when it's well you know if a thing harmed Naisi it isn't I would live after him.

It's well you know it's this day I'm dreading seven years, and I fine nights watching the heifers walking to the haggard with long shadows on the grass,

or the time I've been stretched in the sunshine, when I've heard Ainnle and Ardan stepping

lightly, and they saying — Was there ever the like of Deirdre for a happy and sleepy queen?

LAVARCHAM

And yet you'll go, and welcome is it, if Naisi chooses?

DEIRDRE

I've dread going or staying, Lavarcham. It's lonesome this place, having happiness like ours, till I'm asking each day will this day match yesterday, and will to-morrow take a good place beside the same day in the year that's gone, and wondering all times is it a game worth playing, living on until you're dried and old, and our joy is gone forever.

LAVARCHAM

If it's that ails you, I tell you there's little hurt getting old, though young girls and poets do be storming at the shapes of age.

There's little hurt getting old, saving when you're looking back, the way I'm looking this day, and seeing the young you have a love for breaking up their hearts with folly.

Take my word and stop Naisi, and the day'll come you'll have more joy having the senses of an old woman and you with your little grandsons shrieking round you, than I'd have this night putting on the red mouth and the white arms you have, to go walking lonesome byeways with a gamey king.

DEIRDRE

It's little joy of a young woman, or an old woman, I'll have from this day surely. But what use is in our talking when there's Naisi on the foreshore, and Fergus with him.

LAVARCHAM

I'm late so with my warnings, for Fergus'd talk the moon over to take a new path in the sky. You'll not stop him this day, and isn't it a strange story you were a plague and torment since you were that height to those did hang their lifetimes on your voice.

Don't think bad of my crying. I'm not the like of many and I'd see a score of naked corpses and not heed them at all, but I'm destroyed seeing yourself in your hour of joy when the end is coming surely.

OWEN

Fergus's men are calling you. You were seen on the path and he and Naisi want you for their talk below.

LAVARCHAM

Yourself's an ill-lucky thing to meet a morning is the like of this. Yet if you are a spy itself I'll go and give my word that's wanting surely.

OWEN

So I've found you alone, and I after waiting three weeks getting ague and asthma in the chill of the bogs, till I saw Naisi caught with Fergus.

DEIRDRE

I've heard news of Fergus; what brought you from Ulster?

OWEN

The full moon I'm thinking and it squeezing the crack in my skull. Was there ever a man crossed nine waves after a fool's wife and he not away in his head?

DEIRDRE

It should be a long time since you left Emain, where there's civility in speech with queens.

OWEN

It's a long while surely. It's three weeks I am losing my manners beside the Saxon bull-frogs at the head of the bog. Three weeks is a long space, and yet you're seven years spancellor with Naisi and the Pair.

DEIRDRE

Three weeks of four days might be long surely, yet seven years are a short space for the like of Naisi and myself.

OWEN

If they're a short space there arn't many the like of you. Wasn't there a queen in Tara had to walk out every morning till she'd meet a stranger and see the flame of courtship leaping up within his eye? Tell me now, are you well pleased that length with the same man snorting next you at the dawn of day?

DEIRDRE

Am I well pleased seven years seeing the same sun throwing light across the branches at the dawn of day? It's a heartbreak to the wise that it's for a short space we have the same things only.

Yet the earth itself is a silly place maybe, when a man's a fool and talker.

OWEN

Well, go, take your choice. Stay here and rot with Naisi or go to Conchubor in Emain. Conchubor's a swelling belly and eyes falling down from his shining crown; Naisi should be stale and weary. Yet there are many roads, Deirdre, and I tell you I'd liefer be bleaching in a bog-hole than living on without a touch of kindness from your eyes and voice. It's a poor thing to be so lonesome you'd squeeze kisses on a cur dog's nose.

DEIRDRE

Are there no women like yourself could be your friends in Emain?

OWEN

There are none like you Deirdre. It's for that I'm asking are you going back this night with Fergus?

DEIRDRE

I will go where Naisi chooses.

OWEN

It's Naisi, Naisi, is it? Then I tell you, you'll have great sport one day seeing Naisi getting a harshness in his two sheeps eyes and he looking on yourself. Would you credit it, my father used to be in the broom and heather kissing Lavarcham, with a little bird chirping out above their heads, and now she'd scare a raven from a carcass on a hill.

Queens get old Deirdre, with their white and long arms going from them, and their backs hooping. I tell you it's a poor thing to see a queen's nose reaching down to scrape her chin.

DEIRDRE

Naisi and Fergus are coming on the path.

OWEN

I'll go so, for if I had you seven years I'd be jealous of the midges and the dust is in the air.

I'll give you a riddle Deirdre— Why isn't my father as ugly and old as Conchubor? You've no answer? ...

It's because Naisi killed him.

Think of that and you awake at night, hearing Naisi snoring, or the night you hear strange stories of the things I'm doing in Alban or in Ulster either.

NAISI

Fergus has brought messages of peace from Conchubor.

DEIRDRE

He is welcome. Let you rest, Fergus, you should be hot and thirsty after mounting the rocks.

FERGUS

It's a sunny nook you've found in Alban, yet any man would be well pleased mounting higher rocks, to fetch yourself and Naisi back to Emain.

DEIRDRE

They've answered? They would go?

FERGUS

They have not, but when I was a young man we'd have given a lifetime to be in Ireland a score of weeks, and to this day the old men have nothing so heavy as knowing it's in a short while they'll lose the high skies are over Ireland, and the lonesome mornings with birds crying on the bogs. Let you come this day, for there's no place but Ireland where the Gael can have peace always.

NAISI

It's true surely. Yet we're better this place
while Conchubor's in Emain Macha.

FERGUS

There are your sureties and Conchubor's seal. You'll not be young always, and it's time you were making yourselves ready for the years will come, building up a homely Dun beside the seas of Ireland, and getting in your children from the princes' wives. It's little joy wandering till age is on you and your youth is gone away, so you'd best come this night, for you'd have great pleasure putting out your foot and saying 'I am in Ireland surely.'

DEIRDRE

It isn't pleasure I'd have while Conchubor is king in Emain.

FERGUS

Would you doubt the seals of Conal Cearnach and the Kings of Meath?

It's easy being fearful and you alone in the woods, yet it would be a poor thing if a timid woman could turn away the Sons of Usna from the life of kings. Let you be thinking on the years to come, Deirdre, and the way you'd have a right to see Naisi a high and white-haired Justice beside some king of Emain. Wouldn't it be

a poor story if a queen the like of you should have no thought but to be scraping up her hours dallying in the sunshine with the sons of kings?

DEIRDRE

I leave the choice to Naisi. Yet you'd do well Fergus to go on your own way, for the sake of your own years, so you'll not be saying till your hour of death, maybe, it was yourself brought Naisi and his brothers to a grave was scooped by treachery.

FERGUS

It is a poor thing to see a queen so lonesome and afraid.

Listen now to what I'm saying. You'd do well to come back to men and women are your match and comrades, and not be lingering until the day that you'll grow weary, and hurt Deirdre showing her the hardness will grow up within your eyes.. You're here years and plenty to know it's truth I'm saying.

NAISI

I'll not tell you a lie. There have been days a while past when I've been throwing a line for salmon or watching for the run of hares, that

I've a dread upon me a day'd come I'd weary of her
voice and Deirdre'd see I'd wearied.

FERGUS

I knew it, Naisi . . .

And take my word, Deirdre's seen your dread and
she'll have no peace from this out in the woods.

NAISI

She's not seen it . . . Deirdre's no
thought of getting old or wearied; it's that puts wonder
in her ways, and she with spirits would keep
bravery and laughter in a town with plague

FERGUS

That humour'll leave her. But we've no call going
too far, with one word borrowing another. Will you
come this night to Emain Macha?

NAISI

I'll not go, Fergus. I've had dreams of getting old
and weary, and losing my delight in Deirdre; but my
dreams were dreams only. What are Conchubor's
seals and all your talk of Emain and the fools of
Meath beside one evening in Glen Masain? We'll
stay this place till our lives and time are worn out.
It's that word you may take in your curragh to Con-
chubor in Emain.

FERGUS

It's that you mean
surely?

NAISI

I've had dread I tell you, dread winter and summer
and the autumn and the spring-time, even when
there's a bird in every bush making his own stir till
the fall of night; but this talk's brought me ease, and
I see we're as happy as the leaves on the young trees,
and we'll be so ever and always though we'd live the
age of the eagle and the salmon and the crow of
Britain.

FERGUS

Where are your brothers? My message
is for them also.

NAISI

You'll see them above chasing otters by the stream.

FERGUS

It isn't much I was mistaken, thinking
you were hunter only.

NAISI

You've heard my words to Fergus?

Leave
troubling, and we'll go this night to Glen da Ruadh
where the salmon will be running with the tide.

DEIRDRE

With the tide in a little while
we will be journeying again, or it is our own blood
maybe will be running away

The dawn and evening are a little while, the
winter and the summer pass quickly, and what way
would you and I, Naisi, have joy for ever?

NAISI

We'll have the joy is highest till our age is come, for
it isn't Fergus's talk of great deeds could take us
back to Emain.

DEIRDRE

It isn't to great deeds you're going but to near troubles,
and the shortening of your days the time that
they are bright and sunny; and isn't it a poor thing
that I, Deirdre, could not hold you away?

NAISI

I've said we'd stay in Alban always.

DEIRDRE

There's no place to stay always. It's a long time
we've had, pressing the lips together, going up and
down, resting in our arms, Naisi, waking with the
smell of June in the tops of the grasses, and listening
to the birds in the branches that are highest. It's a
long time we've had, but the end has come surely.

NAISI

Would you have us go to Emain, though if any ask

the reason we do not know it, and we journeying as the thrushes come from the north, or young birds fly out on a dark sea?

DEIRDRE

There's reason all times for an end that's come. And I'm well pleased, Naisi, we're going forward in the winter the time the sun has a low place and the moon has her mastery in a dark sky, for it's you and I are well lodged our last day, where there is a light behind the clear trees, and the berries on the thorns are a red wall.

NAISI

If our time in this place is ended, come away without Ainnle and Ardan to the woods of the East, for it's right to be away from all people when two lovers have their love only. Come away and we'll be safe always.

DEIRDRE

There's no safe place, Naisi, on the ridge of the world . . . And it's in the quiet woods I've seen them digging our grave, throwing out the clay on leaves are bright and withered.

NAISI

Come away, Deirdre, and it's little we'll think of safety or the grave beyond it, and we resting in a little corner between the daytime and the long night.

DEIRDRE

It's this hour we're between the daytime and a night where there is sleep for ever, and isn't it a better thing to be following on to a near death, than to be bending the head down, and dragging with the feet, and seeing one day a blight showing upon love where it is sweet and tender?

NAISI

If a near death is coming what will be my trouble losing the earth and the stars over it, and you Deirdre, are their flame and bright crown? Come away into the safety of the woods.

DEIRDRE

There are as many ways to wither love as there are stars in a night of Samhain; but there is no way to keep life, or love with it, a short space only. It's for that there's nothing lonesome like a love is watching out the time most lovers do be sleeping. It's for that we're setting out for Emain Macha when the tide turns on the sand.

NAISI

You're right, maybe. It should be a poor thing to see great lovers and they sleepy and old.

DEIRDRE

We're seven years without roughness or growing weary; seven years so

sweet and shining, the gods would be hard set to give us seven days the like of them. It's for that we're going to Emain where there'll be a rest for ever, or a place for forgetting, in great crowds and they making a stir.

NAISI

We'll go surely, in place of keeping a watch on a love had no match and it wasting away.

There are Fergus and Lavarcham and my two brothers.

OWEN

Ah, Naisi, wasn't it well I didn't kill you that time. There was a fright you got! I've been watching Fergus above— don't be frightened— and I've come down to see him getting the cold shoulder, and going off alone.

NAISI

There he is.

We are going back when the tide turns, I and Deirdre with yourself.

ALL

Going back!

AINNLE

And you'll end our life with Deirdre, though she has no match for keeping spirits in a little company is far away by itself?

ARDAN

It's seven years myself and Ainnle have been servants and bachelors for yourself and Deirdre. Why will you take her back to Conchubor?

NAISI

I have done what Deirdre wishes and has chosen.

FERGUS

You've made a choice wise men will be glad of in the five ends of Ireland.

OWEN

Wise men is it? and they going back to Conchubor. I could stop them only Naisi put in his sword among my father's ribs, and when a man's done that he'll not credit your oath. Going to Conchubor? I could tell of plots and tricks, and spies were well paid for their play.

Fergus?—

Are you paid,

FERGUS

He is raving, seize him.

OWEN

You won't. Let the lot of you be off to Emain, but I'll be off before you. Dead

men, dead men! Men who'll die for Deirdre's beauty,
I'll be before you in the grave!

DEIRDRE

What has happened?

LAVARCHAM

It's Owen's gone raging mad, and he's after splitting his gullet beyond at the butt of the stone. There was ill luck this day in his eye. And he knew a power if he'd said it all.

AINNLE

That man knew plots of Conchubor's. We'll not go to Emain where Conchubor may love her and has hatred for yourself.

FERGUS

Would you mind a fool and raver?

AINNLE

It's many times there's more sense in madmen than the wise. We will not obey Conchubor.

NAISI

I and Deirdre have chosen, we will go back with Fergus.

ARDAN

We will not go back. We will burn your currachs by the sea.

FERGUS

My sons and I will guard them.

AINNLE

We will blow the horn of Usna and our friends will come to aid us.

NAISI

It is my friends will come.

AINNLE

Your friends will bind your hands, and you out of your wits.

DEIRDRE

For seven years the sons of Usna have not raised their voices in a quarrel.

AINNLE

We will not take you to Emain.

ARDAN

It is Conchubor has broken our peace.

AINNLE

Stop Naisi going. What way would we live if Conchubor should take you from us?

DEIRDRE

There is no one could take me from you. I have chosen to go back with Fergus. Will you quarrel with me Ainnle, though I have been your queen these seven years in Alban?

AINNLE

Naisi has no call to take you.

ARDAN

Why are you going?

DEIRDRE

It is my wish. It may be I will not have Naisi growing an old man in Alban with an old woman at his side, and young girls pointing out and saying, 'that is Deirdre and Naisi had great beauty in their youth.' It may be we do well putting a sharp end to the day is brave and glorious, as our fathers put a sharp end to the days of the kings of Ireland; or that I'm wishing to set my foot on Slieve Fuadh where I was running one time and leaping the streams, and that I'd be well pleased to see our little apple-trees, Lavarcham, behind our cabin on the hill, or that I've learned Fergus it's a lonesome thing to be away from Ireland always.

AINNLE

There is no place but will be lonesome to us from this out, and we thinking on our seven years in Alban.

DEIRDRE

It's in this place we'd be lonesome in the end. Take down Fergus to the sea. He has been a guest had a hard welcome and he bringing messages of peace.

FERGUS

We will make your curragh ready and it fitted for

the voyage of a king.

DEIRDRE

Take your spears, Ainnle and Ardan, and go down before me, and take your horse-boys to be carrying my cloaks are on the threshold.

AINNLE

It's with a poor heart we'll carry your things this day we have carried merrily so often, and we hungry and cold.

DEIRDRE

Go you too, Lavarcham. You are old, and I will follow quickly.

LAVARCHAM

I'm old surely, and the hopes I had my pride in are broken and torn.

DEIRDRE

Woods of Cuan, woods of Cuan, dear country of the east! It's seven years we've had a life was joy only, and this day we're going west, this day we're facing death may be, and death should be a poor untidy thing, though it's a queen that dies.

CONCHUBOR

Has no one come with news for me?

OLD WOMAN

I've seen no one at all, Conchubor.

CONCHUBOR

 Goup then to Emain,
you're not wanting here— Who
is that?

OLD WOMAN

It's Lavarcham coming again. She's a great wonder for jogging back and forward through the world, and I made certain she'd be off to meet them, but she's coming alone. Conchubor, my dear child Deirdre isn't with her at all.

CONCHUBOR

Go up so and leave us.

OLD WOMAN

I'd be well pleased to set my eyes on Deirdre if she's coming this night as we're told.

CONCHUBOR

It's not long till you'll see her. But I've matters with Lavarcham, and let you go on now I'm saying.

LAVARCHAM

This is a queer place to find you, and it's a queer place to be lodging Naisi and his brothers, and Deirdre with them, and the lot of us tired out with the long way we've been walking.

CONCHUBOR

You've come along with them the whole journey?

LAVARCHAM

I have then, though I've no call now to be wandering that length to a wedding or a burial, or the two together.

It's a poor thing the way me and you is getting old, Conchubor, and I'm thinking you yourself have no call to be loitering this place getting your death, maybe, in the cold of night.

CONCHUBOR

I'm waiting only to know is Fergus stopped in the North.

LAVARCHAM

He's stopped surely, and that's a trick has me thinking you have it in your mind to bring trouble this night on Emain and Ireland and

the big world's east beyond them—
and yet you'd do well to be going to your Dun, and
not putting shame on her meeting the High King,
and she seamed and sweaty and in great disorder
from the dust of many roads.

Ah, Conchubor, my lad, beauty goes quickly in the
woods, and you'd let a great gasp, I tell you, if you
set your eyes this night on Deirdre.

CONCHUBOR

It's little I care if she's white and worn, for
it's I did rear her from a child. I should have a good
right to meet and see her always.

LAVARCHAM

A good right is it? Haven't the blind a good right to
be seeing, and the lame to be dancing, and the dum-
mies singing tunes? It's that right you have to be
looking for gaiety on Deirdre's lips.

Come on to your Dun, I'm saying, and leave her
quiet for one night itself.

CONCHUBOR

I'll not go, when it's long
enough I am above in my Dun stretching East and
West without a comrade, and I more needy maybe
than the thieves of Meath. You think I'm old and
wise, but I tell you the wise know the old must die,
and they'll leave no chance for a thing slipping from
them they've set their blood to win.

LAVARCHAM

If you're old & wise, it's I'm the same, Conchubor, and I'm telling you, you'll not have her though you're ready to destroy mankind and skin the gods to win her. There's things a king can't have, Conchubor, and if you go rampaging this night you'll be apt to win nothing but death for many, and a sloppy face of trouble on your own self before the day will come.

CONCHUBOR

It's too much talk you have. Where is Owen? Did you see him no place and you coming the road?

LAVARCHAM

I seen him surely. He went spying on Naisi, and now the worms is spying on his own inside.

CONCHUBOR

Naisi killed him?

LAVARCHAM

He did not then. It was Owen destroyed himself running mad because of Deirdre. Fools and kings and scholars are all one in a story with her like, and Owen thought he'd be a great man, being the first corpse in the game you'll play this night in Emain.

CONCHUBOR

It's yourself should be the first corpse, but my other messengers are coming, men from the clans that hated Usna.

LAVARCHAM

Then the gods have pity
on us all!

CONCHUBOR

Are Ainnle and Ardan separate from
Naisi?

MEN

They are Conchubor. We've got them off, saying
they were needed to make ready Deirdre's house.

CONCHUBOR

And Naisi and Deirdre are coming?

SOLDIER

Naisi's coming surely, and a woman with him is putting
out the glory of the moon is rising and the sun
is going down.

CONCHUBOR

That's your story that she's
seamed and ugly?

SOLDIER

I have more news. When
that woman heard you were bringing Naisi this
place, she sent a horse-boy to call Fergus from the
North.

CONCHUBOR

It's for that you've been playing
your tricks, but what you've won is a nearer death
for Naisi. Go up and call my fighters,
and take that woman up to Émain.

LAVARCHAM

I'd liefer stay this place. I've done my best, but if a bad end is coming, surely, it would be a good thing maybe I was here to tend her.

CONCHUBOR

Take her to Emain, it's too many tricks she's tried this day already.

LAVARCHAM

Don't touch me.

I thought to stay your hand with my stories till Fergus would come to be beside them, the way I'd save yourself, Conchubor, and Naisi and Emain Macha; but I'll walk up now into your halls, and I'll say it's here nettles will be growing, and beyond thistles and docks. I'll go into your high Chambers, where you've been figuring yourself stretching out your neck for the kisses of a queen of women; and I'll say it's here there'll be deer stirring, and goatsscratching, and sheep waking and coughing when there is a great wind from the North.

I'm going surely. In a short space I'll be sitting up with many listening to the flames crackling, and the beams breaking, and I looking on the great blaze will be the end of Emain.

CONCHUBOR

I see two people in the trees, it should
be Naisi and Deirdre. Let you tell them
they'll lodge here to-night.

NAISI

Is it this place he's made ready for my-
self and Deirdre?

SOLDIERS

The Red Branch House is being aired and swept and
you'll be called there when a space is by; till then
you'll find fruits and drink on this table, and so the
gods be with you.

NAISI

It's a strange place he's put us camping and we come
back as his friends.

DEIRDRE

He's likely making up a welcome for us, having cur-
tains shaken out and rich rooms put in order; and it's
right he'd have great state to meet us, and you his
sister's son.

NAISI

It's little we want with state or rich rooms
or curtains, when we're used to the ferns only and
cold streams and they making a stir.

DEIRDRE

We want what is our right

in Emain, and though he's riches in store for us it's a shabby ragged place he's put us waiting, with frayed rugs and skins are eaten by the moths.

NAISI

There are few would worry over skins and moths on this first night that we've come back to Emain.

DEIRDRE

You should be well pleased it's for that I'd worry all times, when it's I have kept your tent these seven years as tidy as a bee-hive or a linnet's nest. If Conchubor'd a queen like me in Emain, he'd not have stretched these rags to meet us—

There's new earth on the ground and a trench dug. It's a grave, Naisi, that is wide and deep.

NAISI

And that'll be our home in Emain. He's dug it wisely at the butt of a hill with fallen trees to hide it. He'll want to have us killed and buried before Fergus comes.

DEIRDRE

Take me away. Take me to hide in the rocks, for the night is coming quickly.

NAISI

I will not leave my brothers.

DEIRDRE

It's of us two he's jealous. Come away to the places where we're used to have our company. Wouldn't it be a good thing to lie hid in the high ferns together? I hear strange words in the trees.

NAISI

It should be the strange fighters of Conchubor, I saw them passing as we came.

DEIRDRE

Come to this side; listen, Naisi!

NAISI

There are more of them . . . We are shut in and I have not Ainnle and Ardan to stand near me. Isn't it a hard thing that we three who have conquered many may not die together?

DEIRDRE

And isn't it a hard thing that you and I are this place by our opened grave; though none have lived had happiness like ours, those days in Alban that went by so quick.

NAISI

It's a hard thing surely we've lost those days forever,

and yet it's a good thing maybe that all goes quick, for when I'm in that grave, it's soon a day'll come you'll be too wearied to be crying out, and that day'll bring you ease.

DEIRDRE

I'll not be here to know if that is true.

NAISI

It's our three selves he'll kill to-night, and then in two months or three you'll see him walking down for courtship with yourself.

DEIRDRE

I'll not be here.

NAISI

You'd best keep him off maybe, and then, when the time comes, make your way to some place West in Donegal, and it's there you'll get used to stretching out lonesome at the fall of night, and waking lonesome for the day.

DEIRDRE

Let you not be saying things are worse than death.

NAISI

I've one word left. If a day comes in the West that the larks are cocking their crests on the edge of the clouds, and the cuckoos making a stir, and there's a man you'd fancy, let you not be thinking that day I'd be well pleased you'd go on keening always.

DEIRDRE

And if it was I that died, Naisi, would you take another woman to fill up my place?

NAISI

It's little I know, saving only that it's a hard and bitter thing leaving the earth, and a worse and harder thing leaving yourself alone and desolate to be making lamentation on its face always.

DEIRDRE

I'll die when you do, Naisi. I'd not have come from Alban but I knew I'd be along with you in Emain, and you living or dead. Yet this night, it's strange and distant talk you're making only.

NAISI

There's nothing surely the like of a new grave of open earth for putting a great space between two friends that love.

DEIRDRE

If there isn't, it's that grave when it's closed will make us one for ever, and we two lovers have had great space without weariness or growing old or any sadness of the mind.

CONCHUBOR

I'd bid you welcome, Naisi!

NAISI

You're welcome,
Conchubor. I'm well pleased you've come.

CONCHUBOR

Let you not think bad of this place where
I've put you till other rooms are readied.

NAISI

We know the room you've readied.
We know what stirred you to send your seals and
Fergus into Alban and stop him in the North,
and dig that
grave before us. Now I ask what brought you here?

CONCHUBOR

I've come to look on Deirdre.

NAISI

Look on her. You're a knacky fancier and it's well
you chose the one you'd lure from Alban. Look on
her I tell you, and when you've looked I've got ten
fingers will squeeze your mottled goose neck though
you're king itself.

DEIRDRE

Hush, Naisi! Maybe Con-
chubor'll make peace . . . Do not mind him, Conchu-
bor, he has cause to rage.

CONCHUBOR

It's little I heed his raging, when a call would bring
my fighters from the trees . . . But what do you say,
Deirdre?

DEIRDRE

I'll say so near that grave we seem three lonesome people, and by a new made grave there's no man will keep brooding on a woman's lips, or on the man he hates. It's not long till your own grave will be dug in Emain, and you'd go down to it more easy if you'd let call Ainnle and Ardan, the way we'd have a supper all together, and fill that grave, and you'll be well pleased from this out, having four new friends the like of us in Emain.

CONCHUBOR

That's the first friendly word I've heard you speaking, Deirdre. A game the like of yours should be the proper thing for softening the heart and putting sweetness in the tongue; and yet this night when I hear you, I've small blame left for Naisi that he stole you off from Ulster.

DEIRDRE

Now, Naisi, answer gently, and we'll be friends to-night.

NAISI

I have no call but to be friendly, I'll answer what you will.

DEIRDRE

Then you'll call Conchubor your friend and king, the man who reared me up upon Slieve Fuadh.

CONCHUBOR

What noise is that?

AINNLE

Naisi . . . Naisi . . . Come to us, we are betrayed and broken.

NAISI

It's Ainnle crying out in a battle.

CONCHUBOR

I was near won this night, but death's between us now.

DEIRDRE

There is no battle . . . Do not leave me, Naisi.

NAISI

I must go to them.

DEIRDRE

Do not leave me, Naisi. Let us creep up in the darkness behind the grave. If there's a battle, maybe the strange fighters will be destroyed, when Ainnle and Ardan are against them.

NAISI

I hear Ardan crying out. Do not hold me from my brothers.

DEIRDRE

Do not leave me, Naisi. Do not leave me broken and alone.

NAISI

I cannot leave my brothers when it is I who have defied the King.

DEIRDRE

I will go with you.

NAISI

You cannot come. Do not hold me from the fight.

DEIRDRE

Go to your brothers. For seven years you have been kindly, but the hardness of death has come between us.

NAISI

And you'll have me meet death with a hard word from your lips in my ear.

DEIRDRE

We've had a dream, but this night has waked us surely. In a little while we've lived too long, Naisi; and isn't it a poor thing we should miss the safety of the grave, and we trampling its edge?

AINNLE

Naisi, Naisi, we are attacked and ruined!

DEIRDRE

Let you go where they are calling.

Have you no shame loitering and talking, and a cruel death facing Ainnle and Ardán in the woods?

NAISI

They'll not get a death that's cruel, and they with men alone. It's women that have loved are cruel only; and if I went on living from this day I'd be putting a curse on the lot of them I'd meet walking in the East or West, putting a curse on the sun that gave them beauty, and on the madder and the stone-crop put red upon their cloaks.

DEIRDRE

I'm well pleased there's no one in this place to make a story that Naisi was a laughing-stock the night he died.

NAISI

There'd not be many'd make a story, for that mockery is in your eyes this night will spot the face of Emain with a plague of pitted graves.

CONCHUBOR

That is Naisi. Strike him!

CONCHUBOR

They've met their death—the three that stole you, Deirdre, and from this out you'll be my queen in Emain.

DEIRDRE

It is not I will be a queen.

CONCHUBOR

Make your laemntation a short while if you will,

but it isn't long till a day'll come when you'll begin pitying a man is old and desolate, and High King also. Let you not fear me, for it's I'm well pleased you have a store of pity for the three that were your friends in Alban.

DEIRDRE

I have pity surely. It's the way pity has me this night when I think of Naisi, that I could set my teeth into the heart of a king.

CONCHUBOR

I know well pity's cruel, when it was my pity for my own self destroyed Naisi.

DEIRDRE

It was my words without pity gave Naisi a death will have no match until the ends of life and time. But who'll pity Deirdre has lost the lips of Naisi from her neck and from her cheek forever? who'll pity Deirdre has lost the twilight in the woods with Naisi, when beech-trees were silver and copper, and ash-trees were fine gold?

CONCHUBOR

It's I'll know the way to pity and care you, and I with a share of troubles has me thinking this night it would be a good bargain if it was I was in the grave, and Deirdre crying over me, and it was Naisi who was old and desolate.

DEIRDRE

It is I who am desolate; I, Deirdre, that will not live till I am old.

CONCHUBOR

It's not long you'll be desolate, and I seven years saying 'it's a bright day for Deirdre in the woods of Alban;' or saying again, 'what way will Deirdre be sleeping this night, and wet leaves and branches driving from the North?' Let you not break the thing I've set my life on, and you giving yourself up to your sorrow when it's joy and sorrow do burn out like straw blazing in an East wind.

DEIRDRE

Was it that way with your sorrow, when I and Naisi went Northward from Slieve Fuadh and let raise our sails for Alban?

CONCHUBOR

There's one sorrow has no end surely, that's being old and lonesome.

But you and I will have a little peace in Emain, with harps playing and old men telling stories at the fall of night. I've let build rooms for our two selves, Deirdre, with red gold upon the walls and ceilings that are set with bronze. There was never a queen in the East had a house the like of your house, that's waiting for yourself in Emain.

SOLDIER

Emain is in flames, Fergus has come

back and is setting fire to the world. Come up, Conchubor, or your state will be destroyed!

CONCHUBOR

Are the sons of Usna buried?

SOLDIER

They are in their grave, but no earth is thrown.

CONCHUBOR

Let me see them. Open the tent!

Where are my fighters?

SOLDIER

They are gone to Emain.

CONCHUBOR

There are none to harm you. Stay here until I come again.

DEIRDRE

It's you three will not see age or death coming, you that were my company when the fires on the hill-tops were put out and the stars were our friends only. I'll turn my thoughts back from this night, that's pitiful for want of pity, to the time it was your rods and cloaks made a little tent for me where there'd be a birch tree making shelter and a dry stone: though from this day my own fingers will be making a tent

for me, spreading out my hairs and they knotted with the rain.

DEIRDRE

It is I, Deirdre, will be crouching in a dark place; I, Deirdre, that was young with Naisi, and brought sorrow to his grave in Emain.

OLD WOMAN

Is that Deirdre broken down that was so light and airy?

LAVARCHAM

It is, surely, crying out over their grave.

DEIRDRE

It will be my share from this out to be making lamentation on his Stone always, and I crying for a love will be the like of a star shining on a little harbour by the sea.

LAVARCHAM

Let you rise up Deirdre, and come off while there are none to heed us, the way I'll find you shelter and some friend to guard you.

DEIRDRE

To what place would I go away from Naisi? What are the woods without Naisi or the seashore?

LAVARCHAM

If it is that way you'd be, come till

I find you a sunny place where you'll be a great wonder they'll call the Queen of Sorrows; and you'll begin taking a pride to be sitting up pausing and dreaming when the Summer comes.

DEIRDRE

It was the voice of Naisi that was strong in Summer, the voice of Naisi that was sweeter than pipes playing, but from this day will be dumb always.

LAVARCHAM

She doesn't heed us at all. We'll be hard set to rouse her.

OLD WOMAN

If we don't the High King will rouse her coming down beside her with the rage of battle in his blood, for how could Fergus stand against him?

LAVARCHAM

There's a score of woman's years in store for you, and you'd best choose, will you start living then beside the man you hate, or being your own mistress in the West or South?

DEIRDRE

It is not I will go on living after Ainnle and after Ardán. After Naisi I will not have a lifetime in the world.

OLD WOMAN

Look Lavarcham! There's a

light leaving the Red Branch. Conchubor and his lot will be coming quickly with a torch of bog-deal for her marriage throwing a light on her three comrades.

DEIRDRE

Let us throw down clay on my three comrades. Let us cover up Naisi along with Ainnle and Ardan, they that were the pride of Emain.

There is Naisi was the best of three, the choicest of the choice of many. It was a clean death was your share, Naisi; and it is not I will quit your head when it's many a dark night among the snipe and plover that you and I were whispering together. It is not I will quit your head Naisi, when it's many a night we saw the stars among the clear trees of Glen da Ruadh or the moon pausing to rest her on the edges of the hills.

OLD WOMAN

Conchubor is coming surely. I see the glare of flames throwing a light upon his cloak.

LAVARCHAM

Rise up Deirdre and come to Fergus, or be the High King's slave for ever!

DEIRDRE

I will not leave Naisi who has left the whole world scorched and desolate. I will not go away when there is no light in the heavens and no

flower in the earth under them but is saying to me that it is Naisi who is gone forever.

CONCHUBOR

She is here. Stay a little back—

Conchubor

Come forward and leave Naisi the way I've left charred timber and a smell of burning in Emain Macha, and a heap of rubbish in the storehouse of many crowns.

DEIRDRE

What are crowns and Emain Macha, when the head that gave them glory is this place, Conchubor, and it stretched upon the gravel will be my bed to-night?

CONCHUBOR

Make an end with talk of Naisi, for I've come to bring you to Dundalga since Emain is destroyed.

DEIRDRE

Draw a little back from Naisi who is young forever. Draw a little back from the white bodies I am putting under a mound of clay and grasses that are withered; a mound will have a nook for my own self when the end is come.

CONCHUBOR

Let you rise up and come along with me

in place of growing crazy with your wailings here.

DEIRDRE

It's yourself has made a crazy story, and let you go back to your arms, Conchubor, and to councils where your name is great, for in this place you are an old man and a fool only.

CONCHUBOR

If I've folly I've sense left not to lose the thing I've bought with sorrow and the deaths of many.

DEIRDRE

Do not raise a hand to touch me.

CONCHUBOR

There are other hands to touch you. My fighters are set round in among the trees.

DEIRDRE

Who'll fight the grave, Conchubor, and it opened on a dark night?

LAVARCHAM

There are steps in the wood. I hear the call of Fergus and his men.

CONCHUBOR

Fergus cannot stop me. I am more powerful than he is though I am defeated and old.

FERGUS

I have destroyed Emain, and now I'll guard

you all times Deirdre, though it was I without knowledge brought Naisi to his grave.

CONCHUBOR

It's not you'll guard her, for my whole armies are gathering. Rise up, Deirdre, for you are mine surely.

FERGUS

I am come between you.

CONCHUBOR

When I've killed Naisi and his brothers, is there any man that I will spare? And it is you will stand against me Fergus, when it's seven years you've seen me getting my death with rage in Émain.

FERGUS

It's I, surely, will stand against a thief and traitor.

DEIRDRE

Draw a little back with the squabbling of fools when I am broken up with misery. I see the flames of Émain starting upward in the dark night, and because of me there will be weazels and wild cats crying on a lonely wall where there were queens and armies and red gold, the way there will be a story told of a ruined city and a raving king and a woman will be young forever. I see the trees naked and bare, and the moon shining. Little moon, little moon of Alban, it's lonesome you'll be this night, and to-morrow night, and long nights.

after, and you pacing the woods beyond Glen Laoi, looking every place for Deirdre and Naisi, the two lovers who slept so sweetly with each other!

FERGUS

Keep
back or you will have the shame of pushing a bolt
on a queen who is out of her wits.

CONCHUBOR

It is I who am out of my wits, with Emain in flames, and Deirdre raving, and my own heart gone within me.

DEIRDRE

I have put away sorrow like a shoe that is worn out and muddy, for it is I have had a life that will be envied by great companies. It was not by a low birth I made kings uneasy, and they sitting in the halls of Emain. It was not a low thing to be chosen by Conchubor, who was wise, and Naisi had no match for bravery. It is not a small thing to be rid of grey hairs, and the loosening of the teeth.

It was the choice of lives we had in the clear woods, and in the grave we're safe surely.

CONCHUBOR

She will do herself harm.

DEIRDRE

I have a little key to unlock the prison of Naisi you'd shut upon his youth forever. Keep back, Conchubor; for the High King who is your master has put his hands between us.

It was sorrows were foretold, but great joys were my share always; yet it is a cold place I must go to be with you, Naisi, and it's cold your arms will be this night that were warm about my neck so often. It's a pitiful thing to be talking out when your ears are shut to me. It's a pitiful thing, Conchubor, you have done this night in Emain. Yet a thing will be a joy and triumph to the ends of life and time.

FERGUS

Four white bodies are laid down together, four clear lights are quenched in Ireland.

There is my sword that could not shield you, my four friends that were the dearest always. The flames of Emain have gone out: Deirdre is dead and there is none to keen her. That is the fate of Deirdre and the Children of Usna, and for this night, Conchubor, our war is ended.

LAVARCHAM

I have a little hut where you can rest, Conchubor;
there is a great dew falling.

CONCHUBOR

Take me with you.

I'm hard set to see the way before me.

OLD WOMAN

This way, Conchubor.

LAVARCHAM

Deirdre is dead, and Naisi is dead,
and if the oaks and stars could die for sorrow, it's a
dark sky and a hard and naked earth we'd have this
night in Emain.







