



J. M. SYNGE

DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS

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PERSONS IN THE PLAY

LAVARCHAM, Deirdre's nurse

OLD WOMAN, Lavarcham's servant

OWEN, Conchubor's attendant and spy

CONCHUBOR, High King of Ulster

FERGUS, Conchubor's friend

DEIRDRE

NAISI, Deirdre's lover

AINNLE, Naisi's brother

ARDAN, Naisi's brother

TWO SOLDIERS

ACT I.

Lavarcham's house
on Slieve Fuadh.

DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS

ACT I

Lavarcham's house on Slieve Fuadh. There is a door to inner room on the left, and a door to open air on the right. Window at back and a frame with a half-finished piece of tapestry. There are also a large press and heavy oak chest near the back wall. The place is neat and clean but bare. Lavarcham, woman of fifty, is working at tapestry frame. Old Woman comes in from left.

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

LAVARCHAM. She has not. . . (*Concealing her anxiety.*) 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 awhile since when the moon was full.

LAVARCHAM -- *more anxiously.* -- The gods send they don't set eyes on her -- (*with*)

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a sign of helplessness) yet if they do itself, it wasn't my wish brought them or could send them away.

OLD WOMAN -- *reprovingly.* -- 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 meant 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. [*She looks out.*]

LAVARCHAM. Is she coming from the glen?

OLD WOMAN. She is not. But whist -- there's two men leaving the furze -- (*crying out*) it's Conchubor and Fergus along with him. Conchubor'll be in a blue stew this night and herself abroad.

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LAVARCHAM -- *settling room hastily.* --
Are they close by?

OLD WOMAN. Crossing the stream, and there's herself on the hillside 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. (*She looks out.*) Go up to the hearth and be as busy as if you hadn't seen them at all.

OLD WOMAN -- *sitting down to polish vessel.* -- 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 -- *wearied with the whole matter.* -- It'd be 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 (*going back to tapestry frame.*)

There they are now at the door.

[*Conchubor and Fergus come in.*]

CONCHUBOR AND FERGUS. The gods save you.

LAVARCHAM -- *getting up and courtesying.* -- The gods save and keep you kindly, and stand between you and all harm for ever.

CONCHUBOR -- *looking around.* -- Where is Deirdre?

LAVARCHAM -- *trying to speak with indifference.* -- 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.

[*Fergus talks to Old Woman.*]

CONCHUBOR -- *stiffly.* -- A night with thunder coming is no night to be abroad.

LAVARCHAM -- *more uneasily.* -- She's used to every track and pathway, and the lightning itself wouldn't let down its flame to singe the beauty of her like.

FERGUS -- *cheerfully.* -- She's right, Conchubor, and let you sit down and take your ease, (*he takes a wallet from under his cloak*) and I'll count out what we've brought, and put it in the presses within.

[*He goes into the inner room with the Old Woman.*]

CONCHUBOR -- *sitting down and looking about.* -- 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 -- *getting up and going to*

frame.</i> -- Is this hers?

LAVARCHAM -- <i>pleased to speak of it.</i> --
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 -- <i>a little uneasily.</i> -- Is she
keeping wise and busy since I passed before,
and growing ready for her life in Emain?

LAVARCHAM -- <i>dryly.</i> -- That is a ques-
tion will give small pleasure to yourself or me.
(<i>Making up her mind to speak out.</i>) 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 wilfuller she's growing these
two months or three.

CONCHUBOR -- <i>severely, but relieved
things are no worse.</i> -- Isn't it a poor thing

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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.

[<i>He examines her workbook.</i>

LAVARCHAM -- <i>sinking into sadness
again.</i> -- I'm in dread so they were right say-
ing 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 -- *getting up.* -- Let you not be talking too far and you old itself.

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Walks across room and back. Does she know the troubles are foretold?

LAVARCHAM -- *in the tone of the earlier talk.* -- 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 -- *he looks out.* -- She's coming now, and let you walk in and keep Fergus till I speak with her a while.

LAVARCHAM -- *going left.* -- If I'm after vexing you myself, it'd be best you weren't taking her hasty or scolding her at all.

CONCHUBOR -- *very stiffly.* -- I've no call to. I'm well pleased she's light and airy.

LAVARCHAM -- *offended at his tone.* -- Well pleased is it? *With a snort of irony* It's a queer thing the way the likes of me do be telling the truth, and the wise are lying all times.

She goes into room on left. Conchubor arranges himself before a mirror for a moment, then goes a little to the left and waits. Deirdre comes in poorly dressed, with a little bag and a bundle of twigs in her arms. She is astonished for a moment when she sees Conchu-

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bor; then she makes a courtesy to him,

and goes to the hearth without any
embarrassment.</i>

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 -- <i>quite self-possessed.</i> -- A bag
of nuts, and twigs for our fires at the dawn
of day.

CONCHUBOR -- <i>showing annoyance in
spite of himself.</i> -- And it's that way you're
picking up the manners will fit you to be Queen
of Ulster?

DEIRDRE -- <i>made a little defiant by his
tone.</i> -- I have no wish to be a queen.

CONCHUBOR -- <i>almost sneeringly.</i> --
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>very defiant.</i> -- I would not,
Conchubor. (<i>She goes to tapestry and begins
to work.</i>) 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

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raven, maybe, and his skin like the snow and
his lips like blood spilt on it.

CONCHUBOR -- <i>sees his mistake, and
after a moment takes a flattering tone, looking
at her work.</i> -- 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. (<i>Looking closely.</i>) What is it
you're figuring?

DEIRDRE -- <i>deliberately.</i> -- Three young
men and they chasing in the green gap of a
wood.

CONCHUBOR -- <i>now almost pleading.</i> --

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

CONCHUBOR -- *very gravely.* -- 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 them-
selves and you? Yet you've little knowledge,
and I'd do wrong taking it bad when it'll be

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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 your-
self that are young and glad only. . . . I'm
thinking you are gay and lively each day in
the year?

DEIRDRE. I don't know if that's true,
Conchubor. 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

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her full age when she'll be my mate and com-
rade and then I'm glad surely.

DEIRDRE -- *almost to herself.* -- I will
not be your mate in Emain.

CONCHUBOR -- *not heeding her.* -- 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 knowl-
edge 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 -- *aghast.* -- Two days!

CONCHUBOR. I have 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 -- *standing up frightened and
pleading.* -- I'd liefer stay this place, Con-
chubor. . . . 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

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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 -- *taking a triumphant tone.* -- 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 -- *dryly.* -- Call Fergus to

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

DEIRDRE -- *now pleadingly.* -- 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. (*He gets up.*) I'll call Fergus, and we'll make Emain ready in the morning.

[*He goes towards door on left.*]

DEIRDRE -- *clinging to him.* -- Do not call him, Conchubor. . . . Promise me a year

of quiet. . . . It's one year I'm asking only.

CONCHUBOR. You'd be asking a year
next year, and the years that follow. (*Calling.*)
Fergus! Fergus! (*To Deirdre.*)

Young girls are slow always; it is their lovers
that must say the word. (*Calling.*) Fergus!

[*Deirdre springs away from him as
Fergus comes in with Lavarcham and
the Old Woman.*]

CONCHUBOR -- *to Fergus.* -- There is a

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

FERGUS -- *cheerfully.* -- The gods shield
you, Deirdre. (*To Conchubor.*) We're late
already, and it's no work the High King to
be slipping on stepping-stones and hilly path-
ways when the floods are rising with the rain.

[*He helps Conchubor into his cloak.*]

CONCHUBOR -- *glad that he has made
his decision -- to Lavarcham.* -- Keep your
rules a few days longer, and you'll be brought
down to Emain, you and Deirdre with you.

LAVARCHAM -- *obediently.* -- Your rules
are kept always.

CONCHUBOR. The gods shield you.

[*He goes out with Fergus. Old Woman
bolts door.*]

LAVARCHAM -- *looking at Deirdre, who
has covered her face.* -- Wasn't I saying you'd
do it? You've brought your marriage a sight
nearer not heeding those are wiser than your-
self.

DEIRDRE -- *with agitation.* -- 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

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in spite of you, and I and mine would be
destroyed for ever.

DEIRDRE -- *terrified with the reality that
is before her.* -- Are there none can go against
Conchubor?

LAVARCHAM. Maeve of Connaught
only, and those that are her like.

DEIRDRE. Would Fergus go against
him?

LAVARCHAM. He would, maybe, and
his temper roused.

DEIRDRE -- *in a lower voice with sudden
excitement.* -- Would Naisi and his brothers?

LAVARCHAM -- *impatiently.* -- 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 sorrow
he'd earn and the shortening of his day of life.

*She turns away, and Deirdre stands up
stiff with excitement and goes and
looks out of the window.*

DEIRDRE. Are the stepping-stones flood-
ing, Lavarcham? Will the night be stormy in
the hills?

LAVARCHAM -- *looking at her curiously.*
The stepping-stones are flooding, surely, and

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the night will be the worst, I'm thinking, we've
seen these years gone by.

DEIRDRE -- *tearing open the press and
pulling out clothes and tapestries.* -- 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 -- *gathering up a dress.* -- 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>gathering her things together with an outburst of excitement.</i>* -- 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

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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.

<i>She goes into room. Lavarcham and Old Woman look at each other, then the Old Woman goes over, looks in at Deirdre through chink of the door, and then closes it carefully.</i>

OLD WOMAN -- *<i>in a frightened whisper.</i>*
-- 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 -- *<i>putting up hanging very anxiously.</i>* -- 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 -- *<i>helping her.</i>* -- 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

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better of her, Lavarcham? If I was Con-
chubor, I wouldn't marry with her like at all.

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

OLD WOMAN -- *at the window.* -- There's
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 Conchu-
bor'll be sick and sorry, I'm thinking, before
this story is told to the end.

[Loud knocking on door at the right.]

LAVARCHAM -- *startled.* -- Who is that?

NAISI -- *outside.* -- 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.

[Old Woman clasps her hands in horror.]

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LAVARCHAM -- *with great alarm.* -- 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 -- *knocking loudly.* -- Open the
door or we will burst it. (*The door is shaken.*)

OLD WOMAN -- *in a timid whisper.* --
Let them in, and keep Deirdre in her room
to-night.

AINNLE AND ARDAN -- *outside.* --
Open! Open!

LAVARCHAM -- *to Old Woman.* -- 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. (*She pulls her hair and cloak over
her face.*) Go in and keep her.

OLD WOMAN. The gods help us.

[*She runs into the inner room.*]

VOICES. Open!

LAVARCHAM -- *opening the door.* --

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

[*Naisi and Ainnle and Ardan come in
and look round with astonishment.*]

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

LAVARCHAM -- *sitting down with her
head half covered.* -- It is not, and you'd best
be going quickly.

NAISI -- *hilariously, shaking rain from
his clothes.* -- When we've had the pick of luck
finding princely comfort in the darkness of
the night! Some rich man of Ulster should
come here and he chasing in the woods. May
we drink? (*He takes up flask.*) 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. (*Pouring out wine for the three.*

They drink.)

LAVARCHAM -- *very crossly.* -- 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

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manners, and they the like of your three selves,
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 -- *quite cheerfully, sitting down be-
side her.* -- At your age you should know
there are nights when a king like Conchubor
will 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 asking 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 -- *giving it to her.* -- Where is she?

LAVARCHAM -- *in confidential whisper,
putting her hand on his arm.* -- 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 -- *hilariously.* -- Here's health, then,
to herself and you!

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

AINNLE -- *in a frightened whisper.* --
Naisi!

[*Naisi looks up and Ainnle beckons to
him. He goes over and Ainnle points
to something on the golden mug he
holds in his hand.*]

NAISI -- *looking at it in astonishment.* --
This is the High King's. . . . I see his mark
on the rim. Does Conchubor come lodging
here?

LAVARCHAM -- *jumping up with ex-
treme annoyance.* -- Who says it's Conchu-
bor's? How dare young fools the like of you
-- (*speaking with vehement insolence*) come
prying around, running the world into troubles
for some slip of a girl? What brings you this
place straying from Emain? (*Very bitterly.*)
Though you think, maybe, young men can do
their fill of foolery and there is none to blame
them.

NAISI -- *very soberly.* -- Is the rain easing?

ARDAN. The clouds are breaking. . . .

I can see Orion in the gap of the glen.

NAISI -- *still cheerfully.* -- 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 comes in on left royally dressed
and very beautiful. She stands for a
moment, and then as the door opens
she calls softly.*]

DEIRDRE. Naisi! Do not leave me,

Naisi. I am Deirdre of the Sorrows.

NAISI -- *transfixed with amazement.* --
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. (*To Lavarcham and Old Woman.*)
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
thing for Naisi only.

LAVARCHAM -- *overawed by her tone.* --
I will do it, and I ask their pardon. I have
fooled them here.

DEIRDRE -- *to Ainnle and Ardan.* -- 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 Conchu-

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bor, 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.

They all go out except Deirdre and Naisi.

DEIRDRE -- *sitting in the high chair in
the centre.* -- Come to this stool, Naisi (*point-
ing to the stool*). If it's low itself the High
King would sooner be on it this night than on
the throne of Emain Macha.

NAISI -- *sitting down.* -- You are Fed-
limid's daughter that Conchubor has walled up
from all the men of Ulster.

DEIRDRE. Do many know what is fore-
told, that Deirdre will be the ruin of the Sons
of Usna, and have a little grave by herself,
and a story will be told for ever?

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

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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 Plower of Ireland.

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

DEIRDRE -- *in a low voice.* -- 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 -- *pulling himself together and be-
ginning to draw back a little.* -- Yet it should
be a lonesome thing to be in this place and you
born for great company.

DEIRDRE -- *softly.* -- This night I have
the best company in the whole world.

NAISI -- *still a little formally.* -- 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.

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. . . . It should be a sweet thing to have
what is best and richest, if it's for a short

space only.

NAISI -- *very distressed.* -- 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 aging in his dun, with his crowds round him, and his silver and gold. (*More quickly.*) I will not live to be shut up in Emain, and wouldn't we do well paying, Naisi, with silence and a near death. (*She stands up and walks away from him.*) 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. (*She comes to him and puts her hands on his shoulders.*) 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?

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DEIRDRE -- *despondently.* -- 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. (*He looks out.*) 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 in dread 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? (*A*
little shaken by what has passed.) Won't I
be in great dread to bring you to destruction,
Naisi, and you so happy and young?

NAISI. Are you thinking I'd go on living
after this night, Deirdre, and you with Con-
chubor in Emain? Are you thinking I'd go

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out after hares when I've had your lips in my
sight?

[*Lavarcham comes in as they cling to
each other.*]

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

DEIRDRE -- *very deliberately.* -- It's Con-
chubor has chosen this night calling me to
Emain. (*To Naisi.*) Bring in Ainnle and
Ardan, and take me from this place, where
I'm in dread from this out of the footsteps of
a hare passing. [*He goes.*]

DEIRDRE -- *clinging to Lavarcham.* --
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 -- *moved.* -- 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?

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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.

[<i>Naisi comes back with Ainnle and Ardan and Old Woman.</i>

DEIRDRE -- <i>taking Naisi's hand.</i> -- 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 courteous. 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 -- <i>joining their hands.</i> -- By the sun and moon and the whole earth, I wed Deirdre to Naisi. (<i>He steps back and holds</i>

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<i>up his hands.</i>) May the air bless you, and water and the wind, the sea, and all the hours of the sun and moon.

CURTAIN

ACT II.

<i>Alban. Early morning in the beginning of winter. Outside the tent of Deirdre and Naisi.

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ACT II

<i>Alban. Early morning in the beginning of winter. A wood outside the tent of Deirdre and Naisi. Lavarcham comes in muffled in a cloak.</i>

LAVARCHAM -- *<i>calling.</i>* -- Deirdre. . . .
Deirdre. . . .

DEIRDRE -- *<i>coming from tent.</i>* -- My welcome, Lavarcham. . . . Whose curagh 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 dawn.

DEIRDRE. And who is coming?

LAVARCHAM -- *<i>mournfully.</i>* -- Let you not be startled or taking it bad, Deirdre. It's Fergus bringing messages of peace from Conchubor to take Naisi and his brothers back to Emain. [*<i>Sitting down.</i>*

DEIRDRE -- *<i>lightly.</i>* -- 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>With more agitation.</i>*) 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 -- *more anxiously.* -- 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 -- *impressively.* -- 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 you, surely.

DEIRDRE -- *without hope.* -- 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 -- *aggressively.* -- Was there little power in what you did the night you dressed in your finery and ran Naisi off

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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 and anguish; and now I'm pointing you a way to save Naisi, you'll not stir stick or straw to aid me.

DEIRDRE -- *a little haughtily.* -- Let you not raise your voice against me, Lavarcham, if you have will itself to guard Naisi.

LAVARCHAM -- *breaking out in anger.* -- 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. (*Starting up with temper.*) 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 -- *sharply.* -- 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. (*With distress.*) 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; (*with emotion*) or the time I've been
stretched in the sunshine, when I've heard

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Ainnle and Ardan stepping lightly, and they
saying: Was there ever the like of Deirdre for
a happy and sleepy queen?

LAVARCHAM -- *not fully pacified.* --
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
for ever.

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. (*Passionately.*) 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. (*Going to Deirdre.*)
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
byways 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 -- *despairingly.* -- I'm late
so with my warnings, for Fergus'd talk the
moon over to take a new path in the sky.
(*With reproach.*) 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. (*Overcome with trouble; gather-
ing her cloak about her.*) 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 comes in quickly, rather ragged,
bows to Deirdre.*]

OWEN -- *to Lavarcham.* -- Fergus's men
are calling you. You were seen on the path,
and he and Naisi want you for their talk below.

LAVARCHAM -- *looking at him with dis-
like.* -- 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. [*Goes out.*]

OWEN -- *to Deirdre.* -- 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 -- *who has been searching, finds a loaf and sits down eating greedily, and cutting it with a large knife.* -- 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 -- *absently.* -- 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 spancelled with Naisi and the pair.

DEIRDRE -- *beginning to fold up her silks and jewels.* -- Three weeks of your days might be long, surely, yet seven years are a short space for the like of Naisi and myself.

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OWEN -- *derisively.* -- If they're a short space there aren'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, (*leaning towards her*) are you well pleased that length with the same man snorting next you at the dawn of day?

DEIRDRE -- *very quietly.* -- 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. (*With contempt.*) Yet the earth itself is a silly place, maybe, when a man's a fool and talker.

OWEN -- *sharply.* -- Well, go, take your choice. Stay here and rot with Naisi or go to Conchubor in Emain. Conchubor's a wrinkled fool with a swelling belly on him, and eyes

falling downward 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

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yourself could be your friends in Emain?
OWEN -- *vehemently.* -- 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 -- *with a burst of rage.* -- 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 sheep's 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. (*With a sad
cry that brings dignity into his voice.*) Queens
get old, Deirdre, with their white and long
arms going from them, and their backs hoop-
ing. I tell you it's a poor thing to see a queen's
nose reaching down to scrape her chin.
DEIRDRE -- *looking out, a little uneasy.*
-- 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. (*Muffles himself in his cloak;
with a sort of warning in his voice.*) 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.

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(*With curious expression.*) 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.

[*He goes out, and in a moment Naisi and
Fergus come in on the other side.*]

NAISI -- *gaily.* -- Fergus has brought messages of peace from Conchubor.

DEIRDRE -- *greeting Fergus.* -- 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 -- *with keenness.* -- They've answered? They would go?

FERGUS -- *benignly.* -- 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.

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NAISI -- *gruffly.* -- It's true, surely. Yet we're better this place while Conchubor's in Emain Macha.

FERGUS -- *giving him parchments.* -- There are your sureties and Conchubor's seal. (*To Deirdre.*) I am your surety with Conchubor. 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 -- *almost annoyed.* -- Would you doubt the seals of Conall Cearneach and the kings of Meath? *He gets parchments from his cloak and gives them to Naisi. More gently.* It's easy being fearful and you alone in the woods, yet it would be a poor thing if a timid woman *taunting her a little* 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

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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 -- *turning away a little haughtily.* -- I leave the choice to Naisi. *Turning back towards Fergus.* 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. [*Goes into tent.*]

FERGUS. It is a poor thing to see a queen so lonesome and afraid. *He watches till he is sure Deirdre cannot hear him.* 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.

[<i>Deirdre comes out of tent with a horn
of wine, she catches the beginning of
Naisi's speech and stops with stony
wonder.</i>

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NAISI -- <i>very thoughtfully.</i> -- 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,
(<i>very slowly</i>) and Deirdre'd see I'd wearied.

FERGUS -- <i>sympathetic but triumphant.</i> --
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 -- <i>with confidence.</i> -- She's not seen
it. . . . Deirdre's no thought of getting old
or wearied; it's that puts wonder in her days,
and she with spirits would keep bravery and
laughter in a town with plague.

[<i>Deirdre drops the horn of wine and
crouches down where she is.</i>

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

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worn out. It's that word you may take in
your curagh to Conchubor in Emain.

FERGUS -- <i>gathering up his parchments.</i>
-- And you won't go, surely.

NAISI. I will not. . . . I've had dread,
I tell you, dread winter and summer, and the
autumn and the springtime, 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 -- *with anger.* -- Where are your
brothers? My message is for them also.

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

FERGUS -- *bitterly.* -- It isn't much I was
mistaken, thinking you were hunters only.

[*He goes, Naisi turns towards tent
and sees Deirdre crouching down with
her cloak round her face. Deirdre
comes out.*]

NAISI. You've heard my words to
Fergus? (*She does not answer. A pause. He
puts his arm round her.*) Leave troubling,
and we'll go this night to Glen da Ruadh,

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where the salmon will be running with the
tide. [*Crosses and sits down.*]

DEIRDRE -- *in a very low voice.* -- With
the tide in a little while we will be journeying
again, or it is our own blood maybe will be
running away. (*She turns and clings to him.*)

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 al-
ways. . . . 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.

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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 -- *broken-hearted.* -- 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 -- *still more eagerly.* -- 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 -- *clearly and gravely.* -- 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 -- *his voice broken with distraction.* -- 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 -- *shaking her head slowly.* -- 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 -- *giving in.* -- You're right, maybe. It should be a poor thing to see great lovers and they sleepy and old.

DEIRDRE -- *with a more tender intensity.* -- 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 -- *very softly.* -- We'll go, surely, in place of keeping a watch on a love had no match and it wasting away. (*They cling to*

each other for a moment, then Naisi looks up.</i>)

There are Fergus and Lavarcham and my two
brothers.

[<i>Deirdre goes. Naisi sits with his head
bowed. Owen runs in stealthily, comes
behind Naisi and seizes him round the
arms. Naisi shakes him off and whips
out his sword.</i>

OWEN -- <i>screaming with derisive laughter
and showing his empty hands.</i> -- Ah, Naisi,
wasn't it well I didn't kill you that time?

There was a fright you got! I've been watch-
ing Fergus above -- don't be frightened --
and I've come down to see him getting the
cold shoulder, and going off alone.

[<i>Fergus and others come in. They are
all subdued like men at a queen's wake.</i>

NAISI -- <i>putting up his sword.</i> -- There

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he is. (<i>Goes to Fergus.</i>) We are going back
when the tide turns, I and Deirdre with your-
self.

ALL. Going back!

AINNLE. And you'll end your 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. (<i>He throws up a bag of gold.</i>)

Are you paid, Fergus?

[<i>He scatters gold pieces over Fergus.</i>

FERGUS. He is raving. . . . Seize him.

OWEN -- <i>flying between them.</i> -- You won't. Let the lot of you be off to Emain, but I'll be off before you. . . . Dead men, dead

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

[<i>Runs out with his knife in his hand.

They all run after him except Lavar-
cham, who looks out and then clasps
her hands. Deirdre comes out to her
in a dark cloak.</i>

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.

[<i>Naisi comes back quickly, followed by
the others.</i>

AINNLE -- <i>coming in very excited.</i> --
That man knew plots of Conchubor's. We'll
not go to Emain, where Conchubor may love
her and have 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 curaghs by the sea.

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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.

[<i>Deirdre comes forward quickly and
comes between Ainnle and Naisi.

DEIRDRE -- <i>in a low voice.</i> -- 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 -- <i>to Deirdre.</i> -- Stop Naisi go-
ing. 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 -- <i>subsiding suddenly.</i> -- Naisi
has no call to take you.

ARDAN. Why are you going?

DEIRDRE -- <i>to both of them and the</i>

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<i>others.</i> -- 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 Ire-
land; or that I'm wishing to set my foot on
Slieve Fuadh, where I was running one time
and leaping the streams, (<i>to Lavarcham</i>) 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 -- *giving in.* -- There is no place
but will be lonesome to us from this out, and
we thinking on our seven years in Alban.

DEIRDRE -- *to Naisi.* -- 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 curagh
ready and it fitted for the voyage of a king.

He goes with Naisi.

DEIRDRE. Take your spears, Ainnle and
Ardan, and go down before me, and take your

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horse-boys to be carrying my cloaks are on the
threshold.

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

They gather up things and go out.

DEIRDRE -- *to Lavarcham.* -- 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.

*She goes out, with a look of awe at
Deirdre.*

DEIRDRE -- *clasping her hands.* -- 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, maybe, and death
should be a poor, untidy thing, though it's a
queen that dies.

She goes out slowly.

CURTAIN

ACT III.

<i>Tent below Emain Macha.</i>

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ACT III

<i>Tent below Emain, with shabby skins and benches. There is an opening at each side and at back, the latter closed. Old Woman comes in with food and fruits and arranges them on table. Conchubor comes in on right.</i>

CONCHUBOR -- <i>sharply.</i> -- Has no one come with news for me?

OLD WOMAN. I've seen no one at all,
Conchubor.

CONCHUBOR -- <i>watches her working for a moment, then makes sure opening at back is closed.</i> -- Go up then to Emain, you're not wanting here. (<i>A noise heard left.</i>) Who is that?

OLD WOMAN -- <i>going left.</i> -- It's Lavar-cham 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>pleadingly.</i> -- I'd be well pleased to set my eyes on Deirdre if she's coming this night, as we're told.

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CONCHUBOR -- <i>impatiently.</i> -- It's not long till you'll see her. But I've matters with Lavarcham, and let you go now, I'm saying.

[<i>He shows her out right, as Lavarcham comes in on the left.</i>

LAVARCHAM -- <i>looking round her with

suspicion.</i> -- 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 have 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. (<i>She sits down wearily.</i>) 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 -- <i>more sharply.</i> -- He's stopped, surely, and that's a trick has me thinking you have it in mind to bring trouble this night on Emain and Ireland and the big world's east beyond them. (<i>She goes to him.</i>)

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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. (<i>Laughing derisively.</i>) 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 -- <i>fiercely.</i> -- 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 dummies singing tunes? It's that right you have to be looking for gaiety on Deirdre's lips. (<i>Coaxingly.</i>) Come on to your dun, I'm saying,

and leave her quiet for one night itself.
CONCHUBOR -- *with sudden anger.* --
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.

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LAVARCHAM -- *nodding her head.* -- If
you're old and wise, it's I'm the same, Conchu-
bor, 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. (*Goes right.*) 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 -- *exultingly.* -- Naisi killed
him?

LAVARCHAM. He did not, then. It
was Owen destroyed himself running mad be-
cause 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 -- *drawing back hopelessly.* -- Then the gods have pity on us all!

Men with weapons come in.

CONCHUBOR -- *to Soldiers.* -- Are Ainle 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 -- *looking at Lavarcham.* -- That's your story that she's seamed and ugly?

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

CONCHUBOR -- *to Lavarcham.* -- It's for that you've been playing your tricks, but what you've won is a nearer death for Naisi. *To Soldiers.* Go up and call my fighters, and take that woman up to Emain.

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 -- *fiercely.* -- Take her to Emain; it's too many tricks she's tried this day already. *A Soldier goes to her.*

LAVARCHAM. Don't touch me. *She puts her cloak round her and catches Conchubor's arm.* 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 (*with a gesture*) 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 goats scratching, and sheep waking and coughing when there is a great wind from the north. (*Shaking herself loose.* Conchubor makes a sign to Soldiers.) 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. [*She goes out.*]
CONCHUBOR -- *looking out.* -- I see two people in the trees; it should be Naisi and

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Deirdre. (*To Soldier.*) Let you tell them they'll lodge here tonight.
[*Conchubor goes out right. Naisi and Deirdre come in on left, very weary.*]
NAISI -- *to Soldiers.* -- Is it this place he's made ready for myself and Deirdre?
SOLDIER. The Red Branch House is being aired and swept and you'll be called there when a space is by; till then you'd find fruits and drink on this table, and so the gods be with you. [*Goes out right.*]
NAISI -- *looking round.* -- 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 curtains 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 -- *gloomily.* -- 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 -- *roaming round room.* -- We want what is our right in Emain (*looking at hangings*), and though he's riches in store for us it's a shabby, ragged place he's put us wait-

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ing, with frayed rugs and skins are eaten by the moths.

NAISI -- *a little impatiently.* -- There are few would worry over skins and moths on this first night that we've come back to Emain.

DEIRDRE -- *brightly.* -- 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. (*She pulls hanging, and it opens.*) There's new earth on the ground and a trench dug. . . .

It's a grave, Naisi, that is wide and deep.

NAISI -- *goes over and pulls back curtain showing grave.* -- 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 -- *pulling himself together.* -- I will not leave my brothers.

DEIRDRE -- *vehemently.* -- It's of us two he's jealous. Come away to the places where we're used to have our company. . . .

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Wouldn't it be a good thing to lie hid in the high ferns together? (*She pulls him left.*) I hear strange words in the trees.

NAISI. It should be the strange fighters

of Conchubor. I saw them passing as we
came.

DEIRDRE -- *pulling him towards the
right.* -- 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 -- *sinking down.* -- And isn't
it a hard thing that you and I are in 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 for ever; 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

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see him walking down for courtship with
yourself.

DEIRDRE. I'll not be here.

NAISI -- *hard.* -- 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 lone-
some for the day.

DEIRDRE. Let you not be saying things
are worse than death.

NAISI -- *a little recklessly.* -- 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 -- *turning to look at him.* --

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

NAISI -- *very mournfully.* -- 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 deso-
late to be making lamentation on its face
always.

DEIRDRE. I'll die when you do, Naisi.

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I'd not have come here 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 -- *coming in on right.* --

I'd bid you welcome, Naisi.

NAISI -- *standing up.* -- You're welcome,
Conchubor. I'm well pleased you've come.

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

NAISI -- *breaking out.* -- 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, (*opening curtain*
and pointing to the grave) 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 -- *coming between them.* --

Hush, Naisi! Maybe Conchubor'll make
 peace. . . . Do not mind him, Conchubor;
 he has cause to rage.

CONCHUBOR. It's little I heed his rag-
 ing, 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 -- *looking at her for a
 moment.* -- That's the first friendly word I've
 heard you speaking, Deirdre. A game the like
 of yours should be the proper thing for soften-
 ing 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 -- *to Naisi.* -- Now, Naisi,
 answer gently, and we'll be friends to-night.

NAISI -- *doggedly.* -- I have no call but to
 be friendly. I'll answer what you will.

DEIRDRE -- *taking Naisi's hand.* -- Then

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

[<i>As Conchubor is going to clasp Naisi's
hand cries are heard behind.</i>

CONCHUBOR. What noise is that?

AINNLE -- <i>behind.</i> -- 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.

[<i>He goes out.</i>

DEIRDRE -- <i>clinging to Naisi.</i> -- There is
no battle. . . . Do not leave me, Naisi.

NAISI. I must go to them.

DEIRDRE -- <i>beseechingly.</i> -- 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.

[<i>Cries heard.</i>

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NAISI -- <i>wildly.</i> -- 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.

[<i>He throws her aside almost roughly.</i>

DEIRDRE -- <i>with restraint.</i> -- Go to your
brothers. For seven years you have been
kindly, but the hardness of death has come
between us.

NAISI -- <i>looking at her aghast.</i> -- 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 -- *behind.* -- Naisi, Naisi, we are
attacked and ruined!

DEIRDRE. Let you go where they are
calling. (*She looks at him for an instant
coldly.*) Have you no shame loitering and

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talking, and a cruel death facing Ainnle and
Ardan in the woods?

NAISI -- *frantic.* -- 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 -- *bitterly.* -- 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. [*He goes out.*]
CONCHUBOR -- *outside.* -- That is Naisi.

Strike him! (*Tumult. Deirdre crouches down
on Naisi's cloak. Conchubor comes in
hurriedly.*) They've met their death -- the
three that stole you, Deirdre, and from this
out you'll be my queen in Emain.

[*A keen of men's voices is heard behind.*]

DEIRDRE -- *bewildered and terrified.* --

It is not I will be a queen.

CONCHUBOR. Make your lamentation
a short while if you will, but it isn't long till

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a day'll come when you 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 -- *more wildly.* -- It was my
words without pity gave Naisi a death will
have no match until the ends of life and time.
(*Breaking out into a keen.*) But who'll pity

Deirdre has lost the lips of Naisi from her
neck and from her cheek for ever? 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 -- *bewildered.* -- 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.

[*Keen heard.*]

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DEIRDRE -- *wild with sorrow.* -- 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 -- *turning on him.* -- 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 lone-some. (*With extraordinary pleading.*) 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.

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SOLDIER -- *running in.* -- 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 -- *angry and regal again.* -- 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! (*Soldier opens back of tent and shows grave.*) Where are my fighters?

SOLDIER. They are gone to Emain.

CONCHUBOR -- *to Deirdre.* -- There are none to harm you. Stay here until I come again.

[*Goes out with Soldier. Deirdre looks round for a moment, then goes up slowly and looks into grave. She crouches down and begins swaying herself backwards and forwards, keening softly. At first her words are not heard, then they become clear.*]

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

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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.

[<i>Lavarcham and Old Woman come in
stealthily on right.</i>

DEIRDRE -- <i>not seeing them.</i> -- 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. [*She goes to Deirdre.</i>*

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 -- <i>coming forward.</i> -- 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 with-
out Naisi or the sea shore?

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LAVARCHAM -- <i>very coaxingly.</i> -- 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 -- *to Old Woman.* -- 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 -- *touching Deirdre with
her hand.* -- There's a score of woman's years
in store for you, and you'd best choose will
you start living them 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 Ardan. After Naisi I
will not have a lifetime in the world.

OLD WOMAN -- *with excitement.* -- Look,
Lavarcham! There's a light leaving the Red

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Branch. Conchubor and his lot will be com-
ing quickly with a torch of bog-deal for her
marriage, throwing a light on her three com-
rades.

DEIRDRE -- *startled.* -- 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. (*Throwing in
clay.*) 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 -- *eagerly.* -- Rise up,
Deirdre, and come to Fergus, or be the High
King's slave for ever!

DEIRDRE -- *imperiously.* -- 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

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

CONCHUBOR -- *behind.* -- She is here.

Stay a little back. (*Lavarcham and Old
Woman go into the shadow on left as Con-
chubor comes in. With excitement, to
Deirdre.*) Come forward and leave Naisi the
way I've left charred timber and a smell of
burning in Emain Macha, and a heap of rub-
bish in the storehouse of many crowns.

DEIRDRE -- *more awake to what is round
her.* -- 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 of talk of
Naisi, for I've come to bring you to Dundéal-
gan since Emain is destroyed.

[*Conchubor makes a movement towards
her.*]

DEIRDRE -- *with a tone that stops him.* --

Draw a little back from Naisi, who is young
for ever. 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 -- *roughly.* -- Let you rise

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up and come along with me in place of grow-
ing crazy with your wailings here.

DEIRDRE. It's yourself has made a crazy
story, and let you go back to your arms, Con-
chubor, 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.

[<i>He moves towards her.</i>

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, Con-
chubor, and it opened on a dark night?

LAVARCHAM -- <i>eagerly.</i> -- There are
steps in the wood. I hear the call of Fergus
and his men.

CONCHUBOR -- <i>furiously.</i> -- Fergus can-
not stop me. I am more powerful than he is,
though I am defeated and old.

FERGUS -- <i>comes in to Deirdre; a red
glow is seen behind the grove.</i> -- I have de-
stroyed Emain, and now I'll guard you all

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

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

FERGUS -- <i>coming between them.</i> -- I am
come between you.

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

in Emain?

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

DEIRDRE -- *stands up and sees the light
from Emain.* -- Draw a little back with the
squabbling of fools when I am broken up
with misery. (*She turns round.*) I see the
flames of Emain starting upward in the dark
night; and because of me there will be weasels
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 for ever. (*She looks round.*) I see
the trees naked and bare, and the moon
shining. Little moon, little moon of Alban,

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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 -- *going to Conchubor's right
and whispering.* -- 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 -- *in a high and quiet tone.* --
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.
(*With a sort of triumph.*) 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 -- *showing Naisi's knife.* -- I
have a little key to unlock the prison of Naisi

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you'd shut upon his youth for ever. Keep
back, Conchubor; for the High King who is
your master has put his hands between us.

She half turns to the grave. 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 talk-
ing 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.

*She presses knife into her heart and
sinks into the grave. Conchubor and
Fergus go forward. The red glow
fades, leaving stage very dark.*

FERGUS. Four white bodies are laid
down together; four clear lights are quenched
in Ireland. *He throws his sword into the
grave.* 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
keep her. That is the fate of Deirdre and
the children of Usna, and for this night, Con-
chubor, our war is ended. *He goes out.*

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

CONCHUBOR -- *with the voice of an old
man.* -- Take me with you. I'm hard set to

see the way before me.

OLD WOMAN. This way, Conchubor.

[<i>They go out.</i>

LAVARCHAM -- <i>beside the grave.</i> --

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.

CURTAIN

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APPENDIX

DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS was first pro-
duced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on
Thursday, January 13th, 1910, with the fol-
lowing cast:

<i>Lavarcham</i> SARA ALLGOOD

<i>Old Woman</i> EILEEN O'DOHERTY

<i>Owen</i> J. A. O'ROURKE

<i>Conchubor</i> ARTHUR SINCLAIR

<i>Fergus</i> SYDNEY J. MORGAN

<i>Deirdre</i> MAIRE O'NEILL

<i>Naisi</i> FRED O'DONOVAN

<i>Ainnle</i> J. M. KERRIGAN

<i>Ardan</i> JOHN CARRICK

{AMBROSE POWER

<i>Two Soldiers</i> {

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