

## CUCHULAIN.

Are you so changed,  
Or have I grown more dangerous of late?  
But that's not it. I understand it all.  
It's you that have changed. You've wives and children  
now,  
And for that reason cannot follow one  
That lives like a bird's flight from tree to tree—  
It's time the years put water in my blood  
And drowned the wildness of it, for all's changed,  
But that unchanged.—I'll take what oath you will:  
The moon, the sun, the water, light, or air,  
I do not care how binding.

CONCHUBAR (*who has seated himself in his great  
chair*).

On this fire  
That has been lighted from your hearth and mine,  
The older men shall be my witnesses,  
The younger yours. The holders of the fire  
Shall purify the thresholds of the house  
With waving fire, and shut the outer door,  
According to old custom, and sing rhyme  
That has come down from the old law-makers  
To blow the witches out. Considering  
That the wild will of man could be oath-bound,  
But that a woman's could not, they bid us sing  
Against the will of woman at its wildest  
In the shape-changers that run upon the wind.

(*The song of the WOMEN.*)

May this fire have driven out  
The shape-changers that can put



Ruin on a great king's house  
Until all be ruinous.  
Names whereby a man has known  
The threshold and the hearthstone,  
Gather on the wind and drive  
Women none can kiss and thrive,  
For they are but whirling wind,  
Out of memory and mind.  
They would make a prince decay  
With light images of clay  
Planted in the running wave;  
Or, for many shapes they have,  
They would change them into hounds  
Until he had died of his wounds,  
Though the change were but a whim;  
Or they'd hurl a spell at him,  
That he follow with desire  
Bodies that can never tire  
Or grow kind, for they anoint  
All their bodies joint by joint  
With a miracle-working juice  
That is made out of the grease  
Of the ungoverned unicorn;  
But the man is thrice forlorn,  
Emptied, ruined, wracked, and lost,  
That they follow, for at most  
They will give him kiss for kiss  
While they murmur "After this  
Hatred may be sweet to the taste;"  
Those wild hands that have embraced  
All his body can but shove  
At the burning wheel of love



Till the side of hate comes up.  
 Therefore, in this ancient cup  
 May the sword-blades drink their fill  
 Of the home-brew there, until  
 They will have for master none  
 But the threshold and hearthstone.

*After "Memory and mind" their words die away to a murmur, but are loud again at "Therefore in." The others do not speak when these words are loud.*

CUCHULAIN. (*Speaking while they are singing.*)  
 I'll take and keep this oath, and from this day  
 I shall be what you please, my nestlings.  
 Yet I had thought you were of those that praised  
 Whatever life could make the pulse run quickly,  
 Even though it were brief, and that you held  
 That a free gift was better than a forced;  
 But that's all over.—I will keep it, too.  
 I never gave a gift and took it again.  
 If the wild horse should break the chariot-pole  
 It would be punished. Should that be in the oath?—

*Two of the women, still singing, crouch in front of him holding the bowl over their heads. He spreads his hands over the flame.*

I swear to be obedient in all things  
 To Conchubar, and to uphold his children.

CONCHUBAR.

We are one being, as these flames are one.  
 I give my wisdom, and I take your strength.  
 Now thrust the swords in the flame, and pray



That they may serve the threshold and the hearth-  
stone

With faithful service.

*The Kings kneel in a semicircle before the two women and CUCHULAIN, who thrusts his sword in the flame. They all put the points of their swords in the flame. The third woman is at the back near the big door.*

CUCHULAIN.

O pure glittering ones,  
That should be more than wife or friend or mistress,  
Give us the enduring will, the unquenchable hope,  
The friendliness of the sword!—

*The song grows louder, and the last words ring out clearly. There is a loud knocking at the door, and a cry of "Open! open!"*

CONCHUBAR.

Some king that has been loitering on the way.  
Open the door, for I would have all know  
That the oath's finished, and Cuchulain bound  
And that the swords are drinking up the flame.

*The door is opened by the third woman, and a Young Man with a drawn sword enters.*

YOUNG MAN.

I am of Aoife's army.

*The Kings rush towards him. CUCHULAIN throws himself between.*

CUCHULAIN.

Put up your swords,  
He is but one. Aoife is far away.



YOUNG MAN.

I have come alone into the midst of you  
To weigh this sword against Cuchulain's sword.

CONCHUBAR.

And are you noble? for if of common seed  
You cannot weigh your sword against his sword  
But in mixed battle.

YOUNG MAN.

I am under bonds  
To tell my name to no man; but it's noble.

CONCHUBAR.

But I would know your name, and not your bonds.  
You cannot speak in the Assembly House  
If you are not noble.

FIRST KING.

Answer the High King!

YOUNG MAN.

I will give no other proof than the hawk gives—  
That it's no sparrow!

*[He is silent for a moment, then speaks to all.]*

Yet look upon me, kings.

I too am of that ancient seed, and carry  
The signs about this body and in these bones.

CUCHULAIN.

To have shown the hawk's grey feather is enough,  
And you speak highly, too. Give me that helmet!  
I'd thought they had grown weary sending champions.  
That sword and belt will do. This fighting's welcome.  
The High King there has promised me his wisdom;  
But the hawk's sleepy till its well-beloved



Cries out amid the acorns, or it has seen  
 Its enemy like a speck upon the sun.  
 What's wisdom to the hawk, when that clear eye  
 Is burning nearer up in the high air!

*Looks hard at YOUNG MAN; then comes down steps  
 and grasps the YOUNG MAN by his shoulder.*

Hither into the light! [To CONCHUBAR.

The very tint  
 Of her that I was speaking of but now.  
 Not a pin's difference. [To YOUNG MAN.

You are from the North,  
 Where there are many that have that tint of hair—  
 Red-brown, the light red-brown. Come nearer, boy,  
 For I would have another look at you.  
 There's more likeness—a pale, a stone-pale cheek.  
 What brought you, boy? Have you no fear of death!

YOUNG MAN.

Whether I live or die is in the Gods' hands.

CUCHULAIN.

That is all words, all words; a young man's talk.  
 I am their plough, their harrow, their very strength;  
 For he that's in the sun begot this body  
 Upon a mortal woman, and I have heard tell  
 It seemed as if he had outrun the moon,  
 That he must follow always through waste heaven,  
 He loved so happily. He'll be but slow  
 To break a tree that was so sweetly planted.  
 Let's see that arm! I'll see it if I like.  
 That arm had a good father and a good mother,  
 But it is not like this.



## YOUNG MAN.

You are mocking me!  
 You think I am not worthy to be fought.  
 But I'll not wrangle but with this talkative knife.

## CUCHULAIN.

Put up your sword; I am not mocking you.  
 I'd have you for my friend; but if it's not  
 Because you have a hot heart and a cold eye,  
 I cannot tell the reason. (*To CONCHUBAR.*) He has got  
 her fierceness,  
 And nobody is as fierce as those pale women.  
 And I will keep him with me, Conchubar,  
 That he may set my memory upon it  
 When the day's fading.

You will stop with us,  
 And we shall hunt the deer and the wild bulls;  
 And, when we have grown weary, light our fires  
 Between the wood and water, or on some mountain  
 Where the shape-changers of the morning come.  
 The High King there would make a mock of me  
 Because I did not take a wife among them.  
 Why do you hang your head? It's a good life.  
 The head grows prouder in the light of the dawn,  
 And friendship thickens in the murmuring dark,  
 Where the spare hazels meet the wool-white foam.  
 But I can see there's no more need for words,  
 And that you'll be my friend from this day out.

## CONCHUBAR.

He has come hither, not in his own name,  
 But in Queen Aoife's name; and has challenged us  
 In challenging the foremost man of us all,



CUCHULAIN.

Well, well, what matter!

CONCHUBAR.

You think it does not matter,  
And that a fancy lighter than the air,  
A whim of the moment has more matter in it,  
For having none that shall reign after you,  
You cannot think, as I do, who would leave  
A throne too high for insult.

CUCHULAIN.

Let your children  
Re-mortar their inheritance as we have,  
And put more muscle on. I'll give you gifts,  
But I'd have something too—that arm-ring, boy.  
We'll have this quarrel out when you are older.

YOUNG MAN.

There is no man I'd sooner have my friend  
Than you, whose name has gone about the world  
As if it had been the wind; but Aoife'd say  
I had turned coward.

CUCHULAIN.

I will give you gifts,  
That Aoife'll know, and all her people know,  
To have come from me. (*Showing cloak which is on a  
chair.*) My father gave me this.  
He came to try me, rising up at dawn  
Out of the cold dark of the rich sea.  
He challenged me to battle, but before  
My sword had touched his sword, told me his name,  
Gave me this cloak, and vanished. It was woven



By women of the Country-under-Wave  
 Out of the fleeces of the sea. O! tell her  
 I was afraid, or tell her what you will.  
 No; tell her that I heard a raven croak  
 On the north side of the house, and was afraid.

CONCHUBAR.

Some witch of the air has troubled Cuchulain's mind.

CUCHULAIN.

No witchcraft. His head is like a woman's head  
 I had a fancy for.

CONCHUBAR.

A witch of the air  
 Can make a leaf confound us with memories.  
 They ride upon the wind and hurl the spells  
 That make us nothing, out of the invisible wind.  
 They have gone to school to learn the trick of it.

CUCHULAIN.

No, no, there's nothing out of common here;  
 The winds are innocent. That arm-ring, boy!

A KING.

If I've your leave, I'll take this challenge up.

ANOTHER KING.

No, give it me, High King, for that wild Aoife  
 Has carried off my slaves.

ANOTHER KING.

No, give it me,  
 For she has harried me in house and herd.

ANOTHER KING.

I claim this fight.



OTHER KINGS *together*).

And I! and I! and I!

CUCHULAIN.

Back! back! Put up your swords! put up your swords!  
There's none alive that shall accept a challenge  
I have refused. Laegaire put up your sword!

YOUNG MAN.

No, let them come! If they've a mind for it,  
I'll try it out with any two together.

CUCHULAIN.

That's spoken as I'd have spoken at your age.  
But you are in my house. Whatever man  
Would fight with you shall fight it out with me.  
They're dumb, they're dumb? How many of you would  
meet [*Draws sword.*

This mutterer, this old whistler, this sand-piper,  
This edge that's greyer than the tide, this mouse  
That's gnawing at the timbers of the world,  
This, this—? Boy, I would meet them all in arms  
If I'd a son like you. He would avenge me  
When I have withstood for the last time the men  
Whose fathers, brothers, sons, and friends I have killed  
Upholding Conchubar, when the four provinces  
Have gathered with the ravens over them.  
But I'd need no avenger. You and I  
Would scatter them like water from a dish.

YOUNG MAN.

We'll stand by one another from this out.  
Here is the ring.



CUCHULAIN.

No, turn and turn about.  
 But my turn's first, because I am the older.  
[Spreading out cloak.  
 Nine queens out of the Country-under-Wave  
 Have woven it with the fleeces of the sea,  
 And they were long embroidering at it. Boy,  
 If I had fought my father, he'd have killed me  
 As certainly as if I had a son,  
 And fought with him, I should be deadly to him,  
 For the old fiery fountains are far off,  
 And every day there is less heat o' the blood.

CONCHUBAR (*in a loud voice*).

No more of that; I will not have this friendship.  
 Cuchulain is my man, and I forbid it.  
 He shall not go unfought, for I myself——

CUCHULAIN.

I will not have it.

CONCHUBAR.

You lay commands on me?

CUCHULAIN (*seizing CONCHUBAR*).

You shall not stir, High King; I'll hold you there.

CONCHUBAR.

Witchcraft has maddened you.

THE KINGS (*shouting*).

Yes, witchcraft! witchcraft!

FIRST KING.

Some witch has worked upon your mind, Cuchulain.  
 The head of that young man seemed like a woman's



You had a fancy for. Then of a sudden  
You laid your hands on the High King himself.

*He has taken his hands from the HIGH KING. He stands as if he were dazed.*

CUCHULAIN.

And laid my hands on the High King himself.

CONCHUBAR.

Some witch is floating in the air above us.

CUCHULAIN.

Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft. Witches of the air.

[To YOUNG MAN.

Why did you? Who was it set you to this work?

Out! out, I say! for now it's sword on sword!

YOUNG MAN.

But . . . but I did not.

CUCHULAIN.

Out, I say! out! out!

YOUNG MAN goes out followed by CUCHULAIN. The KINGS follow them out with confused cries, and words one can hardly hear because of the noise. Some cry, "Quicker, quicker!" "Why are you so long at the door?" "We'll be too late!" "Have they begun to fight?" and so on; and one, it may be, "I saw him fight with Ferdia!" Their voices drown each other. The three women are left alone.

FIRST WOMAN.

I have seen, I have seen.

SECOND WOMAN.

What do you cry aloud?



FIRST WOMAN.

The ever-living have shown me what's to come.

THIRD WOMAN.

How? Where?

FIRST WOMAN.

In the ashes of the bowl.

SECOND WOMAN.

While you were holding it between your hands?

THIRD WOMAN.

Speak quickly!

FIRST WOMAN.

I saw Cuchulain's roof-tree  
Leap into fire, and the walls split and blacken.

SECOND WOMAN.

Cuchulain has gone out to die.

THIRD WOMAN.

O! O!

SECOND WOMAN.

Who could have thought that one so great as he  
Should meet his end at this unnoted sword!

FIRST WOMAN.

Life drifts between a Fool and a Blind Man  
To the end, and nobody can know his end.

SECOND WOMAN.

Come, look upon the quenching of this greatness.

*The other two go to the door, but they stop for a  
moment upon the threshold and wail.*



## FIRST WOMAN.

No crying out, for there'll be need of cries  
And knocking at the breast when it's all finished.

*The women go out. There is a sound of clashing  
swords from time to time during what follows.*

*Enter the FOOL dragging the BLIND MAN.*

## FOOL.

You have eaten it, you have eaten it!  
You have left me nothing but the bones!

*He throws BLIND MAN down by big chair.*

## BLIND MAN.

O, that I should have to endure such a plague! O,  
I ache all over! O, I am pulled to pieces! This is the  
way you pay me all the good I have done you!

## FOOL.

You have eaten it! You have told me lies. I might  
have known you had eaten it when I saw your slow,  
sleepy walk. Lie there till the kings come. O, I will  
tell Conchubar and Cuchulain and all the kings about  
you!

## BLIND MAN.

What would have happened to you but for me, and  
you without your wits? If I did not take care of you,  
what would you do for food and warmth?

## FOOL.

You take care of me! You stay safe, and send me  
into every kind of danger. You sent me down the cliff  
for gulls' eggs while you warmed your blind eyes in the  
sun; and then you ate all that were good for food. You  
left me the eggs that were neither egg nor bird. (BLIND



MAN *tries to rise*; FOOL *makes him lie down again*). Keep quiet now, till I shut the door. There is some noise outside—a high vexing noise, so that I can't be listening to myself. (*Shuts the big door.*) Why can't they be quiet! why can't they be quiet! (BLIND MAN *tries to get away*). Ah! you would get away, would you! (*Follows BLIND MAN and brings him back*). Lie there! lie there! No, you won't get away! Lie there till the kings come. I'll tell them all about you. I will tell it all. How you sit warming yourself, when you have made me light a fire of sticks, while I sit blowing it with my mouth. Do you not always make me take the windy side of the bush when it blows, and the rainy side when it rains?

BLIND MAN.

O, good Fool! listen to me. Think of the care I have taken of you. I have brought you to many a warm hearth, where there was a good welcome for you, but you would not stay there; you were always wandering about.

FOOL.

The last time you brought me in it was not I who wandered away, but you that got put out because you took the crubeen out of the pot when nobody was looking. Keep quiet, now!

CUCHULAIN (*rushing in*).

Witchcraft! There is no witchcraft on the earth, or among the witches of the air, that these hands cannot break.

FOOL.

Listen to me, Cuchulain. I left him turning the



fowl at the fire. He ate it all, though I had stolen it. He left me nothing but the feathers.

CUCHULAIN.

Fill me a horn of ale!

BLIND MAN.

I gave him what he likes best. You do not know how vain this Fool is. He likes nothing so well as a feather.

FOOL.

He left me nothing but the bones and feathers. Nothing but the feathers, though I had stolen it.

CUCHULAIN.

Give me that horn! Quarrels here, too! (*Drinks*). What is there between you two that is worth a quarrel? Out with it!

BLIND MAN.

Where would he be but for me? I must be always thinking—thinking to get food for the two of us, and when we've got it, if the moon is at the full or the tide on the turn, he'll leave the rabbit in the snare till it is full of maggots, or let the trout slip back through his hands into the stream.

*The FOOL has begun singing while the BLIND MAN is speaking.*

(*Sings.*)

When you were an acorn on the tree-top,  
Then was I an eagle cock;  
Now that you are a withered old block,  
Still am I an eagle cock.



## BLIND MAN.

Listen to him now. That's the sort of talk I have to put up with day out, day in.

*The FOOL is putting the feathers into his hair.*

*CUCHULAIN takes a handful of feathers out of a heap the FOOL has on the bench beside him, and out of the FOOL'S hair, and begins to wipe the blood from his sword with them.*

## FOOL.

He has taken my feathers to wipe his sword. It is blood that he is wiping from his sword.

*CUCHULAIN. (Goes up to door at back and throws away feathers.)*

They are standing about his body. They will not awaken him for all his witchcraft.

## BLIND MAN.

It is that young champion that he has killed. He that came out of Aoife's country.

## CUCHULAIN.

He thought to have saved himself with witchcraft.

## FOOL.

That blind man there said he would kill you. He came from Aoife's country to kill you. That blind man said they had taught him every kind of weapon that he might do it. But I always knew that you would kill him.

*CUCHULAIN (to the BLIND MAN).*

You knew him, then?



BLIND MAN.

I saw him, when I had my eyes, in Aoife's country.

CUCHULAIN.

You were in Aoife's country?

BLIND MAN.

I knew him and his mother there.

CUCHULAIN.

He was about to speak of her when he died.

BLIND MAN.

He was a queen's son.

CUCHULAIN.

What queen? what queen? (*Seizes BLIND MAN, who is now sitting upon the bench.*) Was it Scathach? There were many queens. All the rulers there were queens.

BLIND MAN.

No, not Scathach.

CUCHULAIN.

It was Uathach, then? Speak! speak!

BLIND MAN.

I cannot speak; you are clutching me too tightly. (*CUCHULAIN lets him go.*) I cannot remember who it was. I am not certain. It was some queen.

FOOL.

He said awhile ago that the young man was Aoife's son.

CUCHULAIN.

She? No, no! She had no son when I was there.



FOOL.

That blind man there said that she owned him for her son.

CUCHULAIN.

I had rather he had been some other woman's son. What father had he? A soldier out of Alba? She was an amorous woman—a proud, pale, amorous woman.

BLIND MAN.

None knew whose son he was.

CUCHULAIN.

None knew! Did you know, old listener at doors?

BLIND MAN.

No, no; I knew nothing.

FOOL.

He said awhile ago that he heard Aoife boast that she'd never but the one lover, and he the only man that had overcome her in battle. [*Pause.*]

BLIND MAN.

Somebody is trembling, Fool! The bench is shaking. Why are you trembling? Is Cuchulain going to hurt us? It was not I who told you, Cuchulain.

FOOL.

It is Cuchulain who is trembling. It is Cuchulain who is shaking the bench.

BLIND MAN.

It is his own son he has slain.

CUCHULAIN.

'Twas they that did it, the pale windy people.



Where? where? where? My sword against the thunder!  
 But no, for they have always been my friends;  
 And though they love to blow a smoking coal  
 Till it's all flame, the wars they blow aflame  
 Are full of glory, and heart-uplifting pride,  
 And not like this. The wars they love awaken  
 Old fingers and the sleepy strings of harps.  
 Who did it, then? Are you afraid? speak out?  
 For I have put you under my protection,  
 And will reward you well. Dubthach the Chafer?  
 He'd an old grudge. No, for he is with Maeve.  
 'Twas Laegaire did it! Why do you not speak?  
 What is this house? (*Pause.*) Now I remember all.

*Comes before CONCHUBAR'S chair, and strikes out  
 with his sword, as if CONCHUBAR was sitting  
 upon it.*

'Twas you who did it—you who sat up there  
 With your old rod of kingship, like a magpie  
 Nursing a stolen spoon. No, not a magpie,  
 A maggot that is eating up the earth!  
 Yes, but a magpie, for he's flown away.  
 Where did he fly to?

BLIND MAN.

He is outside the door.

CUCHULAIN.

Outside the door?

BLIND MAN.

Between the door and the sea.

CUCHULAIN.

Conchubar, Conchubar! the sword into your heart!



*He rushes out. Pause. FOOL creeps up to the big door and looks after him.*

FOOL.

He is going up to King Conchubar. They are all about the young man. No, no, he is standing still. There is a great wave going to break, and he is looking at it. Ah! now he is running down to the sea, but he is holding up his sword as if he were going into a fight. (*Pause.*) Well struck! well struck!

BLIND MAN.

What is he doing now!

FOOL.

O! he is fighting the waves.

BLIND MAN.

He sees King Conchubar's crown on every one of them.

FOOL.

There, he has struck at a big one! He has struck the crown off it; he has made the foam fly. There again, another big one!

BLIND MAN.

Where are the kings! What are the kings doing?

FOOL.

They are shouting and running down to the shore, and the people are running out of the houses. They are all running,

BLIND MAN.

You say they are running out of the houses? There will be nobody left in the houses. Listen, Fool!



FOOL.

There, he is down! He is up again. He is going into the deep water. There is a big wave. It has gone over him. I cannot see him now. He has killed kings and giants, but the waves have mastered him, the waves have mastered him!

BLIND MAN.

Come here, Fool!

FOOL.

The waves have mastered him.

BLIND MAN.

Come here!

FOOL.

The waves have mastered him.

BLIND MAN.

Come here, I say!

FOOL. (*Coming towards him, but looking backward towards the door.*)

What is it?

BLIND MAN.

There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way; come quickly! The ovens will be full. We will put our hands into the ovens. [*They go out.*]

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DEIRDRE.

(1906)







MUSICIANS.

FERGUS, *an old man.*

NAISI, *a young king.*

DEIRDRE, *his queen.*

CONCHUBAR (*pronounced Conochar*), *the old King of Uladh, who is still strong and vigorous.*

*Men with dark faces.*

SCENE: *A Guest-house in a wood. It is a rough house of timber; through the doors and some of the windows one can see the great spaces of the wood, the sky dimming, night closing in. But a window to the left shows the thick leaves of a coppice; the landscape suggests silence and loneliness. There is a door to right and left, and through the side windows one can see anybody who approaches either door, a moment before he enters. In the centre, a part of the house is curtained off; the curtains are drawn. There are unlighted torches in brackets on the walls. There is, at one side, a small table with a chessboard and chessmen upon it. At the other side of the room there is a brazier with a fire; two women, with musical instruments beside them, crouch about the brazier: they are comely women of about forty. Another woman, who carries a stringed instrument,*



*enters hurriedly; she speaks, at first standing in the doorway.*

FIRST MUSICIAN.

I have a story right, my wanderers,  
That has so mixed with fable in our songs,  
That all seemed fabulous. We are come, by chance,  
Into King Conchubar's country, and this house  
Is an old guest-house built for travellers  
From the seashore to Conchubar's royal house,  
And there are certain hills among these woods,  
And there Queen Deirdre grew.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

That famous queen  
Who has been wandering with her lover Naisi,  
And none to friend but lovers and wild hearts?

FIRST MUSICIAN (*going nearer to the brazier*).  
Some dozen years ago, King Conchubar found  
A house upon a hillside in this wood,  
And there a comely child with an old witch  
To nurse her, and there's nobody can say  
If she were human, or of those begot  
By an invisible king of the air in a storm  
On a king's daughter, or anything at all  
Of who she was or why she was hidden there  
But that she'd too much beauty for good luck.  
He went up thither daily, till at last  
She put on womanhood, and he lost peace,  
And Deirdre's tale began. The King was old.  
A month or so before the marriage day,  
A young man, in the laughing scorn of his youth,



Naisi, the son of Usna, climbed up there,  
And having wooed, or, as some say, been wooed,  
Carried her off.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

The tale were well enough  
Had it a finish.

FIRST MUSICIANS.

Hush! I have more to tell;  
But gather close that I may whisper it:  
I speak of terrible, mysterious ends—  
The secrets of a king.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

There's none to hear!

FIRST MUSICIAN.

I have been to Conchubar's house and followed up  
A crowd of servants going out and in  
With loads upon their heads: embroideries  
To hang upon the walls, or new-mown rushes  
To strew upon the floors, and came at length  
To a great room.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

Be silent; there are steps!

*Enter FERGUS, an old man, who moves about from  
door to window excitedly through what follows.*

FERGUS.

I thought to find a message from the king.  
You are musicians by these instruments,  
And if as seems—for you are comely women—  
You can praise love, you'll have the best of luck,  
For there'll be two, before the night is in,



That bargained for their love, and paid for it  
 All that men value. You have but the time  
 To weigh a happy music with a sad;  
 To find what is most pleasing to a lover,  
 Before the son of Usna and his queen  
 Have passed this threshold.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Deirdre and her man!

FERGUS.

I was to have found a message in this house,  
 And ran to meet it. Is there no messenger  
 From Conchubar to Fergus, son of Rogh?

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Are Deirdre and her lover tired of life?

FERGUS.

You are not of this country, or you'd know  
 That they are in my charge and all forgiven.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

We have no country but the roads of the world.

FERGUS.

Then you should know that all things change in the  
 world,  
 And hatred turns to love and love to hate,  
 And even kings forgive.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

An old man's love  
 Who casts no second line, is hard to cure;  
 His jealousy is like his love.



FERGUS.

And that's but true.  
 You have learned something in your wanderings.  
 He was so hard to cure, that the whole court,  
 But I alone, thought it impossible;  
 Yet after I had urged it at all seasons,  
 I had my way, and all's forgiven now;  
 And you shall speak the welcome and the joy  
 That I lack tongue for.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Yet old men are jealous.

FERGUS (*going to door*).

I am Conchubar's near friend, and that weighed  
 somewhat,  
 And it was policy to pardon them.  
 The need of some young, famous, popular man  
 To lead the troops, the murmur of the crowd,  
 And his own natural impulse, urged him to it.  
 They have been wandering half-a-dozen years.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

And yet old men are jealous.

FERGUS (*coming from door*).

Sing the more sweetly  
 Because, though age is arid as a bone,  
 This man has flowered. I've need of music, too;  
 If this grey head would suffer no reproach,  
 I'd dance and sing—

*Dark-faced MEN with strange, barbaric dress and*



*arms begin to pass by the doors and windows.  
They pass one by one and in silence.*

and dance till the hour ran out,  
Because I have accomplished this good deed.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Look there—there at the window, those dark men,  
With murderous and outlandish-looking arms—  
They've been about the house all day.

FERGUS (*looking after them*).

What are you?  
Where do you come from, who is it sent you here?

FIRST MUSICIAN.

They will not answer you.

FERGUS.

They do not hear.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Forgive my open speech, but to these eyes  
That have seen many lands, they are such men  
As kings will gather for a murderous task,  
That neither bribes, commands, nor promises  
Can bring their people to.

FERGUS.

And that is why  
You harped upon an old man's jealousy.  
A trifle sets you quaking. Conchubar's fame  
Brings merchandise on every wind that blows.  
They may have brought him Libyan dragon-skin,  
Or the ivory of the fierce unicorn.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

If these be merchants, I have seen the goods



They have brought to Conchubar, and understood  
His murderous purpose

FERGUS.

Murderous, you say?  
Why, what new gossip of the roads is this?  
But I'll not hear.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

It may be life or death.  
There is a room in Conchubar's house, and there——

FERGUS.

Be silent, or I'll drive you from the door.  
There's many a one that would do more than that,  
And make it prison, or death, or banishment  
To slander the high King.

*[Suddenly restraining himself and speaking gently.]*

He is my friend;

I have his oath, and I am well content.  
I have known his mind as if it were my own  
These many years, and there is none alive  
Shall buzz against him, and I there to stop it.  
I know myself, and him, and your wild thought  
Fed on extravagant poetry, and lit  
By such a dazzle of old fabulous tales  
That common things are lost, and all that's strange  
Is true because 'twere pity if it were not.

*[Going to the door again.]*

Quick! quick! your instruments! they are coming now.  
I hear the hoofs a-clatter. Begin that song;  
But what is it to be? I'd have them hear  
A music foaming up out of the house  
Like wine out of a cup. Come now, a verse



Of some old time not worth remembering,  
 And all the lovelier because a bubble.  
 Begin, begin, of some old king and queen,  
 Of Ludgaidh Redstripe or another; no, not him,  
 He and his lady perished wretchedly.

FIRST MUSICIAN (*singing*).

“Why is it,” Queen Edain said,  
 “If I do but climb the stair . . . .

FERGUS.

Ah! that is better. . . . They are alighted now.  
 Shake all your cockscombs, children; these are lovers.

FERGUS *goes out.*

FIRST MUSICIAN.

“Why is it,” Queen Edain said,  
 “If I do but climb the stair  
 To the tower overhead,  
 When the winds are calling there,  
 Or the gannets calling out,  
 In waste places of the sky,  
 There’s so much to think about,  
 That I cry, that I cry?”

SECOND MUSICIAN.

But her goodman answered her:

“Love would be a thing of naught  
 Had not all his limbs a stir  
 Born out of immoderate thought;  
 Were he anything by half,  
 Were his measure running dry.  
 Lovers, if they may not laugh,  
 Have to cry, have to cry.”



DEIRDRE, NAISI, *and* FERGUS *have been seen for a moment through the windows, but now they have entered.*

THE THREE MUSICIANS (*together*).  
 But is Edain worth a song  
 Now the hunt begins anew?  
 Praise the beautiful and strong;  
 Praise the redness of the yew;  
 Praise the blossoming apple-stem.  
 But our silence had been wise.  
 What is all our praise to them,  
 That have one another's eyes?

DEIRDRE.

Silence your music, though I thank you for it;  
 But the wind's blown upon my hair, and I  
 Must set the jewels on my neck and head  
 For one that's coming.

NAISI.

Your colour has all gone  
 As 'twere with fear, and there's no cause for that.

DEIRDRE.

These women have the raddle that they use  
 To make them brave and confident, although  
 Dread, toil, or cold may chill the blood o' their cheeks.  
 You'll help me, women. It is my husband's will  
 I show my trust in one, that may be here  
 Before the mind can call the colour up.  
 My husband took these rubies from a king  
 Of Surracha that was so murderous  
 He seemed all glittering dragon, Now wearing them



Myself wars on myself, for I myself—  
 That do my husband's will, yet fear to do it—  
 Grow dragonish to myself.

*The Women have gathered about her. NAISI has stood looking at her, but FERGUS brings him to the chess-table.*

FERGUS.

We'll play at chess  
 Till the king comes. It is but natural  
 That she should fear him, for her house has been  
 The hole of the badger and the den of the fox.

NAISI.

If I were childish and had faith in omens,  
 I'd rather not have lit on that old chess-board  
 At my home-coming.

FERGUS.

There's a tale about it—  
 It has been lying there these many years—  
 Some wild old sorrowful tale.

NAISI.

It is the board  
 Where Ludgaidh Redstripe and that wife of his,  
 Who had a seamew's body half the year,  
 Played at the chess upon the night they died.

FERGUS.

I can remember now, a tale of treachery,  
 A broken promise and a journey's end—  
 But it were best forgot.

*DEIRDRE has been standing with the Women about her. They have been helping her to put on her*



*jewels and to put the pigment on her cheeks and arrange her hair. She has gradually grown attentive to what FERGUS is saying.*

NAISI.

If the tale's true,  
When it was plain that they had been betrayed,  
They moved the men and waited for the end  
As it were bedtime, and had so quiet minds  
They hardly winked their eyes when the sword flashed.

FERGUS.

She never could have played so, being a woman,  
If she had not the cold sea's blood in her.

DEIRDRE.

I have heard the ever-living warn mankind  
By changing clouds and casual accidents,  
Or what seem so.

NAISI.

It would but ill become us,  
Now that King Conchubar has pledged his word,  
Should we be startled by a cloud or a shadow.

DEIRDRE.

There's none to welcome us.

NAISI.

Being his guest,  
Words that would wrong him can but wrong ourselves.

DEIRDRE.

An empty house upon the journey's end!  
Is that the way a king that means no mischief  
Honours a guest?



FERGUS.

He is but making ready  
 A welcome in his house, arranging where  
 The moorhen and the mallard go, and where  
 The speckled heathcock on a golden dish.

DEIRDRE.

Had he no messenger?

NAISI.

Such words and fears  
 Wrong this old man who's pledged his word to us.  
 You speak as women do that sit alone  
 Marking among the ashes with a stick  
 Till they are terrified.—You are a queen:  
 You should have too calm thought to start at shadows.  
 (*To FERGUS.*) Come, let us look if there's a messenger  
 From Conchubar. We cannot see from this  
 Because we are blinded by the leaves and twigs,  
 But it may be the wood will thin again.  
 It is but kind that when the lips we love  
 Speak words that are unfitting for kings' ears  
 Our ears be deaf.

FERGUS.

But now I had to threaten  
 These wanderers because they would have weighed  
 Some crazy phantasy of their own brain  
 Or gossip of the road with Conchubar's word.  
 If I had thought so little of mankind  
 I never could have moved him to this pardon.  
 I have believed the best of every man,  
 And find that to believe it is enough



To make a bad man show him at his best,  
Or even a good man swing his lantern higher.

*NAISI and FERGUS go out. The last words are spoken as they go through the door. One can see them through part of what follows, either through door or window. They move about, talking or looking along the road towards CONCHUBAR'S house.*

FIRST MUSICIAN.

If anything lies heavy on your heart,  
Speak freely of it, knowing it is certain  
That you will never see my face again.

DEIRDRE.

You've been in love?

FIRST MUSICIAN.

If you would speak of love,  
Speak freely. There is nothing in the world  
That has been friendly to us but the kisses  
That were upon our lips, and when we are old  
Their memory will be all the life we have.

DEIRDRE.

There was a man that loved me. He was old;  
I could not love him. Now I can but fear.  
He has made promises, and brought me home;  
But though I turn it over in my thoughts,  
I cannot tell if they are sound and wholesome,  
Or hackles on the hook.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

I have heard he loved you,  
As some old miser loves the dragon-stone  
He hides among the cobwebs near the roof.



DEIRDRE.

You mean that when a man who has loved like that  
Is after crossed, love drowns in its own flood,  
And that love drowned and floating is but hate;  
And that a king who hates, sleeps ill at night,  
Till he has killed; and that, though the day laughs,  
We shall be dead at cock-crow.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

You have not my thought.

When I lost one I loved distractedly,  
I blamed my crafty rival and not him,  
And fancied till my passion had run out,  
That could I carry him away with me,  
And tell him all my love, I'd keep him yet.

DEIRDRE.

Ah! now I catch your meaning, that this king  
Will murder Naisi, and keep me alive.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

'Tis you that put that meaning upon words  
Spoken at random.

DEIRDRE.

Wanderers like you,  
Who have their wit alone to keep their lives,  
Speak nothing that is bitter to the ear  
At random; if they hint at it at all  
Their eyes and ears have gathered it so lately  
That it is crying out in them for speech.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

We have little that is certain,



DEIRDRE.

Certain or not,

Speak it out quickly, I beseech you to it;  
 I never have met any of your kind,  
 But that I gave them money, food and fire.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

There are strange, miracle-working, wicked stones,  
 Men tear out of the heart and the hot brain  
 Of Libyan dragons.

DEIRDRE.

The hot Istain stone,  
 And the cold stone of Fanes, that have power  
 To stir even those at enmity to love.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

They have so great an influence, if but sewn  
 In the embroideries that curtain in  
 The bridal bed.

DEIRDRE.

O Mover of the stars  
 That made this delicate house of ivory,  
 And made my soul its mistress, keep it safe!

FIRST MUSICIAN.

I have seen a bridal bed, so curtained in,  
 So decked for miracle in Conchubar's house,  
 And learned that a bride's coming.

DEIRDRE.

And I the bride?

Here is worse treachery than the seamew suffered,  
 For she but died and mixed into the dust



Of her dear comrade, but I am to live  
 And lie in the one bed with him I hate.  
 Where is Naisi? I was not alone like this  
 When Conchubar first chose me for his wife,  
 I cried in sleeping or waking and he came,  
 But now there is worse need.

NAISI (*entering with* FERGUS.)

Why have you called?

I was but standing there, without the door.

DEIRDRE.

I have heard terrible mysterious things,  
 Magical horrors and the spells of wizards.

FERGUS.

Why, that's no wonder. You have been listening  
 To singers of the roads that gather up  
 The stories of the world.

DEIRDRE.

But I have one  
 To make the stories of the world but nothing.

NAISI.

Be silent if it is against the king  
 Whose guest you are.

FERGUS.

No, let her speak it out,  
 I know the High King's heart as it were my own,  
 And can refute a slander, but already  
 I have warned these women that it may be death.

NAISI.

I will not weigh the gossip of the roads



With the king's word. I ask you pardon for her:  
She has the heart of the wild birds that fear  
The net of the fowler or the wicker cage.

DEIRDRE.

Am I to see the fowler and the cage  
And speak no word at all?

NAISI.

You would have known,  
Had they not bred you in that mountainous place,  
That when we give a word and take a word  
Sorrow is put away, past wrong forgotten.

DEIRDRE.

Though death may come of it?

NAISI.

Though death may come.

FERGUS.

To those that slander kings.

DEIRDRE.

Then I will say  
What it were best to carry to the grave.  
Look at my face where the leaf raddled it  
And at these rubies on my hair and breast.  
It was for him, to stir him to desire,  
I put on beauty; yes, for Conchubar.

NAISI.

What frenzy put these words into your mouth?

DEIRDRE.

No frenzy, for what need is there for frenzy  
To change what shifts with every change of the wind,



Or else there is no truth in men's old sayings?  
Was I not born a woman?

NAISI.

You're mocking me.

DEIRDRE.

And is there mockery in this face and eyes,  
Or in this body, in these limbs that brought  
So many mischiefs? Look at me and say  
If that that shakes my limbs be mockery.

NAISI.

What woman is there that a man can trust  
But at the moment when he kisses her  
At the first midnight?

DEIRDRE.

Were it not most strange  
That women should put evil in men's hearts  
And lack it in themselves?

NAISI.

Come, I command it:  
We'll to the horses and take ship again.

FERGUS.

Fool, she but seeks to rouse your jealousy  
With crafty words.

DEIRDRE.

Were we not born to wander?  
These jewels have been reaped by the innocent sword  
Upon a mountain, and a mountain bred me;  
But who can tell what change can come to love  
Among the valleys? I speak no falsehood now.



Away to windy summits, and there mock  
The night-jar and the valley-keeping bird!

FERGUS.

Men blamed you that you stirred a quarrel up  
That has brought death to many. I have poured  
Water upon the fire, but if you fly  
A second time, the house is in a blaze,  
And all the screaming household will but blame  
The savage heart of beauty for it all;  
And Naisi, that has helped to tar the whisp,  
Shall be a hunted outlaw all his days.

DEIRDRE.

I will be blamed no more. There's but one way:  
I'll spoil this beauty that brought misery  
And houseless wandering on the man I loved.  
These wanderers will show me how to do it;  
To clip this hair to baldness, blacken my skin  
With walnut juice, and tear my face with briars.  
Oh, that the creatures of the woods had torn  
My body with their claws!

FERGUS.

What, wilder yet!

DEIRDRE (*to* NAISI).

Whatever were to happen to my face  
I'd be myself, and there's not any way  
But this to bring all trouble to an end.

NAISI.

What have you told to put such frenzy in her?

FERGUS.

Yes, speak it out.



NAISI.

I give you my protection,  
Are you afraid to speak? Does the king love her?  
Will no one answer?

DEIRDRE.

Tell out all the plot,  
The plan, the network, all the treachery;  
Tell of the bridal chamber and the bed,  
The magical stones, the wizard's handiwork.

NAISI.

Ah! now I understand why it is you fear  
To waken death with words. Take care of Deirdre:  
She must not fall alive into his hands,  
Whatever the cost.

DEIRDRE.

Where would you go to, Naisi?

NAISI.

I go to drag the truth from Conchubar,  
Before his people, in the face of his army,  
And if it be as black as you have made it,  
To kill him there.

DEIRDRE.

You never would return;  
I'll never look upon your face again.  
Oh, keep him, Fergus; do not let him go,  
But hold him from it. You are both wise and kind.

NAISI.

When you were all but Conchubar's wife, I took you;  
He tried to kill me, and he would have done it  
If I had been so near as I am now.



And now that you are mine, he has planned to take you.  
Should I be less than Conchubar, being a man?

*Dark-faced MESSENGER comes into the house, un-  
noticed.*

MESSENGER.

Supper is on the table, Conchubar  
Is waiting for his guests.

FERGUS.

All's well, again!  
All's well! all's well! You cried your doubts so loud  
That I had almost doubted.

NAISI.

I would have killed him,  
And he the while but busy in his house  
For the more welcome.

DEIRDRE.

The message is not finished.

FERGUS.

Come quickly. Conchubar will laugh, that I—  
Although I held out boldly in my speech—  
That I, even I——

DEIRDRE.

Wait, wait! He is not done.

MESSENGER.

Deirdre and Fergus, son of Rogh, are summoned;  
But not the traitor that bore off the queen.  
It is enough that the king pardon her,  
And call her to his table and his bed.



DEIRDRE.

NAISI.

So then, it's treachery.

FERGUS.

I'll not believe it.

NAISI.

Tell Conchubar to meet me in some place  
Where none can come between us but our swords,  
For I have found no truth on any tongue  
That's not of iron.

MESSENGER.

I am Conchubar's man;  
I take no message but he bids me do it. [*He goes.*]

NAISI.

I bid you. I will have you swear to take it.  
*He follows MESSENGER out.*

FERGUS.

Some enemy has paid him well for this.  
I know King Conchubar's mind as it were my own;  
I'll learn the truth from him.

*He is about to follow NAISI, but DEIRDRE stops  
him.*

DEIRDRE.

No, no, old man,  
You thought the best, and the worst came of it;  
We listened to the counsel of the wise,  
And so turned fools. But ride and bring your friends.  
Go, and go quickly. Conchubar has not seen me;  
It may be that his passion is asleep,  
And that we may escape.



FERGUS.

But I'll go first,  
 And follow up that Libyan heel, and send  
 Such words to Conchubar, that he may know  
 At how great peril he lays hands upon you.

(NAISI enters.)

NAISI.

The Libyan, knowing that a servant's life  
 Is safe from hands like mine, but turned and mocked.

FERGUS.

I'll call my friends, and call the reaping-hooks,  
 And carry you in safety to the ships.  
 My name has still some power. I will protect,  
 Or, if that is impossible, revenge.

*Goes out by other door.*

NAISI (*who is calm, like a man who has passed  
 beyond life*).

The crib has fallen and the birds are in it;  
 There is not one of the great oaks about us  
 But shades a hundred men.

DEIRDRE.

Let's out and die,  
 Or break away, if the chance favour us.

NAISI.

They would but drag you from me, stained with blood.  
 Their barbarous weapons would but mar that beauty,  
 And I would have you die as a queen should—  
 In a death chamber. You are in my charge.  
 We will wait here, and when they come upon us,



I'll hold them from the doors, and when that's over,  
Give you a cleanly death with this grey edge.

DEIRDRE.

I will stay here; but you go out and fight.  
Our way of life has brought no friends to us,  
And if we do not buy them leaving it,  
We shall be ever friendless.

NAISI.

What do they say?

That Ludgaidh Redstripe and that wife of his  
Sat at this chess-board, waiting for their end.  
They knew that there was nothing that could save them,  
And so played chess as they had any night  
For years, and waited for the stroke of sword.  
I never heard a death so out of reach  
Of common hearts, a high and comely end.  
What need have I, that gave up all for love,  
To die like an old king out of a fable,  
Fighting and passionate? What need is there  
For all that ostentation at my setting?  
I have loved truly and betrayed no man.  
I need no lightning at the end, no beating  
In a vain fury at the cage's door.  
(*To MUSICIANS.*) Had you been here when that man and  
his queen  
Played at so high a game, could you have found  
An ancient poem for the praise of it?  
It should have set out plainly that those two,  
Because no man and woman have loved better,  
Might sit on there contentedly, and weigh  
The joy comes after. I have heard the seamew



Sat there, with all the colour in her cheeks,  
As though she'd say: "There's nothing happening  
But that a king and queen are playing chess."

DEIRDRE.

He's in the right, though I have not been born  
Of the cold, haughty waves, my veins being hot.  
And though I have loved better than that queen,  
I'll have as quiet fingers on the board.  
Oh, singing women, set it down in a book  
That love is all we need, even though it is  
But the last drops we gather up like this;  
And though the drops are all we have known of life,  
For we have been most friendless—praise us for it  
And praise the double sunset, for naught's lacking,  
But a good end to the long, cloudy day.

NAISI.

Light torches there and drive the shadows out.  
For day's grey end comes up.

*A MUSICIAN lights a torch in the fire and then crosses before the chess-players, and slowly lights the torches in the sconces. The light is almost gone from the wood, but there is a clear evening light in the sky, increasing the sense of solitude and loneliness.*

DEIRDRE.

Make no sad music.

What is it but a king and queen at chess?  
They need a music that can mix itself  
Into imagination, but not break  
The steady thinking that the hard game needs.



*(During the chess, the MUSICIANS sing this song.)*

Love is an immoderate thing  
 And can never be content,  
 Till it dip an ageing wing,  
 Where some laughing element  
 Leaps and Time's old lanthorn dims.  
 What's the merit in love-play,  
 In the tumult of the limbs  
 That dies out before 'tis day,  
 Heart on heart, or mouth on mouth,  
 All that mingling of our breath,  
 When love longing is but drouth  
 For the things come after death?

*During the last verses DEIRDRE rises from the board  
 and kneels at NAISI'S feet.*

DEIRDRE.

I cannot go on playing like that woman  
 That had but the cold blood of the sea in her veins.

NAISI.

It is your move. Take up your man again.

DEIRDRE.

Do you remember that first night in the woods  
 We lay all night on leaves, and looking up,  
 When the first grey of the dawn awoke the birds,  
 Saw leaves above us? You thought that I still slept,  
 And bending down to kiss me on the eyes,  
 Found they were open. Bend and kiss me now,  
 For it may be the last before our death.  
 And when that's over, we'll be different;  
 Imperishable things, a cloud or a fire.



And I know nothing but this body, nothing  
But that old vehement, bewildering kiss.

*CONCHUBAR comes to the door.*

MUSICIAN.

Children, beware!

NAISI (*laughing*).

He has taken up my challenge;  
Whether I am a ghost or living man  
When day has broken, I'll forget the rest,  
And say that there is kingly stuff in him.

*Turns to fetch spear and shield, and then sees that  
CONCHUBAR has gone.*

FIRST MUSICIAN.

He came to spy upon you, not to fight.

NAISI.

A prudent hunter, therefore, but no king.  
He'd find if what has fallen in the pit  
Were worth the hunting, but has come too near,  
And I turn hunter. You're not man, but beast.  
Go scurry in the bushes, now, beast, beast,  
For now it's topsy-turvey. I upon you.

*He rushes out after CONCHUBAR.*

DEIRDRE.

You have a knife there, thrust into your girdle.  
I'd have you give it me.

MUSICIAN.

No, but I dare not.

DEIRDRE.

No, but you must.



MUSICIAN.

If harm should come to you,  
They'd know I gave it.

DEIRDRE (*snatching knife*).

There is no mark on this  
To make it different from any other  
Out of a common forge.

*Goes to the door and looks out.*

MUSICIAN.

You have taken it,  
I did not give it you; but there are times  
When such a thing is all the friend one has.

DEIRDRE.

The leaves hide all, and there's no way to find  
What path to follow. Why is there no sound?

*She goes from door to window.*

MUSICIAN.

Where would you go?

DEIRDRE.

To strike a blow for Naisi,  
If Conchubar call the Libyans to his aid.  
But why is there no clash? They have met by this!

MUSICIAN.

Listen. I am called wise. If Conchubar win,  
You have a woman's wile that can do much,  
Even with men in pride of victory.  
He is in love and old. What were one knife  
Among a hundred?



DEIRDRE (*going towards them*).

Women, if I die,

If Naisi die this night, how will you praise?  
 What words seek out? for that will stand to you;  
 For being but dead we shall have many friends.  
 All through your wanderings, the doors of kings  
 Shall be thrown wider open, the poor man's hearth  
 Heaped with new turf, because you are wearing this  
   *Gives MUSICIAN a bracelet.*  
 To show that you have Deirdre's story right.

MUSICIAN.

Have you not been paid servants in love's house  
 To sweep the ashes out and keep the doors?  
 And though you have suffered all for mere love's sake  
 You'd live your lives again.

DEIRDRE.

Even this last hour.

CONCHUBAR *enters with dark-faced Men.*

CONCHUBAR.

One woman and two men; that is a quarrel  
 That knows no mending. Bring in the man she chose  
 Because of his beauty and the strength of his youth.

*The dark-faced Men drag in NAISI entangled in a  
 net.*

NAISI.

I have been taken like a bird or a fish.

CONCHUBAR.

He cried "Beast, beast!" and in a blind-beast rage  
 He ran at me and fell into the nets,  
 But we were careful for your sake, and took him



With all the comeliness that woke desire  
Unbroken in him. I being old and lenient—  
I would not hurt a hair upon his head.

DEIRDRE.

What do you say? Have you forgiven him?

NAISI.

He is but mocking us. What's left to say  
Now that the seven years' hunt is at an end?

DEIRDRE.

He never doubted you until I made him,  
And therefore all the blame for what he says  
Should fall on me.

CONCHUBAR.

But his young blood is hot,  
And if we're of one mind, he shall go free,  
And I ask nothing for it, or, if something,  
Nothing I could not take. There is no king  
In the wide world that, being so greatly wronged,  
Could copy me, and give all vengeance up.  
Although her marriage-day had all but come,  
You carried her away; but I'll show mercy.  
Because you had the insolent strength of youth  
You carried her away; but I've had time  
To think it out through all these seven years.  
I will show mercy.

NAISI.

You have many words.

CONCHUBAR.

I will not make a bargain; I but ask  
What is already mine.



[DEIRDRE *moves slowly towards CONCHUBAR while he is speaking, her eyes fixed upon him.*]

You may go free

If Deirdre will but walk into my house  
 Before the people's eyes, that they may know  
 When I have put the crown upon her head  
 I have not taken her by force and guile.  
 The doors are open, and the floors are strewed,  
 And in the bridal chamber curtains sewn  
 With all enchantments that give happiness,  
 By races that are germane to the sun,  
 And nearest him, and have no blood in their veins—  
 For when they're wounded the wound drips with wine—  
 Nor speech but singing. At the bridal door  
 Two fair king's daughters carry in their hands  
 The crown and robe.

DEIRDRE.

Oh, no! Not that, not that.

Ask any other thing but that one thing.  
 Leave me with Naisi. We will go away  
 Into some country at the ends of the earth.  
 We'll trouble you no more; and there is no one  
 That will not praise you if you pardon us.  
 "He is good, he is good," they'll say to one another;  
 "There's nobody like him, for he forgave  
 Deirdre and Naisi."

CONCHUBAR.

Do you think that I  
 Shall let you go again, after seven years  
 Of longing and of planning here and there,  
 And trafficking with merchants for the stones



That make all sure, and watching my own face  
That none might read it?

DEIRDRE (*to NAISI*).

It's better to go with him.

Why should you die when one can bear it all?  
My life is over; it's better to obey.  
Why should you die? I will not live long, Naisi.  
I'd not have you believe I'd long stay living;  
Oh no, no, no! You will go far away.  
You will forget me. Speak, speak, Naisi, speak,  
And say that it is better that I go.  
I will not ask it. Do not speak a word,  
For I will take it all upon myself.  
Conchubar, I will go.

NAISI.

And do you think

That, were I given life at such a price,  
I would not cast it from me? O, my eagle!  
Why do you beat vain wings upon the rock  
When hollow night's above?

DEIRDRE.

It's better, Naisi.

It may be hard for you, but you'll forget.  
For what am I, to be remembered always?  
And there are other women. There was one,  
The daughter of the King of Leodas;  
I could not sleep because of her. Speak to him;  
Tell it out plain, and make him understand.  
And if it be he thinks I shall stay living,  
Say that I will not.



NAISI.

Would I had lost life  
 Among those Scottish kings that sought it of me,  
 Because you were my wife, or that the worst  
 Had taken you before this bargaining!  
 O eagle! If you were to do this thing,  
 And buy my life of Conchubar with your body,  
 Love's law being broken, I would stand alone  
 Upon the eternal summits, and call out,  
 And you could never come there, being banished.

DEIRDRE (*kneeling to CONCHUBAR*).

I would obey, but cannot. Pardon us.  
 I know that you are good. I have heard you praised  
 For giving gifts; and you will pardon us,  
 Although I cannot go into your house.  
 It was my fault. I only should be punished.

[*Unseen by DEIRDRE, NAISI is gagged.*

The very moment these eyes fell on him,  
 I told him; I held out my hands to him;  
 How could he refuse? At first he would not—  
 I am not lying—he remembered you.  
 What do I say? My hands?—No, no, my lips—  
 For I had pressed my lips upon his lips—  
 I swear it is not false—my breast to his;

CONCHUBAR *motions*; NAISI *unseen by DEIRDRE, is  
 taken behind the curtain.*

Until I woke the passion that's in all,  
 And how could he resist? I had my beauty.  
 You may have need of him, a brave, strong man,  
 Who is not foolish at the council board,  
 Nor does he quarrel by the candle-light



And give hard blows to dogs. A cup of wine  
 Moves him to mirth, not madness. [*She stands up.*  
 What am I saying?

You may have need of him, for you have none  
 Who is so good a sword, or so well loved  
 Among the common people. You may need him,  
 And what king knows when the hour of need may come?  
 You dream that you have men enough. You laugh.  
 Yes; you are laughing to yourself. You say,  
 "I am Conchubar—I have no need of him."  
 You will cry out for him some day and say,  
 "If Naisi were but living"——(*She misses NAISI.*) Where  
 is he?

Where have you sent him? Where is the son of Usna?  
 Where is he, O, where is he?

*She staggers over to the MUSICIANS. The EXECUTIONER has come out with sword on which there is blood; CONCHUBAR points to it. The MUSICIANS give a wail.*

CONCHUBAR.

The traitor who has carried off my wife  
 No longer lives. Come to my house now, Deirdre,  
 For he that called himself your husband's dead.

DEIRDRE.

O, do not touch me. Let me go to him. [*Pause.*  
 King Conchubar is right. My husband's dead.  
 A single woman is of no account,  
 Lacking array of servants, linen cupboards,  
 The bacon hanging—and King Conchubar's house  
 All ready, too—I'll to King Conchubar's house.



It is but wisdom to do willingly  
What has to be.

CONCHUBAR.

But why are you so calm?  
I thought that you would curse me and cry out,  
And fall upon the ground and tear your hair.

DEIRDRE (*laughing*).

You know too much of women to think so;  
Though, if I were less worthy of desire,  
I would pretend as much; but, being myself,  
It is enough that you were master here.  
Although we are so delicately made,  
There's something brutal in us, and we are won  
By those who can shed blood. It was some woman  
That taught you how to woo: but do not touch me:  
I shall do all you bid me, but not yet  
Because I have to do what's customary.  
We lay the dead out, folding up the hands,  
Closing the eyes, and stretching out the feet,  
And push a pillow underneath the head,  
Till all's in order; and all this I'll do  
For Naisi, son of Usna.

CONCHUBAR.

It is not fitting.  
You are not now a wanderer, but a queen,  
And there are plenty that can do these things.

DEIRDRE (*motioning CONCHUBAR away*).

No, no. Not yet. I cannot be your queen,  
Till the past's finished, and its debts are paid.  
When a man dies, and there are debts unpaid,



He wanders by the debtor's bed and cries,  
 "There's so much owing."

CONCHUBAR.

You are deceiving me.  
 You long to look upon his face again.  
 Why should I give you now to a dead man  
 That took you from a living?

*He makes a step towards her.*

DEIRDRE.

In good time.  
 You'll stir me to more passion than he could,  
 And yet, if you are wise, you'll grant me this:  
 That I go look upon him that was once  
 So strong and comely and held his head so high  
 That women envied me. For I will see him  
 All blood-bedabbled and his beauty gone.  
 It's better, when you're beside me in your strength,  
 That the mind's eye should call up the soiled body,  
 And not the shape I loved. Look at him, women.  
 He heard me pleading to be given up,  
 Although my lover was still living, and yet  
 He doubts my purpose. I will have you tell him  
 How changeable all women are. How soon  
 Even the best of lovers is forgot,  
 When his day's finished.

CONCHUBAR.

No; but I will trust  
 The strength that you have praised, and not your purpose.

DEIRDRE (*almost with a caress*).

It is so small a gift and you will grant it



Because it is the first that I have asked.  
 He has refused. There is no sap in him;  
 Nothing but empty veins. I thought as much.  
 He has refused me the first thing I have asked—  
 Me, me, his wife. I understand him now;  
 I know the sort of life I'll have with him;  
 But he must drag me to his house by force.  
 If he refuse (*she laughs*), he shall be mocked of all.  
 They'll say to one another, "Look at him  
 That is so jealous that he lured a man  
 From over sea, and murdered him, and yet  
 He trembled at the thought of a dead face!"

*She has her hand upon curtain.*

CONCHUBAR.

How do I know that you have not some knife,  
 And go to die upon his body?

DEIRDRE.

Have me searched,  
 If you would make so little of your queen.  
 It may be that I have a knife hid here  
 Under my dress. Bid one of these dark slaves  
 To search me for it. [*Pause.*

CONCHUBAR.

Go to your farewells, queen.

DEIRDRE.

Now strike the wire, and sing to it awhile,  
 Knowing that all is happy, and that you know  
 Within what bride-bed I shall lie this night,  
 And by what man, and lie close up to him,



For the bed's narrow, and there outsleep the cock-  
crow. *[She goes behind the curtain.]*

FIRST MUSICIAN.

They are gone, they are gone. The proud may lie by  
the proud.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

Though we were bidden to sing, cry nothing loud.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

They are gone, they are gone.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

Whispering were enough.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Into the secret wilderness of their love.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

A high, grey cairn. What more is to be said?

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Eagles have gone into their cloudy bed.

*Shouting outside. FERGUS enters. Many men with  
scythes and sickles and torches gather about the  
doors. The house is lit with the glare of their  
torches.*

FERGUS.

Where's Naisi, son of Usna, and his queen?  
I and a thousand reaping-hooks and scythes  
Demand him of you.

CONCHUBAR.

You have come too late.

I have accomplished all. Deirdre is mine;



She is my queen, and no man now can rob me.  
 I had to climb the topmost bough, and pull  
 This apple among the winds. Open the curtain,  
 That Fergus learn my triumph from her lips.

*The curtain is drawn back. The MUSICIANS begin  
 to keen with low voices.*

No, no; I'll not believe it. She is not dead—  
 She cannot have escaped a second time!

FERGUS.

King, she is dead; but lay no hand upon her.  
 What's this but empty cage and tangled wire,  
 Now the bird's gone? but I'll not have you touch it.

CONCHUBAR.

You are all traitors, all against me—all.  
 And she has deceived me for a second time.  
 And every common man can keep his wife,  
 But not the King.

*Loud shouting outside: "Death to Conchubar!"  
 "Where is Naisi?" etc. The dark-skinned men  
 gather round CONCHUBAR and draw their swords;  
 but he motions them away.*

I have no need of weapons.  
 There's not a traitor that dare stop my way.  
 Howl, if you will; but I, being king, did right  
 In choosing her most fitting to be queen,  
 And letting no boy lover take the sway.



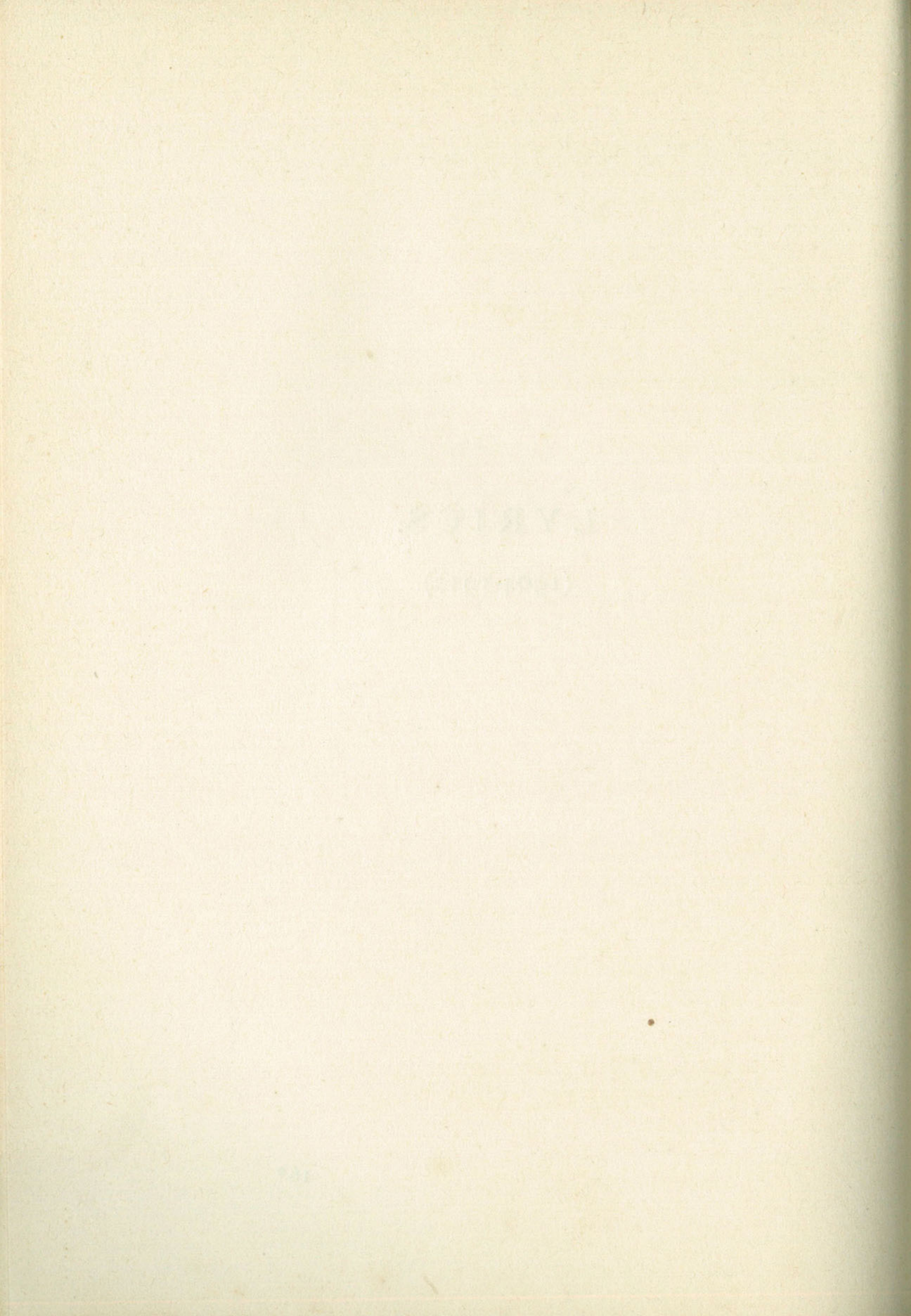




LYRICS.

(1904-1912)







## HIS DREAM.

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

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

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

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

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



## A WOMAN HOMER SUNG.

IF any man drew near  
When I was young,  
I thought, "He holds her dear,"  
And shook with hate and fear.  
But oh, 't was bitter wrong  
If he could pass her by  
With an indifferent eye.

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

For she had fiery blood  
When I was young,  
And trod so sweetly proud  
As 't were upon a cloud,  
A woman Homer sung,  
That life and letters seem  
But an heroic dream.



## THAT THE NIGHT COME.

SHE lived in storm and strife.  
Her soul had such desire  
For what proud death may bring  
That it could not endure  
The common good of life,  
But lived as 't were a king  
That packed his marriage day  
With banneret and pennon  
Trumpet and kettledrum,  
And the outrageous cannon,  
To bundle Time away  
That the night come.

## FRIENDS.

Now must I these three praise—  
Three women that have wrought  
What joy is in my days;  
One that no passing thought,  
Nor those unpassing cares,  
No, not in these fifteen  
Many times troubled years,



Could ever come between  
 Heart and delighted heart;  
 And one because her hand  
 Had strength that could unbind  
 What none can understand,  
 What none can have and thrive,  
 Youth's dreamy load, till she  
 So changed me that I live  
 Labouring in ecstasy.  
 And what of her that took  
 All till my youth was gone  
 With scarce a pitying look?  
 How should I praise that one?  
 When day begins to break  
 I count my good and bad,  
 Being wakeful for her sake,  
 Remembering what she had,  
 What eagle look still shows,  
 While up from my heart's root  
 So great a sweetness flows  
 I shake from head to foot.

NO SECOND TROY.

WHY should I blame her that she filled my days  
 With misery, or that she would of late  
 Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,  
 Or hurled the little streets upon the great,  
 Had they but courage equal to desire?  
 What could have made her peaceful with a mind  
 That nobleness made simple as a fire,  
 With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind



That is not natural in an age like this,  
 Being high and solitary and most stern?  
 Why, what could she have done being what she is?  
 Was there another Troy for her to burn?

### RECONCILIATION.

SOME may have blamed you that you took away  
 The verses that could move them on the day  
 When, the ears being deafened, the sight of the eyes  
 blind

With lightning you went from me, and I could find  
 Nothing to make a song about but kings,  
 Helmets, and swords, and half-forgotten things  
 That were like memories of you—but now  
 We'll out, for the world lives as long ago;  
 And while we're in our laughing, weeping fit,  
 Hurl helmets, crowns, and swords into the pit.  
 But, dear, cling close to me; since you were gone,  
 My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone.

### KING AND NO KING.

“WOULD it were anything but merely voice!”  
 The No King cried who after that was King,  
 Because he had not heard of anything  
 That balanced with a word is more than noise;  
 Yet Old Romance being kind, let him prevail  
 Somewhere or somehow that I have forgot,  
 Though he'd but cannon—Whereas we that had thought  
 To have lit upon as clean and sweet a tale



Have been defeated by that pledge you gave  
 In momentary anger long ago;  
 And I that have not your faith, how shall I know  
 That in the blinding light beyond the grave  
 We'll find so good a thing as that we have lost?  
 The hourly kindness, the day's common speech,  
 The habitual content of each with each  
 When neither soul nor body has been crossed.

### AGAINST UNWORTHY PRAISE.

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

What, still you would have their praise!  
 But here's a haughtier text,  
 The labyrinth of her days  
 That her own strangeness perplexed.  
 And how what her dreaming gave  
 Earned slander, ingratitude,  
 From self-same dolt and knave;



Aye, and worse wrong than these.  
Yet she, singing upon her road,  
Half lion, half child, is at peace.

### THE COLD HEAVEN.

SUDDENLY I saw the cold and rook-delighting Heaven  
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the  
    more ice,  
And thereupon imagination and heart were driven  
So wild, that every casual thought of that and this  
Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out of  
    season  
With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long  
    ago;  
And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,  
Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,  
Riddled with light. Ah! when the ghost begins to  
    quicken,  
Confusion of the death-bed over, is it sent  
Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and  
    stricken  
By the injustice of the skies for punishment?

### FALLEN MAJESTY.

ALTHOUGH crowds gathered once if she but showed her  
    face,  
And even old men's eyes grew dim, this hand alone,  
Like some last courtier at a gypsy camping place,  
Babbling of fallen Majesty, records what's gone.



The lineaments, a heart that laughter has made sweet,  
 These, these remain, but I record what's gone. A crowd  
 Will gather, and not know it walks the very street  
 Whereon a thing once walked that seemed a burning  
 cloud.

TO A CHILD DANCING IN THE WIND.

DANCE there upon the shore;  
 What need have you to care  
 For wind or waters roar?  
 And tumble out your hair  
 That the salt drops have wet;  
 Being young you have not known  
 The fool's triumph, nor yet  
 Love lost as soon as won,  
 Nor the best labourer dead  
 And all the sheaves to bind.  
 What need have you to dread  
 The monstrous crying of wind?

THESE ARE THE CLOUDS.

THESE are the clouds about the fallen sun,  
 The majesty that shuts his burning eye;  
 The weak lay hand on what the strong has done,  
 Till that be tumbled that was lifted high  
 And discord follow upon unison,  
 And all things at one common level lie.  
 And therefore, friend, if your great race were run



And these things came, so much the more thereby  
Have you made greatness your companion,  
Although it be for children that you sigh:  
These are the clouds about the fallen sun,  
The majesty that shuts his burning eye.

## AT GALWAY RACES.

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



## THE MOUNTAIN TOMB.

POUR wine and dance if Manhood still have pride,  
Bring roses if the rose be yet in bloom;  
The cataract smokes on the mountain side,  
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

Pull down the blinds, bring fiddle and clarionet  
That there be no foot silent in the room  
Nor mouth from kissing, nor from wine unwet;  
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

In vain, in vain: the cataract still cries  
The everlasting taper lights the gloom;  
All wisdom shut into his onyx eyes  
Our Father Rosicross sleeps in his tomb.

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NOTES.







## NOTES.

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*The Pronunciation of the Irish Words.*—When I wrote the greater number of these poems I had hardly considered the question seriously. I copied at times somebody's perhaps fanciful phonetic spelling, and at times the ancient spelling as I found it in some literal translation, pronouncing the words always as they were spelt. I do not suppose I would have defended this system at any time, but I do not yet know what system to adopt. The modern pronunciation, which is usually followed by those who spell the words phonetically, is certainly unlike the pronunciation of the time when classical Irish literature was written, and, so far as I know, no Irish scholar who writes in English or French has made that minute examination of the way the names come into the rhythms and measures of the old poems which can alone discover the old pronunciation. A French Celtic scholar gave me the pronunciation of a few names, and I understand that Mr. Whitley Stokes had written something about the subject in German. If I ever learn the old pronunciation, I may revise these poems, but at present I can only affirm that I have not treated my Irish names as badly as the mediæval writers of the stories of King Arthur treated their Welsh names.

*The Meditation of the Old Fisherman* (p. 16).—This poem is founded upon some things a fisherman said to me when out fishing in Sligo Bay.

*Down by the Salley Gardens* (p. 17).—An extension of three lines sung to me by an old woman at Ballisodare.



*The Wanderings of Usheen* (p. 29).—The poem is founded upon the middle Irish dialogues of S. Patric and Usheen and a certain Gaelic poem of the last century. Usheen, son of Finn, is led away into the Happy Islands by a faery woman. The extract in this book describes his visit to the last of these islands and his return home and his meeting with S. Patric. The Gaelic poems do not make Usheen go to more than one island, but a story in *Silva Gadelica* describes "four paradises," an island to the north, an island to the west, an island to the south, and Adam's paradise in the east. For further detail see note on pages 266 and 267.

*The Countess Cathleen* (p. 47) was acted in Dublin in 1899, with Mr. Marcus St. John and Mr. Trevor Lowe as the First and Second Demon, Mr. Valentine Grace as Shemus Rua, Master Charles Sefton as Teig, Madame San Carola as Mary, Miss Florence Farr as Aleel, Miss Anna Mather as Oona, Mr. Charles Holmes as the Herdsman, Mr. Jack Wilcox as the Gardener, Mr. Walford as a Peasant, Miss Dorothy Paget as a Spirit, Miss M. Kelly as a Peasant Woman, Mr. T. E. Wilkinson as a Servant, and Miss May Whitty as The Countess Cathleen. They had to face a very vehement opposition stirred up by a politician and a newspaper, the one accusing me in a pamphlet, the other in long articles day after day, of blasphemy because of the language of the demons or of Shemus Rua, and because I made a woman sell her soul and yet escape damnation, and of a lack of patriotism because I made Irish men and women, who, it seems, never did such a thing, sell theirs. The politician or the newspaper persuaded some forty Catholic students to sign a protest against the play, and a Cardinal, who avowed that he had not read it, to make another, and both politician and newspaper made such obvious appeals to the audience to break the peace, that a score or so of police were sent to the theatre to see that they did not. I had, however, no reason to regret the result, for the stalls, containing almost all that was distinguished in Dublin, and a gallery of artisans alike insisted on the freedom of literature.

After the performance in 1899 I added the love-scene between Aleel and the Countess, and in this new form the play was revived in New York by Miss Wycherley as well as being played a good deal in England and America by amateurs. Now at last I have made a complete revision to make it suitable for performance at



the Abbey Theatre. The first two scenes are almost wholly new, and throughout the play I have added or left out such passages as a stage experience of some years showed me encumbered the action; the play in its first form having been written before I knew anything of the theatre. I have left the old end, however, in the version printed in the body of this book, because the change for dramatic purposes has been made for no better reason than that audiences—even at the Abbey Theatre—are almost ignorant of Irish mythology, or because a shallow stage made the elaborate vision of armed angels upon a mountain-side impossible. The new end is particularly suited to the Abbey stage, where the stage platform can be brought out in front of the proscenium and have a flight of steps at one side up which the Angel comes, crossing towards the back of the stage at the opposite side. The principal lighting is from two arc lights in the balcony which light up the faces of the players, making footlights unnecessary. The room at Shemus Rua's house is suggested by a great grey curtain—a colour which becomes full of rich tints under the stream of light from the arcs. The short front scene before the last is just long enough when played with incidental music to allow the scene set behind it to be changed. The play when played without interval in this way lasts about an hour.

The play was performed at the Abbey Theatre for the first time on December 14, 1911, Miss Maire O'Neill taking the part of the Countess, and the last scene from the going out of the Merchants was as follows:—

MERCHANTS *rush out.* ALEEL *crawls into the middle of the room; the twilight has fallen and gradually darkens as the scene goes on.*

ALEEL.

They're rising up—they're rising through the earth,  
Fat Asmodel and giddy Belial,  
And all the fiends. Now they leap in the air.  
But why does Hell's gate creak so? Round and round,  
Hither and hither, to and fro they're running.

*He moves about as though the air was full of spirits.*

OONA *enters.*

Crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm.



OONA.

Where is the Countess Cathleen? All this day  
 Her eyes were full of tears, and when for a moment  
 Her hand was laid upon my hand, it trembled;  
 And now I do not know where she is gone.

ALEEL.

Cathleen has chosen other friends than us,  
 And they are rising through the hollow world.  
 Demons are out, old heron.

OONA.

God guard her soul.

ALEEL.

She's bartered it away this very hour,  
 As though we two were never in the world.

*He kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear her words.  
 The PEASANTS return. They carry the COUNTESS  
 CATHLEEN and lay her upon the ground before OONA  
 and ALEEL. She lies there as if dead.*

OONA.

O, that so many pitchers of rough clay  
 Should prosper and the porcelain break in two!

*She kisses the hands of CATHLEEN.*

A PEASANT.

We were under the tree where the path turns  
 When she grew pale as death and fainted away.

CATHLEEN.

O, hold me, and hold me tightly, for the storm  
 Is dragging me away.

*OONA takes her in her arms. A WOMAN begins to wail.*

PEASANTS.

Hush!



## PEASANTS.

Hush!

## PEASANT WOMEN.

Hush!

## OTHER PEASANT WOMEN.

Hush!

CATHLEEN (*half rising*).

Lay all the bags of money in a heap,  
 And when I am gone, old Oona, share them out  
 To every man and woman: judge, and give  
 According to their needs.

## A PEASANT WOMAN.

And will she give  
 Enough to keep my children through the dearth?

## ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN.

O, Queen of Heaven, and all you blessed saints,  
 Let us and ours be lost, so she be shriven.

## CATHLEEN.

Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel;  
 I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes  
 Upon the nest under the eave, before  
 She wander the loud waters. Do not weep  
 Too great awhile, for there is many a candle  
 On the High Altar though one fall. Aleel,  
 Who sang about the dancers of the woods,  
 That know not the hard burden of the world,  
 Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell!  
 And farewell, Oona, you who played with me  
 And bore me in your arms about the house  
 When I was but a child—and therefore happy,  
 Therefore happy even like those that dance.  
 The storm is in my hair and I must go.

[*She dies.*]

## OONA.

Bring me the looking-glass.

A WOMAN brings it to her out of inner room. OONA



*holds glass over the lips of CATHLEEN. All is silent for a moment, then she speaks in a half-scream.*

O, she is dead!

A PEASANT.

She was the great white lily of the world.

A PEASANT.

She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN.

The little plant I loved is broken in two.

*ALEEL takes looking-glass from OONA and flings it upon floor, so that it is broken in many pieces.*

ALEEL.

I shatter you in fragments, for the face  
That brimmed you up with beauty is no more;  
And die, dull heart, for you that were a mirror  
Are but a ball of passionate dust again!  
And level earth and plummy sea, rise up!  
And haughty sky, fall down!

A PEASANT WOMAN.

Pull him upon his knees,  
His curses will pluck lightning on our heads.

ALEEL.

Angels and devils clash in the middle air,  
And brazen swords clang upon brazen helmets.  
Look, look, a spear has gone through Belial's eye!

*A winged ANGEL, carrying a torch and a sword, enters from the R. with eyes fixed upon some distant thing. The ANGEL is about to pass out to the L. when ALEEL speaks. The ANGEL stops a moment and turns.*

Look no more on the half-closed gates of Hell,  
But speak to me whose mind is smitten of God,  
That it may be no more with mortal things:  
And tell of her who lies there.

*The ANGEL turns again and is about to go, but is seized by ALEEL.*

Till you speak  
You shall not drift into eternity.