

Deirdire & Clann Uisne

*Deirdire ; and, The lay of the children of Uisne*

Orally Collected in the Island of Barra, and Literally Translated by

Alexander Carmichael

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The story of Deirdire was written down on 16th March 1867, from the recital of John MacNeill, known as ‘ Iain Donn,’ brown John, cottar at Buaile nam Bodach in the island of Barra. The reciter said that he was then eighty-three years of age—‘ the same age as General MacNeill, were he living, the last of the ancient MacNeills of Barra.’

John Macneill was rather under than over medium height, wonderfully well featured and well proportioned, and possessed an active perceptive mind. He was not known as a reciter of tales, but his brother Alexander was. Alexander MacNeill was rather over middle height, well featured and well proportioned, with large, blue, beautiful eyes. He was a famous ‘ sean-chaidh’, reciter, and a practised dictater, having dictated many tales to Mr. Iain F. Campbell of Islay, Mr. Hector Maclean, Islay, and the present writer, all of which, however, were but a small part of the wonderful volume of old lore that died with him.

The following conversation occurred between Alexander Macneill and the writer. ‘ I have taken down a good tale from John your brother, Alexander.’ ‘ Indeed, with your leave, John my brother never had a tale, unless he might have had a fragment of one. He never could take a tale in, and he never could give a tale out. You never, by your leave, saw a man going to recite who had less gumption than John my brother. He would not take tales with him, and he would not give forth tales, yet for all that he would be at scraps of lore.’ ‘ This tale that John gave me is very good, but he was not willing to give it to me at all since he did not have it right. He was saying that he had only bits of it.’ ‘ What is the name of the tale, if you please ?’ ‘ It is “ Deirdire, daughter of Colum Cruitire.” ’ ‘ There is a good tale there indeed, a beautiful tale. It was with myself that John heard that tale, but he did not have it right at all—he only took bits of it with him. I went one night to “ céilidh” to the house of John. He was telling that story to people who were in before I arrived. I listened to him as long and as patiently as I could and, Mary Mother ! it was not easy for me to listen to my own brother spoiling the good story. There was vexation upon me for the bad treatment of the good tale, but I was keeping check on myself ; but at last I could keep check on myself no longer, and I rose softly and dumbly and I left the house and I returned home. The tale of Deirdire is a good tale, and I have the whole of it from beginning to end, and I will give you every word of it if you wish it, and I would like to give it to you before I go.’ ‘ I have no time on this occasion to write the tale of Deirdire, Alexander, but the next time I come to Barra perhaps I will have more time.’ ‘ Your own will, but Deirdire is a good story, and I would like to give you it before I go. There was a lay on Deirdire, too, but I have not the lay. I never took a lay or a song with me. You will not get the lay now from any one in Barra unless you get it from Donald the smith at Breubhaig ; I heard that Donald had it. And you will not get the tale from any one in Barra now but from myself, unless the fragments that you got from John my brother.’

The story of Deirdire and the Children of Uisne belongs to the Cù Chulainn cycle of Gaelic sagas. It is one of the ‘ three sorrows of story-telling,’ the other two being the story of the Children of Lir and the story of the Children of Tuirenn.

The people of the Highlands have retained more of the tales of the Fiann cycle, while the people of Ireland have retained more of the tales of the Cù Chulainn cycle. The present is, I believe, the only version of this tale that has been taken down from oral sources in Scotland. It was printed in the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, volumes xiii. and xiv., and has since been translated into French and German. Those who are acquainted with our Gaelic tales will not fail to notice the quiet restraint and freedom from exaggeration of this story. The dignity of all the principal characters, and especially of Deirdire herself, is well matched by the dignified and simple yet highly idiomatic diction of the long-descended tale. In the wording of the tale two things call for special mention. Professor Mackinnon has pointed out that the duplication of ‘ trì tiùra pòg’ (when Deirdire and Naoise meet,) indicates that when the word ‘ tiùra,’ ‘ teòra,’ was becoming obsolete the reciter added the modern equivalent ‘ trì.’—three, by way of explanation. Again Professor Mackinnon solves the term ‘ drochaid shaor’, to which neither reciter nor collector could give any clue, as being a corruption of ‘ trìocha céad’ a measure of land.

### Deirdire

There was once a man in Eirin of the name of Colum Cruitire—*Colum the Harper*. The man was a worthy man, and he had a goodly portion of worldly means. He had a wife, but the husband and wife had no children. The husband and wife reached a great age, and therefore they had no expectation of children for ever.

What should Colum Cruitire hear but that a soothsayer was come home to the place, and, as the man was a hospitable man, he had a wish that the soothsayer should come near them. Whether it was that he was asked to come, or that he was come of his own accord, the soothsayer came to the house of Colum Cruitire.

‘ Art thou making soothsaying ?’ said Colum Cruitire. ‘ I am making a little ; art thou seeking soothsaying ?’ said the soothsayer. ‘ Well, I do not mind should I take soothsaying from thee if thou hast soothsaying for me, and that thou wouldst be pleased to make it.’ ‘ Well, I will make thee soothsaying. What kind of soothsaying dost thou wish to have ?’ ‘ Well, the sooth-saying that I myself would wish to have would be to know my condition, and what was to happen to me, were it permissible for thee to tell me.’ ‘ Well, I am going out, and when I come in I will put a question to thee,’ and the soothsayer went out of the house.

The soothsayer was not long out when he returned into the house.

‘ Hadst thou ever any offspring ?’ said the soothsayer to Colum Cruitire. ‘ Well, no,’ said Colum Cruitire, ‘ there has never been offspring upon me or upon her whom I have, nor do I expect there ever shall be. I have only myself and my wife.’ ‘ Well,’ said the soothsayer, ‘ that surprises me much, and that I see in my augury that it is about a daughter of thine that the greatest amount of blood will be spilt that has been spilt in Eirin for generations and ages past. And the three heroes of the greatest renown in the land shall lose their lives on her account.’ ‘ Is that the soothsaying that thou art making me ?’ said Colum Cruitire with anger, he thinking that the soothsayer was mocking him. ‘ Well, it is,’ said the soothsayer. ‘ Well, if that be the soothsaying that thou art making me, thou mayst keep it to thyself, for neither thou thyself nor thy soothsaying is worth much, and be thou taking another road.’ ‘ Well,’ said the soothsayer, ‘ I make thee sure enough of that ; I see it in clear form in my own mind.’ ‘ Well,’ said Colum Cruitire, ‘ that cannot come to pass ; I and my wife are of great age, so that it is not possible that there ever shall be offspring upon us. I do not revile thy sooth-saying—I have no right to do that ; but that is the thing of which I am sure, that there never has been and that there never shall be offspring upon me or upon my wife. But that will suffice ; more of thy soothsaying I will neither seek nor receive, since thou hast made the soothsaying

without sense.' And Colum Cruitire allowed the soothsayer to go away, whether he did or did not give him a gift.

The soothsayer went away. That is not deriding the story, but the soothsayer was not long away when the wife of Colum Cruitire began to grow heavy. And as she grew more heavy he grew more dolorous, and vexed at himself that he did not make more conversation with the soothsayer the time he was talking to him. Colum Cruitire was under pain by day and care by night, that he himself was but a man without sense, without knowledge, without trusted friend, without back-support in the world, and should this burden come upon him now, a thing likely to come, and he himself so much against it at first. He now believed that everything would come to pass as the soothsayer saw in his augury, and he was in sore distress and in dismay. He did not know of one way in the wide world that he would do to ward off the spilling of blood from the land, and it was the thought that grew in his head that, should the Good Being send this infant into the world—a thing that He was likely to send—that he himself would need to put her away to a far-off place, where no eye would see a sight of her, and where no ear would hear a sound of her.

Now the time of her delivery drew upon the wife of Colum Cruitire, and she was brought to the floor-bed. The woman was delivered, and she brought forth an infant girl. Colum Cruitire did not allow a living creature to come home to his house, to give attendance to his wife, but the knee-woman alone. Colum Cruitire then put a question to this woman if she herself would undertake to bring up the child, and to keep her in hiding far away, where no eye could see sight of her, and where no ear could hear word about her. The woman said she would, and that she would make her utmost efforts.

Then Colum Cruitire got three men, and he led them to a great hidden mountain far away, without knowledge, without hint, without warning to any person. He there betook him to dig out from the inside of a green conical mound, and to line the hollow thus formed right round, so as to enable a small party to dwell therein comfortably. This was done.

Colum Cruitire then sent the knee-woman away with the infant to this small low shelling among the great hills in the wild distant desert, where no eye could see and where no ear could hear talk of Deirdire, for that was the name of the child. He put everything in order before them, and he sent food and raiment with them to last them for a year and a day, and he told the knee-woman that food and clothing would be sent to them again at the end of the year, and that way from year to year as long as he was alive. And this was so.

## II

Deirdire and her nurse-mother were dwelling in the low little bothy among the great high hills, without the knowledge, without the suspicion of any living one about them, or about anything that happened, till Deirdire was fourteen years of age. Deirdire was growing as lithe and fair as the stately sapling, and as straight and symmetrical as the young moorland rush. She was above comparison of the people of the world, shapely in her person, lovely in her beauty, while her skin and her gait were like those of the swan of the lake and of the hind of the hill. She was the blood-drop of finest form, of loveliest complexion, and of gentlest mien between earth and sky in Eirin, And whatever other colour or complexion she should have on before, no eye looked in her face but she instantly went into blushes like glowing fire on the occasion.

The nurse-mother was teaching Deirdire all the intelligence and knowledge of which she herself had intelligence and knowledge. There was no plant springing from root, nor bird singing from grove, nor star gleaming from heaven, for which Deirdire had not a name. But

one thing, the woman did not wish that Deirdire should have communion or converse with any living one of the general people of the earth.

But on a wild, wintry night and the dark clouds surly, a hunter of wandering game was tired with travelling hills, and what but hunt-wandering came on the man, and he lost his course and his companions. Sleep-drowsiness fell on the man from wandering the hills, and he laid himself down beside the beautiful green knoll in which Deirdire dwelt, and he fell asleep. The man was weak from hunger and fatigue, and benumbed with cold, and deep sleep came on him. When he lay down beside the green bower in which Deirdire abode, sleep-wandering came upon the man, and he thought that he was in the warmth of the mound of the fairies, and the fairies making music within. The hunter called in his dreams, if there was any one in the mound that they would let him in for the sake of the Good Being.

Deirdire heard the voice, and she said to her nurse-mother, ‘ Nurse-mother, what is that ?’ ‘ Only a thing of little worth, the birds of the air astray, and seeking one another ; but let them hie them away past to the forest of branches.’ Another sleep-wandering came upon the hunter, and he called again, if there was any one in the knoll for the sake of the Being of the Elements to let him in. ‘ What is that ?’ said Deirdire. ‘ Only a thing without sense,’ said her nurse : ‘ the birds of the woods astray from each other, and seeking one another ; but let them hie them away past to the forest of branches.’ Then another sleep-wandering came upon the hunter, and he called out the third time, if there was any one in the knoll for the sake of the God of the Elements to let him in, for he was benumbed with cold and sore with hunger. ‘ Oh ! what is that, nurse-mother ?’ said Deirdire. ‘ Thou needst not think there is aught there to give thee gladness, maiden,’ said the nurse-mother, ‘ there is there but the birds of the air and they having lost one another ; but let them hie them away past to the forest of branches. There is neither shelter nor home for them here this night.’ ‘ Oh ! nurse-mother, the bird asked in the name of the God of the Elements, and thou thyself sayest to me that whatever is asked of us in His name that it should be done. If thou wilt not allow me to let in the bird benumbed with cold and sore with hunger, I myself will doubt thy speech and thy faith. But, as I believe in thy speech and in thy faith that thou didst teach me, I myself will let in the bird.’

And Deirdire arose, took the bar off the leaf of the door, and she let in the hunter. She placed a seat in a place of sitting, food in a place of eating, and drink in a place of drinking, for the man who came home.

‘ Go on and eat food, and thou needful of it,’ said Deirdire. ‘ Well, I was that, needful of food, and of drink and of warmth, when I came home to this knoll,’ said the hunter ; ‘ but may I never enjoy my health if these are not gone from me as soon as ever I beheld thee, maiden.’ ‘ Oh, food and clothing ! thou man who camest home, is it not upon thy tongue the running is ?’ said the woman. ‘ It is not a great thing for thee to keep thy mouth shut and thy tongue dumb on coming home here and obtaining the shelter of the dwelling on a cold wintry night.’ ‘ Well,’ said the hunter, ‘ I may do that, keep my mouth closed and keep my tongue dumb, on my coming home and receiving hospitality from thee ; but, by thy father’s hand, and thy grandfather’s, and by thine own two hands to free these, were some others of the world’s people to see this blood-drop whom thou hast in hiding here, it is not long, O King of the elements and of the world, that they would leave her with thee.’ ‘ What people are these or who are they ?’ said Deirdire. ‘ Well, I will tell thee that, maiden,’ said the hunter. ‘ They are Naoise, the son of Uisne, and Aillean and Ardan, his two brothers.’ ‘ And what is the like-ness of these on being seen, should we see them ?’ said Deirdire. ‘ Well, those for you are their names and descent, all that I saw and heard of them,’ said the hunter ; ‘ and the appearance and form of the men on being seen is—the colour of the raven on their hair, their skin like the swan of the waves, and their cheeks like the blood of the speckled-red fawn, while their strength and their spring are those of the salmon of the rapid stream and the stag of the

brindled hill ; and Naoise has all above the slope of the two shoulders over the other people of Eirin.'

' However they are,' said the foster-mother, ' be thou going out of here, and taking another road, and King of the moon, and of the sun, truly and verily small are my own obligations or delight for thyself or for her who let thee in.'

The hunter went his way. Shortly after he left, the man thought to himself that Conachar, the king of Ulster, was lying down and rising up alone without a confidential love, without a conversational mate beside him, and that were he to see this blood-drop that was here, he might possibly bring her home to himself, and perhaps do a good deed to him himself for telling him that there was such a damsel on the surface of the living dewy world.

The hunter went straight and direct to the palace of King Conachar. He sent a message in to the king that he would like to be talking to him were it his pleasure. The king answered the message and came out to speak to the man. ' What is the purport of thy errand with me ?' said the king to the hunter. ' The cause of my own business with you. King,' said the hunter, ' is that I have seen the loveliest blood-drop that ever was born in Eirin, and I have come to tell you.' ' Who is she, that blood-drop, and where is she to be seen, when she had not been seen ever before till thou didst see her, if seen her thou hast ?' said the king. ' Well, I have seen her,' said the hunter ; ' but if I have, no one else can see her till he gets guidance to the place where she dwells.' ' And wilt thou guide me to the place where she dwells, and the reward for thy guidance will be as good as the reward for thy messaging,' said the king. ' Well, I will, O King,' said the hunter, ' though probably my doing so may not be wished.' ' Thou shalt remain in this household itself to-night, and I and my men will go with thee at early morning to-morrow,' said Conachar. ' I will stay,' said the hunter. The hunter remained that night in the household of King Conachar.

Conachar, the king of Ulster, sent word to the men who were nearest of kin to himself, namely, the three sons of Fearachar, the son of Ro, the children of his own father's brother, and he told them, his secret intent. Though soft and early was the carolling of the birds of the bush, and the song of the birds of the grove, yet earlier still was the early rising of Conachar, the king of Ulster, and his band of trusted friends in the mild morning dawn of the gentle, fresh May, with an outpouring of dew on the points of sapling, bush, and plant, going in search of the green sunny shelling in which Deirdire dwelt. There was many a gay gallant of lithe, lively, lightsome step at leaving, who was of weak, wounded, waddled step on reaching there, from the greatness of the distance and the roughness of the way. ' There it is now, down on the floor of the glen, the shelling in which the woman abides, but I will go no nearer than this to the carlin,' said the hunter. Conachar and his band of trusted friends went down to the knoll wherein Deirdire dwelt, and they knocked at the door of the hut. The foster-mother said that no answer or opening would be given to any one, and that she was not for any person to be molesting herself or her home. ' Open thou,' said Conachar, ' and thou shalt get a better hall than this when we get home.' ' I am not wanting a better hall or house than my own little bothy were I left in it,' said the poor woman, ' and permission for my lying down and my rising up left to myself. It is not less than the word of a king and the army of a kingdom that shall drive me from my own little hut this night.' ' Open thou, and if thou wilt not open it with thy will thou shalt open it against thy will,' said the king, and he growing angry. ' Indeed I would be obliged to you,' said the woman, ' were you to tell me who is asking me to open my bothy door ?' ' It is I, Conachar, the king of Ulster, and let not the matter be in darkness to thee longer.' When the poor woman heard who was at the door she arose with haste and she let in the king and all who could hold within of his band.

When the king saw the damsel who was before him, and of whom he was in search, he thought to himself that never in the course of the day nor in a dream of the night saw he a blood-drop so lovely as Deirdire ; and he gave her the weight of his heart of love. There was nothing in his own mind, or in the minds of his men, from the beginning to the end of the matter, but to snatch Deirdire away on the summit of their shoulders be she or be she not willing. This was what was done, and Deirdire was raised on the summit of the shoulders of the heroes, and she herself and her foster-mother were taken away to the palace of King Conachar of Ulster.

With the fondness that Conachar had for Deirdire he wished to marry her immediately (*lit.* on the track of their soles) whether or not she was willing to marry him. When the matter was placed before her she would not do it at all, at all, and that she never saw the features of living man till now. She had no knowledge of the duties of wife, nor of the manners of maiden, and that she had never sat in gathering or in company before. She could not so much as sit on a chair, because she never saw people till now. From the way that Conachar was thrusting marriage upon Deirdire she said, if he would give her a delay of a year and a day she would be obliged to him. He said he would give her that, though it would be hard, if she would give him a sure promise that she would marry him at the end of the year. She gave this.

The king got a teaching woman for Deirdire, and merry, elegant, mannerly, gentle, modest maidens who would be lying down and rising up, and playing and conversing with her.

Deirdire was eident in maidenly acquirements and in womanly knowledge, and Conachar bethought him that he never himself with his bodily eyes saw a blood-drop so pleasing as she.

### III

What but Deirdire and her attendant women were one day out on the hill behind the house viewing the scene and drinking the sun. Whom should they see coming their way but three men on a journey. Deirdire was gazing at the men who were coming, and wondering at them. When the men neared them Deirdire remembered the words of the hunter, and she said to herself that these were the three sons of Uisne, and that this was Naoise, and that he had all that was above the slope of the two shoulders over all the men of Eirin.

The three brothers passed them by without heeding them, without looking above them at the maidens on the hill. What but that the love of Naoise became so implanted in the heart of Deirdire that she could not resist without going after him. She gathered up her garments, and she went after the men who had passed by at the base of the hill, and left the attendant women there, be they pleased or annoyed.

Ailleán and Ardan heard of the damsel whom Conachar, king of Ulster, had, and they thought if Naoise, their brother, were to see her he would have her himself, very especially as she was not married to the king. They noticed the damsel coming, and they exhorted one another to walk well, because of the long distance they had to do, and the darkness of night coming on. They did this. She called, ‘ Naoise, thou son of Uisne, is it intending to leave me thou art ?’ ‘ What is that cry mine ear heard that is not easy for me to answer, and that is not easy for me to refuse ?’ said Naoise. ‘ It is but the quacking of the lake-ducks of Conachar,’ said his brothers. ‘ But let us hasten our feet and hurry our steps, and the long distance we have to do, and the darkness of night falling.’ They did this, and they were stretching the distance between themselves and her. Then Deirdire called again, ‘ Naoise ! Naoise ! thou son of Uisne, is it intending to leave me thou art ?’ ‘ What cry is in my ear and that struck my heart, that is not easy for me to answer, nor easy for me to refuse.’ ‘ There is but the cry of the grey geese of Conachar,’ said his brothers. ‘ But let us walk well, for we have the walking to do and the blackness of night coming on.’ They did this, and they were stretching the distance

between themselves and her. Then Deirdire called the third time, ‘ Naoise ! Naoise ! Naoise, thou son of Uisne, is it intending to leave me thou art ? ’ ‘ What is the wounded, hard cry, the sweetest my ear ever heard, and the hardest that ever struck my heart, of all the cries that ever reached me ? ’ said Naoise. ‘ It is but the wail of the lake-swans of Conachar, ’ said his brothers. ‘ There is the third cry of distress there, ’ said Naoise, ‘ and with the vow of a hero upon me I can go no further than this till I see whence comes the cry, ’ and Naoise went back.

Naoise and Deirdire met each other, and Deirdire gave the three kisses to Naoise, and a kiss each to his brothers. From the shame that was upon Deirdire, she was going into red blushes of fire, and changing the ruddiness of her cheeks as fast as moves the aspen of the streams. Naoise thought to himself that he himself had never seen in bodily form a blood-drop like the blood-drop that was here ; and Naoise gave love to Deirdire that he never gave to thing, nor to vision, nor to person, but to herself alone.

Naoise placed Deirdire on the very summit of his shoulders, and he requested his brothers to walk well now, and his brothers walked well.

Naoise thought that he must not remain in Eirin, as he had put Conachar, king of Ulster, his own father’s brother’s son, against him, on account of the damsel, though she was not married to him, and he returned back to Albain. He reached the side of Loch Naois, and he made a home there. He could kill the salmon of the rapid stream out at the door, and the deer of the many-coloured hill out at the window. Naoise and Deirdire, Aillean and Ardan, were dwelling in a tower, and they were happy during the time they were there. Then came the end of the time when Deirdire was to marry Conachar, the king of Ulster. What was Conachar in his own mind but meditating to win out Deirdire by the sword, be she married to Naoise or be she not. What work was Conachar engaged upon but preparing a great, merry banquet. He sent a message out far and wide through all Eirin to his kinsmen to come to the feast. He was thinking to himself to give a day of combat and of battle to Naoise, the son of Uisne, and to take the woman from him be she or be she not married to him. Conachar thought to himself that Naoise would not come should he send a message to him, and it was the scheme that grew in his head to send word to his father’s brother, Fearachar, the son of Ro, and to send him on an embassy to Naoise. He did this, and Conachar said to Fearachar, ‘ Say thou to Naoise, the son of Uisne, that I am preparing a great, joyous feast for my friends and kinsmen throughout the whole length of all Eirin, and that I shall have no day peace nor night rest and he and Aillean and Ardan absent from the feast. ’

Fearachar, the son of Ro, and his three sons went on their mission, and reached the tower in which Naoise dwelt by the side of Loch Etive. The sons of Uisne put friendly, kindly welcome on Fearachar, the son of Eo, and on his three sons, and they asked of them the news of Eirin. ‘ The best tale I myself have for you, ’ said the hardy hero, ‘ is that Conachar, the king of Ulster, is preparing a great, joyous banquet for his friends and kinsmen throughout the whole length of all Eirin, and that he has vowed a vow by the earth that is beneath him, by the high sky that is above him and by the westward-passing sun, that he would not have day peace nor night rest if the Children of Uisne, his own father’s brother’s sons, did not re-turn to the land of their home and the country of their inheritance and to the banquet, and he has sent us on embassy to ask you. ’ ‘ We will go with you, ’ said Naoise. ‘ We will go, ’ said his brothers. ‘ You will go, ’ said Fearachar, the son of Ro ; ‘ I myself and my three sons will be with you. ’ ‘ We will be, ’ said Boinne Borb. ‘ We will be, ’ said Cuilinn Cruaidh. ‘ We will be, ’ said Fiollan Fionn. ‘ Better is one’s own lording in Albain than householding in Eirin, ’ said Deirdire. ‘ Dearer is the hereditary home than the hereditary country, ’ said Fearachar, the son of Bo. ‘ Unhappy it is for a man, however good his means and his lot, if he does not see his own country and his own home at the time of rising in the morning and at the time of lying at night. ’ ‘ It is unhappy, ’ said Naoise ; ‘ dearer to myself is the land heredity than the

kin heredity ; though much more I would get here than there.’ ‘ It is harmless for you to go with me,’ said Fearachar. ‘ It is harmless,’ said Naoise ; ‘ and we will go with you.’ Deirdire was not willing to go with Fearachar, the son of Ro, and she put every supplication on Naoise not to go with him. She sang and said : —

I

‘ The howling of the dogs is in mine ear,  
The vision of the night is in mine eye ;  
I see Fearachar in league with a bribe,  
I see Conachar without compassion in his  
tower,  
I see Conachar without compassion in his  
tower.

II

‘ I see Naoise without supports of battle,  
I see Ailleán without sounding shield,  
I see Ardan without targe, without sword ;  
I see the house of Atha without luck, without  
joy.  
I see the house of Atha without luck, without  
joy.

III

‘ I see Conachar with a thirst for blood,  
I see Fearachar with the reflection of guile,  
I see the three brothers with their backs to the  
earth,  
And I see Deirdire sorrowful, tearful,  
And I see Deirdire sorrowful, tearful.’

‘ I myself never liked and never yielded to the howlings of dogs nor to the dreams of women, Naoise, and as Conachar, the king of Ulster, has sent invitation of feast and of friendship to you, it will be unfriendly deed if you do not come, Naoise,’ said Fearachar, the son of Eo. ‘ It will,’ said Naoise, ‘ and we will go with you.’ ‘ I saw another vision, Naoise, and explain it to me,’ said Deirdire : —

I

‘ I saw the three white doves  
With the three sips of honey in their  
mouths ;  
And, oh ! Naoise, thou son of Uisne,  
Enlighten thou to me the darkness of my  
tale.’

*Naoise*

‘ It is but the disturbance of sleep,  
And woman’s melancholy, Deirdire !’

## II

### *Deirdire*

‘ I saw the three ungenerous hawks  
With the three drops of blood, cold blood  
of heroes ;  
And, oh ! Naoise, thou son of Uisne,  
Enlighten thou to me the darkness of my  
tale.’

### *Naoise*

‘ It is only the disturbance of sleep.  
And woman’s melancholy, Deirdire !’

## III

### *Deirdire*

‘ I saw the three black ravens  
With the three sad leaves of the yew tree  
of death ;  
And, oh ! Naoise, thou son of Uisne,  
Enlighten thou now the message of my tale.’

### *Naoise*

‘ It is only the disturbance of sleep,  
And woman’s melancholy, Deirdire !’

‘ As Conachar, the king of Ulster, has sent us the message to come to the banquet, it will be unfriendly of us if we do not go, Deirdire.’

‘ You will go,’ said Fearachar, the son of Eo ; ‘ and if Conachar shows friendship to you, you will show friendship to him ; and if he tries fierceness to you, you will try fierceness to him, and I myself and my three sons will be with you.’ ‘ We will,’ said Boinne Borb. ‘ We will,’ said Cuillionn Cruaidh. ‘ We will,’ said Fiollan Fionn. ‘ I have three sons and they are three champions, and harm or danger that shall rise to you they will be with you, and I myself will be along with them.’ And Fearachar, the son of Eo, gave his vow and his word in the presence of his arms, that if any harm or danger should come near the Children of Uisne he and his three sons would leave no head on living body in Eirin, despite sword and helmet, spear and shield, blade and shirt of mail at their best.

Deirdire was not willing to leave Alba, but she went with Naoise. Deirdire was heavy-showering the tears and she sang : —

‘ Beloved is the land, that yonder land,  
Alba full of woods and full of lakes !  
Sore to my heart to be leaving thee,  
But I go away with Naoise.’

Fearachar, the son of Ro, did not stop till he got the sons of Uisne away with him, despite the suspicions of Deirdire.

‘ They placed their curach on the brine.  
They hoisted to her the sails,  
And they reached on the second morrow  
The fair strand of Eirin.’

#### IV

As soon as the Children of Uisne went on land in Eirin, Fearachar, the son of Eo, sent information to Conachar, the king of Ulster, that the men, of whom he was in pursuit, were now come, and to see that he would now act justly towards them.

‘ Well,’ said Conachar, ‘ I did not expect that the Children of Uisne would come, though I sent a message to them, and I am not quite prepared for them. But there is a house down yonder where I was keeping mercenaries, and let them go down there to-day, and my house will be ready before them tomorrow.’ Fearachar, the son of Ro, told the message to the Children of Uisne. ‘ Well,’ said Naoise, ‘ since that is the place which the king has ordered for us, we will go there, but sure am I it is not for too much love of us that Conachar is placing us among the mercenaries.’

They went down on that occasion, and they reached the quarters of the mercenaries. There were there huddled together fifteen twenties of mercenaries, and of mercenaries fifteen. There was not a man among them all who did not give the big shout of laughter on seeing these men coming home among them. And Naoise laughed two big shouts of laughter louder than all the others together.

When the mercenaries got them within they rose one by one, and each placed a bar on the door. Naoise arose when he saw this, and he himself placed two bars on the door. ‘ Who is he, the great stalwart man who has come home among us here, who has made the two loud shouts of laughter, and who has placed the two bars on the door ?’ said the commander of the mercenaries. ‘ I will tell thee that if thou wilt tell me this,’ said Naoise : ‘ What was the cause about which each of you made a loud laugh, and that made each of you to put a bar on the door ?’ ‘ I will tell thee that, hero. I have never seen men of your form, and of your colour, coming home to this dwelling, and I have never seen men, a mouthful of whose flesh and a drop of whose blood I would like so well as your own flesh and your own blood.’ said the commander of the mercenaries. ‘ But tell thou now, hero, why laughed thou the two loud laughs, and why placed thou the two bars on the door ?’ said the head man of the mercenaries. ‘ Well, I will tell thee that,’ said Naoise, ‘ I have not seen in the land of the living, nor in the company of the dead, nor among the general people of the world, those whom I would prefer to yourselves here, mercenary, to knock off your heads completely, directly, and together.’ And Naoise rose in his great standing, and he seized the mercenary of biggest head and of slenderest shanks, and he beat upon them up and down, on this side and on that, and before long he left not a mercenary alive. Then they cleaned the house for themselves, and raised the bright and blazing fire, and they were comfortable enough till morning.

But the man who was up was becoming impatient that he was not getting word up how they were faring down in the house of the mercenaries. ‘ Go thou down, foster-mother,’ said he, ‘ and see if her own bloom and beauty are still upon Deirdire, and if she is what she was when she went away from me. If so, I will win Deirdire at the edge of the lance and by the point of the sword, despite the Feinne at their best ; but if not, be she Naoise’s own.’ The foster-mother went down to the quarters of the mercenaries, where the Clann Uisne and Deirdire dwelt. She had no way or device of looking at Deirdire but through the small chicken-hole on the door. The woman gazed through the chicken-hole, and she returned home to Conachar. ‘ Well, foster-mother, and how now does she look ? or are her own bloom and beauty still upon Deirdire ?’ ‘ It is clear and evident that it is through suffering and sorrow that the love of my heart and the treasure of my reason has been since she went away ; there is not much of her own bloom or beauty upon Deirdire this night.’ ‘ I will need another proof than that yet ere I let her pass. Go thou, Gealbhan Greadhnach, thou son of the king of Lochlann, down, and bring me up information are her own bloom and beauty on Deirdire. If they

are, I will win her at the edge of the blade and the point of the sword ; and if not, she may be with Naoise, son of Uisne, for himself,' said Conachar.

The gallant Gealbhan Greadhnach, the son of the king of Lochlann, went down to the quarters of the mercenaries where the Clann Uisne and Deirdire abode. He looked in through the chicken-hole which was on the door. That woman with whom his business was, was wont to go into glowing blushes of red fire when a person looked on her. Naoise glanced at Deirdire, and he observed that some one was looking on her from behind the door. He seized one of the white dice on the board before him, and he threw it through the chicken-hole and drove the eye out of the gallant Gealbhan Greadhnach and out at the back of his head. The Gealbhan went back home to the palace of King Conachar. 'Thou wert cheerful and joyful going, but I see thee cheerless and joyless returning. What is this has happened thee, Gealbhan? But hast thou seen her, or are her own bloom and beauty on Deirdire?' said Conachar. 'Well, I have seen Deirdire, and I have seen her indeed too, and while I was looking at her through the chicken-hole that was on the door, Naoise, the son of Uisne, put the eye out of me with the dice which was in his hand. But of a truth and verity, though he drove the eye itself out of me, I would fain have continued to gaze at her with the other eye had it not been for the hurry you put on me.' 'That is true,' said Conachar. 'Let three hundred mighty heroes of valour go down to the quarters of the mercenaries, and let them bring me up Deirdire, and kill the others.'

'The pursuit is coming,' said Deirdire. 'I myself will go out and check the pursuit,' said Naoise. 'It is not thou but I who will go out,' said Boinne Borb, the son of Fearachar, the son of Bo. 'It was to me that my father entrusted not to let injury or danger on you when he himself went home.' And the Boinne Borb went out, and he killed a third of the warriors. The king came out, and he called from above, 'Who is that down on the plain slaying my people?' 'I am the Boinne Borb, the first son of Fearachar, the son of Bo.' 'I gave a free cantred (of land) to thy grandfather, a free cantred to thy father, and I will give a free cantred to thyself too, and come over on this hand of me to-night,' said the Conachar. 'Well, I will take that from you,' and the Boinne Borb turned wither-shins, and went over to the hand of the king. 'That man is gone over to the hand of the king,' said Deirdire. 'He has gone, but he performed good work before he went,' said Naoise.

Then Conachar ordered three hundred full warriors down to the quarters of the mercenaries to bring up Deirdire, and to kill the others. 'The pursuit is coming,' said Deirdire. 'It is,' said Naoise, 'but I myself will go out and check the pursuit.' 'It is not thou but I who will go out,' said the Cuillionn Cruaidh, the son of Fearachar, the son of Ro; 'it was to me that my father entrusted to allow no mishap or danger to you when he himself went home.' And the Cuillionn Cruaidh went out and he killed two-thirds of the company. Conachar came out and he called from above, 'Who is that down on the plain slaying my people?' 'I am, the Cuillionn Cruaidh, the second son of Fearachar, the son of Ro.' 'I gave a free cantred to thy grandfather, a free cantred to thy father, a free cantred to thy brother, and I will give a free cantred to thyself too, and come over on this hand of me to-night,' said Conachar. 'Well, I will take that,' said the Cuillionn Cruaidh; and he went over to the hand of the king. 'That man has gone over to the hand of the king,' said Deirdire. 'He has gone,' said Naoise, 'but he performed gallant deeds before he went.'

Conachar then ordered three hundred strong heroes down to the quarters of the mercenaries to bring up Deirdire and to kill the others. 'The pursuit is coming,' said Deirdire. 'Yes, but I myself will go out and check the pursuit,' said Naoise. 'It is not thou who will go out but I,' said the Fillan Fionn; 'it was to me that my father entrusted to allow no injury or danger to you when he himself went home.' And the young hero, fresh-noble, fresh-manly, fresh-glorious, with his lovely brown locks, went out girded in his war weapons of hard

battle, and clothed in his clothing of hard combat and battle, that was polished, gleaming, glittering, brilliant, flashing, on which were the many figures of beasts, birds, and creeping things—*leigheann* (?) lion, tiger and taloned griffin, brown eagle and swift hawk and deadly serpent—and the young gallant checked the third third (three-thirds ?) of the band. Conachar came out in haste, and asked in wrath, ‘ Who is there down on the floor of the plain making slaughter on my people ? ’ ‘ I am, the Fillan Fionn, the third son of Fearachar, the son of Eo. ’ ‘ Well, ’ said the king, ‘ I gave a free cantred to thy grandfather, a free cantred to thy father, and free cantreds to both thy brothers, and I will give thee a free cantred too, and come over on this hand of me to-night. ’ ‘ Well, Conachar, I will not accept that offer from thee, nor thank thee for it. Much more do I prefer to go home, and to tell in the presence of my father the heroism I have done, than any one thing which I could receive from thee, especially in that manner. And Naoise, the son of Uisne, and Aillean and Ardan are as near of kin to thee as they are to me, though thou art so keen to spill their blood, and thou wouldst spill my blood too, Conachar. ’ And the proud, manly, handsome youth, with his beautiful brown locks, returned to the house, the dewy incense around the noble countenance of whitest and reddest of hues. ‘ I am now, ’ said he, ‘ going home to tell to my father that you are now safe from the hands of the king. ’

And the young, straight, handsome hero, brown and splendid, went away home to tell his father that the Children of Uisne were safe. This was about the parting of night from day, at the delay of the morning dawn, and Naoise said that they should go away, and leave this house and return to Albain. Naoise and Deirdire, Aillean and Ardan, left to return to Albain.

## V

Word went up to the king that the company, of whom he was in search, had gone away. Then the king sent word to Duanan Gacha Draogh, a druid of his own, and he spoke to him thus : ‘ Great is the wealth that I have spent upon thee, Duanan Gacha Draogh, giving thee schooling and learning and the secrets of druidism, though those are gone away from me to-day without choice, without heed, without respect for me, without my ability to check them, without power to turn them. ’ ‘ Well, I will turn them, ’ said the druid, ‘ till those whom you sent in pursuit return. ’ And the druid placed a wood before them, through which no one could go. But the Children of Uisne went through the wood without turning, without hindrance, and Naoise had Deirdire by the hand. ‘ However good that is it will not yet suffice, ’ said Conachar, ‘ they going without the bending of foot, without the turning of step, without heed for me, without respect for me, and I without ability to put against them, or power to turn them back this night. ’

‘ I will try another way with them, ’ said the druid, and he placed a grey sea before them on the green plain. The three brave heroes bared themselves and tied their share of clothing behind their heads, and Naoise placed Deirdire on the bend of his two shoulders.

‘ They stretched their sides to the stream, Indifferent to them was sea or land ; The grey, shaggy sea, Or the green, smooth machair. ’

‘ Though that is good, Duanan, it does not turn the men, ’ said Conachar, ‘ they without heed for me, without respect for me, and me without ability to hinder them or to turn them back to-night. ’

‘ We will try another way with them since that did not stop them, ’ said the druid. And the druid froze the grey, uneven sea into jagged, hard lumps, the sharpness of swords on one side of them and the venom of serpents on the other. Then Ardan called that he himself was becoming tired and nearly giving up. ‘ Come thou, Ardan, and sit on my right shoulder, ’ said Naoise. And Ardan came and he sat on the shoulder of Naoise. But he was not long there

when Ardan died ; but though he was dead, Naoise was not letting him go. Then Aillean called that he himself was becoming tired and nearly giving up. When Naoise heard the confession he heaved the sore sigh of death, and he desired Aillean to hold on to him and that he would bring him to land. But Aillean was not long that way when the weakness of death came upon him, and his hold relaxed. Naoise looked from him, and when he saw that his two brothers whom he loved so greatly were dead, he cared not whether he himself were dead or alive, and he heaved the sore sigh of death, and his heart rent.

‘ Those are now past,’ said Duanan Gacha Draogh to the king, ‘ and I have done as thou didst seek of me. The Children of Uisne are now dead, and they shall trouble thee no more, while thou hast thy wife-to-be, and thy sweetheart, whole and hale.’

‘ The honour of that to thee, and the gain to me, Duanan. I call it no loss all that I spent on thee in giving thee schooling and learning. Dry now the sea, so that I may behold Deirdire,’ said Conachar. And Duanan Gacha Draogh dried the sea, and the three sons of Uisne were lying together dead, without life, side by side on the green, smooth machair, and Deirdire bending over their corpses heavy-showering the tears.

Then the people gathered round the corpses of the heroes, and they asked the king what should be done to their bodies. It was the order that the king gave then to dig a pit and to put the three brothers together side by side in the same grave.

Deirdire was sitting on the bank of the grave, and she ever asking the people digging the grave to dig the pit broad and smooth. When the bodies of the brothers were laid in the grave Deirdire said—

‘ Move thou hither, Naoise of my love ; Close thou Ardan over to Aillean ; If dead had understanding, Ye would make place for me.’

They did this. Then Deirdire leapt down into the grave, and she lay close to Naoise, and she was dead by his side. The wicked king ordered her body to be lifted out of the grave and to be buried on the other side of the loch. It was done as the king commanded, and the grave was closed. Then a young pine branch grew from the grave of Deirdire ; and a young pine branch from the grave of Naoise, and the two branches twined together over the lake. Then the king commanded that the two young pine branches should be cut down, and this was done twice, till the wife whom the king married made him to cease the bad work and his persecution of the way of the dead.

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