

The Death of the Sons of Usnach

translated by

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A king renowned, exceeding mighty, became chief of the Province of Ulster. His name was Conchobar, son of Fachtna *fathach*, son of Capa, son of Ginga, son of Rury the Great from whom the Clan Rury are named.... And that valiant, victorious over-king went to enjoy a banquet and a feast, to the house of Fedlimid, son of Dall, Conchobar's own tale-teller. For thus was the feast of Emain Macha enjoyed at that time, to wit, three hundred threescore and five persons was the number of the knight's household that was computed in the house of each man of them. And while they were enjoying the banquet, Fedlimid's wife brought forth a daughter. Cathbad the Druid, who entered the assembly at that moment, uttered forebodings and prophecies about the girl, namely, that much evil and calamity would befall the province on her account. And when the warriors heard that, they desired to kill her on the spot.

But Conchobar said, "It shall not be so done; but I will bring her with me, and put her to fosterage, so that she may be my own one wife."

Cathbad, the Druid, named her Deirdre; and the king placed her in an enclosure apart, with a fosterer and a nurse to rear her. And none of the province durst go near her save her fosterer and her nurse and a female satirist called Levarcham, and Conchobar himself.

And thus she lived until she was ripe for marriage, and she outwent in beauty the women of her time.

Once on a snowy day it came to pass that her fosterer killed a calf for her dinner; and when the blood of the calf was poured upon the snow, a black raven swooped down to drink it. When Deirdre took heed of that, she said to Levarcham that she would desire a husband having the three colours which she beheld, namely, the colour of the raven on his hair, the colour of the calf's blood on his cheeks, and the colour of the snow on his skin.

"Even such a man is there in the household of Conchobar," saith Levarcham, "and he is called Naisi, son of Usnach, son of Conall

Flatnalled, son of Rury the Great, of whose race came also Conchobar, as we said above."

"If that be so, O Levarcham," saith Deirdre, "I beseech thee to bring him to converse with me, no one knowing of it."

Levarcham disclosed that matter to Naisi. Then came Naisi secretly to meet Deirdre, and the girl declared to him the greatness of the love she had for him, and entreated him to take her away in flight from Conchobar. And Naisi consented, though he was slow to do so from dread of Conchobar.

Then Naisi and his two brothers, to wit, Ainle and Ardan, and a troop of thrice fifty warriors with them, journeyed to Scotland, where they found maintenance of quarterage from the king of Scotland, and there they remained until the king heard a description of the beauty of Deirdre, and sought her as a wife for himself.

Great wrath took hold on Naisi when he heard that, and he fared forth with his brothers out of Scotland to a sea-girt isle, fleeing with Deirdre after many battles had been fought between themselves and the followers of the king on every hand.

An exceeding beautiful and mighty feast was prepared by Conchobar, son of Fachtna *fathach* "the wise" and by the nobles of Ulster, in smooth-delightful Emain Macha. And the worthies of the province came unto that feast. Wine was dealt out to them until they were all glad, cheerful, and merry. Then arose the men of music and playing and knowledge, to recite before them their lays and songs and chants, to sound their melodious harps and sweet strings, and their bright, splendid timpanes; to sing their poetic strains, their genealogies, and their branches of relationship.

These are the names of the poets who were present at the feast, namely, Cathbad the Generous Druid, son of Congal Flatnalled, son of Rury, and Genan Bright-cheek, son of Cathbad, and Genan Black-knee, son of Cathbad, and Sencha the Great, Fercertne the Poet, and many others.

And it was thus that they enjoyed the feast of Emain, to wit, a special night was set apart to each man of Conchobar's household. This is the number of Conchobar's household, even five and threescore and three hundred. They were sitting at feasting and enjoyment until Conchobar

uplifted his loud king's voice on high, and this is what he said: "I would fain know, O warriors, have you ever seen a household that is braver than yourselves in Ireland or in Scotland or in the great world beside?" "Truly have we never seen a better," say they, "and we know not if there be such."

"If so," said Conchobar, "do you know of any great want that lies upon you?" "We know not, O high king," say they. "But I know, O warriors," saith he, "the great want that we have, to wit, that the three Lights of Valour of the Gael, the three sons of Usnach, Naisi and Ainle and Ardan, should be separated from us on account of any woman in the world. Naisi for valour and prowess has the making of an over-king of Ireland and sons of a king indeed are they; by the might of his own arm hath he gained for himself a district and a half of Scotland."

"Had we dared to utter that, O royal soldier, long since would we have said it. And, moreover, were these three alone in Ulster and none other with them, they would defend the province of Ulster against every other province in Ireland. For they are sons of a border-king; and heroes for bravery and lions for might and courage are they."

"If it be so," said Conchobar, "let messengers and envoys be sent for them into the fair regions of Alba, to Loch Etive, and to the strongholds of the sons of Usnach to solicit their return."

"Who will take that message?" said they all.

"I know," said Conchobar, "that it is Naisi's prohibition, to come into Ireland in peace, save with one of three, namely, Cuchulainn son of Sualtach, and Conall *cernach* son of Amargin, and Fergus mac Ross; and I will now discover unto which of these three I am dearest."

He took Conall into a place apart, and asked him, "What would be done, O royal soldier of the world, if thou wert sent for Usnach's sons, and they should be destroyed in spite of thy safeguard and thy honour—a thing I attempt not?"

Said Conall, "Not the death of one man only would result therefrom, but every Ulsterman who should do them harm, and upon whom I should lay my hand, he would not escape from me without death and destruction and slaughter being inflicted upon him."

"True it is, O Conall," saith the king. "Now I perceive that I am not dear to thee."

And he put Conall from him, and Cuchulainn came before him, and he questioned him in the same manner. "I pledge my word," said Cuchulainn, "that if you should ask that of me, and that they should be brought home to you to be slain, I would not take the greatest bribe of the globe from thee, though it be sought eastward as far as India itself, in lieu of thy own head to fall for that deed." "That is true, O Cuchulainn, I understand that thou also hast but little love for me."

And he put Cuchulainn from him and Fergus was brought to him. And he asked the same thing of him. And Fergus said: "I promise not to attack thine own flesh or blood; yet there is not an Ulsterman whom I should catch doing them hurt, but he should have death and destruction at my hands."

"Thou it is who must go for the Children of Usnach, O royal soldier," said Conchobar. "Set forward tomorrow, for they would come with thee. And on thy return from the east betake thee to the fortress of Borrach son of Annte, and pledge thy word to me that whether they arrive in Ireland by night or day neither stop nor stay be allowed them, so that they may come that night to Emain Macha." Then they came in together, and Fergus told the others that he had undertaken the safe-conduct of the Children of Usnach.... And they bore away that night.

Then Conchobar addressed Borrach, son of Annte, and asked him, "Hast thou a feast prepared for me?" "I have," said Borrach; "but though I was able to prepare it for thee, I was not able to bring it to thee to Emain Macha." "If it be so," said Conchobar, "bestow it instead upon Fergus, for one of his prohibitions is to refuse a feast." And Borrach promised and they bore away that night in safety.

And, on the morrow, Fergus arose early, and took with him neither troops nor attendants, save his own two sons, Illann the Fair and Buinne the Ruthless Red, and Fuillend, the lad of the Iubrach, and the Iubrach. And they moved forward to the fastness of the sons of Usnach, and to Loch Etive in Alba.

Now thus were the sons of Usnach. Three spacious hunting-booths they had; and the booth in which they did their cooking, in that they ate not, and the booth in which they ate in that they slept not.

And when Fergus came into the harbour he sent forth a mighty cry, so that it was heard throughout the farthest part of the districts around

them. And Naisi and Deirdre were seated together with Conchobar's draught-board between them, and they playing thereon. Naisi said: "I hear the cry of a man of Erin." Now, Deirdre had heard the cry, and knew that it was the cry of Fergus, but she concealed it from them. "It was not the cry of a man of Erin," said Deirdre, "but the cry of a man of Alba." Again Fergus sent forth a cry, and Naisi said: "I hear another cry, and it is the cry of a man of Erin." "Not so," said Deirdre, "let us play on. Not alike are the cry of a man of Erin and the cry of a man of Alba." Fergus sent forth a third cry, and the sons of Usnach knew that this of a certainty was the cry of Fergus. Naisi bade Ardan go and meet him. Then Deirdre told Naisi that she had known the first cry of Fergus. "Why didst thou conceal it, damsel?" said Naisi. "Because of a vision I saw last night," said Deirdre, "to wit, that three birds came to us out of Emain Macha; and in their bills three sips of honey; the sips of honey they left with us, but they took with them three sips of our blood." "How is thy rede of the vision, O damsel?" said Naisi. "It is this," said she: "Fergus hath come from our own native land with peace; for not sweeter is honey than a false message of peace; and the three sips of blood that have been taken from us, they are ye, who will go with him and will be beguiled."

And they were sorry that she had spoken so. "Let that pass," said Naisi. "Fergus is long in the port; go therefore, Ardan, and meet him, and bring him with thee." So Ardan went, and he gave him three kisses fervently, loyally, and brought them with him to the stronghold of the sons of Usnach, wherein were Naisi and Deirdre; and they, too, gave three kisses lovingly and fervently to Fergus and to his sons. And they asked tidings of Erin, and of Ulster in special. "These are the best tidings that I have," said Fergus, "that Conchobar hath sent me for you, and that I have entered into covenant for your safeguard, for I am ever loving and loyal to you, and my word is on me to fulfil my covenant."

"It is not meet for you to go thither," said Deirdre, "for your own lordship in Alba is greater than Conchobar's lordship in Erin." "Better than everything is one's native land," saith Fergus; "for poor is every excellence and prosperity to him who sees not his native land."

"That is true," said Naisi; "for dearer is Erin to myself than Alba, though I should obtain a greater share of Alba's goods." "My word and

my warranty are firm to you," said Fergus. "Verily, they are firm," said Naisi, "and we will go with thee." But Deirdre consented not to what they said, and she strove to hinder their going. But Fergus pledged his word that if all the men of Ireland should betray them, the protection of their shields and swords and helmets should avail them little, for he would overcome them all.

"We know it," said Naisi, "and we will go with you to Emain Macha."

They bore away that night till the bright dawn of early morning on the morrow. And Naisi and Fergus arose and sat in the galley, and they passed over the sea and the mighty ocean until they arrived at the fortress of Borrach, son of Annte. And Deirdre looked behind her at the coasts of Scotland, and she cried, "My love to thee, O land of the east! It is sad for me to leave the sides of thy havens and thy bays, thy smooth-flowered, delightful, lovely plains, and thy bright green-sided hills. Little need had we to leave thee!" And she sang this lay:

Deirdre's Farewell to Alba

A lovable land is yon eastern land,
Alba, with its marvels.
I would not have come hither out of it,
Had I not come with Naisi.
Lovable arc Dún-fidga and Dún-finn,
Lovable the fortress over them;
Dear to the heart Inis Draigende,
And very dear is Dún Suibni.

Caill Cuan!
Unto which Ainle would wend, alas!
Short the time seemed to me,
With Naisi in the region of Alba.

Glenn Láid!
Often I slept there under the cliff;
Fish and venison and the fat of the badger

Was my portion in Glenn Láid.

Glenn Masáin!

Its garlic was tall, its branches white;
We slept a rocking sleep,
Over the grassy estuary of Masán.

Glenn Etive!

Where my first house I raised;
Beauteous its wood:— upon rising
A cattle-fold for the sun was Glenn Etive.

Glenn Dá-Rúad!

My love to every man who hath it as an heritage!
Sweet the cuckoos' note on bending bough.
On the peak over Glenn Dá-Rúad.

Beloved is Draigen,

Dear the white sand beneath its waves;
I would not have come from it, from the East,
Had I not come with my beloved.

After that they came to Borrach's stronghold; and Borrach gave three kisses to the sons of Usnach, and made welcome to Fergus and his sons. And Borrach said: "I have a feast for thee, O Fergus! and a prohibition of thine is to leave a feast before it shall be ended."

When Fergus heard that, he reddened with anger from sole to crown. "Ill done is it of you, O Borrach!" said Fergus, "to put me under prohibitions, for I am under promise to Conchobar to bring the sons of Usnach to Emain Macha on the very day that they land in Ireland."

"I lay you under prohibitions," saith Borrach, "even prohibitions that true heroes will not endure, that thou come to partake of the feast." And Fergus asked Naisi what he should do as to that. "Do," said Deirdre, "what is desired of thee, if thou dost prefer to forsake the sons of Usnach and to consume the feast. Howbeit, to forsake them is a good price to pay for a feast."

“I will not forsake them,” said Fergus, “for I will send my two sons with them to Emain Macha, even Illann the Fair, and Buinne the Ruthless Red, and my own word of honour, moreover.” “We give much thanks for that,” said Naisi, “since no hands but our own have ever defended us in battle or in conflict.” And Naisi turned in great wrath from the place, and Deirdre followed him, and Ainle and Ardan, and Fergus’s two sons. But that plan was carried out in opposition to Deirdre’s wishes.

Fergus remained sunk in gloom and sadness. But of one thing he felt certain: if the five great fifths of Erin should be on one spot, and all of one counsel together, they would not be able to destroy his safe-guard. As to the sons of Usnach, they passed onward by the shortest and clearest way that they could go.

And Deirdre said: “I would give you good counsel, though you would not carry out my advice.”

“What counsel hast thou, O girl?” said Naisi.

“Let us go to-night to the island of Cuilenn between Erin and Alba, and let us remain there until Fergus has concluded his feast; so will the word of Fergus be fulfilled, and the days of your pryncedom will be prolonged.”

“To us that is an evil counsel,” said Illann the Fair and Buinne the Ruthless Red. “It is impossible for us to carry out that advice. For even were the might of your own good hands not with us, and the plighted faith of Fergus sworn to you, ye would not be betrayed.”

“Now is woe come upon us by means of that plighted word of Fergus,” said Deirdre, “when he forsook us for a feast.”

And she was in grief and in deep dejection because they had come into Erin relying on the faith of Fergus. And then she said:

Deirdre:

“Woe that I came at the word
Of Fergus, the rash son of Rôich;
I will utter only lamentation on account of it.
Alas and bitter is my heart!

My heart as a clot of sorrow
Is to-night under great shame.

My grief, O goodly sons!
Your last days have come."

Naisi:

"Say not, O vehement Deirdre,
O woman, that art fairer than the sun!
Fergus would not to the eastward have come
To us, for our destruction."

Deirdre:

"Alas, I am sad for you,
O delightful sons of Usnach!
To have come out of Alba of the red deer,
Lasting shall be the woe of it!"

After that they went forward to the White Cairn of the Watching, on Sliab Fuad, and Deirdre remained behind them in the glen, and sleep fell upon her there. And they did not at first perceive that, till Naisi, observing it, turned back to meet her at the moment when she awoke out of her sleep. "Wherefore didst thou stay there, O Queen?" said he. "I fell into asleep," said Deirdre; "and a vision and a dream appeared to me there." "What was that dream?" "I beheld each of you," said Deirdre, "without a head, and Illann the Fair headless also, but Buinne the Ruthless Red with his own head upon him, and his assistance not with us." And she made the staves: "Sad is the vision that appeared to me—." Thence they went forward to Ard na Sailech, "the Height of the Willows," which is called Armagh to-day. Then said Deirdre, "Sad is my heart, O Naisi, for I perceive a cloud above your head, a cloud of blood; and I would give you counsel, O sons of Usnach!"

"What counsel hast thou?" said Naisi.

"To go to-night to Dún Delgan (Dundalk) where Cuchulainn dwells and to abide there until Fergus come, or else to go under the safeguard of Cuchulainn to Emain."

"Since we are not afraid we will not follow that advice," said Naisi.
And the girl sang:

“O Naisi, look at the cloud
Which hangs above thee in the air!
I see over green Emain
A mighty cloud of crimson blood...”

After these staves, they went forward by the shortest way till they beheld Emain Macha before them. “I will give you a sign,” said Deirdre, “if Conchobar should intend to work treachery upon you.” “What is that sign?” said Naisi. “If you are invited into the house wherein are Conchobar and the nobles of Ulster, the king intends no evil against you. But if ye are sent to the house of the Red Branch while Conchobar stays on in the house of Emain, then treachery and guile will be wrought upon you.”

And they went forward in that wise to the door of the house of Emain and they struck a loud stroke of the hand-wood at the door and asked that it should be opened for them. The doorkeeper answered and demanded who was there. They told him that without were the three sons of Usnach and Fergus’s two sons and Deirdre. This was told to the king and he called his servants and attendants and asked them how stood the house of the Red Branch as to food and drink. They said that if the five battalions of Ulster should be gathered there they would find sufficiency of food and drink. “If that be so,” said Conchobar, “let the children of Usnach be taken into it.” This was told to the sons of Usnach. Then said Deirdre, “Alas, Naisi, great hurt hath befallen you through neglect of my counsel. Let us even now go back.”

“We will not do so,” said Illann the Fair, son of Fergus, “and we protest, O girl, that great is the timidity and cowardice thou dost suggest to us in saying that. We will go to the house of the Red Branch,” saith he.

“Assuredly we will go,” said Naisi. And they moved forward to the house of the Red Branch; and servants and attendants were sent to them, and they were supplied with noble sweet-tasted viands, and with sweet, intoxicating drinks, till every one of their servants and attendants was drunk and merry and loud-voiced. But they themselves partook not of food and drink from the weariness caused by their travel and journey; for they had neither stopped nor stayed from the time they left the fort of Borrach till they came to Emain Macha.

Then said Naisi: "Let the 'Fair-head' [a draught- or chess-board] of Conchobar be brought to us, so that we may play upon it." The "Fair-head" was brought to them, and its men were placed upon it, and Naisi and Deirdre began to play.

At the same hour Conchobar said, "Which of you, O warriors, will bring me tidings whether her own form and shape remain on Deirdre; for if she is unchanged, there is not among the race of Adam a woman whose form is more beautiful than hers." "I myself will go thither," said Levarcham, "and I will bring tidings." Now Naisi was dearer to Levarcham than any other in the whole world, and often she had gone abroad to seek Naisi and to bear tidings to him and from him. Then she went forward to the place wherein were Naisi and Deirdre.

Thus were they, with the "Fair-head" of Conchobar between them, and they playing on it. And Levarcham gave the sons of Usnach and Deirdre kisses of loyalty, lovingly, fervently; and she wept showers of tears, so that her bosom and her breast were wet. And she spake and said, "It is not well for you, O beloved children, to have with you that which the king is most loath to lose and you in his power. For it is to see whether her own form and shape remain upon Deirdre that I am sent to visit you. Grievous to me is the deed that they will do to-night in Emain, the treachery and shame and breach of troth practised upon you, O darling friends. And till the world's end Emain will not be better for a single night than it is to-night." And she made this lay:—

"Sad to my heart is the shame
Which is done in Emain to-night;
And owing to this deed henceforward
It will be an Emain of contentions...."

Levarcham told the sons of Fergus to shut the doors and the windows of the house of the Red Branch. "If ye be attacked, victory and blessing be with you! Defend yourselves well and defend manfully your charge, and the charge of Fergus." After that she went forward gloomily, sadly, unhappily weeping quick-trickling showers of tears to the place where Conchobar was; and the king asked tidings of her. She said: "I have evil tidings for thee and I have tidings that are good." "Tell me

them," said the king of Ulster.

"These are the good tidings that I have," said Levarcham: "The three whose form and make are best, whose motion and throwing of darts are best, whose action and valour and prowess are best in Erin and in Alba, and in the whole great world beside, have come to thee, and henceforth against the men of Erin thou wilt have but the driving of a flock of birds, since the sons of Usnach go with thee. That is the best tidings that I have. And the worst tidings that I have are these: that the woman whose form and make were the best in the world when she went from us out of Erin, her own form and features no longer remain upon her."

When Conchobar heard that, his jealousy and bitterness abated. And they drank a round or two after that, and the king asked again: "Who will go for me to discover whether her own form and fashion remain upon Deirdre?"

Thrice he asked the question before he had his answer.

Then said Conchobar to Tréndorn, "O Tréndorn, knowest thou who slew thy father and thy three brothers?"

"I know that it was Naisi, son of Usnach, who slew them."

"If so," said the king, "go and see whether her own shape and form remain on Deirdre."

And Tréndorn moved forward, and came to the hostel, and found the doors and windows shut; and dread and great fear seized upon him, and he said, "There is no proper way to approach the sons of Usnach, for wrath is upon them." But he found a window that was left unclosed through forgetfulness in the hostel, and he began to watch Naisi and Deirdre through the window. Now Deirdre, who was the most quick-witted, saw him there, and she nudged Naisi, and Naisi followed her eye and caught sight of that man.

And thus was he, having a dead man of the men of the draughtboard, he made thereof a fearful successful cast, so that it landed in the young man's eye, and his eye fell out on the young man's cheek, so that he returned to Conchobar having only one eye. And he told him tidings from beginning to end, and said, "The woman whose form and feature are loveliest in the world is there, and Naisi would be king of the world if she were left to him." When Conchobar heard that, he was filled with jealousy and envy, and he proclaimed to the troops that they should go

forward and assault the house of the Red Branch. And Conchobar and the men of Ulster came round the hostel and uttered many mighty shouts without, and cast fire and fire-brands into the house. When the children of Usnach heard the shouts they asked who were about the Red Branch.

“Conchobar and the men of Ulster,” say they.

“It is like that it is Fergus’s safeguard you mean to break,” said Illann the Fair.

“By my troth,” said Conchobar, “you and the sons of Usnach are like to rue that you have my wife with you.”

“That is true,” said Deirdre, “and Fergus hath betrayed you, O Naisi.” “By my troth!” said Buinne, “if he hath been treacherous we will not be so.” And Buinne the Ruthless Red came forth and slew three fifties at that onset, and he quenched the fires and the torches, and confounded the troops with that shout of doom.

Conchobar asked, “Who causes this confusion to the troops?”

“I, Buinne the Ruthless Red, son of Fergus.”

“Take a bribe from me,” said Conchobar, “and desert the children of Usnach.”

“What bribe?” said he.

“A cantred of land,” said Conchobar, “and my privacy and counsel.” “I accept,” said Buinne, and he took those bribes; but through God’s miracle that night the cantred became a desolate moorland, whence it is called the Moorland of Buinne’s Portion.

And Deirdre heard that parley. “My conscience!” she said, “Buinne hath deserted you, O sons of Usnach, and the son is like his father.”

“By my own word,” said Illann the Fair, “I am not like to leave them so long as this hard sword is left in my hand.” And Illann came forth and made three swift circuits of the house, and slew three hundred of the Ulstermen without, and re-entered the place where Naisi was playing draughts with Ainle the Rough. And Illann made a circuit round them and drank a drink, and carried a torch alight with him out upon the green and began cutting down the troops, so that they dared not close round the hostel. A generous youth was Illann the Fair, son of Fergus! Jewels and treasures he refused to none; he took no stipend from any king nor did he accept a cow save only from Fergus.

“Where is my own son, Fiacha?” said Conchobar. “I am here,” said he.

“By my troth, on one and the same night thou and Illann the Fair were born. And he hath his father’s arms; do thou take my arms with thee, even the Bright-rim and the Victorious, and the Gapped Spear, and my sword; and do thou with them valiantly.”

Then the two youths approached each other; and Fiacha advanced straight to Illann, and Illann asked, “What is thy desire, O Fiacha?” “A combat and a conflict I wish to have with thee,” he said.

“Thou doest not well,” said Illann, “for the sons of Usnach are under my safeguard.”

Then they attacked each other and they fought a combat warlike, heroic, bold, daring, rapid. And Illann got the better of Fiacha, and made him crouch beneath the shadow of his shield, and the shield roared at the greatness of the need wherein he lay. And the three chief waves of Erin answered to that roar, even the wave of Cleena, the wave of Tuag Inbir, and the wave of Rury.

Conall the Victorious, son of Amargin, was at the time in Dunseverick and he heard the thunder of the wave of Rury. “True it is,” said Conall, “Conchobar is in danger, and we should do amiss not to go to him.” And he took his arms and went forward to Emain, and found the fight on the lawn, Fiacha, son of Conchobar having been overthrown, and the shield roaring and crying, for none of the Ultonians dared to interfere to rescue him. And Conall came up to Illann from behind and thrust his blue-green spear “the Culghlas” through him, even through his heart.

“Who hath wounded me?” said Illann. “And whoever did it, by my hand of valour, he would have got battle opposite my face from me, though he hath pierced me at my back.”

“I, Conall,” saith he; “and who art thou?”

“I am Illann the Fair, son of Fergus, and ill is the deed that thou hast done, for the sons of Usnach are under my protection.”

“Is it so indeed?” saith Conall. “True it is,” said he.

“Ah, my sorrow,” saith Conall; “by my word Conchobar shall not bear off his own son alive from me in vengeance for that deed.” And with that he gave a stroke of a sword to Fiacha the Fair and shore his head from his body, and he left them.

Then came the weakness of death upon Illann and he flung his arms into the hostel, and he called on Naisi to do valiantly, for he himself was slain unwittingly by Conall the Victorious.

Then came the men of Ulster round the dwelling, and cast fires and fire-brands into it; and Ardan came forth and quenched the fires, and slew three hundred of the host outside. And the second third of the night went Ainle forth to protect the dwelling; and he slew an innumerable multitude of the Ultonians, so that they retired with loss from the hostel.

Then Conchobar began to hearten the host, and at length came Naisi forth for his third of the night, and it is not possible to number all who fell by his hand. Then the Ultonians gave the battle of the morning to Naisi, and with his single hand he inflicted on them a three hours' rout.

Then Deirdre arose to meet him, and she said, "Victorious is the conflict that thyself and thy two brothers have made, and do ye valiantly henceforward. Ill is the counsel that you took to trust in Conchobar and the Ultonians, and sad it is that you did not do as I counseled." Then the children of Usnach linked each other's shields together; and they put Deirdre between them, and set their faces against the host and they gave three bounds, actively, as birds, over the walls of Emain outwards and slew three hundred at that onrush.

Then Conchobar sought out Cathbad the Druid; and he said, "O Cathbad, stay the children of Usnach, and work enchantment upon them, for if they escape from the men of Ulster at this time, they will destroy this province for ever. And I pledge my word moreover, that I will not harm the children of Usnach provided they be of my accord."

Cathbad believed those sayings of Conchobar, and he went about to restrain the children of Usnach, and he cast spells about them, for he put a great-waved sea along the field before the children of Usnach. Two feet behind them pressed on the men of Ulster though they dared not approach them until their arms fell from their hands and before them was the great sea overwhelming them, and Naisi uplifting Deirdre on his shoulder lest she should be submerged.

Then the king cried out to kill the children of Usnach, but all the men of Ulster refused to do it. For there was not one man in Ulster who had not wages from Naisi.

There was a youth there with Conchobar whose name was Maine Red-hand, the son of the King of Norway. Now Naisi had slain his father and his two brothers, and he said that he himself was ready to behead the children of Usnach in vengeance for that deed. "If so," said Ardan, "let me be the first to die, since I am the youngest of my brothers that I may not see my brothers die."

"Not so," said Ainle, "let me be slain the first."

"It shall not be so," said Naisi; "behold the sword of Manannan mac Lir which he himself gave to me. It leaves no relic of stroke or blow behind. Let us three be struck by it at once, so that none of us may see his brother beheaded." Then these three noble ones stretched forth their necks on one block; and Maine gave them a sword-blow, and shore the three heads at one stroke from them on that spot.

And each of the Ultonians at that grievous sight gave forth three heavy cries of grief.

As to Deirdre, while each of them was attending to the other she came forward on the green of Emain fluttering hither and thither from one to another, till Cuchulainn happened to meet her. And he took her under his safeguard, and she told him tidings of the children of Usnach, from beginning to end, how they had been betrayed.

"That is sad news to me," said he; "and dost thou know who put them to death?" "Maine Red-hand, son of the King of Norway," she said. Then came Cuchulainn and Deirdre to where the children of Usnach lay, and Deirdre dishevelled her hair, and began to drink Naisi's blood, and the colour of burning embers came into her cheeks, and she uttered this lay:

"Great these deeds in Emain," etc.

Then Deirdre said, "Let me kiss my husband." And she kissed Naisi and drank his blood and she sang thus:

"Long the day without Usnach's children.

It was not mournful to be in their company:

Sons of a king, by whom sojourners were entertained,

Three lions from the Hill of the Cave.

Three dragons of Dún Monaid,
The three champions of the Red Branch:
After them I am not alive –
Three that used to break every onrush.

Three darlings of the women of Britain,
Three hawks of Slieve Gullion,
Sons of a king whom valour served,
To whom soldiers used to give homage.

Three heroes who were not good at homage,
Their fall is cause of sorrow –
Three sons of Cathbad's daughter,
Three props of the battalion of Cuailgne.

Three vigorous bears,
Three lions out of Lis Una,
Three heroes who loved their praise,
The three sons of the breast of the Ultonians.

Three who were fostered by Aifé,
To whom a district was under tribute –
Three columns of breach of battle,
Three fosterlings whom Scathach had.

Three who were reared by Boghmain,
At learning every feat:
Three renowned sons of Usnach.
It is mournful to be absent from them.

That I should remain after Naisi,
Let no one in the world suppose;
After Ardan and Ainle,
My time would not be long.

Ulster's over-king, my first husband,
I forsook for Naisi's love;
Short my life after them.
I will perform their funeral game.

After them I shall not be alive —
Three that would go into every conflict,
Three who liked to endure hardships,
Three heroes who refused not combats.

A curse on thee, O Wizard Cathbad,
That slewest Naisi through a woman!
Sad that there was none to help him
The one King that satisfies the world!

O man, that diggest the tomb
And putttest my darling from me,
Make not the grave too narrow;
I shall be beside the noble ones.

Much hardship would I take
Along with the three heroes;
I would endure without house, without fire:
It is not I would be gloomy.

Their three shields and their spears,
Were often a bed for me;
Put their three hard swords
Over the grave, O gillie!

Their three hounds, and their three hawks,
Will henceforth be without hunters —
The three who upheld every battle,
Three fosterlings of Conall the Victorious.

The three leashes of those three hounds
Have struck a sigh out of my heart;
With me was their keeping,
To see them is cause of wailing.

I was never alone
Save the day of making your grave,
Though often have I been
With you in a solitude.

My sight hath gone from me
At seeing Naisi's grave.
Shortly my soul will leave me,
And the folk of my lamentation remain not.

Through me guile was wrought upon them,
Three strong waves of the flood!
Sad that I was not in earth
Before Usnach's children were slain!

Sad my journey with Fergus,
To deceive me to the Red Branch:
With his soft sweet words
He ruined me at the same time.

I shunned the delightfulness of Ulster
Many champions and friends.
Being after them alone,
My life will not be long.

After that, Deirdre flung herself upon Naisi in the tomb and gave three kisses to Naisi, and died forthwith, and stones were laid over their monumental heap; their Ogham names were inscribed, and their dirge of lamentation sung. And Cuchulainn went onwards to Dundalk sadly and mournfully.

Then Cathbad the Druid cursed Emain Macha, in vengeance for that great evil. Cathbad said, moreover, that neither Conchobar nor any of his race should possess that stead from henceforth to all eternity. And this has been verified, for neither Conchobar nor any of his race possessed Emain from that time to this.