

Deirdre's Lamentation

Ireland

Slow Air

Arranged by Susan Zevenbergen

The li - ons of the hills are gone, And

I am left a - lone, a - lone. Dig the

grave both wide and deep, For

I am sick and fain would sleep.

This tune, considered the oldest known Irish air, was written down by Edward Bunting at the famous festival of harpers he organized in 1792.

Deirdre's Lamentation

Deirdre is the most famous tragic heroine in Irish legend. Her story comes from the Ulster Cycle, an ancient text about the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, the ancient inhabitants of Ireland whom tradition holds became the fairy folk. At Deirdre's birth she was prophesied to grow into a beautiful woman over whom kings and lords would make war. To escape her betrothal to Conchobar Mac Nessa, the high king of Ulster, she eloped to Scotland with Naoise, son of Uisneach. Mac Nessa eventually tricked Naoise and his brothers into returning home, where he had them killed, and then forced the despairing Deirdre to marry him. This is her lament over the graves of her beloved and his brothers.

The lions of the hills are gone,
And I am left alone, alone.
Dig the grave both wide and deep,
For I am sick, and fain would sleep.

The falcons of the wood are flown,
And I am left alone, alone.
Dig the grave both deep and wide,
And let us slumber side by side.

The dragons of the rock are sleeping,
Sleep that wakes not for our weeping.
Dig the grave, and make it ready,
Lay me on my true love's body.

Lay their spears and bucklers bright
By the warriors' sides aright.
Many a day the three before me
On their linked bucklers bore me.

Lay the collars, as is meet,
Of their greyhounds at their feet.
Many a time for me have they
Brought the tall red deer to bay.

In the falcon's jesses throw,
Hook and arrows, line and bow.
Never again by stream or plain
Shall the gentle woodsmen go.

Sweet companions, were ye ever
Harsh to me your sister, never.
Woods and wilds, an misty valleys
Were with you as good's a palace.

Oh! To hear my true love singing,
Sweet as sounds of trumpets' ringing.
Like the sway of ocean swelling
Rolled his deep voice round our dwelling.

Oh! To hear the echoes pealing,
Round our green and fairy sheeling,
When the three with soaring chorus
Made the skylark silent o'er us!

Echo, now, sleep morn and even.
Lark, alone, enchant the heaven.
Ardan's lips are scant of breath,
Naisi's tongue is cold in death.

Stag, exult on glen and mountain.
Salmon, leap from loch to fountain.
Heron, in the free air warm ye,
Usnach's sons no more will harm ye.

Erin's stay, no more ye are
Rulers of the ridge of war.
Never more 'twill be your fate
To keep the beam of battle straight.

Woe is me! By fraud and wrong,
Traitors false, and tyrants strong,
Fell Clan Usnach, bought and sold
For Barach's feast and Conor's gold.

Woe to Eman, roof and wall!
Woe to Red Branch, hearth and hall!
Tenfold woe and black dishonour
To the foul and false Clan Conor.

Dig the grave both wide and deep,
Sick I am, and fain would sleep!
Dig the grave, and make it ready,
Lay me on my true love's body.