

ROBERT MACHRAY

GRACE O'MALLEY.
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Grace O'Malley. Machray Robert

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Grace O'Malley Princess and Pirate

CHAPTER I. SAVED FROM THE SEA

It has now become so much a matter of custom – after that familiar human fashion which causes us to turn our faces to the rising sun – to praise and laud the King, James the Sixth of Scotland and First of England and Ireland, in the beginning of whose reign over the three kingdoms – to which he has been pleased to give the name of Great Britain – this chronicle is written, that there would appear to be some danger of a wonderful truth being forgotten.

For there can be no doubt that his Highness follows upon a most remarkable age – an age which must be known throughout all time to come as the Age of Great Women.

And when I think upon Elizabeth of England, who broke the power of Spain, of Mary of Scotland, whose beauty and whose wickedness were at once the delight and the despair of her people, and of the French queens, whose talents in statecraft have never been equalled, I make bold to deny that the period of the rule of his Highness will be in any respect as glorious as that which immediately preceded his time, and in which these great women lived.

Now, whether it was from the influence and inspiration of these high and mighty exemplars, or because it was born of the pith and marrow of decreed circumstance, and so lay at the very heart of things, that women should then lead the way, and that men should give themselves up entirely to their service, I cannot say. Yet I know that there were other women of less exalted rank than those I have mentioned, whose powers, although displayed on but a small stage, were seen to be so superior to those of men that men willingly obeyed them, and lived and died for them – and living or dying were glad indeed.

And the story which I have to tell is the story of such an one.

It was my lot, for so had Destiny cast out from her urn the shell on which my name was marked, that I, Ruari Macdonald, of the Clandonald, of the family of the Lords of the Isles, both of the Outer and the Inner Seas, having been unnaturally deprived of my home and lands in Isla, should have been saved to become the servant of that extraordinary woman called, in the tongue of the English, Grace O'Malley.

It is also not unusual for her to be spoken of by them as the “Pirate Princess,” and the “Pirate Chieftainess of Galway,” and there have been some who have described her as a “notable traitress,” and a “nursing mother of rebels.” But to us Celts, and to me in particular, her name can never be uttered in our own liquid speech without something of the same feeling being stirred within us as when we listen to the sounds of soft music – so sweet and dear a name it is.

It is true, perhaps, that its sweetness has rather grown upon me with advancing years. Be sure, however, there was a time when her name uplifted my heart and made strong my arm more than the clamour of trumpets and all the mad delight of war. But it seems far off and long ago, a thing of shadows and not more real than they. And yet I have only to sit still, and close my eyes for a space, and, lo, the door of the past swings open, and I stand once more in the Hall of Memories Unforgotten.

Now that the fingers of time fasten themselves upon me so that I shake them off but with fainting and difficulty, and then only to find them presently the more firmly fixed, I think it well before my days are done to set forth in such manner as I can what I know of this great woman.

I say, humbly, in such manner as I can.

For I am well assured of one thing, and it is this – that it is far beyond me to give any even fairly complete picture of her wit and her wisdom, of her patience and her courage, and of those other splendid qualities which made her what she was. And this, I fear, will still more be the case when I come to tell of the love and the hate and the other strong stormy passions which entered into her life, and which so nearly made shipwreck of all her hopes, and which in some sort not only did change her whole course but also that of her country.

And, first of all, must I declare how it was that I, Ruari Macdonald, a Scot of the Western Isles, came to have my fortunes so much bound up with those of Grace O'Malley. In the ordinary circumstances of a man of my birth there would have fallen out nothing more remarkable than the tale, perhaps, of some fierce fighting in our Highland or Island feuds, and that, most probably, would have circled round our hereditary enemies, the Macleans of the Rinns of Isla. But thus was it not with me, albeit it was to these same ancient foes of my tribe that I owe my knowledge of Grace O'Malley.

Well do I recall the occasion on which I first heard her voice. In truth I was so situated at the time that while other recollections may pass out of my mind, as assuredly many have passed away, the memory of that never will.

“Do not kill him, do not kill him!” said a shrill treble, piping clear and high above the hard tones of men’s voices mingled together, and harsh from the rough breath of the sea.

“Throw him into the water!” cried one.

“Put him back in the boat!” cried another.

“Best to make an end of him!” said a tall, dark man, who spoke with an air of authority. And he made as if to draw his sword.

“No! no!” cried the shrill treble. “Do not kill him. See, he is only a little boy, a child. Give him to me, father.”

There was a burst of laughter from the men, and the shrill treble, as if encouraged, again cried, “Give him to me, father.”

“What would you do with him, darling?”

“I know not, father, but spare him. You promised before we set out from Clew Bay to give me whatever I might ask of you, if it was in your power. And now I ask his life. Give him to me, father.”

There was a silence for a short space, and I opened my weary, fear-haunted eyes, gazing dazed and distracted about me. Then I saw a small, ruddy-cheeked, black-haired maid on the deck of a ship, while around her and me was grouped a band of sun-browned, unkempt, and savage-looking sailors, clad in garments not very different from those of my own people. In the midst of them was the man whom the maid addressed as father. I, the little boy, the child of whom she had spoken, was lying bound at her feet.

My mind was distraught and overwhelmed with the terror and horror of what I had already undergone. Hungry and thirsty, and bruised and sore, I cared but little what might happen to me, thinking that death itself could hold no greater suffering than that I had just passed through. But the sight of the maid among these men of the sea awoke my boyish curiosity. As I gazed at her, a great wave carried the vessel up on its crest, and had she not put forth her hand and caught me by the thongs of deer with which I was bound, I would have rolled like a helpless log into the hissing waters.

“See,” she said, “he is mine.”

“Then be it so,” her father agreed, after some hesitation. “And yet, it may not be well. Do you understand our language?” he asked of me.

“Yes,” I replied. I knew the Irish tongue, which is almost the same as our own, in which he addressed me. For there was much traffic between the Scottish Islands of the West and the North of Ireland, where many of my own clan had settled, the “Scots of the Glens” of Ulster. So I had heard Irish spoken frequently.

“Who are you?” he demanded.

“I am Ruari Macdonald, the son of Tormod Macdonald of Isla,” I answered, but with difficulty, for my mouth was parched and my tongue swollen.

“I know the breed,” said he, with a smile, “and the Clandonald are men who may be trusted. Besides, you are but a boy.”

He stooped down and cut away my bonds. I tried to stand up, but only fell half swooning upon the deck.

“Water, water!” cried the shrill treble. “He is fainting from thirst.” And the voice seemed to keep my consciousness from ebbing utterly away.

Then the maid in another instant was wetting my cracked and thickened lips from a silver cup, and I drank and was refreshed. Next she brought me food and a little Spanish wine.

“Let him eat and drink,” said she, “so that his life may be whole within him again.”

Taking me by the hand as soon as I had sufficiently recovered, and followed by her father, she led me to the poop of the ship, where there was a sort of cabin, or “castle,” as it is called.

“Now, Ruari Macdonald of Isla,” said the man, who was evidently the commander of the vessel, “tell me how it was that you came to be on the wide sea, lying bound and nearly dead, in that small boat we picked up an hour or so ago?”

“The Macleans,” I gasped, for speech was still a burden to me. But before long my tongue was loosened, and I told them all I knew of what had happened.

“The Macleans,” said I, “of the Rinns of Isla, who were ever our foes, but with whom we had been at peace for a long time, suddenly set upon and surprised my father’s castle by night. I was awakened by the sounds of clashing swords and the death shrieks of men and women – the most fearsome cries – so that my blood ran cold and my heart stood still.”

I stopped and choked as I spoke. The maid nodded kindly, and put her little hand in mine.

“Although I had never seen a fight,” continued I, “I had been told often and often of battles, so I guessed at once what was going on. I got up from my couch, and in the darkness called my mother’s name, but she answered not. I was alone in the chamber. Terrified, I shrieked and sobbed. Then the room filled with smoke. The castle was on fire. Making the best of my way to the door I was clasped in my mother’s arms. She carried a lighted torch, but I came upon her so sharply that it fell out of her hand and was extinguished.

“We are lost,” she wailed, pressing me wildly against her bosom, while I could feel her heart beating fast and hard against my own.

“What, is it, mother?” I asked; but I knew without any words from her.

“We were standing in a corridor, but the smoke soon became so dense that we could no longer endure it. Hardly knowing what she did, I think, she dragged me along to a window in the room where I had slept, and opening it, looked out. The yard of the castle was alive with men holding blazing sticks of fir, and flames shot up from the burning door of the central tower in which we stood. I also looked out, and noticed dark, silent forms lying prone upon the ground.

“Fire or sword? What matters it?” I heard her whisper to herself. ‘Lost, lost, lost! Oh, Ruari, my son, my son!’ And she kissed me – the last kisses she ever gave.”

I broke down weeping. The little hand of the maid caressed and soothed me.

“We had been spied from the yard,” I went on, after I had had my fill of crying, and a great hoarse voice rose above the din.

“Fetch me the woman and the child alive!’ was what it said.

“It is Red Angus Maclean,’ said my mother, hopelessly.

“Then four clansmen plunged through the smoke and flame, and burst in upon us. Seizing us roughly, they took us half dead to Red Angus.

“Do what you will with me,’ said my mother, falling on her knees before him, ‘but shed not the blood of the lad,’ she implored and prayed of him. ‘He has never done you any harm.’

“He scowled at us, and played with the handle of his dirk.

“Why should I not slay ye both?” said he. ‘When did ever a Macdonald spare a Maclean, tell me that?’ He paused, as if in thought. ‘But listen,’ he began again. ‘Choose you,’ said he, speaking to my mother, ‘for such is my humour, choose you, your life or the boy’s.’

“Thank ye,” said my mother. ‘Never did I think I should live to thank a Maclean. Swear you will not shed his innocent blood, and I shall die gladly.’

“Have ye chosen?” said he.

“Will ye swear not to put him to the sword?”

“Yes,” said he, and glared at her.

“Ye have chosen,” said he at length.

“Yes,” said my mother; and with her eyes fixed on me, she fell beneath the stabs of his dirk; but even as she fell I sprang from the arms of the men who held me, and leapt like a wild cat of Mull straight for his throat, but he caught and crushed me in his grip.

“Remember your oath!” cried my mother to him, and died.

“Seeing that she was dead he laughed a terrible laugh, so empty of mirth and so full of menace was it.

“Ay, I shall keep my oath,” said he. ‘No drop of his blood shall be shed. But die he too must, and so shall this accursed brood be destroyed from off the face of the earth. Bind him so that he cannot escape,’ he ordered.

“And they bound me with strips of tanned deerskin, even as you saw when I was found in the drifting boat. Then he spoke to two of his men, who carried me down to the beach, and threw me into the bottom of the boat. Getting themselves into another, they towed that which I was in some two or three miles from shore, until, indeed, I could hear the struggling of the waters made by the tide, called the ‘Race of Strangers.’ And then they left me to the mercy of the sea.”

“How long ago was that?” asked the maid.

“Two days ago,” I replied. “I drifted, drifted with wave and tide, expecting every moment to be swallowed up; and part of the time, perhaps, I slept, for I cannot remember everything that took place. And then you found the boat, and me in it,” I added simply.

“Tis a strange story,” said the maid’s father; and he turned away to see to the working of the ship, which was straining and plunging heavily in the swell, and left us two children to ourselves.

I looked at the maid, who had been so tender and kind.

“Who are ye?” I asked timidly.

“I am Grace O’Malley,” said she proudly, “the daughter of Owen O’Malley of Erris and of Burrishoole in Connaught – he who has just gone from us.”

And then she told me of herself, of her father, and of her people, and that the ship was now returning to Clare Island, which belonged to them.

“See,” said she, pointing through a window in the stern, “there are the headlands of Achill, only a few miles from Clare Island,” and I looked out and saw those black ramparts of rock upon which the ocean hurls itself in vain.

“Now Clare Island comes into view,” she continued, and peeping out again I beheld the shoulder of the hill of Knockmore looming up, while beyond it lay a mass of islands, and still further away the mountains on the coast.

“All this,” said the maid with a sweep of her hand, “and the mainland beyond, is the Land of the O’Malleys.”

“And is the water also yours?” I asked, attempting a boy’s shy pleasantry, for so had she won me from my grief.

“Yes,” replied the maid, “the water even more than the land is ours.” And she looked – what she was, though but a little maid – the daughter of a king of the sea.

CHAPTER II. THE PRINCESS BEGINS HER REIGN

Ten years, swift as the flight of wild swans winging their way southward when the first wind of winter sweeps behind them, passed over our heads in the Land of the O'Malleys; nor did they pass without bringing many changes with them. And yet it so happened that no very startling or determining event occurred till at the very close of this period.

The little maid who had saved me from the sea had grown into a woman, tall of stature and queenly in carriage – in a word, a commanding figure, one to be obeyed, yet also one who had the gifts which made obedience to her pleasant and easy. Already she had proved herself in attack by sea or assault on shore a born leader, brave as the bravest man amongst us all, but with a mind of larger grasp than any of ours.

Yet were there times when she was as one who sees visions and feeds on fantasies; and I was ever afraid for her and us when I saw in her face the strange light shining through the veil of the flesh which spoke of the dreaming soul.

But more than anything else, she possessed in perfection a woman's power to fascinate and charm. Her smiles were bright and warm as the sunshine, and she seemed to know what she should say or do in order that each man should bring to her service of his best. For this one, the ready jest, the gay retort, the laughing suggestion, the hinted rebuke; for that, plain praise or plain blame, as she thought suited the case. She understood how to manage men. And yet was she at times a very woman – petulant, unreasonable, and capricious. Under the spell of passion she would storm and rage and scold, and then she was ill to cross and hard to hold. For the rest, she was the most fearless creature ever quickened with the breath of life.

I have heard it asserted that Grace O'Malley was wholly wanting in gentleness and tenderness, but I know better. These were no lush days of soft dalliance in the Ireland in which we lived; the days were wine-red with the blood of men, and dark with the blinding tears of widows and orphans. The sword, and the sword alone, kept what the sword had taken. And yet was she of a heart all too tender, not infrequently, for such a time.

Chiefly did she show this gracious side of her nature in her fond care of her foster-sister, Eva O'Malley, who had been entrusted when a child, a year or two after my arrival at Clare Island, to Owen O'Malley by a sub-chief who governed one of the islands lying off the coast of Iar-Connaught.

Never was there a greater contrast between two human beings of the same kin than there was between those two women: Grace – dark, tall, splendid, regal; Eva – fair, tiny, delicate, timid, and utterly unlike any of her own people.

Clay are we all, fashioned by the Potter on His wheel according to His mind, and as we are made so we are. Thus it was that, while I admired, I revered and I obeyed Grace O'Malley – God, He knows that I would have died to serve her, and, indeed, never counted the cost if so be I pleased her – I loved, loved, loved this little bit of a woman, who was as frail as a flower, and more lovely in my sight than any.

Men were in two minds – ay, the same man was often in two minds – as to whether Grace O'Malley was beautiful or not; but they were never in any doubt, for there could be none, of Eva's loveliness. Howbeit, I had said nothing of what was in my thoughts to Eva; that was a secret which I deemed was mine alone.

For myself, I had grown to man's estate – a big fellow and a strong, who might be depended upon to look after ship or galley with some regard for seamanship, and not to turn my back in the day of battle, unless nothing else were possible.

Owen O'Malley had received me, the outcast of Isla, into his own family, treating me as a son rather than as a stranger, and, although I never ceased to be a Scot, I was proud to be considered one of the Irish also. Under his tuition I learned all the ways and customs of his people – a wild people and a fierce, like my own. So far as Connaught was concerned, these ten years were for the most part a time of peace among its tribes, and thus it was that I came to know like a native its forests and mountains, its rivers and lakes, and the chief men of the O'Flahertys and Burkes and O'Connors, whose territories marched with those of the O'Malleys on the mainland.

But I learned much more, for Owen O'Malley taught me how to steer and handle a ship so that it became a thing of my own – nay, rather a part of myself. He also gave me my knowledge of the coasts of Ireland, and there was scarcely a bay or an inlet or a haven, especially on the western shores, into which I had not sailed. And as he proved me and found me faithful, he himself showed me the Caves of Silence under the Hill of Sorrow – strange, gloomy caverns, partly the work of nature and partly of man, once the homes of a race long perished, of whom no other trace now remains. With the exception of Grace O'Malley, from whom he kept nothing hid, and himself, no one but I was aware of the entrance to them and of what lay concealed within.

It had been the habit time out of mind of the O'Malleys to take toll of all shipping in these waters, and to make raids from their galleys upon unfriendly tribes living along the coast. The fishermen who came over from Devon, and who paid tribute according to the number of their smacks, went unmolested; but the merchant trader was ever thought to be a fair prey. Thus, except in winter, when storms tied up O'Malley's ships in the harbours of Clare or Burrishoole, Owen's three great galleys were constantly at sea.

After I had reached manhood it was usual for Owen himself to be in command of one, Grace of the second, and myself of the third. It was one of these expeditions which brought about an event that changed the course of our lives.

We had sailed southward, and were standing out one night late in spring about three miles from the northern shores of Kerry, on the watch for any trader on its way to the port of Limerick. The coolness of the night still lay on the edge of dawn under the dying stars, when a fog, dense, dark, and choking, encompassed us around, so that our three ships lost sight of each other and soon drifted out of hail.

Hours passed, and still the fog lay heavy and close. In the afternoon it lightened and lifted and disappeared. There were no signs of our companions. I made my course for a creek at the mouth of the Shannon, where it had been arranged we were to meet in case of any mishap. Towards evening the galley called *The Grey Wolf*, with Grace O'Malley as its chief, came bowling up alongside.

Obedying her summons to go over to her ship, I went on board *The Grey Wolf*, when we exchanged greetings, enquiring of each other if we had seen or heard anything of *The Winged Horse*, her father's vessel. Neither of us knew anything of it, and there was nothing to be done but to await its arrival. We were chatting pleasantly, when I saw outlined against the sunset flaming in the west the bulk of a merchantman, which we guessed from her build and rig to be an English ship, probably from Bristol, coming on under press of sail.

On she came in stately fashion, with her sails bellying out in the fresh breeze, and we could hear her men singing snatches of sailor glees upon her decks. We gazed at her, and then we saw a dreadful and an uncanny thing. Grace O'Malley was the first to speak.

"Look, look!" she said. "What is that?"

My eyes were fixed on the ship, but I could not tell what it was that we saw.

"I know not," I replied. "Perhaps it is some new device of these English. No; it can hardly be that. What is it, I wonder?"

We stared and stared at it, but could make nothing of it.

"It might almost be a phantom ship, Ruari," she said. "But we see it too plainly and hear the sailors too well for that."

Meanwhile, I noticed that the men in our galleys stood about the bulwarks, rubbing their eyes and shading them with their hands, as if they felt that here was some portentous thing.

This is what we saw as the English vessel drew nearly abreast of us.

On the white spread of the mainsail two huge, gigantic shadows of men seemed to appear, to loom large, to grow small, to disappear, and then to reappear again.

A sort of awe fell upon us.

“What can it mean?” I asked.

“Wait,” said she; “we may know soon enough, for I think it is of evil omen for us.”

“’Tis nothing,” said I boldly, although I feared exceedingly; “nothing but a trick played upon us by the sinking sun and its shadows.”

“Nay, ’tis something more than that,” said she.

Suddenly the wind fell off somewhat, and now the canvas of the merchantman slapped against her masts with dull reports like the sounds of an arquebus shot off at a distance.

I saw her name in letters of white and gold —*Rosemary*, and as the way she had on carried her past us, I understood what was the cause of what we had seen. For as she swayed with the movements of wind and wave, we beheld two bodies strung up from the yard of her foremast, swinging to and fro with her every motion, looking, as they jerked up and down, as if they were still alive, struggling and gasping in their last agony.

I glanced at Grace O'Malley, whose face had grown in an instant white and rigid.

“Do you not see,” said she, after a moment’s silence, “that the poor wretches are Irish from their dress? Thus do these English slay and harry us day by day. Is there never to be an end of this wanton killing of our people?” Then she became thoughtful, and added in a tone of sadness, “My heart misgives me, Ruari; I feel the grip of misfortune and grief.”

“Make no bridge for trouble to pass over,” said I, and spoke many words of comfort and confidence, to all of which she scarcely listened. Respecting her mood, I left her, and went back to my own ship, *The Cross of Blood*.

That night, while I was on watch, I heard the soft splash of oars, and presently out of the darkness there came the hail of a sailor from the bow of *The Winged Horse*, as she rounded the point and slipped into the creek where we lay.

Something in the tone of the sailor’s voice, more perhaps in the slow drooping of the oars, at once aroused my attention. Without words I knew that all was not well. Where was the chief? There could but be one reason why there was no sign of Owen O'Malley himself. Either he was grievously wounded or he was dead. Hastily I swung myself into the boat of my galley, and made for *The Winged Horse*, which was now riding at anchor about a bow shot away.

Tibbot, the best of pilots and steersmen in Ireland, met me as I clambered up on to the deck.

“Whist!” he entreated, as I was beginning to open my mouth in eager questionings.

“What has happened?” I asked in a whisper.

“The chief has been badly hurt,” he replied. “He lies in the poop cabin, bleeding, I fear, to death.”

“What!” I exclaimed; “bleeding to death?”

“Let me tell you – ”

But I interrupted him sharply.

“I must see him at once,” I said, and I made my way to the poop, where, stretched on a couch of skins, lay my friend and master. As I bent over him he opened his eyes, and though the cabin was but dimly lighted, I thought he smiled. I took his hand and knelt beside him. My anguish was so keen that I could not speak.

“Ruari,” said he, and that great full voice of his had been changed into that of a babe; “is it you Ruari?”

“Yes; it is I,” replied I, finding nothing else to say, for words failed me.

“Ruari, I am dying,” said he simply, as one who knew the state in which he was, and feared not. “I have received the message of death, and soon must my name be blotted out from among the living.”

As he was speaking there was a rustling in the waist of the ship, and Grace O'Malley stood beside us.

“Father, father,” she cried, and taking his head and shoulders on her breast, she crooned over him and kissed him, murmuring words of passionate mourning, more like a mother than a daughter.

“Grace,” said he, and his voice was so small that my breathing, by contrast, seemed loud and obtrusive. “I am far spent, and the end of all things is come for me. Listen, then, to my last words.”

And she bent over him till her ear was at his lips.

“In the blinding fog,” continued he, “we drifted as the ocean currents took us, this way and that, carrying us we knew not whither – drifting to our doom. The galley, before we could make shift to change her course, scraped against the sides of an English ship – we just saw her black hull in the mist, and then we were on her.”

The weak voice became weaker still.

“It was too big a ship for us, yet there was but one thing to do. I have ever said that the boldest thing is the safest thing – indeed, the only thing. So I ordered the boarders forward, and bade the rowers take their weapons and follow on.”

The dimming eyes grew luminous and bright.

“It was a gallant fight,” he said, and his accents took on a little of their old firmness, “but she was too strong for us. In the attempt we lost several of our men, and two were taken prisoners. We were beaten off. Just as the vessels drove apart, and the barque was lost in the mist, a stray shot from an arquebus hit me in the thigh – and I know I cannot survive.”

“What was the name of the ship?” asked Grace.

“*The Rosemary*, of Bristol,” he replied. It was the name of the merchantman we had seen with the two corpses swinging from the yard of her foremast. “You will avenge my death, Grace, but not now. You must return at once to Connaught, and assemble our people. Tell them that my wish, my command at the point of death, is that you should succeed me in the chieftainship.”

There was no sound for a space save only the cry of the curlews on the shore, calling to their mates that another day was dawning.

“Ruari,” said the ghost of a voice, “Ruari, I had hoped that you and Grace – ”

But the cold fingers of death sealed the lips of the speaker.

Grace O'Malley fell forward on the stiffening body; and, thinking it best, I left the living and the dead together. In another hour the three galleys were beating northward up the coast, and on the evening of the second day after Owen O'Malley's death we anchored in the haven of Clare Island, where the body was buried with all the honours and ancient ceremonies paid by the Irish to their chiefs.

Then came the meeting of the clan to determine who should succeed Owen O'Malley, for, according to a law similar to that which prevails among our Celts of the Islands, the members of each sept who have reached the age of the warrior, have a voice in the election of chiefs. As I was not in reality one of themselves, nor could forget that I was a Scot – a Redshank, as the English called me, albeit I could ruffle it on occasion with the best Englishman that ever stepped – I took no part in the council, nor spoke my mind until the older men had said their say.

It was at once a beautiful sight and a memorable, this great gathering, and the most beautiful and memorable thing of all was that men were content, and more than content, that a woman should, for the first time in their history, be called their chief.

When it was my turn to speak, I related what I had heard fall from Owen O'Malley as he was dying, and, without further words, dropping on my knee I took the hand of Grace O'Malley, and swore by the Five Wounds of God to be her servant so long as it might be her will.

Then her people, old and young, pressed about her, calling her their darling and their pride, and thus she became their leader and chief.

But with the death of Owen O'Malley there was an end of the times of peace and quietness in Connaught, whereat, like the hothead I was, I rejoiced, not seeing the perilous adventures that lay before us.

CHAPTER III. THE TITLE-DEED OF THE SWORD

“Ruari!”

It was the soft note of Eva O'Malley, calling to me as I came within the gate of Carrickahooley Castle, whither Grace O'Malley, our mistress, had come to fulfil her period of mourning for her father. I had just crossed over from Clare Island on a small sailing vessel, which now lay in the little harbour under the west wall.

“Ruari!”

It was ever a sound of gladness to me, that sweet voice; and looking up to the chambers of the women, half-way up the front of the great square tower, I beheld the fair face, framed in its pale-gold curls, against the darkness of the embrasure of her window. My heart gave a quick bound of pleasure, and then I grew hot and cold by turns.

For I loved her, and the fear that is born of love made my strength turn to weakness when I gazed upon her. Yet was I resolved to win her, though in what way I knew not. Neither did I hope overmuch up to that time that I understood her, for her manner was a riddle to me.

And here let me set down what were then my relations with these two women, or, rather, what was their attitude to me.

Grace O'Malley clearly regarded me as a younger brother, and never lost a certain air of protection in her dealings with me. To her I remained always in some sort “a little boy, a child,” whose life she had saved – although I was one of the biggest men in Ireland.

Eva O'Malley, who was two years younger than I, had tyrannised over me when I was a lad, and now that I was a man she mocked at and flouted me, dubbing me “Giant Greathead” – I say “Greathead,” but in our language Greathead and Thickhead are the same – and otherwise amusing herself at my expense. But in her griefs and troubles it was to me she came, and not to Grace, as might have seemed more natural.

“Ruari!” she called, and I waved my hand to her in greeting. As I went into the hall she met me.

“I was waiting for you,” she said, “for I wished to speak to you before you saw Grace.”

“Yes?” I asked, and as I noticed the freshness of the roseleaf face I marvelled at it for the hundredth time.

“Grace has made an end of her mourning,” she went on, “and her purpose now is to go to Galway to see the Lord Deputy, if he be there, as it is said he is, or, if he be not, then Sir Nicholas Malby, the Colonel of Connaught.”

I could have shouted for joy, for I was weary of forced inaction while the fine weather was passing us by, and all the harvest of the sea was waiting to be gathered in by ready hands like ours.

“Glad am I, in truth, to hear it,” said I heartily. I was not fond of Galway, but I was anxious to be again on the waters, and who could tell what might not happen then? There had been no fighting for a long time, and the men were lusting for it, hungering and thirsting for it – only biding, like dogs in the leash, for the word. And I was of the same mind.

“But listen, Ruari,” said Eva. “Is it well that she should go to Galway? To my thinking there is a very good reason against it.”

“Indeed,” said I, surprised. “What is it?” As I have declared already, I had no special liking for Galway – and the sea is wide.

“By going to Galway,” said she, “does she not run the chance of putting herself in the power of the English? Is it not to thrust one's head into the very jaws of the lion? The English never loved her father, Owen O'Malley, and the merchants of Galway were never done accusing him of supplying himself from their ships at his good pleasure without asking permission from them.”

I smiled, for what she said about the dead chief was true.

“’Tis not well to smile,” said Eva, frowning.

“There is wisdom in your words,” I replied, becoming instantly grave at her rebuke. “But why not say to Grace herself what you have said to me?”

“Oh, you mountain of a man,” she said, “to be so big and to be so – ” and she stopped, but I could fill up the gap for myself.

“What have I said?” demanded I, still more abashed.

“Think you not that I have already spoken to her?” she asked. “But she will not hearken.”

“Why should she,” said I, “care for my opinion?”

“You know she does care,” she said testily. “But there is more to tell you.”

“More?” I asked.

Her manner now showed the utmost dejection. Her eyes were downcast, and as I regarded her I asked myself why it was that one so fair should have dark, almost black eyelashes – eyelashes which gave a strange shadow to her eyes. Her next words brought me quickly out of this musing.

“The ‘Wise Man’” said she, “is set against her going. His words are of darkness and blood, and he declares that he sees danger for us all in the near future. I’m afraid – you know he sees with other eyes than ours.”

And she said this with such evident terror that inwardly, but not without some dread, I cursed the “Wise Man,” – a certain Teige O’Toole, called “Teige of the Open Vision” by the people, who counted him to be a seer and a prophet. He was certainly skilled in many things, and his knowledge was not as the knowledge of other men.

As she stood beside me, wistfully, entreatingly, and fearfully, I pondered for a brief space and then I said —

“I will go and speak with Teige O’Toole, and will return anon,” and forthwith went in search of him.

I found him sitting on a rock, looking out to sea, murmuring disconsolately to himself. Straightway I asked him what it was that he had to say against Grace O’Malley’s intended visit to Galway, but he would vouchsafe no reply other than the awesome words which he kept on repeating and repeating —

“Darkness and blood; then a little light; blood and darkness, then again light – but darkness were better.”

Whereat I shuddered, feeling an inward chill; yet I begged of him not once, nor twice, to make plain his meaning to me. He would not answer, so that I lost patience with him, and had he not been an aged man and an uncanny I would have shaken the explanation of his mysterious words out of his lips, and, as it was, was near doing so.

Rising quickly from the stone whereon he had been sitting, he moved away with incredible swiftness as if he had read my thoughts, leaving me staring blankly after him.

What was it he had said?

“Darkness and blood; and then a little light!”

Well, darkness and blood were no strangers to me.

“Blood and darkness; then again light – but darkness were better!”

I could make no manner of sense of it at all; but I saw the meaning of it plainly enough in the years that followed.

I felt a gentle touch upon my arm, and Eva was by my side.

“Grace wishes you to go to her at once,” she said. “O Ruari, Ruari, dissuade her from going.”

“I will do what I can,” I replied; but I knew beforehand that if Grace O’Malley had settled what she was to do, nothing I could urge was likely to change her purpose.

Slowly I went into her presence.

“Eva has told you,” she said, “that we set out at once for Galway.”

“Yes,” I answered, “but I pray you to consider the matter well.”

“I have considered it well,” she replied; “but say on.”

“Is it a necessity,” I asked, “that you should go to Galway? Are there not many more places in Ireland for us to go to? Is not the north open to us, and the west, with plenty of Spanish merchantmen and English trading on the broad waters?”

“All in good time,” said she, smiling at my eloquence.

“Here,” said I, emboldened to proceed, “here you are among your own people, on your own land, and no one will seek to molest us. But in Galway – everything is different.”

“That is it,” she said earnestly. “That is the very reason – everything is different there.”

She stopped as if in thought.

“Listen, Ruari! My mind,” said she, “is made up to go to Galway to talk over our affairs with the English governor.”

So this was the reason.

“You say I am safe here,” she continued, “but am I? Word was brought me only yesterday by a trusty messenger from Richard Burke, the MacWilliam, that my father’s old-time enemy, Murrough O’Flaherty, is whispering in the ear of Sir Nicholas Malby, the Colonel of Connaught – perhaps into the ear of the Lord Deputy himself, for I hear he is expected about this time in the city – that my father was an enemy of the Queen, Elizabeth, and that I, his daughter, am sure to follow in his steps.”

“Murrough O’Flaherty!” cried I, “is he not content with his own wide lands of Aughnanure?”

“Content,” said she. “Such a man is never content! Then this insidious whisperer goes on to hint that I am only a young woman, and that my father has left no heir. It is plain enough, is it not, what he means?”

“Sir Nicholas Malby,” said I, “is reputed to be a just man and a good soldier.”

“A just man – perhaps, who knows! That is why I am going to Galway. I must make clear my right and title to my father’s possessions.”

“Right and title,” I exclaimed, and unconsciously I placed my hand on the hilt of my sword.

She saw and interpreted the action.

“Our title-deed,” said she, “has been that of the sword – ”

“And so shall it always be,” I broke in.

“In one sense, yes,” she assented; “but we live in times of change, and things are not as they were. All the chiefs and lords of Ireland are now getting a title for their lands from the queen. Even my father did something of the sort. If I go not to Galway to put forward my claims it will be said that I am disloyal and a traitress.”

“So,” I said, “it may be an evil to go, but it is a worse thing to stay here.”

“Yes,” she answered; “but I have other reasons. It is not that I put so much trust in a piece of parchment, signed and sealed, although I see no harm in getting it. Ruari, I have purposes that reach far beyond Galway, and Connaught even, and for the present I deem it not well openly to incur the enmity of the English.”

This speech was beyond me, so I held my peace until I remembered what the “Wise Man” had said; but when I mentioned it she replied that she knew of the matter, and though it troubled her, it would make no difference to her plans.

Then she fell to brooding and thinking, as was her way, whereupon I left her to get the ships ready for sea even as she wished.

So, before another day was passed, the three great galleys drew away from the shelter of Clare Island, and, speeding before a fair wind, made for the south. Grace and Eva O’Malley were on *The Grey Wolf*, Tibbot, the pilot, was in command of his dead master’s ship, *The Winged Horse*, while I was on my own vessel, *The Cross of Blood*.

We took a great company with us of nearly one hundred and fifty men, including a band of arquebusiers, besides bards and pipers, and a priest on each ship. The priests were not much to my

liking on shipboard, but Grace would have them. Both Grace and Eva brought of the finest of their garments, all made of rich Spanish stuffs, so that they might appear before the Governor as befitted their rank. I myself took with me two full suits, also of Spanish make, and such as were worn at courts, that I might not appear unworthy of my mistress.

As the wind was steady, the black cliffs of Achill, with the mass of Cushcamcarragh and the dome of Nephin behind them, soon grew distant in our wake. The glowing cone of the Holy Hill of St. Patrick, a wonder of light and shade as beam of sun or shadow of cloud fell upon it, sank behind us.

And on we went through a sea of silence, whereon we saw never another ship; on past the grey or green islands off the coast, until the wind dropped at sunset. Then the rowers bent their backs and knotted their muscles over the oars, and so drove the galleys up the long, narrow arm that is called the Bay of Killery, until we found anchorage under the mighty shoulders of that king of mountains, the lonely Muilrea.

At early morn, before the sun was up, albeit a far-off tender flush had sprung up, like something magical, upon the western rim of the world, the dirl, dirl, dirl, and the clamp, clamp, clamp, of the oars, as they smote the groaning pivots on which they swung, was heard, and the galleys went foaming out from the bay, the spray rising like a fine dust of gems from under the forefeet of the ships. Then we caught a breeze, and the sails swelled and drew, while the sailors gat them to their places with shouts and laughter.

Is there any coast in the four quarters of the globe where you will find more splendid havens than in the portion of Ireland lying between the Bay of Killery and the Bay of Galway? Well has that land been named Connemara – that is, the “Bays of the Ocean.” The rugged cliffs, whereon the weather and the wave have combined to throw all manner of cunning colours far beyond power of painter to copy, still less devise, are everywhere broken by inlets, in many of which all the fleets of Spain and of England together might have ridden safely – hardly one of these bays but has its island breakwater in front of it for its protection from the storm and tempest.

’Tis a rare home for seamen!

As the day wore on we fell in with a Scottish ship hailing from Wigtonshire, called *The Lass of Carrick*, going to Galway like ourselves. But Grace O’Malley had given command that until her business was finished with the Governor, we were to continue peacefully on our course, so we left her without scathe, whereat our men were in no way offended, there being but little profit to be got out of a ship coming from Scotland.

A vessel going back from Galway to Scotland was another thing, for she generally carried a cargo of wines of divers sorts, to say nothing of silks and other valuable materials. Therefore made I a note in my mind to watch *The Lass of Carrick* when we were come to Galway, and to observe what she took away in that broad, ill-built hulk of hers when she left the port.

That night the galleys put in to the Bay of Caslah, the most eastern harbour on that coast, and the following day, without adventure of any sort – so calm a beginning might well have told me what storms there would be before the end – we made Galway.

As had been arranged between us, *The Cross of Blood*, my ship, let go her anchor in the harbour between the mole and the bridge by which the city is entered on that side, while the other galleys stood out some distance in the bay. Sending a messenger ashore, I made known the errand upon which we were come, and, after waiting a long time, received answer that the Lord Deputy was not yet come to Galway, but that Sir Nicholas Malby would see Grace O’Malley, and would give a safe-conduct to her and her guard.

It was now too late for our landing that day, so we remained where we were all that night. Next morning the three galleys rode within the harbour of the city, and not far from us were *The Lass of Carrick* and several other vessels, all come for the wines and the other merchandise of the great and famous city of Galway.

CHAPTER IV. THE COLONEL OF CONNAUGHT

It was about an hour from noon, a hot sun burning in a blue sky, when Grace O'Malley signified from *The Grey Wolf* that she was about to land, and that it was her desire that I should accompany her, but that I should go on shore before her, to make sure that she would not be detained at the gate. Having made a suitable response to my mistress, I gave command to the rowers and the helmsman of *The Cross of Blood*, and the galley slowly drew up alongside the wall of the harbour, beside the gate by which an entrance is made into the "Street of the Key," as it is called.

Perhaps it was the fierce heat which indisposed to exertion of any sort, but the place was strangely quiet and still. Two or three soldiers, with steel morions on their heads and corselets of iron about their bodies, gazed at us with indolent curiosity from the towers and parapets that looked across the bay.

At the gate itself were an officer and his guard, lounging about listlessly enough in the sunshine, and taking apparently but a little languid interest in our movements. A few sailors of different nationalities, among whom the swarthy Spaniards predominated, and some of the country fisher folk, walked about the quay. Not far from us *The Lass of Carrick* was discharging her cargo; below us a fishing smack, with its one great sail set, was being rowed out to sea.

As my galley approached within a few feet of the quay, I heard a whistle, or what seemed a whistle. Indeed, so swift and shrill did the sound bite into the air, that it was as if someone standing close beside me were trying in this fashion, very peremptorily, to excite my attention. At the same time, or, mayhap, a little sooner or a little later – the whole thing, it appeared to me, came together on the instant, as it were – I felt the rush and the wind made by an arrow or a bolt as it flew past my face. Then the crick-crack of the barb, as it smashed and splintered the wood of the bulwark behind me, followed immediately afterwards. Involuntarily, I put up my hand to my cheek.

Death had passed close to me, had almost struck me. Yet, hardly realising what had happened, I stood rooted to the spot. A queer, quaking sob burst from me – the surprise was so sudden, so complete.

My first thought was that the arrow had been intended for me, but I had escaped it by the breadth of a hair, and no more. I was untouched. Momentarily I expected other arrows; but none came. I asked myself what was the meaning of the solitary arrow. At first sight it appeared as if we were about to be dealt with treacherously – that we were being beguiled to our destruction. Evidently, that was the mind of my men in the matter, for they had made a quick and terrible outcry that we were betrayed when they marked the flight of the quivering shaft.

Holding up my hand for silence, but bidding them take their weapons as quietly and calmly as they could, I waited for what might next befall. Ordering the oarsmen to cease rowing, the galley lay motionless on the water. Looking anxiously up at the parapet, and then at the gate, I could perceive no unusual commotion among the soldiers, nor could I see a bowman amongst them. It appeared doubtful if they had observed that anything out of the ordinary had taken place, and, certainly, they acted as if they had not. It plainly was no affair of theirs – that was sure, for they were not more on the alert than before.

Whence, then, had come the arrow, and for what purpose, if not one of death?

My second thought showed me clearly that, had the mysterious archer intended to kill me, there would have been nothing easier, for, standing as I did on the poop, I was the best mark in the world; nor would he have required any marvellous expertness in his art to have made an end of me. So, as everything about us now seemed favourable and fair for us, I next turned my regard to the arrow itself, which was fast in one of the beams of the galley.

Now for the first time I noticed that it had been shot into the ship in such a way that it was nearly or altogether hidden by the shape of the vessel from being seen by those on shore; and I bethought me that it must have been sped without hostile intent, but, on the contrary, conveyed some message of warning which it would be well not to neglect. Wrenching forth the missile with an effort from the beam, I examined it carefully, and found, as I had begun to anticipate, a message; for roughly inscribed upon it was the word "Beware!"

With the dark, foreboding saying of the Wise Man still ringing in my ears, it was not likely that I should overlook any measure of precaution that was in my power, but the safe-conduct of the Governor of Connaught had given me a feeling of security – which was, perhaps, not justified. Thus it was that I could not but suspect that the message of the arrow was meant to prevent me from putting trust overmuch in Sir Nicholas – a man whom I had not yet seen.

Instead, therefore, of taking with me only six spearmen, as I had purposed, as part of Grace O'Malley's bodyguard, I doubled the number. Besides these there also landed three gentlemen of her household, chiefs from the islands, men of proved courage, to whom the use of the sword was as much a part of themselves as the breath they drew. I had already sent ashore early in the morning a trusty steward, with instructions to procure two horses for my mistress and Eva O'Malley, and he now, as we made fast to the quay, came forth from the gate with two splendid barbs, each attended, as is usual in Ireland, by its own swift-footed horse-boy.

While our landing was proceeding I could not help wondering who it was that had sped the arrow, and why he had chosen this way of conveying his warning. Manifestly he was one who was afraid, and desired to keep in the background, for reasons that commended themselves sufficiently to him. Rapidly thinking over the affair, I came to the conclusion that our friend could be none other than Richard Burke, the MacWilliam of whom I have already spoken, and who, I had some reason to guess, cherished a tenderness for Grace O'Malley.

And right mightily glad was I to think that one so strong and brave was in Galway at this time. So great was his fortitude and tenacity of purpose that he was quite commonly spoken of as Richard the Iron, and never in the day of adversity was there a stouter heart or a more vigorous arm than his.

But why had he taken – or caused to be taken, as was most probable – this extraordinary method of apprising me of immediate danger, for that and no less I concluded was the meaning of that one word, "Beware"? The future was to show, and that soon enough.

To lay *The Grey Wolf* alongside of *The Cross of Blood* was the work of a few minutes, and soon the two ladies were mounted upon their horses, but not before I had told Grace O'Malley of the incident of the arrow, and asked if she had any further commands to give.

Now, my mistress was possessed of that high and proud sort of spirit upon which the hint of danger acts as fuel to fire or spur to steed. So she did but cast her eyes over the men I had picked out, and, selecting a similar number from her own ship, said that her purpose was unchanged.

"Tell the officer on guard at the gate," said she, "that I go to confer with the Governor, Sir Nicholas Malby, on affairs of state."

The captain of the gate appeared to be somewhat dazed with the size of our company, which numbered more than thirty swords, spears, and battle-axes, and he arranged his men in a line as we advanced. Saluting my mistresses with grave punctilio, he informed us that Sir Nicholas was lodged at the house of the Mayor of Galway, where for the time he held his court. But, he said, as he stood resting the point of his drawn sword upon the ground, orders had been given to admit into the town only the lady Grace O'Malley, her women, and not more than a few of her people.

When I protested against this, he replied that the Governor was very strict; and as for himself, he was merely a soldier whose duty was to do what he was bid.

My mistress, as he spoke, flashed on me a glance of quick intelligence; then she turned with a brilliant, compelling smile to the officer.

“Sir,” cried she with animation, looking with her dark, lovely eyes into the eyes of the Englishman, “you speak as a soldier should. But here” – and she waved her hand round her company – “are not more than a few of my people, as it were. You think that we be too many? Nay, sir, ’tis not so. Is it not fitting to do as much honour as I can to the Governor? And the more of us the greater the honour done him?”

And she smiled again upon the officer, who was a young man and a gallant, to his undoing. While they were thus engaged in parleying – they conversed for some time, but what further was said I did not hear – we had pressed within the gate and filled up part of the street beyond. Having gained this position, I had no thought of retreating. The captain, noting our bearing, and partly won over by Grace O'Malley's woman's wiles, partly making a virtue of necessity, for we could easily have overpowered his men, again gravely saluted.

“Be it as you wish, lady,” he said; and so we passed on up the Street of the Key.

It has been my lot to see of great cities not a few, but, though I had scant reason to love the place, not many, I will say, that were finer or more handsomely built than Galway was in these days. She was now at the very height of her prosperity, and laid claim to be second in the kingdom to Dublin alone, and proudly vaunted her superiority over her ancient rival Limerick.

As we marched up the Street of the Key, the ladies magnificently attired in our midst, and presently entered the High Street, the tall spires of the church of St. Nicholas of Myra – the patron saint of mariners, who hath ever been most favourable to me – rose in front of us; while the storehouses of the merchant princes of the city – the Lynches, the Martins, the Blakes, the Kirwans, and others whose names escape me – encompassed us with vast buildings of dressed stone on every hand.

On all sides were signs of abundance and wealth. And small wonder; for there was hardly a port of France or Spain – nay, of all Europe – whither the ships of Galway did not go. Her traders, ever unsatisfied, had even sailed out beyond the Spanish Main to the Indies.

But it must be remembered that Galway was not an Irish city, but an English – where it was not Spanish. The strong walls and towers which belted her in were not more for defence against an enemy who might attack her from the sea, than against the Irishry who dwelt beyond her gates. And keen and bitter as was the hatred between Englishman and Spaniard, that between the Englishman of Galway and the Irishman, whose home was in the country, was keener and more bitter still. The day was not to close without a proof of this.

On we passed, making a brave show, with the sun overhead shining on our arms and harness, while the townsmen stood and gaped, and the women looked out at us from their windows and doors. On we passed until we halted before the mansion of Stephen Lynch, the Mayor, reputed to be the richest man in Galway. Here, in front of the house, there was a guard, and I could see through the archway that the courtyard beyond was full of soldiers.

After an exchange of greetings I was shown into an anteroom, and thence sent word to Sir Nicholas that my mistress was without, and waited his pleasure. After a slight delay, the Governor replied that he was at meat, and that he would think it an excellent omen if my mistress, her ladies and gentlemen, would honour him by their company.

Then, to my surprise, the Major himself appeared, helped, with much ceremony, Grace and Eva O'Malley to alight, and invited then myself and certain of our comrades of rank to enter, at the same time commanding that our men should be most courteously entertained.

All this display of friendliness was so different from what I had expected that I knew not what to think. Afterwards I learned that Sir Nicholas had been informed of our numbers, and that this had led him to change the plan that he had originally formed – which I understood was that Grace O'Malley was to have been at once seized and held as a prisoner until he had determined what was to be done in her case – and this notwithstanding the safe-conduct he had given.

Separated as I was by some distance at table from my mistresses, I could not hear the conversation between them and the Governor, who talked to them in a certain bluff, soldier-like fashion. Amongst others present were Sir Murrough O'Flaherty of Aughnanure, Richard Burke of Mayo, and other of the chiefs of Connaught who were known to us. But all my attention was taken up in watching, as carefully as I could, Sir Nicholas Malby, the Governor.

There was no possibility of mistaking him for anything but what he was – the successful soldier of fortune. He had the port of one used to command, and there was a rough dignity about him that became him well. His face was scarred and weather-beaten, and I had heard that he had seen hard service, both in the Low Countries and in Spain. He did not come, I had been told, of any noble or considerable family. His sole possession had been his sword, and he had rather hewn than carved out his path in the world with it.

I at once recognised in him a shrewd and capable man, who would not let many things stand in his way. Here was one, I knew, to be reckoned with. Myself a man who both gave, and therefore expected to receive, heavy blows; he was another of the same sort, and I felt a certain respect for him.

There was told a curious tale of the way in which he had become a soldier – and 'fore God, it is not for me to say I think the worse of him for it! It is never a custom of mine to set down anything I hear to anyone's despite, yet in this instance the story helps show the nature of the man.

In his youth, which was mean and poverty-stricken, he had been arrested, convicted, and condemned to death for coining – so 'tis said, and I understand this to be the truth. In some manner or other – I know not how – he had made interest with one of the great nobles at the English court, and was released on condition that he would enter the nobleman's service as a soldier, and proceed to the war then being waged against the Emperor. And this he did, acquitting himself so much to the satisfaction of his superiors, that he was soon placed in command of a body of mercenaries, and displayed no little valour at their head.

Later, he had come over to Ireland under Sir Henry Sydney, who esteemed him so highly, owing to the manner in which he had fought against the O'Neils of Ulster, that, when Sir Henry was Lord Deputy of Ireland for the first time, he had advanced him from post to post, until he was now Governor, or "Colonel of Connaught," as his title was.

One thing we had heard, and that was, like all the rest of the English, he was very greedy for money, and that his ears readily listened to an argument that was backed up with gold. Therefore had we brought with us rich presents for the Governor, which were duly delivered to him when dinner was finished.

Such, then, was Sir Nicholas Malby, upon whom the fortunes of my mistress so much depended. I perceived that she was studying him with no less intentness than myself, but that she hid this under a gay and sparkling demeanour.

When the meal was over, Sir Nicholas said that he desired to talk with her alone, and they withdrew together to another room. Whereupon Sir Murrough O'Flaherty and the other gentlemen of the Irish, gathered around me, plying me with many questions, to all of which I returned evasive replies, feeling in truth exceedingly anxious, and wishing nothing so much as to be on board my galley again with my mistresses safe in theirs. Nor did I have an opportunity – as I desired – to speak privately to Richard Burke.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when Grace O'Malley sent for me and presented me to Sir Nicholas, telling him that I was her foster-brother, and that I was pledged to her service. The Governor scanned me narrowly up and down, then suddenly put forth his hand and grasped mine with a grip of steel. I fancied, and herein I was right, as events subsequently proved, that he had something of the same feeling in regard to me as that I had experienced for himself.

"I have but one desire," said he, when he had talked for some time, "and that is, the establishment of the Queen's peace in Connaught." And he laid his hand heavily on my own. I bowed,

but answered not, thinking in my mind that silence was best, for what had we to do with the Queen's peace; we, who were the free rovers of the sea?

Then it appeared that Grace O'Malley had been asked by the Mayor to be his guest for awhile, and that she had accepted his invitation. So I now learned that my mistresses were not to return to the ships at once, but were to take up their abode in the mansion of the Lynches along with the Governor.

I was none too well pleased with this arrangement, remembering the message of the arrow, but dissembled my fears and suspicions, particularly when I was informed that no objection was made to her keeping her guard. I further gathered from her air that she was not ill-content with the result of her interview with Sir Nicholas, and that all seemed to be going as she wished.

Anon the Mayor entered, bringing with him his daughter Sabina, a dark, handsome woman of twenty summers, who was to be the hostess of my mistresses, for her mother was dead. And with her in this fair seeming entered also the shadow of Destiny – a shadow not to be lifted for many a day.

It was never given to me to read the hearts of women, nor to comprehend their ways, but, being but a man, I looked upon this woman with pleasure, little dreaming what evil she was to work upon us. Here was one, had I but known it, far more to be feared than the bluff, determined soldier who was Colonel of Connaught.

CHAPTER V. THE QUEEN'S PEACE

It was some three hours or so from sunset when I took leave of my mistresses, both of whom were in the highest spirits. I saw that my young and innocent dear was delighted with her surroundings, and had completely forgotten her objections to Galway. She and Sabina Lynch had at once become friends, and, indeed, it was impossible for anyone to see Eva O'Malley and not immediately to be gained over by her.

But Grace O'Malley had a certain reserve in her talking with the Mayor's daughter – a reserve that sprang from instinct or intuition, or a forecasting of the future, perhaps.

My two ladies had entrusted me with various orders to their women with regard to sundry boxes of apparel to be sent to the Lynch mansion, and as I set off to *The Cross of Blood*, I felt in better humour with myself and the world. Fortune at the moment appeared to smile upon us. Sabina Lynch had told me, just before I bade her good-bye, that her father was to give a revel with dancing – after the fashion which obtained at the Court of Elizabeth, who was immoderately fond, I have heard, of this form of entertainment – in a few days, in honour of the Governor.

I could see that my mistresses both looked forward to it with keen anticipations of pleasure. At first I could not share in their feelings, thinking that we did but waste our time in Galway, until Grace O'Malley had confided to me, in an aside, that she believed her affairs would soon be settled with Sir Nicholas.

She had declared to the Governor that it was her desire to hold her lands from the Queen, on condition that instead of being bound to supply for her Highness's service so many soldiers when called upon for a hosting, she should maintain her ships and their crews of sailors and fighting men so that they would be always ready to do the Queen's will, whether it was on the western coasts of Ireland or of Scotland. He had not said "Nay," but had put the matter off until he had considered it more fully.

As I was walking down the Street of the Key to the harbour, along with the three gentlemen of our household who had gone with me to the Mayor's, we met a party of half a dozen citizens of the place, all standing talking together. Their voices were raised either in anger or debate, and as we approached I heard enough to understand that they were discussing the action of the Governor with regard to my mistress, and that it met with their strong disapprobation.

"Our ships will never be safe," cried one, as we came up with them. They made no effort to let us pass, though the street was narrow at this point, and seemed rather as if they intended to dispute the ground with us. The odds were against us, but not too greatly; so saying, "By your leave," I went on.

"Sir," cried I, the hot, angry blood burning in my cheeks, as I returned roughly enough the push I had received from one of those who blocked the way, "sir, your manners stand in much need of mending – or ending."

And my sword – a flash of living fire in the westering sun – was out in a twinkling.

I knew the fellow who had insulted me. It was Michael Martin, a rich merchant and a person of authority in the town, notwithstanding his comparative youth – he was not much older than myself – to whom I spoke. He had deliberately jostled against me as I made to pass him, and I was never blind to a hint of this kind.

His action, coupled with the words I had heard, had quickly got me out of the happy frame of mind with which I had quitted the Mayor's mansion, and my thoughts were immediately of my mistresses' danger. His unmannerly act meant more than hostility to me.

"Draw!" shouted I furiously, and his sword flashed out at me. Martin was neither a coward nor a poor swordsman, and my hands were full with this business in another instant.

“Manners,” quoth he, as our blades rang together as steel met steel; “manners! Manners, forsooth! Who are you to teach a gentleman of Galway manners? You – the scum of the sea!”

And so he raved, keeping his eyes warily fixed on mine the while.

These fresh insults maddened me like the stirring of venom from the poisonous fangs of a wolf, and a sudden fierce storm of passionate anger such as I had never before felt swept over me, as I cried to him across the darting swords, “We shall see, we shall see!”

Meanwhile my comrades ranged themselves beside me with their weapons unsheathed, and several of those who had been talking with Martin were not slow to follow their example, but it was rather, as it happened, with a view to forming a ring round my opponent and myself, so that we had the fighting to ourselves.

“A brawl, a brawl!” someone cried, and there was the sound of the shutting of windows and the closing of doors.

My position placed me at a disadvantage, for the sun, now sinking downwards behind the hills on the other side of the Bay of Galway, cast its rays in my eyes, and caused me to blink, whether I would or no, as the points of our swords, forming glittering circles of flame, whirled this way and that. I endeavoured to force the fighting so that my adversary would change his ground, but he was fully conscious of how much he gained by maintaining his place, and all my efforts were vain.

Now, as we thrust and parried, lunged and retired, my anger passed away, and I found myself become as cool and collected as if I had been on the deck of my ship. I had successfully met and defeated a stubborn attack, at the same time piercing his breast for a short inch mayhap, so that the blood spurted forth in a little jet, when Martin, saying quickly with a choking gasp,

“Another time, Redshank!” suddenly gave way, much to my surprise, not seeing any reason for his change of front. Surrounded by his friends, he turned swiftly, and in hot haste made off down the street, and, entering a narrow lane not far from the wall, was lost to view.

For one instant I stood, breathing heavily, sword still on guard. Then I was about to follow, when a voice, harsh and commanding, cried: “Halt! Stop! Halt in the Queen’s name! Halt, halt!”

I knew the voice, although I had heard it for the first time in my life that very day. It was Sir Nicholas Malby, the Governor himself, and no other, who spoke. I also realised that I had gotten myself into a position of some hazard, to say the least, with one to whom the preservation of the Queen’s peace was the principal object of his ambition.

But the Governor was, above everything – so I said to myself – a soldier, and I flattered myself he would understand, and even sympathise with, my feelings in this matter. He was attended but by two of his officers, yet he came up without hesitation, and the fierce question of his eyes was full of challenge.

“What is this?” he cried. “I will have no brawling in the streets!”

I saluted with great deference, remembering, perhaps rather late in the day, Grace O’Malley’s orders that we were to do everything we could to make our stay in Galway a peaceable one, and made bold to say as respectfully as I could —

“Sir, the fault scarcely lies with us;” and I went on to tell him exactly how the affair had been brought about, protesting that I could act in no other way than I had done, as the quarrel had been forced upon me. As I told my story he nodded coldly, but not disapprovingly.

“I am resolved to have an end of all strife,” said he; at length, after thinking deeply for a short time: “Can you tell me who was the aggressor?” he asked. “Did you know him?” Then, without waiting for my answer, he continued threateningly, “I will hang any man whom I find disturbing the Queen’s peace, be he prince or kerne, chief or gallowglass!”

Now, it was no part of my business to hand over Martin to the mercies of the Governor, and it was very much my affair, I thought, that I should settle my quarrel with him personally, so I made no reply to the question of Sir Nicholas.

“He was a stranger to you, I presume,” said he, and was about to pass on, but changing his mind, he asked whither I was bound and for what purpose.

When I told him I was on my way to the galleys, and with what object, he smiled a little grimly, and walked with me towards the gate. He made many inquiries as to the number of fighting men there were aboard of the galleys, and the manner in which they were armed. I asked Sir Nicholas whether he would not pay a visit to *The Cross of Blood*, but he declined, as it was his custom to make a survey of the walls at this period of the day.

“Your mistress,” said he, as he left me at the gate, “is in good hands.” And I could not but muse somewhat darkly at this enigmatic sentence.

It was past the middle of the night, when I was aroused by someone coming softly into my cabin. A lantern swung from the beam above my head, and in the half darkness I made out Walter Burke, my chief officer, and with him Richard Burke the MacWilliam. In a moment I was wide awake, knowing that this secret visit of Richard the Iron was pregnant with something evil. Eagerly I looked into his face.

“What brings – !” I exclaimed loudly. But his fingers were placed on my lips.

“Quietly, quietly,” said he. “I do not suppose that there are any traitors on *The Cross of Blood*,” continued he.

“All staunch, staunch,” I interrupted, “everyone.”

“’Tis well,” said he; “but what I am come to tell you is not a thing to be proclaimed from the tops of our towers.”

Stirred by a host of thronging fears, I waited, keenly apprehensive of his next words. They were heavy enough, although the misgivings I had felt had not left me altogether unprepared for tidings of the kind.

“Grace O’Malley,” said he, in a low tone which thrilled me through, “is virtually a prisoner in Galway. The Mayor, or rather, I should say, his daughter, has made herself answerable to the Governor for her. While your mistress is apparently free to come or go as she pleases, she is in reality deprived of her liberty, as she will discover if she tries to leave the mansion of the Lynches.”

“Grace O’Malley a prisoner?”

“That is what she is,” said Richard Burke. “She is not bound, nor is she locked up in a room. Her every movement, however, is watched by Sabina Lynch. While she may think herself a guest, and an honoured guest, the hospitality is a mere pretence.”

“But why, why?”

“There are many reasons, as you well know,” he replied. “The mind of the Governor is set against allowing any of the ancient customs of the land; he is endeavouring quietly and skilfully – for he is not a blustering bully as some others are – to reduce the power of the chiefs and to make them pay tribute to the Queen. Where he does show his hand plainly it is always to strike a deadly blow.”

“Yes, yes,” I said, impatiently. Grace O’Malley a prisoner, and I sitting quietly in my ship! The thing seemed impossible – yet it was true.

“No need for haste,” said he calmly. “Listen to what I have to say, and then you will grasp the matter more surely. Sir Nicholas will offer no violence if he can gain his point without it.”

“What is his point?” I asked.

“Is there any need to ask?” replied Burke. “Grace O’Malley is a powerful princess in Connaught. She has her lands, her galleys, and several hundred well armed men at her back. Is that not enough? Are the English not trying to clip all our wings? But there is far more in the case of your mistress.”

“Go on, go on!” I said.

“This,” said he. “The mind of Sir Nicholas has been wrought upon by the merchants of Galway, who are ever about him, saying this and that, offering him valuable gifts and such things as he loves.”

“To what end?”

“You know as well as I do, that these proud-stomached folk have no great liking for us Irish,” said Burke. “Did you never hear that they have a statute of the town that ‘Neither Mac nor O’ shall strut or swagger’ in the streets of Galway? There has always been, however, a friendship between us Burkes of Mayo and one or two of the families here, as, for instance, the Lynches, and I hear through them all that is going on.

“Owen O'Malley plundered the ships of the Galway merchants, making scant distinction between them and Spanish or French or Scottish ships. Grace O'Malley shared in many of her father's doings before he died, and the people of Galway think that she has inherited her father's nature and disposition as well as his lands and ships, and that as long as her galleys roam the sea there will be no safety for their vessels.”

The words were nearly the same as those Eva O'Malley had used when she tried to dissuade my mistress from setting out from Clew Bay.

“What would they have Sir Nicholas do?” I asked.

“Break up her ships; scatter her people; hang, kill, burn, destroy them; hold her a prisoner; or – for there is no advantage to be derived from our shutting our eyes – kill her, too, by poison, perhaps, unless she agrees to the terms of the Governor.”

Burke now spoke in great excitement, and with labouring breath; nor could I listen to his words with any degree of composure.

“She will never agree to the Governor's terms,” said I. “She is being deceived, for she believes that Sir Nicholas is favourable to her suit.”

“Put that hope out of your mind,” replied he. “Sir Nicholas is merely playing with her – with what object you can easily guess. It is for no other reason than to make her ruin the more complete.”

I assented gloomily.

“Now we know what to expect,” I said. “We are forewarned and so forearmed.”

“Your mistress pays no heed to warnings,” said Burke hotly.

I thought of the arrow and its message.

“The arrow!” I said.

“Yes,” he replied. “I could not send you word openly, so I chose that way, getting one of my men, who is a famous archer, to send the shaft into your ship.”

I thanked him warmly, remarking, however, that Grace O'Malley would pay no attention to any warnings whatever, once she was resolved upon any particular course.

“She must be told now of her danger,” he said, “and at once.”

“I suppose,” said I, “I can still see her.”

“That I know not,” he replied; “but news of your fight with Michael Martin is all over the town, and you will have to walk circumspectly. Sir Nicholas spoke of his meeting with you, and declared that all such conflicts must be severely punished. Go not into Galway – unless with a strong guard.”

The counsel was wise, but I was quite determined, if necessary, to disregard it. My mind, however, suddenly went on another tack, and I spoke out what my thought was.

“I must see her, and that without delay,” I said; “but you mentioned that you were friendly with the Lynches. Could not Grace O'Malley be sent a message through them? If the Mayor is not to be trusted, surely Sabina Lynch, his daughter, cannot sympathise greatly with the dark and terrible projects of the Governor. Would she not convey a letter to my mistress?”

Richard Burke looked at me fixedly and searchingly.

“That is doubtful,” said he, at length. Then he added, “I do not think that we can place our confidence in Sabina Lynch in anything that concerns Grace O'Malley.”

“Why?” I asked simply.

He did not answer immediately, but stopped and pondered awhile before he replied —

“I am about to tell you, Ruari, what I never thought to say to you or any other living soul. But the need is urgent, and I must speak. The Lynches and myself are old friends. I have known Sabina

Lynch since she was a child, and I have been made aware in many ways – there is no need to go further into that – that I am not displeasing to her now she is a woman. And her father has as much as intimated that he regards me with eyes of favour.”

I saw it all in a minute. Sabina Lynch loved Richard Burke, and Richard Burke did not return her affection. Did Sabina suspect that she had a rival? Did she regard Grace O'Malley as a rival? These questions passed through my mind with the speed of light.

“What has Sabina Lynch to do with Grace O'Malley?” I asked.

“I will not conceal from you,” said Burke, “that I am not in love with Sabina Lynch, but am in love with your mistress. Once I imagined that it was Owen O'Malley's intention to wed you to his daughter, but neither you nor she has a passion for the other. Is it not so?”

“Yes,” I replied. “She is an elder sister to me – I am no more than a younger brother to her.”

“I love Grace O'Malley,” said he, “with all my soul and with all my strength. I mean to ask her to be my wife – ”

I broke in harshly.

“This is no time, surely, to talk of such a matter,” I cried, “now when she is a prisoner, and helpless in the hands of people who are her bitter enemies. Rather let us cast about for some means of delivering her.”

“I ask nothing better,” said Burke, “than to assist you – only remember it is not well to place any confidence in Sabina Lynch.”

Then we spent the next hour discussing plans, and having formed one which had some promise of success, Burke left the galley as secretly as he came – his boat disappearing into the darkness of the night.

After he had gone, I tried in vain to sleep, and finding my thoughts but dismal company, had myself rowed over to *The Winged Horse*, where I saw Tibbot, the pilot, whom I informed of the visit of Richard Burke, and of what we had concerted to do for the deliverance of Grace O'Malley. And as we could not foresee what the next step of the Governor might be, it was agreed that Tibbot's galley should be kept ready for instant action, and to provide against any surprise by keeping her out in the bay, at such a distance that she should be out of the range of the calivers and bombards mounted on the walls of Galway.

CHAPTER VI.

GRACE O'MALLEY DANCES OUT OF GALWAY

As early in the morning as was possible, without causing remark or exciting suspicion, I went into the town, taking with me several of my own men. The same officer who had been in charge of the guard the previous day was at the gate, and I advanced towards him boldly, as if I had no notion in the world that there could be anything amiss, nor, so far as he was concerned, was there.

For he gravely returned my salutation, merely giving me "Good-day" without waste of words, and waved his hand in the direction of the church of St. Nicholas of Myra.

When I had arrived at the mansion of the Mayor, I could see no difference in the manner of the reception I was accorded, except such as there would be owing to my mistress not being present on this occasion.

I sent in my name, with a request that Grace O'Malley might be informed of my arrival, and after a short time – short as far as the actual minutes, but it appeared an age to me, so impatient and anxious was I – I was conducted into a spacious room, where I found my two ladies, Sabina Lynch, and several gentlemen, most of whom were Irish. They were in the midst of a conversation as I entered, and I quickly gathered that they were talking about the entertainment the Mayor was to give in honour of the Governor before many days. They were speaking of corantos and other dances, in which I had but small proficiency, and I could not help saying to myself that Grace O'Malley could have no suspicion how slippery would be the floor for her feet!

On endeavouring to get speech with her privately, I found myself completely baffled, and that so subtly and craftily that I raged and fumed inwardly. For when I attempted to draw her aside we were instantly joined by Sabina Lynch, who smilingly disguised her purpose of preventing us from talking together by ourselves under a mock of empty but pleasant words. Indeed, so skilfully and readily did she speak, and with so much apparently of goodwill, that I had constantly to remind myself of all that Richard Burke had told me only a few hours before.

What my feelings were may be guessed, but I did my utmost to conceal them, although not very successfully, as I afterwards was told by Eva O'Malley. I never was one who could play the part of gallant or courtier, and what I knew to be in the wind did not tend to assist me in the efforts I now made to be at my ease and to seem confident that there was not a cloud in the sky.

And it could hardly be that one, who had seen so much of me as Eva had, but would observe my clumsy attempts at gaiety and light-heartedness. What she thus saw in my manner made her very uneasy, but at the time she kept her ideas to herself. It was enough, however, to put her on her guard, and caused her to watch more narrowly whatever was going on.

A couple of hours were spent in this way, and, disturbed beyond measure by reason of my inability even to breathe a word of warning to my mistress – I had resolved to say nothing of their peril to the woman I loved, fearing lest it might prove too hard a trial for her, wherein I misjudged her strength most grievously – I bade them farewell for that day.

As I left I encountered the Governor, who was coming up the street. He reined up his horse, and, after uttering a few courteous words, asked me not to fail to go through the square of the town cross on my way to the quay. He said this with so much curious insistence in his tone that my interest was roused to the quick.

As a man enters this square from the east side the first object which meets the eye is not the town cross, but the town gallows. As soon as I had turned the corner of the street I perceived that from the gibbet there swung in the wind, forward and backward as the breeze rose and fell, the figure of a man. That the Governor had intended me to see this, and that it had some special lesson for

me, I did not doubt, so I pressed forward smartly. Yet it was with an amazed horror that I beheld the dead man's face.

For the victim was none other than Michael Martin, my antagonist of the previous afternoon. The Governor had followed the matter up, and had discovered him whom he had called the aggressor in the interrupted duel. Verily was the Queen's peace being maintained with a vengeance. I had read the ruthless character of Sir Nicholas aright. Here, what had been a man, had been tried, sentenced, and executed in a few hours; and that Martin had occupied no inconsiderable position in Galway showed that the Governor was afraid of none.

If he would not hesitate to act in this fashion in the case of one of the English of Galway, how much less would he care for the Irish of Connaught? This I perceived plainly enough was what he desired Martin's death to intimate to me. For myself, notwithstanding what had passed between Martin and me, I was hot and indignant that a man so brave as he should have been put to so foul a death.

It was in a melancholy mood that I bent my steps to the quay, albeit I made a great effort to keep from my face the troubled thoughts of my mind. Not only had I failed in acquainting Grace O'Malley with her real position, but I was also well aware that the hatred with which she inspired the people of Galway would be made all the fiercer by the death of Martin.

Striving to cast aside these sombre reflections as unmanly, and likely only to hamper me in any plan I might make for the freeing of my mistress, I went on board *The Cross of Blood*. I, at least, was free as yet, and ready to do and dare all. But so far I could not see my way, and had I been left to myself to carry out the device Richard Burke and I had formed, would probably have suffered some such fate as that of Michael Martin.

The next three days passed without any striking event. I had seen my mistress once at the Mayor's mansion, and the attempts I made to reach her private ear were met and checked as effectively as before. I noticed, however, that while she appeared as gay as ever, there was a something about her that suggested in one way or another she was now conscious that she was not at complete liberty.

She had desired – so I got to know later on – to go down to her galley, but obstacles had been put in her path and objections had been raised. Then she had grasped the situation in which she had been placed, but had both the courage and the wisdom not to let this be evident.

It was the fifth day of our stay in Galway when *The Lass of Carrick* cast herself off from her moorings by the quay, and, towed out by her two boats into the bay, made ready for sea. I watched the rich prize slip out of our hands with dismay, but it was my only business at present to stay where I was. Yet, as I noticed how deep the Scottish ship lay in the water, I could not but regret that my hands were tied.

The captain made some signs to me which I did not comprehend, but which I interpreted as ironical farewells. I was the more mystified when, as I watched her approach *The Winged Horse*, I saw a boat put off from her for that galley. But when the night fell I had every reason to bless and not curse *The Lass of Garrick*. For in the dark Tibbot came on board my ship, bringing a letter from Grace O'Malley, which she had managed through one of her women, who had made love to the Scottish captain, to send thus secretly to me.

Now, the revel which the Mayor was giving for Sir Nicholas was to take place on the next day, and in this letter my mistress, who was now thoroughly awake to her danger and also to the perfidy of Sabina Lynch, set forth her plan of escape. It was at once bold and ingenious, and had a fair prospect of succeeding. That it was not carried out exactly as had been calculated – but this is to anticipate events.

My part was simplicity itself.

My mistress told me to come to the revel, as I had been invited, as if attending revels had been my occupation all my life, and to bring with me as many armed men as I thought could be got safely into Galway. But on no account was I to omit to fetch the two pipers – Phelim of the White Lock

(he had an odd-looking tuft of white hair on his forehead) and Cormac, his brother. What they had to do will appear later.

Further, I was commanded to have the galleys ready to put instantly to sea, for the favourable outcome of the matter depended in the end on the swiftness of our movements.

Having received this letter, my breast swelled with joy. The calm was at an end, I said, and now for the storm; and ever in these days loved I storm more than calm. My spirits rose immediately as this week of wearisome waiting drew to an end and the time of action was at hand.

As soon as the day had come I called my chief officers together, and bade them be ready to sail that night, and I gave a similar charge to those of *The Grey Wolf*. Then I picked out several of the older men, and, for a pretext that they might be admitted into the town the more easily, despatched them with boxes and bales for our mistresses, which they were to carry to the mansion of the Lynches. I also sent a gift to the Governor, in order that he should have no ghost of a suspicion that I knew how matters stood.

In this manner, then, I introduced twenty more of our men into Galway, making up for their absence from the two galleys by causing Tibbot to send me some of his.

To those sent into the town I gave as a common meeting-place at a given hour the tavern that is under the sign of "The Golden Eagle," bidding them thereafter to assemble in the High Street near the Mayor's house. There they were to await my coming with my mistresses, if events should fall out according to our wish, and then, if there should be any need, I should tell them what to do.

At the appointed time I presented myself at the Lynch mansion. Here I found a considerable company was gathered together, many of the chiefs having arrived from the surrounding districts, north and south and east. In the streets was a great throng of gallowglasses and kernes, who had come into the place along with their chieftains.

The scene was one of bustle and movement and confusion. Among the crowd, engaged in keeping some sort of rough order, were a few English soldiers, part of the garrison of Galway. I noticed many of our own men, and as I passed through them I succeeded in telling them to take as little part as possible in any sports or quarrels that might be going on, but to hold themselves prepared to rally to me, and to follow when I should call upon them to do so.

When I entered the large room in which the revel was to take place, I saw Sir Nicholas and his officers standing in a group by themselves, receiving the chiefs and their ladies, as well as the principal citizens of Galway and their wives, as they came up.

Near them were the Mayor and his daughter, who was the centre of a number of beautiful maidens and stalwart young men. The instruments of music were already sounding forth their sweetest strains, inviting to the dance; and Sir Nicholas, making a stiff bow to the radiant Sabina, asked her to join him in a coranto.

The dance ended, many compliments were paid to the pair, although to my mind the Governor had disported himself like a clumsy bear, such as the Spaniards and the men of the South have to dance for their amusement.

Sabina Lynch, on the other hand, was, I will confess, a stately figure, and as she had been taught the coranto in Spain, where she had been brought up for some years, and so was vastly proficient in it, met with great and deserved attention. Indeed, I heard one of the English officers declare that he had never seen anyone more graceful or accomplished – no, not even at the Court of Elizabeth.

After a brief rest, Sir Nicholas again appeared, now leading forth Grace O'Malley. Although she thoroughly understood what a mockery all this courtesy on the part of the Governor was, she let no sign of her knowledge escape her. She had too great a soul for that; but had she not been cast in this mould of heroes she might, as a woman, have acted just as she did, so that she should give no triumph to Sabina Lynch.

Dance followed dance in quick succession, and both of my mistresses took their full share of all that went on. Both of them appeared to be devoting themselves without reserve to the pleasure of

the occasion, and I could not but admire them. My love for Eva O'Malley was quickened anew, if that were possible, when I saw how unmoved she was, and how brave a carriage she kept, despite the fact that she knew they were but prisoners in the hands of the English, and in grievous peril of their lives.

I felt I could not have danced with a halter round my neck, yet here was this small, delicate woman doing this, and doing it as if she did not see the dangers that threatened her. The body, indeed, was weak, but the heart – how big it was!

Thank God, I say, for the great hearts of women!

I tried to acquit myself also in the course of the entertainment to the best of my ability, but for the most part, being no skilled performer in the matter of corantos and other dances, was perforce compelled to spend much of the time leaning against the wall. Once, as the Governor was passing me by, he stopped and spoke.

“Sir,” said he, “I have to render you my grateful acknowledgments for the handsome gift you have sent me this day.”

“Sir Nicholas,” replied I, “the gift was sent you by command of my mistress.”

The cruel, fierce eyes twinkled, and too late I perceived that my thoughtless words were making him suspect that some communication had passed between Grace O'Malley and myself in spite of his efforts and those of Sabina Lynch to prevent it. Thinking to undo the effect of my heedless speech, I made speed to continue.

“I thought,” said I, “that had my mistress been on her galley she would not have come to this revel in your honour with empty hands.”

“’Tis well spoken, by St. George!” said he. “Yet methinks there be few in Ireland that can afford to be so generous.”

The Governor’s brow relaxed, then clouded over again, for, on reflecting on my speech, he saw there was that in it which suggested I was not unaware that my mistress had been debarred from going down to her ships.

“You must reap rich harvests,” continued he, after a brief hesitation, “on the coast of Clew Bay, yet am I informed that nothing grows there but rocks.”

Howbeit the strains of music, rising and falling like a summer sea, were borne upon the air, and Sir Nicholas moved off to his own place. But his manner made me anxious that what we had planned might not long be postponed.

The hours one by one went by, and the time came.

I saw my mistress, laughter in her eyes and on her lips, approach Sir Nicholas, and enter into a gay conversation with him. I moved up nearer to the top of the room.

“If you have never seen it, Sir Nicholas,” I heard her saying, “sure am I you would like to see it.”

I listened in painful suspense for the answer of the Governor. Everything depended on it. “Who could resist Grace O'Malley, when she chose to be resistless?” I asked myself. Then I remembered what I had heard and seen of Sir Nicholas, and I replied to my beating heart that here was a man who might resist. But he had no suspicion whatever, and he fell into the trap, baited so cunningly by a woman’s wit.

“I have seen it,” said he, “and if you will honour me by dancing it with me – ?”

“The honour, Sir Nicholas,” quoth she, saucily, “is mine.”

The matter did not fall out quite as we had hoped, for it had been part of our plan that I was forthwith to have danced one of our wild Irish measures, which are more a test of endurance than an exhibition of grace, with my mistress.

It was soon spread through the assembly that the Governor and my mistress were to dance the dance of the country people, and on this proof of his affability towards us there were loud shouts of approval. Then there was a cry for the pipers, and, presently, just as we had schemed, in strode Phelim of the White Lock, and Cormac, our men – striding along the hall, with their pipes blowing the quick step to a merry and rollicksome tune.

Forward came Sir Nicholas and Grace O'Malley, while the people stood round about in a wide circle. But the Governor was no match for my mistress, and he soon began to hang out signals of distress, whereupon, greatly to his discomfiture, she wheeled about and beckoned to Sir Murrough O'Flaherty, of Aughanure, her bitter enemy, to take his place – displaying in this selection her wonderful craft; for how could anyone suppose – the Governor certainly least of all – that the O'Flaherty was chosen but to throw dust in his eyes?

My mistress danced with gliding, pit-patting feet that never tired, while the applause which greeted her every motion grew to a wild enthusiasm. Sir Murrough O'Flaherty had to acknowledge himself beaten, and retired. Grace O'Malley now cried aloud to me to come forward, and I stepped from the crowd, my heart beating faster than it had ever done in the day of battle.

“Dance, dance, dance!” cried she to me, and she whirled about like a mad thing.

“Have ye no pity on the pipers?” I exclaimed, with a laugh that rang out, it seemed to me, false and hollow, but I was determined to follow her lead as best I might.

“The feet were never made,” said she, as she advanced more slowly towards me and I took up my position opposite to her, and began the steps, “that can out-play a piper.”

The company smiled, grimaced, and murmured with delight at her answer, and the pipers, well pleased also, played as they never had played before. And the wild and furious dance went on to the wild and furious music of the pipes. Meanwhile I was watching my mistress with hungry, eager eyes, waiting for her to give the sign.

“Pipe, pipe!” she cried; and again, “Pipe, pipe!” and the playing of Phelim and Cormac was like the roaring of the storm among the trees of the forest.

So the dance went madly on until all the people about us grew quite still and silent, looking on more breathlessly than we who were dancing to that mad music – looking at such a measure as they never had witnessed before in all their lives, or ever, I dare swear, saw the like of again.

Then came the sign.

Grace O'Malley's uplifted hand slowly dropped to her side as with sheer weariness; the tall, queenly figure seemed to droop, to sway uncertainly, to totter, to fall upon the floor, but even as she fell I had gathered her up in these great arms of mine, and was carrying her through the press towards the chambers of the women.

Eva O'Malley flew to my side, her face full of fear, as it appeared to be. The pipers' music suddenly ceased. But no more I saw or heard of what happened next in the room of the revel.

No sooner had the door of the apartments of the women closed upon us three, than Grace O'Malley slipped from my arms and stood up, her faintness – which had been merely assumed – disappearing at once.

“Quick, quick!” she cried, pointing to a door. “There is the stair! That is the way!”

They stopped, however, for a little, to get a couple of heavy cloaks with which they hoped they might be able to conceal themselves somewhat from curious eyes. Short as the time was which this took, it was enough to permit Sabina Lynch to enter the apartment, and she at once perceived not only that my mistress had recovered in a marvellous brief space, but also what our project was.

“Seize her,” said Grace O'Malley, as she and Eva were leaving the room.

I rushed towards the woman, and, clapping my hand to her mouth, prevented her from giving forth the scream she was on the point of uttering. As I was glancing about for something with which I might gag her, and so effectually silence her, my mistress again appeared, and said, her eyes blazing with anger: —

“Bring her with you, if you can; the way is clear.”

“A gag!” I said, and Grace O'Malley made with her own hands one, with which she stuffed Sabina Lynch's mouth, and next she bound the woman's arms. Then I took Sabina Lynch up, and in silence we descended the stair which led us into the street some twenty yards from the main entrance into the Mayor's house.

It was now dark, but not sufficiently so as to hide us completely from observation, and an instant's thought convinced me that carrying a bound woman, as I was doing, it was impossible to go very far without being seen by someone who would instantly give the alarm. Therefore, still keeping in the shadow of the house, I sent forth into the night the O'Malley battle cry, knowing that our men could not be out of hearing; and the sound had not died away when there arose a great noise and shouting.

“O'Malley! O'Malley! O'Malley!” was heard on all sides.

“To me, to me – here!” I cried.

And, in less time than seemed likely, there were gathered about us nearly all our men, but mixed with them several Burkes, O'Flahertys, and others of the Irish. Recognising their mistress, the O'Malleys set up a joyful sound. Forming some of them in a line across the street, I begged Grace O'Malley and Eva to take with them the rest, and to hasten toward the gate, and this they accordingly did, while two of our people carried Sabina Lynch between them in the same direction.

In the meantime the flight of my mistresses had been discovered. I saw lights flitting about the courtyard, and heard the words of command given in the strident tones of Sir Nicholas, then the tramp, tramp of the feet of the soldiers smote upon the night air.

To have a conflict in the streets of Galway, just at the place where the English were strongest, was not to be thought of, as it was not more foolish than it was unnecessary, so I ordered my men to retreat as swiftly as was practicable towards the gate, and to endeavour to catch up to Grace O'Malley before the gate was reached by them.

But when we came to the gate we found it had already been forced by our chieftainess, who had taken the feeble guard completely unprepared, and so had quietly made an end of them. It was all the work of a few seconds; yet in the struggle, short as it was, Sabina Lynch had effected her escape. Without delay we proceeded to embark in the galleys, and to put out to sea.

While we were engaged in this manner the great bell of the church of St. Nicholas suddenly boomed sharply through the night: soldiers began to appear on the battlements, torches flared from the walls, and bullets and arrows poured upon us as the galleys drew away from the quay. Some of the shots were aimed so well that two of our people, one of whom was Walter Burke, were slain and several others wounded.

Then, as we proceeded on our way into the bay, the sputtering fire ceased.

CHAPTER VII. THE DIE CAST

That night I reflected with joy that the die was cast, as, after our breaking out of Galway, there could be no peace between Grace O'Malley and Sir Nicholas – at any rate, until the matter was composed in some definite fashion.

I trod the deck with a feeling of extraordinary buoyancy, and sniffed the salt air with delight as the galleys headed for Inishmore, the largest of the three isles of Arran, which have been thrown for a protection by the hand of God, almost in a straight line, across the entrance to the bay of Galway.

All that I cared for in the world was held in these ships, now speeding over the water under the leadership of Tibbot the Pilot.

It was with deep satisfaction that I went over the events of the evening which had brought us with such success out of the town, and I looked forward with wide-eyed eagerness to the morning when I should meet my mistress, and hear her narrative of all that had passed when she and Eva were prisoners in the mansion of the Lynches.

Eva, who had kept up so bravely while the danger was greatest, had become faint and unstrung when the peril was past. Grace O'Malley would suffer no one but herself to tend her, and thus I had had no opportunity for conversing with either of them after we had made good our escape.

When we had arrived at the island, and had let go our anchors in a fair depth of water in a small bay, which was sheltered from the full shock of the Atlantic by a range of abrupt craggy headlands, I went on board *The Grey Wolf* to see my mistresses, but Grace O'Malley received me alone, her foster-sister not having altogether recovered from the fatigue of the preceding evening. There was a new hardness, even a harshness, both in the face and voice of Grace.

At first, however, she was in no mood for recounting her experiences, and could do nothing but lament the fact that Sabina Lynch had managed to get away when the gate was forced. Indeed, her escape appeared entirely to overshadow in her mind her own escape and that of Eva.

“Had it not been for her plottings and schemings,” said she, “I should have brought the Governor round to my will. I had several interviews with Sir Nicholas, and at the beginning he was inclined to grant my suit, but soon I felt I was being thwarted by one more subtle than Sir Nicholas. How that woman hates me! I did not suspect her at once, for I had given her no cause of offence.”

“Did you find out,” asked I, “why she hates you?”

“’Tis from jealousy,” said she. “Sabina Lynch would be Queen of Connaught, but she thinks that as long as I am free and powerful I am her rival.”

“Is there no other reason?” inquired I, remembering the words of Richard Burke. “Is there not between you two a cause more personal?”

“There may be,” she replied thoughtfully; “for clever as she is, she was not sufficiently so to conceal from me her predilection for the MacWilliam. But what is that to me? Richard Burke is nothing to me.”

“You may be much to him, however,” I answered, whereat she grew more thoughtful still. Being a woman, I said to myself, she could hardly have failed to read the signs of his regard for her. Then I told her of the midnight visit he had paid me, saying nothing, nevertheless, of what Richard Burke had confided to me in regard to his love for herself.

“He is a friend,” said she, after musing for awhile, “and I may have need of many such.”

“Tell me what passed between you and Sir Nicholas.”

She paced the floor of the poop-cabin with quick, uneven steps; then she stopped and spoke.

“After our first meeting,” said she, “he was much less open with me, asking me many questions, but giving no expression of his own views with respect to the ships. Two things, however, he impressed upon me. One was that he considered that I should make immediately a suitable marriage – ”

“A suitable marriage!” I exclaimed.

“The other was that it was common report that my father had left great riches behind him, and that, as he had never paid any tribute to the Queen, I must now make good his deficiencies in that respect.”

“Tribute,” said I blankly.

“He proposed to marry me – for he declared I was in reality a ward of the Crown, and, therefore, at his disposal – to Sir Murrough O’Flaherty, a man old enough to be my father – and our enemy. I would have none of it. I fancy I have to thank Sabina Lynch for suggesting it to Sir Nicholas, and I replied to him, with indignation, that I was a free woman, and would give my hand where I pleased. It was then that I discovered that I was no longer at liberty, for it was told me that I must on no account leave the Lynches’ house without the permission of the Governor, but that no harm would come to me if I consented to his terms. I spoke of the safe conduct which Sir Nicholas had given me, but that was of no avail; and ‘reasons of State,’ said he, overruled any safe conduct.”

“This is how they keep faith!” I cried, bitterly.

“It was no time for railing,” continued Grace O’Malley, “as I was in the Governor’s hands, and could see no way of getting out of them. Therefore I made as though I were about to submit myself, and I desired to see the Governor again with respect to the tribute to be paid to the Queen. My request being granted, Sir Nicholas acquainted me with his determination, demanding a thousand cows and two hundred mares, or their equivalent in gold and silver, by way of payment of the arrears, and two hundred cows each year for the future.”

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