

A woman with dark hair and bangs is sitting on a swing. The swing is decorated with white and pink roses and greenery. She is wearing a white, off-the-shoulder dress with floral patterns. The background is a lush green forest. The text 'ROBERT MACHRAY' is in the top left corner, and 'GRACE O'MALLEY, PRINCESS AND PIRATE' is in a large black box at the bottom.

***ROBERT
MACHRAY***

***GRACE
O'MALLEY,
PRINCESS
AND PIRATE***

Robert Machray

Grace O'Malley, Princess and Pirate

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CHAPTER I.

SAVED FROM THE SEA.

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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 Rinn 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.

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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.

Obeying 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.

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“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