

"He is a beardless youth, crippled, and of small stature," said the seneschal. "I told him your highness would see him on the morrow; but he will not be denied, and says his errand is of great import."

"Admit him," was the speedy answer, and soon Dermot Fitz-Gerald stood on the pavement of the lofty hall.

"Your business, youth?" was the stern demand of the Queen of the West.

"The sound of woe resounds through our dwelling," replied Dermot: "and the Widow Fitz-Gerald, of the house of Annagh, would fain you heard the cry."

"What boots it? Can my hearing the cry prevent the cause?"

"No, mighty princess, it cannot remedy the past, but it may speed well the future."

"Well said, young man. Tell me wherefore, then, the widow's tears?"

"She had three sons, and two are not. The second, Donald, is either dead or languishing in a dungeon, and the eldest, Roderic, was murdered in attempting a release. I alone am left, powerless and a cripple. The widow lays her grief and her wrongs at your feet."

"Donald is a brave youth, and Roderic deserves a better fate. But why should I interfere? He ran his head, doubtless, into the broil, and his family reap the fruits. 'Tis no business of mine."

"Mighty lady, listen for one moment. Eva O'Connor, too, is in danger. Under this very roof she plighted her faith to Donald; but she, too, is under restraint; and it will go hard with her if she consent not to wed the red-haired Gael, Ivan Macrae."

"Eva is my goddaughter. She will discover a method, either to foil or avenge such a proceeding. Who is the man that dares to stand in her path?"

"Her guardian, the Black Knight of Inchagoil. He swears my brother shall never see the light of day till Eva and her broad lands are the property of his kinsman, Ivan Macrae."

"Well, are they not well matched—two to two? Eva and Donald have not been taught at Moona to suffer wrong or insult from any knight or baron, be he black or white. Comfort, boy; they will match him yet. Go, tell them what I say."

"But, princess, the knight has the upper hand by treachery and foul play. Little can a man do whose thews and sinews are bound with links of iron in the deep recesses of a dark dungeon, and little will a woman's art or strength avail against grated windows and bars of steel. The Knight of Inchagoil fears no one, not even Grania Waile."

"Sayest thou so, boy?—the proof?"

"His own words in the presence of his people, I heard them. They were addressed to my wretched mother and myself. The words were these: 'Grace O'Malley has no power here. If she would have the young man, let her dare to fetch him.'"

"Seneschal dismiss the youth; but treat him well, and let him return to-morrow. We will have no further interruption to our night's festivity."

The now captive Eva, like an imprisoned bird, restless and unhappy, gazed wistfully from her casement in the old tower of Inchagoil, hoping, but, alas! against hope, that some change might release her from her present thralldom. The night was serene and still. The moon, unclouded, shed her silver beams o'er land and water, and the