

THE TIGER OF MUSCOVY

FRED WHISHAW

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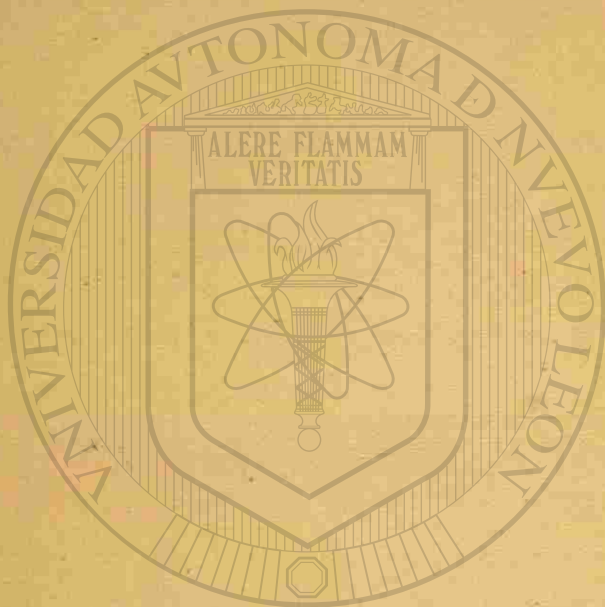
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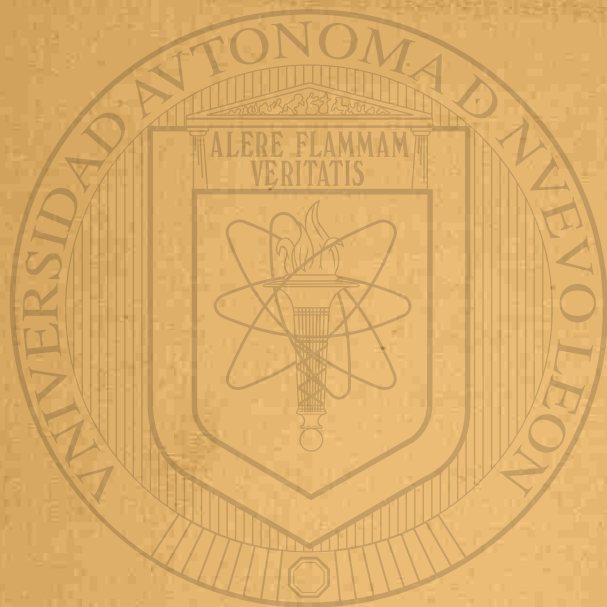


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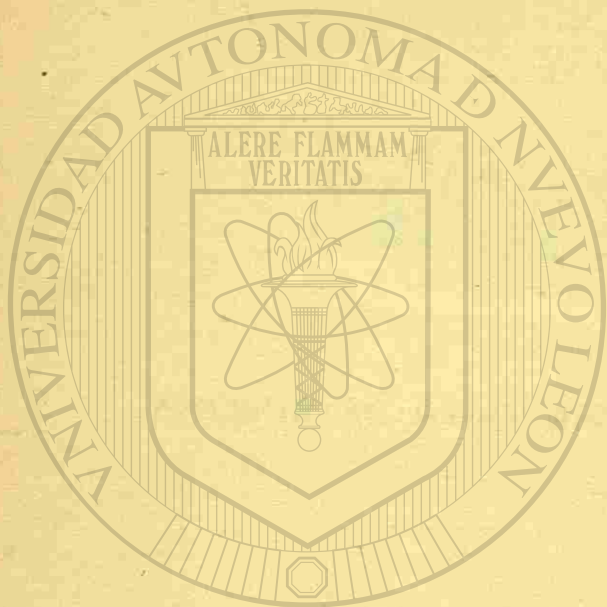
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THE TIGER OF MUSCOVY



BY

FRED WHISHAW

AUTHOR OF "LOVERS AT FAULT," "A BOYAR OF THE TERRIBLE,"
"MANY WAYS OF LOVE," ETC.

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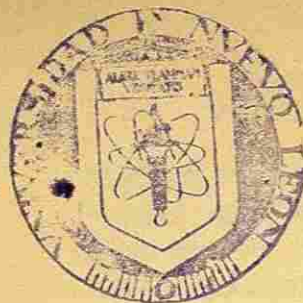
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THE TIGER OF MUSCOVY.



CHAPTER I.

AMY ROMALYN: that is the name which has been the most familiar of all names upon my tongue; the name which will occur, I suppose, more frequently than any other in the history I now set myself to write; the name which, I believe, will be the last upon my lips when I die.

What is my first remembrance of Amy? My first striking recollection of her is of a little slender active girl of thirteen; black of hair and eyes, red of lip, pale of complexion, excepting when excited or flushed with exercise, at which times the most delicate of pink shades would come creeping over cheek, neck and brow, adding greatly to the charm of her appearance. When angry—and this was no rare occasion, for Amy was easily roused—the colour which rushed to her face was of a deeper tint.

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Amy was never so beautiful as when her eyes flashed and her cheeks flushed with rage, excepting indeed when over her sweet features there fell a certain divine smile of tenderness; but this was reserved for the rarest occasions, and was, I think, seen by very few. As a general rule her smile was full of mischief and roguery; a smile to drive a man distracted when accompanied, as it often was, with words of raillery and a gleam from those flashing black eyes that seemed to pierce the very soul and steal from a man half his manhood.

For myself, for many and many a year I was, I think, less than half a man when in Amy's presence. I was afraid of her, I who—as it pleases me to flatter myself—know not what fear is, whether of man or of devil.

Owing to a distant relationship—our grandfathers were cousins, I believe—and to the fact that we lived close to one another in old Devonshire, Amy and I knew each the other from childhood up. I must have been an odd-looking, long, lanky boy of fifteen or sixteen when she was the girl of thirteen whom I have just described. I suppose I knew her long before we had arrived at these ages, but a certain day I think of is far enough away for the starting-

point of my recollection—a day that is fixed in my memory by reason of an event which has marked it for evermore as one of those which cannot be forgotten; the first day, this was, upon which Amy Romalyn asserted that absolute sovereignty over my being which she has exercised ever since, and against which I should strive in vain—nay, have many and many a time striven—to rebel. In time I have learned to love my chains, but it was not ever thus; for though a captive I have been, indeed, since that day, I have not always been a willing one.

At this time Amy Romalyn was the Beatrice to every little Dante in the countryside: the ideal, most beautiful, most adorable, and most unattainable Queen of Love. She had swains a score; every male child from ten years old to fifteen adored her, and she treated all with equal scorn. Most of them were, certainly, vastly beneath Amy in the social scale, being the sons of farmers upon her father's land or may-be upon my father's estate, for the Romalyn lands lay contiguous with those of the Shadwells, my father—Sir Amory Shadwell—being the squire of the district.

Strangely enough I, destined as I was to become so permanent an adorer, was not at

this time among the devoted worshippers at Amy's shrine. It was my pleasure to affect a contempt for her sex which I did not attempt to disguise in her presence. I think there can be little doubt that I was, at this period of my life—whether in appearance or in manner—a singularly unattractive youth; and if Amy Romalyn, my kinswoman, took every opportunity to show and assure me that her disdain for myself quite equalled the contempt which I displayed towards her, it is certainly no surprising matter.

Upon the day I think of, however, certain foolish episodes took place which made lasting impressions upon one at least of the actors—namely, myself. Many of us, boys and girls together, dwellers in the neighbourhood or in the actual village of Waddeton, on the Dart, were in the habit of meeting by the river-bank for the purpose of sailing our toy ships; for at this time all matters connected with shipping were greatly in fashion, by reason, I suppose, of the late triumphs of our fleets at sea. At any rate, we children would meet daily to sail our boats in a certain broad, almost tideless creek of the river, which here formed an ideal place for such amusement.

I remember that there had been arguments. I think we disputed, Amy and I, as to the merits of our respective ships. If I recollect the incident rightly, her vessel had vanquished mine in a contest of speed, and Amy—after her manner—improved the occasion by laughing at me and by throwing contempt upon my brigantine. Now, when Amy led the way, it was the custom of all her slaves to follow blindly; and their following of Amy on this occasion led them foul of me. One lad of twelve summers or thereabouts aggravated me so much, indeed, that I seized him by the shoulders and swung him as far as I could into the stream. There was nothing much in this, for we were all practised swimmers, but it afforded Amy ground for more sarcasm.

"That is a brave act in one who is two feet the lankier," she said. "Why not vent thy spleen upon little Edgar Widcombe here, who is the smallest of all?"

I made no reply.

"He will not hurt thee," she continued. "Here is Philip Ayton, but he—I doubt not—is too big for thee to touch? Nay, fear not; his father being thy father's tenant, he will not dare chastise thee."

"I will throw him in and thee after to fetch him," I said foolishly, "if thou keep not a civil tongue."

"Oh, oh! hear that, all; he would vent his anger upon a maid. Oh! the coward! well, do so—I defy thee!"

"Father or no father, he dare not throw me," said Philip Ayton; "and as for touching thee, Amy Romalyn, he knows well that——"

"Come then, wrestle, Philip," I said in a fury; "and if I throw thee she shall follow into the water to comfort thee—ay, though every puppy dog of her pack bay at my heels!"

In a moment Philip and I were at loggerheads. He was not so tall as I by a head and a half, but he was strong and determined. We fought for five minutes before I succeeded in sending him, with a mighty push, three yards out into the deep water. The fight had not cooled my anger. On the contrary, I now felt consumed with a burning indignation; every one of those present, at any rate those of my own sex, were strongly against me and on the side of Philip. As for Amy, she had derided me throughout the combat, encouraging my adversary the while, and giving thus the note for the music of the rest, who howled about

me in the key she had set them. When Philip flew from my arms riverwards I turned to Amy.

"Now, you scolding wench," I muttered, "it is your turn."

"You dare not!" she said, shrinking from me and paling a little, for I suppose she had not expected that I would really carry out my foolish threat.

"Dare I not? You shall see!" I said.

I seized her forthwith, and in spite of her struggles—for she did struggle, and that stoutly, though she never uttered a sound after the first "You dare not!"—I threw her far out into the stream, which she reached with a great splash and commotion nearly five yards from shore.

No sooner had I done it than the enormity of my offence became clear to me. "What have I done?—what have I done?" I muttered, and almost as quickly as her body touched water, my own carcase was submerged also and moving with frenzied speed to her assistance.

But Amy would have none of my help. She did not need it, for she was a swimmer like the rest of our company. She made for shore and reached it as quickly as I, scrambling, puffing and choking up the bank without assistance.

Half a dozen of her devoted knights standing dryshod above me, furious, I doubt not, at my treatment of their mistress, anxious, too, to act in such a manner as to win her approval, attacked me when I would climb ashore, and prevented my landing. But Amy, perceiving this, bade them desist.

"Let him land!" she said imperiously, and I was allowed to climb dripping up the bank. I had the grace to approach Amy immediately and to ask her pardon. "I am ashamed," I said, "I know not why I acted so unmanly!"

But Amy laughed merrily. "Why," she said, "cousin, to tell you honest truth I have never liked thee before this moment; I doubt not I shall dislike thee again presently; but at this moment I am pleased with thy spirit, of which I have seen but little hitherto."

"Let us throw him in the river, the coward; let us beat him, Amy Romalyn!" cried the boys; "he has attacked a maid; he must be taught manners."

"Teach him what you will!" she replied, with a laugh, and quickly enough I was attacked.

Her remark about my lack of spirit had stung me. "I will show her," I now thought, "whether I have spirit!"

It was a battle royal. Amy Romalyn sat upon the grass and watched, laughing aloud, and encouraging now one side now the other. I was by far the biggest present, but by dint of numbers I was vanquished and thrown into the river, yet not before I had ducked a round half-dozen of my assailants, one or two of whom were, it seemed, so enraged with me that they were all for letting me drown, when at last I was tripped and sent flying into mid-stream, rather than allowing me to land; for again they bawled and shouted and struck at me, making it impossible for me to obtain a foothold—indeed, I know not how I should have landed at last but for Amy's interference; for seeing, I suppose, that my position grew somewhat serious, she bade them for shame leave me to climb ashore. "You cowards!" she said; "you are nine to one, and the lad is exhausted with keeping afloat!"

"He should not have attacked a maid!" some one shouted, but she continued:—

"Tut! I like him the better that he kept his word when he had threatened me!" To the favour of this kind speech Amy added a greater one: she allowed me to escort her home. During the walk she bade me take no

thought of favour in what she had said. "I told thee I never liked thee so well as this day, and that is true," said she, "for up to this morning I have seen in thee little better than a lamb that scarce dares bleat for the terror of hearing its own voice; but to-morrow, I doubt not, thou wilt be the same sheep as before, and I shall like thee no better."

CHAPTER II.

NEVERTHELESS Amy did like me better, on the whole, though indeed she was scornful enough at times. As for me, I began from the first day of her grudging kindness towards me to lose my heart to her. Strange that this should have been so, yet so it was. In alternate close comradeship and enmity—temporary yet bitter—we passed several years of this portion of our lives; then came separation.

Amy, it so happened, was related somewhat distantly to no less distinguished a person than the very greatest in the land, Queen Elizabeth herself, through the mother of her Grace, who had been second cousin to the mother of Amy. This was not, indeed, a very close kinship, yet it served as an excuse for the parents of Amy whereupon to base a petition that Amy might be taken into the household of her Grace, which petition was presently granted to them.

As a result, away went fair Amy to the Court in London, while I remained behind in

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Devonshire, aghast to find how great was the difference to me of Amy here and Amy absent, and how that a maiden, fair indeed, but with a sharp tongue and a scornful wilful demeanour, and a maddening habit of seeming inconstancy, can, in going from a place, take with her the sunshine and the joy of life, the music from the song of birds, the delight of being up and about, and the desire to walk face up to the wind in the pride and strength and exhilaration that belong to youth.

"I doubt not that I shall follow you before long," I had said when Amy departed and I bade her farewell. "I have grown accustomed to you, and shall scarcely know how to do without you."

"Am I so kind?" she laughed. "I have not meant to be."

"Kind or scornful I am accustomed to you," I said. "We have grown up together; one becomes used to the ways of so constant a companion, be they kind ways or the opposite. I know not how I shall do without you."

"As easily, doubt not, as I shall exist without the sunshine of your presence. If thou art a sentimental fool, Herbert, Heaven help thee. Why, man, I am glad to go; I have prayed

for such a chance, and here it is; are you not glad for my sake that I am making so great a step in life?"

"Of course," I replied, "I never said the contrary. I said I should miss you here, which is so true (and you know it!) that I believe I shall not remain very long in this place."

"For that I do not blame you," said Amy; "your employment here is not sufficient to procure for you an even mind, as witness the foolish words you have just spoken. A youth of your age should be up and doing something in the world, not wasting his time and energies in sighing for a maiden who is sick of a cabbage life and prefers to seek her fortune."

"I suppose I shall sigh for you whether I see you or no; there is seldom lack of sighing matter for me in your treatment of me even when we are together; but I would rather sigh for your unkindness present than for your absence in any and all moods."

"If that means anything, which I doubt, for you hesitate and falter this morning so that I think you lose hold of what you would say; if it means anything, it is that you intend to play the sheep and not the man. Come, be ashamed, Herbert; I forbid you to waste time in thinking

of me; rest assured I shall soon forget thee; do thou the same by me."

"Not I," I replied with spirit, for her words nettled me. "I say that I shall miss you, and miss you I shall. Moreover, it is foolish to pretend you will never think of me; you will."

"I say I will not;" she frowned at me as she spoke. "What, among the gallants and educated persons of her Grace's Court? Be assured, Herbert, I shall not have a thought for thee."

"Then be not surprised if I follow one day to London and assert my right to be remembered," I rejoined. Amy flashed her angry eyes at me.

"I forbid it!" she said. "I will not be shamed at the Court of her Grace."

"I shall go where I please, cousin," I replied, as angry as she. "As for shaming you—why should I do so?"

"You and your dog devotion, your long legs and long jaws, and your fool's way with a maid; they will think a sheep's heart beats in your breast."

"They will know it is not so if any but thou speak to me thus. I wish I hated thee, Amy; may-be after these words of thine I shall remember more thy rudeness and thy unkindness

than any good there is in thee. I shall try to do so. A sheep's heart, indeed! I will show the world one day what manner of sheep's heart is mine."

"Show me also, I pray," she laughed, clapping her hands. "Lord, it does me good to see thee reveal a man's spirit, Herbert; go away now, quickly, lest my last impression of thee be spoiled, and thou show again that sheep's heart——"

The repetition of those words maddened me.

"No more of that," I roared at her; "use the phrase but once more, and I will gag thy mouth with my kerchief. I swear it, and I will do it!"

"Good, good!" she cried. "So I would have it—if I think of thee it shall be as now."

She tripped to the door and stood a moment. She curtsied and kissed the tips of her fingers to me. "Farewell," she said most roguishly, "Mr. Sheep's——"

I rushed at her to kill her or kiss her, I know not which, but she banged the door in my face and disappeared.

This was our parting, and I saw no more of her for many weary months.

Though, at so much cost to my own feelings,

I had assured Amy that I should miss her, I little guessed how necessary she had become to me. I found it impossible to devote sufficient attention to my duties as squire and magistrate of the district. My father was no longer alive, but my widowed mother still lived with me, and, fortunately, by reason of her experience and aptitude, was far more capable of administering the estate than I myself. I endeavoured to apply myself to duty, but the life did not interest me, and I suppose I showed it, for my mother rallied me one day.

"The country life is tedious for you, my son," she said—"think not I do not observe it. A great fellow like you, a very giant in energy and strength, must need, I doubt not, more outlet for the forces that lie dormant within so huge a frame."

I was indeed a huge person, long of limb and broad of shoulder and deep of chest, a giant among my fellows, over whom I towered mostly by fully a head.

"Oh, I am big and strong enough, mother," I said laughing; "but my size will scarcely qualify me for any situation in which life would be more active—unless, indeed, it were for a commission as a Yeoman of the Guard."

My mother's reply surprised me.

"It is strange that you should speak of that corps," she said; "for your dear father spoke of it also many times, in connection with your rapid growth as a child. If you should grow up as great a man as you promised you should be sent to London, said your father, to my kinsman the Earl of Sussex, who might use his influence to obtain for you a commission as Yeoman of the Guard."

I was, I think, twenty-one years of age when I left our manor in the care of my mother and a younger brother, a studious lad of half my size, but with a headpiece worth a round dozen of my own, and rode away, like Amy, to seek my fortune. Well I remember that, though my soul was full of ambition for some career in which name and reputation might be gained, I had room in my mind for many a thought of Amy and of the delight of seeing her again and watching the flash of her eyes.

Indeed, my ambition was connected with the thought of Amy. To compel Amy to be proud of me, that for me was ambition. If Amy felt proud of me she would say so; she was as blunt in praise as in scorn; pleased or displeased, it was her way to show it.

I may explain that I left my country home not entirely without prospect; to a purposeless departure my careful mother would never have agreed. She wrote a long letter to her near kinsman Netherby, himself a great lord, and in her Grace's favour—or out of it, as I afterwards discovered, at the Queen's whim, as with most of her favourites. In this letter my mother described my virtues and morals, mentioning at the same time, in parenthesis, that I measured two yards and the length of my hand from crown to sole. My mother also referred her kinsman to Amy Romalyn for further particulars. His lordship's reply was uncourtier-like, we thought, but to the point. He wrote:—

“Damn his morals and virtues, but if his legs are as long as you say let him come; he shall serve with my men-at-arms, or the Queen's”.

This was the extent of the Earl's letter, but there came by the same hand another to me from Amy, in which were concentrated all the chidings and denunciations of an angry fury. His lordship, it appeared, had come to her for confirmation as to my qualifications as man-at-arms to a great courtier. She had told him, wrote Amy, of my sheep's heart, of my foolish face, of my idiotic manner with maids; but had

failed to counteract the excellent effect which, it seemed, my mother had created by her description of the length of my limbs, which, fortunately, Amy could not deny.

“Your legs have saved you this time,” she wrote, “as doubtless they will again whensoever you must fight or run, Mr. Sheep's-heart.” After slipping which bolt, Amy continued with chiding and denunciation to the end of the chapter—as, how dared I follow her to London in order to shame her before men who were men and not sheep, and perhaps before the Queen herself, who detested uncouth and unmanly persons, and so forth. “Dare not claim me as kin before them all,” she ended, “or, as I breathe God's air, I will denounce thee as a sheep's heart in the face of the Queen herself!”

All of which, since I did not then understand Amy so well as, perhaps, I do at this later day of my life, was very painful to me, and caused me many a miserable hour on my long journey to London.



CHAPTER III.

BEHOLD me now at Deptford on the river Thames, at no long distance from the Tower of London. I have arrived and am installed with my debonair kinsman, the Lord Netherby. My first interview with his lordship was short and satisfactory.

"Mercy of Heaven!" he exclaimed, upon seeing me. "Are you Dame Shadwell's long-shanks, the moral and virtuous Herbert she writes of?"

"If my mother so wrote of me, I am," said I; "at any rate I am Herbert Shadwell."

"Two yards and a hand's length," he continued reflectively, and then, "Ho, there, Ingleby! Fetch John Bevis quickly—by Heaven's blue, I wager you'll top him by a good inch."

John Bevis came, another Devonshire man, his speech sounding delightful to me among these strangers. A huge fellow, older and heavier than I, but when we stood back to back it appeared that I was taller by two inches.

This discovery seemed to fill his lordship with the greatest delight. "John, John, thou art fallen from thy high estate," he exclaimed; "this fellow is thy master; I think her Grace herself has none to top him. What of thy muscles, Herbert; thou art younger than this Bevis, and I think lighter, but thy shoulders are well; try a throw with him."

I tried a throw, but, being less practised than Bevis, was overcome after a long tussle. I may here say that at the next encounter, having practised well meanwhile, I was winner.

"For a novice you did right well," said his lordship; "when you write to your mother you shall tell her that I am pleased to have you of my household."

This was satisfactory enough, and quite as much as I had any right to expect. Nevertheless, I hoped for more. I desired occupation which would bring me into touch with Amy; at any rate, into sight and hearing of her. One word of the few which I had hitherto exchanged with my lord gave me some hope in this respect. This was his joyful exclamation that he believed I should overtop the tallest of her Grace's men-at-arms. If so, thought I, and the Queen were to observe me one day, it might be that she

would offer me employment, seeing that there appeared to be a kind of rivalry in the matter of men-at-arms and the length of their lower limbs.

His lordship spoke to me of this very question but a day or two after my arrival.

"It may happen that her Grace will want thee if she hears that I have a bigger man than any of hers," he said. "I will make it worth thy while, lad, to remain of my household; therefore, when the Queen passes at any time stoop or bend thy knee, or stand upon lower ground."

"Nay, my lord, I promise nothing of the kind," I laughed. "If her Grace wants me, she shall have me."

"You speak like a fool," he said angrily; "her Grace's service is full of pitfalls: one day she dispenses favours, the next you may find yourself in the Tower or even at the block; she is not to be trusted. Here you may live a placid life of ease and security."

"I prefer movement and enterprise, even with risk," said I. "Of cabbage life I have lived enough at home."

"As you will," he said; "but remember that if testimony to thy worth be asked of me I shall

have none to give, knowing nothing of thee, and can but repeat what thy own kinswoman Amy Romalyn passed on to me before ever I saw thee."

"And what was that?" I asked, blushing scarlet.

"She said thou wert an awkward long-shanked fool," he laughed, "and indeed when I said but now that I know nothing of thee I spoke wrongly, for I have already learned this much: that she spoke correctly in dubbing thee fool."

"A man may be a fool with maids," I said awkwardly, "and yet be a man with the best. As for my service, it shall be given where I please. I do not expect to be offered service by her Grace, but if I were I should in any case have my long legs to thank, and my head-piece would do no more to recommend me than it did when I entered your lordship's service."

"Less," he laughed, "for I shall verily assure the Queen that so empty a cranium as this of thine never yet crowned a sufficiently lengthy body. Moreover, be sure that the fair Amy would so laugh thee to scorn at Court, in order to rid herself of thy presence, which it seems is

distasteful to her, that life would soon become unbearable."

"Fool as I am," I said, flushing again to my great discomfort and chagrin, "I know this much of maids: that they sometimes do not mean all they say."

"Well, well, we will not take trouble by the forelock. It may be that her Grace will not look at thee, or that looking she will disapprove; meanwhile I am well pleased to have thee of my household, headpiece and all." His lordship laughed and departed, leaving me a little wiser than he found me in the wisdom of the world; for in spite of my empty cranium I was quite able to discern at least this much: that he was anxious to retain my services and afraid lest her Grace should take me from him!

But here was I two days and more in London and as yet my eyes had not seen that which I suppose, if I am to be honest, I should confess that I came to see—Amy's face. Amy was one of those in constant attendance upon her Grace—so much I knew long ago, while still far away in Devonshire. How to obtain sight of her and speech with her?

I inquired of one of my companions in his lordship's service how I might hope to catch a

glimpse of our royal lady, Queen Bess, whom I had never seen; was there any place in which she made a practice of appearing for the delight of her people?

"There is nothing easier," said Beaumont, my friend. "Her Grace loves nothing better than to be rowed up and down Thames in her barge. Can you ply an oar?"

I told him that for all the years of my life, excepting perhaps some six at the commencement of it, I had been used to both rowing and sailing by river and sea.

"Then take a skiff," said he, "and float with the tide between this and Westminster this very afternoon, and if her Grace does not beatify you with a sight of her face it will be because you are blind or have fallen asleep."

I took the hint, and in doing so—as it happened—paved the way for a very foolish escapade, which caused much delight and amusement to others, but much heart-burning to myself.

I lay in my skiff close to Blackfriars, hoping that it might shortly please her Grace to take her pastime upon the water, when I heard shouting and cheering from the Westminster direction, and sat up to see what the noise might

signify. Then I saw what must surely, I thought, be the Queen's barge, and laying my oars upon the stream to keep my boat steady, I stood up in order to command the best view.

In company with the gorgeous barge which I concluded to be that of her Grace, or, rather, following it at a respectful distance, came two other barges, grand also, though much less so than the gorgeous leader; one of them, I observed, floated upon the right of the Queen's barge, the other upon the left, though both were well astern of her.

"Thou'rt in luck, Herbert, for once," thought I; for it was plain to see that coming upon their present course, the three barges would pass close to me, one of the attendant pair probably gliding on the outside of my skiff.

My head was full of Amy and the desire to make sure of seeing her, otherwise perhaps it would have occurred to me that I was acting somewhat over boldly in remaining thus in the direct line of the Queen's route; but no such qualms of conscience assailed me, and I stood gazing on until the procession had come so close that I was able to distinguish faces.

Upon the deck of her great barge, under a canopy or awning of silk and gold, reclined or

lay the Queen herself, laughing and talking with those who stood about her. But no eyes had I for her Grace. After the first glance in the Queen's direction I gazed at her no more, but searched busily among her companions and attendants for a face a thousand times more beautiful and more queenly according to my ideas.

There she was—oh, how splendid in her Court apparel!—there was not one, I instantly concluded, among all that gay and courtly assemblage that could for one moment compare with beautiful proud Amy Romalyn. I watched her talk and laugh with some fair damsel standing by her, and I saw her flush scarlet suddenly, as her companion evidently attracted her attention to me and she caught sight of me.

But I had no opportunity to watch what secondary effect the sight might have had upon her, for at that moment I heard, first, shouts from the attendant barge following on the left in the Queen's wake, and then, sharply and clearly, her Grace's own voice:—

"That long unmannerly fool in the skiff will be run down in a moment".

I looked, and surely enough the attendant barge bore down almost straight upon me, the

procession having suddenly turned in-shore towards the house of some great personage which was, I suppose, the object of the present pilgrimage. The next instant two of the oars of the barge struck and upturned my own, and I found myself in the water.

Having no desire to be buffeted by the oars of the barge, I dived immediately, deep enough for safety, rising to the surface a minute later when the great clumsy craft had passed onward or shoreward. But I rose to learn that every man and woman upon the Queen's barge—and I doubt not upon the other two as well, though I did not look at them—was laughing loudly at my discomfiture. I could see that her Grace herself laughed immoderately and swayed in her couch, as she spoke and pointed. I could not hear what was said, however, but only the general hubbub of mirth. I was making for shore when I saw all this; but since all three barges were now heading for a point which would be very close to the spot at which I must land, I immediately altered my intention and struck out for the opposite bank. The tide was now flowing, and I knew that I had undertaken such an enterprise as might deter the strongest of swimmers, yet I think I would have gone to

certain death rather than creep ashore, be-draggled, besoaked, in the face of laughter and derision such as would greet me on this side of the water.

I distinctly heard the shrill voice of the Queen, following the silence which for an instant killed the laughter, when my change of intention was observed.

"What is the fellow doing? See to it he be not drowned—some one," I did not catch the name.

A man in a skiff followed presently, but I had a good start, and raced him so that he overtook me only as I touched bottom, having been swept by the tide, up river and across, until almost opposite the palace of Westminster.

CHAPTER IV.

THE man in the skiff hailed me as I waded out through the mud, angry and exhausted; he had hailed me more than once before, but I had taken no notice of him.

"Stop, in the Queen's name!" he said. "Are you mad? If you had your deserts you should be floating head down in the ooze; what a fool's trick was this to play, causing me to sweat after you from Blackfriars to Westminster. Stop, I tell you!"

I waited a moment to hear what he had to say.

"Get into your boat," he continued; "thou'rt to appear before the Queen, mercy knows why."

"What—I—appear before her Grace, mud-died and dripping? You speak like a fool, man."

"I speak what her Grace's own lips bade me to say; is not that enough for thee? Come, climb in; pity knows how I shall get my boat clean after thee!"

"It shall remain clean for me," said I. "If I swam the river in order to avoid becoming a laughing-stock, think you I shall submit to be carried back like a lamb to the slaughter? Make what excuses thou canst, I return not with thee." I began again to wade landwards through the shallows and mud.

"Stop, man alive; bethink you, this is no jesting matter; there are birchings and Lord knows what here both for thee and me! Dare not send me back empty-handed—what should I say; what excuse could I provide?"

"Any that pleases you; say I drowned before your eyes; they cannot see us from so far away; for the rest, I care not what excuse you make or whether you make none at all. I am wet and cold and will tarry no longer."

With which words I passed out of the river and up the bank and away, paying no further attention to his frantic and piteous expostulations and entreaties. It occurred to me presently as a mighty good jest that when the fellow should report my drowning, if he did so report it, Amy Romalyn would probably be present, and knowing—as only she knew—who the capsized one had been, would remain in the belief that she must mourn a kinsman deceased.

"When I play the ghost upon her presently," I thought, "it will be easy to discover whether she prefers me dead or living."

I was very angry with myself this day. I suppose no man likes to cut a foolish figure, least of all in the presence of the Queen and of one who, for him, outqueens every queen that ever wore crown.

"She will be the more angry with me now for coming to London to shame her with my awkwardness. Would I had stayed in Devonshire!" Thus I bewailed my ill-fortune as I strode, wet and draggled, homewards; and in the guard-room at my lord's that evening I was so contrary with my companions that twice I came to blows with fellows whose remarks did not please me. When matters came to fisticuffs with me I was in the habit of quickly bending them my way, for my long reach gave me advantage over my antagonists, and a single blow from my fist was generally as much as a man had stomach for.

A few days after this ill-omened enterprise upon the river I encountered Amy unexpectedly; for as I and my fellows exercised in the courtyard of our master's house, runners came to give warning that the Queen herself approached,

intending to pay a visit to my lord, as occasionally she was pleased to do.

We drew up at our best to receive her Grace, with whom came Amy and other ladies, when the very first thing my fair kinswoman must needs do was to fix startled eyes upon my face, to cry aloud, "Oh!" and to stagger backwards as though she would swoon in the arms of her nearest companion.

"Why, what ails the wench—has she seen a ghost?" cried the Queen, angry at the sudden delay. "What has frightened her?"

Fearing lest my blushes should reveal me as the culprit, I stepped forward. "May it please your Majesty's Grace," I blurted out, "I think it was I."

"What should have alarmed her in thee?" the Queen laughed, "the length of thy legs, or the joy-forsaken solemnity of thy countenance?"

"I am a drowned man, madam—that is, I am one that was thought to be drowned—she believed me to have been drowned, and sees me now alive."

The Queen laughed aloud.

"Thou art a merry rogue in spite of thy melancholy countenance," she said. "Stay, where have I seen thee?—what is thy name?"

"Herbert Shadwell. I stood in my skiff on Thursday last, and being intent upon what I saw I——"

"Mercy of Heaven, I remember! So you were that dreamer. Next time you will dream less and keep a better watch, which will save you a wet shirt. What made thee stand and stare like a stucky image till they came and ran thee down?"

"If I am to say truth," I faltered, "because my eyes were busy feasting upon a thing so beautiful that no other object could claim attention for the moment, she being present."

"Good!" said her Grace, flushing; "that is well said, though thy words are somewhat bold. Thou hast a promising courtier in thee. So the man lied, and thou wert not drowned. What made thee swim so far?"

"I could not face the laughter, I preferred the flood tide; the swimming was no hardship—I am used to it."

"Has the girl recovered?" the Queen now asked, looking round; and finding that Amy was restored to herself she gave the word to proceed. As her Grace was borne past me she bowed and smiled, her eye coasting over my figure the while. "That would be a hand-

some boy," I heard her say, "but for his long jawbone."

Amy glanced at me also for an instant, and I thought her expression betokened approval.

On returning through the courtyard half an hour later the Queen honoured me with a second smile. "We shall meet again, Mr. Longshanks," she said.

Amy did not look approvingly this time. On the contrary, she stared somewhat angrily at me, as though I had somehow offended. "It is useless to be moved by this," I told myself sighing; "for who shall explain the contradictory humours of a maiden? Not I, for one."

When my lord came forth presently he approached me. "Cousin Herbert Shadwell," he said, "it seems I found thee only to lose thee; thy last inch has gained thee what many will envy thee; the Queen has need of thy services."

It was true. Her Grace had thus highly honoured me, and at first acquaintance. Truly fortune favoured me well this day. Was it, I wondered, in truth the length of my limbs that had won her regard, or a certain phrase of compliment and flattery which she had taken to herself though intended for some one else?

Thus it happened that on the following day I found myself installed at the palace of the Queen. I was an officer of the guard, and would meet the ladies of the Court upon occasion. Destiny had played my cards exactly as I should have chosen, and I was well pleased.

Apparently Amy was not of my way of thinking, for at the first meeting I had with my cousin she made several remarks which went to show that she was little pleased with my successful hunting of her.

"I thanked Heaven you were upset with your boat on Thursday," she said, "for had I been obliged to confess kinship with so foolish a figure, I should have died of shame." And again: "I looked to see thee disclaim the flattery that her Grace took to herself. It would have tallied well with thy awkward manner to blurt out that thy words referred to another than herself. Hadst thou done so there would have been no employment at Court for thee. But destiny was against me, and thou must needs act out of thy usual awkward manner."

"Since we are now doomed to live so close to one another, cousin," I said, "it would be well to agree to dwell in peace and amity. I intend

to be thy knight at this Court, and if any one——"

"Oh, be assured, the Queen will allow you to be no one's knight but her own; no one that is a man must have eyes for any lady but herself; therefore I shall need no knight."

"Well, may-be it will comfort you from time to time to see a Devonshire face about the Court."

"What, even such a long one as thine? That will depend how often it wears the foolish goose-look that graces it at this moment."

"Such treatment of a faithful lover is enough to make any man's face lengthen," said I. "Will you never be kind, Amy?"

"When the leopard changes his spots," she laughed; "or the crows begin to speak English; or Master Herbert Shadwell becomes the possessor of a cheerful countenance. I could never be kind to a long jawbone."

CHAPTER V.

My service under her Grace was a short one, ending in a manner unforeseen and indeed incredible, had it been foreseen and foretold. The end came by reason of no disfavour on her Grace's part, indeed, for, if I may say so without vanity, the Queen regarded me throughout with special favour, smiling upon me when I found myself in her presence in a manner which was reserved, I was told, for those towards whom she cherished particular regard. I, in my foolishness, was wont to consider that I was indebted for this favour either to the length of my limbs, which had been the ostensible means by which the good fortune of my present position had been obtained for me, or to the good looks with which—in spite of Amy's dis-flattery—I believed myself to be at least more than indifferently endowed; but alas! there came a day when, finding Amy in her best mood—that is, one in which she was willing to converse rationally and with moderate friendli-

ness—I took heart of grace, and in exuberance of good spirits for this cause and that, actually spoke of my unmistakable favour in the eyes of the Queen. Upon hearing this, Amy first broke into uncontrollable laughter, and then, having thus reduced me to a condition in which vanity had no place, for it had fled then and there within the deepest sanctuary of my inner being, she proceeded to explain to me why and only why her Grace looked with favour upon me.

"The Queen," said Amy, "though not a young woman, and, Heaven be witness, no beauty, is nevertheless as vain as—as thou art. Do you remember a certain foolish reply you made to her Grace when she asked you why you stood dreaming upon one leg in your skiff while the barge ran you down? and how, fortunately for you, she accepted that foolish word as flattery intended for herself?—well, that was the beginning."

"Go on," said I, blushing and feeling—as ever in Amy's presence—more sheep than man; "go on, Amy, thou never hast a kind or courteous word for me, and never didst have."

"Well, and the rest is that goose-look thou wearest continually upon thy long face when I am present. It is the expression by which

you are pleased to consider that your passion is most effectively testified. Now, it is in her Majesty's nature to regard every indication of love that is betrayed in her presence as intended for herself, the unconscious or irrepressible tribute of manly hearts to the adorable qualities of mind and body which she believes to be hers in perpetuity."

"At any rate, she is kind and amiable," I said angrily. "And as for the mistake she has made, it is very pardonable; for who would suppose that any man could be so foolish as to sigh for a thing like thee, all unkindness and scorn and heartless mirth and laughter for those who honestly——"

"Tut-tut!" she interrupted me. "Mar not the beginning of thy speech, which had spirit, by ending it with whining and complaining and the drawing out of thy long jawbone. Be assured it is as I say with her Grace; build not upon her favour, which stands upon a false base. Nevertheless, if you wish to continue in her favour, such as it is, beware of foolishly opening her eyes; let her remain blind!"

Amy laughed and withdrew herself from my side; and I, furious because of the revelation she had made to me, and which I was wise

enough to recognise for truth, unpalatable though it were, I went among my companions of my own sex and quickly quarrelled with two, one after the other, upon I know not what pretext, coming to blows in each case, and receiving—to cool my heated blood—a buffet upon the nose which caused the blood to flow very freely. Doubtless at my then age, and in my then mood, I found all this comforting and perhaps satisfying.

But as for the sudden end of my service at the Court of her Grace, it came about very unexpectedly, and as the result of matters which no one could have foreseen as likely to lead to such things as presently befel.

There arrived news of an ambassador or envoy from the Court of Muscovy. Once before, some twenty years since, such an envoy had visited England, accompanying Sir Richard Chancellor, who had travelled to that distant country in search of trade, and had brought home with him, after disastrous seafaring which lasted four months, the said envoy from the Duke or King of Muscovy. At that time a great reception had been given to the strangers by the merchants and traders of London, who met them as they came southwards from Scot-

land, on whose rough shores inhospitable winds had driven their ships. From that day to this her Grace our Queen had been in constant communication with his Muscovish Dukeship, with whom she had effected an exclusive trade treaty. But the fellowship of these two widely distant monarchs did not end in treaties for the benefit of the merchants. The Russian Duke, or Cæsar, as it was stated he presumed to style himself, which title is spelt by the Muscovites Tsar, was named John, or as they write it, Ivan, and to judge by the communications which had passed, as was well known to all, between his Court and our own, he must have been a monarch of peculiar and unusual character. He had suggested to her Grace many quaint things, and among the rest came a veiled proposal of marriage (which had caused great delight both to her Grace and to those about her); and, further, proposals for a secret alliance, by which this Muscovish Cæsar might at any time, if in danger of his life from his own people, claim refuge and sanctuary within her Grace's dominions, in return for a similar privilege to be accorded our great Elizabeth in case we English should show sign of rising against her.

I know not which of these two suggestions provided for our good Queen the more exquisite delight.

To the second she had replied that, standing in no danger from her people, with whom she lived upon terms of mutual love and regard which nothing could ever mar, she dwelt in no need of sanctuary; but that if his Tsarish Grace should at any time find himself in danger, by all means let him take ship and seek sanctuary in this land, where respectful welcome should ever await him.

As for the first proposal—rather hinted at than openly expressed—her Grace returned an answer which bore unexpected fruit. I have sometimes thought that what was then written by the Queen was done thoughtlessly or in that spirit of elfish mischief—if one may use such a term in speaking of the great ones of the earth—which was sometimes employed by her Grace in communication with her Muscovish ally, in the hope of begetting thereby such future merri-ment as his unexpected replies and suggestions almost always occasioned; for Elizabeth replied, I know not whether by written word or spoken message, that though for herself she preferred to wear unchanged to the end the white robes

of maidenhood, yet there were at her Court certain ladies claiming kinship with the throne—and especially one whom she named and described—who she believed would consider favourably any matrimonial suggestion which it might please his Muscovish Cæsarship to condescend to put forward.

The name of the lady mentioned by her Grace—whether with her consent or without it I know not, though I fancy the matter was known beforehand to the person chiefly concerned—was Lady Mary Hastings, daughter of the Earl of Huntingdon, and cousin of the Queen.

Whether Elizabeth expected that anything would come of this message, who can tell? But now, suddenly, there arrived at the Court, unexpectedly and armed with definite and startling instructions, a new envoy from the Court of Ivan, the Cæsar of Muscovy.

He came, he said, to fetch the Lady Mary Hastings, or—as he called her—Lady Marie Hesteenks, whom his master had chosen as his bride.

This communication was made in full Court, and was translated by one Muirhead, an adventurous Scotsman, who had visited the Court

of Muscovy ten years before in search of military occupation and glory. This soldier, now a general of the Cæsar's army, and in much favour at that Court, had accompanied the envoy in order to act as interpreter, and also, as presently appeared, with other well-defined purposes—one of which was to offer private information to the desired bride of the Cæsar in certain matters connected with his Cæsarship of which she must perforce be at present in ignorance; but of this later.

"Well, cousin," said her Grace, after the reading of the communication and the translating by Muirhead of the same, "what sayest thou? This concerns thee more than myself."

"I am ready, madam," said Mary Hastings, most unexpectedly, and so readily that one could scarcely think the matter had been sprung upon her as a new and unconsidered suggestion. "I accept humbly, though unworthy, the great honour offered me by the condescension of his Grace of Muscovy; I am ready to obey the will of his Grace in this matter, if, indeed, your Grace accord me permission so to do."

"As to that," said Elizabeth, "I have nothing against it. Your ladyship will grace the throne of this northern Cæsar—a throne which stands,

I am told, no less high than my own. Let this be known to his honour, Mr. Interpreter."

When Lady Mary's answer and the speech of her Grace were made known to the envoy of the Muscovish Court, he knelt in his gorgeous velvets and sables at the feet of Mary Hastings, greeting her by the name of Tsaritsa, or wife of the Cæsar, afterwards saluting her Grace our Queen, though, as it seemed, with less intensity of reverence. This did not escape the notice of Elizabeth, who observed it with a frowning face.

Thus was Mary Hastings suddenly and unexpectedly betrothed, standing before the gaping Court as a being exalted, in a moment, high above all heads save one, and heiress to an immense and bewildering destiny of greatness which no one present could measure, by reason of the absolute ignorance of all as to every matter connected with the person of Cæsar himself, the nature of the people over whom he reigned, or the size and wealth of the country which was known vaguely in our England as "Muscovy".

There was but one in the audience chamber, if we count not the envoy himself and his

Muscovish suite, who knew anything whatever of these matters, and that was Muirhead.

What he knew he told not at once, but withheld until such time as he should deem auspicious for certain revelations reserved for the private ear of Lady Mary herself.

It was a week later, and the preparations for Mary's departure were in full swing, when the bomb fell whose bursting was destined to dissipate many dreams and to create new situations for some who had least expected to be disturbed where they had taken root.

CHAPTER VI.

FOR Lady Mary Hastings one fine morn burst into the presence of her Grace, upon whom were in attendance Amy Romalyn and others; her face was flushed, her eyes wet with tears, her hands a-tremble, her knees so shaken that she could scarce support herself, but must needs collapse into a chair, and that before the Queen herself, who loves not such liberties from her ladies. She frowned.

"Mercy of Heaven! what means this, cousin?" exclaimed her Grace. "Art thou already the wife of Cæsar? Shall I stand while you sit? Marry, I think I have yet a little period of precedence over your Highness!"

Mary Hastings jumped up. "Pardon, madam," she said, sobbing still, and holding both hands to her breast. "I am faint and frightened. Oh, madam, have mercy; suffer me not to go, a living sacrifice among barbarians in Muscovy land; were his throne the highest in Europe I would not share it with this Ivan; oh, tell me,

sweet Queen and cousin, that I may renounce the honour offered me."

"Well, by the Holy Truth," exclaimed Elizabeth, "what an odd fish is this! Yesterday thy nose was high in air by reason that thou shouldst be a Cæsar's wife and sit as high as I, and to-day—do I hear rightly?—thou wilt not, after all, be the wife of Cæsar?"

"Oh, madam, by your favour I cannot. I have heard that this day which has turned my heart to milk-pap. This Cæsar, this Ivan, says Muirhead, who knows him right well, though not actually a madman is savage mad when the fit is upon him; he has already married six wives, and of these——"

Elizabeth flushed; the picture, I doubt not, recalled that of another royal personage, husband of many wives, of whom her own mother had been one. She frowned, but said nothing. Mary Hastings continued:—

"Of these, says Muirhead, several have died somewhat mysteriously. 'If thou goest to that barbarous Court as the bride of the Cæsar,' says he, 'thou must take thy life in thy hands; as for happiness, bid farewell of it before thou leavest these shores; as for the women of Ivan's Court, the nearer they be to

the Cæsar, the further goes happiness from them."

"Oh," her Grace interrupted hotly, "this fool—what call you him?—Muirhead—has doubtless favoured thee with his fancy; he would have thee for himself; he is a cunning rogue, but——"

"Madam, he is married, and has left a live wife in Muscovy; he swears by all his gods that his tale is true, and that he came on purpose to warn. In Muscovy there is no civilisation, says he, no protection for the innocent, no appeal from barbarity, no comforts such as a lady of position is used to in our own favoured land; and, to crown all, this Cæsar, or Tsar, as Muirhead calls him, carries the power of life and death in his own very hands, riding above and beyond the law; he has many times stricken dead in an instant one of those who stand about his throne; even for his Queen there is no security."

"Marry, this is a fine tale!" laughed Elizabeth. "This Muirhead of thine, I perceive, is no mean artist in matters of the imagination; he has fooled thee, piling horrors and dangers upon the foundation of that eccentricity which we have long known and recognised as an attribute

of our brother the Cæsar. Do not believe him, child—he has fooled thee; or rather," she added, as a new idea occurred to her, "send him hither, and we shall see if he dare tell me the same tale."

Then Muirhead came—a sturdy, bold man, handsome withal, accustomed to courts and princes, and no whit abashed in the presence of the Queen.

"What is this child's tale of bogies wherewith thou hast frightened my kinswoman, sirrah?" asked the Queen haughtily, though her eye wandered with approval over Muirhead's square sturdy form and determined handsome countenance. "What is thy object in desiring to deter the chosen bride of Cæsar?"

"I have told her simple truth, Majesty," he replied, "in doing which I have been urged by no motive save that of justice. It is right that her ladyship should know as much as I, wholly disinterested as I am, can tell her of the bridegroom awaiting her in Muscovy. That land is very far away, may-be further than is realised by your Grace. The Tsar is one day an angel and the next a devil; no man can tell which way his mind will work from hour to hour. If he should fall in love at sight with her ladyship,

which to tell truth is likely enough, well and good, and her happiness is assured until——" Muirhead paused.

"Until——" repeated the Queen.

"Until the Tsar wearies of her, if under favour I may suggest so improbable a matter," he continued, with a courteous bow in Mary's direction. "His nature, madam, is cruel and unstable. I have undertaken a four months' journey, leaving wife and children, in order that Lady Mary Hastings might not come unwarned."

"She shall judge for herself," said the Queen. "How say'st thou, Mary? I shall not influence thee to go or remain—is it yea or nay? Consider well; take time; it is not good to decide in hot blood."

Mary Hastings threw herself at the feet of the Queen. "Madam, I have half feared it from the first," she said, sobbing, "now I feel that if I go I die; I am happy here, let me remain; fear has suddenly slain ambition; rather safety and thy regard and protection than the highest seat in Muscovy; rather happiness as plain Mary Hastings than death in life as the bride of a Cæsar."

"Good!" said the Queen, somewhat affected.

"Stay then, cousin. Heaven forbid I should drive thee forth. She shall not go, Muirhead; thou hast done well to warn us. The envoy of his Grace must somehow explain; nay, I will send an ambassador of my own, who shall make adequate excuses, or inadequate ones—what care I? We are not the Cæsar's subjects; let him rage if he will."

"He will rage, Majesty," said Muirhead, smiling grimly. "I doubt not that the Muscovish envoy will lose honour and may-be life. If I may be permitted to suggest it, send, I would say, the sturdiest of thy men for ambassador, for verily he will not lie upon a bed of roses."

Then an extraordinary and unforeseen thing happened.

Amy Romalyn suddenly stood forward and spoke:—

"May it please your Grace," she said, "if, as appears to me, this Northern Cæsar would be content so long as any kinswoman of thy own were sent him to wife, I too—though unworthy—am distantly related to the throne. It seems a pity and an injustice that the Muscovish envoy should lose his head for no fault of his own. If it should please your Majesty to

send me in place of Mary Hastings, I am ready to go."

A silence fell upon the Court—the silence of deep unutterable surprise and amazement. In the midst of it Amy began to speak once more.

"This good gentleman, Muirhead, has dared much in order to warn thy kinswoman; it might be that he too would suffer if the Cæsar's envoy were to return empty-handed. This were an ill return for his kindness and courage."

"For the love of Heaven stop—give us pause!" exclaimed her Grace, half laughing, half bewildered. "What mean you, chit? That you would sit in Mary's place as bride of the Cæsar?"

"Oh, I promise to marry no one I have not seen," said Amy, "but I am willing to visit the Tsar's Court, and if I see no cause to——"

"Dear saints of light, hearken to her! But it is not for thee to choose, fool!" exclaimed the Queen, now laughing loudly. "If once thou showest thy callow face at his Court, be sure it is his Grace that shall say thee yea or nay, not thou him."

"I mean, madam," said Amy, blushing a little, but no whit disconcerted, "that if I like not him, I shall take care his Grace has little reason

to like me. And if we like not one another, home come I with the envoy of thy Grace!"

"Nay, marry him, marry him!" cried Elizabeth, laughing heartily, and evidently pleased by this new development of matters. "What said I of thee but yesterday?—that only if thou marry the devil himself shalt thou wed one who may keep thee in order; to-day I alter the phrase thus—the devil or the Cæsar! What say'st thou to this, Muirhead?"

Muirhead gazed at Amy with amusement, though there was doubt and fear to be seen underlying the mirth. "Better this one than that," he said, indicating with his chin the still trembling Mary Hastings. "But either one at her own risk and peril."

And then and there it was arranged, as Amy had so impetuously suggested, that she should take Mary Hastings' place, as kinswoman to the Queen, and as such a candidate for the Cæsar's throne. There were many who blamed her Grace for so easily lending countenance to so mad a freak; but others remembered that once, a year or two back, this same King Ivan, being displeased with a letter sent to him by her Grace, had suddenly confiscated all the goods and ships of English merchants within his ports

of the White Sea and had revoked the monopoly accorded to England in matters of trade. This quarrel had been arranged, and now again the trade had increased and grown valuable; and it was well known that Elizabeth, being far-sighted and very wise, desired not to risk again so great a disaster for her merchants. Therefore it was that her Grace was glad of the opportunity thus offered by Amy's foolishness of avoiding, if possible, a further difficulty with his Muscovish Grace.

Here was an upheaval in my little world. When first told of Amy's intention I would not believe it, and cursed the teller for a foolish jester. But the thing became the talk of the Court, and I had no choice but to believe that for some reason of her own—Heaven knew what!—who but Heaven should understand the mind of Amy?—she had truly and indeed taken this amazing step and intended to go forward in the matter.

CHAPTER VII.

AMY's decision was, it may be believed, a withering blow to my happiness. What meant she by it? Was it an outbreak of the devilry that was for ever riot in her nature; a desire to see the world; an evidence that she wearied of her eventless life at the Court of Elizabeth?

That she desired or intended to marry this Muscovish king I never for a moment contemplated.

But at any rate I had been left out of the reckoning, and any lingering hope or half-belief that my existence was of moment to her I was obliged now to abandon. Truly I was nothing to her, and less than nothing.

I rallied her that very afternoon upon her decision.

"Any one might see that her Grace was in a quandary," she replied. "She had promised this Muscovy Cæsar a bride who should be her kinswoman, and Mary Hastings failed her."

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She was vexed, for she had promised and would not go back upon her word. Therefore I, who do not fear Cæsar or devil, will take Mary's place; are you answered?"

"Oh, there is more behind than that!" I said fiercely, for I was angry and knew not yet what I should do for very misery to think of losing her.

"Explain," she said, "for if you know this, you are wiser than I."

"Ambition, may-be," I said. "God knows what; how should I know your mind? Do you know it yourself?"

Amy laughed. "If a ship can carry me to Muscovy a ship can carry me back," she said, "that is what I think. First I will see whether it will suit me to be a Queen, or Cæsaress, or what not; if the prospect pleases me not, I shall return with the Queen's envoy."

"Muscovy is not England; here you may come and go as you will; there you may come, but as for the going that will be at the will of the Cæsar."

"Bah!" she said. "I knew you would counsel thus, Mr. Shadowfearer."

"I fear no shadows," I replied hotly, "and well you know it. I fear that which is real

danger, and that not for myself but for thee. If I went with thee it would be different."

"Oh, we shall need several attendants," she said mockingly; "the envoy will require body-servants, perhaps a cook—what are thy qualifications?"

I replied angrily:—

"To see that little blind fools of maids, who know nothing and therefore fear nothing, run not their heads into the noose; such maids as have too early left their mother's apron-strings, who know not their best friends, who——"

"Oh, for pity cease thy clacking," she laughed. "I command thee to stay behind—is that plain? I will not be shamed by thy long face that all Muscovy will laugh at, as all London does, and the goose-look thou now wearest. Stay at home, I say; I have no need of a nurse."

"Whether I go or stay depends not at all upon thy will, but on my own," I snapped out, and so disappeared from her presence.

But by this time I was fully determined that she should not go without me for protector. My trouble was to obtain permission of her Grace, which permission might or might not be accorded, as the Queen's whim of the moment ordained.

I put the matter to the test at the first available moment. This was no easy matter, for I had scarcely yet spoken a dozen words to the Queen, and though receiving constant evidence of her favour in looks and smiles, I was frightened and awed when it came to speaking, being bitterly conscious that I made a fool of myself and that Amy watched and blushed for me. Standing on guard at the door of an anteroom, I dared to step forward and address her Grace as she passed into the Cabinet. I proffered my request, stammering, speaking so thickly that her Grace understood not what I would say.

"Good Lord! what ails the man?" she said; "speak up, what of Amy Romalyn?"

"She is my cousin," I faltered; "I am concerned that she should visit Muscovy without special protection; her mother——"

"What, and thou wouldst go with her as nurse?" the Queen laughed, though she looked annoyed as well. "That shall be as Amy decides; speak, Amy, wilt thou have this long-legged nurse to wipe thy eyes if the Cæsar slap thee?"

"God forbid!" said Amy, red as a peony; "I need him not. If there be need to baa to the Cæsar, I can baa for myself."

"Thou art answered," laughed her Grace, "though Lord only knows what she means. At any rate, as it seems, thy service is not desired." The Queen passed on with her companions, Amy avoiding my look.

I blushed and retired, more hurt than I cared to show, though no whit less determined to go with Amy, in spite of her unkindness.

That day the man Muirhead, he who was an officer of the Muscovy Cæsar, entered as I stood with others in our guard-room. I was angry and quarrelsome, and my companions were grouped at a distance from me, having found my temper at present intractable.

Muirhead asked which was he who had volunteered to journey with the envoy's party to Muscovy. I heard him, and flushed with shame, knowing that having heard of my petition he would also have heard of the reply of the Queen thereto, and of Amy's comment. But having been pointed out as the man concerned, I roused myself; rather quarrel than bear out the jest of Amy by looking sheepish.

"I am the man," said I, stepping forward; "and though my petition failed, think not I am thereby done with; if I desire to go, neither Queen nor devil shall prevent me."

"Is it so?" said Muirhead gravely, looking me over. "This lady, who is rash enough to fill the place of Lady Mary Hastings, in spite of my warnings, every word of which is true, this rash maiden is a kinswoman of yours?"

"That is so, and may account for her rudeness," I said. "We are in the habit of speaking as we please to one another, having played together as children; but——"

"That is a small matter," he replied, interrupting. "What is of vital importance is that she should be adequately watched and protected. Are you intent upon accompanying us? I warn you that your position, unless you enjoy the Queen's commission, would be full of danger; even under the *ægis* of her Grace, God knows whether you would escape Ivan's *dubina*."

"What is that?" I asked, laughing, for somehow the way to my desired end seemed to clear with this man's words.

"The iron-tipped and pointed staff which the Tsar for ever holds in his hands, to strike or impale withal all such as offend him. Be sure I have been threatened more times than one, and once slightly hurt. Do you observe that I limp a little when walking naturally, though in the presence I am able to pull myself together

and drag my feet equally? I have lost one toe, my friend, for which I have to thank the *dubina* of my gracious master the Cæsar, as you all love to call him."

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "And what of his wife? Would she too be in danger of sudden attack?"

"My friend," said Muirhead, "in the presence of my great master, eye and tongue must be continually upon the watch, even of those whom he loves the best or who have served him longest and most faithfully."

"By all the devils of hell!" I cried, pacing in fury hither and thither, "she shall not go without me to the Court of this demoniac!"

"Good!" he said; "if thou art so determined, the matter shall be arranged. Her Grace has chosen her envoy; it is Sir Jerome Bowes. I will bid Sir Jerome insist that he must have secretary or attendant, or call it what he please, under commission from her Grace, and for the post your name shall be submitted—Shadwell, I am told."

"Herbert Shadwell," said I; "for God's sake say beforehand nothing of what you will do; she—there is one who will influence the Queen against my appointment; she is proud

and independent, and—and foolishly averse to the idea of being watched over and protected; yet I have promised her mother, who is——”

“I see, I see.” Muirhead seemed to repress a smile which trembled upon his lips. “You are fulfilling a family obligation. Her mother should appreciate well your conduct, for before Heaven, young sir, you are undertaking a perilous charge. You do not flinch—I ask for the last time?”

“Sir,” I said, in assumed anger, for in truth my heart beat joyfully, and withal gratefully, in my bosom, “I am seldom asked to repeat an assurance; what I have said may stand.”

“Nay, I meant no offence,” he said, shaking me by the hand; “be sure that I am both surprised and delighted to have found one prepared to act in the capacity you have chosen for yourself.”

“See you get me the appointment,” I laughed, “and forgiveness shall be easy!”

When Muirhead had departed and I ran over in my mind the words he had spoken, I rejoiced for more reasons than one. I should now accompany Amy, whether she professed to approve or no—that was of course the chief matter. Next, I laughed and rejoiced that Sir

Jerome Bowes should have been appointed envoy. Truly her Majesty carried a wise and discriminating head upon her shoulders, unless, indeed, the appointment was made more by way of punishment than in honour, in order to rid herself for a while, and it might be for ever, of one of the few persons within her realm who dared to speak to her Grace without fear, without subterfuge, and without personal compliment or flattery such as her soul loved.

For this Sir Jerome was a Border knight of indomitable spirit, of rough, grim humour, of impregnable honesty and blunt straightforwardness; ready of hand and of rapier, stout of heart to a fault; for the independence of bearing engendered by his undaunted honesty and courage lent to his manners an uncouthness which did not enhance the favour enjoyed by him in the presence of princes. More than once he had gravely offended her Grace by giving with crude simplicity and directness his opinion upon her own conduct. It was said that he had even spent a certain period within the Tower in consequence of one of these errors in good manners; but having, to her Grace's lasting honour, been quickly forgiven and restored, he promptly showed, by repeating the offence at

the first opportunity, that in this respect he was past praying for.

It occurred to me now that, finding him incorrigible as a courtier, but recognising his merits, and especially his fitness for the present enterprise, she had in her wisdom at a stroke rid herself of an uncomfortable, though respected, individuality about the Court, and made an appointment for which could scarcely have been found a more suitable agent.

Indeed, the same could have been said of Sir Jerome if it should have been found necessary to despatch an envoy to the infernal regions, in order to defy there Lucifer himself and all his angels; for assuredly the sturdy knight would have accepted the mission with as much readiness as he displayed in undertaking the present embassy, having no room in his heart for any fear whatever, whether of Cæsars or of devils.

CHAPTER VIII.

Two days later, and a week before the sailing date of our good ship, the *Bona Esperanza*, the Queen, with her company, paused a moment as she passed the door at which I stood upon guard. My heart sank and my foolish face flushed; but seeing in an instant that Amy was not among the attendants of her Grace, I quickly recovered some of the spirit which had escaped at the first shock of the Queen's approach.

"So," she said, frowning a little, "thou art not satisfied with the Queen's service, and would quit it within a month of appointment. Thou must needs be nurse to thy cousin, whether she will have thee or no."

"Madam," I faltered, "her mother has written that—"

"Oh, Lord!" her Grace laughed, "the chit has left her mother's nest; it is *I* that stand *in loco parentis*. Amy has assured me with tears that she needs no protector. Be sure you shall have many black looks."

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"Madam," I said boldly, for her words indicated that my wish would be granted, even though unwillingly, "the child does not always love the nurse who accompanies and protects her; but how should she know wisdom? Though she scream and kick, it is not the less necessary that she be watched, and saved from harm. When her anger is over, even a child may learn to be glad of a nurse."

"Well, well," laughed her Grace, "I would not be in thy place. Even I have suffered black looks because of thee. This child will assuredly both scream and kick when she is in the humour. If she becomes the Cæsar's wife, I know not whether she will not declare war upon me. Upon thee she has declared it already. Thou shalt need all thy longness of leg for flight once she is Ivan's wife and carries like him an oaken staff. Run for thy life, man, when this happens; take ship with Sir Jerome and return."

Her Grace laughed aloud; she was in a merry mood, and I thanked God for it.

"Then I may go, madam," I blurted, wreathing my foolish countenance, I suppose, in an expression of joy and relief.

"Mercy of Heaven, look at the man! One

might suppose he was in love with Cæsar's wife! Yes, go, fool; go, if you will."

Her Grace laughed, passed her eye once over my two yards and eight inches of Devonshire bone and muscle, frowned, and departed.

Thus it happened that when the *Bona Esperanza* cast her moorings and floated down river upon the ebb, I, Herbert Shadwell, found myself aboard in company with Sir Jerome Bowes, in the capacity of Secretary of Embassy; with Muirhead; with the depressed-looking Muscovish envoy, whose name, let me here say, was Pitzemsky or Peesemsky, and his suite; and, lastly, with Amy Romalyn and her woman; and for the first few days we saw but little of one another, being prostrate, most of us, with the sea-sickness.

But within a week, the nausea conquered, passengers began to assemble once more upon deck, and now indeed I had my share of black looks, as her Majesty had forewarned me—ay, and of black words also.

Verily it would seem that in accompanying Amy upon her foolish journey into the little-known and certainly barbarous realms of this Tiger of Muscovy, into whose power she was determined to submit herself, I had performed

towards her the basest and most unpardonable of actions. It was in vain that I appealed to Muirhead for confirmation when I declared that she might find she would need a protector more than she now believed, for poor Muirhead gained nothing by his protestations that I spoke truth and had acted, indeed, partly upon his advice; nothing, that is, save a share of those black looks and frowns which hitherto had been my own portion.

"Leave her alone awhile," he said laughing, altogether undismayed. "It may be that she conceals a feeling of grateful relief under this veneer of apparent displeasure. Who can understand the mysterious ways of a woman?"

So, for a while, I left her alone and devoted all the attention that I could spare to the learning of the Muscovish tongue, in which I proved a promising pupil—so at least Muirhead assured me, who, as my teacher, gave me praise. And behold! Amy herself, observing what I did, was not too proud to do likewise, though she would have none of Muirhead for teacher—by reason of his offence, I suppose, in having taken my side in the matter of my coming. It was Peesemsky, the Muscovish envoy, who taught Amy; the poor old gentleman having fallen,

doubtless, under her spell, like others, and being glad of the opportunity of this much quiet intercourse with her.

Muirhead occasionally spoke with me of the Court at which he lived, and said many times that he thanked Heaven he had frightened Mary Hastings from offering herself a sacrifice to the terrible autocrat who ruled Muscovy with a rod of iron.

"What of this one, then?" I asked him, indicating Amy, who had just passed us, walking the deck, and had frowned blackly at each of us as she went.

"I think Cæsar would meet his match," he laughed, "if only she were armed, like himself, with an iron-pointed staff—without it she will be at a disadvantage. True, she has her eyes!"

"And her tongue," I added.

"The tongue is a dangerous weapon in his presence," said Muirhead. "On the whole I consider that though tenfold better equipped to go through that which awaits her than ever Lady Mary could have been, yet the hour will come when she will wish to Heaven she had listened to the counsel of the wise—meaning my own—and remained in England."

"Oh, be sure she will not marry the Tsar if she desires otherwise!" I laughed. Muirhead laughed also, but looked grave again as he spoke.

"I am sure she will not marry the Tsar; that is not what I fear: the danger for her will begin when the Tsar discovers—as he may—that she is desirable, and she at the same time learns that she will have none of him."

"I shall prefer that to the other," said I, "for at that moment my duties will begin in earnest."

"At that moment," laughed Muirhead, "beware of Cæsar's spiked staff, for be assured it will not be idle. The best would be if the Tsar in his rage refused to look at the maiden and sent her back with Sir Jerome. Why does her Grace wish to marry her cousins to a savage?"

"Heaven help us all," said I, so gravely that Muirhead laughed, "if Amy is thus sent back rejected by the Cæsar!"

Many a storm assailed us during that long voyage through the Northern seas, and right well, on the whole, did the good ship *Bona Esperanza* carry us. Nevertheless, we were more than once in danger of being overwhelmed

by the great waters. Once—I remember the occasion as a red-letter day—when it seemed that death awaited us all very near at hand, Amy clung to me.

"I think we are about to perish, Herbert," she said, and I nodded my head, too full of many thoughts to find words.

"I have not always been kind or even just to thee," Amy said; "you will forgive me this, Herbert, now that we part."

"Whether we live or die," I said, "I have always loved thee, Amy, and thee only, and so it must be in this or any other world, though well I know my love has no return."

"Love and I are strangers," she said, smiling a little. "When I speak of love I discuss that which I do not at all understand. Perhaps I could have loved if there were a man so masterful that—well, enough that I do not hate thee so much as might seem from my unkindness; it is my nature to seem unkind, more especially perhaps when——"

"Say no more of that, Amy, I am content," I said. "I would to God that any exertion of mine could save thee now from death, but I am as helpless as thou among these great waters."

Afterwards, when that terrible storm was

over and we were once more in unexpected safety, the remembrance of her kindness evidently weighed heavily upon Amy, for she bade me think nothing of what she had said in the fear of imminent death.

"I desired to make a good end," she said, "and therefore I would have made thee happier by—by showing thee favour which I do not really feel."

"To pretend kindness when the heart is full of the opposite sentiment, and thus to deceive another with one's last breath, is not to make a good end!" I said laughing.

"That may or may not be," she replied; "but at any rate I shall remember thy rebuke, and good end or no end there shall be an end of kindness for thee, my friend, since it is not appreciated."

"Why should I appreciate what is confessedly not intended?" I said.

But Amy would not continue the argument, and flounced away to join Peesemsky and to continue her practice in the Muscovish tongue.

It was nearly four months from the time of our departure from the Thames that we cast anchor before Archangel, glad indeed to have reached our destination in safety.

Here we found awaiting us a courtly deputation of the Cæsar's subjects, assembled to meet and escort us to Moscow. All these good folk bent the knee in homage to Amy Romalyn, as to the bride of Cæsar, and it must be said that Amy bore herself right nobly in her new dignity. Truly no queen could have received their homage more magnificently. My heart sank, for, thought I, she will be irresistible in the eyes of this Muscovish Cæsar, let him be ever so indignant that Mary Hastings should have sent him the *nolo episcopari*.

CHAPTER IX.

THAT was a gorgeous, semi-barbaric, yet on the whole a pleasant procession through Muscovy, from Archangel to Moscow. My sledge was far behind that of Amy, who travelled in a splendid equipage in company of the two envoys, followed and preceded by other grandees in less gorgeous vehicles. I had for companion a young boyar named Nagoy, with whom I was destined to have much intercourse later. This was a proud young Muscovish noble, but not too proud to be very inquisitive. Our conversation was in his own language, for he had no English, and assuredly I think there was no question as to my position in England, in this embassy, Amy's parentage, virtues, accomplishments, religion, history, and so forth that was left unasked by him. As for the answers, it was easy for me to plead inability to express myself in his tongue when his curiosity ran in awkward channels. In the villages through which we passed, the peasants, when they did

not run away and hide themselves, as they sometimes did, the whole community disappearing, and leaving a deserted hamlet, prostrated themselves as we passed, touching the snow with their foreheads, and so remaining until we had gone by. Once a child ran under a sledge and was badly hurt, and the procession would have continued on its way unheeding, had not Amy heard the cry of the babe, and insisted—to the astonishment of her Muscovish companions—upon stopping to attend to its hurts, which she did with her own hands, giving the parents money for the child, and finally kissing it before she re-entered her carriage.

My companion—Nagoy—was scornful, and even shocked, when he saw all this.

"To stop a cavalcade of boyars and grandees," he said, "for one of these beasts—bah! it is shameful!"

"They are human creatures," I said, "like yourself."

Nagoy glared at me as though he would eat me.

"You are a guest of the Tsar," he said, "or you should not say that; they are beasts—a little better than the cattle and the pigs—not much."

"I claim no privilege as guest of the Tsar!"

I laughed; "and I repeat that these people are human creatures like yourself, or me, or the Tsar himself. Have they no souls?"

"Have foreigners?" he said. Whereat I laughed aloud, to his astonishment and anger. After this we spoke little for the rest of the journey.

I afterwards discovered that the temper of Nagoy had suffered much in consequence of having had to wait nearly two months for us at Archangel, with the rest of those sent to meet us there. This must have been a trying period for all, but perhaps especially for those who, like this young boyar, had other fish to fry at Moscow.

We reached that great city in due course, having occupied, I think, some fourteen days in travelling from Archangel, which is the nearest, and some say the only, seaport of the Muscovish sovereign, and yet so distant from the capital.

Messengers had been sent on in front of us, together with a letter to the Cæsar or Tsar, from his envoy Peesemsky, in which it was explained that her Grace the Queen of England, unable to send over the seas that kinswoman whom she had first named, had despatched in her place one

even more beautiful, and related, like Mary Hastings, to the throne. "One beautiful as the stars," the envoy wrote, "whom to see is to love."

The messenger rode quickly, and returned presently, bringing the reply to Peesemsky's letter.

"Let the Queen's embassy come before me immediately on arrival," the Tsar wrote, "but without this lady whom they have brought in place of the Lady Mary Hastings whom I invited. This one I have not invited. I will first see what this Sir Jerome Bowes has to say; afterwards I will receive her or not receive her."

Peesemsky looked worried when he read the letter of his master. "I fear his Grace is not pleased with the turn of affairs," he said. "I tremble for myself and also for thee, Sir Bowes; I know not how he will receive us."

"Marry—will he chastise us?" Sir Jerome laughed. "We are not children, my friend, to be afraid of a bogey."

"It is very likely that he will chastise me," said the Muscovish envoy. "Be not offended if he shout and curse at thee also."

"If that be so, I shall take the bull by the

horns!" said Sir Jerome; and, indeed, the sturdy ambassador did not lag behind his words, for he treated the Cæsar with scant respect, as shall presently be recorded.

The Muscovish sovereign was surrounded by many boyars and officials when we came into his presence, having left Amy with her woman in the terem, or female quarter, of the wooden palace in which we were received, there to prepare herself in case she should be summoned.

The King's son sat in a prominent place upon the right hand of his Grace, and upon his left a very prominent boyar, by name Boris Godunof (a noble destined, before many years should pass, to imperial dignity, to be achieved by means of acts which are not to be judged by such as I, especially since they have nothing to do with my own experiences in Muscovy and Amy's, which are all I have taken upon myself to record).

The Cæsar or Tsar himself sat upon a very remarkable seat or throne, the like of which was surely never seen upon this earth. The chair itself was fashioned of some wood, dark in colour, of which, however, nothing was to be seen, for embedded in it were rows of the blue stones known as turquoises, set so close together that

nothing else was visible. It is said that the back alone of this marvellous chair contains no fewer than two thousand of these gems, all of a large and valuable size.

As for the Tsar himself, he seemed a thin, gaunt person of smallish size; his face bloodless and passion-worn, but with blazing eyes that rarely rested, but fixed themselves as he spoke now upon one object now upon another; unless, indeed, something in the conversation attracted his special attention, when he would suddenly gaze very intently upon the speaker, and often in a manner which was most disconcerting to him who must meet the stare, if not actually terrifying.

In the Tsar's hand was the oaken staff or *dubina*, with its ugly iron point, of which we had already heard.

He received us with scarce an inclination of the head, glancing from one to another of us as we entered. His eyes rested a moment upon me, and I saw them intensify as they looked. Doubtless the number of my inches surprised him, for he made some remark to Godunof, who now haughtily looked me up and down.

Sir Jerome Bowes advanced, introduced by Peesemsky; he bent his knee and bowed low

enough, but, to my astonishment, I perceived that his hat was still upon his head. The Tsar observed the fact at the same moment, for he said aloud, in querulous tones, addressing the interpreter:—

"Bid him take his hat off".

"I represent the Queen of England," said Sir Jerome, "and her Grace uncovers for no prince upon this earth."

With the words he cocked his hat the more defiantly.

"Is your Queen not content with insulting me in her own person by breaking her promises to me," said the Tsar, furiously banging the floor with the point of his staff, "but must needs add to her offence by sending an envoy whose manners reek of the stable?"

Sir Jerome now boldly declared that if any man, prince or noble, should say word to impugn the honour of his mistress, he was prepared to defend her honour to the death. With these words he threw his gauntlet upon the floor of the chamber, near the Tsar's footstool.

Truly Sir Jerome fulfilled his threat of taking the bull by the horns, though in truth there were some who considered that he shamed his great mistress more than he honoured her.

Then followed an odd argument. For first the enraged Tsar declared that it was fortunate for Sir Jerome that his position as ambassador protected him, otherwise his head must have left his shoulders.

"Ambassador of the greatest sovereign upon earth, deny it who will!" cried Sir Jerome, ignoring the rest of the Tsar's speech.

To this the Cæsar replied that he himself, at any rate, took leave to consider that her Grace was not his equal.

"Oh, your Grace may be sure," cried Sir Jerome, "that my mistress is well able to make the greatest of princes—ay, even the Cæsar of Muscovy—sorrow of his malice."

"Ha!" Ivan laughed derisively, "and what of the French King, and the Spanish?"

"I say that the Queen, my mistress, is as great as any of them both!" replied Sir Jerome, undaunted.

"And what sayest thou of the Emperor of Germany?" was the next taunt.

To this Sir Jerome replied that the King, the Queen's late father, in his wars with France, had held the Emperor in his pay. "Such is the greatness of my mistress, which let no one dare deny!" he ended defiantly.

Then the Tsar became of a sudden furiously angry, and bade us withdraw, which command we promptly and gladly obeyed; and so ended our first audience of the Cæsar of Muscovy.

It was told us that the bluffness of Sir Jerome Bowes proved the cause of much ill-humour on the part of his Grace, which ill-humour being visited upon the courtiers around his person, in blows and curses and threatenings and every kind of ill-usage, Sir Jerome was not blessed by the Court for his sturdy championing of the Queen's honour.

Understanding the Muscovish tongue as I now did, I was able to learn more of the opinions of those around us than was Sir Jerome himself, of whom it was characteristic that he had declared he would not offend his tongue by causing it to struggle with the outlandish gibberish spoken by these barbarians. Consequently he had not a word of Russian, but trusted entirely to Muirhead, the interpreter.

CHAPTER X.

FOR many a day I never heard anything from Amy herself as to her first reception by the Tsar. Offended and mortified, but even more angered was she, that is certain, for never would she speak of that experience.

Nevertheless, there were others present from whose descriptions of the scene I may quote, Muirhead, as interpreter, being one. Muirhead has often declared that Amy has never looked finer, haughtier, more beautiful than when she walked proudly into the Tsar's presence. The anger of the Cæsar was still at its flood-height, for Sir Jerome had but a short while ended his audacious interview. The Prince Ivan still sat at the right of the jewelled chair of state, and Boris Godunof on the left, but there were few boyars present.

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The Tsar did not fix his eyes upon Amy when she entered; he had turned his shoulder towards the door by which she entered the

audience chamber, and so remained, as though he conversed with Godunof.

Nevertheless, having been informed that the lady from England had now entered, he shot over his shoulder a snarling remark, though without glancing in her direction. But Muirhead has often described how the young Tsarevitch or Cæsarevitch, as they call the heir to Cæsar's throne, fixed his eyes upon Amy the moment she entered the room, and stared at her throughout the audience as though he would eat her.

"If thou art the young Englishwoman sent hither without an invitation by the Queen of England," Ivan said, over his shoulder, "go back whence thou camest and tell the Queen—who is, I am told, thy kinswoman—that I had thought she was mistress in her own country, yet I find that not only the women-folk are permitted to do as they please, but even her ambassadors are not instructed in the reverence due to princes, but are allowed to speak with unbridled tongues. Let Sir Bowes escort thee whence thou camest. Does the Queen thy cousin think that I cannot find a bride in my own country that she must needs foist upon me the sweepings of her Court?"

Amy flushed, and replied angrily:—

"Tell his Grace that the Queen, my mistress, will thank God that neither Mary Hastings nor my unworthy self is a slave. We marry or not marry, as we please. Tell him also that if her Grace had known what manner of bridegroom was this she sent me to see, she would have spared me the journey."

Muirhead did not translate the speech literally. His version was this: that in England women marry whom they please, and it did not please Mary Hastings to go so far for a husband; her Grace, he said, knew not how long was the journey upon which she had sent this lady whom the Tsar now rejected.

"Ha! and says the lady nothing of her own feelings?" said the Tsar. "She has come a long way to be disappointed in her hopes. She had, doubtless, fixed her ambitions on becoming the bride of the Cæsar?"

Muirhead translated this to Amy, who understood it well enough without his interference. "Let me recommend you to make some conciliatory reply," he said, noting Amy's flashing eyes and fearing an angry rejoinder, for he had not lived in Amy's company four months without learning something of her haughty temperament.

But Amy would have none of his interference. Distrusting Muirhead, she now plunged for herself into the Muscovish language.

"*Nyet, nyet!*" ("No, no!") she said aloud and defiantly; "I did not know, or I would not have come."

"Ha! you did not know!" the Tsar still threw the words over his shoulder without turning his head. "How should you know that the Tsar would refuse to have for his wife, pushed down his throat by the English Queen, any woman she chose to send him? Now that you know this, you may return and tell her."

"*Nyet, nyet!*" said Amy again, "the Queen did not know, and I did not know, that the Tsar is like one of his own *medvedyi!*"

There was a stir in the audience-chamber; every boyar present gasped and looked at the Tsar. The young prince opened his mouth as wide as his eyes. Godunof concealed a smile as he glanced in the Tsar's face. Amy had called his Grace a bear! What would happen next?

Ivan turned quickly round upon his turquoise throne, and for the first time his eyes fell full upon this audacious English girl.

For a moment no one spoke as the Tsar sat

and glared at Amy. Muirhead expected to see the iron-pointed staff poised and thrown, and was prepared to seize the girl by the arms and drag her out of the line of fire. Then the good Scotsman did a daring thing.

"Majesty," he said, "she knows not the Russian language; in her own tongue the word is used differently; she would have said 'she knew not that the Tsar had been irritated'."

"So!" muttered Ivan, still gazing at the haughty girl, who gazed defiantly back. "She is young, and—as it appears—the Queen's servants know no better manners. Let her be taken back to the terem, Muirhead; when Bowes returns she will return with him."

Ivan made a gesture with his hand, and Muirhead, thanking God for the opportunity, swept Amy away as quickly as might be.

"What have you done?" he whispered in her ear. "You have called the Cæsar a bear." Amy replied angrily and aloud:—

"A bear he is—knows he no better manners than to receive a lady with his shoulder to her? Marry, I will call a bear a bear, let him be Tsar or plain man!"

"Did you mark that I made him turn and

face me in the end?" she continued. "Oh, the bear, the bear that he is!—may-be I shall yet tame that bear, Muirhead. Shall I put a ring in his nose and compel him to dance to my music; what think you?"

"I think not," said Muirhead. "You have not seen such a bear as this, Mistress Amy; be careful or he will eat you up!"

"Let him be careful, rather! I say I will tame him."

"Do as thou wilt, but call him not bear again, for by Heaven's mercy I know not how thou art alive, having so called him."

"Dost thou not? dost thou not? May-be I could tell thee. This bear is in some matters a man!" Amy laughed, though her eyes still blazed with fury. "I tell thee, Muirhead, I will tame the man in him and the bear in him."

"What, you are still determined," said Muirhead, "to aspire to be Cæsar's bride?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Amy; "I said I would tame the beast, not marry him!"

"If that be your intention," said Muirhead, "then may God help you!"

Telling me of this notable audience of Amy, Muirhead was much concerned for her. "She knows not what she does, nor what passions she

threatens to arouse for her sport; that way lies death, Shadwell. I tremble for the child."

"She is angry and means not all she says," I replied; "moreover, be sure, my friend, that as her guardian I shall see that she does not run her head into the bear's open mouth."

"If I judge rightly," said Muirhead, "she is one who will act as she pleases, be it wisely or foolishly."

I took upon myself to argue with Amy upon her foolishness, but came off very poorly.

"But for the wit of Muirhead you were lost," I told her, "for I hear that you grossly offended his Grace."

"Tell Muirhead that I love not babbling tongues," she snapped, "and that I will neither be interfered with by him nor will I have tales carried concerning my behaviour, which is neither his affair nor yours."

"I am told that never since this Tsar ascended the throne has any but one person so greatly dared as thou this day; it is madness to attempt to withstand this Ivan, who is called by his people Grosny—the Cruel or Terrible."

"If it was a woman that withstood him, I wager he married her," laughed Amy. "Can you not see, or is your understanding too dense,

that a palate cloyed with sweets would delight in a flavour of acid long withheld from it? Who was this woman; which of his six wives?"

"It was no woman, but a boyar, one Prince Krapatkin, the Prince of Daredevils he should be called if I am told truly, for he bearded the Cæsar until the Cæsar wearied of him and despatched him upon a campaign against the Siberian chiefs."

"Will he return presently?" asked Amy. "That is a man I could love."

"As for returning, be sure that Ivan sent him where death certainly awaits him. As for loving such a man, it is foolish to speak of loving where one has not seen."

"At least I may say," replied Amy, flashing an angry glance at me, "that of those men I have yet seen there is none I could ever love."

When it came to this, I thought the time had arrived to end the conversation, from which I seemed to be deriving little advantage.

CHAPTER XI.

AMY lost little time in bettering her acquaintance with the chief personages of the realm into which fortune or her own rashness had placed her to live. It is the custom in Muscovy that young women of the boyar rank be kept in strict seclusion. They are not to be seen excepting on rare occasions, and then heavily veiled; and for their accommodation each house is provided with its *terem*, or women's quarters, in which they are obliged to remain, amusing themselves as best they may with sewing, with playing upon the *balaleika*, and doubtless with listening to attractive tales of men and morals told for their entertainment by the older women of the house or palace: those who have already tasted of the delights of the wicked world that lies without the *terem* and the walled garden in which they are allowed to stroll.

And thus they live until the day comes for their betrothal, which is arranged for them by their parents, unless, indeed, the Tsar himself

that a palate cloyed with sweets would delight in a flavour of acid long withheld from it? Who was this woman; which of his six wives?"

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And thus they live until the day comes for their betrothal, which is arranged for them by their parents, unless, indeed, the Tsar himself

or his son should desire to marry, in which case every maiden of boyar rank has an equal chance of being chosen, for the Tsar or his son, as the case may be, will have the very best of his own choice, and all are assembled in each district, where an officer selects the more likely, weeding out the ugly, deformed, ill-favoured, and the weaklings, sending the best only to Moscow, where the Cæsar or his Cæsarevitch shall make his final choice.

Amy was, of course, quartered like other women in the terem of the palace, where, possibly, the duenna in charge of the women thought to retain her in accordance with the strict rules of the place. But Amy made short work of the old woman who attempted to prevent her going when and where she would—she and her woman Joan.

"*Ya Anglichanka*" ("I'm English"), she said. "Please make way: I will go out for exercise."

"*Nyet, nyet, nelzya!*" ("No, you can't!") said the duenna, placing her back to the door, while the roomful of women laughed—all but Amy. Amy stamped her foot and flashed her eyes at the old woman.

"*Ya poidoo gdyé hochoo!*" ("I intend to go

where I please!") she said, and so haughtily, I doubt not, that the duenna lost heart and allowed her to pass without further words. When Amy had passed out, the old lady made a gesture of spitting, and crossed herself, muttering a prayer.

"These foreigners are all mad!" she said. "Let her do as she will; it is not my business. You giggling fools are enough for me to manage!"

"You are right, Matushka!" said a laughing girl. "Hold the Anglichanka if you can; do you know that but yesterday she called the Tsar a bear? How should poor little you deal with a maiden who dares to call the Tsar a bear?"

"Peace, fool; this is nonsense you talk, and worse—it is sacrilege—to call the Cæsar a bear! Whence got you this foolish tale?"

"Young Gagarin told me so this morning," said the girl, off her guard.

"Oho! young Gagarin; and pray where did it please thee to meet young Gagarin, hussy?"

The young ladies of the terem knew very well how and where to meet the youthful boyars of the Court, if it pleased them to do so, while the duenna slept in her chair; but they were seldom so foolish as to convict them-

selves in this simple fashion. Olga Glinkof, the offender, suffered for her foolishness by stricter imprisonment for a week.

All this was told me by young Gagarin himself, who assured me further that he saw Olga whenever he liked.

"It is not difficult," he laughed.

But I must tell of Amy's adventure of the day I speak of. Amy went forth, dressed for walking out of doors, accompanied by Joan, wrapped, like her mistress, in furs. They walked awhile in the streets without, and passing the doors of a great church were about to step within in order to inspect what they could see of the wide, dark nave, when there encountered them on the threshold three men. These three men were the Cæsar himself, his son, and Boris Godunof, the favourite boyar of the day.

The Tsar glared in displeasure, without recognising.

"Two women, walking unveiled and by daylight; go back to your terems for shame, you graceless ones!" he said.

"It is the beautiful Anglichanka!" exclaimed the Cæsarevitch—the first words Amy had yet heard him speak.

"Peace, fool!" cried his father, turning upon him.

"Do you not know," he continued, frowning upon Amy, "that in this country it is a shame for women to be seen unveiled? Go back to your terem, girl."

"Tsar," said Amy, smiling and pushing back the coverings which half concealed her face, protecting it from the frost. "We English women are accustomed to go where we will; we need air and exercise; see how pale my cheek is from confinement within doors." All this Amy said in her broken Russian, which, Godunof told me, sounded pretty enough from her lips. "As for her cheeks," said he, "which she had denounced for their pallor, I swear to you they were like two apples, and her eyes had in them all the laughter of all the devils of mischief."

"Fie!" said the Tsar; "cover thy face." Nevertheless, his eyes dwelt upon Amy's with a softer expression this time. "Thou hast a witch's eyes," he said. "Tell me, art thou considered like this kinswoman of thine, Mary Hastings?"

"My enemies will tell thee yes, Tsar!" Amy laughed.

"It is unseemly to think too well of thyself," he rejoined. "When thou returnest to thy mistress thou shalt tell her the Cæsar will choose his own wife. Cherish no foolish hopes that I will have thee."

"When I return there will be much to tell the Queen," said Amy. "As for hopes—there is much that must come before hoping begins."

"So, and what is that?" asked the Cæsar, always gazing in her face.

"First, to be sure that the thing to be hoped for is a thing desirable——"

"Stay," said Ivan, frowning, "thy Russian is faulty; I do not understand."

Amy tried to express her meaning in other words. The Tsar's frown did not relax.

"Is it not a thing desirable to be the wife of the Cæsar?" he said.

"If the Cæsar were kind; not if——"

"Go back to thy terem, witch," said Ivan, interrupting her; "fear not, the Cæsar desires no witch-wife. When Sir Bowes departs, depart thou with him."

Amy curtsied and smiled in the Tsar's face. Then her eyes sought those of the staring prince who stood beside his father, having gazed at the girl throughout the conversation, and she smiled

even more sweetly. The Cæsarevitch gave a gasp. The Tsar frowned blackly, and his fingers moved convulsively upon the stem of the staff which he held.

"Go to thy terem!" he said angrily; "I will not see thee again before Bowes departs."

The Tsar walked moodily for a few moments without speaking. Then he suddenly turned his head.

"They enter the church," he said, and made as though he too would return; but, after making a few paces, he changed his mind and continued in the former direction.

"She has the eyes of a witch, Boris," he said; "eyes which might enchain the soul of a man against his will. Let us pray that the devil and his enchantments come not nigh the soul of any just person in this land. See thou to it, son," he continued, turning to the Cæsarevitch, "that this witch-woman enchant thee not."

"She is more beautiful than our Russians!" said young Ivan.

"It is the beauty of the devil. See thou look elsewhere when she is present, supposing that you should meet again; but with Sir Bowes she shall depart."

"That is difficult," said the Cæsarevitch,

"to look elsewhere when there is such a face to gaze upon; it is a feast to the eyes, my father."

"Is that so?" cried Ivan furiously; "then thou shalt fast, my friend, and not feast; such food is poison to the soul. Go quickly to church, fool, and pray that the devil enter not into thee in the smiles of a witch-woman."

"I go, my father," said the Cæsarevitch, and turning from the Tsar's side he made as though he would return to the church in which they had lately worshipped, the same which Amy had just entered. The Tsar smote him smartly across the shoulders with the wooden end of his staff.

"Darest thou so far? Wouldst thou make a jest of thy father's counsel?" he said savagely. "Verily, the devil is already at work upon thy soul!"

Then the Cæsarevitch turned and came humbly homewards, neither he nor his father speaking any further words until the palace was reached.

When Godunof told me all this, he laughed much. "I know not how this will end," he said, "for it is true that she has the eyes of a witch. Nevertheless, if she were maiden of mine, or one in whom I had interest as friend or guardian,

by the mercy of Heaven I should not rest until Sir Bowes were well away, and she with him."

"What is the particular danger?" I asked, knowing well the while that the air reeked of danger on every side.

"There are two great dangers," he laughed: "one is the Tsar bear, and the other is the Tsarevitch cub. Other dangers, of which perhaps you are not aware, being as yet ignorant of the inner things of this Court, are the Nagoyes."

CHAPTER XII.

THIS saying of Boris Godunof's puzzled me not a little. It was easy, indeed, to understand that he foresaw danger for Amy from Tsar Ivan, and through him from his son also; for who that lived about the Court of Cæsar could say that he stood not in peril of his life or freedom? For the Cæsar's actions the Cæsar was accountable to no one; upon his love for man or for woman, that it would last for this period or for that, or outlive the passion of one moment of fury, no person could rely.

"Your Anglichanka does not know this," said Godunof, when I questioned him further. "She trusts too much to the magic of her beauty; with Ivan this is not safe—tell her so. It will suffice her for three offences, or for ten, may-be, but at the eleventh he will suddenly turn upon her; let her be warned of this."

"But what of the Nagoy's?" I demanded of him. "Danger from the Tsar is a standing dish

for all who are about his person—that is an obvious matter; but what of the Nagoy's?"

Godunof frowned and shook his head. "Find out for thyself, my friend," he said. "Soon enough you will understand. Meanwhile, if you bear me any gratitude for the warning I have given you, or at least bear me no ill, forget who gave thee either this hint or that, while remembering the substance."

"I do not understand," I said. "Your head is higher than the Nagoy's: why should you fear for them?"

"You would know too much," he replied. "I am sorry I spoke to you; I see that my words will yet be a danger to me."

"Stay, you may trust me—I will be discreet," I protested. "Tell me now about these Nagoy's. I do not understand why they are to be feared. I have not discovered that either of the brothers has as yet honoured my friend with the slightest attention, and if they had she is well able to——"

Godunof laughed.

"You hunt the hare instead of the wolf," he said. "Nay, I will say no more; forget me as the sayer, I pray you."

When I knew Boris Godunof better, I learned

that, being a schemer of the very first rank, his character was the most subtle imaginable. No snake would creep towards its object more cautiously than he. Doubtless even in this warning to myself he had in view some object of importance to his own ends, though no thought of this occurred to me at the time.

I was, however, anxious to understand why Amy must beware of these Nagoy, and with the object of satisfying my curiosity I went to Muirhead.

"So!" said he, "the hare runs that way, then, again? I thought—but stop, who told thee? One that knew?"

"I am not to name my informant—I have promised—if there is anything to know, I should say that he may well know it."

"This is a hare that ran before Lady Mary Hastings," he laughed; "the hunt was long since thrown up—from the day, indeed, that this new scent crossed the trail. Yes, I understand the warning. If the Tsar——"

"Muirhead, for the love of Heaven, remember that I know nothing of thy hares and huntings; my thoughts cannot keep pace with your own."

"Pardon!" he laughed, "I will explain. Before it occurred to the Cæsar in his wisdom to

send over sea for a bride unseen, he went near to deciding upon a lady nearer home, one Maria Nagoy, the sister of that young Nagoy who travelled with thee; this Maria was suddenly thrown over in order that the Cæsar might marry a foreign wife and thereby ally himself with our good Queen Bess. Then followed his disappointment, and with it has come the revival of the hopes of Maria Nagoy; she——"

"I understand!" I cried, the light breaking upon me; "why, Muirhead, this may be good news, not bad! May the Lord send this Maria Nagoy all success and the fulfilment of her ambition, and that quickly!"

Muirhead smiled. "Nevertheless," he said, "the warning is useful. We deal, my friend—if I may call myself your friend and hers—with one whose temperament is as little to be counted upon as the Cæsar's itself. She has, as we are both well aware, vowed to tame the Tsar; that means, mark you, that she will use every feminine art to subdue his heart and to bring him to her feet. Whether she succeed or fail—and God grant she fails!—the jealousy of the Nagoy will meanwhile remain a standing danger."

"But Amy would never ally herself to this

man, even though he prayed at her feet for her love."

"That may or may not be true; how do we know what she would do? Her present idea is to tame the bear and then escape—a matter of frightful danger, mark you—but when a Cæsar pleads who shall say beforehand that a maiden will do this or do that? It is a difficult matter to refuse an offered crown; how many women in this world's history have so done?"

"Let Amy be the very first, but she would refuse it. When was there such another king that offered it? As soon she would mate with a tiger or any other great beast. If there were serious danger of any kind from these Nagoyes, they might be told this?"

"The tale would go straight to the Tsar, be very sure of it! And then where would our poor Amy Romalyn be? No, my friend, by every means let her go back to England with Sir Jerome, and the sooner the better. The Nagoyes are a danger, though one that may be guarded against. It is the Cæsar himself who is a danger against which no man may guard—the pestilence that walketh at noonday and at night-time. Let her go, man, let her go."

"It is easy to say, 'Let her go,' Muirhead;

how should I or any other man persuade her if she will not?"

"Compel her," said Muirhead. Whereupon we both laughed, though for my part there was not much mirth in my laughter.

Meanwhile that happened which was of the worst possible augury for the success of any arguments that I might address to Amy in order to induce her to return to England.

The Tsar Ivan sent for Amy to the audience-chamber.

This time his Grace did not avert his eyes, but gazed in the girl's face as she entered, and continued to look upon her with the fixed, intent look which was a characteristic of the man when interested. His son the Cæsarevitch, dutiful child of his father, stared at Amy with equal fixity.

"I have sent for thee, Amy Romalyn," said the Tsar, "in order to tell thee that Sir Bowes will leave Moscow in two weeks from this day."

Amy flushed and inclined her head, but said nothing.

"I have reflected," the Cæsar continued, "that this is short notice for thee—I would not seem inhospitable—it may be to thy desire to see more of my country?"

Amy, with a reverence, declared that she could well prepare herself for departure in a fortnight.

"It is not my will," said Ivan shortly, an angry look passing like a flash across his face.

"There is no reason that I should remain," said Amy; "I will depart with Sir Jerome."

"I have reflected," the Tsar continued, "that to return thee to the Queen, thy cousin, would be shameful to thee."

Amy's eyes flashed; the speech angered her.

"It may be," she said, "that her Grace will not be surprised to see me back. I made the Queen no promise to remain in Muscovy."

"How couldst thou know beforehand what should be my mind in this matter? Or was the Queen well aware that she acted unfriendly towards me? If so, her offence is the greater."

"I will tell thee truly, Tsar," said Amy.

"Her Grace, my mistress, is in no wise to blame for my coming, nor yet for the not coming of my cousin, Mary Hastings. I came because I would come. 'I will go in the place of Mary,' I said, 'if she is afraid to venture, though I will not promise to stay in the lion's den.'"

"Does the Lion of Muscovy roar so loud that he is heard at the Queen's Court?" said Ivan.

"Mary Hastings was a fool: the lion can turn lamb when he will."

Amy said nothing.

"Then thou camest of thy own will; thou art a rash maiden. Well, stay, since thou hast dared so much to come—the lion will not eat thee, though he will mate where he pleases. I will not send thee away; Sir Bowes shall tell his mistress that I have allowed thee to remain awhile."

"Nay, I will depart, Tsar," said Amy.

"There are boyars at the Court whose blood ran, like my own, in the veins of Rurik; I will give thee as good a husband as thou shalt find in England, as rich and almost royal."

Amy made a quick grimace. "As to husbands, I desire none of them," she said; "may I not follow the example of your Grace, and mate where I please?"

"Thou art a saucy minx," said Ivan, actually laughing. "Come, I desire thee to stay awhile in my country. Wouldst thou refuse the Tsar's hospitality?"

I, standing in a group of men, next to Bowes, blurted out at this, speaking in English:—

"Amy, for God's sake beware how you answer!" The Tsar half turned his head

impatiently towards me, but kept his eyes fixed upon Amy.

Amy took no notice of my warning.

"If the Tsar himself desires it, that is a different matter," she replied smiling.

"I do desire it," he replied. Then he turned upon us with an angry face. "Who dared to interrupt when the Tsar spoke?" he asked, and I stepped forward.

"So, it was thou, long fellow! Thy manners are ill—little better than thy master's" (meaning Sir Jerome); "and what, pray, didst thou say?"

"I warned her beware how she replied," I said.

"Which signified what?"

"That is as the lady understood it," I faltered; and Amy interrupted:—

"He is right, Tsar; he bade me be careful how I replied, for we are both servants of the Queen, our mistress, whose will in this matter must of course be considered. I had so considered it, unknown to him, beforehand, and therefore I replied to your Grace as I did."

"Good!" said Ivan; "nevertheless, Sir Bowes, see that this long fellow departs with thee when thou returnest; I like not his bearing

any more than thy own." Sir Jerome bowed but said nothing; since his first adventure with the Tsar he had held little converse with him, being perhaps somewhat ashamed of his rudeness. The Tsar rose and withdrew, casting a final glance over his shoulder at Amy. Seeing that his son did likewise, he said something angrily to him as they disappeared.

Amy now departed, and I followed as quickly as might be, intending to overtake her in the corridor, if possible, for I must speak with her. As I shouldered my way through the group of persons at the door, I caught sight of young Nagoy, my travelling companion from Archangel. His face was convulsed with rage, and his eyes, as they followed Amy's departing figure, were ablaze with a very ugly light.

CHAPTER XIII.

I SUCCEEDED in overtaking Amy, and entreated her to sit a moment with me upon one of the benches that lined the corridor on each side. Somewhat to my surprise she consented, and sat down.

"You see, Herbert, I have made up my mind to stay here," she said. Any had not her usual haughty bearing, as it seemed to me. She had worn it in the Tsar's presence, indeed; but now her majesty had left her, and she appeared to me to have become suddenly weary, languid, out of spirits.

"I have come to entreat you to unmake it, Amy," I said earnestly. "You are in the midst of many and great dangers that you know not; for God's dear sake take the opportunity of escape He now offers thee and return to England with Sir Jerome."

"What, creep back into the Queen's Court, tail down, like a beaten dog? No, Herbert, I cannot and will not." Amy did not speak

angrily: it was as though the audience had been so fatiguing to her that she had not spirit to be angry. "As to dangers, believe me, they are not so great as you suppose. Tell her Grace, when you return, that when I have tamed this bear to my liking, then I will take ship and sail home, but not until then. I have been browbeaten and insulted, tell the Queen, and would assert the honour of an English maiden who, though unworthy, is kinswoman to herself."

"I shall tell the Queen nothing," said I; "confide thy messages to Sir Jerome."

"And wherefore so uncourteous?" she asked, surprised.

"I will carry no messages because I shall not accompany Sir Jerome," I laughed. "You must think me but a poor fool, Amy; did I not come to protect thee, and for no other reason?"

I had expected Amy to turn upon me after her usual manner, with a ready flood of scathing words, but she paused, and then said gently:—

"Tell me, Herbert, thou good foolish soul, why dost thou harass thyself because of me?"

"Is it necessary to answer?" I laughed. "I think you know the answer, Amy; nevertheless, I will tell you—it is because I love to serve you."

"Nay," she replied; "why shouldst thou so waste thy time, Herbert? Moreover, the Tsar has decreed that thou must return with Bowes."

"Let him decree; I stay. As for time, I have time enough, and sit alone in the lion's den thou shalt not. Come, Amy, let us face this matter, once for all; you would not mate with this devil-man, even though he should desire it of you; that, surely, is an undoubtable matter?"

"It is not undoubtable. The Cæsar or the Cæsar's son—I make no promise that I will not marry the one or the other. I shall see what the lion is like when he is tamed; he still roars, though he purrs between. If I were to marry one of these, must thou still remain at hand to watch me?"

"When you have married him, we shall see what I shall do or not do," I replied, "but sooner I would carry thee hence by force."

"Nay, if it came to force," Amy laughed, "I think the Cæsar would be found stronger than Herbert Shadwell!"

"Well, may-be it will not come to force," said I, "for I think you are wiser, Amy, than you would have me think!"

For answer Amy took from her pocket some-

thing which she held out to me with a laugh. "See," she said, "what has been given to me this day."

I took the object from her hand: it was a beautiful clasp of gold filigree set in precious stones.

"Guess, if you can, who gave it?" she bade me.

"That is easy," I replied, heavy enough at heart. "Remember, Amy, that when a present is given, an equivalent or some adequate return is expected."

"As for expecting, it is no crime to disappoint foolish expectations; but who gave it, come, say?"

"The Tsar, of course; who else?"

"Wrong! Stay, I will tell you the tale of this jewel. There is a youth called Gagarin, a young boyar, who has a friend in the terem—that is the women's portion of this palace in which I am quartered. This friend of Gagarin's bade me, only this morning, come down quickly into the yard or garden in which she and her companions are allowed to take their exercise. 'There is one wishes to speak with thee,' she said; 'one who has come with a message.'"

"A message from whom?" asked I.

"Nay," she replied, "that I cannot tell you; you must come."

"There in the corner of the yard stood Gagarin, who gave me this. 'From one who admires,' he said laughing; 'admires, but dares not, as yet, speak his admiration—so I was told to say.' And when I could not guess the giver, Gagarin added: 'One who admires much, but fears more.' 'Does he fear me?' I asked laughing; 'am I so terrible?' 'Not thee. I may not name him. One who should speak with a loud voice, but is awed by a louder; who sits very high, but not the highest—ah! am I understood?' 'A cub that dares not even whine when his father roars?' I said. 'I accept the jewel, Gagarin. Tell him that one day I shall hope to hear his voice; he is a good starer meanwhile.' 'May-be he dares more than you know even in staring,' said Gagarin. 'I was to add that one day, when it is possible, he will come here with me in hopes of knowing thee better.'"

Amy ended her tale and looked in my face and laughed.

"That would be an evil day," I said, "when he came to see thee secretly. You are running your head into the lion's mouth, Amy."

"The world was not made for cowards," she replied, and began to move away towards her terem.

"Nor yet for the rash," I said, following. "I know that I speak to deaf ears, but there are many dangers in the air, Amy, and whether you will or no you shall be told of them, for it seems to me that wherever there is foolishness or rashness to be done, here are you ready to do it."

"Well spoken," she replied; "I like you better, Herbert, when you speak your very mind without fear or shyness. I love danger, and I have my game to play. At present I do not fear either the big lion or the little one."

"That is because you have not yet seen their teeth; but, as I understand, you would offer the great beast meat and then withdraw it; if you do so you shall see his teeth, be sure, and perhaps feel them also."

"I do not yet know whether he shall have the meat; but I promise you he shall be hungry," she laughed.

"Nay, be warned, for a hungry lion is a very dangerous beast, Amy!"

"I have heard sermon enough, Mr. Preacher Shadwell," she said impatiently; "have you

nothing wiser to say than all this? I weary of warning counsel; I have had nothing else from you since we left London."

"Nevertheless, I will say one thing more—there is a family of boyars by name Nagoy; you are to beware of them."

"Maria Nagoy, who would be Cæsaritsa if she could, and her three brothers who desire the same thing. Oh, Herbert, if thou must croak, croak to a new tune!"

"Who warned you of them?" I asked, astonished.

"Dear cousin, every woman in the terem. What else have they to do, poor things, but talk? Maria Nagoy is there, a guest of the Tsar's; she has been at the palace just as long as I—that is, since the hour when the Tsar learned how ill Mary Hastings had treated him. No sooner did he learn this, than she was sent for; the Cæsar must be consoled for his disappointment."

"Has he seen her?" I asked.

"Not once. Therefore she glares at me who have seen him several times, and therefore, again, the teremful of dull women laugh. I am a godsend to them. 'She will tear thy eyes from thee,' they tell me daily, 'and her brothers are

fierce men and powerful boyars—beware of them also.'"

My heart sank, for Amy laughed as she told this tale of peril unrealised, or but half realised and wholly despised. It was as though a little child sported upon the very edge of a cliff that crumbled under her feet.

"Mercy of Heaven, Amy!" I said aghast. "Do all these dangers seem so light to you? Give pause, girl, while yet you may. Sir Jerome departs in a fortnight; be wise and——"

"Herbert," she said, turning quickly upon me, but speaking calmly and without anger, "no more of Sir Jerome, I pray you, and of sneaking out of this country. Here is the beginning of my life. I rejoice in all this; do you not understand? Do you think I could bear another year—nay, another month—of the Queen's Court? I shall stay. If thou stay also, I shall have a friend upon whom I can rely."

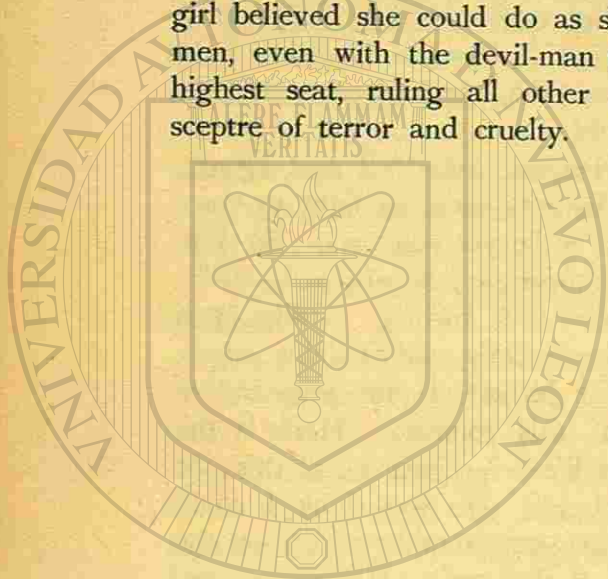
"Oh, be sure that I shall remain."

"Well, that is kind, and I am grateful. More than gratitude I am not offering thee—let that be understood."

Amy laid her hand upon my arm for a moment, smiled up in my face with her great eyes softening and shining like stars, and

hastened down the corridor. At the end she turned and smiled again, waving her hand.

It was no wonder, I told myself, that this girl believed she could do as she would with men, even with the devil-man that sat in the highest seat, ruling all other men with the sceptre of terror and cruelty.



CHAPTER XIV.

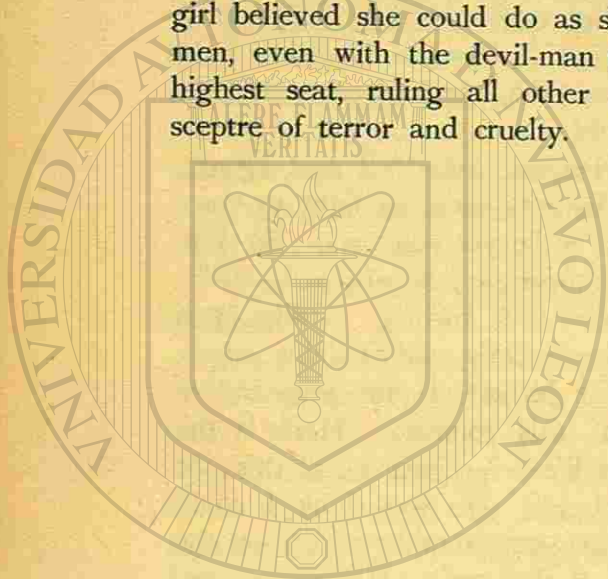
As afterwards appeared, his Grace the Tsar at some time or other beheld me in close conversation with Amy Romalyn. Likely enough this happened when we sat and talked in the wide corridor leading from the audience-chamber, but whether there or elsewhere matters little; his keen eyes were wont to see everywhere and everything, and it displeased him that we should be so intimate. For this or other reasons my presence in Moscow angered him, and Sir Jerome was reminded that when he should depart for England his secretary, the "long man," must go also, as his Grace had already hinted.

"Yet you declare that you are determined to stay," said Sir Jerome. "What, then, is to be done?"

"I must fall sick," I told him. "I have already thought of this; I shall take to my bed one day or two days before your depart-

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"I must fall sick," I told him. "I have already thought of this; I shall take to my bed one day or two days before your depart-

ure, and you shall explain that I am sick to death and cannot be moved."

"I doubt if his Grace will believe me," Sir Jerome replied; "but by all means you shall try. Be not surprised if he comes in person to chase thee from thy bed with his *dubina*."

But though the Cæsar raged and abused me for lying sick abed when Bowes informed him of my plight, he did not come in person to verify the statement; he sent instead his German doctor, one Eberfeldt.

Now, this might have been an awkward matter, but that Eberfeldt proved himself the kindest of men, and resourceful.

I told the good physician the whole truth. The Queen had sent me to see to Amy Romalyn's welfare, yet the Cæsar desired me away. Go I could not, leaving Amy behind, yet the Tsar would not have me remain; therefore it was necessary to invent means—and this was my simple means, to lie abed and pretend sickness.

"Simple indeed," said Eberfeldt, "for you, but what of me? I am an honest man; I cannot give a lying report."

"Then make me ill," I rejoined laughing;

"that should not be difficult for a physician of your attainments."

Eberfeldt reflected. "Good!" he said presently; "I will do as you say. It will not be pleasant, I warn you, for to satisfy the Tsar I must make you ill indeed: he is not one to be put aside with pretence."

"Do not make me sick unto death," I stipulated; "that would be playing the game too well!"

Eberfeldt promised that I should withstand the malady which he would graft upon me. He arrived presently with phials, and bade me swallow a draught which was certainly nauseous enough. "Now farewell," he said, "and do not curse me afterwards for ills which, though severe, are necessary; you will feel like to die, but in a week you shall be convalescent, that I promise you."

During the next few days, if the Cæsar had deigned to come to my bedside in order to make sure that his physician reported truly of my condition, he must have felt well satisfied that Eberfeldt had made no mistake; for truly I felt that death and I were very near neighbours, and one or two of his boyars, sent by the Tsar to see and report, were assured by

my woeful state that I was like to die any moment, and so reported to their master. I did not, indeed, put blame upon the physician in their presence, retaining good sense enough to remember that that might be foolish; but when by myself, I think, there exists not an ill name which I did not apply to poor Eberfeldt, or a black wish or heartfelt curse which I did not lay to his account, for the over-application of his detestable nostrums. I was assured that he had made a mistake in the quality and quantity of the drugs I had been compelled to swallow, and that, after all, I should die; for, indeed, I think a man can be in no wretcheder plight than was I.

Yet in a week I was, as Eberfeldt had promised, convalescent, and within fourteen days I had almost forgotten my pains and sickness.

During this period Sir Jerome Bowes and his servants had departed, and so Amy and I—of all the good British folk who had arrived in Sir Jerome's suite—were left alone in the den of the tiger and at the mercy of his claws and teeth.

Amy had even sent her woman home, for poor Joan had been very miserable in the terem, and pined for England and, may-be, for friends or a friend she had left behind her.

And realising that while I lay mending of my sickness Amy had none to watch over her, I made shift to recover as quickly as Nature allowed. Muirhead visited me constantly in my quarters, and his presence in Moscow and about the Court was a great comfort to me, for he was able to report to me of Amy's welfare. He told me also—and the communication gave me much delight—that Amy had accosted him in the street, seeming anxious to know of my condition. Then Muirhead informed her of the scheme I had devised for remaining in the country, and of how I had got myself thoroughly drenched with poisonous drugs in order to appear sick enough to please his Grace the Cæsar. This narrative softened Amy, it appeared, for she said that it was as noble in a man to sacrifice his life or well-being for the sake of another, whether he did so by offering his body to the sword of an enemy or to the drugs of the apothecary. "Tell him," she said, "that I understand how generously he has acted on my behalf, though his sacrifice was not needed, for I foresee no danger that I could not withstand by myself. Tell him also that the Tsar shall pay for his sickness."

"What meant she by that?" I asked Muir-

head, who coughed and said that, as for him, he had never yet learned to understand Amy, neither her sayings nor her doings, nor the eccentric whims that ordered her actions.

"But this much is clear," he added, "that she is assured of her own power to tame the untameable Tiger of Muscovy, and that this is a mental attitude which is dangerous for her."

It was a matter of moment to me that here was I stranded in this foreign and barbarous land, my occupation gone with Sir Jerome, my resources almost exhausted, the Tsar—from whom alone position and emolument could be hoped for—my ill-wisher. I consulted Muirhead. At present I lay in the quarters engaged for Sir Jerome and his suite, but even my lodging would presently be denied me as soon as I should be well enough to be moved therefrom.

"That is a small matter," said Muirhead, "for you have but to exchange this house for my own, where, be sure, you shall be made exceedingly welcome."

And to Muirhead's house I removed myself very gladly and gratefully, though this hospitable arrangement of his did not solve the difficulty which was my principal trouble at this time, and which was this:—

As secretary to Sir Jerome I had enjoyed the privilege of being about the palace in which Amy lived, and where she might, if necessary, be seen at any time. Now I had no more right to enter the palace than any idler in the streets. I no longer enjoyed any status in the country—indeed, I knew myself to be an undesired guest.

"There, I fear, I cannot at present help you," said Muirhead, "though if opportunity offers be sure I shall not fail to speak a word for you. Do not be sanguine, however, for if the Tsar dislikes you, as you suppose, he will not be anxious to employ you."

"In England I had to thank my inches for a good position at Court," said I ruefully. "Is there no hope that my two yards and a hand's length may cover the multitude of my sins, even in the eyes of the Cæsar?"

Muirhead laughed, and said that he knew not. "I do not even know what these sins are," he declared. "Much would depend upon that."

"The prime sin is that I am Amy's nurse," I replied, "and that he has discovered the fact for himself."

Meanwhile I saw nothing of Amy, though I haunted the great square within the Kremlin,

where I knew she might occasionally be met taking her daily walk. Yet, though I saw her not, I was presently to learn that she had not forgotten me, nor yet my needs of the present, but that at her first interview with his Grace after Sir Jerome's departure she had remembered my necessity, and had actually approached the Tsar with a request for some appointment which would give me occupation and living.

"What have I to do with him?" said Ivan, frowning. "Why should I give preferment to one whose presence here is undesired? Let him follow his master, Sir Bowes."

"Tsar, there are no ships," said Amy; "for awhile, at any rate, he must remain in thy country, and since he remains he must live."

"What is he to thee?" growled the Tsar, and waved Amy away, she having, I learned, actually asked an audience of him on my behalf.

A few days later his Grace sent for Amy. In the chamber wherein the Tsar now received her stood, among the rest, a man unknown to Amy—pale, haggard, bound about the head and shoulders and his lower extremities with blood-stained rags, as though he had returned that very hour from battle.

"See here, Mistress Amy," cried the Tsar,

who laughed nervously; "behold this man; he is wounded, as you see, in many places; his occupation, which he now resigns, has been a dangerous one, though honourable, for he must be a brave man who will undertake it. This one has escaped with his life, as you see; but there have been some that went before him who have been less fortunate—how many have died within ten years, Ostorof?"

"Thirteen," gasped the fellow, who could scarcely speak for pain of his wounds and for weakness.

"So, hear'st thou that? It has occurred to me, Mistress Amy, that this Englishman, this long fellow thy friend, lacking employment, might be glad of Ostorof's honourable position."

Amy, wondering much, yet determined to show neither surprise nor any other emotion, replied simply that if the position were one requiring courage and manhood, it should suit her friend well.

"What, you are not afraid for him?" laughed the Tsar, flushing. "Well, shall we consider the appointment made and accepted?"

"I cannot speak for my friend," said Amy; "if the Tsar has an offer to make, let it be made to whom it concerns, which is not I."

"Ha! may-be he will not be so brave on his own account as thou art for him!" said Ivan. "Ho, there! let this long Englishman be summoned at once; we shall see what he will say. Stay thou also," he added, addressing Amy over his shoulder. The Tsar was not in good humour, even though he had laughed aloud more than once.

CHAPTER XV.

THUS it happened that as I walked in the square of the Kremlin, before the wooden palace of the Cæsar, hoping, as I hoped daily, to catch a sight of Amy, there came hastening up to me two boyars: one was that young Alexis Nagoy who had been my travelling companion, the other a youth by name Kamarof.

"Why," cried the latter, "this is good luck indeed; one would suppose that you had heard beforehand that your presence would be desired at this hour."

"Or that you had come in hope of seeing some one who would walk here," added Nagoy, with a laugh. Nagoy had seen me once walking in Amy's company, and had then come to I know not what conclusions, for at the time he had frowned darkly.

I turned my back upon Nagoy and addressed myself to Kamarof.

"If any one desires to see me, here I am," I said.

"Ha! may-be he will not be so brave on his own account as thou art for him!" said Ivan. "Ho, there! let this long Englishman be summoned at once; we shall see what he will say. Stay thou also," he added, addressing Amy over his shoulder. The Tsar was not in good humour, even though he had laughed aloud more than once.

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I turned my back upon Nagoy and addressed myself to Kamarof.

"If any one desires to see me, here I am," I said.

"No less a personage than the Tsar, my friend," Kamarof replied. "He has sent us to find you, and we supposed——"

"The Tsar?" repeated I, flushing. "What should the Tsar want with me?"

"By the Saints, that you shall soon know," he laughed. "He desires that of thee, which, if it were I, he might desire long before the thing desired were consented to."

"Will he bid me pack and go?" I asked weakly; "there are no ships!"

"Holy Apostles—no; on the contrary, he will have thee stay; he will give thee preferment, an appointment——"

"For life," added Nagoy; "be sure thou shalt never want another."

All this filled my heart with apprehension, which, however, I took care to keep well within bounds. I would not betray my feelings to this Nagoy, whom by this time I greatly disliked, and he me.

"Good!" I said; "if it is an appointment, that is of all things the most desired by me. I am ready to go before his Grace."

"If you are wise," said Kamarof, as we walked towards the palace, "do not accept the offer which his Highness will now make to you."

"Kamarof, you are a fool!" Nagoy interrupted; but I took no notice.

"Is it honourable?" I asked.

"Oh, it is honourable enough; this is a recognised Court appointment, and is always given to men of the boyar rank."

"When they have offended," added Nagoy.

But by this time we were in the anteroom to the audience-chamber. Kamarof opened the door, and we entered.

There sat the Cæsar, looking flushed; he was in the midst of a conversation with Amy, who looked no less excited than he—she who was rarely moved to the display of any kind of emotion. She smiled kindly at me.

"Ha! here is the very man," cried Ivan, fastening his keen cruel eyes upon me. "Well, thou long one, give grateful thanks to this lady, thy cousin: she has entreated of me to offer thee employment, and she has prevailed."

I glanced at Amy, who shook her head. The Tsar's quick eyes saw it.

"Nay, it is true. Why shakest thou thy head, minx?" he frowned. "It is true; and lo! the first appointment that has fallen vacant I offer to thee."

"Tsar, I am grateful," I said, for his Grace paused.

"Good! Go, then, and take up thy duties without delay, for thy predecessor in this office is indisposed and already in the hands of the physician."

I saw several boyars look at one another and exchange smiles.

"Go, some one, and introduce their new Tsar to his subjects," said Ivan; and Nagoy and others laughed aloud. I began to grow angry.

"At least, let me be first informed, Tsar, of the nature of my duties," I said, "that I may judge whether I should accept the position or refuse it."

"Oh, oh! refuse the Tsar's preferment!" said Ivan. "Tell him, Amy Romalyn, what is this appointment that thou hast secured for thy friend."

"Herbert," said Amy, speaking rapidly and in English, "thou hast, it appears, gravely offended the Tsar by remaining in the country. Do not accept this appointment; it is not serious preferment, but is given because of its danger to those of whom the Tsar would rid himself."

"Danger!" I interrupted. "You should

know, Amy, that I would love it none the less for that?"

"This is danger of an unfamiliar kind. The Tsar keeps a pack of great dogs whose blood, it is said, is mixed with the blood of wolves. He would appoint thee custodian of these savage brutes."

"What! He would make me a dog-groom to clean the kennels for him and feed his hounds?" I cried angrily, and turned towards the Tsar in order to reject with I know not what scornful words his offer; but Amy spoke.

"As for that," she said, "the appointment is honourable. There are servants, accustomed to the dogs, to whom is entrusted the menial work of the kennels. The appointment of custodian is nominally a sinecure, but actually, as I am told, dangerous; for, though the custodian has no duties among the hounds, yet he is expected by the Tsar to become, if he can, familiar with the brutes, and to enter the kennels, and go among them when his Grace honours them with his presence. It is a point of honour to go among the hounds from the first without fear, and many have fallen victims. All this was told me by the women of the terem before it was known the Tsar would give thee this post."

I have seen the hounds, which are as savage as their super-master himself."

"I care nothing for such dangers," I laughed, light-hearted enough to have heard the worst and to find it but a trifling matter after all. "I never found a dog yet that was not quickly my friend."

"These are different, being half wolves. Think well before——"

"Come!" cried the Tsar at this point. "Is the long man so dense? Understands he not yet? Must there be so much talking? We weary of waiting."

"Wait no longer, Tsar," I said. "I accept thy preferment, and with gratitude."

"Ha!" he cried, sending a quick glance at Amy; "is it so? That is well; thy eloquence shall be remembered, Amy Romalyn."

"I counselled him to refuse," said Amy.

"What!—and he rejected thy counsel? Remember it, then, to his disadvantage, minx. Go, now, to thy terem; and thou, Shad—what is thy strange English name?—Shadwell, go among thy new subjects. In two weeks, if they have not yet eaten thy long body, I shall come and see what manner of Tsar I have placed over his people."

This pack of hounds, in whose veins, men said, a strain of wolf blood had been originally introduced, and was still occasionally renewed—had already existed for half a hundred years. Heaven alone knows why they were kept by the Kings of Muscovy, unless, indeed, it were for no better end than this—to tear in pieces those who should so greatly offend the Cæsar that no other fate would be dreadful enough for them; and, further, in order that on minor offenders, such as I, might be bestowed their custody, to tame, if I could, or to be fallen upon and torn to shreds for the Tsar's sport whenever it should please him to judge of my custodianship. I had heard rumours of their existence, and had been told, though I scarcely believed it even of this tiger-like creature now occupying the throne of the Cæsars, that Ivan had many times caused to be thrown among these savage beasts the wretched victims of some momentary paroxysm of that devilish rage which oftentimes overmastered his reasonable will and self-control. The first of his victims had been no less a personage than his own Regent, a great boyar, by name Shuisky. This man, if any, deserved his fate, for by every means and in every way he had ill-treated the child-Tsar, encouraging, for his

own ends, the evil in him, quenching every spark of good that showed, until his pupil, being ripe, at the age of fourteen, for any and every devilry that occurred to him, suddenly turned upon this Beelzebub of Regents, asserted his kingly authority, and bade his attendants seize the wretched Shuisky and cast him among the wolf-dogs, by whom he was, in an instant, torn in pieces and devoured, the first of many victims.

So then these great beasts were the subjects over whom I was now to reign, as his Grace mockingly expressed it, their Tsar!

"Well," thought I, "thanks be to God, I shall be a better Cæsar to these brutes than he is to his human subjects, and may-be—if God wills—I shall in time gain the hearts of my people, which Ivan will assuredly never do with his."

The Tsar had bidden Nagoy and Kamarof escort me to the place where the wolf-dogs had their kennels, and under their guidance I made my first visit to my charges. Their habitation was not far from the palace, and within the Kremlin walls.

"You were not wise to accept," said Kamarof gravely, as we walked towards the kennels; "you know not what you have undertaken."

"That shall be seen," I laughed.

"Go not among them during these two weeks," said Nagoy, "or the Tsar will be disappointed of a favourite pastime."

"Which is?" I asked.

"To see his new custodian rescued, alive or dead, by Kiril and Stepan, from the jaws of the beasts. It is an entertaining spectacle—I have seen it many times."

"Come then in a fortnight and you shall see a new thing," said I, angry and inclined to be foolishly boastful.

"I will give thee a rouble for every yard of cloth thou bringest intact out of the kennel that day," he laughed.

"That is a pedlar's wager," I said. "Let it be this, rather—that for every wound I receive thou shalt give me one buffet, and if I receive none, I shall give thee three buffets, or as many as thou canst stand up to."

"That is a fool's wager," he said, flushing; "I will not brawl."

"Then, when the time comes, we will invent some better way, Nagoy," I said, gazing full in his eyes, so that he winced. "But we will be even one way or another."

CHAPTER XVI.

I soon made friends with Kiril and Stepan, the two men who alone—as Kamarof had told me—were able to manage my “subjects”. I gave them money “on my appointment,” which at once secured me their favour. We discoursed of hounds in general, I telling them tales—mostly invented for the occasion—of many savage beasts I had known in my own country.

“It is easy to gain the friendship of a dog,” said I, “if one knows.” The two men looked at one another and grinned.

“These are different,” one said. “They are savage, like the devil.”

“But with you they are friendly?”

“That also is different.”

“What you have done, may not another do?” I asked. “It is kindness that wins a dog, that and firmness.”

Kiril looked at me with approval; he took off his greasy cap and rubbed his towzled yellow hair reflectively.

“If you know that, you know much,” he said. “Most of our Dog-Tsars, as the custodians are called by him—by the big one—go like fools with whips and sticks. Well, what would you have?” Kiril spat thoughtfully and glanced at Stepan, who spat also.

“So long as we are among them with you, you shall be safe,” he said; “but when the Tsar comes he will expect you to enter without us, and then——” Kiril paused.

“That will be in a fortnight,” I said, laughing; “perhaps I shall be ready.”

Kiril gazed at me with approval. “God knows!” he said; “bigness and strength will not save a man!”

Then I made a compact with these good fellows, who promised to assist me in my scheme for asserting the fullest authority over my new people.

The hounds were at this hour shut up within the wooden shed which was their sleeping and living place. Without it was an arena, surrounded by a wooden palisade six feet in height, the floor of the arena being of sand, well trodden down. Into this space access from the shed was gained by a large gate, at the foot of which was a small aperture protected by a sliding door,

by which one hound at a time might be admitted into the arena—an arrangement which suited me admirably, for I would make friends with the animals, one by one.

Nevertheless, I went in among them all on the first day at feeding-time, Kiril being with me, and though most of the savage creatures growled and gathered themselves as though to spring upon me, a word from Kiril served to stave off their evil intentions, one of them even consenting to make friends with me, when it was well fed, and submitting, with but a few growls of protest, to be patted and stroked by my hand. By the end of the interview that great hound followed me about the arena, no more savage than any lap-dog.

On the second day I would have furthered my acquaintance with my subjects by receiving them in audience, one by one, standing in the arena and admitting them into my presence; but Kiril, who had taken a fancy to me, perhaps because I seemed to understand his beloved charges better than most who came, this good Kiril begged me to be less venturesome for at least this one more day. Therefore audience was granted, one by one, to my subjects in the presence of the Court—that is, Kiril. Each

dog went to him to be caressed, and most of them refused to approach me at all or to pay me any greater courtesy than to growl savagely when I would be friendly, though in the end a few consented to receive my advances. As for my friend of yesterday, he knew me at once, and showed no signs of hostility. Then on the third day came my first real reception. Would my subjects receive me as befitted loyal and peaceful lieges, or tolerate my Tsarship (for tolerate it they should) with black looks and even with open acts of war?

The faithful and much-fearing Kiril would have stood at the palisade, in order that the sight of his face looking over might deter such of the brutes as would show resistance to my friendly advances—resistance of fang and of claw!

But I bade the good fellow stand down and go away to his own home, for in this matter I would have no interference, and away he went, kind soul, with tears in his eyes and prayers upon his lips, crossing himself and addressing himself to his patron saint on my behalf.

Then began my reception, and, truly, never did new-elected Tsar pass through so troublous an hour among his courtiers as did I with my

new subjects. It was feeding-time, and I had divided the dogs' rations into twelve portions, for my lieges numbered a round dozen, and these portions I kept separated in a large bag or wallet which Kiril lent to me. I would admit them one by one, and, when they would be moderately friendly, feed them, but not until each had deserved his food should he taste of it.

Of those twelve great beasts about half the pack were now inclined to friendliness, a pair or so would neither be conciliated nor yet show actual hostility, and four declared open war. These flew at me, each one in his turn, as soon as he had been admitted into my presence, but did little harm, since I was ready and had gripped him as quickly as he me, catching him by the throat and half strangling him, in order that from the first he might know that he had met his master.

When I had loosed him, after this treatment, I would pat the brute and speak kindly, when, if he showed signs of submission and friendliness, he had his share of food; if not, he starved.

Two hounds returned to the attack on recovering breath rather than realise that I would be master, and these two, having received a

second dose of the physic which should presently save them, starved for the nonce. This treatment excited the other hounds, so that for a moment or two I was in peril of a general attack, in which case I must have vaulted, if I could, over the palisade and escaped that way; but by calling to them with authority, in the tone and words of Kiril and Stepan, I contrived to quell the excitement.

Afterwards, having finished with each dog, and having established friendly relations with a good half, I came safely forth, to the joy of good Kiril, who, I think, had not expected to see me alive.

"It is wonderful, and if I saw not that you understand the nature of dogs, I should say you were a sorcerer. Ah!—you bleed here—stay, there also—you have not escaped scatheless!"

I had in all four bites: two upon my hands, one in the left forearm, and the last, if I remember, upon the shoulder, but none of them was serious; and after Kiril had treated them with hot pitch, with which he liberally anointed each bleeding wound, I had little further trouble with them.

On the following day I pursued the same tactics, and with increased success. A few of

the dogs now began to show signs of affection for me; one that had begun with open war, having rushed upon me yesterday and received punishment for his sins, was to-day the most loyal of all my subjects and actually attacked a comrade, one of the two incorrigibles who flew at me.

Let me give this honourable liege his name—it was *Lyef*, or Lion—and a lion he proved himself, in my cause, not once but many times.

By the end of the fortnight I was a popular Tsar among my new subjects, all of whom save one or two were now as devoted to me as they had ever been to Kiril and Stepan, their attendants. Of the two incorrigibles, one, *Boorya*, never failed to growl savagely at my approach, though he no longer dared show more active enmity; but snarl and show his teeth he would and did until the end of my Tsarship. The other, *Grom*, or Thunder, when I came near, would raise his upper lip, display his great fangs, and creep away from me until he had placed all his companions between himself and my feared but unloved presence.

During all these two weeks I saw nothing of Amy, for there was no longer admittance for me to the palace. Nevertheless, I heard

from Muirhead, with whom I lodged in the Sloboda, the foreign quarter, of all that passed at Court, where many things had happened which filled me with apprehension, so that I went with a heavy heart, excepting when among my own four-footed subjects, whose society was by this time dear to me and most interesting.

For Muirhead reported that Amy was constantly in the Tsar's society; that the Tsar (and his son no less, as all might see) was much attracted by her beauty and spirit, while Amy herself—whether flattered, or content that it should be so, or in pure mischievous satisfaction to have tamed so well her tiger—showed no aversion to the society of the Cæsar and of his heir, but played at chess with Ivan, and sat at his board, and in every way showed, or at least appeared to desire to show, that she neither feared nor disliked the society of the Terrible One.

"Heaven knows how it will end; will she marry the Tsar, think you?" asked Muirhead.

And I replied heartily, "God forbid! That is not the fear, Muirhead; the fear is that he will certainly desire it of her and she will certainly refuse. She has vowed to tame the Tiger of Muscovy, and tame him she will or

has already done so—ay, and she will have all to see that she has tamed him. Then when the time comes to escape from his fangs, she will find that, after all, he is not yet fully tamed, no, nor ever shall be!”

“If that be so, it is a terrible danger!” said Muirhead. “Yet one may see clearly it is useless to warn her that she treads on perilous ground, for peril is to her soul as food to the starving man; she thrives upon and rejoices in it.”

“It is not so much love of danger as love of mischief,” said I, “and the obstinacy of a beautiful woman, who will show all men that she must have her way.”

“You, too, are in danger,” said Muirhead; “for if, as you tell me, you have mastered those savage beasts, do you suppose that the Tsar will be pleased or that he will forgive you?”

“Marry,” said I, “if he places me among the brutes, surely he will not blame me for making them my friends, if I can.”

“Oh, be sure he will blame you!” said Muirhead, laughing. “Why, think you, are you there but to be torn to pieces? He would be rid of you!”

“Why?” I asked, though I knew the Tsar’s reason well enough, for he understood—none better—that in me Amy had a protector who would stay at nothing in her cause.

Muirhead shrugged his shoulders. “That is Cæsar’s business,” he said. “Only see to thyself that he has not his will of thee.”

Punctual to a day, the Tsar sent word, after fourteen days, that he would come and see for himself how I did with my Tsarship.

CHAPTER XVII.

EARLY in the morning of the day on which the Tsar would visit my little kingdom Kiril came to me with a warning.

"Be not surprised if the dogs are fiercer than usual to-day," he said.

"Why should they be so?" I asked him.

"By the Tsar's desire," he laughed. "It is his custom to arrange that it should so be on exhibition days; that is, when he comes to see how quickly a new custodian can be eaten up or rescued by Stepan and me."

"You speak foolishly, Kiril. How can even a Tsar determine that the dogs should be more savage at one time than another? Were they not fed yesterday?"

"Fed? Ay, and well fed, in the evening only, and then with such food as breeds excitement and devilry and hot blood in their veins!"

"What mean you?" I said. "Explain!"

"Last night a criminal was brought and thrown to them," replied Kiril, laughing; "a

thief or murderer, I know not which. To-day they are savage, as his Grace would have it. There is no fear for thee, for they love thee—all but Boorya and Grom. But it is as well to know beforehand."

Each week seemed to add something to my abhorrence for this Tiger of Muscovy, to my hatred of the man, and to my fears for Amy, who might at any hour fall into the hands of this monster of cruelty and wickedness!

I afterwards learned that Ivan the Tsar kept a record of all the men and women he had murdered, a list containing several thousand names, and that he actually prayed regularly in his churches for the souls of his victims.

Would my name be presently added to this grim catalogue—and Amy's?

Well, I would go down to history as a regicide rather than permit this tyrant to number Amy among his victims. What matter? Honest people yet unborn would honour my name as of a benefactor who had freed the earth of one who disgraced the name of humanity, Cæsar though he should call himself!

The hour arrived when the Tsar would visit the kennels. He came, with a small Court, Amy being among the number, and seats were

placed upon a raised platform without the palisade, so that the animals might be seen in safety and comfort.

"Hail, Tsar of the Dogs!" his Grace called to me, as I stood in the arena, awaiting his pleasure, with the two attendants, Kiril and Stepan. "May it please thee to let us see thy subjects—the entire community together? Let us see how they acclaim their sovereign?" The Tsar laughed and clapped his hands; he was in good spirits this day.

With the help of the attendants I threw open the great door of the kennel, behind which barked and howled the pack, excited and noisy. Out came the twelve great creatures, rushing, snarling, biting at one another, yelping as they fled forth. I had not yet seen them in so great a state of excitement. Several turned and growled at me. Boorya actually sprang upon me and closed his fangs upon my arm before I could clutch his throat. I strangled and threw him down, where he lay and gasped.

"Do not kill the dogs!" cried the Tsar angrily; "I will not have them killed."

"He is not dead, Tsar," I said. "See, he rises and slinks away!"

"Let those fellows depart," cried Ivan, indi-

cating Kiril and Stepan; "let us see what thy subjects will have to say to thee on thy merits as Tsar."

"See they do not by him," cried a man's voice which was strange to me, "as subjects have done before now by Tsars who have displeased them!" The man who made this bold speech laughed as he spoke. I looked up with surprise, and saw that this was a boyar, a big, strong-looking man, with a face that told of robust health, and an eye which looked out fearlessly upon the world.

"Silence, fool!" cried the Tsar furiously. I glanced at Amy, and saw that she looked approvingly at the stranger.

Meanwhile Kiril and Stepan withdrew.

To the Tsar's manifest surprise and chagrin the departure of these men made no difference in the conduct of the dogs, which fought and snarled with one another in vicious mood, but without taking notice of me.

"It is sorcery!" cried Ivan furiously. "Wert thou not a foreigner, thou long-legged wizard, and a kinsman of my sister the Queen of England, I should have thee burned for a sorcerer!"

"Fie, Tsar! wouldst thou have seen the dogs

eat him," said Amy, "that thou art so disappointed? Surely my cousin has displayed his fitness for the appointment which thou, in thy goodness, hast favoured him withal?"

"His Grace is disappointed of entertainment this day," cried the stranger boyar, laughing derisively. "What wouldst thou have had, Tsar, that thou hast not? Thou givest only black looks to this long man among the dogs instead of the applause he has merited. Well done, thou long fellow, thou hast fared bravely with these devilish beasts; the Tsar thought they should have eaten thee."

I listened astonished at the man's temerity, wondering all the while he spoke that the Tsar had not yet struck him dead.

"Seize him, some of you!" he now shrieked aloud to the attendants behind his chair; "seize him and throw him in!"

Very slowly and reluctantly the serving-men went about the enterprise set them by their master. They approached the stranger boyar as men would approach a wasp's nest when the wasps swarm around, angry to be disturbed.

"Lay hold upon me who dares!" he cried, drawing a sword and swinging it before him, but laughing the while.

The small Court that accompanied the Tsar this day rose in alarm and confusion, and stood rooted. The Tsar continued to shriek in his frenzy that the boyar be seized and cast to the dogs. At the uproar many of the animals grew excited, and bayed and sprang hither and thither, uncertain what should happen.

What with the swinging sword of the boyar and the fierce threats that poured from his lips upon any that should presume to lay finger upon him, no man dared approach close enough to touch him. "They cannot carry out thy commands!" he shouted derisively. "But thou shalt not be disappointed of thy pleasure, Tsar. See, I will go among thy devil-dogs of my own accord!"

With the word, this extraordinary person—madman, as I then supposed him, being ignorant of his identity—vaulted lightly over the palisade, sword in hand, and in one moment was among the raging animals below. In an instant, too, they were upon him, every dog of them, from the mildest to the fiercest, foaming, yelping, teeth-showing, snarling, springing, yet none daring to come within reach of that quickly waving sword.

So he kept them at bay for several minutes,

while the Tsar and his Court stood spellbound by the sight and tongue-tied.

"Is it enough, Tsar?" he laughed, presently; "or shall I attack as well as defend? Shall I slay a hound or two? It is easily done."

"Get back, man!" I cried, "and remember that only now thy danger begins."

"Not so," cried the boyar; and with incredible rapidity he turned and sprang upon the palisade, dropping his sword and climbing like a cat.

But, quick as he was, Grom and Boorya, the two savagest of my subjects, were quicker still, of whom the former gripped his arm, springing high to reach it, and hung there, while Boorya had him by the flesh of his left leg. Like a flash I, too, was upon him in the midst of maddened, howling, leaping dogs. I caught Grom by the throat and strangled him loose; while the boyar, bringing his right heel full upon Boorya's skull, forced him to let go also. The next instant he was over the palisade, but had turned already to see how I fared.

"Shout if thou needest help!" he cried.

"I need none," I replied, and indeed, though the whole pack raged and stormed at the palisade where he had climbed, none attacked me except-

ing the two incorrigibles Grom and Boorya, both of whom, recovering their breath, flung themselves upon me in fury. Boorya I caught by the throat and flung with all my strength upon the ground, where he lay stunned or dead. But Grom meanwhile had sprung and taken me by the shoulder, meeting his teeth in my flesh. I should have rid myself of him in a moment, but suddenly an ally appeared to my assistance—one of my own subjects, old Lyef, who flew like a fiend upon my aggressor and, dragging him to earth, was soon engaged in a tussle which ended in Grom's retreat, howling and limping, to the kennel.

Thus ended my exhibition day as Dog-Tsar, for the Court now departed, the Tsar furious and sullen, the rest speechless and subdued. Amy turned and waved her hand, smiling. Only the stranger remained. He leant over the palisade and bade me hand up his sword. "Thou art a man after my heart," he said. "Saw you ever such a Tsar in England as this of ours?"

"We have none such on our side the water!" I laughed. "Seeing that this is a madman, I know not how you dare so much with him!"

"He is a devil-man," said the boyar; "it is my way to be frank with him, but this time

I think I overstepped the limits of discretion. I know not how it will end; but in any case I shall remember that I owe to thy timely help my life, though I think the Tsar will not leave me long in possession. I am Prince Krapatkin, one who has baited the Tsar before now!"

"And has been in Siberia to atone for the same!" I laughed.

"Ah!—then you know me; well, you are a fine man; and your kinswoman is a splendid maiden," he added. "She is peerless; by the Saints, she is no more afraid of Ivan the Devil than I!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER this episode I thought to be deprived of my position as custodian of the Cæsar's wolf-dogs; and, indeed, though I had learned to love the great beasts well enough, yet if, thought I, his Grace maintains this pack of savage animals to no better purpose than for his own entertainment, that he may watch them tear to pieces those of his subjects who have offended him, I would prefer to have no more to do with them, for my very conscience' sake.

Yet no message of deprivation reached me and I remained custodian; lodging meanwhile with good Muirhead, from whom I heard all that happened at the Cæsar's Court.

"Do not abandon your position," he counselled me; "if for no better reason than that it may be given you to defeat, from time to time, the Tsar's devilish intentions, by preserving the life of some poor wretch who has been

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condemned to be food for your savage lieges, as, I am told, you saved Krapatkin."

"Mad Tsar and mad boyar!" I laughed. "This Krapatkin must be mad indeed to beard his master as he does, and also to have sprung into the arena among my dogs."

"He is not mad. The Tsar hates him, but spares him, knowing his value. Since Yermak died—who, you have heard, presented his Grace with the kingdom of Siberia—there is no one who has done more to maintain for his master this new acquisition. He has but now returned from among the Tsar's barbarous subjects in those parts, where he has conquered new lands, defeated rebellious khans and princes, discovered rich mines, and I know not what other services he has not performed for the Cæsar's advantage. Ivan is not so mad as in his moments of fury would appear. As Lord of Muscovy he does, on the whole, not so badly for his kingdom, which has vastly grown in his hands."

"Bah!" I said, "let him set matters in order nearer home!"

"And has this boyar, Prince Krapatkin, received no punishment for his behaviour of the other day?" I asked presently. "May he

come and go about the palace at his free will, as before, and does his Grace make no allusion to that which happened at the arena?"

"Krapatkin goes and comes as he pleases. He is not silent in the matter of the arena and the wound he there received, which was no light one. Each day he finds some new hearer to whom he recounts, in the Tsar's presence, how his Grace would have thrown his faithful servant among the devil-dogs, as he calls them, and how, to please the Tsar, he went among them and was all but killed. 'Thus the Cæsar rewards his lieges who have well served him!' he says, whereat the Tsar, according to his humour, bids him forget the anger of the moment, or frowns and commands silence, or—which he has done but once—aims a blow with his spiked oaken staff!"

By favour of Muirhead, too, I was able to communicate with Amy and to know of her well-being, which was to me an unspeakable comfort, for I might not enter the palace to see and hear for myself; also, at my great desire, conveyed to her by this same good Muirhead, Amy consented to meet me at his house, where from her own lips I might hear report of what had passed.

Amy smiled sweetly upon me when we met ; but it seemed that I was no more in favour now than before, nor yet was my mission as her protector.

"You see," she said, "it would have been wiser to return with Sir Jerome, for of what advantage to me is thy presence in Moscow, thou shut up with thy dogs and I with my Tiger? If my tiger should turn and rend me, as, it would seem, you feared and expected of him, of what avail my absent protector?" Amy laughed at her own pleasantry.

"As to that, there might be found some way to escape the Tiger's fangs," said I, "and in the escaping even such as I might prove of use!"

"Oh, sweet humility!" she laughed; "but, when he turns upon me, there can be no escaping. Tigers spring true upon their prey; he will not miss."

"It is a poor jest," I said. "Be not so sure of thy position, Amy; let him that thinketh he standeth take heed!"

"Why, thou art become a very preacher," she cried, still in laughing mood. "Preach not, Herbert, for thou knowest not how to fit a text; this of thine is a misfit, for, indeed, I claim not

to be secure in my position, which to be one must first have a position, and I have none."

"You are a candidate for the vacant seat upon the throne of the Cæsars," said I.

"Am I? That is the question!" she laughed.

"But are you?" I persisted.

"Nay," she said gravely, "I cannot answer. I think not; watch and wait, and see what will happen. As yet, they tell me, I have seen the Tiger only at his worst; soon there will come a period of mildness, when he will lie and purr, all softness and kindness and benevolence to each and every one who would come near to stroke him. I will first see him in this mood, though Heaven knows when he will be mollified now that Krapatkin has come to Court."

"Ah!" said I; "and is he friendly with thee, this madman?"

"He is no madman, but one of the finest of God's creatures," replied Amy; then, gazing full in my eyes, she added: "Shall I tell you the truth, Herbert? I admire this Krapatkin more than any man I have seen in Muscovy, and I answer thy question thus, that, yes, we are very friendly."

If Amy desired to see me wince, she had her desire, for wince I did, and that lustily.

"Oh, and what of his Grace?" I blurted. "If this great admiration is made patent for all to see, what has Cæsar to say of it?"

"I did not say that it is made patent for all to see," Amy retorted; "may not a maiden carry her dearest sentiments hidden in her heart of hearts for none to guess? It would be foolish to let the Tsar see, for as you—in your great wisdom—have already apprehended, he would quickly take measures to separate me from my——"

"Amy," I cried, "you jest—come, admit it!"

"Do I jest?" she smiled; "it may be, but it may also be that I am serious; nay, thou must protect me from this Prince Krapatkin, Herbert, for, indeed, I admire him vastly. Be sure, my friend, he is no more backward with me than with his master; that which he is impelled to say he says without ado. How should I, who love and adore courage and the manly independence, how should I not admire this man, who is the incarnation of all masterfulness and the manly virtues?"

"And of madness!" I added, laughing, though feeling little merriment. "Well, admire him as thou wilt and jest as thou wilt,

but beware that the Tsar take not thy jesting for truth."

"For his Grace is as slow to see a jest as thou thyself," she cried. "Is that what thou wouldst say? Yes, foolish, fearful Nurse Herbert, I will beware!"

Nevertheless, and though Amy mocked me for my lack of discernment in distinguishing jest from truth, the matter ended for me in utter uncertainty, for I knew not any more than at the beginning whether her admiration for this Krapatkin were serious or pretence. For in dealing with Amy I was ever helpless and incompetent, understanding little or nothing of her heart; loving, perhaps, so jealously that love blinded me.

And yet at this time, I asked myself, who should understand the heart of Amy, were he ever so clear-sighted? It might well be that she knew it not herself, but groped about in the dark for she knew not what, as blind as I or any.

"And how standest thou at present with the Tsar?" I asked her. "Does he summon thee constantly? And what of the Cæsarevitch?"

Amy laughed merrily.

"The Cæsarevitch," she said, "stares with

round eyes. Twice he has spoken to me in the corridor. Once he clutched my arm with his hand and pressed it. 'Amy Romalyn,' he said, 'you are the most beautiful of them all!' The second time he muttered: 'When my father dies, I——' But Boris Godunof, who was with him, laughed and pushed him forward. As for the Tsar," Amy continued, "he sees me every day, and also Maria Nagoy." Amy's eyes flashed as she said this, and the colour mounted in her face. I was not too blind to observe this.

"What—he would make a choice!" I said. "God grant he chooses rightly and wisely!"

"And how would that be, O most wise?" Amy asked haughtily, though she made a show of laughing.

"In the way that would save thee many dangers, by marrying one of his own Muscovish women; he is not fit to be husband of a civilised wife!"

"Save me many dangers, and cover me with much shame," she replied hotly. "What—this spying, tale-bearing Maria to be preferred before me? Is she so beautiful? Has she so much spirit? She has not enough, my friend, to answer the Tsar when he speaks; but pro-

strates herself and kisses the hem of his kaftan, and her eyes fill with tears of mock gratitude for his consideration in that he deigned to throw a word to a worm—ah! a worm she is, no more. If he married the creature, he would crush her in the first hour."

"Let him crush her," said I. "Better her than thee!"

"What; he is to prefer her to me? Thank you for the compliment, Herbert; be sure I shall use all my art to save myself so deep a disgrace and humiliation!"

"Amy, you are mad. To what end all this? Supposing that he should prefer thee—as of course he will if it is your firm purpose to rival this other—what then?"

"That is another matter," she replied, calming down at once. "I shall have tamed the Tiger."

"And entered into the zone of death and danger which surrounds him. Do you seriously believe, Amy, that you may reject such a suitor and live?"

"If we may not climb for fear of a fall, how shall we gather fruit?"

"But you climb to fall, not to gather fruit," I protested.

"Nay, I shall have fruit enough in having attained my desires. I will risk the falling."

"That fruit is the apple of discord. Be wise, Amy, and climb not after so dangerous and useless a prize!"

But Amy laughed, and began to tell me of the Nagoy's, Maria's brothers: how they glared and glowered at her; how they truckled and spoke servilely to the Tsar; how they daily brought to Maria dresses and gauds of every kind to deck her withal for the Cæsar's pleasure; and how, in spite of all jealousies and hatreds and malice, one of them had nevertheless fallen a victim to Amy's charms.

And so entertaining a tale did Amy tell me of her admirers at the Court—of Krapatkin and Nagoy and the Prince, and so forth, and of their jealousies and scowlings at one another behind the chair of Cæsar—that, for all my fears and anxieties, I was able to laugh heartily and to enjoy to the full her narrative.

Perhaps I discerned in a new sense the truth of the old saying "There is safety in numbers". It was as well that Amy should have friends about her, I myself being helpless to protect her in case of sudden need.

But would these lovers of Amy's prove them-

selves men enough to stand to the Tsar on her behalf in emergency?

Krapatkin would, at any rate, I concluded. And at the thought a spasm of foolish jealousy went cutting its way, like a sharp blade, to my heart; for had not Amy said that she admired this man more than any she had yet seen?

CHAPTER XIX.

SAID Muirhead to me, returning to his lodging from the Court one evening: "Truly our fair friend has her hands full of suitors, and she will prove herself wise indeed if she convert none of them into enemies!"

"And which is the favoured one to-day?" I asked, laughing.

"I am not sure," said Muirhead, "for according to her known method, known to thee and to me (though, thanks be to Providence, I am no suitor), she has for each one sweet word for ten bitter ones; but I should say that she is kinder to young Alexis Nagoy than to any other, though, mark you, there is more scorn than kindness even for the most favoured."

"If it be Nagoy," said I, relieved, "the favour is for a purpose."

"I think you are right," Muirhead laughed, "and that the purpose is to deceive the fair Maria."

"And who comes next in favour?" I asked;

but Muirhead shook his head and refused to give an opinion. "How can I," he said, "when first it is the heart of Amy Romalyn, that mysterious citadel, which is besieged, and secondly when the besiegers are, among others, the Cæsar, the Cæsarevitch, and that marvel of a boyar the Knyaz (prince) Krapatkin, who dares with mysterious impunity to play lion to Ivan's tiger. That he remains alive is the greatest mystery."

A little later, neither of us having spoken for a minute or two, Muirhead added: "Were I in love with Amy, which—again I thank heaven—I am not, I should not be very jealous of this Krapatkin, even though at times it seems that he is, perhaps, the most favoured by her fancy".

"Then why not jealous of him?" I asked, surprised and somewhat curious, for indeed I was not in the position suggested by Muirhead's words, being jealous enough of all men that might see and hear Amy when they would, but especially, perhaps, of Krapatkin.

"Because I think he is not long for this world," he laughed. "I believe that, by favour of his Tsar, he will shortly leave it for a better."

"As for that," I said, "I do not see that Krapatkin lies in greater danger than any other

who should offend his most clement Majesty at any moment—even Amy herself, when her time comes. And that it will come and must come before we are all clear of the tiger's claws is what troubles me most of all."

"Yes, that is true," said Muirhead gravely, adding nothing to my comfort by his grim look and the silence which followed it.

But things happened at the palace of which good Muirhead knew nothing, and as some of these matters have since become known to me through other sources, I will here narrate them in their order.

The position at this time, as I take it, was this:—

His Grace lay undecided between Maria Nagoy and Amy, inclining to Amy, save for two reasons. Of these, the one was that he was unwilling to go back upon the boastful message which he had sent to her Grace our Queen, that he would marry whom he would and not any substitute she might choose to send him in place of his chosen bride, which had been the Lady Mary Hastings.

And the second reason was that he was uncertain whether he most liked or hated the girl, for which uncertainty there was a sub-reason

which he himself knew not or perhaps preferred to ignore—namely, that he was afraid of Amy, in whom he recognised a will as strong as his own.

The Cæsarevitch—well, his position with regard to Amy is easily stated. He sighed for her, as the child sighs for the dainty placed by his parent out of reach, and of which his mother has said: "It is not for thee, touch it not, or chastisement will follow".

As for Alexis Nagoy, he—like his two brothers—had begun by hating Amy as his sister's rival, and therefore his own; for in Russia the brothers-in-law of the Cæsar play a great part, receiving the best positions at Court and in the government of the realm. But gradually the admiration which Amy's person and character seemed to provoke in men, as naturally as the perfume of a flower must give pleasure to all who inhale it, had begun to overmaster the unworthier sentiment, and our good Alexis was in a fair way to lose his heart, though as yet he dare not acknowledge it to himself, far less to his brothers or to Maria. From Amy, indeed, his feelings were not hidden, though he had said no word of them. But where is the woman who recog-

nises not the subtle indications of love even in the making—it may be, long before the victim himself is aware of his infection?

Lastly there was Krapatkin—this marvellous boyar who dared to play lion in the very lair of the tiger. Now Krapatkin was doomed to be drawn to Amy by every fibre of his estate, corporal and mental. His fearless, independent, joyous temperament saw instantly in this maiden its natural complement. From the first moment in which he beheld the fire in her eyes as she gave the Cæsar word for his word and smart for his sting, Krapatkin recognised that he had met the woman who, or none, must satisfy his needs. He had not believed that the woman existed whom he could ever look upon as a desirable companion or friend, or that he should ever desire to mate, in the sense of taking a wife according to the laws and limitations of the Greek Church—a woman to be considered and treated as an equal, or near it. He had laughed at the idea of such companionship, making coarse jests when the matter was spoken of by his friends, who bade him see that the blood of Rurik which ran in his veins descended by legitimate channels into the veins of his children.

"Thou art the only woman, Amy Romalyn," he told her within a week of his return from Siberia, "upon whom I have looked more deeply than my eyes can see."

"That is a riddle which I cannot read," she said.

"They call me a lion," he said, "and in thee I recognise a lion-cub. May-be we will mate together one day."

"Oh!" laughed Amy, "the Muscovish lions woo too quickly for me. Knowest thou not, Master Muscovish Lion, to what end I came to this barbarous land?"

"To mate with a tiger, it is said," replied Krapatkin; "but be sure he shall not have thee, nor thou him!"

"Be not so sure, Master Lion, for indeed thou knowest even less of this matter than I myself, who am very ignorant of all that lies in the future!"

"Why, there are some things one may know. Of these, one that I know full well is this: that thou and he will never be mated, and that for many reasons, of which one—he is afraid of thee and thou of him!"

"Not I!" began Amy hotly, but Krapatkin continued masterfully:—

"As free and without the bars of his cage thou fearest him no more than I; but to be set in his cage with him, from which cage there is no escape, mark you, of this you would be afraid. If not, I would say to thee, *be afraid*."

Amy laughed. "And what of the tiger, who is also, by favour of thy wisdom, afraid of me, as I am of him?"

"If I tell thee, thou wilt take offence with me!"

"Tell on; art thou not a lion full grown, and I but a lion-cub, and that a poor female one?"

"Well, then, I say that he will in the end reject thee and take Maria Nagoy, who is a calf to thy lion, and this because he is afraid of thy tongue and of thy good spirit which underlies it. The Tsar, mark you, is a tyrant and a cruel beast, and therefore a coward. He does not love where he fears. He will end by hating thee, take my word for this!"

"And what of thyself? Art thou not afraid that he will end by hating thee also?"

"He hates me already. More than once he would have rid himself of me—what of the dogs but yesterday? That was not the only time. But he fears me more than he hates me, and he knows well that he must beware of me,

for I am rich, of the blood of Rurik, and there are hundreds of boyars who hate him, as they hate the devil, and would range with me against him if I but gave the word. Moreover, I have done him good service, adding kingdoms and khanates to his sceptre in Siberia. I have no fear for myself, rather let him beware!"

"Well, and what of all this?" said Amy, impressed by the strength of this great boyar, and by his splendid courage and self-reliance—the one man in Muscovy who was not afraid of the Cæsar. "What have I to do with all this?"

"Much. The Cæsar will not have thee, nor in any case should I allow him to have thee. Neither wilt thou have him, because——"

"Because," Amy interrupted, laughing merrily, "because it is not thy will that I should be the Cæsar's wife, is it not so, O master of the world we live in, and master of the wills of men and women?"

"Ah, yes, mock me!" said Krapatkin, flushing a little, but gazing with no less admiration upon the mocking maiden; "but may-be there is truth in your jest, little lion-cub, and more of it than you think for!"

"Nay, Mr. Very-sure," said Amy, "be sure of

yet one more thing—there are other wills, even in Muscovy, besides thy own, ay, and other wisdom, besides this rigmarole of Tsars who would but dare not, and of maidens who stand and tremble at the doors of the tiger's cage. I end as I began, that I know little of what shall be, and thou, Master Lion, knowest less."

"At any rate," he laughed, "the present is our own, and there are matters of which a man may be sure, even though he be mocked for posing as a very little prophet!"

"Say on," said Amy, "if there be more wisdom to come!"

"My wisdom shall end with one certain thing," said Krapatkin, making as though he would clasp the girl in his great arms, "that my heart grows very soft towards thee."

But Amy moved quickly out of his reach. "If that is so," she called back as she danced down the corridor, "do not let the Cæsar know it or he will beat thee with his dubina!"

CHAPTER XX.

ON a day about this time two very angry women met in the terem and quarrelled. Of these one was Maria Nagoy, the other Amy Romalyn. It is certain that Maria had just cause for resentment, for by this time, but for the Tsar's sudden desire for a foreign bride, she would already have sat by his side as Tsaritsa for several months. A second time her hopes had been dashed by Amy's rapid growth in the favour of Cæsar and her own consequent decline as an object of interest to him.

Just at the present time it had come to this: that for three days, no less, Amy had been summoned each afternoon to play at chess or to have ordinary audience with his Grace, and she not once.

Thus it was that when Amy returned on the third of these days of disappointment and anger, she was greeted by Maria, who was usually silent in her resentment, preferring to nourish her hatred and generate her schemes of ultimate

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vengeance in secret and under the cover of assumed friendliness, Amy was greeted by her this time, I say, with a storm of reproach, of angry words, and of shameful names.

Now Amy herself was no less a prey to feelings of anger and disgust than Maria this day, having returned suddenly from the Tsar's presence in a fit of rage caused by the conduct of the Cæsar himself, who certainly merited her anger, and all the irresistible impulse of disgust and loathing for his behaviour which had drawn Amy from his presence so quickly, in the very midst of a game of chess begun in all friendliness.

Let me digress in order to explain how Amy, like Maria, had reason for the angry passion which brought her to loggerheads with her rival in the terem.

While she played with the Tsar this day, he being at the beginning in his milder mood, the game went against her opponent, and this displeased him.

"It is not thy skill, thou witch," said the Tsar, in half anger, "but the magic of thy eyes."

"I comprehend not what my eyes have to do with your Grace's discomfiture in losing the Queen!" laughed Amy.

"There is sorcery in thee," said Ivan; "and while I am compelled by that sorcery to gaze in thy face, I forget the game, and in a moment thou hast captured my Queen!"

"I am no witch, Tsar," Amy laughed; "only thy skill is not very great."

"I say thou art a witch. As for my skill, it is great enough to defeat Boris Godunof there, who is no fool; is it not so, boyar?"

Godunof bowed, and replied that his Grace was skilled enough to discomfort all present when the desire was upon him, though at this moment it might please him to turn his eyes and his thoughts elsewhere than upon the chess-board.

"There is no choice," said Ivan, placated; "she is a very witch, Godunof; and as I say, while I am compelled to gaze in her face by some force put forth by her, the game is forgotten, and lo! the Queen is taken!"

"It is better thus, Tsar!" suddenly spake Krapatkin, in his bold, uncourtierlike voice; "better she should take a Queen than thou! Thou hast already taken six, though not in one day."

The Tsar glared at the speaker for a moment, but said no word. He glanced at Amy, who

kept her countenance; then something possessed him to turn and look at the Cæsarevitch who sat near, and the sight of his son staring, all eyes, upon Amy's face, infuriated him. He beat the youth suddenly with the butt of his staff.

"Go from my sight, staring fool!" he cried; and the Prince rose and hurried quickly away, sobbing with pain and holding a hand to his neck where the blow struck.

"Tsar, he did no harm," said Amy; "it was needless severity."

Ivan swept the chessmen from the board with an angry movement of his arm. "Silence!" he said. "There is punishment for witches as well as for disobedient sons!"

"I observed no disobedience," said Amy.

The Tsar rose to his feet, about, as it seemed, to launch forth into angry words; but Krapatkin spoke before him:—

"His Highness the Cæsarevitch," he cried, "would bear as ill as his father to see another take his Queen!"

Ivan's face seemed to wither at the words; fury paled and made haggard his cheeks, and his lips were grey as dust. He strode towards this overbold boyar and stood very close in front of him, the lion and the tiger face to face.

Krapatkin moved not an inch backwards, holding the very ground he stood upon.

"Krapatkin," said the Tsar, "I have borne with thee very long, but I think thy days draw near to an end. Go home and pray for thy soul, for I know not yet what thy end shall be nor when, but I swear my forgiveness for thee is finished."

"It was finished long since," Krapatkin laughed; "there has remained only fear, Tsar; of that thou hast plenty left for me, more than I for thee. It is foolish to threaten when thou darest not strike."

"Thou shalt find my arm is longer than thine, *Knyaz*," said Ivan. "Go home, I say, and pray for thy soul."

"Pray thou, rather, for thine; mine is not laden with the blood of a thousand murdered victims, it——"

The Tsar replied no word, but for a full minute stared in Krapatkin's eyes. Then slowly his hand rose.

The boyars present held their breath, for they feared he would strike Krapatkin to the earth with the iron-pointed dubina he held.

"Must I chastise thee with my own hand?" muttered the Tsar, his eyes ablaze with fury,

his lips working. Krapatkin stood with a smile upon his face.

"Let the Tsar so demean himself if he will," he said, "what care I? this is not the end of the quarrel. The Tsar but adds to the measure of his offences, which mount up for the day of reckoning."

Down came the hand of the Tsar and with it the heavy staff. For a moment it seemed that he had repented of his intention of striking Krapatkin, that he had merely made a threatening demonstration by banging the spike of his dubina into the floor; but as he raised his arm a second time it was seen that Krapatkin winced; then all present observed that the spike of the Tsar's staff had transfixed his foot, and that the anguish of its withdrawal had compelled the betrayal of the pain he had well concealed at the blow itself.

The red blood flowed from the wounded foot over the floor. Amy screamed aloud. Her eyes travelled quickly from the red stream to the face of the Tsar.

"See what thou hast done—see!" she cried; "thy spiked staff has stabbed his foot, Tsar; tell him quickly it was an accident, tell all these boyars—what will they think of thee, else?"

"It was no accident, fool!" said the Tsar, turning his white passion-moved face upon her; "go quickly to thy terem, lest thou see a worse thing; this is the beginning of the end for this man, let him pray for his soul as I have warned him!"

For a moment it seemed that Amy would turn upon this devil-man and pour upon his head a storm of shameful, stinging words, such as her soul longed to hurl in his face; but two boyars—Alexis Nagoy and Boris Godunof—seized her quickly by the arms and bore her from the room before she could speak. They left her at the end of the corridor. "Go to the terem, and return not," said Boris, "when he is in this mood there is death in the air."

But Amy remained and wept awhile to save her heart, which was near a-breaking at this moment with the variety of emotions which filled it to bursting: pity, horror, even some terror, fury, disgust.

The tears did her much good, and when, half an hour later, she entered the terem there remained no trace of them, though her heart was almost as full as ever of the fierce anger and indignation which Ivan's cruelty had planted therein.

And in this mood she received the assaults of Maria Nagoy, who met her in the anteroom, among sewing-maids and the wives of boyars, and, having for the moment lost that control over herself which usually distinguished this fair, foxy maiden, began to abuse and to scold in unfamiliar fashion.

Amy felt first astonished, then somewhat pleased, to be involved in sudden and unexpected warfare; here was vent for the stifling fulness of her bosom, replete with indignation.

"Here is the witch," cried Maria, "who has so blinded the Tsar with her sorceries that he can no longer discern what manner of a creature she is!" Maria trembled and panted, and there were tears of rage in her eyes.

"Who, I?" said Amy, surprised. "What have I done that I am to be called a witch?"

"You have cast a spell over him for three days, during which he has not once sent for me—me, who should have been Tsaritsa to-day but for thee and thy sorceries."

"I have cast no spells," said Amy, at white heat; "if the Tsar has thought better of his taste for such a thing as thou art I therefore a witch? Beware what thou sayest, Maria Nagoy, for I am angry this day."

"Curse thee and thy anger—witch that thou art—these three days thou——"

Maria's angry speech was brought to an abrupt and remarkable end, for Amy suddenly raised her hand and administered to the astounded Maria a vigorous box on the ear, first on one side and a second on the other.

"If I am a witch, I am a witch," she said, white with fury. "How like you my sorceries?"

"The Tsar shall hear of this!" sobbed Maria, crying now and frightened out of her life; "think not he will choose a she-devil for his Tsaritsa."

"And why not?" cried Amy, laughing in loud scorn, and speaking in the recklessness of a fury which had passed beyond control. "Why should he not? Is not a she-devil fit mate for a he-devil? Better that than one who is neither hot nor cold, neither water nor wine, a thing with but half a human soul, like thee, and a body that——"

"All this he shall hear, every word!" sobbed Maria, "then we shall see, my friend, we shall see!"

"I will tell you what you shall see," said Amy, turning upon her so suddenly that Maria fell back in fear into the arms of the fat wife of

Boyar Efimof, "you shall see the Tsar desiring one thing and the witch Amy Romalyn desiring another. But the witch shall have her way, and—who knows—may-be you shall have yours also if the Tsar is fool enough!"

A speech which must have afforded to that teremful of fair ladies much occupation for thought, conjecture, and heart-searchings.

CHAPTER XXI.

RAGE and a new kindled sentiment of fearful respect, born of the ear-boxing to which Amy had submitted her, did not diminish Maria Nagoy's determination to employ any means to defeat her foreign rival, and Amy had now—Maria believed—delivered herself and her chances of preferment into her enemy's hands.

Moreover, the foreign rival now immediately, and with characteristic indifference and independence, lent Maria another weapon to be used against her; for when Amy presently went forth from the terem and sought the open air, Maria sent an old woman, employed by the terem ladies to take messages and so forth, to spy upon Amy, and the messenger presently returned to report that the foreigner had met me, Herbert Shadwell, evidently by appointment, and that we had walked together, talking earnestly.

"Good!" said Maria; "to-morrow there will be many things to tell the Tsar and he shall hear

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"Good!" said Maria; "to-morrow there will be many things to tell the Tsar and he shall hear

this also. We shall see what this foreigner she-cat that strikes and scratches with her claws will gain by to-day's work."

Maria asked for and easily obtained an audience from his Grace, to whom she recounted this and that, as much as she chose or dared to tell of Amy's words.

"Secondly, she smote me with her hands," said Maria. "I carry the mark upon my face!"

"What have I to do with that?" asked Ivan, glowering at Maria. "Am I to be peacemaker between the women of the terem?"

"I thought to serve my lord by proving how devilish a temper is concealed under the smiles and affability which this foreigner displays in the presence of the Cæsar," said Maria. "This is an English wild cat——"

"Enough of that," said Ivan; "Amy Romalyn is not like Maria Nagoy in this: that thou, Maria, art one in the terem and another in this audience room; for the rest, I have seen the girl in many moods—proceed!"

"Thirdly, from the terem she went forth into the street, where she met by appointment her lover, the long foreigner that is placed over the wolf-dogs; with him she walked and conversed for many hours before they disappeared

together, the Saints know into what secret places familiar to them."

"I think thou liest, Maria Nagoy," said Ivan, fixing the woman with his glittering eyes. "Dost thou think I discern not the motive in this lying tale of thine? Be assured all thy good looks shall not save thee from the knout if I find thou art deceiving me."

"I am speaking truth of matters that I know, Tsar," said Maria bravely, determined to gain a point over her rival. "As for my motive, must I make a secret of that which all may know, which is my pride and my joy, my very life blood?—namely, that I love and adore the Cæsar, who would have given to me my heart's desire ere this day but for these foreigners, and that I hope even yet to be preferred over one who has neither love nor proper reverence for Cæsar's sacred person!"

"As to that, see that thou liest not to Cæsar, lest instead of thy heart's desire thou obtain the knout only. This maiden shall confront thee."

Maria paled a little, but she was desperate and made a show of rejoicing. ®

"In Heaven's name let her come!" she said; "we shall see whether she can deny my charge. Choose whom thou wilt, Tsar Ivan Vassilitch,

but at least thou shalt see the woman as she is."

"Good!" said Ivan; "let this English tiger-cat be fetched, Godunof. Stay thou, Maria; if she scratch thy face, it is no matter of mine, and if thou hast lied, the knout!"

Godunof himself went to summon Amy, there being no other present save the Cæsarevitch, for this was a private audience.

Amy entered presently, rosy, flushed, indignant, beautiful; never, said Godunof, was so fair a picture of haughty, fearless beauty. No wonder that the Prince stared and changed colour, that the glitter in the Tsar's eyes grew brighter, that Maria Nagoy looked ugly by reason of the spasm of jealousy and hatred which disfigured for a moment her fair Muscovish comeliness.

"Now," said the Tsar, "speak! what of this woman's tale?"

"As yet I know it not!" Amy replied, smiling.

"Tell it again, Maria, and see thou neither vary nor modify it, for by thy truth thou shalt stand or fall!"

Thus warned, Maria did her best to repeat her story as she had told it, but even so the

Tsar stopped her many times; it appeared he had listened well, and missed nothing; he would have the tale word for word.

"So," said he, when Maria had finished, "thou hast heard, Amy; what hast thou to say?"

"There is truth, and there are lies!" she replied, scarcely deigning a glance in Maria's direction. The truth is this: that I returned yesterday from thy presence, Tsar, angry and sorry, as who should not be that saw how sadly matters went in this room; for a maiden unaccustomed to such things, it is shocking to see blood flow and to hear——"

"Enough," said the Tsar, frowning darkly; "I summoned thee to refute if thou canst this woman's charges, not to speak of other matters which concern thee not at all."

"I would prove, Tsar, that being, as I admit, indignant and sorry with and for thee, I had good reason for both, and that I was in no mood to be met by this Maria Nagoy with foolish reproaches and abusing. Was it my fault that I was summoned to thy presence three days, which days were spent by her in the terem? Accuse thyself for this, Tsar!"

The Tsar glanced at Maria. "Let that

pass," he said; "Maria is not a saint, but a jealous woman."

"And I am no saint," Amy laughed, "therefore when thus angered by Maria Nagoy, I boxed her ears; this is truth."

"As to blows, I care nothing whether she struck, or thou; what of the words she has accused thee of saying?" Ivan's eyes glowed like coals as he fixed them upon Amy's face. Amy would have preferred to brave the man and cry that all she had said to Maria in her anger was the very truth of her true soul, but her heart failed her a little. This she afterwards admitted with shame and self-abasement while telling the tale to those who in turn passed it on to myself. She paused a moment. Dared she admit the very truth?

"Tsar, I was angry," she said temporising, "and ashamed."

"And in thy anger thou saidst foolish words, is it not so?" said the Tsar; "words which thou wouldst now unsay?"

"If we must be answerable for all said and done in the angriest moments," said Amy, "God help us all, thee and me also, Tsar."

The Tsar crossed himself and bowed towards the jewelled ikon that hung in the corner of the

chamber. "That is true," he said. "If we would have God forgive us that which we have done in the hour of our passion, we must also forgive others. Words spoken foolishly under provocation such as this woman gave thee may be forgiven when recalled, as thou hast now recalled these." Amy flushed deeply and would have spoken; Ivan held up his hand.

"I have not yet finished with thee," he said. "There is still the third accusation of Maria—namely, that thou didst leave the terem in order to keep an appointment with a lover, the long Englishman, thy kinsman."

"It is a lie! Tsar; Maria, or her spy, has told the tale as she would fain believe it herself. There was no appointment. I walked alone; the meeting was accidental." Maria made a show of laughing.

"Was ever woman accused," she said, "of such a matter that did not swear to it that she met the man without prepense?"

"Well, it is my word against thy foul insinuation," said Amy, but without looking at Maria; "let his Grace take whose side he will, my conscience is at ease in this matter."

"Then I accept thy word, Amy," said the Tsar. "Go back to the terem, Maria; thou

hast not lied, may-be, therefore the knout is escaped, but thou hast behaved very foolishly, and I like not that my guest in the terem be treated rudely."

"I have not lied, Tsar Ivan!" said Maria furiously; "but there is one who has lied; did not I see her blush in the lying? There is work for thy knout, though me, in justice, it may not bite!" Maria glared at her rival.

"Go quickly, Maria Nagoy," said the Tsar, "the knout is not only for liars, it is also for the insolent and the disobedient."

Maria withdrew as far as the door.

"Ask her for thyself," she cried back from there, "this pattern of truth and of all the virtues, ask this foreign wench if she has lied!"

The Tsar flung a furious word at the woman, his hand restlessly playing with his dubina. Maria saw and quickly vanished.

"Now," he said, raising a face disfigured by returning anger, "must we speak more of all this? Thou needest but to repeat, Amy Romalyn, that thou hast spoken all truth. I am disposed to believe thy words. This meeting with thy long kinsman, it was accidental; thou hast not lied?"

"Nay, that is the very truth," said Amy. "It is to our conversation in the terem that she refers, when we spoke in anger. God knows whether I have told the very truth in this, Tsar, for indeed I am not sure what is the very truth."

"Nevertheless the very truth I will have," said Ivan.

Then Amy knew that the moment had come when she must face the peril into which she had deliberately drawn herself; she had walked fearlessly by the forest edge, and at last she had met the tiger in the way.

CHAPTER XXII.

"It is not that I have lied, Tsar," she said boldly, "but rather that I know not in full how much of that which I told Maria Nagoy is truth. It is true that I came from England with some thought to win for myself a great place in the world. To secure this, two things must first happen, this I knew: first, that the Cæsar should approve me, and, secondly, that I should see my own happiness in such great and honourable preferment."

"To this I reply," said Ivan, frowning, "that the first were in itself sufficient; for if the Cæsar should approve thee the greatest happiness were already attained."

Amy bowed and said nothing; she knew not whether it were wiser to speak or keep silence, hoping that the Tsar would understand without further speech what she must say if compelled to speak.

"As to this you are doubtless agreed?" the Tsar added.

"For a Muscovish maiden, I doubt not that it is as your Grace has shown," she faltered, "but for a foreign maiden, who has left her home and her friends in a land where are other manners, there are many things to consider before she dare assure herself that happiness lies for her in a new country and among strangers, as far from those she has loved as death itself. Even the favour of the Cæsar—" Amy paused—"if she had it——"

"Ay, if she had it," the Tsar interrupted, his eyes glittering; "it is not so easily gained, Amy Romalyn!"

"I say, if she had it," continued Amy, flushing a little, "would not last unless she were able to give back to the Cæsar so much esteem and confidence and respectful affection—even though love were impossible—as would serve to keep alight his favourable regard for her."

"If she came to him heart-free, all this would quickly follow upon the Tsar's favour," said Ivan. "Think not, Amy Romalyn, that because I have received thee and played with thee at chess, and smiled upon thee when thy mood has been pleasant enough to deserve so great favour, that thy end is already won. Thou art yet far from the throne of Cæsar, though nearer than

when the Queen sent thee in Mary Hastings's place."

"Her Grace assented only to my coming; the desire to take Mary's place was my own."

"For the present it has failed, Amy, and by thy own foolishness. With more wisdom thou mightest have attained thy end."

"Then there remains for me but to return to my own country," said Amy, "when I please, or rather when opportunity offers."

"Not so, the time of thy departure, if thou depart, shall be fixed by me. Must thou so hasten? Waits there a lover for thee in London?"

"I have no lover, Tsar! I have said that Maria lied."

"Well, so be it; but return to England thou shalt not. I have not yet done with thee; thy position is not yet hopeless. Thy foolish words, spoken in anger to Maria Nagoy, may be forgiven. We shall see whether thou art in a state of grace; for those who repent there is forgiveness."

"Tsar, I am in no state of grace; there is more truth in that which I said to Maria Nagoy than thou hast discerned; it is true that I fear more than I esteem thee. When Krapatkin's blood flowed, there flowed also from out of my heart

all that might have made me fit to be the wife of the Cæsar, esteem, veneration; there remained only fear and shame."

The Tsar rose suddenly from his seat; it seemed as though he would strike the girl down.

"Tsar! Tsar!" Boris Godunof began to say, soothingly; but the Prince Ivan rose to his feet and interrupted him, crying aloud:—

"Tsar! Father! remember that she is but a weak maiden and a guest of thy house!"

Ivan turned slowly towards his son. The prince burst into tears, for doubtless, poor youth, he thought that the dubina would descend upon his head as it had descended more than once already; but the Tsar made no movement to assault him.

"Thou art right, son," he said, "all this I remember; go then now to thy own quarter—nay, I shall not hurt thee—go in peace."

The Prince Ivan went in more than peace, for Amy sent, to go with him, so splendid a smile of gratitude that he walked all day upon winged feet.

"Amy Romalyn," said the Tsar, "if thou hast planned thy speech this day in order to gain favour and not resentment, thou hast at-

tained thy end. I love not to be withstood, yet thee I like the better for withstanding me. I do not blame thee that by my anger yesterday I estranged thee. I have since prayed to God, through His blessed saints, Cyril and Methodius, founders of our Faith, that I may be forgiven the sin of yielding to my passion. There is not another in this land would have dared speak as thou hast spoken this day, yet I forgive thee. Remain, I entreat thee, yet a while in my country. Let me know myself better, and know thou me better also."

"I will remain a while," said Amy; "though I think that which was done yesterday cannot be undone."

"If God can forgive, canst not thou?"

"It is not for me to forgive," said Amy; "let Krapatkin forgive, and the prince, the Cæsarevitch!"

Ivan scowled. "Forget it then," he said; "thou seest that I have treated thee differently. Sit down now at the chess-table; we will play together."

The Tsar won the game, and with this success came a softer mood.

"You played foolishly," he said laughing, "and without concentration; your thoughts are

elsewhere. Of what were you thinking—come, confess?"

"I have enough to think of," said Amy; "for Maria Nagoy and the Tsar together have given me food for much thought."

"Let not thoughts of Maria worry thee, she is a jealous woman; for the tongue of a jealous woman there are no laws. Thou hast pleased me better with thy fearless truth than she with her talebearing. I am surrounded by liars and sycophants, Amy Romalyn; I weary of such."

"Krapatkin is neither, yet thou lovest him none too well."

"What knowest thou of my mind? If I loved not Krapatkin, he would have been in his grave long since. If his ill-manners enrage me, that is nothing. If I strike him, that is also nothing!"

"If to be struck is a pledge of thy love, Tsar, I envy not the lot of thy Tsaritsa; Maria Nagoy will soon go limping!"

"I have not yet decided that she shall be Tsaritsa; you speak foolishly; it may yet be thyself or another—nay, look not so and shake not thy head; thou didst not come to Moscow for any other purpose but to be chosen by me; it is foolish to pretend otherwise."

"To be approved and to approve," Amy murmured.

"When the Tsar woos there is only one that speaks. To his wooing every heart must open like a flower to sunshine. Hast thou yet been wooed, Amy, in thy country?"

"Not I, Tsar; I love not such foolishness."

"What! wouldst thou not wed and become the mother of children?"

"That shall be as God wills and as——"

"As the Tsar wills, wouldst thou say? Well, I have not yet decided. I am not so set against thee as aforetime, yet build not too much upon that, for I would not have the Queen of England dictate to me in this matter. Mary Hastings defied her mistress and came not—tell me, Amy, has this Hastings a lover?"

"It was not a matter of lovers, Tsar; she is timid. It is no light matter to do as thou wouldst have had her do."

"Yet thou hast done a harder thing—ay, a very impudent thing, Amy, when one considers it. I know not why I sent thee not away with Sir Bowes; are there many such as he in England? He is a bear, not a man!"

"There are few honester or braver, even in

England," said Amy, "where there are many brave men."

"This long fellow, now, he is honest also and brave?"

"Oh, I have found neither dishonesty nor cowardice in him," said Amy.

"Why must he needs stay here, to be by thee?" the Tsar frowned.

"The Tsar has forgotten; he was ill and unable to travel, therefore he remained." The Tsar's anger seemed to return as he thought of poor me.

"His presence is disagreeable to me; I like him not," he said.

"Therefore he was given to the dogs to eat," replied Amy; "I have not yet thanked thee, Tsar, for this favour to my kinsman."

"It is an honourable appointment," Ivan growled, "and not so very dangerous, as he has well proved, for he is still alive. Why didst thou make an appointment with this fellow yesterday, and converse in secret with him?"

"The meeting was accidental; but now my word was accepted in full surety, yet I am again accused. What have I done meanwhile to be mistrusted? For the rest, may I not walk

or talk with my own kinsman, even though it were by appointment?" The Tsar frowned.

"We shall see what thou mayest do and mayest not do. Why hast thou angered me, Amy Romalyn? It is the part of a woman to calm, to soothe, to conquer ill-humour with kindness—why art thou not a woman in this?"

"I know not how I have offended, Tsar; shall I return to the terem and send thee Maria Nagoy?"

"Yes, go, I weary of thee; let Maria come if she will—stay, I will not have her. If I let thee go, promise me that thou wilt not immediately return to thy long kinsman."

"I promise nothing," said Amy hotly; "for the rest, I know not where to find him."

"At every turn thou defiest me. I know not whether I like thee or hate thee for it, but I think it will end in hate. Go! what, dost thou laugh at me—stay!"

But Amy had fled down the corridor, having kissed her hand and laughed merrily as she departed.

The Tsar glared, frowning at the door through which Amy had passed.

"I would and yet I would not," he muttered;

"to-day I will not, and yet it may be that to-morrow I will."

Then his Grace summoned Boris Godunof, who sat in the recess behind Ivan's great chair of state, and gave him an order which resulted in the arrest of poor me, Herbert Shadwell, upon a charge of which I knew nothing.

To Alexis Nagoy, whom he commissioned to arrest me, Godunof said: "The foreigner's star rises fast, Alexis, let thy sister use all her arts. This arrest is a step towards the preferment of the other."

"God send it be not so!" said Alexis fervently, having—in his soul—a double reason for the wish expressed.

"Those two would breed a race of tigers that should eat up all Muscovy!" laughed Boris Godunof.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ladies of the terem were accustomed to receive news quickly, rarely lagging much behind the rest of the world in this respect, but on the day following my arrest there reached the women's quarter of the palace three pieces of information which set the doves therein confined a-fluttering with excitement.

The first of these items was that the Tsar had yesterday finally—or as finally as the Cæsar was wont to make his decisions—resolved to choose the foreigner, Amy Romalyn, for his seventh consort.

The second item contradicted the first, asserting that the Tsar's mind had been made up, indeed, but that, having quarrelled fiercely with the "Anglichanka," or Englishwoman, as they generally called Amy, he had determined against her, and had informed her to this effect.

The third item, which of course was true, contained the news of my imprisonment for

causes unknown. The ladies were assembled at dinner at midday when Olga Shishkin, entering from an assignation in the courtyard, brought in the two last pieces of information, the first having reached the terem but a few minutes before. Amy had not as yet joined the rest at the midday meal, so that the conversation ran more freely and noisily than would have been the case if she had been present. Maria Nagoy, to whom the first item of news had brought floods of tears together with much sympathy, real or pretended, from her companions, had now dried her eyes, and sat flushed and triumphant in an ecstasy of joy. "It may be," she said, "that the Anglichanka is imprisoned also, together with the big fellow she calls her kinsman; was anything said as to this, Olga? Have matters come to light with regard to the relations between these two?"

"Nothing was said," replied Olga, "and, so far as I have heard, nothing is suspected."

"Nay, you speak of what you know nothing, my friend; the Tsar—who should know if not I?—made no secret of his suspicions when speaking his private mind, that is, in conversation with myself. The Anglichanka is sly, fox and tiger in one; by St. Nicholas, if she is arrested

also, my Saint shall have a long candle before his ikon this very day."

"Thy Saint must go candle-less then," laughed Olga, "for I think the Anglichanka now comes."

This was the case, for Amy entered the room next moment, her entrance being the signal for a dead silence among the assembled ladies.

Olga tittered audibly as Amy stood a moment surprised, looking from one face to another, wondering at the sudden silence.

"We talked of thee, Amy Romalyn," said Olga. "Thou comest as one from the grave, for Maria Nagoy has just told us of thy arrest and imprisonment."

"I said the matter was likely," exclaimed Maria, flushing, "not that I knew it to have taken place."

Amy glanced at Maria. "I know not of any such likelihood," she said, taking her place at the table; "but Maria Nagoy knows many things of which the rest of the world is in ignorance, her imagination being her informant."

"Gagarin says," continued Olga, "that Maria has been definitely chosen by the Tsar, and thou rejected—is this true, to thy knowledge?"

"I know not the Tsar's mind," Amy laughed; "dost thou, Olga, or does this Gagarin or any

other? When his Grace has chosen Maria will she not be the first to be told?"

"Nay, but how much has he told thee? that is what we would know. This day we have heard two things—and a third. The first that thou art to be Tsaritsa, and the second that Maria is chosen."

Amy laughed. "I think the Tsar will consider yet a hundred times before he decides," she said.

"If the second is not true, then why is thy long lover arrested and imprisoned?" cried Maria angrily, for there was about Amy an air of quiet confidence which enraged her.

Amy flushed red, and turned instantly upon the speaker.

"Beware! Nagoy," she said; "do not thy ears still tingle? Would they renew acquaintance with these hands? Withdraw that offending word."

"Which word?" Maria hesitated, growing pale.

"Thou knowest—come, withdraw it quickly."

"Well, thy long kinsman, be it then; why is he arrested if thou art not in disgrace and I preferred?"

"You lie, Maria; my kinsman is free."

Olga now spoke :—

"It is said he is imprisoned ; so Gagarin says. Maria speaks the truth in this so far as we have heard it."

"But why, and upon what charge?" Amy cried, "and when?" She rose from her place as though she would leave the table.

"Nay, eat thy dinner," said Olga ; "or wilt thou go eat the Tsar instead? It is his doing that Shadwell is arrested, whose else?"

Amy said not another word ; she left the room by the door which opened upon the corridor leading to the Tsar's quarter.

"She has gone to face the tiger!" said Olga, laughing ; "which will eat the other? By the Saints she is a brave one!"

"This time I pray she may be eaten quite," said Maria Nagoy, laughing nervously. But Olga bade her be not too sure of this, for, said she, "if Shadwell is arrested it is more likely that the Tsar is jealous than otherwise, for what other offence should the long Englishman have committed?"

"That is true," said one or two ; "if he is jealous of the man for her sake, be sure he is not yet done with her, Maria, and thou not yet Tsaritsa!"

"We shall see, we shall see!" cried Maria ; "and if she is now arrested also and put to roost with this lover of hers, it shall be I that spoke wisdom and you foolishness."

"Beware! Maria, and call him not her lover in the Anglichanka's presence, or thy cheeks will smart for it ; the Anglichanka goes not back upon the word spoken!"

"And beware thou, Olga, how thou offendest ; for I swear that I shall yet be Tsaritsa, and I shall remember well both those who have offended and those who have stood my friends!"

Meanwhile Amy actually entered the ante-room of the Tsar uninvited, and sent a page to his Grace to demand immediate audience, which was quickly granted her, his Grace being in a placable mood.

"Is it true, Tsar, that my kinsman is arrested?" Amy asked boldly ; "if so, upon what charge?"

"Is this the object of thy audience?" Ivan said, frowning ; "if so, go back to thy quarter and mind not affairs that concern thee not."

"My kinsman's affairs concern me much," said Amy ; "he has done no wrong, Tsar, and that thou knowest."

"Not so; he has done wrong; go quickly, Amy Romalyn, thou angerest me."

"Nay, I go not until my question is answered. Upon what charge or for what offence——"

"Offence enough!" cried Ivan, with difficulty controlling his rage, yet controlling it in part. "Godunof, tell this minx what she would know and send her back whence she came, I will speak no more with her!"

The Tsar actually rose and left the room without glancing again in Amy's direction—a rare victory, indeed, over his passions and significant withal for those who had eyes to see.

"It is true that the Englishman is imprisoned," said Godunof; "God knows what the Tsar will do with him next."

"But why? What offence hath he committed?" cried Amy, and Boris Godunof could tell her of no more serious charge than that during the scrimmage between the wolf-dogs and Krapatkin, a week ago, Herbert Shadwell had so roughly treated one hound that he had since died. "A terrible offence, truly!" Godunof laughed; "but for our great master any offence is serious enough if a charge is to be laid, or there is an offender to be got rid of."

"He will not—dare not—murder him for this!" cried Amy.

"Dare not? What is there the Tsar dares not?" said Godunof; "as to 'will not,' the Tsar's will is the most unaccountable thing in the world; who knows it from this moment to that? Who can measure it, compass it, define it, understand it? Go back to the terem and pray to thy God—who is, I suppose, the same as our own—that He will protect thy kinsman. Assuredly there is no other who can!"

Amy returned to the dinner-table black as a cloud, her eyes ablaze with the wrath that consumed her. So fierce she looked that none dared speak to her. Evidently, all concluded, she had failed in her enterprise with the Tsar, whatever it may have been. Amy quickly ate a little food and retired from the chamber. Olga Shishkin followed her.

"I have won, I have won! what said I?" exclaimed Maria Nagoy. "Saw you her face? it was the face of one who has lost hope. I wager the Tsar drove her from him!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"If the big Englishman is thy lover, Amy," said Olga, as the two maidens reached the empty sewing-room, "by which word I mean one who loves and is loved, I give thee all sympathy; my heart bleeds for thee."

"He is not my lover, Olga, except that he cares for me well enough to have left home and to have stood by me here in order to protect me in case of unknown dangers; but, even so, I should be base indeed if I could see him imprisoned and remain unmoved. He is arrested for the death of a dog, slain by him, mark you, in the saving of a man!"

Amy laughed, but tears began to come into her eyes as the laughter ended. "Oh, Olga, advise me, what shall I do to help my friend?"

To Olga's astonishment this proud Anglichanka suddenly burst into tears and sobbing, falling upon the girl's neck and bidding her for the love of God help her, somehow, in her need.

"Alas! what can I do? There is Gagarin,

of course!" said Olga; "but he has no influence with the Tsar, who dislikes him. There is Krapatkin," she added as suddenly, "who is head over ears in love with thee; he, at least, is not afraid to defy the Tsar if need be, ay, and would for thy sake, if only he——" Olga paused.

"Speak on, Olga," said Amy, "it is a good thought."

"If only he be not jealous of thy long-legged kinsman, who certainly loves even though he be not loved again."

"Mar not thy good thought by foolish speaking," said Amy; "yes, Krapatkin shall help me; he can and he shall!"

"He will exact payment," said Olga, smiling; "be prepared with thy answer. He will want favours, promises, I know not what!"

"He is a brave man and has a generous heart!" said Amy. "You Muscovish women think but lowly of your boyars, but this one at least has something noble in him; you do the man injustice."

"So be it—I pray it may be so. Go to his house, you know which it is—one of the greatest. It stands at the corner of the Uspensky."

Amy was fortunate enough to find Krapatkin

at home. The boyar was surprised and highly delighted to greet her, but his face darkened a little when he learned the object of her visit.

"How should I release the fellow?" he asked, frowning; "and why?"

"Life for life; he saved thee from the dogs!" said Amy; "more shame to thee, if thou hast already forgotten."

"Yes, that much is true, though I might have escaped without him; nevertheless he served me well. And the Tsar would have him murdered because he killed a dog, you say——"

"In saving thee. It was during that very fight."

"The Tsar is the very prince of the devils. Nevertheless, Amy, I am jealous of this English fellow; he loves thee; why should I, who love thee also, save from death another who is my rival? Surely that would be foolishness!"

"A thousand times, no; not foolishness, but the best wisdom. Knowest thou not better than this the way to a woman's heart? Do nobly and eschew the consequence. Let my kinsman free—he is kinsman, mark you, not lover; we do not speak of love."

"Nay, I think he is both," said Krapatkin. "This which thou wouldst have me do is to

make room at the door of thy heart that another may enter."

"It is not a matter of who shall love and be loved, I say," cried Amy angrily, "but of saving the life of a man who has saved thine. I ask a plain service of thee; grant my request, or I will find another who is more generous."

"Nay, I may do thee this service or I may not. I think I shall do so; but to be plain with thee, as thou art with me, the matter lies thus: here is a man that loves thee, therefore he is my rival."

"So is the Tsar thy rival!" said Amy; "there is no doubt that his heart is now my own!"

"Is it so, indeed? Art thou so sure of him? What then—thou wouldst be Tsaritsa, after all? Beware, Amy; there are dangers even about the throne of Cæsar!"

"Dangers—what matter they, when there is the strength of a lion to overcome them."

"Dangers from within as well as without! Beware of the Tsar, Amy Romalyn! he has enemies who are dangerous to him and to his, remember this. The boyars will not for ever lie under his chariot-wheels; his new Tsaritsa shall not long sit in her high place, even though

the tiger himself withheld his claws from her, which he would not!"

"Thou canst not frighten me, Krapatkin," said Amy, "thy words are wasted. All this I know. If my heart should go out to the Tsar I would gladly marry him, dangers and all, for truth to tell I love the power and position which, as his wife, I should enjoy, but——"

"Yes, *but*," laughed Krapatkin, "there are many *buts*."

"Then at but let it remain, my friend, as remain it shall; for thee, and for thy own ear only, I say this: I have sworn to myself that I will never be the Cæsar's wife."

"Good, so far!" said Krapatkin, well pleased. "And as to that long Englishman, what of him?"

"Dear heaven!" said Amy, "may I not wish for the saving of my own kinsman from torture and from death, and should I not first go for help to him whom this man has delivered from a dreadful end? Shame on thee, Krapatkin—shall I go to another for assistance? To Alexis Nagoy, who would go through the fire at a word from me? To——"

"Go to no man, for I think none will serve thee better than I, but some return I must have

for my service; be sure Nagoy would ask an equivalent first and fail in his mission afterwards. Give me a word, a hint, some little indication of the way thy thoughts are tending. A maiden's heart must incline one way or another."

"Mine is a heart that knows not itself, Krapatkin, excepting that it has not inclined Cæsarward, though to be Cæsar's wife was, in a manner, my object in journeying to this land. Is not this enough for thee?"

"It is much, but not enough. I ask again, what of Shadwell?"

"He is my brother, or near it. I show him neither courtesy nor affection—ask him, if thou must, what is my bearing towards him. As for thyself——" Amy paused.

"Yes, as for myself, for that is the main point—speak on, for upon thy words will depend my service."

"Again, I say, ask Herbert Shadwell what I said of thee," murmured Amy, lowering her lashes in a modest manner and hoping with all her heart that she might blush the while. "My lips will not repeat it in thy presence."

"Nay, tell me."

"Ask Herbert, he will tell thee, and the sooner he is released the sooner thou shalt know."

"Is this a trick?" said Krapatkin. "Beware, Amy, if thou deceivest me! On the other hand, if we should one day come together, mark this and remember it well, that thou mayest even yet be Tsaritsa. This devil-Tsar Ivan will not much longer be tolerated by his boyars; his sons will fall with him, then will follow the election of a new Tsar. I am of the Rurik blood—there are others also, but I think I am as likely at least as any to be raised to Cæsar's throne. Remember all this."

"I will remember," said Amy; "though a man need not be Cæsar to please a woman."

"Well, I will do this service for thee. Give me an earnest of my reward—let me hold thee for a minute in my arms." The big boyar made as though he would seize and clasp the girl, but she eluded his embrace and reached the door in safety.

"First the service, then the reward," she cried, and so the interview ended, Amy escaping without further molestation, in which matter she was more favoured than she knew, considering the character of the man she dealt with. Amy was angry, for she had given more than she intended, fearing further difficulty and complication. Nevertheless she had achieved her object,

which was, Heaven bless her! my release from a very loathsome captivity.

As for me, I lay in my filthy cell or dungeon, whose floor was covered with rank and noisome straw which had lain there rotting with pestilent odours for a year or more, lay almost heart-broken and hopeless, not so much for my own plight as for Amy's; for what would become of my beloved in the midst of the many dangers that beset her, and not a single honest arm to protect her? My poor prayers she might have and had; but if God's will toward me was loathsome captivity, probably torture, and certainly coming death, why should He intend more mercifully towards Amy, assuredly the chief offender in this foolish, sinful enterprise of leaving home and country, and the duties which lay where it had pleased Him to plant us, in order to seek better things in so foul and unblessed a land as this of Muscovy?

All day I had lain here in despair and sickness, begotten of the foul atmosphere and disgusting food provided for me, when—following a slight commotion without—the key turned in the lock and in walked Krapatkin, who bade me follow him forth, quickly and in silence.

A soldier of the Strelitz lay dead or stunned

at the door of my prison. Krapatkin did not so much as glance at him. It was dark, and he carried a lantern. Several soldiers were passed by us at various corners of the corridors we traversed, for my dungeon was in the Tsar's palace, but all slept or seemed to sleep. I learned afterwards that these men were every one in Krapatkin's pay, but that he had nevertheless struck down one man, him who was at the very door of my dungeon, rather than leave him to the certain vengeance of the Tsar.

Safely out and in the square of the Kremlin, I began to express, as in duty bound, the thanks I owed to Krapatkin for my release, but he stopped me, saying:—

"It was for no love of thee, my friend, that I have done this, though thou art a good man in thyself. Let it be understood between us, that as the kinsman of Amy Romalyn I have saved thee, and as her kinsman only, serving her through thee. For reward I am to ask thee two things, to which thou art to provide truthful answers: the first, what is this lady's bearing towards thyself—that thou lovest her is nothing; what is her attitude towards thee?"

"If I am to say the truth and that only," said I, "her bearing to me is none too kind;

we are kin to one another; I am here to protect her; for the rest I do not expect much courtesy or kindness from a kinswoman."

"So far, well. Secondly, what said she to thee of me? that she spoke kindly I do not doubt, judging from her manner in bidding me ask thee rather than say it for herself. Come, the truth!"

As well as I remembered I repeated Amy's words—namely, that for his manly qualities she admired this man far beyond his fellow Muscovish boyars.

"And that is all?" said Krapatkin.

"Is it not enough for thee?" I replied; it had not been the easiest of matters to tell the fellow even that much. Amy had exacted a cruel payment for my release, and I wondered why in Heaven's name she had done so; perhaps Krapatkin had compelled her to grant a *quid* for his *quo*. The thought enraged me.

"Having said this much," I added, "and fulfilled, as I suppose, the obligation to which you submitted this lady as the condition of my release, I will say that I shall not permit thee, Krapatkin, to take advantage of information thus acquired; it is possible that she meant nothing more than the bare words convey, which

is little, and speaks not, mark you, of any sentiment deeper than the mere admiration of manly qualities."

"That shall be a matter between her and myself, my friend," said the boyar. "Think not I shall permit interference in my affairs."

"So long as no man takes advantage of my kinswoman," said I, "there shall be no interference from me; but let her be coerced by man or devil, even to the subverting of the least of her desires, and that devil or that man shall be called to account at my sword's point."

"So be it," said Krapatkin. "These are words that a man may understand!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE Tsar Ivan maintained in his employ a band of men whom he named Oprichinniki, or "the privileged." These fellows were nicknamed sweepers, their coat of arms being a broom and their duties to sweep away his enemies. These men were usually employed upon the dirty work of his Grace; when there was a boyar to be removed or an offender's family to be destroyed these rascals were appointed to the work, and unless the condemned were wealthy enough to pay for their escape and disappearance from the Cæsar's sight and memory they were soon ended. Thieves and rascals were these men, traitors to their employer, pitiless towards their victims, the very scum and outcasts of Moscow's population. Half a dozen of these fellows were, it appears, sent on the morning following my escape in order to examine me in my cell anent the crime which I had committed—namely, the slaying of one of his Grace's hounds in despite of his Grace's own and special warning to do the brutes no injury.

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THE Tsar Ivan maintained in his employ a band of men whom he named Oprichinniki, or "the privileged." These fellows were nicknamed sweepers, their coat of arms being a broom and their duties to sweep away his enemies. These men were usually employed upon the dirty work of his Grace; when there was a boyar to be removed or an offender's family to be destroyed these rascals were appointed to the work, and unless the condemned were wealthy enough to pay for their escape and disappearance from the Cæsar's sight and memory they were soon ended. Thieves and rascals were these men, traitors to their employer, pitiless towards their victims, the very scum and outcasts of Moscow's population. Half a dozen of these fellows were, it appears, sent on the morning following my escape in order to examine me in my cell anent the crime which I had committed—namely, the slaying of one of his Grace's hounds in despite of his Grace's own and special warning to do the brutes no injury.

Finding me flown and the Strelitz who should have guarded my locked door dead and robbed of his keys, the Oprichinniki returned to the Cæsar, full of their startling news.

Who would have thought—not I indeed for one—that the escape of so humble and insignificant a personage as myself should have so roused the rage of a great Cæsar? Yet I have been told that rarely has his Grace been seen in so tiger-like a mood as when his "sweepers" brought him the news—namely, that my prison was empty and I flown.

The unfortunate man who spoke for the rest was struck dead on the spot, the rest informed that until they should have discovered and punished with death the traitor who had brought about my flight their lives, every one of them, were in the balance.

Then the Tsar summoned his boyars, all that were in Moscow, to his great council chamber and there harangued them. If, within twenty-four hours, the guilty persons were not discovered and brought before him to answer for the crime of conspiring to release a prisoner of the Tsar and in the Tsar's own house, each boyar should be fined in the sum of a thousand roubles, to be paid forthwith into the Cæsar's

treasury. At this there fell a silence upon the assembly, for many of the boyars were poor enough and possessed not a quarter of the sum now demanded of them, and these knew well that if they paid not the fine with promptness, their goods would soon be forfeit, their serf-retainers taken from them, and themselves left in Heaven knows what plight at the mercy of his Grace's "sweepers," who would spare neither threat nor ill-usage to screw from their victims a little more for their own pouches.

Some boyar, more bold than the rest, cried out: "Tsar, what have the boyars done? This is some treacherous hound of a Strelitz who has taken money from the prisoner, murdered his companion, and released the criminal."

"Ay, ay! so it is!" one or two voices replied.

"He who accuses shall be himself accused," cried Ivan. "Take the boyar who spoke, Oprichinniki—it is Boris Vyazemsky—lead him to the knout-room; be sure that he tells all he knows."

"I know nothing, Tsar," protested Vyazemsky, but the sweepers had forced him from the chamber before he could say more than this.

A scornful laugh from the midst of a group of boyars suddenly startled all present. "The

Cæsar would enrich himself this day from our pockets, boyars," said a voice aloud; "but he shall be disappointed; not a kopek shall you pay, my brothers; if the Tsar is poor, poor he must remain."

The Tsar's face became convulsed with rage, and his hand played with the dubina it held, as though longing to strike. His keen eyes peered and sought among the boyars; his tongue damped his lips more than once before they would speak.

"Stand forth, Krapatkin," he cried hoarsely, finding his voice at last. "I would to God the Siberian khans had cut thee in pieces. Must thou for ever come to my house to beard me before my boyars?"

"I speak only truth, Ivan Vassilitch; thou shalt not fill thy coffers this day; thou must lie down at night as poor as morning found thee!"

Krapatkin laughed again. The boyars round him shuddered, for there was not one that would have stood surety for the life of this rash fellow, that the Tsar would suffer him to live for another instant.

Krapatkin stood forth boldly and gave no sign of timidity. The two fierce men faced one another, both standing, the Tsar on the

step of his great chair, Krapatkin before him and rather beneath him.

There was silence, while all present waited to see the Cæsar's deadly staff rise and fall, but though his fingers moved nervously upon the shaft, the weapon remained unraised.

"Speak," said Ivan; "condemn thyself; I might have known it would be no other."

"Yes, it was I that released the man," said Krapatkin, eye to eye with the Tsar, watching and ready, yet showing no fear.

"Why? there must be reasons for everything, even for thy treachery and foolishness."

"Is it treachery to save the Cæsar from a crime he would afterwards regret?" laughed Krapatkin. "This man is a guest at thy Court, and the kinsman of a great foreign Queen."

"Thou liest," said Ivan; "that is not thy reason. Speak quickly."

"This man preserved my life—the life of one of the Tsar's most faithful servants," continued Krapatkin, always with that mocking tone of his which might well aggravate a more peaceful man than Ivan. "Has the Tsar no more gratitude for one who has done him so great a service than to imprison and torture him? Is my life, then, of so little value to thee, Tsar, that——"

The Tsar interrupted with a thud of his great staff upon the floor.

"Enough of ribaldry; come, thy reason for this act of disobedience and contempt? I think thou darest not speak truth, Krapatkin."

"Will the Tsar have the truth?" the boyar laughed; "then he shall have it in full. This Englishman is kinsman to one who shall not be made to weep by Tsar or devil while Krapatkin breathes God's air."

"You lie, she does not weep," muttered the Tsar, his blazing eyes dilating with new fury; those who saw knew well that his self-control was at an end. "Beware, Krapatkin!" someone whispered.

But Krapatkin was in his most reckless mood, and cared no more for the rage of Cæsar than he would have listened at such a moment to the very thunders of Jove.

"The tyranny of the Tsar may still draw tears where all his favours have drawn no love," said the boyar, but almost before the words were free of his lips the heavy dubina had been raised and thrust.

Krapatkin was ready, and the blow, aimed at his chest, was eluded, only scratching his left shoulder but inflicting no wound. Quick as

thought the great boyar had wrenched the weapon from the Cæsar's hands, and stood an instant as though uncertain whether he would return the blow to the Tsar's bosom.

Every boyar held his breath; I doubt not that many hoped, if they dared, that Krapatkin would strike, for, indeed, the Cæsar had many deadly enemies present, to all of whom he had given good cause for their enmity.

But Krapatkin did not strike.

In an instant his mind was made up. Silently he took the stout staff, broke it in two pieces with his great hands, staring eye to eye with the Tsar the while, and cast it aside.

"Beware, Tsar!" he muttered hoarsely, "lest the day come when thou art as easily destroyed as I have now broken thy dubina. My blood is as red as thine."

"Boyars," cried the furious Tsar, "would you see the Cæsar offended and threatened by this traitor? Stand ye idle, fools? Will none take the Cæsar's side?"

At this half a dozen boyars, anxious to win the present favour of the Tsar, sprang upon Krapatkin, and, after a struggle, overpowered him, six men to one. They led him away laughing and calling the Tsar by shameful names.

Then the Tsar gazed slowly round upon the boyars, and having summoned his Oprichinniki bade the fellows take the names of all present excepting those six who had fallen upon Krapatkin.

"These curs who dared not fight for their master," he said, "shall be made to yelp. Let each boyar pay ten score of roubles, Oprichinniki, and if they find not the gold, ye shall obtain the value the best way ye can."

Then the Tsar stalked from the audience chamber, leaving a roomful of pale-faced boyars, who bargained and argued with the sweepers, cursed, wept, entreated, promised, threatened, and in the end paid, every man his fine.

"Better this than to lie where Krapatkin lies!" they told one another.

"He will feed the dogs in an hour!" said a pale boyar; "but he broke the Cæsar's dubina and defied the devil to his face, and to have seen that sight I am ready to pay my fine, ay, and glad of it!"

"For that which we have seen this day," said another, "I shall pray daily for Krapatkin's soul, though it cost me two fat candles a week at St. Cyril's ikon."

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN first I came forth from prison, released by Krapatkin, who had—though I knew it not—now taken my place in the same cell, I was much put to it to determine where to hide myself; for if the Tsar should consider my poor self worthy the trouble of a search, he would certainly have me sought for, and the end would be worse than the beginning.

To Muirhead's quarters, wherein I had had hospitable accommodation, I could not of course return; this would be to imperil my friend as well as myself, and to make him but a poor return for his kindness.

I could indeed leave Moscow altogether for a while, and hide myself in some village within a league or two of the city, or even in the forest if matters came to the worst, though that would be a most undesirable matter indeed, for it was now winter, which in Muscovy is a period of great cold and severity.

In the end I decided that I would go to my

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In the end I decided that I would go to my

old friend Kiril, my lieutenant in the custodianship of the wolf-dogs, and to him appeal for sanctuary during the days of my trouble. Both he and his assistant Stepan were, unless I was too easily persuaded to my own advantage, inclined to like me well, whether for the reason that I seemed to understand the nature of the dogs and to be loved by the brutes, or for some other, I know not.

So to Kiril I repaired, informing him that I had incurred the anger of the Tsar for no better reason than that I had accidentally slain the hound Boorya who had savagely attacked me during the episode of Krapatkin's foolish display of bravado.

"Boorya was the most devilish of all our beasts," said Kiril. "I have many scars from his teeth, even I. Our father the Tsar should be told we are well rid of this dog, then may-be he will forgive thee."

"I have no doubt this will be told to his Grace on my behalf, and that his anger will not last long; meanwhile I am in danger, Kiril, and know not where to lay my head; give me shelter, thou shalt be well paid for it."

"A whole skin is dearer than money," said Kiril, scratching his shaggy head, which was

like a bear's coat. "Will the Oprichinniki come to seek thee?"

"I cannot tell," said I. "But even if so they should not find me, for in case of extreme need I should go into the very kennel of the dogs, where, be sure, no Oprichinnik shall thrust his nose to seek me."

"Good! lie within their shed, if thou wilt; or, stay, there is the *lyédnik*, the ice-cellar, wherein is stored our food and the dogs'—it is no fit chamber for a courtier like thyself to sleep in, indeed, but at a pinch——"

"Good! make me a bed of sacks behind the ice-blocks in the pit of the cellar," said I; "it would be a clever Oprichinnik who found me lying snugly there like a maggot in an apple. Come, we will see to it at once. If I should be found, thou shalt know nothing of my hiding. I am there unknown to thee and to Stepan."

Both of my friends grinned at this and scratched their heads, after the fashion of the Muscovish moujik or commoner. Stepan bade me not forget that so great a service as the deceiving of the Tsar's men was surely worth a present in money, and that it would perhaps be safer, all things duly considered, if payments were made beforehand, lest accident should

happen to either or both parties. I therefore paid each man the value of some two shillings, which for them was wealth indeed and the occasion of much gratitude and rejoicing.

During the day came notice from the palace that the dogs should be kept hungry. The meaning of such an order was well known to my friends and to me, and when they brought me food at noon they informed me of the message received.

"God have mercy upon his soul!" said Kiril, "whoever it be; for it is a fearful death to die, and it is to be hoped amends will be made in a better world."

"Amen!" said Stepan, crossing himself. "At least we are safe from such a fate as this, we three."

"Nay, I think it is we whose souls need praying for," I rejoined, "for assuredly the evil one will take a new grip upon each of us for every fellow-creature we send to his death in this manner; it is the worst wickedness to condemn a man to such an end. Let the Tsar see to his soul for this greater part of the crime; but our share is devilish enough if we carry out the orders of the Tsar." Both men crossed themselves.

"Are we, who are helpless instruments," said

Kiril, "to be held responsible for the *ukases* of the Tsar?"

"Ay, if we make no effort to stand between him and the devil by hindering his most hellish desires."

"Who are we so to stand? Doubtless there is wisdom hidden in thy words, *Barin*, but to us they appear only foolishness."

"There might be opportunities to save a man. When he is brought and left for you to cast among the dogs why should you not soil the sand with blood, leaving a few scattered rags of clothing, if you will, as evidence of his end, but let the man himself go free; there are many who would gladly pay half their substance to escape naked into the forest rather than come to such an end."

The double argument of danger to the soul and profit to the pocket prevailed, I think, with these good fellows, and I trust that it may have since brought forth fruit in the saving of a life or two, though of this I cannot be sure, for I was soon to take my leave of both dogs and keepers, as shall presently be seen, never again to set eyes upon either the one or the other.

"At any rate," I now said, "go one of you to the kitchen of the palace and learn the news;

let us know who is this latest victim of the Tsar's rage destined, if we permit it, to be torn by the dogs to-night." Truth to tell, I had my suspicions as to this.

Kiril went to the palace and made some inquiries among the serving people, bringing back a garbled version—which did not lack in luridness by passing through many lips—of the quarrel between the Tsar and Krapatkin.

"It is thought that no less a boyar than Prince Krapatkin himself should be the victim," added Kiril, "though at the palace kitchens they know nothing of the order sent to us."

"It is a deed the Tsar would scarcely dare to blazon abroad beforehand," said I. "This boyar is only a little less than the Tsar himself."

"Nay, have you not heard of the Regent Shuisky and his fate, thirty odd years ago?" said Kiril. "The Cæsar was then but a youth of some fifteen years, yet he suddenly rose in his wrath and condemned this great boyar—greater, in a manner, than himself—to instant death by the dogs."

"It may be that the Tsar is wiser now," said I, "being older; moreover, he has now many enemies. He is wise, be sure, to see to it that so devilish a crime as this he intends for to-night

should not be spoken of beforehand. But thou hast discovered his intentions, Kiril, good man; let us see whether there is not a way to save our souls a devil-grip. Krapatkin is rich, moreover—rich as a Tsar!"

"Saint Vladimir, equal to the Holy Apostles, have mercy upon us; how should we do that!" exclaimed Kiril, and Stepan scratched his head and crossed himself after his manner.

"How many men will bring the victim?" I asked; and Stepan replied that he had taken part in six such executions during his twelve or more years of service in the present office, and there had never been more than two men—armed soldiers, however.

"Their arms matter nothing," I replied, "for there shall be no force used. Buy drink for the fellows beforehand, and invite them to drink in your hut in order to gain nerve for the devil's work to be done. While they drink the victim must be placed somewhere: let him lie here, in the *lyédnik*—the rest is easy; I will see that the dogs go hungry and that you are well paid. If there is blame, it will fall upon the soldiers, but be sure they will not stay in Moscow to meet the trouble half-way!"

"By St. Vladimir," murmured Kiril, "the

equal of the Apostles, it is a good scheme, but a whole skin is better than——"

"There is your soul to think of as well as your skin," said I; "be sure the evil one has a special furnace for those that have no pity for their fellow-men! Such shall scorch and writhe a thousand times for each cruelty done here below."

Kiril spat on the ground. "*Noo*," he said, "*ladno*, I agree!" and Stepan concurring, the matter stood arranged.

It was a dark night when, as I lay shivering upon my sacks behind the ice-blocks in Kiril's cellar, I heard the tramp of feet and the scrape of a sledge upon hard snow; they were bringing their victim to his execution upon a hand-sledge. Now, would Kiril's offer of strong drink prevail? Would the fellows be tempted to delay for half an hour their hateful work? If not, I must be ready for other action, for in any case the dogs should not feast to-night, ay, even though their starved howls already so rent the air that it was difficult to make sure by hearing of what passed.

Nevertheless I heard the sledge arrive and stop, and the voices of Kiril and others began to reach my straining ears.

The dogs heard them also, and where a pair of hungry beasts had howled, the full eleven now joined in the piteous chorus, and drowned, for me, all other sound.

But presently steps approached the cellar; there was the squeak of the sledge-runners—thanks be to God! then my scheme had worked, they were bringing their victim.

"Lift him in here, sledge and all," said Kiril's voice, "the poor devil will be warmer here than outside; he is a boyar, by his dress, and soft."

"A boyar! yes, and a boyar of the boyars," said another voice, "curse him! They say he is next to the Tsar, therefore I hate him next to the Tsar; all that are rich and powerful I abhor in proportion to their power and their riches!"

"Better a live dog than a dead lion," said Kiril, "and this poor devil has but half an hour to live."

"Ten minutes at most," said the other, pushing the hand-sledge into the cellar so violently that it turned over, and the wretched gagged victim bound to it now lay beneath, his face upon the wooden boards.

"Leave him so, it is useless to trouble one—

self needlessly," said the rascal who owned the strange voice! "If the meat is bruised the dogs will not notice!"

Both men withdrew laughing, and out came I forthwith from my sanctuary, for to waste time were foolishness, even though the ten minutes should grow into an hour.

I had provided myself with the wherewithal to cut the bonds of the victim, but until I had turned the sledge over and, fumbling clumsily in the darkness, at last removed the gag, I knew not for certain that I had to deal with Krapatkin.

But no sooner was the voice of that sturdy boyar released from its bondage than he employed it so lustily in cursing the Tsar and his present plight that I was left not another moment in doubt as to his identity.

It seemed that he must first relieve his mind by this exercise before inquiring as to who should be his present benefactor.

As for me, I let him curse on, while I cut the bonds which secured him to the sledge—no light task, for they had bound the man as though they had to deal with the strength of an ox.

"It is thou, Shadwell, doubtless?" he said at last.

"None other," I replied, laughing. "Curse on, if it doth thy soul good!"

"I guessed it; I had great hopes of thee!" said Krapatkin.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"It is true," Krapatkin repeated, "I thought Shadwell is at large and will have heard of my plight, may-be he will desire to return tit for tat and release me as I released him; well, I am grateful!"

"It is a good thing I had a knife," I laughed, "for they have bound thee as though thou wert possessed of a bull's strength!"

"As for that I am no lambkin," he replied; "there are four at least of them that limp since the binding began, one, I think, has limped into the next world; we had a good fight. Tell me quickly, before these fellows return, are the dog-keepers on our side? Nay, they must surely be so or I should have been cast into the pit immediately without the drinking interval, which, I guess, is thy scheme?"

"They are our men, both; I have promised them both, on thy behalf, a good gratuity."

"Lord, they shall be welcome to it; I shall have then but two to settle with."

"What, must thou fight again?" I laughed. "Go, rather, in peace, before the men return."

"Nay, my friend, why, how meanly thou must think of me! To leave two such rascals at large in this over-villained world when they may easily be despatched to another! I deal not so meanly by my fellow-men. Get thee back to the ice-blocks in case either fellow, having seen thee, should afterwards escape; I will wager my head to a silver coin that he will not, but it is useless to run risks which go towards no good end."

"Stay," Krapatkin added, "I will lie down, and place thou the sledge over me as it lay when the fellow threw it down with me, I have a mind to startle my friend before he dies."

I agreed to do as Krapatkin desired, the more gladly because I was never one to love the needless shedding of blood, and I cherished a secret hope that while my grim boyar struggled to his feet from under the hand-sledge his victims might escape into the darkness and go free; for, after all, these men were but instruments of a higher will, brutal agents of a more brutal power. By the time Krapatkin lay once more beneath his overturned sledge I heard the footsteps and the raised voices of the men;

a glint of lantern light fell upon the snow without, and the dogs within their kennel lifted up their voices in a chorus of hungry, piteous baying.

Hurriedly I lowered myself into my icy hiding-place, and that none too soon, for I was scarcely in when the men kicked the door of the cellar open and entered. I heard Kiril utter an exclamation; of course he had not expected to see the boyar still lying as he had been left. He afterwards explained to me that he supposed I must have fallen asleep before the victim was brought and had thus allowed my own plot to fall to the ground.

"What ails thee, man?" asked one of the soldiers; his voice betrayed that he had dealt freely with Kiril's spirit-flask. "Art thou sorry for this fellow's fate? Why, look you, think of it thus: he is a boyar, second to the Tsar; both are devils and oppressors of honest men."

Kiril laughed very loud, doubtless to awaken me from my sleep, good man!

"Shall we unbind him?" he said, "if he is the devil-man you say, it will be grand to see him fight with the dogs!"

"Unbind him? You speak like a fool, my friend! Let this fellow have but a little finger

free and he will contrive to throttle you with it. He is, as I say, like a wild beast for strength and ferocity. We will throw him in, sledge and all. You should have seen him struggle when we bound him, twelve of us and all on the top of him, mark you, and yet we barely had our will of him; now, you devil-man," he continued, "your time has come." He thrust his toe under the sledge and gripped the rim in his hands. "Help to turn him over, brothers, he's as heavy as a bull!"

Then I heard a great scuffle, the opening of a door, the quick rush of feet upon the snow without, groans, exclamations, the thud of falling bodies, and all to the accompaniment of such an uproar from the dogs as though they were aware that even now they were being cheated of a hideous feast. A minute later came Krapatkin's voice:—

"Come forth, my friend," he said aloud, "the fight is over, and well over."

I heard afterwards from Kiril, who stayed to see it while Stepan fled in ungovernable terror, that when Krapatkin rose suddenly from the tangle of cut cords that lay about him and over the sledge, the soldiers dropped back as though they had been struck by the falling sickness.

Krapatkin threw himself instantly upon him who was nearer the door, and having taken the rascal's sword plunged it into the body of the wretched man, and withdrawing the weapon thrust it heart deep into the carcase of the second fellow, who knelt and gasped by the overturned sledge. Kiril's foot was at the very door in case the boyar should, being blood hot, forget that here was a friend and not a third enemy; but Krapatkin after a glance at him threw his sword upon the ground and hailed me, as afore mentioned. The place reeked of blood like a charnel-house as I came up from my sanctuary, and Kiril was already dragging the bodies forth.

"It was a good play," said Krapatkin; "thou shouldst have seen the faces of the fellows, Shadwell, when the fiend arose, clad in my poor body, to confront them. Assuredly they thought it was the devil himself, for they said so, first one and then the other."

"Bah!" I said, "let us go forth into the air, I stifle here."

"Let the dogs have this trash, friend," said Krapatkin; "hark how they cry for food."

"Not so, Kiril," I cried angrily, "see that a priest buries them," and the boyar, after a fierce

glance at me, for at all times he bore ill to be crossed, added: "Well, have thy will!"

Then we two retired to Kiril's hut, for Krapatkin would drink and eat before we went, for he had well-nigh starved all day. Here we found in plenty black bread and the white Muscovish spirit distilled from grain, and as he ate and drank he conversed with me, showing but little of the grace and softness of gratitude for the boon of life and freedom which I had conferred upon him, but rather the jealousy of the rival lover; for it appeared that his thoughts even now dwelt upon his desire to secure my kinswoman for his bride and to carry her quickly away from Moscow to his country seat.

"Moscow is not safe to-day," said he; "I have never before seen the Tsar so given over to his passions, though, Heaven knows, I have confronted him in all moods. My escape now will set the finishing touch to his madness. You shall see that it will be so. There will be a hundred new names to add to his list of victims, for whose souls—having destroyed their bodies—he will pray in the churches. I will see that this Amy Romalyn's is not one of them."

"See thy own is not even yet included in the list," said I. "I think he will not touch Amy, but he will pursue thee as the devil strives for the soul of a man."

"He shall not touch Amy because I shall remove her into safety," said the boyar, and at these words I flashed out.

"See now, Krapatkin," cried I. "Doubtless thou hast thought me up to this time a mild man, and in truth I am not by nature a quarrelsome one. Yet if thou do aught with Amy, against her will, using either violence or any treatment such as were unbecoming to her honour and innocence, I will follow thee until I have found thee, even to the ends of the earth, and having found thee I will teach thee that in me at least there exists one who is able to call even a Krapatkin to account."

"It may very well be," replied the boyar, retaining his coolness, "that we shall yet come to loggerheads over this wench. I am not to be frightened by threats, my friend. Doubtless there would be a fine fight, for though thou hast reach I have the strength of an ox and am no novice with the rapier. The rest may be left. She is not, I think, averse to me. There will be no occasion for such matters as you fear

—violence and so forth. I will persuade her to leave Moscow, if persuaded she will be, which I dare to expect."

"And if she refuse?"

"If she refuse, we both remain in Moscow, to be hunted by the Tsar. It would not be easy to remove a woman from the terem by force; moreover, in these matters I have never found persuasion fail."

"Well," said I, "go thy own way, boyar, but remember that I shall hold thee to account. In the end, thou mayest find I am to be reckoned with."

"With all my heart, so be it, though, be sure, the thought of thee shall not in any case deter me by an inch from my desires, if they happen to fall foul of thy own. Is thy say said? If so, I will depart."

Later in the day, as I afterwards learned, this bold boyar actually visited the Tsar's palace, and the Tsar refusing to see him, as was indeed to be expected, sent him an insolent message. Thence he went to the terem in order to persuade Amy, if he could, to escape with him to his estate at Slatky Ozer, twenty leagues distant from Moscow. This suggestion Amy, to his displeasure, refused—not without anger, I would

wager—neither could he induce her by any word or promise to listen to his offers of protection.

And from the terem the unfortunate man went straight to his sudden doom; for in the great arched gateway of the Kremlin, as he passed through it, he was ambushed, by the Tsar's orders, by a dozen of the Oprichinniki and run through the body before he knew that he was attacked. So died one who was worthy of a better fate than to have lived in such a land and under such a Tsar; a great boyar and a brave man, the bravest of men indeed and the most reckless, and who, but for the excessive independence and boldness of his nature, might have lived to be a Cæsar a dozen years later when a less worthy boyar than he—Boris Godunof—stepped into the place vacated by the last scion of the effete dynasty of Rurik, which then ended in the person of Ivan's unmanly son Feodor and the child Dmitry.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE news of Krapatkin's death reached the terem early on the following day. It came as a shock to Amy, who went mournfully enough, for she had liked and admired this boyar chiefly for his fearless bearing towards the fierce Tsar, his master, though of love for him she had none. As for the rest of the women, her companions, they took but small interest in the tragedy, since it did not affect themselves, none of them being among the admired of the great boyar.

Maria Nagoy affected much pity for her rival. "Amy Romalyn is unlucky in her lovers," she said; "there is the long one, who is under a cloud and likely to follow Krapatkin into deeper gloom; then this great dead boyar himself; and lastly the Tsar, who, I think, will have none of her."

"That is yet to be seen," said Olga Shishkin. "Shall I tell thee what I think of this matter, Maria?"

"Oh, if thou wilt, speak; let those listen who

wager—neither could he induce her by any word or promise to listen to his offers of protection.

And from the terem the unfortunate man went straight to his sudden doom; for in the great arched gateway of the Kremlin, as he passed through it, he was ambushed, by the Tsar's orders, by a dozen of the Oprichinniki and run through the body before he knew that he was attacked. So died one who was worthy of a better fate than to have lived in such a land and under such a Tsar; a great boyar and a brave man, the bravest of men indeed and the most reckless, and who, but for the excessive independence and boldness of his nature, might have lived to be a Cæsar a dozen years later when a less worthy boyar than he—Boris Godunof—stepped into the place vacated by the last scion of the effete dynasty of Rurik, which then ended in the person of Ivan's unmanly son Feodor and the child Dmitry.

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"Oh, if thou wilt, speak; let those listen who

are not weary of thy opinions," replied Maria, yawning.

"Well, then I say there is rather evidence, in the death of this boyar, of the Tsar's jealousy for Amy. He will have no rivals. Shadwell has disappeared—dead, may-be, though I hope not; Krapatkin is killed. I will say one other thing: I think that Amy has but to play the tune for his Grace to dance."

"And I think you are a fool, Olga," said Maria angrily.

Presently, when a messenger came from the Tsar summoning Amy to his presence, Olga glanced at Maria and saw her flush red with vexation. But lo! the messenger returned pale and anxious for his own well-being, for instead of Amy herself he carried back news that she refused to go.

The women of the terem crossed themselves and called their Saints to witness that terrible things were in store.

"What said I, Olga?" whispered Maria Nagoy, frightened yet exulting. "This is the beginning of the end. To disobey Cæsar! The Saints preserve us all!"

Very quickly came a posse of Oprichinniki, who formed up while their leader went in

search of Amy, who—seeing that force was employed—went readily with her escort, for she could do nothing else.

"There is the end of the Anglichanka!" said Maria. "I do not love her, but God grant the Tsar withhold his dubina from her."

"It is not the end, Maria," said Olga; "thou art a babe in the art of winning a man. Amy knows what she knows of the Tsar. Has he loved her less hitherto for her independence?"

"This is rank disobedience," said Maria; "we shall see whether he will now love her or slay her."

When Amy reached the audience chamber she found a sullen Tsar seated amid a pale and anxious Court. There was silence among the groups of boyars, and his Grace sat with his face upon his hand, his elbow resting upon his knee.

"Why camest thou not at my summons, wench?" he said. "Does thy conscience accuse thee of receiving this Krapatkin in the terem? Thy fault is known to me."

"At least my hands are not red with his blood," said Amy. "I came not because I was afraid, Tsar; I cannot look upon thee; I fear thee."

"Nay, that is foolishness. May not I, who am Cæsar, punish the contumacious boyars who are my subjects? Fear nothing, Amy; for my enemies I am a tiger whose fangs they shall not escape; for thee I am a lamb, as thou shalt see. I have sent for thee with purpose the most benign. Let the room be cleared. Stay thou, Godunof, and thou, my son. You shall be witnesses that I approach this maiden in kindness and honour."

The Court, visibly relieved, for they had expected an outbreak of terrible anger, gladly dispersed, crossing themselves in gratitude when safely without that matters had gone more peacefully than they had hoped.

"I have sent for thee this day," continued the Tsar, the chamber being now cleared of all save Godunof and the prince, his son, "to bid thee prepare thyself for much honour, and I doubt not for all happiness. Thou shalt be Tsaritsa. All night I have considered and prayed; and this is my decision, which is in full accord with my own desires, for on the whole thou hast pleased me well, and that in spite of a prejudice formed against thee for no fault of thy own, but rather of the Queen thy mistress. What say'st thou?"

"I will prepare myself," said Amy faintly. Glancing at the face of the young prince she saw that he had suddenly grown white and haggard, and that he held to the arm of his chair as though he would fall over sideways. Fortunately he made no sound, and the Tsar, otherwise occupied, noticed nothing.

"So be it," he said, evidently relieved and pleased by Amy's ready acquiescence, which, it may be, he had not expected. "So be it, chosen one of my heart. In two weeks thou shalt sit beside me as my Tsaritsa; meanwhile leave not the terem, I pray you, for it is unseemly that the chosen of the Cæsar should be seen abroad."

Amy bowed and made as though she would depart.

"Stay, there is no need for haste; we will play together awhile—the chessboard is ready."

"Tsar, I am in no mood to play to-day; suffer me to depart; there is much to prepare."

"Well, go—stay, dost thou mourn for Krapatkin? Or is it for thy long kinsman's disappearance? I have some suspicion, minx, that thou knowest of his hiding-place. Come, where is this Shadwell?"

"I know not, Tsar. If I did, would the

Tsar love me better for delivering his enemies into his hands?"

"The Tsar must have obedience. Mercy is his prerogative, to be exercised by him or not, as he pleases. Thou knowest not my mind; it may be set upon mercy for the man, in spite of his offences. Come, where is thy kinsman?"

"I have said that I know not." Amy blessed the memory of poor murdered Krapatkin, who at his visit to the terem had most discreetly refused to give her any information as to my hiding-place. "The Tsar will demand it of thee, and then what?" he had said.

"Beware how thou liest to me," said Ivan, "Tsaritsa elect though thou be!"

"Is it not enough that I have said I know not? Would the Tsar wed one who hath no truth?"

"There have been Tsaritsas who have deceived me; these have forfeited the love I gave them. Well, it may be thou tellest the truth, only remember this: that if thou revealest nothing I promise no mercy when he is found. Thy telling to-day might buy mercy for him to-morrow."

"Mercy for the slaying of a dog and thereby

postponing for a week the vengeance of Cæsar! Surely there could be no mercy for one so guilty!"

"There is more in this, minx, than the death of a dog. Wilt thou never bridle that bold tongue of thine? Well, let it wag then, I love to hear it—see how I bear with thee! Come, sit down—we will play together; nay, go not—I desire it of thee."

Amy, seeing how the land lay, and that the Tsar was in a placable mood, played out a game of chess with him, which game he won. Godunof and the Prince withdrew meanwhile.

"Now return, if thou wilt, to the terem," he said. "Stay." The Tsar took from his own finger a ring set with a great emerald; this he placed upon hers as her hand lay upon the chess-table. "I had never a bride save the first that I loved like thee, Amy," he said; "thou hast conquered me indeed."

He kissed her hand with the great green ring upon it, then her forehead, Amy submitting quietly. "Two weeks," he continued, "for preparation; more is not needed; I would rather it were less—go, prepare thyself, *goloobooshka ty moya!*"

Amy stalked through the terem head in air,

her heart in a strange whirl of mixed emotions—triumph, self-condemnation, and doubtless a dozen others had place. The women sat in groups in their living-room, sewing, chatting, playing upon the *balaleika*. All paused for a moment in their occupations as Amy entered, for they would read in her face how she had prospered after so unheard of a matter as the refusal to obey the summons of Cæsar; the probabilities one way and another had afforded subject for much conversation during her absence.

Maria Nagoy looked in Amy's face and read there her own defeat.

"Witch!" she hissed as Amy passed her, "what hast thou done to enslave the Tsar's will that he slew thee not for disobedience?"

"See the ring!" suddenly cried Olga Shishkin. "Oh, see the ring upon her finger!"

"Ay, dost thou see it, Maria?" said Amy. "Behold! it is the gift of the Tsar—the gift of the Tsar to his bride elect!"

"Sorceress!" cried Maria. "Sisters, this is a witch—the Tsar should be told—his life is not safe from her; she——"

Poor Maria Nagoy's words failed her, she threw up her arms, her head swayed and

twisted towards her shoulder, and she fell forward in a fit.

Olga Shishkin followed Amy from the room in obedience to a sign from the Anglichanka.

"Olga," said Amy, "it is true that he has chosen me, and with his own hand, red with Krapatkin's blood, has placed this ring upon my finger. This is the end—we meet no more, thou and I, after this night. Take the ring, it burns me like the fires of the nether pit; when three days are past give it to Maria Nagoy, tell her that I who might, neither desire nor dare to be Tsaritsa."

"But, Amy, consider," said Olga aghast; "to sit upon Cæsar's throne——"

"Nay, I have well considered. I cannot and dare not; let Maria sit by his side, if she dare."

"Then why, Amy, in the Saints' names, have you won the Tsar's favour only to reject it in the end?"

"Nay, God knows why; I know not; my own heart I know not."

"As for the ring, keep it for Heaven's sake," said Olga; "for she who took it from thee as thou desirest, and gave it to Maria, were lost indeed. The Tsar would send for me, ask me

this and that, and I should be stripped and knouted for doing thy behests."

Amy considered. "It is true," she said. "Well, I will keep the ring; tell Maria she should have had it. Now farewell!"

"But how—why—whither goest thou—the Tsar's arm is so long, Amy, it will reach thee at the uttermost ends of the earth."

"May-be," said Amy; "if so, I cannot help it; there are others in danger besides myself; I cannot stay longer. It would have been wisest to go with Sir Jerome as I was advised, but my heart was set upon triumphing over the Tsar, who at my first coming made of me a laughing-stock for the Court."

"And what wilt thou do? where hide, that the eyes of the tiger shall not see thee and his nostrils scent thee out?"

"Moscow is wide; I will find sanctuary for the present, and when opportunity offers I shall depart."

"That is when the next envoy comes. Well, I would not be in thy place, Amy; or rather I would, but I should act differently. Dear Heaven! To have the chance of a place by Cæsar's side, and instead to hide like a mouse from the cat's claws."

Amy stood dressed in her fur shooba, ready to go out into the frost.

"Good-bye, dear Olga; I have loved thee alone of all these women," she said.

"Alas! Amy, do not go to thy death," sobbed Olga, clinging to her.

Amy kissed the girl. "I must go, Olga; there is no other way," she said—"farewell!—God keep thee!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

FROM the terem Amy crept in the falling dusk straight towards the place where Kiril and Stepan lived in their filthy hut, close to the noisy abode of the wolf-dogs, their charges. Within the hut Stepan lay and snored on the platform atop of his great stove; Kiril sat and prepared food at the stove mouth.

Amy entered the hut, to the immense wonderment of its owner, who gazed at her with shaded eyes, as though she had brought the sun in with her. He stared suspiciously at her, though with admiration.

"You are Kiril," said Amy, "I know you; where is the Englishman—the custodian—I am his friend, and would speak with him instantly."

But Kiril shook his head, for the Muscovish peasant is a sealed book when it suits him to be ignorant, and until his obstinacy has been surmounted by threat or kindness.

Kiril, it appeared, had not seen me for many days. I had disappeared.

"My father, thou art cautious," Amy smiled; "that is the part of a wise man until he has learned that caution is unnecessary. Thou hast been a good friend to the Englishman. I have heard—what the Tsar shall never hear, nor any other than I—of thy kindness but yesterday when Krapatkin was saved by thee and the Englishman."

Kiril was on his knees and prostrate upon his face in a moment.

"My life is at thy mercy, Soodarina," he cried. "I have seen thee sitting beside the Tsar; I am lost!"

"Not so; this Englishman is more than the Tsar to me, for I am an Anglichanka. It is a matter of his life and of my own, not of thine. Summon him quickly if he is in hiding here; I guess, though I know not, that he may be in thy *lyédnik*."

Kiril crossed himself and departed.

"Soodar," he cried to me, as I lay in a compartment of the dog-kennel which good Kiril had himself partitioned for me from the space occupied by the hounds, for this was warmer than the cellar, and indeed there could scarcely be a safer sanctuary, for who would dare to look within it for a hidden man unless he would

be torn to pieces by the brutes whose shed I had invaded?

"Soodar," said Kiril, "a woman would see thee, an Anglichanka; nevertheless if there is danger I will say that——"

In a moment I was out and by Amy's side in Kiril's hut.

"Herbert," she said, "God has given us our lives up to this and spared us through many dangers which my foolishness has brought upon us, but now I am afraid." Amy sat down upon the narrow wooden bench that ran round three sides of the hut. The girl's body shook and her face paled, she seemed about to swoon. It was the reaction of too much fearlessness, a strain too long borne.

I brought her a small measure of strong spirit and forced a little of it between her lips; she revived presently.

"Krapatkin's death—your danger and my own—" she began, "I know not what, or why, with certainty, but my courage is for the moment gone."

"Art thou in particular and imminent danger?" I said. "Tell me quickly, Amy."

Amy showed me her hand with the great green ring set upon her middle finger.

"What is it—what means it?" I said. "Has the Tsar——"

She inclined her head. "It is his gift; but an hour ago he bade me go prepare myself for I should be Tsaritsa in two weeks. Oh, Herbert, I dare not return to the terem—what shall I do?—where shall I go?"

"The hour of our danger is come indeed, Amy," said I. "Let us consider. Return thou canst not, or if returning it must be but for a day while I devise some arrangement."

"No, no, I will not return to the terem, not for a day nor even for a night. I dare not, Herbert; I have lost heart—I am a coward!"

"Thou a coward!" I laughed, "the word and thy name are as the poles! Couldst thou not be satisfied with a partial triumph, Amy? The Tsar has loved none but thee these many weeks; must thou needs wait for the consummation of deadly danger, as now?"

"Chide me not," she entreated—she who would, up to this time, have withered me with scorn if I had presumed to question her will, as now. "Chide me not, Herbert, for I have no heart but to be comforted this day—encourage me, rather; tell me how we may escape from

Moscow—oh, my God! shall we two ever see dear England again?"

"Nay, God willing, we shall return home in safety. Will you leave Moscow this very night if so it can be arranged? Why should we not set out homeward forthwith—it is dark now? We will hire a three-horsed sledge, and make with all speed and by by-ways for Poland and so through Germany onward. We shall have a night's start of our pursuers; God will help us and this long sword of mine—come, Amy, let us keep a stout heart and show these Muscovites our heels until they prefer to feel the kiss of my blade!"

All this I said to give heart to Amy, though for myself I had not much hope in the successful issue of such a flight as I proposed.

"Why, as to three-horsed sledges, thy words remind me," she now said, flushing as she remembered. "Krapatkin would have had me escape with him last night. 'I have commanded that my horses be waiting at the Northern Gate,' said he, 'both this evening at nine and—in case thou canst not leave the terem to-day—to-morrow also'; this, mark you, Herbert, after I had refused to escape with him; 'for,' said he, 'thou mayest yet change thy mind, or the Tsar's madness may frighten thee, therefore

forget not that my horses shall be ready for thee at the gate every night for a week, and shall be at thy orders whether I meet thee there or no, for who can tell what might befall me meanwhile?' Half an hour later he died—murdered; but doubtless his horses will await me daily."

"Why, then, so be it!" said I; "and here is a good omen indeed for our escape! Darest thou, Amy," I continued, "await me here awhile alone with Kiril? He is very faithful. I would see Muirhead; it is right that he should know that we leave Moscow."

"Oh, Herbert, I am afraid!" Amy exclaimed, clinging to my arm; but a moment later, ashamed of her fears and quickly overcoming them, she bade me go. So through the darkness I crept like a thief of the night, and reached Muirhead's house in safety. To him I told all that had passed, but for the intended direction of our flight; I purposely withheld this from him, for knowledge might prove to him a dangerous thing if it should occur to the Tsar to question our good friend.

Muirhead agreed that, under the circumstances, and since Amy was firmly determined to reject the honour offered her, she must fly.

"Thou art a marked man in any case," he said, "for the Cæsar relentlessly pursues those who once escape him until he has had his will of them—as witness Krapatkin; therefore thou must soon have departed or died. Frankly, I have little hope of your escape and Amy's, my friend; it grieves me to say it, but it is better to be prepared."

"My friend," I laughed, "the odds are certainly against us, but we play for a high stake, which is freedom, and be sure I shall play my best."

"What a foolish maid is here!" said Muirhead. "And what an incomprehensible matter is the mind of a woman."

"Has she not insisted from first to last," said I, unwilling to hear Amy accused, "that she would first tame this tiger and then flee him? She is consistency itself!"

"What a foolish consistency—a consistency that should be spelt vanity, to my thinking. Well, I grieve for thee, Shadwell; the odds are gravely against thee. Would to God I could think that not only thou shouldst win thy stake, freedom, but also as great a one, I fancy, in thine eyes—her heart. I doubt not if thou gain one the other shall also be thine!"

"Of that I have no hope," I said; "in any case it is not a matter for discussion, Muirhead."

My good friend then gave me presents: a better shooba, or fur coat, than my own, a small pistol with powder and bullets, and other articles convenient for the journey. After which we parted, he promising to advise my mother and Amy's in case we should disappear, and no more be heard of us. For indeed he made little secret of his opinion that this night we took our first step into eternity.

Standing in the porch without, and apparently waiting for me, was a muffled figure, and, concluding that I had been followed and was threatened, I quickly drew my sword and stood upon guard.

"Put up thy sword," said the man. "I am a friend—I am the Cæsarevitch. I know thee by thy length; thou art Shadwell; is it not so?" I assented, astonished enough.

"I came to Muirhead for news of thy kinswoman Amy. I went to the terem to give her certain warning and counsel, but she is not there." The Prince was agitated and spoke in gasps.

"Is she not in the terem?" I exclaimed,

feigning surprise. "Doubtless she has gone to take the air, or is in the church at her prayers; she will return presently."

"If thou shouldst see her," said the Prince, intensely agitated, "bid her for the love of God return to the terem no more. My father has chosen her for his wife; will she offer herself a living sacrifice? The Tsar is mad."

"Fie, Prince," said I, "he is thy father."

"Nay, I blame him not; it is God's will that he is mad, not his own fault; only, I say, do not let Amy sacrifice herself. If she is ambitious and would be Tsaritsa, bid her wait a little, the Tsar's heart fails. I shall one day be Cæsar in his place, and then—if only she escape now—my God! Shadwell, the Tsar's love means death; let her wait, I will give her life, happiness, honour—a better love than my father's, for God would bless our union; this marriage would be an abomination in His sight."

"All this I will tell her," said I.

"Stay, take this purse—it is all I have. What is there will assist her escape. She is afraid of the Tsar—oh, I am sure of it; tell her if she knew all, her fear would be ten times tenfold. I pray to God that you persuade her to escape while yet she may."

All of which conversation I passed over to Amy upon my return.

"Verily, Amy, it is time thou quitted Muscovish soil," said I, "for truly there is something in thee very fatal to the hearts of the Tsar and his men."

But Amy was not in the mood for smiling. "I would to Heaven that the Prince might also, like ourselves, remain somewhere in sanctuary until the dawn of a better day."

"Wouldst thou on that day do as he desires?"

I said, laughing, this time without affectation, for to me it seemed that fire and water might as soon make common cause as Amy and the Cæsarevitch.

"I said not so," replied Amy flushing. "I would have him in safety, poor youth. One day the Tsar's dubina may fall more heavily upon him than it has yet fallen."

Words which I remembered at a subsequent time and remembered with wonder as a prophetic utterance, though Amy then repudiated with horror the idea that she had foreseen anything approaching in tragic awfulness the actual event.

CHAPTER XXX.

By nine o'clock that same evening Amy and I were at the Northern Gate of the city, and there, close at hand, we found Krapatkin's *troika*, or three-horsed sledge, in waiting, the driver most anxiously expecting Amy's appearance, for as he told us with tears in his eyes his poor master's goods and serfs—all that were found in his Moscow house—were forfeit to the Tsar, and in order to keep tryst with us he had been obliged to leave home early and to wait about in the streets until it was time to be at his place of appointment, otherwise both he and his horses would by this time have been claimed by the Tsar's men.

"If thou art anxious to be out of Moscow we are even more so," said I. "Therefore drive as though the evil one were behind thee to catch thy soul."

And drive he did, right well.

Meanwhile there was stir at the terem. The hour came at which the ladies were wont to

retire to bed, nine o'clock, and to the consternation of the duenna whose duty it was to see all the rules of the establishment strictly kept, news was brought her that the Anglichanka had not returned home.

"How? Not returned? When went she forth—stay, she attends the Tsar, be sure. No maiden would be out of doors at this time; it is impossible!"

Had the duenna only guessed it, there were many such impossibilities constantly performed by the ladies under her charge, unseen and unguessed by herself.

"She went forth," said Maria Nagoy, "late in the afternoon, when she returned from the Tsar's presence. His grace should know of this. I think he will not approve such conduct, even from the witch-Anglichanka!"

Ten o'clock came and none had retired to bed, for Amy had not appeared, and all were too much interested in this matter to think of sleeping. Maria sent a messenger for one of her brothers, Afanassy, who lived close at hand.

When the boyar arrived he was closeted with his sister awhile in close consultation; and when this was over Nagoy left the terem in order to present himself at the Tsar's quarters.

"He goes to acquaint the Tsar with the disgraceful conduct of the Anglichanka," said Maria.

"Is it not scandal enough that she shows herself openly in the streets at all hours? but to be abroad at night!"

"If the boyar is going to tell the Tsar of Amy's absence, he is a bold man," said Olga. "Keep an eye upon his dubina, boyar!" she added.

"Some one must go; and frankly I would it were not I!" replied Nagoy.

He went, nevertheless, but found that the Tsar had already retired to sleep.

"He must be summoned," said Nagoy; "I have news of importance."

"Is it good news?" asked the page in attendance; "if not, be warned and let it be told to-morrow!"

"Good or bad it must be told to-night; you shall wake the Tsar, my friend."

"Oh, I dare not!" said the youth, paling. "There is another, an Oprichinnik, who waits even now with bad news which, says he, should be told the Tsar—some story of the Anglichanka, for whom his Grace has lately developed a foolish spring madness—but how should I dare wake him from sleep to tell him such a tale?"

"Dear Saints!" exclaimed Nagoy, crossing himself, "and what then is this tale?"

"This fellow, the Oprichinnik, declares that being at about nine o'clock in the neighbourhood of the Northern Gate, he distinctly saw the Anglichanka come with that long English rascal, whose name I forget, but who was imprisoned by the Tsar and escaped by grace of Krapatkin (who has since expiated the offence). There was no mistaking either, says my man, for he had seen the lady more than once, and was one of those who arrested the long Englishman. Well, these two entered a great sledge, a boyar's equipage, which there awaited them, and bade the driver let the horses go as though the devil himself were in pursuit."

"Has not the man made a mistake?" said Nagoy, half frightened and half overjoyed, for if this were true it would be a dangerous matter to inform the Tsar of it, which duty might probably devolve upon himself; and yet, if the Anglichanka had really done this, why, here was an end of her interference between Maria his sister and the Tsar, Amy being an obstacle to Maria's greatness and, indirectly, to his own, so great that it had come near to overtopping altogether the edifice of the Nagoy ambitions.

"Nay," replied the page, "how can I tell whether the fellow speaks truly or falsely; he shall tell his own tale when the Tsar is told!"

"Ay, he shall tell it himself," said Nagoy, much relieved. "Nevertheless, my friend, I think the Tsar will not readily forgive us if we withhold this news one moment longer than is necessary. Go, summon the Oprichinnik; then his Grace must be awakened, and that done, if thou art afraid, leave the rest to me and to this common fellow to whose tale my own is a kind of corroboration."

So the young page, full of terror for his mission, went and roused the Tsar, who might be heard from the anteroom angrily demanding of the disturber of his peace the reason for his awakening, and the timid voice of the page, who replied that the Boyar Nagoy and another, an Oprichinnik, had news which must be told the Tsar at once, but as to which he himself knew nothing, only that these two men insisted. Thus the page escaped the danger he feared, and the wrath of the Tsar was reserved for others. Upon the Oprichinnik fell the brunt of it. For when he had told his tale and his Grace had caused him to repeat it, word for word, the Tsar suddenly fell upon him with his dubina,

cudgeling him so soundly that the wretched fellow yelled for his life and limped away in full howl, wounded and scarcely able to drag himself from Cæsar's presence."

"Now for thy tale," said his Grace, turning furiously upon Nagoy.

"Tsar," said Nagoy, standing boldly, for the Nagoyes are no cowards, "if I bring bad news, I err not in lack but rather in excess of zeal for thy service."

"Thy tale, thy tale," said the Tsar.

"Tis only that the Anglichanka has not returned to-night to the terem. My sister——"

"Oh! thy sister and thou together—there we have the kernel of it. Thinkest thou, Nagoy, that I see not through these fool's tricks of thine and hers? Amy is an obstacle to her greatness and thine, therefore this tale is trumped up to set my heart against an innocent woman; come, confess quickly, it is a lie from the beginning—is it not? The girl Amy has been hidden away by thy sister and thee, or thy brothers, that she may not stand between Maria and her ambitions."

The Tsar stood glaring and panting, his tongue moistening from time to time his lips, which trembled with passion or with agita-

tion. Nagoy remained silent, standing with bent head before him, his eye, nevertheless, upon the dubina which was held by the Tsar's trembling hand.

"Speak, Nagoy," said Ivan. "Tell me this soldier's tale is a lie, and by the God who made us both and whose Name be glorified for ever, thou shalt be the greatest boyar in my realm."

"Tsar, I would to Heaven I could say the words thou desirest to hear. I was not at the gate and cannot therefore corroborate this man's tale, though his is a corroboration of my own. Shall I prove my zeal? Let the Tsar say the word and I will ride this very hour in pursuit. If I should bring back this Englishwoman alive then shalt thou believe that we Nagoy's have had no hand in her disappearance. Shall I ride, Tsar?"

"Yes—ride, ride—take others with thee, three at least, for this Shadwell is great and strong, and he will be desperate. If thou find, Nagoy, that the Oprichinnik has spoken truly, and the girl——" The Tsar paused and sat down, too agitated to complete his sentence. For a moment the muscles of his body worked, his hands clasped and unclasped, the staff fell

with a clatter from his grasp, his mouth opened and closed, and his face twitched.

"The Tsar is ill," said Nagoy, "I will summon a——"

"If thou findest it thus," continued the Tsar, bracing himself suddenly and fixing upon the boyar a most malignant and terrible look, "thou shalt not leave of this Shadwell a piece of flesh so large as would feed a crow—dost thou fully understand me?" Nagoy bowed his head.

"It shall be as the Tsar commands," he said. "As for the maiden, she shall be brought back to Moscow."

Ivan uttered an exclamation of intense fury.

"Fool and idiot!" he cried; "I said not so, she shall be brought neither alive nor dead. She shall not be parted from her lover; with his dust shall mingle hers, and with his bones shall rot her own; cut them to pieces, both, Nagoy, and may God reject them! Dost thou understand me, Nagoy? With thy life thou shalt answer for thy obedience."

"I understand," said Nagoy, horrified with his mission, yet daring to utter no appeal for mercy. He would gladly, if he had dared, counsel the Tsar to allow these lovers to es-

cape where they would, so they returned not to interfere with his sister's ambitions.

"Go then, quickly. Stay! thou shalt count the pieces into which thy sword has carved this snake whom I have nourished in my bosom; for every piece there shall be a curse pronounced by my priests once a year, I swear it."

Nagoy returned to his house to prepare for departure. He roused his brother Alexis and told him all. Alexis grew pale first, then furious.

"By St. Cyril, brother," he cried, "thou art a knave if thou hast promised obedience to the Tsar's most damnable commands."

"What else should I do, fool, when the Tsar raves?"

"Slay the Englishman Shadwell, if thou wilt," continued Alexis, hastily dressing himself; "but by St. Michael and all his angels thou shalt not lay a finger upon the girl."

"Wilt thou then pose as her protector against the commands of Cæsar?" asked his brother.

"Ay, that I will indeed," cried Alexis. "I shall ride with thee, moreover, to see that neither thou nor another dishonour her by word or deed."

"God knows I would rather she lived and escaped over sea or whither she will," said the

elder brother; "only, if thou must be a fool, temper thy foolishness with wisdom, Alexis—what wouldst thou?"

"I have not yet thought, but she shall live, that I swear; and the Tsar shall not know it, that I swear also, for I will stick like a pig any man who blabs, even though it were my own brother."

"Who is the least likely to blab," laughed the elder Nagoy, "for Maria's sake, if not for thine and the girl's."

"Well, we shall see," said Alexis, still angry. "I will ride with thee, for I will trust no one who goes in fear of our Tsar-devil. Who is of our party?"

"Krimsky I thought of, and perhaps young Belsky."

And so it befel that soon after midnight there rode in pursuit of us four strong and determined men, the two Nagoy, Belsky, and Krimsky.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SCARCELY had the Tsar slept two hours when he reappeared in the anteroom to his bedchamber wherein a Strelitz soldier lay sleeping at the door leading to the corridor, while the night-page nodded in a chair by the stove, cursing in his waking moments this night duty, which he abhorred.

The Tsar woke both, the one with a prod from his dubina, the other with a clout of the hand.

To the Strelitz the Tsar said: "Go quickly, take the best horse in the stables and follow the Boyar Nagoy who rides with others towards Slatky Ozer; if thou overtake him thou art corporal from this day, if not thou diest; give to him this paper".

To the page the Tsar said: "Go with the fellow, see him started and bring me word".

In a moment the two men were gone and the Tsar upon his knees before the ikon, praying aloud and smiting his breast; he was still pray-

ing when the page returned, reporting that the Strelitz was already on his way.

Oh the joy of that grand drive of twenty leagues through the pine forests with Amy at my side! Above us a million stars, on every side ghostly trees that seemed to bow to us as we passed; a sombre throng through which the snow road ran like a white ribbon. The night was silent save when, from time to time, a wolf howled dismally in the distance, or some great bird perched in the branches near enough to the road to be disturbed by our passing rose noisily from its sanctuary and hurtled through the darkness, crashing through the twigs and bending tree-tops that barred its passage.

Amy was silent and thoughtful, and I, uncertain whether she would resent to be disturbed in her thoughts, kept silence also. But at length Amy spoke, so suddenly, after so long a silence, that she startled me.

"Now that we are safe," she said, "or at any rate upon the road to safety, at least out of this awful city, I desire first to thank God for His mercies, Herbert, and secondly to say to thee this: that, though I have achieved that which I had determined upon, it is a wonder and a mercy that I have escaped scot free; and that thy

counsel, though rejected by me, has been wiser than my own obstinate will."

"It is right I should tell thee, Amy," said I, "that we are still in much danger. That the Tsar will send after thee is certain; he will have me killed and thee brought back alive—or he would so have it if he could."

I felt Amy's hand fasten upon my arm and tighten there.

"I swear his men shall not have me alive," she said. "Together we escape or together we die—I mean," she added, "that I cannot again face the Tsar alone."

"Do you so fear the tiger's claws?" I said; "you that have danced in the tiger's den?"

"Death is nothing," she said; "but to be alone in Muscovy—my God, save me from it!"

"Thou used not to be so afraid of the Tsar and of Moscow; as for being alone, that should be no new thing, for of what use was my presence there to thee since I might not see thee?"

"Nay, it was different then. Only upon this last day I realise that I have lighted a fire which I have not breath to extinguish. Thank God I am out of the terem; there is one will be as thankful as I," she ended, laughing. "Oh, it is

worth some pain to have baited Maria Nagoy; well, there is no harm done her, she may have her Cæsar now! Are there many, think you, Herbert, who have had a Cæsar at their feet and have rejected him?"

"I see not that you rejected him but that you have created his love for you, and, having so created it, have run forthwith from your own creation." It was wonderful to me that she should be so light-hearted, yet I was glad to see this. Doubtless the relief of being free from Court and terem was so great that as yet she had no thought for any time save the present. For myself, even the joy of being with Amy could not entirely banish from me the thought of her danger and my own; my own I believe I honestly considered only in its relation to Amy; for what cared I for my life, only that Amy must not be left to the vengeance of the Tsar with none to help her.

However, we were not caught yet, and it might be that somehow we should in the end escape. Muscovy is very large: might not two people hide themselves awhile within her bosom from their enemies?

It may be that Amy desired to encourage me by her display of light-heartedness, realising that

I should need all the spirit I possessed in the dangers which lay before us ; but indeed whether this were the reason for her present mood or another—as joy to have left Moscow in safety, the delight of rapid travelling through the keen air, the simple sanguine buoyancy of youth, or what not—I cannot tell ; certain only is it that the maid became more and more imbued with lightness of spirit as the three fine horses dragged us at lightning speed league after league towards our present destination, and that soon I became infected with the same spirit of joyousness, so that we conversed pleasantly of the past and of the future, and if we touched upon the present, we found subject for mirth and laughter even in the terrors and dangers which beset us.

“Will you not sleep awhile, Amy?” said I, when an hour had passed, and she seemed to grow weary of talking. “Our sleep at Krapatkin’s house is likely to be disturbed.”

“Will the Tsar have learned by this of our flight?” she laughed. “Oh, Herbert, how the tiger will rage! I will tell thee what will pass : he who tells the news must be a brave man ; he will be struck down, and perchance the Tsar will himself visit the terem ; what a storm will there arise ! The Nagoyes will be accused of spiriting

me away for Maria’s sake ; the brothers will be examined by the Tsar—poor Alexis ! He would have me for himself ; he will be glad of my escape from the Tsar, but will likely search and pursue on his own account.”

So Amy chattered gaily, and found subject for merriment even in matters of instant peril. But presently she fell asleep and slept for over an hour, and as she slumbered her sweet head dropped upon my shoulder and her breath brushed my cheek. The blood coursed through my veins. I longed to take her into my arms and to my heart ; held there, I should defy the whole world to pluck her away.

But Amy had given me nothing beyond a few words of gratitude ; a little confidence in my power to protect her, if you will ; a modicum of satisfaction that I still lived to see to her safety ; as much kindness as a child might show to her nurse who had helped to pull her out of the ditch. No more than this.

“You fool,” I told myself ; “is this a time for such thought ? Would you make a bargain with the maid for reward and favour : give me this and that, and I will save your life, or give because I have already saved it ?”

Nay, I had not even so much claim upon her,

for in this matter we were certainly at quits with one another ; but for her interference, and the driving of a dangerous bargain with Krapatkin, I should even now be a prisoner within the palace, if, indeed, Cæsar had not already made of me a victim to his insane jealousy, as he had made Krapatkin.

Jealousy, forsooth ! How blind is a man in love, even a Cæsar. The most foolish might surely have discovered, if he would, that me no man had cause to regard as a rival in the pursuit of Amy. Alas ! would it were otherwise.

"Be content, Herbert," I now assured myself, "for it can never be otherwise ; cherish her, love her, serve her, lay down thy very life for her, if thou wilt, but thou shalt have no reward for thy service, no love—scarcely even a little 'like' ; be content, poor fool, with the cold friendliness of kin for kin that leads to no pulse quickening or eye brightening !"

Well, if so it must be, so be it. At any rate, I should have the joy of fighting for her to my last breath ; of that no one could deprive me. Moreover, it was foolish to think regretfully of love and such things, matters which concerned a future time ; whereas, probably, neither Amy nor I would ever see another moon.

Yet, if she would only give me a little love now, my God ! how I would fight to save her life and my own.

"Fool !" I ended, "you will fight your best for her in any case, and that you know right well."

Amy awoke with a start, muttering ; I caught her last words : "Slay me if thou wilt, but his name I will never reveal".

"Where am I ?" she said, awaking and looking about ; then, remembering, "Oh, Herbert, I dreamed I quarrelled with the Tsar, and he threatened me ; thank God it is as it is."

"Whose name is that thou wouldst not reveal to him ?" I smiled.

She started. "Did I speak in my sleep ? What said I ?"

"Only this—that he—the Cæsar doubtless—might slay thee, but this name should never be revealed by thee."

"Is that all ?" she asked. "Swear that I said no more."

"I swear that was all I heard."

"The Tsar was jealous, as usual ; he accused me of loving a man since I would give him no love, whereat—in order to irritate his Grace—I pretended that there might be or might not be

one to whom my heart was given, but that his name I would never reveal!"

"Thou shouldst have felt the dubina but that thou didst wake at the right moment," I laughed.

"As for me, I should not care to withstand a dig from Cæsar's great staff, even in sleep."

"Even in sleep he would have spared me, I think," she said, laughing also.

"And who was this man whose name was used as a stalking-horse to attack the Tsar's jealousy?" I asked.

"A dream-man," she laughed, and said no more, relapsing into silence and thought until presently we dashed up to the gates which, the driver informed us over his shoulder, were the entrance to Slatky Ozer, the country seat of Krapatkin.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THIS was a great rambling wooden house, fashioned, like most of the Muscovish dachi, or country houses, in the form of a square main building in the centre, flanked by a wing on each side which came forward in a semicircle, like a man's outstretched arms, as though to embrace the approaching visitors. There were but few servants in the place, for Krapatkin's main establishment was in Moscow, and these few now went about their duties noisily lamenting the news of the boyar's death. They brought food and set it before us, sobbing and weeping, and spoke to us with the tears pouring down their cheeks.

I bade the good fellows prepare a sleeping chamber for Amy, and to produce and light every candle and lantern that the house possessed.

When these orders were executed I spoke to them and said: "Brothers, if you are wise you will now go to your homes in the village until the

one to whom my heart was given, but that his name I would never reveal!"

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When these orders were executed I spoke to them and said: "Brothers, if you are wise you will now go to your homes in the village until the

morning, for we too, like your master, who has been killed as you know, lie under the Tsar's displeasure; we shall be pursued during the night for sure, and doubtless there will be fighting and bloodshed in which I do not ask you to join."

Right glad were the honest fellows to take the hint I gave them and their departure; there is no love of fighting in the blood of the Muscovish serfs, who prefer a peaceful life among their herds and in their cornfields.

Within five minutes of my warning Amy and I were alone in this great house.

"Now," said Amy, her eyes flashing, "we will prepare for battle."

"Nay," I protested, "retire thou and sleep, at least until our enemies arrive." But Amy would have none of my nurse-counsel, but would first help me in my preparations; afterwards, she said, she would rest awhile.

I chose my battlefield: it should be the stairs. These led in two flights, one from each side of the hall below to the wide corridor above, and since I could not defend both single-handed, one must be blocked; therefore I collected chests and what not, and piled them so that none could pass the barricade. Then I set lanterns and

candles about the hall at the lower portion of the stair upon that side which I should defend, but none above, in order that I might fight in darkness while my enemies should be plainly seen, which, I considered, would prove of no small advantage to me, for I should thus strike at substance, and they at shadow. Besides this, I should have room for arm play, being a-top of the stairs, but they should be cramped; thus one man might, with care and a fair share of good fortune, withstand a score night-long. As for arms, I had my own long rapier, and of course my dagger.

"And I have Muirhead's pistol," said Amy, her face aglow with the light of battle; "that shall be for the very last, in case we are worsted. If I could find a sword or an axe, I would see that none climbed this barricade to get behind thee."

"If thou must indeed be present," I said, "that were the best place for thee. Couldst thou kill a man, if need were?"

Amy made a face. "I hate blood," she replied; "but if one should threaten the life of my friend, I think I could strike with all my strength."

"So strike, if thou must strike at all, but if

God will I shall do all the striking; rather use thy eyes for me and thy voice in quickly discerning danger and in warning me in time."

"Yes, I would rather have it so," she said.

Then, all being prepared, Amy retired to rest, first compelling me to promise that she should be roused at the first note of danger.

As for me, I lay at the top of the stairs, wrapped in my shooba, for it was very cold; my sword lay ready to hand beside me. I dozed, I think, for an hour or more.

Then I suddenly heard the sound of galloping hoofs, which came nearer. Voices shouted to one another. I sprang to my feet—the hour had come then. "God help us now!" I said aloud, turning to go and rouse Amy.

"Amen," said her voice close behind me, and I saw that she was already there and waiting.

"Now for a stout heart and a watchful eye," I said, "both of which thou hast, Amy, my dear."

"And now for a good sword and a long arm," she replied, "both of which are certainly thine; and for a man's fearless soul, which also thou hast if ever man had, Herbert, my dear."

"Thou used not to think highly of my man's courage," I laughed exultingly, for she had spoken with earnest emotion and my heart

swelled with joy at her praise. "Hast thou now changed in thy opinions?"

"I have learned many things here that I knew not before," she said softly. "If I die to-night, Herbert, and thou remainest alive, think not of me as——"

Amy's sentence was never finished, for at this moment there came the sound of quick steps without, followed by the clatter of boot and shoulder at the outer door, which flew instantly open, for we had not barred it—what would a moment's delay have availed us—and into the hall came thronging four men, blinking and dazed by the sudden bright light within.

I spoke their names aloud as they entered. "Afanassy Nagoy, Belsky, Krinsky, and Alexis Nagoy. Is that all, boyars?" I said. "You have undertaken more than the work of four men."

"A voice from the darkness," laughed the elder Nagoy. "Where are you, Shadwell, and where is the lady? Let us parley."

"Parley from there, then," I laughed. "There is death on the stairs."

"Thou art in a boastful mood," said Nagoy. "At any rate, hear what we have to say to thee."

"Well, say on," I cried. "Let us hear the oracle of Cæsar as interpreted by thee, Nagoy."

"The oracle of Cæsar is this," said Afanassy: "that if we four return before we shall have sliced thee in pieces we are to be sliced in thy stead. As for the maiden——"

"Yes, that is the main point," I laughed, "for of course I must be sliced, once the slicer is found."

"We have no death-feud against either thee or her," said Nagoy. "Why should we? I say this lest thou shouldst think that for my sister's ends we would shed the blood of this Amy Romalyn. The Tsar has commanded us to slay both her and thee, but——"

"But," cried Alexis Nagoy, taking up his brother's speech; "but, Amy, if thou art there, and if not, tell her Shadwell, her life is in her own hands; new happiness I promise her, love, all that a woman can desire. This devil Tsar, whom we both fear and hate, may easily be deceived. My brother and these boyars will return and report thy death and mine, but we shall not die; thou shalt live to be a happy wife, and we need not lie hid longer than the life of the Tsar, who fails already, as one may see."

I bade Amy reply. "Speak, Amy; what sayest thou?"

"That is a fair speech, Alexis Nagoy," she said; "and I thank thee for it, but I have had enough and to spare of Muscovy, and would return to my home. Moreover, what of my kinsman, Herbert Shadwell?"

"Let him escape," said Alexis, "where he will. The Tsar shall be persuaded that he fell beneath our swords."

"Do not refuse this offer without due thought, Amy," I whispered; "at any rate it is the offer of life."

Amy uttered an exclamation of anger, replying in English and in her old arbitrary manner, that if I desired to gain my life by selling her into slavery, so be it. This enraged me, and I called aloud to Alexis Nagoy that my kinswoman would have none of him, neither would I take my life at his gift. "She will return to her own people."

"That she shall never do, if I live," cried Nagoy back; "I swear it."

"Then thou art as good as dead, if it depend on thee!" I laughed.

The four boyars consulted awhile.

"At any rate we shall not kill thee, Amy,"

shouted Alexis; "but when we have cut thy fool of a kinsman in pieces, thou must choose between the Tsar and me."

"Reply for me," said Amy, "but for God's sake let it be a man's answer!"

"Fight first and bargain afterwards," I called back, "if ye dare, boyars; but I think you are better merchants than fighters."

Then suddenly the battle began without further warning, and I found myself attacked by two swords, Belsky's and the elder Nagoy's, who sprang up the stairs with marvellous agility and were upon me almost before I discerned their intention.

"Take up thy position, Amy," I shouted.

The two men cut and thrust at me for a moment or two, but the space was too narrow for both to fight freely, neither could they reach me from the position they took up.

"What, no nearer?" I cried, mocking them.

"Will you not come a step or two steps higher? See, even I cannot reach!"

Belsky was a fierce and brave man; he uttered a curse, and springing forward and two steps upward, lunged quickly at my chest; Nagoy tried to follow, but his sword caught the balustrade. I easily parried Belsky's thrust,

and gave him the counter, which just pricked his arm.

"Let me come," cried Nagoy angrily, pushing past his companion, "when he parries, then strike, Belsky; we play the fool."

Nagoy made two vicious thrusts, but hampered Belsky so that he could not strike when Nagoy shouted to him to do so. As he shouted the second time, Nagoy dropped his sword, which clattered down into the hall beneath, and his shout changed into a fierce curse, for the blood flowed from a deep gash in the right fore-arm.

As Nagoy went cursing downstairs Krimsky came rapidly upwards to take his place; this was a small active man, quick in his movements and a good swordsman, as I soon perceived. Therefore upon Krimsky I concentrated my chief attack, feeling that in Belsky's awkward swordmanship there was little danger. The two men fought now in concert, Krimsky attacking while Belsky awaited his opportunity to thrust. Being a much smaller man than Nagoy, Krimsky allowed his companion more space for movement.

"Now for a great effort," thought I, and rushing suddenly upon Krimsky I buried my sword deep in his chest. But with the impetus

I tripped over his falling body and fell with him, just escaping Belsky's thrust as I slipped forward. Fortunately our falling bodies knocked Belsky from his footing, so that here were we three in a moment at the foot of the stairs, lying Heaven knows how intermingled, and the two Nagoys standing above us ready to strike. Up sprang Belsky and up sprang I simultaneously, but Krinsky was out of the fight, dead.

My sword was still in my hand, but broken in the fall; Belsky had lost his. As I sprang up Alexis and Afanassy both thrust at me. The sword of Alexis passed through the flesh of my left arm, but Afanassy, being now left-handed, missed me. Almost at the same moment Belsky found his sword and sprang back to the attack, but in an instant I had cleft his skull with my half sword and he fell.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"HERBERT, beware! Alexis creeps behind thee," suddenly cried Amy from half-way down the stairs, for she hastened—God bless her brave heart!—to my assistance. With the words her pistol discharged its contents, and one moment later the sword of Alexis passed through the upper part of my chest, near the right shoulder, from back to front. I heard Amy's shriek as I fell, and for a day, or it may be two days, that agonised cry was the last thing of which I was conscious, for in falling I banged my head so sorely against the hilt of a sword lying upon the ground that the few wits therein contained took flight and left me helpless.

When I opened my eyes I lay in a room whose heat and odour reminded me of the hut of Kiril; where was I—what had happened? For a space I could remember nothing. I allowed my eyes to wander lazily from object to object—no, it was not Kiril's hut, for there the stove

I tripped over his falling body and fell with him, just escaping Belsky's thrust as I slipped forward. Fortunately our falling bodies knocked Belsky from his footing, so that here were we three in a moment at the foot of the stairs, lying Heaven knows how intermingled, and the two Nagoys standing above us ready to strike. Up sprang Belsky and up sprang I simultaneously, but Krinsky was out of the fight, dead.

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stood here, the table in that corner, the window was on the right of the door.

When I attempted to move my head there was pain in my shoulder, therefore I lay still and wondered, closing my eyes. Presently some one entered. This was an old peasant woman, who came, it seemed, to doctor me, for she removed the coverings over my shoulder, whence the pain had come, and applied herbs and ice, muttering something which I could not follow—spell or incantation, or what not. When she had finished I opened my eyes and allowed her to see that I was sensible.

The old woman crossed herself and bowed low to me. "The boyar has returned from death to life," she said, "glory be to God!"

"Amen," said I feebly; indeed, though I moved my lips I doubt whether any sound came.

"I will tell the boyarina," the hag continued and disappeared.

A few moments later there came the sound of quick feet without and there entered some one.

"Now who is the boyarina?" I asked myself languidly; "and what is the meaning of all this?"

Then Amy came to my couch-side, and laid a gentle cool hand upon my brow and spoke kind words, giving thanks to the Almighty that I was restored at last to consciousness. I lay still with closed eyes, for the sound of her voice and the touch of her hand were so exquisite to me that I feared to end them by making any movement.

"Am I in Heaven, Amy," I whispered at length, "or still on earth?"

"Nay, you live and shall live," said Amy, "please God. Do you suffer much pain?"

I opened my eyes now and gazed into hers. Amy's face was white and her eyes looked as though they had wept much. There was nothing of their usual haughty fire to be seen, but in its place a gentleness and pity which I had but rarely discerned there.

"Yes, there is pain in my shoulder, and I am very very weary," said I, and then, as she has since informed me, I yawned lustily and forthwith fell asleep.

When I awoke and opened my eyes Amy sat close to the couch. I now felt stronger. "Amy, tell me why I lie here—it is a peasant's hut, is it not? And how come you to be with me? Is this Moscow?"

"God forbid!" she exclaimed. "Do you then remember nothing?"

"I remember that Krapatkin is dead and that I am in hiding from the Tsar; dost thou hide also? And why have I fallen ill in this hut, for ill and weak I am?"

Then Amy reminded me little by little of all that had happened and which, for the time, I had entirely forgotten, though since that day the memory of every moment of our flight and of the battle at Krapatkin's house has returned to me doubly vivid. Up to the end of the fight she carried her tale and there ended for the day, for I yawned and grew weary—I who up to this hour had never known weariness—refusing to continue until to-morrow.

So, protesting, I saw Amy depart, and in her place returned old Marfa, the serf, the wise woman of the village, who doctored me and attended to my wants, and until next morning I, who had tasted of Heaven while Amy sat and talked to me, lay in darkness, a sick and discontented man of earth who waited impatiently for God's sun to shine once more upon his heart.

Amy came daily and sat by my side for many hours. From her I learned all that had passed since the moment of my overthrow.

"The sword of Alexis passed through your body," she told me, "and you fell, as I thought, dead. Then both the Nagoyes looked towards me, who had nothing but thy dagger, which I caught up, to defend myself withal. They looked upon me, and the elder laughed.

"What should that avail thee against our two swords?" he said.

"This," said I, "that if either of you advance one step towards me, it shall find its way to my heart; I swear it."

"Do nothing rashly, Amy," cried Alexis; "we shall not come near thee."

"The brothers consulted awhile in whispers, and while they talked two things happened: the one, I—stooping over thee—discerned, as I believed, a breathing; and the other that a horse galloped up to the very door and some one banged upon the panels demanding admittance. Alexis opened to him and there entered, panting and perspiring, a Strelitz soldier, who blinked and crossed himself as his eyes encountered the light and he saw the sight which was here revealed to him—for indeed the place resembled the shambles. The fellow handed Nagoy a paper. 'From the Tsar,' he gasped.

"Alexis read the writing and passed the paper to his brother.

"'The Tsar has changed his mind,' laughed the elder Nagoy; 'thou art to be spared, Amy Romalyn, and carried back to him.'

"'Fear nothing, Amy,' cried Alexis, 'thou shalt not be carried back.'

"'Fool!' said his brother, reproving him, 'beware! This Strelitz hath ears, like another.'

"Alexis turned upon the Strelitz. 'What said the Tsar to thee?' he asked fiercely.

"'I must overtake the Boyar Nagoy or die,' said the man; 'and since I failed to overtake thee, I am a dead man.'

"'Go without, I will speak to thee presently,' said Alexis, and the Strelitz departed.

"Then the brothers quarrelled over me, for Afanassy Nagoy said that the Tsar must be obeyed, and Alexis cursed the Tsar and his brother also.

"'I swear she shall not return to Moscow,' he said; and I cried out: 'That is true, Alexis, for all the Nagoyes in Muscovy shall never carry me alive to the Tsar'.

"'It is easy to say that the Strelitz arrived too late,' said Alexis. 'What if the Tsar's first commands were obeyed before the fellow came with

new instructions? Are we to blame that our horses outran his? Moreover, Maria will benefit, and, as thou knowest, I have sworn to possess this Anglichanka.'

"I allowed this boast to pass," said Amy, smiling upon me as I lay listening and fuming in helpless rage, "since I now knew that my brave Herbert still lived, which Alexis knew not. After this the brothers conferred in lower tones, so that I heard no more, but sat upon the steps between these men and thy body, lest they should learn that there was still breath in thee.

"Presently, their consultation being over, Alexis spoke:—

"'Amy,' said he, 'it is decided between us that we shall both return with our tale to the Tsar. This tale shall set forth that thou and thy kinsman are both dead, the later message of the Tsar sparing thee having gone astray. Thou shalt be left here in charge of the Strelitz soldier, who shall have his orders concerning thee. When I return I shall make further disposition for thy safety and happiness. Be sure that thou shalt be well and considerably treated and shalt learn to think kindly of me. Remember to my advantage that I have saved thee from the Tsar.'

"I will remember," said I.

"Thou shalt remain meanwhile not here, but in a village which lies a league from the great road, whither the Strelitz shall escort thee. Within a week, unless the Tsar has by that time ended me, I shall return."

"With that the brothers withdrew, and I presently heard the sound of a sledge upon the snow, which told of their departure in the carriage which had brought us two to this place.

"Then the Strelitz came, a good fellow, of whom I quickly made an excellent friend. By his help thou wert conveyed to a hand-sledge and so drawn easily and without jolting to this hut, where old Marfa, good soul, has by God's mercy wooed thee back to life."

"Marfa and thou, Amy, but chiefly thou," said I. "Even now, if I had not thy voice to hear and thy face to gaze upon, I should soon sink back into the pit."

"Nay," laughed Amy, "if thou speak thus foolishly it is time I left thee to sleep off thy foolishness. Moreover, let Marfa have her due."

"But stay, Amy, what of this Alexis—has he returned?" I asked.

"He is still absent; time enough for Alexis when I desire a husband," she laughed.

"Oh, that I were strong and well," said I, tears of weakness coming to my eyes; "a pretty protector am I, Amy, lying helpless here."

"Fret not," she said, "so shalt thou the sooner gain strength. As for Alexis, let him come; the very knowledge that thou art alive will so fright him that we shall soon be done with his presence."

"But what if he trade upon my weakness? How easily were I put aside, having not the strength of a mouse; and then what of thee? Who shall protect thee from him?"

"Why—why where is thy stout heart?" she laughed. "As for me, I feel able this day to deal with fifty Nagoyes. Rest in peace, Herbert, for see we have changed places; this time I shall be protector for both myself and thee!"

Two days later Alexis arrived in the village and came to seek Amy in the hut in which I lay, directed thereto by our good Strelitz, who discreetly, and by Amy's advice, said nothing of any sick man. As for ourselves, we had seen him ride past the window and were prepared for him.

"Greeting and all love to thee, my sweet

bride!" cried Alexis, entering the hut quickly and with arms extended to clasp Amy.

Then, suddenly, his eye fell upon my couch. Never shall I forget the change that came over the fellow's face as he started and stopped, as though frozen to the spot on which he stood.

"Diavol!" he muttered. His eyes travelled to Amy's face, and the first look of fear and rage changed into an expression of haggard anguish. "Was he then not slain?"

I spoke, laughing: "I have yet to thank thee, Alexis Nagoy, for a dig from behind; in our country the man who so fights is called 'coward' and even harder names".

Nagoy took no notice of my words.

"Amy, I have come to bear thee away," he said. "All is ready for our marriage."

"Excepting the bride," she laughed. "I am otherwise occupied at present, Nagoy; I have no leisure for marriage. My kinsman needs tending; he has been sick almost to death."

"I will wait," said Alexis, "a little while."

"It is useless, Nagoy," I cried. "Amy will have none of thee if thou wait from now to Doomsday."

"That shall lie between thee and me, Shadwell," said Alexis, turning upon me. "I could

fall upon thee now, if I would, and so the decision should be reached this instant; but——"

Alexis did not finish his sentence. His eyes sought Amy's face, and there read Heaven knows what things, but he continued after a moment:—

"Well, take time to recover strength. I will show her that Alexis Nagoy can deal as easily with a whole man as with a sick one."

"Next time there will be no thrusting from the back!" said I, foolishly fearful lest by this speech he should have gained Amy's approval; "remember that, Nagoy."

"There are many things that I shall remember when we meet," he replied; "meanwhile I shall abide in the village, lest, remembering more fearfully than I, thou recover too soon and depart in safety."

At this Amy laughed aloud. "Fear not, Nagoy, I will hold him to it; he shall not play the coward," she cried. But I, too furious to speak, could only mutter in my teeth that for these words Alexis should one day pay very dearly.

"Well, the sooner the better!" said he, and Amy laughed again as the fellow left us.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

My recovery was not of the most rapid, and even when at length I was able to get upon my feet and totter weakly from couch to window and back again, my strength so lagged behind the desire to be strong that I began to despair of ever seeing myself restored to full vigour.

During all this time Alexis Nagoy lived in the village. From time to time I saw him from the window, and Amy saw and spoke with him frequently, when, said she, he would forever prate of love and marriage. She should be baptised and confirmed into the Holy Orthodox Church and what not, to all of which things Amy said nothing, excepting that her charge grew daily in strength.

"Let him grow and afterwards escape where he will," said Alexis once; "and come thou with me this very day, my estate is but ten leagues distant." But Amy replied that she must first finish her task in nursing her kinsman to full strength; "and afterwards," said

she, "there is his consent to be obtained. Wouldst thou have a maiden marry without consent of her guardian?"

"Do not mock me, Amy!" he said angrily; "you mend this fellow only that he may be ripped again."

"Alas, poor Herbert!" Amy murmured. "Must his poor back suffer a second time?"

"I know not why I do not leave him to stew—that were mercy as much as he deserves—and carry thee away by force."

"Here is a conundrum, indeed! Is it because thou darest not, Nagoy?"

"Tempt me not to strike thee," said the boyar fiercely; "in this country women whose tongues wag are soon taught silence."

"Then I think I shall never be a boyar's wife," said Amy; "for the rest, do not strike me, Nagoy, nor attempt to take me by force, for thou shouldst find, firstly, that I am not without a sting of my own, and, secondly, that my kinsman Shadwell, though still weak and but half a man, is yet man enough for an Alexis Nagoy, provided that this Alexis Nagoy stand to him face to face, and thrust not from behind."

Nagoy raised his hand as though to strike,

but the blow did not fall and the fierce boyar departed.

"What wouldst thou have done if he had struck thee?" I asked Amy, when she repeated this conversation for my entertainment.

"He should never have struck me," said Amy. "If the Tsar refrained, surely a Nagoy might, who is to Cæsar as a barking dog to a tiger that watches to spring."

I know not the mind of this Alexis Nagoy, nor whether he had ever intended to await my restoration to health in order to put to the test his prowess with the sword against my own, or whether he had used this boast but as a stalking-horse, intending to obtain his real end by treacherous means while still I lay helpless. But this is certain: that he attempted neither to carry away the lady nor to rid himself by treachery of her helpless protector; but, after a month, and just as I began to practise myself in the use of my sword-arm in preparation for our meeting, he disappeared and returned no more.

Two weeks after this Amy and I left the village, having bought from the serfs, who by this time were to a man Amy's devoted friends, horses, and a telega or cart, for by this time

the roads were covered by a mixture of snow and mud, and the travelling was very wearisome, and not a little dangerous. We travelled by short stages, for I was not as yet at my full strength, and since we were not pursued, there was no need for particular haste, only, we agreed, we must by all means arrive in time for the first English vessel which should reach Archangel at the opening of navigation after the frost of winter.

But being constantly in Amy's company, a delight which must end or at least be shared by others when aboard ship, I regretted not one yard of the road, nor one hour of the month of days which our journey occupied. Amy was by this time the old Amy, or nearly so. She was the old Amy, yet with a difference. As full of spirit, as ready to mock, to ridicule, even to turn upon a man suddenly and at a word in scorn and anger, and yet softened, chastened, returning more easily to the gentler mood.

Both delight and pain were my portion: delight to be with Amy, to see her and hear her voice, to be in constant touch with her; pain that, though so near to her and she mostly so kind, so friendly, I could come no nearer, as it seemed, to her heart of hearts. Of like for me

she had plenty, and showed it without stint, but of love I could see no sign. Nay, if I showed by flattering word, or foolish bashful behaviour that I would hint, if I dared, of my great longing for something better than the good sisterly friendship which she gave me unsparingly, Amy's favour seemed to vanish, and she would speak shortly, angrily even, as in the days of old when even a sisterly liking for me was absent.

So that I almost despaired of that which was the great desire of my life—the gaining of Amy's heart of hearts for my own.

When within a day's journey of Archangel a surprising thing happened. We, jolting along slowly in our village cart, became suddenly aware that there overtook us two travelling carriages, each drawn by four horses abreast, cantering rapidly.

"Boyars, Amy," said I; "let us draw aside out of the way and allow them to pass. Huddle your face in your furs, lest these be some who have seen us at Court; I will do the same."

Thus, when the great people passed us, our faces were so well hidden in the wide fur collars of our shoobas that he would have been clever who should have recognised us.

When the two carriages had dashed past us as we sat in our humble vehicle half in the ditch and half out, "Didst thou get a sight of either of the two boyars, Amy?" said I. I had caught a glimpse of one dozing amid his furs, and the face—what I saw of it—was strangely familiar.

"I saw both," laughed Amy, "and knew both."

"Was one Peesemsky, our little envoy at the Queen's Court, with whom we came to Muscovy?"

"Peesemsky was certainly one. But didst thou not see the other? It was our good Muirhead, and both men slept like bears in winter."

So it proved when we reached Archangel next day, and I think there were never two men more astounded and amazed than were those two good fellows to see Amy and me still in the land of the living.

"By the mercy of God!" exclaimed Muirhead, as we appeared suddenly before him at the house which he and Peesemsky occupied together. "Do I see visions? This is not you, Shadwell, and Amy Romalyn, in the flesh? Why—"

"In the flesh certainly, and as certainly by the mercy of God," said I, and Amy laughed

and said that she warranted there had been much hard lying in Moscow anent our destruction. "Tell us that history, Muirhead, according to the version prepared specially for Cæsar's reading."

"The Tsar sent men to cut you both to pieces," began Muirhead, "and another, amending the order, whereby you, Shadwell, should have been destroyed and Amy brought back alive. The last messenger, said the Nagoy, arrived too late, for, after a great fight, both of you fell, Krimsky having slain Amy and Afanassy Nagoy ending Shadwell here, who first slew Krimsky, and also Belsky. Tell me now the true version."

This we did, and, our tale finished, Muirhead resumed his story, which was remarkable and tragic enough.

For it appeared that when the Tsar heard of Amy's death at Krimsky's hands, he fell into so terrible a passion of rage that none dared approach him for two days, unless compelled to do so. No man was safe in his presence. After these two days he grew quieter, but was sullen and thoughtful. After a week he sent for Maria Nagoy and bade her prepare for marriage, and fourteen days later the two were married. But

meanwhile the young Prince Ivan, the Cæsarevitch, wept and grew thin, and one day when the Tsar spoke with him, angrily bidding him bear himself in a manly fashion, as a prince should, young Ivan took heart of grace and stood to his terrible father, accusing him of many things, but chiefly of the murder of Amy. No man had ever before seen the Cæsarevitch in this mood nor had deemed him capable of it. Boris Godunof, who alone was present, declared to Muirhead that if the heavens had fallen he could not have been more amazed. The positions of these two were suddenly reversed, for the son stood and upbraided, calling Heaven to witness, while the father sat and wept and groaned, beseeching pardon of God for his sins, but especially for this one, of Amy's murder.

Then most abruptly the Tsar's mood changed. In the place of prayers and the sorrow of the sinner came suddenly a fit of ungovernable frenzy and rage, as a peal of deafening thunder will crash in the midst of the soft patter of quiet raindrops. Whether the Cæsarevitch—accusing his father of many things—had said some word which infuriated him Godunof cannot tell, but the wretched monarch suddenly rose to his feet and without warning committed the most horrible

of all the many crimes which have made his name a terror among all civilised people. With his dubina he struck his own son dead at his feet. This had happened a month ago.

At Muirhead's recital of this tragedy Amy sobbed as though her heart would break; her hand sought mine and pressed it tightly. When Muirhead had finished she bade me follow her where we should be unobserved; her eyes were full of tears.

"Herbert," she said, "until Muirhead told us this last tale of the Tsar's madness, for mad he is, I had not realised in full what it is thou hast done for me. Thou hast taken me out of hell itself, my best and dearest friend."

"If I have saved thee, thou hast also saved me," said I; "we are quits, Amy."

"Nay, even though I had saved thy life, what is death in comparison with the sufferings of hell on earth? To this I should have been condemned but for thee, dear Herbert; what shall I give thee in return, say, fear not to ask, there is no reward too great for such a service?"

Amy trembled and wept and clung to me. For a moment I was tempted to ask of her that which my soul desired above all earthly things—her love; but I refrained, for, thought I,

love cannot be given as a reward for services rendered; if love is love it must sow itself, fertilise itself, take root and grow, and blossom of and by itself; love that was born of gratitude would soon wither and perish!

Moreover, it would be but a base thing to accept from Amy in an hour of emotion and great agitation a gift which in calmer moments she would hesitate to bestow upon me. Therefore I controlled my longing to take her to my heart and claim hers, though the task was not an easy one.

"Nay, we are quits, Amy, as I say; thou art nothing in my debt," said I, disengaging her hands from my shoulders.

"Nay—speak—speak!" she cried; but I shook my head and said nothing, leaving the room rather than be tempted to ask of her what was not my own by right of conquest. Love in payment for service? God forbid!

Whereupon Amy, as I afterwards learned, and that from the best authority, sat down and set herself to laughing and crying by turns, calling me dreadful names the while, such as "honest fool; sheep; blindworm; most dear, most obstinate, most impenetrable blockhead"—and so forth.

CHAPTER XXXV.

PEESEMSKY had letters from the Tsar for her Grace Elizabeth our Queen, sealed letters, as to the contents of which he had no knowledge and no instructions. Doubtless, said he, they treated of commercial matters, of monopolies and so forth. Muirhead travelled as interpreter.

For a month we awaited in Archangel the arrival of some vessel which should presently carry us to English shores. At last one came sailing into sight, and never, I suppose, was good ship more welcome; for every moment spent in Muscovy, now that there were eyes to see Amy and myself in the flesh, and tongues that might carry the news southward, whether by design or accident, was an added danger to us.

But the good ship *Formosa* duly landed her cargo, and presently, filled with Muscovish produce, furs, hides, tallow, and what not, set forth once more upon her return voyage, carrying for passengers Peesemsky and his suite, and

Amy and myself. Right gladly did our feet take their quittance of Muscovish soil. Right fervently did we raise grateful thanks and praise to the Almighty, who had preserved us amid dangers innumerable and horrible, which, like the pestilence, walked in darkness—ay, and in light no less—throughout this fearful land.

Amy had been somewhat coldly disposed towards me since the hour of emotion during which I might have claimed from her her very self in payment for the services I had rendered. I thanked Heaven now that I had not yielded to the desire to take advantage of her; for certainly she herself realised also that she had spoken hastily—witness the coolness of her present attitude towards me.

Nevertheless, there was something—I know not what—which from time to time gave me pause when I pondered upon this matter; a word said—a look given—and I began, though I know not how or why I should have begun, to wonder whether Amy did not after all learn to think differently of me.

One day we spoke of Muscovish men and things, I rallying her upon the number of her admirers in Muscovy. Which, I asked her, had come the nearest to gaining her heart?

"Krapatkin," she replied; "next the Cæsarevitch, then Alexis Nagoy, and lastly the Tsar. Krapatkin was a bold lover—Nagoy lagged but little behind."

"A little overbold both, if I may guess," said I; and Amy laughed and said that there were some who preferred a bold lover to one who knew not how to woo a maid.

"If thou shouldst ever become a lover, Herbert," she said, "I wonder how thou wilt woo! By innuendo, perhaps, or more likely not at all, I wager, for indeed thy manner is most foolish with maidens, and would carry none but such as were ready to do thy wooing for thee!"

"Thou knowest right well that I shall never love or woo, excepting whom I have always loved and always wooed, though gaining nothing by it!" I said, sighing.

"Why, certes, this is news!" Amy laughed. "I who have seen so much of thee, have never heard thee woo. Where dwells the maiden of thy choice?—Nay, look not so sheepish, man; will she not listen to thee?"

"She gives me not her heart of hearts," said I, "though she must know that I would have hers or none. Once she told me this much: 'I like thee,' quoth she, 'yet love thee not; neverthe-

less, take me in payment for a service'—some service I had rendered her."

"Oh, what a heartless, wicked jade! That was a godless thing to say, Herbert. Be advised and have no more to do with one who would marry thee without love, which is indeed a sin."

I replied nothing, for I understood not yet whether Amy mocked me or spoke with a meaning.

"This Alexis Nagoy," she continued, "was a pretty wooer. I dreamed of him but last night that he came to me and said: 'Amy, thy long kinsman is dead; I have slain him in fair fight'."

"Oh, oh!" cried I, half laughing, half foolishly indignant, "then he came to thee, I'll warrant, with a broken head!"

"Nay, he was in my dream untouched, which would in waking time be the most unlikely matter imaginable; so, too, with the rest of my dream, which from beginning to end was foolish and impossible, for I replied to this Nagoy, 'If this is true, Nagoy, slay me also, for I have no love for any but this dear dead man, whom I loved with all my heart and soul and have loved from the beginning, though he was so blind, or

so foolish, or so humble, or so God knows what, that——”

Well, then at last I understood—blindworm, sheep, fool that I had been so long time—and in a moment Amy lay and sobbed upon my breast, sobbed and laughed and whispered in sweet shame that she should never forgive me that in the end I had compelled her to speak for me.

“Nevertheless, Amy, my own love,” said I presently, “I know that for many years thou didst hate me right well.”

“Ay, and loved you also,” she murmured, “and loved most when I hated most; from childhood I loved you—when you threw me into the water.”

“If that is so, and you hated and loved me both,” I laughed, “how should a poor sheep know there was any love, discerning only the other?”

“Nay, I hated thee for thy bashfulness and thy blindness; now thou seest clearly there is love only.”

To the Court of Queen Bess we returned, Amy and I, with gladder hearts than when we had left it; but first we travelled to our home in

Devonshire and were there married, only returning to Court when we were summoned by her Grace in order to give account of ourselves.

“Why, thou minx, thou art dead, if I read Cæsar’s letter rightly,” cried the Queen, seeing us, “and thy long-limbed kinsman also. How came you to life again?” Amy told our story, whereat her Grace laughed and looked grave.

“Now hear,” said she, “what Cæsar hath written—read it, my Lord Chamberlain.”

The Tsar wrote that, in disobedience to his commands, his boyars had murdered the woman Amy Romalyn, whom her Grace had sent, uninvited, to take the place of Mary Hastings. The Tsar had, he explained, since married a subject; but if Mary Hastings should be willing to reconsider her decision, his present consort, Maria Nagoy, should be quickly divorced and placed in a convent.

“So thou wouldst not remain in Muscovy, hussy, even to be the wife of Cæsar himself?” her Majesty laughed.

“Madam, I love England best,” said Amy, “and moreover I have brought my own Tsar back with me.”

“What, has he prevailed at last?” Her Grace glanced, frowning slightly, in my direc-

tion. "Well, I suppose thou must have him! Shall we send Mary Hastings to the tiger's den in thy place?" she laughed. "What say'st thou, Mary?"

Mary Hastings made a grimace. "Let him eat up this Muscovish Mary," she said. "English meat is too strong for him; see how but a taste of Amy Romalyn has turned his stomach."

"Tell me one more thing, Amy," said I, on a day when we spoke of all these matters. "Why didst thou go to Muscovy to the Tsar's Court?"

"In order to show a certain blindworm how much I hated him," said Amy, laughing, "and that I would do any rash thing to escape from England and his presence!"

"And then he came with thee—awkward, interfering fool!" said I.

"Else I had been there now," Amy murmured, "a poor writhing victim beneath the claws of the Muscovish tiger, instead of the happiest wife in all England!"

THE END.

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