

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 *balalaika*, 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

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 terem 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 Nagoys."