

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 starrer 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-