

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

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