

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

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.