

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 aforesaid, 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.