

### CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ladies of the terem were accustomed to receive news quickly, rarely lagging much behind the rest of the world in this respect, but on the day following my arrest there reached the women's quarter of the palace three pieces of information which set the doves therein confined a-fluttering with excitement.

The first of these items was that the Tsar had yesterday finally—or as finally as the Cæsar was wont to make his decisions—resolved to choose the foreigner, Amy Romalyn, for his seventh consort.

The second item contradicted the first, asserting that the Tsar's mind had been made up, indeed, but that, having quarrelled fiercely with the "Anglichanka," or Englishwoman, as they generally called Amy, he had determined against her, and had informed her to this effect.

The third item, which of course was true, contained the news of my imprisonment for

causes unknown. The ladies were assembled at dinner at midday when Olga Shishkin, entering from an assignation in the courtyard, brought in the two last pieces of information, the first having reached the terem but a few minutes before. Amy had not as yet joined the rest at the midday meal, so that the conversation ran more freely and noisily than would have been the case if she had been present. Maria Nagoy, to whom the first item of news had brought floods of tears together with much sympathy, real or pretended, from her companions, had now dried her eyes, and sat flushed and triumphant in an ecstasy of joy. "It may be," she said, "that the Anglichanka is imprisoned also, together with the big fellow she calls her kinsman; was anything said as to this, Olga? Have matters come to light with regard to the relations between these two?"

"Nothing was said," replied Olga, "and, so far as I have heard, nothing is suspected."

"Nay, you speak of what you know nothing, my friend; the Tsar—who should know if not I?—made no secret of his suspicions when speaking his private mind, that is, in conversation with myself. The Anglichanka is sly, fox and tiger in one; by St. Nicholas, if she is arrested

also, my Saint shall have a long candle before his ikon this very day."

"Thy Saint must go candle-less then," laughed Olga, "for I think the Anglichanka now comes."

This was the case, for Amy entered the room next moment, her entrance being the signal for a dead silence among the assembled ladies.

Olga tittered audibly as Amy stood a moment surprised, looking from one face to another, wondering at the sudden silence.

"We talked of thee, Amy Romalyn," said Olga. "Thou comest as one from the grave, for Maria Nagoy has just told us of thy arrest and imprisonment."

"I said the matter was likely," exclaimed Maria, flushing, "not that I knew it to have taken place."

Amy glanced at Maria. "I know not of any such likelihood," she said, taking her place at the table; "but Maria Nagoy knows many things of which the rest of the world is in ignorance, her imagination being her informant."

"Gagarin says," continued Olga, "that Maria has been definitely chosen by the Tsar, and thou rejected—is this true, to thy knowledge?"

"I know not the Tsar's mind," Amy laughed; "dost thou, Olga, or does this Gagarin or any

other? When his Grace has chosen Maria will she not be the first to be told?"

"Nay, but how much has he told thee? that is what we would know. This day we have heard two things—and a third. The first that thou art to be Tsaritsa, and the second that Maria is chosen."

Amy laughed. "I think the Tsar will consider yet a hundred times before he decides," she said.

"If the second is not true, then why is thy long lover arrested and imprisoned?" cried Maria angrily, for there was about Amy an air of quiet confidence which enraged her.

Amy flushed red, and turned instantly upon the speaker.

"Beware! Nagoy," she said; "do not thy ears still tingle? Would they renew acquaintance with these hands? Withdraw that offending word."

"Which word?" Maria hesitated, growing pale.

"Thou knowest—come, withdraw it quickly."

"Well, thy long kinsman, be it then; why is he arrested if thou art not in disgrace and I preferred?"

"You lie, Maria; my kinsman is free."

Olga now spoke :—

“It is said he is imprisoned ; so Gagarin says. Maria speaks the truth in this so far as we have heard it.”

“But why, and upon what charge?” Amy cried, “and when?” She rose from her place as though she would leave the table.

“Nay, eat thy dinner,” said Olga ; “or wilt thou go eat the Tsar instead? It is his doing that Shadwell is arrested, whose else?”

Amy said not another word ; she left the room by the door which opened upon the corridor leading to the Tsar’s quarter.

“She has gone to face the tiger!” said Olga, laughing ; “which will eat the other? By the Saints she is a brave one!”

“This time I pray she may be eaten quite,” said Maria Nagoy, laughing nervously. But Olga bade her be not too sure of this, for, said she, “if Shadwell is arrested it is more likely that the Tsar is jealous than otherwise, for what other offence should the long Englishman have committed?”

“That is true,” said one or two ; “if he is jealous of the man for her sake, be sure he is not yet done with her, Maria, and thou not yet Tsaritsa!”

“We shall see, we shall see!” cried Maria ; “and if she is now arrested also and put to roost with this lover of hers, it shall be I that spoke wisdom and you foolishness.”

“Beware! Maria, and call him not her lover in the Anglichanka’s presence, or thy cheeks will smart for it ; the Anglichanka goes not back upon the word spoken!”

“And beware thou, Olga, how thou offendest ; for I swear that I shall yet be Tsaritsa, and I shall remember well both those who have offended and those who have stood my friends!”

Meanwhile Amy actually entered the ante-room of the Tsar uninvited, and sent a page to his Grace to demand immediate audience, which was quickly granted her, his Grace being in a placable mood.

“Is it true, Tsar, that my kinsman is arrested?” Amy asked boldly ; “if so, upon what charge?”

“Is this the object of thy audience?” Ivan said, frowning ; “if so, go back to thy quarter and mind not affairs that concern thee not.”

“My kinsman’s affairs concern me much,” said Amy ; “he has done no wrong, Tsar, and that thou knowest.”

"Not so; he has done wrong; go quickly, Amy Romalyn, thou angerest me."

"Nay, I go not until my question is answered. Upon what charge or for what offence——"

"Offence enough!" cried Ivan, with difficulty controlling his rage, yet controlling it in part. "Godunof, tell this minx what she would know and send her back whence she came, I will speak no more with her!"

The Tsar actually rose and left the room without glancing again in Amy's direction—a rare victory, indeed, over his passions and significant withal for those who had eyes to see.

"It is true that the Englishman is imprisoned," said Godunof; "God knows what the Tsar will do with him next."

"But why? What offence hath he committed?" cried Amy, and Boris Godunof could tell her of no more serious charge than that during the scrimmage between the wolf-dogs and Krapatkin, a week ago, Herbert Shadwell had so roughly treated one hound that he had since died. "A terrible offence, truly!" Godunof laughed; "but for our great master any offence is serious enough if a charge is to be laid, or there is an offender to be got rid of."

"He will not—dare not—murder him for this!" cried Amy.

"Dare not? What is there the Tsar dares not?" said Godunof; "as to 'will not,' the Tsar's will is the most unaccountable thing in the world; who knows it from this moment to that? Who can measure it, compass it, define it, understand it? Go back to the terem and pray to thy God—who is, I suppose, the same as our own—that He will protect thy kinsman. Assuredly there is no other who can!"

Amy returned to the dinner-table black as a cloud, her eyes ablaze with the wrath that consumed her. So fierce she looked that none dared speak to her. Evidently, all concluded, she had failed in her enterprise with the Tsar, whatever it may have been. Amy quickly ate a little food and retired from the chamber. Olga Shishkin followed her.

"I have won, I have won! what said I?" exclaimed Maria Nagoy. "Saw you her face? it was the face of one who has lost hope. I wager the Tsar drove her from him!"