

## CHAPTER XXIV.

"IF the big Englishman is thy lover, Amy," said Olga, as the two maidens reached the empty sewing-room, "by which word I mean one who loves and is loved, I give thee all sympathy; my heart bleeds for thee."

"He is not my lover, Olga, except that he cares for me well enough to have left home and to have stood by me here in order to protect me in case of unknown dangers; but, even so, I should be base indeed if I could see him imprisoned and remain unmoved. He is arrested for the death of a dog, slain by him, mark you, in the saving of a man!"

Amy laughed, but tears began to come into her eyes as the laughter ended. "Oh, Olga, advise me, what shall I do to help my friend?"

To Olga's astonishment this proud Anglichanka suddenly burst into tears and sobbing, falling upon the girl's neck and bidding her for the love of God help her, somehow, in her need.

"Alas! what can I do? There is Gagarin,

of course!" said Olga; "but he has no influence with the Tsar, who dislikes him. There is Krapatkin," she added as suddenly, "who is head over ears in love with thee; he, at least, is not afraid to defy the Tsar if need be, ay, and would for thy sake, if only he——" Olga paused.

"Speak on, Olga," said Amy, "it is a good thought."

"If only he be not jealous of thy long-legged kinsman, who certainly loves even though he be not loved again."

"Mar not thy good thought by foolish speaking," said Amy; "yes, Krapatkin shall help me; he can and he shall!"

"He will exact payment," said Olga, smiling; "be prepared with thy answer. He will want favours, promises, I know not what!"

"He is a brave man and has a generous heart!" said Amy. "You Muscovish women think but lowly of your boyars, but this one at least has something noble in him; you do the man injustice."

"So be it—I pray it may be so. Go to his house, you know which it is—one of the greatest. It stands at the corner of the Uspensky."

Amy was fortunate enough to find Krapatkin

at home. The boyar was surprised and highly delighted to greet her, but his face darkened a little when he learned the object of her visit.

"How should I release the fellow?" he asked, frowning; "and why?"

"Life for life; he saved thee from the dogs!" said Amy; "more shame to thee, if thou hast already forgotten."

"Yes, that much is true, though I might have escaped without him; nevertheless he served me well. And the Tsar would have him murdered because he killed a dog, you say——"

"In saving thee. It was during that very fight."

"The Tsar is the very prince of the devils. Nevertheless, Amy, I am jealous of this English fellow; he loves thee; why should I, who love thee also, save from death another who is my rival? Surely that would be foolishness!"

"A thousand times, no; not foolishness, but the best wisdom. Knowest thou not better than this the way to a woman's heart? Do nobly and eschew the consequence. Let my kinsman free—he is kinsman, mark you, not lover; we do not speak of love."

"Nay, I think he is both," said Krapatkin. "This which thou wouldst have me do is to

make room at the door of thy heart that another may enter."

"It is not a matter of who shall love and be loved, I say," cried Amy angrily, "but of saving the life of a man who has saved thine. I ask a plain service of thee; grant my request, or I will find another who is more generous."

"Nay, I may do thee this service or I may not. I think I shall do so; but to be plain with thee, as thou art with me, the matter lies thus: here is a man that loves thee, therefore he is my rival."

"So is the Tsar thy rival!" said Amy; "there is no doubt that his heart is now my own!"

"Is it so, indeed? Art thou so sure of him? What then—thou wouldst be Tsaritsa, after all? Beware, Amy; there are dangers even about the throne of Cæsar!"

"Dangers—what matter they, when there is the strength of a lion to overcome them."

"Dangers from within as well as without! Beware of the Tsar, Amy Romalyn! he has enemies who are dangerous to him and to his, remember this. The boyars will not for ever lie under his chariot-wheels; his new Tsaritsa shall not long sit in her high place, even though

the tiger himself withheld his claws from her, which he would not!"

"Thou canst not frighten me, Krapatkin," said Amy, "thy words are wasted. All this I know. If my heart should go out to the Tsar I would gladly marry him, dangers and all, for truth to tell I love the power and position which, as his wife, I should enjoy, but——"

"Yes, *but*," laughed Krapatkin, "there are many *buts*."

"Then at but let it remain, my friend, as remain it shall; for thee, and for thy own ear only, I say this: I have sworn to myself that I will never be the Cæsar's wife."

"Good, so far!" said Krapatkin, well pleased. "And as to that long Englishman, what of him?"

"Dear heaven!" said Amy, "may I not wish for the saving of my own kinsman from torture and from death, and should I not first go for help to him whom this man has delivered from a dreadful end? Shame on thee, Krapatkin—shall I go to another for assistance? To Alexis Nagoy, who would go through the fire at a word from me? To——"

"Go to no man, for I think none will serve thee better than I, but some return I must have

for my service; be sure Nagoy would ask an equivalent first and fail in his mission afterwards. Give me a word, a hint, some little indication of the way thy thoughts are tending. A maiden's heart must incline one way or another."

"Mine is a heart that knows not itself, Krapatkin, excepting that it has not inclined Cæsarward, though to be Cæsar's wife was, in a manner, my object in journeying to this land. Is not this enough for thee?"

"It is much, but not enough. I ask again, what of Shadwell?"

"He is my brother, or near it. I show him neither courtesy nor affection—ask him, if thou must, what is my bearing towards him. As for thyself——" Amy paused.

"Yes, as for myself, for that is the main point—speak on, for upon thy words will depend my service."

"Again, I say, ask Herbert Shadwell what I said of thee," murmured Amy, lowering her lashes in a modest manner and hoping with all her heart that she might blush the while. "My lips will not repeat it in thy presence."

"Nay, tell me."

"Ask Herbert, he will tell thee, and the sooner he is released the sooner thou shalt know."

"Is this a trick?" said Krapatkin. "Beware, Amy, if thou deceivest me! On the other hand, if we should one day come together, mark this and remember it well, that thou mayest even yet be Tsaritsa. This devil-Tsar Ivan will not much longer be tolerated by his boyars; his sons will fall with him, then will follow the election of a new Tsar. I am of the Rurik blood—there are others also, but I think I am as likely at least as any to be raised to Cæsar's throne. Remember all this."

"I will remember," said Amy; "though a man need not be Cæsar to please a woman."

"Well, I will do this service for thee. Give me an earnest of my reward—let me hold thee for a minute in my arms." The big boyar made as though he would seize and clasp the girl, but she eluded his embrace and reached the door in safety.

"First the service, then the reward," she cried, and so the interview ended, Amy escaping without further molestation, in which matter she was more favoured than she knew, considering the character of the man she dealt with. Amy was angry, for she had given more than she intended, fearing further difficulty and complication. Nevertheless she had achieved her object,

which was, Heaven bless her! my release from a very loathsome captivity.

As for me, I lay in my filthy cell or dungeon, whose floor was covered with rank and noisome straw which had lain there rotting with pestilent odours for a year or more, lay almost heart-broken and hopeless, not so much for my own plight as for Amy's; for what would become of my beloved in the midst of the many dangers that beset her, and not a single honest arm to protect her? My poor prayers she might have and had; but if God's will toward me was loathsome captivity, probably torture, and certainly coming death, why should He intend more mercifully towards Amy, assuredly the chief offender in this foolish, sinful enterprise of leaving home and country, and the duties which lay where it had pleased Him to plant us, in order to seek better things in so foul and unblessed a land as this of Muscovy?

All day I had lain here in despair and sickness, begotten of the foul atmosphere and disgusting food provided for me, when—following a slight commotion without—the key turned in the lock and in walked Krapatkin, who bade me follow him forth, quickly and in silence.

A soldier of the Strelitz lay dead or stunned

at the door of my prison. Krapatkin did not so much as glance at him. It was dark, and he carried a lantern. Several soldiers were passed by us at various corners of the corridors we traversed, for my dungeon was in the Tsar's palace, but all slept or seemed to sleep. I learned afterwards that these men were every one in Krapatkin's pay, but that he had nevertheless struck down one man, him who was at the very door of my dungeon, rather than leave him to the certain vengeance of the Tsar.

Safely out and in the square of the Kremlin, I began to express, as in duty bound, the thanks I owed to Krapatkin for my release, but he stopped me, saying:—

“It was for no love of thee, my friend, that I have done this, though thou art a good man in thyself. Let it be understood between us, that as the kinsman of Amy Romalyn I have saved thee, and as her kinsman only, serving her through thee. For reward I am to ask thee two things, to which thou art to provide truthful answers: the first, what is this lady's bearing towards thyself—that thou lovest her is nothing; what is her attitude towards thee?”

“If I am to say the truth and that only,” said I, “her bearing to me is none too kind;

we are kin to one another; I am here to protect her; for the rest I do not expect much courtesy or kindness from a kinswoman.”

“So far, well. Secondly, what said she to thee of me? that she spoke kindly I do not doubt, judging from her manner in bidding me ask thee rather than say it for herself. Come, the truth!”

As well as I remembered I repeated Amy's words—namely, that for his manly qualities she admired this man far beyond his fellow Muscovish boyars.

“And that is all?” said Krapatkin.

“Is it not enough for thee?” I replied; it had not been the easiest of matters to tell the fellow even that much. Amy had exacted a cruel payment for my release, and I wondered why in Heaven's name she had done so; perhaps Krapatkin had compelled her to grant a *quid* for his *quo*. The thought enraged me.

“Having said this much,” I added, “and fulfilled, as I suppose, the obligation to which you submitted this lady as the condition of my release, I will say that I shall not permit thee, Krapatkin, to take advantage of information thus acquired; it is possible that she meant nothing more than the bare words convey, which

is little, and speaks not, mark you, of any sentiment deeper than the mere admiration of manly qualities."

"That shall be a matter between her and myself, my friend," said the boyar. "Think not I shall permit interference in my affairs."

"So long as no man takes advantage of my kinswoman," said I, "there shall be no interference from me; but let her be coerced by man or devil, even to the subverting of the least of her desires, and that devil or that man shall be called to account at my sword's point."

"So be it," said Krapatkin. "These are words that a man may understand!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

THE Tsar Ivan maintained in his employ a band of men whom he named Oprichinniki, or "the privileged." These fellows were nicknamed sweepers, their coat of arms being a broom and their duties to sweep away his enemies. These men were usually employed upon the dirty work of his Grace; when there was a boyar to be removed or an offender's family to be destroyed these rascals were appointed to the work, and unless the condemned were wealthy enough to pay for their escape and disappearance from the Cæsar's sight and memory they were soon ended. Thieves and rascals were these men, traitors to their employer, pitiless towards their victims, the very scum and outcasts of Moscow's population. Half a dozen of these fellows were, it appears, sent on the morning following my escape in order to examine me in my cell anent the crime which I had committed—namely, the slaying of one of his Grace's hounds in despite of his Grace's own and special warning to do the brutes no injury.