

wager—neither could he induce her by any word or promise to listen to his offers of protection.

And from the terem the unfortunate man went straight to his sudden doom; for in the great arched gateway of the Kremlin, as he passed through it, he was ambushed, by the Tsar's orders, by a dozen of the Oprichinniki and run through the body before he knew that he was attacked. So died one who was worthy of a better fate than to have lived in such a land and under such a Tsar; a great boyar and a brave man, the bravest of men indeed and the most reckless, and who, but for the excessive independence and boldness of his nature, might have lived to be a Cæsar a dozen years later when a less worthy boyar than he—Boris Godunof—stepped into the place vacated by the last scion of the effete dynasty of Rurik, which then ended in the person of Ivan's unmanly son Feodor and the child Dmitry.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE news of Krapatkin's death reached the terem early on the following day. It came as a shock to Amy, who went mournfully enough, for she had liked and admired this boyar chiefly for his fearless bearing towards the fierce Tsar, his master, though of love for him she had none. As for the rest of the women, her companions, they took but small interest in the tragedy, since it did not affect themselves, none of them being among the admired of the great boyar.

Maria Nagoy affected much pity for her rival. "Amy Romalyn is unlucky in her lovers," she said; "there is the long one, who is under a cloud and likely to follow Krapatkin into deeper gloom; then this great dead boyar himself; and lastly the Tsar, who, I think, will have none of her."

"That is yet to be seen," said Olga Shishkin. "Shall I tell thee what I think of this matter, Maria?"

"Oh, if thou wilt, speak; let those listen who

are not weary of thy opinions," replied Maria, yawning.

"Well, then I say there is rather evidence, in the death of this boyar, of the Tsar's jealousy for Amy. He will have no rivals. Shadwell has disappeared—dead, may-be, though I hope not; Krapatkin is killed. I will say one other thing: I think that Amy has but to play the tune for his Grace to dance."

"And I think you are a fool, Olga," said Maria angrily.

Presently, when a messenger came from the Tsar summoning Amy to his presence, Olga glanced at Maria and saw her flush red with vexation. But lo! the messenger returned pale and anxious for his own well-being, for instead of Amy herself he carried back news that she refused to go.

The women of the terem crossed themselves and called their Saints to witness that terrible things were in store.

"What said I, Olga?" whispered Maria Nagoy, frightened yet exulting. "This is the beginning of the end. To disobey Cæsar! The Saints preserve us all!"

Very quickly came a posse of Oprichinniki, who formed up while their leader went in

search of Amy, who—seeing that force was employed—went readily with her escort, for she could do nothing else.

"There is the end of the Anglichanka!" said Maria. "I do not love her, but God grant the Tsar withhold his dubina from her."

"It is not the end, Maria," said Olga; "thou art a babe in the art of winning a man. Amy knows what she knows of the Tsar. Has he loved her less hitherto for her independence?"

"This is rank disobedience," said Maria; "we shall see whether he will now love her or slay her."

When Amy reached the audience chamber she found a sullen Tsar seated amid a pale and anxious Court. There was silence among the groups of boyars, and his Grace sat with his face upon his hand, his elbow resting upon his knee.

"Why camest thou not at my summons, wench?" he said. "Does thy conscience accuse thee of receiving this Krapatkin in the terem? Thy fault is known to me."

"At least my hands are not red with his blood," said Amy. "I came not because I was afraid, Tsar; I cannot look upon thee; I fear thee."

"Nay, that is foolishness. May not I, who am Cæsar, punish the contumacious boyars who are my subjects? Fear nothing, Amy; for my enemies I am a tiger whose fangs they shall not escape; for thee I am a lamb, as thou shalt see. I have sent for thee with purpose the most benign. Let the room be cleared. Stay thou, Godunof, and thou, my son. You shall be witnesses that I approach this maiden in kindness and honour."

The Court, visibly relieved, for they had expected an outbreak of terrible anger, gladly dispersed, crossing themselves in gratitude when safely without that matters had gone more peacefully than they had hoped.

"I have sent for thee this day," continued the Tsar, the chamber being now cleared of all save Godunof and the prince, his son, "to bid thee prepare thyself for much honour, and I doubt not for all happiness. Thou shalt be Tsaritsa. All night I have considered and prayed; and this is my decision, which is in full accord with my own desires, for on the whole thou hast pleased me well, and that in spite of a prejudice formed against thee for no fault of thy own, but rather of the Queen thy mistress. What say'st thou?"

"I will prepare myself," said Amy faintly. Glancing at the face of the young prince she saw that he had suddenly grown white and haggard, and that he held to the arm of his chair as though he would fall over sideways. Fortunately he made no sound, and the Tsar, otherwise occupied, noticed nothing.

"So be it," he said, evidently relieved and pleased by Amy's ready acquiescence, which, it may be, he had not expected. "So be it, chosen one of my heart. In two weeks thou shalt sit beside me as my Tsaritsa; meanwhile leave not the terem, I pray you, for it is unseemly that the chosen of the Cæsar should be seen abroad."

Amy bowed and made as though she would depart.

"Stay, there is no need for haste; we will play together awhile—the chessboard is ready."

"Tsar, I am in no mood to play to-day; suffer me to depart; there is much to prepare."

"Well, go—stay, dost thou mourn for Krapatkin? Or is it for thy long kinsman's disappearance? I have some suspicion, minx, that thou knowest of his hiding-place. Come, where is this Shadwell?"

"I know not, Tsar. If I did, would the

Tsar love me better for delivering his enemies into his hands?"

"The Tsar must have obedience. Mercy is his prerogative, to be exercised by him or not, as he pleases. Thou knowest not my mind; it may be set upon mercy for the man, in spite of his offences. Come, where is thy kinsman?"

"I have said that I know not." Amy blessed the memory of poor murdered Krapatkin, who at his visit to the terem had most discreetly refused to give her any information as to my hiding-place. "The Tsar will demand it of thee, and then what?" he had said.

"Beware how thou liest to me," said Ivan, "Tsaritsa elect though thou be!"

"Is it not enough that I have said I know not? Would the Tsar wed one who hath no truth?"

"There have been Tsaritsas who have deceived me; these have forfeited the love I gave them. Well, it may be thou tellest the truth, only remember this: that if thou revealest nothing I promise no mercy when he is found. Thy telling to-day might buy mercy for him to-morrow."

"Mercy for the slaying of a dog and thereby

postponing for a week the vengeance of Cæsar! Surely there could be no mercy for one so guilty!"

"There is more in this, minx, than the death of a dog. Wilt thou never bridle that bold tongue of thine? Well, let it wag then, I love to hear it—see how I bear with thee! Come, sit down—we will play together; nay, go not—I desire it of thee."

Amy, seeing how the land lay, and that the Tsar was in a placable mood, played out a game of chess with him, which game he won. Godunof and the Prince withdrew meanwhile.

"Now return, if thou wilt, to the terem," he said. "Stay." The Tsar took from his own finger a ring set with a great emerald; this he placed upon hers as her hand lay upon the chess-table. "I had never a bride save the first that I loved like thee, Amy," he said; "thou hast conquered me indeed."

He kissed her hand with the great green ring upon it, then her forehead, Amy submitting quietly. "Two weeks," he continued, "for preparation; more is not needed; I would rather it were less—go, prepare thyself, *goloobooshka ty moya!*"

Amy stalked through the terem head in air,

her heart in a strange whirl of mixed emotions—triumph, self-condemnation, and doubtless a dozen others had place. The women sat in groups in their living-room, sewing, chatting, playing upon the *balaleika*. All paused for a moment in their occupations as Amy entered, for they would read in her face how she had prospered after so unheard of a matter as the refusal to obey the summons of Cæsar; the probabilities one way and another had afforded subject for much conversation during her absence.

Maria Nagoy looked in Amy's face and read there her own defeat.

"Witch!" she hissed as Amy passed her, "what hast thou done to enslave the Tsar's will that he slew thee not for disobedience?"

"See the ring!" suddenly cried Olga Shishkin. "Oh, see the ring upon her finger!"

"Ay, dost thou see it, Maria?" said Amy. "Behold! it is the gift of the Tsar—the gift of the Tsar to his bride elect!"

"Sorceress!" cried Maria. "Sisters, this is a witch—the Tsar should be told—his life is not safe from her; she——"

Poor Maria Nagoy's words failed her, she threw up her arms, her head swayed and

twisted towards her shoulder, and she fell forward in a fit.

Olga Shishkin followed Amy from the room in obedience to a sign from the Anglichanka.

"Olga," said Amy, "it is true that he has chosen me, and with his own hand, red with Krapatkin's blood, has placed this ring upon my finger. This is the end—we meet no more, thou and I, after this night. Take the ring, it burns me like the fires of the nether pit; when three days are past give it to Maria Nagoy, tell her that I who might, neither desire nor dare to be Tsaritsa."

"But, Amy, consider," said Olga aghast; "to sit upon Cæsar's throne——"

"Nay, I have well considered. I cannot and dare not; let Maria sit by his side, if she dare."

"Then why, Amy, in the Saints' names, have you won the Tsar's favour only to reject it in the end?"

"Nay, God knows why; I know not; my own heart I know not."

"As for the ring, keep it for Heaven's sake," said Olga; "for she who took it from thee as thou desirest, and gave it to Maria, were lost indeed. The Tsar would send for me, ask me

this and that, and I should be stripped and knouted for doing thy behests."

Amy considered. "It is true," she said. "Well, I will keep the ring; tell Maria she should have had it. Now farewell!"

"But how—why—whither goest thou—the Tsar's arm is so long, Amy, it will reach thee at the uttermost ends of the earth."

"May-be," said Amy; "if so, I cannot help it; there are others in danger besides myself; I cannot stay longer. It would have been wisest to go with Sir Jerome as I was advised, but my heart was set upon triumphing over the Tsar, who at my first coming made of me a laughing-stock for the Court."

"And what wilt thou do? where hide, that the eyes of the tiger shall not see thee and his nostrils scent thee out?"

"Moscow is wide; I will find sanctuary for the present, and when opportunity offers I shall depart."

"That is when the next envoy comes. Well, I would not be in thy place, Amy; or rather I would, but I should act differently. Dear Heaven! To have the chance of a place by Cæsar's side, and instead to hide like a mouse from the cat's claws."

Amy stood dressed in her fur shooba, ready to go out into the frost.

"Good-bye, dear Olga; I have loved thee alone of all these women," she said.

"Alas! Amy, do not go to thy death," sobbed Olga, clinging to her.

Amy kissed the girl. "I must go, Olga; there is no other way," she said—"farewell!—God keep thee!"