

## CHAPTER XXXI.

SCARCELY had the Tsar slept two hours when he reappeared in the anteroom to his bedchamber wherein a Strelitz soldier lay sleeping at the door leading to the corridor, while the night-page nodded in a chair by the stove, cursing in his waking moments this night duty, which he abhorred.

The Tsar woke both, the one with a prod from his dubina, the other with a clout of the hand.

To the Strelitz the Tsar said: "Go quickly, take the best horse in the stables and follow the Boyar Nagoy who rides with others towards Slatky Ozer; if thou overtake him thou art corporal from this day, if not thou diest; give to him this paper".

To the page the Tsar said: "Go with the fellow, see him started and bring me word".

In a moment the two men were gone and the Tsar upon his knees before the ikon, praying aloud and smiting his breast; he was still pray-

ing when the page returned, reporting that the Strelitz was already on his way.

Oh the joy of that grand drive of twenty leagues through the pine forests with Amy at my side! Above us a million stars, on every side ghostly trees that seemed to bow to us as we passed; a sombre throng through which the snow road ran like a white ribbon. The night was silent save when, from time to time, a wolf howled dismally in the distance, or some great bird perched in the branches near enough to the road to be disturbed by our passing rose noisily from its sanctuary and hurtled through the darkness, crashing through the twigs and bending tree-tops that barred its passage.

Amy was silent and thoughtful, and I, uncertain whether she would resent to be disturbed in her thoughts, kept silence also. But at length Amy spoke, so suddenly, after so long a silence, that she startled me.

"Now that we are safe," she said, "or at any rate upon the road to safety, at least out of this awful city, I desire first to thank God for His mercies, Herbert, and secondly to say to thee this: that, though I have achieved that which I had determined upon, it is a wonder and a mercy that I have escaped scot free; and that thy

counsel, though rejected by me, has been wiser than my own obstinate will."

"It is right I should tell thee, Amy," said I, "that we are still in much danger. That the Tsar will send after thee is certain; he will have me killed and thee brought back alive—or he would so have it if he could."

I felt Amy's hand fasten upon my arm and tighten there.

"I swear his men shall not have me alive," she said. "Together we escape or together we die—I mean," she added, "that I cannot again face the Tsar alone."

"Do you so fear the tiger's claws?" I said; "you that have danced in the tiger's den?"

"Death is nothing," she said; "but to be alone in Muscovy—my God, save me from it!"

"Thou used not to be so afraid of the Tsar and of Moscow; as for being alone, that should be no new thing, for of what use was my presence there to thee since I might not see thee?"

"Nay, it was different then. Only upon this last day I realise that I have lighted a fire which I have not breath to extinguish. Thank God I am out of the terem; there is one will be as thankful as I," she ended, laughing. "Oh, it is

worth some pain to have baited Maria Nagoy; well, there is no harm done her, she may have her Cæsar now! Are there many, think you, Herbert, who have had a Cæsar at their feet and have rejected him?"

"I see not that you rejected him but that you have created his love for you, and, having so created it, have run forthwith from your own creation." It was wonderful to me that she should be so light-hearted, yet I was glad to see this. Doubtless the relief of being free from Court and terem was so great that as yet she had no thought for any time save the present. For myself, even the joy of being with Amy could not entirely banish from me the thought of her danger and my own; my own I believe I honestly considered only in its relation to Amy; for what cared I for my life, only that Amy must not be left to the vengeance of the Tsar with none to help her.

However, we were not caught yet, and it might be that somehow we should in the end escape. Muscovy is very large: might not two people hide themselves awhile within her bosom from their enemies?

It may be that Amy desired to encourage me by her display of light-heartedness, realising that

I should need all the spirit I possessed in the dangers which lay before us ; but indeed whether this were the reason for her present mood or another—as joy to have left Moscow in safety, the delight of rapid travelling through the keen air, the simple sanguine buoyancy of youth, or what not—I cannot tell ; certain only is it that the maid became more and more imbued with lightness of spirit as the three fine horses dragged us at lightning speed league after league towards our present destination, and that soon I became infected with the same spirit of joyousness, so that we conversed pleasantly of the past and of the future, and if we touched upon the present, we found subject for mirth and laughter even in the terrors and dangers which beset us.

“Will you not sleep awhile, Amy?” said I, when an hour had passed, and she seemed to grow weary of talking. “Our sleep at Krapatkin’s house is likely to be disturbed.”

“Will the Tsar have learned by this of our flight?” she laughed. “Oh, Herbert, how the tiger will rage! I will tell thee what will pass : he who tells the news must be a brave man ; he will be struck down, and perchance the Tsar will himself visit the terem ; what a storm will there arise ! The Nagoyes will be accused of spiriting

me away for Maria’s sake ; the brothers will be examined by the Tsar—poor Alexis ! He would have me for himself ; he will be glad of my escape from the Tsar, but will likely search and pursue on his own account.”

So Amy chattered gaily, and found subject for merriment even in matters of instant peril. But presently she fell asleep and slept for over an hour, and as she slumbered her sweet head dropped upon my shoulder and her breath brushed my cheek. The blood coursed through my veins. I longed to take her into my arms and to my heart ; held there, I should defy the whole world to pluck her away.

But Amy had given me nothing beyond a few words of gratitude ; a little confidence in my power to protect her, if you will ; a modicum of satisfaction that I still lived to see to her safety ; as much kindness as a child might show to her nurse who had helped to pull her out of the ditch. No more than this.

“You fool,” I told myself ; “is this a time for such thought ? Would you make a bargain with the maid for reward and favour : give me this and that, and I will save your life, or give because I have already saved it ?”

Nay, I had not even so much claim upon her,

for in this matter we were certainly at quits with one another ; but for her interference, and the driving of a dangerous bargain with Krapatkin, I should even now be a prisoner within the palace, if, indeed, Cæsar had not already made of me a victim to his insane jealousy, as he had made Krapatkin.

Jealousy, forsooth ! How blind is a man in love, even a Cæsar. The most foolish might surely have discovered, if he would, that no man had cause to regard as a rival in the pursuit of Amy. Alas ! would it were otherwise.

“Be content, Herbert,” I now assured myself, “for it can never be otherwise ; cherish her, love her, serve her, lay down thy very life for her, if thou wilt, but thou shalt have no reward for thy service, no love—scarcely even a little ‘like’ ; be content, poor fool, with the cold friendliness of kin for kin that leads to no pulse quickening or eye brightening !”

Well, if so it must be, so be it. At any rate, I should have the joy of fighting for her to my last breath ; of that no one could deprive me. Moreover, it was foolish to think regretfully of love and such things, matters which concerned a future time ; whereas, probably, neither Amy nor I would ever see another moon.

Yet, if she would only give me a little love now, my God ! how I would fight to save her life and my own.

“Fool !” I ended, “you will fight your best for her in any case, and that you know right well.”

Amy awoke with a start, muttering ; I caught her last words : “Slay me if thou wilt, but his name I will never reveal”.

“Where am I ?” she said, awaking and looking about ; then, remembering, “Oh, Herbert, I dreamed I quarrelled with the Tsar, and he threatened me ; thank God it is as it is.”

“Whose name is that thou wouldst not reveal to him ?” I smiled.

She started. “Did I speak in my sleep ? What said I ?”

“Only this—that he—the Cæsar doubtless—might slay thee, but this name should never be revealed by thee.”

“Is that all ?” she asked. “Swear that I said no more.”

“I swear that was all I heard.”

“The Tsar was jealous, as usual ; he accused me of loving a man since I would give him no love, whereat—in order to irritate his Grace—I pretended that there might be or might not be

one to whom my heart was given, but that his name I would never reveal!"

"Thou shouldst have felt the dubina but that thou didst wake at the right moment," I laughed. "As for me, I should not care to withstand a dig from Cæsar's great staff, even in sleep."

"Even in sleep he would have spared me, I think," she said, laughing also.

"And who was this man whose name was used as a stalking-horse to attack the Tsar's jealousy?" I asked.

"A dream-man," she laughed, and said no more, relapsing into silence and thought until presently we dashed up to the gates which, the driver informed us over his shoulder, were the entrance to Slatky Ozer, the country seat of Krapatkin.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

THIS was a great rambling wooden house, fashioned, like most of the Muscovish dachi, or country houses, in the form of a square main building in the centre, flanked by a wing on each side which came forward in a semicircle, like a man's outstretched arms, as though to embrace the approaching visitors. There were but few servants in the place, for Krapatkin's main establishment was in Moscow, and these few now went about their duties noisily lamenting the news of the boyar's death. They brought food and set it before us, sobbing and weeping, and spoke to us with the tears pouring down their cheeks.

I bade the good fellows prepare a sleeping chamber for Amy, and to produce and light every candle and lantern that the house possessed.

When these orders were executed I spoke to them and said: "Brothers, if you are wise you will now go to your homes in the village until the