

CHAPTER XXXV.

PEESEMSKY had letters from the Tsar for her Grace Elizabeth our Queen, sealed letters, as to the contents of which he had no knowledge and no instructions. Doubtless, said he, they treated of commercial matters, of monopolies and so forth. Muirhead travelled as interpreter.

For a month we awaited in Archangel the arrival of some vessel which should presently carry us to English shores. At last one came sailing into sight, and never, I suppose, was good ship more welcome; for every moment spent in Muscovy, now that there were eyes to see Amy and myself in the flesh, and tongues that might carry the news southward, whether by design or accident, was an added danger to us.

But the good ship *Formosa* duly landed her cargo, and presently, filled with Muscovish produce, furs, hides, tallow, and what not, set forth once more upon her return voyage, carrying for passengers Peesemsky and his suite, and

Amy and myself. Right gladly did our feet take their quittance of Muscovish soil. Right fervently did we raise grateful thanks and praise to the Almighty, who had preserved us amid dangers innumerable and horrible, which, like the pestilence, walked in darkness—ay, and in light no less—throughout this fearful land.

Amy had been somewhat coldly disposed towards me since the hour of emotion during which I might have claimed from her her very self in payment for the services I had rendered. I thanked Heaven now that I had not yielded to the desire to take advantage of her; for certainly she herself realised also that she had spoken hastily—witness the coolness of her present attitude towards me.

Nevertheless, there was something—I know not what—which from time to time gave me pause when I pondered upon this matter; a word said—a look given—and I began, though I know not how or why I should have begun, to wonder whether Amy did not after all learn to think differently of me.

One day we spoke of Muscovish men and things, I rallying her upon the number of her admirers in Muscovy. Which, I asked her, had come the nearest to gaining her heart?

"Krapatkin," she replied; "next the Cæsarevitch, then Alexis Nagoy, and lastly the Tsar. Krapatkin was a bold lover—Nagoy lagged but little behind."

"A little overbold both, if I may guess," said I; and Amy laughed and said that there were some who preferred a bold lover to one who knew not how to woo a maid.

"If thou shouldst ever become a lover, Herbert," she said, "I wonder how thou wilt woo! By innuendo, perhaps, or more likely not at all, I wager, for indeed thy manner is most foolish with maidens, and would carry none but such as were ready to do thy wooing for thee!"

"Thou knowest right well that I shall never love or woo, excepting whom I have always loved and always wooed, though gaining nothing by it!" I said, sighing.

"Why, certes, this is news!" Amy laughed. "I who have seen so much of thee, have never heard thee woo. Where dwells the maiden of thy choice? Nay, look not so sheepish, man; will she not listen to thee?"

"She gives me not her heart of hearts," said I, "though she must know that I would have hers or none. Once she told me this much: 'I like thee,' quoth she, 'yet love thee not; neverthe-

less, take me in payment for a service'—some service I had rendered her."

"Oh, what a heartless, wicked jade! That was a godless thing to say, Herbert. Be advised and have no more to do with one who would marry thee without love, which is indeed a sin."

I replied nothing, for I understood not yet whether Amy mocked me or spoke with a meaning.

"This Alexis Nagoy," she continued, "was a pretty wooer. I dreamed of him but last night that he came to me and said: 'Amy, thy long kinsman is dead; I have slain him in fair fight'."

"Oh, oh!" cried I, half laughing, half foolishly indignant, "then he came to thee, I'll warrant, with a broken head!"

"Nay, he was in my dream untouched, which would in waking time be the most unlikely matter imaginable; so, too, with the rest of my dream, which from beginning to end was foolish and impossible, for I replied to this Nagoy, 'If this is true, Nagoy, slay me also, for I have no love for any but this dear dead man, whom I loved with all my heart and soul and have loved from the beginning, though he was so blind, or

so foolish, or so humble, or so God knows what, that——”

Well, then at last I understood—blindworm, sheep, fool that I had been so long time—and in a moment Amy lay and sobbed upon my breast, sobbed and laughed and whispered in sweet shame that she should never forgive me that in the end I had compelled her to speak for me.

“Nevertheless, Amy, my own love,” said I presently, “I know that for many years thou didst hate me right well.”

“Ay, and loved you also,” she murmured, “and loved most when I hated most; from childhood I loved you—when you threw me into the water.”

“If that is so, and you hated and loved me both,” I laughed, “how should a poor sheep know there was any love, discerning only the other?”

“Nay, I hated thee for thy bashfulness and thy blindness; now thou seest clearly there is love only.”

To the Court of Queen Bess we returned, Amy and I, with gladder hearts than when we had left it; but first we travelled to our home in

Devonshire and were there married, only returning to Court when we were summoned by her Grace in order to give account of ourselves.

“Why, thou minx, thou art dead, if I read Cæsar’s letter rightly,” cried the Queen, seeing us, “and thy long-limbed kinsman also. How came you to life again?” Amy told our story, whereat her Grace laughed and looked grave.

“Now hear,” said she, “what Cæsar hath written—read it, my Lord Chamberlain.”

The Tsar wrote that, in disobedience to his commands, his boyars had murdered the woman Amy Romalyn, whom her Grace had sent, uninvited, to take the place of Mary Hastings. The Tsar had, he explained, since married a subject; but if Mary Hastings should be willing to reconsider her decision, his present consort, Maria Nagoy, should be quickly divorced and placed in a convent.

“So thou wouldst not remain in Muscovy, hussy, even to be the wife of Cæsar himself?” her Majesty laughed.

“Madam, I love England best,” said Amy, “and moreover I have brought my own Tsar back with me.”

“What, has he prevailed at last?” Her Grace glanced, frowning slightly, in my direc-

tion. "Well, I suppose thou must have him! Shall we send Mary Hastings to the tiger's den in thy place?" she laughed. "What say'st thou, Mary?"

Mary Hastings made a grimace. "Let him eat up this Muscovish Mary," she said. "English meat is too strong for him; see how but a taste of Amy Romalyn has turned his stomach."

"Tell me one more thing, Amy," said I, on a day when we spoke of all these matters. "Why didst thou go to Muscovy to the Tsar's Court?"

"In order to show a certain blindworm how much I hated him," said Amy, laughing, "and that I would do any rash thing to escape from England and his presence!"

"And then he came with thee—awkward, interfering fool!" said I.

"Else I had been there now," Amy murmured, "a poor writhing victim beneath the claws of the Muscovish tiger, instead of the happiest wife in all England!"

THE END.

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