

CHAPTER XIV.

THE REVOLUTION.

NIGHT had come. The lights in palaces and houses were gradually extinguished. St. Petersburg began to sleep, or at least to give itself the appearance of sleeping. The regent, Anna Leopoldowna, also, had already dismissed her household and withdrawn into her private apartments.

It was a fine starlight night. Anna leaned upon the window-frame, thoughtfully and dreamily glancing up at the heavens. Her eyes gradually filled with tears, which slowly rolled down over her cheeks and fell upon her hands. She was startled by the falling of these warm, glowing drops. She had been unconscious of her weeping, as her thoughts had diverted her attention from her tears. She was thinking of Lynar, of the distant, warmly-desired one, to whom she would gladly have devoted her whole existence, but to whom she could belong only through falsehood. She thought it would be nobler and greater to renounce him, that her love might be consecrated by her abnegation, while actually devoting her life to the duties enjoined by the laws and the Church. But these thoughts filled her bosom with a nameless sorrow, and it was involuntarily that she wept.

"No," she murmured low, "I cannot make this sacrifice; I cannot make an offering of my love to my virtue; for this bugbear of a compulsory marriage I cannot give up a love which God Himself has inspired in my heart. Then let it be so! Let the world judge and the priests condemn

me. I will not sacrifice my love to a prejudice. I know that this is sinful, but God will have compassion on the sinner who has no other happiness on earth than this only one—a love that controls her whole being. And if this sin must be punished, oh, my Maker, I pray you to pardon him, and let the punishment fall on me alone!"

Thus speaking, she raised her arms and directed her eyes toward the heavens in fervent prayer. Suddenly a brilliant light flashed through the air—a star had shot from its sphere, and, after a short course, had become extinguished.

"That bodes misfortune," said Anna, with a shudder, her head sinking upon her breast.

At this moment there was a loud knocking at her door, and Prince Ulrich, Anna's husband, earnestly demanded admission.

Anna hastened to open, asking with surprise the cause of his unusual visit.

"Anna," said the prince, hastily entering, "I come to warn you once more. Again has a warning letter been mysteriously conveyed to me. I have just found it upon my night-table. See for yourself. It implores us to be on our guard. It informs us that we are threatened with a frightful danger, that Elizabeth conspires, and that we are lost if we do not instantly take preventive measures."

Anna read the warning letter, and then smilingly gave it back to her husband.

"Always the same old song, the same croaking of the toad," said she. "Count Ostermann has taken it into his head that Elizabeth is conspiring, and doubtless all these

warning letters come from him. Read them no more in future, my husband, and now let us retire to rest."

"And what if it were, nevertheless, true," said the prince, pressingly—"if we are really threatened with a great danger? A word from you can turn it away. Let us, therefore, be careful! Remember your son, Anna—*his* life is also threatened! Protect him, mother of an emperor! Allow me, the generalissimo of your forces, to take measures of precaution! Let me establish patrols, and cause a regiment, for whose fidelity I can be answerable, to guard the entrances of the palace!"

Anna smilingly shook her head. "No," said she, "nothing of all that shall be done! Such precautions manifest suspicion, and would wound the feelings of this good Elizabeth. She is innocent, believe me. I yesterday sharply observed her, and she came out from the trial pure. It would be ignoble to distrust her now. Moreover, she has my princely word that I will always listen only to herself, and believe no one but her. In the morning I will go to her and show her this letter, that she may have an opportunity to justify herself."

"You therefore consider her wholly innocent?" asked the prince, with a sigh.

"Yes, perfectly innocent. Her firm demeanor, her asseverations, her tears, have convinced me that it was unjust in us to believe the hateful rumors they had spread concerning her.* Let us therefore retire in peace and quiet. No danger threatens us from Elizabeth!"

* Levecque, vol. v., p. 227.

There was something convincing and tranquillizing in Anna's immovable conviction; the prince felt his inability to oppose her, and was ashamed of his feminine fears in the face of her masculine intrepidity.

With a sigh he took his leave and returned to his own room. At the door he turned once again.

"Anna," said he, with solemnity, "you have decided upon our destiny, and God grant that it may all eventuate happily! But should it be otherwise, should the monstrous and terrible break in upon you, then, at least, remember this hour, in which I warned you, and confess that I am free from all blame!"

Without awaiting an answer, with a drooping head and deep sigh, the prince left the room.

Anna looked after him with a compassionate smile.

"Poor prince!" she murmured low, "he is always so timid and trembling; that indicates unhappiness! He loves me, and I cannot force my heart to return the feeling. Poor prince, it must be very sad to love and be unloved!"

With a sigh she closed the door through which her husband had passed.

"I will now sleep," said she. "Yes, sleep! Possibly Heaven may send me a pleasant dream, and I may see my Lynar! But no, I must first go to Ivan, to ascertain whether his slumber is tranquil."

With hasty steps she repaired to the adjacent chamber, which was that of the young emperor.

There all was still. Before the door opening upon the corridor she heard the regular step of the soldier on guard.

The waiters upon the emperor were slumbering upon mattresses around him. It was a picture of profound tranquillity.

With light steps Anna approached the cradle of her son, and, bending down over him, regarded him with tender maternal glances, while his still and peaceful slumber seemed to touch her heart with a sweet emotion.

"Sleep, my dear child, my charming little emperor," she murmured—"sleep, and in your dreams may you play with angels as beautiful as yourself!"

Bending again over the cradle, she breathed a light kiss upon the rosy lips of her child, and then noiselessly returned to her own chamber.

"And now," said she, drawing a long breath, "now will I, also, sleep and dream! Good-night, my beloved; good-night, Lynar!"

With a happy smile she reclined upon her couch, and soon slumbered.

At this moment the clock in the next chamber struck the twelfth hour. Slowly and solemnly resounded the tones of the striking clocks that announced the midnight.

At this same hour a lively movement commenced in the palace of the Princess Elizabeth. Lights were seen glancing from window to window, hurrying shadows were seen coming and going in the rooms, every thing there announced an activity unusual for the hour, and certainly it was a signal good fortune for Elizabeth that Anna had forbidden her husband's sending a patrol through the streets. One single patrol passing the palace might have frustrated the whole conspiracy!

But the streets were perfectly quiet; nowhere was a sentinel or watchman to be seen.

The slight creaking and whizzing of a sledge upon the crackling snow was now heard; it came nearer and nearer, and then there was a knocking at the palace gate. The porter opened, and two sledges drove into the court.

The first, with a rich covering and magnificent ornaments, was empty. But Lestocq was seen to spring out of the second, and hurriedly enter the palace.

Elizabeth, splendidly dressed, sparkling with brilliants, was waiting in her small reception-room. No one but Alexis Razumovsky was with her. Neither of them spoke, and their visages plainly discovered that they were in a state of painfully uncomfortable suspense.

Elizabeth was pale and had a convulsive twitching about her mouth, her form trembled feverishly, and she was obliged to cling to Razumovsky, to prevent falling.

"Did you hear the opening of the court-yard gate?" she breathed low. "Lestocq is not yet here, and it is past midnight. Certainly he is arrested, all is discovered, and we are lost! I am fearfully anxious, Alexis; I already seem to feel the sword at my throat. Ah, hear you not steps in the corridor? They come this way. They are my pursuers. They come to conduct me to the scaffold! Save me, Alexis, save me!"

And with a shrill cry of anguish the princess clung to the neck of her favorite.

The door was now hastily opened, and upon the threshold appeared Lestocq and Woronzow.

"Princess Elizabeth!" exclaimed Lestocq, with solem-

nity, "I have come for you. The throne awaits its empress!"

"Up, Princess Elizabeth," said Alexis, "take courage, my fair empress, give us an example of spirit and resolution!"

The princess slowly raised her pale face from Razumovsky's shoulder, and looking around with timid glances, faintly said: "I suffer fearfully! This anguish will kill me! My destiny is so cruel, I am so tormented. Why must I be an empress?"

"That you may be no nun," laconically responded Lestocq.

"And to become the greatest and loftiest woman in the world!" said Woronzow.

"To raise to your own elevation the man you love," whispered Alexis.

With a glance of tenderness, Elizabeth nodded to him.

"Yes," said she, "for your sake, my Alexis, I will become an empress! Come, let us go. But where is Grünstein?"

"With his faithful followers he awaits us before the casern of his regiment. We go there first."

"Then let us go!" said Elizabeth, striding forward. But she stopped on seeing that Alexis followed with the other two.

"No," said she, "you must not go with us, Alexis. If I am to have courage to act and speak, I must know that you are not mingled in the strife—I must not have to tremble for your life! No, no, only when I know that you are concealed and in safety, can I have courage to struggle for an

imperial crown. Promise me, therefore, Alexis, that you will quietly remain here until I send a messenger for you!"

Razumovsky begged and implored in vain—in vain he knelt before her, and covered her hands with tears and kisses.

Elizabeth remained inflexible, and, as Alexis yet persisted in his prayers, she earnestly and proudly said: "Alexis Razumovsky, I command you to remain here. You will obey the first command of your empress!"

"I will remain," sighed Alexis, "and the world will point the finger of scorn at me, calling me a coward!"

"And I will compel the world to honor you as a king!" said Elizabeth, with tenderness, beckoning to Lestocq and Woronzow to follow her from the room.

Silently they hastened down the stairs—silently was Elizabeth handed into her sledge, while Lestocq and Woronzow took their places in the second.

"Forward!" thundered Lestocq's powerful voice, and the train rushed through the dark and deserted streets.

St. Petersburg slept. No one appeared at the darkened windows of the silent palaces, no one boded that a new empress was passing through the streets,—an empress, who at this time had but two subjects in her train!

They had now reached the casern of the Peobrajensky regiment. There they halted. In the open door stands Grünstein with his thirty recruits.

They silently approached the sledge of the princess and prostrated themselves before her.

"Hail to our empress!" whispered Grünstein low, and as low was it repeated by the soldiers.

"Let us enter the casern, call the soldiers, and awaken the officers; I myself will address them!" said Elizabeth, alighting from her sledge. She was now full of courage and resolution. In the face of danger now no longer to be avoided, she had suddenly steeled her heart; her father's spirit was awakened in her.

With a firm step she entered the casern; the conspirators had already raised an alarm there, and the suddenly aroused soldiers rushed from all the corridors, with wonder and admiration staring at this noble and beautiful woman who, radiant in the splendor of her beauty, and sparkling with jewels, stood in their midst.

"Soldiers," cried Elizabeth, with a firm voice, "I come to implore your support in my attempt to obtain justice in the realm of my father! I am the daughter of the great Emperor Peter, the rightful heir to the throne of Russia, and I claim what is mine! I will no longer suffer a German princess to give laws to you, my beloved brethren and countrymen! Follow me, therefore, and let us drive away these foreign intruders who have usurped the throne of your lawful sovereign!"

"All hail, Elizabeth, our empress!" cried the conspirators, prostrating themselves.

Surprised, benumbed, and overpowered, the others made no opposition. Miserable slaves, they were accustomed to obey whoever dared assume the command over them,—and they therefore submitted. Falling upon their knees, they took the oath of allegiance to the new empress!

Elizabeth was now the empress of three hundred soldiers.

"Up, now, my friends, to the palace of the czar, where

these usurpers dwell and inflict upon you the shame of calling a cradled infant your emperor. Come, and let us punish them for this insult, by thrusting them from their usurped power!"

"We will follow our empress in life and death!" cried the soldiers.

They therefore started again, and once more hastened through the silent streets until, at length, they reached the imperial palace, where dwelt the Emperor Ivan with his parents.

Elizabeth, with her confidential partisans in four sledges, had hastened on in advance of the others. With renewed courage they approached the principal entrance of the palace.

The guard took to their arms, and the drummer was preparing to beat an alarm, when a single blow of Lestocq's fist broke through the skin of the drum.

The terrified drummer fell, and over his body passed the band of conspirators, Elizabeth at their head.

No one ventured to oppose them; the slaves fell upon their knees in homage to her who announced herself as their mistress and empress!

Thus meeting with universal submission and obedience, they approached the wing of the palace occupied by the Emperor Ivan and his mother the regent. Here is stationed an officer of the guard. He alone ventures defiance to the intruders. He meets them with his sword drawn, and swears to strike down the first person who attempts to enter the corridor.

"Unhappy man, what is it you dare!" said Lestocq,

boldly advancing. "You are guilty of high-treason. Fall upon your knees and implore pardon of your empress, Elizabeth!"

The officer shrank back in terror. It was an empress who stood before him, and he had dared to defy her!

Begging for forgiveness and mercy, he dropped his sword and fell upon his knees.* The Russian slave was awakened in him, and he bent before the one who had the power to command.

Unobstructed, retained by no one, Elizabeth and her followers now strode through the corridor leading to the private apartments of the regent. Sentinels were placed at every door, with strict commands to strike down any one who should dare to oppose them.

In this manner they reached the anteroom of the regent's chamber.

Elizabeth had not the courage to go any farther. She hesitatingly stopped. A deep shame and repentance came over her when she thought of the noble confidence Anna had shown, and which she was now on the point of repaying with the blackest treason.

Lestocq, whose sharp, observing glance constantly rested upon her, divined her thoughts and the cause of her irresolution. He privately whispered some words to Grünstein, who, with thirty grenadiers, immediately approached the door of Anna's sleeping-room.

With a single push the door was forced, and with a wild

* "Voyage en Sibérie, par l'Abbé Chappe d'Auteroche," vol. i., p. 185.

cry the soldiers rushed to the couch upon which Anna Leopoldowna was reposing.

With a cry of anguish Anna springs up from her slumber, and shudderingly stares at the soldiers by whom she is encompassed, who, with rough voices, command her to rise and follow them. They scarcely give her time to put on a robe, and encase her little feet in shoes.

But Anna has become perfectly calm and self-possessed. She knows she is lost, and, too proud to weep or complain, she finds in herself courage to be tranquil.

"I beg only to be allowed to speak to Elizabeth," said she, aloud. "I will do all you command me. I will follow you wherever you wish, only let me first see your empress, Elizabeth."

Elizabeth, leaning against the door-post, had heard these words; yielding to an involuntary impulse of her heart, she pushed open the door and appeared upon the threshold of Anna Leopoldowna's chamber.

On perceiving her, a faint smile passed over Anna's features.

"Ah, come you thus to me, Elizabeth?" she said, reproachfully, with a proud glance at the princess.

Elizabeth could not support that glance. She cast down her eyes, and again Anna Leopoldowna smiled. She was conquered, but before her, blushing with shame, stood her momentarily subdued conqueror. But Anna now remembered her son, and, folding her hands, she said, in an imploring tone:

"Elizabeth, kill not my son! Have compassion upon him!"

Elizabeth turned away with a shudder, she felt her heart rent, she had not strength for an answer.

Lestocq beckoned the soldiers, and commanded them to remove the traitress, Anna Leopoldowna.

Thirty warriors took possession of the regent, who calmly and proudly submitted herself to them and suffered herself to be led away.

In the corridor they encountered another troop of soldiers, who were escorting the regent's husband, Prince Ulrich of Brunswick, and Anna's favorite, Julia von Mengden.

"Anna!" sorrowfully exclaimed the prince, "oh, had you but listened to my warning! Why did I not, in spite of your commands, what I ought to have done? I alone am to blame for this sad misfortune."

"It is no one's fault but mine," calmly responded Anna. "Pardon me, my husband; pardon me, Julia."

And so they descended to the sledges in waiting below. They placed the prince in one, and the regent, with Julia, in the other.

"Ah," said Julia, throwing her arms around Anna's neck, "we shall at least suffer together."

Anna reclined her head upon her friend's shoulder.

"God is just and good," said she. "He punishes me for my criminal love, and mercifully spares the object of my affections. I thank God for my sufferings. Julia, should you one day be liberated and allowed to see him again, then bear to him my warmest greetings; then tell him that I shall love him eternally, and that my last sigh shall be a prayer for his happiness. I shall never see him again. Bear to him my blessing, Julia!"

Julia dissolved in tears, and, clinging to her friend, she sobbed: "No, no, they will not dare to kill you."

"Then they will condemn me to a life-long imprisonment," calmly responded Anna.

"No, no, your head is sacred, and so is your freedom. They dare not attack either."

"Nothing is sacred in Russia," laconically responded Anna.

The sledges stopped at the palace of the Princess Elizabeth. Hardly two hours had passed since Elizabeth, in those same sledges, had left her palace as a poor, trembling princess; and now, as reigning empress, she sent them back with the dethroned regent.

The latter entered the palace of the princess as a prisoner, while Elizabeth, as empress, took possession of the palace of the czars.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SLEEP OF INNOCENCE.

ANNA LEOPOLDOWNA had hardly left the room in which she had been surprised and captured, when Lestocq turned to Grünstein with a new order.

"Now," said he, in an undertone to him—"now hasten to seize the emperor. This little Ivan must be annihilated."

Elizabeth had overheard these words, and remembering Anna's last prayer, she exclaimed with vehemence:

"No, no, I say, he shall not be annihilated! Woe to him who injures a hair of his head! I will not be the mur-