

## CHAPTER. IV.

THE market-place was thronged to overflowing. All ranks were gathered to hear the proclamation. There was the nobleman, with his numerous retinue of armed vassals, ready to give and take offence at the least signal from their chief. There was the wretched, half-starved, ragged mendicant, whose petitions for relief were neither heard nor regarded. There might be seen the female of rank, gaudily dressed, and well mounted, and guarded by a train of slaves, whose gay apparel proclaimed the wealth of the respective families to whom they belonged. The fair haired Russian, the swarthy Tartar, the Livonian, the Bohemian, the Hungarian, and the German, mingled promiscuously in the crowd, and were distinguished by the badges of their different countries. In the midst of this throng, our little friend Ora was struggling, in order to see and to be seen, and she found, to the no small mortification of her vanity, that the attempt in either case was equally abortive. She was so diminutive in stature that the sea of heads closed in above her, and the huge frames of a band of Cossacks among whom she had unwittingly poked her way, by dodging in and out, and creeping under the arms of the tallest of the crowd, completely closed in the unhappy belle. Her gay dress hung in flutters round her. She had lost the gay silk handkerchief which confined her rich brown hair, which, floating over her face and shoulders, served as an additional veil to impede the passage and sight of the poor girl, who, fearful of being trodden down, and finding it impossible to escape, began to weep and sob aloud.

"What the devil have we here?" said a well known voice, which made little Ora's heart leap within her. "Is it a puppy or a child?" As he spoke, Ora parted her scattered locks, and looked piteously up, and Lechus, for it was he, pushed aside the shoulders of two of the tall broad shouldered Cossacks, and looked down, and both he and Ora burst out a laughing—Lechus at the ridiculous figure Ora cut, and Ora for joy, that she had found a friend and protector.

"Oh, dear Mr. Lechus, pray take me out of this horrible crowd. I have lost both my shoes, and my gown has been torn off my back, it's a thousand wonders that I am alive to tell you all my misfortunes. Instead of being able to see any thing, I have hardly room to see myself. A hundred times since I saw you this morning, I have wished myself safe at home."

"Aye, mistress Ora, when butterflies trust themselves abroad in rude company, they should remember their delicate wings," said Lechus; "you are caught in a trap, and I know not in what manner to get you out. You will never allow the black monster to put his paws upon you, or I would lift you over the heads of the crowd, and convey you to a place of safety."

"Oh, I will give you a thousand thanks, and a kiss in the bargain," said Ora, holding up her arms, as the blacksmith bent down his, and lifted the little maiden, as if she were a mere baby, from her suffocating hiding place; then shouldering a passage through the motley throng, they soon found themselves beyond the outer circle.

"Why, Ora, your fine dress, of which you were so vain this morning," said Lechus, surveying the rescued damsel from head to foot, "is nearly demolished."

"Now don't increase my misfortunes by telling me of them," returned Ora. "Am I not sufficiently punished already? Those rude people pushed me about as if I had been a reptile in their path, instead of the prettiest girl in our village."

"And so you are, Ora; but the world knows nothing of our village—women, to retain their reputation in society, are best at home."

"But every body likes to be seen, now and then," said Ora, "and I thought my youth and sex would ensure me respect."

"And admiration—ha, Ora?"

"Well—and if I did think so?"

"For once you were mistaken, Ora. A pretty young woman is always out of her place, when unprotected in a crowd like this," said Lechus; "and what did you encounter all these dangers to see?"

"The twelve kings, to be sure."

"Now, heaven help us!" returned Lechus laughing, "I think one will be sufficient, and he prove a good man and a true; and what think you induced all this vast multitude to assemble themselves together on this spot?"

"The same folly which led me to abandon my quiet home, I suppose," said Ora.

"You have guessed it. Then cease to marvel that your little head should be overlooked, when high-born damsels are regarded with indifference by men who have only eyes for their future ruler."

"Bless me, master Lechus! you have become a politician since I saw you this morning."

"I have grown somewhat graver; are you not highly edified by my moral and sententious speeches?"

"You have fallen in love," said Ora, thoughtfully.

"Who told you so?" said the blacksmith, with an involuntary start.

"Instinct," said Ora, "the only teacher who never errs in her mode of tuition. Reason may deceive us, nature never; and by infallible symptoms, I know that the spell I cast upon you this morning has begun to operate."

"It was a more skilful hand than yours, Ora, that wove the charm. I have given you over to Casimer. Go and enchant him with your pretty wiles. I am proof against such witchcraft."

Before the disappointed village belle could frame a reply, they were joined by Casimer and Steinulf.