

Trollope Anthony

Linda Tressel



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CHAPTER I

The troubles and sorrows of Linda Tressel, who is the heroine of the little story now about to be told, arose from the too rigid virtue of her nearest and most loving friend, – as troubles will sometimes come from rigid virtue when rigid virtue is not accompanied by sound sense, and especially when it knows little or nothing of the softness of mercy.

The nearest and dearest friend of Linda Tressel was her aunt, the widow Staubach – Madame Charlotte Staubach, as she had come to be called in the little town of Nuremberg where she lived. In Nuremberg all houses are picturesque, but you shall go through the entire city and find no more picturesque abode than the small red house with the three gables close down by the river-side in the Schütt island – the little island made by the river Pegnitz in the middle of the town. They who have seen the widow Staubach's house will have remembered it, not only because of its bright colour and its sharp gables, but also because of the garden which runs between the house and the water's edge. And yet the garden was no bigger than may often nowadays be seen in the balconies of the mansions of Paris and of London. Here Linda Tressel lived with her aunt, and here also Linda had been born.

Linda was the orphan of Herr Tressel, who had for many years been what we may call town-clerk to the magistrates of Nuremberg. Chance in middle life had taken him to Cologne – a German city indeed, as was his own, but a city so far away from Nuremberg that its people and its manners were as strange to him as though he had gone beyond the reach of his own mother-tongue. But here he had married, and from Cologne had brought home his bride to the picturesque, red, gabled house by the water's side in his own city. His wife's only sister had also married, in her own town; and that sister was the virtuous but rigid aunt Charlotte, to live with whom had been the fate in life of Linda Tressel.

It need not be more than told in the fewest words that the town-clerk and the town-clerk's wife both died when Linda was but an infant, and that the husband of her aunt Charlotte died also. In Nuremberg there is no possession so much coveted and so dearly loved as that of the house in which the family lives. Herr Tressel had owned the house with the three gables, and so had his father before him, and to the father it had come from an uncle whose name had been different, – and to him from some other relative. But it was an old family property, and, like other houses in Nuremberg, was to be kept in the hands of the family while the family might remain, unless some terrible ruin should supervene.

When Linda was but six years old, her aunt, the widow, came to Nuremberg to inhabit the house which the Tressels had left as an only legacy to their daughter; but it was understood when she did so that a right of living in the house for the remainder of her days was to belong to Madame Staubach because of the surrender she thus made of whatever of a home was then left to her in Cologne. There was probably no deed executed to this effect; nor would it have been thought that any deed was necessary. Should Linda Tressel, when years had rolled on, be taken as a wife, and should the husband live in the red house, there would still be room for Linda's aunt. And by no husband in Nuremberg, who should be told that such an arrangement had been anticipated, would such an arrangement be opposed. Mothers-in-law, aunts, maiden sisters, and dependent female relatives, in all degrees, are endured with greater patience and treated with a gentler hand in patient Bavaria than in some lands farther west where life is faster, and in which men's shoulders are more easily galled by slight burdens. And as poor little Linda Tressel had no other possession but the house, as all other income, slight as it might be, was to be brought with her by aunt Charlotte, aunt Charlotte had at least a right to the free use of the roof over her head. It is necessary that so much should be told;

but Linda's troubles did not come from the divided right which she had in her father's house. Linda's troubles, as has before been said, sprang not from her aunt's covetousness, but from her aunt's virtue – perhaps we might more truly say, from her aunt's religion.

Nuremberg is one of those German cities in which a stranger finds it difficult to understand the religious idiosyncrasies of the people. It is in Bavaria, and Bavaria, as he knows, is Roman Catholic. But Nuremberg is Protestant, and the stranger, when he visits the two cathedrals – those of St. Sebald and St. Lawrence – finds it hard to believe that they should not be made to resound with masses, so like are they in all respects to other Romanist cathedrals which he has seen. But he is told that they are Lutheran and Protestant, and he is obliged to make himself aware that the prevailing religion of Nuremberg is Lutheran, in spite of what to him are the Catholic appearances of the churches. Now the widow Staubach was among Protestants the most Protestant, going far beyond the ordinary amenities of Lutheran teaching, as at present taught, in her religious observances, her religious loves, and her religious antipathies. The ordinary Lutheran of the German cities does not wear his religion very conspicuously. It is not a trouble to him in his daily life, causing him to live in terror as to the life to come. That it is a comfort to him let us not doubt. But it has not on him generally that outward, ever palpable, unmistakable effect, making its own of his gait, his countenance, his garb, his voice, his words, his eyes, his thoughts, his clothes, his very sneeze, his cough, his sighs, his groans, which is the result of Calvinistic impressions thoroughly brought home to the mind and lovingly entertained in the heart. Madame Staubach was in truth a German Anabaptist, but it will be enough for us to say that her manners and gait were the manners and gait of a Calvinist.

While Linda Tressel was a child she hardly knew that her aunt was peculiar in her religious ideas. That mode of life which comes to a child comes naturally, and Linda, though she was probably not allowed to play as freely as did the other bairns around her, though she was taken more frequently to the house of worship which her aunt frequented, and targed more strictly in the reading of godly books, did not know till she was a child no longer, that she was subjected to harder usage than others endured. But when Linda was eleven, the widow was persuaded by a friend that it was her duty to send her niece to school; and when Linda at sixteen ceased to be a school girl, she had learned to think that the religion of her aunt's neighbours was a more comfortable religion than that practised by her aunt; and when she was eighteen, she had further learned to think that the life of certain neighbour girls was a pleasanter life than her own. When she was twenty, she had studied the subject more deeply, and had told herself that though her spirit was prone to rebel against her aunt, that though she would fain have been allowed to do as did other girls of twenty, yet she knew her aunt to be a good woman, and knew that it behoved her to obey. Had not her aunt come all the way from Cologne, from the distant city of Rhenish Prussia, to live in Nuremberg for her sake, and should she be unfaithful and rebellious? Now Madame Staubach understood and appreciated the proneness to rebellion in her niece's heart, but did not quite understand, and perhaps could not appreciate, the attempt to put down that rebellion which the niece was ever making from day to day.

I have said that the widow Staubach had brought with her to Nuremberg some income upon which to live in the red house with the three gables. Some small means of her own she possessed, some few hundred florins a-year, which were remitted to her punctually from Cologne; but this would not have sufficed even for the moderate wants of herself, her niece, and of the old maid Tetchen, who lived with them, and who had lived with Linda's mother. But there was a source of income very ready to the widow's hand, and of which it was a matter of course that she should in her circumstances avail herself. She and her niece could not fill the family home, and a portion of it was let to a lodger. This lodger was Herr Steinmarc – Peter Steinmarc, who had been clerk to Linda's father when Linda's father had been clerk to the city magistrates, and who was now clerk to the city magistrates himself. Peter Steinmarc in the old days had inhabited a garret in the house, and had taken his meals at his master's table; but now the first floor of the house was his own, the big airy pleasant chamber looking out from under one gable on to the clear water, and the broad passage under the middle gable, and

the square large bedroom – the room in which Linda had been born – under the third gable. The windows from these apartments all looked out on to the slow-flowing but clear stream, which ran so close below them that the town-clerk might have sat and fished from his windows had he been so minded; for there was no road there – only the narrow slip of a garden no broader than a balcony. And opposite, beyond the river, where the road ran, there was a broad place, – the Ruden Platz; and every house surrounding this was picturesque with different colours, and with many gables, and the points of the houses rose up in sharp pyramids, of which every brick and every tile was in its place, sharp, clear, well formed, and appropriate, in those very inches of space which each was called upon to fill. For in Nuremberg it is the religion of the community that no house shall fall into decay, that no form of city beauty shall be allowed to vanish, that nothing of picturesque antiquity shall be changed. From age to age, though stones and bricks are changed, the buildings are the same, and the medieval forms remain, delighting the taste of the traveller as they do the pride of the burgher. Thus it was that Herr Steinmarc, the clerk of the magistrates in Nuremberg, had for his use as pleasant an abode as the city could furnish him.

Now it came to pass that, during the many years of their residence beneath the same roof, there grew up a strong feeling of friendship between Peter Steinmarc and the widow Staubach, so strong that in most worldly matters the widow would be content to follow her friend Peter's counsels without hesitation. And this was the case although Peter by no means lived in accordance with the widow's tenets as to matters of religion. It is not to be understood that Peter was a godless man, – not so especially, or that he lived a life in any way scandalous, or open to special animadversion from the converted; but he was a man of the world, very fond of money, very fond of business, doing no more in the matter of worship than is done ordinarily by men of the world, – one who would not scruple to earn a few gulden on the Sunday if such earning came in his way, who liked his beer and his pipe, and, above all things, liked the fees and perquisites of office on which he lived and made his little wealth. But though thus worldly he was esteemed much by Madame Staubach, who rarely, on his behalf, put forth that voice of warning which was so frequently heard by her niece.

But there are women of the class to which Madame Staubach belonged who think that the acerbities of religion are intended altogether for their own sex. That men ought to be grateful to them who will deny? Such women seem to think that Heaven will pardon that hardness of heart which it has created in man, and which the affairs of the world seem almost to require; but that it will extend no such forgiveness to the feminine creation. It may be necessary that a man should be stiff-necked, self-willed, eager on the world, perhaps even covetous and given to worldly lusts. But for a woman, it behoves her to crush herself, so that she may be at all points submissive, self-denying, and much-suffering. She should be used to thorns in the flesh, and to thorns in the spirit too. Whatever may be the thing she wants, that thing she should not have. And if it be so that, in her feminine weakness, she be not able to deny herself, there should be those around her to do the denial for her. Let her crush herself as it becomes a poor female to do, or let there be some other female to crush her if she lack the strength, the purity, and the religious fervour which such self-crushing requires. Poor Linda Tressel had not much taste for crushing herself, but Providence had supplied her with one who had always been willing to do that work for her. And yet the aunt had ever dearly loved her niece, and dearly loved her now in these days of our story. If your eye offend you, shall you not pluck it out? After a sort Madame Staubach was plucking out her own eye when she led her niece such a life of torment as will be described in these pages.

When Linda was told one day by Tetchen the old servant that there was a marriage on foot between Herr Steinmarc and aunt Charlotte, Linda expressed her disbelief in very strong terms. When Tetchen produced many arguments to show why it should be so, and put aside as of no avail all the reasons given by Linda to show that such a marriage could hardly be intended, Linda was still incredulous. "You do not know aunt Charlotte, Tetchen; – not as I do." said Linda.

"I've lived in the same house with her for fourteen years," said Tetchen, angrily.

"And yet you do not know her. I am sure she will not marry Peter Steinmarc. She will never marry anybody. She does not think of such things."

"Pooh!" said Tetchen; "all women think of them. Their heads are always together, and Peter talks as though he meant to be master of the house, and he tells her everything about Ludovic. I heard them talking about Ludovic for the hour together the other night."

"You shouldn't listen, Tetchen."

"I didn't listen, miss. But when one is in and out one cannot stop one's ears. I hope there isn't going to be anything wrong between 'em about the house."

"My aunt will never do anything wrong, and my aunt will never marry Peter Steinmarc." So Linda declared in her aunt's defence, and in her latter assertion she was certainly right. Madame Staubach was not minded to marry Herr Steinmarc; but she might have done so had she wished it, for Herr Steinmarc asked her to take him more than once.

At this time the widow Staubach was a woman not much over forty years of age; and though it can hardly be said she was comely, yet she was not without a certain prettiness which might have charms in the judgment of Herr Steinmarc. She was very thin, and her face was pale, and here and there was the beginning of a wrinkle telling as much of trouble as of years; but her eyes were bright and clear, and her smooth hair, of which but the edge was allowed to be seen beneath her cap, was of as rich a brown as when she had married Gasper Staubach, now more than twenty years ago; and her teeth were white and perfect, and the oval of her face had not been impaired by time, and her step, though slow, was light and firm, and her voice, though sad, was low and soft. In talking to men – to such a man as was Herr Steinmarc – her voice was always low and soft, though there would be a sharp note in it now and again when she would be speaking to Tetchen or her niece. Whether it was her gentle voice, or her bright eyes, or the edge of soft brown hair beneath her cap, or some less creditable feeling of covetousness in regard to the gabled house in the Schütt island, shall not here be even guessed; but it was the fact that Herr Steinmarc had more than once asked Madame Staubach to be his wife when Tetchen first imparted her suspicion to Linda.

"And what were they saying about Ludovic?" asked Linda, when Tetchen, for the third time came to Linda with her tidings. Now Linda had scolded Tetchen for listening to her aunt's conversation about Ludovic, and Tetchen thought it unjust that she should be interrogated on the subject after being so treated.

"I told you, miss, I didn't hear anything; – only just the name."

"Very well, Tetchen; that will do; only I hope you won't say such things of aunt Charlotte anywhere else."

"What harm have I said, Linda? surely to say of a widow that she's to be married to an honest man is not to say harm."

"But it is not true, Tetchen; and you should not say it." Then Tetchen departed quite unconvinced, and Linda began to reflect how far her life would be changed for the better or for the worse, if Tetchen's tidings should ever be made true. But, as has been said before, Tetchen's tidings were never to be made true.

But Madame Staubach did not resent the offer made to her. When Peter Steinmarc told her that she was a lone woman, left without guidance or protection, she allowed the fact, admitting that guidance would be good for her. When he went on to say that Linda also was in need of protection, she admitted that also. "She is in sore need," Madame Staubach said, "the poor thoughtless child." And when Herr Steinmarc spoke of her pecuniary condition, reminding the widow that were she left without the lodger the two women could hardly keep the old family roof over their head, Madame Staubach acknowledged it all, and perhaps went very suddenly to the true point by expressing an opinion that everything would be much better arranged if the house were the property of Herr Steinmarc himself. "It isn't good that women should own houses," said Madame Staubach; "it should be enough for them that they are permitted to use them." Then Herr Steinmarc went on to explain

that if the widow would consent to become his wife, he thought he could so settle things that for their lives, at any rate, the house should be in his care and management. But the widow would not consent even to speak of such an arrangement as possible. She spoke a word, with a tear in her eye, of the human lord and master who had lived with her for two happy years, and said another word with some mystical allusion to a heavenly husband; and after that Herr Steinmarc felt that he could not plead his cause further with any hope of success. "But why should not Linda be your wife?" said Madame Staubach, as her disappointed suitor was about to retire.

The idea had never struck the man's mind before, and now, when the suggestion was made to him, he was for a while stricken dumb. Why should he not marry Linda Tressel, the niece; gay, pretty, young, sweet as youth and prettiness and gaiety could make her, a girl than whom there was none prettier, none sweeter, in all Nuremberg – and the real owner, too, of the house in which he lived, – instead of the aunt, who was neither gay, nor sweet, nor young; who, though she was virtuous, self-denying, and meek, possessed certainly but few feminine charms? Herr Steinmarc, though he was a man not by any means living outside the pale of the Church to which he belonged, was not so strongly given to religious observances as to have preferred the aunt because of her piety and sanctity of life. He was not hypocrite enough to suggest to Madame Staubach that any such feeling warmed his bosom. Why should not Linda be his wife? He sat himself down again in the arm-chair from which he had risen, and began to consider the question.

In the first place, Herr Steinmarc was at this time nearly fifty years old, and Linda Tressel was only twenty. He knew Linda's age well, for he had been an inhabitant of the garret up-stairs when Linda was born. What would the Frau Tressel have said that night had any one prophesied to her that her little daughter would hereafter be offered as a wife to her husband's penniless clerk upstairs? But penniless clerks often live to fill their masters' shoes, and do sometimes marry their masters' daughters. And then Linda was known throughout Nuremberg to be the real owner of the house with the three gables, and Herr Steinmarc had an idea that the Nuremberg magistrates would rise up against him were he to offer to marry the young heiress. And there was a third difficulty: Herr Steinmarc, though he had no knowledge on the subject, though his suspicions were so slight that he had never mentioned them to his old friend the widow, though he was aware that he had barely a ground for the idea, still had an idea, that Linda Tressel's heart was no longer at Linda's own disposal.

But nevertheless the momentous question which had been so suddenly asked him was one which certainly deserved the closest consideration. It showed him, at any rate, that Linda's nearest friend would help him were he inclined to prosecute such a suit, and that she saw nothing out of course, nothing anomalous, in the proposition. It would be very nice to be the husband of a pretty, gay, sweet-tempered, joyous young girl. It would be very nice to marry the heiress of the house, and to become its actual owner and master, and it would be nice also to be preferred to him of whom Peter Steinmarc had thought as the true possessor of Linda's heart. If Linda were once his wife, Linda, he did not doubt, would be true to him. In such case Linda, whom he knew to be a good girl, would overcome any little prejudice of her girlhood. Other men of fifty had married girls of twenty, and why should not he, Peter Steinmarc, the well-to-do, comfortable, and, considering his age, good-looking town-clerk of the city of Nuremberg? He could not bring himself to tell Madame Staubach that he would transfer his affections to her niece on that occasion on which the question was first asked. He would take a week, he said, to consider. He took the week; but made up his mind on the first day of the week, and at the end of the week declared to Madame Staubach that he thought the plan to be a good plan.

After that there was much discussion before any further step was taken, and Tetchen was quite sure that their lodger was to be married to Linda's aunt. There was much discussion, and the widow, shocked, perhaps, at her own cruelty, almost retreated from the offer she had made. But Herr Steinmarc was emboldened, and was now eager, and held her to her own plan. It was a good plan, and he was ready. He found that he could love the maiden, and he wished to take her to his bosom at once. For a few days the widow's heart relented; for a few days there came across her breast a frail, foolish,

human idea of love and passion, and the earthly joy of two young beings, happy in each other's arms. For a while she thought with regret of what she was about to do, of the sacrifice to be made, of the sorrow to be endured, of the deathblow to be given to those dreams of love, which doubtless had arisen, though hitherto they were no more than dreams. Madame Staubach, though she was now a saint, had been once a woman, and knew as well as any woman of what nature are the dreams of love which fill the heart of a girl. It was because she knew them so well, that she allowed herself only a few hours of such weakness. What! should she hesitate between heaven and hell, between God and devil, between this world and the next, between sacrifice of time and sacrifice of eternity, when the disposal of her own niece, her own child, her nearest and dearest, was concerned? Was it not fit that the world should be crushed in the bosom of a young girl? and how could it be crushed so effectually as by marrying her to an old man, one whom she respected, but who was otherwise distasteful to her – one who, as a husband, would at first be abhorrent to her? As Madame Staubach thought of heaven then, a girl who loved and was allowed to indulge her love could hardly go to heaven. "Let it be so," she said to Peter Steinmarc after a few days of weak vacillation, – "let it be so. I think that it will be good for her." Then Peter Steinmarc swore that it would be good for Linda – that it should be good for Linda. His care should be so great that Linda might never doubt the good. "Peter Steinmarc, I am thinking of her soul," said Madame Staubach. "I am thinking of that too," said Peter; "one has, you know, to think of everything in turns."

Then there came to be a little difficulty as to the manner in which the proposition should be first made to Linda Tressel. Madame Staubach thought that it should be made by Peter himself, but Peter was of opinion that if the ice were first broken by Madame Staubach, final success might be more probably achieved. "She owes you obedience, my friend, and she owes me none, as yet," said Peter. There seemed to be so much of truth in this that Madame Staubach yielded, and undertook to make the first overture to Linda on behalf of her lover.

CHAPTER II

Linda Tressel was a tall, light-built, active young woman, in full health, by no means a fine lady, very able and very willing to assist Tetchen in the work of the house, or rather to be assisted by Tetchen in doing it, and fit at all points to be the wife of any young burgher in Nuremberg. And she was very pretty withal, with eager, speaking eyes, and soft luxurious tresses, not black, but of so very dark a brown as to be counted black in some lights. It was her aunt's care to have these tresses confined, so that nothing of their wayward obstinacy in curling might be seen by the eyes of men; and Linda strove to obey her aunt, but the curls would sometimes be too strong for Linda, and would be seen over her shoulders and across her back, tempting the eyes of men sorely. Peter Steinmarc had so seen them many a time, and thought much of them when the offer of Linda's hand was first made to him. Her face, like that of her aunt, was oval in its form, and her complexion was dark and clear. But perhaps her greatest beauty consisted in the half-soft, half-wild expression of her face, which, while it seemed to declare to the world that she was mild, gentle, and, for the most part, silent, gave a vague, doubtful promise of something that might be beyond, if only her nature were sufficiently awakened, creating a hope and mysterious longing for something more than might be expected from a girl brought up under the severe thralldom of Madame Charlotte Staubach, – creating a hope, or perhaps it might be a fear. And Linda's face in this respect was the true reflex of her character. She lived with her aunt a quiet, industrious, sober life, striving to be obedient, striving to be religious with the religion of her aunt. She had almost brought herself to believe that it was good for her heart to be crushed. She had quite brought herself to wish to believe it. She had within her heart no desire for open rebellion against domestic authority. The world was a dangerous, bad world, in which men were dust and women something lower than dust. She would tell herself so very often, and strive to believe herself when she did so. But, for all this, there was a yearning for something beyond her present life, for something that should be of the world, worldly. When she heard profane music she would long to dance. When she heard the girls laughing in the public gardens she would long to stay and laugh with them. Pretty ribbons and bright-coloured silks were a snare to her. When she could shake out her curly locks in the retirement of her own little chamber, she liked to feel them and to know that they were pretty.

But these were the wiles with which the devil catches the souls of women, and there were times when she believed that the devil was making an especial struggle to possess himself of her. There were moments in which she almost thought that the devil would succeed, and that, perhaps, it was but of little use for her to carry on any longer the futile contest. Would it not be pleasant to give up the contest, and to laugh and talk and shout and be merry, to dance, and wear bright colours, and be gay in company with young men, as did the other girls around her? As for those other girls, their elder friends did not seem on their account to be specially in dread of Satan. There was Fanny Heisse who lived close to them, who had been Linda's friend when they went to school together. Fanny did just as she pleased, was always talking with young men, wore the brightest ribbons that the shops produced, was always dancing, seemed to be bound by no strict rules on life; and yet everybody spoke well of Fanny Heisse, and now Fanny was to be married to a young lawyer from Augsburg. Could it be the fact that the devil had made sure of Fanny Heisse? Linda had been very anxious to ask her aunt a question on that subject, but had been afraid. Whenever she attempted to discuss any point of theology with her aunt, such attempts always ended in renewed assurances of the devil's greediness, and in some harder, more crushing rule by which the devil's greed might be outwitted.

Then there came a time of terrible peril, and poor Linda was in greater doubt than ever. Fanny Heisse, who was to be married to the Augsburg lawyer, had long been accustomed to talk to young men, to one young man after another, so that young men had come to be almost nothing to her. She had selected one as her husband because it had been suggested to her that she had better settle

herself in life; and this special one was well-to-do, and good-looking, and pleasant-mannered, and good-tempered. The whole thing with Fanny Heisse had seemed to go as though flirting, love, and marriage all came naturally, without danger, without care, and without disappointment. But a young man had now spoken to her, to Linda, – had spoken to her words that she did not dare to repeat to any one, – had spoken to her twice, thrice, and she had not rebuked him. She had not, at least, rebuked him with that withering scorn which the circumstances had surely required, and which would have made him know that she regarded him as one sent purposely from the Evil One to tempt her. Now again had come upon her some terrible half-formed idea that it would be well to give up the battle and let the Evil One make free with his prey. But, in truth, her heart within her had so palpitated with emotion when these words had been spoken and been repeated, that she had lacked the strength to carry on the battle properly. How send a daring young man from you with withering scorn, when there lacks power to raise the eyes, to open or to close the lips, to think even at the moment whether such scorn is deserved, or something very different from scorn?

The young man had not been seen by Linda's eyes for nearly a month, when Peter Steinmarc and Madam Staubach settled between them that the ice should be broken. On the following morning aunt Charlotte prepared herself for the communication to be made, and, when she came in from her market purchases, went at once to her task. Linda was found by her aunt in their lodger's sitting-room, busy with brooms and brushes, while Tetchen on her knees was dry-rubbing the polished board round the broad margin of the room. "Linda," said Madame Staubach, "I have that which I wish to say to you; would you come with me for a while?" Then Linda followed her aunt to Madame Staubach's own chamber, and as she went there came over her a guilty fear. Could it be that her aunt had heard of the words which the young man had spoken to her?

"Linda," said Madame Staubach, "sit down, – there, in my chair. I have a proposition to make to you of much importance, – of very great importance. May the Lord grant that the thing that I do shall be right in His sight!"

"To make to me, aunt?" said Linda, now quite astray as to her aunt's intention. She was sure, at least, that there was no danger about the young man. Had it been her aunt's purpose to rebuke her for aught that she had done, her aunt's manner and look would have been very different, – would have been hard, severe, and full of denunciation. As it was, Madame Staubach almost hesitated in her words, and certainly had assumed much less than her accustomed austerity.

"I hope, Linda, that you know that I love you."

"I am sure that you love me, aunt Charlotte. But why do you ask me?"

"If there be any one in this world that I do love, it is you, my child. Who else is there left to me? Were it not for you, the world with all its troubles would be nothing to me, and I could prepare myself to go in peace when He should be pleased to take me."

"But why do you say this now, aunt Charlotte?"

"I will tell you why I say it now. Though I am hardly an old woman yet – "

"Of course you are not an old woman."

"I wish I were older, that I might be nearer to my rest. But you are young, and it is necessary that your future life should be regarded. Whether I go hence or remain here it will be proper that some settlement should be made for you." Then Madame Staubach paused, and Linda began to think that her aunt had on her mind some scheme about the house. When her aunt had spoken of going hence or remaining here, Linda had not been quite sure whether the goings and remainings spoken of were wholly spiritual or whether there was any reference to things worldly and temporal. Could it be that Tetchen was after all right in her surmise? Was it possible that her aunt was about to be married to Peter Steinmarc? But she said nothing; and after a while her aunt went on very slowly with her proposition. "Yes, Linda, some settlement for your future life should be made. You know that the house in which we live is your own."

"It is yours and mine together, aunt."

"No, Linda; the house is your own. And the furniture in it is yours too; so that Herr Steinmarc is your lodger. It is right that you should understand all this; but I think too well of my own child to believe that she will ever on that account be disobedient or unruly."

"That will never make a difference."

"No, Linda; I am sure it will not. Providence has been pleased to put me in the place of both father and mother to you. I will not say that I have done my duty by you – "

"You have, aunt, always," said Linda, taking her aunt's hand and pressing it affectionately.

"But I have found, and I expect to find, a child's obedience. It is good that the young should obey their elders, and should understand that those in authority over them should know better than they can do themselves what is good for them." Linda was now altogether astray in her thoughts and anticipations. Her aunt had very frequently spoken to her in this strain; nay, a week did not often pass by without such a speech. But then the speeches would come without the solemn prelude which had been made on this occasion, and would be caused generally by some act or word or look or movement on the part of Linda of which Madame Staubach had found herself obliged to express disapprobation. On the present occasion the conversation had been commenced without any such expression. Her aunt had even deigned to commend the general tenor of her life. She had dropped the hand as soon as her aunt began to talk of those in authority, and waited with patience till the gist of the lecture should be revealed to her. "I hope you will understand this now, Linda. That which I shall propose to you is for your welfare, here and hereafter, even though it may not at first seem to you to be agreeable."

"What is it, aunt?" said Linda, jumping up quickly from her seat.

"Sit down, my child, and I will tell you." But Linda did not reseal herself at once. Some terrible fear had come upon her, – some fear of she knew not what, – and she found it to be almost impossible to remain quiet at her aunt's knee. "Sit down, Linda, when I ask you." Then Linda did sit down; but she had altogether lost that look of quiet, passive endurance which her face and figure had borne when she was first asked to listen to her aunt's words. "The time in your life has come, my dear, when I as your guardian have to think whether it is not well that you should be – married."

"But I do not want to be married," said Linda, jumping up again.

"My dearest child, it would be better that you should listen to me. Marriage, you know, is an honourable state."

"Yes, I know, of course. But, aunt Charlotte – "

"Hush, my dear."

"A girl need not be married unless she likes."

"If I were dead, with whom would you live? Who would there be to guard you and guide you?"

"But you are not going to die."

"Linda, that is very wicked."

"And why can I not guide myself?"

"Because you are young, and weak, and foolish. Because it is right that they who are frail, and timid, and spiritless, should be made subject to those who are strong and able to hold dominion and to exact obedience." Linda did not at all like being told that she was spiritless. She thought that she might be able to show spirit enough were it not for the duty that she owed to her aunt. And as for obedience, though she were willing to obey her aunt, she felt that her aunt had no right to transfer her privilege in that respect to another. But she said nothing, and her aunt went on with her proposition.

"Our lodger, Peter Steinmarc, has spoken to me, and he is anxious to make you his wife."

"Peter Steinmarc!"

"Yes, Linda; Peter Steinmarc."

"Old Peter Steinmarc!"

"He is not old. What has his being old to do with it?"

"I will never marry Peter Steinmarc, aunt Charlotte."

Madame Staubach had not expected to meet with immediate and positive obedience. She had thought it probable that there might be some opposition shown to her plan when it was first brought forward. Indeed, how could it be otherwise, when marriage was suggested abruptly to such a girl as Linda Tressel, even though the suggested husband had been an Apollo? What young woman could have said, "Oh, certainly; whenever you please, aunt Charlotte," to such a proposition? Feeling this, Madame Staubach would have gone to work by degrees, – would have opened her siege by gradual trenches, and have approached the citadel by parallels, before she attempted to take it by storm, had she known anything of the ways and forms of such strategy. But though she knew that there were such ways and forms of strategy among the ungodly, out in the world with the worldly, she had practised none such herself, and knew nothing of the mode in which they should be conducted. On this subject, if on any, her niece owed to her obedience, and she would claim that obedience as hers of right. Though Linda would at first be startled, she would probably be not the less willing to obey at last, if she found her guardian stern and resolute in her demand. "My dear," she said, "you have probably not yet had time to think of the marriage which I have proposed to you."

"I want no time to think of it."

"Nothing in life should be accepted or rejected without thinking, Linda, – nothing except sin; and thinking cannot be done without time."

"This would be sin – a great sin!"

"Linda, you are very wicked."

"Of course, I am wicked."

"Herr Steinmarc is a most respectable man. There is no man in all Nuremberg more respected than Herr Steinmarc." This was doubtless Madame Staubach's opinion of Peter Steinmarc, but it may be that Madame Staubach was not qualified to express the opinion of the city in general on that subject. "He holds the office which your father held before him, and for many years has inhabited the best rooms in your father's house."

"He is welcome to the rooms if he wants them," said Linda. "He is welcome to the whole house if you choose to give it to him."

"That is nonsense, Linda. Herr Steinmarc wants nothing that is not his of right."

"I am not his of right," said Linda.

"Will you listen to me? You are much mistaken if you think that it is because of your trumpery house that this honest man wishes to make you his wife." We must suppose that Madame Staubach suffered some qualm of conscience as she proffered this assurance, and that she repented afterwards of the sin she committed in making a statement which she could hardly herself have believed to be exactly true. "He knew your father before you were born, and your mother; and he has known me for many years. Has he not lived with us ever since you can remember?"

"Yes," said Linda; "I remember him ever since I was a very little girl, – as long as I can remember anything, – and he seemed to be as old then as he is now."

"And why should he not be old? Why should you want a husband to be young and foolish and headstrong as you are yourself; – perhaps some one who would drink and gamble and go about after strange women?"

"I don't want any man for a husband," said Linda.

"There can be nothing more proper than that Herr Steinmarc should make you his wife. He has spoken to me and he is willing to undertake the charge."

"The charge!" almost screamed Linda, in terrible disgust.

"He is willing to undertake the charge, I say. We shall then still live together, and may hope to be able to maintain a God-fearing household, in which there may be as little opening to the temptations of the world as may be found in any well-ordered house."

"I do not believe that Peter Steinmarc is a God-fearing man."

"Linda, you are very wicked to say so."

"But if he were, it would make no difference."

"Linda!"

"I only know that he loves his money better than anything in the world, and that he never gives a kreutzer to any one, and that he won't subscribe to the hospital, and he always thinks that Tetchen takes his wine, though Tetchen never touches a drop."

"When he has a wife she will look after these things."

"I will never look after them," said Linda.

The conversation was brought to an end as soon after this as Madame Staubach was able to close it. She had done all that she had intended to do, and had done it with as much of good result as she had expected. She had probably not thought that Linda would be quite so fierce as she had shown herself; but she had expected tears, and more of despair, and a clearer protestation of abject misery in the proposed marriage. Linda's mind would now be filled with the idea, and probably she might by degrees reconcile herself to it, and learn to think that Peter was not so very old a man. At any rate it would now be for Peter himself to carry on the battle.

Linda, as soon as she was alone, sat down with her hands before her and with her eyes fixed, gazing on vacancy, in order that she might realise to herself the thing proposed to her. She had said very little to her aunt of the nature of the misery which such a marriage seemed to offer to her, – not because her imagination made for her no clear picture on the subject, not because she did not foresee unutterable wretchedness in such a union. The picture of such wretchedness had been very palpable to her. She thought that no consideration on earth would induce her to take that mean-faced old man to her breast as her husband, her lord – as the one being whom she was to love beyond everybody else in this world. The picture was clear enough, but she had argued to herself, unconsciously, that any description of that picture to her aunt would seem to suppose that the consummation of the picture was possible. She preferred therefore to declare that the thing was impossible, – an affair the completion of which would be quite out of the question. Instead of assuring her aunt that it would have made her miserable to have to look after Peter Steinmarc's wine, she at once protested that she never would take upon herself that duty. "I am not his of right," she had said; and as she said it, she resolved that she would adhere to that protest. But when she was alone she remembered her aunt's demand, her own submissiveness, her old habits of obedience, and above all she remembered the fear that would come over her that she was giving herself to the devil in casting from her her obedience on such a subject, and then she became very wretched. She told herself that sooner or later her aunt would conquer her, that sooner or later that mean-faced old man, with his snuffy fingers, and his few straggling hairs brushed over his bald pate, with his big shoes spreading here and there because of his corns, and his ugly, loose, square, snuffy coat, and his old hat which he had worn so long that she never liked to touch it, would become her husband, and that it would be her duty to look after his wine, and his old shoes, and his old hat, and to have her own little possessions doled out to her by his penuriousness. Though she continued to swear to herself that heaven and earth together should never make her become Herr Steinmarc's wife, yet at the same time she continued to bemoan the certainty of her coming fate. If they were both against her – both, with the Lord on their sides – how could she stand against them with nothing to aid her, – nothing, but the devil, and a few words spoken to her by one whom hitherto she had never dared to answer?

The house in which Linda and Madame Staubach lived, of which the three gables faced towards the river, and which came so close upon the stream that there was but a margin six feet broad between the wall and the edge of the water, was approached by a narrow street or passage, which reached as far as the end of the house, where there was a small gravelled court or open place, perhaps thirty feet square. Opposite to the door of the red house was the door of that in which lived Fanny Heisse with her father and mother. They indeed had another opening into one of the streets of the town, which was necessary, as Jacob Heisse was an upholsterer, and required an exit from his premises for chairs and tables. But to the red house with the three gables there was no other approach than by the narrow

passage which ran between the river and the back of Heisse's workshop. Thus the little courtyard was very private, and Linda could stand leaning on the wicket-gate which divided the little garden from the court, without being subject to the charge of making herself public to the passers-by. Not but what she might be seen when so standing by those in the Ruden Platz on the other side of the river, as had often been pointed out to her by her aunt. But it was a habit with her to stand there, perhaps because while so standing she would often hear the gay laugh of her old friend Fanny, and would thus, at second hand, receive some impress from the gaiety of the world without. Now, in her musing, without thinking much of whither she was going, she went slowly down the stairs and out of the door, and stood leaning upon the gate looking over the river at the men who were working in the front of the warehouses. She had not been there long when Fanny ran across to her from the door of her father's house. Fanny Heisse was a bright broad-faced girl, with light hair, and laughing eyes, and a dimple on her chin, freckled somewhat, with a pug nose, and a large mouth. But for all this Fanny Heisse was known throughout Nuremberg as a pretty girl.

"Linda, what do you think?" said Fanny. "Papa was at Augsburg yesterday, and has just come home, and it is all to come off the week after next."

"And you are happy?"

"Of course I'm happy. Why shouldn't a girl be happy? He's a good fellow and deserves it all, and I mean to be such a wife to him! Only he is to let me dance. But you don't care for dancing?"

"I have never tried it – much."

"No; your people think it wicked. I am so glad mine don't. But, Linda, you'll be let come to my marriage – will you not? I do so want you to come. I was making up the party just now with mother and his sister Marie. Father brought Marie home with him. And we have put you down for one. But, Linda, what ails you? Does anything ail you?" Fanny might well ask, for the tears were running down Linda's face.

"It is nothing particular."

"Nay, but it is something particular – something very particular. Linda, you mope too much."

"I have not been moping now. But, Fanny, I cannot talk to you about it. I cannot indeed – not now. Do not be angry with me if I go in and leave you." Then Linda ran in, and went up to her bedroom and bolted the door.

CHAPTER III

Peter Steinmarc had a cousin in a younger generation than himself, who lived in Nuremberg, and who was named Ludovic Valcarm. The mother of this young man had been Peter's first cousin, and when she died Ludovic had in some sort fallen into the hands of his relative the town-clerk. Ludovic's father was still alive; but he was a thriftless, aimless man, who had never been of service either to his wife or children, and at this moment no one knew where he was living, or what he was doing. No one knew, unless it was his son Ludovic, who never received much encouragement in Nuremberg to talk about his father. At the present moment, Peter Steinmarc and his cousin, though they had not actually quarrelled, were not on the most friendly terms. As Peter, in his younger days, had been clerk to old Tressel, so had Ludovic been brought up to act as clerk to Peter; and for three or four years the young man had received some small modicum of salary from the city chest, as a servant in the employment of the city magistrates. But of late Ludovic had left his uncle's office, and had entered the service of certain brewers in Nuremberg, who were more liberal in their views as to wages than were the city magistrates. Peter Steinmarc had thought ill of his cousin for making this change. He had been at the trouble of pointing out to Ludovic how he himself had in former years sat upon the stool in the office in the town-hall, from whence he had been promoted to the arm-chair; and had almost taken upon himself to promise that the good fortune of Ludovic should be as great as his own, if only Ludovic for the present would be content with the stool. But young Valcarm, who by this time was four-and-twenty, told his cousin very freely that the stool in the town-hall suited him no longer, and that he liked neither the work nor the wages. Indeed, he went further than this, and told his kinsman that he liked the society of the office as little as he did either the wages or the work. It may naturally be supposed that this was not said till there had been some unpleasant words spoken by the town-clerk to his assistant, – till the authority of the elder had been somewhat stretched over the head of the young man; but it may be supposed also that when such words had once been spoken, Peter Steinmarc did not again press Ludovic Valcarm to sit upon the official stool.

Ludovic had never lived in the garret of the red house as Peter himself had done. When the suggestion that he should do so had some years since been made to Madame Staubach, that prudent lady, foreseeing that Linda would soon become a young woman, had been unwilling to sanction the arrangement. Ludovic, therefore, had housed himself elsewhere, and had been free of the authority of the town-clerk when away from his office. But he had been often in his cousin's rooms, and there had grown up some acquaintance between him and aunt Charlotte and Linda. It had been very slight; – so thought aunt Charlotte. It had been as slight as her precautions could make it. But Ludovic, nevertheless, had spoken such words to Linda that Linda had been unable to answer him; and though Madame Staubach was altogether ignorant that such iniquity had been perpetrated, Peter Steinmarc had shrewdly guessed the truth.

Rumours of a very ill sort had reached the red house respecting Ludovic Valcarm. When Linda had interrogated Tetchen as to the nature of the things that were said of Ludovic in that conversation between Peter and Madame Staubach which Tetchen had overheard, she had not asked without some cause. She knew that evil things were said of the young man, and that evil words regarding him had been whispered by Peter into her aunt's ears; – that such whisperings had been going on almost ever since the day on which Ludovic had declined to return again to the official stool; and she knew, she thought that she knew, that such whisperings were not altogether undeserved. There was a set of young men in Nuremberg of whom it was said that they had a bad name among their elders, – that they drank spirits instead of beer, that they were up late at nights, that they played cards among themselves, that they were very unfrequent at any house of prayer, that they belonged to some turbulent political society which had, to the grief of all the old burghers, been introduced into Nuremberg from Munich, that they talked of women as women are talked of in Paris and Vienna and other strongholds of

iniquity, and that they despised altogether the old habits and modes of life of their forefathers. They were known by their dress. They wore high round hats like chimney-pots, – such as were worn in Paris, – and satin stocks, and tight-fitting costly coats of fine cloth, and long pantaloons, and they carried little canes in their hands, and gave themselves airs, and were very unlike what the young men of Nuremberg used to be. Linda knew their appearance well, and thought that it was not altogether unbecoming. But she knew also, – for she had often been so told, – that they were dangerous men, and she was grieved that Ludovic Valcarm should be among their number.

But now – now that her aunt had spoken to her of that horrid plan in reference to Peter Steinmarc, what would Ludovic Valcarm be to her? Not that he could ever have been anything. She knew that, and had known it from the first, when she had been unable to answer him with the scorn which his words had deserved. How could such a one as she be mated with a man so unsuited to her aunt's tastes, to her own modes of life, as Ludovic Valcarm? And yet she could have wished that it might be otherwise. For a moment once, – perhaps for moments more than once, – there had been ideas that no mission could be more fitting for such a one as she than that of bringing back to the right path such a young man as Ludovic Valcarm. But then, – how to begin to bring a young man back? She knew that she would not be allowed to accept his love; and now, – now that the horrid plan had been proposed to her, any such scheme was more impracticable, more impossible than ever. Ah, how she hated Peter Steinmarc as she thought of all this!

For four or five days after this, not a word was said to Linda by any one on the hated subject. She kept out of Peter Steinmarc's way as well as she could, and made herself busy through the house with an almost frantic energy. She was very good to her aunt, doing every behest that was put upon her, and going through her religious services with a zeal which almost seemed to signify that she liked them. She did not leave the house once except in her aunt's company, and restrained herself even from leaning over the wicket-gate and listening to the voice of Fanny Heisse. There were moments during these days in which she thought that her opposition to her aunt's plan had had the desired effect, and that she was not to be driven mad by the courtship of Peter Steinmarc. Surely five days would not have elapsed without a word had not the plan been deserted. If that were the case, how good would she be! If that were the case, she would resolve, on her aunt's behalf, to be very scornful to Ludovic Valcarm.

But though she had never gone outside the house without her aunt, though she had never even leaned on the front wicket, yet she had seen Ludovic. It had been no fault of hers that he had spied her from the Ruden Platz, and had kissed his hand to her, and had made a sign to her which she had only half understood, – by which she had thought that he had meant to imply that he would come to her soon. All this came from no fault of hers. She knew that the centre warehouse in the Ruden Platz opposite belonged to the brewers, Sach Brothers, by whom Valcarm was employed. Of course it was necessary that the young man should be among the workmen, who were always moving barrels about before the warehouse, and that he should attend to his employers' business. But he need not have made the sign, or kissed his hand, when he stood hidden from all eyes but hers beneath the low dark archway; nor, for the matter of that, need her eyes have been fixed upon the gateway after she had once perceived that Ludovic was on the Ruden Platz.

What would happen to her if she were to declare boldly that she loved Ludovic Valcarm, and intended to become his wife, and not the wife of old Peter Steinmarc? In the first place, Ludovic had never asked her to be his wife; – but on that head she had almost no doubt at all. Ludovic would ask her quickly enough, she was very sure, if only he received sufficient encouragement. And as far as she understood the law of the country in which she lived, no one could, she thought, prevent her from marrying him. In such case she would have a terrible battle with her aunt; but her aunt could not lock her up, nor starve her into submission. It would be very dreadful, and no doubt all good people, – all those whom she had been accustomed to regard as good, – would throw her over and point at her as one abandoned. And her aunt's heart would be broken, and the world, – the world as she knew it, – would pretty nearly collapse around her. Nevertheless she could do it. But were she to do so,

would it not simply be that she would have allowed the Devil to get the victory, and that she would have given herself for ever and ever, body and soul, to the Evil One? And then she made a compact with herself, – a compact which she hoped was not a compact with Satan also. If they on one side would not strive to make her marry Peter Steinmarc, she on the other side would say nothing, not a word, to Ludovic Valcarm.

She soon learned, however, that she had not as yet achieved her object by the few words which she had spoken to her aunt. Those words had been spoken on a Monday. On the evening of the following Saturday she sat with her aunt in their own room down-stairs, in the chamber immediately below that occupied by Peter Steinmarc. It was a summer evening in August, and Linda was sitting at the window, with some household needlework in her lap, but engaged rather in watching the warehouse opposite than in sedulous attention to her needle. Her eyes were fixed upon the little doorway, not expecting that any one would be seen there, but full of remembrance of the figure of him who had stood there and had kissed his hand. Her aunt, as was her wont on every Saturday, was leaning over a little table intent on some large book of devotional service, with which she prepared herself for the Sabbath. Close as was her attention now and always to the volume, she would not on ordinary occasions have allowed Linda's eyes to stray for so long a time across the river without recalling them by some sharp word of reproof; but on this evening she sat and read and said nothing. Either she did not see her niece, so intent was she on her good work, or else, seeing her, she chose, for reasons of her own, to be as one who did not see. Linda was too intent upon her thoughts to remember that she was sinning with the sin of idleness, and would have still gazed across the river had she not heard a heavy footstep in the room above her head, and the fall of a creaking shoe on the stairs, a sound which she knew full well, and stump, bump, dump, Peter Steinmarc was descending from his own apartments to those of his neighbours below him. Then immediately Linda withdrew her eyes from the archway, and began to ply her needle with diligence. And Madame Staubach looked up from her book, and became uneasy on her chair. Linda felt sure that Peter was not going out for an evening stroll, was not in quest of beer and a friendly pipe at the Rothe Ross. He was much given to beer and a friendly pipe at the Rothe Ross; but Linda knew that he would creep down-stairs somewhat softly when his mind was that way given; not so softly but what she would hear his steps and know whither they were wending; but now, from the nature of the sound, she was quite sure that he was not going to the inn which he frequented. She threw a hurried glance round upon her aunt, and was quite sure that her aunt was of the same opinion. When Herr Steinmarc paused for half a minute outside her aunt's door, and then slowly turned the lock, Linda was not a bit surprised; nor was Madame Staubach surprised. She closed her book with dignity, and sat awaiting the address of her neighbour.

"Good evening, ladies," said Peter Steinmarc.

"Good evening, Peter," said Madame Staubach. It was many years now since these people had first known each other, and the town-clerk was always called Peter by his old friend. Linda spoke not a word of answer to her lover's salutation.

"It has been a beautiful summer day," said Peter.

"A lovely day," said Madame Staubach, "through the Lord's favour to us."

"Has the fraulein been out?" asked Peter.

"No; I have not been out," said Linda, almost savagely.

"I will go and leave you together," said Madame Staubach, getting up from her chair.

"No, aunt, no," said Linda. "Don't go away; pray, do not go away."

"It is fitting that I should do so," said Madame Staubach, as with one hand she gently pushed back Linda, who was pressing to the door after her. "You will stay, Linda, and hear what our friend will say; and remember, Linda, that he speaks with my authority and with my heartfelt prayer that he may prevail."

"He will never prevail," said Linda. But neither Madame Staubach nor Peter Steinmarc heard what she said.

Linda had already perceived, perturbed as she was in her mind, that Herr Steinmarc had prepared himself carefully for this interview. He had brought a hat with him into the room, but it was not the hat which had so long been distasteful to her. And he had got on clean bright shoes, as large indeed as the old dirty ones, because Herr Steinmarc was not a man to sacrifice his corns for love; but still shoes that were decidedly intended to be worn only on occasions. And he had changed his ordinary woollen shirt for white linen, and had taken out his new brown frock-coat which he always wore on those high days in Nuremberg on which the magistrates appeared with their civic collars. But, perhaps, the effect which Linda noted most keenly was the debonair fashion in which the straggling hairs had been disposed over the bald pate. For a moment or two a stranger might almost have believed that the pate was not bald.

"My dear young friend," began the town-clerk, "your aunt has, I think, spoken to you of my wishes." Linda muttered something, she knew not what. But though her words were not intelligible, her looks were so, and were not of a kind to have been naturally conducive to much hope in the bosom of Herr Steinmarc. "Of course, I can understand, Linda, how much this must have taken you by surprise at first. But that surprise will wear off, and I trust that you may gradually come to regard me as your future husband without – without – without anything like fear, you know, or feelings of that kind." Still she did not speak. "If you become my wife, Linda, I will do my best to make you always happy."

"I shall never become your wife, never – never – never."

"Do not speak so decidedly as that, Linda."

"I must speak decidedly. I do speak decidedly. I can't speak any other way. You know very well, Herr Steinmarc, that you oughtn't to ask me. It is very wrong of you, and very wicked."

"Why is it wrong, Linda? Why is it wicked?"

"If you want to get married, you should marry some one as old as yourself."

"No, Linda, that is not so. It is always thought becoming that the man should be older than the wife."

"But you are three times as old as I am, and that is not becoming." This was cruel on Linda's part, and her words also were untrue. Linda would be twenty-one at her next birthday, whereas Herr Steinmarc had not yet reached his fifty-second birthday.

Herr Steinmarc was a man who had a temper of his own, and who was a little touchy on the score of age. Linda knew that he was touchy on the score of age, and had exaggerated her statement with the view of causing pain. It was probably some appreciation of this fact which caused Herr Steinmarc to continue his solicitations with more of authority in his voice than he had hitherto used. "I am not three times as old as you, Linda; but, whatever may be my age, your aunt, who has the charge of you, thinks that the marriage is a fitting one. You should remember that you cannot fly in her face without committing a great sin. I offer to you an honest household and a respectable position. As Madame Staubach thinks that you should accept them, you must know that you are wrong to answer me with scorn and ribaldry."

"I have not answered you with ribaldry. It is not ribaldry to say that you are an old man."

"You have answered me with scorn."

"I do scorn you, Herr Steinmarc, when you come to me pretending to make love like a young man, with your Sunday clothes on, and your hair brushed smooth, and your new shoes. I do scorn you. And you may go and tell my aunt that I say so, if you like. And as for being an old man, you are an old man. Old men are very well in their way, I daresay; but they shouldn't go about making love to young women."

Herr Steinmarc had not hoped to succeed on this his first personal venture; but he certainly had not expected to be received after the fashion which Linda had adopted towards him. He had, doubtless, looked very often into Linda's face, and had listened very often to the tone of her voice; but he had not understood what her face expressed, nor had he known what compass that voice would

reach. Had he been a wise man, – a man wise as to his own future comfort, – he would have abandoned his present attempt after the lessons which he was now learning. But, as has before been said, he had a temper, and he was now angry with Linda. He was roused, and was disposed to make her know that, old as he was, and bald, and forced to wear awkward shoes, and to stump along heavily, still he could force her to become his wife and to minister to his wants. He understood it all. He knew what were his own deficiencies, and was as wide awake as was Linda herself to the natural desires of a young girl. Madame Staubach was, perhaps, equally awake, but she connected these desires directly with the devil. Because it was natural that a young woman should love a young man, therefore, according to the religious theory of Madame Staubach, it was well that a young woman should marry an old man, so that she might then be crushed and made malleable, and susceptible of that teaching which tells us that all suffering in this world is good for us. Now Peter Steinmarc was by no means alive to the truth of such lessons as these. Religion was all very well. It was an outward sign of a respectable life, – of a life in which men are trusted and receive comfortable wages, – and, beyond that, was an innocent occupation for enthusiastic women. But he had no idea that any human being was bound to undergo crushing in this world for his soul's sake. Had he not wished to marry Linda himself, it might be very well that Linda should marry a young man. But now that Linda so openly scorned him, had treated him with such plain-spoken contumely, he thought it would be well that Linda should be crushed. Yes; and he thought also that he might probably find a means of crushing her.

"I suppose, miss," he said, after pausing for some moments, "that the meaning of this is that you have got a young lover?"

"I have got no young lover," said Linda; "and if I had, why shouldn't I? What would that be to you?"

"It would be very much to me, if it be the young man I think. Yes, I understand; you blush now. Very well. I shall know now how to manage you; – or your aunt will know."

"I have got no lover," said Linda, in great anger; "and you are a very wicked old man to say so."

"Then you had better receive me as your future husband. If you will be good and obedient, I will forgive the great unkindness of what you have said to me."

"I have not meant to be unkind, but I cannot have you for my husband. How am I to love you?"

"That will come."

"It will never come."

"Was it not unkind when you said that I was three times as old as you?"

"I did not mean to be unkind." Since the allusion which had been made to some younger lover, from which Linda had gathered that Peter Steinmarc must know something of Ludovic's passion for herself, she had been in part quelled. She was not able now to stand up bravely before her suitor, and fight him as she had done at first with all the weapons which she had at her command. The man knew something which it was almost ruinous to her that he should know, something by which, if her aunt knew it, she would be quite ruined. How could it be that Herr Steinmarc should have learned anything of Ludovic's wild love? He had not been in the house, – he had been in the town-hall, sitting in his big official arm-chair, – when Ludovic had stood in the low-arched doorway and blown a kiss across the river from his hand. And yet he did know it; and knowing it, would of course tell her aunt! "I did not mean to be unkind," she said.

"You were very unkind."

"I beg your pardon then, Herr Steinmarc."

"Will you let me address you, then, as your lover?"

"Oh, no!"

"Because of that young man; is it?"

"Oh, no, no. I have said nothing to the young man – not a word. He is nothing to me. It is not that."

"Linda, I see it all. I understand everything now. Unless you will promise to give him up, and do as your aunt bids you, I must tell your aunt everything."

"There is nothing to tell."

"Linda!"

"I have done nothing. I can't help any young man. He is only over there because of the brewery." She had told all her secret now. "He is nothing to me, Herr Steinmarc, and if you choose to tell aunt Charlotte, you must. I shall tell aunt Charlotte that if she will let me keep out of your way, I will promise to keep out of his. But if you come, then – then – then – I don't know what I may do." After that she escaped, and went away back into the kitchen, while Peter Steinmarc stumped up again to his own room.

"Well, my friend, how has it gone?" said Madam Staubach, entering Peter's chamber, at the door of which she had knocked.

"I have found out the truth," said Peter, solemnly.

"What truth?" Peter shook his head, not despondently so much as in dismay. The thing which he had to tell was so very bad! He felt it so keenly, not on his own account so much as on account of his friend! All that was expressed by the manner in which Peter shook his head. "What truth have you found out, Peter? Tell me at once," said Madame Staubach.

"She has got a – lover."

"Who? Linda! I do not believe it."

"She has owned it. And such a lover!" Whereupon Peter Steinmarc lifted up both his hands.

"What lover? Who is he? How does she know him, and when has she seen him? I cannot believe it. Linda has never been false to me."

"Her lover is – Ludovic Valcarm."

"Your cousin?"

"My cousin Ludovic – who is a good-for-nothing, a spendthrift, a fellow without a florin, a fellow that plays cards on Sundays."

"And who fears neither God nor Satan," said Madame Staubach. "Peter Steinmarc, I do not believe it. The child can hardly have spoken to him."

"You had better ask her, Madame Staubach." Then with some exaggeration Peter told Linda's aunt all that he did know, and something more than all that Linda had confessed; and before their conversation was over they had both agreed that, let these tidings be true in much or in little, or true not at all, every exertion should be used to force Linda into the proposed marriage with as little delay as possible.

"I overheard him speaking to her out of the street window, when they thought I was out," said the town-clerk in a whisper before he left Madame Staubach. "I had to come back home for the key of the big chest, and they never knew that I had been in the house." This had been one of the occasions on which Linda had been addressed, and had wanted breath to answer the bold young man who had spoken to her.

CHAPTER IV

On the following morning, being Sunday morning, Linda positively refused to get up at the usual hour, and declared her intention of not going to church. She was, she said, so ill that she could not go to church. Late on the preceding evening Madame Staubach, after she had left Peter Steinmarc, had spoken to Linda of what she had heard, and it was not surprising that Linda should have a headache on the following morning. "Linda," Madame Staubach said, "Peter has told me that Ludovic Valcarm has been – making love to you. Linda, is this true?" Linda had been unable to say that it was not true. Her aunt put the matter to her in a more cunning way than Steinmarc had done, and Linda felt herself unable to deny the charge. "Then let me tell you, that of all the young women of whom I ever heard, you are the most deceitful," continued Madame Staubach.

"Do not say that, aunt Charlotte; pray, do not say that."

"But I do say it. Oh, that it should have come to this between you and me!"

"I have not deceived you. Indeed I have not. I don't want to see Ludovic again; never, if you do not wish it. I haven't said a word to him. Oh, aunt, pray believe me. I have never spoken a word to him; – in the way of what you mean."

"Will you consent to marry Peter Steinmarc?" Linda hesitated a moment before she answered.

"Tell me, Miss; will you promise to take Peter Steinmarc as your husband?"

"I cannot promise that, aunt Charlotte."

"Then I will never forgive you, – never. And God will never forgive you. I did not think it possible that my sister's child should have been so false to me."

"I have not been false to you," said Linda through her tears.

"And such a terrible young man, too; one who drinks, and gambles, and is a rebel; one of whom all the world speaks ill; a penniless spendthrift, to whom no decent girl would betroth herself. But, perhaps, you are to be his light-of-love!"

"It is a shame, – a great shame, – for you to say – such things," said Linda, sobbing bitterly. "No, I won't wait, I must go. I would sooner be dead than hear you say such things to me. So I would. I can't help it, if it's wicked. You make me say it." Then Linda escaped from the room, and went up to her bed; and on the next morning she was too ill either to eat her breakfast or to go to church.

Of course she saw nothing of Peter on that morning; but she heard the creaking of his shoes as he went forth after his morning meal, and I fear that her good wishes for his Sunday work did not go with him on that Sabbath morning. Three or four times her aunt was in her room, but to her aunt Linda would say no more than that she was sick and could not leave her bed. Madame Staubach did not renew the revilings which she had poured forth so freely on the preceding evening, partly influenced by Linda's headache, and partly, perhaps, by a statement which had been made to her by Tetchen as to the amount of love-making which had taken place. "Lord bless you, ma'am, in any other house than this it would go for nothing. Over at Jacob Heisse's, among his girls, it wouldn't even have been counted at all, – such a few words as that. Just the compliments of the day, and no more." Tetchen could not have heard it all, or she would hardly have talked of the compliments of the day. When Ludovic had told Linda that she was the fairest girl in all Nuremberg, and that he never could be happy, not for an hour, unless he might hope to call her his own, even Tetchen, whose notions about young men were not over strict, could not have taken such words as simply meaning the compliments of the day. But there was Linda sick in bed, and this was Sunday morning, and nothing further could be said or done on the instant. And, moreover, such love-making as had taken place did in truth seem to have been perpetrated altogether on the side of the young man. Therefore it was that Madame Staubach spoke with a gentle voice as she prescribed to Linda some pill or potion that might probably be of service, and then went forth to her church.

Madame Staubach's prayers on a Sunday morning were a long affair. She usually left the house a little after ten, and did not return till past two. Soon after she was gone, on the present occasion, Tetchen came up to Linda's room, and expressed her own desire to go to the Frauenkirche, – for Tetchen was a Roman Catholic. "That is, if you mean to get up, miss, I'll go," said Tetchen. Linda, turning in her bed, thought that her head would be better now that her aunt was gone, and promised that she would get up. In half an hour she was alone in the kitchen down-stairs, and Tetchen had started to the Frauenkirche, – or to whatever other place was more agreeable to her for the occupation of her Sunday morning.

It was by no means an uncommon occurrence that Linda should be left alone in the house on some part of the Sunday, and she would naturally have seated herself with a book at the parlour window as soon as she had completed what little there might be to be done in the kitchen. But on this occasion there came upon her a feeling of desolateness as she thought of her present condition. Not only was she alone now, but she must be alone for ever. She had no friend left. Her aunt was estranged from her. Peter Steinmarc was her bitterest enemy. And she did not dare even to think of Ludovic Valcarm. She had sauntered now into the parlour, and, as she was telling herself that she did not dare to think of the young man, she looked across the river, and there he was standing on the water's edge.

She retreated back in the room, – so far back that it was impossible that he should see her. She felt quite sure that he had not seen her as yet, for his back had been turned to her during the single moment that she had stood at the window. What should she do now? She was quite certain that he could not see her, as she stood far back in the room, within the gloom of the dark walls. And then there was the river between him and her. So she stood and watched, as one might watch a coming enemy, or a lover who was too bold. There was a little punt or raft moored against the bank just opposite to the gateway of the warehouse, which often lay there, and which, as Linda knew, was used in the affairs of the brewery. Now, as she stood watching him, Ludovic stepped into the punt without unfastening it from the ring, and pushed the loose end of it across the river as far as the shallow bottom would allow him. But still there was a considerable distance between him and the garden of the red house, a distance so great that Linda felt that the water made her safe. But there was a pole in the boat, and Linda saw the young man take up the pole and prepare for a spring, and in a moment he was standing in the narrow garden. As he landed, he flung the pole back into the punt, which remained stranded in the middle of the river. Was ever such a leap seen before? Then she thought how safe she would have been from Peter Steinmarc, had Peter Steinmarc been in the boat.

What would Ludovic Valcarm do next? He might remain there all day before she would go to him. He was now standing under the front of the centre gable, and was out of Linda's sight. There was a low window close to him where he stood, which opened from the passage that ran through the middle of the house. On the other side of this passage, opposite to the parlour which Madame Staubach occupied, was a large room not now used, and filled with lumber. Linda, as soon as she was aware that Ludovic was in the island, within a few feet of her, and that something must be done, retreated from the parlour back into the kitchen, and, as she went, thoughtfully drew the bolt of the front door. But she had not thought of the low window into the passage, which in these summer days was always opened, nor, if she had thought of it, could she have taken any precaution in that direction. To have attempted to close the window would have been to throw herself into the young man's arms. But there was a bolt inside the kitchen door, and that she drew. Then she stood in the middle of the room listening. Had this been a thief who had come when she was left in charge of the house, is it thus she would have protected her own property and her aunt's? It was no thief. But why should she run from this man whom she knew, – whom she knew and would have trusted had she been left to her own judgment of him? She was no coward. Were she to face the man, she would fear no personal danger from him. He would offer her no insult, and she thought that she could protect herself, even were he to insult her. It was not that that she feared, – but that her aunt should be able to say that

she had received her lover in secret on this Sunday morning, when she had pretended that she was too ill to go to church!

She was all ears, and could hear that he was within the house. She had thought of the window the moment that she had barred the kitchen door, and knew that he would be within the house. She could hear him knock at the parlour door, and then enter the parlour. But he did not stay there a moment. Then she heard him at the foot of the stair, and with a low voice he called to her by her name. "Linda, are you there?" But, of course, she did not answer him. It might be that he would fancy that she was not within the house and would retreat. He would hardly intrude into their bedrooms; but it might be that he would go as far as his cousin's apartments. "Linda," he said again, – "Linda, I know that you are in the house." That wicked Tetchen! It could not be but that Tetchen had been a traitor. He went three or four steps up the stairs, and then, bethinking himself of the locality, came down again and knocked at once at the kitchen door. "Linda," he said, when he found that the door was barred, – "Linda, I know that you are here."

"Go away," said Linda. "Why have you come here? You know that you should not be here."

"Open the door for one moment, that you may listen to me. Open the door, and I will tell you all. I will go instantly when I have spoken to you, Linda; I will indeed."

Then she opened the door. Why should she be a barred-up prisoner in her own house? What was there that she need fear? She had done nothing that was wrong, and would do nothing wrong. Of course, she would tell her aunt. If the man would force his way into the house, climbing in through an open window, how could she help it? If her aunt chose to misbelieve her, let it be so. There was need now that she should call upon herself for strength. All heaven and earth together should not make her marry Peter Steinmarc. Nor should earth and the evil one combined make her give herself to a young man after any fashion that should disgrace her mother's memory or her father's name. If her aunt doubted her, the sorrow would be great, but she must bear it. "You have no right here," she said as soon as she was confronted with the young man. "You know that you should not be here. Go away."

"Linda, I love you."

"I don't want your love."

"And now they tell me that my cousin Peter is to be your husband."

"No, no. He will never be my husband."

"You will promise that?"

"He will never be my husband."

"Thanks, dearest; a thousand thanks for that. But your aunt is his friend. Is it not true?"

"Of course she is his friend."

"And would give you to him?"

"I am not hers to give. I am not to be given away at all. I choose to stay as I am. You know that you are very wicked to be here; but I believe you want to get me into trouble."

"Oh, Linda!"

"Then go. If you wish me to forgive you, go instantly."

"Say that you love me, and I will be gone at once."

"I will not say it."

"And do you not love me, – a little? Oh, Linda, you are so dear to me!"

"Why do you not go? They tell me evil things of you, and now I believe them. If you were not very wicked you would not come upon me here, in this way, when I am alone, doing all that you possibly can to make me wretched."

"I would give all the world to make you happy."

"I have never believed what they said of you. I always thought that they were ill-natured and prejudiced, and that they spoke falsehoods. But now I shall believe them. Now I know that you are very wicked. You have no right to stand here. Why do you not go when I bid you?"

"But you forgive me?"

"Yes, if you go now, – at once."

Then he seized her hand and kissed it. "Dearest Linda, remember that I shall always love you; always be thinking of you; always hoping that you will some day love me a little. Now I am gone."

"But which way?" said Linda – "you cannot jump back to the boat. The pole is gone. At the door they will see you from the windows."

"Nobody shall see me. God bless you, Linda." Then he again took her hand, though he did not, on this occasion, succeed in raising it as far as his lips. After that he ran down the passage, and, having glanced each way from the window, in half a minute was again in the garden. Linda, of course, hurried into the parlour, that she might watch him. In another half minute he was down over the little wall, into the river, and in three strides had gained the punt. The water, in truth, on that side was not much over his knees; but Linda thought he must be very wet. Then she looked round, to see if there were any eyes watching him. As far as she could see, there were no eyes.

Linda, when she was alone, was by no means contented with herself; and yet there was a sort of joy at her heart which she could not explain to herself, and of which, being keenly alive to it, she felt in great dread. What could be more wicked, more full of sin, than receiving, on a Sunday morning, a clandestine visit from a young man, and such a young man as Ludovic Valcarm? Her aunt had often spoken to her, with fear and trembling, of the mode of life in which their neighbours opposite lived. The daughters of Jacob Heisse were allowed to dance, and talk, and flirt, and, according to Madame Staubach, were living in fearful peril. For how much would such a man as Jacob Heisse, who thought of nothing but working hard, in order that his four girls might always have fine dresses, – for how much would he be called upon to answer in the last day? Of what comfort would it be to him then that his girls, in this foolish vain world, had hovered about him, bringing him his pipe and slippers, filling his glass stoup for him, and kissing his forehead as they stood over his easy-chair in the evening? Jacob Heisse and his daughters had ever been used as an example of worldly living by Madame Staubach. But none of Jacob Heisse's girls would ever have done such a thing as this. They flirted, indeed; but they did it openly, under their father's nose. And Linda had often heard the old man joke with his daughters about their lovers. Could Linda joke with any one touching this visit from Ludovic Valcarm?

And yet there was something in it that was a joy to her, – a joy which she could not define. Since her aunt had been so cruel to her, and since Peter had appeared before her as her suitor, she had told herself that she had no friend. Heretofore she had acknowledged Peter as her friend, in spite of his creaking shoes and objectionable hat. There was old custom in his favour, and he had not been unkind to her as an inmate of the same house with him. Her aunt she had loved dearly; but now her aunt's cruelty was so great that she shuddered as she thought of it. She had felt herself to be friendless. Then this young man had come to her; and though she had said to him all the hard things of which she could think because of his coming, yet – yet – yet she liked him because he had come. Was any other young man in Nuremberg so handsome? Would any other young man have taken that leap, or have gone through the river, that he might speak one word to her, even though he were to have nothing in return for the word so spoken? He had asked her to love him, and she had refused; – of course she had refused; – of course he had known that she would refuse. She would sooner have died than have told him that she loved him. But she thought she did love him – a little. She did not so love him but what she would give him up, – but what she would swear never to set eyes upon him again, if, as part of such an agreement, she might be set free from Peter Steinmarc's solicitations. That was a matter of course, because, without reference to Peter, she quite acknowledged that she was not free to have a lover of her own choice, without her aunt's consent. To give up Ludovic would be a duty, – a duty which she thought she could perform. But she would not perform it unless as part of a compact. No; let them look to it. If duty was expected from her, let duty be done to her. Then she sat thinking, and as she thought she kissed her own hand where Ludovic had kissed it.

The object of her thoughts was this; – what should she do now, when her aunt came home? Were she at once to tell her aunt all that had occurred, that comparison which she had made between herself and the Heisse girls, so much to her own disfavour, would not be a true comparison. In that case she would have received no clandestine young man. It could not be imputed to her as a fault, – at any rate not imputed by the justice of heaven, – that Ludovic Valcarm had jumped out of a boat and got in at the window. She could put herself right, at any rate, before any just tribunal, simply by telling the story truly and immediately. "Aunt Charlotte, Ludovic Valcarm has been here. He jumped out of a boat, and got in at the window, and followed me into the kitchen, and kissed my hand, and swore he loved me, and then he scrambled back through the river. I couldn't help it; – and now you know all about it." The telling of such a tale as that would, she thought, be the only way of making herself quite right before a just tribunal. But she felt, as she tried the telling of it to herself, that the task would be very difficult. And then her aunt would only half believe her, and would turn the facts, joined, as they would be, with her own unbelief, into additional grounds for urging on this marriage with Peter Steinmarc. How can one plead one's cause justly before a tribunal which is manifestly unjust, – which is determined to do injustice?

Moreover, was she not bound to secrecy? Had not secrecy been implied in that forgiveness which she had promised to Ludovic as the condition of his going? He had accepted the condition and gone. After that, would she not be treacherous to betray him? Why was it that at this moment it seemed to her that treachery to him, – to him who had treated her with such arrogant audacity, – would be of all guilt the most guilty? It was true that she could not put herself right without telling of him; and not to put herself right in this extremity would be to fall into so deep a depth of wrong! But any injury to herself would now be better than treachery to him. Had he not risked much in order that he might speak to her that one word of love? But, for all that, she did not make up her mind for a time. She must be governed by things as they went.

Tetchen came home first, and to Tetchen, Linda was determined that she would say not a word. That Tetchen was in communication with young Valcarm she did not doubt, but she would not tell the servant what had been the result of her wickedness. When Tetchen came in, Linda was in the kitchen, but she went at once into the parlour, and there awaited her aunt. Tetchen had bustled in, in high good-humour, and had at once gone to work to prepare for the Sunday dinner. "Mr. Peter is to dine with you to-day, Linda," she had said; "your aunt thinks there is nothing like making one family of it." Linda had left the kitchen without speaking a word, but she had fully understood the importance of the domestic arrangement which Tetchen had announced. No stranger ever dined at her aunt's table; and certainly her aunt would have asked no guest to do so on a Sunday but one whom she intended to regard as a part of her own household. Peter Steinmarc was to be one of them, and therefore might be allowed to eat his dinner with them even on the Sabbath.

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