LOVE IN A CELLAR.

By making a gigantic effort I had at last succeeded in pushing up the heavy sash of the old-fashioned guillotine window, and now, sitting in the broad window-seat, I was enjoying the scent of the great syringa bush, which grew so close to the house that it pushed its branches inside whenever it had the opportunity, so that sitting in the window was almost like being in an arbor. I was in Germany, of course, for guillotine windows, as we call them, are still the fashion in England, I hear.

Yes; I was in Germany, and it was the day before Whit-Sunday—a lovely May day—and I was just 16.

I am a good deal more than 16 now, but still, often when the syringa is in blossom, and the delicious fragrance comes floating round me, the whole scene rises again before my eyes, and I see the old-fashioned garden, with its quaintly-cut yews and box hedges, and apple trees loaded with blossoms; the wainscoted room, with the faded red carpet and antiquated furniture and ornaments; and, looking through the folding doors into the dining-room beyond, I see the long table decked for some festal occasion. two chairs wreathed with flowers, and before them, on the table, two bouquets composed of sprays of myrtle.

"I see, too, sitting opposite me in a capacious arm-chair, my grandmother, a little old lady in a white lace cap, with a prayer-book on her knees, which she was reading here at home because she could not get as far as the chapel beyond the town gate.

I had been there myself that morning, all in a hurry, just to see how it looked before I brought Granny to the house, and I had seen that it was beautifully decked with flowers, and that there were wax tapers enough to dazzle one.

After that I had come to the "wedding house" and waited, for I could not leave Granny quite alone; and while I waited I puzzled myself to make out why Uncle Dernau, as we all called him, and his wife should have chosen to celebrate their golden wedding in the little country chapel instead of in the large town church, which seemed so much more appropriate.

Then, too, I wondered what could be the meaning of sundry mysterious allusions which I had heard made in the course of the evening before. They had seemed to amuse the rest very much, but I could make nothing of them.

Uncle Dernau's little wife was a favorite little woman, with bright eyes, brown hair without a touch of gray in it, and very small hands and feet. How we had all admired her the night before, when, for "the very last time:" as she said, she had danced the charming minuet which had been arranged in her honor! I can see her now in her old-fashioned, marvelously short-waisted dress of silk, with a three-cornered fichu crossed over the chest, little shoes without heels, wide ribbon sandals and embroidered stockings. Uncle Dernau himself was her partner, and at the close of the dance he made her a low bow, saying with a gleam of fun and mischief in his eyes: "Madame, you dance like a French woman, and I believe I made a mistake after all in carrying you off from the French monsieur."

Every one laughed at this, and Aunt Dernau blushed like a young girl. What did it all mean? Could I ask Granny, I wondered? She had told me once that Aunt Dernau was her oldest and her dearest friend, and that some day she would tell me her history. Could I remind her of her promise now?

As I looked at her she took off her spectacles and closed her prayer-book, and, slipping down from my throne in the window, I seated myself on a stool at her feet.

"Granny," I said coaxingly, couldn't you tell me your friend's story now? You know you promised, and it is just the right day for it. They won't be back for a couple of hours yet. What with the service first and then the wedding, and a long sermon, and all the congratulations, so we have plenty of time."

Just then we caught the sound of distant church bells, by which we knew that the bridal procession must be getting near the chapel.

Ah! child, said my grandmother, it was a beautiful time when we two were young, Lorchen and I; you never saw such a little wild thing as she was. They called her "The Bird" because she was so quick and graceful and had such bright eyes in her pretty little head. There was not a prettier girl far or near, and there was something about her so different from other girls that one could hardly take one's eyes off her; she was so dainty and distingue.

And Lorchen herself was well aware of the fact that she was a perfect little despot. All the men, old and young, did her homage, and many a one did his best to catch and keep the little bird. But this was not so easy, for Lorchen was obstinate, and her greatest delight was to tease and torment her admirers whenever she had the opportunity. I often used to scold her for it; for, being her most intimate friend, I acted as confessor, and she always honestly told me her misdeeds. Sometimes we really got angry with one another after a ball or a picnic, when her list of confessions was unusually long. But where was the use? She knew that I could not help "forgiving" her, as she said directly she asked me, little fondling puss that she was, and she knew, too, that all the young men she had fooled and tormented would be at her feet again directly. But you musn't thinks so badly of her for all that. She was a dear, sweet little thing, and in spite of all her follies, she had a good, honest heart. As I said, she was universally admired, and so it seemed strange that young Dernau, the merchant, who was a next-door neighbor of hers, should be so stiff and cold, and take no notice at all of her. Sometimes I twitted her with the fact that he had never once danced with her, and was quite insensible to her charms. That always made her angry, and she would pout her rosy lips and say: "I'm sure I don't want him, Christel; he's a bear!"

Well you know, bad times came for poor Germany. The French conquered us, and the king and our beautiful Queen Louisa had to fly with their children, and it seemed as if we should all become French subjects. It was a bad time for us in our little town, for the authorities favored the enemy and we were disturbed by the sounds of fighting all around us. Ah! it was terribly sad; for all prosperity was at an end, and we spent our days in misery and anxiety. Poor Lorchen had, too, a special trouble of her own; for accounts of the wild doings of the French reached us from all sides, and it was said that they had a very rough-and-ready way of courting, for if a German girl took their fancy they just sent their soldiers to carry her off, and then took her away with them to the war. We were constantly hearing of deeds of violence and robbery; and the laws, being administered either by the French or their adherents, afforded us no redress or protection whatever. What could we do? People hid their valuables, so far as they could, in hollow trees, behind walls, or in the ground, and whenever any Frenchmen were known to be in the neighborhood they hid their wives and daughters as well. Poor Lorchen had the hardest time of all, for her mother was so nervous that she was always seeing danger, and she insisted on the poor girl spending the greater part of the day down in the cellar, and many an afternoon I spent there, too, keeping her company.

"Look!" said I, on one of these occasions. "you can see straight into neighbor Dernau's garden through this little window."

But Lorchen blushed and turned her head without answering. One Whitsun Eve, a lovely May day, just like to-day, a number of the enemy's troops passed through the town, and, of course, Lore had to sit in the cellar and get through the time as best she might. As soon as the terrible "Parlevouhs," as we called them, had all gone through and out of the town gate, the captive was let out, and what must the silly girl do but go to the sitting-room window and lean out. After being in prison so long she enjoyed the spring air doubly, and it amused her to watch what was going on in the street. But misfortune never slumbers, and, as it fell out, a young French officer came past leading his horse by the bridle and looking for a blacksmith, as the animal had cast a shoe. He had no sooner caught sight of the lovely little head among the roses which clustered round the windows than he threw the reins to a boy and dashed up the steps like a madman. It did not take him a minute, but Lore was as quict as he, and had slipped back into her hiding-place. Still, where was the use of that, when the Frenchman had seen her and was bent upon finding her.

"I want to see the pretty demoiselle," he cried, in his broken German, and he insisted on searching first all the rooms in the house, then the garrets, and finally the cellar! It was useless to say to him nay, for he was master of the situation, and Lorchen's poor mother followed him down the cellar-stairs trembling.

But, wonder of all wonders, the nest was empty, the bird had flown! Finding, snatching up a little ivory miniaing, therefore, that his search was vain the young officer flew into a rage, ture of Lore, dashed out the house, vowing he would come back next day with a whole squadron and stay till the girl was found. As soon as he was gone Lore's mother sank down in a chair and burst into tears, feeling utterly bewildered and altogether at her wits' end. But she had not wept long, when her neighbor, young Dernau, made his appearance, and, to her extreme surprise, asked her with all due form and ceremony to accept him as a suitor for her daughter's hand.

"Ach!" cried the poor woman, "Lorchen is gone—clean gone, she is not in her hiding place, and, if I could find her to-day, where's the use, when to-morrow the French villain is coming to carry her off! I'm a poor, miserable, helpless woman—what can I do? Oh! this terrible war!"

But the young man only laughed in an embarrassed sort of way, and then said:

"Only trust me, mother, if I may call you so, and depend upon it I shall be able to take good care of Lorchen when once I have the right. In the cellar she is, however, at the present moment; though not in yours!"

So saying, he led the astonished dame into his house and down ever so many stairs, and there sure enough was the captive in his cellar, doubly a captive now, and looking very happy as she fell on her mother's neck and begged her to give her and Karl her blessing. And so it came to pass that they were betrothed in the cellar, and immediately after all sorts of mysterious preparations were made in both houses, and at last the good pastor himself was called in to give his advice. At 11 o'clock that same night there was enacted one of the strangest scenes which our peaceful, sober-going little town ever witnessed; for a young couple were married in the darkness in the old chapel outside the Martini gate, and you may imagine my utter amazement at being mysteriously sent for at such an hour, and then finding myself taken to the chapel to be one of the witnesses to my Lore's marriage, the others being her mother and Dernau's most intimate friend, Fritz Berger.

It seemed uncommonly dismal to a girl of 17, as I was then, with my head stuffed full, too, of all sorts of tragical stories. It was a wild, dark night; the sky was much overcast, and ever and anon a distant flash of lightning announced that a storm was coming up. The feeble glimmer from the two tapers on the altar seemed only to make the darkness darker, and the flames flickere incessantly as the wind came sweeping in in gusts and making the bough of the old lime-tree rattle against the church windows. It was enough to make one shudder. child, I can tell you! The venerable old pastor, who had married Lorchen's father and mother and baptized Lorchen herself, gave only a short address, but it was all the more impressive for that, and we were all very much touched by it. When the ceremony was over I helped the sobbing bride to take off her wreath of myrtle and put on a very large hood, which was part of the peasant's costume, such as used to be worn about here, which she was going to wear as a diguise. The poor mother was speechlees with grief, and seemed quite dazed at the prospect of losing her beloved daughter.

Meantime Karl Dernau, who had also dressed himself like a peasant, had brought a poor, miserable, one-horsed covered cart to the door of the chapel, and, after the most heartrending leave-takings, Lorchen was lifted in, weeping bitterly. The night had grown pitch black by this time; the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled in the distance; but under the cover of the darkness, the pair safely effected their escape across the neighboring frontier, to where the French had not yet gained a footing, Lorchen passing for a sick peasant girl who was being taken to some famous wonder-working doctor. As Karl Dernau drove off on his strange wedding journey he looked so brave and tender and self-reliant that we who were left behind felt a comfortable assurance that our little bird would be safely hidden in her nest with him for her protector. Two years passed, and in the meantime I had been married in the regular, ordinary way, in broad daylight, with bridesmaids and wedding breakfast, and without any of the rather uncanny romance which had attended Lorchen's wedding. Still, who knows whether the mere fact of our having taken part together in this romantic affair did not lead to our own marriage? Be this as it may, it is quite certain that the next time Fritz Berger and I found ourselves inside the little chapel it was for our own wedding.

After a time things went better in the town, and as the French were less favored by those in authority it was thought safe for the fugitives to come back; and, as by the death of his father, Karl had become the owner of the house Lorchen's parents had rented—the very house we are in to-day—they came and settled here, and her mother with them, and all lived happily together. How happy we were to be together again! and the very first time we had a quiet hour Lorchen told me the story of her betrothed, which I had never properly understood till then.

"You see, Christel," said she, "you and I were very intimate, and you did know all my secrets—almost; but you did not know that I cared for Karl for a long time past. I was ashamed to confess it either to you or myself. But when he came to the cellar-window that dreadful day, just when I was in the greatest danger, and drove it in—I was too dazed to dare to open it myself—and when he lifted me up, and before I well knew where I was, took me into the cellar of his own house, well, then I knew that I did care for him, and I began to cry. And then he sat down by me and quietly took hold of my hand, and when I was able to speak I thanked him and begged his pardon for having made such fun of him before. You can guess what followed. Our betrothal was not very romantic, Christel, for we sat upon an old sugar chest, and my dress was torn and dusty, and the air of the cellar was damp and musty. But what did we care for that? There were roses all around us, and we were in Elysium, and as for the romance, we had enough before the day was out to last a whole lifetime."

This was Lorchen's confession, and we both thanked heaven for making us so happy and bringing us together again. We two kept together through all that time of terrible waiting and fighting and misery. But at last—at last came the news of victory, and the hills blazed with bonfires. The fatherland was free and our loved ones were safe and coming home crowned with laurels. We had suffered a great deal, but thought ourselves fortunate in having been allowed to look on while such great events were doing.

"But where have I got to with my chattering? I was only going to tell you—"

"Oh! Granny," I interrupted, "you have not told me a bit too much; I could listen all day—"

"Well," said she with a smile, "you deserve something for giving up going to the chapel to sit with an old woman. When I began I only meant to tell you how Aunt Dernau was imprisoned in the cellar, that you might see what a dangerous gift beauty is"

"H—m, Granny, I don't like your moral!" I answered. "The French are far enough off now, and for my own part I shouldn't mind running the risk of being tolerably nice looking."

Granny was going to scold, but the corners of her mouth twiched, and before she could recover herself I had jumped up, exclaiming:

"Listen, the bells have been ringing this long time; the wedding is over, and they will be here directly!"

I went once more hastily through the rooms to see that everything was in order, and then I strewed flowers all down the stairs to the front door, and then Granny and I waited at the window.

Soon the head of the procession made its appearence—such a long, long procession—first came the old people, several couples, and then the young ones, and lastly the grandchildren all decked with flowers; but the bridal pair, who were that day celebrating their golden wedding, were the most beautiful sight of all.

Aunt Dernau looked lovely in her blue-flowered damask and three-cornered lace handkerchief, with the golden sprays of myrtle in her hair: and Uncle Dernau, with his snow-white curly hair and tall, upright figure, looked most dignified and quite grand, too; for, beside the golden sprig in his button-hole, he wore the orders and decorations which he had won during the war. How tender and careful he was of his little wife, too!

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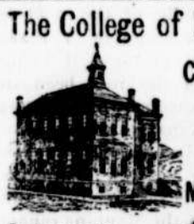

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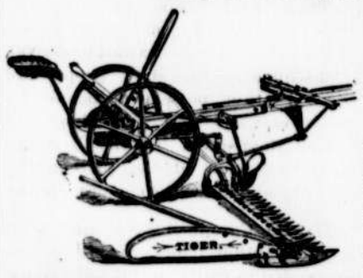

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