Oliphant Margaret

Miss Marjoribanks

Маргарет Олифант

Miss Marjoribanks

«Public Domain»

Олифант М. У.

Miss Marjoribanks / М. У. Олифант — «Public Domain»,

© Олифант М. У.
© Public Domain

Содержание

Mrs (Margaret) Oliphant
Miss Marjoribanks

Chapter I

Miss Marjoribanks lost her mother when she was only fifteen, and when, to add to the misfortune, she was absent at school, and could not have it in her power to soothe her dear mamma's last moments, as she herself said. Words are sometimes very poor exponents of such an event: but it happens now and then, on the other hand, that a plain intimation expresses too much, and suggests emotion and suffering which, in reality, have but little, if any, existence. Mrs Marjoribanks, poor lady, had been an invalid for many years; she had grown a little peevish in her loneliness, not feeling herself of much account in this world. There are some rare natures that are content to acquiesce in the general neglect, and forget themselves when they find themselves forgotten; but it is unfortunately much more usual to take the plan adopted by Mrs Marjoribanks, who devoted all her powers, during the last ten years of her life, to the solacement and care of that poor self which other people neglected. The consequence was, that when she disappeared from her sofa – except for the mere physical fact that she was no longer there – no one, except her maid, whose occupation was gone, could have found out much difference. Her husband, it is true, who had, somewhere, hidden deep in some secret corner of his physical organisation, the remains of a heart, experienced a certain sentiment of sadness when he re-entered the house from which she had gone away for ever. But Dr Marjoribanks was too busy a man to waste his feelings on a mere sentiment. His daughter, however, was only fifteen, and had floods of tears at her command, as was natural at that age. All the way home she revolved the situation in her mind, which was considerably enlightened by novels and popular philosophy – for the lady at the head of Miss Marjoribanks school was a devoted admirer of *Friends in Council*, and was fond of bestowing that work as a prize, with pencil-marks on the margin – so that Lucilla's mind had been cultivated, and was brimful of the best of sentiments. She made up her mind on her journey to a great many virtuous resolutions; for, in such a case as hers, it was evidently the duty of an only child to devote herself to her father's comfort, and become the sunshine of his life, as so many young persons of her age have been known to become in literature. Miss Marjoribanks had a lively mind, and was capable of grasping all the circumstances of the situation at a glance. Thus, between the outbreaks of her tears for her mother, it became apparent to her that she must sacrifice her own feelings, and make a cheerful home for papa, and that a great many changes would be necessary in the household – changes which went so far as even to extend to the furniture. Miss Marjoribanks sketched to herself, as she lay back in the corner of the railway carriage, with her veil down, how she would wind herself up to the duty of presiding at her papa's dinner-parties, and charming everybody by her good humour, and brightness, and devotion to his comfort; and how, when it was all over, she would withdraw and cry her eyes out in her own room, and be found in the morning languid and worn-out, but always heroical, ready to go downstairs and assist at dear papa's breakfast, and keep up her smiles for him till he had gone out to his patients. Altogether the picture was a very pretty one; and, considering that a great many young ladies in deep mourning put force upon their feelings in novels, and maintain a smile for the benefit of the unobservant male creatures of whom they have the charge, the idea was not at all extravagant, considering that Miss Marjoribanks was but fifteen. She was not, however, exactly the kind of figure for this *mise en scène*. When her schoolfellows talked of her to their friends – for Lucilla was already an important personage at Mount Pleasant – the most common description they gave her was, that she was "a large girl"; and there was great truth in the adjective. She was not to be described as a tall girl – which conveys an altogether different idea – but she was large in all particulars, full and well-developed, with somewhat large features, not at all pretty as yet, though it

was known in Mount Pleasant that somebody had said that such a face might ripen into beauty, and become "grandiose," for anything anybody could tell. Miss Marjoribanks was not vain; but the word had taken possession of her imagination, as was natural, and solaced her much when she made the painful discovery that her gloves were half a number larger, and her shoes a hair-breadth broader, than those of any of her companions; but the hands and feet were both perfectly well shaped; and being at the same time well clothed and plump, were much more presentable and pleasant to look upon than the lean rudimentary schoolgirl hands with which they were surrounded. To add to these excellences, Lucilla had a mass of hair which, if it could but have been cleared a little in its tint, would have been golden, though at present it was nothing more than tawny, and curly to exasperation. She wore it in large thick curls, which did not, however, float or wave, or do any of the graceful things which curls ought to do; for it had this aggravating quality, that it would not grow long, but would grow ridiculously, unmanageably thick, to the admiration of her companions, but to her own despair, for there was no knowing what to do with those short but ponderous locks. These were the external characteristics of the girl who was going home to be a comfort to her widowed father, and meant to sacrifice herself to his happiness. In the course of her rapid journey she had already settled upon everything that had to be done; or rather, to speak truly, had rehearsed everything, according to the habit already acquired by a quick mind, a good deal occupied with itself. First, she meant to fall into her father's arms – forgetting, with that singular facility for overlooking the peculiarities of others which belongs to such a character, that Dr Marjoribanks was very little given to embracing, and that a hasty kiss on her forehead was the warmest caress he had ever given his daughter – and then to rush up to the chamber of death and weep over dear mamma. "And to think I was not there to soothe her last moments!" Lucilla said to herself, with a sob, and with feelings sufficiently real in their way. After this, the devoted daughter made up her mind to come downstairs again, pale as death, but self-controlled, and devote herself to papa. Perhaps, if great emotion should make him tearless, as such cases had been known, Miss Marjoribanks would steal into his arms unawares, and so surprise him into weeping. All this went briskly through her mind, undeterred by the reflection that tears were as much out of the Doctor's way as embraces; and in this mood she sped swiftly along in the inspiration of her first sorrow, as she imagined, but in reality to suffer her first disappointment, which was of a less soothing character than that mild and manageable grief.

When Miss Marjoribanks reached home her mother had been dead for twenty-four hours; and her father was not at the door to receive her as she had expected, but by the bedside of a patient in extremity, who could not consent to go out of the world without the Doctor. This was a sad reversal of her intentions, but Lucilla was not the woman to be disconcerted. She carried out the second part of her programme without either interference or sympathy, except from Mrs Marjoribanks's maid, who had some hopes from the moment of her arrival. "I can't abear to think as I'm to be parted from you all, miss," sobbed the faithful attendant. "I've lost the best missus as ever was, and I shouldn't mind going after her. Whenever any one gets a good friend in this world, they're the first to be took away," said the weeping handmaiden, who naturally saw her own loss in the most vivid light. "Ah, Ellis," cried Miss Marjoribanks, reposing her sorrow in the arms of this anxious attendant, "we must try to be a comfort to poor papa!"

With this end Lucilla made herself very troublesome to the sober-minded Doctor during those few dim days before the faint and daily lessening shadow of poor Mrs Marjoribanks was removed altogether from the house. When that sad ceremony had taken place, and the Doctor returned, serious enough, Heaven knows, to the great house, where the faded helpless woman, who had notwithstanding been his love and his bride in other days, lay no longer on the familiar sofa, the crisis arrived which Miss Marjoribanks had rehearsed so often, but after quite a different fashion. The widower was tearless, indeed, but not from excess of emotion. On the contrary, a painful heaviness possessed him when he became aware how little real sorrow was in his mind, and how small an actual loss was this loss of his wife, which bulked before the world as an event of just as much magnitude as the loss,

for example, which poor Mr Lake, the drawing-master, was at the same moment suffering. It was even sad, in another point of view, to think of a human creature passing out of the world, and leaving so little trace that she had ever been there. As for the pretty creature whom Dr Marjoribanks had married, she had vanished into thin air years and years ago. These thoughts were heavy enough – perhaps even more overwhelming than that grief which develops love to its highest point of intensity. But such were not precisely the kind of reflections which could be solaced by paternal *attendrissement* over a weeping and devoted daughter. It was May, and the weather was warm for the season; but Lucilla had caused the fire to be lighted in the large gloomy library where Dr Marjoribanks always sat in the evenings, with the idea that it would be "a comfort" to him; and, for the same reason, she had ordered tea to be served there, instead of the dinner, for which her father, as she imagined, could have little appetite. When the Doctor went in to his favourite seclusion, tired and heated and sad – for even on the day of his wife's funeral the favourite doctor of Carlingford had patients to think of – the very heaviness of his thoughts gave warmth to his indignation. He had longed for the quiet and the coolness and the solitude of his library, apart from everybody; and when he found it radiant with firelight, tea set on the table, and Lucilla crying by the fire, in her new crape, the effect upon a temper by no means perfect may be imagined. The unfortunate man threw both the windows wide open and rang the bell violently, and gave instant orders for the removal of the unnecessary fire and the tea-service. "Let me know when dinner is ready," he said, in a voice like thunder; "and if Miss Marjoribanks wants a fire, let it be lighted in the drawing-room." Lucilla was so much taken by surprise by this sudden overthrow of her programme, that she submitted, as a girl of much less spirit might have done, and suffered herself and her fire and her tea-things to be dismissed upstairs, where she wept still more at sight of dear mamma's sofa, and where Ellis came to mingle her tears with those of her young mistress, and to beg dear Miss Lucilla, for the sake of her precious 'elth and her dear papa, to be persuaded to take some tea. On the whole, master stood lessened in the eyes of all the household by his ability to eat his dinner, and his resentment at having his habitudes disturbed. "Them men would eat and drink if we was all in our graves," said the indignant cook, who indeed had a real grievance; and the outraged sentiment of the kitchen was avenged by a bad and hasty dinner, which the Doctor, though generally "very particular," swallowed without remark. About an hour afterwards he went upstairs to the drawing-room, where Miss Marjoribanks was waiting for him, much less at ease than she had expected to be. Though he gave a little sigh at the sight of his wife's sofa, he did not hesitate to sit down upon it, and even to draw it a little out of its position, which, as Lucilla described afterwards, was like a knife going into her heart. Though, indeed, she had herself decided already, in the intervals of her tears, that the drawing-room furniture had got very faded and shabby, and that it would be very expedient to have it renewed for the new reign of youth and energy which was about to commence. As for the Doctor, though Miss Marjoribanks thought him insensible, his heart was heavy enough. His wife had gone out of the world without leaving the least mark of her existence, except in that large girl, whose spirits and forces were unbounded, but whose discretion at the present moment did not seem much greater than her mother's. Instead of thinking of her as a comfort, the Doctor felt himself called upon to face a new and unexpected embarrassment. It would have been a satisfaction to him just then to have been left to himself, and permitted to work on quietly at his profession, and to write his papers for the *Lancet*, and to see his friends now and then when he chose; for Dr Marjoribanks was not a man who had any great need of sympathy by nature, or who was at all addicted to demonstrations of feeling; consequently, he drew his wife's sofa a little farther from the fire, and took his seat on it soberly, quite unaware that, by so doing, he was putting a knife into his daughter's heart.

"I hope you have had something to eat, Lucilla," he said; "don't get into that foolish habit of flying to tea as a man flies to a dram. It's a more innocent stimulant, but it's the same kind of intention. I am not so much against a fire; it has always a kind of cheerful look."

"Oh, papa," cried his daughter, with a flood of indignant tears, "you can't suppose I want anything to look cheerful this dreadful day."

"I am far from blaming you, my dear," said the Doctor; "it is natural you should cry. I am sorry I did not write for my sister to come, who would have taken care of you; but I dislike strangers in the house at such a time. However, I hope, Lucilla, you will soon feel yourself able to return to school; occupation is always the best remedy, and you will have your friends and companions – "

"Papa!" cried Miss Marjoribanks; and then she summoned courage, and rushed up to him, and threw herself and her clouds of crape on the carpet at his side (and it may here be mentioned that Lucilla had seized the opportunity to have her mourning made *long*, which had been the desire of her heart, baffled by mamma and governess for at least a year). "Papa!" she exclaimed with fervour, raising to him her tear-stained face, and clasping her fair plump hands, "oh, don't send me away! I was only a silly girl the other day, but *this* has made me a woman. Though I can never, never hope to take dear mamma's place, and be – all – that she was to you, still I feel I can be a comfort to you if you will let me. You shall not see me cry any more," cried Lucilla with energy, rubbing away her tears. "I will never give way to my feelings. I will ask for no companions – nor – nor anything. As for pleasure, that is all over. Oh, papa, you shall never see me regret anything, or wish for anything. I will give up everything in the world to be a comfort to you!"

This address, which was utterly unexpected, drove Dr Marjoribanks to despair. He said, "Get up, Lucilla;" but the devoted daughter knew better than to get up. She hid her face in her hands, and rested her hands upon her mother's sofa, where the Doctor was sitting; and the sobs of that emotion which she meant to control henceforward, echoed through the room. "It is only for this once – I can – cannot help it," she cried. When her father found that he could neither soothe her, nor succeed in raising her, he got up himself, which was the only thing left to him, and began to walk about the room with hasty steps. Her mother, too, had possessed this dangerous faculty of tears; and it was not wonderful if the sober-minded Doctor, roused for the first time to consider his little girl as a creature possessed of individual character, should recognise, with a thrill of dismay, the appearance of the same qualities which had wearied his life out, and brought his youthful affections to an untimely end. Lucilla was, it is true, as different from her mother as summer from winter; but Dr Marjoribanks had no means of knowing that his daughter was only doing her duty by him in his widowhood, according to a programme of filial devotion resolved upon, in accordance with the best models, some days before.

Accordingly, when her sobs had ceased, her father returned and raised her up not unkindly, and placed her in her chair. In doing so, the Doctor put his finger by instinct upon Lucilla's pulse, which was sufficiently calm and regulated to reassure the most anxious parent. And then a furtive momentary smile gleamed for a single instant round the corners of his mouth.

"It is very good of you to propose sacrificing yourself for me," he said; "and if you would sacrifice your excitement in the meantime, and listen to me quietly, it would really be something – but you are only fifteen, Lucilla, and I have no wish to take you from school just now; wait till I have done. Your poor mother is gone, and it is very natural you should cry; but you were a good child to her on the whole, which will be a comfort to you. We did everything that could be thought of to prolong her days, and, when that was impossible, to lessen what she had to suffer; and we have every reason to hope," said the Doctor, as indeed he was accustomed to say in the exercise of his profession to mourning relatives, "that she's far better off now than if she had been with us. When that is said, I don't know that there is anything more to add. I am not fond of sacrifices, either one way or another; and I've a great objection to any one making a sacrifice for me – "

"But, oh, papa, it would be no sacrifice," said Lucilla, "if you would only let me be a comfort to you!"

"That is just where it is, my dear," said the steady Doctor; "I have been used to be left a great deal to myself; and I am not prepared to say that the responsibility of having you here without a mother to take care of you, and all your lessons interrupted, would not neutralise any comfort you

might be. You see," said Dr Marjoribanks, trying to soften matters a little, "a man is what his habits make him; and I have been used to be left a great deal to myself. It answers in some cases, but I doubt if it would answer with me."

And then there was a pause, in which Lucilla wept and stifled her tears in her handkerchief, with a warmer flood of vexation and disappointment than even her natural grief had produced. "Of course, papa, if I can't be any comfort – I will – go back to school," she sobbed, with a touch of sullenness which did not escape the Doctor's ear.

"Yes, my dear, you will certainly go back to school," said the peremptory father; "I never had any doubt on that subject. You can stay over Sunday and rest yourself. Monday or Tuesday will be time enough to go back to Mount Pleasant; and now you had better ring the bell, and get somebody to bring you something – or I'll see to that when I go downstairs. It's getting late, and this has been a fatiguing day. I'll send you up some negus, and I think you had better go to bed."

And with these commonplace words, Dr Marjoribanks withdrew in calm possession of the field. As for Lucilla, she obeyed him, and betook herself to her own room, and swallowed her negus with a sense, not only of defeat, but of disappointment and mortification which was very unpleasant. To go back again and be an ordinary schoolgirl, after the pomp and woe in which she had come away, was naturally a painful thought; she who had ordered her mourning to be made long, and contemplated new furniture in the drawing-room, and expected to be mistress of her father's house, not to speak of the still dearer privilege of being a comfort to him; and now, after all, her active mind was to be condemned over again to verbs and chromatic scales, though she felt within herself capacities so much more extended. Miss Marjoribanks did not by any means learn by this defeat to take the characters of the other personæ in her little drama into consideration, when she rehearsed her pet scenes hereafter – for that is a knowledge slowly acquired – but she was wise enough to know when resistance was futile; and like most people of lively imagination, she had a power of submitting to circumstances when it became impossible to change them. Thus she consented to postpone her reign, if not with a good grace, yet still without foolish resistance, and retired with the full honours of war. She had already rearranged all the details, and settled upon all the means possible of preparing herself for what she called the charge of the establishment when her final emancipation took place, before she returned to school. "Papa thought me too young," she said, when she reached Mount Pleasant, "though it was dreadful to come away and leave him alone with only the servants; but, dear Miss Martha, you will let me learn all about political economy and things, to help me manage everything; for now that dear mamma is gone, there is nobody but me to be a comfort to papa."

And by this means Miss Marjoribanks managed to influence the excellent woman who believed in *Friends in Council*, and to direct the future tenor of her own education; while, at least, in that one moment of opportunity, she had achieved long dresses, which was a visible mark of womanhood, and a step which could not be retraced.

Chapter II

Dr Marjoribanks was so far from feeling the lack of his daughter's powers of consolation, that he kept her at Mount Pleasant for three years longer, during which time it is to be supposed he managed to be comfortable after a benighted fashion – good enough for a man of fifty, who had come to an end of his illusions. To be sure, there were in the world, and even in Carlingford, kind women, who would not have objected to take charge of the Doctor and his "establishment," and be a comfort to him; but, on the whole, it was undeniable that he managed tolerably well in external matters, and gave very good men's dinners, and kept everything in perfect order, so far as it went. Naturally the fairer part of existence was left out altogether in that grim, though well-ordered house; but then he was only a man and a doctor, and knew no better; and while the feminine part of Grange Lane regarded him with natural pity, not only for what he lacked, but for a still more sad defect, his total want of perception on the subject, their husbands and fathers rather liked to dine with the Doctor, and brought home accounts of sauces which were enough to drive any woman to despair. Some of the ladies of Grange Lane – Mrs Chiley, for example, who was fond of good living herself, and liked, as she said, "a little variety" – laid siege to the Doctor, and did their best to coax his receipts out of him; but Dr Marjoribanks knew better than that. He gave all the credit to his cook, like a man of sense; and as that functionary was known in Carlingford to be utterly regardless and unprincipled in respect to gravy-beef, and the materials for "stock," or "consommé," as some people called it, society was disinclined to exert its ordinary arts to seduce so great an artiste from the kitchen of her indulgent master. And then there were other ladies who took a different tone. "Dr Marjoribanks, poor man, has nothing but his table to take up his mind," said Mrs Centum, who had six children; "I never heard that the heart could be nourished upon sauces, for my part; and for a man who has his children's future to think of, I must say I am surprised at you, Mr Centum." As for young Mrs Woodburn, her reply was still more decisive, though milder in its tone. "Poor cook! I am so sorry for her," said the gentle young matron. "You know you always like something for breakfast, Charles; and then there is the children's dinner, and our lunch, and the servants' dinner, so that the poor thing is worn out before she comes to what *you* call the great event of the day; and you know how angry you were when I asked for a kitchen-maid for her, poor soul." The consequence of all this was, that Dr Marjoribanks remained unrivalled in Grange Lane in this respect at least. When rumours arose in Carlingford of a possible second marriage for the Doctor – and such rumours naturally arose three or four times in the course of the three years – the men of Grange Lane said, "Heaven forbid!" "No wife in the world could replace Nancy," said Colonel Chiley, after that fervent aspiration, "and none could put up with her;" while, on the other side, there were curious speculations afloat as to the effect upon the house, and especially the table, of the daughter's return. When a young woman comes to be eighteen it is difficult to keep her at school; and though the Doctor had staved off the danger for the moment, by sending Lucilla off along with one of her schoolfellows, whose family was going abroad, to make orthodox acquaintance with all the Swiss mountains, and all the Italian capitals, still that was plainly an expedient for the moment; and a new mistress to the house, which had got along so well without any mistress, was inevitable. So that it cannot be denied Miss Marjoribanks's advent was regarded in Carlingford with as much interest and curiosity as she could have wished. For it was already known that the Doctor's daughter was not a mild young lady, easy to be controlled; but, on the contrary, had all the energy and determination to have her own way, which naturally belonged to a girl who possessed a considerable chin, and a mouth which could shut, and tightly curling tawny tresses, which were still more determined than she was to be arranged only according to their inclination. It was even vaguely reported that some passages-of-arms had occurred between Miss Marjoribanks and the redoubtable Nancy during the short and uncertain opportunities which were afforded by holidays; and the community, accordingly, regarded as an affair of almost municipal importance Lucilla's final return home.

As for the young lady herself, though she was at school, she was conscious of having had a career not without importance, even during these three years of pupilage. Since the day when she began to read political economy with Miss Martha Blount, who, though the second sister, was the directing spirit of the establishment, Lucilla had exercised a certain influence upon the school itself which was very satisfactory. Perhaps her course might be a little deficient in grace, but grace, after all, is but a secondary quality; and, at all events, Miss Marjoribanks went straight forward, leaving an unquestionable wake behind her, and running down with indifference the little skiffs in her way. She was possessed by nature of that kind of egotism, or rather egoism, which is predestined to impress itself, by its perfect reality and good faith, upon the surrounding world. There are people who talk of themselves, and think of themselves, as it were, under protest, and with depreciation, not actually able to convince themselves that anybody cares; but Lucilla, for her part, had the calmest and most profound conviction that, when she discussed her own doings and plans and clevernesses, she was bringing forward the subject most interesting to her audience as well as to herself. Such a conviction is never without its fruits. To be sure, there were always one or two independent spirits who revolted; but for the crowd, it soon became impressed with a profound belief in the creed which Miss Marjoribanks supported so firmly. This conviction of the importance and value of her own proceedings made Lucilla, as she grew older, a copious and amusing conversationalist – a rank which few people who are indifferent to, or do not believe in, themselves can attain to. One thing she had made up her mind to as soon as she should return home, and that was to revolutionise society in Carlingford. On the whole, she was pleased with the success of the Doctor's dinners, though a little piqued to think that they owed nothing to herself; but Lucilla, whose instinct of government was of the true despotic order, and who had no objection to stoop, if by that means she could conquer, had no such designs against Nancy as were attributed to her by the expectant audience in Carlingford. On the contrary, she was quite as much disposed as her father was to take Nancy for prime-minister; for Miss Marjoribanks, though too much occupied with herself to divine the characteristic points of other people, had a sensible and thorough belief in those superficial general truths which most minds acquiesce in, without taking the trouble to believe. She knew, for example, that there was a great difference between the brilliant society of London, or of Paris, which appears in books, where women have generally the best of it, and can rule in their own right; and even the very best society of a country town, where husbands are very commonly unmanageable, and have a great deal more of their own way in respect to the houses they will or will not go to, than is good for that inferior branch of the human family. Miss Marjoribanks had the good sense to see and appreciate these details; and she knew that a good dinner was a great attraction to a man, and that, in Carlingford at least, when these refractory mortals were secured, the wives and daughters would necessarily follow. Besides, as is not uncommon with women who are clever women, and aware of the fact, Miss Marjoribanks preferred the society of men, and rather liked to say so. With all these intentions in her mind, it may be imagined that she received coolly enough the invitation of her friend to join in the grand tour, and the ready consent given by her father when he heard of it. But even the grand tour was a tool which Lucilla saw how to make use of. Nowadays, when people go everywhere, an untravelled woman would find it so much the harder to keep up the *rôle* of a leader of society to which she had devoted herself; and she felt to the depth of her heart the endless advantage to her future conversation of the experiences to be acquired in Switzerland and Italy. But she rejected with scorn the insinuation of other accidents that might occur on the way.

"You will never come back again, Lucilla," said one of her companions; "you will marry some enchanting Italian with a beautiful black beard, and a voice like an angel; and he'll sing serenades to you, and do all sorts of things: oh, how I wish I was you!"

"That may be," said Miss Marjoribanks, "but I shall never marry an Italian, my dear. I don't think I shall marry anybody for a long time. I want to amuse myself. I wonder, by the way, if it would improve my voice to take lessons in Italy. Did I ever tell you of the Italian nobleman that was so

very attentive to me that Christmas I spent at Sissy Vernon's? He was very handsome. I suppose they really are all very handsome – except, of course, the Italian masters; but I did not pay any attention to him. My object, dear, and you know it, is to return home as well educated as possible, to be a comfort to dear papa."

"Yes, dear Lucilla," said the sympathetic girl, "and it is so good of you; but do tell me about the Italian nobleman – what did he look like – and what did he say?"

"Oh, as for what he said, that is quite a different matter," said Lucilla; "but it is not what they say, but the way they say it, that is the fun. I did not give him the least encouragement. As for that, I think a girl can always stop a man when she does not care for him. It depends on whether you intend him to commit himself or not," Miss Marjoribanks continued, and fixed her eyes meditatively, but intently, upon her friend's face.

"Whether I intend? – oh, goodness, Lucilla! how can you speak so? as if I ever intended anything," said her companion, confused, yet flattered, by the possibility; to which the elder sage answered calmly, with all the composure in the world.

"No, I never supposed you did; I was thinking of myself," said Lucilla, as if, indeed that was the only reasonable subject of thought. "You know I have seen a good deal of the world, one way and another, with going to spend the holidays, and I could tell you quantities of things. It is quite astonishing how much experience one gets. When I was at Midhurst, at Easter, there was my cousin Tom, who was quite ridiculous; I declare he nearly brought things to an explanation, Fanny – which, of course, of all things in the world I most wanted to avoid."

"Oh, but why, Lucilla?" cried Fanny, full of delight and wonder; "I do so want to know what they say when they make – explanations, as you call them. Oh, do tell me, Lucilla, why?"

"My dear," said Miss Marjoribanks, "a cousin of my own! and only twenty-one, and reading for the bar! In the first place, my aunt would never have forgiven me, and I am very fond of my aunt. It's so nice to like all one's relations. I know some girls who can't bear theirs. And then a boy not much older than myself, with nothing but what his mother pleases! Fortunately he did not just say the words, so I escaped that time; but, of course, I could understand perfectly what he meant."

"But, oh, Lucilla, tell me the words," cried the persistent questioner; "do, there's a darling! I am quite sure you have heard them – and I should so like to know exactly what they say; – do they go down on their knees? – or do they try to take your hand as they always do in novels? – or what do they do? – Oh, Lucilla, tell me, there's a dear!"

"Nonsense," said Lucilla; "I only want you to understand that I am not likely to fall into any danger of that sort. My only ambition, Fanny, as I have told you often, is to go home to Carlingford and be a comfort to dear papa."

"Yes," said Fanny, kissing her devoted companion, "and it is so good of you, dear; but then you cannot go on all your life being a comfort to dear papa," said the intelligent girl, bethinking herself, and looking again with some curiosity in Lucilla's face.

"We must leave that to Providence," said Miss Marjoribanks, with a sense of paying a compliment to Providence in entrusting it with such a responsibility. "I have always been guided for the best hitherto," she continued, with an innocent and unintentional profanity, which sounded solemn to her equally innocent companion, "and I don't doubt I shall be so till the end."

From which it will be perceived that Miss Marjoribanks was of the numerous class of religionists who keep up civilities with heaven, and pay all the proper attentions, and show their respect for the divine government in a manner befitting persons who know the value of their own approbation. The conversation dropped at this point; for Lucilla was too important a person to be left to the undivided possession of an inquisitive innocent like Fanny Middleton, who was only sixteen, and had never had even a flirtation in her own person. There were no Carlingford girls at Mount Pleasant, except poor little Rose Lake, the drawing-master's second daughter, who had been received on Dr Marjoribanks's recommendation, and who heard the little children their geography and reading,

and gave them little lessons in drawing, by way of paying for her own education; but then Rose was entirely out of Miss Marjoribanks's way, and could never count for anything in her designs for the future. The girls at Mount Pleasant were good girls on the whole, and were rather improved by the influence of Lucilla, who was extremely good-natured, and, so long as her superiority was duly acknowledged, was ready to do anything for anybody – so that Rose Lake was not at all badly off in her inferior position. She could be made useful too, which was a great point in her favour; and Miss Marjoribanks, who possessed by nature some of the finest qualities of a ruler, instinctively understood and appreciated the instruments that came to her hand. As for Rose, she had been brought up at the School of Design in Carlingford, of which, under the supervision of the authorities who, in those days, inhabited Marlborough House, Mr Lake was the master. Rose was the pride of the school in the peaceable days before her mother died; she did not know much else, poor child, except novels, but her copies "from the round" filled her father with admiration, and her design for a Honiton-lace flounce, a spirited composition of dragons' tails and the striking plant called teazle, which flourishes in the neighbourhood of Carlingford (for Mr Lake had leanings towards Preraphaelitism), was thought by the best judges to show a wonderful amount of feeling for art, and just missed being selected for the prize. A girl with such a talent was naturally much appreciated in Mount Pleasant. She made the most charming design for Miss Marjoribanks's handkerchief – "Lucilla," in Gothic characters, enclosed in a wreath of forget-me-nots, skilfully combined with thistle-leaves, which Rose took great pains to explain were so much better adapted to ornamentation than foliage of a less distinct character; and the young draftswoman was so charmed by Lucilla's enthusiastic admiration, that she volunteered to work the design in the cambric, which was a much more serious matter. This was on the eve of Miss Marjoribanks's final departure from school. She was to spend a year abroad, to the envy of all whom she left behind; but for herself Lucilla was not elated. She thought it very probable that she would ascend Mont Blanc as far as the Grands Mulets at least, and, of course, in spring, go up Vesuvius, having got through the Carnival and Miserere and all the balls in Rome; but none of these things moved her out of her usual composure. She took it all in the way of business, as she had taken her French and her German and her singing and her political economy. As she stepped into the steamboat at Dover which was to convey her to scenes so new, Lucilla felt more and more that she who held the reorganisation of society in Carlingford in her hands was a woman with a mission. She was going abroad as the heir-apparent went to America and the Holy Land, to complete her education, and fit herself, by an examination of the peculiarities of other nations, for an illustrious and glorious reign at home.

Chapter III

It may be well to seize the opportunity of Miss Marjoribanks's travels, through which it is unnecessary to follow her, as they have nothing particular to do with the legitimate history of her great undertaking, to explain a little the state of affairs in Carlingford before this distinguished revolutionary began her labours. It is something like going back into the prehistoric period – those ages of the flint, which only ingenious quarrymen and learned geologists can elucidate – to recall the social condition of the town before Miss Marjoribanks began her Thursday evenings, before St Roque's Chapel was built or thought of, while Mr Bury, the Evangelical Rector, was still in full activity, and before old Mr Tufton, at Salem Chapel (who sometimes drank tea at the Rectory, and thus had a kind of clandestine entrance into the dim outskirts of that chaos which was then called society), had his first "stroke." From this latter circumstance alone the entirely disorganised condition of affairs will be visible at a glance. It is true, Mr Vincent, who succeeded Mr Tufton, was received by Lady Western, in days when public opinion had made great advances; but then Lady Western was the most good-natured creature in the world, and gave an invitation, when it happened to come into her head, without the least regard for the consequences; and, after all, Mr Vincent was very nice-looking and clever, and quite presentable. Fortunately, however, the period to which we allude was prior to the entrance of Lady Western into Grange Lane. She was a very pretty woman, and knew how to look like a lady of fashion, which is always of importance; but she was terribly inconsequent, as Miss Marjoribanks said, and her introductions were not in the least to be depended upon. She was indeed quite capable of inviting a family of retired drapers to meet the best people in Grange Lane, for no better reason than to gratify her protégés, which, of course, was a proceeding calculated to strike at the roots of all society. Fortunately for Carlingford, its reorganisation was in abler hands. Affairs were in an utterly chaotic state at the period when this record commences. There was nothing which could be properly called a centre in the entire town. To be sure, Grange Lane was inhabited, as at present, by the best families in Carlingford; but then, without organisation, what good does it do to have a number of people together? For example, Mr Bury was utterly unqualified to take any lead. Mrs Bury had been dead a long time, and the daughters were married, and the Rector's maiden sister, who lived with him, was entirely of his own way of thinking, and asked people to tea-parties, which were like Methodists' class-meetings, and where Mr Tufton was to be met with, and sometimes other Dissenters, to whom the Rector gave what he called the right hand of fellowship. But he never gave anything else to society, except weak tea and thin bread-and-butter, which was fare, the ladies said, which the gentlemen did not relish. "I never can induce Charles to go out to tea," said young Mrs Woodburn piteously; "he won't, and there is an end of it. After dinner he thinks of nothing but an easy-chair and the papers; and, my dear Miss Bury, what can I do?" "It is a great pity, my dear, that your husband's carelessness should deprive you of the benefit of Christian conversation; but, to be sure, it is your duty to stay with him, and I hope it will be made up to you at home," Miss Bury would say. As for the Rector, his favourites were devoted to him; and as he always saw enough of familiar faces at his sister's tea-parties, he took no account of the defaulters. Then there was Dr Marjoribanks, who gave only dinners, to which naturally, as there was no lady in the house, ladies could not be invited, and who, besides, was rather a drawback than a benefit to society, since he made the men quite intolerable, and filled them with such expectations, in the way of cookery, that they never were properly content with a good family dinner after. Then the ladies, from whom something might justly have been expected in the way of making society pleasant – such as Mrs Centum and Mrs Woodburn, for example, who had everything they could desire, and the most liberal housekeeping allowances – were either incapacitated by circumstances (which was a polite term in use at Carlingford, and meant babies) or by character. Mrs Woodburn liked nothing so well as to sit by the fire and read novels, and "take off" her neighbours, when any one called on her; and, of course, the lady who was her audience on one

occasion, left with the comfortable conviction that next time she would be the victim; a circumstance which, indeed, did not make the offender unpopular – for there were very few people in Carlingford who could be amusing, even at the expense of their neighbours – but made it quite impossible that she should ever do anything in the way of knitting people together, and making a harmonious whole out of the scraps and fragments of society. As for Mrs Chiley, she was old, and had not energy enough for such an undertaking; and, besides, she had no children, and disliked bustle and trouble, and was of opinion that the Colonel never enjoyed his dinner if he had more than four people to help him to eat it; and, in short, you might have gone over Grange Lane, house by house, finding a great deal of capital material, but without encountering a single individual capable of making anything out of it. Such was the lamentable condition, at the moment this history commences, of society in Carlingford.

And yet nobody could say that there were not very good elements to make society with. When you add to a man capable of giving excellent dinners, like Dr Marjoribanks, another man like young Mr Cavendish, Mrs Woodburn's brother, who was a wit and a man of fashion, and belonged to one of the best clubs in town, and brought down gossip with the bloom on it to Grange Lane; and when you join to Mrs Centum, who was always so good and so much out of temper that it was safe to calculate on something amusing from her, the languid but trenchant humour of Mrs Woodburn – not to speak of their husbands, who were perfectly available for the background, and all the nephews and cousins and grand-children, who constantly paid visits to old Mr Western and Colonel Chiley; and the Browns, when they were at home, with their floating suite of admirers; and the young ladies who sang, and the young ladies who sketched, and the men who went out with the hounds, when business permitted them; and the people who came about the town when there was an election; and the barristers who made the circuit; and the gay people who came to the races; not to speak of the varying chances of curates, who could talk or play the piano, with which Mr Bury favoured his parishioners – for he changed his curates very often; and the occasional visits of the lesser county people, and the country clergymen; – it will be plainly apparent that all that was wanting to Carlingford was a master-hand to blend these different elements. There had even been a few feeble preliminary attempts at this great work, which had failed, as such attempts always fail when they are premature, and when the real agent of the change is already on the way; but preparations and presentiments had taken vague possession of the mind of the town, as has always been observed to be the case before a great revolution, or when a man destined to put his mark on his generation, as the newspapers say, is about to appear. To be sure, it was not a man this time, but Miss Marjoribanks; but the atmosphere thrilled and trembled to the advent of the new luminary all the same.

Yet, at the same time, the world of Carlingford had not the least idea of the real quarter from which the sovereign intelligence which was to develop it from chaos into order and harmony was, *effectivement*, to come. Some people had hoped in Mrs Woodburn before she fell into her present languor of appearance and expression; and a great many people hoped in Mr Cavendish's wife, if he married, as he was said to intend to do; for this gentleman, who was in the habit of describing himself, no doubt, very truthfully, as one of the Cavendishes, was a person of great consideration in Grange Lane; and some hoped in a new Rector, for it was apparent that Mr Bury could not last very long. Thus, with the ordinary short-sightedness of the human species, Carlingford blinded itself, and turned its eyes in every direction in the world rather than in that of the Swiss mountains, which were being climbed at that moment by a large and blooming young woman, with tawny short curls and alert decided movements; so little do we know what momentous issues may hang upon the most possible accident! Had that energetic traveller slipped but an inch farther upon the *mer de glace*– had she taken that other step which she was with difficulty persuaded not to take on the Wengern Alp – there would have been an end of all the hopes of social importance for Carlingford. But the good fairies took care of Lucilla and her mission, and saved her from the precipice and the crevasses; and instinctively the air at home got note of what was coming, and whispered the news mysteriously through the keyholes. "Miss Marjoribanks is coming home," the unsuspecting male public said to itself as it returned from

Dr Marjoribanks's dinners, with a certain distressing, but mistaken presentiment, that these delights were to come to an end; and the ladies repeated the same piece of news, conjoining with it benevolent intimations of their intention to call upon her, and make the poor thing feel herself at home. "Perhaps she may be amusing," Mrs Woodburn was good enough to add; but these words meant only that perhaps Lucilla, who was coming to set them all right, was worthy of being placed in the satirist's collection along with Mrs Centum and Mrs Chiley. Thus, while the town ripened more and more for her great mission, and the ignorant human creatures, who were to be her subjects, showed their usual blindness and ignorance, the time drew nearer and nearer for Miss Marjoribanks's return.

Chapter IV

"My daughter is coming home, Nancy," said Dr Marjoribanks. "You will have to make preparations for her immediately. So far as I can make out from this letter, she will arrive to-morrow by the half-past five train."

"Well, sir," said Nancy, with the tone of a woman who makes the best of a misfortune, "it ain't every young lady as would have the sense to fix an hour like that. Ladies is terrible tiresome in that way; they'll come in the middle o' the day, when a body don't know in the world what to have for them; or they'll come at night, when a body's tired, and ain't got the heart to go into a supper. There was always a deal of sense in Miss Lucilla, when she hadn't got nothing in her head."

"Just so," said Dr Marjoribanks, who was rather relieved to have got through the announcement so easily. "You will see that her room is ready, and everything comfortable; and, of course, to-morrow she and I will dine alone."

"Yes, sir," said Nancy; but this assent was not given in the decisive tone of a woman whose audience was over; and then she was seized with a desire to arrange in a more satisfactory manner the cold beef on the sideboard. When she had secured this little interval for thought, she returned again to the table, where her master ate his breakfast, with a presentiment. "If you please, sir," said Nancy, "not to give you no vexation nor trouble, which every one knows as it has been the aim o' my life to spare you, as has so much on your mind. But it's best to settle afore commencing, and then we needn't have no heartburning. If you please, am I to take my orders of Miss Lucilla, or of you, as I've always been used to? In the missus's time," said Nancy, with modest confidence, "as was a good missus, and never gave no trouble as long as she had her soup and her jelly comfortable, it was always you as said what there was to be for dinner. I don't make no objection to doing up a nice little luncheon for Miss Lucilla, and giving a little more thought now and again to the sweets; but it ain't my part to tell you, sir, as a lady's taste, and more special a young lady's, ain't to be expected to be the same as yours and mine as has been cultivated like. I'm not one as likes contention," continued the domestic oracle, "but I couldn't abear to see a good master put upon; and if it should be as Miss Lucilla sets her mind upon messes as ain't got no taste in them, and milk-puddings and stuff, like the most of the ladies, I'd just like to know out of your own mouth, afore the commencement, what I'm to do?"

Dr Marjoribanks was so moved by this appeal that he laid down his knife and contemplated the alarming future with some dismay. "It is to be hoped Miss Lucilla will know better," he said. "She has a great deal of good sense, and it is to be hoped that she will be wise enough to consult the tastes of the house."

But the Doctor was not to be let off so easily. "As you say, sir, everything's to be hoped," said Nancy steadily; "but there's a-many ladies as don't seem to me to have got no taste to their mouths; and it ain't as if it was a thing that could be left to hopes. Supposin' as it comes to that, sir, what am I to do?"

"Well," said the Doctor, who was himself a little puzzled, "you know Miss Lucilla is nineteen, Nancy, and my only child, and the natural mistress of the house."

"Sir," said Nancy austerely, "them is things as it ain't needful to name; that ain't the question as I was asking. Supposin' as things come to such a point, what am I to do?"

"Bless me! it's half-past nine," said the Doctor, "and I have an appointment. You can come just as usual when we are at breakfast, that will be the best way," he said as he went out at the door, and chuckled a little to himself when he felt he had escaped. "Lucilla is her mother's daughter, it is true," he said to himself when he had got into the safe seclusion of his brougham, with a degree of doubt in his tone which was startling, to say the least of it, from the lips of a medical man; "but she is my child all the same," he added briskly, with returning confidence; and in this conviction there was something which reassured the Doctor. He rubbed his hands as he bowled along to his appointment,

and thought within himself that if she turned out a girl of spirit, as he expected, it would be good fun to see Lucilla's struggle with Nancy for the veritable reins of government. If Dr Marjoribanks had entertained any positive apprehensions that his dinners would be spoiled in consequence, his amusement would have come to an abrupt conclusion; but he trusted entirely in Nancy and a little in Lucilla, and suffered his long upper-lip to relax at the thought without much fear.

Her father had not returned from the labours of his long day when Lucilla arrived, but he made his last visits on foot in order to be able to send the brougham for her, which was a great thing for the Doctor to do. There was, indeed, a mutual respect between the two, who were not necessary to each other's comfort, it is true, as such near relations sometimes are; but who, at the same time, except on the sole occasion of Mrs Marjoribanks's death, had never misunderstood each other, as sometimes happens. This time Miss Marjoribanks was rather pleased, on the whole, that the Doctor did not come to meet her. At other times she had been a visitor; now she had come into her kingdom, and had no desire to be received like a guest. A sense of coming home, warmer than she remembered to have felt before, came into Lucilla's active mind as she stepped into the brougham. Not that the words bore any special tender meaning, notwithstanding that it was the desire of her heart, well known to all her friends, to live henceforward as a comfort to dear papa, but that now at last she was coming into her kingdom, and entering the domain in which she intended her will to be law. After living for a year with friends whose arrangements (much inferior to those which she could have made had she had the power) she had to acquiesce in, and whose domestic economy could only be criticised up to a certain point, it was naturally a pleasure to Miss Marjoribanks to feel that now at length she was emancipated, and at liberty to exercise her faculty. There were times during the past year when Lucilla had with difficulty restrained herself from snatching the reins out of the hands of her hosts, and showing them how to manage. But, impatient as she was, she had to restrain herself, and make the best of it. Now all that bondage was over. She felt like a young king entering in secret a capital which awaits him with acclamations. Before she presented herself to the rejoicing public, there were arrangements to be made and things to be done; and Miss Marjoribanks gave a rapid glance at the shops in George Street as she drove past, and decided which of them she meant to honour with her patronage. When she entered the garden it was with the same rapid glance of reorganising genius that she cast her eyes around it; and still more decided was the look with which she regarded her own room, where she was guided by the new housemaid, who did not know Miss Lucilla. Nancy, who knew no better (being, like most gifted persons, a woman of one idea), had established her young mistress in the little chamber which had been Lucilla's when she was a child; but Miss Marjoribanks, who had no sentimental notions about white dimity, shook her head at the frigid little apartment, where, however, she was not at all sorry to be placed at present; for if Dr Marjoribanks had been a man of the *prevenant* class, disposed to make all the preparations possible for his daughter, and arrange elegant surprises for her, he would have thoroughly disgusted Lucilla, who was bent on making all the necessary improvements in her own person. When she went down to the drawing-room to await her father, Miss Marjoribanks's look of disapprobation was mingled with so much satisfaction and content in herself that it was pleasant to behold. She shook her head and shrugged her shoulders as she paused in the centre of the large faded room, where there was no light but that of the fire, which burned brightly, and kept up a lively play of glimmer and shadow in the tall glass over the fireplace, and even twinkled dimly in the three long windows, where the curtains hung stiff and solemn in their daylight form. It was not an uncomfortable sort of big, dull, faded, respectable drawing-room; and if there had been a family in it, with recollections attached to every old ottoman and easy-chair, no doubt it would have been charming; but it was only a waste and howling wilderness to Lucilla. When she had walked from one end to the other, and verified all the plans she had already long ago conceived for the embellishment of this inner court and centre of her kingdom, Lucilla walked with her unhesitating step to the fire, and took a match and lighted all the candles in the large old-fashioned candlesticks, which had been flickering in grotesque shadows all over the roof. This proceeding threw a flood of

light on the subject of her considerations, and gave Miss Marjoribanks an idea, in passing, about the best mode of lighting, which she afterwards acted upon with great success. She was standing in this flood of light, regarding everything around her with the eye of an enlightened critic and reformer, when Dr Marjoribanks came in. Perhaps there arose in the soul of the Doctor a momentary thought that the startling amount of *éclairage* which he witnessed was scarcely necessary, for it is certain that he gave a momentary glance at the candles as he went up to greet his daughter; but he was far too well-bred a man to suggest such an idea at the moment. On the contrary, he kissed her with a sentiment of real pleasure, and owned to himself that, if she was not a fool, and could keep to her own department, it might be rather agreeable on the whole to have a woman in the house. The sentiment was not enthusiastic, and neither were the words of his salutation: "Well, Lucilla; so this is you!" said the moderate and unexcited father. "Yes, papa, it is me," said Miss Marjoribanks, "and very glad to get home;" and so the two sat down and discussed the journey – whether she had been cold, and what state the railway was in – till the Doctor bethought himself that he had to prepare for dinner. "Nancy is always very punctual, and I am sure you are hungry," he said; "so I'll go upstairs, with your permission, Lucilla, and change my coat;" and with this the actual arrival terminated, and the new reign began.

But it was only next morning that the young sovereign gave any intimation of her future policy. She had naturally a great deal to tell that first night; and though it was exclusively herself, and her own adventures and achievements, which Miss Marjoribanks related, the occasion of her return made that sufficiently natural; and the Doctor was not altogether superior to the natural prejudice which makes a man interested, even when they are not in themselves particularly interesting, in the doings of his children. She succeeded in doing what is certainly one of the first duties of a woman – she amused her father. He followed her to the drawing-room for a marvel, and took a cup of tea, though it was against his principles; and, on the whole, Lucilla had the satisfaction of feeling that she had made a conquest of the Doctor, which, of course, was the grand and most essential preliminary. In the little interval which he spent over his claret, Miss Marjoribanks had succeeded in effecting another fundamental duty of woman – she had, as she herself expressed it, harmonised the rooms, by the simple method of rearranging half the chairs and covering the tables with trifles of her own – a proceeding which converted the apartment from an abstract English drawing-room of the old school into Miss Marjoribanks's drawing-room, an individual spot of ground revealing something of the character of its mistress. The Doctor himself was so moved by this, that he looked vaguely round when he came in, as if a little doubtful where he was – but that might only be the effect of the sparkling mass of candles on the mantelpiece, which he was too well-bred to remark upon the first night. But it was only in the morning that Lucilla unfolded her standard. She was down to breakfast, ready to pour out the coffee, before the Doctor had left his room. He found her, to his intense amazement, seated at the foot of the table, in the place which he usually occupied himself, before the urn and the coffee-pot. Dr Marjoribanks hesitated for one momentous instant, stricken dumb by this unparalleled audacity; but so great was the effect of his daughter's courage and steadiness, that after that moment of fate he accepted the seat by the side where everything was arranged for him, and to which Lucilla invited him sweetly, though not without a touch of mental perturbation. The moment he had seated himself, the Doctor's eyes were opened to the importance of the step he had taken. "I am afraid I have taken your seat, papa," said Miss Marjoribanks, with ingenuous sweetness. "But then I should have had to move the urn, and all the things, and I thought you would not mind." The Doctor said nothing but "Humph!" and even that in an undertone; but he became aware all the same that he had abdicated, without knowing it, and that the reins of state had been smilingly withdrawn from his unconscious hands.

When Nancy made her appearance the fact became still more apparent, though still in the sweetest way. "It is so dreadful to think papa should have been bothered with all these things so long," said Miss Marjoribanks. "After this I am sure you and I, Nancy, can arrange it all without giving him

the trouble. Perhaps this morning, papa, as I am a stranger, you will say if there is anything you would like, and then I shall have time to talk it all over with Nancy, and find out what is best," – and Lucilla smiled so sweetly upon her two amazed subjects that the humour of the situation caught the fancy of the Doctor, who had a keen perception of the ridiculous.

He laughed out, much to Nancy's consternation, who was standing by in open-eyed dismay. "Very well, Lucilla," he said; "you shall try what you can do. I daresay Nancy will be glad to have me back again before long; but in the meantime I am quite content that you should try," and he went off laughing to his brougham, but came back again before Lucilla could take Nancy in hand, who was an antagonist more formidable. "I forgot to tell you," said the Doctor, "that Tom Marjoribanks is coming on Circuit, and that I have asked him to stay here, as a matter of course. I suppose he'll arrive to-morrow. Good-bye till the evening."

This, though Dr Marjoribanks did not in the least intend it, struck Lucilla like a Parthian arrow, and brought her down for the moment. "Tom Marjoribanks!" she ejaculated in a kind of horror. "Of all people in the world, and at this moment!" but when she saw the open eyes and rising colour of Nancy the young dictator recovered herself – for a conqueror in the first moment of his victory has need to be wary. She called Nancy to her in her most affectionate tones as she finished her breakfast. "I sent papa away," said Miss Marjoribanks, "because I wanted to have a good talk with you, Nancy. I want to tell you my object in life. It is to be a comfort to papa. Ever since poor mamma died that is what I have been thinking of; and now I have come home, and I have made up my mind that he is not to be troubled about anything. I know what a good, faithful, valuable woman you are, I assure you. You need not think me a foolish girl who is not able to appreciate you. The dinner was charming last night, Nancy," said Lucilla, with much feeling; "and I never saw anything more beautifully cooked than papa's cutlets to-day."

"Miss Lucilla, I may say as I am very glad I have pleased you," said Nancy, who was not quite conquered as yet. She stood very stiffly upright by the table, and maintained her integrity. "Master *is* particular, I don't deny," continued the prime minister, who felt herself dethroned. "I've always done my best to go in with his little fancies, and I don't mean to say as it isn't right and natural as you should be the missis. But I ain't used to have ado with ladies, and that's the truth. Ladies is stingy in a-many things as is the soul of a good dinner to them as knows. I may be valleyable or not, it ain't for me to say; but I'm not one as can always be kept to a set figger in my gravy-beef, and my bacon, and them sorts of things. As for the butter, I don't know as I could give nobody an idea. I ain't one as likes changes, but I can't abide to be kept to a set figger; and that's the chief thing, Miss Lucilla, as I've got to say."

"And quite reasonable too," said Miss Marjoribanks; "you and I will work perfectly well together, Nancy. I am sure we have both the same meaning; and I hope you don't think I am less concerned about dear papa than about the gravy-beef. He must have been very desolate, with no one to talk to, though he has been so good and kind and self-sacrificing in leaving me to get every advantage; but I mean to make it up to him, now I've come home."

"Yes, miss," said Nancy, somewhat mystified; "not but what master has had his little parties now and again, to cheer him up a bit; and I make bold to say, miss, as I have heard compliments, which it was Thomas that brought 'em downstairs, as might go nigh to turn a body's head, if it was vanity as I was thinking of; but I ain't one as thinks of anything but the comfort of the family," said Nancy, yielding in spite of herself to follow the leadings of the higher will in presence of which she found herself, "and I'm always one as does my best, Miss Lucilla, if I ain't worried nor kept to a set figger with my gravy-beef."

"I have heard of papa's dinners," said Lucilla graciously, "and I don't mean to let down your reputation, Nancy. Now we are two women to manage everything, we ought to do still better. I have two or three things in my head that I will tell you after; but in the meantime I want you to know that the object of my life is to be a comfort to poor papa; and now let us think what we had better have for dinner," said the new sovereign. Nancy was so totally unprepared for this manner of

dethronement, that she gave in like her master. She followed Miss Marjoribanks humbly into those details in which Lucilla speedily proved herself a woman of original mind, and powers quite equal to her undertaking. The Doctor's formidable housekeeper conducted her young mistress downstairs afterwards, and showed her everything with the meekness of a saint. Lucilla had won a second victory still more exhilarating and satisfactory than the first; for, to be sure, it is no great credit to a woman of nineteen to make a man of any age throw down his arms; but to conquer a woman is a different matter, and Lucilla was thoroughly sensible of the difference. Now, indeed, she could feel with a sense of reality that her foundations were laid.

Miss Marjoribanks had enough of occupation for that day, and for many days. But her mind was a little distracted by her father's parting intelligence, and she had, besides, a natural desire to view the country she had come to conquer. When she had made a careful supervision of the house, and shifted her own quarters into the pleasantest of the two best bedrooms, and concluded that the little bare dimity chamber she had occupied the previous night was quite good enough for Tom Marjoribanks, Lucilla put on her hat and went out to make a little reconnaissance. She walked down to the spot where St Roque's now stands, on her own side of Grange Lane, and up on the other side into George Street, surveying all the capabilities of the place with a rapid but penetrating glance. Dr Marjoribanks's house could not have been better placed as a strategic position, commanding as it did all Grange Lane, of which it was, so to speak, the key, and yet affording a base of communication with the profaner public, which Miss Marjoribanks was wise enough to know a leader of society should never ignore completely; for, indeed, one of the great advantages of that brilliant position is, that it gives a woman a right to be arbitrary, and to select her materials according to her judgment. It was more from a disinclination to repeat herself than any other motive that Lucilla, when she had concluded this preliminary survey, went up into Grove Street, meaning to return home that way. At that hour in the morning the sun was shining on the little gardens on the north side of the street, which was the plebeian side; and as it was the end of October, and by no means warm, Lucilla was glad to cross over and continue her walk by the side of those little enclosures where the straggling chrysanthemums propped each other up, and the cheerful Michaelmas daisies made the best of it in the sunshine that remained to them. Miss Marjoribanks had nearly reached Salem Chapel, which pushed itself forward amid the cosy little line of houses, pondering in her mind the unexpected hindrance which was about to be placed in her triumphant path, in the shape of Tom Marjoribanks, when that singular piece of good fortune occurred to her which had so much effect upon her career in Carlingford. Such happy accidents rarely happen, except to great generals or heroes of romance; and it would have been, perhaps, a presumption on the part of Lucilla to place herself conspicuously in either of these categories. The fact is, however, that at this eventful moment she was walking along under the shade of her pretty parasol, not expecting anything, but absorbed in many thoughts, and a little cast down in her expectations of success by a consciousness that this unlucky cousin would insist upon making love to her, and perhaps even, as she herself expressed it, *saying the words* which it had taken all her skill to prevent him from saying before. Not that we would have any one believe that love-making in the abstract was disagreeable to Miss Marjoribanks; but she was only nineteen, well off and good-looking, and with plenty of time for all that; and at the present moment she had other matters of more importance in hand. It was while occupied with these reflections, and within three doors of Salem Chapel, in front of a little garden where a great deal of mignonette had run to seed, and where the Michaelmas daisies had taken full possession, that Lucilla was roused suddenly out of her musings. The surprise was so great that she stopped short and stood still before the house in the extremity of her astonishment and delight. Who could it be that possessed that voice which Miss Marjoribanks felt by instinct was the very one thing wanting – a round, full, delicious contralto, precisely adapted to supplement without supplanting her own high-pitched and much-cultivated organ? She stopped short before the door and made a rapid observation even in the first moment of her surprise. The house was not exactly like the other humble houses in Grove Street. Two little blank squares hung in the

centre of each of the lower windows, revealed to Lucilla's educated eye the existence of so much "feeling" for art as can be satisfied with a transparent porcelain version of a famous Madonna; and she could even catch a glimpse, through the curtains of the best room – which, contrary to the wont of humble gentility in Carlingford, were well drawn back, and allowed the light to enter fully – of the glimmer of gilt picture-frames. And in the little garden in front, half buried among the mignonette, were some remains of plaster-casts, originally placed there for ornament, but long since cast down by rain and neglect. Lucilla made her observations with the promptitude of an accomplished warrior, and before the second bar of the melody indoors was finished, had knocked very energetically. "Is Miss Lake at home?" she asked, with confidence, of the little maid-servant who opened the door to her. And it was thus that Lucilla made her first bold step out of the limits of Grange Lane for the good of society, and secured at once several important personal advantages, and the great charm of those Thursday evenings which made so entire a revolution in the taste and ideas of Carlingford.

Chapter V

Miss Marjoribanks did not leave the contralto any time to recover from her surprise; she went up to her direct where she stood, with her song arrested on her lips, as she had risen hastily from the piano. "Is it Rose?" said Lucilla, going forward with the most eager cordiality, and holding out both her hands; though, to be sure, she knew very well it was not Rose, who was about half the height of the singer, and was known to everybody in Mount Pleasant to be utterly innocent of a voice.

"No," said Miss Lake, who was much astonished and startled and offended, as was unfortunately rather her custom. She was a young woman without any of those instincts of politeness, which make some people pleasant in spite of themselves; and she added nothing to soften this abrupt negative, but drew her hands away from the stranger and stood bolt upright, looking at her, with a burning blush, caused by temper much more than by embarrassment, on her face.

"Then," said Lucilla, dropping lightly into the most comfortable chair she could get sight of in the bare little parlour, "it is Barbara – and that is a great deal better; Rose is a good little thing, but – she is different, you know. It is so odd you should not remember me; I thought everybody knew me in Carlingford. You know I have been a long time away, and now I have come home for good. Your voice is just the very thing to go with mine: was it not a lucky thing that I should have passed just at the right moment? I don't know how it is, but somehow these lucky chances *always* happen to me. I am Lucilla Marjoribanks, you know."

"Indeed!" said Barbara, who had not the least intention of being civil, "I did not recognise you in the least."

"Yes, I remember you were always shortsighted a little," said Miss Marjoribanks calmly. "I should so like if we could try a duet. I have been having lessons in Italy, you know, and I am sure I could give you a few hints. I always like, when I can, to be of use. Tell me what songs you have that we could sing together. You know, my dear, it is not as if I was asking you for mere amusement to myself; my grand object in life is to be a comfort to papa – "

"Do you mean Dr Marjoribanks?" said the uncivil Barbara. "I am sure he does not care in the least for music. I think you must be making a mistake – "

"Oh, no," said Lucilla, "I never make mistakes. I don't mean to sing *to* him, you know; but you are just the very person I wanted. As for the ridiculous idea some people have that nobody can be called on who does not live in Grange Lane, I assure you I mean to make an end of that. Of course I cannot commence just all in a moment. But it would always be an advantage to practise a little together. I like to know exactly how far one can calculate upon everybody; then one can tell, without fear of breaking down, just what one may venture to do."

"I don't understand in the least," said Barbara, whose pride was up in arms. "Perhaps you think I am a professional singer?"

"My dear, a professional singer spoils everything," said Miss Marjoribanks; "it changes the character of an evening altogether. There are so few people who understand that. When you have professional singers, you have to give yourself up to music; and that is not my view in the least. My great aim, as all my friends are aware, is to be a comfort to dear papa."

"I wish you would not talk in riddles," said Lucilla's amazed and indignant companion, in her round rich contralto. "I suppose you really are Miss Marjoribanks. I have always heard that Miss Marjoribanks was a little – "

"There!" said Lucilla triumphantly; "really it is almost like a recitativo to hear you speak. I am so glad. What have you got there? Oh, to be sure, it's *that* duet out of the Trovatore. Do let us try it; there is nobody here, and everything is so convenient – and you know it would never do to risk a breakdown. Will you play the accompaniment, or shall I?" said Miss Marjoribanks, taking off her gloves. As for the drawing-master's daughter, she stood aghast, lost in such sudden bewilderment and

perplexity that she could find no words to reply. She was not in the least amiable or yielding by nature; but Lucilla took it so much as a matter of course that Barbara could not find a word to say; and before she could be sure that it was real, Miss Marjoribanks had seated herself at the piano. Barbara was so obstinate that she would not sing the first part, which ought to have been hers; but she was not clever enough for her antagonist. Lucilla sang her part by herself gallantly; and when it came to Barbara's turn the second time, Miss Marjoribanks essayed the second in a false voice, which drove the contralto off her guard; and then the magnificent volume of sound flowed forth, grand enough to have filled Lucilla with envy if she had not been sustained by that sublime confidence in herself which is the first necessity to a woman with a mission. She paused a moment in the accompaniment to clap her hands after that strophe was accomplished, and then resumed with energy. For, to be sure, she knew by instinct what sort of clay the people were made of by whom she had to work, and gave them their reward with that liberality and discrimination which is the glory of enlightened despotism. Miss Marjoribanks was naturally elated when she had performed this important and successful *tour*. She got up from the piano, and closed it in her open, imperial way. "I do not want to tire you, you know," she said; "that will do for to-day. I told you your voice was the very thing to go with mine. Give my love to Rose when she comes in, but don't bring her with you when you come to me. She is a good little thing – but then she is different, you know," said the bland Lucilla; and she held out her hand to her captive graciously, and gathered up her parasol, which she had left on her chair. Barbara Lake let her visitor go after this, with a sense that she had fallen asleep, and had dreamt it all; but, after all, there was something in the visit which was not disagreeable when she came to think it over. The drawing-master was poor, and he had a quantity of children, as was natural, and Barbara had never forgiven her mother for dying just at the moment when she had a chance of seeing a little of what she called the world. At that time Mr Lake and his portfolio of drawings were asked out frequently to tea; and when he had pupils in the family, some kind people asked him to bring one of his daughters with him – so that Barbara, who was ambitious, had beheld herself for a month or two almost on the threshold of Grange Lane. And it was at this moment of all others, just at the same time as Mrs Marjoribanks finished her pale career, that poor Mrs Lake thought fit to die, to the injury of her daughter's prospects and the destruction of her hopes. Naturally Barbara had never quite forgiven that injury. It was this sense of having been ill-used which made her so resolute about sending Rose to Mount Pleasant, though the poor little girl did not in the least want to go, and was very happy helping her papa at the School of Design. But Barbara saw no reason why Rose should be happy, while she herself had to resign her inclinations and look after a set of odious children. To be sure, it was a little hard upon a young woman of a proper ambition, who knew she was handsome, to fall back into housekeeping, and consent to remain unseen and unheard; for Barbara was also aware that she had a remarkable voice. In these circumstances, it may be imagined that, after the first movement of a passionate temper was over, when she had taken breath, and had time to consider this sudden and extraordinary visit, a glimmer of hope and interest penetrated into the bosom of the gloomy girl. She was two years older than Miss Marjoribanks, and as different in "style" as she was in voice. She was not stout as yet, though it is the nature of a contralto to be stout; but she was tall, with all due opportunity for that development which might come later. And then Barbara possessed a kind of beauty, the beauty of a passionate and somewhat sullen brunette, dark and glowing, with straight black eyebrows, very dark and very straight, which gave, oddly enough, a suggestion of oblique vision to her eyes; but her eyes were not in the least oblique, and looked at you straight from under that black line of shadow with no doubtful expression. She was shy in a kind of way, as was natural to a young woman who had never seen any society, and felt herself, on the whole, injured and unappreciated. But no two things could be more different than this shyness which made Barbara look you straight in the face with a kind of scared defiance, and the sweet shyness that pleaded for kind treatment in the soft eyes of little Rose, who was plain, and had the oddest longing to make people comfortable, and please them in her way, which, to be sure, was not always successful. Barbara sat down on the stool

before the piano, which Miss Marjoribanks had been so obliging as to close, and thought it all over with growing excitement. No doubt it was a little puzzling to make out how the discovery of a fine contralto, and the possibility of getting up unlimited duets, could further Lucilla in the great aim of her life, which was to be a comfort to her dear papa. But Barbara was like a young soldier of fortune, ready to take a great deal for granted, and swallow much that was mysterious in the programme of the adventurous general who might lead her on to glory. In half an hour her dreams had gone so far that she saw herself receiving in Miss Marjoribanks's drawing-room the homage, not only of Grange Lane, but even of the county families, who would be attracted by rumours of her wonderful performance; and Barbara was, to her own consciousness, walking up the middle aisle of Carlingford Church in a veil of real Brussels, before little Mr Lake came in, hungry and good-tempered, from his round. To be sure, she had not concluded who was to be the bridegroom; but that was one of those matters of detail which could not be precisely concluded on till the time.

Such was the immediate result, so far as this secondary personage was concerned, of Lucilla's masterly impromptu; and it is needless to say that the accomplished warrior, who had her wits always about her, and had made, while engaged in a simple reconnaissance, so brilliant and successful a capture, withdrew from the scene still more entirely satisfied with herself. Nothing, indeed, could have come more opportunely for Lucilla, who possessed in perfection that faculty of throwing herself into the future, and anticipating the difficulties of a position, which is so valuable to all who aspire to be leaders of mankind. With a prudence which Dr Marjoribanks himself would have acknowledged to be remarkable "in a person of her age and sex," Lucilla had already foreseen that to amuse her guests entirely in her own person, would be at once impracticable and "bad style." The first objection might have been got over, for Miss Marjoribanks had a soul above the ordinary limits of possibility, but the second unanswerable. This discovery, however, satisfied all the necessities of the position. Lucilla, who was liberal, as genius ought always to be, was perfectly willing that all the young ladies in Carlingford should sing their little songs while she was entertaining her guests; and then at the right moment, when her ruling mind saw it was necessary, would occur the duet – the one duet which would be the great feature of the evening. Thus it will be seen that another quality of the highest order developed itself during Miss Marjoribanks's deliberations; for, to tell the truth, she set a good deal of store by her voice, and had been used to applause, and had tasted the sweetness of individual success. This, however, she was willing to sacrifice for the enhanced and magnificent effect which she felt could be produced by the combination of the two voices; and the sacrifice was one which a weaker woman would have been incapable of making. She went home past Salem Chapel by the little lane which makes a line of communication between the end of Grove Street and the beginning of Grange Lane, with a sentiment of satisfaction worthy the greatness of her mission. Dr Marjoribanks never came home to lunch, and indeed had a contempt for that feminine indulgence; which, to be sure, might be accounted for by the fact that about that time in the day the Doctor very often found himself to be passing close by one or other of the houses in the neighbourhood which had a reputation for good sherry or madeira, such as exists no more. Lucilla, accordingly, had her lunch alone, served to her with respectful care by Nancy, who was still under the impression of the interview of the morning; and it occurred to Miss Marjoribanks, as she sat at table alone, that this was an opportunity too valuable to be left unimproved; for, to be sure, there are few things more pleasant than a little impromptu luncheon-party, where everybody comes without being expected, fresh from the outside world, and ready to tell all that is going on; though, on the other hand, it was a little doubtful how it might work in Carlingford, where the men had generally something to do, and where the married ladies took their luncheon when the children had their dinner, and presided at the nursery meal. And as for a party of young ladies, even supposing they had the courage to come, with no more solid admixture of the more important members of society, Lucilla, to tell the truth, had no particular taste for that. Miss Marjoribanks reflected as she ate – and indeed, thanks to her perfect health and her agreeable morning walk, Lucilla had a very pretty appetite, and enjoyed her meal in a way that would

have been most satisfactory to her many friends – that it must be by way of making his visit, which was aggravating under all circumstances, more aggravating still, that Tom Marjoribanks had decided to come now, of all times in the world. "If he had waited till things were organised, he might have been of a little use," Lucilla said to herself; "for at least he could have brought some of the men that come on circuit, and that would have made a little novelty; but, of course, just now it would never do to make a rush at people, and invite them all at once." After a moment's consideration, however. Miss Marjoribanks, with her usual candour, reflected that it was not in Tom Marjoribanks's power to change the time of the Carlingford assizes, and that, accordingly, he was not to be blamed in this particular at least. "Of course *it* is not his fault," she added, to herself, "but it is astonishing how things happen with some men always at the wrong moment; and it is *so* like Tom." These reflections were interrupted by the arrival of visitors, whom Miss Marjoribanks received with her usual grace. The first was old Mrs Chiley, who kissed Lucilla, and wanted to know how she had enjoyed herself on the Continent, and if she had brought many pretty things home. "My dear, you have grown ever so much since the last time I saw you," the old lady said in her grandmotherly way, "and stout with it, which is such a comfort with a tall girl; and then your poor dear mamma was so delicate. I have always been a little anxious about you on that account, Lucilla; and I am so glad, my dear, to see you looking so strong."

"Dear Mrs Chiley," said Miss Marjoribanks, who perhaps in her heart was not quite so gratified by this compliment as the old lady intended, "the great aim of my life is to be a comfort to dear papa."

Mrs Chiley was very much moved by this filial piety, and she told Lucilla that story about the Colonel's niece, Susan, who was such a good daughter, and had refused three excellent offers, to devote herself to her father and mother, with which the public in Grange Lane were tolerably acquainted. "And one of them was a baronet, my dear," said Mrs Chiley. Miss Marjoribanks did not make any decided response, for she felt that it would be dangerous to commit herself to such a height of self-abnegation as that; but the old lady was quite pleased to hear of her travels and adventures instead; and stayed so long that Mrs Centum and Mrs Woodburn, who happened to arrive at the same moment, found her still there. Mrs Chiley was a little afraid of Mrs Woodburn, and she took her leave hastily, with another kiss; and Lucilla found herself face to face with the only two women who could attempt a rival enterprise to her own in Carlingford. As for Mrs Woodburn, she had settled herself in an easy-chair by the fire, and was fully prepared to take notes. To be sure, Lucilla was the very person to fall victim to her arts; for that confidence in herself which, in one point of view, gave grandeur to the character of Miss Marjoribanks, gave her also a certain naïveté and openness which the most simple rustic could not have surpassed.

"I am sure by her face she has been telling you about my niece Susan," said the mimic, assuming Mrs Chiley's tone, and almost her appearance, for the moment, "and that one of them was a baronet, my dear. I always know from her looks what she has been saying; and 'the Colonel was much as usual, but suffering a little from the cold, as he always does in this climate.' She must be a good soul, for she always has her favourite little speeches written in her face."

"I am sure I don't know," said Miss Marjoribanks, who felt it was her duty to make an example; "there has always been one thing remarked of me all my life, that I never have had a great sense of humour. I know it is singular, but when one has a defect, it is always so much better to confess it. I always get on very well with anything else, but I never had any sense of humour, you know; and I am very fond of Mrs Chiley. She has always had a fancy for me from the time I was born; and she has such nice manners. But then, it is so odd I should have no sense of humour," said Lucilla, addressing herself to Mrs Centum, who was sitting on the sofa by her. "Don't you think it is very odd?"

"I am sure it is very nice," said Mrs Centum. "I hate people that laugh at everything. I don't see much to laugh at myself, I am sure, in this distracting world; any one who has a lot of children and servants like me to look after, finds very little to laugh at." And she seized the opportunity to enter upon domestic circumstances. Mrs Woodburn did not answer a word. She made a most

dashing murderous sketch of Lucilla, but that did the future ruler of Carlingford very little harm; and then, by the evening, it was known through all Grange Lane that Miss Marjoribanks had snubbed the caricaturist who kept all the good people in terror of their lives. Snubbed her absolutely, and took the words out of her very mouth, was the report that flew through Grange Lane; and it may be imagined how Lucilla's prestige rose in consequence, and how much people began to expect of Miss Marjoribanks, who had performed such a feat almost on the first day of her return home.

Chapter VI

Tom Marjoribanks arrived that night, according to the Doctor's expectation. He arrived, with that curious want of adaptation to the circumstances which characterised the young man, at an hour which put Nancy entirely out, and upset the equanimity of the kitchen for twenty-four hours at least. He came, if any one can conceive of such an instance of carelessness, by the nine o'clock train, just as they had finished putting to rights downstairs. After this, Miss Marjoribanks's conclusion that the fact of the Carlingford assizes occurring a day or two after her arrival, when as yet she was not fully prepared to take advantage of them, was *so* like Tom, may be partially understood. And of course he was furiously hungry, and could have managed perfectly to be in time for dinner if he had not missed the train at Didcot Junction, by some wonderful blunder of the railway people, which never could have occurred but for his unlucky presence among the passengers. Lucilla took Thomas apart, and sent him downstairs with the most conciliatory message. "Tell Nancy not to put herself about, but to send up something cold – the cold pie, or anything she can find handy. Tell her I am *so* vexed, but it is just like Mr Tom; and he never knows what he is eating," said Miss Marjoribanks. As for Nancy, this sweetness did not subdue her in the least. She said, "I'll thank Miss Lucilla to mind her own business. The cold pie is for master's breakfast. I ain't such a goose as not to know what to send upstairs, and that Tummas can tell her if he likes." In the meantime the Doctor was in the drawing-room, much against his will, with the two young people, spinning about the room, and looking at Lucilla's books and knick-knacks on the tables by way of covering his impatience. He wanted to carry off Tom, who was rather a favourite, to his own den downstairs, where the young man's supper was to be served; but, at the same time, Dr Marjoribanks could not deny that Lucilla had a right to the greetings and homage of her cousin. He could not help thinking, on the whole, as he looked at the two, what a much more sensible arrangement it would have been if he had had the boy, instead of his sister, who had been a widow for ever so long, and no doubt had spoiled her son, as women always do; and then Lucilla might have passed under the sway of Mrs Marjoribanks, who no doubt would have known how to manage her. Thus the Doctor mused, with that sense of mild amazement at the blunders of Providence, which so many people experience, and without any idea that Mrs Marjoribanks would have found a task a great deal beyond her powers in the management of Lucilla. As for Tom, he was horribly hungry, having found, as was to be expected, no possible means of lunching at Didcot; but, at the same time, he was exhilarated by Lucilla's smile, and delighted to think of having a week at least to spend in her society. "I don't think I ever saw you looking so well," he was saying; "and you know my opinion generally on that subject." To which Lucilla responded in a way to wither all the germs of sentiment in the bud.

"What subject?" she said; "my looks? I am sure they can't be interesting to you. You are as hungry as ever you can be, and I can see it in your eyes. Papa, he is famishing, and I don't think he can contain himself any longer. Do take him downstairs, and let him have something to eat. For myself," Lucilla continued, in a lower tone, "it is my duty that keeps me up. You know it has always been the object of my life to be a comfort to papa."

"Come along, Tom," said the Doctor. "Don't waste your time philandering when your supper is ready." And Dr Marjoribanks led the way downstairs, leaving Tom, who followed him, in a state of great curiosity to know what secret oppression it might be under which his cousin was supported by her duty. Naturally his thoughts reverted to a possible rival – some one whom the sensible Doctor would have nothing to say to; and his very ears grew red with excitement at this idea. But, notwithstanding, he ate a very satisfactory meal in the library, where he had to answer all sorts of questions. Tom had his tray at the end of the table, and the Doctor, who had, according to his hospitable old-fashioned habit, taken a glass of claret to "keep him company," sat in his easy-chair between the fire and the table, and sipped his wine, and admired its colour and purity in the light, and watched with satisfaction

the excellent meal his nephew was making. He asked him all about his prospects, and what he was doing, which Tom replied to with the frankest confidence. He was not very fond of work, nor were his abilities anything out of the common; but at the present moment Tom saw no reason why he should not gain the Woolsack in time; and Dr Marjoribanks gave something like a sigh as he listened, and wondered much what Providence could be thinking of not to give *him* the boy.

Lucilla meantime was very much occupied upstairs. She had the new housemaid up nominally to give her instructions about Mr Tom's room, but really to take the covers off the chairs, and see how they looked when the room was lighted up; but the progress of decay had gone too far to stand that trial. After all, the chintz, though none of the freshest, was the best. When the gentlemen came upstairs, which Tom, to the Doctor's disgust, insisted on doing, Lucilla was found in the act of pacing the room – pacing, not in the sentimental sense of making a little promenade up and down, but in the homely practical signification, with a view of measuring, that she might form an idea how much carpet was required. Lucilla was tall enough to go through this process without any great drawback in point of grace – the long step giving rather a tragedy-queen effect to her handsome but substantial person and long, sweeping dress. She stopped short, however, when she saw them, and withdrew to the sofa, on which she had established her throne; and there was a little air of conscious pathos on her face as she sat down, which impressed her companions. As for Tom, he instinctively felt that it must have something to do with that mystery under which Lucilla was supported by her duty; and the irrelevant young man conceived immediately a violent desire to knock the fellow down; whereas there was no fellow at all in the case, unless it might be Mr Holden, the upholsterer, whose visits Miss Marjoribanks would have received with greater enthusiasm at this moment than those of the most eligible eldest son in England. And then she gave a little pathetic sigh.

"What were you doing, Lucilla?" said her father, – "rehearsing Lady Macbeth, I suppose. At least you looked exactly like it when we came into the room."

"No, papa," said Lucilla sweetly; "I was only measuring to see how much carpet we should want; and that, you know, and Tom's coming, made me think of old times. You are so much downstairs in the library that you don't feel it; but a lady has to spend her life in the drawing-room – and then I always was so domestic. It does not matter what is outside, I always find my pleasure at home. I cannot help if it has a little effect on my spirits now and then," said Miss Marjoribanks, looking down upon her handkerchief, "to be always surrounded with things that have such associations – "

"What associations?" said the amazed Doctor. To be sure, he had forgotten his wife; but it was four years ago, and he had got used to her absence from her favourite sofa; and, on the whole, in that particular, had acquiesced in the arrangements of Providence. "Really, Lucilla, I don't know what you mean."

"No, papa," said Miss Marjoribanks, with resignation. "I know you don't, and that is what makes it so sad. But talking of new carpets, you know, I had such an adventure to-day that I must tell you – quite one of *my* adventures – the very luckiest thing. It happened when I was out walking; I heard a voice out of a house in Grove Street, just the *very* thing to go with my voice. That is not a thing that happens every day," said Lucilla, "for all the masters have always told me that my voice was something quite by itself. When I heard it, though it was in Grove Street, and all the people about, I could have danced for joy."

"It was a man's voice, I suppose," suggested Tom Marjoribanks, in gloomy tones; and the Doctor added, in his cynical way:

"It's a wonderful advantage to be so pleased about trifles. What number was it? For my part, I have not many patients in Grove Street," said Dr Marjoribanks. "I would find a voice to suit you in another quarter, if I were you."

"Dear papa, it's such a pity that you don't understand," said Lucilla compassionately. "It turned out to be Barbara Lake; for, of course, I went in directly, and found out. I never heard a voice that went so well with mine." If Miss Marjoribanks did not go into raptures over the contralto on its own

merits, it was not from any jealousy, of which, indeed, she was incapable, but simply because its adaptation to her own seemed to her by far its most interesting quality, and indeed almost the sole claim it had to consideration from the world.

"Barbara Lake?" said the Doctor. "There's something in that. If you can do her any good or get her teaching or anything – I have a regard for poor Lake, poor little fellow! He's kept up wonderfully since his wife died; and nobody expected it of him," Dr Marjoribanks continued, with a momentary dreary recollection of the time when the poor woman took farewell of her children, which indeed was the next day after that on which his own wife, who had nobody in particular to take farewell of, faded out of her useless life.

"Yes," said Lucilla, "I mean her to come here and sing with me; but, then, one needs to organise a little first. I am nineteen – how long is it since you were married, papa?"

"Two-and-twenty years," said the Doctor abruptly. He did not observe the strangeness of the question, because he had been thinking for the moment of his wife, and perhaps his face was a trifle graver than usual, though neither of his young companions thought of remarking it. To be sure he was not a young man even when he married; but, on the whole, perhaps something more than this perfect comfort and respectability, and those nice little dinners, had seemed to shine on his horizon when he brought home his incapable bride.

"Two-and-twenty years!" exclaimed Lucilla. "I don't mind talking before Tom, for he is one of the family. The things are all the same as they were when mamma came home, though, I am sure, nobody would believe it. I think it is going against Providence, for my part. Nothing was ever intended to last so long, except the things the Jews, poor souls! wore in the desert, perhaps. Papa, if you have no objection, I should like to choose the colours myself. There is a great deal in choosing colours that go well with one's complexion. People think of that for their dresses, but not for their rooms, which are of so much more importance. I should have liked blue, but blue gets so soon tawdry. I think," said Miss Marjoribanks, rising and looking at herself seriously in the glass, "that I have enough complexion at present to venture upon a pale spring green."

This little calculation, which a timid young woman would have taken care to do by herself, Lucilla did publicly, with her usual discrimination. The Doctor, who had looked a little grim at first, could not but laugh when he saw the sober look of care and thought with which Miss Marjoribanks examined her capabilities in the glass. It was not so much the action itself that amused her father, as the consummate ability of the young revolutionary. Dr Marjoribanks was Scotch, and had a respect for "talent" in every development, as is natural to his nation. He did not even give his daughter that credit for sincerity which she deserved, but set it all to the score of her genius, which was complimentary, certainly, in one point of view; but the fact was that Lucilla was perfectly sincere, and that she did what was natural to her under guidance of her genius, so as always to be in good fortune, just as Tom Marjoribanks, under the guidance of his, brought discredit even upon those eternal ordinances of English government which fixed the time of the Carlingford assizes. Lucilla was quite in earnest in thinking that the colour of the drawing-room was an important matter, and that a woman of sense had very good reason for suiting it to her complexion – an idea which accordingly she proceeded to develop and explain.

"For one can change one's dress," said Miss Marjoribanks, "as often as one likes – at least as often, you know, as one has dresses to change; but the furniture remains the same. I am always a perfect guy, whatever I wear, when I sit against a red curtain. You men say that a woman always knows when she's good-looking, but I am happy to say *I* know when I look a guy. What I mean is a delicate pale green, papa. For my part, I think it wears just as well as any other colour; and all the painters say it is the very thing for pictures. The carpet, of course, would be a darker shade; and as for the chairs, it is not at all necessary to keep to one colour. Both red and violet go beautifully with green, you know. I am sure Mr Holden and I could settle all about it without giving you any trouble."

"Who told you, Lucilla," said the Doctor, "that I meant to refurnish the house?" He was even a little angry at her boldness, but at the same time he was so much amused and pleased in his heart to have so clever a daughter, that all the tones that could produce terror were softened out of his voice. "I never heard that was a sort of thing a man had to do for his daughter," said Dr Marjoribanks; "and I would like to know what I should do with all that finery when you get married – as I suppose you will by and by – and leave me alone in the house?"

"Ah, that is the important question," said Tom. As usual, it was Tom's luck; but then, when there did happen to be a moment when he ought to be silent, the unfortunate fellow could not help but speak.

"Perhaps I may marry some time," said Miss Marjoribanks, with composure; "it would be foolish, you know, to make any engagements; but that will depend greatly upon how you behave, and how Carlingford behaves, papa. I give myself ten years here, if you should be very good. By twenty-nine I shall be going off a little, and perhaps it may be tiring, for anything I can tell. Ten years is a long time, and naturally, in the meantime, I want to look as well as possible. Stop a minute; I forgot to put down the number of paces for the length. Tom, please to do it over again for me; of course, your steps are a great deal longer than mine."

"Tom is tired," said the Doctor; "and there are no new carpets coming out of my pockets. Besides, he's going to bed, and I'm going downstairs to the library. We may as well bid you good-night."

These words, however, were addressed to deaf ears. Tom, as was natural, had started immediately to obey Lucilla, as he was in duty bound; and the old Doctor looked on with a little amazement and a little amusement, recognising, with something of the surprise which that discovery always gives to fathers and mothers, that his visitor cared twenty times more for what Lucilla said than for anything that his superior wisdom could suggest. He would have gone off and left them as a couple of young fools, if it had not occurred to him all at once that since this sort of thing had begun, the last person in the world that he would choose to see dancing attendance on his daughter was Tom Marjoribanks. Oddly enough, though he had just been finding fault with Providence for not giving him a son instead of a daughter, he was not at all delighted nor grateful when Providence put before him this simple method of providing himself with the son he wanted. He took a great deal too much interest in Tom Marjoribanks to let him do anything so foolish; and as for Lucilla, the idea that, after all her accomplishments, and her expensive education, and her year on the Continent, she should marry a man who had nothing, disgusted the Doctor. He kept his seat accordingly, though he was horribly bored by the drawing-room and its claims, and wanted very much to return to the library, and get into his slippers and his dressing-gown. It was rather a pretty picture, on the whole, which he was regarding. Lucilla, perhaps, with a view to this discussion, had put on green ribbons on the white dress which she always wore in the evening, and her tawny curls and fresh complexion carried off triumphantly that difficult colour. Perhaps a critical observer might have said that her figure was a little too developed and substantial for these vestal robes; but then Miss Marjoribanks was young, and could bear it. She was standing by, not far from the fire, on the other side from the Doctor, looking on anxiously, while Tom measured the room with his long steps. "I never said you were to stride," said Lucilla; "take moderate steps, and don't be so silly. I was doing it myself famously if you had not come in and interrupted me. It is frightful to belong to a family where the men are so stupid," said Miss Marjoribanks, with a sigh of real distress; for, to be sure, the unlucky Tom immediately bethought himself to take small steps like those of a lady, which all but threw him on his well-formed though meaningless nose. Lucilla shook her head with an exasperated look, and contracted her lips with disdain, as he passed her on his ill-omened career. Of course he came right up against the little table on which she had with her own hand arranged a bouquet of geraniums and mignonette. "It is what he always does," she said to the Doctor calmly, as Tom arrived at that climax of his fate; and the

look with which she accompanied these words, as she rang the bell smartly and promptly, mollified the Doctor's heart.

"I can tell you the size of the room, if that is all you want," said Dr Marjoribanks. "I suppose you mean to give parties, and drive me out of my senses with dancing and singing. – No, Lucilla, you must wait till you get married – that will never do for me."

"Dear papa," said Lucilla sweetly, "it is so dreadful to hear you say *parties*. Everybody knows that the only thing I care for in life is to be a comfort to you; and as for dancing, I saw at once that was out of the question. Dancing is all very well," said Miss Marjoribanks thoughtfully; "but it implies quantities of young people – and young people can never make what *I* call society. It is *Evenings* I mean to have, papa. I am sure you want to go downstairs, and I suppose Tom would think it civil to sit with me, though he is tired; so I will show you a good example, and Thomas can pick up the table and the flowers at his leisure. Good-night, papa," said Lucilla, giving him her round fresh cheek to kiss. She went out of the room with a certain triumph, feeling that she had fully signified her intentions, which is always an important matter; and shook hands in a condescending way with Tom, who had broken his shins in a headlong rush to open the door. She looked at him with an expression of mild despair, and shook her head again as she accorded him that sign of amity. "If you only would look a little where you are going," said Miss Marjoribanks; – perhaps she meant the words to convey an allegorical as well as a positive meaning, as so many people have been found out to do – and then she pursued her peaceful way upstairs. As for the Doctor, he went off to his library rubbing his hands, glad to be released, and laughing softly at his nephew's abashed looks. "She knows how to put *him* down at least," the Doctor said to himself, well pleased; and he was so much amused by his daughter's superiority to the vulgar festivity of parties, that he almost gave in to the idea of refurnishing the drawing-room to suit Lucilla's complexion. He rubbed his hands once more over the fire, and indulged in a little laugh all by himself over that original idea. "So it is Evenings she means to have?" said the Doctor; and, to be sure, nothing could be more faded than the curtains, and there were bits of the carpet in which the pattern was scarcely discernible. So that, on the whole, up to this point there seemed to be a reasonable prospect that Lucilla would have everything her own way.

Chapter VII

Miss Marjoribanks had so many things to think of next morning that she found her cousin, who was rather difficult to get rid of, much in her way: naturally the young man was briefless, and came on circuit for the name of the thing, and was quite disposed to dawdle the first morning, and attach himself to the active footsteps of Lucilla; and for her part, she had things to occupy her so very much more important. For one thing, one of Dr Marjoribanks's little dinner-parties was to take place that evening, which would be the first under the new régime, and was naturally a matter of some anxiety to all parties. "I shall go down and ask Mrs Chiley to come with the Colonel," said Lucilla. "I have always meant to do that. We can't have a full dinner-party, you know, as long as the house is so shabby; but I am sure Mrs Chiley will come to take care of me."

"To take care of you! – in your father's house! Do you think they'll bite?" said the Doctor grimly; but as for Lucilla, she was quite prepared for that.

"I must have a chaperone, you know," she said. "I don't say it is not quite absurd; but then, at first, I always make it a point to give in to the prejudices of society. That is how I have always been so successful," said the experienced Lucilla. "I never went in the face of anybody's prejudices. Afterwards, you know, when one is known – "

The Doctor laughed, but at the same time he sighed. There was nothing to be said against Mrs Chiley, who had, on the whole, as women go, a very superior training, and knew what a good dinner was; but it was the beginning of the revolution of which Dr Marjoribanks, vaguely oppressed with the idea of new paper, new curtains, and all that was involved in the entrance of Mr Holden the upholsterer into the house, did not see the end. He acquiesced, of course, since there was nothing else for it: but it must be confessed that the spectre of Mrs Chiley sitting at his right hand clouded over for the Doctor the pleasant anticipation of the evening. If it had been possible to put her at the head of the table beside Lucilla, whom she was to come to take care of, he could have borne it better – and to be sure it would have been a great deal more reasonable; but then that was absolutely out of the question, and the Doctor gave in with a sigh. Thus it was that he began to realise the more serious result of that semi-abdication into which he had been beguiled. The female element, so long peacefully ignored and kept at a distance, had come in again in triumph and taken possession, and the Doctor knew too well by the experience of a long life what a restless and troublesome element it was. He had begun to feel that it had ceased to be precisely amusing as he took his place in his brougham. It was good sport to see Lucilla make an end of Tom, and put her bridle upon the stiff neck of Nancy; but when it came to changing the character of the Doctor's dinners, his intellect naturally got more obtuse, and he did not see the joke.

As for Tom, he had to be disposed of summarily. "Do go away," Miss Marjoribanks said, in her straightforward way. "You can come back to luncheon if you like; – that is to say, if you can pick up anybody that is very amusing, you may bring him here about half-past one, and if any of my friends have come to call by that time, I will give you lunch; but it must be somebody very amusing, or I will have nothing to say to you," said Lucilla. And with this dismissal Tom Marjoribanks departed, not more content than the Doctor; for, to be sure, the last thing in the world which the poor fellow thought of was to bring somebody who was amusing, to injure his chances with Lucilla. Tom, like most other people, was utterly incapable of fathoming the grand conception which inspired Miss Marjoribanks. When she told him that it was the object of her life to be a comfort to papa, he believed it to a certain extent, but it never occurred to him that filial devotion, though beautiful to contemplate, would preserve Lucilla's heart from the ordinary dangers of youth, or that she was at all in earnest in postponing all matrimonial intentions until she was nine-and-twenty, and had begun to "go off" a little. So he went away disconsolate enough, wavering between his instinct of obedience and his desire of being in Lucilla's company, and a desperate determination never to be the means of injuring

himself by presenting to her anybody who was very amusing. All Miss Marjoribanks's *monde*, as it happened, was a little out of humour that day. She had gone on so far triumphantly that it had now come to be necessary that she should receive a little check in her victorious career.

When Tom was disposed of, Miss Marjoribanks put on her hat and went down Grange Lane to carry her invitation to Mrs Chiley, who naturally was very much pleased to come. "But, my dear, you must tell me what to put on," the old lady said. "I don't think I have had anything new since you were home last. I have heard so much about Dr Marjoribanks's dinners that I feel a little excited, as if I was going to be made a freemason or something. There is my brown, you know, that I wear at home when we have anybody – and my black velvet; and then there is my French gray that I got for Mary Chiley's marriage."

"Dear Mrs Chiley," said Lucilla, "it doesn't matter in the least what you wear; there are only to be gentlemen, you know, and one never dresses for gentlemen. You must keep that beautiful black velvet for another time."

"Well, my dear," said Mrs Chiley, "*I* am long past that sort of thing – but the men think, you know, that it is always for them we dress."

"Yes," said Miss Marjoribanks, "their vanity is something dreadful – but it is one of my principles *never* to dress unless there are ladies. A white frock, high in the neck," said Lucilla, with sweet simplicity – "as for anything else, it would be bad style."

Mrs Chiley gave her young visitor a very cordial kiss when she went away. "The sense she has!" said the old lady; but at the same time the Colonel's wife was so old-fashioned that this contemptuous way of treating "The Gentlemen" puzzled her unprogressive intelligence. She thought it was superhuman virtue on Lucilla's part, nearly incredible, and yet established by proofs so incontestable that it would be a shame to doubt it; and she felt ashamed of herself – she who might have been a grandmother, had such been the will of Providence – for lingering five minutes undecided between her two best caps. "I dare say Lucilla does not spend so much time on such vanity, and she only nineteen," said the penitent old lady. As for Miss Marjoribanks, she returned up Grange Lane with a mind at ease, and that consciousness of superior endowments which gives amiability and expansion even to the countenance. She did not give any money to the beggar who at that period infested Grange Lane with her six children, for that was contrary to those principles of political economy which she had studied with such success at Mount Pleasant; but she stopped and asked her name, and where she lived, and promised to inquire into her case. "If you are honest and want to work, I will try to find you something to do," said Miss Marjoribanks; which, to be sure, was a threat appalling enough to keep her free from any further molestation on the part of that interesting family. But Lucilla, to do her justice, felt it equally natural that beneficence should issue from her in this manner as in that other mode of feeding the hungry which she was willing to adopt at half-past one, and had solemnly engaged herself to fulfil at seven o'clock. She went up after that to Mr Holden's, and had a most interesting conversation, and found among his stores a delicious damask, softly, spiritually green, of which, to his great astonishment, she tried the effect in one of the great mirrors which ornamented the shop. "It is just the tint I want," Lucilla said, when she had applied that unusual test; and she left the fashionable upholsterer of Carlingford in a state of some uncertainty whether it was curtains or dresses that Miss Marjoribanks meant to have made.

Perhaps this confusion arose from the fact that Lucilla's mind was occupied in discussing the question whether she should not go round by Grove Street, and try that duet again with Barbara, and invite her to Grange Lane in the evening to electrify the little company; or whether, in case this latter idea might not be practicable, she should bring Barbara with her to lunch by way of occupying Tom Marjoribanks. Lucilla stood at Mr Holden's door for five seconds at least balancing the matter; but finally she gave her curls a little shake, and took a quick step forward, and without any more deliberation returned towards Grange Lane; for, on the whole, it was better not to burst in full triumph all at once upon her constituency, and exhaust her forces at the beginning. If she condescended to

sing something herself, it would indeed be a greater honour than her father's dinner-party, in strict justice, was entitled to; and as for the second question, though Miss Marjoribanks was too happy in the confidence of her own powers to fear any rivals, and though her cousin's devotion bored her, still she felt doubtful how far it was good policy to produce Barbara at luncheon for the purpose of occupying Tom. Other people might see her besides Tom, and her own grand *coup* might be forestalled for anything she could tell; and then Tom had some title to consideration on his own merits, though he was the unlucky member of the family. He might even, if he were so far left to himself (though Miss Marjoribanks smiled at the idea), fall in love with Barbara; or, what was more likely, driven to despair by Lucilla's indifference, he might *pretend* to fall in love; and Lucilla reflected, that if anything happened she could never forgive herself. This was the point she had arrived at when she shook her tawny curls and set out suddenly on her return home.

It was now nearly one o'clock, and it was quite possible that Tom, as well as herself, might be on the way to Grange Lane; but Lucilla, who, as she said, made a point of never going against the prejudices of society, made up her mind to remain sweetly unconscious of the hour of luncheon, unless some lady came to keep her company. But then Miss Marjoribanks was always lucky, as she said. A quarter of an hour before Tom applied for admission, Miss Bury came to pay Lucilla a visit. She had been visiting in her district all the morning, and was very easily persuaded to repose herself a little; and then, naturally, she was anxious about her young friend's spiritual condition, and the effect upon her mind of a year's residence abroad. She was asking whether Lucilla had not seen something soul-degrading and dishonouring to religion in all the mummeries of Popery; and Miss Marjoribanks, who was perfectly orthodox, had replied to the question in the most satisfactory manner; when Tom made his appearance, looking rather sheepish and reluctant, and followed by the "somebody amusing" whom Lucilla had commissioned him to bring. He had struggled against his fate, poor fellow! but when it happens to be a man's instinct to do what he is told, he can no more resist it than if it was a criminal impulse. Tom entered with his amusing companion, who had been chosen with care, and was very uninviting to look at; and by and by Miss Bury, with the most puzzled looks, found herself listening to gossip about the theatres and all kinds of profane subjects. "I think they are going to hang that fellow that killed the tailor," said the amusing man; "that will stir you up a little in Carlingford, I should suppose. It is as good as a play for a country town. Of course, there will be a party that will get up a memorial, and prove that a man so kind-hearted never existed out of paradise; and there will be another party who will prove him to be insane; and then at the end all the blackguards within a hundred miles will crowd into Carlingford, and the fellow will be hanged, as he deserves to be; but I assure you it's a famous amusement for a country town."

"Sir," said Miss Bury, with a tremulous voice, for her feelings had overcome her, "when you speak of amusement, does it ever occur to you what will become of his miserable soul?"

"I assure you, wretches of that description have no souls," said the young barrister, "or else, of course, I would not permit myself to speak so freely. It is a conclusion I have come to not rashly, but after many opportunities of observing," the young man went on with solemnity; "on the whole, my opinion is, that this is the great difference between one portion of mankind and the other: that description of being, you may take my word for it, has no soul."

"I never take anybody's word for what is so plainly stated in the Holy Scriptures," said Miss Bury; "I never heard any one utter such a terrible idea. I am sure I don't want to defend a – a murderer," cried the Rector's sister, with agitation; "but I have heard of persons in that unfortunate position coming to a heavenly frame of mind, and giving every evidence of being truly converted. The law may take their lives, but it is an awful thing – a truly dreadful thing," said Miss Bury, trembling all over, "to try to take away their soul."

"Oh, nonsense, Lucilla. By Jove! he does not mean that, you know," said Tom, interposing to relieve his friend.

"Do you believe in Jove, Mr Thomas Marjoribanks," said Miss Bury, looking him in an alarming manner full in the face.

The unfortunate Tom grew red and then he grew green under this question and that awful look. "No, Miss Bury, I can't say I do," he answered humbly; and the amusing man was so much less brotherly than Tom that he burst into unsympathetic laughter. As for Lucilla, it was the first real check she had sustained in the beginning of her career. There could not have been a more unfortunate *contretemps*, and there is no telling how disastrous the effect might have been, had not her courage and coolness, not to say her orthodoxy, been equal to the occasion. She gave her cousin a look which was still more terrible than Miss Bury's, and then she took affairs into her own hands.

"It is dreadful sometimes to see what straits people are put to, to keep up the conversation," said Lucilla; "Tom in particular, for I think he has a pleasure in talking nonsense. But you must not suppose I am of that opinion. I remember quite well there was a dreadful man once here in jail for something, and Mr Bury made him the most beautiful character! Every creature has a soul. I am sure we say so in the Creed every day of our lives, and especially in that long creed where so many people perish everlastingly. So far from laughing, it is quite dreadful to think of it," said Lucilla. "It is one of my principles never to laugh about anything that has to do with religion. I always think it my duty to speak with respect. It has such a bad effect upon some minds. Miss Bury, if you will not take anything more, I think we had better go upstairs."

To think that Tom, whose luck, as usual, had betrayed him to such an unlooked-for extent, should have been on the point of following to the drawing-room, was more than Miss Marjoribanks could comprehend; but fortunately his companion had more sense, and took his leave, taking his conductor with him. Miss Bury went upstairs in silence, sighing heavily from time to time. The good woman was troubled in her spirit at the evident depravity of the young men with whom circumstances had constrained her to sit down at table, and she was sadly afraid that such companionship must have a debasing effect upon the mind of that lamb of the flock now standing before her. Miss Bury bethought herself of Dr Marjoribanks's profane jokes, and the indifference he had shown to many things in which it was his duty to have interested himself, and she could not but look with tender pity in her young friend's face.

"Poor dear," said Miss Bury, "it is dreadful indeed if this is the sort of society you are subjected to. I could recommend to Dr Marjoribanks a most admirable woman, a true Christian, who would take charge of things and be your companion, Lucilla. It is not at all nice for you, at your age, to be obliged to receive young men like these alone."

"I had you!" said Lucilla, taking both Miss Bury's hands. "I felt it was such a blessing. I would not have let Tom stay for luncheon if you had not been there; and now I am so glad, because it has shown me the danger of letting him bring people. I am quite sure it was a special providence that made you think of coming here to-day."

"Well, my dear," said Miss Bury, who was naturally mollified by this statement of the question, "I am very glad to have been of use to you. If there is anything I desire in this life, it is to be useful to my fellow-creatures, and to do my work while it is called day. I should not think the time lost, my dear Lucilla, if I could only hope that I had impressed upon your mind that an account must be given of every careless word – "

"Oh, yes," said Lucilla, "that is *so* true; and besides, it is quite against my principles. I make it a point never to speak of anything about religion except with the greatest respect; and I am quite sure it was a special providence that I had *you*."

Miss Bury took her farewell very affectionately, not to say effusively, after this, with her heart melting over the ingenuous young creature who was so thankful for her protection; but at the same time she left Miss Marjoribanks a prey to the horrible sensation of having made a failure. To be sure, there was time to recover herself in the evening, which was, so to speak, her first formal appearance before the public of Carlingford. Tom was so ill-advised as to come in when she was having her cup

of tea before dinner to fortify her for her exertions; and the reception he met with may be left to the imagination. But, after all, there was little satisfaction in demolishing Tom; and then Lucilla had known from the beginning that the success of her undertaking depended entirely on herself.

Chapter VIII

The evening passed off in a way which, if Miss Marjoribanks had been an ordinary woman, would have altogether obliterated from her mind all recollection of the failure at lunch. To speak first of the most important particular, the dinner was perfect. As for the benighted men who had doubted Lucilla, they were covered with shame, and, at the same time, with delight. If there had been a fault in Dr Marjoribanks's table under the ancient régime, it lay in a certain want of variety, and occasional over-abundance, which wounded the feelings of young Mr Cavendish, who was a person of refinement. To-night, as that accomplished critic remarked, there was a certain air of feminine grace diffused over everything – and an amount of doubt and expectation, unknown to the composed feastings of old, gave interest to the meal. As for the Doctor, he found Mrs Chiley, at his right hand, not so great a bore as he expected. She was a woman capable of appreciating the triumphs of art that were set before her; and had indeed been trained to as high a pitch of culture in this respect as perhaps is possible to the female intelligence; and then her pride and delight in being admitted to a participation in those sacred mysteries was beyond expression. "My dear Lucilla, I feel exactly as if I was going to be made a freemason; and as if your dear good papa had to blindfold me, and make me swear all sorts of things before he took me downstairs," she said, as they sat together waiting for the commencement of the ceremony; and when the two ladies returned to the drawing-room, Mrs Chiley took Lucilla in her arms and gave her a kiss, as the only way of expressing adequately her enthusiasm. "My love," said the Colonel's wife, "I never realised before what it was to have a genius. You should be very thankful to Providence for giving you such a gift. I have given dinners all my life – that is, all my married life, my dear, which comes to almost the same thing, for I was only a baby – but I never could come up to anything like that," said Mrs Chiley, with tears in her eyes. As for Miss Marjoribanks, she was so satisfied with her success that she felt at liberty to tranquillise her old friend.

"I am sure you always give very nice dinners," she said; "and then, you know, the Colonel has his favourite dishes – whereas, I must say for papa, he is very reasonable for a man. I am so glad you are pleased. It is very kind of you to say it is genius, but I don't pretend to anything but paying great attention and studying the combinations. There is nothing one cannot manage if one only takes the trouble. Come here to this nice easy-chair – it is so comfortable. It is so nice to have a little moment to ourselves before they come upstairs."

"That is what I always say," said Mrs Chiley; "but there are not many girls so sensible as you, Lucilla. I hear them all saying it is so much better French fashion. Of course, I am an old woman, and like things in the old style."

"I don't think it is because I am more sensible," said Miss Marjoribanks, with modesty. "I don't pretend to be better than other people. It is because I have thought it all over, you know – and then I went through a course of political economy when I was at Mount Pleasant," Lucilla said tranquilly, with an air of having explained the whole matter, which much impressed her hearer. "But for all that, something dreadful happened to-day. Tom brought in one of his friends with him, you know, and Miss Bury was here, and they talked – I want to tell you, in case she should say something, and then you will know what to believe. I never felt so dreadfully ashamed in my life – they talked – "

"My dear! not anything improper, I hope," cried the old lady, in dismay.

"Oh, no," said Lucilla; "but they began laughing about some people having no souls, you know – as if there could be anybody without a soul – and poor Miss Bury nearly fainted. You may think what a dreadful thing it was for me."

"My dear child, if that was all," said Mrs Chiley, reassured – "as for everybody having a soul, I am sure I cannot say. You never were in India, to be sure; but Miss Bury should have known better than to faint at a young man's talk, and frighten you, my poor dear. She ought to be ashamed of

herself, at her age. Do you think Tom has turned out clever?" the old lady continued, not without a little finesse, and watching Lucilla with a curious eye.

"Not in the very least," said Miss Marjoribanks calmly; "he is just as awkward as he used to be. It is dreadful to have him here just now, when I have so many things to do – and then he would follow me about everywhere if I would let him. A cousin of that sort is always in the way."

"I am always afraid of a cousin, for my part," said Mrs Chiley; "and talking of that, what do you think of Mr Cavendish, Lucilla? He is very nice in himself, and he has a nice property; and some people say he has a very good chance to be member for Carlingford when there is an election. I think that is just what would suit you."

"I could not see him for the lamp," said Lucilla; "it was right between us, you know – but it is no use talking of that sort of thing just now. Of course, if I had liked, I never need have come home at all," Miss Marjoribanks added, with composure; "and, now I have come home, I have got other things to think of. If papa is good, I will not think of leaving him for ten years."

"Oh, yes; I have heard girls say that before," said Mrs Chiley; "but they always changed their minds. You would not like to be an old maid, Lucilla; and in ten years – "

"I should have begun to go off a little, no doubt," said Miss Marjoribanks. "No, I can't say I wish to be an old maid. Can they be coming upstairs already, do you think? Oh, it is Tom, I suppose," said Lucilla, with a little indignation. But when *They* did make their appearance, which was at a tolerably early period – for a return to the drawing-room was quite a novelty for Dr Marjoribanks's friends, and tempted them accordingly – Miss Marjoribanks was quite ready to receive them. And just before ten o'clock, when Mrs Chiley began to think of going home, Lucilla, without being asked, and without indeed a word of preface, suddenly went to the piano, and before anybody knew, had commenced to sing. She was a great deal too sensible to go into high art on this occasion, or to electrify her father's friends with her newly-acquired Italian, or even with German, as some young ladies do. She sang them a ballad out of one of those treasures of resuscitated ballads which the new generation had then begun to dig out of the bowels of the earth. There was not, to tell the truth, a great deal of music in it, which proved Lucilla's disinterestedness. "I only sang it to amuse you," she said, when all the world crowded to the piano; and for that night she was not to be persuaded to further exertions. Thus Miss Marjoribanks proved to her little public that power of subordinating her personal tastes and even her vanity to her great object, which more than anything else demonstrates a mind made to rule. "I hope next time you will be more charitable, and not tantalise us in this way," Mr Cavendish said, as he took his leave; and Lucilla retired from the scene of her triumph, conscious of having achieved entire success in her first appearance in Carlingford. She laid her head upon her pillow with that sweet sense of an approving conscience which accompanies the footsteps of the benefactors of their kind. But even Miss Marjoribanks's satisfaction was not without its drawbacks. She could not get out of her mind that unhappy abortive luncheon and all its horrors; not to speak of the possibility of her religious principles being impugned, which was dreadful in itself ("for people can stand a man being sceptical, you know," Miss Marjoribanks justly observed, "but everybody knows how unbecoming it is in a woman – and me who have such a respect for religion!"); there remained the still more alarming chance that Miss Bury, who was so narrow-minded, might see something improper in the presence of the two young men at Lucilla's maidenly table; for, to be sure, the Rector's sister was altogether incapable of grasping the idea that young men, like old men and the other less interesting members of the human family, were simple material for Miss Marjoribanks's genius, out of which she had a great result to produce. This was the dread that overshadowed the mind of Lucilla as she composed herself to rest after her fatigues. When she slept the sleep of the innocent, it still pursued her into her dreams. She dreamed that she stood at the altar by the side of the member for Carlingford, and that Mr Bury, with inflexible cruelty, insisted upon marrying her to Tom Marjoribanks instead; and then the scene changed, and instead of receiving the salutations of Mr Cavendish as M.P. for the borough, it was the amusing man, in the character of the defeated candidate, who grinned and nodded at her,

and said from the hustings that he would never forget the luncheon that had been his first introduction to Carlingford. Such was the nightmare that pursued Lucilla even into the sphere of dreams.

When such a presentiment takes possession of a well-balanced mind like that of Miss Marjoribanks, it may be accepted as certain that something is likely to follow. Lucilla did her best to disarm fate, not only by the sweetest submission and dutifulness to the Doctor and his wishes, but by a severe disregard of Tom, which drove that unhappy young man nearly desperate. Far from saying anything about luncheon, she even ignored his presence at breakfast, and remained calmly unconscious of his empty cup, until he had to ask for some coffee in an injured and pathetic voice, which amused Dr Marjoribanks beyond description. But even this did not prove sufficient to propitiate the Fates. When They were gone – and it may be well to say that Lucilla used this pronoun to signify *the gentlemen*, in greater or smaller number as it might happen – and she had finished all her arrangements, Miss Marjoribanks decided upon going to Grove Street to pay Barbara Lake a visit, and practise some duets, which was certainly as innocent an occupation for her leisure as could be desired. She was putting on her hat with this object when the bell in the garden rang solemnly, and Lucilla, whose curiosity conquered her good manners for the moment, hastening to the window, saw Mr Bury himself enter the garden, accompanied by a black figure in deep and shabby mourning. All the tremors of the night rushed back upon her mind at the sight. She felt that the moment had arrived for a trial of her courage very different from the exertions which had hitherto sufficed her. Nothing but the most solemn intentions could have supported the Rector in that severe pose of his figure and features, every line in which revealed an intention of being "faithful"; and the accompanying mute in black, whose office the culprit could not divine, had a veil over her face, and wore a widow's dress. Miss Marjoribanks, it is true, was not a woman to be discouraged by appearances, but she felt her heart beat as she collected all her powers to meet this mysterious assault. She took off her hat with an instinctive certainty that, for this morning at least, the duet was impracticable, when she heard Mr Bury's steady step ascending the stairs; but, notwithstanding, it was with a perfectly cheerful politeness that she bade him welcome when he came into the room. "It is so good of you to come," Lucilla said; "you that have so much to do. I scarcely could believe it when I saw you come in: I thought it must be for papa."

"I did hope to find Dr Marjoribanks," said the Rector, "but as he is not at home, I thought it best to come to you. This is Mrs Mortimer," said Mr Bury, taking the chair Lucilla had indicated with a certain want of observance of his companion which betrayed to the keen perceptions of Miss Marjoribanks that she was a dependant of some kind or other. The Rector was a very good man, but was Evangelical, and had a large female circle who admired and swore by him; and, consequently, he felt it in a manner natural that he should take his seat first, and the place that belonged to him as the principal person present; and then, to be sure, his mission here was for Mrs Mortimer's as well as Miss Marjoribanks's "good." After this introduction, the figure in black put up its veil, and revealed a deprecating woman, with a faint sort of pleading smile on her face. Probably she was making believe to smile at the position in which she found herself; but anyhow she took her seat humbly on another chair at a little distance, and waited, as Lucilla did, for the next golden words that it might please the Rector to say.

"My sister told me what happened yesterday," said Mr Bury. "She is very sorry for you, Miss Marjoribanks. It is sad for you to be left alone so young, and without a mother, and exposed to – to temptations which it is difficult to withstand at your age. Indeed, at all ages, we have great occasion to pray not to be led into temptation; for the heart of man is terribly deceitful. After hearing what she had to say, I thought it best to come up at once this morning and talk to Dr Marjoribanks. I am sure his natural good sense will teach him that you ought not to be left alone in the house."

"I do not see how papa can help it," said Lucilla. "I am sure it is very sad for him as well; but since dear mamma died there has been nobody but me to be a comfort to him. I think he begins

to look a little cheerful now," Miss Marjoribanks continued, with beautiful simplicity, looking her adversary in the face. "Everybody knows that to be a comfort to him is the object of my life."

"That is a very good feeling," said the Rector, "but it does not do to depend too much upon our feelings. You are too young to be placed in a position of so much responsibility, and open to so much temptation. I was deeply grieved for Dr Marjoribanks when his partner in life was taken from him; but my dear Miss Lucilla, now you have come home, who stand so much in need of a mother's care, we must try to find some one to fill her place."

Lucilla uttered a scream of genuine alarm and dismay; and then she came to herself, and saw the force of her position. She had it in her power to turn the tables on the Rector, and she did not hesitate, as a weaker woman might have done, out of consideration for anybody's feelings. "Do you mean you have found some one for him to marry?" she asked, with a look of artless surprise, bending her earnest gaze on Mr Bury's face.

As for the Rector, he looked at Lucilla aghast, like a man caught in a trap. "Of course not, of course not," he stammered, after his first pause of consternation; and then he had to stop again to take breath. Lucilla kept up the air of amazement and consternation which had come naturally at the first, and had her eyes fixed on him, leaning forward with all the eager anxiety natural to the circumstances, and the unfortunate clergyman reddened from the edge of his white cravat to the roots of his gray hair. He was almost as sensitive to the idea of having proposed something improper as his sister could have been, though indeed, at the worst, there would have been nothing improper in it had Dr Marjoribanks made up his mind to another wife.

"It is very dreadful for me that am so young to go against *you*" said Lucilla; "but if it is *that*, I cannot be expected to take any part in it – it would not be natural. It is the great object of my life to be a comfort to papa; but if that is what you mean, I could not give in to it. I am sure Miss Bury would understand me," said Miss Marjoribanks; and she looked so nearly on the point of tears, that the Rector's anxious disclaimer found words for itself.

"Nothing of the kind, my dear Miss Lucilla – nothing of the kind," cried Mr Bury; "such an idea never came into my mind. I cannot imagine how I could have said anything – I can't fancy what put such an idea – Mrs Mortimer, you are not going away?"

Lucilla had already seen with the corner of her eye that the victim had started violently, and that her heavy veil had fallen over her face – but she had not taken any notice, for there are cases in which it is absolutely necessary to have a victim. By this time, however, the poor woman had risen in her nervous, undecided way.

"I had better go – I am sure I had better go," she said hurriedly, clasping together a pair of helpless hands, as if they could find a little strength in union. "Miss Marjoribanks will understand you better, and you will perhaps understand Miss Marjoribanks – "

"Oh, sit down, sit down," said Mr Bury, who was not tolerant of feelings. "Perhaps I expressed myself badly. What I meant to say was, that Mrs Mortimer, who has been a little unfortunate in circumstances – sit down, pray – had by a singular providence just applied to me when my sister returned home yesterday. These things do not happen by chance, Lucilla. We are taken care of when we are not thinking of it. Mrs Mortimer is a Christian lady for whom I have the greatest respect. A situation to take the superintendence of the domestic affairs, and to have charge of you, would be just what would suit her. It must be a great anxiety to the Doctor to leave you alone, and without any control, at your age. You may think the liberty is pleasant at first, but if you had a Christian friend to watch over and take care of you – What is the matter?" said the Rector, in great alarm. It was only that the poor widow who was to have charge of Lucilla, according to his benevolent intention, looked so like fainting, that Miss Marjoribanks jumped up from her chair and rang the bell hastily. It was not Lucilla's way to lose time about anything; she took the poor woman by the shoulders and all but lifted her to the sofa, where she was lying down with her bonnet off when the Rector came to his senses. To describe the feelings with which Mr Bury contemplated this little *entr'acte*, which was not in his

programme, would be beyond our powers. He went off humbly and opened the window when he was told to do so, and tried to find the eau-de-Cologne on the table; while Thomas rushed downstairs for water at a pace very unlike his usual steady rate of progress. As for Lucilla, she stood by the side of her patient quite self-possessed, while the Rector looked so foolish. "She will be all right directly," Miss Marjoribanks was saying; "luckily she never went right off. When you don't go right off, lying down is everything. If there had been any one to run and get some water she would have got over it; but luckily I saw it in time." What possible answer Mr Bury could make to this, or how he could go on with his address in sight of the strange turn things had taken, it would have been hard to say. Fortunately for the moment he did not attempt it, but walked about in dismay, and put himself in the draught (with his rheumatism), and felt dreadfully vexed and angry with Mrs Mortimer, who, for her part, now she had done with fainting, manifested an inclination to cry, for which Mr Bury in his heart could have whipped her, had that mode of discipline been permitted in the Church of England. Lucilla was merciful, but she could not help taking a little advantage of her victory. She gave the sufferer a glass of water, and the eau-de-Cologne to keep her from a relapse, and whispered to her to lie quiet; and then she came back and took her seat, and begged the Rector not to stand in the draught.

"I don't think she is strong," said Miss Marjoribanks confidentially, when she had wiled the disconcerted clergyman back to her side, "her colour changes so; she never would be able for what there is to do here, even if papa would consent to think of it. For my part I am sure I should be glad of a little assistance," said Lucilla, "but I never like to give false hopes, and I don't think papa would consent; – she looks nice if she was not so weak, poor thing! – and there are such quantities of things to be done here: but if you wish it, Mr Bury, I will speak to papa," said Miss Marjoribanks, lifting her eyes, which were so open and straightforward, to the Rector's face.

To tell the truth, he did not in the least know what to say, and the chances are he would not have been half so vexed and angry, nor felt in so unchristian a disposition with the poor woman on the sofa, had he meant to do her harm instead of good. "Yes, I should be glad if you would mention it to Dr Marjoribanks," he said, without very well knowing what he said; and got up to shake hands with Lucilla, and then recollected that he could not leave his protégée behind him, and hesitated, and did not know what to do. He was really grateful, without being aware of it, to Miss Marjoribanks, when once again she came to his aid.

"Please, leave her a little," said Lucilla, "and I can make acquaintance with her, you know, in case papa should be disposed to think of it; – she must lie still till it quite wears off. I would ask you to stay to lunch if I was not afraid of wasting your precious time – "

Mr Bury gave a little gasp of indignation, but he did not say anything. On the whole, even though smarting under the indignity of being asked to lunch, as his sister had been, when probably there might be a repetition of the scene of yesterday, he was glad to get safely out of the house, even at the risk of abandoning his enterprise. As for a woman in want of a situation, who had so little common sense as to faint at such a critical moment, the Rector was disposed to wash his hands of her; for Mr Bury, "like them all," as Lucilla said, was horribly frightened by a faint when he saw one, and afterwards pretended to disbelieve it, and called it one of the things which a little self-command could always prevent. When he was gone Miss Marjoribanks felt the full importance of her victory; and then, though she had not hesitated to sacrifice this poor woman when it was necessary to have a victim, that moment was over, and she had no pleasure in being cruel; on the contrary, she went and sat by her patient, and talked, and was very kind to her; and after a while heard all her story, and was more comforting than the Rector could have been for his life.

"I knew it would hurt your feelings," Miss Marjoribanks said candidly, "but I could not do anything else – and you know it was Mr Bury's fault; but I am sure if I can be of any use to you – " It was thus that Lucilla added, without knowing it, another complication to her fortunes; but then, to be sure, clear-sighted as she was, she could not see into the future, nor know what was to follow. She told the Doctor in the evening with the greatest faithfulness, and described how Mr Bury looked,

and that she had said she did not think papa would be disposed to think of it; and Dr Marjoribanks was so much entertained that he came upstairs to hear the end, and took a cup of tea. It was the third night in succession that the Doctor had taken this step, though it was against his principles; and thus it will be seen that good came out of evil in a beautifully distinct and appropriate way.

Chapter IX

It was not till Miss Marjoribanks had surmounted to a certain extent the vexation caused her by her unlucky confidence in Tom, that that unhappy young man took the step which Lucilla had so long dreaded, but which she trusted to her own genius to hinder him from carrying into execution. Miss Marjoribanks had extricated herself so triumphantly from the consequences of that unhappy commencement of her very charming luncheon-parties, that she had begun to forget the culpability of her cousin. She had defeated the Rector in his benevolent intentions, and she had taken up his protégée just at the moment when Mr Bury was most disgusted with the unfortunate woman's weakness. Poor Mrs Mortimer, to be sure, had fainted, or had been near fainting, at the most inopportune moment, and it was only natural that the Rector should be annoyed; but as for Lucilla, who was always prompt in her actions, and whose good nature and liberality were undoubted, she found her opportunity in the failure of Mr Bury's scheme. After the Rector had gone away, Miss Marjoribanks herself conducted the widow home; and by this time Mrs Mortimer's prospects were beginning to brighten under the active and efficient patronage of her new friend. This being the case, Lucilla's good humour was perfectly restored, and she had forgiven Tom his maladroitness. "He cannot help it, you know," she said privately to old Mrs Chiley: "I suppose some people are born to do ridiculous things." And it was indeed as if he had intended to give a practical illustration of the truth of this conclusion that Tom chose the particular moment he did for driving Miss Marjoribanks to the extremity of her patience. The upholsterers were in the house, and indeed had just finished putting up the pictures on the new paper in the drawing-room (which was green, as Lucilla had determined it should be, of the most delicate tint, and looked, as she flattered herself, exactly like silk hangings); and Mr Holden himself waited with a certain complaisance for Miss Marjoribanks's opinion of the effect. He had no doubt on the subject himself; but he was naturally impressed, as most people were, with that confidence in Lucilla's judgment which so much facilitates the operations of those persons who are born to greatness. It was precisely at this moment that his evil genius persuaded Tom Marjoribanks to interrupt Thomas, who was carrying Mr Holden's message to his young mistress, and to shut the library door upon the external world. Lucilla had taken refuge in the library during the renovation of the drawing-room; and she was aware that this was Tom's last day at Carlingford, and had no intention of being unkind to him. To tell the truth, she had at the bottom of her heart a certain regard and impulse of protection and patronage towards Tom, of which something might have come had the unlucky fellow known how to manage. But, at the same time, Miss Marjoribanks was aware that things must be approaching a crisis upstairs, and was listening intently to the movements overhead, and wondering why she was not sent for. This was the moment of all others at which Tom thought fit to claim a hearing; and the state of Lucilla's feelings may be easily imagined when she saw him plant himself by her side, with his face alternately red and white, and all the signs of a desperate resolution in his countenance. For the first time in her life a certain despair took possession of Miss Marjoribanks's mind. The sounds had suddenly ceased upstairs, as if the artists were making a pause to contemplate the effect of their completed work – which indeed was precisely the case – and at the same time nobody came to call her, important though the occasion was. She made a last effort to emancipate herself before it was too late.

"Ring, please, Tom," she said; "I want to know if they have finished upstairs. I am so sorry you are going away; but you know it is one of my principles never to neglect my duty. I am sure they must be waiting for me – if you would only be kind enough to ring."

"Lucilla," said Tom, "you know I would do anything in the world you liked to tell me; but don't ask me to ring just now: I am going to leave you, and there is something I must say to you, Lucilla," said the young man, with agitation. Miss Marjoribanks was seated near the window, and she had a moral certainty that if any of the Browns happened to be in that ridiculous glass-house where they did

their photography, they must have a perfectly good view of her, with Tom in the background, who had placed himself so as to shut her into the recess of the window. This, coupled with the evidence of her senses that the workmen up stairs had ceased their work, and that a slow footstep traversing the floor now and then was all that was audible, drove Lucilla to despair.

"Yes," she said, temporising a little, which was the only thing she could do, "I am sure I am very sorry; but then, you know, with the house in such a condition! Next time you come I shall be able to enjoy your society," said the designing young woman; "but at present I am *so* busy. It is one of my principles, you know, that things are never rightly done if the lady of the house does not pay proper attention. They are sure to make some dreadful mistake upstairs if I don't look after them. I shall see you again before you go."

"Lucilla, don't be so cruel!" cried the unlucky Tom, and he caught her hand though they were at the window; "do stop a moment and listen to me. Lucilla! what does it matter about furniture and things when a man's heart is bursting?" cried the unfortunate lover; and just at that moment Miss Marjoribanks could see that the curtain was drawn aside a little – ever so little – in the glass-house. She sat down again with a sigh, and drew her hand away, and prepared herself to meet her fate with heroism at least.

"What in the world can you have been doing?" said Lucilla innocently; "you used always to tell me, you know, when you got into any difficulty, and I am sure if I can be of any use to you, Tom – But as for furniture and things, they matter a great deal, I assure you, to people's happiness; and then, you know, it is the object of my life to be a comfort to dear papa."

When she said this, Miss Marjoribanks settled herself again in the recess of the window, so that the Miss Browns could command a full view if they chose; for Lucilla's courage was of the highest order, and nothing, except, perhaps, a strategical necessity of profound importance, would have moved her to retreat before an enemy. As for Tom, he was bewildered, to start with, by this solemn repetition of her great purpose.

"I know how good you are, Lucilla," he said, with humility; "but then my uncle, you know – I don't think he is a man to appreciate – Oh, Lucilla! why should you go and sacrifice to him the happiness of your life?"

"Tom," said Miss Marjoribanks, with some solemnity, "I wish you would not talk to me of happiness. I have always been brought up to believe that duty was happiness; and everybody has known for a long time what was the object of my life. As for poor papa, it is the worse for him if he does not understand; but that does not make any difference to my duty," said the devoted daughter. She gave a little sigh as she spoke, the sigh of a great soul, whose motives must always remain to some extent unappreciated; and the sight of her resignation and beautiful perseverance overwhelmed her unlucky suitor; for indeed, up to this moment, Lucilla still entertained the hope of preventing Tom from, as she herself described it, "saying the very words," which, to be sure, are awkward words to hear and to say.

"Lucilla, when you are so good to my uncle, you ought to have a little pity on me," said Tom, driven to the deepest despondency. "How do you think I can bear it, to see you getting everything done here, as if you meant to stay all your life – when you know I love you?" said the unfortunate young man; "when you know I have always been so fond of you, Lucilla, and always looked forward to the time – ; and now it is very hard to see you care so little for me."

"Tom," said Miss Marjoribanks, with indignant surprise, "how *can* you say I care little for you? you know I was always very fond of you, on the contrary. I am sure I always stood your friend at home, whatever happened, and never said a word when you broke that pretty little pearl ring I was so fond of, and tore the scarf that my aunt gave me. I wonder, for my part, how you can be so unkind as so say so. We have always been the very best friends in the world," said Lucilla, with an air of injury. "I always said at school I liked you the best of all my cousins; and I am very fond of all my cousins." Miss Marjoribanks concluded, after a little pause, "It is so unkind to tell me that I don't care for *you*."

Poor Tom groaned within himself as he listened. He did not know what to answer to Lucilla's aggrieved yet frank confession. Naturally it would have been much less displeasing to Tom to understand that she hated him, and never desired to see him any more. But Miss Marjoribanks was far from entertaining any such unchristian sentiments. She even began to forget her anxiety about what was going on upstairs in that delightful sense of power and abundant resources with which she was mastering the present difficulty. She reflected in herself that though it was excessively annoying to be thus occupied at such a moment, still it was nearly as important to make an end of Tom as to see that the pictures were hung rightly; for, to be sure, it was always easy to return to the latter subject. Accordingly, she drew her chair a little nearer to the window, and regarded Tom with a calm gaze of benevolent interest which was in perfect accordance with the sentiments she had just expressed; a look in which a gentle reproach was mingled. "I have always been like a sister to you," said Lucilla; "how can you be so unkind as to say I don't care?"

As for the unhappy Tom, he got up, as was natural, and took a little walk in front of the table, as a young man in trouble is apt to do. "You know very well that is not what I mean, Lucilla," he said disconsolately. "It is you who are unkind. I don't know why it is that ladies are so cruel; I am not such a snob as to persecute anybody. But what is the good of pretending not to know what I mean?"

"Tom, listen!" cried Miss Marjoribanks, rising in her turn; "I feel sure they must have finished. There is Mr Holden going through the garden. And everybody knows that hanging pictures is just the thing of all others that requires a person of taste. If they have spoiled the room, it will be all your fault."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake never mind the room!" said Tom. "I never thought you would have trifled with a man, Lucilla. You know quite well what I mean; you know it isn't a – a new thing," said the lover, beginning to stammer and get confused. "You know that is what I have been thinking of all along, as soon as ever I had anything to live on. I love you, Lucilla; you know I love you! how can you trifle with me so?"

"It is you who are trifling," said Miss Marjoribanks, "especially when you know I have really something of importance to do. You can come upstairs with me if you like. Of course we all love each other. What is the good of being relations otherwise?" said Lucilla calmly; "it is such a natural thing, you know. I suppose it is because you are going away that you are so affectionate to-day. It is very nice of you, I am sure; but, Tom, I feel quite certain you have not packed your things," Miss Marjoribanks added, in an admonitory tone. "Come along with me upstairs."

And by this time Lucilla's curiosity was beginning again to get the upper hand. If she only could have escaped, it would have been impossible for her cousin to have renewed the conversation; and luckily he was to leave Carlingford the same evening; but then a man is always an inconsequent creature, and not to be calculated on. This time, instead of obeying as usual, Tom – having, as Miss Marjoribanks afterwards described (but only in the strictest confidence), "worked himself up to it" – set himself directly in her way, and seized upon both her hands.

"Lucilla," cried the unlucky fellow, "is it possible that you really have misunderstood me all this time? Do you mean to say that you don't know? Oh, Lucilla, listen just five minutes. It isn't because I am your cousin. I wish to Heaven I was not your cousin, but some one you had never seen before. I mean I want you to consent to – to – to – marry me, Lucilla. That is what I mean. I am called to the bar, and I can work for you, and make a reputation. Lucilla, listen to what I have to say."

Miss Marjoribanks left her hands in his with a calmness which froze poor Tom's heart in his breast. She did not even take the trouble to draw them away. "Have you gone out of your senses, Tom?" she asked, in her sensible way; and she lifted her eyes to the face of the poor young fellow who was in love, with an inquiring look, as if she felt a little anxious about him. "If you have any feeling as if fever was coming on," said Lucilla, "I think you should go upstairs and lie down a little till papa comes in. I heard there had been some cases down about the canal. I hope it is not the assizes that have been too much for you." When Miss Marjoribanks said this, she herself took fast hold of

Tom's hands with a motherly grasp to feel if they were hot, and looked into his eyes with a certain serious inspection, which, under the circumstances, poor fellow! was enough to drive him out of the little rationality he had left.

Tom was so far carried away by his frenzy, that he gave her a little shake in his impatience. "You are trying to drive me mad, Lucilla!" cried the young man. "I have got no fever. It is only you who are driving me out of my senses. This time you must hear me. I will not let you go till you have given me an answer. I am called to the bar, and I have begun my Career," said Tom, making a pause for breath. "I knew you would have laughed at me when I was depending on my mother; but now all that is over, Lucilla. I have loved you as long as I can remember; and I always thought – that you – cared for me a little. If you will have me, there is nothing I could not do," said Tom, who thoroughly believed what he was saying; "and if you will not have me, I will not answer for the consequences. If I go off to India, or if I go to the bad – "

"Tom," said Lucilla solemnly, and this time she drew away her hands, "if you ever want to get married, I think the very best thing you can do is to go to India. As for marrying just now at your age, you know you might as well jump into the sea. You need not be vexed," said Miss Marjoribanks, in her motherly way. "I would not speak so if I was not your best friend. As for marrying me, you know it is ridiculous. I have not the least intention of marrying anybody. If I had thought of that, I need never have come home at all. As for your going to the bad, I am not afraid of that. If I were to let you carry on with such a ridiculous idea, I should never forgive myself. It would be just as sensible to go into a lunatic asylum at once. It is very lucky for you that you said this to *me*," Lucilla went on, "and not to one of the girls that think it great fun to be married. And if I were you, Tom, I would go and pack my things. You know you are always too late; and don't jump on your portmanteau and make such a dreadful noise if it won't shut, but ring the bell for Thomas. You know we are to dine at half-past five to-day, to give you time for the train."

These were the last words Tom Marjoribanks heard as Lucilla left the room. She ran up to the drawing-room without losing a minute, and burst in upon the vacant place where Mr Holden had stood so long waiting for her. To be sure, Miss Marjoribanks's forebodings were so far fulfilled that the St Cecilia, which she meant to have over the piano, was hung quite in the other corner of the room, by reason of being just the same size as another picture at the opposite angle, which the workmen, sternly symmetrical, thought it necessary to "match." But, after all, that was a trifling defect. She stood in the middle of the room, and surveyed the walls, well pleased, with a heart which kept beating very steadily in her bosom. On the whole, perhaps, she was not sorry to have had it out with Tom. So far as he was personally concerned, Miss Marjoribanks, being a physician's daughter, had great faith in the *vis medicatrix*, and was not afraid for her cousin's health or his morals, as a less experienced woman might have been. If she was angry with anybody, it was with herself, who had not taken sufficient precautions to avoid the explanation. "But, after all, everything is for the best," Lucilla said to herself, with that beautiful confidence which is common to people who have things their own way; and she devoted her mind to the St Cecilia, and paid no more attention to Tom. It was not till more than an hour after that a succession of dreadful thumps was not only heard but felt throughout the house. It was Tom, but he was not doing any harm to himself. He was not blowing out his brains or knocking his head against the wall. He was only jumping on his portmanteau, notwithstanding that Lucilla had warned him against such a proceeding – and in his state of mind the jumps were naturally more frantic than usual. When Lucilla heard it, she rang the bell, and told Thomas to go and help Mr Tom with his packing; from which it will be seen that Miss Marjoribanks bore no grudge against her cousin but was disposed to send him forth in friendship and peace.

Chapter X

It was nearly six weeks after this before all Miss Marjoribanks's arrangements were completed, and she was able with satisfaction to herself to begin her campaign. It was just before Christmas, at the time above all others when society has need of a ruling spirit. For example, Mrs Chiley expected the Colonel's niece, Mary Chiley, who had been married about six months before, and who was not fond of her husband's friends, and at the same time had no home of her own to go to, being an orphan. The Colonel had invited the young couple by way of doing a kind thing, but he grumbled a little at the necessity, and had never liked the fellow, he said – and then what were two old people to do to amuse them? Then Mrs Centum had her two eldest boys home from school, and was driven out of her senses by the noise and the racket, as she confided to her visitors. "It is all very well to make pretty pictures about Christmas," said the exasperated mother, "but I should like to know how one can enjoy anything with such a commotion going on. I get up every morning with a headache, I assure you; and then Mr Centum expects me to be cheerful when he comes in to dinner; men are so unreasonable. I should like to know what *they* would do if they had what we have to go through: to look after all the servants – and they are always out of their senses at Christmas – and to see that the children don't have too much pudding, and to support all the noise. The holidays are the hardest work a poor woman can have," she concluded, with a sigh; and when it is taken into consideration that this particular Christmas was a wet Christmas, without any frost or possibility of amusement out of doors, English matrons in general will not refuse their sympathy to Mrs Centum. Mrs Woodburn perhaps was equally to be pitied in a different way. She had to receive several members of her husband's family, who were, like Miss Marjoribanks, without any sense of humour, and who stared, and did not in the least understand her when she "took off" any of her neighbours; not to say that some of them were Low-Church, and thought the practice sinful. Under these circumstances it will be readily believed that the commencement of Lucilla's operations was looked upon with great interest in Carlingford. It was so opportune that society forgot its usual instincts of criticism, and forgave Miss Marjoribanks for being more enlightened and enterprising than her neighbours; and then most people were very anxious to see the drawing-room, now it had been restored.

This was a privilege, however, not accorded to the crowd. Mrs Chiley had seen it under a vow of secrecy, and Mr Cavendish owned to having made a run upstairs one evening after one of Dr Marjoribanks's little dinners, when the other *convives* were in the library, where Lucilla had erected her temporary throne. But this clandestine inspection met with the failure it deserved, for there was no light in the room except the moonlight, which made three white blotches on the carpet where the windows were, burying everything else in the profoundest darkness; and the spy knocked his foot against something which reduced him to sudden and well-merited agony. As for Mrs Chiley, she was discretion itself, and would say nothing even to her niece. "I mean to work her a footstool in water-lilies, my dear, like the one I did for you when you were married," the old lady said; and that was the only light she would throw on the subject. "My opinion is that it must be in crimson," Mrs Woodburn said, when she heard this, "for I know your aunt's water-lilies. When I see them growing, I always think of you. It would be quite like Lucilla Marjoribanks to have it in crimson – for it is a cheerful colour, you know, and quite different from the old furniture; and that would always be a comfort to her dear papa." From this it will be seen that the curiosity of Carlingford was excited to a lively extent. Many people even went so far as to give the Browns a sitting in their glass-house, with the hope of having a peep at the colour of the hangings at least. But Miss Marjoribanks was too sensible a woman to leave her virgin drawing-room exposed to the sun when there was any, and to the photographers, who were perhaps more dangerous. "I think it is blue, for my part," said Miss Brown, who had got into the habit of rising early in hopes of finding the Doctor's household off its guard. "Lucilla was always a great one for blue; she thinks it is becoming to her complexion;" which,

indeed, as the readers of this history are aware, was a matter of fact. As for Miss Marjoribanks, she did her best to keep up this agreeable mystery. "For my part, I am fond of neutral tints," she herself said, when she was questioned on the subject; "anybody who knows me can easily guess my taste. I should have been born a Quaker, you know, I do so like the drabs and grays, and all those soft colours. You can have as much red and green as you like abroad, where the sun is strong, but here it would be bad style," said Lucilla; from which the most simple-minded of her auditors drew the natural conclusion. Thus all the world contemplated with excitement the first Thursday which was to open this enchanted chamber to their admiring eyes. "Don't expect any regular invitation," Miss Marjoribanks said. "I hope you will all come, or as many of you as can. Papa has always some men to dinner with him that day, you know, and it is so dreadfully slow for me with a heap of men. That is why I fixed on Thursday. I want you to come every week, so it would be absurd to send an invitation; and remember it is not a party, only an Evening," said Lucilla. "I shall wear a white frock high, as I always do. Now be sure you come."

"But we can't all go in high white frocks," said Mrs Chiley's niece, Mary, who, if her trousseau had been subtracted from the joys of marriage, would not, poor soul! have found very much left. This intimation dismayed the bride a little; for, to be sure, she had decided which dress she was to wear before Lucilla spoke.

"But, my dear, you are married," said Miss Marjoribanks; "that makes it quite different: come in that pretty pink that is so becoming. I don't want to have any dowdies, for my part; and don't forget that I shall expect you all at nine o'clock."

When she had said this, Miss Marjoribanks proceeded on her way, sowing invitations and gratification round her. She asked the youngest Miss Brown to bring her music, in recognition of her ancient claims as the songstress of society in Carlingford; for Lucilla had all that regard for constituted rights which is so necessary to a revolutionary of the highest class. She had no desire to shock anybody's prejudices or wound anybody's feelings. "And she has a nice little voice," Lucilla said to herself, with the most friendly and tolerant feelings. Thus Miss Marjoribanks prepared to establish her kingdom with a benevolence which was almost Utopian, not upon the ruins of other thrones, but with the goodwill and co-operation of the lesser powers, who were, to be sure, too feeble to resist her advance, but whose rights she was quite ready to recognise, and even to promote, in her own way.

At the same time it is necessary here to indicate a certain vague and not disagreeable danger, which appeared to some experienced persons to shadow Lucilla's conquering way. Mr Cavendish, who was a young man of refinement, not to say that he had a very nice property, had begun to pay attention to Miss Marjoribanks in what Mrs Chiley thought quite a marked manner. To be sure, he could not pretend to the honour of taking her in to dinner, which was not his place, being a young man; but he did what was next best, and manœuvred to get the place on her left hand, which, in a party composed chiefly of men, was not difficult to manage. For, to tell the truth, most of the gentlemen present were at that special moment more interested in the dinner than in Lucilla. And after dinner it was Mr Cavendish who was the first to leave the room; and to hear the two talking about all the places they had been to, and all the people they had met, was as good as a play, Mrs Chiley said. Mr Cavendish confided to Lucilla his opinions upon things in general, and accepted the reproofs which she administered (for Miss Marjoribanks was quite unquestionable in her orthodoxy, and thought it a duty, as she said, always to speak with respect of religion) when his sentiments were too speculative, and said, "How charming is divine philosophy!" so as, for the moment, to dazzle Lucilla herself, who thought it a very pretty compliment. He came to her assistance when she made tea, and generally fulfilled all the duties which are expected of a man who is paying attention to a young lady. Old Mrs Chiley watched the nascent regard with her kind old grandmotherly eyes. She calculated over in her own mind the details of his possessions, so far as the public was aware of them, and found them on the whole satisfactory. He had a nice property, and then he was a very nice, indeed an unexceptionable young man; and to add to this, it had been agreed to between Colonel Chiley and

Mr Centum, and several other of the leading people in Carlingford, that he was the most likely man to represent the borough when old Mr Chiltern, who was always threatening to retire, fulfilled his promise. Mr Cavendish had a very handsome house a little out of town, where a lady would be next thing to a county lady – indeed, quite a county lady, if her husband was the Member for Carlingford.

All these thoughts passed through Mrs Chiley's mind, and, as was natural, in the precious moments after dinner, were suggested in occasional words of meaning to the understanding ear of Miss Marjoribanks. "My dear Lucilla, it is just the position that would suit you – with your talents!" the old lady said; and Lucilla did not say No. To be sure, she had not at the present moment the least inclination to get married, as she truly said; it would, indeed, to tell the truth, disturb her plans considerably; but still, if such was the intention of Providence, and if it was to the Member for Carlingford, Lucilla felt that it was still credible that everything might be for the best.

"But it is a great deal too soon to think of anything of that sort," Miss Marjoribanks would reply. "If I had thought of that, I need never have come home at all; and especially when papa has been so good about everything." Yet for all that she was not ungracious to Mr Cavendish when he came in first as usual. To marry a man in his position would not, after all, be deranging her plans to any serious extent. Indeed, it would, if his hopes were realised, constitute Lucilla a kind of queen in Carlingford, and she could not but feel that, under these circumstances, it might be a kind of duty to reconsider her resolution. And thus the time passed while the drawing-room was undergoing renovation. Mr Cavendish had been much tantalised, she said, by the absence of the piano, which prevented them from having any music, and Lucilla had even been tempted into a few snatches of song, which, to tell the truth, some of the gentlemen present, especially the Doctor himself and Colonel Chiley, being old-fashioned, preferred without the accompaniment. And thus it was, under the most brilliant auspices, and with the full confidence of all her future constituency, that Miss Marjoribanks superintended the arrangement of the drawing-room on that momentous Thursday, which was to be the real beginning of her great work in Carlingford.

"My dear, you must leave yourself entirely in my hands," Lucilla said to Barbara Lake on the morning of that eventful day. "Don't get impatient. I dare say you don't know many people, and it may be a little slow for you at first; but everybody has to put up with that, you know, for a beginning. And, by the bye, what are you going to wear?"

"I have not thought about it," said Barbara, who had the painful pride of poverty, aggravated much by a sense that the comforts of other people were an injury to her. Poor soul! she had been thinking of little else for at least a week past; and then she had not very much choice in her wardrobe; but her disposition was one which rejected sympathy, and she thought it would look best to pretend to be indifferent. At the same time, she said this with a dull colour on her cheeks, the colour of irritation; and she could not help asking herself why Lucilla, who was not so handsome as she was, had the power to array herself in gorgeous apparel, while she, Barbara, had nothing but a white frock. There are differences even in white frocks, though the masculine mind may be unaware of them. Barbara's muslin had been washed six times, and had a very different air from the vestal robes of her patroness. To be sure, Lucilla was not taken in, in the least, by her companion's look of indifference, and would even have been delighted to bestow a pretty dress upon Barbara, if that had been a possible thing to do.

"There will be no dress," said Miss Marjoribanks, with solemnity. "I have insisted upon that. You know it is not a party, it is only an Evening. A white frock, *high*– that is all I mean to wear; and mind you don't lose patience. I shall keep my eye on you; and after the first, I feel sure you will enjoy yourself. Good-bye for the present." When she had uttered these encouraging words. Miss Marjoribanks went away to pursue her preparations, and Barbara proceeded to get out her dress and examine it. It was as important to her as all the complicated paraphernalia of the evening's arrangements were to Lucilla. It is true that there were greater interests involved in the case of the leader; but then Barbara was the soldier of fortune who had to open the oyster with her sword, and she was feeling the point of it metaphorically while she pulled out the breadths of her white dress,

and tried to think that they would not look limp at night; and what her sentiments lost in breadth, as compared with Lucilla's, they gained in intensity, for – for anything she could tell – her life might change colour by means of this Thursday Evening; and such, indeed, was her hope. Barbara prepared for her first appearance in Grange Lane, with a mind wound up to any degree of daring. It did not occur to her that she required to keep faith with Miss Marjoribanks in anything except the duet. As regarded other matters, Barbara was quite unscrupulous, for at the bottom she could not but feel that any one who was kind to her was taking an unwarrantable liberty. What right had Lucilla Marjoribanks to be kind to her? as if she was not as good as Lucilla any day! and though it might be worth her while to take advantage of it for the moment, it was still an insult, in its way, to be avenged if an opportunity ever should arise.

The evening came, as evenings do come, quite indifferently whether people are glad or sorry; and it was with a calmness which the other ladies regarded as next to miraculous, that Miss Marjoribanks took Colonel Chiley's arm to go to the dining-room. We say the other ladies, for on this great occasion Mrs Centum and Mrs Woodburn were both among the dinner-guests. "To see her eat her dinner as if she had nothing on her mind!" Mrs Centum said in amazement: "as for me, though nobody can blame me if anything goes wrong, I could enjoy nothing for thinking of it. And I must say I was disappointed with the dinner," she added, with a certain air of satisfaction, in Mrs Woodburn's ear. It was when they were going upstairs, and Lucilla was behind with Mrs Chiley. "The fuss the men have always made about these dinners! and except for a few made dishes that were really nothing, you know, I can't say *I* saw anything particular in it. And as for Lucilla, I can't think she has any feeling," said the banker's wife.

"Oh, my dear, it is because you don't understand," said Mrs Woodburn. "She is kept up, you know, by a sense of duty. It is all because she has set her heart on being a comfort to her dear papa!"

Such, it is true, were the comments that were made upon the public-spirited young woman who was doing so much for Carlingford; but then Lucilla only shared the fate of all the great benefactors of the world. An hour later the glories of the furniture were veiled and hidden by the robes of a radiant flood of society, embracing all that was most fair and all that was most distinguished in Carlingford. No doubt there was a world of heterogeneous elements; but then if there had not been difficulties where would have been the use of Miss Marjoribanks's genius? Mr Bury and his sister, who had been unconsciously mollified by the admirable dinner provided for them downstairs, found some stray lambs in the assembly who were in need of them, and thus had the double satisfaction of combining pleasure with duty; and though there were several people in the room whose lives were a burden to them in consequence of Mrs Woodburn's remarkable gift, even they found it impossible not to be amused by an occasional representation of an absent individual, or by the dashing sketch of Lucilla, which she gave at intervals in her corner, amid the smothered laughter of the audience, who were half ashamed of themselves. "She is never ill-tempered, you know," the persons who felt themselves threatened in their turn said to each other with a certain piteous resignation; and oddly enough it was in general the most insignificant people about who were afraid of Mrs Woodburn. It is needless to say that such a dread never entered the serene intelligence of Miss Marjoribanks, who believed in herself with a reasonable and steady faith. As for old Mrs Chiley, who had so many funny little ways, and whom the mimic executed to perfection, she also was quite calm on the subject. "You know there is nothing to take off in me," the old lady would say; "I always was a simple body: and then I am old enough to be all your grandmothers, my dear;" which was a saying calculated, as Miss Marjoribanks justly observed, to melt a heart of stone.

Then the Miss Browns had brought their photographs, in which most people in Grange Lane were caricatured hideously, but with such a charming equality that the most *exigeant* forgave the wrong to himself in laughing at his neighbours. Miss Brown had brought her music too, and sang her feeble little strain to the applause of her immediate neighbours, and to the delight of those who were at a distance, and who could talk louder and flirt more openly under cover of the music; and there

were other young ladies who had also come prepared with a little roll of songs or "pieces." Lucilla, with her finger as it were upon the pulse of the company, let them all exhibit their powers with that enlightened impartiality which we have already remarked in her. When Mr Cavendish came to her in his ingratiating way, and asked her how she could possibly let all the sparrows chirp like that when the nightingale was present, Miss Marjoribanks proved herself proof to the flattery. She said, "Do go away, like a good man, and make yourself agreeable. There are so few men, you know, who can flirt in Carlingford. I have always reckoned upon you as such a valuable assistant. It is always an advantage to have a man who flirts," said Miss Marjoribanks. This was a sentiment perhaps too large and enlightened, in the truest sense of the word, to meet, as it ought to have done, with the applause of her audience. Most of the persons immediately surrounding her thought, indeed, that it was a mere *bon-mot* to which Lucilla had given utterance, and laughed accordingly; but it is needless to explain that these were persons quite unable to understand her genius.

All this time she was keeping her eyes upon a figure in the corner of a sofa, which looked as if it was glued there, and kept staring defiance at the world in general from under black and level brows. Lucilla, it is true, had introduced Barbara Lake in the most flattering way to Mrs Chiley, and to some of the young ladies present; but then she was a stranger, and an intruder into those regions of the blest, and she could not help feeling so. If her present companions had not whispered among themselves, "Miss Lake! what Miss Lake? Good gracious! Lake the drawing-master's daughter!" she herself would still have reminded herself of her humble paternity. Barbara sat as if she could not move from that corner, looking out upon everybody with scared eyes, which expressed nothing but defiance, and in her own mind making the reflections of bitter poverty upon the airy pretty figures round her, in all the variations of that costume which Miss Marjoribanks had announced as the standard of dress for the evening. Barbara's muslin, six times washed, was not more different from the spotless lightness of all the draperies round her, than was her air of fright, and at the same time of defiance, from the gay babble and pleasant looks of the group which, by a chance combination, she seemed to form part of. She began to say to herself that she had much better go away, and that there never could be anything in common between those frivolous creatures and herself, a poor man's daughter; and she began to get dreadfully exasperated with Lucilla, who had beguiled her into this scene, to make game of her, as poor Barbara said; though, so far from making game of her, nobody took much notice, after the first unsuccessful attempt at conversation, of the unfortunate young woman. It was when she was in this unhappy humour that her eye fell upon Mr Cavendish, who was in the act of making the appeal to Lucilla which we have already recorded. Barbara had never as yet had a lover, but she had read an unlimited number of novels, which came to nearly the same thing, and she saw at a glance that this was somebody who resembled the indispensable hero. She looked at him with a certain fierce interest, and remembered at that instant how often in books it is the humble heroine, behind backs, whom all the young ladies snub, who wins the hero at the last. And then Miss Marjoribanks, though she sent him away, smiled benignantly upon him. The colour flushed to Barbara's cheeks, and her eyes, which had grown dull and fixed between fright and spite, took sudden expression under her straight brows. An intention, which was not so much an intention as an instinct, suddenly sprang into life within her, and, without knowing, she drew a long breath of eagerness and impotence. He was standing quite near by this time, doing his duty according to Miss Marjoribanks's orders, and flirting with all his might; and Barbara looked at him as a hungry schoolboy might be supposed to look at a tempting apple just out of his reach. How was she to get at this suitor of Lucilla's? It would have given her so pure a delight to tear down the golden apple, and tread on it, and trample it to nothing; and then it came into her head that it might be good to eat as well.

It was at this moment that Miss Marjoribanks, who was in six places at once, suddenly touched Barbara's shoulder. "Come with me a minute; I want to show you something," she said loud out. Barbara, on her side, looked round with a crimson countenance, feeling that her secret thoughts must be written in her guilty eyes. But then these were eyes which could be utterly destitute of expression

when they pleased, though their owner, at present just at the beginning of her experience, was not quite aware of the fact. She stumbled to her feet with the awkward motion natural to that form of shyness which her temper and her temperament united to produce in her. She did all but put her foot through Miss Brown's delicate skirt, and she had neither the natural disposition nor the acquired grace which can carry off one of those trifling offences against society. Nevertheless, as she stood beside Lucilla at the piano, the company in general owned a little thrill of curiosity. Who was she? A girl with splendid black hair, with brows as level as if they had been made with a line, with intense eyes which looked a little oblique under that straight bar of shadow. Her dress was limp, but she was not such a figure as could be passed over even at an evening party; and then her face was a little flushed, and her eyes lit up with excitement. She seemed to survey everybody with that defiant look which was chiefly awkwardness and temper, but which looked like pride when she was standing up at her full height, and in a conspicuous position, where everybody could see her. Most people concluded she was an Italian whom Lucilla had picked up somewhere in her travels. As for Mr Cavendish, he stopped short altogether in the occupation which Miss Marjoribanks had allotted to him, and drew close to the piano. He thought he had seen the face somewhere under a shabby bonnet in some by-street of Carlingford, and he was even sufficiently learned in female apparel to observe the limpness of her dress.

This preface of curiosity had all been foreseen by Miss Marjoribanks, and she paused a moment, under pretence of selecting her music, to take the full advantage of it: for Lucilla, like most persons of elevated aims, was content to sacrifice herself to the success of her work; and then all at once, before the Carlingford people knew what they were doing, the two voices rose, bursting upon the astonished community like a sudden revelation. For it must be remembered that nobody in Carlingford, except the members of Dr Marjoribanks's dinner-party, had ever heard Lucilla sing, much less her companion; and the account which these gentlemen had carried home to their wives had been generally pooh-poohed and put down. "Mr Centum never listens to a note if he can help it," said the banker's wife, "and how could he know whether she had a nice voice or not?" which, indeed, was a powerful argument. But this evening there could be no mistake about it. The words were arrested on the very lips of the talkers; Mrs Woodburn paused in the midst of doing Lucilla, and, as we have before said, Mr Cavendish broke a flirtation clean off at its most interesting moment. It is impossible to record what they sang, for those events, as everybody is aware, happened a good many years ago, and the chances are that the present generation has altogether forgotten the duet which made so extraordinary an impression on the inhabitants of Grange Lane. The applause with which the performance was received reached the length of a perfect ovation. Barbara, for her part, who was not conscious of having ever been applauded before, flushed into splendid crimson, and shone out from under her straight eyebrows, intoxicated into absolute beauty. As for Miss Marjoribanks, she took it more calmly. Lucilla had the advantage of knowing what she could do, and accordingly she was not surprised when people found it remarkable. She consented, on urgent persuasion, to repeat the last verse of the duet, but when that was over, was smilingly obdurate. "Almost everybody can sing," said Miss Marjoribanks, with a magnificent depreciation of her own gift. "Perhaps Miss Brown will sing us something; but as for me, you know, I am the mistress of the house."

Lucilla went away as she spoke to attend to her guests, but she left Barbara still crimson and splendid, triumphing over her limp dress and all her disadvantages, by the piano. Fortunately, for that evening Barbara's pride and her shyness prevented her from yielding to the repeated demands addressed to her by the admiring audience. She said to Mr Cavendish, with a disloyalty which that gentleman thought piquant, that "Miss Marjoribanks would not be pleased"; and the future Member for Carlingford thought he could not do better than obey the injunctions of the mistress of the feast by a little flirtation with the gifted unknown. To be sure, Barbara was not gifted in talk, and she was still defiant and contradictory; but then her eyes were blazing with excitement under her level eyebrows, and she was as willing to be flirted with as if she had known a great deal better. And then Mr

Cavendish had a weakness for a contralto. While this little by-play was going on, Lucilla was moving about, the centre of a perfect tumult of applause. No more complete success could be imagined than that of this first Thursday Evening, which was remarkable in the records of Carlingford; and yet perhaps Miss Marjoribanks, like other conquerors, was destined to build her victory upon sacrifice. She did not feel any alarm at the present moment; but even if she had, that would have made no difference to Lucilla's proceedings. She was not the woman to shrink from a sacrifice when it was for the promotion of the great object of her life; and that, as everybody knew who knew Miss Marjoribanks, was to be a comfort to her dear papa.

Chapter XI

"You have never told us who your unknown was," said Mr Cavendish. "I suppose she is professional. Carlingford could not possibly possess two such voices in private life."

"Oh, I don't know about two such voices," said Miss Marjoribanks; "her voice suits mine, you know. It is always a great thing to find two voices that suit. I never would choose to have professional singers, for my part. You have to give yourself up to music when you do such a thing; and that is not my idea of society. I am very fond of music," said Lucilla – "excessively fond of it; but then everybody is not of my opinion – and one has to take so many things into consideration. For people who give one party in the year it does very well – but then I hate parties: the only pleasure in society is when one's friends come to see one without any ado."

"In white frocks, *high*," said Mrs Woodburn, who could not help assuming Lucilla's manner for the moment, even while addressing herself; but as the possibility of such a *lèse-majesté* did not even occur to Miss Marjoribanks, she accepted the observation in good faith.

"Yes; I hate a grand toilette when it is only a meeting of friends," she said – "for the girls, you know; of course you married ladies can always do what you like. You have your husbands to please," said Lucilla. And this was a little hard upon her satirist, for, to tell the truth, that was a particular of domestic duty to which Mrs Woodburn did not much devote herself, according to the opinion of Grange Lane.

"But about the contralto," said Mr Cavendish, who had come to call on Miss Marjoribanks under his sister's wing, and desired above all things to keep the peace between the two ladies, as indeed is a man's duty under such circumstances. "You are always statesmanlike in your views; but I cannot understand why you let poor little Molly Brown carry on her chirping when you had such an astonishing force in reserve. She must have been covered with confusion, the poor little soul."

"Nothing of the sort," said Mrs Woodburn, pursuing her favourite occupation as usual. "She only said, 'Goodness me! how high Lucilla goes! Do you like that dreadfully high music?' and made little eyebrows." To be sure, the mimic made Miss Brown's eyebrows, and spoke in her voice, so that even Lucilla found it a little difficult to keep her gravity. But then Miss Marjoribanks was defended by her mission, and she felt in her heart that, representing public interest as she did, it was her duty to avoid all complicity in any attack upon an individual; and consequently, to a certain extent, it was her duty also to put Mrs Woodburn down.

"Molly Brown has a very nice little voice," said Lucilla, with most disheartening gravity. "I like to hear her sing, for my part – the only thing is that she wants cultivation a little. It doesn't matter much you know, whether or not you have a voice to begin with. It is cultivation that is the thing," said Miss Marjoribanks deliberately. "I hope you *really* thought it was a pleasant evening. Of course everybody said so to me; but then one can never put any faith in that. I have said it myself ever so many times when I am sure I did not mean it. For myself, I don't give any importance to the first evening. Anybody can do a thing once, you know; the second and the third, and so on – that is the real test. But I hope you thought it pleasant so far as it went."

"It was a great deal more than pleasant," said Mr Cavendish; "and as for your conception of social politics, it is masterly," the future M.P. added, in a tone which struck Lucilla as very significant; not that she cared particularly about Mr Cavendish's meaning, but still, when a young man who intends to go into Parliament congratulates a young lady upon her statesmanlike views, and her conception of politics, it must be confessed that it looks a little particular; and then, if that was what he meant, it was no doubt Lucilla's duty to make up her mind.

"Oh, you know, I went through a course of political economy at Mount Pleasant," she said, with a laugh. "One of the Miss Blounts was dreadfully strong-minded. I wonder, for my part, that she did not make me literary; but fortunately I escaped that."

"Heaven be praised!" said Mr Cavendish. "I think you ought to be Prime Minister. That contralto of yours is charming raw material; but if I were you I would put her through an elementary course. She knows how to sing, but she does not know how to move; and as for talking, she seems to expect to be insulted. If you make a pretty-behaved young lady out of that, you will beat Adam Smith."

"Oh, I don't know much about Adam Smith," said Miss Marjoribanks. "I think Miss Martha thought him rather old-fashioned. As for poor Barbara, she is only a little shy, but that will soon wear off. I don't see what need she has to talk – or to move either, for that matter. I thought she did very well indeed for a girl who never goes into society. Was it not clever of me to find her out the very first day I was in Carlingford? It has always been so difficult to find a voice that went perfectly with mine."

"For my part, I think it was a great deal more than clever," said Mr Cavendish; for Mrs Woodburn, finding herself unappreciated, was silent and making notes. "It was a stroke of genius. So her name is Barbara? I wonder if it would be indiscreet to ask where Mademoiselle Barbara comes from, or if she belongs to anybody, or lives anywhere. My own impression is that you mean to keep her shut up in a box all the week through, and produce her only on the Thursday evenings. I have a weakness for a fine contralto. If she had been existing in an ordinary habitation like other people in Carlingford, I should have heard her, or heard of her. It is clear to me that you keep her shut up in a box."

"Exactly," said Lucilla. "I don't mean to tell you anything about her. You may be sure, now I have found her out, I mean to keep her for myself. Her box is quite a pretty one, like what Gulliver had somewhere. It is just time for lunch, and you are both going to stay, I hope; and there is poor Mary Chiley and her husband coming through the garden. What a pity it is he is such a goose!"

"Yes; but you know she never would take her uncle's advice, my dear," said the incorrigible mimic, putting on Mrs Chiley's face; "and being an orphan, what could anybody do? And then she does not get on with *his* family. By the way," Mrs Woodburn said, falling into her natural tone – "I wonder if anybody ever does get on with her husband's family?" The question was one which was a little grave to herself at the moment; and this was the reason why she returned to her identity – for there was no telling how long the Woodburns, who had come for Christmas, meant to stay. "I shall be quite interested to watch *you*, Lucilla, when it comes to be your turn, and see how you manage," she went on, with a keen look at Miss Marjoribanks; and Mr Cavendish laughed. He too looked at her, and Lucilla felt herself in rather a delicate position: not that she was agitated, as might have been the case had the future M.P. for Carlingford "engaged her affections," as she herself would have said. Fortunately these young affections were quite free as yet; but nevertheless Miss Marjoribanks felt that the question was a serious one, as coming from the sister of a gentleman who was undeniably paying her attention. She did not in the least wish to alarm a leading member of a family into which it was possible she might enter; and then at the same time she intended to reserve fully all her individual rights.

"I always make it a point never to shock anybody's prejudices," said Miss Marjoribanks. "I should do just the same with *them* as with other people; all you have to do is to show from the first that you mean to be good friends with everybody. But then I am so lucky: I can *always* get on with people," said Lucilla, rising to greet the two unfortunates who had come to Colonel Chiley's to spend a merry Christmas, and who did not know what to do with themselves. And then they all went downstairs and lunched together very pleasantly. As for Mr Cavendish, he was "quite devoted," as poor Mary Chiley said, with a touch of envy. To be sure, her trousseau was still in its full glory; but yet life under the conditions of marriage was not nearly such fun as it had been when she was a young lady, and had some one paying attention to her: and she rather grudged Lucilla that climax of existence, notwithstanding her own superior standing and dignity as a married lady. And Mrs Woodburn too awoke from her study of the stupid young husband to remark upon her brother's behaviour: she had not seen the two together so often as Mrs Chiley had done, and consequently this was the first time

that the thought had occurred to her. She too had been born "one of the Cavendishes," as it was common to say in Carlingford, with a certain imposing yet vague grandeur – and she was a little shocked, like any good sister, at the first idea. She watched Lucilla's movements and looks with a quite different kind of attention after this idea struck her, and made a rapid private calculation as to who Dr Marjoribanks's connections were, and what he would be likely to give his daughter; so that it is evident that Lucilla did not deceive herself, but that Mr Cavendish's attentions must have been marked indeed.

This was the little cloud which arose, as we have said, no bigger than a man's hand, over Miss Marjoribanks's prosperous way. When the luncheon was over and they had all gone, Lucilla took a few minutes to think it over before she went out. It was not that she was unduly flattered by Mr Cavendish's attentions, as might have happened to an inexperienced young woman; for Lucilla, with her attractions and genius, had not reached the mature age of nineteen without receiving the natural homage of mankind on several clearly-defined occasions. But then the present case had various features peculiar to itself, which prevented Lucilla from crushing it in the bud, as she had meant to do with her cousin's ill-fated passion. She had to consider, in the first place, her mission in Carlingford, which was more important than anything else; but though Miss Marjoribanks had vowed herself to the reorganisation of society in her native town, she had not by any means vowed that it was absolutely as Miss Marjoribanks that she was to accomplish that renovation. And then there was something in the very idea of being M.P. for Carlingford which moved the mind of Lucilla. It was a perfectly ideal position for a woman of her views, and seemed to offer the very field that was necessary for her ambition. This was the reason, of all others, which made her less careful to prevent Mr Cavendish from "saying the words" than she had been with Tom. To be sure, it would be a trial to leave the drawing-room after it had just been furnished so entirely to her liking – not to say to her complexion; but still it was a sacrifice which might be made. It was in this way that Miss Marjoribanks prepared herself for the possible modifications which circumstances might impose. She did not make any rash resolution to resist a change which, on the whole, might possibly be "for the best," but prepared herself to take everything into consideration, and possibly to draw from it a superior good: in short, she looked upon the matter as a superior mind, trained in sound principles of political economy, might be expected to look upon the possible vicissitudes of fortune, with an enlightened regard to the uses of all things, and to the comparative values on either side.

Barbara Lake, as it happened, was out walking at the very moment when Miss Marjoribanks sat down to consider this question. She had gone to the School of Design to meet Rose, with an amiability very unusual in her. Rose had made such progress, after leaving Mount Pleasant, under her father's care, and by the help of that fine feeling for art which has been mentioned in the earlier part of this history, that the charge of the female pupils in the School of Design had been confided to her, with a tiny little salary, which served Mr Lake as an excuse for keeping his favourite little daughter with him. Nothing could be supposed more unlike Barbara than her younger sister, who just came up to her shoulder, and was twice as serviceable and active and "nice," according to the testimony of all the children. Barbara had led her father a hard life, poor man! the time that Rose was at Mount Pleasant; but now that his assistant had come back again, the poor drawing-master had recovered all his old spirits. She was just coming out of the School of Design, with her portfolio under her arm, when Barbara met her. There were not many pupils, it is true, but still there were enough to worry poor Rose, who was not an imposing personage, and who was daily wounded by the discovery that after all there are but a limited number of persons in this world, especially in the poorer classes of the community, and under the age of sixteen, who have a feeling for art. It was utterly inconceivable to the young teacher how her girls could be so clever as to find out each a different way of putting the sublime features of the Belveder Apollo out of drawing, and she was still revolving this difficult problem when her sister joined her. Barbara, for her part, was occupied with thoughts of a hero much more interesting than he of Olympus. She was flushed and eager, and looking very handsome under

her shabby bonnet; and her anxiety to have a *confidante* was so great that she made a dart at Rose, and grasped her by the arm under which she was carrying her portfolio, to the great discomposure of the young artist. She asked, with a little anxiety, "What is the matter? is there anything wrong at home?" and made a rapid movement to get to the other side.

"Oh, Rose," said Barbara, panting with haste and agitation, "only fancy; I have just seen him. I met him right in front of Masters's, and he took off his hat to me. I feel in such a way – I can scarcely speak."

"Met – who?" said Rose – for she was imperfect in her grammar, like most people in a moment of emergency; and, besides, she shared to some extent Miss Marjoribanks's reluctance to shock the prejudices of society, and was disturbed by the idea that somebody might pass and see Barbara in her present state of excitement, and perhaps attribute it to its true cause.

"Oh, you stupid little thing!" said Barbara, giving her "a shake" by her disengaged arm. "I tell you, *him*! – the gentleman I met at Lucilla Marjoribanks's. He looked as if he was quite delighted to see me again; and I am sure he turned round to see where I was going. He couldn't speak to me, you know, the first time; though indeed I shouldn't be the least surprised if he had followed – at a distance, you know, only to see where I live," said Barbara, turning round and searching into the distance with her eager eyes. But there was nobody to be seen in the street, except some of Rose's pupils lingering along in the sunshine, and very probably exchanging similar confidences. Barbara turned back again with a touch of disappointment. "I am quite sure he will find out before long; and don't forget I said so," she added, with a little nod of her head.

"I don't see what it matters if he found out directly," said Rose. "Papa would not let anybody come to our house that he did not approve of; and then, you know, he will never have anything to say to people who are patronising. I don't want to hear any more about your fine gentleman. If you were worried as I am, you would think much more of getting home than of anybody bowing to you in the street. One of the gentlemen from Marlborough House once took off his hat to me," said Rose, with a certain solemnity. "Of course I was pleased; but then I knew it was my design he was thinking of – my Honiton flounce, you know. I suppose this other one must have thought you had a pretty voice."

This time, however, it was an angry shake that Barbara gave to her sister. "I wish you would not be such a goose," she said; "who cares about your Honiton flounce? He took off his hat because – because he admired me, I suppose – and then it was a great deal more than just taking off his hat. He gave me such a look! Papa has no sense, though I suppose you will blaze up when I say so. He ought to think of us a little. As for patronising, I should soon change that, I can tell you. But then papa thinks of nothing but paying his bills and keeping out of debt, as he says – as if everybody was not in debt; and how do you suppose we are ever to get settled in life? It would be far more sensible to spend a little more, and go into society a little, and do us justice. Only think all that that old Doctor is doing for Lucilla; and there are four of us when the little ones grow up," said Barbara, in a tone of injury. "I should like to know what papa is thinking of? If mamma had not died when she did – "

"It was not poor mamma's fault," said Rose. "I dare say she would have lived if she could for all our sakes. But then you have always taken a false view of our position, Barbara. We are a family of *artists*," said the little mistress of the School of Design. She had pretty eyes, very dewy and clear, and they woke up under the excitement of this proud claim. "When papa is appreciated as he deserves, and when Willie has *made a name*" said Rose, with modest confidence, "things will be different. But the true strength of our position is that we are a family of artists. We are everybody's equal, and we are nobody's equal. We have a rank of our own. If you would only remember this, you would not grudge anything to Lucilla Marjoribanks; and then I am sure she has been very kind to you."

"Oh, bother!" said the unfeeling Barbara. "You do nothing but encourage papa with your nonsense. And I should like to know what right Lucilla Marjoribanks has to be kind to me? If I am not as good as she, it is a very strange thing. I should never take the trouble to think about *him* if it was not that Lucilla believes he is paying her attention – that is the great fun. It would be delicious

to take him from her, and make game of her and her kindness. Goodness! there he is again. I felt sure that he would try to find out the house."

And Barbara crimsoned higher than ever, and held Rose fast by the arm, and called her attention by the most visible and indeed tangible signs to the elegant apparition, like any other underbred young woman. As for Rose, she was a little gentlewoman born, and had a horror unspeakable of her sister's bad manners. When Mr Cavendish made a movement as if to address Barbara, it was the pretty gray eyes of Rose lifted to his face with a look of straightforward surprise and inquiry which made him retire so hastily. He took off his hat again more respectfully than before, and pursued his walk along Grove Street, as if he had no ulterior intention in visiting that humble part of the town. As for Barbara, she held Rose faster than ever, and almost pinched her arm to make her listen. "I knew he was trying to find out the house," she said, in an exultant whisper. "And Lucilla thinks he is paying her attention!" For the fact was, that when Miss Marjoribanks took to being kind to Barbara, she conferred upon the contralto at the same moment a palpable injury and grievance, which was what the drawing-master's daughter had been looking for, for several years of her life. And naturally Lucilla, who was at this moment thinking it all over under the soft green shadows from her new hangings, was deprived of the light which might have been thrown on her reflections, had she seen what was going on in Grove Street. The conditions of humanity are such that even a woman of genius cannot altogether overstep them. And Lucilla still continued to think that Mr Cavendish was paying her attention, which, indeed, was also the general opinion in Grange Lane.

Chapter XII

The second of her Thursday evenings found Miss Marjoribanks, though secure, perhaps more anxious than on the former occasion. The charm of the first novelty was gone, and Lucilla did not feel quite sure that her subjects had the good sense to recognise all the benefits which she was going to confer upon them. "It is the second time that counts," she said in confidence to Mrs Chiley. "Last Thursday they wanted to see the drawing-room, and they wanted to know what sort of thing it was to be. Dear Mrs Chiley, it is to-night that is the test," said Lucilla, giving a nervous pressure to her old friend's hand; at least a pressure that would have betokened the existence of nerves in any one else but Miss Marjoribanks, whose magnificent organisation was beyond any suspicion of such weakness. But, nevertheless, Mrs Chiley, who watched her with grandmotherly interest, was comforted to perceive that Lucilla, as on the former occasion, had strength of mind to eat her dinner. "She wants a little support, poor dear," the old lady said in her heart; for she was a kinder critic than the younger matrons, who felt instinctively that Miss Marjoribanks was doing what they ought to have done. She took her favourite's arm in hers as they went upstairs, and gave Mr Cavendish a kindly nod as he opened the door for them. "He will come and give you his assistance as soon as ever he can get away from the gentlemen," said Mrs Chiley, in her consolatory tone; "but, good gracious, Lucilla, what is the matter?" The cause of this exclamation was a universal hum and rustle as of many dresses and many voices; and, to tell the truth, when Miss Marjoribanks and her companion reached the top of the stairs, they found themselves lost in a laughing crowd, which had taken refuge on the landing. "There is no room, Lucilla. Lucilla, everybody in Carlingford is here. Do make a little room for us in the drawing-room," cried this overplus of society. If there was an enviable woman in Carlingford at that moment, it certainly was Miss Marjoribanks, standing on the top of her own stairs, scarcely able to penetrate through the throng of her guests. Her self-possession did not forsake her at this supreme moment. She grasped Mrs Chiley once again with a little significant gesture which pleased the old lady, for she could not but feel that she was Lucilla's only *confidante* in her brilliant but perilous undertaking. "*They* will not be able to get in when they come upstairs," said Miss Marjoribanks; and whether the faint inflection in her voice meant exultation or disappointment, her old friend could not tell.

But the scene changed when the rightful sovereign entered the gay but disorganised dominion where her subjects attended her. Before any one knew how it was done, Miss Marjoribanks had re-established order, and, what was still more important, made room. She said, "You girls have no business to get into corners. The corners are for the people that can talk. It is one of my principles always to flirt in the middle of the company," said Lucilla; and again, as happened so often, ignorant people laughed and thought it a *bon mot*. But it is needless to inform the more intelligent persons who understand Miss Marjoribanks, that it was by no means a *bon mot*, but expressed Lucilla's convictions with the utmost sincerity.

Thus it happened that the second Thursday was more brilliant and infinitely more gratifying than the first had been. For one thing, she felt sure that it was not to see the new furniture, nor to criticise this new sort of entertainment, but with the sincerest intention of enjoying themselves, that all the people had come; and there are moments when the egotism of the public conveys the highest compliment that can be paid to the great minds which take in hand to rule and to amuse it. The only drawback was, that Barbara Lake did not show the same modesty and reticence as on the former occasion. Far from being sensibly silent, which she had been so prudent as to be on Miss Marjoribanks's first Thursday, she forgot herself so far as to occupy a great deal of Mr Cavendish's valuable time, which he might have employed much more usefully. She not only sang by herself when he asked her, having brought some music with her unseen by Lucilla, but she kept her seat upon the stool before the piano ever so long afterwards, detaining him, and, as Miss Marjoribanks had very little doubt, making an exhibition of herself: for Barbara, having received one good gift

from nature, had been refused the other, and could not talk. When Lucilla, arrested in the midst of her many occupations, heard her protégée's voice rising alone, she stopped quite short with an anxiety which it was touching to behold. It was not the jealousy of a rival cantatrice which inspired Miss Marjoribanks's countenance, but the far broader and grander anxiety of an accomplished statesman, who sees a rash and untrained hand meddling with his most delicate machinery. Lucilla ignored everything for the moment – her own voice, and Mr Cavendish's attentions, and every merely secondary and personal emotion. All these details were swallowed up in the fear that Barbara would not acquit herself as it was necessary for the credit of the house that she should acquit herself; that she should not sing well enough, or that she should sing too much. Once more Miss Marjoribanks put her finger upon the pulse of the community as she and they listened together. Fortunately, things went so far well that Barbara sang her very best, and kept up her prestige: but it was different in the second particular; for, unluckily, the contralto knew a great many songs, and showed no inclination to stop. Nothing remained for it but a bold *coup*, which Lucilla executed with all her natural coolness and success.

"My dear Barbara," she said, putting her hands on the singer's shoulders as she finished her strain, "that is enough for to-night. Mr Cavendish will take you downstairs and get you a cup of tea; for you know there is no room to-night to serve it upstairs." Thus Miss Marjoribanks proved herself capable of preferring her great work to her personal sentiments, which is generally considered next to impossible for a woman. She did what perhaps nobody else in the room was capable of doing: she sent away the gentleman who was paying attention to her, in company with the girl who was paying attention to him; and at that moment, as was usual when she was excited, Barbara was splendid, with her crimson cheeks, and the eyes blazing out from under her level eyebrows. This Miss Marjoribanks did, not in ignorance, but with a perfect sense of what she was about. It was the only way of preventing her Evening from losing its distinctive character. It was the Lamp of sacrifice which Lucilla had now to employ, and she proved herself capable of the exertion. But it would be hopeless to attempt to describe the indignation of old Mrs Chiley, or the unmitigated amazement of the company in general, which was conscious at the same time that Mr Cavendish was paying attention to Miss Marjoribanks, and that he had been flirting in an inexcusable manner with Miss Lake. "My dear, I would have nothing to do with that bold girl," Mrs Chiley said in Lucilla's ear. "I will go down and look after them if you like. A girl like that always leads the gentlemen astray, you know. I never liked the looks of her. Let me go downstairs and look after them, my dear. I am sure I want a cup of tea."

"You shall have a cup of tea, dear Mrs Chiley," said Miss Marjoribanks – "some of them will bring you one; but I can't let you take any trouble about Barbara. She had to be stopped, you know, or she would have turned us into a musical party; and as for Mr Cavendish, he is the best assistant I have. There are so few men in Carlingford who can flirt," said Lucilla regretfully. Her eyes fell as she spoke upon young Osmond Brown, who was actually at that moment talking to Mr Bury's curate, with a disregard of his social duties painful to contemplate. Poor Osmond started when he met Miss Marjoribanks's reproachful eye.

"But then I don't know how," said the disconcerted youth, – and he flushed, poor boy, being only eighteen, and not much more than a schoolboy. As for Lucilla, who had no intention of putting up with that sort of thing, she sent off the curate summarily for Mrs Chiley's cup of tea.

"I did not mean you, my dear Osy," she said, in her motherly tone. "When you are a little older we shall see what you can do; but you are not at all disagreeable for a boy," she added encouragingly, and took Osmond's arm as she made her progress down the room with an indulgence worthy of her maturer years; and even Mrs Centum and Mrs Woodburn and the Miss Browns, who were, in a manner, Lucilla's natural rivals, could not but be impressed with this evidence of her powers. They were like the Tuscan chivalry in the ballad, who could scarce forbear a cheer at the sight of their opponent's prowess. Perhaps nothing that she could have done would have so clearly demonstrated the superiority of her genius to her female audience as that bold step of stopping the music, which

began to be too much, by sending off the singer downstairs under charge of Mr Cavendish. To be sure the men did not even find out what it was that awoke the ladies' attention; but then, in delicate matters of social politics, one never expects to be understood by *them*.

Barbara Lake, as was to be expected, took a very long time over her cup of tea; and even when she returned upstairs she made another pause on the landing, which was still kept possession of by a lively stream of young people coming and going. Barbara had very little experience, and she was weak enough to believe that Mr Cavendish lingered there to have a little more of her society all to himself; but to tell the truth, his sentiments were of a very different description. For by this time it must be owned that Barbara's admirer began to feel a little ashamed of himself. He could not but be conscious of Lucilla's magnanimity; and, at the same time, he was very well aware that his return with his present companion would be watched and noted and made the subject of comment a great deal more amusing than agreeable. When he did take Barbara in at last, it was with a discomfited air which tickled the spectators beyond measure. And as his evil luck would have it, notwithstanding the long pause he had made on the landing, to watch his opportunity of entering unobserved, Miss Marjoribanks was the first to encounter the returning couple. They met full in the face, a few paces from the door – exactly, as Mrs Chiley said, as if it had been Mr and Mrs Cavendish on their wedding visit, and the lady of the house had gone to meet them. As for the unfortunate gentleman, he could not have looked more utterly disconcerted and guilty if he had been convicted of putting the spoons in his pocket, or of having designs upon the silver tea-service. He found a seat for his companion with all the haste possible; and instead of lingering by her side, as she had anticipated, made off on the instant, and hid himself like a criminal in the dark depths of a group of men who were talking together near the door. These were men who were hopeless, and good for nothing but to talk to each other, and whom Miss Marjoribanks tolerated in her drawing-room partly because their wives, with an excusable weakness, insisted on bringing them, and partly because they made a foil to the brighter part of the company, and served as a butt when anybody wanted to be witty. As for Lucilla, she made no effort to recall the truant from the ranks of the Incurables. It was the only vengeance she took upon his desertion. When he came to take leave of her, she was standing with her hand in that of Mrs Chiley, who was also going away. "I confess I was a little nervous this evening," Miss Marjoribanks was saying. "You know it is always the second that is the test. But I think, on the whole, it has gone off very well. Mr Cavendish, you promised to tell me the truth; for you know I have great confidence in your judgment. Tell me sincerely, do you think it has been a pleasant evening?" Lucilla said, with a beautiful earnestness, looking him in the face.

The guilty individual to whom this question was addressed felt disposed to sink into the earth, if the earth, in the shape of Mr Holden's beautiful new carpet, would but have opened to receive him; but, after all, that was perhaps not a thing to be desired under the circumstances. Mr Cavendish, however, was a man of resources, and not disposed to give up the contest without striking a blow in his own defence.

"Not so pleasant as last Thursday," he said. "I am not fit to be a lady's adviser, for I am too sincere; but I incline to think it is the third that is the test," said the future M.P.; and Lucilla made him, as Mrs Chiley remarked, the most beautiful curtsey; but then nothing could be more delightful than the manner in which that dear girl behaved through the whole affair.

"If everybody would only help me as you do!" said Miss Marjoribanks. "Good-night; I am so sorry you have not enjoyed yourself. But then it is such a consolation to meet with people that are sincere. And I think, on the whole, it has gone off very well for the second," said Lucilla, "though I say it that should not say it." The fact was, it had gone off so well that the house could hardly be cleared of the amiable and satisfied guests. A series of the most enthusiastic compliments were paid to Lucilla as she stood in state in the middle of the room, and bade everybody good-bye. "Next Thursday," she said, with the benevolent grace of an acknowledged sovereign. And when they were all gone, Miss Marjoribanks's reflections, as she stood alone in the centre of her domains, were of a

nature very different from the usual reflections which the giver of a feast is supposed to make when all is over. But then, as everybody is aware, it was not a selfish desire for personal pleasure, nor any scheme of worldly ambition, which moved the mind of Lucilla. With such motives it is only natural that the conclusion, "All is vanity," should occur to the weary entertainer in the midst of his withered flowers and extinguished lights. Such ideas had nothing in common with the enlightened conceptions of Miss Marjoribanks. Perhaps it would be false to say that she had suffered in the course of this second Thursday, or that a superior intelligence like Lucilla's could permit itself to feel any jealousy of Barbara Lake; but it would be vain to deny that she had been *surprised*. And any one who knows Miss Marjoribanks will acknowledge that a great deal was implied in that confession. But then she had triumphed over the weakness, and triumphantly proved that her estimate of the importance of her work went far beyond the influence of mere personal feeling. In these circumstances Lucilla could contemplate her withered flowers with perfect calmness, without any thought that all was vanity. But then the fact was, Miss Marjoribanks was accomplishing a great public duty, and at the same time had the unspeakable consolation of knowing that she had proved herself a comfort to her dear papa. The Doctor, it is true, after looking on for a little with a half-amused consciousness that his own assistance was totally unnecessary, had gradually veered into a corner, and from thence had finally managed to escape downstairs to his beloved library. But then the sense of security and tranquillity with which he established himself at the fire, undisturbed by the gay storm that raged outside, gave a certain charm to his retirement. He rubbed his hands and listened, as a man listens to the wind howling out of doors, when he is in shelter and comfort. So that, after all, Lucilla's sensation of having accomplished her filial duties in the most effective manner was to a certain extent justified, while at the same time it is quite certain that nobody missed Dr Marjoribanks from the pleasant assembly upstairs.

Chapter XIII

It was thus that the reign of Miss Marjoribanks became gradually established and confirmed in Carlingford. It would be unnecessary to enter into detail, or to redouble instances of that singular genius which made itself so fully felt to the furthest limits of society, and which even indeed extended those limits miraculously beyond the magic circle of Grange Lane. Lucilla's powers beguiled not only the Powells and Sir John Richmond's family, who were, as everybody knows, fully entitled to be called county people, and came only on the Thursdays when there was moonlight to light them home, which was not so much to be wondered at, since county society in those parts was unusually heavy at that period; but even, what was more extraordinary, Miss Marjoribanks made a lodgment in the enemy's country on the other side, and made a capture, of all people in the world, of John Brown, who lived in his father's big old house at the *town* end of George Street, and had always laughed in his cynical way at the pretensions of Grange Lane. But then Lucilla had, as all the ladies admitted, an influence over "the gentlemen," of which, as was natural, they were slightly contemptuous, even if perhaps envious, to some extent, of the gift. For everybody knows that it requires very little to satisfy the gentlemen, if a woman will only give her mind to it. As for Miss Marjoribanks herself, she confessed frankly that she did her best to please Them. "For you know, after all, in Carlingford, one is obliged to take them into consideration," she said, with a natural apology. "So many of you poor dear people have to go where they like, and see the people they want you to see," Miss Marjoribanks added, fluttering her maiden plumes with a certain disdainful pity in the very eyes of Mrs Centum and Mrs Woodburn, who were well aware, both of them, at the bottom of their hearts, that but for Dr Marjoribanks's dinners, their selfish mates would find infinite objections to the Thursday evening, which was now an institution in Carlingford. And Lucilla knew it just as well as they did, which gave a certain sense of condescension and superiority to her frankness. "I never pretend I don't try to please them," Miss Marjoribanks said; and the matrons found themselves worsted as usual; for, to be sure, it was not for *Them*, but for the good of the community in general, that Lucilla exerted herself so successfully.

Nothing, indeed, could have proved more completely the disinterested character of Miss Marjoribanks's proceedings than her behaviour in respect to Mr Cavendish. After the bold and decisive action taken by Lucilla on the first occasion when the flirtation between him and Barbara Lake became apparent, the misguided young man returned to a better frame of mind; perhaps out of admiration for her magnanimity, perhaps attracted by her indifference, as is the known and ascertained weakness of the gentlemen. And perhaps also Mr Cavendish was ashamed of himself, as, in Mrs Chiley's opinion at least, he had so much reason to be. Anyhow, whatever the cause, he behaved himself with the profoundest decorum for several weeks in succession, and treated the contralto with such overwhelming politeness as reduced poor Barbara out of her momentary exultation into the depths of humiliation and despair. Mr Cavendish was Lucilla's right hand for that short but virtuous period, and fully justified Miss Marjoribanks's opinion, which was founded at once upon reflection and experience, that to have a man who can flirt is next thing to indispensable to a leader of society; that is to say, if he is under efficient discipline, and capable of carrying out a grand conception. Everything went on delightfully so long as this interval lasted, and Lucilla herself did not disdain to recompense her faithful assistant by bestowing upon him various little privileges, such as naturally appertain to a subject whose place is on the steps of the throne. She took him into her confidence, and made him to a certain extent a party to her large and philanthropic projects, and even now and then accepted a suggestion from him with that true candour and modesty which so often accompany administrative genius. While this continued, kind old Mrs Chiley kept caressing them both in her old-womanly way. She even went so far as to call Mr Cavendish "my dear," as if he had been a grandson of her own, and took her afternoon drive in her little brougham past his house with a genial sense of prospective property through Lucilla, which was wonderfully pleasant. To be sure there was not very

much known in Carlingford about his connections; but then everybody was aware that he was one of the Cavendishes, and the people who are not content with that must be hard indeed to please. As for Mrs Woodburn, she, it was true, continued to "take off" Miss Marjoribanks; but then, as Mrs Chiley justly remarked, she was a woman who would take off the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Virgin Mary, if she had the opportunity; and there was no fear but Lucilla, if once married, would soon bring her to her senses; and then Mr Chiltern grew more and more feeble, and was scarcely once in a fortnight in his place in Parliament, which was a sacrifice of the interests of the borough dreadful to contemplate. And thus it was in the interests of Lucilla, notwithstanding that ladies are not eligible for election under such circumstances, that Mrs Chiley carried on a quiet little canvass for the future M.P.

All this lasted, alas! only too short a time. After a while the level eyebrows and flashing eyes and magnificent voice of Barbara Lake began to reassert their ancient power. Whatever may be the predisposition of the Cavendishes in general, this particular member of the race was unable to resist these influences. Barbara had managed to persuade Rose to persuade her father that it was necessary for her to have a new dress; and Mr Lake was more persuadable than usual, being naturally pleased to be complimented, when he went to give his lessons, on his daughter's beautiful voice. "Her talent has taken another development from *ours*," he said, with his little air of dignity, "but still she has the artist temperament. All my children have been brought up to love the beautiful;" and this argument had, of course, all the more effect upon him when repeated by his favourite daughter. "And then Barbara has such a noble head," said Rose; "when nobody is looking at her she always makes a fine composition. To be sure, when she is observed she gets awkward, and puts herself out of drawing; but that is not to be wondered at. I don't want her to be fine, or to imitate the Grange Lane people; but then, you know, papa, you always say that we have a rank of our own, being a family of artists," said Rose, holding up her little head with a pretty arrogance which delighted the father both in a paternal and a professional point of view. "If one could only have made a study of her at that moment," he said to himself regretfully; and he consented to Barbara's dress.

As for the contralto, whose sentiments were very different from those of her father and sister, she watched over the making of the robe thus procured with a certain jealous care which nobody unacquainted with the habits of a family of artists could understand. Barbara's talent was not sufficiently developed to permit of her making it herself; but she knew already by sad experience that Rose's views of what was picturesque in costume were peculiar, and not always successful. And then it was only a new dress to Rose, whereas to Barbara it was a supreme effort of passion and ambition and jealousy and wounded *amour propre*. Mr Cavendish had paid a great deal of attention to her, and she had naturally entertained dreams of the wildest and most magnificent character – of riding in her carriage, as she would herself have said, and dressing as nobody else dressed in Carlingford, and becoming the great lady of the town, and eclipsing utterly Lucilla Marjoribanks, who had been so impertinent as to patronise her. Such had been Barbara's delicious dreams for a whole fortnight; and then Mr Cavendish, who had taken her up, put her down again, and went away from her side, and delivered himself over, heart and soul, to the service of Lucilla. Barbara had no intellect to speak of, but she had what she called a heart – that is to say, a vital centre of inclinations and passions, all of which were set in motion by that intense force of self-regard which belongs to some of the lower organisations. Thus she arrayed herself, not in simple muslin, but in all the power of fascination which a strong will and fixed purpose can add to beauty. And in her excitement, and with the sense she had that this was her opportunity, and that advancement and grandeur depended upon the result of her night's work, her level eyebrows, and flushing cheeks, and black intense eyes, rose almost into positive beauty. There was nobody in the room to compare with her when she stood up to sing on that memorable evening. The Miss Browns, for example, were very pretty, especially Lydia, who was afterwards married to young Richmond, Sir John's eldest son; and they were much *nicer* girls, and far more engaging than Barbara Lake, who was not even a lady, Mrs Chiley said. But then her

determination, though it was a poor enough thing in itself, gave a certain glow and passion to her coarser beauty.

When she stood up to sing, the whole room was struck with her appearance. She had her new dress on, and though it was only white muslin like other people's, it gave her the air of a priestess inspired by some approaching crisis, and sweeping forward upon the victim who was ready to be sacrificed. And yet the victim that night was far from being ready for the sacrifice. On the contrary, he had been thinking it all over, and had concluded that prudence and every other reasonable sentiment were on the other side, and that in many ways it would be a very good thing for him if he could persuade Miss Marjoribanks to preside over and share his fortunes. He had made up his mind to this with all the more certainty that he was a man habitually prone to run off after everything that attracted him, in direct opposition to prudence – an inclination which he shared with his sister, who, as everybody knew, had ruined poor Mr Woodburn's fortunes by "taking off," before his very face, the only rich uncle in the Woodburn family. Mr Cavendish, with this wise resolution in his mind, stood up in the very path of the contralto as she followed Miss Marjoribanks to the piano, and, confident in his determination, even allowed himself to meet her eye – which was rash, to say the least of it. Barbara flashed upon him as she passed a blaze of intense oblique lightning from under her level brows – or perhaps it was only that straight black line which made it look oblique – and then went on to her place. The result was such as might have been anticipated from the character of the man. Barbara was in richer voice than ever before, and all but obliterated even Lucilla, though she too was singing her best; and thus poor Mr Cavendish again fell into the snare. That very night the flirtation, which had already created so much talk, was resumed with more energy than ever; and Barbara took Miss Marjoribanks's place at the piano, and sang song after song in a kind of intoxication of triumph. This, to be sure, was visible only to a small portion of the guests who crowded Lucilla's drawing-room. But the result was soon so visible that all Carlingford became aware of it. The hero wavered so much that the excitement was kept up for many weeks; but still from the first nobody could have any reasonable doubt as to how it was to end.

And it was while this process of seduction was going on that the character of Miss Marjoribanks revealed itself in all its native grandeur. Lucilla had various kind friends round her to advise her, and especially old Mrs Chiley, whose indignation went beyond all bounds. "My dear, I would never let her enter my door again – never!" cried the old lady; "I told you long ago I never could bear her looks – you know I warned you, Lucilla. As for her singing, what does it matter? You have a much prettier voice than she has: everybody knows that a soprano is perfect by itself, but a contralto is only a *second*," Mrs Chiley said, with mingled wrath and satisfaction; "and, my dear, I should never let her enter my house again, if it was me."

"Dear Mrs Chiley," said Lucilla, who was now, as usual, equal to the occasion, "it is so nice of you to be vexed. You know I would do anything to please you; – but, after all, there are thousands and thousands of gentlemen, and it is not so easy to find a voice that goes with mine. All my masters always said it was a quite peculiar second I wanted; and suppose Barbara is foolish, that is not to say I should forget *my* duties," Miss Marjoribanks added, with a certain solemnity; "and then, you know, she has no mother to keep her right."

"And neither have you, my poor dear," said Mrs Chiley, kissing her protégée. As for Lucilla, she accepted the kiss, but repressed the enthusiasm of partisanship with which her cause was being maintained.

"I have *you*," she said, with artless gratitude; "and then I am different," added Lucilla. Nothing but modesty of the most delicate description could have expressed the fact with such a fine reticence. No doubt Miss Marjoribanks was different; and she proved her superiority, if anybody could have doubted it, by the most beautiful behaviour. She took no more notice of the unprincipled flirtation thus set agoing under her very eyes, than if Mr Cavendish and Barbara Lake had been two figures in gingerbread. So far as anybody knew, not even a flying female shaft from Lucilla's bow, one of

those dainty projectiles which the best of women cast forth by times, had ever been directed against the ungrateful young person who had made so unprincipled a use of her admittance into Grange Lane; and the faithless gallant had not even the gratification of feeling that Lucilla was "cool" to him. Whether this singular self-denial cost Miss Marjoribanks any acute sufferings, nobody could tell, but Mrs Chiley still marked with satisfaction that Lucilla, poor dear, was able to eat her dinner, of which she had so much need to support her strength; and after she had eaten her dinner Miss Marjoribanks would go upstairs and show herself just as usual. She was in perfect voice, and neither lost her colour, nor grew thin, nor showed any of those external signs of a disappointment in love with which most people are familiar. "It might have been different, you know, if my affections had been engaged," she said to her sole and sympathising counsellor; and Mrs Chiley, who had had a great deal of experience in girls, became more and more of opinion that such sense was all but superhuman.

Meantime the tide of public opinion ran very high in Carlingford against Mr Cavendish, who had been so popular a little while before. If it had been one of the Miss Browns, or a niece of the Colonel's, or indeed anybody in Grange Lane, people might have passed over it – but one of Mr Lake the drawing-master's daughters! The only person indifferent was Mrs Woodburn, who ought to have known better; but then she was thoughtless, like her brother, and liked it all the better, on the whole, that he should transfer those attentions which he had been paying to Miss Marjoribanks, and which in that quarter must have come to something, to a little harmless amusement with Barbara, who, after all, was very handsome, and had by times a little air of obdurate stupidity which captivated the mimic. As for anything coming of *that*, Mrs Woodburn rejected the idea with a simplicity which was perfectly consistent with her insight into other people's weaknesses. She could put on Barbara's stolid defiant look, and even make her eyebrows square, and give something of an oblique gleam to her eyes, with the most perfect skill and mastery of the character, and at the same time be just as stolid as Barbara in respect to what was going on at her very hand, and to the consequences which must follow. She did not want her brother to marry Miss Marjoribanks, and yet she could not have said a word against so unexceptionable a match; and accordingly it was quite a satisfaction to her to see him turned aside in so perfectly legitimate a manner. She added to her repertory a sketch of Barbara at the moment when, yielding to Mr Cavendish's entreaties, she seated herself at the piano "for just one song"; and being perfectly successful in the representation, Mrs Woodburn took no further care about the matter. To be sure, the hero was sufficiently experienced in such matters to know how to get out of it when it should be the proper time.

Thus the affair progressed which was to have far more serious consequences than these thoughtless persons dreamed of. Barbara ascended again to the heights of exultation and enchantment. Perhaps she was even a little in love; for, after all, she was young, and grateful to the man who thus distinguished her from the world. Yet, on the whole, it is to be feared that his house and his position in society, and the prospect of unlimited millinery, were more to her than Mr Cavendish. All these details were not perhaps contemplated by himself as he devoted himself to the handsome contralto. He had not begun to dream, as Barbara had done for a long time, of the wedding breakfast and the orange blossoms, or even of furnishing a new drawing-room handsomer than Miss Marjoribanks's, and giving parties which should be real parties and not mere Thursdays. None of these imaginations occupied Mr Cavendish as he followed Barbara's glowing cheeks and flashing eyes to his undoing. But then if he did not mean it she meant it; and, after all, there are occasions in which the woman's determination is the more important of the two. So that, taking everything into consideration, there can be no doubt that it was very fortunate that Lucilla's affections were not engaged. She behaved as nobody else in Carlingford was capable of behaving, and very few people anywhere, according to Mrs Chiley's admiring belief. It was not for a vulgar antagonist like Barbara Lake to touch Lucilla. The way in which she asked her to lunch and went on practising duets with her was angelical – it brought the tears to Mrs Chiley's eyes; and as for the domestic traitor whom Miss Marjoribanks thus contrived to warm in her magnanimous bosom, she was sometimes so full of spite and disappointment

that she could neither eat her lunch nor go on with her singing. For, to be sure, the dearest climax of her triumph was wanting so long as Lucilla took no notice; and so far from taking any notice, Miss Marjoribanks was sweeter and more friendly than usual in her serene unconsciousness. "I am so afraid you have caught cold," Lucilla would say; "if you don't feel clear in your lower notes, we can pass over this passage, you know, for to-day. You must see papa before you go away, and he will order you something; but, my dear Barbara, you must take care." And then Barbara could have eaten her fingers instead of the gloves which she kept biting in her vexation. For, to tell the truth, if Miss Marjoribanks was not jealous, the victory was but half a victory after all.

Chapter XIV

It was thus that Miss Marjoribanks went through all the preliminary stages, and succeeded finally in making a triumph out of what would certainly have been a defeat, and a humbling defeat, for anybody else. She was much too sensible to deceive herself on the subject, or not to be aware that to have a gentleman who was paying attention to her withdrawn from her side in this open manner in the sight of all the world, was as trying an accident as can happen to a woman. Fortunately, as Lucilla said, her affections were not engaged; but then, apart from the affections, there are other sentiments which demand consideration. Everybody in Carlingford knew that Mr Cavendish had been paying her a great deal of attention, and the situation was one which required the most delicate skill to get through it successfully. Besides, Miss Marjoribanks's circumstances were all the more difficult, since up to this moment she had been perfectly sincere and natural in all her proceedings. Policy had been constantly inspired and backed by nature in the measures Lucilla had taken for the organisation and welfare of her kingdom, and even what people took for the cleverest calculation was in reality a succession of happy instincts, by means of which, with the sovereignty of true genius, Miss Marjoribanks managed to please everybody by having her own way. A little victory is almost necessary to begin with, and it is a poor nature that does not expand under the stimulus of victory; but now the young reformer had come to the second stage. For, to be sure, that sort of thing cannot last for ever; and this Lucilla, with the natural prevision of a ruling mind, had foreseen from the beginning. The shape in which she had feared defeat, if a nature so full of resources could ever be said to fear, was that of a breakdown, when all the world was looking to her for amusement, or the sudden appearance of a rival entertainer in Carlingford with superior powers: though the last was but a dim and improbable danger, the first was quite possible, and might have arrived at any moment. Miss Marjoribanks was much too sensible not to have foreseen this danger in all its shapes, and even in a kind of way to have provided against it. But Providence, which had always taken care of her, as Lucilla piously concluded, had spared her the trial in that form. Up to this moment it had always providentially happened that all the principal people in Carlingford were quite well and disengaged on the "evening." To be sure, the ladies had headaches, and the married gentlemen now and then were out of temper in Grange Lane as in other less favoured places; but these social accidents had been mercifully averted on Thursdays, perhaps by means of some special celestial agency, perhaps only through that good-luck which had been born with Lucilla. Not in this vulgar and likely manner was the trial of her strength to come.

But when she was at the height of her success, and full in the eye of the world, and knew that everybody was remarking her, and that from the sauces for which the Doctor's table was once so famed, but which even Colonel Chiley no longer thought of identifying as Dr Marjoribanks's, to the fashion of the *high* white frock in which Lucilla had taught the young ladies of Carlingford to appear of an evening, she was being imitated on every hand, – at that moment, when an ordinary person would have had her head turned, and gone wild with too much success, Miss Marjoribanks suddenly saw her dragon approaching her. Just then, when she could not put on a new ribbon, or do her hair in a different style, without all Carlingford knowing of it – at that epoch of intoxication and triumph the danger came, sudden, appalling, and unlooked for. If Lucilla was staggered by the encounter, she never showed it, but met the difficulty like a woman of mettle, and scorned to flinch. It had come to be summer weather when the final day arrived upon which Mr Cavendish forgot himself altogether, and went over to the insidious enemy whom Miss Marjoribanks had been nourishing in her bosom. Fifty eyes were upon Lucilla watching her conduct at that critical moment – fifty ears were on the strain to divine her sentiments in her voice, and to catch some intonation at least which should betray her consciousness of what was going on.

But if Miss Marjoribanks's biographer has fitly discharged his duty, the readers of this history will have no difficulty in divining that the curiosity of the spectators got no satisfaction from Lucilla.

Many people even supposed she had not remarked anything, her composure was so perfect. No growing red or growing pale, no harsh notes in her voice, nor evidence of distracted attention, betrayed that her mind was elsewhere while she was attending to her guests; and yet, to be sure, she saw, just as other people did, that Barbara, all flushed and crimson, with her eyes blazing under their sullen brows, stood in a glow of triumph at the open window, with Mr Cavendish in devoted attendance – a captive at her chariot-wheels. Matters had been progressing to this point for some time; but yet the two culprits had never before showed themselves so lost to all sense of propriety. Instead of fainting or getting pale, or showing any other symptoms of violent despite, Lucilla went upon her airy way, indirectly approaching this point of interest. She went up and chatted with them, and ordered Mr Cavendish to find a chair for Barbara. "What can you be thinking of to let her stand so near the window? If she were to catch cold and lose her voice, what should we all do?" said Lucilla; and she established the two in the most commodious corner before she left them. "Take care she does not go back again into the draught," were her parting words, and even the culprits themselves could do nothing but stare at each other with consternation and shame.

This was all the notice Lucilla took of what was going on. If she was affronted, or if she was wounded, nobody found it out; and when Mrs Chiley offered the tribute of her indignation and sympathy, it has already been recorded how her young friend responded to her. "Fortunately my affections never were engaged," Lucilla said, and no doubt that was a great advantage; but then, as we have said, there are other things besides affections to be taken into account when the woman whom you have been kind to snaps up the man who has been paying attention to you, not only before your eyes, but before the eyes of all the world. The result of her masterly conduct on this occasion was that her defeat became, as we have said, a triumph for Miss Marjoribanks. To be sure, it is to be hoped that, in the sweets of their mutual regard, the two criminals found compensation for the disapproval of the spectators; but nothing could be more marked than the way in which Carlingford turned its cold shoulder on its early favourite. "I never imagined Cavendish was such a fool," Mr Centum said, who was a man of few words; "if he likes that style of philandering, it is nothing to me, but he need not make an idiot of himself." As for Mr Woodburn, he, as was natural, inflicted vicarious punishment upon his wife. "It must be all your fault," he growled, when he was taking her home, and had her at his mercy, with that logic peculiar to a married man; "you ought to tell him he's making an ass of himself. Why the deuce do you let him go on with that tomfoolery? He'll lose all his chances in life, and then, I hope, you'll be satisfied. You women can never see an inch before your own noses!" cried the uncivil husband; which, it must be confessed, was rather hard upon poor Mrs Woodburn, who had nothing to do with it, and had indeed calculated upon perfecting her sketch of Barbara in the quietness of the walk home; for as everybody lived in Grange Lane, carriages were not necessary for Miss Marjoribanks's guests. They flitted out and in, in the moonlight, with pretty scarfs thrown over their heads and laced handkerchiefs tied under their chins, and made Grange Lane between the two straight lines of garden-wall like a scene in a masquerade.

While Mr Cavendish was thus suffering by deputy the contempt of his former admirers, Lucilla, by herself in the abandoned drawing-room, was thinking over the evening with a severe but on the whole satisfactory self-examination. After the first shock, which she had encountered with so much courage, Miss Marjoribanks was rather grateful than otherwise to Providence, which had brought the necessary trial upon her in this form. If it had been a breakdown and humiliating failure instead, how different would her sensations have been! and Lucilla was quite conscious that such a thing might have occurred. It might have occurred to her, as it had done to so many people, to see Thursday come round with a failure of all that made Thursday agreeable. Lady Richmond might have had her influenza that day, and little Henry Centum his sudden attack, which had kept his mother in conversation ever since, and Mrs Woodburn one of her bad headaches; and as for the Miss Browns, there was nothing in the world but Lucilla's habitual good fortune which prevented them from having blacked their fingers with their photography to such an extent as to make them perfectly unpresentable. Or, to turn to

another chapter of accidents, the last duet, which Barbara had insisted upon singing without proper practice, might have broken down utterly. None of these things had happened, and Lucilla drew a long breath of gratitude as she thought how fortunate she had been in all these particulars. To be sure, it was necessary to have a trial of one kind or other; and the modest but intense gratification of having stood the test, diffused itself like a balm through her bosom. No doubt she would have felt, like most people, a certain pleasure in snubbing Barbara; but then there is, on the other hand, a sweetness in sacrificing such impulses to the sacred sense of duty and the high aims of genius which is still more attractive to a well-regulated mind. Miss Marjoribanks herself put out the candles, and went to her own room with that feeling of having acquitted herself satisfactorily which many people think to be the highest gratification of which the mind is capable. After all, it was by no means certain that Mr Cavendish would be M.P. for Carlingford. Mr Chiltern might live for twenty years, or he even might get better, which was more unlikely; or supposing him to be comfortably disposed of, nobody could say with any certainty that some man unknown at present in Carlingford might not start up all of a sudden and gain the most sweet voices of the shopkeepers, who were the majority of the community, and quite outnumbered Grange Lane. It was thus that Lucilla consoled herself as she went meditative but undaunted to her maiden rest.

While all this was going on, Dr Marjoribanks remained an amused spectator, and chuckled a little quietly, without saying anything to anybody, over the turn affairs had taken. The Doctor knew all about everybody in Carlingford, and he had never been an enthusiast in favour of Mrs Woodburn's brother, notwithstanding that the young man had been received so warmly into society as one of the Cavendishes. Perhaps Dr Marjoribanks being Scotch, and having a turn for genealogy, found the description a little vague; but at all events there can be no doubt that he laughed to himself as he retired from the scene of his daughter's trial. The Doctor possibly thought, in a professional point of view, that a little discipline of this description would be useful to Lucilla. Perhaps he thought it would be good for her to find out that – though she had managed to slip the reins out of his hands, and get the control of affairs with a skill which amused the Doctor, and made him a little proud of her abilities, even though he was himself the victim – she could not go on always unchecked in her triumphant career, but must endure like other people an occasional defeat. No doubt, had Lucilla been really worsted, paternal feeling would have interposed, and Dr Marjoribanks would to some extent have suffered in her suffering; but then the case was different, and nobody required, as it turned out, to suffer for Lucilla. The Doctor was pleased she had shown so much spirit, and pleased to see how entirely she had discomfited her antagonists, and turned the tables upon the "young puppy," in whom he had no confidence; and withal Dr Marjoribanks chuckled a little in his secret heart over the event itself, and concluded that it would do Lucilla good. She had vanquished Nancy, and by a skilful jerk taken the reins out of his own experienced hands. He was aware that he had been on the whole very wisely governed since his abdication, but yet he was not sorry that the young conqueror should feel herself human; so that nobody except Mrs Chiley felt that mingled rage and disappointment with which Barbara Lake had hoped to inspire Lucilla's bosom; and Mrs Chiley, so to speak, had nothing to do with it. As for Barbara herself, she returned home in a state of mingled spite and exultation and disgust, which filled her sister with amazement.

"She is such an actor, you know," Barbara said; "she never will give in to let you know how she is feeling – not if she can help it; but for all that she must have felt it. Nobody could help feeling it, though she carried it off so well. I knew how it would be, as soon as I had on a dress that was fit to be seen."

"What is it that she could not help feeling?" said Rose. "I suppose it is Lucilla you mean?"

"I should like to know what right she had to be kind to me," cried Barbara, all glowing in her sullen but excited beauty; "and invite me there, and introduce me in her grand way, as if she was any better than I am! And then to look at all her India muslins; but I knew it would be different as

soon as I had a decent dress," said the contralto, rising up to contemplate herself in the little mirror over the mantelpiece.

This conversation took place in Mr Lake's little parlour, where Rose had been waiting for her sister, and where Barbara's white dress made an unusual radiance in the dim and partially-lighted room. Rose herself was all shrouded up in her morning dress, with her pretty round arms and shoulders lost to the common view. She had been amusing herself as she waited by working at a corner of that great design which was to win the prize on a later occasion. Readers of this history who have studied the earlier chapters will remember that Rose's tastes in ornamentation were very clearly defined for so young a person. Instead of losing herself in vague garlands of impossible flowers, the young artist clung with the tenacity of first love to the thistle leaf, which had been the foundation of her early triumphs. Her mind was full of it even while she received and listened to Barbara; whether to treat it in a national point of view, bringing in the rose and shamrock, which was a perfectly allowable proceeding, though perhaps not original – or whether she should yield to the "sweet feeling" which had been so conspicuous in her flounce, in the opinion of the Marlborough House gentlemen – or whether, on the contrary, she should handle the subject in a boldly naturalistic way, and use her spikes with freedom, – was a question which occupied at that moment all Rose's faculties. Even while she asked Barbara what the subject was on which Lucilla might be supposed to be excited, she was within herself thinking out this difficult idea – all the more difficult, perhaps, considering the nature of the subject, since the design in this case was not for a flounce, in which broad handling is practicable, but for a veil.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, купив полную легальную версию на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.