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Margaret Oliphant

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Chapter 1

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 2

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 3

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 4

"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.