

**Chronicles of Carlingford**

**MISS MARJORIBANKS**

*By* **MRS OLIPHANT**

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## *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 heroic, 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

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