

AN ORIGINAL GIRL.

By Christine Faber.

CHAPTER LXIX.

It was Dr. Burney who had told Rachel of the plan and the desirability of young companionship for her. Pasted by means of Notner's letter, which was very explicit, he was able to talk at most as if he knew Miss Geddling, and was quite aware of that young lady's attitude towards Miss Minton.

Rachel listened so pleasantly and even eagerly interested, that the doctor augured unpropitious results from the plan, till Rachel herself quietly but firmly objected.

"I should like it very much, Dr. Burney," she said, "but I could not now receive Miss Geddling; it would be taking an unfair advantage of Miss Burram. I know what her wish was with regard to my renewal of Miss Geddling's acquaintance."

"No amount of argument from the doctor could dissuade her, or shake her opinion of what her duty was to Miss Burram, and when he wrote an account of it to Notner, he added:

"Miss Minton is the most remarkable young girl I have ever seen. Were she a man, her firmness, determination, devotion to principle, and self-control would make her a very exceptional leader among men."

That letter made Notner reflect again upon a former letter from the doctor, a letter in which had been described the doctor's own perplexity when he came upon Rachel in the library having an open letter in her hand and looking very much frightened, but replying to his inquiry that she must see Hardman.

"They will both die," he wrote to Notner, "Miss Burram and her Charge; Miss Burram may linger in this condition for a few weeks, hardly more, for her strength has begun to be alarmingly on the decrease, and her Charge will follow her in a short time; a stranger constitution than hers could not endure the strain of such long vigils at Miss Burram's bedside. To remove her—and it would have to be done by force—would do no good; she would fret herself to death. So there is nothing for it, Notner, but to remain to the end, and—bury them."

Just as he signed his name there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," he said, without turning his head, and Sarah, flinging the door wide open, tiptoed toward him:

"Doctor," her eyes were bulging with excitement, and her long, solemn face had a scared look. "There is a gentleman in the parlor asking for you."

"What is his name—did he give you a card?" asked the doctor quickly.

"No, he didn't give me anything; he only told me to tell you he was a stranger to you, but that on account of Miss Burram, you'd be glad of his visit."

The doctor was out of the room before Sarah had fully recovered her breath after delivering her message.

"May I never be burned nor drowned alive!" she ejaculated as she followed him, but by the time she reached the parlor, the door was tightly shut, and though she lingered in her old fashion of eavesdropping, only a very indistinct and subdued sound of voices reached her.

A tall and somewhat portly middle-aged man rose to greet Dr. Burney. His face was clean shaven, and every feature, from a high, square, and somewhat projecting forehead, that made his dark-blue eyes look smaller than they were, to his large, firm mouth, and his massive chin, showed a will that was conscious of its superior strength, and that never for a moment doubted that strength.

Notner languidly asked for what small visitor the woe chair was designed.

"Miss Rachel," answered Hardman. "I made it for her when she first came, and she uses it still, though it is very low for her, now that she has grown so tall."

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The month of May had set in unusually cold and wet; and with gusts of wind that seemed in their piercing sharpness to have been borrowed from the very middle of an icy winter.

People went about with faces reflecting the gloom of the atmosphere, and everything in the town had a sort of helplessness, wet, distressed look.

The only stirring thing was the Reform Party, but even that, lacking its former opposition—the rout of Herriek's friends had been so complete—seemed to have lost much of its wonted liveliness.

The party held its meetings, and made speeches, and had the popular assurance of a complete victory when it should go to the polls, but for all that, the enthusiasm was not quite so great as might have been expected; perhaps owing to the weather, and perhaps owing to the fact that many of the people had not yet recovered from the suddenness of the change which had come to the town.

In Miss Burram's household there was little change, save that Dr. Burney was growing irritable at the manner in which his patient's disease continued to baffle him—she seemed so near at times to catching what she wanted from her eyes fixed upon him with such pitiful yearning—from her hand, vainly trying to make intelligible motions, that it was tantalizing when it all became as blank as ever.

Only the power of speech for a moment would come to her; but her tongue remained dumb, and her strength, that with silent struggle with herself, began at length to diminish.

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"Well, Jim, I shall not ask you to give me any of the evidences Miss Rachel bestows upon you, but I shall give you some consciousness of my own—so find a seat for yourself."

Jim seated himself on the table.

CHAPTER LXXI.

What an awful dream! and Rachel sat suddenly up and rubbed her eyes, as if she had been in a dream, and she looked about her as if for verification of her thoughts.

It was morning, and she was in her own room, though somehow she could not quite remember how she came there, she did not recollect addressing herself, nor did she recollect coming to her room at all—it must be even late in the morning by the way the sun streamed in, and then she looked at the clock on the mantel—five minutes to ten the hands said.

What was the matter that she should sleep so late? And now it suddenly came to her that her head felt strange, as if there were a pain in it that would not let her think. But she must think, and she must get up; and she threw the bed clothes from her and attempted to rise. Her limbs seemed as little able to obey her will as her mind was, for there was a heaviness and numbness about them that made her dazed, and in greater perplexity than ever she looked again about her.

At that instant the door opened and Sarah's solemn face appeared.

"Oh, Sarah!" Rachel said, and then it all came to her; the scene in Miss Burram's room, and how the nurse made her, Rachel, away, and the nurse made her take some medicine and put her to bed, and she had gone to sleep. So her dream was quite true—Miss Burram was dead. But Sarah reached the bedside, and she was saying in a frightened whisper:

"Me and Mrs. McElvain, to say nothing of Jim, was so anxious to know how you were, Miss Rachel, that I took upon myself to steal in to you when I seen the nurse was with the other nurse, a-talking to the doctor. Last night the nurse said as you'd be all right—that they gave you something to make you have a long sleep, because what you wanted was rest, and this morning she said you was sleeping still, and she didn't think you'd wake for an hour yet—so I'm glad I came, and now that you're awake up, I'll go down and get some breakfast for you."

She turned to go, but Rachel held her, wondering with a kind of dumb terror that Sarah said nothing of her fall; every kind of deed that Miss Burram had ever done for her rose before her, and she said with a burst of tears:

"Oh, Sarah! How can you talk, or think of anything, and Miss Burram dead?"

"Dead!" repeated Sarah. "Miss Burram is not dead. Sure she came to, last night, and the doctor has the greatest hopes of her now. The strange gentleman that came was the means of it—he's some one that Miss Burram used to know, and it was the sight of him that brought her to, and made her scream. Me and Mrs. McElvain heard

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Mama Bourgeuil replied not a word, but looked sadly into her place and tried to conceal the tears which filled her eyes. For two years the same dispute had been going on between the old couple, and it always took place Sunday, the day after the day after their son Edward, who had two years before married against their will, a girl that he had had picked up in the Latin quarter, at a time when he was supposed to be pursuing his law studies. How they loved him, their only child, who had come quite unexpectedly after they had been married ten years, when they had given up all hopes of a family.

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But she could not obey him and from time to time tried to plead the cause of the culprit; but each time with the same result, Bourgeuil always throwing himself into a fury and creating a terrible scene. These two old people who in forty years never had even a reproach for each other, who had lived and labored side by side for thirty years, with scarcely a cloud coming between them, now became almost enemies, or

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