

Agnes Grey

by Anne Bronte

(Adapted book. Upper-Intermediate level)

Chapter 1. The Grey Family

My father, Richard Grey, was a vicar in the north of England, who was respected by everybody who knew him. He lived quite well on a small salary and had a pleasant little house of his own. My mother was the daughter of a rich landowner and she married my father against the wishes of her friends and family. If she became the poor vicar's wife, they told her, she would have to give up her carriage, her lady's maid and the chance to live in a large, beautiful house, A carriage and a maid were certainly nice things to have; but luckily my mother had feet to carry her and hands to dress herself. And a large, beautiful house would be pleasant, but she would rather live in a cottage with Richard Grey than in a palace with any other man in the world.

Her father told her that she could marry the vicar if she wanted to, but that if she did, she would lose her fortune. However, my mother was a strong woman who knew what she wanted. So the couple got married and my mother's fortune was given to her sister. Despite these difficulties and their simple life, I believe that you could search the whole of England and not find a couple who were happier than they were.

My mother gave birth to six children, but my sister Mary and I were the only two that survived the dangers of early childhood. I was six years younger than Mary, so I was always a little spoilt because I was the 'baby' of the family. We lived a very protected life and my sister and I did not go to school. Instead, our mother, who was hardworking and very well educated, taught us at home. Sometimes we went to a tea party at a nearby house or visited our father's parents and other elderly family members. Mostly, however, we heard about the world through the stories our mother told us about her younger days and of carriages,

parties and big elegant houses. While these stories entertained us, they often made me secretly wish that I could see more of the world.

My mother seemed very happy and told her husband that she had everything that she needed in life. However, my father worried that his wife had given up too much in order to marry him. As a result he was always thinking about how he could make more money.

One day, a kind friend suggested to him a way of making a lot of money within just a few weeks. This friend was a merchant, a man who made money by buying and selling goods. If my father lent him some money, he said, he would make them both rich. My father took the chance and gave the man all the money he had. The friendly merchant used the money to buy goods and then arranged for them to be sent abroad on ships to be sold.

My father was excited and so were we all. We were going to be rich! We spent happy hours by the fire talking about what we would do, where we would travel and what we would buy with the money that would surely soon arrive.

The weeks passed but then the terrible news came. The ship, which contained the goods and therefore our fortune, had been caught in a terrible storm. It had sunk to the bottom of the sea along with the goods it carried and the unlucky merchant himself.

I was young and did not understand how serious this loss was, but I could see how it had upset my parents and this worried me. My mother concentrated on taking care of what little money we still had, and on cheering up my father. He, on the other hand, lost all hope and became desperate. He believed that this recent poor decision had made his wife's life even worse. Over time he became ill with the worry of it all and none of us could give him any hope.

We had a pony - a little horse - but we had to sell it. We stopped buying new clothes and we used everything we had as carefully as we possibly could. My father dismissed one of our two servants and my mother and sister began to help with the cooking. I offered to help, too, but although I thought of myself as a young woman, I was still a child in the eyes of my family. My mother would send me away, saying, 'No,

Agnes, there's nothing here you can do. It's much easier for me to do it myself. Go and help your sister.'

Then I would go to my sister and say, 'Mary, Mother says that I should help you.'

To which Mary used to reply, 'No, you are too young to help me, sweet Agnes. Go and play the piano, or play with the cat.' During this difficult time I never once heard my mother complain. When the summer came, though, she and Mary talked about ways in which they could make a little more money. They wanted to give Father a much-needed holiday by the sea.

'I wish I could do something,' I said one day.

'You, Agnes!' they both cried.

'Yes, I've had an idea ...,' I began nervously.

'Really?' said my mother. 'Tell us what it is.'

'I would like to be a governess,' I replied quietly.

My mother said nothing and Mary, who had been holding a book, dropped it in surprise and cried, 'You, Agnes? You want to be a governess?'

'Well, yes. I don't think it's such a strange idea. Surely I could teach little children ... and I think I would enjoy it ... I like children,' I explained. 'Please let me, Mother!'

'My child,' said my mother kindly, 'You have not learnt to take care of yourself yet. Young children need someone who is experienced to look after them.'

'But I am eighteen now,' I told her, 'and I can take care of myself, and others too. You do not know how capable I am, because I haven't had a chance to try. Just let me try, that is all I ask of you.'

At that moment my father came into the room and heard about my idea. He agreed that I was not ready to become a governess and gently said that I was too young to leave home.

The subject was not mentioned again, but I could think of nothing else. How wonderful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; to start a new life; to make my own decisions; to earn my own money, and give some help to my family; to show them what 'little'

Agnes could do. I felt sure that I would be a good governess. Three or four days later I mentioned the idea again to my mother. With some difficulty, I persuaded her to speak to my father. It was not long before my father and sister had warmed to the idea and my mother began to look for a job for me. After a few weeks I was offered the job of taking care of the young family of Mrs Bloomfield, who was a friend of one of our distant family members. The salary was only twenty-five pounds a year and my parents advised me not to take the job. However, I had no other job offers and because I was young and wanted to work, I happily accepted the offer.

Several weeks of preparation followed and I could not wait to start my new job. Finally, September came and my new clothes had been made and my bags had been packed. I had taken my last walk with Mary, I had sung my last song to my father; and I had said goodbye to the little cat. When it was time to go to bed and I saw my empty cupboards, I suddenly felt nervous and wondered if I had made the right decision.

But in the morning I felt excited again. I washed, dressed, ate breakfast and kissed my family goodbye. I climbed up into the small, open carriage and waved to my mother and sister as the carriage began to move away down the hill. Then, and not before then, I burst into tears.

Chapter 2. The Bloomfield Family

The journey was cold and long and it was one o'clock in the afternoon when I arrived at Wellwood House. As the carriage moved through the large gates and the impressive house and gardens came into view, I began to feel very nervous. There was no going back now. How would I introduce myself? What would my new life be like? I hoped that Mrs Bloomfield was a kind, generous woman and that I would get on well with the children.

'Be calm, be calm, whatever happens,' I said to myself as I entered the house and met Mrs Bloomfield for the first time. She was a

tall, serious-looking woman, with thick black hair, cold grey eyes and very pale skin. I was so nervous that I almost forgot to reply when she introduced herself. She showed me my bedroom and then told me to come down for lunch in a few minutes. With some difficulty I found my way into the dining room where some lunch had been put out on a long table. As I ate, she sat opposite me, watching me and asking a few questions. When she spoke, she spoke quite formally, and most of the time I ate in silence.

When I had finished eating, she led me into the sitting room. She rang a bell and when a servant appeared, she asked for the children to be brought to meet me.

‘I think they are clever children,’ said Mrs Bloomfield as we waited for them to arrive, ‘and very keen to learn, especially the little boy; he is generous and always tells the truth.’ I was pleased to hear this good news. ‘His sister, Mary Ann,’ she continued, ‘is generally a very good girl, but you will need to watch her carefully.’ At that moment, my two young pupils came into the room. Master Tom Bloomfield was a handsome, tall boy of about seven with fair hair, blue eyes and a small turned up nose. Mary Ann, who was a year or so younger than her brother, was also a tall girl for her age. She was dark-haired like her mother, but with a round face and pink cheeks.

We spent a few minutes talking and I saw that they seemed to be very confident, lively children. Mrs Bloomfield then suggested that Master Tom should show me where I would teach them and so he led the way to the school room. As soon as we were in the school room the children began to argue with each other and Tom pushed his sister roughly. This was very shocking, but I hoped that in time I would be able to change their behaviour.

Later that evening, after the children had gone to bed, Mrs Bloomfield talked to me again. She told me in great detail about her wonderful children, what they must learn and how I should manage them. At about half-past nine, she invited me to eat a supper of cold meat and bread. I was glad when that was over and I was able to return to my room. Although I really wanted to like her, I could not help

feeling that she was cold, serious and even a little frightening - the very opposite of the kind, gentle woman I had hoped she would be.

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Despite the disappointments of the previous day, I woke up the next morning feeling excited and hopeful. I was going to spend my first morning in the school room with the children. However, the morning turned out to be full of challenges. Tom, although he seemed quite clever, was very lazy. Mary Ann could hardly read at all and kept looking out of the window, or walking away. We had made very little progress by the end of the lesson.

‘Now you must put on your coat,’ Tom told me, ‘I want to show you the garden.’

‘I’m not sure that’s a good idea,’ I told him. ‘It looks like it’s going to rain and...’

‘That doesn’t matter!’ he interrupted. ‘You have to come with us. And I won’t allow any excuses,’ he added rudely. It was our first day together and I did not want to get into an argument, so I agreed to go with the children.

The garden was large and beautiful, but I was not allowed any time to admire it. Instead I was taken to a distant corner of the garden. There Tom showed me different traps he had made to catch birds and other small animals. He proudly told me how he liked to cut the birds up with a knife, or pull off their wings.

‘Don’t you know it is extremely wicked to do those things to animals?’ I cried, shocked by what he had told me.

‘Oh, what nonsense!’ he replied. ‘Father knows what I do to them and he says it’s just what he used to do when he was a boy.’

‘Well, I still think it is wrong,’ I told him. ‘And you will certainly not hurt any animals as long as I have the power to prevent it.’

Next they took me to a pond - a small area of water - in the corner of the garden. Mary Ann started to throw stones into the water. The children’s clothes became wet and dirty and I told them to come away from the pond. But I had no control over them - they did exactly what they wanted to and ignored what I said to them.

After a few minutes of trying to persuade them to leave the pond, I suddenly saw a man riding a horse towards us. He shouted loudly to the children, 'Get out of that water!' then he came towards me. 'I suppose you are Miss Grey,' he said coldly. 'I am surprised that you are allowing them to get their clothes dirty like this. Can't you see that Miss Bloomfield has dirt on her dress? And that Master Bloomfield's socks are wet? I request that in future, you at least keep their clothes clean!' Then he turned and continued his ride up to the house. This must be Mr Bloomfield! I was surprised that he had called his young children 'Miss' and 'Master' and I was shocked that he had not spoken to me in a more polite way.

When the children and I were called into the dining room for lunch, I saw him again. He was quite a short man and was rather thin. He was between thirty and forty years of age: he had a large mouth, pale skin, dull blue eyes, and the sort of hair which is neither fair nor brown. During lunch he complained about the food, said the kitchen servants were lazy and told his wife that she was not even capable of organizing a meal.

'Perhaps, Mr Bloomfield, you will order lunch yourself in future,' she told him, angrily.

Nothing more was said and I was very glad to leave the room with the children. I was not used to hearing people talk to each other in this way. I had never felt so embarrassed and uncomfortable in my life.

In the afternoon I tried to teach Tom and Mary Ann once more, then they took me outside again, then we ate supper together in the school room. Much later, when they had gone down to see their parents, I had some time to myself at last. I sat down and started to write a letter to my lovely family, but the children came back upstairs before I had finished it.

At seven o'clock, I had to put Mary Ann to bed and then I played with Tom until he went to bed at eight. Then I finished my letter and spent some time hanging up my clothes, something I had not yet managed to do. Finally, I got into bed and because I was so tired I fell asleep in just a few minutes.

I did not know it at the time, but this had been a good day compared to many of the days that would follow.

Chapter 3. The Bird's Nest

Teaching and looking after the children became harder, rather than easier, as I got to know them. Master Tom not only refused to be controlled, but tried to control me and his sister. He often refused to do his lessons. Sometimes I had to sit with my chair against the door in order to keep him in the school room. At last, after trying to push me out of the way, and making faces at me, he would finally do his work.

Tom, however, was not as bad a pupil as Mary Ann. If I asked her to read a book or do some writing, she would drop to the floor and yell loudly. She was too heavy for me to pick up, and so she would lie there until the lunch bell meant that she could escape. Then she would jump up with a big smile on her face. She knew she had won.

The children's behaviour meant that it was almost impossible to get them to the dining room at the right time, or make sure they were dressed correctly. Mrs Bloomfield would then give me black looks and Mr Bloomfield would make disparaging comments about me to his wife while I was in the room.

This upset me. I had tried everything I could think of to teach and control the children. In desperation I decided that I should focus on two very important things in order to change their behaviour. I had to be patient and I had to be strict. So I focused on doing this with all of my strength over the coming weeks. However, it did not matter how hard I tried. Their behaviour did not get better.

I will never forget one cold, snowy January afternoon. The children had come into the school room, shouting that they planned 'to be naughty,' and they had done exactly that. While I was holding Tom down on his chair and making him do his work, Mary Ann took my work bag and started to look at what was inside it. When she saw that it only contained my work papers and books, she threw it into the fire! Letting Tom go, I ran to the other side of the room and pulled the bag

out of the fire. Then Tom jumped up from his chair and yelled, 'Let's throw her desk but of the window!' He grabbed my desk, which contained my letters and the little money I owned. I quickly went to rescue it. Both children then ran away from me, out of the house and into the snow, where they rolled about, shouting with happiness.

I stood in shock, watching them. While I was wondering what to do next, I heard a voice behind me.

'What on earth are the children doing?' It was Mr Bloomfield.

'I can't get them to come inside, sir,' I said, turning round.

'Come in now, you dirty brats; or I'll hit both of you!' he yelled. The children ran into the house. 'There, you see! They come at the first word!' he commented.

'Yes, when you tell them what to do, sir,' I told him.

'And it's very strange that you don't seem to be able to control them, isn't it?' he said. 'You're meant to be their governess.'

It was true: I could not control them. At least not without hitting them, or saying that I was going to hit them, which was what their father did. But I felt sure that hurting them was not the right thing to do.

Later that evening, just before I entered the dining room, I heard Mr Bloomfield telling his wife about the afternoon's events. 'Goodness!' I heard Mrs Bloomfield say, 'Do you really think the children are safe with her? I'm beginning to wonder...'

I heard no more, but that was enough.

From that day forward Mr Bloomfield would often come and check on the children while we were in the school room or in the garden. Of course, Tom and Mary Ann were always doing something they should not be doing. If I was quiet at the moment Mr Bloomfield appeared, he said that I was not doing enough to control them; if I was telling them off, he complained that I was being too strict. I could not win.

One day in May, Tom came out of the bushes in the garden carrying a nest of young birds, with Mary Ann running behind him. He put the nest on the ground and stood over it with his legs wide apart, his hands pushed into the pockets of his trousers. 'You're not having any of

the chicks, Mary Ann! They are all mine and I'm going to take them out and pull their legs off!' Tom cried.

'But, Tom,' I said calmly, 'I will not allow you to hurt birds. The nest must be carried back to the place you took it from.'

'No! I won't move from here! And I won't tell you where we found them!' he replied.

'Then if you don't change your mind and tell me,' I replied, 'I will carry them back into the bushes and leave them there, even though their mother may not find them.'

When Tom still refused to return the birds, I decided that I must do what I had said I would do. I picked up the nest and walked quickly into the bushes and trees nearby. Luckily, Tom did not attempt to follow me, but starting yelling loudly instead. I walked until I was far away from the main garden, then I pushed the nest into a bush.

When I returned to the garden I saw that Mr Bloomfield had appeared and Tom had begun to angrily tell him what I had done. Mary Ann stood nearby, crying.

'I see,' said Mr Bloomfield, when Tom had finished his story. 'Never mind, Tom, I'll find you some more chicks tomorrow and you can do what you want with them.'

Feeling anger rising up inside me, I turned to Mr Bloomfield and told him, 'And if Master Bloomfield tries to hurt them, then I will feel it is my duty to take those away from him, too.'

'Will you?' he said and then he looked at me for a long moment before walking away with the children towards the house.

When I reached the house myself, it was clear that Tom had told his mother about the nest.

'I am sorry, Miss Grey, that you stopped Master Bloomfield from enjoying himself,' she said coldly.

'When Master Bloomfield's enjoyment involves injuring animals,' I answered, 'I think it is my duty to stop it. I believe that it is wrong to hurt animals for our enjoyment.'

'But I don't think,' she said, becoming impatient, 'that a tiny animal is more important than my son's enjoyment. Do you?'

I took a breath and thought carefully before I spoke. ‘For the child’s own education, he should be taught to be respectful and kind,’ I answered, as politely as I could.

‘Oh! Of course!’ she replied, ‘But respect and kindness are for people, not animals. And I do not think that you have shown much respect and kindness to my son by taking away something he had spent a long time looking for.’

I decided it was best to say nothing more. This was the nearest I had come to having an argument with Mrs Bloomfield. It was also one of the longest conversations I had ever shared with her. Not long after this Mrs Bloomfield told me that after the summer I would be no longer needed. She explained that while my general behaviour had been acceptable, she and Mr Bloomfield felt that the children had made very little progress since my arrival. Although the children were more intelligent than most children of a similar age, she told me, their school work was a disappointment and they were not well behaved. She believed that this was because I had not been patient and strict enough with them.

But these were exactly the things that I had been focusing on with all my strength! I wanted to tell her how hard I had been trying, but I began to feel upset. I was worried that I would start to cry. So I said nothing and that is how I was dismissed from my first job.

What would my family think of me? After everything I had told them, I had not been able to keep my job as a governess. However, as upset and disappointed as I was, I knew that all parents were not like Mr and Mrs Bloomfield, and all children were not like theirs. Surely the next family would be different, and any change must be for the better. There was no doubt that I had learnt a lot at Welwood House. I felt confident that I could be more successful with a new employer.

Chapter 4. Horton Lodge

I returned to my parents’ house and for a few months I enjoyed a much more relaxing life at home. However, it was not long before I was

ready to look for another job. After a few weeks of searching I was offered a job as a governess for the family of Mr Murray. The family lived at Horton Lodge, which was a large house about seventy miles away from our village. I had never travelled further than twenty miles from home before, so I was excited by the idea of seeing a little more of the world. The Murray children were a little older than those of the Bloomfield family and so I hoped that teaching them would be less challenging. In addition, my salary was going to be fifty pounds a year so I felt sure that I would be able to send a good amount of money back home to help my family.

It was decided that I would start my new job at the end of January. When at last the morning came, it was a wild, stormy day and it was snowing heavily. My journey was long and difficult and it was dark when I finally arrived at the impressive front door of Horton Lodge. A servant invited me inside and took me straight to the school room, which was at the back of the house. There, two young ladies were sitting by the fire. I supposed that they must be my new pupils. After we had been formally introduced, the older of the two girls spoke.

‘Miss Matilda, why don’t you show the new governess her room? I’m sure she is cold and tired after her journey,’ she said to the other girl.

Miss Matilda was a strong-looking girl of about fourteen. She stood up and, a little shyly, asked me to follow her. She took me to a room at the very top of the house. Although small, the room was comfortable enough and I was pleased to be able to take off my wet coat. Matilda left me alone to organise my things and change into dry clothes. A few minutes later, the maid brought me some tea and bread. Feeling a little sad and lonely, I then sat down on the bed and cried.

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The next morning I woke up feeling nervous, but also curious to know what my new life would be like in this house. I went down to the school room to begin what would be the first day of two years of teaching the girls.

I do not want to bore you with all the details of the first year or two with this family. I will simply describe the family and give you a general idea of this time.

The head of the family, Mr Murray, was a tall, well-built man who I did not see very often. Apart from going to church on Sundays, he spent his time horse-riding, fox-hunting, laughing loudly and yelling at the servants.

Mrs Murray was not an unattractive lady. She was about forty years of age and she certainly enjoyed her food. Her main interests seemed to be either holding or going to parties and wearing the very latest fashions. When I met her for the first time, which was not until half way through my first day, she told me what my duties were going to be.

‘And remember,’ she said after she had explained the importance of good manners and not working the girls too hard, ‘that it is best to be gentle with them.’ While Mrs Murray talked a lot about the comfort and happiness of her children, she never once talked about my comfort and happiness.

The eldest daughter, Miss Rosalie Murray, was about sixteen years old. She was tall and slim with pale blue eyes and long fair hair. She really was a very beautiful girl. If only I could say such good things about her character! To begin with she was cold and unfriendly. And, rather like her mother, she was generally only interested in how she looked and in the idea that she might in the future marry someone rich.

The fourth person in the family, Miss Matilda, was a tomboy and was very different from her sister. She did not care how she looked and was much more interested in riding her pony or playing with the family’s dogs. She was not a good student. She often did her school work too quickly, made little effort and would run outside as soon as she saw the chance. Once or twice I told her off for not making any effort. However, her mother became so angry with me that I decided that it was best to allow Matilda to do as little as she always had.

You may want to know how I spent a typical day at Horton Lodge. This is not easy to describe. I ate all of my meals in the school

room with my pupils, at whatever times suited them each day. Their hours of study were managed in a similar way. Sometimes the girls decided that they wanted to get all of their studying finished before breakfast and I would be woken up by the maid at half-past five in the morning. On one of these occasions I ran downstairs and waited, only to be told that they had changed their minds and had stayed in bed. On other days they would simply decide that it was a sunny day and they did not want to study at all. When they were in the school room they were lazy and often rude.

The servants, who saw how the parents and children of the family showed me so little respect, did not make much more of an effort themselves. I sometimes felt disappointed and upset by the life I led at Horton Lodge. But, with time and patience, things did get a little better. Rosalie became a little more friendly. When she was not being difficult she could be fun and pleasant to be with and I grew to like her. Sometimes, when she forgot for a moment that I was the daughter of a poor vicar, I think she may even have loved and respected me.

What is more, the house was attractive and spacious and was better in every way than Mr Bloomfield's house. It had a large garden and was in beautiful countryside. Every Sunday morning the whole family and I would leave the house and go out in the carriage. We travelled through this beautiful scenery and along the two miles of country roads to the village church.

Chapter 5. The Ball

Not long after Rosalie's eighteenth birthday, the time came for her to be formally introduced to society. She had now finished her education and was old enough to look for a husband. Mrs Murray was clearly very excited about this fact and had decided to hold a ball for her daughter at Horton Lodge. It was going to be held on 3rd January and all the rich people (and especially the men) for twenty miles around were invited. Months of preparation began.

One evening, about a month before the ball, I was sitting reading a long letter from my sister, Mary. Rosalie came into the room and said, ‘Miss Grey, put that boring letter away because I want to talk to you about my ball. I don’t want you to go home over Christmas. You must stay here and help me plan!’

‘But I’m afraid I can’t stay,’ I replied, ‘I very much miss my family, and this letter that you call “boring” tells me that my sister is going to get married. I want to be at home with her to help her prepare.’

‘Oh!’ cried Rosalie. ‘Who is she going to marry?’

‘Mr Richardson, a vicar who lives just a few miles away,’ I explained.

‘Is he rich?’ she wanted to know.

‘No, not really,’ I said.

‘Is he handsome?’ she asked.

‘Not really,’ I told her.

‘Then what sort of a house does he own?’

‘A quiet little vicarage,’ I said, ‘with a small old-fashioned garden and-’

‘Oh stop! I don’t want to hear any more,’ she cried, ‘How on earth can she live there?’

‘I expect that she’ll not only manage to live there, hut will be very happy,’ I told her. ‘You did not ask me if he is a good, kind or wise man. I could have answered yes to all those things.’

From this conversation alone it was clear to see what Rosalie considered important, and the type of man she wished to marry.

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When I returned to Horton Lodge after the Christmas holidays, Rosalie and Matilda began to argue about who should tell me their news first. Rosalie, of course, could not wait to tell me about the ball. Matilda was not in the least interested in hearing about her sister’s party, but wanted to tell me about her new pony. Matilda had the loudest voice and so it was she who won the argument.

After hearing everything about the pony, including how high it had jumped and how well Matilda rode it, I heard every detail of the ball

from Rosalie. Of all the women at the party, she had worn the most beautiful dress, she had danced the most elegantly and she had attracted the most attention. I could only take her word for how the evening had gone, but one thing seemed clear to me. She had certainly flirted with almost all of the men who had been invited. She told me about two lords (who unfortunately were already married) and there was Sir Thomas Ashby (who was very rich, but ugly). Then there was Sir Meltham (who was good-looking, but too old) and the younger of his two sons, Harry Meltham (who was good-looking, but too young). There were a few I had not heard of before and then finally there was Mr Hatfield, the local vicar. While he was not impressively rich or from a well-known family, Rosalie seemed to find him acceptable, perhaps because he had been chosen for his job by God himself.

‘And which of them do you like the best?’ I asked her once she had finished naming them all.

‘Oh, I hate them all,’ Rosalie replied coldly. ‘But old Sir Meltham is the most handsome and the funniest, Mr Hatfield is the most intelligent and interesting and Sir Thomas the most wicked. If I had to choose one of them, I suppose I would have to choose Sir Thomas Ashby.’

‘But why would you choose him if you hate him and he is wicked?’ I asked her.

‘Oh, I don’t mind his being wicked - that would make him more fun,’ she explained. ‘And as for hating him, that doesn’t really matter, because I would be Lady Ashby of Ashby Park, in that wonderful house! But the truth is that I would much rather remain single because I want to really enjoy myself. I would love to spend years and years flirting with anyone I want to. Then, when I’ve broken ten thousand hearts, I will stop. I will find one man who is rich, generous and from an excellent family. And I will escape all the black looks that I will be getting from people by marrying him.’

Chapter 6. The New Curate

The next Sunday, I accompanied the whole family to church as usual. Rosalie was very keen to go as she had heard that there was a new curate.

As we left the church later that morning she said, 'Well, Miss Grey. What did you think of the new curate - Mr Edward Weston?'

'It is hard to say,' I replied, 'since I have seen him, but I haven't yet spoken to him.'

'Well, no. But aren't his clothes old-fashioned? And isn't he ugly?' she asked.

'No, he didn't seem unattractive to me,' I replied. I thought for a moment and then added, 'and when he read to us from the Bible, I thought that he read very well. He seemed more interesting and more sincere than Mr Hatfield.'

'Well, anyone can read from the Bible, can't they? But did you see how he walked out of the church?' she said. 'He walked along, not looking left or right, as if there was nobody there apart from himself!'

'Ah, I see,' I said and smiled. 'You mean to say that he made no effort to look at you, or come and speak to you.'

'Well,' she said and gave me a black look, 'I suppose he's good enough for this place. But have you seen how Mr Hatfield comes straight to speak to father and me before anyone else? And he always makes sure that he's waiting outside to help me climb into the carriage.'

'Yes,' I answered. Then I silently thought that it was not good that the vicar had ignored everyone else in the church to go to speak to the Murray family so quickly. I was also offended that he had helped the ladies to get into the carriage and then had closed the door and walked away. He had left me to open the door again and climb up by myself.

The following Sunday we went to church as usual. This time we heard Mr Weston preach the sermon. I thought that his sermon was well written and he preached it in a warm and simple way. I was pleased that it was the opposite of Mr Hatfield's sermons, which were usually boring and full of self-importance.

When we left the church this time, it was young Harry Meltham who quickly came to talk to the girls and to help them get into the

carriage. He did not help me, but at least he looked at me and smiled as I climbed in. I then spent the whole of the return journey listening to Rosalie and Matilda argue over which of the two of them Mr Meltham preferred.

My life was easier now that I now only had one pupil and I therefore did not have to suffer the girls' arguments so frequently.

It also meant that I had a little more free time to look around the family's estate. On several occasions I had gone with my pupils to visit the poor workers who lived in the estate cottages. We had taken them food, medicines and a little money. I had become friendly with one or two of the cottagers and now I started to visit them on my own.

On one bright day near the end of February I went to one of the cottages to see Nancy Brown, a widow - a woman whose husband had died - who had been ill and could not see very well. She loved books and so I went to read to her. The cottage was small and dark, but Nancy had a small fire burning and she kept the place as clean and as tidy as she could. When I had finished reading to her, she spoke to me. 'Miss Grey, what do you think of Mr Weston, the new curate?'

'I don't know,' I replied, a little surprised by the suddenness of the question. 'I think he preaches very well.'

'Yes, he does. And he talks well too!' she added.

'Oh, does he? I haven't had a chance to speak to him yet,' I explained.

'He's such a patient, thoughtful and generous man,' she said, smiling. 'He comes to see me a lot more than Mr Hatfield used to. Mr Hatfield just used to come to tell me that I had to go to church. Once when he came he kicked my cat. But Mr Weston ... he reads to me, and sits and listens to my troubles and talks to me with kind words. And he even lets my cat sit on him!'

'And how often does he come?' I wanted to know.

'Oh, every few days,' she said and then went on, 'and he goes to see all the other sick cottagers, too. I heard that he spent his own money on coal for one family and took food to another.'

I was surprised and pleased to hear this news. I knew that Mr Hatfield, the vicar, rarely came to the cottages and was not interested in the cottagers' needs. But Mr Weston ... well, he really did seem like a breath of fresh air. For two years I had been with silly girls and people who thought that parties and marriage were the only important things in life. At last someone had arrived in the village who would rather spend his money on helping others, than on buying the latest fashions. I very much hoped that I would soon be able to talk to him myself.

Chapter 7. Chance Meetings

When we were in church the following Sunday I looked at Mr Weston in a different light. He was quite a short man, with brown hair and a square face. He was not handsome, but he was not, in my opinion, ugly either. When I had first heard him preach, I thought that he was intelligent and sensible but also quite serious. Now I knew that he was also truly generous, gentle and caring and this made him seem more attractive to me as a result. I started to look forward to seeing him every Sunday at church.

A few weeks later I went to see Nancy again. I stayed with her a little longer than usual because her cat had been missing for a couple of days. I tried to tell her that the cat would surely return and that it was probably just out hunting, but Nancy was sad and worried. However, just as I was about to leave there was a knock at the door. The door then opened and in walked Mr Weston, who was smiling and carrying Nancy's cat!

'Here you are, Nancy,' he said warmly and gave the cat to her. 'I told you I would find him.' Then he smiled at me and said, 'I do hope that you are not planning to leave now, Miss Grey. I'm afraid that it has just started to rain.'

Before I could speak, Nancy had pulled another chair near the fire and said, 'You must both stay here by the fire until the rain has stopped. There's plenty of room for us all.'

We sat together as Nancy thanked Mr Weston several times, and Mr Weston explained how he had found the cat. After a few minutes of conversation, Mr Weston said that he was very pleased to have returned the cat, but that he must now go and visit another neighbour. He politely said goodbye and then left. I had very much enjoyed my visit to Nancy's cottage despite, or perhaps because of, the rain.

* * *

Rosalie was now so keen to flirt with as many men as possible that she usually went to church twice on a Sunday, Happily for me, I was always expected to accompany her. Often, if the weather was good, both she and her sister would walk home instead of taking the carriage. Rosalie preferred to do this as there was always the chance that a man would offer to walk some of the way home with her.

On one sunny day near the end of March I accompanied the girls, and three of their admirers, on one of their walks back from church. I felt uncomfortable on these walks - I did not want to walk next to them and be ignored by them, but neither did I want to walk behind them like a lonely servant. Instead, I pretended to study flowers at the side of the road so that I had an excuse to walk behind them on my own.

As I was walking I saw some yellow primroses growing high on the top of a bank that was covered in grass. These small, beautiful flowers reminded me of my garden at home, where lots of these flowers grew each spring. I wanted to pick some of the flowers to take with me. I started to climb the bank, but found that it was too difficult for me to climb easily.

At that moment I heard someone walking behind me, and a warm, well-known voice suddenly said, 'Allow me to pick them for you, Miss Grey.' Within a few moments the flowers had been picked and were in my hand. It was Mr Weston, of course! Who else would make the effort to do something so thoughtful for me, an unimportant governess?

I was not used to anyone in the village being so kind to me and I felt very grateful. I thanked him nervously and began to walk down the country road towards Rosalie, Matilda and their group.

‘Your young ladies have left you alone,’ he commented as he began to walk next to me.

‘Yes, they are busy with more interesting people,’ I replied. ‘Then slow down a little. If I were you I wouldn’t go so quickly to catch them up he said and smiled.

For a few moments we walked in silence and I could not think of anything to say to him. Then he spoke and asked me if I especially liked primroses.

‘Oh, yes. I love them,’ I said, ‘I miss my family so much and primroses remind me of home.’

‘How lucky you are, Miss Grey, to have a home that you love and know that you can return to,’ he told me.

‘Yes,’ I agreed. ‘It gives me so much comfort that I don’t think I could live without it.’

‘I’m sure you could,’ he said thoughtfully. ‘The human heart is much stronger than we might think. You might be miserable if you lost your home, but you would survive and you would be all right.’ He was quiet for a moment before continuing quietly, ‘Take my word for it because I speak from experience. There was a time when I, like you, believed that a home and family were the only things that made life bearable. But both of my parents have now died and I no longer have a home. All I have are two rented rooms in this village. And yet not only have I survived, but I still have hope.’

‘And you don’t know what happiness there may be in the future for you,’ I said quickly, ‘you are still young.’

‘I am already very happy,’ he replied, ‘because I know that I can be useful and help people who are less fortunate than me.’ When the walk was finished I could not stop thinking about Mr Weston. He seemed such a sensitive, caring, thoughtful man. I felt very sorry for him because he had no mother, no father and no real home. Perhaps this was the reason why he often looked so serious. But I also thought that, over the months, he would surely make friends in the village. If he wanted to he could make a home for himself and in time he might meet a woman. Someone as honest and as good as him, who he could many and share

his new home with. What a happy life they could lead together and how lucky that woman would be...

I put the primroses in some water in my room and looked at them every day. When they finally began to die, I took one of them and placed it between the pages of a large book so that it would dry. I still have that dried flower today, and I plan to keep it forever.

Chapter 8. Mr Hatfield

The following day was as sunny as the previous one. I spent the first part of the morning trying to teach Matilda, who was in a terrible mood because she wanted to go outside and ride her pony. After just a couple of hours she gave up and said that she was going to play with the dogs. When she had left I started to draw. Rosalie had gone out that morning to enjoy a quiet walk and to sit and read her book in the fields. She had told me to finish a drawing that she herself had started several days earlier. At my feet lay a small dog with rough hair. The dog belonged to Matilda, but she hated the animal and said that it was not well behaved. It really was quite a good dog, but she said that it was not even clever enough to know who its owner was.

The truth was that to begin with she had played with the dog all the time, but she had soon got tired of having to look after it. Then, of course, the job became mine. Because I was the person who gave Snap food and took him for walks, he grew to Love me. I became very fond of him too. Matilda, seeing that the dog preferred to be with me than with her, decided she did not like him and often said that she might sell him.

While I was sitting like this trying to finish Rosalie's drawing, Mrs Murray suddenly came into the room.

'Miss Grey,' she began, 'How on earth can you sit inside drawing on such a wonderful day as this?' Of course, I would not have been doing this for my own pleasure, but Mrs Murray did not understand that. 'Why don't you go outside with the young ladies?' she added.

‘I think, Madam,’ I replied, ‘that Miss Murray is out reading somewhere and Miss Matilda is spending time with the dogs.’

‘Well, I think if Matilda spent more time here, in the classroom with you, she wouldn’t need to spend so much time with those silly dogs!’ she said. ‘And if you were a little more cheerful and friendly towards Rosalie, then perhaps she wouldn’t spend so much time walking around the fields with a book in her hand,’ she added. Then, after a pause, ‘And why does she like to be on her own so much?’

‘She says that she likes to be alone when she has a new book to read,’ I explained.

‘But why can’t she read it in the garden? Why should she go into the fields? And why does she so often seem to bump into Mr Hatfield when she is out?’ Mrs Murray was full of questions now. ‘And I’m sure I’ve just seen him from my window, this very minute, walking very quickly in the direction of that field where she often sits!’ she cried. ‘You should know exactly where she is at all times. Please go and see if she is there,’ she continued. ‘It is not right for a young lady to be walking alone like that. Any man at all could approach her and talk to her! And she is often far too friendly with them.’

As Mrs Murray had suggested, I found Rosalie walking by the fields with Mr Hatfield. As I got near them I thought that Rosalie certainly did look elegant as she smiled and chatted to Mr Hatfield. She was walking slowly under the trees, with her closed book in one hand, a flower in the other hand and her long dress moving gently with the light wind. Snap, running ahead of me, interrupted the romantic moment by grabbing her dress in his teeth and pulling at it. This carried on for a moment until Mr Hatfield kicked the dog. Snap ran back to me and as I walked forward to touch him I heard Mr Hatfield speak.

‘When will I see you again, Miss Murray?’ he asked. He had realised that my arrival meant that the time for him to leave had come.

‘At church, I suppose,’ Rosalie replied, ‘unless your work brings you here again, at the exact moment that I happen to be walking in this field.’

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I could always manage to have business here, if I knew exactly when and where to find you.’

‘Oh,’ she said, smiling flirtatiously, ‘I couldn’t possibly know today what I might be doing tomorrow!’

‘Then let me have that flower you are holding, to comfort me and remind me of you,’ he said, half joking and half serious. He reached his hand out to take the flower.

‘No,’ she said and moved the flower away. ‘I won’t give you the flower.’

‘Oh, please do!’ he cried, ‘I will be a miserable man if you don’t. Don’t be so wicked to me. Why say no for something which is so easily given, yet would mean so much to me? Please!’ He could not have sounded more desperate had he been begging someone to save his life!

Rosalie was clearly enjoying the power she had over this man. After a few moments, she finally said, ‘Oh, here then,’ and gave the flower to him. ‘Take it and go!’

He received the gift happily, said something quietly into her ear that made her laugh and go red in the face, then he left.

‘I’m so glad you came,’ Rosalie said to me when he had gone. ‘I was beginning to think he would never leave! He’s always coming here, pretending that his work for the church has brought him out this way.’

‘Well,’ I began, ‘your mother doesn’t want you to go beyond the garden without someone like me to accompany you and fight off all the men. She saw Mr Hatfield walking towards the fields and sent me out to take care of you straight away.’

‘Oh, as if I couldn’t take care of myself!’ she cried. ‘She was telling me to keep away from Mr Hatfield the other day. But I wouldn’t fall in love with him, or with anyone! I hate the word ‘love’. I might prefer one man to another, but even then I would never prefer Mr Hatfield. I like talking to him because he’s clever and funny, but I’m not at all interested in him - he hasn’t got any money! But I must have someone to flirt with and he’s the only person who comes here. When we go out, Mother will only let me flirt with Sir Thomas Ashby because

the plan is that I will marry him and it's not good for me to be seen with other men. But he's boring and not half as nice as Mr Hatfield.'

'Is he?' I asked, 'then why do you want to marry him?'

'Well, it doesn't matter that he's boring,' she replied, 'he's rich, and he'll be all right when he's married. I just wish he wasn't so ugly, but then there aren't very many men to choose from here in the countryside.'

'But wouldn't Mr Hatfield be a better choice?' I asked.

'Well, he would be if he was the lord of Ashby Park, but he isn't. And the fact is that I must have Ashby Park and it doesn't matter who I share it with.'

I was shocked by Rosalie's attitude. 'But Mr Hatfield clearly thinks that you like him!' I said. 'He will be very disappointed when he realizes he is wrong.'

'Well, it is his own fault for making assumptions about what I might feel. Why on earth does he think that I like him? In fact, I'm looking forward to seeing his face when I tell him that I don't,' she replied.

There was nothing I could say that would change her views. Three days went by before Rosalie went to the fields again. I went with her, but after walking for half an hour or so she suddenly asked me to go back to the house to get her book for her. When I returned, some time later, she ran towards me. Her cheeks were pink and she was waving to me.

'Miss Grey!' she called, 'I have some exciting news! Just after you left to get my book, Mr Hatfield suddenly appeared from nowhere. He chatted for a while and was very polite and said all sorts of things about me. But he is so full of himself! You won't believe this ... he actually asked me to marry him!'

'And you ...' I started. I was worried about what she was about to tell me.

'I stood tall and proud and said how shocked I was that he had proposed,' Rosalie explained, 'I said that surely he had seen nothing in my behaviour to make him think that I would want to marry him. You

should have seen him! His face went white. I told him that I did not want to marry him and that my parents would never agree to it. He looked terribly sad and I almost felt sorry for him. Then he seemed angry. He told me that he loved me greatly and that I had broken his heart. That I had flirted with him and played with him like a toy without any thought of marrying him. Can you believe that he said that?’

I certainly did believe it and I agreed with Mr Hatfield, but I said nothing.

‘Then he asked me to keep his proposal to me a secret and tell no one,’ she went on. ‘He said that if I didn’t keep it a secret he would tell people what I had done. He said no one would want to marry me if they knew how badly I had behaved! So I promised and then he left.’

‘But you have broken your promise already!’ I said, truly shocked by how she was talking.

‘Oh, but it’s only you. I know you won’t tell anyone,’ she said. ‘And I will tell my mother, just to show her how wrong she was when she thought that I might fall for him.’

Suddenly I realized why Rosalie seemed so happy - she could now prove to her mother that she had been wrong. I was shocked by how she had behaved toward Mr Hatfield and by how much pleasure she seemed to get from seeing the poor man suffer. The only positive thing I saw in the situation was that Mr Hatfield had escaped what surely would have been a very unhappy life with Rosalie.

Chapter 9. The Change of Heart

‘Oh! I wish Mr Hatfield hadn’t proposed so soon!’ said Rosalie to Matilda the next day at four o’clock, She was looking out through the window at the fields. ‘Now there is no reason to go out and nothing to look forward to,’ she added.

‘It’s a pity you were so hard on him,’ said Matilda. ‘He’ll never come again and I think that you actually rather liked him, I hoped that you would marry him and leave all the other men free for me to flirt with.’

‘Well, I’m sorry to lose Mr Hatfield, I have to admit. But there will be other men like him, I suppose. It’s Sunday tomorrow.,. I wonder how he’ll look and whether he’ll be able to read his sermon. He’ll probably have to pretend he is ill and make Mr Weston give the service.’

‘No, he won’t,’ said Matilda. ‘He’s a stronger man than that.’ Rosalie was a little offended by Matilda’s comment, but it seemed that Matilda was right. Mr Hatfield spoke during the church service as normal. But he never once looked towards where the Murray family were sitting and he did not leave the church until we had gone. Rosalie was clearly disappointed that he had not looked at her once. However, she said, it proved that he was thinking of her all the time, or he would have looked at her if only by chance. But if he had looked at her, she would have said it was because he thought her so beautiful that he had no choice.

After a few more days of being bored at home, Rosalie asked me to walk with her into the village. She said that she needed some new pencils for her drawing. Really I think she wanted an excuse to see Mr Hatfield, or flirt with some other men. I have to admit that on the way I also started to wonder whether we might see Mr Weston in the village.

While Rosalie was in the shop buying her pencils she made me stand by the door to tell her if anyone interesting passed by. No one did, apart from two of Rosalie’s friends, who stopped and chatted to her for a while when she came out. While they were talking I walked a little way down the street to look in a nearby shop. After only a few minutes, Mr Weston appeared beside me.

‘You are alone again, Miss Grey!’ he said.

‘Yes, but only for a few minutes while Miss Murray talks to her friends,’ I told him.

‘But aren’t they your friends, too?’ he asked.

‘No,’ I replied, ‘I don’t really have any friends here in Horton.’

We stood for some time talking in a friendly way. We discussed all sorts of things and he asked me what type of books I liked to read. He listened carefully to what I said, asked thoughtful questions and seemed interested in my answers. Why would he be interested in what I

liked to read and in what I thought and felt? My heart started to beat faster when I thought about the answer to that question.

Soon Rosalie arrived and saw that I was talking to Mr Weston. Rather than being cold to him, as I expected, she smiled and talked to him with unusual cheerfulness. The three of us began to walk along the country road towards Horton Lodge. Before long Rosalie was talking to Mr Weston in such a way that there was no space in the conversation for me. I started to feel upset by this as I listened to her speak so confidently to him. She smiled at him, laughed at what he said and swung her fair hair from side to side. After a while the road divided so we said goodbye to Mr Weston and turned towards Horton Lodge.

‘I thought I could do it!’ cried Rosalie once we were some distance away.

‘Do what?’ I asked.

‘I have shot him through the heart,’ she said. ‘He will go home and think of nothing but me.’

‘How do you know?’ I questioned.

‘Oh, there were many things that gave it away,’ she told me, ‘but especially the way that he looked at me when he said goodbye to us. It was such a gentle, caring look. Ha! He’s not quite as stupid as I thought!’

I did not answer. My heart felt as if it was in my throat. I was worried that if I spoke I would cry. ‘Please, please do not let this happen,’ I said silently to myself, ‘for his sake, not mine.’ As we continued the walk back to the house all I could give were one- word answers to Rosalie’s cheerful chatter. I was in shock and I wanted to go straight to my room and cry.

* * *

The next Sunday was one of the greyest days of April, with dark clouds and heavy rain showers. I went to church with Rosalie and despite the recent conversation between Rosalie and Mr Weston, I was still very much looking forward to seeing him and hearing him preach the sermon.

It was raining heavily and as we were leaving the church Rosalie said that she wanted to wait inside the door for the carriage. Of course, a few moments later Mr Weston came to the door and Rosalie started a conversation with him. She asked him if he would come and see a young girl who was ill and who lived in one of the estate cottages. He promised that he would go to see her the next day.

'And what time do you think you might go to see her?' asked Rosalie. 'I'm sure her mother would like to know so that she can tidy up the house and make you feel welcome. Perhaps I could come and introduce you to them.'

Rosalie, who usually only thought of herself, had suddenly become helpful and generous.

Mr Weston said that he would try to be there at eleven o'clock in the morning. I felt sure that this was just an excuse for her to meet him again. The carriage had now arrived and the footman was waiting with an open umbrella to help Rosalie get into the carriage. Straight away Mr Weston stepped forward and offered to cover me with his umbrella.

'No, thank you. I don't mind the rain,' I said. I always said the most stupid things when I felt shy and did not have much time to think!

'But you don't actually like the rain, I suppose?' he replied, with a smile that showed me that he was not offended.

I could not disagree with that comment and so I allowed him to cover me with his umbrella as I walked to the carriage. He put out his hand to help me climb up the steps. Then he looked directly into my eyes and smiled as he closed the little door behind me. It was only a small smile, and it was only for a moment, but I saw in it, or I thought I saw in it, a meaning of great importance. It gave me more hope than I had ever had before that he might care about me.

The next morning, Rosalie came into the school room.

'Matilda, I want you to go for a walk with me around eleven o'clock today,' she said.

I remembered that that was the time Mr Weston was going to visit the cottagers.

‘Oh, I can’t possibly go for a walk, I’m busy,’ said Matilda, ‘Miss Grey must go with you.’

‘No, I want you to come,’ said Rosalie and explained why in a whisper, so Matilda agreed to go.

That night at dinner, the girls told me about their walk. They had bumped into Mr Weston, and had a long enjoyable walk with him. They found him surprisingly pleasant and interesting. And he had clearly enjoyed walking with them too, they said.

Chapter 10. Hope is Lost

A few weeks later Rosalie went to a party that she had been looking forward to since the winter. It was a ball at Ashby Park and she wore an elegant dress for the occasion. Early the following morning she came to tell me her news. Sir Thomas had proposed to her at the ball, just as she and her mother had hoped and planned. Rosalie was very pleased that she was going to become Lady Ashby and Ashby Park would be hers. She also loved the idea of a big wedding, an impressive party and a honeymoon - a special holiday after the wedding - that would be spent abroad. However, the one thing that she seemed disappointed about was the date of the wedding. It was planned to take place in only six weeks’ time, on 1st June. This meant that she only had a few weeks more to flirt with other men and enjoy being free.

During this time she took every chance to meet Mr Weston and tried every way she could to make him interested in her. She started to visit the poor cottagers, simply because she knew that she would bump into him there. Of course, she never asked me to go with her. She persuaded Matilda to go with her instead as she had done that first morning. She made sure that I stayed at home by asking me to copy out a piece of music or finish a drawing for her. I could not understand why she was doing this. If someone had told me how she was behaving, I would not have believed it. But I saw it with my own eyes and suffered from it too.

During those six weeks I was only able to go to church once or twice. Rosalie and Matilda found any excuse for me to stay at home - I was ill or had some work to finish in the school room. On these days, when they returned home, they would sometimes tell me about the conversations they had had with Mr Weston.

‘He asked if you were ill, Miss Grey,’ said Matilda one day, ‘and wondered why he never saw you with us any more. So we told him you were very well, but that you just didn’t want to come to church and that you preferred reading your books at home to going out.’

I wondered what on earth he must think of me, but there was no point in arguing with Rosalie and Matilda. And if I disagreed too strongly with what they had said, then they would surely realise how much I liked and respected Mr Weston. So I said nothing and kept my feelings for him a secret. I tried to feel better by telling myself that Rosalie would soon be married and gone. In a few weeks I would be able to spend the holidays at home.

During this time I heard that Mr Weston and Mr Hatfield could not agree on anything. This did not surprise me as they were as different from each other as two men could be. But I was shocked to hear that because of this, Mr Weston was soon going to move to a different job in another place. What if he had left Horton by the time I returned in the autumn? I could not stop thinking about him. It seemed that I may not ever see him again and this made me feel desperate and alone.

There were two other things that added to my problems at this time, one small and one much more serious. I was told that Snap, my rough but bright-eyed little friend, was going to be taken away from me and given to someone in the village to look after. The second thing was that each time I received a letter from my sister Mary, she told me that my father’s health was a little worse. This worried me very much. He had not been at all well the last time I had seen him. I could not help feeling that something terrible was going to happen.

Chapter 11. Celebration and Sadness

The first day of June arrived and Miss Rosalie Murray became Lady Ashby. She certainly looked beautiful on her wedding day. After returning from the church she came running into the school room to see me.

‘Miss Grey, I am Lady Ashby!’ she said excitedly, ‘It is done, there is no going back now! I’ve come to say goodbye because I am going on my honeymoon now - I’m going to Paris ... Rome ... Naples ... Switzerland ... London ... Oh! I will be away for months and see and do so much before I see you again! Goodbye - the carriage is waiting and they are calling me.’ She gave me a very quick kiss on the cheek and then began to leave. But then she turned, came back into the room and put her arms around me with more love and warmth than I had thought she was capable of. After this she left with tears in her eyes.

Poor girl! I really loved her then and chose to forget everything she had done that had hurt me and others. She had not really known what she was doing, I felt sure. I hoped with all my heart that she would be happy with her new life.

Now that Rosalie had gone, I had much more free time and I started to visit the cottagers again. I went to see Nancy, partly in the hope that she could tell me about Mr Weston. But she had not seen him for a while. I have to admit that I even stayed a little longer at her cottage in case he came to visit, but he did not.

Sunday came and I was able to go to church and hear Mr Weston preach. It had been several weeks since I had been to church and I was happy to be able to see him and listen to him. I walked home afterwards with Matilda, but he did not come to talk to us and nor did he walk home with us. Matilda was as disappointed as I was that we had to walk home alone. Now that her sister had got married, Matilda had started to think about when her time would come to do the same. Mrs Murray, too, had time to worry about her younger daughter and to look for a husband for her. I was told that I must work extra hard because the young lady’s manners needed to be much better. Matilda was told that she was no longer allowed to go riding every day or play with the dogs. Just when I thought my job had become much easier, it began to get harder again.

In addition to long hours in the school room, Mrs Murray had decided that Matilda needed exercise and should go on walks every day. It was on one of these walks that Matilda and I saw Mr Weston by chance. I had hoped this would happen for such a long time, but now I felt very nervous. My heart was beating very fast. I was worried that how I was feeling would be clear to both Matilda and Mr Weston himself. However, I need not have worried because he hardly looked at me and spoke first to Matilda. He asked if she had heard from her sister, Rosalie.

‘Yes,’ she replied, ‘She was in Paris when she last wrote to us and she was very well. And very happy, of course.’ After these last few words she looked at Mr Weston carefully, waiting to see what he would say.

‘I hope she will continue to be very happy,’ he commented, in what seemed like a sincere way.

‘Do you think it is likely?’ I asked him once Matilda had walked away to look at some horses in a field nearby.

‘I don’t know,’ he replied. ‘According to what people have told me about Sir Thomas and from what I have seen myself of his behaviour, I have my doubts about Miss Rosalie’s happiness. It is a pity that she has married him. Even though Miss Rosalie can be very thoughtless, she is so young and cheerful and ... well, interesting. I suppose that she has married him because that is what her mother wanted her to do. Is that right?’

‘Yes, and it is also what she wanted, I think. She always laughed when I tried to persuade her not to marry him,’ I explained.

‘Well, if you told her not to marry him then at least you know that you are in no way responsible if the marriage is an unhappy one!’ he told me.

At that moment Matilda appeared again. After talking for a little while longer Mr Weston said goodbye and continued on his journey down the road. However, just a few minutes later he returned with some bluebells in his hand. He offered the beautiful blue flowers to me and smiled.

‘I haven’t forgotten how much you like spring flowers,’ Mr Weston said, ‘even though I have hardly seen you over the last two months.’

He gave the flowers to me in a very simple, polite way. But it meant a lot to me - he had thought of me and had remembered the type of flowers that I liked!

‘Miss Rosalie and Miss Matilda told me that you were so busy reading and studying that you never left the house,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ said Matilda very quickly, ‘and it’s true!’

‘No, Mr Weston, don’t believe it,’ I told him. ‘It’s a terrible lie. Some young ladies say things which aren’t true without worrying if it might upset their friends. You should be careful not to believe everything they say.’

‘Well, I certainly hope that in this case it is a lie, Miss Grey,’ he said. ‘It would be a great shame if you chose to read and study so much that you had no time for anything else.’

Then we said goodbye again and he left.

You might be wondering why I have written down all of this detail. You may think it is not interesting enough to write about. But these conversations were important because they gave me hope. That evening I spent time remembering how kind and thoughtful Mr Weston had been towards me. I dreamt that night of his smiling face. The next morning I woke up full of happiness and I was not able to think of anything else other than him.

Hope, however, can leave as quickly as it can arrive. Later that same morning I received a letter from my mother which told me that my father was now very seriously ill. Just two days later another letter came, this time from my sister, Mary. In her letter she told me that she thought my father was going to die very soon.

I went straight to Mrs Murray, explained the situation to her and asked her if she would let me go home to my family. At first she just looked at me. Then she asked me why I was so upset - my father may not be as ill as my mother and sister had said, she told me. And if not,

well, we must all die one day, she added. Finally, she agreed to let me return to my family.

I packed my things and left as soon as I could. It was a long journey and it was half-past ten at night by the time I finally arrived home.

My mother and sister met me at the front door. Both of them looked serious and were tired and pale.

‘Oh, Agnes!’ cried my mother and Mary started to cry.

‘How is he?’ I asked.

‘Dead!’ came the reply.

It was the answer I had expected, but it was still a terrible shock to me.

Chapter 12. Saying Goodbye

My father was buried a few days later. My mother, sister and I then sat down together at home and talked about what we should now do. After a long discussion, it was decided that the family home would be sold. My mother’s plan was to buy a smaller house near the coast and turn it into a school for young ladies. In this way she believed she could earn enough money to live on.

‘What do you think of the idea, Agnes?’ she asked me. ‘Would you leave your job with the Murray family to come and help run a school with me?’

‘Yes, of course,’ I told her, ‘and the money I have earned will buy us furniture and equipment.’

It was sad to say goodbye to the old family home. I had been born in that house and had spent my early years there.

My mother said she would stay until the house was sold and she would make all the preparations for the new school. So I went back to Horton Lodge to work the last six weeks that were still left before the summer holidays. Having explained to Mrs Murray what had happened, I told her that I would not be returning in the autumn.

During those last six weeks at Horton I hardly saw Mr Weston. Every day I hoped I would bump into him on my walks, but for the first two weeks I saw him only at church. I felt disappointed and I told myself that he clearly did not care for me. If he loved me, would he not come to find me? How silly I had been to hope that he might care about me. I should forget all about him.

But then, at last, I saw him. He was on the path walking towards me as I was going through the fields to Nancy Brown's cottage for a visit.

He must have heard from people in the village that my father had died, but he did not mention it. But almost the first words he spoke were, 'How is your mother?' It was a sincere question that seemed full of warmth. I thanked him for asking about her and told him she was as well as could be expected but sad, of course.

'What is she going to do?' he asked kindly.

I explained to him that my mother was planning to open a new school and that I was going to help her to run it.

'Then are you going to leave Horton Lodge soon?' he said.

'Yes, in a month,' I replied.

He said nothing for a minute and it seemed as though he was deep in thought'. Then he spoke again, 'And do you want to leave here?'

'Yes, in some ways,' I told him.

'Only "in some ways" ... I wonder what things might make you want to stay?' he said. He sounded surprised.

I did not like this question, partly because it embarrassed me. I had only one reason to want to stay and that reason was a big secret.

'Why have you made the assumption that I am not happy in this place?' I asked.

'Because you told me yourself that you missed your family terribly and that you had no friends here,' Mr Weston said.

'Well,' I replied, 'that may be true, but it would be impossible to live somewhere for two years without feeling some sadness when you leave.'

‘Will you be sad to leave Miss Matilda, who is your only pupil and friend now?’ he asked.

‘It will probably be a little difficult to say goodbye to her. I did feel sad when I said goodbye to her sister,’ I admitted.

‘Yes, I can imagine that,’ he commented.

‘Well, Miss Matilda is as nice as Miss Rosalie, or perhaps actually nicer than her in one way,’ I told him.

‘In what way is that?’ he wanted to know.

‘She usually tells the truth,’ I said simply, ‘so at least I can say she is honest.’

‘And her older sister is not?’ he said.

‘Well, perhaps she is not actually dishonest, but I have to admit that she can be quite creative with the truth,’ I told him.

‘Ah,’ he said thoughtfully, ‘so she is creative with the truth? I could see that she was a bit silly and loved to talk about herself, yes. And now I can believe that she wasn’t fully honest either. That would certainly explain a few things that I hadn’t understood before.’

After that he changed the subject and talked about more general things. He did not leave me until he had walked with me to the gates of Horton Lodge. He must have gone out of his way’ to walk that far with me. He had not mentioned love, or led me to believe that he cared for me, but I was very happy despite this. To be near him, to hear him talk, to know that he wanted to speak to me was enough to make me happy.

‘Yes, Mr Edward Weston. If I had one friend here, one friend who truly loved me and if that friend were you ... then I would definitely want to stay here. I would be happier than I can imagine,’ I thought to myself. ‘Who knows what can happen in a month? I am twenty-two years old and the last few years have been hard. But perhaps I will be lucky now, perhaps the sun will shine on me at last...’

I remained hopeful for a while but the time I had left in Horton slowly passed away, one week after another, and I hardly saw him. And then the last Sunday came and I went to the village church for the last time to hear him preach, I listened to his sermon, surely the last one of his I would hear, and I tried hard not to cry.

After the service I was leaving the church when I heard a quiet voice just behind me.

‘I suppose you are leaving Horton this week, Miss Grey?’ said Mr Weston.

‘Yes,’ I replied. I was surprised to see him standing there.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I just wanted to say goodbye before you leave.’

‘Goodbye, Mr Weston,’ I said. How difficult it was to say that calmly! I gave him my hand and he held it gently in his own hands for a few seconds.

‘It is possible that we may meet again in the future,’ he said. ‘Would it make any difference to you whether we did or not?’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘I would be very glad to see you again.’

He held my hand gently in his for a moment and then left. Now I was happy again, although probably more likely to burst into tears than ever. I walked home with Matilda, but I could not concentrate on what she was saying. All I could think about was Mr Weston ... how he had held my hand, how he had smiled kindly at me and what he had said. After several minutes Matilda suddenly shouted at me.

‘Are you deaf or stupid, Miss Grey? Have you not heard anything that I have been telling you?’ she cried.

Matilda had woken me from my daydreams about Mr Weston. I looked up at her and asked her to tell me again what she had been saying.

Chapter 13. The School

I left Horton Lodge and went to join my mother in Scarborough, a popular town on the coast in Yorkshire. She seemed to be in good health and had organised the new school house well. To begin with we had nine students but we hoped to have more pupils in the future.

I was happy to start work with my mother and it was certainly different compared to the jobs I had already had. In the first few weeks I enjoyed teaching the pupils and I was happy. When I was not busy I daydreamed about Mr Weston. ‘It is possible that we may meet again in

the future,’ and ‘Would it make any difference to you whether we did or not?’ - I repeated his words over and over again in my head. They gave me great hope.

‘I will see him again. He will come and visit me or he will write to me,’ I told myself. Whenever I heard a knock at the front door and the maid came to say that a gentleman was there, I hoped it was him. And every time the postman came I felt sure that he was going to bring a letter from Mr Weston. But each time I was terribly disappointed. Mr Weston did not come and no letter arrived.

I began to wonder if I had imagined the moment I had shared with him on that last Sunday outside the church. As the months passed I began to lose hope. I told myself I had been stupid to think that he liked me. He had just been trying to be polite.

‘Agnes, you do not seem very well,’ said my mother one day in April. ‘I don’t think this change has done you any good at all. I’ve never seen you look so sad and tired. You should relax and go out a little more.’

My mother was right. I had given up hope and now felt miserable. I often did not feel hungry and I was beginning to feel weak and ill. I told myself that I needed to look after myself for my mother’s sake. She needed me with her and needed my help. If I could not be happy myself at least I could make sure that she was happy.

I decided not to think about Mr Weston anymore, or at least I would try not to. I told myself that I would go for walks and eat well. By following these rules I made for myself, I started to feel a little better.

In June I received a letter from Lady Ashby, or as I had known her before her marriage, Miss Rosalie. In her letter she told me that life was very boring at Ashby Park and that she would very much like to see me.

To my dearest Mis Grey,

I hope you are well and are not missing Horton Large too much. I have been at Ashby Park a little while now and it is beautiful, but so dull! I do not have a single friend here. And you know that I never liked

the idea of just my husband and I living tightly together like two birds in a nest.

I am sure that your holidays will begin in June. When they do, please come and see me straight away! In fact, if you do not come I think I might die. I want you to come and see me as a friend, and not as a my old governess. You will have your own room and as many books as you as you can read.

Do you like babies? I can't remember if you do or do not. If you do, you will want to meet mine. It is well behaved and thankfully I have a maid here to look after it for me. Unfortunately, it is a girl and Sir Tomas is disappointed that I did not give him a son instead. But if you visit me I promise that you will be its governess as soon as it can talk. You can teach it and make it into a much better woman than its mother.

You will be able to see my wonderful new home and I am sure that you will love it. It is full of expensive Italian paintings and all sorts of things that I bought while on my honeymoon. And you can meet my new dog, which I had send over all the way from Paris.

Write to me as soon as you can and tell me when your holidays start. Tell me that you will come on the very first day that you can and that you will stay until the moment you have to return.

Your fiend,

Rosalie Ashby

I showed this strange letter to my mother and asked her what I should do. She advised me to go to Ashby Park and visit Rosalie. I liked the idea of going to see her and her new baby. I hoped that I could help her if she were unhappy. Of course, I imagined that she must be unhappy, or she would not have written to me in this way. I wrote back to her and agreed to go and stay with her for a few days. I had partly agreed to go because Ashby Park was not far from the village of Horton. I secretly hoped that I might see Mr Weston while I was there, or at least hear something about him.

There was no doubt that Ashby Park was a wonderful place to live. The house itself was impressive and elegant and the large park was beautiful. There was a big lake, ancient woods and herds of deer. I could see why Rosalie had been so keen to become the lady of an estate like this one.

She seemed pleased to see me and although I was just a poor governess and a school teacher she welcomed me warmly to her home. However, I did not like her efforts to make me feel comfortable. She told me that I should not be embarrassed about how I looked. She also said I should not worry if I felt that the beauty of the place was too much for me. I did not feel at all embarrassed about how I looked. And nothing that I saw around me in Ashby Park shocked me half as much as the changes I saw in Rosalie herself.

During the twelve months since I had last seen her she had changed in a way you might expect to see after twelve years, not months. She was much thinner, looked very tired and seemed sad. Her new baby girl, who Sir Thomas felt should have been a boy, was just seven or eight weeks of age. I was surprised to see that Rosalie did not seem to be interested in the baby. She was happy to let the maid take care of everything that the baby needed.

My bedroom was small but pleasant. Rosalie also showed me a small sitting room where I could spend time alone and read if I wanted to. I was taken on a tour of the house and was shown the fine Italian paintings and the fat French dog that was lying on an expensive-looking cushion. Rosalie seemed very pleased with all these things. However, when we had finished the tour she took me into the main sitting room and then sat down in a chair. We sat in silence for a moment. Despite all of these impressive things that she had wanted so much, Rosalie did not seem happy.

I asked her some questions, deciding to save my most important question until last. I started by asking her how her parents were. She told me that they were well enough.

‘And how is Matilda?’ I asked her.

‘Oh, she is very well,’ Rosalie replied. ‘She is still wild and a little silly, but she has now got a new, fashionable governess. At last her manners are improving and Mother will soon hold a ball at Horton Lodge so that she can be introduced to society.’

‘And how are the other people in the village?’ I asked. ‘Mr Hatfield, for example?’

‘Ah, Mr Hatfield!’ she said with a smile. ‘I heard that he proposed to an old spinster and married her not long ago. He must have decided that he had not been lucky when he chose someone young and beautiful, so now he has chosen someone old and rich!’

‘And the Meltham family?’ I continued, ignoring her comment about Mr Hatfield.

‘Oh, I don’t know much about them. I suppose they are all right,’ she told me.

‘Well, I think I have asked about everybody ... oh, but not Mr Weston,’ I said. ‘What is he doing?’

‘I don’t know. He’s not in Horton any more,’ Rosalie told me.

‘How long ago did he leave? And where has he gone?’ I asked, trying not to sound too interested to hear her reply.

‘I don’t know anything about him,’ she said, looking out of the window. ‘Only that he left about a month ago. I didn’t ask where he had gone. It seems that all the people in the village were very upset when he left because they liked him so much. Mr Hatfield did not like them all making a fuss about him leaving, of course. He did not like Mr Weston because he was so popular and he did not do things the way he was told to.’ Then Rosalie stood up. ‘Anyway, I really must go and rest for a while before dinner. I will have to eat with Sir Thomas and his mother, old Lady Ashby, in the formal dining room. It’s so dull. But I’ll ask the maid to bring your dinner to you in the sitting room, if that is all right?’

I told her it was. She had invited me to her home as her ‘friend’ but we both knew that the social rules meant that it would not be correct for a poor school teacher to eat dinner with people as important as Sir Thomas and Lady Ashby. I walked back to the little sitting room where I could relax and look out onto the gardens. I ate my dinner there and then

sat for a while thinking about Lady Ashby's present life and her past life, and about the little information she had given me about Mr Weston.

I was not rich enough to own a watch, so I did not know what time it was or how long I had been sitting and thinking. The sun began to disappear behind the trees of the estate. As it began to get dark I felt lonely. I was tired and wished that I could go home. I was thinking about going back to my room when Rosalie appeared. She apologised several times for having left me alone for so long. She blamed her 'horrible old mother-in-law', who she said had made her stay longer in the dining room.

'But I don't know why I had to stay there so long,' she added. 'Sir Thomas never really listens to me. When he is in a bad mood all he does is complain and when he is in a good mood all he does is talk nonsense. And then, in either situation, he always drinks too much and falls asleep on the sofa!'

'Could you not ask him to drink less and keep him busy with something else?' I suggested. 'After all, you are very persuasive and are very good at keeping a man entertained.'

'You think I am here to entertain him!' she cried. 'That's not my idea of a wife. It is the husband's job to keep his wife happy; it's not her responsibility to please him. And no, I will not persuade him to change his habits. I have enough work just putting up with him as he is without making even more of an effort in order to change him.' She paused to take a breath. 'But I am so sorry that I left you alone for so long. What have you been doing?'

'Well, mainly sitting here looking at the park,' I admitted.

'Goodness! How boring that must have been!' she told me. 'Well, let's go to bed now, but tomorrow I will show you around the park.'

* * *

The next morning after breakfast Rosalie took me to see the gardens as she had promised. We walked through the park, talking about what Rosalie had seen and done on her honeymoon. While we were walking a gentleman on a horse rode towards us. As he passed us he looked straight at me, so I could clearly see what he looked like. He was

tall and very thin with a pale face that was a little grey. He had dull, cold eyes. He made no attempt to say hello to us.

‘I hate that man,’ Lady Ashby said quietly as soon as he had ridden away.

‘Who is he?’ I asked her.

‘Sir Thomas Ashby,’ she replied coldly, ‘my husband.’

I was shocked, but I asked her, ‘Do you really hate him?’

‘Yes, I do, Miss Grey, and if you knew him you would not blame me for hating him,’ she told me.

‘But you knew what he was like before you married him,’ I commented.

‘No, I only thought I knew him,’ she said. ‘I remember that you told me not to marry him. I know that I should have listened to you, but it’s too late to say that now. At first I thought that what he was like wouldn’t matter. I thought he would let me do whatever I liked. But he keeps me here like a prisoner and he pays me no attention. He won’t let me go to London and have fun with my friends because he says that I flirt with other men and spend too much money. But he does exactly what he wants! He goes to London and leaves me here alone. He gambles and flirts with other women and is almost always drunk. Oh, I would give anything, anything at all not to be married to that horrible man, but to be Miss Murray again!’ Then she stopped speaking and burst into tears.

Of course, I felt very sorry for her. I tried to comfort her and give her some advice. I told her to keep calm and try to be polite to her husband. I suggested that she should try not to think about him and keep herself busy with other things, perhaps reading and especially her new little daughter. I reminded her that her little baby would grow into a young woman who would truly love her.

‘But what if the child grows up to be just like its father?’ cried Rosalie.

‘I don’t think that is likely. She is a girl and she looks very much like you,’ I told her.

‘Even so, I can’t put all of my hopes in a child,’ she said. ‘It is only one step better than focusing your whole life on a dog. And I can’t spend my life reading. I am young and I should be having fun!’

‘The best way to enjoy yourself,’ I told her, ‘is to do what is right and hate nobody. The more wise and good you are the more happiness you have. And I have one more piece of advice to offer you - don’t make an enemy of your mother-in-law, I have never met her, but I have heard good things as well as bad things about her. If you could be kind to her I believe that in time she could become a good friend for you here.’

But I am afraid that Rosalie did not really listen to any of the advice I had given her. I realized that I could be of little help to her and this made it even more painful for me to see what her life had become. Rosalie begged me to stay longer, but after two more days I told her that my mother needed me at the school.

I was very sorry to say goodbye to Rosalie and leave her in her wonderful, but sad, house. I knew she was very unhappy but I could see no easy way out of the life which she herself had chosen.

Chapter 15. A Walk on the Beach

The school that my mother owned in Scarborough was a short distance from the sea. I loved being near the sea and I would sometimes walk along the beach in my free time. I awoke on the third morning after my return from Ashby Park and saw that the sun was shining. Knowing that my mother would still be asleep, I quietly got dressed and left the house to go for an early-morning walk.

The sea air was fresh and the summer sky was a clear blue. I walked along the long, empty beach and watched the white waves as they came up onto the sand, I felt full of life and as I walked along I forgot all of my worries. At first I was alone on the beach, but as the sun rose higher in the sky I saw that a few people had appeared. There were now several figures ahead of me exercising horses or taking dogs for a walk. As I approached the end of the beach I heard a dog bark behind

me, then suddenly a small animal came running round in front of me and stopped right at my feet. It was Snap - the rough little dog that had been mine at Horton Lodge! I called his name and he jumped up into my arms. I was so pleased to see him and he was clearly excited to see me. But how had he got here? He could not have come so far on his own, so I looked to see who he might be with. I turned around and saw ... Mr Weston!

‘Your dog remembers you well, Miss Grey,’ he said warmly. ‘You must get up very early.’

‘Not often as early as this,’ I said, still very much surprised to see both Mr Weston and Snap.

‘I imagine you must live quite close to the beach, then. In what part of the town do you live?’ he asked. ‘I never managed to find out.’

Never managed to find out? Had he been looking for me, then? I felt my heart jump in my chest. Then I remembered that he had asked me a question, so I told him where our house was.

He asked if the school was doing well. I told him that several more pupils had come to join the school since the new year had started and that we were doing very well.

‘People must have heard that you are a very good teacher, then,’ he said.

‘No, it is my mother they have heard about,’ I replied, ‘she works very hard and manages things so well. And she is so active, clever and kind.’

‘I would like to meet your mother. Will you introduce me to her one day if I come to your house?’ he asked.

‘Yes, of course I will,’ I told him.

‘And would it be all right if I came to visit you every now and then?’ Mr Weston wanted to know.

‘Yes, I don’t think my mother would mind,’ I replied.

We turned and started to walk back along the beach together.

‘You haven’t asked me why I have come to Scarborough,’ he said after a few moments’ silence. ‘Surely you can’t think that I am rich enough to be here on holiday.’

‘Well, I heard that you had left Horton,’ I said.

‘But you hadn’t heard that I am the new vicar of a parish just two miles from here?’ he asked.

‘No,’ I said. ‘I don’t receive much news from Horton. Well then, congratulations! I very much hope that you like your new parish and your new job.’

‘I think I will like it more in a year or two,’ he said, ‘when I have made some of the changes there that I think are needed. It is certainly wonderful to have a parish all to myself with nobody to disagree with me and tell me how I should do things differently. Of course, he was talking about Mr Hatfield. Then he added, ‘And I am lucky enough to have a nice house in a good area and a salary of three hundred pounds a year. In fact, I have nothing but loneliness to complain about. And there is nothing I could wish for apart from someone to share all of that with.’

He looked directly at me as he spoke these last few words and I felt my cheeks go red. I felt embarrassed.

‘Oh, I’m sure that when you are well known in your new parish,’ I said quickly, ‘there will be many women there who will be keen to share that life with you.’

‘I am not so presumptuous as to expect there will be a lot of women who want to marry me,’ he said. ‘But even if there were so many, I am looking for a very special type of person to share my life with. Perhaps I wouldn’t find that person among the ladies of my parish.’

‘If you are looking for perfection - to find someone who has no faults at all,’ I told him, ‘then I don’t think you will ever find that person.’

‘No, I am not looking for perfection,’ he replied. ‘I have no right to because I am certainly not perfect myself.’ We had reached the town now and before we walked up the bank onto the street he offered me his arm to support me. I put my arm in his. Once we were in the street the horses, carriages and men moving around us made it difficult to talk. We walked in silence for a few minutes, arm in arm, before he spoke again.

‘You don’t often go down to the beach, do you?’ he said. ‘I have walked there many times since I have come here. I have come both morning and evening and I have never seen you until now. And I have looked for your school as I have walked about the town, but have never found it. Once or twice I asked if anyone knew of the school, but no one could tell me where the house was.’

He walked with me to the end of the street where I lived. ‘I’ll leave you here, Miss Grey,’ he said kindly.

‘And when will you come to meet my mother?’ I asked him.

‘I hope to come tomorrow,’ he told me. He said goodbye and then called Snap to him. The dog did not know which one of us he should follow. ‘I’m afraid I won’t offer to give him back to you,’ said Mr Weston, smiling, ‘because I like him.’

‘Oh, I am happy not to have him,’ I replied. ‘Now that I know he has a very good owner I won’t need to worry about him any more.’

‘You believe that I am a very good owner then?’ he said and smiled again before walking away. I returned home full of happiness. I had been given another chance and I hoped that this time I would be lucky.

Chapter 16. The Happy Ending

Well, Agnes, you must not take such a long walk again before breakfast,’ said my mother. ‘Are you feeling ill?’ She had seen that I had drunk an extra cup of coffee but had eaten nothing. I told her that I just did not feel hungry because I was hot and tired after my walk.

The truth was that I was too busy thinking about how to tell my mother about Mr Weston to think of eating. If he was coming to visit the next day, then I had to tell her that I had met him on the beach. I waited until breakfast had been taken away and until I had calmed down a little. Then, once I had sat down and started to do some drawing, I began...

‘I bumped into an old friend on the beach, mother,’ I said. ‘An old friend?’ she said, ‘Who on earth could that be?’

‘Two old friends, in fact,’ I told her, ‘One was a dog,’ and then I reminded her of Snap, who I had told her about in my letters from Horton Lodge. I now told her how he had suddenly appeared on the beach and had run to me. ‘And the other friend,’ I continued, ‘was Mr Weston, the curate of Horton.’

‘Mr Weston? I’ve never heard of him before,’ my mother said. ‘Yes, you have,’ I connected her, ‘I’ve mentioned him several times, I think, but you don’t remember.’

‘I’ve heard you talk about Mr Hatfield,’ she told me.

‘Mr Hatfield was the vicar and Mr Weston was the curate. Anyway, he was on the beach this morning with the dog - he must have bought it from someone in the village at Horton. We talked for a little while after the dog had found me. He asked about our school and how well it was doing. I told him it was doing very well thanks to your clever management. When I mentioned you he said that he would like to meet you. Then he asked if I would introduce you to him, if he happened to come by and visit tomorrow. So I said that I would. Was it all right for me to say that?’

‘Of course,’ replied my mother, ‘What type of man is he?’

‘He is a very good man, I think, but you will meet him yourself tomorrow,’ I told her. ‘He is the new vicar in a village just two miles from here and he has only been in that parish for a few weeks. I imagine that he has not yet made any new friends and would like some company.’

I spent the next morning feeling nervous and excited while I waited for him to come. He finally came at noon. Having introduced him to my mother, I moved away to the other side of the room to carry on with my drawing while they talked.

They got on extremely well together. I was so pleased because I had been worried about what my mother would think of him. He did not stay long that time, but when he left she said she would be happy to see him whenever he found the time to visit us again. After he had left she said to me, ‘Well, I think he is a very sensible man. But why did you sit over there, Agnes? And why didn’t you join in with the conversation?’

‘I didn’t join in because you were having a good conversation and did not seem to need any help from me,’ I explained. ‘And anyway, he had come to see you, not me.’

After that, Mr Weston often came to visit us. As it was the summer holidays and my mother and I were not teaching, he could come at any time during the day. When he came he spoke mostly to my mother, but I did not mind that. She loved to talk and I was happy to sit and listen to the two people I loved most in the world.

Formality was quickly forgotten and Mr Weston began to call me ‘Agnes’ instead of ‘Miss Grey’. The days when he did not visit seemed long and very dull but I always had his next visit to look forward to. One evening, near the end of the summer holidays, he came to the house and asked me to go for a walk with him. He wanted to show me the wonderful view over the sea from a nearby hill. With my mother’s permission, I agreed to go and went upstairs to get ready. I took a little longer than usual.

When we left the house a few minutes later I put my arm into his and we went through the busy streets of the town. As we walked quickly along he said very little and I began to think that something was wrong. But as we came out of the town he slowed down a little and he seemed cheerful again.

‘I’m sorry Agnes,’ he said, ‘I think that I have been walking too fast for you. I was keen to get out of the town but we can walk as slowly as you wish now. I think there is going to be a wonderful sunset.’

We walked in silence up the hill for a few minutes before he spoke again. ‘It is still quite lonely in my house,’ he said and smiled at me. ‘And I have now met all of the ladies in my parish and quite a few in this town, too. But I’m not interested in any of them. In fact, there is only one person in the world that I want to share my life with ... and that person is you, Miss Grey. Agnes, will you marry me?’

‘Are you serious, Mr Weston?’ I asked him, because I could not believe what I had heard.

‘Serious!’ he cried, ‘How could you think that I would joke about something like this?’

He put his hand gently over mine as it rested on his arm; he must have felt that I was feeling nervous.

‘I hope that I have not shocked you,’ he said in a serious way looking at me closely. ‘You must have known that I am not the sort of man to flatter you all the time and talk romantic nonsense. I hoped that you would know that a single look or a single word of mine meant more than the many things that most other men use to flirt with women.’

I said nothing for a moment. Many thoughts were going through my head.

‘So, what is your answer?’ he asked me.

‘But what about my mother,’ I said nervously, ‘I’m not sure I could leave her to run the school on her own.’

‘You don’t need to worry about that,’ he told me gently. ‘While you were getting ready to come out for this walk I talked to your mother. She said that she would be happy for you to marry me if that’s what you wanted to do. I also suggested to her, in case you said yes, that she could come and live with us. I thought that you would like that. But she refused and said that she could now afford to employ an assistant to help her teach the pupils. So, you can see that your mother will be fine. Is there anything else that you are worried about?’

‘No,’ I said, ‘no, there isn’t.’

‘Do you love me then?’ he asked, holding my hand tightly in his.

‘Yes,’ I replied. ‘Yes, and I will be very happy to marry you!’ And here I will stop writing. My diary, in which I used to write these chapters, does not continue any further. I will just say that I will never forget that wonderful summer evening. I will always remember how we stood and watched that beautiful sunset together. My heart was filled with so much love and happiness that I could not have imagined being any happier.

A few weeks after that, once my mother had found an assistant to help her at the school, I married Edward Weston. And I am so pleased that I did. We have had difficult times and we know that we will have more, but we deal with them well together. We try to make the most of life and we enjoy each other’s company.

Edward has made some surprising changes in his parish. He is a good man and the people there love and respect him. Whatever his faults are as a man (and of course, everybody has their faults) no one could say that he is not a good vicar, husband or father.

Our children, Edward, Agnes and little Mary, are doing well. At the moment they are mostly taught by me and I try to give them as much love and care as a mother can.

Edward's salary is more than enough for what we need. We try to be careful with the money we have. In this way we live a comfortable life and manage to save a little which we will give to our children when they leave home. We even have enough left to give something to others who might need it.

I am grateful for the life that I have led so far. It is not the life of big houses and expensive parties that other people may have, but I think of myself as being lucky. And now I will end my story, because you can now easily imagine how I might happily spend the years that I have left to live.

- THE END -

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