

Agnes Grey

Anne Bronte

Chapter 25: Conclusion

‘Well, Agnes, you must not take such long walks again before breakfast,’ said my mother, observing that I drank an extra cup of coffee and ate nothing—pleading the heat of the weather, and the fatigue of my long walk as an excuse. I certainly did feel feverish and tired too.

‘You always do things by extremes: now, if you had taken a SHORT walk every morning, and would continue to do so, it would do you good.’

‘Well, mamma, I will.’

‘But this is worse than lying in bed or bending over your books: you have quite put yourself into a fever.’

‘I won’t do it again,’ said I.

I was racking my brains with thinking how to tell her about Mr. Weston, for she must know he was coming to-morrow. However, I waited till the breakfast things were removed, and I was more calm and cool; and then, having sat down to my drawing, I began—‘I met an old friend on the sands to-day, mamma.’

‘An old friend! Who could it be?’

‘Two old friends, indeed. One was a dog;’ and then I reminded her of Snap, whose history I had recounted before, and related the incident of his sudden appearance and remarkable recognition; ‘and the other,’ continued I, ‘was Mr. Weston, the curate of Horton.’

‘Mr. Weston! I never heard of him before.’

‘Yes, you have: I’ve mentioned him several times, I believe: but you don’t remember.’

‘I’ve heard you speak of Mr. Hatfield.’

‘Mr. Hatfield was the rector, and Mr. Weston the curate: I used to mention him sometimes in contradistinction to Mr. Hatfield, as being a more efficient clergyman. However, he was on the sands this morning with the dog—he had bought it, I



suppose, from the rat-catcher; and he knew me as well as it did—probably through its means: and I had a little conversation with him, in the course of which, as he asked about our school, I was led to say something about you, and your good management; and he said he should like to know you, and asked if I would introduce him to you, if he should take the liberty of calling to-morrow; so I said I would. Was I right?’

‘Of course. What kind of a man is he?’

‘A very RESPECTABLE man, I think: but you will see him to-morrow. He is the new vicar of F—, and as he has only been there a few weeks, I suppose he has made no friends yet, and wants a little society.’

The morrow came. What a fever of anxiety and expectation I was in from breakfast till noon—at which time he made his appearance! Having introduced him to my mother, I took my work to the window, and sat down to await the result of the interview. They got on extremely well together—greatly to my satisfaction, for I had felt very anxious about what my mother would think of him. He did not stay long that time: but when he rose to take leave, she said she should be happy to see him, whenever he might find it convenient to call again; and when he was gone, I was gratified by hearing her say,—‘Well! I think he’s a very sensible man. But why did you sit back there, Agnes,’ she added, ‘and talk so little?’

‘Because you talked so well, mamma, I thought you required no assistance from me: and, besides, he was your visitor, not mine.’

After that, he often called upon us—several times in the course of a week. He generally addressed most of his conversation to my mother: and no wonder, for she could converse. I almost envied the unfettered, vigorous fluency of her discourse, and the strong sense evinced by everything she said—and yet, I did not; for, though I occasionally regretted my own deficiencies for his sake, it gave me very great pleasure to sit and hear the two beings I loved and honoured above every one else in the world, discoursing together so amicably, so wisely, and so well. I was not always silent, however; nor was I at all neglected. I was quite as much noticed as I would wish to be: there was no lack of kind words and kinder looks, no end of delicate attentions, too fine and subtle to be grasped by words, and therefore indescribable—but deeply felt at heart.

Ceremony was quickly dropped between us: Mr. Weston came as an expected guest, welcome at all times, and never deranging the economy of our household affairs. He even called me ‘Agnes:’ the name had been timidly spoken at first, but,



finding it gave no offence in any quarter, he seemed greatly to prefer that appellation to ‘Miss Grey;’ and so did I. How tedious and gloomy were those days in which he did not come! And yet not miserable; for I had still the remembrance of the last visit and the hope of the next to cheer me. But when two or three days passed without my seeing him, I certainly felt very anxious—absurdly, unreasonably so; for, of course, he had his own business and the affairs of his parish to attend to. And I dreaded the close of the holidays, when MY business also would begin, and I should be sometimes unable to see him, and sometimes—when my mother was in the schoolroom—obliged to be with him alone: a position I did not at all desire, in the house; though to meet him out of doors, and walk beside him, had proved by no means disagreeable.

One evening, however, in the last week of the vacation, he arrived—unexpectedly: for a heavy and protracted thunder–shower during the afternoon had almost destroyed my hopes of seeing him that day; but now the storm was over, and the sun was shining brightly.

‘A beautiful evening, Mrs. Grey!’ said he, as he entered. ‘Agnes, I want you to take a walk with me to—’ (he named a certain part of the coast—a bold hill on the land side, and towards the sea a steep precipice, from the summit of which a glorious view is to be had). ‘The rain has laid the dust, and cooled and cleared the air, and the prospect will be magnificent. Will you come?’

‘Can I go, mamma?’

‘Yes; to be sure.’

I went to get ready, and was down again in a few minutes; though, of course, I took a little more pains with my attire than if I had merely been going out on some shopping expedition alone. The thunder–shower had certainly had a most beneficial effect upon the weather, and the evening was most delightful. Mr. Weston would have me to take his arm; he said little during our passage through the crowded streets, but walked very fast, and appeared grave and abstracted. I wondered what was the matter, and felt an indefinite dread that something unpleasant was on his mind; and vague surmises, concerning what it might be, troubled me not a little, and made me grave and silent enough. But these fantasies vanished upon reaching the quiet outskirts of the town; for as soon as we came within sight of the venerable old church, and the—hill, with the deep blue beyond it, I found my companion was cheerful enough.

‘I’m afraid I’ve been walking too fast for you, Agnes,’ said he: ‘in my impatience to be rid of the town, I forgot to consult your convenience; but now we’ll walk



as slowly as you please. I see, by those light clouds in the west, there will be a brilliant sunset, and we shall be in time to witness its effect upon the sea, at the most moderate rate of progression.'

When we had got about half-way up the hill, we fell into silence again; which, as usual, he was the first to break.

'My house is desolate yet, Miss Grey,' he smilingly observed, 'and I am acquainted now with all the ladies in my parish, and several in this town too; and many others I know by sight and by report; but not one of them will suit me for a companion; in fact, there is only one person in the world that will: and that is yourself; and I want to know your decision?'

'Are you in earnest, Mr. Weston?'

'In earnest! How could you think I should jest on such a subject?'

He laid his hand on mine, that rested on his arm: he must have felt it tremble—but it was no great matter now.

'I hope I have not been too precipitate,' he said, in a serious tone. 'You must have known that it was not my way to flatter and talk soft nonsense, or even to speak the admiration that I felt; and that a single word or glance of mine meant more than the honied phrases and fervent protestations of most other men.'

I said something about not liking to leave my mother, and doing nothing without her consent.

'I settled everything with Mrs. Grey, while you were putting on your bonnet,' replied he. 'She said I might have her consent, if I could obtain yours; and I asked her, in case I should be so happy, to come and live with us—for I was sure you would like it better. But she refused, saying she could now afford to employ an assistant, and would continue the school till she could purchase an annuity sufficient to maintain her in comfortable lodgings; and, meantime, she would spend her vacations alternately with us and your sister, and should be quite contented if you were happy. And so now I have overruled your objections on her account. Have you any other?'

'No—none.'

'You love me then?' said he, fervently pressing my hand.

'Yes.'

Here I pause. My Diary, from which I have compiled these pages, goes but little further. I could go on for years, but I will content myself with adding, that I shall never forget that glorious summer evening, and always remember with delight that steep hill, and the edge of the precipice where we stood together, watching the



splendid sunset mirrored in the restless world of waters at our feet—with hearts filled with gratitude to heaven, and happiness, and love—almost too full for speech.

A few weeks after that, when my mother had supplied herself with an assistant, I became the wife of Edward Weston; and never have found cause to repent it, and am certain that I never shall. We have had trials, and we know that we must have them again; but we bear them well together, and endeavour to fortify ourselves and each other against the final separation—that greatest of all afflictions to the survivor. But, if we keep in mind the glorious heaven beyond, where both may meet again, and sin and sorrow are unknown, surely that too may be borne; and, meantime, we endeavour to live to the glory of Him who has scattered so many blessings in our path.

Edward, by his strenuous exertions, has worked surprising reforms in his parish, and is esteemed and loved by its inhabitants—as he deserves; for whatever his faults may be as a man (and no one is entirely without), I defy anybody to blame him as a pastor, a husband, or a father.

Our children, Edward, Agnes, and little Mary, promise well; their education, for the time being, is chiefly committed to me; and they shall want no good thing that a mother's care can give. Our modest income is amply sufficient for our requirements: and by practising the economy we learnt in harder times, and never attempting to imitate our richer neighbours, we manage not only to enjoy comfort and contentment ourselves, but to have every year something to lay by for our children, and something to give to those who need it.

And now I think I have said sufficient.

THE END.

