

CHAPTER I - THE PARSONAGE

"Agnes Grey" begins with the titular character reflecting on the potential value of her own story, comparing it to a nut that, despite its hard exterior, might contain a worthy kernel for some readers. She then delves into the background of her family. Agnes's father, a clergyman, and her mother, a spirited squire's daughter, fell in love against the wishes of her mother's family. Despite losing her fortune for marrying him, Agnes's mother chose love and a humble life in a parsonage over wealth. Agnes describes a childhood marked by love and protection, albeit in relative isolation and devoid of luxury. Her parents invested heavily in the education and moral upbringing of Agnes and her sister Mary, sparing them from social ills but perhaps leaving them unprepared for the world's challenges.

The once comfortable life begins to crumble when a risky investment by Agnes's father, encouraged by a seemingly benevolent friend, ends in disaster. The family is thrust into financial hardship, leading to a significant lifestyle shift marked by austerity and resilience, yet bonded by mutual affection and perseverance. The family's sacrifices and Agnes's desire to contribute to their well-being seed in her the idea of becoming a governess, despite her youth and inexperience.

Her proposal is met with skepticism and concern, highlighting the family's closeness and the protective environment in which Agnes has been raised. Despite these doubts, her determination and the family's financial strain eventually lead to agreement. Agnes's optimism about teaching and her belief in her competence contrast with her family's anxieties about her venturing alone into the world. The narrative closes on Agnes preparing for her departure, her mixed feelings about leaving home, and the poignant farewell to her family and familiar surroundings, setting the stage for her entrance into the broader world and the experiences that await her as a governess.