

# Chapter IV - The Grandmamma

**Chapter IV - The Grandmamma** opens with Agnes Grey returning to the Bloomfield household after a brief and cherished stay with her family. Though the reunion at home had brought her a sense of renewal, the comfort fades quickly upon reentering the cold structure of her position as governess. The children, especially Tom, are more defiant than ever, and the disapproval she encounters from Mr. Bloomfield and his imposing mother casts a shadow over her every effort. Her gentle approach to discipline is consistently undercut, either by indulgent parental interference or by the children exploiting the gaps in authority. Agnes finds herself judged not on the fairness of her actions, but on the standards of a household that values obedience above understanding. The presence of the grandmother adds another layer of surveillance, one that often misinterprets Agnes's attempts at moral teaching as weakness. This creates a tense environment where correction is expected, but compassion is seen as a flaw.

One particular day becomes a trial of patience and fortitude when the children seem determined to provoke her. Their misbehavior is relentless, and each attempt to guide them is met with mockery or outright rebellion. Mr. Bloomfield, who seldom engages positively, chooses this moment to intervene with sharp criticism, accusing Agnes of incompetence. The children's grandmother reinforces this with an air of authority, her approval shifting unpredictably based on mood or bias. Even when Agnes does succeed in calming the children, the credit is rarely hers. Her position offers responsibility without power, scrutiny without defense. The emotional toll begins to wear her down, and though she remains calm on the surface, she feels increasingly unseen and unheard. Her experience mirrors the reality faced by many women in subordinate roles during the period—expected to manage problems, yet blamed when control eludes them.

Amid these tensions, Agnes finds a sliver of support in the house nurse, Betty. While Betty doesn't fully share Agnes's values, she at least acknowledges the difficulty of the task. Her suggestion to use stricter methods conflicts with Agnes's principles, yet it reflects the prevailing belief that harshness is the only effective means of control. Agnes knows such punishment would silence behavior but not correct it. Her quiet resolve to treat the children with respect—even when that approach is misjudged—underscores her inner strength. She holds onto her ethics, even while surrounded by voices telling her they're useless. In her solitude, she reflects deeply on the conflict between conscience and compliance. This inner struggle marks her development, not just as a governess, but as a woman learning to stand firm in a system that often confuses submission with virtue.

The grandmother's role in this chapter is particularly revealing. She serves as a figure of inherited authority, using her influence not to guide but to assert dominance. Her opinions shift based on convenience, and her willingness to believe the worst about Agnes exposes the imbalance of trust in the household. This creates a constant pressure on Agnes to defend herself without ever being allowed to speak freely. Her attempts to quietly correct the children are dismissed, while their poor behavior is excused or blamed on Agnes's perceived inexperience. The grandmother's sharp eye misses the heart of the matter—that the children lack discipline because they are never truly taught it. In this world, the governess is expected to succeed without support, to control without influence, and to teach without being listened to.

The chapter closes not with resolution, but with a deeper understanding of Agnes's position. Her failures, if they can be called that, are not her own. They are the result of a role that demands results without offering the tools to achieve them. She cannot reform the children if their own parents, and their grandmother, won't support her values. Yet she does not retreat. Instead, she begins to measure her success differently—not in praise or obedience, but in her own ability to stay true to herself. This perspective, though quiet, becomes a powerful form of resistance. Through her restraint, her moral clarity, and her patience, Agnes maintains her dignity, even when others try to strip it away. In doing so, she exemplifies a deeper strength—one that

does not shout, but endures.



Summaryer