

## CHAPTER 1

SOMEWHERE IN ENGLAND THERE WAS A SMALL TOWN, WHICH was much like all the other small towns around the year 1830. In the middle of this town was a building called the workhouse. It was a plain brick building for very poor people. Here they could find shelter or food if they were starving, but only the hungriest and most desperate went there. In the workhouse, a baby boy had just been born. It wasn't clear if the baby would live, because he was having trouble breathing. But after a struggle, the baby breathed, sneezed, and then started to cry as loud as he could.

A young woman raised her pale face from the pillow. In a low voice she said: "Let me see the child, and then die."

"Oh, you must not talk of dying yet!" said the doctor kindly, as he took the baby and gave him to his mother. She kissed her son's forehead with her cold lips. The doctor saw that she was very weak, and left the room to get some more medicine. Meanwhile, the young woman took a gold locket from around her neck, and gave it to the nurse.

"This is the only thing I own," she said. "You must give it to my son when he is older." Then she took one last look at her baby, shivered, and fell back — dead!

Curious, the nurse looked at the locket. She opened it, and saw two locks of hair, and a gold wedding ring. The name "Agnes" was written inside the ring, but there was no last name. When she heard the doctor returning, she quickly dropped the gold locket into her pocket.

"It is all over," the doctor said, after a glance at the young mother. "She was a good-looking woman. Who was she? Where did she come from?"

"She was found lying in the street last night," replied the nurse. "Her shoes were worn out from walking. But we don't know her name, or where she came from, or where she was going." The nurse didn't say anything about the gold locket in her pocket.

