

He wished her a good morning, and, attended by Sir John, left the room.

The complaints and lamentations which politeness had hitherto restrained, now burst forth universally; and they all agreed again and again how provoking it was to be so disappointed.

'I can guess what his business is, however,' said Mrs Jennings exultingly.

'Can you, ma'am?' said almost every body.

'Yes; it is about Miss Williams, I am sure.'

'And who is Miss Williams?' asked Marianne.

'What! do not you know who Miss Williams is? I am sure you must have heard of her before. She is a relation of the Colonel's, my dear; a very near relation. We will not say how near, for fear of shocking the young ladies.' Then, lowering her voice a little, she said to Elinor, 'She is his natural daughter.'

'Indeed!'

'Oh, yes; and as like him as she can stare. I dare say the Colonel will leave her all his fortune.'

When Sir John returned, he joined most heartily in the general regret on so unfortunate an event; concluding however by observing, that as they were all got together, they must do something by way of being happy; and after some consultation it was agreed, that although happiness could only be enjoyed at Whitwell, they might procure a tolerable composure of mind by driving about the country. The carriages were then ordered; Willoughby's was first, and Marianne never looked happier than when she got into it. He drove through the park very fast, and they were soon out of sight; and nothing more of them was seen till their return, which did not happen till after the return of all the rest. They both seemed delighted with their drive; but said only in general terms that they had kept in the lanes, while the others went on the downs.

It was settled that there should be a dance in the evening, and that every body should be extremely merry all day long. Some more of the Careys came to dinner, and they had the pleasure of sitting down nearly twenty to table, which Sir John observed with great contentment. Willoughby took his usual place between the two elder Miss Dashwoods. Mrs Jennings sat on Elinor's right hand; and they had not been long seated, before she leant behind her and Willoughby, and said to Marianne, loud enough for them both to hear, 'I have found you out in spite of all your tricks. I know where you spent the morning.'



'I HAVE FOUND YOU OUT IN SPITE OF ALL YOUR TRICKS.'

Marianne coloured, and replied very hastily, 'Where, pray?'

'Did not you know,' said Willoughby, 'that we had been out in my curicle?'

'Yes, yes, Mr Impudence, I know that very well, and I was determined to find out *where* you had been to. I hope you like your house, Miss Marianne. It is a very large one, I know; and when I come to see you, I hope you will have new-furnished it, for it wanted it very much when I was there six years ago.'

Marianne turned away in great confusion. Mrs Jennings laughed heartily; and Elinor found that in her resolution to know where they had been, she had actually made her own woman enquire of Mr Willoughby's groom; and that she had by that method been informed that they had gone to Allenham, and spent a considerable time there in walking about the garden and going all over the house.

Elinor could hardly believe this to be true, as it seemed very unlikely that Willoughby should propose, or Marianne consent, to enter the house while Mrs Smith was in it; with whom Marianne had not the smallest acquaintance.

As soon as they left the dining-room, Elinor enquired of her about it; and great was her surprise when she found that every circumstance related by Mrs Jennings was perfectly true. Marianne was quite angry with her for doubting it.

'Why should you imagine, Elinor, that we did not go there, or that we did not see the house? Is not it what you have often wished to do yourself?'

'Yes, Marianne; but I would not go while Mrs Smith was there, and with no other companion than Mr Willoughby.'

'Mr Willoughby however is the only person who can have a right to show that house; and as he went in an open carriage, it was impossible to have any other companion. I never spent a pleasanter morning in my life.'

'I am afraid,' replied Elinor, 'that the pleasantness of an employment does not always evince its propriety.'

'On the contrary, nothing can be a stronger proof of it, Elinor; for if there had been any real impropriety in what I did, I should have been sensible of it at the time, for we always know when we are acting wrong, and with such a conviction I could have had no pleasure.'

'But, my dear Marianne, as it has already exposed you to some very important remarks, do you not now begin to doubt the discretion of your own conduct?'

'I have no doubt of it,' replied Marianne.

'There is no persuading you to change your mind, Brandon, I know of old,' said Sir John, 'when once you are determined on anything. But, however, I hope you will think better of it. Consider, here are the two Miss Careys come over from Newton, the three Miss Dashwoods walked up from the cottage, and Mr Willoughby got up two hours before his usual time, on purpose to go to Whitwell.'

Colonel Brandon again repeated his sorrow at being the cause of disappointing the party, but at the same time declared it to be unavoidable.

'Well, then, when will you come back again?'

'I hope we shall see you at Barton,' added her ladyship, 'as soon as you can conveniently leave town; and we must put off the party to Whitwell till you return.'

'You are very obliging. But it is so uncertain, when I may have it in my power to return, that I dare not engage for it at all.'

'Oh! he must and shall come back,' cried Sir John. 'If he is not here by the end of the week, I shall go after him.'

'Ay, so do, Sir John,' cried Mrs Jennings, 'and then perhaps you may find out what his business is.'

'I do not want to pry into other men's concerns. I suppose it is something he is ashamed of.'

Colonel Brandon's horses were announced.

'You do not go to town on horseback, do you?' added Sir John.

'No. Only to Honiton. I shall then go post.'

'Well, as you are resolved to go, I wish you a good journey. But you had better change your mind.'

'I assure you it is not in my power.'

He then took leave of the whole party.

'Is there no chance of my seeing you and your sisters in town this winter, Miss Dashwood?'

'I am afraid, none at all.'

'Then I must bid you farewell for a longer time than I should wish to do.'

To Marianne, he merely bowed and said nothing.

'Come Colonel,' said Mrs Jennings, 'before you go, do let us know what you are going about.'

'But how came the hand to discompose you so much, if it was only a letter of business? Come, come, this won't do, Colonel; so let us hear the truth of it.'

'My dear madam,' said Lady Middleton, 'recollect what you are saying.'

'Perhaps it is to tell you that your cousin Fanny is married?' said Mrs Jennings, without attending to her daughter's reproof.

'No, indeed, it is not.'

'Well, then, I know who it is from, Colonel. And I hope she is well.'

'Whom do you mean, ma'am?' said he, colouring a little.

'Oh! you know who I mean.'

'I am particularly sorry, ma'am,' said he, addressing Lady Middleton, 'that I should receive this letter today, for it is on business which requires my immediate attendance in town.'

'In town!' cried Mrs Jennings. 'What can you have to do in town at this time of year?'

'My own loss is great,' he continued, 'in being obliged to leave so agreeable a party; but I am the more concerned, as I fear my presence is necessary to gain your admittance at Whitwell.'

What a blow upon them all was this!

'But if you write a note to the housekeeper, Mr Brandon,' said Marianne, eagerly, 'will it not be sufficient?'

He shook his head.

'We must go,' said Sir John. — 'It shall not be put off when we are so near it. You cannot go to town till tomorrow, Brandon, that is all.'

'I wish it could be so easily settled. But it is not in my power to delay my journey for one day!'

'If you would but let us know what your business is,' said Mrs Jennings, 'we might see whether it could be put off or not.'

'You would not be six hours later,' said Willoughby, 'if you were to defer your journey till our return.'

'I cannot afford to lose *one* hour.'

Elinor then heard Willoughby say, in a low voice to Marianne, 'There are some people who cannot bear a party of pleasure. Brandon is one of them. He was afraid of catching cold I dare say, and invented this trick for getting out of it. I would lay fifty guineas the letter was of his own writing.'

'If the impertinent remarks of Mrs Jennings are to be the proof of impriety in conduct, we are all offending every moment of our lives. I value not her censure any more than I should do her commendation. I am not sensible of having done anything wrong in walking over Mrs Smith's grounds, or in seeing her house. They will one day be Mr Willoughby's, and—'

'If they were one day to be your own, Marianne, you would not be justified in what you have done.'

She blushed at this hint; but it was even visibly gratifying to her; and after a ten minutes' interval of earnest thought, she came to her sister again, and said with great good humour, 'Perhaps, Elinor, it *was* rather ill-judged in me to go to Allenham; but Mr Willoughby wanted particularly to show me the place; and it is a charming house, I assure you. — There is one remarkably pretty sitting room up stairs; of a nice comfortable size for constant use, and with modern furniture it would be delightful. It is a corner room, and has windows on two sides. On one side you look across the bowling-green, behind the house, to a beautiful hanging wood, and on the other you have a view of the church and village, and, beyond them, of those fine bold hills that we have so often admired. I did not see it to advantage, for nothing could be more forlorn than the furniture, — but if it were newly fitted up — a couple of hundred pounds, Willoughby says, would make it one of the pleasantest summer-rooms in England.'

Could Elinor have listened to her without interruption from the others, she would have described every room in the house with equal delight.

## Chapter XIII



THEIR intended excursion to Whirwell turned out very different from what Elinor had expected. She was prepared to be wet through, fatigued, and frightened; but the event was still more unfortunate, for they did not go at all.

By ten o'clock the whole party was assembled at the park, where they were to breakfast. The morning was rather favourable, though it had rained all night, as the clouds were then dispersing across the sky, and the sun frequently appeared. They were all in high spirits and good humour, eager to be happy, and determined to submit to the greatest inconveniences and hardships rather than be otherwise.

While they were at breakfast the letters were brought in. Among the rest there was one for Colonel Brandon;—he took it, looked at the direction, changed colour, and immediately left the room.

‘What is the matter with Brandon?’ said Sir John.

Nobody could tell.

‘I hope he has had no bad news,’ said Lady Middleton. ‘It must be something extraordinary that could make Colonel Brandon leave my breakfast table so suddenly.’

In about five minutes he returned.

‘No bad news, Colonel, I hope,’ said Mrs Jennings, as soon as he entered the room.

‘None at all, ma’am, I thank you.’


‘Was it from Avignon? I hope it is not to say that your sister is worse.’

‘No, ma’am. It came from town, and is merely a letter of business.’

morning's amusement; cold provisions were to be taken, open carriages only to be employed, and every thing conducted in the usual style of a complete party of pleasure.

To some few of the company it appeared rather a bold undertaking, considering the time of year, and that it had rained every day for the last fortnight;—and Mrs Dashwood, who had already a cold, was persuaded by Elinor to stay at home.

## Chapter XIV

HE sudden termination of Colonel Brandon's visit at the park, with his steadiness in concealing its cause, filled the mind, and raised the wonder of Mrs Jennings for two or three days; she was a great wonderer, as every one must be who takes a very lively interest in all the comings and goings of all their acquaintance. She wondered, with little intermission what could be the reason of it; was sure there must be some bad news, and thought over every kind of distress that could have befallen him, with a fixed determination that he should not escape them all.

'Something very melancholy must be the matter, I am sure,' said she. 'I could see it in his face. Poor man! I am afraid his circumstances may be bad. The estate at Delaford was never reckoned more than two thousand a year, and his brother left everything sadly involved. I do think he must have been sent for about money matters, for what else can it be? I wonder whether it is so. I would give anything to know the truth of it. Perhaps it is about Miss Williams and, by the bye, I dare say it is, because he looked so conscious when I mentioned her. May be she is ill in town; nothing in the world more likely, for I have a notion she is always rather sickly. I would lay any wager it is about Miss Williams. It is not so very likely he should be distressed in his circumstances *now*, for he is a very prudent man, and to be sure must have cleared the estate by this time. I wonder what it can be! May be his sister is worse at Avignon, and has sent for him over. His setting off in such a hurry seems very like it. Well, I wish him out of all his trouble with all my heart, and a good wife into the bargain.'

So wondered, so talked Mrs Jennings. Her opinion varying with every fresh conjecture, and all seeming equally probable as they arose. Elinor, though she felt really interested in the welfare of Colonel Brandon, could not bestow all the wonder on his going so suddenly away, which Mrs Jennings was desirous of her feelings; for besides that the circumstance did not in her opinion justify such lasting amazement or variety of speculation, her wonder was otherwise disposed of. It was engrossed by the extraordinary silence of her sister and Willoughby on the subject, which they must know to be peculiarly interesting to them all. As this silence continued, every day made it appear more strange and more incompatible with the disposition of both. Why they should not openly acknowledge to her mother and herself, what their constant behaviour to each other declared to have taken place, Elinor could not imagine.

She could easily conceive that marriage might not be immediately in their power; for though Willoughby was independent, there was no reason to believe him rich. His estate had been rated by Sir John at about six or seven hundred a year; but he lived at an expense to which that income could hardly be equal, and he had himself often complained of his poverty. But for this strange kind of secrecy maintained by them relative to their engagement, which in fact concealed nothing at all, she could not account; and it was so wholly contradictory to their general opinions and practice, that a doubt sometimes entered her mind of their being really engaged, and this doubt was enough to prevent her making any inquiry of Marianne.

Nothing could be more expressive of attachment to them all, than Willoughby's behaviour. To Marianne it had all the distinguishing tenderness which a lover's heart could give, and to the rest of the family it was the affectionate attention of a son and a brother. The cottage seemed to be considered and loved by him as his home; many more of his hours were spent there than at Allenhurst; and if no general engagement collected them at the park, the exercise which called him out in the morning was almost certain of ending there, where the rest of the day was spent by himself at the side of Marianne, and by his favourite pointer at her feet.

One evening in particular, about a week after Colonel Brandon left the country, his heart seemed more than usually open to every feeling of attachment to the objects around him; and on Mrs Dashwood's happening to mention

'Remember that whatever your conjectures may be, you have no right to repeat them.'

'I never had any conjectures about it,' replied Margaret; 'it was you who told me of it yourself.'

This increased the mirth of the company, and Margaret was eagerly pressed to say something more.

'Oh! pray, Miss Margaret, let us know all about it,' said Mrs Jennings. 'What is the gentleman's name?'

'I must not tell, ma'am. But I know very well what it is; and I know where he is too.'

'Yes, yes, we can guess where he is; at his own house at Norland to be sure. He is the curate of the parish I dare say.'

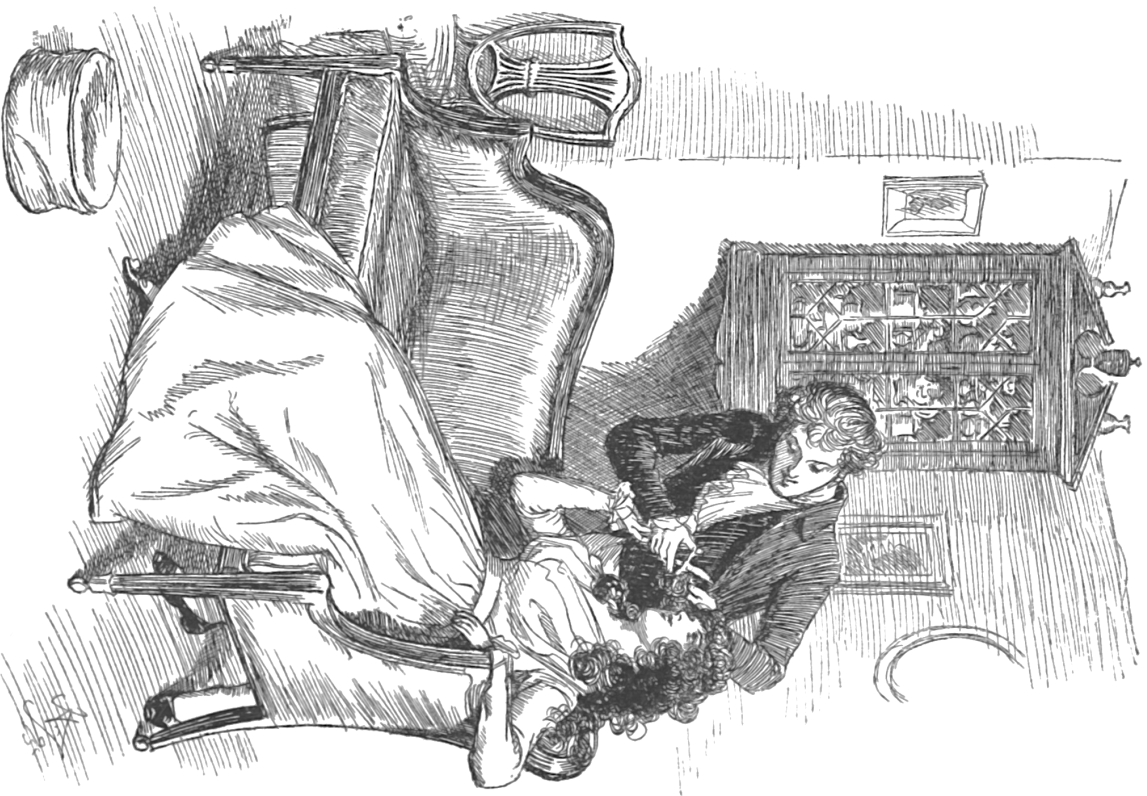
'No, *that* he is not. He is of no profession at all.'

'Margaret,' said Marianne with great warmth, 'you know that all this is an invention of your own, and that there is no such person in existence.'

'Well, then, he is lately dead, Marianne, for I am sure there was such a man once, and his name begins with an F.'

Most grateful did Elinor feel to Lady Middleton for observing, at this moment, 'that it rained very hard,' though she believed the interruption to proceed less from any attention to her, than from her ladyship's great dislike of all such inelegant subjects of railery as delighted her husband and mother. The idea however started by her, was immediately pursued by Colonel Brandon, who was on every occasion mindful of the feelings of others; and much was said on the subject of rain by both of them. Willoughby opened the piano-forte, and asked Marianne to sit down to it; and thus amidst the various endeavours of different people to quit the topic, it fell to the ground. But not so easily did Elinor recover from the alarm into which it had thrown her.

A party was formed this evening for going on the following day to see a very fine place about twelve miles from Barton, belonging to a brother-in-law of Colonel Brandon, without whose interest it could not be seen, as the proprietor, who was then abroad, had left strict orders on that head. The grounds were declared to be highly beautiful, and Sir John, who was particularly warm in their praise, might be allowed to be a tolerable judge; for he had formed parties to visit them, at least, twice every summer for the last ten years. They contained a noble piece of water; a sail on which was to form a great part of the



HE CUT OFF A LONG LOCK OF HER HAIR

her design of improving the cottage in the spring, he warmly opposed every alteration of a place which affection had established as perfect with him.

'What!' he exclaimed—'Improve this dear cottage! No. *That* I will never consent to. Not a stone must be added to its walls, not an inch to its size, if my feelings are regarded.'

'Do not be alarmed,' said Miss Dashwood, 'nothing of the kind will be done; for my mother will never have money enough to attempt it.'

'I am heartily glad of it,' he cried. 'May she always be poor, if she can employ her riches no better.'

'Thank you, Willoughby. But you may be assured that I would not sacrifice one sentiment of local attachment of yours, or of any one whom I loved, for all the improvements in the world. Depend upon it that whatever unemployed sum may remain, when I make up my accounts in the spring, I would even rather lay it uselessly by than dispose of it in a manner so painful to you. But are you really so attached to this place as to see no defect in it?'

'I am,' said he. 'To me it is faultless. Nay, more, I consider it as the only form of building in which happiness is attainable, and were I rich enough I would instantly pull Combe down, and build it up again in the exact plan of this cottage.'

'With dark narrow stairs and a kitchen that smokes, I suppose,' said Elinor.

'Yes,' cried he in the same eager tone, 'with all and every thing belonging to it;—in no one convenience or inconvenience about it, should the least variation be perceptible. Then, and then only, under such a roof, I might perhaps be as happy at Combe as I have been at Barton.'

'I flatter myself,' replied Elinor, 'that even under the disadvantage of better rooms and a broader staircase, you will hereafter find your own house as faultless as you now do this.'

'There certainly are circumstances,' said Willoughby, 'which might greatly endear it to me; but this place will always have one claim of my affection, which no other can possibly share.'

Mrs Dashwood looked with pleasure at Marianne, whose fine eyes were fixed so expressively on Willoughby, as plainly denoted how well she understood him.

'How often did I wish,' added he, 'when I was at Allenham this time twelve-month, that Barton cottage were inhabited! I never passed within view of

it without admiring its situation, and grieving that no one should live in it. How little did I then think that the very first news I should hear from Mrs Smith, when I next came into the country, would be that Barton cottage was taken: and I felt an immediate satisfaction and interest in the event, which nothing but a kind of prescience of what happiness I should experience from it, can account for. Must it not have been so, Marianne? speaking to her in a lowered voice. Then continuing his former tone, he said, 'And yet this house you would spoil, Mrs Dashwood? You would rob it of its simplicity by imaginary improvement: and this dear parlour in which our acquaintance first began, and in which so many happy hours have been spent by us together, you would degrade to the condition of a common entrance, and every body would be eager to pass through the room which has hitherto contained within itself more real accommodation and comfort than any other apartment of the handsomest dimensions in the world could possibly afford.'

Mrs Dashwood again assured him that no alteration of the kind should be attempted.

'You are a good woman,' he warmly replied. 'Your promise makes me easy. Extend it a little farther, and it will make me happy. Tell me that not only your house will remain the same, but that I shall ever find you and yours as unchanged as your dwelling; and that you will always consider me with the kindness which has made everything belonging to you so dear to me.'

The promise was readily given, and Willoughby's behaviour during the whole of the evening declared at once his affection and happiness.

'Shall we see you tomorrow to dinner?' said Mrs Dashwood, when he was leaving them. 'I do not ask you to come in the morning, for we must walk to the park, to call on Lady Middleton.'

He engaged to be with them by four o'clock.

Margaret related something to her the next day, which placed this matter in a still clearer light. Willoughby had spent the preceding evening with them, and Margaret, by being left some time in the parlour with only him and Marianne, had had opportunity for observations, which, with a most important face, she communicated to her eldest sister, when they were next by themselves.

'Oh, Elinor!' she cried, 'I have such a secret to tell you about Marianne. I am sure she will be married to Mr Willoughby very soon.'

'You have said so,' replied Elinor, 'almost every day since they first met on High-church Down; and they had not known each other a week, I believe, before you were certain that Marianne wore his picture round her neck; but it turned out to be only the miniature of our great uncle.'

'But indeed this is quite another thing. I am sure they will be married very soon, for he has got a lock of her hair.'

'Take care, Margaret. It may be only the hair of some great uncle of *his*.'

'But, indeed, Elinor, it is Marianne's. I am almost sure it is, for I saw him cut it off. Last night after tea, when you and mamma went out of the room, they were whispering and talking together as fast as could be, and he seemed to be begging something of her, and presently he took up her scissors and cut off a long lock of her hair, for it was all tumbled down her back; and he kissed it, and folded it up in a piece of white paper, and put it into his pocket-book.'

For such particulars, stated on such authority, Elinor could not withhold her credit; nor was she disposed to it, for the circumstance was in perfect unison with what she had heard and seen herself.

Margaret's sagacity was not always displayed in a way so satisfactory to her sister. When Mrs Jennings attacked her one evening at the park, to give the name of the young man who was Elinor's particular favourite, which had been long a matter of great curiosity to her, Margaret answered by looking at her sister, and saying, 'I must not tell, may I, Elinor?'

This of course made every body laugh; and Elinor tried to laugh too. But the effort was painful. She was convinced that Margaret had fixed on a person whose name she could not bear with composure to become a standing joke with Mrs Jennings.

Marianne felt for her most sincerely; but she did more harm than good to the cause, by turning very red and saying in an angry manner to Margaret,