SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

by Jane Austen

(1811)

CHAPTER 1

The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex. Their estate

was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of

their property, where, for many generations, they had lived in so

respectable a manner as to engage the general good opinion of their

surrounding acquaintance. The late owner of this estate was a single

man, who lived to a very advanced age, and who for many years of his

life, had a constant companion and housekeeper in his sister. But her

death, which happened ten years before his own, produced a great

alteration in his home; for to supply her loss, he invited and received

into his house the family of his nephew Mr. Henry Dashwood, the legal

inheritor of the Norland estate, and the person to whom he intended to

bequeath it. In the society of his nephew and niece, and their

children, the old Gentleman's days were comfortably spent. His

attachment to them all increased. The constant attention of Mr. and

Mrs. Henry Dashwood to his wishes, which proceeded not merely from

interest, but from goodness of heart, gave him every degree of solid

comfort which his age could receive; and the cheerfulness of the

children added a relish to his existence.

By a former marriage, Mr. Henry Dashwood had one son: by his present

lady, three daughters. The son, a steady respectable young man, was

amply provided for by the fortune of his mother, which had been large,

and half of which devolved on him on his coming of age. By his own

marriage, likewise, which happened soon afterwards, he added to his

wealth. To him therefore the succession to the Norland estate was not

so really important as to his sisters; for their fortune, independent

of what might arise to them from their father's inheriting that

property, could be but small. Their mother had nothing, and their

father only seven thousand pounds in his own disposal; for the

remaining moiety of his first wife's fortune was also secured to her

child, and he had only a life-interest in it.

The old gentleman died: his will was read, and like almost every other

will, gave as much disappointment as pleasure. He was neither so

unjust, nor so ungrateful, as to leave his estate from his nephew;--but

he left it to him on such terms as destroyed half the value of the

bequest. Mr. Dashwood had wished for it more for the sake of his wife

and daughters than for himself or his son;--but to his son, and his

son's son, a child of four years old, it was secured, in such a way, as

to leave to himself no power of providing for those who were most dear

to him, and who most needed a provision by any charge on the estate, or

by any sale of its valuable woods. The whole was tied up for the

benefit of this child, who, in occasional visits with his father and

mother at Norland, had so far gained on the affections of his uncle, by

such attractions as are by no means unusual in children of two or three

years old; an imperfect articulation, an earnest desire of having his

own way, many cunning tricks, and a great deal of noise, as to outweigh

all the value of all the attention which, for years, he had received

from his niece and her daughters. He meant not to be unkind, however,

and, as a mark of his affection for the three girls, he left them a

thousand pounds a-piece.

Mr. Dashwood's disappointment was, at first, severe; but his temper was

cheerful and sanguine; and he might reasonably hope to live many years,

and by living economically, lay by a considerable sum from the produce

of an estate already large, and capable of almost immediate

improvement. But the fortune, which had been so tardy in coming, was

his only one twelvemonth. He survived his uncle no longer; and ten

thousand pounds, including the late legacies, was all that remained for

his widow and daughters.

His son was sent for as soon as his danger was known, and to him Mr.

Dashwood recommended, with all the strength and urgency which illness

could command, the interest of his mother-in-law and sisters.

Mr. John Dashwood had not the strong feelings of the rest of the

family; but he was affected by a recommendation of such a nature at

such a time, and he promised to do every thing in his power to make

them comfortable. His father was rendered easy by such an assurance,

and Mr. John Dashwood had then leisure to consider how much there might

prudently be in his power to do for them.

He was not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold hearted

and rather selfish is to be ill-disposed: but he was, in general, well

respected; for he conducted himself with propriety in the discharge of

his ordinary duties. Had he married a more amiable woman, he might

have been made still more respectable than he was:--he might even have

been made amiable himself; for he was very young when he married, and

very fond of his wife. But Mrs. John Dashwood was a strong caricature

of himself;--more narrow-minded and selfish.

When he gave his promise to his father, he meditated within himself to

increase the fortunes of his sisters by the present of a thousand

pounds a-piece. He then really thought himself equal to it. The

prospect of four thousand a-year, in addition to his present income,

besides the remaining half of his own mother's fortune, warmed his

heart, and made him feel capable of generosity.-- "Yes, he would give

them three thousand pounds: it would be liberal and handsome! It would

be enough to make them completely easy. Three thousand pounds! he

could spare so considerable a sum with little inconvenience."-- He

thought of it all day long, and for many days successively, and he did

not repent.

No sooner was his father's funeral over, than Mrs. John Dashwood,

without sending any notice of her intention to her mother-in-law,

arrived with her child and their attendants. No one could dispute her

right to come; the house was her husband's from the moment of his

father's decease; but the indelicacy of her conduct was so much the

greater, and to a woman in Mrs. Dashwood's situation, with only common

feelings, must have been highly unpleasing;--but in HER mind there was

a sense of honor so keen, a generosity so romantic, that any offence of

the kind, by whomsoever given or received, was to her a source of

immoveable disgust. Mrs. John Dashwood had never been a favourite with

any of her husband's family; but she had had no opportunity, till the

present, of shewing them with how little attention to the comfort of

other people she could act when occasion required it.

So acutely did Mrs. Dashwood feel this ungracious behaviour, and so

earnestly did she despise her daughter-in-law for it, that, on the

arrival of the latter, she would have quitted the house for ever, had

not the entreaty of her eldest girl induced her first to reflect on the

propriety of going, and her own tender love for all her three children

determined her afterwards to stay, and for their sakes avoid a breach

with their brother.

Elinor, this eldest daughter, whose advice was so effectual, possessed

a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified

her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother, and

enabled her frequently to counteract, to the advantage of them all,

that eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led

to imprudence. She had an excellent heart;--her disposition was

affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern

them: it was a knowledge which her mother had yet to learn; and which

one of her sisters had resolved never to be taught.

Marianne's abilities were, in many respects, quite equal to Elinor's.

She was sensible and clever; but eager in everything: her sorrows, her

joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable,

interesting: she was everything but prudent. The resemblance between

her and her mother was strikingly great.

Elinor saw, with concern, the excess of her sister's sensibility; but

by Mrs. Dashwood it was valued and cherished. They encouraged each

other now in the violence of their affliction. The agony of grief

which overpowered them at first, was voluntarily renewed, was sought

for, was created again and again. They gave themselves up wholly to

their sorrow, seeking increase of wretchedness in every reflection that

could afford it, and resolved against ever admitting consolation in

future. Elinor, too, was deeply afflicted; but still she could

struggle, she could exert herself. She could consult with her brother,

could receive her sister-in-law on her arrival, and treat her with

proper attention; and could strive to rouse her mother to similar

exertion, and encourage her to similar forbearance.

Margaret, the other sister, was a good-humored, well-disposed girl; but

as she had already imbibed a good deal of Marianne's romance, without

having much of her sense, she did not, at thirteen, bid fair to equal

her sisters at a more advanced period of life.

CHAPTER 2

Mrs. John Dashwood now installed herself mistress of Norland; and her

mother and sisters-in-law were degraded to the condition of visitors.

As such, however, they were treated by her with quiet civility; and by

her husband with as much kindness as he could feel towards anybody

beyond himself, his wife, and their child. He really pressed them,

with some earnestness, to consider Norland as their home; and, as no

plan appeared so eligible to Mrs. Dashwood as remaining there till she

could accommodate herself with a house in the neighbourhood, his

invitation was accepted.

A continuance in a place where everything reminded her of former

delight, was exactly what suited her mind. In seasons of cheerfulness,

no temper could be more cheerful than hers, or possess, in a greater

degree, that sanguine expectation of happiness which is happiness

itself. But in sorrow she must be equally carried away by her fancy,

and as far beyond consolation as in pleasure she was beyond alloy.

Mrs. John Dashwood did not at all approve of what her husband intended

to do for his sisters. To take three thousand pounds from the fortune

of their dear little boy would be impoverishing him to the most

dreadful degree. She begged him to think again on the subject. How

could he answer it to himself to rob his child, and his only child too,

of so large a sum? And what possible claim could the Miss Dashwoods,

who were related to him only by half blood, which she considered as no

relationship at all, have on his generosity to so large an amount. It

was very well known that no affection was ever supposed to exist

between the children of any man by different marriages; and why was he

to ruin himself, and their poor little Harry, by giving away all his

money to his half sisters?

"It was my father's last request to me," replied her husband, "that I

should assist his widow and daughters."

"He did not know what he was talking of, I dare say; ten to one but he

was light-headed at the time. Had he been in his right senses, he

could not have thought of such a thing as begging you to give away half

your fortune from your own child."

"He did not stipulate for any particular sum, my dear Fanny; he only

requested me, in general terms, to assist them, and make their

situation more comfortable than it was in his power to do. Perhaps it

would have been as well if he had left it wholly to myself. He could

hardly suppose I should neglect them. But as he required the promise,

I could not do less than give it; at least I thought so at the time.

The promise, therefore, was given, and must be performed. Something

must be done for them whenever they leave Norland and settle in a new

home."

"Well, then, LET something be done for them; but THAT something need

not be three thousand pounds. Consider," she added, "that when the

money is once parted with, it never can return. Your sisters will

marry, and it will be gone for ever. If, indeed, it could be restored

to our poor little boy--"

"Why, to be sure," said her husband, very gravely, "that would make

great difference. The time may come when Harry will regret that so

large a sum was parted with. If he should have a numerous family, for

instance, it would be a very convenient addition."

"To be sure it would."

"Perhaps, then, it would be better for all parties, if the sum were

diminished one half.--Five hundred pounds would be a prodigious

increase to their fortunes!"

"Oh! beyond anything great! What brother on earth would do half so

much for his sisters, even if REALLY his sisters! And as it is--only

half blood!--But you have such a generous spirit!"

"I would not wish to do any thing mean," he replied. "One had rather,

on such occasions, do too much than too little. No one, at least, can

think I have not done enough for them: even themselves, they can hardly

expect more."

"There is no knowing what THEY may expect," said the lady, "but we are

not to think of their expectations: the question is, what you can

afford to do."

"Certainly--and I think I may afford to give them five hundred pounds

a-piece. As it is, without any addition of mine, they will each have

about three thousand pounds on their mother's death--a very comfortable

fortune for any young woman."

"To be sure it is; and, indeed, it strikes me that they can want no

addition at all. They will have ten thousand pounds divided amongst

them. If they marry, they will be sure of doing well, and if they do

not, they may all live very comfortably together on the interest of ten

thousand pounds."

"That is very true, and, therefore, I do not know whether, upon the

whole, it would not be more advisable to do something for their mother

while she lives, rather than for them--something of the annuity kind I

mean.--My sisters would feel the good effects of it as well as herself.

A hundred a year would make them all perfectly comfortable."

His wife hesitated a little, however, in giving her consent to this

plan.

"To be sure," said she, "it is better than parting with fifteen hundred

pounds at once. But, then, if Mrs. Dashwood should live fifteen years

we shall be completely taken in."

"Fifteen years! my dear Fanny; her life cannot be worth half that

purchase."

"Certainly not; but if you observe, people always live for ever when

there is an annuity to be paid them; and she is very stout and healthy,

and hardly forty. An annuity is a very serious business; it comes over

and over every year, and there is no getting rid of it. You are not

aware of what you are doing. I have known a great deal of the trouble

of annuities; for my mother was clogged with the payment of three to

old superannuated servants by my father's will, and it is amazing how

disagreeable she found it. Twice every year these annuities were to be

paid; and then there was the trouble of getting it to them; and then

one of them was said to have died, and afterwards it turned out to be

no such thing. My mother was quite sick of it. Her income was not her

own, she said, with such perpetual claims on it; and it was the more

unkind in my father, because, otherwise, the money would have been

entirely at my mother's disposal, without any restriction whatever. It

has given me such an abhorrence of annuities, that I am sure I would

not pin myself down to the payment of one for all the world."

"It is certainly an unpleasant thing," replied Mr. Dashwood, "to have

those kind of yearly drains on one's income. One's fortune, as your

mother justly says, is NOT one's own. To be tied down to the regular

payment of such a sum, on every rent day, is by no means desirable: it

takes away one's independence."

"Undoubtedly; and after all you have no thanks for it. They think

themselves secure, you do no more than what is expected, and it raises

no gratitude at all. If I were you, whatever I did should be done at

my own discretion entirely. I would not bind myself to allow them any

thing yearly. It may be very inconvenient some years to spare a

hundred, or even fifty pounds from our own expenses."

"I believe you are right, my love; it will be better that there should

by no annuity in the case; whatever I may give them occasionally will

be of far greater assistance than a yearly allowance, because they

would only enlarge their style of living if they felt sure of a larger

income, and would not be sixpence the richer for it at the end of the

year. It will certainly be much the best way. A present of fifty

pounds, now and then, will prevent their ever being distressed for

money, and will, I think, be amply discharging my promise to my father."

"To be sure it will. Indeed, to say the truth, I am convinced within

myself that your father had no idea of your giving them any money at

all. The assistance he thought of, I dare say, was only such as might

be reasonably expected of you; for instance, such as looking out for a

comfortable small house for them, helping them to move their things,

and sending them presents of fish and game, and so forth, whenever they

are in season. I'll lay my life that he meant nothing farther; indeed,

it would be very strange and unreasonable if he did. Do but consider,

my dear Mr. Dashwood, how excessively comfortable your mother-in-law

and her daughters may live on the interest of seven thousand pounds,

besides the thousand pounds belonging to each of the girls, which

brings them in fifty pounds a year a-piece, and, of course, they will

pay their mother for their board out of it. Altogether, they will have

five hundred a-year amongst them, and what on earth can four women want

for more than that?--They will live so cheap! Their housekeeping will

be nothing at all. They will have no carriage, no horses, and hardly

any servants; they will keep no company, and can have no expenses of

any kind! Only conceive how comfortable they will be! Five hundred a

year! I am sure I cannot imagine how they will spend half of it; and as

to your giving them more, it is quite absurd to think of it. They will

be much more able to give YOU something."

"Upon my word," said Mr. Dashwood, "I believe you are perfectly right.

My father certainly could mean nothing more by his request to me than

what you say. I clearly understand it now, and I will strictly fulfil

my engagement by such acts of assistance and kindness to them as you

have described. When my mother removes into another house my services

shall be readily given to accommodate her as far as I can. Some little

present of furniture too may be acceptable then."

"Certainly," returned Mrs. John Dashwood. "But, however, ONE thing

must be considered. When your father and mother moved to Norland,

though the furniture of Stanhill was sold, all the china, plate, and

linen was saved, and is now left to your mother. Her house will

therefore be almost completely fitted up as soon as she takes it."

"That is a material consideration undoubtedly. A valuable legacy

indeed! And yet some of the plate would have been a very pleasant

addition to our own stock here."

"Yes; and the set of breakfast china is twice as handsome as what

belongs to this house. A great deal too handsome, in my opinion, for

any place THEY can ever afford to live in. But, however, so it is.

Your father thought only of THEM. And I must say this: that you owe no

particular gratitude to him, nor attention to his wishes; for we very

well know that if he could, he would have left almost everything in the

world to THEM."

This argument was irresistible. It gave to his intentions whatever of

decision was wanting before; and he finally resolved, that it would be

absolutely unnecessary, if not highly indecorous, to do more for the

widow and children of his father, than such kind of neighbourly acts as

his own wife pointed out.

CHAPTER 3

Mrs. Dashwood remained at Norland several months; not from any

disinclination to move when the sight of every well known spot ceased

to raise the violent emotion which it produced for a while; for when

her spirits began to revive, and her mind became capable of some other

exertion than that of heightening its affliction by melancholy

remembrances, she was impatient to be gone, and indefatigable in her

inquiries for a suitable dwelling in the neighbourhood of Norland; for

to remove far from that beloved spot was impossible. But she could

hear of no situation that at once answered her notions of comfort and

ease, and suited the prudence of her eldest daughter, whose steadier

judgment rejected several houses as too large for their income, which

her mother would have approved.

Mrs. Dashwood had been informed by her husband of the solemn promise on

the part of his son in their favour, which gave comfort to his last

earthly reflections. She doubted the sincerity of this assurance no

more than he had doubted it himself, and she thought of it for her

daughters' sake with satisfaction, though as for herself she was

persuaded that a much smaller provision than 7000L would support her in

affluence. For their brother's sake, too, for the sake of his own

heart, she rejoiced; and she reproached herself for being unjust to his

merit before, in believing him incapable of generosity. His attentive

behaviour to herself and his sisters convinced her that their welfare

was dear to him, and, for a long time, she firmly relied on the

liberality of his intentions.

The contempt which she had, very early in their acquaintance, felt for

her daughter-in-law, was very much increased by the farther knowledge

of her character, which half a year's residence in her family afforded;

and perhaps in spite of every consideration of politeness or maternal

affection on the side of the former, the two ladies might have found it

impossible to have lived together so long, had not a particular

circumstance occurred to give still greater eligibility, according to

the opinions of Mrs. Dashwood, to her daughters' continuance at Norland.

This circumstance was a growing attachment between her eldest girl and

the brother of Mrs. John Dashwood, a gentleman-like and pleasing young

man, who was introduced to their acquaintance soon after his sister's

establishment at Norland, and who had since spent the greatest part of

his time there.

Some mothers might have encouraged the intimacy from motives of

interest, for Edward Ferrars was the eldest son of a man who had died

very rich; and some might have repressed it from motives of prudence,

for, except a trifling sum, the whole of his fortune depended on the

will of his mother. But Mrs. Dashwood was alike uninfluenced by either

consideration. It was enough for her that he appeared to be amiable,

that he loved her daughter, and that Elinor returned the partiality.

It was contrary to every doctrine of her's that difference of fortune

should keep any couple asunder who were attracted by resemblance of

disposition; and that Elinor's merit should not be acknowledged by

every one who knew her, was to her comprehension impossible.

Edward Ferrars was not recommended to their good opinion by any

peculiar graces of person or address. He was not handsome, and his

manners required intimacy to make them pleasing. He was too diffident

to do justice to himself; but when his natural shyness was overcome,

his behaviour gave every indication of an open, affectionate heart.

His understanding was good, and his education had given it solid

improvement. But he was neither fitted by abilities nor disposition to

answer the wishes of his mother and sister, who longed to see him

distinguished--as--they hardly knew what. They wanted him to make a

fine figure in the world in some manner or other. His mother wished to

interest him in political concerns, to get him into parliament, or to

see him connected with some of the great men of the day. Mrs. John

Dashwood wished it likewise; but in the mean while, till one of these

superior blessings could be attained, it would have quieted her

ambition to see him driving a barouche. But Edward had no turn for

great men or barouches. All his wishes centered in domestic comfort

and the quiet of private life. Fortunately he had a younger brother

who was more promising.

Edward had been staying several weeks in the house before he engaged

much of Mrs. Dashwood's attention; for she was, at that time, in such

affliction as rendered her careless of surrounding objects. She saw

only that he was quiet and unobtrusive, and she liked him for it. He

did not disturb the wretchedness of her mind by ill-timed conversation.

She was first called to observe and approve him farther, by a

reflection which Elinor chanced one day to make on the difference

between him and his sister. It was a contrast which recommended him

most forcibly to her mother.

"It is enough," said she; "to say that he is unlike Fanny is enough.

It implies everything amiable. I love him already."

"I think you will like him," said Elinor, "when you know more of him."

"Like him!" replied her mother with a smile. "I feel no sentiment of

approbation inferior to love."

"You may esteem him."

"I have never yet known what it was to separate esteem and love."

Mrs. Dashwood now took pains to get acquainted with him. Her manners

were attaching, and soon banished his reserve. She speedily

comprehended all his merits; the persuasion of his regard for Elinor

perhaps assisted her penetration; but she really felt assured of his

worth: and even that quietness of manner, which militated against all

her established ideas of what a young man's address ought to be, was no

longer uninteresting when she knew his heart to be warm and his temper

affectionate.

No sooner did she perceive any symptom of love in his behaviour to

Elinor, than she considered their serious attachment as certain, and

looked forward to their marriage as rapidly approaching.

"In a few months, my dear Marianne." said she, "Elinor will, in all

probability be settled for life. We shall miss her; but SHE will be

happy."

"Oh! Mamma, how shall we do without her?"

"My love, it will be scarcely a separation. We shall live within a few

miles of each other, and shall meet every day of our lives. You will

gain a brother, a real, affectionate brother. I have the highest

opinion in the world of Edward's heart. But you look grave, Marianne;

do you disapprove your sister's choice?"

"Perhaps," said Marianne, "I may consider it with some surprise.

Edward is very amiable, and I love him tenderly. But yet--he is not

the kind of young man--there is something wanting--his figure is not

striking; it has none of that grace which I should expect in the man

who could seriously attach my sister. His eyes want all that spirit,

that fire, which at once announce virtue and intelligence. And besides

all this, I am afraid, Mamma, he has no real taste. Music seems

scarcely to attract him, and though he admires Elinor's drawings very

much, it is not the admiration of a person who can understand their

worth. It is evident, in spite of his frequent attention to her while

she draws, that in fact he knows nothing of the matter. He admires as

a lover, not as a connoisseur. To satisfy me, those characters must be

united. I could not be happy with a man whose taste did not in every

point coincide with my own. He must enter into all my feelings; the

same books, the same music must charm us both. Oh! mama, how

spiritless, how tame was Edward's manner in reading to us last night!

I felt for my sister most severely. Yet she bore it with so much

composure, she seemed scarcely to notice it. I could hardly keep my

seat. To hear those beautiful lines which have frequently almost

driven me wild, pronounced with such impenetrable calmness, such

dreadful indifference!"-- "He would certainly have done more justice to

simple and elegant prose. I thought so at the time; but you WOULD give

him Cowper."

"Nay, Mamma, if he is not to be animated by Cowper!--but we must allow

for difference of taste. Elinor has not my feelings, and therefore she

may overlook it, and be happy with him. But it would have broke MY

heart, had I loved him, to hear him read with so little sensibility.

Mama, the more I know of the world, the more am I convinced that I

shall never see a man whom I can really love. I require so much! He

must have all Edward's virtues, and his person and manners must

ornament his goodness with every possible charm."

"Remember, my love, that you are not seventeen. It is yet too early in

life to despair of such a happiness. Why should you be less fortunate

than your mother? In one circumstance only, my Marianne, may your

destiny be different from her's!"

CHAPTER 4

"What a pity it is, Elinor," said Marianne, "that Edward should have no

taste for drawing."

"No taste for drawing!" replied Elinor, "why should you think so? He

does not draw himself, indeed, but he has great pleasure in seeing the

performances of other people, and I assure you he is by no means

deficient in natural taste, though he has not had opportunities of

improving it. Had he ever been in the way of learning, I think he

would have drawn very well. He distrusts his own judgment in such

matters so much, that he is always unwilling to give his opinion on any

picture; but he has an innate propriety and simplicity of taste, which

in general direct him perfectly right."

Marianne was afraid of offending, and said no more on the subject; but

the kind of approbation which Elinor described as excited in him by the

drawings of other people, was very far from that rapturous delight,

which, in her opinion, could alone be called taste. Yet, though

smiling within herself at the mistake, she honoured her sister for that

blind partiality to Edward which produced it.

"I hope, Marianne," continued Elinor, "you do not consider him as

deficient in general taste. Indeed, I think I may say that you cannot,

for your behaviour to him is perfectly cordial, and if THAT were your

opinion, I am sure you could never be civil to him."

Marianne hardly knew what to say. She would not wound the feelings of

her sister on any account, and yet to say what she did not believe was

impossible. At length she replied:

"Do not be offended, Elinor, if my praise of him is not in every thing

equal to your sense of his merits. I have not had so many

opportunities of estimating the minuter propensities of his mind, his

inclinations and tastes, as you have; but I have the highest opinion in

the world of his goodness and sense. I think him every thing that is

worthy and amiable."

"I am sure," replied Elinor, with a smile, "that his dearest friends

could not be dissatisfied with such commendation as that. I do not

perceive how you could express yourself more warmly."

Marianne was rejoiced to find her sister so easily pleased.

"Of his sense and his goodness," continued Elinor, "no one can, I

think, be in doubt, who has seen him often enough to engage him in

unreserved conversation. The excellence of his understanding and his

principles can be concealed only by that shyness which too often keeps

him silent. You know enough of him to do justice to his solid worth.

But of his minuter propensities, as you call them you have from

peculiar circumstances been kept more ignorant than myself. He and I

have been at times thrown a good deal together, while you have been

wholly engrossed on the most affectionate principle by my mother. I

have seen a great deal of him, have studied his sentiments and heard

his opinion on subjects of literature and taste; and, upon the whole, I

venture to pronounce that his mind is well-informed, enjoyment of books

exceedingly great, his imagination lively, his observation just and

correct, and his taste delicate and pure. His abilities in every

respect improve as much upon acquaintance as his manners and person.

At first sight, his address is certainly not striking; and his person

can hardly be called handsome, till the expression of his eyes, which

are uncommonly good, and the general sweetness of his countenance, is

perceived. At present, I know him so well, that I think him really

handsome; or at least, almost so. What say you, Marianne?"

"I shall very soon think him handsome, Elinor, if I do not now. When

you tell me to love him as a brother, I shall no more see imperfection

in his face, than I now do in his heart."

Elinor started at this declaration, and was sorry for the warmth she

had been betrayed into, in speaking of him. She felt that Edward stood

very high in her opinion. She believed the regard to be mutual; but

she required greater certainty of it to make Marianne's conviction of

their attachment agreeable to her. She knew that what Marianne and her

mother conjectured one moment, they believed the next--that with them,

to wish was to hope, and to hope was to expect. She tried to explain

the real state of the case to her sister.

"I do not attempt to deny," said she, "that I think very highly of

him--that I greatly esteem, that I like him."

Marianne here burst forth with indignation--

"Esteem him! Like him! Cold-hearted Elinor! Oh! worse than

cold-hearted! Ashamed of being otherwise. Use those words again, and I

will leave the room this moment."

Elinor could not help laughing. "Excuse me," said she; "and be assured

that I meant no offence to you, by speaking, in so quiet a way, of my

own feelings. Believe them to be stronger than I have declared;

believe them, in short, to be such as his merit, and the suspicion--the

hope of his affection for me may warrant, without imprudence or folly.

But farther than this you must not believe. I am by no means assured

of his regard for me. There are moments when the extent of it seems

doubtful; and till his sentiments are fully known, you cannot wonder at

my wishing to avoid any encouragement of my own partiality, by

believing or calling it more than it is. In my heart I feel

little--scarcely any doubt of his preference. But there are other

points to be considered besides his inclination. He is very far from

being independent. What his mother really is we cannot know; but, from

Fanny's occasional mention of her conduct and opinions, we have never

been disposed to think her amiable; and I am very much mistaken if

Edward is not himself aware that there would be many difficulties in

his way, if he were to wish to marry a woman who had not either a great

fortune or high rank."

Marianne was astonished to find how much the imagination of her mother

and herself had outstripped the truth.

"And you really are not engaged to him!" said she. "Yet it certainly

soon will happen. But two advantages will proceed from this delay. I

shall not lose you so soon, and Edward will have greater opportunity of

improving that natural taste for your favourite pursuit which must be

so indispensably necessary to your future felicity. Oh! if he should

be so far stimulated by your genius as to learn to draw himself, how

delightful it would be!"

Elinor had given her real opinion to her sister. She could not

consider her partiality for Edward in so prosperous a state as Marianne

had believed it. There was, at times, a want of spirits about him

which, if it did not denote indifference, spoke of something almost as

unpromising. A doubt of her regard, supposing him to feel it, need not

give him more than inquietude. It would not be likely to produce that

dejection of mind which frequently attended him. A more reasonable

cause might be found in the dependent situation which forbade the

indulgence of his affection. She knew that his mother neither behaved

to him so as to make his home comfortable at present, nor to give him

any assurance that he might form a home for himself, without strictly

attending to her views for his aggrandizement. With such a knowledge

as this, it was impossible for Elinor to feel easy on the subject. She

was far from depending on that result of his preference of her, which

her mother and sister still considered as certain. Nay, the longer

they were together the more doubtful seemed the nature of his regard;

and sometimes, for a few painful minutes, she believed it to be no more

than friendship.

But, whatever might really be its limits, it was enough, when perceived

by his sister, to make her uneasy, and at the same time, (which was

still more common,) to make her uncivil. She took the first

opportunity of affronting her mother-in-law on the occasion, talking to

her so expressively of her brother's great expectations, of Mrs.

Ferrars's resolution that both her sons should marry well, and of the

danger attending any young woman who attempted to DRAW HIM IN; that

Mrs. Dashwood could neither pretend to be unconscious, nor endeavor to

be calm. She gave her an answer which marked her contempt, and

instantly left the room, resolving that, whatever might be the

inconvenience or expense of so sudden a removal, her beloved Elinor

should not be exposed another week to such insinuations.

In this state of her spirits, a letter was delivered to her from the

post, which contained a proposal particularly well timed. It was the

offer of a small house, on very easy terms, belonging to a relation of

her own, a gentleman of consequence and property in Devonshire. The

letter was from this gentleman himself, and written in the true spirit

of friendly accommodation. He understood that she was in need of a

dwelling; and though the house he now offered her was merely a cottage,

he assured her that everything should be done to it which she might

think necessary, if the situation pleased her. He earnestly pressed

her, after giving the particulars of the house and garden, to come with

her daughters to Barton Park, the place of his own residence, from

whence she might judge, herself, whether Barton Cottage, for the houses

were in the same parish, could, by any alteration, be made comfortable

to her. He seemed really anxious to accommodate them and the whole of

his letter was written in so friendly a style as could not fail of

giving pleasure to his cousin; more especially at a moment when she was

suffering under the cold and unfeeling behaviour of her nearer

connections. She needed no time for deliberation or inquiry. Her

resolution was formed as she read. The situation of Barton, in a

county so far distant from Sussex as Devonshire, which, but a few hours

before, would have been a sufficient objection to outweigh every

possible advantage belonging to the place, was now its first

recommendation. To quit the neighbourhood of Norland was no longer an

evil; it was an object of desire; it was a blessing, in comparison of

the misery of continuing her daughter-in-law's guest; and to remove for

ever from that beloved place would be less painful than to inhabit or

visit it while such a woman was its mistress. She instantly wrote Sir

John Middleton her acknowledgment of his kindness, and her acceptance

of his proposal; and then hastened to shew both letters to her

daughters, that she might be secure of their approbation before her

answer were sent.

Elinor had always thought it would be more prudent for them to settle

at some distance from Norland, than immediately amongst their present

acquaintance. On THAT head, therefore, it was not for her to oppose

her mother's intention of removing into Devonshire. The house, too, as

described by Sir John, was on so simple a scale, and the rent so

uncommonly moderate, as to leave her no right of objection on either

point; and, therefore, though it was not a plan which brought any charm

to her fancy, though it was a removal from the vicinity of Norland

beyond her wishes, she made no attempt to dissuade her mother from

sending a letter of acquiescence.

CHAPTER 5

No sooner was her answer dispatched, than Mrs. Dashwood indulged

herself in the pleasure of announcing to her son-in-law and his wife

that she was provided with a house, and should incommode them no longer

than till every thing were ready for her inhabiting it. They heard her

with surprise. Mrs. John Dashwood said nothing; but her husband

civilly hoped that she would not be settled far from Norland. She had

great satisfaction in replying that she was going into

Devonshire.--Edward turned hastily towards her, on hearing this, and,

in a voice of surprise and concern, which required no explanation to

her, repeated, "Devonshire! Are you, indeed, going there? So far from

hence! And to what part of it?" She explained the situation. It was

within four miles northward of Exeter.

"It is but a cottage," she continued, "but I hope to see many of my

friends in it. A room or two can easily be added; and if my friends

find no difficulty in travelling so far to see me, I am sure I will

find none in accommodating them."

She concluded with a very kind invitation to Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood

to visit her at Barton; and to Edward she gave one with still greater

affection. Though her late conversation with her daughter-in-law had

made her resolve on remaining at Norland no longer than was

unavoidable, it had not produced the smallest effect on her in that

point to which it principally tended. To separate Edward and Elinor

was as far from being her object as ever; and she wished to show Mrs.

John Dashwood, by this pointed invitation to her brother, how totally

she disregarded her disapprobation of the match.

Mr. John Dashwood told his mother again and again how exceedingly sorry

he was that she had taken a house at such a distance from Norland as to

prevent his being of any service to her in removing her furniture. He

really felt conscientiously vexed on the occasion; for the very

exertion to which he had limited the performance of his promise to his

father was by this arrangement rendered impracticable.-- The furniture

was all sent around by water. It chiefly consisted of household linen,

plate, china, and books, with a handsome pianoforte of Marianne's.

Mrs. John Dashwood saw the packages depart with a sigh: she could not

help feeling it hard that as Mrs. Dashwood's income would be so

trifling in comparison with their own, she should have any handsome

article of furniture.

Mrs. Dashwood took the house for a twelvemonth; it was ready furnished,

and she might have immediate possession. No difficulty arose on either

side in the agreement; and she waited only for the disposal of her

effects at Norland, and to determine her future household, before she

set off for the west; and this, as she was exceedingly rapid in the

performance of everything that interested her, was soon done.--The

horses which were left her by her husband had been sold soon after his

death, and an opportunity now offering of disposing of her carriage,

she agreed to sell that likewise at the earnest advice of her eldest

daughter. For the comfort of her children, had she consulted only her

own wishes, she would have kept it; but the discretion of Elinor

prevailed. HER wisdom too limited the number of their servants to

three; two maids and a man, with whom they were speedily provided from

amongst those who had formed their establishment at Norland.

The man and one of the maids were sent off immediately into Devonshire,

to prepare the house for their mistress's arrival; for as Lady

Middleton was entirely unknown to Mrs. Dashwood, she preferred going

directly to the cottage to being a visitor at Barton Park; and she

relied so undoubtingly on Sir John's description of the house, as to

feel no curiosity to examine it herself till she entered it as her own.

Her eagerness to be gone from Norland was preserved from diminution by

the evident satisfaction of her daughter-in-law in the prospect of her

removal; a satisfaction which was but feebly attempted to be concealed

under a cold invitation to her to defer her departure. Now was the

time when her son-in-law's promise to his father might with particular

propriety be fulfilled. Since he had neglected to do it on first

coming to the estate, their quitting his house might be looked on as

the most suitable period for its accomplishment. But Mrs. Dashwood

began shortly to give over every hope of the kind, and to be convinced,

from the general drift of his discourse, that his assistance extended

no farther than their maintenance for six months at Norland. He so

frequently talked of the increasing expenses of housekeeping, and of

the perpetual demands upon his purse, which a man of any consequence in

the world was beyond calculation exposed to, that he seemed rather to

stand in need of more money himself than to have any design of giving

money away.

In a very few weeks from the day which brought Sir John Middleton's

first letter to Norland, every thing was so far settled in their future

abode as to enable Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters to begin their

journey.

Many were the tears shed by them in their last adieus to a place so

much beloved. "Dear, dear Norland!" said Marianne, as she wandered

alone before the house, on the last evening of their being there; "when

shall I cease to regret you!--when learn to feel a home elsewhere!--Oh!

happy house, could you know what I suffer in now viewing you from this

spot, from whence perhaps I may view you no more!--And you, ye

well-known trees!--but you will continue the same.--No leaf will decay

because we are removed, nor any branch become motionless although we

can observe you no longer!--No; you will continue the same; unconscious

of the pleasure or the regret you occasion, and insensible of any

change in those who walk under your shade!--But who will remain to

enjoy you?"

CHAPTER 6

The first part of their journey was performed in too melancholy a

disposition to be otherwise than tedious and unpleasant. But as they

drew towards the end of it, their interest in the appearance of a

country which they were to inhabit overcame their dejection, and a view

of Barton Valley as they entered it gave them cheerfulness. It was a

pleasant fertile spot, well wooded, and rich in pasture. After winding

along it for more than a mile, they reached their own house. A small

green court was the whole of its demesne in front; and a neat wicket

gate admitted them into it.

As a house, Barton Cottage, though small, was comfortable and compact;

but as a cottage it was defective, for the building was regular, the

roof was tiled, the window shutters were not painted green, nor were

the walls covered with honeysuckles. A narrow passage led directly

through the house into the garden behind. On each side of the entrance

was a sitting room, about sixteen feet square; and beyond them were the

offices and the stairs. Four bed-rooms and two garrets formed the rest

of the house. It had not been built many years and was in good repair.

In comparison of Norland, it was poor and small indeed!--but the tears

which recollection called forth as they entered the house were soon

dried away. They were cheered by the joy of the servants on their

arrival, and each for the sake of the others resolved to appear happy.

It was very early in September; the season was fine, and from first

seeing the place under the advantage of good weather, they received an

impression in its favour which was of material service in recommending

it to their lasting approbation.

The situation of the house was good. High hills rose immediately

behind, and at no great distance on each side; some of which were open

downs, the others cultivated and woody. The village of Barton was

chiefly on one of these hills, and formed a pleasant view from the

cottage windows. The prospect in front was more extensive; it

commanded the whole of the valley, and reached into the country beyond.

The hills which surrounded the cottage terminated the valley in that

direction; under another name, and in another course, it branched out

again between two of the steepest of them.

With the size and furniture of the house Mrs. Dashwood was upon the

whole well satisfied; for though her former style of life rendered many

additions to the latter indispensable, yet to add and improve was a

delight to her; and she had at this time ready money enough to supply

all that was wanted of greater elegance to the apartments. "As for the

house itself, to be sure," said she, "it is too small for our family,

but we will make ourselves tolerably comfortable for the present, as it

is too late in the year for improvements. Perhaps in the spring, if I

have plenty of money, as I dare say I shall, we may think about

building. These parlors are both too small for such parties of our

friends as I hope to see often collected here; and I have some thoughts

of throwing the passage into one of them with perhaps a part of the

other, and so leave the remainder of that other for an entrance; this,

with a new drawing room which may be easily added, and a bed-chamber

and garret above, will make it a very snug little cottage. I could

wish the stairs were handsome. But one must not expect every thing;

though I suppose it would be no difficult matter to widen them. I

shall see how much I am before-hand with the world in the spring, and

we will plan our improvements accordingly."

In the mean time, till all these alterations could be made from the

savings of an income of five hundred a-year by a woman who never saved

in her life, they were wise enough to be contented with the house as it

was; and each of them was busy in arranging their particular concerns,

and endeavoring, by placing around them books and other possessions, to

form themselves a home. Marianne's pianoforte was unpacked and

properly disposed of; and Elinor's drawings were affixed to the walls

of their sitting room.

In such employments as these they were interrupted soon after breakfast

the next day by the entrance of their landlord, who called to welcome

them to Barton, and to offer them every accommodation from his own

house and garden in which theirs might at present be deficient. Sir

John Middleton was a good looking man about forty. He had formerly

visited at Stanhill, but it was too long for his young cousins to

remember him. His countenance was thoroughly good-humoured; and his

manners were as friendly as the style of his letter. Their arrival

seemed to afford him real satisfaction, and their comfort to be an

object of real solicitude to him. He said much of his earnest desire

of their living in the most sociable terms with his family, and pressed

them so cordially to dine at Barton Park every day till they were

better settled at home, that, though his entreaties were carried to a

point of perseverance beyond civility, they could not give offence.

His kindness was not confined to words; for within an hour after he

left them, a large basket full of garden stuff and fruit arrived from

the park, which was followed before the end of the day by a present of

game. He insisted, moreover, on conveying all their letters to and

from the post for them, and would not be denied the satisfaction of

sending them his newspaper every day.

Lady Middleton had sent a very civil message by him, denoting her

intention of waiting on Mrs. Dashwood as soon as she could be assured

that her visit would be no inconvenience; and as this message was

answered by an invitation equally polite, her ladyship was introduced

to them the next day.

They were, of course, very anxious to see a person on whom so much of

their comfort at Barton must depend; and the elegance of her appearance

was favourable to their wishes. Lady Middleton was not more than six

or seven and twenty; her face was handsome, her figure tall and

striking, and her address graceful. Her manners had all the elegance

which her husband's wanted. But they would have been improved by some

share of his frankness and warmth; and her visit was long enough to

detract something from their first admiration, by shewing that, though

perfectly well-bred, she was reserved, cold, and had nothing to say for

herself beyond the most common-place inquiry or remark.

Conversation however was not wanted, for Sir John was very chatty, and

Lady Middleton had taken the wise precaution of bringing with her their

eldest child, a fine little boy about six years old, by which means

there was one subject always to be recurred to by the ladies in case of

extremity, for they had to enquire his name and age, admire his beauty,

and ask him questions which his mother answered for him, while he hung

about her and held down his head, to the great surprise of her

ladyship, who wondered at his being so shy before company, as he could

make noise enough at home. On every formal visit a child ought to be

of the party, by way of provision for discourse. In the present case

it took up ten minutes to determine whether the boy were most like his

father or mother, and in what particular he resembled either, for of

course every body differed, and every body was astonished at the

opinion of the others.

An opportunity was soon to be given to the Dashwoods of debating on the

rest of the children, as Sir John would not leave the house without

securing their promise of dining at the park the next day.

CHAPTER 7

Barton Park was about half a mile from the cottage. The ladies had

passed near it in their way along the valley, but it was screened from

their view at home by the projection of a hill. The house was large

and handsome; and the Middletons lived in a style of equal hospitality

and elegance. The former was for Sir John's gratification, the latter

for that of his lady. They were scarcely ever without some friends

staying with them in the house, and they kept more company of every

kind than any other family in the neighbourhood. It was necessary to

the happiness of both; for however dissimilar in temper and outward

behaviour, they strongly resembled each other in that total want of

talent and taste which confined their employments, unconnected with

such as society produced, within a very narrow compass. Sir John was a

sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother. He hunted and shot, and she

humoured her children; and these were their only resources. Lady

Middleton had the advantage of being able to spoil her children all the

year round, while Sir John's independent employments were in existence

only half the time. Continual engagements at home and abroad, however,

supplied all the deficiencies of nature and education; supported the

good spirits of Sir John, and gave exercise to the good breeding of his

wife.

Lady Middleton piqued herself upon the elegance of her table, and of

all her domestic arrangements; and from this kind of vanity was her

greatest enjoyment in any of their parties. But Sir John's

satisfaction in society was much more real; he delighted in collecting

about him more young people than his house would hold, and the noisier

they were the better was he pleased. He was a blessing to all the

juvenile part of the neighbourhood, for in summer he was for ever

forming parties to eat cold ham and chicken out of doors, and in winter

his private balls were numerous enough for any young lady who was not

suffering under the unsatiable appetite of fifteen.

The arrival of a new family in the country was always a matter of joy

to him, and in every point of view he was charmed with the inhabitants

he had now procured for his cottage at Barton. The Miss Dashwoods were

young, pretty, and unaffected. It was enough to secure his good

opinion; for to be unaffected was all that a pretty girl could want to

make her mind as captivating as her person. The friendliness of his

disposition made him happy in accommodating those, whose situation

might be considered, in comparison with the past, as unfortunate. In

showing kindness to his cousins therefore he had the real satisfaction

of a good heart; and in settling a family of females only in his

cottage, he had all the satisfaction of a sportsman; for a sportsman,

though he esteems only those of his sex who are sportsmen likewise, is

not often desirous of encouraging their taste by admitting them to a

residence within his own manor.

Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters were met at the door of the house by

Sir John, who welcomed them to Barton Park with unaffected sincerity;

and as he attended them to the drawing room repeated to the young

ladies the concern which the same subject had drawn from him the day

before, at being unable to get any smart young men to meet them. They

would see, he said, only one gentleman there besides himself; a

particular friend who was staying at the park, but who was neither very

young nor very gay. He hoped they would all excuse the smallness of

the party, and could assure them it should never happen so again. He

had been to several families that morning in hopes of procuring some

addition to their number, but it was moonlight and every body was full

of engagements. Luckily Lady Middleton's mother had arrived at Barton

within the last hour, and as she was a very cheerful agreeable woman,

he hoped the young ladies would not find it so very dull as they might

imagine. The young ladies, as well as their mother, were perfectly

satisfied with having two entire strangers of the party, and wished for

no more.

Mrs. Jennings, Lady Middleton's mother, was a good-humoured, merry,

fat, elderly woman, who talked a great deal, seemed very happy, and

rather vulgar. She was full of jokes and laughter, and before dinner

was over had said many witty things on the subject of lovers and

husbands; hoped they had not left their hearts behind them in Sussex,

and pretended to see them blush whether they did or not. Marianne was

vexed at it for her sister's sake, and turned her eyes towards Elinor

to see how she bore these attacks, with an earnestness which gave

Elinor far more pain than could arise from such common-place raillery

as Mrs. Jennings's.

Colonel Brandon, the friend of Sir John, seemed no more adapted by

resemblance of manner to be his friend, than Lady Middleton was to be

his wife, or Mrs. Jennings to be Lady Middleton's mother. He was

silent and grave. His appearance however was not unpleasing, in spite

of his being in the opinion of Marianne and Margaret an absolute old

bachelor, for he was on the wrong side of five and thirty; but though

his face was not handsome, his countenance was sensible, and his

address was particularly gentlemanlike.

There was nothing in any of the party which could recommend them as

companions to the Dashwoods; but the cold insipidity of Lady Middleton

was so particularly repulsive, that in comparison of it the gravity of

Colonel Brandon, and even the boisterous mirth of Sir John and his

mother-in-law was interesting. Lady Middleton seemed to be roused to

enjoyment only by the entrance of her four noisy children after dinner,

who pulled her about, tore her clothes, and put an end to every kind of

discourse except what related to themselves.

In the evening, as Marianne was discovered to be musical, she was

invited to play. The instrument was unlocked, every body prepared to

be charmed, and Marianne, who sang very well, at their request went

through the chief of the songs which Lady Middleton had brought into

the family on her marriage, and which perhaps had lain ever since in

the same position on the pianoforte, for her ladyship had celebrated

that event by giving up music, although by her mother's account, she

had played extremely well, and by her own was very fond of it.

Marianne's performance was highly applauded. Sir John was loud in his

admiration at the end of every song, and as loud in his conversation

with the others while every song lasted. Lady Middleton frequently

called him to order, wondered how any one's attention could be diverted

from music for a moment, and asked Marianne to sing a particular song

which Marianne had just finished. Colonel Brandon alone, of all the

party, heard her without being in raptures. He paid her only the

compliment of attention; and she felt a respect for him on the

occasion, which the others had reasonably forfeited by their shameless

want of taste. His pleasure in music, though it amounted not to that

ecstatic delight which alone could sympathize with her own, was

estimable when contrasted against the horrible insensibility of the

others; and she was reasonable enough to allow that a man of five and

thirty might well have outlived all acuteness of feeling and every

exquisite power of enjoyment. She was perfectly disposed to make every

allowance for the colonel's advanced state of life which humanity

required.

CHAPTER 8

Mrs. Jennings was a widow with an ample jointure. She had only two

daughters, both of whom she had lived to see respectably married, and

she had now therefore nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the

world. In the promotion of this object she was zealously active, as

far as her ability reached; and missed no opportunity of projecting

weddings among all the young people of her acquaintance. She was

remarkably quick in the discovery of attachments, and had enjoyed the

advantage of raising the blushes and the vanity of many a young lady by

insinuations of her power over such a young man; and this kind of

discernment enabled her soon after her arrival at Barton decisively to

pronounce that Colonel Brandon was very much in love with Marianne

Dashwood. She rather suspected it to be so, on the very first evening

of their being together, from his listening so attentively while she

sang to them; and when the visit was returned by the Middletons' dining

at the cottage, the fact was ascertained by his listening to her again.

It must be so. She was perfectly convinced of it. It would be an

excellent match, for HE was rich, and SHE was handsome. Mrs. Jennings

had been anxious to see Colonel Brandon well married, ever since her

connection with Sir John first brought him to her knowledge; and she

was always anxious to get a good husband for every pretty girl.

The immediate advantage to herself was by no means inconsiderable, for

it supplied her with endless jokes against them both. At the park she

laughed at the colonel, and in the cottage at Marianne. To the former

her raillery was probably, as far as it regarded only himself,

perfectly indifferent; but to the latter it was at first

incomprehensible; and when its object was understood, she hardly knew

whether most to laugh at its absurdity, or censure its impertinence,

for she considered it as an unfeeling reflection on the colonel's

advanced years, and on his forlorn condition as an old bachelor.

Mrs. Dashwood, who could not think a man five years younger than

herself, so exceedingly ancient as he appeared to the youthful fancy of

her daughter, ventured to clear Mrs. Jennings from the probability of

wishing to throw ridicule on his age.

"But at least, Mamma, you cannot deny the absurdity of the accusation,

though you may not think it intentionally ill-natured. Colonel Brandon

is certainly younger than Mrs. Jennings, but he is old enough to be MY

father; and if he were ever animated enough to be in love, must have

long outlived every sensation of the kind. It is too ridiculous! When

is a man to be safe from such wit, if age and infirmity will not

protect him?"

"Infirmity!" said Elinor, "do you call Colonel Brandon infirm? I can

easily suppose that his age may appear much greater to you than to my

mother; but you can hardly deceive yourself as to his having the use of

his limbs!"

"Did not you hear him complain of the rheumatism? and is not that the

commonest infirmity of declining life?"

"My dearest child," said her mother, laughing, "at this rate you must

be in continual terror of MY decay; and it must seem to you a miracle

that my life has been extended to the advanced age of forty."

"Mamma, you are not doing me justice. I know very well that Colonel

Brandon is not old enough to make his friends yet apprehensive of

losing him in the course of nature. He may live twenty years longer.

But thirty-five has nothing to do with matrimony."

"Perhaps," said Elinor, "thirty-five and seventeen had better not have

any thing to do with matrimony together. But if there should by any

chance happen to be a woman who is single at seven and twenty, I should

not think Colonel Brandon's being thirty-five any objection to his

marrying HER."

"A woman of seven and twenty," said Marianne, after pausing a moment,

"can never hope to feel or inspire affection again, and if her home be

uncomfortable, or her fortune small, I can suppose that she might bring

herself to submit to the offices of a nurse, for the sake of the

provision and security of a wife. In his marrying such a woman

therefore there would be nothing unsuitable. It would be a compact of

convenience, and the world would be satisfied. In my eyes it would be

no marriage at all, but that would be nothing. To me it would seem

only a commercial exchange, in which each wished to be benefited at the

expense of the other."

"It would be impossible, I know," replied Elinor, "to convince you that

a woman of seven and twenty could feel for a man of thirty-five

anything near enough to love, to make him a desirable companion to her.

But I must object to your dooming Colonel Brandon and his wife to the

constant confinement of a sick chamber, merely because he chanced to

complain yesterday (a very cold damp day) of a slight rheumatic feel in

one of his shoulders."

"But he talked of flannel waistcoats," said Marianne; "and with me a

flannel waistcoat is invariably connected with aches, cramps,

rheumatisms, and every species of ailment that can afflict the old and

the feeble."

"Had he been only in a violent fever, you would not have despised him

half so much. Confess, Marianne, is not there something interesting to

you in the flushed cheek, hollow eye, and quick pulse of a fever?"

Soon after this, upon Elinor's leaving the room, "Mamma," said

Marianne, "I have an alarm on the subject of illness which I cannot

conceal from you. I am sure Edward Ferrars is not well. We have now

been here almost a fortnight, and yet he does not come. Nothing but

real indisposition could occasion this extraordinary delay. What else

can detain him at Norland?"

"Had you any idea of his coming so soon?" said Mrs. Dashwood. "I had

none. On the contrary, if I have felt any anxiety at all on the

subject, it has been in recollecting that he sometimes showed a want of

pleasure and readiness in accepting my invitation, when I talked of his

coming to Barton. Does Elinor expect him already?"

"I have never mentioned it to her, but of course she must."

"I rather think you are mistaken, for when I was talking to her

yesterday of getting a new grate for the spare bedchamber, she observed

that there was no immediate hurry for it, as it was not likely that the

room would be wanted for some time."

"How strange this is! what can be the meaning of it! But the whole of

their behaviour to each other has been unaccountable! How cold, how

composed were their last adieus! How languid their conversation the

last evening of their being together! In Edward's farewell there was no

distinction between Elinor and me: it was the good wishes of an

affectionate brother to both. Twice did I leave them purposely

together in the course of the last morning, and each time did he most

unaccountably follow me out of the room. And Elinor, in quitting

Norland and Edward, cried not as I did. Even now her self-command is

invariable. When is she dejected or melancholy? When does she try to

avoid society, or appear restless and dissatisfied in it?"

CHAPTER 9

The Dashwoods were now settled at Barton with tolerable comfort to

themselves. The house and the garden, with all the objects surrounding

them, were now become familiar, and the ordinary pursuits which had

given to Norland half its charms were engaged in again with far greater

enjoyment than Norland had been able to afford, since the loss of their

father. Sir John Middleton, who called on them every day for the first

fortnight, and who was not in the habit of seeing much occupation at

home, could not conceal his amazement on finding them always employed.

Their visitors, except those from Barton Park, were not many; for, in

spite of Sir John's urgent entreaties that they would mix more in the

neighbourhood, and repeated assurances of his carriage being always at

their service, the independence of Mrs. Dashwood's spirit overcame the

wish of society for her children; and she was resolute in declining to

visit any family beyond the distance of a walk. There were but few who

could be so classed; and it was not all of them that were attainable.

About a mile and a half from the cottage, along the narrow winding

valley of Allenham, which issued from that of Barton, as formerly

described, the girls had, in one of their earliest walks, discovered an

ancient respectable looking mansion which, by reminding them a little

of Norland, interested their imagination and made them wish to be

better acquainted with it. But they learnt, on enquiry, that its

possessor, an elderly lady of very good character, was unfortunately

too infirm to mix with the world, and never stirred from home.

The whole country about them abounded in beautiful walks. The high

downs which invited them from almost every window of the cottage to

seek the exquisite enjoyment of air on their summits, were a happy

alternative when the dirt of the valleys beneath shut up their superior

beauties; and towards one of these hills did Marianne and Margaret one

memorable morning direct their steps, attracted by the partial sunshine

of a showery sky, and unable longer to bear the confinement which the

settled rain of the two preceding days had occasioned. The weather was

not tempting enough to draw the two others from their pencil and their

book, in spite of Marianne's declaration that the day would be

lastingly fair, and that every threatening cloud would be drawn off

from their hills; and the two girls set off together.

They gaily ascended the downs, rejoicing in their own penetration at

every glimpse of blue sky; and when they caught in their faces the

animating gales of a high south-westerly wind, they pitied the fears

which had prevented their mother and Elinor from sharing such

delightful sensations.

"Is there a felicity in the world," said Marianne, "superior to

this?--Margaret, we will walk here at least two hours."

Margaret agreed, and they pursued their way against the wind, resisting

it with laughing delight for about twenty minutes longer, when suddenly

the clouds united over their heads, and a driving rain set full in

their face.-- Chagrined and surprised, they were obliged, though

unwillingly, to turn back, for no shelter was nearer than their own

house. One consolation however remained for them, to which the

exigence of the moment gave more than usual propriety; it was that of

running with all possible speed down the steep side of the hill which

led immediately to their garden gate.

They set off. Marianne had at first the advantage, but a false step

brought her suddenly to the ground; and Margaret, unable to stop

herself to assist her, was involuntarily hurried along, and reached the

bottom in safety.

A gentleman carrying a gun, with two pointers playing round him, was

passing up the hill and within a few yards of Marianne, when her

accident happened. He put down his gun and ran to her assistance. She

had raised herself from the ground, but her foot had been twisted in

her fall, and she was scarcely able to stand. The gentleman offered

his services; and perceiving that her modesty declined what her

situation rendered necessary, took her up in his arms without farther

delay, and carried her down the hill. Then passing through the garden,

the gate of which had been left open by Margaret, he bore her directly

into the house, whither Margaret was just arrived, and quitted not his

hold till he had seated her in a chair in the parlour.

Elinor and her mother rose up in amazement at their entrance, and while

the eyes of both were fixed on him with an evident wonder and a secret

admiration which equally sprung from his appearance, he apologized for

his intrusion by relating its cause, in a manner so frank and so

graceful that his person, which was uncommonly handsome, received

additional charms from his voice and expression. Had he been even old,

ugly, and vulgar, the gratitude and kindness of Mrs. Dashwood would

have been secured by any act of attention to her child; but the

influence of youth, beauty, and elegance, gave an interest to the

action which came home to her feelings.

She thanked him again and again; and, with a sweetness of address which

always attended her, invited him to be seated. But this he declined,

as he was dirty and wet. Mrs. Dashwood then begged to know to whom she

was obliged. His name, he replied, was Willoughby, and his present

home was at Allenham, from whence he hoped she would allow him the

honour of calling tomorrow to enquire after Miss Dashwood. The honour

was readily granted, and he then departed, to make himself still more

interesting, in the midst of a heavy rain.

His manly beauty and more than common gracefulness were instantly the

theme of general admiration, and the laugh which his gallantry raised

against Marianne received particular spirit from his exterior

attractions.-- Marianne herself had seen less of his person that the

rest, for the confusion which crimsoned over her face, on his lifting

her up, had robbed her of the power of regarding him after their

entering the house. But she had seen enough of him to join in all the

admiration of the others, and with an energy which always adorned her

praise. His person and air were equal to what her fancy had ever drawn

for the hero of a favourite story; and in his carrying her into the

house with so little previous formality, there was a rapidity of

thought which particularly recommended the action to her. Every

circumstance belonging to him was interesting. His name was good, his

residence was in their favourite village, and she soon found out that

of all manly dresses a shooting-jacket was the most becoming. Her

imagination was busy, her reflections were pleasant, and the pain of a

sprained ankle was disregarded.

Sir John called on them as soon as the next interval of fair weather

that morning allowed him to get out of doors; and Marianne's accident

being related to him, he was eagerly asked whether he knew any

gentleman of the name of Willoughby at Allenham.

"Willoughby!" cried Sir John; "what, is HE in the country? That is good

news however; I will ride over tomorrow, and ask him to dinner on

Thursday."

"You know him then," said Mrs. Dashwood.

"Know him! to be sure I do. Why, he is down here every year."

"And what sort of a young man is he?"

"As good a kind of fellow as ever lived, I assure you. A very decent

shot, and there is not a bolder rider in England."

"And is that all you can say for him?" cried Marianne, indignantly.

"But what are his manners on more intimate acquaintance? What his

pursuits, his talents, and genius?"

Sir John was rather puzzled.

"Upon my soul," said he, "I do not know much about him as to all THAT.

But he is a pleasant, good humoured fellow, and has got the nicest

little black bitch of a pointer I ever saw. Was she out with him

today?"

But Marianne could no more satisfy him as to the colour of Mr.

Willoughby's pointer, than he could describe to her the shades of his

mind.

"But who is he?" said Elinor. "Where does he come from? Has he a

house at Allenham?"

On this point Sir John could give more certain intelligence; and he

told them that Mr. Willoughby had no property of his own in the

country; that he resided there only while he was visiting the old lady

at Allenham Court, to whom he was related, and whose possessions he was

to inherit; adding, "Yes, yes, he is very well worth catching I can

tell you, Miss Dashwood; he has a pretty little estate of his own in

Somersetshire besides; and if I were you, I would not give him up to my

younger sister, in spite of all this tumbling down hills. Miss

Marianne must not expect to have all the men to herself. Brandon will

be jealous, if she does not take care."

"I do not believe," said Mrs. Dashwood, with a good humoured smile,

"that Mr. Willoughby will be incommoded by the attempts of either of MY

daughters towards what you call CATCHING him. It is not an employment

to which they have been brought up. Men are very safe with us, let

them be ever so rich. I am glad to find, however, from what you say,

that he is a respectable young man, and one whose acquaintance will not

be ineligible."

"He is as good a sort of fellow, I believe, as ever lived," repeated

Sir John. "I remember last Christmas at a little hop at the park, he

danced from eight o'clock till four, without once sitting down."

"Did he indeed?" cried Marianne with sparkling eyes, "and with

elegance, with spirit?"

"Yes; and he was up again at eight to ride to covert."

"That is what I like; that is what a young man ought to be. Whatever

be his pursuits, his eagerness in them should know no moderation, and

leave him no sense of fatigue."

"Aye, aye, I see how it will be," said Sir John, "I see how it will be.

You will be setting your cap at him now, and never think of poor

Brandon."

"That is an expression, Sir John," said Marianne, warmly, "which I

particularly dislike. I abhor every common-place phrase by which wit

is intended; and 'setting one's cap at a man,' or 'making a conquest,'

are the most odious of all. Their tendency is gross and illiberal; and

if their construction could ever be deemed clever, time has long ago

destroyed all its ingenuity."

Sir John did not much understand this reproof; but he laughed as

heartily as if he did, and then replied,

"Ay, you will make conquests enough, I dare say, one way or other.

Poor Brandon! he is quite smitten already, and he is very well worth

setting your cap at, I can tell you, in spite of all this tumbling

about and spraining of ankles."

CHAPTER 10

Marianne's preserver, as Margaret, with more elegance than precision,

styled Willoughby, called at the cottage early the next morning to make

his personal enquiries. He was received by Mrs. Dashwood with more

than politeness; with a kindness which Sir John's account of him and

her own gratitude prompted; and every thing that passed during the

visit tended to assure him of the sense, elegance, mutual affection,

and domestic comfort of the family to whom accident had now introduced

him. Of their personal charms he had not required a second interview

to be convinced.

Miss Dashwood had a delicate complexion, regular features, and a

remarkably pretty figure. Marianne was still handsomer. Her form,

though not so correct as her sister's, in having the advantage of

height, was more striking; and her face was so lovely, that when in the

common cant of praise, she was called a beautiful girl, truth was less

violently outraged than usually happens. Her skin was very brown, but,

from its transparency, her complexion was uncommonly brilliant; her

features were all good; her smile was sweet and attractive; and in her

eyes, which were very dark, there was a life, a spirit, an eagerness,

which could hardily be seen without delight. From Willoughby their

expression was at first held back, by the embarrassment which the

remembrance of his assistance created. But when this passed away, when

her spirits became collected, when she saw that to the perfect

good-breeding of the gentleman, he united frankness and vivacity, and

above all, when she heard him declare, that of music and dancing he was

passionately fond, she gave him such a look of approbation as secured

the largest share of his discourse to herself for the rest of his stay.

It was only necessary to mention any favourite amusement to engage her

to talk. She could not be silent when such points were introduced, and

she had neither shyness nor reserve in their discussion. They speedily

discovered that their enjoyment of dancing and music was mutual, and

that it arose from a general conformity of judgment in all that related

to either. Encouraged by this to a further examination of his

opinions, she proceeded to question him on the subject of books; her

favourite authors were brought forward and dwelt upon with so rapturous

a delight, that any young man of five and twenty must have been

insensible indeed, not to become an immediate convert to the excellence

of such works, however disregarded before. Their taste was strikingly

alike. The same books, the same passages were idolized by each--or if

any difference appeared, any objection arose, it lasted no longer than

till the force of her arguments and the brightness of her eyes could be

displayed. He acquiesced in all her decisions, caught all her

enthusiasm; and long before his visit concluded, they conversed with

the familiarity of a long-established acquaintance.

"Well, Marianne," said Elinor, as soon as he had left them, "for ONE

morning I think you have done pretty well. You have already

ascertained Mr. Willoughby's opinion in almost every matter of

importance. You know what he thinks of Cowper and Scott; you are

certain of his estimating their beauties as he ought, and you have

received every assurance of his admiring Pope no more than is proper.

But how is your acquaintance to be long supported, under such

extraordinary despatch of every subject for discourse? You will soon

have exhausted each favourite topic. Another meeting will suffice to

explain his sentiments on picturesque beauty, and second marriages, and

then you can have nothing farther to ask."--

"Elinor," cried Marianne, "is this fair? is this just? are my ideas so

scanty? But I see what you mean. I have been too much at my ease, too

happy, too frank. I have erred against every common-place notion of

decorum; I have been open and sincere where I ought to have been

reserved, spiritless, dull, and deceitful--had I talked only of the

weather and the roads, and had I spoken only once in ten minutes, this

reproach would have been spared."

"My love," said her mother, "you must not be offended with Elinor--she

was only in jest. I should scold her myself, if she were capable of

wishing to check the delight of your conversation with our new

friend."-- Marianne was softened in a moment.

Willoughby, on his side, gave every proof of his pleasure in their

acquaintance, which an evident wish of improving it could offer. He

came to them every day. To enquire after Marianne was at first his

excuse; but the encouragement of his reception, to which every day gave

greater kindness, made such an excuse unnecessary before it had ceased

to be possible, by Marianne's perfect recovery. She was confined for

some days to the house; but never had any confinement been less

irksome. Willoughby was a young man of good abilities, quick

imagination, lively spirits, and open, affectionate manners. He was

exactly formed to engage Marianne's heart, for with all this, he joined

not only a captivating person, but a natural ardour of mind which was

now roused and increased by the example of her own, and which

recommended him to her affection beyond every thing else.

His society became gradually her most exquisite enjoyment. They read,

they talked, they sang together; his musical talents were considerable;

and he read with all the sensibility and spirit which Edward had

unfortunately wanted.

In Mrs. Dashwood's estimation he was as faultless as in Marianne's; and

Elinor saw nothing to censure in him but a propensity, in which he

strongly resembled and peculiarly delighted her sister, of saying too

much what he thought on every occasion, without attention to persons or

circumstances. In hastily forming and giving his opinion of other

people, in sacrificing general politeness to the enjoyment of undivided

attention where his heart was engaged, and in slighting too easily the

forms of worldly propriety, he displayed a want of caution which Elinor

could not approve, in spite of all that he and Marianne could say in

its support.

Marianne began now to perceive that the desperation which had seized

her at sixteen and a half, of ever seeing a man who could satisfy her

ideas of perfection, had been rash and unjustifiable. Willoughby was

all that her fancy had delineated in that unhappy hour and in every

brighter period, as capable of attaching her; and his behaviour

declared his wishes to be in that respect as earnest, as his abilities

were strong.

Her mother too, in whose mind not one speculative thought of their

marriage had been raised, by his prospect of riches, was led before the

end of a week to hope and expect it; and secretly to congratulate

herself on having gained two such sons-in-law as Edward and Willoughby.

Colonel Brandon's partiality for Marianne, which had so early been

discovered by his friends, now first became perceptible to Elinor, when

it ceased to be noticed by them. Their attention and wit were drawn

off to his more fortunate rival; and the raillery which the other had

incurred before any partiality arose, was removed when his feelings

began really to call for the ridicule so justly annexed to sensibility.

Elinor was obliged, though unwillingly, to believe that the sentiments

which Mrs. Jennings had assigned him for her own satisfaction, were now

actually excited by her sister; and that however a general resemblance

of disposition between the parties might forward the affection of Mr.

Willoughby, an equally striking opposition of character was no

hindrance to the regard of Colonel Brandon. She saw it with concern;

for what could a silent man of five and thirty hope, when opposed to a

very lively one of five and twenty? and as she could not even wish him

successful, she heartily wished him indifferent. She liked him--in

spite of his gravity and reserve, she beheld in him an object of

interest. His manners, though serious, were mild; and his reserve

appeared rather the result of some oppression of spirits than of any

natural gloominess of temper. Sir John had dropped hints of past

injuries and disappointments, which justified her belief of his being

an unfortunate man, and she regarded him with respect and compassion.

Perhaps she pitied and esteemed him the more because he was slighted by

Willoughby and Marianne, who, prejudiced against him for being neither

lively nor young, seemed resolved to undervalue his merits.

"Brandon is just the kind of man," said Willoughby one day, when they

were talking of him together, "whom every body speaks well of, and

nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see, and nobody remembers

to talk to."

"That is exactly what I think of him," cried Marianne.

"Do not boast of it, however," said Elinor, "for it is injustice in

both of you. He is highly esteemed by all the family at the park, and

I never see him myself without taking pains to converse with him."

"That he is patronised by YOU," replied Willoughby, "is certainly in

his favour; but as for the esteem of the others, it is a reproach in

itself. Who would submit to the indignity of being approved by such a

woman as Lady Middleton and Mrs. Jennings, that could command the

indifference of any body else?"

"But perhaps the abuse of such people as yourself and Marianne will

make amends for the regard of Lady Middleton and her mother. If their

praise is censure, your censure may be praise, for they are not more

undiscerning, than you are prejudiced and unjust."

"In defence of your protege you can even be saucy."

"My protege, as you call him, is a sensible man; and sense will always

have attractions for me. Yes, Marianne, even in a man between thirty

and forty. He has seen a great deal of the world; has been abroad, has

read, and has a thinking mind. I have found him capable of giving me

much information on various subjects; and he has always answered my

inquiries with readiness of good-breeding and good nature."

"That is to say," cried Marianne contemptuously, "he has told you, that

in the East Indies the climate is hot, and the mosquitoes are

troublesome."

"He WOULD have told me so, I doubt not, had I made any such inquiries,

but they happened to be points on which I had been previously informed."

"Perhaps," said Willoughby, "his observations may have extended to the

existence of nabobs, gold mohrs, and palanquins."

"I may venture to say that HIS observations have stretched much further

than your candour. But why should you dislike him?"

"I do not dislike him. I consider him, on the contrary, as a very

respectable man, who has every body's good word, and nobody's notice;

who, has more money than he can spend, more time than he knows how to

employ, and two new coats every year."

"Add to which," cried Marianne, "that he has neither genius, taste, nor

spirit. That his understanding has no brilliancy, his feelings no

ardour, and his voice no expression."

"You decide on his imperfections so much in the mass," replied Elinor,

"and so much on the strength of your own imagination, that the

commendation I am able to give of him is comparatively cold and

insipid. I can only pronounce him to be a sensible man, well-bred,

well-informed, of gentle address, and, I believe, possessing an amiable

heart."

"Miss Dashwood," cried Willoughby, "you are now using me unkindly. You

are endeavouring to disarm me by reason, and to convince me against my

will. But it will not do. You shall find me as stubborn as you can be

artful. I have three unanswerable reasons for disliking Colonel

Brandon; he threatened me with rain when I wanted it to be fine; he has

found fault with the hanging of my curricle, and I cannot persuade him

to buy my brown mare. If it will be any satisfaction to you, however,

to be told, that I believe his character to be in other respects

irreproachable, I am ready to confess it. And in return for an

acknowledgment, which must give me some pain, you cannot deny me the

privilege of disliking him as much as ever."

CHAPTER 11

Little had Mrs. Dashwood or her daughters imagined when they first came

into Devonshire, that so many engagements would arise to occupy their

time as shortly presented themselves, or that they should have such

frequent invitations and such constant visitors as to leave them little

leisure for serious employment. Yet such was the case. When Marianne

was recovered, the schemes of amusement at home and abroad, which Sir

John had been previously forming, were put into execution. The private

balls at the park then began; and parties on the water were made and

accomplished as often as a showery October would allow. In every

meeting of the kind Willoughby was included; and the ease and

familiarity which naturally attended these parties were exactly

calculated to give increasing intimacy to his acquaintance with the

Dashwoods, to afford him opportunity of witnessing the excellencies of

Marianne, of marking his animated admiration of her, and of receiving,

in her behaviour to himself, the most pointed assurance of her

affection.

Elinor could not be surprised at their attachment. She only wished

that it were less openly shewn; and once or twice did venture to

suggest the propriety of some self-command to Marianne. But Marianne

abhorred all concealment where no real disgrace could attend unreserve;

and to aim at the restraint of sentiments which were not in themselves

illaudable, appeared to her not merely an unnecessary effort, but a

disgraceful subjection of reason to common-place and mistaken notions.

Willoughby thought the same; and their behaviour at all times, was an

illustration of their opinions.

When he was present she had no eyes for any one else. Every thing he

did, was right. Every thing he said, was clever. If their evenings at

the park were concluded with cards, he cheated himself and all the rest

of the party to get her a good hand. If dancing formed the amusement

of the night, they were partners for half the time; and when obliged to

separate for a couple of dances, were careful to stand together and

scarcely spoke a word to any body else. Such conduct made them of

course most exceedingly laughed at; but ridicule could not shame, and

seemed hardly to provoke them.

Mrs. Dashwood entered into all their feelings with a warmth which left

her no inclination for checking this excessive display of them. To her

it was but the natural consequence of a strong affection in a young and

ardent mind.

This was the season of happiness to Marianne. Her heart was devoted to

Willoughby, and the fond attachment to Norland, which she brought with

her from Sussex, was more likely to be softened than she had thought it

possible before, by the charms which his society bestowed on her

present home.

Elinor's happiness was not so great. Her heart was not so much at

ease, nor her satisfaction in their amusements so pure. They afforded

her no companion that could make amends for what she had left behind,

nor that could teach her to think of Norland with less regret than

ever. Neither Lady Middleton nor Mrs. Jennings could supply to her the

conversation she missed; although the latter was an everlasting talker,

and from the first had regarded her with a kindness which ensured her a

large share of her discourse. She had already repeated her own history

to Elinor three or four times; and had Elinor's memory been equal to

her means of improvement, she might have known very early in their

acquaintance all the particulars of Mr. Jenning's last illness, and

what he said to his wife a few minutes before he died. Lady Middleton

was more agreeable than her mother only in being more silent. Elinor

needed little observation to perceive that her reserve was a mere

calmness of manner with which sense had nothing to do. Towards her

husband and mother she was the same as to them; and intimacy was

therefore neither to be looked for nor desired. She had nothing to say

one day that she had not said the day before. Her insipidity was

invariable, for even her spirits were always the same; and though she

did not oppose the parties arranged by her husband, provided every

thing were conducted in style and her two eldest children attended her,

she never appeared to receive more enjoyment from them than she might

have experienced in sitting at home;--and so little did her presence

add to the pleasure of the others, by any share in their conversation,

that they were sometimes only reminded of her being amongst them by her

solicitude about her troublesome boys.

In Colonel Brandon alone, of all her new acquaintance, did Elinor find

a person who could in any degree claim the respect of abilities, excite

the interest of friendship, or give pleasure as a companion.

Willoughby was out of the question. Her admiration and regard, even

her sisterly regard, was all his own; but he was a lover; his

attentions were wholly Marianne's, and a far less agreeable man might

have been more generally pleasing. Colonel Brandon, unfortunately for

himself, had no such encouragement to think only of Marianne, and in

conversing with Elinor he found the greatest consolation for the

indifference of her sister.

Elinor's compassion for him increased, as she had reason to suspect

that the misery of disappointed love had already been known to him.

This suspicion was given by some words which accidently dropped from

him one evening at the park, when they were sitting down together by

mutual consent, while the others were dancing. His eyes were fixed on

Marianne, and, after a silence of some minutes, he said, with a faint

smile, "Your sister, I understand, does not approve of second

attachments."

"No," replied Elinor, "her opinions are all romantic."

"Or rather, as I believe, she considers them impossible to exist."

"I believe she does. But how she contrives it without reflecting on

the character of her own father, who had himself two wives, I know not.

A few years however will settle her opinions on the reasonable basis of

common sense and observation; and then they may be more easy to define

and to justify than they now are, by any body but herself."

"This will probably be the case," he replied; "and yet there is

something so amiable in the prejudices of a young mind, that one is

sorry to see them give way to the reception of more general opinions."

"I cannot agree with you there," said Elinor. "There are

inconveniences attending such feelings as Marianne's, which all the

charms of enthusiasm and ignorance of the world cannot atone for. Her

systems have all the unfortunate tendency of setting propriety at

nought; and a better acquaintance with the world is what I look forward

to as her greatest possible advantage."

After a short pause he resumed the conversation by saying,--

"Does your sister make no distinction in her objections against a

second attachment? or is it equally criminal in every body? Are those

who have been disappointed in their first choice, whether from the

inconstancy of its object, or the perverseness of circumstances, to be

equally indifferent during the rest of their lives?"

"Upon my word, I am not acquainted with the minutiae of her principles.

I only know that I never yet heard her admit any instance of a second

attachment's being pardonable."

"This," said he, "cannot hold; but a change, a total change of

sentiments--No, no, do not desire it; for when the romantic refinements

of a young mind are obliged to give way, how frequently are they

succeeded by such opinions as are but too common, and too dangerous! I

speak from experience. I once knew a lady who in temper and mind

greatly resembled your sister, who thought and judged like her, but who

from an inforced change--from a series of unfortunate circumstances"--

Here he stopt suddenly; appeared to think that he had said too much,

and by his countenance gave rise to conjectures, which might not

otherwise have entered Elinor's head. The lady would probably have

passed without suspicion, had he not convinced Miss Dashwood that what

concerned her ought not to escape his lips. As it was, it required but

a slight effort of fancy to connect his emotion with the tender

recollection of past regard. Elinor attempted no more. But Marianne,

in her place, would not have done so little. The whole story would

have been speedily formed under her active imagination; and every thing

established in the most melancholy order of disastrous love.

CHAPTER 12

As Elinor and Marianne were walking together the next morning the

latter communicated a piece of news to her sister, which in spite of

all that she knew before of Marianne's imprudence and want of thought,

surprised her by its extravagant testimony of both. Marianne told her,

with the greatest delight, that Willoughby had given her a horse, one

that he had bred himself on his estate in Somersetshire, and which was

exactly calculated to carry a woman. Without considering that it was

not in her mother's plan to keep any horse, that if she were to alter

her resolution in favour of this gift, she must buy another for the

servant, and keep a servant to ride it, and after all, build a stable

to receive them, she had accepted the present without hesitation, and

told her sister of it in raptures.

"He intends to send his groom into Somersetshire immediately for it,"

she added, "and when it arrives we will ride every day. You shall

share its use with me. Imagine to yourself, my dear Elinor, the

delight of a gallop on some of these downs."

Most unwilling was she to awaken from such a dream of felicity to

comprehend all the unhappy truths which attended the affair; and for

some time she refused to submit to them. As to an additional servant,

the expense would be a trifle; Mamma she was sure would never object to

it; and any horse would do for HIM; he might always get one at the

park; as to a stable, the merest shed would be sufficient. Elinor then

ventured to doubt the propriety of her receiving such a present from a

man so little, or at least so lately known to her. This was too much.

"You are mistaken, Elinor," said she warmly, "in supposing I know very

little of Willoughby. I have not known him long indeed, but I am much

better acquainted with him, than I am with any other creature in the

world, except yourself and mama. It is not time or opportunity that is

to determine intimacy;--it is disposition alone. Seven years would be

insufficient to make some people acquainted with each other, and seven

days are more than enough for others. I should hold myself guilty of

greater impropriety in accepting a horse from my brother, than from

Willoughby. Of John I know very little, though we have lived together

for years; but of Willoughby my judgment has long been formed."

Elinor thought it wisest to touch that point no more. She knew her

sister's temper. Opposition on so tender a subject would only attach

her the more to her own opinion. But by an appeal to her affection for

her mother, by representing the inconveniences which that indulgent

mother must draw on herself, if (as would probably be the case) she

consented to this increase of establishment, Marianne was shortly

subdued; and she promised not to tempt her mother to such imprudent

kindness by mentioning the offer, and to tell Willoughby when she saw

him next, that it must be declined.

She was faithful to her word; and when Willoughby called at the

cottage, the same day, Elinor heard her express her disappointment to

him in a low voice, on being obliged to forego the acceptance of his

present. The reasons for this alteration were at the same time

related, and they were such as to make further entreaty on his side

impossible. His concern however was very apparent; and after

expressing it with earnestness, he added, in the same low voice,--"But,

Marianne, the horse is still yours, though you cannot use it now. I

shall keep it only till you can claim it. When you leave Barton to

form your own establishment in a more lasting home, Queen Mab shall

receive you."

This was all overheard by Miss Dashwood; and in the whole of the

sentence, in his manner of pronouncing it, and in his addressing her

sister by her Christian name alone, she instantly saw an intimacy so

decided, a meaning so direct, as marked a perfect agreement between

them. From that moment she doubted not of their being engaged to each

other; and the belief of it created no other surprise than that she, or

any of their friends, should be left by tempers so frank, to discover

it by accident.

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 mama 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,

"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 raillery 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 a form a great part of the

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 13

Their intended excursion to Whitwell 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."

"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."

"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."

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."

Marianne coloured, and replied very hastily, "Where, pray?"--

"Did not you know," said Willoughby, "that we had been out in my

curricle?"

"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 shew

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

impertinent remarks, do you not now begin to doubt the discretion of

your own conduct?"

"If the impertinent remarks of Mrs. Jennings are to be the proof of

impropriety 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 shew 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 14

The 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 feeling; 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 Allenham; 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 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

twelvemonth, 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 since 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.

CHAPTER 15

Mrs. Dashwood's visit to Lady Middleton took place the next day, and

two of her daughters went with her; but Marianne excused herself from

being of the party, under some trifling pretext of employment; and her

mother, who concluded that a promise had been made by Willoughby the

night before of calling on her while they were absent, was perfectly

satisfied with her remaining at home.

On their return from the park they found Willoughby's curricle and

servant in waiting at the cottage, and Mrs. Dashwood was convinced that

her conjecture had been just. So far it was all as she had foreseen;

but on entering the house she beheld what no foresight had taught her

to expect. They were no sooner in the passage than Marianne came

hastily out of the parlour apparently in violent affliction, with her

handkerchief at her eyes; and without noticing them ran up stairs.

Surprised and alarmed they proceeded directly into the room she had

just quitted, where they found only Willoughby, who was leaning against

the mantel-piece with his back towards them. He turned round on their

coming in, and his countenance shewed that he strongly partook of the

emotion which over-powered Marianne.

"Is anything the matter with her?" cried Mrs. Dashwood as she

entered--"is she ill?"

"I hope not," he replied, trying to look cheerful; and with a forced

smile presently added, "It is I who may rather expect to be ill--for I

am now suffering under a very heavy disappointment!"

"Disappointment?"

"Yes, for I am unable to keep my engagement with you. Mrs. Smith has

this morning exercised the privilege of riches upon a poor dependent

cousin, by sending me on business to London. I have just received my

dispatches, and taken my farewell of Allenham; and by way of

exhilaration I am now come to take my farewell of you."

"To London!--and are you going this morning?"

"Almost this moment."

"This is very unfortunate. But Mrs. Smith must be obliged;--and her

business will not detain you from us long I hope."

He coloured as he replied, "You are very kind, but I have no idea of

returning into Devonshire immediately. My visits to Mrs. Smith are

never repeated within the twelvemonth."

"And is Mrs. Smith your only friend? Is Allenham the only house in the

neighbourhood to which you will be welcome? For shame, Willoughby, can

you wait for an invitation here?"

His colour increased; and with his eyes fixed on the ground he only

replied, "You are too good."

Mrs. Dashwood looked at Elinor with surprise. Elinor felt equal

amazement. For a few moments every one was silent. Mrs. Dashwood

first spoke.

"I have only to add, my dear Willoughby, that at Barton cottage you

will always be welcome; for I will not press you to return here

immediately, because you only can judge how far THAT might be pleasing

to Mrs. Smith; and on this head I shall be no more disposed to question

your judgment than to doubt your inclination."

"My engagements at present," replied Willoughby, confusedly, "are of

such a nature--that--I dare not flatter myself"--

He stopt. Mrs. Dashwood was too much astonished to speak, and another

pause succeeded. This was broken by Willoughby, who said with a faint

smile, "It is folly to linger in this manner. I will not torment

myself any longer by remaining among friends whose society it is

impossible for me now to enjoy."

He then hastily took leave of them all and left the room. They saw him

step into his carriage, and in a minute it was out of sight.

Mrs. Dashwood felt too much for speech, and instantly quitted the

parlour to give way in solitude to the concern and alarm which this

sudden departure occasioned.

Elinor's uneasiness was at least equal to her mother's. She thought of

what had just passed with anxiety and distrust. Willoughby's behaviour

in taking leave of them, his embarrassment, and affectation of

cheerfulness, and, above all, his unwillingness to accept her mother's

invitation, a backwardness so unlike a lover, so unlike himself,

greatly disturbed her. One moment she feared that no serious design

had ever been formed on his side; and the next that some unfortunate

quarrel had taken place between him and her sister;--the distress in

which Marianne had quitted the room was such as a serious quarrel could

most reasonably account for, though when she considered what Marianne's

love for him was, a quarrel seemed almost impossible.

But whatever might be the particulars of their separation, her sister's

affliction was indubitable; and she thought with the tenderest

compassion of that violent sorrow which Marianne was in all probability

not merely giving way to as a relief, but feeding and encouraging as a

duty.

In about half an hour her mother returned, and though her eyes were

red, her countenance was not uncheerful.

"Our dear Willoughby is now some miles from Barton, Elinor," said she,

as she sat down to work, "and with how heavy a heart does he travel?"

"It is all very strange. So suddenly to be gone! It seems but the work

of a moment. And last night he was with us so happy, so cheerful, so

affectionate? And now, after only ten minutes notice--Gone too without

intending to return!--Something more than what he owned to us must have

happened. He did not speak, he did not behave like himself. YOU must

have seen the difference as well as I. What can it be? Can they have

quarrelled? Why else should he have shewn such unwillingness to accept

your invitation here?"--

"It was not inclination that he wanted, Elinor; I could plainly see

THAT. He had not the power of accepting it. I have thought it all

over I assure you, and I can perfectly account for every thing that at

first seemed strange to me as well as to you."

"Can you, indeed!"

"Yes. I have explained it to myself in the most satisfactory way;--but

you, Elinor, who love to doubt where you can--it will not satisfy YOU,

I know; but you shall not talk ME out of my trust in it. I am

persuaded that Mrs. Smith suspects his regard for Marianne, disapproves

of it, (perhaps because she has other views for him,) and on that

account is eager to get him away;--and that the business which she

sends him off to transact is invented as an excuse to dismiss him.

This is what I believe to have happened. He is, moreover, aware that

she DOES disapprove the connection, he dares not therefore at present

confess to her his engagement with Marianne, and he feels himself

obliged, from his dependent situation, to give into her schemes, and

absent himself from Devonshire for a while. You will tell me, I know,

that this may or may NOT have happened; but I will listen to no cavil,

unless you can point out any other method of understanding the affair

as satisfactory at this. And now, Elinor, what have you to say?"

"Nothing, for you have anticipated my answer."

"Then you would have told me, that it might or might not have happened.

Oh, Elinor, how incomprehensible are your feelings! You had rather

take evil upon credit than good. You had rather look out for misery

for Marianne, and guilt for poor Willoughby, than an apology for the

latter. You are resolved to think him blameable, because he took leave

of us with less affection than his usual behaviour has shewn. And is

no allowance to be made for inadvertence, or for spirits depressed by

recent disappointment? Are no probabilities to be accepted, merely

because they are not certainties? Is nothing due to the man whom we

have all such reason to love, and no reason in the world to think ill

of? To the possibility of motives unanswerable in themselves, though

unavoidably secret for a while? And, after all, what is it you suspect

him of?"

"I can hardly tell myself. But suspicion of something unpleasant is

the inevitable consequence of such an alteration as we just witnessed

in him. There is great truth, however, in what you have now urged of

the allowances which ought to be made for him, and it is my wish to be

candid in my judgment of every body. Willoughby may undoubtedly have

very sufficient reasons for his conduct, and I will hope that he has.

But it would have been more like Willoughby to acknowledge them at

once. Secrecy may be advisable; but still I cannot help wondering at

its being practiced by him."

"Do not blame him, however, for departing from his character, where the

deviation is necessary. But you really do admit the justice of what I

have said in his defence?--I am happy--and he is acquitted."

"Not entirely. It may be proper to conceal their engagement (if they

ARE engaged) from Mrs. Smith--and if that is the case, it must be

highly expedient for Willoughby to be but little in Devonshire at

present. But this is no excuse for their concealing it from us."

"Concealing it from us! my dear child, do you accuse Willoughby and

Marianne of concealment? This is strange indeed, when your eyes have

been reproaching them every day for incautiousness."

"I want no proof of their affection," said Elinor; "but of their

engagement I do."

"I am perfectly satisfied of both."

"Yet not a syllable has been said to you on the subject, by either of

them."

"I have not wanted syllables where actions have spoken so plainly. Has

not his behaviour to Marianne and to all of us, for at least the last

fortnight, declared that he loved and considered her as his future

wife, and that he felt for us the attachment of the nearest relation?

Have we not perfectly understood each other? Has not my consent been

daily asked by his looks, his manner, his attentive and affectionate

respect? My Elinor, is it possible to doubt their engagement? How

could such a thought occur to you? How is it to be supposed that

Willoughby, persuaded as he must be of your sister's love, should leave

her, and leave her perhaps for months, without telling her of his

affection;--that they should part without a mutual exchange of

confidence?"

"I confess," replied Elinor, "that every circumstance except ONE is in

favour of their engagement; but that ONE is the total silence of both

on the subject, and with me it almost outweighs every other."

"How strange this is! You must think wretchedly indeed of Willoughby,

if, after all that has openly passed between them, you can doubt the

nature of the terms on which they are together. Has he been acting a

part in his behaviour to your sister all this time? Do you suppose him

really indifferent to her?"

"No, I cannot think that. He must and does love her I am sure."

"But with a strange kind of tenderness, if he can leave her with such

indifference, such carelessness of the future, as you attribute to him."

"You must remember, my dear mother, that I have never considered this

matter as certain. I have had my doubts, I confess; but they are

fainter than they were, and they may soon be entirely done away. If we

find they correspond, every fear of mine will be removed."

"A mighty concession indeed! If you were to see them at the altar, you

would suppose they were going to be married. Ungracious girl! But I

require no such proof. Nothing in my opinion has ever passed to

justify doubt; no secrecy has been attempted; all has been uniformly

open and unreserved. You cannot doubt your sister's wishes. It must

be Willoughby therefore whom you suspect. But why? Is he not a man of

honour and feeling? Has there been any inconsistency on his side to

create alarm? can he be deceitful?"

"I hope not, I believe not," cried Elinor. "I love Willoughby,

sincerely love him; and suspicion of his integrity cannot be more

painful to yourself than to me. It has been involuntary, and I will

not encourage it. I was startled, I confess, by the alteration in his

manners this morning;--he did not speak like himself, and did not

return your kindness with any cordiality. But all this may be

explained by such a situation of his affairs as you have supposed. He

had just parted from my sister, had seen her leave him in the greatest

affliction; and if he felt obliged, from a fear of offending Mrs.

Smith, to resist the temptation of returning here soon, and yet aware

that by declining your invitation, by saying that he was going away for

some time, he should seem to act an ungenerous, a suspicious part by

our family, he might well be embarrassed and disturbed. In such a

case, a plain and open avowal of his difficulties would have been more

to his honour I think, as well as more consistent with his general

character;--but I will not raise objections against any one's conduct

on so illiberal a foundation, as a difference in judgment from myself,

or a deviation from what I may think right and consistent."

"You speak very properly. Willoughby certainly does not deserve to be

suspected. Though WE have not known him long, he is no stranger in

this part of the world; and who has ever spoken to his disadvantage?

Had he been in a situation to act independently and marry immediately,

it might have been odd that he should leave us without acknowledging

everything to me at once: but this is not the case. It is an

engagement in some respects not prosperously begun, for their marriage

must be at a very uncertain distance; and even secrecy, as far as it

can be observed, may now be very advisable."

They were interrupted by the entrance of Margaret; and Elinor was then

at liberty to think over the representations of her mother, to

acknowledge the probability of many, and hope for the justice of all.

They saw nothing of Marianne till dinner time, when she entered the

room and took her place at the table without saying a word. Her eyes

were red and swollen; and it seemed as if her tears were even then

restrained with difficulty. She avoided the looks of them all, could

neither eat nor speak, and after some time, on her mother's silently

pressing her hand with tender compassion, her small degree of fortitude

was quite overcome, she burst into tears and left the room.

This violent oppression of spirits continued the whole evening. She

was without any power, because she was without any desire of command

over herself. The slightest mention of anything relative to Willoughby

overpowered her in an instant; and though her family were most

anxiously attentive to her comfort, it was impossible for them, if they

spoke at all, to keep clear of every subject which her feelings

connected with him.

CHAPTER 16

Marianne would have thought herself very inexcusable had she been able

to sleep at all the first night after parting from Willoughby. She

would have been ashamed to look her family in the face the next

morning, had she not risen from her bed in more need of repose than

when she lay down in it. But the feelings which made such composure a

disgrace, left her in no danger of incurring it. She was awake the

whole night, and she wept the greatest part of it. She got up with a

headache, was unable to talk, and unwilling to take any nourishment;

giving pain every moment to her mother and sisters, and forbidding all

attempt at consolation from either. Her sensibility was potent enough!

When breakfast was over she walked out by herself, and wandered about

the village of Allenham, indulging the recollection of past enjoyment

and crying over the present reverse for the chief of the morning.

The evening passed off in the equal indulgence of feeling. She played

over every favourite song that she had been used to play to Willoughby,

every air in which their voices had been oftenest joined, and sat at

the instrument gazing on every line of music that he had written out

for her, till her heart was so heavy that no farther sadness could be

gained; and this nourishment of grief was every day applied. She spent

whole hours at the pianoforte alternately singing and crying; her voice

often totally suspended by her tears. In books too, as well as in

music, she courted the misery which a contrast between the past and

present was certain of giving. She read nothing but what they had been

used to read together.

Such violence of affliction indeed could not be supported for ever; it

sunk within a few days into a calmer melancholy; but these employments,

to which she daily recurred, her solitary walks and silent meditations,

still produced occasional effusions of sorrow as lively as ever.

No letter from Willoughby came; and none seemed expected by Marianne.

Her mother was surprised, and Elinor again became uneasy. But Mrs.

Dashwood could find explanations whenever she wanted them, which at

least satisfied herself.

"Remember, Elinor," said she, "how very often Sir John fetches our

letters himself from the post, and carries them to it. We have already

agreed that secrecy may be necessary, and we must acknowledge that it

could not be maintained if their correspondence were to pass through

Sir John's hands."

Elinor could not deny the truth of this, and she tried to find in it a

motive sufficient for their silence. But there was one method so

direct, so simple, and in her opinion so eligible of knowing the real

state of the affair, and of instantly removing all mystery, that she

could not help suggesting it to her mother.

"Why do you not ask Marianne at once," said she, "whether she is or she

is not engaged to Willoughby? From you, her mother, and so kind, so

indulgent a mother, the question could not give offence. It would be

the natural result of your affection for her. She used to be all

unreserve, and to you more especially."

"I would not ask such a question for the world. Supposing it possible

that they are not engaged, what distress would not such an enquiry

inflict! At any rate it would be most ungenerous. I should never

deserve her confidence again, after forcing from her a confession of

what is meant at present to be unacknowledged to any one. I know

Marianne's heart: I know that she dearly loves me, and that I shall not

be the last to whom the affair is made known, when circumstances make

the revealment of it eligible. I would not attempt to force the

confidence of any one; of a child much less; because a sense of duty

would prevent the denial which her wishes might direct."

Elinor thought this generosity overstrained, considering her sister's

youth, and urged the matter farther, but in vain; common sense, common

care, common prudence, were all sunk in Mrs. Dashwood's romantic

delicacy.

It was several days before Willoughby's name was mentioned before

Marianne by any of her family; Sir John and Mrs. Jennings, indeed, were

not so nice; their witticisms added pain to many a painful hour;--but

one evening, Mrs. Dashwood, accidentally taking up a volume of

Shakespeare, exclaimed,

"We have never finished Hamlet, Marianne; our dear Willoughby went away

before we could get through it. We will put it by, that when he comes

again...But it may be months, perhaps, before THAT happens."

"Months!" cried Marianne, with strong surprise. "No--nor many weeks."

Mrs. Dashwood was sorry for what she had said; but it gave Elinor

pleasure, as it produced a reply from Marianne so expressive of

confidence in Willoughby and knowledge of his intentions.

One morning, about a week after his leaving the country, Marianne was

prevailed on to join her sisters in their usual walk, instead of

wandering away by herself. Hitherto she had carefully avoided every

companion in her rambles. If her sisters intended to walk on the

downs, she directly stole away towards the lanes; if they talked of the

valley, she was as speedy in climbing the hills, and could never be

found when the others set off. But at length she was secured by the

exertions of Elinor, who greatly disapproved such continual seclusion.

They walked along the road through the valley, and chiefly in silence,

for Marianne's MIND could not be controlled, and Elinor, satisfied with

gaining one point, would not then attempt more. Beyond the entrance of

the valley, where the country, though still rich, was less wild and

more open, a long stretch of the road which they had travelled on first

coming to Barton, lay before them; and on reaching that point, they

stopped to look around them, and examine a prospect which formed the

distance of their view from the cottage, from a spot which they had

never happened to reach in any of their walks before.

Amongst the objects in the scene, they soon discovered an animated one;

it was a man on horseback riding towards them. In a few minutes they

could distinguish him to be a gentleman; and in a moment afterwards

Marianne rapturously exclaimed,

"It is he; it is indeed;--I know it is!"--and was hastening to meet

him, when Elinor cried out,

"Indeed, Marianne, I think you are mistaken. It is not Willoughby.

The person is not tall enough for him, and has not his air."

"He has, he has," cried Marianne, "I am sure he has. His air, his

coat, his horse. I knew how soon he would come."

She walked eagerly on as she spoke; and Elinor, to screen Marianne from

particularity, as she felt almost certain of its not being Willoughby,

quickened her pace and kept up with her. They were soon within thirty

yards of the gentleman. Marianne looked again; her heart sunk within

her; and abruptly turning round, she was hurrying back, when the voices

of both her sisters were raised to detain her; a third, almost as well

known as Willoughby's, joined them in begging her to stop, and she

turned round with surprise to see and welcome Edward Ferrars.

He was the only person in the world who could at that moment be

forgiven for not being Willoughby; the only one who could have gained a

smile from her; but she dispersed her tears to smile on HIM, and in her

sister's happiness forgot for a time her own disappointment.

He dismounted, and giving his horse to his servant, walked back with

them to Barton, whither he was purposely coming to visit them.

He was welcomed by them all with great cordiality, but especially by

Marianne, who showed more warmth of regard in her reception of him than

even Elinor herself. To Marianne, indeed, the meeting between Edward

and her sister was but a continuation of that unaccountable coldness

which she had often observed at Norland in their mutual behaviour. On

Edward's side, more particularly, there was a deficiency of all that a

lover ought to look and say on such an occasion. He was confused,

seemed scarcely sensible of pleasure in seeing them, looked neither

rapturous nor gay, said little but what was forced from him by

questions, and distinguished Elinor by no mark of affection. Marianne

saw and listened with increasing surprise. She began almost to feel a

dislike of Edward; and it ended, as every feeling must end with her, by

carrying back her thoughts to Willoughby, whose manners formed a

contrast sufficiently striking to those of his brother elect.

After a short silence which succeeded the first surprise and enquiries

of meeting, Marianne asked Edward if he came directly from London. No,

he had been in Devonshire a fortnight.

"A fortnight!" she repeated, surprised at his being so long in the same

county with Elinor without seeing her before.

He looked rather distressed as he added, that he had been staying with

some friends near Plymouth.

"Have you been lately in Sussex?" said Elinor.

"I was at Norland about a month ago."

"And how does dear, dear Norland look?" cried Marianne.

"Dear, dear Norland," said Elinor, "probably looks much as it always

does at this time of the year. The woods and walks thickly covered

with dead leaves."

"Oh," cried Marianne, "with what transporting sensation have I formerly

seen them fall! How have I delighted, as I walked, to see them driven

in showers about me by the wind! What feelings have they, the season,

the air altogether inspired! Now there is no one to regard them. They

are seen only as a nuisance, swept hastily off, and driven as much as

possible from the sight."

"It is not every one," said Elinor, "who has your passion for dead

leaves."

"No; my feelings are not often shared, not often understood. But

SOMETIMES they are."--As she said this, she sunk into a reverie for a

few moments;--but rousing herself again, "Now, Edward," said she,

calling his attention to the prospect, "here is Barton valley. Look up

to it, and be tranquil if you can. Look at those hills! Did you ever

see their equals? To the left is Barton park, amongst those woods and

plantations. You may see the end of the house. And there, beneath

that farthest hill, which rises with such grandeur, is our cottage."

"It is a beautiful country," he replied; "but these bottoms must be

dirty in winter."

"How can you think of dirt, with such objects before you?"

"Because," replied he, smiling, "among the rest of the objects before

me, I see a very dirty lane."

"How strange!" said Marianne to herself as she walked on.

"Have you an agreeable neighbourhood here? Are the Middletons pleasant

people?"

"No, not all," answered Marianne; "we could not be more unfortunately

situated."

"Marianne," cried her sister, "how can you say so? How can you be so

unjust? They are a very respectable family, Mr. Ferrars; and towards

us have behaved in the friendliest manner. Have you forgot, Marianne,

how many pleasant days we have owed to them?"

"No," said Marianne, in a low voice, "nor how many painful moments."

Elinor took no notice of this; and directing her attention to their

visitor, endeavoured to support something like discourse with him, by

talking of their present residence, its conveniences, &c. extorting

from him occasional questions and remarks. His coldness and reserve

mortified her severely; she was vexed and half angry; but resolving to

regulate her behaviour to him by the past rather than the present, she

avoided every appearance of resentment or displeasure, and treated him

as she thought he ought to be treated from the family connection.

CHAPTER 17

Mrs. Dashwood was surprised only for a moment at seeing him; for his

coming to Barton was, in her opinion, of all things the most natural.

Her joy and expression of regard long outlived her wonder. He received

the kindest welcome from her; and shyness, coldness, reserve could not

stand against such a reception. They had begun to fail him before he

entered the house, and they were quite overcome by the captivating

manners of Mrs. Dashwood. Indeed a man could not very well be in love

with either of her daughters, without extending the passion to her; and

Elinor had the satisfaction of seeing him soon become more like

himself. His affections seemed to reanimate towards them all, and his

interest in their welfare again became perceptible. He was not in

spirits, however; he praised their house, admired its prospect, was

attentive, and kind; but still he was not in spirits. The whole family

perceived it, and Mrs. Dashwood, attributing it to some want of

liberality in his mother, sat down to table indignant against all

selfish parents.

"What are Mrs. Ferrars's views for you at present, Edward?" said she,

when dinner was over and they had drawn round the fire; "are you still

to be a great orator in spite of yourself?"

"No. I hope my mother is now convinced that I have no more talents than

inclination for a public life!"

"But how is your fame to be established? for famous you must be to

satisfy all your family; and with no inclination for expense, no

affection for strangers, no profession, and no assurance, you may find

it a difficult matter."

"I shall not attempt it. I have no wish to be distinguished; and have

every reason to hope I never shall. Thank Heaven! I cannot be forced

into genius and eloquence."

"You have no ambition, I well know. Your wishes are all moderate."

"As moderate as those of the rest of the world, I believe. I wish as

well as every body else to be perfectly happy; but, like every body

else it must be in my own way. Greatness will not make me so."

"Strange that it would!" cried Marianne. "What have wealth or grandeur

to do with happiness?"

"Grandeur has but little," said Elinor, "but wealth has much to do with

it."

"Elinor, for shame!" said Marianne, "money can only give happiness

where there is nothing else to give it. Beyond a competence, it can

afford no real satisfaction, as far as mere self is concerned."

"Perhaps," said Elinor, smiling, "we may come to the same point. YOUR

competence and MY wealth are very much alike, I dare say; and without

them, as the world goes now, we shall both agree that every kind of

external comfort must be wanting. Your ideas are only more noble than

mine. Come, what is your competence?"

"About eighteen hundred or two thousand a year; not more than THAT."

Elinor laughed. "TWO thousand a year! ONE is my wealth! I guessed how

it would end."

"And yet two thousand a-year is a very moderate income," said Marianne.

"A family cannot well be maintained on a smaller. I am sure I am not

extravagant in my demands. A proper establishment of servants, a

carriage, perhaps two, and hunters, cannot be supported on less."

Elinor smiled again, to hear her sister describing so accurately their

future expenses at Combe Magna.

"Hunters!" repeated Edward--"but why must you have hunters? Every body

does not hunt."

Marianne coloured as she replied, "But most people do."

"I wish," said Margaret, striking out a novel thought, "that somebody

would give us all a large fortune apiece!"

"Oh that they would!" cried Marianne, her eyes sparkling with

animation, and her cheeks glowing with the delight of such imaginary

happiness.

"We are all unanimous in that wish, I suppose," said Elinor, "in spite

of the insufficiency of wealth."

"Oh dear!" cried Margaret, "how happy I should be! I wonder what I

should do with it!"

Marianne looked as if she had no doubt on that point.

"I should be puzzled to spend so large a fortune myself," said Mrs.

Dashwood, "if my children were all to be rich without my help."

"You must begin your improvements on this house," observed Elinor, "and

your difficulties will soon vanish."

"What magnificent orders would travel from this family to London," said

Edward, "in such an event! What a happy day for booksellers,

music-sellers, and print-shops! You, Miss Dashwood, would give a

general commission for every new print of merit to be sent you--and as

for Marianne, I know her greatness of soul, there would not be music

enough in London to content her. And books!--Thomson, Cowper,

Scott--she would buy them all over and over again: she would buy up

every copy, I believe, to prevent their falling into unworthy hands;

and she would have every book that tells her how to admire an old

twisted tree. Should not you, Marianne? Forgive me, if I am very

saucy. But I was willing to shew you that I had not forgot our old

disputes."

"I love to be reminded of the past, Edward--whether it be melancholy or

gay, I love to recall it--and you will never offend me by talking of

former times. You are very right in supposing how my money would be

spent--some of it, at least--my loose cash would certainly be employed

in improving my collection of music and books."

"And the bulk of your fortune would be laid out in annuities on the

authors or their heirs."

"No, Edward, I should have something else to do with it."

"Perhaps, then, you would bestow it as a reward on that person who

wrote the ablest defence of your favourite maxim, that no one can ever

be in love more than once in their life--your opinion on that point is

unchanged, I presume?"

"Undoubtedly. At my time of life opinions are tolerably fixed. It is

not likely that I should now see or hear any thing to change them."

"Marianne is as steadfast as ever, you see," said Elinor, "she is not

at all altered."

"She is only grown a little more grave than she was."

"Nay, Edward," said Marianne, "you need not reproach me. You are not

very gay yourself."

"Why should you think so!" replied he, with a sigh. "But gaiety never

was a part of MY character."

"Nor do I think it a part of Marianne's," said Elinor; "I should hardly

call her a lively girl--she is very earnest, very eager in all she

does--sometimes talks a great deal and always with animation--but she

is not often really merry."

"I believe you are right," he replied, "and yet I have always set her

down as a lively girl."

"I have frequently detected myself in such kind of mistakes," said

Elinor, "in a total misapprehension of character in some point or

other: fancying people so much more gay or grave, or ingenious or

stupid than they really are, and I can hardly tell why or in what the

deception originated. Sometimes one is guided by what they say of

themselves, and very frequently by what other people say of them,

without giving oneself time to deliberate and judge."

"But I thought it was right, Elinor," said Marianne, "to be guided

wholly by the opinion of other people. I thought our judgments were

given us merely to be subservient to those of neighbours. This has

always been your doctrine, I am sure."

"No, Marianne, never. My doctrine has never aimed at the subjection of

the understanding. All I have ever attempted to influence has been the

behaviour. You must not confound my meaning. I am guilty, I confess,

of having often wished you to treat our acquaintance in general with

greater attention; but when have I advised you to adopt their

sentiments or to conform to their judgment in serious matters?"

"You have not been able to bring your sister over to your plan of

general civility," said Edward to Elinor. "Do you gain no ground?"

"Quite the contrary," replied Elinor, looking expressively at Marianne.

"My judgment," he returned, "is all on your side of the question; but I

am afraid my practice is much more on your sister's. I never wish to

offend, but I am so foolishly shy, that I often seem negligent, when I

am only kept back by my natural awkwardness. I have frequently thought

that I must have been intended by nature to be fond of low company, I

am so little at my ease among strangers of gentility!"

"Marianne has not shyness to excuse any inattention of hers," said

Elinor.

"She knows her own worth too well for false shame," replied Edward.

"Shyness is only the effect of a sense of inferiority in some way or

other. If I could persuade myself that my manners were perfectly easy

and graceful, I should not be shy."

"But you would still be reserved," said Marianne, "and that is worse."

Edward started--"Reserved! Am I reserved, Marianne?"

"Yes, very."

"I do not understand you," replied he, colouring. "Reserved!--how, in

what manner? What am I to tell you? What can you suppose?"

Elinor looked surprised at his emotion; but trying to laugh off the

subject, she said to him, "Do not you know my sister well enough to

understand what she means? Do not you know she calls every one

reserved who does not talk as fast, and admire what she admires as

rapturously as herself?"

Edward made no answer. His gravity and thoughtfulness returned on him

in their fullest extent--and he sat for some time silent and dull.

CHAPTER 18

Elinor saw, with great uneasiness the low spirits of her friend. His

visit afforded her but a very partial satisfaction, while his own

enjoyment in it appeared so imperfect. It was evident that he was

unhappy; she wished it were equally evident that he still distinguished

her by the same affection which once she had felt no doubt of

inspiring; but hitherto the continuance of his preference seemed very

uncertain; and the reservedness of his manner towards her contradicted

one moment what a more animated look had intimated the preceding one.

He joined her and Marianne in the breakfast-room the next morning

before the others were down; and Marianne, who was always eager to

promote their happiness as far as she could, soon left them to

themselves. But before she was half way upstairs she heard the parlour

door open, and, turning round, was astonished to see Edward himself

come out.

"I am going into the village to see my horses," said he, "as you are

not yet ready for breakfast; I shall be back again presently."

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Edward returned to them with fresh admiration of the surrounding

country; in his walk to the village, he had seen many parts of the

valley to advantage; and the village itself, in a much higher situation

than the cottage, afforded a general view of the whole, which had

exceedingly pleased him. This was a subject which ensured Marianne's

attention, and she was beginning to describe her own admiration of

these scenes, and to question him more minutely on the objects that had

particularly struck him, when Edward interrupted her by saying, "You

must not enquire too far, Marianne--remember I have no knowledge in the

picturesque, and I shall offend you by my ignorance and want of taste

if we come to particulars. I shall call hills steep, which ought to be

bold; surfaces strange and uncouth, which ought to be irregular and

rugged; and distant objects out of sight, which ought only to be

indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere. You must be

satisfied with such admiration as I can honestly give. I call it a

very fine country--the hills are steep, the woods seem full of fine

timber, and the valley looks comfortable and snug--with rich meadows

and several neat farm houses scattered here and there. It exactly

answers my idea of a fine country, because it unites beauty with

utility--and I dare say it is a picturesque one too, because you admire

it; I can easily believe it to be full of rocks and promontories, grey

moss and brush wood, but these are all lost on me. I know nothing of

the picturesque."

"I am afraid it is but too true," said Marianne; "but why should you

boast of it?"

"I suspect," said Elinor, "that to avoid one kind of affectation,

Edward here falls into another. Because he believes many people

pretend to more admiration of the beauties of nature than they really

feel, and is disgusted with such pretensions, he affects greater

indifference and less discrimination in viewing them himself than he

possesses. He is fastidious and will have an affectation of his own."

"It is very true," said Marianne, "that admiration of landscape scenery

is become a mere jargon. Every body pretends to feel and tries to

describe with the taste and elegance of him who first defined what

picturesque beauty was. I detest jargon of every kind, and sometimes I

have kept my feelings to myself, because I could find no language to

describe them in but what was worn and hackneyed out of all sense and

meaning."

"I am convinced," said Edward, "that you really feel all the delight in

a fine prospect which you profess to feel. But, in return, your sister

must allow me to feel no more than I profess. I like a fine prospect,

but not on picturesque principles. I do not like crooked, twisted,

blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight, and

flourishing. I do not like ruined, tattered cottages. I am not fond

of nettles or thistles, or heath blossoms. I have more pleasure in a

snug farm-house than a watch-tower--and a troop of tidy, happy villages

please me better than the finest banditti in the world."

Marianne looked with amazement at Edward, with compassion at her

sister. Elinor only laughed.

The subject was continued no farther; and Marianne remained

thoughtfully silent, till a new object suddenly engaged her attention.

She was sitting by Edward, and in taking his tea from Mrs. Dashwood,

his hand passed so directly before her, as to make a ring, with a plait

of hair in the centre, very conspicuous on one of his fingers.

"I never saw you wear a ring before, Edward," she cried. "Is that

Fanny's hair? I remember her promising to give you some. But I should

have thought her hair had been darker."

Marianne spoke inconsiderately what she really felt--but when she saw

how much she had pained Edward, her own vexation at her want of thought

could not be surpassed by his. He coloured very deeply, and giving a

momentary glance at Elinor, replied, "Yes; it is my sister's hair. The

setting always casts a different shade on it, you know."

Elinor had met his eye, and looked conscious likewise. That the hair

was her own, she instantaneously felt as well satisfied as Marianne;

the only difference in their conclusions was, that what Marianne

considered as a free gift from her sister, Elinor was conscious must

have been procured by some theft or contrivance unknown to herself.

She was not in a humour, however, to regard it as an affront, and

affecting to take no notice of what passed, by instantly talking of

something else, she internally resolved henceforward to catch every

opportunity of eyeing the hair and of satisfying herself, beyond all

doubt, that it was exactly the shade of her own.

Edward's embarrassment lasted some time, and it ended in an absence of

mind still more settled. He was particularly grave the whole morning.

Marianne severely censured herself for what she had said; but her own

forgiveness might have been more speedy, had she known how little

offence it had given her sister.

Before the middle of the day, they were visited by Sir John and Mrs.

Jennings, who, having heard of the arrival of a gentleman at the

cottage, came to take a survey of the guest. With the assistance of

his mother-in-law, Sir John was not long in discovering that the name

of Ferrars began with an F. and this prepared a future mine of raillery

against the devoted Elinor, which nothing but the newness of their

acquaintance with Edward could have prevented from being immediately

sprung. But, as it was, she only learned, from some very significant

looks, how far their penetration, founded on Margaret's instructions,

extended.

Sir John never came to the Dashwoods without either inviting them to

dine at the park the next day, or to drink tea with them that evening.

On the present occasion, for the better entertainment of their visitor,

towards whose amusement he felt himself bound to contribute, he wished

to engage them for both.

"You MUST drink tea with us to night," said he, "for we shall be quite

alone--and tomorrow you must absolutely dine with us, for we shall be a

large party."

Mrs. Jennings enforced the necessity. "And who knows but you may raise

a dance," said she. "And that will tempt YOU, Miss Marianne."

"A dance!" cried Marianne. "Impossible! Who is to dance?"

"Who! why yourselves, and the Careys, and Whitakers to be sure.--What!

you thought nobody could dance because a certain person that shall be

nameless is gone!"

"I wish with all my soul," cried Sir John, "that Willoughby were among

us again."

This, and Marianne's blushing, gave new suspicions to Edward. "And who

is Willoughby?" said he, in a low voice, to Miss Dashwood, by whom he

was sitting.

She gave him a brief reply. Marianne's countenance was more

communicative. Edward saw enough to comprehend, not only the meaning

of others, but such of Marianne's expressions as had puzzled him

before; and when their visitors left them, he went immediately round

her, and said, in a whisper, "I have been guessing. Shall I tell you

my guess?"

"What do you mean?"

"Shall I tell you."

"Certainly."

"Well then; I guess that Mr. Willoughby hunts."

Marianne was surprised and confused, yet she could not help smiling at

the quiet archness of his manner, and after a moment's silence, said,

"Oh, Edward! How can you?--But the time will come I hope...I am sure

you will like him."

"I do not doubt it," replied he, rather astonished at her earnestness

and warmth; for had he not imagined it to be a joke for the good of her

acquaintance in general, founded only on a something or a nothing

between Mr. Willoughby and herself, he would not have ventured to

mention it.

CHAPTER 19

Edward remained a week at the cottage; he was earnestly pressed by Mrs.

Dashwood to stay longer; but, as if he were bent only on

self-mortification, he seemed resolved to be gone when his enjoyment

among his friends was at the height. His spirits, during the last two

or three days, though still very unequal, were greatly improved--he

grew more and more partial to the house and environs--never spoke of

going away without a sigh--declared his time to be wholly

disengaged--even doubted to what place he should go when he left

them--but still, go he must. Never had any week passed so quickly--he

could hardly believe it to be gone. He said so repeatedly; other

things he said too, which marked the turn of his feelings and gave the

lie to his actions. He had no pleasure at Norland; he detested being

in town; but either to Norland or London, he must go. He valued their

kindness beyond any thing, and his greatest happiness was in being with

them. Yet, he must leave them at the end of a week, in spite of their

wishes and his own, and without any restraint on his time.

Elinor placed all that was astonishing in this way of acting to his

mother's account; and it was happy for her that he had a mother whose

character was so imperfectly known to her, as to be the general excuse

for every thing strange on the part of her son. Disappointed, however,

and vexed as she was, and sometimes displeased with his uncertain

behaviour to herself, she was very well disposed on the whole to regard

his actions with all the candid allowances and generous qualifications,

which had been rather more painfully extorted from her, for

Willoughby's service, by her mother. His want of spirits, of openness,

and of consistency, were most usually attributed to his want of

independence, and his better knowledge of Mrs. Ferrars's disposition

and designs. The shortness of his visit, the steadiness of his purpose

in leaving them, originated in the same fettered inclination, the same

inevitable necessity of temporizing with his mother. The old

well-established grievance of duty against will, parent against child,

was the cause of all. She would have been glad to know when these

difficulties were to cease, this opposition was to yield,--when Mrs.

Ferrars would be reformed, and her son be at liberty to be happy. But

from such vain wishes she was forced to turn for comfort to the renewal

of her confidence in Edward's affection, to the remembrance of every

mark of regard in look or word which fell from him while at Barton, and

above all to that flattering proof of it which he constantly wore round

his finger.

"I think, Edward," said Mrs. Dashwood, as they were at breakfast the

last morning, "you would be a happier man if you had any profession to

engage your time and give an interest to your plans and actions. Some

inconvenience to your friends, indeed, might result from it--you would

not be able to give them so much of your time. But (with a smile) you

would be materially benefited in one particular at least--you would

know where to go when you left them."

"I do assure you," he replied, "that I have long thought on this point,

as you think now. It has been, and is, and probably will always be a

heavy misfortune to me, that I have had no necessary business to engage

me, no profession to give me employment, or afford me any thing like

independence. But unfortunately my own nicety, and the nicety of my

friends, have made me what I am, an idle, helpless being. We never

could agree in our choice of a profession. I always preferred the

church, as I still do. But that was not smart enough for my family.

They recommended the army. That was a great deal too smart for me.

The law was allowed to be genteel enough; many young men, who had

chambers in the Temple, made a very good appearance in the first

circles, and drove about town in very knowing gigs. But I had no

inclination for the law, even in this less abstruse study of it, which

my family approved. As for the navy, it had fashion on its side, but I

was too old when the subject was first started to enter it--and, at

length, as there was no necessity for my having any profession at all,

as I might be as dashing and expensive without a red coat on my back as

with one, idleness was pronounced on the whole to be most advantageous

and honourable, and a young man of eighteen is not in general so

earnestly bent on being busy as to resist the solicitations of his

friends to do nothing. I was therefore entered at Oxford and have been

properly idle ever since."

"The consequence of which, I suppose, will be," said Mrs. Dashwood,

"since leisure has not promoted your own happiness, that your sons will

be brought up to as many pursuits, employments, professions, and trades

as Columella's."

"They will be brought up," said he, in a serious accent, "to be as

unlike myself as is possible. In feeling, in action, in condition, in

every thing."

"Come, come; this is all an effusion of immediate want of spirits,

Edward. You are in a melancholy humour, and fancy that any one unlike

yourself must be happy. But remember that the pain of parting from

friends will be felt by every body at times, whatever be their

education or state. Know your own happiness. You want nothing but

patience--or give it a more fascinating name, call it hope. Your

mother will secure to you, in time, that independence you are so

anxious for; it is her duty, and it will, it must ere long become her

happiness to prevent your whole youth from being wasted in discontent.

How much may not a few months do?"

"I think," replied Edward, "that I may defy many months to produce any

good to me."

This desponding turn of mind, though it could not be communicated to

Mrs. Dashwood, gave additional pain to them all in the parting, which

shortly took place, and left an uncomfortable impression on Elinor's

feelings especially, which required some trouble and time to subdue.

But as it was her determination to subdue it, and to prevent herself

from appearing to suffer more than what all her family suffered on his

going away, she did not adopt the method so judiciously employed by

Marianne, on a similar occasion, to augment and fix her sorrow, by

seeking silence, solitude and idleness. Their means were as different

as their objects, and equally suited to the advancement of each.

Elinor sat down to her drawing-table as soon as he was out of the

house, busily employed herself the whole day, neither sought nor

avoided the mention of his name, appeared to interest herself almost as

much as ever in the general concerns of the family, and if, by this

conduct, she did not lessen her own grief, it was at least prevented

from unnecessary increase, and her mother and sisters were spared much

solicitude on her account.

Such behaviour as this, so exactly the reverse of her own, appeared no

more meritorious to Marianne, than her own had seemed faulty to her.

The business of self-command she settled very easily;--with strong

affections it was impossible, with calm ones it could have no merit.

That her sister's affections WERE calm, she dared not deny, though she

blushed to acknowledge it; and of the strength of her own, she gave a

very striking proof, by still loving and respecting that sister, in

spite of this mortifying conviction.

Without shutting herself up from her family, or leaving the house in

determined solitude to avoid them, or lying awake the whole night to

indulge meditation, Elinor found every day afforded her leisure enough

to think of Edward, and of Edward's behaviour, in every possible

variety which the different state of her spirits at different times

could produce,--with tenderness, pity, approbation, censure, and doubt.

There were moments in abundance, when, if not by the absence of her

mother and sisters, at least by the nature of their employments,

conversation was forbidden among them, and every effect of solitude was

produced. Her mind was inevitably at liberty; her thoughts could not

be chained elsewhere; and the past and the future, on a subject so

interesting, must be before her, must force her attention, and engross

her memory, her reflection, and her fancy.

From a reverie of this kind, as she sat at her drawing-table, she was

roused one morning, soon after Edward's leaving them, by the arrival of

company. She happened to be quite alone. The closing of the little

gate, at the entrance of the green court in front of the house, drew

her eyes to the window, and she saw a large party walking up to the

door. Amongst them were Sir John and Lady Middleton and Mrs. Jennings,

but there were two others, a gentleman and lady, who were quite unknown

to her. She was sitting near the window, and as soon as Sir John

perceived her, he left the rest of the party to the ceremony of

knocking at the door, and stepping across the turf, obliged her to open

the casement to speak to him, though the space was so short between the

door and the window, as to make it hardly possible to speak at one

without being heard at the other.

"Well," said he, "we have brought you some strangers. How do you like

them?"

"Hush! they will hear you."

"Never mind if they do. It is only the Palmers. Charlotte is very

pretty, I can tell you. You may see her if you look this way."

As Elinor was certain of seeing her in a couple of minutes, without

taking that liberty, she begged to be excused.

"Where is Marianne? Has she run away because we are come? I see her

instrument is open."

"She is walking, I believe."

They were now joined by Mrs. Jennings, who had not patience enough to

wait till the door was opened before she told HER story. She came

hallooing to the window, "How do you do, my dear? How does Mrs.

Dashwood do? And where are your sisters? What! all alone! you will be

glad of a little company to sit with you. I have brought my other son

and daughter to see you. Only think of their coming so suddenly! I

thought I heard a carriage last night, while we were drinking our tea,

but it never entered my head that it could be them. I thought of

nothing but whether it might not be Colonel Brandon come back again; so

I said to Sir John, I do think I hear a carriage; perhaps it is Colonel

Brandon come back again"--

Elinor was obliged to turn from her, in the middle of her story, to

receive the rest of the party; Lady Middleton introduced the two

strangers; Mrs. Dashwood and Margaret came down stairs at the same

time, and they all sat down to look at one another, while Mrs. Jennings

continued her story as she walked through the passage into the parlour,

attended by Sir John.

Mrs. Palmer was several years younger than Lady Middleton, and totally

unlike her in every respect. She was short and plump, had a very

pretty face, and the finest expression of good humour in it that could

possibly be. Her manners were by no means so elegant as her sister's,

but they were much more prepossessing. She came in with a smile,

smiled all the time of her visit, except when she laughed, and smiled

when she went away. Her husband was a grave looking young man of five

or six and twenty, with an air of more fashion and sense than his wife,

but of less willingness to please or be pleased. He entered the room

with a look of self-consequence, slightly bowed to the ladies, without

speaking a word, and, after briefly surveying them and their

apartments, took up a newspaper from the table, and continued to read

it as long as he staid.

Mrs. Palmer, on the contrary, who was strongly endowed by nature with a

turn for being uniformly civil and happy, was hardly seated before her

admiration of the parlour and every thing in it burst forth.

"Well! what a delightful room this is! I never saw anything so

charming! Only think, Mamma, how it is improved since I was here last!

I always thought it such a sweet place, ma'am! (turning to Mrs.

Dashwood) but you have made it so charming! Only look, sister, how

delightful every thing is! How I should like such a house for myself!

Should not you, Mr. Palmer?"

Mr. Palmer made her no answer, and did not even raise his eyes from the

newspaper.

"Mr. Palmer does not hear me," said she, laughing; "he never does

sometimes. It is so ridiculous!"

This was quite a new idea to Mrs. Dashwood; she had never been used to

find wit in the inattention of any one, and could not help looking with

surprise at them both.

Mrs. Jennings, in the meantime, talked on as loud as she could, and

continued her account of their surprise, the evening before, on seeing

their friends, without ceasing till every thing was told. Mrs. Palmer

laughed heartily at the recollection of their astonishment, and every

body agreed, two or three times over, that it had been quite an

agreeable surprise.

"You may believe how glad we all were to see them," added Mrs.

Jennings, leaning forward towards Elinor, and speaking in a low voice

as if she meant to be heard by no one else, though they were seated on

different sides of the room; "but, however, I can't help wishing they

had not travelled quite so fast, nor made such a long journey of it,

for they came all round by London upon account of some business, for

you know (nodding significantly and pointing to her daughter) it was

wrong in her situation. I wanted her to stay at home and rest this

morning, but she would come with us; she longed so much to see you all!"

Mrs. Palmer laughed, and said it would not do her any harm.

"She expects to be confined in February," continued Mrs. Jennings.

Lady Middleton could no longer endure such a conversation, and

therefore exerted herself to ask Mr. Palmer if there was any news in

the paper.

"No, none at all," he replied, and read on.

"Here comes Marianne," cried Sir John. "Now, Palmer, you shall see a

monstrous pretty girl."

He immediately went into the passage, opened the front door, and

ushered her in himself. Mrs. Jennings asked her, as soon as she

appeared, if she had not been to Allenham; and Mrs. Palmer laughed so

heartily at the question, as to show she understood it. Mr. Palmer

looked up on her entering the room, stared at her some minutes, and

then returned to his newspaper. Mrs. Palmer's eye was now caught by

the drawings which hung round the room. She got up to examine them.

"Oh! dear, how beautiful these are! Well! how delightful! Do but

look, mama, how sweet! I declare they are quite charming; I could look

at them for ever." And then sitting down again, she very soon forgot

that there were any such things in the room.

When Lady Middleton rose to go away, Mr. Palmer rose also, laid down

the newspaper, stretched himself and looked at them all around.

"My love, have you been asleep?" said his wife, laughing.

He made her no answer; and only observed, after again examining the

room, that it was very low pitched, and that the ceiling was crooked.

He then made his bow, and departed with the rest.

Sir John had been very urgent with them all to spend the next day at

the park. Mrs. Dashwood, who did not chuse to dine with them oftener

than they dined at the cottage, absolutely refused on her own account;

her daughters might do as they pleased. But they had no curiosity to

see how Mr. and Mrs. Palmer ate their dinner, and no expectation of

pleasure from them in any other way. They attempted, therefore,

likewise, to excuse themselves; the weather was uncertain, and not

likely to be good. But Sir John would not be satisfied--the carriage

should be sent for them and they must come. Lady Middleton too, though

she did not press their mother, pressed them. Mrs. Jennings and Mrs.

Palmer joined their entreaties, all seemed equally anxious to avoid a

family party; and the young ladies were obliged to yield.

"Why should they ask us?" said Marianne, as soon as they were gone.

"The rent of this cottage is said to be low; but we have it on very

hard terms, if we are to dine at the park whenever any one is staying

either with them, or with us."

"They mean no less to be civil and kind to us now," said Elinor, "by

these frequent invitations, than by those which we received from them a

few weeks ago. The alteration is not in them, if their parties are

grown tedious and dull. We must look for the change elsewhere."

CHAPTER 20

As the Miss Dashwoods entered the drawing-room of the park the next

day, at one door, Mrs. Palmer came running in at the other, looking as

good humoured and merry as before. She took them all most

affectionately by the hand, and expressed great delight in seeing them

again.

"I am so glad to see you!" said she, seating herself between Elinor and

Marianne, "for it is so bad a day I was afraid you might not come,

which would be a shocking thing, as we go away again tomorrow. We must

go, for the Westons come to us next week you know. It was quite a

sudden thing our coming at all, and I knew nothing of it till the

carriage was coming to the door, and then Mr. Palmer asked me if I

would go with him to Barton. He is so droll! He never tells me any

thing! I am so sorry we cannot stay longer; however we shall meet again

in town very soon, I hope."

They were obliged to put an end to such an expectation.

"Not go to town!" cried Mrs. Palmer, with a laugh, "I shall be quite

disappointed if you do not. I could get the nicest house in world for

you, next door to ours, in Hanover-square. You must come, indeed. I

am sure I shall be very happy to chaperon you at any time till I am

confined, if Mrs. Dashwood should not like to go into public."

They thanked her; but were obliged to resist all her entreaties.

"Oh, my love," cried Mrs. Palmer to her husband, who just then entered

the room--"you must help me to persuade the Miss Dashwoods to go to

town this winter."

Her love made no answer; and after slightly bowing to the ladies, began

complaining of the weather.

"How horrid all this is!" said he. "Such weather makes every thing and

every body disgusting. Dullness is as much produced within doors as

without, by rain. It makes one detest all one's acquaintance. What

the devil does Sir John mean by not having a billiard room in his

house? How few people know what comfort is! Sir John is as stupid as

the weather."

The rest of the company soon dropt in.

"I am afraid, Miss Marianne," said Sir John, "you have not been able to

take your usual walk to Allenham today."

Marianne looked very grave and said nothing.

"Oh, don't be so sly before us," said Mrs. Palmer; "for we know all

about it, I assure you; and I admire your taste very much, for I think

he is extremely handsome. We do not live a great way from him in the

country, you know. Not above ten miles, I dare say."

"Much nearer thirty," said her husband.

"Ah, well! there is not much difference. I never was at his house; but

they say it is a sweet pretty place."

"As vile a spot as I ever saw in my life," said Mr. Palmer.

Marianne remained perfectly silent, though her countenance betrayed her

interest in what was said.

"Is it very ugly?" continued Mrs. Palmer--"then it must be some other

place that is so pretty I suppose."

When they were seated in the dining room, Sir John observed with regret

that they were only eight all together.

"My dear," said he to his lady, "it is very provoking that we should be

so few. Why did not you ask the Gilberts to come to us today?"

"Did not I tell you, Sir John, when you spoke to me about it before,

that it could not be done? They dined with us last."

"You and I, Sir John," said Mrs. Jennings, "should not stand upon such

ceremony."

"Then you would be very ill-bred," cried Mr. Palmer.

"My love you contradict every body," said his wife with her usual

laugh. "Do you know that you are quite rude?"

"I did not know I contradicted any body in calling your mother

ill-bred."

"Ay, you may abuse me as you please," said the good-natured old lady,

"you have taken Charlotte off my hands, and cannot give her back again.

So there I have the whip hand of you."

Charlotte laughed heartily to think that her husband could not get rid

of her; and exultingly said, she did not care how cross he was to her,

as they must live together. It was impossible for any one to be more

thoroughly good-natured, or more determined to be happy than Mrs.

Palmer. The studied indifference, insolence, and discontent of her

husband gave her no pain; and when he scolded or abused her, she was

highly diverted.

"Mr. Palmer is so droll!" said she, in a whisper, to Elinor. "He is

always out of humour."

Elinor was not inclined, after a little observation, to give him credit

for being so genuinely and unaffectedly ill-natured or ill-bred as he

wished to appear. His temper might perhaps be a little soured by

finding, like many others of his sex, that through some unaccountable

bias in favour of beauty, he was the husband of a very silly

woman,--but she knew that this kind of blunder was too common for any

sensible man to be lastingly hurt by it.-- It was rather a wish of

distinction, she believed, which produced his contemptuous treatment of

every body, and his general abuse of every thing before him. It was

the desire of appearing superior to other people. The motive was too

common to be wondered at; but the means, however they might succeed by

establishing his superiority in ill-breeding, were not likely to attach

any one to him except his wife.

"Oh, my dear Miss Dashwood," said Mrs. Palmer soon afterwards, "I have

got such a favour to ask of you and your sister. Will you come and

spend some time at Cleveland this Christmas? Now, pray do,--and come

while the Westons are with us. You cannot think how happy I shall be!

It will be quite delightful!--My love," applying to her husband, "don't

you long to have the Miss Dashwoods come to Cleveland?"

"Certainly," he replied, with a sneer--"I came into Devonshire with no

other view."

"There now,"--said his lady, "you see Mr. Palmer expects you; so you

cannot refuse to come."

They both eagerly and resolutely declined her invitation.

"But indeed you must and shall come. I am sure you will like it of all

things. The Westons will be with us, and it will be quite delightful.

You cannot think what a sweet place Cleveland is; and we are so gay

now, for Mr. Palmer is always going about the country canvassing

against the election; and so many people came to dine with us that I

never saw before, it is quite charming! But, poor fellow! it is very

fatiguing to him! for he is forced to make every body like him."

Elinor could hardly keep her countenance as she assented to the

hardship of such an obligation.

"How charming it will be," said Charlotte, "when he is in

Parliament!--won't it? How I shall laugh! It will be so ridiculous to

see all his letters directed to him with an M.P.--But do you know, he

says, he will never frank for me? He declares he won't. Don't you,

Mr. Palmer?"

Mr. Palmer took no notice of her.

"He cannot bear writing, you know," she continued--"he says it is quite

shocking."

"No," said he, "I never said any thing so irrational. Don't palm all

your abuses of languages upon me."

"There now; you see how droll he is. This is always the way with him!

Sometimes he won't speak to me for half a day together, and then he

comes out with something so droll--all about any thing in the world."

She surprised Elinor very much as they returned into the drawing-room,

by asking her whether she did not like Mr. Palmer excessively.

"Certainly," said Elinor; "he seems very agreeable."

"Well--I am so glad you do. I thought you would, he is so pleasant;

and Mr. Palmer is excessively pleased with you and your sisters I can

tell you, and you can't think how disappointed he will be if you don't

come to Cleveland.--I can't imagine why you should object to it."

Elinor was again obliged to decline her invitation; and by changing the

subject, put a stop to her entreaties. She thought it probable that as

they lived in the same county, Mrs. Palmer might be able to give some

more particular account of Willoughby's general character, than could

be gathered from the Middletons' partial acquaintance with him; and she

was eager to gain from any one, such a confirmation of his merits as

might remove the possibility of fear from Marianne. She began by

inquiring if they saw much of Mr. Willoughby at Cleveland, and whether

they were intimately acquainted with him.

"Oh dear, yes; I know him extremely well," replied Mrs. Palmer;--"Not

that I ever spoke to him, indeed; but I have seen him for ever in town.

Somehow or other I never happened to be staying at Barton while he was

at Allenham. Mama saw him here once before;--but I was with my uncle

at Weymouth. However, I dare say we should have seen a great deal of

him in Somersetshire, if it had not happened very unluckily that we

should never have been in the country together. He is very little at

Combe, I believe; but if he were ever so much there, I do not think Mr.

Palmer would visit him, for he is in the opposition, you know, and

besides it is such a way off. I know why you inquire about him, very

well; your sister is to marry him. I am monstrous glad of it, for then

I shall have her for a neighbour you know."

"Upon my word," replied Elinor, "you know much more of the matter than

I do, if you have any reason to expect such a match."

"Don't pretend to deny it, because you know it is what every body talks

of. I assure you I heard of it in my way through town."

"My dear Mrs. Palmer!"

"Upon my honour I did.--I met Colonel Brandon Monday morning in

Bond-street, just before we left town, and he told me of it directly."

"You surprise me very much. Colonel Brandon tell you of it! Surely

you must be mistaken. To give such intelligence to a person who could

not be interested in it, even if it were true, is not what I should

expect Colonel Brandon to do."

"But I do assure you it was so, for all that, and I will tell you how

it happened. When we met him, he turned back and walked with us; and

so we began talking of my brother and sister, and one thing and

another, and I said to him, 'So, Colonel, there is a new family come to

Barton cottage, I hear, and mama sends me word they are very pretty,

and that one of them is going to be married to Mr. Willoughby of Combe

Magna. Is it true, pray? for of course you must know, as you have been

in Devonshire so lately.'"

"And what did the Colonel say?"

"Oh--he did not say much; but he looked as if he knew it to be true, so

from that moment I set it down as certain. It will be quite

delightful, I declare! When is it to take place?"

"Mr. Brandon was very well I hope?"

"Oh! yes, quite well; and so full of your praises, he did nothing but

say fine things of you."

"I am flattered by his commendation. He seems an excellent man; and I

think him uncommonly pleasing."

"So do I.--He is such a charming man, that it is quite a pity he should

be so grave and so dull. Mamma says HE was in love with your sister

too.-- I assure you it was a great compliment if he was, for he hardly

ever falls in love with any body."

"Is Mr. Willoughby much known in your part of Somersetshire?" said

Elinor.

"Oh! yes, extremely well; that is, I do not believe many people are

acquainted with him, because Combe Magna is so far off; but they all

think him extremely agreeable I assure you. Nobody is more liked than

Mr. Willoughby wherever he goes, and so you may tell your sister. She

is a monstrous lucky girl to get him, upon my honour; not but that he

is much more lucky in getting her, because she is so very handsome and

agreeable, that nothing can be good enough for her. However, I don't

think her hardly at all handsomer than you, I assure you; for I think

you both excessively pretty, and so does Mr. Palmer too I am sure,

though we could not get him to own it last night."

Mrs. Palmer's information respecting Willoughby was not very material;

but any testimony in his favour, however small, was pleasing to her.

"I am so glad we are got acquainted at last," continued

Charlotte.--"And now I hope we shall always be great friends. You

can't think how much I longed to see you! It is so delightful that you

should live at the cottage! Nothing can be like it, to be sure! And I

am so glad your sister is going to be well married! I hope you will be

a great deal at Combe Magna. It is a sweet place, by all accounts."

"You have been long acquainted with Colonel Brandon, have not you?"

"Yes, a great while; ever since my sister married.-- He was a

particular friend of Sir John's. I believe," she added in a low voice,

"he would have been very glad to have had me, if he could. Sir John

and Lady Middleton wished it very much. But mama did not think the

match good enough for me, otherwise Sir John would have mentioned it to

the Colonel, and we should have been married immediately."

"Did not Colonel Brandon know of Sir John's proposal to your mother

before it was made? Had he never owned his affection to yourself?"

"Oh, no; but if mama had not objected to it, I dare say he would have

liked it of all things. He had not seen me then above twice, for it

was before I left school. However, I am much happier as I am. Mr.

Palmer is the kind of man I like."

CHAPTER 21

The Palmers returned to Cleveland the next day, and the two families at

Barton were again left to entertain each other. But this did not last

long; Elinor had hardly got their last visitors out of her head, had

hardly done wondering at Charlotte's being so happy without a cause, at

Mr. Palmer's acting so simply, with good abilities, and at the strange

unsuitableness which often existed between husband and wife, before Sir

John's and Mrs. Jennings's active zeal in the cause of society,

procured her some other new acquaintance to see and observe.

In a morning's excursion to Exeter, they had met with two young ladies,

whom Mrs. Jennings had the satisfaction of discovering to be her

relations, and this was enough for Sir John to invite them directly to

the park, as soon as their present engagements at Exeter were over.

Their engagements at Exeter instantly gave way before such an

invitation, and Lady Middleton was thrown into no little alarm on the

return of Sir John, by hearing that she was very soon to receive a

visit from two girls whom she had never seen in her life, and of whose

elegance,--whose tolerable gentility even, she could have no proof; for

the assurances of her husband and mother on that subject went for

nothing at all. Their being her relations too made it so much the

worse; and Mrs. Jennings's attempts at consolation were therefore

unfortunately founded, when she advised her daughter not to care about

their being so fashionable; because they were all cousins and must put

up with one another. As it was impossible, however, now to prevent

their coming, Lady Middleton resigned herself to the idea of it, with

all the philosophy of a well-bred woman, contenting herself with merely

giving her husband a gentle reprimand on the subject five or six times

every day.

The young ladies arrived: their appearance was by no means ungenteel or

unfashionable. Their dress was very smart, their manners very civil,

they were delighted with the house, and in raptures with the furniture,

and they happened to be so doatingly fond of children that Lady

Middleton's good opinion was engaged in their favour before they had

been an hour at the Park. She declared them to be very agreeable girls

indeed, which for her ladyship was enthusiastic admiration. Sir John's

confidence in his own judgment rose with this animated praise, and he

set off directly for the cottage to tell the Miss Dashwoods of the Miss

Steeles' arrival, and to assure them of their being the sweetest girls

in the world. From such commendation as this, however, there was not

much to be learned; Elinor well knew that the sweetest girls in the

world were to be met with in every part of England, under every

possible variation of form, face, temper and understanding. Sir John

wanted the whole family to walk to the Park directly and look at his

guests. Benevolent, philanthropic man! It was painful to him even to

keep a third cousin to himself.

"Do come now," said he--"pray come--you must come--I declare you shall

come--You can't think how you will like them. Lucy is monstrous

pretty, and so good humoured and agreeable! The children are all

hanging about her already, as if she was an old acquaintance. And they

both long to see you of all things, for they have heard at Exeter that

you are the most beautiful creatures in the world; and I have told them

it is all very true, and a great deal more. You will be delighted with

them I am sure. They have brought the whole coach full of playthings

for the children. How can you be so cross as not to come? Why they

are your cousins, you know, after a fashion. YOU are my cousins, and

they are my wife's, so you must be related."

But Sir John could not prevail. He could only obtain a promise of

their calling at the Park within a day or two, and then left them in

amazement at their indifference, to walk home and boast anew of their

attractions to the Miss Steeles, as he had been already boasting of the

Miss Steeles to them.

When their promised visit to the Park and consequent introduction to

these young ladies took place, they found in the appearance of the

eldest, who was nearly thirty, with a very plain and not a sensible

face, nothing to admire; but in the other, who was not more than two or

three and twenty, they acknowledged considerable beauty; her features

were pretty, and she had a sharp quick eye, and a smartness of air,

which though it did not give actual elegance or grace, gave distinction

to her person.-- Their manners were particularly civil, and Elinor soon

allowed them credit for some kind of sense, when she saw with what

constant and judicious attention they were making themselves agreeable

to Lady Middleton. With her children they were in continual raptures,

extolling their beauty, courting their notice, and humouring their

whims; and such of their time as could be spared from the importunate

demands which this politeness made on it, was spent in admiration of

whatever her ladyship was doing, if she happened to be doing any thing,

or in taking patterns of some elegant new dress, in which her

appearance the day before had thrown them into unceasing delight.

Fortunately for those who pay their court through such foibles, a fond

mother, though, in pursuit of praise for her children, the most

rapacious of human beings, is likewise the most credulous; her demands

are exorbitant; but she will swallow any thing; and the excessive

affection and endurance of the Miss Steeles towards her offspring were

viewed therefore by Lady Middleton without the smallest surprise or

distrust. She saw with maternal complacency all the impertinent

encroachments and mischievous tricks to which her cousins submitted.

She saw their sashes untied, their hair pulled about their ears, their

work-bags searched, and their knives and scissors stolen away, and felt

no doubt of its being a reciprocal enjoyment. It suggested no other

surprise than that Elinor and Marianne should sit so composedly by,

without claiming a share in what was passing.

"John is in such spirits today!" said she, on his taking Miss Steeles's

pocket handkerchief, and throwing it out of window--"He is full of

monkey tricks."

And soon afterwards, on the second boy's violently pinching one of the

same lady's fingers, she fondly observed, "How playful William is!"

"And here is my sweet little Annamaria," she added, tenderly caressing

a little girl of three years old, who had not made a noise for the last

two minutes; "And she is always so gentle and quiet--Never was there

such a quiet little thing!"

But unfortunately in bestowing these embraces, a pin in her ladyship's

head dress slightly scratching the child's neck, produced from this

pattern of gentleness such violent screams, as could hardly be outdone

by any creature professedly noisy. The mother's consternation was

excessive; but it could not surpass the alarm of the Miss Steeles, and

every thing was done by all three, in so critical an emergency, which

affection could suggest as likely to assuage the agonies of the little

sufferer. She was seated in her mother's lap, covered with kisses, her

wound bathed with lavender-water, by one of the Miss Steeles, who was

on her knees to attend her, and her mouth stuffed with sugar plums by

the other. With such a reward for her tears, the child was too wise to

cease crying. She still screamed and sobbed lustily, kicked her two

brothers for offering to touch her, and all their united soothings were

ineffectual till Lady Middleton luckily remembering that in a scene of

similar distress last week, some apricot marmalade had been

successfully applied for a bruised temple, the same remedy was eagerly

proposed for this unfortunate scratch, and a slight intermission of

screams in the young lady on hearing it, gave them reason to hope that

it would not be rejected.-- She was carried out of the room therefore

in her mother's arms, in quest of this medicine, and as the two boys

chose to follow, though earnestly entreated by their mother to stay

behind, the four young ladies were left in a quietness which the room

had not known for many hours.

"Poor little creatures!" said Miss Steele, as soon as they were gone.

"It might have been a very sad accident."

"Yet I hardly know how," cried Marianne, "unless it had been under

totally different circumstances. But this is the usual way of

heightening alarm, where there is nothing to be alarmed at in reality."

"What a sweet woman Lady Middleton is!" said Lucy Steele.

Marianne was silent; it was impossible for her to say what she did not

feel, however trivial the occasion; and upon Elinor therefore the whole

task of telling lies when politeness required it, always fell. She did

her best when thus called on, by speaking of Lady Middleton with more

warmth than she felt, though with far less than Miss Lucy.

"And Sir John too," cried the elder sister, "what a charming man he is!"

Here too, Miss Dashwood's commendation, being only simple and just,

came in without any eclat. She merely observed that he was perfectly

good humoured and friendly.

"And what a charming little family they have! I never saw such fine

children in my life.--I declare I quite doat upon them already, and

indeed I am always distractedly fond of children."

"I should guess so," said Elinor, with a smile, "from what I have

witnessed this morning."

"I have a notion," said Lucy, "you think the little Middletons rather

too much indulged; perhaps they may be the outside of enough; but it is

so natural in Lady Middleton; and for my part, I love to see children

full of life and spirits; I cannot bear them if they are tame and

quiet."

"I confess," replied Elinor, "that while I am at Barton Park, I never

think of tame and quiet children with any abhorrence."

A short pause succeeded this speech, which was first broken by Miss

Steele, who seemed very much disposed for conversation, and who now

said rather abruptly, "And how do you like Devonshire, Miss Dashwood?

I suppose you were very sorry to leave Sussex."

In some surprise at the familiarity of this question, or at least of

the manner in which it was spoken, Elinor replied that she was.

"Norland is a prodigious beautiful place, is not it?" added Miss Steele.

"We have heard Sir John admire it excessively," said Lucy, who seemed

to think some apology necessary for the freedom of her sister.

"I think every one MUST admire it," replied Elinor, "who ever saw the

place; though it is not to be supposed that any one can estimate its

beauties as we do."

"And had you a great many smart beaux there? I suppose you have not so

many in this part of the world; for my part, I think they are a vast

addition always."

"But why should you think," said Lucy, looking ashamed of her sister,

"that there are not as many genteel young men in Devonshire as Sussex?"

"Nay, my dear, I'm sure I don't pretend to say that there an't. I'm

sure there's a vast many smart beaux in Exeter; but you know, how could

I tell what smart beaux there might be about Norland; and I was only

afraid the Miss Dashwoods might find it dull at Barton, if they had not

so many as they used to have. But perhaps you young ladies may not

care about the beaux, and had as lief be without them as with them.

For my part, I think they are vastly agreeable, provided they dress

smart and behave civil. But I can't bear to see them dirty and nasty.

Now there's Mr. Rose at Exeter, a prodigious smart young man, quite a

beau, clerk to Mr. Simpson, you know, and yet if you do but meet him of

a morning, he is not fit to be seen.-- I suppose your brother was quite

a beau, Miss Dashwood, before he married, as he was so rich?"

"Upon my word," replied Elinor, "I cannot tell you, for I do not

perfectly comprehend the meaning of the word. But this I can say, that

if he ever was a beau before he married, he is one still for there is

not the smallest alteration in him."

"Oh! dear! one never thinks of married men's being beaux--they have

something else to do."

"Lord! Anne," cried her sister, "you can talk of nothing but

beaux;--you will make Miss Dashwood believe you think of nothing else."

And then to turn the discourse, she began admiring the house and the

furniture.

This specimen of the Miss Steeles was enough. The vulgar freedom and

folly of the eldest left her no recommendation, and as Elinor was not

blinded by the beauty, or the shrewd look of the youngest, to her want

of real elegance and artlessness, she left the house without any wish

of knowing them better.

Not so the Miss Steeles.--They came from Exeter, well provided with

admiration for the use of Sir John Middleton, his family, and all his

relations, and no niggardly proportion was now dealt out to his fair

cousins, whom they declared to be the most beautiful, elegant,

accomplished, and agreeable girls they had ever beheld, and with whom

they were particularly anxious to be better acquainted.-- And to be

better acquainted therefore, Elinor soon found was their inevitable

lot, for as Sir John was entirely on the side of the Miss Steeles,

their party would be too strong for opposition, and that kind of

intimacy must be submitted to, which consists of sitting an hour or two

together in the same room almost every day. Sir John could do no more;

but he did not know that any more was required: to be together was, in

his opinion, to be intimate, and while his continual schemes for their

meeting were effectual, he had not a doubt of their being established

friends.

To do him justice, he did every thing in his power to promote their

unreserve, by making the Miss Steeles acquainted with whatever he knew

or supposed of his cousins' situations in the most delicate

particulars,--and Elinor had not seen them more than twice, before the

eldest of them wished her joy on her sister's having been so lucky as

to make a conquest of a very smart beau since she came to Barton.

"'Twill be a fine thing to have her married so young to be sure," said

she, "and I hear he is quite a beau, and prodigious handsome. And I

hope you may have as good luck yourself soon,--but perhaps you may have

a friend in the corner already."

Elinor could not suppose that Sir John would be more nice in

proclaiming his suspicions of her regard for Edward, than he had been

with respect to Marianne; indeed it was rather his favourite joke of

the two, as being somewhat newer and more conjectural; and since

Edward's visit, they had never dined together without his drinking to

her best affections with so much significancy and so many nods and

winks, as to excite general attention. The letter F--had been likewise

invariably brought forward, and found productive of such countless

jokes, that its character as the wittiest letter in the alphabet had

been long established with Elinor.

The Miss Steeles, as she expected, had now all the benefit of these

jokes, and in the eldest of them they raised a curiosity to know the

name of the gentleman alluded to, which, though often impertinently

expressed, was perfectly of a piece with her general inquisitiveness

into the concerns of their family. But Sir John did not sport long

with the curiosity which he delighted to raise, for he had at least as

much pleasure in telling the name, as Miss Steele had in hearing it.

"His name is Ferrars," said he, in a very audible whisper; "but pray do

not tell it, for it's a great secret."

"Ferrars!" repeated Miss Steele; "Mr. Ferrars is the happy man, is he?

What! your sister-in-law's brother, Miss Dashwood? a very agreeable

young man to be sure; I know him very well."

"How can you say so, Anne?" cried Lucy, who generally made an amendment

to all her sister's assertions. "Though we have seen him once or twice

at my uncle's, it is rather too much to pretend to know him very well."

Elinor heard all this with attention and surprise. "And who was this

uncle? Where did he live? How came they acquainted?" She wished very

much to have the subject continued, though she did not chuse to join in

it herself; but nothing more of it was said, and for the first time in

her life, she thought Mrs. Jennings deficient either in curiosity after

petty information, or in a disposition to communicate it. The manner

in which Miss Steele had spoken of Edward, increased her curiosity; for

it struck her as being rather ill-natured, and suggested the suspicion

of that lady's knowing, or fancying herself to know something to his

disadvantage.--But her curiosity was unavailing, for no farther notice

was taken of Mr. Ferrars's name by Miss Steele when alluded to, or even

openly mentioned by Sir John.

CHAPTER 22

Marianne, who had never much toleration for any thing like

impertinence, vulgarity, inferiority of parts, or even difference of

taste from herself, was at this time particularly ill-disposed, from

the state of her spirits, to be pleased with the Miss Steeles, or to

encourage their advances; and to the invariable coldness of her

behaviour towards them, which checked every endeavour at intimacy on

their side, Elinor principally attributed that preference of herself

which soon became evident in the manners of both, but especially of

Lucy, who missed no opportunity of engaging her in conversation, or of

striving to improve their acquaintance by an easy and frank

communication of her sentiments.

Lucy was naturally clever; her remarks were often just and amusing; and

as a companion for half an hour Elinor frequently found her agreeable;

but her powers had received no aid from education: she was ignorant and

illiterate; and her deficiency of all mental improvement, her want of

information in the most common particulars, could not be concealed from

Miss Dashwood, in spite of her constant endeavour to appear to

advantage. Elinor saw, and pitied her for, the neglect of abilities

which education might have rendered so respectable; but she saw, with

less tenderness of feeling, the thorough want of delicacy, of

rectitude, and integrity of mind, which her attentions, her

assiduities, her flatteries at the Park betrayed; and she could have no

lasting satisfaction in the company of a person who joined insincerity

with ignorance; whose want of instruction prevented their meeting in

conversation on terms of equality, and whose conduct toward others made

every shew of attention and deference towards herself perfectly

valueless.

"You will think my question an odd one, I dare say," said Lucy to her

one day, as they were walking together from the park to the

cottage--"but pray, are you personally acquainted with your

sister-in-law's mother, Mrs. Ferrars?"

Elinor DID think the question a very odd one, and her countenance

expressed it, as she answered that she had never seen Mrs. Ferrars.

"Indeed!" replied Lucy; "I wonder at that, for I thought you must have

seen her at Norland sometimes. Then, perhaps, you cannot tell me what

sort of a woman she is?"

"No," returned Elinor, cautious of giving her real opinion of Edward's

mother, and not very desirous of satisfying what seemed impertinent

curiosity-- "I know nothing of her."

"I am sure you think me very strange, for enquiring about her in such a

way," said Lucy, eyeing Elinor attentively as she spoke; "but perhaps

there may be reasons--I wish I might venture; but however I hope you

will do me the justice of believing that I do not mean to be

impertinent."

Elinor made her a civil reply, and they walked on for a few minutes in

silence. It was broken by Lucy, who renewed the subject again by

saying, with some hesitation,

"I cannot bear to have you think me impertinently curious. I am sure I

would rather do any thing in the world than be thought so by a person

whose good opinion is so well worth having as yours. And I am sure I

should not have the smallest fear of trusting YOU; indeed, I should be

very glad of your advice how to manage in such and uncomfortable

situation as I am; but, however, there is no occasion to trouble YOU.

I am sorry you do not happen to know Mrs. Ferrars."

"I am sorry I do NOT," said Elinor, in great astonishment, "if it could

be of any use to YOU to know my opinion of her. But really I never

understood that you were at all connected with that family, and

therefore I am a little surprised, I confess, at so serious an inquiry

into her character."

"I dare say you are, and I am sure I do not at all wonder at it. But

if I dared tell you all, you would not be so much surprised. Mrs.

Ferrars is certainly nothing to me at present--but the time MAY

come--how soon it will come must depend upon herself--when we may be

very intimately connected."

She looked down as she said this, amiably bashful, with only one side

glance at her companion to observe its effect on her.

"Good heavens!" cried Elinor, "what do you mean? Are you acquainted

with Mr. Robert Ferrars? Can you be?" And she did not feel much

delighted with the idea of such a sister-in-law.

"No," replied Lucy, "not to Mr. ROBERT Ferrars--I never saw him in my

life; but," fixing her eyes upon Elinor, "to his eldest brother."

What felt Elinor at that moment? Astonishment, that would have been as

painful as it was strong, had not an immediate disbelief of the

assertion attended it. She turned towards Lucy in silent amazement,

unable to divine the reason or object of such a declaration; and though

her complexion varied, she stood firm in incredulity, and felt in no

danger of an hysterical fit, or a swoon.

"You may well be surprised," continued Lucy; "for to be sure you could

have had no idea of it before; for I dare say he never dropped the

smallest hint of it to you or any of your family; because it was always

meant to be a great secret, and I am sure has been faithfully kept so

by me to this hour. Not a soul of all my relations know of it but

Anne, and I never should have mentioned it to you, if I had not felt

the greatest dependence in the world upon your secrecy; and I really

thought my behaviour in asking so many questions about Mrs. Ferrars

must seem so odd, that it ought to be explained. And I do not think

Mr. Ferrars can be displeased, when he knows I have trusted you,

because I know he has the highest opinion in the world of all your

family, and looks upon yourself and the other Miss Dashwoods quite as

his own sisters."--She paused.

Elinor for a few moments remained silent. Her astonishment at what she

heard was at first too great for words; but at length forcing herself

to speak, and to speak cautiously, she said, with calmness of manner,

which tolerably well concealed her surprise and solicitude-- "May I ask

if your engagement is of long standing?"

"We have been engaged these four years."

"Four years!"

"Yes."

Elinor, though greatly shocked, still felt unable to believe it.

"I did not know," said she, "that you were even acquainted till the

other day."

"Our acquaintance, however, is of many years date. He was under my

uncle's care, you know, a considerable while."

"Your uncle!"

"Yes; Mr. Pratt. Did you never hear him talk of Mr. Pratt?"

"I think I have," replied Elinor, with an exertion of spirits, which

increased with her increase of emotion.

"He was four years with my uncle, who lives at Longstaple, near

Plymouth. It was there our acquaintance begun, for my sister and me

was often staying with my uncle, and it was there our engagement was

formed, though not till a year after he had quitted as a pupil; but he

was almost always with us afterwards. I was very unwilling to enter

into it, as you may imagine, without the knowledge and approbation of

his mother; but I was too young, and loved him too well, to be so

prudent as I ought to have been.-- Though you do not know him so well

as me, Miss Dashwood, you must have seen enough of him to be sensible

he is very capable of making a woman sincerely attached to him."

"Certainly," answered Elinor, without knowing what she said; but after

a moment's reflection, she added, with revived security of Edward's

honour and love, and her companion's falsehood--"Engaged to Mr. Edward

Ferrars!--I confess myself so totally surprised at what you tell me,

that really--I beg your pardon; but surely there must be some mistake

of person or name. We cannot mean the same Mr. Ferrars."

"We can mean no other," cried Lucy, smiling. "Mr. Edward Ferrars, the

eldest son of Mrs. Ferrars, of Park Street, and brother of your

sister-in-law, Mrs. John Dashwood, is the person I mean; you must allow

that I am not likely to be deceived as to the name of the man on who

all my happiness depends."

"It is strange," replied Elinor, in a most painful perplexity, "that I

should never have heard him even mention your name."

"No; considering our situation, it was not strange. Our first care has

been to keep the matter secret.-- You knew nothing of me, or my family,

and, therefore, there could be no OCCASION for ever mentioning my name

to you; and, as he was always particularly afraid of his sister's

suspecting any thing, THAT was reason enough for his not mentioning it."

She was silent.--Elinor's security sunk; but her self-command did not

sink with it.

"Four years you have been engaged," said she with a firm voice.

"Yes; and heaven knows how much longer we may have to wait. Poor

Edward! It puts him quite out of heart." Then taking a small miniature

from her pocket, she added, "To prevent the possibility of mistake, be

so good as to look at this face. It does not do him justice, to be

sure, but yet I think you cannot be deceived as to the person it was

drew for.--I have had it above these three years."

She put it into her hands as she spoke; and when Elinor saw the

painting, whatever other doubts her fear of a too hasty decision, or

her wish of detecting falsehood might suffer to linger in her mind, she

could have none of its being Edward's face. She returned it almost

instantly, acknowledging the likeness.

"I have never been able," continued Lucy, "to give him my picture in

return, which I am very much vexed at, for he has been always so

anxious to get it! But I am determined to set for it the very first

opportunity."

"You are quite in the right," replied Elinor calmly. They then

proceeded a few paces in silence. Lucy spoke first.

"I am sure," said she, "I have no doubt in the world of your faithfully

keeping this secret, because you must know of what importance it is to

us, not to have it reach his mother; for she would never approve of it,

I dare say. I shall have no fortune, and I fancy she is an exceeding

proud woman."

"I certainly did not seek your confidence," said Elinor; "but you do me

no more than justice in imagining that I may be depended on. Your

secret is safe with me; but pardon me if I express some surprise at so

unnecessary a communication. You must at least have felt that my being

acquainted with it could not add to its safety."

As she said this, she looked earnestly at Lucy, hoping to discover

something in her countenance; perhaps the falsehood of the greatest

part of what she had been saying; but Lucy's countenance suffered no

change.

"I was afraid you would think I was taking a great liberty with you,"

said she, "in telling you all this. I have not known you long to be

sure, personally at least, but I have known you and all your family by

description a great while; and as soon as I saw you, I felt almost as

if you was an old acquaintance. Besides in the present case, I really

thought some explanation was due to you after my making such particular

inquiries about Edward's mother; and I am so unfortunate, that I have

not a creature whose advice I can ask. Anne is the only person that

knows of it, and she has no judgment at all; indeed, she does me a

great deal more harm than good, for I am in constant fear of her

betraying me. She does not know how to hold her tongue, as you must

perceive, and I am sure I was in the greatest fright in the world

t'other day, when Edward's name was mentioned by Sir John, lest she

should out with it all. You can't think how much I go through in my

mind from it altogether. I only wonder that I am alive after what I

have suffered for Edward's sake these last four years. Every thing in

such suspense and uncertainty; and seeing him so seldom--we can hardly

meet above twice a-year. I am sure I wonder my heart is not quite

broke."

Here she took out her handkerchief; but Elinor did not feel very

compassionate.

"Sometimes." continued Lucy, after wiping her eyes, "I think whether it

would not be better for us both to break off the matter entirely." As

she said this, she looked directly at her companion. "But then at

other times I have not resolution enough for it.-- I cannot bear the

thoughts of making him so miserable, as I know the very mention of such

a thing would do. And on my own account too--so dear as he is to me--I

don't think I could be equal to it. What would you advise me to do in

such a case, Miss Dashwood? What would you do yourself?"

"Pardon me," replied Elinor, startled by the question; "but I can give

you no advice under such circumstances. Your own judgment must direct

you."

"To be sure," continued Lucy, after a few minutes silence on both

sides, "his mother must provide for him sometime or other; but poor

Edward is so cast down by it! Did you not think him dreadful

low-spirited when he was at Barton? He was so miserable when he left

us at Longstaple, to go to you, that I was afraid you would think him

quite ill."

"Did he come from your uncle's, then, when he visited us?"

"Oh, yes; he had been staying a fortnight with us. Did you think he

came directly from town?"

"No," replied Elinor, most feelingly sensible of every fresh

circumstance in favour of Lucy's veracity; "I remember he told us, that

he had been staying a fortnight with some friends near Plymouth." She

remembered too, her own surprise at the time, at his mentioning nothing

farther of those friends, at his total silence with respect even to

their names.

"Did not you think him sadly out of spirits?" repeated Lucy.

"We did, indeed, particularly so when he first arrived."

"I begged him to exert himself for fear you should suspect what was the

matter; but it made him so melancholy, not being able to stay more than

a fortnight with us, and seeing me so much affected.-- Poor fellow!--I

am afraid it is just the same with him now; for he writes in wretched

spirits. I heard from him just before I left Exeter;" taking a letter

from her pocket and carelessly showing the direction to Elinor. "You

know his hand, I dare say, a charming one it is; but that is not

written so well as usual.--He was tired, I dare say, for he had just

filled the sheet to me as full as possible."

Elinor saw that it WAS his hand, and she could doubt no longer. This

picture, she had allowed herself to believe, might have been

accidentally obtained; it might not have been Edward's gift; but a

correspondence between them by letter, could subsist only under a

positive engagement, could be authorised by nothing else; for a few

moments, she was almost overcome--her heart sunk within her, and she

could hardly stand; but exertion was indispensably necessary; and she

struggled so resolutely against the oppression of her feelings, that

her success was speedy, and for the time complete.

"Writing to each other," said Lucy, returning the letter into her

pocket, "is the only comfort we have in such long separations. Yes, I

have one other comfort in his picture, but poor Edward has not even

THAT. If he had but my picture, he says he should be easy. I gave him

a lock of my hair set in a ring when he was at Longstaple last, and

that was some comfort to him, he said, but not equal to a picture.

Perhaps you might notice the ring when you saw him?"

"I did," said Elinor, with a composure of voice, under which was

concealed an emotion and distress beyond any thing she had ever felt

before. She was mortified, shocked, confounded.

Fortunately for her, they had now reached the cottage, and the

conversation could be continued no farther. After sitting with them a

few minutes, the Miss Steeles returned to the Park, and Elinor was then

at liberty to think and be wretched.

[At this point in the first and second editions, Volume 1 ends.]

CHAPTER 23

However small Elinor's general dependence on Lucy's veracity might be,

it was impossible for her on serious reflection to suspect it in the

present case, where no temptation could be answerable to the folly of

inventing a falsehood of such a description. What Lucy had asserted to

be true, therefore, Elinor could not, dared not longer doubt; supported

as it was too on every side by such probabilities and proofs, and

contradicted by nothing but her own wishes. Their opportunity of

acquaintance in the house of Mr. Pratt was a foundation for the rest,

at once indisputable and alarming; and Edward's visit near Plymouth,

his melancholy state of mind, his dissatisfaction at his own prospects,

his uncertain behaviour towards herself, the intimate knowledge of the

Miss Steeles as to Norland and their family connections, which had

often surprised her, the picture, the letter, the ring, formed

altogether such a body of evidence, as overcame every fear of

condemning him unfairly, and established as a fact, which no partiality

could set aside, his ill-treatment of herself.--Her resentment of such

behaviour, her indignation at having been its dupe, for a short time

made her feel only for herself; but other ideas, other considerations,

soon arose. Had Edward been intentionally deceiving her? Had he

feigned a regard for her which he did not feel? Was his engagement to

Lucy an engagement of the heart? No; whatever it might once have been,

she could not believe it such at present. His affection was all her

own. She could not be deceived in that. Her mother, sisters, Fanny,

all had been conscious of his regard for her at Norland; it was not an

illusion of her own vanity. He certainly loved her. What a softener

of the heart was this persuasion! How much could it not tempt her to

forgive! He had been blamable, highly blamable, in remaining at

Norland after he first felt her influence over him to be more than it

ought to be. In that, he could not be defended; but if he had injured

her, how much more had he injured himself; if her case were pitiable,

his was hopeless. His imprudence had made her miserable for a while;

but it seemed to have deprived himself of all chance of ever being

otherwise. She might in time regain tranquillity; but HE, what had he

to look forward to? Could he ever be tolerably happy with Lucy Steele;

could he, were his affection for herself out of the question, with his

integrity, his delicacy, and well-informed mind, be satisfied with a

wife like her--illiterate, artful, and selfish?

The youthful infatuation of nineteen would naturally blind him to every

thing but her beauty and good nature; but the four succeeding

years--years, which if rationally spent, give such improvement to the

understanding, must have opened his eyes to her defects of education,

while the same period of time, spent on her side in inferior society

and more frivolous pursuits, had perhaps robbed her of that simplicity

which might once have given an interesting character to her beauty.

If in the supposition of his seeking to marry herself, his difficulties

from his mother had seemed great, how much greater were they now likely

to be, when the object of his engagement was undoubtedly inferior in

connections, and probably inferior in fortune to herself. These

difficulties, indeed, with a heart so alienated from Lucy, might not

press very hard upon his patience; but melancholy was the state of the

person by whom the expectation of family opposition and unkindness,

could be felt as a relief!

As these considerations occurred to her in painful succession, she wept

for him, more than for herself. Supported by the conviction of having

done nothing to merit her present unhappiness, and consoled by the

belief that Edward had done nothing to forfeit her esteem, she thought

she could even now, under the first smart of the heavy blow, command

herself enough to guard every suspicion of the truth from her mother

and sisters. And so well was she able to answer her own expectations,

that when she joined them at dinner only two hours after she had first

suffered the extinction of all her dearest hopes, no one would have

supposed from the appearance of the sisters, that Elinor was mourning

in secret over obstacles which must divide her for ever from the object

of her love, and that Marianne was internally dwelling on the

perfections of a man, of whose whole heart she felt thoroughly

possessed, and whom she expected to see in every carriage which drove

near their house.

The necessity of concealing from her mother and Marianne, what had been

entrusted in confidence to herself, though it obliged her to unceasing

exertion, was no aggravation of Elinor's distress. On the contrary it

was a relief to her, to be spared the communication of what would give

such affliction to them, and to be saved likewise from hearing that

condemnation of Edward, which would probably flow from the excess of

their partial affection for herself, and which was more than she felt

equal to support.

From their counsel, or their conversation, she knew she could receive

no assistance, their tenderness and sorrow must add to her distress,

while her self-command would neither receive encouragement from their

example nor from their praise. She was stronger alone, and her own

good sense so well supported her, that her firmness was as unshaken,

her appearance of cheerfulness as invariable, as with regrets so

poignant and so fresh, it was possible for them to be.

Much as she had suffered from her first conversation with Lucy on the

subject, she soon felt an earnest wish of renewing it; and this for

more reasons than one. She wanted to hear many particulars of their

engagement repeated again, she wanted more clearly to understand what

Lucy really felt for Edward, whether there were any sincerity in her

declaration of tender regard for him, and she particularly wanted to

convince Lucy, by her readiness to enter on the matter again, and her

calmness in conversing on it, that she was no otherwise interested in

it than as a friend, which she very much feared her involuntary

agitation, in their morning discourse, must have left at least

doubtful. That Lucy was disposed to be jealous of her appeared very

probable: it was plain that Edward had always spoken highly in her

praise, not merely from Lucy's assertion, but from her venturing to

trust her on so short a personal acquaintance, with a secret so

confessedly and evidently important. And even Sir John's joking

intelligence must have had some weight. But indeed, while Elinor

remained so well assured within herself of being really beloved by

Edward, it required no other consideration of probabilities to make it

natural that Lucy should be jealous; and that she was so, her very

confidence was a proof. What other reason for the disclosure of the

affair could there be, but that Elinor might be informed by it of

Lucy's superior claims on Edward, and be taught to avoid him in future?

She had little difficulty in understanding thus much of her rival's

intentions, and while she was firmly resolved to act by her as every

principle of honour and honesty directed, to combat her own affection

for Edward and to see him as little as possible; she could not deny

herself the comfort of endeavouring to convince Lucy that her heart was

unwounded. And as she could now have nothing more painful to hear on

the subject than had already been told, she did not mistrust her own

ability of going through a repetition of particulars with composure.

But it was not immediately that an opportunity of doing so could be

commanded, though Lucy was as well disposed as herself to take

advantage of any that occurred; for the weather was not often fine

enough to allow of their joining in a walk, where they might most

easily separate themselves from the others; and though they met at

least every other evening either at the park or cottage, and chiefly at

the former, they could not be supposed to meet for the sake of

conversation. Such a thought would never enter either Sir John or Lady

Middleton's head; and therefore very little leisure was ever given for

a general chat, and none at all for particular discourse. They met for

the sake of eating, drinking, and laughing together, playing at cards,

or consequences, or any other game that was sufficiently noisy.

One or two meetings of this kind had taken place, without affording

Elinor any chance of engaging Lucy in private, when Sir John called at

the cottage one morning, to beg, in the name of charity, that they

would all dine with Lady Middleton that day, as he was obliged to

attend the club at Exeter, and she would otherwise be quite alone,

except her mother and the two Miss Steeles. Elinor, who foresaw a

fairer opening for the point she had in view, in such a party as this

was likely to be, more at liberty among themselves under the tranquil

and well-bred direction of Lady Middleton than when her husband united

them together in one noisy purpose, immediately accepted the

invitation; Margaret, with her mother's permission, was equally

compliant, and Marianne, though always unwilling to join any of their

parties, was persuaded by her mother, who could not bear to have her

seclude herself from any chance of amusement, to go likewise.

The young ladies went, and Lady Middleton was happily preserved from

the frightful solitude which had threatened her. The insipidity of the

meeting was exactly such as Elinor had expected; it produced not one

novelty of thought or expression, and nothing could be less interesting

than the whole of their discourse both in the dining parlour and

drawing room: to the latter, the children accompanied them, and while

they remained there, she was too well convinced of the impossibility of

engaging Lucy's attention to attempt it. They quitted it only with the

removal of the tea-things. The card-table was then placed, and Elinor

began to wonder at herself for having ever entertained a hope of

finding time for conversation at the park. They all rose up in

preparation for a round game.

"I am glad," said Lady Middleton to Lucy, "you are not going to finish

poor little Annamaria's basket this evening; for I am sure it must hurt

your eyes to work filigree by candlelight. And we will make the dear

little love some amends for her disappointment to-morrow, and then I

hope she will not much mind it."

This hint was enough, Lucy recollected herself instantly and replied,

"Indeed you are very much mistaken, Lady Middleton; I am only waiting

to know whether you can make your party without me, or I should have

been at my filigree already. I would not disappoint the little angel

for all the world: and if you want me at the card-table now, I am

resolved to finish the basket after supper."

"You are very good, I hope it won't hurt your eyes--will you ring the

bell for some working candles? My poor little girl would be sadly

disappointed, I know, if the basket was not finished tomorrow, for

though I told her it certainly would not, I am sure she depends upon

having it done."

Lucy directly drew her work table near her and reseated herself with an

alacrity and cheerfulness which seemed to infer that she could taste no

greater delight than in making a filigree basket for a spoilt child.

Lady Middleton proposed a rubber of Casino to the others. No one made

any objection but Marianne, who with her usual inattention to the forms

of general civility, exclaimed, "Your Ladyship will have the goodness

to excuse ME--you know I detest cards. I shall go to the piano-forte;

I have not touched it since it was tuned." And without farther

ceremony, she turned away and walked to the instrument.

Lady Middleton looked as if she thanked heaven that SHE had never made

so rude a speech.

"Marianne can never keep long from that instrument you know, ma'am,"

said Elinor, endeavouring to smooth away the offence; "and I do not

much wonder at it; for it is the very best toned piano-forte I ever

heard."

The remaining five were now to draw their cards.

"Perhaps," continued Elinor, "if I should happen to cut out, I may be

of some use to Miss Lucy Steele, in rolling her papers for her; and

there is so much still to be done to the basket, that it must be

impossible I think for her labour singly, to finish it this evening. I

should like the work exceedingly, if she would allow me a share in it."

"Indeed I shall be very much obliged to you for your help," cried Lucy,

"for I find there is more to be done to it than I thought there was;

and it would be a shocking thing to disappoint dear Annamaria after

all."

"Oh! that would be terrible, indeed," said Miss Steele-- "Dear little

soul, how I do love her!"

"You are very kind," said Lady Middleton to Elinor; "and as you really

like the work, perhaps you will be as well pleased not to cut in till

another rubber, or will you take your chance now?"

Elinor joyfully profited by the first of these proposals, and thus by a

little of that address which Marianne could never condescend to

practise, gained her own end, and pleased Lady Middleton at the same

time. Lucy made room for her with ready attention, and the two fair

rivals were thus seated side by side at the same table, and, with the

utmost harmony, engaged in forwarding the same work. The pianoforte at

which Marianne, wrapped up in her own music and her own thoughts, had

by this time forgotten that any body was in the room besides herself,

was luckily so near them that Miss Dashwood now judged she might

safely, under the shelter of its noise, introduce the interesting

subject, without any risk of being heard at the card-table.

CHAPTER 24

In a firm, though cautious tone, Elinor thus began.

"I should be undeserving of the confidence you have honoured me with,

if I felt no desire for its continuance, or no farther curiosity on its

subject. I will not apologize therefore for bringing it forward again."

"Thank you," cried Lucy warmly, "for breaking the ice; you have set my

heart at ease by it; for I was somehow or other afraid I had offended

you by what I told you that Monday."

"Offended me! How could you suppose so? Believe me," and Elinor spoke

it with the truest sincerity, "nothing could be farther from my

intention than to give you such an idea. Could you have a motive for

the trust, that was not honourable and flattering to me?"

"And yet I do assure you," replied Lucy, her little sharp eyes full of

meaning, "there seemed to me to be a coldness and displeasure in your

manner that made me quite uncomfortable. I felt sure that you was

angry with me; and have been quarrelling with myself ever since, for

having took such a liberty as to trouble you with my affairs. But I am

very glad to find it was only my own fancy, and that you really do not

blame me. If you knew what a consolation it was to me to relieve my

heart speaking to you of what I am always thinking of every moment of

my life, your compassion would make you overlook every thing else I am

sure."

"Indeed, I can easily believe that it was a very great relief to you,

to acknowledge your situation to me, and be assured that you shall

never have reason to repent it. Your case is a very unfortunate one;

you seem to me to be surrounded with difficulties, and you will have

need of all your mutual affection to support you under them. Mr.

Ferrars, I believe, is entirely dependent on his mother."

"He has only two thousand pounds of his own; it would be madness to

marry upon that, though for my own part, I could give up every prospect

of more without a sigh. I have been always used to a very small

income, and could struggle with any poverty for him; but I love him too

well to be the selfish means of robbing him, perhaps, of all that his

mother might give him if he married to please her. We must wait, it

may be for many years. With almost every other man in the world, it

would be an alarming prospect; but Edward's affection and constancy

nothing can deprive me of I know."

"That conviction must be every thing to you; and he is undoubtedly

supported by the same trust in your's. If the strength of your

reciprocal attachment had failed, as between many people, and under

many circumstances it naturally would during a four years' engagement,

your situation would have been pitiable, indeed."

Lucy here looked up; but Elinor was careful in guarding her countenance

from every expression that could give her words a suspicious tendency.

"Edward's love for me," said Lucy, "has been pretty well put to the

test, by our long, very long absence since we were first engaged, and

it has stood the trial so well, that I should be unpardonable to doubt

it now. I can safely say that he has never gave me one moment's alarm

on that account from the first."

Elinor hardly knew whether to smile or sigh at this assertion.

Lucy went on. "I am rather of a jealous temper too by nature, and from

our different situations in life, from his being so much more in the

world than me, and our continual separation, I was enough inclined for

suspicion, to have found out the truth in an instant, if there had been

the slightest alteration in his behaviour to me when we met, or any

lowness of spirits that I could not account for, or if he had talked

more of one lady than another, or seemed in any respect less happy at

Longstaple than he used to be. I do not mean to say that I am

particularly observant or quick-sighted in general, but in such a case

I am sure I could not be deceived."

"All this," thought Elinor, "is very pretty; but it can impose upon

neither of us."

"But what," said she after a short silence, "are your views? or have

you none but that of waiting for Mrs. Ferrars's death, which is a

melancholy and shocking extremity?--Is her son determined to submit to

this, and to all the tediousness of the many years of suspense in which

it may involve you, rather than run the risk of her displeasure for a

while by owning the truth?"

"If we could be certain that it would be only for a while! But Mrs.

Ferrars is a very headstrong proud woman, and in her first fit of anger

upon hearing it, would very likely secure every thing to Robert, and

the idea of that, for Edward's sake, frightens away all my inclination

for hasty measures."

"And for your own sake too, or you are carrying your disinterestedness

beyond reason."

Lucy looked at Elinor again, and was silent.

"Do you know Mr. Robert Ferrars?" asked Elinor.

"Not at all--I never saw him; but I fancy he is very unlike his

brother--silly and a great coxcomb."

"A great coxcomb!" repeated Miss Steele, whose ear had caught those

words by a sudden pause in Marianne's music.-- "Oh, they are talking of

their favourite beaux, I dare say."

"No sister," cried Lucy, "you are mistaken there, our favourite beaux

are NOT great coxcombs."

"I can answer for it that Miss Dashwood's is not," said Mrs. Jennings,

laughing heartily; "for he is one of the modestest, prettiest behaved

young men I ever saw; but as for Lucy, she is such a sly little

creature, there is no finding out who SHE likes."

"Oh," cried Miss Steele, looking significantly round at them, "I dare

say Lucy's beau is quite as modest and pretty behaved as Miss

Dashwood's."

Elinor blushed in spite of herself. Lucy bit her lip, and looked

angrily at her sister. A mutual silence took place for some time.

Lucy first put an end to it by saying in a lower tone, though Marianne

was then giving them the powerful protection of a very magnificent

concerto--

"I will honestly tell you of one scheme which has lately come into my

head, for bringing matters to bear; indeed I am bound to let you into

the secret, for you are a party concerned. I dare say you have seen

enough of Edward to know that he would prefer the church to every other

profession; now my plan is that he should take orders as soon as he

can, and then through your interest, which I am sure you would be kind

enough to use out of friendship for him, and I hope out of some regard

to me, your brother might be persuaded to give him Norland living;

which I understand is a very good one, and the present incumbent not

likely to live a great while. That would be enough for us to marry

upon, and we might trust to time and chance for the rest."

"I should always be happy," replied Elinor, "to show any mark of my

esteem and friendship for Mr. Ferrars; but do you not perceive that my

interest on such an occasion would be perfectly unnecessary? He is

brother to Mrs. John Dashwood--THAT must be recommendation enough to

her husband."

"But Mrs. John Dashwood would not much approve of Edward's going into

orders."

"Then I rather suspect that my interest would do very little."

They were again silent for many minutes. At length Lucy exclaimed with

a deep sigh,

"I believe it would be the wisest way to put an end to the business at

once by dissolving the engagement. We seem so beset with difficulties

on every side, that though it would make us miserable for a time, we

should be happier perhaps in the end. But you will not give me your

advice, Miss Dashwood?"

"No," answered Elinor, with a smile, which concealed very agitated

feelings, "on such a subject I certainly will not. You know very well

that my opinion would have no weight with you, unless it were on the

side of your wishes."

"Indeed you wrong me," replied Lucy, with great solemnity; "I know

nobody of whose judgment I think so highly as I do of yours; and I do

really believe, that if you was to say to me, 'I advise you by all

means to put an end to your engagement with Edward Ferrars, it will be

more for the happiness of both of you,' I should resolve upon doing it

immediately."

Elinor blushed for the insincerity of Edward's future wife, and

replied, "This compliment would effectually frighten me from giving any

opinion on the subject had I formed one. It raises my influence much

too high; the power of dividing two people so tenderly attached is too

much for an indifferent person."

"'Tis because you are an indifferent person," said Lucy, with some

pique, and laying a particular stress on those words, "that your

judgment might justly have such weight with me. If you could be

supposed to be biased in any respect by your own feelings, your opinion

would not be worth having."

Elinor thought it wisest to make no answer to this, lest they might

provoke each other to an unsuitable increase of ease and unreserve; and

was even partly determined never to mention the subject again. Another

pause therefore of many minutes' duration, succeeded this speech, and

Lucy was still the first to end it.

"Shall you be in town this winter, Miss Dashwood?" said she with all

her accustomary complacency.

"Certainly not."

"I am sorry for that," returned the other, while her eyes brightened at

the information, "it would have gave me such pleasure to meet you

there! But I dare say you will go for all that. To be sure, your

brother and sister will ask you to come to them."

"It will not be in my power to accept their invitation if they do."

"How unlucky that is! I had quite depended upon meeting you there.

Anne and me are to go the latter end of January to some relations who

have been wanting us to visit them these several years! But I only go

for the sake of seeing Edward. He will be there in February, otherwise

London would have no charms for me; I have not spirits for it."

Elinor was soon called to the card-table by the conclusion of the first

rubber, and the confidential discourse of the two ladies was therefore

at an end, to which both of them submitted without any reluctance, for

nothing had been said on either side to make them dislike each other

less than they had done before; and Elinor sat down to the card table

with the melancholy persuasion that Edward was not only without

affection for the person who was to be his wife; but that he had not

even the chance of being tolerably happy in marriage, which sincere

affection on HER side would have given, for self-interest alone could

induce a woman to keep a man to an engagement, of which she seemed so

thoroughly aware that he was weary.

From this time the subject was never revived by Elinor, and when

entered on by Lucy, who seldom missed an opportunity of introducing it,

and was particularly careful to inform her confidante, of her happiness

whenever she received a letter from Edward, it was treated by the

former with calmness and caution, and dismissed as soon as civility

would allow; for she felt such conversations to be an indulgence which

Lucy did not deserve, and which were dangerous to herself.

The visit of the Miss Steeles at Barton Park was lengthened far beyond

what the first invitation implied. Their favour increased; they could

not be spared; Sir John would not hear of their going; and in spite of

their numerous and long arranged engagements in Exeter, in spite of the

absolute necessity of returning to fulfill them immediately, which was

in full force at the end of every week, they were prevailed on to stay

nearly two months at the park, and to assist in the due celebration of

that festival which requires a more than ordinary share of private

balls and large dinners to proclaim its importance.

CHAPTER 25

Though Mrs. Jennings was in the habit of spending a large portion of

the year at the houses of her children and friends, she was not without

a settled habitation of her own. Since the death of her husband, who

had traded with success in a less elegant part of the town, she had

resided every winter in a house in one of the streets near Portman

Square. Towards this home, she began on the approach of January to

turn her thoughts, and thither she one day abruptly, and very

unexpectedly by them, asked the elder Misses Dashwood to accompany her.

Elinor, without observing the varying complexion of her sister, and the

animated look which spoke no indifference to the plan, immediately gave

a grateful but absolute denial for both, in which she believed herself

to be speaking their united inclinations. The reason alleged was their

determined resolution of not leaving their mother at that time of the

year. Mrs. Jennings received the refusal with some surprise, and

repeated her invitation immediately.

"Oh, Lord! I am sure your mother can spare you very well, and I DO beg

you will favour me with your company, for I've quite set my heart upon

it. Don't fancy that you will be any inconvenience to me, for I shan't

put myself at all out of my way for you. It will only be sending Betty

by the coach, and I hope I can afford THAT. We three shall be able to

go very well in my chaise; and when we are in town, if you do not like

to go wherever I do, well and good, you may always go with one of my

daughters. I am sure your mother will not object to it; for I have had

such good luck in getting my own children off my hands that she will

think me a very fit person to have the charge of you; and if I don't

get one of you at least well married before I have done with you, it

shall not be my fault. I shall speak a good word for you to all the

young men, you may depend upon it."

"I have a notion," said Sir John, "that Miss Marianne would not object

to such a scheme, if her elder sister would come into it. It is very

hard indeed that she should not have a little pleasure, because Miss

Dashwood does not wish it. So I would advise you two, to set off for

town, when you are tired of Barton, without saying a word to Miss

Dashwood about it."

"Nay," cried Mrs. Jennings, "I am sure I shall be monstrous glad of

Miss Marianne's company, whether Miss Dashwood will go or not, only the

more the merrier say I, and I thought it would be more comfortable for

them to be together; because, if they got tired of me, they might talk

to one another, and laugh at my old ways behind my back. But one or

the other, if not both of them, I must have. Lord bless me! how do you

think I can live poking by myself, I who have been always used till

this winter to have Charlotte with me. Come, Miss Marianne, let us

strike hands upon the bargain, and if Miss Dashwood will change her

mind by and bye, why so much the better."

"I thank you, ma'am, sincerely thank you," said Marianne, with warmth:

"your invitation has insured my gratitude for ever, and it would give

me such happiness, yes, almost the greatest happiness I am capable of,

to be able to accept it. But my mother, my dearest, kindest mother,--I

feel the justice of what Elinor has urged, and if she were to be made

less happy, less comfortable by our absence--Oh! no, nothing should

tempt me to leave her. It should not, must not be a struggle."

Mrs. Jennings repeated her assurance that Mrs. Dashwood could spare

them perfectly well; and Elinor, who now understood her sister, and saw

to what indifference to almost every thing else she was carried by her

eagerness to be with Willoughby again, made no farther direct

opposition to the plan, and merely referred it to her mother's

decision, from whom however she scarcely expected to receive any

support in her endeavour to prevent a visit, which she could not

approve of for Marianne, and which on her own account she had

particular reasons to avoid. Whatever Marianne was desirous of, her

mother would be eager to promote--she could not expect to influence the

latter to cautiousness of conduct in an affair respecting which she had

never been able to inspire her with distrust; and she dared not explain

the motive of her own disinclination for going to London. That

Marianne, fastidious as she was, thoroughly acquainted with Mrs.

Jennings' manners, and invariably disgusted by them, should overlook

every inconvenience of that kind, should disregard whatever must be

most wounding to her irritable feelings, in her pursuit of one object,

was such a proof, so strong, so full, of the importance of that object

to her, as Elinor, in spite of all that had passed, was not prepared to

witness.

On being informed of the invitation, Mrs. Dashwood, persuaded that such

an excursion would be productive of much amusement to both her

daughters, and perceiving through all her affectionate attention to

herself, how much the heart of Marianne was in it, would not hear of

their declining the offer upon HER account; insisted on their both

accepting it directly; and then began to foresee, with her usual

cheerfulness, a variety of advantages that would accrue to them all,

from this separation.

"I am delighted with the plan," she cried, "it is exactly what I could

wish. Margaret and I shall be as much benefited by it as yourselves.

When you and the Middletons are gone, we shall go on so quietly and

happily together with our books and our music! You will find Margaret

so improved when you come back again! I have a little plan of

alteration for your bedrooms too, which may now be performed without

any inconvenience to any one. It is very right that you SHOULD go to

town; I would have every young woman of your condition in life

acquainted with the manners and amusements of London. You will be

under the care of a motherly good sort of woman, of whose kindness to

you I can have no doubt. And in all probability you will see your

brother, and whatever may be his faults, or the faults of his wife,

when I consider whose son he is, I cannot bear to have you so wholly

estranged from each other."

"Though with your usual anxiety for our happiness," said Elinor, "you

have been obviating every impediment to the present scheme which

occurred to you, there is still one objection which, in my opinion,

cannot be so easily removed."

Marianne's countenance sunk.

"And what," said Mrs. Dashwood, "is my dear prudent Elinor going to

suggest? What formidable obstacle is she now to bring forward? Do let

me hear a word about the expense of it."

"My objection is this; though I think very well of Mrs. Jennings's

heart, she is not a woman whose society can afford us pleasure, or

whose protection will give us consequence."

"That is very true," replied her mother, "but of her society,

separately from that of other people, you will scarcely have any thing

at all, and you will almost always appear in public with Lady

Middleton."

"If Elinor is frightened away by her dislike of Mrs. Jennings," said

Marianne, "at least it need not prevent MY accepting her invitation. I

have no such scruples, and I am sure I could put up with every

unpleasantness of that kind with very little effort."

Elinor could not help smiling at this display of indifference towards

the manners of a person, to whom she had often had difficulty in

persuading Marianne to behave with tolerable politeness; and resolved

within herself, that if her sister persisted in going, she would go

likewise, as she did not think it proper that Marianne should be left

to the sole guidance of her own judgment, or that Mrs. Jennings should

be abandoned to the mercy of Marianne for all the comfort of her

domestic hours. To this determination she was the more easily

reconciled, by recollecting that Edward Ferrars, by Lucy's account, was

not to be in town before February; and that their visit, without any

unreasonable abridgement, might be previously finished.

"I will have you BOTH go," said Mrs. Dashwood; "these objections are

nonsensical. You will have much pleasure in being in London, and

especially in being together; and if Elinor would ever condescend to

anticipate enjoyment, she would foresee it there from a variety of

sources; she would, perhaps, expect some from improving her

acquaintance with her sister-in-law's family."

Elinor had often wished for an opportunity of attempting to weaken her

mother's dependence on the attachment of Edward and herself, that the

shock might be less when the whole truth were revealed, and now on this

attack, though almost hopeless of success, she forced herself to begin

her design by saying, as calmly as she could, "I like Edward Ferrars

very much, and shall always be glad to see him; but as to the rest of

the family, it is a matter of perfect indifference to me, whether I am

ever known to them or not."

Mrs. Dashwood smiled, and said nothing. Marianne lifted up her eyes in

astonishment, and Elinor conjectured that she might as well have held

her tongue.

After very little farther discourse, it was finally settled that the

invitation should be fully accepted. Mrs. Jennings received the

information with a great deal of joy, and many assurances of kindness

and care; nor was it a matter of pleasure merely to her. Sir John was

delighted; for to a man, whose prevailing anxiety was the dread of

being alone, the acquisition of two, to the number of inhabitants in

London, was something. Even Lady Middleton took the trouble of being

delighted, which was putting herself rather out of her way; and as for

the Miss Steeles, especially Lucy, they had never been so happy in

their lives as this intelligence made them.

Elinor submitted to the arrangement which counteracted her wishes with

less reluctance than she had expected to feel. With regard to herself,

it was now a matter of unconcern whether she went to town or not, and

when she saw her mother so thoroughly pleased with the plan, and her

sister exhilarated by it in look, voice, and manner, restored to all

her usual animation, and elevated to more than her usual gaiety, she

could not be dissatisfied with the cause, and would hardly allow

herself to distrust the consequence.

Marianne's joy was almost a degree beyond happiness, so great was the

perturbation of her spirits and her impatience to be gone. Her

unwillingness to quit her mother was her only restorative to calmness;

and at the moment of parting her grief on that score was excessive.

Her mother's affliction was hardly less, and Elinor was the only one of

the three, who seemed to consider the separation as any thing short of

eternal.

Their departure took place in the first week in January. The

Middletons were to follow in about a week. The Miss Steeles kept their

station at the park, and were to quit it only with the rest of the

family.

CHAPTER 26

Elinor could not find herself in the carriage with Mrs. Jennings, and

beginning a journey to London under her protection, and as her guest,

without wondering at her own situation, so short had their acquaintance

with that lady been, so wholly unsuited were they in age and

disposition, and so many had been her objections against such a measure

only a few days before! But these objections had all, with that happy

ardour of youth which Marianne and her mother equally shared, been

overcome or overlooked; and Elinor, in spite of every occasional doubt

of Willoughby's constancy, could not witness the rapture of delightful

expectation which filled the whole soul and beamed in the eyes of

Marianne, without feeling how blank was her own prospect, how cheerless

her own state of mind in the comparison, and how gladly she would

engage in the solicitude of Marianne's situation to have the same

animating object in view, the same possibility of hope. A short, a

very short time however must now decide what Willoughby's intentions

were; in all probability he was already in town. Marianne's eagerness

to be gone declared her dependence on finding him there; and Elinor was

resolved not only upon gaining every new light as to his character

which her own observation or the intelligence of others could give her,

but likewise upon watching his behaviour to her sister with such

zealous attention, as to ascertain what he was and what he meant,

before many meetings had taken place. Should the result of her

observations be unfavourable, she was determined at all events to open

the eyes of her sister; should it be otherwise, her exertions would be

of a different nature--she must then learn to avoid every selfish

comparison, and banish every regret which might lessen her satisfaction

in the happiness of Marianne.

They were three days on their journey, and Marianne's behaviour as they

travelled was a happy specimen of what future complaisance and

companionableness to Mrs. Jennings might be expected to be. She sat in

silence almost all the way, wrapt in her own meditations, and scarcely

ever voluntarily speaking, except when any object of picturesque beauty

within their view drew from her an exclamation of delight exclusively

addressed to her sister. To atone for this conduct therefore, Elinor

took immediate possession of the post of civility which she had

assigned herself, behaved with the greatest attention to Mrs. Jennings,

talked with her, laughed with her, and listened to her whenever she

could; and Mrs. Jennings on her side treated them both with all

possible kindness, was solicitous on every occasion for their ease and

enjoyment, and only disturbed that she could not make them choose their

own dinners at the inn, nor extort a confession of their preferring

salmon to cod, or boiled fowls to veal cutlets. They reached town by

three o'clock the third day, glad to be released, after such a journey,

from the confinement of a carriage, and ready to enjoy all the luxury

of a good fire.

The house was handsome, and handsomely fitted up, and the young ladies

were immediately put in possession of a very comfortable apartment. It

had formerly been Charlotte's, and over the mantelpiece still hung a

landscape in coloured silks of her performance, in proof of her having

spent seven years at a great school in town to some effect.

As dinner was not to be ready in less than two hours from their

arrival, Elinor determined to employ the interval in writing to her

mother, and sat down for that purpose. In a few moments Marianne did

the same. "I am writing home, Marianne," said Elinor; "had not you

better defer your letter for a day or two?"

"I am NOT going to write to my mother," replied Marianne, hastily, and

as if wishing to avoid any farther inquiry. Elinor said no more; it

immediately struck her that she must then be writing to Willoughby; and

the conclusion which as instantly followed was, that, however

mysteriously they might wish to conduct the affair, they must be

engaged. This conviction, though not entirely satisfactory, gave her

pleasure, and she continued her letter with greater alacrity.

Marianne's was finished in a very few minutes; in length it could be no

more than a note; it was then folded up, sealed, and directed with

eager rapidity. Elinor thought she could distinguish a large W in the

direction; and no sooner was it complete than Marianne, ringing the

bell, requested the footman who answered it to get that letter conveyed

for her to the two-penny post. This decided the matter at once.

Her spirits still continued very high; but there was a flutter in them

which prevented their giving much pleasure to her sister, and this

agitation increased as the evening drew on. She could scarcely eat any

dinner, and when they afterwards returned to the drawing room, seemed

anxiously listening to the sound of every carriage.

It was a great satisfaction to Elinor that Mrs. Jennings, by being much

engaged in her own room, could see little of what was passing. The tea

things were brought in, and already had Marianne been disappointed more

than once by a rap at a neighbouring door, when a loud one was suddenly

heard which could not be mistaken for one at any other house, Elinor

felt secure of its announcing Willoughby's approach, and Marianne,

starting up, moved towards the door. Every thing was silent; this

could not be borne many seconds; she opened the door, advanced a few

steps towards the stairs, and after listening half a minute, returned

into the room in all the agitation which a conviction of having heard

him would naturally produce; in the ecstasy of her feelings at that

instant she could not help exclaiming, "Oh, Elinor, it is Willoughby,

indeed it is!" and seemed almost ready to throw herself into his arms,

when Colonel Brandon appeared.

It was too great a shock to be borne with calmness, and she immediately

left the room. Elinor was disappointed too; but at the same time her

regard for Colonel Brandon ensured his welcome with her; and she felt

particularly hurt that a man so partial to her sister should perceive

that she experienced nothing but grief and disappointment in seeing

him. She instantly saw that it was not unnoticed by him, that he even

observed Marianne as she quitted the room, with such astonishment and

concern, as hardly left him the recollection of what civility demanded

towards herself.

"Is your sister ill?" said he.

Elinor answered in some distress that she was, and then talked of

head-aches, low spirits, and over fatigues; and of every thing to which

she could decently attribute her sister's behaviour.

He heard her with the most earnest attention, but seeming to recollect

himself, said no more on the subject, and began directly to speak of

his pleasure at seeing them in London, making the usual inquiries about

their journey, and the friends they had left behind.

In this calm kind of way, with very little interest on either side,

they continued to talk, both of them out of spirits, and the thoughts

of both engaged elsewhere. Elinor wished very much to ask whether

Willoughby were then in town, but she was afraid of giving him pain by

any enquiry after his rival; and at length, by way of saying something,

she asked if he had been in London ever since she had seen him last.

"Yes," he replied, with some embarrassment, "almost ever since; I have

been once or twice at Delaford for a few days, but it has never been in

my power to return to Barton."

This, and the manner in which it was said, immediately brought back to

her remembrance all the circumstances of his quitting that place, with

the uneasiness and suspicions they had caused to Mrs. Jennings, and she

was fearful that her question had implied much more curiosity on the

subject than she had ever felt.

Mrs. Jennings soon came in. "Oh! Colonel," said she, with her usual

noisy cheerfulness, "I am monstrous glad to see you--sorry I could not

come before--beg your pardon, but I have been forced to look about me a

little, and settle my matters; for it is a long while since I have been

at home, and you know one has always a world of little odd things to do

after one has been away for any time; and then I have had Cartwright to

settle with-- Lord, I have been as busy as a bee ever since dinner!

But pray, Colonel, how came you to conjure out that I should be in town

today?"

"I had the pleasure of hearing it at Mr. Palmer's, where I have been

dining."

"Oh, you did; well, and how do they all do at their house? How does

Charlotte do? I warrant you she is a fine size by this time."

"Mrs. Palmer appeared quite well, and I am commissioned to tell you,

that you will certainly see her to-morrow."

"Ay, to be sure, I thought as much. Well, Colonel, I have brought two

young ladies with me, you see--that is, you see but one of them now,

but there is another somewhere. Your friend, Miss Marianne, too--which

you will not be sorry to hear. I do not know what you and Mr.

Willoughby will do between you about her. Ay, it is a fine thing to be

young and handsome. Well! I was young once, but I never was very

handsome--worse luck for me. However, I got a very good husband, and I

don't know what the greatest beauty can do more. Ah! poor man! he has

been dead these eight years and better. But Colonel, where have you

been to since we parted? And how does your business go on? Come,

come, let's have no secrets among friends."

He replied with his accustomary mildness to all her inquiries, but

without satisfying her in any. Elinor now began to make the tea, and

Marianne was obliged to appear again.

After her entrance, Colonel Brandon became more thoughtful and silent

than he had been before, and Mrs. Jennings could not prevail on him to

stay long. No other visitor appeared that evening, and the ladies were

unanimous in agreeing to go early to bed.

Marianne rose the next morning with recovered spirits and happy looks.

The disappointment of the evening before seemed forgotten in the

expectation of what was to happen that day. They had not long finished

their breakfast before Mrs. Palmer's barouche stopped at the door, and

in a few minutes she came laughing into the room: so delighted to see

them all, that it was hard to say whether she received most pleasure

from meeting her mother or the Miss Dashwoods again. So surprised at

their coming to town, though it was what she had rather expected all

along; so angry at their accepting her mother's invitation after having

declined her own, though at the same time she would never have forgiven

them if they had not come!

"Mr. Palmer will be so happy to see you," said she; "What do you think

he said when he heard of your coming with Mamma? I forget what it was

now, but it was something so droll!"

After an hour or two spent in what her mother called comfortable chat,

or in other words, in every variety of inquiry concerning all their

acquaintance on Mrs. Jennings's side, and in laughter without cause on

Mrs. Palmer's, it was proposed by the latter that they should all

accompany her to some shops where she had business that morning, to

which Mrs. Jennings and Elinor readily consented, as having likewise

some purchases to make themselves; and Marianne, though declining it at

first was induced to go likewise.

Wherever they went, she was evidently always on the watch. In Bond

Street especially, where much of their business lay, her eyes were in

constant inquiry; and in whatever shop the party were engaged, her mind

was equally abstracted from every thing actually before them, from all

that interested and occupied the others. Restless and dissatisfied

every where, her sister could never obtain her opinion of any article

of purchase, however it might equally concern them both: she received

no pleasure from anything; was only impatient to be at home again, and

could with difficulty govern her vexation at the tediousness of Mrs.

Palmer, whose eye was caught by every thing pretty, expensive, or new;

who was wild to buy all, could determine on none, and dawdled away her

time in rapture and indecision.

It was late in the morning before they returned home; and no sooner had

they entered the house than Marianne flew eagerly up stairs, and when

Elinor followed, she found her turning from the table with a sorrowful

countenance, which declared that no Willoughby had been there.

"Has no letter been left here for me since we went out?" said she to

the footman who then entered with the parcels. She was answered in the

negative. "Are you quite sure of it?" she replied. "Are you certain

that no servant, no porter has left any letter or note?"

The man replied that none had.

"How very odd!" said she, in a low and disappointed voice, as she

turned away to the window.

"How odd, indeed!" repeated Elinor within herself, regarding her sister

with uneasiness. "If she had not known him to be in town she would not

have written to him, as she did; she would have written to Combe Magna;

and if he is in town, how odd that he should neither come nor write!

Oh! my dear mother, you must be wrong in permitting an engagement

between a daughter so young, a man so little known, to be carried on in

so doubtful, so mysterious a manner! I long to inquire; and how will

MY interference be borne."

She determined, after some consideration, that if appearances continued

many days longer as unpleasant as they now were, she would represent in

the strongest manner to her mother the necessity of some serious

enquiry into the affair.

Mrs. Palmer and two elderly ladies of Mrs. Jennings's intimate

acquaintance, whom she had met and invited in the morning, dined with

them. The former left them soon after tea to fulfill her evening

engagements; and Elinor was obliged to assist in making a whist table

for the others. Marianne was of no use on these occasions, as she

would never learn the game; but though her time was therefore at her

own disposal, the evening was by no means more productive of pleasure

to her than to Elinor, for it was spent in all the anxiety of

expectation and the pain of disappointment. She sometimes endeavoured

for a few minutes to read; but the book was soon thrown aside, and she

returned to the more interesting employment of walking backwards and

forwards across the room, pausing for a moment whenever she came to the

window, in hopes of distinguishing the long-expected rap.

CHAPTER 27

"If this open weather holds much longer," said Mrs. Jennings, when they

met at breakfast the following morning, "Sir John will not like leaving

Barton next week; 'tis a sad thing for sportsmen to lose a day's

pleasure. Poor souls! I always pity them when they do; they seem to

take it so much to heart."

"That is true," cried Marianne, in a cheerful voice, and walking to the

window as she spoke, to examine the day. "I had not thought of that.

This weather will keep many sportsmen in the country."

It was a lucky recollection, all her good spirits were restored by it.

"It is charming weather for THEM indeed," she continued, as she sat

down to the breakfast table with a happy countenance. "How much they

must enjoy it! But" (with a little return of anxiety) "it cannot be

expected to last long. At this time of the year, and after such a

series of rain, we shall certainly have very little more of it. Frosts

will soon set in, and in all probability with severity. In another day

or two perhaps; this extreme mildness can hardly last longer--nay,

perhaps it may freeze tonight!"

"At any rate," said Elinor, wishing to prevent Mrs. Jennings from

seeing her sister's thoughts as clearly as she did, "I dare say we

shall have Sir John and Lady Middleton in town by the end of next week."

"Ay, my dear, I'll warrant you we do. Mary always has her own way."

"And now," silently conjectured Elinor, "she will write to Combe by

this day's post."

But if she DID, the letter was written and sent away with a privacy

which eluded all her watchfulness to ascertain the fact. Whatever the

truth of it might be, and far as Elinor was from feeling thorough

contentment about it, yet while she saw Marianne in spirits, she could

not be very uncomfortable herself. And Marianne was in spirits; happy

in the mildness of the weather, and still happier in her expectation of

a frost.

The morning was chiefly spent in leaving cards at the houses of Mrs.

Jennings's acquaintance to inform them of her being in town; and

Marianne was all the time busy in observing the direction of the wind,

watching the variations of the sky and imagining an alteration in the

air.

"Don't you find it colder than it was in the morning, Elinor? There

seems to me a very decided difference. I can hardly keep my hands warm

even in my muff. It was not so yesterday, I think. The clouds seem

parting too, the sun will be out in a moment, and we shall have a clear

afternoon."

Elinor was alternately diverted and pained; but Marianne persevered,

and saw every night in the brightness of the fire, and every morning in

the appearance of the atmosphere, the certain symptoms of approaching

frost.

The Miss Dashwoods had no greater reason to be dissatisfied with Mrs.

Jennings's style of living, and set of acquaintance, than with her

behaviour to themselves, which was invariably kind. Every thing in her

household arrangements was conducted on the most liberal plan, and

excepting a few old city friends, whom, to Lady Middleton's regret, she

had never dropped, she visited no one to whom an introduction could at

all discompose the feelings of her young companions. Pleased to find

herself more comfortably situated in that particular than she had

expected, Elinor was very willing to compound for the want of much real

enjoyment from any of their evening parties, which, whether at home or

abroad, formed only for cards, could have little to amuse her.

Colonel Brandon, who had a general invitation to the house, was with

them almost every day; he came to look at Marianne and talk to Elinor,

who often derived more satisfaction from conversing with him than from

any other daily occurrence, but who saw at the same time with much

concern his continued regard for her sister. She feared it was a

strengthening regard. It grieved her to see the earnestness with which

he often watched Marianne, and his spirits were certainly worse than

when at Barton.

About a week after their arrival, it became certain that Willoughby was

also arrived. His card was on the table when they came in from the

morning's drive.

"Good God!" cried Marianne, "he has been here while we were out."

Elinor, rejoiced to be assured of his being in London, now ventured to

say, "Depend upon it, he will call again tomorrow." But Marianne

seemed hardly to hear her, and on Mrs. Jenning's entrance, escaped with

the precious card.

This event, while it raised the spirits of Elinor, restored to those of

her sister all, and more than all, their former agitation. From this

moment her mind was never quiet; the expectation of seeing him every

hour of the day, made her unfit for any thing. She insisted on being

left behind, the next morning, when the others went out.

Elinor's thoughts were full of what might be passing in Berkeley Street

during their absence; but a moment's glance at her sister when they

returned was enough to inform her, that Willoughby had paid no second

visit there. A note was just then brought in, and laid on the table,

"For me!" cried Marianne, stepping hastily forward.

"No, ma'am, for my mistress."

But Marianne, not convinced, took it instantly up.

"It is indeed for Mrs. Jennings; how provoking!"

"You are expecting a letter, then?" said Elinor, unable to be longer

silent.

"Yes, a little--not much."

After a short pause. "You have no confidence in me, Marianne."

"Nay, Elinor, this reproach from YOU--you who have confidence in no

one!"

"Me!" returned Elinor in some confusion; "indeed, Marianne, I have

nothing to tell."

"Nor I," answered Marianne with energy, "our situations then are alike.

We have neither of us any thing to tell; you, because you do not

communicate, and I, because I conceal nothing."

Elinor, distressed by this charge of reserve in herself, which she was

not at liberty to do away, knew not how, under such circumstances, to

press for greater openness in Marianne.

Mrs. Jennings soon appeared, and the note being given her, she read it

aloud. It was from Lady Middleton, announcing their arrival in Conduit

Street the night before, and requesting the company of her mother and

cousins the following evening. Business on Sir John's part, and a

violent cold on her own, prevented their calling in Berkeley Street.

The invitation was accepted; but when the hour of appointment drew

near, necessary as it was in common civility to Mrs. Jennings, that

they should both attend her on such a visit, Elinor had some difficulty

in persuading her sister to go, for still she had seen nothing of

Willoughby; and therefore was not more indisposed for amusement abroad,

than unwilling to run the risk of his calling again in her absence.

Elinor found, when the evening was over, that disposition is not

materially altered by a change of abode, for although scarcely settled

in town, Sir John had contrived to collect around him, nearly twenty

young people, and to amuse them with a ball. This was an affair,

however, of which Lady Middleton did not approve. In the country, an

unpremeditated dance was very allowable; but in London, where the

reputation of elegance was more important and less easily attained, it

was risking too much for the gratification of a few girls, to have it

known that Lady Middleton had given a small dance of eight or nine

couple, with two violins, and a mere side-board collation.

Mr. and Mrs. Palmer were of the party; from the former, whom they had

not seen before since their arrival in town, as he was careful to avoid

the appearance of any attention to his mother-in-law, and therefore

never came near her, they received no mark of recognition on their

entrance. He looked at them slightly, without seeming to know who they

were, and merely nodded to Mrs. Jennings from the other side of the

room. Marianne gave one glance round the apartment as she entered: it

was enough--HE was not there--and she sat down, equally ill-disposed to

receive or communicate pleasure. After they had been assembled about

an hour, Mr. Palmer sauntered towards the Miss Dashwoods to express his

surprise on seeing them in town, though Colonel Brandon had been first

informed of their arrival at his house, and he had himself said

something very droll on hearing that they were to come.

"I thought you were both in Devonshire," said he.

"Did you?" replied Elinor.

"When do you go back again?"

"I do not know." And thus ended their discourse.

Never had Marianne been so unwilling to dance in her life, as she was

that evening, and never so much fatigued by the exercise. She

complained of it as they returned to Berkeley Street.

"Aye, aye," said Mrs. Jennings, "we know the reason of all that very

well; if a certain person who shall be nameless, had been there, you

would not have been a bit tired: and to say the truth it was not very

pretty of him not to give you the meeting when he was invited."

"Invited!" cried Marianne.

"So my daughter Middleton told me, for it seems Sir John met him

somewhere in the street this morning." Marianne said no more, but

looked exceedingly hurt. Impatient in this situation to be doing

something that might lead to her sister's relief, Elinor resolved to

write the next morning to her mother, and hoped by awakening her fears

for the health of Marianne, to procure those inquiries which had been

so long delayed; and she was still more eagerly bent on this measure by

perceiving after breakfast on the morrow, that Marianne was again

writing to Willoughby, for she could not suppose it to be to any other

person.

About the middle of the day, Mrs. Jennings went out by herself on

business, and Elinor began her letter directly, while Marianne, too

restless for employment, too anxious for conversation, walked from one

window to the other, or sat down by the fire in melancholy meditation.

Elinor was very earnest in her application to her mother, relating all

that had passed, her suspicions of Willoughby's inconstancy, urging her

by every plea of duty and affection to demand from Marianne an account

of her real situation with respect to him.

Her letter was scarcely finished, when a rap foretold a visitor, and

Colonel Brandon was announced. Marianne, who had seen him from the

window, and who hated company of any kind, left the room before he

entered it. He looked more than usually grave, and though expressing

satisfaction at finding Miss Dashwood alone, as if he had somewhat in

particular to tell her, sat for some time without saying a word.

Elinor, persuaded that he had some communication to make in which her

sister was concerned, impatiently expected its opening. It was not the

first time of her feeling the same kind of conviction; for, more than

once before, beginning with the observation of "your sister looks

unwell to-day," or "your sister seems out of spirits," he had appeared

on the point, either of disclosing, or of inquiring, something

particular about her. After a pause of several minutes, their silence

was broken, by his asking her in a voice of some agitation, when he was

to congratulate her on the acquisition of a brother? Elinor was not

prepared for such a question, and having no answer ready, was obliged

to adopt the simple and common expedient, of asking what he meant? He

tried to smile as he replied, "your sister's engagement to Mr.

Willoughby is very generally known."

"It cannot be generally known," returned Elinor, "for her own family do

not know it."

He looked surprised and said, "I beg your pardon, I am afraid my

inquiry has been impertinent; but I had not supposed any secrecy

intended, as they openly correspond, and their marriage is universally

talked of."

"How can that be? By whom can you have heard it mentioned?"

"By many--by some of whom you know nothing, by others with whom you are

most intimate, Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Palmer, and the Middletons. But

still I might not have believed it, for where the mind is perhaps

rather unwilling to be convinced, it will always find something to

support its doubts, if I had not, when the servant let me in today,

accidentally seen a letter in his hand, directed to Mr. Willoughby in

your sister's writing. I came to inquire, but I was convinced before I

could ask the question. Is every thing finally settled? Is it

impossible to-? But I have no right, and I could have no chance of

succeeding. Excuse me, Miss Dashwood. I believe I have been wrong in

saying so much, but I hardly know what to do, and on your prudence I

have the strongest dependence. Tell me that it is all absolutely

resolved on, that any attempt, that in short concealment, if

concealment be possible, is all that remains."

These words, which conveyed to Elinor a direct avowal of his love for

her sister, affected her very much. She was not immediately able to

say anything, and even when her spirits were recovered, she debated for

a short time, on the answer it would be most proper to give. The real

state of things between Willoughby and her sister was so little known

to herself, that in endeavouring to explain it, she might be as liable

to say too much as too little. Yet as she was convinced that

Marianne's affection for Willoughby, could leave no hope of Colonel

Brandon's success, whatever the event of that affection might be, and

at the same time wished to shield her conduct from censure, she thought

it most prudent and kind, after some consideration, to say more than

she really knew or believed. She acknowledged, therefore, that though

she had never been informed by themselves of the terms on which they

stood with each other, of their mutual affection she had no doubt, and

of their correspondence she was not astonished to hear.

He listened to her with silent attention, and on her ceasing to speak,

rose directly from his seat, and after saying in a voice of emotion,

"to your sister I wish all imaginable happiness; to Willoughby that he

may endeavour to deserve her,"--took leave, and went away.

Elinor derived no comfortable feelings from this conversation, to

lessen the uneasiness of her mind on other points; she was left, on the

contrary, with a melancholy impression of Colonel Brandon's

unhappiness, and was prevented even from wishing it removed, by her

anxiety for the very event that must confirm it.

CHAPTER 28

Nothing occurred during the next three or four days, to make Elinor

regret what she had done, in applying to her mother; for Willoughby

neither came nor wrote. They were engaged about the end of that time

to attend Lady Middleton to a party, from which Mrs. Jennings was kept

away by the indisposition of her youngest daughter; and for this party,

Marianne, wholly dispirited, careless of her appearance, and seeming

equally indifferent whether she went or staid, prepared, without one

look of hope or one expression of pleasure. She sat by the

drawing-room fire after tea, till the moment of Lady Middleton's

arrival, without once stirring from her seat, or altering her attitude,

lost in her own thoughts, and insensible of her sister's presence; and

when at last they were told that Lady Middleton waited for them at the

door, she started as if she had forgotten that any one was expected.

They arrived in due time at the place of destination, and as soon as

the string of carriages before them would allow, alighted, ascended the

stairs, heard their names announced from one landing-place to another

in an audible voice, and entered a room splendidly lit up, quite full

of company, and insufferably hot. When they had paid their tribute of

politeness by curtsying to the lady of the house, they were permitted

to mingle in the crowd, and take their share of the heat and

inconvenience, to which their arrival must necessarily add. After some

time spent in saying little or doing less, Lady Middleton sat down to

Cassino, and as Marianne was not in spirits for moving about, she and

Elinor luckily succeeding to chairs, placed themselves at no great

distance from the table.

They had not remained in this manner long, before Elinor perceived

Willoughby, standing within a few yards of them, in earnest

conversation with a very fashionable looking young woman. She soon

caught his eye, and he immediately bowed, but without attempting to

speak to her, or to approach Marianne, though he could not but see her;

and then continued his discourse with the same lady. Elinor turned

involuntarily to Marianne, to see whether it could be unobserved by

her. At that moment she first perceived him, and her whole countenance

glowing with sudden delight, she would have moved towards him

instantly, had not her sister caught hold of her.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "he is there--he is there--Oh! why does

he not look at me? why cannot I speak to him?"

"Pray, pray be composed," cried Elinor, "and do not betray what you

feel to every body present. Perhaps he has not observed you yet."

This however was more than she could believe herself; and to be

composed at such a moment was not only beyond the reach of Marianne, it

was beyond her wish. She sat in an agony of impatience which affected

every feature.

At last he turned round again, and regarded them both; she started up,

and pronouncing his name in a tone of affection, held out her hand to

him. He approached, and addressing himself rather to Elinor than

Marianne, as if wishing to avoid her eye, and determined not to observe

her attitude, inquired in a hurried manner after Mrs. Dashwood, and

asked how long they had been in town. Elinor was robbed of all

presence of mind by such an address, and was unable to say a word. But

the feelings of her sister were instantly expressed. Her face was

crimsoned over, and she exclaimed, in a voice of the greatest emotion,

"Good God! Willoughby, what is the meaning of this? Have you not

received my letters? Will you not shake hands with me?"

He could not then avoid it, but her touch seemed painful to him, and he

held her hand only for a moment. During all this time he was evidently

struggling for composure. Elinor watched his countenance and saw its

expression becoming more tranquil. After a moment's pause, he spoke

with calmness.

"I did myself the honour of calling in Berkeley Street last Tuesday,

and very much regretted that I was not fortunate enough to find

yourselves and Mrs. Jennings at home. My card was not lost, I hope."

"But have you not received my notes?" cried Marianne in the wildest

anxiety. "Here is some mistake I am sure--some dreadful mistake. What

can be the meaning of it? Tell me, Willoughby; for heaven's sake tell

me, what is the matter?"

He made no reply; his complexion changed and all his embarrassment

returned; but as if, on catching the eye of the young lady with whom he

had been previously talking, he felt the necessity of instant exertion,

he recovered himself again, and after saying, "Yes, I had the pleasure

of receiving the information of your arrival in town, which you were so

good as to send me," turned hastily away with a slight bow and joined

his friend.

Marianne, now looking dreadfully white, and unable to stand, sunk into

her chair, and Elinor, expecting every moment to see her faint, tried

to screen her from the observation of others, while reviving her with

lavender water.

"Go to him, Elinor," she cried, as soon as she could speak, "and force

him to come to me. Tell him I must see him again--must speak to him

instantly.-- I cannot rest--I shall not have a moment's peace till this

is explained--some dreadful misapprehension or other.-- Oh go to him

this moment."

"How can that be done? No, my dearest Marianne, you must wait. This is

not the place for explanations. Wait only till tomorrow."

With difficulty however could she prevent her from following him

herself; and to persuade her to check her agitation, to wait, at least,

with the appearance of composure, till she might speak to him with more

privacy and more effect, was impossible; for Marianne continued

incessantly to give way in a low voice to the misery of her feelings,

by exclamations of wretchedness. In a short time Elinor saw Willoughby

quit the room by the door towards the staircase, and telling Marianne

that he was gone, urged the impossibility of speaking to him again that

evening, as a fresh argument for her to be calm. She instantly begged

her sister would entreat Lady Middleton to take them home, as she was

too miserable to stay a minute longer.

Lady Middleton, though in the middle of a rubber, on being informed

that Marianne was unwell, was too polite to object for a moment to her

wish of going away, and making over her cards to a friend, they

departed as soon the carriage could be found. Scarcely a word was

spoken during their return to Berkeley Street. Marianne was in a

silent agony, too much oppressed even for tears; but as Mrs. Jennings

was luckily not come home, they could go directly to their own room,

where hartshorn restored her a little to herself. She was soon

undressed and in bed, and as she seemed desirous of being alone, her

sister then left her, and while she waited the return of Mrs. Jennings,

had leisure enough for thinking over the past.

That some kind of engagement had subsisted between Willoughby and

Marianne she could not doubt, and that Willoughby was weary of it,

seemed equally clear; for however Marianne might still feed her own

wishes, SHE could not attribute such behaviour to mistake or

misapprehension of any kind. Nothing but a thorough change of

sentiment could account for it. Her indignation would have been still

stronger than it was, had she not witnessed that embarrassment which

seemed to speak a consciousness of his own misconduct, and prevented

her from believing him so unprincipled as to have been sporting with

the affections of her sister from the first, without any design that

would bear investigation. Absence might have weakened his regard, and

convenience might have determined him to overcome it, but that such a

regard had formerly existed she could not bring herself to doubt.

As for Marianne, on the pangs which so unhappy a meeting must already

have given her, and on those still more severe which might await her in

its probable consequence, she could not reflect without the deepest

concern. Her own situation gained in the comparison; for while she

could ESTEEM Edward as much as ever, however they might be divided in

future, her mind might be always supported. But every circumstance

that could embitter such an evil seemed uniting to heighten the misery

of Marianne in a final separation from Willoughby--in an immediate and

irreconcilable rupture with him.

CHAPTER 29

Before the house-maid had lit their fire the next day, or the sun

gained any power over a cold, gloomy morning in January, Marianne, only

half dressed, was kneeling against one of the window-seats for the sake

of all the little light she could command from it, and writing as fast

as a continual flow of tears would permit her. In this situation,

Elinor, roused from sleep by her agitation and sobs, first perceived

her; and after observing her for a few moments with silent anxiety,

said, in a tone of the most considerate gentleness,

"Marianne, may I ask-?"

"No, Elinor," she replied, "ask nothing; you will soon know all."

The sort of desperate calmness with which this was said, lasted no

longer than while she spoke, and was immediately followed by a return

of the same excessive affliction. It was some minutes before she could

go on with her letter, and the frequent bursts of grief which still

obliged her, at intervals, to withhold her pen, were proofs enough of

her feeling how more than probable it was that she was writing for the

last time to Willoughby.

Elinor paid her every quiet and unobtrusive attention in her power; and

she would have tried to sooth and tranquilize her still more, had not

Marianne entreated her, with all the eagerness of the most nervous

irritability, not to speak to her for the world. In such

circumstances, it was better for both that they should not be long

together; and the restless state of Marianne's mind not only prevented

her from remaining in the room a moment after she was dressed, but

requiring at once solitude and continual change of place, made her

wander about the house till breakfast time, avoiding the sight of every

body.

At breakfast she neither ate, nor attempted to eat any thing; and

Elinor's attention was then all employed, not in urging her, not in

pitying her, nor in appearing to regard her, but in endeavouring to

engage Mrs. Jenning's notice entirely to herself.

As this was a favourite meal with Mrs. Jennings, it lasted a

considerable time, and they were just setting themselves, after it,

round the common working table, when a letter was delivered to

Marianne, which she eagerly caught from the servant, and, turning of a

death-like paleness, instantly ran out of the room. Elinor, who saw as

plainly by this, as if she had seen the direction, that it must come

from Willoughby, felt immediately such a sickness at heart as made her

hardly able to hold up her head, and sat in such a general tremour as

made her fear it impossible to escape Mrs. Jenning's notice. That good

lady, however, saw only that Marianne had received a letter from

Willoughby, which appeared to her a very good joke, and which she

treated accordingly, by hoping, with a laugh, that she would find it to

her liking. Of Elinor's distress, she was too busily employed in

measuring lengths of worsted for her rug, to see any thing at all; and

calmly continuing her talk, as soon as Marianne disappeared, she said,

"Upon my word, I never saw a young woman so desperately in love in my

life! MY girls were nothing to her, and yet they used to be foolish

enough; but as for Miss Marianne, she is quite an altered creature. I

hope, from the bottom of my heart, he won't keep her waiting much

longer, for it is quite grievous to see her look so ill and forlorn.

Pray, when are they to be married?"

Elinor, though never less disposed to speak than at that moment,

obliged herself to answer such an attack as this, and, therefore,

trying to smile, replied, "And have you really, Ma'am, talked yourself

into a persuasion of my sister's being engaged to Mr. Willoughby? I

thought it had been only a joke, but so serious a question seems to

imply more; and I must beg, therefore, that you will not deceive

yourself any longer. I do assure you that nothing would surprise me

more than to hear of their being going to be married."

"For shame, for shame, Miss Dashwood! how can you talk so? Don't we

all know that it must be a match, that they were over head and ears in

love with each other from the first moment they met? Did not I see

them together in Devonshire every day, and all day long; and did not I

know that your sister came to town with me on purpose to buy wedding

clothes? Come, come, this won't do. Because you are so sly about it

yourself, you think nobody else has any senses; but it is no such

thing, I can tell you, for it has been known all over town this ever so

long. I tell every body of it and so does Charlotte."

"Indeed, Ma'am," said Elinor, very seriously, "you are mistaken.

Indeed, you are doing a very unkind thing in spreading the report, and

you will find that you have though you will not believe me now."

Mrs. Jennings laughed again, but Elinor had not spirits to say more,

and eager at all events to know what Willoughby had written, hurried

away to their room, where, on opening the door, she saw Marianne

stretched on the bed, almost choked by grief, one letter in her hand,

and two or three others laying by her. Elinor drew near, but without

saying a word; and seating herself on the bed, took her hand, kissed

her affectionately several times, and then gave way to a burst of

tears, which at first was scarcely less violent than Marianne's. The

latter, though unable to speak, seemed to feel all the tenderness of

this behaviour, and after some time thus spent in joint affliction, she

put all the letters into Elinor's hands; and then covering her face

with her handkerchief, almost screamed with agony. Elinor, who knew

that such grief, shocking as it was to witness it, must have its

course, watched by her till this excess of suffering had somewhat spent

itself, and then turning eagerly to Willoughby's letter, read as

follows:

"Bond Street, January.

"MY DEAR MADAM,

"I have just had the honour of receiving your

letter, for which I beg to return my sincere

acknowledgments. I am much concerned to find there

was anything in my behaviour last night that did

not meet your approbation; and though I am quite at

a loss to discover in what point I could be so

unfortunate as to offend you, I entreat your

forgiveness of what I can assure you to have been

perfectly unintentional. I shall never reflect on

my former acquaintance with your family in Devonshire

without the most grateful pleasure, and flatter

myself it will not be broken by any mistake or

misapprehension of my actions. My esteem for your

whole family is very sincere; but if I have been so

unfortunate as to give rise to a belief of more than

I felt, or meant to express, I shall reproach myself

for not having been more guarded in my professions

of that esteem. That I should ever have meant more

you will allow to be impossible, when you understand

that my affections have been long engaged elsewhere,

and it will not be many weeks, I believe, before

this engagement is fulfilled. It is with great

regret that I obey your commands in returning the

letters with which I have been honoured from you,

and the lock of hair, which you so obligingly bestowed

on me.

"I am, dear Madam,

"Your most obedient

"humble servant,

"JOHN WILLOUGHBY."

With what indignation such a letter as this must be read by Miss

Dashwood, may be imagined. Though aware, before she began it, that it

must bring a confession of his inconstancy, and confirm their

separation for ever, she was not aware that such language could be

suffered to announce it; nor could she have supposed Willoughby capable

of departing so far from the appearance of every honourable and

delicate feeling--so far from the common decorum of a gentleman, as to

send a letter so impudently cruel: a letter which, instead of bringing

with his desire of a release any professions of regret, acknowledged no

breach of faith, denied all peculiar affection whatever--a letter of

which every line was an insult, and which proclaimed its writer to be

deep in hardened villainy.

She paused over it for some time with indignant astonishment; then read

it again and again; but every perusal only served to increase her

abhorrence of the man, and so bitter were her feelings against him,

that she dared not trust herself to speak, lest she might wound

Marianne still deeper by treating their disengagement, not as a loss to

her of any possible good but as an escape from the worst and most

irremediable of all evils, a connection, for life, with an unprincipled

man, as a deliverance the most real, a blessing the most important.

In her earnest meditations on the contents of the letter, on the

depravity of that mind which could dictate it, and probably, on the

very different mind of a very different person, who had no other

connection whatever with the affair than what her heart gave him with

every thing that passed, Elinor forgot the immediate distress of her

sister, forgot that she had three letters on her lap yet unread, and so

entirely forgot how long she had been in the room, that when on hearing

a carriage drive up to the door, she went to the window to see who

could be coming so unreasonably early, she was all astonishment to

perceive Mrs. Jennings's chariot, which she knew had not been ordered

till one. Determined not to quit Marianne, though hopeless of

contributing, at present, to her ease, she hurried away to excuse

herself from attending Mrs. Jennings, on account of her sister being

indisposed. Mrs. Jennings, with a thoroughly good-humoured concern for

its cause, admitted the excuse most readily, and Elinor, after seeing

her safe off, returned to Marianne, whom she found attempting to rise

from the bed, and whom she reached just in time to prevent her from

falling on the floor, faint and giddy from a long want of proper rest

and food; for it was many days since she had any appetite, and many

nights since she had really slept; and now, when her mind was no longer

supported by the fever of suspense, the consequence of all this was

felt in an aching head, a weakened stomach, and a general nervous

faintness. A glass of wine, which Elinor procured for her directly,

made her more comfortable, and she was at last able to express some

sense of her kindness, by saying,

"Poor Elinor! how unhappy I make you!"

"I only wish," replied her sister, "there were any thing I COULD do,

which might be of comfort to you."

This, as every thing else would have been, was too much for Marianne,

who could only exclaim, in the anguish of her heart, "Oh! Elinor, I am

miserable, indeed," before her voice was entirely lost in sobs.

Elinor could no longer witness this torrent of unresisted grief in

silence.

"Exert yourself, dear Marianne," she cried, "if you would not kill

yourself and all who love you. Think of your mother; think of her

misery while YOU suffer: for her sake you must exert yourself."

"I cannot, I cannot," cried Marianne; "leave me, leave me, if I

distress you; leave me, hate me, forget me! but do not torture me so.

Oh! how easy for those, who have no sorrow of their own to talk of

exertion! Happy, happy Elinor, YOU cannot have an idea of what I

suffer."

"Do you call ME happy, Marianne? Ah! if you knew!--And can you believe

me to be so, while I see you so wretched!"

"Forgive me, forgive me," throwing her arms round her sister's neck; "I

know you feel for me; I know what a heart you have; but yet you

are--you must be happy; Edward loves you--what, oh what, can do away

such happiness as that?"

"Many, many circumstances," said Elinor, solemnly.

"No, no, no," cried Marianne wildly, "he loves you, and only you. You

CAN have no grief."

"I can have no pleasure while I see you in this state."

"And you will never see me otherwise. Mine is a misery which nothing

can do away."

"You must not talk so, Marianne. Have you no comforts? no friends? Is

your loss such as leaves no opening for consolation? Much as you

suffer now, think of what you would have suffered if the discovery of

his character had been delayed to a later period--if your engagement

had been carried on for months and months, as it might have been,

before he chose to put an end to it. Every additional day of unhappy

confidence, on your side, would have made the blow more dreadful."

"Engagement!" cried Marianne, "there has been no engagement."

"No engagement!"

"No, he is not so unworthy as you believe him. He has broken no faith

with me."

"But he told you that he loved you."

"Yes--no--never absolutely. It was every day implied, but never

professedly declared. Sometimes I thought it had been--but it never

was."

"Yet you wrote to him?"--

"Yes--could that be wrong after all that had passed?-- But I cannot

talk."

Elinor said no more, and turning again to the three letters which now

raised a much stronger curiosity than before, directly ran over the

contents of all. The first, which was what her sister had sent him on

their arrival in town, was to this effect.

Berkeley Street, January.

"How surprised you will be, Willoughby, on

receiving this; and I think you will feel something

more than surprise, when you know that I am in town.

An opportunity of coming hither, though with Mrs.

Jennings, was a temptation we could not resist.

I wish you may receive this in time to come here

to-night, but I will not depend on it. At any rate

I shall expect you to-morrow. For the present, adieu.

"M.D."

Her second note, which had been written on the morning after the dance

at the Middletons', was in these words:--

"I cannot express my disappointment in having

missed you the day before yesterday, nor my astonishment

at not having received any answer to a note which

I sent you above a week ago. I have been expecting

to hear from you, and still more to see you, every

hour of the day. Pray call again as soon as possible,

and explain the reason of my having expected this

in vain. You had better come earlier another time,

because we are generally out by one. We were last

night at Lady Middleton's, where there was a dance.

I have been told that you were asked to be of the

party. But could it be so? You must be very much

altered indeed since we parted, if that could be

the case, and you not there. But I will not suppose

this possible, and I hope very soon to receive your

personal assurance of its being otherwise.

"M.D."

The contents of her last note to him were these:--

"What am I to imagine, Willoughby, by your

behaviour last night? Again I demand an explanation

of it. I was prepared to meet you with the pleasure

which our separation naturally produced, with the

familiarity which our intimacy at Barton appeared

to me to justify. I was repulsed indeed! I have

passed a wretched night in endeavouring to excuse

a conduct which can scarcely be called less than

insulting; but though I have not yet been able to

form any reasonable apology for your behaviour,

I am perfectly ready to hear your justification of

it. You have perhaps been misinformed, or purposely

deceived, in something concerning me, which may have

lowered me in your opinion. Tell me what it is,

explain the grounds on which you acted, and I shall

be satisfied, in being able to satisfy you. It

would grieve me indeed to be obliged to think ill

of you; but if I am to do it, if I am to learn that

you are not what we have hitherto believed you, that

your regard for us all was insincere, that your

behaviour to me was intended only to deceive, let

it be told as soon as possible. My feelings are at

present in a state of dreadful indecision; I wish

to acquit you, but certainty on either side will be

ease to what I now suffer. If your sentiments are

no longer what they were, you will return my notes,

and the lock of my hair which is in your possession.

"M.D."

That such letters, so full of affection and confidence, could have been

so answered, Elinor, for Willoughby's sake, would have been unwilling

to believe. But her condemnation of him did not blind her to the

impropriety of their having been written at all; and she was silently

grieving over the imprudence which had hazarded such unsolicited proofs

of tenderness, not warranted by anything preceding, and most severely

condemned by the event, when Marianne, perceiving that she had finished

the letters, observed to her that they contained nothing but what any

one would have written in the same situation.

"I felt myself," she added, "to be as solemnly engaged to him, as if

the strictest legal covenant had bound us to each other."

"I can believe it," said Elinor; "but unfortunately he did not feel the

same."

"He DID feel the same, Elinor--for weeks and weeks he felt it. I know

he did. Whatever may have changed him now, (and nothing but the

blackest art employed against me can have done it), I was once as dear

to him as my own soul could wish. This lock of hair, which now he can

so readily give up, was begged of me with the most earnest

supplication. Had you seen his look, his manner, had you heard his

voice at that moment! Have you forgot the last evening of our being

together at Barton? The morning that we parted too! When he told me

that it might be many weeks before we met again--his distress--can I

ever forget his distress?"

For a moment or two she could say no more; but when this emotion had

passed away, she added, in a firmer tone,

"Elinor, I have been cruelly used; but not by Willoughby."

"Dearest Marianne, who but himself? By whom can he have been

instigated?"

"By all the world, rather than by his own heart. I could rather

believe every creature of my acquaintance leagued together to ruin me

in his opinion, than believe his nature capable of such cruelty. This

woman of whom he writes--whoever she be--or any one, in short, but your

own dear self, mama, and Edward, may have been so barbarous to bely me.

Beyond you three, is there a creature in the world whom I would not

rather suspect of evil than Willoughby, whose heart I know so well?"

Elinor would not contend, and only replied, "Whoever may have been so

detestably your enemy, let them be cheated of their malignant triumph,

my dear sister, by seeing how nobly the consciousness of your own

innocence and good intentions supports your spirits. It is a

reasonable and laudable pride which resists such malevolence."

"No, no," cried Marianne, "misery such as mine has no pride. I care

not who knows that I am wretched. The triumph of seeing me so may be

open to all the world. Elinor, Elinor, they who suffer little may be

proud and independent as they like--may resist insult, or return

mortification--but I cannot. I must feel--I must be wretched--and they

are welcome to enjoy the consciousness of it that can."

"But for my mother's sake and mine--"

"I would do more than for my own. But to appear happy when I am so

miserable--Oh! who can require it?"

Again they were both silent. Elinor was employed in walking

thoughtfully from the fire to the window, from the window to the fire,

without knowing that she received warmth from one, or discerning

objects through the other; and Marianne, seated at the foot of the bed,

with her head leaning against one of its posts, again took up

Willoughby's letter, and, after shuddering over every sentence,

exclaimed--

"It is too much! Oh, Willoughby, Willoughby, could this be yours!

Cruel, cruel--nothing can acquit you. Elinor, nothing can. Whatever

he might have heard against me--ought he not to have suspended his

belief? ought he not to have told me of it, to have given me the power

of clearing myself? 'The lock of hair, (repeating it from the letter,)

which you so obligingly bestowed on me'--That is unpardonable.

Willoughby, where was your heart when you wrote those words? Oh,

barbarously insolent!--Elinor, can he be justified?"

"No, Marianne, in no possible way."

"And yet this woman--who knows what her art may have been?--how long it

may have been premeditated, and how deeply contrived by her!--Who is

she?--Who can she be?--Whom did I ever hear him talk of as young and

attractive among his female acquaintance?--Oh! no one, no one--he

talked to me only of myself."

Another pause ensued; Marianne was greatly agitated, and it ended thus.

"Elinor, I must go home. I must go and comfort mama. Can not we be

gone to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, Marianne!"

"Yes, why should I stay here? I came only for Willoughby's sake--and

now who cares for me? Who regards me?"

"It would be impossible to go to-morrow. We owe Mrs. Jennings much more

than civility; and civility of the commonest kind must prevent such a

hasty removal as that."

"Well then, another day or two, perhaps; but I cannot stay here long, I

cannot stay to endure the questions and remarks of all these people.

The Middletons and Palmers--how am I to bear their pity? The pity of

such a woman as Lady Middleton! Oh, what would HE say to that!"

Elinor advised her to lie down again, and for a moment she did so; but

no attitude could give her ease; and in restless pain of mind and body

she moved from one posture to another, till growing more and more

hysterical, her sister could with difficulty keep her on the bed at

all, and for some time was fearful of being constrained to call for

assistance. Some lavender drops, however, which she was at length

persuaded to take, were of use; and from that time till Mrs. Jennings

returned, she continued on the bed quiet and motionless.

CHAPTER 30

Mrs. Jennings came immediately to their room on her return, and without

waiting to have her request of admittance answered, opened the door and

walked in with a look of real concern.

"How do you do my dear?"--said she in a voice of great compassion to

Marianne, who turned away her face without attempting to answer.

"How is she, Miss Dashwood?--Poor thing! she looks very bad.-- No

wonder. Ay, it is but too true. He is to be married very soon--a

good-for-nothing fellow! I have no patience with him. Mrs. Taylor

told me of it half an hour ago, and she was told it by a particular

friend of Miss Grey herself, else I am sure I should not have believed

it; and I was almost ready to sink as it was. Well, said I, all I can

say is, that if this be true, he has used a young lady of my

acquaintance abominably ill, and I wish with all my soul his wife may

plague his heart out. And so I shall always say, my dear, you may

depend on it. I have no notion of men's going on in this way; and if

ever I meet him again, I will give him such a dressing as he has not

had this many a day. But there is one comfort, my dear Miss Marianne;

he is not the only young man in the world worth having; and with your

pretty face you will never want admirers. Well, poor thing! I won't

disturb her any longer, for she had better have her cry out at once and

have done with. The Parrys and Sandersons luckily are coming tonight

you know, and that will amuse her."

She then went away, walking on tiptoe out of the room, as if she

supposed her young friend's affliction could be increased by noise.

Marianne, to the surprise of her sister, determined on dining with

them. Elinor even advised her against it. But "no, she would go down;

she could bear it very well, and the bustle about her would be less."

Elinor, pleased to have her governed for a moment by such a motive,

though believing it hardly possible that she could sit out the dinner,

said no more; and adjusting her dress for her as well as she could,

while Marianne still remained on the bed, was ready to assist her into

the dining room as soon as they were summoned to it.

When there, though looking most wretchedly, she ate more and was calmer

than her sister had expected. Had she tried to speak, or had she been

conscious of half Mrs. Jennings's well-meant but ill-judged attentions

to her, this calmness could not have been maintained; but not a

syllable escaped her lips; and the abstraction of her thoughts

preserved her in ignorance of every thing that was passing before her.

Elinor, who did justice to Mrs. Jennings's kindness, though its

effusions were often distressing, and sometimes almost ridiculous, made

her those acknowledgments, and returned her those civilities, which her

sister could not make or return for herself. Their good friend saw

that Marianne was unhappy, and felt that every thing was due to her

which might make her at all less so. She treated her therefore, with

all the indulgent fondness of a parent towards a favourite child on the

last day of its holidays. Marianne was to have the best place by the

fire, was to be tempted to eat by every delicacy in the house, and to

be amused by the relation of all the news of the day. Had not Elinor,

in the sad countenance of her sister, seen a check to all mirth, she

could have been entertained by Mrs. Jennings's endeavours to cure a

disappointment in love, by a variety of sweetmeats and olives, and a

good fire. As soon, however, as the consciousness of all this was

forced by continual repetition on Marianne, she could stay no longer.

With a hasty exclamation of Misery, and a sign to her sister not to

follow her, she directly got up and hurried out of the room.

"Poor soul!" cried Mrs. Jennings, as soon as she was gone, "how it

grieves me to see her! And I declare if she is not gone away without

finishing her wine! And the dried cherries too! Lord! nothing seems

to do her any good. I am sure if I knew of any thing she would like, I

would send all over the town for it. Well, it is the oddest thing to

me, that a man should use such a pretty girl so ill! But when there is

plenty of money on one side, and next to none on the other, Lord bless

you! they care no more about such things!--"

"The lady then--Miss Grey I think you called her--is very rich?"

"Fifty thousand pounds, my dear. Did you ever see her? a smart,

stylish girl they say, but not handsome. I remember her aunt very

well, Biddy Henshawe; she married a very wealthy man. But the family

are all rich together. Fifty thousand pounds! and by all accounts, it

won't come before it's wanted; for they say he is all to pieces. No

wonder! dashing about with his curricle and hunters! Well, it don't

signify talking; but when a young man, be who he will, comes and makes

love to a pretty girl, and promises marriage, he has no business to fly

off from his word only because he grows poor, and a richer girl is

ready to have him. Why don't he, in such a case, sell his horses, let

his house, turn off his servants, and make a thorough reform at once? I

warrant you, Miss Marianne would have been ready to wait till matters

came round. But that won't do now-a-days; nothing in the way of

pleasure can ever be given up by the young men of this age."

"Do you know what kind of a girl Miss Grey is? Is she said to be

amiable?"

"I never heard any harm of her; indeed I hardly ever heard her

mentioned; except that Mrs. Taylor did say this morning, that one day

Miss Walker hinted to her, that she believed Mr. and Mrs. Ellison would

not be sorry to have Miss Grey married, for she and Mrs. Ellison could

never agree."--

"And who are the Ellisons?"

"Her guardians, my dear. But now she is of age and may choose for

herself; and a pretty choice she has made!--What now," after pausing a

moment--"your poor sister is gone to her own room, I suppose, to moan

by herself. Is there nothing one can get to comfort her? Poor dear,

it seems quite cruel to let her be alone. Well, by-and-by we shall

have a few friends, and that will amuse her a little. What shall we

play at? She hates whist I know; but is there no round game she cares

for?"

"Dear ma'am, this kindness is quite unnecessary. Marianne, I dare say,

will not leave her room again this evening. I shall persuade her if I

can to go early to bed, for I am sure she wants rest."

"Aye, I believe that will be best for her. Let her name her own

supper, and go to bed. Lord! no wonder she has been looking so bad and

so cast down this last week or two, for this matter I suppose has been

hanging over her head as long as that. And so the letter that came

today finished it! Poor soul! I am sure if I had had a notion of it,

I would not have joked her about it for all my money. But then you

know, how should I guess such a thing? I made sure of its being

nothing but a common love letter, and you know young people like to be

laughed at about them. Lord! how concerned Sir John and my daughters

will be when they hear it! If I had my senses about me I might have

called in Conduit Street in my way home, and told them of it. But I

shall see them tomorrow."

"It would be unnecessary I am sure, for you to caution Mrs. Palmer and

Sir John against ever naming Mr. Willoughby, or making the slightest

allusion to what has passed, before my sister. Their own good-nature

must point out to them the real cruelty of appearing to know any thing

about it when she is present; and the less that may ever be said to

myself on the subject, the more my feelings will be spared, as you my

dear madam will easily believe."

"Oh! Lord! yes, that I do indeed. It must be terrible for you to hear

it talked of; and as for your sister, I am sure I would not mention a

word about it to her for the world. You saw I did not all dinner time.

No more would Sir John, nor my daughters, for they are all very

thoughtful and considerate; especially if I give them a hint, as I

certainly will. For my part, I think the less that is said about such

things, the better, the sooner 'tis blown over and forgot. And what

does talking ever do you know?"

"In this affair it can only do harm; more so perhaps than in many cases

of a similar kind, for it has been attended by circumstances which, for

the sake of every one concerned in it, make it unfit to become the

public conversation. I must do THIS justice to Mr. Willoughby--he has

broken no positive engagement with my sister."

"Law, my dear! Don't pretend to defend him. No positive engagement

indeed! after taking her all over Allenham House, and fixing on the

very rooms they were to live in hereafter!"

Elinor, for her sister's sake, could not press the subject farther, and

she hoped it was not required of her for Willoughby's; since, though

Marianne might lose much, he could gain very little by the enforcement

of the real truth. After a short silence on both sides, Mrs. Jennings,

with all her natural hilarity, burst forth again.

"Well, my dear, 'tis a true saying about an ill-wind, for it will be

all the better for Colonel Brandon. He will have her at last; aye,

that he will. Mind me, now, if they an't married by Mid-summer. Lord!

how he'll chuckle over this news! I hope he will come tonight. It

will be all to one a better match for your sister. Two thousand a year

without debt or drawback--except the little love-child, indeed; aye, I

had forgot her; but she may be 'prenticed out at a small cost, and then

what does it signify? Delaford is a nice place, I can tell you;

exactly what I call a nice old fashioned place, full of comforts and

conveniences; quite shut in with great garden walls that are covered

with the best fruit-trees in the country; and such a mulberry tree in

one corner! Lord! how Charlotte and I did stuff the only time we were

there! Then, there is a dove-cote, some delightful stew-ponds, and a

very pretty canal; and every thing, in short, that one could wish for;

and, moreover, it is close to the church, and only a quarter of a mile

from the turnpike-road, so 'tis never dull, for if you only go and sit

up in an old yew arbour behind the house, you may see all the carriages

that pass along. Oh! 'tis a nice place! A butcher hard by in the

village, and the parsonage-house within a stone's throw. To my fancy,

a thousand times prettier than Barton Park, where they are forced to

send three miles for their meat, and have not a neighbour nearer than

your mother. Well, I shall spirit up the Colonel as soon as I can.

One shoulder of mutton, you know, drives another down. If we CAN but

put Willoughby out of her head!"

"Ay, if we can do THAT, Ma'am," said Elinor, "we shall do very well

with or without Colonel Brandon." And then rising, she went away to

join Marianne, whom she found, as she expected, in her own room,

leaning, in silent misery, over the small remains of a fire, which,

till Elinor's entrance, had been her only light.

"You had better leave me," was all the notice that her sister received

from her.

"I will leave you," said Elinor, "if you will go to bed." But this,

from the momentary perverseness of impatient suffering, she at first

refused to do. Her sister's earnest, though gentle persuasion,

however, soon softened her to compliance, and Elinor saw her lay her

aching head on the pillow, and as she hoped, in a way to get some quiet

rest before she left her.

In the drawing-room, whither she then repaired, she was soon joined by

Mrs. Jennings, with a wine-glass, full of something, in her hand.

"My dear," said she, entering, "I have just recollected that I have

some of the finest old Constantia wine in the house that ever was

tasted, so I have brought a glass of it for your sister. My poor

husband! how fond he was of it! Whenever he had a touch of his old

colicky gout, he said it did him more good than any thing else in the

world. Do take it to your sister."

"Dear Ma'am," replied Elinor, smiling at the difference of the

complaints for which it was recommended, "how good you are! But I have

just left Marianne in bed, and, I hope, almost asleep; and as I think

nothing will be of so much service to her as rest, if you will give me

leave, I will drink the wine myself."

Mrs. Jennings, though regretting that she had not been five minutes

earlier, was satisfied with the compromise; and Elinor, as she

swallowed the chief of it, reflected, that though its effects on a

colicky gout were, at present, of little importance to her, its healing

powers, on a disappointed heart might be as reasonably tried on herself

as on her sister.

Colonel Brandon came in while the party were at tea, and by his manner

of looking round the room for Marianne, Elinor immediately fancied that

he neither expected nor wished to see her there, and, in short, that he

was already aware of what occasioned her absence. Mrs. Jennings was

not struck by the same thought; for soon after his entrance, she walked

across the room to the tea-table where Elinor presided, and whispered--

"The Colonel looks as grave as ever you see. He knows nothing of it;

do tell him, my dear."

He shortly afterwards drew a chair close to her's, and, with a look

which perfectly assured her of his good information, inquired after her

sister.

"Marianne is not well," said she. "She has been indisposed all day,

and we have persuaded her to go to bed."

"Perhaps, then," he hesitatingly replied, "what I heard this morning

may be--there may be more truth in it than I could believe possible at

first."

"What did you hear?"

"That a gentleman, whom I had reason to think--in short, that a man,

whom I KNEW to be engaged--but how shall I tell you? If you know it

already, as surely you must, I may be spared."

"You mean," answered Elinor, with forced calmness, "Mr. Willoughby's

marriage with Miss Grey. Yes, we DO know it all. This seems to have

been a day of general elucidation, for this very morning first unfolded

it to us. Mr. Willoughby is unfathomable! Where did you hear it?"

"In a stationer's shop in Pall Mall, where I had business. Two ladies

were waiting for their carriage, and one of them was giving the other

an account of the intended match, in a voice so little attempting

concealment, that it was impossible for me not to hear all. The name

of Willoughby, John Willoughby, frequently repeated, first caught my

attention; and what followed was a positive assertion that every thing

was now finally settled respecting his marriage with Miss Grey--it was

no longer to be a secret--it would take place even within a few weeks,

with many particulars of preparations and other matters. One thing,

especially, I remember, because it served to identify the man still

more:--as soon as the ceremony was over, they were to go to Combe

Magna, his seat in Somersetshire. My astonishment!--but it would be

impossible to describe what I felt. The communicative lady I learnt,

on inquiry, for I stayed in the shop till they were gone, was a Mrs.

Ellison, and that, as I have been since informed, is the name of Miss

Grey's guardian."

"It is. But have you likewise heard that Miss Grey has fifty thousand

pounds? In that, if in any thing, we may find an explanation."

"It may be so; but Willoughby is capable--at least I think"--he stopped

a moment; then added in a voice which seemed to distrust itself, "And

your sister--how did she--"

"Her sufferings have been very severe. I have only to hope that they

may be proportionately short. It has been, it is a most cruel

affliction. Till yesterday, I believe, she never doubted his regard;

and even now, perhaps--but I am almost convinced that he never was

really attached to her. He has been very deceitful! and, in some

points, there seems a hardness of heart about him."

"Ah!" said Colonel Brandon, "there is, indeed! But your sister does

not--I think you said so--she does not consider quite as you do?"

"You know her disposition, and may believe how eagerly she would still

justify him if she could."

He made no answer; and soon afterwards, by the removal of the

tea-things, and the arrangement of the card parties, the subject was

necessarily dropped. Mrs. Jennings, who had watched them with pleasure

while they were talking, and who expected to see the effect of Miss

Dashwood's communication, in such an instantaneous gaiety on Colonel

Brandon's side, as might have become a man in the bloom of youth, of

hope and happiness, saw him, with amazement, remain the whole evening

more serious and thoughtful than usual.

CHAPTER 31

From a night of more sleep than she had expected, Marianne awoke the

next morning to the same consciousness of misery in which she had

closed her eyes.

Elinor encouraged her as much as possible to talk of what she felt; and

before breakfast was ready, they had gone through the subject again and

again; and with the same steady conviction and affectionate counsel on

Elinor's side, the same impetuous feelings and varying opinions on

Marianne's, as before. Sometimes she could believe Willoughby to be as

unfortunate and as innocent as herself, and at others, lost every

consolation in the impossibility of acquitting him. At one moment she

was absolutely indifferent to the observation of all the world, at

another she would seclude herself from it for ever, and at a third

could resist it with energy. In one thing, however, she was uniform,

when it came to the point, in avoiding, where it was possible, the

presence of Mrs. Jennings, and in a determined silence when obliged to

endure it. Her heart was hardened against the belief of Mrs.

Jennings's entering into her sorrows with any compassion.

"No, no, no, it cannot be," she cried; "she cannot feel. Her kindness

is not sympathy; her good-nature is not tenderness. All that she wants

is gossip, and she only likes me now because I supply it."

Elinor had not needed this to be assured of the injustice to which her

sister was often led in her opinion of others, by the irritable

refinement of her own mind, and the too great importance placed by her

on the delicacies of a strong sensibility, and the graces of a polished

manner. Like half the rest of the world, if more than half there be

that are clever and good, Marianne, with excellent abilities and an

excellent disposition, was neither reasonable nor candid. She expected

from other people the same opinions and feelings as her own, and she

judged of their motives by the immediate effect of their actions on

herself. Thus a circumstance occurred, while the sisters were together

in their own room after breakfast, which sunk the heart of Mrs.

Jennings still lower in her estimation; because, through her own

weakness, it chanced to prove a source of fresh pain to herself, though

Mrs. Jennings was governed in it by an impulse of the utmost goodwill.

With a letter in her outstretched hand, and countenance gaily smiling,

from the persuasion of bringing comfort, she entered their room, saying,

"Now, my dear, I bring you something that I am sure will do you good."

Marianne heard enough. In one moment her imagination placed before her

a letter from Willoughby, full of tenderness and contrition,

explanatory of all that had passed, satisfactory, convincing; and

instantly followed by Willoughby himself, rushing eagerly into the room

to inforce, at her feet, by the eloquence of his eyes, the assurances

of his letter. The work of one moment was destroyed by the next. The

hand writing of her mother, never till then unwelcome, was before her;

and, in the acuteness of the disappointment which followed such an

ecstasy of more than hope, she felt as if, till that instant, she had

never suffered.

The cruelty of Mrs. Jennings no language, within her reach in her

moments of happiest eloquence, could have expressed; and now she could

reproach her only by the tears which streamed from her eyes with

passionate violence--a reproach, however, so entirely lost on its

object, that after many expressions of pity, she withdrew, still

referring her to the letter of comfort. But the letter, when she was

calm enough to read it, brought little comfort. Willoughby filled

every page. Her mother, still confident of their engagement, and

relying as warmly as ever on his constancy, had only been roused by

Elinor's application, to intreat from Marianne greater openness towards

them both; and this, with such tenderness towards her, such affection

for Willoughby, and such a conviction of their future happiness in each

other, that she wept with agony through the whole of it.

All her impatience to be at home again now returned; her mother was

dearer to her than ever; dearer through the very excess of her mistaken

confidence in Willoughby, and she was wildly urgent to be gone.

Elinor, unable herself to determine whether it were better for Marianne

to be in London or at Barton, offered no counsel of her own except of

patience till their mother's wishes could be known; and at length she

obtained her sister's consent to wait for that knowledge.

Mrs. Jennings left them earlier than usual; for she could not be easy

till the Middletons and Palmers were able to grieve as much as herself;

and positively refusing Elinor's offered attendance, went out alone for

the rest of the morning. Elinor, with a very heavy heart, aware of the

pain she was going to communicate, and perceiving, by Marianne's

letter, how ill she had succeeded in laying any foundation for it, then

sat down to write her mother an account of what had passed, and entreat

her directions for the future; while Marianne, who came into the

drawing-room on Mrs. Jennings's going away, remained fixed at the table

where Elinor wrote, watching the advancement of her pen, grieving over

her for the hardship of such a task, and grieving still more fondly

over its effect on her mother.

In this manner they had continued about a quarter of an hour, when

Marianne, whose nerves could not then bear any sudden noise, was

startled by a rap at the door.

"Who can this be?" cried Elinor. "So early too! I thought we HAD been

safe."

Marianne moved to the window--

"It is Colonel Brandon!" said she, with vexation. "We are never safe

from HIM."

"He will not come in, as Mrs. Jennings is from home."

"I will not trust to THAT," retreating to her own room. "A man who has

nothing to do with his own time has no conscience in his intrusion on

that of others."

The event proved her conjecture right, though it was founded on

injustice and error; for Colonel Brandon DID come in; and Elinor, who

was convinced that solicitude for Marianne brought him thither, and who

saw THAT solicitude in his disturbed and melancholy look, and in his

anxious though brief inquiry after her, could not forgive her sister

for esteeming him so lightly.

"I met Mrs. Jennings in Bond Street," said he, after the first

salutation, "and she encouraged me to come on; and I was the more

easily encouraged, because I thought it probable that I might find you

alone, which I was very desirous of doing. My object--my wish--my sole

wish in desiring it--I hope, I believe it is--is to be a means of

giving comfort;--no, I must not say comfort--not present comfort--but

conviction, lasting conviction to your sister's mind. My regard for

her, for yourself, for your mother--will you allow me to prove it, by

relating some circumstances which nothing but a VERY sincere

regard--nothing but an earnest desire of being useful--I think I am

justified--though where so many hours have been spent in convincing

myself that I am right, is there not some reason to fear I may be

wrong?" He stopped.

"I understand you," said Elinor. "You have something to tell me of Mr.

Willoughby, that will open his character farther. Your telling it will

be the greatest act of friendship that can be shewn Marianne. MY

gratitude will be insured immediately by any information tending to

that end, and HERS must be gained by it in time. Pray, pray let me

hear it."

"You shall; and, to be brief, when I quitted Barton last October,--but

this will give you no idea--I must go farther back. You will find me a

very awkward narrator, Miss Dashwood; I hardly know where to begin. A

short account of myself, I believe, will be necessary, and it SHALL be

a short one. On such a subject," sighing heavily, "can I have little

temptation to be diffuse."

He stopt a moment for recollection, and then, with another sigh, went

on.

"You have probably entirely forgotten a conversation--(it is not to be

supposed that it could make any impression on you)--a conversation

between us one evening at Barton Park--it was the evening of a

dance--in which I alluded to a lady I had once known, as resembling, in

some measure, your sister Marianne."

"Indeed," answered Elinor, "I have NOT forgotten it." He looked pleased

by this remembrance, and added,

"If I am not deceived by the uncertainty, the partiality of tender

recollection, there is a very strong resemblance between them, as well

in mind as person. The same warmth of heart, the same eagerness of

fancy and spirits. This lady was one of my nearest relations, an

orphan from her infancy, and under the guardianship of my father. Our

ages were nearly the same, and from our earliest years we were

playfellows and friends. I cannot remember the time when I did not

love Eliza; and my affection for her, as we grew up, was such, as

perhaps, judging from my present forlorn and cheerless gravity, you

might think me incapable of having ever felt. Her's, for me, was, I

believe, fervent as the attachment of your sister to Mr. Willoughby and

it was, though from a different cause, no less unfortunate. At

seventeen she was lost to me for ever. She was married--married

against her inclination to my brother. Her fortune was large, and our

family estate much encumbered. And this, I fear, is all that can be

said for the conduct of one, who was at once her uncle and guardian.

My brother did not deserve her; he did not even love her. I had hoped

that her regard for me would support her under any difficulty, and for

some time it did; but at last the misery of her situation, for she

experienced great unkindness, overcame all her resolution, and though

she had promised me that nothing--but how blindly I relate! I have

never told you how this was brought on. We were within a few hours of

eloping together for Scotland. The treachery, or the folly, of my

cousin's maid betrayed us. I was banished to the house of a relation

far distant, and she was allowed no liberty, no society, no amusement,

till my father's point was gained. I had depended on her fortitude too

far, and the blow was a severe one--but had her marriage been happy, so

young as I then was, a few months must have reconciled me to it, or at

least I should not have now to lament it. This however was not the

case. My brother had no regard for her; his pleasures were not what

they ought to have been, and from the first he treated her unkindly.

The consequence of this, upon a mind so young, so lively, so

inexperienced as Mrs. Brandon's, was but too natural. She resigned

herself at first to all the misery of her situation; and happy had it

been if she had not lived to overcome those regrets which the

remembrance of me occasioned. But can we wonder that, with such a

husband to provoke inconstancy, and without a friend to advise or

restrain her (for my father lived only a few months after their

marriage, and I was with my regiment in the East Indies) she should

fall? Had I remained in England, perhaps--but I meant to promote the

happiness of both by removing from her for years, and for that purpose

had procured my exchange. The shock which her marriage had given me,"

he continued, in a voice of great agitation, "was of trifling

weight--was nothing to what I felt when I heard, about two years

afterwards, of her divorce. It was THAT which threw this gloom,--even

now the recollection of what I suffered--"

He could say no more, and rising hastily walked for a few minutes about

the room. Elinor, affected by his relation, and still more by his

distress, could not speak. He saw her concern, and coming to her, took

her hand, pressed it, and kissed it with grateful respect. A few

minutes more of silent exertion enabled him to proceed with composure.

"It was nearly three years after this unhappy period before I returned

to England. My first care, when I DID arrive, was of course to seek

for her; but the search was as fruitless as it was melancholy. I could

not trace her beyond her first seducer, and there was every reason to

fear that she had removed from him only to sink deeper in a life of

sin. Her legal allowance was not adequate to her fortune, nor

sufficient for her comfortable maintenance, and I learnt from my

brother that the power of receiving it had been made over some months

before to another person. He imagined, and calmly could he imagine it,

that her extravagance, and consequent distress, had obliged her to

dispose of it for some immediate relief. At last, however, and after I

had been six months in England, I DID find her. Regard for a former

servant of my own, who had since fallen into misfortune, carried me to

visit him in a spunging-house, where he was confined for debt; and

there, the same house, under a similar confinement, was my unfortunate

sister. So altered--so faded--worn down by acute suffering of every

kind! hardly could I believe the melancholy and sickly figure before

me, to be the remains of the lovely, blooming, healthful girl, on whom

I had once doted. What I endured in so beholding her--but I have no

right to wound your feelings by attempting to describe it--I have

pained you too much already. That she was, to all appearance, in the

last stage of a consumption, was--yes, in such a situation it was my

greatest comfort. Life could do nothing for her, beyond giving time

for a better preparation for death; and that was given. I saw her

placed in comfortable lodgings, and under proper attendants; I visited

her every day during the rest of her short life: I was with her in her

last moments."

Again he stopped to recover himself; and Elinor spoke her feelings in

an exclamation of tender concern, at the fate of his unfortunate friend.

"Your sister, I hope, cannot be offended," said he, "by the resemblance

I have fancied between her and my poor disgraced relation. Their

fates, their fortunes, cannot be the same; and had the natural sweet

disposition of the one been guarded by a firmer mind, or a happier

marriage, she might have been all that you will live to see the other

be. But to what does all this lead? I seem to have been distressing

you for nothing. Ah! Miss Dashwood--a subject such as this--untouched

for fourteen years--it is dangerous to handle it at all! I WILL be

more collected--more concise. She left to my care her only child, a

little girl, the offspring of her first guilty connection, who was then

about three years old. She loved the child, and had always kept it

with her. It was a valued, a precious trust to me; and gladly would I

have discharged it in the strictest sense, by watching over her

education myself, had the nature of our situations allowed it; but I

had no family, no home; and my little Eliza was therefore placed at

school. I saw her there whenever I could, and after the death of my

brother, (which happened about five years ago, and which left to me the

possession of the family property,) she visited me at Delaford. I

called her a distant relation; but I am well aware that I have in

general been suspected of a much nearer connection with her. It is now

three years ago (she had just reached her fourteenth year,) that I

removed her from school, to place her under the care of a very

respectable woman, residing in Dorsetshire, who had the charge of four

or five other girls of about the same time of life; and for two years I

had every reason to be pleased with her situation. But last February,

almost a twelvemonth back, she suddenly disappeared. I had allowed

her, (imprudently, as it has since turned out,) at her earnest desire,

to go to Bath with one of her young friends, who was attending her

father there for his health. I knew him to be a very good sort of man,

and I thought well of his daughter--better than she deserved, for, with

a most obstinate and ill-judged secrecy, she would tell nothing, would

give no clue, though she certainly knew all. He, her father, a

well-meaning, but not a quick-sighted man, could really, I believe,

give no information; for he had been generally confined to the house,

while the girls were ranging over the town and making what acquaintance

they chose; and he tried to convince me, as thoroughly as he was

convinced himself, of his daughter's being entirely unconcerned in the

business. In short, I could learn nothing but that she was gone; all

the rest, for eight long months, was left to conjecture. What I

thought, what I feared, may be imagined; and what I suffered too."

"Good heavens!" cried Elinor, "could it be--could Willoughby!"--

"The first news that reached me of her," he continued, "came in a

letter from herself, last October. It was forwarded to me from

Delaford, and I received it on the very morning of our intended party

to Whitwell; and this was the reason of my leaving Barton so suddenly,

which I am sure must at the time have appeared strange to every body,

and which I believe gave offence to some. Little did Mr. Willoughby

imagine, I suppose, when his looks censured me for incivility in

breaking up the party, that I was called away to the relief of one whom

he had made poor and miserable; but HAD he known it, what would it have

availed? Would he have been less gay or less happy in the smiles of

your sister? No, he had already done that, which no man who CAN feel

for another would do. He had left the girl whose youth and innocence

he had seduced, in a situation of the utmost distress, with no

creditable home, no help, no friends, ignorant of his address! He had

left her, promising to return; he neither returned, nor wrote, nor

relieved her."

"This is beyond every thing!" exclaimed Elinor.

"His character is now before you; expensive, dissipated, and worse than

both. Knowing all this, as I have now known it many weeks, guess what

I must have felt on seeing your sister as fond of him as ever, and on

being assured that she was to marry him: guess what I must have felt

for all your sakes. When I came to you last week and found you alone,

I came determined to know the truth; though irresolute what to do when

it WAS known. My behaviour must have seemed strange to you then; but

now you will comprehend it. To suffer you all to be so deceived; to

see your sister--but what could I do? I had no hope of interfering

with success; and sometimes I thought your sister's influence might yet

reclaim him. But now, after such dishonorable usage, who can tell what

were his designs on her. Whatever they may have been, however, she may

now, and hereafter doubtless WILL turn with gratitude towards her own

condition, when she compares it with that of my poor Eliza, when she

considers the wretched and hopeless situation of this poor girl, and

pictures her to herself, with an affection for him so strong, still as

strong as her own, and with a mind tormented by self-reproach, which

must attend her through life. Surely this comparison must have its use

with her. She will feel her own sufferings to be nothing. They

proceed from no misconduct, and can bring no disgrace. On the

contrary, every friend must be made still more her friend by them.

Concern for her unhappiness, and respect for her fortitude under it,

must strengthen every attachment. Use your own discretion, however, in

communicating to her what I have told you. You must know best what

will be its effect; but had I not seriously, and from my heart believed

it might be of service, might lessen her regrets, I would not have

suffered myself to trouble you with this account of my family

afflictions, with a recital which may seem to have been intended to

raise myself at the expense of others."

Elinor's thanks followed this speech with grateful earnestness;

attended too with the assurance of her expecting material advantage to

Marianne, from the communication of what had passed.

"I have been more pained," said she, "by her endeavors to acquit him

than by all the rest; for it irritates her mind more than the most

perfect conviction of his unworthiness can do. Now, though at first

she will suffer much, I am sure she will soon become easier. Have

you," she continued, after a short silence, "ever seen Mr. Willoughby

since you left him at Barton?"

"Yes," he replied gravely, "once I have. One meeting was unavoidable."

Elinor, startled by his manner, looked at him anxiously, saying,

"What? have you met him to--"

"I could meet him no other way. Eliza had confessed to me, though most

reluctantly, the name of her lover; and when he returned to town, which

was within a fortnight after myself, we met by appointment, he to

defend, I to punish his conduct. We returned unwounded, and the

meeting, therefore, never got abroad."

Elinor sighed over the fancied necessity of this; but to a man and a

soldier she presumed not to censure it.

"Such," said Colonel Brandon, after a pause, "has been the unhappy

resemblance between the fate of mother and daughter! and so imperfectly

have I discharged my trust!"

"Is she still in town?"

"No; as soon as she recovered from her lying-in, for I found her near

her delivery, I removed her and her child into the country, and there

she remains."

Recollecting, soon afterwards, that he was probably dividing Elinor

from her sister, he put an end to his visit, receiving from her again

the same grateful acknowledgments, and leaving her full of compassion

and esteem for him.

CHAPTER 32

When the particulars of this conversation were repeated by Miss

Dashwood to her sister, as they very soon were, the effect on her was

not entirely such as the former had hoped to see. Not that Marianne

appeared to distrust the truth of any part of it, for she listened to

it all with the most steady and submissive attention, made neither

objection nor remark, attempted no vindication of Willoughby, and

seemed to shew by her tears that she felt it to be impossible. But

though this behaviour assured Elinor that the conviction of this guilt

WAS carried home to her mind, though she saw with satisfaction the

effect of it, in her no longer avoiding Colonel Brandon when he called,

in her speaking to him, even voluntarily speaking, with a kind of

compassionate respect, and though she saw her spirits less violently

irritated than before, she did not see her less wretched. Her mind did

become settled, but it was settled in a gloomy dejection. She felt the

loss of Willoughby's character yet more heavily than she had felt the

loss of his heart; his seduction and desertion of Miss Williams, the

misery of that poor girl, and the doubt of what his designs might ONCE

have been on herself, preyed altogether so much on her spirits, that

she could not bring herself to speak of what she felt even to Elinor;

and, brooding over her sorrows in silence, gave more pain to her sister

than could have been communicated by the most open and most frequent

confession of them.

To give the feelings or the language of Mrs. Dashwood on receiving and

answering Elinor's letter would be only to give a repetition of what

her daughters had already felt and said; of a disappointment hardly

less painful than Marianne's, and an indignation even greater than

Elinor's. Long letters from her, quickly succeeding each other,

arrived to tell all that she suffered and thought; to express her

anxious solicitude for Marianne, and entreat she would bear up with

fortitude under this misfortune. Bad indeed must the nature of

Marianne's affliction be, when her mother could talk of fortitude!

mortifying and humiliating must be the origin of those regrets, which

SHE could wish her not to indulge!

Against the interest of her own individual comfort, Mrs. Dashwood had

determined that it would be better for Marianne to be any where, at

that time, than at Barton, where every thing within her view would be

bringing back the past in the strongest and most afflicting manner, by

constantly placing Willoughby before her, such as she had always seen

him there. She recommended it to her daughters, therefore, by all

means not to shorten their visit to Mrs. Jennings; the length of which,

though never exactly fixed, had been expected by all to comprise at

least five or six weeks. A variety of occupations, of objects, and of

company, which could not be procured at Barton, would be inevitable

there, and might yet, she hoped, cheat Marianne, at times, into some

interest beyond herself, and even into some amusement, much as the

ideas of both might now be spurned by her.

From all danger of seeing Willoughby again, her mother considered her

to be at least equally safe in town as in the country, since his

acquaintance must now be dropped by all who called themselves her

friends. Design could never bring them in each other's way: negligence

could never leave them exposed to a surprise; and chance had less in

its favour in the crowd of London than even in the retirement of

Barton, where it might force him before her while paying that visit at

Allenham on his marriage, which Mrs. Dashwood, from foreseeing at first

as a probable event, had brought herself to expect as a certain one.

She had yet another reason for wishing her children to remain where

they were; a letter from her son-in-law had told her that he and his

wife were to be in town before the middle of February, and she judged

it right that they should sometimes see their brother.

Marianne had promised to be guided by her mother's opinion, and she

submitted to it therefore without opposition, though it proved

perfectly different from what she wished and expected, though she felt

it to be entirely wrong, formed on mistaken grounds, and that by

requiring her longer continuance in London it deprived her of the only

possible alleviation of her wretchedness, the personal sympathy of her

mother, and doomed her to such society and such scenes as must prevent

her ever knowing a moment's rest.

But it was a matter of great consolation to her, that what brought evil

to herself would bring good to her sister; and Elinor, on the other

hand, suspecting that it would not be in her power to avoid Edward

entirely, comforted herself by thinking, that though their longer stay

would therefore militate against her own happiness, it would be better

for Marianne than an immediate return into Devonshire.

Her carefulness in guarding her sister from ever hearing Willoughby's

name mentioned, was not thrown away. Marianne, though without knowing

it herself, reaped all its advantage; for neither Mrs. Jennings, nor

Sir John, nor even Mrs. Palmer herself, ever spoke of him before her.

Elinor wished that the same forbearance could have extended towards

herself, but that was impossible, and she was obliged to listen day

after day to the indignation of them all.

Sir John, could not have thought it possible. "A man of whom he had

always had such reason to think well! Such a good-natured fellow! He

did not believe there was a bolder rider in England! It was an

unaccountable business. He wished him at the devil with all his heart.

He would not speak another word to him, meet him where he might, for

all the world! No, not if it were to be by the side of Barton covert,

and they were kept watching for two hours together. Such a scoundrel

of a fellow! such a deceitful dog! It was only the last time they met

that he had offered him one of Folly's puppies! and this was the end of

it!"

Mrs. Palmer, in her way, was equally angry. "She was determined to

drop his acquaintance immediately, and she was very thankful that she

had never been acquainted with him at all. She wished with all her

heart Combe Magna was not so near Cleveland; but it did not signify,

for it was a great deal too far off to visit; she hated him so much

that she was resolved never to mention his name again, and she should

tell everybody she saw, how good-for-nothing he was."

The rest of Mrs. Palmer's sympathy was shewn in procuring all the

particulars in her power of the approaching marriage, and communicating

them to Elinor. She could soon tell at what coachmaker's the new

carriage was building, by what painter Mr. Willoughby's portrait was

drawn, and at what warehouse Miss Grey's clothes might be seen.

The calm and polite unconcern of Lady Middleton on the occasion was a

happy relief to Elinor's spirits, oppressed as they often were by the

clamorous kindness of the others. It was a great comfort to her to be

sure of exciting no interest in ONE person at least among their circle

of friends: a great comfort to know that there was ONE who would meet

her without feeling any curiosity after particulars, or any anxiety for

her sister's health.

Every qualification is raised at times, by the circumstances of the

moment, to more than its real value; and she was sometimes worried down

by officious condolence to rate good-breeding as more indispensable to

comfort than good-nature.

Lady Middleton expressed her sense of the affair about once every day,

or twice, if the subject occurred very often, by saying, "It is very

shocking, indeed!" and by the means of this continual though gentle

vent, was able not only to see the Miss Dashwoods from the first

without the smallest emotion, but very soon to see them without

recollecting a word of the matter; and having thus supported the

dignity of her own sex, and spoken her decided censure of what was

wrong in the other, she thought herself at liberty to attend to the

interest of her own assemblies, and therefore determined (though rather

against the opinion of Sir John) that as Mrs. Willoughby would at once

be a woman of elegance and fortune, to leave her card with her as soon

as she married.

Colonel Brandon's delicate, unobtrusive enquiries were never unwelcome

to Miss Dashwood. He had abundantly earned the privilege of intimate

discussion of her sister's disappointment, by the friendly zeal with

which he had endeavoured to soften it, and they always conversed with

confidence. His chief reward for the painful exertion of disclosing

past sorrows and present humiliations, was given in the pitying eye

with which Marianne sometimes observed him, and the gentleness of her

voice whenever (though it did not often happen) she was obliged, or

could oblige herself to speak to him. THESE assured him that his

exertion had produced an increase of good-will towards himself, and

THESE gave Elinor hopes of its being farther augmented hereafter; but

Mrs. Jennings, who knew nothing of all this, who knew only that the

Colonel continued as grave as ever, and that she could neither prevail

on him to make the offer himself, nor commission her to make it for

him, began, at the end of two days, to think that, instead of

Midsummer, they would not be married till Michaelmas, and by the end of

a week that it would not be a match at all. The good understanding

between the Colonel and Miss Dashwood seemed rather to declare that the

honours of the mulberry-tree, the canal, and the yew arbour, would all

be made over to HER; and Mrs. Jennings had, for some time ceased to

think at all of Mrs. Ferrars.

Early in February, within a fortnight from the receipt of Willoughby's

letter, Elinor had the painful office of informing her sister that he

was married. She had taken care to have the intelligence conveyed to

herself, as soon as it was known that the ceremony was over, as she was

desirous that Marianne should not receive the first notice of it from

the public papers, which she saw her eagerly examining every morning.

She received the news with resolute composure; made no observation on

it, and at first shed no tears; but after a short time they would burst

out, and for the rest of the day, she was in a state hardly less

pitiable than when she first learnt to expect the event.

The Willoughbys left town as soon as they were married; and Elinor now

hoped, as there could be no danger of her seeing either of them, to

prevail on her sister, who had never yet left the house since the blow

first fell, to go out again by degrees as she had done before.

About this time the two Miss Steeles, lately arrived at their cousin's

house in Bartlett's Buildings, Holburn, presented themselves again

before their more grand relations in Conduit and Berkeley Streets; and

were welcomed by them all with great cordiality.

Elinor only was sorry to see them. Their presence always gave her

pain, and she hardly knew how to make a very gracious return to the

overpowering delight of Lucy in finding her STILL in town.

"I should have been quite disappointed if I had not found you here

STILL," said she repeatedly, with a strong emphasis on the word. "But

I always thought I SHOULD. I was almost sure you would not leave

London yet awhile; though you TOLD me, you know, at Barton, that you

should not stay above a MONTH. But I thought, at the time, that you

would most likely change your mind when it came to the point. It would

have been such a great pity to have went away before your brother and

sister came. And now to be sure you will be in no hurry to be gone. I

am amazingly glad you did not keep to YOUR WORD."

Elinor perfectly understood her, and was forced to use all her

self-command to make it appear that she did NOT.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Jennings, "and how did you travel?"

"Not in the stage, I assure you," replied Miss Steele, with quick

exultation; "we came post all the way, and had a very smart beau to

attend us. Dr. Davies was coming to town, and so we thought we'd join

him in a post-chaise; and he behaved very genteelly, and paid ten or

twelve shillings more than we did."

"Oh, oh!" cried Mrs. Jennings; "very pretty, indeed! and the Doctor is

a single man, I warrant you."

"There now," said Miss Steele, affectedly simpering, "everybody laughs

at me so about the Doctor, and I cannot think why. My cousins say they

are sure I have made a conquest; but for my part I declare I never

think about him from one hour's end to another. 'Lord! here comes your

beau, Nancy,' my cousin said t'other day, when she saw him crossing the

street to the house. My beau, indeed! said I--I cannot think who you

mean. The Doctor is no beau of mine."

"Aye, aye, that is very pretty talking--but it won't do--the Doctor is

the man, I see."

"No, indeed!" replied her cousin, with affected earnestness, "and I beg

you will contradict it, if you ever hear it talked of."

Mrs. Jennings directly gave her the gratifying assurance that she

certainly would NOT, and Miss Steele was made completely happy.

"I suppose you will go and stay with your brother and sister, Miss

Dashwood, when they come to town," said Lucy, returning, after a

cessation of hostile hints, to the charge.

"No, I do not think we shall."

"Oh, yes, I dare say you will."

Elinor would not humour her by farther opposition.

"What a charming thing it is that Mrs. Dashwood can spare you both for

so long a time together!"

"Long a time, indeed!" interposed Mrs. Jennings. "Why, their visit is

but just begun!"

Lucy was silenced.

"I am sorry we cannot see your sister, Miss Dashwood," said Miss

Steele. "I am sorry she is not well--" for Marianne had left the room

on their arrival.

"You are very good. My sister will be equally sorry to miss the

pleasure of seeing you; but she has been very much plagued lately with

nervous head-aches, which make her unfit for company or conversation."

"Oh, dear, that is a great pity! but such old friends as Lucy and

me!--I think she might see US; and I am sure we would not speak a word."

Elinor, with great civility, declined the proposal. Her sister was

perhaps laid down upon the bed, or in her dressing gown, and therefore

not able to come to them.

"Oh, if that's all," cried Miss Steele, "we can just as well go and see

HER."

Elinor began to find this impertinence too much for her temper; but she

was saved the trouble of checking it, by Lucy's sharp reprimand, which

now, as on many occasions, though it did not give much sweetness to the

manners of one sister, was of advantage in governing those of the other.

CHAPTER 33

After some opposition, Marianne yielded to her sister's entreaties, and

consented to go out with her and Mrs. Jennings one morning for half an

hour. She expressly conditioned, however, for paying no visits, and

would do no more than accompany them to Gray's in Sackville Street,

where Elinor was carrying on a negotiation for the exchange of a few

old-fashioned jewels of her mother.

When they stopped at the door, Mrs. Jennings recollected that there was

a lady at the other end of the street on whom she ought to call; and as

she had no business at Gray's, it was resolved, that while her young

friends transacted their's, she should pay her visit and return for

them.

On ascending the stairs, the Miss Dashwoods found so many people before

them in the room, that there was not a person at liberty to tend to

their orders; and they were obliged to wait. All that could be done

was, to sit down at that end of the counter which seemed to promise the

quickest succession; one gentleman only was standing there, and it is

probable that Elinor was not without hope of exciting his politeness to

a quicker despatch. But the correctness of his eye, and the delicacy

of his taste, proved to be beyond his politeness. He was giving orders

for a toothpick-case for himself, and till its size, shape, and

ornaments were determined, all of which, after examining and debating

for a quarter of an hour over every toothpick-case in the shop, were

finally arranged by his own inventive fancy, he had no leisure to

bestow any other attention on the two ladies, than what was comprised

in three or four very broad stares; a kind of notice which served to

imprint on Elinor the remembrance of a person and face, of strong,

natural, sterling insignificance, though adorned in the first style of

fashion.

Marianne was spared from the troublesome feelings of contempt and

resentment, on this impertinent examination of their features, and on

the puppyism of his manner in deciding on all the different horrors of

the different toothpick-cases presented to his inspection, by remaining

unconscious of it all; for she was as well able to collect her thoughts

within herself, and be as ignorant of what was passing around her, in

Mr. Gray's shop, as in her own bedroom.

At last the affair was decided. The ivory, the gold, and the pearls,

all received their appointment, and the gentleman having named the last

day on which his existence could be continued without the possession of

the toothpick-case, drew on his gloves with leisurely care, and

bestowing another glance on the Miss Dashwoods, but such a one as

seemed rather to demand than express admiration, walked off with a

happy air of real conceit and affected indifference.

Elinor lost no time in bringing her business forward, was on the point

of concluding it, when another gentleman presented himself at her side.

She turned her eyes towards his face, and found him with some surprise

to be her brother.

Their affection and pleasure in meeting was just enough to make a very

creditable appearance in Mr. Gray's shop. John Dashwood was really far

from being sorry to see his sisters again; it rather gave them

satisfaction; and his inquiries after their mother were respectful and

attentive.

Elinor found that he and Fanny had been in town two days.

"I wished very much to call upon you yesterday," said he, "but it was

impossible, for we were obliged to take Harry to see the wild beasts at

Exeter Exchange; and we spent the rest of the day with Mrs. Ferrars.

Harry was vastly pleased. THIS morning I had fully intended to call on

you, if I could possibly find a spare half hour, but one has always so

much to do on first coming to town. I am come here to bespeak Fanny a

seal. But tomorrow I think I shall certainly be able to call in

Berkeley Street, and be introduced to your friend Mrs. Jennings. I

understand she is a woman of very good fortune. And the Middletons

too, you must introduce me to THEM. As my mother-in-law's relations, I

shall be happy to show them every respect. They are excellent

neighbours to you in the country, I understand."

"Excellent indeed. Their attention to our comfort, their friendliness

in every particular, is more than I can express."

"I am extremely glad to hear it, upon my word; extremely glad indeed.

But so it ought to be; they are people of large fortune, they are

related to you, and every civility and accommodation that can serve to

make your situation pleasant might be reasonably expected. And so you

are most comfortably settled in your little cottage and want for

nothing! Edward brought us a most charming account of the place: the

most complete thing of its kind, he said, that ever was, and you all

seemed to enjoy it beyond any thing. It was a great satisfaction to us

to hear it, I assure you."

Elinor did feel a little ashamed of her brother; and was not sorry to

be spared the necessity of answering him, by the arrival of Mrs.

Jennings's servant, who came to tell her that his mistress waited for

them at the door.

Mr. Dashwood attended them down stairs, was introduced to Mrs. Jennings

at the door of her carriage, and repeating his hope of being able to

call on them the next day, took leave.

His visit was duly paid. He came with a pretence at an apology from

their sister-in-law, for not coming too; "but she was so much engaged

with her mother, that really she had no leisure for going any where."

Mrs. Jennings, however, assured him directly, that she should not stand

upon ceremony, for they were all cousins, or something like it, and she

should certainly wait on Mrs. John Dashwood very soon, and bring her

sisters to see her. His manners to THEM, though calm, were perfectly

kind; to Mrs. Jennings, most attentively civil; and on Colonel

Brandon's coming in soon after himself, he eyed him with a curiosity

which seemed to say, that he only wanted to know him to be rich, to be

equally civil to HIM.

After staying with them half an hour, he asked Elinor to walk with him

to Conduit Street, and introduce him to Sir John and Lady Middleton.

The weather was remarkably fine, and she readily consented. As soon as

they were out of the house, his enquiries began.

"Who is Colonel Brandon? Is he a man of fortune?"

"Yes; he has very good property in Dorsetshire."

"I am glad of it. He seems a most gentlemanlike man; and I think,

Elinor, I may congratulate you on the prospect of a very respectable

establishment in life."

"Me, brother! what do you mean?"

"He likes you. I observed him narrowly, and am convinced of it. What

is the amount of his fortune?"

"I believe about two thousand a year."

"Two thousand a-year;" and then working himself up to a pitch of

enthusiastic generosity, he added, "Elinor, I wish with all my heart it

were TWICE as much, for your sake."

"Indeed I believe you," replied Elinor; "but I am very sure that

Colonel Brandon has not the smallest wish of marrying ME."

"You are mistaken, Elinor; you are very much mistaken. A very little

trouble on your side secures him. Perhaps just at present he may be

undecided; the smallness of your fortune may make him hang back; his

friends may all advise him against it. But some of those little

attentions and encouragements which ladies can so easily give will fix

him, in spite of himself. And there can be no reason why you should

not try for him. It is not to be supposed that any prior attachment on

your side--in short, you know as to an attachment of that kind, it is

quite out of the question, the objections are insurmountable--you have

too much sense not to see all that. Colonel Brandon must be the man;

and no civility shall be wanting on my part to make him pleased with

you and your family. It is a match that must give universal

satisfaction. In short, it is a kind of thing that"--lowering his

voice to an important whisper--"will be exceedingly welcome to ALL

PARTIES." Recollecting himself, however, he added, "That is, I mean to

say--your friends are all truly anxious to see you well settled; Fanny

particularly, for she has your interest very much at heart, I assure

you. And her mother too, Mrs. Ferrars, a very good-natured woman, I am

sure it would give her great pleasure; she said as much the other day."

Elinor would not vouchsafe any answer.

"It would be something remarkable, now," he continued, "something

droll, if Fanny should have a brother and I a sister settling at the

same time. And yet it is not very unlikely."

"Is Mr. Edward Ferrars," said Elinor, with resolution, "going to be

married?"

"It is not actually settled, but there is such a thing in agitation.

He has a most excellent mother. Mrs. Ferrars, with the utmost

liberality, will come forward, and settle on him a thousand a year, if

the match takes place. The lady is the Hon. Miss Morton, only daughter

of the late Lord Morton, with thirty thousand pounds. A very desirable

connection on both sides, and I have not a doubt of its taking place in

time. A thousand a-year is a great deal for a mother to give away, to

make over for ever; but Mrs. Ferrars has a noble spirit. To give you

another instance of her liberality:--The other day, as soon as we came

to town, aware that money could not be very plenty with us just now,

she put bank-notes into Fanny's hands to the amount of two hundred

pounds. And extremely acceptable it is, for we must live at a great

expense while we are here."

He paused for her assent and compassion; and she forced herself to say,

"Your expenses both in town and country must certainly be considerable;

but your income is a large one."

"Not so large, I dare say, as many people suppose. I do not mean to

complain, however; it is undoubtedly a comfortable one, and I hope will

in time be better. The enclosure of Norland Common, now carrying on,

is a most serious drain. And then I have made a little purchase within

this half year; East Kingham Farm, you must remember the place, where

old Gibson used to live. The land was so very desirable for me in

every respect, so immediately adjoining my own property, that I felt it

my duty to buy it. I could not have answered it to my conscience to

let it fall into any other hands. A man must pay for his convenience;

and it HAS cost me a vast deal of money."

"More than you think it really and intrinsically worth."

"Why, I hope not that. I might have sold it again, the next day, for

more than I gave: but, with regard to the purchase-money, I might have

been very unfortunate indeed; for the stocks were at that time so low,

that if I had not happened to have the necessary sum in my banker's

hands, I must have sold out to very great loss."

Elinor could only smile.

"Other great and inevitable expenses too we have had on first coming to

Norland. Our respected father, as you well know, bequeathed all the

Stanhill effects that remained at Norland (and very valuable they were)

to your mother. Far be it from me to repine at his doing so; he had an

undoubted right to dispose of his own property as he chose, but, in

consequence of it, we have been obliged to make large purchases of

linen, china, &c. to supply the place of what was taken away. You may

guess, after all these expenses, how very far we must be from being

rich, and how acceptable Mrs. Ferrars's kindness is."

"Certainly," said Elinor; "and assisted by her liberality, I hope you

may yet live to be in easy circumstances."

"Another year or two may do much towards it," he gravely replied; "but

however there is still a great deal to be done. There is not a stone

laid of Fanny's green-house, and nothing but the plan of the

flower-garden marked out."

"Where is the green-house to be?"

"Upon the knoll behind the house. The old walnut trees are all come

down to make room for it. It will be a very fine object from many

parts of the park, and the flower-garden will slope down just before

it, and be exceedingly pretty. We have cleared away all the old thorns

that grew in patches over the brow."

Elinor kept her concern and her censure to herself; and was very

thankful that Marianne was not present, to share the provocation.

Having now said enough to make his poverty clear, and to do away the

necessity of buying a pair of ear-rings for each of his sisters, in his

next visit at Gray's his thoughts took a cheerfuller turn, and he began

to congratulate Elinor on having such a friend as Mrs. Jennings.

"She seems a most valuable woman indeed--Her house, her style of

living, all bespeak an exceeding good income; and it is an acquaintance

that has not only been of great use to you hitherto, but in the end may

prove materially advantageous.--Her inviting you to town is certainly a

vast thing in your favour; and indeed, it speaks altogether so great a

regard for you, that in all probability when she dies you will not be

forgotten.-- She must have a great deal to leave."

"Nothing at all, I should rather suppose; for she has only her

jointure, which will descend to her children."

"But it is not to be imagined that she lives up to her income. Few

people of common prudence will do THAT; and whatever she saves, she

will be able to dispose of."

"And do you not think it more likely that she should leave it to her

daughters, than to us?"

"Her daughters are both exceedingly well married, and therefore I

cannot perceive the necessity of her remembering them farther.

Whereas, in my opinion, by her taking so much notice of you, and

treating you in this kind of way, she has given you a sort of claim on

her future consideration, which a conscientious woman would not

disregard. Nothing can be kinder than her behaviour; and she can

hardly do all this, without being aware of the expectation it raises."

"But she raises none in those most concerned. Indeed, brother, your

anxiety for our welfare and prosperity carries you too far."

"Why, to be sure," said he, seeming to recollect himself, "people have

little, have very little in their power. But, my dear Elinor, what is

the matter with Marianne?-- she looks very unwell, has lost her colour,

and is grown quite thin. Is she ill?"

"She is not well, she has had a nervous complaint on her for several

weeks."

"I am sorry for that. At her time of life, any thing of an illness

destroys the bloom for ever! Her's has been a very short one! She was

as handsome a girl last September, as I ever saw; and as likely to

attract the man. There was something in her style of beauty, to please

them particularly. I remember Fanny used to say that she would marry

sooner and better than you did; not but what she is exceedingly fond of

YOU, but so it happened to strike her. She will be mistaken, however.

I question whether Marianne NOW, will marry a man worth more than five

or six hundred a-year, at the utmost, and I am very much deceived if

YOU do not do better. Dorsetshire! I know very little of Dorsetshire;

but, my dear Elinor, I shall be exceedingly glad to know more of it;

and I think I can answer for your having Fanny and myself among the

earliest and best pleased of your visitors."

Elinor tried very seriously to convince him that there was no

likelihood of her marrying Colonel Brandon; but it was an expectation

of too much pleasure to himself to be relinquished, and he was really

resolved on seeking an intimacy with that gentleman, and promoting the

marriage by every possible attention. He had just compunction enough

for having done nothing for his sisters himself, to be exceedingly

anxious that everybody else should do a great deal; and an offer from

Colonel Brandon, or a legacy from Mrs. Jennings, was the easiest means

of atoning for his own neglect.

They were lucky enough to find Lady Middleton at home, and Sir John

came in before their visit ended. Abundance of civilities passed on

all sides. Sir John was ready to like anybody, and though Mr. Dashwood

did not seem to know much about horses, he soon set him down as a very

good-natured fellow: while Lady Middleton saw enough of fashion in his

appearance to think his acquaintance worth having; and Mr. Dashwood

went away delighted with both.

"I shall have a charming account to carry to Fanny," said he, as he

walked back with his sister. "Lady Middleton is really a most elegant

woman! Such a woman as I am sure Fanny will be glad to know. And Mrs.

Jennings too, an exceedingly well-behaved woman, though not so elegant

as her daughter. Your sister need not have any scruple even of

visiting HER, which, to say the truth, has been a little the case, and

very naturally; for we only knew that Mrs. Jennings was the widow of a

man who had got all his money in a low way; and Fanny and Mrs. Ferrars

were both strongly prepossessed, that neither she nor her daughters

were such kind of women as Fanny would like to associate with. But now

I can carry her a most satisfactory account of both."

CHAPTER 34

Mrs. John Dashwood had so much confidence in her husband's judgment,

that she waited the very next day both on Mrs. Jennings and her

daughter; and her confidence was rewarded by finding even the former,

even the woman with whom her sisters were staying, by no means unworthy

her notice; and as for Lady Middleton, she found her one of the most

charming women in the world!

Lady Middleton was equally pleased with Mrs. Dashwood. There was a

kind of cold hearted selfishness on both sides, which mutually

attracted them; and they sympathised with each other in an insipid

propriety of demeanor, and a general want of understanding.

The same manners, however, which recommended Mrs. John Dashwood to the

good opinion of Lady Middleton did not suit the fancy of Mrs. Jennings,

and to HER she appeared nothing more than a little proud-looking woman

of uncordial address, who met her husband's sisters without any

affection, and almost without having anything to say to them; for of

the quarter of an hour bestowed on Berkeley Street, she sat at least

seven minutes and a half in silence.

Elinor wanted very much to know, though she did not chuse to ask,

whether Edward was then in town; but nothing would have induced Fanny

voluntarily to mention his name before her, till able to tell her that

his marriage with Miss Morton was resolved on, or till her husband's

expectations on Colonel Brandon were answered; because she believed

them still so very much attached to each other, that they could not be

too sedulously divided in word and deed on every occasion. The

intelligence however, which SHE would not give, soon flowed from

another quarter. Lucy came very shortly to claim Elinor's compassion

on being unable to see Edward, though he had arrived in town with Mr.

and Mrs. Dashwood. He dared not come to Bartlett's Buildings for fear

of detection, and though their mutual impatience to meet, was not to be

told, they could do nothing at present but write.

Edward assured them himself of his being in town, within a very short

time, by twice calling in Berkeley Street. Twice was his card found on

the table, when they returned from their morning's engagements. Elinor

was pleased that he had called; and still more pleased that she had

missed him.

The Dashwoods were so prodigiously delighted with the Middletons, that,

though not much in the habit of giving anything, they determined to

give them--a dinner; and soon after their acquaintance began, invited

them to dine in Harley Street, where they had taken a very good house

for three months. Their sisters and Mrs. Jennings were invited

likewise, and John Dashwood was careful to secure Colonel Brandon, who,

always glad to be where the Miss Dashwoods were, received his eager

civilities with some surprise, but much more pleasure. They were to

meet Mrs. Ferrars; but Elinor could not learn whether her sons were to

be of the party. The expectation of seeing HER, however, was enough to

make her interested in the engagement; for though she could now meet

Edward's mother without that strong anxiety which had once promised to

attend such an introduction, though she could now see her with perfect

indifference as to her opinion of herself, her desire of being in

company with Mrs. Ferrars, her curiosity to know what she was like, was

as lively as ever.

The interest with which she thus anticipated the party, was soon

afterwards increased, more powerfully than pleasantly, by her hearing

that the Miss Steeles were also to be at it.

So well had they recommended themselves to Lady Middleton, so agreeable

had their assiduities made them to her, that though Lucy was certainly

not so elegant, and her sister not even genteel, she was as ready as

Sir John to ask them to spend a week or two in Conduit Street; and it

happened to be particularly convenient to the Miss Steeles, as soon as

the Dashwoods' invitation was known, that their visit should begin a

few days before the party took place.

Their claims to the notice of Mrs. John Dashwood, as the nieces of the

gentleman who for many years had had the care of her brother, might not

have done much, however, towards procuring them seats at her table; but

as Lady Middleton's guests they must be welcome; and Lucy, who had long

wanted to be personally known to the family, to have a nearer view of

their characters and her own difficulties, and to have an opportunity

of endeavouring to please them, had seldom been happier in her life,

than she was on receiving Mrs. John Dashwood's card.

On Elinor its effect was very different. She began immediately to

determine, that Edward who lived with his mother, must be asked as his

mother was, to a party given by his sister; and to see him for the

first time, after all that passed, in the company of Lucy!--she hardly

knew how she could bear it!

These apprehensions, perhaps, were not founded entirely on reason, and

certainly not at all on truth. They were relieved however, not by her

own recollection, but by the good will of Lucy, who believed herself to

be inflicting a severe disappointment when she told her that Edward

certainly would not be in Harley Street on Tuesday, and even hoped to

be carrying the pain still farther by persuading her that he was kept

away by the extreme affection for herself, which he could not conceal

when they were together.

The important Tuesday came that was to introduce the two young ladies

to this formidable mother-in-law.

"Pity me, dear Miss Dashwood!" said Lucy, as they walked up the stairs

together--for the Middletons arrived so directly after Mrs. Jennings,

that they all followed the servant at the same time--"There is nobody

here but you, that can feel for me.--I declare I can hardly stand.

Good gracious!--In a moment I shall see the person that all my

happiness depends on--that is to be my mother!"--

Elinor could have given her immediate relief by suggesting the

possibility of its being Miss Morton's mother, rather than her own,

whom they were about to behold; but instead of doing that, she assured

her, and with great sincerity, that she did pity her--to the utter

amazement of Lucy, who, though really uncomfortable herself, hoped at

least to be an object of irrepressible envy to Elinor.

Mrs. Ferrars was a little, thin woman, upright, even to formality, in

her figure, and serious, even to sourness, in her aspect. Her

complexion was sallow; and her features small, without beauty, and

naturally without expression; but a lucky contraction of the brow had

rescued her countenance from the disgrace of insipidity, by giving it

the strong characters of pride and ill nature. She was not a woman of

many words; for, unlike people in general, she proportioned them to the

number of her ideas; and of the few syllables that did escape her, not

one fell to the share of Miss Dashwood, whom she eyed with the spirited

determination of disliking her at all events.

Elinor could not NOW be made unhappy by this behaviour.-- A few months

ago it would have hurt her exceedingly; but it was not in Mrs. Ferrars'

power to distress her by it now;--and the difference of her manners to

the Miss Steeles, a difference which seemed purposely made to humble

her more, only amused her. She could not but smile to see the

graciousness of both mother and daughter towards the very person-- for

Lucy was particularly distinguished--whom of all others, had they known

as much as she did, they would have been most anxious to mortify; while

she herself, who had comparatively no power to wound them, sat

pointedly slighted by both. But while she smiled at a graciousness so

misapplied, she could not reflect on the mean-spirited folly from which

it sprung, nor observe the studied attentions with which the Miss

Steeles courted its continuance, without thoroughly despising them all

four.

Lucy was all exultation on being so honorably distinguished; and Miss

Steele wanted only to be teazed about Dr. Davies to be perfectly happy.

The dinner was a grand one, the servants were numerous, and every thing

bespoke the Mistress's inclination for show, and the Master's ability

to support it. In spite of the improvements and additions which were

making to the Norland estate, and in spite of its owner having once

been within some thousand pounds of being obliged to sell out at a

loss, nothing gave any symptom of that indigence which he had tried to

infer from it;--no poverty of any kind, except of conversation,

appeared--but there, the deficiency was considerable. John Dashwood

had not much to say for himself that was worth hearing, and his wife

had still less. But there was no peculiar disgrace in this; for it was

very much the case with the chief of their visitors, who almost all

laboured under one or other of these disqualifications for being

agreeable--Want of sense, either natural or improved--want of

elegance--want of spirits--or want of temper.

When the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room after dinner, this poverty

was particularly evident, for the gentlemen HAD supplied the discourse

with some variety--the variety of politics, inclosing land, and

breaking horses--but then it was all over; and one subject only engaged

the ladies till coffee came in, which was the comparative heights of

Harry Dashwood, and Lady Middleton's second son William, who were

nearly of the same age.

Had both the children been there, the affair might have been determined

too easily by measuring them at once; but as Harry only was present, it

was all conjectural assertion on both sides; and every body had a right

to be equally positive in their opinion, and to repeat it over and over

again as often as they liked.

The parties stood thus:

The two mothers, though each really convinced that her own son was the

tallest, politely decided in favour of the other.

The two grandmothers, with not less partiality, but more sincerity,

were equally earnest in support of their own descendant.

Lucy, who was hardly less anxious to please one parent than the other,

thought the boys were both remarkably tall for their age, and could not

conceive that there could be the smallest difference in the world

between them; and Miss Steele, with yet greater address gave it, as

fast as she could, in favour of each.

Elinor, having once delivered her opinion on William's side, by which

she offended Mrs. Ferrars and Fanny still more, did not see the

necessity of enforcing it by any farther assertion; and Marianne, when

called on for her's, offended them all, by declaring that she had no

opinion to give, as she had never thought about it.

Before her removing from Norland, Elinor had painted a very pretty pair

of screens for her sister-in-law, which being now just mounted and

brought home, ornamented her present drawing room; and these screens,

catching the eye of John Dashwood on his following the other gentlemen

into the room, were officiously handed by him to Colonel Brandon for

his admiration.

"These are done by my eldest sister," said he; "and you, as a man of

taste, will, I dare say, be pleased with them. I do not know whether

you have ever happened to see any of her performances before, but she

is in general reckoned to draw extremely well."

The Colonel, though disclaiming all pretensions to connoisseurship,

warmly admired the screens, as he would have done any thing painted by

Miss Dashwood; and on the curiosity of the others being of course

excited, they were handed round for general inspection. Mrs. Ferrars,

not aware of their being Elinor's work, particularly requested to look

at them; and after they had received gratifying testimony of Lady

Middletons's approbation, Fanny presented them to her mother,

considerately informing her, at the same time, that they were done by

Miss Dashwood.

"Hum"--said Mrs. Ferrars--"very pretty,"--and without regarding them at

all, returned them to her daughter.

Perhaps Fanny thought for a moment that her mother had been quite rude

enough,--for, colouring a little, she immediately said,

"They are very pretty, ma'am--an't they?" But then again, the dread of

having been too civil, too encouraging herself, probably came over her,

for she presently added,

"Do you not think they are something in Miss Morton's style of

painting, Ma'am?--She DOES paint most delightfully!--How beautifully

her last landscape is done!"

"Beautifully indeed! But SHE does every thing well."

Marianne could not bear this.--She was already greatly displeased with

Mrs. Ferrars; and such ill-timed praise of another, at Elinor's

expense, though she had not any notion of what was principally meant by

it, provoked her immediately to say with warmth,

"This is admiration of a very particular kind!--what is Miss Morton to

us?--who knows, or who cares, for her?--it is Elinor of whom WE think

and speak."

And so saying, she took the screens out of her sister-in-law's hands,

to admire them herself as they ought to be admired.

Mrs. Ferrars looked exceedingly angry, and drawing herself up more

stiffly than ever, pronounced in retort this bitter philippic, "Miss

Morton is Lord Morton's daughter."

Fanny looked very angry too, and her husband was all in a fright at his

sister's audacity. Elinor was much more hurt by Marianne's warmth than

she had been by what produced it; but Colonel Brandon's eyes, as they

were fixed on Marianne, declared that he noticed only what was amiable

in it, the affectionate heart which could not bear to see a sister

slighted in the smallest point.

Marianne's feelings did not stop here. The cold insolence of Mrs.

Ferrars's general behaviour to her sister, seemed, to her, to foretell

such difficulties and distresses to Elinor, as her own wounded heart

taught her to think of with horror; and urged by a strong impulse of

affectionate sensibility, she moved after a moment, to her sister's

chair, and putting one arm round her neck, and one cheek close to hers,

said in a low, but eager, voice,

"Dear, dear Elinor, don't mind them. Don't let them make YOU unhappy."

She could say no more; her spirits were quite overcome, and hiding her

face on Elinor's shoulder, she burst into tears. Every body's

attention was called, and almost every body was concerned.--Colonel

Brandon rose up and went to them without knowing what he did.--Mrs.

Jennings, with a very intelligent "Ah! poor dear," immediately gave her

her salts; and Sir John felt so desperately enraged against the author

of this nervous distress, that he instantly changed his seat to one

close by Lucy Steele, and gave her, in a whisper, a brief account of

the whole shocking affair.

In a few minutes, however, Marianne was recovered enough to put an end

to the bustle, and sit down among the rest; though her spirits retained

the impression of what had passed, the whole evening.

"Poor Marianne!" said her brother to Colonel Brandon, in a low voice,

as soon as he could secure his attention,-- "She has not such good

health as her sister,--she is very nervous,--she has not Elinor's

constitution;--and one must allow that there is something very trying

to a young woman who HAS BEEN a beauty in the loss of her personal

attractions. You would not think it perhaps, but Marianne WAS

remarkably handsome a few months ago; quite as handsome as Elinor.--

Now you see it is all gone."

CHAPTER 35

Elinor's curiosity to see Mrs. Ferrars was satisfied.-- She had found

in her every thing that could tend to make a farther connection between

the families undesirable.-- She had seen enough of her pride, her

meanness, and her determined prejudice against herself, to comprehend

all the difficulties that must have perplexed the engagement, and

retarded the marriage, of Edward and herself, had he been otherwise

free;--and she had seen almost enough to be thankful for her OWN sake,

that one greater obstacle preserved her from suffering under any other

of Mrs. Ferrars's creation, preserved her from all dependence upon her

caprice, or any solicitude for her good opinion. Or at least, if she

did not bring herself quite to rejoice in Edward's being fettered to

Lucy, she determined, that had Lucy been more amiable, she OUGHT to

have rejoiced.

She wondered that Lucy's spirits could be so very much elevated by the

civility of Mrs. Ferrars;--that her interest and her vanity should so

very much blind her as to make the attention which seemed only paid her

because she was NOT ELINOR, appear a compliment to herself--or to allow

her to derive encouragement from a preference only given her, because

her real situation was unknown. But that it was so, had not only been

declared by Lucy's eyes at the time, but was declared over again the

next morning more openly, for at her particular desire, Lady Middleton

set her down in Berkeley Street on the chance of seeing Elinor alone,

to tell her how happy she was.

The chance proved a lucky one, for a message from Mrs. Palmer soon

after she arrived, carried Mrs. Jennings away.

"My dear friend," cried Lucy, as soon as they were by themselves, "I

come to talk to you of my happiness. Could anything be so flattering

as Mrs. Ferrars's way of treating me yesterday? So exceeding affable

as she was!--You know how I dreaded the thoughts of seeing her;--but

the very moment I was introduced, there was such an affability in her

behaviour as really should seem to say, she had quite took a fancy to

me. Now was not it so?-- You saw it all; and was not you quite struck

with it?"

"She was certainly very civil to you."

"Civil!--Did you see nothing but only civility?-- I saw a vast deal

more. Such kindness as fell to the share of nobody but me!--No pride,

no hauteur, and your sister just the same--all sweetness and

affability!"

Elinor wished to talk of something else, but Lucy still pressed her to

own that she had reason for her happiness; and Elinor was obliged to go

on.--

"Undoubtedly, if they had known your engagement," said she, "nothing

could be more flattering than their treatment of you;--but as that was

not the case"--

"I guessed you would say so"--replied Lucy quickly--"but there was no

reason in the world why Mrs. Ferrars should seem to like me, if she did

not, and her liking me is every thing. You shan't talk me out of my

satisfaction. I am sure it will all end well, and there will be no

difficulties at all, to what I used to think. Mrs. Ferrars is a

charming woman, and so is your sister. They are both delightful women,

indeed!--I wonder I should never hear you say how agreeable Mrs.

Dashwood was!"

To this Elinor had no answer to make, and did not attempt any.

"Are you ill, Miss Dashwood?--you seem low--you don't speak;--sure you

an't well."

"I never was in better health."

"I am glad of it with all my heart; but really you did not look it. I

should be sorry to have YOU ill; you, that have been the greatest

comfort to me in the world!--Heaven knows what I should have done

without your friendship."--

Elinor tried to make a civil answer, though doubting her own success.

But it seemed to satisfy Lucy, for she directly replied,

"Indeed I am perfectly convinced of your regard for me, and next to

Edward's love, it is the greatest comfort I have.--Poor Edward!--But

now there is one good thing, we shall be able to meet, and meet pretty

often, for Lady Middleton's delighted with Mrs. Dashwood, so we shall

be a good deal in Harley Street, I dare say, and Edward spends half his

time with his sister--besides, Lady Middleton and Mrs. Ferrars will

visit now;--and Mrs. Ferrars and your sister were both so good to say

more than once, they should always be glad to see me.-- They are such

charming women!--I am sure if ever you tell your sister what I think of

her, you cannot speak too high."

But Elinor would not give her any encouragement to hope that she SHOULD

tell her sister. Lucy continued.

"I am sure I should have seen it in a moment, if Mrs. Ferrars had took

a dislike to me. If she had only made me a formal courtesy, for

instance, without saying a word, and never after had took any notice of

me, and never looked at me in a pleasant way--you know what I mean--if

I had been treated in that forbidding sort of way, I should have gave

it all up in despair. I could not have stood it. For where she DOES

dislike, I know it is most violent."

Elinor was prevented from making any reply to this civil triumph, by

the door's being thrown open, the servant's announcing Mr. Ferrars, and

Edward's immediately walking in.

It was a very awkward moment; and the countenance of each shewed that

it was so. They all looked exceedingly foolish; and Edward seemed to

have as great an inclination to walk out of the room again, as to

advance farther into it. The very circumstance, in its unpleasantest

form, which they would each have been most anxious to avoid, had fallen

on them.--They were not only all three together, but were together

without the relief of any other person. The ladies recovered

themselves first. It was not Lucy's business to put herself forward,

and the appearance of secrecy must still be kept up. She could

therefore only LOOK her tenderness, and after slightly addressing him,

said no more.

But Elinor had more to do; and so anxious was she, for his sake and her

own, to do it well, that she forced herself, after a moment's

recollection, to welcome him, with a look and manner that were almost

easy, and almost open; and another struggle, another effort still

improved them. She would not allow the presence of Lucy, nor the

consciousness of some injustice towards herself, to deter her from

saying that she was happy to see him, and that she had very much

regretted being from home, when he called before in Berkeley Street.

She would not be frightened from paying him those attentions which, as

a friend and almost a relation, were his due, by the observant eyes of

Lucy, though she soon perceived them to be narrowly watching her.

Her manners gave some re-assurance to Edward, and he had courage enough

to sit down; but his embarrassment still exceeded that of the ladies in

a proportion, which the case rendered reasonable, though his sex might

make it rare; for his heart had not the indifference of Lucy's, nor

could his conscience have quite the ease of Elinor's.

Lucy, with a demure and settled air, seemed determined to make no

contribution to the comfort of the others, and would not say a word;

and almost every thing that WAS said, proceeded from Elinor, who was

obliged to volunteer all the information about her mother's health,

their coming to town, &c. which Edward ought to have inquired about,

but never did.

Her exertions did not stop here; for she soon afterwards felt herself

so heroically disposed as to determine, under pretence of fetching

Marianne, to leave the others by themselves; and she really did it, and

THAT in the handsomest manner, for she loitered away several minutes on

the landing-place, with the most high-minded fortitude, before she went

to her sister. When that was once done, however, it was time for the

raptures of Edward to cease; for Marianne's joy hurried her into the

drawing-room immediately. Her pleasure in seeing him was like every

other of her feelings, strong in itself, and strongly spoken. She met

him with a hand that would be taken, and a voice that expressed the

affection of a sister.

"Dear Edward!" she cried, "this is a moment of great happiness!--This

would almost make amends for every thing?"

Edward tried to return her kindness as it deserved, but before such

witnesses he dared not say half what he really felt. Again they all

sat down, and for a moment or two all were silent; while Marianne was

looking with the most speaking tenderness, sometimes at Edward and

sometimes at Elinor, regretting only that their delight in each other

should be checked by Lucy's unwelcome presence. Edward was the first

to speak, and it was to notice Marianne's altered looks, and express

his fear of her not finding London agree with her.

"Oh, don't think of me!" she replied with spirited earnestness, though

her eyes were filled with tears as she spoke, "don't think of MY

health. Elinor is well, you see. That must be enough for us both."

This remark was not calculated to make Edward or Elinor more easy, nor

to conciliate the good will of Lucy, who looked up at Marianne with no

very benignant expression.

"Do you like London?" said Edward, willing to say any thing that might

introduce another subject.

"Not at all. I expected much pleasure in it, but I have found none.

The sight of you, Edward, is the only comfort it has afforded; and

thank Heaven! you are what you always were!"

She paused--no one spoke.

"I think, Elinor," she presently added, "we must employ Edward to take

care of us in our return to Barton. In a week or two, I suppose, we

shall be going; and, I trust, Edward will not be very unwilling to

accept the charge."

Poor Edward muttered something, but what it was, nobody knew, not even

himself. But Marianne, who saw his agitation, and could easily trace

it to whatever cause best pleased herself, was perfectly satisfied, and

soon talked of something else.

"We spent such a day, Edward, in Harley Street yesterday! So dull, so

wretchedly dull!--But I have much to say to you on that head, which

cannot be said now."

And with this admirable discretion did she defer the assurance of her

finding their mutual relatives more disagreeable than ever, and of her

being particularly disgusted with his mother, till they were more in

private.

"But why were you not there, Edward?--Why did you not come?"

"I was engaged elsewhere."

"Engaged! But what was that, when such friends were to be met?"

"Perhaps, Miss Marianne," cried Lucy, eager to take some revenge on

her, "you think young men never stand upon engagements, if they have no

mind to keep them, little as well as great."

Elinor was very angry, but Marianne seemed entirely insensible of the

sting; for she calmly replied,

"Not so, indeed; for, seriously speaking, I am very sure that

conscience only kept Edward from Harley Street. And I really believe

he HAS the most delicate conscience in the world; the most scrupulous

in performing every engagement, however minute, and however it may make

against his interest or pleasure. He is the most fearful of giving

pain, of wounding expectation, and the most incapable of being selfish,

of any body I ever saw. Edward, it is so, and I will say it. What!

are you never to hear yourself praised!--Then you must be no friend of

mine; for those who will accept of my love and esteem, must submit to

my open commendation."

The nature of her commendation, in the present case, however, happened

to be particularly ill-suited to the feelings of two thirds of her

auditors, and was so very unexhilarating to Edward, that he very soon

got up to go away.

"Going so soon!" said Marianne; "my dear Edward, this must not be."

And drawing him a little aside, she whispered her persuasion that Lucy

could not stay much longer. But even this encouragement failed, for he

would go; and Lucy, who would have outstaid him, had his visit lasted

two hours, soon afterwards went away.

"What can bring her here so often?" said Marianne, on her leaving them.

"Could not she see that we wanted her gone!--how teazing to Edward!"

"Why so?--we were all his friends, and Lucy has been the longest known

to him of any. It is but natural that he should like to see her as

well as ourselves."

Marianne looked at her steadily, and said, "You know, Elinor, that this

is a kind of talking which I cannot bear. If you only hope to have

your assertion contradicted, as I must suppose to be the case, you

ought to recollect that I am the last person in the world to do it. I

cannot descend to be tricked out of assurances, that are not really

wanted."

She then left the room; and Elinor dared not follow her to say more,

for bound as she was by her promise of secrecy to Lucy, she could give

no information that would convince Marianne; and painful as the

consequences of her still continuing in an error might be, she was

obliged to submit to it. All that she could hope, was that Edward

would not often expose her or himself to the distress of hearing

Marianne's mistaken warmth, nor to the repetition of any other part of

the pain that had attended their recent meeting--and this she had every

reason to expect.

CHAPTER 36

Within a few days after this meeting, the newspapers announced to the

world, that the lady of Thomas Palmer, Esq. was safely delivered of a

son and heir; a very interesting and satisfactory paragraph, at least

to all those intimate connections who knew it before.

This event, highly important to Mrs. Jennings's happiness, produced a

temporary alteration in the disposal of her time, and influenced, in a

like degree, the engagements of her young friends; for as she wished to

be as much as possible with Charlotte, she went thither every morning

as soon as she was dressed, and did not return till late in the

evening; and the Miss Dashwoods, at the particular request of the

Middletons, spent the whole of every day, in every day in Conduit

Street. For their own comfort they would much rather have remained, at

least all the morning, in Mrs. Jennings's house; but it was not a thing

to be urged against the wishes of everybody. Their hours were

therefore made over to Lady Middleton and the two Miss Steeles, by whom

their company, in fact was as little valued, as it was professedly

sought.

They had too much sense to be desirable companions to the former; and

by the latter they were considered with a jealous eye, as intruding on

THEIR ground, and sharing the kindness which they wanted to monopolize.

Though nothing could be more polite than Lady Middleton's behaviour to

Elinor and Marianne, she did not really like them at all. Because they

neither flattered herself nor her children, she could not believe them

good-natured; and because they were fond of reading, she fancied them

satirical: perhaps without exactly knowing what it was to be satirical;

but THAT did not signify. It was censure in common use, and easily

given.

Their presence was a restraint both on her and on Lucy. It checked the

idleness of one, and the business of the other. Lady Middleton was

ashamed of doing nothing before them, and the flattery which Lucy was

proud to think of and administer at other times, she feared they would

despise her for offering. Miss Steele was the least discomposed of the

three, by their presence; and it was in their power to reconcile her to

it entirely. Would either of them only have given her a full and

minute account of the whole affair between Marianne and Mr. Willoughby,

she would have thought herself amply rewarded for the sacrifice of the

best place by the fire after dinner, which their arrival occasioned.

But this conciliation was not granted; for though she often threw out

expressions of pity for her sister to Elinor, and more than once dropt

a reflection on the inconstancy of beaux before Marianne, no effect was

produced, but a look of indifference from the former, or of disgust in

the latter. An effort even yet lighter might have made her their

friend. Would they only have laughed at her about the Doctor! But so

little were they, anymore than the others, inclined to oblige her, that

if Sir John dined from home, she might spend a whole day without

hearing any other raillery on the subject, than what she was kind

enough to bestow on herself.

All these jealousies and discontents, however, were so totally

unsuspected by Mrs. Jennings, that she thought it a delightful thing

for the girls to be together; and generally congratulated her young

friends every night, on having escaped the company of a stupid old

woman so long. She joined them sometimes at Sir John's, sometimes at

her own house; but wherever it was, she always came in excellent

spirits, full of delight and importance, attributing Charlotte's well

doing to her own care, and ready to give so exact, so minute a detail

of her situation, as only Miss Steele had curiosity enough to desire.

One thing DID disturb her; and of that she made her daily complaint.

Mr. Palmer maintained the common, but unfatherly opinion among his sex,

of all infants being alike; and though she could plainly perceive, at

different times, the most striking resemblance between this baby and

every one of his relations on both sides, there was no convincing his

father of it; no persuading him to believe that it was not exactly like

every other baby of the same age; nor could he even be brought to

acknowledge the simple proposition of its being the finest child in the

world.

I come now to the relation of a misfortune, which about this time

befell Mrs. John Dashwood. It so happened that while her two sisters

with Mrs. Jennings were first calling on her in Harley Street, another

of her acquaintance had dropt in--a circumstance in itself not

apparently likely to produce evil to her. But while the imaginations

of other people will carry them away to form wrong judgments of our

conduct, and to decide on it by slight appearances, one's happiness

must in some measure be always at the mercy of chance. In the present

instance, this last-arrived lady allowed her fancy to so far outrun

truth and probability, that on merely hearing the name of the Miss

Dashwoods, and understanding them to be Mr. Dashwood's sisters, she

immediately concluded them to be staying in Harley Street; and this

misconstruction produced within a day or two afterwards, cards of

invitation for them as well as for their brother and sister, to a small

musical party at her house. The consequence of which was, that Mrs.

John Dashwood was obliged to submit not only to the exceedingly great

inconvenience of sending her carriage for the Miss Dashwoods, but, what

was still worse, must be subject to all the unpleasantness of appearing

to treat them with attention: and who could tell that they might not

expect to go out with her a second time? The power of disappointing

them, it was true, must always be her's. But that was not enough; for

when people are determined on a mode of conduct which they know to be

wrong, they feel injured by the expectation of any thing better from

them.

Marianne had now been brought by degrees, so much into the habit of

going out every day, that it was become a matter of indifference to

her, whether she went or not: and she prepared quietly and mechanically

for every evening's engagement, though without expecting the smallest

amusement from any, and very often without knowing, till the last

moment, where it was to take her.

To her dress and appearance she was grown so perfectly indifferent, as

not to bestow half the consideration on it, during the whole of her

toilet, which it received from Miss Steele in the first five minutes of

their being together, when it was finished. Nothing escaped HER minute

observation and general curiosity; she saw every thing, and asked every

thing; was never easy till she knew the price of every part of

Marianne's dress; could have guessed the number of her gowns altogether

with better judgment than Marianne herself, and was not without hopes

of finding out before they parted, how much her washing cost per week,

and how much she had every year to spend upon herself. The

impertinence of these kind of scrutinies, moreover, was generally

concluded with a compliment, which though meant as its douceur, was

considered by Marianne as the greatest impertinence of all; for after

undergoing an examination into the value and make of her gown, the

colour of her shoes, and the arrangement of her hair, she was almost

sure of being told that upon "her word she looked vastly smart, and she

dared to say she would make a great many conquests."

With such encouragement as this, was she dismissed on the present

occasion, to her brother's carriage; which they were ready to enter

five minutes after it stopped at the door, a punctuality not very

agreeable to their sister-in-law, who had preceded them to the house of

her acquaintance, and was there hoping for some delay on their part

that might inconvenience either herself or her coachman.

The events of this evening were not very remarkable. The party, like

other musical parties, comprehended a great many people who had real

taste for the performance, and a great many more who had none at all;

and the performers themselves were, as usual, in their own estimation,

and that of their immediate friends, the first private performers in

England.

As Elinor was neither musical, nor affecting to be so, she made no

scruple of turning her eyes from the grand pianoforte, whenever it

suited her, and unrestrained even by the presence of a harp, and

violoncello, would fix them at pleasure on any other object in the

room. In one of these excursive glances she perceived among a group of

young men, the very he, who had given them a lecture on toothpick-cases

at Gray's. She perceived him soon afterwards looking at herself, and

speaking familiarly to her brother; and had just determined to find out

his name from the latter, when they both came towards her, and Mr.

Dashwood introduced him to her as Mr. Robert Ferrars.

He addressed her with easy civility, and twisted his head into a bow

which assured her as plainly as words could have done, that he was

exactly the coxcomb she had heard him described to be by Lucy. Happy

had it been for her, if her regard for Edward had depended less on his

own merit, than on the merit of his nearest relations! For then his

brother's bow must have given the finishing stroke to what the

ill-humour of his mother and sister would have begun. But while she

wondered at the difference of the two young men, she did not find that

the emptiness of conceit of the one, put her out of all charity with

the modesty and worth of the other. Why they WERE different, Robert

exclaimed to her himself in the course of a quarter of an hour's

conversation; for, talking of his brother, and lamenting the extreme

GAUCHERIE which he really believed kept him from mixing in proper

society, he candidly and generously attributed it much less to any

natural deficiency, than to the misfortune of a private education;

while he himself, though probably without any particular, any material

superiority by nature, merely from the advantage of a public school,

was as well fitted to mix in the world as any other man.

"Upon my soul," he added, "I believe it is nothing more; and so I often

tell my mother, when she is grieving about it. 'My dear Madam,' I

always say to her, 'you must make yourself easy. The evil is now

irremediable, and it has been entirely your own doing. Why would you

be persuaded by my uncle, Sir Robert, against your own judgment, to

place Edward under private tuition, at the most critical time of his

life? If you had only sent him to Westminster as well as myself,

instead of sending him to Mr. Pratt's, all this would have been

prevented.' This is the way in which I always consider the matter, and

my mother is perfectly convinced of her error."

Elinor would not oppose his opinion, because, whatever might be her

general estimation of the advantage of a public school, she could not

think of Edward's abode in Mr. Pratt's family, with any satisfaction.

"You reside in Devonshire, I think,"--was his next observation, "in a

cottage near Dawlish."

Elinor set him right as to its situation; and it seemed rather

surprising to him that anybody could live in Devonshire, without living

near Dawlish. He bestowed his hearty approbation however on their

species of house.

"For my own part," said he, "I am excessively fond of a cottage; there

is always so much comfort, so much elegance about them. And I protest,

if I had any money to spare, I should buy a little land and build one

myself, within a short distance of London, where I might drive myself

down at any time, and collect a few friends about me, and be happy. I

advise every body who is going to build, to build a cottage. My friend

Lord Courtland came to me the other day on purpose to ask my advice,

and laid before me three different plans of Bonomi's. I was to decide

on the best of them. 'My dear Courtland,' said I, immediately throwing

them all into the fire, 'do not adopt either of them, but by all means

build a cottage.' And that I fancy, will be the end of it.

"Some people imagine that there can be no accommodations, no space in a

cottage; but this is all a mistake. I was last month at my friend

Elliott's, near Dartford. Lady Elliott wished to give a dance. 'But

how can it be done?' said she; 'my dear Ferrars, do tell me how it is

to be managed. There is not a room in this cottage that will hold ten

couple, and where can the supper be?' I immediately saw that there

could be no difficulty in it, so I said, 'My dear Lady Elliott, do not

be uneasy. The dining parlour will admit eighteen couple with ease;

card-tables may be placed in the drawing-room; the library may be open

for tea and other refreshments; and let the supper be set out in the

saloon.' Lady Elliott was delighted with the thought. We measured the

dining-room, and found it would hold exactly eighteen couple, and the

affair was arranged precisely after my plan. So that, in fact, you

see, if people do but know how to set about it, every comfort may be as

well enjoyed in a cottage as in the most spacious dwelling."

Elinor agreed to it all, for she did not think he deserved the

compliment of rational opposition.

As John Dashwood had no more pleasure in music than his eldest sister,

his mind was equally at liberty to fix on any thing else; and a thought

struck him during the evening, which he communicated to his wife, for

her approbation, when they got home. The consideration of Mrs.

Dennison's mistake, in supposing his sisters their guests, had

suggested the propriety of their being really invited to become such,

while Mrs. Jenning's engagements kept her from home. The expense would

be nothing, the inconvenience not more; and it was altogether an

attention which the delicacy of his conscience pointed out to be

requisite to its complete enfranchisement from his promise to his

father. Fanny was startled at the proposal.

"I do not see how it can be done," said she, "without affronting Lady

Middleton, for they spend every day with her; otherwise I should be

exceedingly glad to do it. You know I am always ready to pay them any

attention in my power, as my taking them out this evening shews. But

they are Lady Middleton's visitors. How can I ask them away from her?"

Her husband, but with great humility, did not see the force of her

objection. "They had already spent a week in this manner in Conduit

Street, and Lady Middleton could not be displeased at their giving the

same number of days to such near relations."

Fanny paused a moment, and then, with fresh vigor, said,

"My love I would ask them with all my heart, if it was in my power.

But I had just settled within myself to ask the Miss Steeles to spend a

few days with us. They are very well behaved, good kind of girls; and

I think the attention is due to them, as their uncle did so very well

by Edward. We can ask your sisters some other year, you know; but the

Miss Steeles may not be in town any more. I am sure you will like

them; indeed, you DO like them, you know, very much already, and so

does my mother; and they are such favourites with Harry!"

Mr. Dashwood was convinced. He saw the necessity of inviting the Miss

Steeles immediately, and his conscience was pacified by the resolution

of inviting his sisters another year; at the same time, however, slyly

suspecting that another year would make the invitation needless, by

bringing Elinor to town as Colonel Brandon's wife, and Marianne as

THEIR visitor.

Fanny, rejoicing in her escape, and proud of the ready wit that had

procured it, wrote the next morning to Lucy, to request her company and

her sister's, for some days, in Harley Street, as soon as Lady

Middleton could spare them. This was enough to make Lucy really and

reasonably happy. Mrs. Dashwood seemed actually working for her,

herself; cherishing all her hopes, and promoting all her views! Such

an opportunity of being with Edward and his family was, above all

things, the most material to her interest, and such an invitation the

most gratifying to her feelings! It was an advantage that could not be

too gratefully acknowledged, nor too speedily made use of; and the

visit to Lady Middleton, which had not before had any precise limits,

was instantly discovered to have been always meant to end in two days'

time.

When the note was shown to Elinor, as it was within ten minutes after

its arrival, it gave her, for the first time, some share in the

expectations of Lucy; for such a mark of uncommon kindness, vouchsafed

on so short an acquaintance, seemed to declare that the good-will

towards her arose from something more than merely malice against

herself; and might be brought, by time and address, to do every thing

that Lucy wished. Her flattery had already subdued the pride of Lady

Middleton, and made an entry into the close heart of Mrs. John

Dashwood; and these were effects that laid open the probability of

greater.

The Miss Steeles removed to Harley Street, and all that reached Elinor

of their influence there, strengthened her expectation of the event.

Sir John, who called on them more than once, brought home such accounts

of the favour they were in, as must be universally striking. Mrs.

Dashwood had never been so much pleased with any young women in her

life, as she was with them; had given each of them a needle book made

by some emigrant; called Lucy by her Christian name; and did not know

whether she should ever be able to part with them.

[At this point in the first and second editions, Volume II ended.]

CHAPTER 37

Mrs. Palmer was so well at the end of a fortnight, that her mother felt

it no longer necessary to give up the whole of her time to her; and,

contenting herself with visiting her once or twice a day, returned from

that period to her own home, and her own habits, in which she found the

Miss Dashwoods very ready to resume their former share.

About the third or fourth morning after their being thus resettled in

Berkeley Street, Mrs. Jennings, on returning from her ordinary visit to

Mrs. Palmer, entered the drawing-room, where Elinor was sitting by

herself, with an air of such hurrying importance as prepared her to

hear something wonderful; and giving her time only to form that idea,

began directly to justify it, by saying,

"Lord! my dear Miss Dashwood! have you heard the news?"

"No, ma'am. What is it?"

"Something so strange! But you shall hear it all.-- When I got to Mr.

Palmer's, I found Charlotte quite in a fuss about the child. She was

sure it was very ill--it cried, and fretted, and was all over pimples.

So I looked at it directly, and, 'Lord! my dear,' says I, 'it is

nothing in the world, but the red gum--' and nurse said just the same.

But Charlotte, she would not be satisfied, so Mr. Donavan was sent for;

and luckily he happened to just come in from Harley Street, so he

stepped over directly, and as soon as ever he saw the child, be said

just as we did, that it was nothing in the world but the red gum, and

then Charlotte was easy. And so, just as he was going away again, it

came into my head, I am sure I do not know how I happened to think of

it, but it came into my head to ask him if there was any news. So upon

that, he smirked, and simpered, and looked grave, and seemed to know

something or other, and at last he said in a whisper, 'For fear any

unpleasant report should reach the young ladies under your care as to

their sister's indisposition, I think it advisable to say, that I

believe there is no great reason for alarm; I hope Mrs. Dashwood will

do very well.'"

"What! is Fanny ill?"

"That is exactly what I said, my dear. 'Lord!' says I, 'is Mrs.

Dashwood ill?' So then it all came out; and the long and the short of

the matter, by all I can learn, seems to be this. Mr. Edward Ferrars,

the very young man I used to joke with you about (but however, as it

turns out, I am monstrous glad there was never any thing in it), Mr.

Edward Ferrars, it seems, has been engaged above this twelvemonth to my

cousin Lucy!--There's for you, my dear!--And not a creature knowing a

syllable of the matter, except Nancy!--Could you have believed such a

thing possible?-- There is no great wonder in their liking one another;

but that matters should be brought so forward between them, and nobody

suspect it!--THAT is strange!--I never happened to see them together,

or I am sure I should have found it out directly. Well, and so this

was kept a great secret, for fear of Mrs. Ferrars, and neither she nor

your brother or sister suspected a word of the matter;--till this very

morning, poor Nancy, who, you know, is a well-meaning creature, but no

conjurer, popt it all out. 'Lord!' thinks she to herself, 'they are

all so fond of Lucy, to be sure they will make no difficulty about it;'

and so, away she went to your sister, who was sitting all alone at her

carpet-work, little suspecting what was to come--for she had just been

saying to your brother, only five minutes before, that she thought to

make a match between Edward and some Lord's daughter or other, I forget

who. So you may think what a blow it was to all her vanity and pride.

She fell into violent hysterics immediately, with such screams as

reached your brother's ears, as he was sitting in his own dressing-room

down stairs, thinking about writing a letter to his steward in the

country. So up he flew directly, and a terrible scene took place, for

Lucy was come to them by that time, little dreaming what was going on.

Poor soul! I pity HER. And I must say, I think she was used very

hardly; for your sister scolded like any fury, and soon drove her into

a fainting fit. Nancy, she fell upon her knees, and cried bitterly;

and your brother, he walked about the room, and said he did not know

what to do. Mrs. Dashwood declared they should not stay a minute

longer in the house, and your brother was forced to go down upon HIS

knees too, to persuade her to let them stay till they had packed up

their clothes. THEN she fell into hysterics again, and he was so

frightened that he would send for Mr. Donavan, and Mr. Donavan found

the house in all this uproar. The carriage was at the door ready to

take my poor cousins away, and they were just stepping in as he came

off; poor Lucy in such a condition, he says, she could hardly walk; and

Nancy, she was almost as bad. I declare, I have no patience with your

sister; and I hope, with all my heart, it will be a match in spite of

her. Lord! what a taking poor Mr. Edward will be in when he hears of

it! To have his love used so scornfully! for they say he is monstrous

fond of her, as well he may. I should not wonder, if he was to be in

the greatest passion!--and Mr. Donavan thinks just the same. He and I

had a great deal of talk about it; and the best of all is, that he is

gone back again to Harley Street, that he may be within call when Mrs.

Ferrars is told of it, for she was sent for as soon as ever my cousins

left the house, for your sister was sure SHE would be in hysterics too;

and so she may, for what I care. I have no pity for either of them. I

have no notion of people's making such a to-do about money and

greatness. There is no reason on earth why Mr. Edward and Lucy should

not marry; for I am sure Mrs. Ferrars may afford to do very well by her

son, and though Lucy has next to nothing herself, she knows better than

any body how to make the most of every thing; I dare say, if Mrs.

Ferrars would only allow him five hundred a-year, she would make as

good an appearance with it as any body else would with eight. Lord!

how snug they might live in such another cottage as yours--or a little

bigger--with two maids, and two men; and I believe I could help them to

a housemaid, for my Betty has a sister out of place, that would fit

them exactly."

Here Mrs. Jennings ceased, and as Elinor had had time enough to collect

her thoughts, she was able to give such an answer, and make such

observations, as the subject might naturally be supposed to produce.

Happy to find that she was not suspected of any extraordinary interest

in it; that Mrs. Jennings (as she had of late often hoped might be the

case) had ceased to imagine her at all attached to Edward; and happy

above all the rest, in the absence of Marianne, she felt very well able

to speak of the affair without embarrassment, and to give her judgment,

as she believed, with impartiality on the conduct of every one

concerned in it.

She could hardly determine what her own expectation of its event really

was; though she earnestly tried to drive away the notion of its being

possible to end otherwise at last, than in the marriage of Edward and

Lucy. What Mrs. Ferrars would say and do, though there could not be a

doubt of its nature, she was anxious to hear; and still more anxious to

know how Edward would conduct himself. For HIM she felt much

compassion;--for Lucy very little--and it cost her some pains to

procure that little;--for the rest of the party none at all.

As Mrs. Jennings could talk on no other subject, Elinor soon saw the

necessity of preparing Marianne for its discussion. No time was to be

lost in undeceiving her, in making her acquainted with the real truth,

and in endeavouring to bring her to hear it talked of by others,

without betraying that she felt any uneasiness for her sister, or any

resentment against Edward.

Elinor's office was a painful one.--She was going to remove what she

really believed to be her sister's chief consolation,--to give such

particulars of Edward as she feared would ruin him for ever in her good

opinion,-and to make Marianne, by a resemblance in their situations,

which to HER fancy would seem strong, feel all her own disappointment

over again. But unwelcome as such a task must be, it was necessary to

be done, and Elinor therefore hastened to perform it.

She was very far from wishing to dwell on her own feelings, or to

represent herself as suffering much, any otherwise than as the

self-command she had practised since her first knowledge of Edward's

engagement, might suggest a hint of what was practicable to Marianne.

Her narration was clear and simple; and though it could not be given

without emotion, it was not accompanied by violent agitation, nor

impetuous grief.--THAT belonged rather to the hearer, for Marianne

listened with horror, and cried excessively. Elinor was to be the

comforter of others in her own distresses, no less than in theirs; and

all the comfort that could be given by assurances of her own composure

of mind, and a very earnest vindication of Edward from every charge but

of imprudence, was readily offered.

But Marianne for some time would give credit to neither. Edward seemed

a second Willoughby; and acknowledging as Elinor did, that she HAD

loved him most sincerely, could she feel less than herself! As for

Lucy Steele, she considered her so totally unamiable, so absolutely

incapable of attaching a sensible man, that she could not be persuaded

at first to believe, and afterwards to pardon, any former affection of

Edward for her. She would not even admit it to have been natural; and

Elinor left her to be convinced that it was so, by that which only

could convince her, a better knowledge of mankind.

Her first communication had reached no farther than to state the fact

of the engagement, and the length of time it had existed.--Marianne's

feelings had then broken in, and put an end to all regularity of

detail; and for some time all that could be done was to soothe her

distress, lessen her alarms, and combat her resentment. The first

question on her side, which led to farther particulars, was,

"How long has this been known to you, Elinor? has he written to you?"

"I have known it these four months. When Lucy first came to Barton

Park last November, she told me in confidence of her engagement."

At these words, Marianne's eyes expressed the astonishment which her

lips could not utter. After a pause of wonder, she exclaimed--

"Four months!--Have you known of this four months?"

Elinor confirmed it.

"What!--while attending me in all my misery, has this been on your

heart?--And I have reproached you for being happy!"--

"It was not fit that you should then know how much I was the reverse!"

"Four months!"--cried Marianne again.--"So calm!--so cheerful!--how

have you been supported?"--

"By feeling that I was doing my duty.--My promise to Lucy, obliged me

to be secret. I owed it to her, therefore, to avoid giving any hint of

the truth; and I owed it to my family and friends, not to create in

them a solicitude about me, which it could not be in my power to

satisfy."

Marianne seemed much struck.

"I have very often wished to undeceive yourself and my mother," added

Elinor; "and once or twice I have attempted it;--but without betraying

my trust, I never could have convinced you."

"Four months!--and yet you loved him!"--

"Yes. But I did not love only him;--and while the comfort of others was

dear to me, I was glad to spare them from knowing how much I felt.

Now, I can think and speak of it with little emotion. I would not have

you suffer on my account; for I assure you I no longer suffer

materially myself. I have many things to support me. I am not

conscious of having provoked the disappointment by any imprudence of my

own, I have borne it as much as possible without spreading it farther.

I acquit Edward of essential misconduct. I wish him very happy; and I

am so sure of his always doing his duty, that though now he may harbour

some regret, in the end he must become so. Lucy does not want sense,

and that is the foundation on which every thing good may be built.--And

after all, Marianne, after all that is bewitching in the idea of a

single and constant attachment, and all that can be said of one's

happiness depending entirely on any particular person, it is not

meant--it is not fit--it is not possible that it should be so.-- Edward

will marry Lucy; he will marry a woman superior in person and

understanding to half her sex; and time and habit will teach him to

forget that he ever thought another superior to HER."--

"If such is your way of thinking," said Marianne, "if the loss of what

is most valued is so easily to be made up by something else, your

resolution, your self-command, are, perhaps, a little less to be

wondered at.--They are brought more within my comprehension."

"I understand you.--You do not suppose that I have ever felt much.--For

four months, Marianne, I have had all this hanging on my mind, without

being at liberty to speak of it to a single creature; knowing that it

would make you and my mother most unhappy whenever it were explained to

you, yet unable to prepare you for it in the least.-- It was told

me,--it was in a manner forced on me by the very person herself, whose

prior engagement ruined all my prospects; and told me, as I thought,

with triumph.-- This person's suspicions, therefore, I have had to

oppose, by endeavouring to appear indifferent where I have been most

deeply interested;--and it has not been only once;--I have had her

hopes and exultation to listen to again and again.-- I have known

myself to be divided from Edward for ever, without hearing one

circumstance that could make me less desire the connection.--Nothing

has proved him unworthy; nor has anything declared him indifferent to

me.-- I have had to contend against the unkindness of his sister, and

the insolence of his mother; and have suffered the punishment of an

attachment, without enjoying its advantages.-- And all this has been

going on at a time, when, as you know too well, it has not been my only

unhappiness.-- If you can think me capable of ever feeling--surely you

may suppose that I have suffered NOW. The composure of mind with which

I have brought myself at present to consider the matter, the

consolation that I have been willing to admit, have been the effect of

constant and painful exertion;--they did not spring up of

themselves;--they did not occur to relieve my spirits at first.-- No,

Marianne.--THEN, if I had not been bound to silence, perhaps nothing

could have kept me entirely--not even what I owed to my dearest

friends--from openly shewing that I was VERY unhappy."--

Marianne was quite subdued.--

"Oh! Elinor," she cried, "you have made me hate myself for ever.--How

barbarous have I been to you!--you, who have been my only comfort, who

have borne with me in all my misery, who have seemed to be only

suffering for me!--Is this my gratitude?--Is this the only return I can

make you?--Because your merit cries out upon myself, I have been trying

to do it away."

The tenderest caresses followed this confession. In such a frame of

mind as she was now in, Elinor had no difficulty in obtaining from her

whatever promise she required; and at her request, Marianne engaged

never to speak of the affair to any one with the least appearance of

bitterness;--to meet Lucy without betraying the smallest increase of

dislike to her;--and even to see Edward himself, if chance should bring

them together, without any diminution of her usual cordiality.-- These

were great concessions;--but where Marianne felt that she had injured,

no reparation could be too much for her to make.

She performed her promise of being discreet, to admiration.--She

attended to all that Mrs. Jennings had to say upon the subject, with an

unchanging complexion, dissented from her in nothing, and was heard

three times to say, "Yes, ma'am."--She listened to her praise of Lucy

with only moving from one chair to another, and when Mrs. Jennings

talked of Edward's affection, it cost her only a spasm in her

throat.--Such advances towards heroism in her sister, made Elinor feel

equal to any thing herself.

The next morning brought a farther trial of it, in a visit from their

brother, who came with a most serious aspect to talk over the dreadful

affair, and bring them news of his wife.

"You have heard, I suppose," said he with great solemnity, as soon as

he was seated, "of the very shocking discovery that took place under

our roof yesterday."

They all looked their assent; it seemed too awful a moment for speech.

"Your sister," he continued, "has suffered dreadfully. Mrs. Ferrars

too--in short it has been a scene of such complicated distress--but I

will hope that the storm may be weathered without our being any of us

quite overcome. Poor Fanny! she was in hysterics all yesterday. But I

would not alarm you too much. Donavan says there is nothing materially

to be apprehended; her constitution is a good one, and her resolution

equal to any thing. She has borne it all, with the fortitude of an

angel! She says she never shall think well of anybody again; and one

cannot wonder at it, after being so deceived!--meeting with such

ingratitude, where so much kindness had been shewn, so much confidence

had been placed! It was quite out of the benevolence of her heart,

that she had asked these young women to her house; merely because she

thought they deserved some attention, were harmless, well-behaved

girls, and would be pleasant companions; for otherwise we both wished

very much to have invited you and Marianne to be with us, while your

kind friend there, was attending her daughter. And now to be so

rewarded! 'I wish, with all my heart,' says poor Fanny in her

affectionate way, 'that we had asked your sisters instead of them.'"

Here he stopped to be thanked; which being done, he went on.

"What poor Mrs. Ferrars suffered, when first Fanny broke it to her, is

not to be described. While she with the truest affection had been

planning a most eligible connection for him, was it to be supposed that

he could be all the time secretly engaged to another person!--such a

suspicion could never have entered her head! If she suspected ANY

prepossession elsewhere, it could not be in THAT quarter. 'THERE, to

be sure,' said she, 'I might have thought myself safe.' She was quite

in an agony. We consulted together, however, as to what should be

done, and at last she determined to send for Edward. He came. But I

am sorry to relate what ensued. All that Mrs. Ferrars could say to

make him put an end to the engagement, assisted too as you may well

suppose by my arguments, and Fanny's entreaties, was of no avail.

Duty, affection, every thing was disregarded. I never thought Edward

so stubborn, so unfeeling before. His mother explained to him her

liberal designs, in case of his marrying Miss Morton; told him she

would settle on him the Norfolk estate, which, clear of land-tax,

brings in a good thousand a-year; offered even, when matters grew

desperate, to make it twelve hundred; and in opposition to this, if he

still persisted in this low connection, represented to him the certain

penury that must attend the match. His own two thousand pounds she

protested should be his all; she would never see him again; and so far

would she be from affording him the smallest assistance, that if he

were to enter into any profession with a view of better support, she

would do all in her power to prevent him advancing in it."

Here Marianne, in an ecstasy of indignation, clapped her hands

together, and cried, "Gracious God! can this be possible!"

"Well may you wonder, Marianne," replied her brother, "at the obstinacy

which could resist such arguments as these. Your exclamation is very

natural."

Marianne was going to retort, but she remembered her promises, and

forbore.

"All this, however," he continued, "was urged in vain. Edward said

very little; but what he did say, was in the most determined manner.

Nothing should prevail on him to give up his engagement. He would

stand to it, cost him what it might."

"Then," cried Mrs. Jennings with blunt sincerity, no longer able to be

silent, "he has acted like an honest man! I beg your pardon, Mr.

Dashwood, but if he had done otherwise, I should have thought him a

rascal. I have some little concern in the business, as well as

yourself, for Lucy Steele is my cousin, and I believe there is not a

better kind of girl in the world, nor one who more deserves a good

husband."

John Dashwood was greatly astonished; but his nature was calm, not open

to provocation, and he never wished to offend anybody, especially

anybody of good fortune. He therefore replied, without any resentment,

"I would by no means speak disrespectfully of any relation of yours,

madam. Miss Lucy Steele is, I dare say, a very deserving young woman,

but in the present case you know, the connection must be impossible.

And to have entered into a secret engagement with a young man under her

uncle's care, the son of a woman especially of such very large fortune

as Mrs. Ferrars, is perhaps, altogether a little extraordinary. In

short, I do not mean to reflect upon the behaviour of any person whom

you have a regard for, Mrs. Jennings. We all wish her extremely happy;

and Mrs. Ferrars's conduct throughout the whole, has been such as every

conscientious, good mother, in like circumstances, would adopt. It has

been dignified and liberal. Edward has drawn his own lot, and I fear

it will be a bad one."

Marianne sighed out her similar apprehension; and Elinor's heart wrung

for the feelings of Edward, while braving his mother's threats, for a

woman who could not reward him.

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Jennings, "and how did it end?"

"I am sorry to say, ma'am, in a most unhappy rupture:-- Edward is

dismissed for ever from his mother's notice. He left her house

yesterday, but where he is gone, or whether he is still in town, I do

not know; for WE of course can make no inquiry."

"Poor young man!--and what is to become of him?"

"What, indeed, ma'am! It is a melancholy consideration. Born to the

prospect of such affluence! I cannot conceive a situation more

deplorable. The interest of two thousand pounds--how can a man live on

it?--and when to that is added the recollection, that he might, but for

his own folly, within three months have been in the receipt of two

thousand, five hundred a-year (for Miss Morton has thirty thousand

pounds,) I cannot picture to myself a more wretched condition. We must

all feel for him; and the more so, because it is totally out of our

power to assist him."

"Poor young man!" cried Mrs. Jennings, "I am sure he should be very

welcome to bed and board at my house; and so I would tell him if I

could see him. It is not fit that he should be living about at his own

charge now, at lodgings and taverns."

Elinor's heart thanked her for such kindness towards Edward, though she

could not forbear smiling at the form of it.

"If he would only have done as well by himself," said John Dashwood,

"as all his friends were disposed to do by him, he might now have been

in his proper situation, and would have wanted for nothing. But as it

is, it must be out of anybody's power to assist him. And there is one

thing more preparing against him, which must be worse than all--his

mother has determined, with a very natural kind of spirit, to settle

THAT estate upon Robert immediately, which might have been Edward's, on

proper conditions. I left her this morning with her lawyer, talking

over the business."

"Well!" said Mrs. Jennings, "that is HER revenge. Everybody has a way

of their own. But I don't think mine would be, to make one son

independent, because another had plagued me."

Marianne got up and walked about the room.

"Can anything be more galling to the spirit of a man," continued John,

"than to see his younger brother in possession of an estate which might

have been his own? Poor Edward! I feel for him sincerely."

A few minutes more spent in the same kind of effusion, concluded his

visit; and with repeated assurances to his sisters that he really

believed there was no material danger in Fanny's indisposition, and

that they need not therefore be very uneasy about it, he went away;

leaving the three ladies unanimous in their sentiments on the present

occasion, as far at least as it regarded Mrs. Ferrars's conduct, the

Dashwoods', and Edward's.

Marianne's indignation burst forth as soon as he quitted the room; and

as her vehemence made reserve impossible in Elinor, and unnecessary in

Mrs. Jennings, they all joined in a very spirited critique upon the

party.

CHAPTER 38

Mrs. Jennings was very warm in her praise of Edward's conduct, but only

Elinor and Marianne understood its true merit. THEY only knew how

little he had had to tempt him to be disobedient, and how small was the

consolation, beyond the consciousness of doing right, that could remain

to him in the loss of friends and fortune. Elinor gloried in his

integrity; and Marianne forgave all his offences in compassion for his

punishment. But though confidence between them was, by this public

discovery, restored to its proper state, it was not a subject on which

either of them were fond of dwelling when alone. Elinor avoided it

upon principle, as tending to fix still more upon her thoughts, by the

too warm, too positive assurances of Marianne, that belief of Edward's

continued affection for herself which she rather wished to do away; and

Marianne's courage soon failed her, in trying to converse upon a topic

which always left her more dissatisfied with herself than ever, by the

comparison it necessarily produced between Elinor's conduct and her own.

She felt all the force of that comparison; but not as her sister had

hoped, to urge her to exertion now; she felt it with all the pain of

continual self-reproach, regretted most bitterly that she had never

exerted herself before; but it brought only the torture of penitence,

without the hope of amendment. Her mind was so much weakened that she

still fancied present exertion impossible, and therefore it only

dispirited her more.

Nothing new was heard by them, for a day or two afterwards, of affairs

in Harley Street, or Bartlett's Buildings. But though so much of the

matter was known to them already, that Mrs. Jennings might have had

enough to do in spreading that knowledge farther, without seeking after

more, she had resolved from the first to pay a visit of comfort and

inquiry to her cousins as soon as she could; and nothing but the

hindrance of more visitors than usual, had prevented her going to them

within that time.

The third day succeeding their knowledge of the particulars, was so

fine, so beautiful a Sunday as to draw many to Kensington Gardens,

though it was only the second week in March. Mrs. Jennings and Elinor

were of the number; but Marianne, who knew that the Willoughbys were

again in town, and had a constant dread of meeting them, chose rather

to stay at home, than venture into so public a place.

An intimate acquaintance of Mrs. Jennings joined them soon after they

entered the Gardens, and Elinor was not sorry that by her continuing

with them, and engaging all Mrs. Jennings's conversation, she was

herself left to quiet reflection. She saw nothing of the Willoughbys,

nothing of Edward, and for some time nothing of anybody who could by

any chance whether grave or gay, be interesting to her. But at last

she found herself with some surprise, accosted by Miss Steele, who,

though looking rather shy, expressed great satisfaction in meeting

them, and on receiving encouragement from the particular kindness of

Mrs. Jennings, left her own party for a short time, to join their's.

Mrs. Jennings immediately whispered to Elinor,

"Get it all out of her, my dear. She will tell you any thing if you

ask. You see I cannot leave Mrs. Clarke."

It was lucky, however, for Mrs. Jennings's curiosity and Elinor's too,

that she would tell any thing WITHOUT being asked; for nothing would

otherwise have been learnt.

"I am so glad to meet you;" said Miss Steele, taking her familiarly by

the arm--"for I wanted to see you of all things in the world." And

then lowering her voice, "I suppose Mrs. Jennings has heard all about

it. Is she angry?"

"Not at all, I believe, with you."

"That is a good thing. And Lady Middleton, is SHE angry?"

"I cannot suppose it possible that she should."

"I am monstrous glad of it. Good gracious! I have had such a time of

it! I never saw Lucy in such a rage in my life. She vowed at first

she would never trim me up a new bonnet, nor do any thing else for me

again, so long as she lived; but now she is quite come to, and we are

as good friends as ever. Look, she made me this bow to my hat, and put

in the feather last night. There now, YOU are going to laugh at me

too. But why should not I wear pink ribbons? I do not care if it IS

the Doctor's favourite colour. I am sure, for my part, I should never

have known he DID like it better than any other colour, if he had not

happened to say so. My cousins have been so plaguing me! I declare

sometimes I do not know which way to look before them."

She had wandered away to a subject on which Elinor had nothing to say,

and therefore soon judged it expedient to find her way back again to

the first.

"Well, but Miss Dashwood," speaking triumphantly, "people may say what

they chuse about Mr. Ferrars's declaring he would not have Lucy, for it

is no such thing I can tell you; and it is quite a shame for such

ill-natured reports to be spread abroad. Whatever Lucy might think

about it herself, you know, it was no business of other people to set

it down for certain."

"I never heard any thing of the kind hinted at before, I assure you,"

said Elinor.

"Oh, did not you? But it WAS said, I know, very well, and by more than

one; for Miss Godby told Miss Sparks, that nobody in their senses could

expect Mr. Ferrars to give up a woman like Miss Morton, with thirty

thousand pounds to her fortune, for Lucy Steele that had nothing at

all; and I had it from Miss Sparks myself. And besides that, my cousin

Richard said himself, that when it came to the point he was afraid Mr.

Ferrars would be off; and when Edward did not come near us for three

days, I could not tell what to think myself; and I believe in my heart

Lucy gave it up all for lost; for we came away from your brother's

Wednesday, and we saw nothing of him not all Thursday, Friday, and

Saturday, and did not know what was become of him. Once Lucy thought

to write to him, but then her spirits rose against that. However this

morning he came just as we came home from church; and then it all came

out, how he had been sent for Wednesday to Harley Street, and been

talked to by his mother and all of them, and how he had declared before

them all that he loved nobody but Lucy, and nobody but Lucy would he

have. And how he had been so worried by what passed, that as soon as

he had went away from his mother's house, he had got upon his horse,

and rid into the country, some where or other; and how he had stayed

about at an inn all Thursday and Friday, on purpose to get the better

of it. And after thinking it all over and over again, he said, it

seemed to him as if, now he had no fortune, and no nothing at all, it

would be quite unkind to keep her on to the engagement, because it must

be for her loss, for he had nothing but two thousand pounds, and no

hope of any thing else; and if he was to go into orders, as he had some

thoughts, he could get nothing but a curacy, and how was they to live

upon that?--He could not bear to think of her doing no better, and so

he begged, if she had the least mind for it, to put an end to the

matter directly, and leave him shift for himself. I heard him say all

this as plain as could possibly be. And it was entirely for HER sake,

and upon HER account, that he said a word about being off, and not upon

his own. I will take my oath he never dropt a syllable of being tired

of her, or of wishing to marry Miss Morton, or any thing like it. But,

to be sure, Lucy would not give ear to such kind of talking; so she

told him directly (with a great deal about sweet and love, you know,

and all that--Oh, la! one can't repeat such kind of things you

know)--she told him directly, she had not the least mind in the world

to be off, for she could live with him upon a trifle, and how little so

ever he might have, she should be very glad to have it all, you know,

or something of the kind. So then he was monstrous happy, and talked

on some time about what they should do, and they agreed he should take

orders directly, and they must wait to be married till he got a living.

And just then I could not hear any more, for my cousin called from

below to tell me Mrs. Richardson was come in her coach, and would take

one of us to Kensington Gardens; so I was forced to go into the room

and interrupt them, to ask Lucy if she would like to go, but she did

not care to leave Edward; so I just run up stairs and put on a pair of

silk stockings and came off with the Richardsons."

"I do not understand what you mean by interrupting them," said Elinor;

"you were all in the same room together, were not you?"

"No, indeed, not us. La! Miss Dashwood, do you think people make love

when any body else is by? Oh, for shame!--To be sure you must know

better than that. (Laughing affectedly.)--No, no; they were shut up in

the drawing-room together, and all I heard was only by listening at the

door."

"How!" cried Elinor; "have you been repeating to me what you only

learnt yourself by listening at the door? I am sorry I did not know it

before; for I certainly would not have suffered you to give me

particulars of a conversation which you ought not to have known

yourself. How could you behave so unfairly by your sister?"

"Oh, la! there is nothing in THAT. I only stood at the door, and heard

what I could. And I am sure Lucy would have done just the same by me;

for a year or two back, when Martha Sharpe and I had so many secrets

together, she never made any bones of hiding in a closet, or behind a

chimney-board, on purpose to hear what we said."

Elinor tried to talk of something else; but Miss Steele could not be

kept beyond a couple of minutes, from what was uppermost in her mind.

"Edward talks of going to Oxford soon," said she; "but now he is

lodging at No. --, Pall Mall. What an ill-natured woman his mother is,

an't she? And your brother and sister were not very kind! However, I

shan't say anything against them to YOU; and to be sure they did send

us home in their own chariot, which was more than I looked for. And

for my part, I was all in a fright for fear your sister should ask us

for the huswifes she had gave us a day or two before; but, however,

nothing was said about them, and I took care to keep mine out of sight.

Edward have got some business at Oxford, he says; so he must go there

for a time; and after THAT, as soon as he can light upon a Bishop, he

will be ordained. I wonder what curacy he will get!--Good gracious!

(giggling as she spoke) I'd lay my life I know what my cousins will

say, when they hear of it. They will tell me I should write to the

Doctor, to get Edward the curacy of his new living. I know they will;

but I am sure I would not do such a thing for all the world.-- 'La!' I

shall say directly, 'I wonder how you could think of such a thing? I

write to the Doctor, indeed!'"

"Well," said Elinor, "it is a comfort to be prepared against the worst.

You have got your answer ready."

Miss Steele was going to reply on the same subject, but the approach of

her own party made another more necessary.

"Oh, la! here come the Richardsons. I had a vast deal more to say to

you, but I must not stay away from them not any longer. I assure you

they are very genteel people. He makes a monstrous deal of money, and

they keep their own coach. I have not time to speak to Mrs. Jennings

about it myself, but pray tell her I am quite happy to hear she is not

in anger against us, and Lady Middleton the same; and if anything

should happen to take you and your sister away, and Mrs. Jennings

should want company, I am sure we should be very glad to come and stay

with her for as long a time as she likes. I suppose Lady Middleton

won't ask us any more this bout. Good-by; I am sorry Miss Marianne was

not here. Remember me kindly to her. La! if you have not got your

spotted muslin on!--I wonder you was not afraid of its being torn."

Such was her parting concern; for after this, she had time only to pay

her farewell compliments to Mrs. Jennings, before her company was

claimed by Mrs. Richardson; and Elinor was left in possession of

knowledge which might feed her powers of reflection some time, though

she had learnt very little more than what had been already foreseen and

foreplanned in her own mind. Edward's marriage with Lucy was as firmly

determined on, and the time of its taking place remained as absolutely

uncertain, as she had concluded it would be;--every thing depended,

exactly after her expectation, on his getting that preferment, of

which, at present, there seemed not the smallest chance.

As soon as they returned to the carriage, Mrs. Jennings was eager for

information; but as Elinor wished to spread as little as possible

intelligence that had in the first place been so unfairly obtained, she

confined herself to the brief repetition of such simple particulars, as

she felt assured that Lucy, for the sake of her own consequence, would

choose to have known. The continuance of their engagement, and the

means that were able to be taken for promoting its end, was all her

communication; and this produced from Mrs. Jennings the following

natural remark.

"Wait for his having a living!--ay, we all know how THAT will

end:--they will wait a twelvemonth, and finding no good comes of it,

will set down upon a curacy of fifty pounds a-year, with the interest

of his two thousand pounds, and what little matter Mr. Steele and Mr.

Pratt can give her.--Then they will have a child every year! and Lord

help 'em! how poor they will be!--I must see what I can give them

towards furnishing their house. Two maids and two men, indeed!--as I

talked of t'other day.--No, no, they must get a stout girl of all

works.-- Betty's sister would never do for them NOW."

The next morning brought Elinor a letter by the two-penny post from

Lucy herself. It was as follows:

"Bartlett's Building, March.

"I hope my dear Miss Dashwood will excuse the

liberty I take of writing to her; but I know your

friendship for me will make you pleased to hear such

a good account of myself and my dear Edward, after

all the troubles we have went through lately,

therefore will make no more apologies, but proceed

to say that, thank God! though we have suffered

dreadfully, we are both quite well now, and as happy

as we must always be in one another's love. We have

had great trials, and great persecutions, but

however, at the same time, gratefully acknowledge

many friends, yourself not the least among them,

whose great kindness I shall always thankfully

remember, as will Edward too, who I have told of

it. I am sure you will be glad to hear, as likewise

dear Mrs. Jennings, I spent two happy hours with

him yesterday afternoon, he would not hear of our

parting, though earnestly did I, as I thought my

duty required, urge him to it for prudence sake,

and would have parted for ever on the spot, would

he consent to it; but he said it should never be,

he did not regard his mother's anger, while he could

have my affections; our prospects are not very

bright, to be sure, but we must wait, and hope for

the best; he will be ordained shortly; and should

it ever be in your power to recommend him to any

body that has a living to bestow, am very sure you

will not forget us, and dear Mrs. Jennings too,

trust she will speak a good word for us to Sir John,

or Mr. Palmer, or any friend that may be able to

assist us.--Poor Anne was much to blame for what

she did, but she did it for the best, so I say

nothing; hope Mrs. Jennings won't think it too much

trouble to give us a call, should she come this way

any morning, 'twould be a great kindness, and my

cousins would be proud to know her.--My paper reminds

me to conclude; and begging to be most gratefully

and respectfully remembered to her, and to Sir John,

and Lady Middleton, and the dear children, when you

chance to see them, and love to Miss Marianne,

"I am, &c."

As soon as Elinor had finished it, she performed what she concluded to

be its writer's real design, by placing it in the hands of Mrs.

Jennings, who read it aloud with many comments of satisfaction and

praise.

"Very well indeed!--how prettily she writes!--aye, that was quite

proper to let him be off if he would. That was just like Lucy.--Poor

soul! I wish I COULD get him a living, with all my heart.--She calls me

dear Mrs. Jennings, you see. She is a good-hearted girl as ever

lived.--Very well upon my word. That sentence is very prettily turned.

Yes, yes, I will go and see her, sure enough. How attentive she is, to

think of every body!--Thank you, my dear, for shewing it me. It is as

pretty a letter as ever I saw, and does Lucy's head and heart great

credit."

CHAPTER 39

The Miss Dashwoods had now been rather more than two months in town,

and Marianne's impatience to be gone increased every day. She sighed

for the air, the liberty, the quiet of the country; and fancied that if

any place could give her ease, Barton must do it. Elinor was hardly

less anxious than herself for their removal, and only so much less bent

on its being effected immediately, as that she was conscious of the

difficulties of so long a journey, which Marianne could not be brought

to acknowledge. She began, however, seriously to turn her thoughts

towards its accomplishment, and had already mentioned their wishes to

their kind hostess, who resisted them with all the eloquence of her

good-will, when a plan was suggested, which, though detaining them from

home yet a few weeks longer, appeared to Elinor altogether much more

eligible than any other. The Palmers were to remove to Cleveland about

the end of March, for the Easter holidays; and Mrs. Jennings, with both

her friends, received a very warm invitation from Charlotte to go with

them. This would not, in itself, have been sufficient for the delicacy

of Miss Dashwood;--but it was inforced with so much real politeness by

Mr. Palmer himself, as, joined to the very great amendment of his

manners towards them since her sister had been known to be unhappy,

induced her to accept it with pleasure.

When she told Marianne what she had done, however, her first reply was

not very auspicious.

"Cleveland!"--she cried, with great agitation. "No, I cannot go to

Cleveland."--

"You forget," said Elinor gently, "that its situation is not...that it

is not in the neighbourhood of..."

"But it is in Somersetshire.--I cannot go into Somersetshire.--There,

where I looked forward to going...No, Elinor, you cannot expect me to

go there."

Elinor would not argue upon the propriety of overcoming such

feelings;--she only endeavoured to counteract them by working on

others;--represented it, therefore, as a measure which would fix the

time of her returning to that dear mother, whom she so much wished to

see, in a more eligible, more comfortable manner, than any other plan

could do, and perhaps without any greater delay. From Cleveland, which

was within a few miles of Bristol, the distance to Barton was not

beyond one day, though a long day's journey; and their mother's servant

might easily come there to attend them down; and as there could be no

occasion of their staying above a week at Cleveland, they might now be

at home in little more than three weeks' time. As Marianne's affection

for her mother was sincere, it must triumph with little difficulty,

over the imaginary evils she had started.

Mrs. Jennings was so far from being weary of her guest, that she

pressed them very earnestly to return with her again from Cleveland.

Elinor was grateful for the attention, but it could not alter her

design; and their mother's concurrence being readily gained, every

thing relative to their return was arranged as far as it could be;--and

Marianne found some relief in drawing up a statement of the hours that

were yet to divide her from Barton.

"Ah! Colonel, I do not know what you and I shall do without the Miss

Dashwoods;"--was Mrs. Jennings's address to him when he first called on

her, after their leaving her was settled--"for they are quite resolved

upon going home from the Palmers;--and how forlorn we shall be, when I

come back!--Lord! we shall sit and gape at one another as dull as two

cats."

Perhaps Mrs. Jennings was in hopes, by this vigorous sketch of their

future ennui, to provoke him to make that offer, which might give

himself an escape from it;--and if so, she had soon afterwards good

reason to think her object gained; for, on Elinor's moving to the

window to take more expeditiously the dimensions of a print, which she

was going to copy for her friend, he followed her to it with a look of

particular meaning, and conversed with her there for several minutes.

The effect of his discourse on the lady too, could not escape her

observation, for though she was too honorable to listen, and had even

changed her seat, on purpose that she might NOT hear, to one close by

the piano forte on which Marianne was playing, she could not keep

herself from seeing that Elinor changed colour, attended with

agitation, and was too intent on what he said to pursue her

employment.-- Still farther in confirmation of her hopes, in the

interval of Marianne's turning from one lesson to another, some words

of the Colonel's inevitably reached her ear, in which he seemed to be

apologising for the badness of his house. This set the matter beyond a

doubt. She wondered, indeed, at his thinking it necessary to do so;

but supposed it to be the proper etiquette. What Elinor said in reply

she could not distinguish, but judged from the motion of her lips, that

she did not think THAT any material objection;--and Mrs. Jennings

commended her in her heart for being so honest. They then talked on

for a few minutes longer without her catching a syllable, when another

lucky stop in Marianne's performance brought her these words in the

Colonel's calm voice,--

"I am afraid it cannot take place very soon."

Astonished and shocked at so unlover-like a speech, she was almost

ready to cry out, "Lord! what should hinder it?"--but checking her

desire, confined herself to this silent ejaculation.

"This is very strange!--sure he need not wait to be older."

This delay on the Colonel's side, however, did not seem to offend or

mortify his fair companion in the least, for on their breaking up the

conference soon afterwards, and moving different ways, Mrs. Jennings

very plainly heard Elinor say, and with a voice which shewed her to

feel what she said,

"I shall always think myself very much obliged to you."

Mrs. Jennings was delighted with her gratitude, and only wondered that

after hearing such a sentence, the Colonel should be able to take leave

of them, as he immediately did, with the utmost sang-froid, and go away

without making her any reply!--She had not thought her old friend could

have made so indifferent a suitor.

What had really passed between them was to this effect.

"I have heard," said he, with great compassion, "of the injustice your

friend Mr. Ferrars has suffered from his family; for if I understand

the matter right, he has been entirely cast off by them for persevering

in his engagement with a very deserving young woman.-- Have I been

rightly informed?--Is it so?--"

Elinor told him that it was.

"The cruelty, the impolitic cruelty,"--he replied, with great

feeling,--"of dividing, or attempting to divide, two young people long

attached to each other, is terrible.-- Mrs. Ferrars does not know what

she may be doing--what she may drive her son to. I have seen Mr.

Ferrars two or three times in Harley Street, and am much pleased with

him. He is not a young man with whom one can be intimately acquainted

in a short time, but I have seen enough of him to wish him well for his

own sake, and as a friend of yours, I wish it still more. I understand

that he intends to take orders. Will you be so good as to tell him

that the living of Delaford, now just vacant, as I am informed by this

day's post, is his, if he think it worth his acceptance--but THAT,

perhaps, so unfortunately circumstanced as he is now, it may be

nonsense to appear to doubt; I only wish it were more valuable.-- It

is a rectory, but a small one; the late incumbent, I believe, did not

make more than 200 L per annum, and though it is certainly capable of

improvement, I fear, not to such an amount as to afford him a very

comfortable income. Such as it is, however, my pleasure in presenting

him to it, will be very great. Pray assure him of it."

Elinor's astonishment at this commission could hardly have been

greater, had the Colonel been really making her an offer of his hand.

The preferment, which only two days before she had considered as

hopeless for Edward, was already provided to enable him to marry;--and

SHE, of all people in the world, was fixed on to bestow it!--Her

emotion was such as Mrs. Jennings had attributed to a very different

cause;--but whatever minor feelings less pure, less pleasing, might

have a share in that emotion, her esteem for the general benevolence,

and her gratitude for the particular friendship, which together

prompted Colonel Brandon to this act, were strongly felt, and warmly

expressed. She thanked him for it with all her heart, spoke of

Edward's principles and disposition with that praise which she knew

them to deserve; and promised to undertake the commission with

pleasure, if it were really his wish to put off so agreeable an office

to another. But at the same time, she could not help thinking that no

one could so well perform it as himself. It was an office in short,

from which, unwilling to give Edward the pain of receiving an

obligation from HER, she would have been very glad to be spared

herself;-- but Colonel Brandon, on motives of equal delicacy, declining

it likewise, still seemed so desirous of its being given through her

means, that she would not on any account make farther opposition.

Edward, she believed, was still in town, and fortunately she had heard

his address from Miss Steele. She could undertake therefore to inform

him of it, in the course of the day. After this had been settled,

Colonel Brandon began to talk of his own advantage in securing so

respectable and agreeable a neighbour, and THEN it was that he

mentioned with regret, that the house was small and indifferent;--an

evil which Elinor, as Mrs. Jennings had supposed her to do, made very

light of, at least as far as regarded its size.

"The smallness of the house," said she, "I cannot imagine any

inconvenience to them, for it will be in proportion to their family and

income."

By which the Colonel was surprised to find that SHE was considering Mr.

Ferrars's marriage as the certain consequence of the presentation; for

he did not suppose it possible that Delaford living could supply such

an income, as anybody in his style of life would venture to settle

on--and he said so.

"This little rectory CAN do no more than make Mr. Ferrars comfortable

as a bachelor; it cannot enable him to marry. I am sorry to say that

my patronage ends with this; and my interest is hardly more extensive.

If, however, by an unforeseen chance it should be in my power to serve

him farther, I must think very differently of him from what I now do,

if I am not as ready to be useful to him then as I sincerely wish I

could be at present. What I am now doing indeed, seems nothing at all,

since it can advance him so little towards what must be his principal,

his only object of happiness. His marriage must still be a distant

good;--at least, I am afraid it cannot take place very soon.--"

Such was the sentence which, when misunderstood, so justly offended the

delicate feelings of Mrs. Jennings; but after this narration of what

really passed between Colonel Brandon and Elinor, while they stood at

the window, the gratitude expressed by the latter on their parting, may

perhaps appear in general, not less reasonably excited, nor less

properly worded than if it had arisen from an offer of marriage.

CHAPTER 40

"Well, Miss Dashwood," said Mrs. Jennings, sagaciously smiling, as soon

as the gentleman had withdrawn, "I do not ask you what the Colonel has

been saying to you; for though, upon my honour, I TRIED to keep out of

hearing, I could not help catching enough to understand his business.

And I assure you I never was better pleased in my life, and I wish you

joy of it with all my heart."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Elinor. "It is a matter of great joy to me;

and I feel the goodness of Colonel Brandon most sensibly. There are

not many men who would act as he has done. Few people who have so

compassionate a heart! I never was more astonished in my life."

"Lord! my dear, you are very modest. I an't the least astonished at it

in the world, for I have often thought of late, there was nothing more

likely to happen."

"You judged from your knowledge of the Colonel's general benevolence;

but at least you could not foresee that the opportunity would so very

soon occur."

"Opportunity!" repeated Mrs. Jennings--"Oh! as to that, when a man has

once made up his mind to such a thing, somehow or other he will soon

find an opportunity. Well, my dear, I wish you joy of it again and

again; and if ever there was a happy couple in the world, I think I

shall soon know where to look for them."

"You mean to go to Delaford after them I suppose," said Elinor, with a

faint smile.

"Aye, my dear, that I do, indeed. And as to the house being a bad one,

I do not know what the Colonel would be at, for it is as good a one as

ever I saw."

"He spoke of its being out of repair."

"Well, and whose fault is that? why don't he repair it?--who should do

it but himself?"

They were interrupted by the servant's coming in to announce the

carriage being at the door; and Mrs. Jennings immediately preparing to

go, said,--

"Well, my dear, I must be gone before I have had half my talk out.

But, however, we may have it all over in the evening; for we shall be

quite alone. I do not ask you to go with me, for I dare say your mind

is too full of the matter to care for company; and besides, you must

long to tell your sister all about it."

Marianne had left the room before the conversation began.

"Certainly, ma'am, I shall tell Marianne of it; but I shall not mention

it at present to any body else."

"Oh! very well," said Mrs. Jennings rather disappointed. "Then you

would not have me tell it to Lucy, for I think of going as far as

Holborn to-day."

"No, ma'am, not even Lucy if you please. One day's delay will not be

very material; and till I have written to Mr. Ferrars, I think it ought

not to be mentioned to any body else. I shall do THAT directly. It is

of importance that no time should be lost with him, for he will of

course have much to do relative to his ordination."

This speech at first puzzled Mrs. Jennings exceedingly. Why Mr.

Ferrars was to have been written to about it in such a hurry, she could

not immediately comprehend. A few moments' reflection, however,

produced a very happy idea, and she exclaimed;--

"Oh, ho!--I understand you. Mr. Ferrars is to be the man. Well, so

much the better for him. Ay, to be sure, he must be ordained in

readiness; and I am very glad to find things are so forward between

you. But, my dear, is not this rather out of character? Should not

the Colonel write himself?--sure, he is the proper person."

Elinor did not quite understand the beginning of Mrs. Jennings's

speech, neither did she think it worth inquiring into; and therefore

only replied to its conclusion.

"Colonel Brandon is so delicate a man, that he rather wished any one to

announce his intentions to Mr. Ferrars than himself."

"And so YOU are forced to do it. Well THAT is an odd kind of delicacy!

However, I will not disturb you (seeing her preparing to write.) You

know your own concerns best. So goodby, my dear. I have not heard of

any thing to please me so well since Charlotte was brought to bed."

And away she went; but returning again in a moment,

"I have just been thinking of Betty's sister, my dear. I should be

very glad to get her so good a mistress. But whether she would do for

a lady's maid, I am sure I can't tell. She is an excellent housemaid,

and works very well at her needle. However, you will think of all that

at your leisure."

"Certainly, ma'am," replied Elinor, not hearing much of what she said,

and more anxious to be alone, than to be mistress of the subject.

How she should begin--how she should express herself in her note to

Edward, was now all her concern. The particular circumstances between

them made a difficulty of that which to any other person would have

been the easiest thing in the world; but she equally feared to say too

much or too little, and sat deliberating over her paper, with the pen

in her hand, till broken in on by the entrance of Edward himself.

He had met Mrs. Jennings at the door in her way to the carriage, as he

came to leave his farewell card; and she, after apologising for not

returning herself, had obliged him to enter, by saying that Miss

Dashwood was above, and wanted to speak with him on very particular

business.

Elinor had just been congratulating herself, in the midst of her

perplexity, that however difficult it might be to express herself

properly by letter, it was at least preferable to giving the

information by word of mouth, when her visitor entered, to force her

upon this greatest exertion of all. Her astonishment and confusion

were very great on his so sudden appearance. She had not seen him

before since his engagement became public, and therefore not since his

knowing her to be acquainted with it; which, with the consciousness of

what she had been thinking of, and what she had to tell him, made her

feel particularly uncomfortable for some minutes. He too was much

distressed; and they sat down together in a most promising state of

embarrassment.--Whether he had asked her pardon for his intrusion on

first coming into the room, he could not recollect; but determining to

be on the safe side, he made his apology in form as soon as he could

say any thing, after taking a chair.

"Mrs. Jennings told me," said he, "that you wished to speak with me, at

least I understood her so--or I certainly should not have intruded on

you in such a manner; though at the same time, I should have been

extremely sorry to leave London without seeing you and your sister;

especially as it will most likely be some time--it is not probable that

I should soon have the pleasure of meeting you again. I go to Oxford

tomorrow."

"You would not have gone, however," said Elinor, recovering herself,

and determined to get over what she so much dreaded as soon as

possible, "without receiving our good wishes, even if we had not been

able to give them in person. Mrs. Jennings was quite right in what she

said. I have something of consequence to inform you of, which I was on

the point of communicating by paper. I am charged with a most

agreeable office (breathing rather faster than usual as she spoke.)

Colonel Brandon, who was here only ten minutes ago, has desired me to

say, that understanding you mean to take orders, he has great pleasure

in offering you the living of Delaford now just vacant, and only wishes

it were more valuable. Allow me to congratulate you on having so

respectable and well-judging a friend, and to join in his wish that the

living--it is about two hundred a-year--were much more considerable,

and such as might better enable you to--as might be more than a

temporary accommodation to yourself--such, in short, as might establish

all your views of happiness."

What Edward felt, as he could not say it himself, it cannot be expected

that any one else should say for him. He LOOKED all the astonishment

which such unexpected, such unthought-of information could not fail of

exciting; but he said only these two words,

"Colonel Brandon!"

"Yes," continued Elinor, gathering more resolution, as some of the

worst was over, "Colonel Brandon means it as a testimony of his concern

for what has lately passed--for the cruel situation in which the

unjustifiable conduct of your family has placed you--a concern which I

am sure Marianne, myself, and all your friends, must share; and

likewise as a proof of his high esteem for your general character, and

his particular approbation of your behaviour on the present occasion."

"Colonel Brandon give ME a living!--Can it be possible?"

"The unkindness of your own relations has made you astonished to find

friendship any where."

"No," replied be, with sudden consciousness, "not to find it in YOU;

for I cannot be ignorant that to you, to your goodness, I owe it

all.--I feel it--I would express it if I could--but, as you well know,

I am no orator."

"You are very much mistaken. I do assure you that you owe it entirely,

at least almost entirely, to your own merit, and Colonel Brandon's

discernment of it. I have had no hand in it. I did not even know,

till I understood his design, that the living was vacant; nor had it

ever occurred to me that he might have had such a living in his gift.

As a friend of mine, of my family, he may, perhaps--indeed I know he

HAS, still greater pleasure in bestowing it; but, upon my word, you owe

nothing to my solicitation."

Truth obliged her to acknowledge some small share in the action, but

she was at the same time so unwilling to appear as the benefactress of

Edward, that she acknowledged it with hesitation; which probably

contributed to fix that suspicion in his mind which had recently

entered it. For a short time he sat deep in thought, after Elinor had

ceased to speak;--at last, and as if it were rather an effort, he said,

"Colonel Brandon seems a man of great worth and respectability. I have

always heard him spoken of as such, and your brother I know esteems him

highly. He is undoubtedly a sensible man, and in his manners perfectly

the gentleman."

"Indeed," replied Elinor, "I believe that you will find him, on farther

acquaintance, all that you have heard him to be, and as you will be

such very near neighbours (for I understand the parsonage is almost

close to the mansion-house,) it is particularly important that he

SHOULD be all this."

Edward made no answer; but when she had turned away her head, gave her

a look so serious, so earnest, so uncheerful, as seemed to say, that he

might hereafter wish the distance between the parsonage and the

mansion-house much greater.

"Colonel Brandon, I think, lodges in St. James Street," said he, soon

afterwards, rising from his chair.

Elinor told him the number of the house.

"I must hurry away then, to give him those thanks which you will not

allow me to give YOU; to assure him that he has made me a very--an

exceedingly happy man."

Elinor did not offer to detain him; and they parted, with a very

earnest assurance on HER side of her unceasing good wishes for his

happiness in every change of situation that might befall him; on HIS,

with rather an attempt to return the same good will, than the power of

expressing it.

"When I see him again," said Elinor to herself, as the door shut him

out, "I shall see him the husband of Lucy."

And with this pleasing anticipation, she sat down to reconsider the

past, recall the words and endeavour to comprehend all the feelings of

Edward; and, of course, to reflect on her own with discontent.

When Mrs. Jennings came home, though she returned from seeing people

whom she had never seen before, and of whom therefore she must have a

great deal to say, her mind was so much more occupied by the important

secret in her possession, than by anything else, that she reverted to

it again as soon as Elinor appeared.

"Well, my dear," she cried, "I sent you up to the young man. Did not I

do right?--And I suppose you had no great difficulty--You did not find

him very unwilling to accept your proposal?"

"No, ma'am; THAT was not very likely."

"Well, and how soon will he be ready?--For it seems all to depend upon

that."

"Really," said Elinor, "I know so little of these kind of forms, that I

can hardly even conjecture as to the time, or the preparation

necessary; but I suppose two or three months will complete his

ordination."

"Two or three months!" cried Mrs. Jennings; "Lord! my dear, how calmly

you talk of it; and can the Colonel wait two or three months! Lord

bless me!--I am sure it would put ME quite out of patience!--And though

one would be very glad to do a kindness by poor Mr. Ferrars, I do think

it is not worth while to wait two or three months for him. Sure

somebody else might be found that would do as well; somebody that is in

orders already."

"My dear ma'am," said Elinor, "what can you be thinking of?-- Why,

Colonel Brandon's only object is to be of use to Mr. Ferrars."

"Lord bless you, my dear!--Sure you do not mean to persuade me that the

Colonel only marries you for the sake of giving ten guineas to Mr.

Ferrars!"

The deception could not continue after this; and an explanation

immediately took place, by which both gained considerable amusement for

the moment, without any material loss of happiness to either, for Mrs.

Jennings only exchanged one form of delight for another, and still

without forfeiting her expectation of the first.

"Aye, aye, the parsonage is but a small one," said she, after the first

ebullition of surprise and satisfaction was over, "and very likely MAY

be out of repair; but to hear a man apologising, as I thought, for a

house that to my knowledge has five sitting rooms on the ground-floor,

and I think the housekeeper told me could make up fifteen beds!--and to

you too, that had been used to live in Barton cottage!-- It seems quite

ridiculous. But, my dear, we must touch up the Colonel to do some

thing to the parsonage, and make it comfortable for them, before Lucy

goes to it."

"But Colonel Brandon does not seem to have any idea of the living's

being enough to allow them to marry."

"The Colonel is a ninny, my dear; because he has two thousand a-year

himself, he thinks that nobody else can marry on less. Take my word

for it, that, if I am alive, I shall be paying a visit at Delaford

Parsonage before Michaelmas; and I am sure I shan't go if Lucy an't

there."

Elinor was quite of her opinion, as to the probability of their not

waiting for any thing more.

CHAPTER 41

Edward, having carried his thanks to Colonel Brandon, proceeded with

his happiness to Lucy; and such was the excess of it by the time he

reached Bartlett's Buildings, that she was able to assure Mrs.

Jennings, who called on her again the next day with her

congratulations, that she had never seen him in such spirits before in

her life.

Her own happiness, and her own spirits, were at least very certain; and

she joined Mrs. Jennings most heartily in her expectation of their

being all comfortably together in Delaford Parsonage before Michaelmas.

So far was she, at the same time, from any backwardness to give Elinor

that credit which Edward WOULD give her, that she spoke of her

friendship for them both with the most grateful warmth, was ready to

own all their obligation to her, and openly declared that no exertion

for their good on Miss Dashwood's part, either present or future, would

ever surprise her, for she believed her capable of doing any thing in

the world for those she really valued. As for Colonel Brandon, she was

not only ready to worship him as a saint, but was moreover truly

anxious that he should be treated as one in all worldly concerns;

anxious that his tithes should be raised to the utmost; and scarcely

resolved to avail herself, at Delaford, as far as she possibly could,

of his servants, his carriage, his cows, and his poultry.

It was now above a week since John Dashwood had called in Berkeley

Street, and as since that time no notice had been taken by them of his

wife's indisposition, beyond one verbal enquiry, Elinor began to feel

it necessary to pay her a visit.--This was an obligation, however,

which not only opposed her own inclination, but which had not the

assistance of any encouragement from her companions. Marianne, not

contented with absolutely refusing to go herself, was very urgent to

prevent her sister's going at all; and Mrs. Jennings, though her

carriage was always at Elinor's service, so very much disliked Mrs.

John Dashwood, that not even her curiosity to see how she looked after

the late discovery, nor her strong desire to affront her by taking

Edward's part, could overcome her unwillingness to be in her company

again. The consequence was, that Elinor set out by herself to pay a

visit, for which no one could really have less inclination, and to run

the risk of a tete-a-tete with a woman, whom neither of the others had

so much reason to dislike.

Mrs. Dashwood was denied; but before the carriage could turn from the

house, her husband accidentally came out. He expressed great pleasure

in meeting Elinor, told her that he had been just going to call in

Berkeley Street, and, assuring her that Fanny would be very glad to see

her, invited her to come in.

They walked up stairs in to the drawing-room.--Nobody was there.

"Fanny is in her own room, I suppose," said he:--"I will go to her

presently, for I am sure she will not have the least objection in the

world to seeing YOU.-- Very far from it, indeed. NOW especially there

cannot be--but however, you and Marianne were always great

favourites.--Why would not Marianne come?"--

Elinor made what excuse she could for her.

"I am not sorry to see you alone," he replied, "for I have a good deal

to say to you. This living of Colonel Brandon's--can it be true?--has

he really given it to Edward?--I heard it yesterday by chance, and was

coming to you on purpose to enquire farther about it."

"It is perfectly true.--Colonel Brandon has given the living of

Delaford to Edward."

"Really!--Well, this is very astonishing!--no relationship!--no

connection between them!--and now that livings fetch such a

price!--what was the value of this?"

"About two hundred a year."

"Very well--and for the next presentation to a living of that

value--supposing the late incumbent to have been old and sickly, and

likely to vacate it soon--he might have got I dare say--fourteen

hundred pounds. And how came he not to have settled that matter before

this person's death?--NOW indeed it would be too late to sell it, but a

man of Colonel Brandon's sense!--I wonder he should be so improvident

in a point of such common, such natural, concern!--Well, I am convinced

that there is a vast deal of inconsistency in almost every human

character. I suppose, however--on recollection--that the case may

probably be THIS. Edward is only to hold the living till the person to

whom the Colonel has really sold the presentation, is old enough to

take it.--Aye, aye, that is the fact, depend upon it."

Elinor contradicted it, however, very positively; and by relating that

she had herself been employed in conveying the offer from Colonel

Brandon to Edward, and, therefore, must understand the terms on which

it was given, obliged him to submit to her authority.

"It is truly astonishing!"--he cried, after hearing what she

said--"what could be the Colonel's motive?"

"A very simple one--to be of use to Mr. Ferrars."

"Well, well; whatever Colonel Brandon may be, Edward is a very lucky

man.--You will not mention the matter to Fanny, however, for though I

have broke it to her, and she bears it vastly well,--she will not like

to hear it much talked of."

Elinor had some difficulty here to refrain from observing, that she

thought Fanny might have borne with composure, an acquisition of wealth

to her brother, by which neither she nor her child could be possibly

impoverished.

"Mrs. Ferrars," added he, lowering his voice to the tone becoming so

important a subject, "knows nothing about it at present, and I believe

it will be best to keep it entirely concealed from her as long as may

be.-- When the marriage takes place, I fear she must hear of it all."

"But why should such precaution be used?--Though it is not to be

supposed that Mrs. Ferrars can have the smallest satisfaction in

knowing that her son has money enough to live upon,--for THAT must be

quite out of the question; yet why, upon her late behaviour, is she

supposed to feel at all?--She has done with her son, she cast him off

for ever, and has made all those over whom she had any influence, cast

him off likewise. Surely, after doing so, she cannot be imagined

liable to any impression of sorrow or of joy on his account--she cannot

be interested in any thing that befalls him.-- She would not be so weak

as to throw away the comfort of a child, and yet retain the anxiety of

a parent!"

"Ah! Elinor," said John, "your reasoning is very good, but it is

founded on ignorance of human nature. When Edward's unhappy match

takes place, depend upon it his mother will feel as much as if she had

never discarded him; and, therefore every circumstance that may

accelerate that dreadful event, must be concealed from her as much as

possible. Mrs. Ferrars can never forget that Edward is her son."

"You surprise me; I should think it must nearly have escaped her memory

by THIS time."

"You wrong her exceedingly. Mrs. Ferrars is one of the most

affectionate mothers in the world."

Elinor was silent.

"We think NOW,"--said Mr. Dashwood, after a short pause, "of ROBERT'S

marrying Miss Morton."

Elinor, smiling at the grave and decisive importance of her brother's

tone, calmly replied,

"The lady, I suppose, has no choice in the affair."

"Choice!--how do you mean?"

"I only mean that I suppose, from your manner of speaking, it must be

the same to Miss Morton whether she marry Edward or Robert."

"Certainly, there can be no difference; for Robert will now to all

intents and purposes be considered as the eldest son;--and as to any

thing else, they are both very agreeable young men: I do not know that

one is superior to the other."

Elinor said no more, and John was also for a short time silent.--His

reflections ended thus.

"Of ONE thing, my dear sister," kindly taking her hand, and speaking in

an awful whisper,--"I may assure you;--and I WILL do it, because I know

it must gratify you. I have good reason to think--indeed I have it

from the best authority, or I should not repeat it, for otherwise it

would be very wrong to say any thing about it--but I have it from the

very best authority--not that I ever precisely heard Mrs. Ferrars say

it herself--but her daughter DID, and I have it from her--That in

short, whatever objections there might be against a certain--a certain

connection--you understand me--it would have been far preferable to

her, it would not have given her half the vexation that THIS does. I

was exceedingly pleased to hear that Mrs. Ferrars considered it in that

light--a very gratifying circumstance you know to us all. 'It would

have been beyond comparison,' she said, 'the least evil of the two, and

she would be glad to compound NOW for nothing worse.' But however, all

that is quite out of the question--not to be thought of or

mentioned--as to any attachment you know--it never could be--all that

is gone by. But I thought I would just tell you of this, because I

knew how much it must please you. Not that you have any reason to

regret, my dear Elinor. There is no doubt of your doing exceedingly

well--quite as well, or better, perhaps, all things considered. Has

Colonel Brandon been with you lately?"

Elinor had heard enough, if not to gratify her vanity, and raise her

self-importance, to agitate her nerves and fill her mind;--and she was

therefore glad to be spared from the necessity of saying much in reply

herself, and from the danger of hearing any thing more from her

brother, by the entrance of Mr. Robert Ferrars. After a few moments'

chat, John Dashwood, recollecting that Fanny was yet uninformed of her

sister's being there, quitted the room in quest of her; and Elinor was

left to improve her acquaintance with Robert, who, by the gay

unconcern, the happy self-complacency of his manner while enjoying so

unfair a division of his mother's love and liberality, to the prejudice

of his banished brother, earned only by his own dissipated course of

life, and that brother's integrity, was confirming her most

unfavourable opinion of his head and heart.

They had scarcely been two minutes by themselves, before he began to

speak of Edward; for he, too, had heard of the living, and was very

inquisitive on the subject. Elinor repeated the particulars of it, as

she had given them to John; and their effect on Robert, though very

different, was not less striking than it had been on HIM. He laughed

most immoderately. The idea of Edward's being a clergyman, and living

in a small parsonage-house, diverted him beyond measure;--and when to

that was added the fanciful imagery of Edward reading prayers in a

white surplice, and publishing the banns of marriage between John Smith

and Mary Brown, he could conceive nothing more ridiculous.

Elinor, while she waited in silence and immovable gravity, the

conclusion of such folly, could not restrain her eyes from being fixed

on him with a look that spoke all the contempt it excited. It was a

look, however, very well bestowed, for it relieved her own feelings,

and gave no intelligence to him. He was recalled from wit to wisdom,

not by any reproof of her's, but by his own sensibility.

"We may treat it as a joke," said he, at last, recovering from the

affected laugh which had considerably lengthened out the genuine gaiety

of the moment--"but, upon my soul, it is a most serious business. Poor

Edward! he is ruined for ever. I am extremely sorry for it--for I

know him to be a very good-hearted creature; as well-meaning a fellow

perhaps, as any in the world. You must not judge of him, Miss

Dashwood, from YOUR slight acquaintance.--Poor Edward!--His manners are

certainly not the happiest in nature.--But we are not all born, you

know, with the same powers,--the same address.-- Poor fellow!--to see

him in a circle of strangers!--to be sure it was pitiable enough!--but

upon my soul, I believe he has as good a heart as any in the kingdom;

and I declare and protest to you I never was so shocked in my life, as

when it all burst forth. I could not believe it.-- My mother was the

first person who told me of it; and I, feeling myself called on to act

with resolution, immediately said to her, 'My dear madam, I do not know

what you may intend to do on the occasion, but as for myself, I must

say, that if Edward does marry this young woman, I never will see him

again.' That was what I said immediately.-- I was most uncommonly

shocked, indeed!--Poor Edward!--he has done for himself

completely--shut himself out for ever from all decent society!--but, as

I directly said to my mother, I am not in the least surprised at it;

from his style of education, it was always to be expected. My poor

mother was half frantic."

"Have you ever seen the lady?"

"Yes; once, while she was staying in this house, I happened to drop in

for ten minutes; and I saw quite enough of her. The merest awkward

country girl, without style, or elegance, and almost without beauty.--

I remember her perfectly. Just the kind of girl I should suppose

likely to captivate poor Edward. I offered immediately, as soon as my

mother related the affair to me, to talk to him myself, and dissuade

him from the match; but it was too late THEN, I found, to do any thing,

for unluckily, I was not in the way at first, and knew nothing of it

till after the breach had taken place, when it was not for me, you

know, to interfere. But had I been informed of it a few hours

earlier--I think it is most probable--that something might have been

hit on. I certainly should have represented it to Edward in a very

strong light. 'My dear fellow,' I should have said, 'consider what you

are doing. You are making a most disgraceful connection, and such a

one as your family are unanimous in disapproving.' I cannot help

thinking, in short, that means might have been found. But now it is

all too late. He must be starved, you know;--that is certain;

absolutely starved."

He had just settled this point with great composure, when the entrance

of Mrs. John Dashwood put an end to the subject. But though SHE never

spoke of it out of her own family, Elinor could see its influence on

her mind, in the something like confusion of countenance with which she

entered, and an attempt at cordiality in her behaviour to herself. She

even proceeded so far as to be concerned to find that Elinor and her

sister were so soon to leave town, as she had hoped to see more of

them;--an exertion in which her husband, who attended her into the

room, and hung enamoured over her accents, seemed to distinguish every

thing that was most affectionate and graceful.

CHAPTER 42

One other short call in Harley Street, in which Elinor received her

brother's congratulations on their travelling so far towards Barton

without any expense, and on Colonel Brandon's being to follow them to

Cleveland in a day or two, completed the intercourse of the brother and

sisters in town;--and a faint invitation from Fanny, to come to Norland

whenever it should happen to be in their way, which of all things was

the most unlikely to occur, with a more warm, though less public,

assurance, from John to Elinor, of the promptitude with which he should

come to see her at Delaford, was all that foretold any meeting in the

country.

It amused her to observe that all her friends seemed determined to send

her to Delaford;--a place, in which, of all others, she would now least

chuse to visit, or wish to reside; for not only was it considered as

her future home by her brother and Mrs. Jennings, but even Lucy, when

they parted, gave her a pressing invitation to visit her there.

Very early in April, and tolerably early in the day, the two parties

from Hanover Square and Berkeley Street set out from their respective

homes, to meet, by appointment, on the road. For the convenience of

Charlotte and her child, they were to be more than two days on their

journey, and Mr. Palmer, travelling more expeditiously with Colonel

Brandon, was to join them at Cleveland soon after their arrival.

Marianne, few as had been her hours of comfort in London, and eager as

she had long been to quit it, could not, when it came to the point, bid

adieu to the house in which she had for the last time enjoyed those

hopes, and that confidence, in Willoughby, which were now extinguished

for ever, without great pain. Nor could she leave the place in which

Willoughby remained, busy in new engagements, and new schemes, in which

SHE could have no share, without shedding many tears.

Elinor's satisfaction, at the moment of removal, was more positive.

She had no such object for her lingering thoughts to fix on, she left

no creature behind, from whom it would give her a moment's regret to be

divided for ever, she was pleased to be free herself from the

persecution of Lucy's friendship, she was grateful for bringing her

sister away unseen by Willoughby since his marriage, and she looked

forward with hope to what a few months of tranquility at Barton might

do towards restoring Marianne's peace of mind, and confirming her own.

Their journey was safely performed. The second day brought them into

the cherished, or the prohibited, county of Somerset, for as such was

it dwelt on by turns in Marianne's imagination; and in the forenoon of

the third they drove up to Cleveland.

Cleveland was a spacious, modern-built house, situated on a sloping

lawn. It had no park, but the pleasure-grounds were tolerably

extensive; and like every other place of the same degree of importance,

it had its open shrubbery, and closer wood walk, a road of smooth

gravel winding round a plantation, led to the front, the lawn was

dotted over with timber, the house itself was under the guardianship of

the fir, the mountain-ash, and the acacia, and a thick screen of them

altogether, interspersed with tall Lombardy poplars, shut out the

offices.

Marianne entered the house with a heart swelling with emotion from the

consciousness of being only eighty miles from Barton, and not thirty

from Combe Magna; and before she had been five minutes within its

walls, while the others were busily helping Charlotte to show her child

to the housekeeper, she quitted it again, stealing away through the

winding shrubberies, now just beginning to be in beauty, to gain a

distant eminence; where, from its Grecian temple, her eye, wandering

over a wide tract of country to the south-east, could fondly rest on

the farthest ridge of hills in the horizon, and fancy that from their

summits Combe Magna might be seen.

In such moments of precious, invaluable misery, she rejoiced in tears

of agony to be at Cleveland; and as she returned by a different circuit

to the house, feeling all the happy privilege of country liberty, of

wandering from place to place in free and luxurious solitude, she

resolved to spend almost every hour of every day while she remained

with the Palmers, in the indulgence of such solitary rambles.

She returned just in time to join the others as they quitted the house,

on an excursion through its more immediate premises; and the rest of

the morning was easily whiled away, in lounging round the kitchen

garden, examining the bloom upon its walls, and listening to the

gardener's lamentations upon blights, in dawdling through the

green-house, where the loss of her favourite plants, unwarily exposed,

and nipped by the lingering frost, raised the laughter of

Charlotte,--and in visiting her poultry-yard, where, in the

disappointed hopes of her dairy-maid, by hens forsaking their nests, or

being stolen by a fox, or in the rapid decrease of a promising young

brood, she found fresh sources of merriment.

The morning was fine and dry, and Marianne, in her plan of employment

abroad, had not calculated for any change of weather during their stay

at Cleveland. With great surprise therefore, did she find herself

prevented by a settled rain from going out again after dinner. She had

depended on a twilight walk to the Grecian temple, and perhaps all over

the grounds, and an evening merely cold or damp would not have deterred

her from it; but a heavy and settled rain even SHE could not fancy dry

or pleasant weather for walking.

Their party was small, and the hours passed quietly away. Mrs. Palmer

had her child, and Mrs. Jennings her carpet-work; they talked of the

friends they had left behind, arranged Lady Middleton's engagements,

and wondered whether Mr. Palmer and Colonel Brandon would get farther

than Reading that night. Elinor, however little concerned in it,

joined in their discourse; and Marianne, who had the knack of finding

her way in every house to the library, however it might be avoided by

the family in general, soon procured herself a book.

Nothing was wanting on Mrs. Palmer's side that constant and friendly

good humour could do, to make them feel themselves welcome. The

openness and heartiness of her manner more than atoned for that want of

recollection and elegance which made her often deficient in the forms

of politeness; her kindness, recommended by so pretty a face, was

engaging; her folly, though evident was not disgusting, because it was

not conceited; and Elinor could have forgiven every thing but her laugh.

The two gentlemen arrived the next day to a very late dinner, affording

a pleasant enlargement of the party, and a very welcome variety to

their conversation, which a long morning of the same continued rain had

reduced very low.

Elinor had seen so little of Mr. Palmer, and in that little had seen so

much variety in his address to her sister and herself, that she knew

not what to expect to find him in his own family. She found him,

however, perfectly the gentleman in his behaviour to all his visitors,

and only occasionally rude to his wife and her mother; she found him

very capable of being a pleasant companion, and only prevented from

being so always, by too great an aptitude to fancy himself as much

superior to people in general, as he must feel himself to be to Mrs.

Jennings and Charlotte. For the rest of his character and habits, they

were marked, as far as Elinor could perceive, with no traits at all

unusual in his sex and time of life. He was nice in his eating,

uncertain in his hours; fond of his child, though affecting to slight

it; and idled away the mornings at billiards, which ought to have been

devoted to business. She liked him, however, upon the whole, much

better than she had expected, and in her heart was not sorry that she

could like him no more;--not sorry to be driven by the observation of

his Epicurism, his selfishness, and his conceit, to rest with

complacency on the remembrance of Edward's generous temper, simple

taste, and diffident feelings.

Of Edward, or at least of some of his concerns, she now received

intelligence from Colonel Brandon, who had been into Dorsetshire

lately; and who, treating her at once as the disinterested friend of

Mr. Ferrars, and the kind of confidant of himself, talked to her a

great deal of the parsonage at Delaford, described its deficiencies,

and told her what he meant to do himself towards removing them.--His

behaviour to her in this, as well as in every other particular, his

open pleasure in meeting her after an absence of only ten days, his

readiness to converse with her, and his deference for her opinion,

might very well justify Mrs. Jennings's persuasion of his attachment,

and would have been enough, perhaps, had not Elinor still, as from the

first, believed Marianne his real favourite, to make her suspect it

herself. But as it was, such a notion had scarcely ever entered her

head, except by Mrs. Jennings's suggestion; and she could not help

believing herself the nicest observer of the two;--she watched his

eyes, while Mrs. Jennings thought only of his behaviour;--and while his

looks of anxious solicitude on Marianne's feeling, in her head and

throat, the beginning of a heavy cold, because unexpressed by words,

entirely escaped the latter lady's observation;--SHE could discover in

them the quick feelings, and needless alarm of a lover.

Two delightful twilight walks on the third and fourth evenings of her

being there, not merely on the dry gravel of the shrubbery, but all

over the grounds, and especially in the most distant parts of them,

where there was something more of wildness than in the rest, where the

trees were the oldest, and the grass was the longest and wettest,

had--assisted by the still greater imprudence of sitting in her wet

shoes and stockings--given Marianne a cold so violent as, though for a

day or two trifled with or denied, would force itself by increasing

ailments on the concern of every body, and the notice of herself.

Prescriptions poured in from all quarters, and as usual, were all

declined. Though heavy and feverish, with a pain in her limbs, and a

cough, and a sore throat, a good night's rest was to cure her entirely;

and it was with difficulty that Elinor prevailed on her, when she went

to bed, to try one or two of the simplest of the remedies.

CHAPTER 43

Marianne got up the next morning at her usual time; to every inquiry

replied that she was better, and tried to prove herself so, by engaging

in her accustomary employments. But a day spent in sitting shivering

over the fire with a book in her hand, which she was unable to read, or

in lying, weary and languid, on a sofa, did not speak much in favour of

her amendment; and when, at last, she went early to bed, more and more

indisposed, Colonel Brandon was only astonished at her sister's

composure, who, though attending and nursing her the whole day, against

Marianne's inclination, and forcing proper medicines on her at night,

trusted, like Marianne, to the certainty and efficacy of sleep, and

felt no real alarm.

A very restless and feverish night, however, disappointed the

expectation of both; and when Marianne, after persisting in rising,

confessed herself unable to sit up, and returned voluntarily to her

bed, Elinor was very ready to adopt Mrs. Jennings's advice, of sending

for the Palmers' apothecary.

He came, examined his patient, and though encouraging Miss Dashwood to

expect that a very few days would restore her sister to health, yet, by

pronouncing her disorder to have a putrid tendency, and allowing the

word "infection" to pass his lips, gave instant alarm to Mrs. Palmer,

on her baby's account. Mrs. Jennings, who had been inclined from the

first to think Marianne's complaint more serious than Elinor, now

looked very grave on Mr. Harris's report, and confirming Charlotte's

fears and caution, urged the necessity of her immediate removal with

her infant; and Mr. Palmer, though treating their apprehensions as

idle, found the anxiety and importunity of his wife too great to be

withstood. Her departure, therefore, was fixed on; and within an hour

after Mr. Harris's arrival, she set off, with her little boy and his

nurse, for the house of a near relation of Mr. Palmer's, who lived a

few miles on the other side of Bath; whither her husband promised, at

her earnest entreaty, to join her in a day or two; and whither she was

almost equally urgent with her mother to accompany her. Mrs. Jennings,

however, with a kindness of heart which made Elinor really love her,

declared her resolution of not stirring from Cleveland as long as

Marianne remained ill, and of endeavouring, by her own attentive care,

to supply to her the place of the mother she had taken her from; and

Elinor found her on every occasion a most willing and active helpmate,

desirous to share in all her fatigues, and often by her better

experience in nursing, of material use.

Poor Marianne, languid and low from the nature of her malady, and

feeling herself universally ill, could no longer hope that tomorrow

would find her recovered; and the idea of what tomorrow would have

produced, but for this unlucky illness, made every ailment severe; for

on that day they were to have begun their journey home; and, attended

the whole way by a servant of Mrs. Jennings, were to have taken their

mother by surprise on the following forenoon. The little she said was

all in lamentation of this inevitable delay; though Elinor tried to

raise her spirits, and make her believe, as she THEN really believed

herself, that it would be a very short one.

The next day produced little or no alteration in the state of the

patient; she certainly was not better, and, except that there was no

amendment, did not appear worse. Their party was now farther reduced;

for Mr. Palmer, though very unwilling to go as well from real humanity

and good-nature, as from a dislike of appearing to be frightened away

by his wife, was persuaded at last by Colonel Brandon to perform his

promise of following her; and while he was preparing to go, Colonel

Brandon himself, with a much greater exertion, began to talk of going

likewise.--Here, however, the kindness of Mrs. Jennings interposed most

acceptably; for to send the Colonel away while his love was in so much

uneasiness on her sister's account, would be to deprive them both, she

thought, of every comfort; and therefore telling him at once that his

stay at Cleveland was necessary to herself, that she should want him to

play at piquet of an evening, while Miss Dashwood was above with her

sister, &c. she urged him so strongly to remain, that he, who was

gratifying the first wish of his own heart by a compliance, could not

long even affect to demur; especially as Mrs. Jennings's entreaty was

warmly seconded by Mr. Palmer, who seemed to feel a relief to himself,

in leaving behind him a person so well able to assist or advise Miss

Dashwood in any emergence.

Marianne was, of course, kept in ignorance of all these arrangements.

She knew not that she had been the means of sending the owners of

Cleveland away, in about seven days from the time of their arrival. It

gave her no surprise that she saw nothing of Mrs. Palmer; and as it

gave her likewise no concern, she never mentioned her name.

Two days passed away from the time of Mr. Palmer's departure, and her

situation continued, with little variation, the same. Mr. Harris, who

attended her every day, still talked boldly of a speedy recovery, and

Miss Dashwood was equally sanguine; but the expectation of the others

was by no means so cheerful. Mrs. Jennings had determined very early

in the seizure that Marianne would never get over it, and Colonel

Brandon, who was chiefly of use in listening to Mrs. Jennings's

forebodings, was not in a state of mind to resist their influence. He

tried to reason himself out of fears, which the different judgment of

the apothecary seemed to render absurd; but the many hours of each day

in which he was left entirely alone, were but too favourable for the

admission of every melancholy idea, and he could not expel from his

mind the persuasion that he should see Marianne no more.

On the morning of the third day however, the gloomy anticipations of

both were almost done away; for when Mr. Harris arrived, he declared

his patient materially better. Her pulse was much stronger, and every

symptom more favourable than on the preceding visit. Elinor, confirmed

in every pleasant hope, was all cheerfulness; rejoicing that in her

letters to her mother, she had pursued her own judgment rather than her

friend's, in making very light of the indisposition which delayed them

at Cleveland; and almost fixing on the time when Marianne would be able

to travel.

But the day did not close so auspiciously as it began.-- Towards the

evening Marianne became ill again, growing more heavy, restless, and

uncomfortable than before. Her sister, however, still sanguine, was

willing to attribute the change to nothing more than the fatigue of

having sat up to have her bed made; and carefully administering the

cordials prescribed, saw her, with satisfaction, sink at last into a

slumber, from which she expected the most beneficial effects. Her

sleep, though not so quiet as Elinor wished to see it, lasted a

considerable time; and anxious to observe the result of it herself, she

resolved to sit with her during the whole of it. Mrs. Jennings,

knowing nothing of any change in the patient, went unusually early to

bed; her maid, who was one of the principal nurses, was recreating

herself in the housekeeper's room, and Elinor remained alone with

Marianne.

The repose of the latter became more and more disturbed; and her

sister, who watched, with unremitting attention her continual change of

posture, and heard the frequent but inarticulate sounds of complaint

which passed her lips, was almost wishing to rouse her from so painful

a slumber, when Marianne, suddenly awakened by some accidental noise in

the house, started hastily up, and, with feverish wildness, cried out,--

"Is mama coming?--"

"Not yet," cried the other, concealing her terror, and assisting

Marianne to lie down again, "but she will be here, I hope, before it is

long. It is a great way, you know, from hence to Barton."

"But she must not go round by London," cried Marianne, in the same

hurried manner. "I shall never see her, if she goes by London."

Elinor perceived with alarm that she was not quite herself, and, while

attempting to soothe her, eagerly felt her pulse. It was lower and

quicker than ever! and Marianne, still talking wildly of mama, her

alarm increased so rapidly, as to determine her on sending instantly

for Mr. Harris, and despatching a messenger to Barton for her mother.

To consult with Colonel Brandon on the best means of effecting the

latter, was a thought which immediately followed the resolution of its

performance; and as soon she had rung up the maid to take her place by

her sister, she hastened down to the drawing-room, where she knew he

was generally to be found at a much later hour than the present.

It was no time for hesitation. Her fears and her difficulties were

immediately before him. Her fears, he had no courage, no confidence to

attempt the removal of:--he listened to them in silent

despondence;--but her difficulties were instantly obviated, for with a

readiness that seemed to speak the occasion, and the service

pre-arranged in his mind, he offered himself as the messenger who

should fetch Mrs. Dashwood. Elinor made no resistance that was not

easily overcome. She thanked him with brief, though fervent gratitude,

and while he went to hurry off his servant with a message to Mr.

Harris, and an order for post-horses directly, she wrote a few lines to

her mother.

The comfort of such a friend at that moment as Colonel Brandon--or such

a companion for her mother,--how gratefully was it felt!--a companion

whose judgment would guide, whose attendance must relieve, and whose

friendship might soothe her!--as far as the shock of such a summons

COULD be lessened to her, his presence, his manners, his assistance,

would lessen it.

HE, meanwhile, whatever he might feel, acted with all the firmness of a

collected mind, made every necessary arrangement with the utmost

despatch, and calculated with exactness the time in which she might

look for his return. Not a moment was lost in delay of any kind. The

horses arrived, even before they were expected, and Colonel Brandon

only pressing her hand with a look of solemnity, and a few words spoken

too low to reach her ear, hurried into the carriage. It was then about

twelve o'clock, and she returned to her sister's apartment to wait for

the arrival of the apothecary, and to watch by her the rest of the

night. It was a night of almost equal suffering to both. Hour after

hour passed away in sleepless pain and delirium on Marianne's side, and

in the most cruel anxiety on Elinor's, before Mr. Harris appeared. Her

apprehensions once raised, paid by their excess for all her former

security; and the servant who sat up with her, for she would not allow

Mrs. Jennings to be called, only tortured her more, by hints of what

her mistress had always thought.

Marianne's ideas were still, at intervals, fixed incoherently on her

mother, and whenever she mentioned her name, it gave a pang to the

heart of poor Elinor, who, reproaching herself for having trifled with

so many days of illness, and wretched for some immediate relief,

fancied that all relief might soon be in vain, that every thing had

been delayed too long, and pictured to herself her suffering mother

arriving too late to see this darling child, or to see her rational.

She was on the point of sending again for Mr. Harris, or if HE could

not come, for some other advice, when the former--but not till after

five o'clock--arrived. His opinion, however, made some little amends

for his delay, for though acknowledging a very unexpected and

unpleasant alteration in his patient, he would not allow the danger to

be material, and talked of the relief which a fresh mode of treatment

must procure, with a confidence which, in a lesser degree, was

communicated to Elinor. He promised to call again in the course of

three or four hours, and left both the patient and her anxious

attendant more composed than he had found them.

With strong concern, and with many reproaches for not being called to

their aid, did Mrs. Jennings hear in the morning of what had passed.

Her former apprehensions, now with greater reason restored, left her no

doubt of the event; and though trying to speak comfort to Elinor, her

conviction of her sister's danger would not allow her to offer the

comfort of hope. Her heart was really grieved. The rapid decay, the

early death of a girl so young, so lovely as Marianne, must have struck

a less interested person with concern. On Mrs. Jennings's compassion

she had other claims. She had been for three months her companion, was

still under her care, and she was known to have been greatly injured,

and long unhappy. The distress of her sister too, particularly a

favourite, was before her;--and as for their mother, when Mrs. Jennings

considered that Marianne might probably be to HER what Charlotte was to

herself, her sympathy in HER sufferings was very sincere.

Mr. Harris was punctual in his second visit;--but he came to be

disappointed in his hopes of what the last would produce. His

medicines had failed;--the fever was unabated; and Marianne only more

quiet--not more herself--remained in a heavy stupor. Elinor, catching

all, and more than all, his fears in a moment, proposed to call in

further advice. But he judged it unnecessary: he had still something

more to try, some more fresh application, of whose success he was as

confident as the last, and his visit concluded with encouraging

assurances which reached the ear, but could not enter the heart of Miss

Dashwood. She was calm, except when she thought of her mother; but she

was almost hopeless; and in this state she continued till noon,

scarcely stirring from her sister's bed, her thoughts wandering from

one image of grief, one suffering friend to another, and her spirits

oppressed to the utmost by the conversation of Mrs. Jennings, who

scrupled not to attribute the severity and danger of this attack to the

many weeks of previous indisposition which Marianne's disappointment

had brought on. Elinor felt all the reasonableness of the idea, and it

gave fresh misery to her reflections.

About noon, however, she began--but with a caution--a dread of

disappointment which for some time kept her silent, even to her

friend--to fancy, to hope she could perceive a slight amendment in her

sister's pulse;--she waited, watched, and examined it again and

again;--and at last, with an agitation more difficult to bury under

exterior calmness, than all her foregoing distress, ventured to

communicate her hopes. Mrs. Jennings, though forced, on examination,

to acknowledge a temporary revival, tried to keep her young friend from

indulging a thought of its continuance;--and Elinor, conning over every

injunction of distrust, told herself likewise not to hope. But it was

too late. Hope had already entered; and feeling all its anxious

flutter, she bent over her sister to watch--she hardly knew for what.

Half an hour passed away, and the favourable symptom yet blessed her.

Others even arose to confirm it. Her breath, her skin, her lips, all

flattered Elinor with signs of amendment; and Marianne fixed her eyes

on her with a rational, though languid, gaze. Anxiety and hope now

oppressed her in equal degrees, and left her no moment of tranquillity

till the arrival of Mr. Harris at four o'clock;--when his assurances,

his felicitations on a recovery in her sister even surpassing his

expectation, gave her confidence, comfort, and tears of joy.

Marianne was in every respect materially better, and he declared her

entirely out of danger. Mrs. Jennings, perhaps satisfied with the

partial justification of her forebodings which had been found in their

late alarm, allowed herself to trust in his judgment, and admitted,

with unfeigned joy, and soon with unequivocal cheerfulness, the

probability of an entire recovery.

Elinor could not be cheerful. Her joy was of a different kind, and led

to any thing rather than to gaiety. Marianne restored to life, health,

friends, and to her doting mother, was an idea to fill her heart with

sensations of exquisite comfort, and expand it in fervent

gratitude;--but it lead to no outward demonstrations of joy, no words,

no smiles. All within Elinor's breast was satisfaction, silent and

strong.

She continued by the side of her sister, with little intermission the

whole afternoon, calming every fear, satisfying every inquiry of her

enfeebled spirits, supplying every succour, and watching almost every

look and every breath. The possibility of a relapse would of course,

in some moments, occur to remind her of what anxiety was--but when she

saw, on her frequent and minute examination, that every symptom of

recovery continued, and saw Marianne at six o'clock sink into a quiet,

steady, and to all appearance comfortable, sleep, she silenced every

doubt.

The time was now drawing on, when Colonel Brandon might be expected

back. At ten o'clock, she trusted, or at least not much later her

mother would be relieved from the dreadful suspense in which she must

now be travelling towards them. The Colonel, too!--perhaps scarcely

less an object of pity!--Oh!--how slow was the progress of time which

yet kept them in ignorance!

At seven o'clock, leaving Marianne still sweetly asleep, she joined

Mrs. Jennings in the drawing-room to tea. Of breakfast she had been

kept by her fears, and of dinner by their sudden reverse, from eating

much;--and the present refreshment, therefore, with such feelings of

content as she brought to it, was particularly welcome. Mrs. Jennings

would have persuaded her, at its conclusion, to take some rest before

her mother's arrival, and allow HER to take her place by Marianne; but

Elinor had no sense of fatigue, no capability of sleep at that moment

about her, and she was not to be kept away from her sister an

unnecessary instant. Mrs. Jennings therefore attending her up stairs

into the sick chamber, to satisfy herself that all continued right,

left her there again to her charge and her thoughts, and retired to her

own room to write letters and sleep.

The night was cold and stormy. The wind roared round the house, and

the rain beat against the windows; but Elinor, all happiness within,

regarded it not. Marianne slept through every blast; and the

travellers--they had a rich reward in store, for every present

inconvenience.

The clock struck eight. Had it been ten, Elinor would have been

convinced that at that moment she heard a carriage driving up to the

house; and so strong was the persuasion that she DID, in spite of the

ALMOST impossibility of their being already come, that she moved into

the adjoining dressing-closet and opened a window shutter, to be

satisfied of the truth. She instantly saw that her ears had not

deceived her. The flaring lamps of a carriage were immediately in

view. By their uncertain light she thought she could discern it to be

drawn by four horses; and this, while it told the excess of her poor

mother's alarm, gave some explanation to such unexpected rapidity.

Never in her life had Elinor found it so difficult to be calm, as at

that moment. The knowledge of what her mother must be feeling as the

carriage stopt at the door--of her doubt--her dread--perhaps her

despair!--and of what SHE had to tell!--with such knowledge it was

impossible to be calm. All that remained to be done was to be speedy;

and, therefore staying only till she could leave Mrs. Jennings's maid

with her sister, she hurried down stairs.

The bustle in the vestibule, as she passed along an inner lobby,

assured her that they were already in the house. She rushed to the

drawing-room,--she entered it,--and saw only Willoughby.

CHAPTER 44

Elinor, starting back with a look of horror at the sight of him, obeyed

the first impulse of her heart in turning instantly to quit the room,

and her hand was already on the lock, when its action was suspended by

his hastily advancing, and saying, in a voice rather of command than

supplication,

"Miss Dashwood, for half an hour--for ten minutes--I entreat you to

stay."

"No, sir," she replied with firmness, "I shall NOT stay. Your business

cannot be with ME. The servants, I suppose, forgot to tell you that

Mr. Palmer was not in the house."

"Had they told me," he cried with vehemence, "that Mr. Palmer and all

his relations were at the devil, it would not have turned me from the

door. My business is with you, and only you."

"With me!"--in the utmost amazement--"well, sir,--be quick--and if you

can--less violent."

"Sit down, and I will be both."

She hesitated; she knew not what to do. The possibility of Colonel

Brandon's arriving and finding her there, came across her. But she had

promised to hear him, and her curiosity no less than her honor was

engaged. After a moment's recollection, therefore, concluding that

prudence required dispatch, and that her acquiescence would best

promote it, she walked silently towards the table, and sat down. He

took the opposite chair, and for half a minute not a word was said by

either.

"Pray be quick, sir,"--said Elinor, impatiently;--"I have no time to

spare."

He was sitting in an attitude of deep meditation, and seemed not to

hear her.

"Your sister," said he, with abruptness, a moment afterwards--"is out

of danger. I heard it from the servant. God be praised!--But is it

true? is it really true?"

Elinor would not speak. He repeated the inquiry with yet greater

eagerness.

"For God's sake tell me, is she out of danger, or is she not?"

"We hope she is."

He rose up, and walked across the room.

"Had I known as much half an hour ago--But since I AM here,"--speaking

with a forced vivacity as he returned to his seat--"what does it

signify?--For once, Miss Dashwood--it will be the last time,

perhaps--let us be cheerful together.--I am in a fine mood for

gaiety.-- Tell me honestly"--a deeper glow overspreading his

cheeks--"do you think me most a knave or a fool?"

Elinor looked at him with greater astonishment than ever. She began to

think that he must be in liquor;--the strangeness of such a visit, and

of such manners, seemed no otherwise intelligible; and with this

impression she immediately rose, saying,

"Mr. Willoughby, I advise you at present to return to Combe--I am not

at leisure to remain with you longer.-- Whatever your business may be

with me, will it be better recollected and explained to-morrow."

"I understand you," he replied, with an expressive smile, and a voice

perfectly calm; "yes, I am very drunk.-- A pint of porter with my cold

beef at Marlborough was enough to over-set me."

"At Marlborough!"--cried Elinor, more and more at a loss to understand

what he would be at.

"Yes,--I left London this morning at eight o'clock, and the only ten

minutes I have spent out of my chaise since that time procured me a

nuncheon at Marlborough."

The steadiness of his manner, and the intelligence of his eye as he

spoke, convincing Elinor, that whatever other unpardonable folly might

bring him to Cleveland, he was not brought there by intoxication, she

said, after a moment's recollection,

"Mr. Willoughby, you OUGHT to feel, and I certainly DO--that after what

has passed--your coming here in this manner, and forcing yourself upon

my notice, requires a very particular excuse.--What is it, that you

mean by it?"--

"I mean,"--said he, with serious energy--"if I can, to make you hate me

one degree less than you do NOW. I mean to offer some kind of

explanation, some kind of apology, for the past; to open my whole heart

to you, and by convincing you, that though I have been always a

blockhead, I have not been always a rascal, to obtain something like

forgiveness from Ma--from your sister."

"Is this the real reason of your coming?"

"Upon my soul it is,"--was his answer, with a warmth which brought all

the former Willoughby to her remembrance, and in spite of herself made

her think him sincere.

"If that is all, you may be satisfied already,-- for Marianne DOES--she

has LONG forgiven you."

"Has she?"--he cried, in the same eager tone.-- "Then she has forgiven

me before she ought to have done it. But she shall forgive me again,

and on more reasonable grounds.--NOW will you listen to me?"

Elinor bowed her assent.

"I do not know," said he, after a pause of expectation on her side, and

thoughtfulness on his own,--"how YOU may have accounted for my

behaviour to your sister, or what diabolical motive you may have

imputed to me.-- Perhaps you will hardly think the better of me,--it is

worth the trial however, and you shall hear every thing. When I first

became intimate in your family, I had no other intention, no other view

in the acquaintance than to pass my time pleasantly while I was obliged

to remain in Devonshire, more pleasantly than I had ever done before.

Your sister's lovely person and interesting manners could not but

please me; and her behaviour to me almost from the first, was of a

kind--It is astonishing, when I reflect on what it was, and what SHE

was, that my heart should have been so insensible! But at first I must

confess, my vanity only was elevated by it. Careless of her happiness,

thinking only of my own amusement, giving way to feelings which I had

always been too much in the habit of indulging, I endeavoured, by every

means in my power, to make myself pleasing to her, without any design

of returning her affection."

Miss Dashwood, at this point, turning her eyes on him with the most

angry contempt, stopped him, by saying,

"It is hardly worth while, Mr. Willoughby, for you to relate, or for me

to listen any longer. Such a beginning as this cannot be followed by

any thing.-- Do not let me be pained by hearing any thing more on the

subject."

"I insist on you hearing the whole of it," he replied, "My fortune was

never large, and I had always been expensive, always in the habit of

associating with people of better income than myself. Every year since

my coming of age, or even before, I believe, had added to my debts; and

though the death of my old cousin, Mrs. Smith, was to set me free; yet

that event being uncertain, and possibly far distant, it had been for

some time my intention to re-establish my circumstances by marrying a

woman of fortune. To attach myself to your sister, therefore, was not

a thing to be thought of;--and with a meanness, selfishness,

cruelty--which no indignant, no contemptuous look, even of yours, Miss

Dashwood, can ever reprobate too much--I was acting in this manner,

trying to engage her regard, without a thought of returning it.--But

one thing may be said for me: even in that horrid state of selfish

vanity, I did not know the extent of the injury I meditated, because I

did not THEN know what it was to love. But have I ever known it?--Well

may it be doubted; for, had I really loved, could I have sacrificed my

feelings to vanity, to avarice?--or, what is more, could I have

sacrificed hers?-- But I have done it. To avoid a comparative poverty,

which her affection and her society would have deprived of all its

horrors, I have, by raising myself to affluence, lost every thing that

could make it a blessing."

"You did then," said Elinor, a little softened, "believe yourself at

one time attached to her?"

"To have resisted such attractions, to have withstood such

tenderness!--Is there a man on earth who could have done it?--Yes, I

found myself, by insensible degrees, sincerely fond of her; and the

happiest hours of my life were what I spent with her when I felt my

intentions were strictly honourable, and my feelings blameless. Even

THEN, however, when fully determined on paying my addresses to her, I

allowed myself most improperly to put off, from day to day, the moment

of doing it, from an unwillingness to enter into an engagement while my

circumstances were so greatly embarrassed. I will not reason here--nor

will I stop for YOU to expatiate on the absurdity, and the worse than

absurdity, of scrupling to engage my faith where my honour was already

bound. The event has proved, that I was a cunning fool, providing with

great circumspection for a possible opportunity of making myself

contemptible and wretched for ever. At last, however, my resolution

was taken, and I had determined, as soon as I could engage her alone,

to justify the attentions I had so invariably paid her, and openly

assure her of an affection which I had already taken such pains to

display. But in the interim--in the interim of the very few hours that

were to pass, before I could have an opportunity of speaking with her

in private--a circumstance occurred--an unlucky circumstance, to ruin

all my resolution, and with it all my comfort. A discovery took

place,"--here he hesitated and looked down.--"Mrs. Smith had somehow or

other been informed, I imagine by some distant relation, whose interest

it was to deprive me of her favour, of an affair, a connection--but I

need not explain myself farther," he added, looking at her with an

heightened colour and an enquiring eye--"your particular intimacy--you

have probably heard the whole story long ago."

"I have," returned Elinor, colouring likewise, and hardening her heart

anew against any compassion for him, "I have heard it all. And how you

will explain away any part of your guilt in that dreadful business, I

confess is beyond my comprehension."

"Remember," cried Willoughby, "from whom you received the account.

Could it be an impartial one? I acknowledge that her situation and her

character ought to have been respected by me. I do not mean to justify

myself, but at the same time cannot leave you to suppose that I have

nothing to urge--that because she was injured she was irreproachable,

and because I was a libertine, SHE must be a saint. If the violence of

her passions, the weakness of her understanding--I do not mean,

however, to defend myself. Her affection for me deserved better

treatment, and I often, with great self-reproach, recall the tenderness

which, for a very short time, had the power of creating any return. I

wish--I heartily wish it had never been. But I have injured more than

herself; and I have injured one, whose affection for me--(may I say

it?) was scarcely less warm than hers; and whose mind--Oh! how

infinitely superior!"--

"Your indifference, however, towards that unfortunate girl--I must say

it, unpleasant to me as the discussion of such a subject may well

be--your indifference is no apology for your cruel neglect of her. Do

not think yourself excused by any weakness, any natural defect of

understanding on her side, in the wanton cruelty so evident on yours.

You must have known, that while you were enjoying yourself in

Devonshire pursuing fresh schemes, always gay, always happy, she was

reduced to the extremest indigence."

"But, upon my soul, I did NOT know it," he warmly replied; "I did not

recollect that I had omitted to give her my direction; and common sense

might have told her how to find it out."

"Well, sir, and what said Mrs. Smith?"

"She taxed me with the offence at once, and my confusion may be

guessed. The purity of her life, the formality of her notions, her

ignorance of the world--every thing was against me. The matter itself

I could not deny, and vain was every endeavour to soften it. She was

previously disposed, I believe, to doubt the morality of my conduct in

general, and was moreover discontented with the very little attention,

the very little portion of my time that I had bestowed on her, in my

present visit. In short, it ended in a total breach. By one measure I

might have saved myself. In the height of her morality, good woman!

she offered to forgive the past, if I would marry Eliza. That could

not be--and I was formally dismissed from her favour and her house.

The night following this affair--I was to go the next morning--was

spent by me in deliberating on what my future conduct should be. The

struggle was great--but it ended too soon. My affection for Marianne,

my thorough conviction of her attachment to me--it was all insufficient

to outweigh that dread of poverty, or get the better of those false

ideas of the necessity of riches, which I was naturally inclined to

feel, and expensive society had increased. I had reason to believe

myself secure of my present wife, if I chose to address her, and I

persuaded myself to think that nothing else in common prudence remained

for me to do. A heavy scene however awaited me, before I could leave

Devonshire;--I was engaged to dine with you on that very day; some

apology was therefore necessary for my breaking this engagement. But

whether I should write this apology, or deliver it in person, was a

point of long debate. To see Marianne, I felt, would be dreadful, and

I even doubted whether I could see her again, and keep to my

resolution. In that point, however, I undervalued my own magnanimity,

as the event declared; for I went, I saw her, and saw her miserable,

and left her miserable--and left her hoping never to see her again."

"Why did you call, Mr. Willoughby?" said Elinor, reproachfully; "a note

would have answered every purpose.-- Why was it necessary to call?"

"It was necessary to my own pride. I could not bear to leave the

country in a manner that might lead you, or the rest of the

neighbourhood, to suspect any part of what had really passed between

Mrs. Smith and myself--and I resolved therefore on calling at the

cottage, in my way to Honiton. The sight of your dear sister, however,

was really dreadful; and, to heighten the matter, I found her alone.

You were all gone I do not know where. I had left her only the evening

before, so fully, so firmly resolved within my self on doing right! A

few hours were to have engaged her to me for ever; and I remember how

happy, how gay were my spirits, as I walked from the cottage to

Allenham, satisfied with myself, delighted with every body! But in

this, our last interview of friendship, I approached her with a sense

of guilt that almost took from me the power of dissembling. Her

sorrow, her disappointment, her deep regret, when I told her that I was

obliged to leave Devonshire so immediately--I never shall forget

it--united too with such reliance, such confidence in me!--Oh,

God!--what a hard-hearted rascal I was!"

They were both silent for a few moments. Elinor first spoke.

"Did you tell her that you should soon return?"

"I do not know what I told her," he replied, impatiently; "less than

was due to the past, beyond a doubt, and in all likelihood much more

than was justified by the future. I cannot think of it.--It won't

do.--Then came your dear mother to torture me farther, with all her

kindness and confidence. Thank Heaven! it DID torture me. I was

miserable. Miss Dashwood, you cannot have an idea of the comfort it

gives me to look back on my own misery. I owe such a grudge to myself

for the stupid, rascally folly of my own heart, that all my past

sufferings under it are only triumph and exultation to me now. Well, I

went, left all that I loved, and went to those to whom, at best, I was

only indifferent. My journey to town--travelling with my own horses,

and therefore so tediously--no creature to speak to--my own reflections

so cheerful--when I looked forward every thing so inviting!--when I

looked back at Barton, the picture so soothing!--oh, it was a blessed

journey!"

He stopped.

"Well, sir," said Elinor, who, though pitying him, grew impatient for

his departure, "and this is all?"

"Ah!--no,--have you forgot what passed in town?-- That infamous

letter--Did she shew it you?"

"Yes, I saw every note that passed."

"When the first of hers reached me (as it immediately did, for I was in

town the whole time,) what I felt is--in the common phrase, not to be

expressed; in a more simple one--perhaps too simple to raise any

emotion--my feelings were very, very painful.--Every line, every word

was--in the hackneyed metaphor which their dear writer, were she here,

would forbid--a dagger to my heart. To know that Marianne was in town

was--in the same language--a thunderbolt.--Thunderbolts and

daggers!--what a reproof would she have given me!--her taste, her

opinions--I believe they are better known to me than my own,--and I am

sure they are dearer."

Elinor's heart, which had undergone many changes in the course of this

extraordinary conversation, was now softened again;--yet she felt it

her duty to check such ideas in her companion as the last.

"This is not right, Mr. Willoughby.--Remember that you are married.

Relate only what in your conscience you think necessary for me to hear."

"Marianne's note, by assuring me that I was still as dear to her as in

former days, that in spite of the many, many weeks we had been

separated, she was as constant in her own feelings, and as full of

faith in the constancy of mine as ever, awakened all my remorse. I say

awakened, because time and London, business and dissipation, had in

some measure quieted it, and I had been growing a fine hardened

villain, fancying myself indifferent to her, and chusing to fancy that

she too must have become indifferent to me; talking to myself of our

past attachment as a mere idle, trifling business, shrugging up my

shoulders in proof of its being so, and silencing every reproach,

overcoming every scruple, by secretly saying now and then, 'I shall be

heartily glad to hear she is well married.'-- But this note made me

know myself better. I felt that she was infinitely dearer to me than

any other woman in the world, and that I was using her infamously. But

every thing was then just settled between Miss Grey and me. To retreat

was impossible. All that I had to do, was to avoid you both. I sent

no answer to Marianne, intending by that to preserve myself from her

farther notice; and for some time I was even determined not to call in

Berkeley Street;--but at last, judging it wiser to affect the air of a

cool, common acquaintance than anything else, I watched you all safely

out of the house one morning, and left my name."

"Watched us out of the house!"

"Even so. You would be surprised to hear how often I watched you, how

often I was on the point of falling in with you. I have entered many a

shop to avoid your sight, as the carriage drove by. Lodging as I did

in Bond Street, there was hardly a day in which I did not catch a

glimpse of one or other of you; and nothing but the most constant

watchfulness on my side, a most invariably prevailing desire to keep

out of your sight, could have separated us so long. I avoided the

Middletons as much as possible, as well as everybody else who was

likely to prove an acquaintance in common. Not aware of their being in

town, however, I blundered on Sir John, I believe, the first day of his

coming, and the day after I had called at Mrs. Jennings's. He asked me

to a party, a dance at his house in the evening.--Had he NOT told me as

an inducement that you and your sister were to be there, I should have

felt it too certain a thing, to trust myself near him. The next

morning brought another short note from Marianne--still affectionate,

open, artless, confiding--everything that could make MY conduct most

hateful. I could not answer it. I tried--but could not frame a

sentence. But I thought of her, I believe, every moment of the day.

If you CAN pity me, Miss Dashwood, pity my situation as it was THEN.

With my head and heart full of your sister, I was forced to play the

happy lover to another woman!--Those three or four weeks were worse

than all. Well, at last, as I need not tell you, you were forced on

me; and what a sweet figure I cut!--what an evening of agony it was!--

Marianne, beautiful as an angel on one side, calling me Willoughby in

such a tone!--Oh, God!--holding out her hand to me, asking me for an

explanation, with those bewitching eyes fixed in such speaking

solicitude on my face!--and Sophia, jealous as the devil on the other

hand, looking all that was--Well, it does not signify; it is over

now.-- Such an evening!--I ran away from you all as soon as I could;

but not before I had seen Marianne's sweet face as white as

death.--THAT was the last, last look I ever had of her;--the last

manner in which she appeared to me. It was a horrid sight!--yet when I

thought of her to-day as really dying, it was a kind of comfort to me

to imagine that I knew exactly how she would appear to those, who saw

her last in this world. She was before me, constantly before me, as I

travelled, in the same look and hue."

A short pause of mutual thoughtfulness succeeded. Willoughby first

rousing himself, broke it thus:

"Well, let me make haste and be gone. Your sister is certainly better,

certainly out of danger?"

"We are assured of it."

"Your poor mother, too!--doting on Marianne."

"But the letter, Mr. Willoughby, your own letter; have you any thing to

say about that?"

"Yes, yes, THAT in particular. Your sister wrote to me again, you

know, the very next morning. You saw what she said. I was

breakfasting at the Ellisons,--and her letter, with some others, was

brought to me there from my lodgings. It happened to catch Sophia's

eye before it caught mine--and its size, the elegance of the paper, the

hand-writing altogether, immediately gave her a suspicion. Some vague

report had reached her before of my attachment to some young lady in

Devonshire, and what had passed within her observation the preceding

evening had marked who the young lady was, and made her more jealous

than ever. Affecting that air of playfulness, therefore, which is

delightful in a woman one loves, she opened the letter directly, and

read its contents. She was well paid for her impudence. She read what

made her wretched. Her wretchedness I could have borne, but her

passion--her malice--At all events it must be appeased. And, in

short--what do you think of my wife's style of

letter-writing?--delicate--tender--truly feminine--was it not?"

"Your wife!--The letter was in your own hand-writing."

"Yes, but I had only the credit of servilely copying such sentences as

I was ashamed to put my name to. The original was all her own--her own

happy thoughts and gentle diction. But what could I do!--we were

engaged, every thing in preparation, the day almost fixed--But I am

talking like a fool. Preparation!--day!--In honest words, her money

was necessary to me, and in a situation like mine, any thing was to be

done to prevent a rupture. And after all, what did it signify to my

character in the opinion of Marianne and her friends, in what language

my answer was couched?--It must have been only to one end. My business

was to declare myself a scoundrel, and whether I did it with a bow or a

bluster was of little importance.-- 'I am ruined for ever in their

opinion--' said I to myself--'I am shut out for ever from their

society, they already think me an unprincipled fellow, this letter will

only make them think me a blackguard one.' Such were my reasonings, as,

in a sort of desperate carelessness, I copied my wife's words, and

parted with the last relics of Marianne. Her three notes--unluckily

they were all in my pocketbook, or I should have denied their

existence, and hoarded them for ever--I was forced to put them up, and

could not even kiss them. And the lock of hair--that too I had always

carried about me in the same pocket-book, which was now searched by

Madam with the most ingratiating virulence,--the dear lock--all, every

memento was torn from me."

"You are very wrong, Mr. Willoughby, very blamable," said Elinor, while

her voice, in spite of herself, betrayed her compassionate emotion;

"you ought not to speak in this way, either of Mrs. Willoughby or my

sister. You had made your own choice. It was not forced on you. Your

wife has a claim to your politeness, to your respect, at least. She

must be attached to you, or she would not have married you. To treat

her with unkindness, to speak of her slightingly is no atonement to

Marianne--nor can I suppose it a relief to your own conscience."

"Do not talk to me of my wife," said he with a heavy sigh.-- "She does

not deserve your compassion.--She knew I had no regard for her when we

married.--Well, married we were, and came down to Combe Magna to be

happy, and afterwards returned to town to be gay.--And now do you pity

me, Miss Dashwood?--or have I said all this to no purpose?-- Am I--be

it only one degree--am I less guilty in your opinion than I was

before?--My intentions were not always wrong. Have I explained away

any part of my guilt?"

"Yes, you have certainly removed something--a little.-- You have proved

yourself, on the whole, less faulty than I had believed you. You have

proved your heart less wicked, much less wicked. But I hardly

know--the misery that you have inflicted--I hardly know what could have

made it worse."

"Will you repeat to your sister when she is recovered, what I have been

telling you?--Let me be a little lightened too in her opinion as well

as in yours. You tell me that she has forgiven me already. Let me be

able to fancy that a better knowledge of my heart, and of my present

feelings, will draw from her a more spontaneous, more natural, more

gentle, less dignified, forgiveness. Tell her of my misery and my

penitence--tell her that my heart was never inconstant to her, and if

you will, that at this moment she is dearer to me than ever."

"I will tell her all that is necessary to what may comparatively be

called, your justification. But you have not explained to me the

particular reason of your coming now, nor how you heard of her illness."

"Last night, in Drury Lane lobby, I ran against Sir John Middleton, and

when he saw who I was--for the first time these two months--he spoke to

me.--That he had cut me ever since my marriage, I had seen without

surprise or resentment. Now, however, his good-natured, honest, stupid

soul, full of indignation against me, and concern for your sister,

could not resist the temptation of telling me what he knew ought

to--though probably he did not think it WOULD--vex me horridly. As

bluntly as he could speak it, therefore, he told me that Marianne

Dashwood was dying of a putrid fever at Cleveland--a letter that

morning received from Mrs. Jennings declared her danger most

imminent--the Palmers are all gone off in a fright, &c.--I was too much

shocked to be able to pass myself off as insensible even to the

undiscerning Sir John. His heart was softened in seeing mine suffer;

and so much of his ill-will was done away, that when we parted, he

almost shook me by the hand while he reminded me of an old promise

about a pointer puppy. What I felt on hearing that your sister was

dying--and dying too, believing me the greatest villain upon earth,

scorning, hating me in her latest moments--for how could I tell what

horrid projects might not have been imputed? ONE person I was sure

would represent me as capable of any thing-- What I felt was

dreadful!--My resolution was soon made, and at eight o'clock this

morning I was in my carriage. Now you know all."

Elinor made no answer. Her thoughts were silently fixed on the

irreparable injury which too early an independence and its consequent

habits of idleness, dissipation, and luxury, had made in the mind, the

character, the happiness, of a man who, to every advantage of person

and talents, united a disposition naturally open and honest, and a

feeling, affectionate temper. The world had made him extravagant and

vain--Extravagance and vanity had made him cold-hearted and selfish.

Vanity, while seeking its own guilty triumph at the expense of another,

had involved him in a real attachment, which extravagance, or at least

its offspring, necessity, had required to be sacrificed. Each faulty

propensity in leading him to evil, had led him likewise to punishment.

The attachment, from which against honour, against feeling, against

every better interest he had outwardly torn himself, now, when no

longer allowable, governed every thought; and the connection, for the

sake of which he had, with little scruple, left her sister to misery,

was likely to prove a source of unhappiness to himself of a far more

incurable nature. From a reverie of this kind she was recalled at the

end of some minutes by Willoughby, who, rousing himself from a reverie

at least equally painful, started up in preparation for going, and

said--

"There is no use in staying here; I must be off."

"Are you going back to town?"

"No--to Combe Magna. I have business there; from thence to town in a

day or two. Good bye."

He held out his hand. She could not refuse to give him hers's;--he

pressed it with affection.

"And you DO think something better of me than you did?"--said he,

letting it fall, and leaning against the mantel-piece as if forgetting

he was to go.

Elinor assured him that she did;--that she forgave, pitied, wished him

well--was even interested in his happiness--and added some gentle

counsel as to the behaviour most likely to promote it. His answer was

not very encouraging.

"As to that," said he, "I must rub through the world as well as I can.

Domestic happiness is out of the question. If, however, I am allowed

to think that you and yours feel an interest in my fate and actions, it

may be the means--it may put me on my guard--at least, it may be

something to live for. Marianne to be sure is lost to me for ever.

Were I even by any blessed chance at liberty again--"

Elinor stopped him with a reproof.

"Well,"--he replied--"once more good bye. I shall now go away and live

in dread of one event."

"What do you mean?"

"Your sister's marriage."

"You are very wrong. She can never be more lost to you than she is

now."

"But she will be gained by some one else. And if that some one should

be the very he whom, of all others, I could least bear--but I will not

stay to rob myself of all your compassionate goodwill, by shewing that

where I have most injured I can least forgive. Good bye,--God bless

you!"

And with these words, he almost ran out of the room.

CHAPTER 45

Elinor, for some time after he left her, for some time even after the

sound of his carriage had died away, remained too much oppressed by a

crowd of ideas, widely differing in themselves, but of which sadness

was the general result, to think even of her sister.

Willoughby, he, whom only half an hour ago she had abhorred as the most

worthless of men, Willoughby, in spite of all his faults, excited a

degree of commiseration for the sufferings produced by them, which made

her think of him as now separated for ever from her family, with a

tenderness, a regret, rather in proportion, as she soon acknowledged

within herself--to his wishes than to his merits. She felt that his

influence over her mind was heightened by circumstances which ought not

in reason to have weight; by that person of uncommon attraction, that

open, affectionate, and lively manner which it was no merit to possess;

and by that still ardent love for Marianne, which it was not even

innocent to indulge. But she felt that it was so, long, long before

she could feel his influence less.

When at last she returned to the unconscious Marianne, she found her

just awaking, refreshed by so long and sweet a sleep to the extent of

her hopes. Elinor's heart was full. The past, the present, the

future, Willoughby's visit, Marianne's safety, and her mother's

expected arrival, threw her altogether into an agitation of spirits

which kept off every indication of fatigue, and made her only fearful

of betraying herself to her sister. Short was the time, however, in

which that fear could affect her, for within half an hour after

Willoughby's leaving the house, she was again called down stairs by the

sound of another carriage.--Eager to save her mother from every

unnecessary moment's horrible suspense, she ran immediately into the

hall, and reached the outward door just in time to receive and support

her as she entered it.

Mrs. Dashwood, whose terror as they drew near the house had produced

almost the conviction of Marianne's being no more, had no voice to

inquire after her, no voice even for Elinor; but SHE, waiting neither

for salutation nor inquiry, instantly gave the joyful relief;--and her

mother, catching it with all her usual warmth, was in a moment as much

overcome by her happiness, as she had been before by her fears. She

was supported into the drawing-room between her daughter and her

friend;--and there, shedding tears of joy, though still unable to

speak, embraced Elinor again and again, turning from her at intervals

to press Colonel Brandon's hand, with a look which spoke at once her

gratitude, and her conviction of his sharing with herself in the bliss

of the moment. He shared it, however, in a silence even greater than

her own.

As soon as Mrs. Dashwood had recovered herself, to see Marianne was her

first desire; and in two minutes she was with her beloved child,

rendered dearer to her than ever by absence, unhappiness, and danger.

Elinor's delight, as she saw what each felt in the meeting, was only

checked by an apprehension of its robbing Marianne of farther

sleep;--but Mrs. Dashwood could be calm, could be even prudent, when

the life of a child was at stake, and Marianne, satisfied in knowing

her mother was near her, and conscious of being too weak for

conversation, submitted readily to the silence and quiet prescribed by

every nurse around her. Mrs. Dashwood WOULD sit up with her all night;

and Elinor, in compliance with her mother's entreaty, went to bed. But

the rest, which one night entirely sleepless, and many hours of the

most wearing anxiety seemed to make requisite, was kept off by

irritation of spirits. Willoughby, "poor Willoughby," as she now

allowed herself to call him, was constantly in her thoughts; she would

not but have heard his vindication for the world, and now blamed, now

acquitted herself for having judged him so harshly before. But her

promise of relating it to her sister was invariably painful. She

dreaded the performance of it, dreaded what its effect on Marianne

might be; doubted whether after such an explanation she could ever be

happy with another; and for a moment wished Willoughby a widower.

Then, remembering Colonel Brandon, reproved herself, felt that to HIS

sufferings and his constancy far more than to his rival's, the reward

of her sister was due, and wished any thing rather than Mrs.

Willoughby's death.

The shock of Colonel Brandon's errand at Barton had been much softened

to Mrs. Dashwood by her own previous alarm; for so great was her

uneasiness about Marianne, that she had already determined to set out

for Cleveland on that very day, without waiting for any further

intelligence, and had so far settled her journey before his arrival,

that the Careys were then expected every moment to fetch Margaret away,

as her mother was unwilling to take her where there might be infection.

Marianne continued to mend every day, and the brilliant cheerfulness of

Mrs. Dashwood's looks and spirits proved her to be, as she repeatedly

declared herself, one of the happiest women in the world. Elinor could

not hear the declaration, nor witness its proofs without sometimes

wondering whether her mother ever recollected Edward. But Mrs.

Dashwood, trusting to the temperate account of her own disappointment

which Elinor had sent her, was led away by the exuberance of her joy to

think only of what would increase it. Marianne was restored to her

from a danger in which, as she now began to feel, her own mistaken

judgment in encouraging the unfortunate attachment to Willoughby, had

contributed to place her;--and in her recovery she had yet another

source of joy unthought of by Elinor. It was thus imparted to her, as

soon as any opportunity of private conference between them occurred.

"At last we are alone. My Elinor, you do not yet know all my

happiness. Colonel Brandon loves Marianne. He has told me so himself."

Her daughter, feeling by turns both pleased and pained, surprised and

not surprised, was all silent attention.

"You are never like me, dear Elinor, or I should wonder at your

composure now. Had I sat down to wish for any possible good to my

family, I should have fixed on Colonel Brandon's marrying one of you as

the object most desirable. And I believe Marianne will be the most

happy with him of the two."

Elinor was half inclined to ask her reason for thinking so, because

satisfied that none founded on an impartial consideration of their age,

characters, or feelings, could be given;--but her mother must always be

carried away by her imagination on any interesting subject, and

therefore instead of an inquiry, she passed it off with a smile.

"He opened his whole heart to me yesterday as we travelled. It came

out quite unawares, quite undesignedly. I, you may well believe, could

talk of nothing but my child;--he could not conceal his distress; I saw

that it equalled my own, and he perhaps, thinking that mere friendship,

as the world now goes, would not justify so warm a sympathy--or rather,

not thinking at all, I suppose--giving way to irresistible feelings,

made me acquainted with his earnest, tender, constant, affection for

Marianne. He has loved her, my Elinor, ever since the first moment of

seeing her."

Here, however, Elinor perceived,--not the language, not the professions

of Colonel Brandon, but the natural embellishments of her mother's

active fancy, which fashioned every thing delightful to her as it chose.

"His regard for her, infinitely surpassing anything that Willoughby

ever felt or feigned, as much more warm, as more sincere or

constant--which ever we are to call it--has subsisted through all the

knowledge of dear Marianne's unhappy prepossession for that worthless

young man!--and without selfishness--without encouraging a hope!--could

he have seen her happy with another--Such a noble mind!--such openness,

such sincerity!--no one can be deceived in HIM."

"Colonel Brandon's character," said Elinor, "as an excellent man, is

well established."

"I know it is"--replied her mother seriously, "or after such a warning,

I should be the last to encourage such affection, or even to be pleased

by it. But his coming for me as he did, with such active, such ready

friendship, is enough to prove him one of the worthiest of men."

"His character, however," answered Elinor, "does not rest on ONE act of

kindness, to which his affection for Marianne, were humanity out of the

case, would have prompted him. To Mrs. Jennings, to the Middletons, he

has been long and intimately known; they equally love and respect him;

and even my own knowledge of him, though lately acquired, is very

considerable; and so highly do I value and esteem him, that if Marianne

can be happy with him, I shall be as ready as yourself to think our

connection the greatest blessing to us in the world. What answer did

you give him?--Did you allow him to hope?"

"Oh! my love, I could not then talk of hope to him or to myself.

Marianne might at that moment be dying. But he did not ask for hope or

encouragement. His was an involuntary confidence, an irrepressible

effusion to a soothing friend--not an application to a parent. Yet

after a time I DID say, for at first I was quite overcome--that if she

lived, as I trusted she might, my greatest happiness would lie in

promoting their marriage; and since our arrival, since our delightful

security, I have repeated it to him more fully, have given him every

encouragement in my power. Time, a very little time, I tell him, will

do everything;--Marianne's heart is not to be wasted for ever on such a

man as Willoughby.-- His own merits must soon secure it."

"To judge from the Colonel's spirits, however, you have not yet made

him equally sanguine."

"No.--He thinks Marianne's affection too deeply rooted for any change

in it under a great length of time, and even supposing her heart again

free, is too diffident of himself to believe, that with such a

difference of age and disposition he could ever attach her. There,

however, he is quite mistaken. His age is only so much beyond hers as

to be an advantage, as to make his character and principles fixed;--and

his disposition, I am well convinced, is exactly the very one to make

your sister happy. And his person, his manners too, are all in his

favour. My partiality does not blind me; he certainly is not so

handsome as Willoughby--but at the same time, there is something much

more pleasing in his countenance.-- There was always a something,--if

you remember,--in Willoughby's eyes at times, which I did not like."

Elinor could NOT remember it;--but her mother, without waiting for her

assent, continued,

"And his manners, the Colonel's manners are not only more pleasing to

me than Willoughby's ever were, but they are of a kind I well know to

be more solidly attaching to Marianne. Their gentleness, their genuine

attention to other people, and their manly unstudied simplicity is much

more accordant with her real disposition, than the liveliness--often

artificial, and often ill-timed of the other. I am very sure myself,

that had Willoughby turned out as really amiable, as he has proved

himself the contrary, Marianne would yet never have been so happy with

HIM, as she will be with Colonel Brandon."

She paused.--Her daughter could not quite agree with her, but her

dissent was not heard, and therefore gave no offence.

"At Delaford, she will be within an easy distance of me," added Mrs.

Dashwood, "even if I remain at Barton; and in all probability,--for I

hear it is a large village,--indeed there certainly MUST be some small

house or cottage close by, that would suit us quite as well as our

present situation."

Poor Elinor!--here was a new scheme for getting her to Delaford!--but

her spirit was stubborn.

"His fortune too!--for at my time of life you know, everybody cares

about THAT;--and though I neither know nor desire to know, what it

really is, I am sure it must be a good one."

Here they were interrupted by the entrance of a third person, and

Elinor withdrew to think it all over in private, to wish success to her

friend, and yet in wishing it, to feel a pang for Willoughby.

CHAPTER 46

Marianne's illness, though weakening in its kind, had not been long

enough to make her recovery slow; and with youth, natural strength, and

her mother's presence in aid, it proceeded so smoothly as to enable her

to remove, within four days after the arrival of the latter, into Mrs.

Palmer's dressing-room. When there, at her own particular request, for

she was impatient to pour forth her thanks to him for fetching her

mother, Colonel Brandon was invited to visit her.

His emotion on entering the room, in seeing her altered looks, and in

receiving the pale hand which she immediately held out to him, was

such, as, in Elinor's conjecture, must arise from something more than

his affection for Marianne, or the consciousness of its being known to

others; and she soon discovered in his melancholy eye and varying

complexion as he looked at her sister, the probable recurrence of many

past scenes of misery to his mind, brought back by that resemblance

between Marianne and Eliza already acknowledged, and now strengthened

by the hollow eye, the sickly skin, the posture of reclining weakness,

and the warm acknowledgment of peculiar obligation.

Mrs. Dashwood, not less watchful of what passed than her daughter, but

with a mind very differently influenced, and therefore watching to very

different effect, saw nothing in the Colonel's behaviour but what arose

from the most simple and self-evident sensations, while in the actions

and words of Marianne she persuaded herself to think that something

more than gratitude already dawned.

At the end of another day or two, Marianne growing visibly stronger

every twelve hours, Mrs. Dashwood, urged equally by her own and her

daughter's wishes, began to talk of removing to Barton. On HER

measures depended those of her two friends; Mrs. Jennings could not

quit Cleveland during the Dashwoods' stay; and Colonel Brandon was soon

brought, by their united request, to consider his own abode there as

equally determinate, if not equally indispensable. At his and Mrs.

Jennings's united request in return, Mrs. Dashwood was prevailed on to

accept the use of his carriage on her journey back, for the better

accommodation of her sick child; and the Colonel, at the joint

invitation of Mrs. Dashwood and Mrs. Jennings, whose active good-nature

made her friendly and hospitable for other people as well as herself,

engaged with pleasure to redeem it by a visit at the cottage, in the

course of a few weeks.

The day of separation and departure arrived; and Marianne, after taking

so particular and lengthened a leave of Mrs. Jennings, one so earnestly

grateful, so full of respect and kind wishes as seemed due to her own

heart from a secret acknowledgment of past inattention, and bidding

Colonel Brandon farewell with a cordiality of a friend, was carefully

assisted by him into the carriage, of which he seemed anxious that she

should engross at least half. Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor then followed,

and the others were left by themselves, to talk of the travellers, and

feel their own dullness, till Mrs. Jennings was summoned to her chaise

to take comfort in the gossip of her maid for the loss of her two young

companions; and Colonel Brandon immediately afterwards took his

solitary way to Delaford.

The Dashwoods were two days on the road, and Marianne bore her journey

on both, without essential fatigue. Every thing that the most zealous

affection, the most solicitous care could do to render her comfortable,

was the office of each watchful companion, and each found their reward

in her bodily ease, and her calmness of spirits. To Elinor, the

observation of the latter was particularly grateful. She, who had seen

her week after week so constantly suffering, oppressed by anguish of

heart which she had neither courage to speak of, nor fortitude to

conceal, now saw with a joy, which no other could equally share, an

apparent composure of mind, which, in being the result as she trusted

of serious reflection, must eventually lead her to contentment and

cheerfulness.

As they approached Barton, indeed, and entered on scenes of which every

field and every tree brought some peculiar, some painful recollection,

she grew silent and thoughtful, and turning away her face from their

notice, sat earnestly gazing through the window. But here, Elinor

could neither wonder nor blame; and when she saw, as she assisted

Marianne from the carriage, that she had been crying, she saw only an

emotion too natural in itself to raise any thing less tender than pity,

and in its unobtrusiveness entitled to praise. In the whole of her

subsequent manner, she traced the direction of a mind awakened to

reasonable exertion; for no sooner had they entered their common

sitting-room, than Marianne turned her eyes around it with a look of

resolute firmness, as if determined at once to accustom herself to the

sight of every object with which the remembrance of Willoughby could be

connected.--She said little, but every sentence aimed at cheerfulness,

and though a sigh sometimes escaped her, it never passed away without

the atonement of a smile. After dinner she would try her piano-forte.

She went to it; but the music on which her eye first rested was an

opera, procured for her by Willoughby, containing some of their

favourite duets, and bearing on its outward leaf her own name in his

hand-writing.--That would not do.--She shook her head, put the music

aside, and after running over the keys for a minute, complained of

feebleness in her fingers, and closed the instrument again; declaring

however with firmness as she did so, that she should in future practice

much.

The next morning produced no abatement in these happy symptoms. On the

contrary, with a mind and body alike strengthened by rest, she looked

and spoke with more genuine spirit, anticipating the pleasure of

Margaret's return, and talking of the dear family party which would

then be restored, of their mutual pursuits and cheerful society, as the

only happiness worth a wish.

"When the weather is settled, and I have recovered my strength," said

she, "we will take long walks together every day. We will walk to the

farm at the edge of the down, and see how the children go on; we will

walk to Sir John's new plantations at Barton Cross, and the Abbeyland;

and we will often go the old ruins of the Priory, and try to trace its

foundations as far as we are told they once reached. I know we shall

be happy. I know the summer will pass happily away. I mean never to

be later in rising than six, and from that time till dinner I shall

divide every moment between music and reading. I have formed my plan,

and am determined to enter on a course of serious study. Our own

library is too well known to me, to be resorted to for any thing beyond

mere amusement. But there are many works well worth reading at the

Park; and there are others of more modern production which I know I can

borrow of Colonel Brandon. By reading only six hours a-day, I shall

gain in the course of a twelve-month a great deal of instruction which

I now feel myself to want."

Elinor honoured her for a plan which originated so nobly as this;

though smiling to see the same eager fancy which had been leading her

to the extreme of languid indolence and selfish repining, now at work

in introducing excess into a scheme of such rational employment and

virtuous self-control. Her smile however changed to a sigh when she

remembered that promise to Willoughby was yet unfulfilled, and feared

she had that to communicate which might again unsettle the mind of

Marianne, and ruin at least for a time this fair prospect of busy

tranquillity. Willing therefore to delay the evil hour, she resolved

to wait till her sister's health were more secure, before she appointed

it. But the resolution was made only to be broken.

Marianne had been two or three days at home, before the weather was

fine enough for an invalid like herself to venture out. But at last a

soft, genial morning appeared; such as might tempt the daughter's

wishes and the mother's confidence; and Marianne, leaning on Elinor's

arm, was authorised to walk as long as she could without fatigue, in

the lane before the house.

The sisters set out at a pace, slow as the feebleness of Marianne in an

exercise hitherto untried since her illness required;--and they had

advanced only so far beyond the house as to admit a full view of the

hill, the important hill behind, when pausing with her eyes turned

towards it, Marianne calmly said,

"There, exactly there,"--pointing with one hand, "on that projecting

mound,--there I fell; and there I first saw Willoughby."

Her voice sunk with the word, but presently reviving she added,

"I am thankful to find that I can look with so little pain on the

spot!--shall we ever talk on that subject, Elinor?"--hesitatingly it

was said.--"Or will it be wrong?--I can talk of it now, I hope, as I

ought to do."--

Elinor tenderly invited her to be open.

"As for regret," said Marianne, "I have done with that, as far as HE is

concerned. I do not mean to talk to you of what my feelings have been

for him, but what they are NOW.--At present, if I could be satisfied on

one point, if I could be allowed to think that he was not ALWAYS acting

a part, not ALWAYS deceiving me;--but above all, if I could be assured

that he never was so VERY wicked as my fears have sometimes fancied

him, since the story of that unfortunate girl"--

She stopt. Elinor joyfully treasured her words as she answered,

"If you could be assured of that, you think you should be easy."

"Yes. My peace of mind is doubly involved in it;--for not only is it

horrible to suspect a person, who has been what HE has been to ME, of

such designs,--but what must it make me appear to myself?--What in a

situation like mine, but a most shamefully unguarded affection could

expose me to"--

"How then," asked her sister, "would you account for his behaviour?"

"I would suppose him,--Oh, how gladly would I suppose him, only fickle,

very, very fickle."

Elinor said no more. She was debating within herself on the

eligibility of beginning her story directly, or postponing it till

Marianne were in stronger health;--and they crept on for a few minutes

in silence.

"I am not wishing him too much good," said Marianne at last with a

sigh, "when I wish his secret reflections may be no more unpleasant

than my own. He will suffer enough in them."

"Do you compare your conduct with his?"

"No. I compare it with what it ought to have been; I compare it with

yours."

"Our situations have borne little resemblance."

"They have borne more than our conduct.--Do not, my dearest Elinor, let

your kindness defend what I know your judgment must censure. My

illness has made me think-- It has given me leisure and calmness for

serious recollection. Long before I was enough recovered to talk, I

was perfectly able to reflect. I considered the past: I saw in my own

behaviour, since the beginning of our acquaintance with him last

autumn, nothing but a series of imprudence towards myself, and want of

kindness to others. I saw that my own feelings had prepared my

sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me

to the grave. My illness, I well knew, had been entirely brought on by

myself by such negligence of my own health, as I had felt even at the

time to be wrong. Had I died,--it would have been self-destruction. I

did not know my danger till the danger was removed; but with such

feelings as these reflections gave me, I wonder at my recovery,--wonder

that the very eagerness of my desire to live, to have time for

atonement to my God, and to you all, did not kill me at once. Had I

died,-- in what peculiar misery should I have left you, my nurse, my

friend, my sister!--You, who had seen all the fretful selfishness of my

latter days; who had known all the murmurings of my heart!--How should

I have lived in YOUR remembrance!--My mother too! How could you have

consoled her!--I cannot express my own abhorrence of myself. Whenever

I looked towards the past, I saw some duty neglected, or some failing

indulged. Every body seemed injured by me. The kindness, the

unceasing kindness of Mrs. Jennings, I had repaid with ungrateful

contempt. To the Middletons, to the Palmers, the Steeles, to every

common acquaintance even, I had been insolent and unjust; with a heart

hardened against their merits, and a temper irritated by their very

attention.--To John, to Fanny,--yes, even to them, little as they

deserve, I had given less than their due. But you,--you above all,

above my mother, had been wronged by me. I, and only I, knew your

heart and its sorrows; yet to what did it influence me?--not to any

compassion that could benefit you or myself.--Your example was before

me; but to what avail?--Was I more considerate of you and your comfort?

Did I imitate your forbearance, or lessen your restraints, by taking

any part in those offices of general complaisance or particular

gratitude which you had hitherto been left to discharge

alone?--No;--not less when I knew you to be unhappy, than when I had

believed you at ease, did I turn away from every exertion of duty or

friendship; scarcely allowing sorrow to exist but with me, regretting

only THAT heart which had deserted and wronged me, and leaving you, for

or I professed an unbounded affection, to be miserable for my sake."

Here ceased the rapid flow of her self-reproving spirit; and Elinor,

impatient to soothe, though too honest to flatter, gave her instantly

that praise and support which her frankness and her contrition so well

deserved. Marianne pressed her hand and replied,

"You are very good.--The future must be my proof. I have laid down my

plan, and if I am capable of adhering to it--my feelings shall be

governed and my temper improved. They shall no longer worry others,

nor torture myself. I shall now live solely for my family. You, my

mother, and Margaret, must henceforth be all the world to me; you will

share my affections entirely between you. From you, from my home, I

shall never again have the smallest incitement to move; and if I do mix

in other society, it will be only to shew that my spirit is humbled, my

heart amended, and that I can practise the civilities, the lesser

duties of life, with gentleness and forbearance. As for Willoughby--to

say that I shall soon or that I shall ever forget him, would be idle.

His remembrance can be overcome by no change of circumstances or

opinions. But it shall be regulated, it shall be checked by religion,

by reason, by constant employment."

She paused--and added in a low voice, "If I could but know HIS heart,

everything would become easy."

Elinor, who had now been for some time reflecting on the propriety or

impropriety of speedily hazarding her narration, without feeling at all

nearer decision than at first, heard this; and perceiving that as

reflection did nothing, resolution must do all, soon found herself

leading to the fact.

She managed the recital, as she hoped, with address; prepared her

anxious listener with caution; related simply and honestly the chief

points on which Willoughby grounded his apology; did justice to his

repentance, and softened only his protestations of present regard.

Marianne said not a word.--She trembled, her eyes were fixed on the

ground, and her lips became whiter than even sickness had left them. A

thousand inquiries sprung up from her heart, but she dared not urge

one. She caught every syllable with panting eagerness; her hand,

unknowingly to herself, closely pressed her sister's, and tears covered

her cheeks.

Elinor, dreading her being tired, led her towards home; and till they

reached the door of the cottage, easily conjecturing what her curiosity

must be though no question was suffered to speak it, talked of nothing

but Willoughby, and their conversation together; and was carefully

minute in every particular of speech and look, where minuteness could

be safely indulged. As soon as they entered the house, Marianne with a

kiss of gratitude and these two words just articulate through her

tears, "Tell mama," withdrew from her sister and walked slowly up

stairs. Elinor would not attempt to disturb a solitude so reasonable

as what she now sought; and with a mind anxiously pre-arranging its

result, and a resolution of reviving the subject again, should Marianne

fail to do it, she turned into the parlour to fulfill her parting

injunction.

CHAPTER 47

Mrs. Dashwood did not hear unmoved the vindication of her former

favourite. She rejoiced in his being cleared from some part of his

imputed guilt;--she was sorry for him;--she wished him happy. But the

feelings of the past could not be recalled.--Nothing could restore him

with a faith unbroken--a character unblemished, to Marianne. Nothing

could do away the knowledge of what the latter had suffered through his

means, nor remove the guilt of his conduct towards Eliza. Nothing

could replace him, therefore, in her former esteem, nor injure the

interests of Colonel Brandon.

Had Mrs. Dashwood, like her daughter, heard Willoughby's story from

himself--had she witnessed his distress, and been under the influence

of his countenance and his manner, it is probable that her compassion

would have been greater. But it was neither in Elinor's power, nor in

her wish, to rouse such feelings in another, by her retailed

explanation, as had at first been called forth in herself. Reflection

had given calmness to her judgment, and sobered her own opinion of

Willoughby's deserts;--she wished, therefore, to declare only the

simple truth, and lay open such facts as were really due to his

character, without any embellishment of tenderness to lead the fancy

astray.

In the evening, when they were all three together, Marianne began

voluntarily to speak of him again;--but that it was not without an

effort, the restless, unquiet thoughtfulness in which she had been for

some time previously sitting--her rising colour, as she spoke,--and her

unsteady voice, plainly shewed.

"I wish to assure you both," said she, "that I see every thing--as you

can desire me to do."

Mrs. Dashwood would have interrupted her instantly with soothing

tenderness, had not Elinor, who really wished to hear her sister's

unbiased opinion, by an eager sign, engaged her silence. Marianne

slowly continued--

"It is a great relief to me--what Elinor told me this morning--I have

now heard exactly what I wished to hear."--For some moments her voice

was lost; but recovering herself, she added, and with greater calmness

than before--"I am now perfectly satisfied, I wish for no change. I

never could have been happy with him, after knowing, as sooner or later

I must have known, all this.--I should have had no confidence, no

esteem. Nothing could have done it away to my feelings."

"I know it--I know it," cried her mother. "Happy with a man of

libertine practices!--With one who so injured the peace of the dearest

of our friends, and the best of men!--No--my Marianne has not a heart

to be made happy with such a man!--Her conscience, her sensitive

conscience, would have felt all that the conscience of her husband

ought to have felt."

Marianne sighed, and repeated, "I wish for no change."

"You consider the matter," said Elinor, "exactly as a good mind and a

sound understanding must consider it; and I dare say you perceive, as

well as myself, not only in this, but in many other circumstances,

reason enough to be convinced that your marriage must have involved you

in many certain troubles and disappointments, in which you would have

been poorly supported by an affection, on his side, much less certain.

Had you married, you must have been always poor. His expensiveness is

acknowledged even by himself, and his whole conduct declares that

self-denial is a word hardly understood by him. His demands and your

inexperience together, on a small, very small income, must have brought

on distresses which would not be the LESS grievous to you, from having

been entirely unknown and unthought of before. YOUR sense of honour

and honesty would have led you, I know, when aware of your situation,

to attempt all the economy that would appear to you possible: and,

perhaps, as long as your frugality retrenched only on your own comfort,

you might have been suffered to practice it, but beyond that--and how

little could the utmost of your single management do to stop the ruin

which had begun before your marriage?-- Beyond THAT, had you

endeavoured, however reasonably, to abridge HIS enjoyments, is it not

to be feared, that instead of prevailing on feelings so selfish to

consent to it, you would have lessened your own influence on his heart,

and made him regret the connection which had involved him in such

difficulties?"

Marianne's lips quivered, and she repeated the word "Selfish?" in a

tone that implied--"do you really think him selfish?"

"The whole of his behaviour," replied Elinor, "from the beginning to

the end of the affair, has been grounded on selfishness. It was

selfishness which first made him sport with your affections; which

afterwards, when his own were engaged, made him delay the confession of

it, and which finally carried him from Barton. His own enjoyment, or

his own ease, was, in every particular, his ruling principle."

"It is very true. MY happiness never was his object."

"At present," continued Elinor, "he regrets what he has done. And why

does he regret it?--Because he finds it has not answered towards

himself. It has not made him happy. His circumstances are now

unembarrassed--he suffers from no evil of that kind; and he thinks only

that he has married a woman of a less amiable temper than yourself.

But does it follow that had he married you, he would have been

happy?--The inconveniences would have been different. He would then

have suffered under the pecuniary distresses which, because they are

removed, he now reckons as nothing. He would have had a wife of whose

temper he could make no complaint, but he would have been always

necessitous--always poor; and probably would soon have learned to rank

the innumerable comforts of a clear estate and good income as of far

more importance, even to domestic happiness, than the mere temper of a

wife."

"I have not a doubt of it," said Marianne; "and I have nothing to

regret--nothing but my own folly."

"Rather say your mother's imprudence, my child," said Mrs. Dashwood;

"SHE must be answerable."

Marianne would not let her proceed;--and Elinor, satisfied that each

felt their own error, wished to avoid any survey of the past that might

weaken her sister's spirits; she, therefore, pursuing the first

subject, immediately continued,

"One observation may, I think, be fairly drawn from the whole of the

story--that all Willoughby's difficulties have arisen from the first

offence against virtue, in his behaviour to Eliza Williams. That crime

has been the origin of every lesser one, and of all his present

discontents."

Marianne assented most feelingly to the remark; and her mother was led

by it to an enumeration of Colonel Brandon's injuries and merits, warm

as friendship and design could unitedly dictate. Her daughter did not

look, however, as if much of it were heard by her.

Elinor, according to her expectation, saw on the two or three following

days, that Marianne did not continue to gain strength as she had done;

but while her resolution was unsubdued, and she still tried to appear

cheerful and easy, her sister could safely trust to the effect of time

upon her health.

Margaret returned, and the family were again all restored to each

other, again quietly settled at the cottage; and if not pursuing their

usual studies with quite so much vigour as when they first came to

Barton, at least planning a vigorous prosecution of them in future.

Elinor grew impatient for some tidings of Edward. She had heard

nothing of him since her leaving London, nothing new of his plans,

nothing certain even of his present abode. Some letters had passed

between her and her brother, in consequence of Marianne's illness; and

in the first of John's, there had been this sentence:-- "We know

nothing of our unfortunate Edward, and can make no enquiries on so

prohibited a subject, but conclude him to be still at Oxford;" which

was all the intelligence of Edward afforded her by the correspondence,

for his name was not even mentioned in any of the succeeding letters.

She was not doomed, however, to be long in ignorance of his measures.

Their man-servant had been sent one morning to Exeter on business; and

when, as he waited at table, he had satisfied the inquiries of his

mistress as to the event of his errand, this was his voluntary

communication--

"I suppose you know, ma'am, that Mr. Ferrars is married."

Marianne gave a violent start, fixed her eyes upon Elinor, saw her

turning pale, and fell back in her chair in hysterics. Mrs. Dashwood,

whose eyes, as she answered the servant's inquiry, had intuitively

taken the same direction, was shocked to perceive by Elinor's

countenance how much she really suffered, and a moment afterwards,

alike distressed by Marianne's situation, knew not on which child to

bestow her principal attention.

The servant, who saw only that Miss Marianne was taken ill, had sense

enough to call one of the maids, who, with Mrs. Dashwood's assistance,

supported her into the other room. By that time, Marianne was rather

better, and her mother leaving her to the care of Margaret and the

maid, returned to Elinor, who, though still much disordered, had so far

recovered the use of her reason and voice as to be just beginning an

inquiry of Thomas, as to the source of his intelligence. Mrs. Dashwood

immediately took all that trouble on herself; and Elinor had the

benefit of the information without the exertion of seeking it.

"Who told you that Mr. Ferrars was married, Thomas?"

"I see Mr. Ferrars myself, ma'am, this morning in Exeter, and his lady

too, Miss Steele as was. They was stopping in a chaise at the door of

the New London Inn, as I went there with a message from Sally at the

Park to her brother, who is one of the post-boys. I happened to look up

as I went by the chaise, and so I see directly it was the youngest Miss

Steele; so I took off my hat, and she knew me and called to me, and

inquired after you, ma'am, and the young ladies, especially Miss

Marianne, and bid me I should give her compliments and Mr. Ferrars's,

their best compliments and service, and how sorry they was they had not

time to come on and see you, but they was in a great hurry to go

forwards, for they was going further down for a little while, but

howsever, when they come back, they'd make sure to come and see you."

"But did she tell you she was married, Thomas?"

"Yes, ma'am. She smiled, and said how she had changed her name since

she was in these parts. She was always a very affable and free-spoken

young lady, and very civil behaved. So, I made free to wish her joy."

"Was Mr. Ferrars in the carriage with her?"

"Yes, ma'am, I just see him leaning back in it, but he did not look

up;--he never was a gentleman much for talking."

Elinor's heart could easily account for his not putting himself

forward; and Mrs. Dashwood probably found the same explanation.

"Was there no one else in the carriage?"

"No, ma'am, only they two."

"Do you know where they came from?"

"They come straight from town, as Miss Lucy-- Mrs. Ferrars told me."

"And are they going farther westward?"

"Yes, ma'am--but not to bide long. They will soon be back again, and

then they'd be sure and call here."

Mrs. Dashwood now looked at her daughter; but Elinor knew better than

to expect them. She recognised the whole of Lucy in the message, and

was very confident that Edward would never come near them. She

observed in a low voice, to her mother, that they were probably going

down to Mr. Pratt's, near Plymouth.

Thomas's intelligence seemed over. Elinor looked as if she wished to

hear more.

"Did you see them off, before you came away?"

"No, ma'am--the horses were just coming out, but I could not bide any

longer; I was afraid of being late."

"Did Mrs. Ferrars look well?"

"Yes, ma'am, she said how she was very well; and to my mind she was

always a very handsome young lady--and she seemed vastly contented."

Mrs. Dashwood could think of no other question, and Thomas and the

tablecloth, now alike needless, were soon afterwards dismissed.

Marianne had already sent to say, that she should eat nothing more.

Mrs. Dashwood's and Elinor's appetites were equally lost, and Margaret

might think herself very well off, that with so much uneasiness as both

her sisters had lately experienced, so much reason as they had often

had to be careless of their meals, she had never been obliged to go

without her dinner before.

When the dessert and the wine were arranged, and Mrs. Dashwood and

Elinor were left by themselves, they remained long together in a

similarity of thoughtfulness and silence. Mrs. Dashwood feared to

hazard any remark, and ventured not to offer consolation. She now

found that she had erred in relying on Elinor's representation of

herself; and justly concluded that every thing had been expressly

softened at the time, to spare her from an increase of unhappiness,

suffering as she then had suffered for Marianne. She found that she

had been misled by the careful, the considerate attention of her

daughter, to think the attachment, which once she had so well

understood, much slighter in reality, than she had been wont to

believe, or than it was now proved to be. She feared that under this

persuasion she had been unjust, inattentive, nay, almost unkind, to her

Elinor;--that Marianne's affliction, because more acknowledged, more

immediately before her, had too much engrossed her tenderness, and led

her away to forget that in Elinor she might have a daughter suffering

almost as much, certainly with less self-provocation, and greater

fortitude.

CHAPTER 48

Elinor now found the difference between the expectation of an

unpleasant event, however certain the mind may be told to consider it,

and certainty itself. She now found, that in spite of herself, she had

always admitted a hope, while Edward remained single, that something

would occur to prevent his marrying Lucy; that some resolution of his

own, some mediation of friends, or some more eligible opportunity of

establishment for the lady, would arise to assist the happiness of all.

But he was now married; and she condemned her heart for the lurking

flattery, which so much heightened the pain of the intelligence.

That he should be married soon, before (as she imagined) he could be in

orders, and consequently before he could be in possession of the

living, surprised her a little at first. But she soon saw how likely

it was that Lucy, in her self-provident care, in her haste to secure

him, should overlook every thing but the risk of delay. They were

married, married in town, and now hastening down to her uncle's. What

had Edward felt on being within four miles from Barton, on seeing her

mother's servant, on hearing Lucy's message!

They would soon, she supposed, be settled at Delaford.--Delaford,--that

place in which so much conspired to give her an interest; which she

wished to be acquainted with, and yet desired to avoid. She saw them

in an instant in their parsonage-house; saw in Lucy, the active,

contriving manager, uniting at once a desire of smart appearance with

the utmost frugality, and ashamed to be suspected of half her

economical practices;--pursuing her own interest in every thought,

courting the favour of Colonel Brandon, of Mrs. Jennings, and of every

wealthy friend. In Edward--she knew not what she saw, nor what she

wished to see;--happy or unhappy,--nothing pleased her; she turned away

her head from every sketch of him.

Elinor flattered herself that some one of their connections in London

would write to them to announce the event, and give farther

particulars,--but day after day passed off, and brought no letter, no

tidings. Though uncertain that any one were to blame, she found fault

with every absent friend. They were all thoughtless or indolent.

"When do you write to Colonel Brandon, ma'am?" was an inquiry which

sprung from the impatience of her mind to have something going on.

"I wrote to him, my love, last week, and rather expect to see, than to

hear from him again. I earnestly pressed his coming to us, and should

not be surprised to see him walk in today or tomorrow, or any day."

This was gaining something, something to look forward to. Colonel

Brandon must have some information to give.

Scarcely had she so determined it, when the figure of a man on

horseback drew her eyes to the window. He stopt at their gate. It was

a gentleman, it was Colonel Brandon himself. Now she could hear more;

and she trembled in expectation of it. But--it was NOT Colonel

Brandon--neither his air--nor his height. Were it possible, she must

say it must be Edward. She looked again. He had just dismounted;--she

could not be mistaken,--it WAS Edward. She moved away and sat down.

"He comes from Mr. Pratt's purposely to see us. I WILL be calm; I WILL

be mistress of myself."

In a moment she perceived that the others were likewise aware of the

mistake. She saw her mother and Marianne change colour; saw them look

at herself, and whisper a few sentences to each other. She would have

given the world to be able to speak--and to make them understand that

she hoped no coolness, no slight, would appear in their behaviour to

him;--but she had no utterance, and was obliged to leave all to their

own discretion.

Not a syllable passed aloud. They all waited in silence for the

appearance of their visitor. His footsteps were heard along the gravel

path; in a moment he was in the passage, and in another he was before

them.

His countenance, as he entered the room, was not too happy, even for

Elinor. His complexion was white with agitation, and he looked as if

fearful of his reception, and conscious that he merited no kind one.

Mrs. Dashwood, however, conforming, as she trusted, to the wishes of

that daughter, by whom she then meant in the warmth of her heart to be

guided in every thing, met with a look of forced complacency, gave him

her hand, and wished him joy.

He coloured, and stammered out an unintelligible reply. Elinor's lips

had moved with her mother's, and, when the moment of action was over,

she wished that she had shaken hands with him too. But it was then too

late, and with a countenance meaning to be open, she sat down again and

talked of the weather.

Marianne had retreated as much as possible out of sight, to conceal her

distress; and Margaret, understanding some part, but not the whole of

the case, thought it incumbent on her to be dignified, and therefore

took a seat as far from him as she could, and maintained a strict

silence.

When Elinor had ceased to rejoice in the dryness of the season, a very

awful pause took place. It was put an end to by Mrs. Dashwood, who

felt obliged to hope that he had left Mrs. Ferrars very well. In a

hurried manner, he replied in the affirmative.

Another pause.

Elinor resolving to exert herself, though fearing the sound of her own

voice, now said,

"Is Mrs. Ferrars at Longstaple?"

"At Longstaple!" he replied, with an air of surprise.-- "No, my mother

is in town."

"I meant," said Elinor, taking up some work from the table, "to inquire

for Mrs. EDWARD Ferrars."

She dared not look up;--but her mother and Marianne both turned their

eyes on him. He coloured, seemed perplexed, looked doubtingly, and,

after some hesitation, said,--

"Perhaps you mean--my brother--you mean Mrs.--Mrs. ROBERT Ferrars."

"Mrs. Robert Ferrars!"--was repeated by Marianne and her mother in an

accent of the utmost amazement;--and though Elinor could not speak,

even HER eyes were fixed on him with the same impatient wonder. He

rose from his seat, and walked to the window, apparently from not

knowing what to do; took up a pair of scissors that lay there, and

while spoiling both them and their sheath by cutting the latter to

pieces as he spoke, said, in a hurried voice,

"Perhaps you do not know--you may not have heard that my brother is

lately married to--to the youngest--to Miss Lucy Steele."

His words were echoed with unspeakable astonishment by all but Elinor,

who sat with her head leaning over her work, in a state of such

agitation as made her hardly know where she was.

"Yes," said he, "they were married last week, and are now at Dawlish."

Elinor could sit it no longer. She almost ran out of the room, and as

soon as the door was closed, burst into tears of joy, which at first

she thought would never cease. Edward, who had till then looked any

where, rather than at her, saw her hurry away, and perhaps saw--or even

heard, her emotion; for immediately afterwards he fell into a reverie,

which no remarks, no inquiries, no affectionate address of Mrs.

Dashwood could penetrate, and at last, without saying a word, quitted

the room, and walked out towards the village--leaving the others in the

greatest astonishment and perplexity on a change in his situation, so

wonderful and so sudden;--a perplexity which they had no means of

lessening but by their own conjectures.

CHAPTER 49

Unaccountable, however, as the circumstances of his release might

appear to the whole family, it was certain that Edward was free; and to

what purpose that freedom would be employed was easily pre-determined

by all;--for after experiencing the blessings of ONE imprudent

engagement, contracted without his mother's consent, as he had already

done for more than four years, nothing less could be expected of him in

the failure of THAT, than the immediate contraction of another.

His errand at Barton, in fact, was a simple one. It was only to ask

Elinor to marry him;--and considering that he was not altogether

inexperienced in such a question, it might be strange that he should

feel so uncomfortable in the present case as he really did, so much in

need of encouragement and fresh air.

How soon he had walked himself into the proper resolution, however, how

soon an opportunity of exercising it occurred, in what manner he

expressed himself, and how he was received, need not be particularly

told. This only need be said;--that when they all sat down to table at

four o'clock, about three hours after his arrival, he had secured his

lady, engaged her mother's consent, and was not only in the rapturous

profession of the lover, but, in the reality of reason and truth, one

of the happiest of men. His situation indeed was more than commonly

joyful. He had more than the ordinary triumph of accepted love to

swell his heart, and raise his spirits. He was released without any

reproach to himself, from an entanglement which had long formed his

misery, from a woman whom he had long ceased to love;--and elevated at

once to that security with another, which he must have thought of

almost with despair, as soon as he had learnt to consider it with

desire. He was brought, not from doubt or suspense, but from misery to

happiness;--and the change was openly spoken in such a genuine,

flowing, grateful cheerfulness, as his friends had never witnessed in

him before.

His heart was now open to Elinor, all its weaknesses, all its errors

confessed, and his first boyish attachment to Lucy treated with all the

philosophic dignity of twenty-four.

"It was a foolish, idle inclination on my side," said he, "the

consequence of ignorance of the world--and want of employment. Had my

brother given me some active profession when I was removed at eighteen

from the care of Mr. Pratt, I think--nay, I am sure, it would never

have happened; for though I left Longstaple with what I thought, at the

time, a most unconquerable preference for his niece, yet had I then had

any pursuit, any object to engage my time and keep me at a distance

from her for a few months, I should very soon have outgrown the fancied

attachment, especially by mixing more with the world, as in such case I

must have done. But instead of having any thing to do, instead of

having any profession chosen for me, or being allowed to chuse any

myself, I returned home to be completely idle; and for the first

twelvemonth afterwards I had not even the nominal employment, which

belonging to the university would have given me; for I was not entered

at Oxford till I was nineteen. I had therefore nothing in the world to

do, but to fancy myself in love; and as my mother did not make my home

in every respect comfortable, as I had no friend, no companion in my

brother, and disliked new acquaintance, it was not unnatural for me to

be very often at Longstaple, where I always felt myself at home, and

was always sure of a welcome; and accordingly I spent the greatest part

of my time there from eighteen to nineteen: Lucy appeared everything

that was amiable and obliging. She was pretty too--at least I thought

so THEN; and I had seen so little of other women, that I could make no

comparisons, and see no defects. Considering everything, therefore, I

hope, foolish as our engagement was, foolish as it has since in every

way been proved, it was not at the time an unnatural or an inexcusable

piece of folly."

The change which a few hours had wrought in the minds and the happiness

of the Dashwoods, was such--so great--as promised them all, the

satisfaction of a sleepless night. Mrs. Dashwood, too happy to be

comfortable, knew not how to love Edward, nor praise Elinor enough, how

to be enough thankful for his release without wounding his delicacy,

nor how at once to give them leisure for unrestrained conversation

together, and yet enjoy, as she wished, the sight and society of both.

Marianne could speak HER happiness only by tears. Comparisons would

occur--regrets would arise;--and her joy, though sincere as her love

for her sister, was of a kind to give her neither spirits nor language.

But Elinor--how are HER feelings to be described?--From the moment of

learning that Lucy was married to another, that Edward was free, to the

moment of his justifying the hopes which had so instantly followed, she

was every thing by turns but tranquil. But when the second moment had

passed, when she found every doubt, every solicitude removed, compared

her situation with what so lately it had been,--saw him honourably

released from his former engagement, saw him instantly profiting by the

release, to address herself and declare an affection as tender, as

constant as she had ever supposed it to be,--she was oppressed, she was

overcome by her own felicity;--and happily disposed as is the human

mind to be easily familiarized with any change for the better, it

required several hours to give sedateness to her spirits, or any degree

of tranquillity to her heart.

Edward was now fixed at the cottage at least for a week;--for whatever

other claims might be made on him, it was impossible that less than a

week should be given up to the enjoyment of Elinor's company, or

suffice to say half that was to be said of the past, the present, and

the future;--for though a very few hours spent in the hard labor of

incessant talking will despatch more subjects than can really be in

common between any two rational creatures, yet with lovers it is

different. Between THEM no subject is finished, no communication is

even made, till it has been made at least twenty times over.

Lucy's marriage, the unceasing and reasonable wonder among them all,

formed of course one of the earliest discussions of the lovers;--and

Elinor's particular knowledge of each party made it appear to her in

every view, as one of the most extraordinary and unaccountable

circumstances she had ever heard. How they could be thrown together,

and by what attraction Robert could be drawn on to marry a girl, of

whose beauty she had herself heard him speak without any admiration,--a

girl too already engaged to his brother, and on whose account that

brother had been thrown off by his family--it was beyond her

comprehension to make out. To her own heart it was a delightful

affair, to her imagination it was even a ridiculous one, but to her

reason, her judgment, it was completely a puzzle.

Edward could only attempt an explanation by supposing, that, perhaps,

at first accidentally meeting, the vanity of the one had been so worked

on by the flattery of the other, as to lead by degrees to all the rest.

Elinor remembered what Robert had told her in Harley Street, of his

opinion of what his own mediation in his brother's affairs might have

done, if applied to in time. She repeated it to Edward.

"THAT was exactly like Robert,"--was his immediate observation.--"And

THAT," he presently added, "might perhaps be in HIS head when the

acquaintance between them first began. And Lucy perhaps at first might

think only of procuring his good offices in my favour. Other designs

might afterward arise."

How long it had been carrying on between them, however, he was equally

at a loss with herself to make out; for at Oxford, where he had

remained for choice ever since his quitting London, he had had no means

of hearing of her but from herself, and her letters to the very last

were neither less frequent, nor less affectionate than usual. Not the

smallest suspicion, therefore, had ever occurred to prepare him for

what followed;--and when at last it burst on him in a letter from Lucy

herself, he had been for some time, he believed, half stupified between

the wonder, the horror, and the joy of such a deliverance. He put the

letter into Elinor's hands.

"DEAR SIR,

"Being very sure I have long lost your affections,

I have thought myself at liberty to bestow my own

on another, and have no doubt of being as happy with

him as I once used to think I might be with you;

but I scorn to accept a hand while the heart was

another's. Sincerely wish you happy in your choice,

and it shall not be my fault if we are not always

good friends, as our near relationship now makes

proper. I can safely say I owe you no ill-will,

and am sure you will be too generous to do us any

ill offices. Your brother has gained my affections

entirely, and as we could not live without one

another, we are just returned from the altar, and

are now on our way to Dawlish for a few weeks, which

place your dear brother has great curiosity to see,

but thought I would first trouble you with these

few lines, and shall always remain,

"Your sincere well-wisher, friend, and sister,

"LUCY FERRARS.

"I have burnt all your letters, and will return

your picture the first opportunity. Please to destroy

my scrawls--but the ring with my hair you are very

welcome to keep."

Elinor read and returned it without any comment.

"I will not ask your opinion of it as a composition," said

Edward.--"For worlds would not I have had a letter of hers seen by YOU

in former days.--In a sister it is bad enough, but in a wife!--how I

have blushed over the pages of her writing!--and I believe I may say

that since the first half year of our foolish--business--this is the

only letter I ever received from her, of which the substance made me

any amends for the defect of the style."

"However it may have come about," said Elinor, after a pause,--"they

are certainly married. And your mother has brought on herself a most

appropriate punishment. The independence she settled on Robert,

through resentment against you, has put it in his power to make his own

choice; and she has actually been bribing one son with a thousand

a-year, to do the very deed which she disinherited the other for

intending to do. She will hardly be less hurt, I suppose, by Robert's

marrying Lucy, than she would have been by your marrying her."

"She will be more hurt by it, for Robert always was her favourite.--She

will be more hurt by it, and on the same principle will forgive him

much sooner."

In what state the affair stood at present between them, Edward knew

not, for no communication with any of his family had yet been attempted

by him. He had quitted Oxford within four and twenty hours after

Lucy's letter arrived, and with only one object before him, the nearest

road to Barton, had had no leisure to form any scheme of conduct, with

which that road did not hold the most intimate connection. He could do

nothing till he were assured of his fate with Miss Dashwood; and by his

rapidity in seeking THAT fate, it is to be supposed, in spite of the

jealousy with which he had once thought of Colonel Brandon, in spite of

the modesty with which he rated his own deserts, and the politeness

with which he talked of his doubts, he did not, upon the whole, expect

a very cruel reception. It was his business, however, to say that he

DID, and he said it very prettily. What he might say on the subject a

twelvemonth after, must be referred to the imagination of husbands and

wives.

That Lucy had certainly meant to deceive, to go off with a flourish of

malice against him in her message by Thomas, was perfectly clear to

Elinor; and Edward himself, now thoroughly enlightened on her

character, had no scruple in believing her capable of the utmost

meanness of wanton ill-nature. Though his eyes had been long opened,

even before his acquaintance with Elinor began, to her ignorance and a

want of liberality in some of her opinions--they had been equally

imputed, by him, to her want of education; and till her last letter

reached him, he had always believed her to be a well-disposed,

good-hearted girl, and thoroughly attached to himself. Nothing but

such a persuasion could have prevented his putting an end to an

engagement, which, long before the discovery of it laid him open to his

mother's anger, had been a continual source of disquiet and regret to

him.

"I thought it my duty," said he, "independent of my feelings, to give

her the option of continuing the engagement or not, when I was

renounced by my mother, and stood to all appearance without a friend in

the world to assist me. In such a situation as that, where there

seemed nothing to tempt the avarice or the vanity of any living

creature, how could I suppose, when she so earnestly, so warmly

insisted on sharing my fate, whatever it might be, that any thing but

the most disinterested affection was her inducement? And even now, I

cannot comprehend on what motive she acted, or what fancied advantage

it could be to her, to be fettered to a man for whom she had not the

smallest regard, and who had only two thousand pounds in the world.

She could not foresee that Colonel Brandon would give me a living."

"No; but she might suppose that something would occur in your favour;

that your own family might in time relent. And at any rate, she lost

nothing by continuing the engagement, for she has proved that it

fettered neither her inclination nor her actions. The connection was

certainly a respectable one, and probably gained her consideration

among her friends; and, if nothing more advantageous occurred, it would

be better for her to marry YOU than be single."

Edward was, of course, immediately convinced that nothing could have

been more natural than Lucy's conduct, nor more self-evident than the

motive of it.

Elinor scolded him, harshly as ladies always scold the imprudence which

compliments themselves, for having spent so much time with them at

Norland, when he must have felt his own inconstancy.

"Your behaviour was certainly very wrong," said she; "because--to say

nothing of my own conviction, our relations were all led away by it to

fancy and expect WHAT, as you were THEN situated, could never be."

He could only plead an ignorance of his own heart, and a mistaken

confidence in the force of his engagement.

"I was simple enough to think, that because my FAITH was plighted to

another, there could be no danger in my being with you; and that the

consciousness of my engagement was to keep my heart as safe and sacred

as my honour. I felt that I admired you, but I told myself it was only

friendship; and till I began to make comparisons between yourself and

Lucy, I did not know how far I was got. After that, I suppose, I WAS

wrong in remaining so much in Sussex, and the arguments with which I

reconciled myself to the expediency of it, were no better than

these:--The danger is my own; I am doing no injury to anybody but

myself."

Elinor smiled, and shook her head.

Edward heard with pleasure of Colonel Brandon's being expected at the

Cottage, as he really wished not only to be better acquainted with him,

but to have an opportunity of convincing him that he no longer resented

his giving him the living of Delaford--"Which, at present," said he,

"after thanks so ungraciously delivered as mine were on the occasion,

he must think I have never forgiven him for offering."

NOW he felt astonished himself that he had never yet been to the place.

But so little interest had be taken in the matter, that he owed all his

knowledge of the house, garden, and glebe, extent of the parish,

condition of the land, and rate of the tithes, to Elinor herself, who

had heard so much of it from Colonel Brandon, and heard it with so much

attention, as to be entirely mistress of the subject.

One question after this only remained undecided, between them, one

difficulty only was to be overcome. They were brought together by

mutual affection, with the warmest approbation of their real friends;

their intimate knowledge of each other seemed to make their happiness

certain--and they only wanted something to live upon. Edward had two

thousand pounds, and Elinor one, which, with Delaford living, was all

that they could call their own; for it was impossible that Mrs.

Dashwood should advance anything; and they were neither of them quite

enough in love to think that three hundred and fifty pounds a-year

would supply them with the comforts of life.

Edward was not entirely without hopes of some favourable change in his

mother towards him; and on THAT he rested for the residue of their

income. But Elinor had no such dependence; for since Edward would

still be unable to marry Miss Morton, and his chusing herself had been

spoken of in Mrs. Ferrars's flattering language as only a lesser evil

than his chusing Lucy Steele, she feared that Robert's offence would

serve no other purpose than to enrich Fanny.

About four days after Edward's arrival Colonel Brandon appeared, to

complete Mrs. Dashwood's satisfaction, and to give her the dignity of

having, for the first time since her living at Barton, more company

with her than her house would hold. Edward was allowed to retain the

privilege of first comer, and Colonel Brandon therefore walked every

night to his old quarters at the Park; from whence he usually returned

in the morning, early enough to interrupt the lovers' first tete-a-tete

before breakfast.

A three weeks' residence at Delaford, where, in his evening hours at

least, he had little to do but to calculate the disproportion between

thirty-six and seventeen, brought him to Barton in a temper of mind

which needed all the improvement in Marianne's looks, all the kindness

of her welcome, and all the encouragement of her mother's language, to

make it cheerful. Among such friends, however, and such flattery, he

did revive. No rumour of Lucy's marriage had yet reached him:--he knew

nothing of what had passed; and the first hours of his visit were

consequently spent in hearing and in wondering. Every thing was

explained to him by Mrs. Dashwood, and he found fresh reason to rejoice

in what he had done for Mr. Ferrars, since eventually it promoted the

interest of Elinor.

It would be needless to say, that the gentlemen advanced in the good

opinion of each other, as they advanced in each other's acquaintance,

for it could not be otherwise. Their resemblance in good principles

and good sense, in disposition and manner of thinking, would probably

have been sufficient to unite them in friendship, without any other

attraction; but their being in love with two sisters, and two sisters

fond of each other, made that mutual regard inevitable and immediate,

which might otherwise have waited the effect of time and judgment.

The letters from town, which a few days before would have made every

nerve in Elinor's body thrill with transport, now arrived to be read

with less emotion than mirth. Mrs. Jennings wrote to tell the

wonderful tale, to vent her honest indignation against the jilting

girl, and pour forth her compassion towards poor Mr. Edward, who, she

was sure, had quite doted upon the worthless hussy, and was now, by all

accounts, almost broken-hearted, at Oxford.-- "I do think," she

continued, "nothing was ever carried on so sly; for it was but two days

before Lucy called and sat a couple of hours with me. Not a soul

suspected anything of the matter, not even Nancy, who, poor soul! came

crying to me the day after, in a great fright for fear of Mrs. Ferrars,

as well as not knowing how to get to Plymouth; for Lucy it seems

borrowed all her money before she went off to be married, on purpose we

suppose to make a show with, and poor Nancy had not seven shillings in

the world;--so I was very glad to give her five guineas to take her

down to Exeter, where she thinks of staying three or four weeks with

Mrs. Burgess, in hopes, as I tell her, to fall in with the Doctor

again. And I must say that Lucy's crossness not to take them along

with them in the chaise is worse than all. Poor Mr. Edward! I cannot

get him out of my head, but you must send for him to Barton, and Miss

Marianne must try to comfort him."

Mr. Dashwood's strains were more solemn. Mrs. Ferrars was the most

unfortunate of women--poor Fanny had suffered agonies of

sensibility--and he considered the existence of each, under such a

blow, with grateful wonder. Robert's offence was unpardonable, but

Lucy's was infinitely worse. Neither of them were ever again to be

mentioned to Mrs. Ferrars; and even, if she might hereafter be induced

to forgive her son, his wife should never be acknowledged as her

daughter, nor be permitted to appear in her presence. The secrecy with

which everything had been carried on between them, was rationally

treated as enormously heightening the crime, because, had any suspicion

of it occurred to the others, proper measures would have been taken to

prevent the marriage; and he called on Elinor to join with him in

regretting that Lucy's engagement with Edward had not rather been

fulfilled, than that she should thus be the means of spreading misery

farther in the family.-- He thus continued:

"Mrs. Ferrars has never yet mentioned Edward's name, which does not

surprise us; but, to our great astonishment, not a line has been

received from him on the occasion. Perhaps, however, he is kept silent

by his fear of offending, and I shall, therefore, give him a hint, by a

line to Oxford, that his sister and I both think a letter of proper

submission from him, addressed perhaps to Fanny, and by her shewn to

her mother, might not be taken amiss; for we all know the tenderness of

Mrs. Ferrars's heart, and that she wishes for nothing so much as to be

on good terms with her children."

This paragraph was of some importance to the prospects and conduct of

Edward. It determined him to attempt a reconciliation, though not

exactly in the manner pointed out by their brother and sister.

"A letter of proper submission!" repeated he; "would they have me beg

my mother's pardon for Robert's ingratitude to HER, and breach of

honour to ME?--I can make no submission--I am grown neither humble nor

penitent by what has passed.--I am grown very happy; but that would not

interest.--I know of no submission that IS proper for me to make."

"You may certainly ask to be forgiven," said Elinor, "because you have

offended;--and I should think you might NOW venture so far as to

profess some concern for having ever formed the engagement which drew

on you your mother's anger."

He agreed that he might.

"And when she has forgiven you, perhaps a little humility may be

convenient while acknowledging a second engagement, almost as imprudent

in HER eyes as the first."

He had nothing to urge against it, but still resisted the idea of a

letter of proper submission; and therefore, to make it easier to him,

as he declared a much greater willingness to make mean concessions by

word of mouth than on paper, it was resolved that, instead of writing

to Fanny, he should go to London, and personally intreat her good

offices in his favour.-- "And if they really DO interest themselves,"

said Marianne, in her new character of candour, "in bringing about a

reconciliation, I shall think that even John and Fanny are not entirely

without merit."

After a visit on Colonel Brandon's side of only three or four days, the

two gentlemen quitted Barton together.-- They were to go immediately to

Delaford, that Edward might have some personal knowledge of his future

home, and assist his patron and friend in deciding on what improvements

were needed to it; and from thence, after staying there a couple of

nights, he was to proceed on his journey to town.

CHAPTER 50

After a proper resistance on the part of Mrs. Ferrars, just so violent

and so steady as to preserve her from that reproach which she always

seemed fearful of incurring, the reproach of being too amiable, Edward

was admitted to her presence, and pronounced to be again her son.

Her family had of late been exceedingly fluctuating. For many years of

her life she had had two sons; but the crime and annihilation of Edward

a few weeks ago, had robbed her of one; the similar annihilation of

Robert had left her for a fortnight without any; and now, by the

resuscitation of Edward, she had one again.

In spite of his being allowed once more to live, however, he did not

feel the continuance of his existence secure, till he had revealed his

present engagement; for the publication of that circumstance, he

feared, might give a sudden turn to his constitution, and carry him off

as rapidly as before. With apprehensive caution therefore it was

revealed, and he was listened to with unexpected calmness. Mrs.

Ferrars at first reasonably endeavoured to dissuade him from marrying

Miss Dashwood, by every argument in her power;--told him, that in Miss

Morton he would have a woman of higher rank and larger fortune;--and

enforced the assertion, by observing that Miss Morton was the daughter

of a nobleman with thirty thousand pounds, while Miss Dashwood was only

the daughter of a private gentleman with no more than THREE; but when

she found that, though perfectly admitting the truth of her

representation, he was by no means inclined to be guided by it, she

judged it wisest, from the experience of the past, to submit--and

therefore, after such an ungracious delay as she owed to her own

dignity, and as served to prevent every suspicion of good-will, she

issued her decree of consent to the marriage of Edward and Elinor.

What she would engage to do towards augmenting their income was next to

be considered; and here it plainly appeared, that though Edward was now

her only son, he was by no means her eldest; for while Robert was

inevitably endowed with a thousand pounds a-year, not the smallest

objection was made against Edward's taking orders for the sake of two

hundred and fifty at the utmost; nor was anything promised either for

the present or in future, beyond the ten thousand pounds, which had

been given with Fanny.

It was as much, however, as was desired, and more than was expected, by

Edward and Elinor; and Mrs. Ferrars herself, by her shuffling excuses,

seemed the only person surprised at her not giving more.

With an income quite sufficient to their wants thus secured to them,

they had nothing to wait for after Edward was in possession of the

living, but the readiness of the house, to which Colonel Brandon, with

an eager desire for the accommodation of Elinor, was making

considerable improvements; and after waiting some time for their

completion, after experiencing, as usual, a thousand disappointments

and delays from the unaccountable dilatoriness of the workmen, Elinor,

as usual, broke through the first positive resolution of not marrying

till every thing was ready, and the ceremony took place in Barton

church early in the autumn.

The first month after their marriage was spent with their friend at the

Mansion-house; from whence they could superintend the progress of the

Parsonage, and direct every thing as they liked on the spot;--could

chuse papers, project shrubberies, and invent a sweep. Mrs. Jennings's

prophecies, though rather jumbled together, were chiefly fulfilled; for

she was able to visit Edward and his wife in their Parsonage by

Michaelmas, and she found in Elinor and her husband, as she really

believed, one of the happiest couples in the world. They had in fact

nothing to wish for, but the marriage of Colonel Brandon and Marianne,

and rather better pasturage for their cows.

They were visited on their first settling by almost all their relations

and friends. Mrs. Ferrars came to inspect the happiness which she was

almost ashamed of having authorised; and even the Dashwoods were at the

expense of a journey from Sussex to do them honour.

"I will not say that I am disappointed, my dear sister," said John, as

they were walking together one morning before the gates of Delaford

House, "THAT would be saying too much, for certainly you have been one

of the most fortunate young women in the world, as it is. But, I

confess, it would give me great pleasure to call Colonel Brandon

brother. His property here, his place, his house, every thing is in

such respectable and excellent condition!--and his woods!--I have not

seen such timber any where in Dorsetshire, as there is now standing in

Delaford Hanger!--And though, perhaps, Marianne may not seem exactly

the person to attract him--yet I think it would altogether be advisable

for you to have them now frequently staying with you, for as Colonel

Brandon seems a great deal at home, nobody can tell what may

happen--for, when people are much thrown together, and see little of

anybody else--and it will always be in your power to set her off to

advantage, and so forth;--in short, you may as well give her a

chance--You understand me."--

But though Mrs. Ferrars DID come to see them, and always treated them

with the make-believe of decent affection, they were never insulted by

her real favour and preference. THAT was due to the folly of Robert,

and the cunning of his wife; and it was earned by them before many

months had passed away. The selfish sagacity of the latter, which had

at first drawn Robert into the scrape, was the principal instrument of

his deliverance from it; for her respectful humility, assiduous

attentions, and endless flatteries, as soon as the smallest opening was

given for their exercise, reconciled Mrs. Ferrars to his choice, and

re-established him completely in her favour.

The whole of Lucy's behaviour in the affair, and the prosperity which

crowned it, therefore, may be held forth as a most encouraging instance

of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, however

its progress may be apparently obstructed, will do in securing every

advantage of fortune, with no other sacrifice than that of time and

conscience. When Robert first sought her acquaintance, and privately

visited her in Bartlett's Buildings, it was only with the view imputed

to him by his brother. He merely meant to persuade her to give up the

engagement; and as there could be nothing to overcome but the affection

of both, he naturally expected that one or two interviews would settle

the matter. In that point, however, and that only, he erred;--for

though Lucy soon gave him hopes that his eloquence would convince her

in TIME, another visit, another conversation, was always wanted to

produce this conviction. Some doubts always lingered in her mind when

they parted, which could only be removed by another half hour's

discourse with himself. His attendance was by this means secured, and

the rest followed in course. Instead of talking of Edward, they came

gradually to talk only of Robert,--a subject on which he had always

more to say than on any other, and in which she soon betrayed an

interest even equal to his own; and in short, it became speedily

evident to both, that he had entirely supplanted his brother. He was

proud of his conquest, proud of tricking Edward, and very proud of

marrying privately without his mother's consent. What immediately

followed is known. They passed some months in great happiness at

Dawlish; for she had many relations and old acquaintances to cut--and

he drew several plans for magnificent cottages;--and from thence

returning to town, procured the forgiveness of Mrs. Ferrars, by the

simple expedient of asking it, which, at Lucy's instigation, was

adopted. The forgiveness, at first, indeed, as was reasonable,

comprehended only Robert; and Lucy, who had owed his mother no duty and

therefore could have transgressed none, still remained some weeks

longer unpardoned. But perseverance in humility of conduct and

messages, in self-condemnation for Robert's offence, and gratitude for

the unkindness she was treated with, procured her in time the haughty

notice which overcame her by its graciousness, and led soon afterwards,

by rapid degrees, to the highest state of affection and influence.

Lucy became as necessary to Mrs. Ferrars, as either Robert or Fanny;

and while Edward was never cordially forgiven for having once intended

to marry her, and Elinor, though superior to her in fortune and birth,

was spoken of as an intruder, SHE was in every thing considered, and

always openly acknowledged, to be a favourite child. They settled in

town, received very liberal assistance from Mrs. Ferrars, were on the

best terms imaginable with the Dashwoods; and setting aside the

jealousies and ill-will continually subsisting between Fanny and Lucy,

in which their husbands of course took a part, as well as the frequent

domestic disagreements between Robert and Lucy themselves, nothing

could exceed the harmony in which they all lived together.

What Edward had done to forfeit the right of eldest son, might have

puzzled many people to find out; and what Robert had done to succeed to

it, might have puzzled them still more. It was an arrangement,

however, justified in its effects, if not in its cause; for nothing

ever appeared in Robert's style of living or of talking to give a

suspicion of his regretting the extent of his income, as either leaving

his brother too little, or bringing himself too much;--and if Edward

might be judged from the ready discharge of his duties in every

particular, from an increasing attachment to his wife and his home, and

from the regular cheerfulness of his spirits, he might be supposed no

less contented with his lot, no less free from every wish of an

exchange.

Elinor's marriage divided her as little from her family as could well

be contrived, without rendering the cottage at Barton entirely useless,

for her mother and sisters spent much more than half their time with

her. Mrs. Dashwood was acting on motives of policy as well as pleasure

in the frequency of her visits at Delaford; for her wish of bringing

Marianne and Colonel Brandon together was hardly less earnest, though

rather more liberal than what John had expressed. It was now her

darling object. Precious as was the company of her daughter to her,

she desired nothing so much as to give up its constant enjoyment to her

valued friend; and to see Marianne settled at the mansion-house was

equally the wish of Edward and Elinor. They each felt his sorrows, and

their own obligations, and Marianne, by general consent, was to be the

reward of all.

With such a confederacy against her--with a knowledge so intimate of

his goodness--with a conviction of his fond attachment to herself,

which at last, though long after it was observable to everybody

else--burst on her--what could she do?

Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to

discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her

conduct, her most favourite maxims. She was born to overcome an

affection formed so late in life as at seventeen, and with no sentiment

superior to strong esteem and lively friendship, voluntarily to give

her hand to another!--and THAT other, a man who had suffered no less

than herself under the event of a former attachment, whom, two years

before, she had considered too old to be married,--and who still sought

the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat!

But so it was. Instead of falling a sacrifice to an irresistible

passion, as once she had fondly flattered herself with

expecting,--instead of remaining even for ever with her mother, and

finding her only pleasures in retirement and study, as afterwards in

her more calm and sober judgment she had determined on,--she found

herself at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new

duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the

patroness of a village.

Colonel Brandon was now as happy, as all those who best loved him,

believed he deserved to be;--in Marianne he was consoled for every past

affliction;--her regard and her society restored his mind to animation,

and his spirits to cheerfulness; and that Marianne found her own

happiness in forming his, was equally the persuasion and delight of

each observing friend. Marianne could never love by halves; and her

whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had

once been to Willoughby.

Willoughby could not hear of her marriage without a pang; and his

punishment was soon afterwards complete in the voluntary forgiveness of

Mrs. Smith, who, by stating his marriage with a woman of character, as

the source of her clemency, gave him reason for believing that had he

behaved with honour towards Marianne, he might at once have been happy

and rich. That his repentance of misconduct, which thus brought its

own punishment, was sincere, need not be doubted;--nor that he long

thought of Colonel Brandon with envy, and of Marianne with regret. But

that he was for ever inconsolable, that he fled from society, or

contracted an habitual gloom of temper, or died of a broken heart, must

not be depended on--for he did neither. He lived to exert, and

frequently to enjoy himself. His wife was not always out of humour,

nor his home always uncomfortable; and in his breed of horses and dogs,

and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of

domestic felicity.

For Marianne, however--in spite of his incivility in surviving her

loss--he always retained that decided regard which interested him in

every thing that befell her, and made her his secret standard of

perfection in woman;--and many a rising beauty would be slighted by him

in after-days as bearing no comparison with Mrs. Brandon.

Mrs. Dashwood was prudent enough to remain at the cottage, without

attempting a removal to Delaford; and fortunately for Sir John and Mrs.

Jennings, when Marianne was taken from them, Margaret had reached an

age highly suitable for dancing, and not very ineligible for being

supposed to have a lover.

Between Barton and Delaford, there was that constant communication

which strong family affection would naturally dictate;--and among the

merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked

as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost

within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement

between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands.

THE END