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Masaru Uchida, Gifu University

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This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.
The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

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This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

For many years, the Dashwood family lived at Norland Park in Sussex. It was a large and beautiful place. The house stood in the middle of the land, and the family had lived there for generations. People in the neighborhood respected them. The owner of the estate was an old gentleman, unmarried, who had grown very fond of the family of his nephew, Mr. Henry Dashwood. Henry Dashwood, his wife, and their children lived with him and cared for him kindly in his last years.

Mr. Henry Dashwood had one son by his first wife, and three daughters by his second wife. The son was John Dashwood. The daughters were Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret. John already had money from his mother, and after his marriage he had even more. The girls, however, had very little. Their mother had no fortune of her own, and their father could not freely leave them the Norland estate. So even while the family lived in a great house, there was a quiet danger under their comfort. If Mr. Henry Dashwood died, his wife and daughters could quickly become poor.

That danger came at last. The old gentleman died, and his will was opened. Mr. Henry Dashwood did inherit Norland, but not in a way that gave him real freedom. The property was tied to John Dashwood's little son. Mr. Henry Dashwood could enjoy the estate for a short time, but he could not sell land or use its value to make his wife and daughters secure. The old gentleman had left each of the three girls one thousand pounds, and that was all. It was something, but it was far less than what a loving father would have wished for them.

At first Mr. Henry Dashwood tried to hope. He was cheerful by nature, and he told himself that he still had time. He might live many years. He might save money. He might improve matters little by little. But hope did not stay long. Only one year after the old gentleman's death, Mr. Henry Dashwood himself fell seriously ill. Then he understood that he would not recover, and he sent for his son.

John Dashwood came to his father's room. The sick man was weak, and his breath came with effort, but his mind was clear. His wife and daughters had no strong protector except this son. He looked at John with anxious eyes and said, "My dear boy, I have one thing to ask before I die. Your stepmother and your sisters will be left in a hard situation. Promise me that you will help them. Promise me that you will do what you can to make them comfortable."

John was moved. He was not a man of warm feelings, but death has a strong voice, and at such a moment he could not refuse. He answered, "Yes, sir. I promise it. I will do everything in my power for them." Mr. Henry Dashwood was calmed by those words. He believed his son. That belief brought him peace, and not long after, he died.

When John left his father's room, he still felt the force of that promise. He was now rich. Norland would soon be his. His own income was already good, and the future looked larger still. In that first warm moment, he thought, "I must act generously. I will give my sisters one thousand pounds each. Three thousand pounds in all. It is a large sum, but I can manage it." All that day he was satisfied with the thought. For several days he continued to think himself kind, noble, and just.

But John Dashwood was weak in a quiet way. He liked to think well of himself, yet he did not like pain, loss, or sacrifice. He was not openly cruel. He was respectable, correct, and proper in ordinary life. If he had married a better woman, he might have become better himself. Instead, he had married Fanny Dashwood, a woman very like him, but sharper, colder, and more selfish. What he felt dimly, she could say clearly. What he wished to excuse, she could defend.

Soon after Mr. Henry Dashwood's funeral, Mrs. John Dashwood came to Norland with her child and servants. The house was now hers by law, and no one could prevent her arrival. Still, the speed of it hurt Mrs. Dashwood deeply. Her husband was hardly gone, and already another woman entered the house as mistress. Mrs. Dashwood felt the insult at once. In her grief and pride, she wished to leave Norland immediately and never return. But Elinor, her eldest daughter, gently begged her to stay for a while, for the sake of peace and prudence.

Elinor was only nineteen, but she had strong good sense. She felt sorrow as deeply as anyone, yet she could govern herself. She could think when others only suffered. Marianne, by contrast, felt everything with all her heart and did nothing by halves. She loved deeply, grieved deeply, and had no wish to be calm. Margaret, the youngest, was a cheerful girl, but she had already learned some of Marianne's romantic habits without Marianne's judgment. So in that troubled house, Elinor became the one person who could still act wisely.

Mrs. John Dashwood settled herself at Norland as mistress of the house, while Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters were left almost like guests. John pressed them to stay. He spoke kindly enough, and Mrs. Dashwood, who still loved Norland and could not yet bear to leave the place where she had been happy, accepted. Everything around her reminded her of the past, and sorrow itself kept her there. She walked through rooms filled with memory, and though the memories hurt her, she could not turn away from them.

One day, in this period of waiting and sadness, John spoke to his wife of the promise he had given his father. He still meant, in some uncertain way, to do something for his stepmother and sisters. Fanny listened with alarm. Three thousand pounds for the girls seemed monstrous to her. She stared at him and said, "My dear Mr. Dashwood, you cannot truly mean to rob your own little boy in this way. What claim can your half-sisters have to such a sum? Half blood is hardly any relation at all."

John answered, "It was my father's last wish. He asked me to help them."

Fanny replied at once, "He did not know what he was saying. He was ill. No sensible father would ask one child to take so much from his own son. Think of Harry. Think of your duty to your own family."

John did think of Harry, though he had only just been thinking of his sisters. He said, "My father did not name an exact sum. He only asked me to make them more comfortable. Something must be done."

"Of course," said Fanny sweetly. "Something should be done. But something does not mean three thousand pounds. Once that money is gone, it never returns. Your sisters may marry, and then it will pass out of the family forever."

John grew thoughtful. “That is true,” he said. “Perhaps three thousand is too much. Perhaps five hundred pounds each would be enough.”

Fanny looked at him with warm approval, as if he had already done something noble. “More than enough,” she said. “No brother in the world would do so much, especially for half-sisters.”

The word pleased him. Generosity still sounded fine, and now it sounded cheaper. “I do not wish to do anything mean,” he said. “One should not do too little.”

Fanny moved carefully on. “Certainly not. But we must ask what is reasonable. They already have money. On their mother’s death, each girl will have a comfortable sum. And all four women together can live very well on what they already possess.”

So the gift fell again. From five hundred pounds each, John moved to another idea. “Perhaps,” he said, “it would be better to help their mother with a yearly allowance. One hundred a year might make them all comfortable.”

Fanny did not like that either. She spoke of annuities as if they were chains. “A yearly payment is the worst kind of burden,” she said. “It comes again and again. You never get free of it. People live forever when there is money to be paid to them. No, my dear, never tie yourself down in that way.”

John listened. Little by little, the whole shape of duty changed in his mind. He began by fearing to do too little. Now he feared only inconvenience. He said, “Yes, perhaps an annuity would be unpleasant. Better to give them something now and then, if they need it. A small present from time to time would surely satisfy my father’s request.”

Fanny smiled because she knew she had nearly won. She leaned closer and said, “To tell the truth, I am sure your father meant nothing more. Help them find a small house. Send them fish or game when you can. Offer your services if they move. That is the kind of assistance he must have intended. Four women can live very cheaply. Five hundred a year among them is enough. Really, they may be better able to give something to you than you to them.”

By then John was ready to agree with anything that saved his money and still

let him feel honorable. He said, “You are quite right. I understand it clearly now. I will fulfill my promise in exactly that way.” He even began to think that giving more would not only be unnecessary, but almost improper. And when Fanny reminded him that Mrs. Dashwood already had china, linen, plate, and household things enough for a new home, the last small remains of his generous plan disappeared.

So the promise made at a dying father’s bedside was slowly reduced, then reduced again, and at last turned into almost nothing. John Dashwood still thought himself a good son. Fanny thought him a wise husband and father. But in Norland Park, under the same roof, a widow and her three daughters stood on the edge of a harder life, and the hand that should have protected them was already pulling away.

Part 2

Mrs. Dashwood remained at Norland for some months after her husband’s death. At first she stayed because grief held her there. Every room, every path, every tree spoke to her of old happiness, and though the memory hurt her, she could not yet leave it behind. Later, when her sorrow became a little quieter, she stayed for another reason. She wished to find a house not very far away, for she could not bear the idea of going a great distance from Norland. She wanted comfort, familiarity, and some nearness to the place that had been her home.

But this was not easy. Mrs. Dashwood liked comfort and ease, and when she imagined a new home, she imagined one large enough for friends, plans, and pleasant living. Elinor was much more careful. She looked at every choice with their small income in mind and quietly rejected houses that her mother would gladly have taken. So the search continued without success. Mrs. Dashwood grew restless, but still nothing suitable appeared.

During this time she continued to believe well of John Dashwood. Her husband had told her of the promise his son had made, and she had trusted it completely. She thought, “My poor husband died in peace because of that promise. I must not

dishonor his memory by doubting it too soon." John's manner toward her was civil, and he behaved with enough outward attention to support her hope. For the sake of her daughters, and perhaps for the comfort of her own heart, she chose to believe that he truly meant to act generously.

Yet there was another reason why Mrs. Dashwood did not greatly hurry away. A quiet attachment had begun to grow between Elinor and Edward Ferrars, the brother of Fanny Dashwood. He had come to Norland soon after his sister settled there, and he spent much of his time in the house. Mrs. Dashwood soon saw what was happening. She saw that Elinor liked Edward, and she believed that Edward liked Elinor in return. Once she saw this, every other consideration became small beside it.

Some mothers would have looked first at his money. Others would have looked first at the uncertainty of his future. Edward was the eldest son of a rich family, but his fortune depended largely on his mother, and Mrs. Ferrars was said to be a proud and difficult woman. Mrs. Dashwood thought of none of this in the practical way that others might have done. She only saw that Edward was amiable, that Elinor was worthy of love, and that their temperaments seemed to suit each other. To her, that was enough.

Edward Ferrars did not shine at first sight. He was not handsome in any striking way, and he had none of the easy confidence that often makes a young man pleasing at once. He was shy, often silent, and uncomfortable in company until he knew people well. But when his reserve lessened, a gentle and affectionate nature showed itself very clearly. He was honest, sensible, and modest. He did not speak to impress people, and he did not try to appear more than he was.

This disappointed his mother and sister. They wanted him to become important in the world, though they could hardly say in what exact manner. One day they wished him to enter public life. Another day they wanted him to know great men and rise by connection. If that could not yet happen, they would at least have liked to see him rich, fashionable, and splendid in appearance. Edward wanted none of those things. What he wanted was quiet, domestic comfort, and an affectionate home. In the eyes of his family, such wishes seemed small.

At first Mrs. Dashwood noticed him only as a quiet young man who did not trouble her in her sorrow. That alone made her grateful. He did not force conversation when she was unable to bear it, and he did not fill the room with shallow talk. Later, Elinor happened one day to speak of the difference between Edward and his sister, and from that moment her mother's interest in him became much stronger. The contrast was enough to win her.

"He is not like Fanny," Elinor said.

Mrs. Dashwood answered at once, "That is enough. If he is unlike Fanny, I am ready to love him already."

Elinor smiled a little and said, "I think you will like him more when you know him better."

"Like him?" her mother replied. "No. I feel more than that. I cannot separate esteem from love."

From that time she watched him carefully, and the more she saw, the more she approved. His quiet manner no longer seemed dull to her. She saw warmth under it. She saw that he listened with real attention, that he cared for Elinor's thoughts, and that he was never vain or showy. Soon she was fully persuaded that his regard for her daughter was serious. Once she formed that belief, she looked toward a marriage almost as if it were already on its way.

One day she spoke of it to Marianne. "My dear Marianne," she said, "I think Elinor may soon be settled in life. We shall miss her, but she will be happy."

Marianne answered at once, "Mama, how could we ever live without her?"

Mrs. Dashwood said warmly, "It would hardly be a separation. We should live near enough to see her almost every day. You would gain a brother, and such a brother. I have a very high opinion of Edward's heart. But why do you look so grave? Do you not approve of him?"

Marianne hesitated, for she loved Elinor deeply and did not wish to hurt her. But she was incapable of saying more than she felt. "I do love him," she said. "He is good and amiable. But he is not the kind of man I should have expected for Elinor. There is something wanting. His figure has no particular grace. His eyes do not have that fire which speaks at once of life and feeling. And I am afraid he

has no real taste."

Mrs. Dashwood looked at her with surprise. Marianne continued with growing earnestness. "When Elinor draws, he admires her work, but he admires it as a lover, not as a person who truly understands it. He listens to music, but it does not take hold of him. Last night, when he read aloud, he read so quietly, so calmly, that I could hardly bear it. Those lines are beautiful, and yet he spoke them as if they were no more than common words. If I loved a man, I could not bear such want of feeling."

Mrs. Dashwood, who enjoyed Marianne's warmth even when she did not agree with it, answered more lightly. "He would perhaps have done better with simple prose. You gave him poetry that asks for strong feeling."

"If poetry cannot move him," Marianne said, "what can? No, Mama, I require more. A man must enter into all my feelings. The same books, the same music, the same delights must belong to both of us. He may be good, very good, and Elinor may be happy with him because her mind is calmer than mine. But I know myself. I could never be happy with someone whose taste did not answer mine in every point."

Elinor, meanwhile, had spoken more privately with Marianne about Edward's character. Marianne had once said, "It is a pity Edward has no taste for drawing."

Elinor replied at once, "No taste? Why do you say that? He does not draw himself, it is true, but he takes real pleasure in the work of others. He has natural good taste, though he has not had the chance to improve it. If he had learned, I think he would have drawn well. He is only too modest to trust his own judgment."

Marianne, unwilling to argue too strongly, let the point pass, though she could not truly agree. Still, she respected the affection that made Elinor see so much merit in Edward. Elinor went on, more warmly than she knew. She spoke of his intelligence, his love of books, his good sense, and the sweetness of his expression. At last she even said that now she knew him well, she thought him almost handsome.

Marianne answered with affectionate playfulness, "Then I shall soon think him handsome too. When you ask me to love him as a brother, I shall stop seeing any

fault in his face, just as I already see none in his heart."

At these words Elinor was startled. She felt that she had said too much. She did think highly of Edward, and in her own heart she hoped very much, but she was too honest and too careful to speak as if everything were certain. She said quietly, "I do esteem him greatly. I like him very much."

Marianne almost cried out. "Like him? Esteem him? Elinor, those words are too cold. If you speak of your own feelings in that way again, I shall leave the room."

Elinor laughed a little, but she also grew serious. "Do not be angry," she said. "My feelings may be stronger than my words. I think very highly of him, and I have reason to hope that he cares for me. But I am not certain. There are moments when I cannot fully read him. And even if his regard is real, there are difficulties. He is not independent. His mother may not approve. From what little we hear of Mrs. Ferrars, I fear she expects him to marry for rank or fortune. So I must not let myself believe too much too soon."

These words surprised Marianne. Her own imagination, and her mother's too, had run much farther ahead. She had already thought of the match as nearly settled. Yet Elinor, who felt most deeply where Edward was concerned, remained cautious, silent, and self-controlled. That was her nature. She suffered uncertainty, but she would not turn hope into certainty before the truth had earned it.

Still, if Elinor tried to be prudent, Fanny Dashwood had no wish to be just. She soon noticed enough of Edward's preference to make her uneasy, and when she was uneasy, she became disagreeable. At the first chance she spoke to Mrs. Dashwood in a way that was impossible to mistake. She talked of her brother's great expectations. She talked of Mrs. Ferrars's firm plan that both her sons should marry well. She even warned against any young woman who might try to attract him. The meaning was plain, and the insult was cruel.

Mrs. Dashwood answered with spirit and left the room full of anger and contempt. That moment decided her. Whatever trouble a removal might bring, she would stay no longer where Elinor could be exposed to such treatment. Almost immediately afterward, a letter arrived that seemed like an answer to her wish. It

came from Sir John Middleton, a relation of Mrs. Dashwood's, a man of property in Devonshire. He offered her a small house on very easy terms, Barton Cottage, and wrote in a kind, friendly way that invited trust.

The house was only a cottage, but he promised that anything necessary might be done to make it comfortable. He asked her to come with her daughters and judge the place for herself. Under other circumstances, Devonshire would have seemed much too far from Sussex. But now distance was no longer a pain. It was almost a blessing. To be far from Norland, if Norland must belong to Fanny, seemed easier than to stay near it in humiliation.

Mrs. Dashwood needed no long thought. She read the letter, decided at once, and wrote her grateful acceptance. Then she showed both letters to her daughters. Elinor did not try to oppose the plan. She had always thought that living a little farther away might be wiser. The cottage, as Sir John described it, was modest and inexpensive, and she had no practical objection to make. So the decision was settled. The Dashwoods would leave Norland, and with that choice a new part of their lives began.

Part 3

After Mrs. Dashwood had accepted Sir John Middleton's kind offer, she allowed herself, for the first time in many weeks, a little pleasure in speaking openly of the future. She went at once to her son-in-law and his wife and told them that she had found a house, and that she and her daughters would no longer trouble them after everything was made ready. They heard this with surprise. Fanny said nothing at first, but John answered politely, "I hope you will not settle very far from Norland." Mrs. Dashwood felt real satisfaction when she replied, "We are going to Devonshire."

At that word Edward turned quickly toward her. The change in his face was plain enough for anyone who cared to see it. "Devonshire?" he said. "Are you truly going there? So far away? What part of the county?" Mrs. Dashwood explained where Barton Cottage stood, not far from Exeter, and then, with warm

kindness, she described the little house as cheerfully as she could. She spoke of it as modest, but pleasant, and ended by saying that she hoped her friends would not think the distance too great when she invited them to visit her.

This invitation was given to all with civility, but to Edward it was given with particular warmth. Mrs. Dashwood's recent anger against Fanny had not lessened her wish to see Elinor and Edward united. On the contrary, it made her more resolved to show that she did not fear or obey her daughter-in-law's opinion. If Fanny disliked the connection, Mrs. Dashwood would oppose her not by open quarrel, but by calm and visible confidence. Elinor understood this and felt both gratitude and embarrassment, though she said nothing.

John Dashwood repeated several times how very sorry he was that Devonshire lay at such a distance from Norland. "I am truly vexed," he said, "that I cannot be of real use to you in moving your things." He spoke as if a great duty had been taken from him by force, and as if he would gladly have done much more if only the geography of England had been kinder. In truth, he did feel a little disappointed. The one service he had finally allowed himself to imagine as the full payment of his promise to his father was now no longer possible, and even that small comfort was gone.

The furniture and household things were sent by water. There was linen, china, plate, books, and Marianne's pianoforte, besides many smaller possessions that had belonged to the family for years. Fanny watched these things leave the house with a feeling she could hardly hide. It seemed hard to her that a widow with so little income should still own objects that were handsome and valuable. She thought especially of the china and silver. The idea that Mrs. Dashwood should keep such things while living in reduced circumstances offended her sense of what was proper, though not, of course, her selfishness.

Mrs. Dashwood had taken Barton Cottage for a year. The house was already furnished, and she might go into it at once. Because of this, there was no reason to delay. She had only to settle what should be sold, what should be kept, and how the new household should be arranged. Once her mind was fixed on action, she moved with great speed. The horses that remained after her husband's death had

already been sold, and now the carriage too was sold, though she would have liked to keep it for the comfort of her daughters.

Elinor had advised against keeping it, and as usual her advice was guided by clear sense rather than wish. Their income was too small for such expense. Mrs. Dashwood listened with reluctance, but she listened. The number of servants was also reduced. They would keep only three, two maids and one man, and even this felt to Mrs. Dashwood more like poverty than prudence. Yet Elinor saw that their future peace depended on beginning carefully, not pretending to a style of life which they could no longer afford.

One maid and the man were sent on ahead into Devonshire to make the house ready. Mrs. Dashwood did not wish to go first to Barton Park as a guest, because Lady Middleton was still entirely unknown to her. She preferred to enter the cottage at once as her own home, however small it might be. She trusted Sir John's description enough to suppress her curiosity. She would not examine the place before living in it. The wish to be gone from Norland had grown so strong that any roof kindly offered seemed welcome.

That wish was sharpened every day by Fanny's behavior. Her satisfaction at the coming departure was clear, though she tried to cover it with cold civil words. At times she even invited Mrs. Dashwood to delay, but the invitation had so little warmth in it that it only made the truth more visible. Mrs. Dashwood saw plainly that her leaving was desired. She also began, more and more, to understand that John Dashwood did not intend to give her any money. He talked often of expenses, of how much a man of consequence must spend, and of the many claims on his income, until it became almost ridiculous for him to speak as if he were the one who needed help.

In a few weeks everything was ready for the journey west. Then came the last evening at Norland. The place had been full of sorrow, insult, and disappointment, yet it was still loved. It held the memory of Mr. Dashwood, of happier days, and of a family life now broken forever. The pain of leaving it was not lessened by the knowledge that they must go. It only became quieter and deeper.

Marianne, whose heart always clung to places as strongly as to people, felt this

most violently. On the last evening she walked alone in front of the house and gave herself up to grief. She looked at the trees, the walls, the familiar ground, and thought that perhaps she would never see them again. In her mind the house itself was almost alive because it had witnessed their happiness. “Dear, dear Norland,” she said softly to herself, “when shall I stop loving you? When shall another place feel like home? You will remain the same when we are gone. The leaves will still move in the wind, and the branches will still bend in the sun, and yet we shall not be here to see them.”

The next day they left. The first part of the journey was sad and tiring. Their minds were too full for cheerfulness, and the road seemed long because each mile carried them farther from what had been familiar all their lives. But as they went on, the face of the country began slowly to draw their attention away from sorrow. New hills, new fields, and new woods came before them. Near the end of the journey, when they entered Barton Valley, even Marianne forgot herself for a few moments and looked out with interest.

The valley was rich, green, and pleasant. It was full of trees and open grass, and the road wound through it in a gentle way that made the scene seem calm and welcoming. After they had followed it for more than a mile, they reached Barton Cottage. In front of the house there was only a small green court and a neat little gate. It was not romantic in the way a true cottage ought to be in Marianne’s imagination. The roof was regular, the walls were plain, and there were no climbing flowers over the front. Still, the house was neat, sound, and comfortable.

A narrow passage ran through the middle of it to the garden behind. On each side of the entrance stood a sitting room, each of a good useful size, and beyond these were the offices and the stairs. There were four bedrooms and two garrets above. The house had not been built long before and was in good condition. Compared with Norland it was poor and small, and the difference struck them all at once as they entered. For a moment tears rose again. The change in their life seemed to stand there in wood, stone, and narrow walls.

But the first pain soon passed. The servants were so glad to receive them, and each member of the family tried so kindly to spare the others, that sorrow had less

power than it had had at Norland. The season helped them too. It was early September, the weather was fine, and the place had the advantage of first appearing under a bright sky. Behind the house rose high hills, and on either side there were open downs, trees, and cultivated ground. From the windows they could see the village of Barton on one hill, and in front the view opened across the valley into the country beyond.

Mrs. Dashwood, once she had looked around her properly, began to recover her spirits. The house was smaller than she wished, but not so poor as she had feared. Her mind, which always turned quickly toward improvement, was soon busy with plans. “The house is too small for us,” she said, “but we shall make ourselves comfortable for the present. In the spring, if I have enough money, we may think of building. These rooms are too small if we are to receive many friends. We might open the passage into one room, perhaps take part of the other, and add a drawing room beside it. A bedroom above would make it all very convenient.”

Elinor heard these plans quietly. She knew well that an income of five hundred a year was not likely to produce all these improvements, especially under the direction of a mother who had never learned to save. Still, she did not oppose more than necessary. It was enough, for now, that the house was clean, the rooms were ready, and the family had a place they could call their own. Before long Marianne’s pianoforte was unpacked, Elinor’s drawings were placed on the walls, and books and familiar possessions began to soften the strangeness of the rooms.

They had hardly finished breakfast the next morning when their landlord himself appeared. Sir John Middleton came to welcome them to Barton and to offer every help that his house and garden could supply. He was about forty, pleasant-looking, and full of open good nature. His face and manner showed at once that he liked company, liked to be useful, and liked above all to do a kindness in a noisy and cheerful way. He pressed them warmly to dine every day at Barton Park until they were more settled, and though his kindness was almost too eager to be easy, it was sincere and could not offend.

Nor was his kindness limited to words. Within an hour after he left, a large basket arrived from the park, full of fruit and vegetables, and later in the day game

was sent as well. He insisted on carrying their letters to and from the post, and he promised to lend them his newspaper daily. He also brought a civil message from Lady Middleton, saying that she would visit as soon as she could do so without causing inconvenience. Thus, before they had been one full day in their new home, the Dashwoods found that if Barton Cottage was smaller than Norland, it was at least not lonely, and that the life opening before them, though narrower, would not be without warmth.

Part 4

Barton Park stood about half a mile from the cottage. The Dashwoods had passed near it on their way through the valley, but a turn in the land had hidden it from their view at home. When they first saw it properly, they found it to be a large and handsome house. Sir John Middleton and his wife lived there in a style that joined comfort, show, and constant hospitality. There were almost always visitors in the house, and there was always some plan for dining, walking, shooting, or meeting neighbors. If Sir John loved anything, it was a full table and a noisy drawing room.

In many ways Sir John and Lady Middleton were very different, yet in one important way they were alike. Neither of them had much depth of mind, and both depended on society to keep life pleasant. Sir John needed movement, talk, and cheerful confusion. Lady Middleton needed her children, her house, and the little formal duties of a woman who liked elegance more than feeling. He found happiness in inviting people. She found it in arranging rooms, meals, and appearances. In this way the house was always busy, though not always interesting.

Sir John was especially pleased by the arrival of the Dashwoods. They were young, agreeable, and new to the neighborhood, and that alone made them valuable in his eyes. He liked pretty young women, especially when they were unaffected and ready to join the social life around them. He also liked doing a kindness, and there was something very agreeable to him in saying to himself that he had provided a home for a family of women who had seen better days. His

generosity was real, though it was mixed with his natural love of activity and company.

Very soon after their arrival, the Dashwoods were invited to dine at Barton Park. Sir John came himself to receive them at the door and led them into the house with loud and open pleasure. As they walked toward the drawing room, he apologized again and again for the small number of the party. “I tried hard this morning to find more young people for you,” he said to Elinor and Marianne, “but everyone had some plan already. Moonlight seems to fill the whole country with engagements. You must forgive us today. It shall not happen again.”

He told them they would see only one gentleman besides himself, a friend who was staying in the house, and his mother-in-law, Mrs. Jennings, who had arrived only that day. The Dashwoods were not troubled by this small number. Indeed, they preferred a quiet dinner to a crowded one. Still, Sir John seemed uneasy until they entered the room and the introductions began. He could not imagine that any young ladies could be satisfied without a larger group, more laughter, and at least two or three lively young men.

Mrs. Jennings, Lady Middleton’s mother, was very unlike her daughter. She was a cheerful, loud, middle-aged widow, very comfortable in her own opinions and very ready to speak them. She talked a great deal, laughed a great deal, and had none of Lady Middleton’s reserve. Her manners were less polished, but her spirits were much warmer. Before dinner was half over, she had already begun to joke about lovers, husbands, and hearts left behind in Sussex, and she looked from one sister to another with bright satisfaction whenever she thought she had caused a blush.

Marianne felt this most for Elinor’s sake. She feared that Mrs. Jennings’s careless jokes might touch too near the truth, and every time the widow laughed and hinted at hidden attachments, Marianne turned quickly to look at her sister. Elinor, however, governed herself as she always did. She answered calmly, smiled when politeness required it, and gave no sign that anything troubled her. Yet Marianne’s anxious eyes gave Elinor more pain than Mrs. Jennings’s joking words, because they showed too plainly how much her sister suspected and how little she

could conceal her own feelings.

The other guest was Colonel Brandon, the friend whom Sir John had mentioned. At first sight he seemed formed in a very different mold from his host. He was silent where Sir John was loud, grave where Sir John was restless, and thoughtful where Sir John was merely active. He was about thirty-five, and to Marianne and Margaret this placed him almost among old men. His face was not handsome, but it was sensible, steady, and gentlemanlike. There was something in his manner that showed self-command and kindness, though not animation.

Lady Middleton herself disappointed the Dashwoods more than anyone else. She was handsome, elegant, and perfectly well-bred, but she was cold. After the first few moments, it became plain that she had little to say and little wish to say it. Her visit to the cottage had already suggested as much, but in her own house the truth was even clearer. She seemed alive only to the comfort of formal civility and to the movements of her children. When they entered the room after dinner, noisy, demanding, and full of little violences, she became almost animated by pleasure. Until then she had been little more than a beautiful, quiet presence.

In the evening it was discovered that Marianne was musical, and she was invited to play and sing. The instrument was opened, chairs were arranged, and everyone prepared to admire her. Marianne sang with real feeling, and because her voice was very good, the whole party praised her warmly. Sir John was loud at the end of every song and just as loud in his conversation during the songs themselves. Lady Middleton often turned to him and said, “Sir John, how can you speak when Miss Dashwood is singing?” Yet she herself seemed less moved by the music than by the idea of appearing to value it.

Colonel Brandon, however, listened in a different way. He did not cry out with pleasure or offer exaggerated praise. He simply gave her his full attention. He sat quiet, listened seriously, and looked as if the music had truly entered his mind. Marianne noticed this at once. In a room full of noisy approval and shallow admiration, simple attention seemed a mark of taste. She felt more respect for Colonel Brandon during that hour than she had felt before. Though his pleasure did not rise to the level of her own passionate delight, it was honest, and honesty

in such matters had value in her eyes.

Mrs. Jennings was quick to observe this. She was a woman who loved finding love everywhere, and she needed very little encouragement to begin. Colonel Brandon's quiet attention during Marianne's singing was enough for her to form a full story in her head. The next day, and many days after, she treated the matter as nearly settled. She laughed at the colonel when she was at the park, and laughed at Marianne when she was at the cottage. "Well," she would say, "I see how it is. The colonel has lost his heart already. Miss Marianne must take care, or we shall soon have wedding clothes to think of."

Marianne at first did not understand these jokes. When she did, she was partly angry and partly amused. She thought it absurd that anyone could imagine Colonel Brandon in love with her. She also thought it unkind, because it seemed to make fun of his age. "It is too ridiculous," she said one day to her mother. "Colonel Brandon is old enough to be my father. And if he has ever been in love, I am sure such feelings must have left him long ago. How can anyone speak in that way?"

Elinor, who enjoyed teasing her sister when Marianne was being too absolute, answered with calm good sense. "You speak as if Colonel Brandon were a weak old man," she said. "He is only thirty-five."

Marianne replied quickly, "Thirty-five has nothing to do with marriage. A man of that age may live many years, I know, but he is far too old for real love. And when he speaks of flannel waistcoats and rheumatism, what am I to think? Those things belong to the old and infirm."

Mrs. Dashwood laughed. "At this rate, my dear Marianne, you must think me near the end of life. I am not so very much younger."

"Mama, that is not fair," Marianne said. "I do not mean that Colonel Brandon is dying. I only mean that feeling of the kind Mrs. Jennings talks about must be impossible in him. A woman of seven and twenty, if she had little money and no happy home, might perhaps marry such a man for comfort and protection. But that would not be love. It would only be an arrangement, a kind of bargain, and I could never think such a thing worthy of the name of marriage."

Elinor answered, "That is because you imagine that love can exist only in one

shape and at one age. You are too severe on Colonel Brandon. A slight pain in his shoulder on a damp day has made him, in your mind, half an invalid already." Marianne shook her head and would not yield. She could forgive a fever, because a fever might look interesting, but not flannel, caution, or any sign of mature habit. In her eyes, youth and strong feeling belonged together, and anything calmer seemed scarcely alive.

Yet even while she spoke so freely about Colonel Brandon, another subject lay much nearer her heart. Soon after Elinor had left the room one day, Marianne turned to her mother with sudden concern and said, "Mama, I am afraid Edward Ferrars is not well."

Mrs. Dashwood looked surprised. "Why should you think so?"

"Because we have been here for almost two weeks, and he has not come. If he were free to come, he would have come. Nothing but illness can explain such a delay."

Mrs. Dashwood answered, "I am not sure that Elinor expected him quite so soon. When I spoke to her yesterday about making the spare room more comfortable, she said there was no immediate need, because it was not likely to be wanted yet."

Marianne stood still for a moment, more troubled than satisfied. "How strange," she said. "Everything between them has seemed strange. How quiet they were when they parted at Norland. How little was said on the last evening. Even on the final morning, when I left them alone together on purpose, Edward followed me out of the room almost at once. And Elinor, when she left him, did not cry as I should have done. She is always calm, always in command of herself. When does she show sadness? When does she avoid company? When does she look restless and unhappy?"

Mrs. Dashwood could only answer from hope, not from certainty. Elinor's silence protected her, but it also made her unreadable to those who loved her most. Marianne, who believed that strong feeling must always show itself openly, could not understand this quietness. She measured hearts by her own. Because she would have spoken, wept, hoped, feared, and perhaps despaired aloud, she could

not fully imagine another woman loving deeply and still remaining composed. So while Mrs. Jennings laughed at one imaginary attachment, Marianne grew uneasy over a real one, and the quiet life at Barton had already begun to fill with mistaken guesses, hidden pain, and expectations that would not be easy to satisfy.

Part 5

By this time the Dashwoods were fairly settled at Barton Cottage. The house, the garden, and the hills around them had already become familiar, and the ordinary occupations of home began again. Books, drawing, music, and little domestic duties filled much of the day. These quiet pleasures had once belonged to Norland, but now, because Norland was lost and memory no longer fought with hope, they were felt more peacefully at Barton than they had lately been felt in Sussex. Sir John, who was not used to seeing ladies steadily employed at home, could hardly hide his surprise when he found them always busy.

Their visitors were not many. Sir John often urged them to go more into society and offered his carriage whenever it might be wanted, but Mrs. Dashwood preferred independence. She would not visit any family that lay farther away than a reasonable walk. There were only a few houses that could be reached in this way, and not all of them were truly open to acquaintance. One place, however, had already caught the imagination of the girls. About a mile and a half from the cottage, down the narrow valley of Allenham, stood an old and respectable house which reminded them a little of Norland and therefore interested them at once.

They soon learned that this house belonged to an elderly lady of good character who was too infirm to move much in the world. So Allenham remained only a pleasant object for thought and wonder. Still, the whole country around Barton offered beauty enough without it. High downs rose near the cottage and invited long walks whenever the weather was fair. The girls especially loved those heights, where the air was fresh and the view wide and open. Marianne, who always gave herself most eagerly to weather, landscape, and feeling, found a special joy in such places.

One morning, after two wet days had kept them inside, the sky seemed to promise a little sunshine. Marianne declared at once that the day would soon become fine and that every cloud would pass away. She begged her mother and Elinor to join her in a walk to the downs, but they preferred to stay within doors with a book and some drawing. Marianne then turned to Margaret and said, “Come with me. We shall have the hills to ourselves, and the air will be worth everything.” Margaret was delighted, and the two sisters set off together in high spirits.

As they climbed, they congratulated themselves on their judgment each time a patch of blue showed above them. The wind was strong, but it only pleased them more. Marianne lifted her face to it as if she welcomed a friend. “Is there any happiness greater than this?” she cried. “Margaret, we must stay here at least two hours.” Margaret agreed readily, and for some time they pressed forward against the wind with laughter and delight. But the sky, which Marianne had trusted so confidently, changed all at once.

The clouds met over their heads, and in a moment heavy rain drove straight into their faces. There was no shelter near except their own house, so however unwillingly, they were forced to turn back. The quickest way home was down the steep side of the hill that led directly to the cottage garden. They began to run. Marianne was ahead at first, swift and eager as always, but before she had gone far she made a false step and fell suddenly to the ground. Margaret, already carried forward by speed and slope, could not stop herself in time to help and reached the bottom alone.

At that very moment a gentleman with a gun and two dogs was passing up the hill not far from Marianne. He threw down his gun and ran to her immediately. She had already managed to raise herself, but she had twisted her foot and could hardly stand. He offered help, and when he saw that modesty made her hesitate though pain made help necessary, he did not waste time in polite delay. He lifted her in his arms and carried her down the hill with ease. Then, passing through the open garden gate, he brought her straight into the house and did not set her down until he had placed her safely in a chair in the parlor.

Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor rose in astonishment when he entered with Marianne in his arms. Their alarm for Marianne lasted only a moment, because the injury did not appear dangerous, and then their eyes turned naturally to the gentleman who had brought her in. He was very handsome. His manner was open, graceful, and easy, and when he explained what had happened, he did so with such frankness that his good looks seemed made even more pleasing by his voice and expression. Gratitude alone would have secured him a warm welcome in that house, but youth, elegance, and readiness gave a stronger effect to his kindness.

Mrs. Dashwood thanked him again and again and begged him to sit down, but he declined because he was wet and dirty from the rain. When she asked to whom they were obliged, he replied that his name was Willoughby and that he lived at Allenham. He hoped, he said, that she would allow him to call the next day to ask after Miss Dashwood. “You will be very welcome,” Mrs. Dashwood answered warmly. He then took his leave and disappeared again into the heavy rain, leaving behind him a very clear impression indeed.

As soon as he was gone, all of them began to speak of him. His appearance, his strength, his quickness, and his manner became the immediate subject of admiration. Even the accident itself almost turned into something romantic in the telling because the person who had followed it was so attractive. Marianne had in fact seen less of him than the others, since her confusion had kept her from looking steadily at him after he carried her into the house. Still, she had seen enough, and the color in her face when his name was repeated showed plainly that she was not indifferent to the subject.

Willoughby called the next day as he had promised, and because Marianne’s foot was better than they had feared, his visit was a cheerful one. He was not only handsome. He was lively, animated, and easy in conversation. He seemed to understand quickly what pleased others, and he had the art, natural or practiced, of making himself agreeable without effort. Mrs. Dashwood liked him immediately. Marianne liked him more than immediately. There was in him the fire, the readiness, and the visible feeling that she admired above all things, and his admiration of her showed itself almost at once.

Very soon he became a frequent visitor at Barton Cottage. He came often and stayed long. He walked with them, talked with them, and seemed to enter naturally into every pleasure that gave delight to Marianne. He loved music and books, or at least spoke of them in the same eager way that she did. He admired the country as she admired it, praised what she praised, and laughed with the same quick spirit. With such agreement, intimacy advanced rapidly. In some people, years are needed before true closeness begins. Between Marianne and Willoughby, a few days seemed enough.

Elinor saw all this very clearly. She did not deny that Mr. Willoughby was charming. She herself found him extremely pleasing. Yet she was more careful than her mother and sister in the conclusions she drew. His attention to Marianne was marked, and Marianne's happiness in his company was impossible to miss. But Elinor wished for greater certainty before naming the feeling between them by its strongest name. Mrs. Dashwood, on the other hand, was delighted. She saw the growing attachment, approved it fully, and only regretted that Willoughby was not known to be richer than he appeared to be.

It was soon understood that he was connected with Allenham only through an elderly relation, Mrs. Smith, whose favorite he was said to be. This gave some hope for his future, though nothing very exact was known. He had a small estate of his own, but not one large enough to make him independent in the way a mother might wish for her daughter. Mrs. Dashwood did not let this trouble her much. She thought more of character and feeling than of income, and she believed both of them well suited in spirit. Marianne, for her part, did not think of money at all. She only felt that here, at last, was a man who answered her idea of open heart, taste, and life.

When Colonel Brandon happened to be present during some of these early meetings, the contrast between him and Willoughby was very striking. Brandon was quiet, serious, and self-contained. Willoughby was warm, brilliant, and full of immediate expression. Marianne, who judged quickly and passionately, had no difficulty in choosing between them. If she respected Colonel Brandon, she did not feel drawn toward him. Willoughby, however, seemed to speak the very

language of her mind. Every hour in his company made her brighter, and every hour away from him made her think of his return.

So the peaceful life at Barton entered a new stage. What had been only a quiet refuge after loss began to change into a scene of expectation and feeling. Mrs. Dashwood watched with pleasure. Margaret watched with excitement. Elinor watched with affection and a little caution. Marianne did not watch at all. She only lived in the delight of the present moment, and as Mr. Willoughby's visits became a part of their daily happiness, it was easy for everyone in the cottage to believe that something important had begun.

Part 6

Mr. Willoughby now came to Barton Cottage almost every day, and the ease of his visits soon made him seem less like a new acquaintance than an old friend. He and Marianne read together, sang together, and walked out whenever the weather allowed it. If a book delighted Marianne, Willoughby admired it too. If a piece of music moved her, he seemed moved in the same way. He praised the hills, the valley, the wind, and the changing sky exactly as she did, and because his taste appeared to answer hers at every point, their friendship advanced with extraordinary speed.

Mrs. Dashwood watched this with open pleasure. To her mind, there was little room for doubt. Marianne was happy, Willoughby was devoted, and their temper and tastes seemed made for one another. She spoke of the matter to Elinor with cheerful confidence and said, "I believe they understand each other already. I should not be surprised if everything were settled very soon." Elinor answered more carefully, "I do not deny that he admires Marianne very much. But admiration is not engagement, and until something is said plainly, I cannot feel entirely easy."

Mrs. Dashwood thought this caution unnecessary. She replied, "Why should we ask for formal words when their hearts are so clear? Their feelings speak for them." Elinor did not want to oppose her mother too strongly, yet she could not

help thinking that quick intimacy, however charming, was not the same as a declared intention. Marianne and Willoughby behaved with such openness that secrecy seemed impossible, and yet no actual understanding had been announced. This uncertainty troubled Elinor the more because it did not trouble the others at all. In that house, hope was always in danger of turning itself into certainty.

Sir John, who liked to laugh at anything that looked like love, encouraged the freedom between them by constant teasing. One day, after hearing that Willoughby meant to take Marianne and Margaret to see Allenham in his carriage, he cried out that if Willoughby was not careful, Marianne would soon discover every tree and stone belonging to the place. On another occasion he spoke of a horse with little delicacy and asked whether Marianne would not be tempted to ride out more if Willoughby found the right one for her. Such jokes would have seemed coarse to Elinor under any circumstances, but what alarmed her now was the ease with which Willoughby and Marianne accepted a degree of intimacy that could not fail to invite remark.

The matter became more serious when Willoughby actually offered Marianne a horse. He had one, a beautiful little mare called Queen Mab, which he said was exactly suited to her. Marianne, delighted by the kindness and by the thought of sharing another pleasure with him, was ready to accept it immediately. She spoke of it with shining eyes and said, “He knows how much I love to ride. It is exactly the kind of gift that shows real understanding.” Elinor, startled by the impropriety of such a present, answered firmly, “You cannot take it. We have no horse to match it, no servant to manage the care of it, and above all, no right to accept such a gift from a man who is not a near relation.”

Marianne disliked opposition most when her feelings were engaged, and she defended Willoughby with warmth. “Why should it be improper?” she said. “I would think it far stranger to take such a gift from John, though he is my brother, because I know his heart so little. I know Willoughby much better already.” Elinor saw that argument on that point would only make her sister more stubborn. So she appealed instead to Marianne’s affection for their mother, and showed how an increase in household expense would fall on Mrs. Dashwood, who could not

easily bear it. This argument succeeded where the other had failed, and Marianne at last promised that she would refuse the gift.

She kept that promise. Later the same day, when Willoughby called, Elinor heard Marianne tell him in a low voice that she could not accept Queen Mab after all. She explained the reasons, and they were such that he could not openly resist them. Yet his disappointment was very clear. After a moment he said softly, “Then the horse shall still be yours, Marianne, only not yet. I will keep her for you until the day you can claim her. When you leave Barton for your own home, Queen Mab shall receive you there.” Elinor overheard these words, and in them, in his tone, and in his use of Marianne’s Christian name alone, she heard what seemed to her almost the language of an engagement.

Her impression was strengthened the very next day by Margaret, who came to her full of importance and eager to tell a secret. “Oh, Elinor,” she cried, “I am sure Marianne and Mr. Willoughby will marry very soon.” Elinor, half amused and half cautious, said, “You have told me that almost every day since they met.” But Margaret insisted that this time she knew more. “He has a lock of Marianne’s hair,” she said triumphantly. Elinor tried to laugh and answered, “Perhaps it is some other hair.” Yet she no longer really doubted that the attachment between them had gone very far indeed.

For all this, her peace did not increase. If they were truly engaged, why was the fact not openly known to Mrs. Dashwood? If they were not engaged, why were they allowed to speak and act in a way that every observer must misunderstand? Elinor felt that one of these two states must exist, and either way some danger lay near. She urged her mother gently to ask Marianne the plain truth. “You are her mother,” she said. “Such a question from you would not be unkind. It would only be the natural care of affection.” But Mrs. Dashwood refused at once. “I would not ask for the world,” she said. “If they are not engaged, I would cause pain and shame. If they are engaged, Marianne will tell me herself when she chooses. I will not force the confidence of my own child.”

Elinor thought this generosity excessive and unwise, but she could not move her mother from it. In the meantime, Mrs. Jennings and Sir John continued their

careless jokes, which did more harm than they knew. One evening, when Mrs. Dashwood happened to take up a volume of Shakespeare, she said, “We never finished Hamlet. Mr. Willoughby left before we could get to the end. We must keep it ready for when he comes back, though perhaps that may not be for some months.” Marianne started at once and answered with unusual quickness, “Months? No. Not many weeks.” Mrs. Dashwood regretted the pain she had given, but Elinor found a little comfort in the answer. It showed that Marianne felt secure in Willoughby’s return.

About a week after Willoughby had gone away for a short time, Marianne was at last persuaded to join her sisters in a common walk instead of wandering alone. The morning was quiet, and the three girls went out together through the valley road. Marianne spoke little. Her mind was elsewhere, and Elinor, satisfied for the moment to have drawn her into company, did not press conversation upon her. At length, when they reached a wider part of the road and looked out across the distance, they saw a horseman riding toward them. Marianne turned pale with sudden hope. For one instant she clearly believed it was Willoughby.

It was not Willoughby. It was Edward Ferrars. Their surprise was great, and Marianne’s disappointment was so visible that it might almost have embarrassed anyone less gentle and uncertain than Edward. He came with them to the cottage and was received with sincere kindness. Mrs. Dashwood was glad to see him, Elinor was deeply moved, and Marianne, recovering herself, tried to show him all proper friendliness. Yet from the first hour of his visit there was something wrong in his manner. He was not cold, but he was low in spirits. He did not seem happy in having come, though he had clearly wished to come.

During the days that followed, this impression only deepened. Edward stayed with them, but he brought little ease with him. His affection for Elinor appeared still real, yet he was so uneasy, so absent, and so unlike a man advancing toward happiness, that Elinor’s heart became full of painful doubt. At Barton Park matters were no better. Sir John and Mrs. Jennings laughed, Margaret nearly betrayed Elinor by talking of a gentleman whose name began with F, and Marianne, in trying to protect her sister, only increased the confusion. Colonel Brandon alone

had the kindness to help turn the conversation away. Before that uncomfortable evening ended, however, a new plan had been arranged for the next day, a visit to a fine place called Whitwell, which could only be seen through Colonel Brandon's interest. The whole party agreed to go, and thus the day closed with an appearance of pleasure, though Elinor's mind was less at ease than ever.

Part 7

The planned visit to Whitwell ended very differently from what anyone had expected. Elinor had feared rain, mud, tired horses, and perhaps some trouble on the road, but she had still thought the excursion itself would take place. Instead, the whole plan failed before they had even begun. By ten o'clock everyone had gathered at Barton Park for breakfast. Though it had rained through the night, the morning seemed at first to improve. The clouds were breaking, the sun showed itself now and then, and the whole party had decided in advance that nothing should prevent their being cheerful.

They sat down in high spirits. Every person present was ready to be pleased, and most of them were determined to call every little inconvenience a delight. While they were still at breakfast, however, the letters were brought in. Colonel Brandon received one among the rest. He looked at the direction, changed color immediately, and left the room without a word. The suddenness of his movement startled everyone, because it was so unlike his ordinary self-command.

Sir John was the first to speak. "What is the matter with Brandon?" he cried. No one could answer. Lady Middleton, who valued regularity even at her breakfast table, said, "I hope it is not bad news. Nothing ordinary could make Colonel Brandon rise from the table in that way." In a few minutes he returned, but though he had recovered some outward calm, he still looked disturbed.

Mrs. Jennings leaned forward at once. "No bad news, Colonel, I hope?" she said. He answered, "None at all, ma'am, I thank you." She would not let the matter rest. "Was it from Avignon? Is your sister worse?" He said no, that the letter had come from London and was only on business. Mrs. Jennings laughed at that

answer and said, “Only business? Then why did you look so put out? No, Colonel, that will not do. Tell us the truth.”

Lady Middleton tried to stop her mother, but Mrs. Jennings continued without shame. “Perhaps it is to say that your cousin Fanny is married.” Colonel Brandon denied that as well, and then, turning to Lady Middleton more formally, said that he was very sorry to receive such a letter on that day, because the business required his immediate presence in town. At once there was a general cry of disappointment. Sir John looked amazed. Marianne’s face fell. Even those who cared little for Whitwell itself cared a good deal for not being disappointed.

Marianne spoke first, and more quickly than anyone else. “If you write to the housekeeper,” she said, “would that not be enough? Could we not still go?” Colonel Brandon shook his head. Sir John then said, “You must stay. We are so near it already. You can go to town tomorrow.” Willoughby added, “You would be only a few hours later if you put off your journey until we return.” But Brandon answered steadily, “I cannot lose even one hour.”

Mrs. Jennings, eager as ever to know what did not concern her, said, “If you would only tell us what the business is, we might decide whether it can be delayed.” Colonel Brandon refused that too, though with perfect politeness. Willoughby then bent toward Marianne and said in a low voice, though Elinor still heard him, “There are people who cannot bear a party of pleasure. Brandon is one of them. I dare say he was afraid of a little rain and wrote the letter to himself.” Marianne answered with light readiness, “I have no doubt of it.”

Elinor disliked the joke at once. She thought it unjust and foolish, because Colonel Brandon’s manner had not been the manner of a man inventing excuses. Still, neither Willoughby nor Marianne seemed willing to think seriously of another person’s trouble when it interrupted their pleasure. Sir John continued to argue and to complain, but Colonel Brandon remained firm. At last his horses were brought round. He said again that he was truly sorry to disappoint them all, but that he had no choice in the matter. Then he took leave, asked Elinor whether there was any chance of seeing her and her sisters in town that winter, and when she answered no, he said he must say farewell for longer than he could wish.

To Marianne he said almost nothing, only bowed and looked grave. Then he went away with Sir John beside him, and the moment he had gone, the whole room broke into open complaint. Mrs. Jennings immediately offered a theory. “I know what it is about,” she said with great satisfaction. When they all turned toward her, she lowered her voice only a little and said it must concern Miss Williams. Marianne asked who Miss Williams was. Mrs. Jennings replied, with the pleasure of a woman who liked half-secrets, that Miss Williams was a very near relation of the colonel’s, so near that she would not explain more plainly before young ladies, and then she hinted to Elinor that the girl was his natural daughter.

Elinor was surprised, but she had too much judgment to accept such talk as truth merely because Mrs. Jennings enjoyed repeating it. Sir John soon returned and joined sincerely in the general regret. Yet he was a man who could not remain long with disappointment if any smaller pleasure might be found in its place. After some discussion it was agreed that since they could not be happy at Whitwell, they must try to be tolerably contented somewhere else. So the carriages were ordered, and a drive about the country was chosen as the best substitute the day could provide.

Willoughby’s carriage was the first to set out, and Marianne never looked happier than when she entered it. He drove extremely fast through the park, and within minutes they were out of sight. The rest followed more slowly and by different roads. When at last the whole party returned, Marianne and Willoughby came back later than any of the others, and both seemed in very high spirits. They spoke only generally of having kept to the lanes while the rest had gone over the downs. No one could complain of that, yet there was enough in their happiness and secrecy to catch the attention of everyone around them.

It was then decided that there should be dancing in the evening, and that since the day had failed in one form of pleasure, it must be made merry in another. More of the Careys came to dinner, and Sir John had the satisfaction of seeing nearly twenty people at table. That alone was enough to improve his spirits. Willoughby, as usual, placed himself between Elinor and Marianne. Mrs. Jennings sat next to

Elinor, and before long she leaned behind Elinor and Willoughby and said loudly enough for Marianne to hear, “I know where you spent the morning, in spite of all your clever ways.”

Marianne colored at once and said, “Where, then?” Mrs. Jennings laughed and said, “Do not pretend. I know you were out in the carriage, but I wished to know where you went. I hope you liked your house, Miss Marianne. It is a large one, and when I come to visit you there, I hope you will have had it properly furnished.” Marianne turned away in visible confusion. Elinor then learned that Mrs. Jennings had made her maid question Willoughby’s servant and had discovered, with great triumph, that Marianne and Willoughby had driven to Allenham, walked in the grounds, and gone all over the house.

Elinor could hardly believe it. It seemed very unlikely that Marianne should agree to enter the house of Mrs. Smith, a woman she did not know at all, and with no companion but Willoughby. But when they left the dining room, she asked her sister directly and found that the story was completely true. Marianne was even a little offended that Elinor could doubt it. “Why should you think we did not go?” she said. “You have often wished to see the place yourself.” Elinor answered, “Yes, but not while Mrs. Smith was there, and not with only one gentleman beside me.”

Marianne defended herself warmly. She said that Willoughby was exactly the right person to show the house, that he had wished very much to do so, and that she had never passed a pleasanter morning in her life. Elinor replied, “I am afraid the pleasure of a thing is not always proof that it is right.” Marianne said at once, “No, it is the strongest proof. If I had been doing anything wrong, I would have felt it, and I could not have been happy.” Elinor then tried another way. “But now that Mrs. Jennings has already made such remarks, do you not begin to doubt whether it was prudent?”

“If Mrs. Jennings’s jokes prove a thing improper,” Marianne answered, “then none of us can ever act without blame. I do not care what she says. I know I have done nothing wrong in seeing Mrs. Smith’s grounds or her house. It will one day belong to Mr. Willoughby, and—” She stopped there, blushed deeply, and Elinor said quietly, “Even if it were one day to belong to you, Marianne, that would not

justify what you did today." Marianne's color deepened, but instead of being hurt, she seemed secretly pleased by the suggestion.

After some minutes she returned in a softer mood and admitted that perhaps the visit had been a little unwise. Yet she could not speak of Allenham without delight. She began describing one room after another, especially a pretty sitting room upstairs, with windows on two sides, a view of the church and village from one direction, and of a hanging wood from the other. She said that with fresh furniture and a little expense it would be one of the most delightful summer rooms in England. She spoke with such warmth that Elinor saw how entirely her imagination had already gone into the place, and perhaps into a future connected with it. Had no one interrupted them, Marianne would gladly have described every corner of the house.

The events of that day remained in Elinor's mind long after the conversation ended. Colonel Brandon's sudden departure, Mrs. Jennings's foolish inventions, the secrecy of Willoughby and Marianne, and their freedom with one another all joined to trouble her. Over the next two or three days Mrs. Jennings continued to wonder aloud about Brandon, changing her explanation every hour. At one moment she was sure his money was in disorder. At another she was certain Miss Williams was ill. Then she thought perhaps his sister at Avignon had sent for him. She wished him well, but she also wished very much to know the truth.

Elinor, however, could not give her full attention to Colonel Brandon's absence, because another mystery pressed more closely on her. She was now more and more struck by the strange silence between Marianne and Willoughby on the subject of their own situation. Their behavior said plainly enough that they were deeply attached. Yet neither of them openly admitted any engagement. Elinor could believe that marriage might not be possible at once, since Willoughby was not rich, but she could not understand why they should hide what in fact they were hardly taking any care to conceal. At times she even doubted whether they were truly engaged at all, and that doubt was enough to keep her from asking Marianne the direct question.

Willoughby's conduct, on the surface, only increased the difficulty. He treated

Marianne with all the marked tenderness of a lover, and the rest of the family with the affectionate ease of a son or brother. Barton Cottage seemed almost more his home than Allenham. If no general engagement drew him elsewhere, his morning ride nearly always ended there, and the rest of the day was often spent beside Marianne, with his dog at her feet and his whole attention fixed on her. A week after Colonel Brandon left the country, he was there one evening when Mrs. Dashwood happened to speak of her plan to improve the cottage in the spring.

Willoughby opposed the idea at once, and with unusual warmth. “Do not alter this dear cottage,” he said. “Not one stone should be added, not one inch changed, if my feelings are valued.” Mrs. Dashwood laughed and said that she would never have money enough to do much in any case. He cried, “Then I am glad of it. If riches can only be used to spoil this place, may you always be poor.” Elinor answered more lightly, “Even with wider stairs and better rooms, you may still one day find your own house agreeable.”

But Willoughby continued in the same eager spirit. He said there were conditions under which another house might become dear to him, yet Barton would always hold a claim that no other place could share. He reminded them how he had admired the cottage even before knowing who lived in it, and then, turning his voice lower toward Marianne, spoke as if the happiness he had found there had been foretold to him. Afterward he returned to a general tone and begged Mrs. Dashwood not only to leave the house unchanged, but to promise that she and her daughters would remain always as kind to him as they were then. Mrs. Dashwood gladly gave that promise, and throughout the whole evening his behavior showed such affection and happiness that she watched Marianne with growing pleasure. When he left, she asked, “Shall we see you tomorrow at dinner? We must go to Barton Park in the morning.” He answered that he would certainly come by four o’clock.

Part 8

The next day was one of restless expectation at Barton Cottage. Mrs.

Dashwood and her daughters were to dine at the Park, and all morning Marianne looked toward the hour when Willoughby had promised to come. Four o'clock passed, and he did not appear. The disappointment was felt by all, though by none so sharply as by Marianne, who tried at first to excuse the delay and to believe that some small accident had kept him back only for a few minutes.

At last, when they had almost given up hope of seeing him before dinner, he came. But he did not enter the house with his usual ease and cheerfulness. His face was disturbed, his manner hurried, and his whole appearance seemed unlike itself. Before anyone could properly welcome him, it was clear that he had not come for pleasure, but to say something painful and abrupt.

He told them that he had received a sudden message from London and was forced to leave Barton immediately. Mrs. Smith, the elderly relation at Allenham on whom much of his future depended, had sent for him, and there was no time to lose. He said he must go at once, and that he did not know when he might return to Devonshire. The words were few, but the shock they gave was great. Mrs. Dashwood was surprised, Elinor alarmed by the strangeness of his manner, and Marianne for a moment seemed hardly able to understand what she heard.

Marianne then tried to draw from him some steadier promise of return. She could not believe that a separation so sudden and so cold was all that he intended. Yet Willoughby, though agitated, gave no clear comfort. He spoke as a man divided between strong feeling and some outward pressure that he would not explain. He was far from indifferent, but he was no longer open, and the change itself was almost more painful than the news.

To Mrs. Dashwood he was respectful and grateful as ever, and that very mixture of affection and hurry made the scene more confusing. If he had been careless, they might all have blamed him at once. Instead, he seemed deeply troubled. This led Mrs. Dashwood to hope that necessity alone was taking him away, and that every appearance against him would soon be explained. Elinor, however, though she wished to hope the same, could not help being uneasy at his reserve.

When he turned to Marianne, the pain of the parting became impossible to hide.

She had expected tenderness, certainty, and perhaps some private explanation that would make the separation easier to bear. Instead, she received only hurried distress and uncertain promises. Nothing was actually rude, yet nothing was secure. He left her wounded not only by absence, but by doubt. Still, because she loved him and trusted him, she blamed his situation rather than his heart.

After he was gone, Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor tried to read his conduct in the kindest way. Mrs. Dashwood said that if he had suddenly found himself obliged, for fear of offending Mrs. Smith, to quit Barton without full explanation, then embarrassment was natural enough. She believed that he had felt the pain of leaving Marianne as strongly as Marianne felt his departure. Elinor admitted that this might be true, and she wished sincerely to think so; yet she still believed that a more plain and honorable openness would have been better.

When they came down to dinner, Marianne could not command herself. Her eyes were red and swollen, and even before anyone spoke to her, it was plain that she had been crying bitterly. She sat down with the others, but she could neither eat nor speak. Her mother pressed her hand gently in silence, and at that touch the little strength she had left gave way. She burst into tears and hurried from the room. The whole evening her misery remained violent, and the smallest mention of anything connected with Willoughby overcame her at once.

That night she hardly slept at all. To a calmer person, sleep after such a day might have been a mercy. To Marianne, it would almost have seemed a kind of betrayal. She lay awake and wept through most of the night, and when morning came she rose with a severe headache, unable to talk and unwilling to take food. Her mother and sisters could do nothing for her except watch her suffering. No comfort reached her, because she would not allow even the attempt.

After breakfast she went out alone and wandered through Allenham. Every path and object there reminded her of former happiness. Instead of avoiding these memories, she sought them out. The pain they gave was the only pain she then desired, because it still joined her in thought to Willoughby. In the evening she turned to music and books with the same purpose. She played the songs they had shared, looked at the music he had copied for her, read only what they had read

together, and passed whole hours singing, crying, and remembering.

This violence could not remain at its highest point forever. In a few days it became less wild, but not less sad. Her grief sank into a quieter melancholy, and yet all her habits still fed it. She walked alone, sat silent for long periods, and returned again and again to the music and books that kept the past alive. At times her sorrow broke out as strongly as before. It had merely changed its form.

What troubled Elinor almost as much as Marianne's grief was the silence that followed it. No letter came from Willoughby, and Marianne did not seem actually to expect one. Mrs. Dashwood was surprised by this, but she quickly found an explanation that satisfied her own mind. Since Sir John often fetched and carried the letters himself, she thought that secrecy might be necessary, and that a correspondence could not safely pass through such hands. Elinor admitted that this was possible, but possibility did not bring her much peace.

At last she said to her mother, "Why not ask Marianne plainly whether she is engaged to him or not? From you, such a question would not be unkind. It would come only from love." But Mrs. Dashwood would not do it. She answered that if there were no engagement, such a question would only wound Marianne; and if there were one, she should wait until her daughter chose to speak freely of it. She believed that to force confidence from a child by duty, when inclination might still wish for silence, would be ungenerous. Elinor thought this delicacy excessive, but she could not move her mother from it.

Thus the whole family remained in uncertainty. Mrs. Dashwood trusted and hoped. Marianne suffered and would not explain herself. Elinor, more prudent than either, had to watch the suffering without possessing the one fact that could have guided her judgment. In that state of suspense, every hour felt longer than it was. Willoughby's sudden departure had not only taken away Marianne's happiness. It had left behind it a silence that made the loss harder to understand and therefore harder to bear.

Part 9

The gentleman whom Marianne had mistaken for Willoughby was, as she soon saw, Edward Ferrars. He was almost the only person in the world who could at that moment have been forgiven for not being the man she wished to see. Her disappointment was sharp, but her affection for Elinor was stronger than that first shock, and she forced back her tears in order to welcome him kindly. Edward dismounted at once, gave his horse to a servant, and walked back with the sisters to Barton Cottage, saying that he had purposely come to visit them. Mrs. Dashwood received him with warmth, and for a little while the pleasure of seeing him again seemed likely to soften every other feeling in the room.

Yet this first hope soon failed. Edward did not meet Elinor like a happy lover. He was embarrassed, uneasy, and strangely without joy. He said very little except when questions drew it from him, and though he was never uncivil, he gave Elinor no sign of any particular tenderness. Marianne noticed this immediately. To her mind such a meeting ought to have been full of visible emotion, and Edward's reserve seemed not modesty, but coldness. The more she watched him, the more surprising his behavior appeared, and before long she found herself comparing him, to his disadvantage, with Willoughby, whose manner in every situation had always seemed full of life and feeling.

When the first greeting was over, Marianne asked whether he had come directly from London. Edward answered, "No. I have been in Devonshire for a fortnight." Marianne repeated the words in astonishment. "A fortnight? And you have not been here before?" Edward looked uncomfortable and said that he had been staying with some friends near Plymouth. Elinor then asked whether he had been lately in Sussex. "I was at Norland about a month ago," he said. That name at once changed the direction of the conversation, for Marianne, always eager where memory and feeling were concerned, began speaking warmly of Norland, the fallen leaves, the walks, and the emotions the season had once given her there. Edward listened, but his answers still had a heaviness in them which Elinor could not understand.

As they came within sight of Barton, Marianne pointed out the park, the hills, and the cottage with all her usual fervor, and then asked what Edward thought of

the country. He answered, “It is beautiful, but these bottoms must be very dirty in winter.” Marianne was almost offended. “How can you think of dirt with such views before you?” she said. Edward smiled a little and replied, “Because among the views before me, I see a very dirty lane.” This answer completed Marianne’s disappointment. To her, such a response showed a sad want of imagination. Elinor, however, was too much occupied with Edward’s general manner to think much of that small exchange. She felt only that something was wrong, and that every hour she spent with him increased her uncertainty rather than relieved it.

At Barton Park his behavior was not improved. Sir John was in great spirits because he now had another gentleman to amuse the house, and Mrs. Jennings lost no time in adding Edward to the list of subjects on which she liked to joke. Marianne, who was always impatient of foolish talk when it touched real feelings, watched these attacks with restless irritation. Margaret, too young to understand caution, nearly made matters worse. She began saying, with much importance, that she knew a gentleman’s name beginning with the letter F, and seemed ready to expose more than anyone wanted spoken aloud. Marianne tried to stop her, and Colonel Brandon quietly helped turn the conversation away, but not before Elinor had suffered a very real discomfort. She saw that her secret, if secret it still was, could not remain entirely hidden from the family around her.

Edward himself did nothing to lessen this uneasiness. In company he seemed depressed, and in private he was only a little more at ease. He stayed at Barton Cottage for several days, yet these days, which should have brought Elinor satisfaction, gave her almost nothing but pain. Sometimes she thought he was unhappy because he loved her and saw no hope before him. At other moments his manner seemed so much like indifference that she doubted whether love had any part in it at all. He spoke kindly, looked at her with attention, and seemed pleased by her company, but there was none of the open happiness that ought to have belonged to such a meeting. His heart, whatever it felt, was clearly burdened by something he could not or would not explain.

Mrs. Dashwood still judged more gently than Elinor. She believed that his mother’s influence and his dependence on her must be the cause of his sadness.

“He is not his own master,” she thought. “That is the whole misery.” And because she pitied him, she gave him every opportunity of being near Elinor. She left them alone whenever she could do so naturally, and she tried by kind management to bring about the ease which their own feelings did not seem able to create. Yet even when alone together, the result was disappointing. Edward did not become happier in privacy. He was often silent, often absent, and seemed at times almost afraid of his own comfort.

One small circumstance during this visit struck Elinor more than anything else. She noticed a ring on Edward’s finger that she had not seen there before. It contained a lock of hair. Marianne saw it too and, with the speed of her imagination, immediately cried out that it must be Elinor’s. Mrs. Dashwood was ready to believe the same, because such a token seemed natural enough if Edward secretly considered himself attached to her daughter. Elinor blushed and looked more closely. At first she tried to persuade herself that the color might indeed be like her own hair. But the more carefully she examined it, the less she could think so. The hair in the ring was darker than hers, and once she had seen that difference clearly, she could not overlook it. The whole little incident gave her a new and sharper uneasiness. She did not know what to think, but she knew it was not hers.

Marianne, however, would not easily give up the pleasant interpretation. She said, “The light deceives you. It must be yours.” Elinor answered quietly, “No. My hair is not dark enough for that.” Edward, confused and distressed, gave some uncertain explanation and tried to laugh the matter away, but his confusion only made the subject more painful. Elinor was too proud and too kind to press him with questions he did not wish to answer. She turned from it outwardly, yet the doubt remained in her mind with growing force. If the hair belonged to some woman dear to him, then what was his regard for herself? If it did not, why had he been unable to answer simply? She had no clear explanation, only a feeling that some unknown obstacle had drawn still closer around him.

Marianne’s judgment of Edward became harsher every day. She still loved him for Elinor’s sake, but she could no longer admire him as she once had tried to do. To her, his whole conduct now seemed weak and spiritless. She thought that if he

truly loved Elinor, he would show it with courage and warmth, and if he did not love her, he ought not to remain where his presence must give false hope. Elinor did not defend him as warmly as before, because she no longer trusted herself to do so. Yet she could not blame him openly. She felt too strongly drawn to him, too ready to excuse what she did not understand. So she suffered in silence and grew only more anxious because silence gave no relief.

At length Edward's visit came to an end. He had stayed about a week, and when he left, his departure brought pain, but not the kind of pain Elinor had once expected. There was sorrow in it, but also confusion. Had he come because affection drew him? Had he stayed while feeling himself bound away from happiness? Or had he only drifted toward them from habit and gentleness, without any firm intention at all? Elinor could not answer these questions. She only knew that the visit had not made her happier. It had shown her Edward again, but it had not brought her nearer to understanding him.

After he was gone, Marianne spoke more plainly than ever. She said that his behavior had been unworthy of Elinor, and that a man who truly felt as he ought would never have appeared so cold on meeting a woman he loved. Elinor tried to soften this judgment, but she had little strength for argument. She was herself too disturbed. Edward had left behind him no declaration, no security, and no comfort strong enough to rest on. He had merely deepened the mystery of his own conduct. Thus, while Marianne still grieved for Willoughby, Elinor was left to struggle with a quieter pain, less violent perhaps, but made harder by doubt.

Part 10

Soon after Edward's departure, Sir John found a new way to fill Barton Park and Barton Cottage with company. Two young women, Miss Anne Steele and Miss Lucy Steele, came to stay in the neighborhood. They were some relation of Lady Middleton's side of the family, though not a very near one, and they had just enough connection with the house to be welcomed there for a time. Sir John, who loved nothing more than bringing people together, was pleased at once by the

possibility of making new companions for the Dashwoods. In his view, if young women were of the right age and lived under the same roof for a few days, friendship was almost certain to follow.

The sisters were very unlike in manner, though both wanted real refinement. Anne Steele, the elder, was vulgar, foolish, loud, and full of curiosity about every person and every private matter. She said whatever came into her head and often seemed not to know how improper her words were. Lucy Steele, the younger, had much more cleverness. She was small, pretty, quick, and watchful, and though she had little education, she knew far better how to manage her face and voice. If Anne offended by open folly, Lucy concealed her defects under soft speech, ready smiles, and careful attention to the feelings of those she wished to please.

Sir John, having no taste for finer distinctions, thought them both excellent companions. He praised their good nature, their liveliness, and the ease with which they mixed in company. He liked to see them ready for cards, gossip, or little journeys, and he did all he could to draw the Dashwood sisters into closer acquaintance with them. His efforts were helped by Mrs. Jennings, who liked any addition to a household that promised more talk, more jokes, and more subjects to laugh over. In such a circle, the Miss Steeles quickly found their place.

Marianne, however, could not bear them. At any time she would have had little patience for vulgar curiosity, poor taste, and false feeling. In her present state, still wounded by Willoughby's departure and unwilling to be pleased by common minds, she found them intolerable almost from the first hour. She answered them coldly, gave them no encouragement, and showed so plainly that she did not enjoy their company that they soon gave up most hope of gaining her. Elinor was more civil, and because she was more civil, she became the chief object of Lucy Steele's attention.

Lucy missed no chance to draw Elinor into conversation. She was quick enough to see that Elinor, unlike Marianne, could listen politely even when she was not pleased. For a short time at once, Lucy could even be agreeable. Her remarks were often clever in a small way, and she had the art of seeming frank without truly giving anything of herself. But Elinor soon saw that beneath this

easy manner there was no delicacy and very little truth. Lucy wished to be thought agreeable, wished to appear informed, and wished above all to make herself important. She could flatter steadily, observe sharply, and speak humbly, but Elinor felt that her humility was not sincerity.

Anne Steele, meanwhile, gave much less trouble by subtlety and much more by plain talk. She asked abrupt questions that no well-bred woman ought to ask and seemed to think the private concerns of others were natural property for her curiosity. One day, after very little acquaintance, she began asking Elinor about Devonshire and Sussex, about Norland, about whether they had had many smart young men in that part of the world, and whether Miss Dashwood's rich brother had been a great beau before his marriage. Elinor answered as calmly as she could, but she was surprised by such freedom, especially from a person who had hardly earned the right to ordinary familiarity.

The Steeles were particularly eager to know everything about Marianne and her supposed attachment. Sir John, as usual, helped them in this with more readiness than delicacy. He spoke freely of Marianne's disappointment, of Willoughby's attentions, and of all the little suspicions that had already filled the neighborhood. Anne Steele, who would have been delighted by the smallest detail, often tried to draw Elinor into fuller explanation. At one moment she spoke in pitying tones of Marianne; at another she dropped broad hints about the faithlessness of beaux. But neither Elinor's reserve nor Marianne's disgust gave her the information she wanted.

The real success of the sisters lay elsewhere. Lady Middleton liked them very much, because they flattered both her and her children with unwearied patience. The little Middletons were noisy, troublesome, selfish children, as every stranger could see in five minutes. Yet Lucy and Anne praised their beauty, admired their spirits, submitted to their rough handling, and treated every selfish trick as if it were charming playfulness. Lady Middleton, being a fond mother and not difficult to deceive on such a point, took all this as proof of the sweetest temper in the world. She became more and more pleased with them every day.

One morning this affection was displayed in a ridiculous scene. The children

were in full disorder, pulling at the young women's clothes, searching their bags, stealing scissors and handkerchiefs, and making the whole room uncomfortable. Lady Middleton looked on with calm pride and called it high spirits. When one child threw a handkerchief out of the window, she cried, "John is in wonderful spirits today!" When another pinched one of the Miss Steeles, she said, "How playful William is!" At last little Annamaria scratched her neck on a pin in her mother's dress and screamed as if some dreadful injury had happened. Then Lady Middleton, Anne Steele, and Lucy all rushed to comfort her with kisses, sugar-plums, soft words, and absurd alarm.

As soon as the child and her brothers had been carried out of the room, leaving a rare silence behind them, the sisters began praising the whole family again. "Poor little creatures!" said Anne Steele. "It might have been a very sad accident." Marianne, unable to endure such exaggeration, answered that it could only have seemed serious under very different circumstances. Lucy then said softly, "What a sweet woman Lady Middleton is!" Marianne would not answer at all, and Elinor, as so often happened, had to supply the civility that her sister could not honestly give. When Anne added, "And Sir John too, what a charming man he is!" Elinor replied that he was at least perfectly good-humored and friendly.

Lucy's flattery did not stop there. She spoke of the children as if they were the finest she had ever seen and declared that she adored lively boys and girls. Elinor answered with a smile, "If that is true, I have already seen good proof of it this morning." Lucy, still pretending sweetness, said that perhaps Miss Dashwood thought the children too much indulged, but that for her own part she could not bear tame and quiet little creatures. Elinor replied that while she was at Barton Park, she never found herself longing very much for violent spirits. The answer was gentle enough in words, but Lucy understood that it was not simple agreement.

Yet for all her attempts to please, Lucy had another purpose besides flattery. She watched Elinor with a degree of attention that soon became noticeable. She often drew near, lowered her voice, and tried to turn conversation toward Norland, Sussex, or the Dashwoods' earlier connections. It seemed at first no more than ordinary curiosity, but Elinor began to feel that Lucy's questions were not always

random. She asked too exactly, listened too carefully, and seemed especially interested in any name connected with the Ferrars family.

This suspicion grew stronger at one dinner at Barton Park. Sir John, who delighted in teasing Elinor almost as much as he had once delighted in teasing Marianne, began his old jokes again about the letter F and about the young gentleman who was supposed to have touched Miss Dashwood's heart. Anne Steele, hearing enough to be excited, insisted on knowing the name. Sir John pretended secrecy for a moment, then whispered loudly enough for the whole table to hear, "His name is Ferrars, but do not tell it, for it is a great secret."

Anne cried out at once, "Ferrars! Is Mr. Ferrars the happy man, then? Your sister-in-law's brother, Miss Dashwood? I know him very well." Lucy instantly corrected her. "How can you say that, Anne? We have only seen him once or twice at our uncle's. It is too much to say we know him very well." Elinor heard these words with immediate surprise. What uncle was this? Where had they met Edward? How long had they known his name and family? The manner in which Anne had spoken was careless, but it carried a hint of something more than common acquaintance.

Elinor wished strongly to hear the matter explained, but no one pursued it. Mrs. Jennings, who was generally eager for all useless information, strangely let the subject drop. Sir John moved on to other nonsense. Lucy herself appeared ready to say no more. Yet the moment remained in Elinor's mind. Anne's tone had not been merely foolish. It had sounded almost ill-natured, as if she believed herself to know something to Edward's disadvantage, or perhaps something that gave her sister an interest in his name. Elinor could not guess the truth, but for the first time the presence of Lucy Steele seemed not only tiresome, but dangerous.

Part 11

After Mr. and Mrs. Palmer returned to Cleveland, life at Barton became quiet again for only a very short time. Sir John and Mrs. Jennings could never leave any family long to itself if there was a chance of bringing in fresh company. During a

visit to Exeter they met the Miss Steeles again, and this was enough to renew all their former activity. Sir John invited the two sisters to Barton Park as soon as their business in Exeter was done, and of course they accepted immediately. Lady Middleton, who disliked unknown relations until she was sure they were useful to her comfort, received the news with little pleasure, but she could not prevent their coming.

When the sisters arrived, they were found to be smartly dressed, civil in manner, and wonderfully ready to admire everything before them. This alone carried them a long way at Barton Park. They praised the house, the furniture, the rooms, and above all the children. Because they knew exactly how to flatter Lady Middleton's weakness as a mother, they gained her good opinion within an hour. Sir John, delighted by this success, ran at once to the cottage and begged the Dashwoods to come and see the sweetest girls in the world. Elinor and Marianne did not hurry to obey, but after a day or two the promised visit was made.

On this visit Elinor saw even more clearly than before what the sisters were. Anne Steele, who was nearly thirty, had little beauty and no sense of how foolish she appeared. Lucy Steele, younger and prettier, had a quick eye, a smart air, and enough cleverness to hide some of her defects when she chose. Both of them were extremely careful to please Lady Middleton. They praised her children without rest, followed their wishes with endless patience, and admired every ribbon, pattern, and little arrangement that belonged to their mother. Elinor soon saw that such attentions had already given them a place at the Park stronger than their relation alone could ever have earned.

The children, as usual, behaved badly, and as usual Lady Middleton called it charm. One boy stole a handkerchief and threw it out of the window. Another pinched one of the young women's fingers. Little Annamaria screamed over a slight scratch as if some terrible harm had happened. Yet Anne and Lucy praised them through it all, kissed them, comforted them, offered sweets, and admired their spirits with astonishing patience. Marianne could hardly keep still under such foolishness, and when the children were finally taken away, the little silence that followed felt like relief.

Then the Steeles began speaking in the sweetest voices of Lady Middleton's goodness, Sir John's kindness, and the perfection of the whole family. Marianne remained silent whenever silence was possible, and Elinor, as usual, had to supply the politeness that her sister could not honestly give. When Lucy said, "I do so love children full of life and spirits," Elinor answered with a small smile, "While I am at Barton Park, I never feel much fear of children being too quiet." It was a mild reply, but Lucy felt its edge. Even so, she did not draw back. She was far too determined to make herself agreeable where she thought it useful.

Before long Anne Steele began one of her usual free and awkward conversations. She asked about Sussex, about Norland, and about whether the Dashwoods had had many handsome young men near them there. She then asked, with no shame at all, whether Elinor's rich brother had been a great beau before he married. Elinor answered as well as she could and wondered how a woman could speak in such a way to someone she hardly knew. Lucy tried at times to soften her sister's manners, but she could not prevent the effect. Elinor left the Park that day with no wish to know either of them better.

The Miss Steeles, however, were of a very different mind. They had come from Exeter full of admiration to distribute, and they soon declared the Dashwood sisters the most elegant and agreeable young women they had ever seen. Sir John, who believed that frequent meeting must always produce friendship, took great pains to throw the families together almost every day. He also did everything in his power to help them toward intimacy by speaking freely of his cousins' concerns. In particular, he took pleasure in hinting at Marianne's disappointment and at Elinor's supposed attachment, because to him these private matters were only materials for a joke. It was in this spirit that one day Anne Steele, after hearing enough to awaken curiosity, asked the name of the gentleman meant for Elinor.

Sir John, enjoying the moment, bent toward her and said in a very audible whisper, "His name is Ferrars, but you must not repeat it, for it is a great secret." Anne cried out at once, "Ferrars! Mr. Ferrars the happy man? Your sister-in-law's brother, Miss Dashwood? A very agreeable young man, and I know him very well."

Lucy immediately corrected her. “How can you say so, Anne? We have seen him only once or twice at our uncle’s. That is hardly knowing him very well.” Elinor heard all this with strong surprise. Who was this uncle, and how had they come to know Edward at all?

The subject went no farther then, though Elinor wished very much that it had. Anne’s tone had been careless, but it had also seemed to carry some private meaning, as if she knew or guessed something connected with Edward. A little later, when Elinor and Lucy happened to walk together from the Park to the cottage, Lucy suddenly asked, “Are you personally acquainted with your sister-in-law’s mother, Mrs. Ferrars?” The question was so strange that Elinor’s face showed her surprise before she answered that she had never seen Mrs. Ferrars. Lucy then said, “Indeed? Then perhaps you cannot tell me what sort of a woman she is?” Elinor replied cautiously, “No. I know nothing of her.”

Lucy watched her closely and said, “You must think me very odd for asking. But perhaps there are reasons. I wish I could explain. I hope at least you will believe that I do not mean to be impertinent.” Elinor gave a civil answer, and for a few moments they walked on in silence. Then Lucy began again, in a softer and more confidential tone. “I should be very glad of your advice in a case that is very uncomfortable to me, but I do not know whether I ought to trouble you. Still, I am sorry you do not know Mrs. Ferrars.” Elinor, now even more astonished, said plainly, “I must confess I do not understand why my opinion of Mrs. Ferrars can be of any use to you.”

Lucy lowered her eyes and said with affected hesitation, “Mrs. Ferrars is nothing to me at present. But the time may come, perhaps very soon, when we may be very nearly connected.” Elinor’s first thought was of Robert Ferrars, and the idea did not please her. She asked quickly, “Do you mean Mr. Robert Ferrars?” Lucy looked straight at her and answered, “No. Not to Mr. Robert Ferrars. I have never seen him in my life. I mean his eldest brother.” For a moment Elinor could hardly believe what she had heard. The words were so shocking that disbelief rose with surprise and held her silent.

Lucy continued at once, as if she had long prepared the speech. “You may well

be surprised, for I am sure Mr. Ferrars never gave your family the smallest hint of it. It has always been a great secret. Only Anne knows it among my own relations, and I would never have mentioned it to you if I had not trusted entirely to your honour and secrecy. I know Edward has the highest opinion of all your family. He thinks of you and your sisters almost like his own." Elinor, forcing herself to calmness, asked, "May I inquire how long this engagement has existed?" Lucy answered, "We have been engaged these four years."

Even then Elinor struggled against full belief. She said, "I did not know that you were even acquainted until lately." Lucy replied that their acquaintance was of many years' standing, because Edward had been for several years under the care of her uncle, Mr. Pratt, at Longstaple near Plymouth. She then added that she had been very unwilling to engage herself without Mrs. Ferrars's knowledge, but that she had been too young and loved Edward too well to be prudent. After that, with a little smile, she said, "Though you do not know him so well as I do, Miss Dashwood, you must have seen enough to know that he is very able to make a woman sincerely attached to him." Elinor answered, "Certainly," though she scarcely knew that she spoke.

Still she made one last effort to doubt. "I beg your pardon," she said, "but surely there must be some mistake. We cannot mean the same Mr. Ferrars." Lucy smiled and answered, "We can mean no other. Mr. Edward Ferrars, eldest son of Mrs. Ferrars of Park Street, and brother of your sister-in-law, Mrs. John Dashwood, is the gentleman on whom all my happiness depends." Then, to put an end to every doubt, she took a small miniature from her pocket and placed it in Elinor's hand. "Look at this face," she said. "It is not as handsome as the original, but I think you will know it." Elinor saw at once that it was Edward.

The blow was now complete, yet she still kept command over herself. Lucy, encouraged by this outward calm, went on talking of her difficulties, her suspense, and the pain of seeing Edward so seldom. She said that his mother was proud and would never approve the match, that Anne had no judgment and might betray them, and that she herself had nearly died of anxiety over the matter. Then, after a short pause, she asked with a directness that made her meaning plain enough,

“Sometimes I think whether it would not be better to break it off entirely. But then I cannot bear to make him miserable. What would you advise me to do, Miss Dashwood? What would you do yourself?” Elinor, startled and disgusted by the question, replied, “I can give you no advice in such a case. Your own judgment must direct you.”

Lucy did not stop there. She spoke of Edward’s low spirits when he had lately visited Barton and said, “Did you not think him sadly out of heart?” Elinor answered that they certainly had. Lucy then explained that he had come to them from Longstaple, where he had stayed a fortnight, and that she had begged him to appear more cheerful so that no one might suspect the truth. Finally she drew a letter from her pocket and carelessly showed the address. “You know his hand, I dare say,” she said. “He writes to me as often as he can. It is our chief comfort when we are apart.” Elinor saw the writing and could doubt no longer. Lucy then added, with quiet triumph, “I gave him a lock of my hair set in a ring the last time he was with us. Perhaps you noticed the ring?” Elinor answered, “I did.”

By then they had reached the cottage, and the conversation could go no farther. Lucy and her sister stayed only a few minutes before returning to the Park. Elinor spoke and moved with outward composure until the door had closed behind them. Then she was left at liberty to think, and to suffer. Everything now came back to her with a cruel new meaning: Edward’s silence, his sadness, the ring, the mysterious friends near Plymouth, and all the uncertainty of his conduct. What had seemed strange before now seemed plain, and what had once been hope became, in a single walk home, misery and humiliation.

Part 12

After Lucy Steele left the cottage that day, Elinor remained for some time in a state that was nearer shock than sorrow. She had not merely lost a hope. She had learned that while she had been trying to understand Edward’s silence, another woman had long possessed his promise. Every uncertain look, every uneasy word, every sign of trouble in his manner now returned to her with a cruel new meaning.

Yet even in that first misery, she did not allow herself the wild relief of complaint. Her nature turned suffering inward, and her first thought, after the pain itself, was that no one in the house must guess what had happened.

This effort cost her much. To see Marianne grieving openly for Willoughby had already been painful. To grieve herself and still appear calm was far harder. She feared above all that if her mother knew the truth, the blow would fall on her with all the violence of disappointed certainty. Mrs. Dashwood had believed too fully in Edward's attachment. Marianne had almost treated the marriage as only a question of time. Elinor could not bear to destroy that belief until she absolutely had to do so. So she kept Lucy's secret, though keeping it forced her to live hour after hour in the company of the woman who had taken from her the dearest hope of her life.

Lucy, meanwhile, seemed to think that confidence had created friendship. She now spoke to Elinor with an even greater air of intimacy than before and appeared to expect not only silence, but sympathy. She sought private moments, watched Elinor closely, and seemed pleased whenever she could remind her, directly or indirectly, of Edward's constancy. Her behavior had a softness in it that would have seemed modest to a less observing person. To Elinor it seemed full of self-interest. Lucy had chosen her listener very carefully, and she meant to keep the advantage she had gained.

One great support remained to Elinor. She could still judge Edward more gently than Lucy deserved. Whatever his fault might be, she did not believe him dishonest in the ordinary sense. His long engagement, hidden from the world and painful to himself, proved at least that he had not acted lightly. He had given his word in youth and weakness, and now, though unhappy, still held himself bound by it. This conviction did not lessen Elinor's sorrow, but it saved her from despising him. She could accuse his judgment, perhaps even his want of openness, but not his heart.

During these same days Mrs. Jennings proposed a new plan. She was soon to leave Devonshire for London, and she asked Elinor and Marianne to go with her for some weeks. The invitation was given with so much good nature that refusal

would have been difficult even if Mrs. Dashwood had wished to refuse. In truth, Mrs. Dashwood liked the idea immediately. She thought London would amuse Marianne, enlarge Elinor's circle, and perhaps bring them both some change of scene that might be useful after so many uneasy months. She spoke of it warmly, almost as if pleasure were certain the moment the journey began.

Marianne received the proposal with a joy that startled everyone by its suddenness. London meant only one thing to her. Willoughby was there. If she could not hear from him in Devonshire, she might at least see him in town. All her spirits rose at once. Her voice became quicker, her color brighter, and the whole heaviness of her manner seemed for a time to disappear. Elinor, though she mistrusted the cause of this happiness, could not help being thankful for any change that gave her sister new life. Even Mrs. Dashwood, who understood Marianne too well not to guess the chief source of her delight, preferred hope to sorrow and encouraged the plan.

Elinor at first objected, though not very strongly. She did not like leaving her mother at Barton, and she had no wish to place herself nearer Edward's family or under Lucy Steele's observation in a new setting. Yet when she saw how much Marianne desired the journey, and how firmly Mrs. Dashwood wished it, she gave way. She said quietly, "I will go, if Marianne goes." Sir John was delighted by the arrangement, for he liked every plan that increased the number of people connected with him in any place. Lady Middleton approved because Mrs. Jennings approved. As for Lucy and Anne Steele, they had never seemed happier, since London offered them a better chance than ever of moving closer to the Ferrars family.

Before the journey began, Elinor found herself once more drawn into a private conversation with Lucy. They were at Barton Park, and the room was full enough to make low talk safe under the sound of Marianne's music. Elinor, who despised herself for seeming willing to resume the subject and yet could not rest without knowing more, at last said in a firm but careful voice, "I hope you did not think I blamed you for trusting me. I would not willingly have given you such an impression." Lucy answered at once, "I was afraid I had offended you. You

seemed cold that day, and I have been uneasy ever since. But if you are not displeased, I am very thankful. It was such a comfort to tell someone."

Elinor then asked, with as much steadiness as she could command, what future Lucy really expected. Lucy replied that Edward had only two thousand pounds of his own and that marriage on such a sum would be madness unless Mrs. Ferrars relented. "For myself," she said, "I could live on almost nothing, and I would never complain. But I could not bear to be the reason he lost everything his mother might one day give him." Elinor answered, "Then you are prepared to wait for many years?" Lucy said that she was, because Edward's affection had already stood the test of a long engagement and many separations. She spoke of his constancy with smiling certainty, and every word, though civil in form, seemed meant to press upon Elinor the strength of a claim that could not be shaken.

Elinor forced herself to continue. "But what are his own plans?" she asked. "Does he mean to submit to this suspense for an indefinite time, rather than risk his mother's anger by speaking openly?" Lucy answered that Mrs. Ferrars was proud, hard, and capable, in a first fit of rage, of settling everything on Robert. That danger, she said, frightened her more than delay. Elinor replied, "And for your own sake as well as his, I hope. You are carrying disinterestedness very far if you think only of him." Lucy looked at her sharply for a moment and then changed the subject by asking whether she knew Robert Ferrars. When Elinor said no, Lucy called him vain and foolish, with the sort of easy contempt that suggested she had already measured every member of the family according to her own advantage.

She then returned to Edward with greater triumph than before. She said his love had never once failed her, that she was naturally jealous, and that if he had talked too much of any particular woman, looked altered in spirits, or seemed less happy in her company than formerly, she would have discovered it at once. Elinor heard this with a composure that cost her dearly. She knew too well that Lucy was speaking not from delicacy, but from confidence in her own success. Yet she also knew that to betray pain would only gratify her. So she answered only where politeness required it and kept her countenance guarded with all the strength she

had.

Their conversation was interrupted more than once by the foolishness of the room around them. Anne Steele overheard the word “coxcomb” and immediately imagined that the ladies were discussing their lovers. Mrs. Jennings laughed and began one of her old jokes about Miss Dashwood’s modest beau and Lucy’s secret admirer. Elinor blushed in spite of herself, and Lucy bit her lip with visible annoyance. That small accident was enough to end the confidence for the moment, but not enough to free Elinor from its effects. She left Barton Park that day confirmed in every part of her misery. Lucy’s story was true. Edward was bound. And the journey to London, which had restored Marianne’s spirits so suddenly, now opened before Elinor with a very different kind of anxiety.

Part 13

As January came near, Mrs. Jennings began to think of London. Though she spent a great part of the year moving from one child or friend to another, she still had a house of her own in town, near Portman Square, where she usually passed the winter. One day, quite suddenly, she turned to Elinor and Marianne and asked them both to go with her. Elinor answered at once for them both and refused with gratitude, saying that they could not leave their mother at that season. But even while she spoke, she saw Marianne’s changing face and brightened eyes, and she understood immediately how powerful the invitation had become to her sister.

Mrs. Jennings would not accept the refusal. She pressed them warmly and said, in her open, cheerful way, that Mrs. Dashwood could spare them very well, that they would be no trouble to her, and that she had already set her heart upon their company. She promised them comfort on the journey, kindness in London, and even, with laughing confidence, her best efforts to get one or both of them well married before they returned. Sir John, who loved any plan that carried young people into new company, declared at once that Marianne at least would not object if Elinor could be persuaded. Mrs. Jennings, turning directly to Marianne, held out her hand and urged her to strike the bargain at once.

Marianne, unable to hide her feelings, thanked her with real warmth. “Your invitation gives me more pleasure than I can say,” she answered. “It would make me very happy to accept it. But if my mother would be less comfortable because of our absence, then I could not leave her.” The words were dutiful, but Elinor saw very clearly what lay beneath them. Marianne wanted London with all her heart, and she wanted it for one reason only. The hope of seeing Willoughby again had risen in her with such force that it overcame every other consideration, even her dislike of Mrs. Jennings’s manners, which at another time would have been enough to keep her away. Elinor, observing this, gave up direct opposition and referred the matter to their mother’s decision.

Mrs. Dashwood did not hesitate. She received the plan with delight and immediately began to imagine every sort of good that might come from it. She said, “It is exactly what I could wish. You ought to see London. It will amuse you both, and Margaret and I shall do very well at home together. You will be under the care of a kind, motherly woman, and I am sure I need not fear for your comfort.” Then, with her usual hopeful warmth, she added that they might see their brother, enlarge their circle, and return with fresh spirits. Elinor, who had many private reasons for disliking the journey, tried one last objection. She said, carefully, that however good Mrs. Jennings’s heart might be, her society was not very suitable, nor her protection particularly desirable. Mrs. Dashwood admitted the truth in part, but answered that Lady Middleton and others would make up for it, and Marianne, with unusual readiness, declared that she herself had no scruple at all and could very easily bear any inconvenience of that kind.

Elinor could not help smiling at this sudden patience in a sister who had often found it difficult to be even civil to Mrs. Jennings for half an hour. She now resolved, however, that if Marianne went, she must go too. It did not seem safe to leave her sister entirely to her own judgment in such a state of mind, nor fair to leave Mrs. Jennings to bear Marianne’s restless hopes alone. She was made a little easier also by remembering Lucy’s account that Edward would not be in town before February, and that a moderate visit might therefore begin and end without bringing her into the worst of that pain. So when her mother spoke of the plan

once more, and even hinted that Elinor might perhaps improve her acquaintance with the Ferrars family, Elinor forced herself to answer as calmly as she could, “I shall always be glad to see Edward Ferrars, but as for the rest of the family, it is quite indifferent to me whether I ever know them or not.” Mrs. Dashwood only smiled, and Marianne looked at her in astonishment, as if such words were hardly possible.

The matter was soon settled. Mrs. Jennings was overjoyed, Sir John delighted, Lady Middleton took the trouble to appear delighted, and the Steele sisters seemed happier than anyone, Lucy especially. Elinor submitted with less reluctance than she had expected, because Marianne’s whole appearance changed the moment the journey became certain. Her sister, who had so long moved under a cloud of grief, now seemed almost restored to her natural life. Her voice, her eyes, her very step showed expectation. This joy was so visible that Elinor could hardly distrust the cause without feeling cruel. The only time Marianne was again overcome was at the moment of parting from her mother. Then her affection broke out with great violence, and Mrs. Dashwood herself wept as if the separation were far longer than a few weeks. Elinor alone looked on it with comparative calm. Their departure took place in the first week of January.

Three days were spent on the journey, and Marianne’s conduct during those days proved very plainly what sort of companion she was likely to be while her whole heart was fixed on one object. She was almost always silent, wrapped in her own thoughts, and spoke only when some beautiful scene forced from her a quick word of delight to Elinor. Mrs. Jennings, however, behaved with true kindness throughout. She took constant care for their comfort, worried over their meals, and would gladly have made them choose between dishes with more interest than either of them could feel. To make up for Marianne’s silence, Elinor gave all the civility she could. She talked, listened, laughed when required, and did everything in her power to answer the good nature of their companion. At last they reached London at three o’clock on the third day, tired with confinement and quite ready to enjoy the comfort of a warm room and a good fire.

Mrs. Jennings’s house was handsome and well furnished, and the young ladies

were shown at once into a very comfortable room that had once belonged to Charlotte. Over the mantelpiece still hung a landscape worked in colored silk by Mrs. Palmer in her schooldays, a decoration that gave the room a domestic character of its own. Because dinner would not be ready for some time, Elinor sat down immediately to write to her mother. Marianne did the same. Elinor said, “I am writing home. Would it not be better for you to wait a day or two before writing?” Marianne answered quickly, “I am not writing to my mother.” Elinor asked no more, but the meaning was clear enough to her. Marianne’s note was written in a very few minutes, folded, sealed, and directed with eager speed. Elinor thought she saw a large W on the address, and when Marianne rang for a servant and sent it off by the two-penny post, all doubt ended. To Elinor this was at once a comfort and an uneasiness. If Marianne wrote so directly, she must think herself secure of being understood. Yet the very need for such haste showed how impatient and excited she had become.

As the evening drew on, Marianne’s agitation increased. She could scarcely eat any dinner, and when they returned afterward to the drawing room, she listened anxiously to every sound in the street. Elinor, seeing this, was grateful that Mrs. Jennings happened to be much occupied in her own room and therefore noticed little. After tea, several noises were heard at neighboring doors, and each time Marianne started. At last a loud rap came that seemed too direct, too certain, to belong anywhere else. Marianne rose instantly and moved toward the door. For a moment everything was silent. She opened it, listened on the stairs, and then came back into the room with a face full of conviction and delight. “Oh, Elinor,” she cried, “it is Willoughby, it truly is.” She seemed ready to fly into his arms. But the next moment Colonel Brandon entered instead.

The shock was too great for Marianne to bear. She left the room at once. Elinor herself had also expected Willoughby and was disappointed, but her disappointment was softened by real regard for Colonel Brandon. She felt especially hurt that a man so attached to Marianne should at once perceive that his appearance had brought her only grief. He saw it clearly. Looking after her with astonishment and concern, he almost forgot, for a few moments, the civility

due to anyone else. Then he turned to Elinor and asked, “Is your sister unwell?” Elinor, embarrassed and anxious to spare Marianne, answered that she had low spirits, headaches, and had been overtired by the journey. He listened with serious attention, then said little more on the matter and tried, with gentle kindness, to speak of their journey and their friends in Devonshire. Their conversation remained quiet and somewhat heavy, for both were thinking less of what they said than of Marianne and of another person not present.

Mrs. Jennings soon came in and filled the room at once with questions, cheerfulness, and useless guesses. She laughed over Colonel Brandon’s appearance, asked where he had been, spoke of Mr. Palmer and Charlotte, and before long mentioned Marianne and Willoughby together with her usual freedom. Colonel Brandon answered all her inquiries with patience but gave her no real satisfaction. When Marianne was obliged to return, he grew even more grave and did not stay long. No other visitor came that evening, and the ladies agreed to go early to bed. But if the evening had disappointed Marianne, it did not destroy her expectation. The next morning she rose with recovered spirits and happy looks, as if she were sure that what had not happened yesterday must happen today.

Mrs. Palmer arrived soon after breakfast, full of laughter and noisy pleasure, and after some time spent in talking, it was proposed that they should all go out together to the shops. Mrs. Jennings and Elinor consented readily, and Marianne, though she at first refused, was persuaded to join them. Everywhere they went she was plainly on the watch. In Bond Street especially her eyes were in constant search. She could not care what anyone bought, could give no opinion on anything Elinor showed her, and grew more and more restless under the delay caused by Mrs. Palmer’s delight in every pretty and expensive thing. At last they returned home, and Marianne ran upstairs immediately. Elinor followed and found her turning from the table with a face that announced fresh disappointment. No letter had been left. No message had come. She asked the servant again and again whether he was quite sure. When he answered yes, she could only say in a low voice, “How very strange.” Elinor thought the same. If Marianne had not known Willoughby to be in town, she would not have written to him there. And if he was

in town, why did he neither come nor answer? From that moment Elinor resolved that if appearances remained so painful for many more days, she must at last urge her mother to demand some clear explanation of the whole affair.

Part 14

The days that followed brought Marianne no relief. One small change in the weather could still alter her spirits for a moment, because she continued to connect everything with Willoughby's movements. If the air stayed mild, she told herself that many sportsmen would remain in the country and that such weather might delay Sir John's return to Barton. If she saw the sky grow clearer, she suddenly hoped for frost, then for a letter, then for a visit. Elinor watched these changes with a mixture of pity and pain. Every little sign in the air became, for Marianne, a reason to hope again.

Mrs. Jennings, however, treated them with real kindness. Her house was comfortable, her manner generous, and except for a few old city friends, she did not force on them company that could truly wound or embarrass them. Their evenings were often dull, because they were spent in cards, but dullness was at least easier to bear than open distress. Colonel Brandon came almost every day. He came, as Elinor clearly saw, partly to look at Marianne and partly to talk with herself. Yet even while Elinor found real comfort in his thoughtful conversation, she could not miss the sadness of his continued attachment to her sister.

About a week after their arrival in London, a card was found on the table when they returned from a morning drive. Marianne saw the name first and cried out, "Good God! He has been here while we were out." The effect was immediate. All the agitation that had only half slept in her now woke in full force. Elinor, glad at least to know that Willoughby was in town, said, "He will certainly come again tomorrow." But Marianne scarcely seemed to hear her. She took the card away as if it were a treasure and spent the rest of the day in restless expectation.

The next morning she would not go out with the others. She insisted on staying at home in case he came. Elinor, while driving with Mrs. Jennings, could think of

little except what might be happening in Berkeley Street during their absence. Yet one glance at Marianne on their return was enough to show that Willoughby had not appeared. At that very moment a note was brought in. Marianne sprang forward and cried, “For me!” When the servant answered, “No, ma’am, for my mistress,” she snatched it up and saw with sharp disappointment that it was for Mrs. Jennings. Elinor then said gently, “You are expecting a letter, then?” Marianne answered, “Yes. A little. Not much.”

After a pause Elinor said, hurt in her turn, “You have no confidence in me, Marianne.” Marianne replied quickly, “And you, Elinor? You who have confidence in no one?” Elinor, caught between truth and secrecy, said, “I have nothing to tell.” Marianne answered with pain and bitterness, “Nor I. Our cases are alike. You tell nothing because you will not speak, and I because I have nothing to hide.” Elinor could make no proper reply. The reproach touched too near the truth, and yet the truth could not be given.

Later that same day, after breakfast, Elinor at last began the letter she had long wished to write to her mother. She described Marianne’s state, her own fears about Willoughby, and begged Mrs. Dashwood to demand from Marianne a clear account of the whole engagement. Marianne, meanwhile, walked up and down the room in restless misery, too troubled to work and too full of expectation to sit still. Before Elinor had finished, Colonel Brandon was announced. Marianne, who had seen him from the window and had no strength for any visitor she did not wish to see, left the room at once.

Colonel Brandon entered looking more grave than usual. He sat down, as if he had something important to say, but for some minutes remained silent. Elinor waited anxiously. At last he asked, in a voice of real agitation, “When may I congratulate you on gaining a brother?” Elinor, startled, asked what he meant. He answered, trying to smile, “Your sister’s engagement to Mr. Willoughby is very generally known.” Elinor replied, “It cannot be generally known, because her own family do not know it.”

He looked surprised and said, “I beg your pardon. I thought no secrecy was intended. Their correspondence is spoken of openly, and their marriage is talked

of everywhere." Elinor asked where he had heard this, and he answered, "From many people. Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Palmer, and the Middletons among them. But I might not have believed it fully, if I had not today seen, by chance, a letter in the servant's hand addressed to Mr. Willoughby in your sister's writing." He then spoke with more feeling than before. "Tell me at least whether all is really settled. Is every attempt useless? Is there nothing to be done except to be silent?"

In those words his love for Marianne was confessed as plainly as he could confess it. Elinor was deeply moved by his unhappiness, but she was also placed in sudden difficulty. She did not know the exact truth about Marianne and Willoughby, yet she knew enough to destroy any hope he might still keep. She wished also, as far as possible, to protect her sister from blame. So, after a painful pause, she answered more strongly than certainty allowed. She said that although no formal declaration had ever been made to the family, she had no doubt of the attachment between them, and that she was not surprised to hear of letters passing between them. Colonel Brandon listened quietly, rose at once, and said with emotion, "To your sister I wish all possible happiness. To Willoughby I wish that he may deserve her." Then he took his leave.

His departure left Elinor with no comfort. She pitied him sincerely, but she could not even wish his suffering removed, because the event that must relieve him would also destroy Marianne. A few days passed, and still Willoughby neither came nor wrote. At the end of that time Lady Middleton invited them to a crowded evening party. Mrs. Jennings could not go because one of her younger daughters was ill, so Elinor and Marianne had to attend under Lady Middleton's care. Marianne dressed with complete indifference. She sat by the fire until the last moment without hope in her face or interest in anything around her. When at last they were told that the carriage waited, she started as if she had forgotten there was such an engagement.

The house they entered was full, brilliant, hot, and uncomfortable. The rooms were crowded, the lights strong, and every movement difficult. After speaking to the lady of the house, they passed into the company and at last found seats not far from Lady Middleton's card table. They had not sat there long when Elinor saw

Willoughby standing only a few yards away in close conversation with a fashionable young woman. He soon saw Elinor and bowed, but he did not come near them. He did not speak. He continued talking to the other lady as if nothing more were required.

Elinor turned instantly toward Marianne, but Marianne had already seen him. Her whole face changed in a moment. She half rose, whispered his name with tenderness, and would have gone to him at once if Elinor had not stopped her. “For heaven’s sake, be composed,” Elinor said softly. “Do not let everyone see what you feel.” Marianne answered, “He is there. Why does he not come? Why can I not speak to him?” It was impossible for her to be calm. Every feature of her face showed expectation, fear, and growing misery.

At last Willoughby turned again and came toward them. Marianne stood up and held out her hand. He approached, but instead of looking at her, he addressed himself chiefly to Elinor and asked, in a hurried tone, after Mrs. Dashwood and how long they had been in London. Elinor, shocked by such behavior, could scarcely answer him. Marianne then cried out, with the strongest emotion, “Good God, Willoughby, what does this mean? Have you not received my letters? Will you not shake hands with me?” He took her hand, but only for a moment, and even that touch seemed painful to him.

He then said with forced calmness, “I had the honour of calling in Berkeley Street last Tuesday, and I was very sorry not to find you or Mrs. Jennings at home. I hope my card was received.” Marianne answered in wild distress, “But did you not get my notes? There must be some terrible mistake. Tell me, for heaven’s sake, what is the matter.” For a moment he seemed unable to speak. Then, after glancing toward the fashionable young woman, as if her presence compelled him to firmness, he said only, “Yes, I had the pleasure of receiving the notice of your arrival in town,” made a slight bow, and turned away at once to rejoin his companion.

Marianne became almost white with shock and dropped back into her chair. Elinor, expecting every instant that she would faint, tried to hide her from the notice of others and used lavender water to revive her. As soon as Marianne could

speak, she said, “Go to him, Elinor. Make him come back to me. I must speak to him again. I cannot rest until this is explained.” Elinor answered, “That cannot be done here. You must wait. This is not a place for explanation. Wait till tomorrow.” Marianne was near following him herself, and only with great difficulty did Elinor keep her seated and force her to remain at least outwardly still until Willoughby had left the room entirely.

The moment Elinor saw that he was gone, she urged Marianne to let her ask for the carriage. Marianne begged at once to be taken home. Lady Middleton, though interrupted in the middle of her game, was too polite to object when told that Miss Dashwood was unwell. So they left as soon as the carriage could be found. During the drive back to Berkeley Street, scarcely a word was spoken. Marianne was too crushed even for tears. Once at home, and fortunate enough to find Mrs. Jennings still absent, they went directly upstairs, where hartshorn and quiet gradually restored her enough to be put to bed. She wished to be left alone, and Elinor, seeing that she could do no more for the moment, withdrew.

Alone at last, Elinor tried to think clearly about what had happened. She could no longer doubt that some engagement had existed between Marianne and Willoughby. That much his embarrassment had almost confessed. But she could no longer doubt either that he now wished to escape it. Nothing but a complete change of feeling could explain such coldness and such cruelty. Still, his confusion saved him from appearing wholly without heart. She could not believe that he had been merely playing with Marianne from the beginning. More likely his regard had once been real, and some later cause had overcome it.

This thought did not lessen her anxiety for Marianne. If Willoughby had never cared, there might at least have been contempt to support against sorrow. But to know that he had cared and had nevertheless turned away made the wound deeper. Elinor could compare it only with her own unhappiness, and even in that comparison she found Marianne’s case worse. She herself, though forced to give up Edward, could still esteem him. Marianne, if abandoned by Willoughby, would suffer not only the loss of hope, but the bitter humiliation of a love returned with coldness and almost with insult. And as Elinor sat thinking in the silence of that

late hour, she felt more strongly than ever that some immediate and irreparable rupture had begun.

Part 15

After they returned from the party, Marianne was too shocked for speech. She went almost at once to her room, and Elinor, though deeply shaken herself, soon learned the worst part of the news from Colonel Brandon. Earlier that same day, in a shop in Pall Mall, he had overheard two ladies speaking openly of Willoughby's marriage to Miss Grey. It was no longer being treated as rumor. The match was said to be settled, the preparations were already being discussed, and after the wedding the couple were expected to go to Combe Magna. Elinor heard this with horror, because it gave a public name and shape to what had only begun, the night before, as private cruelty.

Colonel Brandon, who suffered for Marianne almost as much as if the pain had been his own, spoke with unusual openness. He did not try to hide his concern, and Elinor saw more clearly than ever how sincere his attachment was. Yet neither pity for him nor anger against Willoughby could help her in the task now before her. Marianne had to be told what the world was already saying, and she had to be kept from destroying herself under the blow. In that moment Elinor would have given much to spare her sister even one hour of what must follow, but there was no longer any room left for illusion.

Marianne, meanwhile, had retired with all the energy of despair. She could not rest in mere grief. She needed action, even if the action only deepened her misery. Before the night ended, she wrote to Willoughby. Her letter was not calm, proud, or guarded. She asked for an explanation. She appealed to the past. She treated what had happened not as a final desertion, but as some dreadful mistake that still might be corrected if only he would speak plainly. Elinor knew this would happen, and though she foresaw pain in it, she could not find it in herself to forbid the attempt. Marianne's heart could not move directly from hope to resignation. It had to pass first through one last appeal.

The next morning was full of tortured waiting. Mrs. Jennings had gone out early to spread the news among the Middletons and Palmers, because her feelings always needed company and noise. Elinor remained at home and began the painful letter she owed to her mother. Marianne sat near her, watching every line as it was written, grieving both for herself and for the pain the letter must give Mrs. Dashwood. Her nerves were so broken that even a knock at the door startled her. When she saw from the window that the visitor was Colonel Brandon, she withdrew at once in vexation, saying bitterly that they were never safe from him. Yet even this unfairness came only from suffering. She could not bear the sight of pity when her whole mind was fixed on one man alone.

Colonel Brandon did come in, and this time he came with a serious purpose. He wished, if possible, to offer not comfort exactly, but conviction. He wanted Marianne to know something that might lower Willoughby in her opinion and prevent her from wasting her whole life in faithful misery for an unworthy man. But he could not yet speak directly to Marianne, and so he told Elinor enough to show that Willoughby's conduct had not only been cruel to her sister, but dishonorable elsewhere as well. Elinor listened with painful attention. Her anger against Willoughby, already strong, became stronger, though she still thought first of Marianne's immediate suffering.

Before that conversation could go far, another event cut through everything. A letter arrived for Marianne. She took it with trembling hands and knew at once from the look of it that it came from Willoughby. Her whole face changed. Elinor could hardly breathe while she watched her break the seal. For one instant hope returned to Marianne with such force that it almost made her beautiful again. Then she read. The color left her face, her hands shook violently, and the paper dropped toward her lap. There was another small packet with the note. Inside it were the letters she had written to him, and the lock of hair she had once given him. The meaning was complete. He was returning not only her words, but every sign that he had ever wished to keep anything of her.

Marianne could not master herself. She cried out in grief and disbelief and insisted that the letter could not be true to his real heart. She read parts of it aloud,

not steadily, but in broken phrases. In substance it was colder than open insult. Willoughby thanked her for her note, expressed regret if anything in his conduct had caused misunderstanding, said he would always remember her family with gratitude and esteem, and denied that he had ever meant his behavior to imply more than ordinary civility. That language, after all that had passed between them, was worse than a direct confession of selfishness. It reduced their intimacy to polite acquaintance and tried to turn Marianne's deepest feelings into a mistake of her own making.

Elinor took the letter and read it herself. At first she could hardly believe that any man who had once appeared affectionate and honorable could write so meanly. She read it again, and each reading increased her indignation. If he had simply chosen ambition and fortune, she might have despised him. But this was worse. He had chosen also to protect himself by false formality and to leave Marianne not only wounded, but humiliated. Elinor was so full of anger that she scarcely trusted herself to speak. She saw now that whatever good feeling he might once have had, he had at last allowed interest and vanity to master it completely.

Marianne, meanwhile, gave way to unrestrained grief. Her body was weak from sleepless nights and little food, and now that the fever of hope was broken, the weakness showed itself at once. She tried to rise and almost fell. Elinor caught her in time and brought her back to bed. Wine and rest were now more necessary than argument, but even then Elinor could not remain silent for long. Seeing her sister drown herself in hopeless sorrow, she said with unusual force, "You must try to govern yourself, if not for your own sake, then for our mother's. Think what this will do to her." Marianne answered only with broken misery. In that hour she could not hear reason. She could only feel the full violence of loss.

One cry of Marianne's, however, struck Elinor painfully. In resisting all advice, she exclaimed in effect that it was easy for those who had no sorrow of their own to speak of effort and self-command. Elinor felt the injustice of this deeply, but she did not resent it. Marianne knew nothing of Edward and Lucy. She did not know that the sister she accused of coldness had also lost the dearest hope of her life and had been carrying that wound in silence. So Elinor bore even this in quiet.

Her own pain, instead of making her harder, made her more patient. She saw that Marianne, in such an hour, was scarcely responsible for her words.

After some time, when Marianne's first violence lessened into exhaustion, Elinor was able to think more clearly. She had on her lap not only Willoughby's letter, but Marianne's returned letters as well. She did not at first read them. Her mind was too full of disgust at his note and too full of pity for her sister. But even without opening them, she understood enough. Marianne had loved without reserve, trusted without defense, and written as a woman writes only when she believes herself secure in the man she addresses. The shame of having such letters sent back unopened to her own keeping was almost as cruel as the desertion itself. It was a final proof that Willoughby meant to break not only the connection, but every memory of tenderness that could embarrass him in the world he had now chosen.

Mrs. Jennings returned earlier than usual, full of noisy concern and gossip, but Elinor excused herself from attending her and went back immediately to Marianne. Mrs. Jennings, with all her faults, was kind-hearted enough to accept the excuse without complaint. Once more alone with her sister, Elinor found that the body was now taking revenge for what the mind had suffered. Marianne was faint, weak, sleepless, and scarcely able to sit upright. The long strain of suspense had ended, but only by leaving all its damage behind. It was no longer merely grief. It was illness beginning.

Elinor sat by her through the rest of the day with a tenderness made stronger by both pity and anger. She no longer wished only that Marianne might forget Willoughby. She wished that Marianne might one day understand him rightly and be free of him in judgment as well as in circumstance. For herself, Elinor now felt no uncertainty at all. Whatever excuse might later be discovered, the action itself was base. No honorable man would have written such a letter or returned such tokens in such a way. Before, she had feared that Marianne had been abandoned. Now she knew it. And with that knowledge, the sorrow of the previous days gave way to something darker and colder: the certainty that a heart had been trusted where no true faith had ever been safe.

Part 16

Marianne woke the next morning with the same misery with which she had closed her eyes. Sleep had given her body a little rest, but it had not lightened her heart. She still felt the shock of Willoughby's letter, the insult of his cold words, and the shame of having her own letters and hair sent back to her. Every object in the room seemed to remind her of him, and every attempt at comfort only made her pain more certain. She did not speak much, but her silence was full of suffering. Elinor watched her with anxious tenderness and wished more than ever that some truth strong enough to shake Marianne's love might at last be brought before her.

Colonel Brandon came later that day, and this time his manner showed very clearly that he had something serious to communicate. He had already hinted enough to Elinor to make her certain that Willoughby's guilt did not end with the treatment of Marianne. Now he wished to say more, because he believed that the truth, painful as it must be, might still save Marianne from wasting herself on a man who did not deserve even her pity. Elinor received him alone. Marianne was in no state to see him, and indeed he could not yet speak freely in her presence.

For a little while he was silent, as if the story were difficult even to begin. Then he said, "Miss Dashwood, I do not wish to trouble you more than necessary, but I think your sister should know what sort of man Mr. Willoughby truly is. I would not speak at all if I did not believe it might help her." Elinor answered, "You may trust me. I know you would not bring such a subject forward without a strong reason." He bowed gravely and then began, not with Willoughby, but with his own youth.

He told her that long ago, when he was still a young man, his father had chosen a bride for him, a rich young woman whom he had never loved and could not respect. But Brandon's heart had already been given elsewhere. The woman he truly loved was his cousin Eliza, a girl who had been left under his family's care and who had grown up almost as his sister, though never in his feelings. They had loved one another from an early age. "We were not careless children playing at

affection," he said quietly. "We loved seriously, and we hoped seriously. But my father had other plans."

Eliza was forced into marriage with Brandon's elder brother, a hard and selfish man, while Brandon himself was sent away. "I was powerless," he said. "I could neither save her nor follow her. I left England in misery, and when I returned some years later, I found her life already broken." Her marriage had made her wretched. She had been treated with cruelty, neglected, and at last driven into complete unhappiness. She had left her husband, and after many sufferings she died, but not before telling Brandon enough of her history to burden him for the rest of his life. She left behind her a daughter, also named Eliza.

Brandon then became the protector of this younger Eliza. He tried to do for the child what he had not been able to do for the mother. He placed her at school, watched over her, and hoped at least to keep her from the errors and sufferings that had destroyed the first Eliza. For a time all seemed safe. But when the girl was about seventeen, she disappeared from school. Brandon searched for her and at last discovered, with horror, that she had been seduced and carried away by a man whose name she was ashamed and afraid to give. She was ruined, frightened, and abandoned before he could reach her.

Here Brandon paused for a moment, and Elinor hardly dared breathe. She already knew what name must come next. At last he said, "That man was Willoughby." Elinor started, though she had half expected it. Colonel Brandon continued in the same grave tone. Willoughby had met the young girl, gained her trust, taken advantage of her innocence, and left her when he was tired of her or when prudence made her inconvenient. Brandon found her near the time of her child's birth, weak, ashamed, and miserable beyond words. He sent her into the country with proper care, and there she remained with her infant. "Such," he said, "was the man who afterward came smiling into your sister's life."

Elinor listened with pain and indignation. Everything in the story was dreadful, but what struck her most strongly was the miserable likeness between mother and daughter. Both Elizas had been wounded by the same kind of selfish male pride, and Colonel Brandon had loved and failed to save both, though not by any fault

of his own. She said with deep feeling, “Your story is very painful. I am truly sorry that you should have had so much to bear.” He answered, “My own pain matters little. What matters now is your sister. She must not continue to think better of him than he deserves.”

He then told her that when he learned the truth from Eliza, and when Willoughby returned to London, he had met him by appointment. “I did not meet him to speak calmly,” Brandon said. “I met him as one man meets another when explanation is no longer enough.” Elinor understood at once. She asked, startled, “You fought him?” He answered, “Yes. We met, and we both returned unwounded. The affair never became public.” Elinor shuddered a little at the thought, but she was too full of pity and respect for him to blame him strongly. In his place, and with his history, anger had been almost unavoidable.

Colonel Brandon then returned to the purpose of his visit. “I have told you all this,” he said, “because your sister’s mind now works against herself. She tries to excuse him. She suffers more from that effort than she would suffer from a full belief in his unworthiness. If she knows what he has done, she may still grieve, but she will grieve more safely.” Elinor agreed at once. “Yes,” she said, “that is exactly the danger. She would still defend him if she could. But after this, though the first shock will be severe, I think she may begin at last to turn away from him.” Brandon answered, “Use your own judgment. You know her better than I do. But I could not remain silent while she suffered under a false image of him.”

Soon afterward he rose to go. Before leaving, he repeated that Eliza and her child were now in the country and under his protection. Then, remembering perhaps that he had spoken long and painfully in a house not his own, he apologized for having taken so much of Elinor’s time. She thanked him with a warmth she could not hide. Whatever sorrow his story had brought, it had also shown her the full steadiness, tenderness, and honor of his character. When he left, she felt more compassion and esteem for him than ever before. At the same time she also felt the new burden laid on herself. She now had a duty to Marianne that could not be delayed.

She found her sister alone and still deeply cast down. For a moment Elinor

almost hesitated. To speak was to inflict a fresh wound. Yet to remain silent was to allow Willoughby still to keep a false place in Marianne's heart. So she sat down beside her and said gently, "Marianne, I have something painful to tell you, but I believe you ought to hear it." Marianne looked at her with quiet sadness and answered, "If it concerns him, I can bear anything now." Elinor then began, as carefully as she could, and repeated Colonel Brandon's history from the beginning.

Marianne listened with the most serious attention. She did not interrupt. She did not try to dispute the truth. When Elinor described the first Eliza's unhappy marriage, Marianne wept. When she described the second Eliza's seduction and abandonment, Marianne wept more bitterly still. But she made no attempt to defend Willoughby. That was what struck Elinor most. She had feared argument, disbelief, even passionate resistance. Instead Marianne sat as if the strength to struggle had left her. The tears that fell from her eyes seemed to say more plainly than words that she knew the story could not be denied.

Yet the effect was not quite what Elinor had hoped. Marianne did not cry out, "I see him now as he is." She did not renounce him in anger or contempt. Her grief only changed its form. She seemed less eager to justify him, but not more able to free herself from loving him. The truth had entered her mind, yet her heart still clung painfully to the memory of what he had once appeared to be. Elinor understood then that conviction and cure were not the same thing. The story had shaken Marianne's faith in him, but it could not, in a single hour, undo all the tenderness, admiration, and hope that had grown there before the truth was known.

Part 17

After hearing Colonel Brandon's history, Marianne became quieter, but she did not become easier. Her sorrow no longer spent itself in the same wild defense of Willoughby, yet it still held her completely. She now suffered under two pains at once. She had lost him, and she had learned that he was not the man she had believed him to be. That second knowledge did not cure the first wound. It only made her grief heavier and more ashamed.

Elinor, seeing that complete confinement only fed this misery, begged her sister to go out with her one morning for a short walk. Marianne resisted at first, saying that she wished to see no one and that the streets of London had no charm for her. At last, after much persuasion, she consented to go with Elinor and Mrs. Jennings for half an hour. Even that small effort cost her much. She dressed without care, spoke little, and followed the others as if her body moved while her mind remained elsewhere.

They had hardly gone far before Marianne suddenly caught Elinor's arm. A carriage was passing them, and in it sat Willoughby. With him was a young woman, richly dressed and elegant in appearance, whose whole manner announced wealth and fashion. Elinor had only a moment to see them, yet it was enough. She saw Willoughby distinctly. He looked directly at Marianne, bowed, and then turned away. There was no attempt to stop, no sign of confusion strong enough to overcome caution, and no movement that could be mistaken for a wish to renew the meeting.

Marianne gave a slight cry and stood still for a moment as if all power had left her. She could not doubt now. What had seemed uncertain at the party, what had been made cruel in his letter, was here made public and final. The woman beside him must be Miss Grey. The bow he had given was the bow of a man who wished to acknowledge an acquaintance without reviving any claim upon his heart. That one motion, cold and formal in the open street, humiliated Marianne more deeply than many words could have done.

Elinor supported her as well as she could and got her home with all the speed that calmness allowed. Marianne scarcely spoke during the return. Once in the house, she gave way entirely. She threw herself into a chair and burst into tears, not with the sharp violence of fresh hope broken in a moment, but with the exhausted misery of one who has seen the last possibility disappear before her eyes. Elinor did not attempt much argument. She had learned that at such times tenderness was more useful than reason. She stayed beside her until the first force of the emotion had spent itself.

Some days later, when more than a week had passed since John Dashwood's

call in Berkeley Street, Elinor felt that a visit to Harley Street could no longer be delayed. She had no wish to go. Marianne strongly urged her not to go at all, and Mrs. Jennings disliked Fanny too much to encourage the visit, even out of curiosity. Yet civil obligation remained, and Elinor finally set out alone. She was prepared for coldness, silence, and the possibility of finding no one at home. In truth, she almost hoped for that last outcome.

Fanny Dashwood was said to be upstairs and invisible, but before the carriage could drive away, John himself came out of the house and insisted on Elinor's coming in. He received her with easy good humor and at once began speaking in a tone that mixed curiosity, calculation, and self-satisfaction. He had heard of Colonel Brandon's gift to Edward and wanted to know whether it was true. Elinor told him that the living of Delaford had indeed been given. John was astonished, but his astonishment was not generous. He immediately began to reckon what the presentation might have been sold for, what profit had been lost, and how surprising it was that Colonel Brandon should act so imprudently in a matter of money.

Elinor answered him as quietly as she could, though each word increased her dislike of his way of thinking. To him, even kindness required a financial explanation. Yet after finishing his arithmetic, he suddenly turned the matter to his own convenience and began praising Colonel Brandon's judgment and taste. "Now especially," he said, "there can be no objection at all to your sister's seeing more of us. Fanny and my mother were once a little prejudiced against Mrs. Jennings and her daughters, because they had heard that the money was made in trade. But now that I know them better, I can assure Fanny that all is perfectly respectable." This attempt to present condescension as generosity was almost laughable, but Elinor could only answer with the civility that the moment required.

On the very next day Fanny followed up this new wisdom by calling on Mrs. Jennings and her daughter. She found both far more tolerable than she had expected, and Lady Middleton, who was also there, pleased her even more. Lady Middleton, on her side, was just as ready to be pleased. There was in both women the same cold selfishness, the same narrow correctness, and the same want of real

warmth or understanding. Each therefore discovered in the other a most agreeable companion. Mrs. Jennings, however, was far from equally charmed. To her, Fanny appeared exactly what she was, a proud little woman with no cordial feeling and hardly a word to say to her husband's sisters.

Elinor wanted very much to know whether Edward was in town, but Fanny carefully avoided his name. She knew too well that Elinor and Edward had once been attached, and she had no wish to bring them even near each other in conversation. The information, however, came from a quarter that never failed to find its way into Elinor's most private concerns. Lucy Steele soon appeared to complain that Edward had arrived in London with Mr. and Mrs. Dashwood and yet could not safely come to Bartlett's Buildings, because discovery would be too dangerous. She spoke of their mutual impatience to meet as if she had a right to Elinor's pity, and Elinor, compelled once more to hear what she most wished never to hear again, had to endure the recital with outward calm.

Edward himself soon proved the truth of Lucy's account by calling twice in Berkeley Street. Twice his card was found on the table when the ladies returned from their morning engagements. Elinor was glad that he had come, because the act showed remembrance and some desire to see them. Yet she was even more glad that she had missed him. She had no strength for another meeting clouded by secrecy, uncertainty, and the presence of Lucy's claim behind every word. Absence was painful, but presence under such conditions would have been worse.

Meanwhile the Dashwoods, delighted with the Middletons and eager to appear attentive in the large house they had taken in Harley Street, determined to give a dinner. The Middletons were invited, as were Elinor, Marianne, and Mrs. Jennings. John Dashwood took care to include Colonel Brandon too, partly from civility and partly because he always liked a respectable man with property to sit at his table. Colonel Brandon, who was always glad to be where the Miss Dashwoods were, accepted with more pleasure than surprise. Thus another social obligation drew near, and with it the possibility of fresh discomforts. In London, Elinor had begun to find that sorrow rarely came alone. It was continually followed by visits, dinners, chance meetings, and all the empty forms of society that forced wounded

hearts to keep appearing in public as if nothing had happened.

Part 18

Elinor's first curiosity about Mrs. Ferrars had now been completely satisfied, and the result brought her no pleasure. She had seen enough of that lady's pride, narrowness, and prejudice to understand at last how difficult Edward's position must always have been. If he had been free to love where he wished, his mother alone would have made the path hard enough. As it was, Elinor could not help thinking that one great misfortune had at least saved her from many smaller ones. To live under Mrs. Ferrars's favor, to depend on her changing temper, and to seek her approval day after day would have been misery of its own.

Lucy Steele, however, saw matters very differently. The cold civility that Mrs. Ferrars had shown her at the Dashwoods' dinner seemed, in Lucy's eyes, almost a triumph. She forgot, or chose to forget, that the attention had been given only because her real connection with Edward was still unknown. The very next morning she came eagerly to Berkeley Street, hoping to find Elinor alone. Fortune served her well. Mrs. Jennings was quickly called away by a message from Mrs. Palmer, and Lucy at once began speaking with delighted confidence. "My dear friend," she cried, "I have come to talk of my happiness. Could anything be more flattering than Mrs. Ferrars's manner to me yesterday?"

Elinor listened because she had no choice, though every word cost her patience. Lucy went on praising Mrs. Ferrars's affability, her attention, and the marks of favor she believed she had received. To Elinor this self-deception seemed almost as unpleasant as Lucy's vanity itself. She could not admire the eagerness with which Lucy accepted a false preference and turned it into a personal victory. Yet she answered with calm civility, because she was too proud to let Lucy see how distasteful the whole conversation had become.

After this visit, matters remained quiet only a very short time. Then everything broke at once. The secret that had been hidden so long was suddenly discovered. It was not Lucy who betrayed it, nor Edward, but Anne Steele, whose foolish

tongue had at last done the harm that good sense had never restrained. In some careless moment she let enough fall before Fanny Dashwood to awaken suspicion, and from suspicion the truth was quickly reached. Fanny, shocked less by the engagement itself than by the insult to her family pride, lost no time in carrying the news to her mother.

Mrs. Ferrars received it exactly as Elinor had long imagined she would. Her anger was violent, her language harsh, and her determination immediate. Edward was sent for to Harley Street. He came, and there, before his mother, his sister, and his brother-in-law, he was called upon to deny the engagement or break it at once. Had he chosen ease, fortune, and family favor, this was the moment in which to save them. But he did not do so. He admitted everything and declared, with a steadiness that surprised even those who opposed him, that he loved Lucy and would remain faithful to her.

The consequences followed immediately. Mrs. Ferrars, in her rage, stripped him of all expectation and transferred to Robert the advantages that had once belonged to the elder son. Fanny and John supported her in this with as much zeal as if Edward had committed some great crime against justice instead of simply choosing for himself. To them the loss of fortune was the real disgrace, and Lucy's want of money and connection the real offence. Edward's constancy made no appeal to their hearts, because pride and interest were stronger in them than affection. He left the house without reconciliation, and from that hour he was treated almost as if he had ceased to be a member of the family.

Lucy did not bring this first news to Elinor herself. The account came in a broken and foolish way through Anne Steele, who was full of indignation at the rumors that Edward had meant to give Lucy up. "It is no such thing," she declared with triumph. She repeated all she had heard, with no sense of what should or should not be said aloud. Edward, she told them, had been sent for on Wednesday, had been pressed and argued with by them all, and had still answered that he loved nobody but Lucy and would have nobody but Lucy. Afterwards, so disturbed by the whole scene that he could not bear to remain near them, he had ridden off into the country and stayed at an inn for two days to recover himself.

Anne, who heard much and understood little, gave another part of the story too. When Edward at last returned to Lucy, poor, disinherited, and with only a small sum of his own, he did not try to bind her more closely by appealing to her pity. On the contrary, he urged her to think herself free. He told her that with only two thousand pounds, and perhaps nothing better in prospect than a curacy if he entered the church, it would be unkind to keep her to an engagement that could now offer her so little. “If you wish it,” he had said in substance, “let it end now, and leave me to manage for myself.” Even Anne, in all her chatter, made this plain enough. It was not selfish fear in Edward, but generosity and honor.

Lucy, however, refused to release him. Whether she was moved by attachment, pride, or calculation, Elinor did not try to decide. Lucy remained firm, at least outwardly, and allowed Anne to present the whole matter as a proof of her own constancy and Edward’s devotion. There was triumph in this even through the distress. The engagement, once secret and uncertain, had now been publicly tested, and Edward had stood by it against his mother’s power and his family’s pressure. Elinor heard that fact with a feeling that was half pain and half admiration. If his choice wounded her, the spirit in which he made it compelled her respect.

Yet the respect brought no comfort. Edward had done nothing to lower himself in her esteem, but he had also placed himself farther beyond her reach than ever. Before this, there had at least been obscurity, silence, and room for conjecture. Now all was plain. He belonged, by his own word and act, to another woman. He had chosen that bond even at the cost of fortune, comfort, and family peace. Elinor could no longer hope against uncertainty, because uncertainty itself was gone. The nobleness of his conduct only made her sorrow cleaner and more hopeless.

Marianne, when she heard the story, responded to it differently. Her own wound from Willoughby was still too fresh for her to think much about prudence or family ambition. What she saw first was Edward’s fidelity. “He has done right,” she said warmly. “At least he has not betrayed the woman who trusted him.” This judgment, severe toward Willoughby and generous toward Edward, was natural enough in her state. Elinor did not answer much. She was grateful for the justice done to Edward’s character, but every praise of his constancy seemed also a

reminder that constancy had not been given to her.

Mrs. Jennings, when the story reached her, was angry in the loudest and kindest manner. She abused Mrs. Ferrars, pitied Edward, and admired him all in the same breath. She declared that any mother who could cast off a son for such a cause had no feelings at all, and that Lucy, whatever else she might be, had at least gained a man who knew how to keep his word. There was real goodness in these rough judgments, and Elinor, though often tired by Mrs. Jennings, could not help being touched by her honest warmth. John Dashwood, on the other hand, was solemn, pompous, and absurd. He spoke of family suffering, his mother's sensibility, and Fanny's agitation as if the chief tragedy lay there. In his mouth even Edward's ruin was turned into a lecture on submission and proper behavior.

This difference in the conduct of others only threw Edward's own behavior into clearer light. He had not flattered his mother. He had not hidden behind silence. He had not tried to save his fortune by sacrificing Lucy while keeping the appearance of honor. Whatever weakness had marked his earlier conduct, there was no weakness in this. When the choice came, he took the painful side and stood to it. Elinor felt that truth strongly, and because she felt it strongly, she was more miserable than before. It is easier to turn from a man one despises than from one one must still esteem.

So the whole affair settled itself into a form more certain, though not more bearable. Mrs. Ferrars remained furious. Fanny remained offended. Lucy remained secure in her triumph. Edward remained poor, disinherited, and bound by his own promise. And Elinor remained what she had been through so much of her life already: silent under a blow that no one around her fully understood. If Marianne's grief had been louder, Elinor's was now in some ways deeper, because it had to live not only with loss, but with continued esteem.

By the end of these events, one thing at least was fixed beyond question. Whatever might be thought of Edward's first imprudence, no one could honestly accuse him of selfish desertion. He had chosen duty as he understood it, and he had paid for that choice with every worldly advantage his family could take away. Elinor, in her secret heart, could not help honoring him more for that very sacrifice.

But honor was a poor substitute for happiness, and when this stage of the story closed, she found herself looking forward into a future in which Edward was both more worthy and more lost than he had ever been before.

Part 19

After the violence of Mrs. Ferrars's anger and the complete ruin of Edward's worldly hopes, there remained for Elinor only a clearer view of his character and a deeper pain in loving it. He had chosen the hard side without hesitation. He had not defended himself by excuses, nor tried to save fortune by dishonor. If his first engagement had been imprudent, his conduct in holding to it was not weak, but right. This conviction brought Elinor no happiness, yet it gave a sort of stern peace to her judgment. She could no longer doubt him, and because she could no longer doubt him, she suffered more quietly and more hopelessly than before.

Marianne, in her own grief, now did more justice to Edward than she had ever done while she still believed him free. The contrast with Willoughby forced itself upon her at every step. Edward had not deceived. Edward had not denied. Edward had not used tenderness when it suited him and cold formality when it did not. He had remained true to a promise made long ago, even when that truth cost him fortune, favor, and comfort. Marianne could not think of such conduct without warmth. "At least," she said one day, "he has done what is honorable. He has not made the woman miserable who trusted him." Elinor heard those words with gratitude, though they touched her painfully too.

Their stay in London had now lost almost every attraction it might once have had. Marianne had no longer the restless expectation that had first carried her there, and Elinor had no wish to remain near people whose conduct and pride had only deepened her wounds. Mrs. Jennings continued kind in her noisy, useful way, but even her kindness could not make London desirable any longer. The sisters therefore soon returned to Barton, and the journey back, though quieter than the first, was not more cheerful. The glitter of the city was gone from Marianne's eyes, and Elinor came home with a heart more settled in sorrow than it had been when

she left.

Mrs. Dashwood received them with all the tenderness that their altered looks required. Marianne's grief moved her deeply, but Elinor's history, when she came fully to understand it, affected her no less. She had believed Edward destined for her eldest daughter. To lose him was bad enough. To lose him and yet be compelled still to esteem him was harder. Mrs. Dashwood, who loved with warmth and judged with hope, could hardly know whether to pity Elinor more for the disappointment or to love Edward more for deserving pity. She exclaimed more than once that if he had behaved selfishly she could have hated him, and hating him would have made everything easier.

Life at Barton resumed its ordinary forms, but not its former ease. Marianne was calmer than in London, yet only because her sorrow had sunk deeper into her. She no longer abandoned herself in the same violent manner, but she still loved solitude, still sought old music, still lingered over books and scenes that fed remembrance. At times shame now mingled with grief. She had not only lost happiness. She had been deceived, and deceived in the very point where she had once thought herself most incapable of error. This reflection, though painful, was not without use. It made her more silent, more thoughtful, and in some moments more willing to hear what she had once rejected.

Elinor, for her own part, had now less illusion than Marianne, but not less feeling. She knew exactly what Edward had done. She knew also that he was poor, disinherited, and still bound to Lucy. There was no room left for hope unless his principles changed, and that was the one thing Elinor could neither wish nor expect. She sometimes tried to think of his future as one from which she must wholly remove herself, but the effort never lasted long. Affection formed slowly may survive more steadily than a sudden passion, and hers, though quiet, had roots too deep to be torn out in a day.

Among all their acquaintance, Colonel Brandon remained the only man whose company brought Elinor any real comfort. Others were kind, or lively, or useful, but none united sense, feeling, and discretion as he did. He could converse without effort, listen without vanity, and pity without impertinence. Since Willoughby's

fall, Elinor's esteem for him had grown steadily, and Marianne's coldness to him, though still not entirely overcome, had become less open than before. His attachment to her sister was now too plain to be doubted, and because it was plain and hopeless, it touched Elinor more strongly than ever.

One evening at Barton Park, when the younger people were dancing and the others were scattered about the room, Elinor happened to be seated near Colonel Brandon. Marianne was at the pianoforte for a time and then stood apart, grave and thoughtful, while the rest of the company amused themselves as they could. Colonel Brandon's eyes rested on her for some moments in silence. At last, with a faint smile that had more sadness than playfulness in it, he said, "Your sister, I understand, does not approve of second attachments." Elinor answered, "No. Her opinions are all romantic." He replied, "Or rather, I believe, she thinks them impossible."

Elinor, who now saw more clearly than once she had done the danger in such rigid feelings, spoke more seriously than Marianne herself would once have liked. She said that a few years and a better knowledge of the world would probably change those opinions, and that such change, far from being a loss, might prove Marianne's greatest advantage. Colonel Brandon listened and then answered in a tone that showed he felt more than he wished to express. "Perhaps it will be so," he said. "And yet there is something so amiable in the prejudices of a young mind, that one is sorry to see them give way to more general opinions." Elinor replied that there were inconveniences attending Marianne's ideas which enthusiasm could not make harmless, and that her sister's way of feeling had too often led her to set propriety at nothing.

After a short pause he resumed the subject in a still graver manner. "Does your sister make no distinction," he asked, "in her objections against a second attachment? Is it equally wrong in every case? Are those who have been disappointed in a first choice, whether by the inconstancy of the object or by unhappy circumstances, to remain indifferent for the rest of their lives?" Elinor answered that she did not know all the exact limits of Marianne's theory, but that she had never yet heard her admit any case in which a second attachment seemed

pardonable. Colonel Brandon said quietly, “That cannot hold. But perhaps one ought not even to desire a total change of sentiment. When the romantic delicacy of a young mind gives way, it is too often succeeded by opinions that are both common and dangerous.”

Then, as if he had been led farther than he meant to go, he added a few words that spoke very plainly of his own experience. He said that he had once known a woman who resembled Marianne much in mind and temper, a woman whose opinions and feelings had once been like hers, but who had been forced by unhappy circumstances into a great change. There he stopped abruptly. His countenance showed at once that memory had carried him to painful ground. Elinor needed no further explanation to understand that he spoke from the remains of an old and very serious attachment. She made no attempt to press him. Had Marianne been in her place, imagination would at once have formed a whole history. Elinor, more restrained, was content to feel increased compassion without demanding confession.

This conversation remained strongly in her thoughts afterward. It seemed to gather into one point all that she had already half known of Colonel Brandon: his steadiness, his depth of feeling, his power of suffering without display, and the tenderness with which he still regarded Marianne, though she had never rewarded him with more than civility. Compared with the selfish brightness that had once dazzled them all in Willoughby, Brandon’s character now stood in a still clearer light. He had no wish to shine. He wished only to feel rightly and to act rightly, and if this made him less striking at first, it made him infinitely more worthy at last.

Marianne, though not present at that particular conversation, was herself beginning, slowly and unwillingly, to feel something of the same truth. She could not yet think of Colonel Brandon as a lover for herself. That was still far from her imagination. But she no longer laughed at his age, his gravity, or his tenderness. She had suffered too much from false brilliance to despise quiet worth so lightly as before. When he showed her attention now, she did not turn from it with impatience. She received it with gratitude, though gratitude was all she could yet

honestly give.

In this way, without any outward event of great noise or speed, the position of all three became gradually more fixed. Edward remained honorable and lost. Elinor remained constant and silent. Colonel Brandon remained devoted and without hope. The heart may suffer as truly under calm conditions as under violent ones, and at Barton there was now less outward storm than before, but not less inward trial. What had once been romance in Marianne, expectation in Mrs. Dashwood, and modest hope in Elinor had all been chastened by experience. The lessons were not yet complete, but they had begun.

For Elinor especially, this stage of life required a very particular strength. She had to love Edward and renounce him, pity Marianne and guide her, esteem Colonel Brandon and yet know that Marianne could not return his feeling. She performed all this without display, because display belonged neither to her habit nor her pride. But the silence itself was labor. Every day demanded self-command, and every letter, every call, every accidental mention of the Ferrars family renewed the effort. If she bore it well, it was not because she felt little, but because feeling in her had always been ruled by principle.

Thus the weeks passed without any visible change in fortune, but not without change in mind. Marianne’s sorrow was no longer pure self-abandonment. Elinor’s affection was no longer fed by uncertainty. Colonel Brandon’s regard was no longer half hidden under reserve. The world around them remained much the same, but each of them had been altered by disappointment. And in that quiet alteration, more serious than any sudden scene, the story moved forward toward its next turning.

Part 20

The Miss Dashwoods had by this time been in London for more than two months, and Marianne’s impatience to leave it grew stronger every day. She longed for fresh air, quiet fields, and the freedom of the country. In her imagination, Barton alone could give her ease. Elinor was scarcely less desirous

of departure, though she judged the matter more steadily and knew that Marianne was still too weak to think lightly of so long a journey. While she was still considering how their return might best be managed, a plan was proposed which, though it delayed Barton a little longer, seemed safer and more comfortable than any hurried journey straight home. The Palmers were going to Cleveland for the Easter holidays, and Mrs. Jennings warmly pressed Elinor and Marianne to go with them. Mr. Palmer himself seconded the invitation with such real civility that Elinor accepted it with gratitude.

Marianne at first resisted strongly. “Cleveland!” she cried. “No, I cannot go there.” Her objection was simple and painful. Cleveland lay in Somersetshire, and Somersetshire was connected in her mind with hopes she had once cherished too warmly. Elinor did not argue against the feeling itself. Instead, she turned her sister’s thoughts toward their mother and showed that from Cleveland the journey to Barton would be shorter and easier, and that by yielding now Marianne might see Mrs. Dashwood sooner and in better health than by insisting on an immediate direct removal. Marianne’s affection for her mother at last overcame the fancy that had first opposed the scheme, and she submitted. Mrs. Dashwood’s approval was easily obtained, and once the arrangement was settled Marianne even found a kind of comfort in counting the days that still stood between her and Barton.

Mrs. Jennings, far from being tired of their company, begged them to return with her to Berkeley Street again after Cleveland, but Elinor was fixed in another plan and would not be moved. It was soon known, therefore, that the sisters would leave London in due time and not return. This news had different effects on those around them. Mrs. Jennings was sorry in a noisy, affectionate way. Marianne thought almost entirely of Barton. Elinor, though eager to go, could not help seeing that their departure would close one painful chapter of her life without yet opening a happier one. Edward was still bound to Lucy, and London had given her little except clearer disappointment.

When Colonel Brandon heard that the sisters were soon to leave Mrs. Jennings, she immediately began lamenting the dullness that would remain behind. “Colonel,” she said in her cheerful, meddling way, “what are you and I to do when

the Miss Dashwoods are gone? We shall sit and stare at one another like two poor old cats." Her words were not spoken without purpose. She still believed him a lover where he was not speaking, and she liked to think that by painting loneliness strongly enough she might provoke some decisive declaration. Elinor, meanwhile, had gone to the window to look more closely at a print she meant to copy. Colonel Brandon followed her there and, after some moments of quiet conversation, said something that changed the whole color of the day. Mrs. Jennings, who was pretending not to listen and yet hearing what she could, caught only fragments and immediately misread them as the language of courtship.

What Colonel Brandon actually said had nothing to do with himself. He had heard of the injustice Edward Ferrars had suffered from his family. He had seen enough of Edward to respect his character, and because Edward was also Elinor's friend, he wished still more warmly to serve him if he could. That very day's post had brought him news that the living of Delaford was vacant. He therefore asked Elinor whether she would tell Edward that the rectory was his, if he thought it worth accepting. It was not large, perhaps only two hundred a year, and Colonel Brandon frankly regretted that it could not do more. Yet he offered it with full kindness and with the evident wish that it might at least begin to secure Edward's future.

Elinor's astonishment was so strong that, for a moment, she could hardly answer him. Only two days earlier such help for Edward had seemed impossible. Now the means of making him independent enough for ordination, duty, and eventual marriage were suddenly placed within reach. She thanked Colonel Brandon with all the warmth she felt. Whatever private pain still lay in the thought of Edward's future, gratitude for such friendship overcame everything else. She praised Edward's principles and character as they deserved, and promised to deliver the offer if Colonel Brandon truly wished it to come through her. Inwardly, however, she would gladly have been spared the task, for she did not want Edward to feel the obligation as one received from her. But Brandon, from a delicacy equal to her own, preferred not to announce it himself.

Mrs. Jennings, of course, understood none of this. She saw agitation, low

voices, mention of a house, and one sentence in Colonel Brandon's grave tone about something that could not happen very soon. From such fragments she built an entire marriage. When he had gone, she turned to Elinor smiling wisely and said, "My dear, I do not ask what the Colonel has been saying. I heard enough to know his business, and I wish you joy with all my heart." Elinor thanked her, speaking sincerely of Colonel Brandon's goodness, and Mrs. Jennings only took the thanks as further proof that all was settled. Every explanation Elinor attempted merely pushed her deeper into mistake. When Elinor said she must write to Mr. Ferrars immediately, Mrs. Jennings instantly concluded that Edward was to be ordained in order to marry Elinor, and that Brandon had generously resigned his own hopes in favor of his rival.

As soon as she was alone, Elinor sat down to write to Edward. Yet what should have been simple became difficult at once. Between any other two people, a note offering such good news would have written itself. Between Edward and Elinor, every word had to pass through old affection, present restraint, and knowledge that they now stood on opposite sides of an unalterable promise. She feared to say too much, feared to say too little, and remained for some minutes with the pen in her hand, unable to begin. Then, before a line was written, the difficulty changed its form altogether. Edward himself was shown into the room. Mrs. Jennings had met him at the door and, on learning that Elinor wished to speak with him on important business, had forced him to enter.

The meeting embarrassed them both deeply. Elinor had not seen him since his engagement had become fully known to her and to the world. Edward too was plainly distressed. After a few moments of awkward civility, he apologized for coming in so suddenly and said that he had meant only to leave a farewell card before going to Oxford the next day. Elinor, determined to get through the painful duty at once, gathered herself and told him that she had a most agreeable commission from Colonel Brandon. She then explained clearly that the living of Delaford, now vacant, was offered to him, and that Brandon wished him to accept it if he thought proper. She even tried, though with difficulty, to add that she hoped the income might one day contribute not merely to his comfort as a clergyman,

but to the establishment of all his views of happiness.

Edward's astonishment was complete. He could hardly believe what he heard. "Colonel Brandon!" he repeated, as if the name itself were incredible in such a connection. Elinor then spoke more warmly of Brandon's motive. She said that his concern for Edward's unjust situation, and his esteem for his conduct, had prompted the gift. Edward, touched to the heart, answered with sudden feeling that he could not be ignorant to whom, in part at least, he owed this kindness. Elinor denied that she had solicited anything, and did so honestly, though she could not wholly deny that Brandon's friendship for her family had given him particular pleasure in helping Edward. Edward then spoke of Brandon with serious respect and of the gift as making him "an exceedingly happy man." Yet even in that gratitude there was something heavy and subdued, because the happiness now made possible was not one Elinor could share.

Elinor went on to describe Delaford as well as she could. The parsonage, she said, was near the mansion-house, and the parish, land, and income were all such as might suit a small beginning. Edward listened, but when she mentioned the closeness of the two houses, his look was so earnest and troubled that it seemed almost to say he might one day wish a greater distance between them. Still, his gratitude to Colonel Brandon was unfeigned. Rising at last, he said he must go immediately to thank him in person. He and Elinor then parted with all the kindness possible between two people who could not speak freely. When the door closed behind him, Elinor said sadly to herself that the next time she saw him, she would probably see him as Lucy's husband.

Mrs. Jennings returned home full of curiosity and triumph. She had been visiting strangers and had a hundred little things to say, but the secret she imagined herself to possess was much stronger than any common town news. The moment Elinor appeared, she began again. "Well, my dear," she cried, "I sent the young man up to you. Did I not do right? I suppose he was not very unwilling to accept your proposal?" Elinor, who had neither the heart nor the patience to clear the whole misunderstanding, answered only where she must. When she mentioned that ordination might still take two or three months, Mrs. Jennings was almost

offended by such delay and declared that Colonel Brandon should not be kept waiting so long if anyone else could be found to do as well. Elinor could not help smiling faintly even in the midst of her own pain, for the good woman's confusion, though absurd, was entirely kind.

Thus the affair ended for the moment. To Mrs. Jennings it looked like a marriage. To Colonel Brandon it was only an act of friendship. To Edward it was rescue from complete dependence. To Elinor it was all these things and one more besides: another proof that the man she loved might now be helped toward a future from which she herself must remain excluded. Yet she was sincerely glad. She could not have wished Edward poor in order to make his separation from her easier. If she had lost him, she at least wanted him secure, respected, and able to live with independence. The living of Delaford, small as it was, gave him that beginning. And so, with gratitude and sorrow mixed more closely than ever, the story moved toward its next change.

Part 21

When the time came for leaving London, the change seemed welcome to both sisters, though for very different reasons. Elinor wished chiefly for quiet, country air, and distance from scenes that had given more pain than pleasure. Marianne wished for Barton, her mother, and the hope that in returning to an earlier and simpler life she might at last escape from the daily weariness of memory. Cleveland was only a stage on the journey, but it promised rest, and Mrs. Palmer's invitation had been accepted because it offered a gentler road home than an immediate direct departure from town. Mrs. Jennings, who had now grown truly attached to the sisters, helped all the arrangements with real care and insisted on their comfort at every point.

Marianne still did not go willingly in the first moment. The thought of being in Somersetshire, and therefore nearer to places connected in her mind with Willoughby, had first troubled her strongly. But once she had agreed, she submitted with more calm than Elinor had expected. She was tired of London.

Even grief had become dull in the city, because it was always forced to live among visits, dinners, and empty forms. The road westward, though it did not make her happy, at least allowed her once more to breathe. Elinor saw this with gratitude and hoped that a few quiet days at Cleveland might strengthen both Marianne's body and her mind before they returned to Barton.

Cleveland itself proved to be a pleasant and comfortable house, well placed in a rich part of the country. The grounds were handsome, the rooms warm, and the neighborhood open enough to give both exercise and varied views. Mrs. Palmer, with her usual careless good humor, laughed, talked, and welcomed them as if nothing in life could ever be serious. Mr. Palmer was at times absent with business connected to the election, and at times at home with all his ordinary dryness. Yet even his dryness was easier to bear in the country than in London, and the whole house, on first entering it, seemed likely to offer quiet and recovery rather than fresh trial.

But Marianne could not arrive anywhere without feeling the full influence of place. As soon as she learned more exactly where they were and how near certain roads and estates lay to Cleveland, her imagination fixed itself again on old associations. She was not foolish enough now to speak Willoughby's name readily, nor had she the strength for violent display. But Elinor saw clearly that every lane, hill, and distant wood was being measured in her mind against memories she wished and yet did not wish to keep alive. That double movement, of clinging and shrinking at once, gave to all her behavior an uneasy restlessness.

Still, for a short time, her spirits seemed somewhat easier. The country suited her better than London had done. She walked when the weather allowed it, sat sometimes with a book in the open air, and looked less worn than before. Elinor, always ready to take hope from small improvements, believed that return to Devonshire would complete the cure which quiet had begun. Mrs. Jennings, who had accompanied them thus far, spoke cheerfully of their speedy recovery and of surprising Mrs. Dashwood by appearing sooner than expected. All seemed to move, if not toward happiness, at least toward relief.

Yet the improvement was not secure. Marianne's strength had been too much

broken by many weeks of agitation, sleeplessness, and want of food to bear even small imprudences safely. One day, when the weather was uncertain and the air damp, she insisted on going farther than Elinor judged wise. She had always been careless of cold, rain, and fatigue when feeling led her onward, and she would not now allow the body its proper limits. Elinor urged caution. Marianne smiled faintly and answered, “A little rain cannot hurt me.” In another state of health it might not have done so. In her present weakness it was dangerous.

The walk proved longer and wetter than expected. By the time they returned, Marianne was chilled through, her shoes wet, and her whole frame shaken. Elinor immediately saw the consequence that might follow. She begged her sister to change her clothes, take warmth, and rest. Marianne obeyed, but with her usual indifference to anything concerning her own body. That evening she complained only of tiredness and some heaviness in the head. Mrs. Jennings called it a cold, and everyone hoped it would pass in a night. The next morning, however, the complaint had increased. Marianne looked feverish, was languid, and had lost what little appetite she had possessed before.

Mr. Harris, the apothecary, was sent for. He did not at first speak with great alarm. He advised care, quiet, and some simple remedies, and Elinor, always grateful for the smallest encouragement, believed they had nothing worse before them than a short illness and a little delay. Mrs. Palmer, who had lately become a mother and now thought every illness in the house an attack upon all domestic peace, was more frightened. Yet because Mr. Harris did not at first confirm her worst fears, she remained, anxious but not desperate. Colonel Brandon, who was much at Cleveland at this time, came every day and watched Marianne’s condition with a concern that tried to remain calm and could not.

Two days passed in this uneasy way. Marianne was not violently ill, but she was certainly not recovering. She lay most of the time in low spirits and physical weakness, sometimes sleeping, sometimes talking only of the journey home that had been planned and was now delayed. That delay itself made the illness seem worse to her, because it kept her from Barton and from her mother. “We should have begun our journey tomorrow,” she said once with deep sadness. “Mama

would have seen us so soon." Elinor tried to answer cheerfully, telling her it might still be only a short postponement. Inwardly, however, she had begun to fear that the illness was taking a more serious hold.

At length Mrs. Palmer's alarm for her child overcame every other consideration. Mr. Harris, though not yet declaring Marianne in immediate danger, advised caution. This was enough for Charlotte. She insisted on leaving Cleveland with her baby and going to a relation's house near Bath, where she would feel safer. Mr. Palmer, who had more humanity than his manner often showed, was unwilling to go while Marianne remained so uncertain, but Mrs. Jennings strongly urged him to attend his wife, and Colonel Brandon supported the advice. Thus the Palmers prepared to leave, and the house, which had lately seemed full and noisy, began to grow quiet and anxious instead. Mrs. Jennings, in a kindness that Elinor never forgot, refused absolutely to leave while Marianne remained ill and said she would stay and do everything in her power to take a mother's place.

Colonel Brandon also offered his help in every practical way. It was first suggested that he too should go on with Mr. Palmer, but Mrs. Jennings opposed that plan at once. She said openly that she needed him at Cleveland, that Miss Dashwood could not be left without a gentleman near at hand in case of any emergency, and that he must remain. Brandon, whose heart needed no persuasion to keep him there, gave up even the appearance of resistance. To Elinor, this quiet readiness, shown without display and without claim, was more touching than any louder expression of feeling could have been.

For a short time after the Palmers left, Marianne's condition seemed nearly the same. Mr. Harris still spoke of recovery with confidence enough to support hope, and Elinor clung to that hope as long as she could. On the morning of the third day, indeed, he declared her materially better. Her pulse was stronger, and he thought the worst danger passing away. Elinor's spirits rose at once. She was almost happy enough to blame herself for having felt fear so strongly the night before. She wrote to Mrs. Dashwood in a tone purposely light, making as little as possible of the illness and speaking of delay rather than danger. Mrs. Jennings too became more cheerful and began once more to talk of homecoming plans.

But the improvement did not last. Toward evening Marianne grew heavier, more restless, and more uncomfortable than before. Elinor still tried to explain it away. She thought perhaps the effort of sitting up while the bed was made had tired her. She gave the cordials prescribed, watched by her side, and was glad when at last Marianne sank into sleep. Yet the sleep was not the quiet rest she had hoped to see. It became more and more disturbed. Marianne changed her posture constantly, murmured broken complaints, and seemed pursued rather than soothed by whatever dreams or feverish thoughts had taken hold of her.

Then, suddenly awakened by a noise in the house, Marianne started up with wild confusion in her face and cried, “Is Mama coming?” Elinor answered quickly, trying to keep terror out of her voice, “Not yet, my dear, but I hope she will be here before long.” Marianne continued speaking rapidly and incoherently, insisting that her mother must not go by London or she would never arrive in time. At that moment Elinor felt her pulse and found it lower and quicker than ever. The truth could no longer be resisted. Marianne was wandering. What had been illness was becoming fever, and what had been anxiety was becoming real danger.

There was no time now for hesitation. Elinor rang at once for the maid, sent immediately for Mr. Harris, and then, thinking only of the quickest and safest way to bring her mother from Barton, hurried downstairs to find Colonel Brandon. It was late, but she knew he was often in the drawing room at that hour. She entered with all reserve forgotten and told him in a few broken words that Marianne was worse, that Mrs. Dashwood must be fetched instantly, and that she did not know how to send so urgent a message with the necessary speed. Brandon did not answer with useless consolation. He simply listened, understood, and offered himself at once as the messenger. His readiness seemed almost to show that such a service had always lived ready in his mind, waiting only for the moment when it might be needed.

Elinor accepted the offer with gratitude deeper than speech could easily express. Within a very short time Colonel Brandon was prepared to set out through the night for Barton, carrying with him not only the message of danger, but the whole weight of a mother’s coming anguish. Elinor returned upstairs to

Marianne’s room with a heart full of dread and dependence. The house was now still except for the sounds of sickness. Mrs. Jennings remained ready to help. Mr. Harris had been summoned. Colonel Brandon was on the road. And Elinor, left beside her wandering sister, could do nothing more but watch, wait, and pray that her mother would arrive before the worst event of all.

Part 22

After Colonel Brandon had set out through the night for Barton, the long hours that followed were among the hardest Elinor had ever known. Marianne’s fever rose and fell in restless turns, and every change in her breathing seemed enough to stop Elinor’s own. Mr. Harris came and went with increasing seriousness, while Mrs. Jennings, though frightened, remained firmly kind and useful. In such a night there was little comfort except action, and when action failed, there was nothing left but endurance.

Toward morning the violence of the fever seemed to lessen a little. Marianne slept, though not deeply, and when she woke again she was less wandering than before. By afternoon the signs of danger had grown fainter still. Mr. Harris was more hopeful. Elinor, who had not dared to hope except in moments, now at last allowed herself some quiet belief that her sister might recover. Even then she could not be easy, because a relapse was always possible. Yet by six o’clock, when Marianne sank into a more natural and steady sleep, Elinor felt something like happiness for the first time in many days.

That happiness turned at once toward those who were still on the road. Her mother, she thought, must now be travelling in dreadful suspense, uncertain whether she went to see a living child or to hear only the last account of one. Colonel Brandon too, who had ridden for them through the storm with such silent readiness, became in Elinor’s thoughts an object of compassion scarcely less than Mrs. Dashwood. If Marianne were indeed recovering, what joy was waiting for both of them when they arrived. The thought supported Elinor through fatigue, hunger, and the heavy silence of the evening.

After tea, Mrs. Jennings begged her to take some rest, but rest was impossible. Elinor went back to Marianne's room, saw her sister still sleeping quietly, and remained beside her as long as she could. The night outside was cold and stormy. Wind beat against the house, and rain struck the windows in sudden bursts. Yet because her heart was lighter within, the violence of the weather scarcely touched her. She thought only of the carriage that must soon arrive, of the relief it would bring, and of the happiness of saying, "She is better. She is safe."

When the clock struck eight, she suddenly felt almost certain that she heard wheels below. It was too early to be likely, and yet the conviction grew so strong that she opened the shutter and looked out. Lamps shone through the darkness, and a carriage was indeed drawing up before the house. Its speed and the four horses seemed only further proof of her mother's alarm and haste. Elinor's heart beat so violently that for a moment she could hardly move. Then, remembering that what was needed now was swiftness, not emotion, she left Marianne in the maid's care and hurried downstairs.

She entered the drawing room expecting to see Mrs. Dashwood. Instead she saw only Willoughby.

The shock was so great that for some seconds neither of them spoke. Willoughby rose immediately, and his whole appearance showed agitation, shame, and an effort at self-command. Elinor's first feeling was not fear, but indignation. That he should present himself there, and at such an hour, while Marianne lay upstairs between life and death, seemed almost intolerable. Before he could begin, she said coldly, "What do you want here?"

He answered with visible distress, "I know your sister is out of danger, or I would not have dared to come. I learned it from the servant. Do not fear that I mean to disturb her. I came only to hear one word of her safety from yourself and, if possible, to speak to you. I have no right to ask it, but I could not leave this part of the country without trying." Elinor did not soften at once. She replied that after what he had done, it was difficult to understand what good such a visit could bring. He bowed his head and said, "None to your sister. Perhaps none even to me. But my own conscience drove me here."

There was in his manner enough of real suffering to force attention, if not immediate pity. Elinor, though still severe, could not refuse to hear him. She told him briefly that Marianne was better and then remained standing, as if to show that the interview would be short unless he justified its continuance. Willoughby, after a pause, said in a voice full of bitterness against himself, “I do not ask you to excuse me. I only ask you to understand me as far as understanding is possible. The man who has injured your sister as I have done deserves no defence. Yet I loved her. Upon my honour, I loved her.”

Elinor heard these words with anger still strong in her heart. “If you loved her,” she said, “your conduct becomes still less pardonable.” He answered quickly, “I know it. That is the misery of it. Had I been only cold or calculating from the first, I should be a simpler villain. But I was not. I admired her first, then loved her with all the warmth of my nature. She was everything that could delight me. Her mind, her spirit, her affection, the very openness with which she trusted me, all bound me more closely every day. Had I remained one week longer in Devonshire, I should have proposed to her, and I should at that moment have believed myself the happiest man alive.”

He then told the story of his sudden recall to Allenham. Mrs. Smith had just learned the truth of his conduct toward Colonel Brandon’s young relation, Eliza. Her anger was immediate and complete. She demanded explanation, then submission, and when neither could repair the offence in her eyes, she threatened to cast him off forever. “I left Barton,” he said, “meaning still to return, meaning still to be constant to Marianne if I could. But when I found what I stood to lose, when I remembered my own debts, my habits, the expenses in which I had long lived, I failed. I had not greatness enough to choose honorable poverty with the woman I loved, when fortune and comfort were held out elsewhere.” In those words there was no excuse, only confession.

Elinor asked him whether he had truly intended marriage with Marianne before that discovery. He answered with painful earnestness that he had. “When I went to Allenham that morning after leaving the cottage,” he said, “I was delighted with myself and with everything around me. A few hours more, and I should have been

bound to her forever. Instead of that came ruin, disgrace, and the necessity of choosing what sort of man I really was. I chose badly." He spoke then of his last visit to Barton, of Marianne's trust, of Mrs. Dashwood's kindness, and of the shame with which he had stood among people who believed him honorable while he was already preparing to be false. Elinor could not but see that the recollection tormented him.

From there he turned to London and to Miss Grey. He did not pretend affection where none existed. He admitted plainly that he had sought her because she was rich, because her fortune could free him from difficulty, and because once committed to that pursuit he had lacked the courage to break from it even when Marianne's letters reached him. "That infamous letter," he said with sudden passion, "I know what it was. I know there is no baseness in the world more cowardly than what I did then. But by that time I had gone too far. I had chosen my road, and instead of turning back like a man, I continued in it like a fool and a rascal." His marriage, he added, had not brought him happiness. Miss Grey had money, beauty, and fashion, but not the temper or heart that could make a home dear. "I am not happy," he said simply. "I do not deserve to be."

What he seemed most to want from Elinor was not forgiveness, but justice of a particular kind. He begged her to believe, and if possible one day to let Marianne know, that her love had once been fully returned. "Do not let her think," he said, "that I was always merely playing with her. Tell her that I loved her beyond anything in the world, beyond every selfish plan that should have ruled me, though not strongly enough to save her from my weakness. Tell her that if I had stayed one week longer at Barton, our engagement would have been complete. I ask no pardon from her. I have no right to that. But if she could know that she was sincerely beloved, it might perhaps take from her one part of the humiliation I have caused."

Elinor could not promise all that he wished. She said honestly that Marianne had suffered too much through him to make such a communication easy or necessarily useful. Yet as she listened, her judgment, though not reversed, became less simple. She still saw selfishness, weakness, and dishonor in all that he had

done. Nothing could remove those. But she also saw real passion, real repentance, and a mind capable of better things than its conduct had shown. Willoughby was not a cold deceiver who had never felt. He was something more complex and perhaps more pitiable: a man who had loved truly and acted badly because vanity, expense, and fear of poverty had mastered principle at the critical moment.

At length the interview had lasted long enough. Willoughby himself seemed aware that he had no right to prolong it further. He rose, spoke once more of Marianne’s safety with deep emotion, and then said, “I shall never see her again. That is best. But I leave this place less desperate because I have at least spoken truth to someone who will not mistake me entirely.” Elinor answered with gravity rather than softness. She said that she could never think lightly of what he had made her sister suffer, but that she believed him sincerely unhappy and hoped he might yet become more worthy than he had shown himself. He bowed at these words, unable perhaps to reply, and left the room.

When he was gone, Elinor remained for some minutes in deep thought. Her feelings were no longer those with which she had first met him. She could not hate him with the same unmixed indignation as before, because she now knew more of his heart. Yet neither could she esteem him. His confession had explained much and excused little. Still, the explanation itself mattered. Marianne had not been deceived by a heart wholly empty. She had been loved, though not loved with enough strength to make that love honorable. This distinction, painful as it was, seemed to Elinor worth preserving. It might not heal Marianne soon, but it could one day soften the harshest edge of memory.

With that thought, and with the sound of storm still moving round the house, Elinor went quietly back upstairs to her sister’s room. Marianne was still sleeping. The crisis of the illness had passed for the moment, but another sort of reckoning had begun. Before the next day ended, their mother would arrive, and with her the first true change in all their fortunes since this chain of sorrow had begun.

Part 23

Mrs. Dashwood and Colonel Brandon arrived at Cleveland early the next day, and for Elinor the sight of her mother's face was almost as great a relief as the knowledge that Marianne still lived. Mrs. Dashwood had come in terrible fear, expecting at every mile to hear the worst. When Elinor met her and said at once, "She is better. She knows us again. We still have hope," her mother burst into tears of gratitude and hurried upstairs. Colonel Brandon followed more quietly, asking no reward for the service he had done beyond the chance of hearing that Marianne had indeed passed the most dangerous point.

The improvement, once begun, continued more steadily than Elinor had dared to expect. Marianne's illness had been violent, but youth, natural strength, and the nearness of those she loved now helped her recovery every hour. Within four days of Mrs. Dashwood's arrival, she was well enough to be moved from her bed into Mrs. Palmer's dressing room, where the light was softer and the air more cheerful. The danger was gone. Weakness remained, but weakness after such a trial seemed almost like safety. Elinor, who had lately lived from moment to moment, could now at last breathe and look forward again.

One of Marianne's first wishes, once she could speak calmly and at some length, was to thank Colonel Brandon for bringing her mother to Cleveland. She remembered enough of her fever to know that she had called for Mrs. Dashwood and that someone had gone through the night to fetch her. "I must see Colonel Brandon," she said. "I must thank him myself." Mrs. Dashwood gladly granted this request, for she had long valued Brandon highly and now valued him more than ever. When he entered, Marianne received him with a seriousness and gentleness that were new in their manner toward each other. There was no warmth of fancy in it, but there was real gratitude, and Colonel Brandon, who needed little, seemed deeply touched by even that.

From that time onward, Marianne's treatment of him changed in a way that was clear to all who cared to see it. She no longer shrank from his company, no longer listened with half-hidden impatience when he spoke, and no longer measured him only against the false brightness of another man. Suffering had sobered her imagination and opened her eyes. She saw now, as she had not seen

before, the worth of constancy, tenderness, and quiet good sense. Brandon's manners, once thought too grave for admiration, now appeared to her full of a real kindness which demanded respect.

This change was not sudden enough to make her happy, nor strong enough to make her at once easy. She was still recovering both in body and in spirit. There were many silent hours, many turns of thought, and many painful recollections still to pass through. But the direction of her mind had altered. She no longer fed grief as she had once done. She no longer wished to live entirely in memory. Illness had frightened her into reflection, and reflection had begun to humble her. In that humility there was the first true promise of peace.

One day, when the weather was mild enough to let them sit quietly together, Elinor and Marianne were alone for a long time. Their conversation turned, by a natural movement, to the past. Marianne had already shown signs of wishing to speak openly, and at last she said with deep feeling, "Do not try to defend me, Elinor. I know what I have been. My illness has made me think. It has given me time and calm for serious thought. I have looked back on everything, and what I see is only imprudence to myself and want of kindness to others." Elinor tried gently to stop her, but Marianne continued, as if confession itself had become a duty she could no longer avoid.

"I see now," she said, "that my own feelings prepared all my suffering, and that my want of strength under suffering nearly brought me to the grave. Had I died, I should have died by my own fault. I was careless of my health when I knew I ought not to be careless. That alone is terrible enough. But worse than that is the thought of how I treated all of you. Mama, who loved me always; Mrs. Jennings, who was so constantly kind; and you, Elinor, you above all. You knew your own sorrow, and yet you had to bear mine too. I was selfish, unjust, and blind."

Elinor, though moved almost to tears, answered as calmly as she could, "You judge yourself too severely. You have suffered very much." Marianne shook her head. "No," she replied, "not more severely than I deserve. I compare my conduct with what it ought to have been, and I compare it with yours. That is enough. Your example was before me, and yet I took no lesson from it. You loved, and you were

disappointed, and still you thought of others. I loved, and when I was disappointed, I could think of no one but myself." Elinor answered, "Our situations were not entirely the same." Marianne said softly, "They were more alike than our conduct."

She then spoke with particular shame of her behavior in London and at Barton before it. She remembered her contempt for Mrs. Jennings, her coldness to the Middletons and Palmers, her injustice even to the Steeles and to people she did not value, and her bitter refusal to accept ordinary kindness because it came in forms not suited to her taste. "I was insolent in my misery," she said. "I thought suffering gave me the right to despise others. It did not. If I had died, how should I have remained in your memory? That is what frightened me most when I began to recover. I wanted to live, not because life was dear to me then, but because I longed for time to become better."

Elinor could not hear this without a tenderness almost maternal in its force. She took Marianne's hand and said, "You must not speak as if everything were only guilt. Reflection is useful, but self-torment is not. If this illness has taught you to think more calmly and more justly, let the lesson be enough. Do not demand perfection of yourself all at once." Marianne answered, "No, not perfection. Only improvement. I know I shall never again think exactly as I once did. I cannot. Experience has given me another view of life, and I hope it may make me kinder, humbler, and less unjust to those around me."

This conversation gave Elinor more comfort than anything she had known for many months. Marianne's pain had been dreadful to witness, but to see that it had also deepened her understanding and softened her pride seemed now like real gain wrested from misery. She did not mean that Marianne had ceased to feel for Willoughby. That would have been impossible. But the feeling was no longer joined to the same blindness. Memory remained, yet judgment had begun to work beside it. This was the change Elinor had long hoped for and hardly dared expect so soon.

Mrs. Dashwood, meanwhile, had been making observations of her own, and her conclusions were both affectionate and practical in the way that belonged especially to her. She saw Colonel Brandon's devotion more clearly every day,

and now that Marianne no longer treated him with cold indifference, her mother's hopes turned strongly in his direction. One day she said to Elinor, "Your sister will never be so happy with any man as she would with Colonel Brandon. He has steadiness, gentleness, and true feeling. Willoughby had brilliance, but the Colonel has what lasts." Elinor did not answer as warmly as her mother wished, yet she could not deny the justice of much that was said.

Mrs. Dashwood went further still. She praised Brandon's age as an advantage rather than a defect, since it made his principles fixed and his temper settled. She praised his countenance, saying that though he was not so handsome as Willoughby, there was something much more pleasing in his face. She praised his manners even more, because they were gentle, attentive, and entirely free from affectation. "There was always something in Willoughby's eyes," she said, "that I did not fully like, though I did not know why. In Colonel Brandon there is nothing to fear." Elinor listened, partly convinced and partly uneasy, because even good hopes can press too soon upon a wounded heart.

Marianne herself did not yet speak of Colonel Brandon in any language that could justify a mother's full confidence. Gratitude was plain, esteem was growing, and respect had become sincere. But love, or anything near it, was still far away. Elinor knew this well and therefore tried to keep Mrs. Dashwood from moving too quickly in imagination. "Marianne is not ready," she said quietly. "Her first care must be to recover fully." Mrs. Dashwood admitted the truth of this and yet continued to dream, as was her nature, not wildly now, but still hopefully.

Within a very few days Marianne was strong enough to think of leaving Cleveland. The great fear had passed, and every face in the house looked lighter for it. Mrs. Jennings began again to speak of journeys, servants, and roads. Colonel Brandon continued exactly the same as ever, useful without display and attentive without intrusion. Elinor, watching him, thought more seriously than before that if Marianne ever could love again, she could not love a man more worthy. Yet she also knew that such a change, if it ever came, would not come by persuasion or by any generous scheme of others. It would have to grow slowly out of time, gratitude, humility, and altered judgment.

Thus the days after illness brought not sudden happiness, but something quieter and more durable. Marianne had not forgotten, but she had begun to understand. Elinor had not ceased to sorrow, but she had begun to hope for her sister. Mrs. Dashwood had not lost her romantic warmth, but it was now directed toward a man whose worth deserved it. And so, when at last the family prepared to return once more toward Barton, they did so under a changed light. The same people remained, but they were no longer exactly the same minds that had come to Cleveland in pain and confusion. Experience had done its work, and though the end was not yet reached, the heart of the story had already begun to turn toward it.

Part 24

After they returned from Cleveland, Margaret soon came home too, and the family was once more complete at Barton Cottage. Outwardly, life grew quiet again. The books were taken up, work was arranged, and the old rooms began to look like home rather than refuge. But for Elinor there was still one great want in all that quiet. She had heard nothing certain of Edward since leaving London. A few letters had passed between her and John Dashwood because of Marianne’s illness, yet even in those letters Edward’s name was scarcely mentioned, and when it was, it brought no real knowledge. So while the others settled themselves again into country habits, Elinor waited in a silence more painful than open sorrow.

Mrs. Dashwood watched her eldest daughter with increasing tenderness. Now that Marianne was recovering and speaking more calmly of her own past errors, their mother could better see what Elinor had endured in secret all along. She did not force confidence, because she had learned by experience that Elinor spoke only when she chose. Yet there was a new softness in every look and word directed toward her, and Marianne herself, humbled by reflection, was more affectionate and attentive than before. In such an atmosphere of quiet love, Elinor might almost have found peace, had uncertainty not still hung over Edward’s future and her own.

One morning the man-servant returned from Exeter on an ordinary errand, and after answering Mrs. Dashwood's common questions, he added of his own accord, "I suppose you know, ma'am, that Mr. Ferrars is married." The words fell into the room like a blow. Marianne gave a violent start, fixed her eyes on Elinor, saw her turn pale, and immediately fell back in hysterics. Mrs. Dashwood, shocked at once for both daughters, scarcely knew to which she should first turn. The servant himself, seeing only that Miss Marianne was suddenly ill, called for help, and in the first confusion it was possible for Elinor, though deeply shaken, to recover enough self-command to remain seated and ask in a low voice where such news had come from.

Mrs. Dashwood took the inquiry from her at once. The servant answered that he had seen Mr. Ferrars himself in Exeter that very morning, together with "his lady, Miss Steele as was," at the door of the New London Inn. Lucy had spoken to him, asked after the family, and sent her compliments. There was no room left for doubt. It was not rumor, but reported sight and message. Elinor heard every word with a calmness that was only the last effort of strength. Her color remained gone, and her whole manner was so still that Mrs. Dashwood, returning from Marianne's side, was more alarmed by her silence than by anything louder or more visible.

For some time the house was a scene of double distress. Marianne had to be soothed and supported, while Elinor, though not visibly overcome in the same way, seemed struck to the heart. To Marianne the intelligence brought a new pain for her sister as well as a confirmation of all she had lately learned about the false security of human happiness. To Mrs. Dashwood it seemed as if one more cruel turn had been added to a story already full of trial. Yet of them all, the one who suffered most quietly was Elinor. She had long known that Edward belonged by promise to another woman. But promise had still left room for time, for distance, and for the uncertain future. Marriage ended all. It was final, common, public, and beyond appeal.

Once Marianne was somewhat calmer and the servant dismissed, Elinor was left more fully to the weight of her own thoughts. She did not weep much. The

blow had gone too deep for tears at first. Instead there came that kind of inward numbness which is sometimes harder to bear than violence. She tried to think reasonably. Edward had done only what his honor required. If he had married Lucy, he had married as an honest man should. This thought, which would once have given her strength, now only made the pain more complete. To lose him to a base woman would have been bitter enough. To lose him while still compelled to esteem him was harder.

The rest of the day passed heavily. Mrs. Dashwood remained near her children with the helpless tenderness of a mother who can neither cure sorrow nor turn away from it. Marianne, though still weak in body, forgot much of herself in anxiety for Elinor and looked at her with a kind of reverence now, remembering at last how long her sister had already suffered in silence. Yet even this sympathy could not comfort much. Elinor felt as though the last door had closed. She was not angry with Edward. She was not even angry with Lucy beyond the natural indignation the woman inspired. She was simply desolate. Every former hope had now, as she believed, taken on the firm shape of impossibility.

It was therefore in the midst of this desolation that the next surprise became almost too much to bear. Not many days after the news from Exeter, while the family were sitting together quietly, Edward Ferrars himself was shown into the room. His appearance was unexpected enough under any circumstances. Under these, it was astonishing. Mrs. Dashwood, Marianne, and Elinor all started, though each from a different feeling. He entered looking disturbed, embarrassed, and far from easy. There was none of the settled composure of a man recently married and received everywhere as such. Yet the report had seemed too certain to be doubted, and so his presence only deepened the confusion.

Mrs. Dashwood received him with a kindness that was still real, though forced through wonder. Marianne could scarcely look at him. Elinor, with all her self-command, could not at first trust herself to speak at all. Edward sat down, rose again, walked to the window, and seemed not to know what he did. On the table near him lay a pair of scissors in their sheath. He took them up without thinking, and while speaking in a hurried, broken voice, began cutting the sheath to pieces

in a restless confusion that said more of his agitation than any words could have done. At last he turned partly toward them and said, “Perhaps you do not know—perhaps you have not heard—that my brother is lately married—to the youngest—to Miss Lucy Steele.”

“Robert Ferrars!” was repeated by Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne in accents of the utmost astonishment. Even Elinor, though she could not speak, raised her eyes to him with all the impatience of sudden hope and fear struggling together. Edward, still unable to stand still, answered, “Yes. They were married last week, and are now at Dawlish.” The words were enough. In that instant everything changed. The false report, the blow from Exeter, the despair of the last days, all broke apart at once and showed another meaning underneath. Lucy had married a Mr. Ferrars indeed, but not Edward. He was free.

Elinor could remain no longer. Joy came upon her with such force that it was almost pain. She rose, left the room as quickly as she could, and once the door was closed, burst into tears that seemed at first as if they would never stop. They were not tears of one simple feeling. Relief, gratitude, long-delayed hope, and the shock of so complete a reversal all met in them together. She had borne many things quietly because she had thought them final. To find in one moment that the worst conclusion had been false was more than her strength could bear in silence. For perhaps the first time in her life, happiness overcame prudence entirely.

Edward, meanwhile, had seen enough of her emotion to understand it. Until that moment he had scarcely looked directly at her. His own uncertainty had been too great. He did not know how the news would be received, what the family had heard, or whether Elinor might still care what became of him. But when he saw her hurry away in tears, his whole manner changed. He fell at once into a deep reverie from which neither Mrs. Dashwood’s affection nor Marianne’s astonished questions could easily draw him. The room itself seemed filled with amazement. A few minutes earlier he had appeared there almost as an offender. Now he sat among them a free man, yet a free man so agitated that no one could yet clearly ask what freedom would mean.

At last, unable either to explain himself in that crowded confusion or to remain

calm under it, Edward rose again without saying much and went out toward the village. He left Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne in the greatest perplexity. They had the facts, but not the story. Robert married to Lucy, Edward released, Elinor overcome with joy, and Edward himself looking as though every hope of his life might suddenly be restored—these things were plain enough. But how the change had come about, why Lucy had turned from one brother to the other, and what Edward now intended, none of them yet knew. They could only look at one another and form quick, half-spoken guesses.

Marianne was perhaps the first to understand the whole emotional truth of what had happened. Her own recent sufferings had taught her to read sudden joy as well as sudden misery. She looked toward the door through which Elinor had fled and then back at her mother with eyes full of wonder and tenderness. Mrs. Dashwood, too, though she had not yet heard one word of proposal or plan, felt enough already to make her heart beat high. For if Edward was free, and if Elinor still loved him, then a hope once believed dead might now be living again. Nothing was settled yet. But for the first time in many months, the future had opened instead of closed.

In another room Elinor was still trying to quiet herself. She had not yet allowed her mind to go beyond the one overwhelming fact: Edward was not married. That alone was enough to change the whole world. The pain she had borne so steadily, because she believed there was no remedy, had been turned in a moment into trembling possibility. She knew too well that much still remained uncertain. She did not yet know Edward’s full story, nor dare to say to herself what might now follow. But despair had left her. In its place came something far more difficult to govern—hope.

So ended this extraordinary turn, in which one mistaken word from a servant had plunged the whole family into grief, and one broken explanation from Edward had lifted that grief into astonishment and joy. Nothing yet had been formally asked or granted. Nothing yet had been calmly arranged. But the dark certainty of loss had disappeared. The next step, whatever it might be, would no longer be taken under the shadow of impossibility. And for Elinor, who had so long believed

herself called only to endure, that change alone was enough to make the whole heart of life seem new again.

Part 25

Edward did not leave Barton in uncertainty. Once the first disorder of surprise was over, the whole truth came out plainly enough. Lucy, always faithful first to her own advantage, had not remained faithful to Edward when his fortune disappeared. Robert, vain, foolish, idle, and pleased above all things with his own importance, had first gone to her only to persuade her to give Edward up. But one visit led to another. Instead of speaking only of Edward, they gradually came to speak only of Robert, and Lucy, with her usual patience and self-interest, let the change go forward until the younger brother had entirely taken the elder's place. Their private marriage, therefore, had not been the result of sudden passion, but of vanity on one side and calculation on the other.

When this story was understood, Elinor's former pain changed into something very different. She could now see the whole matter with calm justice. Edward had not been released by any noble sacrifice on Lucy's part, nor had he failed in his duty to her. He had been thrown off when poor and taken back in his mother's favour only because Lucy found a better path through Robert. To Elinor this brought not triumph, but relief. Edward was free without blame, and the one person who had most tormented her peace had shown herself exactly what she was. Even now, however, happiness did not come to Elinor all at once. Hope itself was almost frightening after despair. She scarcely dared trust what had happened, still less guess what might now follow.

Edward, on his side, had no long hesitation left in him. Once released, he had only one wish. He returned soon after from the village walk which had followed his first broken explanation, and this time there was no need for reserve or disguise. Mrs. Dashwood, whose heart had already gone farther than words, received him with a warmth that almost gave him Elinor at once. Marianne, softened by all she had suffered and learned, watched the scene with joy more tender than any she

had ever known before. As for Elinor, she could no longer hide what had been hidden so long. The quiet attachment of years, the patience of disappointment, and the sudden light of restored hope all met in one simple truth between them. Edward asked for her hand, and Elinor gave it. There was no need for grand language. Their happiness was too deep and too well deserved for display.

Yet even this happiness had still to pass through the world's common difficulties. Edward was free, but he was not rich. His future depended on Delaford, on his taking orders, and on the uncertain temper of Mrs. Ferrars. Colonel Brandon, however, remained exactly what he had always been: steady in kindness and delicate in service. He had already secured for Edward the living of Delaford, and now he improved the parsonage with eager thought for Elinor's comfort. Edward, grateful by nature and even more grateful now that his whole future was tied to this generosity, accepted both the help and the friendship as they were offered, without pretending independence where dependence was plain. It was one more proof that the happiness now opening to him had been earned through trial rather than given by easy chance.

Mrs. Ferrars, when Edward at last presented himself before her again, behaved very much as might have been expected. She resisted first because resistance suited her dignity. She argued that Miss Morton would still have been the wiser choice. She reminded him of rank, money, and family consequence. She observed, with all her usual cold precision, that Miss Dashwood had only three thousand pounds, while Miss Morton had thirty. But she had already spent one violent fit of disinheritance, and experience had taught her that when Edward's mind was once fixed, noise would not move it. So after a proper delay, and with as little grace as possible, she consented to the marriage. Her consent brought almost no increase of tenderness, but it did bring a certain settled allowance. The ten thousand pounds already standing for Edward remained his, and with Delaford, that was enough for both him and Elinor. They wanted security, not splendour.

Their marriage therefore took place quietly in Barton church early in the autumn. Before that day there had been delays, workmen, improvements, plans for the parsonage, and all the small hindrances that commonly attend even the

happiest arrangements. But at last the ceremony came, and with it a form of happiness exactly suited to their characters. There was no violent triumph in it. Elinor had never wanted triumph. What she gained was better: a husband she could esteem entirely, a home shaped by affection rather than display, and a life near the mother and sisters from whom she had never wished to be separated. The first month after the marriage was spent chiefly at the great house, from which they could oversee the finishing of the parsonage and direct every change as they liked. Mrs. Jennings, whose prophecies had once seemed only comic confusion, had at last the pleasure of visiting them there and declaring them one of the happiest couples in the world.

Lucy and Robert, meanwhile, prospered in exactly the way that suited them. They spent some months in noisy happiness at Dawlish. Robert drew plans for grand cottages, Lucy enjoyed cutting old acquaintances, and together they began the business of getting themselves forgiven by Mrs. Ferrars. Robert asked for pardon and received it first. Lucy, being cleverer, knew how to wait, how to humble herself at the right moment, and how to turn even unkind treatment into future advantage. In time she won over Mrs. Ferrars so completely that she became almost as necessary to her as either Robert or Fanny. Edward, though again acknowledged as a son, was never warmly forgiven for having once meant to marry Lucy, while Elinor, who was far above Lucy in birth and character, was still spoken of as an intruder. Yet Robert and Lucy settled well enough in town, received liberal help, and lived on outwardly good terms with the whole Dashwood connection, though private jealousy and domestic quarrels were never far from them.

Elinor’s marriage changed her daily life as little as marriage could well do. Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters spent more than half their time with her at Delaford, and Barton Cottage still remained full of family feeling. This nearness pleased Elinor, who had never wanted happiness at the cost of distance from those she loved. It pleased Mrs. Dashwood too, though in her case pleasure was joined to design. She had now one darling object which colored all her visits to Delaford. She wished to bring Marianne and Colonel Brandon together. Edward wished it.

Elinor wished it. Brandon deserved it. And Marianne, though not hurried by anyone, could not forever remain untouched by such a confederacy of kindness, gratitude, and quiet worth.

Marianne's marriage, when it came, was not the sort of marriage her younger self had once imagined. It was not born of sudden fire, of exact sameness in every taste, or of that overwhelming first passion which she had once thought the only true foundation of happiness. Instead, it came through time, reflection, esteem, and the humbling lessons of experience. She had learned the falseness of many of her own favourite opinions. She had learned that a heart may be deep without being noisy, constant without being brilliant, and tender without speaking in the language of romance. At nineteen, therefore, she did what at seventeen she would have declared impossible: she gave her hand to Colonel Brandon, a man older than herself, grave in manner, constant in feeling, and strengthened rather than diminished by sorrow.

Yet this marriage was not a surrender to convenience alone. Marianne never loved by halves, and though what first drew her toward Brandon was esteem, gratitude, and the clear sight of his goodness, that feeling deepened in time into something much stronger. In forming his happiness, she found her own. His mind, long weighed down by past disappointment, recovered animation in her company, and his spirits became cheerful again. She, in turn, discovered that a life of duty, kindness, and settled affection could hold as much true warmth as all the dramatic dreams she had once cherished. Their home, their village, and their shared usefulness became dear to her. What had once seemed impossible proved not only possible, but good.

Willoughby heard of Marianne's marriage with a real pang. His punishment was completed when Mrs. Smith, forgiving him after his marriage to a woman of good character, let him understand plainly that had he behaved honorably toward Marianne, he might have been both happy and rich. He regretted her sincerely. He envied Colonel Brandon. He kept Marianne in his mind as his secret standard of female perfection. But he did not die of grief, nor withdraw forever from the world, nor become a dark ruin of a man. He lived on, enjoyed himself often enough, and

found a certain rough domestic comfort in horses, dogs, and sport. His wife was not always disagreeable, and his house was not always miserable. That, perhaps, is one of the harshest truths in the whole story: real repentance does not always destroy a man, even when his misconduct has deeply injured others.

Mrs. Dashwood, wisely enough at last, remained at Barton rather than removing to Delaford. There she could still enjoy independence, and from there she could still be near all that mattered most to her. Sir John and Mrs. Jennings continued exactly what they had always been, loud in kindness and active in the concerns of everyone around them. Margaret grew older and promised in time to profit by the examples, both good and bad, that her elder sisters had set before her. And so the family, though altered by suffering, was not broken by it. What they had lost in innocence, they gained in knowledge; what they had lost in easy expectation, they gained in steadier judgment.

Thus the story reaches its real end, not at the first confession of love, nor at the first disappointment, nor even at the first marriage, but only when all the principal hearts have found their proper place. Elinor is rewarded with the man she always loved and always esteemed. Marianne, corrected but not diminished by sorrow, finds a different kind of happiness from the one she once imagined, yet not a lesser one. Colonel Brandon is consoled. Edward is content. Lucy secures the worldly victory she always sought. Willoughby lives with regret, but also with the ordinary survivals of selfish life. And the sisters, though married, remain close enough that love of family is not sacrificed to love of husband. That is the final balance the novel chooses.