SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

by Jane Austen
(1811)

CHAPTER 1

The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of their property, where, for many generations, they had lived in so respectable a manner as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance. The late owner of this estate was a single man, who lived to a very advanced age, and who for many years of his life, had a constant companion and housekeeper in his sister. But her death, which happened ten years before his own, produced a great alteration in his home; for to supply her loss, he invited and received into his house the family of his nephew Mr. Henry Dashwood, the legal inheritor of the Norland estate, and the person to whom he intended to bequeath it. In the society of his nephew and niece, and their children, the old Gentleman's days were
comfortably spent. His attachment to them all increased.
The constant attention of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dashwood
to his wishes, which proceeded not merely from interest,
but from goodness of heart, gave him every degree of solid
comfort which his age could receive; and the cheerfulness
of the children added a relish to his existence.

By a former marriage, Mr. Henry Dashwood had one
son: by his present lady, three daughters. The son,
a steady respectable young man, was amply provided
for by the fortune of his mother, which had been large,
and half of which devolved on him on his coming of age.
By his own marriage, likewise, which happened soon afterwards,
he added to his wealth. To him therefore the succession
to the Norland estate was not so really important as to
his sisters; for their fortune, independent of what might
arise to them from their father's inheriting that property,
could be but small. Their mother had nothing, and their
father only seven thousand pounds in his own disposal;
for the remaining moiety of his first wife's fortune was
also secured to her child, and he had only a life-interest
in it.

The old gentleman died: his will was read, and
like almost every other will, gave as much disappointment
as pleasure. He was neither so unjust, nor so ungrateful,
as to leave his estate from his nephew;--but he left it to him
on such terms as destroyed half the value of the bequest.
Mr. Dashwood had wished for it more for the sake of his
wife and daughters than for himself or his son;--but to
his son, and his son's son, a child of four years old,
it was secured, in such a way, as to leave to himself
no power of providing for those who were most dear
to him, and who most needed a provision by any charge
on the estate, or by any sale of its valuable woods.
The whole was tied up for the benefit of this child, who,
in occasional visits with his father and mother at Norland,
had so far gained on the affections of his uncle,
by such attractions as are by no means unusual in children
of two or three years old; an imperfect articulation,
an earnest desire of having his own way, many cunning tricks,
and a great deal of noise, as to outweigh all the value
of all the attention which, for years, he had received
from his niece and her daughters. He meant not to
be unkind, however, and, as a mark of his affection
for the three girls, he left them a thousand pounds a-piece.

Mr. Dashwood's disappointment was, at first, severe;
but his temper was cheerful and sanguine; and he might
reasonably hope to live many years, and by living economically,
lay by a considerable sum from the produce of an estate
already large, and capable of almost immediate improvement.
But the fortune, which had been so tardy in coming, was his
only one twelvemonth. He survived his uncle no longer;
and ten thousand pounds, including the late legacies,
was all that remained for his widow and daughters.

His son was sent for as soon as his danger was known,
and to him Mr. Dashwood recommended, with all the strength
and urgency which illness could command, the interest
of his mother-in-law and sisters.

Mr. John Dashwood had not the strong feelings of the
rest of the family; but he was affected by a recommendation
of such a nature at such a time, and he promised to do
every thing in his power to make them comfortable.
His father was rendered easy by such an assurance,
and Mr. John Dashwood had then leisure to consider how
much there might prudently be in his power to do for them.

He was not an ill-disposed young man, unless to
be rather cold hearted and rather selfish is to be
ill-disposed: but he was, in general, well respected;
for he conducted himself with propriety in the discharge
of his ordinary duties. Had he married a more amiable woman,
he might have been made still more respectable than he
was:--he might even have been made amiable himself; for he
was very young when he married, and very fond of his wife.
But Mrs. John Dashwood was a strong caricature of himself;--
more narrow-minded and selfish.

When he gave his promise to his father, he meditated
within himself to increase the fortunes of his sisters
by the present of a thousand pounds a-piece. He then
really thought himself equal to it. The prospect of four
thousand a-year, in addition to his present income,
besides the remaining half of his own mother's fortune,
warmed his heart, and made him feel capable of generosity.--
"Yes, he would give them three thousand pounds: it would
be liberal and handsome! It would be enough to make
them completely easy. Three thousand pounds! he could
spare so considerable a sum with little inconvenience."--
He thought of it all day long, and for many days successively,
and he did not repent.

No sooner was his father's funeral over, than Mrs. John
Dashwood, without sending any notice of her intention to her mother-in-law, arrived with her child and their attendants. No one could dispute her right to come; the house was her husband's from the moment of his father's decease; but the indelicacy of her conduct was so much the greater, and to a woman in Mrs. Dashwood's situation, with only common feelings, must have been highly unpleasing;—but in HER mind there was a sense of honor so keen, a generosity so romantic, that any offence of the kind, by whomsoever given or received, was to her a source of immoveable disgust. Mrs. John Dashwood had never been a favourite with any of her husband's family; but she had had no opportunity, till the present, of shewing them with how little attention to the comfort of other people she could act when occasion required it.

So acutely did Mrs. Dashwood feel this ungracious behaviour, and so earnestly did she despise her daughter-in-law for it, that, on the arrival of the latter, she would have quitted the house for ever, had not the entreaty of her eldest girl induced her first to reflect on the propriety of going, and her own tender love for all her three children determined her afterwards to stay, and for their sakes avoid a breach with their brother.

Elinor, this eldest daughter, whose advice was so effectual, possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother, and enabled her frequently to counteract, to the advantage of them all, that eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. She had
an excellent heart;--her disposition was affectionate,
and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern
them: it was a knowledge which her mother had yet to learn;
and which one of her sisters had resolved never to be taught.

Marianne's abilities were, in many respects,
quite equal to Elinor's. She was sensible and clever;
but eager in everything: her sorrows, her joys, could have
no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she
was everything but prudent. The resemblance between
her and her mother was strikingly great.

Elinor saw, with concern, the excess of her
sister's sensibility; but by Mrs. Dashwood it was valued
and cherished. They encouraged each other now in the
violence of their affliction. The agony of grief
which overpowered them at first, was voluntarily renewed,
was sought for, was created again and again. They gave
themselves up wholly to their sorrow, seeking increase
of wretchedness in every reflection that could afford it,
and resolved against ever admitting consolation
in future. Elinor, too, was deeply afflicted; but still
she could struggle, she could exert herself. She could
consult with her brother, could receive her sister-in-law
on her arrival, and treat her with proper attention;
and could strive to rouse her mother to similar exertion,
and encourage her to similar forbearance.

Margaret, the other sister, was a good-humored,
well-disposed girl; but as she had already imbibed
a good deal of Marianne's romance, without having
much of her sense, she did not, at thirteen, bid fair
to equal her sisters at a more advanced period of life.