

## Summaries of Jane Austen's six novels

# 1. *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*

(Drafted as a sketch *Elinor and Marianne* 1796(?);  
reviewed, retitled and eventually published 1811)

It appears rather unjust that when Mr. Henry Dashwood dies, everything he owns has to go to his son by his first wife (long dead) - John Dashwood - and eventually thereafter to John's little son. Despite Henry's dying wish that John take care of the less fortunate side of the family, Henry's second wife and her three daughters are left with no permanent home and very little income.

The second Mrs Dashwood and her daughters (Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret) are eventually invited to stay in a cottage owned by distant relations, the Middletons, at Barton Park, Devonshire. Elinor, along with her family, is sad to leave their home at Norland. To make her even sadder, she has become attached to Edward Ferrars, the hesitant yet attractive brother-in-law of her half-brother John. Edward's sister, John's wife, has none of her brother's warmth and sensitivity, and is, unlike Edward, keen to be rid of the displaced mother and her three girls.

Once at Barton Park, Elinor and Marianne are drawn into the Middletons' social networks and meet, among others, the reliable Colonel Brandon, and the dazzling young John Willoughby, who rescues Marianne after she hurts her ankle running down the hills of Barton in the rain. Willoughby openly

courts Marianne, and together the two flirt unreservedly, until Willoughby suddenly announces that he must depart for London, leaving Marianne devastated.

Meanwhile, Anne and Lucy Steele, two relations of Lady Middleton's mother, Mrs. Jennings, are invited to stay at Barton Park. Lucy apparently befriends Elinor and informs her in confidence that she (Lucy) has been secretly engaged to Mr. Ferrars for four years. Elinor just manages to conceal her anguish when she realizes that Lucy is actually referring to her own dear Edward, having hoped at first that Lucy meant it was Edward's brother, Robert, who was her secret fiancé.

Elinor and Marianne travel to London with Mrs. Jennings. There, Colonel Brandon informs a surprised Elinor of the rumoured engagement between Willoughby and Marianne, though Marianne has not told her family of any such official attachment. Marianne is anxious to contact Willoughby immediately, but when she finally sees him at a social gathering, he cruelly rebuffs her and then sends her a letter denying that he ever cared for her. Colonel Brandon now feels able to tell Elinor of Willoughby's history of exploitative behaviour, and Mrs. Jennings confirms that Willoughby, having wasted his fortune, has become engaged to a rich heiress.

There is turmoil too for the Steele sisters. Lucy's older sister accidentally lets slip the news of Lucy and Edward's secret engagement. Edward's mother is aghast and promptly casts him off, promising his inheritance to her younger son Robert instead. Meanwhile, the Dashwood sisters visit Mrs

Jennings' daughter and her family at Cleveland on their way home from London. The heart-broken Marianne soon develops a fever and Elinor nurses her sister lovingly, terrified that she might die. Upon hearing of her grave illness, Willoughby arrives unannounced, desperately attempting to explain his misconduct to Elinor and to seek forgiveness. However, once told that Marianne is beginning to recover, he eventually takes his leave again more calmly. Soon afterwards Colonel Brandon brings a distraught Mrs Dashwood to her daughter's sickbed at Cleveland, and both rejoice to learn that Marianne's condition has stabilized.

Elinor has felt some compassion for Willoughby and later shares his story with Marianne, who finally realizes her errors of judgement, and recognises that her relationship with Willoughby would eventually have failed anyway.

When Mrs Dashwood and her daughters return to Barton, they learn from their servant that Lucy Steele and Mr. Ferrars are engaged. They assume that the servant is referring to Mr Edward Ferrars, and this is cruel news indeed for Elinor. However, Edward himself soon arrives and explains that it was his newly-rich younger brother Robert, not himself, whom the financially ambitious Lucy ultimately decided to marry, once Edward's inheritance had been reallocated by his angry mother. Thus, Edward is finally free to propose to his dear Elinor, and not long after, Marianne and Colonel Brandon become engaged as well. After their marriage, the couples live happily alongside one another at Delaford, Elinor and Edward in the parsonage where Edward takes up his clerical duties, and Marianne and Colonel Brandon in the mansion-house. The sisters are as mutually

supportive as ever, but both couples also remain in close touch with the sisters' mother and her youngest daughter at Barton Cottage. This level of harmony is only to be expected among good people with "strong family affection".