MARIANNE. What a pity it is, Elinor, that Edward reads so spiritlessly.

ELINOR. Marianne, you have been hectoring him all afternoon, and you have only made him more self-conscious. If you would leave him alone for a moment, I'm sure that he would read very well indeed.

MARIANNE. I was only trying to help.

ELINOR. Mm.

MARIANNE. Elinor, are you truly offended?

ELINOR. Do you really think him spiritless?

MARIANNE. I have the highest opinion possible of Edward, I assure you! I think him every thing in the world that is worthy and amiable.

ELINOR. (Slightly mollified.) Must you always speak so warmly?

MARIANNE. Don't you agree?

ELINOR. I think that Edward is very... sensible. His mind is excellent, and if he is not always a brilliant orator, it is only shyness that impedes him.

PAUSE...

ELINOR. And so you see that we never really knew Willoughby at all.

MARIANNE. I would sooner think myself deceived by all the world than by Willoughby.

ELINOR. He has practiced nothing but deceit, from beginning to end!

MARIANNE. I cannot explain his behavior towards that poor girl, but whatever his sins, I know that he loved me. He loves me. That much is true.

ELINOR. Did he tell you that he loved you?

MARIANNE. Yes—no. Never absolutely. It does not matter.

ELINOR. Of course it does. He is the worst kind of villain.

MARIANNE. No, he isn't! Not at heart. You say that we never knew him, Elinor, but I did, I knew him as I know myself! If he is wicked, then perhaps so am I. He and I are the same.

ELINOR. You are not being reasonable!

MARIANNE. You do not understand.

ELINOR. Perhaps I don't! Marianne, how could you have written to him?

MARIANNE. I felt myself to be as solemnly engaged to him, as if the strictest legal covenant had bound us!
EDWARD. Miss Dashwood. I fear I have not yet had a proper occasion to express to you, ah, personally, my very sincere condolences on the loss of your father.

ELINOR. Oh. Yes. Thank you.

Another pause. They bend their heads to writing; neither of them is able to write. He clears his throat.

EDWARD. Miss Dashwood. I hope that my presence here has not caused you any... additional distress in this sad time. My sister—I confess, I was not entirely informed of all the particular... particulars before my visit.

ELINOR. Oh. No. You needn't apologize, Mr. Ferrars. In fact, I must thank you—My mother said only yesterday that your presence at Norland is a comfort, and I am very grateful for anything that raises her spirits.

EDWARD. I am pleased that your mother is... pleased. (Mentally kicking himself for that.) That is, ah. Might I enquire after Mrs. Dashwood?

ELINOR. It is rather too early to think of any moderation in grief. My father’s death—it is very difficult.

She attempts not to get emotional.

EDWARD. I am sure that you must be a great comfort to her.

ELINOR. I attempt to be.

Small pause.

I am writing to our cousin, Sir John Middleton. He may have a cottage available for us in Devonshire. The rent is uncommonly moderate.

EDWARD. I imagine it must be very difficult. To leave your home.

ELINOR. Yes. We were...we have been very happy here.

She attempts not to cry.

I must not smudge this.

EDWARD. Miss Dashwood... please forgive me, I fear—I did not mean to upset you—

Edward impulsively takes out his handkerchief and brings it over to her, half-kneeling. Elinor takes it, slightly mortified.

ELINOR. Mr. Ferrars. I cannot use this.

She shows him. There is ink all over the handkerchief, from his stained hand. There is a moment of awkwardness; then she begins to laugh a little. They both begin to laugh a little, despite themselves.

EDWARD. Miss Dashwood, I beg your pardon... no, this is inexcusable... I am very, very sorry...

ELINOR. Oh, no—it's very—it's very kind of you—I beg YOUR pardon... Oh no, no, please stop, you're going to smear it...
MARGARET. It's so small!
MARIANNE. Margaret.
ELINOR. It will fit all of us comfortably, and Thomas and Betsy.
We are really very fortunate, dear.
MARGARET. Where shall I put my telescope?
MARIANNE. Next to my pianoforte. You may spy on the neighbors!
ELINOR. Marianne.
MARIANNE. ...You may not spy on the neighbors.
MRS. DASHWOOD. It is rather small, but I am sure that we will
soon have plenty of money, and then we may think about building!
SIR JOHN. (From outside the cottage.) Hallllloooo!
MRS. JENNINGS. (Echoing.) Hallloooooo, halllooooo!
Sir John Middleton and Mrs. Jennings sweep in—they don't stop
moving the whole time. Sir John is a boisterous middle-aged
man; Mrs. Jennings, his even more boisterous mother-in-law.
She has a herd of noisy lapdogs—represented by the Gossips,
yapping like dogs throughout. It is a circus. They constantly
interrupt each other and overlap portions of lines throughout.
SIR JOHN. Mrs. Dashwood! Welcome, welcome! May I present
my mother-in-law, Mrs. Jennings?
MRS. JENNINGS. Hallo, how d'ye do? Always so thrilling to meet
a relation! Excuse these noisy devils, they get over-excited. Hush!
MRS. DASHWOOD. Sir John. My daughters, Elinor, Marianne,
and Margaret.
SIR JOHN. (To Mrs. Jennings.) Have you ever seen prettier girls in
all the world? (To the dogs.) HUSH, HUSH, YOU!
MRS. JENNINGS. I am sure they have left many broken young
gentlemen in Devonshire! HUSH!
Marianne is repulsed.
SIR JOHN. You must, of course, dine at Barton Park every day
until you are settled. HUSH!
Mrs. Dashwood opens her mouth to politely refuse. The dog
barking reaches a crescendo.
MRS. JENNINGS. Come! You must come! HUSH!
SIR JOHN. Come, come! You must come!
We shall not leave until you agree to come—HUSH!
MRS. DASHWOOD. We shall wait on you for dinner, if it is no
inconvenience.
MRS. DASHWOOD. Oh, Elinor. Why do you always love to think the worst?

ELINOR. (Stung.) I don't. But what else could have happened?

MRS. DASHWOOD. Why, it is perfectly obvious. I can account for everything.

ELINOR. Can you?

MRS. DASHWOOD. Yes! Mrs. Smith must have invented this business in London as an excuse to send Willoughby away. Word has finally reached her of the attachment between Willoughby and Marianne; she disapproves and strives to separate them. Because he is dependent on her, he dares not confess to her—yet—that they are already engaged, and must obey her wishes—for a time! And that is why he cannot predict when he will return. Elinor—what say you?

ELINOR. Nothing. You may be right, Mamma.

MRS. DASHWOOD. Your countenance suggests that you think otherwise. What are your conjectures?

ELINOR. I do not mean to cast suspicion. But Mamma—it may indeed be prudent to conceal their engagement from Mrs. Smith, but why do they conceal it from us?

MRS. DASHWOOD. His entire behavior to Marianne declares that he considers her as his future wife!

MARGARET & ELINOR

MARGARET. (Dancing around.) I have such a secret to tell you both about Marianne! I am sure she will be married to Mr. Willoughby very soon.

ELINOR. You have said that almost every day since they met, Margaret.

MARGARET. But indeed now I am sure they will be married very soon, for he has got a lock of her hair.

Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor exchange glances.

ELINOR. How do you know?

MARGARET. I know MANY secrets, Elinor.

ELINOR. Margaret.

MARGARET. I saw him take it! Last night after tea, when you and Mamma went out of the room, they were whispering together, and he took up her scissors and cut off a lock of her hair, and he kissed it, and put it into his pocketbook! And today she asked to stay at home, ALONE... I am sure that he must be visiting with her now!

MRS. DASHWOOD. (Half-heartedly chiding.) Margaret...

They arrive back at the cottage.

MARGARET. It is Mr. Willoughby's curricle outside! I told you, he DID visit her!
COLONEL BRANDON & ELINOR

COL. BRANDON. (Still watching her.) Your sister is full of life.

ELINOR. She is certainly...energetic. Some day her disposition will settle. I hope.

COL. BRANDON. I am sorry to think of her ever changing.

ELINOR. I cannot agree with you there. Marianne's ideals are all very romantic, but they tend to discard propriety entirely. She would benefit from a more mature understanding of certain realities.

COL. BRANDON. Do not desire it too much. I once knew a lady who resembled your sister—and her introduction to what you might call "realities" was very unfortunate. I will not trouble you with the story. Pardon me—have you dropped this?

He picks her handkerchief off the ground.

ELINOR. Oh, yes.

COL. BRANDON. Shall I have it laundered?

ELINOR. (Rather more frantic than is necessary.) No! No, thank you.

COL. BRANDON. I beg your pardon. But you see, it is covered with ink.

ANNE STEELE – a motor mouth

ANNE. (Leaving no room for response.) And had you a great many smart beaux there? There may be a vast many smart beaux in Exeter, I'm sure; but Lord knows if I can tell what beaux there might be about Norland! And perhaps the Miss Dashwoods might find it dull here if they do not have so many as they used to have. But perhaps you two do not care about the beaux, and had as lief be without! For my part, I think they are vastly agreeable provided they dress smart and behave civil. I can't bear to see them dirty and nasty. Now there's Mr. Rose at Exeter, clerk to Mr. Simpson, if you do but meet him of a morning he is not fit to be seen! I suppose your brother was quite a beau, Miss Dashwood, before he married, as he was so rich, and—

LUCY. —ANNE!

ANNE. (Unchastened.) Well. Sir John tells us Miss Marianne has a special admirer who is VERY handsome. And I hope you will have as good luck yourself soon—but perhaps you have a gentleman friend, already?
ELINOR. Mr. Edward Ferrars.
LUCY. We can mean no other.
ELINOR. ...May I ask if your engagement is of long standing?
LUCY. We have been engaged these four years.
ELINOR. Four years!

Pause. In the background, Anne starts singing, badly.

LUCY. Yes. But we have known each other for far longer. He was a pupil for many years with my uncle, Mr. Pratt, who lives at Longstaple. He visited us there recently, in fact—oh! I suppose, just before he visited you here.

ELINOR. You are his friends in Plymouth?
LUCY. I am. Oh, no—did you think him sadly out of spirits? Poor Edward; it does break his heart terribly, for us to be separated. I gave him a lock of my hair set in a ring, and that was some comfort, he said, but not equal to us being together. Perhaps you noticed the ring when you saw him?

ANNE. Lucy! What is that song the doctor was asking me to sing last Thursday?

*Lucy shoots her Death Eyes.*

...Pardon my interruption.

*She scurries back to the pianoforte.*

LUCY. Miss Dashwood, I hope we can speak of this again. It is such a relief to confide in someone so much older and wiser! Until now, Anne is the only other person I have been able to ask advice of.

*Looks at Anne pointedly.*

And I know my dear Edward cannot be angry at me for confiding in you. He has told me so much about you and your family, and I know that he looks upon you quite as his own sister.

*Anne warbles particularly badly.*

Might we see you in London this winter?
ELINOR. No.
LUCY. I am sorry for that; we could have spent many happy hours together! Anne and I are going in December to see some relations—but I am really going to see my darling Edward. (Leaning in, quietly.) I will, of course, give him your very, very best.
THE GOSSIPS

GOSSIP 1. Poor Mr. Dashwood—carried away so suddenly! Woke one morning with a fever, and drew his last gasp within the week! (Overlapping with next line.) Poor Mr. Dashwood!

GOSSIP 2. Poor Mr. Dashwood! But a very handsome funeral. The serenity of the corpse was most delightful. (Overlapping with next line.) Poor Mr. Dashwood!

GOSSIP 3. Poor Mr. Dashwood! And poor Mrs. Dashwood, in every sense of the word! You know that his widow and daughters are left with almost nothing!

The Gossips, drawn sharply to this information, drop all interest in the corpse.

GOSSIP 4. No!

GOSSIP 1. Not truly?

GOSSIP 4. But Norland Park is such a large estate!

GOSSIP 2. Were there... (In hushed tones.) very many DEBTS in the family?

GOSSIP 3. No, nothing like that. (Officiously.) It was a question of the law!

GOSSIP 4. DID SOMEBODY BREAK THE LAW?

The Gossips all shush him.

GOSSIP 3. No, no. Mr. Dashwood could not legally bequeath it to the ladies.

The Gossips are a bit disappointed.

It all went to his son from the previous marriage, Mr. John Dashwood.

John Dashwood enters.

JOHN. I think that I will give them a thousand pounds apiece to start their new life!

GOSSIP 4. But wasn’t he a rich man already?

GOSSIP 3. Oh yes, he married into money. But his rich wife—(Lowers voice.) not a sympathetic creature! Moved into Norland Park the DAY AFTER THE FUNERAL, without a word of notice to the new widow!