

Sense and Sensibility Synopsis

Sense and Sensibility, adapted from Jane Austen's novel, is a play set in 1790s England. When the elder Mr. Dashwood dies, his estate is left to his son, John Dashwood, and his conniving wife Fanny. Currently living at Norland are Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, their younger sister Margaret, and their mother. Fanny, looking to keep the fortune for herself, convinces John to evict his mother and sisters out of the home. Also visiting Norland is Fanny's brother, Edward Ferrars. Edward is a handsome but awkward bachelor, who Fanny seeks to marry off to a rich woman to advance their family's standing in society. Edward is entitled to a large amount of money from his elderly mother and is therefore a very desirable target to unmarried women. Edward and Elinor both develop repressed feelings for each other, and their relationship is promptly cut off by Fanny forcing the Dashwoods out of the house. The sisters and Mrs. Dashwood move into a cottage owned by the obnoxious Sir John Middleton and his gossiping mother-in-law, Mrs. Jennings.

The play is split into two plots that progress simultaneously. The first focuses on the relationship between Elinor and Edward. Edward visits the Dashwood sisters at the cottage but appears uncomfortable and unhappy. After Edward's premature departure, Elinor soon learns that Edward has been secretly engaged to Lucy Steele, a less wealthy 'fortune hunter' who marries rich men to reach a higher standing in society. When the Steele family visits John and Fanny Dashwood's house, Anne, a younger sister of Lucy, accidentally reveals the secret of Lucy and Edward's engagement. Upon learning that Edward is not marrying a wealthy woman, Mrs. Ferrars disinherits Edward from her fortune. His brother Robert is instead to receive the wealth, and Edward is left with nothing.

Meanwhile, Marianne is introduced to Colonel Brandon, an honorable and dignified military man in his forties. Colonel Brandon finds Marianne attractive, but she does not desire to marry an older man. Marianne then meets John Willoughby, a dashing young man who assists her when she sprains her ankle on a walk. Willoughby's charm, along with his love of art, music, and poetry, makes him instantly endearing to Marianne. Although Elinor disapproves of Willoughby's improper nature, he and Marianne quickly foster a blossoming romantic relationship. Willoughby returns to London on orders from his mother and promises to write to Marianne but does not keep his promise. When Marianne next sees Willoughby at a ball in London, she sees him conversing with another woman and refuses to speak to her. She is confused and devastated. Colonel Brandon then reveals to the sisters that Willoughby had previously seduced and impregnated his young ward, Jane, and then promptly abandoned her. Later, it is revealed that Willoughby was disinherited due to this dalliance and because he has several debts, decided to marry the wealthy woman we saw at the ball. Marianne falls ill, and but recovers with the aid of Brandon and Elinor. Throughout her recovery, Marianne develops feelings for Colonel Brandon after seeing his caring side.

The two plots coalesce when Colonel Brandon gives Edward a home and financial security upon learning of Edward's loss of fortune. Willoughby returns to tell Elinor that while he had been irresponsible and reckless, his love for Marianne was genuine. Willoughby is resigned to stay with his current wife in an unhappy but stable marriage. Marianne, now realizing she would never have been happy with Willoughby, falls in love with Colonel Brandon. At the end of the play, Edward reveals to the Dashwoods that Lucy Steele, upon learning Edward had lost his inheritance, immediately left him and instead married Robert Ferrars. Now free of his

previous obligation to another woman, Edward confesses his love to Elinor, creating two couples that are soon to be married at the end of the play.

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