



Willoughby and Marianne

This extract represents one of the turning points in the novel. Elinor and Marianne are in London at a party and they see Willoughby, the young man Marianne is in love with and who had seemed to return her love when he was at Barton. Willoughby's cold reception causes Marianne's distress.

Jane Austen
Sense and Sensibility
(1811)

Book 2, Chapter 28

- They had not remained in this manner long, before Elinor perceived Willoughby, standing within a few yards of them, in earnest¹ conversation with a very fashionable looking young woman. She soon caught his eye, and he immediately bowed², but without attempting³ to speak to her, or to approach⁴ Marianne, though he could not but see her⁵; and then continued his discourse with the same lady. Elinor turned involuntarily to Marianne, to see whether it could be unobserved by her. At that moment she first perceived him, and her whole countenance glowing with sudden delight⁶, she would have moved towards him instantly, had not her sister caught hold of her⁷.
- 10 'Good heavens⁸!' she exclaimed, 'he is there – he is there – Oh! why does he not look at me? why cannot I speak to him?'
'Pray, pray be composed,' cried Elinor, 'and do not betray⁹ what you feel to every body present. Perhaps he has not observed you yet.'
- This however was more than she could believe herself; and to be composed at such a moment was not only beyond the reach¹⁰ of Marianne, it was beyond her wish. She sat in an agony of impatience which affected¹¹ every feature.
- At last he turned round again, and regarded them both; she started up¹², and pronouncing his name in a tone of affection, held out her hand to him. He approached, and addressing himself rather to Elinor than Marianne, as if wishing to avoid her eye, and determined not to observe her attitude, inquired in a hurried manner after¹³ Mrs Dashwood, and asked how long they had been in town. Elinor was robbed of all presence of mind¹⁴ by such an address, and was unable to say a word. But the feelings of her sister were instantly expressed. Her face was crimsoned over¹⁵, and she exclaimed, in a voice of the greatest emotion, 'Good God! Willoughby, what is the meaning of this? Have you not received my letters? Will you not shake hands with me?'
- He could not then avoid it, but her touch seemed painful to him, and he held her hand only for a moment. During all this time he was evidently struggling for composure¹⁶. Elinor watched his countenance and saw its expression becoming more tranquil. After a moment's pause, he spoke with calmness.
- 30 'I did myself the honour of calling¹⁷ in Berkeley Street last Tuesday, and very much regretted¹⁸ that I was not fortunate enough to find yourselves and Mrs Jennings at home. My card was not lost, I hope.'
- 'But have you not received my notes?' cried Marianne in the wildest anxiety. 'Here is some mistake I am sure – some dreadful¹⁹ mistake. What can be the meaning of it? Tell me, Willoughby; for heaven's sake²⁰ tell me, what is the matter?'
- He made no reply; his complexion²¹ changed and all his embarrassment returned; but as if, on catching the eye of the young lady with whom he had been previously talking, he felt the necessity of instant exertion²², he recovered himself again, and after saying, 'Yes, I had the pleasure of receiving the information of your arrival in town, which you were so good as to send me,' turned hastily away²³ with a slight bow and joined his friend.
- Marianne, now looking dreadfully white, and unable to stand, sank²⁴ into her chair, and Elinor, expecting every moment to see her faint²⁵, tried to screen her²⁶ from the observation of others, while reviving her with lavender water.

- 1 earnest. Sincera, ardente.
- 2 bowed. Fece un inchino.
- 3 without attempting. Senza cercare.
- 4 approach. Avvicinarsi a.
- 5 though he could not but see her. Sebbene non potesse fare a meno di notarla.
- 6 countenance ... delight. Volto animato da un improvviso piacere.
- 7 had not ... of her. Se sua sorella non l'avesse trattenuta.
- 8 Good heavens. Santo cielo.
- 9 betray. Tradire, rivelare.
- 10 beyond the reach. Al di sopra delle capacità.
- 11 affected. Influenzava.
- 12 started up. Trasalì.
- 13 inquired ... after. Chiese frettolosamente notizie di.
- 14 was robbed ... mind. Fu privata di tutta la sua presenza di spirito.
- 15 was crimsoned over. Si fece tutta rossa.
- 16 he was ... composure. Evidentemente si sforzava di mantenersi calmo.
- 17 calling. Far visita.
- 18 regretted. Mi è dispiaciuto.
- 19 dreadful. Terribile.
- 20 for heaven's sake. Per amor del cielo.
- 21 complexion. Colorito.
- 22 exertion. Sforzo.
- 23 turned hastily away. Si allontanò in fretta.
- 24 sank. Si accasciò.
- 25 faint. Svenire.
- 26 to screen her. Di proteggerla, di nasconderla.



45 'Go to him, Elinor,' she cried, as soon as she could speak, 'and force him to come to me. Tell him I must see him again – must speak to him instantly. – I cannot rest – I shall not have a moment's peace till this is explained – some dreadful misapprehension²⁷ or other. – Oh, go to him this moment.'

'How can that be done? No, my dearest Marianne, you must wait. This is not the place for explanations. Wait only till tomorrow.'

50 With difficulty however could she prevent her from²⁸ following him herself; and to persuade her to check²⁹ her agitation, to wait, at least, with the appearance of composure, till she might speak to him with more privacy and more effect, was impossible; for³⁰ Marianne continued incessantly to give way³¹ in a low voice to the misery of her feelings, by exclamations of wretchedness³². In a short time Elinor saw Willoughby quit³³ the room by the door towards the staircase, and telling Marianne that he was gone, urged³⁴ the impossibility of speaking to him again that evening, as a fresh argument for her to be calm. She instantly begged³⁵ her sister would entreat³⁶ Lady Middleton to take them home, as she was too miserable to stay a minute longer.

- 27 misapprehension. Malinteso.
 28 prevent her from. Impedirle di.
 29 to check. A controllare.
 30 for. Poiché.
 31 to give way. A dar sfogo.
 32 wretchedness. Infelicità.
 33 quit. Lasciare.
 34 urged. Insistette su.
 35 begged. Pregò.
 36 entreat. Implorare.

VISUAL ANALYSIS

1 READ the text and write a heading to each section.

- Lines 1-16
- Lines 17-41
- Lines 42-59

2 LOOK at the visual analysis of the text and write down what each highlight and colour represents.

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- pray be composed

3 DISCUSS the following questions in pairs.

- 1 Whose point of view does the reader share?
- 2 What does Marianne's choice of language convey?
- 3 What value does Elinor give credit to?
- 4 By making us sympathetic to Marianne, by helping us to feel her passion and later showing us that Elinor has been too controlled in her feelings, what is Jane Austen trying to say to her readers?
- 5 Which of the two sisters do you find more sympathetic, Marianne or Elinor? Are you more inclined to sense or sensibility?
- 6 'Decorum is a way of behaving which sustains the potential in experience for active and changing relations between others and ourselves. It is a polite lie which promises truth.' Do you agree? Discuss the relationship between impulsive behaviour and decorum in everyday life.

4 WRITE 10-12 lines. Jane Austen's target was the 18th-century heroine of sensibility to be found in the sentimental and Gothic novels. Compare Marianne with Emily, the protagonist of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (→ 4.6). Then discuss the authors' aims in both novels.

5 WRITE 10-12 lines. 'Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place, & governs the unwilling' (William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, → 4.9). Compare Blake's and Austen's attitude to opposite states of mind.