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 to 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 had only enough from the income of his property to leave them at his death a comfortable maintenance. The daughter, Mrs. John Dashwood, was already provided for by her marriage, and her husband was not likely to be in any way backward in bestowing on his wife's sisters every thing that might be desirable. John Dashwood was the heir of his father, and he was a young man of very good feelings, and of a character in no instance more praiseworthy than in the manner in which he behaved to his father. Mr. Dashwood had always been fond of his sister, and had been in the habit of bestowing on her, while she lived, almost every other indulgence in his power to bestow, except that of allowing her to share his fortune or live in his family; but as she married a man whose fortune, though large, was all in the funds, she could not, in the first flush of her husband's generosity, expect more than he was at present able to bestow. Mr. Dashwood was very fond of his wife and daughters, but his affection for them could not prevent his being sensible that they were the most unreasonable women on earth, and that there was no hope of their ever, any of them, saving enough to make a tolerable settlement for themselves. It was on their account that he had, in the first place, asked his relation to settle at Norland; and he was in hopes that they would be able, by their economy, to make a small fortune out of his generosity, which would be sufficient to their comfort, according to their ideas of happiness, and which, if they ever married, some of them might hope to see their brother's heir. Mr. Dashwood had lived to see his son married, on such terms as he could not but think very desirable for his sake; and he was perfectly satisfied with the behaviour of his daughter-in-law towards him, which was such as to promise a future of the most uninterrupted tranquillity to himself, if his fortune were, indeed, to descend to his children, as he was now almost persuaded it would, from his daughter-in-law's behaviour to her own family. Mrs. John Dashwood had a character of decided superiority over her husband, which promised to be as much for his future comfort as his wife's was for that of her husband. It was a character of great prudence and command of herself, of which her husband had been the first victim, as it had been the principal cause of his happiness. But in sorrow she must be equally carried away by her fancy and her feelings, whatever they might be, as in her husband's prosperous days she had been by his. Mrs. John Dashwood did not at all approve of what her husband intended to do for his sisters. To take three thousand pounds from the fortune of their dear little boy would be impoverishing him in the most dreadful degree. She begged him to think again on the subject. How could he answer it to himself, to rob his child and only child of so large an amount? Three thousand pounds! She could not bear the thought; it was a sum which would make a great difference in their own income! She was sure her husband could not wish for it. They had no right to give away so much money! Five hundred pounds was a handsome fortune for a young man to inherit. The money would be lost to them for ever. As soon as Fanny should be married, there would be no end to the demands which would be made upon them. They were young themselves, and had a family; and nothing but ruin could be the consequence of their giving away their money. Mrs. John Dashwood was a woman of great art, and she had been married long enough to know the importance of being earnest in her endeavours to influence the mind of a man who was, in his own opinion, perfectly capable of deciding on the propriety of his own actions; and she had been married long enough to her husband to know that there was a certain point, on every subject, on which it was almost impossible to prevail upon him to change his mind. She resolved to try what her influence might do, on this occasion, and she began with her husband on the subject the next morning, when he came to her with the information of his intended generosity to his sisters. He should think, he said, of their future comfort, of their independence, of everything that might be desirable for them in their situation, with such a fortune as he was now their guardian of. He was sure it was the right thing to be done, and his sisters were fine girls, and he was fond of them; and three thousand pounds could not be a great matter to them, with their fortunes and his own to share it with them. Mrs. John Dashwood was ready to allow that it was a very fine thing for them to have their brother's fortune, and that, as they had no claim upon him, it was a most generous gift, and that he was a very generous young man, and that there was no danger that he should ever be, in his own family, a poor man, and that, if he were, he could not be supposed to feel any of the inconvenience of his generosity, because he was so much richer himself than they were before his father died. She was ready to allow all this, and much more than this, if it were necessary. In short, no one could be more willing to believe every thing that was pleasant to her husband's interest and comfort, than his wife was, where her own children were not concerned. She had a great deal to say, and she was very eloquent upon the subject, for it was a great relief to her mind to dwell on the extreme folly of giving away so large an income as half their father's income must be, to people who had no more right to it than the children of a second marriage. She had no patience with such a man as her husband, who was so blind to his own interest and his children's interest as to be the slave of his dying promise. She was sure he could not have been in his right senses when he made it. It was the most ridiculous, the most absurd, the most improbable thing in the world, that a man who had married a woman who was a stranger to his family, who was only the daughter of a man who had married his uncle for his money, should be so much in the power of his wife's relations, as to be almost a slave to his wishes, and that his own sisters, who were his nearest relations, and who had never done any thing to offend him, should be so cruelly treated by his father's will, that they should be almost beggars, while the whole of their father's property was given to a stranger, who was not related to them by any tie but that of marriage. Mrs. John Dashwood was a woman who could not be long in any doubt as to the proper conduct of a person who had married a man with a fortune like that of her husband. She had not been married many years, she was young herself, and had a great deal of youthful vanity and thoughtlessness in her character, which had been her husband's principal inducement to marry her. She was a woman, however, of a good deal more than common sense, and had been married long enough to her husband to know that he was, in most things, a weak, narrow-minded, selfish man, who was ready to do anything that was right and proper, when his own ease and comfort were not concerned, and who was, in his own way, as fond of his wife as he was of himself. She had no difficulty, therefore, in persuading him that it was his duty to do more than he had intended to do for his sisters. To take three thousand pounds from the fortune of their dear little boy would be impoverishing him in the most dreadful degree. She begged him to think again on the subject. How could he answer it to himself, to rob his child and only child of so large an amount? Three thousand pounds! 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