

The Dashwoods of Norland Park

Norland Park was a fine old house in the county of Sussex. The house and the land around it had belonged to the Dashwood family for very many years. For hundreds of years, members of the Dashwood family had lived at Norland Park.

Eleven years before the start of this story, the owner of Norland Park – Mr Dashwood – invited his nephew and his family to live with him. Mr Dashwood was an old man and he had never married and had children, so his nephew was his heir⁹. The name of the old man's nephew was Henry Dashwood. Old Mr Dashwood wrote in his will¹⁰ that when he died, Henry Dashwood would inherit the property.

Henry had married twice. His first wife had died several years after their son, John, was born. Henry and his second wife had three daughters – Elinor, Marianne and Margaret. Old Mr Dashwood liked his nephew, his nephew's wife, and their young daughters very much and for many years they all lived happily together at Norland Park.

Old Mr Dashwood died and Henry and his family read his will. They were very surprised at what they read there. Only a few years before his death, old Mr Dashwood had changed the words of his will.

John Dashwood, Henry's son, was about twenty-seven years old and he was rich. He had inherited money from his mother and he had also married a rich woman. John and his wife, Fanny, had one child – a boy called Harry. Harry was now four years old. Little Harry had often visited Norland Park with his parents and old Mr Dashwood had become so fond of¹¹ the young child that he had changed his will. The

will said that while Henry Dashwood lived, he was the old man's heir, and Henry and his family could live at Norland Park. But the will also said that when Henry died, his wife and his three daughters would not inherit the property. Instead, the house and the land would belong to little Harry Dashwood – John Dashwood's son. Henry's second wife and his three daughters would have nothing.

'Do not worry, my dear,' Henry said to his wife after old Mr Dashwood's funeral¹². 'Norland Park is our home now and I hope that it will be for many years. Our daughters will get married one day and they will look after us. We will all have many happy years here together.'

However, a year after old Mr Dashwood's death, Henry himself became very ill. When he knew that he was dying, he sent for his son, John. John Dashwood came to Norland Park immediately and stood by his father's bed.

'My dear John, you must look after your sisters and their mother,' Henry Dashwood said. 'Please promise me that you will do this. Your stepmother¹³ and her girls will not have much money. When I am dead, Norland Park will belong to your son. But he is a very young child. You will be looking after everything. Promise me that you will help my dear wife and daughters.'

John Dashwood was not an unkind young man, but he was very careful with money.

'Yes, father,' John said. 'I promise that I will look after them.'

A few days later Henry Dashwood died and, very soon, everything changed. As soon as Henry's funeral had taken place, Fanny Dashwood, John Dashwood's wife, arrived at Norland Park. Little Harry and all her servants were with her. The house was Fanny's home now and she wanted to make sure that Mrs Dashwood and her girls understood this.

Fanny Dashwood was a cold and very selfish woman. She

had no kind feelings and she only thought of herself. She did not care about Mrs Dashwood and her daughters, but she was polite to them at first.

‘You must all stay at Norland Park for as long as you wish,’ Fanny told them. ‘John and I will make changes, of course. But you will always be welcome guests here.’

Mrs Dashwood was now a guest in her own home and she was very unhappy. She had very little money and she was dependent¹⁴ on John and Fanny. Fanny now gave orders to the servants and she decided how much money was spent. Mrs Dashwood had never liked Fanny, and she did not want to live at Norland Park any longer. But her eldest daughter, Elinor, persuaded¹⁵ her to stay.

‘John is our brother, mama¹⁶,’ Elinor said. ‘We do not know him very well. We should spend some time with him. It will be better to stay here for a few months. Later, we can find a smaller house to live in, and remain friends with¹⁷ John too.’

Elinor Dashwood had a pretty face and a fine figure. She was a kind and sensible girl. She always thought about things carefully. She had strong feelings, but she had good sense too. She had learnt to control her feelings.

Marianne, Elinor’s younger sister, was clever, interesting and beautiful. She felt very strongly about everything and her feelings were always clear to everyone. Sensibility was more important than good sense to Marianne. Marianne was either very happy or completely miserable.

Mrs Dashwood behaved in the same way as her daughter, Marianne. She could not hide her feelings easily. Both Marianne and Mrs Dashwood were now very miserable. They could not believe that they would ever be happy again.

Mrs Dashwood’s third daughter was named Margaret and she was aged thirteen. Margaret was more like sixteen-year-old Marianne than nineteen-year-old Elinor. Margaret was lively and independent. She did not like to be told what to

do and she always said what she thought.

John Dashwood had been thinking carefully about his promise to his father. He decided to give each of his sisters £1000. But his wife, Fanny, did not agree with this decision. Fanny had always been rich, but she was very mean. She hated giving money away.

‘Three thousand pounds!’ Fanny cried. ‘That money belongs to our dear little Harry. How can you be so unkind to your own son?’

‘But I must do something to help my stepmother and my sisters,’ John Dashwood replied. ‘I made a promise to my father when he was dying. I promised that I would look after them. But you are right, Fanny. Perhaps £3000 is too much. The girls may marry well and have rich husbands. Then they will not need the money at all. £500 each will be more than enough, I am sure.’

‘Certainly it will be enough,’ Fanny said. ‘If our Harry has many children of his own, he might need all his money. Also, there is an arrangement with your stepmother’s family. When their mother dies, the girls will each have £3000. I have a better idea. Give Mrs Dashwood and her girls a gift of £50 from time to time. Find them a little house where they can all live very cheaply¹⁸. This way we shall all be happy.’

John Dashwood was delighted with Fanny’s idea. It would save him a great deal of money and keep Fanny happy too.

‘You are right, my dear,’ John said to his wife. ‘That is an excellent suggestion. £50 will be more than enough. My stepmother has a little money of her own. She already has everything that they need for their new home. She has china, linen¹⁹ and a few pieces of furniture from Norland. The girls will not need any money at all!’

Mrs Dashwood and her daughters stayed on at Norland Park for nearly six months after Henry Dashwood’s death. During

this time, Fanny was often unkind and thoughtless and she upset Mrs Dashwood many times. But Mrs Dashwood enjoyed looking at other houses for her family to live in. There were several houses in the neighbourhood²⁰ that she liked, but Elinor persuaded her mother that they were all too big and expensive.

Fanny Dashwood had two brothers. Their names were Edward and Robert Ferrars. Twenty-four-year-old Edward Ferrars, Fanny's elder brother, now came to stay at Norland Park. He remained there for several weeks.

Edward Ferrars was not handsome, but he had a pleasant face and very good manners. Edward was very shy – he was uncomfortable when he talked with strangers or large groups of people, and he did not say much. But he was kind and thoughtful. He was very unlike his sister, Fanny.

Edward was always polite to Mrs Dashwood and her daughters. He felt sorry for them. He understood their feelings. Norland Park had been their home for many years. But it did not belong to them now and this was difficult for them.

Elinor and Edward were often together. They walked in the gardens, rode horses in the park, and sat next to each other every evening. Edward was not shy with Elinor and he always had something to say to her. Mrs Dashwood was sure that they were falling in love. She was delighted and she spoke to Marianne about it.

'I think that Edward loves our dear Elinor, and that she loves him too!' Mrs Dashwood told Marianne. 'If all goes well, your sister will be married in a few months and she will have a home of her own. I shall miss her very much. But Edward will make her happy, I am sure.'

Marianne shook her head and said, 'I am not sure about Edward, mama. He is very pleasant, but he is too quiet. He



'I think that Edward loves our dear Elinor, and that she loves him too!' said Mrs Dashwood.

never says anything that is interesting or exciting. He does not like music or poetry, and he does not understand art at all. But I suppose that he might be suitable for Elinor. She is quiet and sensible too. And she is easily pleased.

'I am very different from Elinor, mama,' Marianne went on. 'The man whom I marry must be lively, handsome and charming²¹. He must love art, poetry and music. He must have good manners and make me laugh. He must be able to speak well about interesting things. He must be perfect and please me in every way.'

Marianne sighed²². 'I do not think that I shall ever meet a man whom I can truly love,' she added sadly.

Mrs Dashwood laughed at her daughter's words. 'Marianne, you are not seventeen yet,' she said. 'There is plenty of time for you to find the perfect man!'

Marianne smiled and went to talk to her sister about Edward Ferrars.

'It is a pity²³ that Edward does not share²⁴ your love of art, Elinor,' Marianne began. 'You draw and paint so well, but Edward has very little interest in your work.'

'That is not true,' Elinor answered quickly. 'I have often spoken to Edward about art. His taste and opinions²⁵ are those of a real gentleman²⁶. He does not say much when many people are listening, because he is shy. But he talks to me. I like him very much, Marianne.'

'You *like* him!' Marianne repeated. 'You are cold-hearted, Elinor! Where are your feelings of *love* for Edward Ferrars? Does he not love you?'

'I hope that Edward loves me,' Elinor replied quietly, 'but I cannot be sure. He has no profession²⁷ and very little money of his own. No one can live without money. Edward and his brother are dependent on their mother. Mrs Ferrars will expect her sons to choose rich women when they fall in love.'

‘If Edward loves you and he is sensible, he will choose you. He will not care about money!’ Marianne cried. ‘Mama and I hope that you will soon be engaged. Then I shall love Edward as a brother!’

Elinor did not answer. She had noticed that Edward often looked unhappy. Perhaps there was something that he was hiding from her. Did Edward Ferrars have a secret? Elinor did not know. Although she was very fond of Edward, Elinor could not be completely sure of his true feelings for her.

Fanny Dashwood had noticed the friendship between her brother and Elinor, and it did not please her at all. Elinor Dashwood had very little money and Fanny thought that she was unsuitable in every way. Fanny believed that Elinor was not good enough for her brother. Fanny wanted to make Mrs Dashwood understand this.

‘If my brothers behave well and do not upset our mother, they will both be rich men,’ Fanny said. ‘My mother expects Edward and Robert to marry suitable young women. I am sure that you understand me, Mrs Dashwood. My mother will be very angry if my brothers are tricked into unsuitable marriages.’

Mrs Dashwood was very upset by these words, but she was too angry to answer. She understood Fanny very well. Fanny was saying that Elinor was too poor to marry Edward Ferrars and she must not make him love her.

‘We must leave Norland Park at once!’ Mrs Dashwood told her daughters. ‘We must find a home of our own. I will not live in the same house as Fanny Dashwood any longer!’

A few days later, Mrs Dashwood received a letter from one of her relations – a wealthy gentleman who lived at Barton Park, in Devon. The gentleman’s name was Sir John Middleton and he owned a lot of land and property. Barton Cottage, one of the little houses on his land, was empty. Sir

John suggested that Mrs Dashwood and her daughters could rent²⁸ the cottage and live there.

Sir John's letter was so kind and friendly that Mrs Dashwood decided to move to Devon at once. After Fanny's unkind words, Mrs Dashwood wanted to live as far away from Norland Park as possible. Elinor agreed with her mother, and they sent a letter to Sir John the same day.

John Dashwood was a little embarrassed when he heard this news. His stepmother and sisters were going to live far away because of Fanny's behaviour. He offered to pay the rent for the first six months himself. Mrs Dashwood was delighted. She decided to rent Barton Cottage for a year.

'Our new home is called Barton Cottage,' she told all her friends and neighbours. 'It is in the county of Devon, about four miles north of the town of Exeter.'

Edward Ferrars looked very sad when he heard the news. 'Devon!' he said. 'That is so far away.'

Mrs Dashwood smiled at the young man kindly. 'Barton Cottage is not large,' she said. 'But our friends will always be welcome to stay there.'

The cottage already had some furniture in it. The Dashwoods were taking with them some china and a few pieces of furniture from Norland, their books, Marianne's piano and Elinor's pictures. The lives of Mrs Dashwood and her daughters would now be completely different. They were going to live simply, in a much smaller house. Mrs Dashwood sold her husband's carriage and horses, because she did not have enough money to keep them. There were very many servants at Norland Park, but she would only need three at Barton Cottage. As soon as the arrangements were made, three servants went to Devon. They were going to clean the cottage before the Dashwoods arrived.

'Dear, dear Norland, how sad I am to leave you!' Marianne said on their last evening in Norland Park. 'I love

every room in this wonderful house! Every tree in the park is beautiful. Shall I ever be happy again?"