Mansfield Park

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JANE AUSTEN

Jane Austen was one of seven children born to parents George and Cassandra Austen in Steventon, England, where Austen's father worked as a rector. Despite their position as members of the English gentry, George and Cassandra were not especially wealthy. When Austen was 25 she moved with her family to Bath, England, and then moved nine years later to Chawton, England, where she wrote *Mansfield Park*. Austen published her six novels, including favorites such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, anonymously. They were only published under her own name posthumously.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although Austen, who rarely discusses contemporary politics or news in her books, does not specifically mention any historical events in *Mansfield Park*, she does refer to Sir Thomas's business in Antigua. Antigua had been a British colony since 1632, and its major profit came from plantations worked by slaves. When Austen wrote *Mansfield Park*, slave trading had only recently been abolished in 1807 (meaning human trafficking from Africa to England and its colonies was prohibited). While slavery didn't end for people born into slavery in England or its colonies until 1833, the 1807 act marked the beginning of the end of the brutal system upon which Brits like Sir Thomas built their wealth.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Austen wrote at a time when the novel was undergoing significant changes in style and form. The novel itself was relatively new to the English literary tradition, with Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, published in 1749, considered to be one of the earliest English novels. *Mansfield Park*, published only 65 years after *Tom Jones*, and Austen's other novels are often seen as books that connect the earliest English novels to the highly developed novels of Victorian writers like George Eliot and Charles Dickens. Unlike earlier English novels such as *Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe, Austen's works focus more on interpersonal relationships and less on questions of morality.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Mansfield Park*
- **When Written:** 1812-1813
- **Where Written:** Chawton, England
- **When Published:** 1814
- **Literary Period:** Classicism/Romanticism
- **Genre:** Novel of Manners
- **Setting:** Mansfield Park, Sotherton, Portsmouth (all in England)
- **Climax:** Henry and Maria's disappearance together and the revelation of their affair
- **Antagonist:** Mrs. Norris
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Marriage. Despite the fact that all of Jane Austen's novels prominently feature courtship and marriage, Austen herself never married. Austen did, however, have an intense romantic flirtation with Irishman Thomas Lefroy, whom she met when she was twenty.

Film. *Mansfield Park* has been adapted for the screen three times, once as a full-length movie and twice as a television mini-series.

PLOT SUMMARY

Mansfield Park tells the story of protagonist Fanny Price as she navigates her adolescence and young adulthood. As a child, Fanny is sent to live with her aunt, Lady Bertram, and her uncle, Sir Thomas, at their country estate, Mansfield Park. Mrs. Price, Fanny's mother and Lady Bertram's sister, is of a lower class and struggles financially due to her poorly chosen marriage to naval officer Mr. Price. Together they have too many children to care for, so Lady Bertram, Sir Thomas, and Fanny's other aunt Mrs. Norris contrive to take in Fanny, who is her eldest daughter.

At Mansfield, Fanny grows up with her four cousins: Tom, Edmund, Maria, and Julia. When Fanny first arrives at Mansfield, she is uncomfortable because of her lack of proper manners and exposure to luxury and wealth. She is homesick and misses her brother William, with whom she is extremely close. In Fanny's early years at Mansfield, her relations generally neglect her, and Mrs. Norris is downright tyrannical and verbally abusive in how she treats her niece. Only her cousin Edmund goes out of his way to make Fanny feel comfortable, establishing an intense bond between them.

As Fanny grows older, she begins to feel more used to the lifestyle at Mansfield. Fanny serves as a companion to Lady Bertram, and stays at home with her reclusive aunt when the rest of the family leaves to socialize. Mrs. Norris's husband Mr. Norris eventually dies, causing Mrs. Norris to move out of the

Parsonage and into a house nearby. Normally, Edmund should have inherited his fortune, but Tom, who has a gambling problem, must use the money set aside to pay back his debts. A new preacher, Dr. Grant, moves into the Parsonage with his wife, Mrs. Grant.

Sir Thomas leaves for business in Antigua, and, frustrated by his son Tom's lack of responsibility, takes him along. Maria, meanwhile, attracts the attentions of the rich but stupid Mr. Rushworth, and they begin a courtship. Mr. Rushworth asks for Maria's hand in marriage, and she and Sir Thomas both agree to it, on the condition that they wait until Sir Thomas returns from the West Indies to wed.

That summer, Mrs. Grant's half siblings, Mary and Henry Crawford, come to stay with her. They are both attractive and charming, and they quickly befriend the Bertrams. Tom returns from the West Indies, with Sir Thomas to follow in the late fall. Henry flirts with both Julia and Maria, despite Maria's engagement. Together, the Bertram children, the Crawfords, and Fanny make a trip to Mr. Rushworth's estate, where Henry focuses his flirtation on Maria, leaving Julia feeling dejected. Meanwhile, Mary and Edmund begin to develop a romantic feeling between them. This upsets Fanny, who, over the years, has come to love Edmund as more than just a cousin.

The young people decide to put on a play after hearing about Tom's friend, Mr. Yates, doing the same at another party. Edmund and Fanny resist, saying it would not be proper, but eventually Edmund joins in. Fanny, however, holds out. Maria and Henry continue to flirt. Edmund and Mary fall deeper in love, and Fanny experiences intense pain watching them perform the love scenes. They make all the preparations for the play, but Sir Thomas returns from Antigua just before it is ready. He is angry at them, thinking the theatrics are totally improper, and puts an end to the fun.

Maria, who had hoped Henry would ask to marry her, gives up her dreams and marries Mr. Rushworth. She and Julia go to Brighton together with him, and then to London. Mary becomes closer with Fanny. With the other young women gone, Henry decides that, as a game, he will try to seduce Fanny. Fanny, meanwhile, is still secretly in love with Edmund, and is caught in the middle of Mary and Edmund's romance, which is a constant source of pain. Edmund tries to determine if Mary would marry him, but Mary is unwilling to commit because Edmund is a younger son, fortuneless, and a clergyman.

Fanny's brother William comes to visit, and Sir Thomas, who has warmed to Fanny since his return from Antigua, throws a formal ball in her honor. Henry has not succeeded in his sport of seducing Fanny, but has accidently fallen in love with her while trying. He leaves for London, where he secures a promotion for William in an attempt to win Fanny's heart. He then proposes to Fanny, who rejects him, much to Sir Thomas's disapproval. Not long afterward, Fanny returns to her childhood home in Portsmouth for the first time in many years. Fanny loathes Portsmouth, but becomes close with her younger sister, Susan.

Henry visits Fanny at Portsmouth and reiterates his affection for her. Fanny begins to warm up to him, and Mary encourages her to marry him. Soon afterward, however, Fanny receives word that Tom is gravely ill. She worries and longs to return to Mansfield. Then, Fanny hears rumors that Henry and Maria have run away together. In a letter, Edmund confirms the rumors, and adds the news that Julia and Mr. Yates have eloped. Fanny returns home to Mansfield and brings her sister Susan with her.

When Edmund talks to Mary about the affair between Maria and Henry, she does not condemn their actions, but rather complains about the fact that they were found out. As a result, Edmund is disgusted and terminates his relationship with her, much to Fanny's delight. Henry is totally excommunicated from the Bertram household. Maria, now disgraced, leaves Mansfield to live in a house far away with Mrs. Norris. Julia and Mr. Yates attempt to make amends with Sir Thomas and are forgiven. The Grants and Mary move away from Mansfield, settling in London. Edmund thinks about Fanny for the first time as a romantic option, and eventually falls in love with her. They marry and lead a happy life together.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Fanny Price – Fanny Price is the protagonist of *Mansfield Park*, though much has been made of the fact that, to many modern readers, she is not especially likeable. Fanny is a physically delicate, uptight, morally righteous, and easily-upset girl and later young woman, the niece of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram and the cousin and later wife of Edmund. Fanny moves to Mansfield Park as a child in order to relieve her impoverished mother of a financial burden. At Mansfield, Fanny learns proper manners and improves her health through walking and riding. Fanny struggles with intense feelings of guilt thanks to her vicious aunt Mrs. Norris, who verbally abuses Fanny, constantly belittling her and calling her ungrateful. Fanny maintains a close relationship via letters with her brother William, and of the Bertrams she is closest with Edmund, with whom she is deeply and secretly in love. Over the course of the novel, Fanny's strong moral compass serves her well, keeping her out of trouble and making her trustworthy to other characters. Henry Crawford attempts to woo Fanny and falls in love with her, but she refuses him time and time again because of her sense of their incompatibility and her love for Edmund. Ultimately, after Edmund fails to secure a marriage with Mary Crawford, Edmund and Fanny marry each other.

William Price – William Price is Fanny's older brother and one of the people she loves best. A devoted letter writer, William is

Fanny's faithful correspondent throughout the book while he is sailing with the Navy. Twice during the events of the novel he is on leave, and goes to visit Fanny at Mansfield, where he is generally well-liked. Toward the end of the book Henry uses his connections to help William rise in the ranks of the British Navy in an attempt to gain Fanny's love.

Lady Bertram – Lady Bertram is Fanny's aunt, Mrs. Norris's sister, and the mother of the Bertram children. Lady Bertram, who was known as quite a beauty in her youth, received her title through her advantageous marriage to Sir Thomas. Lady Bertram is a sluggish, un-emotive, reclusive woman, slow to follow conversations and generally found on her sofa. She often seems more interested in the behavior of her beloved pug than the lives of her four children. Lady Bertram rarely voices strong opinions, but often her hesitancy to leave the drawing room forces Fanny to forgo social events in order to provide her with company.

Sir Thomas Bertram – Sir Thomas is Lady Bertram's husband, Fanny's uncle by law, and the father of the Bertram children. He is a baronet and the owner of Mansfield Park. Sir Thomas is stoic and severe, but also genuinely loving, and wants what's best for his children and Fanny. Sir Thomas also has business interests in Antigua (presumably involving the slave trade). In the middle of the book, he leaves for the West Indies to settle some business there, and returns just in time to put an end to the play that his children are putting on. After his return, Sir Thomas treats Fanny very warmly, ensuring that she has what she needs and throwing a ball in her honor.

Mrs. Norris – Mrs. Norris is Fanny's aunt and primary source of unhappiness. She is essentially a self-centered, self-righteous, superficial, dramatic, money-grubbing, manipulative bully, and Austen portrays her with a biting irony that often renders Mrs. Norris comedic, as her actions are generally petty and hypocritical without her awareness of it. Mrs. Norris's hilarious awfulness also has real repercussions for others, however. She can often be seen exploiting people for financial or social gain, and the way she treats Fanny is often shockingly cruel and borders on psychological abuse, despite Mrs. Norris having been the first to suggest taking Fanny in. While she neglects Fanny, Mrs. Norris dotes on and spoils Maria. At the book's end, Mrs. Norris moves far away to live with the disgraced Maria.

Julia Bertram – Julia is the younger daughter of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, and is Fanny's cousin. Julia is described as quick to laugh and has a bit of a dramatic flair. She is very close with her older sister Maria, but often competes with her, especially for male attention. Julia has a crush on Henry, and is upset when he begins to favor Maria over her. Julia does not take part in the play, because she doesn't get the part that she wants, but it is during the theatre production that Julia meets Mr. Yates, with whom she elopes at the end of the book.

Maria Bertram – Maria Bertram is the eldest daughter of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, Fanny's cousin, and Mr. Rushworth's fiancée and later wife. She is a beautiful, accomplished, well-mannered young woman who attracts the attentions of the boring but wealthy Mr. Rushworth. During their engagement, Maria flirts heavily with Henry, competing with her sister Julia for his attention (besides the competition, Julia and Maria enjoy a close relationship). Six months after Maria marries Mr. Rushworth for his money, she runs away with Henry, disgracing her family and catalyzing her divorce.

Edmund Bertram – Edmund is Sir Thomas's younger son and Fanny's cousin and later husband. Edmund is a kind, handsome, contentious young man who trains to become a minister and is ordained during the course of the book. He and Fanny are close confidants, and for most of the book he is unaware that Fanny harbors a secret romantic love for him. Edmund is bewitched by Mary Crawford's charm and beauty, and they begin a romantic courtship. Edmund's career choice and lack of fortune gets in the way, however. Finally, after Henry and Maria's affair, Edmund breaks with Mary. He comes to love Fanny, and in the end the two are happily married.

Tom Bertram – Tom Bertram is the oldest son and heir of Sir Thomas, and is Fanny's cousin. Tom, although exuberant and jovial, is extremely irresponsible, especially when it comes to money. Tom is a big gambler and drinker, and ends up with significant debts, necessitating him to dip into the fortune set aside for Edmund as a result. Tom spends some time with his father in Antigua in order for Sir Thomas to keep an eye on him.

Henry Crawford – Henry Crawford is the brother of Mary Crawford and the half-brother of Mrs. Grant. Raised by his uncle the Admiral and the Admiral's wife, Henry is a young man of considerable fortune and the owner of an estate. He spends several weeks at a time visiting Mrs. Grant and Mary at the parsonage, which is how he comes to know the Bertram family. Despite his landownership, Henry hates to stay in one place for two long. Similarly, Henry cannot settle on just one woman, and, despite the fact that he is described as average looking, he is notorious for his charm and powers of seduction. Henry makes both Julia and Maria fall in love with him without seriously considering either of them. Later, Henry resolves to put his heartbreaking skills to the test and attempt to seduce Fanny. His seduction fails, and moreover, he actually falls in love with her instead. Ultimately, though, Henry cannot prove to Fanny that his interest in genuine, and he engages in an adulterous affair with Maria, ruining both of their reputations.

Mary Crawford – Mary Crawford is Henry Crawford's sister and Mrs. Grant's half-sister. She is very beautiful and very charming, but can sometimes transgress rules of propriety due to her lively way of thinking. Mary, who lived in London with her uncle the Admiral and his wife before moving to the Parsonage to live with Mrs. Grant, enjoys city life and sociability. Despite her love of London, her home there with the Admiral was tense, since the two of them do not get along well. Mary is ambitious

and intends to marry advantageously, initially setting her sights on Tom. She ends up falling in love instead with Edmund, but cannot get over his profession as a clergyman and his small income. Ultimately, her romance with Edmund fails because of this difference and because of Mary's support of her brother's affair. Mary serves in Fanny's life as both an occasional friend and a constant source of pain, due to Edmund's affections for her.

Mr. Rushworth – Mr. Rushworth is a neighbor of the Bertrams and Maria's fiancé and later husband. He is slow-witted and boring but very rich. Throughout the first half of the book, Mr. Rushworth tags along with the Bertrams and the Crawfords as they socialize, often weighing down the conversation, and seeming alternatively comedic and pitiable in his lack of social grace. Maria marries him for his wealth and property, and when she later leaves him to run away with Henry, Mr. Rushworth divorces her.

Mrs. Grant – Mrs. Grant is Dr. Grant's wife, and the half sister of Mary and Henry. Generally described as likeable, Mrs. Grant caters to her husband's extravagant food requests and enjoys spending time with Mary, who comes to live with her, and Henry, who visits often. Mrs. Grant likes imagining romantic matches between her half-siblings and the Bertram children. When the young people put on the play, Mrs. Grant plays the role of the Cottager's Wife.

Dr. Grant – Dr. Grant is Mrs. Grant's husband, and the preacher of Mansfield Park's parish following Mr. Norris's death. Dr. Grant is kind, but also a self-indulgent food-lover. As result, he is very demanding, and asks his wife to arrange elaborate meals for him. Dr. Grant represents the hypocritical preachers that Mary references throughout the text—he is more interested in his next luxurious meal than what he says on the pulpit.

John Yates – John Yates is Tom Bertram's friend, whom he brings to Mansfield Park. Yates tells the young people of Mansfield about his recent experience nearly performing in a play, and the young people decide to put on a play of their own, in which Yates plays Baron Wildenheim before the project is quashed. Yates expresses romantic interest in Julia, and elopes with her at the end of the book.

Mrs. Frances Price – Mrs. Price is Fanny's mother and Mr. Price's husband. Mrs. Price is described as being very similar to her sister Lady Bertram, except for her circumstances. Mrs. Price's decision to marry a naval officer has turned out disastrously, and resulted in her living with meager means and many children in Portsmouth. When Fanny returns for her visit to Portsmouth, Mrs. Price is kind, but too busy and uninterested to make a real effort to get to know her daughter.

Susan Price – Susan is Fanny's younger sister, age fourteen, who she reconnects with when she returns to Portsmouth. Susan, although unrefined because of her upbringing, tries to be good, kind, and well-mannered, and Fanny mentors her in proper behavior. When Fanny returns to Mansfield Park after her time in Portsmouth, Susan goes with her, such that she might benefit from a calmer, more structured upbringing.

Mr. Norris – Mr. Norris is Mrs. Norris's husband, and serves as her excuse for why she cannot take in Fanny at the beginning of the book. Mr. Norris is never described in detail, and dies early on in the book, catalyzing Mrs. Norris's move from the Parsonage into the White House. Mr. Norris is a preacher, and is succeeded by Dr. Grant after his death.

The Admiral – The Admiral is Henry and Mary's uncle, with whom they lived before Mary moved to the Parsonage. Henry gets along well with his uncle, but Mary butts heads with him often, and speaks negatively of him to other characters. The Admiral is a navy admiral whose high position allows him to help William rise in the ranks when Henry requests his intervention.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mr. Price – Mr. Price is Fanny's father and Mrs. Price's husband. He is a naval officer who Mrs. Price unfortunately married. Mr. Price shows no interest in Fanny when she comes to visit. Fanny describes him as a totally unrefined alcoholic.

Mrs. Rushworth (senior) – Mrs. Rushworth (senior) is Mr. Rushworth's mother. She greatly approves of and tries to help facilitate the match between her son and Maria. In a sometimes-confusing overlap, Maria is also occasionally referred to as Mrs. Rushworth after her marriage.

Nanny – Nanny is Mrs. Norris's servant, who she promises will fetch Fanny from London when Fanny first arrives from Portsmouth to begin her new life with the Bertrams.

Miss Lee – Miss Lee is the instructor of Maria, Julia, and Fanny. She is in charge of their schooling at Mansfield Park when they are children.

Rebecca – Rebecca is Mrs. Price's servant. She is not a very good cook.

Betsy Price – Betsey is Fanny's younger sister. She is spoiled and often quarrels with Susan.

Tom Price – Tom is Fanny's younger brother. He is rowdy and spends a lot of time playing noisily with Charles.

Charles Price – Charles is Fanny's younger brother. He is rowdy and spends a lot of time playing noisily with Tom Price.

Mary Price – Mary Price is Fanny's deceased younger sister, who died after Fanny moved to Mansfield, and was beloved by Susan.

Mr. Owen – Edmund's friend, with whom he stays just after he is ordained. Mr. Owen has three sisters and Mary Crawford worries about them stealing Edmund's affection.

Sam One of Fanny's brothers.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MONEY AND MARRIAGE

Like other Jane Austen novels, *Mansfield Parks* observes—and scathingly satirizes—the fickle hearts and courtship rituals of members of England's genteel class as they fall in and out of love. Like so many other novels of its day, *Mansfield Park* organizes itself around a marriage plot, meaning that the action of the story drives toward a wedding as the plot's culmination and fulfillment. The book's characters talk about marriage obsessively, and as they do, they repeatedly articulate a view of marriage as, ideally, a love match. For example, Sir Thomas worries about Maria's loveless engagement to Mr. Rushworth, and Edmund tells Fanny that she should only marry for love as Henry courts her.

Marriage, moreover, seems to be the only socially acceptable form that love is allowed to take—extramarital affairs are roundly condemned in the book. Most notably, the characters express unanimous horror after Maria and Henry disappear together to pursue their adulterous affair. Mary even suggests that Maria and Henry's affair must end in a marriage, because otherwise there would be no saving them from total social disgrace.

But despite the characters' professed commitment to marital love-matches, marriage *in practice* throughout the book serves primarily as a means for economic or social advancement, not emotional fulfillment. For instance, Austen shows the reader the transactional nature of marriage through the Bertrams' open acknowledgement and acceptance that Maria married Mr. Rushworth for material comfort and social influence rather than love. Likewise, Fanny's family enthusiastically encourages her to marry Henry Crawford because the match is socially and financially advantageous, despite the fact that Fanny repeatedly states that she does not love Henry. Meanwhile, Mary Crawford outright refuses to marry Edmund, despite her love for him, because she sees the marriage as being neither economically nor socially beneficial. So while Austen's characters obsessively idealize marriage as a deep intimate connection between two lovers, in practice they carry out marriage primarily as an economic transaction.

The characters' insistence on financially advantageous marriages makes their veneration of marriage bitterly ironic. The characters profess to cherish marriage as an institution, but they constantly degrade it by making it merely an instrument for achieving material, as opposed to emotional, comfort. That, in turn, renders the entire novel profoundly ironic, since the novel orbits around an institution that has clearly been hollowed out of any emotional or spiritual meaning. In a further irony, despite the novel's commitment to a story that centers around marriage, and despite the characters' insistence upon marriage as the only acceptable format for love, Austen gives the reader virtually no positive portraits of married life in *Mansfield Park*. Examples of messy marriages, on the other hand, are plentiful. Despite the fact that Maria married for money, Maria's marriage to Mr. Rushworth is a disaster and, ironically, leaves her as a social outcast with a meager budget courtesy of her father.

Marriage seems to be particularly devastating for Austen's female characters, even those who married "well." Mrs. Grant, for example, is made miserable by her husband's demanding expectations of her role as a housekeeper. Even Lady Bertram, whose marriage to Sir Thomas is not explicitly described as negative, suffers from such a profound sense of apathy in her marriage that she, devoid of any personality or passion, rarely leaves her couch.

Austen's cynicism towards marriage, palpable in her depiction of marriage as a financial transaction, paired with her many portraits of unhappy marriages and their negative effects on women, ultimately renders the book's "happy ending" somewhat sour. Even the marriages that are purportedly love-matches end poorly, like Mrs. Price's marriage to Mr. Price, which produces a domestic life that is hectic, financially strained, and haunted by Mr. Price's alcoholism. Even Edmund and Fanny's marriage, supposedly a perfect match, and seemingly the desired ending to the book, is somewhat tainted. Edmund's quick change of affection from Mary Crawford towards Fanny comes across as sudden and, as a result, unfulfilling and unconvincing. Likewise, though the narrator tells the reader that their marriage is happy, the book ends without showing any evidence of marital bliss. Both Fanny and the reader get what they are looking for, but Fanny's nuptial success seems like far less of a triumph when put in context of dark view of marriage portrayed in the rest of the book. By making Fanny victorious in winning Edmund's hand in marriage, but also showing how that accomplishment might not actually be such a happy one, Austen sardonically implies that the marriage plot, when carried out to its inevitable conclusion, is fundamentally unsatisfying because the institution of marriage itself is toxic.

MANNERS VS. MORALITY

Throughout *Mansfield Park*, Austen explores the complex relationship between manners and morality. Austen's view of manners is difficult to identify, in part because Austen's characters do not clearly define what they mean when they refer to "manners." The

meaning of manners in the book seems to be somewhat fluid, sometimes referring to knowledge of etiquette, sometimes to general politeness, sometimes to modesty, or gratitude, or pleasantness of personality, or social grace. Looked at more generally, the concept of manners in *Mansfield Park* refers to a series of expectations of a character's social conduct.

At the book's beginning, good manners, though highly valued at Mansfield Park, do not seem to correspond to good morals. For example, although Mrs. Norris and Sir Thomas congratulate themselves on their supposed moral goodness when they take Fanny in, Austen damningly portrays their "kindness" as a way to make *them* feel and look generous rather than actual generosity for Fanny's benefit. Fanny's initial arrival at Mansfield Park reveals this dissonance, when ten-year old Fanny expresses intense anxiety and fear about her new home. Rather than recognizing Fanny's unhappiness and trying to make her more comfortable, Mrs. Norris remarks that Fanny's response is ungrateful and rude. Mrs. Norris then continually uses the idea of good manners, and Fanny's failure to show them, as an excuse to criticize and demean her. From the very first chapters of *Mansfield Park*, then, Austen betrays the discrepancy between good manners and genuine morality.

As Fanny grows older, unlike the other characters, she does not deviate from her strong set of moral principles, even when it means that she appears ill mannered or contrarian. Throughout the novel, whenever Fanny resists something that contradicts her moral compass but that other people approve of, Mrs. Norris harshly reminds Fanny that she should be grateful to her uncle for providing for her and so do whatever the Bertrams want. For example, when Fanny refuses to act in the play because the text's questionable moral undertones, despite the fact that all the other young people are taking part, Mrs. Norris harangues her for her refusal. As for Fanny, she recognizes when other characters mask their immorality with good manners. Early on, she disdains Mary Crawford's behavior when Mary speaks ungratefully and disrespectfully of her uncle the Admiral, identifying Mary's comments, which Edmund waves off as mere affectation, as indicative of bad character. Moreover, Fanny refuses to marry Henry, despite everyone else's support, because she believes that, despite his charm and superficial kindness, he does not have good values—an impulse that turns out to be correct.

Curiously, it's Fanny's strict sense of propriety, which the novel seems to suggest is Fanny's best character trait, that makes Fanny such an unlikeable protagonist to many readers (Austen's own mother referred to Fanny as "insipid"). If this unlikeability is intentional, it may be Austen's way of emphasizing that Fanny will not compromise on her morality for the sake of being liked by anyone— not even the reader.

As the novel progresses, Fanny begins to be explicitly frustrated by good manners, which so often hide immorality, and which often keep her from connecting with other people. At Mansfield, the rules of society prevent her from, for example, joining in social events above her class, or comforting Julia after Henry's rejection. By the time Fanny goes to visit Portsmouth towards the end of the book, she looks forward to relief from the strict rules of manners. The narrator, after describing how her sisters did not greet her with proper manners when she arrives, states, "But manner Fanny did not want. Would they but love her, she should be satisfied."

However, as Fanny spends more time at her childhood home, she begins to see that their looser understanding of manners does not necessarily correlate to genuine morality or closer relationships. Fanny, in fact, starts to see the value of good manners, and longs for the quietness and respect of a household where manners are valued. She fails to develop meaningful relationships with her mother and most of her siblings despite the lack of structure and behavioral expectations in the house. While at Mansfield manners don't necessarily result in morality or human connection, neither does the *lack* of manners at Portsmouth. Ultimately, when Fanny returns to Mansfield Park, she is happy to rejoin a household where manners are appreciated.

By the book's end, Fanny has elevated herself to an equal place in the Bertram household, and her own volition in choosing a moral path is more respected. Through this exploration of Fanny's developing sense of the relationship between manners and morality, Austen expresses her criticism of 19th century obsession with manners. Ultimately, the novel seems to indicate that, although good manners do not necessarily correspond to good morals, neither does their absence. Through Fanny, who moves beyond overly strict rules of manners while maintaining her commitment to treating others well, the novel suggests following one's own moral compass, in spite of social expectations, is essential to being a good person.

LETTERS AND CHARACTER

As the plot of *Mansfield Park* unfolds, Austen draws attention to what her characters say and how they say it. *Mansfield Park* is bursting with commentary on language, and Austen repeatedly highlights how characters express themselves verbally— particularly through letters. Letters hold a place of supreme importance in the story, often serving as plot catalysts or revealing essential information. For example, Mrs. Norris's letter to Mrs. Price, in which she asks her to send Fanny to Mansfield, triggers the events of entire novel. Likewise, later letters alert characters to new developments in other parts of London, to characters' impending arrivals, and to alarming news. It is through letters that the characters and the reader receive news of Sir Thomas's journeys in Antigua, that Fanny hears of William's overseas adventures, and that Fanny learns of Tom's sickness and Julia's elopement while she is in Portsmouth.

Letters also have a complex relationship with character in

Mansfield Park, and at various points in the novel, people suggest that letters might reveal essential truths of character and identity. At one point, Mary Crawford, bemoaning the shortness of the letters Henry writes to her, suggests that brothers only write in a "manly" style, curtly and to the point. In doing so, she essentially asserts that writing might reveal an essential difference in gender. To go a step further, this also implies that letters could be used as proof of identity or character— that by parsing letters, readers may be able to reveal the writer's identity.

Letters do often serve as evidence of changing emotional states or even changing character within the novel. When Mary's letters arrive less and less frequently, Fanny worries that Mary is growing uninterested in their friendship. Conversely, Fanny begins to entertain the possibility of Henry's love being genuine, and of his character having changed, because of letters. Henry's professions of love in speech are insufficient—she only begins to warm to him when he shows her the letters securing William's promotion, and as she reads Mary's letters describing Henry's obsessive love. Furthermore, letters *themselves* can even change a character's identity. For example, William is made a lieutenant—which is to say, his identity and role in society is changed—through the writing of letters. Henry's letters secure William's promotion, and an official letter makes his promotion real.

However, even as the novel suggests that letters might reveal character or serve as proof of it, Austen, always contrary, also undermines those very ideas. For instance, Fanny immediately challenges Mary's idea that there is a "manly" style of letter writing when she indicates that her own brother, William, writes her very long, intimate letters. Likewise, while the letter from Mrs. Norris to Mrs. Price at the book's beginning supposedly rejuvenates their relationship, it seems to have in fact done little to end their estrangement, considering that Mrs. Norris later has the opportunity to visit Mrs. Price but declines.

In other words, Austen suggests that while letters give the appearance of providing insight into the sender's character, they might in fact, sometimes, be *false* evidence and should be treated with skepticism. For example, Mary's letter to Fanny stating that the rumor about Maria and Henry running off together is false ends up being patently untrue. And indeed, Henry's professed devotion to Fanny and insistence that he has changed is revealed to be hollow, since Henry later runs off with Maria. Ultimately, Austen challenges the wisdom of blind faith in written words (a bold move for a writer), and instead privileges patterns of actions in assessing another person's character. Rather than seeing letters as windows into character, she shows that letters are unreliable as evidence, and that letter-writing is as much a performance as a window into the letter-writer's soul.

THE COUNTRY VS. THE CITY

Throughout the book, characters in *Mansfield Park* move between their country homes at Mansfield and the surrounding property and cities like London and Portsmouth for business and for pleasure. Over the course of these travels, and through the characters' discussions of these two different kinds of environments, Austen expresses a difference in how she and her characters view rural spaces versus how they see urban spaces, and how, although city-spaces are viewed as more sociable and cultured, certain types of knowledge are only accessible in the country.

Mansfield, which is in the country, is a place of quiet, tranquility, and health. It is at Mansfield that Fanny's health improves, and that the young people practice invigorating sports like riding. Fanny frequently comments on the silence of Mansfield, and she and the other young people at Mansfield and its environs seem occasionally bored by the area's sleepiness. Mary Crawford repeatedly says that she could not live in the country for a long time because she would miss the fast-paced fun of London, where she lived previously.

The city (be it London, Portsmouth, or elsewhere), meanwhile, is lively and intense, with constant stimulation and entertainment. Maria and Julia are thrilled to go to London, where there are more social engagements to be had. Mary's time in London gives her a cultured, cosmopolitan air that is very charming, and she has the city to thank for her massive network and highly developed social graces. Fanny's house in Portsmouth, similarly, is clamoring with her siblings' noisy play, prompting her to seek out spaces of quiet.

Despite these benefits, however, the city is an imperfect place. For one thing, Austen shows that characters who have little exposure to country life also are ignorant about the way middle and lower class rural people live, and so come across as snobby and entitled. For example, at one point in the book Mary is trying to get her harp transported from London to the Parsonage, but cannot find a farmer to rent a cart from because it is harvest time. Mary is shocked that her money cannot convince them, and when she relates this story to Edmund, he is surprised that she is. Mary's lack of awareness of harvest shows how little Mary understands about the people who are of a lower class than she is—a concerning fact, since the gentry's wealth depends on their tenants. Henry, likewise, never knew his tenants before Fanny convinced him to meet with them. In a novel that entertains ideas of meritocracy as a viable alternative to aristocracy and gentry, utter removal from the lives of common people seems dangerously out of touch.

Austen also codes the city as a space of danger and vice. When the characters discuss London in Mansfield, they generally refer to it as a depraved place. When Mary, for example, suggests that preachers are morally corrupt, Edmund responds that she must be referring to the preachers in London.

And indeed, morally upright Fanny finds Portsmouth, where bad behavior reigns, to be considerably less enjoyable than Mansfield. Mr. Price's alcoholism shadows Fanny's view of Portsmouth as she observes how his problem heavily and negatively influences her family's finances and dynamic. Moreover, it is in Portsmouth that Fanny, against her better judgment, begins to consider falling in love with Henry—a decision that, had it not been avoided, would have proved detrimental. Fanny's health even suffers in the city, where it is harder for her to get exercise.

Ultimately, the city proves to be a thoroughly disastrous environment for the Bertram children. During his tenure in London, Tom takes a trip to the city of Newcastle and falls deathly ill after a night of rowdy drinking. He then needs to be brought back to Mansfield to recover. Likewise, it is in London that Maria and Julia make their terrible decisions to run away with Henry and Mr. Yates, respectively, ruining their reputations and gravely upsetting their family. Ultimately the damage that the family experiences in and around the city marks Austen's clear preference country life. This preference is reinforced by the fact that the novel's happy ending takes place in the country near Mansfield, where Edmund and Fanny settle.

INHERITANCE AND MERITOCRACY

Throughout *Mansfield Park*, issues of inheritance and meritocracy recur as Austen explores how characters' different positions in families and society affect their incomes. Austen models the inheritance system in the novel on that of real-world England in the early 1800s, when inheritance worked through the system of male primogeniture, meaning that a father's entire fortune goes to his first born son. Often, childless uncles' would set aside money for younger male children. Otherwise, younger sons could not legally inherit their fathers' estates, unless their older brothers died before their fathers. The purpose of this system was to ensure that family estates remained intact.

In the world of *Mansfield Park*, the implications of this system can be seen immediately in how it affects marriage—due to the rules of inheritance, women cannot inherit, and so must marry rich men in order to lead lives of luxury. Moreover, in the Bertram family, Austen gives the reader two sons: Tom, who is older, and a younger son Edmund. Tom, although set to inherit all of his father's fortune and his title, clearly is wildly irresponsible with money. Tom struggles with a gambling problem and prefers parties to managing estates. His debts are so enormous that the family must use money that Edmund's uncle Mr. Norris set aside for him to pay them off. Sir Thomas tries to tell Tom he should be ashamed of to steal Edmund's fortune like that, but Tom, who has grown up feeling that he is entitled to do what he wants, is unabashed. Tom clearly has not done anything to deserve his fortune (and, in fact, has shown that he would likely run the estate into the ground). However, according to law, Tom must inherit his father's assets and his title.

Edmund, meanwhile, who has grown up knowing his whole life that he would not have a fortune of his own, shows himself to be much more responsible and obedient than Tom. Not only is Edmund not a drinker or gambler, but he also strives to please his father and make him proud of him. Edmund, who becomes a minister, speaks passionately about his career, showing not only his commitment to hard work, but also his inclination toward moral behavior and righteousness. By contrasting the two brothers, Austen clearly implies that Edmund would be a more deserving heir to Sir Thomas's estate. Their juxtaposition, then, ironically highlights how ineffectively the system of inheritance works. Though the system is intended to keep fortunes intact, Tom would almost certainly squander his fortune to nothing, whereas if Edmund could be allowed to inherit, Sir Thomas could rest easy knowing that the estate will be preserved.

Austen's implied challenge to the inheritance system becomes more interesting when considered in conjunction with the middle and lower class characters in the book. Fundamentally, Austen's implicit judgment that the inheritance system should be more meritocratic leads to the question of inheritance in general: if characters' wealth and social status should not be determined by their birth order, should their wealth be determined by their birth at all? In order words, why should Maria, who is vain and vapid but the daughter of a baronet, be considered of a higher social status than Fanny, who is smart and morally righteous, but the daughter of a naval officer?

Sir Thomas himself thinks something along these lines in the final few pages of the novel, and even goes a step further, when he compares how his own children have turned out to Fanny, William, and Susan. As he thinks about the Price children's virtues, Sir Thomas acknowledges "the advantage of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure." Essentially, Sir Thomas thinks not only that his own children are no more deserving than the Price children, but also that there may be some spiritual or personal benefits to having the mentality that you must work for your livelihood and your luxuries. Placed conspicuously as the novel's conclusion, Austen champions the merit of middle class people over the indulgence of the upper class, foreshadowing a common theme in later 19th century literature. In this way, Austen uses her mocking critique of the inheritance system to subtly undermine perceptions of class, valuing meritocracy over aristocracy.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE GATE AT SOTHERTON

When the Crawfords, the Bertrams, and Fanny go to visit Mr. Rushworth at Sotherton, they go for a walk in the woods on the property. Maria, Mr. Rushworth, Henry, and Fanny, who have been walking together, stumble upon a locked gate. They want to go through and walk up to a knoll that they have spotted, but Mr. Rushworth has forgotten the key, so he walks back to the house and get it. While he is gone, Maria and Henry climb over the gate and head to the knoll without him. Fanny, thinking it improper, stays behind, while Julia follows Maria and jumps over the fence as well.

The crossing gate, which seems to represent moral transgression, foreshadows Henry and Maria's later scandalous behavior when they run away together after Maria marries Mr. Rushworth, once again leaving Mr. Rushworth behind. Likewise, at the end of the book Julia ends up eloping with Mr. Yates. The narrator implies that Julia follows Maria's led in her elopement, just as she does in jumping over the gate. Fanny, who is consistently on the side of moral rectitude throughout the book, does not cross, symbolizing her moral uprightness.

THE FIRE IN THE EAST ROOM

Before Sir Thomas leaves for Antigua and while he is gone, Fanny's favorite room in the house, the East Room, does not usually have a fire going in it. Fanny, who is afraid to ask for things and appear ungrateful, does not ask for one, and no one notices that the room is cold and thinks to offer one. The lack of a fire seems to symbolize the ways in which Fanny is neglected as a child at Mansfield Park. When Sir Thomas returns from Antigua, however, he begins to take more and more notice of Fanny, who has grown more refined and beautiful. Sir Thomas then insists on lighting a fire in the East Room for her. Lighting the fire shows how Fanny has become an important member of the household and how the Bertrams, though they have had difficulty showing it in the past, love and care for her.

GOLD CHAINS

Before the ball at Mansfield Park, William gives Fanny a beautiful cross meant to be hung from a necklace. She has no chain to hang it from, however. When she expresses this concern, Mary gives Fanny a beautiful, decorative gold chain that Henry gave to her—at Henry's request. The same day, Edmund gives her a simpler gold chain that suits her better, but when he learns of Henry's gift, he tells Fanny to wear Henry's instead. Ultimately, Fanny cannot wear the one that Henry gave her through Mary, because it does not fit the cross. The two different gold chains symbolize the two different options that Fanny has in Henry and Edmund. Henry's chain's ornateness and apparent expense represent how Henry, with his wealth and charm, might seem like the right choice for Fanny. However, Edmund's chain, which is simpler and more fitting to Fanny's tastes, is the one that actually fits her needs. Significantly, Edmund's chain fits the cross, symbolizing how Edmund fits better with Fanny's sense of morality and religiosity.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *Mansfield Park* published in 2001.

Chapter 1 Quotes

There will be some difficulty in our way, Mrs. Norris…as to the distinction proper to be made between the girls as they grow up… how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a Miss Bertram… they cannot be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations will always be different.

Related Characters: Sir Thomas Bertram (speaker), Fanny Price, Mrs. Norris

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Sir Thomas discusses with Mrs. Norris the possibility of adopting Fanny. They air the potential problems that might arise from such an arrangement, and Sir Thomas expresses his concern that Fanny or Maria and Julia might forget her status and think that Fanny is as high-class as Sir Thomas's own daughters.

Sir Thomas's insistence that his daughters and Fanny "cannot be equals" speaks to his anxiety about maintaining class distinctions. Sir Thomas insists that "their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations will always be different," showing how he believes the class system to be static, and without the potential for change or upward mobility. Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris's obsession with class distinctions is part of why Fanny goes unloved and neglected for so much of the book—it's merely what's "proper" to treat her as less valuable than the Bertram girls, in an early sign of how good manners can hide (or even encourage) cruelty. For despite Sir Thomas's concern not to "depress her spirits too far," Mrs. Norris verbally abuses Fanny, constantly reminding her of her lower class, and Fanny can never feel totally comfortable in the house. Sir Thomas's early preoccupation with ensuring that they maintain a difference between his daughters and Fanny wears away over the

course of the book, however, as Sir Thomas begins to value Fanny's good character above her class, and the class system itself is revealed to be arbitrary and unfair.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Maria Bertram was beginning to think matrimony a duty; and as a marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father's, as well as ensure her the house in town, which was now a prime object, it became, by the same rule of moral obligation, her evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could.

Related Characters: Mr. Rushworth, Maria Bertram

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Maria, who is now 21 and of prime marrying age, is beginning to feel the societal pressure to get married. For Maria, marriage is not a dream, but rather a "duty"— an unfortunate reality rather than a happy fantasy. That "duty," moreover, is not even a religious duty, but according to the quote, becomes confused with a moral one. Maria's decision to marry Mr. Rushworth is purely strategic: she wants to ensure that she will have a large income and access to the city of London, thus securing her financial and social status. Maria's understanding of marriage as a practical duty, not a fairytale or even a religious obligation, shows how marriage not only structures women's romantic lives, but also determines their monetary situation, where they will live, and which social circles they will belong to.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ There is not one in a hundred of either sex who is not taken in when they marry…it is, of all transactions, the one in which people expect most from others, and are least honest themselves… it is a manoeuvring business. I know so many who have married in the full expectation and confidence of some one particular advantage in the connexion, or accomplishment, or good quality in the person, who have found themselves entirely deceived, and been obliged to put up with exactly the reverse.

Related Characters: Mary Crawford (speaker), Henry Crawford, Mrs. Grant

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 30-31

Explanation and Analysis

During a conversation between Mrs. Grant and Mary, Mary expresses her belief that everyone who gets married is "taken in," or duped into the arrangement. Mrs. Grant expresses more positive sentiments about marriage, but Mary maintains her conviction that people are tricked into marriage, and that the people they marry are never exactly the people they thought they were.

Mary's word choice makes her cynical view of marriage even harsher. She calls marriage a "transaction" and a "manoeuvring business," highlighting how marriage is not a spiritual connection, but rather a monetary exchange, in which each person wants to get a good deal. Notably, Mary includes not only marriages for money or connections in this category, but also marriages for "good quality" in the spouse. In doing so, Mary casts all marriage in an unsavory light, not just marriage that is obviously for financial or social gain.

❝ Manners as well as appearance are…so totally different…A girl not out has always the same sort of dress: a close bonnet, for instance; looks very demure, and never says a word… The most objectionable part is, that the alteration of manners on being introduced into company is frequently too sudden. They sometimes pass in such very little time from reserve to quite the opposite— to confidence!

Related Characters: Mary Crawford (speaker), Fanny Price, Edmund Bertram, Tom Bertram

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

Mary speaks this quote during a conversation with Tom and Edmund about debutantes, sparked by Mary asking if Fanny is "out" yet. Mary is confused by Fanny's lack of interest in Henry, and thinks it might be because she is not yet looking for a husband.

According to Mary, the difference in behavior and manners between a girl who is out and a girl who is not out is significant, with girls who are out (having "debuted" into society) being much more talkative, flirtatious, and confident. Mary sees this distinction as important, but

thinks it is tacky when the transition is too abrupt.

This quote shows how Mary favors proper appearances and manners over consistency of character, and thinks that women must alter themselves depending on the social situation and their romantic availability. Her objection to transitions that are too stark, however, might be due to the fact that a marked change in behavior shows the adjustment in manners to be unnatural, revealing the behavior's artifice. To Mary, the art of manners is to be strategic without appearing so. Fanny's consistency of character, then, regardless of who is around, and her lack of affection confuses Mary, because her behavior and manners do not fit into the stylized social codes of courtship and debuting.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Guess my surprise, when I found that I had…offended all the farmers, all the labourers, all the hay in the parish…coming down with the true London maxim, that every thing is to be got with money, I was a little embarrassed at first by the sturdy independence of your country customs.

Related Characters: Mary Crawford (speaker), Edmund Bertram

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mary tells Edmund about her debacle trying to get her harp to the Parsonage. She had not realized that it is unreasonable to ask farmers to use their cart during harvest season, and accidentally offended many of them due to her ignorance.

Mary's confusion when she could not rent a cart, despite the fact that she was offering money, shows how Mary believes that her wealth can accomplish anything. Moreover, it's Mary's city upbringing that has left her ignorant of the ways of the rural working class, which is to say most of the country. Her ignorance comes across as snobbish and rude, since it suggests that she does not understand how hard the farmers must work during harvest time to make their living.

❝ What strange creatures brothers are! You would not write to each other but upon the most urgent necessity in the world; and when obliged to take up the pen…it is done in the fewest possible words. You have but one style among you…'Dear Mary, I am just arrived. Bath seems full, and everything as usual. Yours sincerely.' That is the true manly style; that is a complete brother's letter.

Related Characters: Mary Crawford (speaker), Fanny Price, Henry Crawford

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mary, prompted by Edmund's comment that he does not intend to write to Tom any time soon, discusses her frustration with how the men in her life write letters. She implies they are emotionally closed off in their letters, only writing to convey necessary, practical information, and that their style is curt, calling it a "truly manly style."

Mary's belief that all men write in the same "truly manly style" suggests that masculine identity is fixed, and that it corresponds to a brief, unemotional writing style. Mary's belief collapses the differences between men, essentializing masculinity as callous and unsuited for written expression. This idea, when taken further, suggests that a reader could decode a letter writer's identity (gender identity, certainly, and potentially other aspects of identity as well) by parsing a letter's language. In other words, Mary's viewpoint suggests that a reader can use letters to reveal some essential truth about the writer, that letters are reliable proof of identity and character. This assumption is interrogated throughout the book.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ "How can two sermons a week… do all that you speak of? govern the conduct and fashion the manners of a large congregation for the rest of the week? One scarcely sees a clergyman out of his pulpit."
"You are speaking of London, I am speaking of the nation at large."
"The metropolis, I imagine, is a pretty fair sample of the rest."
"Not, I should hope, of the proportion of virtue to vice throughout the kingdom. We do not look in great cities for our best morality."

Related Characters: Edmund Bertram, Mary Crawford (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mary and Edmund debate their views of ministers and the role they can play in their communities. Mary says that she is skeptical of the idea of ministers making their parishioners better people, since they only give two sermons a week. Edmund argues that she is speaking of London, and that in the rest of the country, clergymen are very present role models in their communities.

When Edmund suggests that Mary's negative view of absentee clergymen is because of her experience in London, he suggests that London is a place that is less morally sound than the rest of the country. In doing so, Edmund adds to the comments throughout the book that code London, and cities in general, as a place where morality is threatened. When Mary suggests that London is a representative sample, she reveals how little she understands the rest of the country, which thinks of itself as, and indeed is, highly different from the metropolis. Edmund and Mary's conversation shows that their views on religion and the role of the clergy are highly different, as well as their understandings of the city as a moral landscape.

Chapter 10 Quotes

"Your prospects…are too fair to justify want of spirits. You have a very smiling scene before you."
"Do you mean literally or figuratively? Literally, I conclude. Yes, certainly, the sun shines, and the park looks very cheerful. But unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha, give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. 'I cannot get out,' as the starling said."

Related Characters: Maria Bertram, Henry Crawford (speaker), Fanny Price, Mr. Rushworth

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 67-68

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Henry and Maria are lingering near the locked iron gate in the woods, waiting for Mr. Rushworth to return and bring them the key while Fanny looks on. Henry and Mary are discussing Henry's ride to Sotherton with Julia, and Julia's light-heartedness. The first speaker of the quote is Henry, telling Maria that she should be smiling like Julia, since a "smiling scene" surrounds her.

When Maria responds to Henry, she first asks him if his comment about the "smiling scene" is literal or figurative, and the idea of taking a "smiling scene" figuratively evokes Maria's impending marriage to Mr. Rushworth, which is socially and financially advantageous, and should ostensibly make her happy. Maria replies that the "sun shines," and the "park looks cheerful," but that the iron gate gives her a feeling of "restraint and hardship."

Maria is describing her actual surroundings—but her words, if read metaphorically, also suggest that, though the marriage Maria is about to enter into is a good match on paper, and though it would provide her with a financially secure and luxurious life, Maria feels stifled by the institution of marriage, and particularly the idea of her marriage to Mr. Rushworth. The gate represents the constraints and strictness of life in a loveless marriage, and so when Maria and Henry later jump over the fence together, they foreshadow their escape from marriage in the form of their adulterous, ruinous affair.

Chapter 15 Quotes

"I am quite ashamed of you, Fanny, to make such a difficulty of obliging your cousins in a trifle of this sort— so kind as they are to you! Take the part with a good grace, and let us hear no more of the matter, I entreat."
"Do not urge her, madam," said Edmund…
"I am not going to urge her," replied Mrs. Norris sharply; "but I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, if she does not do what her aunt and cousins wish her— very ungrateful, indeed, considering who and what she is."

Related Characters: Edmund Bertram, Mrs. Norris (speaker), Fanny Price

Related Themes:

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange takes place after Fanny refuses to take part in the play, because she does not like to act and because she objects to the morals presented in the script. Mrs. Norris criticizes Fanny for being selfish, and Edmund tries to defend his cousin. Mrs. Norris accuses Fanny of being "obstinate" and "ungrateful."

Throughout the book, Mrs. Norris terrorizes Fanny and

manipulates her into doing what she wants by reminding her of her debt to the Bertrams. Mrs. Norris frequently uses Fanny's lower class status and financial dependence to try to manipulate her into doing as Mrs. Norris wishes, and even acting against her morals. When Mrs. Norris tells Fanny to take the part "in good grace," she suggests that by refusing the part, Fanny is showing bad manners. This quote shows how Mrs. Norris pits good manners against morals, using the idea of good manners as a way to encourage Fanny to do something she finds unsavory. While the reader and many of the characters might think that good manners and good morals ought to go hand in hand, Mrs. Norris shows how, by following her sense of right and wrong, Fanny risks social reprove and accusations of selfishness and rudeness.

Chapter 17 Quotes

Fanny saw and pitied much of this in Julia; but there was no outward fellowship between them. Julia made no communication, and Fanny took no liberties. They were two solitary sufferers, or connected only by Fanny's consciousness.

Related Characters: Julia Bertram, Fanny Price

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, in which the narrator describes Fanny and Julia's mutual suffering, occurs during the rehearsals for the play, when Fanny and Julia are repeatedly forced to watch their love interests flirt with other women. Fanny is upset when she sees Edmund with Mary, while Julia is heartbroken over Henry's attentions to her sister Maria.

Despite their mutual suffering caused by similar situations, Fanny and Julia do not confide in each other. Julia is not forthcoming about her emotions to Fanny, while Fanny, who still juggles her lower status in an upper class household, feels that it is not her place to bring up Julia's heartbreak. Fanny's own feelings about Edmund, meanwhile, also might be seen as inappropriate because of her lower status, so she keeps those to herself.

As a result, neither young woman speaks of their hardship. This situation shows how the class system prevents women from supporting each other across class boundaries, despite the fact they all suffer under the system of marriage that prevents them from taking initiative in their own love lives and having control over their own choices.

Chapter 20 Quotes

He was going…—He might talk of necessity, but she knew his independence.—The hand which had so pressed hers to his heart!—The hand and the heart were alike motionless and passive now!...She had not long to endure what arose from listening to language, which his actions contradicted, or to bury the tumult of her feelings under the restraint of society… and the farewell visit, as it then became openly acknowledged, was a very short one.

Related Characters: Henry Crawford, Maria Bertram

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130-131

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, the narrator describes Maria's thoughts as Henry says goodbye to her for the last time before she is married. Maria had hoped that Henry would propose to her, saving her from a loveless marriage to Mr. Rushworth, but he does not.

Though Maria is not an especially sympathetic character in the book, her heartbreak as it becomes clear that Henry will not propose to her is quite poignant. Henry has been leading Maria on, and divorcing his intimate, flirtatious words from his noncommittal actions (now that he is leaving, Maria has "not long to endure…listening to language which his actions contradicted").

Maria is confused as to why Henry frames leaving as a necessity when she knows that he can go wherever he wants. In contrast, Maria's movement, along with most women in 19th century England, is highly restricted because she does not have her own money and cannot travel alone. The difference in their freedom of movement, which Maria evokes by noting Henry's ability to come and go, serves as just one example of how societal inequalities give Henry the power to control their relationship. Likewise, it is not in Maria's power to propose to Henry.

Maria strongly feels her restrictions as a woman, especially in terms of marriage, as she indicates when she says she must "bury the tumult of her feelings under the restraint of society," evoking her earlier sentiments at Sotherton that she feels stifled by the iron gate, which represents the limits of socially acceptable action.

Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ It was a very proper wedding. The bride was elegantly dressed– the two bridesmaids were duly inferior– her father gave her away– her mother stood with salts in her hands, expecting to be agitated– her aunt tried to cry…Nothing could be objected to when it came under the discussion of the neighbourhood, except that the carriage which conveyed the bride and bridegroom and Julia from the church door to Sotherton, was the same chaise which Mr. Rushworth had used for a twelvemonth before. In every thing else the etiquette of the day might stand the strictest investigation.

Related Characters: Julia Bertram, Mr. Rushworth, Maria Bertram

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the narrator describes Maria's marriage to Mr. Rushworth, which takes place soon after Sir Bertram comes back from Antigua and Henry leaves Mansfield, dashing her hopes of a proposal.

Maria's marriage is described not as loving or beautiful, but as "proper," suggesting that, foremost, it has fulfilled all social expectations. The narrator then goes on to list what made it "proper," with each item separated by an em-dash as if being checked off a list— the fact that the bridesmaids were less beautiful than the bride, that Maria's father gave her away, that her female relatives feigned emotion. The narrator's view of the marriage ceremony is distinctly cynical, focused on correct appearances rather than substance, and fulfilling the stereotypical image of a wedding to a tee.

The narrator's comment that "nothing could be objected to when it came under the discussion of the neighbourhood," and her later statement that "the etiquette of the day might stand the strictest investigation" suggest that the wedding will be scrutinized and picked apart, with neighbors looking for flaws in the wedding's properness or the "happy couple's" happy veneer. Weddings, based on the narrator's description, are ceremonies to be carried out for the sake of appearances, not happy events for true celebration.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ "I am so glad your eldest cousin is gone that he may be Mr. Bertram again. There is something in the sound of Mr. Edmund Bertram so formal, so pitiful, so younger-brother-like, that I detest it."
"How differently we feel!" cried Fanny. "To me, the sound of Mr. Bertram is so cold and nothing-meaning–so entirely without warmth or character!–It just stands for a gentleman, and that's all."

Related Characters: Mary Crawford, Fanny Price (speaker), Edmund Bertram

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 142

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mary and Fanny are sitting in the garden together, having recently started up a friendship. Mary talks about how she likes that Tom is gone from Mansfield, since while Tom is gone, she is allowed to call Edmund "Mr. Bertram" instead of "Mr. Edmund Bertram" (according to the rules of etiquette, the latter is used to distinguish that Edmund is the younger brother).

Mary and Fanny's disagreement shows the difference in their love for Edmund. Fanny finds the title stiff and cold, as it removes Edmund's first name, thus removing his individuality. Mary, meanwhile, is caught up in the glamour and status of a more stately name, showing her desire to marry into wealth and power.

The women's different reactions reflect the fact that, while Mary continues to wish that Edmund were the older brother, and so the heir to Sir Thomas's estate and fortune, Fanny loves Edmund for who he is.

Chapter 24 Quotes

❝ [Henry Crawford] longed to have been at sea, and seen and done and suffered much. His heart was warmed, his fancy fired, and he felt the highest respect for [William] who, before he was twenty, had gone through such bodily hardships, and given such proofs of mind. The glory of heroism, of usefulness, of exertion, of endurance, made his own habits of selfish indulgence appear in shameful contrast; and he wished he had been a William Price, distinguishing himself and working his way to fortune and consequence with so much self-respect and happy ardour, instead of what he was!

Related Characters: Henry Crawford, William Price

Related Themes:

Page Number: 159-160

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Henry is listening to William Price discuss his adventures in the navy. Henry, who has never had to make his own wealth, and instead manages the state he inherited, is admiring and envious of William's life.

Henry romanticizes William's self-made career, reveling in the lifestyle he leads, which Henry sees as highly masculine and heroic. When Henry thinks of his own lifestyle, he sees it as self-indulgent, and wishes that, like William, he'd had to make his own way in the world.

In this quote, Austen implies the meritocratic philosophy she weaves throughout the book, showing how Henry feels that his character has suffered by not having had to struggle like Henry. Though Austen's message is meritocratic, she and her characters also glamorize lower and middle class struggle in a way that is out of touch with the realities of financial insecurity.

Chapter 27 Quotes

❝ Two lines more prized had never fallen from the pen of the most distinguished author— never more completely blessed the researches of the fondest biographer. The enthusiasm of a woman's love is even beyond the biographer's. To her, the handwriting itself, independent of anything it may convey, is a blessedness. Never were such characters cut by any other human being as Edmund's commonest handwriting gave! This specimen, written in haste as it was, had not a fault; and there was a felicity in the flow of the first four words, in the arrangement of "My very dear Fanny," which she could have looked at for ever.

Related Characters: Edmund Bertram, Fanny Price

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 179

Explanation and Analysis

Fanny, having walked into the East Room, encounters Edmund writing her a note to leave along with the gold chain he bought for her. After Fanny explains how Mary has also given her a chain, they discuss the matter and then Edmund leaves. Fanny, once he is gone, admires the letter he was writing her.

This quote clearly displays the intensity of Fanny's love for Edmund, as she obsesses over Edmund's handwriting. When Fanny says that the two lines Edmund wrote are more prized than the work of the "most distinguished author," her focus on authorship speaks to her preoccupation with the writer rather than what has been written. Edmund's note is not exactly poetry, just a message to indicate that the chain is for her, with the affectionate opening "my very dear Fanny." Still, for Fanny, the authorship of the letter is the important part. This quote shows how authorship can overshadow content or style in letters and perhaps even writing in general.

To Fanny, the letter, even more so than the actual gift of the gold chain, is proof that Edmund cares about her. She refers to the note as a "specimen," as if her study is a search for scientific truth. This instance is one of many examples in the book of letters being viewed as evidentiary material.

❝ Yes, that uncle and aunt! They have injured the finest mind; for sometimes, Fanny, I own to you, it does appear more than manner: it appears as if the mind itself was tainted.

Related Characters: Fanny Price, Edmund Bertram (speaker), The Admiral, Mary Crawford

Related Themes:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

Edmund speaks this quote as he and Fanny discuss some of Mary's character flaws just before the ball. Edmund has just come from the Parsonage, where Mary told him she would dance with him for the last time that night, since he will soon be ordained as a clergyman.

Edmund suggests that he believes that Mary's upbringing has ruined her character, one of many times throughout the book that the characters bring up questions of nature versus nurture. Though Mary is born a gentlewoman, Edmund believes she has been corrupted by the bad influence of the Admiral, and so has gone against her better nature.

Here, Edmund acknowledges the difference between manner and morals. Though he implies that he originally thought some of Mary's more controversial comments were only "manner," which is to say affectation or light-hearted frivolity, Edmund has come to see that they may in fact

indicate a bad moral core.

Chapter 28 Quotes

❝ Having…a general prevailing desire of recommending herself to [Sir Thomas], [Mary] took an opportunity of stepping aside to say something agreeable of Fanny.

Related Characters: Fanny Price, Mary Crawford, Sir Thomas Bertram

Related Themes:

Page Number: 187-188

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, the narrator describes Mary's manipulations at the ball thrown in Fanny's honor. At the party, Mary, who knows that Sir Thomas does not like her, decides to compliment Fanny to him in order to endear herself to him.

The narrator shows how Mary's good manners, far from being indicative of her inner goodness, are mostly the result of careful social calculations. The narrator's revelation of Mary's thought process casts doubt on all of Mary's other kindnesses throughout the book, such as her attentions to Fanny, when the narrator might have held Mary's inner monologue back. Mary's superficiality makes her unreliable.

Chapter 31 Quotes

❝ She took the letters as he gave them. The first was from the Admiral to inform his nephew…of his having succeeded in the object he had undertaken, the promotion of young Price…Sir Charles was much delighted in having such an opportunity of proving his regard for Admiral Crawford, and…William Price's commission as second Lieutenant of H.M. sloop Thrush… was spreading joy through a wide circle of great people.

Related Characters: The Admiral, Fanny Price, Henry Crawford, William Price

Related Themes:

Page Number: 202-203

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Fanny reading the letters that made William a lieutenant, thanks to Henry's uncle, the Admiral. The letters both prove that William was made lieutenant, and also that Henry catalyzed the promotion itself. The letters also show Henry's large network and social influence, which helped to secure the promotion.

The use of Henry's social connections, primarily the result of his social class, to obtain William's promotion has troubling implications for Austen's meritocratic themes in the book. Although William is frequently held up as the self-made man, William obtained his post in the navy thanks to Sir Thomas's help, and now has received his promotion thanks to Henry. The fact that William needs to use his rich, upper class connections to secure his positions suggests that even situations that seem meritocratic are often based on preexisting, underlying structures of wealth and class.

Chapter 34 Quotes

❝ His reading was capital, and her pleasure in good reading extreme. To *good* reading, however, she had been long used; her uncle read well— her cousins all—Edmund very well; but in Mr. Crawford's reading there was a variety of excellence beyond what she had ever met with…His acting had first taught Fanny what pleasure a play might give, and his reading brought all his acting before her again.

Related Characters: Edmund Bertram, Henry Crawford, Fanny Price

Related Themes:

Page Number: 228

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Henry has already declared his love for Fanny several days before, and Fanny has swiftly and thoroughly rejected him. Still, Henry continues to pursue her. Here, Henry is reading aloud from the Shakespeare book that Fanny was perusing.

Though Fanny is totally certain of her lack of interest in Henry, his reading greatly appeals to her, and she is spellbound by his performance, as he has a great talent for reading and acting. Previously, he showcased this gift during their ill-fated play.

Henry's gift for acting seems to be a metaphor for, or actually genuinely related to, his charisma. He often says charming things that make him instantly likeable and attractive. However, like the acting, Henry's lines are just that: lines, without genuine feeling or intention underneath. Henry's silver tongue is rarely backed up by corresponding action, as evidenced by previous incidences, such as when he promised his love to Maria and then never asked her to

marry him.

Chapter 35 Quotes

I *should* have thought…that every woman must have felt the possibility of a man's not being approved, not being loved by some one of her sex, at least, let him be every so generally agreeable. Let him have all the perfections in the world, I think it ought not be set down as certain, that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may happen to like himself.

Related Characters: Fanny Price (speaker), Henry Crawford, Edmund Bertram

Related Themes:

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

Fanny speaks this quote during a conversation with Edmund about why she will not marry Henry. Edmund professes to not support marriage for money. However, he continues to push Fanny on her reluctance, and tells her that Mary does not understand why Fanny will not marry Henry.

Fanny responds in this quote, where she says that she imagines every woman understands that a woman can have no specific objections to a man and still not want to marry him. Moreover, when Fanny says that "it ought not be set down as certain, that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may like himself," she points out a massive gender inequality in the marriage process.

Fanny shows Edmund how, although men may choose whomever they like as a partner, women are expected to accept any man without obvious flaws who offers to marry them. Fanny, in resisting this expectation, asserts the importance of her own choice and her own desire in marriage, radically undermining the monetized system of marriage in which women are exchanged as objects.

Chapter 38 Quotes

Fanny was in the narrow entrance-passage of the house, and in her mother's arms, who met her there with looks of true kindness, and with features which Fanny loved the more, because they brought her aunt Bertram's before her, and there were her two sisters…both glad to see her in their way, though with no advantage of manner in receiving her. But manner Fanny did not want. Would they but love her, she should be satisfied.

Related Characters: Mrs. Frances Price, Fanny Price

Related Themes:

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

Fanny has just arrived back at her childhood home in Portsmouth for the first time since she left for Mansfield at age nine. Her mother and siblings greet her at the door.

As her family greets Fanny, Fanny notices how the children possess "no advantage of manner in receiving her." The children, who have not been raised with the same emphasis on etiquette as the Bertram children, lack what Fanny can now recognize as the proper manners when greeting a guest. This meeting recalls Fanny's first day at Mansfield Park, when Fanny was the one without manners, greeting the well-bred, well-mannered Bertram children.

The narrator, however, notes that "manner Fanny did not want." The sentence's direct, curt structure gives it a sense of definitiveness, as if Fanny has thought it over, and decided that she is tired of the strict manners of the Bertrams. Instead, the narrator notes, Fanny wants "love." By juxtaposing love and manners, the narrator suggests that, at this point in the novel, Fanny views love and manners as in some way mutually exclusive.

Chapter 39 Quotes

She could think of nothing but Mansfield…Every thing where she now was in full contrast to it. The elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony, and perhaps, above all, the peace and tranquillity of Mansfield, were brought to her remembrance every hour of the day, by the prevalence of everything opposite to them *here*… If tenderness could be ever supposed wanting, good sense and good breeding supplied its place…Here everybody was noisy, every voice was loud…The doors were in constant banging, the stairs were never at rest, nothing was done without a clatter, nobody sat still, and nobody could command attention when they spoke.

Related Characters: Fanny Price

Related Themes:

Page Number: 266

Explanation and Analysis

When the narrator articulates this quote, Fanny has been at Portsmouth for long enough to realize that her childhood home is not what she imagined it would be. Fanny originally

thought that she would prefer Portsmouth to Mansfield because at Portsmouth she would be loved by her mother and siblings and treated as an equal.

However, as this quote makes clear, Fanny finds the change of habits, pace, and environment overwhelming. Mansfield represents a countryside household, a place of peace and tranquility, and provides the nature and quiet that Fanny enjoys. Portsmouth, meanwhile, which represents a poorer urban household, is full of commotion and constant noise.

At Portsmouth, Fanny does not find the love she is looking for in her mother, who is too busy to spend time with her. Fanny also realizes that manners are more important to her than she thought. She longs to live in a space like Mansfield where the inhabitants respect each other's peace and quiet. Fanny says that if Mansfield lacked "tenderness," at least it had "good sense and good breeding," suggesting that, though Mansfield is not as loving as she would like, she appreciates the manners there.

Chapter 42 Quotes

❝ We have all a better guide in ourselves, if we would attend to it, than any other person can be.

Related Characters: Fanny Price (speaker), Henry Crawford

Related Themes:

Page Number: 280

Explanation and Analysis

Fanny speaks this quote during a conversation with Henry, who has come to Portsmouth to visit Fanny. When he asks for Fanny's advice on a moral business problem, he says that Fanny is his ultimate moral compass, and Fanny responds with the above.

Fanny has spent much of the book following her own set of principles and values, staying faithful to them even when others have implored her to change her mind, such as during the play or after Henry's proposal. Fanny's commitment to listening to her own morality rather than public opinion serves her well, and the above quote is the crystallization of her moral philosophy.

Ultimately, Fanny's moral compass is part of what leads her to consistently reject Henry, a decision that seems at first to be a bad one, but after Henry runs away with Maria, turns out to be correct.

Chapter 46 Quotes

❝ She dared not indulge in the hope of the paragraph being false. Miss Crawford's letter, which she had read so often as to make every line her own, was in frightful conformity with it. Her eager defence of her brother, her hope of its being *hushed up*, her evident agitation, were all of a piece with something very bad; and if there was a woman of character in existence, who could treat as a trifle this sin of the first magnitude, who could try to gloss it over, and desire to have it unpunished, she could believe Miss Crawford to be the woman!

Related Characters: Henry Crawford, Mary Crawford, Fanny Price

Related Themes:

Page Number: 299

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Fanny has just read the newspaper article about Maria and Henry's affair, and she is trying to imagine that it might not be true. However, when Fanny thinks of Mary's letter to her, she sees the letter as proof that the transgression did occur.

The intention of Mary's letter—to smooth over the damage done by Henry— fails completely, and even undermines Mary's purpose as Fanny cross-references the letter and the newspaper article. Fanny analyzes Mary's tone and style using what she knows about Mary and her emotional reactions to determine that Mary is lying. Rather than serving as proof that the affair is just a rumor, Mary's letter does the opposite, showing how using letters as proof of truth can backfire, and that Fanny has never really trusted Mary as a morally upright friend.

Chapter 48 Quotes

❝ I purposefully abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people. I only entreat everybody to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny as Fanny herself could desire.

Related Characters: Mary Crawford, Edmund Bertram, Fanny Price

Related Themes:

Page Number: 319-321

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, which occurs after most of the plot has concluded, the narrator is telling the reader how Edmund and Fanny ended up together in the end. The narrator's manner of articulating the culmination of Edmund and Fanny's romance, which the reader has ostensibly been hoping for the entire book, is somewhat surprising. There is no grand romantic love scene, no beautiful declaration, no sense of how or why Edmund finally came to love Fanny. Rather than giving the reader what they want, Austen robs them of the scene of Fanny's "victory."

Moreover, the narrator, who refers to herself self-reflexively in this passage, states that she will not give an exact date of the beginning of Edmund and Fanny's romance, saying instead that it was "exactly at the time it was quite natural," for fear that the reader will think not enough time has passed since Edmund's love for Mary died out. By saying that the reader will have to decide an appropriate amount of time for themselves, the narrator seems to acknowledge that Edmund's love is unconvincing, and also renders her own narration somewhat unreliable. Moreover, the narrator's focus on the appearance that Edmund's love is genuine undermines the idea that Fanny and Edmund's love is beyond superficiality.

> In [Susan's] usefulness, in Fanny's excellence, in William's continued good conduct and rising fame, and in the general well-doing and success of the other members of the family…Sir Thomas saw repeated, and forever repeated reason to rejoice in what he had done for them all, and acknowledge the advantages of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure.

Related Characters: William Price, Fanny Price, Susan Price, Sir Thomas Bertram

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 321

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Sir Thomas is thinking over the Price children's success in contrast to his daughters' disgrace. Throughout the last few chapters, after Maria's transgression, Sir Thomas has been contemplating how upbringing affects children's behavior.

Sir Thomas, who has been the children's benefactor for varying degrees of time, takes pride in their accomplishments. Significantly, Sir Thomas acknowledges the "advantages of early hardship and discipline," conditions of Fanny, William, and Susan's upbringing that his own children, who were pampered and spoiled, did not have. This is a big departure from Sir Thomas's sentiments at the beginning of the book, when he worried that his children's proximity to Fanny, with her lack of manners and education, would degrade them.

Sir Thomas also endorses the "consciousness of being born to struggle and endure," which seems to be another way of saying that he sees the benefit of connection to a working-class identity, and the sense of responsibility that brings. Sir Thomas's acknowledgement that needing to hard work to achieve good seems to further undermine his earlier class snobbishness, as he expresses sentiments that are downright meritocratic. However, he's also offering these sentiments from a place of privilege—it's easy for a rich person to vaguely comment on the values poverty can teach.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Austen opens her novel with the stories of the marriages of the three Ward sisters. One had the "good luck" to marry Sir Thomas Bertram, thus enjoying a large income and becoming Lady Bertram. Another sister became Mrs. Norris when she married Reverend Mr. Norris, who earned only a small income. The last sister became Mrs. Price, deigning to marry a naval lieutenant and disgracing her family in doing so.

For the Ward sisters, marriage determines everything from their wealth to their names. Austen attributes Lady Bertram's marriage to Sir Bertram to luck rather than love (and the fact that it's "good" luck is entirely based on his money), showing how marriage, although so important in shaping women's lives, is often the result of chance rather than merit, choice, or emotion.

Mrs. Price's unsuitable marriage angers her sisters, and resulted in a long period of total estrangement between them, which continues easily and uninterrupted for eleven years. Finally, Mrs. Price writes her sisters a letter, worrying about her inability to provide for all of her offspring. Mrs. Price asks if Sir Thomas can help her oldest boy, William, find a job.

The fact that Mrs. Price's marriage is what drives Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris away from their sister shows how marriage (and the "manners" associated with what is an appropriate or inappropriate marriage) strains and dismantles female relationships that might otherwise provide support to women in difficult situations.

The letter establishes friendlier terms between the sisters, and they send Mrs. Price baby linens, advice, money, and letters. Mrs. Norris decides that someone should take care of Mrs. Price's oldest daughter and thus relieve Mrs. Price of the expense of raising her.

The importance of letters in the novel is clear from the very first chapter, when this letter from Mrs. Price to Lady Bertram catalyzes the plot, and improves the relationships between the Ward sisters.

Sir Thomas, however, is not so keen on this plan, recognizing the commitment and investment it would require. Mrs. Norris, however, implies that she would bear the brunt of the burden, suggesting that Sir Thomas would play only a small part in the arrangement.

At first Mrs. Norris appears to be kind and altruistic. Here, Austen sets up the irony that she reveals later, when it turns out that Mrs. Norris does not intend to take Fanny in whatsoever.

Mrs. Norris also guesses that Sir Thomas might be worried about a romantic affair between one of his sons and their cousin. Mrs. Norris insists that raising the children together lessens the chances of a romantic relationship. They discuss the importance of distinguishing between the Bertram children and the lower class Price child during her upbringing, so she does not think herself "a *Miss Bertram*." After a little more back-and-forth, Sir Thomas agrees to the arrangement.

Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris's desire to ensure that neither Tom nor Edmund fall in love with Fanny stems not from a taboo against cousins marrying cousins (which was still social acceptable in Austen's day), but from the sense that Fanny would not be of a high enough social class to be a good match for one of her cousins. This conversation reads as rather heartless, and shows how manners and societal expectations can lead to unkindness in some situations.

The narrator describes Mrs. Norris's self-righteous flakiness and miserliness, discussing how she often makes plans to be generous and then foists the expense upon someone else. Indeed, Mrs. Norris reneges on her promise to be the child's main caretaker, and the girl ends up living with the Bertrams in their attic room.

Austen shows the reader how Mrs. Norris manipulates Sir Thomas, leading him to believe that she will take care of Fanny when, in fact, she has no intention of doing so. Mrs. Norris exemplifies the dissonance between polite appearance *of righteousness and genuine goodness.*

Mrs. Norris writes to Mrs. Price the next day, and arranges to have her servant, Nanny, fetch the daughter: Fanny Price. Mrs. Price accepts the offer and attests to her daughter's good graces, writing that she hopes the child, who is delicate, will benefit from the difference in environment. The narrator notes that, "poor woman," Mrs. Price likely thought many of her children would benefit from a "change of air."

When Mrs. Price writes that Fanny's health will benefit from a change of air, Austen codes the city environment as unhealthy compared to the countryside (and also reveals that Fanny is frail or sickly in some way). That many of Mrs. Price's children would benefit from a "change in air" suggests that the difference in air pollution is significant.


CHAPTER 2

The child, named Fanny like her mother, travels safely to Mansfield Park (the home of the Bertrams). The narrator describes Fanny as a fragile, shy, unremarkable ten-year-old with a sweet voice and an awkward air. Sir Thomas attempts to make her comfortable, but his stoic manner prevents his success. Lady Bertram, meanwhile, makes no effort to do so, but her smile and calmness appeal to Fanny.

In this section, the reader meets Fanny, the protagonist, for the first time. Her meek character contrasts with the grandeur of Mansfield park. Meanwhile, Sir Thomas's failed attempt to be kind to Fanny shows how manners can get in the way of human connection and create discomfort.


Fanny meets the Bertram children: two teenaged sons, Edmund and Tom, aged sixteen and seventeen, and two daughters, Maria and Julia, three and two years older than Fanny respectively. The girls' fine manners and good looks contrast with Fanny's discomfort and plainness.

Here, Austen introduces both the reader and Fanny to the Bertram children. Well-bred Maria and Julia serve as foils (characters that contrast with another character in order to highlight certain qualities in them) to Fanny.

Fanny, who is frightened, homesick, and tired, is quiet and avoids eye contact. Mrs. Norris scolds Fanny for being insufficiently grateful, leaving Fanny feeling uncomfortable and guilty. She begins to cry and then is taken to bed. Later, Mrs. Norris complains that Fanny was sulky and rude, thinking her sadness was excessive. The narrator acknowledges that no one tried especially hard to make Fanny comfortable.

Mrs. Norris cements her hypocrisy and the gap between her manners and her morals when she harangues Fanny for being insufficiently grateful, undermining the fact that adopting Fanny was meant to be a kind gesture and totally failing to empathize with Fanny's situation.

The following day, Julia and Maria are perplexed by Fanny's lack of knowledge of French, her limited amount of clothing, and other differences that arise from Fanny's less privileged upbringing. Fanny, meanwhile, feels unwelcome among the Bertram family and their servants, especially due to their critical comments about her manners, appearance, and general inferiority. The grand house and its lavish furnishings make her anxious.

Clearly, Julia, Maria, and the adults in their lives believe Fanny lacks knowledge of certain subjects because she is stupid, not because she hasn't had access to education. This shows how the aristocracy attributes its success to inherent superiority, rather than to the benefits of its immense privilege.

After one week of Fanny's severe discomfort, her cousin Edmund finds her crying on the stairs. Edmund consoles Fanny, and then, changing tactics, asks Fanny to tell him about her siblings. Fanny describes them, focusing on her brother William, the oldest, with whom she is closest. Edmund supplies Fanny with paper and postage to write to him. Fanny is extremely touched by Edmund's kindness, and Edmund, realizing how challenging the move is for Fanny, resolves to treat Fanny with active kindness and pay special attention to his forlorn little cousin.

In contrast to Mrs. Norris's actions, Edmund's attention to Fanny is the first real kind deed that occurs in the novel without an ulterior motive. Moreover, letters appear here as a force that comforts and creates human connection— not just between the letter writers, William and Fanny, but also between Fanny and Edmund, who helps her find the necessary materials.

Fanny begins to feel more comfortable in her new home and with her new companions. She plays with Maria and Julia. Edmund continues to be extra kind to her, while Tom, the oldest, teases her jovially and brings her presents.

As Fanny adjusts, Edmund's attention is portrayed as more meaningful and genuinely kind than the physical gifts that Tom gives to Fanny.

Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris are satisfied with their scheme to adopt Fanny. However, Fanny's education is somewhat difficult, because she is so far behind her cousins. The girls are shocked the Fanny does not know where Isle of Wight is, the names of Roman Emperors, etc. Mrs. Norris explains to the girls that Fanny is not as smart as they are.

Once again, Austen shows how the adults in Fanny's life see her lack of an education as a personal failing. This ironic incapacity to grasp the real reason (that is, unequal opportunity) for this "achievement gap" makes the adults look stupid rather than Fanny.

Lady Bertram, meanwhile, has no interest in the girls' education. Austen mockingly describes her as a person who "spent her days in sitting, nicely dressed, on a sofa." Lady Bertram expresses sympathy for Fanny, however—she likes her because Fanny fetches her letters.

Lady Bertram's languidness is a source of comedy throughout the book, and her inattention to her daughters leads to their later mistakes. Once again, letters help foster a sense of closeness between people, this time Lady Bertram and Fanny.

Sir Thomas helps Mrs. Price find employment for William. The two siblings spend an extremely happy week together before William, now a sailor, sets out on a journey. William's new career path worries Fanny, but Edmund sets her mind at ease by telling stories of sailing adventures.

William, who is around the same age as Edmund, serves as a foil to his cousin, showing the different paths that young men may take depending on their status: to university to read about adventure, or straight to work to live it.

Edmund continues to be especially kind to Fanny. He gives her attention and books that she loves. Because of his affection toward her, Edmund rises in Fanny's opinion until he is second only to William in Fanny's heart.

The reader sees Fanny's affections for Edmund increasing, which will lead to her later romantic interest in him.

CHAPTER 3

Mr. Norris dies when Fanny is fifteen, and, as a result, Mrs. Norris moves to a smaller house. She is not especially aggrieved by her husband's death, but regrets the smaller income she will receive now that he is dead. Dr. Grant takes Mr. Norris's place as the reverend at Mansfield Park's parish. He brings with him his wife, Mrs. Grant, and no children.

Mrs. Norris's inner nastiness comes through again when her husband dies, as Mrs. Norris's main concern is her decreased income, not the loss of her partner. Mrs. Norris's apathy suggests their marriage was not a love match, and not especially happy.

Edmund is supposed to be entitled to inherit his uncle's wealth upon his death. However, Tom, who has a gambling habit, needs to pay back his debts, and Edmund uses his inheritance for that purpose. Sir Thomas feels that Tom has wronged Edmund by robbing him of part of his inheritance. Tom feels somewhat remorseful, but quickly rationalizes his poor decisions.

Austen begins to comment more directly on the problems with the inheritance system in 19th century England as she shows how Tom, despite his irresponsibility, is set to inherit Sir Thomas's fortune. Edmund, meanwhile, will be left with nothing after helping his brother.

Now that Mr. Norris is dead, Sir Thomas expects that Mrs. Norris will take Fanny into her household, desiring company. Lady Bertram, hearing Sir Thomas's musings, tells Fanny. Fanny finds the idea very distressing, and discusses it with Edmund, who soothes her.

Much of Fanny's distress at Mansfield is due to Mrs. Norris's cruelty. The other characters, however, fail to see this, because Mrs. Norris shows her good manners around them.

Ultimately, Fanny's fears turn out to be unnecessary, because Mrs. Norris intends to do everything she can to avoid taking Fanny in. She tells Sir Thomas that the White House, where she lives, is too small for another person since she must have an extra bedroom for guests, and that due to her grief and her reduced income, she is utterly incapable of caring for Fanny. She says she is trying to put money away for Lady Bertram's children to inherit one day.

Austen has already shown the reader that Mrs. Norris's excuses for not taking Fanny in are not true—she hardly grieves her husband, and never hosts guests. Mrs. Norris's hypocrisy is comedic, but also shows how two-faced Mrs. Norris is, illustrating how good manners do not always correspond to good morals.

Sir Thomas is perplexed, since Mrs. Norris indicated otherwise when they first discussed adopting their niece. However, he believes Mrs. Norris when she insists it is for the good of his children that she saves an inheritance, and is content to continue hosting his niece. Fanny learns that plans to move her to the White House are off, much to her happiness. Mrs. Norris completes her move into the White House and the Grants move into the parsonage.

Mrs. Norris's insistence that she is saving money for her nieces and nephews is what convinces Sir Thomas to keep Fanny. This shows how the problem of the male primogeniture inheritance system pervades all aspects of life, including domestic decisions that might seem otherwise unrelated.

The Grants are extremely friendly, pleasant people, prompting Mrs. Norris to make it her mission to find out their faults. She learns that Dr. Grant is an indulgent eater, which satisfies her. Lady Bertram feels threatened that Mrs. Grant, who is not especially beautiful, has married so well.

Austen uses comedy to reveal the gap between Mrs. Norris's outer charm and inner rottenness. Lady Bertram, meanwhile, shows she is still preoccupied with marriage long after her own marriage.

Sir Thomas, needing to settle business matters in Antigua, decides to go there himself, and takes Tom with him in an attempt to set the young man straight. They leave England for what they anticipate will be a year. Sir Thomas is sad to leave his family, and concerned about leaving his daughters in the less-than-attentive hands of Lady Bertram.

Sir Thomas, clearly worried about Tom's ability to manage his estate once he dies, hopes to encourage responsibility in his son by showing Tom his investments, interesting him in the business, and removing Tom from the bad crowd he circulates with in London.

Lady Bertram is displeased that her husband is leaving, but, because she is so self-centered, is not especially concerned for his safety. Julia and Maria are not sad whatsoever, and instead are excited to benefit from the looser oversight of their mother.

Austen mocks the family's lack of sadness at Sir Thomas's departure, pointing to the lack of real love in the household through Lady Bertram's dispassionate manner and her daughters' excitement.

Fanny, likewise, is happy that Sir Thomas is leaving, but feels bad about then. Then Sir Thomas says something critical of her, and his coldness prevents Fanny from feeling too bad.

Sir Thomas's stiff, cold, brusque manner prevents Fanny from developing a loving relationship with her uncle.

CHAPTER 4

Without Sir Thomas, the family gets along fine. Edmund takes care of the logistics of managing Mansfield Park to Lady Bertram's satisfaction.

Austen shows Edmund managing the family estate, suggesting that he would be a better heir than Tom.

Mrs. Norris indulges in obsessive, neurotic fantasies of the men's journey resulting in disaster. She pictures herself as the center of attention as she breaks the news to the others. When the family learns that Sir Thomas and Tom have arrived in Antigua safely, Mrs. Norris is sad her imaginings are ruined.

Mrs. Norris's inner vanity and cruelty continue to be a source of frustration and comedy, as the narrator suggests that she would like Sir Thomas and Tom's ship to sink just to get more attention for herself.

Winter passes without incident. Mrs. Norris pays lots of attention to Maria and Julia, who have blossomed into young women renowned in the area for their accomplishments, their good manners, and their beauty.

Maria and Julia are evaluated on the traits (manners, accomplishments, beauty) that make them desirable as wives, showing how female identity becomes centered on marriage.

Unlike Mrs. Norris, who takes a great interest in the girls' social engagements, Lady Bertram is too lazy to socialize. Fanny stays in and keeps Lady Bertram company when the other girls go out. She loves to hear about the balls that Maria and Julia attend. She also looks forward to her brother William's impending visit.

Fanny's obligation to stay at home with Lady Bertram allows her to form an identity that is not centered on marriage, since she is being groomed for other things. Still, she longs for the romance, balls, and courtship that her cousins experience.

In the spring, Fanny's beloved pony dies. As a result, Fanny feels her health suffering from lack of exercise. Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris tell Fanny to ride Maria or Julia's horses when they do not want them, but Fanny has few opportunities to do so.

This section shows how not just Mrs, Norris, but also Lady Bertram, who is usually relatively nice to Fanny, neglects her needs due to her lower status.

When Edmund returns to Mansfield and sees that Fanny has no opportunities to ride, he insists that Fanny get a horse. Mrs. Norris, ever frugal and mean, believes that Fanny owning her own horse would be improper since it would elevate her to the status of her cousins. She insists that Sir Thomas would think the same, and to purchase a horse without his permission and given his financial troubles would not be appropriate.

Mrs. Norris's insistence that Fanny owning a horse would be improper shows how class divides her from her cousins, and also shows how arbitrary and cruel those class distinctions can be. The birthright of her cousins appears to be maintained only for the sake of appearances and as an excuse to neglect Fanny and maintain a sense of superiority.

Edmund rejects all of these arguments. Lady Bertram sides with her son, but thinks they should wait until Sir Thomas returns to make the purchase. Edmund concedes that point, and so he exchanges one of his own horses for one suitable for Fanny, and lets Fanny use it whenever she wants. Fanny is thrilled and extremely touched by Edmund's kindness.

Edmund, unlike Mrs. Norris or even Lady Bertram, exhibits genuine kindness to Fanny, even sacrificing one of his own possessions for her comfort. Edmund becomes a standard for genuine kindness in the novel, always being good without ulterior motive.

Sir Thomas, who intended to return in September, sends word that he must stay in Antigua longer, but will be sending Tom home. Tom arrives back in England and reports that Sir Thomas is in good health, but Mrs. Norris, ever dramatic, returns to her obsessive worrying and fatalist fantasies.

Mrs. Norris returns to her fantasies of disaster, once again showing her love of sick, self-centered drama masquerading as concern for her loved ones.

Once social events start up again, Mrs. Norris becomes preoccupied with marrying off Maria. Mr. Rushworth, a rich man, is courting her. Maria, age 21, is satisfied with Mr. Rushworth's interest in her, since he is rich and has a house in London. Mrs. Norris approves of the match, and tries to manipulate social situations in order to make the couple's success more likely.

Maria's desire to marry Mr. Rushworth comes not from a love connection between them, but rather from his material wealth and access to the city. This shows how marriage is primarily a transactional institution in the novel rather than a romantic and emotional one.

To this end, Mrs. Norris befriends Mr. Rushworth's mother. Mrs. Rushworth is also in favor of the match, and the two make it clear that they have a mutual understanding. After dancing together at several balls, Maria and Mr. Rushworth enter into a tentative engagement, contingent on Sir Thomas's consent.

Mrs. Norris showcases her two-faced personality when she strategically befriends Mr. Rushworth's mother. That Maria and Mr. Rushworth's romance is boiled down to a few dances shows the shallowness of their engagement.

Edmund is the only family member who is skeptical of the arrangement, as he is concerned that the match seems to be, on his sister's end, more about money than love. Edmund also thinks Mr. Rushworth is rather stupid.

Edmund's skepticism towards the match between Maria and Rushworth indicates his resistance to the monetization marriage, and his generally upright moral principles.

Sir Thomas, though, indicates via letter that he is thrilled by the match. He insists that Maria wait until he returns home to hold the wedding so that he can attend. Sir Thomas tells them he hopes to leave Antigua by the end of the summer.

Sir Thomas, meanwhile, supports the match without ever even having met Maria's fiancé, underlining the fact that marriage is a numbers game in his aristocratic world.

In July, Mrs. Grant wealthy, charming, and attractive half siblings, Henry and Mary Crawford, come to stay with her. Henry and Mary previously lived with an uncle, the Admiral, and his wife. Mary was close with Mrs. Crawford but did not like her uncle, while Henry had a lot of affection for him. When the Admiral's wife died, Mary moved out of his house and in with Mrs. Grant. Mrs. Grant, being childless, was happy to accept the company.

In addition to introducing the reader to the very important characters Henry and Mary, this section also shows how Mary, as an unmarried woman, must be shuffled around between her relatives because she is unable to possess any fortune of her own, despite her parents' wealth and her pedigree.

Mrs. Grant does, however, worry that Mary, who is used to the excitements of life in London, will be bored in the country. Mary shares these fears, which is why she previously tried to get Henry to move in to his own country house and take her with him. But Henry, who does not like stay in one place, refused. Instead, to help her settle in, her accompanies her to the Grants' house, and promises to come get her if she dislikes it there. Mary, however, finds Mrs. Grant and the house satisfactory. Mrs. Grant, likewise, is thrilled to reconnect with her half-siblings, who fell out of touch with her after their uncle's remarriage.

Austen's characters here describe London and city life as fast-paced and stimulating, coding the environment as more exciting than a countryside environment like Mansfield Park. This section also shows how marriage can destroy nonromantic relationships, when it discusses how, after the Admiral remarried, Mrs. Grant was unable to see her beloved half-siblings for a long time.


CHAPTER 5

When the Bertrams and the Crawfords meet for the first time, they immediately like each other. Though Maria and Julia don't find Henry especially attractive, his charm quickly wins them over. Julia begins to think she is in love with him. Maria also finds herself drawn to Henry, but feels conflicted because she is engaged to Mr. Rushworth. Henry, who is actively flirting with both young women, rationalizes his flirtation by telling himself he means no harm, and is only trying to get them to like him.

As Henry's charm and flirtation win Maria over, Austen shows how love, rather than being the driving force for marriage, can actually be a threat to it in the highly monetized system of marriage of 19th century England. Moreover, Henry has excellent manners, but his inner thoughts reveal that he lacks moral fiber.


After Henry and Mary dine with the Bertrams, Henry, Mrs. Grant, and Mary discuss the relative merits of each Bertram girl. Henry implies that he prefers Maria, and Mary waves him off, tells him she likes Julia best, and reminds him that Maria is engaged.

Henry Crawford clearly does not especially respect the rules of courtship and the marriage process, as shown by his willingness to go after Maria despite her engagement.

Mary considers her romantic options in the Bertram brothers, deciding she prefers Tom, since he has been to London more often and is older, and so stands to inherit his father's title and estate. In order to try to win Tom's favor, Mary tries to learn about horse racing, on which Tom often bets.

Unlike Henry, Mary must think about marriage more seriously, since it is her only means to gaining wealth and power. Her preference for Tom emphasizes the role of inheritance in another seemingly unrelated field: romance.


Mary is puzzled by Fanny's reserve and lack of interest in Henry, commenting to Tom and Edmund that she does not understand whether Fanny has debuted in society yet or not (which is to say, whether she is looking for a fiancé). Edmund replies that Fanny is an adult, but that he doesn't concern himself with questions of "outs or not outs." They discuss debutantes at length.

The idea of debuting and the difference in behavior between women who are looking for fiancés and those who are not shows how the institution of marriage even affects women's personalities, shaping their manners and determining who they should talk to and how.

CHAPTER 6

Tom leaves Mansfield. Mary anticipates that, with Edmund as the head of the household, their social events with the Bertrams will be much less fun.

Mary lacks enthusiasm about Edmund as a romantic partner because she likes the idea of Tom's inheritance.

Mr. Rushworth visits Mansfield for the first time since Henry and Mary have arrived. Mr. Rushworth plans to renovate the grounds of his estate, Sotherton Court, and talks of little else. The party discusses who might be best able to help Mr. Rushworth plan the changes.

Mr. Rushworth is incredibly boring, as evidenced by the fact that he can't talk about anything but his renovations. This emphasizes how important money was in Maria's decision to marry him.

Mrs. Norris praises Mr. Rushworth's wealth, commenting that she imagines he will spare no expense. She then rambles about her own improvements to the Parsonage when she lived there with Mr. Norris, including the planting of an apricot tree. Dr. Grant tells her that the tree is still there but that it bears bad fruit, which offends Mrs. Norris, who says the tree comes from a good orchard. Mrs. Grant smoothes over the awkward moment by telling Mrs. Norris that Dr. Grant hasn't even eaten many of the apricots.

Mrs. Norris meets her match in Dr. Grant, who checks her ego by telling her that her apricot tree bears bad fruit. Mrs. Norris's insistence that the tree comes from a good orchard could be read as a metaphor for not overestimating the role of hereditary traits in determining someone or something's quality— in other words, Mrs. Norris should judge on merit rather than birth.

But then Mr. Rushworth again brings up the grounds at Sotherton, comparing them to other estates in the area. As they talk, Fanny tells Edmund she wishes she could see Sotherton before Mr. Rushworth makes the improvements. Edmund, surprised she has never been, wishes they could find a way to show her.

Each time he returns to the renovations, Mr. Rushworth shows himself to be more and more tiresome. Edmund's kindness shines through once again when he tries to think of ways for Fanny to go to Sotherton.

Mary asks what style of building Sotherton is, and Edmund describes the house. Mary is impressed by his genteel manner in replying. They discuss improving estates, and Mary says something negative about her uncle (the Admiral) and mentions that Henry has excellent design taste. Edmund is disappointed that Mary would speak so negatively of her uncle.

Mary begins to notice Edmund, despite his calm nature and lack of a fortune. Edmund, meanwhile, is surprised when Mary speaks negatively of her uncle in mixed company. Mary's manners are generally very good, but the remark seems to Edmund to reveal bad character.

Mary talks about her harp, which she is having sent to the Parsonage and arrives the next day. Edmund expresses his desire to hear her play. Mary discusses the difficulty she had in transporting her instrument because the farmers were in harvest season, a problem that surprised her.

Mary, who has spent most of her life in the city, reveals her total lack of knowledge of country ways and the lives of lower class rural people when she expresses surprise about the harvest season.

Edmund says that the harp is his favorite instrument, and Fanny says that she has never heard the harp, but would like to very much. Mary offers to play for them. Mary tells Edmund to write to Tom and tell him the harp has arrived.

Mary offers to play her harp as a way to attract romantic attention. She continues to focus on Tom, which she makes clear when she asks Edmund to write to him.

Edmund tells Mary has no plans to write to Tom soon. Mary then launches into a rant about how brothers are bad at correspondence, and only write to each other when absolutely necessary. She comments that there is a "manly" style to writing these letters that is curt and unemotional. Fanny, who has a long, fulfilling correspondence with William, pushes back on this idea, and Edmund explains that Fanny's brother is a sailor and a devoted correspondent.

Mary's insistence that there is a "manly" style of writing shows that she believes that letters can reveal an essential truth about the person writing them. Fanny, however, rejects this one-to-one view of letters as reliable windows to the truth of character. The reliability of letters continues to be a thematic focus throughout the rest of the book.

Mary asks questions about William, making Fanny uncomfortable. Mary and Edmund discuss the navy men they know. Mary, having lived with her uncle the Admiral, is well acquainted with navy men, and makes a risqué joke about them, causing Edmund to feel uncomfortable. The conversation reverts to a discussion of Mary's harp.

Once again, Mary reveals what Edmund and Fanny perceive as a character flaw when she makes an off-color joke about the navy. This demonstrates how, despite her good manners, Mary might harbor some unsavory personality traits (or at least a lack of the kind of prudence that Edmund and Fanny so cherish).

Meanwhile, the rest of the party is still discussing Mr. Rushworth's landscaping. Mrs. Grant asks Henry if he has any thoughts on the matter, since he has experience in design on his own estate, Everingham, which is known to be extremely beautiful.

That Mr. Rushworth continues to dominant the conversation, despite the fact that he is very boring, shows how his money gives him social influence and power.

Julia and Mrs. Grant encourage him to share his opinion, and Henry agrees to give it. Mr. Rushworth invites him to come to Sotherton to take a look at the place, and Mrs. Norris suggests that they all go, saying they can either dine at Sotherton or back at Mansfield Park afterward, and Fanny will stay home with Lady Bertram. Everyone agrees except Edmund, who is quiet.

As the group makes plans to visit Sotherton, Fanny is once again left out because her lower social status obliges her to be the one to stay at home with (the ever couch-bound) Lady Bertram. Edmund, kind as usual, seems unhappy with this arrangement.

CHAPTER 7

The next day, Edmund asks Fanny what she thinks of Mary. Fanny says she enjoys Mary's engaging way of speaking and her beauty. Edmund agrees, but asks Fanny if anything that Mary said struck her as "not quite right." Fanny mentions Mary's way of speaking of her uncle struck her as improper. Edmund agrees that she should not openly reveal such opinions in public. They go on to discuss Mary at length, with Edmund giving a much more positive opinion of her.

Fanny and Edmund both find Mary's way of talking about her uncle unacceptable, and talk about how it contrasts with the seeming goodness of her manner. Mary, like many of the other characters, reveals how good manners can obscure deep personal flaws and an inclination towards cruelty or disrespect.

Edmund goes to the Parsonage daily once Mary's harp arrives to listen to her play, and in doing so becomes more and more fond of her, until he is totally in love. Mary, who previous was uninterested in Edmund, begins to find him intriguing. Fanny is surprised by Edmund's tolerance of Mary's company more generally, despite the faults they already pointed out together, and which continue to annoy Fanny.

As Edmund falls in love with Mary over her harp playing, Fanny, whose manner and morality are generally in harmony, cannot understand how Edmund reconciles Mary's questionable comments with her sweet manner.

Edmund's attention towards Mary becomes especially hurtful when he starts using the mare he acquired for Fanny to teach Mary to ride. The first time, this does not bother Fanny, nor does it keep her from riding. But the second time, Mary and Edmund keep the horse out so long that Fanny misses her chance to ride. When Fanny goes to look for them, she finds a whole party (including Mary and Edmund, as well as the Grants and Henry) gathered without her to watch Mary ride. Fanny is extremely hurt that Edmund would forget her.

Edmund, now totally enamored of Mary, starts to forget Fanny and her feelings just as everyone else does. Edmund's love for Mary, rather than improving him, makes him inconsiderate and neglectful. While Fanny has not yet explicitly articulated her feelings toward Edmund as romantic love, her competition with Mary for Edmund's attention sets them up for a later love triangle.

Fanny, afraid of being noticed by the party and seeming impatient for her turn, walks over and says hello to the party. Mary apologizes for keeping her waiting. Fanny responds politely and Mary dismounts and wishes Fanny a pleasant ride.

Mary's manners are perfectly civil as she apologizes to Fanny. However, her actions showed a clear lack of consideration for Fanny's feelings.

Fanny is lifted on to her horse and starts her ride, watching with sadness as the group walks together to the village. The coachman comments that Mary is an exceedingly good horsewoman, comparing her to Fanny, which further annoys her.

When the coachman compares Mary to Fanny, he sets the two up as foils to each other, and their comparison will continue throughout the book as they compete for Edmund's love.

As everyone goes to bed that night, Edmund asks Fanny if she plans on riding tomorrow, because he would like to take Mary to the Commons, a longer ride. Fanny says she is not. The next day, Mary, Edmund, Henry, and several others ride to Mansfield Commons. They enjoy the ride so much that they decide to go out on a far ride again the following day. This pattern repeats itself for four days in a row, so the Crawfords can begin to know the countryside.

In Mary's presence, Edmund favors good manners over kindness. Although Edmund exhibits good manners by asking Fanny if she plans to ride the next day, Edmund, who knows how Fanny is often excluded, fails to be genuinely kind to her and find a way to allow her to take part in their outing.

On the fourth day of these long rides, Edmund and Julia are invited to dinner at the Parsonage, but Maria is not because Mr. Rushworth is supposed to pay a visit to Mansfield. Still, the lack of an invitation upsets Maria. When Mr. Rushworth does not end up coming to visit, she is even angrier.

Although Maria has ostensibly succeeded in her duty to marry through her engagement to Mr. Rushworth, her engagement bars her from taking part in certain social activities, making it unsatisfying.

When Edmund and Julia return from dinner, the atmosphere of the drawing room, clouded by Maria's bad mood, is sullen. Edmund finds Fanny lying on the sofa at the other end of the room. Mrs. Norris then scolds Fanny for lying down instead of doing work. Edmund perceives that Fanny looks unwell, and Fanny admits that she has a headache.

When Fanny gets scolded for lying on the sofa, the reader may contrast Fanny with Lady Bertram. Lady Bertram's higher status allows her to lie on the sofa without any repercussions, whereas Fanny is punished for the same behavior.

Mrs. Norris explains that Fanny went out to cut roses for Lady Bertram while Lady Bertram sat outside, and she walked to Mrs. Norris's house twice that day to drop off the roses. When Edmund hears that Fanny has been overexerting herself, he is very angry and argues that someone else should have been sent to bring the roses to the White House.

Edmund says that a servant should have been sent to bring the flowers to the White House, implying that Fanny is being treated as lower class than she actually is. Although he collapses the class divide between the Bertrams and Fanny, he also reinforces the divide between Fanny and the lower classes.

Mrs. Norris defends herself, saying she makes the same walk all the time. Edmund responds by pointing out that, unlike Fanny, Mrs. Norris is in good health. Mrs. Norris then points out that Fanny would be in better health if she could go out riding.

Mrs. Norris continues to reveal her bad character by trying to shift the blame for mistreating Fanny from herself onto Edmund, showing no remorse for her neglect.

Edmund does not respond to these comments, and instead brings Fanny a glass of wine. Fanny has started to cry. Edmund is annoyed at his mother and aunt, but especially annoyed at himself for neglecting Fanny and allowing her to go four days without riding or companionship. He resolves never to let it happen again.

Edmund's regret at his mistreatment of Fanny shows how he, unlike Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris, feels genuine remorse when he neglects her. Edmund's realization of his own mistake shows his inner goodness.

Fanny goes to bed, and though she has been feeling very sad and her head hurts, she is suddenly incredibly happy about Edmund's concern for her and his kindness towards her.

Fanny is overwhelmed by her appreciation for Edmund. Her love for him gradually develops, though the narrator has not yet articulated it as such.

CHAPTER 8

Fanny begins riding again the next morning. While she is out, Mr. Rushworth and his mother arrive at Mansfield Park in order to plan the group visit to Sotherton. They pick a date for the trip. Needing to make sure that Henry is available, Mr. Rushworth walks to the Parsonage to ask.

This beginning section of the chapter serves to advance the novel's plot as the group plans for their trip. As usual, Fanny is left out of the plans, unable to control her own fate as the least powerful member of the household.

While Mr. Rushworth is out, Mrs. Grant and Mary arrive at Mansfield. The Mansfield residents fill them in about the Sotherton plans. Mrs. Rushworth tries to convince Lady Bertram to come, and though Lady Bertram consistently rejects the invitation, she does so in such a mild-mannered way that Mrs. Rushworth keeps trying.

This section shows how manners sometimes interfere with successful communication, as Lady Bertram's consistent rejection of Rushworth's invitation is not taken seriously because her refusal is so gentle.

Finally Mrs. Norris steps in, and tells Mrs. Rushworth that the exhaustion of traveling would be overwhelming for Lady Bertram. She tells her that Lady Bertram will stay home and that Fanny will keep her company, while Edmund will join them at Sotherton. Mrs. Rushworth concedes Lady Bertram's absence, but expresses her disappointment that she and Fanny, who has not yet seen Sotherton, will not come.

Mrs. Rushworth's disappointment that both Lady Bertram and Fanny will not be at Sotherton suggests that the class divide between Fanny and her relatives might be less perceptible or important to outsiders than to the family members.

Mrs. Rushworth goes on to invite Mary and Mrs. Grant to Sotherton. Mrs. Grant turns her down, but Mary accepts. Mr. Rushworth then returns with the news that Henry can come on the date they agreed upon, and Edmund returns home, where he is informed of the plans.

With the date decided and the whole party invited, it appears that the Sotherton trip will be another instance where Fanny, due to her lower status, attends to Lady Bertram while everyone else has fun.

Edmund goes into the breakfast room, where Mrs. Norris worries about if there is enough space in Henry's barouche (a kind of carriage). The family argues back and forth about which carriage to take, with Maria and Julia advocating for the barouche, and Edmund loses the debate. Edmund then says that, since there is so much room in the carriage they chose, they should take Fanny with them. Edmund asks if Lady Bertram would let Fanny go to Sotherton if she did not need her company, and Lady Bertram says she would, but that she *does* need her company.

Edmund continues to advocate for Fanny. During the carriage debate, Maria and Julia want to take the barouche rather than their own carriage because the barouche is more expensive and fashionable, showing their superficiality and obsession with money. Austen also ironically shows how Lady Bertram's excessive neediness and languidness are pandered to, while Fanny's humble requests are consistently denied.


Edmund offers to stay at home in Fanny's place, prompting an outcry from the others. Mrs. Norris objects that she has already told Mrs. Rushworth that Fanny will not be going. Edmund explains that he has already discussed Fanny's attendance with Mrs. Rushworth, and that she whole-heartedly extended an invitation to Fanny. Mrs. Norris is annoyed, but concedes that Fanny should be allowed to go. Indeed, when Fanny learns of the plan she is extremely grateful, a feeling that is exaggerated by Fanny's increasing appreciation for Edmund, which are developing into romantic feelings.

Mrs. Norris tries to mask her desire to keep Fanny from having fun along with her cousins by saying that she already declined the invitation and it would be in bad taste to accept it now. As usual, Mrs. Norris attempts to disguise her cruelty in a guise of good manners, showing how good manners can be abused to mislead people and hide immoral intentions. Fanny sees Edmund more and more as a love interest.

Ultimately, Edmund does not have to stay home, because Mrs. Grant offers to keep Lady Bertram company instead. Everyone is thrilled with this plan, and Mrs. Norris claims to have been about to suggest it just before Mrs. Grant proposed it.

Mrs. Norris again shows how she wants to take all the credit for being helpful and kind without actually doing anything to act that way (and often acting the contrary).

Wednesday, the day of the outing, arrives. Henry arrives in his barouche to take them to Sotherton, with both Maria and Julia vying for the seat in the front next to Henry. Mrs. Grant suggests that Julia take the seat, much to her delight and Maria's discontent. They take off.

Maria and Julia, who normally enjoy a close relationship, here compete for the seat next to Henry and his attention. This shows how the marriage process can drive a wedge between female relationships.

During the carriage ride, Fanny admires the scenery and looks forward to talking about it with Edmund, who is riding his horse behind them. Mary, meanwhile, pays no attention to the environs. The narrator contrasts Fanny and Mary, who are sitting next to each other, saying the only thing they have in common is their interest in Edmund. When Edmund catches up with the carriage, both Mary and Fanny exclaim "there he is!"

Mary's city upbringing prevents her from appreciating the beauty of the nature surrounding them, while country-raised Fanny enjoys the scenery. Meanwhile, the narrative sets Fanny and Mary in opposition to each other, firmly establishing them as foils to each other and competitors for Edmund's love.

Maria is sullen because Julia is sitting in the front with Henry, and she grows jealous as she watches them flirt. Julia doesn't hesitate to rub in her good luck, telling the passengers in the back about how stunning the view is up front.

Henry's attention to Julia ruins Maria's ride, showing how competition for male attention strains the formerly loving relationship between Julia and Maria.

Once they arrive closer to Sotherton, however, Maria remembers her engagement to Mr. Rushworth and perks up. She points out the land that Mr. Rushworth owns to Mary, bragging about his property. Mrs. Norris also delights in Mr. Rushworth's wealth, and even Fanny compliments it. Maria is giddy with pride as they pull up to the house.

Maria's sadness that Henry does not pay attention to her abates as the grounds reminds her that her fiancé is rich. This in turn reminds her of her success in a marriage process that values wealth and status above all else in a partner.

CHAPTER 9

Mr. Rushworth greets his guests at the door, and shows them to the drawing room where Mrs. Rushworth greets them. They all head to the dining room to eat, and over their meal they discuss how Henry should be shown the grounds to make his recommendations for the renovation. They debate which carriage to take outside. Mr. Rushworth suggests the chaise, which no one is enthusiastic about. Then he suggests a tour of the house, which is better received.

Once again, the choice of carriage, which represents levels of wealth and fashionableness, becomes a central debate question among the group, revealing the young people's shallowness. Mr. Rushworth's suggestion that they take chaise shows how out of touch he is with the group's social nuances.

Mrs. Rushworth leads them through the rooms of the house, which is beautiful and full of luxurious furniture. Mary, who is used to these kinds of houses, is not especially impressed, but Fanny thinks it is breathtaking, and listens attentively to Mrs. Rushworth's explanations.

Fanny, who never experienced material comforts during her early childhood in Portsmouth, can appreciate luxury, while Mary, who is spoiled, cannot appreciate the nice things that the Rushworths own.

The group enters the family chapel, which is simply furnished. Mrs. Rushworth tells them how the whole family used to gather there for prayer twice a day before the practice was discontinued. Mary jokes that "every generation has its improvements." Fanny exclaims that she thinks it's a shame that the family no longer gathers for daily prayer. Mary laughs and imagines the family forcing their servants to go to prayer while coming up with excuses to avoid going themselves. Edmund defends Fanny's viewpoint.

This section contrasts Mary and Fanny's moral and religious attitudes. Mary is very critical of the church, which the book presents as evidence of her inferior character. Fanny, meanwhile, appreciates services, aligning her as the better candidate for Edmund's affections, since Edmund intends to work as a clergyman.

Mary goes on to say she thinks it is better to leave religion to people's private lives, since forcing people into praying takes away the authenticity of it. She imagines the Rushworth daughters bored at church, with an unattractive chaplain, and thinking only of men. Edmund and Fanny do not respond to her right away. Fanny is extremely angry, but Edmund collects himself and says that Mary's mind is lively, and she can't be serious about anything, even something as serious as religion. They continue to debate back about forth about religion for a while.

Mary evaluates the church services in terms of the chaplain's sexual attractiveness, degrading the religion that Fanny and Edmund hold dear. Edmund shrugs off her irreverence, showing how he is willing to overlook indications of Mary's questionable morality because of his romantic interest in her. Of course, to the modern reader Mary might seem more sympathetic (or at least interesting) here than the stiffly righteous Fanny and Edmund.

Julia, meanwhile, calls Henry's attention to Maria and Mr. Rushworth, saying that the chapel surroundings make them look like a bride and groom. Henry smiles, and then whispers to Maria that he would not like to see her at the altar. Maria is startled. They exchange a few more flirtatious phrases.

As Julia imagines the wedding between Maria and Mr. Rushworth (and makes a seemingly pointed remark meant to remind Maria that she isn't supposed to flirt with Henry), Henry's comment makes him a real potential threat to their engagement, and an option for romance that is totally outside of the institution of marriage.

Julia states that she wishes Edmund were already a clergyman so that he could marry them right then. Mary, who did not realize that Edmund intended to join the clergy, looks aghast. Fanny feels bad for her, since Mary just said so many flippant things about religion. Mary asks if it is true, and Edmund confirms that he is to be ordained at Christmas. Mary says that if she had known, she would have been more respectful, and changes the subject.

Julia's wish that Maria and Mr. Rushworth could marry immediately is clearly due to the fact that Julia wants to remove her sister from competition for Henry's attentions. Meanwhile, Mary's comment shows how Mary favors tact and agreeability over expressing her real opinion.

The party leaves the chapel and goes into the garden. Slowly, they make their way out of the garden and towards the gate out of the garden and into the woods, with Henry heading to the terrace first, then Maria, and Mr. Rushworth following. Edmund, Mary, and Fanny show up close to the gate, sticking together in a group. Lastly, Mrs. Rushworth, Mrs. Norris, and Julia are far behind.

The large group separates into smaller trios that correspond to two developing love triangles: Mr. Rushworth and Henry with Maria, and Mary and Fanny with Edmund. Julia's fall from favor with Henry is represented symbolically as she is left behind with the older women.

Mary, Edmund, and Fanny go into the woods, where the temperature will be cooler. Mary brings up Edmund's choice to become a clergyman again, saying it surprises her. Edmund asks why, and Mary explains that she had not thought of it, and that usually an uncle or grandfather would have a fortune to leave to him as the second son.

Mary thinks of Edmund's career choice in terms of his position as a second son and thus in terms of his lack of inheritance. Again, inheritance not only determines wealth, but also marriageability and career choice in turn.

Edmund says that is not his case, and asks if she thinks no one ever chooses the profession. Mary says that she would not use the word "never," but that it's not a very common choice. They discuss the reasons why someone might want to be a clergyman.

Mary cannot imagine that Edmund would be interested in religion of his own volition, highlighting the lack of common moral understanding between them.

Mary describes clergymen who give only one or two sermons a week and do little else. Edmund says that Mary is thinking of clergymen in London, not the rest of England. In the countryside, parishioners know how the clergyman acts in his daily life, so he can lead by example. Fanny agrees. Mary, however, thinks Edmund should go into law instead.

Austen aligns the city with a lack of morality and religious motivation, suggesting that the countryside is a more righteous, moral place. Fanny's agreement shows how she and Edmund have more common values than Edmund and Mary.

They are quiet for a while. Fanny breaks the silence by saying she would like to sit down for a while. Edmund feels bad for not thinking of her strength earlier, and he takes her arm and Mary's.

As is becoming a pattern, Edmund's attention to Mary is taxing for Fanny, manifested physically here in her exhaustion.

The trio arrives at a bench and they all sit down. Edmund observes that Fanny is very tired. Fanny says she will soon be rested, but Mary gets up and wants to move, saying that resting tires her. She decides to go look at an **iron gate** she spies a ways away. Edmund and Mary playfully banter about how far away the fence is. They decide to walk more, and Fanny offers to come too, but Edmund insists she rest more, and so Edmund and Mary walk off together.

Again, Fanny's tranquil nature is contrasted with Mary's overactive, excitable personality. When she and Edmund walk off together, leaving Fanny behind, they physically manifest how Edmund's affection for Mary causes him to leave Fanny behind in his thoughts and consideration.

CHAPTER 10

Twenty minutes go by and Fanny is still sitting on the bench, surprised to be left for so long. Maria, Mr. Rushworth, and Henry stumble upon her. Fanny explains her exhaustion and Edmund and Mary's abandonment. Maria, Mr. Rushworth, and Henry sit down on the bench as well. They discuss the improvements Henry suggests, with Mr. Rushworth complacently agreeing to everything he mentions.

Fanny, sad and surprised to be left behind, observes the dynamic between Henry, Maria, and Mr. Rushworth. When the narrative juxtaposes the two men, Henry clearly is more dynamic and charismatic, making Maria's interest in Henry somewhat understandable.

Maria says she would like to go through the **iron gate** into the park. Everyone agrees, and they decide to go to a knoll that they spot, that looks like it's about a half mile away. Mr. Rushworth, however, has forgotten the key to the gate, and so he heads back to the house to get it.

Mr. Rushworth clearly cares about Maria, as he walks all the way back to the house to get the gate key so she can fulfill her wish. (And notably, he wants to go through the iron gate, which comes to represent marriage and social propriety, the "proper" way.)

With Mr. Rushworth gone, Maria and Henry discuss his thoughts on the house. Henry says it is bigger and grander than he expected, and then whispers that next summer he imagines he would not enjoy it as much. Maria is embarrassed, and replies with her doubts, which Henry protests.

Maria and Henry, meanwhile, linger in front of the gate, and Henry flirts heavily with Maria while Fanny silently observes the dangerous behavior.

There is a silence between them, and then Maria comments that Henry seemed to enjoy driving with Julia that morning. Henry says he does not even remember, and then recollects that he was telling her a story about an uncle's servant, and that she loves to laugh. Maria asks if he finds Julia more light-hearted than herself, and Henry replies that she is more easily amused. Maria replies that, unlike Julia, she has more important things to think of, and Henry agrees, but thinks Maria should smile more anyway, since she has a lot to smile about. Maria agrees, but mentions that the **iron gate** is making her feel trapped.

Maria tests Henry's interest in Julia by commenting on their ride together, and Henry confirms his lack of interest in Julia by first implying that the trip was not memorable, and second describing Julia in a way that, although seemingly complimentary, makes Julia seem like she is not especially interesting. Maria's comment about the iron gate is a metaphor for how she feels that the institution of marriage is stifling to her.

Henry proposes that they jump the **fence** instead of waiting for the key. Maria agrees. Henry says that even if they are out of sight before he returns, Fanny can tell him where they've gone. Fanny protests that Maria will hurt herself climbing the fence, but as she is speaking Maria and Henry take off.

Henry and Maria jump over the iron gate, metaphorically representing their later moral transgression when Maria leaves her marriage to Mr. Rushworth to be with Henry, resulting in her social ruin.

Fanny, alone again, is annoyed that Henry and Maria would do something so bold. She thinks sadly of Edmund and Mary, who seem to have forgotten her. Suddenly, Fanny hears footsteps, and Julia approaches, asking where everyone is. Fanny explains where Maria and Henry have gone, and Julia decides to try to catch up to them.

Fanny finds herself, as usual, observing the romances and transgressions of her cousins. Julia, lagging behind the group, is like Fanny—also often left outside these romantic dynamics.

Fanny suggests that Julia should wait for Mr. Rushworth to arrive with the key, but Julia says that she has "had enough" of the Rushworths, having spent so much time with Mrs. Rushworth that morning. Fanny asks if Julia has at least seen Mr. Rushworth on her way from the house. Julia tells her she did, and that he was in a rush to get the key. Julia then jumps the **fence** and walks away.

Julia, frustrated by having to spend time with the older women instead of the young people, decides to follow Maria and Henry over the fence, foreshadowing how, at the end of the book, Maria's transgression triggers Julia's own elopement with Mr. Yates.

Five minutes after Julia leaves, Mr. Rushworth shows up, and when Fanny explains that the others have not waited for him, he is upset. He stands before the **gate**, unsure of whether to cross. He says that by the time he would get to the knoll, they would likely already be gone, and sits down. Fanny does her best to console him.

Mr. Rushworth, who has been left behind, goes unconsidered by Maria and the others not just now, but also throughout the book as Maria pursues a romance with Henry.

Mr. Rushworth asks Fanny if she likes Henry as much as everyone else seems to, saying that he does not understand the appeal. Fanny says she does not think he is handsome, and Mr. Rushworth agrees, saying they were better off without the Crawfords. Fanny continues to try to sooth Mr. Rushworth's hurt feelings, then tries to encourage him to catch up with Maria, Julia, and Henry. At last Mr. Rushworth agrees and sets off, going through the **gate** with his key and walking away.

Mr. Rushworth clearly views Henry as a threat to his marriage to Maria, since he brings him up only to criticize him. Although Mr. Rushworth hesitates, he ultimately follows the others through the gate, showing how Mr. Rushworth's pursuit of Maria, despite his awareness that she does not love him, puts him also at fault for their unhappy marriage.

Fanny turns her thoughts back to Mary and Edmund, and decides to go look for them. She finds them mid-laughter, having just crossed back into the woods. Fanny, whose romantic feelings for Edmund are by now fairly established, is upset that they had forgotten her.

Yet again, Fanny is upset to have been forgotten by Edmund as he tries to woo Mary. By now, Fanny's romantic love for Edmund is quite clear, rendering the slight even more painful.

On their way back toward the house, they run into Mrs. Rushworth and Mrs. Norris, who are just arriving to the woods. Mrs. Norris has enjoyed her time at the house so far because she has received cheese from Mrs. Rushworth and a heath plant from the gardener. They all return to the house to lounge in the salon and wait for the others to return.

As usual, the narrator shows Mrs. Norris's conniving, materialistic nature by describing how she enjoyed her time with Mrs. Rushworth simply because she received several gifts from her and members of the staff.

Maria, Julia, Henry, and Mr. Rushworth return late. Things are still a little tense because Maria did not wait for her fiancé at the gate, and Julia and Mr. Rushworth seem gloomy. Henry and Maria are more spirited.

The iron gate debacle has clearly upset the scorned Julia and embarrassed Mr. Rushworth. Henry and Maria, meanwhile, are invigorated by their adventure.

They all have dinner together, and then everyone loads back into the carriage for the drive back. Mrs. Norris settles in with all her gifts from Mrs. Rushworth and her staff. Henry suggests that Julia sit with him again up front, much to Julia's delight and Maria's disappointment. Mr. Rushworth says goodbye to Maria, helping her into the carriage.

Henry, despite the fact that he has been acting as if he is most interested in Maria, now returns to paying attention to Julia instead. His continuously noncommittal behavior shows his resistance to the restrictions of marriage and his naturally flirtatious, manipulative nature.

As they drive away, Mrs. Norris comments that it was a good day for Fanny, and that she expects her to be grateful as a result. Maria makes a snarky comment about how Mrs. Norris has left with so many presents and is taking up so much carriage space with them. Mrs. Norris prattles on about where she got each of her gifts. When she is done, the carriage is quiet.

Mrs. Norris's hypocrisy strikes again when she says that Fanny should be grateful for being allowed to come with them due to her lower status, and then brags about each of the gifts she received from Mrs. Rushworth.

CHAPTER 11

Soon after their trip to Sotherton, a letter arrives from Sir Thomas in Antigua, informing them that he will return in November since he has finished his business in the West Indies. Neither Maria nor Julia is happy about this update, since he is so strict. Maria is especially displeased because her father's return means that she will finally be married to Mr. Rushworth, an event she has been dreading. She consoles herself by imagining that he will likely not arrive in early November, but rather in the middle of the month, giving her three more months of freedom.

Austen uses letters to provide essential information about Sir Thomas, who, in Antigua, is far away from Mansfield Park. (It's also worth noting that his "business" in Antigua most likely involves slaves, a disturbing possibility that is never explicitly stated and that would certainly undercut the morality of this otherwise mostly positive character.) The fact that his daughters are unenthusiastic about his return also makes them look unloving and displays their lack of morals. Maria's dread at her impending marriage to Mr. Rushworth recalls her earlier comment about feeling trapped by the iron gate.

Mary, Edmund, and Fanny engage in a long discussion of Edmund's choice to be a clergyman, after Mary suggests that Edmund chose the profession so his father would continue providing him with an income. Fanny and Edmund push back on this, and try to relieve Mary of her cynical views of the clergy, but to no avail.

Once again, Mary, unable to understand Edmund's commitment to morality, frames Edmund's choice to become a clergyman as a financial necessity due to his lack of inheritance.

Maria and Julia then invite Mary to play instruments with them, and so she leaves Edmund and Fanny. As she walks away, Edmund articulates lots of admiring thoughts about Mary's good nature to Fanny. Fanny agrees, and is happy that Edmund continues to stand with her by the window.

When Edmund and Fanny are alone, Edmund confides in Fanny that he admires Mary, showing his closeness to Fanny and trust in her. Fanny's happiness in his company shows her deep love for him.

Fanny looks out the window, and says to Edmund that she thinks people would be happier and better if they spent more time contemplating nature. As they gaze at the stars, Edmund says they should really be out on the lawn for a better view. Fanny says she would like to go. To Fanny's sadness, Edmund then walks over to listen to the singers, and asks them to play again. This leaves Fanny alone at the window until Mrs. Norris scolds her away, warning her that she'll catch a cold.

Fanny, perhaps tired of hearing Edmund praise another woman, turns the conversation towards nature, showing her connection to the countryside and Mansfield Park. When Edmund chooses to listen to the music instead of going with Fanny to the lawn, his clear preference for Mary upsets Fanny.

CHAPTER 12

Though Sir Thomas intends to return to Mansfield in November, Tom comes back at the end of August. Mary, who used to enjoy hearing his stories of gambling and parties, realizes upon his return that she prefers Edmund. She is disappointed by this, but gives up trying to attract Tom, and it quickly becomes apparent that Tom was not especially interested in her either. The lack of interest between them becomes so pronounced that the narrator notes that, even if Tom were to become the owner of Mansfield Park on the spot, Mary still would not want to marry him.

Mary's dreams of marrying Tom and becoming the next Lady Bertram are dashed when, upon Tom's return, she realizes her preference for Edmund. The fact that she gives Tom up shows that, unlike Maria, Mary has limits on her ambitions of marrying for money and a title. This renders Mary a somewhat more nuanced, sympathetic character.

Henry, meanwhile, leaves Mansfield for his property in Norfolk for two weeks. During his absence, Maria and Julia are extremely bored.

Maria and Julia's boredom without male attention shows their shallowness.

During those two weeks Maria spends a lot of time with Mr. Rushworth, who bores her out of her mind, and that makes her miss Henry more. Julia misses him as well, and believes she is Henry's favorite thanks to hints from Mrs. Grant. Maria, meanwhile, believes that she is the favorite because of Henry's advances. Henry returns after two weeks to resume his game of seducing Maria and Julia.

Mrs. Grant's interference shows how romance in the world of Mansfield Park, far from being a spiritual connection between two people, involves the manipulations of many outside influences. This undermines traditional ideas of love as a natural emotional connection.

Fanny, however, continues to dislike Henry. She tries to hint at her feelings to Edmund, but he does not catch on. Edmund mentions that Mrs. Grant believes Henry prefers Julia, and that, though he has not seen any proof of it himself, he hopes that is the case. Fanny says that it almost seems like he prefers Maria, except that she is engaged, and Edmund speculates that this is so he will have an ally in winning Julia's affections. Fanny guesses she must be mistaken.

Edmund, with whom Fanny usually shares similar opinions about almost everything, fails to see that Henry is leading his sisters on. Fanny's perception of the situation, meanwhile, shows how her position as an observer allows her to critically distinguish between real love and Henry's games.

Fanny overhears Mrs. Rushworth and Mrs. Norris discussing Julia and Henry one night at a ball, which happens to be Fanny's first. Mrs. Norris draws Mrs. Rushworth's attention to Maria and Mr. Rushworth, who are dance partners. Maria does look happy and talks excitedly to Mr. Rushworth—at least while Julia and Henry are dancing nearby. Mrs. Norris points out Julia and Henry to Mrs. Rushworth, and they agree that it is a nice match.

In another instance of appearances being deceiving, Maria looks happy with Mr. Rushworth at the ball. However, the narrator's note that Julia and Henry are dancing nearby suggests that Maria is just trying to make Henry jealous. Her outward affection toward Mr. Rushworth is unreliable.


Tom appears. Fanny hopes he will ask her to dance, but instead he pulls up a chair to talk to Fanny about horse racing. He says, "If you want to dance, Fanny, I will stand up with you." Fanny declines, and Tom says he is glad because he's very tired. Mrs. Norris asks Tom to join them in playing cards to entertain Mrs. Rushworth. Tom, who is totally uninterested in playing, tells Mrs. Norris that he was just on his way to dance with Fanny. They head off to the dance floor.

Tom's offer to dance with Fanny feels like an obligation or favor to her, showing how Tom's good manners, although seemingly generous, are in fact hollow. Once dancing with Fanny becomes a convenient way for Tom to avoid playing cards, he discourteously whisks her off without even asking again if she'd like to dance.

CHAPTER 13

Tom's friend John Yates is also at the ball. Yates came to Mansfield Park on Tom's invitation after taking part in a theatrical group elsewhere. Yates's shares his stories of the theater. He explains the plot of the play "Lover's Vows," and the dynamics of casting, rehearsal, and the cast's relationships.

Yates's descriptions of the process of putting on a play appeal to the young people of Mansfield Park, all of whom clearly are interested in the romantic drama that Yates describes.

Tom suggests that they put on a play at Mansfield Park, with Yates as manager. Tom becomes fixated on the idea, and it catches with Maria and Julia as well. Henry wholeheartedly voices his support. Tom insists that in order to do a play they must have a curtain, and Mr. Yates begins to imagine what to do for a stage.

Henry's enthusiastic support for the play draws attention to the fact that Henry is an actor both onstage and off. His feigned interest in both Bertram girls at once is a kind of theatrical production in itself.

Edmund, who does not like the idea of the play, sarcastically says they should throw an enormous production. Edmund's negativity does not stop them, however, and they go on to debate what genre of play to produce. Lady Bertram hears the whole conversation, and does not voice any objection.

In the upper class society of Mansfield Park, taking part in theatre is somewhat transgressive. This makes putting on a play undoubtedly more appealing to the bored youth of Mansfield, except for the morally upright Edmund.

Later that night, Edmund determines to stop the production from happening. Edmund confronts Tom with his reservations about the play in the drawing room, saying that he thinks it would be improper, especially since their father is absent, and since Maria is about to be married to Mr. Rushworth. Tom complains that Edmund takes everything too seriously, that they will have no audience anyway, and that they should certainly do the play before Sir Thomas returns, since his voyage will make Lady Bertram nervous and it is better to keep her distracted.

Edmund's concerns about propriety fit with Edmund's consistent sense of morality and desire to please his father, both of which Tom clearly lacks. This is yet another instance where Edmund shows himself to be much more responsible than Tom, despite the fact that he cannot inherit and Tom can. Edmund's mention of Maria's marriage as a reason not to do the play shows how improper manners threaten the marriage process, and how the marriage process makes otherwise seemingly innocuous things improper.

As Tom speaks of Lady Bertram, he and Edmund look over to see that she is exceptionally relaxed, and even about to fall asleep. Tom and Edmund continue to argue. Tom insists on doing the play, and finally Edmund begs him to at least be quiet about it for their father's sake, and to be careful of spending too much money. Tom waves off his concern and tells him it will cost very little. He then tells Edmund that he doesn't have to act if he doesn't want to, but he can't expect to control everyone else. Edmund says he absolutely will not be acting, and Tom walks out of the room.

Lady's Bertram's lack of concern about Sir Thomas after Edmund has just used her anxiety as an excuse is comedic. Lady Bertram is often used as a pawn for other characters to prove their points or negotiate, showing her lack of real will or agency as a character. At the same time, Lady Bertram's lack of passion for her husband, who supposedly was a good (and "lucky") match, again proves even socially admirable marriages to be rather dismal.

Fanny, who overheard the quibble, tries to comfort Edmund by suggesting that they may not find a suitable play. Edmund brushes off this idea, and says that all he can do is try to persuade Maria and Julia not to take part. Fanny suggests that Mrs. Norris might side with him. Edmund agrees, but doubts that she could convince Tom, Maria, and Julia either.

Fanny and Edmund strategizes about how to convince the others to not do the play, aligning them again in their sense of morality, and showing how the pair possess compatible values and senses of propriety.

The next morning Edmund speaks to Maria and Julia, who are just as unwilling to listen to him as Tom. As Edmund is trying to convince them, Henry enters the room, declaring that he and Mary will partake in the theatre as well. Edmund, now knowing that Mary approves of the play, softens his resolve. Mrs. Norris turns out to support the play as well, and so the project moves forward.

Edmund's sense of righteousness, though, is clearly not as strong as it seems, since Edmund's resolves softens when he hears Mary will do the play. Edmund's love for Mary negatively impacts his morality, showing she is a bad influence for him.

CHAPTER 14

Picking a play turns out to be a difficult decision. The carpenter already begins building the set, and the curtain is being made before the script is even picked. Julia, Maria, Henry, and Mr. Yates want the play to be a tragedy, while Tom and Mary prefer comedy. They vet various options, but find all of them imperfect for one reason or another. Fanny, meanwhile, listens and observes these discussions. She finds the objections to various plays petty, but hopes they end up picking one so she can watch.

Interestingly enough, Fanny, who seemed to side with Edmund in her objection to the play, and does not want to participate in the production, still hopes they end up putting on a play so she can watch. Fanny, though often described as morally consistent, can also be hypocritical, content to benefit from the people and things to which she morally objects.

Tom declares that they are wasting time and must choose something. He proposes another play, which flops. Then he suggests "Lover's Vows" (the play that Yates rehearsed for previously). Everyone seems content with this suggestion. Mr. Yates is especially thrilled. He offers to play the Baron, and Henry to play Frederick.

"Lover's Vows," although now a fairly obscure text, was a popular and contemporary play at the time Austen wrote Mansfield Park. *Like the novel, it follows the love lives and disgraces of a group of people from a mix of social classes.*

Maria and Julia both want to play Agatha, Frederick's mother. Julia points out that there is no part for Mary. Henry tells them that Mary does not want to act, but rather help with the production. Tom, however, insists that Mary should play the character Amelia. Henry says that Julia should not be the one to play Agatha, much to Julia's upset and Maria's triumph. Tom agrees, saying there is nothing tragic about Julia, and that she would do better as the Cottager's Wife.

In the play, the character of Agatha is a lower class woman who has an illegitimate son, Frederick (played by Henry) with the Baron (played by Yates). As Maria and Julia fight over the part, they are again competing for the role that will allow them the most attention, and time onstage with Henry.

Yates objects to Julia playing the Cottager's wife, thinking it is too insignificant a part for her. They argue back and forth. Henry tries to flatter Julia by telling her to take the part of Amelia. Tom objects and says that Mary is better suited for the part. Henry, though, continues to implore Julia to take the part. This softens Julia's feeling of rejection, but she is suspicious of Henry's waffling.

Yates, who throughout the rest of the play expresses romantic interest in Julia, seems to want her to play Agatha so she will be his character's love interest. Julia, meanwhile, begins to catch on to Henry's strategy of flattering her in order to maintain her affection and manipulate her.

Julia calls out the fact that Henry thought she would be overpowering as Agatha but not as Amelia, and Henry is stumped. Julia says that she would not take Amelia anyway, since she only wanted to play Agatha, and she hates the comedic part of Amelia. Julia then leaves the room, making everyone else feel awkward. Fanny feels bad for Julia and pities her feelings of jealousy.

Henry's charm and good manners fail him when Julia calls out his hypocrisy, revealing her awareness of his tactics. Generally, the casting of the play involves a lot of negotiation, mirroring the real life manipulation in the actors' love lives as well.

After a short silence, the conversation turns back to the play. Tom and Yates discuss the scenery while Maria talks with Henry. Eventually, Tom and Yates leave to look in the billiards room, which is now the theatre. Maria and Henry go to the Parsonage to tell Mary she has been cast as Amelia, and suddenly Fanny is alone. She picks up the play script, which is on the table, and reads. Fanny is scandalized by the parts of Amelia and Agatha, which she thinks are unfit to be played by gentlewomen. She hopes that Edmund's chastisements will sink in and they will change their minds.

Fanny's conviction that the roles of Amelia and Agatha are unfit for gentlewomen like Maria, Julia, and Mary is interesting, because it seems to support class distinctions —although Fanny herself has been consistently degraded due to lower class. In the play, Agatha, a commoner, marries above her station, while Amelia, the daughter of a Baron, marries below. This foreshadows the later interclass marriage between Fanny and Edmund.

CHAPTER 15

Maria returns home, reporting that Mary has accepted her part. Mr. Rushworth arrives at the house, and is offered either the part of Anhalt or Count Casel. He chooses Count Casel. Maria, thinking Mr. Rushworth's slowness might prevent him from learning his lines, shortens all the speeches of his that she can. Mr. Rushworth occupies himself with figuring out what his costume should be, a job that he likes very much but pretends not to.

In the play, Mr. Rushworth's character, Count Casel, is supposed to marry Amelia, but she loves the character Anhalt instead. Mr. Rushworth's choice of the role of the scorned lover instead of the love interest reflects his real life role in the novel's love triangle between Maria, Henry, and Mr. Rushworth.

When Edmund enters the drawing room, he stumbles upon the group mid-discussion. Mr. Rushworth tells him that they have chosen "Lovers' Vows" and that he is playing Count Casel, and begins to talk about what he will wear. Mr. Yates confirms the chosen play, saying it is surprising they did not think of it earlier, and that they have cast almost every part.

Throughout the preparations for the play, Austen pokes fun at Mr. Rushworth, who, like he did with the renovations, fixates on the number of lines he has and what he will wear. He annoys everyone, and makes it obvious why Maria does not love him.

Edmund asks what roles the women are playing, and Maria tells him she is Agatha and Mary is Amelia. Edmund turns to sit near Mrs. Norris, Lady Bertram, and Fanny at the fire. Mr. Rushworth tells him that he has forty-two speeches in the play, and talks about his clothes again.

Again, Austen uses Mr. Rushworth's fixation on his speeches and clothes to give the chapter humor. She also shows how unbearable he is, helping the reader to understand Maria's dislike of her fiancé.

Tom leaves the room to answer a question posed by the carpenter, and Mr. Yates follows him out. Edmund tells Maria that he cannot condone the play they have chosen, saying it is inappropriate, and hopes they will decide to quit. He tells her to read it over so she will understand. Maria tells him that she knows the play well and that with a few alterations it will be perfectly appropriate. Edmund tells her she should be setting a good example for the other women, which flatters her, but she still refuses to quit. They argue back and forth.

When Edmund confronts Maria about the play, he seems to think that Maria has only agreed to it because she has not read the text, and so does not realize that it features sex outside of marriage, an illegitimate child, interclass marriage, etc. Maria, however, says she knows the play already, suggesting that she is more comfortable with being improper and possibly immoral than Edmund is.


Lady Bertram, who seems to not care very much, tells Maria to be proper and tells Fanny to order her dinner. Edmund tells Lady Bertram that Sir Thomas would not like Maria playing Agatha. Maria says that if she drops the part Julia will take it, thinking that the fact that she is not engaged would make her playing it more proper. Furthermore, Maria says that if they change the play they will never choose one.

Lady Bertram, who should be the one calling the play off for being inappropriate, shows as usual her ineffectiveness and lack of discipline as a parent. Much later in the book, the Bertrams' parenting styles will be blamed for Maria and Julia's moral ruin despite their good pedigree.

Mrs. Norris agrees with Maria, and says they should not waste money on a new set. She adds that, since Mr. Rushworth will be acting as well, there can be no harm for Maria's reputation. She then drones on about the curtain she is making for the play and some irrelevant interaction with a servant. No one answers her. Edmund gives up his objections to the play as a lost cause.

As is typical, Mrs. Norris's frugality gets in the way of her doing what would certainly be the most prudent choice— changing the play to something less risqué. Superficial as usual, she is concerned more with Maria's reputation than her exposure to (and seeming endorsement of) improper ideas.

At dinner, Mrs. Norris once again tells her story about the servant. They don't discuss the play much, because of the tension between Edmund and Tom, Julia's sourness about her part, and the fact that Mr. Rushworth's repeated attempts to center the conversation on himself, his speeches, and his dress are very boring.

Edmund and Tom's disagreement about the choice of the play once again shows that Edmund is much more responsible than his older brother, who continually makes choices that put the family's reputation in jeopardy.

After dinner, Tom, Maria, and Mr. Yates go into the drawing room to study the play. Henry and Mary arrive. Mary compliments Lady Bertram on the play being finally chosen, saying she is sure that Lady Bertram is tired of all their discussion, along with Mrs. Norris, Fanny, and Edmund. Lady Bertram says something pleasant in response, but Edmund says nothing.

Mary's unconcern about the choice of such a controversial play might be the reason for Edmund's quiet, as he struggles to reconcile his own moral objections with the fact that Mary, whom he hopes to have a romantic future with, seems unfazed.


Mary asks who is going to play Anhalt, who has not yet been cast. Mr. Rushworth brags about the number of his speeches. Mr. Yates suggests that Edmund should take the part, but Tom refuses to ask him.

Mr. Rushworth again provides comic relief. Mary, meanwhile, inquires about who will play her character's love interest, perhaps hoping it will be Edmund.

Mary returns to Lady Bertram, Fanny, and Edmund, and asks Edmund what he thinks they should do about Anhalt. Edmund suggests they change the play. Mary says she agrees, but that no one else will. Mary suggests that Edmund might be tempted to play Anhalt since he is also a clergyman, and Edmund declines. Mary, embarrassed, goes to talk to Mrs. Norris.

When Mary asks Edmund to play Anhalt, she professes to also want to change the play. However, Mary has not shown any other evidence of objecting to it—this suggests that Mary is just telling Edmund want he wants to hear rather than truly caring about a more proper choice of text.

Tom tells Fanny that they need her to play the Cottager's Wife. Fanny is shocked and says she cannot. Tom insists, but Fanny thoroughly objects, and they go back and forth while Edmund watches. Mrs. Norris tells Fanny that she is ashamed of her because she will not help her cousins. Edmund defends Fanny, and tells Mrs. Norris to let her choose for herself. Mrs. Norris says that Fanny is ungrateful, making Edmund angry. Fanny begins to cry.

Fanny's reluctance to act in the play puts her in conflict with her friends and cousins, and, according to Mrs. Norris, makes Fanny appear ungrateful and badly mannered. Fanny is forced to choose between being good mannered and following her morals. She still refuses the part.


Mary moves her chair over towards Fanny's and tries to soothe her, giving the others a look to indicate that they should leave Fanny alone. Fanny is grateful for Mary's kindness. Mary asks her about her needlework, and about William, making Fanny like her more.

Mary shows herself again to be a calculating character when she goes to comfort Fanny after Mrs. Norris's cruel words. It's unclear whether Mary is genuinely being kind, or just wants to appear kind.

Meanwhile, the others continue discussing the play. Eventually, Tom calls Mary away from Fanny to discuss the problematic lack of an Anhalt. Tom proposes finding someone from the surrounding area to play him, saying he will go tomorrow morning into the village and ask a few men he knows. Mary says she thinks that would be fine. They decide to ask a villager. Though everyone expects Edmund to object, he says nothing. Mary then confides in Fanny that she is not very enthusiastic about the play, and will shorten her lines, now that her counterpart will be a villager she hardly knows.

The actors, who anticipate that Edmund will object to opening up the play to more people and thus jeopardizing his sisters' reputations, are surprised when Edmund says nothing. Whether Mary's statement to Fanny that she is unenthusiastic about the play is genuine or not is unclear, as she could just be saying that in the hopes that Fanny will convince Edmund to change his mind.

CHAPTER 16

When Fanny wakes up the next morning, she is still unhappy about everything that happened the previous night, and how Tom tried to bully her into taking part in the play. Fanny dresses and goes into the room that used to be their schoolroom, now called the East Room, which is generally considered to be Fanny's space since no one else wants it.

As Tom's insistence that Fanny take a part in the play continues to wear on her, she seeks out one of her favorite quiet spaces, the kind of place that Fanny misses later in the book in the city of Portsmouth.

In the East Room, there is no **fire** in the grate, but Fanny still spends her time there, since she can go there to be alone and read and think without being ridiculed or called ungrateful. The narrator describes the room's décor: Fanny's plants, the plain, old furniture, a picture that William drew. Fanny paces the room, feeling conflicted about having refused the part. She wonders if she is not being selfish in refusing it. Fanny feels reassured by the fact that Edmund shares her convictions. Still, Fanny looks around the room and sees Tom's presents to her, and feels torn.

The lack of the fire in Fanny's grate in the East Room shows how her care is neglected, and when Sir Thomas later lights one it symbolizes Fanny's elevated place in the family. As Fanny struggles with Mrs. Norris's comment that she is being selfish, she feels torn between having good manners and pleasing others or doing what makes her comfortable and what she feels is proper.


Edmund knocks on the door and enters the room, asking Fanny for her opinion. He tells her that the theatre scheme is even worse now that someone from the outside is playing Anhalt. He asks what she would think if he played the part himself instead. He tells her to imagine how improper it would be to establish such a friendly relationship with someone like the lower class Anhalt actor, and how strange Mary must feel playing the love interest of a stranger. Fanny is sorry for Mary, but also sorry that Edmund would have to compromise his morals. Edmund though, believes keeping the play within their small circles is supremely important, and Fanny cannot think of another solution, so Edmund decides it is the best course of action.

Edmund's concerns about having an outsider play Anhalt are caught up in class distinctions, as he says that he would not like to establish a friendly relationship with someone so much lower class and have Mary pretend to be in love with him. Again, this shows Edmund's hypocrisy in how he thinks about class distinctions—while he rejects the differences his parents and aunt make between himself and middle class Fanny, he supports maintaining class distinctions between them and the lower classes.

Edmund mentions how kind Mary was to Fanny the night before. Fanny agrees, but not enthusiastically. He tells Fanny he will leave her to her reading, but that he is glad the decision, which was torturing him, is made, and he will tell Tom at breakfast. Fanny, however, is so overwhelmed by the news that after he leaves she cannot read. She blames Mary for manipulating Edmund into deciding to act, and resolves to refuse to take part in the play.

Edmund's decision disturbs Fanny both because it undermines her own decision not to act, which she rationalized by remembering Edmund's support, and because she worries that Mary, her competitor for Edmund's affection, is using her charm to manipulate Edmund so they can spend more time together (and, perhaps, to chip away at his moral convictions).


CHAPTER 17

Tom and Maria are thrilled by Edmund's concession to play Anhalt. They celebrate together privately, saying that Edmund's decision to act despite his scruples is pure jealousy over Mary. Toward Edmund, however, they do not rub it in. Mrs. Norris offers to make Edmund's costume, Mr. Yates tells him Anhalt is a good part, and Mr. Rushworth counts his lines.

As Edmund is initiated into the play, the other characters believe his decision is due to his feelings for Mary. Although to Fanny Edmund said it was for practicality and privacy, it's unclear whether Edmund was telling the truth, or just rationalizing the decision he thought was immoral.


Mary is likewise happy that Edmund will be playing her love interest. Fanny learns that Mrs. Grant has offered to play the Cottager's Wife at Mary's suggestion, so Fanny is safe from having to act. Fanny is happy about this, but pained to be indebted to Mary, since she still does not like Mary and feels bad about herself in comparison.

Mrs. Grant comes to Fanny's aid, allowing her to escape acting. Fanny's concern about being indebted to Mary might stem from her fear that Mary is manipulating her in order to endear herself to Edmund.

Julia also feels insignificant and underappreciated after Henry led her on for so long. Julia, who can no longer deny that Henry prefers Maria, mopes around and flirts with Mr. Yates. Henry hoped to clear the air by complimenting Julia, but quickly becomes distracted by the rehearsals and forgets about it. Mrs. Grant, who had hoped so much that Henry and Julia would end up together, is disappointed. She warns Henry against pursuing Maria because she is engaged.

Julia and Mrs. Grant begin to recognize that Henry clearly prefers Maria, prompting intense resentment from Julia. Henry's failure to appease Julia's anger towards him shows the limits of Henry's manners and charms in smoothing over his bad behavior.

To Mary, Mrs. Grant wonders if Julia is in love with Henry, and Mary says she thinks both sisters are. Mrs. Grant is shocked and tells her to think of Mr. Rushworth. Mary responds by saying that Maria is the one who needs to think of him, or risk losing his fortune and good profession. Mrs. Grant warns Mary not to think that Maria is interested in Henry. She tells Mary that, if she suspects there is something going on between Maria and Henry, then they send Henry away.

As Mary and Mrs. Grant discuss Henry's flirtation with Maria, it is clear to both of them that Maria, who is set to marry a rich, well-connected man, has a lot more to lose from a scandal. This shows how the rules of courtship, propriety, and inheritance disadvantage women more than men, as they depend on marriage for financial security.

The narrator returns to Julia's heartbreak, saying that despite Henry's lack of interest, she still loves him and hopes he will fall in love with her. She is angry at Maria, with whom she is normally very close. Fanny feels bad for Julia because of this messy situation, but they do not discuss the matter. Neither Edmund, nor Tom, nor Mrs. Norris notices Julia's distress because they are so distracted by the play.

Again, Austen shows the reader how competition for male attention drives Julia and Maria apart, exemplifying how the marriage system can damage female relationships. Fanny, who could perhaps comfort Julia, fails to reach out to her, perhaps afraid of overstepping her class status.

CHAPTER 18

Everyone continues to prepare for the play, with no shortage of mishaps. They are frustrated with each other and complain often. Fanny enjoys the goings-on, and likes to slip into the theatre to watch their rehearsals. She aids Mr. Rushworth in memorizing his lines, as he is having a great deal of difficulty. Meanwhile, Mr. Rushworth grows progressively more jealous of Henry.

Mr. Rushworth's bragging about how many lines he has in the play becomes deeply ironic when he cannot remember any of them. At the same time, Mr. Rushworth's failure to address the flirtation between Maria and Henry despite his increasing jealousy further shows his ineffectiveness.

Fanny helps Mrs. Norris with the needlework as well, and Mrs. Norris, as usual, criticizes her constantly. Fanny nervously awaits the three-act rehearsal, nervous about watching Edmund and Mary do their love scenes. She wonders if they have rehearsed it together yet.

For Fanny, who loves Edmund and by now admits so in her inner monologue, imagining the love scenes between Edmund and Mary is deeply painful, although they are, of course, only acted.

The next day, the day of the three-act rehearsal, Fanny is sitting in the East Room when there is a knock at her door and Mary enters. Mary asks Fanny if she will practice the love scenes with Edmund's character with her before she reads them with Edmund himself. Fanny agrees, and they practice until, unexpectedly, there is another knock at the door, and Edmund enters. Edmund had been looking for Fanny for the exact same purpose.

Fanny finds herself caught in the middle of Mary and Edmund's courtship, and forced to be audience to it. This position is extremely difficult for her, since she loves Edmund. Watching him act out loving Mary's character while actually falling for Mary is very painful.

No longer having an excuse to use Fanny instead of each other, Edmund and Mary practice together while Fanny prompts them if they forget their lines. Watching them perform the love scene is miserable for Fanny, whose unrequited love for Edmund makes her heart ache.

The blurry lines between the love Mary and Edmund are acting out and their love in reality is one of many instances in the book when the difference between what's fake and what's real is unclear.

Before the three-act rehearsal, the cast gets news that Mrs. Grant cannot attend because her husband is sick. They are all disappointed, as this means they cannot rehearse. Several people, including Edmund, suggest that Fanny should read the part instead. Fanny hesitates, but finally agrees—when suddenly Julia announces that Sir Thomas is home.

Although Fanny has maintained her moral position thus far, Edmund's request that she read the part shows how, just as Edmund cannot resist Mary's request to act, Fanny cannot resisted being asked by the person she loves.

CHAPTER 19

Everyone is shocked by Sir Thomas's sudden arrival. Julia, Edmund, Tom, Maria, and Mr. Rushworth go to meet their father, while Fanny stays with the guests. The Crawfords soon leave, but Mr. Yates sticks around.

The Crawfords, who are socially tactful, realize that they should leave. Yates, however, lacks the manners to realize that he should make himself scarce.

Fanny goes to greet her uncle once the Crawfords leave. Sir Thomas greets her much more affectionately than she expected, catching her off guard. He is very merry, happily telling stories of his travels and greeting Mr. Rushworth with a firm handshake. Lady Bertram is very happy to see her husband despite her sluggishness, while Mrs. Norris is upset that she was not the one to announce his arrival, and plies him with food that he doesn't want.

Sir Thomas's trip to Antigua seems to have changed him, as his manner is much more warm and open towards Fanny, and his speech is very kind. Mrs. Norris's displeasure that she is not the one to have announced the arrival is funny and satisfying, because she has so consistently and self-centeredly imagined being the one to do so.

Lady Bertram tells Sir Thomas that the young people have been acting, making everyone nervous that he will respond angrily. Tom navigates the explanation successfully and distracts his father with talk of hunting. However, a little later Sir Thomas goes into his room (which has been converted into a green room), where he finds Yates. Sir Thomas is extremely annoyed, and Yates blabbers on about the play gratingly. Sir Thomas tactfully indicates that the acting stunt is over.

Although Tom at first manages to tactfully navigate Lady Bertram's mention of the play to his father, Yates's bad manners as he greets Sir Thomas and his inability to evaluate the situation at hand result in Sir Thomas's anger and bad opinion for the rest of the book. For Sir Thomas, good manners are extremely important.

CHAPTER 20

Edmund goes to talk with his father about the play debacle, apologize, and say they are all at fault except for Fanny. Sir Thomas accepts his apology. Sir Thomas is, however extremely vexed that Mrs. Norris allowed the play to take place. She, not knowing how to handle it, derails the conversation when he tries to bring it up by monologuing about other things and flattering Sir Thomas until he gives up.

After his voyage to Antigua, Sir Thomas's relationship with Mrs. Norris deteriorates over the course of the book, starting with his frustration that she allowed the play to take place. As Mrs. Norris tries to justify herself, Sir Thomas seems to see through her flattery for the first time, but does not push the issue.

Sir Thomas takes stock of his estate and resumes his duties as a landowner. Every trace of the play is removed from the house. When Mr. Yates realizes the show will not go on, he is extremely disappointed.

Sir Thomas's return relieves Edmund of the pressure to manage his estate, which he has been taking care of instead of Tom.

In the evening, Sir Thomas lounges in the drawing room while his daughters play music. Maria is nervous while she plays because she is hoping Henry will declare his love for her before she has to marry Mr. Rushworth. The Crawfords and the Bertrams, however, do not see each other for several days. Later, Dr. Grant and Henry come to Mansfield to greet Sir Thomas. Henry informs them he is going away from Mansfield for a while, but tells them that if the play will be resumed he will come back immediately.

Maria's hope that Henry will propose so she will not have to marry Mr. Rushworth shows how little power she has as a woman in the system of courtship and marriage— she must wait for Henry to propose rather than declaring her love for him, and, if she does not marry Mr. Rushworth, she risks social disapproval for breaking the engagement.

Tom tells Henry that there is no chance that the play will be resumed. Henry says goodbye to Maria, who cannot understand why he is going away since he is supposed to be in love with her. Julia is happy when he leaves, now bitter about the love triangle in which she "lost." Fanny is also happy to hear that Henry is gone.

Maria's heartbreak when Henry does not propose is poignant, despite Maria's shallowness as a character, because it dooms Maria to choose between potential spinsterhood and financial insecurity and marrying a man she does not love.

At last Mr. Yates leaves as well. Sir Thomas is thrilled, because he loathes Mr. Yates. Finally, Mrs. Norris removes the theatre curtain she made.

Mr. Yates's misstep has not blown over with Sir Thomas, and the removal of the curtain marks the play as officially over.

CHAPTER 21

With Sir Thomas's return to Mansfield, the family is much more somber and less social. Sir Thomas refuses to let anyone besides Mr. Rushworth visit. Edmund laments the exclusion of the Grants, and says that he thinks Sir Thomas would like Mary if he knew her. Fanny disagrees.

Sir Thomas's desire for quiet and his lingering anger about the play means that the family returns to its stiff, antisocial pace. Edmund suffers since he can't see Mary, while Fanny sides with Sir Thomas, wanting to keep Mary away from him.

Fanny says she doesn't mind the quiet evenings, and then self-deprecatingly suggests that it is because she is strange. Edmund rejects that conclusion and proceeds to compliment her, telling her that Sir Thomas has found her very pretty since his return, and wishes she would talk more. Fanny is flattered. Edmund then proceeds to talk about Mary's many virtues, frustrating Fanny.

Fanny's affinity for peace and quiet, which connects her with the quiet of Mansfield and the countryside, contrasts with Mary's love of excitement and sociability. When Edmund compliments Fanny, he does so on behalf of Sir Thomas, so while Fanny is flattered, the praise is unsatisfying.

Fanny mentions the fact that Edmund, Tom, and Sir Thomas are going to eat at Sotherton with Mr. Rushworth tomorrow, and hopes Sir Thomas will continue to like Mr. Rushworth. Edmund doubts that will be the case. Edmund turns out to be right, and Sir Thomas, recognizing how unappealing Mr. Rushworth is, talks to Maria to ask if Mr. Rushworth is really her husband of choice. Maria, who has given up hope that Henry will propose to her, confirms that he is, satisfying Sir Thomas's concerns.

Sir Thomas approved of Maria's engagement to Mr. Rushworth before meeting him because of his wealth and status. However, when Sir Thomas doubts his character, he offers Maria an out. Maria, though, sees no point in declining Mr. Rushworth's proposal since Henry has not offered an alternative.

The families make the wedding arrangements and Mrs. Rushworth starts to organize to move to Bath and leave Maria and Mr. Rushworth with the house. Not long after Sir Thomas's return, Maria and Mr. Rushworth are married. After the wedding, Maria and Mr. Rushworth take off for a trip to Brighton along with Julia, leaving the Mansfield Park quieter than ever.

Maria's marriage to Mr. Rushworth is described without much fanfare, highlighting how it is more business-like than passionate. Now that Maria and Julia are no longer in competition, their relationship returns to being close, shown by how Julia goes with them to Brighton.

CHAPTER 22

Fanny, now the only young woman in the house, becomes more sought after company for her family and for Mary, whom she begins visiting after being invited into their house one day when she is caught in the rain. During that accidental visit, Mary plays her harp for Fanny while Fanny thinks of all the times Edmund must have listened to her play the instrument. Mary asks Fanny to come back again, and they begin a friendship.

Fanny's love for Edmund colors her budding friendship with Mary, and Fanny thinks of him often when she is with Mary. Whether the friendship is genuine is unclear, because Fanny has never really liked Mary, and Mary's interest in Fanny may be because she wants an ally in pursuing Edmund.

Fanny goes to the Parsonage every few days, often walking with Mary in Mrs. Grant's garden, where Fanny admires the nature. Mary, who is not a great lover of the outdoors, is less enthusiastic. She marvels at the fact that she has come to like Mansfield Park despite her urban inclinations.

Once again, Austen juxtaposes Fanny's love of nature, which helps her fit in at Mansfield Park, with Mary's lack of enthusiasm for it (although she likes Mansfield anyway) and her preference for the city.

They are sitting on a bench and discussing Mr. Rushworth and Maria's marriage when Edmund appears with Mrs. Grant. Mary tells Fanny she is glad that Tom is gone so she can call Edmund "Mr. Bertram" again, and Fanny disagrees, saying the title feels cold. Edmund, who is happy that Mary and Fanny are growing closer, is happy to see them.

Mary's comment that she prefers when Tom is gone so she can call Edmund "Mr. Bertram" speaks to her continued wish that Edmund were the older brother, and so an heir and future baronet. Fanny, on the other hand, prefers Edmund as he is.

Mary and Edmund flirt, discussing the weather and debating whether it is warm out or not. Mrs. Grant mentions that she had intended to have her cook fix Dr. Grant a turkey on Sunday, but because of the warm weather, they will have to prepare it for the next day or it will spoil. Mary and Edmund banter back and forth, discussing whether Mary requires a large income, with both of them knowing that Edmund will likely not have one, and with heavy undertones about the possibility of them getting married.

Mary and Edmund's flirtation circles around one of the central tensions in their relationship: Edmund's lack of an inheritance. As they negotiate that problem through veiled reference and hypothetical, depersonalized speech, they reveal their deep interest in each other. Meanwhile, Fanny looks on, presumably painfully aware of this subtext.

The flirtation between Mary and Edmund distracts Fanny, and she resolves to leave. They all go back into the Parsonage, where they find Dr. Grant. Dr. Grant invites Edmund to eat with him the next day, and Mrs. Grant invites Fanny as well. Fanny is bashful, but they insist that she accept. Mrs. Grant tells them that, as she said before, they will be eating turkey. Edmund and Fanny say goodbye and walk home, mostly quiet.

When Mrs. Grant invites Fanny to dinner, Fanny is surprised because she is usually excluded from personal invitations because of her class. The invitation shows how, through her good graces, Fanny is beginning to transcend the boundaries of her class and assume a position as her cousins' equal.

CHAPTER 23

Back at the house, Lady Bertram asks why Mrs. Grant has invited Fanny. They discuss the fact that Sir Thomas will keep Lady Bertram company. When Sir Thomas is home, Fanny leaves the room and Lady Bertram asks if he thinks Fanny's invitation is proper. Sir Thomas says that he thinks it is.

Sir Thomas's approval of Fanny's invitation to dine at the Grants' shows how Sir Thomas's attitude toward Fanny has changed from his earlier desire to maintain strict class distinctions between his children and his niece.

Fanny is very glad, but also worries about the pain of having to watch the flirtation between Mary and Edmund. Mrs. Norris, as usual, tries to make Fanny feel like she does not deserve to go, as she is lower class than the rest of them, telling her she is being ungrateful and should not let the invitation go to her head.

Mrs. Norris, unlike Sir Thomas, has not moved beyond her early desire to keep Fanny in her place. Once again, she harps on Fanny's lack of gratitude to make her feel unworthy of the invitation.

Mrs. Norris adds that, if it rains that night, Fanny should not expect them to send the carriage for her. Sir Thomas, however, sends Fanny out with the carriage on the way there even without the rain, much to Mrs. Norris's dismay. Fanny is very grateful for the kindness.

Despite Mrs. Norris's commitment to keeping Fanny in her lower-class place, Sir Thomas, who has more power than Mrs. Norris, allows Fanny to take the carriage, marking her elevated status.

In the carriage, Edmund compliments Fanny's appearance. When they pass the stable yard of the Parsonage, Edmund spots Henry's barouche, and they realize that he must be visiting. Edmund is happy to see him, but Fanny feels the opposite.

Edmund's compliments to Fanny, though they make Fanny happy, generally adopt a tone of brotherly praise rather than romantic love.

At dinner, conversation flows easily, so Fanny can sit back and relax without having to say too much. The men discuss hunting while Fanny thinks about the fact that Henry is present even though Maria and Julia are in Brighton. Henry acknowledges that Fanny's cousins are away, and they discuss the failed attempt at putting on a play. Fanny thinks critically about his dishonest flirtation with Maria and Julia, and tells him angrily she is glad that Sir Thomas ended the play. Henry is surprised by her reaction and agrees with her to smooth things over.

Henry's presence in Mansfield despite the fact that Maria and Julia are in Brighton confuses Fanny because she thought he only came to Mansfield to flirt with them. When Fanny responds to Henry in anger, he is clearly unused to honesty and to his charm failing. Fanny's frank, ungraceful response, although not exactly well mannered, causes Henry to concede the point.

Mary and Henry quietly discuss the fact that Edmund will be ordained soon, and talk about his relatively meager income in the future. Henry tells Edmund he has come back to Mansfield to hear Edmund give his first sermon. The group plays cards after dinner and Mary plays her harp. She focuses on the music, upset that Edmund will be joining the clergy so soon, having thought that she could convince him otherwise. She thinks that his willingness to be a preacher despite her insistence that she will not marry one shows his lack of genuine interest in her.

Henry's statement that he returned to watch Edmund's first sermon shows a kinder side of Henry. Mary continues to be unsure about her commitment to Edmund because of his future career as a minister and his small income. Through Mary, Austen shows the problem with major differences in values between potential partners, as both Mary and Edmund hope the other will give up what's important to them.

CHAPTER 24

Henry decides to stay in Mansfield for two weeks. Henry tells Mary that he intends to try to seduce Fanny for fun, and Mary says that it is only because he has no one else to be interested in. Henry indicates that he finds Fanny interesting because she dislikes him so much. Mary asks him not to break Fanny's heart, and Henry says that all he will do is flirt with her and make her "feel when [he goes] away that she shall be never happy again."

Henry now focuses his rakish ways on Fanny. Mary's comment that he is only doing so since Fanny is the only option suggests that she does not think Fanny is especially romantically intriguing (which is ironic, since ultimately Mary loses Edmund to her). Henry clearly does not take love seriously, perhaps because, as a wealthy man, he has little to lose—he just enjoys manipulating women's feelings.

As Henry flirts with Fanny, Fanny does not forget what Henry did to Maria and Julia, but feels his charms soften her hatred for him. Henry tries to be the first to break the news that William's ship has returned from sailing to England, but Fanny receives a letter from him just before he can bring her the newspaper. Henry devotes himself to learning about William, who is clearly very close with Fanny and a good way to her heart.

Although Fanny is skeptical of Henry, she is not totally immune to his charms, and her hatred for him begins to abate, showing how good manners can soften even the most principled people's resolve. Letters resume their importance, showing how Fanny uses them to remain close with William.

William comes to Mansfield to see Fanny, and they are both extremely happy to be reunited. Their conversation is at first awkward between the siblings, who have not seen each other in years, but they quickly warm back up.

William and Fanny's reunion at Mansfield shows how, though many years have passed, Fanny has not forgotten her humble origins and her family.

Henry is struck by the intimacy that William and Fanny share, and by how much he likes William. Henry also begins to genuinely admire Fanny, and decides to extend his stay. At night, William tells exciting stories about his life in the navy that scare Mrs. Norris and Lady Bertram, but excite Henry's sense of adventure and make him feel that his own life is fairly boring. Henry likes Fanny's brother so much he even lends William his horse to go hunting with him and Edmund.

William and Henry, whom the narrator contrasts, highlight the difference between the young men of the gentry and those of the middle class. The narrator seems to favor William, and thus the middle class, by noting how Henry's own pampered lifestyle is far less exciting, and not something Henry works hard for.

CHAPTER 25

The Crawfords and the Bertrams begin to spend a lot of time together again, which they have not done since the play. Even Sir Thomas opens up to the Grants. He notices, also, Henry's increasing attention to Fanny. One night, Sir Thomas goes so far as to accept an invitation to dine at the Parsonage on behalf of the family, and the dinner goes well.

Sir Thomas's stiff manners and stoic, uptight ways begin to loosen as he gets to know and like his neighbors. Sir Thomas continues to develop into a kinder, more open character, a big change from the book's beginning.

After the dinner, they play cards. Lady Bertram, who is in the game, cannot make decisions by herself, and so asks Fanny. Fanny does not know how to play either, and so Henry offers to teach them both. During the game, which everyone is enjoying very much, Henry tells a story about how he was out riding and stumbled upon Thornton Lacey, the property that Edmund intends to inhabit after he gets ordained.

Henry keeps trying to flirt with Fanny. He clearly reads her well, appealing to her by being kind and helpful. Henry's comments about Edmund's future dwelling at Thornton Lacey brings the question of Edmund and Mary's romance to the fore, since that's the house they would likely inhabit if wed.

The group goes on to discuss the renovations that Edmund will need to make before the house is satisfactory. Henry and Edmund both have ideas, but Edmund knows he will be constrained by his modest budget. Mary, focusing on the game to avoid thinking about Edmund's lack of fortune, wins, and the group starts another round of cards. Henry and Edmund continue their discussion of the Thornton Lacey renovations, with Henry pushing him to consider more luxurious and more expensive changes.

Austen juxtaposes Henry and Edmund's different visions for Thornton Lacey, with Henry showing his preference for luxury and Edmund favoring modesty and comfort. The two different men who occupy romantic roles in Fanny's life offer two different visions of what their ideal domestic life would be like.

As Henry directs Fanny in playing her hand, he asks her if she has ever seen Thornton Lacey, and she replies that she has not. Mary suggests that Henry go out to Thornton Lacey with Edmund to give his opinion on the improvements to be made, since he did so well at Sotherton. Fanny remembers her dislike for Henry on that afternoon, but Henry whispers to her that he is different now.

Henry's direction of Fanny's hand might be a metaphor for his manipulation of her. He anticipates her thoughts when he mentions Sotherton and tells her he has changed since then. The present situation with Edmund's renovation mimics Sotherton, but under very different circumstances.

Mrs. Norris, catching on the topic of Sotherton, tells William that Maria and Mr. Rushworth are at Brighton and that William should visit them on his way to Portsmouth. William tells Mrs. Norris that it is a far trip, and Sir Thomas advises against William going to Brighton since it is so out of the way.

Mrs. Norris's encouragement that William should go visit his cousins is peculiar, since she is usually so disdainful of Fanny and her lower class, which William shares. His charisma, however, seems to have made even Mrs. Norris like him.

Sir Thomas continues to notice Henry's attention to Fanny. Henry tells them of his plans to rent a house near Mansfield that winter, and hopes he might rent Thornton Lacey. Sir Thomas says he hopes Edmund will be living in the house by then. Edmund tells Henry not to rent the house, but just to come stay with him. Sir Thomas expresses his sadness that Edmund will be moving the eight miles away, saying that he imagines Edmund, who is committed to being a good preacher, will spend much of his time among his parishioners.

If Henry and Edmund's differing visions of Thornton Lacey represent the two different domestic lives they would offer Fanny, Henry's desire to rent Thornton Lacey, and his inability to do so because the house is Edmund's, might be a loose metaphor for Henry's later "loss" of Fanny to Edmund. Austen reiterates Edmund's devotion to preaching, showing how he will not be like the London ministers Mary complained of.

Mary and Fanny have been listening to the conversation. Fanny laments that soon Edmund will move and she will not see him every day, while Mary continues to wish she could convince Edmund not to join the clergy.

The differences in Fanny and Mary's reactions to Edmund's future absence speak to their differing levels of care for him, with Mary thinking of herself and Fanny of missing Edmund.

The group moves to sit around the fire, except for William and Fanny, who stay at the card table while Henry watches them from the hearth. The siblings talk about life in Portsmouth, and William expresses his frustration that he has not moved up in the ranks of the navy.

William's frustration about not being promoted in the navy, despite his accomplishments, shows how even the military works based on connections and class- based rank, with promotion being far easier for the upper classes.

William tells Fanny he would like to see her dance at a ball, and asks Sir Thomas, who is sitting nearby, if Fanny is a good dancer. Fanny is embarrassed and expects to be chastised, but instead Sir Thomas light-heartedly says that he has never seen Fanny dance. Henry adds his two cents, saying Fanny is an excellent dancer (though in fact he only saw her dance once).

When Fanny cringes at William's boldness with Sir Thomas, she shows how she is used to being criticized for overstepping her status. William's charm, however, works in his favor, and Sir Thomas is more easygoing now than in the past.

At last, the event ends and the Bertrams return home with the Prices and Mrs. Norris. As they are leaving, Henry seizes the shawl Edmund was about to put around Fanny's shoulders and does so in his place.

Henry's usurpation of Edmund's role in putting the shawl on Fanny's shoulders reflects his attempt to take Edmund's place in her heart.

CHAPTER 26

Sir Thomas, inspired by William's comment that he has never seen Fanny dance, decides to throw a ball before William leaves. Mrs. Norris suggests instead a ball when Maria and Julia return at Christmas, but Sir Thomas rejects that idea. Edmund, William, and Fanny are all excited. Mrs. Norris insists on putting herself at the center of the ball's organization, and the ball is set for the last day of William's visit.

Sir Thomas shows his newfound generosity towards Fanny by throwing her a ball. He goes against the advice of Mrs. Norris, who is still trying to keep up class distinctions and proposes waiting until Maria and Julia are home so they can steal the spotlight from Fanny.

Fanny worries over her dress. William has bought her a cross that she would like to wear, but she has no **gold chain** to wear it with, and so she frets that she will have to put it on a ribbon instead.

Though Fanny has been coming up in the family's esteem, she still lacks the financial resources to buy jewelry like her cousins.

Edmund, meanwhile, is preoccupied by his impending ordainment, and the fact that he has decided for certain that he would like to marry Mary. He worries that Mary, who has expressed her dislike for his profession and the countryside, will not feel the same. A proposal would also be time sensitive, since Mary is about to leave Mansfield to visit with a friend in London. Edmund worries about the ball and how he will interact with his sweetheart.

Edmund's anxiety over a potential proposal to Mary and their interactions at the ball shows how their relationship, which is so uncertain, lacks communication. Again, Mary's preference for the city and her disdain for the clergy—essentially, her dislike of major aspects of who Edmund is as a person—continues to be a problem for them.

The day before the ball, Fanny decides to go to the Parsonage to consult Mrs. Grant and Mary about her dress. She runs into Mary outside and the two of them go up to Mary's room. They decide on Fanny's dress, but Mary asks what Fanny will do for a necklace. Mary, knowing that Fanny intends to wear William's cross, but that she has no chain for it, tells Fanny to pick one of Mary's own **gold chains** as a gift so she will have something to wear. Fanny tries to decline, saying the gift is too valuable.

Mary, who knows that Fanny needs a chain for William's cross, gives her one, in what seems to be a very kind, unselfish gesture. The chain in some ways represents Fanny's initiation into the luxury of upper class society. Fanny continues to be uncomfortable with that identity, however, and she tries to decline the gift.

Mary, however, insists, and Fanny at last chooses the **gold chain** that she thinks is the plainest and least expensive. Fanny does not like being indebted to Mary, but she is very grateful nonetheless. She tells Mary she will think of her when she wears the necklace, and Mary says that she must think of Henry as well, since he gave her the necklace in the first place. Fanny, horrified to take someone else's gift, tries to give it back, but Mary protests, and at last Fanny keeps it. Fanny, however, wonders whether Henry might have had a hand in Mary offering her the necklace.

Fanny's choice of the plainest and least expensive-looking chain shows her discomfort with the valuable jewelry. When Mary then tells her that the chain was given to her by Henry, Fanny suspects that Henry is trying to manipulate her into thinking well of him. Henry's elaborate gestures and trickery continue to make Fanny wary, since she still believes he is not sincere in his affection.

CHAPTER 27

Fanny returns home to put the necklace in her box in the East Room, where she finds Edmund seated and writing a letter. Edmund tells her he came to look for her, and was just writing her a note asking her to accept a **gold chain** that he bought her for William's cross. He leaves the chain on the table and is about to dash out when Fanny stops him. Edmund's gesture touches Fanny greatly, and the chain he picked is perfect for her.

When Fanny returns to find Edmund writing her a letter, and he explains that he has bought her a chain, she reacts much more happily than she did with Mary. Unlike with Mary's chain, the gift does not embarrass Fanny, but rather touches her. It is not too fancy, showing how Edmund understands Fanny better.

Fanny then tells Edmund that Mary has just gifted her a **gold chain**, and she asks Edmund's advice as to whether she should return it. Edmund insists that she must not, and tells her to wear the one that Mary has given her. He tells her he would hate it if her not wearing the necklace were to cause "the shadow of coolness between the two dearest objects" he has. Edmund then leaves.

Fanny's proposal to return the gold chain shows her preference for Edmund's love over Mary's, and by extension, Henry's. Edmund, however, does not understand this, and his sense of good manners makes him implore Fanny not to return the necklace.

Fanny is unsure of whether to be happy or sad that she is one of Edmund's two dearest objects, considering that the other is Mary, and that this clearly means he intends to marry her. Fanny thinks Mary does not deserve Edmund, and the idea of them marrying makes her cry. Fanny reads the note he began writing her, obsessing over the handwriting and the fact that it is her only letter from him.

Edmund's remark that Fanny and Mary are his two dearest objects puts the two women once again in competition and comparison, and proves to Fanny that Edmund wishes to marry Mary. She idolizes his letter as a physical representation of Edmund's love.

The day of the ball arrives. Henry sends a note offering to give William a ride with him to London and inviting him to dinner with him and his uncle the Admiral. William accepts, meaning that he will have to leave Mansfield a few hours earlier. Sir Thomas approves of the idea, since he believes that meeting the Admiral might benefit William's career.

Henry continues to try to curry favor with Fanny by using her love for her brother. Henry's offer of dinner with the Admiral could improve William's career, showing how important connections and high social status are to William's rank.

Fanny is excited but nervous for the ball, which will be Fanny's first big debut. She walks upstairs to the East Room, where she again finds Edmund, who seems upset. He tells her that he has just come from the Parsonage, where he asked Mary for the first two dances. Mary agreed, but told Edmund it was the last time he would dance with her because she will not want to dance with him once he is a clergyman.

Fanny continues to be the person that Edmund turns to when he is upset about Mary, a role that has pained Fanny for a long time. Mary's pettiness comes out in her unwillingness to dance with Edmund as a clergyman, thinking ministers to be too lowly for her.

Edmund goes on to say that he thinks Mary is naturally good, but has been ruined by her upbringing by the Admiral and his wife. Fanny, unsure what to say, tells him she is happy to listen to him, but cannot tell him what he should do, and asks him to not tell her anything he will later regret. Edmund says he has given up the idea of marrying Mary, but then they are interrupted by a housemaid, their conversation ends, and they part ways.

Edmund's comment that Mary has been ruined by her childhood influences suggests that not just birth, but also upbringing determines a person's goodness. Edmund's assertion that he is done considering marrying Mary is unreliable, however, because he reneges on this promise.

Fanny, now alone and dressing for the ball, is thrilled about Edmund's bad news which, along with the note from Henry asking William to dine with him and the Admiral, puts her in good spirits. She tries to thread Mary's **chain** through the cross, but it does not fit, and so she happily has an excuse to wear Edmund's instead. When Lady Bertram sends up her servant to help Fanny, she finds her already dressed.

Fanny's joy at Edmund's rejection affirms her continued love for Edmund. The fact that Mary/Henry's chain does not fit William's cross, while Edmund's does, seems to be a sign that Henry's love would not fit Fanny right, whereas Edmund's would, since he understands her tastes and values much better.

CHAPTER 28

Fanny arrives in the drawing room, where everyone is waiting for the guests to arrive. Everyone says Fanny looks nice, though Mrs. Norris manages to be mean about it. Edmund tells her to reserve two dances for him.

Fanny, who has long been kept in the shadows at balls because of her lower status, is suddenly the center of attention.

The guest's carriages begin to pull up to the house. Fanny finds herself being introduced and making small talk. The Grants and the Crawfords arrive. Fanny watches Edmund and Mary's interactions carefully. Henry approaches Fanny and asks her for the first two dances, relieving Fanny of her anxiety that she will have no one to dance with.

Henry strategically asks Fanny for the first two dances, a relief for Fanny, who is used to not having anyone ask her. Despite Henry's welcome offer, she still focuses on Edmund and Mary, watching for evidence of a proposal or a rejection.

As everyone moves into the ballroom, Fanny ends up near Mary, and explains to her that she is not wearing her **chain** because it did not fit, and that Edmund gave her another chain that did. Mary is delighted at Edmund's kindness, and Mary's clear continued interest in Edmund disappoints Fanny.

While Fanny had hoped that, as Edmund had indicated to her, Mary was losing interest in Edmund because his ordainment was approaching, Mary still seems to love him. Fanny, of course, does too.

Sir Thomas tells Fanny that she and Henry are to open the ball, much to Fanny's surprise and happiness. During the first two dances, Fanny is totally bewildered, but slowly warms up. The company generally approves of Fanny, and she makes Sir Thomas proud. Mary, noticing Sir Thomas's affection for Fanny, decides to say something about her to him. Mary schmoozes with Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris as well.

Fanny continues to be surprised by all the attention she is receiving, as she is not used to being the most important person at a party. When Mary strategizes to endear herself to Sir Thomas, she shows that she is calculating and ambitious, traits that contrast starkly with Fanny's nature.


When Mary tries to endear herself to Fanny, however, she missteps by trying to suggest Henry's interest in Fanny, only to embarrass and confuse her. Henry's attention to her during the ball does not especially make Fanny happy, but neither does she mind. Fanny enjoys her dances with Edmund, who is not in good spirits because he and Mary have been quarrelling.

Mary's attempt at gaining Fanny's affection through charm and flattery backfires because she does not realize that Fanny, until many other women in their circles, does not place her self-worth on male attention, and so finds Mary's comments about Henry uncomfortable.


After dancing with Edmund, Fanny is out of breath and must sit down. William, Henry, and Sir Thomas keep her company, and they make plans to have breakfast the next morning before Henry and William leave. Henry's enthusiasm convinces Sir Thomas that he is in love with Fanny. Fanny, meanwhile, wishes that she could eat with her brother alone. Afterward, Sir Thomas tells Fanny to go to bed, and she leaves reluctantly, thinking the ball was delightful.

Sir Thomas's observation that he thinks Henry is in love with Fanny serves as another example of how married older adults in the story continue to focus on courtship. Fanny still has not reversed her opinion on Henry, however, as evidenced by her desire to eat alone.


CHAPTER 29

Fanny sees William off in the morning and cries afterward. Edmund also leaves for his ordainment in Peterborough. Fanny tries to find someone to discuss the ball with, and settles for Lady Bertram, who is unsatisfactory. They then play cribbage together.

Fanny's shining moment at the ball is soured by the fact that, now the only young person at Mansfield, she has no one to share the moment with afterward.

The next day, Fanny is in better spirits. She enjoyably discusses the ball with Mrs. Grant and Mary. The house is very quiet without the Bertram children and William, and Fanny expects that she will have to get used to it since Edmund will soon be moving away for good. Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram express sadness that all their children are leaving the nest. Julia, who was supposed to return home soon, decided instead to go to London with Maria. To each other, the Bertrams say how glad they are to have Fanny, who they doubt will ever marry and leave them.

This section shows how Julia and Maria, although doted upon by their parents as children, do not seem to have much loyalty to them. They leave them alone in Mansfield while they go off to London, despite the fact that they know their mother gets lonely. The fact that what pulls them away is the city of London further associates London and city spaces with irresponsibility and immorality.

Fanny and Mary experience Edmund's absence differently. Fanny is relieved by it, but it makes Mary very sad. Mary regrets how she spoke to Edmund before he left, and it tortures her more as Edmund extends his absence to stay with his friend Mr. Owen. Mary, who has plans to go to London soon, is afraid they will not see each other before she leaves.

Fanny and Mary, once again contrasted, show how different they are through their responses to Edmund's absence. Fanny, who is used to Edmund's lack of attention, prefers to not have to see him flirt with Mary, while Mary suffers from the absence.

Mary and Fanny discuss Edmund's absence, and Mary asks if she has any news of when he will be back. Fanny is unsure, saying she only heard part of the letter in which he explained his extended stay. Mary asks if Mr. Owen has pretty, accomplished sisters, and Fanny says she does not know. Mary then speaks of her upcoming departure for London, and Fanny tells her she will be missed. Mary worries again about Edmund marrying one of the Owen sisters, and then suggests that Fanny does not think Edmund is likely to marry anyone at all. Fanny agrees, and Mary changes the subject.

Mary's jealousy of the Owens sisters, whom she has never met, is a role reversal, since Fanny is usually the one who is jealous, but she is jealous of Mary. Fanny, for her part, seems to enjoy the conversation somewhat, and Mary's upset. This reveals Fanny's hypocrisy and jealousy, as she is supposed to be Mary's friend, but clearly harbors intense resentment towards Mary because of Edmund.

CHAPTER 30

Henry returns to the Parsonage from London. Henry tells Mary that he wants to marry Fanny, to Mary's complete surprise. Mary says Fanny is very lucky, and that she approves of his choice. She conjectures that he must have been in London to consult the Admiral about his choice. Henry says no, but that when the Admiral meets her he will love her. Henry has not yet asked Fanny, and Mary says that she thinks Fanny will not agree to marry him unless she loves him, but that she thinks he could make her love him.

Henry's revelation that his flirtation with Fanny has become more than just a game, and that he is, in fact, in love with her, comes as a surprise to Mary and likely to the reader as well. Mary's warning that Fanny won't marry him for his money implies that Fanny is unusual in this respect, highlighting how removed marriage is from love for most people in this society.

They then discuss all of Fanny's charms and virtues. Mary comments that Henry's cruel project of trying to make Fanny fall in love with him for sport ended up taking a turn. Henry says that once they are married he would like to move to Northamptonshire, the neighborhood of Mansfield, so they can all be together, and divide their time between Northamptonshire and London.

The twist that Henry falls in love with Fanny is extremely satisfying, since he spent so much of the book tricking women into falling in love with him. He clearly believes that Fanny will marry him, showing that he is confident in getting what he wants with his money and charm.

Mary tells him that she was afraid that Henry was going to end up like the Admiral, and Henry tells her not to let her negative opinion of the Admiral influence Fanny's. Mary tells Henry that she has no worries about how Henry will treat Fanny, despite his flirtatious behavior, since he loves her. They discuss the fact that Julia and Maria will be angry, but that they will eventually forget about it. Henry plans to do even more for Fanny's happiness than Edmund and Sir Thomas have.

Mary mentions her fear that Henry would end up like the Admiral, recalling Edmund's earlier comment that he worries Mary's upbringing with the Admiral has negatively affected her character. Henry's enthusiasm for Fanny seems to be really genuine, despite the fact that he has lied so much in the past.

CHAPTER 31

Henry goes to Mansfield Park the next morning. Lady Bertram leaves Fanny alone with Henry. Henry announces to Fanny that William has been made a lieutenant, thanks to his influence with the Admiral, and shows her the letters to prove it. He describes the networking he did to accomplish William's promotion. Fanny, shocked and happy, thanks Henry profusely and expresses her deep gratitude for his kindness.

That Henry orchestrates the promotion through his letters shows the importance both of social connections and of letters for communication and business. That he then uses the letters to prove the promotion shows how letters have meaning not only as pieces of writing, but also as physical proof. It's also somewhat frustrating that a simple letter from a well-born and well-connected man like Henry is more effective than any amount of hard work and merit from a poorer man like William.

Fanny is then about to leave to tell Sir Thomas when Henry stops her, and tells her that everything he did for William he did because he is in love with her. Fanny asks him to stop his proclamation, but he keeps on describing the intensity of his affection for her, and asks her to marry him. Fanny, upset, and thinking that Henry's affections are not genuine, says she is thankful for what he did for William, but that he must stop. She then hurries out of the room.

Henry gets William a promotion to impress Fanny, trying to fulfill his promise that he will do more for Fanny than Edmund or Sir Thomas has done. Without knowing it, he is competing with Edmund not just for Fanny's care, but also her love. Fanny, however, cannot trust Henry's confession.

Fanny goes to the East Room and thinks over the events that just occurred, from William's promotion to Henry's proposal, until she is sure that Henry has left. She then goes down from her room to talk with Sir Thomas about the happy news of the promotion. Sir Thomas tells her Henry is coming to dinner that night, which distresses Fanny.

Fanny, totally shocked by the confession, leaves Henry for the space she is most comfortable in to think over his proposal. Her shock is due in part to the fact that Henry never proposed to either Maria or Julia, though they are of a higher status than she is.

At dinner, Henry gives Fanny a note from Mary, which Fanny opens and reads immediately. The note expresses Mary's approval of a match between Henry and Fanny. This confuses Fanny, because it makes it seem that Henry's proposal was serious. Fanny is so anxious she cannot eat and doesn't speak. At last, they retire to the drawing room.

Mary's note to Fanny again shows the preeminence of letters in the novel. Mary wrote a letter because she is in London, but the letter form also makes Mary's approval, and thus Henry's proposal, seem more official.

Mrs. Norris and Lady Bertram discuss the promotion, on which Mrs. Norris's thoughts are money-focused as usual, and Lady Bertram self-centered and flighty as usual as well. Fanny, meanwhile, continues to ponder Henry's declaration and Mary's note. She debates the possibility that Henry's love is authentic, flip-flopping and avoiding Henry all night. Henry finally corners her and asks if she has a reply for Mary. Fanny goes to the table to write, explaining her rejection. Henry approaches her and she gives him the note.

Mrs. Norris and Lady Bertram's shallow, narcissistic reactions to William's promotion provide comic relief after Henry's love declaration. Henry's request for a reply to Mary shows again how the letter form affects the situation's dynamics and possibilities, forcing Fanny to write a reply that Henry could open and see word for word.

CHAPTER 32

The next morning, Fanny has not forgotten the previous day's events, and she wishes Henry would go away and take Mary with him. She is surprised to find Henry at the house again that day, but he does not come up to the East Room. Instead, Sir Thomas comes in and is surprised to find that Fanny has no **fire** going despite the cold. Sir Thomas insists that she must have a fire, despite Mrs. Norris's stinginess.

Sir Thomas's surprise that Fanny does not have a fire shows his new consideration for her comfort, and his insistence that she should have a fire represents her newfound place as a full-fledged, equal member of the family, rather than a dependent, lower class cousin.

Sir Thomas then tells Fanny that Henry came to talk to him about his love for her, and that Henry is downstairs waiting. Fanny tells him she already rejected Henry, and Sir Thomas is confused, saying that Henry implied that they had discussed it and Fanny seemed to approve. Fanny explained that she did no such thing. Sir Thomas does not understand why Fanny would reject Henry, since he seems like a great match. Sir Thomas begins to suggest that Fanny might love someone else, but then dismisses the possibility. Sir Thomas says he regrets that neither she nor Edmund will marry early.

Henry's revelation of his love to Sir Thomas, and his implication that Fanny already expressed her approval, is a highly manipulative move, since Henry knows that Sir Thomas will approve of the financially and socially advantageous marriage. Sir Thomas's influence over Fanny is significant, since she feels a deep debt of gratitude to him, making Henry's recruitment of Sir Thomas's approval unfair.

Sir Thomas presses Fanny about why she does not like Henry, and Fanny wants to tell him about how Henry played with Maria and Julia's affections, but does not want to betray them to their father. Sir Thomas says he is frustrated and disappointed that Fanny seems to be rejecting the match for no reason, that she did not think of how it might have benefited her family, and that she is being ungrateful and selfish. Fanny begins to cry and apologizes. Sir Thomas softens and thinks that perhaps she is just nervous, and can be convinced to accept Henry's offer. He leaves to tell Henry the bad news.

As anticipated, Sir Thomas does press Fanny on her reasons for not wanting to marry Henry. Henry probably guesses that Fanny's sense of propriety will prevent her from telling Sir Thomas about Henry's flirtation with Maria and Julia, as she will not want to betray them. Sir Thomas, who thinks advantageous marriages are more important than loving ones as long as it is a good match, cannot understand Fanny's hesitation.

Sir Thomas returns a half hour later to tell Fanny that Henry is gone. Sir Thomas promises not to tell anyone want happened, and tells Fanny to go for a walk outside. Fanny obeys, and when she returns to the East Room she finds a **fire** burning in the hearth.

Though Sir Thomas is mad at Fanny, he still sends someone to light a fire in Fanny's room, affirming that Fanny still retains her elevated place in his esteem.

When Fanny sees Mrs. Norris at dinner, Mrs. Norris criticizes her for not telling her she was going out so she could give her some errands to do. Fanny believes that Sir Thomas's anger is abated when he sees how badly Mrs. Norris treats Fanny. Fanny hopes that when Henry goes away to London he will forget about her. After tea, a servant calls Fanny into Sir Thomas's room, where she finds not Sir Thomas, but Henry.

Mrs. Norris, as usual, treats Fanny miserably. Yet unlike previously, when Sir Thomas might have turned a blind eye, Fanny now thinks this makes him more sympathetic to her. Fanny's hope that Henry will forget her in London speaks to her sense that London is a distracting space with lots of other women.

CHAPTER 33

Henry reiterates his passionate love for Fanny, saying he will never give up. Fanny repeats that she does not and cannot love him, but to no avail. Fanny's manner is too gentle, however, causing Henry to think there is still hope. Unlike previously, when Fanny despised Henry, she now is more sympathetic to him, especially after what he did for William, though she does not think they are compatible for romance. When Fanny leaves, returning to the East Room, Henry shows no signs that he believes he will not succeed in winning her love eventually, and this hubris makes Fanny angry.

Henry's persistence in pursuing Fanny is considerable, as is Fanny's persistence in rejecting him. Fanny's kind manner hides the fact that she is set on never marrying Henry, and this misleads Henry into thinking there is hope. Henry's confidence is unshakable, and Fanny is too mild-mannered to convince him of her disinterest. Her good manners keep Henry from respecting her wishes.

Sir Thomas waits until the next day to hear the news of what happened during their meeting. He meets with Henry, who is disappointed but certain he will eventually win Fanny over. Sir Thomas totally supports Henry in his efforts, and they leave each other on good terms.

Sir Thomas and Henry both serve to benefit from Fanny's marriage to Henry—for Sir Thomas, because Fanny's marriage to Henry would relieve him of Fanny as a financial burden.

Sir Thomas tells Fanny that he spoke with Henry, and thinks he is an exceptional man. Fanny begins to explain the reasons for her rejection again, and Sir Thomas interrupts her, telling her he accepts her reasons and does not need to hear them again, nor do they need to continue to speak of it, especially since Henry will soon leave Mansfield.

Sir Thomas continues to voice his support for Fanny's match to Henry, but at least respects her decision—though he'll continue to try to change it. Sir Thomas clearly favors monetary gain to love in marriage, as he showed with Maria's match.

Sir Thomas ends up telling Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris what has happened, but even Mrs. Norris does not harass Fanny about it. She is angry that Fanny received the offer instead of Julia, not angry that Fanny refused it. Lady Bertram, for her part, thinks Fanny must be prettier than she realized to attract Henry. She tells Fanny she is happy for her, and that she should take the offer.

Sir Thomas goes back on his promise to not tell anyone about Henry's proposal. Mrs. Norris is madder that Fanny received the proposal instead of higher-class Julia than she is angry that she rejected it, showing again Mrs. Norris's obsession with class and consistent disdain for Fanny.

CHAPTER 34

When Edmund returns from his travels, he is surprised to run into Henry and Mary as he rides into town, especially since he extended his stay in an attempt to avoid Mary. Sir Thomas updates Edmund on William's promotion and Henry's proposal.

Edmund, who clearly still has feelings for Mary, is distressed at seeing her, since he believes that she will never marry him now that he is ordained.

Henry calls on the family the next day to say hello to Edmund, and Sir Thomas invites him to dinner. Later that night, Edmund and Henry walk into the drawing room to find Fanny reading Shakespeare aloud to Lady Bertram. Henry takes up the book and begins to read, impressing Fanny, despite herself, with his beautiful manner of reading.

That Henry's beautiful reading voice appeals to Fanny speaks to her love of literature (which she expresses throughout the book). It also shows how Henry has a charismatic and appealing voice and manner, whatever he is reading or saying.

They all compliment Henry's reading and discuss Shakespeare. Lady Bertram tells Henry he should set up a theatre at his estate, and Henry replies that there will be no theatre there, implying that Fanny, as its mistress, would not allow it. They move on to discussing Edmund's preaching, the rhetoric of sermons, and the role of religion, debating back and forth, with Henry paying lots of attention to Fanny.

The fact that acting and theatre are Henry's strengths shows how Henry is comfortable playing a role—just as he did when he seduced Maria and Julia. Though Henry's acting appeals to Fanny, it also demonstrates Henry's unreliability and untrustworthiness.

When Henry comments that he could only preach once or twice a season rather than every Sunday, Fanny shakes her head, and he privately implores her to tell him what she means. Fanny eventually implies that his fickleness is one of his more consistent traits. Henry tells her that he will prove her wrong in his love, and that he deserves her, and goes on to shower her with compliments. Tea then arrives, and Henry moves away from Fanny.

Henry's statement that he would only preach once a season shows his lack of commitment. When Fanny tells Henry that he is fickle, and Henry say he will prove her wrong, Henry professes to be changing his ways and committing to Fanny's love and the married lifestyle that he always resisted.

CHAPTER 35

Henry makes his plans to leave Mansfield for London, and Sir Thomas determines to try once more to help Henry win over Fanny before he goes. Edmund, who had intended to let Fanny bring up the matter if she wanted, resolves to speak with her before he joins in helping Sir Thomas. He finds her in the garden and asks to walk with her.

Sir Thomas recruits Edmund for his last attempt to get Fanny to agree to marry Henry. Edmund clearly thinks Fanny should *marry Henry—Edmun still doesn't think of her in any romantic capacity—but he decides to have a talk with her about the matter first, to get a sense of her feelings.*

Edmund asks Fanny if she is the only one who will not tell him about Henry's proposal, upsetting Fanny, who appears to not want to discuss the matter. Edmund says that he thinks it would be a good match but that if it is not what Fanny wants, then she should not marry Henry, since he would never advocate for a loveless marriage. Fanny, who had thought Edmund blamed her for rejecting Henry, is extremely relieved.

While Edmund says that he would never advocate for a loveless marriage, and though Edmund, as a minister, should think of marriage as a sacred love match, his encouragement of the engagement somewhat undercuts this.

Edmund goes on to tell Fanny, however, that she should try to let Henry succeed in winning her over. When Fanny insists she will never love him, Edmund keeps encouraging her to try, and tells her they are not as unalike as she thinks, that she should judge him less harshly for his behavior toward Maria and Julia during the play. Fanny senses, as Edmund talks, that his thoughts drift to Mary, who he has begun seeing again. When Edmund suggests that Fanny will be everything to Henry, Fanny says that she does not want that responsibility.

Though Edmund professes to understand Fanny's reasons for rejecting Henry, his belief that Fanny will change her mind shows that, in fact, he does not recognize Fanny's commitment to her convictions. Edmund is distracted by his thoughts of Mary, for whom he has been willing to compromise on some of his morals. Moreover, he of course does not know that Fanny is secretly in love with him.

Edmund then describes his conversation with Mary about Henry's affection for Fanny, saying that Mary loves Fanny and approves of the match. Fanny notes that she has not seen Mary in over a week, and Edmund tells her that Mary is angry with Fanny for her rejections. Fanny says that her rejection was natural, because she had no idea Henry was in love with her, and even if she did, after what he did to Maria and Julia, she could not trust him. Edmund understands, but Fanny is growing agitated.

Fanny appears to grow frustrated with the fact that everyone is contriving to convince her to marry Henry, including Edmund, despite the fact that she has clearly indicated she has no interest in Henry. Mary's anger at her rejection of Henry might be especially frustrating to Fanny, since Mary is taking Edmund's love for granted.

Edmund, recognizing this, changes the subject, telling Fanny that the Crawfords are leaving Mansfield on Monday, and that Edmund almost missed seeing them. Fanny asks how Edmund's time at Mr. Owen's was, and he says it was very nice. Fanny asks what he thought of Mr. Owen's sisters, and Edmund says they were lovely, but that he is spoiled when it comes to women's company, so no one seems as wonderful as Fanny or Mary.

Fanny, remembering Mary's jealousy towards Mr. Owen's sisters, asks about them. Edmund's response, that they were not as good as Mary or Fanny, once again puts Mary and Fanny in the same category in a way that compares the two and makes Edmund's continued love for Mary clear.

CHAPTER 36

Edmund and Sir Thomas discuss Fanny and Henry once again, with both agreeing that Fanny will be convinced to love Henry eventually. Fanny, meanwhile, worries about the possibility of Mary coming to visit them, fearing her anger. When Mary does pay them a visit, she is in the breakfast room with her aunt. As a result, Mary cannot be outwardly angry with Fanny. Mary, though, asks Fanny if they can speak privately, and they leave the room together.

Edmund and Sir Thomas continue to ignore Fanny's clearly stated insistence that she will not marry Henry. Their conviction that Fanny could love him eventually, since she will not marry him without love, suggests that they view love as learnable, rather than as a perfect spiritual or emotional match.

The two head upstairs to the East Room. Mary exclaims that she was only in the room once before, when she and Edmund were practicing their lines, and she reminisces about the play. Mary then collects herself and tells Fanny that she had intended to express her anger, but that she didn't have the heart for it, since she loves Fanny and will not see her for a long time once she goes away. Mary's words make Fanny start to cry.

Mary recalls the play and the painful instance when Fanny had to help Edmund and Mary practice their love scene. Mary ends up failing to be mad at Fanny, and expresses that she will love and miss her. Mary's emotions seem genuine, but her later unreliability in corresponding through letters troubles that idea.

Fanny then says that Mary should not be sad, since Mary is going to stay with friends, albeit different ones, but Mary says she doesn't like her other friends as much. Mary then goes on to tell Fanny that she wishes she could show Fanny how Henry talks about her when she is not there, as it is so affectionate and moving, despite the fact that many other women are vying for his attention.

Mary's heartfelt goodbye provokes a strong emotional reaction in Fanny. It is unclear, however, exactly why, since Fanny continues to express her dislike for Mary in her inner monologue because she does not think Mary is good enough for Edmund.

Mary tries many tactics to convince Fanny of the authenticity of Henry's affection, starting by pointing out his attention to her at the ball. Mary does not defend his history of liberal flirtation with other women, but says that the way he acts toward Fanny is something else entirely. Mary then reminds Fanny of his tenacity in securing William's promotion, the most powerful argument in Fanny's mind.

Mary uses this opportunity to tell Fanny how much Henry loves her and how he has changed for the better, trying to leverage their emotional intimacy. Though Mary's goodbye seemed heartfelt, it is unclear whether it was genuine or just a strategic setup to talk about Henry.

The two hug. Mary asks Fanny to write her letters and to look after Mrs. Grant. Fanny agrees, though not too enthusiastically, to the letter writing. She is relieved that the conversation went much better than she'd hoped. The pair then return downstairs. Later in the evening, Henry bids Fanny goodbye with only a touch of her hand, seeming sadder than usual, and leaves. The next day, the Crawfords leave Mansfield.

That Fanny does not want to keep up a correspondence with Mary indicates that, although she pretends they are friends, Fanny in fact does not like Mary very much—so while Fanny is often held up as the book's most moral character, she also appears to be not so genuine with Mary.

CHAPTER 37

Sir Thomas looks out for signs that Fanny seems sad that Henry is gone. He asks Edmund to look as well, but Edmund does not notice any changes. Edmund is surprised, however, that Fanny doesn't seem sad that Mary is gone, since they were supposedly so close. In fact, Fanny worries that Mary and Edmund are more likely to get married than ever. Edmund is going to London to do business in a few weeks, and Fanny believes that while he is there he may propose to Mary. Fanny believes that, despite Mary's kindness towards her, Mary does not deserve Edmund.

Fanny's love for Edmund has gotten in the way of any affection she might otherwise have had for Mary, showing again how the marriage process often disrupts and prevents female friendships. For both Fanny and Mary, their relationship is overshadowed by the men around them—especially Henry and Edmund, who are courting their love.

William, who has a leave of absence, heads to Mansfield to spend time with Fanny. Sir Thomas wishes to organize for Fanny to return with William to Portsmouth after his visit, to see her family after so many years. Sir Thomas thinks that she will quickly grow sick of her home, and it will convince her to marry Henry so she can always live the lifestyle she is now used to.

Sir Thomas, who continues to meddle in the relationship between Fanny and Henry, decides that Fanny should go to Portsmouth to see what her life would be like if she didn't marry into money. Again, Sir Thomas pushes the marriage for financial reasons above all else.

The one hang-up in the plan is concern that Lady Bertram, who is so dependent on Fanny, will not be able to function without her. Sir Thomas, however, tells Lady Bertram that she should think of it as a sacrifice. Mrs. Norris says that no one will miss Fanny anyway. Lady Bertram finally is convinced that Fanny should go, but says she will miss her.

Lady Bertram's reluctance to let Fanny go is funny, because what Fanny does for Lady Bertram—fetch her letters, sit with her on the couch—is far from necessary. Austen is making fun of Lady Bertram's spoiled upper class existence.

Fanny then writes to her family, asking to come stay with them. Mrs. Price responds kindly and accepts. Fanny is very excited to be going home to her family, as she has not seen them in seven years. She looks forward to a large, loving family, and feeling like she is equal to them all. William, like Fanny, is very excited about the plan. He tells Fanny that they could use some of her nice manners in the house.

Fanny looks forward to feeling equal to her family, suggesting that, to Fanny, social equality might be more important than wealth. Fanny privileges kindness over luxury, as evidenced by her refusal to marry Henry despite the financial security he could provide.

Mrs. Norris is upset when Sir Thomas gives William money for the trip, unhappy to see someone else be the recipient of Sir Thomas's generosity. She tells them that she is considering going along on the trip as well, to see her supposedly beloved sister, much to William and Fanny's horror. Ultimately, though, she decides against it, not wanting to pay for her own trip back.

Mrs. Norris's money-grubbing once again provides ironic comedy and also horrifies Fanny and William. Mrs. Norris tries to mask her cheapness by saying she misses Mrs. Price, her sister, again giving her selfishness the veneer of good intentions.

Edmund, who had intended to go to London, delays his trip and stays home to keep his parents company. He tells Fanny that he intends to propose to Mary when he finally gets to London. He tells Fanny he will write when he does. Despite her happiness at going home to Portsmouth, Fanny cries on her last night in Mansfield Park, and she and William leave the next morning.

Edmund's intention to propose is of course upsetting to Fanny, who still harbors her secret love for him. The fact that he intends to send news of the proposal in a letter again places letters in a place of importance, bearing news and representing for Fanny the potential for great pain.

CHAPTER 38

Fanny and William enjoy their travels together, talking and laughing. They do not discuss Henry's proposal, though. Despite Fanny's hopes, Henry does not seem, from Mary's letters, to have forgotten about her in London.

Mary's letters continue to bear an unwelcome stream of love from Henry, making the reader understand why Fanny did not originally want to correspond with her.

Fanny and William stay overnight in Newbury, and then set off again the next day. They arrive in Portsmouth at their parents' house. William exits the carriage first, and everyone hurries to tell William about a ship, the Thrush, going out to sea. When Fanny descends from the carriage, her mother, her sisters Betsey, Rebecca, and Susan, and her brother Sam greet her with kindness. Mrs. Price offers them tea, which they accept. While they wait, Mr. Price walks into the house, talks about the Thrush, greets Fanny, and then returns to talking about the Thrush.

When Fanny arrives back in the city of Portsmouth, her return home contrasts sharply with when she first arrived at Mansfield park as a child. The family that greets her is much more informal, and not stiff like the Bertram family. But the Prices are more distracted and louder, talking constantly of the ship that just came in, while the Bertrams had set aside time for Fanny's arrival.

No tea materializes, but two of Fanny's brothers, Tom (Price) and Charles, do. They greet her and then return to causing a loud ruckus. Fanny has then seen everyone in the household—she has two other brothers as well, but they are adults and live elsewhere. Fanny is shocked that the house is so chaotic. At last the tea arrives, which Susan makes for her. Fanny immediately likes Susan.

The fact that Fanny does not get tea until Susan finally makes it for her shows how disorganized the household is. The lower-class, urban Price household continues to contrast with the upper-class, countryside Bertram household, where servants are efficient.

William emerges from another room wearing his lieutenant costume, and Fanny hugs him and cries that she is so proud. All day long people come and go to and from the house, making noise as they go. When things at last calm down somewhat, Mrs. Price asks Fanny about the Bertrams. Mrs. Price laments the difference between her own servants and the more professional ones at Mansfield.

Fanny continues to notice the house's noise. The 19th century middle- and upper-class house was meant to be a place for rest, tranquility and repose, but the Price household represents none of these things. Unlike Mansfield Park, the Price house is run very inefficiently and without a sense of decorum.

Fanny looks at Betsey, and remembers another one of her sisters, Mary Price, who died after Fanny had left for Mansfield. Betsey shows Fanny a silver knife, which Susan immediately insists is hers, and that Mary gave it to her on her deathbed. She says that Betsey always steals it. Mrs. Price tells Susan to drop the issue, and scolds Betsey as well. After she finishes talking with her mother about Mary and the Mansfield Park family, Fanny goes to bed.

Though it is unclear how Mary Price, one of Fanny's younger sisters, died, the reader might recall the narrator's early comment that Mrs. Price would have liked all of her children to get some countryside air. Austen codes the city as an unclean, sickly place, suggesting it may be responsible for Mary's death.

CHAPTER 39

Fanny's first week at the Price home in Portsmouth ends up being disappointing. She does not see William much before he leaves again, because everyone's lives in Portsmouth are so hectic. Fanny entirely fails to connect with her father, who seems more interested in sailing and drinking than his children. She doesn't fare much better with her mother either, who is so busy she cannot spend much time with Fanny, and who generally prefers her male children anyway.

Fanny is disappointed by Portsmouth. The effects of relative poverty sour Fanny's stay—her mother is busy with too many children, her father drinks too much, and the house is noisy because the children are not well disciplined. Though Austen criticizes the lives of the rich, she also acknowledges how wealth allows for certain comforts.

Fanny is hurt by this total lack of interest on her mother's part, but still tries to help out around the house. Fanny develops different relationships with each of her younger siblings. She finds Sam clever, Tom (Price) and Charles quite wild, Betsey spoiled, and Susan very agreeable. Fanny hates how there are no quiet spaces in the house, and begins to long for Mansfield.

When Fanny's longs for the quiet spaces of Mansfield, she expresses a clear preference for countryside life over the city. She also comes to understand the importance of manners—though Fanny thought that she would not mind their absence, and might even be refreshed by her family's roughness and lack of decorum, the resulting chaos proves her wrong.

CHAPTER 40

Fanny receives Mary's next letter, which arrives later than the previous ones, and she reads it excitedly, happy for news from outside of Portsmouth. Mary describes how Henry asks about Fanny, how Julia is courted by Mr. Yates, and how Edmund remains at Mansfield.

Fanny had thought that she would not want to correspond with Mary, but her discomfort in Portsmouth makes the letters welcome. Again, letters bring news and emotional support from afar.

In Portsmouth, Fanny fails to attach herself to her mother and father's social circle because she carries herself so differently. Fanny does find a friend in her sister Susan, in whom she sees good manners despite her upbringing, and a desire to be kind, helpful, and perceptive.

Fanny's good manners are viewed as pretentious in Portsmouth, so she has trouble mingling with the lower-middle class, showing how manners divide people along class lines.

Fanny decides to buy a silver knife for Betsey so that she will stop stealing the knife that their deceased sister Mary (Price) gave to Susan. When she does, Susan is extremely grateful to her, and their relationship becomes closer. Fanny takes Susan under her wing, mentoring her in proper etiquette and manners and refining her taste.

Fanny, who is used to feeling grateful for other people's generosity instead of being generous herself, takes on a role like Sir Bertram's when she gives Betsy the knife. Fanny has elevated herself to the same roles as the people who used to be higher class than she was.

CHAPTER 41

After Edmund has been in London for a week, Fanny still has not received a letter from him. She does, however, receive a visitor—one day, Henry arrives at the Price's door.

Fanny desperately awaits a letter from Edmund, knowing it will carry news of his engagement to Mary, or his rejection.


Henry talks with Fanny's mother as Fanny recovers from the shock of his appearance. Once Fanny is a little less stunned, Henry describes his travels to her, and then suggests they go for a walk. Fanny accepts, and takes Susan with her. On their walk, they run into Fanny's father, much to Fanny's dismay. Mr. Price, however, is on his best behavior, and he and Henry seem to get on well.

Fanny is embarrassed for Henry, who is used to being around refined, well-mannered people, to meet her crass father. Portsmouth and Mansfield are clearly very different and separate lives for Fanny, and her humble origins embarrass her now.


Mr. Price offers to show Henry the dockyard, and he accepts. On the walk there, Henry talks of his business in Norfolk, and describes going out of his way to meet his tenants, a kind act that endears him to Fanny. They then talk about Mansfield, which Fanny is happy to do, but when Henry implies that Edmund and Mary will hopefully be engaged soon, Fanny sours.

Henry's act of going to meet his tenants, which he is doing to appeal to Fanny, is an act that transgresses traditional class boundaries. Fanny, with her own ability to rise through class strata, is Henry's inspiration for reaching out to those below him.

Henry tells Fanny he came to Portsmouth only for her, which Fanny is not happy to hear. Despite this, Fanny is surprised to find that she has really enjoyed Henry's company on this visit. After the walk, Mr. Price invites Henry to dinner. Henry tells them he has other plans, but promises to come back the next day.

Though she enjoys his company, Henry's continued pursuit of Fanny still makes her uncomfortable. When Henry rejects the invitation to dinner, he restores the class distinctions between them.


CHAPTER 42

The next day, a Sunday, Henry joins the family, all dressed in their Sunday best, for church. After the service, Henry and Fanny join Mrs. Price on her weekly walk around town. The weather is very good, and Fanny and Henry enjoy themselves immensely.

Fanny continues to enjoy Henry's company, and the fact that he attended church with them shows that he is trying to align his values more closely with Fanny's.

They discuss the fact that Fanny has been in Portsmouth for one month, and intends to stay for two. They also talk about Henry's business dilemmas and moral qualms. Henry tells Fanny that he knows that the inhabitants of Mansfield can sometimes be neglectful to her, and tells her that if she needs someone to take her back to Mansfield at the end of the second month, or even before, he would be happy to do it. Henry also suggests that Susan, who would benefit from a change of environment immensely, should join them.

Henry's offer to take Fanny away from Portsmouth to Mansfield shows his attention to Fanny, and his acknowledgement that the Bertrams can neglect her puts himself as a more attentive caretaker than even Edmund. Though Fanny is wary of Henry's kindness, he certainly knows the right things to say.

When their walk is over, Henry says goodbye to Fanny. He asks if she needs anything from London, and Fanny tells him to send her love to Mary and to tell Edmund to write her. Henry leaves, refusing an invitation to dinner.

Henry again refuses an invitation to dinner, showing how, while he will spend time with Fanny's family, he will not entertain their equality by eating with them.

Fanny eats her unappealing dinner, and then spends the rest of the day sad that Henry is gone, which surprises her. Still, Fanny wonders if, now that Henry has made it clear that he cares for her, he will stop pursuing her, since she finds it distressing.

Fanny thinks that if Henry really cares for and understands her, he will realize that his pursuit is hopeless. However, it seems like he might have a chance, since Fanny is warming to him.

CHAPTER 43

Henry travels back to London the next day, and a few days later Fanny receives a letter from Mary saying that Henry told her of his visit. Mary then updates Fanny on the social scene in London, writing about courtships and balls. She mentions that Edmund has been looking handsome. Mary reiterates Henry's offer that they will come bring Fanny to Mansfield whenever she wants, and she mentions a party where they will see Maria and Mr. Rushworth.

Mary's letter keeps Fanny updated on the social dynamics far away in London. Though Mary has previously talked about letters as straightforward windows to the soul, Fanny must decode the writing in front of her, determining from Mary's comments about Edmund that she still loves him.

Fanny is gratified to learn that Edmund has not yet proposed to Mary, but dislikes that it seems that Mary, despite the distractions of London, is just as in love with him as ever. Fanny thinks, again, that Mary does not deserve Edmund.

Fanny had hoped that London would remind Mary of her preference for city life, and that the social distractions of London would make Mary forget Edmund.

In the days following, Fanny waits for a letter from Edmund, but receives none. Eventually she gives up waiting and focuses on mentoring Susan, who adores her and loves to hear about Mansfield. Fanny wishes she were in love with Henry so she could marry him and have an estate and take Susan to live with her.

When Fanny wishes she could marry Henry and take Susan to his estate, it shows how society leaves women with no options for supporting themselves outside of marriage (Fanny cannot just, for example, buy a house for them herself).

CHAPTER 44

At last, Edmund's long-awaited letter arrives. Fanny reads it warily, afraid it will carry the news that he and Mary are engaged. Edmund writes that he has returned to Mansfield. He describes how Mary's friends are a bad influence on her character. However, he insists that he cannot give up on her. Edmund worries that Mary will reject his proposal due to his lack of money or profession, but insists he will propose anyway. He considers proposing by letter.

Edmund's letter, which Fanny has been anticipating and dreading, turns out to be less eventful than expected. That Edmund considers proposing by letter shows how not only do letters allow for long-distance communication, but also their form, which allows the author to be absent, might be helpful for emotionally charged conversations.

Edmund then tells Fanny about seeing Henry and Maria interact at a recent party. He describes the coolness between them, and says that Maria and Mr. Rushworth's marriage seems to be going fine. Edmund tells Fanny that the Grants are moving to Bath, and that Sir Thomas will not be able to pick her up when he intended to. He sends love from everyone at Mansfield and signs off. Fanny is upset and angry, both at Edmund's declarations of love for Mary and the fact that she must stay at Portsmouth longer than expected.

Edmund's letter also describes the interactions between Maria and Henry. While their affair has not yet occurred, the fragments of letters from Mary and Edmund describing Maria and Henry's interactions serve as evidence of their impending transgression, clues that Fanny and the reader can later return to and parse. As we will learn, it is this seeming "coolness" between Maria and Henry that makes Henry want to make Maria fall for him again.

A few days later, Fanny receives a letter from Lady Bertram. She tells her that Tom has fallen gravely ill after a night of drinking in Newcastle, and returned home to Mansfield to recover. Fanny feels great sympathy for everyone at Mansfield. Lady Bertram continues to write Fanny daily letters, updating her on Tom's worsening illness and the family's fright. Fanny confides her fears for Tom in Susan, who is very sympathetic.

While Tom did not fall ill in London itself, his trip to Newcastle was from London, and with his city friends. The association of the city with Tom's deathly illness and the partying and drinking that led to it add to the city's aura of sickness and moral depravity.

CHAPTER 45

By the end of the week, Fanny receives news from Lady Bertram that Tom's fever breaks, but that the doctors continue to worry about his lungs. Edmund serves as the primary source of comfort to Lady Bertram and helps tend to Tom. He writes to Fanny that he has decided not to send Mary a letter declaring his desire to marry her.

Fanny continues to be updated by letters, which are of supreme importance in this part of the book, while Fanny is away and a great many events occur in London and at Mansfield.

As Fanny's time at Portsmouth reaches three months, she longs to be taken back to Mansfield and worries she will be left in Portsmouth much longer. Fanny had hoped that Portsmouth would be a home to her, but she learns that Mansfield is her home. Fanny wishes she could comfort everyone at Mansfield through Tom's illness and enjoy the spring weather. Fanny is astonished that Maria and Julia remain in London during their brother's time of need, and decides that London is a bad influence on people.

Austen again contrasts Fanny's life at Mansfield with her current situation at Portsmouth. Fanny finally realizes that she belongs at Mansfield, and thinks of the reasons she prefers it—both due to the inhabitants and to its place in the country, where she can enjoy the nature. This shows again how Austen prefers the countryside to the city.

After a long silence, Fanny receives a letter from Mary, saying that she hears that Tom may be dying, and asking Fanny whether this is true. Mary says she would be sorry if he died, but implies that then Edmund would inherit the estate and she would be able marry Edmund and live the lifestyle she wants, despite his occupation as a clergyman. In a postscript, Mary says that Henry has just seen Maria and discussed Tom's illness with her. Despite Henry's attentions to Maria, Mary reassures Fanny that Henry is still totally devoted to her. She tells Fanny to please accept their offer to take her back to Mansfield.

Though before she left for London Mary told Fanny she was one of her best friends, Mary has not been writing her often, shedding doubt on Mary's assertion. When Mary does finally write again, asking about Tom's health, her inquiry, rather than being a kind and sympathetic message from a friend, shows how Mary is using Fanny to gain information that might benefit her. *Her letter also crucially reveals her character, as Mary suggests that Tom's death wouldn't be so bad since it would benefit Edmund (and thus Mary herself, if she were to marry him), displaying a callous and greedy nature.*

Mary's unsavory hope that Tom will die disgusts Fanny. Likewise, she is skeptical of Henry's relationship with Maria, which she suspects is a flirtation. She is, however, tempted to take Mary up on her offer to convey her to Mansfield. In her reply to Mary, Fanny ultimately rejects the offer, saying it is up to Sir Thomas when she should return.

Mary's suggested hope that Tom will die so Edmund can inherit shows how the systems of marriage and inheritance result in the worst forms of moral depravity, with Mary going so far as to hope her lover's brother dies so she can marry him and have money.

CHAPTER 46

Fanny receives another letter from Mary over a week later. Mary writes to tell Fanny that there is a vicious rumor circulating about Henry, and that she should not believe it and should know that Henry is still totally devoted to her. Once again, she asks if Fanny will let her come get her from Portsmouth.

Mary's letter seems to have arrived earlier than it should have, before Fanny has even heard the rumor, highlighting the fact that the timing of the post affects how letters work as communication.

Having heard no such rumor, Fanny is confused and concerned. She is surprised by the implication that Henry has done something improper, since she had begun to believe that he really loved her. When no second letter follows the next day, Fanny is disappointed.

Mary's context-less letter is mysterious and confusing. Fanny seems to have been about to flip in her resolve against Henry, as evidenced by the fact that she had finally believed he loved her.

Mr. Price, who is reading the newspaper, asks Fanny if one of the society page articles is referring to her cousin. Fanny reads the excerpt, which states that Maria has run away with Henry and their whereabouts are unknown. Fanny insists it must be a mistake, but slowly realizes that it is probably true. Fanny is shocked and horrified by the scandal, and by Maria and Henry's careless disregard for the disgrace their behavior brings upon their families.

In contrast to the privacy and intimacy of letters, Fanny learns of Maria and Henry's transgression in the very public newspaper. Maria and Henry's selfishness shocks Fanny, as adultery in 19th century England means total social disgrace not just for the people involved, but also for their families.

Two days later Fanny receives a letter from Edmund, confirming that they do not know where Maria and Henry have gone, and adding that Julia has eloped with Mr. Yates. Edmund also tells her that Sir Thomas is sending for Fanny to return to Mansfield tomorrow, and that Susan is welcome to come stay with them for a few months.

Maria's actions are not only taboo—they also serve as a threat to the institution of marriage by revealing how marriage might be devoid of love. Adultery also threatens the system of inheritance, as a child's father may not be known.

Fanny is thrilled to be soon leaving Portsmouth and to take Susan with her. She is shocked by Julia's elopement, but too distracted to dwell on it. Susan is excited to go as well. They prepare for their travels the next day, and Edmund arrives in the morning. A half hour later, they leave Portsmouth.

Julia's elopement poses its own milder threat to marriage as a monetary system as well as a class system, since elopement is used for marriages across social and economic classes.

The trip is relatively quiet, because Edmund is so upset. The family matters weigh heavily on him, and he is also distressed by how ill Fanny looks after months of being in Portsmouth. Susan enjoys looking out the window. They arrive at Mansfield at dinner time, and Fanny is nervous to see everyone, but happy to be back. Lady Bertram, upon seeing her, hugs her, calls her "dear Fanny," and says that she can at last be comfortable.

Fanny is finally out of Portsmouth, having realized that the happy life she dreamed of among people of her own social class is impossible. When she gets back to Mansfield, she is greeted with all the kindness that she was not given as a child, shown by how Lady Bertram calls her "dear Fanny."

CHAPTER 47

Mrs. Norris is extraordinarily disturbed by Maria's scandal and the general disruption in the house due to Tom's illness. Naturally, she is also furious that Fanny is back, and even less happy to see Susan.

Mrs. Norris has always favored Maria, and treated her much better than Fanny because of her higher class, so Maria's mistake disturbs her.

Fanny consoles and supports Lady Bertram, who tells her exactly what happened between Maria and Henry, detailing the flirtation that led up to their escape together.

Maria and Henry's affair shows that Henry did not in fact change, vindicating Fanny's decision not to marry him.

Lady Bertram tells how, upon learning the news via letter, Sir Thomas and Edmund went to London to find Maria, but did not succeed, and a unhappy servant exposed the story to the public. Sir Thomas is extremely distressed by Maria's scandal and Julia's elopement (which, though a very unwelcome event, pales in comparison to Maria's actions).

Once again, letters prove to be of central importance to the story, sometimes obscuring the truth (as Mary's letter tried to do) and other times revealing it. That one of Maria's servants exposed the story suggests that Maria did not treat her servants well.

Edmund does not speak to Fanny until five days after she arrives in Mansfield. Edmund tells Fanny that he went to see Mary while he was in London, where Mary expressed anger at both Henry and Maria. Her anger, though, was at the fact that they let themselves be found out, not that they had done what they did in the first place. Mary also expressed sadness that Henry had ruined his chances with Fanny as a result, but was simultaneously mad at Fanny for not marrying him earlier so the scandal could be avoided. Mary even suggested that Henry and Maria must marry in order to clear up the scandal.

Edmund at last sees Mary as Fanny sees her: someone who, although pleasant and beautiful, has been corrupted by her environment and her upbringing in the Admiral's household. Mary's suggestion that Henry and Maria should get married to cover up their mistake shows yet another way that the institution of marriage could be abused as a convenient social tool, rather than a true love match.

Edmund is so disgusted by Mary blaming Fanny, and her focus on the detection of the affair and covering it up rather than the affair itself, that he gives up on Mary once and for all. Edmund tells Mary that his romantic interest in her is over, and though Mary tries to detain him, he leaves. Fanny and Edmund discuss the faults of Mary a while longer before Lady Bertram interrupts them.

Mary's anger that Henry and Maria were discovered, not that they committed adultery in the first place, shows Edmund how Mary favors the appearance and manners of morality and goodness, but does not care about morality and goodness when no one is watching.

CHAPTER 48

Fanny, back at Mansfield Park and totally certain that Edmund will never marry Mary, is very happy. Edmund, meanwhile, is very upset, and Sir Thomas even more so, as he blames himself for his daughters' disgraces.

Sir Thomas's concern that his parenting is responsible for Julia and Maria's downfalls suggests how nurture, not good breeding, may be a crucial reason for quality of morality and manners—an idea that would have been controversial in Austen's time.

Julia returns to Mansfield and begs the family's forgiveness, and Mr. Yates, wanting to be approved of, tries hard to appease the family. Tom regains his health, and following his illness he is much more considerate and responsible. Edmund's spirits improve, and Sir Thomas slowly begins to blame himself less, but he does think that Maria and Julia's upbringing was the cause for their bad choices.

Julia's mistake is forgivable, and her reputation salvageable, since although she eloped, she at least transgressed within *the system of marriage. Though her marriage is not desirable and does not benefit her financially or socially, it does not carry the taboo that adultery does.*

Mr. Rushworth divorces Maria. Once Henry eventually leaves her (it is unclear in the text why or when he does so), Maria returns to Mansfield and the family wonders what exactly to do with her. Mrs. Norris blames Fanny for Maria's downfall, an accusation that Sir Thomas rejects. Mrs. Norris and Maria move far away and live together, their income provided for by Sir Thomas. Sir Thomas is very happy to have Mrs. Norris gone, as his opinion of her has been lowering since his return from Antigua. No one, it turns out, misses Mrs. Norris very much.

When Maria's affair with Henry ends, society has little space for her as an unmarried, unmarriageable (because "disgraced") woman of the upper class. That Mrs. Norris and Maria must move away shows how damning sexual transgression is for women. However, for Maria, marriage itself was so confining that it's unclear whether her suffocating marriage to Mr. Rushworth was much better than social exile.

Julia having fared better than Maria, the narrator notes, is perhaps due to the fact that she was always less spoiled than her sister. She never forgave Henry for favoring Maria over her at Mansfield, and so rejected his company in London. The narrator also states that Julia's elopement with Mr. Yates was catalyzed by Maria's affair, because Julia feared going home and dealing with her father's anger at his eldest daughter.

The narrator, like Sir Thomas, attributes Maria's fall from grace to her upbringing, as evidenced by the fact that the narrator thinks Julia got by thanks to the fact that she was less spoiled. That Julia's elopement was catalyzed by Maria's affair also recalls the earlier metaphor of Julia going after Maria over the iron gate.

The narrator then describes Henry's mistake, suggesting that, had Henry kept trying, he might have eventually succeeded in securing Fanny's affections. After Maria's coldness to him at a party, his vanity made him pursue Maria once more. Henry greatly regretted it, because he did truly love Fanny.

The narrator confirms definitively that Henry did love Fanny, but unfortunately his underlying bad qualities (his fickleness, his vanity) got the best of him, despite his charm and sincere feelings.

The Grants, who luckily had gone away before all the drama, move to London permanently. Mary moves in with them, and resumes her city lifestyle. Dr. Grant eventually dies. Mary resolves never to love a younger brother again, but has trouble finding anyone she likes as much as Edmund.

The Grants and Mary return to London, where it's suggested that Mary's lack of principled morals fits in with the surroundings. She decides to pursue wealth in marriage (by avoiding younger brothers), but this prevents her from finding a love like Edmund.

Edmund, for his part, finally begins to notice Fanny, and falls in love with her. He begins to act romantically towards her, and Fanny admits that she has been in love with him the whole time. Sir Thomas approves of the match, finally getting the kind and good daughter he'd wanted.

Although the narrator assures the reader that Edmund's love for Fanny is legitimate, when they finally get together the moment is glossed over, disappointing the reader and rendering the supposed "happy ending" of the marriage plot quite unfulfilling.

Lady Bertram is unhappy about the marriage because it means she will lose Fanny's company, but Susan, who is thriving at Mansfield, takes Fanny's place as Lady Bertram's companion.

It seems that Fanny's upward mobility will be repeated in her sister, suggesting that Fanny's movement up the social ladder was not an isolated incident.

Sir Thomas, observing how good Fanny, William, and Susan are, thinks that struggle in early childhood yields good morals and responsibility. He compares the Price children to his own children, and sees how his children's good pedigree has done little to make them good people and obedient children.

In this important passage, Sir Thomas, who began the book with a rigid sense of class hierarchy, begins to see how merit, rather than birth, might be the best way to judge people. Furthermore, he sees how the hardship of the lower classes can build character.

Edmund and Fanny are extremely happy once they are married, and after Dr. Grant's death they move into the Parsonage to be close to Mansfield Park.

Edmund and Fanny's married life goes under-described, failing to give the reader a last happy image of marriage.

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