

Chapter [REDACTED]

Elinor had tossed and turned all night, and dark circles hung below her eyes. A knock sounded at her door.

“Come in,” she called.

“Mr. Cummings is here to see you, miss,” Agnes, the lady’s maid, said.

“Tell him I’ll be right down,” Elinor said. She slumped in front of the mirror, trying in vain to make herself look respectable. Having arrived from Pittsburgh the day before, she dreaded this meeting with William. Maybe he wouldn’t bring up the substance of their last conversation, and she wouldn’t have to worry about her problem until later.

William came to his feet when she entered the room. His energetic smile turned into a frown. “Are you unwell?” he asked.

“No,” Elinor said. “I just had a rather long night. Probably overly fatigued by the journey.”

He took her arm and led her to the sofa. “Sit down,” he said in genuine concern. “Truly, you do look exhausted.”

Elinor was exhausted. She’d been lecturing and torturing herself non-stop for a week—ever since they attended the opera. How could she have let this happen? Could she summon the strength to tell William the truth?

“I want to thank you for the book,” he said. “I’ve almost read half of it already.” He sat down beside her and continued, obviously wanting to discuss the novel. “I couldn’t believe it when he was arrested on his wedding. All his wonderful plans gone to smash.”

Commented [AT51]: Perspective error: Elinor wouldn’t be able to see the dark circles below her eyes unless she looked in the mirror. You could describe how Elinor feels instead.

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Commented [AT52]: Show: What would she do to make herself look respectable? For example, would she fuss with her hair?

Commented [AT53]: Does “having arrived from Pittsburgh the day before” refer to William or Elinor?

Commented [AT54]: To remind the reader about the content of their last conversation, I would mention his tentative proposal of marriage.

Commented [AT55]: Which room is Elinor entering?

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Commented [AT56]: While I think using questions is a good way to show how/what Elinor is feeling, I noticed that you use this technique regularly in previous chapters. I wanted to draw your attention to this pattern to make sure that this was an intentional way you would like to develop Elinor’s character.

Deleted: It’s intriguing.

Commented [AT57]: Show: How would Elinor know that William wanted to discuss the novel? What actions would he do?

Commented [AT58]: Maybe remind the audience that it is the Count of Monte Cristo.

Elinor's stomach clenched, and she lowered her gaze to the floor. Why did he have to speak of plans or marriage—even if it was part of the book's plot? She was about to dash all his hopes for a life with her. Unable to sit any longer, she jumped up and began pacing the floor in front of the fireplace.

He glanced up at her, and, from the expression of dread on his face, Elinor could tell he suspected what she was about to say.

“William, I don't know how to tell you this, but...” Elinor was having trouble articulating her feelings. “Do you remember our last conversation before I left for Pittsburgh?”

“Yes,” he said. “I didn't mean to rush you.”

“I know, and I appreciate that.” Elinor hated herself at this moment. “I can't tell you how much your friendship has meant to me the past couple of months.”

“But...” he said, slumping back on the sofa.

“But, though I love you dearly as a friend, it is simply not enough. I don't think I could ever love you as a wife should love her husband.”

He leaned forward, clasping his hands, staring at the floor.

“It would be wrong of me to ask you to continue courting me.”

“Was it something I did or said?” he asked.

“No. Not at all. I know that you will make some lucky woman very happy—just not me.”

He sat in silence for a few moments. Elinor's anxiety increased. How could she possibly make him understand? Had she just made a huge mistake? Was she destroying any hope of marriage with a decent man?

“Please forgive me,” she said. “Maybe I have an impossible vision of what a marriage should be. I don't know.”

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Commented [AT59]: Show: I would describe William's behavior and expressions. While we know he had an expression of dread on his face, it sounds like he is trying to reassure her that he will wait and that he doesn't want her to refuse him. Subsequently, would William feel something different than dread? Possibly desperation? You could describe his feelings here.

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When he finally spoke, his voice shook with emotion. “When you first had your mother invite me to dinner, I could hardly believe my luck. That you would want to associate with me was hard to fathom.” He ran his fingers through his hair, mussing it up. “Now I know that I was right to be reticent. You ~~are~~ too good for the likes of me.”

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“Please don’t place me on a pedestal,” Elinor cried. “You are the kindest and best man I’ve ever met. I just don’t believe that I can give you the happiness you deserve.”

He looked her in the eye for the first time since their conversation began. “I can’t deny that I find this news devastating.”

Commented [AT60]: While William is a blunt, straightforward man, I think he is kind enough that he would attempt to conceal how he was feeling to help Elinor feel better about the situation. He may look brokenhearted, but I think he would say something more reserved, like “Thank you for being honest with me.” (This is just an example.)

“Oh William, forgive me,” Elinor pleaded. “I feel as though I don’t deserve to ever be happy again.”

William, now pale, rubbed his hands nervously together. “Well, I feel you’ve been desiring my absence for quite some time. I’ll just excuse myself.”

Tears ran freely down Elinor’s cheeks. “Please accept my fervent wishes for your future happiness.”

Clearly devastated, he turned and bowed to her before leaving the room. When she heard the front door close, she fled to her room and knelt beside her bed, sobbing, her tears wetting her satin bedspread.

Commented [AT61]: Show: If you choose to include William’s statement about being devastated, “clearly devastated” may be repetitive. Instead, you can describe how William looked “devastated.” For example, William might fight back tears.

“Oh God,” she prayed, “help him find happiness and bless him for his goodness. Please help him forgive me. Help me forgive myself. Help us both find our way.”