

# Elinor's duties and emotions: conflicting forces in sense and sensibility



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Elinor's mind is pulled in conflicting directions by her desires and obligations. Elinor loves Edward and wants to be with him, but after hearing about Lucy's engagement to him, she withdraws her feelings. However, Elinor is aware of Lucy's jealousy and deception, and doubts Edward's love for Lucy. Elinor's desire to be with Edward and her obligation to abide by society's rules create conflicting feelings within Elinor.

Although Elinor hides her feelings, it is evident that she feels deep affection for Edward. When Edward arrives at Norland, he and Elinor become acquainted. Through Elinor's mother's eyes, it is apparent that Elinor and Edward love each other and will get married. However, Elinor's sister Marianne questions how Elinor could love a man who is so untasteful and plain. In response, Elinor states that she has "[seen] a great deal of him" and "studied his sentiments and heard his opinions." She continues on to praise Edward, pronouncing that his "mind is well read," "his imagination lively," and "his taste delicate and pure." Elinor also states that she knows Edward "so well she thinks him handsome" (Austen, 22). Through Elinor's compliments, it is apparent that she admires and cares for Edward. It is also evident that Elinor believes Edward loves her. Thinking to herself, Elinor says she "believed the regard to be mutual" (Austen, 23). After Edward visits their new home at Barton, Elinor draws in an attempt to distract herself, but thinks of Edward often. To find comfort, Elinor thinks of "Edward's affection" and "every mark of regard in look or word which fell from him" (Austen, 100). Elinor thinks of good memories with Edward constantly and deciphers his behavior, making her feelings for Edward apparent.

After Edward leaves Barton, Lucy Steele tells Elinor of her secret engagement to Edward. Elinor is visibly affected and hurt by the news, but she remains calm and civil due to her societal obligation. Upon hearing the of the engagement, Elinor felt “astonishment,” “surprise,” and “solicitude” (Austen, 124-125). In her responses to Lucy, Elinor describes feeling a “painful perplexity” and that her “heart sunk within her” (Austen, 125, 129). However, Elinor kept her composure and although her security sank, “her self command did not sink with it” (Austen, 126). Elinor is shocked and hurt, but her moral imperative to follow society's rules triumphs, and Elinor is able to conceal her feelings. Elinor “spoke cautiously” and “calmly,” and she “struggled so resolutely against the oppression of her feelings, that her success was speedy...and complete” (Austen, 124, 129).

Laurence Sterne once wrote “No body, but he who felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a man's mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength.” In the conversations between Elinor and Lucy, it is apparent that Elinor's mind is pulled in conflicting directions. As Elinor continued to speak to Lucy, she began to doubt their engagement, and resolved that Edward must not really love Lucy but be stuck in engagement with her. Following her senses, Elinor decides to orchestrate another conversation with Lucy to learn more of the engagement. The second conversation between Lucy and Elinor consists of false sincerity from both girls. Lucy repeatedly tries to gain a reaction from Elinor, and Elinor struggles internally while remaining civil towards Lucy. Elinor states that she hid her “very agitated feelings” with a smile (Austen, 143). After the conversation, Elinor is convinced that “Edward was not only without affection for the person who

was to be his wife; but that he had not even the chance of being tolerably happy in the marriage" (Austen, 145). Elinor is able to see the deceit and insecurity through Lucy's continuous gloating. However, Elinor controls her emotions and natural instincts to uphold her social responsibility and preserve her dignity. In another conversation between Elinor and Lucy following a dinner with Mrs. Ferrars, Lucy intentionally vaunts about Mrs. Ferrars' kindness and liking towards her. Elinor responds bluntly and hopes to end the conversation, but Lucy continues, asking if Elinor is ill. The conversation between the two is interrupted when Edward arrives. Elinor speaks of "forcing herself" to greet Edward as she would normally, and refers to the act as a "struggle" (Austen, 227). Through Elinor's meetings with Lucy it is shown that Elinor wants to defend herself and Edward's love for her, but chooses not to as an effort to maintain decency and respectability.

After Edward and Lucy's engagement is revealed, Elinor is forced to face Edward when Colonel Brandon asks her to relay a message. Upon seeing Edward for the first time since his engagement became public, Elinor describes feeling "astonished," "confused," and "uncomfortable" (Austen, 269). She states that she was "determined to get [telling the news] over with" (Austen, 270). Elinor keeps her composure, congratulating and wishing happiness to Edward. During her meeting with Edward, Elinor acts as though his engagement with Lucy has changed nothing, acting as if their connection and love had never existed. After Edward leaves, though, Elinor recollects on her past with Edward, his words, and her feelings for him. Complying

with her societal obligation, Elinor loses hope of being with Edward, and accepts his marriage with Lucy.

Elinor's confliction between her love and her conscience highlights the major theme of the novel, passion versus reason. Elinor's desire to be with Edward and her feelings for him illustrate the passion. However, Elinor conceals her desires in order to abide by societal etiquette, representing the reasoning. Elinor's voice of reason triumphs in the end, as Elinor and Edward get married and live happily.