Summary

What exactly made Marianne decide to marry Colonel Brandon? Jane Austen tells us that it was …a conviction of his fond attachment to herself, which at last, though long after it was observable to everybody else, burst on her…

Notes
See the end of the work for notes.

“Mother, Elinor,” Marianne said very seriously, “I believe that Mrs. Jennings was right when she claimed that Colonel Brandon was attached to myself.”

Elinor looked in astonishment over the head of her small son. Her mother exclaimed, “My dear, whatever has happened?” So long had the colonel’s affection been unnoticed by Marianne, though obvious to all of their mutual friends, that her family had all but given up hope that it would ever become evident to the lady in question.

“At the picnic today,” she replied. “I turned from speaking to Lady Middleton to find Colonel Brandon looking rather at me, with such an longing gaze! As if there were no other beings in the world but the two of us.”

Hope rose within Elinor, but she wisely held her tongue. Marianne seemed now to be speaking to herself rather than her sister and mother.

“As I look back, I become convinced that this is a fondness which has indeed existed almost since we have first known him. The jests of Sir John and Mrs. Jennings, which I saw as an unkind gesture, so wildly off the mark, were actually in the gold. His behavior to me, especially when I was so ill after being in London: always such gentleness, such warmth! Even in that…unfortunate time, when I was so unkind as to cruelly malign him, in such a manner that he must have known, he never conducted himself with less than perfect kindness to me.”
She now turned to Mrs. Dashwood with an appealing look. Her mother answered eagerly, “What you have only now seen is what we have long known to be true, my dear. Colonel Brandon is very fond of you—indeed he loves you.”

“Yet he has never spoken!”

“How could he?” Elinor broke in. “Knowing your heart to be, at first, otherwise engaged, and now dedicated to your home and your mother? He is too delicate a man to risk your friendship and esteem on a chance that he could not believe would be fulfilled.”

Marianne said no more, though her face remained thoughtful through the afternoon.

In the evening, Colonel Brandon appeared, to speak of some matters of business with Edward. Both sisters happened to be in the sitting room when he was announced; Elinor using a few precious moments of quiet to draw Marianne, who sat at the pianoforte.

Elinor greeted him as she ever had; Marianne’s face changed in colour, but she held her composure as she shook his hand. He looked anxious, for his part. He glanced frequently at Marianne, who played with rather more energy and less skill than was her wont. He seemed to grow no happier during his short visit, until, upon his leaving, Marianne rose from the piano and thanked him warmly for visiting. His look brightened at once, and his steps were firmer when he left than they had been when he entered.

Elinor looked wonderingly at her sister. Marianne answered the look by saying, “I have been thinking, dearest. It is clear, as you and mother have said, that Colonel Brandon loves me. I shall never again be attached to anyone, but now I begin to see that I have the power of making another human being very happy indeed.” In a lower tone, she added, “I wish only to know—would it make you happy as well?”

Her sister at once rose and put her arms around her. “My dear, it would make me, and our mother, very happy indeed to see you joined to such a man as the colonel has time and again proven himself to be.”

Marianne put her head upon her sister’s shoulder. “I have been so sure that I should never be connected with anyone, that I am not certain if I am fit for marriage. His friendship is very sweet to me, but my heart—I cannot give him anything more.”

“He loves you, and has for some years now,” Elinor answered slowly. “You are too honest to dissemble, and the colonel would not wish you to. He understands.” She felt her sister nod, and was sure, though nothing had been decided in words, that Marianne had made up her mind; and that Colonel Brandon, so long solemn and grave, would soon become one of the happiest men of her acquaintance.

Sir John threw yet another card party a few days later. Elinor had just sat down to the whist table, having seen her sister at the pianoforte again, when she was astonished to hear Marianne say, “Colonel, I would be greatly obliged if you might aid me by turning pages.” Whatever came next was lost in the babble of card playing. Elinor lost rather badly through inattention. When the rubber was over, she begged leave to cut out, citing her infant son as an excuse. Taking Charles into her arms, she observed over his head her sister, playing and singing with a slight blush on her cheek, and the Colonel, standing by her side with a look that said he did not yet dare to believe his good fortune.
Believe it he did in time. He came by every day while the Dashwoods remained at Delaford, and when they removed to Barton, quickly found an excuse to visit his old residence there as well.

Marianne drifted about the cottage in distraction for a few days. Having made her choice, she was not used to being quietly loved by a man who asked so little in return. In time, her confusion faded, as the colonel exerted himself to provide her with every small pleasure he could think of, the results of which surprised all of their acquaintances. He brought her music and books; he exerted himself to organize riding parties so that she could ride the most beautiful horses he possessed. Better still, he became adept at making her laugh. And Marianne’s thoughtful, contented face seemed to say that she did not regret the loss of old dreams.

The already lively friendship between the two blossomed. In the light of her smile, he became more animated, more vigorous, than he had been, which better recommended him to her. She began to see, even if she did not yet understand, how truly her presence made him happy; and Marianne, whose loving heart could never be contained, found joy in making such a good friend happier still.

Just four months after Marianne intercepted Colonel Brandon’s gaze, he asked her to become his wife. With fast beating heart she accepted, and his delight upon the occasion put flight to all her fears. They were wed shortly after, to the exultation of Mrs. Jennings, who insisted that she had made the match, and all were so glad that no one begrudged her this triumph.

End Notes

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