

COL. BRANDON

comfort — no, not comfort, but I may be able to relate some history about Mr. Willoughby which may bring some ... clarity.

ELINOR. Please go on.

COL. BRANDON. You may find me a very awkward narrator.

ELINOR. Please.

COL. BRANDON. In my youth, I knew a lady who ... was very like your sister Marianne, both in person and in temperament. I loved her, and she loved me in return — but Eliza had no fortune, and I was a young man with no independence and no occupation. I was under my father's power. *(Beat.)* He forbade the match, of course. A marriage of that kind was impossible, he said, unthinkable — and though I protested violently, I am ashamed to say that he won his point at the last. Threatened with disinheritance and disownment, I faltered. And Eliza was sent away. *(Pause.)* At seventeen, I was also shipped off to my regiment in the East Indies, and there lost contact with Eliza entirely. A man came along, and treated her kindly for a time ... and then another, and then another. I returned to England a grown man, independent — and determined to find her. By the time I did, she was dying in the poorhouse, her infant by her side. You may have heard some rumors about my ward, Miss Jane Williams. She is Eliza's daughter, whom I swore to look after as my own. That was fifteen years ago. Last February, Jane suddenly disappeared from her boarding school; for months, I could not find her. Finally, I received a letter from her — on that evening I left Barton so suddenly. In it, she did not name the man who had seduced her — his luck, for I would have done him violence at the table, even as he basked in your sister's smiles.

ELINOR. Mr. Willoughby.

COL. BRANDON. He left Jane in a situation of the utmost distress, with no home, no help, no friends, ignorant of his whereabouts. She is fifteen. And now she is with child.

ELINOR. This is beyond everything!

COL. BRANDON. When I came to you last week, I thought that all was settled between your sister and Mr. Willoughby. I did not know how I could stop the marriage without heaping scandal upon both her and my poor Jane.

ELINOR. Who knows what his designs on Marianne were!

COL. BRANDON. I promise you, Miss Dashwood, if I did not from my heart believe that this might eventually lessen Miss Marianne's regrets, I would never have burdened you with such troubling