

# MANSFIELD PARK

by Jane Austen



## THE AUTHOR

Jane Austen (1775-1817) was the seventh child and second daughter of an Anglican rector in a country parish in Hampshire, England. She had a happy childhood. She read widely, though she had little formal schooling, and she and her siblings delighted in writing and performing plays at home. At the age of twelve, she began to write parodies of popular literary works and set her hand to her first serious writing project when she was nineteen. That project was an epistolary novel called *Lady Susan* which, while not a work of genius, was good enough to encourage her to keep writing.

Austen's novels evolved through years of writing and rewriting. In 1795, she began a novel called *Elinor and Marianne* that was finally published in 1810 as *Sense and Sensibility*. She started writing *First Impressions* in 1796; it was initially rejected for publication, but later saw print in 1812 as *Pride and Prejudice*. She began work in 1799 on a novel called *Susan* (not to be confused with her initial effort), which was published posthumously in 1818 as *Northanger Abbey*. She wrote three other novels as well - *Mansfield Park* (1813), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (published posthumously in 1818).

Her personal life was a happy but quiet one, consisting largely of her writing along with the kind of country amusements - balls, parties, and teas - described in her novels. The family struggled financially between the death of her father in 1805 and the publication of her first novel in 1810. She never married, though in her late twenties she received a proposal from a local aristocrat named Harris Bigg-Wither. She accepted, but changed her mind the next morning. She always maintained a close relationship with her older sister Cassandra, though we know little of her private life, because not only did she guard her privacy very closely, but her family either censored or destroyed almost all of her correspondence after her death.

Jane Austen died in 1817 of what is now believed to have been Addison's disease. She knew she was dying and raced against time and declining strength to finish *Persuasion*, the novel containing the character considered to be most like Jane herself - the plain but witty Anne Elliot. She also began work on a novel called *Sanditon*, which she never finished. Her brother Henry arranged for the publication of her last two completed novels after her death. Only then did people become aware of the author of these popular works of literature - all the novels published during her lifetime had been published anonymously.

*Mansfield Park* (1814) is generally considered the most serious of Jane Austen's novels. Though it does contain comic figures like the buffoonish James Rushworth and the obnoxious Mrs. Norris, the novel displays nothing of the light-hearted atmosphere of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, and *Pride and Prejudice*. Like other Austen novels, it deals with the British class system and social mobility, contrasts the virtues of country life with the evil influences of the city, values sexual purity, and incorporates a clergyman as a major character. *Mansfield Park* differs from other Austen works, however, in the direct way in which it deals with political issues, particularly those related to colonialism and slavery (she showed signs of addressing these matters even more explicitly in *Sanditon*, but died before she was able to finish it).

## **PLOT SUMMARY**

Chapter 1 - The author begins by introducing the reader to the three Ward sisters, each of whom thirty or so years ago contracted marriages - Maria to Sir Thomas Bertram, the wealthy owner of Mansfield Park, the middle sister to Rev. Norris, who was given a living by Sir Thomas, and Frances, the youngest, to Mr. Price, a penniless Marine Lieutenant. In choosing such an unsuitable spouse, Fanny cut herself off from her sisters, who had nothing to do with her for many years. Eleven years later, as Frances was pregnant with her ninth child and faced with a husband who was no longer on active duty but regularly turned to the bottle, she sought to repair relations with her family, writing to Lady Bertram for assistance. She and Mrs. Norris send money and clothing, but soon Mrs. Norris suggests that they ought to do something more - relieve Fanny of the burden of one of her children, the eldest daughter, who is then ten years old. Sir Thomas is reluctant to take on such a large responsibility, but Mrs. Norris convinces him that it is not only the right thing to do, but also could be managed without much trouble or expense. Sir Thomas expects the child to stay at the parsonage, but Mrs. Norris insists that, with her husband's poor health, she could not possibly care for a little girl. Lady Bertram thus agrees to take the child in, though all involved are desirous of making a clear distinction between young Miss Price and the Bertram offspring.

Chapter 2 - Young Fanny, a plain, shy girl, arrives safely and is well received by her relations, though she did not want to come and misses her home terribly. She spends most of her first day in tears. Fanny's female cousins, Julia and Maria, aged twelve and thirteen respectively, look down on her as a poor relation. Only her sixteen-year-old cousin Edmund is kind to her. One day he finds her crying and draws her out to speak of her family. She especially misses her older brother William, and Edmund supplies her with paper so she can write to him. Edmund's efforts to reach out to her make her more comfortable, and from that day onward she begins to fit in better. Julia and Maria, however, consider her stupid because she has not had the benefits of the education they have received. As the children grow, Tom proves to be lazy and wasteful while Edmund is a young man of good character; his father intends him for the life of a clergyman. The girls, he hopes, will make good marriages. He also takes care to assist Fanny's mother and her siblings, though during the years in which she comes to maturity she is only able to see William on one brief occasion, for a week before he took to the sea. In all this time, Edmund unfailingly takes care of her, supervising her education and becoming her one true friend.

Chapter 3 - When Fanny is fifteen, her uncle, Mr. Norris, becomes ill and dies. Sir Thomas, because of the extent of Tom's debts, does not give the living to Edmund, as he had planned, but brings in one Dr. Grant and his wife to fill the post. At this point Lady Bertram determines that Fanny will

move in with her Aunt Norris. Fanny hates the idea, but Edmund convinces her that it is for the best. The issue becomes moot, however, when Mrs. Norris flatly refuses to take Fanny in. She also becomes highly critical of the new occupants of the parsonage. Fanny, however, is delighted at the reprieve. A year later, Sir Thomas decides to visit his failing Antigua plantation, taking Tom with him in the hopes of breaking him of his prodigal habits.

Chapter 4 - Sir Thomas and Tom arrive safely in Antigua, much to the disappointment of Mrs. Norris, who had been working herself up to a tragic emotional outburst at the expected reception of bad news. Otherwise, they are not really missed, as Edmund steps in very efficiently as the man of the house. Mrs. Norris takes on the task of introducing her nieces to society. Julia and Maria are lovely but somewhat vacuous, and the constant compliments of their aunt tend to make them vain. Fanny was never invited to the balls, but served as a companion to her aunt, hearing only of social events secondhand. When her old grey pony dies, she is deprived of one of her few pleasures in life, but no one thinks to do anything about it. Once Edmund finds out, however, he insists on buying her a real horse to ride. He exchanges one of his own for a suitable mare so that his family will not suffer needless expense. Sir Thomas stays in Antigua longer than he anticipated, but sends Tom home. Mrs. Norris, meanwhile, occupies herself with the task of marrying off Maria to the richest possible eligible bachelor. Young Mr. Rushworth, a dull but wealthy local landowner, soon becomes the target of her endeavors. The two soon become engaged, to the delight of everyone in both families except Edmund, who considers Rushworth uncommonly stupid. Sir Thomas insists, however, that the wedding not occur until his return from the West Indies. Meanwhile, new people move into the neighborhood - Henry and Mary Crawford, the wealthy and worldly brother and sister of Mrs. Grant. Mary is beautiful as well as rich, and her sister quickly determines to marry her off to Tom Bertram while matching Henry with Julia. Mary is open to romance with Tom, but warns her sister that Henry is averse to commitments of any kind, as many young women (and their mothers) who have pursued him have found to their cost.

Chapter 5 - Henry and Mary hit it off immediately with the Bertram siblings. After a visit with the Bertrams, Mrs. Grant talks to both of them about the benefits of marriage, but both insist that they have no interest in committing themselves; they simply desire to be liked by those around them. Henry quickly fixes his attention on Julia while Mary focuses on Tom, soon reconsidering her dislike for the marital state. Fanny remains a puzzle to Mary, leading to a lengthy discussion about whether or not she is yet out in society.

Chapter 6 - Tom leaves for an extended trip to a horse race and soon Mr. Rushworth pays a visit. He can talk of nothing else but his plans to renovate his estate. When Edmund enters the conversation, Mary is impressed by his good breeding. She then turns the conversation to the difficulty she has encountered in bringing her harp to the parsonage. Henry then returns the conversation to estate improvements and mentions that he has had some experience with his own property. Rushworth solicits his opinion, and Mrs. Grant suggests that a party travel to the Rushworth estate, including her, Maria and Julia, Edmund, and Henry and Mary. Fanny is to be left at home, which only Edmund seems to notice.

Chapter 7 - On the day following the dinner, Edmund asks Fanny her opinion of Mary Crawford. She considers her lively and pretty, but both Fanny and Edmund noticed that she has a tendency to speak ill of her relations, including her brother and the uncle who supported them. Edmund,

however, is inclined to dismiss such minor peccadilloes, especially when the harp arrives and Mary proves to be an excellent musician. He soon finds himself falling in love with her, and she begins to develop a liking for him, though he lacks the advantages of his brother, the heir. Fanny, meanwhile, wonders that Edmund could be so blind to Mary's obvious faults, which continue to manifest themselves every time she is with them. When Mary expresses the desire to learn to ride, Edmund offers her the use of the horse that he had previously made available to Fanny, promising that Fanny would not be inconvenienced in any way. On the second day, however, Mary extends her ride so long that Fanny goes to look for them and sees Edmund paying special attention to his riding companion. When they return, Mary apologizes for her lack of consideration. Edmund insists that Mary should only have the mare in the future when Fanny did not want it, and the next day, all the young people except Fanny enjoy a ride to Mansfield Common. Similar trips occur on the next three days, with Fanny always being omitted. On the fourth day, Edmund and Julia are invited to the parsonage, but Maria is left out, which offends her greatly. When they return, Maria is in a foul mood and Fanny is sitting by herself, nursing a headache. Edmund discovers that his mother and Mrs. Norris have been working the poor girl to death in the heat with little concern for her physical well-being. He recognizes that he is to blame for ignoring her and determines to do better in the future.

Chapter 8 - Soon plans move forward for the visit to the Rushworth estate at Sotherton. Only Lady Bertram declines to make the trip, and of course Fanny must stay back to keep her company. While the women argue over the most desirable travel arrangements, Edmund discovers their plans and objects to the idea of omitting Fanny; in fact, he offers to stay at home with his mother so she can go. Mrs. Norris in particular strongly objects to the change in plans, but Edmund refuses to yield. When Fanny hears that she is to be included, she is grateful to Edmund but knows that she will not enjoy the trip very much if he is not there. Later Mrs. Grant offers to stay back with Lady Bertram so Edmund can go. When the appointed day arrives, they drive to Sotherton in beautiful weather, Fanny marveling at all she sees around her.

Chapter 9 - After luncheon, Mrs. Rushworth gives them a tour of the house. Fanny is disappointed with the chapel, which has fallen into disuse. She speaks of the value of daily family devotions, but Mary ridicules the idea as a waste of time. Edmund quickly defends Fanny's view. The company begins to joke about the impending marriage of Rushworth and Maria, teasing them that they could get married right then if Edmund were only ordained. Mary, not knowing that Edmund intended to take orders, is embarrassed at her earlier mockery. They then begin to explore the grounds. As they walk, Mary questions Edmund's desire to be a clergyman. He considers it a valuable contribution to society, but she thinks it worthless. Fanny, who is walking with them, soon tires and sits down on a bench while Edmund and Mary continue to stroll through the woods.

Chapter 10 - Fanny's solitary musings are interrupted by Maria Bertram, Rushworth, and Henry Crawford, who are still discussing improvements to the Rushworth estate. They express a desire to go into the park to get a better view of the house, but the gate is locked. While Rushworth returns to the house to fetch it, Henry and Maria slip around the gate, soon followed by Julia. When Rushworth returns, he is offended that they have not waited for him, but Fanny convinces him to follow them anyway; by this time Fanny has come to the conclusion that Rushworth and Henry have little regard for one another. Fanny finally gets tired of waiting for Edmund and Mary, who an hour ago had promised to return in a few minutes. She goes in search of them and finds them happily in

conversation under a tree in the park, at which point they decide to return to the house. They return home after dinner, with Mrs. Norris carrying with her all sorts of things she has managed to acquire from the members of the estate staff.

Chapter 11 - The Bertrams soon receive a letter from Sir Thomas indicating that he intends to return three months hence, in November. Maria is less than pleased, for she is no longer looking forward to marrying Rushworth as she once had been. For Edmund, his father's return meant that he could take orders as he had long been intending. Mary Crawford cannot believe that Edmund desires to become a clergyman out of honest motives. She either thinks the members of the clergy mercenary or else devoted to lives of ease. She even has the effrontery to use Dr. Grant, her host, as an example to support her assessment. Edmund and Fanny defend the clergy as a class while admitting that some, like Dr. Grant, are less than worthy representatives. After the others leave to sing around the pianoforte, Edmund and Fanny look at the stars for a few moments, but he is soon drawn to Mary's side, his infatuation preventing him from seeing her all-too-obvious faults.

Chapter 12 - Young Tom returns to Mansfield Park in September, but Mary Crawford soon realizes that her initial interest in the heir to the estate has altogether diminished in the light of the superior qualities of the younger son. At the same time Henry returns to his estate for a few weeks, leaving Maria and Julia, who clearly do not see that they are being trifled with, bored and listless. Fanny sees right through him, but is unwilling to share her feelings more than obliquely with Edmund, who refuses to accept her assessment. Later, at Fanny's first ball, where she is largely ignored, she overhears a conversation between Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Rushworth about the young people. Both are convinced that Rushworth and Maria will soon marry, and Mrs. Norris believes that Henry and Julia will be next. Finally Tom rescues Fanny by asking her to dance, but only so he can avoid being drawn into a game of whist by Mrs. Norris.

Chapter 13 - The arrival of John Yates, a friend of Tom's from Weymouth, brings new excitement to the gathering. He is interested in theatricals and is very disappointed that his last production had to be canceled because of the death of a family member. He speaks of nothing but the theater and finds ready auditors among his new companions. Tom soon suggests that Yates organize a theatrical production at Mansfield Park. The others respond enthusiastically and soon are discussing what kind of play to perform and what sort of scenery to construct. Only Edmund thinks the whole idea a waste of time. Edmund, fearing that his father would disapprove, tries to talk Tom out of it, but with no success. Fanny tries to encourage him, but he sees little hope of countering the plan. When Edmund hears that Mary Crawford is interested in getting involved, he begins to soften his stance.

Chapter 14 - Unsurprisingly, the actual task of pulling the play together proves more difficult than first imagined. They have trouble choosing a script that suits everyone, and the scenery turns out to be more expensive than initially thought. Most of the troubles stem from the selfishness of all involved, which Fanny finds amusing and which makes Edmund wish fervently that no play may ever be chosen. They finally decide on a play called *Lovers' Vows*, which had been the play that was canceled at Yates' previous venue. They then proceed to argue about who will take what parts, especially since the cast contains two major female characters coveted by Maria, Julia, and Mary. When Julia fails to secure the lead, she storms out of the room, insisting that she will play no part at all. When the dust settles, Fanny picks up the script and begins reading it. She is shocked by the

behavior and language of the two main female characters and can't imagine such a play being performed in a proper aristocratic home.

Chapter 15 - When Edmund arrives home, he is informed that the play has been chosen and almost completely cast, but is appalled by the evident unsuitability of their selection. He tries to convince Maria to back out of the production, but she refuses. They still need someone for the male lead and suggest that Edmund take the part, in which he has no interest, then turn their attention to Fanny, badgering her to undertake a minor character in the production - an idea that terrifies her. When Mrs. Norris steps in and attempts to bully her by alluding to her dependent position in the household, Mary intervenes and rescues her by changing the subject. Tom finally suggests that one of their neighbors be invited to play the male lead, to which no one voices any objection. During all of this, Edmund is silently fuming.

Chapter 16 - Fanny goes to bed that night still in a state of shock over the way she was treated by Tom, Maria, and Mrs. Norris. The next morning she leaves her small attic bedroom for the more spacious schoolroom, now in use by no one but her. As she ponders the situation, she almost becomes convinced that she should yield to her cousins' desires, simply out of gratitude for past kindnesses. Then Edmund joins her and proposes that he take the male lead, however reluctantly, in order to keep Tom from searching the neighborhood for a replacement; by doing so he hopes to limit the scope of the production and keep it in the family. Fanny says little, but greatly fears that he has chosen this route in order to please Mary Crawford.

Chapter 17 - Tom and Maria are delighted with Edmund's capitulation, which they consider a victory on their part; he can no longer claim the moral high ground that he so often assumes. Only Fanny and Julia are unhappy; the former because she not only dislikes the whole idea of the play but also believes that Edmund has decided unwisely, and the latter, not only because she has excluded herself from the play, but also because both she and Maria have become infatuated with Henry Crawford and Maria is clearly winning the competition.

Chapter 18 - Preparations for the play are not all happy experiences. Edmund is upset at the expenses incurred by the production as well as by the fact that Tom is inviting all and sundry to attend the show. Tom is impatient with the slow progress of preparations, while Yates is frustrated with the poor quality of the acting. Fanny, the patient ear, is forced to listen to all their complaints. She gradually finds herself being drawn in, providing backstage help to whoever needs it. The first three acts are to be practiced the following evening, and Fanny dreads the scene in Act III where Edmund and Mary portray young lovers. That afternoon Mary comes to the schoolroom and asks Fanny to help her practice her lines for the love scene. Soon after they begin, Edmund enters with the same intention. Fanny is reduced to the role of prompter. That evening, everyone appears anxious for the rehearsal to begin, but Mrs. Grant is unable to come because her husband is indisposed. Everyone begs Fanny to fill in for her, and she finally reluctantly agrees. Just as the rehearsal begins, however, Julia bursts into the room to announce that their father has arrived from his long Caribbean voyage.

Chapter 19 - All except Yates, the Crawfords, and Rushworth are horrified, imagining what Sir Thomas's reaction will be. The members of the family hurry off to face the music, leaving Fanny alone with the Crawfords and Yates. The Crawfords soon leave for the parsonage while Fanny steels

herself to face her uncle. Fanny is astonished when Sir Thomas greets her with the most profound kindness, compliments her appearance and asks about her family. She quickly discerns that the other family members have not yet told him about the play. After he completes a long narrative of his travels, Lady Bertram innocently mentions that the young people have been preparing a play. Tom tries to stall him, promising that he will hear all about the trifle tomorrow, but he soon begins to wander through the rest of the house and finds himself in the theater, confronted face to face with Yates, who is rehearsing his lines. Yates, completely clueless, launches into a long explanation of the origins of the production and its progress, then invites Sir Thomas to attend the following day's rehearsal. Sir Thomas, maintaining his composure throughout, insists in no uncertain terms that there will not be any more rehearsals.

Chapter 20 - The next morning Edmund goes to see his father and does his best to explain the entire situation. He clarifies his own role in the fiasco, refuses to direct blame toward any individual, and stoutly defend Fanny as the only one who had shown sound judgment throughout. Rather than investigating further, Sir Thomas is satisfied to clear every vestige of the production from the house. He does, however, indicate to Mrs. Norris that he certainly expected better of her than to allow such a thing to go on. She quickly changes the subject, claiming entire credit for arranging the connection between Maria and Rushworth. Maria, however, still hopes that Henry Crawford will declare himself and is distraught to find that he intends to leave the following day. Yates, disappointed in his thespian efforts once more, follows him a day later.

Chapter 21 - With Sir Thomas now firmly in charge of the household, evenings are quiet once again, lacking the gaiety that was commonplace when the Grants and Crawfords were regular visitors. Fanny quickly becomes her uncle's favorite, and Edmund embarrasses her by telling her that she has grown into quite an attractive young woman. He goes on to speak of Mary Crawford's accomplishments and insights and insists that, should his father get to know her, he would surely appreciate her as well. Needless to say, this is not exactly the direction of conversation that is calculated to please Fanny. Edmund also suspects that as his father becomes further acquainted with Rushworth, he will not only perceive him to be dull and inferior, but also recognize that Maria doesn't love him. He offers to break off the engagement, but Maria refuses, insisting that she anticipates a happy life with her intended; she is determined not to allow Henry Crawford to ruin her life. Her attitude brooks no delay, and within a few weeks they are married. Julia joins them on their honeymoon, and Fanny wanders around Mansfield Park aimlessly, missing her cousins more than they would ever miss her.

Chapter 22 - With Maria and Julia away, Fanny plays a more central role, not only at Mansfield, but also at the Parsonage, where the Grants and Mary Crawford often seek her company. Her first visit occurs when she is caught in a rainstorm and seeks shelter in the Parsonage. There she is given dry clothes and has the opportunity for the first time to hear Mary play the harp, which she does exceptionally well. After that, she visits two or three times a week. One day Edmund joins them in their walk and they begin talking of their prospects. Mary insists that she intends to be rich, while Edmund, having few prospects either by inheritance or vocation, is satisfied to be honest and poor. At the end of the day, Edmund walks Fanny home after the two have accepted an invitation to dine with the Grants the following day.

Chapter 23 - Lady Bertram is astonished that the Grants would invite Fanny to dinner and immediately insists that she cannot do without her. Edmund, pointing out that Sir Thomas will be at home all evening, is adamant that Fanny should accept the invitation. When Sir Thomas concurs, Lady Bertram has nothing more to say on the matter. Mrs. Norris typically does everything she can to throw cold water on Fanny's big day by assuring her that the invitation was in no way intended as a compliment to her. She furthermore warns her to remember her place at all times and not to put herself forward in company so clearly above her station in life. When Fanny and Edmund arrive, they are surprised to find that Henry Crawford has joined the party. Everyone is glad to see him except Fanny, who still resents his callous treatment of Maria in seeking to play with her feelings and undermine her relationship with her intended husband. Conversation then turns to Edmund's intention to take orders in the near future. This pleases everyone but Mary, who is certain that he knows that she would never stoop to such a lowly position in life and is therefore convinced that Edmund has no serious interest in her.

Chapter 24 - Henry decides to spend a fortnight at the Parsonage. The next morning, he confides in his sister that he intends to use the time making Fanny fall in love with him, playing with her emotions as he had done with the Bertram sisters. His attentions to her soften her somewhat, but her greatest increase in happiness comes from the news that her brother William has returned from the sea and has arrived in England. The days that follow are the happiest of Fanny's young life, and she and her brother take long walks on the estate and he tells her of his adventures and shares news from the family. Henry Crawford, meanwhile, sees in Fanny a liveliness and spirit of which he had previously been unaware and decides to extend his visit indefinitely in order to pursue his flirtation. He is in a sense jealous of William's accomplishments in contrast to his own life as a wastrel, but the feeling soon passes.

Chapter 25 - As time passes, even Sir Thomas notices that Henry Crawford shows a decided preference for Fanny. One night all are invited to the Parsonage for dinner. As they play cards afterward, Henry mentions that the day before he passed by Thornton Lacey, the village where Edmund's living is to be. He launches into a long description of all the changes necessary in order to make the place livable, but Edmund insists that no such great expense is needed to satisfy his simple needs. Henry nonetheless perseveres with his plans for the property. He suggests that he occupy the house for half the year, but Edmund will hear none of it; he intends to move in as soon as possible, though he welcomes Henry as an occasional guest. Henry continues to flirt with Fanny, speaking of her skill as a dancer though he has only seen her dance once, until the time arrives for the guests to go home.

Chapter 26 - Sir Thomas, reflecting on the conversation of the previous night, determines to organize a ball at Mansfield Park. Mrs. Norris is prepared to take over all the arrangements and is taken aback when Sir Thomas declares that he already has everything planned and that her help is not needed. Fanny immediately begins to worry about what she will wear, realizing that she has none of the finery of the other young ladies who will be in attendance. Edmund's mind is occupied with other matters. His ordination is to take place shortly after the ball, and he is debating whether or not to propose marriage to Mary Crawford. He knows that her tastes are different from his, but wonders whether she is willing to sacrifice what she once considered so important for the life he is able to offer her. On the day before the ball, Fanny decides to consult Mrs. Grant and Mary about what she ought to wear. Mary helps her choose a dress and offers to give her a necklace to wear with a cross

from Sicily given her by William. Fanny is reluctant to accept such a gift, but Mary finally convinces her. Fanny is then shocked when Mary tells her that the necklace had been provided by Henry for that very purpose; she wants to return it immediately, but can think of no way to do so graciously. She is becoming increasingly convinced that Henry is playing with her emotions as he had earlier done with Maria and Julia.

Chapter 27 - When Fanny returns home, she is startled to find Edmund in her room writing a note to her. The note explains that he has procured for her a chain that she can wear with William's cross. Fanny is grateful, finding it much more to her taste than the one given her by Mary, but now faces a dilemma. She shares her problem with Edmund, hoping for his consent to return the necklace to Mary. Edmund disappoints her, however, and insists that she should wear the necklace rather than the chain in order to avoid offending Mary by seeming to reject her generosity. By the time the conversation is over, Fanny is convinced, both that Edmund intends to marry Mary and that she does not deserve him. She then picks up Edmund's unfinished letter, cherishing every line. She is by this time not looking forward to the ball at all, but soon she encounters Edmund again. He confides that he has asked Mary for the first two dances, but that she has told him that she will never dance with him again once the ball is over. He now understands that he can never commit himself to one who is so unsuitable. Fanny now looks forward to the ball, especially when she discovers that the necklace is too large to fit through the ring of the cross. She therefore must wear both the chain and the necklace, which suits her perfectly.

Chapter 28 - When the evening of the ball arrives, Fanny's appearance is noted by all who see her; Edmund in particular makes a point of asking her to save two dances for him. As the guests arrive, Fanny deals with the awkwardness of meeting and making small talk with new people. Then the Grants and Crawfords come in, and Henry immediately asks Fanny to join him for the first two dances. She is glad to have a partner, but something about his attitude troubles her. Fanny is horrified when Sir Thomas informs her that she and Henry are to be the lead couple in the first dance. The only real pleasure Fanny finds in the evening is during her dances with Edmund. By three o'clock she is exhausted, though the ball still has two hours to go. She wants to get up to see William off the next morning, so she excuses herself and goes to bed. By this time, however, Sir Thomas is convinced that Henry, who has been hanging around Fanny most of the evening, is in love with her.

Chapter 29 - William leaves early the next morning and Fanny mourns his departure, uncertain when she will see him again. Soon after, Edmund departs for a week-long visit with some friends and Fanny has no one to talk to. She soon begins to enjoy the peace and quiet, but Mary becomes increasingly annoyed at Edmund's absence, knowing that she is soon to leave Mansfield and realizing that she has foolishly alienated him by her attitude toward the clergy. She decides to visit Fanny to try to find out anything she can about Edmund's attitude, and as soon as possible she begins to pump her about the contents of Edmund's letter. She is particularly concerned that Edmund might decide to marry one of his friend's three single sisters, but Fanny neither knows nor cares anything about the matter.

Chapter 30 - Soon Henry returns from London and appears to be hiding something. Mary soon discovers what he is concealing when he announces that he intends to marry Fanny; his flirtation has

taken an unexpected turn. Mary is pleased despite the fact that her brother is clearly marrying beneath his social status. Neither one can at this point see any serious barriers to the union.

Chapter 31 - The next morning, Henry catches Fanny alone and gives her letters announcing that her brother William has been promoted to the rank of lieutenant, largely through the instrumentality of Henry's uncle, the Admiral. Henry admits that he arranged the whole thing, then tells Fanny the reason - that he loves her and wants her to be his wife. She refuses to listen to him and rushes from the room, convinced that he is engaged in one of his usual flirtations. After he leaves, Fanny shares the good news about William with Sir Thomas, but is appalled to find that Henry is returning for dinner that evening. He brings with him a letter from Mary, congratulating her on the incipient union and giving her full approval. Fanny finds it impossible to believe that either one is serious, and struggles to get through the dinner, looking at no one, saying nothing, and eating very little. Before he leaves, Henry asks her to write a note in answer to his sister, and Fanny awkwardly assures her that she knows her brother cannot be serious and she hopes to have no further such addresses in the future.

Chapter 32 - When Fanny wakes up the next morning, she sees Henry Crawford coming up the walk toward the house. She hopes the visit has nothing to do with her, but soon Sir Thomas comes up to her room. He tells her that Henry has asked for her hand in marriage and that he has given his consent; in fact, Henry is waiting downstairs to formalize the arrangement. Fanny is completely flustered and tells her uncle that she has already refused the proposal and has no intention of changing her mind. Sir Thomas reviews all of Henry's fine qualities and notes that he has been paying special attention to Fanny for some time now. She insists that those attentions have always been unwelcome. When he asks if her affections are directed elsewhere, she is too embarrassed to mention her hopes regarding Edmund. She longs to tell Sir Thomas about her observations of Henry's character, but cannot do so without at the same time raising questions about Maria and Julia. Sir Thomas at this point vents his wrath, accusing Fanny of selfishness and ingratitude. Fanny bursts into tears, and her uncle, rather than forcing her to face Henry, leaves her to her misery. Soon Henry leaves, but with the intention of returning in the near future to speak with Fanny face to face. Fanny feels completely isolated, wishing that Edmund were home; at least Sir Thomas promises to keep the matter secret from the rest of the household. The next day she is summoned to Sir Thomas' room, where she finds herself alone with Henry Crawford.

Chapter 33 - The conversation is frustrating simply because Henry refuses to take no for an answer. He cannot imagine that Fanny does not love him and assumes that she simply does not know her own mind. He concludes that she is holding back in order to force him to persevere in his declarations of love. No matter how plainly she expresses her refusal, he cannot believe she is serious; the idea that any woman could reject his overtures is simply beyond the realm of his comprehension. By the time he leaves, she is furious at his self-centeredness and convinced more than ever that he is not a man of good character. When Sir Thomas hears from Henry the next day, he is gratified to find that the young man intends to persevere in his overtures. He promises, however, that he will no longer raise the subject with Fanny. He warns her, however, that Henry does not share his desire for privacy and will undoubtedly share the matter with Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris, both of whom, for very different reasons, are mightily displeased.

Chapter 34 - When Edmund returns, he is surprised to find the Crawfords still in the neighborhood; he had hoped to avoid further contact with Mary. He soon learns of William's promotion and all the news regarding Fanny. To her great disappointment, Edmund takes his father's side and assures her that, in time, she will come to appreciate the value of what Henry had offered her. At dinner, Edmund sees clearly that Fanny does not return Henry's ardor. Later Henry and Edmund interrupt Fanny while she is reading to Lady Bertram. Henry picks up a volume of Shakespeare and reads it beautifully; Fanny is entranced. Henry and Edmund then speak of the extent to which young men are no longer taught to read aloud with expression, either in the theater or in the pulpit. Henry expresses his desire to preach, but only to an educated London audience that can appreciate his talents, and then only a few times a year. Fanny shakes her head at this clear demonstration of his lack of constancy, and Henry badgers her to reveal what she meant by the gesture. He remains oblivious, however, insisting that he will persevere in his efforts to earn her affection.

Chapter 35 - With the Crawfords planning to leave Mansfield soon, Edmund decides to breach the issue with Fanny, hoping to persuade her to accept Henry's offer. As they walk together in the garden, he assures her that he would never pressure her to agree to a marriage without love, which relieves her greatly. He hopes, however, that in time she will grow to love Henry, but Fanny insists that she can never love such a man. Unwilling to tell him the real reasons for her dislike, she instead dwells on the differences in their interests and inclinations. He argues that differences can sometimes be advantageous and points to areas where their interests are similar. As the conversation proceeds, Fanny detects an undertone of justification for Edmund's renewed interest in Mary Crawford. She finally opens up and tells Edmund the real reason for her dislike of Henry - his treatment of Rushworth and his flirtations with Maria and Julia while Sir Thomas was away. Edmund minimizes the follies of those days and insists that Henry is now displaying his true colors. Furthermore, Mary is fully supportive of the marriage.

Chapter 36 - Edmund reports the conversation to his father and advises that Fanny be badgered no further; she simply needs time to get used to the idea and everyone should allow Henry to work his magic on her. Fanny, meanwhile, dreaded the coming visit of Mary Crawford. When Mary arrives, she reminisces about the preparations for the play, which she calls the happiest days of her life, then talks about how much she will miss Fanny and the rest of the family when she and her brother leave for London. She then suggests that Fanny visit them in London so she can see the power of her conquest, observing the multitude of young women who have tried to win Henry's heart but have failed to do so. Mary cannot resist reminding Fanny of the role played by Henry in securing William's promotion. Before they part the next morning, Mary asks Fanny to write to her, but uppermost in Fanny's mind is the sincere wish that she should never see Henry Crawford again until he was the husband of some other woman.

Chapter 37 - After the departure of the Crawfords, Sir Thomas hopes that the lack of personal attention will cause Fanny to miss them - that absence will make the heart grow fonder. Neither he nor Edmund can discern any such emotions, however. As far as Fanny is concerned, she misses neither brother nor sister and heartily wishes that both would stay as far from Mansfield as possible; she is particularly concerned that Edmund might renew his attentions to Mary. Fanny is delighted when William is given leave to visit Mansfield, but Sir Thomas sees here another opportunity to forward his schemes. He intends to propose that Fanny accompany William back to Portsmouth to visit her family, hoping that the miserable conditions in which they live will impress on Fanny even

more strongly the privilege that could be hers in the home of Henry Crawford. Arrangements are soon made for the journey, which pleases everyone involved except for Lady Bertram, who will not have Fanny to attend to her every need. Before Fanny leaves, however, Edmund confides in her that he intends to propose to Mary Crawford on his next trip to London.

Chapter 38 - The trip goes smoothly and they are welcomed with open arms by Fanny's mother, though her father and the other children largely ignore her, and William quickly discovers that his ship is ready to sail so that he must leave them sooner than anticipated. Fanny finds that the house is in total chaos. Her mother is incapable of managing all the children, her father is drunk most of the time, and the two servant girls are slovenly and lazy. The contrast with Mansfield is palpable. William is the only one in the house with whom Fanny is able to relate.

Chapter 39 - Within a week, Fanny finds herself miserable in her home. William has left on his voyage and no one else is in the least a suitable companion. The constant noise and disorder made her long for the life of Mansfield.

Chapter 40 - Her unhappiness is such that she is actually glad to receive a letter from May Crawford. It contains news of Maria and Julia and other gossip. Henry is away on business and Edmund is occupied with parish duties, so she sees little of either. Fanny finds no one among her parents' acquaintances in Portsmouth with whom she has anything in common, but she does begin to develop some connection with her sister Susan, who is rough and untutored, but who has a good heart. She soon undertakes to bestow on Susan the benefits of her own breeding and education, guiding her to the limited extent possible in such an environment. Meanwhile, she hears that Edmund has gone to London and every day expects word of his engagement to Mary Crawford.

Chapter 41 - Fanny has now been at Portsmouth for a month and is speculating about why she has heard nothing from Edmund when she is startled to receive a visit from Henry Crawford. After communicating news of their acquaintances, he asks Fanny and Susan to join him for a walk. As they walk they encounter Fanny's father, who for a change is on his best behavior and invites them to accompany him to the docks. When Fanny tires, Henry sits with her and tells her of ways in which he had been busy caring for the tenants on his estate, thus showing her a different side of him than she had previously seen. He then speaks to her of Mansfield - something of which she longs to hear. She is amazed at the improvement in Henry, but is relieved when he tells her that he is unable to join them for dinner; she cannot imagine the embarrassment of having him share a meal with her family.

Chapter 42 - The next day Henry appears again to join Fanny's family as they go to church. The members of the family look their best, and for a change Fanny is not ashamed of them. After church Henry takes a long walk along the ramparts with Fanny and Susan. He observes that Fanny's health has declined since her return to Portsmouth because of lack of exercise and suggests that the intended two-month stay at home could easily be shortened if necessary. He even offers to have Mary arrange transportation for her back to Mansfield, knowing that the denizens of the estate may easily forget about her out of concern for their own convenience. He intends to leave the next day, and Fanny is glad to see him go; she is pleased to be relieved of his renewed attentions, though he seems to be the closest thing to a friend she has found in Portsmouth.

Chapter 43 - A few days later, Fanny receives a letter from Mary assuring her that Henry thoroughly enjoyed his time in Portsmouth. She then shares her own news, confiding that Edmund has visited them on three occasions, but she has nothing more to say about their interaction. She also encourages Fanny to take advantage of Henry's offer to bring her back to Mansfield as soon as possible. The fact that Edmund had yet to make a proposal left Fanny in a state of useless speculation. Meanwhile she occupies herself with advancing Susan's education. She becomes increasingly convinced that, if possible, she should liberate her younger sister from the constraints of Portsmouth. If she could manage to return Henry's affection, would he be willing to have Susan join them on his estate?

Chapter 44 - After seven and a half weeks at Portsmouth, Fanny finally receives a letter from Edmund. He had spent three weeks in London and had been terribly disappointed in Mary's behavior. Among her London friends, she displayed all the character flaws he had earlier observed, clearly sharing their mercenary values, shallowness and vanity. He is nonetheless convinced that she is capable of improvement should she be separated from London society and still looks at her as a potential wife. He believes that, if she rejects him, it will be because of his lack of wealth rather than because of his profession. He then praises Henry Crawford and tells Fanny how much she is missed, both by himself and by those at Mansfield. He also tells her that Sir Thomas has no intention of bringing her back to Mansfield until after Easter. The letter frustrates her for several reasons - because of the delay in returning to Mansfield, but primarily because of Edmund's blindness in thinking that Mary's character will change upon removal from London. She is now convinced that he will marry her and wind up being miserable, and that she will be miserable until he finally ends the suspense once and for all. She soon receives a letter from Lady Bertram informing her that Tom is seriously ill as the result of a drinking bout. Edmund is going to be with him, and Sir Thomas hopes to bring him home as soon as he is well enough to travel. When he arrives at Mansfield, Lady Bertram is so shocked by his altered appearance that she desires Fanny to come and comfort her. Fanny feels the pain of her Mansfield family, though no one else at Portsmouth seems to care very much for their tribulations.

Chapter 45 - After a week at Mansfield, Tom's fever abates and his mother is convinced that he is on the road to recovery. Edmund, however, writes to inform Fanny that problems with his lungs are far more serious than the fever and he is still in grave danger. Fanny quickly realizes that Edmund is the only one in the house who is really capable of providing comfort to his brother; he thus delays any communication with Mary. Fanny, however, fears that Mary, for her own selfish reasons, would be pleased if Edmund were to become the only son and heir of his father's estate and title. Easter comes and goes with no indication of her return to Mansfield; Fanny has now been in Portsmouth for three months instead of the originally-planned two. She longs to go to Mansfield and be of service there and can't imagine why Maria and Julia have made no effort to travel from London to assist their family in this crisis. Furthermore, she has heard nothing from Mary Crawford for weeks. When she finally does receive a letter, Mary expresses her desire to know the state of affairs at Mansfield, but seems more concerned with the possibility of Edmund becoming the heir than she does with Tom's health. She reports that Henry still speaks of Fanny often and renews their offer to transport her to Mansfield any time she wishes. Fanny refuses the offer, but wishes that Sir Thomas would think of her and bring her back. Meanwhile, the letter confirms everything she has always believed about the Crawfords.

Chapter 46 - Within a week, Fanny receives a letter from Mary Crawford warning her about a scandalous rumor making the rounds. Maria Rushworth has disappeared, and the gossip maintains that she has run off with Henry Crawford. Mary insists that the rumor is false and that Fanny should give no credence to it. Fanny, while hoping that her extended family is not involved in anything scandalous, wishes that this means that Henry will finally drop his pursuit of her. Surprisingly, the gossip column of the newspaper confirms the rumor the next day; Maria has indeed run off with Henry. Fanny has little trouble believing, not only the truth of the matter, but also that Mary would be anxious to defend her brother and hush up the whole affair. Fanny is unable to comprehend such evil in a civilized society. Two days later she receives a letter from Edmund, not only informing her that Henry and Maria cannot be traced, but also that Julia has eloped with John Yates. Mansfield Park is in turmoil and Edmund begs Fanny to return home and bring Susan with her; he intends to travel to Portsmouth to get her the next morning. The thought of returning to Mansfield leaves Fanny in ecstasies, but she now has less than twenty-four hours to prepare herself and Susan for the move. Edmund is clearly suffering from the scandal, and during their trip has little to say, particularly because of the presence of Susan in the carriage. He does manage to communicate that his suffering includes the revelation of Mary's true character. By the end of the second day, they are joyfully received at Mansfield.

Chapter 47 - The denizens of Mansfield Park are miserable and helpless, each preoccupied with his or her own suffering. Mrs. Norris is embarrassed into silence because she was largely responsible for Maria marrying Rushworth. She wants to blame Fanny, reasoning that none of this would have happened had she accepted Crawford, and resents the addition of Susan to the household. Lady Bertram, on the other hand, is happy to receive both Fanny and her sister. Gradually the details of the shocking incidents become evident to Fanny as she is shown the letters from Sir Thomas, Rushworth, and his mother. After several days of silence, Edmund finally opens up to Fanny and shares his feelings. He met once with Mary and was stunned that she seemed more disturbed by Henry and Maria's lack of discretion than by their actions; she was sorry, not that they had been immoral, but that they had been foolish enough to have been caught. She too blamed Fanny for not accepting Henry and thus opening the door for his scandalous behavior. Furthermore, she argued that Henry and Maria must marry and that, if they did so, they would eventually be accepted in good society again. Edmund, his eyes opened to Mary's true character at last, ended their relationship. Fanny finally felt free to share with him her conviction that Mary had sought a renewed bond with Edmund because Tom's illness opened up the possibility of him becoming the heir. Edmund finds himself in a situation where Fanny's friendship is all he has left in his shattered world.

Chapter 48 - Fanny is now happy back at Mansfield Park in the loving acceptance of her family. True, they are mourning - even Edmund, though she is pleased to see him delivered from the clutches of Mary Crawford. Sir Thomas grieves over his responsibility in allowing the marriage to Rushworth for what he knew were unworthy motives, but is comforted by Tom's gradual recovery, greater sense of responsibility, and the fact that Julia and Yates prove to be acceptable members of the family. Edmund gradually recovers his spirits, largely through long afternoon conversations with Fanny. Sir Thomas comes to realize that he had failed as a parent, largely in ignoring his offspring and allowing Mrs. Norris freedom to flatter the girls. Rushworth divorces Maria, who hoped to marry Henry Crawford, but when she perceives that he has no desire in that direction, the two come to despise one another and eventually separate. Sir Thomas refuses to allow Maria to return home despite Mrs. Norris' pleas, but sets her up in an establishment far away from the neighborhood; Mrs.

Norris thereupon leaves Mansfield to attend to her favorite niece, where they become one another's suitable punishment. No one at Mansfield regrets the loss of Mrs. Norris. Dr. Grant is offered a post at Westminster, so he and his wife leave Mansfield and move to London, where Mary Crawford joins them, continuing to live with her sister after the death of Dr. Grant; this, too, is beneficial to the peace of the denizens of Mansfield. Mary regrets the loss of Edmund as much as Henry regrets the loss of Fanny. Eventually Edmund comes to realize that he must look at Fanny as far more than a friend. As he pursues her, she reveals to him that she has always loved him. When he proposes marriage, Sir Thomas readily gives his consent; his values have changed drastically since he first brought his impoverished ten-year-old niece into his home. Lady Bertram selfishly opposes the marriage because Fanny's departure to Edmund's parsonage at Thornton Lacey will deprive her of her longtime companion, but she is mollified by the willingness of Susan to fill her sister's place. With the departure of Dr. Grant for London, Edmund accepts the living at Mansfield and the family is brought together once again.

## **MAJOR CHARACTERS**

- Sir Thomas Bertram - The wealthy owner of Mansfield Park, he is a solemn and serious man. He and his wife take in young Fanny Price, their niece. He maintains considerable distance from his children and from Fanny, though he later comes to regret this and changes his ways.
- Lady Maria Bertram - Sir Thomas' wife, she is indolent and cares for little other than herself.
- Tom Bertram - Their older son, he is the heir apparent to the estate but is lazy and extravagant. His illness as a result of his devotion to drink almost costs the family their fortune.
- Edmund Bertram - Their younger son, he is kind to Fanny; he is of good character and is intended by his father for the clergy. He and Fanny ultimately fall in love and marry after he almost falls prey to the aggressive flirtations of the worldly Mary Crawford.
- Julia and Maria Bertram - Their daughters, two and three years older than Fanny respectively, they are silly and selfish. Maria marries James Rushworth, then elopes with Henry Crawford six months later, winding up alone and in disgrace, cared for only by the obnoxious Mrs. Norris. Julia elopes with John Yates, like her sister bringing shame on the family.
- Rev. Norris - A clergyman who owes his living to Sir Thomas, he dies when Fanny is fifteen.
- Mrs. Norris - Lady Bertram's self-centered sister, she is fond of ordering others around and thinking of ways they can spend their money. She encourages her sister to take young Fanny Price in, but refuses to lift a finger to assist her other than interfering in her education and upbringing as much as possible. She treats Fanny badly, always trying to keep her in her place.
- Mr. Price - A penniless Lieutenant of Marines who, after becoming unable to serve, turns to drink and dissipation.

- Frances Price - Lady Bertram's other sister, she is rejected by her family after her unwise marriage to a drunken sailor. She produces nine children; her eldest daughter, Fanny, is invited to live at Mansfield Park by her sisters.
- Fanny Price - The heroine of the story, she is invited to live with her aunt and uncle at the age of ten. A quiet girl, she from a young age is in love with her cousin Edmund, whom she eventually marries after resisting the advances of the playboy Henry Crawford.
- William Price - Fanny's brother, he spends years at sea experiencing many adventures. Both Sir Thomas and Henry Crawford contribute to his advancement in the navy.
- Susan Price - Fanny's younger sister who is taken under her wing and eventually accompanies her to Mansfield.
- Mr. and Mrs. Grant - The clergyman who takes the living vacated at the death of Mr. Norris and his wife.
- Henry Crawford - Mrs. Grant's wealthy brother, he is a restless soul who hates the idea of settling down. He romances women for the fun of it with no intention of establishing any serious relationships. He entices both Maria and Julia Bertram to fall in love with him, romances Fanny, and eventually runs away with Maria six months after her marriage to Rushworth, though the scandalous relationship never results in marriage.
- Mary Crawford - Mrs. Grant's wealthy and worldly sister, she seeks to draw Edmund into an unsuitable marriage, especially when she suspects that he will become the heir of Mansfield when Tom becomes seriously ill.
- James Rushworth - He is a wealthy but dull landowner who marries Maria Bertram.
- John Yates - A friend of Tom Bertram, he is obsessed with the theater and, like many of his ilk, thinks much of his own talents. He eventually elopes with Julia Bertram and they marry; the two are ultimately reconciled with the rest of the family.

## NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“There certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them.” (ch.1)

“You are thinking of your sons - but do not you know that of all things upon the earth *that* is the least likely to happen, brought up, as they would be, always together like brothers and sisters? It is morally impossible. I never knew an instance of it.” (Mrs. Norris, ch.1)

“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 to preserve in the minds of my *daughters* the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a *Miss Bertram*. I should wish to see them

very good friends, and would, on no account, authorize in my girls the smallest degree of arrogance towards their relation; but still they cannot be equals.” (Sir Thomas, ch.1)

“It is not very wonderful that with all their promising talents and early information, [Julia and Maria] should be entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility. In every thing but disposition, they were admirably taught.” (ch.2)

“She regarded her cousin as an example of every thing good and great, as possessing worth, which no one but herself could ever appreciate, and as entitled to such gratitude from her, as no feelings could be strong enough to pay. Her sentiments toward him were compounded of all that was respectful, grateful, confiding, and tender.” (ch.4)

“[Edmund] was not pleasant by any common rule, he talked no nonsense, he paid no compliments, his opinions were unbending, his attentions tranquil and simple.” (ch.7)

“Selfishness must always be forgiven you know, because there is no hope of a cure.” (Mary, ch.7)

“As the clergy are, or are not what they ought to be, so are the rest of the nation.” (Edmund, ch.9)

“A clergyman has nothing to do but to be slovenly and selfish - read the newspaper, watch the weather, and quarrel with his wife. His curate does all the work, and the business of his own life is to dine.” (Mary, ch.11)

“I speak what appears to me the general opinion, and where an opinion is general, it is usually correct.” (Mary, ch.11)

“Family squabbling is the greatest evil of all, and we had better do any thing than be altogether by the ears.” (Edmund, ch.13)

“I would not have the shadow of coolness arise between the two dearest objects I have on earth.” (Edmund, ch.27)

“She was willing to hope, secondly, that her uncle’s displeasure was abating, and would abate farther as he considered the matter with more impartiality, and felt, as a good man must feel, how wretched, and how unpardonable, how hopeless and how wicked it was, to marry without affection.” (ch.32)

“He knew not that he had a pre-engaged heart to attack.” (ch.33)

“He will make you happy, Fanny, I know he will make you happy; but you will make him every thing.” (Edmund, ch.35)

“Though Mansfield Park might have some pains, Portsmouth could have no pleasures.” (ch.39)

“She loves nobody but herself and her brother. Her friends leading her astray for years! She is quite as likely to have led *them* astray. They have all, perhaps, been corrupting one another.” (Fanny, ch.44)

“Fanny’s friendship was all that he had to cling to.” (ch.47)

“He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice. To be distinguished for elegance and accomplishments - the authorised object of their youth - could have had no useful influence that way, no moral effect on the mind. He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-denial and humility, he feared they had never heard from any lips that could profit them.” (ch.48)

## ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Some commentators have argued that Jane Austen deliberately contrasted her heroines from one novel to the next. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* were published in consecutive years. Compare and contrast the heroines of the two novels, Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price. Consider their personalities, their insights into those around them, and the courses of their respective romances in your essay.
2. In the first paragraph of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, the narrator remarks, “There certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them.” *Pride and Prejudice*, on the other hand, begins with the words, “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” How do these two sentences serve to set the stage for the stories that follow them? What similarities and differences do they reflect about the content and nature of the novels?
3. Compare and contrast Henry Crawford’s proposal to Fanny Price in chapter thirty-three of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* to the proposal of marriage offered to Elizabeth Bennet in chapter 19 of *Pride and Prejudice*. Be sure to address the attitudes with which the men offered the proposals and the reasons why those proposals were unwanted by the recipients.
4. Mrs. Norris in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* and Mrs. Bennet in the same author’s *Pride and Prejudice* are overbearing characters who insist on seeing the world through their own peculiar interests and prejudices. Compare and contrast the two women. Which do you find the more difficult to tolerate, and why?

5. In chapter forty-six of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Maria Rushmore elopes with Henry Crawford and her sister Julia runs off with John Yates. Compare and contrast these elopements with that of George Wickham and Lydia Bennet in the same author's *Pride and Prejudice*. Consider the characters of the people involved, the impacts of their decisions on their own lives, and the consequences for their families.
6. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* centers on a love story where characters who originally dislike one another come to love one another deeply and are changed in the process. In *Mansfield Park*, however, she turns that conventional narrative on its head through the failure of oppositional romances between Henry Crawford and Fanny Price on the one hand and Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford on the other. Instead, the genuine love match emerges between characters who are perhaps the most similar - Edmund and Fanny. In both cases, "the course of true love never did run smooth," but in very different ways. What is Austen saying about the nature of romantic love here? What is required in order for a love match to be successful? Be sure to incorporate specifics from both novels in your analysis.
7. Jane Austen's father was a Church of England rector, as were two of her brothers, so we should not be surprised that clergymen play a central role in many of her novels. The two who perhaps have the most in common are Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park* and Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*. Compare and contrast the two men, both of whom are central romantic figures in the novels in which they appear. Consider not only their roles in the stories, but also what they tell the reader about the author's view of the English clergy.
8. One critic of Jane Austen's novels has observed that the clergymen she so often incorporates into her stories are "men first and clergymen second." Evaluate this assertion with regard to Edmund Bertram of *Mansfield Park* and Edward Ferrars of *Sense and Sensibility*. To what extent does the fact that they are members of the clergy really matter to their roles in the novels? Be sure that you both compare and contrast the two men in your essay.
9. Jane Austen had a tendency to write her own personality - quiet, reserved, and self-denying - into her heroines, some more than others. How do these qualities define Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* and Elinor Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*? Compare and contrast the two with regard to their essential qualities. Be sure to include specifics from both novels.
10. Jane Austen had a tendency to write her own personality - quiet, reserved, and self-denying - into her heroines, some more than others. How do these qualities define Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* and Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*? Compare and contrast the two with regard to their essential qualities. Be sure to include specifics from both novels.
11. Critics have compared certain aspects of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* to William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In both stories, young people freed from parental authority find themselves in sexually-charged adventures, in one case in the woods outside the Sotherton estate and in the other in the enchanted forest outside Athens. Both works also contain a "play within the play" that satirizes in extreme form the conflicts among the young lovers. In your opinion, is the comparison a valid one? Why or why not? Support your arguments with details from both works of literature.

12. In both Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, the protagonists are not united with their soul-mates until the very end of the novel. Edmund and Fanny on the one hand and David and Agnes on the other had known each other since they were children and valued one another as trusted friends, but the men in each case were slower than the women to realize the true nature of the relationship. When they finally propose, Agnes tells David, "I have loved you all my life," while Fanny only reveals to Edmund "the delightful and astonishing truth" of her long attachment after they commit themselves to one another. Compare and contrast the two couples with regard to the development of their relationships and why the men take so long to realize the extent to which they are loved.
13. Fanny Price in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and the title character in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* are both guided by internal moral principles that will not allow them to yield to the powerful temptations with which they are faced. Compare and contrast their respective temptations, their responses, and the underlying principles by which the two heroines live and evaluate these principles on the basis of Scripture.
14. The most extensive treatment of the role of a clergyman in the novels of Jane Austen, who incorporates many of them into her works, is found in *Mansfield Park*. To what extent does her view of the proper duty of a clergyman match what the Bible teaches about the ministry of a pastor? Be sure to consider, not only the dialogues on the subject between Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford, but also what other characters have to say about the clergy.
15. Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* has much to say about the English class system, those who seek to preserve their place in it, and the difficulty of social mobility. Choose three characters from the novel who are most concerned about maintaining their social status and keeping others from gaining that status. What motivates them to behave in the ways they do, and what are the consequences of their attitudes and actions?
16. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, the Bertram fortune is built on slave labor from a plantation in Antigua. By the time the novel was published in 1813, the abolitionist movement was gaining ground in the British Parliament - the slave trade was abolished in 1807, though slavery itself was not abolished until 1833. Discuss the extent to which Austen incorporates a critique of slavery into the novel.
17. The contrast between city and country values and practices plays a major role in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, as represented by the Crawford siblings and the Bertram family. What are the chief differences between the two, and how does the author display her preference for the latter above the former?
18. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Edmund Bertram is attracted to Mary Crawford despite their obvious differences. Why is this the case? What personal qualities of hers is he seemingly able to overlook, and what finally opens his eyes to her unsuitability as a marriage partner?

19. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Henry Crawford is attracted to Fanny Price. The two are radically different in their personalities and values. Why does Henry find her so attractive that he actually proposes marriage to her? Had they married, would Fanny have been able to reform him and turn him into a responsible person? Why or why not?
20. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price take an excruciatingly long time to move beyond a brother-sister relationship to a romantic one. Why does it take them so long? Is their slowness credible? Why or why not?
21. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price are both admirable characters, but Fanny has much greater insight into the true natures of the people around her. Why is this the case? What about her personality and experiences makes her more insightful than Edmund, who is too often blinded with regard to those close to him, especially Fanny and Mary Crawford?
22. Letters play a significant role in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. Why is this the case? In what ways are letters more honest indicators of the personalities and motives of the writers than verbal communication? How do they affect the plot of the novel?
23. When the young people in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* prepare to perform the play *Lovers' Vows*, they do so with full knowledge that Sir Thomas Bertram would disapprove if he knew about it, and indeed he does when he returns home unexpectedly. Why would the patriarch prohibit his offspring and their friends from performing a play for themselves and their neighbors? Did he disapprove of their choice of script, or the idea of putting on a play in general?
24. Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* contains a number of characters who serve as foils for one another - contrasting personalities whose differences serve to emphasize their salient qualities. Choose one pair of characters from the novel who serve as foils and discuss how their differences put their personalities into bold relief.
25. Fanny Price, the heroine of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, lives by bedrock moral principles that guide her thought and behavior. Describe those principles - be specific - and evaluate them according to the teachings of Scripture.
26. Some have suggested that Jane Austen, in *Mansfield Park*, intended to portray true Christianity in the character of her heroine and hero, Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram, and to do so in contrast to the other characters, who professed Christianity but did not live it out in practice. To what extent is this a valid assessment? How does the novel succeed in distinguishing between real and merely professed Christianity through the attitudes and actions of its characters?
27. To what extent do financial considerations govern the behavior of the characters in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*? Choose three characters and discuss how their decisions are largely driven by mercenary concerns. Be specific.

28. Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* contains many love triangles that drive the plot forward. How do the conflicts implicit in these triangles reveal the true natures of the people involved? Choose three triangles from the novel in order to illustrate your analysis.
29. Fanny Price, the heroine of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, is often required to take moral positions in situations where she stands alone, contrary to the wishes and pressures of the other characters. This is particularly true when she refuses involvement in the performance of *Lovers' Vows* and when she rejects the repeated entreaties of Henry Crawford and the ensuing pressure placed upon her by Sir Thomas and others. What in her character enables her to take these principled stands? Why does she refuse to involve herself in these situations that seem to everyone else to be perfectly acceptable?
30. C.S. Lewis, commenting on Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, observed, "One of the most dangerous literary ventures is the little, shy, unimportant heroine whom none of the other characters value. The danger is that your readers may agree with the other characters." Evaluate this assessment of Fanny Price. Is the reader truly in danger of dismissing her as of little importance? Why or why not?
31. At the end of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Edmund Bertram marries Fanny Price while acknowledging that she is "too good for him." Do you agree? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
32. At the end of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Maria Rushworth and Mrs. Norris wind up living together in isolation from the family that has rejected them both. Some believe that this represents poetic justice for two of the most unpleasant characters in the novel. Do you agree? Why or why not? Be sure to support your arguments with specifics about the two characters' personalities and behavior.
33. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas Bertram returns from his trip to the Caribbean to find his offspring engaged in rehearsing for a sexually-charged play called *Lovers' Vows*. Some critics have compared this incident to the account in Exodus 32 when Moses descends from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments and finds the Israelites worshipping a golden calf. To what extent are the two stories similar? Consider the nature of the transgressions, the reasons why the authority figures immediately put a stop to the proceedings, and the consequences that result.
34. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, siblings Henry and Mary Crawford play a destabilizing role in the relationships at the Bertram estate. To what extent are the two similar? Consider their values, the moral standards or lack thereof, and the motivations and ways in which they pursue relationships with others.
35. In chapter seven of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Mary Crawford says, "Selfishness must always be forgiven you know, because there is no hope of a cure." To what extent does the story confirm or contradict her statement? Consider not only Mary, but other selfish people in the novel as well.

36. In chapter one of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas Bertram, speaking of the conditions under which Fanny Price is to be invited into their house, says, "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 to preserve in the minds of my *daughters* the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a *Miss Bertram*. I should wish to see them very good friends, and would, on no account, authorize in my girls the smallest degree of arrogance towards their relation; but still they cannot be equals." What does this policy look like in practice and how does it help to shape, not only Fanny's character, but also those of the other children in the house?
37. In chapter two of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, the narrator gives the following description of Maria and Julia Bertram: "It is not very wonderful that with all their promising talents and early information, they should be entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility. In every thing but disposition, they were admirably taught." In what ways does this assessment prove to be true as the story unfolds, and how does it set the sisters apart from their cousin Fanny Price?
38. In chapter four of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, the narrator describes Fanny Price's feelings about Edmund Bertram in the following words: "She regarded her cousin as an example of every thing good and great, as possessing worth, which no one but herself could ever appreciate, and as entitled to such gratitude from her, as no feelings could be strong enough to pay. Her sentiments toward him were compounded of all that was respectful, grateful, confiding, and tender." To what extent is this a foreshadowing of their later romantic relationship? At what point did Fanny begin to love Edmund as more than a brother? When did she realize that she felt this way?
39. In chapter eleven of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Mary Crawford, in her assessment of clergymen, says, "I speak what appears to me the general opinion, and where an opinion is general, it is usually correct." Discuss the folly of her conclusion, not only with regard to the pastoral ministry, but regarding life in general. What is the danger of forming one's opinions by adopting the popular view at any given time? How are characters in the book harmed by doing so? What impact do we see of such an attitude in contemporary society? Be sure to incorporate what the Bible has to say on the subject in your analysis.
40. In chapter thirty-five of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Edmund, in the process of trying to convince Fanny to marry Henry Crawford, argues that "He will make you happy, Fanny, I know he will make you happy; but you will make him every thing." The statement contains two reasons for choosing a spouse. Evaluate both of them. Are they good reasons? Why or why not? Be sure to incorporate a biblical perspective into your analysis.

41. In the last chapter of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas Bertram looks back on his failures as a father to his daughters as follows: "He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice. To be distinguished for elegance and accomplishments - the authorised object of their youth - could have had no useful influence that way, no moral effect on the mind. He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-denial and humility, he feared they had never heard from any lips that could profit them." Christianity plays a central role in Austen's most serious novel, and most of the characters in the book fail to practice what they profess. To what extent is Sir Thomas responsible for the ensuing lives of his children? How does Fanny serve as an example of what a good Christian ought to be, and how did she develop such qualities while being raised in the same house as Maria and Julia?