

Becoming Jane

SARAH WILLIAMS and KEVIN HOOD

Level 3

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Contents

	page
Introduction	v
Chapter 1 Sunday in the Country	1
Chapter 2 City Life	4
Chapter 3 A Visit from Mr Wisley	8
Chapter 4 A Special Evening	10
Chapter 5 In the Forest	13
Chapter 6 A Night of Dancing	16
Chapter 7 At the Country Fair	20
Chapter 8 Mr Wisley's Offer	23
Chapter 9 Eliza's Plan	28
Chapter 10 A Big Problem	32
Chapter 11 Back Home	34
Chapter 12 Tom's Offer	39
Chapter 13 Running Away	42
Chapter 14 Another Sunday in the Country	45
Chapter 15 Twenty Years Later	47
Activities	50

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Introduction

'His money will not buy me!' Jane said crossly.

'What will buy you?' Eliza asked, laughing at her young cousin.

Jane smiled at Eliza, but did not answer. Then she became serious again, as she thought about her future.

This story begins in 1796 in Hampshire, the area of England where the writer Jane Austen grew up with her six brothers and her sister Cassandra. Her family did not have much money and her parents wanted her to marry a rich, important man. But Jane wanted to marry a different man – someone she loved.

Becoming Jane is a story from a film of the same name. We do not know much about Jane's early life. We can only imagine what happened to her. But people in this story are real.

Jane started writing when she was a child. But her first book, *Sense and Sensibility*, did not come out until she was thirty-six years old. This was soon followed by *Pride and Prejudice*, her most famous book. (Both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* are Penguin Readers.)

Jane Austen is one of the world's most popular writers. Her books are enjoyed for their amusing characters and their interesting romantic stories about life in England in the late 1700s and early 1800s. All the stories have also been made into films and television programmes – some of them many times.

Chapter 1 Sunday in the Country

At the age of twenty, Jane was still living with her family in the small country village where her father was the rector. The house was not large, and the Austens did not have much money, but this was home.

One warm Sunday morning in spring, Jane, a beautiful woman with large brown eyes and wavy brown hair, was waiting for the rest of the family to get up. Bored, she started playing the piano. Upstairs, her older sister Cassandra was woken by the sound of the music and looked across the room to Jane's empty bed. In the next room, her cousin Eliza lifted her eyes from her book and smiled.

Mrs Austen, Jane's mother, tried and failed to continue sleeping.

'Jane!' she called angrily, and then turned to Mr Austen. 'That girl needs a husband!'

Robert Fowle heard Mrs Austen's shout and ran out of the small guestroom. He stopped suddenly as he found himself face to face with Cassandra, his future wife, in her nightdress. The two young people quickly turned away and returned to their rooms. Cassandra closed her bedroom door with a playful look on her face.

Downstairs, Jane had an idea, stopped playing and reached for her notebook. It was her dream to be a writer. She wrote, 'She always did as she was told. But she was not pleased ...'

◆

Later that morning, after church, the Austens made a visit to their rich, aristocratic neighbour, Lady Gresham. They stood around in the large, cold sitting-room as Mr Austen introduced



It was her dream to be a writer.

their visitors to the old woman. Lady Gresham sat comfortably on her sofa, holding a warm cup of tea.

'Lady Gresham,' Mr Austen said. 'This is our cousin Eliza – the Comtesse* de Feuillide.'

Lady Gresham looked at the young woman, unsmiling. 'Your husband is not with you?' she asked.

'My husband cannot be here,' Eliza replied coldly. 'He was killed in France.'

'Your nephew is visiting again, I see,' Mrs Austen said quickly, turning to the young man at Lady Gresham's side. 'Mr Wisley? Mr Wisley bowed politely.

'And this is Mr Fowle,' continued Mr Austen to Lady Gresham. 'He is going to marry Cassandra.'

'And when will you marry?' Lady Gresham asked Cassandra.

'Not for some time,' Cassandra said softly.

'Why not?'

Robert spoke. 'I must first go to the West Indies. I will marry Cassandra when I return.'

'I see,' said Lady Gresham coldly, as she started to drink her tea.

The Austens stood and watched Lady Gresham. The room grew uncomfortable with the silence.

'Mr Wisley,' said Mrs Austen in a loud voice. 'Jane likes dancing and the Basingstoke Dance will be soon.'

Jane looked at her mother angrily, with wide eyes. Mr Wisley turned to Jane and smiled, but she looked away. Mr Wisley was very tall, but not handsome. Jane knew that he did not like talking about flowers or trees or books. These were her interests, but not his. In Jane's eyes, he was ordinary – not the type of man she could ever love deeply.

'My nephew does not enjoy dancing,' the old woman said.

* Comtesse: a French word for the wife of an aristocratic Frenchman



Mr Wisley was very tall, but not handsome.

'I see,' said Jane. 'That is a pity, as these dances are very important to life here in the country. They are places where young people can have pleasant conversations.'

Mr Wisley looked embarrassed. He said simply, 'Then I shall go to this dance.'

After the uncomfortable visit ended, the Austens walked away from Lady Gresham's large house. As they crossed the old woman's land, Jane's mother spoke angrily to her daughter:

'Jane, how could you be so rude to Mr Wisley? He is an unmarried man – and an important one.'

'Mother, please,' Jane said, moving away from her.

'You know our situation!' her mother continued. 'And Mr Wisley is Lady Gresham's favourite nephew. He already has the land *and* money that his father left him. But he will have a lot more in the future.'

Mrs Austen looked out hopefully at the hills, trees and lakes that were all on Lady Gresham's land.

Jane walked faster away from her mother and joined Eliza.

'His money will not buy me!' she said crossly.

'What *will* buy you?' Eliza asked, laughing at her young cousin.

Jane smiled at Eliza, but did not answer. Then she became serious again, as she thought about her future.

Chapter 2 City Life

At a men's club in London, the rooms were crowded and noisy. In every room people were drinking and having loud conversations. In one smoky room, a group of people stood in a circle and watched two men boxing. Tom Lefroy, a handsome young man, was one of the boxers. He was quick as he moved around his teacher. He was hitting the other man hard with his

strong arms – but not hard enough.

His friend Henry Austen, Jane's older brother, came into the room. That night he was wearing his bright red coat because he was returning from his duties as a soldier.

'Lefroy!' Henry called out.

When he heard Henry's voice, Tom turned his head. He was immediately hit in the face, and fell hard on to the floor. Quickly, a woman hurried across the room and offered him a glass of wine. Then she helped him to get up. He smiled at her and she kissed him on the side of his face. She worked at the club and knew him well.

'Winning again, I see,' said Henry, walking up to Tom. The two friends laughed and shook hands.

'So, how long will it be before you return to the country?' asked Tom.

'A day,' Henry said sadly. 'I would like to stay here, but I have not got enough money.'

'Poor Henry,' Tom said jokingly.

'Henry!' called a shaky voice from the other side of the room.

It was John Warren, another friend of Henry's. He was standing nervously against a wall. A strange woman stood in front of him, touching his suit and then his hair. Her interest was clearly making him very uncomfortable.

Henry and Tom pushed their way around people to reach him.

'Mr Tom Lefroy,' Henry said, 'let me introduce you to Mr John Warren. John is going to go to Hampshire with me tomorrow. My father is going to prepare us both for positions in the Church.'

'Really?' Tom said, shaking hands with John.

'I understand that you have visited Hampshire, Mr Lefroy,' John said. 'Was it a long visit?'

'Very long,' Tom said with a smile. 'Almost three hours.'
After Tom changed his clothes, the three men went out together to a bar. They continued to drink and talk.



The following day, Tom was tired and his head hurt from his late night. But he was a law student and he often had to go to courtrooms and make notes.

That day his uncle, Judge Langlois, was sitting in the judge's seat. When Tom arrived late, his uncle's long, grey face gave him a serious look.

The judge then turned back to a poor man in dirty clothes, and continued to speak. The man was in court for stealing pigs. He was clearly afraid of Judge Langlois.

'You and people like you are a danger to all honest, hard-working people,' Tom's uncle said. 'You have no place in our world.'

He sent the man away to Australia for the rest of his life.

After leaving the courtroom, Tom had to meet the judge in his office. His uncle, not for the first time, was unhappy with his nephew.

'Why are you in London, Tom?' he asked, taking off his coat.

'To learn the law, Uncle,' Tom said bravely.

The judge looked at him with narrow eyes. 'And to prove yourself to me. You do *want* my money after my death? I was born rich and I've stayed rich. Why? Because I follow the rules of good, honest people. I have a good reputation and I have manners.'

Tom listened in silence, feeling like a child.

'But you seem to spend your time in clubs and bars. You are drinking and boxing and spending time with the wrong kind of women,' the judge continued. 'What kind of lawyer will that make you?'



'I have a good reputation and I have manners.'

'No different from other lawyers,' Tom said with a small smile.

'It is easy to be amusing,' the judge said. 'But it is harder to be accepted in today's world.'

'But Uncle —'

'Look at your family. My sister, your mother, lost everything because she married the wrong man.'

This made Tom angry. 'She married my father because she loved him.'

'And now she is poor, and cannot look after all your brothers and sisters.' His uncle gave him a cold look. 'Who is going to do that?'

Tom tried to stay calm. 'I am, sir,' he said quietly.

'I think you need to learn a lesson, Tom,' Judge Langlois continued, more kindly. 'I am sending you to the country, to Hampshire, to be with your other relatives for the summer.'

'The country?' Tom's face showed his unhappiness.

'It will be good for you,' his uncle said. 'You must get away from London. London is full of the wrong kinds of people — people that a young man should not be with.'

'But Uncle, please,' Tom said. 'I hate the country.'

Chapter 3 A Visit from Mr Wisley

Back in the country, Jane was writing at a table, while Cassandra and Eliza were getting dressed for the evening. Guests were invited because Henry was coming home.

The two older women wanted to look their best and were excited about that evening. Cassandra asked Jane for help and her younger sister carefully tied Cassandra's hair on top of her head.

When the two sisters looked into the mirror together, Eliza

said, 'I think you two are the prettiest girls in England.'

Jane and Cassandra laughed.

Eliza continued, 'Mr Fowle will agree with me.' Cassandra stopped laughing. 'Soon he will be far away and he will forget about me,' she said sadly.

'Impossible,' said Jane, putting her arms around her sister.

'His heart will stop when he sees you this evening.'

Cassandra smiled hopefully, but she was still worried.

Jane suddenly had an idea and hurried back to the table. She started writing again.

The other two women watched Jane. Her fingers were covered with ink. Cassandra shook her head.

'You will drive the unmarried men away with those fingers,'

Eliza said.

Jane replied, 'The unmarried men can all do as they please.'

But she did not believe what she said. She knew she had to get married. It was a duty to her family.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the front door. The three young women ran to the window. From the first floor, Jane looked down on the top of Mr Wisley's head. She stepped back quickly.

But soon Jane was pushed out of the rectory and the door was closed quickly behind her. She was trying to get back inside when she heard Mr Wisley's voice.

'Miss Austen.'

She knew that her mother was watching her from inside the house. She had to talk to the man.

They walked slowly together in the garden. Mr Wisley seemed to be deep in thought and Jane was nervously searching for an idea for conversation. Finally, he spoke.

'A fine day.'

'Yes, it is,' Jane said.

'The flowers are ...' he continued, but then stopped. He

looked embarrassed and was acting strangely. Jane knew that he wanted to say something important. But she did not want to hear it.

He coughed a few times and finally spoke more decisively. 'Miss Austen, you are an interesting young lady, you are exciting and so full of life.'

Jane did not know what to say. She looked around uncomfortably, searching for an escape. Then she suddenly noticed two horses pulling a coach. They were coming towards the rectory.

'Miss Austen ...' Mr Wisley continued.

'My brother!' Jane shouted.

'Who?' asked Mr Wisley

'Please excuse me, Mr Wisley,' she shouted, running to the coach with a wide smile on her face.

Mr Wisley watched Jane and called to her, 'Perhaps I could see you later?'

But Jane, of course, did not hear him.

Chapter 4 A Special Evening

That evening at the rectory, the sitting-room was filled with family, friends and neighbours. Everyone was talking and enjoying themselves. Henry was telling stories about the life of a soldier and the guests around him were laughing.

Eliza, watching Henry, said to Jane, 'I forgot that your brother was so likeable.'

'Yes, everyone admires Henry – Henry more than anyone,' Jane said with a smile. 'Everyone except me.'

The Lefroys, the Austens' neighbours, came into the room, and walked towards Jane and Eliza.

'My cousin is staying with us for the summer. He has come

from London,' Lucy said, excitedly. She was the Lefroy's fifteen-year-old daughter. 'And he is a clever young lawyer,' she added.

'Lucy, please,' said Mrs Lefroy.

But Lucy continued, 'And he has a reputation.'

'For being late?' Jane asked jokingly.

The talking and laughing in the room stopped when Mr Austen coughed loudly. He started to speak to his guests.

'Friends, neighbours – welcome,' he said. 'A family is always moving. First, our son Henry has proudly protected his country and finished his duties. Now he has returned to us with his friend John.' Mr Warren bowed to the other guests, and Mr Austen continued with his speech. 'Soon, our daughter Cassandra will leave us for a short time. She is going to help her brother Edward and his wife Elizabeth with the birth of their child.'

The guests clapped at the good news and Mrs Austen looked very proud.

'While Cassandra is away, Mr Robert Fowle will travel to the West Indies,' Mr Austen continued. 'And when he returns, he and Cassandra will marry.'

Everyone clapped again. Then they held up their glasses of wine and drank to Cassandra and Robert. The two young people smiled sadly at each other. They did not want to wait for marriage and they did not want to live in different countries for so long.

When Mr Austen's speech was finished, Mrs Austen moved around the room. She talked excitedly to her guests about Cassandra's future. John walked across the room to Jane. He was always nervous when he spoke to a woman. But he tried his best with Jane.

'Miss Austen, I understand that you are going to read one of your stories for us tonight,' he said softly.

Soon, everyone was listening to Jane as she read to them from

her notebook. She told them a story about two young people who had to wait for their marriage. Everyone knew that it was about Cassandra and her future husband.

'His manner was decisive, but polite,' Jane read. She looked up at Robert.

Her voice was clear and she spoke her words carefully and read beautifully. Everyone admired Jane when she read her stories.

Outside the rectory Tom Lefroy was arriving late, as always. He pulled angrily at his long green coat as it became caught in some tall plants. Thoughts about being in London with his friends were in his mind.

When he stepped into the rectory, the door shut loudly behind him. In the sitting-room, everyone jumped.

Jane stopped reading.

'May I introduce my nephew, Mr Thomas Lefroy,' said the older Mr Lefroy, looking embarrassed.

'He is welcome,' said Mr Austen kindly.

Tom bowed politely to the room full of people, took off his coat and sat down next to John and Henry.

Lucy pulled Jane's arm and said quietly, 'What a handsome green coat. Those have become quite popular in London.'

John said to Tom, 'You will find this story very amusing.'

But Tom just smiled. Then he prepared himself to become bored.

Jane continued reading her romantic story. Everyone except Tom was enjoying it.

'There is writing on *both* sides of those pages?' he said quietly to John after a minute or two.

He preferred the excitement of London bars and clubs. He closed his eyes.

As Jane finished her story, everyone clapped. Only Tom showed no enjoyment. He was asleep. John called out, 'Well done, Jane.'

Jane turned towards John and noticed Tom next to him. She saw Tom suddenly wake up and her face turned red. She felt like crying.

Later in the evening, as Jane talked to Cassandra and Robert about their plans for the future, she heard John and Tom Lefroy behind her.

She heard John say, 'What a wonderful story from a very clever girl.'

Jane smiled to herself, but her smile soon disappeared.

'I thought it was childish,' Tom replied. 'Not like the stories that we hear in the city. I cannot wait to return to London at the end of the summer.'

Jane held back her tears and walked out of the room. She moved as quickly as she could with her notebook in her hand. Then she ran up the stairs to her bedroom. There, she began to pull the pages out of her notebook, quietly crying. She threw them into the fire. Then she looked under her bed and found her box of notebooks. On the box she wrote the word 'childish'. She felt like a stupid child.

Chapter 5 In the Forest

A few days later, Tom's relatives went hunting. Tom did not know anything about guns or hunting, so he stayed at home. He missed his friends and his exciting life in London. Soon he was bored in the house and decided to take a walk.

He followed a path away from the house. After some time, he found himself walking in a beautiful forest of tall, thick trees.

Suddenly, he realised that he was not on the path. He turned around to return to the house. But he could not remember the way. To Tom, every path looked the same in the forest. He fell over some large stones. When he picked himself up, he found

two paths going different ways. He did not know which one to take.

Jane was also walking in the forest, with her notebook. She was enjoying the silence of the forest and thinking about a new story. As she turned onto another path, she saw Tom Lefroy between the trees. She looked away from him.

But Tom saw Jane walking through the forest in front of him. It was strange that she did not say hello.

'Miss?' he called. 'I am lost.'

Jane moved faster along the path.

Tom started to run, calling again. Then he fell over a dead tree into a small pool of water. Jane looked quickly behind her and laughed to herself.

Tom got up and shook his coat. He spoke more loudly.

'Perhaps you could help me, Miss?'

Jane finally stopped and turned to him. 'Austen,' she said coldly.

'Mr Lefroy,' Tom said, bowing.

'Yes, I know,' said Jane quickly. 'But I am *alone*.'

'Except for me,' Tom said with a smile.

Jane said with a serious face, 'Exactly.'

Tom stepped closer to her and said, 'What are the rules in this situation? We were introduced a few nights ago. Can we not talk together in the forest now?'

'But you could not remember my name. You could not stay awake when we were in the same room,' Jane walked away again.

Tom did not know what to say. He bowed politely and started to walk along a different path.

But Jane was still angry with him. She turned to follow him.

'The situation in a forest may seem very simple, even *childish*, to a man from the city,' she said, speaking quickly.

'I am told that one can admire many things on a walk in the forest,' Tom said, not understanding. 'And I can see only green above and brown below.'

'Other people have noticed more than that,' Jane said. 'There is a book about this forest.'

'Oh,' Tom said. 'Do you mean fiction?'

'Ah, fiction! Stories are, of course, read only by women. Sometimes – and that is worse – they are *written* by women.'

'But I read fiction,' said Tom.

Jane was surprised. 'You do?'

'My favourite book is called *The History of Tom Jones*,' he

continued. 'Perhaps you have read it?'

'I am afraid I have not,' Jane said quickly, wanting to end the conversation.

'That is no surprise,' he said. 'Your life has not taught you about those things. But there is a copy of the book in my relatives' library. I am sure you can borrow it from them.'

Jane thought for a few seconds and then asked, 'What do you mean by "those things"?''

'The story has many bad characters in it,' he said.

'I see,' she said, feeling again like a child.

'It is a wonderful story by a clever young man.'

'Some wonderful stories are written by clever women,' she said.

Tom finally understood. 'So we are talking about the story that you read a few nights ago,' he said. 'Did I not admire you enough?'

'You were asleep.'

Tom looked embarrassed. 'The story was ...' he began to say.

Jane turned and started to walk away.

'But if you want to write good fiction,' Tom added quickly, 'you need to know more about life.'

Jane stopped and turned around again.

'Do I?' she said coldly. 'And why should I listen to your opinion?'

'I know more of the world,' he said.

'You know more?' she asked.

He smiled at her and said playfully, 'I know enough. I know that you know little about it.'

Jane was embarrassed now. 'I must go,' she said quietly. She walked along the path more quickly.

Tom called after her, 'I hope I did not hurt your feelings.'

'Not at all,' Jane shouted. Then she hurried to get away from him.

'Oh, how do I get home?' he called.

She pointed to a path without speaking.

He watched her as she continued on her way. What an interesting young woman, he thought.

Chapter 6 A Night of Dancing

Eliza, Jane, Henry and John arrived together at the Basingstoke Dance.

The air was filled with excitement. Along the walls and around the windows of the large room were candles and flowers. At the back, there was another room with a long table of drinks and food.

Jane wore a pretty dress made by her mother. Her wavy hair was pulled up on top of her head.

'Mr Wisley has seen you,' Eliza said to her.

'From that height he can see most of the area,' Jane replied, turning her back to Mr Wisley.

Henry moved closer to Eliza and she quickly took his arm.

'How kind, Cousin,' she said.

She gave Jane a wide smile as Henry took her to the dance floor. Jane was left alone.

Suddenly, Mr Wisley stood in front of her. Jane smiled politely, but did not want to have a conversation with him.

'Miss Austen,' he said, 'may I request the next dance?'

Outside, Mr and Mrs Lefroy, their daughter Lucy and nephew Tom were just arriving. Lucy was very excited because this was her first time at the Basingstoke Dance.

As soon as they stepped into the main room, Tom's eyes searched for Jane. He saw that she was dancing with Mr Wisley.

Mr Wisley stepped on Jane's foot.

'Oh!' she cried.

'I am sorry,' Mr Wisley said. 'I do practise, but I cannot get better.'

After the dance, Jane tried to walk quickly to the other room to get a drink. This was not easy because her toes were still aching. With a drink in her hand, she joined Eliza, Henry and John. Tom watched her from across the room and slowly started to walk towards her.

Eliza asked Jane, 'What do you think of Mr Lefroy?'

Lucy joined the conversation. 'My cousin Tom? I think he is a very fine man. We are ...'

'Pleased that he is here tonight,' Jane joked.

'Oh?' said Eliza.

'Well, he does have a silly green coat and bad manners,' Jane continued. 'He thinks he is so special.'

'Jane - ' Henry said quickly.

But Jane continued, 'And he refuses to dance when there are so few men here. It is a good thing that he is only here for a short time. Henry, are all your friends so unpleasant? Where in Ireland does he come from?'

From behind her Tom's voice said, 'Limerick, Miss Austen.'