

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.'

He bowed.

Jane felt very embarrassed.

'The next dance is going to begin,' Tom said, holding his arm out to her.

She did not know what to say. So she took his arm and he walked her to the dance floor. As the dance began, Tom said, 'You are the first woman in Hampshire to dance with me.'

'Then your reputation in the country needs a good report from me,' she said with a smile.

Tom held her waist and they danced in a circle. They then stood opposite each other.

'This is a country dance,' Jane explained. 'It is what simple people in the country do.'

Tom laughed. 'Do you really think that?'

Jane replied, 'I was describing what you were thinking.'

'Please — I can think for myself,' Tom said as he took her arm.

His wide eyes watched her turn around him.

'And I can think for *myself*, sir,' she said. 'Will you agree that a woman can?'

'Perhaps. But what does the woman think of me?' Tom asked as they continued to dance.

She answered, now holding his hand, 'That you are too important for the simple activities of the country.'

'And I think that you, Miss ...' Tom started to say as he followed the dance. He then stepped to one side, still holding her hand.

'Austen,' Jane said with a smile on her face. 'Mr ...?'

'Lefroy,' Tom said, smiling back at her. 'You think that you are better than other people.'

Jane stopped dancing and dropped his hand. She could not believe what she was hearing. She looked angrily at him.

'Me?' she asked.

'You, Miss Austen,' Tom said. 'Secretly,' he added.



*'It is what simple people in the country do.'*

Jane realised that her mother was watching them. She continued to dance, but did not say another word to Tom. Together, they moved smoothly across the dance floor. For the first time, Tom was enjoying life in the country.

Mr Wisley was also watching them until he looked away unhappily. Mrs Austen, noticing this, crossed the room to him. She quickly started talking to him about Jane.

When the evening ended, Jane and Eliza left together. Henry and John followed closely behind them.

'How many times did you dance with Tom?' Eliza asked Jane.

'Twice is fine,' Henry said. 'But three times and people will think you like him.'

Jane counted the dances on her fingers and realised her mistake.

Sounding like an older brother, Henry continued seriously, 'Be careful, Jane. Mr Lefroy does have a reputation.'

When Jane was finally alone in her bedroom, she took out a notebook. She put her pen into a bottle of ink and wrote quickly and angrily: *rude, unkind, unpleasant* ...

After she finished, she read her words again. 'Exactly,' she said to herself.

Feeling better, she went to bed. But she could not sleep, so she picked up the book at her bedside. It was Tom's favourite book, *The History of Tom Jones*.

## Chapter 7 At the Country Fair

Every summer there was a country fair near the Austens' village in Hampshire, and this year was no different. The park was filled with people enjoying games and music. All around there was singing and laughing.

Jane, Eliza, Henry and John arrived at the fair as the sun was going down. At the gate they saw Tom and his young cousin Lucy. They greeted each other politely and continued to walk together into the park.

'The Leverton Fair!' Lucy said. 'I am so glad that you suggested coming, Jane.'

Tom and Jane looked at Lucy and smiled at each other. Then, they watched two colourfully dressed men throwing sticks of fire into the air. With wide eyes they saw the men catch the hot sticks in their hands.

Busy with their own conversation, Eliza and Henry walked away from the others.

'I see that you are not wearing your red soldier's coat,' Eliza said.

'My father thinks that a black coat is better for a future man of religion,' he replied.

'But a red coat suits your character better.'

Henry smiled at her. It was clear that she understood him.

Tom and Jane were stepping carefully across the wet ground when a drunken man fell down in front of them.

'A countryman, Miss Austen?' Tom said, jokingly.

Jane just smiled at him as they walked around the man. They were soon in a crowd who were watching two men boxing.

'Trouble here,' Jane said, not wanting to watch.

But Tom was interested. 'And excitement,' he said.

Jane looked away each time the larger man hit the smaller one.

'Only a stupid person boxes with a professional,' Tom said.

'You know about that, of course,' said Jane. She closed her eyes when she heard the man being hit. 'Perhaps it is very popular in London, watching men hurt each other.'

The smaller man was knocked to the ground. Tom quickly took off his coat and handed it to Jane.

Surprised, Jane said, 'Mr Lefroy! What are you doing?'

But it was too late. Tom was already stepping into the boxing area. He was ready to teach the boxer a lesson.

'Stop!' Jane cried.

Henry saw what was happening. He was not worried at all. He called out to the crowd, 'Five shillings\* if the young man wins! A few people were happy to put their money on the professional. Tom tried a few times but failed to hit the other boxer. The men danced around each other, Tom looking more and more angry. The other man hit the air and missed Tom.

John and Lucy joined the crowd. Lucy was surprised to see her cousin there. 'Tom! Wonderful!' she called.

Tom heard his cousin's voice and turned his head for a second. That proved to be a mistake. The other boxer hit poor Tom in the face, and he fell back hard on to the ground. He was clearly in pain.

Jane ran to him immediately, now very worried, and helped him to get up.

Henry was paying people their five shillings.

'You spend money too easily,' Eliza said.

Henry looked embarrassed. Then Eliza laughed, and he smiled.

As Tom put on his coat, Jane asked, 'Why did you do it?'

'I had all those expensive boxing lessons,' he replied, cleaning the blood from his nose.

'You fought because the last fight was unfair,' Jane said. 'I admire that.'

'Unfair?' Tom joked. 'I am a lawyer. There is no fairness in the law.'

Later, at the rectory, Mrs Austen called Jane to her. She was not happy.

'Leverton Fair! At night! With Mr Lefroy!' she screamed, while Jane kept her head down.

'But Henry was there. And Eliza, John and Lucy too.'

'But Mr Wisley will hear about this,' her mother continued. Jane looked up. 'Do you mean that he will not want to marry me?' she said coldly.

'That is not what I mean —'

'Then all is well,' Jane said. 'My price has not changed.' She started to leave the room.

'Jane!' Mrs Austen called. 'You will not see Mr Lefroy again!'

As Jane walked away, her father joined his wife in the sitting-room. Jane stopped at the bottom of the stairs and listened to their conversation.

'At the end of the summer Mr Lefroy will be gone,' Mrs Austen said, sounding calmer now. 'And Mr Wisley will wait — I hope.'

Mr Austen shook his head. 'The man is so boring.'

'He will grow out of that,' his wife said. 'And she can change him. You should tell her.'

'Tell her what? To be unhappy?' said Mr Austen, 'Jane should have the man she wants.'

Still on the stairs, Jane smiled.

## Chapter 8 Mr Wisley's Offer

It was a warm summer morning and Jane was sitting in the garden. She enjoyed the quiet mornings, writing in her notebook with the smell of flowers all around her. She was thinking about Tom Lefroy and she decided to write a new story. It was about a

\* shilling: a type of money used in Britain in the past

young woman who falls in love with the wrong man.

Mrs Austen, Lady Gresham and Mr Wisley came into the garden from the rectory. When Jane saw them, she hid behind some tall plants. But there was no escape.

Jane, at last, her mother said. 'Lady Gresham and Mr Wisley are visiting us.'

Jane greeted their guests politely.

Lady Gresham said, unsmiling, 'Of course, the young people will prefer to walk. I see that there is a pretty little garden here.'

Jane suddenly had an idea for her story and did not want to forget it.

'Excuse me,' she said, as she picked up her pen and bottle of ink. She then sat down to write in her notebook.

'What is she doing?' Lady Gresham asked.

'Writing,' Mr Wisley said simply.

'Can anything be done about it?' Lady Gresham asked.

But no one answered.

Soon Jane and Mr Wisley were walking together in the garden. Jane was very uncomfortable. She knew that he wanted to talk to her about her future.

'Miss Austen,' he said nervously. 'I have ...'

'The garden is so beautiful in this season.'

Mr Wisley did not seem to be listening. He continued, 'I have known you for a long time now, and the feelings that I have —'

Again, Jane stopped him. 'And I like the flowers best at this time of year.'

'I own land in this country and in the West Indies,' Mr Wisley said. 'And one day, I believe, my aunt's land —'

'Sir, stop,' Jane tried again.

Mr Wisley went down on one knee and took Jane's hand. He spoke quickly. 'It is yours if we marry. All of it. Yours.'

'Mr Wisley,' Jane said coldly. 'Your offer is very kind, and you are a kind man. But I cannot accept. I cannot marry without ...' She stopped, looking embarrassed.

'Love.'

'Yes,' Jane said, surprised.

They looked at each other.

'Sometimes love is a shy flower,' Mr Wisley said. 'It takes time to grow.'



Later that day, Jane was working in the Austens' vegetable garden when her mother came outside. At first they did not speak as they searched for potatoes. Mr Austen began working quietly in another part of the garden.

Finally Mrs Austen said, 'There is no money for you. We have very little, and that will go to your brothers. When we are gone, you will have nothing without a husband.'

Jane pulled a potato out of the ground and said, 'Then I will have nothing. I will not marry without love.'

'Do you really want to be poor, old and single?' her mother asked. 'You will be the subject of jokes in the village.'

Jane continued to work. She thought about what her mother was saying. It was all true. She started to cry quietly to herself.

'Love is very nice,' her mother continued. 'But money is necessary.'

'Perhaps I can live by writing,' Jane said softly.

'What? Don't be silly, girl!'

As Jane ran away angrily, Mr Austen stopped his work. He followed her to the other side of the house. Jane was feeding the pigs, pushing the tears from her face.

'He will give you a good home and a comfortable life,' her father said kindly.

Surprised, Jane said, 'Father!'

'This has been your only offer,' her father added.

'But Wisley?'

'It is true,' Mr Austen said. 'He is ...'

'Boring,' Jane completed his sentence.

Her father said calmly, 'Yes, but he will probably grow out of that.' Jane watched as the pigs fought for the food. 'You don't want to be poor all your life.'



A few days later, there was a big party at Lady Gresham's house. The front of the great house was brightly lit, and it looked like a palace. Jane arrived with her parents, Henry, John and Eliza. She was dressed in a beautiful soft green dress, but she did not feel beautiful. As she stepped into the large main room, she noticed the expensive furniture. Then her eyes grew wide when she saw some of the rich guests. They were wearing silver and gold, and expensive clothes.

Of course, Jane had to dance with Mr Wisley. She felt that it was her duty. But it was clear to everyone that she was bored. As they danced, he stepped on her foot again. She smiled politely, then looked at her mother. Mrs Austen was watching her very closely. When the dance finished, Jane quickly walked away.

She was suddenly greeted by Tom Lefroy. He held out his hand and they began the next dance together. They moved smoothly and happily across the dance floor, and she was not bored.

'You dance with feeling,' Tom said to her.

'No sensible woman should show her feelings,' Jane replied with a smile. 'She will never get a husband.'

Then she saw the look on her mother's face and her smile disappeared.

Tom knew that something was wrong. He held her closer as they danced. But she pulled back, knowing that she should not

enjoy herself. He tried to hold her closer again. She wanted to be near him. But suddenly she stopped dancing.

'Excuse me. I am too warm and I need air,' she said softly.

As she started to walk away, he reached out to her.

'Wait,' he said.

But Jane continued to walk through the crowds of party guests until she was outside in the fresh night air.

She stood in the garden. It was dark, lit only by candles. She looked unhappily at the lakes and at the lines of trees.

Suddenly, she heard voices talking near her. At first she could not see who it was. Then, when she moved a little closer, she saw Henry and Eliza. They kissed and, surprised, Jane turned away. She did not know what to think.

As she walked back to the house, Lady Gresham came up to her. Jane bowed.

'Miss Austen,' Lady Gresham said, unsmiling, 'I cannot believe that I must have this conversation.'

Jane stood nervously and listened.

'Mr Wisley's mother, my dear sister, died young. I have no children, so my nephew is important to me. I will do anything to make him happy.'

'I understand, madam,' Jane said.

Lady Gresham's voice became angry. 'When a rich man like my nephew is interested in a young woman, she must accept immediately. But what do we find?'

'A young woman with her own ideas,' Jane answered nervously.

'Exactly!' Lady Gresham was displeased. 'Your family is admitted because your father is a good rector. Also, of course, your cousin has a title. But your father does not have much money. Luckily for him, he has a daughter. This daughter can choose to become very rich.' She gave Jane a cold look, and returned inside to her guests.

Jane stood in the garden. She did not know what to do next. Then she heard Tom's voice behind her.

He said softly, 'I have heard that Mr Wisley has made you an offer of marriage. You should accept.'

They faced each other in silence. They both knew that their feelings were too strong.

Finally Jane said, 'Are you really leaving tomorrow?' Her eyes filled with tears. She stepped closer to him and kissed him. He held her for a few seconds and then kissed her. She did not want him to stop.

'I have no money,' Tom said. 'I am nothing without my uncle's money, and he will never agree to our marriage. So I cannot offer you marriage, Jane,' he continued. 'But you must know what I feel. I am yours. My heart is yours.'

She took his hand and they sat together in silence for a few minutes.

He finally spoke. 'What shall we do?'

'What we must,' Jane said.

## Chapter 9 Eliza's Plan

The next day, Jane discussed her situation secretly with Henry and Eliza in the rectory garden.

'Shall I go to London? Perhaps I can do something there,' she said.

Eliza said, 'But you are an unmarried woman. You cannot travel alone.'

'Oh, help me, please,' Jane asked.

Henry and Eliza thought about it. Then Henry said, 'You are right, Jane. Perhaps you should visit Tom's uncle.'

'But how can I?'

Eliza looked at Henry, and they understood each other.



*He held her for a few seconds and then kissed her.*

'We can visit your brother Edward in Kent to help Cassandra,' Eliza suggested. 'The baby will be here soon. Of course, we must travel with a man – the right kind of man.'

Both women looked lovingly at Henry.

He said slowly, 'Perhaps we can stop in London on the way and visit the judge. He is a relative of our close neighbour.'

'A perfectly sensible idea,' Jane said with a laugh. She felt better now.



A few days later, Jane, Henry and Eliza were in Judge Langlois's London home, being introduced by Tom Lefroy.

'Comtesse?' The judge asked, as he was introduced to Eliza. He was always pleased to meet an aristocrat. He smiled as he bowed to Eliza and her cousins.

That evening, they all had dinner together in the large dining-room. They discussed many interesting subjects. Henry told the judge about his time as a soldier. Eliza explained how she kept her money safe during the war in France. Jane was less of a success. His uncle's face as she seemed to joke about serious subjects worried Tom.

'My cousin, Jane, is a writer,' Eliza explained.

'Of what?' the judge asked.

Jane became very nervous. 'Fiction, sir,' she said quietly.

'A young woman from a good family?' the judge said, not believing her words.

Eliza and Henry smiled at Jane. There was an uncomfortable silence.

Jane noticed Tom's worried face across the large wooden table. 'There are women writers who make money,' Jane said.

'From writing?' the judge asked.

Tom felt he needed to help Jane. 'I know of a female writer who has made five hundred pounds from one book. She was

given seven hundred pounds for her next book.'

The judge shook his head and finally smiled at Jane. 'You are a clever young lady, Jane, with many ideas. Perhaps one day you will succeed as a writer.' He stood up, saying, 'I will leave you young people now and see you again in the morning. Do enjoy your stay here.'

When the old man left the room, the others laughed. Everything was going well. It seemed that Judge Langlois liked Jane.

When the judge was asleep in his bed, Tom showed Jane to her room. Jane followed him up the stairs by candlelight as her wide eyes viewed the expensive paintings on the walls. She was very excited, but spoke softly.

'Will I really have this?' she asked Tom.

'What?' he said with a smile.

'You,' she said. 'This life with you.'

When they arrived at the top of the stairs, he stepped closer to her. 'Oh, yes,' he said.

He wanted to kiss her again, but she stepped back. She knew that they could be seen there.

He touched her soft, pale face and said, 'My uncle will be kind, I am sure.'

'Will you speak to him?' she asked.

'Tomorrow.'

They said good night and Jane went into her room, but she was too excited to sleep. She thought about Judge Langlois agreeing to her marriage with Tom. She imagined herself in the future, living happily with Tom in that great house. She imagined her mother being proud of her.

She began to write in her notebook, just names at first: Elizabeth Bennet, Mr Bingley ... Mr Darcy.