

Chapter 10 A Big Problem

The next morning, the post arrived as Henry, Eliza and Jane waited for the judge in the sitting-room.

The judge came downstairs and went into the dining-room. He looked at his watch in surprise when he saw Tom waiting for him.

'Has the world gone crazy?' he said. He sat down and started looking at the letters.

As the judge ate his breakfast, Tom nervously began to speak.

'Sir, I would like to discuss something with you.'

'I cannot give you any more money,' the judge said, opening an envelope.

'I am pleased that you have met my friend Jane Austen,' Tom continued, as his uncle read the letter. 'I am sure you will agree with me. She is a fine young lady.'

The judge stood up angrily, his face becoming purple.

'This is terrible!' he said in a loud voice, waving the letter in the air.

Tom stepped back, frightened and surprised.

'This letter explains everything. You do not need to say anything more,' the judge said angrily.

'What letter?' Tom asked.

'Now I know exactly what the two of you were doing in Hampshire,' the older man said, throwing down the letter. 'Is it true that you have feelings for this young woman?'

'I wanted to introduce you to her first, Uncle,' Tom said, his voice shaking.

'But first you introduced me to her rich, aristocratic cousin,' the judge shouted. 'I understand your little game now.'

In the sitting-room, Henry, Eliza and Jane then heard the judge call Jane 'a poor little husband hunter'! Eliza and Jane had to stop Henry running into the dining-room.

'I wanted you to meet her. She is a wonderful, clever lady,' Tom said.

Jane stepped closer to the door to listen. Henry and Eliza watched her with worried faces.

'Sir, what about my happiness?' Tom continued.

'Happiness?' Judge Langlois said angrily. 'You will not be happy in a marriage with a woman like that.'

There was nothing more to say. The judge left the room, not finishing his breakfast. As he passed Jane, outside the dining-room, he looked at her without a word.

'My uncle has refused. He does not want us to marry,' Tom said sadly. 'And without his agreement, I will not get any more money from him.'

Jane shook her head.

'The letter has done its work,' Tom continued.

'But who sent it? Lady Gresham?' Jane asked.

'Or perhaps her nephew.'

'We are just toys to them,' Jane said angrily. 'They think they can destroy our lives.' She started to cry.

'But now we have to do as we are told,' Tom said simply.

'No, we do not,' said Jane.

There was an uncomfortable silence. Finally, Tom took Jane's hand and looked into her tearful eyes.

'But I need my uncle's money,' he said seriously. 'I must do what is right. I must think of my family.'

'Tom! Is that all you have to say?'

He was unable to reply.

Jane turned around and left the house. Henry and Eliza followed her. As she walked away, Tom watched unhappily from the window.

Chapter 11 Back Home

On the way home from visiting her brother Edward and his wife, Jane sat silently in the coach next to Cassandra. The two sisters were glad to be together again. But at the same time they were sad. Robert was in the West Indies, and Jane's dream of a life with Tom was gone.

As the coach moved slowly in the rain, Henry and Eliza fell asleep on the seat facing the girls. Eliza's head rested on Henry's shoulder.



On her first day back at the rectory, Jane tried to keep busy with housework. She was hanging up the wet clothes when her mother called her. She told her daughter to dress for a visit to Lady Gresham.

Jane and Mrs Austen bowed when they were shown into the old woman's sitting-room.

'What news?' asked Lady Gresham.

'My son and his wife have a new baby. Another girl,' said Mrs Austen proudly.

With a small smile Lady Gresham said, 'I hope she is well.' She looked at Jane for a minute or two, making the younger woman feel very uncomfortable. Finally, she continued, 'Miss Austen, will you and your family accept my invitation to eat here this evening?'

'Yes, Lady Gresham,' Jane said sadly, as her mother smiled proudly. 'Thank you.'



That evening, in the heavy rain, a messenger rode through the forest on horseback to Lady Gresham's house.

The old woman was in her dining room with her many

guests. The Austens were all there, with Eliza, John and, of course, Mr Wisley.

There was loud conversation as almost everyone enjoyed Lady Gresham's food. Only Jane was quiet. She was still thinking about Tom and did not eat much. When John asked about her visit to her brother, she answered his questions quickly. Then she said no more. She was polite, but the sadness in her heart made even that difficult.

There was a sudden knock on the door, and the messenger arrived with an important message for Jane's father. The other guests stopped talking in surprise. Mr Austen took the note and opened it immediately. As he read, his face turned pale.

The other people around the table waited for him to speak, and finally he lifted his head and looked at Cassandra.

The message was from the West Indies, and it was the worst possible news. After a short but serious illness, quite soon after his arrival, Robert Fowle was dead.

The dinner ended immediately and the Austens returned home.

Jane, her mother and Eliza stayed with Cassandra. The heart-broken young woman cried through the night.

When Cassandra finally fell asleep, early the next morning, Jane left her sister's room. She went for a walk in the garden with her notebook. But she was too tired and too sad. She could not write. She continued walking into the forest. It was difficult not to think about Tom. How could he be so cold to her? How could he think only about his uncle's money?

Henry and Eliza followed Jane into the forest. When they reached her, Eliza pulled at Henry's arm.

'I have more bad news, Jane,' Henry said. 'It is about Tom Lefroy.'

'What?' asked Jane, but she did not really want to hear it.

'I could not keep this a secret from you. The village will



The heart-broken young woman cried through the night.

know soon, and someone will tell you,' her brother continued.

'He is going to get married,' Eliza said quickly.

Surprised, Jane said, 'I see. So soon?' She suddenly felt weak and in a soft voice asked, 'Who is she?'

'A rich young lady from Ireland,' Henry explained. 'There was an agreement between Judge Langlois and the girl's father.'

Jane started to laugh because the situation seemed silly to her.

'Does the young lady know about this?'

'He has not been kind to you, Jane,' Eliza said.

'Who – the uncle or the nephew?' Jane replied, walking away from them. She had to be alone.



A few days later, Cassandra woke up to the sound of Jane writing at the table in their room. She watched her younger sister in silence, then said, 'A letter?'

'No,' Jane replied. 'Something that I began to write in London. It is a story about two young women who are better than their situations.'

'There are many of those.'

'And two young men who get more than they should. There are many of them too.'

'How does your story begin?' Cassandra asked.

'Badly,' said Jane.

'And then?'

'It gets worse. But with some amusing parts, I hope.'

Cassandra thought for a minute, then asked, 'How does it end?'

Jane did not yet know the ending, but she looked at the sadness on her sister's face and said, 'The women both have surprisingly happy endings.'

Cassandra smiled for the first time in days and asked, 'Wonderful marriages?'

'To very rich men,' her sister added.

'Oh, Jane,' Cassandra said. 'He was dead for weeks and I did not know.'

'How could you know?' Jane said. 'No one has ever felt more than you have for Robert. But you could not save him.'



The next day, their neighbour Mrs Lefroy visited the Austens for tea. 'I am glad to see you looking better, Cassandra,' she said kindly.

'Thank you,' said Cassandra, looking embarrassed.

'Is there any news in your family, Mrs Lefroy?' asked Mr Austen politely.

'My nephew is staying with us,' she said, watching Jane's face. Jane looked away. 'Just for a few days on family business.'

John spoke bravely. 'His marriage, perhaps.'

'He is well, I hope?' Mr Austen asked politely.

'Well enough.'

'Nothing seems to make *him* unhappy,' John said, looking warmly at Jane.

'Perhaps he has changed,' Mrs Lefroy said, still looking at Jane. 'He is not the same person.'

Mrs Austen stood up suddenly. 'Someone is coming,' she said in surprise.

Jane jumped to her feet.

'It is Mr Wisley!' Mrs Austen said.

'Yes,' said Jane. 'I invited him.'

She walked out of the room and joined Mr Wisley in the garden.

'You asked me a question,' Jane said quickly before he could speak. 'I am ready to give you my answer. It is now a better answer.'

He bowed and smiled at her, and they continued to walk.

'But there is one thing ...' She had to ask, but did not know how. 'You are a good man, Mr Wisley.' She thought for a few seconds and added, 'So I do not understand why you wrote the letter.'

'What letter?' he asked. 'I know nothing about a letter.'

'Or was it your aunt, for you?' Jane asked. 'It does not matter. One way or another, we are all made stupid by love.'

'In time,' Mr Wisley said kindly, 'I hope you will again have a higher opinion of love.'

'I think not,' Jane said. She stopped walking and turned to Mr Wisley. 'I thank you for your offer of marriage. I accept. Good day.'

And then she bowed and walked away.

Mr Wisley watched her as she moved past the flowers and out of his view. His mouth hung open in complete surprise.

Chapter 12 Tom's Offer

The autumn days were shorter and colder. Jane wore a coat around her shoulders as she walked through the garden. She noticed that most flowers were already dead. She took out her notebook to describe the brownness of it all. Then she heard footsteps on the path.

It was Tom Lefroy.

At first, neither of them could speak. She noticed that he was not wearing his long green coat. He wore black and looked like a lawyer now. He searched her large brown eyes, hoping for a sign from her about her feelings.

'Miss Austen,' he finally said softly.

'Mr Lefroy,' Jane said, unsure of herself, but trying to be strong. 'I understand that you will soon be married. Tell me about the lady.'

Tom looked embarrassed. 'She is from Ireland,' he said quickly.

'Your own country. Excellent,' she said. 'I see that she does not like your green coat. What was it that won her? Was it your smiles or your pleasing manners?'

Tom did not say anything more at first. He took out a few letters from his coat pocket and finally said, 'I cannot do this. I came to offer you an explanation. God knows what you must think of me. I know what I think of myself.' He put the letters back in his pocket, shaking his head. Again he said, 'I cannot do this.'

He suddenly stepped up to her and started to kiss her. She tried to push him away, but he continued. She hit him on the chest and he finally pulled back.

Again he said, 'I cannot do this.'

'What?' she asked.

'This,' Tom said. 'Any of it. Anything that is not with you. I cannot live this lie.' He looked straight into her eyes and asked, 'Can you?'

Jane was too surprised by his words to speak. She could feel her heart in her chest. Turning away, she said, 'I think you should leave now.'

'Come with me,' he said. 'Run away with me.'

Jane looked into his eyes. 'Marriage?' she asked. 'But without the agreement of my family or yours?'

'That is what I am offering,' Tom replied. 'I am not going to worry about my uncle. We can go to London tomorrow. By Friday we can be in Scotland and be married.'

In Scotland, but not in England, weddings could take place immediately.

Jane grew angry. 'And leave everything!'

'Everything,' Tom said decisively. 'It is the only way we can be together.'

'Unthinkable!' she said.

Tom stepped closer to her, saying, 'We were meant to be together.'

'Impossible! Mr Lefroy - ' she started, but he stopped her with another kiss.

This time, she did not push him away. After a few seconds, she lifted her eyes up to him.

Worried, she said, 'My mother will kill me.'



The next morning, Jane was up before her family. She quietly finished filling her suitcase. Then she wrote a note to Cassandra, stepped carefully to her sister's bed and placed the note on top of the covers. She studied Cassandra's sleeping face.

But as she walked quietly and slowly to the door, she heard Cassandra's voice behind her.

'You will lose everything,' her sister said. Surprised, Jane turned quickly. Cassandra continued, 'Family. Your place in the world. For what? A life of being poor? A child every year and no money to feed them?'

Jane did not want to listen. She hurried to the door.

'How will you write?' her sister asked coldly.

Jane stopped and thought for a few seconds. 'I do not know,' she said. 'But happiness is in my reach and I cannot stop myself.'

Cassandra jumped out of bed. 'There is no sense in this,' she said.

Jane said softly, 'Imagine being with your Robert again - even like this.'

The two sisters looked seriously at each other. Cassandra lowered her head.

'Please keep this a secret for now,' Jane said.

Cassandra watched as her younger sister opened the door.

'Wait!' she said suddenly. She quickly went to her cupboard, took out a box and gave some money and a silver ring to Jane. 'Now go – quickly,' she said.

With tears in their eyes, the sisters kissed goodbye.

Chapter 13 Running Away

The sun was coming up as Jane and Tom ran through the forest with their suitcases. At the end of the forest, they waited on a country road. Jane was cold and shaking. As Tom held her close, she felt warmer in his coat. They could not hide the worry on their faces.

Finally, the coach arrived. The horses shook their heads as the coachman threw their bags on top.

After Jane's suitcase was tied down, Tom asked her, 'Are you sure?'

'Yes,' she replied.

He helped her into the coach, and soon they were leaving Hampshire. From the window, Jane watched the hills and valleys of her years as a child moving past her. She was happy with Tom, but at the same time frightened about their future together.

'Hampshire,' Tom said to her. 'Your home.'

'It was,' Jane said simply.

Suddenly, the coach stopped, caught in the soft, wet ground. The coachman asked the passengers to get out. As Tom carried Jane to drier ground, she was already starting to feel like his wife.

The men were trying to push the coach. Before he joined them, Tom gave Jane his coat. As he did, the letters in his pocket fell out. Quickly, she reached for them before they fell into the dirty water.

She could not help noticing the first line of one of the letters, in an open envelope. It began:

'Dear Tom,

Thank you for the money that you sent. We really needed it ...'

She thought for a minute, then took the letter out of its envelope and read it. Then she walked away.

At last, the coach was freed from the dirty water. Tom looked up and saw Jane walking into the forest. He ran to catch her.

'We are ready to go now,' he said.

She stopped and looked down, deep in thought.

Tom stepped closer to her. Placing his arm on her shoulder, he asked, 'Worried?'

But she did not reply. She just put her head on his chest. Her face was sad.

'Are you worried about your reputation?' he asked.

'No,' she replied. 'Yours.'

He looked at her without understanding. Then the coachman shouted to them.

'Quickly now. We are late.'

Tom took Jane's hand and together they returned to the coach. As the journey continued, Jane was silent. She looked out of the window, still deep in thought.

Tom wanted to ask what those thoughts were. But there were strangers in the coach, and he could not. This was not the place to talk about personal business.

About five hours later, they stopped at a bar to change horses.

The coachman told everyone to be back at the coach in twenty minutes. The passengers climbed out of the coach, tired from the uncomfortable journey.

In the bar, people sat down and warmed themselves in front of the fire. Jane and Tom ordered hot drinks. Jane did not want to eat because she still had something on her mind. Tom waited

for her to speak.

Finally, she took Tom's hand and asked him sadly, 'How many brothers and sisters have you got in Ireland?'

Tom waited a second before answering. 'Enough,' he said nervously. 'Why?'

She took the letters out of his coat pocket, saying, 'What are their names?'

He suddenly realised that she knew about his large family. He was unable to speak.

Jane continued, 'They clearly need you. This will destroy your reputation and your uncle will stop giving you money. You need his money for your family.'

'But I can *earn* money,' he said, afraid now.

'It will not be enough.'

He shook his head and told her, 'I will not earn a lot at first, but in time.'

'Not with an important judge as your enemy, a wife from a poor family, and your brothers and sisters waiting for food. No, my sweet, sweet friend,' she said sadly, 'we will all be poor and unhappy.'

She reached for her hat, but he quickly took her by the wrist.

'I will never give you up,' he said.

A coachman from another coach called, 'Anyone for Hampshire?'

Jane stood up.

Tom stood up too and shouted at the coachman, 'Wait, wait.' He turned back to Jane. 'Don't speak,' he said. 'Don't think. Do you love me?'

She did not want to answer, but finally said, 'Yes. But if our love destroys your family, it will destroy itself. It seems that we were not meant to be together.'

'That is not true,' he said, pulling her to him.

He kissed her, but she pulled away.

'Goodbye,' she said.

Chapter 14 Another Sunday in the Country

It was late in the day when Jane walked slowly out of the forest, returning to the rectory with her suitcase in her hand. She stopped for a minute in front of her family's home. Did everyone in her family – everyone in the village – know about her and Tom? She tried to be brave.

When Jane stepped into the sitting-room, no one was there.

'Hello?' she called.

John ran into the room. He was clearly happy to see her.

'Where is everyone?' she asked.

'Looking for you,' John said excitedly. 'Your family is trying to keep this a secret, but perhaps it is too late. Lucy has probably told everyone in Hampshire by now. Where is that man, Lefroy? When Henry sees him, he will kill him.'

'There is no need. And he will not find him,' Jane said.

'So what ... happened?'

'Nothing "happened"', Jane replied as she sat down at the piano.

'I see,' John said, walking nervously across the room. He looked out of the window, then moved back towards Jane. 'I may not be as handsome as Mr Lefroy,' he said, going down on one knee. 'But my feelings for you ...'

Jane stopped him, 'Please – I have no hope of marriage at the present time.'

'Hope? But Jane,' he said softly, 'you cannot imagine ...'

'Are there no other women in Hampshire for you?' she said angrily, walking towards the door. But then she stopped, realising something. She turned back to John and said, 'It was

you who wrote the letter to the judge.'

'I have always loved you, Jane,' he said sadly.

She gave him a cold and angry look. He stepped back and quickly left the room.



The next day was a Sunday and Jane walked with her family to church. Everyone in the family was worried about what people were saying about Jane and Tom. As the Austens arrived at the church, Lady Gresham and her nephew were also passing. But they did not stop.

The old woman shouted, 'Mr Austen, I must tell you that I will not be in church today. Not if this young woman is going to be there.' Her narrow eyes looked angrily at Jane.

'Why not?' asked Mr Austen.

'Aunt, please,' Mr Wisley said.

'I believe your youngest daughter has been ... on a journey,' Lady Gresham said.

'Do you think travelling is a crime?' Jane asked politely.

'You took a journey without your parents' permission and with plans to marry a man. And that man was not the one she agreed to marry,' Lady Gresham said loudly.

'Who has told you that?' Jane asked.

'Mr John Warren has told us,' the old woman said. 'And he is a friend of your family.'

'Not now,' said Mr Austen bravely.

'And,' Lady Gresham continued, 'my nephew takes back his offer of marriage. He cannot be seen with someone like you.'

Mr Austen stood next to Jane and held her hand tightly. Her mother stepped closer and stood on the other side of her daughter.

At the same time, Mr Wisley bowed to his aunt. He then took Jane's arm and walked her away from the others.

'Wisley!' Lady Gresham called angrily.

He said softly to Jane, 'It seems you could not marry without love – or even with it. I admire you for that. And I agree with you. I cannot either. I always hoped to win your love one day. But I want to be loved for myself, not for my money.'

Jane was surprised and happy to hear this. 'So are we still friends?' she asked him.

'Of course we are,' Mr Wisley said with a smile.

'I am glad,' Jane said, as they continued to walk.

'And you will live by your pen?' he said. 'Will your stories have happy endings?'

'My characters will have – after a little trouble – all that they want, with a home, a family and great happiness.'

That afternoon, Jane continued working on the story of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy.

Chapter 15 Twenty Years Later

Jane was with Henry and his wife Eliza in a theatre in London, listening to music. Henry and Eliza had some grey hairs, but were still happy together. Jane looked younger than her age.

Suddenly, she realised that people were looking at her. When the song finished, everyone clapped the singer. Then they turned to Jane and continued clapping.

Henry said, 'You are becoming famous, Jane.'

Jane stood and bowed politely, first to the front and then behind her. When she turned around, she saw Tom sitting a few seats behind her. He was watching her with interest. He, too, was older. But she knew who he was.

She looked away. She did not want to talk to him after so many years.

After the show, Jane was greeted by many people who enjoyed

reading her books. They wanted to meet her, and she politely spoke to a few of them.

As she tried to get away from the crowd, a young woman came up to her.

'Are you Miss Jane Austen?' she asked. 'The writer of *Pride and Prejudice*?'

Jane smiled politely, then hurried to the door. But it was too late. She saw Tom coming towards her.

'Lefroy!' Henry called. The two old friends greeted each other.

Jane continued to walk away.



Later that night, there was a dinner party at Henry and Eliza's house. Many guests were already there when a few latecomers arrived. One of them was Tom.

Jane turned to Eliza. 'I will never forgive Henry for inviting him here.'

'Yes, you will,' Eliza said, and she smiled. 'We always forgive him for everything.'

Tom and Henry shook hands and Henry said, 'My old friend. Late as ever.'

Tom bowed to Jane. 'Miss Austen,' he said. He was clearly as uncomfortable as she was in this situation.

'Mr Lefroy,' Jane said politely.

Tom continued, 'May I introduce you to one of your admirers – my daughter, Miss Lefroy? Miss *Jane* Lefroy.'

The young woman stepped shyly towards Jane. 'Miss Austen,' she said. 'It is wonderful to meet you.'

Jane looked at her and said, 'You have your father's eyes.'

'Will you read for us tonight, Miss Austen?' the younger woman asked excitedly.

'She never reads at parties,' Henry explained.

The young woman looked unhappy.

Jane Austen looked at Tom with a small smile and thought for a minute.

'Tonight will be different,' she said finally, 'because my new friend wants me to.'

She sat next to the young Miss Lefroy and started to read the story of *Pride and Prejudice*. The story of how Elizabeth Bennet learnt to love Mr Darcy, and became his wife.



Tom Lefroy married a rich woman. He became a lawyer, sat in parliament and, many years later, became Ireland's most important judge.

Neither Jane Austen nor her sister Cassandra ever married. Jane completed six very successful books before dying at the age of forty-one.