

Excerpt from Twenty-seventh Chapter of
Yours Affectionately, Jane Austen

Two days were soon gone and Jane was visiting at Chawton Great House. Inside Fanny's bedroom Jane and her niece were sharing secrets as friends are wont to do.

“Did I tell you,” Jane asked her niece, “that Mrs. Knight offered me the gift of her spinning wheel, so that I might have one of *my* own.”

“Spinning wheel,” asked an incredulous Fanny, “what did she think you would do with a spinning wheel?”

Jane laughed, “If I were able to spin straw into gold I might have accepted it but as it was I probably would only have spun a rope to hang myself rather than use it to spin wool.”

Fanny giggled, “What did you do?”

“I thanked her for her kind offer and changed the subject.” The two women giggled like school girls.

Fanny began complaining about, what she perceived, as a dearth of eligible young men even though she had recently received an offer of marriage. The young man was so serious-minded that he was often very dull. However, Fanny continued, she did wonder if his strong attachment might not be the best thing for a marriage partner.

Admitting that it was important for a man to love the woman, her aunt added that it would be best if the woman loved him as well.

Jane admonished her niece, “It must be affection on both sides for a marriage should be a partnership. If you do not feel the same regard for him as he does for you then it is best to not prolong the affiliation.”

“I do not want to marry him and have already told him no but I have met no one else I would consider marrying. Why can I find no one?”

“Perhaps you are looking for the kind of excellence that it is more than difficult to find in people. You seem to want the kind of perfection where grace, spirit and worth are united with manners equal to heart and understanding, however, even should you find such a man he may not belong to your country.”

Fanny smiled, “You mean like Mr. Darcy?”

“I made him up, Fanny.”

“He did not look made up to me and Mr. Darcy of Virginia was not of our country.” Fanny gave her aunt a sly look, “While he was staying here I was sure I observed affection on both sides and he was very real. Was there no attachment there?”

A tiny smile curved Jane’s mouth, “There might have been given the opportunity but it was not to be.”

“And do you not regret that?”

“Regret serves no useful purpose and past experience is what makes us who we are so we should regret as little as possible.”

“What about Tom LeFroy? Cousin Anna says that you were much in love with him but he treated you very ill.”

Jane shook her head, everyone seemed to make much more of that connection than either she or he ever imagined.

“He went away at his family’s urging which could hardly be considered his ill treatment. However, even if he had left because he simply wanted to he never imposed upon me, never injured me and we were never attached to each other. It was a flirtation of very short duration.”

“Truly?”

“Yes.”

“So there has never been anyone you would have married?”

Jane thought for a moment and Fanny took her Aunt’s hesitation as confirmation that there was someone. “Tell me, who was he?”

Jane chuckled, “It was many years ago and I cannot say absolutely that I would have married him but he was one of the most amiable men of my acquaintance. He died before I was able to know him well. So in answer to all of your questions there has been nothing out of the common way, no attachment that has overclouded happiness.”

*Based on letters to
sister Cassandra dated 31 May 1811 and
niece Fanny Austen-Knight dated 18 November 1814*