

Excerpt from Fifteenth Chapter of  
**Yours Affectionately, Jane Austen**

Mr. Woolls had proudly regaled the other guests at Edward's dinner last night of improvements he was making to his home. Jane's interest had been piqued when he mentioned an American garden. Her curiosity was further aroused when he said that many of the plants had come over by ship from Virginia where his cousin lived.

Mr. Darcy had never mentioned plants being different in America, of course, they had had little time to talk of such mundane details. She tried to imagine his estate about which she knew virtually nothing, in fact, all she did know was that he bred horses and it was called Pemberley Farms, and as he had emphatically said, was not an agricultural farm. Yet another way, she realized later, for him to stress the fact that he had no slaves but then that was before she knew the truth about him. She looked at the fields surrounding her and noted the horse chestnut trees, the birch trees, the grasses and wild flowers; an American garden; she was looking forward to seeing just what that meant.

As her thoughts were thus engaged the clouds she'd seen on the horizon earlier had moved in and far more quickly than she anticipated. A flash of lightning followed by a clap of thunder startled her and once again her stomach tightened. The surrounding countryside seemed otherworldly, illuminated as it was by the lightning which preceded every clap of thunder, as her agitation grew the rain started in earnest. Jane turned the donkey around; there would be no American garden today.

Thankfully the donkey seemed inured to the loudness of the thunder that was causing her anxiety and trotted quickly all the way to the Great House. His speed, however, was not enough to get Jane out of the pelter in time to avoid getting wet through.

*Letter to Nephew James Edward dated 9 July 1816*

## Continuation of Chapter 15

Fanny was beside herself with concern when Jane arrived, drenched to the skin. Rushing her aunt to her bedroom where a maid had just laid and started a fire, she insisted, "We must get you out of these wet clothes and dried off."

An astonished Jane said, "But Fanny, dear, a fire? It is warm and I will dry in due time."

Adamantly Fanny insisted, "Dr. Phillips says that a chill from remaining in wet clothes can cause a cold in the lungs or worse." She paused but a moment, "No, we must get you dry. Martha finished dyeing your gown yesterday so we have something for you to wear and you can borrow one of my bodice petticoats."

Fanny gave Jane a dressing gown and along with the maid helped her father's sister out of her wet things and positioned her by the fire, sending the maid away with the wet clothes and ordering tea to be brought up immediately.

"I am not cold."

"But the heat will dry you. We should take your hair down so it will dry as well."

"Fanny, I am fine."

"You will be when you are warm and dry."

Jane finally relented and resigned herself to her niece's ministrations admitting, if only to herself, that she rather enjoyed being fussed over. After taking her hair down she combed it through with her fingers tilting her head toward the fire. The flames were hot enough that she was sure it would take a very short time for her hair to dry.

While her oldest niece was pouring the chamomile tea they heard Fanny's younger sisters whispering from the doorway; not allowed in unless specifically invited the two young girls had gone no further.

Fanny sighed, "Alright you can come in."

Jane asked, "What were you two whispering about?"

Louisa said, "Your hair."

"My hair?"

"The other day Marianne told me that she had found you once with your hair down and it was the most beautiful hair she had ever seen and it is."

"Why, thank you, girls."

Louisa picked up Fanny's brush. "May I brush your hair, Aunt?"

“Of course, dear.”

Her young niece ran the boar bristles through her hair over and over until it was completely dry. The natural curl made it fall in soft waves down her back, almost to the floor and with her heart shaped face framed by tendrils of the chestnut tresses, Louisa asked, “Why do you not wear your hair down, Aunt Jane?” as she pulled the brush through one last time.

Marianne offered, “It is immodest. I told you, mother said so.”

“And your mother was right. The church says that a woman’s hair is her crowning glory so to keep pride under good regulation a woman must tie up and cover her hair.”

“But Marianne and I do not.”

“You are not yet women.”

“What about Fanny, she wears hers up but not covered.”

“Fanny is a young woman. Generally it is married women who cover their hair, so only their husbands see it.”

“But you and Aunt Cass are not married.”

“True. But we are old and so are expected to dress and act in a more conservative manner like married women.”

Louisa in her innocence said, “I do not understand that at all.”

Jane hugged her young relative and said, “Frankly Louisa, I do not fully understand it myself.”

Fanny interrupted any further questions from her sisters by telling them that they all needed to allow their Aunt Jane some privacy so she could dress for tea. Jane smiled as Fanny took her younger siblings by the hands and the three of them left their father’s sister alone.

At the window Jane watched as the rain stopped and the black clouds parted revealing a rainbow arching over Edward’s estate, brilliant against the rain scrubbed sky. The cloud burst was over, she sighed deeply, her nieces had been a great comfort during the worst of the thunder storm. The darkness was vacating the sky portending a sunny afternoon.

Jane turned at the sound of the door opening and Martha came in with the dress. It was one of Jane’s favorite gowns. A white muslin that had unfortunately been stained by spilled tea and at her age white was no longer appropriate so she had, herself, used tea to dye it, just enough to cover the stain. But in time the ecru of the tea dye had become dingy and Fanny had suggested that Martha the Austen-Knight family laundress dye it for her. To her surprise the gown was now

the colour of spring grass, a much brighter colour than she was used to wearing. Could she really wear such a colour in company? White, green; there it was again she was allowing society and propriety to dictate what she wore based on the fact that she was no longer sixteen.

Jane stood in the borrowed bodice petticoat staring at the green dress as Martha laid it on the bed and left, sending Amy, Fanny's personal maid, to help Jane dress. Completing the chore, the young servant curtsied and said, "You look nice, Miss Jane."

Jane looked at the woman in the full length mirror. The high cheekbones had some colour, the dark hair almost glistened in the newly revealed sun streaming through the window. She tilted her head for a different perspective and smiled at her own reflection. Since her fichu was as wet as her dress she must go uncovered leaving the tops of her breasts exposed. In spite of feeling a bit naughty, she was well pleased with the way she looked. Then reminded herself that 'Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall'. She hoped her own vanity was not pride enough to cause destruction or even a fall.

In the second floor drawing room Jane entered to many comments from Fanny's friends and guests, espousing her pleasing appearance and high colour; the colour coming no doubt from the blush of embarrassment at hearing such admiration from so many. Lord Moore-Jeffries insisted she sit with him after taking a turn about the room making her compliments to each guest in attendance.

Sitting with his Lordship Jane felt at ease for the first time that afternoon for while he too had made mention of how lovely she looked, it was as though her father was saying it and that brought her pleasure. Taking small bites of one of the many pastries being served by Fanny, Jane admitted to the Earl that she supposed she must leave off being young now; although as a sort of chaperon for her niece's party, there were, she discovered many douceurs. For example she could sit in comfort with him rather than having to make small talk with people she did not know. Then, of course, she whispered conspiratorially, she could drink as much wine as she liked. They laughed together.

*Letter to sister Cassandra dated 6 November 1813*