

**Excerpt from Twenty-Eighth 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 you know," Jane asked her niece, "that Mrs. Knight has 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 county.”

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, most definitely, not of our county.” 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 can not 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."

Jane then read excerpts from *Pride and Prejudice*, mostly the ones involving Mr. Collins and his fawning, unctuous behavior that both women found exceedingly funny. It was gratifying, for Jane, that Fanny enjoyed it so much since she had written the character as a comic figure.

Marianne and Louisa were sitting atop the first step of the stairs, finishing off the cake they had procured from cook and waiting for their father's sister. Finally Fanny's bedroom door opened and when Fanny and Aunt Jane came out the young girls jumped up, dusting their hands of cake crumbs. Their aunt smiled and took their hands in hers.

"Come along girls, to the garden we go."

As the three Austen females skipped down the stairs together and out into the garden, Fanny went to check on the other Austen-Knight children.

Jane and her nieces ran through the garden, tumbling on to the soft grass under a large beech tree.

Marianne begged, "Tell us a story Aunt Jane."

"Yes, so I shall." Their aunt thought a moment then began, "Once upon a time there was a young farmer who vanished two days before his wedding, his bride swore to the heavens that she would stop at nothing to find him and then pleaded with the fairies of the garden for their help."

After keeping her young charges enthralled for some time Jane ended the story. "The fairy queen brought the farmer back to his bride just in time for the wedding.

In their joy the farmer and his new wife set out a great feast for all the fairies and in appreciation for saving the groom from the ogre who kidnapped him the couple left tokens, gifts and food for the fairies every night.

And for the rest of their lives they lived in peace and harmony, always watched over by the fairies in their garden.” With a verbal flourish Jane said, “Finis.”

The young girls clapped and Louisa said, “Tell us another Aunt Jane.”

“Another time, dear.”

Relinquishing the shade of the tree and the comfort of the cool grass Jane, Marianne and Louisa returned to The Great House taking a turn through the fruit orchard. Their aunt reached up and plucked apricots for each of them from the lowest branches on one of the trees heavy with fruit.

When they reached the courtyard the small cadre of Austen females found Fanny speaking with James, the groom.

Seeing her aunt over the stableman’s shoulder Fanny said, “James here has asked if you would like him to bring the curricle around when you are ready to return home.”

Jane turned and smiled at the young man, “I thank you James but I have been sitting so much today that I believe some exercise is what I need so I will walk across the far meadow on my way home. I do appreciate your thoughtfulness.”

As Jane bid farewell to the Austen-Knight clan with a promise to join them for luncheon the next day, Fanny wondered at her Aunt’s un-natural familiarity with the lower classes, such as the servants. Knowing there was nothing to be done she ushered the little girls into the house.