

The Marriage of Miss Jane Austen: Volume II

Collins Hemingway

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Hemingway's novel invites you to linger, to savor, and to enjoy this imagined side of Jane.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the better a lady is acquainted with romantic disappointment, the more eloquently she will speak on the virtues of love. That, at least, is the conception of Jane Austen, a writer famous for her satisfying, lively novels about love and marriage—who was never married. Collins Hemingway's *The Marriage of Miss Jane Austen* wonders: what if Jane Austen had followed in her characters' footsteps and walked down the aisle? The result is a spirited romp through the Regency period that will satisfy even the most jaded Janeite.

The year is 1805, and Mrs. Ashton Dennis, formerly Jane Austen, lives a life that is consumed with household management. Her writing desk is "relegated to a deep corner of the room as if being isolated for misbehavior." Instead of writing, Jane applies her substantial brainpower to learning the ropes of her new role.

The kitchen, social events, and a troublesome mother-in-law give her plenty of opportunities for bon mots and small domestic victories. Chapters written as letters to Jane's sister, Cassandra, add historical and personal details from her life and develop the story's believability. As Jane adjusts to her new role of "wife," she is caught up in her husband's involvement in the revolutionary industrial and scientific movements of the early 1800s. Coffeepots, cannons, and comets fill her letters to Cassandra and add a steampunk element.

Hemingway's fanciful fiction is fun and fast paced, weaving historical details together in a style that mimics Austen's own. The novel quickly ventures beyond familiar boundaries, however. Science and sex in particular take center stage in *The Marriage of Miss Jane Austen*. These are described in discreet terms, but their presence make the novel Hemingway's own creation. Jane's sexual awakening, for example, is as much a part of her new life as her other domestic duties: "Under the tutelage of marriage, she was speedily becoming conversant with her body and consequently less hesitating about its cloistered inclinations." Jane's attitudes about female independence and social issues are progressive, and her daily struggles seem modern and relatable.

Although the real Jane Austen received only one marriage proposal—and rejected it the following morning—Hemingway's Jane takes on the adventure of a true romantic partnership and all the excitement that the nineteenth century had to offer. "Our dearest experiences come when we do not rush," she says. Hemingway's novel invites you to linger, to savor, and to enjoy this imagined side of Jane.

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