



**Jane Austen**

*The Watsons*



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## PREFACE

This work was left by its author, a fragment without a name, in so elementary a state as not even to be divided into chapters, and some obscurities and inaccuracies of expression may be observed in it, which the author would probably have corrected. The original manuscript is the property of my sister, Miss Austen, by whose permission it is now published. I have called it *The Watsons*, for the sake of having a title, by which to designate it. Two questions may be asked concerning it. When was it written? And, why was it never finished? I was unable to answer the first question, as long as I had only the internal evidence of the style to guide me. I felt satisfied, indeed, that it did not belong to that early class of her writings, which are mentioned at page 46 of the *Memoir*, but rather bore marks of her more mature style, though it had never been subjected to the filing and polishing process, by which she was accustomed to impart a high finish to her published works. At last, on a close inspection of the original manuscript, the watermarks of 1803 and 1804 were found in the paper, on which it was written. It is therefore probable that it was composed at Bath, before she ceased to reside there in 1805. This would place the date a few years later than the composition, but earlier than the publication of *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Pride and Prejudice*. To the second question, why was it never finished? I can give no satisfactory answer. I think it will be

generally admitted that there is much in it, which promised well; that some of the characters are drawn with her wonted vigour, and some with a delicate discrimination peculiarly her own; and that it is rich in her especial power of telling the story, and bringing out the characters by conversation rather than by description. It could not have been broken up for the purpose of using the materials in another fabric; for, with the exception of Mrs. Robert Watson, in whom a resemblance to the future Mrs. Elton is very discernible, it would not be easy to trace much resemblance between this and any of her subsequent works. She must have felt some regret at leaving Tom Musgrave's character incomplete; yet he never appears elsewhere. My own idea is, but it is only a guess, that the author became aware of the evil of having placed her heroine too low, in such a position of poverty and obscurity as, though not necessarily connected with vulgarity, has a sad tendency to degenerate into it; and, therefore, like a singer who has begun on too low a note, she discontinued the strain. It was an error, of which she was likely to become more sensible, as she grew older and saw more of Society; certainly, she never repeated it by placing the heroine of any subsequent work under circumstances likely to be unfavourable to the refinement of a lady.

*J. E. Austen Leigh*

## CHAPTER I

**T**he first winter assembly in the town of D—, in Surrey, was to be held on Tuesday, October 13th, and it was generally expected to be a very good one. A long list of county families was confidently run over as sure of attending, and sanguine hopes were entertained that the Osbornes themselves would be there. The Edwards' invitation to the Watsons followed, as a matter of course. The Edwards were people of fortune, who lived in the town and kept their coach. The Watsons inhabited a village about three miles distant, were poor and had no close carriage; and ever since there had been balls in the place, the former were accustomed to invite the latter to dress, dine, and sleep at their house on every monthly return throughout the winter. On the present occasion, as only two of Mr. Watson's children were at home, and one was always necessary as companion to himself, for he was sickly and had lost his wife, one only could profit by the kindness of their friends. Miss Emma Watson, who was very recently returned to her family from the care of an aunt who had brought her up, was to make her first public appearance in the neighbourhood; and her eldest sister, whose delight in a ball was not lessened by a ten years' enjoyment, had some merit in cheerfully undertaking to drive her and all her finery in the old chair to D— on the important morning.

As they splashed along the dirty lane, Miss Watson thus instructed and cautioned her inexperienced sister.

“I daresay it will be a very good ball, and among so many officers you will hardly want partners. You will find Mrs. Edwards’ maid very willing to help you, and I would advise you to ask Mary Edwards’ opinion if you are at all at a loss, for she has a very good taste. If Mr. Edwards does not lose his money at cards you will stay as late as you can wish for; if he does he will hurry you home perhaps—but you are sure of some comfortable soup. I hope you will be in good looks. I should not be surprised if you were to be thought one of the prettiest girls in the room, there is a great deal in novelty. Perhaps Tom Musgrave may take notice of you, but I would advise you by all means not to give him any encouragement. He generally pays attention to every new girl, but he is a great flirt, and never means anything serious.”

“I think I have heard you speak of him before,” said Emma. “Who is he?”

“A young man of very good fortune, quite independent, and remarkably agreeable, a universal favourite wherever he goes. Most of the girls hereabouts are in love with him, or have been. I believe I am the only one among them that have escaped with a whole heart; and yet I was the first he paid attention to when he came into this country six years ago; and very great attention did he pay me. Some people say that he has never seemed to like any girl so well since, though he is always behaving in a particular way to one or another.”

“And how came *your* heart to be the only cold one?” asked Emma, smiling.

“There was a reason for that,” replied Miss Watson, changing colour. “I have not been very well used among them, Emma. I hope you will have better luck.”

“Dear sister, I beg your pardon, if I have unthinkingly given you pain.”

“When we first knew Tom Musgrave,” continued Miss Watson, without seeming to hear her, “I was very much attached to a young man of the name of Purvis, a particular friend of Robert’s, who used to be with us a great deal. Everybody thought it would have been a match.”

A sigh accompanied these words, which Emma respected in silence. But her sister, after a short pause, went on.

“You will naturally ask why it did not take place, and why he is married to another woman, while I am still single. But you must ask him—not me—you must ask Penelope. Yes, Emma, Penelope was at the bottom of it all. She thinks everything fair for a husband. I trusted her: she set him against me, with a view of gaining him herself, and it ended in his discontinuing his visits, and, soon after, marrying somebody else. Penelope makes light of her conduct, but *I* think such treachery very bad. It has been the ruin of my happiness. I shall never love any man as I loved Purvis. I do not think Tom Musgrave should be named with him in the same day.”

“You quite shock me by what you say of Penelope,” said Emma. “Could a sister do such a thing? Rivalry, treachery between sisters! I shall be afraid of being acquainted with her. But I hope it was not so; appearances were against her.”

“You do not know Penelope. There is nothing she would not do to get married. She would as good as tell you so herself. Do not trust her with any secrets of your own, take warning by me, do not trust her; she has her good qualities, but she has no faith, no honour, no scruples, if she can promote her own advantage. I wish with all my heart she was well married. I declare I had rather have her well married than myself.”

“Than yourself! Yes, I can suppose so. A heart wounded like yours can have little inclination for matrimony.”

“Not much, indeed—but you know we must marry.”

“I could do very well single for my own part.”

“A little company, and a pleasant ball now and then, would be enough for me, if one could be young for ever; but my father cannot provide for us, and it is very bad to grow old and be poor and laughed at. I have lost Purvis, it is true; but very few people marry their first loves. I should not refuse a man because he was not Purvis. Not that I can ever quite forgive Penelope.”

Emma shook her head in acquiescence.

“Penelope, however, has had her troubles,” continued Miss Watson. “She was sadly disappointed in Tom Musgrave, who afterwards transferred his attentions from me to her, and whom she was very fond of, but he never means anything serious, and when he had trifled with her long enough, he began to slight her for Margaret, and poor Penelope was very wretched. And since then she has been trying to make some match at Chichester—she won’t tell us with whom, but I believe it is a rich old Dr. Harding, uncle to the friend she goes to see; and she has taken a vast deal of trouble about him, and given up a great deal of time to no purpose as yet. When she went away the other day, she said it should be the last time. I suppose you did not know what her particular business was at Chichester, nor guess at the object, which could take her away from Stanton just as you were coming home after so many years’ absence.”

“No, indeed, I had not the smallest suspicion of it. I considered her engagement to Mrs. Shaw just at that time as very unfortunate for me. I had hoped to find all my sisters at home, to be able to make an immediate friend of each.”

“I suspect the Doctor to have had an attack of the asthma, and that she was hurried away on that account. The Shaws are quite on her side—at least I believe so; but she tells me nothing. She professes to keep her own counsel; she says, and truly enough, that “Too many cooks spoil the broth.”

"I am sorry for her anxieties," said Emma, "but I do not like her plans or her opinions. I shall be afraid of her. She must have too masculine and bold a temper. To be so bent on marriage—to pursue a man merely for the sake of situation, is a sort of thing that shocks me; I cannot understand it. Poverty is a great evil; but to a woman of education and feeling it ought not, it cannot be, the greatest. I would rather be teacher at a school—and I can think of nothing worse—than marry a man I did not like."

"I would rather do anything than be teacher at a school," said her sister. "*I* have been at school, Emma, and know what a life they lead; *you* never have. I should not like marrying a disagreeable man any more than yourself, but I do not think there *are* many very disagreeable men; I think I could like any good-humoured man with a comfortable income. I suppose my aunt brought you up to be rather refined."

"Indeed, I do not know. My conduct must tell you how I have been brought up. I am no judge of it myself. I cannot compare my aunt's method with any other person's, because I know no other."

"But I can see in a great many things that you are very refined. I have observed it ever since you came home, and I am afraid it will not be for your happiness. Penelope will laugh at you very much."

"That will not be for my happiness, I am sure. If my opinions are wrong I must correct them; if they are above my situation, I must endeavour to conceal them; but I doubt whether ridicule—has Penelope much wit?"

"Yes, she has great spirit, and never cares what she says."

"Margaret is more gentle, I imagine?"

"Yes, especially in company; she is all gentleness and mildness when anybody is by. But she is a little fretful and perverse among ourselves. Poor creature! She is possessed



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