

Lane
and the

**WATERLOO
MAP**

.....
BEING A JANE AUSTEN MYSTERY
.....

Stephanie Barron

**SOHO
CRIME**

A COMMAND PERFORMANCE

Monday, 13 November 1815
23 Hans Place, London

There can be few things more lowering to the female sensibility than to be caught in a shower of rain at exactly the moment one most desires to appear to advantage. It is not that I care two straws for His Royal Highness the Prince Regent's good opinion; indeed, I should regard the admiration of such a roué as bordering upon insult; but there is an undeniable duty to answer a summons to Carlton House that demands the donning of one's best carriage gown, the coiffing of one's hair, and the hiring of a suitable chaise.

To be thoroughly drenched, therefore, in the simple act of gaining that chaise, is a rebuke to misplaced vanity and expence. As I shivered on the threshold of the palace, my elegant boots damp at the toes and my curls lank upon my brow, I could not bear to look at Manon hovering two steps behind me. My brother's French housekeeper had deplored this visit from the outset. She had no opinion of the Royal House, and appeared certain that all I should achieve by accepting the Prince's invitation

was ravishment at his hands. She had insisted, therefore, upon accompanying me—my brother Henry being as yet too ill to leave his bed.

It was because of Henry—who else but Henry?—that I was known to Carlton House at all.

I arrived in London a month ago, expressly to negotiate the terms of publication of my latest novel, *Emma*—an eventuality by no means assured. It has not been enough that my earlier works were generally admired, and briskly sold, nor that the third of these—*Mansfield Park*—has exhausted its first edition. My publisher, Mr. Thomas Egerton, refused a second edition of the latter, and spurned my fourth book entirely. I am inclined to attribute his disaffection to the dislike felt by some readers—and perhaps Egerton himself—for my saintly *Mansfield* heroine, Fanny Price. Where the arch and impertinent *Lizzy Bennet* found favour among the abandoned inhabitants of the Metropolis, Fanny was simply too *good* to be entertaining. Egerton must have feared that my spoilt and headstrong *Emma* should be similarly received; but in this he showed the limitations of a journeyman publisher. I suspect that *Emma* will prove the darling of the frivolous *ton*.

Another lady might have read in Egerton's rebuff the instruction of Providence, and left off writing such dubious stuff as *novels*; my brother James, in his role as Divine Intermediary, counseled as much. He regards the indulgence of novel-reading as a dangerous diversion from Duty, particularly among women. To embrace the scandalous project of actually *writing* such books—and profiting by them!—is to tempt Satan. I would not have had James learn of Egerton's defection for the world, but

my mother let slip some part of the intelligence, when relating the news of my journey to Hans Place.

My beloved Henry, far from scolding my arrogant proclivities, actually encourages them. In the face of Egerton's stupidity, he proposed that we approach none other than the illustrious Mr. John Murray, of Albemarle Street, founder of the *Quarterly Review*. As Murray is well known to publish Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott, the hubris of this notion was staggering. Only Henry could assume that a tale dismissed by an Egerton might be coveted by a Murray; our Henry has been tilting at windmills all his life. But in the event, his wager answered: Murray deigned to glance at my *Emma*. It seems he was a little acquainted with Lizzy Bennet, and found her charming.

All matters of cost and gain being uncertain in these straitened months after Wellington's great victory, however, Murray proved cautious.* He required a second opinion—none other than that of the *Quarterly Review's* editor, Mr. William Gifford, who found “nothing but good” in my manuscript, and offered to edit it for publication. *Emma* having survived the scrutiny of so critical a reader, Murray offered me his price: £450 for the copyright.

For *Emma* alone, this should have proved acceptable. But being a rogue as well as a man of letters, Murray demanded the rights to *Mansfield Park* and *Sense and Sensibility* as well. Such terms being likely to beggar me, I refused them. Miss Marianne Dashwood and Miss Mary Crawford cost me too much effort in their fashioning, to be cast upon the world for a pittance.

* England's economy was severely disrupted by the conclusive fall of Napoleon Bonaparte in June 1815, as markets spurred by warfare contracted and soldiers returned home in search of employment. —*Editor's note.*

The delicate business was complicated by my brother's falling ill, of a trifling cold. He attempted to dictate from his bed an indignant letter to Mr. Murray, protesting the publisher's terms, but was unequal to completing it. Henry's indisposition turned to something far more dangerous by the third week in October—a low fever that worsened every hour. I had little time or thought for business. Days passed with no improvement in my brother's condition. He was delirious and wandering, his pulse depressed.

The excellent Mr. Haden, our surgeon, bled Henry copiously, but urged me to inform my family of the gravity of his illness. I was so alarmed by Haden's sombre looks as to send Express to James at Steventon and Edward in Kent, that Henry's last hours might not go unwitnessed by those he loved. Indeed, so wrapped in misery was I, and so deprived of sleep, that I required the presence of others to support me.

James collected Cassandra on his way to London, which suggested he was not so entirely bereft of sense as I usually judge him. They were all three arrived in Hans Place by the twenty-fourth of October, so that Manon and her mother had their hands full of Austens. Edward immediately urging the services of a more experienced man than Mr. Haden, Dr. Matthew Baillie, the Court Physician, was summoned—and so answered his patient's need, that by the thirtieth October, Henry was on the mend.

I cannot describe the exquisite relief of being spared my particularly beloved brother. Suffice it to say that when the crisis was observed to have passed—a little before dawn on the twenty-ninth October—that Cassandra and I, who had

been sitting up together at the bedside, neither being willing to fail in the final moments of Henry's life, fell into each other's arms and wept.

It was some days before the patient could stand, or consume more than a little thick gruel. By the first week of November, however, Edward was gone back into Kent and James into Hampshire, taking my sister with him. I remained here in London to nurse Henry—and see what could be done with my difficult *Emma*.

I wrote directly to John Murray and desired him to wait upon me in Hans Place. He was so good as to appear the following morning, and the briefest of conversations secured our mutual satisfaction. I am to retain the copyright of *Emma*, publishing the work at my own expence; and Mr. Murray is to take ten percent of the profits, for his trouble in putting out the volumes. As I followed a similar course with all my dearest children but *Pride and Prejudice*—which copyright Egerton purchased outright for the sum of £110—I am untroubled by fear of risk. Murray has agreed to publish a second edition of *Mansfield Park*, on similar terms.

James shall be appalled to learn that I have become a woman of Business, as well as Letters. My fallen nature is confirmed.

I HAD SCARCELY CLOSED the door on one visitor, than another appeared in Hans Place—entirely unknown to me, and unsettling in the extreme.

Mr. James Stanier Clarke is a clergyman notable for his reliance upon Royal patronage. He is Historiographer to the King (tho' what a madman may want with learning, is open to

question), a Canon of Windsor, and author of the yearly *Naval Chronicle*, which must endear him to everyone in the Austen family. He also wrote a fulsome biography of Admiral Lord Nelson, that praised all the hero's better qualities and ignored whatever was lamentable in his character—an office Clarke undertook with the aid of the Duke of Clarence and the Prince Regent.

When he sent in his card, I instructed Manon to convey Mr. Austen's compliments and the intelligence that he was as yet confined to his rooms. But Manon looked darkly and said that Mr. Clarke wished to interview *me*. I bade her show him up to the parlour, therefore, and prepared for a tedious quarter-hour.

"Miss Austen!" he cried, as tho' we met again after many years parted. "What pleasure is this, to trace in your gentle looks and modest attire the Genius that lends such animation to your works—and, I need not add, provides amusement to so many!"

He bounded forward from the threshold, a round little man with fair hair and innocent blue eyes, very finely turned out in a dark green coat. I stepped backwards, a trifle disconcerted, but managed a feeble curtsy. The fact of my authorship is but lately known, my first novel having been published as "by a Lady." Henry chose to explode my anonymity, entirely against instruction, and deposit the books at my feet for the World to criticise. I should have preferred to write in all the freedom of obscurity, without the weight of either censure or praise.

"Mr. Clarke," I acknowledged. "I am grateful for your good opinion, sir. But I confess I cannot account for the honour of your presence in Hans Place. My brother is only lately delivered

from his sickbed, and is quite unequal to the strain of visitors. How may I serve you?"

"By accepting my sincere congratulations on Mr. Henry Austen's deliverance, madam, and the good wishes of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent, who was informed of your brother's illness in recent days—and of your own angelic office, in nursing him back to health—by our esteemed mutual acquaintance, Dr. Matthew Baillie."

The Court Physician. He had impressed me as a quiet and efficient fellow, spare of figure and ugly of countenance, with a monkey's shrewd eyes. Why should he canvass the difficulties of a common banker and his sister around the card tables at Carlton House? Henry's pockets had been thoroughly emptied by the Regent's circle in the past—he was forever lending money on generous terms to friends of Eliza's, and my late sister had been acquainted with far too many of the Great; but—

"The Regent, I may say, was instantly electrified to learn of *Miss Jane Austen's* residence in the Metropolis," Clarke persisted, bowing low, "and despatched me to your door with all possible haste."

I groped behind me for a chair.

That the presence in London of a woman unremarkable for birth, beauty, blowsy corpulence, or loose morals should be immediately electrifying to the Prince Regent!

"You must know," Clarke added, "that His Royal Highness keeps a complete set of your works, handsomely bound, in each of his residences. The young Princess Charlotte has also found them vastly entertaining."

"Pray sit down, sir," I said faintly.

The cherub beamed, and did so.

“I am instructed to convey all that is proper of His Royal Highness’s esteem and commendation, Miss Austen, and to offer the considerable resources and ample solitude of the Library at Carlton House, for your use and pleasure, should you require it, during your stay in London. I may add that His Royal Highness has further instructed Dr. Baillie to call here in Hans Place each day and carry a report of your brother’s progress to Carlton House—the Regent being most anxious for Mr. Austen’s return to robust health.”

I am afraid I openly frowned at the little man, so incomprehensible did this speech seem. Had Henry been in his usual high spirits and stout form, I should have suspected him of hiring the fellow to trick me.

“The Library at Carlton House? The Regent intends for me to *write* there?”

“Not if you should dislike it,” Mr. Clarke said hurriedly. “But I cannot conceive why you should. It is in every way an admirable chamber, lined with a varied and thorough selection of works on every subject; handsomely appointed, the lighting good, the warmth without question (His Royal Highness is highly particular about the heating of his rooms)—and as nobody at Carlton House is excessively devoted to literature, generally empty.”

This last, I could well believe; and as the final note rang true, I must credit the whole.

“You are very good, sir,” I said, rising with an air that must be read as dismissal—“and the Regent’s generosity is nothing short of remarkable. Please say everything proper to His Royal

Highness, of my gratitude for his notice and his esteem. It must be impossible for me to accept his kind invitation, however. The demands of my brother's precarious health make any interests of my own immaterial at present."

The expression of dismay on poor Mr. Clarke's face was so sudden and ill-disguised that I very nearly disgraced myself with laughter. His disappointment was vast, and his discomfiture palpable. He stood to his full height of five feet and turned agitatedly before the hearth, his hands clasped upon his stomach. It was evident I had committed some solecism, and by my refusal presented Mr. Clarke with a problem.

"My *dear* Miss Austen," he managed at length, "be assured I have every sympathy with the family difficulties you entertain. I am sensible of the burdens that rest so heavily upon the shoulders of a writer, too, being not unacquainted with the demands of that celestial endeavour myself. —You *are* in the midst of some noble creation of the pen, I assume? An understanding as fertile as your own, cannot long be occupied solely with the sickbed."

"I am," I conceded. *Emma* being complete, I had begun to trifle with a tale I thought suited to November—the story of a slighted young woman despairing of her present, whose heart is buried with her past.

Clarke came to a standstill and studied me with his earnest child's eyes. "I am afraid you do not entirely apprehend the situation," he said. "An invitation of this sort, from a personage such as His Royal Highness, to a lady of your station and accomplishments . . . is by way of being impossible to refuse. It is as much a Royal *summons*, as an extension of gracious notice. Forgive me, madam—but do I make myself intelligible?"

I hesitated for a moment. There are few people of whom I think less than the Prince Regent. His entire history is either foolish or despicable, and his injured wife—tho' little better than he—ought to be the object of every woman's pity. But poor Mr. Clarke was denied the luxury of my sentiments. He had arrived in Hans Place as the bearer of joyous gifts, of Royal favour and attention; his position must be miserable, did he return to Carlton House unrequited. As ridiculous as I might find his manners and appearance, he had taken the trouble to call upon me and fulfill his Prince's errand. I could not be so cruel as to deny him success.

"Perfectly intelligible." I sighed. "Pray let us name the day, Mr. Clarke, when I am to visit the Regent's Library."

THE BODY IN THE LIBRARY

Monday, 13 November 1815
23 Hans Place, London, cont'd.

Carlton House sits at the southern end of Pall Mall, behind an imposing set of gates and a broad sweep. Having stated one's business to an imperious porter, one jogs forward into the semi-darkness of a massive porte cochere, fronted with Ionic columns and all the bustle of lackeys at the carriage door. As one descends (quite damply) from the conveyance and endeavours to ascend the short flight of steps with insouciance and composure, the regal doors are swept wide as if by invisible hands. And there, in the foyer, stands Mr. James Stanier Clarke—rendered even shorter and more absurdly round by the loftiness of his setting.

“My dear Miss Austen!” he cried. “What a pleasure—what an *honour*, indeed, to welcome you to Carlton House!”

I advanced a little and curtseyed. The pheasant plume secured to my bonnet, sodden with rain, bobbed unhappily by my left cheek.

“Come straight in to the fire,” he commanded, “and recover

yourself. His Royal Highness should be most distressed if you were to take a chill, given your brother's late indisposition. Indeed, I wonder if I ought to summon Dr. Baillie to you now, with a paregoric draught—”

I assured him that such a precaution was unnecessary.

He led me anxiously from the foyer into the vast space of the hall beyond, where fires burned in twin stoves to the left and right.

Behind me, Manon drew a swift breath and muttered a faint *mon dieu* at our surroundings.

Severely classical, the rectangular hall rose a full two storeys to a domed ceiling, constructed much as the Pantheon appears in old prints. An oculus pierced the dome, throwing light on the black and white marble floor at our feet. Columns of orange marble flanked the sides of the room and simple chairs were disposed before the duelling hearths. I may say that I was pleasantly surprized at the restraint of the decoration—I had once had occasion to visit the Regent's folly in Brighton, where every flight of exotic phantasie is indulged.* Tho' equally costly, this place had more real elegance.

And unlike the usual run of London houses, it was remarkably warm. The Prince was notorious for his fear of draughts; and as my boots began to steam before the excellent stove I recalled that more than one lady had *preferred* to dampen her skirts before entering the Pavilion at Brighton. It must be the same at Carlton House.

“Does this suffice? Are you throwing off your chill?” Mr. Clarke enquired.

* See *Jane and the Madness of Lord Byron* (Bantam, 2010)—*Editor's note*.

I assured him that the warmth was delightful and that I was in a fair way to being recovered; and stole a glance around the hall as I did so. It is a curious sensation to enter a private home—albeit a Royal one—and to find oneself in a publick thoroughfare. Half a dozen footmen, as like one another as possible from their excessive height to their powdered wigs, were stationed impassively along the walls. They appeared lost in contemplation, indifferent to the trivial nothings of a Mr. Clarke or a Miss Austen. I was aware of various persons crossing the marble floor and disappearing into the vastness beyond, some of them in groups of two or three; a faint murmur of conversation travelled around the walls, as though one were at an exhibition in a picture gallery.

“Then let us not waste another moment, my dear lady,” Mr. Clarke said. “We shall proceed to all the delights of the Library, where I flatter myself a modest refreshment has been provided, not unsuited to the hour of the day and the inclemency of the weather. If your maid prefers, she may of course await your return here by the fire.”

Manon, however, made no sign of having heard Mr. Clarke and looked determined to dog my footsteps. I gave her a quelling glance from under my brows, and with a muttered oath she seated herself in one of the chairs. I shall be forty next month, and must be allowed to pay a call upon a gentleman without a chaperon. But the tedious interval Manon contemplated in the hall, surrounded by inhuman footmen, should remind me of my duty. I would not remain with Mr. Clarke above half an hour.

We proceeded through the hall to an octagonal vestibule, where the Regent’s more flamboyant taste was evident—the

walls were a vibrant green picked out in Adamesque mouldings of white. Heavy crimson draperies, fringed in gold, lined four archways. One let out onto a courtyard, drearily soaked with November rain. Another led to a magnificent oval staircase. Here Mr. Clarke hesitated.

“Before we descend—for I must tell you that the Library, along with many of the publick rooms, is below ground at Carlton House—should you like to *just peek* at the Rose Satin Room?”

“If you think it advisable,” I said.

“Oh, Miss Austen—I do! I do! In my experience it is the one of His Royal Highness’s rooms most generally commended by ladies.” He bustled through the octagonal chamber to the anteroom beyond. This was decidedly French, done up in white and gilt boiseries with hangings of Prussian blue, and an early portrait of the Regent in ermine and ostrich feathers.

I followed Mr. Clarke discreetly, aware that a pair of strangers was disposed on a settee before the fire. One of them was a very fair-haired lady who had eyes only for her companion. *He* possessed a profile that must be instantly recognisable from a hundred print-shop windows and notices of publick thanksgiving: a broad brow, a hawk’s prominent nose, an air of impatience about the curling lips. I averted my gaze and hurried after my clergyman, who had merely inclined his head to the couple.

Mr. Clarke had drawn up before a set of doors guarded by another pair of footmen. These silently admitted us to the Rose Satin Room and waited until we had satisfied our interest.

“I am anxious to learn your opinion,” Mr. Clarke whispered.

It appeared to be the fashion at Carlton House to mark every chamber by a different colour scheme. This one was hung

entirely in pink damask, gathered with gold medallions and fringe. The ceiling was painted with classical subjects picked out by gilt lozenges. In candlelight, the atmosphere of old rose must be vastly forgiving of aging complexions. Paintings of the finest quality and subject were arrayed on each side; it wanted only a pianoforte and a harp to be utterly delightful.

“Charming,” I said.

“It *is* a sweet room,” Mr. Clarke agreed, “tho’ only rarely frequented. I have known the whist tables to be set up here, of an evening.”

When we returned through the French anteroom, it was empty of its interesting couple. I profited from the moment and enquired, “Was that not the Duke of Wellington I saw?”

“Indeed,” Mr. Clarke replied, his breast swelling visibly. “He is often to be found at Carlton House. It is not only the Regent’s intimates who frequent these halls, I assure you.”

An embarrassing admission, to be sure—that the Duke was not to be confused with—nay, was to be *distinguished* from—the Prince’s usual friends. Mr. Clarke must be well aware of the reputation of the Carlton House Set—as disreputable a covey of well-born gamblers and rakes as ever convened under a Royal roof. I speak not simply from rumour, but from certain knowledge: my late lamented Gentleman Rogue, Lord Harold Trowbridge, was one of the Set’s founding members. That he had put his intimacy at Carlton House to good use, in the prosecution of the Crown’s enemies, was a subtler truth few could know.

We had returned once more to the residence’s octagonal heart, and passed through a different arch this time—towards the sweeping oval staircase. This was a work of art in its own

right, the steps broad and wide, the railings intricately fashioned of iron and gilt. Far above in the reaches of the house, an oculus shed light on its turnings. But Mr. Clarke was waiting by the lower flight of stairs, and gesturing that I must go before him. Card tables might hold pride of place in the sumptuous public rooms of Carlton House—but books, it seemed, were relegated to the cellars.

“I am sure you are thinking that it is out of the common way for so much of the residence to be below-stairs,” Mr. Clarke confided. “Indeed, it is considered extraordinary that even the principal reception chambers are at ground level! For you know that is not the usual manner of houses in Town. But the Regent requires so much *room*—” He paused on the lowest step in a sudden agony of embarrassment, no doubt fearful that I had misconstrued his words—for the Regent is an immense figure of a man, barely able to mount a horse at present, and dependent upon corsets for his clothing’s accommodation. But I fancy my countenance betrayed no hint of a mischievous construction; the trembling only of a lifted brow, may have hinted at the mirth within.

“Undoubtedly,” I agreed. “He is everywhere regarded as an inveterate collector, and such passions require an infinite succession of lumber-rooms. Is His Royal Highness in residence at present?” We had achieved the lower vestibule: a dramatic space divided along its middle by a colonnade of dark green marble columns. Here, where windows must be difficult to construct and natural light fugitive, the interiors were a tapestry of scarlet and gilt, with mirrored lustres intended to throw back the glow of countless candles. Pier glasses lined

the walls, in a fashion that recalled all my late, lamented sister Eliza had told me of her youth at Versailles—I found myself repeated a hundred-fold in their reflections.* Being accustomed to only a small looking-glass at home, I must be fascinated by the image of myself: appearing taller than I suspected, more angular, with suggestive shadows beneath my eyes and hollows in my cheeks. I had chosen my carriage dress well, however—one of the delights of being a dissipated novelist being the unwomanly management of my own purse. Before Henry’s illness demanded all my hours, I had profited from this trip to Town to order some neat but elegant gowns. This, a Prussian blue French wool, was trimmed with dull bronze braid at the bodice and wrists; my hussar bonnet was dull bronze, as were my boots. Prussian blue and hussar bonnets are all the rage this autumn, owing to the general enthusiasm for things military following the victory at Waterloo; but I was no mere slave to Fashion. In practical deference to the inclement weather, I carried a sable muff that had once been Eliza’s. Tho’ I should hardly pass for a member of the *haut ton*, I was no dowd; and my colours looked very well against Carlton House’s canvas.

“His Royal Highness is indeed in residence,” Mr. Clarke

* Henry Austen’s late wife, Eliza, who styled herself Comtesse de Feuillide after the title of her guillotined first husband, was born in India and raised primarily in France. She was commonly believed to be the illegitimate daughter of Warren Hastings, former governor-general of India. A first cousin to the Austen siblings, she fled to England after the French Revolution and although ten years older than Henry Austen, accepted his offer of marriage. She was therefore both Jane’s cousin and her sister-in-law, although the latter was not a term employed in Austen’s day. Jane referred to Eliza variously as “my cousin” and “my sister” throughout her life. Eliza died of breast cancer in 1813.—*Editor’s note.*

returned eagerly, “tho’ deprived of his freedom by the demands of an artist this morning. There is to be a series of paintings in commemoration of Waterloo, you know. That is why His Grace the Duke of Wellington will have been waiting in the Blue Anteroom.”

“His Royal Highness was hardly present at the battle in Belgium,” I observed, a trifle bemused. “He cannot be necessary to any tableau of victory.”

“No-o,” Mr. Clarke conceded. “But that is not the point, my dear Miss Austen. He shall appear in any picture as the presiding genius by whom our beloved Duke was *guided*.”

What little I knew, by reputation, of the Duke’s character, was in violent opposition to every syllable of this facile sentiment; but I preserved an interesting silence, and followed Mr. Clarke through the open doors at the far end of the vestibule.

The Carlton House Library is a feast for the eyes of anyone abandoned from birth to the seductions of literature as I must confess myself to be. It is not so imposing as the Long Library at Blenheim, nor the remarkable galleried room at Chatsworth, which are soaring in height and overlook pastoral scenes.* The five windows marching down one side of this room looked out onto an area formed only of Portland stone. But Blenheim and Chatsworth are the county seats of dukes; for a collection of books in a London home, the Carlton House Library will do

*Austen scholars have long debated whether Jane ever travelled farther north than Hamstall Ridware, Staffordshire, where she visited her cousin Edward Cooper in August 1806. As readers of these edited journals have discovered, however, she stayed at Bakewell in Derbyshire (and visited neighboring Chatsworth) during the period recounted in *Jane and the Stillroom Maid* (Bantam Books, 2008).—*Editor’s note.*

very well. I should judge some thousands of books, beautifully bound in buff-and-blue leather (the Prince's household colours), were shelved from waist-height to ceiling on every side, and in perpendicular bays that reached towards the centre of the room. A spacious aisle ran from our entry to the exit at the far end, furnished with three long tables placed at intervals. These were set with oil lamps ideal for reading, and supplies of ink, pens, and paper in handsome tooled-leather boxes. A roaring fire in a massive marble hearth punctuated the shelves on my left; before this was an arrangement of easy chairs.

How I should have loved to while away my hours, writing in the warmth and solitude of this room, had the acceptance of the Prince's invitation been remotely possible! But it could not be. Henry was too close to danger, still, to spare me; and even if he were not, I must be made uncomfortable by the generosity of a prince I held in contempt.

I set my muff and reticule on the nearest table and began to scan the shelves. "What an admirable collection, Mr. Clarke. You must be happy in your hours of reading, with such volumes to hand."

"Indeed." He inclined his head. "And given that the exquisite peace of this room is seldom disturbed—"

As tho' in mockery, his speech was interrupted by a heart-rending groan, deep in timbre and suffering. It seemed to emanate from the far end of the room.

I gazed enquiringly at Mr. Clarke.

"Forgive me, dear lady." The clergyman frowned at finding our literary idyll overlistened by a stranger, and bustled towards one of the perpendicular bays.

I followed.

“Colonel MacFarland!”

I came round the end of the shelves and stopped short. A soldier in the redcoated uniform of a Scots Greys cavalry officer, his grey pantaloons distinguished by a scarlet stripe down their length, was sprawled at the clergyman’s feet. I could not fail to recognise the dress; it was everywhere represented in shop vitrines, after the Greys’ heroic charge at Waterloo. The officer’s eyes were startled and wide. Tho’ clearly conscious of his indecorous position, he made no attempt to rise. As I watched, however, his right hand trembled spasmodically and his lips worked.

Mr. Clarke bent with effort—he was neither young nor nimble—and said distinctly, “Are you ill, sir?”

A second groan issued from the Colonel’s depths, as tho’ his very soul twisted in his bowels.

“He is going to be sick,” I said urgently.

Mr. Clarke stepped back in haste.

Without so much as turning his head, the unfortunate man expelled the contents of his stomach with a dreadful choking sound.

“Get help.” I gathered my skirts in one hand and crouched low. Mr. Clarke scurried to the Library door.

Colonel MacFarland was retching horribly, his gaze imploring. I tore off my gloves, drew a clean handkerchief from the sleeve of my gown, and wiped his mouth. Then I forced his head to one side. He drew a stifled breath, vomit dripping to the Prince’s parquet. He could no more summon command of his limbs than he could of his neck. One foot jerked and was still.

“Wah,” he forced out. The syllable was strange and distorted, as tho’ his tongue had thickened. “*Waher*—”

I pressed one hand to my nose. The stench was dreadful, and for an instant I feared I might be sick myself. Then I suppressed my weaker impulses and forced myself to my feet. I glanced round. There must be a ewer of water *somewhere* in this gilded room.

“Waher . . . Loo.”

“*Waterloo?*”

His eyelids flickered as if in assent. His fingers clenched. The choking sound again. His breathing, more stertorous.

I dropped once more to my knees and leaned close to the struggling fellow, regardless of the foulness of his breath.

“Mah-h-p,” he whispered. His pupils were enormous and dark.

“Waterloo map?”

His lips worked, but no sound came. I lowered my ear to his mouth, straining for a syllable.

The clatter of rapidly approaching feet drowned anything the Colonel might have attempted to say. I glanced round, and caught the spare figure of Dr. Baillie.

“MacFarland,” he said calmly. “Are you unwell?”

I got to my feet and stepped back as the physician knelt by the sick man’s side. Mr. Clarke hovered in the doorway, wringing his hands.

The Colonel lay immobile as before; but at the doctor’s words, he expelled a gurgling breath.

Baillie listened to his heart, then grasped his wrist. “The pulse is weak and the flesh cold. We must get you to bed, Colonel! Come, man, let me help you to your feet.”

There was an instant of tension, when it appeared the sick man exerted all his force of will to lift himself, without the slightest result or sound.

“Is it apoplexy?” Mr. Clarke asked in a lowered tone.

“Some sort of fit,” the doctor replied. “Be so good, Clarke, as to summon a footman.”

Mr. Clarke hurried through the doorway. I heard him cry out, “James! James!”

All footmen in each of the Prince’s homes are called James. It saves the Royal the trouble of distinguishing one from another.

“Has he moved whilst you observed him, Miss Austen?” Dr. Baillie enquired.

“His limbs jerked some once or twice. But a few moments ago he lacked the power even to turn his head. It was I who placed it thus to the side, when he became ill.”

The doctor frowned, and rose from Colonel MacFarland’s inert form. “Nervous collapse. Most strange. He was well enough when I saw him this morning.”

Further speech was forestalled by the appearance of three strapping footmen arrayed in buff-and-blue livery. They bore Colonel MacFarland away on their shoulders without comment or fuss. I wondered if they were often pressed into a similar service, when the Regent’s cronies had sampled too much of His Royal Highness’s claret.

Dr. Baillie made as if to follow the cortège. Then his monkey gaze met mine. “Did the Colonel say anything whilst you attended him, Miss Austen?”

“He did. Waterloo Map.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“That is what the Colonel said. *Waterloo Map*.”

“Was his speech slurred?”

“Yes. But he went to great effort to utter the phrase, and I am sure I heard him distinctly. I believe his tongue grew too swollen for speech shortly thereafter.”

The doctor hesitated a moment, but our tête-à-tête was broken by Mr. Clarke—who stood panting on the threshold as tho’ he, and not the footmen, had suffered all the exertion of MacFarland’s transport.

“It is decided,” he declared. “We shall take our refreshment in the Bow Room, Miss Austen, as it would not do to lay the table *here*. You will find that the stove in that room is excellent and the view from the window delightful. One would not credit the arrangement of boxed shrubs in the Area with being *subterranean*.”

Dr. Baillie bowed. “Do not be in a hurry to run away, Miss Austen. Mr. Clarke—you are not to quit Carlton House either. I may have need of you, by-and-by.”

“Dr. Baillie,” I said impulsively, “did Colonel MacFarland take part in the battle at Waterloo?”

“He did,” the physician replied. “Indeed, there are many who call him a hero for it.”