

# In Honour of Jane Austen

## Overcoming

I stumbled when I first walked this narrow path,  
I was a child, clutching the hand of another:  
Older, wiser, sister to the sisterless,  
You held my hand. You who, though I did not see it,  
Faced this huge invisible wall that rose before you  
Wherever you walked - I could not comprehend  
The scale or dimensions of this untold barrier.  
Even now, without you, I do not understand how you,  
A lonely figure cut from a solitary cloth, could ever  
Survive in a wilderness, in this crowd of rock-faced men.

You will overcome, are overcoming and have overcome  
This transcending fear of the feminine - it's one of  
Those things that spans space and time, a testament  
To the prevailing bitterness of angry men.  
I wish you could hear me now as  
I howl outside the door to your tomb  
Carved from the language of letters and love.  
I wonder if you'd be proud or ashamed of this  
Outpouring of sentiment over you or you'd just  
Sit, embarrassed of my twenty-first century words.

So please, take us now by the hand and lead us  
To the next place where, I am sure, you will continue  
To thrash your way through the tall crop, your hand a scythe,  
Cutting a path between one life to the next, stringing  
Ariadne's thread from person to person;  
The ineffable and the tangible sandswept in a declaration  
To you, oh, the great named heroine,  
Lead us too as we tell stories to pass the time -  
I will transcribe them in the chambers of my heart,  
Your letters and words echoing in the spaces between,  
Each and every other heart that beats a pounding drum.

My Jane, our Jane, your very own self -  
Did you ever let yourself anticipate the scale of the words you wrote?  
The power you wield over us today as we sit,  
Respectably, and marvel at you from afar; up close,  
You are a warrior of words with a hand stained from ink.  
You live on in our hearts, and stand here beside me now -  
I ask you to look around and see what wonder you have created.

Specially Commissioned for the inauguration of  
the new stone to Jane Austen. 28 June 2025.  
Read on the day by the author, Imogen Haley  
of Sten of the Abbey School. @Imogen Haley.