



## Cassandra and Jane

By Jill Pitkeathley  
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### Introduction

History and legend tell us that after Jane Austen's death, many of her personal letters were deliberately destroyed by her sister Cassandra—forever closing the door on her most intimate thoughts on her family, friends, lovers, and enemies . . . until now.

In *Cassandra & Jane*, Jill Pitkeathley re-imagines the close friendship between these two sisters, drawing on Jane's beloved novels and other sources to breathe fresh, new life into her endlessly fascinating world. In real life, both sisters suffered through financial dependency on their relatives. In *Cassandra & Jane*, Pitkeathley ushers readers into their company, as they trade secrets (and barbs) about their beaux, challenge each others' opinions, and in myriad other ways rehearse the tales of the hearth that Jane would bring to fruition in novels like *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

### Questions for Discussion

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1. How would you characterize the sibling relationship between Jane and Cassandra? To what extent does their attachment to one another seem entirely mutual?
2. How does Jane experience her lot as an unmarried woman in her society, and how does the financial uncertainty of her situation propel her to become an author?
3. How does Jane's reliance on Cassandra's editorial feedback change over the course of her writing career, and what does this change reveal about Jane's opinion of her work?
4. How do Cassandra's and Jane's respective disappointments in love affect each of them individually?
5. How does Cassandra understand the tension between Jane and their mother, and to what extent do you agree with her assessment of their strained relationship?
6. How did the details of the publication of Jane's works inform your appreciation of her difficulty in becoming an author?
7. At any point in your reading of *Cassandra & Jane*, did you question what aspects of the work were historically true, and which were entirely fictional? Which ones?
8. What do the hardships endured by the Austen family reveal to you about everyday life in late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century England?
9. To what extent do you agree with Cassandra's decision to burn her letters from Jane? Would you have made the same decision, if the choice were yours?
10. What aspects of Jane Austen's character came alive for you in reading *Cassandra & Jane*, and how did they connect you with her literary works?

### About the Author

Jill Pitkeathley was born on the Channel Islands of the United Kingdom. The former Chief Executive of the Carers National Association (now Carers UK), she is a Life Peer in the House of Lords and a longtime Austen fan. She lives in London.