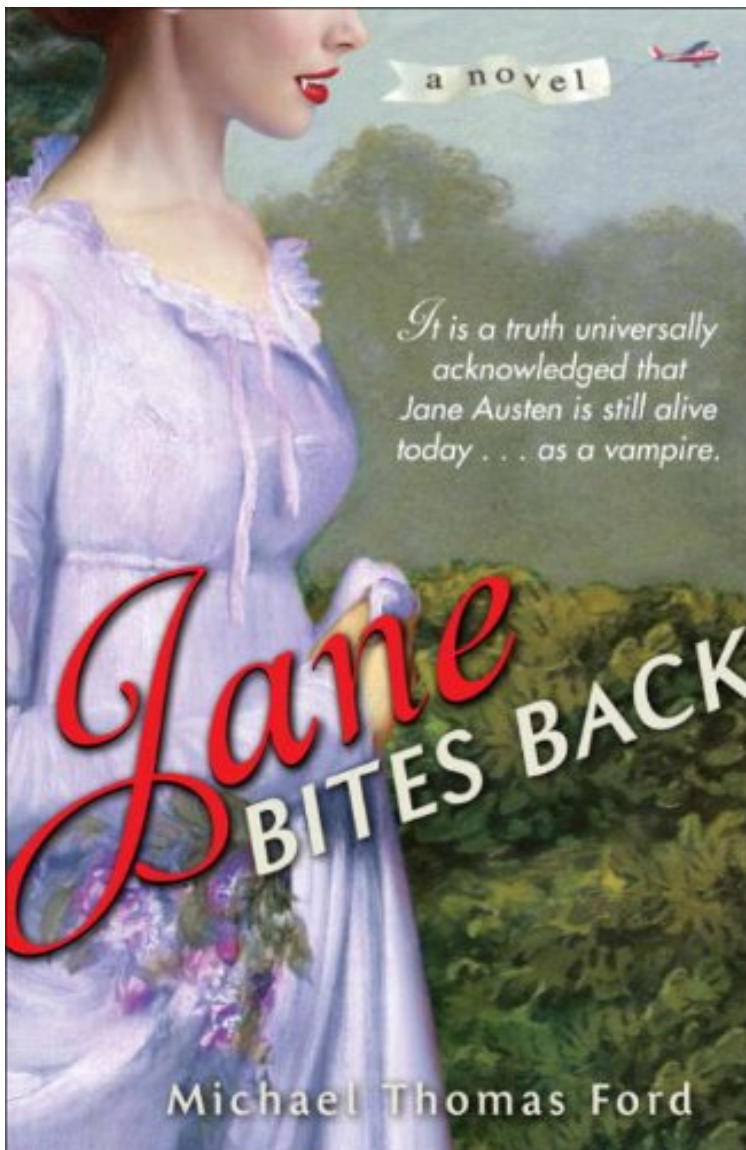


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Jane Bites Back: A Novel



Par Michael Thomas Ford
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurTwo hundred years after her death, Jane Austen is still surrounded by the literature she lovesbut now it's because she's the owner of Flyleaf Books in a sleepy college town in Upstate New York. Every day she watches her novels fly off the shelvesalong with dozens of unauthorized sequels, spin-offs, and adaptations. Jane may be undead, but her books have taken on a life of their own.To make matters worse, the manuscript she finished just before being turned into a vampire has been rejected by publishers116 times. Jane longs to let the world know who she is, but when a sudden twist of fate thrusts her back into the spotlight, she must hide her real identityand fend off a dark man from her past while juggling two modern suitors. Will the inimitable Jane Austen be able to keep her cool in this comedy of manners, or

will she show everyone what a woman with a sharp wit and an even sharper set of fangs can do? From the Trade Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter One My dear Cassandra, I do wish you could have been at the party last night. I was compelled to converse with the most disagreeable woman. But then, as I have said to you before, I do not want people to be very agreeable, as it saves me the trouble of liking them a great deal. JANE AUSTEN, in a letter to her sister, Cassandra, 24 December 1798 IT WAS NOT, OF COURSE, EXACTLY WHAT JANE HAD WRITTEN TO her sister that long-ago Christmas Eve, but the sentiment was the same. Besides, after more than two hundred years, she could hardly be expected to remember every little detail of her voluminous correspondence. Although she supposed she could check for herself there was a collection of her letters sitting on a shelf notten feet away. Instead, she remained where she was and imagined how she would describe the disagreeable woman standing before her in a letter to Cassie. Melodie Gladstone was slight, her birdlike arms and pale skin giving her the appearance of fragility, as if she might at any moment collapse under the weight of her own head. Her hair, blond as summer wheat, was gathered at the nape of her neck and tied with a pink ribbon. When she spoke her voice was soft, and every head in the room was forced to lean toward her as she read. Elizabeth's spirits soon rising to playfulness again, she wanted Mr. Darcy to account for his having ever fallen in love with her. How could you begin? said she. I can comprehend your going on charmingly, when you had once made a beginning; but what could set you off in the first place? I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look, or the words, which laid the foundation. It is too long ago. I was in the middle before I knew that I had begun. My beauty you had early withstood, and as for my manners my behaviour to you was at least always bordering on the uncivil, and I never spoke to you without rather wishing to give you pain than not. Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence? For the liveliness of your mind, I did. You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little less. The fact is, that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking, and looking, and thinking for your approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike them. Had you not been really amiable, you would have hated me for it; but in spite of the pains you took to disguise yourself, your feelings were always noble and just; and in your heart, you thoroughly despised the persons who so assiduously courted you. There I have saved you the trouble of accounting for it; and really, all things considered, I begin to think it perfectly reasonable. To be sure, you knew no actual good of me but nobody thinks of that when they fall in love. Melodie Gladstone closed the book in her hands and gazed intently at her audience. You see, she said, Mr. Darcy fell in love with Elizabeth because she wasn't afraid to be herself. This was her reward for not accepting the first proposal offered to her. A murmur of agreement rippled through the crowd. I told you we'd have a packed house. Lucy had come to stand beside Jane at the back of the store. She was surveying with obvious satisfaction the crowd perched on folding chairs set up between the bookcases. We certainly do, Jane replied to her young assistant. I can't believe they're actually buying this nonsense. It was bad enough, she thought, that so many of them had arrived in costume. She counted two dozen Elizabeths, and perhaps a quarter that many Darcys. Although I suppose some of the Elizabeths could be Emmas. Or Mariannes or Catherines or Annes. Possibly some of them were even Fannys, although she doubted this. Very few readers seemed to like Fanny. We've already sold sixty-three copies of the book, Lucy informed her. And I guarantee you will break a hundred on these done talking. Jane said nothing. Although she was grateful for the sales, she couldn't help wishing they were for some other book. Any other book. Were all here tonight because we believe as Elizabeth Bennet believed, and as Jane believed that true love is life's most precious gift. Jane regarded Melodie Gladstone with a mixture of active dislike and reluctant awe. How had this book of hers become such a phenomenon? She remembered glancing through an advance copy of it six months earlier and thinking it was doomed to failure. Now she realized that not only were very many people foolish enough to embrace it, they were embracing it with an excitement that bordered on the hysterical. The message of *Waiting for Mr. Darcy* is this, Melodie said, holding up her book as if it were some kind of holy text. If you really want to experience the beauty of love true love you won't give yourself to anyone until you've found it. The audience applauded. Melodie beamed, then raised a hand, silencing them. I know many of you have already committed yourselves to this ideal, she said. I can tell by the number of lockets I see out there. Laughter filled the air as people turned their heads to look at one another. Some raised their hands to their throats and clutched at the silver lockets that hung from chains around their necks. Melodie held up an identical locket, letting it dangle in the air like a hypnotist's charm. Her sky-blue eyes surveyed her listeners. For those of you who don't know, she said, this locket is the symbol of those of us who have decided that we will indeed wait for our Mr. Darcy to come to us. She opened the locket to reveal a portrait inside. Isn't

he handsome? Melodie asked. His portrait was painted especially for us by none other than Paul Henry Mattheson, the same artist who created all of the beautiful covers for the collection of Jane Austen novels my publisher has reissued in conjunction with *Waiting for Mr. Darcy*. This locket is available only to those who sign the contract found at the back of my book and send it in along with receipts for the purchase of the book and the novels. So, if you have one, you're part of a very special club. Jane saw heads nodding all over the room. The reading was starting to feel like a religious revival. She half expected Melodie Gladstone to call forward those wishing to be saved from sin while the devout fell out in the aisles weeping and shouting hallelujahs. Instead, the author put the locket down and clasped her hands together. It has been such a joy to meet you all tonight, she said. I can't tell you how thankful I am to see you all and to know that perhaps, in some small way, I've encouraged you to embrace our beloved Jane's message of purity and self-respect. As the room erupted in thunderous applause, Lucy called out, Miss Gladstone will be signing books in just a moment. As she mentioned, those of you who purchase a copy of her book as well as the set of Jane Austen novels will be eligible to also purchase one of the lockets with Mr. Darcy's portrait inside. We have a limited number of. Before she could finish, the audience stood up and stamped for the tables stacked high with books, shouting and pushing one another out of the way. Jane stepped back as two girls, both in Empire-waist dresses, elbowed past her in a mad dash to be the first ones to the table. They may be interested in purity, Jane thought as she watched the girls grabbing for books, but their manners are sorely in need of reinforcement. The next hour and a half was a whirlwind of ringing up sales, bagging purchases, and marveling at the seemingly endless line of people who wanted Melodie to sign their copies of her book. Many of the women, and not a few of the young men, left the shop in tears, clutching books to their chests and lovingly stroking the lockets around their necks. Finally the last autograph seeker was shown the door by Lucy, and Jane let out a sigh of relief. The table of books she and Lucy had set out for the event was completely empty. Behind the counter she called up the night's sales figures on the computer screen. When she saw them she gasped audibly. That's more than we made in the last three weeks combined, said Lucy, who was peering over Jane's shoulder. It's unbelievable, Jane agreed. It's like that every night, sighed Melodie Gladstone. Everybody loves their Jane Austen. Jane was surprised to hear the change in the author's tone. She looked up to find Melodie sprawled back in her chair, her feet stretched out beneath the table as she massaged her forehead. Do you have any aspirin? she asked. Better yet, do you have any vodka? Jane and Lucy exchanged glances, then Lucy went off in search of aspirin. Jane smiled politely and said, This tour must be exhausting for you. It's a fucking nightmare, Melodie replied. Jane cringed. Every night it's the same thing. Don't have sex until you've found the right one. Keep yourself pure. Wear this stupid locket and one day your prince will come. What a load of crap. But they eat it up. She waved her hand in the air. You've seen the numbers. They certainly are impressive, Jane said wryly. That's why I do the dog and pony show, Melodie replied. Every time one of these idiots buys a copy I picture another five bucks piling up in my bank account. Lucy returned with a glass of water and two aspirin, which she handed to Melodie. Melodie popped the pills into her mouth and drained half the glass. My head is killing me, she said. I should have taken a Valium. So, Jane said carefully, you don't really believe what you say in your book? Melodie shook her head. Please, she said. Do you really think there are any Mr. Darcy's left in the world? No, there aren't. I don't think there ever were. But these girls want to think there are, so I give them what they want. And in return they make you quite wealthy, Jane commented. It's just my piece of the Austen pie, Melodie said. Everyone's in on it now. You've seen the books. Austen is all the rage. You put her name on anything and it will sell. Hell, my publisher is coming out with a Jane Austen massage book in the spring. You know what it's called? Sense and Sensuality. She laughed. I bet it sells two million copies. We can only hope, Jane remarked dryly. If she'd disliked Melodie Gladstone before, she now loathed her. The woman was vile, an opportunist who was using her name to make her fortune. Meanwhile, I haven't seen a royalty check in almost two hundred years, she thought. Melodie, oblivious to Jane's growing animosity, snorted rudely. I don't get the big deal about Austen myself, she said. I mean, have you read her novels? I could barely get through them. Most of what I know I got from watching the PBS specials. But the books? Talk about boring. She made a grotesque snoring sound that caused Jane to clench her jaw in irritation. I love Austen, Lucy said. I think her books are wonderful. And if you ask me, they're not about finding Mr. Darcy at all; they're about young women breaking convention and going after what they want. Jane sent Lucy a silent thank-you. She gets it, thought Jane. It never was about Darcy. All I know is that the more people there are who love Mr. Darcy, the bigger my royalty checks are, Melodie said. I could care less about the rest of it. You mean you couldn't care less, Jane resisted the urge to say out loud. Not only was Melodie Gladstone without dignity, she had appalling grammar. We have a few

books left in the storage room, said Lucy. Would you mind signing them? Melodie rolled her eyes. I suppose not, she said. I wish you had them out here for the reading, but someone is sure to snatch them up. I hear I'm one of the top five holiday sellers this year. I'd be number one if it wasn't for that book about that stupid blind kid and her dog. Lucy retreated to the stockroom and returned with half a dozen copies of *Waiting for Mr. Darcy*, which she set on the table in front of the author. When you're done I'll drive you back to the hotel, she offered. Jane, who had been counting the cash drawer, looked up. Lucy, I can drive Miss Gladstone back to her hotel, she said. Why don't you go home? Lucy glanced at Melodie, who was signing the last of the books. You're sure? she asked Jane. I don't care which one of you drives me, said Melodie, snapping the cap back on the pen she'd used to sign the books. But let's get going. I've got to be on a plane for Columbus or Detroit or some other shit hole first thing in the morning. I'm quite sure, Jane told Lucy. You go on. I'll see you in the morning. Thank you for all of your work on the event. No problem, said Lucy. She turned to Melodie. Thank you for coming, she said. It was nice to meet you. The woman nodded but said nothing. After a short pause during which it became obvious that Melodie had no intention of returning Lucy's thanks, Lucy shot Jane a look. See you tomorrow, she said as she turned and walked to the front door. I'm ready to go, said Melodie, standing and putting on her coat before Lucy had even shut the door behind her. Jane looked at the woman and smiled. Well then, she said. Let's tarry no longer in the parlor of joy. Melodie stared at her. My car is out back, said Jane. I'll just get my coat. A few minutes later they were sitting in Jane's beat-up Volkswagen, waiting for the heat to kick in. Melodie rubbed her hands together. How old is this thing, anyway? she asked dismissively. You should never ask a lady her age, Jane said primly, earning a peculiar look from Melodie. She put the car into gear and pulled out of the lot. As they drove through the snowy streets of downtown Brakeston, Melodie looked out the window. This place is so boring, she said. How can you stand living here? I find its unassuming character charming, Jane answered. If I had to live in a place like this, I would absolutely die, Melodie continued. When I saw my tour itinerary I was like, Brakeston? Where the hell is Brakeston? Lucy went to a lot of trouble to get you here, Jane informed her. And I think the turnout was quite impressive, don't you? Melodie shrugged. It was nothing compared to the New York reading, she said. We had to turn people away from that one. Oh, the horror, said Jane sympathetically. Right, Melodie agreed. Anyway, I guess I'm probably the biggest thing to ever come through here, so at least I added a little excitement to those people's lives. We're ever so thankful you agreed to grace us, said Jane. I'm sure we'll be talking about it for months. I just can't wait to get back to civilization, Melodie said, sighing. That's it, Jane thought. She suddenly turned off the main street and headed down a quiet side lane. The hotel is that way, Melodie protested. This is a shortcut, said Jane curtly. At the end of the street she pulled the car to the side and stopped in front of a house that blinked red and green with Christmas lights. On the lawn a life-size Mary and Joseph stared at the car. Behind them Santa, Frosty, and Rudolph gazed rapturously down at the baby Jesus asleep in his plastic manger. Giant candy canes provided a backdrop for three elves bearing gaily wrapped packages. Where are we? Melodie asked. What are we doing here? I just need to take care of a little errand, said Jane. She unfastened her seat belt and leaned toward her passenger, who was too busy looking at the bizarre Nativity scene to notice. As Jane opened her mouth the two fangs secreted in her upper jaw slipped from their bony sheaths and clicked into place. When her lips connected with Melodie's neck, Melodie jumped and gave a little scream, which was cut short as Jane pushed the young woman's face against her own coat and held it there as the blood began to flow past her lips. *Revue de presse* "A hilarious send-up of vampire novels, the Austen industry, and one immortal author's complete inability to find a publisher Jane would have loved it!" Stephanie Barron, author of the Jane Austen mysteries "It's impossible not to love Ford's sharp-witted, sharp-fanged Jane Austen (and I'm not just saying that because she spares my life in Chapter Six)." Seth Grahame-Smith, author of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* Fang-tastic Ford's Jane is a very fun and funny heroine to root for as she endures the indignities of publishing and bookselling, fends off danger and (perhaps) finds love. Her hilarious smack downs with Violet hint of more madness to come in this first of a series. *Publishers Weekly* Ford approvingly cites Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, but his own mashup is better integrated, more knowledgeable about Austen and considerably funnier. *Kirkus* In this clever paranormal tale Ford has created warm, witty characters that will appeal to both Janeites and vampire fanciers. Literary humor and intriguing snippets from Jane's book are the icing on the cake. Two more books are promised in this series, so readers who fall under Jane's spell will be eagerly awaiting her next adventure. *Library Journal* Michael Thomas Ford has struck gold. The plot is inventive and funny, and the story progresses with the kind of light touch that compares favorably to the Stephanie Meyer *Twilight* series. Ford manages to strike just the right tone and consistently delights. *Bay Area Reporter* Few

authors can deliver [Austens] dry, deft and wickedly funny style. Michael Thomas Ford is one of them. Light, campy and a bit Buffyish. The literary and historical references really shine. Austen prose "Ford gives us an authentic, sympathetic and witty Jane Austen as a modern-day vampire. An inventive mashup plot coupled with creative storytelling and amusing dialogue make this story a delightful read." Romantic Times Hilarious. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and know you will too! Vampire Librarian Such a fun read. I especially love to imagine Austen duking it out with fellow literary blood-suckers, both literal and figurative. Book Bitch I must admit I started this story prepared to dislike it (too many Jane related novels), and then found I was enjoying it! It has a little bit of something for everyone. You will enjoy it, too. Romance s Today A rollicking good read. Dirty Laundry A confection of a novel. The Advocate In the past year, I have read quite a few Jane Austen spin-offs, but none quite as original as Jane Bites Back by Michael Thomas Ford. Incredibly readable, extremely funny, and highly entertaining. Booking Mama FIVE STARS! Huntress s