

The Watsons Ball Scene by Jane Austen

[Note: Copied from: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/63569> Chapter 2, which is a digital copy of “*The Watsons* by Jane Austen, Concluded by L. Oulton”, published in 1923. The Oulton volume changed some spelling and capitalizations, and much of the punctuation and paragraph structure of the original manuscript of *The Watsons*. I have edited the file to reflect the spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and paragraph structure of *The Watsons* as published in *The Works of Jane Austen, Vol VI, Minor Works*, edited by R.W. Chapman & first published by Oxford U Press in 1953. For ease of reading, I did not use Austen’s superscript for some abbreviations as Chapman did, such as “M^{rs}” (and most abbreviated titles in the manuscript do not have a period after). This section corresponds to MW 326-337. Michele Larrow]

With nothing to do but to expect the hour of setting off, the afternoon was long to the two young ladies; & tho’ Miss Edwards was rather discomposed at the very early hour which her mother always fixed for going, that early hour itself was watched for with some eagerness.—The entrance of the Tea things at 7 o’clock was some relief—& luckily, Mr & Mrs Edwards always drank a dish extraordinary, & ate an additional muffin when they were going to sit up late, which lengthened the ceremony almost to the wished-for moment. At a little before 8 the Tomlinsons carriage was heard to go by, which was the constant signal for Mrs Edwards to order hers to the door; & in a very few minutes the party were transported from the quiet & warmth of a snug parlour to the bustle, noise, & draughts of air of a broad Entrance passage of an Inn,—Mrs Edwards, carefully guarding her own dress, while she attended with yet greater Solicitude to the proper security of her young Charges’ Shoulders & Throats, led the way up the wide staircase, while no sound of a Ball, but the first Scrape of one violin, blessed the ears of her followers, & Miss Edwards on hazarding the anxious enquiry of whether there were many people come yet, was told by the Waiter, as she knew she should, that “Mr Tomlinson’s family were in the room.” In passing along a short gallery to the Assembly-room, brilliant in lights before them, they were accosted by a young Man in a morning dress & boots, who was standing in the doorway of a Bedchamber, apparently on purpose to see them go by.—“Ah! Mrs E., how do you do? How do you do, Miss E?” he cried, with an easy air. “You are determined to be in good time, I see, as usual. The candles are but this moment lit.”—“I like to get a good seat by the fire, as you know, Mr Musgrave.” replied Mrs E. “I am this moment going to dress.—said he. “I am waiting for my stupid fellow.—We shall have a famous Ball, The Osbornes are certainly coming; you may depend upon *that* for I was with Ld Osborne this mornng—”

The party passed on—Mrs E’s sattin gown swept along the clean floor of the Ball-room, to the fireplace at the upper end, where one party only were formally seated, while three or four Officers were lounging together, passing in & out from the adjoining card-room.—A very stiff meeting between these near neighbours ensued—& as soon as they were all duly placed again, Emma in the low whisper, which became the solemn scene,

said to Miss Edwardes, "The gentleman we passed in the passage was Mr Musgrave, then?—He is reckoned remarkably agreeable, I understand."—Miss E. answered hesitatingly—"Yes—he is very much liked by many people.—But we are not very intimate."—"He is rich, is not he?"—"He has about 8 or 900£ a year I believe.—He came into possession of it, when he was very young, & my Father & Mother think it has given him rather an unsettled turn.—He is no favourite with them."—The cold & empty appearance of the Room & the demure air of the small cluster of Females at one end of it began soon to give way; the inspiriting sound of other Carriages was heard, & continual accessions of portly Chaperons, & strings of smartly-dressed girls were received, with now & then a fresh gentleman straggler, who if not enough in Love to station himself near any fair Creature seemed glad to escape into the Card-room.—Among the increasing numbers of Military Men, one now made his way to Miss Edwards, with an air of Empressément which decidedly said to her Companion "I am Capt. Hunter."—Emma, who could not but watch her at such a moment, saw her looking rather distressed, but by no means displeased, & heard an engagement formed for the two first dances, which made her think her Brother Sam's a hopeless case.—

Emma in the meanwhile was not unobserved, or unadmired herself.—A new face & a very pretty one, could not be slighted—her name was whispered from one party to another, & no sooner had the signal been given, by the Orchestra's striking up a favourite air, which seemed to call the young Men to their duty, & people the centre of the room, than she found herself engaged to dance with a Brother officer, introduced by Capt. Hunter.—Emma Watson was not more than of the middle height—well made & plump, with an air of healthy vigour.—Her skin was very brown, but clear, smooth, & glowing—; which, with a lively Eye, a sweet smile, & an open Countenance, gave beauty to attract, & expression to make that beauty improve on acquaintance.—Having no reason to be dissatisfied with her partner, the Eveng began very pleasantly to her; & her feelings perfectly coincided with the reiterated observation of others, that it was an excellent Ball.—The two first dances were not quite over, when the returning sound of carriages after a long interruption, called general notice, & "the Osbornes are coming, the Osbornes are coming"—was repeated round the room.—After some minutes of extraordinary bustle without, & watchful curiosity within, the important Party, preceded by the attentive Master of the Inn to open a door which was never shut, made their appearance. They consisted of Ly. Osborne, her son Ld Osborne, her daughter Miss Osborne; Miss Carr, her daughter's friend, Mr Howard, formerly Tutor to Ld Osborne, now Clergyman of the Parish in which the Castle stood, Mrs Blake, a widow-sister who lived with him, her son a fine boy of 10 years old, & Mr Tom Musgrave; who probably imprisoned within his own room, had been listening in bitter impatience to the sound of music for the last half hour. In their progress up the room, they paused almost immediately behind Emma, to receive the Compts of some acquaintance, & she heard Ly. Osborne observe that they had made a point of coming early for the gratification of Mrs Blake's little boy, who was uncommonly fond of dancing.—Emma looked at them all as they passed—but chiefly & with most interest on Tom Musgrave, who was

certainly a genteel, good looking young man.—Of the females, Ly. Osborne had by much the finest person;—tho' nearly 50, she was very handsome, & had all the Dignity of Rank.—

Ld Osborne was a very fine young man; but there was an air of Coldness, of Carelessness, even of awkwardness about him, which seemed to speak him out of his Element in a Ball room. He came, in fact, only because it was judged expedient for him to please the Borough—he was not fond of Women's company, & he never danced.—Mr Howard was an agreeable-looking Man, a little more than Thirty.—

At the conclusion of the two Dances, Emma found herself, she knew not how, seated amongst the Osborne set; & she was immediately struck with the fine Countenance & animated gestures of the little boy, as he was standing before his Mother, wondering when they should begin.—"You will not be surprised at Charles's impatience, said Mrs Blake, a lively pleasant-looking little Woman of 5 or 6 & 30, to a Lady who was standing near her, "when you know what a partner he is to have. Miss Osborne has been so very kind as to promise to dance the two 1st dances with him."—"Oh, yes—we have been engaged this week. cried the boy. & we are to dance down every couple."—On the other side of Emma, Miss Osborne, Miss Carr, & a party of young Men were standing engaged in a very lively consultation—& soon afterwards she saw the smartest officer of the sett, walking off to the Orchestra to order the dance, while Miss Osborne passing before her, to her little expecting Partner hastily said—"Charles, I beg your pardon for not keeping my engagement, but I am going to dance these two dances with Coln Beresford. I know you will excuse me, & I will certainly dance with you after Tea." And without staying for an answer, she turned again to Miss Carr, & in another minute was led by Col. Beresford to begin the set. If the poor little boy's face had in it's happiness been interesting to Emma, it was infinitely more so under this sudden reverse;—he stood the picture of disappointment with crimson'd cheeks, quivering lips, & eyes bent on the floor. His mother, stifling her own mortification, tried to sooth his, with the prospect of Miss Osborne's second promise;—but, tho' he contrived to utter with an effort of Boyish Bravery "Oh! I do not mind it"—it was very evident by the unceasing agitation of his features that he minded it as much as ever.—Emma did not think, or reflect; she felt & acted—. "I shall be very happy to dance with you Sir, if you like it." said she, holding out her hand with the most unaffected good humour.—The Boy in one moment restored to all his first delight—looked joyfully at his Mother and stepping forwards with an honest & simple Thank you Maam was instantly ready to attend his new acquaintance.—The thankfulness of Mrs Blake was more diffuse;—with a look, most expressive of unexpected pleasure, & lively Gratitude, she turned to her neighbour with repeated & fervent acknowledgements of so great & condescending a kindness to her boy.—Emma with perfect truth could assure her that she could not be giving greater pleasure than she felt herself—& Charles being provided with his gloves & charged to keep them on, they joined the Set which was now rapidly forming, with nearly equal complacency.—It was a Partnership which cd not be noticed without surprise. It gained

her a broad stare from Miss Osborne & Miss Carr as they passed her in the dance. "Upon my word Charles you are in luck (said the former as she turned him) you have got a better partner than me"—to which the happy Charles answered "Yes."—Tom Musgrave who was dancing with Miss Carr, gave her many inquisitive glances; & after a time Ld Osborne himself came & under pretence of talking to Charles, stood to look at his partner.—Tho' rather distressed by such observation, Emma could not repent what she had done, so happy had it made both the boy & his Mother; the latter of whom was continually making opportunities of addressing her with the warmest civility.—Her little partner she found, tho' bent cheifly on dancing, was not unwilling to speak, when her questions or remarks gave him anything to say; & she learnt, by a sort of inevitable enquiry, that he had two brothers & a sister, that they & their Mama all lived with his Uncle at Wickstead, that his Uncle taught him Latin, that he was very fond of riding, & had a horse of his own given him by Ld Osborne; & that he had been out once already with Ld Osborne's Hounds.—At the end of these Dances Emma found they were to drink tea;—Miss E. gave her a caution to be at hand, in a manner which convinced her of Mrs E.'s holding it very important to have them both close to her when she moved into the Tearoom; & Emma was accordingly on the alert to gain her proper station. It was always the pleasure of the company to have a little bustle & croud when they adjourned for refreshment;—The Tea-room was a small room within the Cardroom, & in passing thro' the latter, where the passage was straightened by Tables, Mrs E. & her party were for a few moments hemmed in. It happened close by Lady Osborne's Cassino table; Mr Howard who belonged to it spoke to his Nephew; & Emma on perceiving herself the object of attention both to Ly. Osborne & him, had just turned away her eyes in time to avoid seeming to hear her young companion delightedly whisper aloud "Oh! Uncle, do look at my partner. She is so pretty!" As they were immediately in motion again however Charles was hurried off without being able to receive his Uncle's suffrage.—On entering the Tea room, in which two long Tables were prepared, Ld Osborne was to be seen quite alone at the end of one, as if retreating as far as he could from the Ball, to enjoy his own thoughts & gape without restraint.—Charles instantly pointed him out to Emma "There's Lord Osborne;—Let you & I go & sit by him.—"No, no, said Emma laughing you must sit with my friends."

Charles was now free enough to hazard a few questions in his turn. "What o'clock was it?"—"Eleven."—"Eleven!—And I am not at all sleepy. Mama said I should be asleep before ten.—Do you think Miss Osborne will keep her word with me, when tea is over?" "Oh! Yes.—I suppose so."—tho' she felt that she had no better reason to give than that Miss Osborne had *not* kept it before.—"When shall you come to Osborne Castle?"—"Never, probably.—I am not acquainted with the family." "But you may come to Wickstead & see Mama, & she can take you to the Castle.—There is a monstrous curious stuff'd Fox there, & a Badger—anybody would think they were alive. It is a pity you should not see them."

On rising from Tea, there was again a scramble for the pleasure of being first out of the room, which happened to be increased by one or two of the card parties having just broken up & the players being disposed to move exactly the different way. Among these was Mr Howard,—his sister leaning on his arm;—& no sooner were they within reach of Emma, than Mrs B. calling her notice by a friendly touch, said "Your goodness to Charles, my dear Miss Watson, brings all his family upon you. Give me leave to introduce my Brother—Mr Howard." Emma curtsied, the gentleman bowed,—made a hasty request for the honour of her hand in the two next dances, to which as hasty an affirmative was given, & they were immediately impelled in opposite directions.— Emma was very well pleased with the circumstance;—there was a quietly cheerful, gentlemanlike air in Mr H. which suited her;—& in a few minutes afterwards, the value of her Engagement increased when as she was sitting in the Cardroom somewhat screened by a door, she heard Ld Osborne, who was lounging on a vacant Table near her, call Tom Musgrave towards him & say, "Why do not you dance with that beautiful Emma Watson? I want you to dance with her—& I will come & stand by you."—"I was determined on it this very moment, my Lord, I'll be introduced & dance with her directly."—"Aye, do;—& if you find she does not want much Talking to, you may introduce me by & bye."—"Very well, my Lord.—If she is like her Sisters, she will only want to be listened to.—I will go this moment. I shall find her in the Tea room. That stiff old Mrs E. has never done tea."—Away he went—Ld Osborne after him—& Emma lost no time in hurrying from her corner, exactly the other way, forgetting in her haste that she left Mrs Edwardes behind.—"We had quite lost you," said Mrs E.—who followed her with Mary, in less than five minutes.—If you prefer this room to the other, there is no reason why you should not be here; but we had better all be together." Emma was saved the Trouble of apologizing, by their being joined at the moment by Tom Musgrave, who requesting Mrs E. aloud to do him the honour of presenting him to Miss Emma Watson, left that good Lady without any choice in the business, but that of testifying by the coldness of her manner that she did it unwillingly. The honour of dancing with her, was solicited without loss of time.—Emma, however she might like to be thought a beautiful girl by Lord or Commoner, was so little disposed to favour Tom Musgrave himself, that she had considerable satisfaction in avowing her previous Engagement.—He was evidently surprised & discomposed. The stile of her last partner had probably led him to beleive her not overpowered with applications.—"My little friend, Charles Blake, he cried, must not expect to engross you the whole evening. We can never suffer this.—It is against the rules of the Assembly—& I am sure it will never be patronised by our good friend here, Mrs E.; She is by much too nice a judge of Decorum to give her licence to such a dangerous Particularity."—"I am not going to dance with Master Blake Sir." The Gentleman, a little disconcerted, could only hope he might be fortunate another time—& seeming unwilling to leave her, tho' his friend, Ld Osborne was waiting in the Doorway for the result, as Emma with some amusement perceived,—he began to make civil enquiries after her family.—"How comes it that we have not the pleasure of seeing your Sisters here this Evening?—Our assemblies have

been used to be so well treated by them, that we do not know how to take this neglect."—"My eldest Sister is the only one at home.—& she could not leave my Father"—"Miss Watson the only one at home! You astonish me! It seems but the day before yesterday that I saw them all three in the Town. But I am afraid I have been a very sad neighbour of late. I hear dreadful complaints of my negligence wherever I go, & I confess it is a shameful length of time since I was at Stanton.—But I shall *now* endeavour to make myself amends for the past."—Emma's calm curtsey in reply must have struck him as very unlike the encouraging warmth he had been used to receive from her Sisters, & gave him probably the novel sensation of doubting his own influence, & of wishing for more attention than she bestowed. The dancing now recommenced; Miss Carr being impatient to *call*, everybody was required to stand up;— & Tom Musgrave's curiosity was appeased, on seeing Mr Howard come forward and claim Emma's hand—"That will do as well for me"—was Ld Osborne's remark, when his friend carried him the news—& he was continually at Howard's Elbow during the two dances.—The frequency of his appearance there was the only unpleasant part of her engagement, the only objection she could make to Mr Howard.—In himself, she thought him as agreeable as he looked; tho' chatting on the commonest topics he had a sensible, unaffected, way of expressing himself, which made them all worth hearing, & she only regretted that he had not been able to make his pupil's Manners as unexceptionable as his own.—The two dances seemed very short, & she had her partner's authority for considering them so.—At their conclusion the Osbornes & their Train were all on the move. "We are off at last, said his Lordship to Tom.—How much longer do *you* stay in this Heavenly place?—till sunrise?"—"No faith! my Lord, I have had quite enough of it. I assure you—I shall not shew myself here again when I have had the honour of attending Ly. Osborne to her Carriage. I shall retreat in as much secrecy as possible to the most remote corner of the house, where I shall order a Barrel of Oysters, & be famously snug." "Let us see you soon at the Castle; & bring me word how she looks by daylight."—Emma & Mrs Blake parted as old acquaintance, & Charles shook her by the hand & wished her "goodbye" at least a dozen times. From Miss Osborne & Miss Carr she received something like a jerking curtsey as they passed her; even Ly. Osborne gave her a look of complacency—& his Lordship actually came back after the others were out of the room, to "beg her pardon", & look in the window seat behind her for the gloves which were visibly compressed in his hand.—

As Tom Musgrave was seen no more, we may suppose his plan to have succeeded, & imagine him mortifying with his Barrel of Oysters, in dreary solitude—or gladly assisting the Landlady in her Bar to make fresh Negus for the happy Dancers above. Emma could not help missing the party, by whom she had been, tho' in some respects unpleasantly, distinguished, & the two Dances which followed & concluded the Ball, were rather flat, in comparison with the others.—Mr E. having play'd with good luck, they were some of the last in the room—"Here we are back again, I declare—said Emma sorrowfully, as she walked into the Dining room, where the Table was prepared, & the neat Upper maid was lighting the Candles—"My dear Miss Edwards—how soon it

is at an end!—I wish it could all come over again!—” A great deal of kind pleasure was expressed in her having enjoyed the eveng so much—& Mr Edwards was as warm as herself, in the praise of the fulness, brilliancy, & Spirit of the meeting. Tho’ as he had been fixed the whole time at the same Table in the same Room, with only one change of chairs, it might have seemed a matter scarcely perceived.—But he had won 4 rubbers out of 5, & everything went well. His daughter felt the advantage of this gratified state of mind, in the course of the remarks & retrospections which now ensued over the welcome soup.—"How came you not to dance with either of the Mr Tomlinsons, Mary?"—said her Mother. "I was always engaged when they asked me." "I thought you were to have stood up with Mr James the two last dances; Mrs Tomlinson told me he was gone to ask you—& I had heard you say two minutes before that you were *not* engaged."—"Yes—but—there was a mistake—I had misunderstood—I did not know I was engaged.—I thought it had been for the 2 Dances after, if we stayed so long—but Capt. Hunter assured me it was for those very Two.—"

"So, you ended with Capt. Hunter, Mary, did you?" said her father. And whom did you begin with?" "Capt. Hunter." was repeated, in a very humble tone—"Hum!—That is being constant however. But who else did you dance with?" "M. Norton, & Mr Styles." "And who are they?" "Mr Norton is a Cousin of Capt. Hunter's."—"And who is Mr Styles?" "One of his particular friends,"—"All in the same Reg added Mrs E.—Mary was surrounded by Red coats the whole eveng. I should have been better pleased to see her dancing with some of our old Neighbours I confess."—"Yes, yes, we must not neglect our old Neighbours—. But if these soldiers are quicker than other people in a Ball room, what are young Ladies to do?" "I think there is no occasion for their engaging themselves so many Dances beforehand, Mr Edwards."—"No—perhaps not—but I remember my dear when you & I did the same."—Mrs E. said no more, & Mary breathed again.—A good deal of goodhumoured pleasantry followed—& Emma went to bed in charming Spirits, her head full of Osbornes, Blakes & Howards.