

Chawton

She shared this small back bedroom
with her darling Cass. Mama, across the corridor
in double bed, enjoyed the light and space they lacked.
Jug, basin, chamber pot immortalize
in Wedgwood blue the sisters' huddled,
whispering nights, the cold discomforts
of their waking hours.

Here genius thrived on simple fare:
coal fires, bare boards, rush chairs;
a visit in the donkey cart to friends,
to church; long walks, arms linked,
then home to needlework, piano play,
and evening prayers.

Gently her characters evolved,
creatures of drawing room and vicarage,
untouched by all the hangered beauty of the hills
and Revolution just across the sea.

I settle in the café opposite and look back
at the house: its plain-Jane face,
bricked windows, lack of ornament.

But balanced, honest, open as a book.

Phil Powley