



Linore Rose Burkard

*Inspirational Romance
for the Jane Austen Soul*



Getting Ready for the Ball: Pride and Prejudice Revisited

Do you love those elegant scenes of Regency balls, such as those featured in the movie, *Pride and Prejudice*? What about the glam hair-dos, sparkling jewels, and modish accessories? Ever wonder how a 19th century lady got herself looking so good? And, how much time did it take, anyway?

Hint: It wasn't fast, cheap, or easy! If you've ever attended an American high school prom, then you can probably imagine how a young regency miss felt before her first ball.



Getting ready to have a ball:
Keira Knightley and Rosamund Pike in *Pride and Prejudice*.

For the Bennet girls in Jane Austen's stories, a ball was especially exciting, because it didn't take place very often in their area of Longbourne. Thus, prior notice of the event was essential, so that ladies and gentlemen had enough time to prepare. Which brings us back to the question: What sort of preparation was needed? Actually, the answer is two-fold, because you needed to:

- Wear the proper clothing
- Acquire adequate knowledge of the latest dances.

For this article, we'll discuss the first concern of having proper clothing. This includes a lady's full "toilette," which were her entire preparations concerning her appearance for the big event. The most important decision focused on what gown to wear, as well as its accoutrements. Attending a ball or assembly required "Full-dress," which included the following components:

- A short-sleeved, low-necked gown usually white or light-colored. The dress would have an empire-waist beneath the bust and could be ornamented, layered, embroidered, frilled with lace, etc.
- A pair of genteel "slippers" for the feet, often made of satin, silk, or other light material.
- Implicit beneath it all was proper underclothing, such as a chemise, stays, and perhaps a petticoat, as well as stockings.
- Modish hairstyles included ornamentation, braids, and tiaras, headdress, or ribbons.
- Jewelry was appropriate, if not required. Ladies wore necklaces, bracelets, armlets, "ear-rings," brooches, tiaras. And, for royals, coronets were worn. Plus, others donned jeweled hair ornaments, fans, lorgnettes, or seals. Rings were often worn over the gloves in order to be seen.
- A pair of ball-room gloves at three-quarter length past the elbow would be worn.



www.LinoreRoseBurkard.com
Inspirational Romance for the Jane Austen Soul

Now that we know what a lady needed to wear to a ball, let's consider her "toilette" experience. To help explain, I've provided an excerpt from my novel, *Before the Season Ends*, which follows Ariana Forsythe getting ready for a ball. Read along and discover the rigors of her preparation:

"At length Mrs. Bentley sought out Ariana to direct her remaining hours in preparations for the ball that night. It seemed outlandish, but she insisted Ariana soak in a hot tub, and then quickly into and out of a cold one. She called this "polishing the skin."

Harrietta, the lady's maid, then took over, trimming the nails on Ariana's feet and hands, and supplying her with an array of vials, lotions, perfumes, powders, and other solutions. Some were for her face and neck, others for her hands, elbows, and even her feet!

Later Ariana was allowed a small meal, followed by tea. Then, to her surprise, Mrs. Bentley announced it was time to "earnestly prepare for the evening." Ariana had to wonder what they had been doing all along, if not earnestly preparing for the evening!

They fussed over her hair, her chemise, her stockings, her gown. Mrs. Bentley had insisted upon a small corset, or stays. Only wantons, she declared, did without them. But, now she decided it needed to be tightened, and the gown was promptly removed; the stays were tightened, more so than mama had ever insisted upon, and Ariana felt sure she would have to adjust to breathing differently. Once satisfied, they pulled the gown carefully back over Ariana's head and arms and smoothed it into place.

By the time the two women had finished pulling, pinching, poking and pressing, Ariana felt more than ready to face the *'Paragon'*. Her hair was coifed elegantly atop her head, with curled tendrils about her face. (Ariana wished she had jet black hair, but Mama said her lighter tresses matched the light in her eyes, and indeed, this night her words rang true.) Ariana was a picture of sparkling, beautiful youth.

Still, Mrs. Bentley insisted upon loaning her a matching set of jewels consisting of a necklace, earrings, brooch and bracelet. And, as a last dignifying element, a tiara: a delicate, lightly embellished headpiece, which was placed over her head and fastened into place with pins.

When at last she stood quietly resplendent in a pale pink gown of satin and net, with elegant white gloves that reached past her elbows and pale pink satin slippers upon her feet, even Mrs. Bentley had to smile. "You do me credit, my girl," she said, almost affectionately. "Even Mornay will be smitten, I daresay, eh, Harrietta?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am!" breathed Harrietta, fully as pleased with the way Ariana had turned out as her mistress. "So tall and striking as miss is, just like a princess!" Ariana's aunt smiled. "I thought at first you were too tall," she admitted, "but it turns out that 'tall' can be 'statuesque' as well!" Ariana was hustled out of the room and downstairs, to wait for Mr. Mornay in the parlour."

I hope you enjoyed this brief glimpse into the life of a Regency woman. Just like today, glamour didn't necessarily come easy. There was a great deal less make-up, if any at all. But, at least a Regency beauty had only to look good by candle or lamplight!



The Empress Josephine
in a fancy evening gown
with accessories.

A Simple Tub Bath?

Drawing a bath in Regency days bore little similarity to the task today. First, the water had to be heated. Then, it was carried in bucketfuls up stairs to the bedchamber or dressing room. And, this process was repeated until the tub was full! In short, a simple tub bath was never simple.



Regency: Did you know?

When preparing for a ball, a lady's maid might put the lady's hair into "papers" hours earlier. Papers were the Regency equivalent of hair rollers. Later, or the next day, she would take out the papers, artfully leaving curls hanging about the face. Also, she might braid, comb, and coax other portions of a lady's hair into an acceptable style.

Then, the maid would help put pins, jewelry, or other manner of headwear in place for an elegant look to complete the Regency belle's evening ensemble. Depending on the lady being dressed, she might also help apply powders or a mild rouge to the face.



Linore Rose Burkard writes *Inspirational Romance for the Jane Austen Soul*. Her characters take you back in time to experience life and love during the Regency England era (circa 1800 – 1830). Ms. Burkard's novels include *Before the Season Ends* and *The House in Grosvenor Square* (coming April, 2009). Her stories blend Christian faith and romance with well-researched details from the Regency period. Experience a romantic age, where timeless lessons still apply to modern life. And, enjoy a romance that reminds you happy endings are possible for everyone.

For more information, visit: www.LinoreRoseBurkard.com

