

Dear Mr. Knightley: Sam's Reading List

If asked about her favorite books, Sam would reply “All Jane Austen.” She loved Austen’s “safe, ordered and confined” world. Granted Austen heroines might dispute Sam’s assertion: Charlotte Lucas certainly didn’t feel safe – otherwise she would have passed on Mr. Collins without a second thought. But everything is relative...

Pride and Prejudice: Who wouldn’t want to be the indomitable Elizabeth Bennet with her quick wit and *fine eyes*? And who doesn’t love beautiful, demure Jane Bennet? And Lydia? Not prudent to follow in her steps – but such obtuse, brash boldness is probably fun on occasion. One can readily understand Sam’s longing to spend time within the Bennet family.

Emma: Sam hardly dared to dream of what life might be like in Emma’s warm bubble of adoration and love. Certainly many other Highbury residents didn’t feel so secure, in fact most didn’t – but Emma? She “can not really change for the better.”

Sense and Sensibility: Austen’s most obvious juxtaposition of two opposite ways of thinking, feeling and living, but, thankfully, Sam grew right along Elinor and Marianne. And, after fleeing Josh, she too gravitated to nicely to a moderate center.

Alongside Jane Austen, Sam would place *Jane Eyre* as a dear favorite. And how could these two not be fast friends? Yet, in Jane, Sam found more than a friend, she found the guide she desperately needed. Sure Miss Eyre got swept away for a moment – and what a scene it was – but, on the whole, she was a young woman with her feet firmly planted on the ground.

Sam also adored Edmond Dantes in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. His is the story of a young man robbed of everything of meaning, by his best friend no less, and left to die in a horrid prison. But wait – he escapes, he finds a treasure beyond measure, he devises a ruthless, elegant and sophisticated plan for revenge... So satisfying. It’s easy to see why he appealed to Sam. But thank you, Dumas, for underpinning your adventure with strong threads of faith, hope, reconciliation and forgiveness. Sam needed those too.

There are so many others, I’ll just run through a few – or we could be here for pages:

The Scarlet Pimpernel by Baroness Orczy: Percy Blakeney, the true master of disguise and a dashing handsome hero.

Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery: If you’re an orphan, Anne is a good friend. She is spunky, fun, ready to get you into mischief and determined to keep you safe on Prince Edward Island. However, Anne always wanted to be a writer and poor Sam would be horrified if she knew you’d read her letters.

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens: I don't think Sam set out to love Ebenezer Scrooge, but I think she now considers him a very dear friend. Alex certainly does and thanks Dickens for his tale.

North and South by Elizabeth Gaskell: Margaret Hale and John Thornton, a couple different in every way – but so clearly meant to be together. Sam says it was the “one last go at all that matters” that appealed to her; I think it was John Thornton.

Sam started with *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C.S. Lewis, but is now working her way through *The Chronicles of Narnia*. She adores them. Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy delight her, but Eustace will always be most near and dear to her heart – as will the glorious lion, Aslan, who saved him...

And I must add... Please never let Sam know her letters were published. She may have a psychotic break like poor Miss Havisham from *Great Expectations* and we will find her seeking solace in her banquet of books forever... Thank you... KBR