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Jane Austen's Falling Women

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Jane Austen's Falling Women

Mary Dengler

The fall at Lyme
from stone to stone
that bruised Miss Musgrove's head,
reduced her to a silent girl,
reclining on an invalid's bed,
declared that girls who would descend
obey their lover's voice
and by their lover's hand be led.
A great strong girl who takes the lead,
who leaps upon her lover so,
presumes too much—a wit, a stance
that's strong enough to stand the blow.

Miss Elliot learned a better way;
her bruises grew beneath her gown.
She listened to persuasions's arts;
she let herself be taken down.
For years she practiced self-control,
withstood the heart's impulse to leap.
And when Miss Musgrove fell to earth,
she stood,
the other's fall to reap.
Though quietly she moved along
through suitors, mirrors, Bath, and hall,
when Wentworth fell without a sound,
she caught him,
lest she miss his call.

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