

“Now I have got some news for you,” said Lydia, as they sat down at table. “What do you think? It is excellent news—capital news—and about a certain person we all like!”

Jane and Elizabeth looked at each other, and the waiter was told he need not stay. Lydia laughed, and said:

“Aye, that is just like your formality and discretion. You thought the waiter must not hear, as if he cared! I dare say he often hears worse things said than I am going to say. But he is an ugly fellow! I am glad he is gone. I never saw such a long chin in my life. Well, but now for my news; it is about dear Wickham; too good for the waiter, is it not? There is no danger of Wickham’s marrying Mary King. There’s for you! She is gone down to her uncle at Liverpool: gone to stay. Wickham is safe.”

“And Mary King is safe!” added Elizabeth; “safe from a connection imprudent as to fortune.”

“She is a great fool for going away, if she liked him.”

“But I hope there is no strong attachment on either side,” said Jane.

“I am sure there is not on *his*. I will answer for it, he never cared three straws about her—who *could* about such a nasty little freckled thing?”

Elizabeth was shocked to think that, however incapable of such coarseness of *expression* herself, the coarseness of the *sentiment* was little other than her own breast had harboured and fancied liberal!

As soon as all had ate, and the elder ones paid, the carriage was ordered; and after some contrivance, the whole party, with all their boxes, work-bags, and parcels, and the unwelcome addition of Kitty’s and Lydia’s purchases, were seated in it.

“How nicely we are all crammed in,” cried Lydia. “I am glad I bought my bonnet, if it is only for the fun of having another bandbox! Well, now let us be quite comfortable and snug, and talk and laugh all the way home. And in the first place, let us hear what has happened to you all since you went away. Have you seen any pleasant men? Have you had any flirting? I was in great hopes that one of you would have got a husband before you came back. Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost three-and-twenty! Lord, how ashamed I should be of not being married before three-and-twenty! My aunt Phillips wants you so to get husbands, you can’t think. She says Lizzy had better have taken Mr. Collins; but *I* do not think there would have been any fun in it. Lord! how I should like to be married before any of you; and then I would *chaperon* you about to all the balls. Dear me! we had such a good piece of fun the other day at