

quarrel. Come as soon as you can on receipt of this. My brother and the gentlemen are to dine with the officers.—Yours ever,

“CAROLINE BINGLEY”

“With the officers!” cried Lydia. “I wonder my aunt did not tell us of *that*.”

“Dining out,” said Mrs. Bennet, “that is very unlucky.”

“Can I have the carriage?” said Jane.

“No, my dear, you had better go on horseback, because it seems likely to rain; and then you must stay all night.”

“That would be a good scheme,” said Elizabeth, “if you were sure that they would not offer to send her home.”

“Oh! but the gentlemen will have Mr. Bingley’s chaise to go to Meryton, and the Hursts have no horses to theirs.”

“I had much rather go in the coach.”

“But, my dear, your father cannot spare the horses, I am sure. They are wanted in the farm, Mr. Bennet, are they not?”

“They are wanted in the farm much oftener than I can get them.”

“But if you have got them to-day,” said Elizabeth, “my mother’s purpose will be answered.”

She did at last extort from her father an acknowledgment that the horses were engaged. Jane was therefore obliged to go on horseback, and her mother attended her to the door with many cheerful prognostics of a bad day. Her hopes were answered; Jane had not been gone long before it rained hard. Her sisters were uneasy for her, but her mother was delighted. The rain continued the whole evening without intermission; Jane certainly could not come back.

“This was a lucky idea of mine, indeed!” said Mrs. Bennet more than once, as if the credit of making it rain were all her own. Till the next morning, however, she was not aware of all the felicity of her contrivance. Breakfast was scarcely over when a servant from Netherfield brought the following note for Elizabeth:

“MY DEAREST LIZZY,—

“I find myself very unwell this morning, which, I suppose, is to be imputed to my getting wet through yesterday. My kind friends will not hear of my returning till I am better. They insist also on my seeing Mr. Jones—therefore do not be alarmed if you should hear of his having been to me—and, excepting a sore throat and headache, there is not