

much the matter with me.—Yours, etc.”

“Well, my dear,” said Mr. Bennet, when Elizabeth had read the note aloud, “if your daughter should have a dangerous fit of illness—if she should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders.”

“Oh! I am not afraid of her dying. People do not die of little trifling colds. She will be taken good care of. As long as she stays there, it is all very well. I would go and see her if I could have the carriage.”

Elizabeth, feeling really anxious, was determined to go to her, though the carriage was not to be had; and as she was no horsewoman, walking was her only alternative. She declared her resolution.

“How can you be so silly,” cried her mother, “as to think of such a thing, in all this dirt! You will not be fit to be seen when you get there.”

“I shall be very fit to see Jane—which is all I want.”

“Is this a hint to me, Lizzy,” said her father, “to send for the horses?”

“No, indeed, I do not wish to avoid the walk. The distance is nothing when one has a motive; only three miles. I shall be back by dinner.”

“I admire the activity of your benevolence,” observed Mary, “but every impulse of feeling should be guided by reason; and, in my opinion, exertion should always be in proportion to what is required.”

“We will go as far as Meryton with you,” said Catherine and Lydia. Elizabeth accepted their company, and the three young ladies set off together.

“If we make haste,” said Lydia, as they walked along, “perhaps we may see something of Captain Carter before he goes.”

In Meryton they parted; the two youngest repaired to the lodgings of one of the officers’ wives, and Elizabeth continued her walk alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise.

She was shown into the breakfast-parlour, where all but Jane were assembled, and where her appearance created a great deal of surprise. That she should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by herself, was almost incredible to Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and Elizabeth was convinced that they held her in contempt for it. She was received, however, very politely by them; and in their brother’s manners there was something better than politeness;