

An Afternoon with Lydia Wickham, Nay Benet

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Originally Directed by: Alison King

Lydia, off stage, receives a letter from a silent maid.

For Me?

Enters and lands at the table, opens letter and notices the handwriting. She turns to face downstage.

....Oh....Mama. Your handwriting is more illegible than usual. I can hardly read it.

Throughout the letter, she walks and lands in certain places, never sitting down from a slight entertainment she feels at reading the tedious letter. Until, that is, she sees her sister's name...

My dear Lydia,

Bath this season has been so diverting. The society, the landscape, the houses, all the most pleasing I've ever seen. Mama, it's Bath.

This season has been so filled, I have found hardly any time to keep up with my usual correspondence. This is the first letter I've received from her these two months mama. I am quite aware of the exhilarating and busy life she leads!

I regret that I have not been able to send the materials you requested in your last letter. My time has been so occupied as of late. Oh mama!

We have been much engaged in the society here. We missed you at

Lady Hainesworth's dinner party the other night. The house was pleasingly well appointed. I especially liked the dining room curtains.

They were made of the most expensive yellow velvet, lined with exquisite white silk. Imported from Paris, or so Lady Hainesworth told me over an *Ex-ce-cra-ble?* - Excellent dinner. Oh Mama! (Giggle)

I must say that the imagination, which inspired the curtains, did not extend to the menu, which was a trifle predictable, although I must add delicious. Oh Mama, food and drink? T'was ever thus!

We danced to the newest tunes and the latest steps. Papa danced? Oh that must have been entertaining!

Ahhh. That is to say your father and I observed, while we took tea. Oh how I wish I could learn these dances as quickly as Kitty. She was so graceful on the floor that night. Kitty graceful?

Lands downstage left.

So much so, her dance card was filled within the first few moments of our arrival. Dinner parties where Kitty is able to go about on her own? I remember when she could hardly take one step from my side without her inquiring on how to meet one of the members of the regiment, or what ribbons best suited her bonnet...and now she has taken my place with Mama?

Turns on her heels in a huff, and pouts into her chair.

Well. ... Well...

A pause while she decides not read the letter, but changes her mind, knowing there is nothing else to do.

Though of course three dances were with a specific gentleman of high rank and good standing. We have great hopes for an engagement in the future, Lydia.

Lydia starts having troubling catching her breath and shaking badly. She pours herself a cup of tea, and gets her bottle of laudanum out. She puts in 4 or 5 drops, and then drinks her tea. Once she feels it slightly help, she tries to relax. She then begins the letter again, not fully recovered.

He has been quite attentive. And why not? She has grown into a beauty, unlike Jane of course, but hers is a truly glowing beauty. It would indeed be a most advantageous match for our Kitty. I secretly believe he has been quite taken with her. This would be extremely satisfying for both your papa and myself. To see four of my girls so happily arranged. I will write again soon, when Kitty's engagement is fully settled. Presently, I am to go with Kitty to take tea with the gentleman's mother and sisters, who all seem extremely pleasant. Though, you know what your papa truly feels of entertaining, he seems to be enjoying himself. Really?

My love, As Always

Mama

Ps. your father sends his love. I am sure he will write soon.

Before she finishes the last line, she has another mini tantrum, and bursts from her chair to downstage right.

Oh Papa, do write soon. Letters from you, although rare, are very important to me... You know, Darcy reminds me of Papa, a little. Always hiding in his study the way he used to always hide in your library....

Looks back at the table, notices the letter.

Hopefully, I will not be receiving any letters from Mama quite so soon.

Crosses downstage left

Engagements take a great deal of arranging, I believe, before things are absolutely settled...yes...

When this thought occurs to her, she crosses back upstage to her table to retrieve the letter. Then returns downstage left.

I wonder if any members of the regiments were invited to Lady Hainesworth's dinner party? Surely Mama would have written about that. And she has omitted mention of My Wickham. In previous letters, it was so exhausting to read her 'opinions' of my husband. Kitty's future takes precedence over my past it seems. Lizzy is much kinder. She keeps her own council on it. She and I have not spoken openly about My Wickham for some time now.

Outside her window (upstage right) she hears laughter, children's laughter. She smiles as she recognises the voice, and dashes over to the window. She waves, but

it's too late, they have gone. Lydia takes a breath, and grabs one of the books on her windowsill and leaves the window. She has taken no notice of the book she has grabbed until she is by her tea table. When she know which book it is, she goes to her chair.

I read this book so often as a girl, that I am all astonishment at its resilience. I've assumed, for some time now, that it would fall to pieces any day, and yet it stays whole. Whenever the world was too dull or too dreadful, I would read my books. I actually read from this one to my Wickham our first night in London together. Ahh, how my Wickham reminded me of the dark soldier when I first met him. That day in Meryton with Denny and Kitty and the rest of my sisters. He was so handsome, so very gallant, with this smile that swayed my heart as it's willing captive almost instantly. He has this smile that can make me do anything, can make anyone his slave, win any and everything he desired.

She stands, crossing to centre.

Ahh He was so very tall, with dark hair and clean sideburns. His brow had an air of confidence, as did his walk. Not even his blue eyes, once they had locked on to mine, could compare to his smile. I must admit, I was smitten. When he first spoke to me, it took all the power of my will that I could muster not to be too bold with him especially since he had first fained interest in Lizzy. His uniform so became him, his swagger just enchanting. The way he danced our first night together in London, in that little inn, it was so exciting. So much so that when he saw my book, and how my eyes kept drifting towards it, he claimed to be interested in it. Oh, this page falls open so easily.

While reading these books, she gets a bit over-dramatic, trying to enwrap herself within these books as much as possible, for the obvious reasons. She begins downstage left.

She examined herself in the windowpane. The silent midsummer night air causing a pleasant draft through the open window. Her dark eyes, shimmering in the starlight, searched for anything she might find lacking in her person. Her pale skin, glowing in the soft candlelight glistening from her bedside table, was flushed with anticipation. Her lips, soft and velvet pink, were warmed by the thought of her soldier. George...

She remembers that there is more to come and faces the audience on stage left.

Her hair, wild as Diane's after a hunt, hung free and a single gentle curl brushed her slender collarbone. A curt knock at her door made her spin on her heels, her eyes locked on to the dark figure. Shutting the heavy door soundlessly, almost in one swift move, the man took a single step forward. He was a man of dark completion, his hair had a sheen of the darkest ink, and was almost as wild as hers in disarray.

No matter how many times I read this, it still disturbs and thrills me!