

My Dear Charlotte

(With the assistance of Jane
Austen's letters)

Hazel Holt



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*For Jane Austen
With
Admiration, Gratitude and my
Duty*

Author's Note

When I began to write a mystery story set in the early 1800s in the form of a series of letters, I thought a splendid way to give it authenticity might be to interweave those of my heroine with the letters written by Jane Austen. Fully aware that this was a truly presumptuous thing to do, nevertheless I have plundered that treasure house—a most enjoyable occupation.

I hope the result will give those of my readers who already know the Austen letters the pleasure of recognition and, those who do not, the delight of discovery.

Someone once said that writing pastiche was like being lent an expensive and powerful motor car, which is thrilling to drive, but you're terrified of breaking it. I do hope I have returned this particular, wonderful vehicle in relatively pristine condition.

I have used the Brabourne Edition of the Letters, published in 1884 and dedicated to Queen Victoria, who was a great Jane Austen fan.

Hazel Holt, 1st July, 2009

Introduction

Hazel Holt has many devoted fans in the United States and Great Britain as a writer of “cosy” British mysteries; she has published nineteen Mrs. Malory novels at last count. She is also known to admirers of Barbara Pym as the friend and biographer who additionally edited Pym’s posthumous works. This background of talent and expertise along with a deep appreciation of Jane Austen’s novels and letters allows Holt to do what no one to my knowledge has attempted. She writes, as the title page announces, “with the assistance of Jane Austen’s letters.” That is, Holt brings together the style of the letters with a cast of characters that would be at home in Austen’s novels, creating a work that offers pleasures that are the next best to those that an Austen novel affords.

Of course, you don’t have to love Austen to love this book. If you enjoy detective novels, you will find here a completely satisfying murder mystery, coupled with a romance (or more than one, in fact). *My Dear Charlotte* gives you, in addition to mystery and romance, a portrait of the world of the English gentry at around 1815, immediately after the defeat of Napoleon—its manners and its moral certainty. As in Austen, Napoleon is not directly mentioned, but his shadow is there: one brother of the heroine is a sailor and the other a junior diplomat at the Congress of Vienna. It’s the social world at home that is central, however, with its balls, visits, courtships, gossip, and of course murder, underlining the tensions and rifts within that apparently civilized society.

But it’s readers of Jane Austen who will get the most pleasure from *My Dear Charlotte*. It is in my opinion the only successful attempt to re-create the **world** of Austen’s novels, better even than the best of Georgette Heyer’s Regency romances. Holt does much more, though: she has chosen to write a novel-in-letters, which allows her to incorporate witty quotations directly from Austen’s letters into her novel, quotations about persons, occasions, the minutiae of daily life from housekeeping and shopping to the weather and human nature. Austen’s comments take new meaning when they are

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thus placed in the context of this novel, in ways that I will hope to illustrate more fully later. Even without an added context, they can seem richer here, as in the following (taken from the 19th-century Brabourne edition of the letters):

The masons are now repairing the chimney, which they found to be in such a state as to make it wonderful that it should have stood so long, and next to impossible that another violent wind should not blow it down. (MDC 29 Oct; JA Letters 7 Oct. 1808)

Seeing this line as a paragraph to itself, I finally appreciated its perfect evocation of the doom-laden pronouncements of repairmen, shaking their heads over the dismal condition of our fabric (“wonderful it should have stood so long”) and over the heroic exertions they must undertake to save us before something like “another violent wind” occurs to our destruction. That is, Holt first of all makes the complicated ironies of Austen’s letters more available to readers by taking them out of their original context and allowing us to focus on them.

What is even more important, however, is that the inclusion of such comments from Austen’s letters dictates style. Unless you know those letters really well, you will simply not detect all of the quotations in *My Dear Charlotte*. The insertions are seamless because, astonishingly, Holt captures their tone and wit and language, their style, in fifty-five letters from her heroine Elinor Cowper (pronounced Cooper) to her sister, “My Dear Charlotte,” over about seven months. And, as in Austen, style is character. Elinor has the qualities of Austen in the letters, an inquisitive, sharp, ironical eye that she turns on everything in her world—dress, food, family life, and in Elinor’s case, murder. But because she is a character in a story, enmeshed in plot, she is more knowable than Jane Austen and more familiar. We inevitably read her through our understanding of Austen’s characters, and as the novel progresses, Elinor the letter writer (or narrator) sounds more and more like Elizabeth Bennet, with the occasional dash of Mary Crawford’s superior bitchiness. Her irony doesn’t, then, have the “godlike impersonality”

that some scholars attribute to Austen's narrators.¹ Instead, all Elinor writes reveals character, her own or others', even when she is producing sentences from Austen's letters. As an example, the line about the masons repairing the chimney shows Elinor's relish for the human foibles that lubricate society, keep it going—in this case, both the masons' enjoyment of the power their expertise gives them, stretching to exaggeration of danger, and also our own helpless and probably ignorant reliance on that expertise.

Often, the quotations from Austen's letters are placed firmly in the context of the mystery plot and do service there. After rejecting the idea that "chicken and asparagus fricassee" could have caused a suspicious death in another household, Elinor wonders what should be served to the magistrate at dinner:

...perhaps we should settle on having a plain roasted bird when Sir Edward comes to dine since any possible threat to a magistrate might put us in danger of the law.

Our mother said that Mr Russell looked remarkably well—legacies are a very wholesome diet (MDC 26 July).

Austen's witty "legacies are a very wholesome diet"—pointing out how we selfishly thrive on what allegedly should grieve us—becomes even wittier in the context of genuine but also slightly absurd concern over what to feed the magistrate. The majesty of the law is thus mocked by appearing to preside over the wholesomeness of a dinner instead of inquiring into a possibly ill-gotten legacy. The reference to a chicken and asparagus fricassee will also make readers of *Emma* recall the "delicate fricassee of sweetbread and some

¹ Deirdre Lynch, "Jane Austen and Genius," *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p.394.

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asparagus,”² a favorite dish snatched away from poor Mrs. Bates by Mr. Woodhouse’s concern for his own health. This subtle allusion to Austen’s novel ties together the selfishness that can underlie hospitality with the selfishness of inheritance—not a “wholesome diet” at all.

As is evident, the pleasures of *My Dear Charlotte*, are increased the more one knows not just Austen’s letters but her biography and the novels as well, particularly *Emma*. Those who know the biography will enjoy finding parallels and contrasts between Elinor and Austen herself, and between their sisters Charlotte and Cassandra. One of my favorite instances occurs when Elinor is describing to Charlotte the contents of a cupboard she had to empty. Among other childhood treasures, Elinor finds “the book of pressed ferns that occupied so much of your time until you wearied of it and turned your attention to collecting riddles” (MDC 16 Aug.). That Charlotte, who is more sedate and proper than Elinor and also a bit of a hypochondriac, should have collected riddles like *Emma*’s Harriet Smith is perfect—and that Elinor should enjoy this slight jab at her beloved sister’s pastimes reveals their real intimacy. While we know nothing of Cassandra Austen’s pastimes other than her drawing, this line encourages me to reread Austen’s letters for signs that she too has a sister who complains perhaps overmuch.

Though allusions to *Emma* are the most evident, it is of course not the only Austen novel that events and comments and characters and sometimes even passages in *My Dear Charlotte*, evoke. *Persuasion* is important also. The town closest to Elinor’s home is Lyme, after all. Elinor’s slightly hypochondriacal sister Charlotte is outdone by their married sister Mary who, as Elinor reports, “has had one of her bad throats this last month or more and, as we are aware, her throats are always worse than anyone’s” (MDC 25 June): the whining Mary Musgrove of *Persuasion* is with us here almost word for word (see the postscript to Mary Musgrove’s letter,

² Here and elsewhere in this introduction, page numbers refer to R.W. Chapman’s editions of Austen’s novels.

p.164), and whining is a constant thread in *My Dear Charlotte* as a whole. But Holt manages to allude to *Persuasion* through just one word in the following passage—which doesn't at all quote Austen's letters—while also skewering various characters as well as the society that shapes them:

Poor Miss Craven and her mama must have been sadly disappointed. Without Mrs Woodstock's eye upon him, Mr Russell exchanged the merest civilities with them and made his escape as soon as he decently could. But Miss Craven may still find a husband. She is, for the most part, silent and not ill-looking if one can overlook her freckles, and I am sure that may easily be done by contemplation of her fortune, so I shall not feel sorry for her. (MDC 26 Aug.)

It's the word "freckles" that brings in Mrs. Clay of *Persuasion* and Sir Walter Elliot's delusions about them—first that her freckles are impossible to overlook, rendering Mrs. Clay hopelessly unattractive, and second that they have been erased by his recommendation of Gowland's lotion. Mrs. Clay has no fortune to make her freckles vanish—whereas, in the society of *Persuasion* and *My Dear Charlotte*, fortune makes any woman able to find a husband, especially a woman who, tellingly, is "silent" and "not ill-looking." In this world, such a woman's fortune nicely alliterates with and cancels out her freckles. Though we never learn the precise amount of Elinor's fortune (or that of Charlotte), nor indeed what she looks like (though she is evidently attractive), we discover that her father's estate of Monkton near Lyme is worth £2000 a year (MDC 5 Nov.)—an essential detail in the world of *My Dear Charlotte*, as in any of the Austen novels.

One final instance of the rich and complex relation between this novel and Austen's: Elinor thus reports her mother's rhapsodies on Mr. Rivers—

'Why, when Mrs Brompton was laid up with a cold he went all the way to Exeter to procure some special wool she needed to complete a carpet she was making. And when he dined with us he was able to converse easily with Mr Mildmay, who is quite deaf and needs a good deal of trouble to make him hear—a great problem on

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such occasions, and I have often said to Mr Cowper that only the fact that he is one of our oldest friends persuades me to invite him! No, Mr Rivers is a splendid addition to our society and I for one will be very sorry to see him go back to Barbados.’ (MDC 19 Sept.)

Character is finely rendered here. Mrs. Cowper is a little like Miss Bates in her loquacity and sometimes even like Mrs. Bennet her bare-faced manipulativeness. In this instance, the good-hearted, open tone of Miss Bates’s voice seems to prevail, but it is possible that when we arrive at “a great problem” and “I have often said to Mr Cowper” we can hear in our minds something of the fretfulness of Mrs. Bennet. That is, when dialogue is reported, as here, the tone remains ambiguous, like the tone of Darcy’s remarks to Elizabeth in the first volume of *Pride and Prejudice*: on first reading, we are likely to hear that tone as haughty, as Elizabeth does; on subsequent readings, we may hear the same words as more friendly, more interested, more attracted. Holt’s dialogue in this novel has some of that same Austenian ambiguity, inviting rereading.

Comedy is also finely rendered in this passage. What is delightful here is the way that Mrs. Cowper reveals that she herself is the gold standard of politeness: only because Mr. Mildmay is such an old friend will **she** invite him, so that Mr. Rivers’ civility elevates him to her own moral high ground. In this passage, the moral certainty of Mrs. Cowper is treated comically, but the social world described is one in which such judgments are constantly made, with a freedom that seems alien in our own world. Not that such judgments are necessarily correct. Here, as in Austen’s novels, sometimes even the most confident judges, proud of their discernment, like Elizabeth Bennet or indeed like Elinor Cowper, make mistakes.

In these passages and just about any others chosen at random from *My Dear Charlotte*, readers can appreciate how far Holt’s choice to base her novel on Austen’s letters dictates its tone, wit, and language, and how far her choice to mine Austen’s novels to provide paradigms for characters, courtships, and moral qualities, dictates its overall comedy. To all this, Holt adds a murder mystery, used (as is traditional) to underline the inequity that the social world is partly based upon,

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however many admirable individuals populate it. Holt depicts this class-based historical community without nostalgia. Though the main characters are of the gentry, all the classes are there and shown to be interdependent. The relations among the classes, how they each affect one another, are carefully sketched, but the murder and some of the unpleasant characters indicate a fundamental corruption that precludes a nostalgic presentation of community, of the world we have lost.

Because readers will enjoy finding their own parallels to the novels and to Austen's own family, as well as their own favorite comic moments, I have been sparing in my examples. I have also tried to avoid spoiling the various plots by giving too many details. With great confidence, I recommend to you the pleasures of reading and rereading *My Dear Charlotte*.

Jan Fergus

Professor of English Emerita, Lehigh University

Principal Characters

Residing at Lyme Regis:

Henry Cowper, gentleman (pronounced "Cooper")
Mrs. Cowper, his wife
Charlotte Cowper, their elder daughter, away on visits
Elinor Cowper, their younger daughter, letter writer
Frank Cowper, their son, in Vienna with the diplomatic corps
William Cowper, their son, on duty with the Royal Navy
Lucy maidservant to the Cowpers and sister to Sarah, housekeeper at Holcombe Park
Mrs. and Miss Caroline West, new residents at Chilton House by the Cobb, Lyme
Maria Brompton and Mrs. Holder, who know all that goes on in and around Lyme
Rugeley's book shop and Layton's haberdashery, where Lyme residents often call

At Holcombe Park:

Mr. Woodstock, gentleman
Mrs. Woodstock, invalid
Sir Matthew Russell, Mrs. Woodstock's brother, an eminent physician
Mr. James Russell, Mrs. Woodstock's nephew, and nephew to Sir Matthew Russell, on a visit from London
Mr. Frederick Rivers, Mr. Woodstock's cousin and estate manager in Barbados, on a visit
Corbett, Mr. James Russell's valet
Chapman, Mrs. Woodstock's maid
Sarah, Mrs. Woodstock's housekeeper

At Marshwood Abbey:

Sir Edward Hampton of Hatch Beauchamp and Marshwood Abbey, justice of the peace
George and John Hampton, his young sons
Miss Blair, their governess
Mrs. Hodges, housekeeper to Sir Edward

My Dear Charlotte

Monkton

May 12th

My Dear Charlotte,

Your letter this morning was quite unexpected and disappointed me of my first sentence which I had planned, full of proper hopes about your journey. I was sorry to hear that your trunk was too heavy to go by the coach from Taunton, but you were fortunate to find a wagon that could convey it all the way to Bath. I do indeed hope that you may not have taken cold after your stop at Shepton Mallet, but I have often found the brief introduction of a warming pan into cold sheets does provoke the *feeling* of dampness without the actual ill effects.

I am glad that our uncle has settled on a house in Green Park Buildings since the one that he and our aunt took last year in New King Street had pitifully small rooms. You may remember that the best of the sitting rooms was not as large as our parlour here. Those at G.P. Buildings are quite spacious and *dry* since I believe that no inconvenience from the river may be felt there. So I shall think of you happily established with a fire in your room and every kind of comfort about you.

I was surprised at your news that bonnets of cambric muslin are much worn in Bath and that there are a multitude of black gauze cloaks. Our mother has ordered a new bonnet; white stripe with white ribbon, while I shall continue with my old straw bonnet which I fancy is as smart as other people's.

My news is of a less elevated order, namely that Mrs Woodstock has taken to her old tricks of ill health again and, pronouncing herself to be dying once more, has ordered her nephew James Russell post haste from London to attend upon her. So our circle will be enlarged by one, and since he seems an agreeable young man (you will recall his being so obliging, the last time he was at one of our assemblies, to stand up with me for two of the dances) I for one am delighted at her indisposition.

We dine now at half after three, and have done dinner I suppose before you begin. We drink tea at half past six—I am afraid that when you return you will despise us.

MY DEAR CHARLOTTE

Some of the flower seeds are coming up very well, but the pinks and mignonette make a wretched appearance. By the blossom we are likely to have a great crop of Orleans plums, but not many greengages. Your hens show no sign of missing you and continue to lay with great prodigality. Adieu—I must leave off to stir the fire and call on Miss Williams.

Yr affectionate sister,
Elinor Cowper

May 19th

My Dear Charlotte,

This will be a quick return for yours: I doubt it having much else to recommend it. I am sorry that your poor ankle prevented you from walking in the Crescent fields with Miss Winstone, but if the wind was cold perhaps it was as well you forwent the pleasure. It was fortunate that you had your new paisley shawl as well as your pelisse when you went to the Rooms with our uncle. I do trust that our aunt will soon be free of her bilious fever and hope that you do not feel obliged to follow the fashion she has set.

I do have one brand new item of news for you. A Mrs West and her daughter have taken Chilton's house by the Cobb. It is said that Miss West has been ill and has been advised to seek the beneficial effects of sea air. They come, it seems, from Kent and I would have thought that there would be sea air enough in that county to suffice, but perhaps it has not such a benevolent quality as that at Lyme. I should not complain of any addition to our company, although I have heard that Miss West, illness notwithstanding, is reckoned to be exceptionally good looking, so we may find ourselves eclipsed by the presence of a distinguished Beauty in our midst.

Henry Wilmot called yesterday to visit our father and stayed to drink tea with us. He is sadly accommodated at Charton, such a poor parish, a miserable house and less than £50 a year. If only he could get the curacy of Westover he would be made, but although the living is in Mr Woodstock's gift, the whole world knows that it is Mrs Woodstock's dislike of Mr Wilmot's Evangelicalism that holds him back from this felicity. Though our father, as you know, is fond of Mr Wilmot (in spite of his forever quoting the more extreme opinions of Mr Wesley) still I thought that yesterday even he was somewhat taken aback by our guest's *enthusiasm*. But I feel Mr Wilmot is a good man, forever on the lookout for some means of alleviating the wretchedness of the many needy souls in his charge and I wish he had a wife who might help to alleviate some of his, for he lives very poorly, and apart from the satisfaction of converting an obdurate parishioner, appears to have very little that might pass for happiness in his life.

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If you will send our father an account of your washing and letter expenses etc, he says he will send you a draft for the amount of it as well as money for your next quarter. If you do not buy that gown of china crape now, on the strength of this, I shall never forgive you.

We have finished 'The Female Quixote' and our father is now reading Crabbe's "The Borough" once more for our evening's entertainment. Rugeley the bookseller has promised that Miss Edgeworth's latest work which he has at his Bridport shop will be at Lyme next week and also Mr Bickerstaff's play "The Hypocrite," if Mrs Jennings at Uplyme shall have returned it.

I hope your weather has been more agreeable than the variety we are enjoying here (though we both know that an umbrella is, of course, a prime necessity in Bath). The rain has been woefully persistent and I am feeling 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confined' by being limited to walking in the shrubbery these last few days. However the Lythams did brave the shocking roads to drink tea and play cribbage so we have not been left quite to our own resources. They have heard from their son John who is at Gibraltar and was thus able to give us news of the *Scorpion*. He had seen William and mentioned him in his letter in such terms as to relieve all our minds of anxiety and give great comfort and satisfaction to our mother.

It seems likely that William may be there for a little while yet, so that it might be possible to send his shirts as they are finished; one set could go this week. Mr Lytham who, as you know, has the ear of Admiral Gambier was most hopeful of William's prospects.

I hear from Martha who desires her best love and says a great many kind things about spending some time with you when you go to Robert and Mary later.

Your affectionate sister,
E.C.

May 24th

My Dear Charlotte,

I was astonished to hear how inhumanly thin of company the Upper rooms were—though the people there would have made five or six very pretty Lyme assemblies. I am glad that it *cheered up* after tea and that you were able to link the Winstones onto your party. I am sure that your muslin was greatly enhanced by the plaited white satin ribbon with the pearl edge, which must have made it practically a new gown. Was Mrs Winstone expensively and nakedly dressed, as she was when I saw her last? I was glad to hear that Mrs Maitland's disorder had not ended fatally as you had feared and that she was pronounced out of danger last Sunday.

Did you think of our ball last Tuesday and did you suppose me at it? On Monday morning it was settled that I should go with Mrs Holder and in the afternoon she sent to ask if I should mind if Mrs West and her daughter Caroline were of the party. You may imagine that I was delighted to have the opportunity of observing the Beauty at close quarters and you will also have guessed that I spent extra care on my choice of gown (the muslin with the glossy spot) and desired Lucy to curl my hair high up so that I might wear a band of the same muslin about my head.

I was by no means disappointed in Miss West's appearance. She is tall and decidedly handsome with golden hair (dressed à la Grèque) and large blue eyes. I would guess that she is nineteen or twenty and, as far as I could see, bore no trace of illness of any kind. Indeed her step was positively *sprightly*—she was wearing the most elegant white slippers—and she stood up for nine of the dances, of which there were only twelve. I danced ten and was merely prevented from dancing the rest by the want of a partner.

Miss West was all that was amiable and determined to be friendly.

“Do you read much, Miss Cowper?” she asked. “I am very fond of reading.”

I agreed that reading was a pleasant pastime.

“Have you read “Udolpho,” Miss Cowper? Is it not an excellent book?”

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I confirmed her opinion.

“And do you care for walking, Miss Cowper?” she enquired. Mrs Holder being present declared that I was a great one for walking, even in the dirtiest of weather.

“Then,” said Miss West “perhaps we could walk together, since I am sure there are many delightful walks in the neighbourhood, if you will be kind enough to shew them to me.”

Mrs Holder seized upon this idea with all the enthusiasm of one who is not to be involved and so I am committed to an hour’s insipid conversation tomorrow. Perhaps I may be permitted to learn what the mysterious illness was and why the air of Kent was not considered sufficient to ensure a full recovery from it, though this intelligence will hardly compensate me for such tedium.

The Misses Cox paid us a morning visit and from them we learned that James Russell is expected on Saturday, so I will hope to have more interesting news to give you in my next letter to balance the report of my excursion with Miss West.

I hear that Mr Littlemore is to be married to a very agreeable young lady, rich in music and money. I met her at the Chamberlynes once and found her like any other tall girl with a wide mouth, large nose and fashionable dress. However, Mr Littlemore can count himself fortunate to get her since, although he is a gentlemanlike young man, his legs are too short.

We all unite in love and I am affectionately yours,
E.C.

28th May

My Dear Charlotte,

My expectations of Miss West were not disappointed. We were on the Cobb for an hour together, she having rejected my suggestion of a walk towards Charmouth.

“I adore walking, Miss Cowper,” she said “indeed I am never happier than when so engaged, but the roads here are so very bad, quite unlike our roads in Kent which are clear even in the worst of winter.” And so it was—a paean of praise for every aspect of Kentish life and everything at Lyme quite disparaged, which makes me wonder all the more what brings her to this despised place.

She is amazingly affable.

“I declare that is a delightful spencer you are wearing, Miss Cowper, kerseymere is so comfortable on such a brisk spring day as this. The sea air is so strong that I had barely stepped from our front door when I was obliged to return for my fur tippet. And such a charming purse; did you net it yourself? Is there a good draper here in Lyme? I am sadly short of knotting silk and gold paper. Do you know, I was so distressed to find that my silver embroidery scissors have been lost in our removal here. They were a present from a very dear friend and I value them greatly. I do not suppose that such a pair are to be had in Lyme.” And so on, until Miss West declared that the wind coming off the sea was too strong for her to stand upright (it was the merest breeze) and we walked back to her house.

Like some young ladies Miss West is genteeler than her parent (I mean Mrs West since I have not yet discovered if there be a Mr West) who sat darning a pair of stockings the whole of my visit. She is a large-faced woman, of ample figure and dressed in grey but with black ribbons on her gown and cap, so perhaps Mr West is no more. She has an effusive manner of speech and rattles away with scarcely a pause for breath between the sentences and certainly no gap into which anyone else could conveniently drop a word. I sat as long as civility required and then thankfully made my escape without committing myself to another expedition, using your absence as an excuse for my busyness at home.

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Indeed, it is no more than the truth since our mother is at present suffering from a cold which affects her in the usual way. Dr King called yesterday to see her and I hope she will soon physic away the worst part of it. Meanwhile I have taken on the housekeeping and am much tormented by thoughts of haunches of mutton and apple dumplings. I ordered three pair of small soles and although they only had a short journey to make from the harbour they cost the best part of three shillings. I have carefully concealed from our mother the intelligence you sent me that meat in Bath is only 8d a pound and cheese 9d, but I may let her know that salmon is 2s.9d. per pound the whole fish.

Lucy, thank goodness, is an excellent servant and greatly eases my burden, not least by her ready flow of information which keeps me amused during some of our more tedious household tasks. She tells me that Mrs Woodstock has turned away their coachman John, for no other reason than a slight delay in bringing round the carriage last month which, Lucy avows, was by no means his fault. This is particularly unfortunate since he was to marry Lucy's sister Sarah, who, you will recall, is the Woodstock's housekeeper, and now there will be no marriage since there is not money enough and, after such a dismissal, he will find it difficult to get another position in this neighbourhood. Lucy, by the by, does not think the mead in a state yet to be stopped down.

I forgot to say that I was in such a state of frustration after my miserable amble with Miss West that the next morning I walked the greater part of the way to Uplyme to visit Fanny Grafton, who among other more trivial items of news, told me that Mr Edmund Moore is to have the living of Kilmington and will thus be practically our neighbour. Now do not tell me that this news does not cause your heart to flutter a little. At least it will greatly increase our interest in the Axminster assemblies.

Mr James Russell is looked for tomorrow. We must hope that his delay in attending upon his aunt will not cause him to be turned away like poor John. I will keep you informed upon this and other important matters in my next letter. But now Lucy has come in asking for more soap so I must leave

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off and seek the storeroom key which I laid down I know not where this morning. So you see how greatly you are missed and what a poor creature is in your place.

My mother desires her love to you all.

Yours affectionately,
E.C.