Pride and Prejudice

by Jane Austen

Chapter 1

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in posses-

sion of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be

on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the

minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful

property of some one or other of their daughters.

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” said his lady to him one day, “have you

heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?”

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

“But it is,” returned she; “for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she

told me all about it.”

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

“Do you not want to know who has taken it?” cried his wife impa-

tiently.

“You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.”

This was invitation enough.

“Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is

taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England; that

he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and

was so much delighted with it, that he agreed with Mr. Morris imme-

diately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of

his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week.”

“What is his name?”

“Bingley.”

“Is he married or single?”

“Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune;

four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!”

“How so? How can it affect them?”

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” replied his wife, “how can you be so tire-

some! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.”

“Is that his design in settling here?”

“Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that

he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him

as soon as he comes.”

“I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may

send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you

are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley may like you the best of

the party.”

“My dear, you flatter me. I certainly have had my share of beauty,

but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman

has five grown-up daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her

own beauty.”

“In such cases, a woman has not often much beauty to think of.”

“But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr. Bingley when he

comes into the neighbourhood.”

“It is more than I engage for, I assure you.”

“But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it

would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined

to go, merely on that account, for in general, you know, they visit no

newcomers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit

him if you do not.”

“You are over-scrupulous, surely. I dare say Mr. Bingley will be

very glad to see you; and I will send a few lines by you to assure him

of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses of the girls;

though I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy.”

“I desire you will do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than

the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half

so good-humoured as Lydia. But you are always giving her the prefer-

ence.”

“They have none of them much to recommend them,” replied he;

“they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something

more of quickness than her sisters.”

“Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way?

You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion for my poor

nerves.”

“You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves.

They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consid-

eration these last twenty years at least.”

“Ah, you do not know what I suffer.”

“But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of

four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood.”

“It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come, since you will

not visit them.”

“Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I will visit

them all.”

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour,

reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had

been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind

was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understand-

ing, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discon-

tented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get

her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.

Chapter 2

Mr. Bennet was among the earliest of those who waited on Mr. Bin-

gley. He had always intended to visit him, though to the last always

assuring his wife that he should not go; and till the evening after the

visit was paid she had no knowledge of it. It was then disclosed in the

following manner. Observing his second daughter employed in trim-

ming a hat, he suddenly addressed her with:

“I hope Mr. Bingley will like it, Lizzy.”

“We are not in a way to know what Mr. Bingley likes,” said her

mother resentfully, “since we are not to visit.”

“But you forget, mamma,” said Elizabeth, “that we shall meet him

at the assemblies, and that Mrs. Long promised to introduce him.”

“I do not believe Mrs. Long will do any such thing. She has two

nieces of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have no

opinion of her.”

“No more have I,” said Mr. Bennet; “and I am glad to find that you

do not depend on her serving you.”

Mrs. Bennet deigned not to make any reply, but, unable to contain

herself, began scolding one of her daughters.

“Don’t keep coughing so, Kitty, for Heaven’s sake! Have a little

compassion on my nerves. You tear them to pieces.”

“Kitty has no discretion in her coughs,” said her father; “she times

them ill.”

“I do not cough for my own amusement,” replied Kitty fretfully.

“When is your next ball to be, Lizzy?”

“To-morrow fortnight.”

“Aye, so it is,” cried her mother, “and Mrs. Long does not come

back till the day before; so it will be impossible for her to introduce

him, for she will not know him herself.”

“Then, my dear, you may have the advantage of your friend, and

introduce Mr. Bingley to her.”

“Impossible, Mr. Bennet, impossible, when I am not acquainted

with him myself; how can you be so teasing?”

“I honour your circumspection. A fortnight’s acquaintance is cer-

tainly very little. One cannot know what a man really is by the end of

a fortnight. But if we do not venture somebody else will; and after all,

Mrs. Long and her daughters must stand their chance; and, therefore,

as she will think it an act of kindness, if you decline the office, I will

take it on myself.”

The girls stared at their father. Mrs. Bennet said only, “Nonsense,

nonsense!”

“What can be the meaning of that emphatic exclamation?” cried he.

“Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the stress that is laid

on them, as nonsense? I cannot quite agree with you there. What say

you, Mary? For you are a young lady of deep reflection, I know, and

read great books and make extracts.”

Mary wished to say something sensible, but knew not how.

“While Mary is adjusting her ideas,” he continued, “let us return to

Mr. Bingley.”

“I am sick of Mr. Bingley,” cried his wife.

“I am sorry to hear that; but why did not you tell me that before? If I

had known as much this morning I certainly would not have called on

him. It is very unlucky; but as I have actually paid the visit, we cannot

escape the acquaintance now.”

The astonishment of the ladies was just what he wished; that of

Mrs. Bennet perhaps surpassing the rest; though, when the first tumult

of joy was over, she began to declare that it was what she had expected

all the while.

“How good it was in you, my dear Mr. Bennet! But I knew I should

persuade you at last. I was sure you loved your girls too well to neglect

such an acquaintance. Well, how pleased I am! and it is such a good

joke, too, that you should have gone this morning and never said a

word about it till now.”

“Now, Kitty, you may cough as much as you choose,” said Mr. Ben-

net; and, as he spoke, he left the room, fatigued with the raptures of his

wife.

“What an excellent father you have, girls!” said she, when the door

was shut. “I do not know how you will ever make him amends for his

kindness; or me, either, for that matter. At our time of life it is not so

pleasant, I can tell you, to be making new acquaintances every day; but

for your sakes, we would do anything. Lydia, my love, though you are

the youngest, I dare say Mr. Bingley will dance with you at the next

ball.”

“Oh!” said Lydia stoutly, “I am not afraid; for though I am the

youngest, I’m the tallest.”

The rest of the evening was spent in conjecturing how soon he

would return Mr. Bennet’s visit, and determining when they should

ask him to dinner.

Chapter 3

Not all that Mrs. Bennet, however, with the assistance of her five

daughters, could ask on the subject, was sufficient to draw from her

husband any satisfactory description of Mr. Bingley. They attacked

him in various ways—with barefaced questions, ingenious supposi-

tions, and distant surmises; but he eluded the skill of them all, and

they were at last obliged to accept the second-hand intelligence of their

neighbour, Lady Lucas. Her report was highly favourable. Sir William

had been delighted with him. He was quite young, wonderfully hand-

some, extremely agreeable, and, to crown the whole, he meant to be at

the next assembly with a large party. Nothing could be more delight-

ful! To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love;

and very lively hopes of Mr. Bingley’s heart were entertained.

“If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Nether-

field,” said Mrs. Bennet to her husband, “and all the others equally

well married, I shall have nothing to wish for.”

In a few days Mr. Bingley returned Mr. Bennet’s visit, and sat about

ten minutes with him in his library. He had entertained hopes of being

admitted to a sight of the young ladies, of whose beauty he had heard

much; but he saw only the father. The ladies were somewhat more

fortunate, for they had the advantage of ascertaining from an upper

window that he wore a blue coat, and rode a black horse.

An invitation to dinner was soon afterwards dispatched; and al-

ready had Mrs. Bennet planned the courses that were to do credit to her

housekeeping, when an answer arrived which deferred it all. Mr. Bing-

ley was obliged to be in town the following day, and, consequently, un-

able to accept the honour of their invitation, etc. Mrs. Bennet was quite

disconcerted. She could not imagine what business he could have in

town so soon after his arrival in Hertfordshire; and she began to fear

that he might be always flying about from one place to another, and

never settled at Netherfield as he ought to be. Lady Lucas quieted her

fears a little by starting the idea of his being gone to London only to

get a large party for the ball; and a report soon followed that Mr. Bin-

gley was to bring twelve ladies and seven gentlemen with him to the

assembly. The girls grieved over such a number of ladies, but were

comforted the day before the ball by hearing, that instead of twelve he

brought only six with him from London—his five sisters and a cousin.

And when the party entered the assembly room it consisted of only

five altogether—Mr. Bingley, his two sisters, the husband of the eldest,

and another young man.

Mr. Bingley was good-looking and gentlemanlike; he had a pleas-

ant countenance, and easy, unaffected manners. His sisters were fine

women, with an air of decided fashion. His brother-in-law, Mr. Hurst,

merely looked the gentleman; but his friend Mr. Darcy soon drew the

attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, no-

ble mien, and the report which was in general circulation within five

minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gen-

tlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared

he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with

great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a dis-

gust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to

be proud; to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not

all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a

most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be

compared with his friend.

Mr. Bingley had soon made himself acquainted with all the princi-

pal people in the room; he was lively and unreserved, danced every

dance, was angry that the ball closed so early, and talked of giving one

himself at Netherfield. Such amiable qualities must speak for them-

selves. What a contrast between him and his friend! Mr. Darcy danced

only once with Mrs. Hurst and once with Miss Bingley, declined being

introduced to any other lady, and spent the rest of the evening in walk-

ing about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party. His

character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man

in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there

again. Amongst the most violent against him was Mrs. Bennet, whose

dislike of his general behaviour was sharpened into particular resent-

ment by his having slighted one of her daughters.

Elizabeth Bennet had been obliged, by the scarcity of gentlemen, to

sit down for two dances; and during part of that time, Mr. Darcy had

been standing near enough for her to hear a conversation between him

and Mr. Bingley, who came from the dance for a few minutes, to press

his friend to join it.

“Come, Darcy,” said he, “I must have you dance. I hate to see you

standing about by yourself in this stupid manner. You had much better

dance.”

“I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am par-

ticularly acquainted with my partner. At such an assembly as this it

would be insupportable. Your sisters are engaged, and there is not an-

other woman in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me

to stand up with.”

“I would not be so fastidious as you are,” cried Mr. Bingley, “for a

kingdom! Upon my honour, I never met with so many pleasant girls

in my life as I have this evening; and there are several of them you see

uncommonly pretty.”

“You are dancing with the only handsome girl in the room,” said

Mr. Darcy, looking at the eldest Miss Bennet.

“Oh! She is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld! But there is

one of her sisters sitting down just behind you, who is very pretty, and

I dare say very agreeable. Do let me ask my partner to introduce you.”

“Which do you mean?” and turning round he looked for a moment

at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said:

“She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me; I am in no hu-

mour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted

by other men. You had better return to your partner and enjoy her

smiles, for you are wasting your time with me.”

Mr. Bingley followed his advice. Mr. Darcy walked off; and Eliza-

beth remained with no very cordial feelings toward him. She told the

story, however, with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively,

playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous.

The evening altogether passed off pleasantly to the whole fam-

ily. Mrs. Bennet had seen her eldest daughter much admired by the

Netherfield party. Mr. Bingley had danced with her twice, and she had

been distinguished by his sisters. Jane was as much gratified by this

as her mother could be, though in a quieter way. Elizabeth felt Jane’s

pleasure. Mary had heard herself mentioned to Miss Bingley as the

most accomplished girl in the neighbourhood; and Catherine and Ly-

dia had been fortunate enough never to be without partners, which

was all that they had yet learnt to care for at a ball. They returned,

therefore, in good spirits to Longbourn, the village where they lived,

and of which they were the principal inhabitants. They found Mr. Ben-

net still up. With a book he was regardless of time; and on the present

occasion he had a good deal of curiosity as to the events of an evening

which had raised such splendid expectations. He had rather hoped

that his wife’s views on the stranger would be disappointed; but he

soon found out that he had a different story to hear.

“Oh! my dear Mr. Bennet,” as she entered the room, “we have had

a most delightful evening, a most excellent ball. I wish you had been

there. Jane was so admired, nothing could be like it. Everybody said

how well she looked; and Mr. Bingley thought her quite beautiful, and

danced with her twice! Only think of that, my dear; he actually danced

with her twice! and she was the only creature in the room that he asked

a second time. First of all, he asked Miss Lucas. I was so vexed to see

him stand up with her! But, however, he did not admire her at all;

indeed, nobody can, you know; and he seemed quite struck with Jane

as she was going down the dance. So he inquired who she was, and

got introduced, and asked her for the two next. Then the two third

he danced with Miss King, and the two fourth with Maria Lucas, and

the two fifth with Jane again, and the two sixth with Lizzy, and the

Boulanger—”

“If he had had any compassion for me,” cried her husband impa-

tiently, “he would not have danced half so much! For God’s sake, say

no more of his partners. O that he had sprained his ankle in the first

place!”

“Oh! my dear, I am quite delighted with him. He is so excessively

handsome! And his sisters are charming women. I never in my life

saw anything more elegant than their dresses. I dare say the lace upon

Mrs. Hurst’s gown—”

Here she was interrupted again. Mr. Bennet protested against any

description of finery. She was therefore obliged to seek another branch

of the subject, and related, with much bitterness of spirit and some

exaggeration, the shocking rudeness of Mr. Darcy.

“But I can assure you,” she added, “that Lizzy does not lose much

by not suiting his fancy; for he is a most disagreeable, horrid man, not

at all worth pleasing. So high and so conceited that there was no en-

during him! He walked here, and he walked there, fancying himself so

very great! Not handsome enough to dance with! I wish you had been

there, my dear, to have given him one of your set-downs. I quite detest

the man.”