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# Pride and Prejudice

JANE AUSTE

6

OXFORD BOOKWORMS



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'The moment I first met you, I noticed your pride, your sense of superiority, and your selfish disdain for the feelings of others. You are the last man in the world whom I could ever be persuaded

to marry,' said Elizabeth Bennet.

And so Elizabeth rejects the proud Mr Darcy. Can nothing overcome her prejudice against him? And what of the other Bennet girls – their fortunes, and misfortunes, in the business of getting husbands?

This famous novel by Jane Austen is full of wise and humorous observation of the people and manners of her times. (Word count 29,455)



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# Pride and Prejudice

JANE AUSTEN

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## PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

### Stage 6

'It is a truth well known to all the world that an unmarried man in possession of a large fortune must be in need of a wife.' And so, when such a man comes to live near the Bennet family, Mrs Bennet is delighted. At once, she sees in Mr Bingley a possible, almost a certain, husband for one of her five daughters.

'People say he's quite young, very handsome, and extremely charming!' says foolish Lydia, the youngest of the Bennet sisters. 'And even better, he loves dancing! Everybody knows that means he's likely to fall in love!'

But with whom? Soon, Elizabeth Bennet is sure that he admires her eldest sister, Jane. Certainly, he is most attentive to her whenever they meet, but who can tell if admiration will lead to marriage, and happiness?

Mr Bingley, however, is not the only young man to show interest in the Bennet girls. There is their cousin, the boring Mr Collins. There are the officers of the regiment – the charming Mr Wickham, for example. And of course, there is Mr Bingley's friend, Mr Darcy – tall, dark, and extremely wealthy, but then he is such a rude, proud, disagreeable man . . .

Jane Austen (1775–1817), one of England's best-loved authors, led an uneventful life. Her novels deal with the relationships and manners of the English middle-class, and she wrote with a wit and a sharpness of observation that have made her famous to this day.

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### *The Bennets' new neighbour*

It is a truth well known to all the world that an unmarried man in possession of a large fortune must be in need of a wife. And when such a man moves into a neighbourhood, even if nothing is known about his feelings or opinions, this truth is so clear to the surrounding families, that they think of him immediately as the future husband of one or other of their daughters.

'My dear Mr Bennet,' said Mrs Bennet to her husband one day, 'have you heard that someone is going to rent Netherfield Park at last?'

'No, Mrs Bennet, I haven't,' said her husband.

'Don't you want to know *who* is renting it?' cried Mrs Bennet impatiently.

'You want to tell me, and I don't mind listening.'

Mrs Bennet needed no further encouragement. 'Well, my dear, I hear that he's a very rich young man from the north of England. It seems he came to see Netherfield on Monday and was so delighted with it that he arranged to rent it at once. Of course, it *is* the finest house in the area, with the largest gardens. His servants will be here by the end of the week, and *he* will be arriving soon afterwards!'

'What is his name?' asked Mr Bennet.

'Bingley.'

'Is he married or single?'

'Oh, single, my dear, of course! A single man of large fortune – he has an income of four or five thousand pounds a year. How wonderful for our girls!'

'Why? How can it affect them?' Mr Bennet asked.



'My dear Mr Bennet,' she replied, 'how can you be so annoying! You must realize I'm thinking of his marrying one of our daughters.'

'Is that his purpose in coming to the area?'

'His purpose? No, of course not. But it's very likely that he'll fall in love with one of them. And I want him to see the girls as soon as possible, before our other neighbours introduce themselves. So you must visit him as soon as he arrives.'

'I really don't see why I should,' said Mr Bennet. 'You and the girls can visit him, or perhaps you should send them by themselves. Yes, that might be better, as you're as attractive as any of them, and Mr Bingley might like you best.'

'My dear, you flatter me,' replied his wife, 'I certainly have been called beautiful in the past, but I think a woman with five adult daughters should stop thinking of her own beauty. Mr Bennet, I beg you to visit him. You know it's correct for the gentleman of the family to visit new neighbours first. I simply cannot take the girls to see him unless you have already met him.'

'Surely you worry too much about the rules of polite society. I'm sure Mr Bingley will be delighted to see you all. And I'll write him a few lines, which you can give him, agreeing gladly to his marrying any of the girls, although I must especially recommend my dear little Lizzy.'

'Oh no, Mr Bennet!' gasped Mrs Bennet, horrified. 'Please don't do that! And Lizzy is no better than the others, although I know she is your favourite.'

'Our daughters are all very silly, ignorant girls, it's true. But at least Lizzy is a little more intelligent than her sisters.'

'Mr Bennet, how can you speak so unkindly of your own children? Oh dear, how ill I feel! Have you no pity for me? Don't

you realize how I suffer?'

'Indeed, my dear, I've suffered *with* you for the last twenty-three years. But I think you will recover, and live to see many more rich young men come into the neighbourhood.'

When he was young, Mr Bennet had made the mistake of falling in love with a pretty but foolish young woman. During the long years of their marriage, he had had time to regret his mistake. He soon realized that his wife had little intelligence or common sense, and was only interested in talking, shopping and finding husbands for her daughters. His experience had made him rather bitter, and he could not stop himself mocking his wife, who never understood her husband's sense of humour.

So when, a week later, Mrs Bennet discovered that her husband had in fact visited Mr Bingley at Netherfield, she was surprised and very pleased. But she and her daughters tried in vain to persuade Mr Bennet to describe the wealthy stranger, and in the end they had to rely on another neighbour's description.

'He sounds wonderful, Mama!' cried Lydia, the youngest and noisiest of the sisters. 'Charlotte Lucas's father has been to see him, and says he's quite young, very handsome, and extremely charming! And even better, he loves dancing! Everybody knows that means he's very likely to fall in love!'

As politeness required, Mr Bingley came to visit Mr Bennet a few days later. He was not, however, fortunate enough to see the Bennet girls, who were hiding behind the curtains in an upstairs room in order to catch sight of the handsome stranger. Mrs Bennet planned to invite him to dinner, but in fact they met him at another social event first. The Bennets lived in the small Hertfordshire village of Longbourn, and public dances were



regularly held in the nearest town, Meryton. The girls were greatly looking forward to this particular dance, because they had heard that Mr Bingley would be attending, with a group of friends from London.

On the night of the dance, all eyes were on Mr Bingley as he entered the room. He had brought his two sisters, with the husband of the elder, Mr Hurst, and another young man, Mr Darcy. Mr Bingley was indeed good-looking and gentleman-like, and his sisters were fine, fashionable women. However, everybody was soon talking about Mr Darcy, a tall, handsome man, who, it was said, had an income of ten thousand pounds a year. The ladies in the room gazed at him in admiration for about half the evening, until they became aware of his constant frown and his unwillingness to talk or dance. Then there was general agreement that he was proud and disagreeable, and considered himself superior to country people. Mr Bingley, on the other hand, made himself popular with the ladies by dancing every dance and talking to everybody.

As there were not as many gentlemen as ladies, Elizabeth Bennet did not have a partner for one of the dances, and was sitting watching the dancing. Mr Darcy was standing near her, and when Mr Bingley came up to speak to his friend, Elizabeth could not avoid hearing their conversation.

'Come, Darcy,' said Bingley, 'I hate to see you looking so cross! Why don't you dance with one of these lovely girls?'

'Certainly not,' replied Darcy. 'You know how I hate dancing with a partner I don't know. I would particularly dislike it at a village dance like this. Apart from your sisters, there isn't a woman in the room I would even consider dancing with. *You* are dancing with the only attractive girl here.' He was looking at Mrs Bennet's eldest daughter Jane, who was waiting

for Bingley to join her for the next dance.

'Oh yes! She's the most beautiful creature I've ever seen! But just behind you is one of her sisters. She's very pretty, and I'm sure she's very pleasant. My partner could introduce you.'

'Who do you mean?' And Darcy turned to look at Elizabeth for a moment. 'No,' he said coldly, 'she's not attractive enough to tempt *me*. Go back to your partner, Bingley.'



'No,' Darcy said coldly, 'she's not attractive enough to tempt me.'



This conversation did not endear Mr Darcy to Elizabeth, but she told the story very cheerfully and amusingly to her friends.

The evening passed very happily for everybody else, and Mrs Bennet was delighted with the effect her eldest daughter had had on Mr Bingley.

'He danced with Jane *twice*!' she told her husband later. 'He danced with all the others only once! And he really is so handsome! But his friend Mr Darcy was so rude to poor Elizabeth! Luckily, she doesn't care! She wouldn't *want* to please him! Such a horrible, proud man! I simply hate him!'

When Jane and Elizabeth were alone, they discussed their dancing partners.

'I was really very flattered when Mr Bingley asked me to dance a second time!' said Jane, blushing. 'I didn't expect it at all!'

'Didn't you?' said Elizabeth. 'I did. Dear Jane! You were five times prettier than any other woman in the room, but you're too modest ever to expect admiration.'

'I have to admit that I liked Mr Bingley,' continued Jane in her gentle voice. 'He's so good-mannered and agreeable!'

'He's also handsome,' added her sister, 'which makes his character quite perfect! But what did you think of his sisters?'

'Very pleasant when you get to know them. The younger, Miss Caroline Bingley, will be living at Netherfield with her brother. I'm sure we'll enjoy having her as a neighbour.'

Elizabeth listened in silence. She was not convinced. 'Jane is so kind!' she thought. 'Always ready to see the good side of people's characters! I considered Mr Bingley's sisters too proud, almost rude, in fact. I'm sure they feel superior to most other people, like Mr Darcy.' But she did not say any more.

After the dance the Bennet and Bingley families began to visit

each other every few days. It became evident that Mr Bingley admired Jane very much, and Elizabeth knew that her sister was close to falling in love with him. She was discussing this with her good friend, Charlotte Lucas, one day. Charlotte was a sensible, intelligent young woman of twenty-seven, the eldest daughter of Sir William and Lady Lucas, who were neighbours of the Bennet family.

'It's a good thing,' said Elizabeth, 'that if Jane *is* in love with Mr Bingley, nobody will know, because she always behaves so cheerfully and normally.'

'That's sometimes a mistake,' replied Charlotte, shaking her head wisely. 'If she doesn't show her feelings at all, even to the man she loves, she may lose the opportunity of catching him. Jane should use every moment she gets with Bingley to attract and encourage him.'

'But I consider a man should try to *discover* a woman's feelings, not wait for her encouragement! And Jane probably doesn't know what her real feelings for Bingley are yet – she has only seen him a few times, not often enough to understand his character, or be sure that she really loves him.'

'Well, I wish Jane success with all my heart,' said Charlotte finally, 'but I think she'd have as much chance of happiness if she married him tomorrow, as if she studied his character for a whole year. Happiness in marriage is simply a question of chance. I think it's better to know as little as possible about the person you're going to spend your life with.'

Elizabeth laughed, sure that Charlotte did not mean what she was saying.

While observing Mr Bingley's interest in Jane, however, Elizabeth had not noticed Mr Darcy's interest in herself. Although at first he had not even considered her pretty, he now



began to realize what a beautiful expression her dark eyes gave to her intelligent face, and what an attractive figure she had. 'Of course, she is only an unfashionable village girl,' he told himself, 'but her conversation is often quite amusing.' Whenever they met, he did not speak to her, but stood near her, listening to her and watching her closely, conscious of a wish to know her better.

One evening at a party at the Lucases' house, Darcy was standing alone, as usual, away from the other guests, watching the dancing. His host, Sir William, came to speak to him.

'Mr Darcy! Are you enjoying the dancing, sir? What a delightful entertainment it is!'

Darcy frowned. 'Yes,' he said with cool disdain, 'it's something that any uneducated person can be good at.'

'I'm sure you're good at dancing yourself, sir,' replied Sir William cheerfully. 'Look! Here's Miss Elizabeth Bennet.' She was crossing the room at that moment. 'Let me persuade you to dance with her. You cannot refuse to dance when so much beauty is in front of you.'

'Indeed, sir,' replied Elizabeth quickly, in some embarrassment, 'I have no intention of dancing. You must excuse me.'

'Miss Bennet, please allow me the pleasure of dancing with you,' said Mr Darcy politely, holding out his hand.

But with equal politeness Elizabeth refused again, and turned away. Mr Darcy was watching her walk away, with a slight smile on his face, when Caroline Bingley came up to him.

'Mr Darcy,' she said, 'I'm sure I know what you're thinking – how boring all these silly little country people are!'

'Not at all, Miss Bingley. In fact, I was just thinking what pleasure a pair of fine eyes can give.'

'Really! And who do these fine eyes belong to, may I ask?'

'Miss Elizabeth Bennet.'

'Well! Let me be the first to congratulate you, Mr Darcy! When will the wedding be?'

'Ah! That's what I expected you to say. A lady's imagination jumps from admiration, to love, to marriage, in a moment.'

'Well, of course, when you're married, you will often have her charming mother and sisters to stay. How delightful for you!' And Miss Bingley, seeing that Darcy remained calm, continued to mock the Bennet family as amusingly as she could.



### *Jane's illness*

Mr Bennet had a comfortable income of two thousand a year, and a pleasant house in Longbourn. But, unfortunately for his daughters, after his death all his property would pass to a distant male relation. Mrs Bennet's father had been a lawyer, and had only left his daughter a small amount of money. She had a brother who owned shops in London, and she also had a sister, married to a Mr Philips. He had been her father's clerk, and now carried on his late employer's business.

Mr and Mrs Philips lived in Meryton, which was only a kilometre or so from the village of Longbourn. It was a most convenient distance for the Bennet girls, who were usually tempted there three or four times a week, to visit their aunt or a dressmaker who lived opposite. The youngest daughters, Kitty and Lydia, were particularly regular visitors. Their minds were more vacant than their sisters', and if no better entertainment was available, a walk to Meryton always provided some



amusement, as well as interesting local news from their aunt.

The latest news, which delighted Kitty and Lydia, was that the regiment which had recently arrived in Meryton was to stay there for the whole winter. The two girls now visited their aunt every day, and as Mr Philips knew all the officers, Kitty and Lydia were soon introduced to them. At home they could talk of nothing but officers and their handsome uniforms: even Mr Bingley's fortune now seemed hardly worth considering.

After listening to their praise of the officers one morning, Mr Bennet said coolly, 'From what I can see, you must be two of the silliest girls in the country. I've suspected it for some time, but now I'm convinced.'

Kitty was embarrassed and did not reply, but Lydia, the youngest, continued to express her admiration for a certain Captain Carter, with perfect indifference.

'I am very surprised, my dear,' said Mrs Bennet, 'that you should be so ready to think your own children silly. As it happens, they are all very clever.'

'That is the only point, I think, on which we do not agree. I am afraid I must say that I consider our two youngest daughters unusually foolish.'

'My dear Mr Bennet, you mustn't expect such young girls to have the common sense of their father or mother. I remember when I used to like a red coat myself, and indeed I still do. If a good-looking officer with five or six thousand a year wanted to marry one of my girls, I wouldn't turn him down. And I thought Colonel Forster looked very handsome last night at Sir William's, in his regimental uniform.'

Just then a servant entered with a note for Jane, which had come from Netherfield. Mrs Bennet's eyes shone with pleasure and she called out eagerly, while her daughter was reading it,

'Well, Jane, who is it from? What does he say? Tell us, tell us quickly, my love!'

'It's from Miss Bingley,' said Jane. 'She invites me to dinner at Netherfield, as she and her sister are alone. It seems her brother and the gentlemen are having dinner with the officers, in Meryton.'

'With the officers!' cried Lydia. 'I wonder why aunt Philips didn't tell us that!'

'Having dinner in Meryton,' repeated Mrs Bennet, shaking her head. 'That's very unlucky.'

'May I take the carriage?' asked Jane.

'No, my dear, you'd better ride over there, because it looks likely to rain, and then you'll have to stay the night.'

'That would be a good plan,' said Elizabeth to her mother, 'if you were sure they wouldn't offer to send her home in *their* carriage.'

'Oh, but they can't! The gentlemen must have taken Mr Bingley's carriage to go to Meryton.'

'I'd much rather go in the carriage,' Jane said.

'But, my dear, your father can't spare the horses, I'm sure. They're needed on the farm, aren't they, Mr Bennet?'

Mr Bennet finally agreed that they were in fact being used that day in the fields. So Jane set out on her horse, while her mother called cheerfully after her, 'I do hope it'll rain heavily, my love!' And Jane had not been gone for long before it rained hard. Elizabeth was a little worried about her sister, but Mrs Bennet was delighted. 'What a good idea of mine that was!' she said more than once, extremely pleased with herself.

Not until the next morning, however, did she realize the full extent of her success. After breakfast a servant from Netherfield arrived with a note from Jane to Elizabeth, explaining that Jane



## ACTIVITIES

### While Reading

Read Chapters 1 to 4. Who said this, and to whom? What, or who, were they talking about?

- 1 'So you must visit him as soon as he arrives.'
- 2 'I didn't expect it at all!'
- 3 'A lady's imagination jumps from admiration, to love, to marriage, in a moment.'
- 4 'I've suspected it for some time, but now I'm convinced.'
- 5 'You'd better ride over there, because it looks likely to rain...'
- 6 'She has no conversation, no elegance and no beauty!'
- 7 'I think it shows a very pleasing affection for her sister.'
- 8 'I have come prepared to admire the young ladies. And perhaps when we know each other better—'
- 9 'I've spent four days in the same house as him, and I consider him very disagreeable.'
- 10 'When the post became vacant, it was given to somebody else.'
- 11 'You could remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples.'
- 12 'Whether he can keep them is less certain.'

Before you read Chapter 5 (*Mr Collins proposes twice*), can you guess the answers to these questions?

- 1 Who will Mr Collins propose to?
- 2 Will he propose to the same girl twice, or to two different girls?
- 3 Will anybody accept him, and if so, who?

Read Chapters 5 to 7. Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)? Rewrite the false sentences with the correct information.

- 1 When Elizabeth rejected him, Mr Collins was sure she would accept him the next time he proposed.
- 2 Mr and Mrs Bennet agreed in their opinion of Mr Collins.
- 3 Caroline Bingley hoped her brother would marry Jane Bennet.
- 4 Charlotte Lucas was happy to accept Mr Collins' proposal.
- 5 Jane was only slightly disappointed at Mr Bingley's failure to return to Netherfield.
- 6 Mrs Gardiner gave Elizabeth some sensible advice about Wickham.
- 7 Charlotte spent as much time as possible with her new husband.
- 8 Lady Catherine was a polite, charming woman, and sensitive to other people's feelings.
- 9 Colonel Fitzwilliam needed to marry a girl with a fortune.
- 10 Darcy denied doing his best to separate Bingley and Jane.
- 11 If Darcy had made his proposal to Elizabeth more flattering, she would have accepted him.

Before you read Chapter 8 (*Elizabeth learns more about Darcy and Wickham*), what do you think is going to happen? Circle Y (Yes) or N (No) for each of these possibilities.

- 1 Elizabeth learns something that makes her change her mind about Wickham. Y/N
- 2 Darcy proves to Elizabeth that he had good reasons for his actions. Y/N
- 3 Elizabeth discovers that Darcy is even prouder and more cruel than she thought. Y/N