



# Pride and Prejudice

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OXFORD BOOKWORMS

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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!'

'Whv? 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

# Pride and Prejudice



'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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