

# Pride and Prejudice

JANE AUSTEN

## PRIDE AND PREJUDICE


'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 . . .

سرشناسه	وست، کلر West, Clare
عنوان و نام پدیدآور	Pride and prejudice [by] Jane Austen/ retold by Clare West.
مشخصات نشر	تهران: زبان مهر، ۱۳۸۷، ۲۰۰۸م.
مشخصات ظاهری	۱۲۰: موص.
وضعیت فهرست نویسی	فبا
یادداشت	انگلیسی.
یادداشت	متن اصلی این کتاب با عنوان "غرور و تعصب" به فارسی ترجمه و منتشر شده است.
یادداشت	واژهنامه.
یادداشت	الفبت از روی چاپ ۲۰۰۰: دانشگاه آکسفورد.
عنوان به زبان دیگر	غرور و تعصب
آوانویسی عنوان	پراید آند پریجودیس
موضوع	زبان انگلیسی -- کتابهای فرانت (دانشگاهی)
موضوع	زبان انگلیسی -- راهنمای آموزشی (عالی)
شناسه افزوده	اوستن، جین، ۱۷۷۵-۱۸۱۷م، غرور و تعصب، Austen, Jane
رده بندی کنگره	PE1۱۱۳۳/۵۰۲
رده بندی دیویی	۲۲۸/۲۲
شماره کتابشناسی ملی	۱۵۲۲-۲۲



انتشارات زبان مهر

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ناشر: انتشارات زبان مهر (نشر همکاران مجرم علم)

تیراژ: ۵۰۰۰ جلد

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مرکز پیش: میدان انقلاب - خیابان کرچادی - بین زوان مهر و ایلی دزاد - زوبیروی پلاستر میسنان - پ. ۱۷۵ - ولکند ۲  
 تلفن: ۲۹۸، ۶۶۹۷۰، ۶۶۹۷۴۶۳۹-۶۶۹۷۴۶۳۹، ۹۱۲۲۸۴۷۴۶۳۹، فاکس: ۶۶۹۷۴۶۳۹  
 فروشگاه شماره ۱: میدان انقلاب - خیابان جنوب شرقی میدان - پلاک ۱۵۳۸ - فروشگاه زبان مهر تلفن: ۶۶۴۹۲۱۶۲  
 فروشگاه شماره ۲: پلازم - خیابان آیت - جویین تر از ایستگاه دفتر - پ. ۵۰۶ - تلفن: ۹۲۲۴-۷۷۹



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Stage 6 (2500 headwords)

Series Editor: Jennifer Bassett

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JANE AUSTEN

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*Retold by*  
Clare West



OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford ox2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.  
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,  
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi  
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi  
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece  
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore  
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

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First published in Oxford Bookworms 1995

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3

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ISBN 978 0 19 479267 7

A complete recording of this Bookworms edition of  
*Pride and Prejudice* is available on audio CD ISBN 978 0 19 479247 9

Printed in Hong Kong

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Illustrated by: Sue Shields

Word count (main text): 29,455 words

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## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

Mr Bennet, *of Longbourn House*

Mrs Bennet, *his wife*

Jane Bennet

Elizabeth Bennet

Mary Bennet

Kitty Bennet

Lydia Bennet

} *their daughters*

Charlotte Lucas, *a friend of Elizabeth Bennet's*

Sir William and Lady Lucas, *Charlotte's parents*

Maria Lucas, *Charlotte's sister*

Mr Collins, *a rector and a distant cousin of Mr Bennet's*

Mrs Philips, *Mrs Bennet's sister*

Mr Philips, *her husband*

Mr Gardiner, *Mrs Bennet's brother*

Mrs Gardiner, *his wife*

Mr Charles Bingley, *of Netherfield Park*

Miss Caroline Bingley, *his younger sister*

Mrs Louisa Hurst, *his elder sister*

Mr Hurst, *husband to Mrs Hurst*

Mr Darcy, *a friend of Mr Bingley's*

Miss Georgiana Darcy, *Mr Darcy's young sister*

Colonel Fitzwilliam, *Mr Darcy's cousin*

Lady Catherine de Bourgh, *Mr Darcy's aunt*

Miss Anne de Bourgh, *Lady Catherine's daughter*

Mr George Wickham, *an officer in the regiment*

Colonel Forster, *Commanding Officer of the regiment*

Mrs Forster, *his wife*





## *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

had caught cold on her wet ride, and had been invited to stay at Netherfield until she recovered.

'Well, my dear,' said Mr Bennet, 'if your daughter should become seriously ill and die, it would be a comfort to know that she died in a good cause, and in obedience to your orders.'

'Oh, I'm not afraid of her dying. People don't die of colds. She'll be looked after well at Netherfield. As long as she stays there, everything will be all right.'

But Elizabeth felt really anxious, and was determined to go to her sister. As the carriage was not available, and she was not keen on riding, she decided to walk the five kilometres to Netherfield. Kitty and Lydia accompanied her as far as Meryton, where they went to visit one of the officers' wives. Elizabeth continued alone, crossing field after field and jumping impatiently over streams, in her anxiety to see her sister.

When she arrived at Netherfield, with tired feet, muddy stockings and a face healthily pink with exercise, she was shown straight into the sitting-room. The two sisters, Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst, could hardly believe that she had come so far alone and on foot in such bad weather, but they received her politely. Their brother, however, was more than polite: he was kind and considerate towards her. Mr Darcy said very little, hesitating between admiration of her healthy good looks and doubt whether she should have come such a distance alone. Mr Hurst said nothing at all, as he was thinking only of his breakfast.

Elizabeth was glad to be taken almost immediately to her sister's room, where she found Jane delighted to see her, but very feverish and unwell. The doctor came, and after examining his patient, advised that she should stay in bed and take some medicine. Elizabeth stayed with her all day, looking after her, and the Bingley sisters also spent some time in the patient's

room. However, in the afternoon, when it was time for Elizabeth to leave, Jane seemed so upset that Miss Bingley was obliged to invite Elizabeth to stay at Netherfield for the present, and a servant was sent to Longbourn to inform the Bennet family and bring back some clothes.

That evening Elizabeth went down to dinner, leaving Jane in bed in her room. She noticed the Bingley sisters' apparent concern for Jane change to indifference in a few moments, and knew she had been right to dislike them at first sight. Mr Bingley, indeed, was the only one of the group whose behaviour she was satisfied with. His anxiety for Jane was evident, and his politeness towards herself most pleasing. But the others, she felt, treated her as an unwelcome guest. Miss Bingley was concentrating all her attention on Mr Darcy, and Mrs Hurst also joined in their conversation, while Mr Hurst was only interested in eating, drinking and playing cards.

When Elizabeth left the room after dinner to see if Jane needed anything, Miss Bingley at once began to criticize her.

'What bad manners she has! She's both proud, and lacking in politeness to her superiors! She has no conversation, no elegance and no beauty!'

Mrs Hurst agreed, and added, 'She has no good qualities, except that she's an excellent walker. I'll never forget her appearance this morning. She really looked almost wild.'

'She did indeed, Louisa. How silly of her to come at all! Why must she run around the countryside, just because her sister has a cold? Her hair looked so untidy! And her dress! Simply covered in mud!'

'I must say,' said Bingley, 'I didn't notice any of that. I thought she looked remarkably attractive when she arrived this morning.'

'You observed her wild appearance, I'm sure, Mr Darcy,' said Miss Bingley, 'and I imagine you wouldn't wish *your sister* to make such a show of herself.'

'Certainly not.'

'Walking four or five kilometres, whatever it was, up to her ankles in mud, and alone, quite alone! It seems to me to show a dreadful sort of independence, a country girl's indifference to what is acceptable.'

'I think it shows a very pleasing affection for her sister,' said Bingley.

'I'm afraid, Mr Darcy,' whispered Miss Bingley, 'that this adventure has rather lessened your admiration of her fine eyes.'

'Not at all,' he replied. 'They were brightened by the exercise.'

After a short pause, Mrs Hurst began again. 'I have a great liking for Jane Bennet. She is really a very sweet girl, and I wish with all my heart she were well married. But with such a father and mother, and with such vulgar relations, I'm afraid there's no chance of it.'

'I think the Bennet girls have an uncle who's a lawyer in Meryton.'

'Yes, and they have another who owns shops in Cheapside! Such a *nice* part of London!' Both the sisters laughed.

'If they had enough uncles to *fill* Cheapside,' cried Bingley, 'it wouldn't make them any less charming!'

'But it must considerably lessen their chances of marrying men of any position in the world,' replied Darcy.

Bingley did not answer, but his sisters agreed enthusiastically, and continued mocking their dear friend's vulgar relations for some time.

Late in the evening, when Elizabeth was satisfied that Jane

was asleep, she felt she ought to go downstairs again. She found the party in the sitting-room, playing cards, but although they invited her to join in their game, she refused politely, and picked up a book to read.

'I can fetch you more books to read, if you wish,' offered Bingley, 'but I'm afraid I haven't got a large library. Unlike you, I'm too lazy to spend much time reading.'

'What a delightful library you have at Pemberley, Mr Darcy!' said Miss Bingley. 'And what a beautiful house it is! Charles, when you buy *your* house, I hope it will be even half as lovely as Pemberley.'

'I hope so too,' agreed Bingley.

'And your dear sister, Mr Darcy? I expect she's grown since the spring. I want so much to see her again! I've never met anyone who delighted me so much! Such an appearance, such manners! And so extremely accomplished for her age!'

'I'm always surprised,' said Bingley, 'to find how very accomplished all young ladies are. How do they have the time and patience to learn all these skills?'

'Certainly people use the word "accomplished" too loosely,' said Darcy, 'but I am far from agreeing with you about ladies in general. I cannot boast of knowing more than six who are really accomplished.'

'Then,' said Elizabeth, 'your idea of an accomplished woman must include a great many qualities.'

'Yes, a great many.'

'Oh! Certainly,' cried his faithful assistant, Miss Bingley, 'an accomplished woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and modern languages, and besides this, a certain something in her manner of walking, in her voice and in her behaviour.'

'All this she must possess,' added Darcy, 'and something more solid, the improvement of her mind by wide reading.'

'I'm no longer surprised at your knowing only *six* accomplished women,' said Elizabeth. 'I rather wonder at your knowing *any*. I've never seen such elegance, and intelligence, and knowledge, as you describe, in one woman.'

Mrs Hurst and Miss Bingley were both protesting loudly that they knew many women like this, when Mr Hurst called their attention back to the card game. As this meant an end to the conversation, Elizabeth soon afterwards left the room.

'Miss Elizabeth Bennet,' said Miss Bingley to Darcy, 'is one of those women who try to appear attractive to men by undervaluing other women. *I think that's a mean trick.*'

'It is true,' said Darcy, 'that there is meanness in *all* the tricks used by ladies to attract men.'

Miss Bingley was not satisfied enough with this answer to continue the conversation.

The next morning Elizabeth was glad to be able to inform Mr Bingley and his sisters that Jane was very much better.

In spite of this improvement, however, she asked for her mother to be sent for, as she wanted Mrs Bennet's opinion of Jane's state of health. Soon after breakfast, therefore, Mrs Bennet, accompanied by her two youngest daughters, reached Netherfield.

Elizabeth, although relieved to hear that her mother did not think Jane's illness serious, began to regret asking her to come, when she saw the Bingley sisters smiling at Mrs Bennet's remarks. Elizabeth blushed for her mother, who could not help showing her lack of intelligence and common sense in everything she said.

Kitty and Lydia made an equally bad impression. They had



been whispering together, when suddenly Lydia, who was an attractive, confident, well-grown girl of fifteen, pushed herself rudely forward. She begged Mr Bingley to hold a ball at Netherfield. With his usual politeness, Mr Bingley promised he would, but Elizabeth saw his sisters exchanging meaningful glances. She was quite glad when her mother and sisters left. She and Jane were to stay another night at Netherfield, to allow Jane to recover completely.

That evening Elizabeth appeared again in the sitting-room. She could not avoid noticing how frequently Mr Darcy's eyes were fixed on her, but as she felt sure that so great a man could not possibly admire her, she assumed that when he looked at her, he was criticizing her in some way. This thought did not cause her any pain, as she liked him too little to care for his approval.

In the conversations she had with him, she spoke in her usual slightly mocking manner, rather expecting to offend him, but was surprised by the quiet politeness of his replies. Darcy had never before been so charmed by any woman. He really believed that if she did not have such vulgar relations, he might be in danger of falling in love with her. Miss Bingley saw or suspected enough to be jealous, and her great anxiety for the recovery of her dear friend Jane was increased by her wish to get rid of Elizabeth.

Fortunately perhaps, for almost everyone at Netherfield, Elizabeth and her sister, who was now quite recovered, were returning home the next day. Only Mr Bingley showed real sorrow at this, and was concerned that Jane might not be fit enough to travel. Mr Darcy was quite relieved, and determined that no sign of admiration for Elizabeth should escape him now. Miss Bingley's politeness to Elizabeth, as well as her affection



*Lydia begged Mr Bingley to hold a ball at Netherfield.*

for Jane, increased rapidly as the moment of departure approached, and she was able to say goodbye to them with many warm expressions of friendliness and a promise to visit them very soon.

Mr Bennet was glad to welcome his eldest daughters home again, as he had felt their absence from the family circle, but

Mrs Bennet, who had hoped they would stay much longer, was quite disappointed to see them come back in such a short time.



*Mr Collins visits Longbourn*

'I hope, my dear,' said Mr Bennet to his wife at breakfast the next morning, 'that you have told the cook to send up a good dinner today, as I am expecting a visitor.'

'Who is it, my dear? I know of nobody who is coming, unless Charlotte Lucas happens to call in, and I hope *my* dinners are good enough for *her*.'

'The person I'm talking about is a gentleman and a stranger.'

Mrs Bennet's eyes shone with excitement. 'It's Mr Bingley, I'm sure! Why, Jane, you never mentioned it! Well, I'll be extremely glad to see him. Lydia, my love, ring the bell. I must speak to the cook at once.'

'It is *not* Mr Bingley,' said her husband. 'It's a person whom I have never seen before.'

This caused general astonishment, and he had the pleasure of being eagerly questioned by his wife and five daughters all at the same time. Having amused himself for some time with their curiosity, he finally explained. 'I have recently received a letter from my cousin, Mr Collins, who, as you know, will inherit all my property when I die, and may throw you out of this house as soon as he wants.'

'Oh, my dear!' cried his wife. 'Please don't mention that hateful man. It's the hardest thing in the world to accept the fact that your property is not left to your own children, and I'm sure,

if I were you, I'd have tried to do something about it.'

Jane and Elizabeth tried to explain the legal situation to her again. They had often attempted to do this before. But it was a matter which Mrs Bennet refused to understand, and she continued to complain bitterly about Mr Collins.

'It certainly is most unjust,' agreed Mr Bennet, 'and nothing can clear Mr Collins from the guilt of inheriting this house. But if you listen while I read his letter to you, you may perhaps be a little softened by his manner of expressing himself.'

He read aloud the following letter:

Dear Sir,

The disagreement between you and my late respected father always worried me, and since his death I have frequently wished to improve the relationship between our families. After a long period of study and training I have recently become a priest, and have been fortunate enough to gain the patronage of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, widow of Sir Lewis de Bourgh. This generous lady has given me the post of rector at Hunsford, which was luckily vacant. Hunsford is the village near her own large country house in Kent. Here I carry out the duties of my profession whenever necessary, and I take great care to behave at all times with grateful respect towards her ladyship. As a priest, moreover, I feel it my duty to encourage all families in my area of influence to live peacefully. Because of this, I flatter myself that I am acting correctly in offering you my friendship. I am of course concerned that when I eventually inherit all your property, your daughters will doubtless be very poor, and I do apologize for this. I promise you I am ready to make amends in every possible way – but more about this later. If you do not object, I propose to visit you and your family

on Monday November 18th, at four o'clock, and shall probably stay until the following Saturday week. This will cause me no inconvenience at all, as Lady Catherine is far from objecting to my occasional absence from my duties.

I remain, dear sir, with respectful good wishes to your lady and your daughters, your friend, William Collins.

'So we can expect this peace-making gentleman at four o'clock today,' said Mr Bennet, as he folded up the letter. 'He appears to be a most polite and serious young man. How considerate of Lady Catherine to allow him to visit us!'

'Well, if he is ready to make amends to the girls in some way, I shall certainly not discourage him,' said Mrs Bennet.

'Although it's difficult,' said Jane, 'to guess *how* he intends to do that, it's good of him to want to help us.'

'I think he's peculiar,' said Elizabeth. 'He sounds too pleased with himself, and he speaks so politely of Lady Catherine! And why does he apologize for inheriting Father's property in future? We know it's not his fault. Can he be a sensible man, sir?' she added, turning to Mr Bennet.

'No, my dear, I think not. I have great hopes of finding him quite the opposite. There is a mixture of servility and self-importance in his letter, which promises to be entertaining. I am impatient to see him.'

Mary, the middle daughter, who spent most of her time reading and who seldom joined in family conversations, now remarked that in her opinion his letter was well expressed. But Kitty and Lydia did not show any interest in the letter or its writer. As it was highly unlikely that their cousin would arrive in a regimental uniform, they could not imagine having any pleasure in meeting him. Their mother, however, had changed

her attitude towards Mr Collins after his letter, and was now preparing to meet him with such calmness that it astonished her husband and daughters.

Mr Collins arrived punctually, and was received with great politeness by the whole family. Mr Bennet indeed said little, but the ladies were ready enough to talk, and Mr Collins did not seem in need of encouragement. He was a tall, heavy-looking young man of twenty-five. His expression was serious, and his manners very formal. Soon after his arrival, he said to Mrs Bennet, 'Madam, I must compliment you on having such a fine family of daughters. I had heard much of their beauty, but I find them even more beautiful than reports have stated. I do not doubt you will see them all well married quite soon.'

Mrs Bennet never quarrelled with compliments, and she answered, 'You're very kind, sir, and indeed I do hope so, because otherwise they'll have nothing at all to live on.'

'You refer perhaps to my inheriting the Bennet property?'

'Ah, yes, sir, I do! You must confess it is a sad business for my poor girls.'

'I am very aware, madam, of the hardship to your lovely daughters—and could say more about this, but I am cautious of saying too much too soon. But I *would* like to say that I have come prepared to admire the young ladies. And perhaps when we know each other better—'

The bell rang for dinner, and the family moved into the dining-room with their guest. The girls smiled secretly at each other, as Mr Collins praised the hall, the dining-room and all the furniture. Mrs Bennet would normally have been delighted with such praise, but she could not help thinking that he was perhaps admiring it all as his future property. The dinner, too, he considered excellent, and he asked which of his charming

cousins was responsible for it. But Mrs Bennet explained quite sharply to him that they were very well able to afford a good cook, and that her daughters had nothing to do in the kitchen. He begged her pardon immediately for offending her, and continued to apologize for about a quarter of an hour.

Mr Bennet had hardly spoken up to now, but he thought it was time to enter the conversation. 'You seem very fortunate in your patron, Mr Collins,' he said.

He could not have chosen a better opening remark. Mr Collins spoke enthusiastically for several minutes in praise of Lady Catherine. 'Never in my life have I witnessed such considerate behaviour in a person of high birth! Although she is such a great lady, she has never treated me with disdain. She talks to me almost as an equal, and gives me advice. For example, she has recommended me to marry as soon as possible. And do you know, she has asked me to dinner twice at her house! Some people consider her proud, but she has only ever been *kind* to me. She even took the trouble to visit my small house, and was thoughtful enough to suggest one or two improvements – some shelves upstairs.'

'That is very correct and polite, I'm sure,' said Mrs Bennet. 'Does she live near you, sir?'

'Only a small country road separates my poor house from Rosings Park, her ladyship's home.'

'I think you said she is a widow? Has she any family?'

'She has only one daughter, who will inherit Rosings and all Lady Catherine's property. A most charming young lady, unfortunately in weak health. I often pay her some little compliment on her appearance or her accomplishments when I visit Rosings. Lady Catherine appreciates these compliments to her daughter, and I see it as my duty to please her ladyship.'

'I am sure you're right,' said Mr Bennet. 'No doubt you are expert at flattering with delicacy. May I ask how you think of these pleasing compliments?'

'Some of them come to me at the time, but in my spare moments I do occasionally prepare a few words which may be suitable for different occasions.'

Mr Bennet listened to his cousin with the greatest enjoyment. Mr Collins was as foolish as he had hoped. But by tea-time Mr Bennet had had enough, and after tea, asked his guest to read aloud to the ladies. However, when a novel was handed to Mr Collins, he looked shocked, and protested that he never read novels. He chose a religious book instead, and started reading in a slow, serious voice. Lydia could not hide her boredom for long, and after only three pages she interrupted him rudely, to ask her mother a question about one of the officers in Meryton. Mr Collins was offended, and refused to read any more, although Mrs Bennet and her other daughters apologized for Lydia's lack of manners.

Mr Collins was not a sensible man, and neither education nor society had improved him. The respect he felt for his patron, and his very good opinion of himself and his new position, made him proud and servile at the same time. Now that he had a home and a considerable income, he had decided to marry. The Bennet girls, who would lose their inheritance because of him, had a reputation for being attractive and charming, and his idea of making amends to them was to marry one of them. He considered this an excellent plan, and thought himself extremely generous and unselfish in carrying it out.

He had known he was right when he arrived at Longbourn and saw Jane Bennet's lovely face. As the eldest, she should marry first, and for the first evening *she* was his choice. But the



next morning, after a fifteen-minute conversation with Mrs Bennet, he had to change his mind. When he explained that he was hoping to find a wife among her daughters, she replied, with a happy smile, that her eldest daughter was very likely to be engaged soon. 'But there are my other daughters, Mr Collins,' she continued, encouragingly.

Mr Collins had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth, and it was soon done – done while Mrs Bennet was pouring the tea. Next to Jane in birth and beauty, Elizabeth was the obvious choice.

Mrs Bennet was delighted, hoping that she might soon have *two* daughters married. The man whom she had so disliked the day before was now a favourite with her.



### *Elizabeth meets Mr Wickham*

When later that morning Lydia suggested walking to Meryton to see some of the officers, all her sisters except Mary agreed to accompany her. Even Mr Collins went with them, encouraged by Mr Bennet, who was by now most anxious to have some time to himself. During their walk, the girls listened politely to Mr Collins' self-important speeches, but as soon as they entered Meryton, the younger ones no longer even pretended to be interested in his conversation, but looked eagerly around in search of the officers.

Just then all the young ladies noticed a very gentleman-like young man, whom they had never seen before, walking down the street with an officer they knew. They were all wondering

who the handsome stranger could be, when the officer came up to them to greet them. He asked permission to introduce his friend, whose name was Mr Wickham, and who had apparently arrived recently from London, to become an officer in the regiment. This was exactly as it should be, because the young man only needed an officer's uniform to become completely charming. He was very good-looking, with a very pleasant, sociable manner, and after the introductions, conversation flowed most enjoyably in the little group. They were still standing and talking happily together, when they heard the sound of horses, and saw Darcy and Bingley riding down the street. The two gentlemen came straight towards the ladies to greet them. Bingley was clearly most interested in Jane Bennet, and started talking particularly to her. Darcy, however, was just determining not to look at Elizabeth, when he suddenly noticed the stranger. By chance Elizabeth saw Darcy's and Wickham's faces at the moment when they caught sight of each other, and she was astonished at the effect of the meeting. Both changed colour, one white, the other red. After a few moments Mr Wickham touched his hat, and Mr Darcy nodded very slightly. What could this mean? It was impossible to imagine, and it was impossible not to wish to know.

In another moment Mr Bingley, who did not seem to have noticed what had happened, said goodbye and rode away with Mr Darcy. The two officers accompanied the young ladies to Mrs Philips' house, but did not go in, in spite of Lydia's repeated invitations. Mrs Philips was always glad to see her nieces, and welcomed Mr Collins most politely when he was introduced to her. She did not, however, have any more information for the girls about the agreeable Mr Wickham.

'But I tell you what, my dears,' she said brightly, 'I'm giving