

Penguin



Readers

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Pride and Prejudice



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CHAPTER ONE

Mrs Bennet's plan

"My dear Mr Bennet, have you heard the news? Someone has rented Netherfield Park!" Mrs Bennet said, excitedly. "His name is Mr Bingley. He's a rich young man from the north of England, and will be in the house at Netherfield before the end of September. It's wonderful for our girls!"

"For our girls? Why?" Mr Bennet asked.

"Because I want him to marry one of them, of course!" Mrs Bennet answered.

"Is that his plan?" Mr Bennet asked.

"His *plan*? How can you say that?" Mrs Bennet answered. "But he may fall in love with one of them, so you must visit him as soon as he comes."

"There's no need for that," Mr Bennet said, **teasing** his wife. "You and the girls can go, or you may send them by themselves, which may be better. You're as beautiful as them, and Mr Bingley might like you best."

"It's impossible for us to visit if you don't meet him first, and you know that!" she said.

"I'll give you a message for him," Mr Bennet said. "I'll tell him he can marry any one of our five daughters. But I must say a good word for my dear Lizzy."

Often when Mr Bennet teased his silly wife, she thought he was being **serious**.

"You will not!" Mrs Bennet replied. "Lizzy isn't a bit

better than the others. She's neither half as beautiful as Jane, nor half as funny as Lydia. But you've always preferred her."

"Our daughters are all silly . . . but Lizzy's the most **sensible** and intelligent," he said.

"Oh, Mr Bennet! How can you speak of your own children like that? You're not thinking of my **nerves**!" Mrs Bennet said.

"Your nerves are my old friends," he replied. "You've talked about them for twenty-three years."

"They give me much pain, but you don't care. They'll kill me one day," she said.

"I hope you live to see many rich young men become our neighbours," Mr Bennet replied.



"It won't matter if you don't visit them!" replied Mrs Bennet.

When Mrs Bennet was unhappy about something, she always **blamed** her nerves. The business of her life was to get her five daughters married to rich men, which made her nerves even worse. The Bennets' oldest daughter, Jane, was already twenty-two; Elizabeth, or Lizzy to her family, was twenty; Mary was the middle child; Kitty was seventeen and Lydia was fifteen. Mr Bennet, a few years older than his wife and much cleverer, was neither a rich nor a poor **gentleman**.

Their home in the village of Longbourn in Hertfordshire was three miles from Netherfield Park. A few days after this conversation, Mr Bennet visited Bingley without saying a word to his wife. That evening, Mr Bennet had a surprise for his family.

"I visited Mr Bingley this morning," Mr Bennet said.

"Oh, Mr Bennet!" Mrs Bennet cried. "We are so happy! I was sure that you loved your girls and I could **encourage** you to go."

"What does he look like?" asked his daughters. Their father did not answer. Tired of his family's silly conversation, he left the room.

A few days later, Bingley visited Mr Bennet but was not introduced to his daughters. The girls saw only Bingley's back from the upstairs window when they watched him leave. They had to wait two more weeks for a **ball** in the village of Meryton to see his face.

CHAPTER TWO

The Meryton ball

Two weeks later at the Meryton ball, Mrs Bennet was as excited as her daughters when Bingley arrived. With him were his two sisters, Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst, with her husband, Mr Hurst. Behind them was Bingley's friend Mr Darcy. The Bennet sisters noticed that Bingley was a handsome gentleman, and his pretty sisters looked lovely in their fashionable dresses. But when Darcy entered, every woman noticed that he was taller and more handsome than Bingley. Some people were talking about Darcy, who was richer than Bingley. He had a large **estate** in Derbyshire and £10,000 each year. But people also noticed that he was very **proud**. He thought he was better than everyone there. Soon, everyone agreed that he was not a gentleman.

While Bingley danced all evening and talked about having a ball at Netherfield, Darcy danced only with Bingley's sisters. People agreed he was the proudest man in the world.

Elizabeth was sitting near Darcy when Bingley started a conversation with him, and she heard every word.

"Darcy, you must dance with some of the other ladies," Bingley said.

"Your sisters are already dancing, and there's not another woman here who I want to dance with," answered Darcy. "You're dancing with the only pretty one here."

“Miss Jane Bennet is the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen,” said Bingley. “But her pretty sister’s sitting down. Miss Bennet can introduce you to her.”

Darcy looked at Elizabeth. “She is quite pretty, but she’s not beautiful enough for me,” he said. “And I do not want to dance with a woman no other man will dance with. Go back to Miss Bennet. Do not worry about me.”



Bingley went back to Jane. Darcy was proud and not **polite**, Elizabeth thought. But she only laughed when she told her friends how he described her. She did not allow unkind words to give her pain.

At home after the ball, Mrs Bennet and her daughters found Mr Bennet reading a book in his library. He heard them come in, and he wanted to hear that his wife's plan for Bingley did not end well. But he soon heard a different story.

"We had an excellent evening!" Mrs Bennet said, excitedly. "Everyone was looking at Jane, and they were saying how beautiful she looked. When Bingley saw Jane, he asked who she was. Then someone introduced him to Jane. Bingley danced with Jane twice!" she reported, proudly. Jane was very happy, but she kept quiet. "She was the only one he danced with twice!" Mrs Bennet continued.

She told Mr Bennet about the other girls Bingley danced with, but he only danced once with all of the others.

"Say no more!" cried Mr Bennet. "I don't care who he danced with."

"He's so handsome! And his sisters are lovely! I've never seen more beautiful dresses than theirs," Mrs Bennet continued. "They looked so fashionable!"

"I don't want to hear about his sisters and their dresses," Mr Bennet said.

She then told him about Darcy. "Lizzy is not his favourite, which is good for her! He's a horrible, proud man! I don't like him at all!" Mrs Bennet said.