



Jane  
Austen

PRIDE  
AND  
PREJUDICE

  
GIUNTI CLASSICS

  
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JANE AUSTEN

# Pride and Prejudice

Edited with an Introduction by  
Luciana Pirè

 **GIUNTI**

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## Introduction

Jane Austen's life is often described as uneventful and her world as unchanging. She travelled little and even after the great success of her novels, her life didn't become much more public. The major events in her life were local and ordinary: a death in the family, illness, financial troubles, disappointments in courtship or love. Their disruptions are deep but they are contained, as though the tenor of daily existence needed to be protected from unbalancing forces.

Born in 1775, Jane was the unmarried daughter of a country clergyman, George Austen, the rector of Steventon in the county of Hampshire. George Austen's solid prospects and good connections were enough to win him a similarly well-bred and well-connected wife, Cassandra Leigh. To the small parish, the Austens came in 1764, and there eight children (six boys and two girls) were born to them. Their meagre property made it impossible for the Austens to dower their daughters and their sons could be established in life only by drawing upon the resources of their rich relatives. Jane herself had repeatedly to face the fact that, belonging to the unlanded gentry, she was what a hierarchical society termed a poor relation. *The Watsons*, her unfinished novel written some time after 1803 about a family of impecunious spinsters, betrays her dislike of being patronised on account of her poverty.

The whole of Jane's life began and ended in the Hampshire countryside, with an eight-year interlude during her late twenties in Bath and Southampton. At Steventon rectory Jane enjoyed a happy, gregarious childhood rather like that attributed to Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*: she learnt boys' games, rolled down the slope behind the house, and watched the older children acting comedies in her father's barn. We are reminded in *Emma* that it was the usual destiny of sons to go away to school and daughters to remain at home. But in the Austen household it was otherwise. The girls, Cassandra and Jane, were sent to school and they had about two years of formal schooling. As for other home instruction, Mrs Austen probably taught her sons and daugh-

ters to read, leaving higher education to her husband. George Austen, though a conscientious and pious clergyman, encouraged secular pursuits in his family, such as the reading of sensational Gothic novels and the acting of plays which were almost invariably light comedies. Jane seems to have read with great eagerness. We know also that at about the time of their college education Jane's brothers, James and Henry, produced a weekly periodical called "The Loiterer" in which there were a number of essays on literary style and convention.

As Jane grew up, she became a popular young woman with many admirers, but she was especially in love with Tom Lefroy, whose family had grander views for him. He married another, but remembered her to the end of his life. She agreed to marry an heir to a large estate, but changed her mind the next day. She then rejected a clergyman, Edward Bridges, and sometimes regretted her refusal. Later, the Austens may have moved to Bath to provide their daughters with a wider circle in the hope of finding them husbands, but no offer was forthcoming there. In fact, in 1801 George Austen decided to retire with his wife and daughters to Bath, where, on 21 January 1805, he died. None of the Austen children could inherit the family home from their father.

After George Austen's death, Mrs Austen, Jane and her sister Cassandra would have been left with a mere £210 a year, had it not been more than doubled by contributions from the older brothers Edward, James, Henry and Frank. Between 1807 and 1809 they shared lodgings at Southampton with the newly married Frank; and from the year 1809 they lived in a six-bedroom house belonging to Edward in the Hampshire village of Chawton. The nearly three years that Jane spent in Southampton were apparently the most unproductive of her literary career. Probably the most disturbing event here was the death in childbirth of Edward's wife Elizabeth; six years later, another brother's wife died shortly after giving birth. Austen's letters show an increasing concern with the costs of pregnancy to women. Her mature attitudes to actual pregnancy and mothering express a sense of the burdens of these states rather than anything else.

It was a very important part of the Austen family ethos to keep together. For the rest of her life Jane enjoyed a strong sense of mutual support and security within her own domestic circle and among the families of adjoining parishes and landed gentry, playing the warm, loving sister, the affectionate aunt and the sharp "old maid". Her letters reveal her engaged throughout her life in the visits and charitable deeds expected of a gentlewoman, especially of clergy families.

Recent film versions of her novels heighten the sense that Jane Austen is now merely part of a nostalgic heritage and is especially attrac-

tive to those who live, as she appeared to do, outside history. It is often said of her novels that the public events of her time passed them by, though they affected in direct personal ways Jane's intimate friends and immediate family. Although she wrote her books in troubled years (which included the French Revolution with its aftermath, and the Napoleonic wars) her six novels ostensibly suggest little active political commitment or deep involvement in national and international affairs. Yet a more dynamic critical view has discovered Austen's awareness of current changes in the relationship between women and the economy, and of the new fashions in social traffic, such as health tourism and seaside resorts. There is a whole larger world of which she says nothing, but that does not invalidate her judgments of the characters and events in the small, completely detailed world she created.

Jane Austen was a born storyteller. Wherever she travelled, she took with her a mahogany writing-desk, possibly a nineteenth birthday present from her father. The date on the manuscript of "Love and Friendship"<sup>1</sup> ("Finis June 13<sup>th</sup> 1790") reveals her precocious literary skill. She was then less than fifteen. Her juvenile works, often unfinished, began as stories to amuse her younger brother and were appreciated by a family that evidently shared her sense of the ridiculous. They are short pieces of surreal brilliance and absurdity, full of literary parody, and in their way they are very modern. They show both how much she owed to the books she read and how from the beginning she was working to put the lessons of her reading to uses of her own.

By the age of 25 Jane Austen had written three great novels, although none of these was published until she was 36. At home, she was surrounded by minds who inspired her own wit; but no one, within or outside of the family, could have viewed her as a professional writer until the last six years of her life. The sum Jane Austen left in her will, about £400, is approximately the sum she made from writing.

The history of the composition of Jane Austen's novels is by no means simple. In 1795 she began working hard on a novel called *Elimor and Marianne*, which she continued to revise and finally changed from an epistolary form to a third-person narrative entitled *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), the first of her works to be published. Austen's authorship was kept a secret, not revealed until a few years later.

Jane Austen had much sympathy for women who showed a romantic indifference to worldly prudence in the name of true love, affectionately mocking such a one in Marianne Dashwood, the heroine of *Sense and Sensibility*. She is betrayed by John Willoughby, an attractive

1. The original spelling of the title (*Love and Friendship*) was amended by the author when she revised her notebooks later in her life.

but selfish young man, with whom she impetuously has fallen in love in the romantic excess of her *great expectations*. Coming to a gradual recognition of the need for self-discipline, Marianne's rebellions are tamed, and she ends up marrying Colonel Brandon, a middle aged family friend. By contrast, Elinor, the older Dashwood sister who may seem to be cold and rational, knows enough of her loved one – Edward Ferrars – to see beyond the defects of his manners and the modesty of his income to the enduring qualities of his mind and spirit.

An early version of another novel, *First Impressions*, seems to have been composed during the years 1796-97. Jane's father thought well enough of the novel to offer it, unsuccessfully, to a publisher. When the book was finally published in 1813, its title had been changed to *Pride and Prejudice*. It was Austen's most popular work, both with the public and with her family and friends. In 1802 or 1803 Jane had completed a new novel entitled *Susan* which was sold in the spring of 1803 to a London publisher, Mr. Crosby, for ten pounds, but he did not publish it. Six years later, Austen wrote him an angry letter adopting the pseudonym 'Mrs Ashton Dennis', a name which allowed her to sign herself 'M.A.D.'. One of her brothers bought the manuscript back at the same price, and the short 'Advertisement' that Jane Austen composed for the novel shows that the book was prepared for the press in 1816. In her only direct address to her readers, she did not speak of herself as an 'authoress', a term frequently used in a patronising manner, but as 'author'. *Susan* was not published until 1818, when it appeared posthumously as *Northanger Abbey*. It was conceived as a satire on Anne Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, and set out to show the confusion in an immature mind between literature and life.

When Austen arrived in Chawton, she was determined to achieve publication. Despite the disappointment of not seeing her previous works in print, she gathered enough literary energy to draft *Mansfield Park* between February 1811 and the summer of 1813. The book was advertised in the *Morning Chronicle* of 23 and 27 May 1814. Fanny Price is the exemplary heroine of this novel written in a more serious manner, with fewer characters in a stylised pattern. As a virtuous young girl struggling towards judgment and knowledge that are being neglected by other characters, Fanny becomes at last the spiritual centre of Mansfield Park, the house of Sir Thomas Bertram who had adopted her when she was a poor child of nine. In an ethos of continuity and respectability, she remains the one to dedicate herself to the future of Mansfield Park. Austen's titles are always strictly relevant to the novels, and *Mansfield Park* is a study of the inhabitants of the house of that name, the values they live by, and the consequences of those values.



If compared with the multiple revisions of other novels, the composition of *Emma* was very rapid and attributed to the writer's growth in confidence and in practice. Begun on 21 January 1814 and finished 29 March 1815, it was published early in 1816. Speculation about marriage – always the first and last relationship in Jane Austen – is the basis of the novel's plot, because the heroine, Emma Woodhouse, is herself a determined matchmaker. Yet Emma does not define herself in relation to men, and has no aspirations to marriage as a means of economic or social survival. She has her own unique sense of moral values and a clear and consistent self-image. At the end, all that is left for her to achieve is to recognise the love she already has for Mr Knightley, a well acquainted and wise man who will give up his home in order not to remove her from the world she knows. We are persuaded, by Austen's superb craft, that the marriage to Mr Knightley will enjoy an ideal equality. No other novel has the extensive and dynamic interaction of characters as that which in subtle ways links the members of *Emma's* community to one another.

*Persuasion* (1818) was Austen's last novel, and there is a belief that her own love affairs are reflected in those of Anne Elliot. Reversing the previous pattern, *Persuasion* suggests the advisability of obeying one's first and strongest love, of taking risks for the sake of love, of the mistake of not marrying in youth because one's elders thought a suitor unsuitable. Almost alone among Jane Austen's heroines, Anne does not return to the stable and rooted existence of the land. Here are the unmistakable signs that we are at the founding of a new social community, one considerably different from those which have concluded the preceding novels.

In the unfinished *Sanditon*, interrupted by her death, Jane Austen was writing a merciless satire on crazed romantic sensibilities in a language reminiscent of the burlesques she wrote in her youth. She had been ill for at least a year suffering from Addison's disease, and during the period in which she wrote *Sanditon* she was failing rapidly. It is not surprising, then, that the subject here is a dying woman treating her own illness with amusement and fortitude. We'll never know whether or not the author would have wanted it published. On 18 July 1817, Jane died at the age of 41. Cassandra arranged to publish the two remaining novels and kept her sister's memory alive. In a letter she remembers her with anguish: "I have lost a treasure, such a Sister, such a friend as never can have been surpassed".

Jane Austen shows in her novels that she was conscious of the disagreeable lives awaiting heroines who did not or would not secure husbands and of a social discrimination that might now be called snobbish. Our own age is no longer familiar with hierarchical customs, rules, and,

above all, the formal restrictions present in Jane Austen's novels. Nevertheless, her argument against confusing display of feeling with moral judgment is still a relevant one, and we would do well to apply her lucid penetration to our own times.

She, certainly, would not have expected more justice than is contained in Virginia Woolf's finely balanced recognition of "Jane Austen's greatness. It has the permanent quality of literature. Think away the surface animation, the likeness to life, and there remains, to provide a deeper pleasure, an exquisite discrimination of human values."

### *Pride and Prejudice*

The text of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) was originally written in the late 1790s, and then extensively rewritten over a period of sixteen or seventeen years. Because the manuscript of the early version – *First Impressions* – no longer exists, its differences from *Pride and Prejudice* can only be guessed at. As has been noticed, a title which points towards subjective experience – 'impression' – is significantly replaced with one which emphasises abstract qualities. However, *Pride and Prejudice* was so different from the story her sister had repeatedly read many years earlier that Jane was "exceedingly pleased" when Cassandra, her best audience and critic, said that she liked it very much. Whatever *First Impressions* may have been like, the twenty-one year old girl distanced herself radically from this apprentice work as she developed into a mature writer, discovered and extended the range of her powers. After *Pride and Prejudice* Jane Austen was never to draw again so heavily on a work of her apprenticeship.

*Pride and Prejudice* was the most fashionable novel of the 1813 season. It had many admiring readers and reviewers in the nineteenth century, who praised the book for its lucid descriptions of life and manners and for its useful morality. The Prince Regent let it be known that he would not object to her dedicating one of her books to him. Walter Scott, the most famous poet and novelist of the day, wrote in his private journals: "Also read again, and for the third time at least, Miss Austen's very finely written novel of *Pride and Prejudice*. That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with". The popularity of the novel meant the end of Austen's anonymity.

The marriage problem is set in its simplest form in the famous opening sentence of the novel: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife". Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are those concerned with the business of

getting their five daughters married and the problem is to call them to the attention of a rich young bachelor who has taken Netherfield Park, an estate nearby. This is because women have no access at all to work, and thus in the absence of a male heir, the Bennet girls must marry. But Mr. Bennet's inadequacy as a father and Mrs. Bennet's vulgarity nearly neutralise the possibility of their manipulation of advantageous marriages.

The wit, humour, and "best chosen language" have certainly contributed to making *Pride and Prejudice* the most generally popular of Austen's works. But possibly even more of its popularity arises from the relationship between the central characters – Elizabeth, the second of the Bennet girls, and Fitzwilliam Darcy, nephew of the haughty Lady Catherine de Bourgh – and the complexities they continue to manufacture for themselves. Darcy, though attracted to the lively and spirited Elizabeth, greatly offends her by his supercilious behaviour at a ball. Elizabeth soon repays him with an increasing aversion.

Despite her youth and the limitations of a rural society, Elizabeth is a busy "studier of character"; indeed, she is far more aware of distinctions in personality than any of the author's previous heroines. And yet, though always charming, witty and self-critical, Elizabeth bases her moral judgment, for the greater part of the time, on an intelligent misinterpretation of the world and on a naïve overestimation of her own independence. At the beginning, she can dismiss the blatantly simple person very well because, as she points out, it is only the "intricate" persons that require and merit attention. But when inexperience and emotional partiality deceive her, she fails to judge and classify a man like Darcy. However difficult Elizabeth's task of interpreting him, it is clear from the outset that Darcy is the potential lover of a complex young woman.

On the other hand, while Darcy's response to Elizabeth's intelligence is more conscious, it does not conceal his upper-class inability to endure her middle-class family. He is a proud man with a strong sense of external propriety and dignity, and aware of the restrictions that inevitably limit the individual will. Darcy's pride and Elizabeth's prejudices imperil their union. The part of the woman in this action is central. Elizabeth rejects his arrogant proposal which insensitively emphasizes the social gap between them. Her prejudice against him deepens, and so does Darcy's pride. But the contrast is between two ways of behaving rather than between two ways of feeling.

They are united at the end because Darcy overcomes class distinctions, proposes to her, returns to her even after all hope seems to have vanished, and eventually brings about the marriages of three of the Bennet daughters. In spite of his rigid and principled reserve, he finally

makes his explanations to Elizabeth in a thoroughly and unreserved letter. Elizabeth's acknowledgement of her error lays the ground for the resolution of ambiguities and for the consequent "change of sentiment" toward Darcy. She marries the richest man in all of Jane Austen's novels and is established as mistress of Pemberley, the vast estate of a husband who will support her in comfort.

In portraying the gradual change in Elizabeth's estimate of Darcy and his attitude to her, Jane Austen achieves a perfect harmony between the extraordinary richness of ironic texture and the movement toward the climactic scene in which the new estimate is revealed. The novelist is fascinated by the complexities of personal relationships and, as usual, conversation develops the novel's theme as well as characters. The small talk is the focus for Austen's keen sense of the variability and intricacy of character, for her awareness of the possibility that the characters are not the same when projected through the conversation of different people. Elizabeth's affirmations have an ironic overtone, accompanied by the sharp thoughtfulness of her observation.

The ease with which Elizabeth Bennet can be assimilated into high rank has enabled some critics to read this as an essentially conservative novel. More correctly, Franco Moretti sees *Pride and Prejudice* as the classic *Bildungsroman* (the novel of growth and development) which stabilises its closed world by opting for socialisation rather than free individual exploration. Though an acute and critical observer, Elizabeth is no rebel and she cannot contemplate the possibility of happiness outside her given social frame. And yet a good deal of the increasing interest of the book does undoubtedly arise from Austen's understanding of and feelings about the problems of women in her society. Starting with the remarks of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their highly influential *The Madwoman in the Attic*, there have been numerous reappraisals of Jane Austen's novel in relationship to contemporary and modern feminism.

The final reconciliation in *Pride and Prejudice* suggests that social boundaries can be crossed. Darcy and Elizabeth, then, learn complementary lessons: he recognises that individual feelings outweigh conventional social distinctions; she recognises the sound traditional order that should be treated with respect. In doing so, Austen solves the tension created by the two conflicting perspectives that function in the novel – love and money.

Moreover, as we have said, Austen was a member of the gentry faction that faced acute financial difficulties during the years 1780-1820. The literary consequence of this social situation is that Austen's novels perform a series of negotiations and compromises between residual and progressive elements of the social formation. The marriage that con-

cludes *Pride and Prejudice*, closing the gap between social classes and temperamental differences, remains for Austen the ideal paradigm of the most perfect fusion between the individual and society. Individuals must recognise the need for objective understanding of themselves and others if the fabric of society is to be preserved. This is what Elizabeth learns in her passage into adulthood. Her triumph signals the achievement of the balance that characterises Austen's mature novels.



# Pride and Prejudice





# Chapter 1

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession 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 impatiently.

"*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 immediately; 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 tiresome! 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 new comers. 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 which ever he chuses 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 preference."

"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 on 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 consideration these 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 understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented 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 Bingley. 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 trimming 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, Mama,” said Elizabeth, “that we shall meet him at the assemblies, and that Mrs Long has 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 neices 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 so 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 chuse," said Mr Bennet; 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 acquaintance every day; but for your sakes, we would do any thing. 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 suppositions, 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 handsome, extremely agreeable, and to crown the whole, he meant to be at the next assembly with a large party. Nothing could be more delightful! 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 Netherfield," 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 already had Mrs Bennet planned the courses that were to do credit to her housekeeping, when an answer arrived which deferred it all. Mr Bingley was obliged to be in town the following day, and consequently unable to accept the honour of their invitation, &c. 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 Bingley 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 had 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 pleasant 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, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen 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 disgust 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 principal 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 themselves. 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 walking 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 every body 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 resentment, 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 overhear 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 particu-

larly acquainted with my partner. At such an assembly as this, it would be insupportable. Your sisters are engaged, and there is not another 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*; and I am in no humour 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 Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feelings towards 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 family. 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 Lydia had been fortunate enough to be never 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 Bennet 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 event of an evening which had raised such splendid expectations. He had rather hoped that all his wife's views on the stranger would be disappointed; but he soon found 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. Every body 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 enquired 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 impatiently, "he would not have danced half so much! For God's sake, say no more of his partners. Oh! that he had sprained his ankle in the first dance!"

"Oh! my dear" continued Mrs Bennet, "I am quite delighted with him. He is so excessively handsome! and his sisters are charming women. I never in my life saw any thing 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 enduring 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."

## Chapter 4

When Jane and Elizabeth were alone, the former, who had been cautious in her praise of Mr Bingley before, expressed to her sister how very much she admired him.

“He is just what a young man ought to be,” said she, “sensible, good humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy manners! – so much ease, with such perfect good breeding!”

“He is also handsome,” replied Elizabeth, “which a young man ought likewise to be, if he possibly can. His character is thereby complete.”

“I was very much flattered by his asking me to dance a second time. I did not expect such a compliment.”

“Did not you? *I* did for you. But that is one great difference between us. Compliments always take *you* by surprise, and *me* never. What could be more natural than his asking you again? He could not help seeing that you were about five times as pretty as every other woman in the room. No thanks to his gallantry for that. Well, he certainly is very agreeable, and I give you leave to like him. You have liked many a stupider person.”

“Dear Lizzy!”

“Oh! you are a great deal too apt you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in any body. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in my life.”

“I would not wish to be hasty in censuring any one; but I always speak what I think.”

“I know you do; and it is *that* which makes the wonder. With *your* good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough; one meets it everywhere. But to be candid without ostentation or design – to take the good of every body’s character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad – belongs to you alone. And so, you like this man’s sisters too, do you? Their manners are not equal to his.”

“Certainly not; at first. But they are very pleasing women when you converse with them. Miss Bingley is to live with her brother and keep his house; and I am much mistaken if we shall not find a very charming neighbour in her.”

Elizabeth listened in silence, but was not convinced; their behaviour at the assembly had not been calculated to please in general; and with more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than her sister, and with a judgement too unassailed by any attention to herself, she was very little disposed to approve them. They were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of being agreeable where they chose it; but proud and conceited. They were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in town, had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank; and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others. They were of a respectable family in the north of England; a circumstance more deeply impressed on their memories than that their brother's fortune and their own had been acquired by trade.

Mr Bingley inherited property to the amount of nearly an hundred thousand pounds from his father, who had intended to purchase an estate, but did not live to do it. – Mr Bingley intended it likewise, and sometimes made choice of his county; but as he was now provided with a good house and the liberty of a manor, it was doubtful to many of those who best knew the easiness of his temper, whether he might not spend the remainder of his days at Netherfield, and leave the next generation to purchase.

His sisters were very anxious for his having an estate of his own; but though he was now established only as a tenant, Miss Bingley was by no means unwilling to preside at his table, nor was Mrs Hurst, who had married a man of more fashion than fortune, less disposed to consider his house as her home when it suited her. Mr Bingley had not been of age two years, when he was tempted by an accidental recommendation to look at Netherfield House. He did look at it and into it for half an hour, was pleased with the situation and the principal rooms, satisfied with what the owner said in its praise, and took it immediately.

Between him and Darcy there was a very steady friendship, in spite of great opposition of character. – Bingley was endeared to Darcy by the easiness, openness, ductility of his temper, though no disposition could offer a greater contrast to his own, and though with his own he never appeared dissatisfied. On the strength of Darcy's regard Bingley had the firmest reliance, and of his judgement the highest opinion. In understanding Darcy was the superior. Bingley was by no means deficient, but Darcy was clever. He was at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and his manners, though well bred, were not inviting. In that respect his friend had greatly the advantage. Bingley was sure of being liked wherever he appeared, Darcy was continually giving offence.

The manner in which they spoke of the Meryton assembly was sufficiently characteristic. Bingley had never met with pleasanter people or prettier girls in his life; every body had been most kind and attentive to him, there had been no formality, no stiffness, he had soon felt acquainted with all the room; and as to Miss Bennet, he could not conceive an angel more beautiful. Darcy, on the contrary, had seen a collection of people in whom there was little beauty and no fashion, for none of whom he had felt the smallest interest, and from none received either attention or pleasure. Miss Bennet he acknowledged to be pretty, but she smiled too much.

Mrs Hurst and her sister allowed it to be so— but still they admired her and liked her, and pronounced her to be a sweet girl, and one whom they should not object to know more of. Miss Bennet was therefore established as a sweet girl, and their brother felt authorised by such commendation to think of her as he chose.

## Chapter 5

Within a short walk of Longbourn lived a family with whom the Bennets were particularly intimate. Sir William Lucas had been formerly in trade in Meryton, where he had made a tolerable fortune and risen to the honour of knighthood by an address to the King during his mayoralty. The distinction had perhaps been felt too strongly. It had given him a disgust to his business and to his residence in a small market town; and quitting them both, he had removed with his family to a house about a mile from Meryton, denominated from that period Lucas Lodge, where he could think with pleasure of his own importance, and unshackled by business, occupy himself solely in being civil to all the world. For though elated by his rank, it did not render him supercilious; on the contrary, he was all attention to every body. By nature inoffensive friendly and obliging, his presentation at St. James's had made him courteous.

Lady Lucas was a very good kind of woman, not too clever to be a valuable neighbour to Mrs Bennet. – They had several children. The eldest of them, a sensible, intelligent young woman, about twenty-seven, was Elizabeth's intimate friend.

That the Miss Lucases and the Miss Bennets should meet to talk over a ball was absolutely necessary; and the morning after the assembly brought the former to Longbourn to hear and to communicate.

"*You* began the evening well, Charlotte," said Mrs Bennet with civil self-command to Miss Lucas. "*You* were Mr Bingley's first choice."

"Yes; – but he seemed to like his second better."

"Oh! – you mean Jane, I suppose – because he danced with her twice. To be sure that *did* seem as if he admired her – indeed I rather believe he *did* – I heard something about it – but I hardly know what – something about Mr Robinson."

"Perhaps you mean what I overheard between him and Mr Robinson; did not I mention it to you? Mr Robinson's asking him how he liked our Meryton assemblies, and whether he did not think there were a great many pretty women in the room, and *which* he thought the prettiest? and his answering immediately to the last question – Oh!

the eldest Miss Bennet beyond a doubt, there cannot be two opinions on that point.”

“Upon my word! – Well, that is very decided indeed – that does seem as if – but however, it may all come to nothing you know.”

“My overhearings were more to the purpose than *yours*, Eliza,” said Charlotte. “Mr Darcy is not so well worth listening to as his friend, is he? – poor Eliza! – to be only just *tolerable*.”

“I beg you would not put it into Lizzy’s head to be vexed by his ill-treatment; for he is such a disagreeable man that it would be quite a misfortune to be liked by him. Mrs Long told me last night that he sat close to her for half an hour without once opening his lips.”

“Are you quite sure, Ma’am? – is not there a little mistake?” said Jane. “I certainly saw Mr Darcy speaking to her.”

“Aye – because she asked him at last how he liked Netherfield, and he could not help answering her; – but she said he seemed very angry at being spoke to.”

“Miss Bingley told me,” said Jane, “that he never speaks much unless among his intimate acquaintance. With *them* he is remarkably agreeable.”

“I do not believe a word of it, my dear. If he had been so very agreeable he would have talked to Mrs Long. But I can guess how it was; every body says that he is ate up with pride, and I dare say he had heard somehow that Mrs Long does not keep a carriage, and had come to the ball in a hack chaise.”

“I do not mind his not talking to Mrs Long,” said Miss Lucas, “but I wish he had danced with Eliza.”

“Another time, Lizzy,” said her mother, “I would not dance with *him*, if I were you.”

“I believe, Ma’am, I may safely promise you *never* to dance with him.”

“His pride,” said Miss Lucas, “does not offend *me* so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, every thing in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a *right* to be proud.”

“That is very true,” replied Elizabeth, “and I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*.”

“Pride,” observed Mary, who piqued herself upon the solidity of her reflections, “is a very common failing I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that it is very common indeed, that human nature is particularly prone to it, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary. Vanity and pride are different things, though

the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us.”

“If I were as rich as Mr Darcy,” cried a young Lucas who came with his sisters, “I should not care how proud I was. I would keep a pack of foxhounds, and drink a bottle of wine every day.”

“Then you would drink a great deal more than you ought,” said Mrs Bennet; “and if I were to see you at it I should take away your bottle directly.”

The boy protested that she should not; she continued to declare that she would, and the argument ended only with the visit.