

## Pride and Prejudice

### Mr and Mrs Bennet

p. 317

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*These are the first pages of the novel, perhaps Jane Austen's most quoted lines, where the Bennet family is introduced.*



Jane Austen  
**Pride and Prejudice**  
**(1813)**

Chapter I

6.9

It is a truth universally acknowledged<sup>1</sup>, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want<sup>2</sup> of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood<sup>3</sup>, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

5 'My dear Mr Bennet,' said his lady to him one day, 'have you heard that Netherfield Park is let<sup>4</sup> 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.

10 'Do not you 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.

15 '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<sup>5</sup> 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<sup>6</sup>, 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?'

20 '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<sup>7</sup>! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.'

25 'Is that his design in settling<sup>8</sup> here?'

'Design! nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely<sup>9</sup> that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes.'

30 '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 might like you the best of the party<sup>10</sup>.'

'My dear, you flatter me<sup>11</sup>. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be any thing extraordinary now. When a woman has five grown up daughters, she ought to give over<sup>12</sup> thinking of her own beauty.'

'In such cases, a woman has not often much beauty to think of.'

35 'But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr Bingley when he comes into the neighbourhood.'

'It is more than I engage for<sup>13</sup>, 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<sup>14</sup>, 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.'

40 '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 chooses of the girls; though I must throw in<sup>15</sup> a good word for my little Lizzy.'

- 1 acknowledged. Riconosciuta.
- 2 in want. Alla ricerca.
- 3 neighbourhood. Comunità, società locale.
- 4 let. Affittato.
- 5 in a chaise and four. In una carrozza a quattro cavalli.
- 6 before Michaelmas. Prima del giorno di S. Michele (29 settembre).
- 7 tiresome. Irritante, noioso.
- 8 his design in settling. Il suo proposito nello stabilirsi.
- 9 likely. Probabile.
- 10 party. Gruppo.
- 11 you flatter me. Mi lusinghi.
- 12 to give over. Rinunciare, smettere.
- 13 I engage for. Posso ingegnarmi a fare.
- 14 merely on that account. Solo per quel motivo.
- 15 throw in. Aggiungere.



'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.'

45 "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*<sup>16</sup> *than her sisters*.'

'Mr Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me<sup>17</sup>. You have no compassion on my poor nerves.'

50 'You mistake me, my dear. *I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them*<sup>18</sup> *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*.'

55 'It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come since you will not visit them.'

'Depend upon it<sup>19</sup>, my dear, that *when there are twenty, I will visit them all*.'

*Mr Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts*<sup>20</sup>, *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*

60 *uncertain temper. When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace*<sup>21</sup> *was visiting and news*.

- 16 quickness. Prontezza, vivacità.  
 17 vexing me. Contrariarmi, irritarmi.  
 18 mention them. Nominarli.  
 19 Depend upon it. Puoi contarci.  
 20 quick parts. Vivacità, impulsività.  
 21 solace. Consolazione, sollievo.

It is the introduction to the novel, and it anticipates some remarkable features of the novel.

We get to know that the main worry of upper middle class family who have daughters is marriage: **marriage** is the most important theme of the novel, and it is closely connected to **love, status** and **wealth**.

Marriage will be presented in the novel from several point of view.

- The marriage between Elizabeth's best friend Charlotte and Mr Collins is based on security
- Instead an other point of view is the **infatuation**, which is the marriage between Lydia and Mr Wickham
- The marriage between Mr Bingley and Elizabeth is better because it is based on. **physical attraction** and **real love**: this is the perfect marriage according to Jane Austen: it is based on mutual comprehension.
- Mr and Mrs Bennet are quite peculiar, since their marriage was based on physical attraction, but through the time beauty became withered, and now there is nothing, since they are too different:
  - Mr Bennet dislikes his wife, he despises her; he is much more clever than his wife, and he belongs to a superior family; he left his wife educate their 5 daughter , and he has isolated from the family (he is a sort of misanthrope). He looks down to his wife and daughter. He has given up in their education because his wife is uncontrollable, and he appreciates only one of his daughter, which is **Elizabeth**.
  - Mrs Bennet on the other hand is superficial, simple minded, ignorant and moody. He cares only about social occasions and gossip.

- This is an example of how a marriage should never be from the very beginning: it's a way to demonstrate Austen's thesis.