***Pride and Prejudice***

***Volume 1***

***Chapter 4***

***Summary in Detail:***

* When [**Elizabeth**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/elizabeth-bennet)and [**Jane**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/jane-bennet) are alone, we learn that Jane likes [**Mr. Bingley**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/charles-bingley)a lot more than she lets on.
* We also learn a major difference between the sisters: Jane doesn't think much of herself, but she sure thinks highly of other people. And Lizzy, of course, is almost the exact opposite.
* Jane even claims to have liked Mr. Bingley's sisters.
* We then transition to descriptions of Mr. Bingley and [**Mr. Darcy**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/fitzwilliam-darcy)who are coincidentally very similar to the sisters.
* They're both good men, but Mr. Bingley tends to like people and be liked in return, while Mr. Darcy … not so much.
* Like, Mr. Bingley claims to have never met a more agreeable, good-looking crowd of [**women**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/themes/women-and-femininity) than at the ball, but Mr. Darcy thinks—well, we've already learned what he thinks.
* Fine, he'll admit that Jane is pretty. But she smiles too much. (Is that even a thing?)

***Brief Summary:***

Eager to learn more, Mrs. Bennet and the girls question Mr. Bennet incessantly. A few days later, Mr. Bingley returns the visit, though he does not meet Mr. Bennet’s daughters. The Bennets invite him to dinner shortly afterward, but he is called away to London. Soon, however, he returns to Netherfield Park with his two sisters, his brother-in-law, and a friend named [Darcy](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/character/fitzwilliam-darcy/).

Mr. Bingley and his guests go to a ball in the nearby town of Meryton. The Bennet sisters attend the ball with their mother. The eldest daughter, [Jane](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/character/jane-bennet-and-charles-bingley/), dances twice with Bingley. Within her sister [Elizabeth’s](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/character/elizabeth-bennet/) hearing, Bingley exclaims to Darcy that Jane is “the most beautiful creature” he has ever beheld. Bingley suggests that Darcy dance with Elizabeth, but Darcy refuses, saying, “she is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me.” He proceeds to declare that he has no interest in women who are “slighted by other men.” Elizabeth takes an immediate and understandable disliking to Darcy. Because of Darcy’s comments and refusal to dance with anyone not rich and well-bred, the neighborhood takes a similar dislike; it declares Bingley, on the other hand, to be quite “amiable.”

At the end of the evening, the Bennet women return to their house, where Mrs. Bennet regales her husband with stories from the evening until he insists that she be silent. Upstairs, Jane relates to Elizabeth her surprise that Bingley danced with her twice, and Elizabeth replies that Jane is unaware of her own beauty. Both girls agree that Bingley’s sisters are not well-mannered, but whereas Jane insists that they are charming in close conversation, Elizabeth continues to harbor a dislike for them.

The narrator then provides the reader with Bingley’s background: he inherited a hundred thousand pounds from his father, but for now, in spite of his sisters’ complaints, he lives as a tenant. His friendship with Darcy is “steady,” despite the contrast in their characters, illustrated in their respective reactions to the Meryton ball. Bingley, cheerful and sociable, has an excellent time and is taken with Jane; Darcy, more clever but less tactful, finds the people dull and even criticizes Jane for smiling too often (Bingley’s sisters, on the other hand, find Jane to be “a sweet girl,” and Bingley therefore feels secure in his good opinion of her).

### *Analysis: Chapters 1–4*

The opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*—“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife”—establishes the centrality of an advantageous marriage, a fundamental social value of Regency England. The arrival of Mr. Bingley (and news of his fortune) is the event that sets the novel in motion. He delivers the prospect of a marriage of wealth and good connections for the eager Bennet girls. The opening sentence has a subtle, unstated significance. In its declarative and hopeful claim that a wealthy man must be looking for a wife, it hides beneath its surface the truth of such matters: a single woman must be in want of a husband, especially a wealthy one.

[Read more about the significance of the first line of the novel.](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/key-questions-and-answers/#what-is-the-significance-of-the-novels-opening-line)

The first chapter consists almost entirely of dialogue, a typical instance of Austen’s technique of using the manner in which characters express themselves to reveal their traits and attitudes. Its last paragraph, in which the narrator describes Mr. Bennet as a “mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice,” and his wife as “a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper,” simply confirms the character assessments that the reader has already made based on their conversation: Mrs. Bennett embodies ill-breeding and is prone to monotone hysteria; Mr. Bennet is a wit who retreats from his wife’s overly serious demeanor. There is little physical description of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, so the reader’s perception of them is shaped largely by their words. Darcy makes the importance of the verbal explicit at the end of the novel when he tells Elizabeth that he was first attracted to her by “the liveliness of [her] mind.”

[Read more about Jane Austen's writing style.](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/style/)

The ball at Meryton is important to the structure of the novel since it brings the two couples—Darcy and Elizabeth, Bingley and Jane—together for the first time. Austen’s original title for the novel was *First Impressions*, and these individuals’ first impressions at the ball initiate the contrasting patterns of the two principal male-female relationships. The relative effortlessness with which Bingley and Jane interact is indicative of their easygoing natures; the obstacles that the novel places in the way of their happiness are in no way caused by Jane or Bingley themselves. Indeed, their feelings for one another seem to change little after the initial attraction—there is no development of their love, only the delay of its consummation. Darcy’s bad behavior, on the other hand, immediately betrays the pride and sense of social superiority that will most hinder him from finding his way to Elizabeth. His snub of her creates a mutual dislike, in contrast to the mutual attraction between Jane and Bingley. Further, while Darcy’s opinion of Elizabeth changes within a few chapters, her (and the reader’s) sense of him as self-important and arrogant remains unaltered until midway through the novel.

***Analysis:***The following day, Lizzie and Jane discuss the evening's events. Jane is obviously very much taken by Mr. Bingley. Elizabeth approves of Jane's choice, but being the more reasonable sibling, she is not as prone to unnecessary flattery as Jane is, and senses immediately that while Mr. Bingley is a perfect gentleman in every sense of the word, his sisters are not equal to him in manners and good breeding.

It is in chapter 4 that we begin to learn about Jane Bennet, the eldest daughter. She is the sister that Elizabeth is closest to, and sensible, sensitive, and kind. She also has the potential to be slightly naïve, tending to ignore the bad in people and believe everyone to be as good and kind as she herself. The conversation Jane has with Elizabeth about the Miss. Bingleys, and their differences of opinion on the subject foreshadow events in the future that prove Elizabeth correct in her original assessment of the Bingley sisters.

In this chapter, we also learn about Mr. Bingley's financial circumstances. His father had made his fortune in trade, and had intended to purchase an estate with his savings. Dying before managing to make the purchase, Mr. Bingley junior was left a small fortune of 100,000 pounds, and his sisters are anxious that he should use it to purchase an estate.

***Synopsis:***

When they are alone, Jane admits her feelings for Bingley to Elizabeth. It is clear that the sisters are quite close. Elizabeth approves of Bingley, but cautions Jane to be certain of the nature of her feelings because the older Bennet daughter never sees fault in anyone. They also discuss Caroline and Bingley's other sisters. Elizabeth found them to be snobbish, but Jane describes them as charming.

The narrator then reveals some important personal information about Bingley and Darcy. Bingley is extraordinarily wealthy because of a large inheritance from his late father. He has been friends with Darcy for a long time, despite their opposite personalities. Bingley is easy-going and open, while Darcy is haughty and reserved. While Bingley found the company at the Meryton ball to be quite amiable, Darcy saw no one with whom he wished to associate. Darcy even finds fault with the beautiful Jane; she smiles too much for his taste. Bingley's sisters approve of Jane, though, which makes their brother happy.

## ***Critical Analysis:***

Jane and Elizabeth discuss the ball, especially Mr. Bingley's attention to Jane. Elizabeth points out how she and her sister are different in temperament. Jane is much more accepting and open to other people, perhaps blinding her to their faults. Elizabeth tends to be less open-minded and accepting of others, and she does not hesitate to express her opinions.

Simultaneously, Mr. Bingley, his sisters, and Mr. Darcy discuss the ball. Mr. Bingley found the women who attended to be lovely and charming, especially [Jane Bennet](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Pride-and-Prejudice/character-analysis/#Jane_Bennet). Mr. Darcy is far less complimentary, finding little beauty or fashion among the attendees. All of them, including Mr. Bingley's sisters, consider Jane to be very pretty and perhaps worth knowing.

The aftermath of the Meryton ball provides more character insights. Elizabeth considers herself less kind and generous than her sister. She teasingly accuses Jane of being oblivious to the flaws and attitudes of others. Ironically, the criticism of obliviousness will later apply to Elizabeth as her initial impressions of Mr. Darcy and other characters evolve.

Elizabeth's reflection on the Bingley sisters illustrates attitudes about class and social mobility at the time. The narrator points out that the sisters "had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds; were in the habit of ... associating with people of rank; and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others." The Bingleys inherited their considerable wealth from their father, who earned it through "trade," or business. As members of the newly rich, they are less respected by the traditional landed gentry. This fact makes their snobbery more pronounced and, as [Austen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Pride-and-Prejudice/author/) emphasizes, more irritating.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part***

***Summary Part 1:***

Upstairs, [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/jane-bennet) and [Elizabeth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/elizabeth-eliza-lizzy-bennet) talk more openly about their admiration for [Bingley's](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters) looks, humor, and manners. Jane is reluctant to say anything bad about Bingley's sisters, but Elizabeth is skeptical of them. She thinks they are educated and polished, but conceited.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Elizabeth is quick to judge and is unimpressed by the higher class. On the other hand, Jane refuses to judge anyone badly, which makes her seem angelic but also naÏve.

***Summary Part 2:***The narrator explains [Bingley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters)'s background: he has a respectable family; he inherited £100,000 and may be looking to buy an estate; and he's renting Netherfield in the meantime. His sisters, [Mrs. Hurst](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters) and [Caroline](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters), are very happy to follow him around.

***Analysis Part 2:***

£100,000 is a lot of money, making Bingley very high class. At the same time, Bingley's lack of a home reflects his immaturity and lack of confidence in his decisions.

***Summary Part 3:***[Bingley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters) and [Darcy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/fitzwilliam-darcy)'s friendship is explained as a meeting of opposites: Bingley's easy manner and Darcy's more stringent personality. Bingley deeply respects Darcy's judgment. But their demeanors are different. Anywhere they go, Bingley is sociable and well-liked, while Darcy is always so aloof that he offends people. After the ball, Bingley was delighted with the locals (especially [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/jane-bennet)) but Darcy considered them plain and uninteresting.

***Analysis Part 3:***Novels about marriages are frequently concerned with bringing two parties with different characteristics into harmony. Friends like Bingley and Darcy are also opposites: each has some admirable and some weak traits that the other helps to expose and resolve.