

Pride and Prejudice

In the early 19th century, during the Napoleonic Wars, the Bennet family lives at their Longbourn estate, situated near the small town of Meryton in Hertfordshire, England. Mrs. Bennet's greatest desire is to marry off her five daughters to secure their futures. A regiment of Militia is encamped outside the town, and the younger Bennet daughters flirt with the officers.



She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me.

The arrival of Mr. Bingley, a rich bachelor who rents the neighbouring Netherfield estate, gives her hope that one of her daughters might contract a marriage to their advantage, because, as stated in the novel's opening sentence, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife". At a ball, the family is introduced to the Netherfield party, including Mr. Bingley, his two sisters, Caroline, who is unmarried, and Louisa, who is married to Mr. Hurst, and his closest friend Mr. Darcy. Mr. Bingley's friendly and cheerful manner earns him popularity among the guests. He appears interested in Jane, the eldest Bennet daughter. Mr. Darcy, reputed to be twice as wealthy as Mr. Bingley, is haughty and aloof, causing a

decided dislike of him. He declines to dance with Elizabeth, the second-eldest Bennet daughter, as she is "not handsome enough". Although she jokes about it with her friend, Elizabeth is deeply offended. Despite this first impression, Mr. Darcy secretly begins to find himself drawn to Elizabeth as they continue to encounter each other at social events, appreciating her wit and frankness.

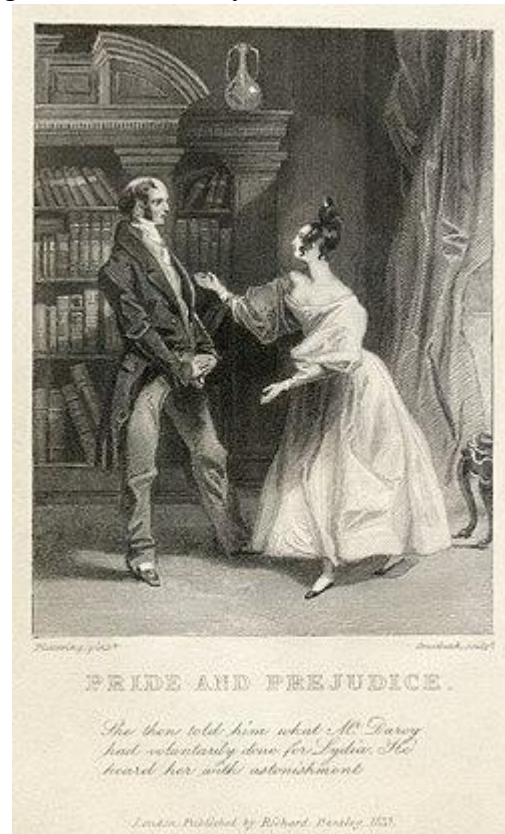
Mr. Collins, a recently ordained clergyman and, as a distant cousin, the presumptive inheritor of the Longbourn estate, visits the Bennet family with the intention of finding a wife among the five girls under the advice of his patroness Lady Catherine de Bourgh, also revealed to be Mr. Darcy's aunt. He decides to pursue Elizabeth. The Bennet family meets the charming militia officer George Wickham, who tells Elizabeth in confidence that Mr. Darcy had treated him badly in the past. Elizabeth's prejudice toward Mr. Darcy leads her to believe Wickham. Elizabeth dances with Mr. Darcy at a ball where Mrs. Bennet hints loudly that she expects Jane and Bingley to become engaged. Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins's marriage proposal, to her mother's fury and her father's relief. Mr. Collins subsequently proposes to Charlotte Lucas, a friend of Elizabeth's, and is accepted. Having heard Mrs. Bennet's words at the ball, and disapproving of the marriage, Mr. Darcy prompts Mr. Bingley to leave for London and then, supported by the two sisters, persuades him not to return to Netherfield. A heartbroken Jane visits her Aunt and Uncle Gardiner in London to raise her spirits, while Elizabeth's hatred for Mr. Darcy grows, as she suspects he was responsible for Mr. Bingley's departure.

In the spring, Elizabeth visits Charlotte and Mr. Collins in Kent. Elizabeth and her hosts are invited to Rosings Park, Lady Catherine's home. Mr. Darcy and his cousin, Colonel Fitzwilliam, are also visiting. Fitzwilliam tells Elizabeth how Mr. Darcy recently saved a friend,

presumably Bingley, from an undesirable match. Elizabeth realises that the prevented engagement was to Jane. Mr. Darcy proposes to Elizabeth, declaring his love for her despite her low social connections. She is shocked, as she was unaware of Mr. Darcy's interest, and rejects him angrily, saying that he is the last person she would ever marry and that she could never love a man who caused her sister such unhappiness; she further accuses him of treating Wickham unjustly. Mr. Darcy brags about his success in separating Bingley and Jane and sarcastically dismisses the accusation regarding Wickham without addressing it. The next day, Mr. Darcy gives Elizabeth a letter explaining that Wickham, the son of his late father's steward, had refused the parish "living" Mr Darcy's father had intended for him, and was instead given money to pursue a career in the law. Wickham had quickly squandered the money and then tried to elope with Darcy's 15-year-old sister, Georgiana, for her considerable dowry. Mr. Darcy also writes that he separated Jane and Bingley because he believed her to be indifferent to Bingley and because of the lack of propriety displayed by her family. While still believing Mr Darcy having been mistaken about Jane, Elizabeth realises from his letter how much he has had to be on guard against marital adventurers; and is ashamed by her mother's predatory behaviour and her own prejudice.

Elizabeth tells her father that Darcy united Lydia and Wickham – one of the two earliest illustrations of Pride and Prejudice. The fashions reflect the engraving date (1830s), not the period of the novel.

Months later, Elizabeth accompanies the Gardiners on a tour of Derbyshire. They persuade Elizabeth to visit Pemberley, Darcy's estate there, noting that he is unlikely to be at home. When Mr. Darcy returns unexpectedly, he is exceedingly gracious with Elizabeth and the Gardiners. Elizabeth is surprised by Darcy's behaviour and grows fond of him, even coming to regret rejecting his proposal. In Derbyshire she receives news that her sister Lydia has run off with Wickham. She tells Mr. Darcy; both depart in haste. The errant couple are eventually tracked down in London. After an agonising interim, Wickham agrees to marry Lydia; all assume that Mr Gardiner has paid-off Wickham; and Mr Bennet is deeply troubled at how this debt may be repaid. But when Lydia and Wickham, now married, visit the Bennet family at Longbourn; Lydia accidentally lets slip to Jane and Elizabeth that Mr. Darcy was at her wedding. Jane assures Lydia that they will not probe her further; but Elizabeth, seized with suppositions, writes to Aunt Gardiner for further information. Although Mr. Darcy, seeking to avoid placing Mr Bennet and Elizabeth under further obligations, had sworn everyone involved to secrecy, Mrs. Gardiner now feels obliged to inform Elizabeth in a confidential letter that he had secured the match at



great expense and trouble to himself. Mrs Gardiner concludes this letter by observing that Mr Darcy is clearly in need of a wife, and supposes that Elizabeth is the object of his 'sly' intentions. She indirectly implies that Elizabeth herself may already be aware of this.

Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy return to Netherfield. Jane accepts Mr. Bingley's proposal. A week later, Lady Catherine, having heard from a confidential letter that Mr Collins has nevertheless shared with her, that Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy may intend to marry; visits Elizabeth and demands she promise never to accept Mr. Darcy's proposal, as she and Darcy's late mother had already planned his marriage to her daughter Anne. While admitting that she and Mr Darcy were not engaged, Elizabeth insistently refuses to offer any assurance that they would never do so. Outraged Lady Catherine storms off, pointedly refusing to proffer the conventional civilities, to confront Mr Darcy with the same demands she had made of Elizabeth. Darcy similarly refuses to comply, and heartened at his aunt's indignant relaying of Elizabeth's response, returns with Bingley to Longbourn. When Elizabeth reveals that she had already known of his part in Lydia's marriage, and offers him her thanks, Darcy realises that this may not present the bar to their engagement that he had feared. He again proposes marriage and is accepted. That evening, Darcy seeks the proper approval of Mr Bennet; and receives it, though Mr Bennet needs extensive persuading from Elizabeth that this truly is her wish. He eventually gives his blessing, at which Elizabeth lets him into the secret of what Darcy had done for Lydia. Which ostensibly takes the burden from Mr Bennet's shoulders. He may now immediately make an offer to repay the debt in full, safe in the confidence that it will be refused. But family honour will be restored.