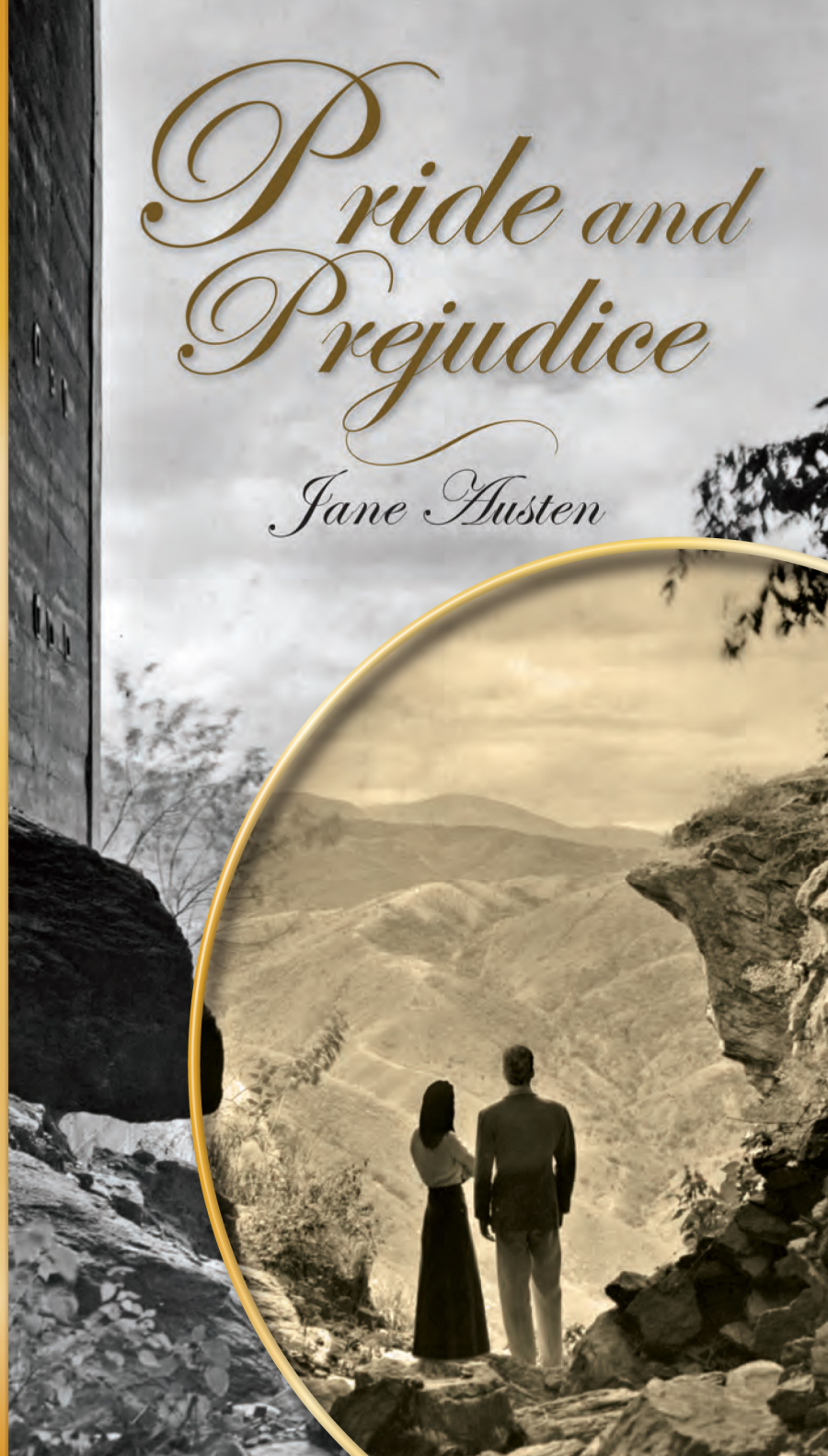


Pride and Prejudice

Jane Austen

 TIMELESS CLASSICS



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A New Neighbor

There is one truth that most women agree upon: A young, single man with a good income must be needing a wife.

When such a young man moves into a neighborhood, he may not be aware of his need for a wife. But his neighbors are well aware of it. In fact, he is considered the property of one or another of their daughters.

Mrs. Bennet had heard the nearby estate, Netherfield Park, had just been rented. She was very eager to tell her husband.

“My dear Mr. Bennet, Netherfield Park has been rented at last!” his wife announced.

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

“Do you not want to know who has taken it?” she asked impatiently.

“You want to tell me,” Mr. Bennet said, “and I have no objection to hearing it.”

“His name is Bingley,” Mrs. Bennet said. “He is a single man with a large fortune—four or five thousand a year! What a fine opportunity for our girls!”

“How so?” Mr. Bennet inquired. “How can it affect them?”

“Oh, my dear Mr. Bennet!” his wife cried. “How can you be so tiresome? You must know what I am thinking. Perhaps he will marry one of them. You must call on him just as soon as he arrives.”

“I see no reason for that,” Mr. Bennet said.

“Mr. Bennet, you seem to take delight in provoking me. You have no compassion for my poor nerves,” his wife complained.

“You mistake me, my dear,” Mr. Bennet chuckled. “I have nothing but the highest respect for your nerves. I’ve heard you talk about them for 20 years at least.”

Mr. Bennet was an odd mixture of reserve and sarcastic humor. His poor wife didn’t understand him. Her mind, however, was less difficult to understand. She knew little and

understood little. The business of her life was to get her five daughters married.

Mr. Bennet, in fact, was one of the first to visit Mr. Bingley. He revealed this news one evening when his second oldest daughter, Elizabeth, was decorating a hat. “I hope Mr. Bingley will like it,” he said quietly.

His wife sighed. “I’m afraid we shall never know what Mr. Bingley likes. In fact, I am sick of Mr. Bingley.”

“Why did you not tell me so before?” Mr. Bennet said. “I wouldn’t have visited him.”

His family’s astonishment was just what he had wished! His daughters, Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Catherine, and Lydia, were speechless. And Mrs. Bennet was the most surprised of all. But she pretended that she knew all along her husband would visit Mr. Bingley.

To the Bennet family’s delight, Mr. Bingley attended the next ball. With him, he brought his two sisters, the husband of the eldest sister, and another young man.

Mr. Bingley was a good-looking man. His manners were easy and unaffected. His sisters were fine, fashionable women.

His brother-in-law, Mr. Hurst, looked like an average gentleman. But his friend Mr. Darcy drew most of the attention. He was tall, handsome, and noble-looking. Within five minutes of his arrival, almost everyone knew he had an income of ten thousand a year. For half the evening, everyone admired him. Then their feelings turned to disgust, for they discovered what a proud fellow he was.

While Bingley danced every dance, Mr. Darcy mostly stood alone. At one point, Bingley urged his friend to join in the fun.

Elizabeth Bennet was nearby. She overheard their conversation. Since there were few men to dance with, she was sitting down.

“Come, Darcy!” Bingley urged his friend. “I must insist that you dance.”

“I certainly shall not!” Darcy said. “Your sisters have other partners, and you are dancing with the only pretty girl in the room.” He looked over at Jane Bennet.

“Oh, yes! She is the most beautiful girl I ever saw!” Bingley agreed. “But her younger sister, Elizabeth, is sitting down just behind you. She is very pretty, too.”



Darcy turned and studied Elizabeth for a moment. “She is tolerable,” he said coldly, “but not pretty enough to tempt me.”

After the men walked off, Elizabeth told her friends the story with great spirit. She had a lively, playful personality. She loved to laugh and make others laugh, too.

After the ball, Jane and Elizabeth were talking. Jane confessed that she liked Mr. Bingley a great deal.

“I was very flattered that he asked me to dance a second time,” Jane told her sister.

“I didn’t dare to expect such a compliment.”

“Did you not?” Elizabeth asked. “I did. Well, he seems very agreeable, so I’m pleased that you like him. Heaven knows, you’ve liked many a stupider person.”

“*Lizzy!*” Jane protested.

Elizabeth smiled. “Oh, you never see a fault in anybody,” she said. “In all my life, I’ve never heard you speak ill of a single human being! You have good sense—but you are blind to the nonsense of others.”

Back at Netherfield Park, Darcy and Bingley also discussed the ball. Bingley said he had never met more pleasant people in his life. And as for Miss Jane Bennet, he couldn’t imagine an angel more beautiful! Darcy, on the other hand, had no interest in anyone at the ball. He agreed that Jane Bennet was very pretty—but he thought she smiled too much.

The two friends had very different characters. Darcy admired his friend’s easiness and openness. Bingley valued Darcy’s opinion and judgment. Darcy was well-bred, but stiff. His manners were not inviting, and he often offended people. Bingley was very popular.

The Lucas family lived quite near the Bennets. Sir William Lucas had made a great fortune in trade. He'd even been knighted! After receiving this honor, however, he'd given up business entirely.

Lady Lucas was an especially good kind of woman. Charlotte, her oldest daughter, was sensible and intelligent. She was also a close friend of Elizabeth Bennet's.

The morning after the ball, the Bennets and the Lucases were gathered at Lucas Lodge. Everyone had something to say about Mr. Darcy's behavior.

"His pride doesn't offend me as pride often does," Charlotte said. "He's a fine young man, with family and fortune—he has a *right* to be proud!"

"I could easily forgive his pride," said Elizabeth, "if he had not mortified mine."

"If I were you, Lizzy," her mother said, "I would not dance with him *ever*."

"I believe, ma'am, I can promise I shall *never* dance with him!" Elizabeth assured her.

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Netherfield Hall

The more Mr. Bingley saw of Jane, the more he seemed to like her. As for Jane, Elizabeth could tell that her sister was falling in love. But Elizabeth was pleased to see that Jane refused to show her feelings. That would keep her safe from the suspicions and teasing of others. Elizabeth mentioned this to Charlotte Lucas.

“It’s not always good to be so guarded,” Charlotte said. “If a woman hides her affection, she may lose the man she likes.”

“Jane does help him on—as much as her nature will allow,” Elizabeth explained. “But whenever she sees him, it’s in a large party. She really doesn’t know his character well.”

“Of course,” Charlotte said, “I wish Jane success with all my heart. But happiness in marriage is a matter of chance. I believe it is

better to know as little as possible about the faults of the person you marry.”

Elizabeth smiled. “You make me laugh, Charlotte. You’d never act that way yourself.”

Whenever Bingley was with her sister, Elizabeth watched closely. Meanwhile, there was one thing she failed to notice: Mr. Darcy was becoming interested in *her*.

The next time Darcy saw Elizabeth was at Lucas Lodge. Several couples were dancing at one end of the room.

Sir William Lucas remarked to Mr. Darcy, “There’s nothing like dancing! I believe it’s one of the true signs of fine society.”

“Dancing is also popular in less fine societies,” Darcy said. “Every savage can dance.”

Just then, Elizabeth was moving in their direction. “Mr. Darcy,” Sir William said, “you must allow me to present this young lady to you. She’s a perfect dancing partner.”

Sir William took Elizabeth’s hand and was about to offer it to Mr. Darcy. But she instantly drew back.

“Indeed, sir,” she said quickly. “I don’t have the least intention of dancing.”