

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen, Summary



The arrival of the wealthy Mr. Bingley to the estate of Netherfield Park causes a commotion in the nearby village of Longbourn. In the Bennet household, Mrs. Bennet is desperate to marry Bingley to one of her five daughters—Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty, or Lydia. When Bingley meets Jane at a ball, he seems immediately smitten with her. Yet Bingley's snobby friend Darcy is rude to Elizabeth. Through the next few social gatherings, Jane and Bingley grow closer, while Darcy, despite himself, finds himself becoming attracted to Elizabeth's beauty and intelligence.

When Jane is caught in the rain while traveling to visit Bingley, she falls ill and must stay at Netherfield. Elizabeth comes to Netherfield to care for Jane, and though Bingley's sisters are rude and condescending to her (Caroline Bingley wants Darcy for herself), Darcy's attraction to her deepens. Elizabeth, however, continues to consider him a snob. Meanwhile, Mr. Collins, a pompous clergyman and Mr. Bennet's cousin and heir, visits the Bennets in search of a marriageable daughter. At about the same time, the Bennet sisters also meet Wickham, an army officer Elizabeth finds charming, and who claims Darcy wronged him in the past. Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy hardens. Soon after, at a ball at Netherfield, Mrs. Bennet, much to Darcy's annoyance, comments that a wedding between Jane and Bingley is likely to soon take place. Collins, in the meantime, proposes to Elizabeth, who declines, angering her mother, but pleasing her father. Collins then proposes to Elizabeth's friend Charlotte Lucas, who accepts out of a desire for security rather than a need for love.

Bingley suddenly departs for London on business, and Caroline informs Jane by letter that not only will they not be returning, but moreover her brother is planning to wed Georgiana, Darcy's sister. Jane is crushed. Elizabeth is sure Darcy and Caroline are deliberately separating Bingley and Jane. The sisters' aunt and uncle, Mr. Gardiner and Mrs. Gardiner, invite Jane to London hoping that she will get over her disappointment, but after she arrives Caroline snubs her and she regrets letting herself fall in love with Bingley. Elizabeth visits Charlotte and Mr. Collins, where she encounters Collins' patron and Darcy's relative, the wealthy and formidable Lady Catherine. Darcy arrives and surprises Elizabeth by joining her for long intimate walks. She grows angry, however, when she learns that Darcy advised Bingley against marrying Jane. Oblivious, Darcy announces his love for her and proposes marriage. Elizabeth refuses his proposal, accusing him of ruining Jane's marriage and mistreating Wickham. In a letter Darcy explains that he intervened because he felt Jane did not truly love Bingley. Wickham, he writes, is a liar and a scoundrel. Elizabeth begins to feel she has misjudged Darcy and may have been rash in turning him down. Returning home, Elizabeth finds that Lydia has become smitten with Wickham. She urges her father to intervene, but he chooses to do nothing. Elizabeth soon accompanies the Gardiners on a trip. During the trip, Elizabeth visits Pemberley, Darcy's magnificent estate. She fantasizes about being his wife there and is further impressed when he unexpectedly shows up and introduces her to his charming sister, Georgiana. Bingley also arrives and reveals that he is still in love with Jane.

Elizabeth's trip is cut short by a letter from Jane announcing that Lydia has eloped with Wickham. Fearing a scandal that will ruin all the daughters' futures, the Bennets search for Lydia in London. When Mr. Gardiner tracks them down, Wickham demands his debts be paid off in return for marrying Lydia. The Bennets assume that Gardiner gives in to the demand, since Lydia and Wickham soon return, playing the happy newlyweds. (Mrs. Bennet is happy that at least one of her daughters is married.) Elizabeth soon discovers that Darcy, not Gardiner, paid off Wickham's debts, out of love for her. Bingley and Darcy return to Netherfield and Bingley finally proposes to an overjoyed Jane. While Darcy goes to London on business, Lady Catherine visits Elizabeth, warning her not to marry Darcy. Elizabeth refuses to promise. On his return, Darcy asks Elizabeth again to marry him. This time she accepts, telling him her prejudice against him had made her blind. Darcy acknowledges that his pride made him act rudely. Both couples are married and the Bennet family rejoices in their daughters' happiness.