

Pride and Prejudice



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JANE AUSTEN

Jane Austen was the seventh child of the parish rector in the town of Steventon, where she and her family resided until moving to Bath in 1801. Though her parents were members of the English gentry, they remained relatively poor. Modest to a fault about the value of her work, Jane Austen nevertheless produced some of the enduring masterpieces of English literature, including the novels *Pride and Prejudice*, [Sense and Sensibility](#), [Emma](#), and [Persuasion](#). Her novels were published anonymously until after her death, when her authorship became known. While it was not unheard of for women to publish under their own names in Austen's lifetime, it was still a rarity. Despite the fact that her books focus on the intricate rituals of courtship and marriage among the British middle class, Austen herself remained single throughout her life, preferring the life of a writer over that of a wife and hostess.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Austen's novels are famous for the way they seem to exist in a small, self-contained universe. There are almost no references in her work to the events of the larger world. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Austen's depiction of life in the tranquil English countryside takes place at the same time when England was fighting for its life against the threat of Napoleon, and all of Europe was embroiled in war and political chaos. No mention is ever made of the imminence of a French invasion in her novels. Napoleon was finally defeated by the British at Waterloo in 1815, two years before Austen's death.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Between the late 18th and early 19th centuries, English literature underwent a dramatic transition. The 18th century had seen the rise of the novel in the works of writers like Daniel Defoe ([Moll Flanders](#)) and Samuel Richardson ([Pamela](#)). These novels focused on broad social issues of morality and domestic manners. With the turn of the century and the rise of Romanticism, however, the novel began to explore human relationships with a greater degree of emotional complexity. Neither a Classicist nor a Romantic, Jane Austen is perhaps best thought of as a pioneering figure in the development of the novel, providing the bridge from the often didactic novels of an earlier era to the great works of psychological realism of the Victorian period by writer such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Pride and Prejudice*
- **When Written:** 1797-1812
- **Where Written:** Bath, Somerset, England
- **When Published:** 1813
- **Literary Period:** Classicism/Romanticism
- **Genre:** Novel of manners
- **Setting:** Hertfordshire, London, and Pemberley, all in England at some time during the Napoleonic Wars (1797–1815)
- **Climax:** The search for Lydia and Wickham
- **Antagonist:** There is no single antagonist. The sins of pride and prejudice function as the main antagonizing force
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Pride and Silver Screen? *Pride and Prejudice* was first adapted for movies in a 1940 production starring Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier. It was again filmed in 1995, as a mini-series for A&E Television, featuring Jennifer Ehle as Elizabeth Bennet and Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy. The most recent production stars Keira Knightley as Elizabeth and was filmed in 2005.

First Impressions: Austen's initial title for her manuscript was "First Impressions." Though the book was eventually published as *Pride and Prejudice*, the initial title hints at the story's concern for social appearances and the necessity of finding people's true qualities beneath the surface.



PLOT 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.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet — The novel's heroine and the second oldest of the five Bennet sisters, Elizabeth is smart, lively, and attractive. She prides herself on her ability to analyze other people, but she is very often mistaken in her conclusions about their motivations. To her credit, though, she is eventually able to overcome her own prejudice. Elizabeth places little value on money and social position. Instead she prizes a person's independence of character and personal virtue. Although she is drawn to Darcy, she resists him based on her own mistaken preconceptions about him.

Fitzwilliam Darcy — Bingley's closest friend, the brother of Georgiana, and the nephew of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Darcy is very wealthy and a person of great integrity, but his extreme class-consciousness makes him appear vain and proud. He finds Elizabeth attractive, even ideal, but is clumsy in expressing his feelings and disdains her sometimes crass family. Elizabeth's harsh appraisal of him compels him to reassess his behavior and attitudes. Her intelligence and her disregard for mere social rank teaches him to see people more for who they are, rather than the status in to which they were born.

Jane Bennet — The oldest of the Bennet sisters, Jane seems almost too good to be true: beautiful, sweet-tempered, and modest. Her sole fault is that she refuses to think badly of anyone. She always looks on the bright side and is quick to defend someone when Elizabeth suspects them of having shortcomings.

George Wickham — Wickham is an officer in the local military regiment and appears to be the very model of a gentleman. In reality, he is a liar, hypocrite, and an opportunist. He thinks nothing of ruining a young woman's reputation, and is instead much more concerned with paying off his massive gambling debts.

Mrs. Bennet — Mrs. Bennet is a giddy, frivolous woman whose only purpose in life seems to be gossiping and marrying off her five daughters. She lacks any awareness of her vulgar conduct and embarrasses Elizabeth and Jane to no end. Her behavior depicts what can happen to women when they lack an education and the ability to think for themselves.

Mr. Bennet — Though a discerning, well-educated man, Mr. Bennet has made a bad marriage and is resigned to endure it. He is a good-hearted person, but fails his family by remaining sarcastically detached: everything is a joke to him. This leads to poor judgment, as when he does not interfere between Lydia and Wickham.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Charles Bingley — Bingley is Darcy's best friend and the brother of Caroline Bingley and Mrs. Hurst. Unlike Darcy, however, Bingley is down to earth. Despite his huge wealth, he is humble and modest, placing no great weight on social standing.

Lydia Bennet — The youngest of the Bennet sisters, Lydia is a vain, empty-headed flirt who has never had to deal with the consequences of her actions. She is her mother's favorite.

Catherine (Kitty) Bennet — The second youngest of the Bennet sisters. A bit of a whiner, she tends to follow Lydia.

Mary Bennet — The middle child of the five Bennet sisters. Mary is plain looking and a recluse who enjoys lecturing others about morality, which she learns from books.

Mr. Collins — Mr. Bennet's cousin and heir to the Bennet estate. His patroness is Lady Catherine. He is a ridiculous pompous clergyman concerned only with impressing others.

Charlotte Lucas — A close friend of Elizabeth's. She weds Mr. Collins for security, not love, but nevertheless finds happiness in her situation.

Sir William Lucas — Charlotte's father, foolishly obsessed with rank.

Lady Lucas — Charlotte's mother.

Mrs. Gardiner — Mrs. Bennet's sister-in-law. Intelligent and caring, she is the mother that Elizabeth and Jane cannot find in Mrs. Bennet.

Mr. Gardiner — Mrs. Bennet's brother and a successful, warm-hearted, cultivated merchant.

Caroline Bingley — Charles Bingley's sister. She cares only about social status and tries to undermine Elizabeth because she wants Darcy for herself.

Mrs. Hurst — Bingley's other sister. Though married, her views and temperament mirror her sister Caroline's.

Georgiana Darcy — Darcy's younger sister. Georgiana is a shy, good-spirited person whom Elizabeth wrongly dislikes until they meet and become friends. Georgiana has her own scandalous history with Wickham.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh — Domineering and rich, Lady Catherine meddles in everyone's affairs and cannot tolerate any breach of class rank.

Miss de Bourgh — Lady Catherine's sickly daughter. Her

mother intends for Darcy to marry her.

Colonel Fitzwilliam — Darcy's cousin and Georgiana's guardian. He's a model gentleman, though as a second son he lacks any inheritance and so must seek out money through marriage.

Mrs. Philips — Mrs. Bennet's shallow silly sister. The gossip queen of Meryton.

Colonel Forster — The leader of Wickham's regiment.

Mrs. Forster — Colonel Forster's wife. She irresponsibly aids Lydia in her elopement with Wickham.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



PRIDE

Pride is a constant presence in the characters' attitudes and treatment of each other, coloring their judgments and leading them to make rash mistakes. Pride blinds Elizabeth and Darcy to their true feelings about each other. Darcy's pride about his social rank makes him look down on anyone not in his immediate circle. Elizabeth, on the other hand, takes so much pride in her ability to judge others that she refuses to revise her opinion even in the face of clearly contradictory evidence. This is why she despises the good-hearted Darcy for so long, but initially admires the lying Wickham. Yet while *Pride and Prejudice* implies that no one is ever completely free of pride, it makes it clear that with the proper moral upbringing one may overcome it to lead a life of decency and kindness. In the end, the two lovers are able to overcome their pride by helping each other see their respective blind spots. Darcy sheds his snobbery, while Elizabeth learns not to place too much weight on her own judgments.



PREJUDICE

Prejudice in *Pride and Prejudice* refers to the tendency of the characters to judge one another based on preconceptions, rather than on who they really are and what they actually do. As the book's title implies, prejudice goes hand in hand with pride, often leading its heroine and hero into making wrong assumptions about motives and behavior. Austen's gentle way of mocking Elizabeth's and Darcy's biases gives the impression that such mistakes could, and indeed do, happen to anyone; that faulting someone else for prejudice is easy while recognizing it in yourself is hard. Prejudice in the novel is presented as a stage in

a person's moral development, something that can be overcome through reason and compassion. Austen only condemns those people who refuse to set aside their prejudices, like the class-obsessed Lady Catherine and the scheming social climber Caroline. Though *Pride and Prejudice* is a social comedy, it offers a powerful illustration of the damaging effects to people and to society that prejudice can inflict.



FAMILY

The family is the predominant unit of social life in *Pride and Prejudice* and forms the emotional center of the novel. Not only does it provide (or fail to provide, as in the case of Lydia) the Bennet daughters with their education and manners, but the social ranking of the family determines how successful they may reasonably expect to be in later life. Austen skillfully reveals how individual character is molded within the family by presenting Jane and Elizabeth as mature, intelligent adults, and Lydia as a hapless fool. The friction between Elizabeth and her mother on the one hand and the sympathy she shares with Mr. Bennet on the other illustrate the emotional spectrum that colors the family's overall character. The influence of Elizabeth's aunt and uncle shows how the family works in an extended sense, with the Gardiners acting as substitute parents, providing much needed emotional support at key moments of stress.



MARRIAGE

Pride and Prejudice is a love story, but its author is also concerned with pointing out the inequality that governs the relationships between men and women and how it affects women's choices and options regarding marriage. Austen portrays a world in which choices for individuals are very limited, based almost exclusively on a family's social rank and connections. To be born a woman into such a world means having even less choice about whom to marry or how to determine the shape of one's life. The way that society controls and weakens women helps to explain in part Mrs. Bennet's hysteria about marrying off her daughters, and why such marriages must always involve practical, financial considerations. As members of the upper class, the Bennet sisters are not expected to work or make a career for themselves. Yet as women they are not allowed to inherit anything. As a result, marriage is basically their only option for attaining wealth and social standing. Yet Austen is also critical of women who marry solely for security, like Charlotte. The ideal for her is represented by Elizabeth, who refuses to trade her independence for financial comfort and in the end marries for love.



CLASS

Class is the target of much of the novel's criticism of society in general. Austen makes it clear that people like Lady Catherine, who are overly invested in their social position, are guilty of mistreating other people. Other characters, like the suck-up Mr. Collins and the scheming Caroline, are depicted as thoroughly empty, their opinions and motivations completely defined by the dictates of the class system. To contrast them, Austen offers more positive examples in Bingley and the Gardiners. Bingley is someone from the upper class who wears his position lightly and gallantly. The Gardiners represent the honest, generous, and industrious middle class and are examples of how to be wealthy without being pretentious.

Austen does seem to respect the class system in a few ways, especially when it operates not as a dividing power in society, but as a force for virtue and decency. Darcy is the primary example of Austen's ideal high-class gentleman. Though originally he seems to be an arrogant and selfish snob, as the novel progresses it becomes clear that he is capable of change. Eventually, thanks to Elizabeth's influence and criticism, he combines his natural generosity with the integrity that he considers a crucial attribute of all upper-class people. He befriends the Gardiners and plays a key role in helping the ungrateful Lydia out of her crisis. The marriage of Darcy and Elizabeth shows that class restrictions, while rigid, do not determine one's character, and that love can overcome all obstacles, including class.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



HOUSES

Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen pays particular attention to the manner and style of many of the characters' homes or estates. A small-scale home like the Bennets' is presented as a suitable, if modest, dwelling place in which to raise five daughters. Though it's somewhat plain, it's still respectable. In contrast, larger manors like Bingley's at Netherfield Park, Lady Catherine's estate of Rosings, or Darcy's palatial home of Pemberley are showcases for their owner's enormous wealth and are conspicuous symbols of social prestige. Elizabeth's reaction on first seeing Pemberley and her imagining how it would be to live there illustrates that even her calm, cool sense of detachment is awed by the beauty and size of the estate. In a way, houses and estates function as the outward signs of their owner's inward character. They carry an almost spiritual significance. Rosings may be grand, but it does not possess the tasteful elegance of

Pemberley. Elizabeth's elevation from Longbourn to Pemberley marks not only a rise in her social position, but an advance in her moral growth as well.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Pride and Prejudice* published in 2002.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☝ It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

With this, one of the most famous opening lines in literature, *Pride and Prejudice* begins. Austen will quickly move into greater specifics, as she describes the goings-on at the Bennet house, but it is telling that it is a general statement, and not a description of a particular family in general, that sets the tone for the book. It is ironic that Austen's "universal" is, of course, limited to a particular moment in history and to a particular, upper-class social environment. However, for that group, this fact *is* so widespread as to be universal as well as obvious - even if another aspect of that environment is that people tend not to explicitly talk about such facts.

In Austen's universe, people seek order and stability through two main venues: fortune and marriage. Men who have a certain income, and thus can comfortably imagine starting a family, seek wives who can give one to them: women, on the other hand, who are barred from holding fortunes themselves, can only find an equivalent stability in marrying a man who is wealthy enough to support them. For the rest of the book, Austen will explore in intricate detail the lives of a single family and the people around them, but here she suggests that their story is not unique but typical and representative - and that this makes their story more, not less, interesting and relevant.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝ His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there again.

Related Characters: Fitzwilliam Darcy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Elizabeth is about to overhear Darcy say to Bingley that Elizabeth isn't pretty enough for him to ask her to dance, so he'll prefer to ask no one. Darcy has acted proud and aloof throughout the dance, and this is the last straw for Elizabeth. Here, Austen screens a description of Darcy through the opinions of "everybody" at the party. Elizabeth may be making a relatively quick judgment about Darcy's character, but at least she is not alone in her judgment. Indeed, the fact that certain prejudices are shared by the majority of people in this small community is often what will allow them to be sustained for so long.

Darcy's coldness is not just looked down upon by the partygoers because he is rude; his attitude also suggests that he does not consider the others worthy of his attentions or of his politeness. As a result, their natural response is to act the same way towards him. Pride often kicks in, in the book, as a defense mechanism to prevent feelings of shame or inferiority, and here is the first major example of such a reaction.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ Oh! you are a great deal too apt, you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in anybody. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in your life.

Related Characters: Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet (speaker), Jane Bennet

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

As Jane and Elizabeth debrief on their experiences at the ball, Jane expresses surprise that Mr. Bingley would have paid her so much attention. Elizabeth exclaims that it is natural for him to do so, given all Jane's gifts. Elizabeth then criticizes Bingley's sisters, while Jane is reluctant to say anything bad about them. Here Elizabeth makes a more general statement about Jane's willingness to see the positive in everyone, and to fail to criticize - not because she is holding her tongue, but because she really is so slow to

judgment. Elizabeth is implicitly contrasting Jane with her own tendency to judge others, a tendency shared by many in their community.

In Austen's work, families often are composed of quite different elements, their members possessing distinct character traits, rather than being joined under a shared ethos. The differences between Jane and Elizabeth (not to mention the other Bennets) give Austen the opportunity to explore the intricacies of family life but also to develop some of her major interests, including that of prejudice, since each character reacts so differently to it.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ Darcy had at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty ... But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she hardly had a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes ... he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness.

Related Characters: Fitzwilliam Darcy, Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 24


Explanation and Analysis

Elizabeth has walked three miles to Netherfield in order to look after Jane, who has fallen ill, and Darcy - who is at Netherfield as well - is impressed both by her insistence on running after her sister (something that other characters find unladylike) and by how pretty she looks as she arrives, anxious and eyes shining. Darcy too had leapt to conclusions the first time he had seen Elizabeth, affected by the assumptions of his class and social environment that found her wanting in several aspects. Now, however, when he considers her more closely, he finds that she is pleasing both physically and in terms of her spirit and intelligence. While this passage is an example of Darcy's slow maturation, as he opens his mind to the possibility of liking Elizabeth, it also underlines the way men saw and judged women at the time, frankly and even like property that they might be interested in.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ Having now a good house and a very sufficient income, [Mr. Collins] intended to marry ... he meant to choose one of the daughters, if he found them as handsome and amiable as they were represented by common report. This was his plan of amends—of atonement—for inheriting their father's estate; and he thought it an excellent one, full of eligibility and suitability, and excessively generous and disinterested on his own part.

Related Characters: Mr. Collins

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Collins has inherited Mr. Bennet's estate since women, at this time in England, do not have the right to inherit property. In some ways, Mr. Collins is thus simply fulfilling the general statement that began the book: now that he has a considerable income, he will go in search of a wife. But he also fancies himself a fount of kindness and generosity, as he seeks to restore some sense of fairness to the dealings.

The tone throughout this passage, however, is undeniably ironic. Austen may not believe that there is anything intrinsically wrong about primogeniture (the rule by which an estate passes to the first-born son or other male relative), but she certainly can see how silly it is for Mr. Collins to think himself so generous and kind, when he is really just planning to share with one of the daughters the riches that he took away from them in the first place. Austen also pokes fun at Mr. Collins's high-minded self-regard in general, suggesting that he holds himself a bit too much in esteem.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ When Mr. Wickham walked into the room, Elizabeth felt that she had neither been seeing him before, nor thinking of him since, with the smallest degree of unreasonable admiration. The officers of the —shire were in general a very creditable, gentlemanlike set, and the best of them were of the present party; but Mr. Wickham was as far beyond them all in person, countenance, air, and walk.

Related Characters: Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet, George Wickham

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 75



Explanation and Analysis

Elizabeth and Mr. Wickham find themselves at dinner together, and before Wickham sits down she watches him and compares him to his fellow officers. Just as Elizabeth was quick to pronounce a judgment on Darcy's demeanor from afar, now she quickly comes to an opinion about Mr. Wickham based largely on how he looks and acts, and although she doesn't know him very well. Here we see how prejudice does not always have to be a negative sentiment: indeed, one can easily be prejudiced in favor of someone or something. Although we see the scene through Elizabeth's eyes, we are meant to question her unbridled admiration. Is Wickham really the most admirable of *all* the officers, and in *all* the traits that Elizabeth describes? Austen is sympathetic towards Elizabeth's assumptions, but she also cautions the reader against being caught up in the same current.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☝☝ Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications. As I must therefore conclude that you are not serious in your rejection of me, I shall choose to attribute it to your wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females.

Related Characters: Mr. Collins (speaker), Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

In this excruciating scene, Mr. Collins proposes marriage to Elizabeth, and, as she attempts to reject the proposal again and again, simply brushes off the rejection. He knows that he is rich and Elizabeth comparatively poor: everything he has been taught tells him that there can be no rational reason for her to reject his offer (only the more irrational question of love and suitability). Mr. Collins is blinded by this businesslike and rationalistic (though in his defense quite widespread) understanding of marriage. He even weighs Elizabeth's beauty and amiability against her paltry income to conclude that he must be right.

Mr. Collins's speech grows increasingly ridiculous from beginning to end. He finally does bring in evidence from more romantic sources, but only as further evidence in his

favor, as he refuses to believe he can fail to see the truth. By portraying Mr. Collins as so utterly blind and silly in his stubbornness, Austen reminds us that considering marriage as a business transaction can lead to truly awkward consequences - even if she does not embrace the other extreme of passionate love.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☝☝ Mr. Collins, to be sure, was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want.

Related Characters: Mr. Collins

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis



Mr. Collins's next marriage proposal is to Elizabeth's friend Charlotte Lucas. Unlike Elizabeth, Charlotte accepts. She too understands that Mr. Collins is far from the ideal husband, that he is petty, pompous, and can even be ridiculous. But here she attempts to explain her reasoning for why she will marry him, in the absence of love or admiration. Charlotte has a true realist's attitude towards marriage. She knows that since she is not wealthy, it will be her greatest source of stability, and as a well-educated young lady, she knows just how important stability and order are in order to allow her to pursue the few things that women are allowed to pursue in this society.

While Austen had ridiculed Mr. Collins's businesslike view of marriage, Charlotte's attitude is treated with greater sympathy. Working within a system that disadvantages women, Charlotte makes a calculated move that will actually allow her more freedom than if she remained single and less well-off. Elizabeth may not agree with Charlotte's choices - and we will see later a more ideal scenario for marriage - but we are not meant to entirely dismiss or scorn Charlotte's decision either.

Chapter 29 Quotes

☝☝ Her air was not conciliating, nor was her manner of receiving them such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank. She was not rendered formidable by silence; but whatever she said was spoken in so authoritative a tone, as marked her self-importance

Related Characters: Lady Catherine de Bourgh

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Collins has, smirkingly, warned Elizabeth that it's just as well that she has only a simple dress, since Lady Catherine enjoys making distinctions of class and rank even more obvious than they already are. Now, having arrived at the home for dinner, Elizabeth realizes just how true that is. Lady Catherine seems to almost gloat about her social position - and about how much higher her position is than that of her guests. Rather than make them feel comfortable and at home, she prefers to act as if class differences are a natural mark of hierarchy in character and worth as well.

Elizabeth isn't the kind of person who would allow such attitudes to embarrass or shame her. She holds her head high in such situations: while Lady Catherine's pride is boastful, Elizabeth is shown to be elegant and proper.

Chapter 33 Quotes

☝☝ If his own vanity, however, did not mislead him, *he* was the cause, his pride and caprice were the cause, of all that Jane had suffered, and still continued to suffer. He had ruined for a while every hope of happiness for the most affectionate, generous heart in the world; and no one could say how lasting an evil he might have inflicted.

Related Characters: Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet, Fitzwilliam Darcy, Jane Bennet

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

Speaking with Colonel Fitzwilliams, Elizabeth learns that Darcy - a friend of his - has intervened to stop Bingley from making an "impudent marriage." Elizabeth realizes that he must be talking about Bingley's relationship with her sister Jane. She is appalled, and immediately takes the opportunity

to condemn Darcy with all her judgment. She particularly criticizes his pride, as she assumes that he considers the Bennet girls too lowly and unworthy for a gentleman like himself and his friend Bingley.

Although this understanding of marriage was relatively common at the time, Elizabeth takes a quite different opinion. She argues internally that Jane's character is so unblemished that anyone would be lucky to marry her, regardless of his fortune. It is Jane's unquestionable goodness that makes Darcy's actions such a crime in Elizabeth's eyes (not to mention her sense of pride in response to the notion that her family is more unworthy than others). Darcy sinks even lower in her estimation, even as she decides not to try to confirm her assumption by talking to Fitzwilliam.

Chapter 34 Quotes

☝☝ "In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you." ... He spoke well; but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed; and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding

Related Characters: Fitzwilliam Darcy (speaker), Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

Darcy arrives at the Bennet home to make an offer of marriage to Elizabeth, something that shocks her entirely. Although Elizabeth admires Darcy's eloquence, her pride is deeply hurt by just how much he lingers on everything that counts *against* her, everything *in spite of* which he still, strangely, loves and wants to marry her. Darcy says that his feelings are real and strong, but then he lingers over her inferior social situation and her embarrassing family. As he enumerates the list, he seems cold and calculating; his first words about his "ardent" admiration and love begin to seem totally out of place, if not a painful joke.



We see here, however, just how knotty a problem it was at this time for people from even slightly different social stations to marry. Darcy believes he is simply being honest,

and that by showing how society strives against such a marriage, he will flatter Elizabeth - since he still wants to marry her even so. But Elizabeth, proud as she is, cannot understand how Darcy can be both in love with her and conscious of her inferiority. Such an attitude towards a future partner utter disqualifies him from her consideration. Of course, Elizabeth already knows exactly what she thinks about Darcy, so it is doubtful that anything he would say would be considered positively or generously by her.

Chapter 36 Quotes

☝☝ I, who have prided myself on my discernment!—I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable mistrust.—How humiliating is this discovery!—Yet, how just a humiliation! ... Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself.

Related Characters: Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet, George Wickham, Fitzwilliam Darcy

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

Elizabeth has read Darcy's long letter explaining himself, and although she only slowly begins to realize its truth, she soon accepts it and then turns to a contemplation of her own character and of her own mistakes. This interior monologue, in which Elizabeth flits from thought to thought, is a kind of epiphany: thanks to the letter, she sees her past and those around her in an entirely new light. It is only now that Elizabeth understands the full implications of her prejudice. She had always thought this attitude superior to that of Jane's, because it allowed her to be a good judge of character and separate the good from the ill. Now, however, she recognizes that her mistrust was completely baseless, and that she would have done well to follow the unprejudiced attitude of her sister.

In addition, Elizabeth has to come to terms with the painful realization that she has acted precisely opposite to the way she should have, prizing one man over another and courting unsavory values as opposed to defensible ones. It was her pride, among other things, that led to her stubborn judgments of Darcy, as well as to her prejudice in favor of Wickham. Elizabeth's mistake is thus humiliating because of

the consequences it has for how she has treated other people; but it is also so painful because she realizes only now just how little self-knowledge she really had.

Chapter 40 Quotes

☝☝ There certainly was some great mismanagement in the education of those two young men. One has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it.

Related Characters: Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet (speaker), George Wickham, Fitzwilliam Darcy

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 217



Explanation and Analysis

Elizabeth is relating to her sister Jane everything that has happened and what she has learned since reading Darcy's letter. Here, she makes some remarks that sum up much of what she has realized about the two men, Darcy and Wickham: while Wickham has succeeded in convincing everyone around him that he is good, only Darcy is truly a good person. Darcy and Wickham have been paired at various points in the book: not only are they Elizabeth's two main love interests, but they allow Austen to develop a more nuanced account of prejudice and judgment by considering both men and both cases. Austen is not against all judgment: indeed, Elizabeth's pronouncement here can be considered another judgment itself. Instead, the book makes it clear that initial prejudice can often cloud rational thinking and prevent true, proper judgment - a process that only time, patience, and humility will allow to unfold.

Chapter 41 Quotes

☝☝ Our importance, our respectability in the world must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character. Excuse me—for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment.

Related Characters: Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet (speaker), Lydia Bennet, Mr. Bennet

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis



Lydia has accepted an invitation from Colonel Foster to join the regiment at Brighton. It is not considered proper for a young woman to run after soldiers in such a way: even Elizabeth, who is quick to flout societal pressure in other ways, recognizes how important it is for Lydia's and the family's reputation that she calm down and refrain from acting in such a way.


Mr. Bennet is a largely "hands-off" father: that is, tucked away behind his newspaper, he lets things unfold as they will, without seeking to interfere in them in any way. Here Elizabeth begs him to reconsider this parenting strategy. She knows that if Lydia is allowed to do whatever she likes, she will never learn to act properly, and soon she will be set in her ways - there is only a small window of time left. Elizabeth has taken it upon herself to look after her family's reputation, since her father is, in her eyes, failing to lead the family as he should, and she knows that this decision will only further contribute to their appearance of inferiority in the eyes of others - as well as contributing to Lydia's sorry character.

Chapter 43 Quotes

👁️ Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!

Related Characters: Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet, Fitzwilliam Darcy

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 235

Explanation and Analysis

Elizabeth is touring Pemberley, Darcy's estate, and she is impressed by the beauty of the place. Elizabeth has never been vain or silly (like her sister Lydia), and this is one of the few times that she seems enraptured by something so material as an estate. Still, Pemberley is closely linked in her mind with Darcy as a person, and as she tours it she cannot help but imagine a life that might have been possible for her, had she not made the mistake of rejecting his proposal.

Elizabeth does not really feel at home with her own family, and she knows that as a young lady without a fortune she cannot create a home for herself without a husband. At Pemberley she indulges in the thought that being with Darcy would have allowed her to have this kind of home, with all the order and stability that stems from it, and even to be "mistress" of a place. Elizabeth's fanciful thoughts are less rational than is usually the case for her, but they are meant to show just how powerful the symbols of class and class stability can be for someone in a vulnerable position at this time.

Chapter 44 Quotes

👁️ When she saw him thus seeking the acquaintance and courting the good opinion of people with whom any intercourse a few months ago would have been a disgrace—when she saw him thus civil, not only to herself, but to the very relations whom he had openly disdained ... the difference, the change was so great, and struck so forcibly on her mind, that she could hardly restrain her astonishment from being visible.

Related Characters: Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet, Fitzwilliam Darcy

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 251



Explanation and Analysis

Darcy has come to see Elizabeth and Jane with their relatives the Gardiners, and has even brought his sister Georgiana. The Gardiners are just the example of the kind of inferior relations that Darcy had mentioned when making his awkward proposal of marriage. Now that Elizabeth has rid herself of her prejudice against Darcy, she sees his tone and actions with new eyes: but it also seems true that Darcy's own attitude has shifted. A great part of the reason that Elizabeth had long wanted nothing to do with Darcy was that he looked down on her and her family, making her natural, even defensive feeling of pride kick in: now that reason seems no longer to exist. We are meant now to take Elizabeth's judgments at her word, having witnessed her epiphany and painful acceptance of the fact that she judged too quickly before. Now, instead, she pays close attention to what surrounds her so as to make the most accurate judgment possible.

Chapter 47 Quotes

☞☞ Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson: that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable; that one false step involves her in endless ruin; that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful; and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex.

Related Characters: Mary Bennet (speaker), Lydia Bennet

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 275

Explanation and Analysis

Lydia has run away with Mr. Wickham, and the entire Bennet family is frantic as each member attempts to track her down and save her from utter ruin. Here, though, Mary Bennet attempts to siphon off something useful from this embarrassing, shameful family incident, by making a broader moral judgment. The Bennet women may think themselves at least somewhat stable, but Lydia's story has taught them that reputation and social judgment are incredibly precarious, and it doesn't take much to lose a reputation that one has spent years cultivating. A woman's "virtue" is highly prized in this society, and for women who do not possess a fortune or other coveted possessions, virtue is what they may cling to in order to assure a decent, and even moderately independent, life for themselves.

Chapter 48 Quotes

☞☞ The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this ... They agree with me in apprehending that this false step in one daughter will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others; for who, as Lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family?

Related Characters: Mr. Collins (speaker), Mr. Bennet, Lydia Bennet, Lady Catherine de Bourgh

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 281

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Collins has written a letter of condolences to the Bennet family, but he hardly seems to strike a tone of compassion or understanding. Instead, his attitude seems almost gleeful, as he carefully delineates just how Lydia's


ruinous decision will affect not only her life, but also the prospects of each of her sisters.

Lady Catherine, of course, should be known to us by now as proud in the worst ways, acutely aware of subtle class differences and eager to maintain those differences in any way possible - without taking to account more significant (at least in Austen's view) elements of character and morality that should support, not compete with, class distinctions. That Mr. Collins has embraced such a viewpoint speaks, in one sense, to his own sense of pride: having been refused marriage by one of the Bennet sisters, he takes some satisfaction in seeing the family fall from grace. But his attitude is also meant to stand in for societal opinions in general. In this environment, great danger can stem from one young woman's careless actions. Marriage for these women is not just a frivolous matter; without other means of freedom, it determines what kind of lives they can hope to have, so anything that jeopardizes their marriage prospects must be treated with the utmost seriousness.

Chapter 49 Quotes

☞☞ It is all very right; who should do it but her own uncle? If he had not had a family of his own, I and my children must have had all his money, you know; and it is the first time we have ever had anything from him, except a few presents. Well! I am so happy! In a short time I shall have a daughter married. Mrs. Wickham! How well it sounds!

Related Characters: Mrs. Bennet (speaker), Mr. Gardiner, Lydia Bennet, George Wickham

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 290

Explanation and Analysis

Thanks to Mr. Gardiner, Lydia's honor and reputation have been saved: Mr. Wickham will marry Lydia, as long as Mr. Bennet pays him a certain amount annually. Suspecting that Mr. Gardiner has already paid Wickham a good deal himself, Elizabeth and Jane wonder how they can ever repay him. Mrs. Bennet, though, does not linger over such questions of gratitude or debt. She is shown here at her most shallow, caring largely for appearances - how impressed others will be that Lydia is marrying such a man. She doesn't think of what kind of character Wickham must have: for Mrs. Bennet too marriage is a kind of transaction, and while Austen doesn't *entirely* disagree with this point of view, she shows just how much she disapproves of taking that idea to this extreme.

Chapter 52 Quotes

☝ They owed the restoration of Lydia, her character, every thing, to him. Oh! how heartily did she grieve over every ungracious sensation she had ever encouraged, every saucy speech she had ever directed towards him. For herself she was humbled; but she was proud of him. Proud that in a cause of compassion and honour, he had been able to get the better of himself.

Related Characters: Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet, Fitzwilliam Darcy, Lydia Bennet

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 309

Explanation and Analysis



Elizabeth learns from Mrs. Gardiner's letter that it was in fact Darcy who negotiated Lydia's and Wickham's marriage and paid Wickham off, asking only that Mr. Gardiner take the credit so that his generosity might remain secret. Now Darcy grows in even greater estimation in Elizabeth's eyes. She is once again reminded of how she allowed too-quick prejudices to cloud her opinion of him, whereas now she has subtle but concrete proof of Darcy's goodness and humility.

Elizabeth recognizes, too, that pride doesn't always have to be a vice: you can be humble yourself but proud of other people, in which case the sentiment becomes virtuous. She knows that Darcy isn't perfect - he has the tendency to be proud just like her - but she realizes that he has conquered his innate sense of class differences in order to help a family in desperate need. As a result she only admires him more.

Chapter 55 Quotes

☝ in spite of his being a lover, Elizabeth really believed all his expectations of felicity to be rationally founded, because they had for basis the excellent understanding, and super-excellent disposition of Jane, and a general similarity of feeling and taste between her and himself.

Related Characters: Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet, Charles Bingley, Jane Bennet

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 328

Explanation and Analysis

Bingley has proposed marriage to Jane, and Elizabeth is overjoyed. Here she shares some of what she has learned

about what is important to her in marriage and in family life, lessons that she has developed over the course of the novel. Elizabeth doesn't share the opinion of some, like Lady Catherine, who believe marriage to be a confirmation of undeniable class differences, and therefore also a chance to look down on those who have less attractive options. Nor does she share her mother's view, that marriage is the chance to claw one's way up the social ladder and then grow smug about one's success.

However, Elizabeth is also wary of the opposite understanding of marriage, such as Lydia's heady, irrational escape based on her feelings for Wickham. Instead, Elizabeth promotes a mix of reason and love. Indeed, she believes that love can be even stronger when founded on real, true facts, principles of character and personality. Elizabeth's enumeration of the reasons Jane and Bingley may be happy might sound a bit cold to a modern reader; but her balanced, rational approach shows her maturity in a world in which marriage is probably the most important choice, and the freest one, that a young lady can make.

Chapter 56 Quotes

☝ I have said no such thing. I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to *you*, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me.

Related Characters: Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet (speaker), Lady Catherine de Bourgh

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 338

Explanation and Analysis

Lady Catherine de Bourgh claims that Elizabeth has tricked her nephew Darcy into proposing to her. She also demands that Elizabeth refuse any offer of marriage from Darcy, who is meant to marry Lady Catherine's daughter. Elizabeth here refuses. She is shocked by Lady Catherine's brute frankness and scheming attitude towards marriage, and in response to the suggestion that she is not "good enough" for Darcy, her natural pride kicks in to enough of an extent for her to hold her ground against the older woman.

Elizabeth claims here that Lady Catherine is meddling in affairs that do not concern her at all. Because she is from a wealthier background than Elizabeth, she seems to believe that she can say what she want, and holds that Elizabeth must out of shame bow to Lady Catherine's wishes. While

the novel respects class differences to a certain extent, it also wishes to show how inappropriate such blatant displays of class friction can be, and how unpleasant they can become.

Chapter 57 Quotes

☝☝ *That is what makes it amusing. Had they fixed on any other man it would have been nothing; but his perfect indifference, and your pointed dislike, make it so delightfully absurd!*

Related Characters: Mr. Bennet (speaker), Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet, Fitzwilliam Darcy

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 344

Explanation and Analysis



Mr. Bennet has called Elizabeth in to share with her a rumor that is going around about Elizabeth's and Darcy's possible engagement. Mr. Bennet thinks that such a thought is wild and hilarious. He is absolutely certain that Darcy has no interest in Elizabeth, and that the same is true from his daughter to Darcy. Mr. Bennet has largely stayed out of his daughter's love interests and affairs before, and he doesn't meddle in them now, but his comment reflects the fact that he does have an opinion on what goes on even if he doesn't interfere.

Elizabeth is embarrassed that her father has miscalculated so wildly. Like Elizabeth, in fact, he has judged the possible relation between her and Darcy and found there to be nothing that could possibly develop between them. Mr. Bennet's comment is thus meant to show once again how wrongheaded quick prejudice can be, not to mention painful for the parties involved.

Chapter 58 Quotes

☝☝ *What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased.*

Related Characters: Fitzwilliam Darcy (speaker), Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 349

Explanation and Analysis

Elizabeth and Darcy have finally met in private again, and Elizabeth breaks propriety to confess that she knows about all Darcy did for Lydia. She is willing to risk being overly frank because she wants Darcy to know just how much gratitude she has for him, and just how much her prejudiced feelings towards him have shifted since their last meeting. Darcy, in turn, is utterly gracious as he reflects on Elizabeth's refusal of his offer of marriage. The refusal was a blow to his pride, of course, but it helped him to realize just how much he needed to be humbled, just how much he needed to ease his sense of pride and entitlement. Elizabeth has grown in his estimation since he asked her to marry him, and both of them have learned important lessons in the meantime.

Chapter 59 Quotes

☝☝ *I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage ... My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life.*

Related Characters: Mr. Bennet (speaker), Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 356

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Bennet is initially shocked and confused when Elizabeth tells him the news of Darcy's proposal, and of her changing attitudes towards him. Indeed, his reaction and that of the entire Bennet family underline just how rare it is for someone's prejudices to change. But Mr. Bennet, unlike others, finds this change of heart a sign of Elizabeth's complexity of character, rather than of any kind of inconsistency.



Mr. Bennet has remained in the background for much of the novel. Here, though, we learn that he has a surprisingly nuanced understanding of what marriage means. He does not assume that men are naturally more intelligent and more witty than women: indeed, he clearly considers his daughter more clever and interesting than most. However, Mr. Bennet does see this quality as somewhat of a liability:

he assumes that the man must always be considered superior in marriage, so the problem for Elizabeth becomes how she might find someone who is even more talented than she is. Mr. Bennet's remarks thus show a great deal of respect and care for his daughter, even as they also rely on certain assumptions about what an "equal" marriage entails that stem from sexist social realities.

Chapter 60 Quotes

☛ The fact is, that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking, and looking, and thinking for *your* approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike *them*.

Related Characters: Elizabeth (Eliza, Lizzy) Bennet (speaker), Fitzwilliam Darcy

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 359

Explanation and Analysis

Elizabeth and Darcy finally directly broach the topic of their mutual prejudice and suspicion, as well as how those feelings began to loosen for each of them. Here Elizabeth suggests that it is precisely because she was not like other upper-class women, because she did not align with the assumptions of how ladies in her station should act, that Darcy slowly found himself attracted to her - even though Darcy always officially scorned women who failed to align with propriety. Elizabeth has a different view of marriage than many of her peers: she puts a great deal of emphasis on character, and this passage highlights how important she finds mutual attraction based on personality rather than on looks or on economic or social factors. Still, the fact that it took so long for Darcy to realize that he felt differently reminds us just how strongly he was influenced by the social ideas of what marriage should look like.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The narrator begins with the statement: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." Then the narrator begins the story. One day in their modest house in Longbourn, Mrs. Bennet shares some news with her husband, Mr. Bennet. A wealthy young gentleman, Charles Bingley, has just rented the nearby estate of Netherfield. Mrs. Bennet twitters with excitement because she wants him to meet her daughters and hopefully marry one.

One of the most famous lines in literature, the opening establishes the pursuit of marriage as central to the social world of the English gentry. In addition, the claim that a wealthy man must be looking for a wife shows how desperately important it was for women to marry wealthy men. In Austen's time, they had no other means of support.



Mrs. Bennet asks her husband to get them an introduction. Mr. Bennet purposely frustrates his wife by sarcastically replying that he'll write to give his consent for Bingley to marry any of his daughters, especially Elizabeth, whom he considers especially bright.

In terms of taking an interest in their daughters' futures, Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet are polar opposites: she gets involved while he remains distant and makes jokes.



CHAPTER 2

Without telling his family, Mr. Bennet visits Bingley. Back at home, Mr. Bennet teases his family by pretending to be uninterested in Bingley's arrival, only to then reveal his visit by asking Elizabeth when the next ball is scheduled and promising to introduce her to Bingley beforehand.

It was inappropriate for women to seek a direct introduction to men, so Mr. Bennet must initially act as the mediator. Mr. Bennet's visit shows that even he recognizes the importance of making a match.



Mrs. Bennet is delighted and praises her husband and his little joke. She promises all the girls that they'll get a chance to dance with Bingley.

An early sign of Mrs. Bennet's fickle character. She can snap from disapproval to approval.



CHAPTER 3

Mr. Bingley pays a return visit to Mr. Bennet and is subsequently invited to dinner at Longbourn. Elaborate plans are made, but Bingley breaks them because of urgent business in London. He soon returns, however, along with his sister Mrs. Hurst and her husband, his youngest sister Caroline, and his friend Darcy for the upcoming ball.

Austen focuses on just a few families of different status—the extremely wealthy upper class (Bingley and Darcy) and the less wealthy country gentry (the Bennets)—in order to reveal the class dynamics of her society on a small scale.



The ball takes place at Meryton, where the locals gossip about the newcomers. Darcy is handsome but proud and aloof. Bingley makes friends with everyone, dancing every dance, including several with Jane, which makes the Bennets very happy.

Elizabeth overhears Bingley tell Darcy that Jane is the most beautiful girl he's ever seen. Bingley demands that Darcy find someone to dance with, and suggests Elizabeth. Darcy says she isn't pretty enough for him. Elizabeth overhears, and is annoyed.

Returning home, Mrs. Bennet regales her husband with an abundance of details. She is excited for Jane and convinced of Bingley's interest in her, and detests Darcy for his attitude about Elizabeth.

CHAPTER 4

Upstairs, Jane and Elizabeth talk more openly about their admiration for Bingley's 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.

The narrator explains Bingley'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 and Caroline, are very happy to follow him around.

Bingley and 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) but Darcy considered them plain and uninteresting.

CHAPTER 5

The next morning, the Bennet women walk over to discuss the ball with their neighbors: Sir William Lucas, Lady Lucas, and Charlotte, who is their eldest daughter and is Elizabeth's close friend.

Balls were among the few socially acceptable venues for mingling between the sexes. Here the locals make character judgments based on appearances and first impressions.



Initially prideful, Darcy doesn't think these country people are good enough for him. Elizabeth has pride, too: though looks aren't everything to her, Darcy's insult still stings.



Mrs. Bennet's attitude toward Darcy and Bingley is already fixed, showing how strong prejudices can be once formed.



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.



£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.



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.



The Lucas family can sympathize with the Bennets because their daughters will also need husbands.



Everyone agrees that Bingley liked Jane. The conversation quickly shifts to Darcy. Apparently he offended everyone who tried to speak with him. Charlotte consoles Elizabeth about Darcy's insult and wishes he would have agreed to a dance, but she adds that Darcy's pride may be forgiven because of his high standing and fortune. Elizabeth responds that she could forgive his pride if he hadn't insulted her own.

Mary pompously lectures the group about human nature. She clarifies that pride is self-regard while vanity concerns what others think of you.

Here Charlotte suggests that pride isn't always bad. Indeed, pride can help protect a family reputation, or can provide the motivation to help people. Charlotte also implies that sometimes men's faults have to be overlooked when you're on the hunt for a husband.



Mary represents a very strict by-the-book type of morality that, Austen makes clear, needs to be tempered with experience.



CHAPTER 6

Bingley's sisters soon start exchanging visits with Jane and Elizabeth. Elizabeth suspects they are only nice to Jane because of Bingley, whose admiration for Jane seems to grow with every meeting.

Suspecting that Jane is falling in love, Elizabeth admires her sister's composure. She privately mentions it to Charlotte Lucas, who warns that women who don't show their affection risk losing the objects of it. Elizabeth considers this attitude too businesslike; besides, Jane can't know her true feelings yet. Charlotte replies that happiness in marriage happens only by chance.

Meanwhile, as he spends more time with her, Darcy begins to notice Elizabeth's beauty and verve. At a party, Sir William Lucas tries to set up Darcy and Elizabeth to dance, but she refuses. Later, Darcy tells Caroline that Elizabeth has captured his admiration, though to Caroline's relief he seems to show no interest in marrying Elizabeth and gaining Mrs. Bennet as a mother-in-law.

Social interaction among gentry had to follow precise guidelines, making it difficult to discern how people really felt. Elizabeth must read between the lines.



Elizabeth believes that an individual should act with dignity and follow his or her feelings. In Charlotte's view, one's dignity and emotions must come second to the pragmatic concerns of finding financial security through marriage.



Darcy was prejudiced against Elizabeth because of her lower social standing, but time and exposure starts to change his first impressions. This shift shows Darcy's capacity to change. Even so, he still deplores Elizabeth's family's behavior and can't imagine joining their family through marriage.



CHAPTER 7

Soon after, Kitty and Lydia Bennet are thrilled to learn that a military regiment is being stationed in Meryton. They make frequent visits to Mrs. Philips to learn all they can about the officers. Mr. Bennet dismisses the girls as incredibly silly.

A letter arrives to Jane from Caroline Bingley inviting her to visit. Mrs. Bennet schemes to send Jane on horseback, even though it will rain, so that she will have to spend the night at Netherfield.

Compared to gentlemen like Bingley and Darcy, military officers offered a slightly less but still respectable option for marrying.



Mrs. Bennet is so desperate to get Jane married to a wealthy man that she's willing to risk her daughter's health by denying her shelter from the storm.



The next morning, Jane sends Elizabeth a letter explaining that she caught a bad cold in the storm. Elizabeth walks the three miles to Netherfield to care for Jane, arriving dirty and tired. Caroline later mocks Elizabeth's appearance, but Darcy is moved by the glow of exercise on Elizabeth's face. Jane's condition soon worsens and Elizabeth is invited to stay at Netherfield too.

While Elizabeth displays great loyalty to her sister, her appearance strikes Bingley's sisters as undignified. Darcy might have thought the same thing before, but now his view of Elizabeth is influenced by his growing feelings for her.



CHAPTER 8

During the conversation at dinner, Elizabeth accepts, but sees through, the empty concern that Mrs. Hurst and Caroline show for Jane. Still, she is grateful to Bingley for his sincere interest in Jane.

Elizabeth continues to value character over class. She seems to have good intuition about people's true character.



When Elizabeth returns upstairs, Mrs. Hurst and Caroline criticize her looks, manners, and judgment. Mrs. Hurst says she does really like Jane, but that her family situation—having few connections and no money—will block her hopes of making a good match. Darcy agrees.

The high class women show their prejudice. Though Mrs. Hurst speaks as if in sympathy with Jane, she's deviously trying to ruin the chances of either Bennet sister by mentioning their "family situation."



Elizabeth returns downstairs in the evening, choosing to look through some books instead of joining in cards. Caroline, who has been absorbed with Darcy, asks him about his estate, Pemberley, and about his sister, who she deems a very accomplished woman. Darcy says he knows few women who are really accomplished. Elizabeth asks his definition of the term and, stunned by the long list of qualifications, expresses witty surprise that Darcy could know anyone who with all of those characteristics.

By choosing books over the social fluff of cards, Elizabeth shows her inner substance. Plus she has the common sense to recognize the foolishness of society's unreasonable ideals about women. And she has the courage to say so in company. These characteristics distinguish her more than useless accomplishments would.



When Elizabeth leaves again, Caroline accuses her of using mean tactics to raise her own status.

Ironic, because that's actually what Caroline is doing. Caroline wants Darcy, and puts down others to elevate herself in his eyes.



CHAPTER 9

Elizabeth sends home a note requesting that her mother come and visit Jane. Mrs. Bennet arrives with Lydia and, not wishing Jane to leave Bingley's company, declares that Jane seems worse than ever.

Mrs. Bennet continues her ridiculous and manipulative campaign to "win" Bingley for Jane.



In conversation, Mrs. Bennet, seeking to raise Jane's status, tries to impress Bingley about her family and their situation in the country. Darcy suggests that one finds more variety of character in town than in the country, but Mrs. Bennet loudly objects. Everyone is surprised. Elizabeth is mortified and tries her best to fill the awkward silence.

By talking up the Bennets' status, Mrs. Bennet actually degrades it by seeming crass, foolishly proud, and clearly not of the best class or character. If you're high class, you don't need to tell others about it—they just know.



Lydia jumps in to remind Bingley of his promise to give a ball at Netherfield. Bingley says he hasn't forgotten but will wait until Jane recovers.

Lydia's insistence is impolite. Bingley, with his better breeding, turns it into a compliment to Jane.



CHAPTER 10

The next day, Elizabeth joins the evening party in the drawing room. Caroline looks on as Darcy tries to write a letter. Trying to flatter him, she offers empty compliments about his writing, but only manages to interrupt him.

Whenever a character in P&P tries to scheme their way to social advantage, they invariably end up with the opposite result.



Elizabeth and Darcy get into an argument about Bingley's character. Darcy says that people should always follow their convictions. Elizabeth counters that sometimes regard for others must modify one's conduct. But Bingley, hating conflict, stops them.

Darcy reiterates his pride in his own beliefs. Elizabeth pridefully believes that she considers other people's views, but events will show that she really just follows her own prejudices.



As Bingley's sisters sing at the piano, Elizabeth notices that she seems to fascinate Darcy. He asks her to dance and she playfully refuses. Still, Darcy is bewitched: he thinks that if it wasn't for her lowly connections, he might fall in love.

Elizabeth attracts Darcy by standing up to him. Yet class and pride are so important for Darcy that attraction alone won't suffice.



Caroline is increasingly jealous. The next day, she takes Darcy on a walk to tease him about marrying Elizabeth and about the awful family he would join.

Caroline tries to exploit Darcy's pride in the integrity of his family to protect her chances with him.



CHAPTER 11

That evening, Jane is well enough to join the group. Bingley dotes on her and talks to no one else. Caroline, watching Darcy read, pretends to be absorbed in reading a book. But she's soon bored and suggests to Elizabeth that they walk around the room together. This gets Darcy's attention.

Conversation, books, walks: these are the few tools of seduction in Austen's world. Caroline has to work to get Darcy's attention. But by doing what comes natural to her, Elizabeth gets it anyway.



Caroline invites Darcy to join them, but he says he doesn't want to interfere: they must either be sharing secrets or showing off—in which case he's happy to watch.

Sexual attraction in the novel are expressed only in little comments like these. But it's definitely there.



Elizabeth advises Caroline that the best response is to laugh at what is ridiculous, which leads to a discussion of the aspects of Darcy's character that might be ridiculed. Darcy claims that his main fault is that "my good opinion once lost is lost forever." When Elizabeth retorts that it is difficult to laugh at a "propensity to hate every body," Darcy says that if his defect is holding grudges, Elizabeth's is misunderstanding people.

Darcy incorrectly identifies his own flaw, which is the immense pride he takes in himself and his social standing. But he correctly diagnoses Elizabeth's: she believes so fully in her own ability to see to the heart of things that she becomes subject to her prejudices and blinds herself to the truth.



CHAPTER 12

Elizabeth and Jane write to Mrs. Bennet to send their carriage to take them home. Mrs. Bennet, still scheming to have them stay, replies that it isn't available. So Elizabeth and Jane have to borrow Bingley's carriage instead.

Mrs. Bennet's schemes to get Jane married to Bingley force her daughters to be beggars, making the Bennet family as a whole look bad.



Darcy is relieved: he is starting to worry that his attraction to Elizabeth might show, so he remains distant for the short remainder of her stay.

Darcy has not overcome his prejudice against the Bennet's low connections.



Though Mrs. Bennet is disappointed that Jane and Elizabeth didn't stay, Mr. Bennet is glad to have them back. He had missed their conversation amid Kitty and Lydia's infatuation with anything related to the regiment.

Mr. Bennet wants to ignore his younger daughters' interest in the regiment, to remain detached from anything that strikes him as ridiculous. This will come back to haunt him.



CHAPTER 13

The next morning, Mr. Bennet reveals to his family that they will have a surprise guest: Mr. Collins, the relative who will inherit Mr. Bennet's estate. The news upsets Mrs. Bennet because Mr. Collins can legally kick Mrs. Bennet and her daughters out of the house when Mr. Bennet dies. But the tone of reconciliation in Mr. Collins' letter consoles her.

Collins is Mr. Bennet's heir because women weren't allowed to inherit. This explains Mrs. Bennet's obsession about getting her daughters married. It was the only way to ensure their financial security, and her own if her husband died before she did.



The letter explains that Mr. Collins is now a parish rector and enjoys the patronage of Lady Catherine De Bourgh—whose wealth and generosity Mr. Collins tirelessly compliments. He now seeks to make peace in the family by some unspecified plan.

Mr. Collins gets ahead in the world not through his own virtues, but by sucking up to the rich and by his almost arbitrary future inheritance of the Bennet's property.



When Mr. Collins arrives, he is heavy, pompous, and dull. His conversation is weighted with overwrought compliments and vague hints about making amends to the Bennet daughters.

Austen makes Mr. Collins a ridiculous comic figure, in the process mocking all suck-ups.



CHAPTER 14

After dinner, Mr. Bennet gets Mr. Collins talking about his favorite subjects: his benefactress, Lady Catherine De Bourgh; her lavish estate, Rosings; and the invalid daughter who will inherit it all. Mr. Bennet sits back to enjoy the absurdity of Mr. Collins's hollow praise and self-importance.

Mr. Bennet invites Mr. Collins to read to the ladies. Offered a novel, Mr. Collins flinches in disgust and chooses instead a book of sermons. Lydia, refusing to listen to this, interrupts with bits of news about Colonel Forster. Mr. Collins seems insulted, but accepts the family's apologies and joins Mr. Bennet in a game of backgammon.

Although a clergyman, Mr. Collins is obsessed with the worldly glories of wealth and rank. Mr. Collins himself seems to have no center. He lives only to please Lady De Bourgh.



Austen uses Mr. Collin's distaste for novels to poke fun at the then-common prejudice against the immorality of novels. But Mr. Collins' readiness to play a board game instead of reading the scripture shows his shallow commitment to the gospel.



CHAPTER 15

Mr. Collins has come to Longbourn with a plan to marry one of the Bennet sisters. He believes that doing so will atone for the injustice of his taking over their inheritance. He privately tells Mrs. Bennet his intentions, and she redirects his target from Jane, whom she hopes will marry Bingley, to Elizabeth. Mr. Collins obligingly agrees to shift his focus.

Mr. Collins joins the Bennet sisters in a walk to Meryton. There, everyone's attention is captured by a striking and unfamiliar young man: Mr. Wickham, who just accepted a post in the regiment. Wickham's conversation is friendly and lively.

Just then, Bingley and Darcy come up the street and stop to chat. When Darcy and Wickham see each other, each man recoils in shock. Elizabeth wonders how they know each other. Mr. Collins and the Bennet sisters then go to visit Mrs. Philips who invites them to dinner the next night. The girls convince her to invite Wickham too.

Mr. Collins' plan falls far short of providing the Bennet girls with any kind of self-determination. In addition, though he poses as a man of convictions, his love interest can change in the blink of an eye.



Wickham is a master of first impressions. As such, he tests Elizabeth's belief that she can see through lies and falseness to uncover the truth in things.



Austen creates tension here: the details Elizabeth most wants to know are the one she can't ask about, out of politeness. At this point, Elizabeth seems to like Wickham in part because he causes Darcy discomfort.



CHAPTER 16

At dinner the next evening, Elizabeth is fascinated by Wickham's pleasant demeanor. The two of them easily fall into conversation and Wickham soon asks about Darcy. Elizabeth says he is widely disliked for his pride. Wickham withholds an opinion out of respect for Darcy's father, who Wickham reveals was his godfather and dear friend.

On the surface, Wickham is pleasant and well-mannered. Elizabeth will remember later that while Wickham says he withholds an opinion on Darcy, he soon goes ahead and gives one. But Elizabeth is under his spell and does not notice now.



Wickham explains that he was the son of one of Darcy's father's employees, and that he and Darcy grew up together. Darcy's father died and left Wickham money to pursue a career in the ministry, but Darcy, who was jealous of his father's love for Wickham, found a loophole and refused to give Wickham the money. Elizabeth is shocked and appalled.

With close relations to her own siblings and a keen sense of justice, Elizabeth is predisposed to believe Wickham's story. The story also fits perfectly with her own existing prejudices about Darcy.



Elizabeth asks about Darcy's sister, Georgiana. Wickham says that she is an accomplished young woman living in London but that she is, like her brother, distastefully proud.

This is a lie, but Wickham is on a roll. He's trying to separate himself from his former victim and degrade her, too.



Wickham, hearing Mr. Collins go on about Lady Catherine, informs Elizabeth that Lady Catherine is actually Darcy's aunt. He adds that Lady Catherine apparently hopes to marry Darcy to her daughter.

Such an arranged marriage would have been no surprise to Elizabeth. Lady Catherine seems to share Darcy's pride in their extreme high class status.



CHAPTER 17

The next day, Elizabeth tells Jane what she learned. Jane cannot believe that Darcy could be so blameworthy and that there must be other parts to the story. But Elizabeth believes Wickham, saying "there was truth in his looks." She wonders how Bingley could actually be Darcy's friend.

Elizabeth dismisses Jane for only seeing the good in people. Yet at the same time, Elizabeth bases her own preference for Wickham entirely on his looks and on her own pride in her ability to read people.



Bingley and his sisters visit Longbourn with an invitation to a ball at Netherfield. Lydia and Kitty are overjoyed. Jane is excited to see Bingley, while Elizabeth looks forward to dancing with Wickham, though Mr. Collins requests that she give him the first two dances, which she must do out of politeness.

Dancing is the closest thing to intimate physical contact allowed between unmarried people. It's a thrill.



CHAPTER 18

Arriving at the ball at Netherfield, Elizabeth is disappointed to realize that Wickham is not at the party. Elizabeth blames Darcy for Wickham's absence. She endures two dreadful dances with Mr. Collins.

Because Elizabeth is set in her own prejudice, she interprets everything against Darcy and blames him for everything.



Darcy then asks Elizabeth for a dance. Caught by surprise, she accepts. Their conversation is short and abrupt. Darcy is uncomfortable when she brings up Wickham.

Darcy's dance invite shows his growing feelings for Elizabeth. But now Elizabeth's prejudice against him is in full effect.



Afterwards, Caroline approaches Elizabeth about Wickham. He wasn't wronged by Darcy, she says. On the contrary, Wickham treated Darcy terribly and now Darcy has nothing to do with him. Jane, who has been speaking to Bingley, tells Elizabeth the same story: the fault, whatever it is, was Wickham's. But Elizabeth refuses to believe it.

Elizabeth now has evidence, from various sources, that it was Wickham, not Darcy, in the wrong. But Elizabeth pridefully chooses to go with her prejudices against Darcy and for Wickham.



The rest of the evening is a disaster. Mr. Collins rudely introduces himself to Darcy and later pontificates to the whole assembly. Darcy overhears Mrs. Bennet talking about Jane and Bingley like they're already married. Mary insists on playing the piano, and does so awfully. And Mrs. Bennet conspires to be the last to leave. Realizing that her family's reputation is falling lower than ever, Elizabeth is mortified.

Elizabeth and Jane have a social grace that their family members sorely lack. If Darcy's major concern about Elizabeth was her family, the Bennets do everything to prove that his prejudice against them is accurate.



CHAPTER 19

The next morning, Mr. Collins asks for a private meeting with Elizabeth. The rest of the family scrambles out of the room. When they are alone, Mr. Collins explains in detail his two main reasons for seeking marriage: all clergymen should marry, and Lady Catherine told him to do it. He details his income and stresses his future wife's association with Lady Catherine.

Mr. Collins wants to marry because of outside pressures. As he explains his reason for marrying, it becomes clear that his wife will be merely an ornament in the "respectable" life he's creating for himself.



Elizabeth interrupts to decline, but Mr. Collins responds that women will typically reject an offer two or three times. He goes on to say that Elizabeth should accept him because she's not likely ever to get a better offer. Elizabeth insists that she's serious, that she and Mr. Collins could not make each other happy. He doesn't understand. In exasperation, she leaves the room.

Mr. Collins makes a valid point: based on her family and situation, Elizabeth isn't likely to get a better offer. By declining his offer, she is giving up her family's best hope to hold on to their home. Even so, Elizabeth believes too strongly in love to agree to marry a man whom she doesn't even like.



CHAPTER 20

Mrs. Bennet rushes in to congratulate Mr. Collins but is shocked to hear that Elizabeth refused him. She runs to Mr. Bennet and demands that he convince his daughter to accept.

Although women could refuse a proposal, they were not expected to. Elizabeth shows her dedication to her happiness.



Mr. Bennet calmly calls in Elizabeth and, relishing the moment, tells her: "Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do."

Mr. Bennet deeply respects his daughter's intelligence. They share an ability to perceive the absurdity in the world.



Outraged, Mrs. Bennet tries to find support from anyone else: Jane, who keeps out of it, and then Charlotte Lucas, who has just arrived to visit. But it's too late. Mr. Collins soon explains to Mrs. Bennet that, though he's not insulted, he has changed his mind about wanting to marry Elizabeth.

In contrast, Mrs. Bennet doesn't really care about Elizabeth's happiness. She treats her daughters like chess pieces in a match-making game. Only marriage matters to her.



CHAPTER 21

Mr. Collins prolongs his stay, acting coldly to Elizabeth and transferring his attention to Charlotte Lucas.

Mr. Collins wastes no time in changing the object of his shallow affection yet again.



One morning, the Bennet sisters walk to Meryton and meet Wickham who confirms to Elizabeth that he was avoiding Darcy at the ball. He walks them home and Elizabeth introduces him to her parents.

Since she's interested in Wickham, Elizabeth believes everything he says. An introduction to her parents is significant: it sets the stage for courtship.



A letter from Caroline Bingley arrives for Jane, who reads it in distress. Upstairs, Jane shares the contents of the letter with Elizabeth. Everyone at Netherfield has left for London, not to return for at least six months, if ever. Caroline ends the letter by saying that she will be delighted to see Georgiana Darcy again, who she hopes will become Bingley's wife. Jane is despondent and refuses to believe that, as Elizabeth explains, Caroline is trying to break her and Bingley up while also gaining better footing with Darcy for herself. Elizabeth does manage to convince Jane that she shouldn't doubt Bingley's affections.

Elizabeth can read between the lines to discern what's really going on. Caroline wants to prevent Jane from going any further with her brother because she does not want her own family associated with the Bennets for two reasons: she disdains them; and she believes that by marrying her brother to Georgiana she will improve her own chances with Georgiana's brother, Darcy.



CHAPTER 22

Charlotte Lucas has been attentive and encouraging to Mr. Collins. One morning he sneaks out to her house and delivers a long-winded marriage proposal. Aware of his shortcomings but wanting stability in her future, Charlotte accepts. Her parents, seeing her fortunes rise so quickly, are thrilled.

Charlotte contrasts with Elizabeth in putting her future financial security before love. She knows that marriage is her only option to guard against a hard life.



Charlotte privately tells Elizabeth that she's engaged, and that all she wants is a comfortable home. Elizabeth is stunned but wishes Charlotte happiness. Afterwards, Elizabeth is disappointed that her friend is humiliating herself, having "sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage."

Elizabeth thinks she could never marry just for financial advantage. But the reasons to marry are complicated. Even Elizabeth will later have a strong attraction to Darcy's magnificent estate.



CHAPTER 23

Sir William Lucas arrives to share his happy news. Mrs. Bennet and Lydia rudely exclaim that they cannot believe it, but Elizabeth intervenes to congratulate him on the match.

Lydia and Mrs. Bennet are ignorant of social graces. Elizabeth constantly has to set the example for her family.



Mrs. Bennet fumes for days. She is angry with Elizabeth, the Lucases, and Charlotte, who will someday displace them at Longbourn. Her mood worsens when Mr. Collins returns to make wedding arrangements.

Mrs. Bennet is so angry because Elizabeth's rejection of Collins eliminates her only guarantee that she would be able to stay in her house if Mr. Bennet should die.



Meanwhile, Jane and Elizabeth start to worry because Bingley has not written. Jane writes to Caroline. Elizabeth believes that Bingley truly cares for Jane, but fears that his sisters, Darcy, and London will prove stronger than his love for Jane.

Elizabeth senses that Bingley is not completely confident and might be swayed by the prejudices of others.



CHAPTER 24

Caroline writes back: Bingley will certainly be gone for awhile and everyone is delighted with Darcy's sister, Georgiana. Jane tries to put on a brave face, telling Elizabeth that Bingley has not wronged her and refusing to believe that Caroline has ulterior motives.

Jane again insists on seeing only the bright side, denying even her own hurt feelings. It's the opposite of prejudice, but it makes her just as blind as the prejudiced Elizabeth.



Elizabeth is disgusted that Bingley could be so weak as to let his sisters and friend determine his affections. She cites him and Charlotte as examples of human inconsistency. But Jane tells Elizabeth she judges them too harshly.

Elizabeth complains that Bingley can't direct his own true feelings. This is ironic since Elizabeth's affections and prejudices are being guided by Wickham's suave lies.



Wickham occasionally visits and his pleasant company helps to dispel the gloom. Mr. Bennet encourages Elizabeth in her pursuit of Wickham.

Mr. Bennet continually fails to understand what will be good for his daughters.



CHAPTER 25

Mr. Collins leaves again and Mrs. Bennet's brother and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, arrive for a visit. Mr. Gardiner is a tradesman in London. Mrs. Gardiner is intelligent and extremely well-liked by Jane and Elizabeth.

The Gardiners represent the established middle class. They are a "lowly" family connection that might hurt the Bennet sisters' prospects of marrying well.



After listening sympathetically to Mrs. Bennet's outpouring of complaints, Mrs. Gardiner speaks with Elizabeth about Jane's situation. Elizabeth confirms that Jane was very much in love and swears that Bingley's departure was no accident.

Mrs. Gardiner takes the place of Mrs. Bennet in soothing and restoring the family. She represents a stronger, sympathetic, and more sensible mother figure for the girls.



Mrs. Gardiner proposes that Jane come stay with them in London to help her recovery. While Mrs. Gardiner promises that Jane and Bingley are not likely to meet, Elizabeth secretly hopes that Jane's presence nearby will rekindle Bingley's affections.

Because of their class, the Gardiners live in a very different part of town and travel in different social circles than Bingley and his family and friends.



CHAPTER 26

Having noticed the warmth between Elizabeth and Wickham, Mrs. Gardiner cautions Elizabeth about making an unpromising match, warning that Wickham has no fortune. Elizabeth can only promise that she won't rush into anything.

Mrs. Gardiner recognizes the hard reality of needing to marry into a secure situation. Elizabeth is not convinced, and still is focused mainly on finding love.



Mr. Collins returns for his marriage to Charlotte. Before they leave, Charlotte makes Elizabeth agree to come visit. Once she is gone, Charlotte writes to Elizabeth frequently about her excellent situation with Mr. Collins, but Elizabeth has her doubts.

Elizabeth thinks that anyone who gives up the hope of love in exchange for stability (particularly with a fool like Collins) can't be anything but miserable.



Jane travels with the Gardiners to London and writes a letter to Elizabeth. She says that she wrote to Caroline but received no reply, and then visited Caroline but was coldly received. Now four weeks have passed and Jane has heard nothing from Bingley, and when Caroline finally paid her a return visit she was again exceedingly cold.

Caroline knows that Jane and Bingley, if they saw each other, would rekindle the spark. So while being careful to conform to the niceties of high class social interaction, she at the same time does everything she can to discourage and denigrate Jane.



Around the same time, Wickham's interest shifts from Elizabeth to a young woman who recently inherited £10,000. Elizabeth finds she isn't affected much by losing Wickham's attention. She realizes she was never in love with him and wishes him well.

A double standard: Elizabeth judged Charlotte harshly for marrying for money, but excuses Wickham for seeking a fortune in marriage.



CHAPTER 27

Sir William Lucas, his youngest daughter, and Elizabeth go to visit Charlotte, stopping along the way in London to check up on Jane. Speaking privately with Elizabeth, Mrs. Gardiner confirms that Jane feels dejected, but she thinks that Jane has finally given up the illusion of Caroline's friendship.

All the major characters in the novel grow and change: after her experiences in London, Jane starts to admit that people can have cruel and deceitful intentions.



Mrs. Gardiner also consoles Elizabeth about losing Wickham. She considers his shift in attention to a suddenly-rich woman to be quite self-serving. But Elizabeth defends Wickham, reminding her aunt that she had once advised Elizabeth to think about money when marrying. Mrs. Gardiner later invites Elizabeth to join her and Mr. Gardiner on a summer tour of Derbyshire and the Lake Country. Elizabeth is delighted to accept.

Apparently it's okay—even necessary—to marry for money, but not okay to make it obvious. Elizabeth points out the contradiction in what is considered socially acceptable behavior.



CHAPTER 28

Elizabeth, Sir William Lucas, and his daughter arrive at the parsonage home of Mr. Collins and Charlotte. Mr. Collins soon gives them a tour, taking pains to show off every architectural feature, garden view, and piece of furniture in the house.

A parsonage home is the home given to a parish clergyman. But for a clergyman, Mr. Collins is obsessed with rank and riches. He seems to have things only in order to show them off.



If Charlotte is embarrassed by her husband, she hides it well. She takes Elizabeth on a tour of her neatly arranged home and Elizabeth realizes that Charlotte has made herself a comfortable life here.

Elizabeth realizes that while Charlotte's choice may mean that she doesn't have love, she has found contentment.



The next day, the arrival of a carriage at Rosings containing the young and sickly Miss De Bourgh causes a great commotion. Everyone is invited to dinner at Rosings. Elizabeth smirks that the sickly Miss De Bourgh will make the perfect wife for Darcy.

Miss De Bourgh is the exact opposite of Elizabeth. She has all the class and wealth, but none of Elizabeth's beauty or intelligence.



CHAPTER 29

Mr. Collins gloats as they prepare for the dinner. He condescendingly tells Elizabeth not to worry that her best dress is simple, because Lady Catherine "likes to have the distinction of rank preserved."

Class rank is not about personal substance: it is all about the outward and arbitrary.



At Rosings, they meet the haughty Lady Catherine, whose conversation consists entirely of commands and strong opinions. Mr. Collins and Sir William Lucas suck up to her, agreeing with everything she says. Miss De Bourgh is uncommunicative and dull.

Lady Catherine has more pride than anyone in the book. She is also friendless and can only interact by commanding people.



After lecturing Charlotte about how to run her household, Lady Catherine asks Elizabeth a series of invasive questions about her family, property, and upbringing. She disapproves of the Bennets' choices—educating their own daughters, failing to provide musical training—and is astonished that Elizabeth answers so pointedly, offering her own opinions to counter Lady Catherine's.

Lady Catherine, like Darcy, believes in a set of "accomplishments" for women. In contrast, Elizabeth is self-made and proud of having determined her own character.



CHAPTER 30

Completely satisfied with his daughter's situation, Sir William Lucas soon departs. Elizabeth and Charlotte pass the time in her drawing room, conveniently separated from Mr. Collins's room. Their dinners at Rosings continue. Lady Catherine also visits them at the parsonage, though seemingly only to dispense advice about everything she notices.

Charlotte's contentment in marriage is based on being as separate from Mr. Collins as possible. Lady Catherine believes so strongly in her high-class superiority that she thinks nothing of telling "lower class" people what to do.



Lady Catherine has arranged a visit from her nephews: Darcy (her favorite) and Colonel Fitzwilliam, his cousin. Upon their arrival, Mr. Collins brings them home for a visit. Darcy meets Elizabeth with his usual reserve. Conversation is sparse. Darcy seems uncomfortable when Elizabeth asks if he ever sees Jane in London, but the moment passes.

Lady Catherine wants nothing but the best for Darcy, which of course means her own high-class daughter. Elizabeth's prejudice toward Darcy for breaking up Jane and Bingley remains, and Darcy's reaction shows her attack is on target.



CHAPTER 31

Elizabeth and Colonel Fitzwilliam get along very well. During one visit to Rosings, he asks Elizabeth to play the piano. Darcy leaves his aunt to watch, and Elizabeth playfully accuses him of spreading her poor musical reputation. Colonel Fitzwilliam asks Elizabeth about Darcy's reputation. She relates how Darcy hardly danced at the Meryton ball, even though some ladies wanted partners.

Colonel Fitzwilliam seems at first like another potential love interest for Elizabeth. While Elizabeth lacks the musical accomplishments to recommend her to Lady Catherine, her conversation is sharp and witty, highlighting her independence of spirit.



Darcy tries to excuse his behavior at the ball by saying that he lacks the conversational warmth to introduce himself to strangers. Elizabeth counters with an analogy: if she practiced piano, she might become a tolerable musician. Darcy smiles and says that neither of them performs for strangers.

Here Darcy is trying to apologize to Elizabeth. He suggests that they share underlying similarities. He has gotten past his pride and can now perceive their fundamental compatibility.



Lady Catherine demands to be included in the conversation, and praises her daughter's musical potential—if only she were healthy. Elizabeth notices that Darcy is totally uninterested in Miss De Bourgh.

Lady Catherine sees quality where it isn't there in her daughter. Pride and class prejudice make her blind.



CHAPTER 32

The next morning, Elizabeth is surprised by a visit from Darcy. Conversation is awkward, and they struggle to avoid awkward silences. Elizabeth asks Darcy about suddenly departing Netherfield. Darcy suggests that Bingley is not likely to return there because of his connections in London. After Darcy leaves, Charlotte tells Elizabeth that the only explanation for Darcy's odd behavior in calling on her is that he must be in love with her. Elizabeth finds this idea hard to believe.

Elizabeth's barbed questions show that she blames Darcy for steering Bingley away from Jane. That Darcy doesn't quite understand her question implies that she may not be entirely right. In Charlotte's observation, Elizabeth is once again presented with evidence that she doesn't believe because of her prejudice against Darcy.



Darcy and Colonel Fitzwilliam continue their visits, but Darcy is unreadable and Charlotte comes to think that maybe it's Fitzwilliam who loves Elizabeth.

Yet Darcy is an intensely private person, which makes him hard to read.



CHAPTER 33

When she goes on walks in the countryside near Rosings, Elizabeth keeps running into Darcy by chance. During one meeting, he questions her about Charlotte's happiness and about her own feelings for the neighborhood, Elizabeth suspects that he may actually be trying to set her up with Colonel Fitzwilliam.

On another day, Elizabeth meets Colonel Fitzwilliam on a walk. As they talk, he tells her that as a younger son, he has concerns that Darcy does not have: for instance, about having to marry for money. Elizabeth blushes.

During the same conversation, Colonel Fitzwilliam relates a story about how Darcy intervened before one of his friends made an "imprudent marriage." Elizabeth realizes that Fitzwilliam is unknowingly referencing a story about Bingley and Jane, and is appalled to realize that Darcy ruined Jane's chances with Bingley. Darcy, she thinks, must have selfishly wanted Bingley to marry Georgiana instead.

Darcy tries to figure out if Elizabeth will accept him and move to Pemberley, which is nearby Rosings. But her prejudice against him leads Elizabeth to an entirely different interpretation.



Unlike Wickham, Colonel Fitzwilliam is a good man. But just like Wickham, Fitzwilliam must take into account financial concerns when thinking about marriage.



Predisposed to think of Darcy as prideful, Elizabeth's opinion of him only gets worse when she hears the story. She can't imagine that Darcy may have had legitimate concerns about Jane or the Bennets and sincerely wanted to protect his friend.



CHAPTER 34

One day, while Charlotte and Mr. Collins go to visit Rosings, Elizabeth stays behind. The doorbell rings: expecting Colonel Fitzwilliam, Elizabeth is surprised to find Mr. Darcy.

Her surprise becomes shock when he passionately confesses his love for her and asks her to marry him. Darcy then explains how his affection outgrew his concerns about Elizabeth and her family's inferiority. Elizabeth grows angry, and firmly refuses his offer of marriage.

Darcy is astonished and demands an explanation. Elizabeth blasts him for insulting her, for ruining Jane's happiness forever, and for robbing Wickham of his chances in life.

Darcy stands by his decision to break up Bingley and Jane. He is sarcastic about Wickham's misfortunes. And he tells Elizabeth that he was only being honest about his complicated feelings for her.

In Austen's time, it would be awkward and often inappropriate for an unmarried man and woman to be alone together.



It's not very romantic to reassure someone that you're no longer bothered by their inferiority. Darcy may love Elizabeth, but he's still prideful, and Elizabeth responds harshly.



Elizabeth unleashes the full force of her prejudice against Darcy, finally letting him see what she truly thinks of him.



Darcy, his pride insulted, responds with the same lack of composure. Although he isn't smooth, he is at least honest.



Elizabeth assures Darcy that he's the last man she would ever marry. Darcy leaves angrily and Elizabeth breaks down crying, though she soon regains her confidence that she was correct to reject Darcy.

Elizabeth's rejection of Darcy is the climax of her prejudice against him. Yet her crying indicates that she still may have deeper feelings for him.



CHAPTER 35

The next day, Elizabeth takes a walk. She finds Darcy waiting for her. He gives her a letter of explanation. In the letter, Darcy answers Elizabeth's charges of misconduct toward Jane and Wickham. He knew that Bingley was in love with Jane, but he detected no affection on her part and, given that, thought it unwise for Bingley to become attached to Elizabeth's family, with its improprieties and lack of wealth. In London, he joined with Caroline in convincing Bingley to give up the attachment. Darcy also confesses, with regret, to keeping Bingley from finding out that Jane was in London, too.

In Chapter 6, Charlotte warned Elizabeth that Jane needed to show her affections for Bingley. It turns out she was right, and that Darcy interpreted Jane's reserve as a lack of love for Bingley. In conjunction with the Bennets' tastelessness at the ball, he believed that the marriage was not in Bingley's interest. However, he does not admit he crossed the line by lying to Bingley.



Regarding Wickham, Darcy says that after Darcy's father died, Wickham resigned his opportunity with the church in exchange for money for law school. Rather than using the money to attend law school, though, he spent it on partying. When the money ran out, he asked Darcy for more money, and was furious when Darcy refused.

Wickham turns out to be a classic example of a corrupt, directionless opportunist. In this case, Darcy's pride meant that he refused to meet Wickham's demands. In other words, he wouldn't let Wickham use him.



Years passed. Wickham saw an opportunity with Darcy's sister Georgiana, who was both rich and, at age 15, naïve. Wickham charmed her into eloping with him, but Darcy discovered their plans and sent Wickham away. To protect his sister's reputation, Darcy has kept everything a secret. He refers Elizabeth to Colonel Fitzwilliam to confirm the story.

Wickham tried to seduce and marry Georgiana merely for her money. Darcy keeps it secret because even Georgiana's willingness to run off with Wickham could ruin her reputation and wreck her own chance at a good marriage.



CHAPTER 36

Elizabeth is stunned. At first, she doesn't believe any of this information because she thinks that Darcy's tone in the letter seems unrepentant and haughty. But, upon rereading the letter, she starts to see things in a different light. Elizabeth realizes Wickham was inconsistent and that his history was never verified. She realizes that Wickham tricked her.

At first, Elizabeth misreads the letter just as she has misread Darcy. But then she realizes that her prejudice caused her to misread Wickham without challenging his flimsy story or motives, as she always had done with Darcy.



Elizabeth is utterly ashamed. She had considered herself to be a discerning judge of character, but now she sees that she was blind and prejudiced. Until this moment, she thinks, she never really knew herself.

Elizabeth realizes her errors and faults, and begins to rebuild her character. She doesn't realize it yet, but Darcy is undergoing a similar process.



Elizabeth also rereads the part of the letter about Jane, and realizes that she can't blame Darcy for intervening: Jane was reserved, as Charlotte had pointed out; and she must admit that the other Bennets were terribly crass.

On returning to the parsonage house, Elizabeth learns that Darcy and Colonel Fitzwilliam had both visited to say good-bye.

Everything looks different when prejudices are removed. But at least Elizabeth has the strength to face and accept her failures.



Elizabeth thinks she'll never see Darcy again because she had so wrongly insulted him.



CHAPTER 37

Darcy and Colonel Fitzwilliam leave the next morning. Lady Catherine, now bored, requests to see Mr. Collins, Charlotte, and Elizabeth again. Lady Catherine supposes that Elizabeth is melancholy for having to leave Rosings herself, but Elizabeth declines the invitation to stay any longer. So Lady Catherine shows her how to pack.

Elizabeth keeps thinking about Darcy's letter. She decides that she respects Darcy but hopes never to see him again.

Lady Catherine thinks that because she is so high class she has the right to instruct other people about even the most insignificant things, such as how to pack. Her intrusions on such petty matters make her seem ridiculous.



Elizabeth is too ashamed of herself to want to see Darcy again.



CHAPTER 38

The next day, Mr. Collins delivers to Elizabeth his earnest and solemn farewell. He wishes Elizabeth the same kind of perfect happiness in marriage that he has found with Charlotte. Though Elizabeth knows that Mr. Collins' assessment of his marriage is totally wrong, she must admit that Charlotte does appear to be content.

Elizabeth arrives in London to visit with the Gardiners before returning to Longbourn with Jane. Though desperate to share her news about Darcy, she is apprehensive that the news about Bingley will hurt Jane. She decides to wait until they get home.

Mr. Collins's delusion is ludicrous: Charlotte's contentment is based on avoiding him. Elizabeth's recognition that Charlotte has found comfort, despite her earlier belief that Charlotte would be miserable, shows Elizabeth's growth.



Elizabeth is not immune to feeling flattered that someone of Darcy's stature would propose to her.



CHAPTER 39

On their way to Longbourn, Elizabeth and Jane are met by Kitty and Lydia, who talk constantly about the soldiers. Lydia tells them the regiment will soon leave for Brighton, and that she hopes to convince their parents to take everyone there for the summer. Lydia adds, with delight, that the girl Wickham was pursuing has left town, leaving Wickham available.

Lydia is completely blind to the reality of Wickham's situation. Like Elizabeth, she doesn't care about marrying for money. But she also doesn't seem to care about marrying for love. She just seems to be "boy crazy."



When they arrive home, Mr. Bennet is glad to see Elizabeth and Jane, Mrs. Bennet wants to hear about the latest fashions, and Kitty and Lydia want to walk to Meryton to see the officers. To avoid seeing Wickham, Elizabeth chooses not to accompany them.

A portrait of the Bennet family's different interests. Elizabeth's desire to avoid Wickham highlights her own embarrassment for being wrong about him.



CHAPTER 40

Later, Elizabeth tells Jane how Darcy proposed to her and also shares the part of Darcy's letter about Wickham. Elizabeth says that she can hardly believe how Darcy got all the goodness while Wickham got all the appearance of it.

Elizabeth now realizes the immense challenge involved in trying to know people beyond their appearances.



Elizabeth asks for Jane's advice: should they publicize Wickham's faults? They agree not to, for the sake of Darcy and his sister. Besides, no one would believe that Darcy is actually the good guy. Anyway, they agree, he will soon leave along the regiment with no harm done.

In a social world that so values reputations, Jane and Elizabeth make the same choice that Darcy did to keep quiet about Wickham. It's ironic that their silence about past scandal will only create more scandal in the future.



CHAPTER 41

As the regiment prepares to depart Meryton, Lydia receives an invitation from the wife of Colonel Forster to come with the regiment to Brighton. Elizabeth secretly asks Mr. Bennet to stop Lydia from going. Elizabeth urges him to realize how Lydia's flirty foolishness will hurt the family. But Mr. Bennet wants a quiet house and thinks Lydia must make her own mistakes. And besides, Colonel Forster will look after her.

Elizabeth is motivated by having lost Bingley and Darcy to the Bennet's foolishness. She urges Mr. Bennet to act like the father he's never been. But Mr. Bennet sits back and passes the job to someone else.



In the days following, Elizabeth encounters Wickham at a social event. He blushes when she asks if he knows Colonel Fitzwilliam. When Wickham asks how Darcy is doing, Elizabeth responds that she understands Darcy better now. Wickham gets the point, and they part.

Elizabeth cannot be directly insulting to Wickham, but she lets him know that she knows about his sketchy past. She also admits to realizing and respecting why Darcy is the kind of man he is.



CHAPTER 42

Elizabeth reflects on her disappointment regarding her parents' marriage. After Mr. Bennet realized he married a foolish woman, he sought comfort in his library and in making fun of Mrs. Bennet. Though Elizabeth hates to admit it, Mr. Bennet has failed as a respectful spouse and responsible father.

Elizabeth shares certain traits with her father, especially humor and intelligence, but she knows these won't suffice. She'll add a sense of responsibility and compassion to them.



In July, Elizabeth leaves on her summer holiday with Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner. They tour Derbyshire, which takes them near Pemberley. Mrs. Gardiner suggests they visit the estate. Elizabeth consents to go only when she learns that Darcy will not be there.

Elizabeth's hesitation about visiting Pemberley reflects her new concern for Darcy. She does not want her presence to embarrass him.



CHAPTER 43

At Pemberley, Elizabeth admires the estate's beauty. The house is lavish but tasteful, and Elizabeth imagines what it would have been like to be mistress of the place as Darcy's wife.

Rosings is showy, but Pemberley is tasteful. Pemberley and the high life it represents make Elizabeth fantasize about marriage.



Elizabeth and Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner are escorted around the rooms by a housekeeper who praises Mr. Darcy as a kind and generous man: good to his servants, his tenants, and especially his sister.

Darcy is Austen's ideal upper class man, balancing power and compassion, community involvement and dedication to family.



Elizabeth notices a portrait of Darcy. As she stares at it, the housekeeper asks if she thinks Darcy is handsome. Elizabeth says yes.

Pemberley makes Elizabeth see Darcy differently.



As they walk, Darcy suddenly appears—he came home a day earlier than scheduled. Elizabeth is stunned and embarrassed, but Darcy is extremely polite to them all. He impresses Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner with his courtesy, offering to take Mr. Gardiner fishing in his streams. Elizabeth silently wonders if he might still love her.

Elizabeth feels like a stalker who just got caught. But Darcy steps in and smooths out the awkward situation—a social skill Elizabeth herself possesses. Pemberley brings out an entirely different side of Darcy.



Darcy says he is expecting guests the next day: Bingley and his sisters, and Georgiana. He asks Elizabeth if he can introduce his sister to her. Elizabeth accepts. The Gardiners, having heard so many negative things about Darcy, leave with an entirely revised opinion of him.

It is now clear that Darcy is still interested in Elizabeth; she's getting a second chance. Darcy's bad reputation had prejudiced the Gardiners, but here his real character shines.



CHAPTER 44

The next day, Elizabeth and the Gardiners are again surprised when Darcy shows up with Georgiana and Bingley for a visit. The Gardiners note Darcy's eagerness and realize he must be in love.

By bringing his sister to meet Elizabeth and the Gardiners, Darcy shows he sees them as equals. He has overcome his pride.



Georgiana turns out to be shy rather than proud. Bingley, meanwhile, is delighted to see Elizabeth, and asks questions that lead Elizabeth to suspect he might still love Jane. Darcy and Georgiana invite Elizabeth and the Gardiners to Pemberley for dinner the next evening.

Elizabeth learns much more from her extended personal encounters than she ever did from reports, rumors, and her own snap judgments based on prejudice.



Elizabeth is amazed at the change in Darcy. His pride has turned into tenderness. If he was embarrassed by Elizabeth's relations before, Darcy shows nothing but good will toward the Gardiners. Above all, Elizabeth feels incredibly grateful that Darcy has forgiven her misjudgments and harsh rejection, and now treats her with affectionate respect.

Darcy's attitude toward the Gardiners—an example of Elizabeth's "lowly" connections—indicates how Darcy has grown. In his marriage proposal, he said he could overlook them. Now, he wants to engage them as friends.



CHAPTER 45

The next morning, Mr. Gardiner joins Bingley and Darcy to fish, and Elizabeth and Mrs. Gardiner visit the women at Pemberley. Caroline Bingley and Mrs. Hurst do not seem pleased to see Elizabeth.

When Darcy arrives, Caroline tries to embarrass Elizabeth by bringing up her connection with Wickham. The plan backfires: the name of Wickham mortifies Georgiana, and only Elizabeth's cool handling of the question saves the situation. After Elizabeth leaves, Caroline mocks Elizabeth's looks, but Darcy says he ranks her among the most beautiful women he knows.

Darcy's growth is highlighted by the Bingley women's lack of growth—they still look down on Elizabeth.



Caroline knows that she can't compete with Elizabeth on substance, so she once again tries to drive a wedge between them by exploiting Darcy's pride. But this effort only reveals her selfish, nasty character. Like Mrs. Bennet's schemes, Caroline's backfire because they are motivated by selfishness.



CHAPTER 46

At her inn, Elizabeth receives two awful letters from Jane. The first contains the shocking news that Lydia had run off with Wickham to get married in Scotland. The second letter has much worse news: that Colonel Forster learned that Wickham had no plans to marry Lydia at all, and that the two of them were now in London. The colonel and Mr. Bennet have gone there to search; Mrs. Bennet is a nervous wreck. Jane asks Elizabeth to come home immediately; she also requests that Mr. Gardiner help Mr. Bennet in London.

Elizabeth meets Darcy as she is running out the door and tells him the story. Elizabeth blames herself for not revealing Wickham's character to everyone, which would have prevented this.

Looking serious, Darcy wishes he could offer help, and leaves. Elizabeth worries that this new disgrace to her family will put a final end to her rekindled relationship with Darcy. Soon, Elizabeth and the Gardiners are on the road for Longbourn.

While Lydia's running off to marry without permission is a scandal, the major threat is to Lydia herself: society placed a huge importance on a woman's chastity before marriage. An unmarried couple living together for any length of time was considered immoral. Lydia's reputation would be ruined and would taint the rest of her family's reputation as well.



Because of pride, Elizabeth and Darcy both tried to take the moral high ground with Wickham.



Elizabeth mistakenly interprets Darcy's seriousness as an attempt to distance himself from her. She knows that if Lydia brought shame to the Bennets, Darcy would not marry into her family.



CHAPTER 47

In the carriage, Mr. Gardiner wonders if Jane might be right in hoping for the best: Wickham knows Lydia has no money and stands to lose his reputation with his regiment, so what else could he be after but marriage? Elizabeth assures them that Wickham is an awful person, capable of anything.

Elizabeth knows from Darcy's story that Wickham has no morals and is therefore capable of anything. Only marrying him can save Lydia's reputation, and that of her entire family.



At Longbourn, Mrs. Bennet is holed up in her room, frantic with nervousness, and blames Colonel Foster for not watching over Lydia. She tells Mr. Gardiner to *make* Lydia and Wickham marry when they are found—and to make Lydia consult her about finding the best deals on wedding dresses.

Mrs. Bennet always tries to keep herself in the right, so she blames Colonel Foster rather than herself. And she's just as superficial and frivolous as ever: how can she worry about dresses at a time like this?



Elizabeth and Jane dissect the situation. They are relieved that apparently Lydia did think she was getting married, which they can tell from a note she left for Mrs. Forster signed "Lydia Wickham."

If Lydia had not intended to marry, and was just after a sexual fling, she would be seen an indecent "fallen woman."



CHAPTER 48

Longbourn buzzes with the news. It comes out that Wickham accrued serious debts in Meryton as well as gambling debts at Brighton.

Everyone was duped by Wickham's genial manners and handsome appearance.



Mr. Bennet and Mr. Gardiner search hotels in London to no avail. Mr. Gardiner suggests that Elizabeth ask for help from anyone related to Wickham.

Mr. Gardiner implies that Elizabeth should ask Darcy for help, but she is too embarrassed.



A letter arrives from Mr. Collins. He offers condolences, but spends most of the letter underlining how Lydia's heinous offense will ruin the other Bennet girls' chances at marriage. Mr. Collins adds that Lady Catherine agrees with him.

Lydia's actions are an extreme breach of rank and polite behavior, both of which are extremely important to Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine.



More time passes, but all attempts to find Wickham and Lydia fail, and Mr. Bennet returns home. He asks Elizabeth not to talk with him about Lydia, saying that he brought this on and only he should suffer.

Mr. Bennet realizes his fault in the matter, but tries to remain isolated from his family. He doesn't realize that everyone will suffer, not just him.



CHAPTER 49

Two days later, a letter arrives from Mr. Gardiner: Lydia and Wickham have been found! They are not yet married, but will be, provided that Mr. Bennet pay Wickham a small amount every year.

Wickham is basically ransoming Lydia. If marriage is always partly a financial deal, Wickham has taken it to an extreme.



Mr. Bennet says he strongly suspects that Mr. Gardiner has already paid Wickham much more. Wickham would be a fool to take less for Lydia, he says. The Bennets all agree that Lydia and Wickham must marry, but Jane and Elizabeth wonder how they can ever repay Mr. Gardiner.

Mr. Bennet has no choice. Since Lydia and Wickham are already living together, Lydia's reputation is already tarnished. Marriage to Wickham will salvage enough of it to save the other Bennet girls from the stain.



Jane and Elizabeth share the news with Mrs. Bennet, who is overjoyed, instantly forgetting Lydia's disgrace. Asked about repaying Mr. Gardiner, Mrs. Bennet dismisses the debt, saying that as an uncle he should pay. Mrs. Bennet rushes out to make the news about her daughter's marriage public.

The last part of the novel concerns gratitude, and Mrs. Bennet is despicably ungrateful. With her fake physical ailments, gossipy pride, and willingness to overlook Lydia's recklessness, which almost took down the entire family, Mrs. Bennet is at her shallowest.



CHAPTER 50

As Mrs. Bennet makes plans for Lydia's wedding, Elizabeth regrets having told Darcy about the scandal. She expects him to distance himself from her now that Wickham will be joining the Bennet family. Elizabeth realizes that she and Darcy would have been perfect together, each capable of improving the other.

Lydia and Wickham reinforce each other's bad qualities. Elizabeth and Darcy, on the other hand, would have complemented each other. Elizabeth's realization of this shows that she has really changed.



Mr. Gardiner sends a letter saying that Wickham has changed regiments to one in Northern England and that Lydia hopes they can visit Longbourn on their way. Elizabeth and Jane convince Mr. Bennet, who wants nothing to do with Lydia or Wickham, to let the new couple come visit.

Refusing to allow Lydia and Wickham to visit would only advertise the scandal surrounding their marriage. Once again, Elizabeth and Jane must intervene to ensure that their parents act in a socially respectable way.



CHAPTER 51

Lydia and Wickham arrive at Longbourn. Lydia is giddy over her marriage, mocking her older sisters for failing to get married before she did. Wickham acts as if he did nothing wrong.

Lydia is as shallow and senseless as Mrs. Bennet. Wickham is just as crass, in his own way.



Yet during their ten-day visit, Elizabeth observes that Wickham doesn't entirely return Lydia's infatuation. She figures he ran away from creditors in Brighton and, preferring companionship, took Lydia along.

This is a marriage founded not on love, but on opportunity and poor decisions. Since divorces were very uncommon, the relationship will only sour.



While gloating about the details of her wedding, Lydia reveals to Elizabeth that Darcy attended the ceremony. Lydia quickly apologizes: it was supposed to be a secret. Elizabeth burns with curiosity and writes to Mrs. Gardiner for more details.

Darcy is the absolute last person Elizabeth would expect to be at Wickham's wedding. To be polite, Elizabeth can't directly ask about it, furthering the mystery.



CHAPTER 52

Mrs. Gardiner sends a long reply detailing how Darcy went to London, tracked down Wickham and stopped him from abandoning Lydia and escaping to Europe, and then negotiated a deal with Wickham and presented it to Mr. Gardiner. Darcy would pay and Mr. Gardiner would take all the credit. Mr. Gardiner resisted, but Darcy was firm, arguing that it was his silence about Wickham's character that set all of these problems in motion. Mrs. Gardiner writes that she suspects that Darcy had another motivation, however.

Wickham is ready to abandon Lydia. Darcy realizes that this would wreck the Bennets' reputation and totally prevent any future association he could have with them. As Mrs. Gardiner realizes, Darcy bribes Wickham in order to preserve Elizabeth's reputation, not Lydia's. He then refuses the credit out of pride and respect for Elizabeth.



Before Wickham leaves, Elizabeth encounters him on a walk. She reiterates that she knows his story but, resigned to be his sister-in-law, requests that they not argue about the past.

Elizabeth will be neither fooled by Wickham nor overly prejudiced against him. She shows compassion in accepting Wickham into the family.



CHAPTER 53

Soon after Wickham and Lydia leave, Mrs. Bennet hears rumors that Bingley is returning to Netherfield. Mr. Bennet refuses to visit him, however.

Mr. Bennet's pride won't let him visit a man who hurt his daughter, even though avoiding Bingley is impolite.



Not long after, however, Bingley and Darcy visit the Bennets. Mrs. Bennet gives a warm welcome to Bingley and almost none to Darcy. She then goes on to speak glowingly about Lydia's marriage to Wickham, much to Elizabeth's mortification.

Mrs. Bennet fails to welcome the person to whom she should be most grateful: Darcy. She commits another social blunder by openly discussing Lydia's disgrace.



Darcy is not so congenial as he was at Pemberley, and Elizabeth doubts he has returned for her. Bingley, however, warms up to Jane as the initial awkwardness subsides. Mrs. Bennet reminds Bingley about having left the neighborhood so suddenly, and reinvites Bingley and Darcy to dinner.

Outside his Pemberley comfort zone, Darcy is a different person. Elizabeth worries that her mother continues to offend him. As expected, Bingley and Jane rediscover their affection when they're together.



CHAPTER 54

At the dinner party, Bingley decides to take the seat next to Jane—just as he used to. Watching them, Elizabeth is sure that Bingley will soon propose.

Bingley has come full circle and finally trusts his own decisions and emotions.



Darcy, however, sits at the far end of the table from Elizabeth, next to Mrs. Bennet, and barely speaks to Elizabeth. Afterwards, she feels silly for thinking she had another chance with Darcy after already rejecting him once.

Unlike Jane with Bingley, Elizabeth has no chance to express herself to Darcy in person. Elizabeth's inner tumult makes her a richly developed character. She is constantly reevaluating things.



CHAPTER 55

Bingley visits again, this time alone. Mrs. Bennet, expecting a proposal, awkwardly clears everyone but Jane from the room. Nothing happens. The next morning, Bingley returns to shoot with Mr. Bennet. When Bingley comes inside, Mrs. Bennet again empties the room. Elizabeth returns from writing a letter and sees Bingley and Jane together by the fireside: he has just proposed marriage.

The first non-proposal builds suspense. The second provides the payoff. In keeping with Jane's modesty, Austen does not describe the proposal scene.



Overjoyed, Jane goes upstairs to tell her mother. Bingley and Elizabeth greet each other as brother and sister. Elizabeth knows that Bingley and Jane's mutual understanding will make them very happy.

Bingley and Jane's marriage, unlike Lydia's, will have a solid foundation of respect and mutual admiration.



Bingley tells Jane that he didn't know she was in London, but—to Elizabeth's relief—he leaves Darcy out of it. Jane realizes that Caroline and Mrs. Hurst had worked against her, but hopes they can repair some version of friendship.

Bingley is honest and discrete—qualities that Elizabeth shares. Jane has matured to accept the malice in the world and uses her compassion to deal with it.



CHAPTER 56

About a week later, Lady Catherine De Bourgh makes a surprise visit to Longbourn. She says almost nothing to Mrs. Bennet, coolly inspecting the rooms and property, then asks Elizabeth to take a walk.

Lady Catherine's first instinct is to measure the Bennets' class rank by their property.



Lady Catherine gets to the point: she knows of Jane's engagement; she also knows that Elizabeth has tricked her nephew, Darcy, into proposing as well. Elizabeth denies having done any such thing. Lady Catherine demands that she promise never to accept a proposal from Darcy. Elizabeth unconditionally refuses.

Lady Catherine's interrogation of Elizabeth is very rude. She feels her power exempts her from common decency, and she can't believe that Darcy would choose Elizabeth. So, she thinks he must have been tricked.



Lady Catherine is shocked at Elizabeth's nerve. She says that Darcy was always intended for her daughter, Miss De Bourgh. And that Darcy's connection to the Bennets would bring shame, dishonor, and alienation from his family. Elizabeth, deeply insulted, denies that Lady Catherine's arguments have relevance for either herself or Darcy: they will make their own choices. Lady Catherine drives away furious.

Elizabeth boldly asserts her freedom of mind and freedom from the class concerns of Lady Catherine. In doing so, Elizabeth suggests that individuals can define themselves regardless of class or social prejudices.



CHAPTER 57

The next morning, Mr. Bennet calls in Elizabeth to congratulate her on her upcoming engagement. Elizabeth is stunned. Mr. Bennet shares with her a letter from Mr. Collins in which he cautions Elizabeth not to go forward with an engagement to Darcy against Lady Catherine's wishes.

Mr. Bennet thinks the rumor about Elizabeth and Darcy is hilarious because he is certain that Elizabeth hates Darcy and that Darcy is indifferent to her. Elizabeth fakes a laugh to hide her deep embarrassment about her father's misjudgment. But a small part of her worries that her father might be right and that she has overestimated Darcy's interest.

The exact opposite of Elizabeth, Mr. Collins has no independent will to act outside of Lady Catherine's stuffy social approval.



Mr. Bennet exemplifies how first impressions and prejudices can be so enduring. Elizabeth and Darcy have each changed profoundly, and the Bennets owe Darcy everything. But all of these changes are under the surface, so Mr. Bennet can't see them. In fact, even Elizabeth isn't entirely sure what's going on in Darcy's heart.



CHAPTER 58

Only days later, Darcy comes to Longbourn with Bingley. They all go for a walk and Elizabeth and Darcy soon find themselves alone. Elizabeth cannot contain her gratitude any longer for all that Darcy suffered and sacrificed for Lydia. Darcy tells Elizabeth that he did everything for her.

Darcy says his feelings for her have not changed since his rejected proposal, and asks about her feelings. Elizabeth confesses that her feelings have *significantly* changed. Darcy is overwhelmed with happiness.

Darcy explains that he started to hope after Lady Catherine informed him about Elizabeth's stubborn refusal to follow her commands.

Darcy regrets his first proposal to Elizabeth. He's been prideful since childhood and presumed that she would accept. He thanks Elizabeth for teaching him a lesson about humility. Elizabeth apologizes for treating him so roughly.

Darcy explains that he told Bingley the truth about Jane and advised him to return to Netherfield. Bingley was angry about being deceived while Jane was in London, but he has forgiven Darcy.

Elizabeth has to be a little impolite in ignoring Darcy's request that Mr. Gardiner take the credit. But by breaking the rules, Elizabeth allows for their climactic emotional exchange.



While there is no explicit marriage proposal from Darcy yet, everything hinges on Elizabeth's growth as a character and ability to overcome her prejudice..



Selfish plans based on class prejudice all backfire in this novel.



Just as Elizabeth was humbled after she learned the truth about Darcy, so Darcy learned humility in realizing that his pride injured her and prevented his own happiness.



Darcy does penance for his blatantly wrong decision to lie and must ask forgiveness: another example that Darcy has relinquished his pride.



CHAPTER 59

That night, Elizabeth tells Jane everything. Jane thinks Elizabeth is joking. After all, doesn't Elizabeth hate Darcy? Elizabeth explains how her affections gradually changed, and Jane is absolutely delighted.

Mrs. Bennet is annoyed when Darcy returns the next day with Bingley. She apologizes to Elizabeth for the inconvenience of having to go on long walks with him.

Later Darcy visits Mr. Bennet in private to ask his consent to marry Elizabeth. Mr. Bennet calls in Elizabeth. He's stunned at the proposal, and wonders why Elizabeth would marry a man she hates. Elizabeth explains everything, and Mr. Bennet happily gives his blessing.

Elizabeth tells her mother the news that night. After a moment of shock, Mrs. Bennet joyfully stutters that Elizabeth will be genteel and rich—even richer than Jane! Elizabeth fears that her mother will continue to embarrass Darcy, but Mrs. Bennet, because she's intimidated, treats him with uncharacteristic respect.

CHAPTER 60

Elizabeth asks Darcy how he ever fell in love with her. He points to her liveliness of mind, but, like Elizabeth, he can't put his finger on when it happened.

Elizabeth writes to tell Mrs. Gardiner of her engagement, as does Darcy to Lady Catherine. Mr. Bennet writes to Mr. Collins who, along with Charlotte, soon return to town to congratulate the couple and steer clear of a furious **Lady Catherine**.

Georgiana Darcy writes to Elizabeth of her happiness at having such a sister. Caroline Bingley writes empty congratulations to Jane. Jane sees through her shallow sentiments, but replies with a nicer letter than Caroline deserves.

Elizabeth tries to insulate Darcy from the foolishness of Mr. Collins, Sir William Lucas, and Mrs. Philips, but Darcy tolerates them pretty well. Elizabeth looks forward to hosting her close family at Pemberley.

Even the closest person to Elizabeth doesn't know her feelings, which shows how closely people guarded their emotions.



Mrs. Bennet here provides some comic irony with her misplaced prejudice against Darcy. She should be encouraging him.



Like the rest of his family, Mr. Bennet needs Elizabeth to interpret Darcy. This serves as a metaphor for how Elizabeth helps Darcy identify and correct his own flaws, bringing out his best attributes.



Mrs. Bennet never changes. She measures her daughters' successes by the size of their husbands' bank accounts. She doesn't recognize that Jane and Elizabeth have chosen their husbands for better reasons.



Elizabeth and Darcy change gradually, through careful reflection and self-improvement. This gives their marriage a solidity that Lydia's lacks.



The web of letters sent indicates how Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage affects everyone. The fact that the two most shallow and class-conscious characters—Lady Catherine and Caroline—disapprove of the marriage makes it seem like a true union of equals based on respect, love, and commitment.



Darcy's pride is tempered by his new humility. Elizabeth looks forward to sharing the new wealth she has gained.



CHAPTER 61

A year later, Jane and Bingley move into an estate near Elizabeth and Darcy at Pemberley. Mrs. Bennet, extremely proud, visits them often. Mr. Bennet misses Elizabeth and visits frequently, too. Kitty improves in character from spending time with her two older sisters. Mary lives with her parents.

Lydia writes to Elizabeth with congratulations and asks if Darcy could pitch in some money for them. Elizabeth is annoyed, but sends them the money from her own savings. Lydia sometimes visits Pemberley, though always without Wickham, whose affection for her has waned.

Even though Caroline Bingley is disappointed by Darcy's marriage, she tries to make nice with Elizabeth. Georgiana and Elizabeth get along wonderfully, just as Darcy had hoped. Lady Catherine abuses Darcy in a letter, but Elizabeth eventually encourages him to make amends. Lady Catherine eventually accepts the marriage and occasionally visits. Elizabeth and Darcy remain on close terms with Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, grateful for the Gardiner's role in bringing them together.

Elizabeth fulfills her daydreams about Pemberley and, as Darcy had hoped, eased her attachment to Longbourn. Jane and Elizabeth were always the moral center of the family, and now they are rewarded.



Lydia is as opportunistic and shameless as ever. She married a useless man and spends beyond her means. Elizabeth respects Darcy's pride, so she only uses her own savings.



Marriage plots are about compromise. Elizabeth and Darcy influence each other. Their marriage also softens Lady Catherine's prejudices and Caroline's disappointment. The friendship between the upper-class Darcy and Elizabeth and the middle class Gardiners shows that virtue and affection can overcome class prejudice.





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