

Pride and Prejudice for Teens

A simplified retelling of Jane Austen's classic romance

by Jane Austen and Gerry Baird

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Clearstone Publishing
P.O. Box 462
Provo, UT 84601

Preface

I have loved *Pride and Prejudice* ever since I first read it in my high school English class, but I remember struggling with the long sentences, sophisticated vocabulary and archaic terms found in the book. Here is an example of a 104-word sentence from the novel:

"It was generally evident whenever they met, that he did admire her; and to her it was equally evident that Jane was yielding to the preference which she had begun to entertain for him from the first, and was in a way to be very much in love; but she considered with pleasure that it was not likely to be discovered by the world in general, since Jane united, with great strength of feeling, a composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner which would guard her from the suspicions of the impertinent."

I have endeavoured in this edition to make a classic work more accessible by breaking long sentences into smaller ones. I have also gently modernized the text and punctuation while honouring, to the degree possible, the beauty and intent of the original. Here is the rewritten version of the sentence above:

"It was generally evident whenever they met that he *did* admire her, and it was equally evident that Jane was on her way to being very much in love. But Elizabeth considered with pleasure that it was not likely to be discovered by the world in general, since Jane's natural reserve and kindness to everyone would protect her from suspicion."

I am deeply indebted to the volume "*The Annotated Pride and Prejudice, Revised and Expanded Edition*" published by David M. Shapard (New York: Anchor, 2012. Print.), which provided valuable insight into the words and world of Jane Austen.

Chapter 1

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

This truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters, even if the feelings or views of such a man on his first entering a neighbourhood are little known.

"My dear Mr. Bennet," said his wife to him one day, "have you heard that Netherfield Park is rented at last?"

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

"But it is," returned she, "for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it."

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

"Do not you want to know who has taken it?" cried his wife impatiently.

"*You* want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it."

This was invitation enough.

"Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England. He came down on Monday in a coach with four horses to see the place, and was so much delighted with it that he made an agreement with Mr. Morris immediately. He is to move in before the end of September, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week."

"What is his name?"

"Bingley."

"Is he married or single?"

"Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!"

"How so? How can it affect them?"

"My dear Mr. Bennet," replied his wife, "how can you be so tiresome? You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them."

"Is that his purpose in settling here?"

"Purpose! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he *may* fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes."

"I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better. Since you are as beautiful as any of them, Mr. Bingley might like you the best of the party."

"My dear, you flatter me. I certainly *have* had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman has five grown-up daughters she ought to stop thinking of her own beauty."

"In such cases a woman has not often much beauty to think of."

"But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr. Bingley when he comes into the neighbourhood."

"It is not necessary, I assure you."

"But consider your daughters. Only think what a benefit it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go, solely for that reason, for in general, you know, they visit no newcomers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not."

"You are overly concerned with formality, surely. I dare say Mr. Bingley will be very glad to see you, and I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses of the girls. Although I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy."

"I desire you will do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others, and I am sure she is not half so beautiful as Jane, nor half so good-natured as Lydia. But you are always giving *her* the preference."

"They have none of them much to recommend them," he replied. "They are all silly and ignorant, like other girls, but Lizzy has something more of intelligence and wit than her sisters."

"Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way! You take delight in upsetting me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves."

"You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them often these twenty years at least."

"Ah! You do not know what I suffer."

"But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood."

"It will be no use to us if twenty such should come, since you will not visit them."

"Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I will visit them all."

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of wit, sarcastic humour, reserve, and peculiarity that the experience of twenty-three years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. *Her* mind was less difficult to grasp. She was a woman of limited understanding, little information, and unpredictable temper. Whenever she was unhappy she thought she was developing a nervous condition. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and gossip.

Chapter 2

Mr. Bennet was among the earliest of those who visited Mr. Bingley. He had always intended to do so, though to the last he assured his wife that he would not go. Until the evening after the visit was paid she had no knowledge of it. It was then disclosed in the following manner: — Observing his second daughter employed in trimming a hat, he suddenly addressed her with —

"I hope Mr. Bingley will like it, Lizzy."

"We have no way of knowing *what* Mr. Bingley likes," said her mother resentfully, "since we are not to visit."

"But you forget, mama," said Elizabeth, "that we shall meet him at the assemblies, and that Mrs. Long has promised to introduce him."

"I do not believe Mrs. Long will do any such thing. She has two nieces of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have nothing good to say about her."

"Nor have I," said Mr. Bennet, "and I am glad to find that you do not depend on her serving you."

Mrs. Bennet made no reply, but, unable to contain herself, began scolding one of her daughters.

"Don't keep coughing so Kitty, for Heaven's sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves. You tear them to pieces."

"Kitty has no discretion in her coughs," said her father. "She times them poorly."

"I do not cough for my own amusement," replied Kitty fretfully. "When is your next ball, Lizzy?"

"Two weeks from tomorrow."

"Yes, so it is," cried her mother, "and Mrs. Long does not come back until the day before, so it will be impossible for her to introduce him, for she will not know him herself."

"Then, my dear, you may have the advantage over your friend, and introduce Mr. Bingley to *her*."

"Impossible, Mr. Bennet, impossible, when I am not acquainted with him myself. How can you be so teasing?"

"I honour your discretion. Two weeks' acquaintance is certainly very little. One cannot know what a man really is by the end of it. But if we do not introduce him then somebody else will. After all, Mrs. Long and her nieces must be introduced. Therefore, as she will think it an act of kindness, if you decline to do it, then I will do it myself."

The girls stared at their father. Mrs. Bennet said only, "Nonsense, nonsense!"

"What can be the meaning of that exclamation?" cried he. "Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the importance that is placed on them, as nonsense? I cannot quite agree with you *there*. What do you say, Mary? For you are a young lady of deep reflection, I know, and read great books."

Mary wished to say something very wise, but knew not how.

"While Mary is sorting out her ideas," he continued, "let us return to Mr. Bingley."

"I am sick of Mr. Bingley," cried his wife.

"I am sorry to hear *that*. Why did not you tell me before? If I had known it this morning I certainly would not have visited him. It is very unfortunate, but as I have actually paid the visit, we cannot escape the acquaintance now."

The astonishment of the ladies was just what he wished; that of Mrs. Bennet perhaps surpassing the rest. After her initial excitement, though, she began to declare that it was what she had expected all along.

"How good it was of you, my dear Mr. Bennet! But I knew I would persuade you eventually. I was sure you loved your girls too well to neglect such an acquaintance. Well, how pleased I am! And it is such a good joke, too, that you should have gone this morning, and never said a word about it till now."

"Now, Kitty, you may cough as much as you choose," said Mr. Bennet. Then he left the room, tired of his wife's jubilant exclamations.

"What an excellent father you have, girls!" said she, when the door was shut. "I do not know how you will ever pay him back for his kindness; or me either, for that matter. At our time of life it is not so easy, I can tell you, to be making new acquaintance every day; but for your sakes, we would do anything. Lydia, my love, though you *are* the youngest, I dare say Mr. Bingley will dance with you at the next ball."

"Oh!" said Lydia stoutly, "I am not worried on that account; for though I *am* the youngest, I'm also the tallest."

The rest of the evening was spent wondering how soon he would return Mr. Bennet's visit, and determining when they should ask him to dinner.