

Summaries of Jane Austen's six novels

2. *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

(Drafted as *First Impressions* 1796(?); refused publication as such 1797; reviewed, re-titled and eventually published 1813)

Jane and Elizabeth Bennet are the first and second of five girls born to Mr and Mrs Bennet of Longbourn. As the daughters have no brother, the family home is entailed to their cousin, a clergyman called William Collins. Mr Collins is not a wealthy man but he has a noble patron named Lady Catherine De Bourgh, mother of a frail only daughter and the proud owner of the Kentish estate of Rosings where Mr Collins serves as the clergyman.

When a rich, young bachelor, Mr. Charles Bingley, leases a house called Netherfield Park in the neighbourhood of Longbourn, Mrs. Bennet is excitedly determined to provide introductions into high society for her eldest daughters. Mr Bennet makes contact with the young gentleman without participating in his wife's fervent hopes of marriage-making. Jane, kind and trusting to a fault, soon falls in love with Bingley. His even wealthier friend, Fitzwilliam Darcy, a nephew of Lady Catherine, appears to snub Elizabeth and the other local women at a public dance. His proud behaviour becomes the subject of considerable discussion and prejudice against him. He starts to take an interest in Elizabeth during the course of the evening, but she refuses to dance with him.

Jane is subsequently invited to visit the Bingleys but she walks there in the rain, and soon falls ill. Elizabeth later walks over to Netherfield to take

care of her sister, impressing Darcy with her caring nature and her intelligence. However, Elizabeth is scorned by Bingley's sisters Mrs. (Louisa) Hurst and Miss (Caroline) Bingley. Miss Bingley has her own plans about possible marriage partners for the two young men; these schemes do not include a young woman without either money or position, who has mud on her skirts.

The handsome and dashing George Wickham, son of Darcy's father's steward, comes into the neighbourhood. He tells a sympathetic Elizabeth about Darcy depriving him of a living intended for him by Darcy's father. Elizabeth believes Wickham's story and is even more hostile towards Darcy when they next meet.

During the course of the Netherfield ball, the awful Mr Collins appears to be courting Elizabeth, his second object of affection among the five girls since Jane and Bingley are, according to Mrs Bennet, about to become engaged.

He promptly proposes to Elizabeth and needs convincing about the sincerity of her refusal! In the wake of this refusal, her mother is upset, her father is delighted and Mr. Collins himself seems resilient since he swiftly proposes marriage to Elizabeth's friend, Charlotte Lucas. She accepts what seems like a practical proposition for her future.

Bingley and his party suddenly move back to London. Bingley has been persuaded to leave the area by his sisters and by Darcy, who all seek to prevent the developing romance between Bingley and Jane. Later, Jane is

invited to visit Mrs. Bennet's brother, Edward Gardiner, and his wife in London. There Jane is apparently neglected by Bingley; she is unaware that Bingley has been kept ignorant of her presence in the city.

Elizabeth travels with Sir William and Lady Lucas and their second daughter Maria to the Gardiners' home in London and then on to the Collins at Hunsford. There they are invited to dine with Lady Catherine at her estate Rosings along with her sickly daughter who is, in her mother's mind, destined for marriage to Mr Darcy. Elizabeth is questioned intrusively by the self-important Lady Catherine but she remains politely assertive despite intimidation by her hostess. Darcy and his cousin, Colonel Fitzwilliam, arrive for a visit at Rosings. Elizabeth is intrigued by their presence but continues to display her apparent cool distaste for Darcy's company.

Darcy, however, soon visits Mr Collins' nearby parsonage where Elizabeth is staying. Charlotte wonders if he has fallen in love with Elizabeth, but both of them are still defensive with each other. Elizabeth learns from his cousin that Darcy caused Bingley to halt his relationship with Jane.

Darcy appears at the parsonage again and declares his love for Elizabeth, having struggled in vain against his distaste for her mother, sisters, and her general lack of superior connections. Elizabeth angrily refuses him, prejudiced against him for the breaking up Jane's relationship with Bingley, and condemning his pride as well as his apparent injustice to Wickham. Later, Darcy sends Elizabeth a letter explaining that he had

thought Jane was indifferent to Bingley. He goes on to explain that Wickham has been telling elaborate lies and was in fact only just prevented from disgracing Darcy's fifteen year old sister Georgiana.

Elizabeth is soon to have personal reasons for believing this version of events. The local militia moves to Brighton and Lydia, though only fifteen, arranges to travel with Colonel Forster and his wife Harriet, to be near the camp, despite Elizabeth's unsuccessful effort to persuade her father to forbid this plan. Elizabeth is right to fear the consequences but she is to be far from home when these become all too apparent.

The Gardiners take her on a tour, and when they reach Derbyshire they decide to visit Darcy's estate, Pemberley, near Lambton where Elizabeth finds Darcy highly regarded by his loyal servants. She is then extremely embarrassed unexpectedly to encounter the man himself. He, however, treats them all with great hospitality, much to the surprise and delight of the Gardiners. He also makes a point of introducing Elizabeth to his shy sister, Georgiana.

Elizabeth is shocked to learn by a letter that the irresponsible Lydia has run off with Wickham. The news means that Elizabeth has to return home immediately. After a long painful period of tortured uncertainty, it appears that the runaway couple has been found and that Wickham has agreed to marry Lydia without any undue demands. When the newly-weds visit Longbourn they appear relaxed and carefree but Elizabeth picks up Lydia's

carelessly dropped remark that Darcy attended their wedding and realises that Darcy must have traced the couple and paid Wickham to marry Lydia in order to preserve her own respectability and that of her sisters.

Bingley and Darcy arrive to visit the Bennets. Bingley is evidently still in love with Jane and finds the courage to propose marriage, bringing new joy to the household. Lady Catherine then arrives to demand that Elizabeth renounce any possibility of marriage to Darcy, insisting he is engaged to her daughter. Elizabeth holds her ground against this bullying. Ironically, this aggressive behaviour of Lady Catherine and Elizabeth's refusal to cooperate subsequently signals to Darcy that he could have a chance of winning Elizabeth's hand after all.

Soon afterwards, Darcy and Elizabeth seize an opportunity to express their mutual love along with apologies to each other for past misunderstandings. Darcy asks for her hand, and the opinion about Darcy in the Bennet household swings round to fall in line with Elizabeth's high regard for him. Jane and Bingley marry joyfully but the marriage of Wickham and Lydia begins to cool. Elizabeth becomes mistress of Pemberley, good friends with Georgiana and a loving and beloved wife to Darcy.