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New Neighbours

Everyone knows that a rich, unmarried man needs a pretty wife. And every mother wants her daughters to be happily married.

Mr and Mrs Bennet of Longbourn House, in the village of Longbourn, had five unmarried daughters. So when Mrs Bennet heard that a young man was coming to live in the neighbourhood¹, she was delighted². She found out all she could about him, and hurried to tell her husband the good news.

'Oh, Mr Bennet, Netherfield Hall is let³ at last!' Mrs Bennet cried excitedly. 'Don't you want to know who is going to live there?'

'No,' Mr Bennet answered, 'but I am sure you want to tell me.'

'The house is let to a young man from the north of England. His name is Bingley, he's very rich and not married. What a chance this is⁴ for our dear Jane! Everyone knows she's the most beautiful girl in Hertfordshire. She's so good-natured⁵ too. She will be an excellent wife for Mr Bingley.'

'I shall be very happy to have her living so near us. And in a fine⁶ house like Netherfield too! Mr Bingley plans to live there with his sister. She and Jane —'

'Please, stop a moment, Mrs Bennet,' her husband said quietly. 'Why are you telling me all this? Mr Bingley is a stranger. But you are saying that he has come here to marry one of our daughters!'

'I did not say that,' Mrs Bennet answered. 'But we must think of our daughters' future. You must call on⁷ Mr Bingley at once, Mr Bennet.'

'I don't think so, my dear,' Mr Bennet said calmly⁸. 'But I'll write to this young man and give him my permission to marry Jane — or whoever he chooses. Perhaps he'd like to marry my little Lizzy.'

'Don't tease me, please, Mr Bennet,' Mrs Bennet replied. 'I

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know Lizzy is your favourite daughter, but she is not as beautiful as Jane, nor as lively as Lydia.'

'Our girls are silly and thoughtless,' Mr Bennet said severely¹⁰. 'But Lizzy is a little more sensible than the others.'

Mr and Mrs Bennet were not happily married. After twenty-three years, Mr Bennet was tired of his wife's chatter and love of gossip¹². And Mrs Bennet had never understood her husband's sense of humour¹³.

A few days later, Mr Bennet called on Mr Bingley, without telling Mrs Bennet. She was delighted when she found out that Mr Bennet had called at Netherfield Hall.

'Girls, you have such a good father!' Mrs Bennet cried. 'You will thank him for calling at Netherfield, Jane, when you are married to Mr Bingley.'

'You must look very beautiful at the next assembly ball¹⁴, my dear,' Mrs Bennet went on, 'I'm sure that Mr Bingley will be there.'

On the following Friday, the assembly rooms in the town of Meryton were crowded. Everyone stared as Mr Bingley came in with two ladies and two gentlemen.

The fashionably dressed young woman with Mr Bingley was his unmarried sister, Miss Caroline Bingley. Mr Bingley's married sister, Louisa Hurst, was also there, with her husband. The other gentleman was Mr Bingley's friend, Mr Fitzwilliam Darcy.

Mr Bingley was a good-looking young man with a pleasant smile. Mr Darcy was tall, very handsome and from a noble family¹⁵. People said he had twice as much money as Mr Bingley and a large estate¹⁶ in Derbyshire. He was also unmarried.

At first, everyone admired Mr Darcy. But he danced only with Bingley's sisters and spoke to no one else. Mrs Bennet and her friends soon agreed that, although Mr Darcy was a fine gentleman, he was much too proud.

However, Mr Bingley pleased everyone. And Mrs Bennet was delighted when he danced with Jane.

Elizabeth Bennet watched Jane and Mr Bingley. Her dark eyes were shining with pleasure.

'Darcy, why aren't you dancing?' Bingley called to his friend. 'There are plenty of pretty girls here tonight.'

'You are dancing with the only beautiful woman in the room,' Mr Darcy replied.

'But one of Miss Jane Bennet's pretty sisters is without a dancing partner,' Bingley answered. 'I will ask Jane to introduce you to her.'

Darcy looked at Elizabeth, who was standing near him. They looked at each other for a moment and then Darcy turned away.

'She is quite pretty, but not beautiful enough to interest me,' Darcy said coldly.

Elizabeth was amused. She repeated the conversation to all her friends. When Mrs Bennet heard what Darcy had said she was very angry.

'That man thinks he is too good for us!' Mrs Bennet cried. 'Don't worry, Lizzy. One day, Mr Darcy will ask you to dance. When he does, refuse to dance with him!'

Elizabeth laughed.

'I shall never dance with Mr Darcy,' she said. 'He is a very proud man. I have decided to dislike him.'

Kitty and Lydia, the youngest of the Bennet girls, had a much happier time than Elizabeth. A militia regiment²⁰ was staying in Meryton for the winter. The officers were at the ball wearing their smart red coats. Kitty and Lydia danced with the young soldiers all evening.

Jane Bennet, too, had a very happy time.

'I admire Mr Bingley,' Jane told Elizabeth quietly when they were at home again. 'He has such fine manners²¹. And we agreed about everything.'

'You are so good-natured that you think everyone else is good-natured too,' Elizabeth answered. 'But I think Mr Bingley is a very pleasant young man. You have my permission to fall in love with him!'

Jane blushed²² and smiled.

'Mr Bingley is very different from Mr Darcy. I am surprised they



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are friends,' she said. 'Poor Lizzy. He thought you were only "quite pretty".'

'I have no interest in what Mr Darcy thinks,' Elizabeth answered, laughing. 'Mr Darcy is very rich and handsome, but he is also very proud. I will never like him!'

During the next month, the Bennets met their new neighbours several times. Jane and Bingley enjoyed being with each other more and more and Mrs Bennet was delighted.

Darcy was very surprised when he began to be interested in Elizabeth Bennet. Darcy disliked her family - he thought that Mrs Bennet and her youngest daughters were noisy and rude. But he admired Elizabeth's clever conversation and her beautiful dark eyes.

One evening, there was a party at Lucas Lodge, the home of Sir William and Lady Lucas, the Bennets' neighbours.

Elizabeth noticed that Mr Darcy, who was standing near her, was watching her closely.

'Why is he standing there, listening to every word I say?' Elizabeth whispered to her friend, Charlotte Lucas.

'That is a question only Mr Darcy can answer,' Charlotte replied.

'I am going to speak to him,' Elizabeth said. 'He is proud and cold. And I shall become afraid of him if I don't tease him a little.'

Elizabeth stood up and smiled at Darcy.

'You heard me asking Colonel Forster to arrange a ball in Meryton,' she said. 'Do you think I said the right things to him?'

'Yes, you did,' Mr Darcy answered. 'Young ladies always say the right things when they want to go to a ball.'

'You do not have a good opinion²³ of us,' Elizabeth replied.

At that moment, Mary Bennet sat down to play the piano. Mary was the only plain²⁴ girl in the Bennet family. She was quiet and liked to study. Soon Mary was asked to play some music for dancing.

Sir William Lucas called to Elizabeth. 'My dear Miss Elizabeth,

you must dance! Here is Mr Darcy. He will be your partner, I am sure!

Elizabeth expected²⁵ Mr Darcy to walk away. But, to her surprise, he bowed²⁶ politely.

'Will you dance with me, Miss Elizabeth?' he asked.

'I do not want to dance this evening,' Elizabeth said quickly. 'But thank you for asking me,' she said, as she turned away.

Miss Caroline Bingley had been watching them. She now walked up to Mr Darcy and smiled.

'I know what you are thinking, Mr Darcy,' she said. 'There is no one here who interests you this evening. You are as bored as I am.'

'You are wrong,' Darcy answered. 'I was thinking how attractive the fine eyes of a pretty woman can be.'

Miss Bingley thought that he was talking about her. She smiled happily.

'I was speaking about Miss Elizabeth Bennet,' Darcy said quietly.

'Miss Elizabeth Bennet?' Miss Bingley repeated in angry surprise. 'How long have you been interested in her? When can I congratulate you both on your engagement²⁷?'

'That is exactly what I expected you to say,' Darcy replied. 'But one compliment²⁸ does not always lead to marriage.'

'You mentioned marriage!' Miss Bingley cried. 'What a delightful mother-in-law you will have! You must invite her to your house in Derbyshire. You will most certainly enjoy her visits to Pemberley!'

Mr Darcy did not reply. He listened calmly as Miss Bingley talked on. She soon decided that Darcy was not in love with Elizabeth Bennet.

Miss Bingley felt happier, because she planned to marry Mr Darcy herself!