



CHAPTER  
1

Everyone knows that a rich single man needs a wife. When such a man moves to a new neighborhood, no matter how little is known about his thoughts or feelings, local families are so convinced of this truth that he is considered the rightful property of one or another of their daughters.

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” said Mrs. Bennet to her husband one day, “have you heard that Netherfield Park has finally been leased?”

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

“But it has,” she answered. “Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it.”

Mr. Bennet said nothing.

“Don’t you want to know who has taken it?” asked his wife impatiently.

“You want to tell me, and I don’t object to hearing it,” he answered.

This was enough of an invitation for Mrs. Bennet.

“Why, my dear, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield has been taken by a young man from the north of England who has a large fortune. He came down

on Monday to see the place, and was so delighted with it that he agreed to take it immediately. He will move in quite soon, and some of his servants will 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 bachelor, very rich. 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 know that I am thinking about him marrying one of them.”

“Ah, I see. Is that why he is moving here?”

“You are making fun of me,” his wife responded. “But still, it is very likely that he will fall in love with one of them, and so you must visit him as soon as he comes.”

“I don’t know why I must go. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves. That might be best, actually. You are as good-looking as any of them, and Mr. Bingley might like you the best of all.”

“My dear, you flatter me!” cried his wife. “I certainly had my share of beauty once, but I do not pretend to be anything special now. When a woman has five grown daughters, she has to stop thinking of her own beauty.”

“In such cases, a woman generally didn’t have much beauty to think of,” said her husband.

“But, my dear, you really must go and see Mr. Bingley when he moves into the neighborhood,” Mrs. Bennet said insistently.

“That sounds like a great deal of bother to me.”

“But think of your daughters! Imagine what a great match it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are already planning to visit Mr. Bingley, just for that reason. In general, you know, they do not visit newcomers. You really must go! For if you don’t, you know he won’t be able to visit us.”

“You are too concerned about etiquette, surely. I imagine Mr. Bingley will be very glad to see you. I will send a note along, giving him my permission to marry whichever of the girls he chooses, although I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy.”

“You shall do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others. She is not half as pretty as Jane, or half as good-humored as Lydia. But she has always been your favorite.”

“None of them have much to recommend them,” he answered. “They are all silly and ignorant like most girls, but Lizzy is better than the others.”

“Mr. Bennet, how can you speak about your own children in such a way? You enjoy tormenting me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves.”

“You are mistaken, my dear. I have the highest respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I

have listened to you talk about them for at least twenty years.”

“Ah! You do not know how I suffer.”

“But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many rich young men come into the neighborhood.”

“It will be no use to us if twenty should move here, since you will not visit them,” said his wife bitterly.

“Believe me, my dear, when there are twenty I will visit them all.”

Mr. Bennet was such an odd mixture of witty talk, sarcastic humor, shyness, and impulsiveness, that even after twenty-three years of marriage his wife did not understand him. She had a less complicated character. She was an ignorant woman without interests or finer feelings. When she was bored and restless, she complained of her nerves. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; her comfort was visiting neighbors and gossiping.