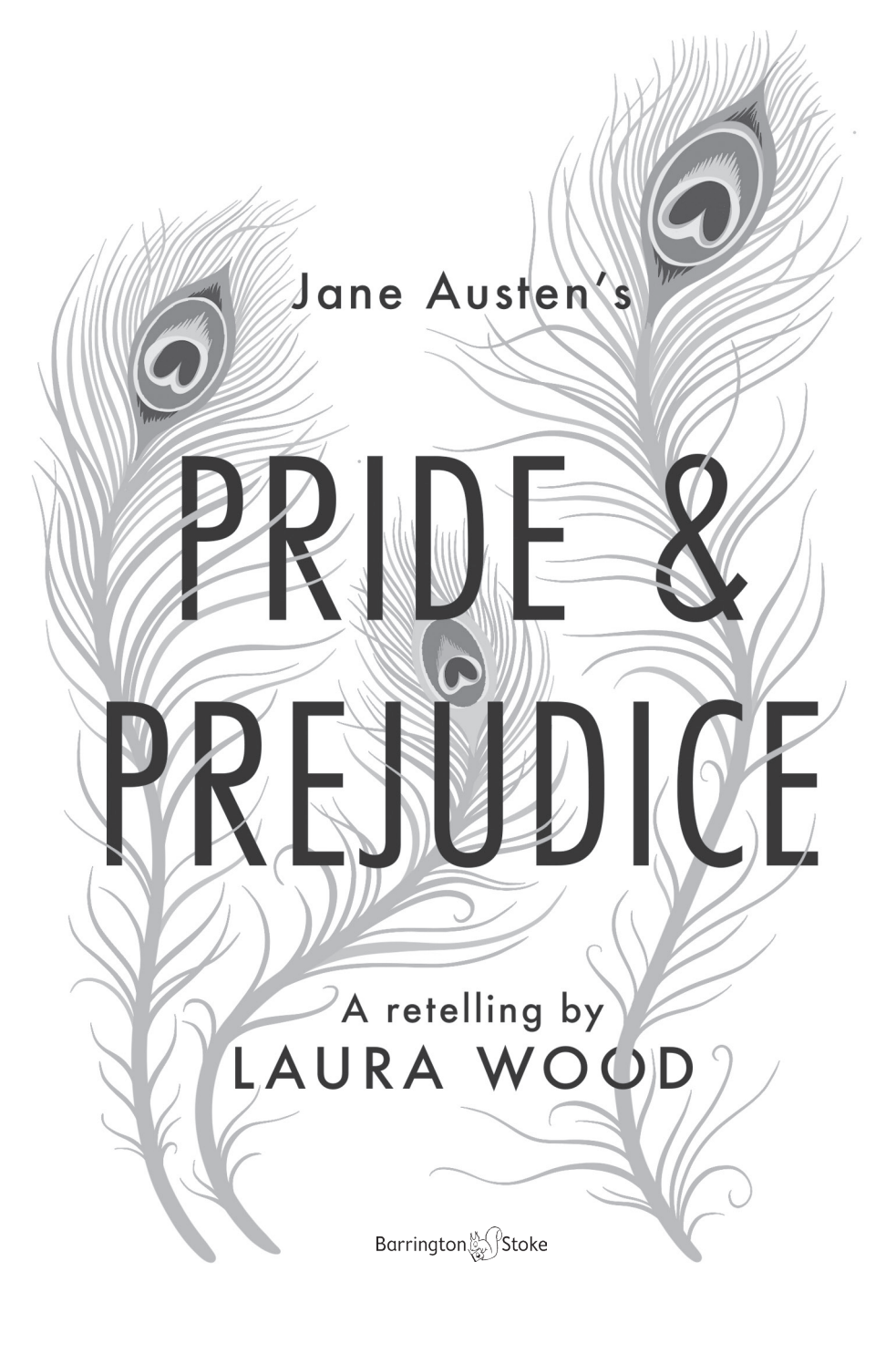




Jane Austen's

PRIDE & PREJUDICE

A retelling by
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For my mum



Mr Bennet was not a man who gave out many compliments, but today he looked around him and thought – almost in surprise – that his girls made a pretty picture.

Jane, the eldest, was working at her embroidery, her gold hair shining in the light falling through the window. Kitty and Lydia, his two youngest daughters, were looking at a magazine that showed off the latest fashions, and Mary, the middle daughter, was reading, her face hidden in her book.

Elizabeth, his second oldest daughter and Mr Bennet's particular favourite, was putting a new ribbon on her hat. Her dark eyes sparkled as she laughed at something that Jane said. Mr Bennet was just about to ask Lizzy what the joke was when this peaceful scene was interrupted.

“My dear Mr Bennet!” Mrs Bennet cried, rushing into the room. “Have you heard the news? Netherfield Park has been let at last!”

Mr Bennet said that he had not heard the news.

“Mrs Long has just been here, and she told me all about it,” Mrs Bennet said, as if Mr Bennet had not spoken.

This time Mr Bennet made no answer at all and returned to reading his newspaper.

“Do you want to know *who* will be living there?” cried his wife impatiently.

“You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it,” Mr Bennet said, lowering the paper with a sigh.

This was all the encouragement that Mrs Bennet needed, and Lizzy Bennet bit her lip to keep from laughing.

“Mrs Long says that a young man with a large fortune from the north of England came down on Monday to see the place, and he was so happy with it that he agreed to take it at once.” Mrs Bennet rocked back on her heels happily, her hands clasped to her chest.

“What is his name?” Jane asked.

“His name is Mr Bingley.” Mrs Bennet said his name as if it were something quite delicious. “And

he is not married!" she continued. "A single man with a large fortune – four or five thousand pounds a year. What a fine thing for our girls!"

Mr Bennet looked puzzled. "Why is it a fine thing for our daughters?" he asked.

"My dear Mr Bennet," his wife replied, looking at him as though he were a simpleton. "How can you be so tiresome? It will be a fine thing for our girls because he will *marry* one of them."

"Oh, is *that* why he is moving here?" Mr Bennet raised his eyebrows.

"Because a single man in possession of a good fortune *must* be in want of a wife." Lizzy smiled.

"What nonsense you talk," Mrs Bennet huffed. "Of course he is looking for a wife! And I am sure he will fall in love with one of our girls, and so Mr Bennet *must* visit him as soon as he arrives."

"I see no need for that. You and the girls may go and visit him," Mr Bennet said. "Or maybe you should send them alone, in case Mr Bingley falls in love with *you* instead."

Kitty and Lydia began to giggle at that, but Mrs Bennet did not seem to notice.

"When a woman has five grown-up daughters, she should not be thinking of her own beauty," Mrs

Bennet replied, but she couldn't help casting a quick glance at the mirror over the fireplace.

Mr and Mrs Bennet were indeed blessed with five daughters but a worrying lack of sons. This meant that when Mr Bennet died, his estate would be passed on to his nearest male relative, and his wife and daughters would be left with very little indeed.

The matter of getting her daughters married therefore weighed heavily on Mrs Bennet's mind.

It weighed on Mr Bennet's mind as well, although he did not like to show it. Which is why he let his wife continue complaining that he was a cold and unfeeling man, while he made his own plans to visit Mr Bingley as soon as possible.

Mr Bennet smiled behind his newspaper. He did enjoy teasing his family.



The Bennet family had been eagerly awaiting the ball at the assembly rooms the following week. It would be the first time that they would meet Mr Bingley.

The assembly rooms in which the ball was held were split into three separate rooms: the ballroom, where there was music and couples danced; the card room, where card games were played and occasionally fortunes were won or lost; and the dining room, where refreshments were served. Everything looked splendid – a whirl of pretty dresses and happy faces lit by hundreds of candles.

Lizzy was with her sisters and mother in the ballroom when Mr Bingley arrived with four other people – two women and two men.

“Those are Mr Bingley’s sisters,” Mrs Long, a friend of Mrs Bennet, whispered. “And that man is Mr Hurst, his sister’s husband.” She pointed to the older of the two men.

“Who is the other gentleman?” Mrs Bennet asked. “He is very handsome.”

“*That* is Mr Darcy,” Mrs Long replied. “They say he has a fortune of ten thousand pounds a year!”

Lizzy overheard this. “I expect Mother thinks him even more handsome now,” she whispered to Jane.

Mr Bingley and his guests were very grand, dressed in the finest clothes. His sisters looked around with obvious disapproval – it seemed this ball was not up to their standards. Mr Bingley was almost as handsome as Mr Darcy, with curly blond hair and a wide smile that suggested he was very pleased with everything he saw, even if his sisters weren’t.

This smile seemed to widen even further when Mr Bingley’s eyes rested on Jane. The two of them stared at each other for a few intense seconds, then Jane dropped her eyes and blushed.

Lizzy looked thoughtfully at Mr Darcy. It was true that he was a very good-looking man. He was tall and dark haired, with sharp cheekbones and dark eyes, but his expression was very serious and his dark eyes were cold.

Mr Bingley wasted no time being introduced to everyone – he was lively and friendly, and danced every dance.

What a difference between him and his friend! Mr Darcy danced only twice – once with Mrs Hurst and once with Miss Bingley. He would not speak to any other lady and spent the evening ignoring everyone.

Soon the chatter at the ball was that Mr Darcy was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world.

But there was worse to come.

Lizzy had been forced to sit out two of the dances because there were fewer men than women at the ball. She heard a voice coming from nearby while sitting in her seat, watching the dancing. It was Mr Bingley.

“Come on, Darcy,” said Mr Bingley. “You must dance.”

“I certainly shall not,” Mr Darcy replied.

Lizzy sank lower in her chair so that they would not see her as she listened to their conversation.

“You know how I detest dancing unless I know my partner very well,” Mr Darcy went on. “Your

sisters are busy, and there is not another woman in the room I would even consider dancing with.”

“Upon my honour!” cried Mr Bingley. “I never met so many pleasant girls in my life as I have this evening. Several of them are very pretty indeed.”

“You have been dancing with the only handsome girl in the room,” said Mr Darcy, and Lizzy realised he was talking about Jane.

“Oh! She is the most beautiful creature I ever saw!” Mr Bingley exclaimed. “But there is her sister Miss Elizabeth Bennet, who is very pretty, and I dare say very agreeable. Do let me ask my partner to introduce you.”

Lizzy stiffened to hear her name, not sure that she wanted anything to do with Mr Darcy. He seemed to be a terrible snob.

“She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me,” Mr Darcy replied to Mr Bingley. He spoke in a low voice, but not so low that Lizzy did not hear him.

Mr Bingley left to dance with Jane again and Mr Darcy wandered off, leaving Lizzy feeling no kindness towards him at all. However, it was not long before Lizzy began to chuckle to herself, and then she took great joy in sharing the story with her friends. She did a wonderful impression of

Mr Darcy by sticking her nose up in the air and growling, “She is *tolerable*.”

All in all it was a pleasant evening for the whole family. Mrs Bennet had seen her eldest daughter much admired, and Mr Bingley had danced with Jane *twice*!

Lizzy squeezed Jane’s hand as they left, knowing that her shy, quiet sister was as excited as their mother in her own way. Jane gave Lizzy a dazzling smile.

Lizzy’s other sisters were also happy. Mary had heard someone saying to Miss Bingley that she was the most accomplished girl in the neighbourhood, while Kitty and Lydia had danced every dance. They returned, therefore, in good spirits to Longbourn, the village where they lived, and Mrs Bennet recounted the story of the night’s events to Mr Bennet with glee.