

- MRS.BENNET Yes, it is true one cannot buy anything one really wants in the High Street at Meryton. It certainly upsets me at times.
- MR.BENNET (as before) You must endeavour not to be so readily upset, dearest.
- MRS.BENNET Did you speak, Mr. Bennet ?
- MR.BENNET I am aware, Mrs. Bennet, that the subject of your nerves has supplied us with ample conversation for nearly a quarter of a century, and is not therefore to be lightly dismissed. But I expressed the hope that you would not be too upset by the shops in the High Street. (He returns to his reading)
- MRS.BENNET Oh. I do wish that Lydia would spend a little more time at home. I really am becoming very weary of this embroidery. Lydia Bennet seven times over.
- MR.BENNET I do not imagine that its completion is a matter of any great urgency. Why not leave it for Lydia.
- MRS.BENNET By then it might be 1814. To embroider Lydia Bennet 1813 seven times over in 1814 would not be logical, Mr. Bennet. But she is so restless; constantly walking to Meryton, visiting her aunt.
- MR.BENNET It occurs to me, Mrs. Bennet, that the officers who also visit her aunt may not be unconnected with her restlessness. Her desire for exercise coincided almost exactly with the arrival of the militia, if I remember rightly.
- MRS.BENNET (brightening considerably) You think so ? Oh, I do hope that you are right. Think of it, Mr. Bennet - first the militia stationed in Meryton, then that charming Mr. Bingley taking Netherfield Park; and to crown it all, his friend Mr. Darcy to stay with him. It really could appear that Providence is with us after all.
- MR.BENNET With us in what, Mrs. Bennet ?
- MRS.BENNET (cooly) Why Mr. Bennet - you would not wish your daughters old maids, would you ? And Mr. Bingley is a young man of large fortune - do you know how much ?
- MR.BENNET You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.
- MRS.BENNET Four or five thousand a year ! What a fine thing for our girls !
- MR.BENNET How so ? How can it affect them ?

MRS.BENNET It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

MR.BENNET Well - I dare say Mr. Bingley will be very glad to see you all; 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.

ELIZABETH has finished her letter, and is crossing to the door.

Though I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy.

She gives him a look, and exits.

MRS.BENNET I desire you will do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others. But you are always giving her the preference.

MR.BENNET They have none of them much to recommend them; they are all silly and ignorant, like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of a quickness than her sisters.

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

MR.BENNET You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. After all they are my old friends.

MRS.BENNET - If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield, and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for. They do say that Mr. Darcy is even richer than his friend.

MR.BENNET Then let us not waste our time with Bingley. Not with bigger fish about. Should I instead write to Mr. Darcy?

MRS.BENNET We must not be mercenary, Mr. Bennet. I think you tease me.

MR.BENNET No dearest, never.

MRS.BENNET It is easy for you to speak lightly on these matters. You will be dead before the entail is carried out.

MR.BENNET Well, it is pleasant to know you have something to look forward to. I never knew you in such a merry mood, Mrs. Bennet.

MRS.BENNET And when you are dead, your daughters will be penniless. Your daughters and your widow.

MR.BENNET Let us be optimistic, my dear. Perhaps all of you may predecease me, who knows ?

MRS.BENNET Penniless ! And all because you entailed the estate to that wretched clergyman.

MR.BENNET Come, dearest, that is no way to speak of our holy guest. Besides, I did not make the law of entail; if there is a fault it must be with you.

MRS.BENNET With me !

MR.BENNET That you presented me with girls instead of sons. I do not blame you, my dear. It is simply you forgot the law of entail, and did not think what you were doing. I did my part well enough.

MRS.BENNET Really, Mr. Bennet ! If you are dissatisfied with what you have, you are somewhat late in saying so. No man ever owned a better family. And because they are all girls they must inherit nothing; it must all be entailed to that miserable cleric. To add to the injury, you invite him as a guest !

MR.BENNET No, dearest, no - he invited himself. The idea of the olive branch was not, perhaps, wholly new. Yet I think it was well expressed.

COLLINS enters. He is a grave and stately young man, and his manners are very formal. His natural humility mingles with his opinion of his right as a clergyman to make him a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility.

Ah, my dear nephew ! My wife was just speaking of you. Were you not, dearest ? Pray seat yourself.

COLLINS Thank you. I trust my intrusion is not - er - not..... ?

MR.BENNET An intrusion ? No, no, most certainly not. Mrs. Bennet was only saying how pleasant it was to have a member of the clergy in the house, and how regrettably little we have spoken to you since your arrival. Although you, of course, have spoken much to us.

COLLINS Ah - thank you. Yes. Most kind.

MR. BENNET smiles drily.

MRS.BENNET You have taken tea, Mr. Collins ?