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*Pride and Prejudice:*

A Novel of Action

Jane Austen's classic novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), though loved by thousands of nineteenth-, twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers, is not universally admired. In fact, some have found the Bennet sisters and their obsession with finding husbands to be a yawner rather than a page-turner. But love it or loathe it, a reader must agree that something significant happens on virtually every page of the novel—an event that either advances or complicates the plot, or perhaps there is dialogue that helps to define a character or the dynamics between characters.

Examples of significant events and dialogue are everywhere in the novel. Here are a few illustrations of developments that occur heel-to-heel. The eldest Bennet sister, Jane, is overjoyed to receive an invitation to dine with the Bingley sisters, even though their brother, Charles, who has become of romantic interest to Jane, will not be at home. Always scheming, Mrs. Bennet insists that her daughter travel to Bingley's estate by horseback, as opposed to carriage, "because it seems likely to rain; and then you must stay all night" (20; ch. 7). A few lines later the narrator reports that Mrs. Bennet's "hopes were answered; Jane had not been gone long before it rained hard" (20). In fact, caught in the downpour, Jane becomes ill and is unable to leave Netherfield Park. Jane's

father, Mr. Bennet, remarks to his wife, wryly, “[I]f she should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders” (21).

The incident prompts Elizabeth, Jane’s younger sister and the novel’s protagonist, to travel to Netherfield Park to check on the welfare of her sister. Besides furthering the plot—because there she will resume her acquaintance with Fitzwilliam Darcy, her own romantic interest—the episode also helps to define Lizzy’s strong personality and her ardent devotion to Jane. Austen writes, “Elizabeth, feeling really anxious, was determined to go to her, though the carriage was not to be had; and as she was no horse-woman, walking was her only alternative. She declared here resolution” (21). Her mother replies, “How can you be so silly [. . .] as to think of such a thing, in all this dirt! You will not be fit to be seen when you get there” (21). This exchange between daughter and mother speaks volumes about their personalities. Lizzy is genuinely worried about the health of her dearest sister, and she is willing to traverse miles of muddy roads and fields to reach her. Meanwhile, Mrs. Bennet’s primary concern is her second daughter’s appearance once she arrives at the doorstep of the well-to-do Bingleys.

All of these plot advancements and character studies, plus others not highlighted, are compressed into a few hundred words, suggesting that, in fact, *Pride and Prejudice* does offer a significant event on virtually every page. Such compression of detail is perhaps why so many readers have loved the story and will continue to love it well into the new century.

Work Cited

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. 1813. Ed. Candace Ward. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1995. Print.