

Shine Bright LLCE Cycle Terminal

Snapfile 6 Unmarriageable

Pride and Prejudice's incipit p. 77

The story is set in England during the Regency era. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet have five daughters, Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Lydia and Kitty.

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

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” said his lady to him one day, “have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?”

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

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

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

“Do you not want to know who has taken it?” cried his wife impatiently.

“You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.”

This was invitation enough.

“Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four¹ to see the place, and was so much delighted with it, that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before

Michaelmas², and some of his servants are to 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 single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. 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 must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.”

“Is that his design³ in settling here?”

“Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes.”

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813

1. a carriage with four horses 2. September 29th 3. intention

Unmarriageable's opening page p. 77

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a girl can go from pauper to princess or princess to pauper in the mere seconds it takes for her to accept a proposal.

When Alysba Binat began working at age twenty as the English literature teacher at the British School of Dilipabad, she had thought it would be a temporary solution to the sudden turn of fortune that had seen Mr. Barkat 'Bark' Binat and Mrs. Khushoo 'Pinkie' Binat and their five daughters – Jenazbat, Alysba, Marizba, Qittyara and Lady – move from big-city Lahore to backwater Dilipabad. But here she was, ten years later, thirty years old, and still in the job she'd grown to love despite its challenges. Her new batch of Year 10s¹ were starting *Pride and Prejudice*, and their first homework had been to rewrite the opening sentence of Jane Austen's novel, always a fun activity and a good way for her to know her students better.

1. It is unfortunately not a truth universally acknowledged that it is better to be alone than to have fake friendships.
2. It is a truth universally acknowledged that every marriage, no matter how good, will have ups and downs.

Sonia Kamal, *Unmarriageable*, 2019

1. the British equivalent of the French *classe de 2de*

Darsee's proposal p. 78

The door opened. Alys's smile disappeared.

"Hello," Darsee said.

"Is everyone all right?" Alys said. "Isn't there a dinner at your aunt's place?"

"All fine. No need to panic." Darsee glanced at the plate of half-eaten dal chawal¹.

"I came to see how you were doing."

"How I'm doing?"

"Sherry said you've had a bad headache since this morning. Raghav said he and you jogged together and it was humid. Could it be heat stroke? Is that oil on your hair?"

"Yes, it is. I was not expecting the Crown Prince of Pakistan to visit."

"I was worried." Darsee sat down. "You're watching Terminator. Is this your first time?"

"No," Alys said rudely.

"This is one of the only films with an even better sequel. Have you seen it?"

"Listen," Alys said, "where does your aunt think you are?"

"Picking up mountain emergency stuff for Raghav. He leaves tomorrow morning."

Darsee rose. Then he sat back down. Then he rose again. He cleared his throat.

"What?" Alys said, as he looked down at her. "What's wrong with you?"

"Will you marry me?"

Alys stared at him.

"I love you."

This was so preposterous², Alys let out a hearty laugh.

“My admission is a joke to you?”

“Is this a prank³?” Alys looked around. “Is there a hidden camera somewhere?”

“Don’t be absurd.” Darsee crossed the room. “I’ve tried to get you out of my head. I’ve tried so hard. I think about you all the time. Of how I want your opinion on this book and that film and this work of art and that play. I respect your opinions.”

“You respect my opinions.”

“Will you, Alys? Marry me? It’s not the wisest of matches,” Darsee said dolefully⁴. “In fact, it’s a disadvantageous match for me in all respects – well except that you’re smart, fun and have a quirky⁵ personal style, which I like. And you are not a gold-digger. This is the biggest plus of all.”

“It is, is it?” Alys said.

Soniah Kamal, *Unmarriageable*, 2019

1. Pakistani dish of lentils and rice
2. ridiculous
3. *canular*
4. with sorrow
5. unconventional

Mr. Darcy's proposal p. 79

In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”

Elizabeth's astonishment¹ was beyond expression. She stared, coloured, doubted, and was silent. This he considered sufficient encouragement and the avowal of all that he felt and had long felt for her immediately followed. He spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on² with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounded, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit.

In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection, and though her intentions did not vary for an instant, she was at first sorry for the pain he was about to receive; till roused to resentment by his subsequent³ language, she lost all compassion in anger. [...]

“In such case as this, it is, I believe, the established mode to express a sense of obligations for the sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned. It is natural that obligation should be felt, and that if I could feel gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot—I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed⁴ it most unwillingly⁵.”

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813

1. surprise 2. talk about for a long time 3. following 4. accorder 5. reluctantly

Soniah Kamal's interview p. 80

Do you think literary characters like Elizabeth Bennet, but also like Alysba Binat can be inspiring?

Absolutely. Elizabeth Bennet arrives at Netherfield Park with mud on her dress. She refuses two proposals just because she doesn't like either of the men. She does not let Catherine de Bourgh intimidate her. Alysba also goes against many of society's unspoken rules, much to her mother's chagrin. Alys cut her hair very short in a country where long hair on girls is prized. She likes to tan and doesn't care if she gets dark in a country where a fair complexion is prized. She teaches her students that there is more to life than getting married and having children. In fact, she is determined never to marry unless she finds someone she can like and respect and even after she does get married, she is adamant¹ about not having children in a country where marriage and motherhood go hand in hand. She is opinionated and not scared to voice those opinions as we see in her encounter with Beena de Bagh and, moreover, challenges Beena's notions of what a 'good family', a 'good woman' and respectability mean. And Alys is not impressed by money and status in a country where these two things often outweigh² decency and good character. I absolutely believe Elizabeth and Alysba can be inspirational for people who want to break free from society's rigid rules.

What is your book's most important message?

To make your own good income so you are never financially dependent on anyone, especially for women. To not marry for status or money as the most important things. Instead, to choose a partner based on like and respect.

What are the most frequent comments made by readers around the world? In Pakistan?

Pakistani readers are loving *Unmarriageable* which has nothing to do with the usual subjects of abused women or terrorism. It is fun to read a novel set in Pakistan where women go to watch the theatre, and work and have their own businesses, and have coffees in cafes where they discuss their mothers and cute guys. That said, *Unmarriageable* is written through a feminist and postcolonial lens and I'm thrilled at the numbers of readers around the world who have said *Unmarriageable* reminds

them of their own family. Readers from the American South, Jewish readers, Greek, Italian, Mormon, Nigerian, Indian, Chinese, Korean, Egyptian, Russian—I get messages from everywhere saying they see themselves in this story which is so gratifying because in this increasingly divisive world, it's wonderful that *Unmarriageable* is able to forge connections across cultures, communities and countries. As I say in *Unmarriageable*:

“Characters’ emotions and situation are universally applicable across cultures, whether you’re wearing an empire dress, shalwar kurtas, or kimonos.”

Sonia Kamal, interviewed by Seonaid Cruickshank for *Speakeasy News*,
November 28, 2019

1. stubborn 2. take priority over