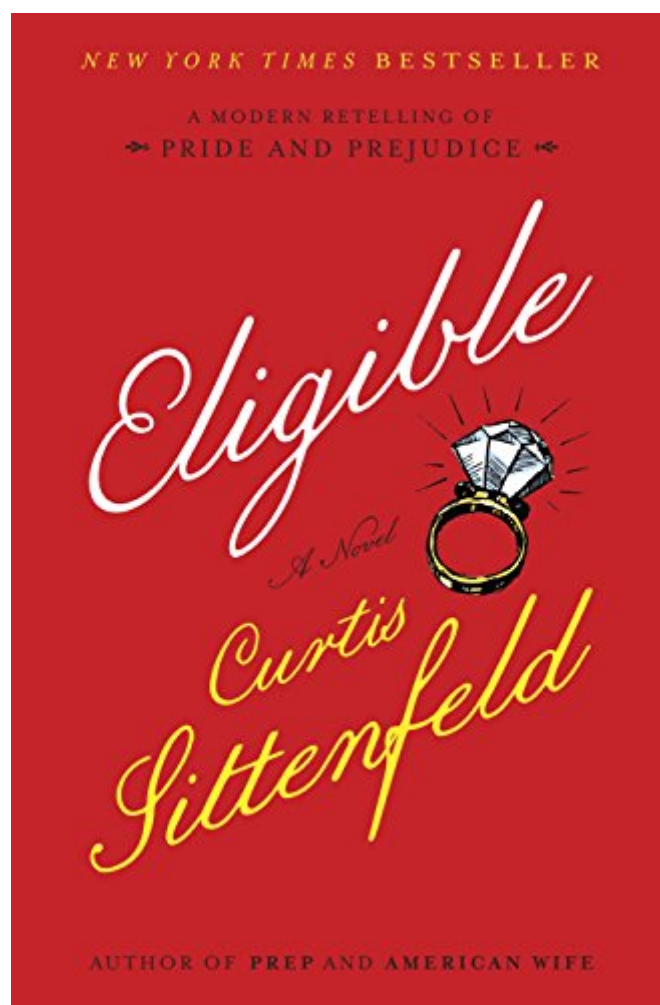


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# Eligible: A Novel



## Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • Wonderfully tender and hilariously funny, *Eligible* tackles gender, class, courtship, and family as Curtis Sittenfeld reaffirms herself as one of the most dazzling authors writing today. This version of the Bennet family's "and Mr. Darcy" is one that you have and haven't met before: Liz is a magazine writer in her late thirties who, like her yoga instructor older sister, Jane, lives in New York City. When their father has a health scare, they return to their childhood home in Cincinnati to help and discover that the sprawling Tudor they grew up in is crumbling and the family is in disarray. Youngest sisters Kitty and Lydia are too busy with their CrossFit workouts and Paleo diets to get jobs. Mary, the middle sister, is earning her third online master's degree and barely leaves her room, except for those mysterious Tuesday-night outings she won't discuss. And Mrs. Bennet has one thing on her mind: how to marry off her daughters, especially as Jane's fortieth birthday fast approaches. Enter Chip Bingley, a handsome new-in-town doctor who recently appeared on the juggernaut reality TV dating show *Eligible*. At a Fourth of July barbecue, Chip takes an immediate interest in Jane, but Chip's friend neurosurgeon Fitzwilliam Darcy reveals himself to Liz to be much less charming. . . . And yet, first impressions can be deceiving. Praise for *Eligible* "Even the most ardent Austenite will soon find herself seduced." "O: The Oprah Magazine" "Blissful . . . Sittenfeld modernizes the classic in such a stylish, witty way you'd guess even Jane Austen would be pleased." "People (book of the week)" "A sparkling, fresh contemporary retelling." "Entertainment Weekly" "[Sittenfeld] is the ideal modern-day reinterpreter. Her special skill lies not just in her clear, clean writing, but in her general amusement about the world, her arch, pithy, dropped-mike observations about behavior, character and motivation. She can spot hypocrisy, cant, self-contradiction and absurdity ten miles away. She's the one you want to leave the party with, so she can explain what really happened. . . . Not since *Clueless*, which transported Emma to Beverly Hills, has Austen been so delightfully interpreted. . . . Sittenfeld writes so well" "her sentences are so good and her story so satisfying. . . . As a reader, let me just say: Three cheers for Curtis Sittenfeld and her astute, sharp and ebullient anthropological interest in the human condition." "Sarah Lyall, The New York Times Book Review" "A clever, uproarious evolution of Austen's story." "The Denver Post" "If there exists a more perfect pairing than Curtis Sittenfeld and Jane Austen, we dare you to find it. . . . Sittenfeld makes an already irresistible story even more beguiling and charming." "Elle" "A playful, wickedly smart retelling of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*." "BuzzFeed" "Sittenfeld is an obvious choice to re-create Jane Austen's comedy of manners. [She] is a master at dissecting social norms to reveal the truths of human nature underneath." "The

Millionsâ œA hugely entertaining and surprisingly unpredictable book, bursting with wit and charm.â •â "The Irish Times â œAn unputdownable retelling of the beloved classic.â •â "PopSugarFrom the Hardcover edition.

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## Customer Reviews

Charles Caleb Colton (an English writer who I believe was born in the 1700â™s ) once said that: â œImitation is the sincerest form of flattery.â •Most days I agree with this statement. Today I do not. My shelves are filled with classic literature, and subsequently hundreds of books that retell those classic stories from many different angles in many different eras. They are some of my most beloved books. Why? Because they take what I love and allow me to read it over and over again with fresh eyes. Some of them are silly, mostâ |serious but I have enjoyed each and every one of them for what they are. Until now. When I first caught wind that Curtis Sittenfeld (an author I had not read but heard much about) was publishing a modern retelling of (easily) my favorite bookâ |I was excited. That excitement however, quickly faded when I realized â œEligibleâ • was more of a mockery of Austenâ™s work than an actual reworking of it. Letâ™s start with the plot first (because

I'm much less angsty about it than the characters.) While the parallels between Austen and Sittenfeld's version were easily recognizable, most were poorly executed. Not once, but in every chapter scenes were chopped and pieced back together like a puzzle. Insignificant information (usually flashbacks explaining a sibling's past behavior, but also the listing of every street name Liz passed during her daily jog) seemed to be Sittenfeld's niche, engulfing more space than necessary. Because of this quirk the active plot felt like an afterthought, a stitch in Sittenfeld's side that needed to be taken care of rather than nurtured. It also led to missed opportunities and bad choices. Most of those bad choices had to do with her characters, and how each was dealt with.

Jane Austen does not seem the type to flip the bird to another lady, but for Curtis Sittenfeld she just might make an exception. *Eligible*, "a modern retelling" of *Pride and Prejudice* is worse than dull. Sittenfeld's "homage" completely misunderstands the moral underpinnings and paradox of the original, particularly the character of Elizabeth Bennett. The result is a bloated and banal travesty that proves a cheap imitation is never the sincerest form of flattery. Wit is the hallmark of *Pride and Prejudice* and a talent completely alien to Ms. Sittenfeld. Instead of pages peppered with sardonic quips and epigrams we are anesthetized with the endless drones and whines of petty malcontents. Mr. Collins, Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Mrs. Bennett are three of the great comic creations of literature. Each serves an important function, allowing Austen to gently satirize figures of power, i.e., the Church, the aristocracy, parental 'authority'. Those reincarnated in *Eligible* are barely recognizable boobies who are merely contemptible. Worse yet are *Eligible*'s two eldest daughters, Elizabeth and Jane. The original Elizabeth Bennett is a woman of intelligence, humor and the courage to stand up for her sex and what one might term an equality of the talented. She is a model of moral rectitude and propriety and as the daughter of a gentleman, she is, therefore, a lady. Her place in the world is determined by not merely her birth but by her behavior. The modern Ms. Bennett is unremarkable in every way except she is a bit of a skank, having an affair with a married man, injudicious in personal relationships and rather stuck in the same mid-level job for years and going nowhere. The problem with depicting Ms.

I love Jane Austen, but I'm not a rabid purist. I've enjoyed plenty of follow-ons to her various novels and I like lots of the different film and TV dramatizations. I was a little dubious about the announcement of The Austen Project, in which six contemporary authors would reimagine the Austen novels in the present day. So much of Austen depends on the exploration of the social conventions and class structure of its time, none of which can be readily translated to the modern

day. But I like Curtis Sittenfeld's work, so I thought Eligible would be worth reading. What a disappointment. There was little charm, romance or erotic tension in this too-modern retelling. The characters lack the nuance of Austen's versions and are mostly just flat-out dislikable. Not Jane and Elizabeth, but neither are they the kind of warm or, in Elizabeth's case, good-naturedly impertinent characters that Austen made them. The biggest problem for me is the sex. By making the eldest daughters nearing 40, it goes without saying that they will be sexually active. But Sittenfeld spends too much time on sexual situations and they're not romantic or erotic. Here's the worst, though:\*\*\*\*\*SPOILER\*\*\*\*\*Instead of having romantic/erotic tension between Elizabeth and Darcy, Sittenfeld has them go straight from animosity to hate sex. • I just about threw the book across the room with that.\*\*\*\*\*END SPOILER\*\*\*\*\*Though the sex issue was a big problem for me, it was just one of several aspects of Sittenfeld's modernization that fell flat. Her Cousin William Collins is just as boring and inexplicably self-satisfied as Austen's, but now, instead of being a clergyman, he's a dot-com multi-millionaire.

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