

Dating Mr. Darcy

A Smart Girl's Guide to Sensible Romance

Sarah Arthur



Visit Tyndale's thirsty Web site at areUthirsty.com

Visit www.saraharthur.com to learn more about Sarah Arthur.

Copyright © 2005 by Sarah Arthur. All rights reserved.

Cover photo copyright © by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of house copyright © by Photodisc. All rights reserved.

Author photo copyright © by Tom Arthur. All rights reserved.

TYNDALE is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Thirsty and the *Thirsty* logo are trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Pride and Prejudice quotations are taken from the Penguin Classics edition © 2003 by Penguin Books, London, England.

All Jane Austen quotations are public domain.

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Arthur, Sarah.

Dating Mr. Darcy : a smart girl's guide to sensible romance inspired by Jane Austen's *Pride and prejudice* / Sarah Arthur.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4143-0132-7 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 1-4143-0132-4 (pbk.)

1. Dating (Social customs) 2. Mate selection. 3. Man-woman relationships. 4. Single women—Psychology. 5. Austen, Jane, 1775-1817. *Pride and prejudice*. I. Title: Dating Mister Darcy. II. Title.

HQ801.A795 2005

646.7'7—dc22

2005002717

Printed in the United States of America

10 09 08 07 06 05

6 5 4 3 2 1



Part One
PRESSURE AND PROMISCUITY





- Why Jane Austen can give us tips for the Dating Game
 - Installing your Creep Detection System
 - How to avoid the Love Nest Syndrome



Part One

PRESSURE AND PROMISCUITY

Our ball was rather more amusing than I expected. . . . The melancholy part was, to see so many dozen young women standing by without partners, and each of them with two ugly naked shoulders!

JANE AUSTEN IN A LETTER TO HER SISTER, CASSANDRA,
DECEMBER 9, 1808⁴

The next time you're really bored on a Friday night, flip through the cable channels or the pages of a recent girl mag and count the belly buttons, bare legs, and cleavage. Seriously. Keep track on a piece of scrap paper: fifteen innies, twelve outies, thirty-six bare legs, eighteen thighs, twenty-four bosoms, etc.

Any bare backs, bikini tops, or naked torsos with certain areas coyly covered? Add those too. Then divide the total by four and treat yourself to the same number of large scoops of caramel-latte-macadamia-nut-chunk ice cream. Go ahead: make yourself sick.

Despite the retro-preppie fashion movement, a quick survey of today's magazines, TV episodes, movies, and Super Bowl halftime shows proves that girls are exposing more skin than ever. What's *that* about? If we are supposedly so "liberated" compared to, say, when Jane Austen published *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813, why are we still tempted to offer our physical bodies as our greatest and only attribute?

Welcome to the Relationship Market, otherwise known by the more humane title of the Dating Game (though "game" still implies winners and losers). It's

☹ ☹ ☹
"I do not
particularly like
your way of getting
husbands."
LIZZY TO LYDIA

the public auction where single girls and guys advertise their (mostly physical) attributes in order to get the attention of the opposite sex.

Okay, so that's putting it rather bluntly. But you know exactly what's going on. And so did Jane Austen, our beloved authoress.

In fact, the pursuit of romantic attachments in the twenty-first century is eerily similar to what young people went through in Jane Austen's time. Singles in the dating "market" often have only brief, contrived opportunities to get to know each other and decide whether or not a person's character or personality fits theirs. Much like the young people of Regency England, we often congregate at "watering places" where other singles are likely to be and parade our best attributes in order to gain the attention of a potential partner.

And, as in Jane Austen's time, those of us who are respectable still dance the intricate dance of healthy relationships while the silly and selfish pursue paths that lead to pain for themselves and others. We girls may feel like we have more power than ever to choose for ourselves which guy to date or marry (or not), but to a large extent culture still dictates how to

look, what to wear, what to say, and how to “advertise” ourselves to the opposite sex.

Yes, as much as it disturbs us, the metaphor of the “market” in reference to relationships is, unhappily, still current. This doesn’t mean we like it. That *any* of us would put ourselves up for sale in *any* century is degrading to our sense of human dignity. To our disgust and annoyance, guys still respond to the female form, and girls still respond to guys’ responses to the female form. And round and round it goes.

“Adieu to
disappointment and
spleen. What are men
to rocks and
mountains?”

LIZZY, ON BEING
INVITED TO TRAVEL
WITH HER AUNT AND
UNCLE TO THE
LAKE DISTRICT

Perhaps that’s why we girls are intuitively drawn to Jane Austen. The world’s most famous writer of romantic comedy wrestled firsthand with the realities of the relationship market, though the stakes were arguably much higher back then (i.e., we’re not likely to end up destitute in spinsterhood, dependent on the financial assistance of our older brothers).

While she was a young woman in her early twenties, Jane Austen met and flirted with a cute young Irishman by the name of Tom Lefroy, who, historians suspect, might have married her if she'd had any money (creep). Later Jane accepted a marriage proposal from a family friend, but then turned him down the next morning. Some biographers suggest that she refused yet another offer later on. By that time she was a novelist. We get the sense from her letters that her identity now rested in her *ability*, not her *marketability*. How many of us would have the self-awareness to do the same?

In the same way that we're intrigued by Jane Austen, we're also drawn to the character of Elizabeth Bennet. Like Lizzy, we don't want to play the "market" in any of its forms. We don't want to put our "wares" on display for the admiration of the Mr. Collinses or Mr. Wickhams in order to feel secure about our own body image, if not our future. We don't want to gear all our words and actions toward pleasing, intriguing, or enchanting every eligible

bachelor who comes our way. Not only is the prospect exhausting, but it grates on our sense of dignity and self-respect. If guys can't deal with us as we are, then it can't be worth bothering about them, right?

Yeah! So there!

The problem is, we're wired by God to be in loving relationships with the opposite sex, which hopefully isn't a problem *after* we find those relationships. In the meantime, we long to be special in someone's eyes: to capture his attentions, win his affections, and make him feel lonely when we're not around. When an attractive single male enters the room, we pick up a signal somewhere in our relational radar that activates our marketing instincts, try as we might to override them. A sudden urge to smooth our hair, pick the lint off our skirt, and rub the lip gloss off our teeth takes us by force, and we find ourselves prisoner to our deepest insecurities. We *know* we shouldn't care that this Bingley or Darcy or whoever he is has just entered our field of vision. But we *really* wish we'd worn a different skirt.

Lizzy herself is only too human in this regard. While in agony as to whether or not Darcy still cared for her, “she followed him with her eyes, envied every one to whom he spoke, had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee; and then was enraged against herself for being so silly!”

Phew. So we’re not the only ones.

But Lizzy needn’t worry. What Darcy has grown to appreciate most are her inner qualities, not the color of the dress she’s wearing, though his initial reaction to her outward appearance at the Meryton Assembly is one of bored indifference. Silly boy! It takes Lizzy’s lengthy visit to Netherfield during Jane’s illness for him to begin to admit that not only is Elizabeth Bennet attractive in her own right, but she holds an unexpected fascination for him, largely because she isn’t conscious of her looks and refuses to play games. (Of course, when compared to the sly tactics of Miss Bingley or the wild flirtations of Lydia, any girl looks modest.)

This doesn’t mean Lizzy is meek and unassum-

ing, however. Once she gets past her initial intimidation, she engages Darcy in verbal sparring that has the unintentional consequence of making him fall head over heels in love with her. "Now be sincere," she teases him after they get engaged; "did you admire me for my impertinence?" And he replies, "For the liveliness of your mind, I did." Mmm. A guy who falls for us because of our wit and intelligence? Yum.

Yet when this unconscious bewitchment first begins, Darcy is alarmed. He quickly reverts back to assessing Elizabeth Bennet's outward traits in order to keep himself "safe" from her intriguing inner qualities. As Austen writes, "Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her. He really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger." In other words, he thinks to himself, *Okay, so she's smart. And pretty. But what about her obnoxious family and friends? Dude, don't go there.*

At first this strikes us as extremely snobby, and

of course it is. But part of what's going on is Darcy's acknowledgment that our family and friends play a large role in who we really are. In fact, our connections form a major part of our identity and eventually influence our romantic attachments, whether we like it or not. Our connections become his connections too, even when we're just dating. Darcy understands this principle to some extent, though he makes the mistake of seeing Lizzy's family and friends themselves as points against her rather than looking at her character in light of those relations. Had he inspected further, he would have seen a girl doing her best to be a wise and patient daughter, a caring sister, a faithful friend, and a respected young woman in the community.

He also would have seen a girl of faith and moral conviction, someone who acknowledges there is a higher rule or law that guides our speech and actions in all of our relationships. This moral law says we are responsible for the pain others experience as a result of our selfish words and actions. We will

deal with the consequences someday, if not in this lifetime then certainly when we stand face-to-face with God. We are accountable to God for the way our romantic relationships might hurt those who love us best—something Lydia, for example, fails to grasp and Wickham chooses to ignore.

But Darcy at first decides not to probe too deeply into Lizzy's character as a daughter, sister, friend, and person of faith. He prefers to keep his distance. And Lizzy treats him with the same dismissive attitude. Judging a guy's character without taking into account his family background, the quality of his friendships, and the strength of his moral convictions is a dangerous business.

Very dangerous. When it comes to guys like Wickham, a girl's got to have her Creep Detection System fully functioning. Unfortunately, Lizzy is just as blinded at first by Wickham's outward appearance of goodness as she is by Darcy's outward appearance of smug arrogance. Because Wickham is cute and friendly, she easily falls for his half-truths and

outright lies about Mr. Darcy. Even when Lizzy's sister Jane questions how Darcy could get away with such awful behavior, Lizzy insists that Wickham couldn't have made up the story. "Besides," she says, "there was truth in his looks."

Eek! Lizzy is the *last* person we'd expect to win the prize for Most Gullible. If *she* falls for the resident hunk, what does that mean for the rest of us?

We're toast, that's what it means. All of us will get burned at some point or another. That's because we're created to find certain facial features, mannerisms, and body types attractive, and we often find ourselves attracted to a guy on the basis of those characteristics before our brain has time to kick in. This isn't necessarily a bad thing every time. As you've no doubt been told a million times, physical attraction is a God-given gift that all healthy couples enjoy. You don't want to make a commitment to someone you have no attraction for, or your disinterest could quickly turn to repulsion (think *Charlotte Lucas*). But you also don't want to make an emotional

attachment to a guy on the basis of his stunning profile alone. Or the way he looks in that button-down Oxford. Or the cute little dimple in his chin. Or the . . .

Right. Get ahold of yourself. This is where the sensible side of you is supposed to kick in.

As Lizzy discovers after reading Darcy's letter of explanation, it's far too easy to let your emotions lead you off track in your assessment of someone. "Pleased with the preference of one," she chastises herself, "and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned." She reviews the attributes of Wickham's character and realizes she's been deceived, while Darcy has in fact been the best sort of guy all along: an esteemed friend, an affectionate brother, and someone with strong moral values. Eventually she comes to realize that he's exactly the sort of guy with whom she could make a serious commitment for life.

“Whoa,” you’re saying right about now. “Who said anything about serious commitment? I just want to have fun here. Give me Wickham any day rather than a boring weekend at home babysitting my little brother.” Point well taken. Marriage may be a long way off, and there’s plenty of time to play the Dating Game for a while before getting really serious. . . . And yet, like Lydia Bennet, perhaps we *should* take everything a bit more seriously after all. Not because we’re going to be married by the time senior prom or even grad school rolls around, but because all the habits we form in our dating relationships become the (often shaky) foundation on which our marriages are built down the road. Yep, it’s never too soon to consider whether those habits are good or bad, healthy or unhealthy, just as we need to pay attention to the food we eat and the grades we get in school. Everything we do now has consequences later, and that’s true in romance too.



“Women fancy
admiration means more
than it does.”

“And men take care that
they should.”

JANE AND LIZZY

So let's say Mr. Darcy has entered the ballroom of your life, whether as a date or a prospect. As Lizzy can tell you, beware the "Love Nest Syndrome," where no one except your Number One Crush is invited to be part of your life anymore. That's exactly what Darcy himself wants to create with Lizzy in his first marriage proposal. He tells her, in so many words, "I want you so badly, I'm determined to ignore my family, my friends, and my moral principles in order to have you."


Now, for a fleeting moment that sounds horribly romantic: "He's going to throw all that away for *me*? Because he loves *me*?" But Elizabeth is sensible enough to see the audacity of his words. She recognizes instantly that it's impossible to ignore those other factors when it comes to romance. We simply can't pretend our family, friends, and faith don't exist. They are at the core of who we are.

It's far too easy to think of dating Mr. Darcy as this bubble that protects and secludes you from all other relationships. Sure, your family and friends

are important, but sometimes you'd like to change your name and zip code and start over. The truth is, as Jane Austen so eloquently expressed, those relationships—as well as your faith commitments—are ground zero for your romantic attachments. This is the arena in which your character is tested, tried, perfected, and strengthened.

So the question of gauging a guy's DP is bigger than simply figuring out his favorite Slurpee flavor or ideal movie. It's more than merely assessing what you think you know about his virtues and vices. What reality TV fails to show is that a guy's character is primarily shaped by his other relationships, and if you're clueless about who this guy is in the context of his family, friends, and faith, you're clueless about who he is, period.

Not only that, but you need to consider how well you know *yourself* in all of those areas too. Forget



"I might as well enquire," replied she, "why with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character?"

LIZZY TO DARCY, AFTER
REJECTING HIS FIRST
PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE

how that skirt looks on you for a moment: How well are you getting along with your dad or stepmom lately? When was the last time you honestly reviewed your faults and set goals for improvement? If Lizzy is any indication, you are strongest when you know yourself on the inside, not just the outside. That's the most crucial way to gauge your own EP.

And take it even one step further: How well does *Darcy* know you in those areas? Has he spent one-on-one time with your brother lately? Do you let your friends hang out with the two of you? Do you ever discuss church together? Because who you are in those settings is the best indicator of how you'll develop and mature as a woman who will love him as a partner and friend.

In fact, the only way your relationship with Mr. Darcy will be as healthy and wonderful as it can be is if all your other relationships are healthy too—or at least as healthy as you can try to make them.

So let's start by looking at family.