

A Note About the Author

Helen Fielding was born on 19 February, 1958, in Yorkshire in the north of England. She went to Wakefield Girls' High School and then studied English at St Anne's College at the University of Oxford. She worked for many years in London as a newspaper and television journalist, travelling to Africa, India and Central America. During this time, she wrote her first novel, *Cause Celeb*, published in 1994, which was set in Africa.

In 1995, Helen was asked by the British newspaper, *The Independent*, to write a newspaper column about herself. But she preferred to write about a fictional woman instead. So she created the character of Bridget Jones – a single career woman in her thirties whose main goals in life are to lose weight and attract a man.

Many single women in their thirties identified¹ with Bridget. Nobody had written about their lives in such an honest and funny way before. Bridget was not a beautiful film heroine², but a likeable, ordinary woman with real-life problems. Helen's column became very popular and was turned into a book, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, which was published in 1996. The sequel – the book which follows it – *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* was published in 1999. Both books became best-sellers and have been made into highly successful films.

Helen Fielding is a very funny writer. In 2003, she was listed in *The Observer* newspaper as one of the fifty funniest people in British comedy. Many other comedy writers are her friends.

Helen has written another novel, *Olivia Joules and the Overactive Imagination* (2003), and she co-wrote the screenplays for the two Bridget Jones films. Today she works full-time as a novelist and screenwriter, and lives in London and Los Angeles.

Bridget Jones was a great success because Helen Fielding wrote about a subject which not many other writers had written about before. She showed women that there is nothing wrong with being single. They shouldn't worry about it, but should enjoy life and have fun. Some people think that Helen Fielding is Bridget Jones and is writing about her own life. But this is not true. Helen says she wrote *Bridget Jones* as a way of making herself laugh. Many of the ideas in the book have come from her friends. She has succeeded well in making many other people laugh too.

A Note About the Story

Helen Fielding said that she got the idea for *Bridget Jones* from Jane Austen's famous novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. Although *Pride and Prejudice* was published in 1813, there are many similarities with *Bridget Jones*. Both plots centre round the problems of young women trying to attract a man. Like Elizabeth, the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*, Bridget is attracted to a charming man who is wrong for her. But in the end, both heroines find true love.

Bridget Jones is a very warm, funny story. It is written as a diary, and takes place over one year of Bridget's life. So much of the story is told through Bridget's inner thoughts. The book is easy to read because we feel that Bridget is talking to us, and that we know her.

Bridget has a flat and a job in London. She works in the publicity department of a publishing company. She has three very good friends, whom she meets regularly for meals and drinks. The four friends support each other when they have emotional problems. Bridget has other friends as well, both married and single. But her big worry is that she has no boyfriend. She is afraid of never meeting the right man, and ending up alone.

Bridget is sure that she is very unattractive and is constantly trying to lose weight. She is always trying to eat and drink as few calories as possible. She thinks that men don't like her because she is too fat. But although she wants to attract a man, she still smokes, drinks and eats a lot! She also does foolish things, like getting drunk and having an affair³ with her boss. And she is terrible at cooking.

Bridget is a very likeable character and women can easily identify with her problems. For example, many single women in their thirties have friends like Bridget's, who tell them that

they must get married and have children before they get too old. But Bridget's experiences show us that married life brings problems too. The husband of one of Bridget's friends has an affair, and Bridget's own mother leaves her father.

Bridget was played brilliantly in both *Bridget Jones* films by Renée Zellweger, who is not British, but Texan! The main male characters were played by Colin Firth and Hugh Grant.

Cultural References

Bridget's flat is in South London. She lives the typical life of a young British career woman in her thirties, with a job and a car. She is not rich, but she has enough money to enjoy herself and go out for drinks and meals with her friends.

There are many references to well-known London restaurants, shops and other places in the story. For example, Debenhams, Café Rouge and Harvey Nichols. Bridget's boss, Perpetua, is a 'Sloane' – a rich and confident person from the area round Sloane Square in London's Chelsea. There is a reference to British cooking too. Bridget tries to cook for her friends, and decides to make shepherd's pie – a popular dish with meat and potatoes.

Bridget's parents have a typical British middle-class lifestyle. They live in a small village which is two hours' drive from London. Sometimes Bridget is invited to social events at her parents' friends' houses. Every New Year's Day, her mother's friend Una invites her friends over for a Turkey Lunch. Bridget meets the rich and divorced⁴ Mark Darcy at this lunch, and this is where the story begins...

Stone – a unit for measuring weight in the UK containing 14 pounds. 1 stone = 6.35 kilograms. Bridget usually weighs around 9 stone. 9 stone = 57 kilograms.

Alcoholic units – used for measuring the amount of alcohol that people drink. 1 unit = 1 small glass of wine. Doctors in the

UK advise that women should not drink more than 14 units of alcohol in one week and men should not drink more than 21 units.

Calorie – a unit for measuring how much energy you get from food or drink. Doctors in the UK advise that women should not have more than 2000 calories a day and men should not have more than 2500.

The People in This Story



Bridget Jones



Mark Darcy



Daniel Cleaver



Jude



Shazzer



Tom



Magda

Jeremy

Bridget's mum



Bridget's dad

Julio



Una Alconbury

Geoffrey Alconbury

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January: A Very Bad Start

New Year's Resolutions⁵

These are the things I decided I would do this year.

1. Stop smoking.
2. Develop a mature⁶ relationship with an adult man.
3. Go to the gym.
4. Be kinder and help others more.

Sunday 1 January

Weight 9st 3, alcohol units 14, cigarettes 22, calories 5424.

Noon. London: my flat. Ugh! I've got to drive to Una and Geoffrey Alconbury's New Year's Day Turkey Lunch. Una and Geoffrey Alconbury are my parents' best friends and they have known me since I was a small child.

I'm not a child any more – I'm in my thirties with a flat and a job in London. But every year my mother makes me go to Una and Geoffrey Alconbury's New Year's Day Turkey Lunch. She usually tries to introduce me to a man she thinks would be a good boyfriend for me. But she always chooses the most awful men.

This year, for weeks before New Year's Day, my mother had talked about Mark Darcy. 'Do you remember Malcolm and Elaine Darcy, darling?' she kept saying. 'They're bringing their son Mark with them to Una's New Year's Day Turkey Lunch. He's a top lawyer – just back from America. He's just got divorced.'

I don't know why my mother didn't just say openly, 'Darling, Mark Darcy would make a very good boyfriend for you. He's very rich.'

11.45 p.m. Ugh! The first day of New Year has been awful. I took the wrong road on the way to the Alconburys' so I got lost and arrived very late.

'Bridget! Happy New Year!' said Geoffrey Alconbury. He gave me a huge hug⁷. 'Come on, let's get you a drink. How's your love-life?'

'Fine,' I said in an embarrassed sort of way.

'So you *still* haven't got a boyfriend!' said Geoffrey in a loud voice.

'If you don't hurry up and get married soon, you'll be too old to have children,' said Una, his wife. 'Come along and meet Mark.'

The rich, divorced Mark was standing with his back to us. He was quite tall and was looking at the books on the Alconburys' bookshelves.

'Mark!' said Una. 'I've got someone nice for you to meet.'

Mark Darcy turned round, and I saw that he was wearing a jumper with a pattern of yellow and blue diamonds on the front. It was awful.

'Mark, this is Colin and Pam's daughter, Bridget,' said Una. 'Bridget works in publishing, don't you, Bridget? Well, I'll leave you two young people together.' She went away quickly.

For a moment neither of us spoke.

'Um ... Have you been staying with your parents over New Year?' I asked him.

'Yes,' he said eagerly⁸. 'You too?'

'Yes. No. I was at a party in London last night,' I replied. Suddenly I started talking very quickly – too quickly. But I couldn't stop. Mark Darcy was looking at me with a look of horror on his face.

'Maybe you should get something to eat,' he said, and went away. Everyone was staring at me. I knew they were thinking, 'So that's why Bridget isn't married. She talks too much and is very unattractive to men.'



Mark Darcy was looking at me with a look of horror on his face.

Later, Una brought Mark over to me. 'Mark,' she said, 'you must take Bridget's telephone number, then you can get in touch when you're in London.'

I turned bright red. Now Mark would think I had told Una to say that.

'I'm sure Bridget's life in London is quite full enough already, Mrs Alconbury,' Mark replied.

I felt annoyed. I didn't want Mark to have my telephone number. But I didn't want everyone at the party to know that he didn't want it.

2 a.m. Oh, why am I so unattractive? Why? I hate New Year. I hate everyone – except Daniel Cleaver.

Tuesday 3 January

Weight 9st 4, alcohol units 6 (excellent), cigarettes 23, calories 2472.

9 a.m. Ugh! I cannot face⁹ the thought of going to work. The only good thing about going to work is the thought of seeing Daniel again.

10 p.m. Ugh! Perpetua – who thinks she's my boss – talked for hours to her friends on the phone about the property she is buying with her rich boyfriend, Hugo. Perpetua was wearing a tight red skirt, which made her bottom¹⁰ look very big.

But Perpetua doesn't care about how she looks. Perpetua is a Sloane, which means she is not only rich, but also very confident. I wish I could be like that.

Mmmm. I've been thinking about Daniel Cleaver. He asked me if I got anything nice for Christmas in a rather flirty way. I wonder if he's attracted to me. I think I might wear my short black skirt tomorrow.

Wednesday 4 January

Weight 9st 5, alcohol units 5, cigarettes 20, calories 700 (very good).

4 p.m. My friend Jude just rang up in tears because her boyfriend, Richard, has told her he doesn't want to see her any more. Jude's friends all call him 'Vile Richard' because he is *so* horrible. He thought she was getting too serious about their relationship because she asked him to go on holiday with her.

I immediately called Sharon (Shazzer), our other friend, and we arranged to meet Jude at 6.30 in Café Rouge.

11 p.m. Shazzer, who doesn't have a very high opinion¹¹ of men, gave us her ideas on Richard. And everyone else in Café Rouge heard.

'How *dare*¹² he say you were getting too serious about him?' she shouted. 'What is he *talking* about?'

I thought about Daniel Cleaver. 'Not all men are like Richard,' I said.

'Yes, but should I call Richard or not?' asked Jude.

'No,' said Sharon, just as I was saying, 'Yes.'

Thursday 5 January

Weight 9st 3 (excellent), alcohol units 6, cigarettes 12, calories 1258.

11 a.m. Office. Oh my God. Daniel Cleaver just sent me a message. I was sitting at my computer when New Mail suddenly flashed¹³ up on my screen.

Message Jones

You appear to have forgotten your skirt.
Cleave