

Happily Ever After

Monday 27 January

Weight 9st 3, boyfriends 1 (great!), calories 1500 (excellent)

7.15 a.m. Hurrah! For four weeks and five days I have been in a relationship with an adult male – my boyfriend, Mark Darcy. I feel marvellous¹⁰. He is lying beside me now. Ooh. He just moved.

7.30 a.m. I know, I will get up and make him a fantastic breakfast of sausages, eggs and mushrooms.

7.32 a.m. Except I do not have any mushrooms or sausages.

7.33 a.m. Or eggs.

7.34 a.m. Or milk.

7.35 a.m. He still has not woken up. Mmmm. He is lovely. I love looking at him when he is asleep.

7.40 a.m. Maybe I will put ... GAAAAAH!

7.50 a.m. That was Mark Darcy sitting up in bed and shouting, 'Bridget, will you stop staring at me when I am asleep. Go and find something to do.'

8.45 a.m. In Coins Café having coffee, a chocolate croissant and a cigarette. It's great to be able to have a cigarette openly. It's very complicated having a man in the house. I have to keep my clothes tidy and not leave them in piles on the floor.

9 a.m. My mother has just walked in, wearing a green jacket with shiny gold buttons.

'Hello, darling,' she said. 'I'm just on my way to Debenhams and I know you always come in here for your breakfast. How's it going with Mark?'

'Lovely,' I said dreamily.

'Oh, and by the way,' said my mother, changing the subject. 'Did I tell you that Una and I are going to Kenya?'

Una Alconbury is my mother's best friend.

'What?' I shouted.

'We're going to Kenya!' she repeated. 'Imagine, darling! To darkest Africa! We want to go on safari and meet the Masai tribesmen¹¹, then stay in a beach hotel!'

I was shocked. Only a few months ago, my mother went on holiday with Una and met Julio, a Portuguese tour operator. My father got very jealous of Julio. I really don't want Mum to upset Dad again.

11 a.m. Sit Up Britain office. I'm a researcher for a TV news and current affairs¹² programme called *Sit Up Britain*. My boss is the producer, Richard Finch. He's very large and he shouts a lot. When I arrived, he was having a meeting with the other members of the research team.

'Come on, Bridget!' he yelled when he saw me. 'I'm not paying you to be late. I'm paying you to get to work on time and have good ideas.'

11.03 a.m. At my desk. I keep thinking about last night with Mark Darcy.

11.05 a.m. I thought about a book I read recently – *How to Get the Love You Want* – or maybe it was *Keeping the Love You Find?* In this book, it says the man must chase the woman. So I will wait for Mark Darcy to ring me.

11.15 a.m. Richard Finch shouted at me again. He wants me to go to Leicestershire to interview some people who hunt foxes.

11.21 a.m. Telephone.

11.30 a.m. It was my friend Magda. Magda is married to Jeremy and they have three small children. Magda was trying to talk to me, but she kept having to interrupt¹³ our conversation to attend to¹⁴ the children.

'Bridget, hi! I was just ringing to ... Do it in the potty¹⁵! In the potty!' Then there was a terrible sound followed with 'Mummy will smack¹⁶! Mummy will *smack!*'

'I'm sorry, Magda,' I said. 'But I'm in the middle of work. I've got to leave for Leicestershire in two minutes ...'

'I know you're very important, Bridget,' said Magda. 'I was ringing to say that I've arranged for my builder to come and put up your shelves tomorrow. He's called Gary Wilshaw. Sorry to have bothered you with my boring life. Bye.'

The phone rang again. This time it was my friend Jude. She was crying.

'It's Vile¹⁷ Richard,' she said.

Jude's boyfriend is called Richard. But her friends call him 'Vile Richard' because he treats her so badly.

'I found ... Richard has a self-help book ... book ... called ... called ... *How to Date Young Women: A Guide For Men Over Thirty-Five*. I feel just terrible,' she said. 'Can I see you tonight, Bridge?'

'Um, well, Mark's coming round.'

There was a silence.

'Fine,' she said in a cool voice. 'Have a good time.'

I feel guilty about my friends now that I have a boyfriend. I'm like a traitor¹⁸ in a war. I called Jude back and arranged to see her tomorrow night with our other friend Sharon (Shaz). Now I had better ring Magda and make sure that she doesn't feel boring.

'Thanks, Bridge,' said Magda after we'd talked. 'I'm just feeling depressed since I had the baby. Can you come round tomorrow night?'

'Um, well, I'm supposed to be meeting Jude in Bar 192,' I said.

There was a pause.

'And I suppose I'm too much of a boring Smug Married to come along?' Magda finally said.

My friends and I call married people 'smug' because they always seem so pleased with their lives.

'No, no, come. That would be great!' I said. I knew that Jude would be annoyed that I had invited Magda because she wanted to talk about Vile Richard. But I can't think about that now. I've got to go to Leicestershire. I wonder if I should quickly ring Mark Darcy to tell him where I'm going?

11.35 a.m. Humph¹⁹. The conversation went like this:

Mark: Yes? Darcy here.

Me: It's Bridget.

Mark: (Pause) Right. Err. Everything OK?

Me: Yes, it was nice last night, wasn't it? I mean, you know, when we ...

Mark: Yes. (Pause) I'm actually with the Indonesian Ambassador right now.

Me: Oh. Sorry. I'm just going to Leicestershire.

Mark: Right. Well, ring me when you know what time you're coming back. Bye now.

Hmmm. I don't think I should have called him. It says in one of my books that men really do not like being called when they are busy.

8.30 p.m. Back at my flat. I had a terrible trip to Leicestershire. Everything went wrong. I feel better now. I've tidied my flat, lit the fire and had a bath. I've also washed my hair and put on make-up and sexy black jeans. The jeans are very uncomfortable, but I look nice.

8.35 p.m. Hurrah! It will be a lovely, warm, sexy evening with delicious pasta and firelight. I am a marvellous mixture of a career woman and a girlfriend.

8.40 p.m. Where is he? I'm really fed up ...

8.50 p.m. Doorbell. Hurrah! Mark Darcy came in looking really gorgeous²⁰.

'It's so good to see you,' he whispered into my hair.

I poured him a drink and brought it to him. 'Supper won't be long,' I said. 'I'll just go and check the pasta.' Just then, the phone rang. It was Shaz.

'Hi,' she said. 'How's it going with Mark?'

'He's here,' I whispered, trying to keep my mouth closed so that Mark wouldn't hear.

Mark nodded. 'It's OK,' he said. 'I know I'm here. I don't think we need to keep it a secret from each other.'

'OK. Listen to this,' said Shaz excitedly. 'It's this book called *What Men Want*.' She started reading. "'We are not saying that all men cheat²¹. But all men do think about cheating.'"

'Actually, Shaz, I'm just cooking pasta,' I said.

"'If you have a beautiful sister,'" Shaz went on, "'or friend, be sure that your boyfriend is **HAVING THOUGHTS ABOUT SEX WITH HER.**'"

'Shaz, can we talk about this tomorrow?'

I put the phone down. I had just put the pasta in a bowl when it rang again. This time it was Jude. Mark did not look very pleased. But Jude and Shaz are my friends. They'd been kind to me for years before I met Mark. So I have to talk to them when they call.

Jude was depressed because she had read an article about single girls over thirty. According to the article, all that girls over thirty want is to get married and have babies. But I told Jude that I thought this was rubbish and as we chatted²², she became more cheerful. Then I put the phone down and went

back to join Mark at the table.

Unfortunately the pasta did not look very good. There was a lot of water in it. So we ordered pizzas and ate them in front of the fire.

Mark started talking to me about his day at work. Then the phone rang again.

'Don't answer it,' said Mark.

It was Jude again. 'Bridget, I think I've done the wrong thing. I called Stacey, this guy at work, and he hasn't called me back.'

I talked to Jude for some time. I told her that Stacey would ring tomorrow. When I put the phone down, Mark was watching football. I stared at him.

'Do you want to have sex with Shazzer?' I asked.

'I'm sorry?'

'Do you want to sleep with Shazzer and Jude?'

'Do you mean separately?' he asked. 'Or both at the same time?'

'But have you ever thought about it?' I asked.

'Well,' said Mark, laughing. 'They are very attractive girls.' Just as we'd cleared away the plates, the phone rang again.

'Leave it,' said Mark. 'Please.'

The answer phone was on. We heard a man's voice.

'Ah, hi. Giles Benwick here. I'm a friend of Mark's. I don't suppose he's there, is he? It's just ...' Suddenly his voice broke. 'My wife's just told me she wants a separation and ...'

Mark grabbed the phone. There was an expression of panic²³ on his face. 'Giles, wait ... um ... ah ... Giles, I think Bridget should talk to you.'

I did not know Giles, but I think I gave him good advice. I managed to calm him and recommended some self-help books to him. Afterwards I had a lovely time with Mark. I felt very safe and warm with him.