

bridget jones' diary

one

Friday, December 12

9st 1lb (vg); cigarettes: 12 (vg); alcohol units v.bad.

5am: Oh God. Why? Why? **I'm never going to** drink again **as long as I live**. Oof.

Wednesday December 17

9st 1 (poor) alcohol units 5 (vg) cigarettes 19 (excellent) calories 80 (canape) good but maybe **slightly** unhealthy?

6.30pm: Will I never learn? The week before Christmas, I always **swear** next year I will escape to a **tiny** woodman's cottage deep in the forest to sit quietly by the fire **instead of waking up** in a huge **bustling** city **with** the entire population **going** "oh my God" **at the thought of** work, cards, and present **deadlines** and **getting all dressed up**, and **stuck in traffic** every night, arriving at **do's wanting** to shout "Oh **will you** all just **SOD OFF!**" as everyone is **exhausted** and **sick of seeing each other**.

Also Christmas reminds **one** of the **entire year's failure** to **achieve** anything e.g. form a functional relationship. **A case in point:** Mark Darcy. A relationship that **was left frustratingly** uncertain. We spent one weekend together in Paris and one here, but now he **has gone** back to work in Japan. I hoped he **might** ring to **suggest spending** Christmas in a Swiss Mountain village but he **has not even rung** for 10 days. I'm just rubbish. I'm going to **end up...** Oh-oh. I realise what has happened. I clearly have **got in a mad mood through** stress. I will call Jude.

6.45pm: I have **left** a message **asking** if she is mad too. **Anyway**, tonight I am going to stay **in** quietly, **listening** to classical music.

7pm: **You see**, it is good to calm down, everyone needs to nourish their soul.

7.02pm: It's very boring, **though**.

7.04pm: I think I will ring up Sharon.

7.15pm: Hurrah! Shazzer has invited me to a party.

Midnight: The hair **would** not go right, then the entire city was **gridlocked** so when I arrived Shazzer **had been standing** outside for 15 minutes, and **gave me a real earful**. **Next thing I bumped into an old friend**, Michael, who said 'Bridge, **isn't it about time you had a baby?**'

I **was just about to** give him an earful when he said '**Why don't you** have a baby with me?'

I **gaped at** him. '**I mean,**' he said **hurriedly**, 'be a single Mum. New Labour... well **anyway I was just going to get a drink**. I'll **make up** the six quid for you.'

I could suddenly **imagine being** a **trendy** single Mum with a lovely tiny pink baby **to love and teach things to**, shopping with it in markets, **keeping** it in the bedroom and **slipping off** marvellously during dinner parties to feed it. I **shot off** to discuss it with Shazzer, who **was talking to a posh** lady.

'**The trouble is,**' said Shaz. '**On top of,** 'Why aren't you married?' every minute of the bloody day you'd have "Who's the father?" **to struggle with.**'

"**You could say** it was an immaculate conception."

'I think all this would be **extremely selfish...**' the posh lady **snapped**.

'Why?' said Shaz. 'Because a child needs two parents. You **would be doing** it to satisfy yourself when **actually** you're just **too selfish to have** a relationship.'

Blimey. **Knowing** how mad we all are this week I **could see** Shaz **taking** out a sub-machine gun and **gunning her down**. Maybe the lady was right, **though**. Maybe we are the **fussy** generation and **actually** just want to be free and have fun **while whingeing** about the non-existence of the **50s-style** marriage.

'That's rather a narrow, unrealistic, Smug Middle-Class-Married-Parent view, isn't it?' Shaz was saying. 'Look at the Caribbean' – Mmmm, I thought, a lovely **luxury hotel** and white sand. - 'The women **bring the children up** and the men just **turn up** sometimes and shag them, and now the women are getting economic power and **there are pamphlets saying** "Men at Risk" because they're losing their role.'

Sometimes I **wonder** if Sharon is **quite such an** authority on, well, everything as she **pretends to be**.

'A child needs two parents,' said the woman, coldly.

'**Bollocks**. Children need relationships and life and people **around**, but it doesn't have to be a husband...'

"You can't **spoil** a child **by loving** it," I **slurred** suddenly remembering something my - **ironically enough** - mother always **comes out with**.

'Shut up, Bridge, you're drunk.'

Eventually the Posh woman **stormed off** and I **ended up having** a **snappy exchange** with Shaz about Caribbean customs **at which** I **spotted** the future father of my child **chatting up** a 12-year-old and decided to go home.

I **got back** to a lovely message from Jude.

'Yes. I'm also mad. The cat has **picked up my mood** and started poeing in the basket. I'm going to start doing that too. Call me.'

Hurrah, I love my lovely friends. Maybe if Jude had a baby too we could live in a community together and... aargh.

12.15am: I have **set the wastebin on fire with** a fag end. I will just have a glass of wine, then I'll ring.

1am: I called Jude but the cat **had** just poeed again. 'Can I call you back in a minute?' When it rang I picked up and said "**Would you hold?** Just poeing on the carpet."

'I'm sorry?' said a male voice. Oh my God. It was Mark Darcy.

Grr. **What is it about** him that he always catches me **at the wrong moment?** **For** the entire last 10 days I **have** answered the phone **by simply saying** "hello". (Jude **and I** sometimes answer **by purring** "So you **did** call" which can be amusing. Also one time Shaz worked for a programme called The Night is Young, and had to answer the phone **saying** "He-llo. The Night is...")

'Bridget,' said Mark. '**You've gone** curiously silent. Are you poeing on the carpet?'

I tried to **explain about** Jude and the cat...

'I see,' he said, **dismissively**. 'Are you going to your parents for Christmas?'

Yesss! Yesss! Swiss Mountain village!

"Not sure, **actually**," I replied.

'Pity. I'm going to **mine** for a few days.'

"Well I'm **bound to** be there **for some of the time**," I **gabbled**. Mark's parents live in the same village.

'Great! Well, **in that case**...'

Now I'm **in turmoil**. It's **definitely** v.g. that Mark **is coming** to England but **there was no question of sleeping** together **at my parents'** so does that mean we are "just friends"? Oh God. I'm going to spend Christmas Day with Mum, Dad and Granny, the Alconburys, Mark's parents and Mark himself whom Mum **has been trying to get me off with** for four years and does not know I am sleeping with. And now **neither do I. Still**, it will be lovely to see him. Hurrah! Happy Christmas.

Week Seven: Christmas day

15 stone (feels like) cigarettes 4 (but out of window so v. pure) alcohol units 6 calories 4,675,824 approx.

This is what I have got for Christmas.

1. A small box of bottom-shaped chocolate liqueurs.
2. A **set of different-sized** spanners for taking the lids **off** jars which **may have become stuck**.
3. A bag **to hang** up in the kitchen **to keep** other carrier bags in.
4. Tights.
5. A breadmaker from Mum - which is great, so when I **lurch** home at the end of an evening I can spend an hour **sieving** ingredients into a **giant** plastic machine. Then when I wake up in the morning I can consume an entire giant loaf of bread on the way to work **instead of buying** a chocolate croissant when I get a cappuccino.
6. A very small cheeseboard from Auntie Una with Delft tiles on and a plastic cover **large enough to cover** 1 piece of micro-cheese.

7. A case of wine from Dad. I love Dad.

I'm quite **excited about Mark Darcy coming** for lunch. I **wonder** if he **will have bought** me a present. It's always **thrilling** when **there is something going on** between you and someone else and no one else **knows**. Two Christmas days ago exactly **it seemed as though** Mark **and me were going to** start going out, then **it all went wrong** and Mum and Una were **furious** but now they do not know we are **back together**, but maybe we're not so... Gaaaaaaah.

It was Mum, **holding** a box of chocolate brazils.

'I hope nobody is smoking **in here**,' she said in a weird narrowed-eyed manner.

"It's certainly to be hoped not at this Christmas time," I **giggled owing to having had** a few sheries with Dad **while doing** the sprouts.

'I hope no one's **going to be smelling of** smoke when Mark **arrives**, they don't like it, you know. Don't you think **you'd better** get ready?'

Grrr. I was already ready **actually** but she always **makes** me so paranoid that I have **ended up getting changed** out of the trousers into a stupid dress.

8pm: Oh God. When I **got** down into the hall **my heart skipped a beat** as I **saw Mark talking** to Una in the lounge looking **downright irresistible** in a suit with dark hair brushing against the collar so that I wanted to kiss his neck and started thinking about all the things we...

'Bridget, what are you doing with your **mouth open**, like one of those **morons**? **Go give** everyone a sausage roll,' said Mum.

Why anyone would want to eat a sausage roll before a full Christmas dinner is **beyond** the limits of human imagination. I could not **for the life of me go up to** Mark, so I **ended up having** a mad conversation with Uncle Geoffrey about fast-growing hedges and did not **take in a single** word. **Halfway through**, Mark and I **crossed eyes** and I thought my legs **were going to give way**.

'Stand up straight, Bridget and **hand them round**,' hissed Mum, **from behind shoving** me towards Mark.

It was **dreadful**. I **kept looking** at the buttons on his shirt imagining what was underneath.

'D'you know **the older I get** the harder it is to find presents,' Una was trilling. 'I always **used to** buy Pam Portmeirion but she's got everything now **except** the clock and we both think they're **common**.'

'Yes it **does get** harder and harder,' murmured Mark with a **meaningful glance** down, then at me. 'Don't you **find**?'

"I'm always just really wet about it," I said, desperately trying **not to** start laughing.

'Really one should just thrust in there and **get on with it**, but...'

"There are so many people around," I finished.

'... and then as Christmas approaches, you're in and out all the time.'

"Up and down."

'It really is very, very hard,' he murmured.

Una looked from one to the other of us **confusedly**. 'Well! **You can't** have too many cheese-boards!' she said. 'Just going to **sort out** the gravy.'

Lunch was a torture **with** Mark's toe touching my leg under the table. **Afterwards** I went up to improve my make-up and **was just coming** down the stairs when he appeared in the hall closing the door behind him. **For a second** we **stared**, then **fell upon each other** like beasts, kissing each other wildly **against** the telephone table.

Suddenly the door opened again, and Mum appeared, **going**: 'Bridget, can you remember where I put that box of chocolate brazils...?'

We turned and looked at the assembled family, gaping with their mouths open. What **were they going to** do? **Burst into** spontaneous applause? Shoot us?

'Chocolate brazils,' said Mum, coldly. 'The Cadbury's one,' - **like** the house was filled with a **range** of missing chocolate brazils from **rival manufacturers**.

I stared **fixedly ahead**. "I think you **might have left** them in my room," I said, then I bolted up there and **leaned against** the door. When I **crept** back downstairs the entire Darcy family **were leaving** and everyone was pretending nothing **had** happened. I thought my heart **was going to** break when I **saw Mark going** away **with no** plan to **ever** meet again and no present. Then everyone just sat down in front of the telly.

When I left the room Mum **bustled** out after me and hissed: '**In my day** a kiss meant something.' Oh God. I'm a **doomed**, doomed evil **slut** from... Oooh.

8.30pm: It was Dad yelling, 'Bridget! Telephone!'. He gave me a little smile and **pat** as he **handed** me the phone.

It was Mark. 'Darling, I'm so sorry I left you **in the lurch...**'

"No, I'm sorry I..."

A **heaven-sent** conversation. We both **agreed** we **did the right thing to** escape and let the **grown-ups take over** with the "pretend nothing has happened" parallel universe **which is maybe how** married people survive.

I'm going to spend the whole day with him tomorrow and he has bought me a present. And now I am going to **break the news** to Mum.

Week Eight: New Year resolutions

Resolve not to drink at the moment when the drink is offered **rather than** the morning after

Cigarettes smoked 3,242 (a v. irresponsible use of the gift of life).

Cigarettes not smoked 47* (v.g.). * i.e. nearly smoked but I remembered I **had** given up so I **specifically** did not smoke those **particular** 47. The number is not, **as a result**, the number of cigarettes in the entire world not smoked as that would be a **ridiculous** over-large-style number.

Calories 747,000 (a strange, **impossible-to-imagine** number).

Fat units 3,874: a **repulsive notion**.

Alcohol units 1,364 = 3.73 per day = 26.15 per week.
Quite good.

Weight lost 4st 5lb (excellent).

Weight gained 4st 6lb.

No of correct lottery numbers 147 (better, but still **useless** as they're all on different tickets).

No of days **I've had** boyfriend 29.5 (not counting 3 weeks before Christmas when I did not know whether I **had** a boyfriend or not. **Actually** maybe I should **include** this period divided by 2 = 10.5. So **in real terms**: no of days I've had a boyfriend 40 (g.).

No of times I went to the gym 11. The cost, therefore, per visit of gym membership £36. Oh God.

No of resolutions **kept** from last year 0.33 (poor).

Thursday, January 1

9st 4lb, alcohol units 0 (v.g.) cigarettes 0 (v.g.) calories 1,000.

7pm: Hurrah, I am the perfect saint-style person with a boyfriend who **is coming round** in one hour. This will be the year I definitely **stick to resolutions**, so I am going to do them now **so as not to** be ready over-early and nervous.

New Year's Resolutions

I WILL

Eat food **for** correct reasons e.g. because I'm hungry **as opposed to** bored, or **depressed about being** fat.

Go to the gym **first thing in the morning instead of spending** all day **grumpy about having to** go to the gym, then not going **anyway**.

Reduce cost per visit of gym membership to less than £4 i.e. go at least three times **a week**.

Not be so **obsessed with** gym.

Make relationship work with Mark Darcy.

Get rid of all unnecessary **stuff** from the flat **so** I have only possessions that I need, so I can **travel light** in the manner of feng shui.

Perhaps light fragrant candles or **even** floating candles in bowls.

Have **separate** drawers for socks, pants, tights and bras **so I do not have to wrestle with** a snake-like mass of bras hooked into tights, **as a result being late for work.**

Have regular manicures in order to create a sense of nails as decorative items rather than **foodstuff.**

Listen to the Today programme **instead of lying** in bed thinking about sex.

Make my body into something I am **proud of** instead of **disgusted by.**

Have a less **sedentary** lifestyle and **take up** badminton.

When I **get home** alone at the end of an evening, no longer do the thing of **chain-smoking** fags, **glugging** wine then **lurching** around to "I Will Survive", bursting into tears and calling Shazzer, but instead sip camomile tea, press and prepare clothes for next day.

Resolve not to drink at the moment when drink is offered rather than morning after.

Learn how to do the washing machine **so** it does not always stop **with water left** in the tub.

Read more books and less travel brochures.

Read such books **all the way** to the end.

Finish The Famished Road by Ben Okri.

Drink **sensibly.**

Get ready for **things in good time rather than** believe I can wash my hair, **do my make-up**, choose an **outfit** in a negative **amount of time**, as **being** late **annoys** Mark Darcy.

I WILL NOT

Be so **rubbish** this year.

Smoke butt ends from the bin when I have **run out of** cigarettes.

Smoke at all, **in fact**.

Put things under the bed when people are coming round.

Ring 1471 when I have already rung once and **have not been** out of the flat **since** or **heard the phone ring**.

Take part in any of the following organised by my mother: Easter egg hunts, **slide shows** of the members of the Rotary Club going up or down rivers or mountains, **fancy dress events of any kind**.

Go **round** the flat putting everything edible I can find in my mouth **even if** it is actually mouldy.

Believe **things** e.g. that the washing machine man will come when I stay at home all day waiting for him or that true love exists.

Keep changing mind about **things**.

Worry all the time.

Get existential despair a month before birthday.

Mind if I do not get any Valentine's Day cards.

Flirt with random men during approach to Valentine's Day in order to increase the possibility of cards.

Dislike other girls who get Valentine's Day cards.

Obsess about Valentine's Day cards.

Allow more than two hours **to pass between waking up and getting** out of bed.

Get newspapers delivered then not read them.

Allow **piles** of unread newspapers to **overrun** the house.

Put piles of newspapers in cupboards which then crash out when people come.

Wake up every morning **swearing** I will not drink again because of a **hangover** then as soon as it is the evening think: "Hurrah, time for a little drinky."

Be much more calm **around** Mark as the greatest gift a woman can give to a man is a **peace of mind**.

Aaargh, aargh. It's 7.45. I need a fag to calm down, but **there** are no fags. Also, I do not smoke any more. I think I will **have** a small sip of wine as I have not given

up alcohol like an alcoholic but only to **keep sensible limits**. Right, **what to do about** the mess? I will **shove** it under the bed, but for the last time, **definitely**. Rome was not built in a day or anything.

7.50: I'm bursting with unperformed tasks. I have got to have a fag as it's **too** sudden to **just give up like that**, it'd better to be hypnotised. Then I will quickly wash and dry my hair.

7.55: Goody. I have found quite a long fag-end in the wastebin.

7.59: Right. I have washed my hair now. Doom – papers have fallen out of the cupboard.

8pm: Aaargh, doorbell. Why does he have to come so bloody early?

Monday, January 5

9st 5lb (total emergency) cigarettes 6 (v.g.) alcohol units 0 (but 8am) calories 2,340 (midnight feast)

8.15am: Mmmm. It **has been so** lovely **freakish having** a boyfriend **over** the festive season. **It's been** a funny week, **though**. I **feel as if** I **have been away to** the North Pole for 2 years and everyone **has** forgotten me. **Also** I **cannot believe** the number of celebrities who have **skied** into trees. **Surely** they must notice the trees **ahead of** them? I must not, **however**, **judge** as on my only skiing trip I **accidentally** got on the button lift without skis, **to be dragged puzzled** uphill while three-year-old international downhill racers **whizzed by yelling sniggeringly**: "Ca va?" I love **the way** the News has started **calling** Mo Mowlam "Doctor Mowlam".

Ooh. Mark Darcy just moved. Maybe he will wake up and talk to me about my opinions.

8.30am: Mark Darcy has not woken up.

8.35am: He still has not woken up. I **love looking** at him **asleep, though**.

8.37am: Still he has not woken up. I **must not** make noise, but maybe I could wake him **subtly** by thought vibes.

8.40am: Still has not GAAAAAH!

8.50am: Mark Darcy sitting **upright** yelling: "Bridget, will you stop bloody staring at me when I am asleep! Go find something to do."

Huh. I **have** spent so much time lonely, fantasising **about having** someone **to talk to** in the mornings and now this. Also yesterday I got a **lecture** about the **foolishness of using** Service Wash instead of a washer-dryer: totally **dismissing** the argument that a washer-dryer is too **complex** for human use. The romantic dream has **turned into** a **harsh** domestic reality. I **wonder if that is the reason** people are Singletons, **preferring** fantasising about imaginary relationship to **actually having one?** Oooh, telephone.

It was Mum. "Oh hello, darling. **Guess what?** They've found a 2,000-year-old woman in a cave. **Actually** I think it was a whole family. And a wolf. Ooh, I've **left the oven on.** Byeee."

Hmm. Well **I'd better** go to work.

Tuesday, January 6

7pm: Right. Super. The whole evening to **tackle** washing.

8pm: The bloody stupid machine from the jaws of hell **keeps stopping** with water **left** in the drum and the door **will not** open. Also the dial is not **in alphabetical order** so it **keeps going past.**

9pm: I have got the door open now but **drying** a few pants is **like trying** to launch the solar space Challenger or trying to find the Cottesloe theatre from the **signposts:** "You can wash and dry **by selecting** G or H, depressing the button dry and setting a drying time in **either** the green or blue section of the dry dial. **To select** dry as a separate programme turn the programme dial to J (blue) or K (green). Following the indications in the chart on page 10 turn the time selector dial to the **appropriate setting** and colour. Press the dry button. Press the on/off button. **Check** that the pilot and door locked lights have illuminated. The machine will start operating."

Except it doesn't. I have just **ripped** a huge hole in the tights **out of pure rage**, and bitten my own hand.

Wednesday, January 7

8.30am: I have got the Service booklet now. I must first **look up** the area on the chart to find the **matching** code. Then look up the code on a separate chart to find the Service number and get an engineer.

9am: Right. I have got the code and the number.

9.05am: I have dialled a number and an Indian voice said: "Helloes Khyber Tandoori."

9.45am: Nine minutes **later** I finally got the **head office** and **threw a fit at a startled** telephonist, **threatening to** write to the chairman **after which** she said the engineer **would** come on Friday but they couldn't say when.

Why not? Why? How can **domestic appliance** companies **get away with hanging on to** this 50s idea of homes full of wives in aprons and pointy bras? Could you **imagine making an appointment** in any other **business without saying** a time and expecting the person just to **hang around for** you all day? **I'm going to have to take the entire day off** now.

Friday, January 8

11am: The washing machine man **has** not come.

Noon: Still has not come.

4pm: Still has not come.

5.30pm: Right.

5.45pm: I've just called the Service number to **eventually** get a **bad-tempered** girl **snapping**: "Look, we've got two engineers **off sick**. **There's nothing I can do**. You can **wait in** on Monday and we **might be able to fit you in**." I am completely **drained** after threatening to **report** her to Tony Blair and **expose** the company on national TV. I need a drink.

8pm: When I got into 192, I felt a real **relief** that life **was back to normal**. Jude was talking very **urgently** and seriously to Shaz.

"They're black suede with a three-and-a-half-inch kitten heel. Then low at the front with a black buckle. And **I thought** sheer black tights..."

"Jude," said Shaz. "Do the words **shallow, airheaded** and **bimbo** mean anything **to** you? It's a board meeting, you're the chairman."

"Chairperson," Jude **corrected**. "And then bloody Vile Richard. I was just trying to **get him to listen** to me about my therapy for five minutes - **I mean I've been listening to his** for five bloody years - and then he said, 'Look, I'd **find this much better** if you could e-mail me **about it**'. I **couldn't believe it**. I said, '**I suppose** you'd **prefer it if** the whole bloody relationship **was done over e-mail?**' And he said, 'Well, the telephone **as well**. But **actually yes**'."

"**Bastards**" growled Shaz. "Bloody bastards."

"Well, not all men are complete bastards," I said, thinking about Mark Darcy's Christmas present. "But what about me? I can't **get my washer to work**. **I've been waiting** in all day for the engineer and he **didn't** come."

There was a cold silence.

"Bridget," said Shazzer." Has it **occurred to** you that you **might be turning into** an **extremely dull**, Smug-Going-Out-With-Someone after only two weeks?" I **stared at** them with tears welling in my eyes. **Just when** you **get one area of life sorted out, everything else seems to go wrong**.

Sunday, January 11

9st 3lb (continuing good work), alcohol units 4 (but Bloody Mary, so healthy), cigarettes 22, thoughts about self per hour 32.

"**The thing is,**" said Tom, **striding** around the kitchen and **helping himself to** my crackers, "how many thoughts about yourself is it normal to have?"

Grr. It really **annoys** me **the way** Tom just eats everything in the flat but then maybe **that is what is wrong with** me. When I'm **on my own** I feel lonely but then if I **have someone round** the flat all the time they really **get on my nerves**. Maybe I **am becoming**...

"What I want to know," Tom interrupted, opening the fridge, taking out a piece of Brie, **tearing** the end **off it**

and **shoving** it in his mouth, "is am I **self-obsessed**? Does **living on your own** **make** you self-obsessed? How many thoughts do you have about yourself each hour **as opposed to** thoughts not about yourself?"

"I **don't** think I think about myself much at all!" I said, trying to **work out** whether **what he'd** just done with the Brie was **genuinely** disgusting or whether **the fact that** I **found** it disgusting - **even though** I often do that myself to the Brie or actually just **scoff** the end **straight off** before it's **hardly** out of the fridge - shows that I'm **mean** and unable to share, and that **actually** the real reason I was disgusted was because it was my Brie. **Mine** mine mine.

"So what were you thinking about before I **came round**?" Tom said.

"**Mind your own business.**"

"Tell me," he hissed, **getting hold of** my ear. I **hate it when** he **gets like this**, but **on the other hand** I partly like it because it is **like having** an older brother and I need to be... Ow. He was really **twisting**.

"Robin and Margaret Cook, **for your information.**"

"Yes but that **actually** is thinking about yourself."

"No it's not," I said, **reaching for** a Silk Cut. I **wonder if** the reason I am unable to stop smoking is that I am an **addictive** person or because I am emotionally unbalanced and use the cigarette for soothing like a baby's dummy or "What were you thinking exactly about Margaret Cook?"

"Well, it's very interesting because she's so young and modern-looking, like the lead singer of Texas and therefore you can really imagine **what it was like** when she and Robin **first** started going out at university. So now I can understand how **furious** she is **at** suddenly **being seen** as a sad **dumped 50-something** wife when she **is the same age** as bloody him and **500 times prettier** and probably funnier and **just as bright** and successful in her own field. And also I really like **the way** she is so inconsistent. It's like when Daniel **left me for** the American girl: one minute you decide to be all saintly and **high-minded** then next minute you just **go**

mental with rage and jealousy and want to **get everyone to gang up against** them, then next minute you have a few drinks and get all jolly and think, 'Har har **make mine a large one**, oops it's **down** my trousers!."

"I **rest my case**."

"What?"

"You were thinking about yourself."

"I wasn't. I was thinking of the feminist cause."

Tom made a **hideous** scoffing noise and started snuffling around in a packet of Alpen.

"I was. **It's to do with** the **notion** that women have a **sell-by date** and men **don't** so they're **entitled to** a new young **one every so often**. I mean how horrible is that? People shouldn't think like that any more. Margaret Cook's really great because **she's just not having it** and not letting everyone **ignore the fact that** she's got a **character** and her own **appeal** and..."

"Oh God, shut up Bridge. Let's **go get** a Bloody Mary."

Tuesday, January 13

9st 2lb (but **what is the point of being slim** if you're self-obsessed?), thoughts about myself per hour 32 (average), thoughts about other people but **at the root** about myself per hour 14, thoughts **about how** many thoughts **I am having** about myself per hour: 67.

Hmm. **Surely** I am not self-obsessed, as I often think about **all sorts of things**. The only reason I am unable to stop thinking about myself is that Tom **has set me off**. The good thing is that **I am having** lunch with Magda, who has **made a special effort** to escape the children so I **will be able to** talk **without her carrying on** a simultaneous conversation with a **tiny** person who can't speak English **yet** about poo poo. Or maybe that is just my interpretation as I **am resentful of** people with children. But I can find out how many thoughts Magda has about herself and, if it's as many as me, then self-obsession is definitely not just the product of single living.

The thing is, it is quite interesting **analysing** your own thoughts. There is a v.g. **bit** in the self help book Emotional Intelligence where a woman goes to the psychiatric hospital because she is **worrying** too much and the psychiatrists ask her to worry for one minute **so they can** observe her. So she immediately starts worrying that she won't be able to worry **properly** to order, but if she **doesn't** worry properly now she'll **ruin** her last chance to stop worrying and be happy so **by the end** of the minute she's worried that she's ruined her entire life **by not being** able to worry properly when Gaaaaaaaah! It's 1.15. I **was supposed to** be in Café Rouge 15 minutes ago. I am going to **be** 45 minutes late **for** lunch with Magda.

Saturday, January 23

9st 1lb (vg), alcohol units 4, cigarettes 12, minutes **spent imagining** people **having** oral sex with President Clinton: 48 (better)

1pm: A horror magazine-quiz-style dilemma. **No matter** how much Jeremy has told Magda he **was not having** an affair, and that the **purchases** from the Ann Summers shop on his December Access bill were for her Christmas present, last Thursday night I **saw him getting** out of a car with another woman.

I'm having tea with Magda today and do not know what to do. Instinct says I should not **meddle** but then **how dare** the bloody bastard do that to my friend? Hmm. I **wonder if** it is true, as **implied** by the Clinton situation, that oral sex does not constitute **actual** infidelity: in the same way that at school everyone thought **as long as** you did not **go all the way** you were pure, so you **got up to** every worst kind of depraved... Gaaah! doorbell.

5pm: It was Mark Darcy **carrying** a present. I opened it **to find** an expensive-looking box which looked **as though** it **might have contained** jewels. **Obviously** I am not a Material Girl but the idea of a jewellery gift is unbelievably **heady** and Marilyn Monroe-esque. **Also, it says in the Rules** if a man gives you jewellery or underwear it really means he loves you. **Gracefully** I pressed open the little catch then gaped. It looked like a weird alarm clock.

"**Don't** you know what it is?" he said **fondly**. "It's a Persona, 'contraception that works with your body'."

I **groped for** the **appropriate response** and facial expression. What **was he saying** here? Did he **want me to have** a baby? Did he want to stop using condoms? Or was he just mad?

"Aha. Ahahaha," I trilled maniacally, pressing **repeatedly** on a button with M on it, **at which** an electronic display of eggs, books and toothbrushes appeared.

"I've got the instructions in my bag," he said, pleased, and then **dropped his bombshell**: "**I've been offered** a pretty good job back in Japan or a **slightly** less good **one** here. I don't know what to do."

7pm: Just back from Magda's where conversation was completely typical. "Of course you're not a love pariah, hon, open your mouth! Open it!" I was trying to talk to her about me and Mark **before switching** to the **trickier Jeremy conversation** but Harry, **aged** three, was **on the point of** swallowing an eye shadow.

"Until you find the right **one**," she said, **forcing open** Harry's mouth, "relationships don't **work** because they're not it, not because **there's** anything **wrong with** you. Now that was **naughty**, wasn't it?"

"**Call** me a megalomaniac," I **grumbled** "but **you would have thought** he would have mentioned me **as having** at least some **relevance** to whether he goes back to Japan. And why... "

Magda looked dreamy. "**Some day**, Bridge, you'll meet the right man and then it'll be as easy as leaves falling off a tree."

Grrrr. Sometimes Smug Marrieds can be so so... smug. Everyone knows that in relationship crises girlfriends must say what you want to hear, i.e. "**Obviously** Mark is so **in awe of** you that he's **waiting for you to ask** him to stay," not to **imply** that your relationship is rubbish and **over** while they have everything perfectly **sorted out**.

The truth is, someone like Magda, who **has been** with Jeremy since the age of 23, **would be eaten alive if** she

turned out from domestic care into the **vicious** jungle of the **current** dating world. **Which was exactly why** I was **finding** it impossible to **prick her confidence bubble even though** she was doing it to me. My plan, therefore, was simply to find out what Jeremy **had** said he **was** doing that night.

"Last Thursday," I began, "I nearly rang and asked you to come out with us all." I **paused**, teetering on the edge of a cliff. "**Were** you and Jeremy doing anything?"

"God. I **wish you had**. He was **entertaining** Koreans. I was just in **on my own**."

Hah!

"Where's Jeremy now?" I said **casually**.

"Playing squash. Oh dear, Bridge, poor you," she said, **stroking** her wedding ring smugly.

On the way back to my car, **who should I bump into but** Jeremy.

"Bridget! Still **hanging on to** that chap **of yours**? It **must be** a record."

"**Where've you been?**" I **glowered**.

"Squash," he said. "Phew, exhausted."

"And last Thursday night, outside 192?"

For a split second I saw the **smooth** Jeremy **panic**. "Did you say anything **to** Magda?" Then he **recovered**. "Don't be so silly. I was **dropping off** a colleague **after entertaining** clients."

"**Yeah, right,**" I **muttered**.

"Bridget!" It was Magda. "You've forgotten your keys. Oh darling! Hello!" As I drove away, **watching them wave me off**, the picture of domestic happiness, I felt really **fed up**. Maybe that is just life, I thought, **what with** President Clinton and Robin Cook. I once read an article which claimed there are certain times in history when nations **get swept** by depression epidemics. The last time was in the 17th century due to preachers going round preaching hellfire and damnation and **apparently** the newspapers are **performing** the same function now. Or maybe we just expect too much of love, and **actually**

nobody really **minds** what President Clinton does with girls, it is just an **entertaining distraction** and **once** he has been impeached they will think "**So what?**" and want to peach him again.

Back home I **fiddled miserably** with my Persona, **jabbing distractedly** on the M button. I opened the PhD-style 60-page instructions. "The M button is pressed to tell the Monitor your period has started," it instructed, "DO NOT press the M button until you are ready." Great. So Persona now thinks I have started 14 periods **in the space of** six hours... ooh doorbell.

It was Mark. "You don't love me," he **burst out**. "I **spent all day talking about going** back to Japan, and **not even once**, not once, **did you say you wanted** me to stay."

Mmmm. A dreamy romantic evening. **Even if** love always **seems to end up in a mess**, maybe at least **you have to try**.

Friday, February 6

Minutes **worked out** in the gym: one. Minutes reading a magazine in the gym: 20. No. of booster pads put in Wonderbra to create a **passable** cleavage: four (total)

11am: Office. Last night at the gym I read a **hideous** article in an old magazine **by** Alex Renton **calling thirtysomething girls** "Re-treads". When they were **in their twenties**, he "**argued**", you wanted to go out with them, but couldn't. Now they're in their thirties, you can, but you don't want to any more: **his conclusion being**, "nothing **over 25**". I suddenly felt a cold depression that maybe that is reason for all... Gaaaah!

It was Richard Finch. "Wake up, dolly dum-dum," he was saying. "I'm thinking Age Concern poster. I'm thinking droopy tits. **Get** me six women in the studio - twenties to seventies - I **want them all wearing** Wonderbras **without showing** their heads."

"The Daily Mail **has done** that, Sir," piped up Creepy Hugo.

"Not like we're going to do it, my son," **leered** Richard, revoltingly. "We're gonna get a panel of experts to guess

the ages from the cleavages, then..." He let out a horrible, gurgling laugh.

"**Instead of revealing** the ages **by showing** the heads, we'll take the Wonderbras **off. Get on to it, Bridge, will you?**"

I **stared at him in total disbelief.**

"Do you really think I'm going to work on an item like that?" I exploded. "**You can't** put that out on **daytime TV.**"

"**You can** on cable," he smirked.

"Do you just hate women?" I asked. "Don't you understand what that poster is saying?"

"What? Come on. What?"

"Well, that... that..." God, I **wished I could** call Shazzer. "That women are **fed up of being treated as if** they've got a sexual **sell-by date.** As if their only value is sexuality, and they're only sexually viable if they're young."

"So why's that woman **pretending to be** young in her uplift bra, then? Why didn't they put a picture of Madeleine Albright?"

I thought about this, **thoughtfully.**

"Isn't that woman just doing the same for **your average** fiftysomething as Kate Moss does for your average twentysomething? Most fiftysomething women don't look like that in their bras."

"How do you know?" I **growled.**

"I've seen them in bikinis in Barbados."

I **shuddered at** the thought of Richard Finch in swimming trunks.

"Well," I began, "the first thing that campaign's trying to say **is that** people shouldn't think middle-aged women **stop being** sexy after a certain age, any more **than men do.** And then probably the next poster will be **one of** Madeleine Albright or Betty Boothroyd with some sexist git **asking,** 'Did she **throw herself into her career** because she **Lost Out In Love?**' "

Richard Finch stared at me for a long time, **tapping** the table with his pencil. "Do you want me to put you on Gardener's Corner?" he asked. "Toddlers' Tea Time? Katie's Kitchen Tips?"

I breathed through my nose, dangerously. "If you **do** that item..."

"Oh come on. I'm not saying all the old tits are going to droop when we take the bras off. It's just an experiment."

"If you do that item..."

"What?"

"I'll... I'll resign." **Just then** the phone rang.

"Oh hello, darling, guess what?" - my mother.

I looked nervously towards Richard Finch, who **had** started giving Hugo a **crash course in how to** persuade 70-year-olds to take their tops off.

"Una **and I** are going to the NSPCC Olde English Supper," Mum trilled, "and we're going to go in Wonderbras! Imagine! What do you think Daddy and Uncle Geoffrey will say!"

Oh God. Mark Darcy's parents live in the next village and **are bound to turn up** at the supper. I **don't** think our embryonic re-relationship can **take the strain**.

"Hahaha!" I laughed playfully, then hissed. "But you **will be wearing** something over the Wonderbras, won't you?"

"No," she said. "The Spice Girls go out in their cleavages, why shouldn't me and Una?"

"Because you and Auntie Una are not members of a twentysomething girl band. And the NSPCC Olde English Supper is not an Acid House Rave."

"**I see,**" said Mum icily. "You're an ageist. I've **given birth to** an ageist."

"**Why don't you** go in **matching** gold dressing gowns and nighties like Cherie and Hillary?" I **cajoled**.

"Dressing gowns! **I suppose** you'll be **suggesting that we go** in bedjackets next. With Zimmer frames. Or wheelchairs. **Haven't** you seen that poster?"

"Yes," I said **patiently**. "But I **don't** think **what Age Concern is trying to do is to encourage** 67-year-olds to **socialise** topless."

"**That's what** you think of me, isn't it? You think I'm **some sort of old geezer**."

"No! I just don't **want Mark's parents to think** you're mad," I **blurted**, as Richard Finch bore down on me with a potted petunia.

8pm: My flat. Total panic... The item **was dropped**, but only because the women **wouldn't** do it. I have got till tomorrow to decide whether to resign. Gaaaah! Doorbell.

It was Mark Darcy. "**What's the matter**, sweetheart?"

There is nothing like someone **being** nice to you **to make you cry**. I **ended up telling** him the whole story. "I'm just a Re-tread," I **sobbed**, "and don't even look like that in a Wonderbra now!"

Mark Darcy **burst out laughing** and **put** his arms round me.

"Re-tread!" he **scoffed**. "That's the most **miserable**, stupid, **joyless**, life-denying argument **I've ever heard in my life**. It ignores **character**. It ignores love. I don't care how old you are or how bouncy your cleavage is, I just love you. Now **why don't you** start looking for another job and then resign. And **while you're at it**, write to that Alex Renton and say you hope he loses his hair."

Mmmm. I love Mark Darcy. Unfortunately, however, as he **bent over** to open the fridge, I **could not help noticing** his bald patch **is getting bigger**. I'm an awful person, as well as a small-breasted Re-tread.

Wednesday, February 11

9st 1, cigarettes 1 (vg) Nicorettes 20 (v.bad) No. of early Valentines 0. huh.

5pm office. Mark Darcy just called.

"Bridget, I'm really sorry, I've got to go over to New York for this Holdern case for four or five days, so I **won't be able to make it tonight**."

"Oh, marvellous, **don't worry**," I said, sitting on my hands and **shoving** an entire lump of cheese in my mouth to **stop myself yelling** BUT IT'S VALENTINE'S DAY ON SATURDAY. IT'S VALENTINE'S DAY. WAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!

The **fake** calm poise **went pretty well** until Mark said: "**By the way**, I met your friend Rebecca."

"What?" I **stammered**.

"She's great, isn't she?"

Humph. Rebecca is not "great"; she is a Jellyfisher. **Talking** to her is like swimming in a lovely warm sea, then suddenly something stings you and **next thing** everything **is back to normal except** a bit of you really hurts.

"I didn't know you **knew** Rebecca," I said, trying **not to** squeak.

"She was at Barky Thompson's drinks last night and introduced herself."

I mean: a) What was she doing there if **I wasn't**?

"Yes," he **murmured**, "**I thought she was extremely** nice and intelligent."

b) **What was she doing being** "Nice and Intelligent" to Mark Darcy and not telling me about it?

"What... what did you talk about?"

"She seemed **interested in** my work and was very nice **about** you. You've got great friends."

c) If Jude or Shaz **had** met him they **would have been** on the phone to me during the party with a full **account**.

"What nice things did she say?"

"She was saying what a free spirit you are."

d) In Rebecca-speak "free spirit" **is equal to saying** "Bridget **sleeps around** and is going to **chuck** you".

5.10pm I managed to be nice and calm till the end of the conversation but oh, oh; maybe Rebecca is going to New York too. Mark and Rebecca **are having** a secret date in New York. He's in love with her.

5.15pm **You see**, men are a bit stupid and do not notice such **qualities** as Jellyfishing when **flattery** and thinness is **going on**.

5.30pm I have summoned Jude and Shazzer for an **emergency** summit 192.

7pm Valentine's Day is nearly as bad as Christmas. On the way home **even** the washing machine shop **had red hearts hanging** above the vacuums. **Honestly I would rather not have** Valentine's Day gift than a vacuum. What would that say about your **man's feelings for you?**

7.30pm **Actually, I would rather get** vacuum than just nothing.

Thursday, February 12

1am Back home. I **had** secretly hoped the girls **would dismiss** the whole **Rebecca issue** as paranoia but an air of War HQ hung heavily above 192.

"**The point is**," Jude was saying tersely, "if Rebecca had **even an elementary grasp of** the spirit of Girlfriendom, she **would have rung you by now**."

"Man oh Man," shrieked Shazzer. Rebecca was coming in, looking hideously thin, beautiful and elegant, a mobile phone to her ear.

"How's it going?" she said, kissing us all. "Bridge, how's it going with Mark? You **must be** really pleased **to get** a boyfriend **at last**. Is it heaven?"

"At last" – the first jellyfish of the evening.

"Fine," I **mumbled**.

"So!" said Rebecca. "What are we all doing for Valentine's Day?"

There was an uncomfortable pause.

"What are you doing?" said Shazzer aggressively.

"I think I **might** go away for a few days." My heart did a great big clunk down through my stomach.

"With Paul?" said Sharon, looking ill.

"**God no**. I've just got to **get away from** him, he's too **all over me**. He **leaves** messages all day, saying 'Hello, gorgeous girl, just longing to talk to you.' And he's

planning all this **embarrassing stuff** for Saturday. I don't know what's wrong with me - I **should be flattered**, but..."

I stepped sympathetically on Sharon's toe. Four months ago Rebecca **kept going on about how** she didn't **fancy** Paul but he really fancied Shazzer and claimed she was trying to **fix them up**. Shazzer **got all excited** but Paul just **kept blowing her out** for dates. **Next thing** Rebecca was going out with him.

"He's **handsome**, he's successful, he's funny, he's **crazy about** me," Rebecca went on. "So why **aren't I** in love with him?"

"I hear you met Mark **the other night**." It was out before I could stop myself.

"Oh yeah. God, aren't that Barky Thompson **set** hard work? If I were you I'd just be yourself, don't try to **keep up with** them. You're great **just as you are**."

As Shazzer said in the loos later, **it wasn't so much** a jellyfish as a Portuguese Man of War. **First**, she **glossed over** the Mark meeting suspiciously; second, she **implied I was** stupid; and third, she **made it seem like** Mark **had** said I **was** trying too hard with his friends. Unfortunately, Shazzer could not help me as she was too jellyfished **herself**. Why do we let Rebecca do this to us? **By the time** she **had** flicked a few tentacles at Jude - "I don't know why you call him Vile Richard, he's always really nice to me..." - we were all **slumped** staring into space, nursing our stings.

"Where are you **thinking of going**?" I managed **at one point**.

"I dunno, Paris maybe..." she began. "Or New York..."