

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

Daniel Cleaver is flirting with me! I've never sent him a message before but I'm going to send him a funny one now.

Message Cleave

Sir, I am shocked by your message. My skirt is short, but it does exist.

Jones

Noon. Oh God. Daniel has not replied. Maybe he was being serious about my skirt.

12.10 p.m. Maybe he hasn't got my message yet.

12.15 p.m. Hah. Daniel is in a meeting with Simon from the Marketing Department. Aha. New Mail.

Message Jones

Your skirt is clearly absent¹⁴. Is skirt off sick?

Cleave

Just sending back:

Message Cleave

Skirt is neither sick nor absent.

Jones

Oh dear. This was the return message.

Message Jones

'Absent', Jones, not 'abscent'. Try using a computer spell-check.

Cleave

Daniel walked past with Simon from Marketing and gave my skirt a very sexy look. I must try and improve my spelling.

Friday 6 January

5.45 p.m. I could not be happier. Daniel's last message read:

Message Jones
I wish to send flowers to your skirt over the weekend.
Please give me your home telephone number.
Cleave

Yesssss! Daniel Cleaver wants my phone no. Marvellous¹⁵!

Sunday 8 January

Weight 9st 2 (good, but what's the point?¹⁶), alcohol units 2 (excellent), cigarettes 7, calories 3100 (poor).

2 p.m. Oh God, why am I so unattractive? I've spent two days staring at the phone and waiting for Daniel to call.

8 p.m. The phone rang, but it was my friend Tom. Tom helps me a lot. He listened patiently while I told him first about Mark Darcy and then about Daniel. Then Tom said, 'Mark Darcy? But isn't he that famous human rights¹⁷ lawyer?'

Monday 9 January

Weight 9st 2, alcohol units 4, cigarettes 29, calories 770.

It was a terrible day in the office. I watched the door for Daniel all morning.

Then Perpetua suddenly shouted into the phone: 'Daniel? He's gone to a meeting in Croydon. He'll be in tomorrow.' She

banged down the phone and said, 'God, why are all these girls calling Daniel?'

When I went home that evening, in a mad moment I left a message on Daniel's answer-phone. I said, 'Hi, it's Jones here. I was just wondering if you wanted to meet to talk about the skirt.'

As soon as I put the phone down, I realised I had made a big mistake.

Tuesday 10 January

Weight 9st 1, alcohol units 2, cigarettes 0, calories 998 (excellent).

I crept into the office feeling really embarrassed about the message. Then Daniel appeared looking very sexy. Suddenly New Mail flashed up on my computer screen.

Message Jones
Thanks for your phone call.
Cleave

I sent back:

Message Cleave
Please shut up. I am very busy and important.
Jones

And after a few minutes more, he replied. Finally he suggested a date for Sunday night, and I accepted.

Sunday 15 January

Weight 9st (excellent), alcohol units 0, cigarettes 29 (very bad), calories 3879 (awful), negative thoughts 942.

6 p.m. I am completely exhausted¹⁸ by getting ready for my date with Daniel. It has taken all day. Being a woman is worse than being a farmer. There's so much preparation and harvesting¹⁹ to do.

7 p.m. I cannot believe this has happened. I was completing the final farming touches to my face and body, when I noticed the answer-phone light was flashing. It was Daniel.

'Look, Jones, I'm really sorry. I think I'm going to have to cancel tonight. I've got a presentation at ten in the morning.'

I cannot believe it. I've wasted the whole day.

9 p.m. Still, Daniel is in a top job. Maybe he didn't want to come on a first date worrying about work.

11 p.m. Humph²⁰. He's probably out with someone thinner than I am.

5 a.m. What's wrong with me? I *hate* Daniel Cleaver.

Monday 16 January

Weight 9st 2 (from where? Why?), alcohol units 0, cigarettes 20, calories 1500, positive thoughts 0.

10.30 a.m. Daniel is still in his meeting. Maybe he was telling the truth.

1 p.m. I just saw Daniel leaving for lunch. He has not sent me any messages. I feel very depressed.

11.50 p.m. I just had dinner with Tom on the 5th floor at Harvey Nichols. I wanted to talk about Daniel but Tom talked all the time about someone new he's met – a film-maker.

Tuesday 24 January

Today was wonderful. At 5.30, Daniel sat down on the edge of my desk, took out his diary and whispered, 'What are you doing on Friday?'

Friday 27 January

Weight 9st 3, alcohol units 8, cigarettes 400 (feels like), calories 875.

Huh. We had a dream date at a little Italian restaurant near Daniel's flat.

After dinner, we went back to Daniel's flat. As soon as we were inside, he started to try and take off my skirt. Then he whispered, 'This is just a bit of fun, OK? I don't think we should start a relationship with each other.' But I immediately felt angry with him.

'That is such rubbish!' I said. 'You want me to sleep with you, but you don't want to have a relationship? I am not interested in emotional cowards²¹. Goodbye.' Then I walked out of the door.

I did the right thing. But now I feel depressed. I am afraid of one day being found dead in my flat, all alone, half-eaten by an animal.