

"Bastards!" yelled Jude, slurping her Pino Grigio.

"Bastards," I yelled through a mouthful of raspberry pavlova mixed with tiramisu.

"Bloody bastards!" shouted Jude, lighting a Silk Cut with the butt end of the last one.

Bridget's New Year Resolutions that begin the novel include finding a better job, losing weight, organizing her photographs, and starting "a functional relationship with a responsible adult." She appropriately titles January, "An Exceptionally Bad Start."

She obsesses over her boss Daniel, a man far from the responsible adult she craves. After several flirty e-mails concerning the near non-existence of her black mini-skirt, she finds herself an emotional wreck even before their first date.

Hideous, wasted two days glaring psychopathically at the phone, and eating things. Why hasn't he rung? Why? What's wrong with me? Why ask for my phone number if he wasn't going to ring, and if he was going to ring surely he would do it over the weekend? Must center myself more. Will ask Jude about appropriate self-help book, possible Eastern-religion-based.

Yet as much as Bridget inwardly wanes for Daniel, she maintains her pride when he unzips her skirt and says, "This is just a bit of fun, OK? I don't think we should start getting involved." Bridget stands her ground and kicks him out, dignity intact—even if dignity's repercussions mean smoking a few hundred Silk Cuts and ingesting a few thousand calories.

As the year progresses, Bridget's life goes from worse to "v.g." (her abbreviation for very good) to "not v.g." Her mother leaves her father and pursues a new life, lover, and career, all more glamorous than Bridget's. In the midst of everything, she's also fighting off questions about her love life from the "Smug Marrieds," a group of happily married couples who look down on singletons and haunt Bridget at a variety of inane social gatherings.

One of these inane social gatherings include a Tart-and-Vicar party no one tells her has been canceled. When Bridget walks through the doors dressed in a bunny tail and stockings while all the other guests wear their Sunday best, "inner poise" eludes her again. She's bombarded with stares and persecuted about the absence of her boyfriend. (He's sleeping with another woman, she later discovers.) However, her sarcasm is as strong as ever when Mark Darcy, a guy she can't decide if she loves or hates, ap-

proaches her with his newest girlfriend.

I could feel someone's eyes on me and looked up to see Mark Darcy staring fixedly at the bunny tail. Beside him was the tall thin glamorous top family-law barrister clad in a demure lilac dress and coat like Jackie O. with sunglasses on her head.

The smug witch smirked at Mark and blatantly looked me up and down in a most impolite manner. "Have you come from another party?" she breathed.

"Actually, I'm just on my way to work," I said, at which Mark Darcy half smiled and looked away.

The months pile up and so do the pounds, the butts, and the hangovers. But by the end of the year Bridget gains more than weight, black lungs, and liver cirrhosis. She leaves the year with optimism and a germ of confidence. Bridget may at times believe she will die a recluse "half-eaten by an Alsatian," but her sharp tongue and persistence bring to mind that feminist anthem of long ago—I am woman, hear me roar.

LAURA DURNELL

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### Jon Loomis. *Vanitas Motel*. Oberlin College Press, 1998.

The very title "Vanitas Motel" seems to locate us in a highminded but slightly seedy environment, and Jon Loomis's poems veer deftly and ironically between the sacramental and the sordid. If all flesh is grass, and it is vanity to think otherwise, nevertheless Loomis would have us celebrate this flesh: his wry deflations of self-importance coexist with admonitions to live and live well, even if living well means living in rented or borrowed rooms. This is something of a guy book, not in its subjects—which range from the death of the poet's father to illness to landscape to painting to desire to divorce—but in its tone, which is marked by a kind of roughhewn sentiment, a tough-but-tender machismo. The opening poem, "Playing Seven Card Stud with the Men of My Wife's Family," reveals in its title Loomis's investment in men's rituals as well as domestic affections. Over the course of this book, Loomis implicitly traces several narrative lines. The story of the end of his marriage emerges slowly and delicately, particularly in such poems as "Adultery," "Divorce," and "Separation."