

ALLEN & UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

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About the book

Helen McNeil is a vet in the small rural town of Broadview. While taking evasive action from a dull girl at a party one night she falls over – and fails to recognise – national sporting hero, Mark Tipene. For some mysterious reason Helen never really grasps, Mark finds this charming and appears the next day at the front counter of the vet clinic to ask her out.

A whirlwind romance follows and everything is going swimmingly until one little hiccup changes everything ...

Chocolate Cake for Breakfast is the funny and heart-warming story of the pros and cons of dating a man whose shirtless picture adorns a wall in every second lunchroom in the country, of calving cows and crazy cat ladies, and of doing your best when life takes an unexpected turn.

About the author

Danielle Hawkins grew up on a sheep and beef farm near Otorohanga in New Zealand, and later studied veterinary science. After graduating as a vet she met a very nice dairy farmer who became her husband. Danielle spends two days per week working as a large animal vet and the other five as housekeeper, cook and general dogsbody. She has two small children, and when she is very lucky they nap simultaneously so she can write. She is the author of the critically acclaimed novel, *Dinner at Rose's*.

Author, Danielle Hawkins, on writing *Chocolate Cake for Breakfast*

I get the impression that writers fall into two camps – the bash-out-a-rough-draft-and-fix-it-up-later type and the polish-exhaustively-as-you-go type. I'm the exhaustive polishing type, so every sentence gets picked up, shaken, altered and re-altered before I go onto the next one. It's a staggeringly slow process, although it's very satisfying when you finally get the words looking the way you want them.

I struggled quite a lot with writing *Chocolate Cake*. I wrote my first book purely because I wanted to, but with the second book I had a deadline and an awareness that people were going to read and comment on what I produced. By the time I handed in the manuscript I was very tired and pretty unhappy – which is a bit embarrassing, because if you're going to be a tortured artist surely you should be producing deep literary works rather than light-hearted commercial fiction. However, the experience taught me a lot about work/life balance and with any luck I'm a more cheerful, sensible person because of it.

Reviews and quotations

'Bucking the trend for unlikeable protagonists, Helen is frankly delightful – intelligent but oh-so-human. A plausible, relatable storyline and hugely appealing characters. A charming read and a giggling good time.'

- *Australian Women's Weekly* (NZ edition)

'Hawkins has created a scrumptious treat with this book, the main character Helen, is affable, sincere and completely relatable to any woman who has experienced the warmth and uncertainty of the beginning of a relationship...

Chocolate Cake for Breakfast is deliciously addictive.' - *Townsville Bulletin*

'Hot boy falls for clumsy-but-clever girl – watch their romance unfold! This is a cute, funny and easy-to-swallow read.'

- *Cleo Magazine*

'A witty novel full of heart...!' - *Cairns Post*

Reviews for *Dinner at Rose's*

'Just when the novel has settled into a romantic trajectory, the mood darkens. An entertainment with brains ...'

- *Sunday Age*

'This is a charming, warm and funny romance' - *Herald Sun*

For discussion

- 📖 Reviewers repeatedly praise Danielle Hawkins' portrayal of her female protagonist. What do you think makes Helen so likeable and easy to relate to compared to the main female characters in other commercial women's fiction.
- 📖 One of the reviews refers to a recent trend towards unlikeable protagonists in commercial women's fiction. Do you agree with this?
- 📖 Reader and newspaper reviews make frequent references to *Chocolate Cake for Breakfast* being 'charming'. What is it about the book that you think evokes this reaction?
- 📖 Another aspect of Danielle's two books that readers and reviewers enjoy are their humour. Do you prefer your light commercial women's fiction to be funny at times?
- 📖 Some readers thought there was too much of veterinary practice and rugby. Do you agree or do you think it added interest and colour to the story?
- 📖 Did you feel like you knew Mark Tipene by the end of the book? Did you like him?
- 📖 Did you enjoy the portrayal of Helen's father, step-mother and younger sisters?

Suggested further reading

Dinner at Rose's by Danielle Hawkins

Breakfast at Six by Mary Scott

Dinner Doesn't Matter by Mary Scott

Pursuit of Love by Nancy Mitford

A Hopeless Romantic by Harriet Evans