

Love Actually

Richard Curtis



About the author

Richard Curtis is a very successful film and television comedy writer. He wrote two popular TV series in the 1980s: *Blackadder* and *Mr Bean*. In the 1990s he started writing for the cinema. His successes include *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Bean* (1997) and *Notting Hill* (1999). He also wrote the screenplay for *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001). *Love Actually* came out in 2003.

Summary

Love Actually consists of seven loosely interlocking stories about a group of Londoners and their love lives, set in the hectic month before Christmas.

Chapters 1–2: Billy Mack, an ageing rock star, is in a recording studio. He is recording a Christmas song which he thinks is rubbish. Daniel is struggling to come to terms with the recent death of his wife. He calls his friend, Karen, whose daughter has been given a part in a Christmas play. Mark, who runs an art gallery, films the wedding of his best friend, Peter, and Juliet. A new Prime Minister enters Downing Street and is attracted to Natalie, a tea-girl.

Jamie, a writer, comes back early from Peter and Juliet's wedding to discover that his girlfriend is having an affair with his brother. Daniel attends his wife's funeral with his eleven-year-old stepson, Sam.

The next day, Mark's friend Sarah is at the office of her company, Fairtrade. She admits to her boss Harry that she is in love with the chief designer, Karl, but she is too shy to do anything about it. On a radio interview about his new Christmas song, Billy talks about being old and lonely.

Chapters 3–4: The Prime Minister discusses an upcoming visit from the American President with his ministers and blushes when he meets Natalie again. Daniel tells Karen that Sam is behaving strangely, and Daniel thinks this is because of his mother's death. However, he discovers that it's because Sam is in love with Joanna, a girl at his school, and is relieved. Jamie leaves London for his farmhouse in France and begins writing again.

Daniel and Sam discuss Sam's girlfriend problems. Billy gives an interview on a children's TV show that upsets his long-suffering manager, Joe. Juliet asks Mark if she can see the video film that he shot at the wedding, but Mark is reluctant to show her. At Fairtrade, Mia, the secretary, seems to flirt with Harry. In France, Jamie meets and falls in love with his attractive Portuguese cleaning lady, Aurelia.

Chapters 5–6: The Prime Minister stands up to the American President during his visit, and the British public approves. The Prime Minister's sister, Karen, calls him, then tells her husband Harry that she thinks her life is dull compared with the Prime Minister's. While Jamie has breakfast in his farmhouse in France, Aurelia, who speaks only Portuguese, jumps in a lake to retrieve his lost manuscript. Jamie jumps in as well. Although they have communication problems their love grows.

Juliet visits Mark unexpectedly and discovers that Mark's wedding video is only of her – even though she thought Mark didn't like her. The Prime Minister has Natalie transferred to another job so that he will stop thinking about her. Daniel's son Sam is sad because Joanna is going back to America. Aurelia helps to pack Jamie's car for his Christmas trip to England. Sam watches a music video of Billy's Christmas song. He thinks that if he is a drummer in a rock group, Joanna might fall in love with him.

At the Fairtrade Christmas party, Mia dances with Harry. Karl invites Sarah to dance. She invites him up to her flat, but their romantic evening is interrupted by a telephone call. Sarah's sick brother, Michael, needs her. At home after the party, Karen warns Harry to be careful of Mia. The next day, Mia asks Harry to buy her a Christmas present. Jamie, back in London, is studying Portuguese.

Chapters 7–9: It is the evening before Christmas, and Karen's family is opening presents. She opens a gift from Harry, a CD, which disappoints her. Billy's song has unexpectedly become the Christmas Number 1 hit and he is invited to Elton John's Christmas party. Jamie returns

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to France to get Aurelia. Sarah says goodbye to Karl at the Fairtrade office and spends Christmas opening presents with Michael in hospital. Mark gives Juliet a Christmas card that tells her how he feels. Billy leaves the Elton John party early to be with Joe, who is about to spend Christmas alone.

The Prime Minister is alone in 10 Downing Street. He finds a Christmas card from Natalie. He goes to her house on Christmas Eve and accompanies her and her family to a school Christmas concert, where he meets his sister, Karen, and her family. Near the end of the concert, Sam plays drums while Joanna sings a Christmas song to him. The Prime Minister and Natalie try to be inconspicuous, but end up kissing in front of the whole audience.

After the concert, Karen confronts her husband, Harry. She tells him that she knows he has secretly bought Mia an expensive Christmas present. Daniel encourages Sam to tell Joanna that he loves her, but she and her family have left for the airport. Daniel and Sam follow. Joanna kisses Sam just before she boards the plane. In France, Jamie visits Aurelia's family and, using his new Portuguese, asks Aurelia to marry him.

One month after Christmas, the Arrivals Hall at Heathrow Airport is a busy but happy place. Billy Mack and his girlfriend are met by Joe; Jamie arrives next with Aurelia and introduces her to his friends Peter, Juliet and Mark; Harry is met by Karen and the children; Joanna is met by Sam and Daniel (who has become friendly with Carol, a young mother); and Natalie and the Prime Minister are met by a crowd of journalists!

Love, actually, is all around!

Background and themes

Romantic love: Romantic love can hit anybody at any time. It crosses social boundaries and brings chaos to our lives. It brings great sadness as well as great happiness. The journey of life is never easy when love interrupts our plans – but without love, is the journey worth making at all?

Marriage: In the past, marriage was traditionally a business or political affair. Love was not a necessary part of it. But now, romantic attraction is seen as not only desirable but the only acceptable way of choosing a partner for life. It's probably the most difficult and complicated human relationship that can be attempted, combining the tenderness of love with household cares and the raising of children. But, in a cynical, competitive, materialistic modern

world, romantic love remains almost everybody's goal. It is necessary for the satisfaction of our main emotional needs and happiness.

Christmas: The story is set just before Christmas and features a number of traditional seasonal activities – office parties, Christmas carols, school Christmas plays, Christmas shopping and so on.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Discuss:** Read these words out to students and ask them to number them in the order of importance for happiness: *fame, wealth, power, love, job satisfaction, good looks, intelligence*. Then divide the class into groups of three or four students. Ask each group to compare and discuss their lists.
- Discuss:** Tell students that the story they are going to read is set just before Christmas in London. Divide the class into small groups. Ask them to talk about Christmas in their country, or their most important annual festival.

Introduction

After reading

- Discuss:** When students have read the Introduction (pages v–vii) read out these sentences and ask the students to correct the mistakes.
 - The story of *Love Actually* begins just after Christmas.
 - Peter and Sarah are about to be married.
 - The film *Love Actually* came out in 2001.
 - Richard Curtis worked on *Notting Hill* before he worked on *Bridget Jones's Diary*.
 - Some scenes in *Love Actually* were filmed in famous places in New York.
 - The actors who played Jamie and Aurelia did not really swim because the lake wasn't very warm.
 - In the first scene in the film, Hugh Grant wears eleven different ties.
 - The film story was changed several times to make it longer.
 - There is one connection between each of the characters.
- Predict:** Look at the Contents (page iii) and read the chapter titles. *Do you think the story has a happy ending? Why/why not? What do you think happens in the story?*

Chapters 1–2

After reading

- Write:** Ask students to write a short news item about Billy Mack's new Christmas single for a pop music magazine. They can write about what the song is about, how the song has been changed, who Billy Mack is and who helped him record the song.

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- 6 Write:** Ask students to imagine they are the Prime Minister. They can make notes of the people they have met at 10 Downing Street and what each one is responsible for.
- 7 Predict:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss what they think will happen next to:
Billy's Christmas song. Jamie.
Daniel. The Prime Minister and Natalie.

Chapters 3–4

After reading

- 8 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss this question: *The ministers and the Prime Minister disagree about how to deal with the American President. What do they say? Which side do you think is right?*
- 9 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss this question: *Harry says the office Christmas party is not his favourite night of the year. Why do you think he says this? Have you ever worked for a company that has a party every year? What do you think about such parties?*
- 10 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss this question: *Karen says, 'People hate men who behave like girls.' Do you agree with her? Why/why not?*
- 11 Write:** Ask students to imagine they are Jamie and they have just arrived in France. Have them write an entry in Jamie's diary. *Say what has happened to you and why you have gone to France. Say how long you think you will stay in France. Say what you hope will happen to you now.*
- 12 Predict:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss what they think will happen next to:
Harry and Mia. Jamie and Aurelia.
Sarah and Karl. Sam.
The Prime Minister and the American President.

Chapters 5–6

After reading

- 13 Write:** Ask students to imagine they are the American President. The Prime Minister has just told journalists that the special relationship between Britain and America must change. Have them write an entry in the President's diary. *Say what you think about what the Prime Minister said to the journalists. Say what you think about the Prime Minister personally. Say what you think will happen next between America and Britain.*
- 14 Role play:** Students work in pairs. Ask them to prepare and then act out the following conversation:
Student A: You are the Prime Minister. Tell your sister Karen about Natalie. Ask for advice. Then listen to Karen's problem and give her advice.
Student B: You are Karen. Listen to your brother's problem and give him advice. Then tell your brother about your husband and the necklace. Ask for advice.

- 15 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss this question: *What do you think is wrong with Michael? Why do you think he tries to hit Sarah? What do you think of his relationship with Sarah?*
- 16 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss this question: *Sam says that in romantic films, people only come together at the end. What are some examples of romantic films that end this way? What do you think this means for Sam and his stepfather? Do you think this is true in real life?*
- 17 Predict:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss what they think will happen next to:
Harry and Karen, Mark and Juliet, Billy's Christmas song, The Prime Minister and Natalie.

Chapters 7–9

After reading

- 18 Write:** Ask students to imagine they are Karen. Harry has just given her the Joni Mitchell CD. Have them write an entry in Karen's diary. *Say what Harry has given you and how you feel about it. Say what you thought he was going to give you, and what you think may happen next.*
- 19 Write:** Ask students to imagine that a newspaper journalist was at the school Christmas concert. Ask them to write a short, amusing news story about it. *Say what you thought of the play and the music, and say what happened at the end of the concert.*
- 20 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss these questions:
Whose story were you most interested in? Why?
Whose story were you least interested in? Why?
Which character would you most like to meet? Why?
- 21 Write:** Ask students to imagine it is Christmas, one year later. Have students write one or two sentences about what each of these characters is doing for Christmas:
- | | | |
|---------|-------|--------------------|
| Aurelia | Billy | Daniel |
| Juliet | Karen | Mark |
| Sam | Sarah | The Prime Minister |
- 22 Art work:** Ask students to draw an illustration of one of the following:
- Sarah and Michael opening presents at the hospital (page 39)
 - Mark showing his cards to Juliet (page 40)
 - Natalie and the Prime Minister kissing at the Christmas concert (page 46)
 - Sam running past the guards at the airport as Joanna is boarding the plane (page 50)
 - Jamie asking Aurelia to marry him (page 52)