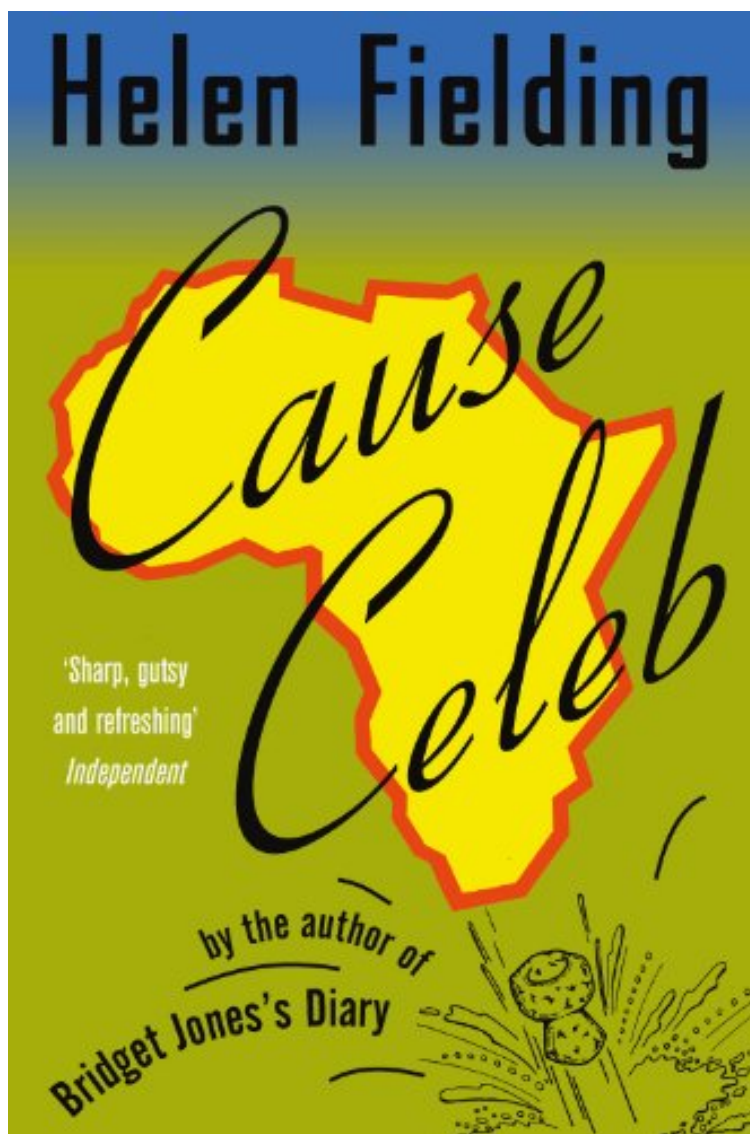


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Cause Celeb (English Edition)



Par Helen Fielding
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurCause Celeb is the debut novel from Helen Fielding, the bestselling author of Bridget Jonesess Diary.Disillusioned by her glitzy life in London and her desirable but cruel TV-presenter boyfriend, Rosie Richardson chucks it all in and spends four years running a refugee camp in Africa. Then famine strikes in a nearby province and an influx of starving refugees threatens to overwhelm the camp. Frustrated by the cautious response of the aid agencies, Rosie decides on a drastic short-term solution. She returns to London, breaks back into the celebrity circuit and brings the celebs out to Africa for a star-studded TV emergency appeal.comHelen Fielding's novel Bridget Jones's Diary had a meandering, rather shapeless shape (as diaries will). Both fans and critics of that 1998 smash hit will be surprised to find that the author's first novel, previously unpublished in the United States, is a lot more sophisticated in structure. And Cause

Celeb is nearly as fun as Bridget Jones's Diary, which is saying a lot, especially since Fielding's debut is about African famine. The narrator, Rosie Richardson, runs a relief camp in the invented country of Nambula. Henry, the most flippant member of her staff, wears a T-shirt that tersely lists the various motivations for relief workers to come to Africa: "(a) Missionary? (b) Mercenary? (c) Misfit? (d) Broken heart?" As Rosie herself admits, she is "a c/d hybrid and soft in the head to boot." Flashbacks reveal that in London, Rosie had fallen in love with an erratic, emotionally abusive (but adorable!) newscaster. As she trailed about town in Oliver's wake, she came to know his in-crowd of movie stars, directors, and musicians. Her split with this media magnet is what initially sent her to Africa. Four years into Rosie's exile, however, a plague of locusts descends on the crops of a neighboring country, and refugees begin to flood her camp. She decides there's only one thing to do: go back home and round up her old celeb pals for a benefit TV special.

It should come as no shock that the London sequences are great fun, as is the climactic collision between movie stars and refugees. But the real treat is Fielding's handling of the camp sequences. Rosie and her staff struggle with their petty emotions as they confront the incredible suffering in front of them. Henry watches in disbelief as some starving refugees move their tent to a better location: "Never mind the old malnutrition--you go for the view." A newswoman visits the camp, and, fraught with emotion after first seeing the starving children, she caresses Rosie, whose response is this: "I hope the famine hadn't turned her into a lesbian." Fielding has found a voice that is both compassionate and irreverent, a rare and wonderful combination. --

Claire Dederer
Extrait
Chapter One
It used to seem extraordinary to me that someone like Henry could actually exist, extraordinary that a person could be transported into an environment so alien to his own, and remain so utterly unaffected by his surroundings. It was as if he had been coated with a very strong sealant, the sort of thing they use to paint on oceangoing yachts. Henry was spreading thick cut luxury marmalade from a Fortnum and Mason's jar on a piece of Nambulan unleavened bread. "Got up this morning, didn't Boris Believe it family of eight outside my hut wanting to move their tent nearer the river. I said to the chap, I thought this was a bloody refugee camp, not a holiday camp, but you go ahead, mate, by all means. Never mind the old malnutrition you go for the view." Breakfast was taken in Safila, just after dawn. It was a quiet time, the hour before the heat became intolerable, with the silence broken only by the rooster and Henry, who was incapable of shutting up except when he was asleep. I was particularly annoyed by Henry that morning, because I suspected he had started an affair with one of our more emotionally fragile nurses, Sian. She was sitting next to him now, giving him a look you could have spread on a piece of toast. Sian was a sweet-natured girl who had joined us two months ago, after returning early from night shift to find her husband of eighteen months in bed with a Turkish minicab driver. Her therapy was being continued via correspondence. Betty was talking about food as usual. "Do you know, what I could really eat now is a pudding. Mind you, I say that. Bread-and-butter pudding. Oooh, lovely, with raisins and a bit of nutmeg. I wonder if Kamal could do us a bread-and-butter pudding if we made that biscuit tin into an oven?" It was five-thirty in the morning. I got up from the table, walked outside and sighed. How the tiny irritations of life filled the mind out here, keeping the big horrors at bay. I dipped a cup into the water pot, and walked to the edge of the hill to brush my teeth. Our compound was behind me, with its round mud huts, showers, latrines and the cabana where we took our meals. Before me was the sandy basin which housed Safila camp, a great scar in the desert. The light was very soft at that time, the sun pale, just clearing the horizon. Clustered over a pattern of hummocks and paths, leading down to the point where the two blue rivers met, were the huts which housed the refugees. Five years ago, during the great mid-eighties famine, there were sixty thousand of them, and a hundred a day were dying. Now twenty thousand remained. The rest had gone back over the border to Kefti, to the mountains and the war. A gust of hot wind made the dry grasses rustle. I was bothered by more than Henry that morning. A rumor was circulating in the camp about a locust plague back in Kefti, which was threatening the harvest. There were often scare stories in the camp of one kind or another: it was hard to know what to believe. We'd heard talk of a new influx of refugees on their way to us again, maybe thousands. Sounds were beginning to rise from the camp now, goats being herded, laughter, children playing, contented sounds. Once, the great swathe of cries which rose to us here were those which went with starvation and death. I bit the side of my thumb, and tried not to remember. I couldn't think back to that time again. Footsteps were coming from the cabana. Henry was sauntering across the compound and back to his hut. He was wearing his favorite T-shirt, which featured a motif set out like a multiple choice questionnaire for relief workers. (a) Missionary? (b) Mercenary? (c) Misfit? (d) Broken heart? Henry had ticked (b), which was a joke since his family owned half of northeast England. Me? I was a c/d hybrid and soft in the head to boot. Q In London in the summer of 1985 I was afflicted by a crush, which is a terrible thing to happen to a

woman. I met Oliver, the object of my rampant imaginings, at a gala performance of Vivaldi's Gloria at the Royal Albert Hall. I was what was known as a puffette: a publicist in a publishing company, Ginsberg and Fink. I wiggled around in short skirts, legs in sheer black tights crossing and uncrossing in meetings, then kept going on and on about people not being interested in my mind. Funny how at twenty-five you worry about not being taken seriously and take being a sex object for granted. Later you take being taken seriously for granted, and worry about not being a sex object. Our company chairman, Sir William Ginsberg, liked to put together little gatherings of the arty and the talented from all walks of life, not revealing to the guests in advance who the other guests would be. For all the ill-informed like me these gatherings were a total nightmare. You feared to ask anyone what they did lest they turned out to be the author of Love in the Time of Cholera, or one of the Beach Boys. I had been to three dinner parties at Sir William's house. I wasn't sure he remembered quite who I was. He employed several young girls and always used to invite one or two of us along because of our fine minds, presumably. I spent the evenings in a state of awed nervousness, saying very little. But I liked meeting these creative interesting people. I wanted to fit in. This was the first time I had been invited to a large-scale party, and I was most excited. Sir William had organized a little soire before the concert: drinks for a hundred in one of the Hall's hospitality suites; fifteen boxes hired on the company; then a sit-down dinner for a chosen dozen and the rest of us could piss off. I arrived deliberately late at the Albert Hall, inspected my reflection in the ladies' powder room, and made my way along the deep red corridor to the Elgar Room. A uniformed attendant checked my name on a list and swung open the dark wooden door into a burst of light. The room was golden and all-a-glitter, the black-tied guests spilling down an ornamental staircase in the center of the room, and leaning on the gilt balustrades of the higher level. It was bizarre being in a room full of celebrities you felt as if you knew everyone, but nobody knew you. I set off towards the table where drinks were being served, catching snatches of conversation as I squeezed my way along. "Frankly, I have to say, it's not coming off the page..." "You see the trouble with Melvyn..." "Jerome, have you got the mobile?" I felt a hand on my elbow. "Mmmmm! The most gorgeous girl in the world. Oh, dear heaven, you look absolutely divine. My heart's going to go this time, I swear it. Absolutely convinced of it. Give me a kiss, my darling, do." It was Dinsdale Warburton, one of my major authors, and an ancient giant of the English stage. Dinsdale had recently written his memoirs for us. He had a worried face, was queer as a coot, and unfailingly kind. "But, my darling!" Dinsdale's brows were almost meeting in horror. "You do not have a drink. But let us get you one! Let us get you one at once!" Then his eyes were caught by something over my shoulder. "Oh! The most gorgeous man in the world. Dear boy, dear boy. You look absolutely divine. You know, I did love your whatever it was you did the other night. You looked so exquisitely clever and pretty." Oliver Marchant was the editor and presenter of a successful and right-on arts program called Soft Focus. His reputation as the thinking-woman's man preceded him, but I had no idea he was going to be quite so devastating. Dinsdale was speaking to me: "Have you met this gorgeous man, my darling. Do you know Oliver Marchant?" I panicked. How were you supposed to answer this question with famous people? Yes, I've seen you on the telly? No...in other words, I've never heard of you. "Yes, I mean...no. Sorry...pathetic." Oliver took my hand. "And this is?" "Ah. The most gorgeous girl in the world, dear boy, absolute goddess." "Yes, but what is her name, Dinsdale?" said Oliver. Dinsdale looked flummoxed for a moment. I absolutely couldn't believe he'd forgotten my name. I'd been working very closely with him for two months. "I'm Rosie Richardson," I said apologetically. "Pleased to meet you...Rosie Richardson," said Oliver. He was long, lean and dark in a navy suit with an ordinary tie, not a bow tie, loosened at the neck. I noticed very precisely the way his black hair fell against his collar, the half shadow on his chin. "Rosie, my darling, I'm off to get you a drink this second. On my way. You must be fainting with thirst," said Dinsdale and hurried off looking sheepish. I turned to Oliver, to find he was now talking to a gray-haired newsreader. The newsreader had his teenage daughter with him. "How's it going, mate?" said the newsreader, clapping Oliver on the shoulder. "Oh, same old shit, you know. How are you, Sarah?" Oliver spoke charmingly to the girl, who was getting even more flustered than I was. He glanced across and smiled at me as if to say, "Hang on." "Bye-bye, Sarah," said Oliver sweetly, as the girl and her father prepared to move off. "Good luck with those exams." He gave her a little wave. "Dirty bitch," he said to me in an undertone, looking at the departing teenager. "Dying for it." I laughed. "So," he said, "are you having a lovely time?" "Well, I find it very odd, to be honest," I said. "I've never been in a room with so many famous people before. They all seem to know each other. It's like a club. Do they all know each other?" "You're right. I've always thought it was more of a new aristocracy, but you're absolutely right. It has more open membership. It's the Famous Club. The only membership requirement is that the public know who you are,"

he said, glancing disparagingly round the room. "No, no, you're right, it is like an aristocracy," I said eagerly. "You know, the country estates and the hunting, and it's hereditary now: Julian Lennon, Kiefer Sutherland, Charlie Sheen." "It also inhabits every single first-class lounge and awards ceremony you ever pass through. But, actually, it is more like a club with its rules. You have to know the form. He who is less famous must wait to be approached by he who is more famous," Oliver said. At this, Lady Hilary Ginsberg, Sir William's wife, interrupted him, rather knocking down his theory. "Oliver, I'm so thrilled to see you. How is the Lorca coming along?" Oliver looked blank just for a moment. He didn't recognize her. "Hilary Ginsberg, so pleased you could come," she said hastily, her back slightly turned to me, excluding me. "Have you met Martin?" Lady Hilary was a tragic name-dropper. I had often bent with her over her dinner party celebrity lists, which were like a Dow Jones index of fame, with artists, actors, writers, journalists, moving up and down, depending on fashion, acts of God, or their own greediness for exposure. Lady Hilary seemed to have embraced this index as a yardstick for her entire life. I once heard her discuss, without irony, why a certain name was not a particularly good one to drop. Even her closest women friends would be invited to dinner parties with Sir William only when their value was up, otherwise it was lunch alone with her. Oliver was continuing with the Famous Club theory. "You put two of them in a room full of noncelebs, they'll end up talking to each other, whether or not they've already met, providing...providing the more famous of the two approaches the other one first," Oliver went on. Everyone was laughing by this time. "Come on, Martin, you're a celeb, you must know it's true." As Oliver finished his sentence he turned his eyes to mine and kept looking. Sir William appeared, booming behind us, startling everyone. "Come along, come along, heavens above, we're ver', ver' late, going to miss the trumpets," and seizing Oliver and the novelist by their elbows like an old hen, he hustled them out. Oliver was seated behind me in the box. I spent the entire performance in a state of almost unbearable arousal. I fancied I could feel his breath on my neck and back in my low-cut dress. At one point his hand brushed my skin as if by accident. I almost died. When the music stopped and the applause died down I dared not look at him. I stood surveying the emptying Albert Hall as everyone left the box, trying to calm down. I heard someone moving down the steps behind me. It was him. He bent and kissed the nape of my neck. At least I hoped it was him. "I'm so sorry," Oliver murmured, "that was just something I had to do." I looked round at him, trying to raise one eyebrow. "I could murder a pizza," he whispered urgently. "Why don't you turn into a pizza?" "Because I don't want to be murdered." "I didn't mean murder...exactly." And thus the obsession began, and a chain of events which was to lead me surely but circuitously to a mud hut in Africa. There are people, particularly in times of prominent famine, who become almost reverent when you say you are an aid worker. Actually, the reason I first got interested in Africa was because I fancied someone. That's about how saintly I am, if you really want to know. If Oliver had asked me out that night in the Albert Hall, I'd probably have never even heard of Nambula. As it was, Sir William interrupted us. "Oliver, Oliver, wherever have you got to? Come along, come along, grub's up!" Typically, my employer ignored me. Oliver took an elegant-enough leave, but I still had to face the fact that he had allowed himself to be whisked off to dinner with the chosen few, after kissing my neck, without so much as a what's-your-phone-number. For about a week after the Vivaldi Works Outing I was in a state of sexual overexcitement, convinced that Oliver would find out who I was and call. But Oliver didn't ring. He didn't ring. I reached out for any form of contact possible. I started arranging an unnatural number of evenings with a friend who had worked for him four years ago. I watched Soft Focus three times a week. I rang the Soft Focus press office for the list of the next three months' programs to see if any of them had anything remotely to do with any of our authors. I went to exhibitions on Sundays. I started reading extraordinarily dull articles in the arts pages about East European spatter-print painters. No luck. Zilch.