

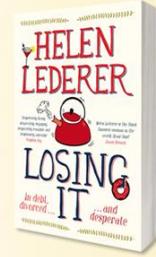
HELEN LEDERER



LOSING IT

In debt, divorced . . . and desperate

#HelensLosingIt



Reading Group Questions

1. Millie is clearly a desperate woman in dire financial straits. Do you think this is of her own making? What would you do in her position?
2. Each chapter starts with one of Millie's affirmations. What do these tell you about her character? Which one is your favourite? And what would be one of your own affirmations?
3. In *Losing It*, we hear Millie's uncensored thoughts on everything and everyone, including herself. What difference does this make to your opinion of her as a character?
4. When does observational humour become bitchy and unfunny and how does the author avoid that?
5. Helen Lederer has coined the term Mid Lit and in doing so created a new genre for the comic novel for women of a certain age. Do you agree with the author that this is an under-represented and overlooked area? Are there too few novels, and even fewer comic novels, for women who are no longer young but also not yet old? Where do you stand on novels for specific age groups?
6. Millie agrees to front a new diet pill because she needs the money. Is there anything you wouldn't endorse or help to promote and sell? Where would you draw the line and would that change, if you were about to lose everything?
7. Are the mother-daughter relationships in *Losing It* realistic portrayals? What do they say about the characters and the ways in which the different generations approach their careers, relationships and life in general?

About *Losing It*

Losing It, Helen Lederer's first novel, is the hilarious story of Millie, agony aunt for 'The Good Woman Magazine'. In debt, divorced and desperate, she's about to lose her house. Worse, she has no money, a best friend with a better sex life than her, a daughter in Papua New Guinea and too much weight in places she really doesn't want. Can a middle aged woman really have it all? **Losing It** is a hilarious, brutally honest exploration of a woman who still feels 30 but can't deny the odd stray grey...

'Desperately funny, desperately engaging, desperately readable and desperately adorable.' **Stephen Fry**

The Times described **Losing It** as 'Funny and sharp and often horribly true'. *Woman and Home* described it as 'Funny and touching'.

Available in all good bookshops and online.
[Buy the book or tell us what you thought!](#)

About the Author



Helen Lederer is a familiar face to many and one of Britain's best-loved comedians. She made her name at London's famous Comedy Store, along with other early 1980s comedians such as French and Saunders, the late Rik Mayall, and Ben Elton.

Helen Lederer is perhaps best known for her work on TV shows such as *Naked Video* and *Absolutely Fabulous* but she's also appeared on *The Young Ones*, *French and Saunders*, *Bottom*, and more recently *Love Soup* and *Hollyoaks*.

Find Helen at helenlederer.co.uk / [@helenlederer](https://www.facebook.com/helenlederer) / [facebook.com/helenlederer](https://www.facebook.com/helenlederer)

Additional material for reading groups



An Interview with Helen Lederer*

I now know which Millie favours but what about you, Helen: Margarita or Mojito, followed by a bottle of wine, or no messing around and straight to a bottle of wine?

Mojito can be festive and slow down the inevitable graduation to a bottle of plonk when one starts realising the cost of the individual cocktail and the item taken to get the pith of a fruit into a glass... give me the WINE!

Millie has an humiliating episode in a hotel lobby thanks to some shapewear. Should we squeeze ourselves into those things, or let it all hang out (while still being fully dressed, obviously!) and embrace the bodies we have?

Well a certain ballast underneath a dress for evening wear can enable getting out of the house at times? But I say no to the girdle on top of waist clincher and corset... what if one was in a car accident – what would the paramedics make of it all?

Millie's such a sympathetic character that you can't help rooting for. Well, I couldn't anyway. I really felt for her, even if I wouldn't have made her choices. But would you and she fight over the chunky KitKats or share your last bottle of sherry with each other?

We would be friends but I would have to make the running as I know that Millie is a bit of a recluse if indulged. She would hide the sherry from me and drink it alone. I would also secret a KitKat from her bag to mine if left unsupervised...

Sustaining the comedy over a full-length novel is an incredibly hard thing to do but you've managed it really well without Millie becoming a caricature. Clearly, she's a desperate woman but she's also desperately funny with it, and very human. How important was it to you to get this balance right, and not make her a figure of fun?

Ah yes, that was interesting – I'm not sure, but I've noticed that authenticity is the only way to connect – so showing her less charitable thoughts of others somehow made her likeable. By exposing the human failings we all have we make ourselves acceptable to each other – with love.

Do you think it's inevitable that women will lose it in some shape or form, whether by being angry, feeling down or having a meltdown?

I lose it quite regularly especially when I have a hangover I find I can't even park or work my iPhone. It's nice to feel vexed sometimes – it means there are things we have to get done – we have purpose!

*You've coined the term 'mid-lit' for **Losing It**, as being the age between chick lit and grey lit? Do you feel this is an overlooked group or is it that there's a lack of comedic novels for this grouping?*

The last bit – I think the comedic novel is still unsung and unrecognised – especially in prizes! (Which is why I'm setting up my own – sadly I won't be able to award it to myself.)

*How important was the daughter's story to **Losing It**? And why Papua New Guinea? Was this a way of sneaking in mention of the havoc that periods can wreak on a woman's life, and using it as a metaphor generally?*

I loved having the sub plot of Papua New Guinea and the paradox that Mary needed a swamp environment to do her anthropological study – and yet illegal logging was the very thing that was keeping the land swamp-like – a bit of geopolitics never hurts. The period metaphor is now something I will claim as my own, thanks Kath!

*What would you like to see readers losing (apart from themselves in your book), and what do you want them to gain from reading **Losing It**?*

I want them to lose the prejudice that I can't write – and I want them to gain the knowledge that a laugh out loud book is utterly cool and to be coveted.

*This interview was first published online as part of Helen Lederer's blog tour to promote **Losing It** at <http://nutpress.co.uk/2015/02/author-interview-helen-lederer-helens-losing-it-blog-tour/>*

Some thoughts from Kath Eastman on *Losing It* and Mid Lit

What is Mid Lit?

Mid Lit is a term coined by *Losing It's* author Helen Lederer to cover novels *written for women by women* who have left their Becky Bloomwood or Bridget Jones days behind them but haven't quite reached the Olive Kitteridge or Miss Marple-stage of their lives. Mid Lit is for these women ...

You're established in your career or you've decided to set up your own business and go it alone, after working for someone else.

You've raised a family and the kids are older and doing their own thing with their friends or have already left home.

You don't have children but live a full life with a network of friends and a range of interests.

You've met Mr Right or Mr Good Enough even if he didn't quite pan out to be as right or good enough as you thought and you're no longer together.

You're no longer cat-called on the way to work, the gym, your car but you still want to feel good about yourself and not feel invisible to others.

Your idea of a good weekend might be one spent visiting nearby towns and sights or one spent in the garden or relaxing with a book or meeting friends for coffee instead of one spent clubbing or drinking with friends but you're happy doing your own thing and you know what's important to you.

You're energetic and spirited and independent and know your own mind but sometimes just want to flop on the sofa and read or drink a glass of wine.

You've learned to laugh at yourself and others and the world around you.

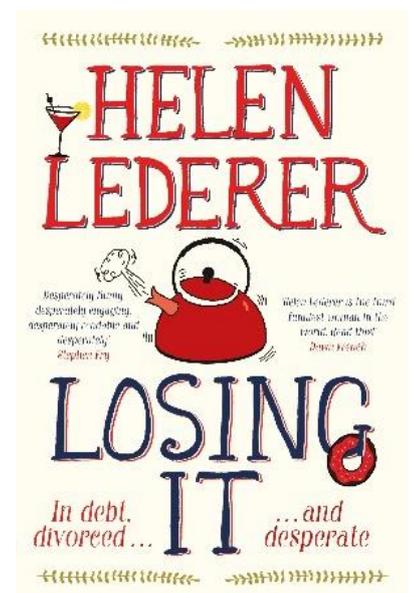
And yes, *Losing It* is Mid Lit and it was written for you by fellow Mid Lit woman, Helen Lederer.

Why is *Losing It* a comic novel?

If you're reading this after having read *Losing It*, you'll know that *Losing It* is a very funny novel. If you haven't yet read it, you're in for a treat. In fact, how about you go and read it now and come back here later?

I think it was Toni Morrison who wisely said: "If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." And that's exactly what one of our best-loved comedians has done with *Losing It*.

Helen Lederer has made a living from laughing at both herself and the world around her. She's done it in magazine columns, on television and radio, in theatres, on sitcoms and in standup comedy. But there was one medium where she felt not only was comedy itself undervalued and under-appreciated but also that women of a certain age, both as characters and their creators, are under-represented.



You can read more about mid lit and comic writing on Helen's website – helenlederer.co.uk
Join the conversation #HelensLosingIt