

He may be a movie star now, but to Dawn, Chris is still 'just Chris'

BELOW
Launching a million crushes in *Bridesmaids*, with Kristen Wiig

'EEK! MY MY BOYFRIEND'S A HOLLYWOOD SEX SYMBOL'

Screaming women... A-list fans... When Dawn Porter's actor boyfriend, Chris O'Dowd, appeared in this year's smash-hit film *Bridesmaids*, she had no idea her life would change overnight...



'AS I SAT AT HOME LAST MONTH, I couldn't have felt more sorry for myself. London was falling apart at the seams, riots going on all over the place, and I was stuck in my house, alone. There was only one person I really, really wanted by my side: my big, strong, Irish boyfriend, Chris, 31.

'But Chris was millions of miles away. Having a lovely time frolicking in a swimming pool with the one woman every man (and possibly quite a few ladies) fancy: Megan Fox. Sure, they were working – filming the new Judd Apatow movie, *This Is Forty* – but still. "Lucky bastard," I muttered to myself as I flicked between Sky News and *Come Dine With Me*.

'I meant it, too. I would have moved the earth to swap places with him. But, a few weeks later, when Megan posted a picture of herself in said pool with Chris on Facebook, with the caption: "On set with Jason and Chris... Two very handsome, very tall, VERY funny men," well, people started to ask how I felt about it. People were *concerned* – and I, in turn, began to worry I wasn't concerned enough. Is this going to be my life now, I wondered, one where I have to worry about matching up to Megan Fox? Welcome to my weird world; a world where my boyfriend has, apparently, become an overnight sex symbol – even in the eyes of A-listers...

'It was just the latest in a line of strange episodes that have surrounded Chris since he starred in *that* ▶

film. You might know it – I think a few people saw it. *Bridesmaids*? Well, Chris is in it. He plays Officer Rhodes, a character so cute grown women sighed out loud every time he appeared on screen. It was his first leading Hollywood role and, what with the film becoming the highest-grossing female comedy of all time, it's propelled him into a new league in terms of being recognised.

'Take a recent night out to see a band in London's Camden. I'm queueing to get us some burgers while Chris waits a few feet away. Suddenly, I hear a high-pitched scream. I turn around only to see a dozen women swarming around someone. Chris is nowhere to be seen. Oh, hang on...

I focus in on the crowd and, yes, my boyfriend is, in no uncertain terms, being mobbed. There he is – the man I see first thing in the morning with crazy bed hair, who likes nothing more than chilling out on the sofa eating Celebrations and watching *X Factor* – being screamed at like he's Justin Bieber. What the heck is going on?

'Ironically, when I met Chris in 2009 I had no idea who he was. I was living in LA and a mutual friend told him to look me up on Facebook while he was there for work. He friend requested me three times, but I declined – I was kind of seeing someone else, although that was on its way to a slow and dismal demise. However, after a few weeks I caved in and invited Chris to my 30th birthday party because I was worried no one else would turn up. Chris arrived at about midnight with a friend. By this time I was jiving alone on the dance floor with a bottle of wine. I don't know what I had been expecting (if I'm honest, I'd forgotten he was coming), but what I got was a 6ft 4in, scruffy, hot piece of Irish ass in a lumberjack shirt, who I fell in love with the moment I saw him.

'He came towards me with his arms stretched out and I said something rubbish like, "Wow, what a wingspan!" before he swept me into his arms and danced with me until the early hours. The next morning I woke up and said to my sister, "I think I have just met the man I am going to spend the rest of my life with" (I just needed to ditch the other guy, first).

'After six months of being on and off, Chris asked me to be his girlfriend in a kebab shop as we drank a bottle of champagne out of a brown paper bag. Four months later he had moved into my flat in LA, and now, two and a half years on, we live in a lovely house in East London with our cat Lilu and our dog Potato.

'As we spent more time in the UK, I was surprised at how often Chris was recognised. *The IT Crowd*, the comedy series in which he starred, wasn't really my kind of show,



From above: Dawn and Chris; a scene from *The Crimson Petal And The White*; with A-list co-stars Megan Fox and Jason Segel



so I had no idea I was dating someone with such a cult following. People would ask to take his photo, but mostly guys yelled things like, "Oi, Roy, you're a fookin' ledge, mate!" I was happy to take on the role of chief photographer and thought the attention was lovely – although I still didn't get the jokes they shouted at him.

'Then, in April, Chris starred in period drama *The Crimson Petal And The White*. It was pretty racy: lots of on-screen humping with Romola Garai. As we sat down to watch it, I was worried I'd be jealous. But I was genuinely *so* impressed by Chris's acting and loved the series *so* much that I kind of forgot he was my boyfriend at all (I remembered as soon as it was over and he brought me a cup of tea). But it was only after the release of *Bridesmaids* in June that everything changed...

'Sitting in the dark alongside Chris and his family at the Irish premiere in Dublin, I winced at the collective sound of women swooning in the aisles. It became apparent that he was about to become, to quote one newspaper, an "unlikely pin-up". Of course, I think Chris is worthy of such an accolade – he is the sexiest, most impressive man I've ever met – and he's been flattered, if not bemused, by all the attention. But I still, and probably always will, find the "my boyfriend is a sex symbol thing" bizarre.

'Take that night out to see the band: if I returned to the queue at the burger bar, would it look like I was in a strop? If I went over and stood next to Chris, would I look like a possessive girlfriend? I was completely torn. In the end, I fought my way through the crowd, feeling the death stares of the women around me. A couple of them were definitely giving me a "Don't kid yourself. He doesn't really fancy you. Chris is OURS!" look. I tried to ignore it – but as much as I find the attention towards



Chris fun, some girls definitely cross the line. I think that's pretty rude – and how I am supposed deal with it, I have *no* idea...

'It's not just nights out that have changed. Some members of my family can't have a conversation without asking when I'm going to "make" Chris marry me, or when I'm going to "make" him get me pregnant – as if they think if I don't trap him, I'll lose him to someone like Megan Fox. Then there's the friends who seem to think, "OMG! MOVIE STAR! SNAG HIM!" and talk about our relationship as if it's somehow different now he's hit the big-time. Which, of course, it isn't. Chris is still just Chris. He may be a heart-throb but he does all the DIY; we eat big, hearty dinners that I cook while he sorts out the wine; our cat pukes on the carpet and we scoop up our dog's poo twice a day, just as we did two years ago and just as we will in 10 years' time.

'Of course, I *can* understand where his female fans are coming from. As a teenager I dreamed of dating George Michael, Face from *The A Team* and Rick Astley. And, trust me, if Ashley from Diversity walked into the room I'd probably use Chris as a gymnast's horse to leapfrog my way to him. It's exciting to see your heart-throb – I get that.

'So, as we finally took our seats that night in Camden, burger-less and slightly ruffled, I guess we both realised we'd learnt a few lessons. But the main one? The next time we go to a gig, we'll eat at home first.' ■