

The Spinster, the Cock and the Box

Synopsis

A single woman in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a life. That is perhaps how the modern day idiom would go. And that is exactly what this book questions, as it dethrones marriage from its status at the Holy Grail, and probes what it means to be a single and female.

The Spinster, the Cock and the Box is a chick lit novel with a twist. Like most chick lit novels it features a single girl in a big city at its core but this young protagonist Delilah is framed in the context of being the dreaded Spinster. The underpinnings of this term are explored in a witty novel that exposes all that it means to be single. There is a meld between post-modern feminist criticism and good old women's fiction as Delilah uncovers a Secret Society of Spinsters, and learns what it means to own your own sexuality and self.

This novel is very relevant to a new readership that for the first time is postponing marriage in such a mainstream way. It speaks to a whole new generation of Spinsters. Spinsters however aren't framed to be simply the Old Maids history has painted them to be. But instead they reveal a mystique, sexuality and power all their own. These were women who explored the margins of society, intellect and found a room of their own without playing second place to a man. These women were mocked and ridiculed by history but this novel through a witty play on the iconography and stereotype of the Old Maid, the Spinning Wheel, and the assertiveness that is traditionally enshrined as that of the gentleman and the Cock, bring the Spinster and the reader to a place of glamour, excitement and intrigue.

Chapter 1

Reader she did not marry him.

A single woman in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a life.

Somehow Spinsters became the ugly misfit Aunties with Nanny buns, and britches that know one ever saw. While the bachelors of course were out wowing the ladies, picking a veritable one every night like a sampler from a menu- may not always be steak but they'll make do with some ground beef if they don't have to call her in the morning

Ah, those bachelors- the men about town.

But with an entire generation of educated, unmarried chics earning good money and roaming the town you've got to wonder do they realize that the apocalypse has come? Oh dear, someone tell them soon. Where is a good natured alarmist when you need one? An entire generation of Spinsters by choice.

Her name was Delilah. , yes as in Samsun and....

Anyway, this is the story of how she became a Spinster. Cat and all.

I feel like I'm at an AA meeting. Rightly so eh. It's got the same ominous ring of doom and gloom to it. But hey at least you can be a recovering alcoholic. Have you ever heard of a recovering spinster? That's a wife. And let's face it that's a whole other cuss word on its own.

So she became a Spinster, and I'm sitting here telling you how. It's important for people to know things like this. I may write a guidebook someday, perhaps not inappropriately sponsored by Lonely planet.

I don't know how all this drama started. She was on the right track – headed somewhere great like a suburb and a 9-5 job. She was a pretty low maintenance kind of girl, but something wasn't working. She had been quiet and good, and got quite good grades. And still she was missing something.

So there she was standing on the porch of her soon to be new house with her soon to be husband, still called fiancé as though the French understood the point of having a before we get married waiting period, like some cultures understand the pre-funeral Wake.

And it happens. She looks across the fence and the lawn was just the same as hers. The grass wasn't even greener on the otherside. That's the suburbs for you. The only homo here is homogeneity. And homo sapiens perhaps but by the sounds of the people here, they'd evolved far past that by now.

They didn't only walk upright but drove SUV's too.

She hated that conformist green lawn. She spent all morning at brunch- a meal that only truly exists in this post-homosapien world. And she had started to feel sick of the puffs settling in her stomach, sicklier than the green of that insipid lawn; and like a complete sycophant for spending an entire morning complimenting her soon to be inlaws on the finery and shinery of their china.

This all happened while Uncle Brad made some joke about Chinese food being served in boxes instead of china, or something else that was staler than the brioche she had bought the night before and pretended to bake.

This was it. This was to be her grand life of intrigue and fantasism and whatever else. And there was Vernon sweet Vern, and what was a girl to do but go to the bathroom and get over it, and come back to the table and swig some gin, and talk to his Aunt Ginny and tell her how fine her China was.

These suburbs were a relatively new phenom on the Island of Erynne. I mean, this is the West Indies. There was more or less untouched country in the place not ten years ago in that spot that you now have your Country Club.

Her Grandmother told Delilah all about it. She's dead now. But she'd burn the sweet oil in the lamp and tell her tales. There were so many tales about deaths, and tragedies and beasts, and beauties, and that was only the neighbourhood gossip, don't get me started on the fairy tales.

And she always ended them with one statement, that remained with Delilah in its profundity all her life –“The end” I'm only kidding. Seriously though, she'd say, “And Delilah that's their

quest, that's their tale, their story. What is going to be yours? In the end that's all that remains Delilah. The Story. Your Story. No one can take that away from you Delilah Your story "

Oh what a pretty thing it was to hear how she said Delilah's name. It was the Grandmother herself that chose that name. She told the parents that she would, long before Delilah was born. She shook her head sternly at any suggestion they made, and said it must be biblical. "Mary, Martha, Anne" they suggested but she only shook her head solemnly, and when the time came and the baby was born, she said "Delilah" The parents were aghast but as the story goes, I am told that Grandmother and the baby shared a laugh. The nurse hit the child but she didn't cry. Her grandmother made her laugh.

And so as we speak of stories, Delilah's begins in a sense, or perhaps it ends. Isn't this the beginning of the Happily Ever After Part. Vernon Prince slips the ring unto her finger, and I believe it was supposed to go something like this:

"Dearest Dally (they always have charming nicknames for each other in romances like these) what do you think of our new house." Cooed (they never say said in pieces like this) Vernon

"Oh Vern." She exhaled crumbling into his lap (It always has the ambiguity to sound like this show of affection could also be the symptom of a fearful disease) " It is the best, simply the best." (or insert other suitable "simple" cliché)

They both fell into each others arms (again with the hint of dropsy or some other possible near fatality) fell asleep with heaving bosoms. (Heaving bosoms always sell more romances)

Yes it was clearly supposed to go like this. If you're paying attention and remember the speal about her becoming a Spinster, you'll realize it clearly didn't.

In fact this is how the narrative for this one goes: (I'll take the liberty of putting it in melodramatic fashion as a pastiche in the newspaper/magazine/masterpiece that I one day will no doubt write/edit/own serial rights to.)

“What do you think about our new house? Asked Vern”

“You know isn’t it funny how these lawns all look like a big, green sea threatening to swallow us up in one big tsunami, and we build these arcs. These houses they’re arcs hoping to float us away to somewhere better. And in the end all we are animals two by two just like Noah himself put them in. Marriage it’s the same principle isn’t it two animals trying to make sure the species doesn’t fall apart. But what happens if you’re put in with a mongoose and you’re a snake?”

She stopped talking and looked up at his incredulous face. Palpable disgust was on his face.

She bit her lips and he yelled “Stop being such a jackass!”

The minute the words left his lips, he frowned in a thoughtful way that spoke of his own surprise for having said them.

He was livid. He was annoyed and he screamed at her. He’d always kept the floodgates locked before. He was motioning to comfort her.

But Delilah turned and looked at him. She stared with something of a squint, and smiled. It was a smile that said so much.

He hadn’t called her sweetheart, or darling or even bitch. He’d call her a jackass; a name mostly reserved for sport commentators that he disagreed with or suited men at work who- well, he disagreed with.

How did she become a jackass? Delilah and Vern had been going out since boybands were in – that meant since before university, which was a fair portion of a twenty six year old’s life.

And now she was being a jackass! The sofa was the same if a little bit stained, but as they packed their bags to go home, something was undeniably different.

“Lies, you know I didn’t mean it. Look we’re going to make a home to Crest Falls (yes like the toothpaste)and everything would be sorted with us.”

Vern, was chiefly wrong in three main points.

- 1) He was the only one going back to Crest.

- 2) Nothing was about to be sorted wit them
- 3) Her name wasn't lies.

This was a lie. This relationship had become one huge lie and she'd read enough of DH Lawrence in Second Year Lit Analysis to know that "even a huge lie is smaller than a little truth." Or something like that. (give the girl a break, I didn't have a Dictaphone I was just scribbling notes)

She must have mouthed the tail of the sentence because he was suddenly agreeing with her.

"Exactly, you know it's the truth baby." He said, making a motion like a hug.

Gawd, Vern always did that. He really had the uncanny ability to always be right, even if he was the only one in the room smart enough to know it.

She didn't want to go back to being called a baby. He'd hit the name on the head when he called her jackass. She was still relishing the sound. It was almost as good as if he'd called her a cock. It was funny how cock had a much stronger song than "that old hen."

She arched her back and stood up to walk away. "I just want a little truth. I'm fed up of the perfect façade." (and I really was)

"You're fed up of being perfect? Very ..."

His voice trailed off into a long tirade, and she knew he hadn't heard the word façade, just like he didn't hear how excited she was about her internship at a magazine in the city, just like he didn't hear the sound of her typing her play as anything more serious than a hobby, and just like her didn't hear- well, mostly everything.

"Gawd Vern, I can't take this. We're walking round pretending all the time like we're some cute couple when we don't want any of the same things."

"Delilah you can't do this to me. It's not part of the plan."

"Whose plan Vern? Dr Vernon Prince? I move back with you to Crest and we spend the next fifty years watching the lawn grow."

“Lies, you’re being unreasonable.”

Of course she was being unreasonable. The slightest disagreement was a sure symptom of some lobotomy necessitating neurosis.

“Vern, I didn’t want to break up but we kept growing apart and…”

He wasn’t listening to her now. He was just madly tapping his index on the polished plaque on wall. It said “best of something” to be sure. She couldn’t remember whose it was. They’d both been best of so many things. She felt really bad about herself for letting Vern down, and she felt bad about feeling bad as though it were un-feminist or something.

“Delilah, you’re coming with me,” he said pulling her by the arm. “Don’t do something you are going to regret.”

She freed herself, grabbed her bag, opened the door, and said “Exactly.”

Walking out into the air made her feel a bit better, and there was a sense of liberty that made her exhilarated, but then it started to sink in.

There would be no more of this constant in her life. There would be no more corny jokes people inevitably make about Samsung and Delilah. There would be no more Vern, and she started to feel badly and wonder if she was being callous and hurting him. Poor Vern, and she almost slapped herself before she chickened out- henned out.

She stepped into a taxi. It must have been faith.’

And that is how that narrative ended and she knew it wasn’t what people want in a romance, but it was a long time coming. And she did step into that taxi. It was waiting on the corner just for her. It must have been faith. Of course she’d called and ordered it a half hour ago. But hey, sometimes you have to make your own faith.

Chapter 2

Welcome to Spin City

She could see the glimmer of the glass shining on the Coliseum City Hall as her bus crawled into the City. It was the kind of place you dreamt about in Utopian novels, and City Planning schemes. The place was tidy and well kept for a Caribbean Port and closely mimicked its Euro-American counterparts. There was the smell of the sea air and the salty sweat of the workers riding high on the air though, and it distracted you from the sky scrapers and made you think of holidays by the sea.

The city was sprawling and robust, a thing unto itself. It was like the gradually rising smog that dissipated into the air, threatening to spread into the hinterland, and welcomed there. It was a welcome pollution. Or so it seemed to be when the buses started arriving in droves. People spoke of the better times that had come.

And what's more was this entire generation of young people walking around the city, as though it was their only home; as though it were the only place that they belonged. Maybe she would belong here too. Maybe she would find a place amidst the glass windows, under that glass ceiling that picked up the light of the sun.

And all the while she gave little thought to Vern and the sea of well-wishers turned gossip mongers that she must have left in her wake. Her mind was fixed on the feeling of something over her shoulder hunting my down. It watched her and stalked from a distance. There it was again, that knowing presence and she felt a hand gently push her forward into a future unlike the one that had been preordained for her since birth. Perhaps this difference *was* her birthright. Perhaps this was what they were fighting for- her parents- when they thought the newness of the new clothes and new toys was pretty, they must have realised that new ideas too came with these things. But perhaps they didn't realise. From the wailing, disappointed messages her mother left her on the cell phone, she could tell the thought hadn't even occurred to them.

She hailed a taxi.

“Where you heading?” asked the driver while he helped me load my bags into the car trunk.

Delilah glanced down at the slip of paper. “105 Sweet Briar Road,” she rattled off.

The cabby’s raised eyebrows made her ask, “Do you know the place?”

“Yeah, Sure. Step in Miss. Step in.”

The shiny, black polished to perfect cab pulled off and took her like a magic pumpkin on her way.

“How was the bus ride up here?”

He seemed to know a lot about her. He seemed to know a lot, and she shuffled uncomfortably in her seat. The taxi cab was dark, the tint heavy, and as the kind of girl who got claustrophobic playing hide and seek, as a child, she started feeling a bit trapped.

“How do you know I just got off the bus?”

The cabby smiled, “Bags, bag tags, not too far from the station. Doesn’t take a genius.”

She turned red, and would have welcomed a genie so she could wish herself away.

“It’s alright to be nervous mam. I’d be suspicious of all folk if I just came to the City too. Especially where you’re heading..”

He swung the corner and his voice trailed off.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Mam?”

“What do you mean ‘where you’re heading?’”

“105 Sweet Briar,” He said in way of a definitive answer.

“And where’s that?”

“Mam?”

“What’s at 105 Sweet Briar?”

“That’s where you’re going isn’t it?”

Gosh, this was like going around a Merry Go Round, round about, round the town.

What did she really know about this place, about anything about her future? The Job agency had placed her there in affordable housing to fit a recent graduate starting off her first job.

“Is it in a bad area,” she asked.

“ No mam. It’s a really nice area. Really fine neighbourhood it is. Posh as a Pearl.”

“Oh.” She said, frustration building up in her. He seemed oblivious to his roundabout answers, or maybe he was just literally taking her for a ride.

“What did you mean then?”

“Oh that place gives me the spooks. It surely does. A lot of bad things happened there. Alot. That’s where that lady Margeruite died.”

“A woman died?”

“That was a long time ago though.”

“Died? Killed,” came a sudden melodramatic echo from the front seat.

Delilah jumped.

She realised there was a man slumped in the front seat.

Murder, and hidden people

“I didn’t know anyone else was here.” said Delilah, a certain frisson creeping up her now.

“Oh never mind him. Johnny go back to sleep. That’s my son. Hung over. Just picked him up from the sidewalk he spent the night on, before I stopped for you.”

“Oh, ok.” said Delilah trying to settle back in.

The traffic jam was thick, and they were crawling through. They had been in that standstill stop for the last thirty minutes or so; city life for you. And here she was trapped with a lunatic father son combo, with extra fries. It was hot. She cranked the taxi window down a notch, and the smells of the street slithered in. Smog, and dust and honey roasted peanuts. And all this talk of murder, and death. Two men just trying to spook her, she took a deep breath and fixed her eyes on the people pounding the pavements on their way to somewhere important, the local shopping arcades and the cinemas and Saturday spots in the park.

“How much further?” she asked.

“We’re almost there. Not that much if it weren’t for the traffic.”

“Good,” she said.

“Didn’t mean to spook you. It’s a just that that building has a story. It has something – some secrets that are locked behind those doors.”

“What kind of secrets?”

“A history. Crazy convent” the prodigal son started up again, in a hiss, his slumped body visible from the side of the seat, but his head still hidden.

She smelled the strong stench of liquor. It drowned out the city from outside. Here she was in a carriage with a tell all driver, and his headless horseman son, and where was she going, some haunted house.

Maybe Vern was right. Maybe her place was in Crest Falls. But this was it, she thought, a great adventure , or the start of it. It was the start of something, a young girl on the way to the Castle of Otranto. A gothic horror story, a start of something. She liked the sound of that: the start of something. The start. She tried to be strong, but still she couldn’t shake the shiver, and the stench of night old liquor.

By the time the car pulled up, she paid the fare, and got the hell out of there. The car pulled off, and she watched it drive away until it was no longer visible. Perhaps she just didn't want to turn round. She didn't want to face that new future, and the fright that the pair had warned her of.

But she had to. She grabbed her bag by the scruff, and turned around only to face the most shocking sight imaginable. A colonial building so beautifully restored that she giggled to herself at how silly she was. The whitewashed building spoke of a certain elegance but the drunken son was right; there was an unmistakable history.

She entered the building. The glass shone bright, and the topiaries were trimmed to perfection. There was a historic depth to this place though. Perhaps this place has secrets locked in its walls.

As she walked in Delilah saw an emblem of sorts etched unto the frosted glass window. It was the semblance of a lady spinning. She thought of Rumpelstilskin. This was the city where straw was spun into gold, and quite literally at that; the textile factories had ensured that.

The woman was sitting at the spinning wheel, and as she stepped past, the symbol seemed to follow her. It had a foreboding feel to it. She had to admit that, but the sheer prettiness of the pale pink carpet distracted her, as she entered the building. Champagne, it would be called by the society set.

Delilah had arrived.

The building was fantastically decorated, and even the foyer with its gilded mirror, and white roses in clear vases bespoke a fantastic sense of style. Delilah admired the minimalist beauty of the room, where there was clear attention to detail, and a keen sense of an appreciation of delicacy.

How could she be affording the rent on this place? Her room must be a complete shithole, or the size of a closet. But she didn't care. She was glad to be rid of Vern. She was determined to find something. She thought of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Self actualisation; that is what she was after, something of substance. She felt a pang of guilt for being in a position privileged enough to scorn her lot, and search for something better. But Delilah had been feeling guilt all her life, and she shook her head and flicking her hair from her face, she thought that perhaps she had used up her quota of guilt for an entire lifetime. And what was there if not the search for something?

Delilah was lost in her musings and basking in her newfound resolution when she realised there was a someone, definitely someone watching her.

The figure was at the top of the stairs, and shrowded in the darkness of the balcony, and then suddenly a shrill voice broke out, "The light here's blown. I've got to get the ladder to fix it." The voice stressed its 't's with a crisp and definite emphasis. "Put the downstairs light on. The switch is by the door."

Delilah moved forward.

"To your left." The person seemed to see in the dark.

Delilah felt a sinking feeling. The smell of Opium perfume was high, a little too high. It overpowered her with the musky oriental smell.

As Delilah flicked on the light she saw Medusa herself looking down on her from a Mount. It was a fearful sight of a wide mouthed woman, with her hair twisted among all manner of bows in lue of curlers.

"I've only just woken up." She said with a beaming smile that stretched all the way to her studded ears.

It was after midday.

“You must be Delilah,” continued the woman as she spread her arms in an exaggerated stretch, and cocked her head back so she was all mouth.

“Welcome to Spinster House,” she said, “I’m your landlady. Call me Stella.”

Delilah immediately grinned to herself thinking about a loud, animalistic Stanley shouting, “Stellaarr,” at the bottom of the stairs.

“Pleased to meet you.”

“Let me take you to your room,” said the mouth.

Delilah climbed the stairs and followed her to her room.

“The light must have blown this morning. The heavy drapes drown out the light.”

Delilah wondered that it didn’t seem a possibility to this woman that she could simply have drawn the drapes.

Stella continued, “Got to get a ladder to fix it. Lord put a hand or send a man!”

Delilah smiled at the woman as took the key and unlocked the door of her room. It was the furthest one down the hall, and she had little hope for its prospects given its price, but as she entered and she was surprised to find that it held the most pleasant, and spacious disposition. The beams were exposed and there was a large dark mahogany chest of drawers, and a four poster tarnished brass bed.

Delilah dropped her bags and collapsed on the bed. She thought of the foreboding cryptic keepers in the taxi and the Chesire cat of a landlady, and the grandeur of the room. How lucky it must be to find a room of this price in the city. It seemed uncanny. Yes, uncanny indeed.

Chapter 3

Marsha Marsha Marsha

The next morning Delilah awoke in her four poster bed, in a new place. She checked her cell to find three messages.

Message 1. Delilah this is your mother. Have you gone mad? Absolutely mad. Call me and we will arrange for you to come home. Delete.

Message2. Delilah this is your mother. Where are you? Why aren't you answering your phone? You better not be dead Delilah. Are you hearing me? You better not be dead. Delete.

Message 3. Delilah this is your mother. Why are you doing this to me? Why Delilah? Vern is worried sick. Hurry up and come home before this awful rumour spreads any further. Delete Delete Delete.

Count on her mother to call her leaving Vern a rumour, as though it were some malicious lie. Her mother had the uncanny ability to deny anything that was not what she considered fitting for her perfect reality. This was a fact evidenced by the thick velvet curtains that hid out the view of the "bad side" of the street, and the thicker dash of gin that laced her mother's limeade on warm Erynian nights.

And what was her mother really worried about? Was it really Delilah's disappearance or the wagging tongues, tongues that wagged more than her mother's perfect groomed pompeck Dolly's tail.

Delilah had begun to see something frightening, shocking and horrific as she looked in the mirror lately. She had begun to see the creature from the swamp! No worse! She had begun to see her mother. Ah the horror!

It was not the features, eyes or turn of the mouth that distressed her. These perhaps were indeed taking the form of that lady that had paid someone to nurse her, but she admittedly had little to complain about in that regard. Her mother was considered the Beauty of the street. She merited glances and popped horns, and wolf whistles from builders, and advances from her friend's husbands, i.e. the things that chief currency of a woman from Crest.

It was something else that worried Delilah. It was the particular disapproving twist of the lip, and the hollowness of the eyes. It was the way her mouth motored into an exaggerated smile when anyone walked in the room, as though her teeth were greased with Vaseline. She had stopped doing that since the Miss Cutie Pie Beauty Contest.

Delilah hated this. Though her hair was shorter, cut right to her jaw and a deep brown, she had begun wearing the expressions of her mother, and that was something that made her brow furrow. Yes, much in the same way her mother's does.

And what was this about Vern being worried sick. Delilah felt a pang of guilt at leaving him, but when she heard his name it completely dissipated, vanished like her mother's wrinkles after that trip to San Feton last year. Recovery time was only two months, and her smile was just as plastic before.

Delilah had the funny habit of feeling guilt for everyone in the world. A regular martyr this one, but something had changed recently. It all started with that letter, its crisp white envelope, and bloody wax seal.

Dear Miss Delilah X,

You have been invited to stay at Spinster House, on the commencement of your stint as at the WorkNett Corporation. We trust that you will find it pleasing and find your place here.

Looking forward to having you.

Ms. Karyl ChooSing

Something about that letter intrigued Delilah. She could not get it out of her head, and when Vern ripped it up, and laughed playfully with her, thanking God that she would never have the misfortune to stay in "some run down hostel full of cockroaches and spinsters in the city," as he put it, she felt something pang inside her. It was not pain, or sorrow, or misery. It was a feeling she had known best as a child running away from Sunday School to play in muddy ponds, and God's own garden. Delilah felt a pang of defiance. It was sudden and singular and definitely there, and she saved what she could of the letter, and when he left she played with the pieces in

her hand, and thought if it would really be such an awful thing to go to a new place, even if it was a run down hostel full of cockroaches and spinsters in the city.

And here she was. It was anything but rundown. The place was nothing short of lovely, and as she drew her drapes and the light flooded her whitewashed room, she was full of exhilaration and ready to enter the day; to let it take her where it would. For the first time she had no real idea of where she was heading. She felt no certain assurances. She felt confused and bewildered but she also felt excited, and that was something she thought she had forgotten to feel. That expression on her face wasn't like her mother's.

Delilah decided to roam the building. There was absolute quiet on the floor. You could sell this silence on the city streets. Hey by the looks of it everything was sold there, perhaps even silence. She moved down the corridor glancing at the glint of the silver numbers on each door. She was number 28.

The Hall was empty except for a woman in a tight grey bun, ushering a young man into her room. Moments later the handyman started pounding loud hammering sounds that broke the quiet.

On the opposite side of the hall was a room, the door slightly ajar. She peeked in to see Stella the Landlady waltzing to a ditty that she played on giant headphones. What a sight she was dressed in slippers and midcalf tights, and a pink stripy shirt tied at the waist, and curlers still in her hair, and dangly necklaces, and rings on her fingers and bells on her toes. And so she danced to unheard music, shaking her waist in rhythmic tempo, and occasionally venturing a grind. Delilah bit her lip to keep from bursting out in a full giggle.

She could not see much of the room, but from what she could see she counted seven unicorn statues, and over a dozen throw pillows, and a giant poster of Jimmy Dean.

Delilah was taking it all in when the silence was broken by a loud jingle. Santa had come, well not quite. This was a slender ,slim, let's face it downright malnourished looking chic with a bag the size of Saint Nick.

She was fishing in it for something. Her oversized shades had fallen to her nose as she poked in into the bag. Finally she surfaced with a ring of keys, and she opened her door. Delilah turned to leave but the girl said, “Hi, sorry didn’t see you there. You must be new.”

“Hi, My name is Delilah. Nice to meet you.”

“I’m Marsha. Why don’t you come in? Hear we were getting a new one on this floor.”

Delilah motioned that it was alright but the girl insisted and Delilah eventually followed her in.

“Sorry the place is such an absolute mess. Things are everywhere.”

She must have been drinking the absolute vodka because the room was completely impeccable.

“How are you liking it so far?” said Marsha

“I only got here yesterday. The place seems lovely.”

“You’ll like the city. There’s tonnes to do. Fetes, parties, clubs single nights. Us single girls have got to stick together. You are single aren’t you?”

Marsha said this with complete assurance that she was. And after last week she was right, Delilah supposed. She was single. Not that she knew what that meant. It had the funny resonance of single portion orders, and dinner for one, and single scoops of ice cream, not that that had anything to do with it, but she wasn’t censuring her thoughts.

“Yes I am. Just got out of a relationship. An almost marriage to be exact.” Delilah said, thinking how she always gave away far too many unnecessary details.

“Oh,” said Marsha, “sit down and tell me all about it. Marsha wants to hear.”

So she was one of those people who referred to themselves in the third person. But nonetheless Delilah started only to have Marsha interject. “Look at me being a horrible hostess. Let me get you a drink.”

She disappeared into what must have been the kitchen and reemerged with a cold glass of beer.

Delilah wasn't exactly a beer drinker but she graciously accepted, and started up again resting the glass on the coffee table.

Delilah started up, but just as she began Marsha turned around with the most ghastly look on her face and all but shrieked and definitely lunged at Delilah.

"Here's a coaster," she said.

Delilah quickly complied and the crazed look in Marsha's eyes disappeared as she urged Delilah to go on.

And there Delilah sat ready to pour out her heart in an entire swoop to a complete stranger. She felt the tears about to gush. They climbed onto the brink of her eye and perched themselves there ready to jump, so suicidally sad was this tale. But before she could. Before she could pour out her heart and finish the sentence, 'We started going out in...'

Marsha jumped up." I've got to head to the gym. Oh God . I almost forgot. Gosh Marsha where is your head at? I cant bear to miss an appointment. I'm due for a holiday next month. I've got to prepare myself."

She said that like some people said they were due for a period, or had to prepare for an exam.

She dashed off to another room, and told Delilah to make herself at home.

Delilah said she was going to leave, and Marsha told her not to be silly.

She shouted out from the bedroom, " you must have so much to do to settle in. Marsha loves helping people settle in. I'm very good at stuff like that."

"Ok," said Delilah,

There was silence for a bit as Marsha presumably changed.

Delilah eventually said " Hey Marsha do you have internet here. I need to get hooked up. Do we have to talk to Stella about it."

"Oh God, feel free to use mines. The notebook is in the corner."

Delilah moved across and pushed up the top to see the screensaver, none other than a slideshow of Marsha in various outfits and poses. A reel of Marsha followed by Marsha and then yet another Marsha.

And then gym Marsha entered in complete outfit with matching pod case and waterbottle.

It was like a hologram of the images on the screen, and she was almost in 3D. Who knows what she could be preparing herself to lose in that gym.

As though she read Delilah's mind she said, "I've got to lose five more inches."

From where Delilah didn't wait to ask. They both dashed out the door, one heading to the saner ground, and the other to skinnier, and both not to sure if they would ever get there.

Delilah sat on her bed, door locked and knees to her chest. What insane asylum had she admitted herself into. She was surrounded by crazy spinsters or so it would seem by the name of the place. Spinsters Hall. What kind of a name was that? There they were in all their mad glory. A chatchki collecting landlady, and a narcissist neurotic, and a glum spinster who needed to hire young men to do her handiwork because she had no man of her own.

Delilah was seriously reconsidering her choice. Vern wasn't so bad afterall. He rarely noticed that she was in the room, and quite possibly had not yet realized she was gone, but hey been seen isn't everything.

Delilah thumbed through her bag, looking for reassurance or her sanity. Where was a good old lobotomy when you needed one? She didn't unpack. She thought the better of that and instead pulled out a red rubber ball. It must have fallen in in her haste to throw some stuff together.

She was glad to have it now. She bounced it on the wall and the rhythm soothed her. It calmed her to think of the certainty of her throw and hit, and its return.

Tap. Tap Tap.

It was a very male thing to throw a ball. That's the sort of thing her mother would say and the thought of her mother made her miss, and the ball ricocheted unto the ceiling and made a crazy thump followed by the sound of something falling and a rustle.

Delilah threw the ball up once more, and there it was again, a rustle after the thud.

The ceiling sounded hollow but there was definitely something up there. She tried to reach the ceiling but the bed was too soft and her feet only sunk as she tried to leap.

It was like trying to jump in quicksand.

There was something there though. She threw the ball again. The phone started ringing though. It would be her mother. She decided to ask Stella for the ladder tomorrow. But of course she knew where it was, how odd. Stella had told her it was under the step.

She decided to take the call and placate her mother before she sent the army, guard and girlscouts out to look for her.

So that is how Delilah remained with something hovering above between heaven and her head as she got her whole gripe with Vern off her chest talking to her mother on the phone. That hidden thing had to wait. It had to wait a little while longer to be freed; a little while longer to escape.