

Character Study

by Fran Duffield

Subscribes to aspirational magazines

Dislikes eggs

Believes in fate

Has taken up country walking

Can't cook

Has a responsible job

Is self-conscious about her appearance

Is conflicted about her political views

She sighed as she turned the last glossy page of moody interiors to the large pictures of extravagant dishes with ingredients she wasn't even sure she knew, or how to pronounce them. 'To share with friends for a summer feast' it cooed, with a small insert picture of a vine covered loggia draped with cotton voile, strewn linen napkins and a large hat. It had the air of a sudden departure as if Vesuvius was about to erupt again.

She didn't have those kind of friends, or that kind of house, or ever would have. Nor could she cook any of it, if she had. She slid the magazine across the table and surveyed her poky living room with dissatisfaction. 'Bijou' they'd called it: it was what she could afford now, since she lost her chance of promotion in the merger of departments, so called. Just an excuse to move her sideways and bring in that strutting little bitch from the city branch. Wonder she could walk in those shoes, and amazing her boobs didn't drop into the manager's coffee, she leaned so far over the desk.

Maybe she should have been bolder herself over the years, but she'd never been a beauty or had a bosom to speak of, and she couldn't bring herself to fawn and drool over the paunchy men who lapped it up like big overfed tomcats. And now of course she was getting past her 'best before' date, not that Miss Cleavage was that much younger, but she'd obviously had every beauty treatment going. Must cost a fortune.

Of course they'd told her it was a new senior role she was moving to, but the pay difference was miniscule, and it was anyone's guess what they were paying the new cow. It was a mean stroke of fate that she should have booked that walking holiday all those months back, which just mysteriously coincided with the 'reorganisation'.

The walking had been pleasant enough, she supposed, if tiring at first, but the food was not up to scratch, and oh, those bloody breakfasts in the garden all seeming to consist of eggs in every obnoxious form. The very thought made her feel queasy even now. And all the while she was being taken up a very different garden path, had she but known it.

Distracted by the attentions of that widower, she hadn't given work a thought for the whole fortnight. He'd seemed all keen, but after he started on about being from a staunch Labour family she had become distinctly cool. Her parents had voted Labour because they didn't know any better, but she never discussed it with anyone. And, she thought, see, within the day he was chatting up that languages teacher woman. Didn't take to her from the start, showing off and speaking to the locals, and getting to know all the other guests in the first five minutes. Pushy, that's what it was. She preferred to keep herself to herself and have some dignity.