

# THE GIRL IN THE '67 BEETLE

## by Linda Lenhoff

### EXCERPT

I think it's a sign of our times that when we feel low or confused, unsure or unloved, we look for someplace warm and comforting, with soft colors and soothing music, and find ourselves time and again at Pottery Barn. At least, my pal Susan and I do.

"Shopping has gotten a bad name," Susan says. Susan is my bestie from college, though we don't use the term bestie because it's a little too cute, and Susan is a serious person. She has a serious face with a serious haircut—auburn tinted straight hair, excellent posture, and one of those fit bodies where everything's proportioned right. I think it's because she's tall. But she doesn't lord it over me or anything.

"It's true," I say. "I feel guilty shopping now. Even window shopping makes me look over my shoulder to make sure no one's watching. When did this happen?"

"It's all those TV shows where women in too much eye makeup are constantly shopping for shoes.

"I've never willingly gone into one of those pricey shoe stores," I say.

"Boutiques," Susan corrects me.

"That's a polite word for them," I say. "What's wrong with DSW? What's wrong with grabbing your own size and putting shoes on yourself?" I ask.

"You just don't get what it means to be a modern woman," Susan says, raising her nose in the air. "A modern woman who spends money on shoes that hurt."

"I'd rather have a nice quilt," I say, looking at a nice quilt. It's five-hundred dollars, so I won't be buying it, either. But at least if I did, it wouldn't pinch my toes.

I am scanning the aisles of Trader Joe's, looking for something celebratory but inexpensive for dinner. It is my anniversary, and I realize I'm acting a little like a New Agey Hallmark card for a thirty-four-year-old celebrating the first anniversary of her divorce (and you just know the card would be too pink, with a girl holding a martini glass with too much martini in it).

Trader Joe's is the grocery store where I came as a college student to buy very cheap wine (I still buy it) and big blocks of cheese (I've cut down on the cheese—dairy, you know).

The store looks brand new, having undergone renovation this past year. A lot like me, but more fluorescent and way more noticeable. You can now find some form of chocolate at the end of almost every aisle. Something that makes me think they know I shop here, or there are a lot more women like me than I ever thought.

A crowd has gathered around the low-carb section, which thankfully isn't too large an area. Lots of women studying the fine print.

An older man is watching the low-carb folks, too. He looks at me, and we share a smile. He then accidentally turns and knocks over an entire rack of chocolate bars (the ones with the white wrappers and hazelnuts inside, a very good choice), and the whole group of low carb-ettes turns to see, with looks of longing on their determined faces. The older man looks slightly bemused.

"You're a tempter, is that it?" I ask, helping him pick up the bars. I put one in my basket. I don't care if it fell on the floor. It's wrapped.

"Who could resist?" he says, with a mischievous smile on his face. "Thanks for the help. I should buy you a chocolate bar," he says.

"Please, I'm over thirty," I joke. "You should buy me two."