



Suburban stealth and tipple

Brigid Delaney

**Lace
G-strings.**

Studio apartments. Hangovers. Cellulite. Fake Versace. Blind dates. Tim Tams. Welcome to chick-lit, Adelaide-style.

The Vodka Dialogue is the third book by Adelaide writer Kirsty Brooks. Her hero, Cassidy Blair, is a 29-year-old shop assistant who dabbles in "sexual sleuthing" to pay off her \$10,000 credit card bill. The result is part modern romance, part crime fiction.

The romance element works, because Cassidy is so insecure that when she finally gets a man the reader wants to weep with relief. Consider this: "At the bottom of my scorn and distrust, was there really a fear that I too would be discovered by strangers, sprawled on the floor of my apartment, in loose tracksuit pants, a smudge of chocolate sauce on my chin? And maybe an aged parrot pooping in my ear."

Part of Cassidy's Bridget Jones-like lack of confidence is food-related. Brooks has her scoffing hot chips, chocolate and cakes, and skolling cocktails - before the recriminations: "My thighs are like two slabs of Spam."

Beneath the body image blues, Cassidy is affable and endearing. She's an every-girl who can talk about boys

for hours, is not afraid of a drink or 10 and is down-to-earth and caring. Brooks has resisted any temptation to glamorise her - she's a bit bogan, with tacky clothes, food smeared over her face and a McJob at a DVD store.

Brooks's snappy dialogue and well-drawn supporting cast also assist in fleshing Cassidy out.

The sleuthing element does not work quite as well. Cassidy accepts an assignment from a woman who is convinced her boyfriend is having an affair. Breaking into his house, Cassidy rifles through his wardrobe and some dusty boxes. The surveillance she undertakes of his quiet, suburban street is as exciting as, well, surveillance of a quiet suburban street.

But the sleuthing device gives the book some plot other than the singledom whinge of other chick-lit. Cassidy at least gets bashed, stalked and put to hospital in the course of her moonlighting.

Brooks has several subplots on the boil, which keeps the story from getting bogged down in the silly sleuthing. If you like your chick-lit suburban style, *The Vodka Dialogue* is a tasty tipple. ■

**The Vodka
Dialogue**

By Kirsty Brooks
Hodder, 310 pp,
\$29.95

Brigid Delaney is a *Herald* journalist.

ILLUSTRATION:
ROCCO FAZZARI