

The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic

OK. Don't panic. Don't panic. It's only a VISA bill. It's a piece of paper; a few numbers. I mean, just how scary can a few numbers be?

I stare out of the office window at a bus driving down Oxford Street, willing myself to open the white envelope sitting on my cluttered¹ desk. It's only a piece of paper, I tell myself for the thousandth time. And I'm not stupid, am I? I know exactly how much this VISA bill will be. Sort of. Roughly.

It'll be about... £200. Three hundred, maybe. Yes, maybe three hundred. Three-fifty max.

I casually close my eyes and start to tot up². There was that suit in Jigsaw. And there was dinner with Suze at Quaglino's. And there was that gorgeous red and yellow rug. The rug was £200, come to think of it. But it was definitely worth every penny – everyone's admired it. Or, at least, Suze has.

And the Jigsaw suit was on sale – 30 per cent off. So that was actually saving money.

I open my eyes and reach for the bill. As my fingers hit the paper I remember new contact lenses. Ninety-five pounds. Quite a lot. But, I mean, I had to get those, didn't I? What am I supposed to do, walk around in a blur?

And I had to buy some new solutions and a cute case and some hypo-allergenic eyeliner. So that takes it up to... four hundred?

At the desk next door to mine, Clare Edwards looks up from her post. She's sorting all her letters into neat piles, just like she does every morning. She puts rubber bands round them and puts labels on them saying things like, 'Answer immediately' and 'Not urgent but respond'. I loathe Clare Edwards.

"OK, Becky?" she says.

"Fine," I say lightly. "Just reading a letter."

I reach gaily into the envelope, but my fingers don't quite pull out the bill. They remain clutched around it while my mind is seized – as it is every month – by my secret dream.

Do you want to know about my secret dream? It's based on a story I once read in the newspaper about a mix-up³ at a bank. I loved this story so much, I cut it out and stuck it onto my wardrobe door. Two credit card bills were sent to the wrong people, and – get this – each person paid the wrong bill without realizing. They paid off each other's bills without even checking them.

And ever since I read that story, my secret dream has been that the same thing will happen to me. Some dotty old woman in Cornwall will be sent my humongous⁴ bill and will pay it without even looking at it. And I'll be sent her bill for three tins of cat food at 59p each. Which, naturally, I'll pay without question. Fair's fair, after all.

A smile is plastered⁵ over my face as I gaze out of the window. I'm convinced that this month it'll happen – my secret dream is about to come true. But when I eventually pull the bill out of the envelope – goaded⁶ by Clare's curious gaze – my smile falters, then disappears. Something hot is blocking my throat. I think it could be panic.

The page is black with type. A series of familiar names rushes past my eyes like a mini shopping mall. I try to take them in, but they're moving too fast. Thorntons, I manage to glimpse. Thorntons Chocolates? What the hell was I doing in Thorntons Chocolates? I'm supposed to be on a diet. This bill can't be right. This can't be me. I can't possibly have spent all this money.

Sophie KINSELLA, *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic*, 2000

¹ **cluttered**: made untidy and confused (by filling with useless or unwanted things)

² **tot up**: to add up

³ **mix up**: mistake

⁴ **humongous**: combination of huge and enormous

⁵ **plaster**: to spread, cover thickly

⁶ **goaded**: forced to do something by strong annoyance

Sophie Kinsella is a writer and former financial journalist. She is the author of a bestselling series – The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic, Shopaholic Abroad, Shopaholic Ties the Knot, Shopaholic and Sister, Shopaholic and Baby.

Questions

1. **Read lines 1 to 3. Who could the narrator be speaking to? Imagine the possible situations.**
[*situations possibles*]

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2. **Read down to line 10 and check your answer. What is the character worried about? Explain her feelings.** [*sentiments du narrateur*]

3. **Read the whole text quickly and pick out information about the characters (names, jobs, lifestyles).** [*repérages*]

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4. **Read from line 11 to line 31. Fill in the chart.** [*dépenses et réactions*]

What she has spent	How she reacts
—	—
—	—
—	—
—	—
—	—
—	—
—	—
—	—

5. **Judging from what Becky has bought, say what you learn about her personality.**
[*personnalité de la narratrice*]

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6. Compare the two main characters' attitudes. [*comparaison des personnages*]
7. Read line 32 to line 40. Use these key expressions to sum up Becky's secret dream: *credit card bills, mix-up, wrong address, cat food, checking*. What does Becky wish? [*rêve de la narratrice*]
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8. Read the rest of the text. Analyse Becky's attitude and explain why she is in such a state of mind. [*attitude de la narratrice*]
9. How would you qualify the narrator's tone? Pick out examples to justify your answer. [*ton du texte*]

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Writing

10. You have just received your exam report. Although you did rather well in some subjects, you hesitate before opening the envelope. Using elements from the text, write a monologue. [*identification avec la narratrice à partir d'une situation qui concerne tous les élèves*]

Synopsis

Meet Rebecca Bloomwood. She's a journalist. She spends her working life telling others how to manage their money. She spends her leisure time...shopping. Retail therapy is the answer to all her problems. She knows she should stop, but she can't. She tries Cutting Back, she tries Making More Money. But neither seems to work. The stories she concocts become more and more fantastic as she tries to untangle her increasingly dire financial difficulties. Her only comfort is to buy herself something – just a little something...Can Becky ever escape from this dream world, find true love, and regain the use of her Switch card?



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SOPHIE KINSELLA

When the going gets tough – the tough go shopping...