

CORNELIA C. HORNOSTY

## Millefiori Beads

HERE IN THE VICTORIA PRINCESS Hotel, seated at the dining-room table, Denise can see the light-coloured wingback sofa along the wall, the soft beige carpeting, the large cream and gold ceramic lamps, the well-appointed living-room with a view of the Grand Pacific across the street, and as she suffers the anguish, she is transported back to her mother's apartment in Chicago, the one overlooking Lake Michigan, the one she sat in year after year during her semi-annual visits, and a story forms in her mind. It is a story about hopes that never materialize, about love that is never shared, about love that is never worked out because stuff gets in the way, because things are bought to bring comfort, but somehow they do not. Only now can it be disclosed:

This tormented woman keeps a diary. In it she regrets the Delftware she should have kept, the spankings she should not have given her children, the resentment she should not have harboured toward her mother, the anger she should not have revealed to Dr. Mead the psychiatrist over those many years. In it she records the purchase of the brown plaid lazyboy chair her husband sat in every evening until he died in late January, the walnut oval dining-room table from Roger Smythe's of downtown, Thursday's groceries from Mr. G.'s across the street who deliver, the gallon of rum for her nightcaps, the beige purse from Carson's when she had lunch with Myra and had such a wonderful day out on the town. The food was so delicious, and Carson's is such an elegant department store and has a truly beautiful restaurant with its high ceilings, ornate archways and hanging plants. She used to go there as often as possible, a lovely place to escape, when her mother lived with

them for those years during the war and she would take the train, luxuriate in the forty-three-minute ride down to the LaSalle Street Station, meet up with her friends, buy sweaters and blouses and orange jelly slices to take home to her daughter and son. How she loved them.

Her husband, her husband the doctor dies and leaves her all alone. For six years she sits and scans catalogues of things to buy, feeling bereft and betrayed by this man who organized her life and gave it meaning, colour, substance. For six years she sends for catalogues and receives catalogues and orders items out of catalogues while she sits and looks out of the window at Lake Michigan. For six years she reads catalogues and makes phone calls and watches the six o'clock news and comments on events as if her husband were in the room to agree about the terrible injustices in the world. He never leaves but he is gone and he has betrayed her.

She calls her sister in Barrington (they are so close, even though they are twelve years apart) to say hello and are you okay and did you sleep well and did you finally decide on royal blue for the dress. When she was three (in 1909) her mother would get in a mood and threaten to leave her sisters and her forever and stomp out of the house for hours, and they just had to believe that she would return. Of course she did, and she sewed all the four girls' dresses and even the shirts for Paul, her brother, but mother was so tired of sewing and having babies that she had those dark times.

This poor woman tried and tried not to use those moods, not to do that very thing to her own, but she was pretty sure she had failed. Especially that time when she broke her leg and her daughter rushed to the basement to tell her brother Vince of the accident, but he didn't believe her and thought his mother was just in another one of her snits. Those catalogues have beautiful things like silver bells for Christmas, shawls from Scotland, millefiori beads. She tried to send the very best things to her children, the loveliest stuff from those catalogues, but somehow it never seemed to be right.

One day she contracts pneumonia from a lady who comes twice a week to bathe the infection on her foot. In two weeks she feels feverish and terrible and calls a taxi to take her to hospital and in three days she dies. The last entry in the diary in a very shaky hand records the cost of the taxi. For ten years after, the catalogues are forwarded to her daughter in Canada.