

FRIDAY

The symptoms of an anxiety attack include dryness of the mouth, a racing heartbeat and lightheadedness. She was on the fourth floor of downtown Eaton's, wandering aimlessly somewhere near the back of the lingerie section, looking for something. She wasn't sure of how she'd gotten there. Desperately seeking an escalator, a down escalator, she was careful to appear composed and therefore remain anonymous. She stroked a pair of cotton pajamas. The overhead banks of fluorescent lights are annoying. There is no escalator around here, of course not, unless it's hidden over there in the middle of the bras and panties. She found herself buffeted by soft and luxurious fabrics promising warmth comfort sex or sexiness, moments of pure relaxation, leisurely evenings in front of a stone fireplace, a fire burning brightly while she sips hot chocolate from a pretty white Austrian hot-chocolate mug. The room is lit by flickering candles, there is someone there beside her.

On her way home from work in the art department of a popular lifestyle magazine, she had just slipped in to try on a lipstick. It wouldn't take long, and besides, she wasn't feeling very decisive or motivated to part with some cash. The fluorescent lights and white acoustic-tiled ceilings were especially irritating in their lack of substance. Lacy patterns of black pinhole dots stretched on over her head, relentlessly repeating themselves. Gaily-coloured silk garments fluttered at her sides as she squeezed past a display of designer loungewear. Maybe that escalator over there just past the plus sizes will bring deliverance. Yes! No! Going up. No! Not again. This always happens. No matter how many years you've been coming here. The floor plans have been completely redesigned several times, creating months of confusion after each new configuration. Furniture and Appliances. Let's see. Yes, a couch was exactly what she needed, had needed for possibly two or three years. It's a hard decision to make. Being a successful

and wise consumer requires large amounts of research and expertise. Is it actually worth it? she's asking herself, not for the first time. An abundance of pillows was important, they're comforting, yielding, I need cushioning, and slipcovers, preferably, but nothing too casual, blah blah blah. Nothing too Martha Stewart. Blah, blah, blah. Keep moving. A glass of water would be nice right about now.

The brocade of a deep maroon-coloured pillow caught her attention. Make a mental note of this, come back another time. Comfort was important to her now, as was projecting a certain sense of style, sophistication. She had been reading the magazines in a desultory way, keeping a scrapbook, planning. She was having trouble committing herself to an image. Easing herself into an enormous deep blue couch she gazed across the aisle at another woman seated on a couch, intensely consulting a thick wad of fabric samples. Their eyes met briefly, they each looked away. Two diminutive elderly women shuffled by on their way to the restaurant, followed by a man from approximately the same generation. Another man, a younger man, the manager she guessed from the rectangular black plastic pin on his shirt pocket (she couldn't read it without her glasses), was asking her if he could be of assistance and she shook her head, declining any assistance and then got up and walked slowly but steadfastly towards the suddenly rather imposing entrance to the escalator which was going up. Up she went and at the top walked around past the Belgian chocolates with cashew nuts peering out of dark chocolate blobs, and over to the down escalator and took it down, down down five floors to the main floor, the cosmetics floor.

The cosmetics floor again. Maybe she could find one this time. Oh, and there are the lipsticks, there they are, I knew they were over there. Yes I'll take that one please she said and handed over her mastercard, noticing that even though the ceilings were so much higher here, the lights seemed brighter. More relentless, glittering, deceitful.

Kind of crusty. The predominance of glass and chrome makes her edgy. Okay, okay time to go, she tears herself away from the leather handbags section, making a mental note of the brown Italian one with the woven strap, I'll come back she said to herself for the millionth time. She was irritated with herself as she recognised the refrain. But then becomes distracted by something at the edges of her vision. A flash of yellow. But it's only a poster featuring large bunches of bright yellow bananas. Next to it a splashy display of straw tote bags. Suddenly she notices that everything around her is looking kind of withered, dull, and demanding, like a hall full of beggars. She pictures herself drinking mineral water in the subway. Basically she just wants to be home or at least get outside. Three more steps and she's in the revolving doorway with its lovely brass handles worn from billions of shopper's caresses. She's walking across the sidewalk, down the stairs and into the subway. Breathing easier now, just determined to go straight home without dawdling and gawking at another store window. She felt dirty. The subway ride was routine. When she got home she runs a bath and uses the bathoil she got for her birthday, putting on a CD to distract herself. She lights about thirty candles, of all sizes, colours and shapes, each one held by a wax-encrusted candlestick. She had indulged herself because she was unable to choose. It was easier. I'll never go there again, she promises herself, again, sinking into the foamy water. She begins to think about the feeling she has that each time she goes there she leaves something behind and it isn't money.