

OLD BAGGAGE

Chapter One

“What is this? Stupid bitch, you know I hate pickles!”

“Then don’t eat them.” And we are off; it takes so little to start an argument in this house of lies.

He crawled in well after sunrise and even after all of these years, I still worry. Never am I able to completely rest, not sure if he has found a better bed or if the road and alcohol have claimed him. But the real fuel to his fire is that I know where he was at all night.

I may never know why this day, is it enough? Am I finally through with the degradation and his volatile anger? I know it isn’t the kosher dills that set him off. His usual defense is to divert his guilt with an attack. Of all the people on this earth, I know how he operates.

“The dills aren’t for you. I buy the groceries and I deserve a freaking pickle.” He also knows how I work to avoid these arguments and the shock is visible when I respond.

The single hamburger patty continues to sizzle in the pan, and the bun sits on a small plate prepared with my favorite condiments. “This is my lunch. Why don’t you go back to bed, or is it too empty for you?”

The slap to my face stings and I feel his angry fingers around my throat. His only response is a string of swear words and name-calling. I know where this ends. Soon I will be on the floor, broken and apologizing; or maybe, this time, he may kill me.

He pushes me back against the counter, and I touch the cold heft of the pickle jar. I have no conscious thought about my next action. For the rest of my life, I won’t remember hitting him. I hear the jar break.

The juice christens his head as the acrid liquid slowly splashes over both of us. I watch the hateful look on his face change to surprise and finally to sleep as he crumbles to the floor.

I run to our room and pull out my suitcase. I dump in my underwear, toothbrush, all of the toothpaste (screw him; he can buy his own), and my makeup bag. At a second thought, I throw his toothbrush into the toilet. As I zip my suitcase closed, the smoke detector begins to wail.

Seeing his wallet sitting on the dresser, I take an overdue allowance before running back into the kitchen. I reach over his lifeless body to turn off the stove.

To my horror, he stirs. His eyes don't open, and he remains unconscious. There is an all-consuming desire to kick him, but instead, I dial 911. Calmly I request an ambulance, provide the address and promise to leave the door open.

Wheeling my suitcase to the open door, I gaze at the horizon when I suddenly hear a long-silenced voice from my childhood yelling, "Go, just go.