

Fall 12-1-2018

## Baggage

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### Recommended Citation

Bissonnette, Monalisa (2018) "Baggage," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 41 : No. 1 , Article 32.  
Available at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol41/iss1/32>

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# Baggage

She was frozen in stillness, like a miniature statue cemented in place. Her head bowed, eyes closed. She was reverently posed, as if in prayer. I need to move, she thought. She couldn't seem to connect the thought with any action.

She stepped out of the car and leaned into her abandonment, curbside to the entrance of Detroit Metro Airport. As she turned her head and watched the taillights of the old brown Rambler disappear, she felt strangely relieved.

A frenzy of activity buzzed around her. There were people stepping out of taxis, walking with authority. There were voices booming from the overhead speakers. Luggage on wheeled racks scurried about like urgently deployed soldiers.

In one hand she clenched her old Holly Hobby suitcase and in the other she held a stuffed monkey (named Henry) close to her chest. Her Papa had proudly won Henry for her at a local fair some years ago. At that moment, she wished she would have packed

Henry in the suitcase. She imagined how silly she must look, clinging to an old stuffed animal. She was eleven, after all - much too old for such a childish indulgence. The night before she had to determine which of her worldly possessions she would take with her. She didn't have many to begin with. Late into the night she removed and added nominal items from the small suitcase, unsure of what to pack for the journey. She decided on various items, clothing, her fluffy pillow, a pink polka dotted piggy bank (holding \$26.23), a few photos of her papa and brothers, her secret book (a diary), and a bottle of perfume her papa had given her on her tenth birthday.

It was expensive and very grown-up-Chanel No. 5. The night her papa died in the car crash, her mother had taken the perfume from her room and placed it upon her own dresser. The little girl decided in the darkness that it was worth the risk of sneaking into her mother's room, clinging to the shadows and grabbing the bottle. Luckily, in the morning her mother hadn't noticed it was missing.

Standing alone outside the airport, she was filled with questions about how she would survive. How it would feel, what she would do. Fear began to embrace the girl tightly. She bit her lip, this is how she held back tears. The taste of salt and sharp pain always helped her resist the urge to cry.

She could see rows of connected plastic chairs through the glass doors. She told herself to walk through the doors and sit down. Then she could decide what to do next. She took a deep breath, mustered all the will within her small body and took one step forward. Yes! Victory!

She had freed herself from the invisible chains which held her in place. Over and over again, she took a deep breath and then one step forward, a deep breath and then one step forward...

She didn't sit down on the chair, but rather collapsed in it like a clump of snow too heavy for a branch to hold up any longer. She was not merely shivering now, she was shaking uncontrollably. Her teeth chattered and she felt nauseated, even though she hadn't eaten anything that day. Tears began rolling down her cheeks, she could no longer hold back the torrent of emotions.

She had not wept since learning of her Papa's death four days earlier. Not even when her mother had forced her to look at him as he lay in a black lacquered box lined with white satin. Her mother had told the keeper of this place of death that the young girl insisted on seeing him. That was a lie. Her mother lied often, but the girl knew better than to say anything. They stood in front of the casket, the little girl rigid in front of the inanimate body, so close that she could have reached out and touched it. Instead, she looked off to the side to avoid the sight that was too harrowing to see. Her mother placed a hand under the girl's long dark hair, clutching at the nape of her neck, long nails digging into her skin. She leaned in close and whispered, "Look at him, you little bitch." The young girl knew that she had no choice and turned to face the coffin. She was expressionless. No wincing, no tears. She had learned a long time ago that crying only made matters Worse.

MONALISA BISSONNETTE