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Literacy Narrative

The Inclinorator

I was halfway between shuttle drop and hotel check-in when I felt a strange tickle up my arm. I stopped, shook out my hand and continued, switching my suitcase to the other arm.

Ten more minutes and I'll be running a bath.

At least the rooms in the Luxor didn't have that industrial-air-freshener-meets-stale-cigarettes smell that permeated the casino level. I rounded a forty-foot plaster pharaoh and suppressed a groan. A huge line crisscrossed the marble lobby between brass stanchions.

I hate Las Vegas.

The thwack-clack of my wheels transitioning from carpet to marble reverberated up my arm as I joined the line. Standing my suitcase up, I rolled my shoulders in relief. When the line inched forward, I nudged my bag with a knee only to pull it back in surprise. My suitcase was rattling.

No, not rattling. I glanced around and placed a hand atop the bag. Vibrating.

I mentally searched the contents. There was nothing inside but my trade show gear and the thick book I hoped to enjoy with that bath.

The vibrating stopped, started, and stopped again in a rhythm I recognized with dawning horror.

I jerked my hand back and glanced around again.

It wasn't audible. With the casino floor only a few feet behind us, the cavernous pyramid shaped interior reflected sounds in a dull roar. I couldn't even make out the conversation near me.

I fished out my phone and texted my husband.

“You put something in my bag?”

“:-) It's a care package. Thought you'd miss me.”

“I'm in lobby. Suitcase is vibrating.”

“LOL”

Asshat.

I stowed my phone and considered options. No one could hear it. *I* couldn't even hear it. I also didn't know what “it” was. But I had an idea.

I felt a flush creep up my neck as I remembered the wink and chuckle from the shuttle driver when he'd given me my bag

Maybe if I unzipped the bag just a bit and reached in, I could locate the stowaway and disable it?

But a vision of the offending object falling out and skittering across the lobby stopped that thought.

Right. I'd get to my room and sort it out there. Then I'd call my husband and treat him to a few of my innermost thoughts.

Thirty minutes later, I joined the loose knot of people waiting for the inclinators, the Luxor's painfully slow, diagonal elevator.

My suitcase continued to throb secretly and I pulled it closer, pretending interest in the TV over the elevator doors. The soundtrack was lost in the competing *pling-pling-pling* of slot machines and the hundreds of conversations that echoed into the hall.

When it was our turn, I scurried in, jabbed the golden "eleven" and pulled my bag tight against my knees.

Was it getting worse?

More guests shuffled in, filling the space to capacity. Then the doors closed, sealing out the cacophony of the casino floor and enveloping us in sudden silence.

Bvvvvv! Bvvvvv!

My stomach dissolved, leaving only a tingling sensation. So much for it being inaudible.

My suitcase pulsed and throbbed with the urgency of a trapped hornet.

Bvvvvv! Bvvvvv!

Heads turned, people looked from the corners of their eyes for the source of the rattling.

Someone tittered, a high abbreviated giggle.

Why was it so loud?

Had he packed something worse than I'd imagined?

Bvvvvvv! Bvvvvvv!

A few people looked resolutely ahead, but most turned to look at my bag. What had he done?

Would I have to dispose of something as long as my arm and shaped like a...like a...

Bvvvvvv! Bvvvvvv!

The inclinor wasn't glass, so I couldn't jump from it. Suicide not being an option, I sighed, raising a hand.

"Yep. It's me."

The passengers could hold onto their masks of polite interest no longer. They erupted into laughter. My face was hot, pulse hammering in my ears. Red from neckline to hairline, I shifted my feet while my suitcase continued to buzz and throb away.

"Hey," someone called above the dying laughter. A rheumy-eyed tourist in denim cutoffs smiled at me. He clutched a mostly empty souvenir glass shaped like a leg in a fishnet stocking.

I tried to smile but couldn't feel my lips.

His grin widened and he treated me to a slow-motion wink. "I like a gal that comes prepared."

In my room, I shoved the suitcase down and wrenched open the zipper. The entire bag pulsated against the floor as I yanked out clothes and toiletries, tossing them aside in my search for the culprit.

What would I do with it? I couldn't put it in the trash for the maid to find. Could I hurl it from the balcony and run for it? No, too many cameras.

It lay against the metal frame at the bottom of the case. It was miniscule, no larger than half my pinky; an innocent pink and purple gizmo the size and shape of a bumble bee. Now that I held it pinched between thumb and forefinger, it emitted only the faintest tickly buzz. I flicked the tiny switch to disable it and enjoyed a moment of silence before my phone rang.

I jabbed the answer key and said, by way of greeting, "If this is your idea of a care package, we need to talk before the kids go away to camp."

When you've loved someone for fifteen years, you have a good idea what makes them tick, what makes them laugh, and what makes them want to murder you with a spoon.

The next day when I got to my room, a real care package had arrived with all my favorite treats from home. He'd spent half a day in effort plus a small fortune on shipping. I sat on my bed and bit into the buttery-sweet kouign amann pastry he'd sent.

"Hey Siri," I said into my phone, careful to enunciate, "Search the web for live cockroaches."

I knew a certain germaphobe with a business trip next month.