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“We know what’s inside, lady. You got to pay for this.”

The steamer trunk is up on its end and the big suitcase is next to it. The stink is coming from them like a rotten halo you can almost see. Flies buzz and land and buzz crazy-like again. There are these lines of black wetness that come from the seams and make sticky pools under each one.

I start to choke. Then I’m running for the door and running up the stairs and past the piles of suitcases.

“What the hell?” Gordon says when he catches up in the main room—the men close behind. “What the hell is in those, Pearl?”

“I didn’t pack them.”

And where are the keys? I don’t know, I think I tell him.

“The lady knows nothing about this,” Gordon makes himself sound important to the men. “I’ll call the hospital where they’ll page her husband, Dr. Martin Tild...”

Gordon finally gets through to the hospital from the phone hanging on the wall. He is calling my husband, the doctor. He motions to me to wait outside, tells me he will take care of everything. I’m already walking out the door.

After a long time he comes out to me where I’m pacing by his car, and he lights another cigarette for us both. Nothing has been taken care of.

“He’s not there.”

“Let’s go.”

“You don’t get it. He’s never been there. Not since he had that interview with them more than a month ago. Pearl?”

“Let’s go, please.”

“They didn’t hire him. The director of the whole damn hospital just told me. He lied to you. He was never supposed to be here, ever.”

There is some kind of loud, roaring sound that must be a train speeding in.
But the tracks are empty.

“Let’s go,” I think I whisper it.

Gordon looks at me. I know he sees the edge of a scream in me. It was
growing on the trip all the time I’ve been hoping it was not real...