

**The Window in the Luggage  
(Alternative Ending)**

by Olen Rambow

I wake up. A sense of wrongness twists my gut, but as I look around my bedroom, I see nothing out of place. My clothes and books are strewn about as usual, and there on the floor lies my suitcase, a black Rockland carry-on.

That's right. Just yesterday, I was relaxing in the beryl waters of Destin.

I realize what's making me uneasy. The time I spent on the beach is clear in my mind; but I don't remember coming home. I sift through my memories, searching for the most recent one. The hotel lobby. Rushing to the airport. And then... nothing.

I roll out of bed and stumble over to my suitcase. Up close, I see that it's green, not black. And it's not Rockland. I stare for a moment, and it sinks in that this isn't my bag.

*Great.*

While my mind clumsily processes the situation, my hands move of their own accord. Thumb and forefinger find a zipper and slide it all the way around. Then, with both hands, I open the case and look inside.

I have just enough time to register neat stacks of men's clothing before the suitcase is gone and I find myself looking through the eyes of an unfamiliar man. I *am* the man, and I'm talking to a clerk in a store.

"Ohio State?" the clerk asks.

"That's right," I say. "Red. With an 'O' on it."

"You realize we're in Florida, right?"

"Yeah. But my daughter's graduating from Ohio State, and I'd like a hat."

"I guess I can order one for you."

"I'd appreciate that," I say, reaching for my wallet.

Back in my bedroom, I close the suitcase and stare at it. It's different now. It's small and blue, with a cartoon clownfish on it. *What's happening?* Even as I think the question, my hands reach out, unbidden, and open the new case.

I'm a little boy.

"Are you ready, Aiden?" my mom asks.

“Yeah.” My chest swells; I’ve packed my own suitcase for the first time.

“Let me see.” Mom opens the Nemo case and examines the contents. “Shorts, shirts, socks, underpants. Good. You’re missing something, though.”

“What?”

“A toothbrush.”

“Doesn’t Grandpa have one?”

Mom laughs. “Yes, but you should bring your own.”

“Oh.”

“Let’s go get it.”

I start to follow after her, but then I’m in my bedroom again, looking down at yet another suitcase. This one is burgundy. I open it, and I’m a... man of God or something. I’m looking in a mirror, fingering a scar over my left eye. I always hated the scar, but it doesn’t matter. I have a higher purpose now.

I close the burgundy case and open a black one. Then another green one. I lose track of how many suitcases I open, how many people I become. And then there it is: a black Rockland. My pulse is a drumbeat in my ears. Hesitantly, I open the case... and I’m myself.

I’m on the flight back from Florida.

On my right, in the aisle seat, is the man from the store, wearing an Ohio State hat. His name is Jim. I chatted with him a minute ago, and he said that he’s on his way to his daughter’s graduation. He turns and sees me staring. Swallowing, I look the other way.

Aiden is looking out the window. I remember talking to him, too. He’s going to visit his grandfather. His mother is in a different row because they couldn’t get seats together. When I offered to give up my seat, Aiden refused. “I’m an independent man,” he said.

I hear a noise and look up. The man with the scar over his eye is opening an overhead compartment. He takes out a package and fumbles with it for a moment. Something is wrong.

An explosion tears through my body.

The plane is gone.

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