



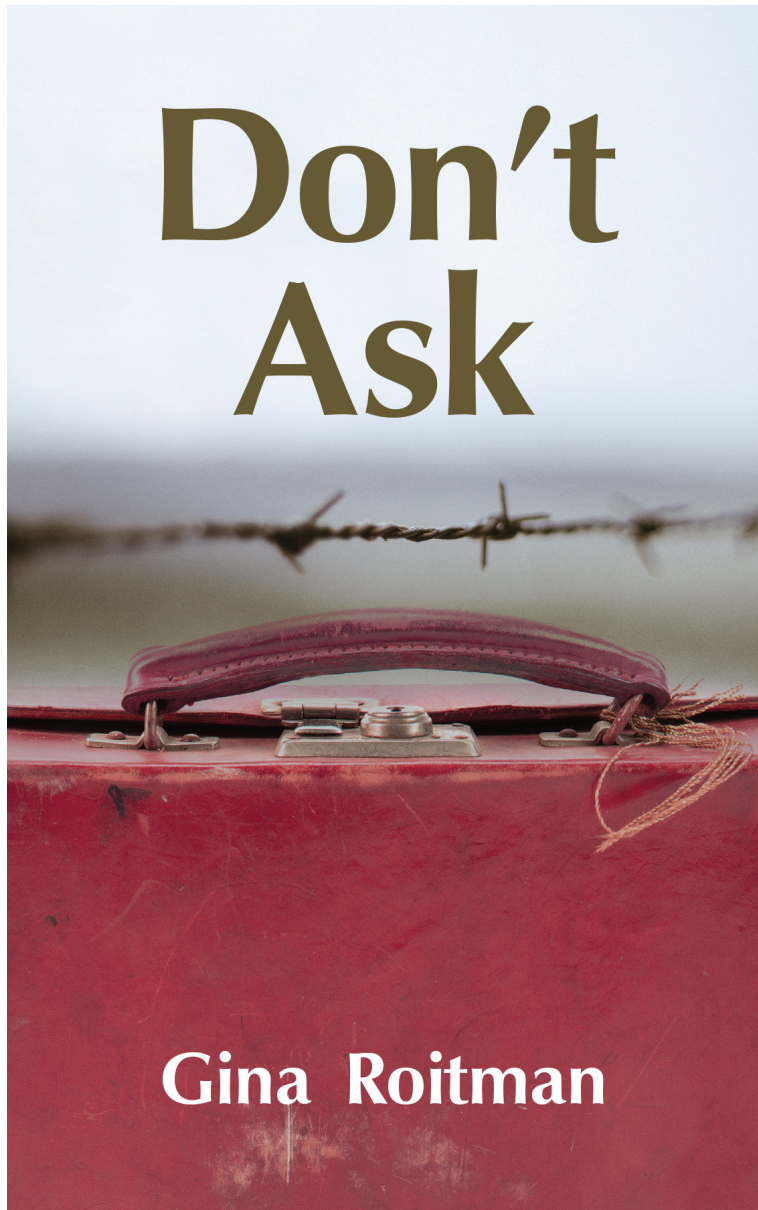
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Don't Ask

Gina Roitman

Fiction | Jewish

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Don't Ask

A NOVEL BY

Gina Roitman



Posing the question: who packed the baggage we carry from birth?

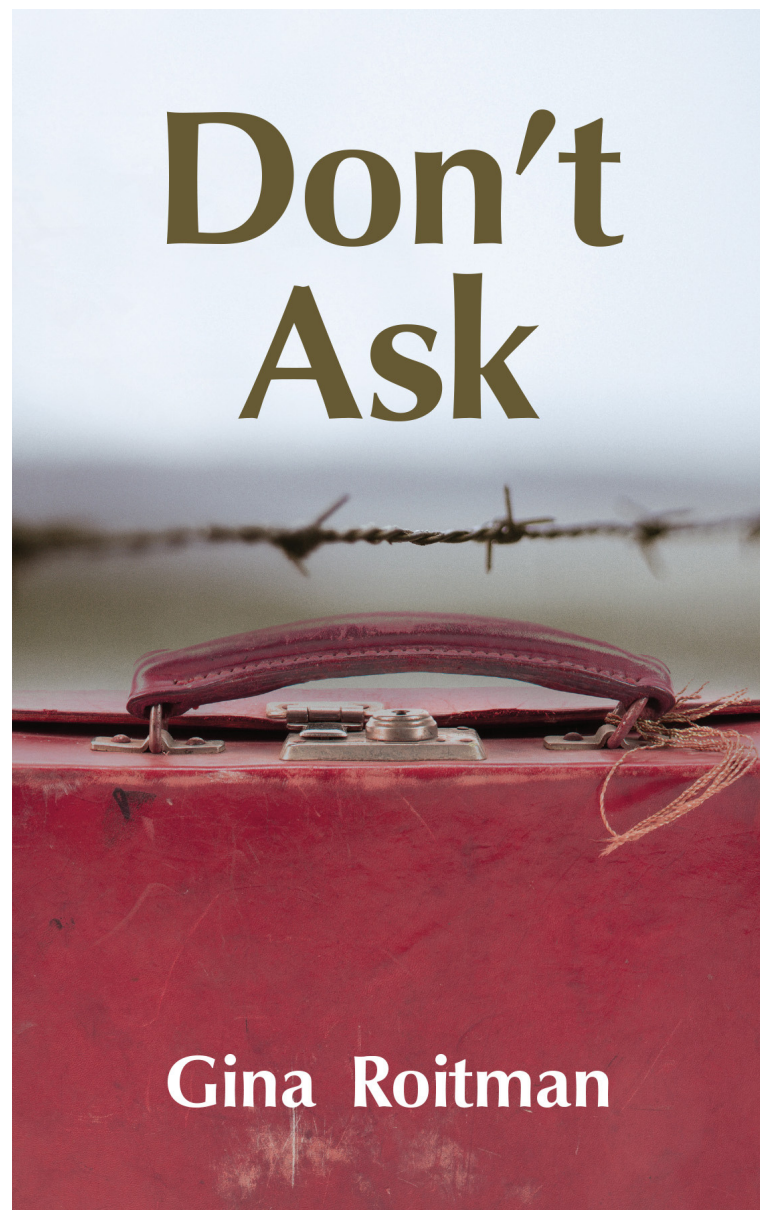
In this literary thriller, a woman agonizes over her mother's suicide and is thrown into turmoil over her attraction to a German. Hannah Baran is 45, a successful Montreal real estate broker with a highly lucrative client who, like her parents, is a Holocaust survivor. Born in a German DP camp, she is the only child of Rokhl and the late Barak. One day, she arrives to take her mother to the doctor's but Rokhl is gone, leaving behind a mystifying note that reads: I am not her. Throughout Hannah's life, Rokhl's notes have been all the guidance she received from a laconic, distant mother, a foil to Hannah's voluble father who rescued Rokhl from Auschwitz. When Hannah announces that she must travel to Germany on business, Rokhl threatens that should Hannah 'go to that land of murderers,' it would be over her dead body. Three days later, Hannah locates her missing mother in the morgue. Secreted away in a confessional letter for Hannah to find one day is the story of Rokhl's life filled with loss, betrayal, and guilt. It is woven into the intrigue of the plot about contested land and a love affair weighted down by the baggage of history.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author of the short story collection, *Tell Me a Story, Tell Me the Truth*, and co-author of *Midway to China and Beyond*, the biography of a globetrotting Montreal businessman, Gina Roitman's work has appeared in anthologies and magazines including *Poetica*, *Wherever I Find Myself*, *the Forward* and *carte-blanche*.

Keywords: literary, thriller, jewish, Holocaust, love, Auschwitz, guilt, suicide, Germany, Montreal, family history, romance.



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Excerpt from *Don't Ask*

She raked her nails through her thick hair and examined the copper strands that came back laced between her fingers. When she was young, Rokhl used to whistle a high, bird-like trill as she brushed her daughter's hair until it shone like a bright penny. As if mesmerized, Hannah would watch the arc of her mother's arm complete a slow, downward stroke, the movement carried out in the same precise way each time. Rokhl's pale skin was so delicate except for the scar on her forearm, a lumpy welt of red and blue, like the tiny tableau of a mountain range. Rokhl's whistling as she gently ministered to her daughter's tangled mass was a silken thread of intimacy that bound their daily lives in a way that comforted young Hannah.

Balefully stuffing the loose strands of hair into her pocket, Hannah absentmindedly opened the hall closet and was momentarily confused when she spied Rokhl's purse. She reached in and turned it over slowly as if to reassure herself she wasn't mistaken. It was a bag she knew well with all its little zippered compartments because it had once belonged to her, earmarked for the Pioneer Women's annual bazaar until Rokhl had snatched it from the pile. Her mother could not bear to throw anything out, a habit that she had transmitted to her daughter. In a corner of Hannah's cedar closet, four shoeboxes - one for each decade and a fresh one marked 2000 - printed in heavy black marker on the end of each box contained Rokhl's notes neatly stacked. Like the dream logs she had been keeping since her teens, Hannah planned to one day read them all at once. When she had to.

Ignoring the hammering of her heart, Hannah unzipped the main compartment. Her mother's wallet which had also once been hers lay next to a crumpled cotton handkerchief with a faded embroidered rose on the edge and an old black comb. In the front compartment, Hannah found a scrap of paper. On it was Rokhl's meticulous script. Her hands suddenly trembling, she pulled the note out of the bag and laid it in her lap.

On the day her mother disappeared, Hannah read the last note Rokhl would leave her. It said, *I am not her.*