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Stuck in the Alps

ADVENTURES IN SWITZERLAND

It's approximately 3:30am and I am driving in this empty city, south part of Switzerland. I feel sick—my stomach rumbling in anxiety. My brain is about to explode. The GPS stares at me with a strange address, certainly not the one I need. Finally I see someone and I pull over. The damn. How do I get to the damn? He motions his finger by his mouth as if I am asking where I could eat. I shake my head and drive away. Night has turned into day. I think about earlier in the evening.



I pick up a massive piece of Toblerone and lift it up high and ask my daughter Hana if she wants to get it for the flight home. We'll need another suitcase for it I tell her. She laughs from the table where everyone else is finishing dinner, here in the restaurant by the second largest dam in Switzerland high up in the Alps.

Rob, my bother-in-law wolfs down his meal. He definitely needs it after biking from the city up to the restaurant to meet us. I collect the bill and we all head outside. There was only the van that we had squeezed myself and Hana, my parents, my sister, Kinney and baby Abbie.

Rob had taken the other car earlier in the morning from our BnB in Geneva to drive to the city, rent a bike, and ride to the top of the mountain to meet us. We didn't have space now for all of us in the van.

No problem.

Kinney and my mom would stay at the restaurant while the rest of us would drive down to the city to where Rob had parked. Then my dad

and I would head to the Bnb while Rob, Abbie and Hana would head up the mountain in the van.

In the car, I wave to Hana who motions with a weird wave. What a girl, always goofy.

My dad and I drive for about an hour and a half before reaching our destination. Then I see a couple messages from my sister which I must have missed while driving.

“Where are you guys?”

“Where’s Rob?”

Confused, I show my dad. We try calling back with no answer. How is it possible that Rob, Hana and Abbie are not with them?

Just after 1am, I see a text from my sister.

“The van won’t start.”

My dad tries to get a hold of the car rental company who said they take care of it and send a cab. An hour later we hear nothing. Then another hour. He calls the police who didn’t believe what he was saying. Trying to look online to see what he could do, we realize there is no wifi.

I sit on the bed in one of the rooms trying to figure out what do to next. My dad is on hold again in the other room, another call with Hertz? EuropeCar? The police?

“I’m going to get Hana” I finally state realizing I should have left earlier. Back down the dark winding road as fast as I can, a car honks, then some animal runs in front and I swerve. I pass through a red light on one of the one way parts hoping to not see an upcoming car.

Quite and calm. Streets are empty. The GPS says to go straight but I can’t due to construction. We had the same problem when we first went up the mountain. I turn back remembering what we did earlier in the evening. But something doesn’t look right. The GPS doesn’t make sense; it hadn’t readjusted to my location. A scroll in the GPS screen to reset the address to the mountain restaurant but it’s not listed. I look to

the passenger seat expecting my folder with the details of the trip and the address. Not there.

So I drive what feels like the right direction for I don't know how long. Suddenly I'm on an unrecognizable highway—a sign with an arrow...to France. I manage to turn around. I can't call anyone because my phone is dead. I see a gas station with some men standing by a car—presumably getting ready for a new day. I pull over, and ask about the damn. They have no idea what I am saying. I walk back to the car. I sit, hand holding my head as I sob.

I don't know how long I was there but I finally realize I have no choice but to head back to the BnB. Thankfully the location is in the GPS. And think they should all be at the Bnb when I get there. I drive fast. Not that it matters I thought—no cars are on the road. Then a long stretch adjacent to the river before the base of the mountain. I try and remember if I took my anti-seizure medication. Can things get any worse? I imagine getting a seizure. And driving into the river. Who would know? And once found, who would they contact?

I always thought I'd die one day from the brain cancer, not drowning in a car in a river in some city in Switzerland in the middle of the night.

My stomach aches. Suddenly I'm at the BnB. I don't even remember driving but at least I didn't end up in the river. I get out quickly hoping to open the door and see everyone.

But it's quiet. I walk in and no one around except my dad still on the messy bed and on the phone.

“What's going on?”

He didn't know. Feeling like I was about to throw up, I head to the washroom after plugging in my phone.

It's 7am now. My dad had finally got a message from Kinney. Apparently they were sent a mechanic up to fix the car with no luck and they were now waiting to be picked up. We waited. And waited. Finally, a van rolls in that Rob's driving. It's 11am. I wait to give Hana a big hug. What a horrible night she must have had. Anticipating a tired girl, she jumps out with a big smile.

“Hi daddy!”

I give her a big hug trying hard to hold back tears. My mom however did not show the same energy. She looked exhausted and rightly so. She was slow to get out of the van.

“Why did I get a message at midnight saying that Rob hadn't showed up?” I ask Kinney.

“He hadn't! We were waited for 4 hours after you left with no idea what was going on. We thought maybe an accident. Maybe you had a seizure. Rob showed up at midnight; in the city, the van wasn't starting and finally they got it to work after a few hours. But once up on the mountain to get us, the van wouldn't start again.”

“Daddy, the restaurant was closed and I had to go to the bathroom but it was too dark outside and in the morning we saw that an outhouse was right nearby!”

“Hana, that was a weird wave you gave just as we drove away and you were all in the van...”

“I was trying to tell you the van wasn't starting.”

Later in hospital, doctor's said, after hearing about my mom being stuck all night on the mountain, that she may have had a heart attack.

If only I bought that huge Toblerone. Chocolate is supposed to be good for the heart.