Sure Things [1]

October 14, 2015 Short Stories [2]

Short Story by Hannah Thurman



The road to the Missoula airport cuts through an uninterrupted patchwork of wheat fields, so flat you can see straight out to where they butt up against the roots of the Rockies. The peaks are white this time of year, my second and final Montana winter, and as I stare out the passenger's seat, I shiver, watching clouds hover around them.

"John," Ellie says, then "Hey, John" again.

I turn. She's got one hand clenched on the gearshift, knuckles white like she's going to rip it off.

"I'm sorry," I say. "I thought I'd set the alarm for seven." So I could go home, pack for a weekend at my girlfriend's, and drive myself to the airport. Instead, it's an hour and a half before my flight leaves, and I smell like sex.

Ellie bites her lip. She has a crooked tooth on one side. "I feel complicit," she says.

"Because you're driving me?"

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

“Yes,” she says. “That, too.” Her voice shakes a little with the vibration of the car.

I lean my head against the cold window. “Think it’s going to snow this weekend?”

“I hope not. I don’t know if I can read any more of those fucking Jack London sonnets.”

I smile. After each blizzard, a handful of people in our program bring in poems about nature’s victory over man. I’ve been tempted too. When the temperatures drop twenty below and heavy clouds fill the sky, you feel like you’re in the only place that has ever mattered. But Ellie’s lived here her whole life. Last week, she went on a condom run during a whiteout.

“How about you?” I say, “What are you working on this weekend?”

“I don’t know yet.” She shifts gears, and the truck growls. I put my hand on hers. She takes it away. “Maybe the dishes poem,” she says. “I get what Mark said about it needing reordering.” She tucks her blonde hair behind her ears, revealing a long, pale neck. My girlfriend Caitlin is brunette, a head shorter. It’s hard not to compare the two.

“Can you send it to me?” I ask. “Before you send it out again?”

“Won’t you be busy?”

I hug my bag tight. “I want to read it.”

Ellie’s silent for a long time. “She knows, doesn’t she?”

“Don’t be melodramatic.”

“Don’t be a jackass.”

“I don’t know,” I say. “She hasn’t said anything. She might not have even seen it.” A week ago, Ellie saw that my account was online and chatted me, asking if I wanted to spend the night. But I had been asleep and the only other person who knows my password is Caitlin. She sometimes logs in to check on flight information I forget to email her.

We had Skyped each night since then like usual, and I haven’t been able to tell if anything’s different. It’s possible she wasn’t at her computer when it popped up. But she might have seen everything. Thinking about these possibilities has kept me up for two nights straight. I’ve slept so little my head hurts, and no matter how I breathe, my stomach stays clenched.

As we begin to hear the faint roar of planes, a thought pops into my head that this weekend I am flying blind, but I don’t say it out loud, because that feels just as cliché as the poems about snow.

• • •

In San Francisco, I get out at gate C91 and nothing has changed. The terminal is full of light and the same people run back and forth, wearing uniforms I recognize: pilot, flight attendant, business traveler, family. It seems for a minute that I have not traveled any distance. The magazines at Hudson News have the same covers as the ones in Missoula. I look around, wondering whether I feel any different. But I can’t stand still. There are rules for this place, and I must keep moving.

When I step off the escalator at Arrivals, Caitlin comes running. She is still wearing her suit—the tight one that the old doctors love—and when she reaches me, she locks her arms around my neck and kisses me hard. I tense. But she just smiles.

“How was your flight?” She touches my hair. “Traffic was *wretched*.”

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

I shoulder my bag. “I missed you,” I say.

“Me, too. Can we promise no more of this four-week bullshit?”

I swallow. It’s been my turn to come down for awhile now, but I had to wait until my last fellowship check came through. She had offered to pay for the flight and was mad when I refused. “Okay,” I say. “No more.”

We step through the automatic doors into the walkway to short-term parking. The air is warm and windy, and I’m beginning to sweat in my down parka. She leads me to her car, a shiny silver Fusion made last year. One of the perks of being a pharma rep. She gathers an armful of pamphlets out of the passenger’s seat and drops them into the trunk. I get in and pick up one she left behind. A green shield emblazoned with a pair of lungs spread across the top.

New Once-Daily Dosing Tramendia. Fight rejection at its source.

“Doctor,” she says, putting a hand on my thigh. “I can’t begin to tell you how much patient adherence can improve with our extended-release formula.”

I shift in my seat. “I still don’t get it. You’d think that if they knew they were going to get organ failure if they didn’t take their meds, it wouldn’t be so hard to convince them to just do it.”

Caitlin shrugs. “People do self-destructive shit all the time.” She looks at me, and my heart starts racketing around in my chest. But she just says, “Are you going to put on your seatbelt?”

“Oh, yeah.” The car beeps softly as she backs out of the parking spot. “I like it,” I say, holding up the brochure.

“I didn’t make it,” she says.

“Sorry,” I say. I start to say *fight rejection at its source* would also be a good tagline for a dating site for people with low standards, but she says she needs to concentrate on driving and could I hold on for just a minute?

I stare out the window, watching the web of overpasses cut above us then retreat, leaving behind our highway, crowded and familiar. I grew up in San Jose, went to undergrad at Berkeley. And in five months, I’ll be back. These two years up north have seemed so long at times, but now they’re fading fast.

“Okay,” Caitlin says. “That’s better.” She smiles at me. “Does it feel really warm here?”

“No,” I say. “I don’t think so.”

“Really? I’d think you’d be so used to the cold….”

“No,” I say. “Not used to it at all.” My face flushes, overheating, and I wonder why I am lying. I unzip myself awkwardly beneath the seatbelt.

“Okay,” Caitlin says. “Well, let me know if you want the AC.”

We round a bend, and the South Basin appears, matte gray in the twilight. Houses in the hills glow soft orange, the same brightness as the fading sky. Amid all the fucked-up stuff going on in my head, I feel happy to be here. I touch Caitlin’s thin arm, and she smiles.

“I love you,” I say, and I do.

• • •

Caitlin lives in Cole Valley, in a small, new building we picked out together. She pulls her car into the underground lot and holds my hand as we ride together to the sixth floor.

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

“I just cleaned yesterday,” she says, taking out her keys. “You have to at least pretend to be impressed.” She unlocks the door and pushes it open. The apartment smells faintly lemony.

“I am impressed,” I tell her. She smiles, but quickly looks away.

Her studio is neat and comfortable—especially compared to the shitty student housing I live in now—and she’s left large blank spots on the carpet and walls for my things. Seeing them makes me feel relieved and uncomfortable at the same time.

“Do you want a drink?” she asks. “Gin and tonic?” She gets out a round gray bottle I don’t recognize. “You’re going to think this is crazy, but one of my doctors gave this to me.”

“Why?”

She shrugs. “I don’t know. He’s just one of the nephrologists I see every couple of months, Dr. Bloomfield at UC. And I think he felt bad. I had just cut my hand on my goddamn roller bag.” She waves it at me, and I can see the ragged edge of her skin. “Anyway, he gave me a Band-Aid and a bottle of gin he had lying around. Great doc, right?”

“Really great.” She disappears into the kitchen, and I frown as jealousy spreads through my stomach. Caitlin is thin with long, shiny brown hair and blue eyes. She’s brilliant, too—almost went to med school. But I don’t think Dr. Bloomfield gave her the gin for being smart. I feel angry for a moment, then tell myself I’m an idiot. She isn’t the one who’s cheating.

She brings two full cups to the table and sits down beside me. “What did you do today?”

“Not a lot. Wrote some on the plane.”

“Nice. What about?”

“Um, dreams.” The drinks are very strong. It smells like I crammed a Christmas tree up my sinuses.

“Like, I-have-a-dream dreams?”

“No, like night dreams. It’s this whole thing about, like, do they even matter? In some sense, no, because no one else ever experiences them with you—on the other hand, people talk about them and think they represent stuff and—you know.” I stop, embarrassed.

“That’s really cool,” she says.

“I dunno. This girl in my program—”

“Ellie?”

I freeze, but she just smiles. “Yeah, actually,” I say. “The other day in class, she said, ‘Dreams are like childhoods. Everyone has them, and no one wants to hear about yours.’”

“That’s retarded. What about *Oscar Wao*? That had a lot of dreams.”

“That’s different,” I say, picking up my drink again. The Diaz book is the only piece of lit she’s read in a year, and it drives me nuts that she keeps bringing it up. “So what did you do today?” I ask.

“Oh, you know.” She grins. “Sold drugs.”

• • •

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

We have three drinks each, then she puts her hand on my crotch and says, “Come on.”

We strip and get in her bed, which smells like dryer sheets. I look up at the darkened ceiling, suddenly exhausted.

“It’s been too long,” she keeps saying as she rides me. “Too fucking long.” My face feels hot. I bite her neck and wonder over and over again if she knows.

When it’s all over, I wrap my arms around her, spooning.

She whispers, “Just a few more months.”

I don’t say anything. Her breath is sweet and alcoholic.

“February, March, April….”

“May,” I say. “May fourteenth.” I know she wants me to ask her then or soon after. She knows I can’t afford a ring, but she at least wants me to ask.

She squeezes my hand. “Do you think it’ll go fast or slow?”

I press my face into her shoulder. “I love you the most.”

“That’s not an answer,” she says, but then she laughs, and I can’t help it. I laugh, too.

• • •

The next day, I wake up alone in bed with a hard-on and a hangover. The clock says 11 a.m., and the rest of the apartment is empty, so I walk to the bathroom and pull out my phone.

Three emails pop up. Two are class listserv bullshit, visiting poets and some speaker on what to do with your MFA if you don’t want to teach. I delete both without reading. The third is from Ellie, and contains no greeting, just eight lines of verse, double-spaced. It’s the dishes poem, the one where she’s scrubbing down the sink after her brother got kicked by the horse. I read it twice. She’s added two lines at the end so you know he survived, and you realize that maybe she didn’t want him to. Reading it makes me feel jealous and energized. I’ve been blocked all week, but now I want to write, badly.

Instead, I lean against the counter, scrolling up and down until I hear Caitlin come in the front door. I flush the toilet and step out. She puts coffees down on the table.

“Good morning,” she says, putting her arms around my waist.

She hands me half of a croissant. I push the whole thing into my mouth and put my arms around her, clenching my phone tight behind her back.

She lets go. “Hey, do you want to come grocery shopping this morning?”

“Now?”

“I was thinking about making chili. The meat has to cook for a couple of hours, so….”

It seems like she’s avoiding my eyes, but then I really look at her and realize I was the one looking away.

“Okay, sure,” I say, thinking of how it will feel afterward when we're doing the dishes.

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

• • •

We walk to Whole Foods, and I follow her as she pulls a rolling basket through the narrow rows. She picks up cilantro, several glass jars of spices, two pounds of organic stew meat, maple syrup. I begin to feel nervous. I was going to offer to pay for the groceries, but she keeps dropping in stuff like macadamia nuts and prosciutto and baking powder. I think about my meager stipend.

“Is that all going in the chili?” I ask.

“Sorry, I haven’t been grocery shopping since Monday. It’s been so crazy at work.”

I run my hand along the rows of waxy apples. Maybe it’ll be on sale, I tell myself as the checkout guy keys in a bagged red pepper.

“Is that all?” he asks.

I turn to her. “Um—”

“Want me to get this?” she asks.

“No, no way. Do you want anything else?”

“Don’t worry, I can get it,” she says, handing her AmEx to the checkout guy.

Now that the decision has been taken away from me, I feel angry. “Let me give you some money,” I say, pulling out my wallet.

“No, really.” She swipes her card. “You’re my date.”

I don’t say anything, just slide past her to the end of the counter and watch as the checkout guy places our stuff into bags. When I move back here, my job options are: teaching, editing, temp work. She will always make more than I do. I pick up a bag. It feels heavier than it should be.

“Thanks for carrying that,” Caitlin says and kisses me on the cheek.

• • •

When we get home, she browns the meat while I sit on the couch. The air smells like grease. There’s nothing good on Caitlin’s 112 channels, and I want to send Ellie a text, but I’m nervous. I hear the chunks of beef plop into the crockpot, then the click as it’s turned on. Caitlin comes out into the living room, brushing off her hands.

“We’ve got four hours, then we can dump in the rest of the ingredients.” She sits down next to me and begins pushing my hair from side to side. “What do you want to do?”

I pull away. “Let’s go see a movie.”

She picks up the remote control.

“No, let’s go out and see one.”

“You have something in mind?”

“I just thought it would be fun. I’ll pay, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“I’m not,” she says, getting up.

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

“Don’t you want to look up show times?” I ask.

“I thought it didn’t matter,” she says.

• • •

We walk to the theater, a five-story building with screens on each level. There’s nothing playing for an hour, but we buy tickets anyway and sit in the darkness watching ads. Caitlin drinks a large lemonade.

“Are you hungover?” I ask.

“No,” she says. “I think that gin was really high quality.”

“You’ll have to tell Dr. what’s-his-name you enjoyed it.”

“Bloomfield,” she says.

The movie is violent and long; it’s about an assassin—some knockoff Jason Bourne who keeps saying he has nothing to lose. When he sneaks into a darkened hallway, Caitlin leans into me. I put my arm around her but cannot get comfortable.

The movie ends and we remain seated, watching the credits scroll up and up.

“Did you like it?” I ask.

“Most of it,” she says.

• • •

We return to an apartment that smells metallic and sticky. Caitlin rushes over to the crockpot and says, “Oh, shit.”

“What?” I peer around her. The broth inside the ceramic pot is filmy white, and the blobs of meat remain pink.

“I left it on ‘warm,’ not ‘heat,’” she says, clicking the button back and forth. “Shit.”

I take off the lid and spear one of the chunks with a fork. It feels rubbery. “I think it’ll be okay,” I lie.

“No,” she says. “No, it won’t. And there’s no time to make anything more.” She stirs the dirty water until the chunks of fat break up like icebergs.

“Hey,” I say, “It’s just me. I’ll eat anything.”

“I know,” she says, pressing her face to my chest. “Sorry, sorry.” She sniffs once, but then her voice is clear. “These weekends just seem really short.”

I hold her. My stomach feels like someone’s clenching into it with their fingernails. I don’t trust myself to speak.

“Can we just go lie down?” she asks.

I say yes, and she turns off the crockpot.

We lie on the bed on our sides, facing each other but not touching. Her long hair looks coarse up close. Maybe I should ask her if she knows. I take her hand. “Caitlin?” I say.

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

“Yes?” She blinks once, and it looks like a secret code.

Or maybe I’m just paranoid. I lose my nerve. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” she says and presses herself into me so fast my heart jumps. We stay like that for a few minutes until she sits up.

“Let’s get Chinese,” she says. “Chinese, television, drinks, sex, bed.”

“Just what I’ve always wanted,” I say, letting out a long breath.

She kisses me, then goes into the kitchen to get the menu off her fridge. While she’s gone, I pull out my phone. *I liked your poem,* I text Ellie. Guilt fills me like a heavy gas. I scrunch up my face and turn off my phone and put it in the bottom of my backpack.

• • •

“Guess we didn’t make it to bed after all,” she says, touching my arm. The sun is shining and we are curled up on the couch, legs tangled. It takes me a moment to remember where we are.

“What did we do last night?”

“We finished the gin, don’t you remember?”

I sit up, rubbing at my eyes. Maybe it would be easier if I told her everything now. Each nervous moment feels like another petal from a daisy. She knows me. She knows me not. “Let’s go somewhere,” I say.

She stares at me. Her hair is tangled. “Really? Where do you want to go?”

“I dunno. Get out, anywhere.”

She frowns. I know why this seems strange to her; usually I’m the one who wants to stay in. Besides, we’re both hungover. But this morning, I feel suffocated in here.

“It’s such a nice day,” I say, looking outside.

She stretches and begins pulling her hair back into a ponytail. “Well…what about getting some brunch? Or we could do a museum?”

Those seem quieter, worse. “Let’s bike the bridge,” I say. Biking the bridge reminds me of a dream I had last night but can’t remember now.

She frowns. “The Golden Gate Bridge? We haven’t done that in years."

“Yeah.” I feel a little crazed. I want her to go to the bathroom so I can get my phone.

“I’d really prefer something else,” she says.

“Come on….” Now that it’s gotten into my head, the idea won’t leave. I take her hand. “Don’t you remember last time?”

It had been our second date. We had not said we loved each other, but later on, when we did finally say it, she confessed she had been thinking it on the bridge. I will know, I think. When I go there, I will know.

“Please,” I say.

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

“Fine,” she says and sighs.

• • •

We rent blue-painted bikes at a tiny shop on the wharf and begin weaving through traffic to the point. Caitlin leads, and I watch her dark hair flap in the wind as we cut through a soccer field. To our right, the bay begins to sparkle. I feel both nostalgia and excitement for this place. I wonder if, years later, Montana will seem like a blip in an unbroken stay in San Francisco. Or like the beginning of the rest of my life. I can’t tell. Everything seems so fluid now it feels strange to think about the future.

I stretch my fingers in the sun. It is so much warmer than it is back at school, but I still feel chilly. Caitlin turns a corner and begins pedaling up an alley lined with redwoods. She is annoyed that I’ve dragged her out here.

“You’re really in shape,” I tell her. I have to stand up on my bike to push it the last few feet up the hill. My hangover has subsided, but I feel weak.

She shrugs. “Thanks.”

“Are you training for something?”

“No, just going to the gym.”

My stomach twinges. I see a flash of her, naked, spread-eagle on a weight bench. Why do I keep picturing her cheating on me? I pull up alongside her, but she doesn’t look any different.

“Do you want a picture?” she asks. We are gliding past the piers, and the bridge looms in front of us, smooth, red, and hanging tall over the choppy water.

“No,” I say, and she speeds even farther ahead.

The last hill before the bridge makes me pant and sweat. I can tell she is holding back. She rides with her lips pressed together. I weave back and forth as I go. If I pedal faster, maybe I can lose my clinging thoughts. But I can’t. I grunt as I force my bike forward.

When we reach the parking lot before the bridge, she asks if I want to take a break. Sweat is burning down my neck, but I shake my head. My hands begin to quiver. Traffic races past us, and she says, “No, really. Let’s stop.”

I pedal past her.

She follows me up the ramp and out onto the smooth sidewalk of the bike side of the bridge. The sun has come out, but the wind keeps whipping at us, and cars whiz past. I look down.

Below us, the cobalt water looks heavy. A few scattered rocks make white breaks in the blue. My mouth tastes oily. Dr. Bloomfield’s gin.

A polyester bike team zips past, and I slow even further. My hands tingle. Laminated signs say *THERE IS HOPE, DO NOT JUMP*. The water is shallow, and hitting the rocks is the closest you can get to a sure thing. I imagine what it would feel like to stand on the railing for that brief second. My hands shake faster.

The glare off the water. My eyes tear up. I think of Ellie’s brother, the one who got kicked by the horse. He killed himself years later, after they thought everything was fine again. That’s when she began to write.

“Are you okay?” Caitlin asks. I get off my bike and turn away and hold onto the wall that separates us from the cars.

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

“I want to go back,” I say, and before I even know what I’m doing, I’m crying.

Caitlin drops her bike. “Are you okay?” she asks again. Her hands are cold on my face.

“I hate this,” I say. “Let’s please go back.”

She takes both of our bikes, and we walk quickly along the concrete path. A line of people divides around us. They all stare, looking for the broken chain or popped tire. When they don’t see anything wrong, they look away. I watch my feet, feeling like I might throw up. When we get off the bridge and into the park, I sit down. She squats beside me on the wet grass.

“I have to tell you something,” I say. I pull out my phone. There is a string of texts, for proof. I want her to see just how awful I've been.

My hands are cold, and my throat is raw, and Caitlin puts a hand on my bare arm. “No,” she says. “No you don’t.”

I lean against her and feel her long hair tickle my exposed neck. “Caitlin, I—”

She clears her throat. “You’re scared of heights,” she says in a straight, flat voice. “That’s what it is.”

“That’s not what it is. I’m trying to tell you—”

“No!” She slaps me on the shoulder. “That’s what it is,” she says again. “I don’t want to talk about it anymore.”

I begin to shiver. My body aches of tiredness. “But did you see the email?” I say.

“Yes,” she says, “And I don’t care.” She puts a steady hand on my forearm. “I’ve been counting down the days for too long. I’m not going to throw this all away just because you got lonely in that snowy shithole.”

I swallow. Relief is rushing through me so fast I can hardly breathe. “I’m sorry,” I say. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay,” she says. “Well, it will be.”

My heart feels like it’s expanding, billowing out into the space between my ribs and into the soft reaches of my lungs. “What can I do?” I say. I am ready to swear on anything, or swear off anything, to promise it will never happen again.

She blinks, “Don’t bring it up any more,” she says. “Let this be the last time we ever talk about it or think about it, and someday we’ll go a day without remembering it ever happened. Can you do that for me?”

I turn back for a moment to look at the bridge, but it is crowded with people talking and laughing. It’s sunny outside, and no one will jump today.

“Of course,” I say. “Never again.”

Caitlin offers her hand and I take it, feeling her pulse throb through the soft skin of her fingers. I swallow once and look at her.

“Let’s go back home,” I say.

She nods and takes my hand, and together we pull ourselves up and walk our bikes back into the wind. She is a good person, better than I deserve, and while I am grateful for this chance, I also feel sad. There will be no more nights in the snow. There will be no more snow at all.

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

Art Information

- "Missoula [3]" © Katie Brady; Creative Commons license.



Hannah Thurman is a writer living in Brooklyn, New York. Her short stories have been published or are forthcoming in the *Brooklyn Rail*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Brain, Child Magazine*, and others.

Source URL: https://mail.talkingwriting.com/sure-things

Links:
[1] https://mail.talkingwriting.com/sure-things
[2] https://mail.talkingwriting.com/talkingwriting-categories/short-stories
[3] https://www.flickr.com/photos/cliche/5437059668/in/photolist-9hsmq5-9hsiRU-9tXUt1-qHtJYu-dbSAK-6wUAC-6zFR2v-nLsYYq-b4APbM-8JX6gU-fAxJHS-bNSj5-Ghzvu-6zaZvr-6KkpMT-89pF4J-6NgDVL-a5oV4w-8JU4tD-dbSBb-dbSBQ-aaG1JG-UDWcE-qKB3Ev-qKAXcX-pNZrkZ-pNLnnL-qKGdJu-4urQmN-296Gby-5PEd4E-5B5gvh-b5HKB-b5HCj-dbSCJ-dbSD9-mU6c-aaG1UW-6zKTF1-4oiK4K-26B6kg-26AG2r-9X5dQc-5GYxaL-26AAVe-f2xkqZ-26Fbub-9CqRSf-865oYh-9hkWp5

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');