

Eight minutes, twenty one seconds

by Jeanna Goodrich

"It's an art," I said. "I have it timed exactly."

"You do?" she asked.

"Yep, to the T."

She laughed. "The T?"

"Yep. Eight minutes and twenty one seconds from front door to front door. Well, but only if I leave after ten o'clock."

"So you're telling me that you've timed your trip, every time you've left his house."

"Well, no."

"Well what?"

"It takes about 40 seconds to get in my car and get to the stoplight. And if I leave after ten, then the stoplight turns green for me."

"It does what?"

"It turns green for me. The sensors, or whatever."

"Ok."

"And so as I'm turning left through the stoplight, I turn on a song. Either the last song on the Receiving End of Sirens or 'Death and All of His Friends'. They're both about 7 minutes and 15 seconds, once I find them on their respective CDs. And as I'm pulling in to my driveway, the song is starting to end."

"So wait. Where do the other twenty six seconds come in?"

"Are you really that quick with math?"

"Yeah."

"Well, it depends. If the second stoplight is red, then that's good. Because if I have to wait at that stoplight, I can soar through the other five in a row, because they'll all be green. But if the second stoplight is green—and it varies because the first stoplight turns

green when I want it to—then I end up having to wait at the third stoplight, which is the longest and most inefficient stoplight north of Hildebrand.”

She laughed again. “So hold on. You even have the stoplights timed?”

“No,” I said, “but I know their rotations. Or schedules. Or whatever. They're not timed but they're on a timer and the timer is pretty easy to figure out. And in order to beat the timer on the last light, you have to cruise through all of the lights at a smooth 35 miles per hour.”

“And risk the speeding ticket for going 5 miles over?”

This time, we both laughed.

“So,” she said. “Eight minutes and twenty one seconds. You still haven't counted for the last twenty six seconds.”

“Well, I turn the car off, the song turns off, I gather all of my stuff, turn off my lights, inevitably drop something as I'm getting out of the car, shut the door, lock the car, fumble for my house key, walk up the stairs, unlock the front door, set my stuff down, say hello to my cat, and look at my watch. Eight minutes, twenty one seconds. On the dot.”

“Weird.”

“Hey,” she asked, “how long does it really take you to get home from his house?”

“What?”

“Come on.”

“Two hours and fifty six minutes early in the morning, three hours and eleven minutes in traffic, and three hours and thirty two minutes if I stop to get some chocolate chip cookies.”

The morning before, I had been talking to myself in the shower when she came into the bathroom, without knocking.

“What are you talking about?”

“I'm thinking of something to write.”

“What about?”

“God.”

“You always write about God. Why don't you write about love or happiness or something?”

“Because. I already know those don't exist.”

