

Three Times, If I Count

by Jennifer Donnell

At first, it was to the fairgrounds, to watch the spinning and the drops. I didn't get close. The roller coasters looked easy, thrilling, not being on them. Later, I went to see someone who would give my body the same effect. You talk about it now, lying on the floral sheets we borrowed from my mother. You say you need the fan on but then add a comforter. Hot and cold, always hot and cold. You run your fingers across your scalp. It shines in the overhead light, a mini moon, white and bright. I kiss it. You act as if I did too much, back then, when I hardly did anything at all. Once or twice, it was only once or twice. Three times, if I really count. And I wasn't giving or loving. And my self stayed hidden and I kept most of my clothes on. Yet, you talk about that touch, those times. I say it was simple, unimportant, not as bad as it could have been, less than you did, not worth bringing up- but it doesn't sound simple to you.

I wait for you to love and understand me like I do myself, but may keep waiting. Worse, maybe you can't, won't. I hug my left arm with my right, a temporary way to self sooth. I tell my pulse to calm some, to believe in itself more, that you aren't the decider. No lover is a dictionary that defines who I am. You say my honesty is manipulative, but that doesn't make it so. I don't have to care what you say.

So I drive.

Fierce and independent, but slow, emotional, in the slow lane. Every bit the woman who can do whatever she wants and not answer to anyone, but almost wants to. Midnight left a quiet town, a suburb where everyone dreams of what you wish I didn't do. I don't tell you where I'm going, as I don't know. The freeway on-ramp is closed. Men in orange hats fix it, the difficult made easy. Why can't we be more like that?

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Down two winding side streets, I finally park and call you. You pick up, it's late and I hear it in your voice. I know I should go home, but wait for you to say it. You wait for me to say I want to, instead.

Not selfish, we aren't selfish, but stubborn, yes. Squeezing love from nuance, the easy becomes so difficult. I want to climb to the top of your pedestal, find the entrance, how lucky those women are. It would feel like the top of a roller coaster without the drop low, the spin or twist.

I come home. You're in bed. The lightness of it all washes over me, the breezy fan, the comforter pulled off. I giggle at the contrast, the darkness suddenly in the light. You hold me like the multitudes have held their lovers throughout the ages. It never solves anything for future generations, but I still delight against your strong chest. My gentle touch is yours now.

Earlier, at the beach, you told me that you believe in life after death. That's a long time.

