

Who's Chasing You?

by Jennifer Donnell

“Every breaking wave on the shore tells the next one there'll be one more. And every gambler knows that to lose is what you're really there for.” -U2, Every Breaking Wave.

It was a hot August for the town, everyone kept saying so. It wasn't the kind of Oregonian town most would willingly visit, but we'd been lured there to stay with his family. It was only for three weeks. His mother was finally dating again after divorcing his dad. While his dad had completed his jail time, his sister hadn't completely recovered from the abuse, and was using drugs and living on the streets in California.

It still got cold in the mornings and, when it did, I'd wear a flannel I'd bought at a thrift store- green and blue plaid. I was pretty sure its previous owner had been an old man. I felt like we were roleplaying being locals. We went to craft fairs and walked dull streets that hadn't been renovated in twenty years. We drove anywhere, everywhere, just because. The house roofs were all a-frames and every building was blandly the same. It was the kind of place where you needn't dress up to go to the mall, where you didn't have to dress up at all. I was happy to be with him, though, more or less.

Barely adults, we played “house”. We slept on his mother's living room floor and made macaroni and cheese from scratch. I added tomato and breadcrumbs to make it crispy on top, the way my mother had shown me. We picked cherries from his uncle's tree. I wasn't used to not eating vegetables and soon got sick with a fever. He applied a cool flannel cloth to my forehead, when my fever peaked at 103.5. We watched the entire “Hellraiser” series and he often sat around naked, once his mother went to stay with her boyfriend, probably uncomfortable from us invading her home.

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At first, it was my driving. We'd taken my car on the trip, as he didn't own one. He began to tell me how badly I drove. "You never said anything before?" I cautioned, warmly, as I'd known him for three years, during which he'd left or cheated or broken my heart more than a few times. This time I assumed he was back for good, a changed boy who seemed like a man.

Soon my driving was terrible and I was selfish, or the things I said were shallow. It's hard to know verbal abuse the first time you witness it. I kept trying to explain what I'd meant or why I'd made a left turn, but he never understood. I didn't know the term "crazy-making", but I'd learn it soon enough.

By the end of week two, when we'd drive somewhere or go to do something, he'd often refuse to go inside. His refusals and misdirected anger seemed spontaneous and I never knew when he'd pick his next fight.

It happened that day, when he wouldn't go into the movie we'd planned on seeing all week. I paid for myself and watched the film on my own. He called me names I walked away, into the theater. I hoped it might have been a product of the trip, but once we went back to our home state, he got worse. It got worse.

I thought of that summer trip today, all these years later, when I'm lucky he's a ghost from the past whom I hardly think of.

Not that love hasn't gotten much easier. It can still be mean, have teeth you don't realize will bare. People still leave, stop loving themselves and then you.

When I want to chase the loose string of heartbreak, I liken it to that scene from another old movie, "My Best Friend's Wedding". In it, Julia Robert's character has (improbably, but suspend logic)

stolen a van to chase after her love interest, Dermot Mulroney, who is chasing after his fiancée, Cameron Diaz. Robert's character calls up her B.F.F. Rupert Everett, who, when she describes what's happening, plainly and pivotally answers, "Who's chasing you?".

When the answer is 'no one', it's best to drive away, like you would from a forgettable Oregon town or someone who can't love you more than they hate themselves.

