

The Numbers Game

One.

Two...

On three I'll stand up. On three I'll stand up and walk out. I'll open the closet door and face the day. That's what "three" is for, right? It's for changes and preparations and warnings. Warnings. But I shouldn't be afraid, there should be nothing to be warned about. But I feel like "three" is a warning. It's a change, a preparation, and a warning; but mainly a warning.

I'm trying my best to stand up, but every movement causes my entire body to root deeper into the floor. The roots inch in between the planks of hardwood, connecting me to the frame of this 21st century prison. Maybe it's a sign that I shouldn't stand up. It's a sign that the world is too dangerous to venture yet. While others brave the harsh winds of life, I have the upper hand and am doing what I can to survive. I should bury myself in this closet, in cardigans and cashmere, in sweatshirts and skirts. I could hide back here closet and nothing and nobody would ever find me if I desired. Yet I find myself sitting right by the door, waiting for someone to open it and find me. Someone to look me in the eye and tell me to get off my ass because the day will go on with or without me.

People move downstairs, oblivious to the calamity occurring above their heads in my head. I'm curled up in a ball, buried in clothes and shame while everyone is caught up in a world of *Pop Tarts* and *iPhones*. I'm trying to keep up with the buzz of pointless and unrelated events, but it's difficult when I can't convince myself to give a shit.

I'm not depressed, I'm just not motivated. I'm not broken, I just need to be fixed. I'm not unhappy, I'm just lost.

Two and a quarter.

I'm being silly. This isn't normal. I need to stop being weak. Other people don't do this. Other people don't cower from their problems. I'm not dying, I'm not starving; I have clean water, I have food, and I have a closet of clothes to hide me. But I feel like I'm dying. I feel like I'm starving and without water or food and the closet seems so vast that it's empty. If I move every bone will shatter, my head will explode with everything I'm trying to suppress. My lungs will cave in and my heart will pop. At my age, a popped heart would be considered a tragedy, a misspent youth and a cruel twist on humanity. What a sorrowful sin that nobody could save the child with a broken head.

Spectators would line up to hear the stories of glorified hospital bed speeches and failed attempts to reverse the madness in my head. Morning news shows would broadcast my bitter end alongside the new iPhone and Kardashian gossip until the buzz of my story fizzled out like an open pop can. My name would be lined up with the name of many other adolescents that destroyed themselves while others watched, popcorn in hand, like a real life horror story. I would be forgotten like everyone else until my story became a case study in a university psychology course. But nobody would want to hear about pitiful teenage girl who spent her mornings buried in a closet.

I feel like my life doesn't run in order. Life should be a list, and you run down the list and tick off the things you need to get done: be a baby, go to school, go to school some more, find yourself, find a husband, fall in love, get married, have kids, retire, have grandkids, pass away in a melancholy, woe-is-me fashion. A, B, C, D: the same order for everyone. But my life seems to be running this track where I've shaken up the letters so "X" comes before "N" and there is no "J".

And the letters think that they're numbers and I'm trying to arrange "1, F, 7, and H" in order, but nothing's fitting and nothing's working and nothing will ever work.

Two and a half.

I should have welcomed "three" with open arms because now I'm so lost in the darkest corners of my mind that I fear I will never get out. I can feel my logic running in circles like a dog chasing its tail. Soon logic will realise its efforts are futile and give the reins to illogic. Maybe illogic has already won though, because I'm sitting in a closet and I have no intent on standing up.

Should I just start to count again? Would it be like pressing the restart key on a computer? But if the computer already has a virus, does pressing "restart" do it any good? Why bother if I'm just tiring myself in this infinite spiral of insanity, wishing and waiting for some hand of light to pull me out of the places I can't escape even though they are places that I've dug myself into. In the mean time I've buried every good thing I've ever worked for and I'm trying and trying and trying to get out but I can't. I hate this. I hate this: the comparisons, the guessing, the counting, the hiding and the shaking. The rooting myself into the floor. The wondering if I'll do this again tomorrow when I know it's not a question. Even if it was a question, the answer would be yes. I hate lying down at night and staring at the ceiling. I hate waking up to happy music and cheerful people. I feel nothing I want to hate and when I hate I just want it to stop. I want it to stop. I want it to stop.

Two and three quarters.

Is this the end? Will I finally give in to my fatal habits? But I think I can see the horizon from here. I can see the light at the end of the tunnel; if I reach for it too quickly or too aggressively, I'll be back at square one or H or Q or 5 or wherever this messed up maze begins. I think I can

feel my roots loosening up as I prepare for the long-awaited end. My sitting position has gone from upright to fetal and I hadn't even noticed the regression. I feel around for the wad of used tissues in my pocket only to come up empty so I dab away the tears that have migrated down my cheeks with my shirtsleeve. Although it's a familiar routine it still feels uncomfortable. I slide my phone across the floor. I don't remember throwing it this time. But the crack has now crept its way to the back of the phone and there's another dent in the white wall. I click buttons to make sure they all work, and they do. Each one bringing the small device back to life to reveal the same screen. I clear out the messages and notifications without bothering to read them and look at the time. It has been longer than I thought, but not record breaking. I look around at the familiar space knowing I'll see it all again tomorrow and play out the same, twisted scene.

Three.

1224 words.