

COUNTING TO THREE

By Terri Collin

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We hear the drone of a television set. MOTHER enters the kitchen carrying an overflowing laundry basket. The basket contains boys' tee shirts and a virtual mountain of unpaired socks. SHE dumps the contents of the basket onto the kitchen table, then searches through the pile looking for pairs. The sound of the television fades away as MOTHER alternatively speaks to the audience and to her three sons in the adjoining family room.

MOTHER

You've got the information highway but nobody can figure a way out of this sock mess. You've got your cotton sock, nylon sock, dress sock, sport sock. Gotta be forty-seven sub-categories of the sport sock...mid-calf, mid-ankle, low-ankle, no-ankle. Then you've got your men's nylon dress sock in forty-eight shades of navy blue...wide rib, narrow rib, ribless.

(Calls to sons)

Somebody come in here, help me pair up these socks!

(Holds up a single plain white sock)

Whose sock is this?! I can tell a strange sock a mile away. Wesley!
Whose sock is this?!

(A few beats as SHE waits for a response.)

They don't answer you, boys. Don't greet you either. I could return from a month on African safari, a stint in the state pen . . . come back from the dead . . . hey, hi, hello . . . nothin'!

(Reconsiders)

I'm carrying a grocery bag, okay, maybe I get, "Hey . . . what's for dinner?"

(SHE hears the television in the background. Calls to boys)

No TV unless your homework is done!

COUNTING TO THREE – Page 3

(SHE listens.)

Oh. They all did their homework.

(A beat)

They lie.

(Noticing boys are rough housing, SHE rushes toward them.)

STOP IT! Stop! You're cutting off his airway!

(SHE keeps her eyes on the boys for a moment, then retreats back to the kitchen table.)

I hate commercials. What do you do with a thirty second break? Smack your brother, toss him across the room, get the dog agitated. Michael!

(After a few beats, SHE calls again.)

Michael! Michael?! Don't you have to go the library, Michael?

(A short pause as SHE waits for a response.)

Every school year, four weeks in, Mike's new teacher calls . . . suggests I have his hearing tested. There's nothin' wrong with his hearing. He's just not interested in what most people have to say. They say he has ADHD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

(SHE takes a few steps toward the boys, observes them for a moment.)

Look at em'. Okay, now if I didn't tell you . . . which one would you say had it? The one juggling the tomatoes? The one karate chopping my new mission coffee table, STOP THAT CHOPPING! . . . or . . . the one running his dump truck through the cat litter. JUSTIN! DO NOT run your truck through the dirty cat litter! Where you planning on dumping that, huh?

(SHE returns to the table, continues pairing socks.)

Before I had kids . . . I was the perfect mother. Never raised my voice. I was a model of patience and understanding. Three boys later . . . I'm doing a great job if my kids are still alive at the end of the day. Oh, I start out good. Get up every morning planning to be the best mother any kid

COUNTING TO THREE – Page 4

ever had. And I'm great . . . until I run into a kid. Then right away . . . the kid starts acting like a kid . . .

(Mimicking whining kids)

He won't share. He hit me. He called me a tub of lard. Why can't I pierce my tongue? It's my tongue.

(A beat)

I sing songs to myself. Drowns out the noise.

(Laughs)

sing some really dumb songs . . .

(Sings)

"Rollin', rollin', rollin', keep them doggies rollin' . . . Rawhide!"

(Laughs)

I remember tellin' my mother, "I want six kids!" She said, "Six, huh?"

(A beat)

Have *one* first." Every mother knows. Continuous exposure to kids turns you into a stark, raving, mad lunatic. Any mother that doesn't admit this . . . is a liar . . . or shouldn't be operating heavy machinery . . . a can opener.

(A beat)

Tuesday. Wesley had me certifiable by 9:00AM. He wants a seventy dollar football jersey. Convinces me that he'll have long-term psychological problems if he doesn't get the thing. So, I put my aging skin on hold, buy him the jersey instead of my Estee Lauder Fruition with alpha hydroxyl. Five days later . . . he didn't lose the jersey, no. He's just not sure of the exact location of it. Maybe he left it the woods behind Charlie's house.

(Calmly to herself)

In the woods.

COUNTING TO THREE – Page 5

(A beat)

How?

(A beat)

How? HOW do you leave . . . a brand new seventy dollar jersey in the WOODS?!

(Mimicking son)

“You don’t have to yell! I was playing football. I was hot!” He was hot.

(Imitating herself losing it)

I’ll show you HOT! You will not EAT. You will not SLEEP until you find that jersey . . . and when you do . . . I’m giving it to charity. I’m givin’ it to a kid who’s not a spoiled, irresponsible . . . BRAT!

(Takes a few beats to compose herself. Pairs one black sock with one white one, rolls them into a ball, tosses them into the basket.)

The adolescent brain. It’s just not right. MOOSE! Get off that couch right now!

(The dog does not comply. SHE starts to move toward him.)

I mean it, Moose. Off! Right now! ONE! TWO!

(SHE stops.)

Good boy. Good dog.

(SHE goes back to the table and to pairing socks. SHE pairs one long sock with one short one, one red with one white, one dress sock with one sport sock.)

Michael?!

(A beat)

Michael!

(Singing to the tune of Rollin', Rollin' Rollin')

COUNTING TO THREE – Page 6

MICHAEL, MICHAEL, MICHAEL! Your book report. When is it due?

(SHE listens. His reply doesn't sink in at first. Casually)

Tomorrow.

(His reply registers.)

TOMORROW? Are you crazy? Are you nuts? You can't wait until the report is due to get the book!

(Sings through gritted teeth)

"Don't try to understand 'em, just rope, throw and brand 'em."

(A beat)

I'm not doing it. I'm not doing it, Michael!

(A beat)

Okay, normally, I'd rush him off to the library lecturing him about responsibility . . . then I'd stay up all night writing a report on deciduous plants. I'm not doing it. Consequences. That's what all the parenting books say. Let the kid have consequences, right?

(A beat)

Wrong. You can't convince a kid that anything is his fault. He'll tell his teacher that he couldn't do his report because his mean, lazy mother wouldn't take him to the library. He'll believe it too! He'll believe that *his* F is *my* fault. And when I can't convince him otherwise . . . I'll yank the controls out of his X-Box, hide them in my sock drawer while swearing to deprive him of liberty and the pursuit of happiness for the rest of his young life.

COUNTING TO THREE – Page 7

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