

WHEN MATH STUDENTS GO BAD

By Kelly Meadows

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Cast 1F, Dorabella, 16 years old

(DORABELLA is talking to her math tutor, a cute high-school senior, and figuring out a problem. SHE speaks with rising excitement as if SHE just found out some scoop from a gossip magazine.) So let's see... you subtract seven from both sides, multiply by x, add five, and oh-you-are-not-serious x equals 42! *(so excited SHE can't contain it)* Oh my gosh this is so cool you are kidding me this is amazing! Let's do the next one!

(Now, addressing her audience) So, OK, I had a crush on my math tutor. I was 16, he was 17, I mean, sure he was doing it because he spray painted the answers to the calculus test up in the guys bathroom, but still. Who knew a math problem could be so... wonderful?

I hated math. I didn't get it. Well I *could* get it, but I didn't want to get it. And the teacher? She'd been teaching math since the time of Isaac Newton and she was so bored with it... *(in the manner of an elderly teacher who is very disinterested)* "Everybody go home and learn chapter six, and we'll have a test on it tomorrow."

I'm like "Hey, I already have a foreign language class, can you like, explain this to us as per your job description?"

And she's all like, "The author of this book has gone to great pains in providing explanations and examples. Today, in class, we're going to study probability by watching yesterday's edition of *Deal or No Deal*."

Well, I could have spent the evening going over chapter six, but I preferred to follow my math teacher's example and spend the whole night in front of the television watching Howie Mandel. My grade? "No deal." That's when my parents and the school counselor fixed me up with Todd. *(more interested each time SHE says it.)*

Todd.

Todd.

Todd was a numbers savant. He was a bad kid who was great at math. They said he was *too* smart and since he was bored, he started breaking rules to get attention. One day, he chose to solve complex mathematical equations with several cans of Krylon spray paint. You know how the teachers say "show your work?" This isn't what they mean.

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It's different when you have a bad kid who's just bad. You shuttle him off to Alternative University and hope for the best. But Todd had potential. He could be reformed, so the principal gave him the job of salvaging Mrs. Nomial's 5th hour math class. We all called her "Ma Nomial." Nobody really got it.

So I walked in there, I'm like (*dreading the encounter*) this is going to be a good time, then he's like:

(*Sexy and seventeen*) "Hi, you must be Dorabella."

Yep that's me. Named after a character in a Mozart opera.

I'm like... (*really taken by him*) and you must be...

"I'm Todd. I'm your math tutor."

(*Instantly attracted to him*) "Well, I need help. Lots of it."

"Let's start with chapter six."

Well, he was so cute, handsome, you name it... I suggested that we needed to start from the very beginning. You know. One plus one, two plus two, and work our way up. Before we know it, we'd be married with children and I'd have passed 5th hour math!

Not to be; we started in on Chapter 6. Subtract seven from both sides, multiply by X, simplify, simplify, simplify... that sort of thing. I couldn't take my eyes off him. I couldn't stop listening to his voice. My grades started improving... even my father was impressed.

"Well, Dorabella, you've finally reached your potential. I never thought you could do it."

(*Offended*) Thanks, dad.

Mom agreed, and added some conditional love. "From now on, we'll expect A's in math."

Don't you hate to be punished when you do something right?

(*As mother*) "A's, do you hear me? Your sister got A's."

(*In response*) Yeah, but my sister's doing time for armed robbery.

Well, she is. Aced math, flunked civics. We're all barred from Seven-Eleven.

Todd did a great job—so good, in fact, that my tutoring was about to come to a stop. It was a double edged sword. If I did well in math, I wouldn't be able to spend three afternoons a week after school...

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alone... with Todd... talking about the most intimate personal things imaginable.

Well, Todd made multiplying both sides by X intimate and personal. For me, at least. For all I knew, five other burnout girls were having the same problem. Passing math, flunking Todd.

(As Todd) "I don't understand why you're not getting this. Everything up to now has been fine. But... if you need to, perhaps I'll be able spend an extra hour with you later tonight."

My plan was working. I could feign misunderstanding and get further tutoring. Todd would explain things to me three or four times, while I'd pay no attention to him whatsoever and try to figure out ways to get him to ask me out. But while my conscious brain was plotting and strategizing, the back of my mind was registering everything he said.

I finally got into it with old Ma Nomial.

(Sassy, like a back-talking student in class) No, that's not the way you do it.

(In response) I've been doing it this way for the last 40 years. If it solved the equation 40 years ago, it will solve the equation today. Math never grows moldy! *(teacher laughs at her own joke)*

(As herself, haughty) I think it's open to reinterpretation.

(As Mrs. Nomial) "Are you accusing me of mis-educating my students for the past four decades? That I've sent countless graduates out into the world not understanding that you do, indeed, multiply both sides by seven and subtract x ?"

"Yes," I say, "you're the most boring, ill-informed instructor in the Milky Way." The entire class agreed, but math class was as much a democracy as it was a lesser version of North Korea.

(As the teacher) "Perhaps you'd like to discuss my lack of credentials with the principal."

"I'd be happy to. And with the board of education. Because, Mrs. Nomial, I can't imagine anyone being more bored of education than you are."

Okay, so none of that was a good idea, and everyone blamed Todd. Bad kid, good at math, he must be twisting Dorabella's brain in the wrong way. So no, no more tutoring.

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They of course, lied to me. *(as an older faculty member)* “Dorabella, Todd’s community service hours have been completed, and he won’t be mentoring you any longer.”

On the other hand, the dissolution of the tutor-student relationship gave me leave to ask him out.

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