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A NEAR TRAGEDY

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A NEAR TRAGEDY *

BY FLORENCE BROOKS MILLER

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ACT I

Time: The present.

Place: The realm of Mathematics.

(Father Mathematics is seated upon his throne which is on a raised platform. At his feet sits Arithmetic.)

Father Mathematics: Humanity is certainly working at cross purposes. While making use of me constantly in new inventions such as the radio, the airplane, television, and the like, we hear rumors that some people are belittling us, even neglecting some of my children.

* A play worked up for presentation by the Junior Mathematics Club of Fairmount Junior High School at the close of the school year. Though the Sponsor of the Club, Mrs. Florence Brooks Miller, for the main part wrote the play she was influenced greatly by criticisms and suggestions of the club members.

In the first act the stage was made to appear dignified with draperies, the only furniture being the raised throne upon which Father Mathematics sat. All of the characters with the exception of Mr. Spoiler, the human being, were dressed in flowing robes which had some symbol that designated the branch of mathematics being represented. A crown with the name of the branch of mathematics was also worn. Colors which blended well were chosen in working up the costumes. Father Mathematics wore a white robe, with a heavy white cord around the waist, a gold crown on which was printed in black the word **MATHEMATICS**. He had a long white beard which gave him a venerable appearance.

The characters in the second act were dressed in modern attire as the different parts suggested. In the first scene of the second act the stage was made to look like a dining room with the table set for breakfast. The second scene required very little change to make it look like a living room. The various electrical articles such as an electric fan, a telephone, a lamp are conspicuous first because of their uselessness and later because of their very sudden transformation into usefulness. Behind the scene a motor and several bells attached to it added to the telephone bell and the appearance of the light of the lamp and the running electric fan. All of the electrical appliances were attached to one switch so that at the crucial moment a button was pressed and all started to work at the same time.

Page (Entering and bowing to Father Mathematics): Father Mathematics, your son Demonstrative Geometry is hurrying to see you.

Father Mathematics: Have him enter.

Demonstrative Geometry: Father! It is true! I am not to be given a chance in the High Schools. Only those pupils who choose to study me need do so. How can a boy know whether he would like me or not without being given a chance to become acquainted with me. Isn't there a possibility that he might like me even if he did not care for my brother Arithmetic or sister Algebra?

Father Mathematics: There, there, son. They will have to learn by experience. They will have to find out your importance. You may be neglected for a time and have your feelings terribly hurt but finally humanity will see that you are needed. Don't worry!

Page: Intuitive Geometry enters, Sir.

(All greet her.)

Intuitive Geometry: (Entering, addressing her father and then her brother Demonstrative Geometry) Good evening Father. Demonstrative, where did you run away to this morning?

Demonstrative Geometry: I went to hear my fate. I am to be neglected.

Intuitive Geometry: Not for long though. As the children of humanity study me more they will learn to like me better. They do like me. You see I am more on their thinking level than you are. (Walks over to Demonstrative Geometry and they continue talking in an undertone.)

Page: Here come your daughters, Trigonometry and Algebra, Father Mathematics.

(As they enter all exchange greetings with them.)

Trigonometry: Why! What does this mean? A sob party? What is the matter with Demonstrative Geometry?

Demonstrative Geometry: It is easy for you two to be cheerful these days. You are becoming more popular. I am losing the position I held so long.

Trigonometry: There was a time when only college people studied me, but now I am being introduced to quite young boys and girls.

Algebra: I, too, am made use of by even seventh graders to help them solve their problems.

Page: Father Mathematics, your children, Analytical Geometry and Conic Sections, and Calculus are approaching.

Father Mathematics: Have them come in.

(They enter and all exchange greetings.)

Father Mathematics: Good evening children. What news have you?

Calculus: The citizens are gathering in groups. We overheard disturbing talk.

Conic Sections: Yes, I heard them say such things as these: "My boy thinks Mathematics is too hard." "I don't see why my daughter has to study Algebra." "My girl will never need to know Geometry."

Analytical Geometry: I heard a man say, "Let's do away with Mathematics."

Page: Father Mathematics, your children, Astronomy and Music are without.

Father Mathematics: Tell them to come in here.

(As they enter those already there move naturally around forming groups.)

Astronomy: What is this! A family reunion?

Father Mathematics: Yes, and it is never complete without you and Music, Astronomy.

Music: I heard a girl say that she loved Music but hated Mathematics! (Laughing.) She didn't realize that I am of the Mathematics family.

Demonstrative Geometry: A lot of people think Arithmetic is all there is to Mathematics. Father, how did Arithmetic become so well known?

Father Mathematics: When people began to ask such questions as, "How much?" "How many?" "How long?" they started to count. Then Arithmetic was born. Very shortly after that measuring became a necessity and Geometry arrived upon the scene. I mean Intuitive Geometry. One of the greatest activities of man is that of buying and selling. My son Arithmetic is needed to figure costs and settle accounts.

Arithmetic: In games, too, I am used. Everyone wants to know how to keep score.

Page: Father Mathematics, a human is here to see you.

Father Mathematics: Have him enter.

(All show polite curiosity as the man, Mr. Spoiler, enters.)

Father Mathematics: Good evening Sir!

Mr. Spoiler: Mathematics, altogether too much importance has been given to your family. If people want to study you, well and good. We cannot see why all pupils in our schools have to study your children other than Arithmetic.

(Arithmetic looks around very pompously.)

Father Mathematics: Do you think that you can get along without us?

Mr. Spoiler: Most of us can. If I can, I don't see why the rest cannot.

Father Mathematics: My son Arithmetic is very much in demand but do you use him in adding the long columns of figures in your business?

Mr. Spoiler: No, of course not. I have an adding machine which is more accurate and more rapid, too.

Father Mathematics: Those who made that great convenience for you made use of their knowledge of branches of Mathematics other than Arithmetic, in its construction.

Mr. Spoiler: Not everyone needs to know how to make the machinery which we use. Let those who like to do it, do it.

Father Mathematics: How can you people tell who would like us until all have a chance to make our acquaintance? How would you choose the people who would enjoy knowing about and using us?

Mr. Spoiler: Well, I don't know about that.

Father Mathematics: Have you thought what it would mean to the world to do away with us, or even to limit an understanding of us?

Mr. Spoiler: We don't want to do away with your son Arithmetic, but Algebra and the other members of your family are too difficult for our children to understand.

(Arithmetic looks proudly around while the others look down-cast.)

Father Mathematics: Would your wife be satisfied to go back to the use of a broom instead of an electric cleaner to clean her house? Would you like to see the work on the building constructions, bridges, street paving, and so on,

cease? Do you enjoy your radio? Do you ever use the telephone?

Mr. Spoiler: What has all that to do with the question at hand?

Father Mathematics: My children to whom you object play a very important part in the many inventions which make living easier and pleasanter. Think of the many people who must understand how to set up and how to follow instructions in building, in the laying out of properties, the making of roads, tunnels, bridges, to say nothing of automobiles and the many electrical devices upon which you have come to depend. I haven't mentioned the cultural value of my family. With the elevation of your race comes an appreciation of the arts which are very dependent upon Mathematics.

Mr. Spoiler: You have almost convinced me, but I fear it is too late! I hear my fellow citizens coming to overpower you.

(A mob enters crying out, "We don't want any more of you! Down with Mathematics! Away with you!" They bind Father Mathematics and his children.)

(The clock strikes ten as the curtain is drawn.)

ACT II

Scene I

Time: The following morning.

Place: Dining room in the home of Dr. Curem.

(Breakfast table is set and Mrs. Curem is busy about it when Dr. Curem enters.)

Dr. Curem: Haven't Mary and John come down yet?

Mrs. Curem: No! I called them and expect them soon.

Dr. Curem: (Looking at his watch and then holding it up to his ear) Why! My watch has stopped!

Mrs. Curem: The kitchen clock stopped at ten last night. I can't understand it because I distinctly remember winding it.

Dr. Curem: That is the time my watch stopped, too.

Mary: (Entering hurriedly) My watch stopped at ten o'clock! What time is it?

Dr. Curem: Well! What does this mean? (Looking at the clock in the room.) That stopped at ten, too.

John: (Entering leisurely) Hello folks!

Mary: John, what time have you?

John: (Looking at his wrist watch) Ten o'clock! (Laughing.)
Let's go to bed again. Or is it ten A.M.? I must have
forgotten to wind my watch.

Mrs. Curem: I'll call Western Union. (Goes to the phone.
Central does not answer. Tries clicking the receiver.
Finally gives it up.)

Dr. Curem: Well John, run over to Browns and ask them for the
correct time. (John runs out.) Let's sit down and eat.
It must be late. (They sit down at the table.)

Mrs. Curem: I guessed at timing the eggs. I hope they are
cooked to your liking.

John: (Running in breathless.) They said all their clocks and
watches stopped at ten! What do you know about that?

Mary: How wierd!

Mrs. Curem: The cars don't seem to be running. I haven't seen
one go by this morning.

John: (Looking out of the window) There goes Mr. Elliott walk-
ing

Dr. Curem: Walking! He never walks. When his car is out of
order he calls a taxi. Well, I must hurry. Come John,
if you are to ride with me.

(Exit Dr. Curem and John.)

Mrs. Curem: (Calling after them) Telephone us the correct time.
(Then turning to her daughter who is still sitting at the
table) I didn't want to worry Daddy so kept quiet about
my experiences this morning. I tried to weigh some sugar
and the scales would not work. They would not register.
I tried to use the electric sweeper and it was out of order.
I went down to the laundry and put some soiled clothes in
the washer and there seemed to be no electricity. Why!
Here comes Daddy and John! What can be the matter?

(Enter Dr. Curem and John.)

Dr. Curem: The car won't start. We'll have to take the street
car. I don't see how I'll call on my patients to-day with-
out the auto.

Mrs. Curem: The streetcars aren't running.

(A rap at the door. Mary goes to the door and lets Mr. Todd
in.)

Mr. Todd: Good morning Mrs. Curem. Good morning Doctor.
Your bell evidently doesn't ring so I rapped.

Mrs. Curem: More strange things have happened this morning, Mr. Todd.

Mr. Todd: At our house, too. Even our clocks and watches have stopped, and the strange thing about it is that they all stopped at the same time.

All: At ten o'clock!

Curtain

ACT II

Scene II

Time: Evening of the same day.

Place: Livingroom in the home of Dr. Curem.

(Dr. and Mrs. Curem, John and Mary are sitting by candle light.)

Dr. Curem: How I miss the newspaper! This has been a hectic day!

Mrs. Curem: I have come to the conclusion that we had better go back to living as the primitive people did. I can't use any of the mechanical devices. The phone is of no use. Here we sit by candle light. No electricity!

John: You are fortunate to be at home. You have no idea what it has been like at school. No one knew what time it was. We were in history and English classes two hours or more at a time. We had no mathematics at all, no science, no mechanical drawing. It was fierce!

Mary: The funniest thing happened at our school. There we were all studying history when the mathematics teacher stuck her head in the door and said to Miss Myers, "Are we going or coming?" She said the children had forgotten all they had ever known and I overheard her add that she herself could think of nothing to help them.

(A rap at the door. Mary lets Mr. Saveyourmoney in.)

Mr. Saveyourmoney: Good evening Mrs. Curem. Good evening Doctor. Mary. John. (They all exchange greetings.)

Mr. Saveyourmoney: I feel so strange! At the bank to-day I felt as if I were in a world of confusion. There was nothing that went right. Some of the tellers had to be taken to the hospital. They said they felt unbalanced. They could not count money nor add columns.

Dr. Curem: More people have come to me with similar complaints. It evidently is a disease of the mind. We doctors are to have a meeting to-night to exchange ideas.

(A rap at the door. Mary lets in Mr. Buildahouse.)

Mr. Buildahouse: Doctor, this is more than a friendly call. May I see you in your office?

Dr. Curem: Certainly, Mr. Buildahouse. Come right in this way.

(Exit the two men.)

Mr. Saveyourmoney: Poor fellow! I bet I know how he feels!

Mary: (Hiding a yawn.) I think I'll go to bed.

Mrs. Curem: Yes dear. Do go.

(Exit Mary.)

(Dr. Curem and Mr. Buildahouse enter.)

Dr. Curem: The same complaint. Practically the same symptoms but experienced along different lines of thinking.

Mr. Buildahouse: Misery loves company!

(A rap at the door. John lets Mr. Buyfromme in.)

(All exchange greetings.)

Mr. Buyfromme: Doctor, Doctor! I thought I would never get here. The cars aren't running. I can't get my own car to run and I have walked five miles carrying this lantern to light my way.

Dr. Curem: Take this chair Mr. Buyfromme. Mother, would you please get a glass of water for this poor man?

Mrs. Curem: Certainly. (Hurrying from the room.)

Mr. Buyfromme: Thank you. I wish you had been in my store to-day. I feel as if I am losing my mind. We had to bring in oil lamps and lanterns because it was so dark. All my clerks came and asked me questions about costs and measures. They seemed to have forgotten all they ever knew. The funny thing about it was that I couldn't answer them! (Enter Mrs. Curem with the glass of water.) Thank you Mrs. Curem. There were not as many people in the store as usual because of the difficulty in getting down town. My clerks were late. That is most of them were. One came way too early. No one knows whether the money received or the change given were correct or not. Oh, it was terrible!

John: I wonder if we are the only community that is doing without electricity?

Mr. Buyfromme: A man came into my store this afternoon who had driven from Norwood and he said every village he came through was afflicted. We get no sound over the radio.

(A rap at the door. John lets in Mrs. Cutandsew and her daughter Mabel.)

Mrs. Cutandsew: Good evening Dr. Curem. I am Mrs. Cutandsew.

Dr. Curem: Good evening Mrs. Cutandsew.

Mr. Buyfromme: I guess I'll start back home. (Starts for the door.)

Dr. Curem: I'll see you tomorrow, old man.

Mr. Buyfromme: Perhaps. (Exit.)

Mrs. Cutandsew: Doctor I want to talk with you about myself. I seem to have forgotten certain things, others are perfectly clear in my mind. I am a dressmaker and to-day I haven't been able to use my charts to cut out a dress. I can't measure. All day I have accomplished nothing. I sent Mabel to the store and she had an awful time. Tell Doctor about it, Mabel.

Mabel: Mother gave me some money to buy some sugar. The storekeeper didn't know how much sugar to give me. He said the scales didn't work. And he didn't know how much money to give back to me either. Everyone in the store was out of sorts.

Dr. Curem: We are all experiencing a very strange condition. I don't understand it. To-night we doctors are to have a conference and we hope to find out something. Come in tomorrow to see me.

Mrs. Cutandsew: Very well Doctor. Come Mabel. (Exit.)

(A rap at the door. Mr. Spoiler, the dissatisfied citizen is let in by John.)

Mr. Spoiler: Good evening Doctor. My name is Spoiler. I have a great weight on my mind.

Dr. Curem: What is it, Mr. Spoiler.

Mr. Spoiler: Something happened last night! I went too far! My eyes are opened now to the consequences of what I did! Oh! Why did I do it?

John: He's gone entirely crazy.

Mrs. Curem: John, don't talk that way. The poor man!

Dr. Curem: Tell me about it, Mr. Spoiler.

Mr. Spoiler: Well, I would have told no one this morning, but after what I have experienced to-day I'll tell anyone who will listen. (All pay close attention.) For a long time I have been hearing of the difficulties of mathematics. My children have complained and said it was too hard. Other parents told me that their children were suffering because of it and we decided to do away with mathematics. To make a long story short, a crowd of us bound Mathematics last night at ten o'clock.

All: At ten o'clock!

Dr. Curem: Ah! Light is dawning!

John: Well! Clocks do depend upon mathematics don't they?

Mrs. Curem: No wonder I couldn't weigh or measure things!

Mr. Saveyourmoney: Who could expect anything but confusion in a bank without mathematics?

Dr. Curem: Poor Mr. Buyfromme! He thought he was unbalanced. So much of his business at the store depends upon mathematics, measuring goods, making prices, counting change and so forth.

John: Electrical things! How the lack of mathematics cripples the world!

Dr. Curem: (To Mr. Spoiler) Could you take us to the place where the deed was done?

Mr. Spoiler: Yes come with me.

(All go out together excepting Mrs. Curem.)

(Mary enters with a kimona and bedroom slippers on.)

Mary: (Yawning) Have they all gone?

Mrs. Curem: Yes Mary. They have gone to release Mathematics.

Mary: (Putting her arms around her mother) Poor Mother!

Mrs. Curem: No, Mary. I am not unbalanced. Let me tell you what has happened. A certain Mr. Spoiler was here and informed us that he and several dissatisfied citizens had bound Father Mathematics and his children last night at ten o'clock. Naturally when Mathematics was bound, all law and order, all mechanical devices, all measuring and computations vanished.

Mary: Who ever heard of such a thing? Can they unbind them?

Mrs. Curem: They have gone to do so now.

(Lights suddenly come on. An electric sweeper starts running. A telephone bell rings. An electric fan whirls. A motor is heard. The clock strikes.)

Mary: (Looking out of the window) The cars are running! Mathematics is free!

Curtain