

A MATHEMATICAL NIGHTMARE

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A MATHEMATICAL NIGHTMARE¹

BY JOSEPHINE SKERRETT

Class of 1930 Simon Gratz Senior High School, Philadelphia, Pa.

PROLOGUE

As a member of the Mathematics Club, I do not come before you to solicit your membership. Instead, it is my purpose and intent to prepare your minds for the little sketch which will follow me.

No doubt you are wondering what kind of a play would be presented by a mathematical group. Probably you suspect something "deep," with the characters using highly technical language; or perhaps you expect something fantastic, with the characters dressed as triangles or squares and performing a formal mathematical dance.

Whatever your thoughts on the subject may be, you are probably mistaken. Mathematics is a live subject and our little sketch is a picture taken from life. The story is of a high school boy, a very unusual boy—would you believe it, he did not like mathematics! and—well you shall see for yourselves.

THE PLAY

Characters

Bob Weston, a high school sophomore.

Earl Weston, an engineer, about twenty-three years of age.

Jean Weston, a bookkeeper, about twenty years of age.

Mrs. John Weston.

Mr. John Weston.

Fred Frazer, Bob's school chum.

Court Crier, from Caesar's court.

Two Soldiers.

Knight.

¹ The members of the Mathematics Club of the Simon Gratz Senior High School in Philadelphia were asked by their sponsor, Mr. Milton Brooks, to submit original plays for presentation at a school assembly. This is the play selected.

Act I

Place—Living room of the Weston home.

Time—Evening.

Bob is seated at desk, reading.

Bob (closing book and rising): Well, that's done. I'm positively fed up on Caesar. You get Caesar in Latin, and Caesar in English, and Caesar in history. I'll be dreaming about Caesar next—Now what?—(Goes to desk and picks up book—groaning) Algebra! (Sits down—reading) Page one hundred, problem four. (Reading) “Mary's age plus Ann's age equals forty-four years. Mary is twice as old as Ann was, when Mary was half as old as Ann will be, when Ann will be three times as old as Mary was, when Mary was three times as old as Ann. How old are Mary and Ann?”—Whee—what a problem! Let's see. Mary is twice as old as Ann was when—oh, I'll do it tomorrow.—Gee, but I'm sleepy. (Falls asleep.)

*Curtain**Act II*

Place—Living-room of the Weston home.

Time—Morning.

Mrs. Weston is arranging some articles on the table.

Enter Court Crier followed by soldiers.

C. C.: Hear ye! Hear ye! (reading from scroll) “The almighty Caesar hath decreed that on this theday of nineteen hundred and twenty-nine, and henceforth, the study, use, or persuance, in any shape or form, of the subject of mathematics is prohibited. Anyone caught violating this law, shall be condemned to instant death.”

Soldiers, seize all mathematics books, newspapers, calendars, clocks, and other mathematical devices.

(The command is carried out and they depart.)

Meanwhile Bob has entered.

Mrs. W.: Bob, why are you home from school so soon?

Bob: No mathematics, no school. They couldn't make out our rosters.

Mrs. W.: My goodness, school hasn't stopped forever?

Bob: No such luck! We have to be back in two weeks. The rosters may be made out by then. Besides, now they can't teach

Algebra, or Geometry, or Trigonometry, or Commercial Arithmetic, or Bookkeeping, or Mechanical Drawing, and they have to revise the course in Physics and Chemistry. (Enter Earl) Hello Earl, aren't you home rather early?

(Earl sits down dejectedly.)

Mrs. W.: What is the matter, Earl?

Earl: No work. Engineering involves so much mathematics that it's worth your life to carry out operations. I don't know what I'll do now.

Bob: Tom Richards is awfully mad because he wanted to be a surveyor and now he can't. And Fred said that Astronomy will be impossible now, without mathematics.

Earl: Looks as if we'll all have to take up farming.

Bob: It might even be dangerous to do that because farming now-a-days is so scientific.

Earl: But the most important thing is what to do now.

Mrs. W. (perturbed): Oh, I don't know what to say—Why don't you two go to the theater and cheer up?

Bob: That's just it. All of the Movies are closed. They have to use mathematics in some way, I don't know how. And there's only one good show in town and I've seen that.

Earl: And the lecture at Town Hall this evening on Modern Finance had to be cancelled—because it would have used considerable mathematics and the lecturer was afraid to risk his life.

Mrs. W.: Well, go to the library.

Bob: That's closed, too. They have to use mathematics to keep the books in order.

Mrs. W.: Can't you call up some of the boys and go out?

Bob: The phone is disconnected—more mathematics. (Enter Jean.) Here's Jean.

Mrs. W.: Jean! Don't you have any work either?

Jean: No, Mother. All the bookkeepers were just informed about Caesar's law. Bookkeeping can't possibly be done without mathematics. (Disgustedly) So I guess I'll stay home and wash dishes.

Earl: That'll be a good way to get rid of the dishes.

Mrs. W.: Can't you get a position as typist or stenographer?

Jean: No. I did try at three places, but all the positions were filled.—Doris is out of work, too. She is an accountant.

(Enter Mr. Weston.)

Bob: Here comes Dad. Looks like a family reunion.

Mrs. W.: Why John! What is wrong?

Mr. W.: I'm out of work. The firm closed down to-day.

Mrs. W.: Out of work!

Mr. W.: How can a brokerage exist without mathematics? All the companies called in their stock to-day, and now I have nothing to do. (Takes newspaper from pocket, glancing right and left.)

Earl: Say, Dad, where did you get the newspaper?

Mr. W.: Sh-h. From my golf caddy. He's the newsboy now. (Looking at paper.) It says here that thousands of people are out of work.—The stock exchange has collapsed; all banks are closed; all architects and draftsmen are out of work; building construction has ceased; several factories and mills have shut down.

Jean: How long do you think this wretched law will be in force?

Mr. W.: Until the people overthrow it.

Earl: Oh for another Brutus!

Bob (thoughtfully): There is only one thing to be thankful for.

Earl: What's that?

Bob: We won't be pestered with insurance agents any more.

Jean: I can't understand why you insist upon joking at a time like this. All of us are out of work and there is no telling when we will be back at work again.

Earl: Joking! Who's joking? I'm serious. Do you realize I was to be married in two weeks and now that is impossible, since I'm out of a job? By the way, Mother, what time is it? I'm hungry.

Mrs. W.: I don't know. The soldiers came and confiscated all the clocks. Hereafter, you will have to rely upon the sun.

Bob (adding): And upon your stomach.

Mr. W.: I wonder how long we shall have food to satisfy it.—Oh, Caesar! Why did you bring this upon us?

(Enter Knight.)

Knight: Ho—neighbor! Assist! Death to the tyrant Caesar! Civilization is dependent upon mathematics and mathematics we will have. To death with Caesar!

All: To death with Caesar!

Curtain

*Act III**Place*—A street.*Time*—Morning.

Enter Bob from right, Fred from left.

Bob: Hello, Fred.*Fred*: Hello, Bob. Did you do that problem?*Bob*: Do you mean about Mary and Ann?—No. I'll do it later. I had a peculiar dream last night and I've come to the conclusion that mathematics is a necessary evil.*Fred*: Evil! Why mathematics is good. It's full of thrills. Lots of people enjoy doing it. Your brother and sister like it.*Bob*: Yes, but I don't see why.*Fred*: Come to the Math Club some afternoon and we'll show you why. It's lots of fun.*Bob*: All right. But do you realize that it is exactly three minutes of nine?*Fred*: Three minutes of!

(They start to hurry off stage.)

Bob (stopping): Wait a minute. How old were Mary and Ann, anyway?*Fred*: Come around to Math Club this afternoon and find out.*Bob* (looking at watch): Two minutes of nine.

(Exeunt hurriedly.)

Curtain

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