

MORE REASON TO HATE MATH

FLASH FICTION

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Everybody dreaded when the bell rang for seventh grade math because when the bell rang, the she-devil showed up. The clip clop of her sandals from down the hall would alert the students sitting by the windows. “She’s coming!” they would loudly whisper to the class. The warning would leave us with the exact amount of time to haphazardly scramble into our seats, facing the whiteboard, sitting bolt upright, petrified.

Her harsh scream would pierce the air before she came into view. “Everybody shut up!” The she-devil would enter the classroom, her wildly frizzy hair escaping from the tight restraints of her braid. Her pressed clothes were starched so stiff, they always stuck out and away from her body. The sight always made me giggle internally as my friends and I would joke about even her clothes being repulsed by her.

The cause of this repulsion might be surprising. It was not because, when she was scribbling away on the whiteboard, and someone’s cross-talk inconvenienced her, she would press her marker so violently into the board that the nib would get pressed flat. Before she sent the marker flying straight at the talker with a clean, scarily precise throw that was sure to leave behind a bright red welt. It wasn’t because she would walk up to “disobedient” twelve-year-olds, ask them to hand over their rulers – metal, wood, plastic, it didn’t matter – and use their own rulers to give them a good beating.

That one time, when the girl sitting right up front was yanked by her “unkempt hair” from one end of the classroom to the other, tears and shrieks of protest galore, the entire class found ourselves very concerned. Not for the pain or the humiliation the girl had endured but for the safety and sanctity of her hair. Our repulsion of the she-devil was not rooted in our fear of her. No, it was rooted in disgust. For the she-devil had a head so full of lice, it would send anyone packing.

She never deliberately used her insectile helpers to assist in her bullying – I bet she thought no one in the class even knew about them. But with her permanently scratching away at her scalp, it never took very long

for someone to piece things together. It was one of the most disgusting sights I've ever had the misfortune of encountering. Standing in the center of the classroom, for everyone to see, the she-devil would intensely scratch and pick at her scalp. When she pulled her hand away, she would check for spoils. Any of the crawling critters that hadn't died from all that scratching would be crushed under that one long nail on the she-devil's index finger; their carcasses then flicked into the abyss. She loved to do it, no matter what the activity of the hour was. Instructing the class? Scratch, crush, flick. Proctoring a test? Scratch, crush, flick. Correcting said test papers? Scratch, crush, flick right onto the test paper. Never to be brushed off, only to be sent back to some poor kid – the cherry on top of her brutal grading.

But nobody ever tattled on her. Not for her bullying, not for the parasites living in her hair. The she-devil kept her job. Yes, our repulsion was rooted in disgust. But our fear? That was the devil's doing.