

Math, a short play about Heidegger by T. Adamson

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(GIRL and BEAR [no bear costume or mannerisms] stand facing the audience. The MATHEMATICIAN sits at a table.)

GIRL:

Math. A girl. A man. A bear. Once there was a bear who wished to know math.

BEAR:

Teach me math.

MATHEMATICIAN:

Alright, I'll teach you bear math.

BEAR:

Don't teach me bear math. Teach me math itself.

MATHEMATICIAN:

I cannot teach you math itself. You are a bear. I can teach you bear math.

BEAR:

I wish to learn no qualified form of math.

MATHEMATICIAN:

But my friend-

GIRL:

Implored the mathematician.

MATHEMATICIAN:

You yourself are a qualified form of being. You are a bear.

GIRL:

The bear considered eating the mathematician.

MATHEMATICIAN:

If you eat me you will never even learn so much as bear math.

GIRL:

The bear considered eating the mathematician.

BEAR:

I'll return.

MATHEMATICIAN:

Please do, friend.

GIRL:

The mathematician chimed.

MATHEMATICIAN:

That'll be forty-six dollars.

(The MATHEMATICIAN dons a Wizard Cap, becomes WIZARD.)

BEAR:

Are you a wizard?

WIZARD:

Yes!!

GIRL:

Explained the wizard.

WIZARD:

That's why I work at the WIZARD STORE!!

BEAR:

I wish to be a bear no longer.

WIZARD:

Well!

GIRL:

Cautioned the wizard.

WIZARD:

Magic, like all action, cannot summon nothingness. It cannot undo a thing, but merely shift that things properties and create a new thing from what was.

BEAR:

I would, if it were possible, have you shift me to a creature which must not content himself with the qualified study of math but who can and may learn the unqualified study of math itself.

GIRL:

The wizard thought long and hard about this, having himself knowledge only of wizard math.

WIZARD:

Return tomorrow.

BEAR:

Okay. That night the bear, disappointed by the failed encounters of the day, but hopeful for what the wizard might teach him the following, journeyed home. And as usual when he journeyed home, he encountered the very lovely girl of whom he was so deeply fond.

GIRL:

Hello.

BEAR:

Hello again.

GIRL:

How are you?

BEAR:

I'm well. He didn't know whether he should tell her he was learning math or not, as he had not yet learned anything of math, except that there was, evidently, a separate sub-study for bears known as bear math of which he had never before been aware. He decided not to mention the math until the following day when the wizard would transform him and he would learn math itself. He instead asked the girl how her own study of math was ensuing.

GIRL:

She told him it was going very well. And she smiled for a while, and then disappeared into the night air, leaving a faint trace of honey lingering on the empty patch of earth where she had stood moments before. The following day the bear returned to the wizard store.

WIZARD:

Hello!

GIRL:

Said the wizard.

WIZARD:

I wasn't expecting to see *you* again!

BEAR:

Why not?

WIZARD:

You didn't seem dedicated.

BEAR:

I am dedicated.

WIZARD:

Well-

GIRL:

Chimed the wizard.

WIZARD:

I know that now.

BEAR:

Do you know now how to fix my problem?

WIZARD:

You didn't seem dedicated. I wasn't expecting to see you again, so I didn't look into it. Now that I know you're dedicated, I'll have the answer tomorrow.

BEAR:

You said you would have it today.

WIZARD:

I don't!!

GIRL:

Grinned the wizard.

WIZARD:

But if you're as dedicated tomorrow as you were today, you'll be as sure of having your answer tomorrow tomorrow as you were of having it today yesterday.

GIRL:

The bear considered eating the wizard.

WIZARD:

If you eat me, you won't even become something that can become something that can learn the unqualified study of math itself.

GIRL:

The bear considered eating the wizard.

WIZARD:

Return tomorrow.

BEAR:

I will.

(Five second pause.)

Hello again.

WIZARD:

Yes, hello!! Well, I've been thinking about your problem, and it appears that what you wish is to become an unqualified being and therefor capable of learning unqualified math.

BEAR:

That's exactly the case.

WIZARD:

So I have to ask, for what means do you wish to learn math?

BEAR:

Means? For a girl.

WIZARD:

(Laughing hysterically.) A girl!? But you're a bear!

GIRL:

The bear's tiny heart broke into a million pieces.

WIZARD:

I suppose I could transform you into an unqualified being.

BEAR:

Do that.

WIZARD:

But if you really want to get a girl- even-though- you're- a bear-

BEAR:

"Do that," I said. Do that. Make me an unqualified being or I'll eat you on the spot.

GIRL:

So the wizard did what he was told.

(The BEAR dons an unqualified-being cap, becoming an unqualified BEING. The WIZARD removes his cap, becoming MATHEMATICIAN.)

And the unqualified being returned to the mathematician.

BEING:

I want to know math.

MATHEMATICIAN:

Alright. If you don't mind my asking, what kind of being are you?

BEING:

An unqualified being. Hence the cap.

MATHEMATICIAN:

Well. We're going to need more chalk. And forty-six dollars.

GIRL:

They worked late into the night until they had used all their chalk and it was far too late to purchase more from the chalk store, which had been closed for hours, so that the mathematician said-

MATHEMATICIAN:

I've never done so much math before in my life. You can go home for tonight.

GIRL:

And the unqualified being returned home, on his usual route, in his usual manner. Good evening.

BEING:

Good evening. Do you not recognize me?

GIRL:

No. You look vaguely like a bear I knew once.

BEING:

I know math.

GIRL:

Really? I study math. What kind of math do you know?

BEING:

I know math itself.

GIRL:

Oh. I only know pretty-girl math. That's very impressive though, to know the thing itself.

BEING:

And she stood for a moment and smiled at the unqualified being, and then disappeared into the night air, leaving a faint trace of qualifications lingering on the empty patch of earth where she had stood just moments before.

GIRL:

The following day the unqualified being went to levy a complaint.

BEING:

I wish to levy a complaint. I wish to a bear again.

WIZARD:

I thought you wished to know math.

BEING:

I know math.

GIRL:

Explained the unqualified being.

BEING:

I know math itself. But knowing math is not what I thought it was.

WIZARD:

Of course it isn't. Knowing math is an end, not a means to one. You explained your end to me before I transformed you, and now that you've changed, perhaps you've found that your vision of that end is different since you have at your disposal different means by which to achieve it. Perhaps that end no longer seems desirable because it is no longer attainable. Perhaps it no longer seems attainable because it is no longer desirable.

BEING:

Perhaps it will be both desirable and attainable if I am a bear again.

WIZARD:

But I cannot make you a bear again now that you have learned math itself.

GIRL:

Explained the wizard in what might have been construed as a faint, but potent, lament.

WIZARD:

For I cannot summon nothingness. I cannot make you unlearn math itself anymore than I can make myself unlearn wizard magic. And a bear cannot know math itself,

merely the math of bears, so I'm afraid the transformation is impossible. You must remain as you are.

GIRL:

The unqualified being considered eating the wizard.

WIZARD:

If you eat me-

GIRL:

And he did eat the wizard.

(WIZARD removes his cap, becoming MATHEMATICIAN.)

And he returned once more to the mathematician.

MATHEMATICIAN:

How is my star pupil?

BEING:

Sad.

GIRL:

The unqualified being said sadly.

BEING:

And unhappy. I thought math would bring happiness, but it has not.

MATHEMATICIAN:

Math has brought me happiness. As best as math can. What did you want from math?

BEING:

Love.

GIRL:

Sighed the being.

MATHEMATICIAN:

Yeah, there's your problem. Math doesn't do love. Math does math.

BEING:

I know that now.

MATHEMATICIAN:

But I did buy more chalk-

GIRL:

Added the mathematician.

MATHEMATICIAN:

If you'd like to stay awhile. Free of charge.

GIRL:

The being considered eating the mathematician.

BEING:

I'll return tomorrow-

GIRL:

He said.

BEING:

If you're dedicated.

MATHEMATICIAN:

I am. And that night the unqualified being walked home, and again he saw the lovely girl of whom he was so deeply fond.

GIRL:

I recognize you.

BEING:

Hello.

GIRL:

How is math itself?

BEING:

It's going well. Thank you.

GIRL:

I'm glad to know it's going well.

BEING:

Yes. I know more about math than you can ever know.

MATHEMATICIAN:

The being brutishly remarked.

GIRL:

I'm glad. It's getting late.

MATHEMATICIAN:

And at that moment the unqualified being did something unqualified beings very rarely do by saying something they very rarely say.

BEING:

I love you. I used to love you because you were very beautiful and knew math and smelled like honey, and I love you still because you are very beautiful still and know pretty girl math and smell like qualifications, even if I never before noticed your qualifications, and even if I no longer have any qualifications myself and perhaps should not desire any, and even if the qualifications I've found in you are different than the ones I used to have myself and perhaps I have no right to miss them; still, I loved you as the bear and now I love you as I am: unqualified.

GIRL:

I remember the bear.

MATHEMATICIAN:

She said.

GIRL:

I always liked that he smelled like a bear. You smell like chalk. If you still love me, it must be in a different way.

MATHEMATICIAN:

The very pretty girl remarked.

GIRL:

If you can even still love me at all.

MATHEMATICIAN:

And the two looked at each other for a very long time and did not know who should speak next or what they should say. And I, who am an admittedly qualified narrator, cannot say whether the unqualified being spoke first, or whether the girl spoke first, or whether they merely parted in the night without exchanging a word. But if they did speak, as I'd prefer to think they did, the words they exchanged lingered on the empty patches of still, night air for a long time after they'd gone, when everything was once more ruled by silence. Blackout. *(End of play.)*