

Tale For My Lost Son

A one-woman play

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“Tale For My Lost Son”

Characters

Jenny.....Late-20s Mathematics Teacher.

Setting

The play takes-place in a classroom.

Synopsis

Some have bursts of energy. Some go into depression. Some become mathematicians.

Other Notes

Jenny has recently had an abortion, though it is never mentioned in the play. This play tells her story through the teaching of calculus.

“Tale For My Lost Son”

JENNY enters, goes to someone sitting in the first row, and talks to them.

JENNY

I'm going to toss three pieces of chalk to you. Not now, but over the course... You'll have to catch it. Is that alright?*(they agree)* It's just three pieces, nothing major. *(they agree)* Thanks.

In my observations, mathematics is extremely polarizing.

A mathematician goes to a party. A nice party where there is the possibility of space between people there, and at the front door you're met with warm smiles, though not exclamations. A mathematician is kind of a party-pooper, you see.

And you pour a drink from the kitchen, and walk around the room, mingling, and you start to play a game: how many vibrant conversations can you stop, just by entering them. The talk dies, and the more sober people don't stare at you and the more drunk do, until someone asks how you're doing. What you're up to now. You tell them, and it's like there is a film over their eyes, almost as if they willingly detached themselves.

Welcome to the life of a mathematician.

It never fades. The same people, the same parties, same reaction. I enter and I'm branded. I don't say anything, but they still know what I am.

To some, mathematics is a horrible travesty. To others it is something that is incomprehensible, but supported. To me, it is a choice that I've made.

A choice not many people make, so while I can't make you a mathematician, I would like to have you understand who I am, the choice that I made, so that if you recognize me at a party, you will know I am a person, a person who doesn't need to count conversations.

I think that the mystery, the hesitancy, the fear that some people feel for mathematics is based on (a) their ignorance of the art, or (b) not knowing that there is always a parallel that can be found. From it, and life. A bridge to greater understanding.

In explaining Calculus I and II, I hope to break that mystery.

Calculus focuses on how objects change overtime, and the effects the change has on our surroundings.

We start with a curve. Watch the chalk.

JENNY throws the piece of chalk to the man, who catches it.

JENNY

Excellent. (*she steps aside and points at where she started*) Now it started here. At a point. To remember it better, we'll draw a parallel: make that point a person, a baby, just conceived. John. And this is where he started. (*she goes a quarter of the distance*) This is where his concavity changes: he's a little hellion. (*she moves to half of the difference*) Here, at the maximum, is his mid-life crisis, half-way through his life. (*she goes to the third quarter*) Then we get another concavity change, probably around retirement, until the end.

Each of these moments in John's life are different, with some changes being positive, or negative; steep or shallow: a derivative, early calculus. A derivative is one following the change of the arch at any point in John's life.

Now, if this room we're in is the universe, and it can have an infinite amount of archs in it, lives in it.

Then what would be all of the space under John's arch?

JENNY throws another piece of chalk to the man, who catches it.

JENNY

From where my hand released it to where his caught it, connect with a line. And the distance from the arch to the line, the space under John's life, looks like a bubble. That is an integral. You know John's life changes over time by watching the arch, but you can see its change, you can see the effect that he has on people closest to him with the space, the area, under his arch. Think of the integral as how his existence effected those he knew: his family, friends, coworkers. Now what would happen if we rotated it?

JENNY is becoming more-animated and is now using her arms to describe it.

JENNY

Calculus II. Take that flat line (*shown by her arm*) and the arch (shown by her other arm) again. And then rotate it. (*she moves her 'arch-arm' so that it rotates around her 'line arm'*) So now it isn't two-dimensional, it's three-dimensional. You not only see how John's change effects the people he knows, but by rotating, we are showing what the sum-total of his effect was throughout his life. What if we could chart his impact, in the most minute way. That is the effect that his existence has on the universe.

Now let's say that the point, John, doesn't live to his full life.

If we want to find him at 40 years (goes to look, points at a point on the arch), see where he is, what he's changing, who he's affected. (*she follows it back as she talks*) Or we can see him at 30, 20, 10, 5, a year; two months and he's just a dot. And if he stopped at a dot, and you can look back, you can see his whole life, everything that would or could have happened is seen.

The magic of mathematics.

Finally, think of this universe-room, but instead of it being empty, it's solid. Now take John's arch, and cut it out. Take the integral, and cut it out. Cut it all out, remove it from the universe until all you have left is this winding gap.

So he's not there, but instead of noticing him there, you notice the absence. Like this whole universe is inside of you and you can feel something not there.

You have a negative space, and you have a series of archs: friends, family, coworkers, all intersecting, falling into the gap to fill it. But no matter what you can always see it.

I can always see it.

Pause.

JENNY

So, calculus should no longer be a mystery. The concept of it, I mean. So, when you see me, a mathematician at a party, whom the others don't know how to deal with, don't know what to say, don't know how I made my choice, of what I'm doing now.

JENNY tosses the last piece of chalk to the guy in the audience.

END OF PLAY