

Math for Actors

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Excerpt

KATE. ...twenty minutes late, comes in and strips! Why did I agree to tutor him...?

(KEITH finishes changing into street clothes, pulling down his shirt, switching shoes, etc. He should probably remain half in costume.)

KEITH. Thirty minutes late.

KATE. What?

KEITH. I'm thirty minutes late.

KATE. But...it's twenty past nine.

KEITH. Yeah, I know, so I'm half an hour late.

KATE. But, um, *Keith*...it's *twenty* after nine. That means you're *twenty* minutes late.

KEITH. Yeah. That's what I said. Thirty minutes. Do you have any baby wipes?

(KEITH reaches for KATE'S bag to search for a baby wipe, but she snatches it away, saying:)

KATE. Do I have any.... Do I look old enough to have a baby?

KEITH. I don't know. Have you ever tried?

KATE. *(Primly.)* What time was our meeting?

KEITH. Nine o'clock.

KATE. And what time is it now?

KEITH. *(Looking at KATE'S watch.)* Niiiiiiiiine...twenty-three.

KATE. So how late are you?

KEITH. Not a single baby wipe? This lipstick really isn't my color.

(KATE whips out a baby wipe from her bag and plays keep away with KEITH while he speaks.)

KATE. Not 'til you answer.

KEITH. Fine. It's nine *twenty-three*?

KATE. *Twenty-four*, now.

KEITH. Then I'm...uh...carry the two...round to the nearest decimal point...take the square root....

(KEITH swipes the baby wipe from KATE and proceeds to luxuriously take off the worst of his make-up.)

KEITH. I'm...*thirty-four* minutes late.

KATE. *Thirty-four*? I...! How can you be so *dense*?

KEITH. I'm not dense. I'm lithe and becoming.

KATE. You're an idiot.

KEITH. I'm *not* an idiot, Kate. And I'm not wrong. What time were we supposed to meet?

KATE. Nine p.m.

KEITH. And what time was I supposed to *be* here?

KATE. Nine p.m.!

KEITH. Wrong! Call time is always ten minutes before. Hence, ten to nine, plus (*Checking KATE'S watch.*) *twenty-five* minutes makes me a whopping *thirty-five* minutes late. I am *not* an idiot.

KATE. No. You're just stupid.

KEITH. You take that back.

KATE. What are we? Five?

KEITH. I don't know! *You're* the math wiz.

KATE. Yeah, and you're the...the...the *thespian*!

KEITH. Thespian and proud of it. Now take it back. Say I'm not stupid.

KATE. You're stupid. You're more than stupid. You're incapable of being taught. You're thoughtless and childish and arrogant and...

(KEITH *turns his back and starts sniffing obviously. As the scene progresses, his sobs become more outlandish.*)

KATE. Are you crying?

KEITH. No.

KATE. I didn't mean to make you cry.

KEITH. I'm not crying.

(KEITH *gives a loooong shuddering sob.*)

KATE. You *are* crying.

KEITH. Of *course* I'm crying. I'm an *actor*! I have *emotions*!

KATE. I didn't mean to upset you.

KEITH. Yeah? Well, you *did*! And now my *mascara's* running!

KATE. I have another baby wipe....

KEITH. I don't want your *baby wipe*! I just want to—I just...!

(KEITH *throws himself melodramatically into the chair and starts bawling his way through his speech.*)

KEITH. It's just that *everything's* so hard right now—and my grades are falling all the way to a B *minus* and it's Hell Week and I'm working on three hours of sleep...from *three days ago* and I *still* can't get my quick change down to one minute because...*do you see what I'm wearing??!?!?*

And I forgot to eat and then I threw up and half the cast has walking pneumonia—including the half of the cast I have to *kiss*. REPEATEDLY. And people think: "Oh, it's so *easy* to be an actor!" But it *isn't* and all I wanted was some *help* to bring my math grades up and now you're calling me *names* and now I'm *hurt* and...*can't we just do some math without all the name-calling?*

(KEITH is absolutely wailing now, leaving KATE at a total loss. She fusses about him, looking for a tissue. KATE pulls out various objects: calculators, rulers, etc., until she finds a handful of graphing paper and gives it to him.)

KATE. I'm—I'm so sorry! I didn't mean—I—look, here's a—um...use this.

(KEITH blows his nose and happily turns to KATE.)

KEITH. Thanks.

KATE. You were *acting*?

KEITH. I am the best.

KATE. That was the last of my graph paper!

KEITH. Oh. Do you want it back?

KATE. No, I—*no*. Thanks anyway. Let's get started, shall we? Now that we're twenty-nine...

KEITH. Thirty-nine.

KATE. Minutes late.

KEITH. Please. I doubt you have anything better to do.

KATE. As a matter of fact, I have a date.

KEITH. You have a date?

KATE. I do. In thirty-one—

KEITH. Twenty-one.

KATE. *Thirty-one* minutes. So, why don't you take out your homework and we'll take a look at how you—

KEITH. What kind of a date?

KATE. Just a date.

KEITH. Like Christmas? That's a date.

KATE. *Like a date*. Where's your homework?

KEITH. I...um....I—

(KEITH *tries crying again*. KATE'S *unimpressed*.)

KATE. You didn't do your math homework.

KEITH. Oh, I *did* my math homework. It's just....

KATE. Mmmm-hm. The dog ate it?

KEITH. There are a lot of things you can eat that aren't made of food.

(KATE *grabs KEITH'S bag and goes through it*.)

KATE. Nevermind. I'll find it.

KEITH. No! No, you really don't want to dive in there.

KATE. Afraid I'll find your hidden cache of sequins?

KEITH. Absolutely! My bag's just *crawling* with sequins. *Glitter* sequins! Feathered glitter sequins with little Bob Fosse hats! C'mon, give it—

(KATE *pulls out a folded piece of paper*.)

KATE. Ah-ha! Your homework. And here I thought you hadn't done it. Very well acted, sir. Very well acted.

KEITH. I'm not acting. I didn't do it. That's not my homework. I'm a total slacker. Give it back to me.

KATE. Is this my name on it?

KEITH. No, it's my...my *girlfriend's* name.

KATE. Riiiiight, Mr. Jazz Hands. I know you. You don't *have* a girlfriend.

KEITH. No, you're right. I don't.

(KEITH *takes the paper from KATE*.)

KEITH. But it's not my homework, either.

KATE. All right, all right.

KEITH. I...hate math. I hate these stupid appointments. I hate *you*. I hate your stupid boyfriend. What's his name?

KATE. His parents didn't give him one.

KEITH. I hate his parents. I hate these stupid *numbers*. I hate everything about...*math*.

KATE. Hate math?

KEITH. Yeah! What good is it? What do you really need to know beyond addition and subtraction and how much to tip at restaurants? It's no good in the real world. $5xy$ times three squared pi? What good is that? It's all just...useless.

KATE. Useless? Math is everything! Math is perfection. The curve of every arc, the pattern of every flower, the notes of a song—all of it, math. Math makes up our very being, our molecules, our DNA, the way we think. Do you know the complex calculations required to throw a ball? And yet, a child can do it. The stars dance in harmony to their mathematical patterns. Why, every time you read a line or climb a balcony or dance a waltz, you're using math. The very beat of your heart—math. Math is order. Math is beauty. Math is perfection.

(They're very close. KEITH gulps.)

KEITH. Oh.

(Play continues.)