

Dancing

Just leaving sixth period, I walked through the hallway glad that the day was almost over. It was the first, humid blossom of summer and our red bricked prison didn't have air conditioning to combat the heat. Everyone was wearing as little as was allowed by our private school's dress code. Waving and smiling at some friends, I continued squeezing my way through the crowded, noisy hallway.

I wanted to get to my next class. Seventh period was my favorite. It was Advanced Placement Calculus, but the teacher was interesting. He made the class worth listening to and the subject easier to learn. Hopefully, he could end this warm day on a good note.

“Ready for Ol' Doc?” asked Marie as she bustled in beside me.

“Of course,” I answered smiling back at her.

“Think its going to get any more toasty?”

“Will make for a nice weekend.” I replied.

“Hmm, we need to get a group together to drive out to the beach, get some of the sun in.” Marie said as she compared our fair complexions.

“We should,” I agreed as we bustled into the classroom. The room was cramped for the thirty some desks it had to maintain.

Ivy Preparatory Academy was built somewhere in the pre-war era. There was always the rumor of a bomb shelter hidden somewhere in the bricked building. Its once bright, red bricks had gained the ivy and wear of a mature building. Its once spacious classrooms and hallways have almost become unmanageable.

Marie and I took our seats in the classroom still void of most students. She was in

front of me, and we were both near the door. I got out my calc notebook and discussed our weekend plans with Marie as more seniors sauntered in and the ancient bell clanged.

He walked in.

His comfortable brown loafers so worn that I'm sure that they even forget they were loafers. The khaki's told the same story of comfort, an odd assortment of nameless stains pockmarked the pants.

“Ah, Ol' Doc's wearing his favorite flannel,” whispered Marie in front of me. His favorite was the red and maroon print that was carefully tucked into his khaki's. His shirt came up over his pudgy little belly, was unbuttoned at the collar, and was rolled up at the sleeves as in protest to the warm, sticky classroom. It shared a few the same nameless stains.

Dr. Gill waddled to his altar, his overhead projector. His kind, glacial blue eyes scanned the classroom. He put on his grandfatherly smile, patted down the delicate comb-over of his sparse white hair and began writing with his favorite blue dry-erase marker.

“W-where were we?” he said with his typical nervous stutter. I smiled, after teaching for who-knows how many years, he still seemed nervous in front of the classroom. All of the students liked to joke that Dr. Gill had been at Ivy Prep since before it had ivy.

I started to take notes as Dr. Gill wrote in his delicate script; we were covering integrals. The open windows did nothing to quench the heat of summer and the thirty bodies that sat in the classroom.

Dr. Gill was running through an example, one of the many written in my notebook, “A-anyone know the way of s-solving this?” he asked, flashing us another

smile. All the students rushed to their calculators, ready to type in the work and retrieve an answer. I just stared at Dr. Gill's glacial eyes, they seemed to shimmy. He wrote the answer on the overhead just as someone raised their hand.

No one has ever seen Dr. Gill use a calculator. We didn't even know if he owned one. It didn't matter the problem, he knew the sine, cosine, tangent or natural log of anything we threw at him. He knew his theorems, postulates and laws like they were loved ones. I remember walking into his classroom one day and catching him grading tests. He had no answer key and no calculator. He just looked at the test and then his eyes would twirl.

I personally thought he was always too good for Ivy Prep. His mind seemed too sharp, and I felt he always belonged in a research institute adding and subtracting the secrets of the universe. Instead, he stood there, with his nervous stutter and stained clothes, teaching students that for the most part didn't seem to care.

Siblings that were now alumni of Ivy Prep had told us before how Dr. Gill used to reminisce about "his university" and "his problem". Anytime current students tried to bring it up to him, he'd always dismiss us with a wave of his aging hand and one of his grandfatherly smiles.

Dr. Gill started to continue with another example, when his hand went limp, scarring the delicate four he had written. He stopped talking as his jaw went slack and his gaze went upward and his head tilted to a small angle. Everything about him made him look as though he were zoned out or in a trance. There was only one thing that betrayed him.

His eyes danced.

The sharp, frigid blue iris of his eyes zigzagged. They jumped. They leapt across

the white. He'd punctuate the series of moves with a blink, and then a new scene would begin. Every time he did an equation, this happened in a subtle form. Now though, his eyes went wild. They rolled. They spun. They dashed. They twirled. They flew. Occasionally, his brows would tighten and his eyelids would close like a curtain on an unfinished performance, quickly rushing back open.

It almost looked like he was dreaming. The rapid eye movement showing that he was looking at something entirely different. He wasn't looking at the students, or at the off-white wall with an Einstein poster, or the early summer day outside. Like the tip of the iceberg, the sporadic movement of his eyes held a much deeper meaning to him.

“Hey, about this weekend,” Marie interrupted my thoughts.

“Shhhhh,” I answered harshly, not taking my eyes off Dr. Gill's.

“Hey, this Gill Spill could go on for five minutes. He doesn't care if we talk, he's said so before,” snapped Marie.

Shutting out Marie's abrupt interruption, I went back to my head.

I always thought it was a language. If I could ever decipher it, I would know exactly what he was subtracting or dividing. If I watched enough, and caught every blink, roll and twist of his eyes, I hoped I could get a glimpse of what mystery he was trying to solve. I could be the first one, other than Dr. Gill, to see exactly what he was contemplating.

“Gill spills” and “Doc Locks” were the most popular nicknames this year for what was happening. They were just a part of AP Calculus, like a binder or calculator. From what I knew, Dr. Gill has had them since he started teaching. They could range anywhere from a minute to five. Then his eyes would slow, then stop. He'd blink, take a

deep breath and continue exactly where he left off. It only happened once or twice a month, nothing to seriously disrupt the class or alert the administration.

The classroom was noisy now, talking of the weekend and senior summer. Dr. Gill had long ago given permission for the students to talk during his “spills”, as long as no one directly interrupted him during his thought. Most of the students just felt that it happened due to Dr. Gill's age or his eccentricity. I liked to think otherwise.

I continued to watch his eyes as the dance slowed. He blinked. A look of elation came over his wrinkled face. And without a word, he dashed out of the classroom. His favorite dry erase marker falling to the floor, silencing everyone in the room.

Rumors caught like a dry brush. The school was alive with Dr. Gill's apparent freak-out.

“Did you see the way he flew? I never knew Ol' Doc could move like that!”

“I think he finally overheated.”

“Can't blame him.”

“Gill Overspill...”

“Think he's coming back?”

“Prolly hidden in a corner with his eyes twitchin'!”

I walked back home in silence, only a handful of blocks away. I didn't want to listen to the snide comments of anyone. I saw the look of elation on Dr. Gill's face. I knew he didn't overheat, or overspill or anything absurd. I thought he finally solved “his problem”, the one from his days at his university. I thought Dr. Gill could finally escape Ivy Prep.

I entered my bedroom. The off-white walls covered in posters. Sitting down in my bed, I reached under and grabbed my notebook. I pictured Dr. Gill in my mind, that one look of elation that spread through his entire body. I wrenched my well-used pencil from the notebook's binding. Flipping open to a free page, my fingertips began tapping out a beat. Finally, the lead touched the page.

My pencil danced.