

WRONG EQUATION

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[Assignment: Henry Adams, in his autobiography, claims that the most important things he learned in life he learned accidentally. Write a list for yourself of all the things you remember learning accidentally. Choose one interesting and important item from your list; make another list of all the details that flood into your mind as you recount that learning process. Then write a narrative essay about what happened. Your purpose is twofold: to relate that story to your reader as completely as you can, and to comment on what the process meant to you.]

He had soft chestnut-brown hair that curled around his head in beautiful wisps. When the florescent light of the classroom hit it in just the right way, rays of gold splayed like sunshine in all directions. With downcast, almond eyes, so deep I simply drowned in them with every glance, he shuffled over to the seat right next to me. My heart stopped as I awaited my return to reality. As I realized that this was no dream, my soul soared with hope and excitement. Needless to say, chemistry my sophomore year taught me much more than covalent bonds of radioactive isotopes.

David. He was the entire reason I could not concentrate on empirical formulas and the like during lectures. I remember trying to sound very casual and nonchalant as I asked him to be my lab partner that year. I can also recall trying to control my unruly urge to do backflips around the room when he said "yes."

Had I known then that he was a man of very few words, I would have savored that moment. However, that did not hinder any of my efforts to win him over. I began to long for lab work, even though I did not actually get to participate in any of the experiments. My job typically consisted of cleaning up after him and copying down data that I never quite understood. These I did quite readily because they gave me an excuse to be near him, to observe him, to savor every moment with him. I loved the way his thick, wooly sweaters smelled almost as much as the way they hung on his strong shoulders. I loved the warmth of his hand as it brushed against my fingers each time I handed him a test tube. I loved the way his onyx eyes intensified and how his brow wrinkled when he was deep in thought, pondering a formula. I had never been so infatuated with anyone as I was with David.

My persistence must have had some effect, for we began to talk like regular acquaintances a few months into the semester. He began to see I was more than just some beaker washer, and sometimes we would have fairly deep conversations about everything from life to friends. The more we talked, the more I fell for him. Our relationship even progressed to the point where we could comfortably communicate over the telephone, and I would anxiously await his calls when we needed to discuss lab results. And then came the unforeseen event that changed my overall perception of life in high school--the Turnabout Dance.

I desperately wanted to attend this highly over-rated high school event, and I knew who I wanted to be escorted by. However, I was a chicken. I refrained from asking Dave for the most primitive reason of all: the ever-impending fear of rejection.

Four days before the dance, we were in the lab and happened to be discussing the event when it became evident that David was not going. Most girls would have jumped at this fateful opportunity; however, thinking logically for once, I knew it would be nearly impossible to obtain a dress, make a hair appointment, and scrape up enough cash in time for the big event. Yet that did not slake my curiosity a bit. I asked him if he would have ever considered going to the dance with a certain friend/lab partner if she would have asked in advance. His answer made my entire year! He said he probably would have gone with me. I was ecstatic and practically floated to my next hour class. My excitement and joy of just knowing he was even slightly attainable was too much for my tiny self to bear, and I quickly whipped out a sheet of paper to share my news with my best friend, Kimmy.

As fast as I could move my pen, I poured out all my feelings toward David with uninhibited passion. I knew he did not feel nearly as strongly about me as I did for him, but this incident had given me hope, a reason to keep trying to win his heart.

I was so naive. The next week, while sitting in chemistry class, I began to initiate a conversation with David about his weekend. He stared ahead. Thinking he had not heard me, I repeated the question I had asked him. Still no response. Trying to quell the waves of panic that were within me, I gently touched the sleeve of his arm in a desperate last attempt to get his attention. This time he was more responsive. He yanked his arm away and continued to stare into space. I was hurt, angry, and confused--to say the least.

I later found out that my *friend*, Kimmy, had given him the note I had written to her. I had confided in her all my innermost thoughts and feelings, and she had betrayed me. I trusted her, and she let me down. Dave never spoke to me or looked at me again. He could not or would not handle dealing with my feelings for him, and, like a coward, he chose to ignore me. I was devastated, initially, but I eventually realized he was not worth it. The humiliation I experienced taught me two very essential lessons: to respect myself and to be careful of whom I trust in the future.

As a result of my experience, I withdrew into a tiny shell with steel walls. I would not let myself trust anyone or be completely honest about my feelings with anyone I cared about. I was always petrified of getting too close to people for fear I would lose them, as I had lost David.

However, people and circumstances change. My group of friends now is different from the one I had two years ago. And of course, I am different. I realized that by limiting myself emotionally I was missing out on life. Throughout life, most of us learn lessons, either the easy way or the hard way; yet most of us will still learn them. One advantageous quality about our experiences is the possibility of coming away with the priceless knowledge we have the potential to gain through them. Learning is an essential part of life, even if the lessons we learn are difficult ones. So what if the only sparks that flew between David and me were from the chemical reactions performed in the laboratory? Even though we had the "wrong equation," I still came away with the right answer.