

DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

Other Math

1.

- —Grampa?
—Joseph? Come in.
—Can I come in?
—Come in. Sit down.
—How are you feeling?
—Fine, fine. Fine.
—I'm in love with you.
—How'd you get in here, son? Isn't there school today? What day is this?
—I'm in love with you, Grampa.
—In love with me?
—Yes.
—What do you mean?
—I mean I'm in love with you, Grampa. I want only to be with you. With only you.
—What the heck do you mean, you're in love with me?
—I. . . .
—Is this a kind of joke? What day is this?
—No, Grampa.
—Why, then, I love you too, Joe. You're a good boy. You always make your Gramma and I proud. We want to be with you, too. Why, soon as I get out of here. . . .
—That's not what I'm talking about, Grampa. I'm in love with you. You're all I think about. Your image lives and moves inside me. I value

David Foster Wallace's first novel, *The Broom of the System*, was published simultaneously in 1987 by Viking and by Penguin Contemporary American Fiction. His collection of stories and novellas, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, will appear from Viking in 1988. Wallace is currently a visiting writer at Amherst College.

your interests above my own. Your presence affects my nervous system, I live for your touch. I want to be with you. Always.

—I'm married. I'm married to your own Gramma.

—Yes.

—We're both the same sexual gender.

—Granted.

—What day is this, Joe? How'd you get up here?

—

—I'm old, boy. I'm sick. I've only got half a colon. My face hangs off my skull. I can tell from the way my mouth tastes that my breath smells like rotten egg salad.

—Side issues. It's you I love.

—You discussed this with your Dad?

—I haven't told anyone, sir. I've carried it inside me. Alone. I felt I should talk to you first.

—I see.

—Right.

—

—

—What grade are you in, over at school, Joseph? Are you in the fifth grade?

—Sixth grade, sir.

—Sixth grade.

—Yes.

—And you're in love with me.

—Yes.

—I think I just don't know what to say. I don't even know the day of the week. How should I know what to say?

—Don't say anything, Grampa. Just sit. Just like that. That's perfect.

2.

—So wait, Gramma. Let me get this straight. Two girls and a man are walking, and one of the girls is holding hands with the man, and that means she's involved with the man, and likes him a lot, and the other one isn't, but is just along?

—Yes.

—And if they changed, and the man started holding hands with the other girl, that would mean that now the man and the other girl are involved? And the first girl is now just along?

—Yes.

—

—Let me fix your necktie, Joseph. The knot is off to the side.

—And do they hold hands just to show who's involved with who? To show it in public? Or do they feel something, when they do it?

—It's unclear. It's unclear whether things are felt, or whether it's just a demonstration.

—You don't know?

—No.

—You've never been in a hand-holding situation?

—No.

—What about you and Grampa?

—Your Grampa's hand wasn't a hand. Your Grampa's hand was a dead thing, attached to his wrist by the same force that flung everything toward him, dead and brown, a flat, square conveyor of chill, an extension I never recognized and certainly never held.

—I see.

—There. Learn to keep the knot in the middle, Joseph.

—Do you think maybe that's why we didn't cry? I saw everyone else crying.

—

—

—Life-Saver?

—Thanks.

3.

—Did your Dad ever tell you how, when he was back in medical school, one of the fellows in his class fell in love with a cadaver?

—No, sir.

—This fellow, to hear your Dad tell it, fell head over heels in love with a cadaver. He stole it out of the medical school's cadaver department. He took the thing with him everywhere he went. Even out in public, to the theater.

—This is nothing like that, Grampa.

—Your Dad says this fellow would talk to him about how he was head over heels in love with this cadaver. He told your Dad he could live with the cadaver's being so quiet and passive all the time, because the cadaver was gentle, and portable, and it was always there for him.

—Nothing like that here, Grampa. Totally different type of thing.

—I'm thinking your Dad says they had to put that fellow away somewhere. Said he just couldn't live without his cadaver.

—

—Do an old man a favor and don't stare like that, son.