

MAKING THE GRADE

A Play in One Act

By James Brady

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Katherine Bourgeois, a senior at a southern college, has flunked algebra, a course she needs to graduate. She complains to Dr. Hoffmann, the chairwoman of the math department. Dr. Hoffmann tells Mr. O'Leary, Katherine's instructor, to go over the final exam and give her another test. Mr. O'Leary tries to do this, but Katherine stalls. She makes excuses, asks for more time to study, and asks for extra credit. Mr. O'Leary tries again to go over the test but Katherine has something else in mind. Mr. O'Leary is shocked. Is she really offering to have sex with him for a grade? When Dr. Hoffmann returns, a sobbing Katherine accuses Mr. O'Leary of sexual harassment. Dr. Hoffmann offers Katherine an incomplete, but she's not interested. Either she passes or she sues. What will Dr. Hoffmann do? What will Mr. O'Leary do?

This play deals with the very delicate and important issues of sexual harassment and manipulation of the educational system. The play was performed for the president and deans at a major university and selected for the One-Act Play Festival at Mississippi State University.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 M, 2 W)

COLIN O'LEARY: A math instructor, 30.

DR. HOFFMANN: Math department chairwoman, late 30s.

KATHERINE: A student, mid-20s.

PLACE: Colin's office at a Louisiana college.

TIME: The present.

SETTING

The office is small, about ten feet by eighteen. It has the standard office furniture: a desk and chair, two chairs that face the desk, a bookshelf, and a filing cabinet.

PROPS

DR. HOFFMANN: Watch, telephone.

COLIN: Grade book, math text book, papers, box of tissues, college catalog, pen, change of grade form.

KATHERINE: Book bag, text books, test papers, calendar, notepad and pencil.

MAKING THE GRADE

(AT RISE: COLIN is sitting behind the desk and DR. HOFFMANN is seated across the desk from him.)

COLIN: You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.

DR. HOFFMANN: Excuse me?

COLIN: Dr. Hoffmann, I've uh...I've spent hours and hours with this student. She spent so much time in my office, she was like a fixture. The cleaning lady had to sweep around her.

DR. HOFFMANN: Some students are slow in math and are going to need extra help.

COLIN: I agree with you one hundred percent.

DR. HOFFMANN: It takes a lot of patience, Mr. O'Leary.

COLIN: Patience? Dr. Hoffmann, I'm from Texas. We talk slow, and move slow, and take our time. *(DR. HOFFMANN smiles faintly.)* If anybody's got patience, it's me.

DR. HOFFMANN: Then, what exactly is the problem?

COLIN: It's this...student. She, uh...just doesn't have it... *(Points to HIS head)*...up here.

DR. HOFFMANN: Mr. O'Leary, this student is a graduating senior and...

COLIN: And I just solved Fermat's Last Theorem.

DR. HOFFMANN: ...and she said she made a B in the same course at UWL.

COLIN: Come on, Doctor. You're puttin' me on.

DR. HOFFMANN: No.

COLIN: Why didn't they transfer the credit?

DR. HOFFMANN: I didn't want to go into that.

COLIN: And how did she get to be a senior without passing algebra?

DR. HOFFMANN: I have no idea. I didn't want to go into that.

COLIN: It amazes me how some of these students beat the system. I, uh, had this one student. He took three classes from me...different semesters. The first day of class, he would leave after 20 minutes.

COLIN: (*Cont'd.*) Never said a word, just got up and walked out. Now, the rest of the semester, he, uh, stayed for the full period. What he was doing, Dr. Hoffmann...you're gonna love this one...he was scoutin'. Can you believe that? Scoutin'! Every semester, during the first week, he would sit in on classes, decide which courses and teachers he liked, and then he would register. Pretty ingenious, huh?

DR. HOFFMANN: Fascinating. Can we get back —

COLIN: Now, some of the students are just downright strange puppies....This one kid got mad because his hamster wouldn't take a shower with him. He put the little guy on a hot plate —

DR. HOFFMANN: Mr. O'Leary, please! I would love to hear your anecdotes, but I am a very busy person. Can we get back to the student we were discussing?

COLIN: I'm sorry, Dr. Hoffmann. I was just trying to point out some of the stuff —

DR. HOFFMANN: I've been here a semester and I've seen some of the stuff that goes on. That's why I'm here.

COLIN: It's about time they brought someone in to straighten out the department. Nothing against Dr. Bloomfield, he's a nice guy and a good research mathematician, but he's not an administrator. I don't think he ever talked to the dean. The dean came to the Christmas party last year and was walkin' around wishing everybody a Merry Christmas. He was movin' to his right, and as he was movin', Ol' Dr. Bloomfield was moving away from him. They went around the room twice, in a circle. (*Laughs*) Don't get me wrong. Dr. Bloomfield's a good guy but we, uh...needed a change.

DR. HOFFMANN: There are going to be some changes.

COLIN: You've got to get the hogs out of the creek before you can have clean water.

DR. HOFFMANN: Excuse me?

COLIN: It's, uh...just a saying that we, uh, use back home...in Texas. You're, uh...from NYU, aren't you?

DR. HOFFMANN: Yes.

COLIN: Ph.D. from Princeton. Over 100 publications?

DR. HOFFMANN: Yes.

COLIN: Whew! That's some might fancy credentials. I, uh...I'm a University of Texas man, myself.

DR. HOFFMANN: (*Looks at HER watch*) I do wish I could spend more time with you but...back to the student.

COLIN: I'm, uh...really sorry that she came to you.

DR. HOFFMANN: I don't mind that.

COLIN: I don't understand why she didn't come to me first.

DR. HOFFMANN: That's not a problem.

COLIN: My, uh...door is always open...I don't under—

DR. HOFFMANN: It's OK, Mr. O'Leary. She came to me because she's a little upset about not graduating...I want you to go over the final exam with her and give her another test.

COLIN: Now, Dr. Hoffmann, she's got about as much of a chance of passing as Rice has of beating the Dallas Cowboys. (*Opens HIS grade book and turns some pages*) Katherine Bourgeois. Average for the semester...a big whoppin' 28.

DR. HOFFMANN: Her average is not the issue. She said you told her she would pass the course if she passed the final exam. Is that correct?

COLIN: Yeah. That's the, uh...standard procedure for undergraduate math courses. It's been that way since—

DR. HOFFMANN: I don't have a problem with that.

COLIN: If she would have passed the final exam, she would have passed the course. (*Looks at HIS grade book*) She made 35 on the final exam. (*Points to the grade and shows it to DR. HOFFMANN*) Thirty-five. Last semester, she asked me if she could sit in on my remedial math course. The one they call "bonehead" math. She told me that she made higher than 13 on her math ACT score and wasn't required to take remedial math but she felt that it would help her pass algebra. I gladly let her sit in. She came to class and took the tests. (*Turns some pages in HIS grade book*) Bonehead math. Bourgeois, Katherine. (*Tries to give the grade book to DR. HOFFMANN*)

DR. HOFFMANN: I don't need to see the grades.

End of Freeview

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