

$22 \div 7$

$Life = Mistakes \times 10^5$

 π

Violet and the

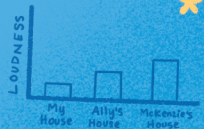
My Current
Pie Chart



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PIE OF LIFE

Mom's Favorite
Lectures



DEBRA GREEN

VIOLET AND THE PIE OF LIFE

Violet
and the
PIE
OF
LIFE

DEBRA GREEN

HOLIDAY HOUSE  NEW YORK



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TO JEFF GARFINKLE, THE COURAGE, BRAINS,
AND HEART AT THE END OF MY RAINBOW



VIOLET AND THE PIE OF LIFE

ONE

I knew my parents could solve most of their problems by applying simple math.

The night when everything went wrong started problem-free. Great, actually, once Dad came home. I was in my room, but I heard Dad at the door because our house is only 875 square feet, and my dad is never quiet. “Who wants a bucket full of heaven?” he asked.

I hurried to the front of the house, inhaling the delicious smell of fried chicken along the way.

Dad stood grinning at the door, holding a large fast-food bag. He hugged me with his non-bag-holding arm and said, “Vi! The apple of my eye! You hungry?”

“Now I am!” I said, following him into the kitchen.

Dad pulled out a bucket of fried chicken and plopped it on the counter. “Your mom’s not here?”

I shook my head. “She’s at that listing appointment she was all excited about.”

“Some people have a passion for music. Some for doing good. Your mother has a passion for real estate.” Dad laughed. “Hey, let’s each sneak one piece of chicken before she gets home.”

I stared at him. It sounded like fun, but not if Mom found out. She was into family dinners—with the whole family, not two-thirds of it. I loved fried chicken, but it wasn’t worth hearing another argument.

“Come on, Vi,” Dad pressed. “It’s killing me to resist this smell! If I can’t sneak a piece of chicken, I’ll keel over and die.” He stuck his tongue out and clutched his chest.

I laughed. “The smell is driving me completely crazy,” I said. “If I can’t sneak a piece of chicken, my brain will explode.”

“We can’t let that happen. You know how your mother feels about messes. For her sake, you’d better eat.” Dad opened the bucket, pulled out a thigh, and bit into it. “Ahh,” he said.

I took a drumstick, ate a mouthful, and said “Ahh” too.

“But seriously, don’t tell your mother,” Dad said.

“Don’t worry. I won’t.” If Mom saw us—eating without

her, leaning against the kitchen counter, talking with our mouths full, not using napkins—*she* might die.

“The only thing better than eating fried chicken is eating fried chicken with my favorite girl,” Dad said, and I grinned at him.

I’d finished about 80 percent of my drumstick when I heard a car in the driveway. “It’s Mom!” I whispered.

“Toss the chicken bones! Wipe your hands!” Dad said.

We rushed around the kitchen, two laughing fools.

“Admit to nothing!” Dad said in a loud whisper.

Mom walked in right as I was throwing paper towels over the evidence in the kitchen trash. She smiled. “What’s so funny?”

“We’re just deliriously happy to see you,” Dad said.

Mom raised her eyebrows. That didn’t ring true. Not lately anyway. Then she pointed to the bucket on the counter while she put her hand on her hip. “Why didn’t you tell me you were picking up dinner? I defrosted turkey cutlets.”

“You’re welcome,” Dad said unwelcomingly.

Mom put her other hand on her hip, doubling the unwelcomeness. “Did you go to the market for eggs and broccoli like I asked?”

“Does every word out of your mouth have to be a nag?”
Dad said, frowning now.

“Does every word out of your mouth have to be a complaint?” Mom complained.

That’s where math should have come into the picture. My parents should have stopped right there and determined how many words from Mom’s mouth actually were nags and how many of Dad’s words were complaints. Mom nagged a lot, but she also talked about real estate and the weather and other boring stuff. And Dad’s complaints were totally outnumbered by his funny stories. One simple division calculation for each parent could have shown them that they did a lot more than nag or complain.

Or my mom could have solved most of their problems simply by reversing her nag-to-compliment ratio from this:

$$\frac{\text{NAGS}}{\text{Compliments}}$$

to this:

$$\frac{\text{Nags}}{\text{COMPLIMENTS}}$$

Unfortunately, my parents weren't interested in my mathematical solutions. Last time I'd suggested one, Dad had laughed as if I were joking and Mom had apologized for arguing in front of me. At least my math proposal had distracted them from their fight.

"I love fried chicken," I said now, trying the distraction technique again. Also, I was still hungry. I put my nose in the air and said in a snooty voice, "Such excellent cuisine."

My parents laughed.

My mom said, "Quite so!"

It wasn't that funny, but I faked a laugh to keep the household mood up.

"Let's eat," Dad said.

Mom put the bucket and sides on the kitchen table, I got the ketchup from the fridge, and we all sat down.

Then Mom tried to ruin things again. She said, "Do three people really need a large bucket of fried food?"

Before Dad could respond with his usual line that nothing he did was ever good enough for her, I said, "Yes, three people need a large bucket of fried food when one of those people is me."

To prove it, I grabbed another thigh and drumstick from

the bucket, drowned them in ketchup, and wolfed them down.

“Slow down, Violet,” Mom said, frowning. “You’ll make yourself sick.”

Dad winked at me. “It’s impossible to slow down with such excellent cuisine.”

I winked back at him, poured out more ketchup, and grabbed more chicken, even though I already felt like I might throw up.

It was worth it though, because Dad put his arm around my shoulder and said, “That’s why I bought a large bucket,” and Mom said with a smile, “Twelve years old, ninety-something pounds, but she eats like a linebacker.”

Dad laughed and went with it, speaking in a deep, dramatic voice like a sports announcer, “Violet Summers, newest, youngest member of the Chargers. Best known for her fierce tackle and her charming smile.”

I grinned, and my parents grinned back, and I clutched my stomach under the table.

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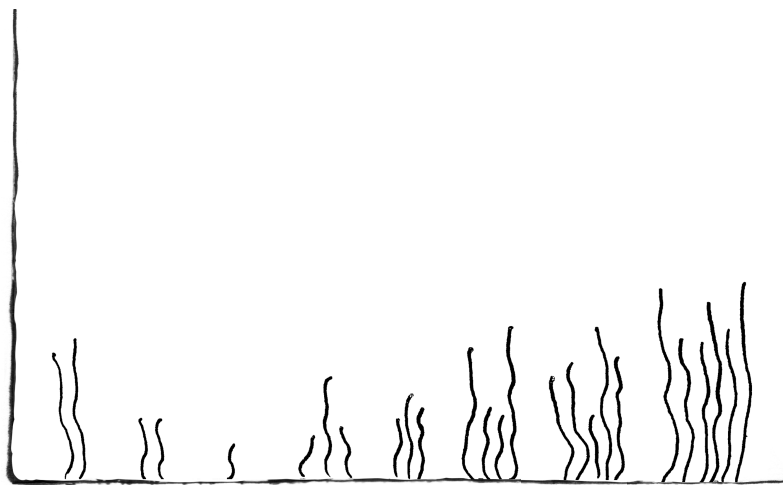
I felt even more throw-up-y later that night in my bedroom when the fighting started again. I could hear it through my door.

The thing about math is that it's logical. You have to solve the first part of a problem before going on to the next. Once that's figured out, you keep moving on until you have the whole problem solved.

My parents' fights were the opposite. They started arguing about one thing and moved to another and then another. Nothing ever got solved. In fact, it seemed like everything was getting worse.

I sat at my desk and added my parents' latest argument to my chart to see if I was right.

INTENSITY
OF FIGHTS



NUMBER OF FIGHTS

I stayed there, frowning down at the chart while my mom and dad shouted in the background. Finally, I put the chart facedown in a drawer, climbed into bed, turned out the light, and put a pillow over my head.