Mr. Occam was a mean old man who nobody in all of Appleton High could stand. He was the trigonometry teacher. It would have been better if he taught calculus or statistics, as only nerds who were dumb enough to think math had some real-world application took those classes. He didn’t though, he taught trigonometry, which was unfortunate for all involved. Everybody had to take trigonometry. Including the enlightened masses who knew that mathematics only exists to lower your ACT scores and crush your soul, which everyone knew is precisely why Mr. Occam liked it. Mr. Occam had taught trigonometry at Appleton High for forty-five years, and the rumor was the only time he ever smiled was when he threw a kid out for referring to the holy subject as simply “trig.”

Poppy Eaton never had much time for Mr. Occam or Appleton High in general. She sat in the back and hid behind her jet-black hair and worked, rather mathematically it must be confessed, on her routine. The tournament was in a few days. She’d need a score above 80 to win. If she wanted to skate for a living, she needed to win.

“Hey, psst,” the boy in front of her had turned around and was watching her.

“What?” Poppy had found in her fifteen years that boys who pssted you in the middle of class were even worse than the ones who waited till after.

“Do you know what the hell he is talking about?” the boy jerked a thumb at Mr. Occam, who was babbling in a voice so monotone one would bet that even he was bored of the lecture.

Poppy forced herself to pay attention for a moment. Good old sine, cosine, and tangent.

“Yea kinda,” she replied.

“What’s that?” the boy had already moved on from Occam’s lecture and was leaning his head at an absurd angle peering at the sketches of ramps in front of her.

“None ya,” Poppy growled as she used her arms to hide the sketches.

“Oh hell,” the boy said, noticing Poppy’s bag for the first time, “you’re a damn skateboarder.”

“…isn’t that right Mr. Smith?” Occam’s voice pierced the boy from behind before Poppy could respond.

“Huh?” the boy whipped around, his face turning red.

“Why don’t you tell the class about whatever it is that Ms. Eaton was showing you which is obviously more interesting than our discussion?”

“Sure,” the boy replied, his embarrassment turning to cruelty, “she…uh…Ms. Eaton here was showing me her kickass skateboard.”

Behind him, Poppy shot the boy a look of pure hatred that could have melted stone.

“You have a skateboard with you, Ms. Eaton?”

Poppy looked down at the floor. Mr. Occam was already over her, his dorky dress shoes and his tube socks, visible because his suspenders had his trousers yanked too far up his ass, on the floor in front of her.

“Yea,” she confessed.

“Excuse me?”

“Yes, sir. I have a skateboard with me, sir.” Poppy said through clenched teeth as she made eye contact with him, his wore old bald head behind thick round glasses.

“Give it here then. It is obviously distracting poor Mr. Smith from our lecture.”

Poppy considered taking her board out and hitting poor Mr. Smith across the jaw with it, but instead she handed it over.

“Thank you,” Mr. Occam said with a fakeness that went perfectly with his button up and bowtie. He set the board down on his desk, continued his idiotic lecture, and Poppy sat in misery in the back of the room, every fiber of her being working overtime to keep her from killing poor Mr. Smith.

Hours, an eternity, later, after school, Poppy walked back down to the math hall. She knew the policy. Anything taken up in class you got back at the end of the week, unless the teacher chose to give it back early. Mr. Occam was the sort of man who wouldn’t give water to a drowning man, so Poppy didn’t really expect it back. But she wanted it back, and she was pretty sure she had calmed down enough to be reasonable. It was her first offense. It really was poor Mr. Smith’s fault, why didn’t Mr. Occam address the real problem by taking up Smith’s tongue? She was certain she could reason with Occam. She could try.

She rounded the corner, entered the math hall, and gasped in surprise.

“Mr. Occam?”

Mr. Occam looked up, saw her, smiled, a real smile, and promptly fell off the skateboard.

“Hi Poppy,” he muttered as he picked himself and the board up. Poppy wasn’t sure which was stranger, the sight of Occam on a skateboard or that he had used her first name.

“Here’s your board,” he handed it to her sheepishly, “I meant to give it back after class but forgot all about it.”

“Umm, thanks.” Poppy took the board and just looked at the math teacher for a moment.

“I know,” he said with a grin, “totally ridiculous. I haven’t skated in a long time. Had to see if I still could.”

Poppy smiled and went home. After that, she tried harder to pay attention in Mr. Occam’s trigonometry class. Mr. Occam, the mean old nerdy skateboarding math teacher. The thought made her smile.