

Calculus by Howard Meyer

I read somewhere that the entire universe is held together by numbers. I bet you that's true. Practicality, down to earth stuff. "The calculus of life." Whatever the hell that means. Everything's an equation if you think about it long enough. This plus this equals that. And most of the time you have to multiply. Finding the right multiplier. Now that's the bitch... Like with getting a man, not just any man, but the right one, there are lots of little mystery multipliers. Algebra, I guess you could say. But keeping him. Now that's, I don't know, that's on a whole other plane. That's definitely calculus.

My mother. She taught me. About cracking that code. Too many wives, they're like personal prostitutes. Doing all kinds of things they'd rather not do. Being married to so and so, and going to so and so affair. Some things would even shock you, the things women do. But then, at the end of the day, what do they have? I consider myself one of the lucky ones. I found something we both like, something that keeps me fresh, every day. I learned very early on, that for my husband to experience a sense of true satisfaction, I had to show him that I could be a good saver. Not saving, like in a 'save me Jesus' kind of way. The security and protection that only money can provide... Me, knowing that I'm the one that gives him that, feels like, I don't know. Love.

Our saving thing all started out as a game, kind of. How much I could peel off the weekly budget. Little things. Coupons, store circulars. My Ricky, he likes games. But really, all boys like games, don't they? My grandkids, can't peel them away from their X-Box, Game Cubes, whatever. And men, let's face it, aren't they really still boys deep down? You hook into that, that mind set, and the rest just flows.

He owns card shops, my husband. He bought the first one 25 years ago. Now we have three. (*She winks*). You know, the ones that sell rows and rows of greeting cards, Hallmark, and racks of daily newspapers and weekly mags. I come in once a week to do the books. And the grandkids, they like to run around up and down the aisles. The customers, they like the kids, but what they really like are all those money games. Pick 10, Quick Draw, Fat Wallet. They're like 50, 60 different varieties. All color coded for the mentally insane. The State of New York owns every single one, did you know that? Millions of people scratching those cards every day, and they still can't balance the budget. Those no-lives lining up for their strips of colored cards every morning, as if somehow by winning it's going to change them into what? Model citizens with good habits? They'd still be scratching at those cards. Scratching like dogs... One, two cents a ticket we get on those cards. But it gets 'em in the store. They wind up buying other things, things we make real money on. I guess everyone has their little sacrifices. This one is ours.