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[Who I am](#)

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Les maths comme je les aime ... et comme je les raconte ! 😊

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## Math as I like it /1a



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### NEVER tell Ioran that he is a point!

*The point, always the point. Yes, I have a monomaniacal side!*

*But this time, it's not really about math, just the first chapter of a story I wrote for my daughter when she was in seventh grade, about twenty years ago. Please be kind!*

Lauréline is sitting at her desk. In HER room. She's in seventh grade now, so she has HER own room. With a real desk, a computer, and even a loft where her guinea pigs live. Benjamin, on the other hand, only has a sort of half-room, without a door, separated from the main room by a bookcase and an aquarium. But he's only 8 years old and seems fine with it.

Lauréline is sitting at her desk. How do you write that a point belongs to a segment? She grimaces. She's fed up with stupid questions that everyone knows the answer to. Well, almost everyone. But what does it mean to belong? Did the segment buy the point? Maybe it found it one day, on the ground? And left it at the lost and found for a year and a day? Or maybe it found it in front of its door, in a cradle? And adopted it. Now that's a good segment!

And anyway, what does a point look like? She raises her head and looks out the window. In the distance, the Eiffel Tower's light flashes, and she follows it with her eyes, without really seeing it. Laureline isn't really focused.

A funny little song creeps into her thoughts. No, it's not the music that's funny, she's known it all her life, "À la claire fontaine"... but the lyrics echo her daydream:

*A point isn't much,  
It's even smaller than that,  
But that's where I settle,  
Without a point, I wouldn't be.*

Laureline snorts, frowns, perplexed... where did that come from? And now the chorus!

*I've been wandering for a long time,  
Never missing a beat.*

A burst of light, like a camera flash, makes her blink.

*"Oh, sorry. Wait!"*

The light becomes a tiny star, even tinier than that, with a bearable brightness.

"That's it, I'm going crazy!" She blinks several times again, but nothing works, the star is still there. IN the room, because she sees its reflection on the window.

*"Good evening, young lady. You are a young lady, aren't you? Fashions change so much."*

Sounds in her head, but she doesn't know how they got there. Besides, she wears earplugs because of Benjamin's organ. Well, if that's the case... a little magic isn't going to scare her, is it? Just a quick glance to check that Mom is there, in the big room.

"Yes, I'm a young lady, as you say. A girl, basically!"

"Did you say something, sweetie?"

"No, Mom, I was reciting."

*"Quiet, quiet! You don't need to speak. Just think, it'll be fine."*

"Who are you? I mean, who am I talking to here? I mean, who am I thinking about?"

*– I'd like you to call me Ioran. But you can call me Dhor Ioran O'Shee, if you prefer. It's an augmentative of Ioran.*

An augmentative?

– I don't like it at all! It's ugly! You're a talking point, right?

*– I am **NOT** a point! Never say I'm a point again. It's... it's insulting!*

Oh dear! And touchy too!

– Okay, okay, don't get mad. You look like a point, but you're not one... So what are you?

*– I'm a punctual human. You won't see many of us. And you're talking nonsense, I don't look like a point at all: a point is a place. Do I look like a place?*

"How should I know? What is a place?"

A kind of burst of laughter, a new song. To the tune of "La Mère Michel," more or less.

*You saw me here and you see me there (and the star jumps from one place in the room to another)  
But that's because in the meantime I changed places  
The place where you saw me, I abandoned it,  
I chose another and occupied it.*

The song stops, the star returns to Lauréline's nose:

*"A place is where you are. Or where you've been... Or where you'll be... Or even where you'll never be, but where you could have been one day. A place is almost nothing: it doesn't move, you can't grab it. It's just there, that's all. All your life, you occupy, or you leave, or you pass through places. You never think about them, but if they didn't exist, where would you be?"*

– Is my room a place?

*– Exactly. And your desk, or rather your office, occupies a place, a part of your room. And if you moved it, for example to the next room, it would occupy another place...*

– Yes, but my parents wouldn't like that at all!

*"Well, that's something else. In any case, I occupy a place. Like your desk, like you. And I can change it at will. And hop... and hop..."*

And the star disappears again, reappears, disappears, reappears... above the bed, the desk, the guinea pigs. And laughs in Lauréline's head, who bursts out laughing in turn. Laughter is contagious!

"Well, sweetie, is your recitation really that funny?"

Oops!

"No, it's the light from the lighthouse making funny reflections on the window!"

(Well, I didn't really lie, did I?)

"Are you sure you're studying seriously? Will you recite it to me later?"

– Absolutely sure, Mom. You'll see!

Where's Ioran gone?

– Ioran? Ioran? Ioo-ran? Dhor Ioran – What's-his-name?

– *I'm here. I'm looking at your guinea pigs. It's good to laugh. I haven't laughed in a long time.*

– Where, there? I can't see you!

– *Sorry. Wait a moment, I turned it off.*

And right in front of the cage, sure enough, the star reappears, at first pale, almost fragile. Then brighter and brighter.

– *There. Can you see me now?*

– Yes, great. But how do you do that?

– *I don't really know. I've always been able to do it. Well, since I've been punctual, naturally.*

Lauréline thinks for a moment, then pouts:

"Dad's always on time, well, almost. But he doesn't shine like that!"

A burst of laughter.

"*No, not punctual as in arriving-on-time, silly... punctual as in being-in-a-point. Like me.*"

She feels herself blushing, hates it:

"But I'm fed up with it! How do you manage to occupy a point? What IS a point?"

"*That's a long story. Do you know Merlin?*"

"Merlin? You mean... Merlin the wizard?"

"Lauréline? Are you setting the table, sweetie?"

"Yes, Mom. Five more minutes."

– Hurry up, sweetie. Dad's making carbonara, so you'd better set the table if you value your life!

– I'm coming, Mom, I'm coming.

– Ioran? Will you wait for me? Will you tell me about it?

– *Yes, I'll wait for you. And I'll tell you all about it. Don't worry.*

– Promise? Do you promise?

– *I promise. Time doesn't mean much to me, young lady.*

– Okay then, see you later. But you'll be there, right?

– *I'll be there. Now get out of here!*

– I'm coming, Mom!

No matter how hard she tries to act normal, the evening is passing terribly slowly. Even though, as always, Mom is teasing her, Benjamin is running around and bursting out laughing, and Dad is getting annoyed by the noise and then laughing too and watching everyone fussing about.

Terribly slowly or not, time passes. Lauréline has brushed her teeth and her hair – grumbling about the knots – and now she's sitting in her bed with her heart pounding and a little anxiety.

"loran?"

A flash of light at the end of the bed. Laureline breathes a sigh of relief.

*"I'm here, my dear lady."*

"Is that me? Thank you. Tell me now?"

*"If you want me to."*

*Over a thousand years ago, Merlin and I were friends. Together with five other wise magicians, we formed the powerful Council of Mathemagicians.*

"The what?"

*– You've heard of Merlin, but not of the Council. There's something I don't understand here. We were the guardians of magic. It was our job to shape it – and put it into formulas. And to devise new spells, ever more powerful.*

A silence, perhaps a sigh.

*"We explored all avenues – oh, cautiously, very cautiously! Some forces have terrible powers... And sometimes, after exploring them, we decided to forbid access to them when they seemed too dangerous.*

Another silence. Laureline isn't even aware of it: she imagines forces with terrible powers.

*"We were the seven most respected magicians. None of our peers ever defied our prohibitions. None. But in my stubbornness, I brought dishonor upon the Council. And I..."*

A very deep sigh.

"What did you do? I mean, if you're willing to tell me?"

Cautious, cautious... but she's dying to know.

*"Try to understand. We, the Mathemagicians, had access to all magic, since we decided what would be allowed or forbidden... One day, one cursed day, I discovered a new reduction spell. A complicated incantation, accompanied by a gesture with three fingers of the left hand.*

"What is a reduction spell?"

*"A spell that makes things smaller. This one reduced things 12 times over. With each use. After the third use, the subject was already 1,728 times smaller than its natural size.*

"That's great! And could it make them bigger again?"

– *Of course. With the same incantation and the same gesture, but with the right hand.*

– That's really handy. Can you teach it to me?

*"Out of the question, fair maiden. Learning magic is a long task that requires patience, discipline, and years of hard work. As for this spell, it has done enough harm..."*

– But why? It doesn't seem very dangerous to me?

*"Dangerous spells always seem harmless to the unconscious mind. And that only makes them more dangerous. This spell was iterative, which is why our Council decided to study it especially carefully.*

"Iterative? What's that?"

*"A spell that can be repeated. Before the Council, I cast it three times in a row on a barrel, and it became as big as one of your fingernails. Three more times and we could only see it with our most powerful glasses. In itself, an iterative spell is already worrying. But we also discovered that it was personal: none of the six other Mathemagicians could restore the barrel to its original size. Neither by reversing the spell nor by any other means. It was a near-certain clause for banishment – for prohibition: a spell that can only be lifted by the magician who cast it can create irreparable disasters.*

Laureline nodded gravely.

"Yes, I think I understand. If the magician dies, or something like that."

*"Or something like that, yes... But we continued to study it anyway. We were the Council, weren't we? We thought our wisdom would protect us from danger. And that it was our job to study every new spell in depth before issuing a verdict.*

*But that wasn't true. We had repeatedly forbidden other paths without taking them ourselves. In truth, that spell fascinated us – it fascinated me even more than my peers, and it was I who convinced them to continue our observations. It is only right that I pay the highest price.*

– What happened? What did you do?

It's late, she should be asleep: there's that recitation tomorrow morning. But she doesn't even want to think about it.

– *We cast the spell on ourselves. Several times.*

– But it wasn't dangerous, since you could go back?

*"That's exactly what we told ourselves. And that's what we did, without any difficulty. So we did it again. Each time venturing a little further.*

A long, long silence, which Laureline doesn't dare break.

*"We discovered the foundations of all matter. We reduced ourselves to the size of what your world calls a molecule, but we lacked the knowledge necessary to understand what we were seeing. It was mind-boggling. And then one day..."*

"One day... What?"

*"One day, we reached the limit of the spell. We had become smaller than anything you can imagine, and we wanted to shrink even further. But the spell – I don't know how to describe it to you... It slowed down our actions, it resisted our invocation.*

"And you forced it...?"

– No. Not that time. We returned to our normal size and reduced a silver ingot to that limit. And I made it cross it.

"And it disappeared, is that right?"

*"It had disappeared long ago, young lady. From the fifth incantation onwards, we could no longer see it. No, that's not it. A star appeared in place of the ingot. A star without heat and smaller than anything else.*

Lauréline is worried and captivated:

"You mean... a bit like you?"

*"A bit like me, yes. Like me. When I tried to return the ingot to its normal size, nothing happened. Nothing at all. It remained a star. I tried again, many times. We even tried the Collegiate Invocation, in which the powers of the other Mathemagicians enhanced mine. Without success. We then decided to invoke the spell again. It fought back fiercely, and only an exhausting Collegiate Invocation enabled us to subdue it. And the star disappeared. Forever. The ingot ceased to exist.*

– Brrr... I hope you didn't want to try it on yourself?

*"We were at the end of our strength. And very gloomy. A magician has duties, and respect for existence is one of the most absolute. We couldn't accept this disappearance. Many days of doubt followed, and I finally convinced the Council to let me reach the limit. With the idea that if we couldn't bring the ingot back to its original size, it was because it had become too small in relation to us. Too small for me to grasp it accurately... If I found myself at its level, I was sure I would succeed!*

"Oh dear. But you knew you were taking a risk, didn't you?"

*"I think so. And so did the Council. But with the hope of making amends for our mistake, they allowed me to attempt what should never have been attempted..."*

– And what happened?

She knows now, but she wants to hear it.

*"We waited for the new moon. Magic is often more favorable then. The Council imbued me with all the spells that could help or protect me – and it's thanks to one of those spells that you can hear and understand me, kind lady – and I reached the limit. I resisted the slowdown, I imposed my will... unfortunately!*

"And you crossed the line?"

*"I... imploded. Like an explosion, but inward. I went inside myself. And I crossed the boundary of the measurable: I no longer measured anything, neither in width, nor in height, nor in thickness. Nothing. I occupied exactly one point, without overflowing, without form: no head, no arms, no legs... But the spell hadn't killed me. I continued to think, and even to see, without understanding anything I saw. I now knew what had happened to the silver ingot, and I also knew that I should never have persisted!*

"But why? I don't understand. You did know how to use the spell backwards?"

*"Yes, kind lady, I knew how to do it. I knew the incantation by heart, of course. But I no longer had a form, no right hand to make the gesture... and it was a personal spell, so!"*

"Oh..."

Lauréline didn't quite know what to say:

"...you mean you've been like this all this time?"

Strangely, Ioran's "voice" seems amused, with an undertone of pride:

*"Yes... and no. Fortunately. 1,200 years in one point, I would have gone mad! Yes, young lady, 12 centuries separate what I told you from now. But I only made three stops there before tonight.*

"I don't understand."

That's not true, she understands perfectly well, she's just not sure she believes it. And calling someone a liar is not right – when it comes to a magician, it can even be dangerous!

*"I detect a hint of disbelief. You are mistaken, young lady, many magicians use 'Tempus Fugit', the spell of time travel! But it is very late, and you should have been asleep for a long time. And me... well, I think 'Tempus Fugit' has tired me out a little too.*

"Oh no, stay a little longer?"

But she can't help letting out a huge yawn, and her eyelids grow heavy, heavy...

"You'll come back, then? Promise?"

*"Yes, I'll come back, kind lady. Tomorrow evening. I promise, but sleep now!"*

"I'm sleeping, I'm sleeping... but do you really promise?"

*– Yes, really. Sleep!*

And as Lauréline's consciousness slowly slips away, she hears Ioran's song growing fainter and fainter:

*A point isn't much,  
It's even smaller than that...*

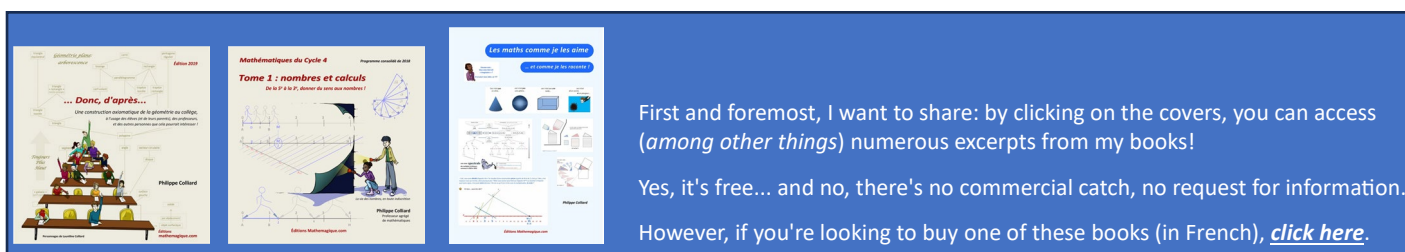
And she has just enough strength to smile and think:

– In the end, a point isn't that complicated. That's what Ioran takes up... But ME, how many points do I take up?

Far, far away, a voice answers her:

*"Billions, kind lady, billions... good night!"*

*I've been wandering for a long time,  
Never have I been lacking.*



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