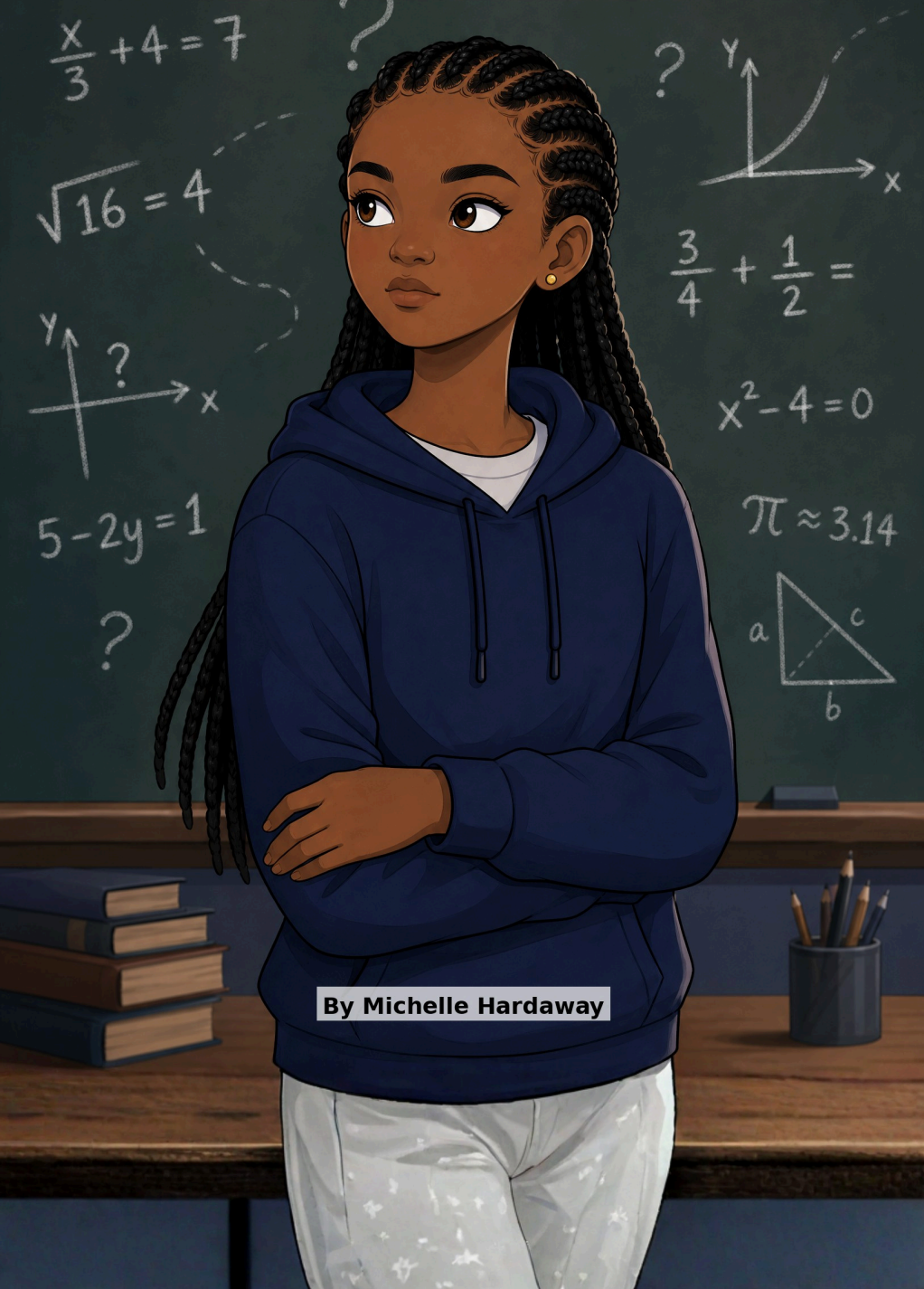


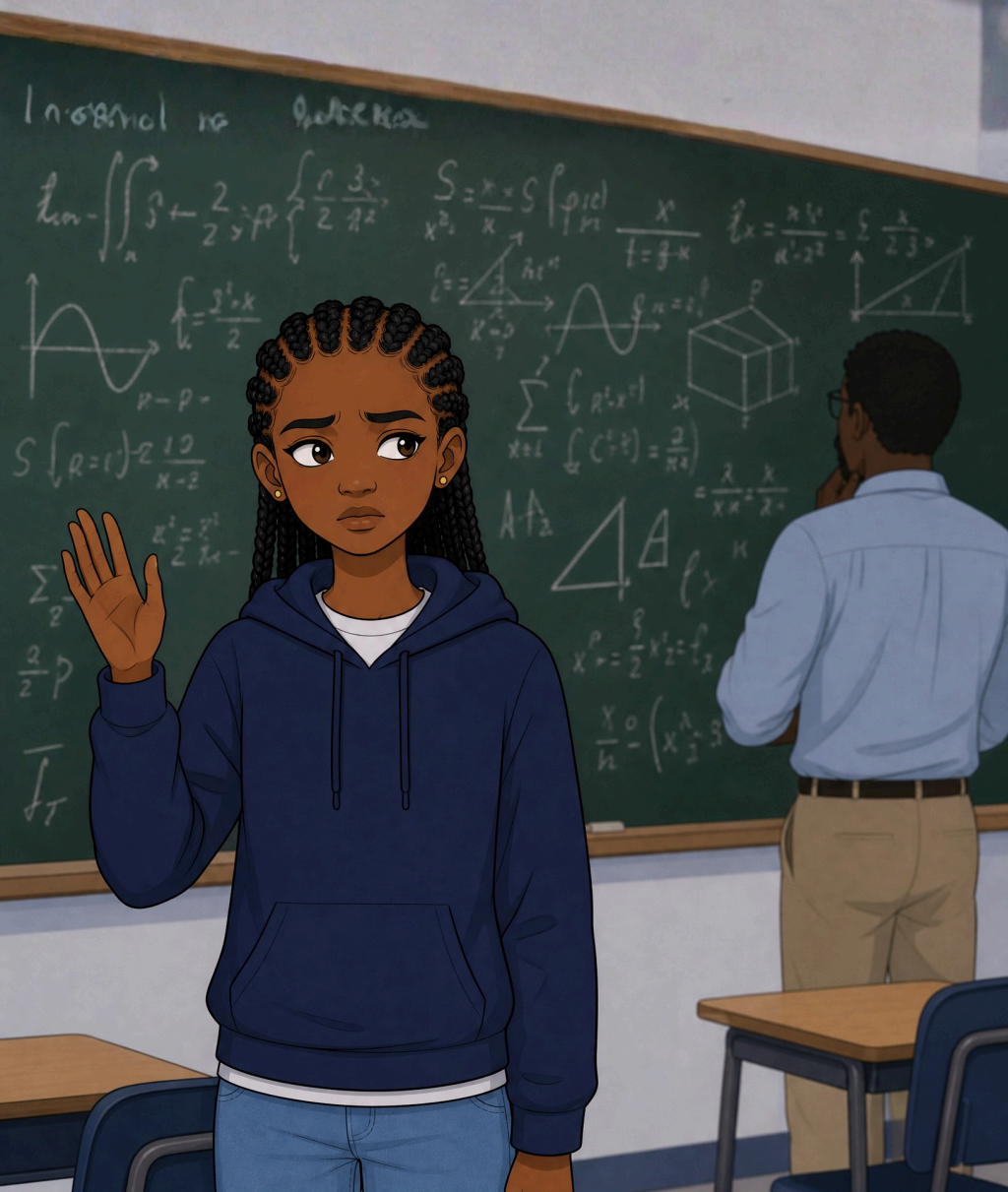
Penny and the Math Class That Didn't Add Up



By Michelle Hardaway



Page 1: Penny's World Penny was quiet. Not the "I forgot to talk" kind of quiet. More like the "I don't waste words unless I have to" kind of quiet. She was kind, observant, and extremely no-nonsense. If something didn't make sense, she didn't pretend it did. If something was unfair, she noticed it immediately... even if she didn't always say it out loud. Middle school, however, had its own opinions about Penny. And Penny had her own opinion about middle school. It was simple: "We are not friends."



Page 2: The Math Problem (Literally and Emotionally) Math class was Penny's biggest challenge. Not because she didn't try. But because no matter how hard she focused, the numbers might as well have been speaking a different language. She raised her hand sometimes. "Can you explain that again?" Her teacher would nod vaguely. "Just review the notes." Penny reviewed the notes. The notes reviewed her right back... and still made no sense. Eventually, she stopped asking.



Page 3: Invisible in Class Over time, something strange happened. Penny didn't get more help. She got less attention. It was like she had mastered the art of being academically invisible. If she asked a question, it was brushed off. If she didn't understand, she was told to "figure it out." So Penny did what Penny did best. She stayed quiet, did her work, and handled her frustration internally like a professional.



Page 4: The Giant Problem But math wasn't her only problem. There was also... her classmates. Especially one girl. Everyone called her "Big Shay" (not her real name, but it fit). She was tall, strong, and walked like she owned the air in the room. One day, Big Shay stopped next to Penny's desk. "You need to move," she said. Penny looked up calmly. "No," she replied. Just like that. No drama. No shaking voice. Just... no.



Page 5: The Classroom Goes Silent Big Shay blinked like she had misheard. "Excuse me?" "I said no," Penny repeated. "Now go find your own business." The room went quiet. Some students gasped. One kid dropped a pencil and didn't even bother picking it up. Penny went back to her work like she hadn't just disrupted the entire social order of middle school.



Page 6: Attempted Relocation Big Shay was not used to “no.” So she decided to solve the problem physically. She grabbed Penny’s chair. Then, in one smooth motion, lifted Penny right out of it. “I said MOVE,” she said again. But Penny did not panic. She locked her legs straight like a human tripod. Big Shay tried to set her down. Penny stayed upright. She tried again. Penny stayed upright. Third attempt. Still no success. The room looked like a very serious science experiment gone wrong. Finally, Big Shay sighed and put her back down.



Page 7: The Unexpected Respect Big Shay crossed her arms. "...I respect you," she said, almost confused by her own words. Penny adjusted her clothes and sat back down. "I don't need your respect," she replied calmly. "And don't put your hands on me again." The class froze. Even the air felt like it was watching. Big Shay paused... then nodded slightly and walked away. Nobody had ever seen that before.



Page 8: Penny Becomes a Legend (Unintentionally) By the next day, the hallway version of the story had evolved. By lunchtime, Penny had supposedly: "Judo flipped Big Shay" "Won a silent argument battle" "Mentally intimidated someone into retreat" None of which were true. Penny just kept doing her work. But now, people looked at her differently. Not because she was loud. But because she wasn't easily pushed around.



Page 9: The Letter Home One afternoon, Penny received a letter from her math teacher. It wasn't good news. Her grade was failing. Penny didn't argue. She just took it home and handed it to her mom. Her mom read it carefully. Then looked up. "Why are you failing math?" Penny explained everything. The confusion. The lack of help. The times she asked questions and was ignored. Her mom's expression slowly changed. Not angry at Penny. Angry for Penny. "I'm going to handle this," she said.





Page 10: The Next Day Surprise Penny didn't know what "handle this" meant. But she found out quickly. The next day, she was called out of class. Standing in the hallway were: Her mom The principal Her math teacher Penny blinked. "...Oh." Something serious was happening.



Page 11: The Truth Comes Out Penny's mom wasted no time. She asked the teacher directly: "Why was I not informed earlier?" The teacher tried to explain. "She's just not a good student—" That was the wrong answer. Penny's mom stepped in immediately. "My daughter is not a bad student. She is a student who asked for help and was ignored." The hallway went quiet. The principal listened carefully... and not happily. Because the truth was becoming very clear.



Page 12: A Decision Is Made The principal apologized. Not just to Penny. But to her mom. And to Penny herself. A decision was made quickly: Penny would be moved to a different math class with proper support. No more ignoring. No more brushing her off. Just actual teaching. Penny nodded quietly. "Okay," she said. And that was enough.



Page 13: Penny's Lesson A few weeks later, things began to change. Math didn't magically become easy. But it became understandable. And something else changed too. Penny started raising her hand again. Not because she suddenly loved attention. But because she finally had someone willing to answer. And when students saw her in the hallway, they didn't see someone to push around. They saw someone who would stand her ground without raising her voice.



Heartfelt Message Bullying doesn't only come from students—it can come from adults too when support is missing. You deserve to be heard, helped, and respected. And sometimes, standing up for yourself doesn't mean being loud—it means being firm, calm, and knowing when to ask for better help. You are not meant to be ignored. You are meant to be supported and understood.