

Solve For X

By Yvone Bamba

“But I’m not good at math,” I tell my calculus teacher, hoping this explanation is enough for the big, red X splattered across the top of the pop quiz he hands back to me.

My calculus teacher scoffs, “Math doesn’t care about your excuses. Math only cares about what X is.”

“I don’t care about what X is. Nobody cares. When we’re out in the real world, making a real difference with real jobs, nobody will even remember what X is.”

He examines me through his thick-framed glasses sliding down his nose, and exhales slowly, “You’re wrong.”

When we were kids, it was simple. X marked the spot for the places treasure chests were buried under six feet of sand, places pirates only dreamed of going. But pirates don’t build ships prepared to cross Red Seas.

Now,

X is the unknown we have yet to solve for, the axis perpendicular to Y, the Roman numeral, an operation, multiply.

X is a wing fighter, the group of mutants led by Professor

X is the radiology test they order when they need to visualize the world that is happening inside of you, to see what holds you up. Bone. Air. Blood.

X is the half of us we get from our mothers.

X is the black Sharpie written on the back of her hands because she is not old enough to drink at the bars at these concerts yet, but that doesn’t matter because the music does.

X is the kiss he cannot give her from an Atlantic ocean away.

So X is the letter he scribbles down on this piece of paper

As the simplest promise for their future plans.

Exes are people of the past, and X is his name on my contacts list, attached to all the memories I no longer plan on revisiting.

Then again, I never planned on him being an X so why haven’t I deleted his number?

X's are the zoomed-in picture of a meteor shower moment
created by two lines, two paths that crossed once upon a time.
This is an intersection, an interchange
But it isn't the only one.

"Are you sure you wish to delete this contact?"

X