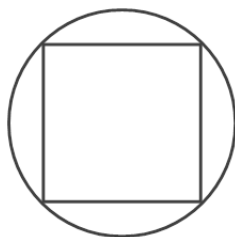


The Ambition of Geometric Love

by Roy Wnek

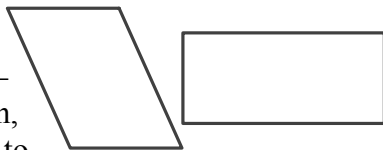


Square was a regular fellow, well balanced and quite equal on all sides. Even his angles were considered all right. He came from the Parallelogram branch of the well-regarded Quadrilateral family and was probably its most promising member. In fact, he was considered by many to be near the pinnacle of the whole Polygon race. Only the over-achieving Triangle could shoot a lower score in numbers of sides. But as we all know, Triangle had his own personal flaws, being not always regular—sometimes Triangle could even be quite obtuse. Square possessed none of those flaws.

Nevertheless, Square led an unhappy life. In fact he was a closed figure obsessed. At first, it was merely admiration, then an innocent planar crush, developing into all-consuming Euclidean love. The target of Square's emotions was Circle. He had never seen such a perfectly beautiful figure.

She had a smooth curve all around and with the cutest little center in her middle. She also wore no angles and Square loved that about her. And Circle got around; she rolled with a fast crowd, in ways Square never could.

Square's two brothers, Rhombus and Rectangle—even his unbalanced cousin, Rhomboid—tried in vain to

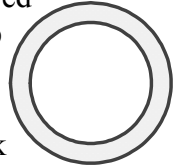


warn him about Circle. She was empty they insisted, merely a set of evenly placed points. Even her much lauded centered was only definitional. In vain, they warned Square that she would break his heart.

Totally smitten, Square could hear none of that. He worshiped Circle. Oh, how she rolled with ease. He dreamed of a future with her—any future with her would do: a join or a union. Yes, he was so desperate that even a quick two-point clip would be so very nice.

He fantasized about her constantly. How she'd extrude to a long cylinder or rotate into a smooth sphere and of course, how she'd circumscribe him with her even embracing his four eager corners. And the hole of her negation kept him awake on many nights.

The entire Quadrilateral clan's concern for Square grew daily. Knowing his preference for curved shapes the Parallelograms tried to set him up with Annulus—at least in her area she had some substance. Square dismissed the idea out of hand. He said Annulus was just thick in the middle and no substitute for the circles that made her who she was.



Once, one of the Ellipse sisters showed romantic interest in Square. And in spite of the Parallelogram's doubts about her conical origins, they encouraged Square to at least meet her. Upon seeing her, Square expressed quite a rude view of her two uneven foci. Ellipse ran home in tears.



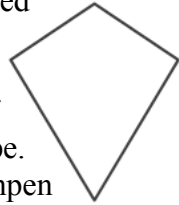
But one day, Square got his chance. He had brought up the courage to talk with Circle. They hit it off instantly and Square was beyond delighted. He thought that he had died and gone to geometry heaven when she fell tangent to one of his sides.

Things started well for the two shapes. Circle was seen with Square all over Flatland. Square couldn't be happier or more pleased with life. He especially loved

showing her off to his astounded and very skeptical brothers. Alone with them, Square would taunt them on how they could never get all their corners on her at one time like he could—and, by the way, often did.



Square dismissed his brothers' continued warnings as rank jealousy. He even laughed off Kite, his unbalanced cousin, who insisted that he could circumscribe Circle himself if he wanted to but she was just not his type. At the moment in time, nothing could dampen Square's high spirits.



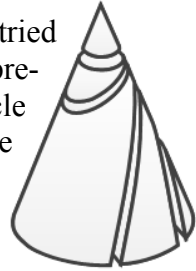
Square sought to spend more time with Circle, if such a thing were even possible. But behind their backs, rude jokes about square pegs and round holes met with quick laughter. Soon ugly rumors began to swirl about them and their mismatched love. The cruelest of this gossip speculated on the horrid off-spring Square and Circle were undoubtedly creating. They were already to have produced a hideous brood of ill-shaped Lunes, some of which were said to be nothing more than mere squiggles that ought not be allowed to live.



Together, Square and Circle ignored even the meanest gossip about them. They had each other and that was all that mattered. The rest of those shapes could just go get erased. Square and Circle began to seriously, and with geometric precision, plan their future together.

And that is when it all fell apart. Square was invited to meet Circle's family, the Conics. They were known far and wide as being extremely strict. They greeted Square

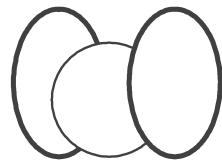
with cold animosity. For his part, Square tried to be optimistic and hoped they would appreciate his honest and regular features. Circle just wanted to die on the spot. Beyond the immediate embarrassment that she felt, she knew it would soon be over between her and Square; the Conics would see to that.



They sat down to a meal of fine Conic cuisine, cherries, grapes, oranges, and meat-balls. But having been raised exclusively on food packaged in nice, cornered boxes, Square found it all strange and quite unappetizing. To make matters worse, after dinner, the Conics took glee-ful pleasure in mocking Square's awkward flatness and peculiar corners. When they grew bored with their cruel attacks, the Conics just slid Square out of their house on one of his sides. As a final insult, they called him "a square".

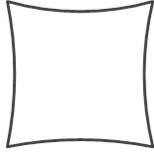
Square heard Circle's sobs fade in the distance as he dragged himself home with a coefficient of friction that only the rejected could understand. At home, he ran a gauntlet of further abuse: he should have known better, he was told so, she was no good, he was a fool, etc., etc., etc.

He longed to see Circle again but the Conics simply wouldn't allow it. Occasionally, he caught glimpses of her around Flatland. But she was always accompanied by two of her more elliptic brothers, both of whose extra-bold line-weight scared the very center out of Square. He dared not approach her. Worse still, he was never sure that she even saw him.

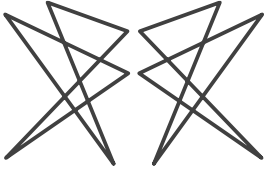


Square was at the lowest point in his life. His sides felt unimaginably bruised and deflated, just as if he were trying to tile a hyperbolic plane. And that was a truly

frightening prospect for one of the Euclidean faith as was Square, but he just didn't care any longer. He was on the verge of breaking down into a hopeless mass of disjoint segments. Each day he'd have to be dragged from his bed by his brothers and ordered to "Come on and snap out of it". He'd stare at his transposition in the mirror and even he didn't like what he saw. His corners were red and moist from crying himself to sleep, and his weak sides looked no better. Worst of all, those sides of his were so terribly straight. And to him that was the cause of all his woes. If only...



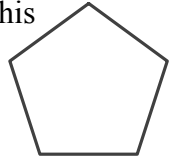
For weeks, he never got much farther in his day than being dragged from his bed to lament in front of the mirror and return in wails of regret. The Parallelograms went from initial amusement to deep concern to finally feeling that Square was a hopeless case. They said he was all too regular by half for his own well-being. Even his brothers lost interest in Square's plight, especially after they began going with the Concave sisters who were a kinky pair of self-intersecting polygons.



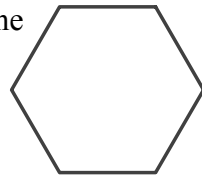
One day, unexpectedly, Square's life changed forever. He was in the middle of his daily lament in front of the mirror. If only he have been born a circle, life would be just fine. All of a sudden the grandest of ideas hit him like a bilateral intersection. He'd turn himself into a circle and then the Conics would have to accept him and he could be together with Circle. Of course, he knew it would take a great deal of effort but he was sure that he could do it. He had to do it, for his dear Circle's sake.

So Square began his quest of complete transfor-

mation. Standing in front of the mirror, Square selected a side by a quick round of “Eeny, meeny, miny, moe”. Over the next hour or so he strained with all his might, squeezing hard on his corners until his first new vertex appeared. Although fatigued from the effort, he was immediately delighted with his success. He was now a pentagon and it felt very odd.



But being a pentagon was not much better, Square quickly realized. So tired as he was, he began squeezing on his corners again. It took the rest of the day for another vertex to pop out. Square was now a hexagon. Square was utterly exhausted but he really loved his new form. Not only was he on his way to become a circle, he liked the look of the hexagon and the fact that he could still tile a plane without gaps.



Square collapsed in bed to rest and await the return of his brothers and their certain admiration. Square fell asleep to dreams of a wondrous reunion with circle. He was awakened by the late return of Rhombus and Rectangle both of whom were quite drunk. They sang rude songs and performed a drunken dance; Rhombus swayed on his angles while Rectangle gyrated his sides. They boasted at the top their lungs about the many pleasures of the Concave sisters and of the acuteness of their interior angles.

When their focus turned to Square, he had the blanket pulled up, covering nearly all but a single vertex. Rectangle immediately noticed something wrong with his brother’s exposed angle. Asked what was wrong, Square became very self-conscious and refused to lower the blanket. After some unsuccessful coxing, Rhombus became impatient and yanked the blanket off of Square.

To say his brothers were shocked and horrified would be an extreme understatement. Rhombus nearly collapsed into a single segment and Rectangle refusing to believe the abomination before his eyes, vowed to lay off strong drink. Their panicked shouts added to Square's embarrassment and brought their parents running into their room.

Mrs. Parallelogram exclaimed "Oh my god!" and fainted on the spot. Mr. Parallelogram snatched Square by one of his vertices and dragged him out of the house. Once outside, Old Man Parallelogram laid into Square. He wondered whatever possessed Square to do such a foolish and obviously irreversible act and cursed the disrespect that Square has shown to his mother. Finally, Old Man Parallelogram kicked Square out of the house, saying that he was no longer a Parallelogram, heck, he wasn't any sort of a Quadrangle. And he better never show his many corners around this part of town again.

Unimaginably life sunk even lower for Square. Flatland became a very hostile place for him; both the Conics and all the Quadrilaterals shunned him with evil stares and hostile threats. For the longest time Square remained a hexagon. He was listless and without the slightest motivation to add more vertices. He did once try to hide his extra corners and possibly be accepted back into Quadrangle society. But it was no use, he only succeeded in looking like a slightly irregular polygon. So for many months, he lived on the fringes of Flatland society, mostly in the company of bee-keepers, architects, and board-war-gamers.

One afternoon as Square was returning to the low-rent honeycomb in which he lived, he caught sight of Circle. He may have imaged it but he thought that she saw him too and smiled at him before being ushered off by her brothers. His old feelings for her returned in full force

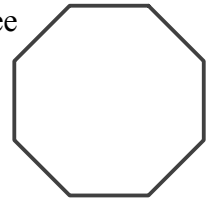
and he found new meaning in life. Square immediately rushed home.

Standing in front of his old second-hand mirror, he began squeezing his corners. Square had almost forgotten the exertion required to pop a new vertex and exhaustion overcame him before the slightest sign of deformation. Laying on his back he realized that he now had six corners to squeeze. And that would mean a significantly greater effort to accomplish. But he wouldn't be dissuaded from this goal of complete transformation and a blissful reunion with Circle.

Square took to the challenge with the discipline and patience that only a regular polygon could muster. He set to squeezing his corners every day with a carefully paced routine of effort, reset, and re-effort. With practice he found that he could maintain a good pace nearly all day.

His efforts were rewarded with a new vertex in a couple days and another by the end of the first week. He was now an octagon. He had to move out of the honeycomb. But with a new job as a stop sign he could afford his own house. Still Square never neglected his daily squeezing routine.

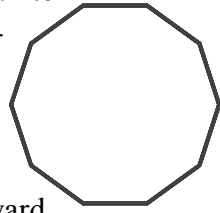
His next two vertices came within the month. Square was quite delighted with himself and his new look as a Decagon. He could now plainly see the circle developing in himself. With great pride and self-satisfaction, he decided to parade around Flatland, showing off his new look with all its many sides and shallows angles.



Square was disappointed not to see Circle about that day. However he did run face-to-face into Rhombus and

Rectangle. His bothers exclaimed, “My god, what have you done to yourself?” Refusing to hear anything that Square had to say, they demanded that Square immediately seek medical help. They even suggested that he admit himself to a sanitarium for misguided polygons. Square absolutely refused them and parted company, cursing their lack of understanding.

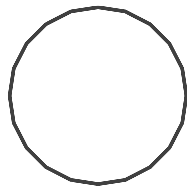
Square’s life fell into a routine. With his new facets, he had been promoted up from his stop-sign job. Every day without fail, he exercised his vertices. He didn’t lose heart when it took a few months for his next two vertices to develop. As a dodecagon, Square began to forget many of his old quadrangle ways. He rarely ate packaged food any more, instead he found his 10 sides preferred more circular food. Also, he no longer slid around; rather he was now able to roll himself. Rolling was still very awkward for him and he got stuck often. Still he was rolling and he told himself that it was very circle-like. He couldn’t wait to show himself off to his beloved Circle, whenever he should see her.



Actually, Square had not seen Circle, even from afar, in well over a year. But he was not discouraged in the slightest. He maintained his daily squeezing routine fueled by the certain fantasy of his eventual reunion with Circle. Even as Square honed his skill, new vertices took greater effort and more time to develop. Months would transpire between new ones.

Between work and his daily routine, Square’s life became very full and time passed quickly. By the time he became a pentadecagon, he took his 15 sides with little celebration. Nevertheless, he did promise himself something special at 20.

A few years later, Square achieved his 20th side; he was now a icosagon. Casual acquaintances and a few of his coworkers actually mistook him for a circle. This made Square immensely happy and very satisfied with himself and the world. By now he rolled fairly well and rarely got stuck. Square felt so confident that he decided to boldly enter the Conics' neighborhood and present himself at Circle's house.



At the front door of the Conics's home, Square suddenly felt self-conscious and wanted to bolt. But the extra-bold Ellipse brothers opened the door before Square's feet had a chance to obey his second thoughts. At first the brothers didn't notice Square's inconspicuous sides. But when he spoke, the boys immediately recognized him and unleashed such an onslaught of threatening abuse that it could be heard for miles. In a bouncing roll, Square barely escaped with his life.

Square felt thoroughly dejected and rather confused; how could the Conics have fostered such vehemence for years. At what he perceived to be a safe distance, Square turned to look back at the Conics' house. He saw the Ellipse brothers' anger going nearly hyperbolic. But he was saved by their present inability to chase him. He scanned though each of the windows of the Conics' house for Circle. Catching slightest glimpse of her being pulled back from an upper window only reinforced his rejection. His roll home was slow and terribly painful.

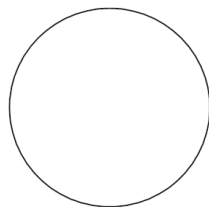
Over the following years, Square continued his daily exercises. Realizing new vertices was increasingly ever more difficult and took longer and longer. A new one every few months slowed to only a couple a year. While he could often pass as circle, Square no longer celebrated any new vertices. His triacontagon milestone passed with

no more than an approving nod into his mirror. Years later, when Square turned 40 and a tetracontagon, he hardly took any notice of his 40th vertex.

All the while he kept a look out for Circle wherever he went and with whomever he met. Even the occasional distant glimpse of her eventually dwindled to the rare second-hand rumors of her life. Some said that she got married off to some degenerate Conic. Others heard that she was banished from Flatland after she eloped with a Cylinder. Still others maintained that she was still living at home, kept virtual prisoner of her brothers. But whether he believed any of these stories, he never failed to listen. Also, he never dared to return to the Conics' house.

Square was now living the life of a circle and was generally accepted as one by nearly every shape, including most conics. Alas, he never tried to contact Circle or even venture near her family's house. He pretty much led his life without thinking of her or his occasional uncontrolled new vertices. Still, as the years passed, Square would every so often, ponder on where might she be living, what her life would have been like, how is she now?

In his later years, Square became a pentacontagon. He never knew exactly when he got his 50th vertex, likely it developed quietly in his sleep. Deformations like that sometimes happen to older polygons.



Square was rolling around town with some routine errands, mindlessly enjoying a clear autumn afternoon. He had been smoothly rolling for years, but now he preferred going a little slower. Coming out of the grocery store where he had been stocking up on discounted cans of

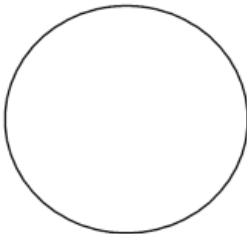
Spaghetti-O's, he caught sight of a familiar face.

Square had anticipated that meeting Circle for the first time in so many years would unbearably awkward. But it proved to be reasonably bearable. Circle seemed overwhelmed by Square's appearance. Of course, she had heard rumors of his changes which she never fully believed. But the actuality in front of her was something else. She rather approved. Nevertheless, Square could feel discomfort in her.

For his part, she also seemed different. Square remembered a young Circle with a smooth ideal curve all around. Age had had developed any number of kinks in her circumference but nature kindly left them quite small and very evenly distributed. Square found Circle's appearance pleasant and quite dignified for her age. Still, he couldn't shake a vague uncomfortable feeling towards her.

The two shapes began swapping superficial details of their lives with a polite unease. Their belaboring of neutral topics was an obvious avoidance of personal feelings and any mention of their families. They chatted politely for a socially acceptable amount of time.

As the two shapes drifted on to mundane subjects like the prospects for rain and the high price of fresh doughnuts, each began to offer excuses for a hasty departure. A short ceremonial hug later, they were rolling their separate ways. For the rest of the afternoon, they both held a



common but unemotional thought of how well the other looked.

