

SURROUNDED BY SQUARES

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There once was a sphere in the land of cubes.

It was a rarity, of course, but not uncommon. As you can well imagine, however, it was quite a shame on his family. Not that it would be fair to say that an overt social stigma was attached to the family for this deed, but undoubtedly it led to whisperings about the background of a family that could introduce such a rounded oddity into a world of squared perfection. And these whispers had their effect.

The sphere early on was shadowed with guilt for violating the symmetry of his more angular fellows. At home he would receive such caustic admonishings as: "Now, you behave or I'll flatten your rounded hide," or "There are places for such as you." He didn't know if there really were such places but remarks such as these, though generally rare, also had their effects. For the most part his family tried not to blame him for their social eclipse. It was not his fault, after all.

Outside, however, there were no such mediating motivations. He was taunted unmercifully by his six-sided contemporaries and befriended by no one. Why should they? With his awkward shape he could play none of their games such as "Pyramid Building." He did have one edge, though, and that was his ability to roll, but this just made them hate him all the more.

Quite naturally he came to be a loner, even taking a perverse pride in his difference. Maybe they were right, he decided, when they jeered that his thoughts ran around in circles. And so he grew used to being alone, though he never became content being so. He went for long journeys to enjoy his one advantage over his angular race—that of mobility. But the loneliness grew as did an inner determination to succeed despite his difference.

And he tried. Tried hard and long to fit a sphere into a world designed by cubes for cubes. The rejections were unending but at least he had built up some immunity to the insults of others. It was the little

things more than any other that defeated him—rolling about helplessly in a square seat on the subway, bouncing down escalators while cubes rode on immobile. But even these hardships he might have faced if not for the ultimate rejection.

There had been one cube he had been attracted to (even though he was a sphere he had adopted the values of what was considered beauty in his society), and she had not turned away, at first. Would that she had! But she gave him the first companionship he had ever known. And so when social pressures forced her to abandon her ideals of the equality of all despite their shape and leave him, he finally broke.

He knew where to go. Those “places for such as you” with which he had been threatened so long ago did exist, he knew now. There was only one and he had found its location and buried the knowledge hoping he would never need it but fearing he might.

The sign on the building said: “Want a straight and level course through life? We will square you up.” He struggled with himself only briefly. To be normal like everyone else was more than he could really believe. It would mean losing a part of himself, argued the hardened individualist side of him, but he suppressed the arguments in a sudden burst of passion. To be like everyone else! To have the wealth of his world finally opened to him! And the companionship of his fellows he had longed for would be his! And maybe even the one cube . . . ? He went inside.

They put him in a great stamping machine, like a printing press, which stamped, crushed, and molded him. And when he came out he had six sides like all the other cubes and perfect geometric symmetry. And he went out into his world and became one of the faceless building blocks of society and did what everyone else did and enjoyed what everyone else enjoyed, and sometimes he almost managed to forget that he had once been different.