

Chapter 7

Love's Awakening

*Pace non trovo et non ò da far guerra
e temo e spero, et ardo et son un ghiaccio,
et volo sopra'l cielo et giaccio in terra,
et nulla stringo et tutto'l mundo abbraccio*

- Petrarch, Sonnet 104

Felicia Salvador sat next to me in class. We got into the habit of comparing notes to see if between the two of us we could make some sense out of Frank's lectures. We couldn't do this in class, since Kriegle threw a temper tantrum whenever he caught us conversing. Still, for some strange reason he insisted that we continue to sit next to each other. He once told us, in a voice thick with menace, that we were his "witnesses for the prosecution". What deeper meanings were contained in that comment totally escaped us.

Felicia and I therefore arranged to meet clandestinely, in a darkened booth in a tawdry yet cozy drugstore/diner, the kind of place dear to students, yet certain to be shunned by anyone of Frank's aristocratic pretensions.

In terms of advancing our studies, these sessions were not overly helpful; yet they were valuable in other ways. Her notes in Exceptional Logics were even more scattered than mine. I'd taken Kriegle's disconnected oratory and worked it up into a continuous hydrodynamic froth of meaningless phrases. One might have called the result a form of

Surrealism. Felicia, just as confused, had simply written down the odd word here and there, not even noticing where they were being placed on the page, under the misguided assumption that she would be able to rearrange them later on into a more-or-less connected discourse.

The imaginative scenarios in my pages did not in any way complement the random words on hers. Had an impartial observer from the mathematics community been invited to read our notes, he would have thought we were attending classes in completely unrelated subjects. None of her key words appeared in any of my phrases, nor did my phrases shed any light on her words.

We usually gave up after 15 minutes and spent the remainder of the time just getting to know one another. Obviously I was curious to know what a Felicia Salvador could see in a Frank Kriegle. My question came to her as no surprise: one had the impression that she'd often asked herself the same thing. When I first brought up the subject she countered with an official statement to the effect that she was aware of all his faults but was still very much in love with him. Piecing together a more satisfactory answer required several weeks of meetings at the diner. The picture that finally emerged is unavoidably biased by future developments, though true in its essentials:

They'd met several times at social events in the department. However the first time they really took a serious look at one another was at a football game in December of

1947. Frank Kriegle was a football fanatic. Felicia had never seen an American football game in Argentina. Out of curiosity she'd bought a ticket and gone alone to the stadium. As she recalled, Frank was standing up on the bleachers and compulsively stuffing popcorn in his mouth. He was appropriately dressed for the occasion: a long woollen scarf with alternating red and white stripes; Ivy League trench coat; baseball cap and mittens bearing the Zelosophic insignia. The consumption of popcorn was only interrupted long enough for him to shout obscenities whenever the home team fell short of his expectations.

Felicia was seated on a bench three rows down in the bleachers and directly below him. What drew her eyes in his direction was the impact of volleys of popcorn flying out of his mouth and dropping into her coat collar and down the back of her neck. She turned around to glare at him in indignation. Their eyes met; each held the others' as in an iron vice : it was love at first sight.

Formal introductions were superfluous since they'd already met in the department. It appears that this total alienation from their natural habitat had been required to effect the copulation of spark and tinder. I have often speculated about the significance of that football game: was it the stimulating catalyst of manly sport which heightened the flow of vital juices, in order that the quivering babe of love might spring unsolicited from the loins of visual contact? Or would it be more accurate to say that Frank

Kriegle had finally found someone who would allow him to drop popcorn down the back of her neck without protest?

As with most things, the answer will never be known; not that it matters very much. Even if correct, the latter hypothesis does not explain her side of the attraction. Despite her insistence that she'd loved him from that instant recognition at the football game, what I think happened is that the impressions accumulated from their earlier encounters in the mathematics department finally came to a head. Frank Kriegle challenged Felicia Salvador's basic assumptions about human nature. The enigma haunted her until she found relief in the conclusion that it was love.

After the game they went to her apartment for coffee. Frank tried within his limitations to play the gallant. He apologized for getting her coat dirty, even promised to buy her a new one. Having gotten that out of the way, he spent the next hour demeaning the cut, design and material of the one she was wearing until he'd convinced her that the genes that attune one to modish style and fashion were not in her heredity. As he lectured her on her biological incapacity for civilization, they lay side by side, face upwards on her bed, with Mozart on the record player.

From that initial moment of eye-contact there was never any doubt about where things were headed. All the same it took over a month for them to hop into bed together. Felicia confided in me that Frank was pathologically shy; she herself is not exactly the most aggressive person on the

planet. There could never be any question of their holding hands together in public, let alone hugging or kissing. Even in the safety of her own apartment many subjective hang-ups obstructed the performance of the customary rituals.

In the beginning, a date meant a long and dreadful evening in her apartment. The boredom was excruciating. While Felicia sat up rigidly on the couch, immobilized and exasperated, waiting to be touched, Frank tried to work up the nerve to do so. For the first month or so they sat separated by a distance of 5 or more feet. As Felicia stared at the upper left hand corner of the room with hands folded on her lap, Frank, while talking an impassioned babble of mathematics, made groping motions with his left hand. As quanta will fall through a diffraction grating, he did accomplish random hits every now and then on her shoulders and breasts. Such sessions could go on for 3 hours at a stretch.

By the end of that first month Kriegle had worked up the nerve to rest his hand on her shoulder for long periods : unbearably long periods from what she told me. It would be as tedious for me to relate every stage through which they passed before making the final plunge, as it would be to have to relive their experience of doing so . A final existential leap was needed to get them past the down-to-the-underwear phase; but after that it was easy.

All too easy, as Felicia was to discover. Next to mathematics, sex was the only outlet powerful enough to mitigate all the frustrations of a Frank Kriegle's tortured

existence. It was only after she was absolutely certain that she could trust me that Felicia confessed that for the first year the only way to get him out of bed was to remind him of some theorem he was intent on proving. It was just her good fortune that the problems he chose to tackle were beyond the power of a dozen mathematicians working in tandem . Otherwise she could never have gotten rid of him.

Mathematics, sex, fashion; yet the learned Kriegle had ideas about politics, too. In her years as a undergraduate in the university at Buenos Aires, Felicia had fancied herself a Marxist of somewhat ambiguous persuasion: she'd gone to leftist rallies and supported 'people's revolutions' around the world. Settled in the United States and doing graduate study in mathematics she'd discovered that women, even educated ones were encouraged to not think much about politics. Her relationship with Frank Kriegle had led her to understand that she had no choice in the matter. It is no exaggeration to say that Frank could have her chewing the wallpaper once he started going on politics.

Frank was a fascist, an anarchist, a racist, a Marxist - a bit of everything in fact - but basically he was just a prick. The most astounding tenet of his political philosophy was mass extermination of the unworthy. To his way of thinking too many inferior people were alive on an already overpopulated planet. They weren't happy - how can anyone ignorant of (for example) mathematical logic, be accounted happy? - and they made everyone else unhappy. The world

had to be thinned out to insure the survival of the intelligent. Frank's fantasy schemes for achieving this objective made the architects of the Third Reich look like a pack of incompetent ninnies.

I'd already heard from him more than I ever wanted to hear again about his defoliation scheme. Defoliation was both simple and cost effective, and the only real objection to its indiscriminate employment was that large scale population displacements could lead to rioting, mob violence and other consequences of anarchy. It was a virtual certainty as well that many of the wrong people would be eliminated along with those who ought to be disposed of.

Kriegle therefore suggested that one begin by defoliating small tracts of land over an extended period of time. The uprooted hordes of refugees could then be engineered into patches of desert before being herded into concentration camps. When the overcrowding reached the breaking point, the government could begin dropping the A-bombs.

Frank was noted for expressing these views at Mensa meetings where he received a cordial reception. But poor Felicia was obliged to listen to him elaborating his mad schemes for hours on end.

Surprisingly, (or perhaps not so surprisingly) Frank thought of himself as a Socialist: among the undesirables he wanted to eliminate were the corporate executives. Felicia had been exposed to these ideas for so long she'd almost come to

believe in them herself. With a painful hesitation in her voice she asked me if I agreed with him.

After giving the matter some thought I confessed that I didn't. It was more than likely that his notions, however clever they might be, contained something in them that ought to be considered immoral. His logic I granted was airtight, and his arguments appeared to follow inevitably from first principles. All the same it just didn't seem right to murder so many people. That's what she thought at the beginning, Felicia replied. Now she wasn't so sure. She acknowledged that it was possible to love someone and not agree with his ideas. She imagined it might even be possible to love a man for himself while hating him for his ideas. But what could one do when the man and the thinker were so tangled up that it was impossible to extricate one from the other?

My heart went out to her at once. How much I'd suffered from precisely this ambivalence of attachment! How many good friendships I'd seen ruined through the frank revelation of beliefs, either my friend's or my own ! The stale cliché , "Love is blind" is well off the mark. It is more accurate to say that love is stupid . Few emotional attachments can long survive the intrusion of an idea. Throwing a concept between friends or lovers creates as much devastation as dropping a lit match in a gas tank.

Writers and philosophers had by and large avoided looking at the extent to which brute unquestioning stupidity

is essential to peace and harmony in all human relationships . No society could last a day, filled with Nietszches and Wagners! Love is impatient of opinions, intolerant of ideas, forgiving only of prejudices, and that with condescension. If one is in love and wishes to continue to be loved in return, no tactic is too underhanded that impedes the communication of even one complete thought to the object of one's affection.

Over the weeks as Felicia continued to confide in me, it became clear that her relationship with Frank Kriegle was poised, like a ballerina on tip-toe, on the presumption that he would never be expected to acknowledge that Felicia Salvador had a mind . A mind, Felicia certainly had. She had no confidence in it, but it was there, and it was impressive.

At the age of 15 she'd memorized the eclipse tables. Felicia could predict an eclipse anywhere in the world for the next 2 centuries . Before entering the university she'd trained herself to do arithmetic in base twelve. This unusual skill could be put to good use in Number Theory, even though she was intended to specialize in Algebraic Geometry. She was remarkable in lots of ways and Frank Kriegle didn't know about them. She also had original ideas in politics, much better than Kriegle's, which she'd kept to herself. One day Felicia told me that she'd uncovered a statistical correlation between fluctuations in the Earth's gravitational field and the inevitable Marxist revolution. According to her theory, such fluctuations could be closely correlated to the cycles of inflation and depression. There had to come a day when the

oscillations of the gravitational field struck the resonance frequency of the business cycle, resulting in universal chaos.

I was very pleased that Felicia had chosen me to discuss ideas she could never tell her fiancé. Victim of my own vanity I encouraged her to pour her heart out to me. It wasn't long before I fell head over heels in love with her. It was my first infatuation, as sentimental, pathetic, ridiculous and tragic as such things always are. The memory of it haunts me to this very day.

Of course I'd liked her from the start. As a colleague she was bright, free from envy, and willing to give encouragement even while pointing out the flaws in one's reasoning. Despite her connection to Frank Kriegle we might have gone on being friends indefinitely. Yet it was not to be. I was at precisely that age when the sexual oversoul proclaims its immanence, always with great fanfare, staking its imperious claims on the world, intolerant of opposition, an irrepressible, irresistible force of awesome destructive power that, once erupting in the psyche, ceases only with death.

Although 11 years my senior, Felicia was a woman. Felicia's interests were compatible with mine. As a companion, Felicia was congenial and charming. Felicia furthermore was pretty, sensual in a Spanish way with a polish of European sophistication that many must have found irresistible. Felicia and I were together too many hours each week. The rest is history.

My romantic interest in her was initially aroused by the sound of her voice making calculations in duodecimal arithmetic. To a trained mathematician the noises generated by verbal computation produce a sweet, gentle, purring music. In no form of computation is this more pronounced than in duodecimal arithmetic, which enables associations to be set up between the twelve digits of the representation modulo 12, and the twelve tones of the dodecaphonic system. Frank Kriegle may have acknowledgment no other God before him than Mozart, but Felicia was vintage Schönberg.

Sometimes she would recite in English, sometimes in Spanish. Words such as *dos*, *tres*, *cuatro*, being so much more musical than *two*, *three*, *four*, there was no mystery in their capacity to lull me into a delicious slumber. As substitutions for "10" and "11", she used the words *sueno* and *corazon*, *dream* and *heart* in English. No doubt she imagined I was too juvenile for them to have much effect on me.

Hypnotized by the rhythmic gouts of soothing alto melody cascading freely from her full-blooded, quivering lips, my heart, unresisting to its magmatic flow, was gently rocked into a state of mild hypnosis.

Of a sudden it struck me with the force of a tidal wave that one of Felicia's ample breasts was larger than the other. We'd been sitting next to one another in Kriegle's classes for

weeks without my taking stock of this commonplace truth. It occurred to me that this phenomenon was characteristic of all women, that it had been staring me in the face all my life without ever entering my awareness. So addicted in mankind to bilateral symmetry .

These idle reflections set my mind to wandering through labyrinths of hypothesis and deduction. This discovery, measured in terms of its revolutionary impact on my world-view, bears comparison with the moment at which Galileo Galilei remarked that there was something unusual in the swaying of a pendulum, a phenomenon familiar for mankind for over a million years . Galileo's insight ushered in all of Modern Science. My meditations on the relative proportions of Felicia's breasts heralded the quite terrifying eruption of my libido, much as if a tree , smouldering wickedly in the dark earth for untold ages, were to spontaneously blossom above the ground, grown to its full height , diversified and articulated to the outermost twig.

Felicia and I had already been sitting together for an hour in our customary booth in the drugstore. We'd wasted most of that time trying to reconstruct some meaning from our lecture notes in Exceptional Logics, and we were both knocked out. It was then that, by way of a diversion, that Felicia proposed to recite, declaming every step along the way, the calculation of π to 144 duodecimal places.

The realization that her left breast was smaller than the right came at the 28th duodecimal place. Of course there had

to be other women whose left breasts are larger than their right. There was a natural subdivision of the world's population of women into these two classes, (making some convenient decision as to where to place the boundary situations in which both breasts are roughly equal.)

This led to the peculiar insight that I preferred women who belonged to the class occupied by Felicia. No rational explanation for this preference was forthcoming. As an infant I'd been nurtured on baby formula and Similac. Yet it was obvious to me that, had I been breast-fed, the right breast would have been the one most frequently sought.

A statistical study could profitably be made of such anomalous biases. As subject for the Ph.D. thesis of some grad student in Sociology, one could hardly come up with anything better. One imagines the National Endowment for the Humanities underwriting a door-to-door survey, or a questionnaire on which men would be asked to state if they favored right or left breast size differentials. A statistic like that could well be correlated to all sorts of amazing facts ! Making society more aware of its preferences in relative breast size would greatly reduce the number of failed marriages and broken homes in our society. It is just wrong to blame women for the random distribution of mammarian asymmetry!

Around the 40th duodecimal place of π it occurred to me that the relative size of Felicia's breasts might serve as a

standard of comparison for ranking all women with larger right breasts. There had to be women whose large breast was smaller than Felicia's small one. And I'd certainly observed women with both breasts larger than Felicia's largest!

Reasoning in this way I ended up with 6 equivalence classes:

I. Women with both breasts smaller than (or equal to) Felicia's smaller one .

II. Left breast smaller than or equal to Felicia's smaller, right breast larger than Felicia's smaller, but smaller than Felicia's larger.

III. Left breast smaller than or equal to Felicia's smallest, right breast larger than Felicia's larger.

IV. Both breasts larger than or equal to Felicia's smaller, and smaller than or equal to Felicia's larger.

V. Left breast larger than Felicia's smaller but smaller than Felicia's larger, right breast larger than Felicia's larger

VI. Left breast and right breast both larger than or equal to Felicia's large breast .

It would not be a bad idea, I reflected, to put out a call for *standard reference women with maximal breast differential* . Serious political ramifications could not be ignored; the exclusion of single-breasted women, including those who have had mastectomies, from this system of classification might raise protests from some quarters. I've always firmly believed that Science cannot allow itself to be intimidated by political agenda of any kind.

Logically the next step would involve the fabrication of a *Felicia-in-mirror-image* as a standard of comparison for ranking women whose left breasts were larger than their right ones.

Felicia in mirror-image ! At the 80th duodecimal place, I begged her to stop. I was in total delirium.

Felicia in mirror image!

I passed out. My equilibrium had been fatally undermined. What I was experiencing was nothing less than the spontaneous birth of the monster of sexual desire in my pubescent psyche, hitting me like a wack on the brain from Dionysius' long-reaching scepter. To this day I have not recovered from it. The bare facts of human reproductive anatomy had already been learned in Fraulein Zwicky's class in sex education. Yet, until the moment when the conceptualization of Felicia's breasts in mirror image rose, borne on the flotsam of my vague, lethargic meditations, from the septic tank of the unconscious; until the conflation of the disparate ideas , " Felicia" , and , "mirror inversion in 3-dimensional space" , shed its iridescence into my adolescent darkness , I knew less about sexuality than some incorrigible pedant who, with all knowledge at his fingertips, has not the wit to tie his shoelaces correctly.

Felicia in mirror-image ! With an irresistible fury my imagination feasted on the minute details involved in the process of moving Felicia's arms, legs, breasts, eyes and other distinctive physical features from one side to the other.

As the infusion of her proximate physicality seeped, potent and raw like the a quintessence of toxic nectars, into my inebriated soul, the transcendental hypostatization of her idealized femininity contaminated my sensibility - forevermore!

I give fair warning: this sort of mental exercise is dangerous. Reconstructing any representative of the attracting gender in mirror-image is the quickest route to sexual folly. Ever does the wasp of desire hover within striking range , indefatigable in its vigilance, seeking every opportunity to ram its sting into our hypothalamus.

On the other hand, married couples who, perhaps, have fallen out of love , might think about experimenting with some form of deep meditation on the refashioning of each other in mirror image. Let them sit down face-to-face . They should breathe deeply, after which they can begin describing to one another all the maneuvers involved in moving each other's bodily parts from right to left, and conversely. Especial attention must given to the eyes; they may cause exquisite and agonies . If, after three such mirror-inversion sessions , both husband and wife aren't sex maniacs, one can't imagine any option other than divorce.

It must have been about 15 minutes before I awoke to find Felicia hovering over me, her face drawn with anxious concern. I looked at her ; our gazes blended insensibly into one, our eyes each drowning in the limpid pools of the other. There was an ill-fated locking of minds, fiendish and tragic.

All about us, the world blackened to spiritual nightmare. In the desolate wilderness of our fixated symbiosis there resounded the wolf-howl of the abyss.

In desperate confusion Felicia gathered up her books and hurried out of the drugstore . I buried my face in my hands and wept. I needed 3 cups of coffee to pull myself together. An hour later I walked back to my dorm room, lay down naked on my bed and, steeped in the intensity of Felicia's presence, masturbated twice to orgasm. I'd kept count: this was the 78th time since the age of 10, though never beneath the paralyzing aura of passionate love. Shortly afterwards I fell into a deep sleep. The nightmare was long, terrible and beautiful:

... sitting naked on the edge of a sheer cliff face descending into a deep chasm, the valley floor obscured by polluted mists.... the air at these high altitudes is refined , murky, turbulent ... a sensation of immersion in filth. hot ash and cinders whirl about the noxious eddies , suffocating , scalding

Unfriendly crustacean creatures crawling over the rocks ... biting, pinching my body covered with burns...Pain everywhere! ... writhing and howling in torment, helpless to relieve my condition....

...Hair...Hair....growing from everywhere, out of my pores, through my skull and limbs, soothing my pain... sleek, black,

glossy hair, overflowing onto the surrounding plateau sand down into the chasms . It wraps itself about me like a magnanimous carpet, opiating, comforting. It heals my wounds, dissolves my suffering ...

Fissures open up in the cliff ,... A pleasant tingling in the gonads

Cut! Toan oppressive room in some small town, homely furnishings, crass wallpaper. A wild , frothy party .. I circulate in a sparkling jacket covered with glinting sequins , gaudy trousers... many people , a few familiar faces ... other in vague outline Everyone in the room is throwing things at me cracks open in skin, blood flows over my body...

...Flying through the chasm, cutting myself against glassy walls , crashing to my death! Black thunderclouds cover the sky.

At the moment my body hit the ground I pulled myself frantically erect. It was 10 P.M. Four hours had passed since entering the room. I was suffocating; sweat poured down my face . Irritating my lower belly was a large glob of caked come. Throwing aside the covers, I sprang off my bed, staggered to the window and vomited into the night.

My dorm room was on the fourth floor of an impressive long and sinister Victorian Gothic building. As it turned out my vomit which, under the normal action of gravity should have hit the ground in a few seconds, was destined instead to be intercepted by the night watchman just then coming on

duty. In such a fashion did I share the ecstasy of my first white night!

Scraping some of the vomit off the top of his head, he swore: " *What the fuck -!* ". He examined it ; his mouth dropped open in horror. Another curse. Then he craned his neck up in my direction:

" *What the hell's going on ???!* " he yelled, but I'd already pulled away from the window and was scrambling into my clothes. It is a pity that the opportunity to absorb the important lesson, that all love, even the most sublime, has its sordid underbelly , was lost, and it took many years for it to be assimilated. Too inexperienced to acknowledge the inevitable, I merely cursed my bad luck. Dashing out of the room and slipping out the back door of the building , I headed towards a neighborhood all-night diner for a belated supper and much intensive soul-searching.

Of my love for Felicia there could be no doubt whatsoever although, of course, some doubt had to exist, for according to Descartes even our existence is uncertain until we begin to doubt it...and even then... David Hume's analysis of causation may occasionally serve as a consolation for unhappy lovers. How does one *know* that one *really* loves the object of one's affections? One don't know of course , one just thinks one knows. Even granting that much, how does one know that the love one feels for the other fellow creature is *caused* by that fellow creature? I dare anyone to prove the existence of a necessary connection.

Might it not be the case that the beloved, and our love for the beloved, constitute independent phenomena with no causal connection worth speaking of? Think along those lines long enough, and you'll end up never feeling anything for anyone.

Fortunately my anxieties were quickly focused on the universal concern of normally constituted human beings at such moments: *the next step* .

She was too old for me. I was too young for her. What else is new? Both sides of this stale conundrum have inspired opera, popular song, saga, folk tale, legend and cracker-barrel philosophers since the men of the Cro-Magnon epoch stalked their wives through the caves.

I reminded myself - as briefly as courtesy requires - that a third party was involved, one who'd already staked a prior claim. This tedious annoyance was summarily debated and as quickly dismissed. When has true love ever taken such trivia into account? Frank Kriegle was a destructive, anti-social nut. It flew in the face of all notions of justice that he should succeed where I failed. It shouldn't be that difficult to bring someone as intelligent as Felicia around to my point of view.

The age barrier was another matter. A formidable obstacle, yet not insurmountable. She was 24, I was still two months shy of my fourteenth birthday. On the other hand our emotional ages were about the same. Hadn't the great contemporary Russian mathematician, Andrei Nikolaevitch Kolmogorov, stated that mathematicians never grow

emotionally beyond the age at which they discover the joy of mathematics? We liked the same things, thought the same way; regarded the world and the people around us with the same intensity and at the same abstract distance. Our perspectives were equally shallow, our addiction to obsessive rumination equally limitless.

The obstacles separating us were therefore largely physical, that is to say sexual. Well, I told myself, consider this : it is virtually an axiom throughout the living kingdom that bodily organs develop with use. Muscles grow tough and strong with exercise, thigh bones swell through jogging; calluses harden with manual labor, unbelievable dexterity on musical instruments results from long practice. This observation, combined with arguments of unassailable logic, convinced me that whatever disparity there was between Felicity's sexual development and my own was caused by her more extensive exercise of the organs involved.

By the time the diner closed late at 1 P.M. , I'd concluded that it might be possible to catch up with Felicity through a rigorous and structured program of masturbation over a period of, say, two months, after which - but not before - I might think about making my intentions known. In the meantime it was of the utmost importance that she know nothing of my attachment to her.

Writing these lines I realize that they must sound a bit strange to others, and can't help thinking them a bit odd myself. By every account we seem to be dealing with a

uniquely bizarre variant of the traditional doctrine of sowing one's wild oats: in the 19th century the scions of the rotten classes used similar arguments to justify their activities with prostitutes and maids.

Now I realize that my strategy was based on an erroneous theory of animal development. Given that , in all other respects the comportment of the sex organs always goes contrary to that of every other corporeal gimcrack , their development is enhanced not by the gratification of their natural inclinations , but through their frustration.

(If one insists on laboring the point, I will concede that my lame rationalizations were merely a pathetic means permitting my juvenile unconscious to assert its devious will to power. Let us grant that, in fact, I would have masturbated a whole hell of a lot at that stage in my life, even without cooking up some silly argument to justify it.)

I did not procrastinate in putting my plan into action; it was launched with a stated goal of three masturbations per day. It often happened that I didn't have the strength to persist beyond the second . On really stressful days it was hard enough to get through even the first one , although I never turned in for the night without seeing it out to the bitter end.

It wrecked me, of course, yet I derived some consolation from the recognition that the ordeal was for a worthy cause. Nothing of any value can be accomplished without sacrifices. The number of masturbations was totaled up in a private

notebook. My calculations were based on the 78 times I'd jerked off since age 10. By reasonable estimate, another 200 over the next two months should add 9 years to my sexual maturity, enough to close the somatic gulf dividing us.

A month after making the resolve, with full acceptance of the risks, to enter into this novel way of life (which, in analogy to Felix Klein's *Erlanger Programme* of basing all of Geometry on the properties of transformation groups , I dubbed my *Felicia Programme*) others began noticing that my behavior was becoming increasingly erratic. The most immediate symptom was the marked intensification of my normal introversion. Strange reports began filtering back to the mathematics department: I'd often been seen, walking about the campus with my briefcase bulging with books and papers, muttering to myself and gesticulating in wide arcs. Sometimes I'd lie down on the grass, or even on the pavement, and thrash about. just as suddenly I would be up on my feet again running off for no discernible reason.

Afternoons often found me in the cafeteria of the Student Union in the company of friends and associates. In this, my natural milieu, I somehow remained in a world apart, scarcely aware of what others were saying to me, capriciously breaking into silly giggles or throwing out wild, threatening remarks directed to no-one in particular. I'm sure some people were afraid of me, though most of them merely thought me a bit odd.

These patterns of deviation from "normative comportment in genteel society" - (a synonym for the purpose of a college education) - reached their apogee, one will hardly be surprised to learn, in Kriegle's classes on Exceptional Logics. A climate of terror emanated from my vicinity as, at random, I fixed individuals with hardened stares in which no purpose could be discerned. I hurled my arms about in a disjointed manner, or rocked back and forth, davening like a *Yeshiva-bucher* , leading many to suspect that I urgently needed to rush to the bathroom yet was afraid to do so lest I miss the details of some important theorem being demonstrated on the blackboard.

Needless to say, Frank Kriegle noticed absolutely nothing. So strong was he in his belief that he'd monopolized the role of class nut, that it took a very long time before he was able to recognize that serious competition had emerged.

Not so with Felicia. My comportment in her presence was guaranteed to cause her intense misery. This was not deliberate on my part. It just so happened that I went completely out of control in her vicinity, thus providing the opportunity for the more aberrant tendencies of my psyche to take command. We still sat next to each other. If she looked in my direction I turned my body away and refused to address her. This was temporary. My face, returning to confront hers, was screwed up into a mask of such concentrated agony that her horror quite outdistanced her pity. Her pen might then drop out of her hand, or her papers

fall to the floor. While she trembled with fear, I followed up my performance by a train of forced and sinister chuckles. They weren't directed at her of course; they weren't directed at anyone. But how was she to know that?

Once in awhile I got a glimpse of her around campus. I never tried to follow her. Rather I would seat myself on the nearest bench and glower at her from a great distance, my face burning, eyes all aflame, slave to a passion that could never hope for release, never allow itself to become articulated, causing nothing but suffering, yet which had become the sole focus of my existence.

After I'd fallen in love with her, we'd stopped meeting at the drugstore. However, there were a few occasions on campus when she worked up the nerve to come over to try to talk to me. I was off in a flash, disappearing around the nearest building or running down the street. At the 4 o'clock teas in the math lounge I stoically feigned ignorance of her presence while speaking to everyone else in short, senseless bursts, usually with a hostile edge to them, accompanied with gestures tinged with the fanaticism that now infected everything I said or did.

Like the devotee to some ghoulish cult, after every contact with her, however superficial, I would rush back to my dorm room, tear off my clothes and masturbate cruelly to exhaustion. Afterwards, fiery dragons infesting my brain, I would fall into a tortured slumber which, though its

nightmares brought some excitement to the lonely and dull state customary to frustrated passion, did nothing to relieve my suffering.

At the same time I'd become prey to excessive morbidity. One of my prize possessions was a recording of the first 5 symphonies of Gustav Mahler. I fell into the habit of keeping them on the record player from morning to night, playing and re-playing all 5 symphonies in succession. This might go on till midnight, forming a constant backdrop of which I soon became unaware but which had a decided influence on my state of mind.

I read extensively, historic accounts of epidemics, famine, genocide and atrocities. Medical anomalies and bizarre medical practices, particularly in the treatment of the insane, fascinated me for hours. Prey to obstinate compulsion I re-read all of Shakespeare's tragedies, including *Titus Andronicus*, four times, and *The Brothers Karamazov* five times. I forced myself to read and re-read Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus* even though I hated it, because for me it represented the pinnacle of morbidity.

After that it was the *Lachrymosa* of Mozart's Requiem. It's not very long, yet replaying it 50 times in an afternoon might be considered over-doing it. Immersed in its outpouring of bitterness and grief washed over me, I sat on the side of my bed, my face buried in my hands, weeping my heart out. The Brahms Requiem may also have figured among my obstinate obsessions. I can't remember everything

Some temporary relief from my condition of spiritual wretchedness was discovered in an ambitious research project in mathematics, an undertaking involving hours of dull computational labor, hopeless from the outset. A certain amount of productive spin-off often emerges from such projects, so they aren't time wasted: Fermat's Last Theorem is a good example. In March of 1949 I boldly attempted to devise an algorithm on the digits of the decimal representation of an integer that would provide a sufficient condition for its being a prime.

Such algorithms exist for simple divisibility: if an integer is divisible by 3 or 9, then the sum of its digits is also divisible by 3 or 9 respectively. If divisible by 11, then subtracting the sum of the digits in even places from those in the odd places will equal zero, or another number divisible by 11; and so forth. In general, given any particular divisor, one can use modular arithmetic (the arithmetic basic to the clock and calendar) to determine whether or not a number k has that divisor as a factor. In general this is a fairly rapid process.

It makes sense to inquire into the converse procedure: given that it is so easily checked to see if some number p divides another q , is there a way of showing q can't be divided by anything? At the very least there should be an algorithm above a certain cut-off number N , which shows that q is not divisible by any prime greater than N .

The problem is two-fold: finding the algorithm, finding the cut-off number N . After weeks of intense labor I was able to show that N must be greater than 13,495,327,852. Then the algorithm I finally came up with involved no less than 300 distinct operations per digit! Undaunted, I set about testing its validity for a set of eight huge integers satisfying certain criteria. If these number did turn out to be primes, I could publish the result in some out-of-the-way journal and await more confirming evidence. Even the uninitiate will already have, I think, some notion of the enormity of the project. Already unmanageable from the outset, I found ways of turning it into a veritable Augean stable. That my mental and even physical state were dangerously overwrought was now apparent to everyone but myself (discounting totally self-preoccupied mathematicians like Kriegle and others) . I was convinced that everyone hated me, that Felicia wished me dead, that in fact she and Kriegle were already working on a scheme to murder me. Excessive masturbation had destroyed whatever little mental coherence I'd started out with, both mind and body being enfeebled to the point of collapse.

A direct consequence of my state was that I couldn't carry out a single page of calculations without making 20 mistakes in arithmetic. A silly mistake on Monday might not be discovered until the following Saturday, but it could invalidate the work of that entire week. The memory of the frenzy with which I once tore up 150 sheets of worthless calculations and burned them over the butane burner of the

hot plate I kept in my room will never go away. Nor will I forget the tidal wave of despair that washed over me immediately afterwards, ruining my capacity for work for 2 weeks.

Months passed. It was now the beginning of May and I'd only gotten half-way through the algorithm for the first of my 8 test cases . Since the algorithm provided a sufficient condition only , a negative result gave no information. And there was no guarantee of a positive result. Rough calculations indicated that if the algorithm should fail to show that my first number was prime, I would have to push up the cut-off integer N by as much as a trillion. Computing that number would involve yet another algorithm which, by a quick estimate, entailed 723 calculations.

The discovery was made at about that time, that an infantile mistake in arithmetic, *perpetrated on the very first day of my project* ($7 \times 8 = 53$) , made rubbish of all the work I'd done up to that point . It was at that very moment, April 19, 1949, that my essentially benign, merely speculative fantasies of suicide, suddenly turned malignant, pushing that final option to the forefront of my attention.

