

## Oblate hemi-spheroids

It all came back to Max in a flash. He had gone to that conference in Warsaw to give the Plenary Lecture. Svetlana had walked into the packed theatre, alone, during the Chair's introduction and stalked all the way down the central aisle from the gloom of an obscure back entrance. Ignoring the other delegates, she had thrown herself down insolently on the otherwise unoccupied front row, staring up at Max with her enormous green eyes. She was worth staring back at and, indeed, it would have been almost impossible for any man to look away.

Svetlana was dressed to catch the eye in a bright red, closely fitting, Dolce & Gabbana dress with black accessories - including Jimmy Choo heels, a Mulberry Bayswater bag and Prada sunglasses that perched on the top of her head.

Russian, Max guessed, by her unshakeable physical confidence, icy blonde colouring and perfect cheekbones. She could have been a model, except models didn't usually turn up at conferences at the University of Warsaw. But this late arrival was so gorgeous, so expensively dressed and so out of place that Max wasn't sure whether he smelt a rat or scented a once in a lifetime opportunity. Looking down at her, as she crossed and uncrossed her legs so carelessly, and as her short dress rode up higher and higher towards her crotch, he wasn't sure whether he cared.

As the Chair continued his interminable recitation of the keynote speaker's achievements, Max returned the girl's expressionless gaze with equal force. Almost immediately, she upped the ante. Once she was sure of his attention, Svetlana bent right forward to retrieve her pen from the floor, treating Max to a complete, clear view of her high, firm breasts.

'Perfect examples of oblate hemi-spheroids,' he thought to himself; and quickly he had estimated the relevant parameters. It was the habit of a lifetime then to calculate their volume and to solve the equations governing their motion. He closed his eyes and smiled to himself. 'Those equations really are beautiful,' he whispered silently, before rising to his feet. Bringing himself back to the task in hand, Max rolled up his sleeves to reveal his muscled forearms and picked up his chalk.

Svetlana kept her eyes on Max all the way through his talk, her Aspinall notebook lying idly on her lap. As he faced the rapt audience to explain a complex point about the asymptotics of certain Feynman integrals, he realised that the beautiful Russian delegate had shifted her gaze from his face to his torso with an intense and pleased interest. The tables were turned. With a shiver of erotic excitement, Max realised that she was now trying to estimate his parameters

and solve the equations governing his motion. In fact, he could feel himself responding rapidly as she devoured him with eyes that were as hungry as those of a young, wild lioness.

This focus on his physique was extremely distracting and Max was pleased that the lecture didn't absorb too much of his cognitive fire power. In fact, the blood seemed to be rapidly draining from his brain as he continued seamlessly with his explanations. Although it went down in history as one of the most brilliant and original talks ever to take place in Warsaw, Max was relieved that he could remain on automatic pilot as he spoke.

As the distinguished audience threw question after question his way, Max found it harder and harder to keep his mind on the job. He continued to parry his interlocutors with his usual incisive panache, but Svetlana was merciless in her seduction. Silently, she stroked the inside of her taut, brown thighs, thoughtfully adjusted her breasts in her low-cut dress, and looked up at Max invitingly with open, moistened lips.

Given this onslaught, Max certainly didn't expect her to contribute to the explosion of questions and debate that filled the room. Svetlana's expression remained blank and disinterested, leaving him unsure if she even understood what he was talking about. Everyone else in the room was frowning, gesticulating, scribbling on bits of paper or turning to a colleague in amazement. Meanwhile, blonde Svetlana just sat alone on the front row, in her sexy red dress, and stared up at him with her cat-like green eyes and angelic, inscrutable face. Not that it mattered; he wanted her extremely badly by now.

However, as the debate died down, and the Chair asked for any final questions or comments before lunch, Svetlana lifted one long slender arm and lazily reached for the microphone. Not bothering to stand or introduce herself, she asked with a faint, sardonic smile, 'Thank you for a most interesting talk, Professor Warrington, but I didn't understand why your answer only involves contributions from some solutions of the Hamilton-Jacobi equation and not all of them. Haven't you missed some terms?'

Max felt his attraction to this woman crystallise into something quite new to him. It was an excellent, probing question and he had to properly engage his intellect to answer it. He had never wanted a woman as badly as he did at that moment. Walking across the podium towards Svetlana, he stood at the edge, right above her seat and crossed his powerful arms.

'Good question,' he said drily. 'But don't overlook the branch point. Only a subset of the solutions lie on the same Riemann sheet as the original contour, and these are the ones that one needs to include, they are the ones the contour of integration can be deformed to pass through.'

They stayed smiling at each other in mutual recognition for a few moments while the Chair wrapped up the session, offered his thanks and directed delegates to the delicious buffet. Svetlana rose to her feet, which brought her head up to exactly the same level as Max's impressive crotch, which was now plainly visible through his trousers.

'I am called Svetlana,' she said, looking straight ahead, as though addressing his groin directly, 'and I am very pleased to meet you, Professor Warrington. I am a PhD student at the Steklov Institute in Saint Petersburg under the supervision of Professor Landau. I have followed your work with great admiration for many years, since I was a girl, and would very much like to ask you more about transseries. It would fulfil the ambition of my lifetime to converse with Europe's greatest living mathematician on topics of mutual interest. Shall we

skip the conference dinner later so that I can buy you a cocktail to thank you for a most fascinating talk?’

‘Yes,’ said Max briefly, ‘as long as you promise to wear that dress and continue to ask such challenging questions.’

## Lie Groups

As Svetlana watched Max from her seat in the Warsaw lecture theatre, her beautiful green eyes flashed with a combination of desire and hostility. The files had told her that this man was magnificent: handsome, strong, kind, and brilliant. Exceptionally brilliant. ‘The greatest mind in Europe’ they had called him in Moscow.

She was still shocked to realise how irresistible she found him, as he talked to his rapt audience in an airless and overheated hall. Despite the warmth, Svetlana shivered with an icy premonition. She realised that she was in great emotional danger and that the two of them might come close to destroying each other. It seemed written in the stars that she would break his heart and that he would destroy her career...both of her careers.

Svetlana listened to his beautiful, rich voice and wished passionately that she was still a proper student. She had been the most gifted mathematician in Moscow State University, and the most beautiful girl in her cohort with her platinum blonde hair, her piercing green eyes, and her taut athletic figure.

Her exceptional mathematical abilities seemed to destine her for greatness. She should have been a Professor by now, teaching students and creating a school in her beloved field of Lie groups. When she came top of her year in the notoriously difficult final exams, she had expected to win a scholarship - just as the best boys always did.

But the letter that came through the door in the modest apartment she shared with her mother and six siblings was not the offer of a scholarship. It told her to report to an office in the University she had never heard of before: the office of Comrade Chernov. ‘Who is this Chernov?’ she thought to herself. She ended up wishing that she had never found out. She came to resent her brilliance and her beauty, because, under Chernov's influence, they only brought suffering.

Chernov had told her that she had been assigned by the Kremlin to a special task, one that would use all her talents in the service of Russia and bring her glory. When he told her how she was to prepare, she was horrified. She was to learn how to seduce researchers and to either turn them or betray them. It was vital work of national importance, Chernov told her, banging his desk with emphasis. And anyway, if she wished her mother to enjoy a comfortable retirement in Moscow then she really had no choice. Chernov leant back into his chair as the unshaded lightbulb hissed softly. Svetlana bowed her head, and he smiled as he passed the paperwork across for her to sign.

What Chernov created from Svetlana was the most brilliant asset in the Russian Secret Service. She had a specific role that underpinned the country's entire intelligence operation: to seduce western defence scientists and learn their most valuable secrets.

Oh, she was good at this. They worshipped her, they confided in her, and then she broke their

hearts. It was too easy. They were like children in her hands. The physicists, the chemists, and the experimental psychologists all fell for her, all told her everything, and were then all left broken.

Once Chernov had entire confidence in her skills, she was assigned to the biggest intelligence prize of all. Svetlana was given a one-way ticket to Warsaw, a lanyard and delegate pack, and instructed to entrap Professor Max Warrington of the blandly named National Mathematics Institute in the UK.

The most brilliant mathematician in the West, they had called him. Moscow was sure he was working on a new crypto system. Her handlers told her that Warrington would be her ultimate conquest and her greatest triumph. She would bring glory to her family and to Russia.

But Svetlana knew that mathematicians are in a category of their own. She did try to tell Chernov that Max and his type were unlike other scientists. They seemed to her like monks: pure, devoted to their ideas, and unbreakable. And, when faced with Max in Warsaw, she realised that this man could also have any woman he wanted and that she would have to work very hard indeed to ensnare him. Her own heart was crying out with loneliness and with her need for intellectual companionship. In Max, she recognised her equal, and she was very frightened indeed.

But Svetlana had no choice but to proceed with her mission.

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