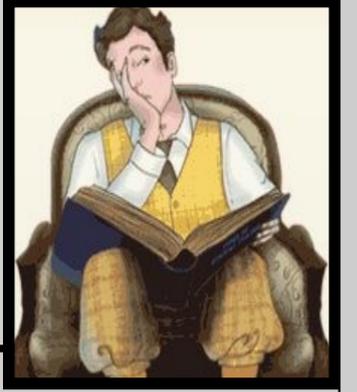


“**Dashed** important business, **Valentine's Day!** I do so love Jeeves, bless the old chap. What did that bird say about comparisons and summer days? Jeeves is whom I shall take to the altar, if Aunt Agatha presses me. Not that rummy stars-are-God's-daisy-chain Madeline Bassett: a little off in the brain department, poor girl.”

-Bertram Wilberforce Wooster



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Letter from the Editor



Greetings, my dear readers. It is from the very bottom of my black and deadened heart that I wish each and every one of you a very happy Anti-Valentine's Day. We, at the *Dead Hearts' Society*, hope to celebrate the occasion with as much fervor our little hardened souls can muster; and this week's issue is an attempt to showcase the hidden joys of a breakup, the epiphany of falling out of love, the emotional fulfillment of single-hood, and surprisingly enough, alternate sources of amour. (My truly fulfilling object of devotion is purring beside me as I stroke his head.)

I pause to introduce myself as the newly expired heart of the *Dead Hearts' Society*. My predecessor was believed to stand for independence, singlehood and everything else non-amorous. Her long-dead heart, however, sprung to life one day at the sight of a man with eyes like the moon, mahogany skin, raven-black hair and a mesmerizing voice. (*The disease of romance is infiltrating me. Insidiously, though it is someone else's. I must resist.*) What ensued was a forbidden date on an even more forbidden day, and her assiduous covertness only delayed the inevitable. All virtues notwithstanding, I accept that us dead hearts are truly merciless. I feel a little twinge of sadness. After all, a loss to love is the most tragic of all.

My heart, however, is too happy to brood. At my crumbling desk, with a pen in one hand and cat in the other, I proceed to tell you the story of my happiness. Brevity being the soul of wit, I keep it short. All hearts were alive and enslaved once upon a time, and mine once belonged to a young man. Forty years back, in the prime of my life. The Day arrived, and with it an obligation to celebrate it in its opposite sense. But perhaps, the red was already beginning to fade. I could not stand the sight of cards full of it – the colour of facetious love, frivolous romance, empty platitudes – and told him so. He grew upset. Arguments snowballed into fights, and fights snowballed into 'the talk'. Post-breakup syndrome afflicted both parties, who flirted with the dangers of getting back together. Then, one day, I decided to get a cat.

The feline family is, in my opinion, the most underrated source of emotional fulfillment I know of. A cat gives without taking. A cat does not need to be asked for a hug, nor does it give you a hug when you do not ask for one. A cat's eyes are even more beautiful than our besotted ex-editor's eyes of the moon, impossible though that may seem. A cat expects nothing, and breeds no expectations. (*Although a rather large litter.*) A cat solicits no expenditure whatsoever. (Calvin, incidentally, strikes me as the true anti-valentine. He has realized the supremacy of a feline (albeit a stuffed tiger) as a bosom friend and also given his arch-enemy a bunch of crummy dead flowers on Anti-Valentine's Day. It would be lovely if he existed in person.)

My little companion bred the aforementioned large litter, and cats filled the space a man had left. Although my heart shrunk, my cup of happiness filled – I had just found a new place to keep it. (*The little kitten on my lap meows, and it over flows just a little bit. This is heaven, is it not?*)

In this spirit, I proceed to share the joys of emotional detachment and independence with you, and perhaps a few reasons to avail of a sudden (metaphorical) heart attack. The cover page of this issue is a rather intriguing piece by Draupadi, the queen of the Pandavas, who speaks out about her, to put it mildly, unusual marriage arrangement. (*It is sad that there was no prevalence of cats in ancient India.*) We feature a poem about the sinister side of redness by a woman who, for a while, believed in the façade of amorous love. (*I add that black (and white, and perhaps the colour of ginger hair)) is, contrary to popular opinion, the colour of joy.*) In addition, we have an article titled 'A Girl on Valentine's Day'.

We, of course, cater especially to those poor souls caught between life and death, and who have not encountered a cat to lead them the right way. The 'Agony Aunt' column suggests relatively painless methods of breakup, and has helped many an irritated lover in need of an escape route. Continuing in the same vein, it provides a list of parting gifts which serve as, should we say, painkillers? (*The lesser-known value a gift can possess.*) In addition, we expose the heartbreak beneath literary lovers' epitaphs. (*Killing others' love stories is one of my favorite pastimes, indeed.*) Even Shakespeare, the paragon of romance, is not spared – our little lovers' sonnet sings of everything but love.

I must specially mention a letter written to me, which I have published in this issue. An admirable woman expounds fervently the virtues of love in quite a direct counterattack. Unlike our facetiously amorous counterparts, we are a tolerant community. We do not ostracize cat-haters. We permit shades of grey in our otherwise black-painted world. (*Red, of course, is an entirely different story.*) But, driven by a slight insecurity, I provide a last burst of heartfelt propaganda:

Are you feeling lonely? Do you need a hug? Do you need a pair of adoring eyes to look at you with all the meaning in the world?

Get a cat.

Again, wishing a very happy Anti-Valentine's Day to you all.



“This day is all about casting the net, and catching the right fish.”

–Cat in the Hat

Draupadi's Lament

In my dreams, I lie in bed, completely satiated. With a little sigh, I run my nails gently over the battle-marred, but beautifully muscled hand around my waist, part of an entirely battle-marred, but beautiful muscled body I have grown to cherish. This is the happiest I've ever felt - I feel it breaking over me like a wave. Bliss soon transcends into oblivion as I drift off to sleep.

I wake up in the arms of a still beautifully muscled body. But something is different. The scars are missing. Disoriented, I look up to the heavenly calendar on the wall of my Palace bedchamber.

Oh.

Memories of the previous night slowly seep into my brain- disconnected images of Yudhisthira's clumsy embraces, my reluctant acceptance of his attentions, and our awkward awareness of the peculiarity of my strange contract. Why, when only yesterday, it was Arjuna who'd so tenderly showered his affections upon me. We'd held on to one another with a silent desperation, as lovers about to be parted, as indeed, we were. I feel a stab of something (is it pain?) in my chest, and my eyes begin to water of their own accord. *Stop being a fool*, I admonish myself sternly. *Nobody hurt you, you have no reason to cry.*

But the tears keep coming. I keep the sniffing to a minimum so as not to wake my husband up. Unable to face him, I turn to my side, staring at the mud wall of our hut through a haze of tears. I reflect idly upon my life.

Draupadi, daughter of King Draupad, I was prophesied to live a life like no other, and change the fate of an empire. A woman of many names, I have been called *Krsna*, the one of the dark-skinned beauty, *Yajnaseni*, the child of divine fire, *Mahabhaarti*, wife of the five great Pandavas, descendants of Bharata. Bards have sung of my unique comeliness; sages have prophesied my deeds. I lived my childhood in anticipation of a momentous future. With all the foolish confidence of youth, I was sure that there would be great things in store for me; I yearned to step into the shoes of the woman I was to become.

But when a twist of fate and some carelessly uttered words caused me to be married to all the five Pandava brothers, it seemed as though the future of the prophecies was all at once hurtling towards me at breakneck speed. Suddenly, I didn't know what it was that I wanted anymore. I would change the world, yes. But would it be for the better? And more importantly, would I be happy? There have been times when I bore the mantle of my fate lightly, wearing it but as a gossamer cloak over my shoulders, flaunting it, even. But right now, that same mantle overwhelmed me, and I wished to cast it off, and seek release from the prophecies, the songs, the poems that spoke of war and bloodshed and great and terrible deeds. I wanted to be free of all duty, and to love and be loved fully and whole-heartedly, to live a life of everyday pleasures, a privilege granted to the most common of people, yet denied to me.

My marriage into the Pandava clan, to put it mildly, was a strange contract of sorts. Every year, I would be the spouse of a different brother, and at that time, the other Pandavas were not to touch me, approach me amorously, or intrude upon our privacy. But what of the pain of parting, at the end of each year?

What of the familiarity I would develop with my 'husband for the year', so to say? Were we to pretend to be strangers after a year of intimacy? The contract of my marriage, signed in an indelible ink (an ink that was composed of, in equal parts, duty and obligation) said nothing of this, maintaining a stoical silence on the matters of the heart. What if I did not wish to be passed around like a communal drinking bowl, to be sipped from and then passed to the next brother? But the contract mentioned nothing of that, either. And while the masses celebrated my marriage, while there was cheer and jubilation all around, I stepped into the binding terms of the agreement, riddled with doubts that nobody acknowledged, or cared to clarify. To be fair to the Pandavas, I have no cause to complain about the way I have been treated. They have always treated me with respect and fairness, providing me with every modest luxury that they could afford in their austere circumstances. With time, I grew fond of each of my husbands, albeit in different ways: Arjuna, the skilled archer, the husband of my innermost desires, Bheema, affectionate and strong, Yudhisthira, righteous and dutiful, Nakul and Sahadeva, the flawlessly handsome twins. Yes, I learned to love them all. But love, I also learned, is of different kinds.

There is the love that poets die for, the love that sends lovers into raptures of ecstasy, the kind of love that knows no rational bounds, that knows no reason or logic. The kind of love that borders on madness, that thrives on passion, that resonates with excitement. The gut-wrenching love that can make babbling, incoherent fools of the wisest men, and sages out of fools. I have read and heard much about such love, yet I know nothing of it. And then there is another kind of love. A love that rises out of duty and fondness and circumstance and familiarity and respect. (Duty. How that word has plagued my life.) I care for my husbands, and would defend them staunchly till my last breath. Yet romance, passion and bliss, these words are strangers to me! I am known as the ideal wife, patient, kind, the paragon of virtue (or so the bards tell me), and yet fiery and fierce when I need to be. But have I experienced the heights of ecstasy and the depths of despair that accompany passionate love? Well, how *could* I, when two days after sharing my bed with Arjuna, I am forced to treat him as a brother, and not a lover?

But today I am in one of my melancholy moods. I force myself to snap out of it and remember that are many wonderful things about my life. More than a year into my marriage, I have learned to enjoy the harsh ways of the beautiful forest we live in. I have taught myself to marvel at the innate goodness in each of my husbands, their small gestures of love, and most importantly their selfless love for each other, perhaps their greatest and most remarkable characteristic.

A gentle stirring startles me out of my reverie. My husband is awakening. I gaze upon his face, musing over its intricacies, acquainting myself with the crests and troughs of his eyes, nose, mouth. The hollow of his neck, his sinewy limbs- I am drinking it all in, memorizing each detail of the man in whose bed I will wake up for the next year. As he opens his eyes, I am careful to compose my face into the portrait of happiness and satisfaction, a 'good morning' face that betrays none of my inner conflict. What surprises me is that this is not very difficult. Maybe this transition will not be as hard as I expected. As I look into his eyes, he reaches out and brushes the hair awkwardly from my face. My lips begin to curve, of their own accord, into a small smile, as he gets out of bed and begins to prepare himself for the day ahead.

Perhaps, in time, I will get used to waking up with Yudhisthir. Maybe we will carve out our own special relationship, maybe we will have the pleasure of little rituals (whispering secrets to one another in the dark, playing 'have you ever' in the idle hours of the early morning), maybe we will weave our own special story in the intricate and complex tapestry that is the life of the Pandavas. We will walk the year-long journey together, discovering ways to love and delight one another.

The heady romance of my wishful fantasies may never come to be, but that does not prevent me from achieving my own happiness and fulfilment. And with a firmness of will that surprises me, I gently release my pent up fantasies and wishes from me, breathing them out of my being as one does air. I look up above me, watching them float up into the air, moving further and further from me, growing fainter until suddenly they are swirling wisps of mere illusion, and then I can no longer see them anymore. I look up above me, and all I can see is the brilliant blue sky of a new morning.



“...But love, I also learned, is of different kinds.”

Agony Aunt

I am an IITian. That should have been reason enough for a girl to fall in love with me, but sadly that hypothesis of mine was proved incorrect. Nobody seems to be attracted to me as an electron should be to the proton (my favourite sub-atomic particle by the way), and all my actions have failed to cause reactions. I am not good looking in the conventional sense (though my mother says otherwise). My problem is simple. I want a girlfriend.

-Clueless Seeker

Ah, naiveté, cho chweet! By IITian, I take it you mean you are suffering from Incurable Intellectual Trauma. The sadist Nazi in me wants to virtually throw you off the nearest rooftop, by finding you a way to get a girlfriend, however impossible it seems. For there is no greater misfortune than being confined in a relationship, governed by the laws of attraction. Even Newton's laws won't help you out of the quagmire that is close association with the opposite sex. It should never be attempted. However, dear little Mama's Boy, it is not a misfortune I would wish even my arch nemesis. There are others in more need of our services than you, so I would advise you to continue as you are in your quasi-static life. Love is...only conjectured to exist in an alternate dimension. My answer is simple. Stop looking for a girlfriend. Hunt instead for the God(damn) particle.

A girl on Valentine's Day at Café Coffee day

Just another girl, blends in with the mellow light, the Hindi film music in the background and the smell of freshly brewed coffee and chatter.

Watches the people around her.

A couple.

Sees what lies for them ahead.

I am just another girl at Café Coffee Day on Valentine's Day. Around me sit happy couples and the young ones deluded in love, all lost in the little worlds they have created for themselves. But I am different. I am a single woman at a coffee shop on Valentine's Day, a wry, disillusioned one at that.

They do not see me. I have somehow blended in with the mellow lighting, the Hindi film music in the background and the scent of freshly brewed coffee and hot chocolate. I am as indistinct as the chatter and the few laughs that break out occasionally. But I read faces and I know what lies ahead.

You, for example, the pretty one in the blue *kurti*. I watch as you laugh to his jokes, your kohl lined eyes clearly in love. I watch as he proceeds up to the counter to pay and you smile to yourself and the huge plastic cover that lies next to you.

I see you five years from now, your eyes still lined with hope. He proposes to you and you get married, a lavish affair at that. You brush away the fact that you gave up a well paying job for him, like a loose strand of hair. Your elastic smile never sags, to his family, his mother who would never approve of you, his sister who thinks you aren't pretty enough and to his world, which suddenly doesn't seem familiar anymore.

I am a woman of the 21st century, you tell yourself. I am smart and independent. I am not my mother, times have changed. I am different, I dared to date someone and marry someone of my liking.

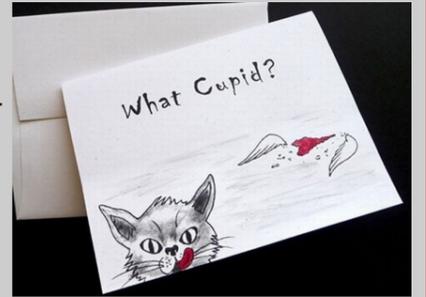
Yet twenty years from now, you wonder if you were right. You look at your beetroot stained fingers, your sagging stomach adorned with stretch marks. I am a mother first, you tell yourself over and over again. And then a wife. A good daughter-in-law next. And then, perhaps I am the eighteen year old me.

Fifty years later, you wonder where all those dreams have vanished. You find yourself boring people with tales of all that you dreamt of doing. And at night, lying next to your wheezing, demanding husband you once loved, you remember that night you danced on the coffee table to a cheering crowd, free from inhibition and hypocrisy.

You look at me as you leave, your eyes brimming with expectations and dreams for a rosy future ahead. You tilt your head slightly and look at me, as if in question.

And I find myself smiling, despite all my cynicism. Go ahead, I want to say. Savour your moments of innocent wishful thinking when you can. It's a fucking circle of life anyway.

But retain the job, woman. And your bank account.



Editor's Note: *In sharp contrast to the sentiments voiced in the piece above, I would like to publish a letter that I received from an anonymous writer. Just because. For variety, or some such.*

Love— A Many Splendored Thing

Dear Editor,

The joy of feeding a starving, skeletal dog on the streets in front of one's house or the ecstasy of meeting a long-lost friend by chance at an airport, the bond that is formed deep in a woman's womb or the first, flailing steps of cautious teenage attraction - we all know that we have been there, perhaps even done that. We all know the wave of blood that courses through us, the sparkling smile that breaks out from ear to ear, the feeling of warmth, joy and pure, unadulterated love.

Love - perhaps the one word that is so grossly misunderstood by this generation. Today is the age of 'lowe' and 'luv' and '<3' and yet, one needs to dig deep for its original root, that sanctified emotion of giving and getting, desiring and being desired, the experience of Love.

Every citizen of this global village, as we call our world today, prides himself of having an opinion on love. We either endorse it or despise it, we either buy cards for Valentine's Day or spend our time spreading clichés about how it is merely a tactic by marketing giants and proponents of commercialization. How many of us truly take the time off to spread the joy of being loved?

There is not one of us who woke up today without, as Mark Twain said, the irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired. It is perhaps one of the necessities for emotional wellbeing to be wanted, to be deemed worthy of someone's affection. When grey clouds gather above ominously and large drops start to splash down on window-sills around us, converting every shade of gloom to hues of life, there are very few of us who are content with isolation and loneliness. The cliché of "walking with the right person" and the oft-repeated Bollywood scene of dancing in the rain exist in our lives today only because, in our heart of hearts, that is what most of us swoon for, dream about and silently cross our fingers about. The only difference that exists in the world is whether or not we admit to this need, whether or not we are open about our desires, whether or not we face the truth.

Julia Roberts famously sang "When the dogs bite, when the bees sting, when I'm feeling sad, I simply remember my favourite things, And then I don't feel so bad!". Whether they are things or people, objects of our attention have the unfailing power to convert shades of grey to a rainbow, an abyss of sorrow to a mere obstacle that needs crossing.

It all boils down to one thing - I believe in love. I believe in love because I believe in hope and the power of goodness. I believe there is some honesty left in this world of corruption and dirty politics. I believe in the power of love to break down the walls of hatred and anger, of discrimination and animosity, of enmity and hate. If there exists a magic wand to wipe away sorrows and swish away fears, to conjure happiness and construct security, it could only be love.

With much love,

X

Agony Aunt

My girlfriend of two years just broke up with me. She suddenly started doing all these weird things. She even stuck pins in a voodoo doll that resembled me! I'm scared I'll only ever attract the creepy kind. Shall I give up altogether?

-Humpty Dumped-me

Two years? Really?! I fail to understand why one would be so readily willing to submit to the mental bondage that is love for prolonged periods of time. Are you masochistic? You might as well be sticking pins in yourself. However, I commend you on finally crossing over from the DARK SIDE. There is hope for you yet. 'Give up' is not how I'd put it. I'd much sooner go for 'Start over', or 'Finally see sense', or 'Stop being stupid', or...you get the point.

Love, my dear, is a bottomless pool of hurt and frustration. The rosy initial feelings last only for a while, and then it's all downhill. The pro-love cult is full of creeps, so if you refuse to better your life, yes, you'll only attract the creepy kind. Perhaps your girlfriend's read our previous columns. She's a gift from the Gods for taking those blurry tinted glasses off your nose, in that case.

The value of a 'companion for life' is overrated. Why does it have to be a screwed up XY-for-your-XX fellow member of the Homo sapiens? Our lovely editor finds complete emotional fulfillment in her feline friends, and shares the popular opinion that Liz's presence is pointless, if not contemptible, in Garfield's and Jon's lives. If a beating heart means being willing to pledge your life to someone, it's infinitely more palatable to have a Dead Heart.



"Valentine's Day? Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.

-Rhett Butler"

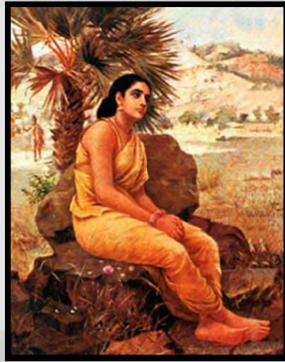
A Lesson in Punctuation

I was born and promptly dropped
 In a vat of unabashed pink -
 extracted from a sweeping sky
 that spoke volumes of the dawn.
 My toes and my fingers remained
 shriveled from the dyeing,
 my eyes stayed stained
 from the curious baptism,
 until childhood dripped away
 like a melted, slightly rancid,
 pool of strawberry ice cream.
 As a child I took pride in my meas-
 ured
 robing of the world in a rosy mantle -
 afraid to expose its naked shame
 in its absence of a heart.
 To placate and comfort it:
 a "there, there" of sorts,
 I surgically extracted paper hearts
 from a uniform pink canvas -
 of equal size and equal width
 all strung on a hope, a wish, a dream
 that someday, somewhere, I would
 find
 you.

In the end, it was really quite simple.
 All it took was a drop to remind me
 that I was the heroine of a charade
 that had played out in my head.
 A ruby red drop that silenced forever
 the patient ticking of a hope,
 a full stop that shushed for life
 the dogged beating of a wish,
 an epitaph carved in stone
 for a deadened dream.

When I became a woman, I learned
 that the color that remained when
 ambition drained,
 was a determined, furious red.
 Red was the color of the network
 of roads that my tears paved
 in my eyes.
 Red was the color of wrists
 that were slashed with the precision
 of a surgeon.
 Red was the color of mute horror
 that bled from my heart
 on my marriage bed.

Yesterday I visited the provision store
 to buy a plastic heart -
 Hollow? Just add stuffing.
 Bloodless? Just add water.
 Dead? Just breathe harder,
 until the walls of your lungs
 collapse.
 Heart preparation for autopsy:
 in just under two minutes!
 I have given up looking for you be-
 cause
 red is the color of the sindoor
 that decorates my forehead.
 It is my final full stop,
 a quick correction of error -
 say goodbye to wrong punctuation.



“Dushyanta visited **Amnesiacs Anony-
 mous** yesterday as a kind of thanksgiving.
 We're also thankful to D'Damas Gold for
 gifting us a ring on our anniversary.”

-Shakuntala

An Ode to my Man

“Long ago, I had a lover, very gentle and sweet
 Though not quite the same, he is still my man.
 His words were: Hair like night and breasts like wheat
 Rage of a kettle and passion of a frying pan.

You, my Lover, have eyes quite unlike sundrops,
 Stars-of-Bethlehem intricately mark your rosy lips.
 Your hair flourishes like silent weeds in crops,
 And your words sweetly taste like orange pips.”

“Mighty warrior, brave though you may be,
 A slithering snake to a mongoose and a frog.
 Eagle-eyed, you may be, but do you not see
 A precious red jewel sinking in the bog.

My love, you are honest as the poison I drank,
 Nectar, though is sweeter but not as simple and frank.”

I'm getting Eddie **body glitter**
 for this Valentine's Day. He's go-
 ing to sparkle all over my
 dreams while he watches me
 sleep. It worries me that he's
 friends with Humbert Humbert
 though.”

-Bella Swan



*“To really learn the meaning of love, you must learn to love yourself. Who do you see
 when you look at yourself in the mirror? Do you love that man? Then buy him some anti-wrinkle
 cream for Valentine's Day.”*

-Dorian Gray

“I'm going to get me a new husband this time 'round. That ain't nothing new, is it, mammy?”

-Scarlett O'Hara

*“If she rejects your offerings of love and ardent admiration, I urge you to get her to a nunnery. Some-
 thing is rotten in the state of Denmark, and I do believe that it is the chocolates she hath gifted me.”*

-Prince Hamlet

*“Valentine's Day means another year has passed with you wearing the same white lace dress. Do not
 buy into consumerism - do not buy another one.”*

-Miss Havisham

*“I am rather tired of Miss Castafiore's high notes. I am honestly quite
 sick of her jewelry. Snowy is not one for intellectual conversation, and nei-
 ther is Captain Haddock, for that matter. I would like a new woman in my
 life.”*

-Tintin



“We are doing wonderful business this year. Miss Poppins and I are
 somewhat romantically engaged, you see, and a spoonful of sugar really
 does wonders to our chocolate.”

-Willy Wonka