

Agony of an Affair

Sukhbir Singh¹
Osmania University, Hyderabad, India

I had decided at a tender age not to get involved with girls. I was advised so by my grandfather who once fell in love and found it forever not worth the trouble. For him the whole enterprise was extremely strenuous and incredibly demeaning. You had to act like an actor without a stage and beg like a beggar with a bowl to earn the goodwill of the girl. You had to walk long distances to meet her for a short while, talk at length to elicit a monosyllabic answer, stare at her face for hours to fetch one fleeting glance, and spend badly to create any good impression on her.

As Cupid had caught upon me, I forgot the wise counsel of the old man and fell in love with a pretty classmate of mine in Shimla. Actually, another student from Psychology was already pursuing her. It seems he tried to handle her psychologically for quick returns, but his premature confession caused a quicker regression and in reaction she showed him her toe. Later, he blamed his failure on the out-dated psycho theories of the previous century. On a misty evening following their fall out, I coincidentally met her in the library of the Humanities block. She smiled ambiguously at me, clearly suggesting that the sky was overcast with clouds. I was quick as lightning to take the hint and to trespass the forbidden terrain.

Next evening I dressed up in all foreign stuff and dashed off to meet her in the campus restaurant. I was too eager after yesterday's flash of revelation in the library. I saw her sitting alone on a secluded table. I quietly walked up to her and said tenderly: "Hello! How are you?" She looked surprised and said equally courteously, "I am just fine. Thanks!" "It seems you like this place," I continued to push the conversation. She replied in an unexpectedly friendly tone, "Not the place so much. Yea... the pizza. I like the pizza here." I quickly added, "Yea, the pizza. You are very right. They make delicious pizzas." "Would you like to share one with me? I want to go for... which one?" she asked me rather persuasively. "Whichever, you like," I said with an air of required gallantry. "Shall we have the Cheese & Capsicum? I like it *so* much," she enquired quite

¹ Sukhbir Singh works as professor of English at Osmania University, Hyderabad (India). He holds a Ph.D. in American Literature and has published critical articles widely in the national and international journals. Currently Singh is doing a collection of comic pieces entitled *Humour from Hyderabad*. These pieces have come out of his propensity to invent humour in the routine matters of life. He can be accessed at ssukhbir@hotmail.com.

earnestly. I replied promptly, “Yea, I too like it *so* much. They bake it really so well.” “Incredible! We both have similar tastes. It’s a pleasure to me,” she said jubilantly. She then softly smiled and I quickly tendered an order for one. “But, then, we shall have something to drink too. We shall have a Coke or Miranda to wash it down,” she proposed gently. “Whichever, you want,” I answered nodding agreeably. She smiled once again and I immediately asked for two Cokes as well. Taking a sip of the drink, she said, “Ah, so refreshing!” “Very refreshing,” I corroborated almost simultaneously. She then suddenly looked serious like a scholar while eating her pizza. She chewed with a tightly closed mouth and widely opened eyes. I could see the rhythmic *jugalbandi* of her jaws through her thin white cheeks. It turned my elation into excitement and I too began eating with matching interest and earnestness. I further tried to know about her tastes in other matters for a more sustainable equation between us. But she kept nodding wisely all the while, without answering at all.

We soon finished the pizza and the bearer lost no time to bring the bill. He most courteously placed it between the two of us like a commonly conquered trophy. It suddenly stimulated the ingested musical resonances in her, and she began to whistle and look sideways as if trying to locate her lost lover in the crowded restaurant. I waited for some time and finally asked her to foot the bill. She thumped her feet on the floor and responded drawing up her dagger-like eyebrows, “No! I have no money on me. You pay it off for now.” I was bewildered at it. I too carried no money for the unscheduled treat. At this I told her helplessly, “I am *so* very sorry. I too don’t have it today. Moreover, *you* invited me to *share* it with you.” She was flabbergasted and furious. I was ashamed and apologetic. She then suddenly looked clairvoyant and suggested, “Okay, I shall walk up to my room in the hostel and get the dough. You wait here in the meanwhile.” I happily agreed and felt so relieved at her timely suggestion. She strode out waving fervently to other acquaintances in the restaurant.

I kept waiting for her second coming. But she didn’t come back and I was caught in an unsavoury situation with all the friends around looking enviously at me. With the delay in her return, I began to enumerate the possible consequences of the unforeseen crisis. I imagined that the hotelier would perhaps relieve me of my watch and shoes in return of the expenses. But he might as well need more in case the bill exceeded the cost of the two not so new items. In such eventuality, he would probably be tempted to ask for my Nike T-shirt and Levis trousers, which contrastingly looked attractive and expensive. Then how shall I go back to the hostel? Just in case it happened, I should request him to lend me at least a towel to wrap around for a respectable return to my room. But the cost of the eats may still not permit it. In that condition I should beg him for a few tender banana leaves to cover myself and crawl into the hostel from the back side. With all these ominous cogitations I

became terribly restless and wanted to charge out of the restaurant at top speed. The waiters began to pull on the curtains and switch off the lights. I saw the end of the first act coming soon. The tragedy was wrought to its uttermost rather prematurely.

Suddenly there was a commotion at the cash counter. I immediately made a dash to find out what it was all about. It would perhaps give me a chance to sneak out of the restaurant unnoticed. Two students were quarrelling with the old, bespectacled cashier for not returning them the balance. "We gave you one hundred bucks," they shouted in equal measure. The cashier shrieked back, raising his eyebrows in matching proportion, "You gave me nothing at all!" "You forget it now!" the students screamed harmoniously. "You made no payments. I didn't forget it at all," the cashier retorted with a cancelling gesture of his hands. Cutting through their sharp altercation, I told the cashier not to forget the two hundred rupees I had given him for the eats. He immediately said settling his hand on the cash box, "Yes, you have paid me all right. I remember it clearly. But they didn't. I don't forget it at all!" He immediately threw the remaining amount to me to score over the quarrelling students. I promptly collected the balance and dashed off to the hostel, turning back at every turn to see whether the mistaken cashier was coming after me.

We met again the next Sunday. The morning was bright and the air was cool. The sky was deep blue and dotted with tiny flecks of white clouds. The boys and girls were eagerly getting ready to go for their favourite movies. While returning to my room after an early breakfast, I saw her walking into the recreation room of the boy's hostel. She wore z-black T-shirt and trousers. Her face reflected a rare maiden shine. I walked up eagerly to know why she hadn't come back last time. She sounded enticingly apologetic and told me she had indeed come back just a few minutes after I left. "Anyway, I'll make up for it today. Let's go to the Mall for a movie," she proposed in pressing earnestness. I couldn't really resist it despite my earlier experience with her. One should never discard a woman's generosity and a man's goodwill. Both are extremely rare. Hence, I instantly accepted the invitation and started out with her to the city. On the way, we came across several young boys and girls in colourful dresses walking hand in hand. I too intended to hold her hand but she carefully thrust them into her deep pockets saying, "Oh, it's too cold!" I then tried it a different way – by flattery, which normally works well with resistant women. I asked her whether she had ever participated in the annual quiz competitions of the university. She proudly said, "Yes, of course. I missed the third prize last time." "Then you must be terrific at general knowledge," I said in a complimentary tone. She gladly confessed, "Yes, I know a lot of it." And, I promptly asked her, "Where is the Taj Mahal?" She replied in a child-like tone, "In my house! Papa bought it in Agra." I laughed to myself, without making it known to her. I didn't want to spoil my case right away. I said, "Yes, of course. You seem to

know a lot about it.” She said, “Yes! Indeed!” without sensing the sarcasm in my comment. I continued with another easier question this time: “Who wrote the *Mahabharata*?” She at once answered, “Kalidas!” I said, “No, Ved Vyas.” She quickly refuted, “Non-sense! He wrote *Kamasutra*. I know it right.” She got angry and accused me of knowing nothing about general knowledge. Nothing indeed can be more provocative for a woman than to tell her she is wrong. It is like telling a man that he resembled a dog. I had committed the folly and found no way to repair it. I therefore kept quiet until she reluctantly bought the tickets and we got into the theatre. She threw herself into the chair and began to chew a bubblegum. I too sat down beside her and began to talk about my future plans in life. She curtly told me not to speak while watching the movie. I apologised, trying to look all right. After a little while I made another attempt to engage her into an intimate conversation. This time I tried it with a little spice. I quietly leaned toward her to forge a body-to-body contact. But it worked like hot iron with her. She pulled in a deep breath and pushed me away with both her hands. “Don’t disturb me like this. Keep off!” she yelled out angrily. The neighbours let off a loud streak of laughter. I dared no further throughout the three hours.

We began to walk back in utter silence after the show. I saw the lightning tearing across the dark clouds far away in the sky. The wind blew waywardly, smelling of the surging sea. It looked as if a rainstorm was likely to strike soon. She was still not talking much, perhaps because some of the scenes were still reeling in her mind. She then broke her long stilled silence and casually enquired, “Did you like the movie, um?” “So much!” I said gleefully. “What about you?” I joyously asked her in return. “Liked it... sort of,” she replied half-heartedly. As we walked further, the movie moved out of her mind and the money spent on it began to bite her. She became irritated and began to curse me for my queries in the theatre. I kept walking with her silently not knowing how to salvage the nearly lost opportunity. As a last resort, I proposed to pay her back for my ticket next month. She quickened her pace to suggest her dislike for my offer. I too started walking briskly, almost a step behind her. Finally, I decided to force the moment to its crisis seeing that the time was running out. I put my hand on her shoulder and said softly, “I... I have fallen in love with you.” She stopped at once, perhaps to give me a tight slap. But before she could strike, the law of kinesics struck in a mysterious manner. Unable to hold myself instantly, I headlong hurled into her with an unbearable thrust. She fell down flat on the road with her legs wide open to the sky. And I fell down too, beside her. Quickly she got on to her feet like a filly in fear and kicked into my knee with the force of a horse. It sank me into my subconscious for a few seconds. But soon I regained my senses and saw her slouching toward the university canteen. I got up in slow motion with seething pain in my knee and slowly limped toward the canteen to tender my apology. I found it the only way to save my love’s labour for the day. As I entered the canteen, I saw her in the

bright lamplight sitting with the student from Psychology. He was fondling her toe tenderly. I wobbled out in the rain with a tender insight into my good old grandfather's advice.

© Copyright 2009 Asiatic, ISSN 1985-3106
<http://asiatic.iium.edu.my>
<http://asiatic.iu.edu.my>
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)