

LIVING

The Cabbage-Patch Conspiracy

by Farah Ghuznavi

less to say, this also raised rather misleading hopes and often misplaced joy when other female relatives were heard to be going to the hospital.

The same friend's daughter, when all entreaties to her mother to go there and get her a little sister failed, starting leaving small notes in her bag and other strategic places.



begging her to go to the hospital and fetch a baby for her to play with. This also led to the occasional embarrassing situation, as when they visited a cousin in the hospital, who had just given birth to a baby girl and my friend's daughter dragged her out into the corridor and suggested "You said that people could only get babies from the hospital. Since my aunt has had a baby girl, why don't we take this baby

This is rather more vicious than the standard "baby arriving in cabbage patch" story than used to be circulated in some western countries, but it would be interesting to know if western parents have a similar version for their kids when they are particularly regretting having had them!

exception that proves the rule, and in this case one of my colleagues had a rather traumatic experience to mention to us. She comes from a large family, and her uncle had apparently devised a number of stories to account for the existence of each child. She clearly got the worst story of the entire bunch.

She was told that she had been picked up from the area where the Hindu untouchable community lived. Since her parents were Muslim, this was enough to make her feel the odd one out. But to make it worse, being a particularly sensitive child, rather than clarifying the matter with her parents, she then decided that the Hindu women who swept the streets must be her real mother, and spent ages following the woman around and trying — fruitlessly — to see her face, which was covered by the sari she kept draped over her head while she knelt to do her sweeping. Similarly, she decided that the Hindu man who used to clean the drains nearby her house was probably her real father. She would shave up chapatis and vegetable bhaji, or halwa, and rush out to give it to him, and rush back inside the gate before her mother noticed that she was gone. It was clearly a joke of her uncle's for which she paid dearly.

Nor are uncles or even parents the only culprits guilty of such behaviour. Siblings can be far worse, with there often being a positive correlation between the closeness in age of

siblings and the degree of evil involved in devising the story. One friend used to make her younger sister cry on a regular basis by telling her, when she was particularly annoyed with her, that her sister was adopted and that my friend herself was the natural child of her parents, which was why they loved her more. The age gap between the two was one and a half years.

An exception to this was another friend, who has one brother who is a year younger than her, and another brother who is about ten years younger. She would tell her little brother, with great glee, that he was the result of a contraceptive error on the part of their parents! Luckily, he had a healthy enough ego to be unaffected by this....

The clear enough message from all these stories seems to be that to survive in this world, you have to develop a healthy skepticism for what people tell you at a very early age! A good example of this was provided by another friend, who has one brother, younger than her by two years. Her mother was also fond of telling her, when annoyed to death by her pranks, that she had been picked up from the rubbish dump. She briefly considered the possibility of this being accurate, but dismissed it totally once she had seen that her mother would tell her younger brother the same thing when he annoyed her, adding at that point that my friend was actually her real daughter! Alas, not everyone is capable of such clear-minded deductive reasoning at such an early age....

The Lazy Hazy Days of Hartal

by Fayza Haq

"HAPPY Hartal!" said a teen-aged contributor to the feature section of the newspaper, as he left to go, with a twinkle in his eye and an exaggerated bounce in his walk. I had heard of "Happy New Year", "Happy Eid" and "Happy Diwali" but this was surely a new coinage. Yet how can one be entirely amazed at this nouveau phraseology — hardly a month passes without days being notched off for days from work to become a day of life in Dhaka because some political party or another has called a hartal or a strike.

As I cautiously find my way to work, I see the Satmasjid Road divided into sections of numerous cricket fields, with bricks and stones serving for the wickets, and numerous well-to-do people of various ages sitting around as rapt audience — as if it were the most natural thing to do on week days. Young travelling tea-sellers with their huge flasks of sweet tea and plastic bags of sweet balls of moa make a flourishing business meanwhile. Nothing deters these leisurely hartal observers — not the heat, the scorching sunshine or the sight of long-faced office-goers, clinging on to their lunch-boxes and office files, with their do-or-die appearance of marathon participants.

I myself am lazy and care-free. I'll wake up an hour later than usual and lool around reading the newspapers before going to work. The other women living as far off as Uttara, DOHS and Pallabi won't be there. What a pity — I enjoy my colleagues around me as it makes me work. If Nuzhat and Nusrat are glued to the computer, I can hardly sit idle

flipping through a copy of "Cosmopolitan". The only reason I turn up at work is that the boss will point out to my bulging and bloated midriff tyre and say "A walk to office and back is a prescription I have always been giving you for your constant complaint that your belly outgrows your kameezes in six months. Make your beginning during the hartal and keep it up the rest of the month." I admit to myself, I find more excuses for prowling and loafing about the house. After all, once I'm at my work-place the conversation will rotate once more to the same old "How did you get to work?", and the men will recount how many rickshaws they had changed and the numerous *manstans* they had encountered and overcome all these obstacles to come to work, and at least an hour will pass debating who paid the most to the rickshawalla to reach the office.

My other excuse for dragging my feet and having cups of tea till mid-day at home is when I look at the maids in the house I say to myself: "They are blithely collecting raw mangoes from the trees and chatting with the neighbouring servants about how the *sahib* next-door spends hartal days in fixing his video and being glued to the screen with the excuse, They have shifted the week-end movie to Thursday, while his wife grumbles her litany about how he should tutor the children in their Maths or complete his do-it-yourself job of plumbing or preparing the flower beds in the garden.... Why even Rehana and Ruksana, my "best bud-

dies" will be on their swing-chairs at home... why should I rush?"

"Hartals are not that much of a calamity". Rehana will soothe me on the phone, when I reach office. "I am catching up with beauty treatments, such as putting *uptan* on my face and henna on my hair. Tomorrow I'll alter my blouses and *kameezes*. Shopon, my husband, wants me to embroider his *purbais*. Look at the silver lining in the cloud, my girl!"

Ruhsana will pour out her patented gossip about her goings-on. "In a way I am relieved that it's hartal. I can now convert the tamarinds and green mangoes into *achars*, that Russel brought back from his last field trip to Comilla. If these unofficial holidays continue, we can keep our jobs at the office and perhaps even run the homes without the constantly whining maid servants."

"I'm listening to *ghazals* on my walkman and doing my nails at the office... my boss isn't in as he would have to come by car from Banani, and with the hartal on it's out of question. The only problem is that the neighbouring food shops are closed and my sandwich from home must suffice. We'll postpone the visit to the hairdressers and the *darzi* at New Market till next week...." says Romana, another friend and confidante, blithely, from her air-conditioned half-empty office, as her piece of telephone conversation for the day.

With shops shut and many streets nearly empty the post-office closed and very few officials even in the banks, can you blame the people for their Lotus-eater attitudes?

FISH SEEKING BICYCLES FILL THE SINGLES BARS

Germany is the Lonely Hearts capital of Europe: 12 million Germans close the door on themselves every night and drink a solitary coffee in the morning. In some big cities this means that more than a third of all people live alone. But a new lust for romance is sweeping the land — and making new fortunes.

Petar Hadji-Ristic writes from Berlin

FOUR-year-old Iris is definitely the star of the party. Perched high on her mother's shoulders she is the most striking of all the women; her long, golden hair changes colour every moment as the psychedelic spotlights sweeps backwards and forwards catching her aloft laughing and wriggling to the beat of the blues singer.

But whoever fancies little Iris has to take 30-year-old Mami Marisa, too. And tonight, at Berlin's second Lonely Hearts party they have competition.

Marisa has already made her choice from hundreds of Lonely Hearts advertisements that appeared in advance in the magazine *Tip*. Pinned to her tack are her two large stars with the numbers 221 and 124.

Number 221 has the best chance with her: he said in his advertisement that he could laugh, cry and was prepared to carry off any women for a multicultural adventure. He did not mention, though, whether he would spare a place for a child.

"I feel it is going to happen. He doesn't know his luck!" says Marisa.

She would know at first glance whether 221 — who had broken the general Lonely Hearts rule by not giving his size in centimetres — was the one. If he turned out to be one centimetre shorter than Marisa minus Iris on her shoulders he would have to make way for 124.

"And he has got to be against alcohol, very emotional, a little spiritual and like the

guitar — although this is not an absolute must. But marriage is." With that she staggers off of find Mr 221 among the 1,200 single people crammed into the Lonely Hearts party organised by the group *Fisch sucht Fahrrad* (Fish seeks Bicycle — from the feminist joke that a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle).

Such parties have become the latest craze to sweep the nation. Similar sell-out parties for singles are being held all over the country.

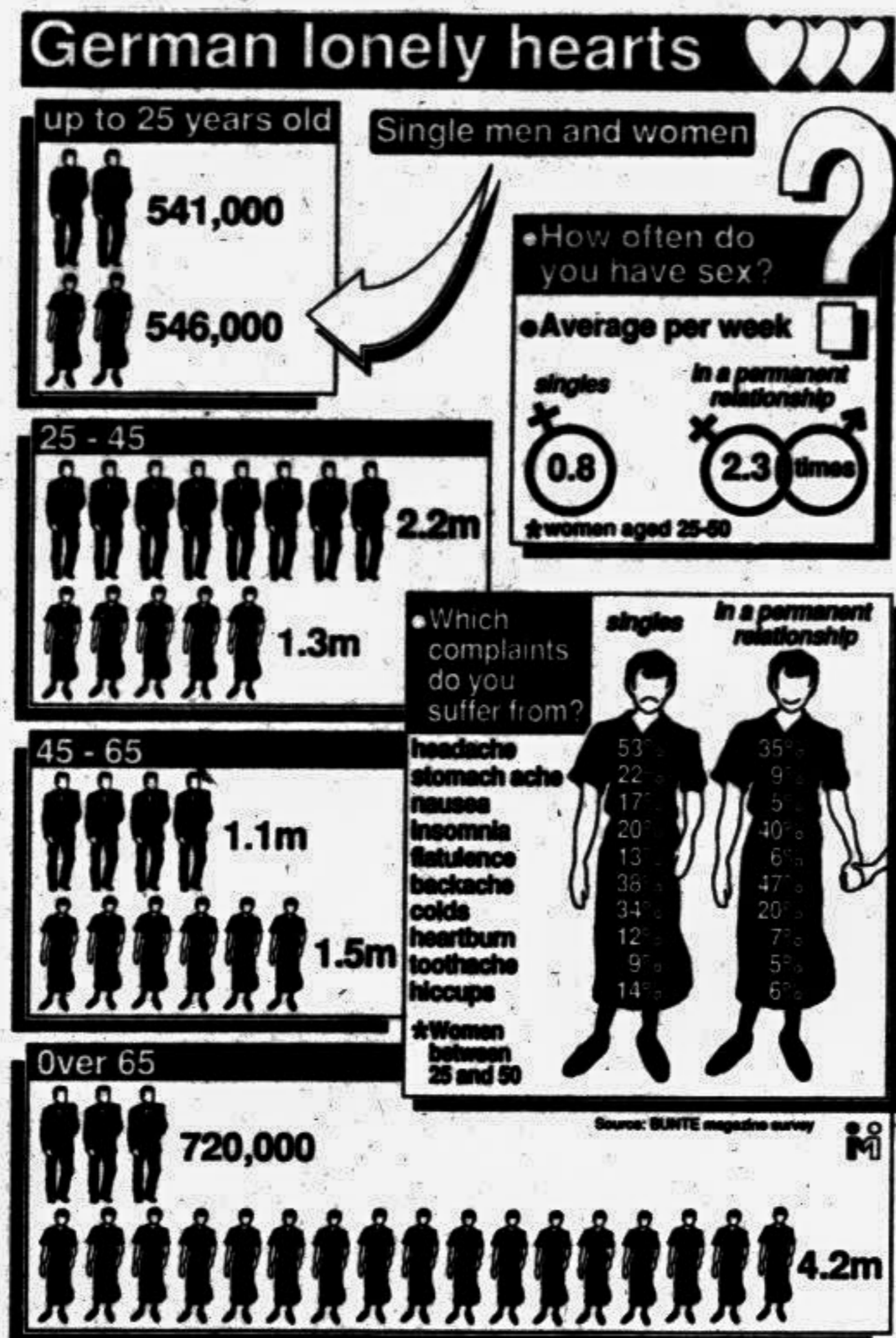
So keen were Berliners to pay 16 deutschmarks for the chance to find a partner that this Lonely Hearts party got under way two hours before the official starting time. And the giant *Tip* tents between the New National Gallery and National Library will now stay up for one every month.

At DM8 for the right of a number, DM8 for a five-line advertisement, DM15 for an entrance ticket, besides DM4 for the magazine, the magazine has found a handsome side business.

"This is better than disco," said an approving Jorgen, a 40-year-old consumer journalist who had tested out every available means of finding a partner for his magazine — and was not going to take on *Tip*.

"This way you get to see who is hiding behind the advertisement — after all many people get help in writing them," he added, indicating the experience of a man who had been seriously led astray in the past.

Placing himself strategically at the party's entrance door he had spotted the two numbers he had chosen from *Tip* —



even before they saw their stars on his jacket. But he had rejected both of them.

His gaze was now fixed on a pretty woman called Christine. But their first blazing row seemed to be looming.

"I would like to marry," said Jorgen, opening his heart to a fellow journalist.

"What's the need?" interrupted Christine cutting him dead.

Jorgen certainly had a point in believing that Germans cheat and do not write their own Lonely Hearts advertisements. In fact, wrestling with the language to make oneself alluring in five lines has developed into a high art form and another source of income for the journalistic profession.

Franjo Graff, a 42-year-old journalist from Cologne, is the country's most famous mater of the skill. His evening classes on how to woo a dream partner through an ad are permanently booked out.

Genuine or not, the simple Lonely Hearts advertisement without an accompanying party is still the favourite means of meeting someone in Germany.

They spill out of almost every newspaper and magazine — an estimated 100,000 a week. And that is not counting all the radio and TV spots for the longsame.

There are also computer "e-mail boxes" for managers to set up dates between spreadsheets, blind date boxes, marriage agencies who fix up the rich for DM10,000 or more and, of course, all the advertisements for the 1.2 million a day calls on prostitutes who turn over DM50 billion a year — DM10 billion more than the country's top company Daimler-Benz.

"It is a very efficient method," commented a young Berlin historian and writer, Christoph Ernst.

He chose his current part-

ner after sifting through a list of about 30 advertisements from several magazines and selecting three of the best-written for an interview.

"I was at an emotional low. But I decided not to lick my wounds and go out there and test my market value."

He was snapped up — by a dentist, a profession that is widely envied for its skill in writing high bills.

"I found there is no rubbish out there. There are many beautiful and nice women. Everyone is doing it!"

The Lonely Hearts problem does not look like going away. Social worker Sylvia Baeck is working on another approach.

She runs a Flirt School in Berlin. "I teach them their time could be any day, while shopping, going to the library or in the U-Bahn (underground railway)," she explains. "People thought they could only pair off on non-working days."

"They wait until the weekend. Their anticipation is so high," she explains, panting like a dog to illustrate the point. "Then they are devastated when nothing happens."

For a weekend course on the art of the pick-up (look, resist winking and keep strictly to the right flirt distance of between 60 centimetres and 1.5 metres), she charges DM350.

"What I do is very serious," she emphasises. But there is fun, too.

She laughs loudest at the story of the university mathematics professor who spotted one of his male students at one of her *Flirtwochenends* (Flirtweekends). "Fortunately, the student was so short-sighted he did not notice."

There are other such schools in Munich, Dresden and Dusseldorf, the German singles capital. One man is even trying to franchise the idea for DM1,600 a month.

None of this meets with the approval of Horst Schillat, an economist and university lecturer who believes focusing on the number of lonely hearts is unfair to Germany: a country should not be judged by the number of its Lonely Hearts Ads, and, anyway, there were just as many in other countries.

If there was a problem, he said, the explanation lay in the country's development since World War Two.

The old structure was destroyed and a new one was created. The technology was more, modern than other countries, the development quicker, the work more specialised and the people worked and worked. They lacked time for deeper relationships and carried over the organisation in their work to their private lives.

He thinks that Lonely Hearts advertisements and parties are part of current fashion. Some people are earning so much that they splash out on dozens of Lonely Hearts advertisements at a time.

"It has become a whole industry. But for every tendency there is an alternative one."

PETAR HADJI-RISTIC is a Berlin-based freelance journalist.

— GEMINI NEWS

A HOME TO INSPIRE ART



Beautiful surroundings seem to aid the creative processes — judging by the houses and gardens of famous people who once lived in the south of England.

This sixteenth-century house was bought in 1899 by one of the most acclaimed figures in the history of the British theatre — Dame Ellen Terry. She lived in the house whenever she was not away working, and died there in 1928.

Ellen Terry first fell in love with the house when out walking in Kent with her stage partner Henry Irving. Inside it was an old shepherd, and she asked him to let her know when it was for sale. It was several years later that she received a postcard simply bearing the words "House for sale" with the Tenterden postmark, and she hurried down to Smallhythe in Kent to buy the house.

Despite the passage of time and various incidents, Smallhythe Place has managed to retain many of its original features and is considered a solid testimonial to the soundness of early Tudor Kentish construction. It served first as the Port House to what was then a thriving shipyard, acquiring its new name — The Farm — and purpose when the sea receded and agriculture took over.

The house is now owned and run by the National Trust, a charitable organisation that helps to conserve historic houses and parklands all over Britain. — LPS

COOKERY

Shepherd's Pie

- 1/2 lb. cooked or tinned meat
- 1/4 lb. Bombay onions
- 1 oz. dripping
- 1 teacup stock

- 1 dessertspoon Worcester sauce
- seasoning
- mashed potatoes
- a little milk or beaten egg

The remains of cold roast beef or mutton could be used for this. Trim the meat removing all skin and gristle and chop it finely or put it through the mincing machine. Heat the dripping in a stewpan, put in the onions (chopped) and brown them lightly, then add the meat and the stock, season to taste with powdered cinnamon, cloves, pepper and salt, add the sauce and cook slowly for about 15 minutes. Put the meat into a greased pie-dish, prepare some mashed potatoes and pile them on the top. Smooth over

neatly with a knife and roughen the top with a fork. Brush over with a little milk or beaten egg and bake in a moderate oven for about three-quarters of an hour or until browned.

Meat and Macaroni Timbale

- 1/4 lb. cooked meat
- 1/4 lb. macaroni
- 2 oz. grated bread
- 1 teaspoonful chopped fennel
- 2 eggs

The remains of cold roast beef or mutton could be used for this. Trim the meat removing all skin and gristle and chop it finely or put it through the mincing machine. Heat the dripping in a stewpan, put in the onions (chopped) and brown them lightly, then add the meat and the stock, season to taste with powdered cinnamon, cloves, pepper and salt, add the sauce and cook slowly for about 15 minutes. Put the meat into a greased pie-dish, prepare some mashed potatoes and pile them on the top. Smooth over

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with a nice brown gravy.

Banana Apple Betty

- 2 tart apples, pared and cored
- 1/2 teaspoonful cinnamon
- 3 cupful sugar
- 3 firm bananas, peeled
- 3 cupfuls soft breadcrumbs
- 1/4 teaspoonful salt

Slice apples and cut bananas crosswise into 1/2-in. pieces. Mix sugar, cinnamon and salt with crumbs. Place alternate layers of crumbs and fruit in a well buttered baking dish, using crumbs for top and bottom layers. Cover baking dish and bake in a moderate oven about 40 minutes. Uncover. Bake 5 minutes longer or until crumbs are browned. Serve hot, with cream, custard or fruit sauce.



Shalwar-kameez designs in "bandini" to be worn with prominent earrings.