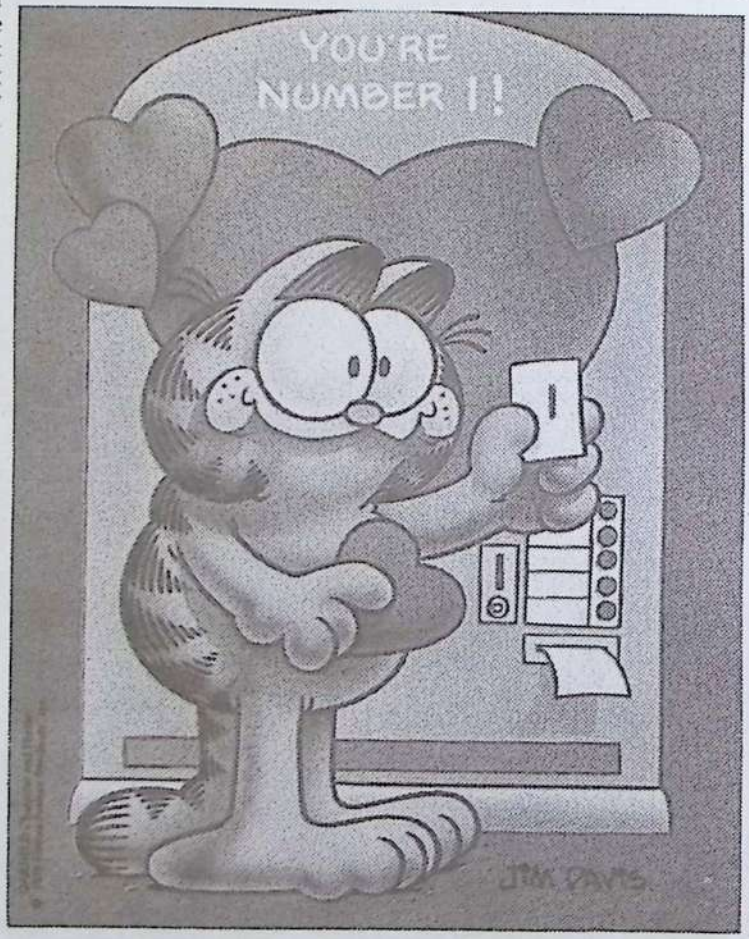
The Story of Valentine's Day

By Masroor Ahmed Deepak

WE have been noticing that for the past few years the concept of Valentines is catching on pretty fast. Cable TV has certainly helped us a lot regarding this matter. A few years back Valentine's Day was taken as a fashion accessory. Only trendy and high classed people used to celebrate this day. But now we get to see more people getting hooked into this particular Western style of celebration. We as a nation tend to enjoy the best of everything. Just a few days ago we celebrated the holy Eid-Ul-Fitr. That day we saw boys and girls wearing their best clothes, alms being given to beggars, there was a smell of "giving" in the air. On the other hand during Christmas and New Year's Dhaka changes into Las Vegas, New York or even London. So we get the best of everything. And Valentines Day happens to be one of those occassions that we still no very less about. We all know what Valentine's Day is for, but have you have ever thought about exactly why it started in the first place. Well readers, read on. That way you will be able to impress your partner that much more on Valentine's Day right? No, way!



The holiday of Valentine's Day probably obtains its origins from the ancient Roman feast of Lupercalia. In the early days of Rome, fierce wolves roamed the woods nearby. The Romans called upon one of their gods, Lupercus, to keep the wolves away. A festival held in honor of Lupercus was celebrated February 15th. The festival was celebrated as a spring festival. Their calender was different at that time, with February falling in early springtime.

One of the customs of the young people was name-drawing. On the eve of the festival of Lupercalia the names of Roman girls were written on slips of paper and placed into jars. Each young man drew a slip. The girl whose name was chosen was to be his sweetheart for the year.

Legend has it that the holiday became Valentine's Day after a priest named Valentine. Valentine was a priest in Rome at the time Christianity was a new religion. The Emperor at that time, Claudius II, ordered the Roman soldiers NOT to marry or become engaged. Claudius believed that as married men, his soldiers would want to stay home with their families rather than fight his wars. Valentine defied the Emperor's decree and secretly married the young couples. He was eventually arrested, imprisoned, and put to death.

Valentine was beheaded on February 14th, the eve of the Roman holiday Lupercalia. After his death, Valentine was named a saint. As Rome became more Christian, the priests moved the spring holiday from the 15th of February to the 14th - Valentine's Day. Now the holiday honored Saint Valentine instead of Lupercus.

Cupid happens to be the sign of love. Cupid has always played a role in the celebrations of love and lovers. He is known as a mischievous, winged child, whose arrows who would pierce the hearts of his victims causing them to fall deeply in love. In ancient Greece he was known as Eros the young son of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. To the Roman's he was Cupid, and his mother Venus.

One legend tells the story of Cupid and the mortal maiden, Psyche. Venus was jealous of the beauty of Psyche, and ordered Cupid to punish the mortal. But instead, Cupid fell deeply in love with her. He took her as his wife, but as a mortal she was forbidden to look at him. Psyche was happy until her sisters convinced her to look at Cupid. Cupid punished her by departing. Their lovely castle and gardens vanished with him and Psyche found herself alone in an open field.

As she wandered to find her love, she came upon the temple of Venus. Wishing to destroy her, the goddess of love gave Psyche a series of tasks, each harder and dangerous than the last. For her last task Psyche was given a little box and told to take it to the underworld. She was told to get some of the beauty of Proserpine, the wife of Pluto, and put it in the box.

During her trip she was given tips on avoiding the dangers of the realm of the dead. And also warned not to open the box. Temptation would overcome Psyche and she opened the box. But instead of finding beauty, she found deadly slumber.

Cupid found her lifeless on the ground. He gathered the sleep from her body and put it back in the box. Cupid forgave her, as did Venus. The gods, moved by Psyche's love for Cupid made her a goddess.

Well readers, these are the basics for Valentines Day. ■