Hamlet in Love

(A play for our times)

MOHIT UL ALAM

(The first part of this play was published last week. Today we bring to you the second part)

--- Literary Editor)

Scene Three **Location: Campus Lobby**

[The same setting, the girls now seated: Cordelia, Rosalind, Portia, Viola and a few others.]

Cordelia: Rose, have you heard that Ophelia is going to America this week to marry a guy over there by the name of Cassio?

of everybody to go out of his sight? Rosalind: Did he? I don't remember though. Yes, Ham has

Viola: Good, Ham deserves it. Didn't he ask Ophelia in front

this bad temper. Good student, very sensitive, but very bad temper. Maybe his poor background is responsible.

Portia: I think he hates us women.

Viola: He's proud. Portia: Yeah, he never talks to me. I don't greet him either, when I see him. Gertrude Miss has pumped him too much

with praise. Rosalind: Though, I think, his love for Ophelia may be genuine. Cord, I don't understand why they should fall in love while studying. Look, everybody, including Einstein or Tagore,

got twenty four hours everyday. If you love, then you can't study. You waste your parents' money and also become a liability for the country, because you are unfit intellectually. Cordelia: Your father is rich, Rose, that's why you can speak

in that confident manner. You don't have to think about your future. But I would rather choose a guy for myself while studying, to secure my future, than finish education and not getting married because I've become a granny or 'highly qualified.' Rosalind: Then, Ophelia's father is filthy rich, why then she should fall in love?

Viola: You both are missing the point, love comes like that . . . [the song "You fill up my senses" by John Denver can be heard in the background. All the girls suddenly look romanti-

[Then appear the boys. All kinds of extempore greetings take place. Antony in his breeches does a jig in front of Cordelia. Rosalind moves herself a chair away both to give Antony a place to sit and to show her disgust. Rosalind, then in total disregard of others, speaks to Hamlet.]

Rosalind: Can I have a word with you, Ham? [Hamlet and Rosalind take the forestage.]

cally moved.]

Hamlet: I know what it is about. Rosalind: Yes, something that Gertrude Miss wants me to

Hamlet: Gertrude Miss, then my ears have sixty holes.

Rosalind: She says she's disappointed with you about your

ast assignment.

Hamlet: But I thought, I wrote the essay rather well. My personal feelings went into it.

Rosalind: That's what she is not happy about. She says if you want, she might give you another deadline to submit. Hamlet: I don't think I would like to do that. I mean, I'm not

in a mood to go over it again. She wanted an essay on subjectivity, and I exactly did that. Nothing is the crap there. Do you know where the problem actually lies!

Rosalind: I'm afraid, I don't.

Hamlet: She hates me for everything I am. She'll give me a

B, I know. Never an A. Rosalind: I don't understand how you can talk like that about a teacher, who we know praises you the most in your

absence. Why in the world should she hate you?

Hamlet: She also hates Ophelia, because we both are in love. People unhappy in life become jealous of people falling

Rosalind: That's the right feeling. You both are students in the same year. Rather be friends. Don't be lovers. She sees that in consequence you both will destroy your career. Hamlet: Did

she preach this matter to you to tell me? Rosalind: Nope! Ok, let's cut this stuff off. Now, come to the

point. Does Ophelia love you? Hamlet: Rose, you're impossible. How can you ask this question, when the whole world knows about it?

Rosalind: Ham, don't think me rude. If she does love you, then why is she marrying the boy from America? Ham, it's your career, not hers that's at stake here. Probably, Gertrude Miss also hinted at this when she said your grades are falling, and it's worrying her.

Hamlet: Do you understand heroism? Ophelia right away loves me, but she wants a little bit of heroism on my part. And, I'm going to act that part out.

Rosalind: I don't get you there, what do you mean?

Hamlet: Ask Macbeth, he'll tell you about it.

[In the meantime, Antony has unwittingly told the girls about the wall, about the moonshine, and the elopement. Portia and Cordelia were still laughing at it, when Hamlet and Rosalind have joined them again.]

Portia: Listen Rose, these boys are going to shoot a Hindi movie tonight. Rosalind: What's that?

Viola: They will put a ladder against the boundary wall of Ophelia's house.

Which side of the wall I don't know. Ophelia will cross over the wall. There'll be moonshine, and Mac and Ham will wait in the car, and if everything happens in the right way, they will drive off with Ophi.

Rosalind: Oh, that's the heroic act? Well, what happens if the moon doesn't shine, if the dogs of the house bark, if the security senses the presence?

Horatio: Yeah, there's the rub.

Rosalind: Why don't you better talk to her or see her guardians, won't that be a softer option?

Antony (doing another jig, puts his expensive mobile on his ear): What's the number?

Hamlet: Whose number?

Antony: Whose else? Ophelia's! Rosalind: Why Ophelia's number?

Antony: To call her to know if she loves Ham. If yes, we go to

her father as a pressure group, pleading for Ham. Rosalind: Ant, slowly. Let Viola talk to her first.

Viola: I'm not on talking terms with her since when she has decided to marry that American boy.

Antony: Let me talk. I eyed her first, before Ham sneaked in. Ham, the destroyer.

Hamlet (angrily): Don't get at me that way, Ant. I may not have your father's money, or your muscles, but I can teach you English as long as you want.

Antony (humorously): Say, Banglish, with your that peculiar accent. Well, that's the reason. The teacher in you is what Ophelia hates. She's leaving, because she doesn't want a teacher-husband. Got that!

Rosalind: Ant, you talk too much. If you are that smart, talk to Ophelia, then.

Antony (on the phone): Hello, Ophi, this is Ant, I'm going to ask you a direct question, a Khodar kasam close-door question, and reply me in one single yes or no. One, two, three, here's my question--are you going to marry Ham or the American boy? The American boy, your reply is the American boy, ok, talk to Rose then.

[Rosalind talks to Ophelia for nearly fifteen minutes. In the meantime Guildenstern brings out his guitar, and strums on it while Rosencrantz sings out "How many roads must a man

walk down," and all break out in a chorus.] [And then, through the main entry enters Cleopatra in a dazzling dress. Instantly the singers change to another love song: "Is it me you're looking for?" As Cleopatra saunters in other girls instantly look less bright beside her. Antony breaks into a different dance now, and escorts Cleopatra forward, introduces her to all his friends.]

Portia: Should I tell your friend, what you said a moment

Antony (gesturing at Portia not to, then turns to Cleopatra): Cleo, tell them why you want to come to our university?

Cleo: Why should I tell them, have they asked me? Antony: Soft Cleo, (then softly to her ears) tell them you want to come here for me.

(Cleopatra doesn't seem much amused. But she sits beside Antony, crossing her legs.)

Rosalind (returns from the corner in a glum face): She says she loves Ham, but she yet will marry the American boy. For god's sake, Ham, why can't you drop her, as you drop from a course? Concentrate on your studies instead, such a fine brain that you have!

Hamlet: My life will be meaningless without Ophelia. I stand no wall. I brook no opposition. My love is a force for me, and I will force my love. [The song "Nothing can stop emotions" by Michael Learns to Rock is heard.]

Cordelia: Force, Ham, did you say force? You sound like an MCP.

Hamlet: MCP! Male chauvinist pig. Yes, that's what I am. Mac, go ahead with your plans. I'll talk to her. You'll see her 'no' will become 'yes'. Mac, I have a special idea. But first you all go to her father's office. Tell him in a clear language that Hamlet is going to be his son-in-law, and nobody else.

Location: Mr Polonius's office chamber, very posh interior design.

[Ophelia's father Polonius's office at the 17th floor of a highrise building in the busy area of Motijheel. All except Hamlet seek an appointment. Cleopatra has also joined.]

[In the Board Room Mr. Polonius is in the midst of a meeting with other directors of his company, Shylock, Henry Bolingbroke, Richard Gloucester and Prospero. All of them are in complete black suits. Prospero, Polonius and Shylock have beards. Shylock has a tupee on his head.]

Polonius (addressing the young group who have just entered his office): Ok, all of you stand there and talk. One at a time. And be brief. As you know brevity is the soul of wit.

Macbeth (stepping slightly forward): Thank you sir. We've come to appeal to you not to marry your daughter off to America, because she has a deep understanding with our friend, Hamlet.

Polonius (hum): Young man, I must thank you for talking on behalf of your friend. But you've actually come to the paddy field to collect egg-plants. It's her decision I'm respecting. She gave her consent.

Rosalind: May I have the opportunity to speak sir. We have very confirmed reports that she has been kept confined in the house, and that she has been intimidated by the guardians of the family into consent. I would request you to let her come here and say in front of us that she doesn't love our friend,

Prospero: Young lady, if I may interfere. Let both the parties be on an equal footing. If she has to come here, the boy has to

come here too. [Hearing this there's a little shuffling and restlessness among the group of the young students. Then Cordelia speaks:]

Cordelia: If you guarantee his security, he'll come.

Henry Bolingbroke (bursting out in a big laughter, shoves his elbow into Richard's chest): I never knew that a man wanting to marry is afraid of security. Listen Richard, the value has fallen so low from that of our time!

Richard: Yeah, truly so. You remember, I just snatched your bhavi from her wedding seat, just the night before her marriage to another person was in progress.

[Right at the moment, there was a great stirring in the landing in front of the door, which just flung open, and entered Hamlet, with the same book in his hand, one of his fingers still inside it. His hair most disheveled, his shirt open on the chest, his jeans tottering at the feet, and he was looking pale.]

Hamlet: I'm not a rat. I'm not afraid of security. And I mortgage my life to my love. Shylock (taking off his tupee, and scratching his head a

little): My dear young man, what's your name you said . . . Hamlet. Ok. Listen, do you know my friend Mr. Polonius here is a very powerful man in society. You're willing to marry his only daughter. Are you aware about the wages at stake?

Hamlet (in a distinctly defiant voice): I said I've waged my life. Shylock: Come to the practical world, sonny. How much do

you think you will agree on her kabinnama? Hamlet: You quote. It doesn't bother me at all.

Prospero: Wait, Shylock. Let me talk. Suppose she does love you, but she will not marry you. Isn't that possible! Hamlet: Yes, in general possible, but in my case, not possible. Because she loves me, I know deeply at my heart, so I can't

be persuaded otherwise. Henry Bolingbroke: Young man, you're missing the point. My friend said that she loves you, but she will not marry you because she has a future which she thinks won't be safe if she

marries you. Am I clear? Hamlet (more defiantly): I said she loves me, and she'll marry me. Is that clear, sir.

[Henry and Richard become so furious; they are almost

getting up from their chairs, but Prospero calms them down, and starts speaking in a calm voice.] Prospero: It looks like you believe that force has a place in

love and marriage.

Hamlet: Yes, I do firmly believe in it. It's an essential part of the survival. It's part of the politics of relationships too.

Shylock: Education has destroyed your head, and made you insensible to the basic questions. Marriage is a matter of social compatibility.

(to be continued)

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Death at dawn

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

Shona has been dead these past few years. She will not come back. The dead mingle with time, become dust and simply cease to be. So it will be with Shona. Only I will stand beside her grave, see the grass grow tall, watch the rain fall and seep into the spot where she sleeps. And I will remember the romance we whizzed through, the passion we let flow into our love. I, an old man made ancient by grief, will speak to Shona, she who once let the music flow, she who made a face every time I asked her to turn, and turn again. I will ask her about the dreams that came to her. And I will speak to her, again, of the dreams I wove around her. 'See how we shared beautiful time and space?' That was what she said, as I played with the raindrops on her cheeks, with the dew that glorified her lips, in our own pristine woods of grace and beauty. I caressed her nose.

It was a November morning of declining youth when I met Shona. There was something of the Greek about her; and as she smiled, flashes of Roman charm seemed to drape her being. The sari she wore was white. A crimson teep shone on her forehead and brilliance shot forth from her eyes. I stole a look at the way she wore that sari. She sensed the innocent malevolence and quickly pulled the edge of it, her anchal, all across her belly. But that November wind? It was kind to me. It let that anchal drift. Forbidden delight was what I savoured. A man's reach should exceed his grasp, right? Or what's a heaven for?

That was aeons ago. Or perhaps it was yesterday? It was a time when Shona, my Shonamuni as I was hers, and I discovered each other, explored the worlds that lay beyond us. On a rain-driven Asharh evening, we pushed the world aside, got on to a rickshaw and went travelling, to nowhere in particular and everywhere we could think of. Rainwater seeped through the torn plastic that served as a hood for the rickshaw. The winds blew into her hair and, as lightning threw its beams across her chiseled, dew-bedecked cheeks, I broke into song. She loved music. And she loved it when I held her close as I sang. Then she sang a solo, in that rain, even as vehicles of varied dimensions and colours swished past us in the rain. Aami tomaye chharha aar kichhu hai bhaabte parina je was what she sang. There was quiet passion in that song. And she gave it a cheerful texture. The roads we travelled on those wet evenings were our journey

through space. We moved through time and space. It was a cosmic reality we built in our lives as we went browsing through tomes in the bookshops. On foreign streets, as darkness descended on what had been a luminous day, I led her by the hand, a warm, passionate hand, into a coffee shop. As she sipped the coffee, I watched her, examining all the contours of her swan-like neck. She winked, to tell me she knew



what I was thinking about. As she passed the book of Donne's poetry we had come by earlier in the day into my hands, I held on to her long fingers and did not let go. What happens if one day all these days come to an end? She asked, looking sharply and deeply into my eyes. I waved the thought away. No, tell me, she insisted. I moved from her fingers to her hand, before beginning to caress her forearm. Shona, my lovely Urvashi, my Pearl, it will be Tagore I will go to for a song to remember you by. She waited for me to finish. And I obliged her. I sang a few lines of the song amar praaner pore chole galo ke / boshonter batash tukur moto . . . On the way back to the flat we shared in Earl's Court, she wept. The wind whistled through the autumnal trees and rushed through her graying hair. My arms held her by her shoulder and her waist. She was a rose I did not want the winds to scatter through the universe. Shona passed into the region beyond time on a beautiful dawn in

spring. The night before she went away, she read out passages to me from a book I had given her. It was called Literary Seductions. It spoke of high profile romance linking men and women who write. She laughed loudly as she read some of the lines. And then she stopped laughing, put the book aside as she curled up in my arms. We too write, don't we? I nodded, as my hand went all over her cheeks, felt her nose and my fingers rummaged through her hair. Her lips tasted like grapes ripe enough to drip into sunset wine.

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A funny fishy fiasco

MASROOR AHMED DEEPAK

Three weeks, four days and eighteen hours later Mira, our three month old Betta fish, unexpectedly dropped dead in his water bowl. It was a good thing that both my six- and nine-year-old children were at school. Otherwise we would have had a very messy situation in hand.

My life partner Eva never believed in inviting anything but Homo Sapiens to her home. Being a pet lover is not one of her strong points. I used to have a cross German Shepherd (Alsatian) by the name of Danny before she came into my life. Slowly but gradually Danny was kicked out from my bed, from my room, from the kitchen, from our house, and eventually ended up in a cubicle somewhere on the roof being looked after, fed, washed by others. At the end Danny became so heartbroken that he decided to leave us indefinitely. That is what the relationship was between my better half and any four legged or single tailed pet. To her dismay, a month and a half ago her home was invaded by a three year old rabbit by the name of Bun Bun and afterwards came Mira, our three weeks, four days and eighteen hour old presently-deceased fish.

Before I have any women's liberation feminist reader separating my head from my spine, let me clarify something. Please don't get me wrong, Eva is a very loving person with a fantastic heart. One day Bun Bun, our three year old rabbit, decided to take a pleasant, non-violent evening stroll through our living room and out of curiosity managed to jump up 14 inches and landed on the couch. For an amateur photographer such as myself, timing is a very important thing. If I had a stop watch and a ruler I could have scientifically proven with a 0.05% of error margin that Eva had jumped more than 28 inches and her scream could have downed a Lockheed Martin's F-35 Lightning IIs single Pratt and Whitney's F135 turbo fan engine which spits out 43,000 pound-force of thrust on a full after burner with a 6.0 reading on the Richter Scale as an aftershock on yours truly. That is how much my wife stays away from any pets. As long

as they are on the cover of a magazine, on the TV screen or behind cages in a zoo then all is good. Anywhere else is definitely not good.

My six-year-old daughter Megha feeds both the fish and rabbit, talks to them nonstop (and, boy, can she talk their ears off! It's a good thing fish don't have those), and reads bedtime stories to them. Especially for her the death of Mira would be heart shattering.

One hundred and fifty minutes and counting before the kids come home from school. Time to return from school is not that far away, and Mira is floating upside down in the fish bowl. Some would say it is a sure shot sign of an Armageddon. My first time and money saving choice of frying Mira for lunch didn't go quite well with Eva. So we decided to trash Mira and head towards the pet store to get a replacement as soon as possible. Time was against us and we had to move fast.

Matching the exact size and color of a fish is not an easy task at all. But I let Eva decide as I would rather have two upset people than three at home.

Sixty minutes and counting before the kids come home from school. Both guilty parents return home with their prized hidden possession, Mira gets flung inside the garbage (which is hidden for ever), bowl is washed, water is conditioned, receipt for the newcomer is destroyed and Mira II is welcomed into our family. That is when the proverbial 'poop' hit the fan. There was a case of a color mismatch and it was too late for an exchange. So we had to come up with a strategy pretty quick. If humans can get old so can fish, I guess. So for the time being Mira II has gotten older and wiser. That is the reason why he has become fairer and shorter. Good choice, eh? Kids believed it and that's the main thing.

Somewhere the soul of Mira 1 is floating around no doubt. I quietly closed my eyes and prayed for the deceased. I wonder if fish spirit can speak human? I guess I'll know it soon if it happens. I wonder how many more Miras we have to go through before the kids catch up with their extra smiling, fraudulent but ever loving and caring parents' deceiving plans.

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