

MAN TO MAN

On Valentine's, buy yourself out of being single

"YOU don't know what you've got till it's gone." Cinderella, the band, sang that power ballad back in the late 80's. I was a kid then and had no idea why an older brother would listen to it so often. Neither did I have any idea if the band would turn into a string quartet after twelve midnight.

This brotherly guy was in a lengthy, hectic yet loving relationship with his college sweetheart. He was not the type to be mushy about life, love and lyrics. However, that one sad nostalgic song was a stable mate of his. Years later after having fallen in love myself many times, mostly with cars, I asked him why that song. He smiled and replied, "I was single once."

That was not as much of an earth shaking revelation as I thought it would be. We were all single once. Some more single than others. Some people are so single that other numbers split into ones when they come in contact. So, huh?

He mumbled some more about how miserable it was being single for a long time. Then one day, poof, magic of the reverse kind happened. And he was part of a plural. He loved that shared feeling of being one half but every year a particular calendar date would come round and it would cause tremors of fear to rise in him.

Valentine's Day has that effect on many. Some fearlessly embrace it. But then, they do say there is no greater fool than a fool in love.

Being single is slowly becoming a stigma. Being a coupe is a badge. It is almost like a membership to a club where they serve cucumber sandwiches under fancy French names that still mean lowly, ordinary, non-heroic cucumber. Others see it as a spa where similar patients go looking for psychiatric counseling. Single people suffer grief at the hands of friends, family, pet animals that can talk (mostly cats) and themselves. Single is a crime.

It is such a crime that some people have even legally commoditised it. In China, women can rent boyfriends. Taobao is China's biggest online marketplace and it has a specific section where you can choose a boyfriend.

Women are apparently under a lot of pressure from family to hook up in this country of more than a billion. More than

a billion people pressuring a woman to hook up is enough to turn her carbon based form into a diamond. New Years, Valentine's Day or simply any family occasion like the purchase of a distant uncle's new hip or death is an occasion for such purchases. Men offer their services to act like a boyfriend for a few hours or few days. Family backs off for a while like a rabid dog from a stick. Hugging costs extra!

There is a saying if you dig from China you will end up in Los Angeles. And in that opposite end, cuddling is the commodity on offer. Cuddling has medicinal values. It alleviates stress by inducing the body to release endorphins. Endorphins sound like dolphins and in reality, they are just as joyous to have around.

The SnuggleBuddies.com is a site that specialises in women offering to cuddle or be cuddled all across USA. A cuddle a day might keep a doctor away, unless it is the doctor that needs a cuddle. Although I have a feeling a puppy would act as a better, less arousing stress reliever. Avoid ducklings though because they suffocate from cuddles.

Unlike ducklings, people are resilient. They devise coping mechanisms to avoid pain and discomfort. "Singles Awareness (or Appreciation) Day" (S.A.D.) is also celebrated on February 14 to ward off the public displays of affection. It is a sad holiday in more ways than one because most singles would rather not be aware of the fact that they are not plural.

Where does that bring us? Back to how being single is a crime. Valentine's Day is coming up in a few days and it will make the ones still left single feeling awful. Plural people will be buying chocolates, researching perfumes online and discussing flowers with strange names like gladiola when you would much rather be watching gladiators. But being single on Valentine's Day is okay. The trick is to treat it like any other day. Know that after the 14th, some of your friends will have gift chocolates at home. Visit them. Enjoy what you have, that feeling of being single. Cause you don't know what you got till it's gone.

By Ehsanur Raza Ronny
Art: Moonwomen-19
by Goutam Chakraborty

