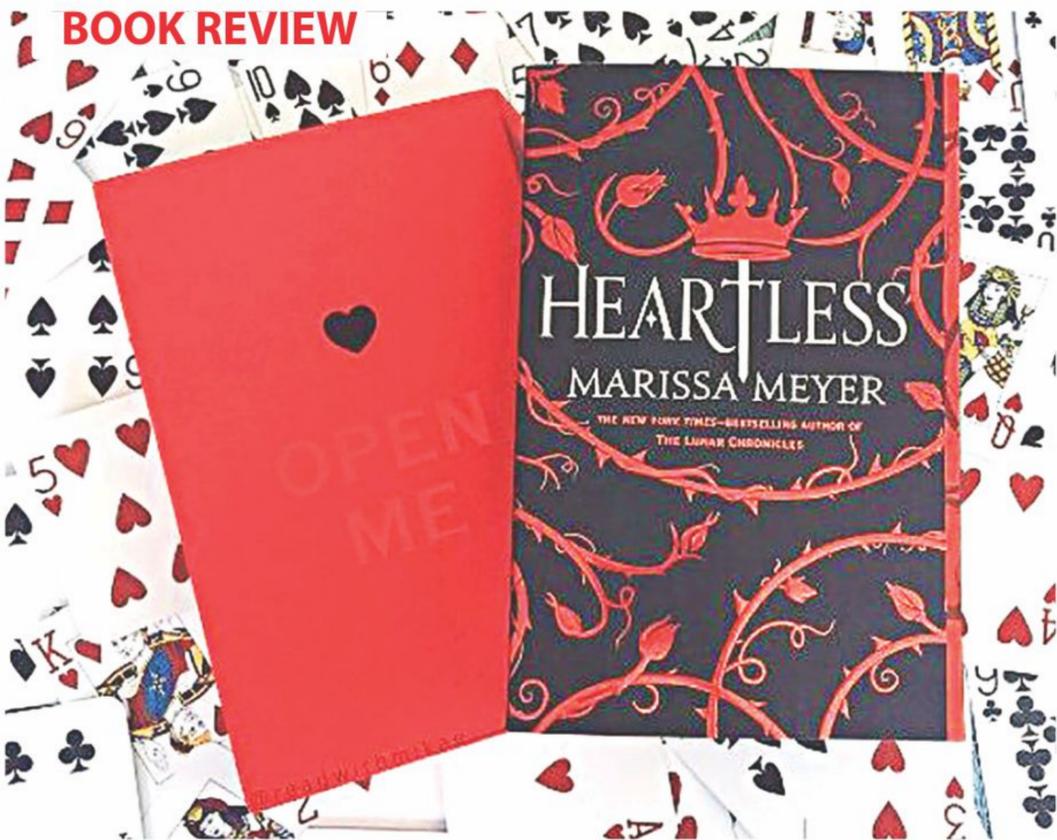


BOOK REVIEW



Down the rabbit hole we go

MASHIYAT NAYEEM

Long before Alice fell down the rabbit hole... And before the roses were painted red... The Queen of Hearts was just a girl, in love for the first time.

If you grew up watching Disney's animated classic *Alice in Wonderland*, you must have questioned a lot of the peculiar aspects or as Alice calls it "nonsense" that goes on in the Kingdom of Hearts. Best-selling author Marissa Meyer does just that, taking an underrated character and spinning a prequel so rich in detail that you almost believe it really is the origin story of the Queen of Hearts.

The book opens in Rock Turtle Cove, the home of a marquis and revolves around his sweet young daughter, Catherine, who would go on to become the notorious Queen of Hearts in Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". Although born into riches, Catherine is a simple-minded girl with an exceptional hand for baking whose magical dreams cause lemon trees and flower bushes to sprout behind her bedpost. She wants nothing more than to set up the best bakery in all of Hearts with her best friend. At the same time, she is the first choice in the King's hunt for a bride.

While desperately trying to avoid the King's proposal at a ball, she meets the new court joker, Jest and eventually falls in love with him. Engaging in a secret courtship with him endangers her future as a queen as well her social status and relationship with her parents. Before she knows it, she is whisked away into a world of darkness and prophecy, tea parties and monsters. While Disney portrays the Queen as a ridiculous

woman, Meyer develops her character by the chapter, delivering a seamless transition of her personality.

The beauty of this novel is in how well it ties to the original tale and manages to weave a story behind every little reference. Brushing up on the animated classic really helps to understand all the references and connect with book. For instance, in the animated classic we see the card courtiers frantically paint white roses red before the hot tempered Queen arrives. Is it simply because she didn't like the look of them? No, it was to curb her bittersweet memory of Jest presenting her a delicate white rose that led her to ban the very flower from the castle grounds. Meyer explores such seemingly miniscule aspects and connects them thread by thread with the original. Characters like the Cheshire Cat and the Caterpillar make several appearances and the Mad Hatter is established as an important character in the story; the King remains true to his original character: a meek and tiny blubbering fool.

The thing about retellings is that you already know the ending and Meyer reminds you of that at the start of *Heartless*. What makes this an exceptional retelling is how the plot is executed. A familiar world is built upon with a hefty dose of all things Alice, thus introducing a nostalgia factor that spans the entire book. Furthermore, eloquent descriptions of the characters and Catherine's delectable desserts make reading it worthwhile.

When you are as in love with fairy tales as I am, you will be trying to revisit them time and again. And this book is the very portal through which you can jump into the rabbit hole. Give it a read and you might just know why the Queen wants everyone off with their heads.

Dealing with overly sensitive men

ZARIN RAYHANA

Before you start judging me after having read that title, let me make it clear to you guys: I am not an orthodox, stick-in-the-mud prick who disapproves of men being sensitive. In fact, I would find it rather cute if a guy got teary while watching *Me Before You*.

However, there is a limit to everything. Having a breakdown because someone commented about your height or demeaning a girl who turned you down in order to feel better about yourself does not fall under the acceptable radar. If you have male friends like that who are sensitive about insignificant matters, you will already know how tough it can get to deal with them. Looking back at my experiences, here are a few things that I learned.

DO NOT STATE THE OBVIOUS ABOUT HIM

If you do not want to be bombarded with hate messages from your friend whom you just casually called "short", then stay away from hitting on his insecurities. And here, hitting on his insecurity actually means stating the obvious about him being shorter than you. Short people are cute, right? On the other hand, even if he is tall, do not state that. Or if he is wearing clothes that looks like air was vacuumed out of them, do not be a nice friend and point out how ridiculous he will look in front of his crush. You never know what will make him go through another breakdown, again.

BE WILLING TO APOLOGISE

Let's say you sent him a meme that you initially thought was self-

depreciating but somehow he ended up being the one who's offended - apologise to him rather than trying to point out how unreasonable he's being. If he asks you out and you turn him down, be sure to apologise. If you killed his video game character, apologise. If you teased him for being single, apologise.

GIVE HIM AN OUT

Your friend ended up getting butthurt about something a girl said to him and is now wallowing about it over the phone while you are trying to solve a Calculus problem. You can't even hang up on him because you are worried that it will hurt him more. Do yourself a favour and give him an out. Tell him you are busy. He needs to deal with issues on his own, especially when those issues are pretty trivial.

FILTER YOUR WORDS BEFORE SPEAKING THEM

I like to call my friends names. Who doesn't? Who doesn't like to playfully provoke their friends? However, you have to be careful when with these people. My word of advice to them: stop taking everything on a personal level.

SILENCE IS THE BEST ANSWER

If he asks your opinion on a matter and you think your answer might offend him, then better be silent than brutally honest.

P.S. If this article offends you, I am sorry.

Zarin Rayhana likes to spend her time by pondering over alternative theories about the universe instead of studying for school. Send her your theories at ericaavianazarin@gmail.com

