ARBiT
it happens here...



A Sweet Celebration of Joy and Togetherness

National Cake Day, observed on 26 November, is a light-hearted yet delightful celebration of one of the world's most beloved desserts. From classic sponges and rich chocolate truffles to regional favourites like fruit-based or cream-filled varieties, cake symbolises celebration, comfort, and shared moments. The day encourages people to bake, share, and indulge, reminding us how food can bring people together across cultures and generations. Whether it marks birthdays, festivals, milestones, or simple joy, cake carries a sense of warmth and nostalgia. National Cake Day is not just about dessert, it's about happiness served by the slice.

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THURSDAY
26 November 2026
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#DIANCUI

The Secret Behind the Blue

Qing dynasty jewellery often combined these vivid blue feathers with gold, pearls, coral, glass and semi-precious stones





Why did traditional Chinese jewellery glow in such an extraordinary shade of blue? It was not paint, turquoise or enamel. The colour came from the brilliant feathers of a kingfisher, painstakingly attached to precious metal in an ancient decorative technique known as dian cui (also called tian tsui), meaning kingfisher feather decoration.

The technique involved craftsmen carefully cutting tiny pieces of iridescent kingfisher feathers and attaching them to metal surfaces, often using delicate gold or silver settings. The result looked almost like enamel or precious gemstones, producing a brilliant blue that could shift towards turquoise and green depending on the angle of the light.

Unlike ordinary pigments, the colour was not created by dye. It came from the microscopic structure of the feathers, which reflected and scattered light in extraordinary ways. This phenomenon, known as structural colour, gave the ornaments their distinctive iridescent appearance, making the blue particularly difficult to reproduce using conventional materials.

Although the technique had much older roots, it reached remarkable levels of refinement during China's Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties. Kingfisher feather decoration was not restricted to tiny hairpins. It appeared on elaborate headdresses, earrings, hair ornaments, fans and other luxury objects.

Qing dynasty jewellery often combined these vivid blue feathers with gold, pearls, coral, glass and semi-precious stones. The contrast between the metallic settings and the shimmering feathers created elaborate ornaments that reflected the craftsmanship and aesthetic preferences of the imperial elite.

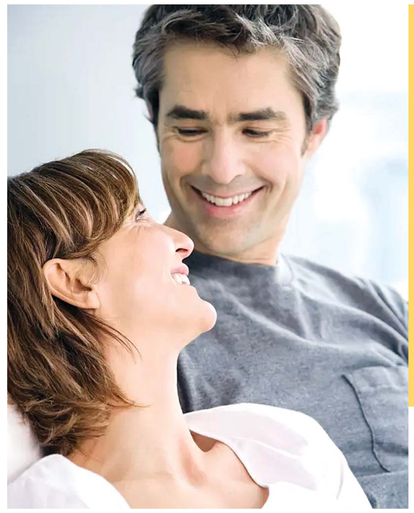
The trade behind this fashion also had an international dimension. Kingfisher feathers were sourced through networks extending beyond China, including Southeast Asian regions such as Cambodia and Siam, present-day Thailand. The demand for these feathers connected Chinese luxury craftsmanship with wider regional trading networks.

However, the beauty of dian cui came at a cost. The process required real feathers, and thousands of birds were killed to supply the luxury trade over time. As conservation awareness and changing attitudes towards wildlife grew, the use of kingfisher feathers declined.

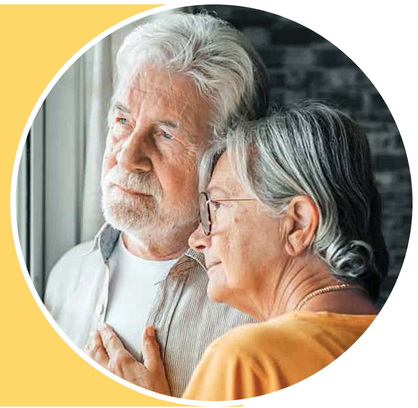
Today, surviving examples of dian cui jewellery are valued as remarkable records of traditional Chinese craftsmanship. Their extraordinary blue remains a reminder of how artisans once transformed something as delicate as a bird's feather into an object of dazzling luxury.







Holding hands is one of the simplest and most powerful gestures. Young couples may hold hands because they are in love; older couples sometimes hold hands because they have become accustomed to facing the world together. There is a subtle difference. For an elderly couple, holding hands may contain memories of decades of journeys, hospital visits, family celebrations and difficult moments.



Not a word spoken





Dr. Goutam Sen
CTVS Surgeon
Traveller
Storyteller

There is something fascinating about the way married couples communicate. After years of living together, they seem to develop a non-verbal private language for which no dictionary exists. A raised eyebrow, a pause, a glance across the dining table or even the way one puts down a cup of tea can convey a message far more clearly than a long conversation.

I have often wondered at this silent communication between husband and wife. They can sometimes complete each other's sentences, know what the other is about to say, and understand a thought that has not yet been expressed. It is almost as though two people, who have lived together for decades, gradually acquire a common vocabulary of gestures, expressions and silences.

The remarkable thing is that this language is not confined to affection. Love and anger are communicated with equal efficiency. A husband may merely look at his wife when a guest says something amusing and she immediately understands what he is thinking. The same husband may give her a particular look when she is about to reveal something he would rather keep private. She needs no explanation.

One look says, "Please stop."

Another says, "I told you so."

A third may say, "Let us discuss this later."

Sometimes, the communication is in the wrinkled forehead. At other times, it is in the eyes. Most dangerously, it is in the silence.

There are several other fascinating forms of communication that develop between couples.

One of them is anticipation. After many years together, spouses begin to know each other's requirements before they are expressed. A wife may notice that her husband has started looking around the room and quietly bring his reading glasses. A husband may see his wife searching through a cupboard and say, "It is on the second shelf," even before she asks where a particular item is.

This can look almost like mind-reading to an outsider. In reality, it is accumulated observation. Years of living together have taught them the other person's habits.

The same anticipation can extend to food. A wife knows that her husband will remove the chilies from his plate. A husband knows that his wife will leave the last piece of the favourite sweet for him, although she will insist that she did not want it. The plate itself becomes a means of communication.

Then, there is the communication of routine. Every household develops rhythms that outsiders may not notice. The sound of the front door closing may tell one spouse whether the other is tired, cheerful or irritated. The manner in which the newspaper is folded may indicate whether the reader is relaxed or preoccupied. Even the morning cup of tea can become a ritual with its own grammar.

"Tea?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

A few minutes later, the cup arrives anyway.

That is not merely hospitality. It is communication based on experience. A marriage gradually develops its own vocabulary of touch. In the beginning, physical gestures may be deliberate and self-conscious. Holding hands, touching an arm or putting a hand on a shoulder can carry the excitement of a new relationship. With the passage of years, however, touch becomes almost unconscious. It becomes part of the daily rhythm of life.

A hand on the back while walking through a crowded place can say- I am here; stay with me. It may also gently guide the other person through a doorway or across a road. There is no announcement of affection. The gesture is so natural that the couple may not even realise they have made it.

Holding hands is one of the simplest and most powerful gestures. Young couples may hold hands because they are in love; older couples sometimes hold hands because they have become accustomed to facing the world together. There is a subtle difference. For an elderly couple, holding hands may contain memories of decades of journeys, hospital visits, family celebrations and difficult moments.

Even the way hands are held can communicate something. A firm grip may mean reassurance. A brief squeeze may mean - I agree. A hand suddenly reaching for the other during an anxious moment can say - Don't worry; we will manage this together.

Then, there is the hand on the shoulder. It is remarkably versatile. It can be affectionate, reassuring, congratulatory or apologetic. A husband returning from a difficult day may sit beside his wife and simply rest his hand on her shoulder. He may not say, "I know you have had a difficult day too." The gesture says it.

The reverse is equally common. A wife may put her hand on her husband's shoulder when he is telling a story to guests, perhaps without even thinking about it. It may mean affection, but it can also carry a warning:

'Enough. Do not tell them that story.'

The remarkable thing is that the husband may understand immediately.

Then, there is the reassuring pat. It is particularly common when one spouse is distressed. A few gentle pats on the back can accomplish what a long speech cannot. "I am with you" is sometimes better communicated by a hand than by a sentence. And there is a wonderful variation: the silent embrace.



#MARRIAGE



A hug between husband and wife is not always romantic. It may follow an achievement, a bereavement, a frightening experience or simply a long separation. Sometimes, one spouse returns from a journey and the first communication is an embrace. No report of the journey is required. The embrace says- You are home!

With age, such gestures can become even more meaningful. The dramatic romance of youth may gradually give way to a quiet physical companionship, sitting close together, touching feet under a blanket, resting a head on a shoulder, or instinctively reaching for the other person's hand.

There is also the protective gesture. At a busy railway station, airport or crowded market, one spouse may automatically move slightly closer to the other. A hand may rest lightly on the other's arm. While crossing a busy road, one may instinctively hold the other's elbow.

It is not necessarily about physical strength or protection in a literal sense. It is an old reflex that says: We are responsible for each other.

Straightening someone's clothes is especially revealing. A wife may notice that her husband's collar is crooked and correct it before he meets guests. A husband may notice that his wife's dupatta or sari has become misplaced and quietly alert her. There is something almost parental about the gesture, but between spouses it often means - I notice you.

Another fascinating gesture is the touch of the feet, not in a ceremonial sense, but in ordinary domestic life. One spouse may massage the other's feet after a tiring day, rub a cramped leg, or apply balm to a sore shoulder. Such gestures can be more eloquent than declarations of love because they involve effort.

There is a beautiful Indian expression for this kind of affection: seva. Caring for the other person becomes almost instinctive. A glass of water, a pillow adjusted under the head, a blanket pulled up during sleep, these are not grand romantic acts, but they are the physical grammar of companionship. Just a touch!

Shared humour is another expressive gesture. Couples who have lived together for decades accumulate hundreds of private jokes. A particular name, incident or expression may make them laugh when nobody else understands why. Someone at the dinner table may innocently mention a place they once visited and husband and wife exchange a glance and suddenly begin smiling.

The others wonder what happened. Nothing has happened.

Everything has happened, twenty years ago.

Their laughter is a form of communication based on a shared history.

A marriage creates a strange division of memory. One remembers dates, another remembers faces. One remembers where the keys were kept five years ago; the other remembers the exact words spoken during an argument ten years ago.

Arguments bring us to another remarkable language: the language of anger.

Long-married couples often do not need words to show irritation. The volume of a cupboard door closing can become a declaration. The distance maintained at the dining table can become a diplomatic signal. A wife who normally asks, "Would you like some tea?" and suddenly asks 'nothing' has communicated something quite effectively.

There are also degrees of silence.

There is the comfortable silence of two people reading in the same room.

There is the tired silence of two people who have had a long day.

There is the thoughtful silence in which both are considering important issues.

And then, there is the famous marital silence which says, with remarkable clarity, "You know exactly what you have done."

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Yet, anger too develops its own rules. Couples who have lived together long enough may know when an argument is serious and when it is merely theatrical. They may quarrel fiercely at breakfast and sit together watching television in the evening as though a diplomatic treaty has been signed.

Sometimes, reconciliation itself is wordless.

A cup of tea appears.

A favourite snack is placed on the table.

That apparently ordinary question can mean: I am still angry, but I am not prepared to stop caring for you.

Perhaps, that is one of the deepest forms of communication in marriage.

There is also the communication of sacrifice. Much of married life consists of tiny acts which are never announced. One person takes the less comfortable chair. One gives the larger portion to the other. An outing is quietly postponed because the other is tired.

The act itself is the message.

Another remarkable form is communication through absence. When one spouse travels, the other often discovers how many things were silently being done every day. The missing person may have been the one who switched off the lights, checked the doors, filled the water bottles, reminded everyone about an appointment or knew where the spare batteries were kept.

Only when that person is away does the household realise how much unspoken communication was taking place through routine.

Modern technology has added another dimension. Couples now communicate through WhatsApp messages, emojis and photographs.

A photograph of lunch may say, "This is what I am eating." A photograph of a queue may say, "Look at what I am suffering through." A photograph of a beautiful sunset may simply say, "I wish you were here."

Even emojis acquire a private marital vocabulary.

But perhaps, the most extraordinary communication is knowing when not to communicate.

There are moments when advice is unnecessary. A person may return home after a difficult day and simply want to sit quietly. A spouse who has lived with him or her for many years learns not to ask twenty questions.

Often, love means knowing when to speak.

At other times, it means knowing what to say.

Finally, it means knowing that nothing should be said at all.

The longer a marriage lasts, the more communication seems to move from the spoken word to the unspoken understanding. In the early years, couples may spend hours explaining themselves to each other. Later, a sentence may be reduced to a gesture.

This private language is not necessarily romantic. It is built from ordinary life, illnesses, journeys, children, bills, celebrations, quarrels, relatives, disappointments, holidays, successes and thousands of unremarkable evenings. Every shared experience adds another word to the speechless dictionary.

Perhaps, that is why old married couples sometimes appear to communicate so effortlessly. They are not really communicating only in the present. They are communicating with the accumulated knowledge of their entire shared past.

A stranger sees a glance.

The spouse sees twenty years behind it.

A stranger hears silence.

The spouse knows what that silence means.

A stranger hears an ordinary question, "Did you have lunch?"

The spouse may hear, "I was thinking about you."

And perhaps, that is the greatest achievement of a long marriage: not that two people always agree, but that they gradually learn to understand what the other means, even when nothing is said. Then comes the language of proximity.

Notice an old married couple sitting in a room. They may not be touching at all. Yet, their chairs are often closer than necessary. One may be reading while the other watches television. They may be doing completely different things, but neither feels the need to be elsewhere.

That physical closeness itself communicates comfort.

Young lovers often want to be together because they have something to say to each other. Long-married couples may want to be together even when they have nothing to say.

And sometimes, distance communicates more than closeness.

After an argument, one spouse may deliberately sit at the other end of the sofa. The gesture is unmistakable.

The sofa has suddenly become a diplomatic frontier.

Yet, even during an argument, physical habits often survive. One may angrily refuse to speak but still put a cup of tea beside the other's chair. Another may be furious but still remind the spouse to take her doses of medicines.

This is one of the amusing contradictions of marriage: the mouth may declare war while the hands continue providing domestic services.

There is also the extraordinary gesture of reaching for someone in sleep. A couple may have been married for forty years and still instinctively reach across the bed when one wakes during the night. Sometimes, there is no conscious awareness of the gesture.

It is perhaps one of the purest forms of physical communication because there is no audience and no performance. Another subtle form is the glance accompanied by a touch. At a family gathering, one spouse may touch the other's arm while someone is speaking. To an outsider, it is meaningless. To the couple, it could mean anything:

Let us leave soon.
Don't interrupt him.
I agree with you.
I am embarrassed.
Look at what he is saying.
We will discuss this later.

The gesture becomes a private code developed over years.

And perhaps, the most touching physical communication is the gesture that replaces a question.

A husband sees his wife looking tired and brings her a chair.

A wife sees her husband rubbing his neck and begins massaging his shoulders.

One notices that the other is cold and quietly closes the window.

Neither asks, "Are you uncomfortable?"

They have already answered the question.

This is why physical communication in marriage can become so rich. It is not simply about romantic touch. It encompasses care, reassurance, humour, protection, apology, companionship, irritation, forgiveness and habit.

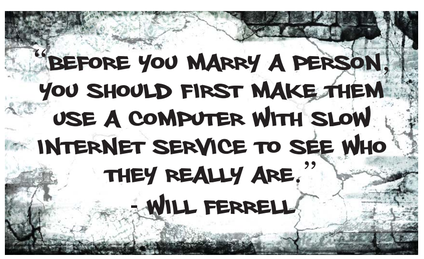
After decades together, a married couple may speak thousands of sentences every year. But some of the most important messages may never be spoken.

Perhaps, that is the secret of physical communication between couples: the gesture becomes meaningful not because of what the hand does, but because of all the years behind that touch.

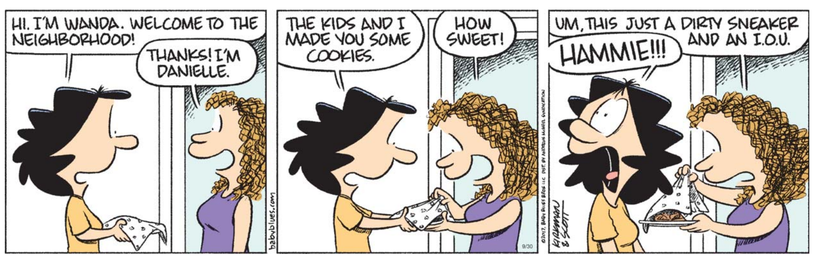
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THE WALL



BABY BLUES By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

