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politeness you Professor!' I quickly apologised and tried to explain that the haste and roughness in my voice was not due to my callous attitude or impolite demeanour but due to the feelings I held for a kindred spirit. When she was convinced of my intention, she proceeded further.

"So, his name is Raju. We met here in the village during the festival of Holi. You know, Holi also falls on a full moon night. I met him then and have lost my heart to that dandy pigeon! What to do? He was so tall and good looking. The violet on his throat was so glossy and smooth that it shone in the silvery moonlight too. And uffffff! My God! What to say about his plumes and feath ers. They looked so vibrant and rich and colourful that it appeared as if God him self painted them in careful, meticulous strokes of fine brushes made out of silk. The cherry on the top of the cake, he had graduated with an Honours in **English Literature!**"

This sounded so familiar. As she fervently described her lover, a page out of a quintessential Jane Austen's novel flashed on the screen of my mind. Poor Dhauli was truly, madly and deeply in love with Raju. Before she could disclose anything further, my gut feeling revealed to me, the exact reason for he disillusionment. The way it happens in typical love-story, when one partner gets separated from the other leaving behind the former to howl and wail like a lovelorn diva, likewise, poor Dhauli might have been estranged from Raju. Yet. I made an effort to ask her in a soothing tone. "Dear Dhauli! It is okay to be fond of somebody. Why are you so sad? What went wrong?'

She replied, "Wrong! There isn't any thing right about us in the present. In the beginning, everything was hunky dory. He professed his love and told me that he had never come across a peahen





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an essay. I do not know in which genre of literature does this piece of writing fall in? It is a simple, genuine and heart-felt narration of my conversation with a peahen, who hails from the same village to which I belong to. Her name is Dhauli or the 'White One'. I keep bumping into her whenever I visit my

village. You can assume that by now we have made good friends with each other. I am a regular visitor to my village which lies tucked away in one corner of the Great Indian Desert or the Thar. Since my village lies along the western slopes of the Aravalli Mountain Range, it occupies a relatively greener tract of the Thar Desert lying sandwiched between seasonal streams flowing down from the mountains. During a good monsoon, our lands get quite wellwatered and the resultant greenery, despite being short-lived, lets us forget the rigors of the desert for a few months. This year happens to be one such year and we have been blessed with abundant rains. My village is looking like a nikhlistan

Usually, when I visit my village and stay in the beautiful. little castle which

Dr Abhimanyu open. My bed is laid either on the dagla (terrace), during summers or in the dalan, if it is cold at night. It is a routine to hear the cooing of my peahen friend in the middle of the night when I sleep in the open. Each night, unfailingly, Dhauli breaks the nocturnal silence his is not a short story or with

her cacophonous screams Sometimes I wonder as to why she starts honking right at midnight. I have often observed that when the night is lit up by a resplendent moon, quite mysteriously, she starts straining her vocal chords exactly at the time when the clock strikes 12. That night also appeared to be one such normal routine occurrence until I discovered a strange happenstance

was built by my ancestors almost five

centuries ago, I prefer to sleep out in the

Bliss of a Conversation

It was a full-moon night of late August. I was invited to a goth (feast) at my cousin's farm lying on the outskirts of the village. The entire field was covered with adolescent stalks of a rich wheat crop. We drank, discussed politics, listened to some songs of the late Nayarra Noor and gorged on the sumptuous desi food prepared on charcoal. On my way back, I drove my SUV through the countryside very slowly because I wanted to let my eyes savour the faintly lit landscape bathed in the chandni (moonlight). Just when I was about to enter the village, I reached the huge Imli (Tamarind) tree which happens to be Dhauli's home and I brought my car to a dead stop. I could see Dhauli perched on a thick branch and I waived a 'hi' to her. She responded with a cold shudder of **#SAWAN**

her shoulder and seemed conspicuously dejected. It was clear to me that she was upset about something and I didn't want to pester her any further. I drove off quickly because after having a happy evening, my cool bed was beckoning me On full moon nights like these, beds laid out on the terrace floor and covered with white cotton sheets become so cool that when you lay your tired frames on them, you feel like taking a dip in a bath tub filled with rose water.

So, I returned, changed my clothes quickly, asked for a kunja (pitcher) of water for myself, took leave from my helper and retired to my bed. After making myself comfortable on the bed, I got busy checking my phone. The inebriation flowing out of a few posts on instagram, engaging videos on YouTube and interesting messages on some WhatsApp soon engulfed me and trans-

ported me into a La La land. Just then, very close to the striking of the 12 o' clock gong, the raucous cooing started echoing from the distant Imli tree located near the village temple. There was a strange restlessness and melancholy in Dhauli's voice that night. The pain and pathos of her voice imparted a spooky appearance to the silver washed night marked by a black and white contrast. The huge white moon whose light was fading and flickering due to the hasty flow of the floating clouds around it, also appeared to be agitated. There was a compelling sense of uneasiness in her voice, so much so that it was difficult to ignore it. Her boisterous shrieks urged me to detach myself from the phone and I sprung up from the bed like a cork. I walked up to the edge of the roof and stood near the pony wall on the terrace with my palms placed on it.

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Sweet Encounters

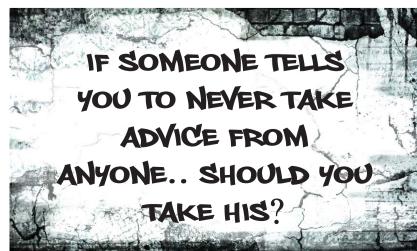
To my delight, she threw no tantrums this time and quickly responded. She flew from her home towards the castle and landed on one of the larger battlements. When her face shone under the ilvery moonlight, all my doubts were laid to rest. Tears were oozing out of her gorgeous longish eyes, she wore a mournful countenance and looked emaciated. At the very first look, I knew that my dear friend was love-struck.

After a few minutes of silence between us, we broke into a conversation. I asked, "So, who is he? What's cooking between the two of you?"

Dhauli cleared her choked throat and said, "Of course! It is a peacock. What a silly billy question to ask? And you call yourself my friend! Is this how you behave with a sick friend? Learn some



THE WALL





FOR THIS





World Puppetry Day

tep into a world of imagination with puppetry. From simple hand puppets to elaborate marionettes, these lovable characters will delight audiences, young and old. Come join the show and let the magic begin! While it can take on a variety of different forms, puppetry involves creating animation from inanimate objects, with the purpose of telling a story. Puppetry has been used for thousands of years to communicate ideas theatrically, whether in a comedic, dramatic, political or tragic fashion. World Puppetry Day is here to celebrate the creativity and art.

more beautiful and loving than me. While assuring me of a life-long companionship, he confessed that I make him feel like no peahen has ever made". I interrupted, "Brilliant! This is a perfect script. Then where is the prob-

"Ohfo! Listen you moron!" "Things were fine until monsoons struck. In the initial bout of the rains, he was happy frolicking in the village meadows. We would spend long hours in the thicket all by ourselves in the monsoon afternoons, that seemed to last for ever. Initially, it seemed that he had no business in life other than to dance around me, showing off his Technicolor plumage to woo me incessantly. Then, I do not know what suddenly got into his mind. One day, he came up to me and announced his wish to go to a place called University of Rajasthan in Jaipur and pursue Higher Studies. He envisaged a brighter future for us in the city. On the contrary, you know how much I love the village and my cosy little Imli tree. I cannot even imagine to leave this spot even if I were offered the Heaven in exchange. However, my decision or choice is immaterial to him. Before I could make up my mind, he departed for the city of his dreams.

"Ahaaan! So that's about it." I said. In order to console her, I added, "Oh dear Dhauli! It happens with everyone. You meet somebody great. The two of you strike a common chord and both of you experience a fine emotion called love'. Isn't that enough? We cannot live our lives according to the conditions and whims that we would like to entertain. We all have to strike compromises somewhere and move on. Besides, there are many woes and laments in our lives other than those related to love and courtships. Like the famous poet Faiz wrote. "Aur bhi dukh hain zamane main mohabbat ke siva" (There remain many



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graver griefs in this world other than Dhauli replied, "I know all of that. I am also not a teen whining away to glory because I have failed in my first dalliance. My woes are deep seated because

of how Raju has left me in the lurch." "What pains me most is that I am rapped in an existence where I have thing to hold on to but the memorie of our sweet encounters, the depth o our soul-touching conversations, the fragrance of our special moments, the leviof our heart-felt laughter and the hope that our amazing bond was forged by the grace of destiny not just to with er awav like a meaningless idea. You know how optimistic I am. Something inside me keeps me going, when I think that if there is a soulmate on Earth with whom I can share my mind and heart so well, if there is a twin flame on Earth with whom even silence and glances become beautiful tools of language and expression, if there is a person on this planet with whom I feel one, then how can we remain apart? The vacuum that my lover has left me in, tests my patience and my optimism each night each day of my life.

Platonic Love

'Lovers are supposed to survive several ups and downs. True love can brave anv listress but the anguish of being left in the lurch is excruciatingly painful. That endless wait for your other half, that lesperate clinging onto a tiny ray of nope and that lonesome life bereft of that blissful companionship worsens the plight of hijra (period of separation). From the beginning, I made it amply clear to my partner about what longed for. A faint acknowledgment of our platonic love in our heart of hearts is all that I expected. Was that too demanding?

The enormous distance that sepa rates us makes things more difficult. I wish he called me, once. I wish he wrote to me, once. Am I so dispensable for him? And if it is the other way round (which I know it is because I could look nto his eyes and read him), then why does he play this guessing game with



me. One word of assurance from him and I can wait for a lifetime for the fructification of our togetherness. I am willing to walk that extra mile by conceding to him the comfort that even if any fructification cannot be possible tangibly, a mere mind-bond is enough for me. If not Rukmini, I am happy being his Radhika but I am not capable of becoming his Meera.'

Dhauli let out a big sigh and a long pause followed thereafter. She had expressed her state of mind so articulately and beautifully. Grief has the power to lend even the most reticent creatures, the ability of impeccable expression, a skill that no other emotion in the world is capable of bestowing. My heart went out to her and I was touched by her despondency which she carried, none the less, with remarkable grace and élan. How deeply she felt? How unfathomably she loved? How patient and intense was her longing? No wonder, the cooing of this peahen is so penetrating and so forlorn. I believe that in the age of 'Artificial Intelligence', the age of social media and the age of 'gadgets galore' in the twenty-first century humans are rendered incapable of feel ing so genuinely for someone. The options are way too many. Can there be a man today who can wait so long for his beloved who lives so distant and so far away from him? Can there be a woman who can love like Dhauli?

With a heavy heart, I hugged Dhauli I offered her help. I told her that when I return to Jaipur, I shall try to find Raju and reach out to him. As a true friend, I decided that in this love-story I shall play the role of a perfect Prem-doot (Messenger of love) and pull her out of this misery. When I confided my plan to her, she got a bit anxious. She exclaimed

with worry. "But what if you actually meet him and he denies his love for me? I replied. "All the more better! Didn't you yourself say just now that you were left in the lurch? A denial will set you free. And an affirmation will light up your soul and being. So, kindly allow me to do what I think is the best for you.' This time Dhauli gave me a bear hug. I asked her to give me some clue as to how to identify Raju She said, "Oh! Trust me you will

recognise him the moment you see him. He is the most gorgeous peacock ever to

"Relax Dhauli! It is you who are besotted with him, not me. I can find better peacocks than him, any day. And, by the way, why the hell will I find any peacock for myself? Come out of your obsession for him and tell me something practical." I said.

"OK! Raju wears a golden ring in his left foot That night I bid goodbye to Dhauli with some comforting words. She flew back to the Imli tree and did not coo again. However, the next two nights that I staved in the village, her midnight cooing resumed with full force. I could relate her entire story in those moments. Now, I knew, the melancholy in a peahen's cooing on a moist Swan moonlit night.

The next morning, I drove back to Jaipur and resumed my teaching at the University. Since then, it has become my daily habit to go for a walk in the campus looking for Raju. I carry a binocular with me and whenever I see a gorgeous peacock. I try to look for a golden ring in its left foot. Alas! I have not been able to find him so far. If you come across one, please ping me... writetoarbit@rashtradoot.com





#REVIEW Crown Royal Roots

The Pan Shots – a sweet liqueur made from gulkund is divine – now especially as the mercury rises. It was once considered the elixir of life when temperatures in the Thar became life threatening. Gulkund to date is best made in Pushkar, with the petals of pink desi Gulab where it's cultivation is done on a commercial scale.





ocial media, food bloggers and even Zomato, multinational restaurant food aggregator site should be

taken with a handful of salt. Or how else do you explain the exclusion of Royal Roots - a fine dining restaurant of Crown Plaza, from the list of white table cloth restaurants in Jaipur on the social media?

Roval Roots, as the name suggests, delivers a range of Awadhi cuisine together with the local flavours. The table ware, the cutlery, the lay out, the ambience is not only upscale but unique.



Pan Shots

The usual suspects of Paneer items are all there but the Kandhari Paneer Tikka. marinated in vellow mustard sauce, added to this, the beetroot pomegranate seeds, roasted in clav oven turns it into a saliva inducing signature Kandhari dish.

The Nadrooki Shammi or a Lotus stem braised patties stuffed with cheese is as enticing as Mahi Kagzi Tikka, Tandoori Jhinga, the Roval Root Galauti Kebab. The latter are soft lamb patties with a distinct taste of cloves and other masalas that are essential ingredients in the quintessential Indian Khada Garam Masala.

For non-vegetarians, the fare is as flavoursome as it is fulfilling. The Khade Masala Murg and Avadhi Murg Biryani stuffed scented chicken in Basmati rice cooked on slow charcoal fire is combo to savour.

The lacarte menu of Roval Roots is curated for a five course meal - as any fine dining restaurant should have. Some of the most popular

dishes mentioned in the reviews are Murgh Awadhi Korma, Sab Dum Biryani and Chule Ka Shikar. The latter is tender lamb meat cooked in



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman



wood fired Bhatti. Korma is saffron scented chicken. What gives the Royal Root it's distinctive taste, be it Da makhani. Raigharano Ka Sag or the non-veg-fare is the gen erous but judicious use of Khada Garam Masala and Royal Root signature gravy. Add to this, the copper ves

sel and wood fired chulha's slow cooking, that gives the food-fare an authentic flavour. The Dal Makhani for once is just right. It is a pity that a city with

overwhelming majority of foodies who love their meat and mutton is vet to discover Roval Roots. It's vegetarian repertoire is

as inviting as it is innovative The Wargi Malai Parantha Jafrani Taftab - the latter is a flat round Persian bread, though resembling a Naan, is much softer. lighter and fluffier. The presence of selenium makes it a hot favourite with fitness freaks as it ups the good cholesterol – HDL.

The Pan Shots - a sweet liqueur made from gulkund is divine – now especially as the mercury rises. It was once considered the elixir of life when temperatures in the Thar became life threatening Gulkund to date is best made in Pushkar, with the petals of pink desi Gulab, where it's cultivation is done on a commercial scale.

Desserts in the bygone era in this part of the world were niether many nor were they exotic. More often than not, it was Laddoos, Halwa, kheer and sweet rice. The latter being a sole preserve of the



Dal makhani

well-heeled, as rice in the dessert was once a delicacy. The desserts section i somewhat limited to kulfi, rasmalai and gulabjamuns. One could do with some regional specialities like coin ghewar or token sized Mawa kachoris or even malpuas! Yet next time round you look for a roval culinary expe rience and service, head to the "Crown" nestled beautifully in

the Plaza So, refresh the culinary heritage of the Thar and celebrate - less is more , gastronomic traditions of the region

