

Dear Reader,

My obsession with Shakespeare began in Dr. Stringfellow's 10th grade English class. We started *Much Ado About Nothing*, and after each act in the play, we'd watch the corresponding section of the 1993 adaptation. The first time I saw Kenneth Branagh address Emma Thompson as 'my dear Lady Disdain!' I was HOOKED. I finished reading the play that weekend, and promptly went out to buy the movie. Then came *Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and so much more. Shakespeare was a key influencer in all of my art from that point on.

A few years ago, I visited the Folger Shakespeare Library in D.C. and toured the exhibits with one of their in-house scholars. I reminisced about my first read of *Much Ado* and mentioned how the family dynamics resonated with me. The in-house scholar replied: "That's why we don't know exactly which of the folios contain the original plays. Shakespeare updated his work for changing audiences. He wanted his work to resonate with different people."

That conversation was the genesis of the *If Shakespeare was an Auntie* trilogy. It would've been so easy to lean into South Asian stereotypes and do straight retellings, but South Asians aren't monolithic and many of us don't live the stereotypes that have been assigned to us. Instead, I wanted to take Shakespeare's themes and make it more relevant for me. A remix instead of a retelling. Something for my audience that resembled a feminist rom-com. And like all of my trilogies, I started with the most problematic, and difficult story first. *Taming of the Shrew*.

In *Taming*, we have a story within a story, where the heroine doesn't want to leave her home, and the hero coerces the heroine into a marriage where they fight until the heroine submits. In the end Katherine is considered 'tamed.' This is, of course, an over-simplification, but the end result is the same. *Taming of the Shrew* does not work as a modern-day romance. In romance, the heroine fights back, but Katherine does not. She could not at the time she was written.

That's why I wrote Kareena. Kareena's not so much shrewish as she is sad and frustrated because no one ever listens to her. She knows who she is, and what she wants, and that never changes in the story. Prem isn't like Petruchio, either. He's processed grief, and he doesn't know what to do with feelings when he meets Kareena.

I also flipped the plot a bit. Instead of the hero starving the heroine to weaken her resolve, Prem and Kareena are always eating. Instead of the heroine being forced to stay awake, the hero's bed is the only place she can sleep peacefully through the night. And lastly, instead of manipulating the heroine to agree with something that she doesn't believe, Kareena refuses to settle for less than she deserves. Prem is the one who changes instead...after a bit of suffering of course.

My love for the complexity that exists in Shakespeare, themes from different *Taming* adaptations, and my own experiences as a single, frustrated thirty something are all in the pages of this novel. I hope you enjoy *Dating Dr. Dil* and the way that I've remixed a story to tell a South Asian romance. I also hope that in the end you see that sometimes, finding love means making lists, involving family, and accepting that life can get very, VERY messy.

Happy Reading,

Nisha

