

## The Fair One...

Azhar was standing in the queue at the payment counter in *Starbucks*, waiting for his turn. 'One hot chocolate and a cheese cake please', said the voice before him, and Azhar looked up with surprise. The voice belonged to a young white woman; probably, a native Australian. She was in the queue before him, and after listening to what she had ordered, Azhar was amused. *She is a white woman, while I am a brown Asian, and yet our tastes are similar... She has ordered what I am going to order—hot chocolate and cheese cake*, thought Azhar and smiled to himself.

He got his order and sat at a table next to the window, and began sipping his hot chocolate. The white woman was sitting at the adjacent table. It had been four years since Azhar had come to Melbourne. He worked as a Manager in the Commonwealth Bank, and there had been several occasions to interact with the local Australian women. Some of them had even been attracted towards him, and had suggested going out on a date with him, but he had not encouraged anyone. He was a very quiet and a shy person. Even while studying at the University in his hometown, he had never engaged in any flirtatious behaviour, though he had gauged that there were a couple of girls interested in being friendly with him.

It was not that he was not interested in marriage; he always had nursed a desire to marry a typical Indian girl, and hence professed no interest in the white Australian women. He had recently returned to Melbourne from a trip to India. He had gone to his hometown, in order to search for and finalise a suitable girl for marriage. Proposals were sent by his parents to a couple of families, but almost all of them had kind of rejected him. The fact that he was settled abroad since a few years had generated a bit of scepticism, regarding his character and conduct. People had heard umpteen stories of eligible bachelors settled abroad, who duped the families of innocent girls by entering into matrimony and then, left the brides behind, to never return again. In some cases, it was discovered later that the boys had already been married with the white-skinned native girls abroad, and later entered into matrimony with Indian girls for either pacifying their own parents or for the sake of hefty amounts that could be secured in dowry from the families of girls. Hence, parents of prospective brides had become very cautious, and were generally suspicious of matrimony proposals coming from boys who were living alone abroad for some years. Azhar too had become a target of the prevalent scepticism, and despite good looks and an ambitious career path, he did not succeed in finding a girl of her choice. He had come back to Melbourne, dejected. *What am I to do now?*, Azhar was wondering and digging into the cheese cake.

Still engrossed in his thoughts, Azhar looked up absent-mindedly and saw the white woman looking keenly at him.

'Hi', she said.

'Hello', he replied.

'Your face looks familiar', she added, a little loudly—in order to be heard over the tables.

'I guess you could come over here and join me at my table... or else, we may have to shout and converse', and saying so, he had laughed. She laughed too, and taking her tray, she came over and sat opposite him.

'Oh, you are having a cheese cake too!!' she was smiling.

'Yes, like you, even I love cheese cake', replied Azhar, while looking at her plate.

'I am Liz', she introduced herself.

'My name is Azhar', he said.

'Are you an Indian?' she asked.

'Yes... Why do you feel that you have seen me somewhere? I think we have never met before.'

'Oh yes... I remember now. I guess you work in the Commonwealth Bank. I had come a few days ago, regarding a car loan, and you were busy with a client. I had looked at you several times and that is why I could recollect your face now. However, you had not looked up at me, and hence you do not remember'.

'Why did you look at me several times', Azhar asked matter-of-factly.

Liz was startled by the direct question. She hesitated for a moment and replied: 'Your chiselled features and sharp nose, caught my attention and I ended up looking at you several times.'

'If I had looked once towards you, even I would have kept looking at you', Azhar replied and they both laughed.

'Why would you keep looking at me?' It was now her turn to ask directly.

'Because you have beautiful black hair and lovely deep eyes', he replied earnestly. There was a look of admiration on his face.

They both laughed for the next several seconds. She continued laughing, even after he had stopped. *Why is she trying to be so cheerful? Is there a sorrow she is trying to hide?*, Azhar wondered to himself. He decided to be straightforward and ask her.

Liz was taken aback at his question. 'This is dangerous indeed! I did not know you are a mind-reader, as well. Yes, I have been betrayed by an Indian once.'

'How? When? What did he do?' Azhar blurted out. He was concerned.

'He married me and later, I found out that he already had a wife in India', she replied in a pensive tone.

'Are you still married with him?' he asked.

'No, we are divorced now.'

'Then... now, what next?' He was earnestly concerned.

'Will never be able to trust an Indian again.' She was honest in her reply.

Both had finished drinking from their cups of hot chocolate. 'Let us go', said Liz, while getting up from the chair. Picking up her purse, she said 'Bye', and began walking towards the door.

'Hey, Liz... listen', Azhar called out. Liz stopped with a start, and turned back to face Azhar. He was looking at her intently.

In a solemn tone, he asked: 'Will you marry me?'

She looked into his eyes, and after a pause that lasted for several seconds, she replied: 'Yes'.

*My mom's wish to find for me a fair wife will be fulfilled... But how will they both converse in Urdu?*  
Azhar wondered... while briskly taking his steps towards Liz.

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