

Love is Blind

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“Damn!” exclaimed Vikram, slamming his fist on the table, spilling some of his coffee. *Work for hours, and can't even fix a small bug. What a life!!!* A slight headache was starting in his head, which was very normal. Soon it will be followed by slight throbbing around the temples. Vikram knew that.

“Hey Vikram, some woman to see you. Claims she has an appointment. Some Ayesha...” Tania shouted across the room. Vikram glanced at his watch; the journalist was about 25 minutes late. They usually aren't.

He walked across the room, sneaking a glance at his reflection in the mirror, and smiled sadly. What he saw in the mirror wasn't very pleasing. Thin fair man, short, with black hair all ruffled up, small unshaven chin. High cheekbones and a sharp nose. His body was half bent, as if somebody had just punched him in the stomach. Vikram walked on, tugging at his clothes here and there, trying to make them look neater.

“Hi, Ms. Ayesha?” he said to the young woman sitting in the meeting room. She looked up from a magazine she was reading.

“Yes.” She said, looking at him, up and down, not surprised. *I probably look like a nerd*, thought Vikram. The journalist did not greet him back. Nor did she apologize for being late. No smiles either.

“New in journalism?” he said.

She clearly did not expect the question, the surprise very evident on her face. “Err... yeah. Did I do anything wrong?”

“Not *wrong*, just things an experienced journalist wouldn't do.”

“Oh, sorry... uh... got stuck in the traffic...” she smiled awkwardly.

Vikram laughed. The ice broken, Vikram asked her if she minded going to the café for the interview. She didn't, so they walked to the café. While walking, they were silent, each observing the other. She was a young journalist, maybe younger than he was. Dark brown hair over her fair well shaped face. Bright green eyes smiled at him. *She's pretty*, he thought. Tall for a woman, and looked very intelligent.

“Actually this is my first major ‘front page’ article. Have been doing some...” She started telling him about her career. He kept looking intently at her, those green eyes, half-hearing, not listening at all. Nodding now and then, when expected. Those eyes, they’ll help her a lot, as a journalist. “... And so he said do an article on the social lives of these so called geeks. And here I am.”

“Social life?” he said, bewildered. “I don’t have one, Ms. Ayesha.”

She looked at him, surprised. “Friends...?”

“Umm... Some people in the company, people who I program with, program for.”

“Oh, those are colleagues. Neighbors?”

“Yeah, some guys. But I reach my place everyday around midnight. Hardly the right time to socialize, isn’t it?” he smiled.

She smiled back, though not very happily. “I guess everybody was right. You nerds do not have a social life at all. But they think it’s because you guys are different. Now, that’s wrong. I think deep inside, all of you are just normal people, just a little busy.”

“I guess...” he smiled awkwardly. This girl was one of the few who treated him normally. Others saw him and ignored. Or passed some smart comments. Never this. He liked her. “You’re a gem, Ms. Ayesha.”

“So are you, Vikram. And call me Ashi.”

And thus it began, an acquaintance. They kept in touch over the phone, calling each other once a week. Telling the other about their lives. Gradually they became friends; one’s comments and suggestions began to gain importance. Vikram started taking breaks, leading to a healthier and a more productive mood. His bosses were happy. Ashi came to realize through him what power she could yield through her wide beautiful eyes over men. She yielded this power freely, faking sadness and excitement as needed. She started getting interviews and assignments faster than others of her age, soared to greater heights in her career, and fame followed. She moved onto the telecommunication industry. Then, not so gradually, they got closer. Meetings became more frequent. Vikram realized what she had started meaning to him. He had never known any girl so well, never liked anyone so much.

Once, when they were sitting in the same café as the first day, he told her. He told her all. What she meant to him. How much he wanted her. How he couldn't live without her. How she had been the only "love" of his life. He said it all, in one go.

She was not surprised. It had happened before, befriended some guy, and before one knows it; he's fallen for her amazing looks, her eyes. She paused for some time, and then said, "You know about my career, right. You know how much appearances matter. You know how much whom I'm going to parties with matters. Basically, I can only hang around a man who's much neater than you are. Don't misunderstand me, I do love you too. But my career is also important, isn't it?"

He smiled sadly. He had been expecting too much, he was a nerd after all. How could he have any relationships? Dejected, he left, telling her he'll call at her place the next day. He went home, straight to the bathroom. He studied himself in the mirror. Was he so ugly? What if he shaves off this half-grown beard, and gets these hair cut. Some small change here and there, and he wouldn't be so "unpresentable", would he? So he didn't go the office the next day, grooming himself. Shaving, exercising, scrubbing, cutting, stitching. Until, by evening, he stood, tall and straight, wearing an unwrinkled suit, short hair combed back, smooth chin gleaming below his satisfied smile. Not looking fabulous, but still not a creature to be ashamed of. *Ashi would be pleased.*

And she was. They went out to have dinner. Next day, they went to a party together for the first time. Ashi introduced him to her friends, they treated him like just another normal person. Nobody stared at him, or commented, or whispered behind his back. He was one of them, a normal person. And so it continued, parties and gatherings. He impressed nobody; he was just a normal guy.

Her career did not suffer adversely because of this relationship, unlike his. Frequent parties and meetings led to his absence more often than necessary on his PC. He lost out on some projects, he couldn't complete some by the deadlines. The bosses weren't happy, and they told him why. One day he decided to talk to Ashi about it.

He told her about it over the dinner few days later. She wasn't happy. She said she had to go to parties, and if he wasn't present, questions will be asked. Questions, which will not be satisfied by a simple "he's busy". Vikram said he didn't want to be shown around as an exhibit. She said her career didn't matter to him. He said his doesn't to her. And, for the first time, they fought. Soon after, she left in her car, very angry.

Vikram sat for some time, going through the times they had had. Was this “love”? What was going wrong? Whose fault was it? Was he wrong in expecting her to be a bit considerate about his career? He was miserable, too miserable to think straight. Yes, he thought, it was his fault. What was his career for the woman he loved? What difference would it make if he couldn’t work for two hours each day? Yes, he had to apologize.

When he was sure she had reached her house, he went to the nearest booth to call. The maid picked up the phone and told him Ashi had an accident while coming back and she was in the so-and-so hospital. Shocked, Vikram hurried to the hospital, to her room.

She was in a bed, sleeping, *or dead*. There didn’t seem to be any major injury, scratches here and there, some bruises on her left arm. Her face and neck was covered with small pieces of glass. Her left eye was covered with a bandage. A doctor was talking to an old couple in a corner of the room, whom Vikram recognized from photos as her parents. He greeted them. After introductions, the doctor said, “Ashi is going to be fine. Because the accident itself wasn’t very serious, she has suffered only slight injuries on her self, which will heal on their own. During the accident, the front window shattered, sending small pieces of glass onto her face. They are now embedded on her face, which we will extract. Her face will be normal in about a month. The only worrying thing is her left eye. A small piece of glass has entered it, though we do not know how deep. We shall let you know how serious it is as soon as we conduct tests.”

And so he did, and he did not have anything pleasant to tell them. The piece of glass had entered the eye very deeply, and had scratched the retina. Though the eye itself can be replaced, the retina can’t be. Ashi had lost the vision of one of her eyes. Upon being questioned by Vikram, the doctor said yes, there was a way to heal her eye, but it would cost money. Ashi’s father, being a rich man, asked him to go on. The doctor said the retina, though cannot be replaced by a dead retina, can be replaced by a live retina. Somebody will have to donate his or her live eye for Ashi to have perfect vision.

After this shocking news, Vikram went to talk to Ashi, who had been brought back to consciousness. She refused, still angry about his demands and now blaming her accident and loss of an eye on him too. The relationship seemed ending. There was nothing more to look forward to. Ashi will lead her life as a one-eyed female, a once successful journalist, but now an ugly, one-eyed ruin of a young woman. It will mean an end for her career as a journalist, and it was too late to start any other job. *All because of me*. There was no way she was going to forgive him. He will not be able to forget her ever, and will never be able to work again. Their lives were doomed.

Then a sudden thought struck him. What if he donates his retina? He doesn't need it, he can manage as well with one eye. Ashi will get her eyes back, world would be happy again. But was it worth it? A woman for an eye? There were thousand fishes in the sea. He smiled. There always had been, but the only *fish* that had come to him, loved him, the only *fish* he had loved. She will also start loving him again.

He went to the hospital, and told his decision to the doctor and Ashi's parents. They were very happy, amazed by his love for Ashi, his dedication to her, his desire for her love. She did know of this, and he made the doctor and her parents promise they wouldn't tell her until after she's cured.

And so, after a week the operation took place. Vikram's eye was taken out, then the retinal tissue. Nothing was put back, an empty hole was left of his left eye. The operation was successful, and the doctors gave the tissue a week to start working. All this while, Ashi was still angry at Vikram, not talking to him. But Vikram was not angry, he knew how much she'd love him when she comes to know.

The week was spent in a lot of anxiousness, both by Vikram and Ashi, but for different reasons. Ashi about her eyes; him about her love for him. Meanwhile, Vikram got fired because of excess vacation and incomplete and inefficient work.

The day when doctors took off her bandages to check her eyesight, Vikram stayed home, freed his phone line for the expected call. It came in the evening. Ashi wanted a meeting, and the regular place, the café they first met at. *Finally*, he thought.

But when they met, she looked more worried than happy. Her eyes were the same ones, bright green, beautiful. People might have wondered what such a pretty girl was doing with an ugly deformed nerd.

"Vikram, I want to thank you for what you did for me. I shall never forget this. Thank you, very very much."

"Hey, that's all right. I'm happy you love me again, and everything is back to normal."

"Actually, it isn't." she said, bowing her head.

"What do you mean?"

"I can't actually be seen walking around with a one-eyed ugly man, now can I? It's not going to help my career."