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THE FAR HIMALAYA

by Phillip Ernest
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EXCERPT

It was around 10 o'clock when they left the graduate residence and set off west along Bloor, walking as far as Robert Street and then south. It was a splendid spring day, with cool air and aspiring white clouds that gave intermittent relief from the hot sun. Aditi wore her huge rock star sunglasses, jeans, a light jacket, and Ben his broad-brimmed brown cloth hat. He kept his hands in his jacket pockets as they strolled, and she held him by the crook of his right arm, a deceptively submissive-looking posture dictated by the almost comical disparity of their heights.

In this neighbourhood, the Annex, with its preponderance of university-related people, they looked completely at home, a couple of young grad students, or assistant professors, or professionals in one cultural domain or the other, and Ben felt the appeal of this apparent legitimacy, which from a practical point of view was so completely within his grasp. And how he yearned for it, as he would share it with her: the little house, the twin studies filled with books and music, the back yard with two lawn chairs where they would sit together, reading or talking, in the shade of some big old tree, no children (they were agreed on that, thank god), but a dog and a cat with hilarious ten-syllable Sanskrit names, a professorship for her, and for him some kind of worthy and remunerative work in which the talents people saw in him could be realized and appreciated, and which would be his more or less equal contribution to their shared life.

His eyes brimmed with tears. He looked straight ahead, widening them, lest the tears spill, removed his hand from his pocket and caressed her lower back, again looking her in the face and smiling. She smiled back, with a touch of inquiry at the tragic intensity of his expression, but asked nothing, since this was nothing out of the ordinary for him.

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