

**(Honorable Award Winning Story in 2002 Writer's Digest Contest)**

**SEEKING A SIX-FOOT BRIDE**

**By Shobhan Bantwal**

Ignoring the hum of activity around him, Rajesh Sanwal furiously typed up his classified matrimonial advertisement: *Seeking young woman—at least six feet tall...* His brow creased in concentration while his long, wide back leaned forward and hunched over the computer keyboard. He had the intense look of an Olympic athlete, hell-bent on winning the game.

“I’m going to find the perfect bride yet,” he told himself. He could feel it in his bones. His parents’ astrologer, Mr. Nadkarni, Palgaum’s finest, had predicted that the time would come soon—in fact, it was right around the corner. Nadkarni boasted a near-perfect record. His predictions were rarely off target.

At thirty-two, Rajesh was still single when most of his friends were married, some of them already enjoying fatherhood or well on their way to that blissful phase in their lives. What was wrong with him, he wondered? He was not bad-looking, had a bright head on his massive shoulders, two master’s degrees, and a decent job with promise. And, to top it all, his parents were well to do—another significant element that a potential Hindu bride’s parents looked for.

It wasn’t a scarcity of prospective brides that had caused his predicament. Women found him attractive. Every day his parents received queries from parents of eligible girls—beautiful girls, accomplished girls, rich girls, all kinds of girls. They were not right for him though—not tall enough—that was the crux of the problem. In this particular instance he was his own worst enemy. His quandary was a result of his own persnickety ways.

After he finished typing the last word and hit the ‘submit’ button to send the last of the e-mails out, he leaned back in his squeaky-wheeled leather chair and sighed. Now that that was done, he would sit back and wait. “Be patient,” he counseled himself.

Alas, Rajesh was well aware of what his shortcoming was. He was too damned tall—six feet and five inches. Most Indian girls wanted tall husbands, even a hulking monolith like himself, but then, he didn’t want a short wife; he wanted someone who could look him in the eye. The only solution was to find an extremely tall Indian girl through some unconventional methods. Amongst the girls his parents had brought to his attention, he hadn’t come across a single young woman who was beyond five seven so far. He hit upon the idea of placing an advertisement in *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, *Deccan Herald*, and a couple of other Indian newspapers to find the right match.

There had to be one tall woman for him out there somewhere. Every pot has a lid, as the popular cliché preached. Or doesn’t it?

“Another chapter in the continuing saga of *Rajesh needs a Bride?*” asked an amused female voice from the doorway.

Rajesh looked up to find Veena Tripathi standing with one slim hip thrust against the doorjamb and her slender arms folded across her middle. A wickedly mischievous smile lit up her dark eyes and displayed the prominent dimples in her fair, high-boned cheeks.

“You guessed it. Believe it or not, I just e-mailed a matrimonial ad to some major newspapers. My very last resort!” He ran his hand over his straight, crisp hair in an effort to conceal his embarrassment at having to admit that he was employing desperate measures in trying to find a wife. In India’s male-oriented society, simply being a single male was enough to send every mama with an eligible daughter into a tizzy, and yet, here he was, an eligible

bachelor in every way, but single and feeling sorry for himself. And, what was worse, Veena was teasing him about it, too.

“Wow! Newspapers? You’ll be inundated with responses soon, Rajesh. Don’t you fear, you’ll find your perfect mate one of these days. There’s bound to be one willowy female out there with your name tattooed on her long arm.”

Despite the pearly-toothed smile, Veena’s arched eyebrow gently mocked and taunted. Then she turned on her high-heeled sandal to return to her own cubicle. As a thought struck her, she stopped in her tracks and glanced over her shoulder, making her long dark hair swing across her back. “Oh, good luck, by the way. Let me know how the bride-seeking saga progresses.”

“Sure, why not?” Rajesh retorted, his tone dripping with sarcasm. It was easy for her to scoff at his dilemma. She had a dozen men chasing after her. Rajesh unfurled his long legs and stood up to his full height to brush the front of his expensive navy trousers. He smoothed the wrinkles that had formed from sitting at the computer for long hours.

He watched Veena’s straight back in puzzlement as she walked down the long hall toward her cubicle. She wore a pantsuit in an unusual shade of green. He had no idea what that particular shade was called. It suited her very well though. Nice girl, friendly, attractive, outgoing and smart—single, too, just like him—a bit unusual in Palgaum’s conservative milieu. “Too bad she’s barely five feet tall,” he murmured to himself, as he idly tossed his empty bottle of Fresca in the rubbish bin. Veena had already ascended the corporate ladder to the title of group manager at the tender young age of twenty-six. She made a fine manager, too—patient, insightful and capable, always ready to go the extra mile to get the job done.

Rajesh was the director of software development at Palgaum Technologies, and he was Veena’s boss. He observed with quiet hilarity the way the other young fellows eyed her with

eager interest. A few of them asked her out all the time, but rumor had it that she turned them down in a firm but polite manner. “I wonder why she doesn’t go for all these young and handsome suitors that hover around her constantly?” he had asked himself a couple of times. He had found no logical answer to his own question. Maybe she was finicky like he was—maybe she was waiting for the right man to come along. She was likely to settle down soon with some nice young man, in any case. She was too pretty to languish in the ‘single’ status for long.

That evening at the dinner table, Rajesh’s mother, Bimla, cast him a sidelong glance before she made a cheerful announcement. “Rajesh, guess what, we just received the horoscope and photo of the perfect girl for you, *beta*.”

He took his time swallowing his *baingan sabji* and *paratha* (eggplant curry and flat wheat bread). “Is that right? And how tall is she, Maji?”

His mother took a sip of water and smiled. “Very tall, actually. She’s five nine. That’s extremely tall for an Indian girl, don’t you think?” Her eyes looked painfully hopeful as they searched his face.

Rajesh glanced at his tall, lean father to gauge his reaction to his mother’s question. As always, his father had his head buried in the Times of India while he chewed his food vigorously. His father owned a large wholesale clothing store in town and rarely found time to read the paper. He made time each night during dinner to scan the headlines. It had been like this at the dinner table as far back as Rajesh could remember.

His two older brothers were married and lived with their wives and children in their respective homes. They were both involved in the family business. Rajesh was the baby of the family and still the unmarried one who lived with his parents. He was also his mother’s pet.

He knew well that his mother hoped that even after he got married he would live right here, in this big rambling house, with his wife and children.

Rajesh called out to his father, “Bapuji, what do you think?”

His father looked up absently. “Huh? What did you say, *beta*?”

“I said, what do you think about this new girl that Maji says will be perfect for me?”

His father dismissed the question with a nonchalant wave of his bony, long-fingered hand.

“I leave that to your Maji, Rajesh. Horoscopes and marriage are her department. If she says the girl is good, I’m sure the girl is good.” He went right back to reading the paper after shoveling some rice and curry into his mouth.

Just like that, case closed!

Rajesh mentally rolled his eyes at his father’s disinterest in such a significant matter. He found his mother still staring at him, her round and girlish face eager with anticipation. He couldn’t bear to dampen her enthusiasm. “All right, I’ll look at the girl’s photo if you insist. But I still think five nine is too short for me.”

“Okay, but please, no crude jokes about the girl,” his mother warned. “It is not nice to make fun of girls like that, no?”

Chuckling, Rajesh agreed. He had to admit he could be rather unkind in his comments about the girls his mother insisted on trying to get him interested in. He noticed how she rubbed her hands in glee at the prospect of showing him the girl’s photograph, but still managed to give him that stern look only she could manage. He had always wondered about that particular talent of hers. She had perfected the rare art of combining the emotions of maternal adoration and severe discipline and then wearing them on her face with such ease.

The girl in the photograph had a kind face. That was all Rajesh could see. Rather plain, but definitely a kind face—wholesome even. It did nothing for him. He shook his head and

returned the photo to his mother. She stared at the photo for a second and sighed, then slipped it back in the envelope with great care. “I will send it back to her parents tomorrow...with our apologies.”

As the meal ended, Rajesh looked at both his parents and contemplated for a moment. A good time to spring his own news on them, he concluded. He cleared his throat to gain a couple of seconds to gather his thoughts. “By the way, I’ve decided to run a matrimonial ad in the Times of India and a couple of other papers for a suitable girl.”

His mother gasped and put her pudgy hand to her ample bosom. “*Hi Ram!*”

“Don’t look so horrified, Maji.”

“Why did you do that, *beta?*”

“Because it’s the modern way of doing things, Maji.”

“It is the worst way, too. Now everyone will think there is something wrong with you. All the eligible girls will run like scared rats when they find out. Oh God, a matrimonial advertisement!” She sent her husband a troubled glance. “Jee, did you hear this?”

Disturbed by his wife’s tone and her stunned remarks, Krishanlal Sanwal looked up, his eyebrows drawn in a sharp V over his long, aristocratic nose. He threw his newspaper down in disbelief. “Rajesh, are you out of your mind? Advertising for a wife! No Sanwal man has ever advertised for a wife. Girls and their families come begging at our door for the privilege of marrying a Sanwal,” he declared, giving an imperious twist to his mustache.

Rajesh’s gaze bounced from one parent to the other in bafflement. “Oh, come on—this is the twenty-first century—the age of smart computers and maybe even trips to Mars. Advertising for whatever you want is perfectly acceptable. People advertise for the perfect car, the perfect house, the perfect anything. Why not the perfect wife?”

His mother placed her elbows on the table, cupped her face in her palms and stared at him dumbfounded. His father's salt and pepper mustache began to quake—a sure sign of wrath in an otherwise tranquil man. That mustache trembled only on very rare occasions, such as the time when Rajesh's oldest brother, Brijesh had decided to run away from home at the age of sixteen, or the time when their business manager had admitted to stealing thirty thousand rupees from the store's cash-box.

With a slight shake of his head, Rajesh rose from his chair. “All right, all right, no need to have a fit. If and when any responses come in, the two of you will have complete access to the girls and their parents.” He laid a warm hand on his mother's shoulder and aimed a conciliatory look at his father. “You can decide to some extent if a girl is suitable to become a lofty Sanwal or not. Besides, it's an e-mail box ad, without my name or yours in it. All inquiries will come to the anonymous box. Does that make you feel better?”

The quaking mustache relaxed a bit and his mother's bosom stopped heaving rapidly. “Oh, thank God, *Hare Ram*,” she said and wiped her forehead with the edge of her sari. “For a minute there I thought the entire town and all our relatives all over the world would find out about it. Huh, a handsome Sanwal boy shopping for a bride. Imagine the big-big scandal!”

His father's beady eyes narrowed suspiciously. “How many people already know about this advertisement, Rajesh?”

“Only Veena Tripathi, a young lady who works for me. Why?”

His father gave his mustache another twist and pondered for a second. “Is this Veena Tripathi the type who will spread the gossip or what?”

“No, Bapuji. She's very sociable, but not a gossip. So just relax, will you?” Rajesh excused himself with some silly pretext of a project deadline and escaped upstairs to his room. He couldn't believe his parents' reaction to something as simple as a classified ad. The naive

people were still mired in the nineteen forties. He sat at his home computer and surfed on the Net, wrote some e-mail letters to friends living out of state, and then went to bed.

He headed directly to Veena's cubicle the next morning and whispered to her. "Have you mentioned my classified *bride wanted* ad to anyone yet?"

She gave him a wide-eyed innocent look and shook her head, making her dangling gold earrings brush her delicately molded jaws. "Uh-unh, not a word. I didn't think you'd want that publicized."

He patted her hand and nodded in relief. "Right. Thanks. My parents threw a tantrum when they found out about it, so keep it under your hat for now, will you?"

She nodded, staring down at her hand, the one he had touched. He noticed a faint flush suffuse her fair skin and wondered if it was the April heat that was bothering her or something else. He eyed her in bafflement for a second, then deciding not to comment on her flush, went on his way. It wasn't any of his business why she looked a little flustered. She did look pretty when she blushed like that, though—like a little porcelain doll. She reminded him of the delicate dolls on display at the Kaveri Handicrafts Emporium on the corner of Ramdev Street. Even her clothes looked like they belonged on a doll: crisp, well coordinated and tasteful.

To his surprise, Rajesh's ad appeared for three straight days in the newspapers of his choice, starting the very next day. Wow, this e-mail business had certainly accelerated the process of communication!

Then the responses started to flood in—dozens every day. Some looked promising while others were entirely preposterous. One was from a woman who was six feet and one inch, but weighed three hundred pounds—she was a wrestler by profession. Another one was from a woman with a thyroid problem—she hadn't stopped growing. At twenty-five she was six three

and still growing—her doctor had said she could grow to seven feet and beyond—the sky was the limit.

As he chortled and puzzled and gasped and gagged over the various responses, Veena continued to keep a vigilant eye on his progress. “Any luck yet? Or the perfect woman still eludes you?” was her query every few hours. Rajesh shook his head and tossed another e-mail printout in his rubbish bin. The bin was beginning to look full in the last three or four days, he decided. Pitifully full.

Veena came over one day and said, “Rajesh, I’ve been watching you go crazy over the overwhelming number of responses. Would you like me to help you sort and organize them?”

When he reluctantly agreed to accept her help, she advised him to sort them into three piles: The *Good*, the *Maybe* and the *Bad*. The really inane responses went straight into the bin and they added up to literally close to a hundred messages. The *Bad* pile was to be reviewed one more time, just in case; the *Maybe* pile was to be given reasonable consideration; and the *Good* pile was to be handed over to his mother for further investigation. After a whole week of collecting piles, the *Good* had four responses, the *Maybe* had seven, the *Bad* had twenty-two.

Veena straightened up the sheets into neat stacks and smiled in triumph. “Well, looks like you’re all set to go forward in the search for the perfect mate, Rajesh. Now, it’s only a matter of time before your mother picks the immaculate one for you.”

Her smile remained wide and brilliant, but her eyes looked somber, he noticed. Maybe she was upset that he hadn’t thanked her for her kind assistance and for keeping his secret safe, he decided. After all, she had brought some order to his haphazard paperwork. Perhaps he could buy her a present or do something nice to show his gratitude. Yes, oh yes, women loved to be appreciated and they loved presents. His brothers’ wives always said that. He would ask his

sister-in-law, Shashi, to help him pick something suitable. His brother's wife was a keen shopper and knew everything about shopping and bargains.

Shashi advised him to buy something elegant but not pricey, small but not too small to gift-wrap, personal and yet not so personal that the woman receiving it would be offended. At the end of the ten-minute conversation Rajesh's mind was reeling. But after much debate and consideration, Shashi and he settled on a suitable gift. She even wrapped it up for him and offered him a knowing wink and a grin. Although, he had no clue as to why the shy and practical Shashi he knew could be behaving so strangely.

The next morning, after making sure that nobody was around to observe him, he walked into Veena's office with a sheepish grin on his face. He put a gift-wrapped package bound with a tiny pink satin bow before her. "Surprise! A gift for a very helpful and resourceful young lady."

She sucked in a quick breath and looked up at him in astonishment. "A gift? What for?"

"For being such a big help with my silly matrimonial ad, of course. What else?"

"Oh, that. You didn't have to, Rajesh. I would have helped anybody." Her voice sounded flat and mildly disappointed.

"I know that—you're a very generous person, but I wanted to say thanks in my own way." He raised his brows suggestively at the package, silently intimating that she should open her gift.

He noticed her hands shake as she opened the package. She inadvertently dropped it on her desk and the contents inside the package rattled. "Oops, sorry, I'm a little clumsy today. Hope I didn't break something."

He stood with his arms folded across his expansive chest and grinned. "Don't worry. If it's broken, I'll get you another one."

When she finally managed to open the package and see what the cardboard box contained, she squealed in delight. She picked up the dainty porcelain mug with a matching lid and held it up to admire the delicate oriental design on it. The little gold-rimmed peacock perched on a tree limb was exquisite. “Ooh, how beautiful! I love it—it’s perfect for my afternoon tea. Thanks, Rajesh,” she beamed.

“Don’t mention it. I know you drink a cup of tea at four o’clock every afternoon. I thought you could use a decent mug to drink it in.” He cast an insinuating eye on the chipped and worn mug sitting on her desk.

Noticing his eyes on her old mug, Veena giggled. “I know, my ancient cup looks wretched, but I’m sort of attached to it. But now it looks like I’ve been given a reason to wean myself from it. Anyway, thanks again, Rajesh. I appreciate the present—it’s charming. I’ll...ah...I’ll cherish it, always.”

Rajesh observed her smile fade away as she said the last few words. Was there a hint of tears developing in those lovely eyes, he wondered? It was only a small gift, for heaven’s sake! Why was she getting so mushy and sentimental over something so trivial?

Veena sniffled a couple of times. “So, I bet your mother has already started some serious background checking on those girls in the *Good* pile, huh?”

A hearty laugh erupted from Rajesh. “Oh, yes. And how! She’s made a couple of phone calls already this morning. The only thing that bothers her is that she has to initiate the contact. In our old-fashioned, conservative household, the boy’s parents never approach the girl’s family—it’s beneath their dignity. The poor woman is devastated at having to swallow her pride and make the first move. I feel guilty about forcing her into this position, too.”

Veena smoothed her silvery white, two-piece *salwar-kurta* outfit as she got up to place her new mug on the file cabinet. “Your mother loves you, Rajesh. She’ll do anything for you, I’m

sure, including contacting the girls' families." She held the mug up to the light to examine it one more time. "I'll have to wash it before I use it this afternoon. Care to join me in the tea-room while I take my tea-break with my new mug?" She flashed him a smile.

He noticed how elegant she looked. But then, she always looked elegant and she moved with an uncommon grace. As she passed by him he sniffed appreciatively. She always used that elusive fragrance, too—subtle yet captivating, spicy yet delicately floral. Somehow, it was Veena. He nodded enthusiastically, "Sure, why not. In fact, let's take our tea break together in my office. I'd like to go over the *Maybe* pile of responses in detail with you. I'd like to get your opinion again."

It took her a long while to respond. "I'll stop by around four."

That afternoon after work, Veena stopped by his office with two steaming mugs of tea, hers in her new Oriental mug and his in an ordinary mug. They went over the various responses and one after another they sent them flying into the rubbish bin. Rajesh found every one of them lacking in something. "They all seem to be perfectly fine young women, but they're not for me," he declared with a resigned sigh. "I guess I'm doomed to be single."

Sipping the last of her tea, Veena nodded. "Hmm, if you keep discarding every hot prospect the way you do—yes—you will be doomed to be single. If and when your mother finds someone suitable from the *Good* pile, you better agree," she advised sternly. "This rejection business on your part is getting out of hand, Rajesh."

He stacked his large hands behind his head as he leaned back in his chair to contemplate on her remarks. "Hmm...you're right. I'm not getting any younger, am I?" He picked up his mug and absently took a sip as he stared into near space, his mind steeped in thought.

Veena rose from her chair, picked up her empty mug and started to walk away. “No, you’re not getting any younger.” As she reached the hallway Rajesh heard her mumble something that sounded strangely like, “And neither am I.”

He looked puzzled. What the heck was that? Why was she talking about herself that way? She was only twenty-six—a lot younger than he was. He just couldn’t figure out women. The only woman he knew closely was his mother and she was quite predictable—old-fashioned, adoring to a fault, and always hovering and fussing over him. All he had to do was bestow a smile upon her once a day and appreciate her cooking, and Maji literally glowed.

He picked up his own empty mug and started toward the door so he could rinse it out. He noticed something on the guest chair Veena had just vacated. He picked it up. It was a delicate, white, lace-edged handkerchief. A slow smile spread over his face as he held the weightless piece of fluff in his huge palm. It was just like her: dainty, refined and classy. He brought it to his nose and sniffed it. It smelled of her, too. He buried his nose in the handkerchief for a second and inhaled the scent. Damn, he thought, the scent was wonderful, and it sent his pulses racing. Why was a tiny square of white cotton with lace edges transporting him into a romantic daydream? It had to be all this talk of marriage and suitable brides, he firmly told himself. He was becoming sentimental in his old age. Then he placed the handkerchief against his rough cheek and marveled at how soft and sweet it felt, like Veena’s own hand held against his face.

He heard a footstep, sensed movement behind him and whirled around. It was Veena, watching him with her mouth slightly open, about to say something. He dropped his hand holding the handkerchief to his side.

Veena blushed. “I...I came to get my handkerchief back. I must have dropped it while I was here earlier.”

She had obviously seen Rajesh holding the handkerchief to his cheek and caressing it. It was his turn to look embarrassed. He held it out to her. Their hands brushed as she took it from him. Her hand trembled. He felt his pulse leap again, and this time his heart did a strange somersault, sending an unfamiliar sensation similar to a thunderbolt shooting through his body. The air between them crackled with a tense electric charge. They stared at one another for what seemed like a long second or two. “I was just about to bring it back to you,” he said. He was mortified to find that his voice sounded shaky and breathless.

“Thanks,” she whispered and raced back to her office, as if she were being chased by a pack of rabid dogs.

He closed the door to his office and sank back into his chair, the mug still in his hand. He raked his fingers through his hair. Dear God, what had just happened here? He had feelings for Veena—strange, unfamiliar feelings—deliciously deep, sinfully sensual, warm and syrupy as fresh honey feelings! Damn, his heart felt as if it had just been assaulted by something hot and prickly.

And it felt fabulous!

Rajesh and Veena had worked together for nearly five years and he had watched with respect and admiration that sharp mind of hers write brilliant software programs and come up with great ideas to make the company successful. He treated her with high regard and he enjoyed working with her. But now—now there was this strange and wild sensation that infused his whole body. Her perfume still lingered in his office; her personality still hung in the air.

No wonder Rajesh had failed to find a suitable girl in all these years. The perfect woman had been right under his nose all this time: beautiful, smart, sexy, and witty. She even had similar likes and dislikes as his. They liked the same movies, music, cartoons, even foods.

They laughed at the same nerdy jokes. Like a blind fool he had looked high and low for her, even to the extent of placing a ridiculous matrimonial ad in the papers.

He had clearly perceived her interest in him a few minutes ago. Now it made sense as to why she had shed tears this morning. At the time he had puzzled over her peculiar reaction, but now it was as obvious as the rather long nose on his face. In retrospect, he realized she had always looked at him with that special light in her eyes, she had always gone out of her way to make his life easier, always volunteered to assist him, even to help him find the perfect wife. Good God, how she must have resented that task! He had been a complete idiot and wasted five precious years envying his friends and his brothers. He could have had what he wanted all along.

Well, he wasn't about to fritter away one more minute. He picked up the phone and dialed Veena's extension to request her to come into his office. She appeared a minute later with a pad and pen, looking cool and professional, and poised to take notes. "Close the door, Veena, and lock it please," he ordered, his voice a little harsher than he meant for it to be.

She locked the door and approached his desk with a rare timidity. Her large eyes looked apprehensive as they met his. "You sound serious. Did I do something wrong?"

He shook his head. "No. Sit down, Veena. I'm sorry if I sounded a little gruff."

"You're making me nervous, Rajesh." She sat down and sent him a look that bordered on panic.

He got up and started to pace the floor behind his chair. "Veena, I don't know how to say this. I've spent the last fifteen minutes trying to think of what to say and how to say it, but I still don't know."

She gasped. “Are you going to fire me? Has my job performance been that bad?” When he shook his head, she broke into a plea. “I promise to try harder, I really do. I’ll try not to let you down, Rajesh. I’m sorry if I seem a bit off today, but I—”

Abruptly he came around the desk, bent down, put one hand behind her back and the other under her knees, and scooped up her tiny form into his arms so he could look in her eyes. Caught in mid-sentence, he heard her sharp intake of breath, her mouth still open. “Oh, shut up, Veena. Just shut up and listen. You’re doing a fantastic job and I’m not going to fire you. All I want to say is that you are terrific; you are more than terrific. Will you consider going out with me—give me a chance to see if maybe we could sort of...sort of date?” All that stuttering! He was making a complete fool of himself.

Veena’s eyes grew wide with incredulity and a most becoming pinkish hue spread across her face and neck. “I...oh...date? Date! What are you saying?”

He still held her in his arms. She barely weighed more than a child. “What I’m saying is that I’m interested in you and want to take you to dinner. Tonight, if you’ll say yes?”

Perhaps seeing he was serious and looked like a little boy anxiously holding his breath for her answer, she nodded. “Yes...if you mean it.” She threw him a suspicious frown. “You’re not poking fun at me, are you?”

“No, no, I’ve never been more serious. I’ve been a complete fool, waiting for five years to do this. I realize now that what I want is you, what I need is you. Will you give me a chance?” His eyes spoke volumes as they looked into hers, waiting for her response.

“This is all so sudden. I’m still trying to understand what’s happening.”

“Once again, I apologize for being completely blind. Despite my stupidity, would you consider giving me that chance? ”

She put out a shy, gentle hand to touch his face, as if trying to make sure he was real, what he was uttering was the truth. She looked at him in wonder. “I thought you’d never ask.”

“Besides being an idiot, I’m also slow.”

“But are you sure? I’m four feet and eleven inches—not six feet tall like that dream girl you want. I can’t even make eye contact with you without climbing on a chair.”

He laughed at her remark. “Well then, any time you want to make eye contact with me, just say the word and I’ll pick you up in my arms, just like this.”

She giggled and traced the line of his firm, hard jaw. “Okay, if you’re sure. What about your parents? Don’t they want a tall girl for their darling son?”

“Don’t worry about my parents. They’ll be thrilled that their wayward son has finally settled on a girl—a wonderful girl. My father can’t imagine why I’m after a tall girl, anyway. My mother is short and plump and makes him happy. He has put her on a pedestal since the day they were married.” His brow creased as he recalled something. “Oh God, that reminds me—I’ll have to put you down for a minute and call my mother to tell her not to pursue any of those responses from the *Good* list.” He carefully placed her like a fragile object on top of his desk to pick up the phone.

“Ah, yes, of course, the famous *Good* list and the *six-foot tall girls*.” Veena eyed with amusement the printed copy of his matrimonial ad on the desk while Rajesh waited for the phone call to go through.

Rajesh, even as he spoke to his mother, noted Veena’s impish smile as he picked up the ad and crumpled it in his big, strong hand before tossing it in the rubbish bin. Despite lying there in a scrunched-up ball, one vital part of it was still visible: *at least six feet tall*. An amused smile touched his face as Veena slid off the desk and straightened her back to draw herself up to her full height and grinned to herself.

**THE END**