

**Excerpt: Never Enough**

by **Suad Kamardeen**

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I glance up from time to time, twisting the folded pink napkins on the table around my fingers. Amal’s never late and she hasn’t texted me either; I wonder if she’s okay. I lean back in my seat and take in the scent of vanilla and hot melting chocolate which fills the air as a waiter, all in black with a pink logo at the centre of her T-shirt to match her bubble-gum-pink wig, sweeps past my table, balancing a tray in each hand.

Two hijabi girls take up the table two away from mine. They are speaking in hushed tones, eyes on each other. When they glance my way with smiles on their faces, I immediately lower my gaze. It’s weird but whenever I see someone my age with the hijab – except Amal, of course – Mum’s voice rings in my head. It feels like they’re watching me in the same judgemental manner, though there’s no way they’d know I’m Muslim. I should speak to them or say salam or something, but my words stay stuck in my throat. I can never muster the courage to speak to strangers unless they approach me, and even then, it’s like my tongue is twisted. I barely spoke to anyone back in high school besides Amal, and till this day, I don’t know how I would’ve survived without her.

When I raise my head again, the hijabi girls are at the entrance (I guess they’re not staying after all), and I spot a neon pink hijab through the window bobbing towards them. It’s Amal, and I know because my girl loves her bright hijabs. In her words ‘she likes to be seen,’ though I tell her even if her hijab matched the colour of her skin, she would still be seen. Hijab screams ‘I’m a Muslim girl. See me, notice me,’ but I guess for her, it’s not a big deal. I’m certain she’s got on her white Air Forces with the pink tick to match. That’s as far as her fashion goes.

She says salam to them; they respond to her greeting and even wave goodbye like old friends. That’s the beauty of being visibly Muslim, and, I guess, also the good side of being seen – you immediately connect with others like you. But I wonder if it’s worth the attention and judgment which comes with it.

From the entrance to the café, I see Amal’s face shining – evidence of her love for shea butter as the optimal moisturiser – and the glow gets brighter when the lights hit her face. My chest tightens from how much she looks like Babu. She’s a carbon copy of him: the same bronzy skin tone, slightly wide forehead, full lips that are almost always in a smile. As soon as our eyes meet, she quickens her pace with a wide grin, and I return her smile with one that’s much wider, hoping she doesn’t catch any sadness in my expression. I can’t help but wonder what crosses her mind when she looks in the mirror.