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## Bada Din

The first thing Egon noticed when he awoke was the faint scent of sandalwood and cinnamon, mingling pleasantly in the cool morning air. His eyes blinked open, adjusting to the soft glow of sunlight streaming through the gauzy curtains. His eyes instinctively checked the nightstand, checking the time and saw a precisely wrapped box. "A kurta" Egon thought. The wrapping paper shimmered subtly, a deep red adorned with golden designs, and the bow on top was so perfectly tied it seemed almost too beautiful to disturb. Curiosity piqued, Egon picked up the box and shook it gently. There was no sound, no hint of what lay inside. His fingers lingered on the ribbon, tempted to unwrap it, but something held him back. Instead, he carried the box with him as he rose from the bed and made his way into the living room.

The sight that greeted him stopped him in his tracks. The once plain room had been transformed into a vibrant celebration of color and light. Strings of twinkling fairy lights were woven around banana and mango leaves, their green hues enhanced by the soft glow. A small tree stood in the corner, adorned with cotton balls that mimicked snow and garlands of marigolds. Interspersed were touches of American Christmas tradition—red and gold baubles, tinsel, and a small star perched at the top.

Vivek stood in the center of the room, wearing a simple white kurta, his face lighting up with a warm smile as he saw Egon. "Merry Christmas, Egon. Or as we say here, Bada Din. The Big Day."

Egon was overwhelmed, his throat tightening with emotion. He crossed the room in a few quick strides and pulled Vivek into a tight embrace, the small box still clutched in his hand. "You did all this?" he murmured, his voice thick.

"I had some help from the staff," Vivek admitted, returning the hug. He pulled back just enough to press a gentle kiss to Egon's forehead. "I wanted today to feel special for you. A mix of our worlds."

Egon's eyes glistened with unshed tears as he looked around the room again. "It's perfect. Thank you, Vivek. Truly."

Vivek guided Egon to a set of cushions arranged on the floor by a low table. The table was laden with a simple but beautifully arranged breakfast: fresh fruit, spiced flatbreads, and steaming cups of chai. They settled onto the cushions, the morning sunlight filtering through the windows casting a golden glow over the scene.

As they ate, Vivek began to explain. “Bada Din, or Big Day, is what many in India call Christmas. It’s celebrated differently here, of course. There are Christian communities, but even among Hindus, it’s seen as a day of joy and generosity.”

Egon listened intently, sipping his chai. The spices were warm and comforting, the perfect complement to Vivek’s soothing voice. “It’s beautiful,” he said softly. “Tell me more about Hinduism. I’ve always been curious, but I don’t know much.”

Vivek’s eyes brightened, his passion for the subject evident. “Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world, dating back over 4,000 years. Today, it has around 1.2 billion followers, most of whom live in India. It’s not just a religion; it’s a way of life, a philosophy.”

He paused to take a sip of chai before continuing. “At its core, Hinduism is about seeking truth and understanding the nature of the universe. Dharma plays a central role—it’s about living in harmony with the laws of the universe and adhering to moral principles.”

Egon tilted his head, intrigued. “Is Dharma the same as Karma?”

“Not exactly,” Vivek replied. “Karma is cause and effect. Every action has a consequence, and those consequences shape our future lives. Dharma, on the other hand, is about spiritual discipline and moral law. It’s living in a way that aligns with your purpose and responsibilities. In a way, it’s similar to what Jesus taught in the Two Commandments—love God and love your neighbor.”

Egon nodded slowly, processing Vivek’s words. “It’s... beautiful,” he said finally. “A reminder that so many of our beliefs, at their core, are about love and doing what’s right.”

Vivek reached for Egon’s hand, their fingers intertwining. “Exactly. At the heart of it all, we’re more alike than we are different.”

They sat in comfortable silence for a while, the quiet punctuated only by the sounds of the morning and the occasional clink of a cup against the table. For Egon, it was a moment of peace he hadn’t realized he desperately needed. In Vivek’s presence, surrounded by the warmth of their shared traditions, he felt a flicker of hope—not just for himself, but for the possibility of bridging the gaps in his life.

And in the small, precisely wrapped box he had yet to open, he felt the promise of something new.

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