

He stood at the entry gate, watching her, as she took the escalator carrying her tote bag, containing more of the things that she would need in the new country; things that either did not fit into the check in luggage or she would need on the flight. He could almost list the things that were sure to be there – a tube of face wash; it was surely an orange scrub, a set of wet tissues, her iPod, a pair of clean underwear, her Nikon DSLR Camera, a comb, and a book. As far as the other things went, they did not matter, for there were there because they did not fit into the suitcases. Given an option, these were the only things that she would take.

He silently willed her to turn around, to look at him one more time before she disappeared from view for the last time. He wanted to say things that were whirling in his mind. He wanted to ask her what she had meant. He never told them to her before; he had today; that did not change anything yet that changed everything.

She did not look back. She walked on, seemingly oblivious to him standing next to her parents and horde of relatives, almost of all them in tears. She did not turn back even once on the walk to the escalator, on the ride up the escalator and then finally she departed.

He kept watching her as she walked away, silently, weaving her way through the sea of humanity that surrounded her. For a moment he felt what all the ancient Jews might have felt, looking at Moses parting the sea in front of them.

He finally got the guts to bring out the flower from with in his jacket; kept so close, yet so far.

It was so fragile now in his hands, the yellow rose, now half wilted from the hug she gave him.

He smiled thinking how ironic it was that the flower that he had gotten for her, remained with him, wilted.

There were still a lot of questions that ran through his head. There seemed to be too many things that he wanted to say all at the same time. He had half a mind to run towards her, catch her by the scruff of her collar and shout it out into her ears, so that he could be sure that she actually heard what it was that he was saying.

He wanted to hug her one more time; not as a friend; not a man who has told a woman that he wants to be with her, yet does not know if she wants to be with him as well; but as a man who has found the woman he wants to be with, both think that there is no one better suited to be with them.

Oh, what he would give for that one last time.

What did she mean by OK? Was that to mean that she is glad that he finally told her that he wanted to be with her and it was something that she knew before? Did that also mean that she wanted to be with him?

"I want to be with you."

"OK."

"Does that mean that you want to be with me as well?"

"Yes, that is why I said OK; else I would have said 'No'."

How did that OK sound? Was it just an acknowledgement of the fact that he wanted to be with her and that she did not have anything to say? Was it like when we tell someone a fact and they acknowledge the fact without passing their own opinion on the issue for it is something outside their control?

"The cost of a can of Coca Cola is Rs. 25/-."

"OK."

"It rained here last night."

"OK."

"I want to be with you."

"OK."

"Does that mean that you want to be with me too?"

"No, all I am doing is acknowledging the fact that you want to be with me. If I wanted to be with you, I would say out, would I not?"

"I never expected you here", she said.

"You have to be kidding me; I would not miss it for the world."

"All the way to the airport, I was thinking how come I never said goodbye to you in person. Everyone came to meet me at home today, Shankar, Guru, Vindhya, Divya,

Swati, Shanti, Raj, everyone came. In fact, even Ganga came to tell me that she would miss me. When I asked them why you were not there, they did not know. That does not matter anymore for now you are here."

He steadied myself, there was not going to be another chance.

"Do you not have anything to say, not even a goodbye? I am late and if you do not say something in two seconds, I am leaving."

"I want to be with you. I do not want to let you go. I think that I love you."

"OK."

With those words and a quick hug, she walked away towards the security check-in.

She was clearly surprised to see him. It was obvious from the look on her face as he called out to her and walked up to her. For a moment, she actually seemed not to recognize him, and for that briefest of moments, he knew that it was either now or never.

He walked up to her and stood behind her as she began saying goodbye to all her relatives. It was first touching the feet of her uncles and aunts to seek their blessing, followed by the feet of her grand parents, followed by a handshake with her male cousins, hugs with the female ones, ruffling of hair of the younger ones. It was then the turn of her mother; all she could do was hug her. Already fighting back tears, she turned to her father, her idol, her knight in shining armor, her guide, and the human who symbolized all man in her life. She held out a hand bravely, her father took it in his own, a shake, and then he pulled her into him. A tear rolled out from their eyes, and then it was over.

She rushed into the airport a few minutes the scheduled close of the security gates. Since it was an international flight, the passenger was required to check in couple of hours before the actual departure of the flight. However, as it was typical of her, she came in the nick of time.

Given the rush she was in, she almost missed him. However, he had managed to position himself that there was no way that she could get into the airport without him seeing her.

She had chosen wisely, a tee shirt with a light jacket, her hair bunched up in a ponytail. She was wearing three-fourths and her sneakers. In fact, when she had to travel for anything more than an hour, she invariably wore sneakers. As he called

out to her, he smiled remembering the time when she had worn sneakers to a friend's wedding and forgotten to carry a change of shoes. The image was still in his head, wearing a silk sari with sneakers on her feet.

She had repeatedly told him not to come; he had chosen not to listen to her for the first time. She said that she would not be able to give him enough time and that they should finish their good byes at her house. He was adamant, so was she. Finally, she gave up and asked him to do what he pleased.

Looking around, he saw scores of people waiting with others. Most were holding hands, there were men and women, sitting close to each other, one was leaving, the other was not, one had their head on the other's shoulders. It seemed as in the last few minutes, people would have a thousand things to say to each other. Yet, not many people were talking. It seemed as the impending departure clamped their mouths shut.

Few thoughts ran repeatedly in his head.

"What am I doing here? How did I land up at this place, with a yellow rose in my hand? Why did I pick yellow? Does it mean something? I am not too sure that it does. All I know is that I did not want to pick a red rose, too cheesy."

For quite sometime, he did cut a sorry figure.

Imagine this if you can, a guy, standing alone for quite some time near a coffee shop, does not get himself even a cup, keeps looking around to see if someone that he is waiting for has arrived, and he is not even looking at the arrivals, he is looking at the entry gate, the one through which all the people who are to depart are to arrive at the airport. To this mix add the fact that he is carrying a rose, not even a red one, a yellow one, not a bouquet, just a single rose.

It is just him and his yellow rose.

He was standing next to the coffee counter; as usual, he was early. She had told him sometime back that her flight would depart at two in the morning and that she would have to enter security check in a couple of hours before. Yet, it was hardly close to being ten and he was already at the airport.

Yes, it was a fact that he lived quite some distance from the airport and it would be close to impossible to obtain a means of transportation here. Moreover, it was not as if he could spend a bomb on those private taxis and autos in the middle of the night. After all, he was on a shoestring budget and needed every penny that he could save.

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The Departure
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P.S. if you got here and were totally bugged by the way that the story ran in reverse, and would have the patience to read the story, opposite to the way I wrote it, but in correct chronological order, start from the last and read upwards. I hope that it makes sense then.