

# BOUGAINVILLEA

NOX

All the passengers had boarded the flight. They were conducting their last minute checks, but still she was nowhere to be seen. Aamir's eyes scoured, in futility, the area where she was supposed to be. Her entire crew was missing. He was being called to board now. Aamir gave the boarding lounge one last glance.

Almost a year ago, across this exact boarding lounge, he had seen her for the first time. In her red pencil skirt and jacket, with a scarf extending from her hat to her neck, and red lipstick to finish off her look. She was a sight to behold. And it didn't matter that there were half a dozen other women around her dressed exactly the same. She stood out. Suddenly, she looked up from the clipboard she was perusing and their eyes met. For the briefest second she looked at him, and then they both looked away.

Aamir felt himself blushing, and then quickly wondered if she could see it. Their eyes kept meeting for short glances. After the fourth or fifth time, she smiled minutely at him. It was probably that smile that undid him. The little twinkle in her eyes, the rounded cheeks. She had dimples for heaven's sake! All too soon, the passengers from her flight finished

boarding. As she was about to board herself, she looked back at him one last time, and gave him a little wave. And just like that, Aamir was in love.

As was the nature of their lives though, Aamir thought he would never see her again. However, just the next week, there she was again, boarding the same flight as last week. Soon enough, they figured out that their flights were regularly scheduled, and that's how they became more than fleeting acquaintances.

The third time he saw her, he wasn't going to let her leave with glances and smiles from a distance. He approached her, and introduced himself. Neither knew the other's language, but of course they could communicate in English. Sometime she said little exasperated phrases in her own tongue when he got too expressive of his feelings, and they sounded so sweet to Aamir that he felt like he understood them without knowing the words.

It had been many weeks of sweet meetings. They never met outside the airport though. This was before the time of mobile phones, and neither had the means to make international calls. They were living in the present, taking solace in these short opportunities they were gifted with. Never did they discuss the future. It

held nothing for them.

So where was she now? They hadn't discussed any change in plans the last time they had met. He was wearing the cologne she had gifted him, and wanted to see the look in her blue eyes when she realised. He also had a little gift for her; a book that held something very dear to him.

It looked as though he would have to leave disappointed today. However, just as he was about to turn around and board his flight, he saw a little red figure running towards him. Without thinking twice, he met her midway, and embraced her. They had never hugged before, but it didn't matter, she reciprocated all the same.

"I feared you wouldn't be here today."

"Our boarding gates were changed for today without prior notice. My crew is waiting for me right now. But I couldn't leave without saying goodbye."

"I'm glad you didn't. I won't hold you back for long, but I have something for you."

He handed her the book. She looked at him inquisitively.

"It's my favourite book. And don't open it now, but there's something else in there that I thought you might like."

"I am certain I will treasure it. Until next time then."

She left soon after that, and boarded her flight. The flurry of activity from then till after the plane had taken off had stopped her from opening the book. After the first round of refreshments for the passengers were complete, she finally had some respite. Sitting down in her designated spot on the plane, she took the book in her hands. She felt the embossed letters of the title on the cover with her fingers. It was a thick book, paperback, but an original.

She let the book fall open on her lap. The pages parted at a particular spot to reveal a flattened little pink flower. A bougainvillea. She wouldn't have known that name before, but now it made a smile appear on her face. He had mentioned this flower earlier.

Of the very little detail they had shared of their lives back home, this was one of them. Aamir's house back in Dhaka had a bougainvillea tree in front of it. He was very fond of the tree, and always told Safia that the little pink flowers reminded him of her. She had never seen this flower before. They didn't have these trees back home. But now she knew. It was beautiful.

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