

## Pages & Strings

\*flight announcement\*

Vaayu: Excuse me!

Vaayu: Excuse me!

Vaayu: I am sorry to bother you ma'am, but this is the only chair available and I have some urgent work to do. May we share?

Ayesha: Sure.

Vaayu: Thank you.

Ayesha: Excuse me! Could you let me know when another table is free, please?

Waiter: Sure ma'am!

Ayesha: Thank you.

Vaayu: I'm so sorry ma'am, if you want, I'll go look for another table.

Ayesha: No, in fact I thought you need more space, I'm doing okay.

Vaayu: You're doing okay? All flights are delayed and you're doing okay?

Ayesha: It's a good book.

Vaayu: It must be a magic book.

Waiter: Sorry ma'am, all the tables are occupied.

Ayesha: We'll manage, I think. Thank you.

Vaayu: I'm so sorry to intrude, I'm Vaayu!

Ayesha: Ayesha!

Waiter: Sir, may I get you anything?

Vaayu: No thanks. Actually yeah, I'll have a black coffee.

Waiter: Sure!

Vaayu: Have you got a decaf?

Waiter: Yes Sir.

Vaayu: But get the sugar separately!

Waiter: Okay.

Vaayu: You know what? I'll tell you what. Cancel the earlier order, just get me an espresso and hot water...and sugar separately.

Waiter: Yes sir.

Vaayu: Thank you!

Vaayu: It's better to do it yourself, they always mess up the order.

Vaayu: So? Is it meditation?

Ayesha: Is what meditation?

Vaayu: I'm just amazed, I mean everybody is panicking but you are highly relaxed. Is it one of those self-help books?

Ayesha: No, I don't care much about misplaced cheese and Ferrari transactions.

Vaayu: It's Rumi! The mystic poet from Persia, so it is self-help but with better production values!

Ayesha: And more love.

Ayesha: You're clearly an assessment type, uuh...banking, no insurance, no wait accountant. Yeah! You're an accountant.

Vaayu: That's not bad, actually. An actuary.

Ayesha: Actually what?

Vaayu: No, I'm an actuary, A..C..T..U..

Ayesha: I'm sorry, I couldn't resist the pun. I get it. There's not much to smile about in your vocation otherwise, is there? So, actuary....dark arts...not many of you around, I hear.

Vaayu: Apparently, there are more tigers in the wild than us.

Ayesha: So what? You're on your way to assess what a life's worth? Put a number to everything? Assets, risks, liabilities. That kind of stuff, right?

Vaayu: Not a bad summary of what I do at all. In fact, I'm on my way to make a rather lucrative assessment if the flights were on time.

Vaayu: You? You are, a tarot card reader or something? That was a damn good guess about my career.

Ayesha: Ah well, clues are hard to miss.

Vaayu: Yeah, I guess you're right...but you're still good.

Vaayu: So....what do you think that guy does?

Vaayu: Over there...

Ayesha: Hmm....he's..he's clearly a banker with a mid life crisis? Doesn't know what to do with his life next, something like that?

Vaayu: True..

Vaayu: That's amazing, ok don't look now, the lady on your left, really big earrings and a bag that costs more than my education.

Ayesha: Ah...easy peasy..she's a rich south Delhi housewife...ah..part time Reiki healer, failed life coach.. haha

Vaayu: That's really good, that's super cool!

Vaayu: Okay, last one, gentleman over there...the guy with the boots, khaki jacket, pony tail?

Ayesha: hmm....He's a black n white photographer. No wait, he's a...wildlife documentary film maker, owns one of those roadster bikes, does Spiti valley, once a year...ah...yeah!

Vaayu: Well, how do you do this?

Ayesha: Shoes, they give it away.

Vaayu: You're a detective!

Vaayu: Alright, let me guess. You are, you are a musician? No, not a musician, you are a...writer, you're a writer, no artist!

Ayesha: I'm a freelance tree hugger.

Vaayu: Okay!?

Ayesha: Not much left to hug.

Vaayu: And I feel like I'm in this Bond film in which I'm clearly not Bond.

Ayesha: Wow! Nobody's called me a secret agent before this. It feels oddly satisfying, better than being called tarot card reader.

Vaayu: Well, you are being very secretive.

\*flight announcement\*

Ayesha: I scribble, I doodle, I hum a lot. So, I guess you're right on many counts.

Vaayu: Well done, another Rumi reply! But don't worry, we actuaries are actually pretty good at fishing out the facts.

Vaayu: So, what is it that you do for a living Ms. Ayesha?

Ayesha: Okay...so let's just say I hang a lot around the airport.

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Vaayu: Sorry, that's me...."regret the inconvenience"...

Waiter: Sir, your coffee.

Vaayu: Ah, thank you!

Waiter: Here's your espresso with hot water and an extra cup. Sugar on the side.

Vaayu: Thank you!....well I do not need this.

Vaayu: I really need to tap into this zen attitude of yours, you know? My wife would love you. She's always complaining that I'm in the middle of a melt-down. Like calm down, Vaayu... calm down.

Ayesha: Zen was my pet turtle a long time ago.

Vaayu: Really? Don't they live forever?

Ayesha: No they do, it was a day like this, the weather was really bad and it was raining heavily and he wandered off somewhere. I'm still hoping he'll come back someday.

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Vaayu: Alright, let's start from the beginning, so you like sitting at airports, you lose turtles and you read Rumi. But I'm sure there's a lot more to you than that. I would've said you're a celebrity or something but you'd be hiding behind these big dark glasses. I should also then know who you are!

Ayesha: You wouldn't if I was one of those poor art cinema actors that nobody recognises. You don't recognize me?

Vaayu: No, no (mumbles).

Ayesha: I'm offended!

Vaayu: I'll tell what...

Ayesha: Are you serious?

Vaayu:...I never...

Ayesha: I'm just kidding.. (laughs)

Ayesha: I'm sorry.

Vaayu: But I'm done. I'm not playing this game anymore.

Ayesha: What?

Vaayu: Yes.

Ayesha: That's not very persistent for an actuary.

Vaayu: You seem highly amused every time you take that name.

Ayesha: Yeah well...having been a banker for most of my life ... pretty close in your vicinity, isn't it?

Vaayu: You are a banker!? No way! I would never have guessed! You don't look like a banker at all!

Ayesha: I'm going to take that as a compliment. What do bankers look like anyway?

Vaayu: Like me. But that's amazing! Wow! That's incredible! For a banker, you're very relaxed, amazingly patient. Everybody else is panicking and screaming and you look like you are having a picnic at a park!

Ayesha: Well, so after years of battling with numbers, I figured that I've earned myself some leisure time.

Vaayu: So, you're off on a holiday!

Ayesha: No, I'm on it, right now!

Vaayu: What..? Where? Here?

Ayesha: umhmm...

Vaayu: I have no idea what's going on!

Waiter: Ma'am, we need your signature on this book order.

Ayesha: Did you check the numbers?

Waiter: Yes.

Ayesha: Okay, good. Thank you!

Ayesha: Welcome to my book shop café!

Vaayu: I feel like such an idiot!

Ayesha: I hope you enjoyed your coffee?

Vaayu: It was really good, by the way.

Ayesha: Considering you made it yourself...

Vaayu: No, it's amazing...it's a beautiful place that you have...I'm sorry I don't even start conversations with people otherwise. I usually hate people, but you were too relaxed...

Ayesha: It's okay! I had fun chatting with you!

Vaayu: Then, tell me a bit more about your banking life.

Ayesha: Okay, so book shop cafes don't just spring up on their own. I mean, they're usually the result of number crunching on excel sheets for years.

Vaayu: So, done with the crazy corporate world?

Ayesha: Hmm...no. Unfortunately I can't say that. I am done with the labels though, corporate type, banker, tarot card reader, what have you?

Vaayu: Wow!

Ayesha: I guess I want a bit of .....I want a bit of everything.

Vaayu: Wow! That's great! I can't multitask at all. I mean I'm a bonafide corporate type and it's been years since I've re-strung my guitar but tell me how did you end up with such a beautiful coffee shop?

Ayesha: I've always wanted to create something... something real... something meaningful. Not just some fancy apartment for the next generation to fight over. Something with a soul in it, you

know what I mean? And... books, coffee, travel are my three big loves. So, I thought to myself why not? And came up with this place.

Vaayu: That's really something....wow!

Ayesha: Yeah, I want to leave behind a legacy for the next generation. For the kids... Do you have kids, Bablu?

Vaayu: Well...we're expecting.....What did you just call me?

Ayesha: Bablu?! 1993, LedZep on nylon strings, Air India colony.

Vaayu: Okay...Binu di (sister)?

Ayesha: Yes!

Vaayu: Oh my God!

Ayesha: It's been a long time...

Vaayu: I know...I thought...I.....you feel sooo....I knew it, by the way....I was not sure.....my God, Binu di, how are you!? Air India colony!

Ayesha: hmm...

Vaayu: I haven't heard that name in 20 years? Every apartment with those ugly pink mosaic tiles. You remember that? What lovey days they were. I still remember, after school at about 4 – 4.30 p.m., that samosa guy (snack vendor) used to turn up with the sound of a bell and those hot samosas.

Ayesha: And also that chole wala (another snack vendor) on the cycle and those pickles!

Vaayu: Santosh!

Vaayu: And that uncle! My God! Air India colony... I remember that uncle with those loose dentures and used to have those pet parrots in his house.

Ayesha: Mr Garg, he was a lawyer, his wife was a Buddhist, she was always chanting!

Vaayu: He needed the chanting! She was such a crazy person. And Ashish dada (brother)! My God! How is he? With his black leather jacket, he was the first guy in the colony with a leather jacket which he never took off even in summer and you had those funny pig tails...

Ayesha: Which he was always pulling..

Vaayu: And those music rehearsals at your house all through the afternoon. And you'll started that library...ah..I read my first Asterix there. I was your delivery boy! Ashish dada was the first person in the colony to have a double deck mixed player.

Ayesha: I still have it...

Vaayu: You have it? I have to come to see it! Do you know how many mixed tapes he made for us? I mean, everlasting love songs vol. 1,2...50,60,70.....you know it's so strange, I was telling my wife about him a while back and decided to look him up on Facebook. He's not on Facebook and social networking sites. So what's he up to? Where is he now? Let's give him a call!

Ayesha: He's ah...he's....tuning his guitar somewhere, up there. Umm... he fought a battle with cancer and he...lost and ...he went pretty much when we left the colony and ....that silly brother of mine....he is gone.

Vaayu: (shocked) I don't know what to say Binu di?

Ayesha: It's okay...

Vaayu: I just can't get my head around it. He was our hero!

Ayesha: He was everyone's hero. In fact, we would've started this place together. But...our man was in a hurry to leave.

Vaayu: Music was clearly his legacy. You know Binu di, Ashish dada was the first one who taught me the first chords on my guitar.

Ayesha: I remember. He couldn't sing to save his life but, when he played those low notes, he was like George Harrison!

Vaayu: My favourite Beatle.

Ayesha: So, did you keep up with the music?

Vaayu: Yes and no. I mean, after I left the colony I moved on to metal strings. Made at least one girlfriend by playing my terrible Led Zep covers. Now I've got a job, we're expecting a baby, so there's no time for musical dreams.

Ayesha: On the contrary, it's time to renew your dreams. And congrats on your baby!

Vaayu: Thank you!

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Ayesha: That's your boarding call...

Vaayu: Yeah.

Ayesha: Sorry, I couldn't help but overhear.

Vaayu: Yeah, yeah...I've made it pretty obvious.

Ayesha: It was nice chatting with you after all these years.

Vaayu: Thank you...

Vaayu: Binu di...you know, everything that you said about leaving behind a legacy and not just working to buy another house or chasing another number, has really hit home. I'm really sorry about Ashish dada. Ashish dada was really everything for us. He was the first person who made us feel that everything is possible and somehow he was the one guy who had time for everyone and everything.

Ayesha: You better go....

Vaayu: Yeah..

Ayesha: Here...it's not really an Asterix, but makes a pretty good read.

Vaayu: The actuary who discovered Rumi.

Ayesha: Has a nice ring to it?

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Vaayu: Binu di! I promise you, I'm going to go home and I'm going to re-string that guitar!

Ayesha: Take care of yourself.

Vaayu: Yeah, you too.