

In the streets of Pushkar!

~ by Kshiteej Kabra

"*What did you wish for?*" I asked, my curiosity piqued as I glanced at her radiant face.

She grinned, a mischievous sparkle dancing in her eyes, as though she was delighting in keeping a secret—just for a little while longer.

With a playful tilt of her head, she replied, "*Well, I do want to tell you, and I will tell you... but only after my wish comes true. I promise!*"

Her words lingered like a sweet mystery, and I couldn't help but smile, wondering what it was that had her so joyfully guarded.

The golden rays of the setting sun painted the streets of Pushkar in mesmerizing hues of orange and pink as we stepped out of the sacred Brahma Temple.

Visiting the only temple dedicated to the four-headed god felt profoundly auspicious, leaving us with a sense of happiness and divine blessing. The clock struck 6:30 PM, and the sun was lazily dipping into the horizon, the sky painting itself in warm shades. The evening air carried a faint chill, a kind of sweet cold that begged for the comfort of a light jacket—just enough for me to wrap it around both of us as we strolled.

She walked beside me, dressed in a lilac-purple kurti that seemed as though it had been handpicked by the universe to complement her natural beauty. The golden rays of the setting sun caressed her face, while the soft winter breeze played with the strands of her hair, which I gently tucked behind her ears.

To me, she looked even lovelier than the red rose I had given her. Earlier, during our darshan, we had offered a garland to the deity, and when the priest returned a single rose after our Pooja, I instinctively handed it to her—my own goddess of love.

Her hand slipped into mine naturally, as if it had always belonged there. Together, we ventured into the vibrant streets of Pushkar, where life bloomed in the form of bustling shops, tantalizing aromas, and lively chatter. The streets were alive with a blend of Indian and foreign tourists, the air thick with the scent of incense and freshly made street food, and every corner hummed with the joyful chaos of this sacred city.

She walked close, her shoulder brushing against mine, her fingers clasping mine softly and she rested her head lightly against my shoulder. My hand alternated between resting in my jacket pocket and wrapping protectively around her waist.

"*Stay to my left,*" I murmured, guiding her gently. "*Let me take the right—there's too much crowd here.*"

She let out a soft laugh and teased, "*Kshiteej...*"

I glanced at her with a knowing look, already bracing myself for whatever playful plan she had in mind.

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"Now that we've done everything you planned..." she began, her tone laced with mock seriousness.

I raised an eyebrow. *"Oh? And what would that be?"*

She smirked. *"Hotel check-in and luggage? Done."*

"Yes," I agreed.

She asked, *"Brahma ji ke darshan?"*

"Done," I nodded again.

"So, Kshiteeeeeeej..." she stretched out my name with an irresistible charm that only she could pull off. Her eyes glinted with playful mischief, and I already knew what she was about to ask.

"Now can we go for..."

I interrupted her with a firm, *"No, baby."*

She pouted, her voice turning adorably whiny. *"Yes, baby, please,"* she begged with her trademark antics, her pout so convincing it was almost unfair.

I couldn't help but tease her. *"And wasn't it you, just an hour ago, who said she was too tired to even walk back to the hotel?"*

"Oh, come on!" she exclaimed, her tone full of faux exasperation. *"We're not going to visit this place, these shops, these markets again. So, only for your sake, I'm ready to put in the effort!"* She shot me a playful look of mock annoyance, her chin tilted ever so slightly.

"Of course, love," I replied with a grin. *"And are these not the same words you told me in Jaipur and Udaipur over the past four days?"*

Her cheeks flushed as she struggled to come up with a retort. Instead, she shifted gears, her eyes narrowing with mock suspicion. *"You know what? I think I know why you don't want to go shopping."*

"Oh?" I asked, humoring her. *"And what might that reason be, Madam?"*

"Because," she declared dramatically, *"these shopkeepers always praise me when I buy something, and you get jealous!"* Her wicked smile only added to her charm.

Feigning offense, I replied, *"Huh! In your dreams, baby!"*

She leaned closer, her voice dropping to a teasing whisper. *"So, you'd be fine if they praised me in front of you?"*

I met her gaze with a soft smile. *"Let them say whatever they want. No one knows you better than I do, princess. And no one can bring a smile to your face better than I can."*

She grinned, clearly enjoying the banter. *"Then bring a smile to my face, my king."* She extended her hand dramatically toward the market. *"Take me shopping!"*

Her laughter was infectious as she suddenly stopped in her tracks, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Look at that!" she exclaimed, pointing to a charming little shop decorated with glittering jhumkas and bindis that danced in the warm glow of the shop lights. Before I could react, she tugged me toward it, her enthusiasm lighting up the evening.

1. The Bindi and Jhumka Shop

The shopkeeper, a warm elderly man, welcomed us with a practiced smile and an intuitive flair for compliments. *"Madam,"* he said, holding up a delicate blue bindi, *"this one will look exquisite on you."*

She smiled politely and began browsing through the small boxes arranged neatly on the counter. After a few minutes, she picked up a black bindi and held it against her forehead, tilting her head slightly as she sought my opinion.

Before I could respond, she herself dismissed it with a soft shake of her head. *"Do you have other options?"* she asked the shopkeeper, her voice carrying that adorable mix of indecisiveness and curiosity that I adored.

The shopkeeper handed her another box, and after sifting through it for a moment, she pulled out a packet of red bindis. This time, as she held it to her forehead and turned to the mirror, her gaze flickered toward me, silently asking for my verdict.

Even the shopkeeper chimed in, *"These are much better, madam."*

Before she could second-guess herself, I stepped behind her. Together, we faced the mirror, our reflections framed in its ornate border.

"It's perfect," I said, my eyes meeting hers through the mirror. Her cheeks turned a soft pink, and she gave me a bashful smile, the kind that could stop time.

Noticing her hesitation as she tried on jhumkas, I saw her sigh after rejecting pair after pair. She held them up, inspecting them from every angle, but none seemed to satisfy her.

As she stood there, I quietly reached for another pair of silver jhumkas, removing them from their plastic cover. Gently, I brought them to her ears and clasped them on myself. *"These,"* I whispered into her ear, *"were made for you."*

Before she could respond, I leaned in a little closer, singing softly:

"Teri bindiya re, re aye haye teri bindiya re..."

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She laughed, her eyes twinkling with joy, and turned to face me fully. “*You’re unbelievable,*” she said, shaking her head, but her expression betrayed how much she loved every bit of it.

I bought the red bindis and the silver jhumkas, the shopkeeper nodding in approval as he packed them. Opening the packet, I gently placed one bindi on her forehead. “*Perfect,*” I said, stepping back to admire my handiwork.

Her laughter rang out like a melody as we walked out of the shop, my arms now burdened with the first of many shopping bags. Yet, as she looped her hand through mine, I couldn’t help but feel that my real treasure was the woman walking beside me.

2. The Bangles of Many Colors

Our next stop was a dazzling riot of colors—bangles in every shade imaginable glittered under the shop’s warm lighting, creating a kaleidoscope of hues.

“*Please come, madam!*” the shopkeeper greeted us warmly. “*What shall I show you? Regular bangles or fancy kangans?*”

She smiled and replied, “I want sets of bangles to wear daily, so regular ones will do.”

I couldn’t resist teasing her. “*Oh, c’mon, Bhaiya! Even the simplest daily-wear bangles become fancy when she wears them on her wrists.*” My playful flirtation earned me a soft blush from her, as she pretended to focus on the colorful displays in front of her.

She was already trying on a dozen bangles - when the shopkeeper chimed in, holding up a pair of shimmering green ones. “*Sahib, these green ones will look perfect on Madam’s wrists,*” he said confidently.

I noticed her gaze linger on the bangles, and her eyes lit up with interest. Without hesitation, I gently clasped the bangles from the shopkeeper’s palm, turning to her. Taking her hand softly, I delicately held her wrist and began sliding the bangles on, one by one.

Her cheeks turned a lovely shade of pink as I complimented her openly, not minding the shopkeeper’s presence. “*Her wrists are so perfect that even these bangles must feel privileged to be here,*” I said with a grin.

The shopkeeper chuckled, and she laughed nervously, her blush deepening with every passing second.

“*So, a set of green?*” she asked, looking up at me with curiosity and a hint of hesitation.

“*Green and blue and pink,*” I replied, my smile widening as I watched her expression shift.

“*All of them?!*” she exclaimed, her eyes widening in playful disbelief.

The shopkeeper, clearly enjoying the moment, nodded approvingly and began packing the sets.

“Yes, *all of them*,” I said softly, leaning toward her, my voice dropping to a whisper. “*After all—I love—all of you.*”

Her cheeks turned a shade deeper, her lips curling into a shy smile as she looked away, unable to hide her joy.

As we moved toward the billing counter, I couldn’t help but brush my hand lightly across her waist. Leaning in close to her ear, I whispered playfully, beginning to sing softly:

“*Gori hain kalaiyaan, pehna de mujhe hari-hari chudiya, apna banade mujhe saajnaa...*”

Her reaction was priceless—a perfect mix of blush, happiness, and the cutest surprise. Her smile radiated pure joy, making the moment feel timeless.

At the counter, I handed the shopkeeper the money, taking the bags from him with a sense of pride. As we stepped out of the shop, I couldn’t help but admire how her happiness seemed to make the bangles sparkle even brighter.

3. The Sweetness of Mithai

The enticing aroma of ghee and sugar wafted through the air, drawing us irresistibly into a quaint mithai shop. The display counters glimmered with golden jalebis, soft laddoos, and countless other treats, each more tempting than the last.

“*Jalebi or laddoo?*” she asked, her finger playfully hovering between the two options.

Before I could respond, the shopkeeper, a lively man with a warm grin, chimed in enthusiastically, “*Madam, you must try our malpuas! They are our speciality, the sweetest mithai in town!*”

I chuckled, shaking my head. “*Impossible,*” I said, looking at her with a mischievous smile. “*Nothing is sweeter than her and her smile—not even your malpuas.*”

She rolled her eyes at my exaggerated flattery, though the soft blush creeping up her cheeks betrayed her amusement. Ignoring me, she wandered toward the glass counters, her eyes lighting up as she browsed the colorful array of mithais and savory snacks on display.

While she was engrossed, I quickly moved behind her, purposely brushing past her as I rushed to block her path. She was startled slightly, her laughter bubbling up as I leaned in and asked, “*What do you feel like having, sweetie?*”

With a playful pout, she replied, “*Let’s try the malpua—since the shopkeeper claims it’s their speciality!*”

Turning to the manager, I smiled and said, “*For your madam, please bring one plate of malpuas, two samosas, and a bowl of your chilled special dry fruit rabdi.*”

“And what about you?” she asked, tilting her head with curiosity.

I leaned closer to her, lowering my voice so only she could hear. *“Didn’t I already tell you? You’re the sweetest thing here. I’d rather have...you,”* I murmured, my words brushing against her ear.

Her cheeks turned a deeper shade of pink as she gently pushed me away, glancing around in embarrassment when she realized the manager had heard part of our exchange. I quickly recovered with a casual grin, saying to the manager, *“I’ll have the same as your madam.”*

We found a cozy corner table and sat down. Soon, our order arrived, and the spread before us looked as delectable as the smile on her face. I was briefly caught up in a work call when she reached over and fed me a piece of malpua dipped in rabdi.

Each bite was heavenly, but I couldn’t help but tease her. *“Still not as sweet as you,”* I said dramatically after every morsel, making her laugh harder each time.

As we stepped out of the shop, the weight of our shopping bags in one hand and her fingers entwined with mine in the other, I leaned closer to her ear and began to hum softly: *“Aaj unse milna hai humein, baat dil ki kehna hai humein...”*

Her eyes sparkled as she turned to me, her smile wide and her voice soft. *“You’re impossible,”* she whispered, though her tone was filled with affection.

4. Our Resting Desires

A few minutes later, as we wandered through the bustling market, she let out a soft yawn. The day’s travel, darshan, and continuous exploration had begun to take their toll.

She turned to me and said with a playful pout, *“Next time, don’t make me eat in between shopping!”*

I raised an eyebrow, amused. *“And why is that?”*

She sighed dramatically. *“Because the food is always too good to resist, and then I feel like resting or, worse, sleeping!”*

Grinning, I teased her, *“Then why do you eat so much, hmm?”*

She stopped in her tracks, shooting me an exaggeratedly angry look before quipping back, *“Excuse me! First of all, you are the one who always orders extra for me. And secondly,”* she added with a wicked grin, *“you should probably eat less, Kshiteeej—you’re getting a little healthy-healthy!”*

She teasingly called me fat, her voice dripping with mischief.

I couldn't help but laugh as I pulled her closer, my fingers lacing through hers. *"Don't worry, love,"* I whispered, leaning down so only she could hear, *"I'll make sure we do enough cardio tonight to stay fit by tomorrow morning... and ready for even more food."* I finished with a cheeky wink and a grin.

Her cheeks flushed, but she didn't back away. Instead, she surprised me, stepping closer until her lips were just a breath away from mine. Rising onto her toes, she whispered in a sultry tone, *"As much as I'd love to join your cardio program, darling, let's focus on one thing at a time. Before you think about removing my kurti, you're going to earn your chance—by buying me some new ones!"*

And just like that, she had me once again, her charm leaving me with no choice but to surrender. Smiling, I let her drag me into a kurti shop, her laughter echoing softly as we disappeared into the vibrant world of colorful fabrics and playful banter.

5. The Colorful World of Fabrics

A shop brimming with a kaleidoscope of kurtis drew her gaze, its vibrant hues calling out to her like a painter's palette. The shopkeeper, ever enthusiastic, began his rapid chatter about the various designs, eagerly displaying piece after piece. She sifted through them, dismissing some and momentarily setting others aside. Then, with a gleam in her eye, she held up a radiant yellow kurti, giving it a quick twirl to admire its charm.

"You have impeccable taste, Madam," the shopkeeper gushed, *"this color shines brighter than the sunshine itself!"*

"Not true," I interjected, smirking.

The shopkeeper, momentarily flustered, corrected himself, *"I mean, sir, it's as bright as the sunshine!"*

"Still not true," I replied, tilting my head with a grin. *"Your sunshine and my sunshine are worlds apart, my friend,"* I added, gesturing towards her. *"Mine is standing right here, about to light up this kurti."*

The shopkeeper blinked in confusion as I picked out a couple more kurtis in the same size. She chuckled softly, shaking her head at my antics, and headed to the dressing room to try on the yellow one.

When she stepped out, wearing that sunny yellow kurti, my breath hitched for a moment. *"Your sunshine might be setting right now,"* I said, pointing at the sky, *"but mine is right here, wearing this yellow kurti and outshining the brightest day."*

She rolled her eyes, a soft sigh escaping her lips, but I caught the faintest hint of a smile. *"Too cheesy?"* I asked, grinning unabashedly.

"Maybe," she replied, *"but your claim is duly noted."*

“So?” she asked, twirling for my opinion. *“How’s the fit?”*

Without a word, I stepped closer, adjusting the kurti at her shoulder and smoothing the fabric along her neckline. I carefully plucked out the price tag that could’ve itched and annoyed her and even removed the tiny stray threads from the seams. My gaze lingered—not on the kurti, but on her—as if the fabric’s only purpose was to complement her glow.

As I circled back to her front, I couldn’t help but hum under my breath:

*“Teri shirt da main ta, button soniye,
Baalon ka tere main haye, clip ho gaya...”*

Her laughter rang out like a melody, her face hidden behind another kurti she grabbed to stifle her amusement.

“Perfect fit,” I declared, stepping back with mock authority.

By the time she changed back into her outfit, I had already picked two more kurtis in the same size. She inspected my choices, her smile softening into approval. Hand in hand, we walked out of the shop, the streets of the market suddenly brighter in her presence.

6. The Souvenirs of Love

The final shop we wandered into was a vibrant haven of Rajasthani artistry—colorful puppets swaying in the breeze, delicately carved boxes glinting under the lights, and vivid hand-painted wall hangings adorning every corner. Amidst this tapestry of culture, her eyes settled on a small mirror, its frame intricately designed with patterns as timeless as tradition.

“This mirror,” the shopkeeper said with a flourish, handing it to her, *“will reflect your beauty, Madam.”*

I couldn’t resist. *“Why would she need a mirror,”* I quipped, *“when I remind her of that every single day?”*

The shopkeeper’s wife, who had been quietly observing the exchange, chimed in with a teasing smile. *“And what about the days, Sir, when work keeps you so busy you can’t even glance at Madam’s reflection?”*

Her playful question caught me off guard, but it was my partner who turned to me next, her gaze expectant, her lips twitching as if suppressing a grin. Her eyes seemed to ask, *“Well? What’s your answer to that?”*

I smiled, slipping out my wallet as if to pay, but instead of reaching for the currency, I pulled out a photograph carefully tucked inside. Turning it toward the small gathering, I revealed her picture—my sunshine, my love—etched forever in my heart and now displayed for all to see.

“She’s with me even when I’m busy,” I said, my voice low yet sure, *“right here, where it matters most.”*

Then, with a dramatic flair, I handed over the note to settle the bill and began humming softly:

"Main dekhu teri photo, sau sau baar kude..."

Her cheeks flushed, a mixture of pride and delight spreading across her face as the shopkeeper's wife chuckled knowingly.

"Pack the mirror," I told the shopkeeper, grinning. *"It may not be needed, but a souvenir of her smile today is worth keeping."*

As we left the shop, her hand slipped into mine, and I knew that every mirror, every glance, and every moment would forever reflect the love we shared.

7. The End of the Journey

As we strolled out of the bustling streets of Pushkar, the bags in my hands felt weightless compared to the joy radiating from her. The vibrant market lights slowly faded into the distance, leaving only the quiet rhythm of our steps and the echo of shared laughter.

Breaking the silence, she said softly, *"You know... I loved it."*

I glanced at her, curiosity sparking in my eyes. *"Loved what? The mirror?"*

She shook her head, a playful smile tugging at her lips.

"The mithai, then?" I ventured, teasingly.

Another shake of her head, her smile growing wider.

"The kurtis?" I asked, pretending to be perplexed.

This time, she let out a soft laugh and shook her head again. Then, unable to hold back any longer, she said, *"I loved you. The way you kept competing with the shopkeepers just to make me smile. The way you made sure I had the most perfect day today. You were, without a doubt, the best—better than all of them."*

I paused, letting her words linger in the cool evening air before replying, *"And do you know why that is?"*

She tilted her head, curiosity alight in her gaze. *"Why?"*

I smiled and answered, *"One, I know you. Two, I understand you. And three..."* I leaned closer, my voice dropping to a tender whisper, *"I love you."*

She laughed softly, her cheeks tinged with warmth as she whispered back, *"Brahmaji ki Jai! Looks like he fulfilled my wish far too soon."*

Her words hung between us, their sweetness echoing louder than the distant hum of the marketplace. Hand in hand, we walked back to our room, hearts light and full.

Pushkar had given us more than just souvenirs that day. It had gifted us a canvas painted with vibrant memories—love, laughter, and togetherness woven into its very fabric. As I glanced at her, the glow on her face brighter than the setting sun, I realized something profound.

No market in the world could ever sell what I had found in her: a journey of endless love, boundless joy, and a future I couldn't wait to embrace.

So, I sang ~

*Tu dhoop sunehari fizaaron mein,
Rehti ho meri duaaon mein,
Tera naam jis lamhe mein loon,
Behad mile aaraam hai.
Teri hi galiyon mei Aawara Shaam Hai!*

~ That's me, KRK, signing off!

My song references -

1. Teri Bindiya Re ~

<https://youtu.be/DRaVzCwkl98?si=QdmsaVjOeMo1sTej>

2. Gori Hain Kalaiyaan ~

<https://youtu.be/9CYcd2kH-hg?si=kvnsaWjAe6qARQy8>

3. Aaj Unse Milna hain humein ~

<https://youtu.be/PIA-vdbx6dY?si=ADSFcBC6P8w53eZw>

4. Teri Shirt da main ta Button soniye ~

<https://youtu.be/dTvZxazwVKk?si=2XErKegGbwzAFLaM>

5. Main dekhu teri photo ~

<https://youtu.be/dPmhZ8I7zfA?si=YLcKXfKnxfPnkXBg>

6. Teri hi Galiyon mei Aawara Shaam ~

<https://youtu.be/P-z3aLhp9w4?si=VC4CWB1AmW-N4fVT>

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