Gate D27

By: Talese Nicole

Airports have a way of making everything feel like a movie. The kind where the main character stares at planes landing from the large windows, lost in thought, coffee growing cold in her hands, waiting for something—or someone—that may never come.

Guess I'm the main character today.

I've always hated goodbyes, but I think I hate *almost*-goodbyes even more—the ones that don't really end, they just fade.

Quietly.

Without clarity.

Like him and I.

We were young and naive, running around Detroit together. Both of us believed we had time to figure everything out later. Maybe we did. But "later" came and went. Life moved on. Cities changed. *We* changed. Yet, somehow, we never truly let go.

It's been ten years. A decade of back and forth, push and pull. I leave; he calls. He leaves; I miss him. We move like a song stuck in a loop—repeating the same verse, never making it to the chorus.

No matter how long the silence lasted, or how many times we tried to move on, it always circled back to us. He's the one I could never quite get over. I think he knows that. I think he

always has. That's part of the hold he has, the quiet confidence that no matter how far I go, part of me will always look over my shoulder for him.

A year ago today, I flew out to see him. I still remember how I felt on that flight. Nervous, excited, hopeful. I told myself, *This is the beginning of something.* I wanted to believe that so badly.

When I landed, I waited for him to see me like I saw him. He hardly looked my way.

I sat there in a city full of strangers, next to someone I thought I was close to, and felt completely alone. I felt like a shadow trailing behind someone who used to make me feel like sunlight.

Still, I stayed. I smiled. I told myself maybe he was distracted, it had been a work trip for him after all. I tried not to take it personally, but it was personal. It always is when your heart is on the line.

Later, we talked. We became close again. We tried to patch things up, to be better, to meet in the middle. But the truth is, I don't think we ever stood on the same ground. Every time we got close, something would shift. Misunderstandings, silence, missed chances. And me… always the one reaching.

Last week, he was in my city. Usually, I drop everything and rearrange my life. Find a way to be where he is. I've done it more times than I care to admit. But this time… I didn't move. I didn't make space.

He asked why, and I told him the truth: *I'm tired.*

Tired of the loops. The silent stretches that last for weeks. The way he always feels just out of reach—never fully gone, never fully present. Tired of asking for consistency. Of feeling like my presence is conditional. Tired of showing up for someone who only shows up when it's convenient.

I told him, *Anything that's not growing is dead.*

He said we haven't grown because I stopped watering. I stopped trying.

That's what hurts the most—he doesn't see all the years I *did*. All the times I reached, gave grace, opened doors, made excuses for his absence. All the times I swallowed my needs just to keep the connection alive.

I didn't stop because I stopped loving him.

I stopped because I finally started loving *myself* more.

Still, if I'm honest, I don't think I'll ever stop loving him. And I hate that. I hate that no matter how much time passes, no matter how many lessons I learn, there's still a part of me that aches when I think of him. Still a soft spot in my heart when I hear his name.

That's the kind of love no one warns you about—the kind that lingers and burns slowly. The kind that doesn't break you but keeps you in a quiet state of longing. I've accepted that he may always be the one I carry. I think I'll always be the one he keeps tucked away, too—close enough to never lose, far enough to never commit to.

Anyway, I should be going soon. The flight crew has called for final boarding a few times now. "Final boarding call for Flight 313 to Detroit, all passengers please proceed to Gate D27."

That’s me.

It’s strange, going back to the city where it all began with no plans this time. No text. No meeting up.

I’m not calling. I’m not asking if he’s around.

For once, I’m going home without hoping he’ll reach for me.

Maybe this is our first real goodbye.

Right now, I feel sad. Not angry. Not bitter. Just, soft and bruised. A little wiser.

Definitely a little lonelier.

The End