

Cricket 103

Chapter 103

I was taking slow sips of my tea, still absorbing everything Sachin sir had just told me, when I heard footsteps approaching from inside the house. The soft but confident steps echoed in the silent afternoon, and before I could even turn to look, a voice rang in my ears.

I glanced up and saw someone stepping out of the house, dressed in casual clothes. My eyes widened in disbelief.

No way. It can't be her.

For a second, my brain refused to process the situation. My grip on the teacup tightened, and my mind was racing.

What is she doing here?

She came closer, and as soon as our eyes met, we both froze. A moment of complete silence passed between us before, in perfect synchronization, we both exclaimed—

"YOU?!"

Sachin sir raised an amused eyebrow as he took another sip of tea, but I wasn't even paying attention to him anymore.

"What are you doing here?" I blurted out at the same time she asked me the exact same question.

We both frowned at each other, confused beyond belief.

Then she crossed her arms and said, "What do you mean, what am I doing here? This is my house!"

I blinked. Once. Twice. Then, as her words settled in, my jaw nearly dropped.

"Wait... what?!"

I couldn't even respond properly. My brain was still struggling to put two and two together.

As I sat there still reeling from the shock, Sachin sir gave a small chuckle and gestured toward her.

"Aarav, meet my daughter, Shradha."

I barely managed to nod before he continued, "And Shradha, this is Aarav Pathak. One of India's next big things in cricket."

Shradha's eyes widened as she turned to look at me. I could feel her gaze burning into me, and without even realizing it, I found myself staring back.

The entire room fell into silence for a few moments before Anjali ma'am cleared her throat and asked, "You two know each other?"

Shradha broke the silence, crossing her arms and narrowing her eyes slightly.

"Yeah, kind of," she admitted, her voice carrying a hint of something I couldn't quite place.

Sachin sir raised an eyebrow, clearly intrigued. "Oh? Where did you two meet?"

Shradha didn't even hesitate. "In New Zealand."

Sachin sir and Anjali ma'am exchanged glances, while I was still trying to figure out how to respond. Before I could say anything, she continued, turning to her dad.

"And guess what, Papa? When we met, he told us he was in New Zealand just for fun and enjoyment! And now you're telling me he's a cricketer?"

I blinked. Oh. Right. That.

Sachin sir looked at me with an amused expression, waiting for my explanation. I quickly raised my hands in defense.

"Okay, okay, in my defense, I wasn't lying! I was genuinely in New Zealand for a break at that time! we meet after end of the series so I was enjoying New Zealand."

Shradha scoffed. "Yeah, right. You never mentioned being a professional cricketer."

I frowned. "Oh, and you never told me you were Sachin Tendulkar's daughter!"

She tilted her head, "Yeah, because I don't go around telling people, 'Hey, I'm the daughter of the Sachin Tendulkar!'"

I opened my mouth, then closed it. Fair point.

Sachin sir laughed, clearly enjoying this unexpected reunion. "Well, well. Looks like fate wanted you two to meet again."

"I guess so," she muttered before looking away.

Shradha leaned back in her chair, sipping her tea before casually mentioning, "Bhaiya and didi are also coming here. Didi's returning from her trip, and bhaiya from his practice."

Sachin sir and Anjali ma'am exchanged a warm glance before nodding.

"Good," Sachin sir said with a smile. "It'll be nice to have everyone here together."

We continued chatting while sipping on tea, the atmosphere relaxed and welcoming. Despite the initial shock of seeing Shradha here, I found myself settling into the moment. I wasn't just in the presence of a cricketer legend—I was in his home, sharing a conversation with his family.

As the conversation flowed, Sachin sir suddenly placed his cup down and looked at me.

"Aarav, let's head to the backyard."

I raised an eyebrow. "The backyard?"

He grinned. "There's something I want to see."

I followed him through the house, passing through a corridor that led to a large open space. As soon as I stepped out, I froze.

A full-fledged cricket net stood in the backyard. The setup was nothing short of professional—pitch markings, a net enclosure, and even a bowling machine neatly placed at the side. I looked around in awe.

"You have a proper cricket net in your backyard?" I asked, still taking in the view.

Sachin sir chuckled. "Of course. Where else would I practice in peace?"

I turned to see him already picking up a bowling arm attachment, casually preparing to bowl.

"Pad up," he instructed.

I didn't need to be told twice. I quickly grabbed the gear and got ready.

"I just want to see how you play," he said, positioning himself at the other end. "No pressure. Just focus on defense for now."

I nodded, gripping my bat tightly as he took his stance.

He tossed a few deliveries my way—nothing too fast, but enough to test my technique. I focused, playing each ball with a straight bat, carefully defending.

"Good," he nodded. "Your technique is solid, but you could work on your stance a little. Try keeping your head steadier when you defend."

I adjusted my posture as he continued throwing. With each delivery, he pointed out subtle areas I could improve—my balance, my bat angle, the way I followed through.

"It's the small things that make a big difference," he said. "Efficiency is key. The less effort you waste, the longer you can play at your best."

I listened intently, absorbing every bit of advice. It wasn't every day that the God of Cricket was giving you personal pointers.

After a while, he stepped back and motioned toward me.

"Now, let's see your bowling."

I took my mark, gripping the ball tightly as I prepared to bowl. My heart was racing. Bowling to Sachin Tendulkar—it felt surreal.

I ran up and delivered my first ball. He played it effortlessly, tapping it with a casual flick of his wrist.

I bowled again. Another clean shot.

I continued for three overs, trying different lengths, different speeds—trying to find a way to trouble him. But he was Sachin Tendulkar. Every ball I bowled was met with perfect timing, perfect execution.

Finally, he smiled and walked toward me.

"You're good," he said, patting my shoulder. "But you rush your follow-through. Try staying balanced after your delivery. It'll give you more control."

I nodded, taking mental notes of everything he said.

"Bowling to you is impossible," I admitted, exhaling deeply.

He laughed. "You'll get there. Just keep refining your skills."

We stood there for a moment, the air filled with the slight evening breeze. I realized something then—this wasn't just about cricket. This was a moment of learning, of growth.

Sachin sir wasn't here to teach me like a coach. He was here as a senior, as a mentor, guiding me in the way only he could.

After practicing with Sachin sir for nearly two hours, I finally wrapped up my session. My muscles were sore, but the satisfaction of learning from the legend himself made it all worth it.

I walked over to the small wash area, splashing cold water on my face, letting the coolness seep into my skin. Taking a deep breath, I grabbed my kit bag, walked to my Mercedes G-Wagon, and placed it in the trunk.

As I turned around to say goodbye to Sachin sir, I noticed him sitting at the lawn table again, enjoying tea with Anjali ma'am and Shradha. Their conversation seemed lively, and as I approached, I caught onto Shradha's voice.

"Papa, since bhaiya and didi are coming, I want to surprise them at the airport. Please, pretty please!" she said, her tone almost childlike, as she clasped her hands together dramatically.

Sachin sir smiled but shook his head. "No, Shradha. We only brought one car to the farmhouse, and it's already gone to pick them up."

Shradha groaned, leaning back in her chair. "Ugh, that's not fair. I really wanted to surprise them!"

By this time, I had reached the table after putting my bag in the car. I stood there, waiting for the right moment, before addressing Sachin sir.

"Thank you so much for today, sir. It was an honor learning from you. I'll take my leave now."

Sachin sir looked up at me, his usual calm smile playing on his lips. But then, just as I turned slightly, he said, "Aarav, could you do me a favor?"

I immediately stopped and turned back. "Of course, sir. Just say the word."

He leaned back in his chair, crossing his arms. "Could you drop Shradha at the airport? She wants to surprise her siblings, but there's no car available right now."

I blinked, surprised for a second. Dropping her off? That wasn't a big deal.

"Sure, no problem, sir." I nodded.

Sachin sir smiled before turning to Shradha. "Now you can go. You're okay with it, right?"

Shradha looked at me for a moment before shrugging casually. "Yeah, that works. Thanks, Aarav!"

I nodded again. "Let's go then."

She got up, adjusting her hair, and waved at her parents before following me toward the car. I walked ahead, opening the passenger door for her.

"Thanks," she mumbled as she slid in.

I shut the door and moved to the driver's side, settling into my seat before starting the car. As we pulled out of the farmhouse, the silence inside the car stretched for a few minutes.

Finally, she spoke. "So... you drive a G-Wagon?"

I glanced at her, smirking. "Surprised?"

She shrugged. "A little. I mean, I just never imagined you as the G-Wagon type."

I chuckled. "And what type did you imagine me as?"

She pretended to think for a second before smirking. "Maybe something more... classic. Like an Aston Martin or even a vintage Mustang."

I let out a laugh. "I'll keep that in mind for my next car."

After a few minutes, I decided to break the silence. "So, you are studying to be a doctor, right?"

Shradha, who was looking out the window, turned towards me and nodded. "Yeah. First medical, then a nutritionist specialization."

I raised a brow. "Ohh, that's unique."

She smiled. "Yeah. I always wanted to do something in the medical field, but I also have a huge interest in fitness and nutrition, so why not combine them?"

I glanced at her briefly before returning my focus to the road. "Makes sense. But wait... you're what, 18? 19? How are you already doing a doctorate?"

She blinked at me before bursting into laughter. "Oh my god, Aarav, do you think I'm already a doctor?"

I smirked. "I mean... aren't you?"

She shook her head, still laughing. "No, genius. I'm in medical college. I just started. It takes years to actually become a doctor."

I chuckled. "Okay, okay, my bad. Guess I should stick to cricket and not make assumptions about the medical field."

She leaned back in her seat, a playful glint in her eyes. "Yeah, that'd be best."

A comfortable silence settled in again before she spoke up. "So, what about you? Anything other than cricket?"

I nodded. "Yeah. I'm an investor and a businessman... or to use the fancier term, an entrepreneur."

She tilted her head slightly, curiosity evident in her expression. "Really? What kind of business?"

I smirked. "A little bit of everything—stocks, real estate, startups." I kept my answer vague, not wanting to dive too deep.

Shradha, however, wasn't one to let things slide so easily. "You must be doing well then, huh? I mean, you're driving a G-Wagon, after all."

I chuckled. "Not much, but yeah, we're well off."

She raised a brow. "Not much? Aarav, a G-Wagon isn't exactly 'not much.' That's, like, serious money."

I shrugged. "It's just a car."

She laughed. "Spoken like a true rich person."

We continued talking, the conversation flowing more easily now. At some point, we exchanged contacts—something that felt natural rather than forced. She saved my number under "Aarav – The Mysterious Cricketer," while I saved hers as "Shradha – The Almost Doctor."

By the time we reached the airport, we had covered everything from our favorite cities to travel to, weird food combinations, and even our most embarrassing moments. It was easy talking to her, something I hadn't expected.

As I pulled up near the terminal, she checked her phone. "Perfect timing. Their flight just landed."

I nodded. "Well, here you go. Enjoy your little surprise."

She smiled. "Thanks, Aarav. For the ride and the company."

I nodded. "Anytime."

She stepped out, but before running off, she turned around and gave me a small wave. "See you around?"

I smirked. "Maybe."

She grinned before sprinting toward the arrivals section. I watched for a moment as she spotted her siblings, her face lighting up as she ran toward them.

I nodded to myself, then pulled away from the airport, heading back home. Today had been... unexpected.

Author: But maybe, just maybe, fate had a funny way of making things happen.