

KING OF CRICKET

Chapter 11: A Milestone Birthday

It was the night of August 30, 2013. Aarav lay on his bed, staring at the ceiling, his mind replaying the last six months. The transformation he had undergone was remarkable. His days were meticulously scheduled: early morning exercises, school, training at the academy, and then an hour of practice with his best friend, Abhishek Sharma.

Their friendship had blossomed over countless hours of drills, games, and conversations about cricket. Aarav often marveled at how their bond, born on the cricket field, had extended into a genuine friendship. Despite the professional nature of the academy, where competition was fierce and expectations high, Aarav had thrived. Under the watchful eye of Coach Ashwin, his stamina had increased significantly, and his bowling had improved exponentially. He had started learning the art of reverse swing—a skill he once only dreamed of mastering.

"My batting was already ahead of many," Aarav thought, a small smile playing on his lips. "But my bowling—it's like a whole new world opening up."

As Aarav reflected on his growth, another thought crossed his mind, one that filled him with joy—his birthday. Tomorrow, on August 31, he would turn 13. A new chapter awaited, one he was eager to embrace. He glanced at the clock, watching the minutes tick by, waiting for it to strike midnight.

In his past life, he would have waited for a call from his parents at this hour. The memory brought a bittersweet feeling to his heart. But before he could dwell on it, his thoughts were interrupted by the sudden creak of his bedroom door.

"Happy Birthday, beta!" his parents exclaimed, their voices filled with love and warmth as they stepped into the room.

Aarav sat up, startled but delighted. The sight of his parents standing there, smiling and holding a cake, brought tears to his eyes. Overwhelmed, he jumped out of bed and hugged them tightly.

"Thank you, Mom! Thank you, Dad!" Aarav said, his voice choked with emotion. He quickly rubbed his eyes, trying to hide the tears.

His father patted his back. "Beta, this is a special day. You've worked so hard, and we're proud of you."

Aarav stepped back and touched their feet, seeking their blessings. "Thank you for everything, truly. I'll do my best to make you even prouder."

His mother cupped his face, her eyes glistening. "You already make us proud every day. Now, let's celebrate!"

They moved to the table where a small but beautiful chocolate cake awaited. Aarav cut the cake, his parents cheering and clapping. They fed him a slice, and he did the same, laughter and joy filling the room.

As they sat down together, Aarav's father handed him a large package. "Here, beta. This is for you. Open it."

Aarav tore open the wrapping paper eagerly, revealing a brand-new cricket bat. Its polished wooden surface gleamed in the light, the sharp grain lines

running perfectly down the blade. The handle, wrapped in fresh black rubber, felt sturdy and comfortable in his hands.

"Wow!" Aarav exclaimed, running his fingers along the smooth surface. "This is amazing, Dad! Thank you so much!"

His father smiled. "This bat is special, Aarav. It's for you to achieve even greater heights in cricket. Make every shot count."

"I promise I will," Aarav said, gripping the bat with a sense of purpose.

Next, his mother handed him a smaller package. "This is from me. I know it might feel a bit early, but you'll need this."

Aarav opened it to find a smartphone. His eyes widened in surprise. "A phone? Really, Mom?"

She nodded. "You're growing up, Aarav, and with your training and schedule, this will help you stay connected. But remember, it's a tool, not a toy."

Aarav grinned. "Thank you, Mom! I'll use it wisely."

Plans for the Day

As they sat together, his father spoke up. "By the way, Aarav, I've reserved a spot for your birthday celebration at Pat Culinaria. Invite your friends."

Aarav's eyes lit up. "Really? That's amazing! I'll make sure Abhishek and my school friends can come."

Pat Culinaria was the newest addition to their family's ventures, a luxury-themed food store in Mumbai. The name, suggested by Aarav's mother, was a blend of "Pat" from Pathak and "Culinaria" to evoke a sense of elegance and fine dining. Though the store wasn't making huge profits yet, its popularity was growing steadily, and it had already boosted sales at their original outlet.

"Mom, Dad, your idea was brilliant," Aarav said, grinning. "Pat Culinaria feels so classy. Everyone loves it."

His mother beamed. "Thank you, beta. It's all about giving people a place where food feels special."

The next morning, Aarav woke up early, a bright smile on his face. He got ready and, along with his parents, went to the temple to offer prayers to Lord Krishna and Lord Shiva. He closed his eyes, thanking them for everything—the opportunities, the growth, and the love in his life.

After the prayers, they distributed food, new clothes, and blankets to the needy. Seeing the smiles on the faces of those they helped filled Aarav with gratitude.

By afternoon, Aarav was back at the academy for practice, his excitement barely contained. He told Abhishek about the party, who immediately agreed to come. "Wouldn't miss it for the world," Abhishek said with a grin.

Later that evening, Aarav arrived at Pat Culinaria, where his mother had already invited his school friends—Raj, Vikram, and others. The venue looked festive, with colorful balloons, streamers, and a large "Happy Birthday Aarav" banner.

As his friends began to arrive, Aarav greeted each of them warmly. When Abhishek walked in, Aarav grinned. "You made it!"

"Of course," Abhishek replied. "I couldn't miss my best friend's big day."

The evening was filled with laughter, games, and delicious food. Aarav's friends marveled at the elegant ambiance of Pat Culinaria.

"This place is awesome, Aarav," Raj said. "Your family really nailed it with this idea."

"Thanks, Raj," Aarav replied, pride evident in his voice. "It's all my mom and dad's vision."

As the night went on, they cut another cake, sang songs, and enjoyed a variety of dishes. Abhishek leaned over and whispered, "You've got an amazing family, Aarav. This is unforgettable."

Aarav smiled, looking around at his friends and family. "Yeah, I really do."

The party ended with everyone taking photos and sharing heartfelt wishes. As Aarav lay in bed that night, he felt an overwhelming sense of happiness. Thirteen years old, a new journey ahead, and surrounded by love and support—life couldn't be better.