

Cricket 131

Chapter 131

After finishing my gym session, I grabbed my phone and tried calling Shraddha again. No response. She had told me she had a surprise for me, but ever since our last conversation, she had disappeared. Even now, she wasn't picking up. I sighed in frustration, running a hand through my damp hair. The anticipation was killing me.

Deciding to shift my focus, I grabbed my phone and recorded a quick short story for my company's new app, Reels, as well as YouTube. The video was casual, just me talking to the camera:

"Hey guys, currently in New Zealand for our upcoming ODI series against the Kiwis. Today's a rest day, so I'll be exploring Auckland and doing some shopping. But from tomorrow, full cricket practice begins!"

After posting the video, I tossed my phone aside, changed into a simple outfit—trousers and a plain t-shirt—and stepped out of my hotel. The air was crisp, and the streets of Auckland bustled with both locals and tourists. I had no specific destination in mind, just the desire to clear my head and enjoy the moment.

As I walked down the street, soaking in the lively atmosphere, my phone rang. Shraddha. Finally! I quickly answered.

"Where were you?" I asked immediately. "You told me you had a surprise, and then you just disappeared!"

"Uhh... well, yeah! I was sleeping, and my phone was discharged," she said sheepishly.

I sighed, shaking my head. "How could you be so careless?"

She pouted, even though I couldn't see her, but I knew exactly what expression she was making. Like she was right, and I was wrong.

"Okay, okay. Now tell me what my surprise is!" I asked, curiosity taking over.

"Hmm... I won't tell you!" she teased.

I groaned. "Shraddha, come on! Just tell me already."

"Fine, fine. The surprise is... I AM IN NEW ZEALAND!!"

Silence.

"Hey... is the network clear?" she asked.

"What the hell?! How the f—how are you here? Weren't you working on your project?" I almost shouted in disbelief.

She giggled. "The project was done mid-semester. I was just playing a prank on you! Heee heee 😂😂."

I ran a hand through my hair, exhaling sharply. "Where are you? Let's meet."

"Hey, are you outside the hotel?"

"Yeah, at my favorite café—Auckland Bean Coffee."

"Perfect! I'm nearby. Wait there, I'll be there soon!"

A few minutes later, I sat at an outdoor table, sipping on a cappuccino. The café had a warm, rustic aesthetic, with wooden tables and potted plants decorating the space. I kept glancing at the street, eager to spot Shraddha.

And then, there she was.

Wearing a light blue sundress and white sneakers, she walked toward me with a wide grin. Her hair bounced with each step, and her eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Surpriseee!" she beamed, throwing her arms up.

I shook my head, still in disbelief. "You're insane."

She laughed. "Aren't you happy to see me?"

I rolled my eyes, but a smile tugged at my lips. "Of course, I am."

She pulled out a chair and sat across from me. "So, tell me, what's the plan for today?"

"Well, I was going to explore the city and do some shopping. Now, I guess I have company."

"You guessed right!" she said, stealing a sip from my cappuccino. "Let's go, then! Auckland awaits!"

We walked through Queen Street, the heart of Auckland's shopping district. Shraddha's eyes sparkled at every store window, and she practically dragged me into every other shop.

"Oh my god, Aarav! Look at this dress. Should I buy it?" she asked, holding up a flowy red dress.

"Do you really need my opinion? You're going to buy it either way," I said, smirking.

She stuck her tongue out at me. "Still, what do you think?"

I glanced at the dress and then at her. "It would look good on you."

She grinned. "Sold!"

After some more shopping—mostly for her—we grabbed some street food. We tried hangi, a traditional Maori dish, and I made Shraddha taste a kiwi fruit ice cream, which she immediately loved.

"This is so good!" she said between bites. "Why don't we have this back home?"

"Because you never leave your usual chocolate flavor," I teased.

She playfully punched my arm. "Shut up."

As we walked through the harbor, the sun began to set, casting a golden glow over the water. The Sky Tower loomed in the distance, its lights beginning to flicker on.

"This city is beautiful," she said softly, looking out at the view.

"It is," I agreed. "But you know what makes it better?"

She turned to me. "What?"

I smirked. "Having you here."

She rolled her eyes, but I caught the small blush on her cheeks.

"Alright, Romio-Lite. What's next?" she asked, quickly changing the subject.

I checked my watch. "Dinner, I guess? There's a great place near Viaduct Harbour. You'll love it."

"Lead the way," she said, as we walked down the vibrant streets of Auckland, laughter filling the air around us.

Dinner was at a waterfront restaurant with soft candlelit tables and a stunning view of the harbor. Shraddha was mesmerized, her fingers tracing patterns on the wooden table as she admired the surroundings.

"This place is so romantic," she mused, resting her chin on her palm.

I chuckled. "You say that like I planned it."

She narrowed her eyes. "You didn't?"

"Nope!" I teased.

We ordered seafood platters and clinked our glasses together in a silent toast. Conversation flowed easily, from reminiscing about old memories to making plans for the future. By the time we left the restaurant, the city lights shimmered over the water like tiny stars.

As we strolled back toward the hotel, Shraddha suddenly stopped. "Wait, let's take a picture!"

She pulled out her phone and took a selfie of us with the harbor in the background. She grinned as she checked the picture. "Perfect."

I leaned in. "Send me that."

She smirked. "Maybe I will, maybe I won't."

I rolled my eyes. "Shraddha!"

She laughed, looping her arm through mine again. "Alright, alright. I'll send it. But you owe me one more ice cream."

I sighed dramatically. "Fine."

We walked through the Auckland streets, the night alive with music and chatter, the cool breeze making the moment feel even more perfect.

And just like that, the surprise turned into one of the best days I'd ever had.

As we rode through the streets on our electric scooters, the cool night air brushed against us, carrying the distant scent of street food and the quiet hum of the city settling down. The streetlights reflected off the wet pavement, giving everything a dreamy glow. Shraddha, riding beside me on her scooter, looked happy—her hair slightly flowing in the breeze, her laughter breaking through the noise of the occasional honking car. There was an ease between us, an unspoken comfort, and for a moment, it felt like we had known each other forever.

We reached her hotel, and just as she was about to step inside, I found myself blurting out, "Would you like to see the match tomorrow?"

She paused, tilting her head slightly, her face suddenly thoughtful. Her eyes flickered with something unreadable, and I braced myself for a polite refusal. But then, her lips curled into a bright, almost mischievous smile—one of those smiles that lit up her entire face and made it impossible not to grin back.

"Of course! I'd love to watch you play," she said, her excitement clear.

I nodded, relieved and thrilled at the same time. "I'll ask the coach to use one of my two tickets. Each player gets two free tickets for family and friends members, so I'll use one for you."

Shraddha's eyes sparkled. "That sounds great! I'll be cheering for you."

We exchanged goodbyes, and as I watched her walk into the hotel lobby, I couldn't shake off the feeling that tomorrow was going to be more special than just another game. There was an anticipation in my chest, a feeling that something had shifted.

Back at our team's hotel, dinner was in full swing. The dining hall was lively with chatter, the clinking of spoons against plates, and the occasional bursts of laughter. The aroma of dal chawal mixed with the rich, spicy scent of chicken. Some players stuck to light salads, others indulged in protein-heavy meals, knowing tomorrow was a big day.

As I walked in, I noticed Coach Ravi Shastri, KL Rahul, and Virat Kohli sitting together, sharing a hearty laugh over something. Ravi Sir was enjoying his plate of chicken, KL Rahul had dal chawal, and Virat, ever the disciplined athlete, was eating a balanced meal with his usual high-protein portions.

Kohli Bhaiya noticed me first. "Aarav! What's up? Looking for something?" he asked, setting his spoon down.

I nodded and then turned to Coach Shastri. "Sir, I need one of my player-quota tickets for tomorrow's match."

Coach didn't even hesitate. "Sure, done."

Kohli Bhaiya leaned in, a mischievous grin forming. "A ticket? Someone's coming? Family or a friend?"

"A friend from India," I answered casually.

His grin widened. "Ohh! A girl friend?" he teased, emphasizing the two words separately.

I shook my head. "No, Bhaiya, just a good friend." I kept my voice steady, deliberately leaving out the detail that Shraddha was Sachin Sir's daughter. I knew that would only escalate the teasing to another level.

KL Rahul chuckled. "A good friend, huh? Alright, we'll see."

The conversation naturally drifted back to cricket. We discussed the pitch, the opposition's strategies, and our expected playing XI. The bowling attack was going to be challenging, and we debated the best approach to counter them. The match was critical, and we needed to be at our best. Yet, despite the

seriousness of our discussion, a part of me kept circling back to the thought of Shraddha in the stands, cheering.

After dinner, I went up to my room, changed into my nightwear, and stretched a little. My muscles ached, but it was the kind of exhaustion that felt satisfying. I lay down on my bed, staring at the ceiling, listening to the faint sounds of the city outside. The Air Conditioner hummed softly, and the distant murmur of traffic was oddly calming.

Tomorrow wasn't just a random game. It felt like more than that. Maybe it was because I was playing in front of someone I know especially. Maybe it was because, for the first time in a long time, I was looking forward to something beyond just cricket.

As I closed my eyes, my last thought was simple yet profound: I couldn't wait for tomorrow.

The sun rose over the horizon, casting a golden glow across the city. The air was crisp, and the energy was electric—match day had arrived. I woke up with an unusual excitement coursing through me.

After a quick breakfast with the team, I headed to the practice nets. The ground was already buzzing with the sounds of bats hitting balls, the chatter of players, and the occasional cheer from support staff. I grabbed my cricket ball and stepped onto the pitch, ready to warm up.

For the next thirty minutes, I bowled continuously to Virat Bhaiya and Rahul Bhai. My focus was razor-sharp, my deliveries landing with precision. They played each ball carefully, offering tips between shots.

"You're bowling fire today!" Virat Bhaiya exclaimed after an inswinger narrowly missed his bat.

"Amazing champ! Keep this up, and you're set for a great match!" Rahul Bhai added.

"Hold the length!" Virat reminded as I sent another delivery towards the off stump.

"Missed!" he chuckled as he mistimed a shot.

"Single for this one!" Rahul called out as he tapped an easy run.

"Gone for six!" Virat finally smirked, launching one of my deliveries over the ropes.

I grinned, knowing I was at my best. Their feedback was invaluable, but more than that, their confidence in me was uplifting.

After the intense session, I walked over to the dugout, gulping down water as I caught my breath. My muscles ached, but it was the good kind of exhaustion—the one that made you feel alive. The match was still three hours away, but the anticipation was already settling deep in my bones.

I pulled out my phone and dialed Shraddha's number. The phone rang twice before she picked up.

"Hey, Aarav!"

"Hey! I just sent you the ticket. You're coming, right?"

"Of course! I'd never miss seeing you play in person for the first time," she replied, her voice filled with excitement.

I chuckled. "Yeah? Maybe you'll be my lucky charm! Who knows?"

She giggled, a soft, delighted sound. "Hee hee, hope so!"

There was a brief pause before I added, "You know, I'm just 153 runs away from becoming the fastest batsman to score 1000 runs in ODIs. If I do well in this series against New Zealand, I could break the record."

Shraddha gasped dramatically. "Oh-ho! I, the goddess Shraddha, daughter of the god of cricket, bless you to score these runs in just one match!"

I laughed. "Hope your blessings work, Miss Goddess! I'll need them."

"They better!" she teased.

"Alright then, talk to you after the match."

"Sure! Best of luck, Aarav! Give it your best shot!"

"Thanks, Shraddha. See you!"

With that, I ended the call, feeling lighter, yet more determined than ever.

The stadium was packed. The roar of the crowd sent frenzy in the stadium. Fans waved flags, chanted slogans, and filled the air with an infectious energy. It was moments like these that reminded me why I fell in love with cricket in the first place.

We huddled up before the toss. Virat Bhaiya, our captain, exuded confidence as he addressed the team.

"Boys, today is about showing them what we're made of. Stick to our plans, stay sharp, and trust each other. Let's bring this home!"

A collective cheer erupted as we placed our hands together.

The coin went up, and the umpire's call echoed.

"India wins the toss and elects to bat first!"

A surge of adrenaline shot through me. We were going to set the score, dictate the pace. And I had a chance to put my name in the record books in this series.

As I padded up, I glanced at the VIP section. There she was—Shraddha, watching keenly, a soft smile on her lips. I nodded to myself. Time to deliver.

How was the interaction Between Aarav and Shradha, is it moving too fast or is it in right direction?

tell me!