

Cricket 136

Chapter 136

The morning sun filtered through the curtains as I lazily blinked my eyes open. Today was a rest day—no training, no practice, just a day to unwind. I stretched my arms and let out a satisfied sigh, savoring the rare luxury of time on my side. The crisp morning air carried the distant hum of city life outside, but within the comfort of my hotel room, it felt like the world had slowed down just for me.

A quick glance at my phone showed the time—7:30 AM. I had the entire day ahead of me, and I knew exactly how to start. First up, a gym session. No matter the day, my body craved movement. Throwing on my workout gear, I made my way to the hotel gym, already feeling the familiar buzz of adrenaline kicking in.

As I entered, I saw Gill, Kohli bhaiya, and Rahul, all engrossed in their workouts. Their earbuds were plugged in, their focus unshaken as they lifted weights and pushed through their routines. The rhythmic clang of metal and the occasional grunt of exertion filled the air.

I raised my hand in greeting. "Good morning, guys!"

They acknowledged me with a nod before returning to their exercises, embodying the discipline we all lived by.

Smiling, I plugged in my own music and started my warm-up. The next 1.5 hours were spent pushing my limits—lifting weights, running on the treadmill, and focusing on endurance. I let the sweat pour, the burn in my muscles a reminder of my commitment to my craft. By the time I finished, my body was buzzing with energy.

As I cooled down, I spotted Jadhav and Prithvi Shaw sitting by the lounge area, shuffling a deck of cards.

"Up for a game?" Jadhav smirked, his eyes glinting with challenge.

I chuckled and took a seat. "Why not?"

For the next hour and half, we played, laughing and teasing each other over wins and losses. The camaraderie we shared off the field was just as important as the connection on it. These moments, free from the pressures of competition, were rare and precious.

After the game, I ordered a healthy breakfast, took a refreshing bath, and finally sat down to eat. My mind, however, was elsewhere—on the plans for the day, on the person I was about to meet.

Finishing my meal, I made my way down to the reception, where the keys to my rented McLaren 12C awaited. But before leaving, I called Shradha.

"Hey, are you ready? I'm coming to pick you up," I said.

Shradha's voice came through the speaker, light and teasing. "Yeah! You can come. I'm ready! I'm not one of those people who take two hours just to get ready."

I chuckled. "Yeah, I know you don't need two hours for makeup. Be ready, I'll be there in twenty minutes."

"Sure!" she responded.

Hanging up, I slid into the driver's seat of the McLaren. The engine roared to life, a powerful purr that sent a thrill through me. The drive to Shradha's hotel was smooth, the roads quiet in the morning air. But as I reached, my breath hitched.

She stepped out of the hotel, her hair flowing in soft waves, catching the breeze just right. The sunlight cast a warm glow on her, illuminating her in a way that seemed straight out of a movie. She was wearing a simple yet elegant dress—light, flowing, and effortlessly beautiful. Her eyes sparkled with excitement, and for a brief moment, I found myself completely stuck, as if time itself had paused.

She walked towards the car, her movements graceful, like the perfect female lead in a rom-com.

Shradha noticed my dazed expression and smirked. "Hey!"

I snapped out of it, clearing my throat. "Hey, you... you look amazing."

She blushed slightly but quickly changed the topic. "Nice car. Supercar. Amazing choice!"

I grinned, playing along. "Yeah! I thought, with this amazing weather and a beautiful lady next to me, we should have an amazing experience."

She blushed deeper but recovered fast. "Hmm, buttering me up! Do you say these things to all your female fans?"

I feigned innocence. "Hey, hey! Don't ruin my reputation. I'm a good guy, and I don't do such things! Besides, this was the coolest car on the rental site."

She laughed. "Yeah, yeah, I was just joking. So, where are we going?"

"Well, first, we're heading to Sri Radha Krishna Mandir (ISKCON Temple) nearby, then BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir. After that, dinner at a nice restaurant."

She raised an eyebrow. "Seems like you planned everything."

I shook my head. "Nah, my mom told me to visit these temples the last time I was on tour. But yeah, now I'm going with you, my partner for this trip."

Shradha blinked in surprise, and for a second, she didn't respond. A soft blush crept onto her cheeks, but I was too busy starting the engine to notice.

"Alright then," I said, revving the engine playfully. "Get set, go!"

The drive was breathtaking. The scenic roads of New Zealand stretched ahead, the landscape a beautiful blur as we sped through the highway. Shradha had rolled down the window, and the open car, wind was flooding us, letting the wind mess up her hair as she closed her eyes, enjoying the moment.

{this chat below is suggested to me by ai, as I am getting educated by ai to write these kinds of chats!}

"You know," she mused, "I never imagined riding in a supercar like this."

I smirked. "And with a cricket star, no less."

She rolled her eyes. "Oh, please! I liked you even before you became a 'cricket star.'"

I glanced at her, slightly taken aback. "Oh? So you admit you liked me?"

Realizing what she just said, she quickly looked away. "I-I meant as a friend! Don't twist my words, Aarav!"

I chuckled. "Right, right. Whatever you say."

She crossed her arms, pretending to be mad. "You're impossible."

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"Are you excited?" Aarav asked, stealing a glance at her.

Shradha grinned, her eyes twinkling. "Of course! Visiting temples in a foreign country? It feels surreal."

Aarav smirked. "Well, today is going to be a memorable day. Just wait and watch."

Before long, they reached Sri Radha Krishna Mandir.

As they arrived at the temple, the peaceful chanting of Hare Krishna filled the air. The temple was magnificent, adorned with intricate carvings, its golden dome gleaming under the sun. Devotees were gathered in small groups, some meditating, others singing bhajans.

Shradha stepped out of the car, adjusting her dupatta. Aarav, watching her, couldn't help but notice how effortlessly graceful she looked.

"You look like you belong here," he teased.

They walked up the marble steps, removing their shoes before stepping into the cool interior of the temple. The scent of incense wrapped around them, and a sense of serenity settled over them.

As they joined the aarti, Shradha clasped her hands together, her eyes closed in deep prayer. I couldn't help but stare. There was something so pure and beautiful about her in that moment.

As if sensing my gaze, she opened one eye and caught me. "What?" she whispered.

I looked away quickly. "Nothing."

She smirked. "Were you staring at me?"

"No," I lied.

"You totally were!"

I sighed. "Can we just pray?"

Giggling, she returned to her prayers.

Suddenly, a priest approached them, a kind smile on his face.

"Bless you both," the priest said, placing a garland around their necks. "May your love last for eternity. May you always walk together."

Shradha's eyes widened. "Oh, um...we're not—"

Aarav quickly interrupted, "Thank you, Panditji. We accept your blessings."

Shradha turned to him, her jaw dropping. "Aarav! What are you—"

"Shhh," Aarav whispered, a mischievous glint in his eyes. "Let's not break his heart."

The priest blessed them once again before walking away. Shradha turned to Aarav, smacking his arm.

"He thought we were married! You should have corrected him!"

Aarav chuckled. "And miss that moment? Never! You should have seen your face!"

Shradha groaned, shaking her head. "I can't believe you!"

"Believe it, wifey," he said, winking at her.

Shradha gasped. "You!"

They both burst into laughter, the temple bells ringing in the background as if echoing their joy.

The next stop was the Swaminarayan temple, known for its architectural grandeur. As they walked through the entrance, they were greeted by the sight of towering spires and delicately carved pillars. The temple's tranquility was enchanting.

"This place is breathtaking," Shradha whispered, taking in the sight.

Aarav nodded. "You know, my mom always says visiting temples brings good fortune. Maybe this is why I scored 200 runs."

Shradha smirked. "Or maybe, it's because I was there. I am your lucky charm, after all."

Aarav chuckled. "You never miss a chance to take credit, do you?"

"Nope!" she said, grinning.

As they performed darshan, another priest approached them. He blessed them and then, just like before, assumed they were a couple.

"May the divine bless your union," the priest said. "Your love is pure, and it will only grow stronger."

Shradha covered her face with her hands. "Not again!"

Aarav, enjoying her flustered state, leaned in and whispered, "I think the universe is trying to tell us something."

Shradha glared at him, but the redness of her cheeks betrayed her.

As they exited the temple, a few elderly Indian ladies smiled at them warmly. "Newlyweds?" one of them asked.

Aarav, without missing a beat, nodded. "Yes, ma'am. Just received blessings for our lifelong happiness."

Shradha's jaw dropped. "Aarav!"

The ladies clapped their hands together. "Oh, may you both always stay in love!"

As they walked away, Shradha punched Aarav's arm. "You are insufferable!"

He laughed, pulling her closer for a second before letting go. "But admit it, this is kind of fun."

Shradha huffed, but her small smile gave her away.

After a long day of temple visits, Aarav drove them to a fine-dining restaurant overlooking the sea. The place was dimly lit with fairy lights, soft instrumental music playing in the background. The moment Shradha stepped in, her eyes widened.

"Wow, Aarav...this place is beautiful."

Aarav grinned. "Only the best for my partner."

They settled into their seats, ordering their food. As they waited, Aarav reached across the table, tapping her fingers lightly.

"So, tell me, did you enjoy today?" he asked, his voice soft.

Shradha smiled. "Honestly? It was amazing. The temples, the blessings, the teasing... everything."

"And what about the part where we got mistaken for a married couple?" he teased.

Shradha groaned. "That was embarrassing!"

Aarav laughed. "Admit it, it was fun."

She rolled her eyes but smiled. "Maybe... a little."

Their food arrived, and as they ate, the conversation flowed effortlessly. They talked about their childhoods, dreams, and everything in between. Aarav found himself lost in the way Shradha spoke, her animated expressions, her laughter—it was intoxicating.

As they finished dessert, Aarav suddenly grew serious. "Shradha..."

She looked up, sensing the shift in his tone. "Yes?"

He hesitated for a moment before smiling. "I'm really glad you came today. It wouldn't have been the same without you."

Shradha felt a warmth spread in her chest. "Me too, Aarav."

For a moment, they just looked at each other, the world around them fading. The chemistry between them was undeniable. The teasing, the laughter, the shared moments—it all felt so right.

As they walked back to the car, Shradha playfully bumped into him. "So, what's next, Mr. Cricketer?"

Aarav smirked. "Well, Mrs.—I mean, Shradha, let's just say this is only the start."

Shradha rolled her eyes but couldn't hide the blush creeping up her face.

As Aarav drove them back, the night air was cool, the city lights twinkling around them. And in that moment, with the road stretching ahead and Shradha beside him, Aarav realized—this day had been perfect.

And maybe, just maybe, the priests were right.

Shradha's POV

As Aarav pulled up in front of her hotel, Shradha felt a strange knot in her stomach. The night air was crisp, but her heart was racing like a drum, completely ignoring the serenity around her. She turned to him, forcing a casual smile, though inside, she was anything but calm.

"So... today was fun," she said, playing with the hem of her kurti, her fingers fidgeting mindlessly.

Aarav smirked, leaning slightly towards her. "Fun? That's it? I thought it was unforgettable."

Her breath hitched. Unforgettable? Was that how he saw it too? She tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear, looking up at him. The streetlights illuminated his face, highlighting the teasing glint in his eyes.

"Alright, unforgettable," she admitted, rolling her eyes, though the blush creeping up her cheeks betrayed her.

Aarav chuckled. "Good. Now go get some rest. We had a long day today!"

She nodded, reaching for the door handle, but something held her back. A hesitation. A reluctance. A silent wish for just a few more moments with him.

As she stepped out, she turned back one last time. "Good night, Aarav."

"Good night, Shradha," he said, his voice softer now, his eyes lingering on her for just a second too long.

She closed the door, and before she could take a single step toward the hotel entrance, the roar of his McLaren filled the quiet night. She watched as he sped away, the car vanishing down the empty street.

And then, suddenly—

"AAAAAHHHH!"

She jumped in excitement, her heart unable to contain itself. She twirled in circles, clutching her phone close to her chest. What was happening to her? What was he trying to say back there? Was he... was he flirting? Or... was he proposing?!

Her face turned beet red. "No, no, no! That's impossible! Right?!" she whispered to herself, pacing outside the hotel like a madwoman.

She shook her head, forcing herself to calm down, but the moment she stepped inside, she froze. The entire hotel lobby had gone silent.

The staff was staring at her, wide-eyed. The receptionist looked confused, the bellboy had paused mid-step, and even an elderly couple seated on a couch were looking at her like she had lost her mind.

She cleared her throat, straightened her posture, and walked toward the elevator as if nothing had happened. Once inside, she smacked her forehead.

"God, I'm such an idiot!" she groaned.

Reaching her room, she quickly changed into her soft blue night suit and collapsed onto the bed. But sleep was the last thing on her mind.

She grabbed her phone, scrolling through the photos of the day. Her fingers hesitated on a particular one—a picture of her and Aarav standing close, their heads tilted slightly towards each other, laughing at something she couldn't even remember now. She zoomed in on his face. Then hers. Then both of them together.

Her heart pounded against her ribs.

Something was happening to her.

Something big.

And she had no idea what to do about it.

Aarav's POV

Aarav drove through the empty streets, the night air rushing through the open window. The McLaren hummed beneath him, but his mind was somewhere else. Or rather, with someone else.

Shradha.

He couldn't stop smiling.

The way she blushed, the way she teased him back, the way her eyes twinkled under the temple lights—it was all playing in his mind on an endless loop. He felt like an idiot, grinning to himself like some love-struck teenager.

"Damn it," he muttered, shaking his head. "What are you doing to me, Shradha? This had never happened to me in my 2 life's."

Reaching his hotel, he pulled into the parking lot and turned off the engine. He sat there for a moment, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel, trying to process everything.

Then, he smiled.

"I knew today would be special. But I didn't know it would be this special."

He stepped out, stretched a little, and made his way to his room. The moment he entered, he kicked off his shoes and collapsed onto the bed. But instead of closing his eyes, he reached for his sunglasses—the sleek, high-tech RayGlasses resting on his nightstand.

He tapped them twice.

A soft beep sounded.

And then—the entire day replayed in his Mobile Phone.

Yes, this wasn't just an ordinary pair of glasses. This was the third-generation prototype of RayGlasses, equipped with direct cloud access, high-definition video recording, and seamless video transmission.

Aarav had recorded the entire day.

Every moment.

Every smile.

Every tease.

Every stolen glance at Shradha when she wasn't looking.

He watched as the video played, reliving the temple visits, the aarti, the unexpected blessings from the priests, the playful banter, and her adorable frustration when people mistook them for a couple.

"May your love last for eternity. May you always walk together in happiness."

Aarav paused the video, staring at the frame where Shradha's face turned red from embarrassment.

He chuckled. "Poor thing. She really doesn't know how cute she is."

Then he reached the final moments—the part where they said goodbye.

The way she hesitated before stepping out of the car.

The way her voice softened when she said, Good night, Aarav.

He sighed, rubbing the back of his neck.

"What the hell am I doing?"

He was a cricketer, a risk-taker, a man who faced high-pressure matches without breaking a sweat. And yet, here he was, lying on his bed, watching a girl's video like some hopeless romantic.

But he couldn't stop.

Because something was happening to him too.

Something big.

And for the first time in his life, he had no game plan.

That day, something between them shifted. It wasn't just another outing. It was a memory—one they would replay in their minds over and over again.

To be continued...