

Cricket 154

Chapter 154

After the chaos, celebration, and pure madness of last night, I finally got back to the hotel. My clothes were soaked in champagne, reeking of sticky sweetness mixed with adrenaline. As soon as I entered the room, the silence hit me—a stark contrast to the roaring team and exploding confetti. I looked at myself in the mirror and couldn't help but laugh. My face was stained with gold paint, my shirt was a wreck, and my hair had crusted bits of cake in it.

"Champagne or shammpain?" I muttered to myself, peeling off the jersey. "Smell like a bakery on steroids."

The shower felt like a reset button. I stood under the hot water, letting the moments replay—the crowd, my century, the fans chanting my name, and the feeling of finally reaching the finals. The steam clouded the mirror, but I could still see a proud, tired smile spreading across my face.

Toweled off and in my hotel robe, I finally sat down to check the upcoming fixtures. Tomorrow, we had the Eliminator on 6 November 2020. Then, a short break before Qualifier 2 on 8 November. And finally, the Grand Finale on 10 November. My heart thudded just reading the dates.

With some time to breathe, I checked my IPL stats so far. I opened the BCCI portal on my iPad, sipping from the hotel's lemon-infused water.

Aarav Pathak — IPL 2020 Stats:

Wickets: 30

Runs: 872

I blinked. Then smiled.

"Not bad... not bad at all," I whispered, leaning back against the chair. It felt surreal.

I decided to get some rest. Pulled the blinds, turned on ambient rain sounds, and curled under the crisp white hotel sheets. As my body sunk into the mattress, the exhaustion from the past few days finally caught up. Sleep took over.

Next Morning — 6 November 2020

I woke up to the soft beep of my alarm. 8:00 AM. The morning sunlight was peeking through the sides of the curtains. I got out of bed, did a few light stretches, and changed into my workout gear. Heading to the hotel gym, I kept my hoodie on and cap pulled low to avoid fans to avoid interaction during this covid period.

Inside, the gym was empty—just me and the sound of my shoes hitting the treadmill. After some cardio, I moved to weights and core training. Nothing too intense. Just enough to keep the blood flowing.

After 90 minutes, I returned to my room and devoured a protein-packed breakfast—egg white omelets, avocado toast, a protein shake, and fruit salad. I needed to refuel.

Then, came rest time.

I took a power nap for about an hour, then grabbed the controller.

The PS4 was already hooked up to the 55-inch TV. My customized controller had my logo on it—AP in red and gold. I fired up OBS, connected my Elgato, and opened YouTube Studio.

Title: The Last of Us Part II - Live with Aarav |

Within minutes, 180,000 people were waiting.

I turned on the camera.

"Hey hey! What's up everyone, it's ya boy Aarav. Welcome back to the stream. I know, I know—'Shouldn't you be training?'—but listen, a guy needs rest too! And what better way to rest the mind than some high-quality, emotionally scarring storytelling from The Last of Us Part II?"

Live Chat Started Blasting:

@RCB_FAN: "HE'S LIVE HE'S LIVE OMGGGGGGG 🔥🔥🔥"

@AaravKeBacchoKiMaa: "Please don't die in the first 10 mins like last stream 😊"

@EmotionalDamageChai: "My chai and Aarav's stream = perfect combo 🍵"

@PineappleOnPitch: "GAMING AARAV >>>>> CRICKET AARAV 🏏"

@YourMomsFavRCBFan: "Bro how are you so good at everything wtf 😊"

"Alright fam," I said, adjusting my mic. "Let's do this. And please—no spoilers or I'm banning you faster than a Yorker to the ankle."

I launched the game. The background score hit, haunting and beautiful.

"God, this soundtrack slaps," I muttered.

As Ellie moved through the dark forest, the tension gripped me.

We hit 600k live viewers in an hour. My face was red from laughter, rage, and concentration.

After the fun and enjoyment of the game, it refreshed my mind.

I shut the console, turned off the lights, and looked out at the Dubai skyline. Tomorrow, the journey would continue. But for now, tonight, I was just a guy playing video games in his hotel room, recharging.

And it felt perfect.

As I was lying on the bed, a thought tugged at the back of my mind. Or rather, someone. Her.

Shradha.

I couldn't even remember how it all started anymore. Maybe a random DM. But over time, late-night chats turned into longer calls, shared memes into inside jokes. Before I knew it, she became part of my daily routine.

Not a girlfriend. Not officially. But more than a friend. Way more.

We never talked about it. Maybe we were scared to define it. Or maybe, it was easier — safer — to enjoy the uncertainty, to enjoy whatever this was.

It was around 11:45 PM. I lay on my bed, phone in hand, smile playing on my lips.

Incoming Video Call: Shradha

I picked up instantly.

There she was, lying on her bed, hair wet and tousled. The soft fairy lights strung behind her gave her a dreamlike glow. She looked effortlessly stunning.

"Wow," I said, eyes widening. "You just walked out of a shampoo commercial or what?"

She giggled, rolling her eyes. "Stop it. I literally just showered. You know, like clean people do. Unlike some sweaty boys who marinate in champagne."

"Hey," I defended, "that was the smell of victory, madam. Not everyone gets to experience that."

"Mmm," she hummed, smirking. "Well, congrats. you reached the finals and today eliminator was fire, My MI reached to Qualifier 2. So now... the real fun begins."

"Oh no," I groaned. "Here we go."

Her eyes lit up. "MI is going to the finals. I feel it. We're winning this cup."

I raised a brow, settling against my pillows. "You do remember who beat you twice in the league stage, right?"

"Flukes," she shot back instantly. "We have legacy, Aarav. When it counts, MI delivers."

"Legacy won't help when RCB storms the finals like a hurricane."

"Dream on, Mr. Pathak. Your team's bubble is about to burst."

"And yet," I teased, "you call me every night. Even on rest days. Even when you're supposedly heartbroken."

She blushed. Visible. Red creeping up her cheeks as she looked down at her blanket.

"I like talking to you," she murmured, voice quieter.

"I like talking to you too," I replied, voice softening.

"You're annoying, though. Like really annoying."

"Yet here you are," I grinned.

"Because you'd be lost without me," she teased.

I leaned closer to the screen, lowering my voice. "Say it. You missed me."

She scrunched her nose. "Aarav..."

"Say it."

"Ugh, fine. I missed you. Happy?"

"Ecstatic."

She laughed, hiding her face behind her pillow.

"God, you're embarrassing."

"I live to embarrass you," I winked.

"Well, it's working. Mission successful."

We fell into a silence — not awkward, but warm. Her fingers were gently twisting a lock of her wet hair. My eyes stayed on hers.

"You looked really happy today," she said.

"I was. But I'm even happier now."

She tilted her head. "Why?"

"Because I get to end my day with you."

That got her. Her smile grew softer, eyes glowing.

"You know, sometimes during your matches... when they zoom in on your face... I get butterflies. It's so dumb."

"That's called being in love, Miss Shradha."

She gasped. "Aarav!"

"I mean," I chuckled, "just calling it like I read in those childhood book."

"I'm gonna block you."

"No, you're not."

She didn't respond. Just smiled and looked away.

She nodded slowly. "Do you think about me? Am I your distraction between these matches?"

"You're more than just a distraction during matches. You're... kind of my peace."

Her eyes shimmered. "That's the nicest thing anyone's said to me."

"Get used to it. I plan on saying nice things to you for a long, long time."

We kept talking — about everything and nothing. Netflix shows, food cravings, her annoying roommate, my team's dumb locker room jokes. We laughed so much, my cheeks started to hurt.

"My jaw's hurting from smiling," she complained.

"That's your fault for being too cute."

She stuck out her tongue. "Stop flirting."

"Make me."

Her blush returned. Fiercer this time. "You're impossible."

"Too much," she admitted quietly.

Eventually, she started yawning.

"Tired?"

"Little bit. But I don't want to hang up."

"Then don't. Leave the camera on. I'll stay."

She nodded, curling up in her blanket. Her eyes were heavy but content.

"You make me feel safe," she mumbled.

"And you make me feel whole."

She smiled one last time before sleep took over. I watched her breathing slow, her features soft and peaceful.

And as I lay there, watching her on the screen, I whispered:

"Goodnight, Shradha. Sweet dreams."

She stirred just a bit. "Night... Aarav..."

The screen dimmed slightly, but I didn't hang up. Not yet. I just watched her sleep. My heart felt full, my mind calm, and for the first time in a long time, everything felt right.

It wasn't the stadiums, the crowds, or even the game that gave me this feeling.

It was her.

And maybe, just maybe...

This was the part, where I know — this was something worth falling into completely.

Today was 10th November 2020. The sun had barely risen when I opened my eyes to the realization that it was the IPL 2020 Finals. My heart was already thudding with anticipation. The big day. Mumbai Indians were our opponents. The very same MI who had won the IPL in 2020 in my past life. But this time? This time, I wasn't going to let it slip away. Not when I had a chance to change destiny.

I took a long bath to shake off the nerves. The water felt soothing as it flowed over me, washing away not just the tension but the last traces of the past. I looked into the mirror after drying off and whispered to myself, "Not this time. This year belongs to RCB."

After breakfast, the team gathered for our final strategy session. Coach Simon Katich led the discussion, with Mike Hesson stepping in from time to time, throwing in sharp tactical suggestions.

"We need to contain Rohit within the Powerplay," Katich said, tapping his pen against the whiteboard. "Use spin early, Chahal and Moeen both."

Hesson added, "Remember their middle order, boys. If you get Suryakumar and Kishan out early, we tilt the balance."

I sat at the front, jotting notes but also visualizing everything. I had played with these guys on the international stage, I knew their weaknesses. Today, I was going to exploit every single one.

We left the hotel around 3:00 PM and reached the stadium by 4:00. The energy was electric, some fans screaming even though COVID had not allowed any crowd, but they were outside the stadium. We waved from the bus, soaking in every bit of that excitement.

As we walked into the stadium, MI was already warming up. I spotted Rohit Bhai stretching near the nets and walked over.

"Rohit Bhai!" I called.

He turned, grinned, and opened his arms. "Abe Aarav! Tu toh superstar ban gaya re! 30 wickets and almost 900 runs? Who are you, man? Some cricketing mutant?"

We hugged, and soon Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, and Bumrah Bhai joined.

Hardik chuckled, "So when are you finding a girlfriend, haan? Don't wait too long or all good ones will be taken."

I laughed, "Why? Is there a discount sale going on or what?"

Bumrah nodded sagely, "Good ones are always in high demand, bro. Trust me."

We joked and teased each other for a good few minutes before heading to our nets.

I was batting against Siraj in the practice nets and the guy was bowling fire, but somehow everything connected perfectly today. Every other ball I sent flying over the ropes.

WHACK! One shot landed right outside the net.

WHACK! Another soared over the adjacent practice pitch.

Then I heard a voice behind me, full of exaggerated shock. "Brooooo, WHAT are you eating? Steroids ka halwa?"

I turned to see Ishan Kishan with a wide grin.

I smirked, "No man, just normal biryani. Maybe some extra protein in the raita."

Ishan marched toward me, dramatic as ever. He snatched my bat.

"Lemme check this. This isn't legal. No way," he muttered, inspecting the bat like Sherlock Holmes.

He tapped the bat, stuck it to his ear, then shook it.

"HELLO? Secret power source? Wakanda tech? Are you listening? Hello?"

I burst out laughing, along with Surya and Rohit watching from the sidelines.

Then he pretended to bite the bat. "Nope. Tastes like normal wood."

I raised an eyebrow. "Did you seriously just lick my bat?"

"Of course! Gotta taste success to achieve it!" he declared.

We laughed like maniacs. That's the thing about the Indian team — competition or not, camaraderie always stayed strong.

As the sun dipped lower, we got our final pep talk from Virat Bhai. He stood before us in the locker room, fire in his eyes.

"Boys," he said, pacing slowly, "I know what this moment means to us. Years of heartbreak, trolls, pressure. All of it. But today, we play for more than just a cup. We play for every fan who stood by us. For that dream we've all held close. Let's finish this. Together."

The room exploded into a unified shout: "RCB! RCB! RCB!"

But as we were getting ready, my phone buzzed.

[Incoming Call: Shradha]

I smiled, stepping aside.

I answered. "Hey, Shrads!"

Her face appeared on the screen — she was lying on her bed, wearing MI's jersey.

"Aaaaaaravvv! Today's the big dayyy! Ready to lose to Mumbai?"

I rolled my eyes, chuckling. "Keep dreaming. Didn't we beat you in both league matches? Or did your MI memory suddenly wipe clean?"

She pouted dramatically. "That was before. Today's different. Today, MI lifts the cup and I get to rub it in your face, and don't forget we never lost any finals!"

I leaned closer to the camera. "Okay madam, we'll see. But just remember, I'm the top scorer and top wicket taker this season. I'm gonna crush those MI hopes like... well, like Kieron Pollard crushes yorkers."

She giggled. "You and your metaphors! God, you're such a nerd sometimes."

"You love it," I smirked.

She blushed, tucking her hair behind her ear. "Maybe. A little."

She grinned, then said softly, "Aarav... no matter who wins, just be safe, okay? And... make sure you smile. I love your smile when you're on the pitch."

My chest warmed. I swallowed the lump in my throat. "Only if you're watching."

She blushed again, looking away. "Shut up. You're such a flirt."

"You started it," I replied, laughing.

A long silence stretched, comfortable, like we didn't need words anymore.

"You really mean it, huh? That you'll win this for RCB?" she asked.

I nodded. "I mean it. For RCB. For myself. And maybe... a little for you too."

Her eyes sparkled. "Then go. Win. I'll be watching every second."

The call ended, but the smile didn't leave my face.

I geared up, tightened my gloves, and stepped onto the field.

It was time to rewrite history.