

Cricket 162

Chapter 162

SHRADHA POV:

The screen had gone dark.

Aarav's face had vanished in an instant, but his words still floated in the silence of Shraddha's room, reverberating through the dim glow of the fairy lights draped across her wall.

"Sweet dreams, Shraddha and I really really lov—nothing, just Good night!"

He had said it. Or almost said it. she was just pretending to sleep, and he just...

Shraddha sat still, her phone pressed to her chest, her cheeks a hue of deep crimson, heart pounding with a rhythm that felt foreign and exhilarating. Her mind tried to convince her that she might've heard it wrong. Maybe it was the connection cutting out. Maybe he said something else.

But no.

She knew what she heard.

"I really, really love..."

The pause. The panic in his voice. The sudden switch.

Then the call had ended.

She buried her face in her pillow, kicking her legs like a teenager smitten with her school crush. And that's exactly what she felt like. Her stomach did somersaults, her mind spinning, painting pictures faster than she could handle.

Did he mean it? Had he been holding that in all this time?

Why stop himself?

Did he think she wouldn't feel the same?

A smile tugged at her lips — not a small one, but one that made her entire face glow. She turned on her side and hugged her pillow tighter, the scent of her lavender mist rising softly around her like a cocoon of calm.

Then came the flood — memories, dreams, fantasies.

She imagined them holding hands. Not in some far-off dramatic way, but quietly, fingers brushing together on a park bench, palms finding each other naturally. She could almost feel the warmth of his skin against hers, that nervous, electric touch of early love.

She saw them sitting in a café, sipping coffee from the same mug, laughing at their inside jokes, sharing bites of chocolate cake as if it were a ritual. Maybe he'd tease her about her obsession with extra whipped cream, and she'd flick a drop of it on his nose, pretending not to blush as he licked it off with a grin.

She saw Aarav tying her apron in their kitchen, wiping flour off her cheek with his thumb, laughing at how terrible her cooking was.

And then, more daringly, she pictured them curled up on the couch under a blanket during a monsoon night, binge-watching movies, his arms around her as she slowly drifted to sleep. She imagined the rhythm of his heartbeat against her cheek, the quiet that only two people in comfort can share, and the scent of rain mingling with his cologne.

The fantasy deepened, fed by every shared look, every teasing remark from their past. But it was one particular memory that suddenly surged to the surface — something that now felt less like coincidence and more like destiny.

New Zealand.

The trip they had both taken a long time ago, back when their friendship was strong but undefined.

She remembered the old couple they had met at the temple and even the priests.

"You two are adorable together!" the woman had exclaimed.

Shraddha had chuckled nervously, about to correct her, but Aarav had just smiled.

"Thank you," he had said.

It had thrown Shraddha off completely.

Was it just politeness back then? Or something more?

She stared up at the ceiling now, heart swelling with the realization that maybe — just maybe — the universe had been planting seeds all along. Little hints. Tiny nudges.

What if New Zealand had been the sign she had missed? What if this moment — this almost-confession — was the sign she'd been waiting for?

Shraddha sat up, the blanket falling from her shoulders. She grabbed her journal from her bedside table, flipping past pages of mundane thoughts and scribbled poetry until she reached a blank page.

She wrote, without thinking:

He said he loves me.

And maybe I do too.

No... I know I do.

She bit the edge of the pen, her heart now thudding a little slower but deeper, more certain. Each word felt like peeling back a curtain she hadn't realized she'd drawn — a gentle unveiling of what her heart had known for so long but never dared to speak aloud.

Love. It was terrifying. And thrilling. And utterly real.

She shut the journal, hugging it to her chest. The clock blinked 1:47 AM.

She thought about calling him back, just to tease him, just to say, "Did you mean to say you love me, or was that just my wild imagination?" But something stopped her.

Not fear.

Hope.

The kind that brews slowly, delicately — like the way love creeps in through shared laughter, burnt momos, and falling asleep on video calls. The kind that doesn't rush or force, but waits — tenderly, patiently.

She imagined the next morning. Would he pretend like nothing had happened? Would he text her a meme like always, or perhaps send a shy "Good morning :)" and hope she forgot?

But she wouldn't forget.

How could she?

That voice — trembling, caught between courage and hesitation — had told her everything she needed to know.

She lay back down, this time on her back, staring at the stars glowing above her head — stickers she had placed there as a kid, now shining with a new kind of magic. She traced them with her eyes, whispering wishes into the quiet night.

Wishes that, perhaps, she wouldn't have to keep to herself much longer.

And for the first time in weeks, she drifted into sleep not wondering where things stood between them.

But dreaming.

Dreaming of Aarav.

Of them.

Together.

Planning spontaneous trips. Cooking new disasters. Fighting over playlists. Dancing barefoot in the kitchen. Watching the stars from rooftops. Calling each other names out of affection. Laughing at everything. Crying together. Building something only they understood.

And this time, she didn't wake up questioning it.

She just smiled.

Because some confessions don't need to be complete to be understood.

Some hearts speak even when the words don't.

And hers had heard his loud and clear.

AARAV POV: -

The world around Aarav shimmered in a dreamlike haze, bathed in the warmest light of dawn. The golden sun streamed through the lush green canopy of trees, casting playful shadows that danced across the garden path. Birds chirped a lazy, cheerful tune, and the air carried the scent of blooming jasmine. Laughter drifted on the breeze—a sound that warmed the soul.

He walked hand-in-hand with a girl whose presence was both familiar and comforting. Her laughter was soft, musical, and her touch electric. Her head rested in his lap as they sat beneath a cherry blossom tree, pink petals occasionally falling like confetti around them. He ran his fingers gently through her hair, brushing away a few unruly strands. Her eyes were closed, a serene smile playing on her lips.

The silence between them wasn't empty—it was full. Full of unspoken affection, shared memories, and a thousand emotions too fragile to name.

Aarav looked down at her and felt something stir deep within him—something raw, consuming, and terrifying in its intensity.

Love.

He leaned forward, heart racing. Words tumbled to the tip of his tongue.

"Shraddha... will you be mine?"

Her lips curled into the softest smile, and her eyes fluttered open. Just as she opened her mouth to respond—

"Ting... Ting... Ting..."

The shrill tone of his alarm shattered the dream like glass.

He shot up in bed, breath catching in his throat. The sunlight filtered harshly through the half-drawn curtains, and the illusion faded into the corners of his memory.

His room was still. But the echo of that dream lingered.

His fingers, once clasped around hers in the dream, now trembled slightly as they reached for his phone.

He didn't hesitate.

Good Morning Shradhs ❤,

Let's meet today. 1 PM. I'll pick you up.

Movie, beach, and dinner.

See ya!

He hit send.

No second-guessing. No overthinking.

Tomorrow, he was leaving for a cricket tour in Australia. One whole month. Maybe more. And deep down, he knew he couldn't board that plane with this weight in his chest. He had to tell her.

He had to.

Shraddha's phone buzzed just as she rolled over in bed. Still groggy, she reached out and squinted at the screen. As her eyes adjusted and the message registered, she blinked.

Then read it again.

And again.

Movie. Beach. Dinner. Today. With Aarav.

She sat up quickly, her pulse rising. Her cheeks flushed, the heat rushing to her ears. She let out a small laugh—half disbelieving, half exhilarated.

So it was happening. Finally.

She texted back with shaking fingers:

Yes! I'll be ready.

She didn't know what exactly was in store for the day, but everything inside her told her it was going to be special. Monumental, even. This wasn't just another spontaneous plan.

This was going to change everything.

At 12:57 PM sharp, Aarav's car rolled up outside her home. The engine purred like it was part of the moment. Aarav stepped out, running a hand through his neatly styled hair. He wore a crisp white shirt that hugged his broad frame and dark jeans that struck the perfect balance between casual and classy. A whiff of his cologne—her favorite, warm and earthy—floated toward her as she stepped outside.

She wore a flowing blue sundress, soft as a sigh, the fabric catching in the breeze like waves. Her smile was unsure but radiant. As she slid into the car and their eyes met, something shifted.

Time seemed to pause.

"Hey," he said softly.

"Hi," she replied, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear.

The drive was laced with music that matched their mood—light, hopeful, and teasing. They laughed about inside jokes, reminisced about high school drama, and playfully debated about which Marvel character would survive a zombie apocalypse. At red lights, their eyes met for just a second too long. When their hands brushed while reaching for the same bottle of water, neither of them moved away.

It was magnetic. It was real.

Aarav for today, booked an entire mall, and opened for himself and her, and obviously the staff. (If you have money, you could do anything!)

They chose a romantic comedy—intentionally so. In the dark theater, laughter echoed around them, but they barely noticed. They were lost in their own bubble. At one particularly mushy kiss scene, Aarav and Shradha, stared at each other but none speak a single word!

After the movie, they headed to the beach. The sun was beginning to set, drenching the sky in hues of coral, lavender, and gold. The salty breeze tousled their hair as they slipped off their shoes and walked along the water's edge. The ocean kissed their feet, cool and playful.

He reached out and held her hand.

She tightened her grip in response.

It felt like the most natural thing in the world.

They walked in silence, broken only by the sound of waves and the distant cries of gulls. As they reached a quieter, more secluded spot, Aarav slowed and turned to face her.

"Shraddha," he said, his voice trembling.

She looked up at him, her heart pounding.

"I'm leaving tomorrow. For the tour in Australia."

She nodded. She knew.

"And before I go, there's something I need to tell you. Something I should've said a long time ago."

His hands found hers again, fingers intertwining.

"That night on video call, when I almost said it... I meant every word. I don't know you listened or not. And today, I don't want to almost say it."

He took a breath that shook slightly.

"Shraddha, I love you. I think I've been falling for you since the first time we enjoyed we met. I didn't see it then. But now I do. Our second tour in New Zealand, the temple priest commenting on us being couples, and even aunties, then our late night chats, and now this cooking session. This all told me I am in Love with you Shradha Tendulkar. And if I leave tomorrow without telling you, I'll regret it every single day."

She looked stunned, eyes wide and glistening. But there was no fear in her face. Only wonder.

"I know you may not feel the same," he added hurriedly, "and that's okay. I just... I had to say it."

For a long second, the waves filled the space between them.

Then she stepped closer.

"You idiot," she whispered, eyes shimmering with tears.

"What?"

She reached up and wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him into a hug.

"You think I'd let you leave without telling you I love you too?"

His breath caught. He pulled back just enough to see her face.

"I love you, Aarav. I think I've known it for months now. I just... I was waiting for you to realize it."

Their lips met in a kiss that was soft and hesitant at first, but deepened into something unspoken, passionate, and lasting. It was the kind of kiss that told stories, that made time irrelevant.

When they finally broke apart, her forehead rested against his.

"I'm so glad you didn't wait another day," she whispered.

They sat down on the sand, watching the last of the sunset bleed into the ocean. Stars began to twinkle above them, and the moon peeked out, casting a silvery glow.

They didn't speak much after that.

They didn't have to.

In the shared silence, they made a promise—without words, without vows. A promise that whatever the distance, no matter the time zones or matches played under foreign skies, their hearts had already chosen each other.

That night, love didn't feel like a dream.

It felt like home.

It felt like forever.