

Cricket 190

Chapter 190

The morning sun filtered through the curtains of Shradha's apartment, casting a warm glow on the empty plates from their breakfast. Aarav stood in the bathroom, the steam from the hot shower still clinging to the mirror. He wiped it away with his hand, staring at his reflection. At twenty, his face showed the marks of a life already full—faint lines from the sun-baked cricket fields, eyes that held both the thrill of victory and the weight of expectations. The Gabba win in Australia felt like yesterday, yet here he was, back in Mumbai, stealing moments with the girl who made him feel normal.

Shradha leaned against the doorframe, her hair still messy from sleep, wearing old t-shirt that hung loose on her frame. "You sure you have to go already?" she asked, her voice soft, teasing.

Aarav turned, pulling on his shirt. He smiled, that easy grin that hid so much. Inside, his heart tugged—love was a quiet storm for him, pulling him between the pitch and her arms. "Yeah, parents are waiting. Can't keep disappearing without excuses." He stepped closer, wrapping his arms around her waist. Her scent, a mix of vanilla and fresh coffee, filled his senses. They hugged tight, her head resting on his chest. For a moment, the world outside faded—the media buzz, the team pressures, the legacy he was building. Here, he was just Aarav, not the Prince of Cricket.

"Call me later?" she whispered, looking up.

"Always." He kissed her forehead, then her lips, slow and gentle. As he pulled away, a pang hit him. Keeping their relationship secret was his choice, to shield her from the spotlight that followed him everywhere. But it meant lies, and lies weighed heavy.

He grabbed his keys and headed out, the door clicking shut behind him. The January air in Mumbai was crisp, a rare coolness after the Australian summer heat. His car waited in the parking. Sliding into the

driver's seat, the leather cool against his skin, he felt the shift—from lover to son, from hidden romance to family duties.

As the engine hummed to life, he remembered his phone. It had died last night, forgotten in the rush of being with Shradha. He plugged it into the charger, the screen flickering on. Notifications flooded in like a wave—missed calls stacking up. His mother's number appeared five times, his father's three. But the most were from Abhishek Sharma, his best friend. Twelve calls. Aarav's stomach tightened. What had happened?

He hit dial on Abhishek's number, putting it on speaker as he pulled out onto the road. The city buzzed around him—horns blaring, street vendors calling out, the salty sea breeze sneaking through the cracked window. It rang twice before Abhishek picked up.

"Where the fuck were you the whole night?" Abhishek's voice exploded through the speakers, laced with frustration but underlined with concern. "Your parents kept calling me, asking if you were okay. I told them you were at my place, crashing after a late PlayStation session. Man, if you're using my name to sneak out, at least give me a heads up so I can come up with better excuses!"

Aarav chuckled, the sound easing the knot in his chest. Abhishek always had his back, no questions asked—at least, not too many. "Thanks, bro. You saved my ass again. Sorry about that. Phone died, and... well, you know."

Abhishek sighed, but Aarav could hear the smile creeping in. "Yeah, yeah. Just be careful. Your folks worry."

Aarav nodded to himself, gripping the wheel tighter. Friendship like this was rare in his world—loyalty forged on the field, where every run and wicket counted. Abhishek, Shubman, Yashasvi, Arshdeep—they were his anchors, the ones who saw past the headlines. "Where are you right now? Sounds windy."

"Punjab, man. Training hard."

"Punjab? What, you switching Ranji teams or something?" Aarav teased, though curiosity sparked. Abhishek was an all-rounder like him, always pushing limits.

"Nah, nothing like that. Yuvraj Singh saw something in my game. He's training me personally—batting, bowling, the works. Wants me to level up."

Aarav whistled low. Yuvraj, the legend who fought cancer and came back swinging. "That's huge, yaar. Good luck. Can't wait to see you crush it in IPL this season."

Abhishek laughed. "Yeah, see you on the field, champ. Don't go disappearing again."

"See ya." The call ended, leaving Aarav with a mix of envy and pride.

The drive home wound through familiar streets, the high-rises giving way to the villa where his family's mansion stood. Mango trees swayed in the breeze, and the guard at the entrance waved him through with a respectful nod. "Good morning, sir."

Aarav forced a smile. "Good morning." Fame's double edge—admiration from strangers, isolation from real life. He parked in the driveway, the gravel crunching under tires. The house loomed grand, white walls gleaming, gardens blooming with roses his mother tended. Filthy rich, as people whispered—one

of India's wealthiest families, diversified in tech, real estate, manufacturing. But to Aarav, it was home, a place of comfort and expectations.

He stepped inside, the cool air from the AC washing over him. The foyer smelled of fresh flowers and his mother's cooking—spices lingering from breakfast. "Ma? Dad?" he called, kicking off his shoes.

His mother appeared first, wiping her hands on a towel, her face a mix of relief and scolding. "Aarav! Where were you? We called so many times. Your phone was off!"

Dad followed, his broad shoulders filling the doorway, phone in hand. "Son, we were worried. After Australia, with all the media around..."

Aarav rubbed the back of his neck, the lie ready. "Sorry, Ma. Phone died, and I was at Abhishek's. We got into a late-night gaming session. You know how it is."

His mother frowned but softened, pulling him into a hug. "Just tell us next time. Eat something? You look tired."

"I'm fine." He hugged back, feeling the warmth of her concern. Lying stung, but revealing Shradha now? Not yet. Their love was his private world, away from the dual life of hero and son.

Dad nodded, accepting the story. "Good. Come in. We have a guest."

Aarav followed them to the living room, where a man sat on the couch, sipping tea. Samir Mehta—Uncle Samir, as Aarav called him. Childhood friend of Dad's, chairman of Torrent Group. The company spanned pharmaceuticals, power, gas—valuation over 18 billion USD, a giant in India's business landscape. Aarav remembered the stories: three years ago, Torrent teetered on bankruptcy, debts piling up. Dad had stepped in, investing a massive sum, stabilizing it and becoming the majority shareholder at 56%. It was a bold move, one that cemented their family's power.

"Uncle," Aarav greeted, touching his feet in respect. Samir stood, smiling warmly, his eyes sharp behind glasses.

"Aarav, beta! Look at you—the prince of cricket. That innings... unforgettable." His voice carried genuine pride, but Aarav sensed the undercurrent—business talk ahead.

"Thanks, Uncle." Aarav sat, the plush cushions sinking under him. The room was elegant—marble floors, art on walls, a chandelier catching the light. Yet, it felt like a stage, where family and fortune intertwined.

Dad cleared his throat. "Aarav, go freshen up and come back. We have a meeting. I want your insights—you've got a keen mind for business."

Aarav raised an eyebrow. At twenty, cricket was his life, but business ran in his blood. "Sure, Dad. Give me ten minutes."

Upstairs in his room, he changed into fresh clothes—a simple shirt and jeans. The mirror reflected a young man balancing worlds: the athlete with calloused hands from batting, the heir with a mind for numbers. He splashed water on his face, the cool droplets grounding him. Thoughts swirled—Shradha's touch still lingered, Abhishek's training news sparked ambition, and now this meeting. Identity pulled at

him: was he the cricketer chasing greatness, or the son stepping into empire-building? The pressure of legacy in cricket mirrored business— one wrong move, and it all crumbled.

Back downstairs, the three men gathered around the dining table, papers spread out. Mom brought snacks—samosas, chai steaming hot. The aroma filled the air, spicy and comforting.

"Morning again," Aarav said, sliding into the empty chair beside Dad. He flashed a quick smile at Mom, who squeezed his shoulder before retreating to her seat. Her eyes held that mix of pride and worry, the kind only a mother could balance.

Dad looked up, his gaze appraising. "Feeling better? Let's dive in. Samir was just about to lay it out."

Uncle Samir nodded, pushing a blueprint across the polished teak table. The paper unrolled with a soft crinkle, revealing intricate lines and labels that sprawled like a dream sketched in ink. Aarav leaned in, the wood's grain pressing into his forearms. "Aarav, Rohan(i forgot mc parent's name so yaa😊😊)—your family— you've been my rock through storms. Remember three years back? Torrent was drowning. Debts like an ocean, that massive infrastructure bid we lost but couldn't shake off. Your dad's investment pulled us from the brink. But there's more to the story. This..." He tapped the blueprint. "This is the heart of it all."

Aarav glanced at Mom, who frowned slightly, her fingers tracing the rim of her chai glass. Dad nodded knowingly, but Aarav felt the confusion knot in his chest. "What's this, Uncle? Looks big."

Samir's eyes lit with a spark, the kind that came from unveiling a long-held secret. "It's called PATRA City. Pathak And Torrent Rapid-growth Area. We've been building it in the shadows for five years now. Not a word to the press, no big contractors like L&T involved. All in-house, through Torrent Urja—our energy and construction arm. It's on 400 acres of prime land in Surat, Gujarat. Just 30 kilometers from the airport, easy access, room to breathe."

Mom set her glass down with a gentle clink. "Five years? Rohan, you never mentioned..."

Dad reached for her hand, his voice steady. "It was sensitive, Priya. Risks too high to drag the family in early. But now, with completion in sight, it's time."

Aarav's mind raced, piecing it together. Surat—diamond hub, industrial pulse of Gujarat. 400 acres was no small plot; it was a canvas for something monumental. He traced the lines on the blueprint: curving roads, clustered buildings, a massive oval that screamed stadium. The scale hit him like the first ball of a Test innings—daunting, full of potential. But beneath the excitement, a flicker of doubt. Their family was rich, yes—filthy rich, as the whispers went—but projects like this could swallow fortunes whole. Just like cricket: one bad session, and the legacy teetered.

Samir leaned forward, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial tone, as if the walls might eavesdrop. "The bankruptcy scare? It stemmed from this beast. We poured everything into it, betting the farm on a vision. Total cost: around 4,500 crore. But look what we've built." He pointed to the blueprint's core. "A self-contained world. Sports at its heart—a 90,000-seat stadium, finishing touches by next year. Cost us 2,850 crore alone. Grandstands that echo like the Lords with Indian History, floodlights to rival Eden Gardens and water system like chinnaSwammy. Then, five-star hotels—five of them, each 60 crore, total 300 crore. Luxury from the ground up, drawing tourists, business folk."

Aarav's breath caught. A stadium. His world, etched into concrete and steel. He imagined the roar of crowds, the crack of bat on ball under those lights. But Mom's face tightened, her knuckles white on the table. "Hotels? Stadiums? Rohan, this sounds like a city, not a project."

"Exactly," Samir said, warming to it. "And it is. Two practice grounds too—75 crore each, 150 total. Full pitches, nets, training facilities that could host national camps for each and every sports. Then the bones of it all: urban infrastructure. Land prep and site work, 200 crore. Roads, utilities—power lines, water, sewage—another 300. That's 500 crore right there. Miscellaneous? Architectural fees, permits, a contingency buffer—say 550 crore to be safe. It adds up, but it's ours. Completely owned by Torrent, with Pathak holding the majority reins."

The numbers landed like overs in a tense chase—heavy, relentless. Aarav sipped his chai, the hot liquid burning his tongue, grounding him. 4,350 crore in black and white, per the breakdown Samir slid over. His eyes scanned the table:

Component	Estimated Cost (₹ Crore)
90,000-seat Stadium	2,850
Hotels	300
2 Practice Stadiums	150
Urban Infrastructure	500
Miscellaneous Costs	550

Total Estimated Cost 4,350

Proper billing attached—receipts stamped, approvals from state boards. No red flags, just the cold precision of big money. Aarav's fingers drummed the edge of the paper, a habit from waiting at the crease. Dad's investment three years ago had stabilized Torrent, but this? This was resurrection on steroids.

Silence fell, thick as the humid air outside. Mom broke it first, her voice soft but edged with fear. "And if it fails? We've given so much already."

Samir's face softened, the chairman yielding to the friend. "Priya, it's near done. Next year, the Prime Minister himself cuts the ribbon. Imagine—headlines across India, the world. 'India's First Planned City: PATRA Rises.' Efficient like Tokyo's grids or Shanghai's pulse. Malls with global brands, theater chains screening blockbusters, street food stalls sizzling with chaat and kebabs. Security our own—cameras, patrols, safe as a vault. Entertainment woven in: parks, amphitheaters, vibe that pulls people in. It's not just buildings; it's a heartbeat."

Aarav turned serious, the playfulness from breakfast with Shradha evaporating. He flipped through the file, pages whispering under his touch. Blueprints detailed every inch—stadium seating tiered for optimal views, hotels with infinity pools overlooking green expanses. Paperwork gleamed: environmental clearances dated 2018, labor contracts audited. His keen mind, honed by analyzing bowlers' grips and field placements, clicked into overdrive. "Uncle, the stadium—construction cost 2,350 crore, plus 500 for ancillaries? That's tight. Any overruns?"

Samir's eyebrows rose, impressed. "Spot on. We've kept it lean, in-house crews. No middlemen bleeding us dry."

Dad watched Aarav, a quiet pride in his eyes. "See? Told you he's got the head for this."

But Aarav pressed on, emotion bubbling under his calm. This wasn't just numbers; it mirrored his life—the pressure of legacy, building something enduring amid risks. Here, failure could tarnish the Pathak name. "And recovery? 4,350 crore's a mountain. How do we climb back?"

Samir grinned, leaning in. "That's the fire, Aarav. My sources whisper: BCCI's opening bids for a new IPL team. Gujarat's slot—empty, hungry. We snap it up, base it in PATRA. That stadium? Our home ground. Imagine: IPL nights under those lights, crowds flooding hotels, malls buzzing. Revenue streams—tickets, sponsorships, broadcasts. We scale it global: host internationals, concerts. PM's opening? Pure gold for PR."

Mom's eyes widened. "An IPL team? Rohan..."

Dad squeezed her hand again. "It's vision, Priya. "

"Scaling it," Aarav said, voice steady. "Like Tokyo—efficient transport hubs linking airport to city in minutes. Add solar panels on roofs; Torrent Urja's strength. Cut energy costs 20%, green cred for investors." He sketched a quick note on the blueprint's margin, lines bold and sure.

Samir clapped once, sharp. "Yes! And Shanghai's vibe—night markets alive till dawn. Our street stalls: pav bhaji steaming, jalebi frying golden. Theaters with IMAX, malls stocked from Delhi to Dubai. Security seamless—AI cams, no blind spots. It's planned perfection, first in India. No slums creeping in, no chaos. Order, with heart."

Discussions flowed like a well-set innings. Dad countered risks: "Inflation's biting—steel prices up 15% since COVID hit. Contingency's 400 crore; is it enough?" Samir parried with projections: "ROI in nine years. IPL alone: 500 crore annual from merch, ads.

Aarav wove in, emotions deepening with each exchange. Pride swelled—for Dad's gamble, Uncle's grit. But vulnerability crept: "What if the PM backs out? Or bids go south?" His voice cracked slightly, revealing the boy beneath the all-rounder.

Hours slipped by, sun arcing across the room, shadows lengthening on the rug. Chai refilled twice, biscuits reduced to crumbs. Laughter broke in—Samir recounting a site visit gone wrong, mud up to knees in monsoon rains. "Your dad bailed me out then, too," he said, toasting with his glass.

As dusk tinted the windows orange, they wrapped. "We're in," Dad declared, folding the blueprint. "Pathak-Torrent, unbreakable."