

Cricket 56

Chapter 56

After a well-deserved rest, we decided to take a leisurely walk around the town to relax and soak in the ambiance. The weather was cool and inviting, with a gentle breeze carrying the sounds of bustling streets and occasional laughter. Pant, Arshdeep, and I strolled along, chatting and joking about our practice sessions and the surreal feeling of being around cricketing legends.

As we wandered past various shops, Pant grinned mischievously. "Boys, let's do some shopping. I could use some new clothes, and I'm pretty sure you both could too."

Arshdeep nodded enthusiastically. "Why not? Let's see what this place has to offer."

We walked into a quaint clothing store that had a decent mix of modern and traditional attire. Pant was immediately drawn to the bright, quirky t-shirts, while Arshdeep headed toward the section with jackets and hoodies. I browsed around and finally settled on a sleek black turtleneck sweatshirt and a simple pair of pants. The minimalist look was just my style.

Pant, as usual, couldn't stop himself from making jokes. Holding up a ridiculously oversized shirt, he said, "Aarav, this one's perfect for you. It screams 'future allrounder of the decade.'"

I rolled my eyes but couldn't help laughing. "Pant, focus on finding something that actually fits you. Or do you want to look like a walking billboard?"

After making our purchases and joking with the shopkeeper, we headed back to the hotel. This time, we were each assigned individual rooms. As I entered mine, I took a moment to appreciate how cozy it was—a neatly made bed, a desk with a lamp, and a small balcony overlooking the city lights.

Just as I was about to relax, my phone rang. The screen lit up with Freya's name. Smiling, I picked it up and greeted her in French. "Salut, Freya! Comment ça va?" (Hi, Freya! How are you doing?)

She sounded delighted, her laughter ringing through the phone. "Oh, Aarav! Ça va bien, merci. Et toi?" (Oh, Aarav! It's going well, thank you. How about you?)

We continued conversing in French for a while, which brought back memories of how amazed she had been the first time I spoke her native language fluently. I had learned French with the help of the system, and back then, she couldn't stop gushing about how my accent was indistinguishable from that of a native speaker.

"Aarav," she had said during that first conversation, "you sound like you've lived in France your whole life. It's incredible!"

Thinking back to that moment brought a smile to my face. She'd been so thrilled, and it was a fun secret to keep that my language skills weren't entirely natural but a gift from the system.

As we chatted, the conversation shifted to more mundane topics. "So, how was your day?" Freya asked.

"Pretty eventful," I replied. "Training was intense, and then we went out for some shopping. Just a simple day, but it felt good."

She told me about her day, and we shared stories about our recent experiences. Suddenly, I heard her scream in excitement.

"Freya! What happened?" I asked, startled.

"I just got a notification," she said, barely able to contain her enthusiasm. "I've been selected for a role in a series! It's a minor role, but it's my first step into acting!"

"That's amazing, Freya!" I said, genuinely happy for her. "Every journey starts with a single step, and this is yours. Congratulations!"

"Merci, Aarav," she said, her voice brimming with gratitude.

We talked a little longer, with me encouraging her to give it her all and sharing how proud I was of her. Finally, it was time to say goodbye.

"Goodnight, Freya. And again, congrats!"

"Bonne nuit, Aarav (Good night, Aarav). And thank you for always supporting me."

As I hung up, I couldn't help but feel a sense of contentment. It was a small but significant moment, both for her and for our friendship.

Before drifting off to sleep, I briefly thought about my rewards for the ongoing T20 series. The system had recently upgraded my cooking skill to a medium level—not groundbreaking, but it was still something useful and, more importantly, free. I chuckled at the thought of trying out my improved skills the next time I had the chance.

With these thoughts, I closed my eyes, ready to recharge for another exciting day ahead.

The morning began with me sitting cross-legged on the hotel balcony, meditating in an attempt to suppress the aggression I'd been feeling lately while playing cricket. My mind had been restless over the past few days, and it wasn't just nerves or excitement. It was something deeper—an overwhelming intensity bubbling just beneath the surface, emerging every time I stepped onto the field.

As I focused on my breathing, the calm morning air was suddenly interrupted by the familiar ding of the system.

"Host, we have identified the reason for your aggression," the system said in its usual neutral tone.

Opening my eyes, I frowned. "What's the reason?" I asked curiously.

The system replied, "The cause is Dale Steyn."

I blinked in confusion. "Dale Steyn? What does he have to do with me feeling this way?"

The system elaborated, "During your training, we analyzed your body's energy patterns and temperament. The energy and aggression of Dale Steyn have synced perfectly with your physical and mental attributes. His intensity as a bowler is resonating with your natural instincts. Even the calming influence of players like Cheteshwar Pujara and KL Rahul could not fully suppress this alignment."

I was stunned by the revelation. "So, you're saying my aggression is a natural fit for my style of play, and Dale Steyn's energy amplified it?"

"Precisely," the system confirmed. "Additionally, while your current abilities are influenced by the KL Rahul template, your natural personality leans towards aggression. This template suppressed those traits until now."

I nodded slowly, letting the information sink in. It made sense in a strange way. I had always admired players who played with passion and fire, and perhaps this was my own version of channeling that energy.

"Alright," I said. "But how do I control it? I can't let it affect my game in a negative way."

The system suggested, "Continue your meditation and physical training. Harness the aggression and use it to fuel your performance without letting it cloud your judgment."

With renewed determination, I resumed my meditation, followed by a rigorous gym session. By 8 a.m., Arshdeep and I were back at the ground, ready for another day of training.

As we entered the field, Coach Ravi Shastri greeted us with his usual enthusiasm. "Boys, today we're going to mix things up a bit. We'll have a 10-over match between the players. A little friendly competition to keep things lively."

I glanced at Arshdeep, assuming we wouldn't be involved since we weren't officially part of the team yet. But just as I started to step aside, Virat Kohli approached us with a grin.

"You two are playing," he said firmly.

"Us?" I asked, surprised.

"Yes, you," he replied. "You've earned it. Now go grab your kits."

Excitement surged through me as the teams were announced. Kohli and Rahane would each lead a side, with seven players on each team. To my thrill, I was placed in Virat Kohli's team alongside Hardik Pandya, Shikhar Dhawan, Jadeja, Ishant Sharma, and Dinesh Karthik. 3 Batsman, 2 Bowlers, 1 Wk and 1 allrounder. I was Playing as a Batsman.

Arshdeep, on the other hand, was assigned to Rahane's team with KL Rahul, Ashwin, Pujara, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, and Pant. 3 Batsman, 3 bowlers, 1 Wicketkeeper.

"Looks like we're opponents today," I joked to Arshdeep.

"Don't go easy on me," he shot back with a grin.

The match began with Kohli's team winning the toss and opting to bat first. Kohli and Dhawan opened the innings, and I found myself eagerly waiting for my turn to bat. Watching Kohli in action up close was nothing short of mesmerizing. His footwork was flawless, and his timing impeccable. Dhawan, with his graceful elegance, complemented him perfectly.

After a solid start, Kohli called me up to bat at number three. I adjusted my gloves, took a deep breath, and stepped onto the pitch, feeling a mix of excitement and nerves. Arshdeep was the first bowler I faced, and he greeted me with a fiery bouncer that I barely managed to duck under.

"Nice one!" I called out, grinning at him.

"Just warming up," he replied with a playful smirk.

I settled into my stance, ready for the next delivery. It was a length ball, and I drove it straight down the ground for a boundary. The sound of the ball meeting the bat was pure satisfaction, and I could hear Kohli clapping from the non-striker's end.

"Good shot!" he called out.

The innings progressed with me and Kohli building a strong partnership. I played my shots freely, finding gaps and rotating the strike and hit 7 sixes, while Kohli unleashed his trademark cover drives and pull shots.

When our 10 overs ended, we had put up a competitive score of 132 runs. Kohli patted me on the back as we walked off the field. "You've got some serious talent," he said. "Keep playing like this, and you'll go far and would share the crease like this in real match too."

"Thanks, Virat Bhaiya," I replied, feeling a rush of pride.

Now it was time for Rahane's team to chase. Rahane opened the innings with KL Rahul, and they got off to a flying start. Rahul's aggressive strokes and Rahane's steady batting put our bowlers under pressure.

But when I was brought into the attack, I managed to break their partnership with a well-executed outswinger that took the edge of Rahul's bat and landed safely in Karthik's gloves.

The match turned into a thrilling contest, with both teams fighting hard. In the final over, Rahane's team needed 12 runs to win. Kohli handed Pandya the ball, trusting him to defend our total.

Pandya focused on his line and length, mixing up his deliveries to keep the batsmen guessing. With two balls remaining, they needed 6 runs. he bowled a yorker that shattered Ashwin's stumps, sealing the victory for our team.

The celebrations that followed were filled with laughter and camaraderie. Kohli lifted the ball in the air, declaring, "Man of the match—our new allrounder, Aarav!"

The day ended on a high note, leaving me feeling more confident and inspired than ever before.