

Cricket 59

Chapter 59

After our emphatic Test series win against South Africa, the team's momentum carried us to Bangladesh. It was a short, intense series, and though we won it 2-1, it wasn't without its challenges. Personally, my batting didn't live up to my expectations; I failed to score big runs. But cricket has its way of balancing things out—I managed to pick up 8 wickets across the three matches, playing a crucial role in our victories.

Once the series concluded, we were given a much-needed break as the next major focus was the World Cup. It was a rare opportunity for all of us to step away from cricket and spend some time at home. As the holiday period began, the team dispersed, each of us making plans to return to our families.

A group of us—Abhishek, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Arshdeep, and I—realized we had flights scheduled for the same day, with departure timings close to each other. To make the journey to the airport smoother, I arranged for a car from the dad's company to pick us up. When the car arrived, it turned out to be a sleek black Range Rover, a vehicle that oozed luxury and class.

As we stepped outside the hotel, Abhishek was the first to spot the car. "Wow," he said, his eyes wide. "This is next level. I feel like a celebrity already!"

Yashasvi chuckled, running his hand along the polished surface of the car. "This is the kind of car I want someday. Imagine cruising down Marine Drive in one of these!"

Shubman, always the calm and composed one, smirked and said, "Only if you can afford it, Yash. Cricket ke saath stocks mein bhi invest karna padega (You'll need to invest in stocks alongside cricket)." He said this in sagelike voice, and then continued with a 2x speed disclaimer.

We all laughed at this!

Arshdeep, meanwhile, didn't say much but whistled appreciatively as he climbed into the car. "This is smooth, bro. I could get used to this kind of ride," he said, reclining into the plush leather seat.

Once we were all settled in, the car set off. The journey to the airport turned out to be a test of patience, courtesy of the infamous Bangalore traffic. The two-hour ride was filled with banter and laughter, with each of us sharing stories and pulling each other's legs.

"Abhishek," I teased, "you might need to work on your batting if you want to keep enjoying rides like these."

Abhishek rolled his eyes. "Says the guy who didn't even score a fifty in Bangladesh!"

That earned him a round of laughter, and Shubman chimed in, "Aarav has wickets to his name, at least. What about you, Mr. Sharma?"

As we finally approached the airport, there was a mix of relief and excitement. The long ride had been exhausting, but now it was time to part ways. Each of us headed to our respective terminals, exchanging hugs and wishes for the break.

Abhishek and I had the same flight to Mumbai, so we walked to the check-in counter together. The flight itself was uneventful, a peaceful two-hour journey that gave me time to reflect on the matches and the upcoming World Cup preparations.

When we landed in Mumbai, the airport was bustling with its usual energy. As we made our way toward the exit, I spotted a familiar figure standing in the crowd—my father, waiting for me with a proud smile on his face. Standing beside him was Abhishek's father, equally excited.

"Welcome back, champ!" my dad said as he pulled me into a warm hug. "It's good to have you home."

Abhishek's father patted him on the back, saying, "Well played, son. You've made us proud."

The feeling of being back home, surrounded by family, was unparalleled. As we walked toward the car, I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of gratitude for the journey so far and anticipation for the challenges ahead. The World Cup awaited, and I knew the break would be the perfect time to recharge and come back stronger than ever.

As we approached my house, I could already feel my excitement building. The car pulled up to the familiar gate, and before I could even step out, the front door flung open. My mother stood there, her face a mix of joy and worry, holding the edge of her dupatta in her hands.

"Aarav!" she called out, her voice full of warmth and relief. I quickly grabbed my bags and walked toward her, only for her to immediately pull me into a tight hug.

"You've become so thin," she said, stepping back to get a better look at me. "Don't they feed you there? Or are you too busy playing cricket to eat properly?"

I laughed, setting my bags down by the door. "Maa, they provide us with plenty of food. You're overreacting."

"Overreacting? Look at you!" she exclaimed, placing her hands on my shoulders and shaking her head. "Your cheeks aren't as full as they used to be. And you look tired. Are you even sleeping enough?"

"I'm fine, Maa. Really," I reassured her. "It's just been a hectic schedule with the matches and travel. But I'm home now, so you can fatten me up again."

That brought a small smile to her face, though her worry was still evident. "Wait, don't just stand there. Come inside," she said, ushering me into the house.

As I entered, the familiar aroma of home hit me—the faint smell of incense mixed with the lingering spices from her morning cooking. It was a comforting embrace, one that instantly made all the stress of the past weeks melt away.

She immediately started fussing over me, handing me a glass of water. "Sit down. You need to rest. I'll make you something to eat right now. What do you want? Parathas? Kheer? Tell me, beta."

"Maa, relax!" I said, trying to hold back a laugh. "I just got here. I'm not going anywhere. Let me settle in first."

"Settle in, my foot," she muttered, already heading to the kitchen. "You'll settle in after eating a proper meal. Cricket ke chakkar mein pata nahi kya ban gaya hai (Cricket has turned you into God knows what)."

I leaned back in the chair, watching her bustle around, feeling a profound sense of gratitude. No matter how many stadiums I played in or how many crowds cheered my name, nothing compared to the love and care of a mother.

After a while, she returned with a plate of steaming hot parathas and a bowl of kheer, placing them in front of me with an expectant look. "Eat. And don't even think about saying you're not hungry."

"Yes, Maa," I said, grinning as I dug in. The taste was heavenly, a reminder of everything I'd missed while being on the road.

As I ate, she sat beside me, her questions coming rapid-fire. "Did you meet everyone at home? How's your training going? Do you need anything? And how is Abhishek?"

"Slow down, Maa," I said between bites. "Everyone's fine. Training is tough but good. I don't need anything except to rest. And Abhishek? He's doing great too. I'll tell him you said hi."

She smiled, finally looking a bit more relaxed. "That's good, beta. But don't overwork yourself. Remember, your health comes first."

"Yes, Maa," I replied, my heart full as I looked at her. She might worry endlessly, but that's what made her who she was. And I wouldn't trade it for the world.

The week passed in a blissful haze of family time and relaxation. After months of traveling, competing, and training, it was a joy to simply exist in the company of my loved ones. My mother fussed over me constantly, preparing my favorite dishes every day. My father, though quieter, shared stories of his own childhood, tales that left me laughing so hard my sides hurt.

Evenings were spent on the balcony, sipping chai and watching the sun dip below the horizon. My school friends visited one day, and we ended up playing cricket in the backyard. It felt surreal to go from stadiums filled with roaring crowds to a small patch of grass, but the laughter and cheer were no less fulfilling.

One night, after dinner, my father and I stayed up late talking. "You've made us proud, Aarav," he said, patting my shoulder. "But always remember where you came from."

"Always, Papa," I replied, feeling a wave of gratitude for everything my family had given me.

The next morning, as the first rays of sunlight filtered through my window, I woke up to find the house unusually quiet. Curious, I went to the living room, where I saw my mother surrounded by stacks of papers. She was meticulously sorting through them, a look of deep concentration on her face.

"Maa," I called out, walking closer. "What's all this? Are these from the film company?"

She looked up and shook her head. "No, beta. I left the chairperson position. It wasn't something I could handle with my abilities."

I frowned, sitting down beside her. "What do you mean? You've always been capable of handling anything, Maa."

She gave me a small smile, placing her hand over mine. "It's not about capability, Aarav. It's about where my heart lies. And right now, I feel like doing something meaningful for others, for those who aren't as fortunate as we are."

"What do you mean?" I asked, my curiosity piqued.

"We've decided to start a charity," she said, her eyes lighting up. "Your father and I have been discussing it for weeks. We've been blessed with so much, Aarav. It's time to give back to those in need."

"A charity?" I repeated, leaning back in my chair. "Is this... for tax savings?"

Her expression turned serious, and she shook her head firmly. "No, Aarav. This isn't about saving money. This is about real charity. We've received so much—more than we could have ever imagined. It's our responsibility to share that with others."

I nodded slowly, taking in her words. "What kind of charity are you thinking about?"

"Well," she began, picking up one of the papers, "we want to focus on areas that truly make a difference. Education, health, and opportunities for the underprivileged. I was thinking we could start by funding scholarships for children who can't afford school. Maybe even open a school ourselves one day."

"That's a great idea, Maa," I said, feeling a swell of pride for her. "What else?"

"Healthcare," she continued. "There are so many people who can't afford basic medical treatment. We could organize health camps, provide medicines, and maybe even sponsor surgeries for those in dire need."

I nodded enthusiastically. "And we could partner with local hospitals and doctors to make it more efficient."

"Exactly!" she said, her excitement growing. "We'll also organize events to raise awareness and funds. Community gatherings, charity cricket matches—things that will bring people together for a good cause."

"And you'll be the chairperson of this charity?" I asked, grinning.

She hesitated for a moment before nodding. "Yes. Your father and I discussed it, and he thinks I should take the lead. It's a big responsibility, but I'm ready for it."

"Pathak Trust," I said thoughtfully, testing out the name. "It has a nice ring to it."

She smiled warmly. "Pathak Trust it is. And we'll make sure it becomes a beacon of hope for those who need it."

Over the next few days, our family threw themselves into the project with full vigor. My mother began reaching out to her network, gathering support and resources. My father worked on the legal and financial aspects, ensuring everything was above board.

We held our first meeting in the conference room of our house, where my mother laid out a detailed plan. "Our first step will be to identify the areas that need immediate attention," she said, addressing the small group of trust's employees who had joined us.

"Education," my one employee suggested. "Start with scholarships. Identify bright students who lack the means to continue their studies."

"And healthcare," my father added. "We could begin by organizing a health camp in the village where I grew up."

"That's a wonderful idea," my mother said, jotting down notes. "We'll need volunteers, doctors, and equipment."

As the days went on, the plans began to take shape. My mother's determination was inspiring, and her passion was infectious. Watching her work tirelessly reminded me of the values she had instilled in me—hard work, compassion, and the importance of giving back.

One evening, as we sat together reviewing the progress, I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of pride. "Maa," I said, breaking the silence, "you're doing something incredible. This trust... it's going to change lives."

She looked at me with a soft smile. "Beta, this isn't just my effort. It's ours. As a family, we have the power to make a difference. And that's all I've ever wanted."

In that moment, I realized just how lucky I was to have a mother like her—a woman who not only cared deeply for her family but also for the world around her. And as the Pathak Trust began its journey, I knew it was only the beginning of something truly meaningful.