

Cricket 69

Chapter 69

The flight back to India was a mix of excitement and longing. After weeks in Australia, traveling and soaking in the country's culture, it was time to return home. As the plane descended into Mumbai, the familiar sights and sounds of my homeland filled me with a comforting sense of belonging.

I arrived at the bustling Mumbai Airport, my heart pounding slightly faster as I walked through the arrival gates. A car waited for me outside, sent by my parents. But to my surprise, my father wasn't there to receive me. I brushed off the thought, assuming he must be busy, and climbed into the car for the drive home.

The hour-long ride to our farmhouse was serene, with the landscape transitioning from the city's chaotic energy to the peaceful greenery of the outskirts. As the car pulled into the driveway, I noticed the familiar surroundings—the vibrant flowers lining the path, the sprawling garden my mother tended to with care, and the house itself, radiating warmth.

The moment I stepped out of the car, I saw my mother rushing out with a pooja thali in her hands, her face glowing with joy. "Aarav!" she exclaimed, her voice filled with emotion.

She performed a small aarti, her hands steady as she circled the diya in front of me. Then, she placed a red tika on my forehead and smiled, her eyes glistening with pride. I bent down to touch her feet and then my father's, who had come outside and was watching with a broad grin.

"You're finally home, champ," my father said, pulling me into a tight hug after I stood up. "The house felt empty without you."

"It's good to be back," I replied, feeling a warmth I had missed during my travels.

As we walked inside, my mother kept fussing over me. "You must be so tired after the long flight. Sit down, and I'll get you something to eat. Your favorite paneer curry is ready."

"Ma, I'm fine," I said, laughing. "I've been spoiled enough with good food in Australia."

"Good food in Australia? Nonsense!" she retorted, half-joking. "No food is better than your mother's cooking, and you know it."

My father chuckled, settling into his chair. "So, world cup-winning captain, tell us—how does it feel to be back in India after lifting that trophy?"

"It feels surreal," I admitted. "Winning the World Cup was a dream come true, but coming back home is the cherry on top."

"You've made us so proud, Aarav," my mother said, sitting down beside me. "Every time I see you on the news, I feel like my heart will burst with joy."

"Especially with that match winning knock in the final," my father added. "You led the team from the front. I couldn't be prouder."

"Thanks, Dad," I said, smiling. "But it wasn't just me. It was a team effort. Everyone contributed, and that's what made the victory special."

"And what about your two-week tour of Australia?" my mother asked. "You called and told us a little, but we want all the details."

"Yes," my father chimed in. "Don't skip anything."

I leaned back, ready to recount my adventures. "Well, after the World Cup, I decided to stay back for a bit. I wanted to explore the villages, experience the local culture, and, of course, visit the Whitsunday Islands. The yacht ride there was incredible—the waters were crystal clear, and I even went scuba diving."

"Scuba diving!" my mother exclaimed. "Weren't you scared?"

"Not at all," I said. "It was one of the most peaceful experiences I've ever had. Swimming with dolphins and seeing the marine life up close was magical."

"And what about the Melbourne Cricket Ground tour?" my father asked, clearly excited.

"Ah, the MCG," I said, my eyes lighting up. "That was something else. Even though I'd played a match there during the World Cup, learning about its history and seeing the century board was a different experience. I told the tour guide that my name would be up there one day, just like my idols."

"That's the spirit," my father said, his chest swelling with pride.

"But," I added with a grin, "the best part was returning home to you both."

My mother's eyes softened, and she reached out to pat my cheek. "You've grown so much, Aarav. But no matter how big a star you become, you'll always be our little boy."

"Little boy who's making the country proud," my father added, winking.

The evening was spent sharing stories, laughter, and delicious home-cooked food. My parents wanted to know every detail of my journey, and I was happy to oblige, knowing that these moments with them were just as precious as any victory on the cricket field.

After a hearty dinner with my family, I finally headed to my room. Exhaustion from the long flight, endless chatter, and the warmth of being home began to take its toll. But before I could settle in, I remembered there was one person I had to call—Abhishek.

I dialed his number, and it rang for only a second before he picked up.

"Hello, my world cup-winning captain!" he greeted loudly, his excitement palpable even through the phone.

"Hey Abhishek," I replied, grinning. "How are you, man?"

"Forget me," he said. "How are YOU? Back from Australia, victorious, and probably more famous than ever?"

I chuckled. "It feels great, honestly. But I'm more excited about being back home. I just got in a while ago."

"That's amazing," he said. "We need to meet soon. There's so much to talk about!"

"For sure," I agreed. "I'll need some time to settle in, but let's plan something soon."

"Done," he said. "Now go get some rest, champ. You've earned it."

"Thanks, Abhishek. Talk soon!" I said before hanging up.

Finally, I lay down on my bed, sinking into the familiar comfort of my room. Within moments, sleep enveloped me, a deep, dreamless rest that only comes after weeks of exhaustion.

The next morning, I woke up refreshed, ready to embrace the day. After a quick stretch, I changed into my workout gear and headed outside. The air was crisp and fresh, perfect for a morning run around the farmhouse. I completed my usual circuit, followed by some weight training and a few cricket drills to keep myself sharp.

By the time I returned inside, the aroma of breakfast wafted through the house. My mother had prepared a feast—parathas, fresh fruit, and a glass of mango lassi that tasted like heaven.

As I sat at the dining table, savoring each bite, my father joined me, holding a newspaper. "Look at this," he said, pointing to an article about the World Cup victory. "You've made the headlines again."

I smiled, glancing at the paper. Seeing my name in print never got old, but I reminded myself to stay grounded. There was still so much more to achieve.

Just as I was finishing breakfast, my phone buzzed. The screen displayed "Unknown Number." I hesitated for a moment before picking it up.

"Hello?" I said cautiously.

"Hello, Aarav! How are you, man?" came a voice, familiar yet not immediately recognizable.

"I'm fine," I replied, frowning slightly. "Who's this?"

The person on the other end chuckled. "Can't you guess? We just met in England not too long ago."

It clicked in an instant. "Virat Bhaiya?" I asked, my voice a mix of surprise and excitement.

"Bingo," he said, laughing. "This is my personal number. I got your contact from the BCCI. Hope that's okay."

"Of course, Bhaiya!" I said quickly. "It's an honor to hear from you."

"I saw your game," he continued, his tone serious now. "Congratulations on the World Cup. Your performance was outstanding. The way you carried the team in the final was phenomenal."

"Thank you so much, Bhaiya," I said, humbled by his words. "It means a lot coming from you."

"And listen," he added, his voice brimming with enthusiasm. "I wanted to tell you something. Watching you play reminded me of my younger self. But honestly, you're even more talented. You have the potential to be one of the greats."

I was at a loss for words, my heart pounding with a mix of pride and disbelief. "That's... that's such a huge compliment. Thank you, Bhaiya."

"Don't thank me yet," he said with a chuckle. "Because I'm also calling to give you some exciting news. RCB is going to bid for you in the IPL this year. And trust me, we're going all in."

My breath caught for a moment. "Wait, what? Are you serious, Bhaiya?"

"Absolutely," he said. "I've already spoken to the management. We want you on the team. I want you to play alongside me. What do you say?"

"I don't know what to say," I admitted, my voice trembling slightly. "It would be an honor to play with you, Bhaiya. I've looked up to you my entire life."

"Good," he said. "Then get ready. Because this IPL, we're going to take the trophy home. Together."

"Yes, Bhaiya," I said, my determination renewed. "I'll give it my all."

"I know you will," he said. "Now go enjoy your time at home. But stay sharp—we've got a lot of cricket ahead."

We said our goodbyes, and as I hung up, I sat there for a moment, letting the conversation sink in. To hear such praise from someone like Virat Kohli was a dream come true. And the prospect of playing in the IPL, especially for a team like RCB, was beyond exhilarating.

I looked out the window, the sunlight streaming in. The world felt full of possibilities, and I was ready to embrace them all.

After a restful morning, I decided it was time to reconnect with an old friend who had been eagerly waiting to meet me—Abhishek. I called him up and told him about my plan to spend the day exploring Mumbai. Without hesitation, he agreed.

"Finally, the champion makes time for his mere mortal friend," Abhishek teased as he met me outside my hotel.

"Don't start already," I said, laughing. "Today's our day to tour the best of Mumbai."

He smirked. "Buckle up, my friend. You're in for an unforgettable tour!"

Our first stop was the iconic Gateway of India. As we stood before the majestic structure, its grandeur left me in awe. The intricate designs carved into the stone seemed to hold stories of a bygone era.

Abhishek gestured toward the Arabian Sea. "Did you know this was originally built to commemorate King George V and Queen Mary's visit to India in 1911?"

I nodded. "I read about it in school, but seeing it in person is something else. It feels like a gateway to history."

We took a ferry ride from there, the cool sea breeze brushing against our faces as we marveled at the city's skyline. "This city," Abhishek said, leaning against the ferry rail, "it's chaotic but magical. You'll see that magic as we go along."

Next, we headed to Marine Drive, the "Queen's Necklace" of Mumbai. Walking along the promenade, we could see the sun glittering on the water. Abhishek and I sat on the edge, letting the waves provide a calming backdrop.

"Remember when we used to sit on the academy Grounds, dreaming of playing for India?" Abhishek said, smiling.

I chuckled. "Yeah, and look at us now. Who would've thought those dreams would lead to this?"

Abhishek grinned. "You, captain of the World Cup-winning team, and me being part of the team touring Mumbai. It's surreal."

From Marine Drive, we made our way to Film City, the heart of Bollywood. Abhishek had arranged a guided tour, and I was immediately struck by the scale of the sets. Streets transformed into European alleys, dense forests used for jungle scenes—it was fascinating to see the creativity behind the glitz and glamour.

"You ever think of acting?" Abhishek joked, pointing at a mock cricket stadium set.

I laughed. "Let me stick to cricket. But hey, if there's ever a biopic, I'll consider it."

The tour guide chimed in, "Who knows? You might just inspire a Bollywood blockbuster someday!"

After Film City, hunger got the better of us, and we went for local eatery vada pav. The soft bun filled with spicy potato filling and chutney was heavenly.

"Now this," I said, savoring the bite, "is Mumbai magic."

Abhishek nodded enthusiastically. "You can't say you've experienced Mumbai without having vada pav."

With our stomachs full, we headed to Mandir. Walking on the narrow pathway surrounded by water on both sides felt serene. The Temple itself, with its domes and intricate designs, was a peaceful retreat amidst the bustling city.

"Sometimes, amidst all the chaos of life, places like this remind you to slow down and reflect," I said, gazing at the structure.

Abhishek agreed. "It's like a breath of fresh air. You need moments like these to balance the craziness."

As the evening approached, we made our way to Bandra-Worli Sea Link. Driving across the massive suspension bridge, with the city lights twinkling around us, felt like a scene straight out of a movie.

"Mumbai by night is something else," Abhishek said, rolling down the window.

I leaned back, taking in the view. "It's beautiful. There's an energy here that's hard to describe."

Our final stop for the day was a rooftop café overlooking the city. With the night sky above and the city bustling below, it was the perfect place to unwind.

"To dreams coming true," Abhishek said, raising a toast with his coffee mug.

"To friendship," I added, clinking my mug with his.

We spent the rest of the evening reminiscing about our friendship, sharing laughs, and planning our next adventures. As the night came to an end, I realized just how much I valued moments like these—simple, heartfelt, and filled with joy.

Mumbai had shown me its magic, but it was the company of an old friend that made the day truly unforgettable.

The anticipation of the IPL auction was building up, and the thought of being part of such an iconic event was both exhilarating and nerve-wracking. As the big day approached, I decided there was no one better to share this moment with than Abhishek. Both of us in the Auction and could see this together and see, where would we go and even would we get picked, I know i would be picked but i don't know about Abhishek.

I picked up my phone and dialed his number. It didn't take long for him to answer, his voice as cheerful as always.

"Hey! What's up?" Abhishek greeted.

"Hey, I have something exciting in mind. In three days, we have the IPL auction, and I want you to come over and watch it with me at home, we would watch it together" I said.

"Are you serious? Of course, I'll be there!" he replied, his excitement palpable even over the phone.

"Good. It's going to be a long day, so come prepared for endless discussions, snacks, and maybe a bit of stress," I joked.

Abhishek laughed. "Stress for you, maybe. I'm just going to sit back and enjoy the show. But don't worry, I'll bring the best energy for you!"

After finalizing the plan, I began preparing for the day. The house would need to be set up for the occasion—comfortable seating, a big screen to watch the auction, and enough snacks to last hours of intense bidding wars.

On the morning of the auction, Abhishek arrived early, carrying a box of sweets. "For good luck," he said, grinning.

I chuckled, taking the box from him. "You're more excited than I am."

"Of course! both of us, and our complete team in the IPL auction—it doesn't get bigger than this," he said, settling into the couch.

The clock ticked closer to the start of the auction, and as the host began introducing the event, a wave of nervous excitement washed over me and Abhishek.

Although we know that uncapped players would come tomorrow but we were just seeing this Auction. tomorrow Both Of our Parents would be there with us to watch the auction and hope we got selected in an IPL team.