

Cricket 82

Chapter 82

The night of October 7th, 2018, was just like any other for me lately. I had spent the evening celebrating, as I had been doing often. Life felt like a never-ending cycle of playing cricket, smashing runs, partying, and waking up to do it all over again. Success was pouring in, and I was basking in its glory. The domestic cricket circuit had treated me kindly, and every match seemed to add another chapter to my rising legend.

At 11:30 p.m., I returned home, tipsy from the high of celebration and perhaps something stronger. My steps were unsteady as I fumbled with the keys, pushing open the door to my house. My mind was still buzzing with laughter and cheers from the party. I was in my own world, oblivious to everything around me, including my mother, who was seated silently in the corner of the living room.

As I walked to my room, ready to collapse into bed, she observed me with a mix of emotions—love, worry, and helplessness. Her son, her pride, was thriving on the field, but at what cost? The Aarav who once practiced tirelessly, who had a glint of hunger and discipline in his eyes, seemed to be slipping away. In his place was someone who took his talent for granted, someone whose confidence teetered dangerously on the edge of arrogance.

He didn't even notice her sitting there. Perhaps if he had, he would've seen the glimmer of tears in her eyes or the slight tremble of her hands clasped tightly together. But in his head, there was nothing to worry about. Life was perfect.

She sat there long after he disappeared into his room, thinking back to the times when cricket wasn't just a game for him but a passion that consumed him. She remembered how I would wake up at dawn, eager to hit the nets. How I'd spend hours perfecting a shot or analyzing a bowler. But now, it seemed like I was just coasting on talent, letting discipline slip through the cracks.

What hurt her most was the memory of a recent incident. At a corporate meeting one evening, someone had offered me a drink—alcohol. She had heard about it through the grapevine, though he hadn't mentioned it. The next day, I stepped onto the field and smashed a double century, as if to prove that nothing could faze him. But that incident stayed with her. It wasn't about the runs he scored; it was about the choices he was making off the field.

She was proud of his achievements but terrified of what might come next. She knew this path was dangerous, that overconfidence was a slow poison. She needed to act before it was too late.

The next morning, I woke up late, as usual, the faint remnants of last night's party still lingering. I lazily made my way to the dining table, expecting breakfast to be ready. My mother was there, quiet but determined.

"Good morning," I mumbled, yawning as I poured myself a glass of water.

She didn't respond immediately, just watched me with those piercing eyes that only a mother can have. Finally, she spoke, her voice calm but firm. "Aarav, we need to talk."

I looked up, surprised by her tone. "About what?"

"About you," she said, her gaze unwavering. "About where you're headed."

I frowned, confused. "What do you mean? I'm doing great, Ma. Have you seen my stats? People are calling me the next big thing!"

"And that's exactly what worries me," she said, leaning forward. "You're living as if this success is permanent, as if you don't need to work for it anymore. Aarav, talent alone doesn't keep you at the top. Discipline does."

I rolled my eyes, leaning back in my chair. "Come on, Ma. I'm working hard. Just because I party doesn't mean I'm not serious about cricket."

She shook her head, her expression stern. "Aarav, there's a fine line between confidence and arrogance. And right now, you're crossing it. Do you think I don't know about the drinking? About how you've been treating your matches like they're just another day at the office?"

Her words hit me like a bouncer, unexpected and sharp. "Ma, I'm scoring runs. Isn't that what matters?"

"It matters, yes," she said, her voice softening. "But what happens when the runs stop coming? What happens when others catch up to you, when your talent isn't enough? Will you still be the Aarav I know, or will you crumble because you let success get to your head?"

I had no answer. Her words were a reality check I didn't know I needed.

She continued, her tone now laced with emotion. "Aarav, I'm not saying you shouldn't enjoy your life. But there's a balance. You're too young, too talented, to throw it all away. Success can be fleeting, my son. Don't let it blind you."

For the first time in weeks, I felt a pang of guilt. My mother wasn't trying to scold me or bring me down; she was trying to protect me. She saw what I couldn't, or perhaps refused to see—that my current lifestyle wasn't sustainable.

"I'll try," I said finally, my voice barely above a whisper.

She reached out, placing her hand over mine. "That's all I ask, Aarav. Just try. For yourself, for your future."

That conversation with my mother shook me, but it wasn't just her words that transformed me. It was the way she chose to show me, rather than just tell me, what I was losing sight of. That night, after our talk, I went to bed feeling unsettled. I didn't realize she had already devised a plan to bring me back to my roots—back to the disciplined, hungry cricketer I once was.

The next morning, I woke up to an unexpected surprise. My mother had packed my cricket kit and told me we were going somewhere. Still groggy and a little confused, I followed her to the car. She didn't say much, only that she wanted me to accompany her for the day.

We drove for over an hour, eventually pulling up to a small, dusty cricket ground in the outskirts of the city. It was the very ground where I had played my first professional match as a teenager. The sight of it instantly brought back memories—the uneven pitch, the rickety stands, and the sound of the crowd cheering for a young boy with big dreams.

"Why are we here?" I asked, stepping out of the car.

My mother smiled, but there was a hint of seriousness in her eyes. "You'll see."

To my surprise, a few of the local kids were already there, warming up with their coach. They couldn't have been older than 13 or 14. My mother approached the coach, whispered something to him, and then turned to me.

"These kids look up to you, Aarav," she said. "Today, you're going to coach them."

"Coach them?" I asked, bewildered.

"Yes," she said firmly. "Teach them what you know, but more importantly, show them what it means to love the game."

At first, I hesitated. I wasn't sure what she was trying to achieve. But as I started working with the kids, something clicked. They were eager, full of energy, and completely in awe of the game. Watching them dive for catches, laugh over missed shots, and hang on to every word I said, I saw a reflection of my younger self.

During a break, one of the boys asked me, "Bhaiya, how do you stay so focused? How do you score so many runs?"

His innocent question caught me off guard. I realized I didn't have a good answer—not anymore. How could I talk about focus and discipline when I had been letting them slip away?

I knelt down to his level and said, "You know, cricket is like a best friend. If you love it and respect it, it will give you everything you dream of. But if you take it for granted, it might leave you when you need it the most."

The boy nodded, his eyes wide with understanding. It was as if, in teaching him, I was reminding myself of the very values that had brought me success.

Later that day, my mother sat beside me on the sidelines. "Do you see now, Aarav?" she asked. "These kids don't have your talent or your opportunities, but they have the same love for the game that you once had. That love is what makes you great, not the parties or the runs. Don't lose it."

Her words hit home. Spending the day with those kids reignited something inside me—a spark that had been buried under layers of overconfidence and indulgence. I realized how lucky I was to be where I was and how easily it could all slip away if I didn't respect the game.

From that day forward, I made a conscious effort to change. I still partied occasionally, but always in moderation. I started waking up early again, hitting the nets with the same intensity I had as a teenager. I reconnected with my old coach, seeking his guidance to fine-tune my game.

And every time I felt tempted to stray, I thought about those kids on the dusty ground and their unfiltered love for cricket. They reminded me of who I was and who I wanted to be.

My mother's lesson wasn't just about discipline or limits; it was about gratitude. She taught me to treat cricket like a gift, one that I needed to cherish every single day. Because at the end of the day, talent can open doors, but it's love and respect for the game that keep them open.

Looking back, that day at the ground was a turning point in my life. It wasn't just a lesson—it was a lifeline, one that pulled me back before I drifted too far. And for that, I owe everything to my mother, the unsung hero of my story.

It had been two weeks since my mother's intervention and the day I rediscovered my purpose. The past fortnight had been a grind—early mornings at the nets, intense gym sessions, and late evenings studying footage of matches. Cricket had become my obsession again, just like it used to be. The days were packed, but I felt alive, rejuvenated, and ready to take on the world.

On the 22nd of October, I found myself sitting on the field after a grueling practice session. Drenched in sweat and staring at the sky, I felt a strange calmness wash over me. The grind was tough, but it was fulfilling.

For some reason, my mind wandered to the system, the mysterious entity that had been with me since the start of my journey. Curious, I called out to it, "System, do I get any rewards for my performances in domestic cricket or IPL?"

The system's reply came instantly, its voice calm and precise. "No rewards available for domestic cricket or IPL."

"Seriously?" I scoffed, half-joking. "I just turned 18 a few weeks ago. Don't you think I deserve something for becoming an adult? Come on, give me a birthday gift!"

There was a moment of silence, and I thought the system had ignored me. But then, the familiar ding echoed in my head.

"Gift unlocked for achieving adulthood," the system announced.

My heart raced in excitement. "What is it?" I asked, leaning forward as if the system could sense my eagerness.

"Reward:

Language Mastery (Advanced) with accent customization.

Mastery to drive any professional vehicle, including two-wheelers, three-wheelers, four-wheelers, and airplanes."

"What?! Airplanes?" I exclaimed, my voice laced with disbelief. "You mean, if this cricket thing doesn't work out, I could just become a pilot?"

The thought made me laugh out loud. The absurdity of picturing myself as a pilot, navigating through the skies, was hilarious. "System, you're too generous," I chuckled, shaking my head.

Still smiling, I decided to check my profile. "System, show me my profile," I commanded.

Immediately, a transparent holographic screen appeared before me, displaying my updated stats:

Name: Aarav Pathak

Age: 18 years (Birthday: 31 August, born 31 August 2000)

Talent Level: SS (Rare)

Skills: Low injury risk Fast recovery Sleep fatigue healing

Batting Type: Right-Hand Batsman

Bowling Type: Left-arm medium pace

Height: 6'2"

Talent By System:

KL Rahul: 80% (Module Complete)

Dale Steyn: 80% (Module Complete)

Fielding: 80% (Module Complete) => Currently one of the best fielders in world cricket with one of the best reaction times.

Looking at the stats, I couldn't help but feel a sense of pride and accomplishment. Seeing the words "currently one of the best fielders in world cricket" sent a wave of satisfaction through me. I smiled, knowing how far I had come and how much potential lay ahead.

Feeling refreshed from the interaction, I headed back to my room. It was only 4 PM, plenty of time to unwind. I decided to hit the sauna before taking a relaxing bath. As I leaned back in the steam-filled room, I couldn't help but chuckle at the absurdity of the day. From asking for a birthday gift to receiving airplane piloting skills, life with the system was anything but ordinary.

But deep down, I knew one thing for certain: the journey was just beginning. I was only 18, and the world was at my feet. With cricket as my foundation and the system as my ally, there was no telling how far I could go.

After a refreshing bath and sauna session, I stood before the mirror, the steam from the hot water still faintly lingering in the room. Today wasn't just any other day. I carefully picked out a crisp white shirt, paired it with a sleek navy-blue blazer, and completed the look with matching trousers and polished

black shoes. My reflection stared back at me, exuding an air of confidence and elegance. Tonight was going to be special.

The occasion? The premiere of MS Dhoni: The Untold Story, a film that had the entire nation buzzing. It was a story close to every cricket fan's heart, and I was thrilled to be a part of the evening. Over the past months, I had grown close to Sushant Singh Rajput, the actor who had poured his heart and soul into bringing the legend of MS Dhoni to life on the big screen. It wasn't just the film that connected us—our shared love for cricket had blossomed into a genuine friendship.

This project had also given me the rare privilege of meeting MS Dhoni himself on multiple occasions. Spending time with Mahi bhai was surreal. His calm demeanor, sharp cricketing mind, and down-to-earth personality were nothing short of inspiring. Watching him mentor Sushant and share insights about his journey was a masterclass in humility and greatness.

As I fastened my watch and adjusted my cufflinks, my phone buzzed with a message from Sushant:

"Bro, you're coming tonight, right? It's going to be amazing. Don't miss it!"

I smiled, typing back a quick reply:

"Wouldn't miss it for the world. See you there!"

Just as I was about to leave, my mother entered the room. She looked at me with a mix of pride and fondness. "You look dashing, beta. Ready for the big night?"

I nodded, grinning. "Of course, Ma. It's not every day you attend the premiere of a movie about one of your idols."

She placed a gentle hand on my shoulder. "Remember, no matter how far you go or how many people you meet, stay grounded. That's what makes you special."

Her words resonated with me deeply. "I will, Ma. Promise," I said, giving her a quick hug before heading out.

The venue for the premiere was buzzing with energy. Paparazzi lined the entrance, their cameras flashing incessantly as celebrities arrived one by one. The red carpet was a spectacle of glamour, with stars from the film industry mingling with cricketers and other notable figures.

As I stepped out of the car and walked toward the entrance, a few cameras turned my way. I wasn't a Bollywood star, but my recent cricketing achievements and being son of the owner of the production house or even a billionaire son was enough, as the reporters began calling out, "Aarav! Over here!"

I obliged with a few photos and quick answers to their questions.

"Excited about the movie?" one reporter asked.

"Absolutely! It's a story that every cricket fan will relate to. MS Dhoni is a legend, and I'm thrilled to see his journey unfold on the big screen," I replied.

Inside, the atmosphere was electric. The theater lobby was filled with laughter and chatter as familiar faces greeted one another. I spotted Sushant standing near the entrance to the main hall, looking every bit the star of the evening. As soon as he saw me, his face lit up.

"Aarav!" he exclaimed, pulling me into a bear hug. "You made it!"

"Of course, yaar. Wouldn't miss this for anything," I said. "Nervous?"

He laughed. "A little. But more than that, I'm excited. This isn't just my film; it's a tribute to Dhoni's incredible journey."

"And you've done justice to it, I'm sure. Can't wait to see it," I said sincerely.

Just then, the man of the hour himself walked in—MS Dhoni. The crowd seemed to collectively hold its breath for a moment before breaking into applause. Mahi bhai, as composed as ever, acknowledged everyone with a warm smile and a slight wave.

When he reached where we were standing, he greeted Sushant and me warmly. "Aarav, good to see you again," he said, extending his hand.

"It's always an honor, Mahi bhai," I replied, shaking his hand firmly.

The three of us chatted briefly before the screening began. Mahi shared a few anecdotes about his journey that hadn't made it into the film, and Sushant listened intently, absorbing every word.

As the lights dimmed and the movie began, I found myself completely engrossed. Watching Sushant bring Dhoni's story to life was nothing short of magical. The struggles, the triumphs, the sheer determination—it was all portrayed with such authenticity that it felt like reliving the journey of a cricketing icon.

By the time the movie ended, the entire theater erupted into applause. Tears, smiles, and cheers filled the room as everyone congratulated Sushant and the team.

After the screening, there was a small gathering where everyone mingled. I approached Sushant and clapped him on the back. "You were phenomenal, man. Dhoni's legacy is in safe hands with you."

He grinned, visibly relieved and happy. "That means a lot coming from you. Thank you, Aarav."

As the premiere event shifted into full swing after the screening, the energy in the room was electric. Celebrities, cricketers, and industry stalwarts mingled in the luxurious after-party hall, exchanging laughter and congratulations. I stood near the bar, sipping on a mocktail, observing the crowd with a sense of satisfaction. This was more than a movie premiere—it was a celebration of passion, dedication, and the spirit of cricket.

The first to approach me was Kiara Advani. Dressed in an elegant evening gown, she walked up with a warm smile. "Aarav Pathak, right?" she began, extending her hand.

"Yes, that's me," I replied with a slight nod, shaking her hand.

"I just wanted to say, I've been following your cricket journey. You've made quite the name for yourself already, and you're so young! It's inspiring," she said.

"Thank you, Kiara. That means a lot. And you were amazing in the film, by the way. Your role added such depth to the story," I complimented.

"Coming from you, that's high praise. I hope I can attend one of your matches someday," she said with a laugh. After a chat, I excused myself to mingle with others.

Soon after, Disha Patani walked over, her effortless charm lighting up the room. "Aarav, I had to come and say hi," she began, her tone enthusiastic.

"Disha, it's great to meet you. You were fantastic in the film," I said, smiling.

"Thank you! You know, I've been hearing so much about you from Sushant and the others. Apparently, you're not just an incredible cricketer but also a genius businessman. What's your secret?" she teased.

I chuckled. "No secret, really. Just a lot of hard work and a bit of luck. And having a good team around you always helps."

"Well, if you ever decide to get into movies, let me know. I'd love to work with a multi-talented star like you," she joked before being called away by the director.

The next person to approach was Anupam Kher, a legend in his own right. "Aarav, my boy!" he greeted, his deep voice carrying warmth and admiration.

"It's such an honor to meet you," I said, standing a little straighter.

"Honor is all mine. I've seen your interviews and read about your rise in cricket. You remind me of the young Dhoni—calm, collected, and focused. But with a flair of your own," he said, smiling.

"That's the biggest compliment I could ask for. Thank you, sir," I said sincerely.

"Stay humble, young man. With your talent and attitude, you're destined for greatness," he said before giving me a reassuring pat on the shoulder and moving on.

As the evening progressed, I noticed Varun Dhawan and Alia Bhatt making their way toward me. Their camaraderie and lively energy were infectious.

"Aarav Pathak, the man everyone's talking about!" Varun exclaimed, clapping me on the back.

"And rightly so," Alia added. "Your story is incredible. Cricket's rising star and already a business mogul? How do you do it all?"

I laughed. "Honestly, it's a balancing act. But when you love what you do, it doesn't feel like work."

"That's such a Bollywood answer," Alia teased, grinning.

"Maybe, but it's true," I said, matching her playful tone.

"Varun and I were just saying that we should come watch one of your matches soon," Alia said.

"Absolutely! Maybe we can even make a movie about your journey someday," Varun added.

"Well, if that ever happens, you two have to star in it," I said with a wink, earning a laugh from both of them.

As the night wore on, I found myself in conversation with Sidharth Malhotra. His calm and composed demeanor mirrored my own.

"Aarav, congratulations on all your success," he said, offering a firm handshake.

"Thank you, Sidharth. That means a lot coming from you," I replied.

"I've been keeping up with your journey, both in cricket and business. You're redefining what it means to be a modern athlete," he said.

"That's the goal. I want to leave a legacy, not just in cricket but beyond it as well," I said.

By the end of the night, I had interacted with some of the biggest names in the industry, each conversation a reminder of how far I had come and how far they could go to flatter me so that they could get more role in future. The blend of admiration and respect I received wasn't just because of my achievements—it was because I am the son of the owner of the biggest production house of India.

As I left the venue, the crisp night air filled my lungs, and I couldn't help but feel a sense of gratitude. This was just the beginning. The world was watching, and I was ready to show them what I was truly capable of.

As the night wound down, I found myself reflecting on the journey of MS Dhoni. His story was a testament to resilience, hard work, and staying true to oneself. It reminded me of my own path—the struggles, the sacrifices, and the unwavering love for cricket that kept me going.

Driving home that night, I couldn't help but feel inspired. If Dhoni could rise from humble beginnings to become one of the greatest cricketers in the world, then the sky was the limit for me too. With renewed determination, I vowed to keep pushing myself, striving for greatness, and making every opportunity count.