

Chapter 10: The Unexpected Guest

Maurya Mansion

Ivaan asked Jharna, “How do you know so much about Shimla?”

Without thinking, Jharna blurted, “Because Shimla is my...”

She stopped mid-sentence, alarm flashing in her eyes.

Ivaan leaned in slightly, sensing something, “Because Shimla is your... what? Go on.”

Jharna quickly masked her slip with sarcasm. “Because I have a brain and I use it. Unlike you. Knowing about places in our own country is kind of basic, don’t you think? But maybe that’s too boring for you—you’d probably be more interested in crime stats and criminal cases, right?” She turned her attention to the capsicums she was slicing, ending the conversation sharply.

Ivaan narrowed his eyes at her. Something wasn’t adding up.

Be careful, Jharna, she told herself. One careless word could ruin everything.

Ivaan’s thoughts raced. There’s a secret you’re hiding, Jharna. And you’ve picked the wrong person to fool this time.

Later, everyone gathered around the dining table. The aroma of spices filled the air.

Adhik sniffed dramatically and exclaimed, “Whoa! Smells heavenly!”

Shikha smiled at Ivaan and Jharna. “You both have cooked with so much love.”

At the word love, Ivaan and Jharna exchanged a quick, awkward glance before looking away.

“Shall we eat?” Miransh chimed in eagerly.

“Yes, let’s,” Vihaan added, practically drooling. “The food looks too good to wait.”

As the first bites were taken, the room filled with compliments and satisfied hums. Everyone began praising the meal—and the duo who had cooked it.

Later, in Shikha's room, she handed Jharna a beautifully wrapped box.

"It's a gift—for your first kitchen ritual," Shikha said warmly.

"Oh no, I can't accept something so expensive," Jharna protested.

"It's not expensive," Deepa reassured her. "It's a small token of good luck."

"But Auntie," Jharna replied, "Ivaan helped me just as much. He deserves credit too."

Deepa chuckled, "Then share the bangle with him."

Shikha nodded and placed the gift in Jharna's hands. "No more arguments. Keep it."

Jharna smiled and accepted it. Back in her room, she saw Ivaan on the phone. The memory of him teasing her in the kitchen sparked irritation.

Ivaan noticed her gaze. "What?" he asked casually.

She crossed her arms. "Why are you looking at me like that? Or should I ask, what were you doing in the kitchen?"

"I was doing what you told me to—helping cook," he said, feigning innocence.

"Don't try to act smart, okay?" she snapped. "You joined in just to annoy me."

He smirked, "What did I do? All I mentioned was Shimla."

At that word, Jharna's expression shifted again.

Why does he keep bringing up Shimla? she thought. Did he find out...?

Ivaan watched her carefully. You're trying hard to hide something... and it has everything to do with Shimla.

Trying to divert, Jharna showed him the bangle.

"What's this?" he asked, confused.

"Gift for the first meal cooked together."

"You should wear it then," he teased. "Maybe it'll keep you calm."

As he was about to leave, Jharna stopped him and said, "But this isn't just for me. If we both cooked the meal, then this bangle belongs to both of us

equally.”

Ivaan jokingly said, “So, what do you want? Should I wear it and dance around?”

Jharna placed the bangle in his hand. “Your choice.”

As she turned to leave, he caught her hand. She looked at him. He gently put the bangle back into her hand and walked away.

Jharna stared at the bangle, murmuring, “Is this guy even real? Sometimes I feel like I know everything about him, and sometimes... nothing at all.”

A Few Days Later — The Reception

Ivaan and Miransh were in the garden. The guests hadn’t arrived yet.

“Superhero,” Miransh said, “Momma must be ready. Let’s go to her!”

“Let’s,” Ivaan said with a smile.

Upstairs, they found Shikha and Deepa standing at the door.

“Where’s Momma?” Miransh asked.

Both women smiled and pointed.

There she stood—Jharna, radiant in a golden lehenga with a red dupatta, her makeup subtle and elegant, a tiny shining bindi on her forehead, her hair pinned in a regal style. She looked like a queen descended from a dream.

“Wow, Momma! You look like a queen!” Miransh shouted, running into her arms.

Jharna hugged him tightly, both laughing and sharing a sweet moment.

Shikha smiled. Deepa nudged her subtly, and they both turned toward Ivaan. He was frozen, his gaze locked on Jharna, heart pounding in his chest.

“She’s beautiful, isn’t she?” Deepa whispered.

“Very,” Ivaan said softly, almost to himself.

“Like a queen?” she nudged further.

“My queen. Just mine,” Ivaan whispered.

Shikha teased, “Okay, okay—stop staring so much.”

“I’ll look away when I want to,” he replied, unbothered.

Both women laughed.

Just then, Adhik barged in, loud as ever. “Bhabhi!!!! WOW!”

His sudden shout broke Ivaan’s trance.

Adhik rushed to Jharna and hugged her. Ivaan’s eyes darkened.

“You look stunning. Seriously, divorce Bhai and marry me instead!”

“Adhik!” Deepa scolded. “She’s your sister-in-law! It’s barely been a month since her wedding, and you’re taking about divorce!”

“So what?” Adhik grinned. “Tell me Bhabhi, when are you divorcing Bhai?”

Ivaan’s voice dropped like thunder. “May I tell you?”

Adhik paled. “B-Bhai! I didn’t see you there...”

“I saw. And I heard everything,” Ivaan said, he glared Adhik’s hand, which was clutching Jharna’s hand.

Adhik quickly let go of her hand.

“I was just kidding! She’s like a mom to me! Right, bhabhi?”

Jharna raised an eyebrow. “So now you don't want me to get a divorce?”

Adhik whispered, “Why do you want me dead? He’s staring at me as if he will eat me raw!”

Jharna laughed.

The reception was about to begin. But Abhimaan still hadn’t arrived.

“Mom,” Jharna asked, “When will Dad come?”

Shikha’s smile faltered.

“He... has some urgent office work. He might not come.”

“Again?” Jharna’s voice cracked. “He didn’t come to the wedding, and now the reception too? No. Not this time. He has to come. I’ll bring him myself.”

She stormed off before Shikha could stop her.

Shikha whispered, worriedly, “Oh God, please don’t let this go wrong. If Ivaan finds out... I don’t know what he’ll do.”

Maurya Enterprises

Abhimaan sat in his cabin as usual—leaning back on his chair, eyes fixed at the ceiling as though searching for answers in its blankness. The room was silent, save for the hum of the air conditioner. Just then, a knock broke the stillness.

“Come in,” he said without looking.

The door creaked open, and to his surprise, it was Jharna.

His brows knitted in disbelief. Not even Ivaan had ever stepped foot in the Maurya Enterprises office—what was Jharna doing here?

Standing up, he said sharply, “You? What are you doing here?”

Jharna walked in with a calm smile. “I came to pick you up,” she said gently.

Abhimaan’s expression turned rigid. “Does your husband know you’re here?”

Jharna hesitated, unsure of how to answer. But before she could speak, Abhimaan continued coldly, “Of course he doesn’t. If he did, he wouldn’t have let you come. He himself has never set foot in this office—not even when his mother begged him to. And you? You came here without informing him?”

Jharna composed herself. “I don’t know what’s between you and Ivaan. As for informing him—I didn’t get the time. The function was about to begin, and if I’d called him, I would’ve been late. That’s why I came straight here.”

Abhimaan scoffed. “And you think I’ll come just because you said so?”

With innocent defiance, she replied, “You’ll have to come. Now whether you come by your will or mine, that’s up to you.”

His eyes narrowed. “Are you threatening me?”

She smiled softly. “No. I’m requesting you... Please, Papa.”

The word Papa hit him like a soft blow. His eyes momentarily softened—but he masked his emotion behind anger.

“Will you leave on your own, or should I call security?”

Without another word, Jharna turned and walked out. Abhimaan slumped back into his chair, the echo of Papa still resounding in his ears. That word, once a melody in his life, had now become a painful reminder of his past.

He closed his eyes and rested his head back.

When he opened them, darkness had engulfed the room.

Irritated, he grabbed his phone and turned on the flashlight. Dialing his secretary, he asked, “What’s going on? Why is there no light?”

The secretary’s voice trembled. “Sir... the lights can’t come back.”

“What nonsense! Why not?”

“S-sir, you should come and see for yourself...”

Annoyed, Abhimaan muttered, “Troubles never end,” and stormed toward the generator room.

There, a crowd had gathered. He barked, “What’s going on here? Can't we maintain basic systems in this office?”

The secretary approached hesitantly, his steps unsure, voice barely above a whisper.

“Sir... the daughter-in-law is inside.”

Abhimaan's gaze sharpened, a flicker of something unreadable crossing his face.

He spoke slowly, deliberately.

"What is your daughter-in-law doing inside?"

A tense silence followed.

The secretary faltered, shifting on his feet as though the words themselves were dangerous.

With measured caution, he replied, “Pardon me, sir... but she isn't mine.”

He hesitated, then added softly, “She’s your daughter-in-law.”

Confused, Abhimaan stepped in, his phone’s light scanning the dark corners—until it landed on Jharna. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, she held a fuse in her hand.

He stared in disbelief. “You? You’re still here? What drama is this now? You and your husband—won’t you ever let me live in peace?”

Jharna stood up with mischief glinting in her eyes. “Look, Sasur ji (father-in-law), the fault is yours. I asked nicely, but you didn’t listen. So I had to take matters into my own hands.”

He was speechless. Jharna turned to the people outside, raising her voice just enough to be heard.

“Look, Sasurji, the entire company’s work is at a standstill because of you. If you come with me, the lights will come back on and everyone can get back to work.”

She stepped closer and murmured, her voice just above a whisper, “And think about it—what must they all be wondering? What is Abhimaan Maurya’s daughter-in-law doing in the generator room? What will happen to your reputation then?”

Abhimaan blinked. He couldn’t believe this girl—his daughter-in-law—had cornered him this cleverly.

Back at the venue

The function was moments from starting. Ivaan looked dashing in a golden outfit that subtly matched Jharna’s attire. He exuded confidence, elegance, and effortless charm.

Shikha paced nervously, eyes fixed on the entrance. Sensing something was off, Ivaan approached her.

“Mom? You look tense. What’s going on?”

She quickly masked her worry. “Nothing, beta. You’re just overthinking.”

Ivaan didn’t push. “Where’s Jharna?”

Her breath caught.

He repeated, more firmly, “Mom? Where is she?”

“Uh... she went to fix her dress. She’ll be back soon.”

Satisfied for the moment, Ivaan walked away. Shikha exhaled in relief. Jharna, please come back.

Time ticked by.

Ivaan stood on the stage, guests murmuring.

“Where is the bride?”

“Something’s wrong.”

“This doesn’t look good...”

Shikha watched the growing whispers with panic rising in her chest.

I need to tell him the truth, she thought. Walking up to him, she confessed, “Ivaan... I lied. She didn’t go to fix her dress.”

“Then where is she?” he asked sharply.

“She went to the Maurya Enterprises office... to bring your father.”

“What?” His voice thundered. “Does she think he’ll come just because she calls? Why didn’t you stop her?”

“I tried, beta. But she had already left.”

Ivaan ran a hand through his hair, muttering, “I told her to stay away from him. She messed up.” He turned to leave. “I’ll bring her back.”

But before he could take a step, Jharna walked in.

Their eyes met. Her expression was unbothered, but his gaze was furious.

He’s angry, she thought. Let him be. I’m not scared of him.

Cameras began flashing as media captured the moment. Ivaan strode over, voice low but sharp. “You were told to stay away from him.”

He scanned behind her sarcastically. “So? Where’s your father-in-law now? The one you were so eager to bring?”

At that exact moment, Abhimaan appeared behind her.

Everyone froze.

Shikha, Deepa, Adhik, and Vihaan watched in awe. Abhimaan, who hadn’t attended a single wedding function, was here.

Abhimaan looked at Ivaan, then turned to Jharna. “If you can attend my party at your mother’s request... then I can come here at my daughter-in-law’s. Nothing shocking.”

Shikha had tears in her eyes. Deepa whispered, “Bhabhi... how did this miracle happen?”

Shikha smiled, emotional. “When you call with love... even God listens. He’s still human.”

Adhik nudged Vihaan. “Bro, pinch me. I can’t believe this.”

Vihaan pinched him hard. “It’s all real.”

Adhik winced. “Ow! Okay, okay!”

Vihaan grinned. “May be it's a beginning of parivartan.”

Adhik blinked. “Which bartan?”

Vihaan rolled his eyes. “Parivartan, not bartan!”

Later, the function was in full swing.

A reporter asked Ivaan, “Sir, being such a successful businessman, with so many women wanting to marry you, why did you choose Ms. Jharna?”

Jharna, standing beside him, whispered softly to herself, “I’d like to hear the answer to that too.”

Though quiet, Ivaan heard her.

He smiled, then pulled her closer. “Because I love her. I love Jharna.”

Jharna’s eyes widened in shock. What? She knew he didn’t love her—this was all for show. She tried to pull away, but he tightened his grip.

“Money and power are easy to find,” he continued. “But love? Love, I found only in Jharna. That’s why I married her.”

Everyone smiled, thinking of them as the perfect couple. Deepa whispered, “Bhabhi, Ivaan is crazy in love with Jharna.”

Shikha just smiled, saying nothing.

Jharna, however, burned inside. It’s all a lie, she thought.

Yet amidst it all, Abhimaan Maurya smiled.

For the first time in a long, long time.

Sitara's Note

Sometimes, the people who matter the most don't need invitations. They just appear—quietly, unexpectedly—but exactly when your heart needs them.

This chapter is a reminder that even a silent presence can speak louder than a thousand words.

Thank you for walking through this moment with my characters. I hope it touched something tender in you, the way it did in me.

Until next time,

– Sitara Chandria