

Chapter 14: The Reunion

Vertigo Office

Amaan was sorting through some files when a soft knock echoed on the door.

"Come in," he said, without looking up.

A girl entered, her face hidden behind a towering stack of files. She took cautious steps, trying not to drop them. Amaan glanced at her and shook his head with mild disbelief.

The girl continued walking, wobbling slightly under the weight. Just as she lost her balance, Amaan instinctively rushed forward and caught her in his arms.

Her eyes were shut tight in fear. Amaan kept staring at her. Slowly, she opened her eyes and looked up at him, startled.

Their eyes locked — a pause in time.

Amaan seemed captivated, silently watching her. He gently brushed a strand of hair behind her ear. She looked at him, confused by his sudden tenderness.

Just then, Amaan's phone rang, snapping him back to reality. He quickly let go — too quickly.

Thud!

She landed on the floor with a soft cry, "Ah!"

Amaan straightened his blazer and checked his phone. It was Ivaan.

He answered the call, talking as if nothing had happened. Meanwhile, the girl glared at him in frustration and muttered under her breath, flipping through the files:

"If I had a time machine, I would go back and stop myself from ever meeting this man."

After finishing the call, Amaan turned toward her with a stern expression.

"Ms. Aashiya!" he said firmly.

She flinched, her eyes widening in fear.

He walked up to her, voice cold, “I want all the data from these files digitized within an hour. We’re going to the boss’s place — he’s too busy to come here. So be quick and don’t make any mistakes. Understood?”

Aashiya nodded quietly. Amaan gave her one last sharp look and left.

As soon as he was gone, she sighed deeply and lightly tapped her own head with a file.

"Great start to the day, Aashiya," she mumbled.

Maurya Villa

Ivaan was fixing his cufflinks in front of the mirror when Jharna walked in, carrying a glass of milk.

“Ansh, baby, your milk—” she began, but paused when she saw the room empty.

Then, her eyes met Ivaan’s reflection in the mirror. He was already looking at her. The brief eye contact made her turn to leave, but before she could, Ivaan grabbed her wrist and gently pulled her into his arms.

Startled, she exclaimed, “What are you doing? Why do you always pick a fight with me for no reason?”

Ivaan took the glass from her hand, set it aside, and wrapped one hand around her bare waist.

Her eyes widened. “You—”

“What happened yesterday?” he asked, cutting her off.

She frowned. “What do you mean?”

“When you returned from the bakery, you looked disturbed. Just tell me—what’s going on?”

She understood what he meant, but pretended not to. She tried to move away, but his grip only tightened.

“Either answer me,” Ivaan said with a smug smile, “or stay like this all day. I don’t mind.”

Jharna glared at him. “It’s nothing. And even if it is—why do you care so much? It’s my life. I can handle it on my own. You don’t need to interf—”

Before she could finish, Ivaan leaned in dangerously close. Their faces were mere inches apart. One move, and their lips would touch.

Her breath caught. She was sweating despite the cool air.

Ivaan smirked and said in a husky voice, “What happened, wifey? Finish your sentence. Just reminding you—who I am to you. You forget sometimes.”

Jharna couldn’t say a word. He continued, “I’m your husband. I stayed out of your past, because I don’t belong there. But I am your present—and I don’t ignore what’s mine. If something’s bothering you, I need to know.”

His words sent a shiver down her spine. Their intense eye contact was broken only when a small voice piped up.

“You’re kissing without me!”

They both jumped and turned.

Miransh.

He was standing there with his camera, a cheeky grin on his face.

Jharna and Ivaan instantly stepped apart.

“What’s wrong?” Miransh asked innocently.

“Nothing!” Jharna replied quickly. “Where were you? I was looking for you. Here—drink your milk.”

She handed him the glass, and he drank it all in one go.

“See! Dadu gifted me this camera!” he said, proudly showing it.

“Really?” Ivaan asked, surprised.

Miransh nodded. Ivaan muttered, “There must be a hidden agenda behind this...”

Jharna rolled her eyes. “Why do you always assume the worst?”

“Because I know him too well.”

“You misunderstand him, Ivaan. Sometimes people aren’t what they seem.”

“How well do you even know him, you—”

“Oops!” Miransh interrupted. “I forgot to tell you — Amaan uncle and a

very pretty aunty are waiting for you downstairs!”

Ivaan gave one last glance at Jharna and left. She followed silently.

Meanwhile, Miransh scratched his chin and thought, They always fight. What if I could fix that somehow...?

His gaze fell on his camera.

A mischievous smile spread across his face.

“Yeah! I’ll install this camera here and start recording. That way, I’ll know when they fight—and then I’ll solve everything like a hero!”

He hid the camera behind a flower pot.

“Yes! All set!”

Later – Living Room

Amaan and Ivaan were deep in conversation. Aashiya sat nearby, bored out of her mind.

Just then, Jharna came downstairs. She spotted Amaan and Ivaan first, then noticed a girl sitting with her back turned.

She narrowed her eyes, trying to recognize her.

“Jharna beta!” Deepa called from across the hall.

The moment Aashiya heard that name, she stiffened. She stood up and turned around—and froze.

Jharna saw her.

Their eyes met.

Aashiya’s breath caught as memories rushed back. Her eyes welled up with tears.

She slowly walked toward Jharna, eyes locked.

Jharna’s heart pounded.

Aashiya? Here?

What if she says something? What if everyone finds out about the past?

No. That can’t happen.

They were just a few steps apart now. Panic rushed through Jharna’s veins. Suddenly, she knocked the bowl of soup from Shikha’s hands—right onto

Aashiya's clothes.

“Oh no!” Shikha exclaimed, startled.

Everyone turned.

Jharna quickly acted concerned. “Oh god! Your dress! Come, I'll help you clean it.”

Without waiting, she grabbed Aashiya's hand and led her away.

Jharna's Room

She closed the door behind them.

Aashiya looked confused. Before she could speak, Jharna rushed to her and hugged her tightly, tears falling from her eyes.

Aashiya, shocked at first, slowly hugged her back.

Neither of them noticed the tiny camera hidden in the flower pot—quietly recording everything.

Aashiya, tears streaming down her face, said, “Jharna, I can't even begin to tell you how happy I am to see you alive. I thought I lost you forever in that fire all those years ago. You were my one and only friend... and I truly believed I had lost you.”

Crying harder, she asked, “But if you were alive, then why didn't you come back? Why? How did you end up there? How did you meet Ivaan's sir? Please, Jharna, tell me... Why didn't you return?”

Breaking her silence, Jharna spoke with a heavy heart, “Who would I have come back for? Who was left for me? I lost everything... Mom, Dad, Meera di... I lost them all. The only thing I had left was Ansh — Meera di's last reminder, her son, Miransh.”

Aashiya gasped, “What?! Miransh? What are you saying, Jharna? Meera di...?”

Jharna took a deep breath and began her story.

Flashback

After Mom and Dad passed away, Meera di was shattered. She had the

entire household's responsibility — including mine. We often fought. She got irritated easily, even over small things. I thought it was because she was mentally broken, until one day I discovered she was pregnant.

Jharna's pov

It had been three months since Mom and Dad's death. Slowly, we were accepting they were gone forever. But something wasn't right — Meera di's strange behavior. That morning, I woke up and called out for her, but she wasn't in her room. Just as I was about to leave, my eyes caught a letter lying on the table. I picked it up and read:

My dear sister Jharna,

I love you so much. I know you love me too. Please listen to me — take care of yourself. I promised Mom I would look after you, but now... I can't anymore. I have lost this fight. I am pregnant.

Do you remember the night I was missing from home? I was with a boy — it was my choice, though I don't know why. I have his child in my womb now. I went to him for help, but he told me to abort and forget everything. I can't bear the thought of killing my own child. I have no reason to live anymore. Please forgive me and please, take care of yourself — for me.

Your Meera di.

Tears welled up and blurred the words. I threw the letter down and ran out, knowing where she might be. I couldn't let her do something so foolish.

At the cliff

Meera stood by the edge, tears streaming down her face. She put a hand over her stomach and whispered, "Forgive me, my child. I can't bring you into this cruel world. Forgive your unlucky mother."

She closed her eyes and took a step forward — just one step from death. Suddenly, someone grabbed her hand.

Meera di opened her eyes to see me holding her, keeping her from falling.

“Let go, Jharna! You’ll fall too!” she screamed.

“If you want to die, go ahead,” I said firmly, “but I won’t let this baby die. It hasn’t even been born yet, and you’re already denying it life.”

Through her tears, Meera said, “Even if it’s born, no one will let it live. That’s why I want to let go. Please, Jharna. Let go of my hand. It’s better this way.”

I was angry. “Shut up, Di! You’re thinking about giving up? Suicide is cowardice — running away from problems won’t solve anything. People will talk no matter what. Don’t ruin your life or this little one’s because of others’ opinions. Please, Di.”

I pulled her up slowly. “We will raise this child together. You almost left your other child because of one problem. You promised Mom you’d look after me — well, I won’t take care of myself alone. You have to live, Di. You have to live.”

Wiping tears, Meera started climbing with me. Together, we got out of that dark place.

I hugged her tightly and scolded, “If you ever try that again, don’t call yourself my sister.”

Through sobs, she promised, “I’m your sister. I swear I’ll never do that again.”

Flashback ends

Aashiya asked softly, “Then? What happened next?”

Tears flowed freely from my eyes. “Meera di was in her last month of pregnancy. I didn’t let her step outside — I was terrified someone would find out about the baby. I couldn’t imagine the shame or gossip. We hadn’t even thought about what would happen after delivery — my only focus was keeping her and the baby safe.”

Then one night...

Flashback

Meera was restless, pacing. She said to herself, “I need fresh air... maybe the terrace will help.”

On the terrace, she leaned on the railing and gazed at the moon, tears falling as she saw her parents’ faces in its glow.

Suddenly, a man from the neighboring house watched her, his eyes fixed on her stomach. Alarmed, Meera covered her belly and hurried down.

She slipped but caught herself, whispering, “Don’t worry, baby. Nothing will happen to you.”

Jharna woke, reaching for Meera, but the room was empty. Suddenly Meera rushed in, door shutting behind her.

Nervous, I asked, “Di, what’s wrong? Where did you go? Are you okay?”

“Something bad is coming, Jharna. My heart is racing. Something is very wrong,” Meera said.

Confused, I told her to calm down.

Suddenly, flickers of fire appeared, and I smelled smoke. The house was on fire.

Outside, people poured petrol and kerosene.

One man spat, “No right for such a girl to live here — carrying sin in her womb.”

A woman nodded, “I warned Kashyap Ji — if you leave them loose, girls will slip away. This is what happens.”

Inside, Meera panicked. “It’s over. My baby... we won’t survive.”

I tried to comfort her. “Nothing will happen, Di.”

She remembered her promise to Mom to protect me. “Jharna, let’s go — quick.”

I nodded, and we moved toward the back door Papa made for emergencies. But the door was stuck.

Meera tried opening it, screaming in pain. I begged, “Di! What’s wrong?”

She gasped, “I can’t anymore. Go save yourself — leave me.”

Angrily, I shouted, “You’re crazy! I won’t leave you. Get up, we’ll go together.”

She cried, “The baby’s coming... I can’t.”

I wiped tears and pushed harder — the door opened.

I lifted her. “Come on, Di, to the hospital.”

She refused, but I didn’t listen. I carried her through the flames and smoke.

Hospital

Meera di was critical, writhing in pain. I cried outside, trying to believe things would be okay.

Then her screams stopped — and I heard a baby crying.

A doctor appeared, “I’m sorry... we couldn’t save Meera.”

My world shattered. I sank down, memories flooding me. How cruel fate was — first Mom and Dad, now Meera di.

A nurse appeared with a crying baby boy.

The doctor said, “It’s a boy.”

They placed him in my arms. He smiled, a tiny mole on his eyelid, just like Meera’s.

Tears poured down. I sat, holding him, whispering, “Baby, our destinies are the same. We lost our family — now it’s just us.”

The baby cried, and so did I.

Flashback ends

Back in the present, Jharna sobbed, finally sharing all the pain she had buried for so long.

Aashiya held her gently, stroking her hair.

Angrily, she said, “I hate those people. I hate that bastard who left my di alone when she needed help the most. I hate the people of that city — those without a shred of humanity, who tried to burn her alive. That’s why my di isn’t here with me today.”

Downstairs, Ivaan was deep in thought, confused by Jharna’s actions — why she brought Aashiya with her, why they were taking so long.

Suddenly, a thought struck him.

He asked Amaan, “Aashiya is from Shimla, right?”

Amaan nodded, puzzled.

Ivaan got up and headed to his room. Amaan followed, sensing something was up.

Sitara's Note

Some stories don't begin with love — they begin with loss.

Some truths don't surface with words — they return with faces from the past.

This chapter carries smoke and silence, unanswered letters and unborn dreams — and still, in the middle of it all, it carries hope.

A trembling reunion. A child born in fire.

A girl who became a mother without ever giving birth.

Sometimes, family is not blood — it's what you choose to protect with everything you have.

This one's for the promises made in flames... and kept in silence.

— Sitara Chandria