

Chapter 15: The Warmth We Forgot

Maurya Villa

Ivaan and Amaan stood outside the door. Ivaan knocked firmly. Inside the room, Jharna instantly became alert at the sound.

“Open the door, Jharna,” Ivaan said firmly.

Jharna tensed up and turned to Aashiya. “No one else should know about this. I can’t take any risks. Come, clean your face.”

Aashiya nodded and followed her into the washroom. Meanwhile, outside, Ivaan’s patience was wearing thin.

“What’s taking them so long to open the door?” he muttered, knocking again.

“Boss, should we break it?” Amaan suggested.

Ivaan agreed and braced himself to push the door open—just then, the door swung open and he stumbled right into Jharna. Their eyes locked, but she quickly turned away, knowing well that Ivaan was sharp. If their gaze lingered any longer, he might figure everything out.

Ivaan looked at Jharna, then at Aashiya. Something felt off.

“What’s going on in here?” he asked in a steely tone.

Jharna and Aashiya exchanged nervous glances. He asked again, more sternly, “I asked something. What were you both doing behind a closed door for so long? And why did it take you forever to open it?”

Jharna opened her mouth to speak, but Ivaan cut her off. He didn’t want her to twist the situation. Turning to Aashiya instead, he said, “Ms. Aashiya.”

His tone made Aashiya nervous.

“Tell me in plain words—what was happening here?”

She froze. She couldn’t lie, but she couldn’t speak the truth either. Jharna saw her struggling and tried to intervene, but Ivaan stopped her again. “I said, you’re not going to say anything. Ms. Aashiya will answer.”

Trying to distract him, Jharna snapped, “Why? Why should Aashiya answer and not me? Am I your wife or is she?”

Before Ivaan could respond, Aashiya blurted out in shock, “Wife?! You’re sir’s wife?”

Jharna turned toward her, and Aashiya’s eyes fell on her sindoor and mangalsutra. Her jaw dropped. “Oh my God! You’re married!”

Ivaan and Amaan were both confused by her reaction. Jharna shot her a death glare.

Amaan asked, “You’ve been working with ma’am this whole time and didn’t know she’s the boss’s wife?”

Without thinking, Aashiya replied, “Well... we weren’t exactly talking about all this...” But she stopped herself just in time and faked a cough to divert attention.

Jharna joined in the act, rubbing her back and saying, “Oh dear, what happened? Are you okay?”

Amaan mumbled under his breath, “Does Shimla have an acting club or what?”

Ivaan, now clearly annoyed, shouted, “Enough! Don’t test my patience. I’m warning you for the last time—what was—”

“Girl problems,” Jharna cut in.

A heavy silence followed. She continued, “Now should I explain everything in detail, or is this enough for you?”

She knew that this was the perfect answer to shut down further questions. And it worked—just as she expected, Ivaan didn’t ask anything else.

Later, Ivaan, Amaan, and Aashiya were sitting in the living room, working quietly. Jharna passed by on her way to the kitchen. Aashiya, still curious about how Jharna and Ivaan ended up together, coughed again—this time, for attention.

Ivaan and Amaan looked up. Amaan offered her a glass of water, but she declined politely.

“Sir, I prefer room temperature water. I’ll get it myself.” She stood up and walked toward the kitchen.

Ivaan folded his arms and leaned back, watching her walk away.

“Boss,” Amaan said, “do you think ma’am and Aashiya have some kind of connection?”

“Think? I’m 100% sure,” Ivaan replied. “But did you see how Jharna covered up the situation? I couldn’t even speak.”

Amaan chuckled.

“What’s funny?” Ivaan snapped.

“Love has changed you, boss.”

“What?! Love? Me? Have you lost your mind?”

“No, boss. I’m in full control of my senses. But you? You’re losing yours to her.”

Ivaan opened his laptop with a scoff. “Rubbish.”

Amaan leaned forward. “Whether you admit it or not, you love her. It’s not just that you’re possessive. It’s not just that you care. It’s not just that her pain shakes you. You’re in love with Jharna ma’am.”

His words struck a chord. Ivaan went silent.

Amaan continued gently, “Life rarely gives second chances, boss. And Jharna ma’am? She’s your second chance. You, her, and Miransh... you look like a complete family. And you—you’re not the same Ivaan when you’re with them. Please... realize it before it’s too late.”

Ivaan said nothing. He was deep in thought.

In the kitchen, Jharna was preparing something when Aashiya entered. Startled, Jharna whispered urgently, “What are you doing here? Are you trying to get me killed? Someone might see us. I just managed to get us out of trouble, and Ivaan already suspects something. Aashi, please just go.”

Aashiya calmly replied, “Relax, I only came to get water—and I told Ivaan sir I was coming.”

Jharna sighed. “Your Ivaan sir isn’t as innocent as you think.”

Aashiya teased, “Oho! You know your husband very well. Anyway, tell me

—how did you two meet? How did you fall for each other? And the wedding! I want the full story.”

“I’ll tell you everything, Aashi. But not now. I can’t risk it. Give me your number—I’ll text you.”

“Good idea!” Aashiya agreed.

Just then, Miransh walked in. “Momma, my sandwich—” He paused when he saw Aashiya. “Oh! Beautiful aunty, you’re here!”

Aashiya looked at Jharna, seeking confirmation. Jharna nodded. Aashiya knelt down and smiled at the boy.

“Hello, little man. I’m Aashiya.”

“Hello, Aashiya aunty! I’m Miransh,” he replied cheerfully, shaking her hand.

Aashiya hugged him, and Jharna smiled warmly. But the moment didn’t last long—Jharna quickly whispered, “Aashi, you should go now. We’ll talk later.”

Aashiya nodded and left.

Later, Amaan and Aashiya were getting ready to leave when Adhik, Vihaan, and Sagarika walked in.

Adhik grinned. “What’s up, everyone?”

His eyes landed on Aashiya. “Whoa! You’re stunning.”

Aashiya looked behind, confused.

Adhik walked up to her. “Hey, I’m talking to you.”

“Me?” Aashiya asked, startled.

“Yes! I’m Adhik Maurya. And you are?”

“Aashiya,” she said with a polite but strained smile.

“Your name’s as beautiful as you are.”

She forced another smile.

“By the way, are you Ivaan bhai’s friend or something?”

“No, no,” she said quickly. “I’m his employee. I work at Vertigo.”

“Wow! I didn’t know Vertigo hired such beautiful girls. Maybe I should

join too.” He casually placed a hand on her shoulder.

Aashiya instantly grew uncomfortable.

From behind, Ivaan’s cold voice cut through the moment. “You should ask me first. I own Vertigo.”

Adhik quickly withdrew his hand. “Oh—uh—bhai, I was just kidding. I’m way too young to work anyway. Actually, I just remembered something important. Okay, bye!”

He turned to Aashiya, “Bye.”

“Bye,” she said softly.

As he left, Aashiya caught Amaan staring at her intently. She looked away, flustered.

Why is he staring at me like that? she wondered.

That Night

Jharna was in her room, chatting with Aashiya on her phone.

Aashiya: OMG! You threw dirty water on Ivaan sir! Girl, you’ve got guts.

No one at the office even dares look him in the eye.

Jharna: Forget that. Tell me how you came to Mumbai?

Aashiya: Six months ago, I applied for a job and got selected by Vertigo. I didn’t want to miss the opportunity, so I moved here. And guess what happened next?

Jharna: What?

Flashback – Aashiya’s POV

I was waiting for a taxi to take me to my apartment, but none showed up.

So, I started walking, hoping to find one ahead.

Suddenly, a gust of wind blew my dupatta away. It landed on a car’s windshield, nearly causing an accident.

A man stepped out of the car, furious. He picked up the dupatta and looked around—his eyes landed on me.

“Is this yours?” he asked.

To avoid trouble, I acted bold. “You! Give it back. Don’t you have manners?” I snatched it from him.

He looked at me, dumbfounded. “Seriously? I almost crashed because of your dupatta, and instead of apologizing, you’re yelling at me?”

He was right, of course—but I didn’t want to admit it. I didn’t know anyone in the city and didn’t want problems. So I argued a bit more... and then left.

Flashback Ends

Jharna: Don’t tell me that guy was Amaan.

Aashiya: Yeah! Since that day, he’s been holding a grudge against me.

Jharna was so engrossed in their chat, she didn’t notice Ivaan standing by the door, watching her.

Suddenly, he strode in and snatched the phone from her hand.

“Ivaan! Give me my phone back!” she said, panicking.

She tried to get it back, but he wouldn’t return it. In the scuffle, they both fell onto the bed—Jharna on top of Ivaan.

He tried to get up, but she pushed him back down... seductively.

Ivaan was stunned.

Jharna gently traced her fingers along Ivaan’s face and neck. Her touch sent shivers down Ivaan’s spine. He was already on edge ever since Amaan’s words earlier that morning — and now, Jharna’s actions were only making things worse. He gulped hard and tried to sit up again but failed.

Jharna leaned closer, her cheek brushing against his. Ivaan’s heart pounded in panic. His grip on the phone loosened — and before he could react, Jharna swiftly snatched it back.

That tiny gesture snapped Ivaan back to reality. As Jharna attempted to move away with her phone, Ivaan grabbed her wrist and pulled her toward him.

And now it was Jharna's turn to be stunned.

Ivaan mirrored her earlier move, brushing his cheek against hers. "W-what are you doing?" Jharna asked in a trembling voice.

"What you were doing a little while ago," he replied, his voice laced with mock innocence.

"Listen, stop this nonsense. Ansh could walk in at any moment. Let me go!" she snapped.

Ivaan leaned close and whispered, "Your Ansh is with his chachus tonight. Don't worry — he's not coming."

"What??!" Jharna exclaimed, alarmed.

"He's sleeping with Adhik and Vihaan," Ivaan said casually. "No space for you there anyway."

Jharna narrowed her eyes. "That's fine. Those two are like my kids too."

Ivaan moved even closer. "They might be like kids, but I'm not. I am your one and only husband. And I think, I deserve one night with my wife."

Jharna cursed herself for using this plan to retrieve her phone. Ivaan was getting dangerously close again when—

KNOCK! KNOCK!

A loud knock on the door startled them both. They froze.

Somewhere in a dark room...

A girl sat watching the news in the dim glow of a screen. Her eyes gleamed with satisfaction. She took a slow sip of her drink, then smiled to herself.

"That," she whispered, "is what you call hitting two targets with one arrow."

Maurya Villa – Living Room

Everyone sat in tense silence, eyes glued to the news headlines.

BREAKING NEWS

A fire breaks out at Maurya Enterprises.

Several injured. Smoke and flames rise through the night.

Is it just a building burning — or Abhimaan Maurya's ego?

How could such negligence happen in such a reputed company?

Deepa gasped. "How could this happen? The building has tight security and every safety measure!"

Vihaan said grimly, "Exactly, Mom. Nothing adds up. And it just keeps getting worse."

Deepa added, "Bhaiya is there. Thank God Bhabhi is asleep after her medication — otherwise, this would've broken her."

Jharna stood up suddenly. "We need to go. Papa needs us."

Adhik crossed his arms. "I'm not going. He's not my father."

Jharna stared at him, horrified. "Seriously, Adhik? Did you even think about what he's going through? Everything he built — his life's work — is burning to the ground. He's being blamed and he has no answers. And his own sons... don't even care."

She shook her head. "Being upset with someone is one thing, but what you two are doing is nothing but ego. Stay in it if you want — but I'm going. He called me his daughter, and I will not abandon him."

She stormed out. Vihaan silently followed. Ivaan sat still on the sofa, lost in thought.

Maurya Enterprises – Outside

The building blazed. Firefighters fought the flames. Ambulances rushed back and forth. Reporters buzzed around the chaos like flies to a wound. Abhimaan stood still, watching his empire burn.

A woman from the media rushed to him.

"Mr. Abhimaan Maurya, how can you be so irresponsible? People are injured — some could die! Earlier, a chandelier fell at your party, and now this! You have so much money — couldn't you afford proper safety? Where did the management fail?"

Abhimaan didn't speak. His eyes remained fixed on the flames.

Suddenly, he felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned — and saw Jharna

standing beside him.

Tears welled up in his eyes.

Jharna gently wiped them away and shook her head. No need to explain, I'm here.

The reporter turned to Jharna. "Ma'am, as the daughter-in-law of Mr. Maurya, what do you have to say about his irresponsibility?"

Jharna's eyes narrowed. "Irresponsible? You want to talk about his irresponsibility? He's the same man who donates crores to charity. Who runs an NGO for children. Who paid for his employee's daughter to study abroad. That's your definition of irresponsible?"

Abhimaan's lip trembled. Jharna stepped forward.

"You media people have no shame. You're asking these questions to a man whose years of hard work are burning before his eyes. Can't you see what he's feeling? Do you even care?"

The woman pressed on, "It's my right to ask questions. People are injured. Someone has to be held responsible."

Before Jharna could respond, a calm but cold voice interrupted.

"I'll answer."

Everyone turned. It was Ivaan.

He walked up to the reporter, his presence commanding.

"You want answers? Ask. I'll respond to every single question."

The reporter froze. Everyone knew better than to challenge The Ivaan Maurya. Without another word, she stepped back and left.

Abhimaan watched, stunned.

Vihaan arrived beside Ivaan. "Bhai, I've arranged everything — more fire trucks, additional rescue teams. Everything is under control."

Ivaan nodded. Then turned to Jharna, "Go home. Take Papa with you. I'll handle everything here."

Jharna looked at him, confused and emotional.

Abhimaan stepped forward, overwhelmed. Without thinking, he embraced

Ivaan tightly.

Ivaan stiffened in shock — but as his father’s arms wrapped around him, something inside him softened. His hands slowly lifted, and he returned the hug.

Vihaan and Jharna smiled. She whispered, “Vihaan, take a picture. This is the best moment of the day.”

Vihaan nodded and clicked the photo.

Then, Jharna turned to Adhik. He was silently watching, his eyes filled with emotion. She said softly, “What are you waiting for? He’s your father, Adhik. Your father.”

The words echoed in Adhik’s ears. His eyes welled up, and without another thought, he rushed forward and hugged Abhimaan, joining them. Abhimaan held them both, eyes closed.

Ivaan stepped back, wiping his tears. He looked at Jharna. “I told you to go home. Maa, Bua, and Miransh need you. I’ll take care of this.”

Jharna nodded. “I know you will.”

They shared a quiet glance.

“Go,” he said firmly.

She smiled and turned to Abhimaan. “Papa, let’s go.”

Abhimaan gently stepped back from Adhik. “No, beta. You go ahead. I’m staying here.”

“But Papa—” she began.

He cut her off. “I’m fine. Just go.”

Jharna turned to Ivaan again. He nodded once. She understood — and left.

In the same dark room...

The girl stared at the television screen, her face now twisted with fury as she saw the Mauryas united.

She turned off the TV and stood up.

“So much family drama,” she hissed. “You all love your father, don’t you?”

But wait — my next move will make you hate him.”

Her eyes blazed.

“I will destroy each one of you. That’s the only purpose of my life now.”

Maurya Villa

Jharna returned home. Deepa rushed to her. “Jharna! What happened? Is everything okay?”

Jharna smiled and pulled out her phone. “See for yourself.” She showed her the photo — Abhimaan and Ivaan hugging.

Deepa’s eyes widened. “Pinch me! Am I dreaming?!”

Jharna laughed. “No, Bua ji. It’s real.”

Deepa hugged her tightly. “This is all because of you. Thank you, beta.”

Jharna smiled. “No, Bua ji. They love each other. They just pretend not to.”

Deepa sighed. “But they never admit it. Anyway, I’ve put Miransh to sleep. You should rest too.”

“I’ll go after I show this picture to Maa,” Jharna said. “She’ll be so happy.”

Deepa replied, “She’s asleep after taking medicines. She had a terrible headache.”

Jharna frowned. “That’s odd. She never sleeps this heavily. What medicine was it? Did it have sleeping pills?”

“I’m not sure.”

“I’ll check,” Jharna said and hurried toward Shikha’s room.

She opened the door, turned on the lights, and saw Shikha still sleeping.

Jharna walked over, smiling. “Maa, wake up. I have something to show you. You always wanted to see Papa and Ivaan together, right? Look!

They’re together. Papa hugged him. Adhik and Vihaan were there too.”

She shook Shikha gently. “Come on, Maa. You’ve been asleep too long. Wake up.”

No response.

Her smile faded.

“Maa?” she said louder, now worried. She touched her hand — and gasped.

Her body felt cold.

Just then, Deepa entered. “What happened, Jharna? Why are you shouting?”

Jharna’s voice cracked. “Bua ji... Maa’s not responding. Her body is cold... we need to get to the hospital. Now!”

They rushed to the car, carrying Shikha.

“Bua ji, please stay here with Ansh,” Jharna said as she got behind the wheel. “Don’t worry — Maa will be fine.”

Deepa nodded anxiously.

Jharna started driving, her hands shaking. She called Ivaan. No answer. She tried again.

Still nothing.

Frustrated, she muttered, “Oh God, Ivaan. Please pick up the phone... please...”

Sitara's Note

Some nights test more than just buildings — they test hearts,
loyalty, and forgotten bonds.

In the blaze that should've broken them, the Mauryas found
something stronger: each other.

Because sometimes,

things need to burn —

for truth to rise,

for egos to melt,

and for love to find its way back home.

Not every fire is a tragedy.

Some are a beginning in disguise.

— Sitara Chandria