

Chapter 17: Between Distance and Desire

Next Day – Hospital Room

The morning light filtered gently through the white curtains as Shikha slowly opened her eyes. Her vision was still hazy, but two familiar figures came into focus—Ivaan and Adhik, standing silently at her bedside. Their faces were pale with concern. Her lips trembled, trying to speak, but no words came out.

A doctor entered the room, clipboard in hand.

"How are you feeling, Mrs. Maurya?" he asked kindly.

Shikha blinked softly in response. Her body was still too weak to respond fully, but her eyes spoke volumes.

The doctor gently checked her vitals and noted her progress.

"She's recovering well. Out of danger now," he announced with a reassuring smile.

Adhik stepped forward, hopeful.

"Can we take Mom home?"

"Once the reports are in and we do a final checkup, you can," the doctor replied before leaving the room.

Ivaan pulled a chair closer and sat beside Shikha. He took her hand into his—gentle, comforting. A faint smile touched Shikha's lips, but it faded the moment her eyes landed on Ivaan's hand. It was bandaged.

Her heart sank.

"You hurt yourself...?" she whispered, her voice hoarse.

Tears welled up in her eyes.

"Ivaan... why would you do that?"

Ivaan lowered his gaze.

"I'm sorry, Maa. I failed to protect you... failed to take care of you."

Before she could respond, Adhik broke down. His emotions, which he had bottled up for so long, burst out in tears. He rushed to her side, wrapped his arms around her, and sobbed.

"I was so scared, Mom..."

Shikha, now overwhelmed, embraced him tightly.

"I'm fine, beta. I'm okay now. Don't cry."

Just then, Vihaan entered the room, holding a few documents.

"Ivaan bhai, all the formalities are done. Once the reports arrive, we can take Mamiji home."

Shikha turned toward him.

"Vihaan... where is Abhimaan ji?"

The moment Abhimaan's name was spoken, tension sliced through the room like a knife. Both Ivaan and Adhik stiffened. Their faces darkened. Adhik snapped, unable to hold back anymore.

"Why do you even want to see him? He's the reason you were in danger in the first place!"

Shikha's eyes widened.

"What?!"

She struggled to sit up, her pulse rising.

"What are you saying?" she demanded. "What do you mean by that?"

Adhik was about to answer, fury flashing in his eyes, but Ivaan stopped him firmly.

"Adhik, not now."

But Shikha wouldn't let it go. Her voice was sharp, angry, protective.

"So you both blame him? Is that why he isn't here? Where is he? He must be—"

Vihaan quickly interrupted, gently.

"Mamiji, please... calm down. He's at home. Don't worry—Jharna Bhabhi is with him."

Shikha exhaled deeply. She looked away, struggling to process everything. After a moment, her voice came soft but determined.

"I want to go home."

The car came to a slow halt outside the Maurya mansion.

As Shikha stepped inside the familiar walls of her home, her eyes swept across the living room. Everyone was there—Vihaan, Adhik, Deepa, Jharna, even little Miransh—but her gaze lingered, searching. But not him. Not Abhimaan.

Before she could ask, a tiny voice tugged at her heart.

“How are you, Dadi?”

She turned to see Miransh, standing with folded hands and eyes full of hope. His innocence broke the heaviness in the air.

A smile spread across Shikha’s tired face. She gently cupped his cheek and patted his head.

“I’m fine, beta.”

Miransh beamed.

“I asked God to make you better as soon as possible. See? He listened to me!”

Everyone chuckled softly, a brief moment of relief washing over the room.

Deepa came forward and hugged Shikha tightly.

“Thank God, bhabhi. You’re safe. You have no idea how scared we all were.”

Shikha’s smile faltered for a moment. She pulled back gently, her eyes scanning again.

“Where’s Abhimaan ji?”

Deepa hesitated.

“Uh... he’s in the study room.”

Shikha narrowed her eyes.

“Take me to him.”

Silence.

No one moved.

Then, Jharna stepped forward quietly.

“Come, Maa. I’ll take you.”

Shikha nodded, grateful. But as Jharna took her arm, Ivaan's eyes followed them coldly—his stare heavy with unspoken disappointment. Jharna noticed it, but said nothing.

In the Study Room

The door creaked open slowly.

Abhimaan sat on the corner sofa, his head resting on the backrest. The room was dim, silent. His face looked pale, eyes hollow, and the dark circles beneath them spoke of sleepless nights. He hadn't shaved. He hadn't moved.

Shikha's breath hitched.

A tear slid silently down her cheek.

She turned to Jharna, her voice barely a whisper.

“What happened to him? Why is he like this...?”

Jharna replied gently,

“Because of the guilt. But what he really needs... is you, Maa. Only you.”

Shikha wiped her tears, composed herself, and took slow, steady steps toward him.

Hearing footsteps, Abhimaan opened his eyes. The moment he saw her, he stood up, shocked.

“Shikha? What are you doing here? You should be resting! You shouldn't be walking around like this. Jharna, why did you bring her here?”

Before Jharna could respond, Shikha's calm voice cut through.

“Because I asked her to.”

She looked at him with quiet intensity.

“If I had gone to our room... would you have come to see me?”

Abhimaan dropped his gaze. He had no answer.

“It's not good for you to be standing like this,” he mumbled, concern clouding his guilt.

Jharna smirked.

“Exactly, Papa. Then carry her. How can you let her walk in this

condition?”

Shikha gave her a playful scolding look.

“Leave it, Jharna. He won’t be able to lift me now. He’s become old.”

Abhimaan let out a long breath. A ghost of a smile appeared through his guilt.

Without another word, he bent down, slipped his arms beneath her, and gently lifted her off the floor—just like he used to years ago.

Shikha let her head rest on his shoulder.

Jharna watched silently, a smile forming on her lips.

As Abhimaan walked toward their room with Shikha in his arms, the air around them shifted. Not heavy with tension anymore, but with something deeper—regret, forgiveness, and a quiet, unshaken love.

Jharna’s smile lingered as she watched Abhimaan carry Shikha away, like a fragile piece of his own soul that he had nearly lost. But that smile slowly faded the moment her eyes shifted...

Ivaan.

He stood at a distance, watching the same scene, but his eyes weren’t soft—they were stormy. Heavy.

She walked up to him, her voice steady but layered with quiet emotion.

"They are husband and wife, Ivaan. They need space. You don’t have the right to separate a wife from her husband."

Ivaan's eyes flickered, but he said nothing.

“At this moment,” she added, “Maa and Papa are the only medicine for each other.”

She said and walked towards her room. Ivaan stood still for a second, absorbing her words.

Then he followed. Quietly.

They entered the room. Ivaan stepped in and shut the door behind them with a loud click.

Jharna flinched at the sound.

She turned, startled.

Now what's going on in his mind...?

She didn't have to wait long.

Ivaan took slow, steady steps toward her.

There was fire in his eyes—but it wasn't anger. It was something deeper.

Unsettling. Conflicted.

Jharna instinctively turned to walk away, but he caught her wrist, pulling her gently but firmly toward him.

“You said I have no right to separate a wife from her husband,” he murmured, voice low. “Then neither do you.”

Her breath caught.

Their eyes locked.

Before she could speak, Ivaan's gaze dropped to her arms. His fingers gently traced over the bandage on her wrist—wounds caused by his own recklessness.

His voice softened, guilt flickering underneath.

“I told you to leave, but you stayed.”

Jharna looked away, her body tensing. She tried to pull back, but he drew her even closer—so close she could feel his breath on her skin.

Her heartbeat pounded in her ears.

“If you didn't leave yesterday...”

His voice dropped to a whisper.

“...I won't let you leave today.”

She swallowed hard. Her body froze.

“Ivaan... please. Leave me.”

But he held her gaze.

“You did? When have you ever listened to me? So why should I listen to you?”

The room was still. Their faces were inches apart. Her back pressed lightly against the wall, his presence looming, intense—but not aggressive. Just...

overwhelming.

Their eyes stayed locked.

His—full of quiet fire.

Hers—torn between defiance and fear.

He leaned in, slowly, closing the distance. His eyes fluttered shut, and his lips moved closer to hers, inch by inch—

And then... she pushed him.

Hard.

Ivaan stumbled back a step.

Jharna's voice cracked the air like a whip.

“What do you think you're doing, huh?”

She was shaking—with rage, with heartbreak, with everything she'd buried inside.

“You forced me into this marriage. Now you want to force yourself on me too?”

Her voice broke.

“How cheap are you, Ivaan!”

Tears welled in her eyes but didn't fall.

“I'm here only because of Ansh,” she continued, voice thick with emotion.

“Otherwise, I wouldn't even want to breathe the same air as you.”

She turned, storming toward the door. But just before leaving, she added one last blow—

“You may have married me, but don't ever think you own me.”

And she was gone.

Ivaan stood frozen.

The silence in the room grew louder.

This was the first time...

her words didn't make him angry.

They made his heart ache.

He realized—maybe for the first time—
That Jharna's pain wasn't just resistance.
It was real.
It was raw.
And he had caused it.

Jharna stepped out of the room, her heart still thudding, her breath unsteady. The air outside felt heavier than inside.
As she descended the stairs, she found Miransh sitting quietly on the living room floor, legs folded, a box of crayons scattered around him. His small hands moved carefully over the paper, coloring the sun with orange and yellow strokes.
That innocent scene—so normal, so untouched by the chaos around—struck something deep inside her.
A single tear slipped down her cheek.
She walked toward him and knelt beside him.
“You are my one and only responsibility, Ansh,” she thought.
“I can bear anything... sacrifice everything... just for your sake.”
Her hand gently caressed his soft hair. He didn't look up—too focused on making the sun brighter.
And maybe that was symbolic.
Maybe he was her sun—her only light in this dim, complex world.
Her smile wavered, her fingers froze.
Because in that quiet moment, memories from just minutes ago returned like echoes—Ivaan's closeness... the way he had pulled her toward him... the way her heart betrayed her for a second... skipping, trembling, wanting to feel—but refusing to fall.
She clenched her eyes shut, trying to erase that closeness, but her lips trembled.
"No," she whispered to herself.

"It's better this way. It's better if we stay away from each other, Ivaan. That's what's good... for everyone."

Her voice cracked as she said it—but she believed it. She had to believe it. She quickly wiped the tear off her cheek before Miransh could notice, then sat beside him in silence.

Taking a deep breath in, she picked up a crayon from the floor and began to color with him.

Sitara's Note

Some love stories don't bloom in poetry and petals.
They unfold in silence...
In stolen glances, in aching restraint,
In battles fought within the heart.
Today's chapter wasn't about who was right or wrong.
It was about the price people pay for love,
The sacrifices made quietly,
The storms they bury in their chests just to protect someone
else's peace.
Jharna didn't walk away because she didn't feel anything.
She walked away because she felt too much...
And some emotions, if left unchecked, could destroy the very
people she's trying to protect.
Ivaan hurt her.
But he also hurt himself in ways he may not even understand yet.
Sometimes, guilt wears the mask of arrogance.
And sometimes, love wears the armor of distance.
And in the midst of it all,
There stood a little boy with crayons in his hand,
Unaware that his mother just fought the biggest war of her life—
Choosing him over everything else... even over what her heart
whispered in the silence.
Until next time,
— Sitara Chandria