

Chapter 18: Operation Patch-Up

One Week Later

Life was slowly returning to its rhythm.

Shikha's recovery brought a gentle warmth back into the Maurya house, and Maurya Enterprises too was finding its footing again. But the man who once ruled the empire with an iron fist had shifted. Abhimaan Maurya no longer prioritized boardrooms over bedrooms. Instead of suits and strategy meetings, his mornings were now filled with brewing tea for Shikha and holding her hand during her slow walks around the garden. He hadn't stepped into the office once since the incident. He worked from home, and for the first time in years, his calendar bowed before his wife's comfort.

But not everyone found peace in the stillness.

Ivaan buried himself in work, drowning in meetings, presentations, and long drives to avoid coming home. Since that night—since that storm of words with Jharna—he had silently chosen distance. Some nights, he didn't even return. Jharna noticed everything. His absence. His silence. His retreat.

But she said nothing.

In the car...

Jharna was driving, her eyes calm but her hands tightly gripping the steering wheel. Beside her, Miransh sat swinging his legs and clutching his school bag. His excited voice broke the quiet.

“Momma, tomorrow is PTM! You and Superhero have to come,” he said, eyes sparkling with hope.

Without emotion, she replied, “Of course, Ansh. I'll be there.”

Miransh asked again, softer this time, “And... Superhero?”

She hesitated. “He's busy. And why do you need him? I'll be there, like always. That's enough, right?”

The innocence in his face twisted into quiet sadness. “Earlier, I didn’t have a father. But now I do... Shouldn’t he be there too?”

Jharna didn’t answer. She couldn’t.

She dropped Miransh at home and left for the bakery, trying to silence the ache in her chest.

Back at the house...

Miransh walked inside slowly, his tiny hands clutched tightly around the straps of his bag. His little feet dragged over the floor, heart heavy with disappointment.

But just then—

A thought sparked in his eyes.

He turned. And ran back out of the house.

At Vertigo – Ivaan’s Office

The atmosphere was suffocating.

Ivaan stood by his desk, voice booming in fury over a call. Amaan watched silently from the corner. This wasn’t the same Ivaan who once softened after meeting Jharna. This was the man from before—cold, arrogant, restless. And now, angry.

He cut the call, and before Amaan could intervene, Ivaan slammed his laptop on the floor. The screen shattered, fragments spreading across the carpet.

But it wasn’t just the device that broke.

Ivaan himself looked like he was breaking—piece by piece, breath by breath.

“Boss...” Amaan said, cautiously, “You should rest.”

Ivaan dropped into his chair, eyes shut, his fingers pressing against his temple.

And then...

A soft, familiar voice pierced through the silence.

“Superhero...”

Ivaan's eyes opened wide. He stood up instantly and turned. There, at the door, stood a little boy in a school uniform, bag still strapped tightly, shoes a little dusty.

“Miransh?” he rushed to him. “What are you doing here? And who brought you?”

The boy smiled. “I came alone, Superhero.”

Ivaan's heart skipped. Alone?!

He scolded, “Are you out of your mind? What if something happened? You should’ve told someone, or called me!”

But Miransh ignored the scolding. His eyes didn’t waver.

“Papa.”

The room froze.

Miransh stepped forward. “Are you my papa or not?”

Ivaan paused, then slowly knelt down. “Do you have any doubt?”

“Then will you come tomorrow to my school? For PTM?” His voice cracked with hope. “I told Momma I want both of you there. But she said you’re too busy. Are you really?”

Ivaan cupped his tiny face gently.

“No, champ. I’ll be there.”

That was all it took.

Miransh leapt into his arms, holding him tightly.

And Ivaan—he smiled. For the first time in a week, he smiled.

The Next Day – School

Jharna and Miransh sat on a bench outside the classroom. His name would be called any minute.

But his eyes kept looking at the main gate. Searching. Hoping.

There was no sign of Ivaan.

Jharna noticed the shift in his posture. His shoulders slumped. His excitement faded into quiet disappointment.

She knelt in front of him, placing a hand on his knee.

“Ansh,” she whispered, “I’m here. I’ve always been here. For the last few years, I’ve been your mother and father both. And now—”

“—Now his father is here.” A voice cut her gently.

Jharna froze.

She didn’t even need to turn around. That voice had already etched itself somewhere in her heart.

But before she could respond, Miransh squealed with joy.

“Superhero!!”

He ran to Ivaan, who opened his arms and picked him up effortlessly.

Their eyes met—Jharna’s and Ivaan’s.

No words.

Just silence thick with things left unsaid.

Just then, the teacher called Miransh’s name.

The three of them walked in together. A trio that didn’t look perfect.

But for that one moment...

They looked complete.

That Night – Maurya Mansion, Living Room

The night was unusually quiet.

In the living area, the entire family had gathered—Shikha resting against the cushions, Deepa beside her, Vihaan casually sipping on tea, Abhimaan lost in thought, and Adhik lying sideways on the rug. And right at the edge of the sofa, like a tiny commander surveying his confused battalion, sat their leader—Miransh, legs dangling, eyes narrowed in deep thought.

It wasn’t a usual family moment.

There was a mission at hand.

Adhik finally broke the long silence, throwing his arms up in the air.

“Uff, nothing’s clicking! What should we do to bring Ivaan bhai and Jharna bhabhi back together?”

Abhimaan let out a tired sigh. “Even if we try something, they’ll end up

arguing again. They're like petrol and fire—one spark and boom.”

Shikha shook her head gently, “But we can't just sit back, right? We have to do something.”

Deepa chimed in, “Exactly. This distance between them can't go on forever. It's affecting the entire vibe of the house... and us.”

Vihaan sat forward, “Should we plan a trip for them? Just the two of them?”

Adhik looked at him like he'd suggested sending them to war.

“Come on, bhai. Even if we send them, one will be glued to his phone, and the other will be glued to her son. It'll turn into a solo retreat—not a couple's trip.”

Everyone nodded in agreement.

Silence returned... for a few seconds.

Suddenly, Miransh jumped up like he'd discovered a treasure.

His eyes gleamed. “Idea!”

Everyone turned to him in unison, hopeful.

“What?!” they chorused.

He giggled, motioning them to come closer.

Then, with all the seriousness of a secret agent, he formed a huddle—tiny hands motioning everyone inward.

He leaned in and began whispering, khusur-phusur... khusur-phusur...

Their faces slowly lit up with amusement.

Some gasped, some chuckled, and Shikha even covered her mouth with surprise.

Adhik ruffled his hair, “You naughty little genius!”

Deepa hugged him, “Miransh beta, this is wicked. But it might actually work!”

Vihaan smirked, “I didn't know we had a mastermind living with us.”

And just like that—

A plan was set in motion.

A tiny spark had been lit, not in anger this time, but in hope.

Next Morning – Maurya Mansion

The sun had barely risen when chaos began to stir.

The entire family was mysteriously busy, especially Miransh, who kept darting around like a squirrel high on secrets. He kept giving knowing glances to Deepa and Shikha, while Abhimaan pretended to be clueless, hiding a smirk behind the newspaper.

Meanwhile, Ivaan had just come down from his room, adjusting his cufflinks, when Deepa stopped him.

“Ivaan, can you please bring that box down from the storage room? It’s too high for me.”

He raised a brow, a little annoyed, “Now?”

“Please,” Deepa gave him a sugary smile, “It’ll take a second.”

Just then, Jharna entered the hallway, dressed in a soft beige saree, ready to drop Miransh at school.

“Jharna bhabhi, wait a sec,” Vihaan called. “Can you just go with Ivaan bhaiya to get that box?”

Before either could protest, they were coaxed, nudged, and pushed into the storage room—a large, rarely used room at the back of the house.

As soon as they entered—

CLICK.

The door slammed shut.

Jharna whipped around.

“Vihaan—what the—?” she banged the door.

“Vihaan! This isn’t funny!”

No response.

They were locked in.

Ivaan immediately stepped forward, his brows furrowed. He knocked sharply, voice hard, clipped with irritation—

“Vihaan, stop this nonsense. I’m getting late. Open the door.”

A teasing voice came from the other side.

Adhik, “Sorry bhai. Today you’re not going to the office. And don’t worry—I already informed Amaan. He’ll handle everything.”

Jharna’s jaw tightened. She marched toward the door, smacking her palm against it.

“Adhik, open the door! I have to drop Ansh to school. He’s getting late!”

A familiar giggle floated through the door.

Miransh, “Don’t worry momma, chachus will drop me. You both just stay there and sort out your problems.”

There was a beat of stunned silence inside the room.

Jharna and Ivaan exchanged a sharp look, equally annoyed, equally trapped.

Jharna growled, “See? You three stop all this nonsense before I seriously lose it!”

Ivaan, arms crossed, added, “Either you guys open this door... or I’m breaking it.”

Jharna nodded in full agreement.

But before they could say anything—

Shikha’s voice rang out, loud and commanding.

“Oh really? If you break that door, I’ll break your legs, Ivaan.”

Silence.

Adhik burst into laughter.

“Wow Mom! Wild card entry!”

Outside, the mischievous trio exchanged high-fives and smirks.

Jharna gasped, “Maa, you too?!”

Shikha, voice full of calm authority, replied, “Exactly. You both are acting like stubborn teenagers. So if we don’t do something, how will anything change?”

Ivaan tried again, his tone slightly more pleading now, “Mom, please, I’m really getting late—”

Shikha interrupted sharply, “Shut up, Ivaan. This door will only open when you two talk. Patch up. Clear things out. Or stay in there forever for all I care.”

She walked off with finality.

Adhik added cheekily, “Best of luck, lovebirds.”

Vihaan’s voice chimed in, “Do try not to kill each other.”

And then... silence.

Only the soft whirr of the faulty AC remained, already humming above their heads.

Inside the room, Ivaan leaned back against the wall, exhaling sharply.

Jharna crossed her arms.

“All are gone mad.”

Ivaan didn’t miss a beat.

“They get it from you.”

She shot him a glare.

That’s when a soft clink echoed from above. Then another.

Ivaan glanced up at the AC. “What’s that noise now?”

Jharna followed his gaze, brows furrowed.

A strange clink... clink echoed again. Then, a low hum. The next moment, a sharp chill swept across the room.

The temperature had dropped noticeably.

The AC wasn’t working properly—

It was overworking.

Jharna wrapped her arms around herself. “What noise is this?” she asked, concerned.

Ivaan shot her a dry look. “It’s singing,” he said sarcastically.

Jharna rolled her eyes with a scoff. “Wow. Hilarious.”

She marched toward the door and began knocking. “Adhik! Vihaan! Is anyone out there?” Her voice turned sharper, more urgent. “The AC’s gone crazy, it’s freezing in here! Open the door!”

Silence.

No footsteps. No response.

Ivaan meanwhile dragged a small table under the AC, climbed up and tried yanking out the plug. It didn't budge.

He pulled again. Nothing.

He frowned and stepped down.

Jharna turned to him, arms still folded tightly against the cold. "Done?"

He shook his head. "It's stuck. Plug's practically welded into the board."

A shiver ran through Jharna. She glanced around helplessly, then muttered, "Great. Trapped in a freezer with a black beast."

Ivaan raised a brow. "Believe me, the feeling's mutual."

Their eyes met for a second—frustrated, stubborn—but behind all that, a hint of something else.

Something unspoken.

Sitara's Note

Some walls are made of bricks.

And some... of silence.

But when two people are locked in the same space with nothing but words, glances, and years of unresolved emotions— even the coldest air can start to melt.

While writing this chapter, I didn't just imagine a room with a broken AC.

I imagined two people trapped in more than just four walls—

Trapped in denial, misunderstandings, unspoken truths...

And perhaps... a longing they both refuse to admit.

Jharna and Ivaan may be cold.

But their hearts?

They're warming. Slowly. Tenderly. Awkwardly.

I hope you felt the awkward tension, the teasing sarcasm, and that growing softness peeking from beneath the surface. Because love doesn't always knock with roses and rain—

Sometimes, it enters with a broken AC and an attitude problem.

Signing this chapter with shivers, smirks, and a spark that's about to catch. Until then, tell me—have you ever been locked in a room... with your own 'Ivaan/Jharna'?

— Sitara Chandria