

Chapter 9: The Taste Of Tension

Next Day, Maurya Mansion

The sun had barely kissed the marble floors of the Maurya Villa when Ivaan, Miransh, and Jharna returned. Shikha, who was arranging flowers in the hallway, caught sight of them and asked with a curious frown, “Where are you three coming from so early?”

Ivaan replied casually, “Mom, we stayed at my villa last night. Just came back from there.”

Shikha gave a brief nod. “Alright. Go freshen up. We have more ceremonies to attend today, remember?” Her gaze then shifted to Jharna, who gave a silent nod in response. But her eyes inadvertently wandered toward Abhimaan, the man she hadn’t seen before.

Noticing the direction of Jharna’s gaze, Shikha smiled gently. “Come, let me introduce you,” she said, guiding Jharna toward him.

Abhimaan stood tall, his presence calm yet distant. Jharna looked at him, confusion settling in her eyes. Before she could ask, Shikha broke the silence, “This is Jharna, Ivaan’s wife. And Jharna, this is Abhimaan... your father-in-law.”

Jharna blinked, surprised. Ivaan’s father? Then why wasn't he at the wedding? Why hadn’t anyone mentioned him before—not even Deepa, Adhik, or Vihaan? A thousand questions flooded her mind, but she pushed them aside for the moment.

She bent down to touch Abhimaan’s feet in respect—but before she could, Ivaan stepped forward, firmly grabbing her hand and pulling her back. Jharna looked at him, startled.

A silent battle raged between Ivaan and Abhimaan’s eyes. Without uttering a single word, Ivaan turned and walked away, taking Jharna with him.

Abhimaan chuckled bitterly and said to Shikha, “So, what you were saying something last night?”

Shikha lowered her eyes, unable to meet his. Abhimaan gave a cold smile and walked off.

Shikha sighed, “Relationships are cracking, Deepa. If this continues, they’ll become strangers... maybe even enemies.”

Adhik added sharply, “But the fault is Dad’s, right, Mom? He always prioritized work. When we needed him, he wasn’t around. What does he expect from us now?”

Shikha looked at him, eyes soft with emotion. “Even if he made mistakes... that doesn’t mean he doesn’t love you all. You don’t see it—but I do.”

Upstairs

Ivaan pulled Jharna into their room. She yanked her hand away and glared at him. “What’s your problem? Why did you drag me like that? He’s your father! He wasn’t there for the wedding, fine—but at least let me greet him properly. What must he be thinking about me—about us?”

In a fit of rage, Ivaan grabbed her face, his fingers tight against her cheeks. Jharna winced in pain as he growled through clenched teeth, “I, Ivaan Maurya, don’t bow to anyone. And now that you’re my wife, you won’t bow either. Understand?”

He released her and turned to walk away.

Jharna’s fury erupted. “I’m your wife, not your slave. And you forced this marriage on me! So keep your attitude to yourself. What I will do, whom I will bow down to, I will decide, not you.”

Ivaan clenched his fists but didn’t respond. Jharna stormed into the bathroom, slamming the door behind her.

Fuming, Ivaan pulled out his phone and called Amaan. “Any updates? Who is this girl? Where is she from? And Miransh’s father—did you find anything?”

Amaan replied, “Nothing yet, boss.

Ivaan was very angry upon hearing Amaan’s words. He was about to say something when Amaan added, “But... I did find out that Jharna came from Shimla. Five years ago.”

Ivaan frowned. “Shimla?”

“Yes. We found old train records. Jharna arrived in Mumbai from Shimla five years ago.”

Ivaan fell silent, thoughts spiraling. Shimla... what secrets are you hiding, Jharna? After a pause, something struck in his mind, he snapped back to the call. “And what were you calling her? Jharna? —remember she’s The Ivaan Maurya’s wife. Act accordingly.”

“Sorry, boss,” Amaan said quietly.

A Little Later

Jharna stepped out of the bathroom wearing a soft yellow saree. She moved to the mirror, applying a gentle pink lipstick, adjusting her oxidized jewelry, placing a bindi, and letting her hair fall freely. She looked radiant. Just as she was about to apply sindoor, Shikha entered. “Wow,” she said, smiling warmly. “You look absolutely beautiful, dear.”

Jharna gave a small smile in return.

At that moment, Ivaan entered from the balcony. His eyes locked on Jharna, and he froze. She looked... ethereal. He couldn't look away.

Shikha noticed his trance and teased, “Come closer, Ivaan. She’s your wife, after all.”

Snapping out of it, Ivaan blinked and turned away. Jharna glanced at him and then quickly looked away.

Shikha chuckled, “Alright, Jharna. Come downstairs once you're ready.” She exited, leaving the two alone.

Ivaan noticed Jharna staring at the sindoor box. With a slight smirk, he asked, “Need help?”

Without replying, Jharna picked up the box and applied the sindoor herself. She then walked out, head held high.

Ivaan shook his head and entered the bathroom.

Downstairs

Miransh was giggling beside Shikha and Deepa. When he saw Jharna, he ran to her. “Momma! You look sooo pretty!”

Jharna laughed and kissed his forehead. “Thank you, baby.”

Deepa said warmly, “He’s such a lovely child.”

Shikha added, “And sharp too. Just like Ivaan was as a kid.”

Jharna muttered under her breath, “Then something must have gone wrong as he grew up.”

Shikha asked, “Did you say something?”

Jharna quickly smiled. “No, nothing.”

Adhik and Vihaan walked over. Adhik grinned, “So, bhabhi, what are you cooking today?”

Jharna blinked. “What do you mean?”

Shikha explained, “Today’s your first kitchen ritual. You’re supposed to cook something for the family.”

Vihaan reassured her, “Don’t worry. We’ll eat whatever you make.”

Just then, Ivaan came down the stairs. Jharna looked at him and smirked. If he ruined my peace, why should I suffer alone?

With a sweet smile, she said aloud, “No, no. We’ll cook whatever you all like.”

Adhik raised a brow. “We?”

“I mean Ivaan and I,” Jharna said, still smiling.

Everyone looked surprised. Ivaan stared at her, puzzled.

Deepa laughed. “Wait—Ivaan will cook with you?”

Jharna replied confidently, “Yes. He said we’ll do all rituals together. Right, Ivaan?”

Still confused but aware of all eyes on him, Ivaan said, “Absolutely.”

Everyone was stunned. Vihaan whispered, “See? Ivaan bhai is in love.”

Adhik nodded. “Yeah. He never did this for anyone.”

Shikha clapped. "Alright, both of you go then. Start the ritual."

Jharna smiled to herself. You made things hard for me, Ivaan. It's your turn now.

Ivaan looked at her, thinking, You're going to regret this, sweetheart.

Meanwhile, In a dimly lit room, Chhaya sat scrolling through Ivaan's photos. Her eyes burned with rage. "How could you, Ivaan? You said you loved me. And now you've married that... roadside girl?"

She stood by the window, fists clenched. "I won't let this slide. I've sacrificed too much. You can't just erase me from your life like that."

Her eyes glinted with vengeance.

Maurya Mansion

The kitchen buzzed with a quiet tension as Jharna and Ivaan stood together amidst clinking utensils and the soft hum of the stove.

"So, let's begin," Jharna said.

Ivaan's eyes scanned Jharna from head to toe, lingering with a curious intensity. He tilted his head slightly, lips curling into a faint smirk.

"Here... okay," he murmured, his voice low and deliberate, as he took a slow, deliberate step toward her.

Before he could get any closer, Jharna placed a firm hand on his chest and pushed him back, her eyes sharp with resolve.

"Cooking," she said.

Ivaan nodded with an easy smile. "Sure. Just tell me what to do."

With a slight authoritative tilt in her tone, Jharna instructed, "Bring all the spices here."

Without protest, Ivaan turned to obey. As he brushed past her, his arm lightly grazed her waist. The sudden touch made Jharna flinch inwardly, her breath hitching for a brief moment.

Before she could say anything, Ivaan remarked casually, "Offo, stand a little to the side. There's plenty of space."

He began to pull out the spice boxes, an amused smile dancing on his lips,

as if he'd noticed her discomfort and found it oddly entertaining.

Jharna, choosing silence over confrontation, stepped aside quietly. She watched as Ivaan placed the boxes neatly in front of her and then looked at her expectantly, awaiting the next command.

"I'll chop the vegetables," she said hesitantly, picking up a knife and a green capsicum.

But Ivaan wasn't done intruding. He stepped closer and said, "Hey, not like that."

Before she could protest, he was beside her, his hand guiding hers. Their cheeks brushed faintly, and his warm breath tickled the side of her neck. A jolt of unease ran through her, making her pull back ever so slightly.

"I... it's okay. I'll do it now," she said, her voice a little breathless as she tried to create some space.

But Ivaan leaned in again, grinning playfully. "Why? We're cooking together, remember? It's our first kitchen ritual. We should do everything together."

Jharna bit her lip, her discomfort growing. Ivaan knew—he knew she disliked his touch, yet he continued to toy with her boundaries.

Then, in an attempt to change the mood, he said, "By the way, I love capsicum. Did you know they grow a lot in Shimla?"

Jharna scoffed lightly, unable to stop herself.

Oh please," she said, rolling her eyes with a smirk, "who told you that? Just because it's called 'Shimla mirch' doesn't mean it actually grows in Shimla."

She turned to face him, arms lightly crossed. "For your kind information, Shimla isn't famous for Shimla mirch, okay? It's known for its breathtaking views, pleasant weather, and those winding roads lined with pine trees. The kind of place where clouds feel close enough to touch... not a vegetable garden!"

There was a strange glint in her eyes as she continued, "It's one of the

most beautiful hill stations in India—snowfalls, mall road walks, old colonial architecture... that kind of charm."

Ivaan looked at her curiously now, his smile fading into a thoughtful stare. He raised an eyebrow, clearly amused. "Oh? How do you know so much about Shimla?"

Without thinking, Jharna blurted out, "Because Shimla is m..."

She froze, her words hanging dangerously in the air.

Ivaan caught the slip instantly. "Shimla is your...?" he echoed, stepping closer. "Go on."

Sitara's Note

When I wrote this chapter, I wanted you to feel that subtle spark—the kind that lingers between words left unsaid and touches that carry more weight than they should. Sometimes, the smallest kitchen moment can stir the deepest emotions.

Jharna and Ivaan's story is still unfolding, but don't we all have a "Shimla" of our own? A place tied to memories, a feeling, or someone we never really talk about.

Thank you for reading *The Taste of Tension*. If this scene made you smile, frown, or pause for a second—know that your heart walked alongside mine while I wrote it.

Tell me your favorite part in the comments. I'd love to hear from you.

Until the next chapter,

– Sitara Chandria