

Chapter 21: Maybe I'm Falling

A Hillside Evening

Jharna reached the place—dark, hilly, and quiet, wrapped in nature’s silence. The cold wind whispered around her, but her heart was pounding louder than the breeze.

“Ivaan!” she screamed into the emptiness.

“Ivaan, where are you?” she cried, tears streaming down her face.

“Ivaan!!”

Suddenly—lights turned on.

The darkness faded, replaced by a glowing fairytale. A dinner setup shimmered before her—fairy lights hung between trees, a table beautifully decorated with flowers, candles flickering gently. The air smelled of something warm, something familiar.

She blinked through her tears, stunned by the sight. And then, a soft voice called out:

“Momma!”

She turned sharply.

Miransh was running toward her, beaming. Ivaan stood behind him, smiling, hands tucked behind his back.

Miransh hugged her tightly, “Surprise, Momma! Superhero planned a dinner night for us!”

Jharna didn’t smile. Instead, she shot Ivaan a sharp glare. Her face was unreadable—but her eyes burned with anger.

Ivaan scratched the back of his head, took a careful step forward, and said, “If I had asked you normally... you wouldn’t have come, right?”

She gave a sarcastic smile, “So... that’s why you faked an accident call, Ivaan?”

He nodded sheepishly.

Miransh jumped in, “Momma, don’t be mad. He did all this for you! He even cooked our favorite food!”

Ivaan grinned, “And your favourite spaghetti—well, noodles, I mean.”
Jharna finally let out a dry chuckle, “Interesting. Because I have a surprise for you too.”

Ivaan blinked. “Really?”

She nodded calmly. Then helped Miransh onto a chair... and turned back to Ivaan with a sudden shift in energy.

Her smile vanished as she tucked the end of her saree into her waist.

Ivaan’s smile faded too, eyes narrowing.

“Wait, what are you doing?” he asked cautiously.

Without answering, Jharna picked up a long, thin stick lying beside the tree... and marched toward him.

“Jharna, no—listen, Jharna—no, no,” Ivaan backed away in panic.

Too late.

She chased him and began whacking him with the stick, furious but not entirely serious.

Miransh burst into a fit of giggles.

“Oye! Listen! That was just a prank!” Ivaan cried.

“Prank? How dare you pull a prank like that on me?!” she shouted.

“I said listen—”

“Listen? Listen what, Ivaan?” she snapped, finally stopping. “Do you have any idea how scared I was? My brain, my heart—both just... stopped working!”

Her breath was heavy now. Tears welled up and spilled down again. She threw the stick aside and clutched her head, trying to calm herself.

Ivaan slowly stepped closer, gently wiped her tears, and whispered,

“Crying for me...? Is that... love?”

Their eyes met.

The world paused. Time stilled.

And then—

Miransh, eyes half-covered, giggled from his seat, “I can’t see anything!”

Not watching!”

Jharna snapped out of it. She broke the eye contact, wiped her tears, and turned to leave.

But Ivaan stopped her, catching her wrist. She looked at him, startled.

“Answer me,” he said softly.

She looked toward Miransh and whispered sharply, “What are you doing in front of Ansh?”

“He said he’s not watching anything,” Ivaan replied calmly.

She tried to pull away again, but his grip didn’t loosen.

“Tell me,” he urged.

Jharna finally lost her patience. “No—you tell me first!”

She took a pause. Her voice shook.

“Why do you love me, Ivaan? Haan? What’s the reason behind this love?”

Ivaan let out a soft, bittersweet smile.

“Love doesn’t need a reason, Jharna.”

She shot back, “But you always have a reason behind everything you do.

You married me with a reason. So this love—this too has a reason. I know it does. What is it, huh?”

He looked into her eyes—calm, clear, and deeply honest.

“There’s no reason. It’s just... love. Pure, real love.”

Her voice broke, “And what do you want in return for this love? My body?”

His face fell.

He slowly released her hand, eyes softening. “So that’s it... That’s the reason behind your fear. That’s what’s stopping you.”

She stayed silent.

He stepped back, leaving a small gap between them. His voice was steady now.

“If that’s all it is—then I promise you... there will always be a distance between us.”

And he took a small step back.

She looked at him, stunned.

He stepped forward again, cupped her face with gentle hands, and said:

“But this distance... will never, ever change how much I love you. I don’t want your body, Jharna. I want you. Just you. Will you stay... with me?”

Jharna froze in place—completely stunned.

His words echoed in her ears, soft yet shaking something deep inside her.

She couldn’t speak. Couldn’t blink. Tears kept rolling down her cheeks, but her eyes stayed locked on him—searching, breaking, and maybe... quietly, falling.

Ivaan took a slow breath and softly continued,

“Okay... fine. Even if you say no to this—it's okay. In fact, forget everything. Everything I said to you. You don’t need to feel guilty. I love you... and that’s not your fault.”

He paused, eyes gently searching hers.

“And honestly... it’s not my fault either. You're just that kind of person—so lovable that I fell for you, even when I didn’t mean to.”

He smiled faintly.

“I can’t control my heart. But trust me—there’s no pressure on you. This bond? I’ve created it... and I’ll protect it—with full honesty. Even if it’s one-sided.”

His voice softened further.

“So you don’t have to worry anymore. Just... stop crying.”

He reached out and gently wiped her tears with his thumb.

She stood frozen—speechless. His words had shaken something deep within her.

Just then, a tiny voice interrupted their moment.

“Oh-ho! How long do I have to keep my eyes closed?”

Miransh’s dramatic complaint snapped both of them out of their little bubble.

Ivaan chuckled and said, “Right... we can’t keep someone waiting anymore.”

He walked over to Miransh and slowly removed his small hands from his eyes.

Miransh pouted, arms crossed.

“You both talk so much!”

Ivaan looked over at Jharna and teased,

“What can I do? Your mom’s like that.”

With a proud little smile, Miransh replied,

“Because she’s my momma!”

Ivaan laughed and leaned forward to feed him a spoonful.

Laughter danced around them—playful teasing, warm food, light hearts.

But Jharna...

She wasn’t laughing. Not on the outside.

For the first time, her teary eyes stayed fixed on Ivaan.

And her thoughts whispered:

How did you say something so big... with such ease?

How could you speak your heart like that—so openly, so honestly?

Maybe people with nothing to hide... really are like this. Just like you.

And people like me? The liars... the selfish ones... the ones carrying guilt

—maybe that’s why God took everything away from me.

Maybe I never deserved love.

Especially not yours.

Her heart ached with those silent words.

She blinked quickly and wiped her tears again—before anyone could notice.

Aashiya sat in the backseat of the cab, exhausted.

Her eyes kept fluttering shut, yawns escaping one after another. The day had drained her.

But suddenly—something felt off.

She frowned and glanced at her phone. The map showed a different route than where they were heading.

Her heart skipped slightly.

She leaned forward, her voice sharp with concern,

“Excuse me, which route are you taking? The map shows a different direction.”

The cab driver replied calmly, without turning,

“Shortcut, madam.”

Her expression stiffened.

“No. I said take the main road. Follow the map.”

He didn’t respond. Didn’t even slow down.

Her breath grew shallow. She raised her voice, panic starting to build.

“Hey! I’m talking to you. Stop the car! I’ll get down here!”

Still, no reaction.

Just then—a car zoomed ahead and blocked the cab’s path. The driver was forced to slam the brakes.

Aashiya’s heartbeat thundered in her chest. Her hands trembled. What was happening?

The car door opened—and Amaan stepped out.

The moment she saw him, relief flooded her. Her knees almost gave out.

Without a word, Amaan stormed to the cab, yanked the door open, and helped Aashiya out.

The cab driver shouted,

“Who the hell are you? Let her go—she’s coming with me!”

Amaan stood protectively in front of Aashiya, shielding her with his body.

He pulled up his sleeves, voice sharp and fearless,

“Oh really? Try taking her now.”

His eyes dared the man to come closer.

The driver’s confidence cracked. He muttered something under his breath,

turned the car around, and sped off into the night.

Amaan turned to Aashiya, eyes blazing.

“I told you I’d drop you home! But no—madam always has to do things her own way. If I hadn’t followed you, then what? Why do you always walk into trouble like—”

He stopped mid-sentence when he noticed the tears streaming down her face.

His anger melted instantly.

“Hey... don’t cry,” he said, gently stepping closer.

“It’s okay. Nothing happened. You’re safe now. Relax.”

But Aashiya didn’t say anything.

She just threw her arms around him.

He stiffened for a moment, shocked by the sudden hug. But then—slowly—his arms wrapped around her too. One hand stroked her hair gently, while his other hand rested on her back.

“Shhh... I’m here. Nothing’s going to happen to you,” he whispered.

Both their hearts were pounding—loud, real, alive.

After a few moments, he slowly pulled away and said quietly,

“It’s late. Let’s go.”

He turned toward his car. She followed without a word.

He opened the passenger door for her, and she got in silently.

Amaan walked around, got in on the driver’s side, and started the engine.

Neither of them spoke.

But in the quiet of the car... something had changed.

Something soft.

Something undeniable.

Sitara's Note

Sometimes, a single evening can change everything.
In this chapter, someone cried out in fear, and found love
wrapped in fairy lights. Someone ran from guilt, only to be held
in honesty. And someone tried to hide her tears—until a silent
hug became louder than all the words she couldn't say.
This story isn't about perfect people.
It's about the ones who are scared... but still stay.
The ones who push love away... but still feel it growing.
And maybe, like Jharna, like Aashiya...
Maybe we all fall a little before we realize we're safe.
If your heart ached in this chapter, or smiled, or just quietly
paused—
Then know you read it with the same heart I wrote it with.
— Yours,
Sitara Chandria