

Home, After Everything

Chapter 1: When Home Comes to You

A sunny Sunday, resonates well with the name of this day, doesn't it? For a corporate man, it is the day meant to be spent sleeping, going for a movie and if there is nothing to do then going to a nearby mall complex. For Vivan this Sunday was not the same as described above, he had been working for a year in a corporate company and his parents were going to visit him for the first time.

"Keep the box of litchis carefully!" Vivan's father instructed the driver as they neared their destination.

"Is this the society?" his mother asked, peering out of the car window.

"Yes, yes, this is the one," his father replied, adjusting his glasses. "I told him to meet us at the entrance. Let me call him."

Before he could dial, his mother noticed Vivan walking towards them—**dressed in a plain dark blue T-shirt and cargo shorts**. She tapped his father's shoulder, pointing. "There he is."

As Vivan reached them, his father frowned. "Where were you? I told you we'd be here in five minutes!"

"Papa, it's been half an hour since we last spoke," Vivan corrected.

"Alright, alright." His father waved it off before pointing to the large box of litchis. "Pick that up, it's heavy."

Vivan raised an eyebrow. "Wouldn't the luggage be heavier?" He turned to the driver, "Bhaiya, you pick up the box."

Before the driver could move, his father interrupted, "No, no! I'll handle the luggage. You pick up the box."

Shaking his head, Vivan paid the fare and lifted the box himself. As they walked towards the elevator, his father muttered, "If the driver had carried it, he would've asked for a bigger tip."

Upon entering the flat, his mother looked around. "It's quite big, isn't it?"

"It is," his father agreed, but then added, "though the ventilation isn't great."

"Papa always finds something to complain about," Vivan sighed as he placed the luggage beside the sofa.

His father sat down, stretching his legs. "Nothing in this world is perfect, beta."

"Vivan, where's the kitchen?" his mother asked.

"Come, I'll show you."

She walked in, taking in the space. "It's quite spacious." Then, turning to him, she asked, "What do you want to eat?"

Vivan smiled. "First, you take some rest. I'll decide in the meantime."

From the other side of the kitchen, his father's voice called out, "So untidy, Vivan!"

"Papa, I just woke up an hour ago, that's why..." Vivan explained.

His father frowned. "Why so late?"

“Had to work late on Saturday,” Vivan replied.

His mother came to his defense. “He’ll learn gradually.”

“It’s been a year now! When will he learn?” his father muttered.

“Let it be,” his mother said, diffusing the conversation. As they stepped out, she glanced at the smaller room beside the bedroom. “This room is quite compact.”

“That’s the study room. I’ve converted it into a bedroom,” Vivan explained.

That afternoon, his mother prepared his favorite home-cooked **Bihari meal—rice, dal (lentils), mashed potatoes, and fried eggplant.**

“The best lunch I’ve had in a year!” Vivan exclaimed, savoring every bite.

His mother continued serving. “Maa, you too sit,” he urged.

“I’ll eat later, first let me serve you both properly,” she said.

Vivan got up, gently pulling her towards a chair beside his father. “No, you’re sitting with us.”

“Wait, I’ll bring everything to the table,” he added, rushing to the kitchen. He brought out the remaining food and placed it before them.

The afternoon, wrapped in the warmth of a **Sooraj Barjatya movie**, slowly faded into a **cool, breezy evening**. The echoes of melodious songs and heartfelt dialogues lingered in the air.

“I’m going for a walk,” Vivan’s father announced, cleaning his spectacles.

“Where to?” his mother asked, clearing the tea cups from the table.

“Just around the society,” he replied.

As he stepped out, the **faint hum of evening conversations and the rhythmic chirping of crickets filled the air**. Vivan’s mother continued cleaning, the clinking of cups adding to the silence that had settled over the house.

The night deepened, dinner was served, and soon, **the home softened into stillness**.

Vivan lay on his bed, staring at the ceiling, lost in thought. His mother walked in, her footsteps light, as if not wanting to disturb him. Sitting beside him, she gently ran her fingers through his hair.

“How was your day?” she asked softly. “How’s work going?”

Vivan shifted slightly, his eyes still fixed on the ceiling. “It’s fine, Ma.”

She waited for him to say more, but when he didn’t, she sighed and smiled, continuing to stroke his hair.

“Don’t ask too many questions at once,” he murmured sleepily.

She chuckled, letting him be, her fingers still tracing gentle patterns in his hair.

Sunlight streamed through the curtains, filling the room with a soft glow. **Birds chirped outside as the house slowly came to life**. The faint clatter of utensils from the kitchen mixed with the comforting aroma of tea and toast.

The doorbell rang.

Vivan’s father, adjusting his glasses, went to open it.

A young woman stood outside, a bright smile on her face. “Good morning, Uncle!”

Vivan’s father looked at her curiously. “Good morning, beta... but who are you?”

Just then, Vivan walked out of his room, dressed in formals, ready for work. "She's my friend, **Avni**."

"Oh, is that so? Come in, beta!" his father said warmly.

Avni stepped inside, glancing around.

"I'll be ready in a couple of minutes," Vivan said before disappearing back into his room.

Vivan's father lifted his cup of tea. "Would you like some?"

"No, Uncle, I don't like tea," Avni replied with a polite smile.

Just then, Vivan returned, grabbing his shoes. "Give me a second," he said, quickly tying his laces.

His father turned to Avni. "You're from Delhi?"

"No, I'm from Ranchi," she answered.

Vivan's mother walked out of the kitchen, drying her hands on her saree. "Vivan, you never mentioned her before."

"She's my office colleague, Maa," he replied, fastening his watch.

"What does your father do, Avni?" his father asked, taking a sip of tea.

Before Avni could answer, Vivan swiftly got up. "Papa, you can ask for her biodata later—we're getting late." He motioned to Avni. "Let's go."

As they stepped out, Avni playfully nudged him. "You could've at least told me your parents were visiting!"

"I was going to... but I forgot," Vivan admitted with a sheepish grin.

She shook her head, amused. "Typical."

And with that, the two of them walked out, another day beginning in the city.



To be continued

Chapter 2: Echoes of a Simple Day

Vivan's mother was in the kitchen preparing the breakfast, the hot grilling pan producing a sizzling sound as time to time she tossed up the fried egg on it, the air filled up with the aroma of the boiling tea kept just beside the hot pan on the stove.

Vivan's father turned to the next page of the Times of India newspaper "did he wake up?"

Vivan's mother peeped through the small window of the kitchen which gave a good sight of Vivan's bedroom, "no he is still sleeping."

Her eyes swiftly gazed at the hanging clock in the hall, "it is 9 o'clock now!". She quickly poured the tea in a cup, prepared a plate of fried eggs with a couple of bread slices and got out of the kitchen.

"Here is your breakfast" she said, keeping it on the sofa table and ran quickly into Vivan's room.

She nudged Vivan's shoulder "Beta wake up, you are getting late!" This did not wake Vivan an inch from his sleep.

She snatched his blanket and started folding it, this made him realize the gentle touch of the fan's cool air. He got up and checked his phone.

"Maa, I am on leave today!" he said, rubbing his eyes.

"We will go for an outing today" he said while wearing his slippers.

His mother, while keeping the pillow aside said, "now go get freshen up!"

After getting freshen up, Vivan joined his father in the hall, "why so late Vivan?" asked his father.

"When I don't go to the office I wake up normally at this time " Vivan clarified.

His mother brought a cup of tea with the fried egg and a couple of slices of bread slices and gave it to Vivan and sat beside him on the sofa.

Vivan said "Maa, Avni will also join us." He took a sip of the tea, " no tea anywhere else will ever match this"

His father flipping through another newspaper said "no news, only nuisance advertisements!"

Vivan informed both "The show timing is 12 o'clock so quickly get ready "

The clock ticked at 11 o'clock and the doorbell rang, Vivan's father was cleaning his shoes, he got up and opened the door, "Good morning uncle" said Avni standing at the other side of the entrance.

Vivan's father gracefully said "ohh beta come, come, Vivan told us that you would join us."

Avni walked toward the sofa with Vivan's father following behind. She placed her purse down and settled into the armchair next to the sofa.

Vivan's father sat on the sofa facing Avni. "Vivan is getting ready," he informed her.

"Where is aunty?" she asked, looking for her towards the bedroom.

"She just completed her worship offering, " he continued "she must be getting ready. I have told her to do this right in the morning itself but she always gets late!"

"Oh, these things are time consuming as well," she said.

"Maa we are getting late" Vivan commanded aloud coming out of his room, adjusting his wrist watch.

Avni looked at him and gave a gentle wave of hand. He reciprocated in the same gesture and joined both of them.

"I hope papa is not troubling you" he said.

Avni gave a gentle smile towards his father convincing him that he is not troubling her.

His father instinctively remembered, "Haa beta, what does your father do?"

Avni responded, "My father is no more uncle"

Vivan's father instantly said "oh sorry..."

Avni continued, "I have my mother though."

In the meantime, Vivan's mother came out of the room, adorned in a beautiful purple color kurti with artistic embroidery on it paired along with a white salwar.

Vivan checked his watch ticking at eleven past thirty minutes, "All ready, we must leave now"

Avni got up adorning Vivan's mother with her graceful words, "oh, aunty you are looking so pretty!" She embraced her with a hug.

"Is it? So nice of you" Vivan's mother reciprocated.

Both Vivan and his father got up, "Vivan, I am near the elevator come fast" said his father and went out of the flat.

His mother said, "Vivan help me out to take out my footwear"

Vivan went towards the shoe rack which was kept just at the entrance of the flat.

Vivan asked, "Where is it?" searching it among a group of other footwear.

"It is in the fourth rack " instructed his mother, still figuring out where her footwear is.

In a while she said, "that black one." Vivan took it out and gave it to his mother and gave the car key to Avni, "you take out the car, I will join in a while." He went into the kitchen for a quick hand wash.

After a while he joined all of them in the basement, Avni and Vivan were sitting in the front seats, Avni took the driving seat. His parents were sitting at the back.

Vivan asked "have you set the map?" seeing on the mobile kept on the holding stand.

Avni fastened her seat belt "Yup, the nexus mall, isn't? "

"Yup, let's go!" he commanded.

The car filled with chatter as Vivan's childhood stories were shared—some interesting, while others were embarrassing for him, though he remained silent. With each story, Avni would glance at him with a warm laugh, and he would reciprocate with the same gesture, all while chartbuster songs of the Gen Z generation played in the background.

Vivan's father said, "what are these songs, play something classic."

Vivan connected his phone to the Bluetooth and played an old classic by Kishore Kumar, *'Aap Ki Aankhon Mein Kuch Mehke Hue Se Raaz Hain...'*—a taste in music

he had inherited from his father. The song created a soothing atmosphere in the car, which was suddenly interrupted when they hit unexpected traffic!

Vivan's father said, "We faced traffic on this road when we were coming home."

Vivan instructed, "Avni, when you reach the point next to the grocery shop, take a right turn."

In another ten minutes, they reached their destination. The mall buzzed with the chatter of strangers, its atmosphere alive with energy. Branded shops lined the walkways, drawing in excited shoppers—women admiring the latest collections while men trailed behind, carrying their shopping bags. As always, children ran around playfully, testing their parents' patience as they chased after them.

Vivan's mother said "quite a big mall, isn't it?"

Vivan's father looked around and said, 'Hmm, Patna doesn't have a mall complex like this.'

Vivan instructed, "We need to go to the third floor; the PVR is there."

All of them headed toward the escalator. Vivan's mother hesitated, unsure, as her knees were not very strong. She asked, "is there any elevator?"

Avni insisted "you can try aunty, it is not that hard"

Vivan's father interrupted, "she had her hernia operation twice, so she may not be able to do it!"

Vivan's mother tried to step onto the escalator, but each time she hesitated, pulling her foot back and forth.

People started piling up in the line to take the escalator but Vivan's mother was still struggling, seeing that Vivan decided to take the elevator.

As they stepped out of the elevator, Vivan's mother adjusted her hanging bag, still a little unsettled from the earlier hesitation. His father walked beside her, his hands folded behind his back, scanning the busy mall with mild disapproval. The floors gleamed under the bright lights, and the air carried a mix of freshly brewed coffee, baked goods, and the faint scent of expensive perfumes from nearby stores.

"Escalators... too fast for their own good," his father muttered, shaking his head.

Vivan chuckled. "Next time, we'll just take the elevator from the start."

They entered the cinema hall, where a cool blast of air-conditioning greeted them. The lobby was alive with chatter—groups of friends laughing, families deciding on snacks, and children tugging at their parents' hands, pointing at colorful posters of upcoming movies. The scent of buttered popcorn and caramelized nuts filled the air.

Vivan's mother slowed down near the concessions counter, her eyes scanning the menu. "Popcorn and samosas?" she asked, turning toward his father.

Vivan already knew what was coming. His father glanced at the prices and let out a soft huff. “They charge so much for something we can make at home!”

His mother sighed, her fingers playing with the corner of her saree. “It’s too expensive...” she agreed reluctantly.

Vivan grinned. “So, homemade samosas tonight?”

His mother’s eyes lit up. “Yes! We’ll fry them fresh when we get back.”

They took their seats inside the dimly lit theater, the giant screen flickering to life. The sound of rustling popcorn bags, hushed whispers, and the occasional ringtone echoed around them before the previews started. Vivan stole a glance at his parents—his father leaning back with his arms crossed, and his mother watching the screen with an amused smile, occasionally whispering comments to him.

As the credits rolled and the lights brightened, they made their way out of the hall, blending into the sea of people heading toward the exits. Outside, the evening air was cool, a gentle breeze carrying the scent of street food from vendors stationed just beyond the mall entrance. Neon signs flickered across the glass facade of the building, reflecting in puddles left behind by an earlier drizzle.

As they reached the parking lot, Avni turned to Vivan and reminded him, “Vivan, my mother wanted to meet you today.”

Vivan nodded. “Yeah, so when should we go?”

Avni glanced at his parents. "We could go now. Uncle and Aunty can join too."

Vivan's father gave a tired smile and shook his head. "It's okay, beta. You both go ahead. It was too much for us today." His voice carried the weight of the long day, and his mother gave a small nod in agreement.

Vivan looked at them, understanding their exhaustion. "Alright, we'll take an auto. You both can drive home and rest."

His father patted his shoulder approvingly. "Definitely!"

Outside the mall complex, the night air carried a hint of moisture from the evening drizzle. The streets were alive with honking vehicles, flashing billboards, and the distant sound of street vendors calling out their wares. Under the golden glow of the streetlights, Vivan booked an auto.

As it pulled up, Avni stepped in first, followed by Vivan. He glanced back just in time to see his parents' car merging into traffic, the red taillights disappearing into the busy street.

With a soft hum, the auto rickshaw took off, weaving through the lively city, carrying them toward Avni's home.



