

CHAPTER 8

NEW NEIGHBORHERS

Many days, weeks and even months went by, life settled into a same comfortable routine for Yash, Prathamesh, and their friends. They would wake up, go to school, attend lectures, enjoy canteen fun, return to lectures, head back to their rooms, eat at the mess, and then sleep. It was the usual blend of daily fun and enjoyment, with nothing particularly extraordinary happening. The most exciting event had been Prathamesh's first date with Srushti.

When Prathamesh returned from that date, he eagerly recounted the experience to Yash. They had initially headed to the school office, but Srushti quickly realized it was closed. In truth, it hadn't been closed; this was just an excuse Srushti made to create another opportunity for Prathamesh to extend their time together, which he grabbed, thanks to Yash's encouragement. They then went to the campus café, where they enjoyed snacks and coffee, and engaged in deep conversations about their hobbies, favorite life anecdotes, and families.

During the date, Prathamesh mustered the courage to confess his feelings for Srushti. Although she didn't respond with a clear "yes," they agreed to go on another date. Since then, they had gone on a few more dates and had started spending time together almost daily. While these regular meetups could be considered dates if they were less frequent, their consistency suggested the beginnings of a relationship.

Srushti hadn't given a direct "yes" yet, and Prathamesh hadn't pressed for a definitive answer. However, her words and actions—like saying she enjoyed spending time with him, expressing her love for his company, and asking him not to leave—were strong indications of her affection. Their private moments were increasingly intimate, with romantic gestures such as holding hands and Srushti resting her head on Prathamesh's shoulder. Although Prathamesh hadn't mentioned to Yash whether they had kissed yet, their open sharing of details suggested they hadn't. Nonetheless, it was clear that a healthy and supportive relationship was blossoming between them.

As the end of the school year approached, only a few weeks remained of their first year. The school had finished its syllabus, and they had scheduled some revision lectures for each subject. Today, Yash had a revision lecture on Human Aging. This was crucial for him since he had missed many sessions of this particular lecture due to his tendency to oversleep. The Human Aging lectures were often held early in the morning, and Yash's sleepy habits had kept him from attending them regularly. Although Human Aging was a basic conceptual theory subject and not particularly difficult, Yash knew he needed to catch up. So, early that morning, he reluctantly dragged himself out of bed and headed to class, determined to make the most of the revision lecture.

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The teacher adjusted her glasses and began, "Although Human Aging isn't a particularly extensive topic and most of you are already familiar with it, I won't dwell too much on the details. I'll just cover the key points that will be important for your exams."

Yash focused intently on the teacher, ignoring the chatter of his nearby friends.

"A human's lifespan typically ranges from 80 to 100 years. The different stages of life and the activities associated with each age range constitute what we refer to as human aging. From 0 to 10 years, you experience childhood—a time spent with your family, clan, and within your galaxy. It's a period of enjoyment without the burden of responsibilities.

"Next comes the school phase, which generally spans from 10 to 23 years and is divided into three phases. Phase 1, from 10 to 17 years, is the most important and compulsory part of your schooling. During this phase, you learn to wield lending weapons and, if possible, acquire a keystone weapon by age 15. If you don't obtain a keystone weapon by then, you have until 17 to try. If you still don't have one by 17, you can either leave school after completing Phase 1 with your basic lending weapon skills or continue in Phase 1 for as many years as it takes to obtain a keystone weapon.

"Phase 2, from 17 to 19 years, involves tasks and exams that qualify you for Phase 3. However, this phase is optional. It includes government missions and practical

exams from your respective galaxy. Only about 10% to 15% of students who appear for Phase 2 qualify for Phase 3.

"In Phase 3, from 19 to 23 years, there are no traditional teachers, but guides who help you learn advanced levels of power, various types of power, blended powers, and even enigma powers. It's important to note that learning advanced powers can be also done without Phase 3, but learning it is crucial for ranking up in the authority and government system, which leads to higher posts and greater respect.

"After 23, until death, you work under the government, completing missions and striving to rank up for better respect and financial rewards. If you choose to leave education after Phase 1, you can start government missions at the early age of 17-18.

"You may want to review some examples of government missions mentioned in your textbooks. While they might not be on the exam, it's better to be prepared.

"That concludes our session on Human Aging. Thank you for your attentive listening."

Yash scribbled down the important points, feeling more confident about the topic as the teacher wrapped up the lecture.

HUMAN AGE:

Life span: 80 – 100 years.

0 – 10: With family and clan.

10 – 17: Phase 1 school

17 – 19: Phase 2 school (optional)

19 – 23: Phase 3 school (optional)

23 – till death: Government works, own life

As the session concluded, everyone began to leave the classroom. Yash joined his friends, and they headed out together.

While walking through the hallway, they noticed a new announcement on the noticeboard near the schedule board.

The notice read, "Attention 1st Year Students: Due to unforeseen circumstances, the practical subjects scheduled for the 1st year will now be conducted in the 2nd year. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause."

Yash and his friends exchanged glances, absorbing the news. Prathamesh then spoke up, "Oh right, I remember Vedant mentioned once that we were supposed to have practicals in the 1st year."

"Really? I didn't even know we had practicals," Ram replied, sounding surprised.

Yash felt a bit off about the whole situation but decided to shrug it off and keep moving.

Suddenly, Sunny approached Yash excitedly. "Hey, I almost forgot to tell you, my team and I are moving to a room near yours today!"

Yash's eyes lit up. "Huh? How come?"

Sunny explained, "We had some leakages in our previous hostel room, so we applied for a room change. Today, the 7th-year students are finishing their exams and heading home, so a lot of rooms opened up. We got assigned H12-A1, which is in the same direction as H10."

Putting a hand on Sunny's shoulder, Yash grinned. "Really? That's awesome, buddy. We can eat together and hang out in each other's rooms!"

"Yeah, definitely," Sunny said with a big smile.

The group continued walking, chatting excitedly about the change in living arrangements and the fun times ahead.

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(Somewhere in the Zorgonax Dominion, a boy is bound and gagged, struggling futilely against his restraints.)

Astarch of Galaxar: So, this is the one who caught one of our strongest agents?

Astarch of Celestius: Yes. He put up quite a fight. During a mission from Orionis, this boy discovered our agent. Despite his efforts, our man managed to escape.

Astarch of Galaxar: Huh. He was a real problem for us. Good work capturing him. But why did it take so long?

Astarch of Celestius: He's the top student in the 7th year of Phase 1 and a formidable agent of Orionis, personally known to the Astarch of Orionis. Capturing him at school would have triggered an investigation. But today, the 7th-year students returned home, severing ties with the school. Even if there's an investigation, it will be easier to handle.

Astarch of Galaxar: What? He's only 17? And already an agent for Orionis? Damn, this brat. But good thinking, Astarch of Celestius. Well done.

Astarch of Celestius: His strength and powers were so significant that Astarch of Nebulon himself went to capture him.

Astarch of Galaxar: Is he that powerful?

Astarch of Nebulon: Yes. At just 17, he's a veteran. He has mastered fire at level 2 and lightning at level 1. We were fortunate that these power have no blending or he have

learnt that too. That's why I used my Mind Power to capture him discreetly, without a trace.

Astarch of Galaxar: Excellent work, Astarch of Nebulon. And you, boy, you might have risen to the ace soon, but you chose the wrong fight. Astarch of Nebulon, use your Mind Power one more time to eliminate this pest without leaving any evidence.

(The boy tries to scream and struggles desperately, his muffled cries echoing through the room.)

Astarch of Nebulon: As you wish. Mind Explosion.

(Astarch of Nebulon uses his power, and the boy goes dead.)

Astarch of Galaxar: Good. Handle any fallout with the authorities if it arises.

Astarch of Celestius: Yes, my lord. Leave it to me.