

## CHAPTER 6

**YOUNSTERS DRIVE**

After a hectic day filled with long lectures, it was finally time for some relaxation and sharing moments with friends.

Yash, Srushti, Ram, and Prathamesh headed together towards the canteen as per their regular routine. As they walked, Ram was teasing Srushti, and their playful banter filled the air with laughter. Yash, however, noticed something different about Prathamesh. He seemed unusually happy, a subtle smile playing at the corners of his lips, and a certain lightness in his step.

Curious, Yash put a hand on Prathamesh's shoulder. "Why are you smiling so much? Something good happen?" he asked with an intrigued grin.

Prathamesh's eyes widened slightly, and a faint blush crept up his cheeks. "Huh? Nothing! What are you talking about?" he said, trying to downplay his obvious joy. His attempt to hide it only made his happiness more evident, his eyes sparkling with unspoken excitement.

Yash raised an eyebrow, unconvinced. After a brief pause, Prathamesh quickly pointed ahead. "Look, there they are," he said, directing their attention to where Sunny and the others were sitting. His face was still lit with that mysterious smile, a clear indication that something special was on his mind.

The group joined their friends at the table and resumed their usual gossip.

"Did you two have a lecture together today?" Misa asked, gesturing towards Yash and Srushti.

"Yep! How did you know?" Yash replied, a bit surprised.

"I saw you both entering WB earlier," Misa said with a smile.

"By the way, guys, I was wondering why Gojo isn't always hanging out with us lately. Is he always with his so-called girlfriends?" Kaustubh said, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah, that's true. Where is he, Prathamesh?" Levi chimed in.

"Not sure! Can't really force him to be with us all the time, I guess," Prathamesh replied with a shrug.

"Forget about him, guys. Look over here," Srushti said, pointing to a nearby cat. "Isn't she adorable? Look at her, ulululu kitty!" She went over to the cat and started petting it, her voice sweet and playful. The cat, in turn, looked a bit embarrassed but content.

Everyone chuckled at the sight, but Yash noticed something else. Prathamesh's eyes were glued to Srushti, a soft smile spreading across his face as he watched her pet the cat. His happiness was almost palpable, and while the others were focused on the cat, Yash couldn't help but notice Prathamesh's captivated expression.

Whispering to Prathamesh, "You really like cats, don't you?" Yash teased, nudging him gently.

Prathamesh snapped out of his reverie, his cheeks flushing slightly. "Uh, yeah, I guess. They're... cute."

Yash chuckled, his suspicion confirmed. It wasn't the cat that Prathamesh found so captivating—it was Srushti. And as everyone else continued their lighthearted conversation, Yash silently made a mental note to keep an eye on this budding interest.

Soon, everyone finished their meal and checked their schedules. Yash and Prathamesh discovered they had no more lectures for the day. They said their goodbyes to the others and headed home.

\* \* \*

Upon arriving at their room, Yash threw his bag on the bed and collapsed onto it. Prathamesh, being more disciplined, headed to the washroom first. As usual, Gojo was nowhere to be found, likely spending time in the garden with his new girlfriend. Lying on his back and staring at the ceiling, Yash shouted, "Argh! So tired. Room, sweet room."

"I'm craving ice cream!" he exclaimed, his childish antics in full swing.

Coming out of the washroom, Prathamesh smirked, "Are you trying to be cute in front of me?"

"Why would you bother? You only find Srushti cute, not me," Yash teased with a grin.

Blushing, Prathamesh threw a pillow at Yash. "Don't make up your own stories," he said, trying to hide his embarrassment.

"Don't act so tough in front of me. We live together, remember? I can practically hear your heart jumping for joy every time you see Srushti," Yash teased, his eyes twinkling with mischief. "And you don't even talk to her much. You just sink into shyness."

Prathamesh blushed even more, trying to defend himself. "That's not true! I just...don't know what to say sometimes."

Yash chuckled as he sat up, his eyes gleaming with mischief. "Alright, time for a plan."

"A plan? For what?" Prathamesh asked, his curiosity piqued.

Yash flashed a mischievous grin. "Mission Srushti."

Prathamesh looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"

Yash's grin widened. "A plan to set you up with Srushti."

Prathamesh's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "How?"

Leaning in, Yash lowered his voice. "Let's strategize. First, we need to identify your competition. Any ideas?"

Prathamesh pondered for a moment. "Well, maybe Ram? They seemed pretty close today with all their cute bickering."

"And Levi," Yash added, continuing, "Since they live with her, we can consider these two as your potential competitors. And out of our circle, I don't think she has many friends she's particularly close to. So, our first aim is to find out if either of these two guys has a crush on Srushti. If not, then we can move on to the next plan."

"Seems logical, but how do we proceed?" Prathamesh asked.

"I've got that covered," Yash said confidently. "Before coming back to the room, I took care of everything. When I went to the washroom with Ram, I started a random discussion and slipped in some questions. Based on that, I found out that Ram doesn't like Srushti romantically. Instead, they have more of a brother-sister kind of relationship."

"Really?" Prathamesh's face lit up with relief. "And what about Levi?"

"Don't worry, I've got a plan for that too," Yash assured him. "I didn't get a chance to discuss with Levi, so I just invited him over to our room after dinner."

"Why did you do that?" Prathamesh asked, a hint of tension in his voice.

Yash grinned. "To talk, of course. Actually, I overheard him asking Kaustubh for some power theory notes, and then it hit me that Mikasa had given me her first-year notes

a while back. So, I told Levi that I had the notes he wanted. That way, he'll be in our room tonight, and we can have a chat with him to see if he's interested in Srushti."

Prathamesh's face was full of excitement. "That's a great plan! You've done most of the work, and I didn't even have to tell you about my feelings."

"You don't need to, buddy. I can feel your emotions," Yash said warmly, a smile spreading across his face. "So, get ready for tonight."

Suddenly, Prathamesh wrapped Yash in a hug, expressing his gratitude. Yash was momentarily taken aback but then hugged him back. "I'd do anything for you," he said sincerely.

\* \* \*

Yash and Prathamesh had just finished their dinner. Gojo hadn't shown up, which meant he was likely staying over at a friend's place for the night—probably a girl. As they made their way back to H10B from the mess, they spotted Levi.

"Hey guys," Levi greeted.

"Hey, come on, let's head to our room," Yash said.

Once they entered the room, Yash began searching for the notes.

"But the exams are still a long way off. Why are you starting to study so early?" Prathamesh teased, giving him a playful look.

"It's not for me! Srushti needed those notes, so I was searching for her," Levi explained.

Yash and Prathamesh exchanged anxious glances. Both felt a twinge of fear, and Prathamesh's hope seemed to wane. Yash was nervous too, but suddenly, an idea sparked in his mind.

Pausing his search, Yash got excited and, with a mischievous grin, draped his arm around Levi. "Oh, all this trouble for Srushti, huh? Looks like something's going on between you two!"

Prathamesh, catching on to Yash's strategy, joined in. "Oh, is that the story? Tell us more about what's going on between you two."

"No, no, no! It's nothing like that, guys. I don't like her; I was just helping her," Levi said, waving his hands defensively, a nervous expression on his face.

"Sure, asking about notes as a friend is one thing, but coming all the way from H7 to H10 just for her notes? That seems a bit much for mere friendship, don't you think? You can tell us—we won't spill the beans," Yash teased, pinching Levi's arm playfully. With a sly grin, he added, "But if you don't tell us, I might just spread the word."

Levi quickly shook his head. "No, really, it's not like that." After a moment, he sighed. "Alright, I'll tell you the truth."

Yash and Prathamesh exchanged a look, their smiles hiding their inner worry. They had an unspoken conversation through their expressions. "Truth? That means he likes her," Prathamesh thought. "No, no, no! Let's just hear him out," Yash reassured him mentally. "It doesn't matter. I know I'm out of the race now," Prathamesh lamented. Aloud, they both said, "The truth?"

Levi stood up, motioning for them to calm down. "Alright, calm down, guys. Actually, we're from the same clan. We're cousins. The reason we didn't tell anyone is that we didn't want our relationship to affect how others interacted with us. If people knew we were cousins, no boy would become her friend because of me, and the same might happen to me."

Yash and Prathamesh exchanged another look, this time with genuine relief and happiness. Their silent conversation resumed. "I knew it, see?" Yash thought

triumphantly. "Yeah, you were right. I'm so happy," Prathamesh mentally shouted, his heart lifting.

"And Srushti was about to come for the notes, but she was heading to a friend's place, so she asked me to get them instead. That's all. Please don't tell anyone about this—I don't want it to spread around," Levi explained.

Yash and Prathamesh, relieved, agreed quickly. "Okay, we won't tell anyone," Prathamesh said gently.

Suddenly, Yash again sparked. "So, does that mean you both are doing this so she or you can have relationships with other people without anyone being afraid of a cousin's watchful eye?"

Levi nodded with a smile. "Yeah, exactly. If she likes someone, she can go for it, and the same goes for me."

Yash and Prathamesh felt elated, their hearts soaring with joy. "Hmm, interesting! So that's the story," Prathamesh said, a bit more relaxed now.

Returning to his search, Yash said, "Alright, let me find those notes for you."

"Thanks, guys," Levi said with a relieved smile.

After a moment, Yash exclaimed, "Got it! Here are the Power Theory notes," handing the book to Levi.

Levi took the book gratefully. "Thanks a lot. I should get going now. Bye-bye," he said, heading out.

"Bye!" Yash and Prathamesh waved as Levi left the room.

Once the door closed, they exchanged a look of shared excitement and relief, and shouted, “Yayyyyy!”

“Phase 1 of Mission Srushti accomplished!” Yash screamed with excitement, raising his arms overhead.

“Yes!” Prathamesh shouted, striking a victory pose. But then he paused, looking worried. “Phase 1?”

With a sharp, confident pose, Yash said with a mischievous sparkle in his eye, “Yes. The main mission starts tomorrow.”

“What? Tomorrow?” Prathamesh exclaimed, his face full of apprehension.

“Yep! Now go to sleep. I’ll tell you all about it tomorrow,” Yash said, turning to his bed and facing away from Prathamesh.

“Why tomorrow?” Prathamesh protested, his eyebrows knitting together in frustration.

Yash turned off the lights, pulled his blanket up, and said, “Just go to sleep! I’ll give you all the details tomorrow.”

Prathamesh silently fumed, but then he let out a sigh and climbed into his bed. “Alright, good night. I trust you,” he said, his voice calmer now. He drifted off to sleep with a smile on his face.

Yash too smiled to himself in the darkness, thinking, “I hope I can make her fall for you tomorrow, Prathamesh.” With that hopeful thought, he too drifted into a peaceful sleep.