



SECTION ONE

THE AWAKENING

Chapter 1

WHISPERS IN THE MIST

“Strange,” Navya whispered. “The winds feel... different tonight.”

The moon hung low, like a half-shut eye watching from the sky. Pine trees rustled softly as if trading secrets with the wind. Far off, an owl’s lonely call pierced the stillness that had settled over Saraswati Valley Academy.

Navya stood by the tall arched window of her dorm room, her silhouette framed in moonlight. Her eyes traced the hills in the distance — dark, hushed outlines that bordered the valley like ancient sentinels. The forests beyond seemed to breathe — not just with wind, but with something older. Something watching.

Unseen by the rest of the world, something had stirred.

Two floors below, Prisha sat cross-legged on her bed, the moonlight brushing the open pages of her old copy of the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*. A quiet ritual she had inherited from her grandfather — one that lived on in whispers and verses.

Her fingers glided across the delicate script as her lips formed the ancient mantra:

**“Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya
Saccidanandarūpaya
Viśvotpattyadihetave...”**

“I bow to Lord Vasudeva, whose form is eternal, full of knowledge and bliss; who is the cause of the universe’s creation, sustenance, and dissolution.”

She closed her eyes and whispered the meaning aloud. The words hummed like a soft pulse beneath her skin, as if the verse itself remembered something she did not. How could something so old feel so... alive?

A light knock pulled her back.

Navya stepped in.

“Can’t sleep?” Prisha asked, already knowing.

Navya shrugged. “Neither can you. Reading your favourite grandpa scriptures again?”

Her voice teased, but her eyes lingered on the glowing page. For all her sarcasm, even Navya felt the pull of the words — though she rarely admitted it.

“They speak to me,” Prisha said quietly. “Sometimes I feel like... they’re waiting.”

Navya leaned against the bedpost, arms folded. “Strange night, isn’t it? The forest feels... awake.”

The silence that followed wasn’t empty. It was full. Full of unspoken questions, quiet stirrings, and a thread — invisible but taut — that connected them to something just beyond their reach.

Earlier that morning...

Saraswati Valley Academy sat like a crown carved from stone, nestled deep in the green folds of Uttarakhand’s hills, a few quiet kilometres outside Dehradun.

Built in the late 19th century by Sir Harold Statham — a British officer enchanted by Indian philosophy — the school had grown into a rare blend of old-world charm and modern excellence. His vision? To build a place where science, art, culture, and the ancient wisdom of India could breathe together.

A long driveway lined with Sal trees led to a sandstone building crowned by a tall white clocktower. Classrooms branched out like wings, and beyond them, past a lotus pond, the hostels sat like sleepy guardians of teenage dreams.

It was late autumn. The mornings carried the crisp perfume of pine and wildflowers. Evenings cloaked the valley in fog soft as old wool.

Inside the school’s grand auditorium, excitement bubbled like soda fizz.

“... and first place in Class 11 goes to — *Baani Gandhi*!”

Principal Bhargava’s calm, resonant voice echoed across the room.

Polite applause followed as Baani, graceful as ever, walked up to receive her medal. Sharp-witted, soft-spoken, and humble to the core — even the quieter students nodded in approval.

Prisha and Navya clapped too, exchanging a private smile.

Two rows behind, Agastya's arms folded across his chest, his jaw tight. Ishaan, Simran, and Kabir — his usual orbit — exchanged dramatic eye-rolls.

“And now,” the principal continued, “Special recognition for innovation in the Tech Club goes to — *Manas Agarwal!*”

A ripple of laughter followed as Manas stood, hair in wild disarray, looking as though he had just been struck by lightning. Which, knowing Manas, wasn’t entirely off.

Professor Aalekh — the ever-jovial PE instructor — leaned towards Raghav.

“Your friend’s brain might short-circuit one day,” he chuckled.

“As long as he doesn’t fry mine,” Raghav replied.

Aalekh laughed. “That’s the spirit, young man!”

Later, in the Mess Hall...

The scent of hot parathas and tomato soup hung in the air. Wooden benches creaked under laughing students as the hall filled with clatter, chaos, and ketchup debates.

Mrs. Smita — queen of the kitchen and mess supervisor extraordinaire — patrolled like a general in a flowery apron.

“Navya! Eat your vegetables. You skipped breakfast, too!”

“Aunty,” Navya groaned, “you sound worse than my mom.”

“That’s a compliment,” Mrs. Smita replied, pointing her ladle like a weapon of affection.

Prisha giggled. “Navya, one day you’ll *miss* this food.”

Navya rolled her eyes. “Maybe... but *today* isn’t that day.”

In the Library...

By evening, the library whispered a different kind of peace. Old books breathed softly under golden lamplight. A grandfather clock ticked like a patient sage.

Mrs. Pragya, the librarian, noticed Prisha flipping through a book.

“You’ve found my favourite guest,” she said warmly.

“It feels... alive,” Prisha replied.

“It is,” Mrs. Pragya smiled. “Knowledge never dies. Scriptures don’t just sit. They wait — for the right hearts to awaken them.”

Navya, standing nearby, muttered, "Still looks like just another heavy book with difficult words."

Mrs. Pragya chuckled. "Even the wildest rivers begin as a hidden spring. You, too, will find your stream, Navya."

Neither of them knew then — how true those words would be.

Back to the Mess...

Standing by the window once more, Navya whispered, "Do you ever feel like something's... calling us?"

Prisha gently closed the *Bhagavatam*. Her fingers lingered on the cover, tracing the embossed script.

"I do. But I don't know what it means... yet."

Outside, the wind whispered through the valley. The hills stood quiet, old, listening.

And deep within the forest — past where eyes could see and reason could follow — something ancient stirred.

The Guardians of Dharma were beginning to awaken.

सच्चिदानन्दरूपाय विश्वोत्पत्त्यादिहेतवे ।
तापत्रय विनाशाय श्रीकृष्णाय वर्यं नमः ॥

Meaning

*We bow to Lord Shri Krishna,
who is of the nature of existence, consciousness, and bliss;
who is the cause of the universe's creation and dissolution;
and who removes the threefold sufferings of life.*

(Bhagavatam: Canto 1, Chapter 1, Shloka 1)

