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## Neha Speaks

*S*AMIR BHAIYYA,

*I don't know how and when you will read this, this letter that I've got to write anyway. I am always composing replies to that last mail of yours, the one you penned only to me though I am not happy about the exclusivity. But then I have told you that before.*

*Anyway, let me tell you about this boy I met. You could call Hari my boyfriend, though I don't. He is a student, can you believe it? Remember how we hated every IIT student who lived on campus? We met in this totally strange manner, there was something about him that drew me from the very beginning.*

*Not very good looking or anything, nor super smart but there he was, this silly bumbler. As you can guess, Dad and Mom have no clue, something that I've learnt to live with since*

*you left but you can well imagine what will happen if Dad finds out. Remember how he called cops to arrest a man who whistled at me at the campus bus stop? And the time he changed the home phone number because a male classmate called for notes? He wants to bring up his daughter right. I am his mission in life. He doesn't want to make the same mistake twice. Did you have to do that to me, Bhaiyya?*

*I just want to tell you, don't worry about me for I know girls should be good. Sometimes I feel this guy is only interested in getting physical. Other girls who have boyfriends tell me all boys are the same, want the same thing. But can I tell you something? Even I want the same. No, no I haven't done anything yet. But then, every now and then I get curious, start imagining what Hari would do if I let him. Is thinking that a bad thing?*

*Oh no, here I go, throwing questions at you again. Let me tell you more about Hari. He has two friends - Ryan and Alok. They are nuts. Now don't think I have started liking IIT students or anything - just that these guys are different. For one, they can barely remain students with their five-point something GPAs.*

*I know what you are thinking, they are the kind of students Dad would hate, and you are thinking she is hobnobbing with them for precisely that reason. You are wrong, Bhaiyya. You know on my last birthday, they broke into our house, these loafers I am talking about. Hari came into my room and gave me flowers plucked from our garden! I hope Dad never finds out about him the wrong way. And I hope I can keep meeting him forever. Though there is so much more I don't yet know about Hari.*



*My plan is the day Hari gets a job, I will introduce him to Dad. I mean, Dad will still flip his lid, but at least there would be something going for Hari. Right now, he is a little bit of a loser if you ask me. Sorry, if I am being mean. But in some ways, he is. For one thing, he is besotted with Ryan. "Ryan this, Ryan that," bugs me no end sometimes. I don't think this Ryan guy is all that cool. Wears branded clothes, but that is only because his parents are loaded. I personally think behind all this guy's aggression there is a vacuum.*

*See, that is the thing with these IIT guys and their college, they all are too wrapped up in the bricks and walls to know who they really are and what they really want. I want to tell them – before you get all gung-ho about working for the future, work out your past and present but that will just sound so grandma-ish and I am, well, so young.*

*Well, that is all I shall write for now. I promise to write again, and I promise to be good. But do not tell Dad and Mom what I've been babbling about. See, I kept your last promise and have not told anyone about your letter to me how much ever that broke me, so keep mine. Yes, I know Mom would not have been able to take it. She hardly speaks these days anyway. Why did you leave us Bhaiyya? It isn't fair, you know that, right?*

*Missing you,  
Neha*

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### One More Year Later

WE WERE DRINKING ON THE INSTI ROOF. THIRD YEAR students now, alcohol no longer a novelty. This meant we could drink less and not throw up every time to certify having a good time. We were drowning our sorrows today for two reasons. Firstly, after a year of working the files, the mechanical engineering department had coolly rejected Ryan's lube project proposal. Secondly, I had messed up yet another viva. When it came to screwing vivas, I am the man you want!

"Screw the lube project. I have wasted too much time on it. But look at you, Hari. It is so bloody typical of you. Why do you get so tongue-tied?" Ryan said, in whose veins confidence corpuscles flowed larger than red.

"I wish I knew." I squinted, frustrated.

"You know the answer to the viva questions. You know the answers, right?" That was Alok.