

22

Ryan Speaks

I BLEW IT. DAMN, FATSO WAS IN THE ICU BATTLING TO breathe. That really was disaster, eh? This whole Operation Pendulum was a mistake – in hindsight of course. It could all have been different you know. If Fatso had just not tried to save a buck and make that phone call, or better yet, if he hadn't come at all. If nothing else, at least he should have known better than to jump. What is it with Alok, or for that matter, even with Hari? When will they grow up?

Now you will say, I really don't want to accept that it was my fault. Ryan will blame anyone – his parents, his friends, his college, even god – anyone but himself. He is that boy with the grudge!

I don't blame you. You are reading Hari's version. How can he be the bad guy, right? After all, Hari is just a bumbling IITian who can't get his grades or life in order. He is just kind-hearted

and confused – hopelessly in love, physically unappealing, wants to keep his friends together, fumbles in vivas – whatever, whatever, whatever. Can't help but feel sorry for that guy right?

Did it ever occur to you that at one level Mr Sorryboy has a layer to him that he doesn't want to unpeel and will not bring up in his, yes that is the key word – HIS, book? Like he will never really bring up his parents. Or if you think he will reveal the big bad story about why his vivas get screwed up – sorry, no luck there. Or why does he always make fun of Alok's family – I mean it is funny but it isn't what you could call sensitive.

No, he won't go into all that. Maybe I can touch on it at least (too much and he'll edit it right out). But before that, I want to come back to Alok. Man – you don't jump nine stories because some old bozos do a Disco on you. Or if you can't pay for the car that will buy your sis a loser for the rest of her life. Why is he so stupid? If he was so mad, he should have pushed me instead.

You know what, despite what you might think, I like Alok. Yes, we fight, we argue and sometimes I hate his mugger-whiner guts. But at the end of the day, the guy lives a selfless life. He doesn't really want to get that high average in the quiz. Damn, he doesn't even want to be an IITian (but then, who would). It is something he does for his folks back home, day after day after day. Just as he has been serving his dad since he was twelve, locked in that room full of books, medicines and misery. That is why he never grew up. That is why he thinks its okay to – ugh – cry at twenty.

And that is why he never had fun. But does that mean he doesn't want to? Why do you think he stuck with us? Or why did he come back? Because at one level, he knew that he wasn't

Venkat. He was just a boy who wanted to be an artist – and couldn't become one. And he was a boy who never had real friends in his life – but he wanted them. And when I saved him from that hideous ragging, it wasn't something that happened to him every day. So he stuck with me, and fought with me, and cursed me and hated me – while all he was doing was fighting, cursing and hating himself. I shook his convictions – one didn't have to care for parents at all costs, one didn't have to accept the system, one didn't have to sacrifice fun. I pushed him, he resisted and liked it at the same time. And I pushed some more, and more, until I went too far. God, please let him live.

But Hari? Him I want to ask a few questions. Like what's with your parents Hari? Is there going to be no chapter covering that? What about your Dad – the colonel in the army? What is the rule in the house – no TV, no music, no laughing loud? It is all for discipline, right?

And your mother – she turns silent for days, right? Oh, wait a minute, I am not supposed to talk about that. What about the belt your father hangs in the closet. Do you still dream of that sometimes, Hari? He told you not to answer back. If you answer your superiors back, you will be punished. Severely. Is it viva-time? Does it still hurt, Hari?

Okay, I think I am pushing it. Hari is okay, he just has some issues he doesn't want to talk about. And just because one writes a book doesn't mean one has to bare all. After all, this is a book about IIT – the place where one makes a future. What is the point of digging up the past?

So let me come back to IIT. Hari (with more vodka inside him than he can handle) once told me his view on friendship.

He said, "Ryan, you are stupid to want to sacrifice so much for your friends. In some ways, it is the same madness that Alok has for his family. Both of you have lost touch with what you really want."

Profound eh? So, I asked him if he was in touch with what he wanted. And he nodded.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"To be you."

"What?" I hadn't heard right!

"I want Neha," he said and passed out, the horny bastard.

So what's the deal here – he may not live for others, but he wants to be like others? Confused, I tell you.