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Kaju-burfi

TWO MONTHS INTO OUR SUSPENDED SEMESTER, ALOK finally returned to Kumaon. The casts were still on, and doctors said that even when they came off, he would be left with a slight limp in his left leg. Small price to pay for one's life I guess, though it meant Alok would never forget that night for the rest of his life.

We visited him daily in the hospital, as we had nothing else to do anyway. We never discussed going home for the semester. Somehow, we knew we had to stay in Kumaon and be near each other. No one really talked to us much. If they did, they only wanted to know the inside story – what we did, what was the Disco like, why did Alok jump etc. It suited us to stick to our rooms and limit our outside trips to the hospital.

Alok swore us into keeping his high jump a secret from his family. His bones healed gradually and after a month he could

at least hop-and-walk to the toilet and not embarrass himself with company there. Though docs had warned us not to mention the fall, Ryan couldn't resist asking once, "Stupid or what?"

But Alok kept silent. A couple of times, Prof Veera visited at the hospital. He kept our spirits high, saying how he would try to get us to take extra course-work in the last semester to complete our credits. He even unsuccessfully tried talking to Cherian on a mercy plea.

Prof Veera even came to Kumaon, to welcome Alok back. "So Tiger, you are back in your den," he greeted.

Alok was sitting on my bed, his torso propped up on pillows. "Sir, you shouldn't have bothered to come."

"No big deal," Prof Veera dismissed and took out a box from his bag, "Here have some sweets. On Alok's return home and for something else."

Alok looked at the box and almost snatched it out of Prof Veera's hand. When it comes to food, Fatso forgets all formalities. The box contained *kaju-burfi*, his all-time favourite.

"You shouldn't have, sir," he said, the three pieces stuffed in his mouth muffling his voice.

"Just enjoy guys. Thirteen bones broken and home in two months, that is worth celebrating," Prof Veera said, stroking Alok's head.

We were happy at Alok's return too, and now at the box of *kaju-burfi*. If only Alok would leave the box alone for one second.

"Sir, what was the other reason for the sweets?" Ryan eventually enquired.

"Yes, of course. I have some good news for you guys finally," Prof Veera said.

"What? Cherian wants to do another Disco?" Ryan said.

"Easy Ryan," Prof Veera said, "I know it has not been cool for you guys. But this time I arranged it through the Dean."

"What?" Alok and I said in unison.

"You remember the lube project? Well, Prof Cherian never approved further research, but I went to the Dean and said we would like to revise and re-submit our proposal based on Prof Cherian's feedback."

"I am not working on any feedback from that bastard," Ryan declared.

"Will you relax, Ryan? Sir, why would we re-submit?" I said.

"That is where lies my idea. If they allowed us to re-submit, we will do some more experimentation in the lab to prove that our lube additives do have potential. In some ways, doing some of the research at the proposal stage," Prof Veera said.

"And?" Ryan squinted his eyes.

"And that means you guys can help do those experiments. I asked the Dean if he would allow you guys to work in the lab to revise the work we had done, since it will be a productive use of your time. And the good news is the Dean agreed. Of course, on a non-credit basis."

Ryan snatched the box away from Alok's hands, took two pieces of the sweets, and sat down to light a cigarette. "Will someone explain what will be the point of this? Working our butts off for no reason," he said.

"There maybe a benefit," Prof Veera said, pulling the cigarette out of Ryan's mouth and stubbing it on the floor, "for one, you could later explain the absence in your grade sheet. And I don't know, if they like the proposal this time, you may be allowed extra credit for this work in the next semester."

"Really?" Alok said, "You mean we will be able to graduate like normal students, in four years?"

"Wow! Sounds like you gave it a lot of thought Prof Veera," I said.

"Cherian will never allow it. I am not falling for this," Ryan said.

"Maybe he won't. But if the work is good and the Dean likes it, who knows? At least you have something to do in your spare time."

"We have plenty to do in our spare time," Ryan said.

"Ryan, will you talk properly to Prof Veera," I said. Somehow, the Disco had changed my attitude toward Ryan. It had become easier for me to tell him things he didn't want to hear. He didn't argue much either.

"It is okay Hari. Ryan is obviously mistrustful of everything about the insti. But guys, this is the only chance you got. And if you do more work on the lube proposal, who knows, we might get an industry sponsor this time?"

"Sir is right, Ryan. And we can't do this without you. It is your project."

"You guys really want to do this?" Ryan said.

"Yes," Alok and I said.

"On one condition then," Ryan said.

"What?" Prof Veera said.

"I get the rest of the *kaju-burfi*," Ryan said.

"Ten o' clock in my lab then, we start tomorrow," Prof Veera said even as we burst into laughter.