The Silverstone Hug

Ajith and Vijay — two lives, one afternoon at Silverstone

SUBASH

CHAPTER 1

Secunderabad, 1971

Ajith Kumar was born on the first of May 1971 in Secunderabad, in what was then Andhra Pradesh and is today Telangana.

He was the middle of three sons. His father, P. Subramaniam — known to almost everyone as Mani — was a Palakkad Iyer from Kerala. His mother, Mohini, was a Sindhi from Kolkata. That is an unusual pairing by the standards of the time and the place, and it is the first thing worth noticing about the household Ajith grew up in: it was not, in any straightforward sense, a Tamil household. He would spend his career as one of the most recognisable faces in Tamil cinema while carrying, by his own cheerful admission, an imperfect command of the language.

"I wish I knew Tamil better," he told an interviewer on Sun TV in 2020. He was fifty at the time and had been a leading man for twenty-five years. There is something disarming in the fact that he simply said it.

His brothers went in different directions. Anil took a degree at IIT Madras and became an entrepreneur. Anup went his own way. Ajith dropped out of Asan Memorial Senior Secondary School in the

tenth standard.

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Here is the detail that decides the rest of this book.

Ajith's father worked for a pharmaceutical company based in Mumbai. One of the managing directors at that company raced cars — he drove for a team owned by Vijay Mallya — and was closely connected to a well-known tuner.

So somewhere in the mid to late nineteen-seventies, a boy of about five or six was taken to see motor racing.

He has never really recovered.

Everything else in his life — the films, the fame, the several hundred crores of box office, the two decades of being one of the two or three most photographed men in south India — sits on top of a five-year-old at a racetrack. When people ask him why a man with his career keeps strapping himself into prototypes at fifty-five, they tend to expect an answer about adrenaline or ego or midlife.

What he actually says is this: **"I do racing for the soul. It soothes me."**

Not *thrills*. Soothes.

* * *

The story continues.

Twenty-one chapters and an epilogue. 71 pages.

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