

## **FRIENDSHIP**

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It was the last day of the final examination. Anupam was going to be a graduate within a couple of weeks. Though he had prepared well, he was under tremendous pressure. The aspirations his family members had thrust upon him made him lose his sleep. In the morning, he took his bath, dressed himself and reached the mess well before his scheduled time. The thought that there won't be a long queue offered him some relief. He collected his plate. But the sight of his favourite dish, *alu paratha* could not delight him. He sat at a corner and started having his breakfast.

“Do you have earphones, brother?” The voice startled him. There was a mess worker standing in front of him. Anupam was a bit surprised. He had seen the man serving food in the mess but they never exchanged words. There were hundreds of students coming to the mess thrice every day for their food but hardly anyone had the time to indulge in any kind of conversation with the mess workers. No one even felt the necessity.

“Yes, I do”, he replied, hesitantly.

“Can you give it to me for fifteen minutes? Before you finish your tiffin, I'll come back. I promise.” Reluctantly, Anupam took the earphones out of his bag and gave it to him. He saw the man disappear with his cycle.

Though the man was out of his sight, he couldn't really get the thought about his earphones out of his mind. After some time, apprehensive thoughts gripped his mind, “What if the man doesn't come back...if he denies ever taking my earphones... No, I shouldn't have given it to him. He must have planned this after keeping an eye on me for some time...otherwise how he would know that I have earphones with me. Ah! What a stupid I am.” Somehow, he finished his breakfast and was waiting for the man to return. Twenty minutes passed. There was no trace of him. Anupam was growing impatient. He was getting angry with himself for such an act of stupidity.

The wrist-watch showed nine o'clock. It was a little more than half an hour since the man had gone. He was almost sure that he had been tricked. With a sad face he started walking slowly towards the exam hall. But, suddenly, he saw the man running towards him with the earphones in his hand.

“Sorry! I was late because my cycle...” he couldn't complete the sentence. Anupam snatched the earphones from his hand and with an awkward smile, hurried towards the exam hall.

The paper went well as expected. Anupam was happy. It was lunchtime. He entered the mess while discussing the paper with his friends. He was surprised to find one piece of extra chicken in his plate. He looked up at the person serving chicken. The man was smiling at him. Anupam bent his head down for a while. He faced the man for a second time with a smiling face and then, made way for others in the queue.