

The HairBand Story

By Sparrow (Divya Shetty)

On a scorching August afternoon in 2012, my post-lunch lethargy led me to abandon the classroom and indulge in some leisurely window shopping along FC Road. With each step, I intended to adhere strictly to window shopping, yet my resolve crumbled as I found myself impulsively purchasing various trinkets that caught my eye—a scarf, a dainty belt, stylish eyeglass frames, bangles, to name just a few. Laden with shopping bags in both hands, I stood before a captivating display outside a store, mesmerized by a collection of metallic star-shaped earrings.

As I contemplated my purchases, a voice broke through the shopping buzz. "Beta, for your birthday, buy whatever you want," the voice said. I turned to the source and encountered a man in worn clothes, smeared with grease and oil stains. He balanced a vehicle tire on his right shoulder while holding the hand of a young girl, no older than eight. There was an air of excitement around them.

The little girl's eyes danced across the display, finally fixing on a beautiful baby pink hairband adorned with a rose, beads, and glitter. She couldn't resist trying it on. The shop attendant, clearly uncomfortable with her touch, shifted uneasily. The hairband looked perfect on her, and the joy reflected in her eyes made it a picture-worthy moment. "Beautiful," I thought to myself, "like a May queen."

The man in shabby attire turned to the shop attendant and asked about the price of the hairband. "Rs 350/-," came the reply. I witnessed a visible shrinking of the man before me. He bit his lower lip, his eyebrows twitching in a dilemma, as his daughter observed him silently. From his shirt pocket, he produced a single Rs 100/- bill. He tried to hide his inner conflict with a smile and asked his daughter, "Do you really like this one?"

Facing the attendant, he pleaded, "Could you offer a discount? It's for her birthday, please?" The attendant scoffed, delivering a harsh, "Fixed-price, take-it-or-leave-it."

Desperation welled up in the man as he rummaged through his pants for some spare change. Then, unexpectedly, the little girl spoke up in a calm voice, "It's not very nice! Let's not buy this. I don't like it that much." She smiled innocently at her father. "Let's find something else. Shall we, Baba?"

I watched as her father's eyes misted up. "Are you sure?" he asked her.

"Yes, Baba, let's go," she replied, gently tugging him out of the shop.

The shop attendant turned to me, his tone polite, and asked, "What can I assist you with, Madam?" A lump formed in my throat, and I couldn't respond. I stood there, overwhelmed by shame for my reckless spending habits. This young girl had humbled me with her profound understanding of the family's financial situation and her effortless ability to preserve her father's dignity.

In that moment, I contemplated whether I should offer them the money. But I questioned my audacity to impose my charity on this remarkable father-daughter duo. Who was I to make her father feel small? I had no right.

By the end of that afternoon, I had learned far more than I would have sitting through a day of lectures.