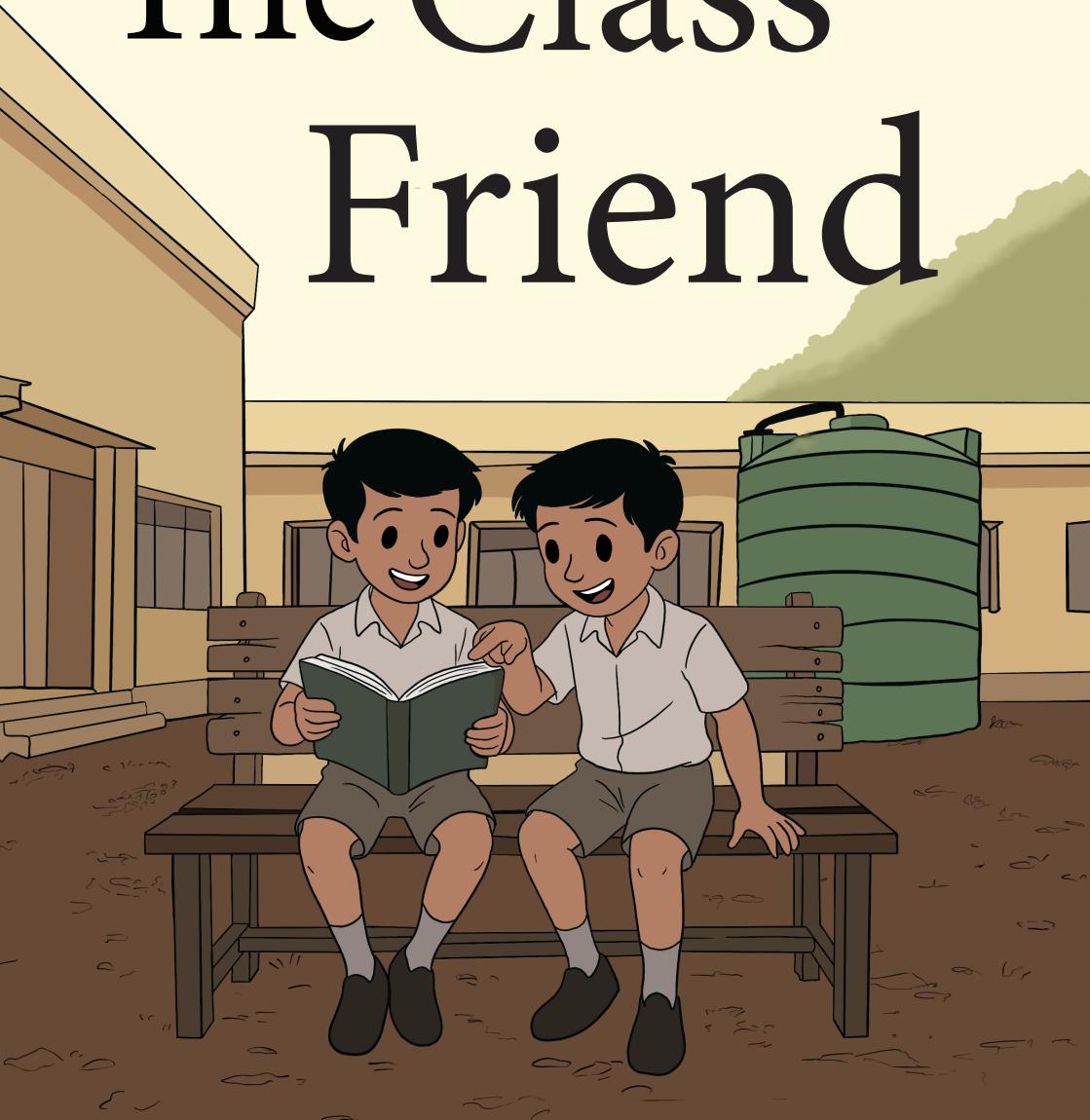


The Class Friend



It was around a quarter past nine on a calm morning when Mohit Sarkar stood in front of the mirror adjusting his tie, preparing to leave for work. Just then, his wife entered the room and told him that someone was holding on the telephone asking for him. The caller had given only a single name—"Joy." The name struck Mohit like an old forgotten melody. It carried him back instantly to his school days, to a boy named Joydev Bose, handsome, intelligent, and always cheerful. But after thirty long years of silence, the sudden call felt strange, leaving Mohit puzzled about why an old classmate would contact him after so long.





When Mohit picked up the receiver, a warm but faintly unfamiliar voice greeted him. The man introduced himself as Joydev from Ballygunj School and spoke with a tone of hesitant excitement, as if meeting Mohit again meant something important. Mohit could not recognize the voice at all, but the man clearly remembered him. Joy said he wished to meet and talk in person, and although Mohit felt no real eagerness, he politely agreed and fixed the time for seven in the evening. After the call ended, a quiet sense of uneasiness remained, as though the past had unexpectedly opened a forgotten door.

On the way to his office, driving his new light blue Standard car, Mohit found himself wandering deep into memories. He remembered school days filled with friendship, rivalry, and innocent fun. He recalled how he, Shankar, and Joy often competed for the top three positions in class, how he and Joy had shared the same bench, solved sums together, and played football in the playground.



Childhood bonds that once felt permanent had quietly dissolved the moment school ended. Life had simply carried them away in different directions, leaving behind only faint memories.

After school, Mohit's life unfolded smoothly. Coming from a wealthy, respected family, he had studied in the best institutions and settled into a good, well-paying job soon after college. Joy, however, moved away because of his father's transferable post, and their friendship faded without any dramatic ending—just silence and distance. Mohit hardly missed him; new college friends and later office colleagues filled his life. Yet the name Joy remained tucked somewhere deep in his mind—a stronger memory than he expected, one that resurfaced fully with the morning's unexpected phone call.



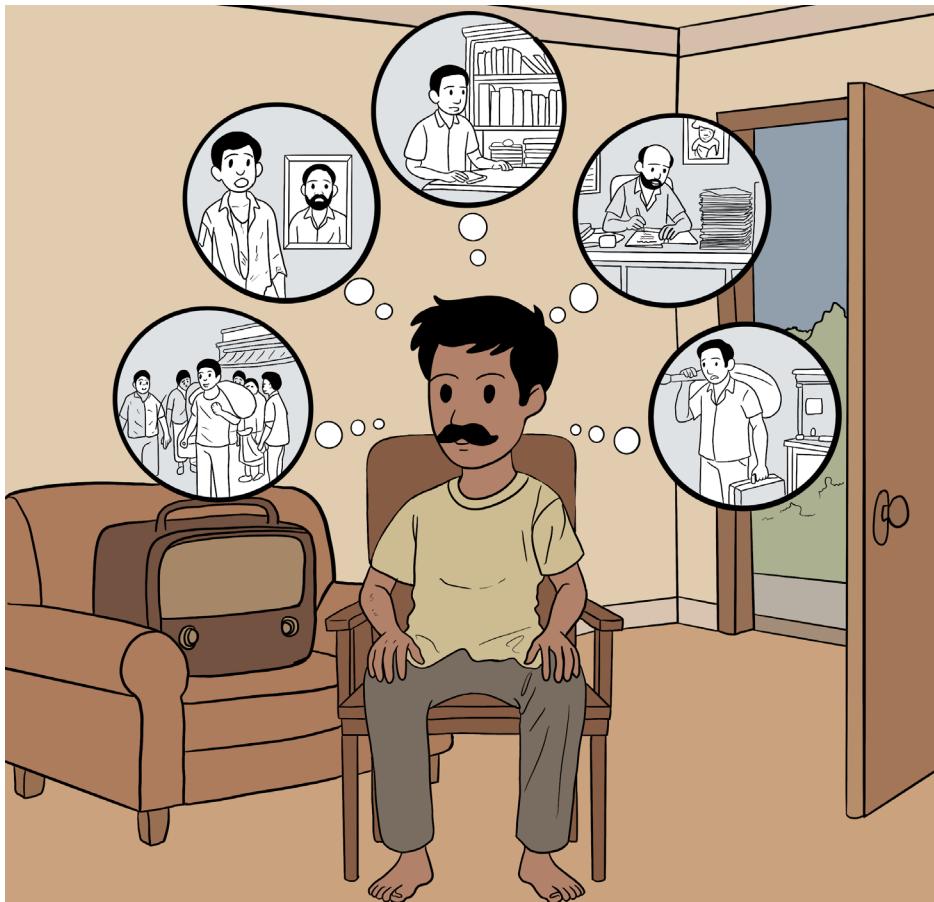


That evening when Mohit returned home to his flat on Lee Road, he had entirely forgotten about Joy's visit. It was only when Bipin, his servant, handed him a torn scrap of exercise-book paper with the words "Joydev Bose, as per appointment" that Mohit remembered. He hurriedly switched off the radio, wondering why he had made no special arrangements. He felt a brief guilt that he hadn't even asked his wife to prepare snacks or tea. As he waited for Joy to enter, a mixture of curiosity and discomfort filled him—what would an old classmate look like after thirty years?

When Bipin finally let the visitor in, Mohit froze. The man looked nothing like the cheerful schoolboy he remembered—tired, shabby, and worn down. His loose grey trousers and faded bush shirt seemed as neglected as he was. Mohit felt the ground slip beneath him. This thin, weary stranger claimed to be Joy, yet the change was so extreme that Mohit could barely believe it.

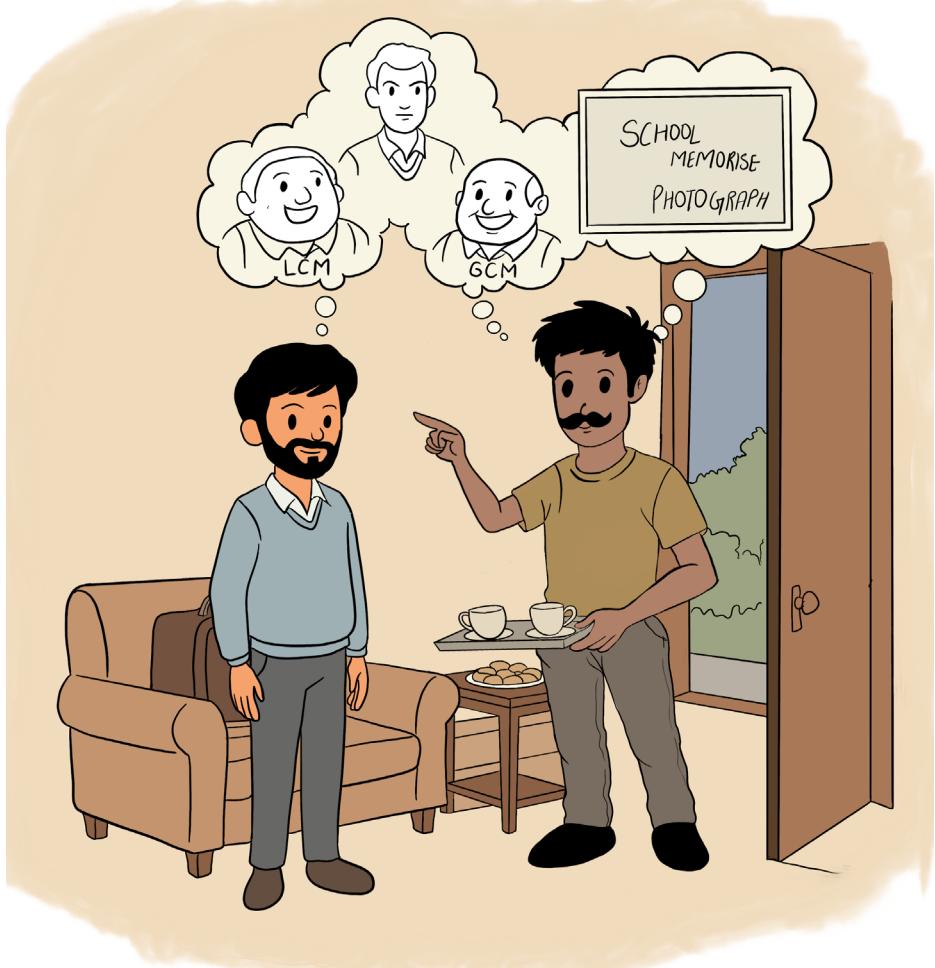


The man's appearance unsettled Mohit—sunburnt skin, hollow cheeks, sunken eyes, and a nearly bald head with a few uneven strands by the ears. His untrimmed salt-and-pepper stubble and stained teeth showed years of neglect. Mohit couldn't find even a shadow of Joy's childhood charm, yet the stranger spoke to him with calm familiarity. Trying to hide his shock, Mohit wondered how time had changed someone so completely.



Joy began sharing the story of his difficult life. After school, his father had died suddenly, and with no financial support, he was forced to abandon his studies and look for work. He drifted endlessly from one small job to another—sometimes as a clerk, sometimes a helper, sometimes a salesman—never finding stability. He spoke openly about the struggles that had shaped his worn-out appearance. Mohit listened with polite sympathy, still questioning whether this man was truly the Joy he once knew, but the weight in Joy's voice made the suffering sound real.

To ease the tension, Mohit called for tea, and Bipin soon brought two cups along with a plate of biscuits. Joy brightened instantly and began recalling their school memories in lively detail. He remembered their teachers—LCM the PT sir, GCM the math teacher, and even the group photograph taken behind the water tank. Every detail matched perfectly. As Joy spoke, the room filled with echoes of the past, and Mohit slowly began to believe that despite his changed face, this man truly was his old classmate.



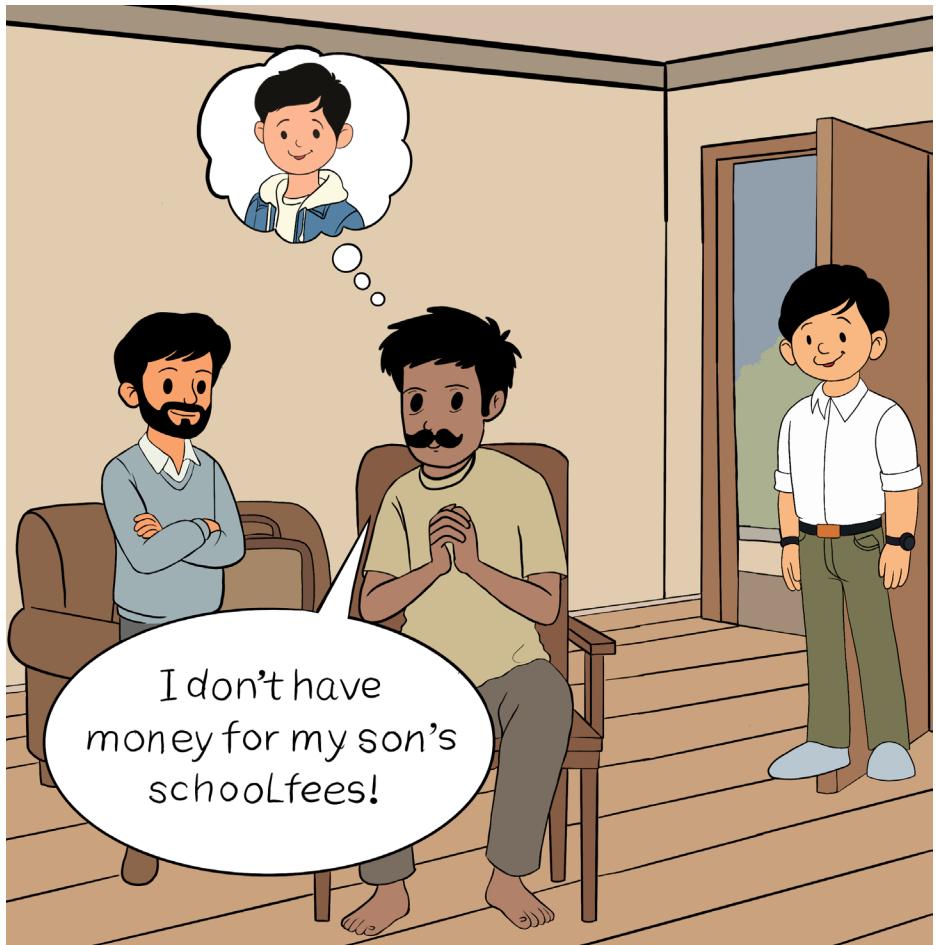
Joy then grew emotional, reflecting on how school days were the happiest time of his life. He spoke of laughter, games, innocence—things he had never again experienced with the same joy.

When Mohit carefully asked why he now looked so much older than his age, Joy answered with a single word: "Struggle." His voice carried years of exhaustion. He explained that relentless hardship, sleepless nights, and constant insecurity had drained the vitality from his face and body, aging him far beyond his actual years.



Joy continued explaining—baldness ran in his family, and poor diet had hollowed his cheeks. He talked about drifting from job to job, never being able to hold one for long. Just then Bipin entered again with hot samosas and sweets, and Joy eagerly helped himself, speaking between bites. Mohit observed silently, sensing more clearly that Joy's visit had a deeper motive. The warmth of nostalgia seemed only a doorway to something else—something Joy was slowly approaching.

Joy finally confessed that his son's exams were nearing and he didn't have the money for the fees. He spoke of sleepless nights and fear for the boy's future, his voice heavy with worry. Mohit felt a mix of sympathy and irritation tightening in his chest—after thirty long years, this was the real reason Joy had sought him out, a truth their entire conversation had been quietly leading toward



Joy hesitated before asking for a hundred—or perhaps a hundred-and-fifty—rupees, his voice uncertain. Mohit, unwilling to help, quickly claimed he had no cash at home. When Joy asked if he could return the next day, Mohit lied that he would be out of town, and after a brief pause, they settled on Sunday morning.

Moments after Joy left, Mohit's friend Banikanto arrived. When Mohit described the visitor, Banikanto casually remarked that he had often seen the same man at the horse races. The comment irritated Mohit even more, and he firmly decided he would avoid Joy completely when he showed up again.



Mohit returned from Baruipur to learn that Joy had come and gone, which relieved him, but the next morning Bipin handed him a note saying Joy had sprained his foot and was sending his son instead. Soon a fourteen-year-old boy arrived—polite, neat, and soft-spoken—and in his eyes and gentle smile, Mohit instantly recognized the real Joy he had once known. Something in him softened, and he quietly opened his safe to give the boy the money. As the child walked away, Mohit felt an unexpected calm, realizing he had finally recognized Joy not in the man who visited, but in the innocent face of his son.

Thirty years ago, they were inseperable

When Mohit gets a sudden phone call from his long-lost classmate Joydev, he feels more confused than excited. Thirty years after their bright schooldays, he is stunned to find Joy transformed into a tired, worn-out man who bears no trace of the boy he once knew. As their meeting unfolds, Mohit begins to wonder whether this stranger is truly his old friend—or just another impostor in a city full of tricks.

But everything changes when a quiet boy arrives in Joy's place, revealing a truth Mohit never expected. Blending nostalgia, deception, and rediscovery, this story shows how time reshapes people—and how the past can return in the most surprising ways.