

The Night Train at Deoli (1988)
By Ruskin Bond (India)

DIRECTIONS: After reading Ruskin Bond's "The Night Train at Deoli," complete the activities that follow.

1. The relationship between the narrator and the basket seller at the Deoli station exists almost entirely through the exchange of glances and is initiated when the narrator departs from his usual schedule to see what he can of the place beyond the railway platform.

Following are all the passages from the story about the basket seller that involve seeing, looking, eyes, or the way visual images are interpreted or remembered. Re-read the passages and look for any patterns or common features, then write one to two paragraphs in which you explain the role of visual imagery in the story. You obviously do not have to account for every single instance of such imagery, but you must discuss at least TWO specific instances in explaining your theory as to why the author incorporates so much of this visual imagery.

She saw that I was looking at her intently, but at first she pretended not to notice (2)

She had pale skin, set off by shiny black hair, and dark, troubled eyes. And then those eyes, searching and eloquent, met mine (2).

But when she moved on, I found myself leaving my seat and going to the carriage door, and stood waiting on platform, looking the other way (2).

We stood looking at each other for what seemed a very long time, and she said, 'Are you sure you don't want a basket?' (2).

She was alone on the platform and she did not move, but she was looking at me and smiling (2).

I watched her until the signal box came in the way, and then the jungle hid the station, but I could still see her standing there alone (2)...

I could not rid my mind of the picture of the girl's face and her dark, smouldering eyes (2).

But when I reached Dehra the incident became blurred and distant' for there were other things to occupy my mind (2-3).

I was looking out for the girl as the train drew into the station, and I felt an unexpected thrill when I saw her walking up the platform (3).

When she saw me, she smiled. She was pleased that I remembered her (3).

She did not go down the length of the train selling baskets, but came straight to the tea stall; her dark eyes were suddenly filled with light. We said nothing for some time but we couldn't have been more eloquent (3).

I could not bear the thought of having to watch her recede into the distance of Deoli station (3).

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She was with me for the remainder of the journey, and for long after. All that year she was a bright, living thing (3).

The train came to Deoli and I looked up and down the platform, but I could not see the girl anywhere (3).

But I paced up and down the platform and stared over the railings at the station yard; all I saw was a mango tree and a dusty road leading into the jungle (4).

As Deoli platform receded, I decided that one day I would have to break journey there, spend a day in the town, make enquiries and find the girl who had stolen my heart with nothing but a look from her dark, impatient eyes (4).

I went to Dehra again in the summer and when, in the early hours of the morning, the night train drew into Deoli station, I looked up and down the platform for signs of the girl, knowing I wouldn't find her but hoping just the same (4).

In the last few years I have passed through Deoli many times, and I always look out of the carriage window, half expecting to see the same unchanged face smiling up at me (5).

I prefer to keep hoping and dreaming, and looking out of the window up and down that lonely platform, waiting for the girl with the baskets (5).

2. On page two Ruskin Bond includes the following passage:

I felt the impulse to put her on the train there and then, and take her away with me; I could not bear the thought of having to watch her recede into the distance of Deoli station. I took the baskets from her hand and put them down on the ground. She put out her hand for one of them, but I caught her hand and held it.

‘I have to go to Delhi,’ I said.

She nodded, ‘I do not have to go anywhere.’

The guard blew his whistle for the train to leave and how I hated the guard for doing that.

‘I will come again,’ I said. ‘Will you be here?’

She nodded again, and, as she nodded, the bell clanged and the train slid forward. I had to wrench my hand away from the girl and run for the moving train.

Compare the previous passage to the entirety of page five and explain what the author seems to be saying about EITHER the nature of happiness or the possibility of happiness OR love or the possibility of love. Use at least two quotations from these passages in developing your answer (one from the above passage and one from page five).

3. On page 5, the narrator speaks of how he half expects to see her as “unchanged” and refers to his stopping (or not stopping) as a “game” he plays with himself. Clearly the girl has taken on some larger meaning for him (representing more than just a character from his past). Assuming that this is the case, what does the girl signify or symbolize for the narrator? What does he intend for her to signify to the reader? Explain.