

The Night Train at Deoli 61

afraid of discovering what really happened to the girl. Perhaps she was no longer in Deoli, perhaps she was married, perhaps she had fallen ill. . . .

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. I wonder what happens in Deoli, behind the station walls. But I will never break my journey there. It may spoil my game. I prefer to keep hoping and dreaming, and looking out of the window up and down the lonely platform, waiting for the girl with the baskets.

I never break my journey at Deoli, but I pass through as often as I

Notes

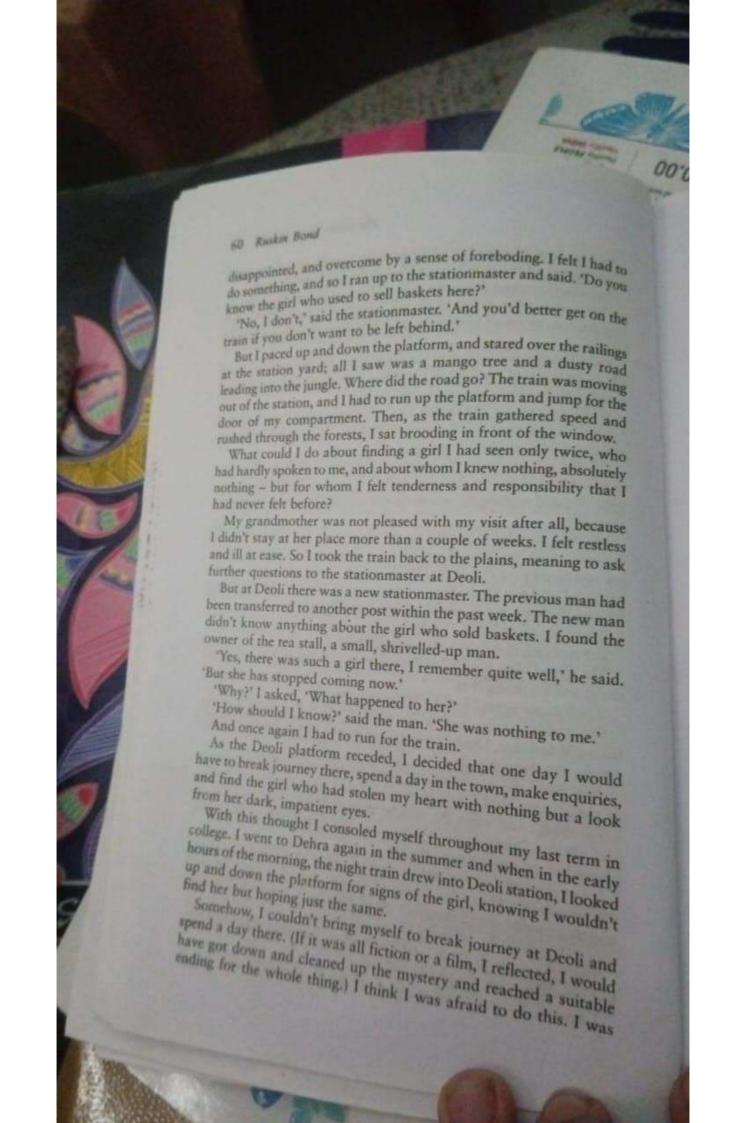
to Du

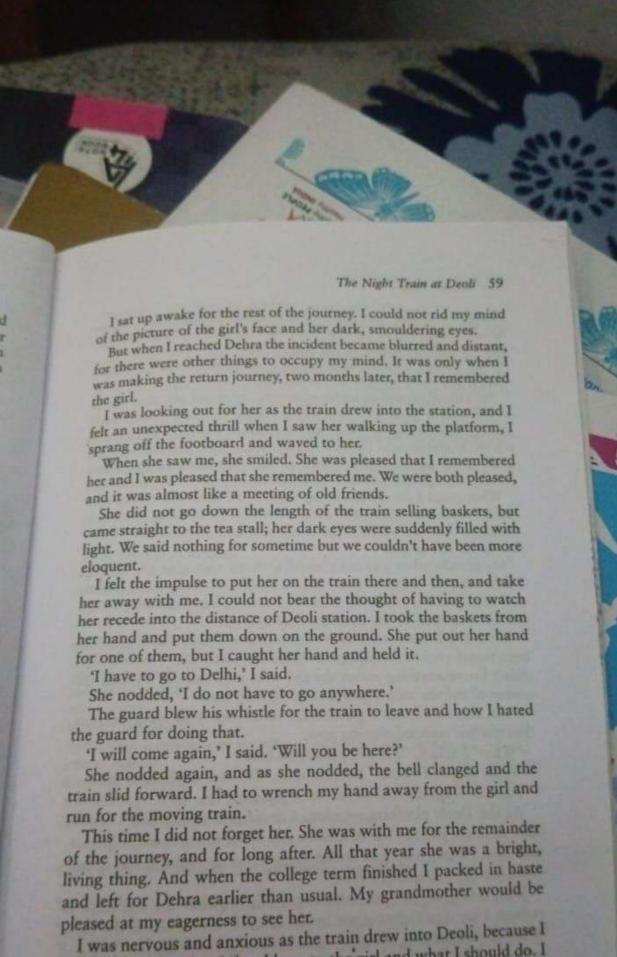
le

Terai: Himalayan foothills eloquent: expressive clanging: ringing shuddered: shook jolted. jerked smouldering: glowing with deep emotion became blurred and distant: faded in memory sprang. jumped recede: fade away slid: moved wrench: pull sharply foreboding, a feeling that something unpleasant will happen paced: walked brooding: worrying shrivelled-up: small and shrunken break . . . journey. stop midway in one's journey

Give brief answers to the following questions

- 1. Why did the narrator go to Dehra every summer?
- 2. How does he describe the station at Deoli?
- 3. Describe in your own words the narrator's first meeting with the girl who sold baskets.
- 4. What effect did she have on him when he next met her?
- 5. Why did he feel disappointed on reaching Deoli the next summer?
- 6. Was he able to trace the girl? What did he suppose happened to her?
- 7. What does the ending tell us about the narrator?



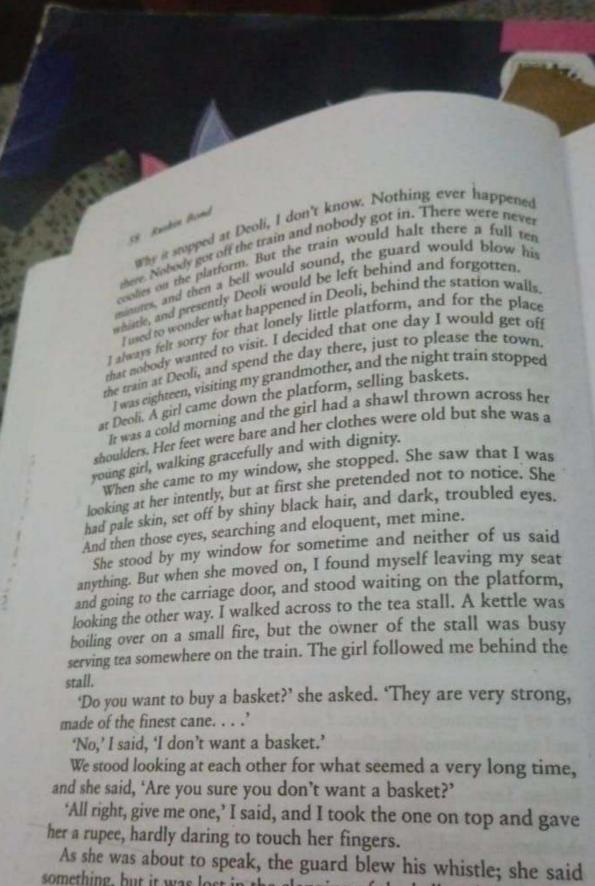


was wondering what I should say to the girl and what I should do. I was determined that I wouldn't stand helplessly before her, hardly able to speak or do anything about my feelings.

The train came to Deoli, and I looked up and down the platform,

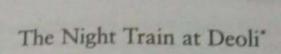
but I could not see the girl anywhere.

I opened the door and stepped off the footboard. I was deeply



As she was about to speak, the guard blew his whistle; she said something, but it was lost in the clanging of the bell and the hissing of the engine. I had to run back to my compartment. The carriage shuddered and jolted forward.

I watched her as the platform slipped away. She was alone on the platform and she did not move, but she was looking at me and smiling. 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



RUSKIN BOND

Ruskin Bono was born in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh in 1934 and grew up in Jamnagar (Gujarat), Dehra Dun and Shimia. A prolific writer, he has more than a hundred short stories, essays and novels to his credit, many of which are for children. His first novel, The Room on the Roof, written when he was seventeen, received the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957. In 1992, he received the Sahitya Akademi Award for English Writing in India, for his book Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra. His themes include the joys and pains of childhood, love, nature, and the travails of growing up. Written in simple and lucid prose, his stories celebrate ordinary moments and everyday experiences. He was awarded a Padmashree in 1999.

'The Night Train at Deoli' is a story of adolescent infatuation presented with great sensitivity. It expresses the narrator's love for a poor basket-seller whom he encounters at a small railway station while on his way to Dehra. He meets the girl only twice, never to see her again, but she remains in his memory ever after. The story reminds us of Wordsworth's 'The Solitary Reaper,' a frequently made comparison that has earned Bond the soubriquet 'Indian Wordsworth'.

When I was at college I used to spend my summer vacations in Dehra, at my grandmother's place. I would leave the plains early in May and return late in July. Deoli was a small station about thirty miles from Dehra; it marked the beginning of the heavy jungles of the Indian Terai.

The train would reach Deoli at about five in the morning, when the station would be dimly lit with electric bulbs and oil lamps, and the jungle across the railway tracks would just be visible in the faint light of dawn. Deoli had only one platform, an office for the stationmaster and a waiting room. The platform boasted of a tea stall, a fruit vendor, and a few stray dogs; not much else, because the train stopped there for only ten minutes before rushing on into the forests.

^{*} From Ruskin Bond's The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2004.