

[This is a true story, and the sentences about certain communities were really spoken by passengers on the train. These are not author's opinion. This story is narrated to me by my grandmother - the old lady in the train.]

The Train

The scene opens with Sadhna and her mother taking a train back to their home. Sadhna had given birth to a baby boy the last day, with three eyes, who didn't last even a minute. For that reason, she was very sad and her mother was trying to console her.

Next, enters a young lady, around 20, with an infant, and a young man. She was dark and beautiful, with curly hairs. By her dress and aura, one could easily guess that she didn't belong to the general compartment of the train. It only worsened Sadhna's situation and she started wailing.

"I am sorry! I don't understand! Is everything ok?" The young lady asked Sadhna's mother.

"I am very sorry. It has nothing to do with you. My daughter gave birth to a baby boy yesterday who died moments later." Sadhna's mother replied.

"That's so sad. I am so sorry to hear that." Said the young lady.

After sometime.

Sadhna: "What's the baby's name?"

Young lady: "It's David."

Sadhna: "That doesn't sound Indian."

Young lady: "My name is Rimsha. I am a Muslim. I wanted to name him Dawood, but his father is Russian. So, we settled on the Christian version of Dawood - David."

Sadhna didn't like it. She came from a conservative Hindu priest's family. Sadhna: "How come you met a Russian man?"

Rimsha: "Actually, I am pursuing medicine from Russia. Well, Ukraine now (It was early 1992)."

Sadhna: "You look from a good family." At this Sadhna's mother squeezed Sadhna's hand.

After a brief silence.

Sadhna: "I wanted to name my baby 'X'."

Rimsha: “Needless to ask, X is your favourite actor. You want to hold him?” and she gave the baby to Sadhna.

Sadhna: “He resembles you.”

Rimsha: “Yeah. Except that he has gotten eyes and nose of my husband. Also, this’s why he is more fair than me.”

“You don’t seem from Mithila? You have a Gujrati accent?” asked a young man to Rimsha.

“Yeah. I was born and raised in Ahmedabad. That’s why...” Rimsha replied.

“I see. Yeah, you do look like girls from western side of India. (Pause) How come you came this far? It’s almost the other end of India.” The young man asked again. He seemed a bit cold towards Rimsha, who turned red at this question. She got very uncomfortable for sure, but got distracted by the slowing down train and her baby. It was approaching a big junction named Jhanjharpur to fill water. Those were steam engine days. For some reason, a cheerful Rimsha started showing sign of sadness.

Rimsha: “I need to nurse him.” And she took the infant back.

When the train stopped at Jhanjharpur, the young man with Rimsha said: “I am going to get some water.” And he deboarded the train.

After some ten minutes, when the young man didn’t return. Rimsha started panicking. She was overall behaving strange. She was also crying. Other passengers in the train were calming her saying that the train usually stops at Jhanjharpur junction for at least forty-five minutes, but she wasn’t listening.

Rimsha (to Sadhna): “Can you please hold him again? I am just going to check and will come back.” She gave the infant to Sadhna and deboarded the train.

10 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, and the train whistled, but there was no sign of Rimsha, nor of the young man with her. Now, it was Sadhna and her mother’s turn to panic. The train gave the final whistle and started moving. One passenger stood up, pulled the chain and said: “I am going to go look for them. That’s strange, but let’s not forget that we are having ongoing Hindu-Muslim riots (1992).”

At this an old lady remarked: “She is never coming back dear. I got the gut feeling when she told you (pointing at Sadhna) to hold the baby.”

“Yeah. She was a Muslim. If her husband is indeed Russian, or if it is an illegal child, then, probably both she and this baby was going to get killed.” The young man, who were cold to Rimsha, supported the old lady.

Indeed, she never came back; nor anyone could find a trace of them. The train was going to move again. Other passengers was feeling terrible. A few middle aged women were cursing Rimsha.

Old lady to Sadhna: “Does anyone else in your family knows that your son didn’t survive?”

Sadhna’s mother: “No. Just we two.”

Old lady: “If you carry this baby with you. No one will know. Otherwise, I am sure your mother-in-law is not going to be happy that you couldn’t giver her a grandson.”

Sadhna: “Why not to consult police?”

An old man among passengers said at this: “The police won’t take the baby and will only tell you that they will search for the woman and the man with her. On the worst, everyone will know that this is not your baby. Moreover, let’s not forget what this young man said. Most likely, she is still going to get killed, but she saved the baby by giving it to you.”

Sadhna: “I am not keeping him. You don’t know, what if she was a prostitute?”

Sadhna’s mother: “Didn’t you yourself say that she looked from a good family?”

There was a brief silence which was broken by the whistle of the train. The train slowly started moving taking each passenger on their journey.

[Sometimes, it is easier to tell a comforting lie than a hard truth.]