

DO NOT WRITE ON THIS STORY

“The Eyes Are Not Here” by Ruskin Bond

- 1 I had the compartment to myself up to Rohana, and then a girl got in. The couple who saw her off were probably her parents; they seemed very anxious about her comfort, and the woman gave the girl detailed instructions as to where to keep her things, not to lean out of windows, and how to avoid speaking to strangers. They said their goodbyes; the train pulled out of the station.
- 2 As I was totally blind at the time, my eyes sensitive only to light and darkness, I was unable to tell what the girl looked like; but I knew she wore slippers from the way they slapped against her heels. It would take me some time to discover something about her looks, and perhaps I never would. I liked the sound of her voice and even the sound of her slippers.
- 3 “Are you going all the way to Dehra?” I asked.
- 4 I must have been sitting in a dark corner because my voice startled her. She gave a little exclamation and said, “I didn’t know anyone else was here.”
- 5 Well, it often happens that people with good eyesight fail to see what is right in front of them. They have too much to take in, I suppose, whereas people who cannot see (or see very little) have to take in only the essentials, whatever registers most tellingly in their remaining senses.
- 6 “I didn’t see you, either,” I said. “But I heard you come in.”
- 7 I wondered if I would be able to prevent her from discovering that I was blind. I thought to myself, *Provided I keep to my seat, it shouldn’t be too difficult.*
- 8 The girl said, “I’m getting down at Saharanpur. My aunt is meeting me there.”
- 9 “Then I had better not get too familiar,” I said. “Aunts are usually formidable creatures.”
- 10 “Where are you going?” she asked.
- 11 “To Dehra, and then to Mussoorie.”
- 12 “Oh, how lucky you are, I wish I were going to Mussoorie. I love the hills. Especially in October.”
- 13 “Yes, this is the best time,” I said, calling on my memories. “The hills are covered with wild dahlias, the sun is delicious, and at night you can sit in front of a log-fire and drink a little brandy. Most of the tourists have gone, and the roads are quiet and almost deserted. Yes, October is the best time.”
- 14 She was silent, and I wondered if my words had touched her, or whether she thought me a romantic fool. Then I made a mistake.
- 15 “What is it like?” I asked.
- 16 She seemed to find nothing strange in the question. Had she noticed already that I could not see? But her next question removed my doubts.
- 17 “Why don’t you look out the window?” she asked.
- 18 I moved easily along the berth and felt for the window-ledge. The window was open and I faced it, pretending to be studying the landscape. I heard the panting of the engine, the rumble of the wheels, and in my mind’s eye, I could see the telegraph-posts flashing by.
- 19 “Have you noticed,” I ventured, “that the trees seem to be moving while we seem to be standing still?”
- 20 “That always happens,” she said. “Do you see any animals?” Hardly any animals left in the forests near Dehra.
- 21 I turned from the window and faced the girl, and for a while we sat in silence.

22 “You have an interesting face,” I remarked. I was becoming quite daring, but it was a safe remark. Few girls can resist flattery.

23 She laughed pleasantly, a clear ringing laugh.

24 “It’s nice to be told I have an interesting face. I am tired of people telling me I have a pretty face.”

25 *Oh, so you do have a pretty face,* I thought. Aloud, I said, “Well, an interesting face can also be pretty.”

26 “You are a very gallant young man,” she said, “but why are you so serious?”

27 I thought then, that I would try to laugh for her, but the thought of laughter only made me feel troubled and lonely.

28 “We’ll soon be at your station,” I said.

29 “Thank goodness it’s a short journey. I can’t bear to sit in a train for more than two or three hours.”

30 Yet, I was prepared to sit there for almost any length of time, just to listen to her talking. Her voice had the sparkle of a mountain stream. As soon as she left the train, I knew, she would forget our brief encounter; but it would stay with me for the rest of the journey and for some time after.

31 The engine’s whistle shrieked, the carriage wheels changed their sound and rhythm. The girl got up and began to collect her things. I wondered if she wore her hair in a bun, or if it was braided, or if it hung loose over her shoulders, or if it was cut very short.

32 The train drew slowly into the station. Outside, there was the shouting of porters and vendors and a high-pitched female voice near the carriage door, which must have belonged to the girl’s aunt.

33 “Good-bye,” said the girl.

34 She was standing very close to me, so close that the perfume from her hair was tantalizing. I wanted to raise my hand and touch her hair, but she moved away, and only the perfume still lingered where she had stood.

35 *‘You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will, but the scent of the roses will linger there still...’*

36 There was some confusion in the doorway. A man, getting into the compartment, stammered an apology. Then the door banged shut, and the world was shut out again. I returned to my berth. The guard blew his whistle and we moved off. Once again, I had a game to play with a new fellow traveler.

37 The train gathered speed, the wheels took up their song, the carriage groaned and shook. I found the window and sat in front of it, staring into the daylight that was darkness for me. So many things were happening outside the window. It could be a fascinating game, guessing what went on out there.

38 The man who had entered the compartment broke into my reverie.

39 “You must be disappointed,” he said. “I’m not as attractive a traveling companion as the one who just left.”

40 “She was an interesting girl,” I said. “Can you tell me – did she keep her hair long or short?”

41 “I don’t remember,” he said, sounding puzzled. “It was her eyes I noticed, not her hair. She had beautiful eyes – but they were of no use to her. She was completely blind; didn’t you notice?”

Answer the following questions by **circling** the correct answer.

1. Why is the end of the story ironic?
 - A) The girl realized that she had been talking to a blind boy.
 - B) The girl was much prettier than the boy had thought.
 - C) The boy, who was hiding his own blindness, finds out that the girl was also blind.
 - D) The aunt does not yell at the boy for talking to the girl during the long trip.

2. The author says that the boy is playing a game with the other passengers. What is this game?
 - A) The boy tries to see if he can go the whole way without being noticed by other passengers.
 - B) The boy tries to pretend that he is not blind.
 - C) The boy plays tricks on the passengers as they leave the train.
 - D) Since the boy travels a lot, he bets that he has been to where the other passenger is going.

3. Which paragraphs foreshadow that the girl is also blind?
 - A) 4, 16-17, 20
 - B) 2, 13, 31
 - C) 1, 18-19, 21
 - D) 4, 18, 31

4. What is the purpose of paragraphs 1 and 2?
 - A) To show the conflict in the story
 - B) To give background information on the characters in the story
 - C) To show the reader what it is like to be blind
 - D) To make the reader sympathize with blind people

5. What does the word “tantalizing” mean in paragraph 34?
 - A) smelly
 - B) overwhelming
 - C) pungent
 - D) teasing

6. The main challenge and conflict in the story is:
- A) external; between the boy and the girl
 - B) external; between the boy and the aunt
 - C) external; between the girl and her aunt
 - D) internal; between the boy and his confidence
7. The imagery in paragraph 18 is used to show:
- A) what the boy actually sees as he looks out the window.
 - B) what the boy wants to see as he looks out the window.
 - C) how the boy uses his hearing to compensate for his vision.
 - D) how they boy wishes he could get his vision back.
8. What does the following sentence from paragraph 35 suggest: *You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will, but the scent of the roses will linger there still...* ?
- A) The smell of a flower lasts a long time.
 - B) The train smelled of roses.
 - C) The girl's hair left a smell in the train long after she left.
 - D) The meeting of this girl has left a lasting impact on the boy.
9. What is the most likely explanation of the word "dahlias" in paragraph 13?
- A) garbage
 - B) flowers
 - C) people
 - D) birds
10. Which of the following sentences could be described as a run-on sentence?
- A) I wanted to raise my hand and touch her hair, but she moved away, and only the perfume still lingered where she had stood.
 - B) I heard the panting of the engine, the rumble of the wheels, and in my mind's eye, I could see the telegraph-posts flashing by.
 - C) A man, getting into the compartment, stammered and apology.
 - D) I liked the sound of her voice and even the sound of her slippers.