

One-Way Train

By John Potts
Wayne

I did not want to leave her, but I had no choice. I had caused her too much pain and loss, and this was the right thing to do.

It was Victoria Terminus, Bombay, India, 1955. A railway station hub of teeming, frenetic human activity. Wall-to-wall travelers, well-wishers, and hawkers plying their offerings.

A long train stood waiting as passengers boarded, its locomotive huffing, puffing, and hissing as it built up steam for the odyssey upon which it was about to embark: a trek of 1,500 miles across northern India. Leaving Bombay on the west coast, it would climb the Ghats hills and trudge laboriously eastwards across the gradual rise of the Deccan plateau, arriving four days later in Dehradun, at the foothills of the mighty Himalayas.

I had taken my seat in the last car of the train. Gazing through the grimy, soot-covered window, I could see her standing there, one hand waving me goodbye and the other holding a handkerchief to dab away the tears. Despite those tears, she smiled so that I would remember her that way. Amid the swirling crowd on the platform, she seemed eerily isolated, beautiful and angelic.

My tears welled up, but I was determined not to let her see me cry.

I could hear the guard whistles blowing as the train began making way. I slowly raised my hand to return her wave. I still managed to hold back the tears, but they were blurring my vision of her. I loved her so much!

As the train pulled out and I lost sight of her, my tears finally broke, along with my heart. My fifth birthday was in two weeks, but I would spend it alone. It would be nine months before I saw my mother again.