

Will You WRITE With Me? Contest

This is how the story begins:

Not far from Mumbai is a small town called Vajraghat, known primarily for its juicy guavas. It is a long night's train journey from Mumbai to Vajraghat – a journey that very few people take.

Raghunath took this train often since he traded in guavas. An avid reader, he always carried a good book on these journeys to while away the hours.

One evening, when Raghunath made just such a trip, something strange happened.

He was sharing his compartment with three others. One of his companions was a tall, skinny, pale man with a long nose and a furtive demeanor. When Raghunath entered, the man was already seated, reading a book intently. Always curious, Raghunath peeked at it through the corner of his eye, but the book had a dark cover with no title. A bit disappointed, Raghunath pulled out his own book and began to read.

The journey began. The companionable silence in the compartment was constantly interrupted by vendors of food and beverages.

But oddly, while the other passengers sat down to dinner, the skinny, pale man had his long nose stuck to his book. He never put it down!

Raghunath became very interested in what the man was reading. What book could be interesting enough to skip dinner? He waited for an opportunity to peep into the book, but it was impossible to get a glimpse of the pages.

Soon, the ticket collector came in to inspect everyone's tickets. As he left, the man mumbled something under his breath. Intrigued, Raghunath leaned in. Had he imagined it? Raghunath was sure that he had heard the man say '76.'

But why would someone say '76' simply out of the blue? Was it his seat number? Quietly, Raghunath checked and found that the man's seat number was, in fact, 31.

So why did he suddenly say 76?

Raghunath's curiosity knew no bounds. He looked for an opportunity to strike a conversation with the man. But the man was completely lost in his book.

As nighttime set in, the other two passengers went to sleep. Raghunath determinedly continued his efforts to talk to the man, but to no avail. He would have to resort to drastic measures to attract the man's attention.

Lying on the top berth with feigned casualness, Raghunath 'accidentally' dropped his pillow - right on the man's head! Then, he started apologising profusely. Although the man wasn't hurt, Raghunath fussed over him until his constant apologies almost became annoying. Finally, the man looked up and said with a smile on his face, '332.'

Raghunath was stunned. Did this man speak only in numbers? Raghunath now looked straight into the man's eyes and asked, 'Are you all right?'

The man returned Raghunath's piercing gaze and replied, '7-93-289.' After a pause, he added, '27.'

Attempting to appear unnerved, Raghunath continued the conversation. 'So, what is your name?'

The man answered with a deadpan face, '8563.'

So the man did speak only in numbers, Raghunath concluded. But it was obvious that Mr. 8563 was not interested in continuing the conversation. Raghunath lay in bed, mulling over the peculiar incident.

After a while, 8563 rose. He placed the book on the berth and went out of the compartment, presumably to use the washroom.

Grabbing the opportunity, Raghunath leapt out of his seat, picked up the book and opened it. What he saw made him gasp. The book had lines and lines and lines of just numbers!

Raghunath heard footsteps right outside the compartment and he quickly replaced the book and went back to his own berth. 8563 came into the compartment and started reading the book again.

Soon, Raghunath began to feel sleepy and, although he was terribly curious about 8563, he could not keep his eyes open any longer. He fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

The piercing screech of iron wheels on the rail tracks awoke Raghunath in the middle of the night. The bustle outside suggested that they had reached a station. Raghunath groggily looked up and was aghast to see that 8563 was not in the compartment. Had he got off?

Suddenly wide awake, he leapt to his feet. He had to find the man and solve the mystery.

What do you think happens next? Complete the story in 700 to 800 words, give it a title and send it to Karadi Tales! Please note, the part of the story that YOU write must contain 700-800 words. Three lucky winners will have their endings published by Karadi Tales and the story will be narrated by a Karadi celebrity!