

THE STATION MASTER

— A STORY OF DUTY AND KINDNESS —

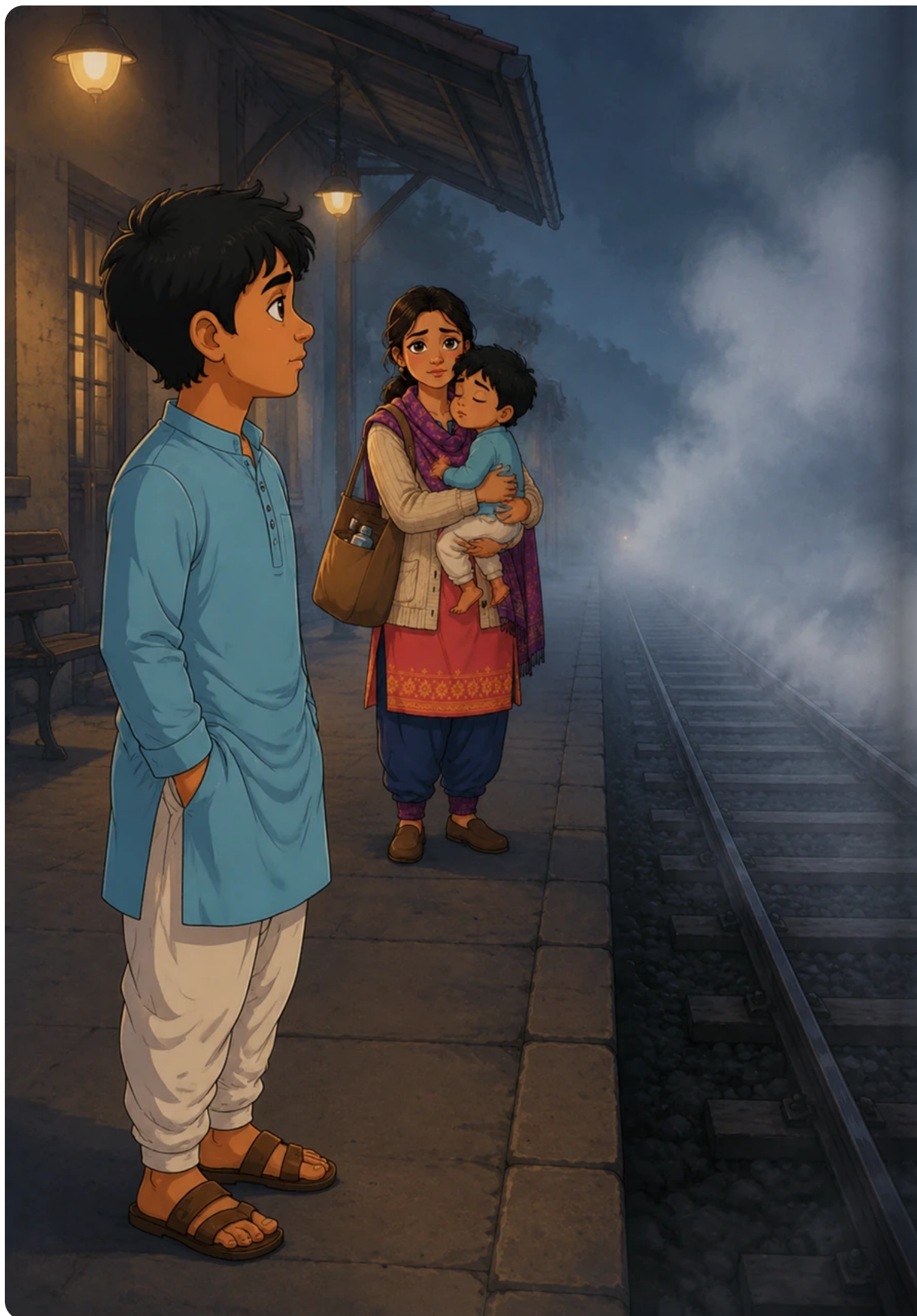


The Station Master's Lantern

SHUBHAM KUMAR



Ravi Swamy adjusted his crisp, dark blue railway uniform and smoothed his thick mustache as the grand grandfather clock in his office struck midnight. With a serious face hardened by years of discipline, he lifted his heavy brass lantern, its warm amber glow cutting through the shadows of the quiet station.



Walking out onto the empty platform of the small Indian town, Ravi watched the fog roll across the iron tracks like a silent river. The air was cool, and the distant, rhythmic clicking of a telegraph machine echoed from the office behind him, signaling that the night express was on its way.



A young mother and her sleepy child sat huddled on a wooden bench, shivering slightly in the midnight chill. Ravi walked past them with his usual stern expression, but he subtly angled his lantern to cast a comforting, warm light over their corner, shielding them from the biting darkness.



Suddenly, a stray dog darted onto the tracks, its eyes reflecting the green signal light in the distance. Ravi blew his sharp silver whistle, its piercing sound echoing through the valley, and waved his arms to scare the frightened animal back to the safety of the platform.



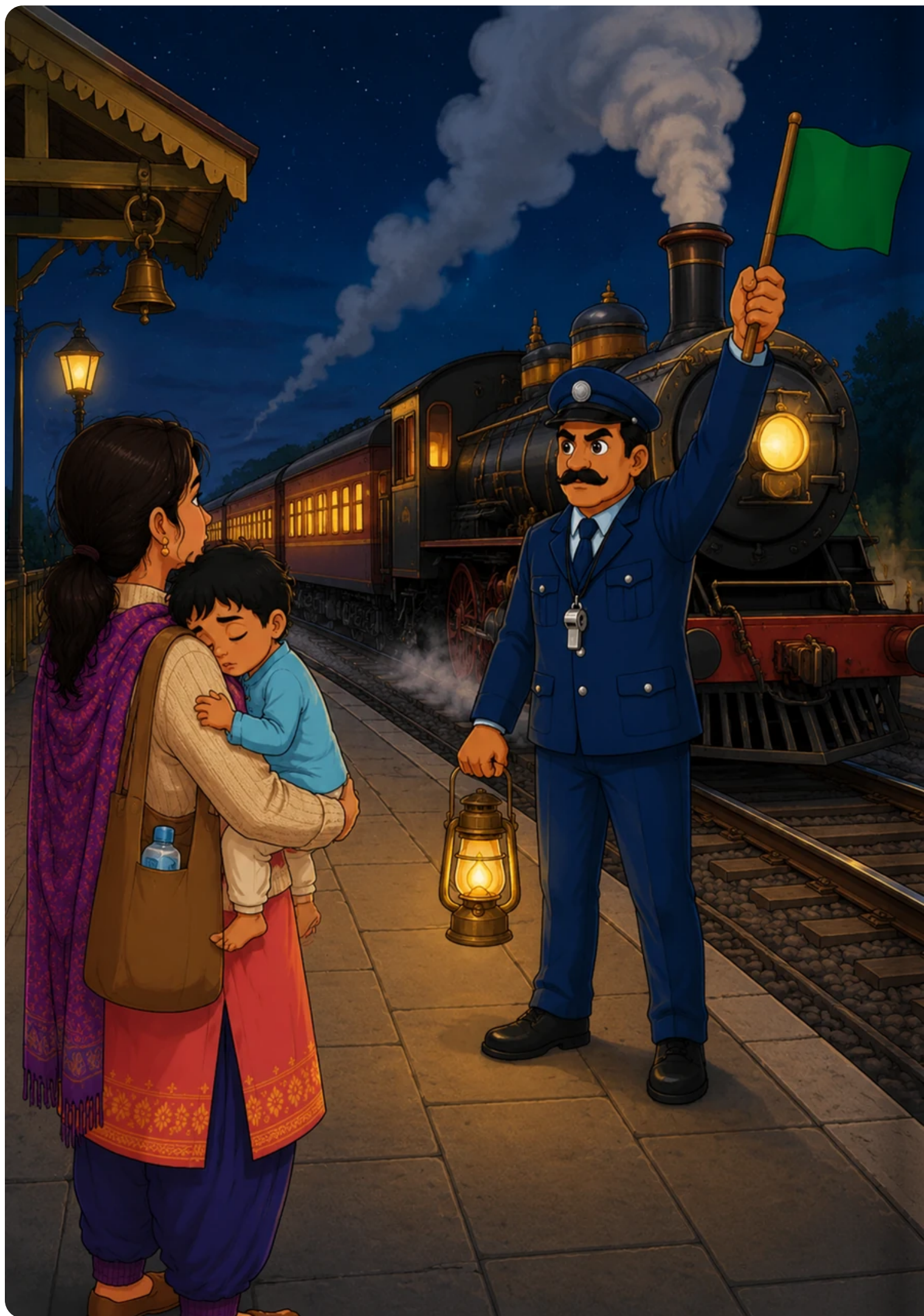
The ground began to vibrate, and a low rumble shook the station as the giant steam locomotive roared into view, its headlight piercing the mist like a powerful searchlight. Ravi stood tall and perfectly still at the edge of the platform, holding his lantern high to guide the iron giant safely into the station.



Passengers poured out of the wooden carriages into the dramatic, smoky light of the platform, creating a bustling oasis of life in the middle of the night. Ravi moved through the crowd with absolute authority, directing weary travelers and ensuring the heavy baggage carts moved safely down the tracks.



Near the back of the train, an elderly gentleman struggled with a massive, rope-bound trunk that was slipping from his hands. Forgetting his strict demeanor for a moment, Ravi rushed forward and caught the heavy box, his strong hands steadying the old man with a reassuring nod.



As the station bell rang out three times, signaling the train's imminent departure, Ravi marched back to his post and raised his green signal flag high above his head. The locomotive let out a mighty hiss of steam and slowly began to roll forward, pulling its long chain of glowing windows back into the dark night.



With the train gone, a deep and peaceful silence settled over the small station once again, leaving only the faint smell of coal smoke in the air. Ravi walked back to his office, his boots clicking softly on the stone floor, feeling a quiet satisfaction in another safe journey guarded by his watch.



Sitting back at his wooden desk, Ravi finally let a gentle, proud smile soften his serious face as he blew out the lantern's flame. As the first light of dawn began to purple the horizon, the dedicated station master closed his logbook, knowing he had kept the world moving safely through the dark.