



## The Railway Controller

**Content and Purpose:** The story is told of a man sacrificing his son so that a train full of people doesn't plunge into the river and kill all onboard. Looks at people's reactions to this sacrifice, drawing parallels to what people say about Jesus.

**Cast:** 6 people – Story Teller, A, B, C, D, X

Five people standing on stage (A, B, C, D, X)

*The Story Teller enters and speaks.*

ST: About seventy years ago, John Smith lived in America, a college lecturer by profession. He has, however, lost his job in the years of the Great Depression, and to make ends meet had taken the job as the operator of a vast railway bridge over the mighty Mississippi River. His wife had died very young, leaving just him and his six-year-old son, by now his only real joy in life. Everyday they would stand by the river and watch the boats sailing along, the little boy in awe of his father, and twice a day, John would lower the bridge and trains would rush by, while his son looked on in delight. One day as they stood by the river John realised it was only two minutes until the next train was due, and so telling his son to stay put rushed up to the control tower. He glanced at his watch as he reached the top: thirty seconds to go, and he looked up to see the train hurtling through the trees. He was about to lower the bridge when he happened to look downwards. There, caught between the huge cogs of the bridge, was his son, where he had fallen, desperately trying to climb out. The train was coming closer, there was no time to run and help his son get out, or the train would plunge into the river. What else could he do? He pushed the button, and cogs turned, the bridge lowered and the train rushed by. Now imagine if that man had gone to where the train stopped to tell people what he had done. What would they have said?

*A and B turn round as if gossiping*

A: And then she said to him 'You can leave now if you are going to behave like that!'

B: She did not! I would never have thought it of her!

*X approaches*

X: Excuse me

*A and B turn round and look at X as if he is incredibly rude*

X: *(struggling to get the words out)* I operate the railway bridge back there...and my son...I had to kill my son so your train could cross the river

A: *(passively)* Oh

X: I don't think you understand. I killed my son so that you could stay alive.

*A and B look at each other, then look back*

B: And?

X: *(shocked)* What?

A: Well what has it got to do with us?

X: *(still stunned)* Well...a lot...

B: And we were having a private conversation. *(To A)* Anyway, I don't think I've ever...

X: *(Interrupting)* Do you think I'm lying, because believe me...

A: *(rudely)* No, we believe you, but we really don't feel it's any of our concern. We were just standing here minding our own business until you started pushing your sob sorry story down our throats. So if you'll excuse us.

*They turn around*

*X turns away, completely gutted. D turns round and speaks in a brisk businesslike manner.*

D: Taxi!



*X walks over and tries to address D. All the time he speaks D is preoccupied with something behind X.*

X: *(Politely)* Sorry to bother you.

D: *(Very aggressively)* What do you want?

X: Your train back there...well my son died so it could get across the river.

D: *(Looking past X)* Uh-huh.

X: Did you hear what I said? My son died so you could get here safely.

D: *(still preoccupied)* Good

X: *(angry)* I don't think you heard what I said...

D: Yes I did

X: Then...

D: *(losing patience, finally looking at X)* I really have something very important to get to...*(face of realisation, and takes out wallet)* How much do you want?

X: I don't want your money. My son is dead!

D: Then could you stop hassling me please; I have several important engagements and simply no time for this sort of rubbish. Goodbye! *(Turns round abruptly)*

*X turns away and C turns round and looks straight forward. X approaches him with determination.*

X: There's something really important you should know

C: *(looks at X with absolute disgust)* Have you got some sort of problem?

X: *(Angrily)* Yes actually. My son died so you didn't have to!

C: *(As offensively as possible)* And what do you want me to do about it?

X: *(Stating in the simplest terms)* I killed my son for you!

C: To be perfectly honest I just don't care. *(Motions to others)* None of us do. *(Turns round)*

X: *(In desperation)* You don't care? What's wrong with all of you? I killed my own precious son so you could all live and you don't care? How can you not care?

*They all turn round as if he has just attracted their attention. Throughout this sequence they become angrier and angrier.*

A: We have our own lives to worry about.

D: I'm just too busy to listen to you.

B: We have other things on our minds.

C: It's got nothing to do with us.

A: We aren't interested in what you have to say.

D: Just leave us alone and let us get on with our lives.

B: Your son doesn't matter to us.

**C: We just don't care.**

*During the above X has fallen to his knees and they have gathered around him. They freeze in that position.*

*The Story Teller enters.*

ST: Of course it's just ridiculous isn't it? It just wouldn't happen. It's so ridiculous, you'd hardly believe it happens every day.