



The Railway Children

by E. Nesbit Adapted by Twinkl This is a story about three children: Roberta (Bobbie), Phyllis and Peter. They move to a house near a railway line where they have many adventures. They find out all about the passing trains, the workers at the station and the people who travel on them.

The mouth of the tunnel was some way from their home, so Mother let them take their lunch with them in a basket. When they got to the top of the cutting, they leaned over the fence and looked down to where the railway lines lay at the bottom of what was exactly like a mountain gorge. The sides of the cutting were of grey stone, very roughly hewn. Indeed, the top part of the cutting had been a little neutral glen that had been cut deeper to bring it down to the level of the tunnel's mouth. Among the rocks, grass and flowers grew, and seeds dropped by birds in the crannies of the stone had taken root and grown into bushes and trees that overhung the cutting. Near the tunnel was a flight of steps leading down to the line – just wooden bars roughly fixed into the earth – a very steep and narrow way, more like a ladder than a stair.

They went along the fence towards the little swing gate that is at the top of these steps. And they were almost at the gate when Bobbie said,

‘Hush. Stop! What’s that?’

‘That’ was a very odd noise indeed – a soft noise, but quite plainly to be heard through the sound of the wind in tree branches, and the hum and whir of the telegraph wires. It was a sort of rustling, whispering sound. As they listened it stopped, and then it began again.

And this time it did not stop, but it grew louder and more rustling and rumbling.

'It's ALL coming down,' Peter tried to say, but he found there was hardly any voice to say it with. And, indeed, just as he spoke, the great rock, on the top of which the walking trees were, leaned slowly forward. The trees, ceasing to walk, stood still and shivered. Leaning with the rock, they seemed to hesitate a moment, and then the rock and trees and grass and bushes, with a rushing sound, slipped right away from the face of the cutting and fell on the line with a blundering crash that could have been heard half a mile off. A cloud of dust rose up.

'Look what a great mound it's made!' said Bobbie.

'Yes,' said Peter, slowly. He was still leaning on the fence. 'Yes,' he said again, still more slowly. Then he stood upright. 'The 11.29 down hasn't gone by yet. We must let them know at the station, or there'll be a most frightful accident.'

'Let's run,' said Bobbie, and began.

But Peter cried, 'Come back!' and looked at Mother's watch. He was very prompt and businesslike, and his face looked whiter than they had even seen it.

'No time,' he said, 'it's two miles away, and it's past eleven.'

'If we had anything red, we could get down the line and wave it,' said Peter.

They got down the steep stairs. Bobbie was pale and shivering. Peter's face looked thinner than usual. Phyllis was red-faced and damp with anxiety.

'Oh how hot I am!' she said; 'and I thought it was going to be cold; I wish we hadn't put on our-' she stopped short, and then ended in quite a different tone – 'our flannel petticoats.'

Bobbie turned at the bottom of the stairs.

'Oh, yes,' she cried; 'THEY'RE red! Let's take them off.'

They did, and with the petticoats rolled up under their arms, ran along the railway, skirting the newly fallen mound of stones and rock and earth, and bent, crushed and twisted trees. They ran at their best pace. Peter led, but the girls were not far behind. They reached the corner that hid the mound from the straight line of railway that ran half a mile without curve or corner.

Peter took hold of the largest flannel petticoat. 'Tear them into little bits if you like,' said Bobbie. 'If we can't stop the train, there'll be a real live accident, with people KILLED. Oh horrible!'

'There!' said Peter, tearing in his turn. He divided each petticoat into three pieces. 'Now, we've got six flags.' He looked at the watch again. 'And we've got seven minutes.'

Then came the distant rumble and hum of the metals, and a puff of white steam showed far away along the stretch of line.

'Stand firm,' said Peter, 'and wave like mad! When it gets to that big furze bush step back, but go on waving! Don't stand ON the line, Bobbie!'

The train came rattling along very, very fast.

'They don't see us! They won't see us! It's all no good!' cried Bobbie.

It was very near now.

'Stand back!' cried Peter, suddenly, and he dragged Phyllis back by the arm.

The front of the engine looked enormous. Its voice was loud and harsh. 'Oh, stop, stop, stop!' cried Bobbie.

The train slackened swiftly, slackened and stopped. She saw the great black engine stop dead, but somehow she could not stop waving the flags.

Questions:

1. What were the names of the three children?
2. Where was the house that they moved to?
3. Why did the children have their lunch with them?
4. Who hears the Earth moving first?
5. Look at the paragraph beginning, 'It's ALL coming down,' Peter tried to say. The author describes the tree as if they were people. Find and copy two words that show this.
6. Why do the children decide not to run to the station to warn the adults about the fallen trees?
7. Find and copy a phrase near the end of the story that shows that children risked danger.