
The Railway
Children

E. Nesbit (1858-1924)

Edith Nesbit wrote a hundred years ago, when most people rode by horse, not car, and television hadn't been invented. Her stories are full of excitement, adventure and magic. *The Railway Children*, first published in 1906, is one of her most famous books. It has been adapted for television four times and has twice been made into a film.



Chapter 1
Change

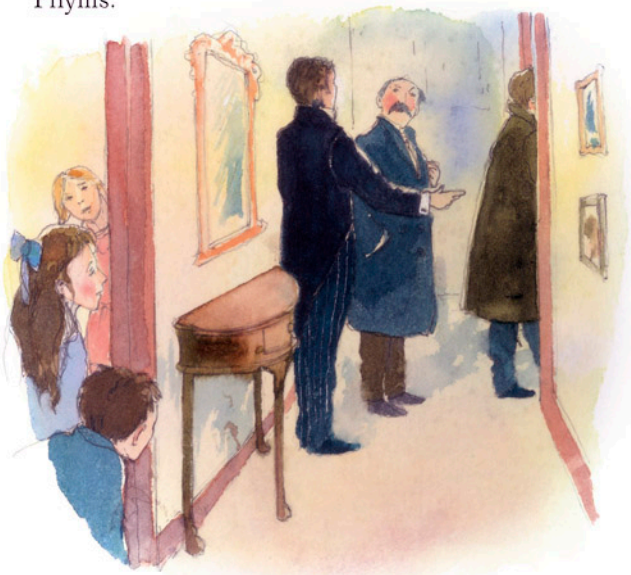


It all began at Peter's birthday party. The servants were just bringing out the birthday cake, when the doorbell clanged sharply.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Father. "Who can that be? Start without me, everyone. I'll be back in a minute."

Peering into the hallway, Peter saw Father leading two men into his study.

"Who are they, Mother?" asked his sister, Phyllis.



"I don't know," said Mother, frowning. "Stay here. I'm going to find out."



Mother disappeared into the study for ages.

"What's going on?" asked Phyllis.

"We'll just have to wait and see," replied Bobbie, the eldest.

Mother emerged just as the front door slammed shut. Bobbie saw a carriage and horses driving rapidly away into the night. Mother's face was icy white and her eyes glittered with tears.

"Where's Father?" demanded Peter, running into the empty study.

"He's gone away." Mother was shaking now. Bobbie reached for her hand and held it tight.

"But he hasn't even packed his clothes," said Phyllis.

"He had to go quickly – on business," Mother replied.



"Was it to do with the Government?" asked Peter. Father worked in a Government office.

"Yes. Don't ask me questions, darlings. I can't tell you anything. Please just go to bed."



Upstairs, the children tried endlessly to work out where Father had gone. The next few days were just as strange.



All the maids left. Then a FOR SALE sign went up outside the house. The beautiful furniture was sold and meals now consisted of plain, cheap food. Mother was hardly ever at home.

"What's happening?" asked Peter, finally. "Please tell us."

"We've got to play at being poor for a bit," Mother replied. "We're going to leave London, and live far away in the countryside."



"Father is going to be away for some time," she went on. "But everything will come right in the end, I promise."

Chapter 2
A coal thief

After a long, long journey, they arrived at the new house, late at night.

Mother rushed around, digging sheets out of suitcases.



The next day, Bobbie, Peter and Phyllis woke early to explore. They raced outside until they came to a red-brick bridge.

Suddenly there was a shriek and a snort and a train shot out from under it.

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"It's exactly like a dragon," Peter shouted above the noise. "Did you feel the hot air from its breath?"

"Perhaps it's going to London," Phyllis yelled.

"Father might still be there," shrieked Bobbie. "If it's a magic dragon, it'll send our love to Father. Let's wave."

