



**PENGUIN READERS**



# **The Railway Children**

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## Chapter 1

### Leaving the City

To begin with, they were no railway children. They looked at trains sometimes and they thought they were exciting, but they did not know anything about them.

There were three children. Roberta was the oldest and the most clever. Then there was a boy, Peter — he wanted to be the boss. Phyllis was the youngest.

They lived with their mother and father in a house near the city. They were lucky children. They had everything — pretty dresses, warm fires, good food.

Their mother played with them and told them stories and they often laughed. Their father was never angry with them and he was always ready to help them.

They were lucky and they were happy, and then. . .

It was Peter's tenth birthday. His mother and father gave him a train engine. Peter loved trains. When he left school he wanted to work on a train.

Peter loved his engine more than anything — then Phyllis broke it! Phyllis often broke things. Peter was very sad, but he knew that Father could put it together again.

When Father came home, he looked at the engine.

'I can repair it, but you must all help me.'

'The girls too?' Peter asked. He thought only boys could repair things.

'Girls are as clever as boys, you know,' Father said.

'Do you want to help us repair the engine, Roberta?'

'Yes, I want to help,' Roberta said. 'Do you think I can?'

Before Father could repair the engine, two men came to see him and Mother. The children could hear them talking. They were very angry.

The children heard the men leave the house. Later, Mother came back into the room. Her face was very white and her eyes were red from crying.

'Father is going away' she said.

Roberta knew that something was wrong.

'What did the men want, Mother?' she asked. 'Why are you crying? Is somebody dead?'

'No,' Mother said. 'Nobody is dead. I can't tell you what is wrong.'

The children went to bed. Roberta could not sleep because she could hear her mother crying.

The next day Father was not there. Mother went out.

'There's something wrong,' Peter said.

It was very late when Mother came home. She was tired and sad.

'Listen to me,' Mother said. 'Father is not coming back for a long time. You must help me.'

'How can we help?' asked Roberta.





*'Listen to me,' Mother said. 'Father is not coming back for a long time. You must help me.'*

'You must be good and happy and you must not ask me any questions. All I can tell you is that Father is away because of his job.'

When they went to bed, Peter said, 'Let's start being good tomorrow morning.'

Why not today?' Phyllis asked.

'Because it's late and there's nothing to be good about now,' Peter said.

Five days later Mother told them, 'We're leaving the city. We're going to live far away in a little white house. I know you're going to love it.'

They put everything in boxes — cups and plates, dresses and shoes, games and books.

'This is exciting,' Peter said. 'Can we move to a new house every month?'

But Roberta saw her mother's sad face and knew that it was not a game.

The next day they went by train to their new house. It was late at night when they arrived.



*They stood on the cold, dark station and watched the train  
leave them.*



They stood on the cold, dark station and watched the train leave them. They did not know then, standing there cold and afraid, how important the railway and the station were for them.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Stop Thief!**

They walked for a long time before they arrived at their new home.

Mother found the key and opened the door. Inside the house there was no fire and nobody to meet them.

Phyllis wanted to cry.

'We must make a fire,' Mother said.

'I want Father,' Phyllis said. 'He can make fires.'

Roberta kicked her.

'Be quiet!' she said. Mother did not like talking about Father.



The next morning they looked at the house. It was small and quite dirty, but it was pretty.

'This house is prettier than our old house,' said Phyllis. 'Let's look at the garden.'

Below the house they could see the railway line and a dark tunnel. They could not see the station but they could see a big bridge.

All day they helped Mother in the house. Late in the afternoon, they went to look at the railway.

They stood next to the railway line. Suddenly they heard a noise and looked at the tunnel. Next minute a train came past them.

'The engine is very big,' Peter said.

'Do you think the train is going to the city?' Roberta asked.

'Let's go to the station and ask,' Peter said.

Behind the station was a lot of coal.

The Station Master saw them and came to talk to them.

Peter asked, 'What's the coal for?'

'It makes the engine work so that it can pull the train,' said the Station Master.

There was a lot to do and see at their new home and they soon forgot their old house in the city.

In June it began to rain and the weather turned unusually cold.

'Mother,' Roberta said, 'can I make a fire?'

'No,' her mother said. 'We can't make fires in June because the coal is too expensive.'

With Father away, they did not have much money. They could not buy coal to make fires.

Then Peter had an idea.

'What's your idea?' the girls asked.

'I'm not telling you,' he said.

'Why not?' asked Roberta.

'I can't tell you what I'm going to do. It's dangerous. Don't tell Mother where I am, OK? Say you don't know.'

Peter went — the girls did not know where. The next day there was some coal in the coal-box and they made a fire. The coal came from the station. Peter brought only small bags of coal home so that Mother did not know about it.

One night Peter went back to the station to take some more coal. The girls followed him. That night the Station Master caught him. The two girls stood behind a tree and listened.

'You young thief!' the Station Master shouted.

'I'm not a thief!' Peter answered.

'You, you are,' the Station Master said. He was very angry. 'You're taking coal from the railway. I'm taking you to the station.'

Roberta ran across to them.

'Not the *police* station!' she said. 'Please don't take him to the police station!'

'Oh, it's you — the children from the small house!' the Station Master said. 'Why are you taking this coal?'



*'You young thief!' the Station Master shouted.*



'Because it's cold and Mother says coal is too expensive for us to have a fire.'

The Station Master smiled. 'You can go this time,' he said, 'but next time you must remember that this is railway coal. You cannot take it from the station or you *are* a thief.'

The children were very happy that they could go home. Again and again Peter said, 'I'm not a thief. It was not wrong to take some coal when there was a lot of it at the station.'

But they all knew that it *was* wrong.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **New Friends**

The Station Master was their first friend at the railway. Their second new friend was Perks. He worked there, too. Their third new friend was an old man. They saw him every day on the train.

'Do you think he's going to the city?' Phyllis asked. 'Is he going to see Father? And when is Father going to write to us?'

'I don't know,' Roberta said. 'Let's all wave when the train goes past tomorrow. The train can take our love to Father.'

Every morning they waved at the train and every morning their new friend on the train waved back at them.

They often went to the station to talk to the Station Master and Perks. Perks told them stories about the trains and the Station Master was always happy to see them. He said nothing more about Peter and the coal.

One morning Mother was ill. That night she was worse, so Roberta called the doctor for her.

'She must stay in bed,' the doctor said. 'And she must stay warm. Give her good food to eat — a lot of meat and fruit.'



*Every morning they waved at the train.*

Roberta was afraid. Mother was very ill but they did not have any money to buy a lot of meat and fruit.

'What can we do?' she asked Peter and Phyllis.

'We must find somebody to help us,' Peter said.

The children thought for a long time before they thought of somebody.

'Perhaps the man on the train can help us,' Roberta said.

The next morning when the train went past their house, the old man saw a big piece of paper next to the railway line. It said: LOOK OUT AT THE STATION. When the tram arrived at the station, he looked out of the window. Phyllis was there. She gave him a letter.

The letter said:

*To Mr We Don't Know Your Name*

*Mother is ill. The Doctor says we must give her good food but we don't have any money because our father is in the city. Can you help us? We can pay you back later.*

*From Roberta, Peter and Phyllis*





*When the train arrived at the station, he looked out of the window. Phyllis was there. She gave him a letter.*

Below their names they wrote down what they wanted for their mother.

That night Perks came to their house with a big box. Inside, there was a lot of food for everybody. There was a letter, too.

*Children,*

*I am happy to help you. Here is the food for your mother.*

The old man's name was under that, but his writing was bad and they could not read it.

'Is Mother going to be angry when she knows about our letter to the old man, do you think?' Roberta said.

Two weeks later the children put up another big piece of paper near the railway line. It said: MOTHER IS MUCH BETTER. THANK YOU.

Mother did get better - and she was *very* angry about their letter to the old man on the train.

'You must never ask people for money!' she said.

## Chapter 4

### Danger on the Railway

Their best times of the day were when they went to the station to watch the trains and talk to Perks and the Station Master. They met Jim and Bill — they worked on the engines.

One morning when the children were near the tunnel, they heard a noise.

'What's that?' Phyllis asked.

The noise did not stop. It came from under their feet.

'Look at that tree,' Peter shouted. 'It's moving!'

They looked at the big tree near the tunnel. It moved slowly nearer and nearer to the railway line.

'The tree is walking!' Phyllis said.

'Trees can't walk,' said Peter.

More trees began to move.

'I don't like this,' Phyllis said. 'Let's go home.'

There was another noise and trees began to fall on the railway line.

'What can we do?' Roberta said. 'A train is going to come through the tunnel and hit the trees. There's going to be an accident!'

'We must stop the train,' Peter shouted. 'Quickly! We must wave at Jim and Bill and stop the train.'

'But we always wave at the train,' Roberta said. 'They're not going to stop when they see us waving at them.'

Peter had an idea. 'We must wave something red. Red is for danger.'

'Our skirts are red!' Roberta said.

'We can't wave those,' said Phyllis.

'We must! We must stop the train or there's going to be an accident!'

The girls took off their skirts. When the train came past they waved them and shouted 'Stop! Stop!'



'It isn't stopping! It isn't stopping!' Phyllis shouted - but then suddenly it did.

They ran up to the engine and told Jim and Bill about the trees on the railway line near the tunnel.

'You were very clever to wave those red skirts,' Jim said. 'When I saw those red skirts, I knew there was some danger on the line.'

Peter and Phyllis found it all very exciting, but Roberta did not. She knew that it was lucky that many people did not die. Sometimes at night she could not sleep when she remembered how afraid she was.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Fire! Fire!**

One of the children's best friends at the railway was Perks.

A few weeks after they stopped the train, Roberta said, 'It's Perks's birthday soon. He's always good to us.'

Perhaps we can do something for him.'

'But we have no money,' Phyllis said.

'Let's go down to the bridge at the river and catch some fish,' Peter said. 'We can think of something for Perks when we are fishing.'

They did not catch any fish, but they stayed near the river and watched the boats. These boats were small houses. Families lived on them.

A man came out of one of the boats and shouted at them.

'What are you doing? You can't fish here.'

'Why not?' Peter asked. 'We're not doing anything wrong.'

'Yes, you are,' the man said. 'You can't fish here!'

Roberta ran across and pulled Peter away before he started a fight.

After the man walked away, his wife spoke to the children.



*They stayed near the river and watched the boats.*

'Please don't be angry with my husband,' she said to Peter. 'He usually likes children.'

The women and her husband lived on the boat with their baby. 'I'm going to find my husband,' she said.

'Is the baby OK on the boat without you there?' Roberta asked.

'Oh, yes,' the woman said. 'I'm only going away for a few minutes.'

The children stood on the bridge and watched the boat. It was quite dark now and they were tired. It was time to go home.

Suddenly Phyllis shouted, 'Look! What's that?'

'The boat is on fire!' Peter said.

'The baby!' Roberta shouted. 'We must get the baby.'

They all ran to the boat. Peter pushed Roberta back.

'I'm going to find the baby,' he said. 'Stay here.' But Roberta did not want to wait.

Together they jumped on the boat. It was dark and there was a lot of smoke. They could not see, but when





*Together they jumped on the boat.*

the baby began to cry, they quickly found him.

They climbed off the boat and Roberta ran to the village. 'I'm going to find the man and his wife,' she said.

She found them in a shop.

'Come quickly,' she said. 'Your boat is on fire.'

The woman began to cry. 'My baby! Where's my baby?'

'He is OK,' Roberta said. 'We took him off the boat.'

They all ran back to the boat. The man stopped the fire with water from the river.

'I'm sorry I was angry with you earlier,' he said.

'Because of you, our little boy is not dead! Thank you! Thank you!'

And the next day he took them down the river on his boat.

'You can catch fish here when you want to,' he said.

'We made a new friend today,' they told Mother when they went home.

'Now you have friends on the railway and friends on the river,' she said with a smile.

When Mother said 'railway', they remembered Perks's birthday.

'What are we going to do?' Roberta asked.

## **Chapter 6**

### **A Village Birthday**

Peter had an idea.

'Perks is always nice to everybody in the village. Perhaps a lot of people want to give him a gift for his birthday.'

They went to every house and every shop in the village. Most people wanted to give something for Perks.

The next day, when they knew Perks was down at the railway station, they took these gifts to his house. Mrs Perks opened the door.

'We know it's Mr Perks's birthday and we want him to have these,' Peter said, and showed her all the bags and boxes.

Mrs Perks began to cry.

'What's wrong?' Peter asked. He could not understand why she cried. Most people *liked* to get gifts on their birthday.

'I'm crying because I'm happy,' Mrs Perks said. 'All these new things! Food to eat, and something for Mr Perks to wear and games for the children.'

And she started to cry again.

But when Perks came home, he was not happy. He was very angry.

'Take these back!' he shouted. 'I don't want you to give me things.'

'Why not?' Peter asked. 'We always get gifts on our birthdays.'

'I can't take all this from you.' Perks said more quietly. He knew the children had no money to buy gifts.





*Mrs Perks began to cry.*

'But it isn't all from us,' Roberta said. 'Everybody in the village wanted to give you something.'

Then she told him what all the people in the village said about him. 'You help people and you are their friend. That's why they gave us these things for you.'

'You must take these gifts, Mr Perks,' Peter said, 'or everybody in the village is going to be very unhappy.' Slowly Perks began to smile.

'Well, I *must* take them, then,' he said. 'Thank you very much.' And he asked the children into his house for tea.

## **Chapter 7**

### **The Spy**

When the children came to live in their new home, they talked about their father all the time but later they did not talk about him as much. Roberta thought that Mother was sad when they said his name.

'Is Father coming home one day?' she asked her mother.

'Yes he is, but not for a long time.'

Roberta knew that her father was not ill or dead, but she did not understand why he was not with them. Mother told them nothing. All she said was, 'One day he's going to come home and then we can all be happy together again.'

Most of the time the children were good. They did not fight because they knew Mother did not like it. But sometimes they forgot to be good.

One day Roberta and Peter had a big fight. They were in the garden and Peter took the garden knife from Roberta.

'I want that!' Roberta said.

'I want it, too!' Peter shouted and pulled it away from her.

Roberta pulled, too. Suddenly the knife went into Peter's foot. He started to cry.





*One day Roberta and Peter had a big fight.*



'Stop crying,' Roberta said. 'You're not badly hurt.'

But he did not stop crying. Mother came out to see what all the noise was.

'Are you hurt, Peter?' she asked.

'It's my foot.'

When Mother took off his shoes, there was a lot of blood on his foot.

Phyllis ran to get the doctor.

'Is Peter going to die, Mother?' Roberta asked, very afraid.

The doctor looked at Peter's foot.

'He's going to be OK, but he must stay in bed.'

Peter did not like staying in bed because he had nothing to do. Roberta went to the station and asked Perks for any old newspapers for Peter to read.

'Yes, girl, I have a lot of old newspapers,' Perks said. 'Take these.'

Roberta carried them home, and she looked at them. Suddenly she stopped and she read one newspaper story

very carefully. When she finished, her face was white and sad.

There was the name of her father. 'Five years in prison,' the newspaper said. 'This man is a spy!'

Now she knew why Father did not come home. He was in prison!

'They are wrong,' she thought. 'My father isn't a bad man.'

Later she went to see her mother and showed her the newspaper.

'Oh, Roberta,' her mother said. 'Your father did not do anything wrong. Those two visitors in London were policemen. They thought Father was a spy after they found some letters. They took Father away.'

'But who *was* the spy?' Roberta asked.

'I don't know,' her mother said, 'but there was one man at your father's work — he didn't like Father. I think it was him.'

'What can we do?'



*Suddenly Roberta stopped and she read one newspaper story very carefully.*

'We can only wait for Father to come home again.'

A week later Roberta wrote a letter. It was to the old man, their friend on the train. She cut the story out of the newspaper and sent it with her letter.

*To my friend,*

*You see what it says in the newspaper about our father. But I know Father is not a spy. Someone put those papers and letters in Father's desk. Please help us to find the spy. Please, please help us.*

*Your friend, Roberta.*

That afternoon she took the letter to the station. She gave it to the Station Master and asked him to give it to the old man the next day.



## **Chapter 8**

### **Accident in the Tunnel**

Next day, Peter got out of bed for the first time — his foot was better now. The children went to watch a game at the school. One boy ran in front and left pieces of paper behind him. The other boys followed the paper and tried to catch the first boy.

The first boy went near the railway line and into the tunnel. Soon the other boys followed.

Peter, Roberta and Phyllis watched. They saw the boys go into the tunnel. Then they ran as fast as they could to watch them come out of the tunnel again, near the station.

'Look, here they come,' Peter said.

The boys came out of the tunnel and ran away.

'There, that's all,' Roberta said. 'Now what are we going to do?'

'One boy is down there, in the tunnel,' Peter said. 'Six went in but only five came out. We must go in and find him.'

They went into the tunnel to look for the boy.

Inside the tunnel it was very dark and cold and wet.

Phyllis was afraid. 'I don't like this,' she said. 'I want to go home.'

Then, before they could answer her, they heard a noise.

'It's a train!' Roberta said. 'What can we do?'

'Quick!' shouted Peter. 'Get down!' In no time they were all face-down on the floor of the tunnel, next to the railway lines.

The train came very near to them, then it was gone.

'We're OK, but that was very near!' Phyllis said.

'Where's the boy? Do you think he was on the railway line?'

They ran down the tunnel and soon they found the boy. He was down on the floor of the tunnel, next to the

railway line. His eyes were closed.

'Is he dead?' Phyllis asked.

'No, he's not dead. The train didn't hit him.'

The boy opened his eyes.

'My leg,' he said. 'It hurts badly. ... Where did you come from?'

'We saw you go into the tunnel, but we didn't see you come out again,' Peter said. 'Can you walk? It's OK. We can take you out of the tunnel.'

But the boy could not walk.

'We must get help,' Roberta said. 'I'm going to stay with him. You go to the nearest house and get somebody to help us.'

'No,' Peter said. 'I'm staying with him. You go for help.'

Roberta stayed; Peter and Phyllis went to find help. Because she was the oldest, she thought she must stay with the boy. After they left she took off the boy's shoe. His leg was very badly hurt.

The boy opened his eyes again. 'What's your name?' he asked.

'Roberta.'

'I'm Jim.'

'My brother and sister are getting somebody to help you,' Roberta said. 'I wanted to stay with you.'

'That's good of you. It's very dark in here. Are you afraid?'

'No. Not — not much.'

'Take my hand,' Jim said. They sat together in the dark tunnel and waited for somebody to come.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Help at Last**

Peter and Phyllis walked a long way before they came out of the tunnel.

When they were outside, Phyllis said, 'I'm never going into a tunnel again.'



'We're going back into the tunnel to help that boy,' Peter said. 'We must.'

They ran to the nearest building. It was the signal-box. They called for the signalman but there was no answer.

They looked through the door. The signalman was in a chair in the corner, his eyes closed.

Peter shouted at the signalman; he opened his eyes.

The signalman was angry with them. He was afraid. He knew that it was wrong to sleep when he was at work.

'My son is ill,' he said. 'I sit with him at night and I don't sleep. Please don't tell anybody that you found me sleeping at work. I don't want to lose my job.'

'We're not going to tell anybody,' Peter said.

'But you must help us,' Phyllis said. 'There's a boy in the tunnel and he can't walk because he hurt his leg.'

'I can't help you. I must stay here. Run to the house up the road. There's somebody there most of the time.'



*The signalman was in a chair in a corner, his eyes closed.*

At the house they found two men. They all went back to the tunnel together, and they found Roberta and Jim.

Together they carried Jim back to their house and Mother called the doctor.

The doctor came and looked at Jim's leg.

'I want to watch,' Peter said. 'I want to see what the doctor is doing. Is there going to be a lot of blood?'

'Stop it!' Roberta said angrily. 'Jim's badly hurt. This isn't a game, you know.'

Mother wrote a letter to Jim's grandfather. She told him about the accident.

'Can Jim stay here?' Peter asked. 'I want another boy in the house. There are too many girls here.'

'We don't have much money,' Mother said. 'We can't buy him what he must have.'

The next day a man visited Mother. The children did not see him when he arrived because they were in the kitchen.

'Is it the doctor?' Phyllis asked.

'I don't think it is,' Peter said. He opened the kitchen door and listened to Mother and the man in the front room.

Then Mother called Roberta.

'Jim's grandfather is here,' she said. 'He wants to meet you.'

The children quickly washed their hands and faces and went to the front room.

Mother was in a chair near the window. In another chair near her was — the old man from the train!

'Oh! It's you!' Roberta said. Then she remembered to say hello.

'This is Jim's grandfather,' Mother said.

'Are you here to take Jim away?' Peter asked. 'Can he stay with us for a week or two?'

'Yes, he can come home when he's better,' said the old man. Then he and Roberta walked through the garden together. 'I have your letter,' he said, 'and I think I can help you.'





*Mother was in a chair near the window. In another chair near her was – the old man from the train!*

## Chapter 10

### A Happy Day

Slowly Jim's leg got better. He and the children were good friends now. Every day they all had lessons with Mother and played games outside in the garden.

Because the children were with Jim all the time, they had no time to go to the railway.

'We never go there now,' Phyllis said.

'Let's go tomorrow,' Roberta said.

In the morning they ran down to the railway line.

'Wait for me!' Phyllis shouted.

The train went past and they all waved. Jim's grandfather waved back, and all the other people on the train waved, too. They all had newspapers in their hands and smiles on their faces.

'Why did they all wave?' Peter asked.

'I don't know,' Roberta said. 'Perhaps it was because of the old man.'



*The train went past and they all waved. Jim's grandfather waved back, and all the other people on the train waved, too.*



She was right. That morning the old man asked everybody on the train to wave when they saw Roberta, Peter and Phyllis.

The children went back to the house. Roberta could not think about her lessons. She was excited and afraid at the same time.

'Are you ill?' Mother asked.

'I don't think so,' Roberta said. 'But can I go outside, please? I don't want to be inside the house.'

Mother said Roberta could go outside. She walked slowly through the garden and down to the railway station.

On the road to the station people smiled at her and said hello.

When she got to the station, the Station Master smiled too, then quickly walked away.

'Something's going to happen,' Roberta thought.

Perks came out. He had a newspaper in his hand.



'This is very good,' he said, waving the newspaper.

'Very, very good.'

'What is it?' Roberta asked.

Before he could answer, the train came into the station.

Then something very good and very exciting happened.

Only three people got out of the train. The first was an old lady. The second was a young lady, and the third —

'Daddy! My daddy!'

Everybody looked out of the windows of the train and saw the pretty girl run and throw her arms around the tall, thin man.

'This is my happiest day. I'm so happy you're home,' she said as they walked down the road to the house.

'They caught the spy,' her father said. 'Everybody knows now that I was not the spy'

'I always knew that it was not you, Father. We all knew — Mother and I and Jim's grandfather.'



*'Daddy! My daddy!'*

'Because he helped me, I'm now out of prison,' said her father. 'Now go into the house and tell your mother that I'm home.'

Roberta went into the house and spoke to her mother. Father stood in the garden, watched the birds and the flowers, and knew that now he was home. Home with his wife and his children. His railway children.