

E. Nesbit
THE RAILWAY CHILDREN

Read by **Eve Karpf • Delia Paton • Robert Benfield and cast**

**JUNIOR
CLASSICS**



1	Edgecombe Villa	3:46
2	Father is taken away	4:59
3	A little, white house in the country	7:43
4	Coalmining	4:55
5	The old gentleman	3:14
6	“Look out at the station!”	9:57
7	The doctor and the head nurse	2:22
8	Bobbie’s birthday	4:36
9	The Russian gentleman	6:27
10	Saving the train	7:27
11	Heroes	8:57
12	Drama on the canal	13:13
13	Perks’s birthday	20:14
14	A squabble	6:04
15	The terrible secret	7:03
16	The hound in the red jersey	10:30
17	Jim’s grandfather	5:16
18	A happy ending	12:40

Total time: 2:19:31

*Cover picture: Children waving at a train/Staniland-Pugh.
Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library.*

E. Nesbit

THE RAILWAY CHILDREN

The Railway Children is E. Nesbit's most famous novel. Written in 1906, it has survived the ravages of time and fashion to become a well-loved staple of most children's literary diet.

Perhaps one of the reasons it is so popular today, is that it harks back to a time of innocence when children were children, not the safety-conscious mini-adults they are in today's world of tabloid terrors. The world, its people, and all its secrets are at Bobbie, Peter and Phyllis's feet. Bobbie climbs happily into the doctor's cart for a ride; Mother welcomes total strangers into her home and door keys are left on doorsteps. Adventures are there for the taking and the children are allowed to explore their environs and their own capabilities unfettered by fear – a freedom available to very few children today. E. Nesbit's world is a nostalgic escape from the one most of her readers inhabit.

And yet it is not a purely sugar-and-spice world. The adventures the children encounter are often terrifying or dangerous, and the lessons they learn hard.

The scene in the railway tunnel is a

genuinely frightening episode. At first the children risk being wiped out in the pitch-black by a passing express train, as they search for a lost young boy. Later, they risk life and limb again, by standing in the path of a thundering train in order to prevent an accident. The children's courage is rewarded in the novel in various ways, sometimes materially, but, more importantly to E. Nesbit, by the love and respect of others and their own feelings of self-worth.

The children learn some tough lessons about human pride and the ethics of charity. Perks's birthday and the scene where the old gentleman brings the hamper are good examples. The children are not out-and-out goody-goody, but as fallible as real children. They do make gauche and embarrassing mistakes, they do upset their parents and they do get some sharp reprimands.

They also come face-to-face with the ugly reality of injustice and the abuse of human rights. Not only has their own father been wrongfully imprisoned on a trumped-up charge, but they also learn about the cruel treatment of political prisoners from the

Russian refugee they find at the station.

Nesbit's commitment to presenting children with serious political themes in a way they can understand extends to her portrayal of the working-class characters who share the stage with the middle-class Bobbie, Peter and Phyllis. A keen socialist and founder member of the Fabian Society, Nesbit treats Perks, the barge couple and other similar characters with dignity, intelligence and sensitivity. They are anything but mere figures of fun. Perks commands unanimous respect from his fellow villagers and lives in horror of being a 'charity' case. Bill the bargeman, although brusque and aggressive, is shown to be generous and fair beneath the surface and,

despite his nights at the pub, a loyal family man. Nesbit's description of the bargees at the Rose and Crown shows genuine admiration for the working-class way of life.

Born Edith Nesbit in 1858, her childhood was unsettled and spent between France, Germany and England. She married young and experienced poverty. This was when she decided to turn to writing, and discovered a knack for family adventures: *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* came in 1899, *The Phoenix and the Carpet* in 1904, *The Story of the Amulet* and *The Railway Children* in 1906.

Notes by Anna Britten

The Railway Children – The Cast

Narrator	Eve Karpf
Mother	Delia Paton
Bobbie	Sarah Corbett
Peter	Thomas Martin
Phyllis	Nicola Grant
Perks	Robert Benfield
Father/Old gentleman	Neville Jason
Ruth/Barge woman/Mrs Perks	Laura Paton
Doctor/Bill the Bargeman/Jim	Benjamin Soames



Eve Karpf (Narrator) trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. Her extensive experience of voiceover, audiobook and radio work includes stints on BBC Radio and *Spitting Image*, and cartoon series such as *Oscar's Orchestra* and *Dennis and Gnasher* for BBC TV. She is regularly seen on television and her film credits include *A Touch of Class* and *Human Factor*.



Delia Paton (Mother) trained at RADA and after extensive stage experience she moved towards radio and television work. Her many television credits include the BBC series *Survivors*, *Backs to the Land*, *Seal Morning* and *Eastenders* and she has written and performed her own adaptation of Mrs Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* as a one-woman show. She also reads on *The Moonstone* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Robert Benfield (Perks) played the role of Perks in the hugely popular stage version of *The Railway Children* at the Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich, with which he has had a long association. He has also performed in theatres nationwide, including Scarborough's Theatre in the Round and the Greenwich Theatre.



Sarah Corbett (Bobbie), **Thomas Martin** (Peter) and **Nicola Grant** (Phyllis) are all aspiring young actors at school in St. Albans.

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Read by **Eve Karpf • Delia Paton • Robert Benfield
Sarah Corbett • Thomas Martin • Nicola Grant**

When Roberta, Peter and Phyllis's father is arrested for a crime he did not commit and they have to start a new life in the country, they fear the happy times are gone forever. Little do they expect the exciting adventures and the new friends that await them. By the end they have learned more about life and themselves than they had ever dreamed possible. This full-cast, dramatised version of E. Nesbit's children's classic delightfully brings to life the adventures of *The Railway Children*.

*"E. Nesbit's story...has been given a new lease of life...
a high quality recording."*

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