

The Railway Children by E. Nesbit

Peter had a birthday – his tenth. Among his presents was a model engine more perfect than you could ever have dreamed of. The other presents were full of charm, but the Engine was fuller of charm than any of the others were.

Its charm lasted in its full perfection for exactly three days. Then, owing either to Peter's inexperience or Phyllis's good intentions, which had been rather pressing, or to some other cause, the Engine suddenly went off with a bang. James was so frightened that he went out and did not come back all day. All the Noah's Ark people who were in the tender were broken to bits, but nothing else was hurt except the poor little engine and the feelings of Peter.

Father had been away in the country for three or four days. All Peter's hopes for the curing of his afflicted Engine were now fixed on his father, for Father was most wonderfully clever with his fingers. He could mend all sorts of things. He had often acted as veterinary surgeon to the wooden rocking-horse; once he had saved its life when all human aid was despaired of, and the poor creature was given up for lost, and even the carpenter said he didn't see his way to do anything. And it was Father who mended his doll's cradle when no one else could; and with a little glue and some bits of wood and a penknife made all the Noah's Ark beasts as strong on their pins as ever they were, if not stronger.

Peter, with heroic unselfishness, did not say anything about his Engine till after Father had had his dinner and his after-dinner cigar. The unselfishness was Mother's idea – but it was Peter who carried it out. And it needed a good deal of patience, too.

At last Mother said to Father, 'Now, dear, if you're quite rested and quite comfy, we want to tell you about the great railway accident, and ask your advice.'

'All right,' said Father, 'fire away!'

So then Peter told the sad tale, and fetched what was left of the Engine.

'Hum,' said Father, when he had looked the Engine over very carefully.

The children held their breaths.

'Is there *no* hope?' said Peter, in a low, unsteady voice.

'Hope? Rather! Tons of it,' said Father, cheerfully; 'but it'll want something besides hope – a bit of brazing, say, or some solder, and a new valve. I think we'd better keep it for a rainy day. In other words, I'll give up a Saturday afternoon to it, and you shall help me.'

