

‘It’s magic,’ said Phyllis, breathlessly. ‘I always knew this railway was enchanted.’

It really did seem a little like magic. For all the trees for about twenty yards of the opposite bank seemed to be slowly walking down towards the railway line, the tree with the grey leaves bringing up the rear like some old shepherd driving a flock of green sheep.

‘What is it? Oh, what is it?’ said Phyllis; ‘it’s much too magic for me. I don’t like it. Let’s go home.’

But Bobbie and Peter clung fast to the rail and watched breathlessly. And Phyllis made no movement towards going home by herself.

The trees moved on and on. Some stones and loose earth fell down and rattled on the railway metals far below.

‘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 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.

‘Oh,’ said Peter, in awestruck tones, ‘isn’t it exactly like when coals come in?—if there wasn’t any roof to the cellar and you could see down.’

‘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 ever seen it.

‘No time,’ he said; ‘it’s two miles away, and it’s past eleven.’

‘Couldn’t we,’ suggested Phyllis, breathlessly, ‘couldn’t we climb up a telegraph post and do something to the wires?’

‘We don’t know how,’ said Peter.

‘They do it in war,’ said Phyllis; ‘I know I’ve heard of it.’

‘They only *cut* them, silly,’ said Peter, ‘and that doesn’t do any good. And we couldn’t cut them even if we got up, and we couldn’t get up. If we had anything red, we could get down on the line and wave it.’

‘But the train wouldn’t see us till it got round the corner, and then it could see the mound just as well as us,’ said Phyllis; ‘better, because it’s much bigger than us.’

‘If we only had something red,’ Peter repeated, ‘we could go round the corner and wave to the train.’

‘We might wave, anyway.’

‘They’d only think it was just *us*, as usual. We’ve waved so often before. Anyway, let’s get down.’

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, skirting² the newly fallen mound of stones and rock and earth, and bent, crushed, twisted trees. They ran at their best pace. Peter led, but the girls were not far behind.

1 *petticoat*—a thin dress worn under the outer clothes.

2 *skirting*—going around.