

# The Perkins Family

## by Jennifer Russell

Mr and Mrs Perkins were ordinary people. They were neither extravagant and exciting, nor mysterious or fascinating. In truth, they were really rather dull. Mr Perkins was a clerk at the West Village Recruitment Office. Mrs Perkins took care of the children, Margaret, John and Darcy, at their new home on 56 Western Road.

Margaret and John were children with a wild imagination. They longed to leave the house and explore, but they were shut away while Mrs Perkins cared for the baby. Instead, they played together with Margaret's dolls and read Enid Blyton books until they knew each story word for word.

"Would you like some sugar mice, John?" Margaret passed him the bag of sweets, grinning. She was thirteen years old, three years older than John, but she certainly had still acquired a sweet tooth.

"We aren't allowed those before tea!" John lowered his voice to a whisper, as if someone else might hear him. "You haven't taken them from the cupboard, have you? Mummy will be frightfully angry if she finds out."

"I'll put them back, don't be a worry wart. She won't notice a thing if we only take a few."

"Oh, all right." He took one from the bag, and then handed them back to Margaret. "But you better be careful."

Rolling them up into her dress pocket, she sighed and picked a book from the shelf. "Don't you get bored, John? I fear that we shall never get to explore the village, not until we start at our new school. I say we go ourselves."

"Are you mad? We'd surely get caught, and then we'd be in real trouble. It is dreadfully boring, but—"

"It'll be fun, I promise! Daddy says there's a railway station just down the road. We can wave to the people. You like trains, don't you?"

The look on Margaret's face was one of excitement and longing, and John couldn't very well say no to that.

"All right, I'll come with you – but we mustn't be long!"

So off they went the next morning after breakfast, hurrying down the street. The railway station was past the school and down the slope. An older man sat on the bench with his briefcase as he waited for the train, waving to the children as they ran along. As they raced alongside the tracks, they could see smoke puffing out into the air from the distance.

"Look, Margaret! It's a steam train!" John ran further ahead, lifting his cap off his head and waving it about. Margaret quickly caught him up, laughing and waving as the train came closer.

"Aye, a steam train ye say? I'd been wonderin' if it'd show up." Both children jumped at the sound of a man's voice behind them and turned their heads to see the man with his briefcase.

"Ah, sorry, didn't mean to scare ya." He raised his voice as the train passed, watching them both wave to the people. "I'm Mr Mannings, I'm waitin' for me brother to return from London."

"Whatever do you need a briefcase for?" Margaret asked, turning to face him. "Are you going on a journey too?"

The man huffed a laugh. "Me, leave this village? I wouldn't dream of it."

As the train slowed near the station, he nodded to the children. "I better head back. Don't get yerselves into any trouble now." And with that, he was gone.

"What an odd man!" Margaret exclaimed. "I wonder what his brother had been doing in London."

John nodded in agreement, watching the people leave the train. "Daddy tells me that there are lots of businesses in London. I should like to visit one day."

"Perhaps he might take us. I hope so. A train journey does sound fun – we can share sweets on the way!"

The thought of sweets on a journey to London made John very excited, and he ran down the path to Mr Mannings and his brother. The man who had just left the train was tall and bearded, and his large fingers swallowed Mr Mannings' as he shook his hand. His eyes followed the children running towards him.

Mr Mannings laughed. "Oh, you two're back? Did ye have something to ask?"

John nodded, looking up at Mannings' brother with fascination. "What was the journey like? Was London very noisy?"

So, they followed the man to the bench and sat beside him and Mr Mannings. He talked for a long time about London, and about how trains work – how the systems operate. He talked for such a long while, in fact, that by the time he was finished the sky had clouded over.

"John and I must get back now." Margaret said, anxious that someone might have noticed their disappearance.

"Ah, well, it was a pleasure." He nodded.

Mr Mannings pulled the briefcase out from under the bench. "Here, I have one more thing for you kids." Opening the briefcase, he pulled out a large, old wooden toy train and handed it to them.

Margaret gasped. "Oh, for us? Thank you, sir! That's very kind of you." Mr Mannings smiled. "It's no trouble. You'll make more use from it than I would've."

Carrying the train with them, they ran back home and snuck inside through the door. The smell of a roast was wafting through the air. "Lunchtime!" Mrs Perkins called, and they hurriedly hid the train under John's bedcovers.

As they arrived at the dinner table, their mother was smiling at them. "Children, I have some good news for you. Your father is taking you on a trip to London!"