

The Storyteller

It was a hot afternoon, and the hour-long train journey had only just begun. There were five people in the railway carriage – two young girls and their brother, sitting with their aunt, and a young man, who was sitting alone in the corner. The young man had already begun to think he'd chosen the wrong carriage to sit in.



The children were hot, tired, and bored, and behaving badly. The youngest girl was singing the first line of a song, over and over again. Everything the aunt said began with 'Don't!' and everything the children said began with 'Why?'

'Don't put your feet on the seat, Cyril!'

'Why not?'

'Because you'll make it dirty. And don't stare at the man. Oh, look at those sheep in that field!'

Nearly every field the train had travelled past had had sheep in it, so the aunt's surprise was difficult to explain.

'Why is that man taking the sheep into the other field?' asked the younger girl.

'Perhaps there's more grass in that field,' replied the aunt.

'But there's lots of grass in both fields.'

'Well, perhaps the grass is better in the other field.'

'Why is it better?' came the immediate question from Cyril.

The young man was looking annoyed. 'I imagine he doesn't like children,' the aunt thought.

'Come and sit over here, all of you, and I'll tell you a story', she said.

The children did not look at all excited by the aunt's offer. They'd obviously heard her stories before, and this one was very boring indeed. It was about a beautiful young girl



who worked very hard and behaved perfectly. Everyone in the village loved her. One day she fell into a lake, and of course, everybody ran to save her immediately.

‘So they saved her because she was so good?’ asked the bigger girl.

‘Exactly so,’ said the aunt.

‘But that’s silly,’ said the girl. ‘When people are in danger, you always try to save them – you don’t ask whether they’re good or not.’

‘Well, perhaps they ran a little faster to save her because she was so good,’ the aunt replied.

‘Oh, how stupid!’ said the girl.

‘It’s definitely the most stupid story I’ve ever heard,’ said Cyril.

‘It was so stupid I didn’t even listen to it,’ the younger girl said, and began singing the first line of her song again.

‘You’re not a great success as a storyteller,’ said the young man suddenly from the corner.

‘Well, it’s not easy to tell stories that young people can understand and enjoy,’ the aunt replied, sounding stressed.

‘I don’t agree,’ said the young man.

‘Well, perhaps you would like to tell them a story then?’ she suggested.

‘OK,’ said the young man. And he began.

