

Reggie the Rusty Engine



Illustration by Josiene Saibrosa da Silva

By

Mr Sproulle and Mrs Sproulle

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Alex woke up early on Saturday morning. “No school today,” he said to himself as he jumped out of bed.

On Saturdays he went with his family to the Slimstone Railway. There was lots for him to do while Dad and the other volunteers worked in the sheds and Mum ran the cafe. He had to look after his little sister, Thea, but she was alright. They could play on the swings then Mum might give them something to eat.

After breakfast they set off. Soon Alex and Thea were playing on the swings but today was different. He wanted to explore.

“Come on, Thea! Let’s have a look round.”

“But Mummy said ...”

“We won’t go far. What’s in those sheds? Let’s go and have a look.”

They left the playing field and skirted round some of the sheds.

“You can’t come in here,” said a man. “Health and Safety!”

They walked down the side of a very large black shed until they reached the large double doors.

“The railway goes in,” observed Thea, “there must be engines in there!”

There was a large lock on the door. They carried on round the other side and there was a small shed with a rickety door that didn’t close properly. Some rails also ran inside as well. Alex was curious so he peered into the gloom.

“I can see an engine,” he said.

“We can go and have a look,” said Thea, “there’s no one here.”

The door creaked as they eased it open. Inside stood a dirty-looking little engine. It was rusty, oily and there were boxes of bits on the floor.

Alex walked beside it, picking his way over bits of metal and pools of dark oily water.

“It’s called Reggie!” he cried.

“How do you know?” asked Thea.

“It says so here, look! R - E - G - G - I - E!”

It was indeed called Reggie with the nameplate on the side of its cab.

Later that day when the family had returned home, Alex wanted to talk to his father.

“Dad, why isn’t Reggie working like the other engines?”

“Reggie? Which one’s that?” There were quite a few engines, carriages, trucks and other things scattered around the site.

“He’s in a shed round the back.”

“Oh yes. Well, Alex, it needs a lot of work. And money. The boiler’s rusted badly and that’s very expensive to repair.”

“But you’re repairing other engines.”

“Yes, I know. Maybe one day we’ll get round to Reggie.”

“But he looked so sad all alone in his shed.”

“I know, Alex. One day we’ll fix him and then you can go for a ride. How about that?”

On Monday afternoon Alex’s class were drawing pictures. Ms Frost, their teacher, was looking at their work. She made encouraging comments as she went from student to student.

“That’s a really good engine, Alex!” she said as she looked over his shoulder.

“It’s Reggie, Miss,” replied Alex.

“Is he a real engine, or did you make him up?” she asked.

“He’s at the Slimstone Railway, Miss. He’s all alone in a shed and he looks sad.”

“Why is he sad?”

“Because he’s all rusty and there’s no money to fix him.”

Alex’s friend, Timmy, looked at Alex’s drawing. “If he was all fixed up, we could all go for a ride, Miss!”

“That would be fun, wouldn’t it?”

Soon other students wanted to know about the fun that Alex and Timmy were to have.

“We could all go for a ride!” enthused Mia.

“Queens have trains, don’t they? So princesses ride in them, too!” exclaimed Bella.

“But we need lots of money to fix Reggie,” said Alex.

Mia wasn’t going to be put off by this. “Can’t we get money, Miss? We can make biscuits and cakes and ... and...”

Ms Frost thought they’d need to sell a lot of cakes to make a difference but she didn’t want to dampen their enthusiasm.

Two days later Ms Frost was talking to a friend. “They’re so enthusiastic about this rusty engine at the Slimstone Railway.”

“They cost an awful lot to fix up.”

“They want to sell cakes.”

“Why don’t I have a chat with a friend at Eastern Television?”

Two weeks later Alex was still drawing pictures of Reggie and the other students were drawing trains or queens and princesses riding in trains.

Ms Frost had an announcement to make. “Students! I have exciting news! Eastern Television want to do a short piece on Reggie the Rusty Engine! Also, they want to interview some children.”

“Alex should be on television, Miss. It’s his engine,” pointed out Timmy.

Everybody looked at Alex. He thought for a bit then he spoke. “Mia made those biscuits so she should be there and Bella helped and ... Miss? Can’t we all be on the television?”

“Please, Miss? Can we, Miss?” chorused the class.

“Well, I think that’s a really good idea. I must ask the head teacher, but yes, why not?”

Two weeks later the rickety doors on Rusty Reggie’s shed were held wide open and bright lights penetrated the gloom. Mia and Bella had collected some wild flowers and these were placed on Reggie.

The interview went really well and the children played their part. Alex explained why Reggie was so important to the class and Mia told the viewers how they had raised £17.60 selling cakes. Timmy and Bella said how keen they were to go for a ride and finally the class gave Reggie a rousing cheer.

A few days later Alex’s father got a phone call from the Slimstone Railway. “The phones been ringing all day! We’ve had lots of people pledging money. We need to set up a separate fund. Can you manage it for us? As you know, we need to raise close to a £100,000. But thanks to the children it’s now looking possible!”

One year later Reggie stood waiting for his first passengers to arrive. The whole school had been invited and Alex and Thea were head of the queue.

The mayor of the town had come to cut the ribbon. The townspeople were cheering and the television cameras were filming the celebrations.

Alex stood with Thea and his classmates and looked at a brightly polished Reggie. Smoke rose from his chimney and steam squirted out at various points. The little engine stood proudly on his four wheels with his bright red paint and his squat black chimney. His cab had little round windows facing forward and they could see the driver's head as he checked his instruments.

"He looks like he has a hat on!" remarked Mia.

"That's his water tank," said Timmy.

"He needs a lot of water to make steam," said Alex.

"He's so shiny!" said Thea.

And they all agreed, Reggie didn't look sad anymore.