

## **An Eagle in the Snow by Michael Morpurgo**

### **Part One - The 11.50 to London**

The train was still in the station, and I was wondering if we'd ever get going. I was with my Ma. I was tired. My arm was hurting and itching at the same time, inside the plaster. I remember she was already at her knitting, her knitting needles tick-tacking away, automatically, effortlessly. Whenever she sat down, Ma would always be knitting. Socks for Dad this time.

"This train's late leaving," Ma said. "Wonder what's up? That clock on the platform says it's well past twelve already. Still, not hardly surprising, I suppose, under the circumstances." Then she said something that surprised me. "If I drop off to sleep, Barney," she told me, "just you keep your eye on that suitcase, d'you hear? All we got in this world is up there in that luggage rack, and I don't want no one pinching it."

I was just thinking that was quite a strange thing to say, because there was no one else in the carriage except the two of us, when the door opened and a man got in, slamming the door behind him. He never said a word to us, hardly even acknowledged we were there, but took off his hat, put it up on the rack beside our suitcase, and then settled himself into the seat opposite. He looked at his watch and opened up his paper, his face disappearing behind it for a while. He had to put it down to blow his nose, which was when he caught me staring at him, and nodded.

Everything about him was neat, I noticed that at once, from his highly polished shoes, to his trim moustache and his collar and tie. I decided straight away that he didn't look like the sort of man that would pinch Ma's suitcase. There was also something about him that I thought I recognised. Maybe it was just because he seemed about the same age as Grandpa, with the same searching look in his eye.

But this stranger was neat, and there was nothing neat about my grandpa. My grandpa was a scarecrow.