District 1040 Young Writer – Intermediate class – winner Esther Derbridge

**On the train**

Lower Chumley was a small, single track train station in Shropshire. John Macintosh stood on platform 2. He looked at his watch. The 8:15 to Birmingham was running ten minutes late. He shifted his feet impatiently and rechecked his watch. Mary Brown hurried anxiously onto platform 1 on the other side of the track; two small children in tow in one hand, in the other, a large leather suitcase. Her left eye blackened, her hands shaking as she clutched the worn handle. The train to Birmingham finally arrived. Mary took a seat opposite John; a kind looking man, she thought, but then again that’s what she thought about Bill and within a week he had started hitting her.

John didn’t look at Mary. He stared blanky into space, the train tracks chanting,

*‘Got to get rid of it,*

*Got to get rid of it,*

*Got to get rid of it,*

*Got to get rid of it.’*

The money sat in the bag at his feet. £2 million. Cash. Stolen money. Stolen from his dead twin, James, who died a soldier in Afghanistan. His life insurance had gone to his wife, just months later she died of a broken heart. With them both dead John had used his twin’s ID to fraudulently get hold of the money. John had not slept for weeks night. Not since the guilt kept him awake.

Mary sat opposite John, her children sitting either side of her. The air around them was stuffy and awkward. John kept staring into space, so Mary took that as a sign that he didn’t want to talk to her. Ever since Mary had been married to Bill, he had been abusive. The last few months had been harder. The punching more constant. She had to get away. She had to give her children a proper life. Mary had had this idea many a times but this time she was doing it, she was running away.

John was uncomfortable, it wasn’t that the seats were hard. It was Mary. He could feel her looking at him, he didn’t want to ignore her, but he didn’t know what to say. “H-hello, err h-how are you?” John didn’t quite know what to say, he wasn’t a very big socializer. “Hello, very good thanks, you?” “Well, thank you.” “John, my name” “ahh Mary”. Mary explained where she was going and why. As she was talking, John was listening and thinking. This was the best way to get rid of the money, and not feel the guilt! Sounds like she could use the money anyway.

John pulled a small notepad from his pocket. He tore a sheet a wrote this simple message. *‘Keep the money, you need it’.* As the train pulled to a stop, John got up. “That would be me”. He got off the train and walked away. Mary noticed that he left his bag and stood. “John, JOHN!”, she shouted from the window, but he just carried on walking. What should she do? What if she never saw him again? Then, her daughter picked up John’s note. She read out what it said. John walked away the feeling of peace settled over him. Mary sat back down. For the first time in years, she knew hope.

Esther Derbridge