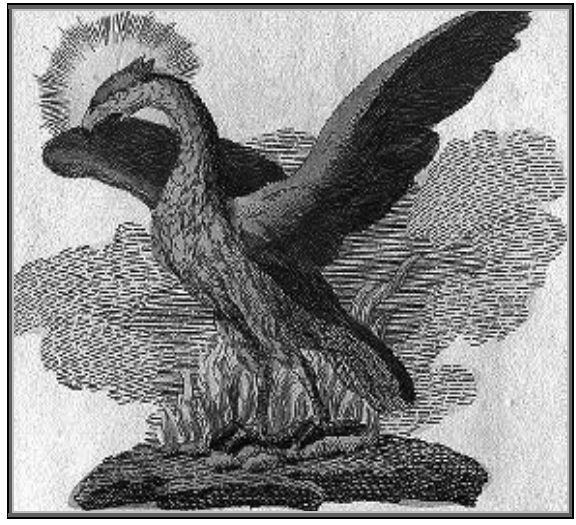
The

Phoenix

And the Carpet

By

Edith Nesbit



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* * *

TO
My Dear Godson
HUBERT GRIFFITH
and his sister MARGARET

TO HUBERT

Dear Hubert, if I ever found
A wishing-carpet lying round,
I'd stand upon it, and I'd say:
'Take me to Hubert, right away!'
And then we'd travel very far
To where the magic countries are
That you and I will never see,
And choose the loveliest gifts for you, from me.

But oh! alack! and well-a-day!
No wishing-carpets come my way.
I never found a Phoenix yet,
And Psammeads are so hard to get!
So I give you nothing fine—
Only this book your book and mine,
And hers, whose name by yours is set;
Your book, my book, the book of Margaret!

E. NESBIT
DYMCHURCH
September, 1904

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* * *

CHAPTER 1.
THE EGG

It began with the day when it was almost the Fifth of November, and a doubt arose in some breast—Robert's, I fancy—as to the quality of the fireworks laid in for the Guy Fawkes celebration.

'They were jolly cheap,' said whoever it was, and I think it was Robert, 'and suppose they didn't go off on the night? Those Prosser kids would have something to snigger about then.'

'The ones *I* got are all right,' Jane said; 'I know they are, because the man at the shop said they were worth thribble the money—'

'I'm sure thribble isn't grammar,' Anthea said.

'Of course it isn't,' said Cyril; 'one word can't be grammar all by itself, so you needn't be so jolly clever.'

Anthea was rummaging in the corner-drawers of her mind for a very disagreeable answer, when she remembered what a wet day it was, and how the boys had been disappointed of that ride to London and back on the top of the tram, which their mother had promised them as a reward for not having once forgotten, for six whole days,

to wipe their boots on the mat when they came home from school.

So Anthea only said, 'Don't be so jolly clever yourself, Squirrel. And the fireworks look all right, and you'll have the eightpence that your tram fares didn't cost to-day, to buy something more with. You ought to get a perfectly lovely Catharine wheel for eightpence.'

'I daresay,' said Cyril, coldly; 'but it's not YOUR eightpence anyhow—'

'But look here,' said Robert, 'really now, about the fireworks. We don't want to be disgraced before those kids next door. They think because they wear red plush on Sundays no one else is any good.'

'I wouldn't wear plush if it was ever so—unless it was black to be beheaded in, if I was Mary Queen of Scots,' said Anthea, with scorn.

Robert stuck steadily to his point. One great point about Robert is the steadiness with which he can stick.

'I think we ought to test them,' he said.

'You young duffer,' said Cyril, 'fireworks are like post-age-stamps. You can only use them once.'

'What do you suppose it means by "Carter's tested seeds" in the advertisement?'

There was a blank silence. Then Cyril touched his fore-head with his finger and shook his head.

'A little wrong here,' he said. 'I was always afraid of that with poor Robert. All that cleverness, you know, and being top in algebra so often—it's bound to tell—'

'Dry up,' said Robert, fiercely. 'Don't you see? You can't TEST seeds if you do them ALL. You just take a few here and there, and if those grow you can feel pretty sure the others will be—what do you call it?—Father told me—"up to sample". Don't you think we ought to sample the fire-works? Just shut our eyes and each draw one out, and then try them.'

'But it's raining cats and dogs,' said Jane.

'And Queen Anne is dead,' rejoined Robert. No one was in a very good temper. 'We needn't go out to do them; we can just move back the table, and let them off on the old tea-tray we play toboggans with. I don't know what YOU think, but *I* think it's time we did something, and that would be really useful; because then we shouldn't just HOPE the fireworks would make those Prossers sit up—we should KNOW.'

'It WOULD be something to do,' Cyril owned with languid approval.

So the table was moved back. And then the hole in the carpet, that had been near the window till the carpet was turned round, showed most awfully. But Anthea stole out on tip-toe, and got the tray when cook wasn't looking, and brought it in and put it over the hole.

Then all the fireworks were put on the table, and each of the four children shut its eyes very tight and put out its hand and grasped something. Robert took a cracker, Cyril and Anthea had Roman candles; but Jane's fat paw closed on the gem of the whole collection, the Jack-in-the-box that had cost two shillings, and one at least of the party—I will not say which, because it was sorry afterwards—declared that Jane had done it on purpose. Nobody was pleased. For the worst of it was that these four children, with a very proper dislike of anything even faintly bordering on the sneakish, had a law, unalterable as those of the Medes and Persians, that one had to stand by the results of a toss-up, or a drawing of lots, or any other appeal to chance, however much one might happen to dislike the way things were turning out.

'I didn't mean to,' said Jane, near tears. 'I don't care, I'll draw another—'

'You know jolly well you can't,' said Cyril, bitterly. 'It's settled. It's Medium and Persian. You've done it, and you'll have to stand by it—and us too, worse luck. Never mind. YOU'LL have your pocket-money before the Fifth. Anyway, we'll have the Jack-in-the-box LAST, and get the most out of it we can.'

So the cracker and the Roman candles were lighted, and they were all that could be expected for the money; but when it came to the Jack-in-the-box it simply sat in the tray and laughed at them, as Cyril said. They tried to light it with paper and they tried to light it with matches; they

tried to light it with Vesuvian fusees from the pocket of father's second-best overcoat that was hanging in the hall. And then Anthea slipped away to the cupboard under the stairs where the brooms and dustpans were kept, and the rosiny fire-lighters that smell so nice and like the woods where pine-trees grow, and the old newspapers and the bees-wax and turpentine, and the horrid an stiff dark rags that are used for cleaning brass and furniture, and the paraffin for the lamps. She came back with a little pot that had once cost sevenpence-halfpenny when it was full of red-currant jelly; but the jelly had been all eaten long ago, and now Anthea had filled the jar with paraffin. She came in, and she threw the paraffin over the tray just at the moment when Cyril was trying with the twenty-third match to light the Jack-in-the-box. The Jack-in-the-box did not catch fire any more than usual, but the paraffin acted quite differently, and in an instant a hot flash of flame leapt up and burnt off Cyril's eyelashes, and scorched the faces of all four before they could spring back. They backed, in four instantaneous bounds, as far as they could, which was to the wall, and the pillar of fire reached from floor to ceiling.

'My hat,' said Cyril, with emotion, 'You've done it this time, Anthea.'

The flame was spreading out under the ceiling like the rose of fire in Mr Rider Haggard's exciting story about Allan Quatermain. Robert and Cyril saw that no time was to be lost. They turned up the edges of the carpet, and

kicked them over the tray. This cut off the column of fire, and it disappeared and there was nothing left but smoke and a dreadful smell of lamps that have been turned too low.

All hands now rushed to the rescue, and the paraffin fire was only a bundle of trampled carpet, when suddenly a sharp crack beneath their feet made the amateur firemen start back. Another crack—the carpet moved as if it had had a cat wrapped in it; the Jack-in-the-box had at last allowed itself to be lighted, and it was going off with desperate violence inside the carpet.

Robert, with the air of one doing the only possible thing, rushed to the window and opened it. Anthea screamed, Jane burst into tears, and Cyril turned the table wrong way up on top of the carpet heap. But the firework went on, banging and bursting and spluttering even underneath the table.

Next moment mother rushed in, attracted by the howls of Anthea, and in a few moments the firework desisted and there was a dead silence, and the children stood looking at each other's black faces, and, out of the corners of their eyes, at mother's white one.

The fact that the nursery carpet was ruined occasioned but little surprise, nor was any one really astonished that bed should prove the immediate end of the adventure. It has been said that all roads lead to Rome; this may be

true, but at any rate, in early youth I am quite sure that many roads lead to BED, and stop there—or YOU do.

The rest of the fireworks were confiscated, and mother was not pleased when father let them off himself in the back garden, though he said, 'Well, how else can you get rid of them, my dear?'

You see, father had forgotten that the children were in disgrace, and that their bedroom windows looked out on to the back garden. So that they all saw the fireworks most beautifully, and admired the skill with which father handled them.

Next day all was forgotten and forgiven; only the nursery had to be deeply cleaned (like spring-cleaning), and the ceiling had to be whitewashed.

And mother went out; and just at tea-time next day a man came with a rolled-up carpet, and father paid him, and mother said—

'If the carpet isn't in good condition, you know, I shall expect you to change it.' And the man replied—

'There ain't a thread gone in it nowhere, mum. It's a bargain, if ever there was one, and I'm more'n 'arf sorry I let it go at the price; but we can't resist the lydies, can we, sir?' and he winked at father and went away.

Then the carpet was put down in the nursery, and sure enough there wasn't a hole in it anywhere.

As the last fold was unrolled something hard and loud-sounding bumped out of it and trundled along the nursery floor. All the children scrambled for it, and Cyril got it. He took it to the gas. It was shaped like an egg, very yellow and shiny, half-transparent, and it had an odd sort of light in it that changed as you held it in different ways. It was as though it was an egg with a yolk of pale fire that just showed through the stone.

'I MAY keep it, mayn't I, mother?' Cyril asked.

And of course mother said no; they must take it back to the man who had brought the carpet, because she had only paid for a carpet, and not for a stone egg with a fiery yolk to it.

So she told them where the shop was, and it was in the Kentish Town Road, not far from the hotel that is called the Bull and Gate. It was a poky little shop, and the man was arranging furniture outside on the pavement very cunningly, so that the more broken parts should show as little as possible. And directly he saw the children he knew them again, and he began at once, without giving them a chance to speak.

'No you don't' he cried loudly; 'I ain't a-goin' to take back no carpets, so don't you make no bloomin' errer. A bargain's a bargain, and the carpet's puffik throughout.'

'We don't want you to take it back,' said Cyril; 'but we found something in it.'

'It must have got into it up at your place, then,' said the man, with indignant promptness, 'for there ain't nothing in nothing as I sell. It's all as clean as a whistle.'

'I never said it wasn't CLEAN,' said Cyril, 'but—'

'Oh, if it's MOTHS,' said the man, 'that's easy cured with borax. But I expect it was only an odd one. I tell you the carpet's good through and through. It hadn't got no moths when it left my 'ands—not so much as an hegg.'

'But that's just it,' interrupted Jane; 'there WAS so much as an egg.'

The man made a sort of rush at the children and stamped his foot.

'Clear out, I say!' he shouted, 'or I'll call for the police. A nice thing for customers to 'ear you a-coming 'ere a-charging me with finding things in goods what I sells. 'Ere, be off, afore I sends you off with a flea in your ears. Hi! constable—'

The children fled, and they think, and their father thinks, that they couldn't have done anything else. Mother has her own opinion.

But father said they might keep the egg.

'The man certainly didn't know the egg was there when he brought the carpet,' said he, 'any more than your mother did, and we've as much right to it as he had.'

So the egg was put on the mantelpiece, where it quite brightened up the dingy nursery. The nursery was dingy,

because it was a basement room, and its windows looked out on a stone area with a rockery made of clinkers facing the windows. Nothing grew in the rockery except London pride and snails.

The room had been described in the house agent's list as a 'convenient breakfast-room in basement,' and in the daytime it was rather dark. This did not matter so much in the evenings when the gas was alight, but then it was in the evening that the blackbeetles got so sociable, and used to come out of the low cupboards on each side of the fireplace where their homes were, and try to make friends with the children. At least, I suppose that was what they wanted, but the children never would.

On the Fifth of November father and mother went to the theatre, and the children were not happy, because the Prossers next door had lots of fireworks and they had none.

They were not even allowed to have a bonfire in the garden.

'No more playing with fire, thank you,' was father's answer, when they asked him.

When the baby had been put to bed the children sat sadly round the fire in the nursery.

'I'm beastly bored,' said Robert.

'Let's talk about the Psammead,' said Anthea, who generally tried to give the conversation a cheerful turn.

'What's the good of TALKING?' said Cyril. 'What I want is for something to happen. It's awfully stuffy for a chap not to be allowed out in the evenings. There's simply nothing to do when you've got through your homers.'

Jane finished the last of her home-lessons and shut the book with a bang.

'We've got the pleasure of memory,' said she. 'Just think of last holidays.'

Last holidays, indeed, offered something to think of—for they had been spent in the country at a white house between a sand-pit and a gravel-pit, and things had happened. The children had found a Psammead, or sand-fairy, and it had let them have anything they wished for—just exactly anything, with no bother about its not being really for their good, or anything like that. And if you want to know what kind of things they wished for, and how their wishes turned out you can read it all in a book called Five Children and It (It was the Psammead). If you've not read it, perhaps I ought to tell you that the fifth child was the baby brother, who was called the Lamb, because the first thing he ever said was 'Baa!' and that the other children were not particularly handsome, nor were they extra clever, nor extraordinarily good. But they were not bad sorts on the whole; in fact, they were rather like you.

'I don't want to think about the pleasures of memory,' said Cyril; 'I want some more things to happen.'

'We're very much luckier than any one else, as it is,' said Jane. 'Why, no one else ever found a Psammead. We ought to be grateful.'

'Why shouldn't we GO ON being, though?' Cyril asked—'lucky, I mean, not grateful. Why's it all got to stop?'

'Perhaps something will happen,' said Anthea, comfortably. 'Do you know, sometimes I think we are the sort of people that things DO happen to.'

'It's like that in history,' said Jane: 'some kings are full of interesting things, and others—nothing ever happens to them, except their being born and crowned and buried, and sometimes not that.'

'I think Panther's right,' said Cyril: 'I think we are the sort of people things do happen to. I have a sort of feeling things would happen right enough if we could only give them a shove. It just wants something to start it. That's all.'

'I wish they taught magic at school,' Jane sighed. 'I believe if we could do a little magic it might make something happen.'

'I wonder how you begin?' Robert looked round the room, but he got no ideas from the faded green curtains, or the drab Venetian blinds, or the worn brown oil-cloth on the floor. Even the new carpet suggested nothing, though its pattern was a very wonderful one, and always

seemed as though it were just going to make you think of something.

'I could begin right enough,' said Anthea; 'I've read lots about it. But I believe it's wrong in the Bible.'

'It's only wrong in the Bible because people wanted to hurt other people. I don't see how things can be wrong unless they hurt somebody, and we don't want to hurt anybody; and what's more, we jolly well couldn't if we tried. Let's get the Ingoldsby Legends. There's a thing about Abra-cadabra there,' said Cyril, yawning. 'We may as well play at magic. Let's be Knights Templars. They were awfully gone on magic. They used to work spells or something with a goat and a goose. Father says so.'

'Well, that's all right,' said Robert, unkindly; 'you can play the goat right enough, and Jane knows how to be a goose.'

'I'll get Ingoldsby,' said Anthea, hastily. 'You turn up the hearthrug.'

So they traced strange figures on the linoleum, where the hearthrug had kept it clean. They traced them with chalk that Robert had nicked from the top of the mathematical master's desk at school. You know, of course, that it is stealing to take a new stick of chalk, but it is not wrong to take a broken piece, so long as you only take one. (I do not know the reason of this rule, nor who made it.) And they chanted all the gloomiest songs they could think of. And, of course, nothing happened. So then

Anthea said, 'I'm sure a magic fire ought to be made of sweet-smelling wood, and have magic gums and essences and things in it.'

'I don't know any sweet-smelling wood, except cedar,' said Robert; 'but I've got some ends of cedar-wood lead pencil.'

So they burned the ends of lead pencil. And still nothing happened.

'Let's burn some of the eucalyptus oil we have for our colds,' said Anthea.

And they did. It certainly smelt very strong. And they burned lumps of camphor out of the big chest. It was very bright, and made a horrid black smoke, which looked very magical. But still nothing happened. Then they got some clean tea-cloths from the dresser drawer in the kitchen, and waved them over the magic chalk-tracings, and sang 'The Hymn of the Moravian Nuns at Bethlehem', which is very impressive. And still nothing happened. So they waved more and more wildly, and Robert's tea-cloth caught the golden egg and whisked it off the mantelpiece, and it fell into the fender and rolled under the grate.

'Oh, crikey!' said more than one voice.

And every one instantly fell down flat on its front to look under the grate, and there lay the egg, glowing in a nest of hot ashes.

'It's not smashed, anyhow,' said Robert, and he put his hand under the grate and picked up the egg. But the egg was much hotter than any one would have believed it could possibly get in such a short time, and Robert had to drop it with a cry of 'Bother!' It fell on the top bar of the grate, and bounced right into the glowing red-hot heart of the fire.

'The tongs!' cried Anthea. But, alas, no one could remember where they were. Every one had forgotten that the tongs had last been used to fish up the doll's teapot from the bottom of the water-butt, where the Lamb had dropped it. So the nursery tongs were resting between the water-butt and the dustbin, and cook refused to lend the kitchen ones.

'Never mind,' said Robert, 'we'll get it out with the poker and the shovel.'

'Oh, stop,' cried Anthea. 'Look at it! Look! look! look! I do believe something IS going to happen!'

For the egg was now red-hot, and inside it something was moving. Next moment there was a soft cracking sound; the egg burst in two, and out of it came a flame-coloured bird. It rested a moment among the flames, and as it rested there the four children could see it growing bigger and bigger under their eyes.

Every mouth was a-gape, every eye a-goggle.

The bird rose in its nest of fire, stretched its wings, and flew out into the room. It flew round and round, and

round again, and where it passed the air was warm. Then it perched on the fender. The children looked at each other. Then Cyril put out a hand towards the bird. It put its head on one side and looked up at him, as you may have seen a parrot do when it is just going to speak, so that the children were hardly astonished at all when it said, 'Be careful; I am not nearly cool yet.'

They were not astonished, but they were very, very much interested.

They looked at the bird, and it was certainly worth looking at. Its feathers were like gold. It was about as large as a bantam, only its beak was not at all bantam-shaped. 'I believe I know what it is,' said Robert. 'I've seen a picture.'

He hurried away. A hasty dash and scramble among the papers on father's study table yielded, as the sum-books say, 'the desired result'. But when he came back into the room holding out a paper, and crying, 'I say, look here,' the others all said 'Hush!' and he hushed obediently and instantly, for the bird was speaking.

'Which of you,' it was saying, 'put the egg into the fire?'

'He did,' said three voices, and three fingers pointed at Robert.

The bird bowed; at least it was more like that than anything else.

'I am your grateful debtor,' it said with a high-bred air.

The children were all choking with wonder and curiosity—all except Robert. He held the paper in his hand, and he KNEW. He said so. He said—

'*I* know who you are.'

And he opened and displayed a printed paper, at the head of which was a little picture of a bird sitting in a nest of flames.

'You are the Phoenix,' said Robert; and the bird was quite pleased.

'My fame has lived then for two thousand years,' it said. 'Allow me to look at my portrait.' It looked at the page which Robert, kneeling down, spread out in the fender, and said—

'It's not a flattering likeness... And what are these characters?' it asked, pointing to the printed part.

'Oh, that's all dullish; it's not much about YOU, you know,' said Cyril, with unconscious politeness; 'but you're in lots of books.'

'With portraits?' asked the Phoenix.

'Well, no,' said Cyril; 'in fact, I don't think I ever saw any portrait of you but that one, but I can read you something about yourself, if you like.'

The Phoenix nodded, and Cyril went off and fetched Volume X of the old Encyclopedia, and on page 246 he found the following:—

'Phoenix—in ornithology, a fabulous bird of antiquity.'

'Antiquity is quite correct,' said the Phoenix, 'but fabulous—well, do I look it?'

Every one shook its head. Cyril went on—

'The ancients speak of this bird as single, or the only one of its kind.'

'That's right enough,' said the Phoenix.

'They describe it as about the size of an eagle.'

'Eagles are of different sizes,' said the Phoenix; 'it's not at all a good description.'

All the children were kneeling on the hearthrug, to be as near the Phoenix as possible.

'You'll boil your brains,' it said. 'Look out, I'm nearly cool now;' and with a whirr of golden wings it fluttered from the fender to the table. It was so nearly cool that there was only a very faint smell of burning when it had settled itself on the table-cloth.

'It's only a very little scorched,' said the Phoenix, apologetically; 'it will come out in the wash. Please go on reading.'

The children gathered round the table.

'The size of an eagle,' Cyril went on, 'its head finely crested with a beautiful plumage, its neck covered with feathers of a gold colour, and the rest of its body purple; only the tail white, and the eyes sparkling like stars. They

say that it lives about five hundred years in the wilderness, and when advanced in age it builds itself a pile of sweet wood and aromatic gums, fires it with the wafting of its wings, and thus burns itself; and that from its ashes arises a worm, which in time grows up to be a Phoenix. Hence the Phoenicians gave—'

'Never mind what they gave,' said the Phoenix, ruffling its golden feathers. 'They never gave much, anyway; they always were people who gave nothing for nothing. That book ought to be destroyed. It's most inaccurate. The rest of my body was never purple, and as for my—tail—well, I simply ask you, IS it white?'

It turned round and gravely presented its golden tail to the children.

'No, it's not,' said everybody.

'No, and it never was,' said the Phoenix. 'And that about the worm is just a vulgar insult. The Phoenix has an egg, like all respectable birds. It makes a pile—that part's all right—and it lays its egg, and it burns itself; and it goes to sleep and wakes up in its egg, and comes out and goes on living again, and so on for ever and ever. I can't tell you how weary I got of it—such a restless existence; no repose.'

'But how did your egg get HERE?' asked Anthea.

'Ah, that's my life-secret,' said the Phoenix. 'I couldn't tell it to any one who wasn't really sympathetic. I've always been a misunderstood bird. You can tell that by

what they say about the worm. I might tell YOU,' it went on, looking at Robert with eyes that were indeed starry. 'You put me on the fire—' Robert looked uncomfortable.

'The rest of us made the fire of sweet-scented woods and gums, though,' said Cyril.

'And—and it was an accident my putting you on the fire,' said Robert, telling the truth with some difficulty, for he did not know how the Phoenix might take it. It took it in the most unexpected manner.

'Your candid avowal,' it said, 'removes my last scruple. I will tell you my story.'

'And you won't vanish, or anything sudden will you? asked Anthea, anxiously.

'Why?' it asked, puffing out the golden feathers, 'do you wish me to stay here?'

'Oh YES,' said every one, with unmistakable sincerity.

'Why?' asked the Phoenix again, looking modestly at the table-cloth.

'Because,' said every one at once, and then stopped short; only Jane added after a pause, 'you are the most beautiful person we've ever seen.' 'You are a sensible child,' said the Phoenix, 'and I will NOT vanish or anything sudden. And I will tell you my tale. I had resided, as your book says, for many thousand years in the wilderness, which is a large, quiet place with very little really good society, and I was becoming weary of the monoto-

ny of my existence. But I acquired the habit of laying my egg and burning myself every five hundred years—and you know how difficult it is to break yourself of a habit.'

'Yes,' said Cyril; 'Jane used to bite her nails.'

'But I broke myself of it,' urged Jane, rather hurt, 'You know I did.'

'Not till they put bitter aloes on them,' said Cyril.

'I doubt,' said the bird, gravely, 'whether even bitter aloes (the aloe, by the way, has a bad habit of its own, which it might well cure before seeking to cure others; I allude to its indolent practice of flowering but once a century), I doubt whether even bitter aloes could have cured ME. But I WAS cured. I awoke one morning from a feverish dream—it was getting near the time for me to lay that tiresome fire and lay that tedious egg upon it—and I saw two people, a man and a woman. They were sitting on a carpet—and when I accosted them civilly they narrated to me their life-story, which, as you have not yet heard it, I will now proceed to relate. They were a prince and princess, and the story of their parents was one which I am sure you will like to hear. In early youth the mother of the princess happened to hear the story of a certain enchanter, and in that story I am sure you will be interested. The enchanter—'

'Oh, please don't,' said Anthea. 'I can't understand all these beginnings of stories, and you seem to be getting

deeper and deeper in them every minute. Do tell us your OWN story. That's what we really want to hear.'

'Well,' said the Phoenix, seeming on the whole rather flattered, 'to cut about seventy long stories short (though *I* had to listen to them all—but to be sure in the wilderness there is plenty of time), this prince and princess were so fond of each other that they did not want any one else, and the enchanter—don't be alarmed, I won't go into his history—had given them a magic carpet (you've heard of a magic carpet?), and they had just sat on it and told it to take them right away from every one—and it had brought them to the wilderness. And as they meant to stay there they had no further use for the carpet, so they gave it to me. That was indeed the chance of a lifetime!'

'I don't see what you wanted with a carpet,' said Jane, 'when you've got those lovely wings.'

'They ARE nice wings, aren't they?' said the Phoenix, simpering and spreading them out. 'Well, I got the prince to lay out the carpet, and I laid my egg on it; then I said to the carpet, "Now, my excellent carpet, prove your worth. Take that egg somewhere where it can't be hatched for two thousand years, and where, when that time's up, some one will light a fire of sweet wood and aromatic gums, and put the egg in to hatch;" and you see it's all come out exactly as I said. The words were no sooner out of my beak than egg and carpet disappeared. The royal lovers assisted to arrange my pile, and soothed

my last moments. I burnt myself up and knew no more till I awoke on yonder altar.'

It pointed its claw at the grate.

'But the carpet,' said Robert, 'the magic carpet that takes you anywhere you wish. What became of that?'

'Oh, THAT?' said the Phoenix, carelessly—'I should say that that is the carpet. I remember the pattern perfectly.'

It pointed as it spoke to the floor, where lay the carpet which mother had bought in the Kentish Town Road for twenty-two shillings and ninepence.

At that instant father's latch-key was heard in the door.

'OH,' whispered Cyril, 'now we shall catch it for not being in bed!'

'Wish yourself there,' said the Phoenix, in a hurried whisper, 'and then wish the carpet back in its place.'

No sooner said than done. It made one a little giddy, certainly, and a little breathless; but when things seemed right way up again, there the children were, in bed, and the lights were out.

They heard the soft voice of the Phoenix through the darkness.

'I shall sleep on the cornice above your curtains,' it said. 'Please don't mention me to your kinsfolk.'

'Not much good,' said Robert, 'they'd never believe us. I say,' he called through the half-open door to the girls;

'talk about adventures and things happening. We ought to be able to get some fun out of a magic carpet AND a Phoenix.'

'Rather,' said the girls, in bed.

'Children,' said father, on the stairs, 'go to sleep at once. What do you mean by talking at this time of night?'

No answer was expected to this question, but under the bedclothes Cyril murmured one.

'Mean?' he said. 'Don't know what we mean. I don't know what anything means.'

'But we've got a magic carpet AND a Phoenix,' said Robert.

'You'll get something else if father comes in and catches you,' said Cyril. 'Shut up, I tell you.'

Robert shut up. But he knew as well as you do that the adventures of that carpet and that Phoenix were only just beginning.

Father and mother had not the least idea of what had happened in their absence. This is often the case, even when there are no magic carpets or Phoenixes in the house.

The next morning—but I am sure you would rather wait till the next chapter before you hear about THAT.