

# **THE STORY OF THE AMULET**

**by E. Nesbit**

**TO**

**Dr Wallis Budge  
of the British Museum as a  
small token of gratitude for his  
unfailing kindness and help  
in the making of it**

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## CHAPTER 1. THE PSAMMEAD

There were once four children who spent their summer holidays in a white house, happily situated between a sandpit and a chalkpit. One day they had the good fortune to find in the sandpit a strange creature. Its eyes were on long horns like snail's eyes, and it could move them in and out like telescopes. It had ears like a bat's ears, and its tubby body was shaped like a spider's and covered with thick soft fur—and it had hands and feet like a monkey's. It told the children—whose names were Cyril, Robert, Anthea, and Jane—that it was a Psammead or sand-fairy. (Psammead is pronounced Sammy-ad.) It was old, old, old, and its birthday was almost at the very beginning of everything. And it had been buried in the sand for thousands of years. But it still kept its fairylikeness, and part of this fairylikeness was its power to give people whatever they wished for. You know fairies have always been able to do this. Cyril, Robert, Anthea, and Jane now found their wishes come true; but, somehow, they never could think of just the right things to wish for, and their wishes sometimes turned out very oddly indeed. In the end their unwise wishings landed them in what Robert called 'a very tight place indeed', and the Psammead consented to help them out of it in return for their promise never never to ask it to grant them any more wishes, and never to tell anyone about it, because it did not want to be bothered to give wishes to anyone ever any more. At the moment of parting Jane said politely—

'I wish we were going to see you again some day.'

And the Psammead, touched by this friendly thought, granted the wish. The book about all this is called *Five Children and It*, and it ends up in a most tiresome way by saying—

'The children DID see the Psammead again, but it was not in the sandpit; it was—but I must say no more—'

The reason that nothing more could be said was that I had not then been able to find out exactly when and where the children met the Psammead again. Of course I knew they would meet it, because it was a beast of its word, and when it said a thing would happen, that thing happened without

fail. How different from the people who tell us about what weather it is going to be on Thursday next, in London, the South Coast, and Channel!

The summer holidays during which the Psammead had been found and the wishes given had been wonderful holidays in the country, and the children had the highest hopes of just such another holiday for the next summer. The winter holidays were beguiled by the wonderful happenings of The Phoenix and the Carpet, and the loss of these two treasures would have left the children in despair, but for the splendid hope of their next holiday in the country. The world, they felt, and indeed had some reason to feel, was full of wonderful things—and they were really the sort of people that wonderful things happen to. So they looked forward to the summer holiday; but when it came everything was different, and very, very horrid. Father had to go out to Manchuria to telegraph news about the war to the tiresome paper he wrote for—the Daily Bellow, or something like that, was its name. And Mother, poor dear Mother, was away in Madeira, because she had been very ill. And The Lamb—I mean the baby—was with her. And Aunt Emma, who was Mother's sister, had suddenly married Uncle Reginald, who was Father's brother, and they had gone to China, which is much too far off for you to expect to be asked to spend the holidays in, however fond your aunt and uncle may be of you. So the children were left in the care of old Nurse, who lived in Fitzroy Street, near the British Museum, and though she was always very kind to them, and indeed spoiled them far more than would be good for the most grown-up of us, the four children felt perfectly wretched, and when the cab had driven off with Father and all his boxes and guns and the sheepskin, with blankets and the aluminium mess-kit inside it, the stoutest heart quailed, and the girls broke down altogether, and sobbed in each other's arms, while the boys each looked out of one of the long gloomy windows of the parlour, and tried to pretend that no boy would be such a muff as to cry.

I hope you notice that they were not cowardly enough to cry till their Father had gone; they knew he had quite enough to upset him without that. But when he was gone everyone felt as if it had been trying not to cry all its life, and that it must cry now, if it died for it. So they cried.

Tea—with shrimps and watercress—cheered them a little. The watercress was arranged in a hedge round a fat glass salt-cellar, a tasteful device they had never seen before. But it was not a cheerful meal.

After tea Anthea went up to the room that had been Father's, and when she saw how dreadfully he wasn't there, and remembered how every minute was taking him further and further from her, and nearer and nearer to the guns of the Russians, she cried a little more. Then she thought of Mother, ill and alone, and perhaps at that very moment wanting a little girl to put eau-de-cologne on her head, and make her sudden cups of tea, and she cried more than ever. And then she remembered what Mother had said, the night before she went away, about Anthea being the eldest girl, and about trying to make the others happy, and things like that. So she stopped crying, and thought instead. And when she had thought as long as she could bear she washed her face and combed her hair, and went down to the others, trying her best to look as though crying were an exercise she had never even heard of.

She found the parlour in deepest gloom, hardly relieved at all by the efforts of Robert, who, to make the time pass, was pulling Jane's hair—not hard, but just enough to tease.

'Look here,' said Anthea. 'Let's have a palaver.' This word dated from the awful day when Cyril had carelessly wished that there were Red Indians in England—and there had been. The word brought back memories of last summer holidays and everyone groaned; they thought of the white house with the beautiful tangled garden—late roses, asters, marigold, sweet mignonette, and feathery asparagus—of the wilderness which someone had once meant to make into an orchard, but which was now, as Father said, 'five acres of thistles haunted by the ghosts of baby cherry-trees'. They thought of the view across the valley, where the lime-kilns looked like Aladdin's palaces in the sunshine, and they thought of their own sandpit, with its fringe of yellowy grasses and pale-stringy-stalked wild flowers, and the little holes in the cliff that were the little sand-martins' little front doors. And they thought of the free fresh air smelling of thyme and sweetbriar, and the scent of the wood-smoke from the cottages in the lane—and they looked round old Nurse's stuffy parlour, and Jane said—

'Oh, how different it all is!'

It was. Old Nurse had been in the habit of letting lodgings, till Father gave her the children to take care of. And her rooms were furnished 'for letting'. Now it is a very odd thing that no one ever seems to furnish a room 'for letting' in a bit the same way as one would furnish it for living in. This room

had heavy dark red stuff curtains—the colour that blood would not make a stain on—with coarse lace curtains inside. The carpet was yellow, and violet, with bits of grey and brown oilcloth in odd places. The fireplace had shavings and tinsel in it. There was a very varnished mahogany chiffonier, or sideboard, with a lock that wouldn't act. There were hard chairs—far too many of them—with crochet antimacassars slipping off their seats, all of which sloped the wrong way. The table wore a cloth of a cruel green colour with a yellow chain-stitch pattern round it. Over the fireplace was a looking-glass that made you look much uglier than you really were, however plain you might be to begin with. Then there was a mantelboard with maroon plush and wool fringe that did not match the plush; a dreary clock like a black marble tomb—it was silent as the grave too, for it had long since forgotten how to tick. And there were painted glass vases that never had any flowers in, and a painted tambourine that no one ever played, and painted brackets with nothing on them.

‘And maple-framed engravings of the Queen, the Houses of Parliament, the Plains of Heaven, and of a blunt-nosed woodman's flat return.’

There were two books—last December's Bradshaw, and an odd volume of Plumridge's Commentary on Thessalonians. There were—but I cannot dwell longer on this painful picture. It was indeed, as Jane said, very different.

‘Let's have a palaver,’ said Anthea again.

‘What about?’ said Cyril, yawning.

‘There's nothing to have ANYTHING about,’ said Robert kicking the leg of the table miserably.

‘I don't want to play,’ said Jane, and her tone was grumpy.

Anthea tried very hard not to be cross. She succeeded.

‘Look here,’ she said, ‘don't think I want to be preachy or a beast in any way, but I want to what Father calls define the situation. Do you agree?’

‘Fire ahead,’ said Cyril without enthusiasm.

‘Well then. We all know the reason we're staying here is because Nurse couldn't leave her house on account of the poor learned gentleman on the

top-floor. And there was no one else Father could entrust to take care of us—and you know it's taken a lot of money, Mother's going to Madeira to be made well.'

Jane sniffed miserably.

'Yes, I know,' said Anthea in a hurry, 'but don't let's think about how horrid it all is. I mean we can't go to things that cost a lot, but we must do SOMETHING. And I know there are heaps of things you can see in London without paying for them, and I thought we'd go and see them. We are all quite old now, and we haven't got The Lamb—'

Jane sniffed harder than before.

'I mean no one can say "No" because of him, dear pet. And I thought we MUST get Nurse to see how quite old we are, and let us go out by ourselves, or else we shall never have any sort of a time at all. And I vote we see everything there is, and let's begin by asking Nurse to give us some bits of bread and we'll go to St James's Park. There are ducks there, I know, we can feed them. Only we must make Nurse let us go by ourselves.'

'Hurrah for liberty!' said Robert, 'but she won't.'

'Yes she will,' said Jane unexpectedly. 'I thought about that this morning, and I asked Father, and he said yes; and what's more he told old Nurse we might, only he said we must always say where we wanted to go, and if it was right she would let us.'

'Three cheers for thoughtful Jane,' cried Cyril, now roused at last from his yawning despair. 'I say, let's go now.'

So they went, old Nurse only begging them to be careful of crossings, and to ask a policeman to assist in the more difficult cases. But they were used to crossings, for they had lived in Camden Town and knew the Kentish Town Road where the trams rush up and down like mad at all hours of the day and night, and seem as though, if anything, they would rather run over you than not.

They had promised to be home by dark, but it was July, so dark would be very late indeed, and long past bedtime.



They started to walk to St James's Park, and all their pockets were stuffed with bits of bread and the crusts of toast, to feed the ducks with. They started, I repeat, but they never got there.

Between Fitzroy Street and St James's Park there are a great many streets, and, if you go the right way you will pass a great many shops that you cannot possibly help stopping to look at. The children stopped to look at several with gold-lace and beads and pictures and jewellery and dresses, and hats, and oysters and lobsters in their windows, and their sorrow did not seem nearly so impossible to bear as it had done in the best parlour at No. 300, Fitzroy Street.

Presently, by some wonderful chance turn of Robert's (who had been voted Captain because the girls thought it would be good for him—and indeed he thought so himself—and of course Cyril couldn't vote against him because it would have looked like a mean jealousy), they came into the little interesting criss-crossy streets that held the most interesting shops of all—the shops where live things were sold. There was one shop window entirely filled with cages, and all sorts of beautiful birds in them. The children were delighted till they remembered how they had once wished for wings themselves, and had had them—and then they felt how desperately unhappy anything with wings must be if it is shut up in a cage and not allowed to fly.

'It must be fairly beastly to be a bird in a cage,' said Cyril. 'Come on!'

They went on, and Cyril tried to think out a scheme for making his fortune as a gold-digger at Klondyke, and then buying all the caged birds in the world and setting them free. Then they came to a shop that sold cats, but the cats were in cages, and the children could not help wishing someone would buy all the cats and put them on hearthrugs, which are the proper places for cats. And there was the dog-shop, and that was not a happy thing to look at either, because all the dogs were chained or caged, and all the dogs, big and little, looked at the four children with sad wistful eyes and wagged beseeching tails as if they were trying to say, 'Buy me! buy me! buy me! and let me go for a walk with you; oh, do buy me, and buy my poor brothers too! Do! do! do!' They almost said, 'Do! do! do!' plain to the ear, as they whined; all but one big Irish terrier, and he growled when Jane patted him.

'Grrrrr,' he seemed to say, as he looked at them from the back corner of his eye—'YOU won't buy me. Nobody will—ever—I shall die chained up—and I don't know that I care how soon it is, either!'

I don't know that the children would have understood all this, only once they had been in a besieged castle, so they knew how hateful it is to be kept in when you want to get out.

Of course they could not buy any of the dogs. They did, indeed, ask the price of the very, very smallest, and it was sixty-five pounds—but that was because it was a Japanese toy spaniel like the Queen once had her portrait painted with, when she was only Princess of Wales. But the children thought, if the smallest was all that money, the biggest would run into thousands—so they went on.

And they did not stop at any more cat or dog or bird shops, but passed them by, and at last they came to a shop that seemed as though it only sold creatures that did not much mind where they were—such as goldfish and white mice, and sea-anemones and other aquarium beasts, and lizards and toads, and hedgehogs and tortoises, and tame rabbits and guinea-pigs. And there they stopped for a long time, and fed the guinea-pigs with bits of bread through the cage-bars, and wondered whether it would be possible to keep a sandy-coloured double-lop in the basement of the house in Fitzroy Street.

'I don't suppose old Nurse would mind VERY much,' said Jane. 'Rabbits are most awfully tame sometimes. I expect it would know her voice and follow her all about.'

'She'd tumble over it twenty times a day,' said Cyril; 'now a snake—'

'There aren't any snakes, said Robert hastily, 'and besides, I never could cotton to snakes somehow—I wonder why.'

'Worms are as bad,' said Anthea, 'and eels and slugs—I think it's because we don't like things that haven't got legs.'

'Father says snakes have got legs hidden away inside of them,' said Robert.

'Yes—and he says WE'VE got tails hidden away inside us—but it doesn't either of it come to anything REALLY,' said Anthea. 'I hate things that haven't any legs.'

'It's worse when they have too many,' said Jane with a shudder, 'think of centipedes!'

They stood there on the pavement, a cause of some inconvenience to the passersby, and thus beguiled the time with conversation. Cyril was leaning his elbow on the top of a hutch that had seemed empty when they had inspected the whole edifice of hutches one by one, and he was trying to reawaken the interest of a hedgehog that had curled itself into a ball earlier in the interview, when a small, soft voice just below his elbow said, quietly, plainly and quite unmistakably—not in any squeak or whine that had to be translated—but in downright common English—

'Buy me—do—please buy me!'

Cyril started as though he had been pinched, and jumped a yard away from the hutch.

'Come back—oh, come back!' said the voice, rather louder but still softly; 'stoop down and pretend to be tying up your bootlace—I see it's undone, as usual.'

Cyril mechanically obeyed. He knelt on one knee on the dry, hot dusty pavement, peered into the darkness of the hutch and found himself face to face with—the Psammead!

It seemed much thinner than when he had last seen it. It was dusty and dirty, and its fur was untidy and ragged. It had hunched itself up into a miserable lump, and its long snail's eyes were drawn in quite tight so that they hardly showed at all.

'Listen,' said the Psammead, in a voice that sounded as though it would begin to cry in a minute, 'I don't think the creature who keeps this shop will ask a very high price for me. I've bitten him more than once, and I've made myself look as common as I can. He's never had a glance from my beautiful, beautiful eyes. Tell the others I'm here—but tell them to look at some of those low, common beasts while I'm talking to you. The creature inside mustn't think you care much about me, or he'll put a price upon me far, far beyond your means. I remember in the dear old days last summer

you never had much money. Oh—I never thought I should be so glad to see you—I never did.’ It sniffed, and shot out its long snail’s eyes expressly to drop a tear well away from its fur. ‘Tell the others I’m here, and then I’ll tell you exactly what to do about buying me.’ Cyril tied his bootlace into a hard knot, stood up and addressed the others in firm tones—

‘Look here,’ he said, ‘I’m not kidding—and I appeal to your honour,’ an appeal which in this family was never made in vain. ‘Don’t look at that hutch—look at the white rat. Now you are not to look at that hutch whatever I say.’

He stood in front of it to prevent mistakes.

‘Now get yourselves ready for a great surprise. In that hutch there’s an old friend of ours—DON’T look!—Yes; it’s the Psammead, the good old Psammead! it wants us to buy it. It says you’re not to look at it. Look at the white rat and count your money! On your honour don’t look!’

The others responded nobly. They looked at the white rat till they quite stared him out of countenance, so that he went and sat up on his hind legs in a far corner and hid his eyes with his front paws, and pretended he was washing his face.

Cyril stooped again, busying himself with the other bootlace and listened for the Psammead’s further instructions.

‘Go in,’ said the Psammead, ‘and ask the price of lots of other things. Then say, “What do you want for that monkey that’s lost its tail—the mangy old thing in the third hutch from the end.” Oh—don’t mind MY feelings—call me a mangy monkey—I’ve tried hard enough to look like one! I don’t think he’ll put a high price on me—I’ve bitten him eleven times since I came here the day before yesterday. If he names a bigger price than you can afford, say you wish you had the money.’

‘But you can’t give us wishes. I’ve promised never to have another wish from you,’ said the bewildered Cyril.

‘Don’t be a silly little idiot,’ said the Sand-fairy in trembling but affectionate tones, ‘but find out how much money you’ve got between you, and do exactly what I tell you.’

Cyril, pointing a stiff and unmeaning finger at the white rat, so as to pretend that its charms alone employed his tongue, explained matters to the others, while the Psammead hunched itself, and bunched itself, and did its very best to make itself look uninteresting. Then the four children filed into the shop.

'How much do you want for that white rat?' asked Cyril.

'Eightpence,' was the answer.

'And the guinea-pigs?'

'Eighteenpence to five bob, according to the breed.'

'And the lizards?'

'Ninepence each.'

'And toads?'

'Fourpence. Now look here,' said the greasy owner of all this caged life with a sudden ferocity which made the whole party back hurriedly on to the wainscoting of hutches with which the shop was lined. 'Lookee here. I ain't agoin' to have you a comin' in here a turnin' the whole place outer winder, an' prizing every animile in the stock just for your larks, so don't think it! If you're a buyer, BE a buyer—but I never had a customer yet as wanted to buy mice, and lizards, and toads, and guineas all at once. So hout you goes.'

'Oh! wait a minute,' said the wretched Cyril, feeling how foolishly yet well-meaningly he had carried out the Psammead's instructions. 'Just tell me one thing. What do you want for the mangy old monkey in the third hutch from the end?'

The shopman only saw in this a new insult.

'Mangy young monkey yourself,' said he; 'get along with your blooming cheek. Hout you goes!'

'Oh! don't be so cross,' said Jane, losing her head altogether, 'don't you see he really DOES want to know THAT!'

'Ho! does 'e indeed,' sneered the merchant. Then he scratched his ear suspiciously, for he was a sharp business man, and he knew the ring of

truth when he heard it. His hand was bandaged, and three minutes before he would have been glad to sell the 'mangy old monkey' for ten shillings. Now—'Ho! 'e does, does 'e,' he said, 'then two pun ten's my price. He's not got his fellow that monkey ain't, nor yet his match, not this side of the equator, which he comes from. And the only one ever seen in London. Ought to be in the Zoo. Two pun ten, down on the nail, or hout you goes!'

The children looked at each other—twenty-three shillings and fivepence was all they had in the world, and it would have been merely three and fivepence, but for the sovereign which Father had given to them 'between them' at parting. 'We've only twenty-three shillings and fivepence,' said Cyril, rattling the money in his pocket.

'Twenty-three farthings and somebody's own cheek,' said the dealer, for he did not believe that Cyril had so much money.

There was a miserable pause. Then Anthea remembered, and said—

'Oh! I WISH I had two pounds ten.'

'So do I, Miss, I'm sure,' said the man with bitter politeness; 'I wish you 'ad, I'm sure!'

Anthea's hand was on the counter, something seemed to slide under it. She lifted it. There lay five bright half sovereigns.

'Why, I HAVE got it after all,' she said; 'here's the money, now let's have the Sammy,... the monkey I mean.'

The dealer looked hard at the money, but he made haste to put it in his pocket.

'I only hope you come by it honest,' he said, shrugging his shoulders. He scratched his ear again.

'Well!' he said, 'I suppose I must let you have it, but it's worth thribble the money, so it is—'

He slowly led the way out to the hutch—opened the door gingerly, and made a sudden fierce grab at the Psammead, which the Psammead acknowledged in one last long lingering bite.

'Here, take the brute,' said the shopman, squeezing the Psammead so tight that he nearly choked it. 'It's bit me to the marrow, it have.'

The man's eyes opened as Anthea held out her arms.

'Don't blame me if it tears your face off its bones,' he said, and the Psammead made a leap from his dirty horny hands, and Anthea caught it in hers, which were not very clean, certainly, but at any rate were soft and pink, and held it kindly and closely.

'But you can't take it home like that,' Cyril said, 'we shall have a crowd after us,' and indeed two errand boys and a policeman had already collected.

'I can't give you nothink only a paper-bag, like what we put the tortoises in,' said the man grudgingly.

So the whole party went into the shop, and the shopman's eyes nearly came out of his head when, having given Anthea the largest paper-bag he could find, he saw her hold it open, and the Psammead carefully creep into it. 'Well!' he said, 'if that there don't beat cockfighting! But p'raps you've met the brute afore.'

'Yes,' said Cyril affably, 'he's an old friend of ours.'

'If I'd a known that,' the man rejoined, 'you shouldn't a had him under twice the money. 'Owever,' he added, as the children disappeared, 'I ain't done so bad, seeing as I only give five bob for the beast. But then there's the bites to take into account!'

The children trembling in agitation and excitement, carried home the Psammead, trembling in its paper-bag.

When they got it home, Anthea nursed it, and stroked it, and would have cried over it, if she hadn't remembered how it hated to be wet.

When it recovered enough to speak, it said—

'Get me sand; silver sand from the oil and colour shop. And get me plenty.'

They got the sand, and they put it and the Psammead in the round bath together, and it rubbed itself, and rolled itself, and shook itself and scraped itself, and scratched itself, and preened itself, till it felt clean and comfy, and then it scabbled a hasty hole in the sand, and went to sleep in it.

The children hid the bath under the girls' bed, and had supper. Old Nurse had got them a lovely supper of bread and butter and fried onions. She was full of kind and delicate thoughts.

When Anthea woke the next morning, the Psammead was snuggling down between her shoulder and Jane's.

'You have saved my life,' it said. 'I know that man would have thrown cold water on me sooner or later, and then I should have died. I saw him wash out a guinea-pig's hutch yesterday morning. I'm still frightfully sleepy, I think I'll go back to sand for another nap. Wake the boys and this dormouse of a Jane, and when you've had your breakfasts we'll have a talk.'

'Don't YOU want any breakfast?' asked Anthea.

'I daresay I shall pick a bit presently,' it said; 'but sand is all I care about—it's meat and drink to me, and coals and fire and wife and children.' With these words it clambered down by the bedclothes and scrambled back into the bath, where they heard it scratching itself out of sight.

'Well!' said Anthea, 'anyhow our holidays won't be dull NOW. We've found the Psammead again.'

'No,' said Jane, beginning to put on her stockings. 'We shan't be dull—but it'll be only like having a pet dog now it can't give us wishes.'

'Oh, don't be so discontented,' said Anthea. 'If it can't do anything else it can tell us about Megatheriums and things.'



## CHAPTER 2. THE HALF AMULET

Long ago—that is to say last summer—the children, finding themselves embarrassed by some wish which the Psammead had granted them, and which the servants had not received in a proper spirit, had wished that the servants might not notice the gifts which the Psammead gave. And when they parted from the Psammead their last wish had been that they should meet it again. Therefore they HAD met it (and it was jolly lucky for the Psammead, as Robert pointed out). Now, of course, you see that the Psammead's being where it was, was the consequence of one of their wishes, and therefore was a Psammead-wish, and as such could not be noticed by the servants. And it was soon plain that in the Psammead's opinion old Nurse was still a servant, although she had now a house of her own, for she never noticed the Psammead at all. And that was as well, for she would never have consented to allow the girls to keep an animal and a bath of sand under their bed.

When breakfast had been cleared away—it was a very nice breakfast with hot rolls to it, a luxury quite out of the common way—Anthea went and dragged out the bath, and woke the Psammead.

It stretched and shook itself.

'You must have bolted your breakfast most unwholesomely,' it said, 'you can't have been five minutes over it.'

'We've been nearly an hour,' said Anthea. 'Come—you know you promised.'

'Now look here,' said the Psammead, sitting back on the sand and shooting out its long eyes suddenly, 'we'd better begin as we mean to go on. It won't do to have any misunderstanding, so I tell you plainly that—'

'Oh, PLEASE,' Anthea pleaded, 'do wait till we get to the others. They'll think it most awfully sneakish of me to talk to you without them; do come down, there's a dear.'

She knelt before the sand-bath and held out her arms. The Psammead must have remembered how glad it had been to jump into those same

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