

ROALD DAHL



The Magic Finger



Illustrated by Quentin Blake



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PUFFIN

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[The Magic Finger](#)



ROALD DAHL was a spy, ace fighter pilot, chocolate historian and medical inventor. He was also the author of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda*, *The BFG* and many more brilliant stories. He remains THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE STORYTELLER.



QUENTIN BLAKE has illustrated more than three hundred books and was Roald Dahl's favourite illustrator. In 1980 he won the prestigious Kate Greenaway Medal. In 1999 he became the first ever Children's Laureate and in 2013 he was knighted for services to illustration.

This book is for Ophelia and Lucy

INTRODUCING . . .



Girl



**Philip
Gregg**



**William
Gregg**



**Mr and Mrs
Gregg**



The farm next to ours is owned by Mr and Mrs Gregg. The Greggs have two children, both of them boys. Their names are Philip and William. Sometimes I go over to their farm to play with them.

I am a girl and I am eight years old.

Philip is also eight years old.

William is three years older. He is ten.

What?

Oh, all right, then.

He is eleven.

Last week, something very funny happened to the Gregg family. I am going to tell you about it as best I can.

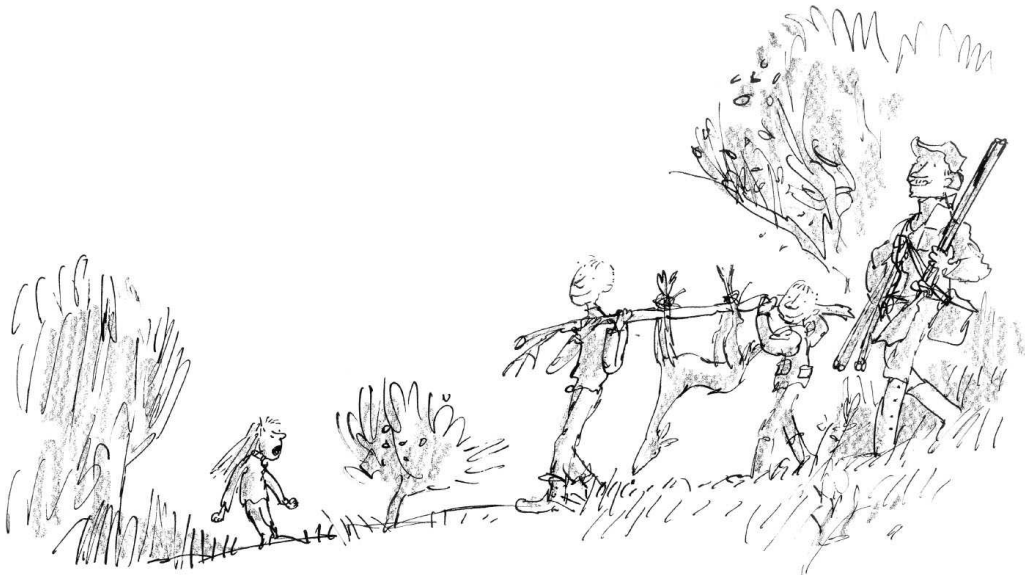
Now the one thing that Mr Gregg and his two boys loved to do more than anything else was to go hunting. Every Saturday morning they would take their guns and go off into the woods to look for animals and birds to shoot. Even Philip, who was only eight years old, had a gun of his own.

I can't stand hunting. I just can't *stand* it. It doesn't seem right to me that men and boys should kill animals just for the fun they get out of it. So I used to try to stop Philip and William from doing it. Every time I went over to their farm I would do my best to talk them out of it, but they only laughed at me.

I even said something about it once to Mr Gregg, but he just walked on past me as if I weren't there.

Then, one Saturday morning, I saw Philip and William coming out of the woods with their father, and they were carrying a lovely young deer.

This made me so cross that I started shouting at them.



The boys laughed and made faces at me, and Mr Gregg told me to go home and mind my own P's and Q's.

Well, that did it!

I saw red.

And before I was able to stop myself, I did something I never meant to do.

I PUT THE MAGIC FINGER ON THEM ALL!



Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I even put it on Mrs Gregg, who wasn't there. I put it on the whole Gregg family.

For months I had been telling myself that I would never put the Magic Finger upon anyone again – not after what happened to my teacher, old Mrs Winter.

Poor old Mrs Winter.

One day we were in class, and she was teaching us spelling. 'Stand up,' she said to me, 'and spell cat.'



'That's an easy one,' I said. '*K-a-t.*'

'You are a stupid little girl!' Mrs Winter said.

'I am not a stupid little girl!' I cried. 'I am a very nice little girl!'

'Go and stand in the corner,' Mrs Winter said.

Then I got cross, and I saw red, and I put the Magic Finger on Mrs Winter good and strong, and almost at once ...

Guess what?



Whiskers began growing out of her face! They were long black whiskers, just like the ones you see on a cat, only much bigger. And how fast they grew! Before we had time to think, they were out to her ears!



Of course the whole class started screaming with laughter, and then Mrs Winter said, 'Will you be so kind as to tell me what you find so madly funny, all of you?'

And when she turned around to write something on the blackboard we saw that she had grown a *tail* as well! It was a huge bushy tail!



I cannot begin to tell you what happened after that, but if any of you are wondering whether Mrs Winter is quite all right again now, the answer is No. And she never will be.

The Magic Finger is something I have been able to do all my life.

I can't tell you just *how* I do it, because I don't even know myself.

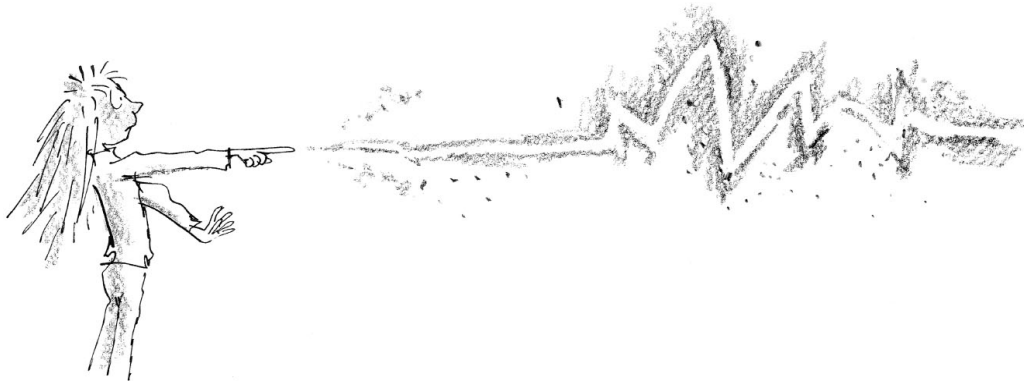
But it always happens when I get cross, when I see red ...

Then I get very, very hot all over ...

Then the tip of the forefinger of my right hand begins to tingle most terribly ...

And suddenly a sort of flash comes out of me, a quick flash, like something electric.

It jumps out and touches the person who has made me cross ...



And after that the Magic Finger is upon him or her, and things begin to happen ...

Well, the Magic Finger was now upon the whole of the Gregg family, and there was no taking it off again.

I ran home and waited for things to happen.

They happened fast.

I shall now tell you what those things were. I got the whole story from Philip and William the next morning, after it was all over.

In the afternoon of the very same day that I put the Magic Finger on the Gregg family, Mr Gregg and Philip and William went out hunting once again. This time they were going after wild ducks, so they headed towards the lake.



In the first hour they got ten birds.

In the next hour they got another six.

'What a day!' cried Mr Gregg. 'This is the best yet!' He was beside himself with joy.

Just then four more wild ducks flew over their heads. They were flying very low. They were easy to hit.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! went the guns.



The ducks flew on.

'We missed!' said Mr Gregg. 'That's funny.'



Then, to everyone's surprise, the four ducks turned around and came flying right back to the guns.

'Hey!' said Mr Gregg. 'What on earth are they doing? They are really asking for it this time!' He shot at them again. So did the boys. And again they all missed!

Mr Gregg got very red in the face. 'It's the light,' he said. 'It's getting too dark to see. Let's go home.'

So they started for home, carrying with them the sixteen birds they had shot before.

But the four ducks would not leave them alone. They now began flying around and around the hunters as they walked away.

Mr Gregg did not like it one bit. 'Be off!' he cried, and he shot at them many more times, but it was no good. He simply could not hit them. All the way home those four ducks flew around in the sky above their heads, and nothing would make them go away.



Late that night, after Philip and William had gone to bed, Mr Gregg went outside to get some wood for the fire.

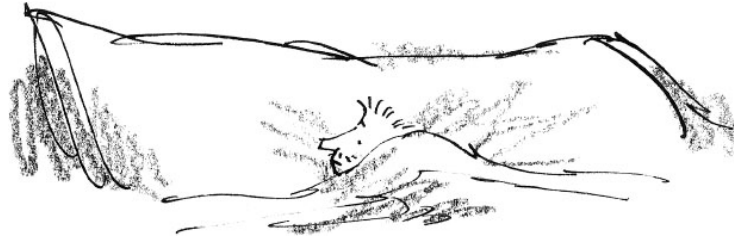
He was crossing the yard when all at once he heard the call of a wild duck in the sky.

He stopped and looked up. The night was very still. There was a thin yellow moon over the trees on the hill, and the sky was filled with stars. Then Mr Gregg heard the noise of wings flying low over his head, and he saw the four ducks, dark against the night sky, flying very close together. They were going around and around the house.



Mr Gregg forgot about the firewood, and hurried back indoors. He was now quite afraid. He did not like what was going on. But he said nothing about it to Mrs Gregg. All he said was, 'Come on, let's go to bed. I feel tired.'

So they went to bed and to sleep.



When morning came, Mr Gregg was the first to wake up.
He opened his eyes.

He was about to put out a hand for his watch, to see the time.

But his hand wouldn't come out.

'That's funny,' he said. 'Where is my hand?'

He lay still, wondering what was up.

Maybe he had hurt that hand in some way?

He tried the other hand.

That wouldn't come out either.

He sat up.

Then, for the first time, he saw what he looked like!

He gave a yell and jumped out of bed.

Mrs Gregg woke up. And when she saw Mr Gregg standing there on the floor, *she* gave a yell, too.

For he was now a tiny little man!

He was maybe as tall as the seat of a chair, but no taller.

And where his arms had been, he had a pair of duck's wings instead!



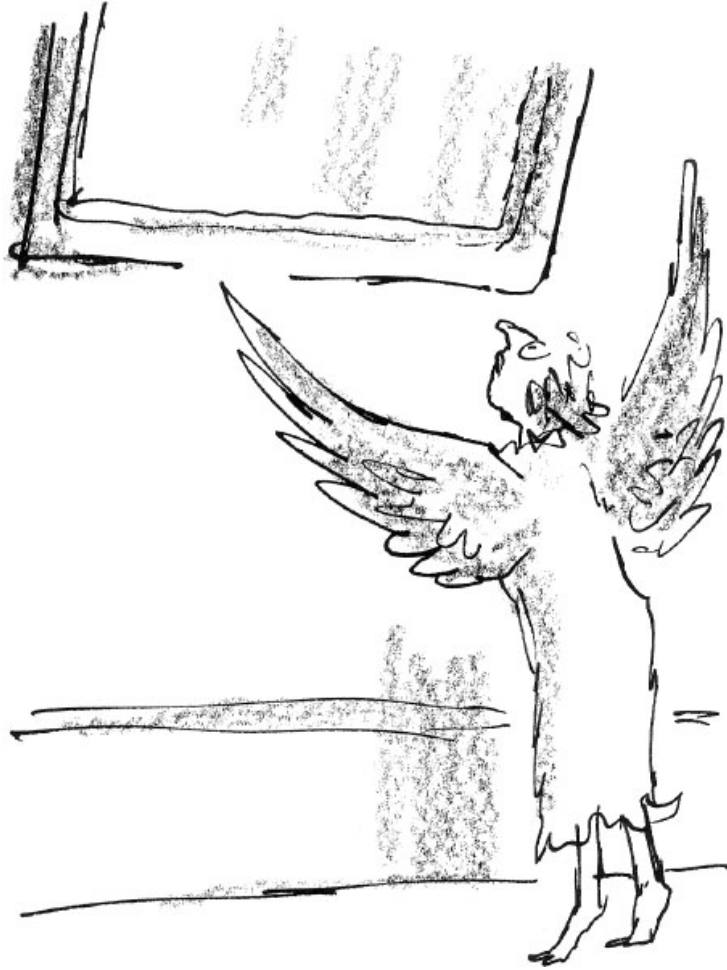
'But ... but ... but ...' cried Mrs Gregg, going purple in the face. 'My dear man, what's happened to you?'

'What's happened to both of us, you mean!' shouted Mr Gregg.

It was Mrs Gregg's turn now to jump out of bed.

She ran to look at herself in the glass. But she was not tall enough to see into it. She was even smaller than Mr Gregg, and she, too, had got wings instead of arms.

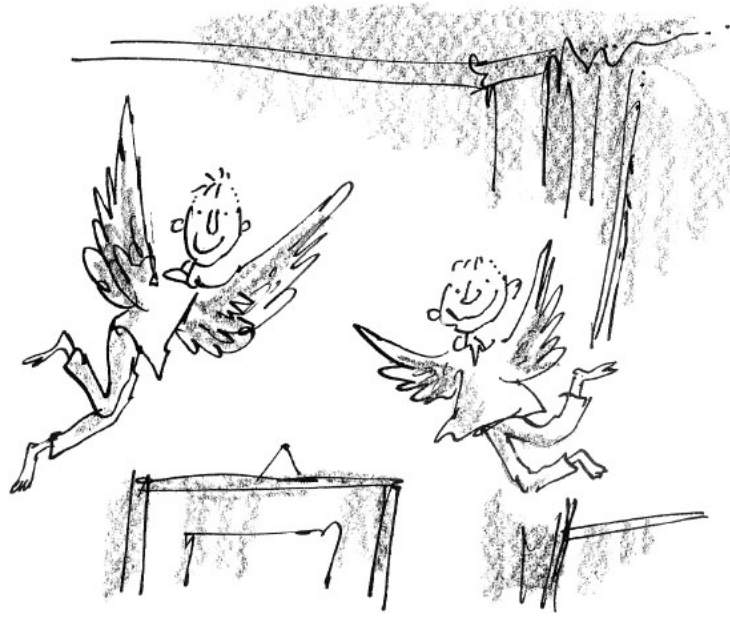
'Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!' sobbed Mrs Gregg.



‘This is witches’ work!’ cried Mr Gregg. And both of them started running around the room, flapping their wings.

A minute later Philip and William burst in. The same thing had happened to them. They had wings and no arms. And they were *really* tiny. They were about as big as robins.

‘Mama! Mama! Mama!’ chirruped Philip. ‘Look, Mama, we can fly!’ And they flew up into the air.



‘Come down at once!’ said Mrs Gregg. ‘You’re much too high!’ But before she could say another word, Philip and William had flown right out the window.

Mr and Mrs Gregg ran to the window and looked out. The two tiny boys were now high up in the sky.

Then Mrs Gregg said to Mr Gregg, ‘Do you think we could do that, my dear?’

‘I don’t see why not,’ Mr Gregg said. ‘Come on, let’s try.’

Mr Gregg began to flap his wings hard, and all at once, up he went.

Then Mrs Gregg did the same.

‘Help!’ she cried as she started going up. ‘Save me!’

‘Come on,’ said Mr Gregg. ‘Don’t be afraid.’

So out the window they flew, far up into the sky, and it did not take them long to catch up with Philip and William.

Soon the whole family was flying around and around together.



‘Oh, isn’t it lovely!’ cried William. ‘I’ve always wanted to know what it feels like to be a bird!’

‘Your wings are not getting tired, are they, dear?’ Mr Gregg asked Mrs Gregg.

‘Not at all,’ Mrs Gregg said. ‘I could go on for ever!’

‘Hey, look down there!’ said Philip. ‘Somebody is walking in our garden!’

They all looked down, and there below them, in their own garden, they saw four *enormous* wild ducks! The ducks were as big as men, and what is more, they had great long arms, like men, instead of wings.

The ducks were walking in a line to the door of the Greggs’ house, swinging their arms and holding their beaks high in the air.

‘Stop!’ called the tiny Mr Gregg, flying down low over their heads. ‘Go away! That’s my house!’

The ducks looked up and quacked. The first one put out a hand and opened the door of the house and went in. The others went in after him. The door shut.



The Greggs flew down and sat on the wall near the door. Mrs Gregg began to cry.

‘Oh, dear! Oh, dear!’ she sobbed. ‘They have taken our house. What *shall* we do? We have no place to go!’

Even the boys began to cry a bit now.



‘We will be eaten by cats and foxes in the night!’ said Philip.

'I want to sleep in my own bed!' said William.

'Now then,' said Mr Gregg. 'It isn't any good crying. That won't help us. Shall I tell you what we are going to do?'

'What?' they said.

Mr Gregg looked at them and smiled. 'We are going to build a nest.'

'A nest!' they said. 'Can we do that?'

'We *must* do it,' said Mr Gregg. 'We've got to have somewhere to sleep. Follow me.'



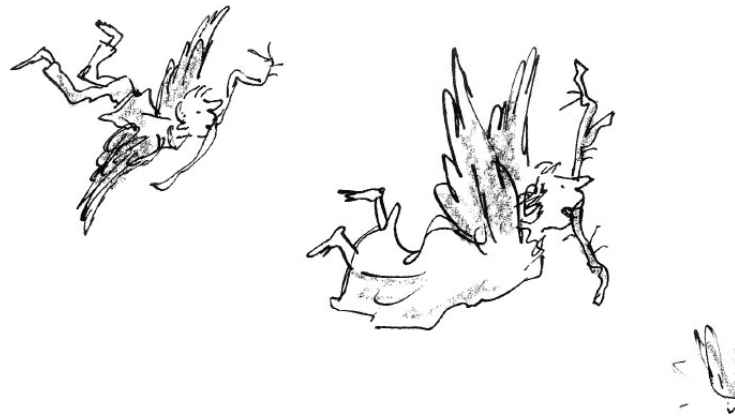
They flew off to a tall tree, and right at the top of it Mr Gregg chose the place for the nest.

'Now we want sticks,' he said. 'Lots and lots of little sticks. Off you go, all of you, and find them and bring them back here.'

'But we have no hands!' said Philip.

'Then use your mouths.'

Mrs Gregg and the children flew off. Soon they were back, carrying sticks in their mouths.



Mr Gregg took the sticks and started to build the nest.

'More,' he said. 'I want more and more and more sticks. Keep going.'

The nest began to grow. Mr Gregg was very good at making the sticks stick together.



After a while he said, 'That's enough sticks. Now I want leaves and feathers and things like that to make the inside nice and soft.'

The building of the nest went on and on. It took a long time. But at last it was finished.

'Try it,' said Mr Gregg, hopping back. He was very pleased with his work.

'Oh, isn't it lovely!' cried Mrs Gregg, going into it and sitting down. 'I feel I might lay an egg any moment!'



The others all got in beside her.

‘How warm it is!’ said William.

‘And what fun to be living so high up,’ said Philip. ‘We may be small, but nobody can hurt us up here.’

‘But what about food?’ said Mrs Gregg. ‘We haven’t had a thing to eat all day.’

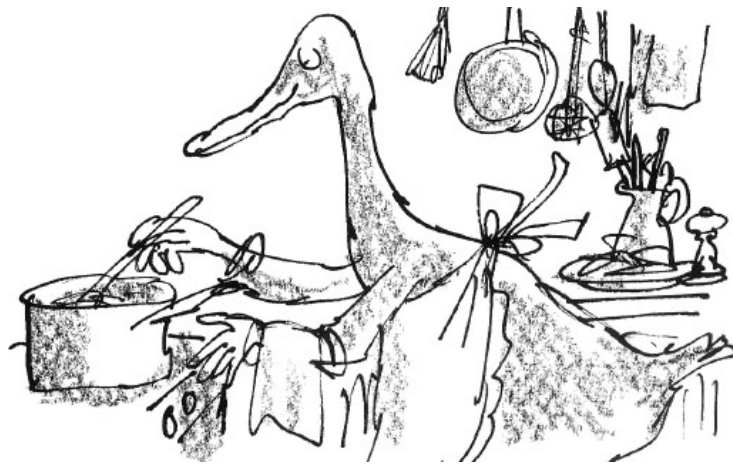
‘That’s right,’ Mr Gregg said. ‘So we will now fly back to the house and go in by an open window and get the tin of biscuits when the ducks aren’t looking.’

‘Oh, we will be pecked to bits by those dirty great ducks!’ cried Mrs Gregg.

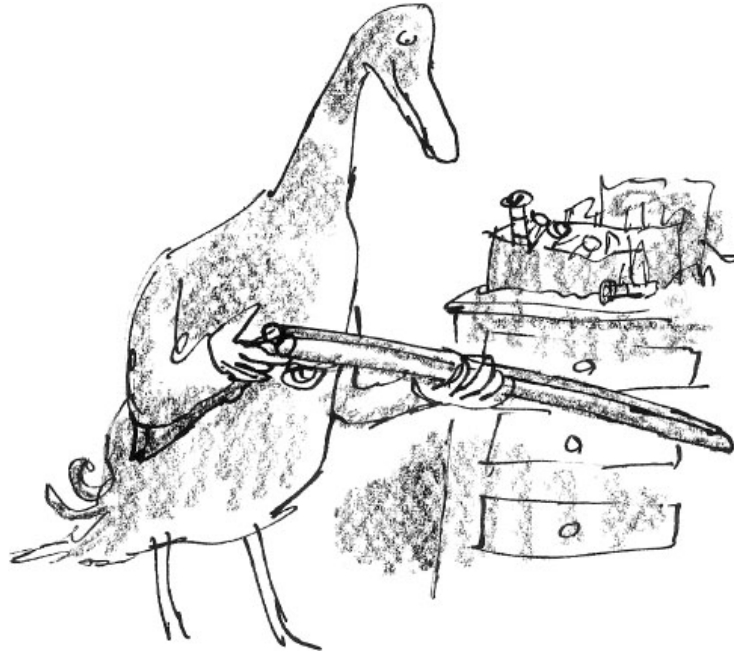
‘We shall be very careful, my love,’ said Mr Gregg. And off they went.

But when they got to the house, they found all the windows and doors closed. There was no way in.

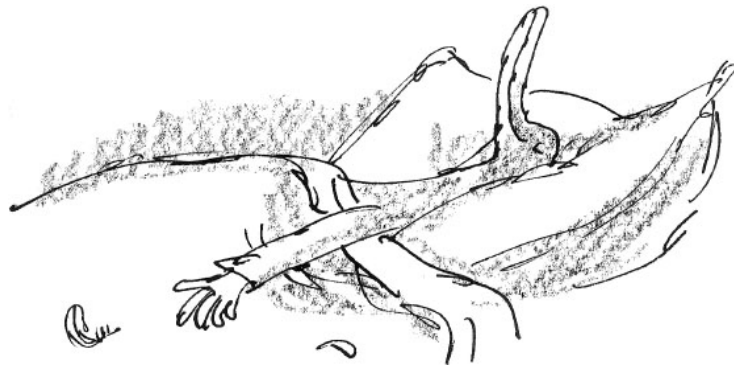
‘Just look at that beastly duck cooking at my stove!’ cried Mrs Gregg as she flew past the kitchen window. ‘How dare she!’



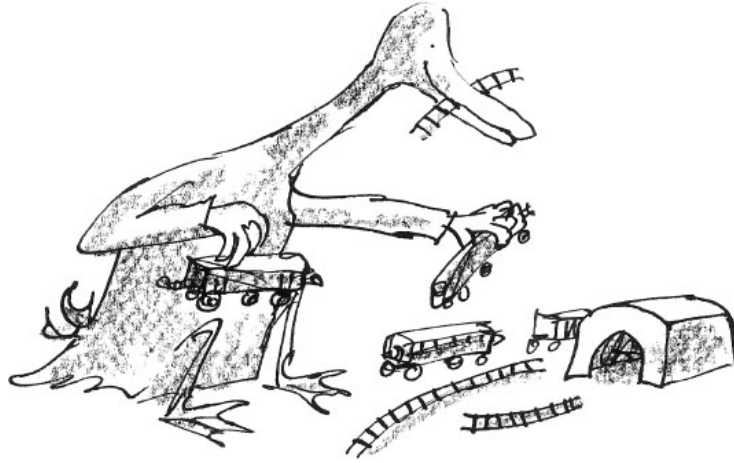
‘And look at *that* one holding my lovely gun!’ shouted Mr Gregg.



‘One of them is lying in my bed!’ yelled William, looking into a top window.



‘And one of them is playing with my electric train!’ cried Philip.



‘Oh, dear! Oh, dear!’ said Mrs Gregg. ‘They have taken over our whole house! We shall never get it back. And what *are* we going to eat?’

‘I will *not* eat worms,’ said Philip. ‘I would rather die.’

‘Or slugs,’ said William.

Mrs Gregg took the two boys under her wings and hugged them. ‘Don’t worry,’ she said. ‘I can mince it all up very fine and you won’t even know the difference. Lovely slugburgers. Delicious wormburgers.’



'Oh no!' cried William.

'Never!' said Philip.

'Disgusting!' said Mr Gregg. 'Just because we have wings, we don't have to eat bird food. We shall eat apples instead. Our trees are full of them. Come on!'

So they flew off to an apple tree.



But to eat an apple without holding it in your hands is not at all easy. Every time you try to get your teeth into it, it just pushes away. In the end, they were able to get a few small bites each. And then it began to get dark, so they all flew back to the nest and lay down to sleep.

It must have been at about this time that I, back in my own house, picked up the telephone and tried to call Philip. I wanted to see if the family was all right.

'Hello,' I said.

'Quack!' said a voice at the other end.



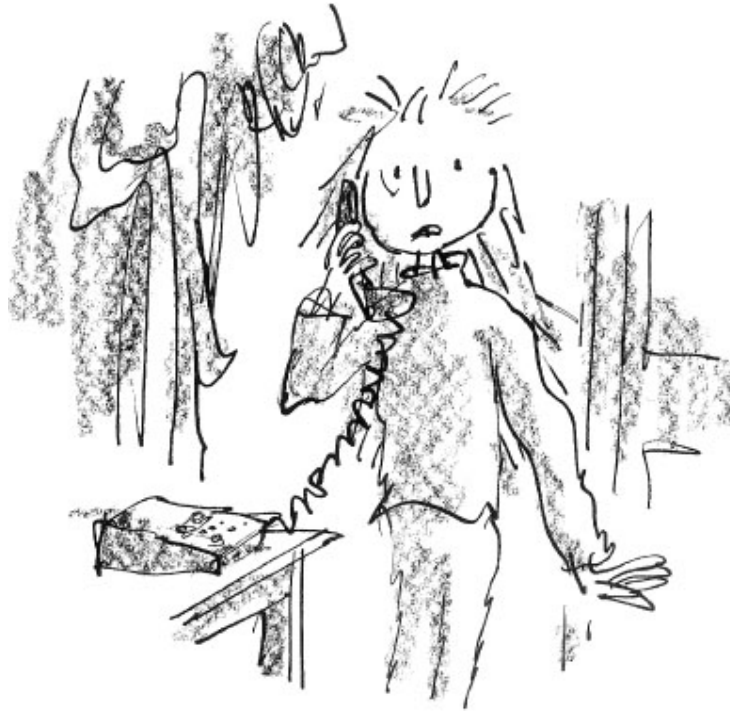
'Who is it?' I asked.

'Quack-quack!'

'Philip,' I said, 'is that you?'

'Quack-quack-quack-quack-quack!'

'Oh, stop it!' I said.



Then there came a very funny noise. It was like a bird laughing.

I put down the telephone quickly.

‘Oh, that Magic Finger!’ I cried. ‘What *has* it done to my friends?’

That night, while Mr and Mrs Gregg and Philip and William were trying to get some sleep up in the high nest, a great wind began to blow. The tree rocked from side to side, and everyone, even Mr Gregg, was afraid that the nest would fall down. Then came the rain. It rained and rained, and the water ran into the nest and they all got as wet as could be – and oh, it was a bad, bad night!



At last the morning came, and with it the warm sun.
'Well!' said Mrs Gregg. 'Thank goodness that's over! I never want to sleep in a nest again!' She got up and looked over the side ...



'Help!' she cried. 'Look! Look down there!'
'What is it, my love?' said Mr Gregg. He stood up and peeped over the side.
He got the surprise of his life!

On the ground below them stood the four enormous ducks, as tall as men, and three of them were holding guns in their hands. One had Mr Gregg's gun, one had Philip's gun, and one had William's gun.

The guns were all pointing right up at the nest.



'No! No! No!' called out Mr and Mrs Gregg, both together.
'Don't shoot! Please don't shoot!'

'Why not?' said one of the ducks. It was the one who wasn't holding a gun. 'You are always shooting at *us*.'

'Oh, but that's not the same!' said Mr Gregg. 'We are *allowed* to shoot ducks!'

'Who allows you?' asked the duck.

'We allow each other,' said Mr Gregg.

'Very nice,' said the duck. 'And now *we* are going to allow each other to shoot you.'

(I would have loved to have seen Mr Gregg's face just then.)

'Oh, *please*!' cried Mrs Gregg. 'My two little children are up here with us! You wouldn't shoot my *children*!'



'Yesterday you shot *my* children,' said the duck. 'You shot all six of my children.'

'I'll never do it again!' cried Mr Gregg. 'Never, never, never!'

'Do you really mean that?' asked the duck.

'I *do* mean it!' said Mr Gregg. 'I'll never shoot another duck as long as I live!'

'That is not good enough,' said the duck. 'What about deer?'

'I'll do anything you say if you will only put down those guns!' cried Mr Gregg. 'I'll never shoot another duck or another deer or anything else again!'

'Will you give me your word on that?' said the duck.

'I will! I will!' said Mr Gregg.



'Will you throw away your guns?' asked the duck.

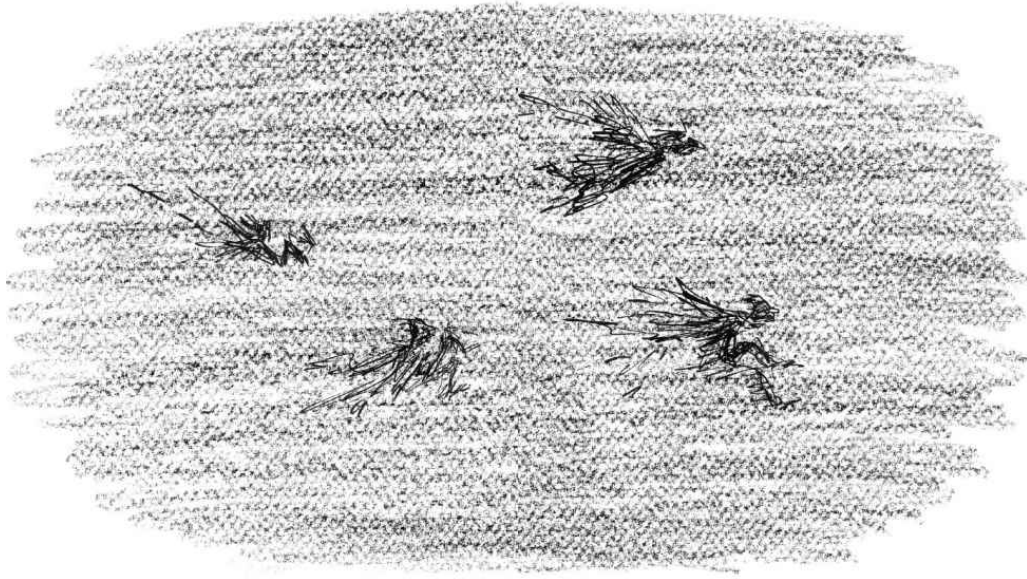
'I will break them into tiny bits!' said Mr Gregg. 'And never again need you be afraid of me or my family.'

'Very well,' said the duck. 'You may now come down. And by the way, may I congratulate you on the nest. For a first effort it's pretty good.'

Mr and Mrs Gregg and Philip and William hopped out of the nest and flew down.



Then all at once everything went black before their eyes, and they couldn't see. At the same time a funny feeling came over them all, and they heard a great wind blowing in their ears.



Then the black that was before their eyes turned to blue, to green, to red, and then to gold, and suddenly, there they were, standing in lovely bright sunshine in their own garden, near their own house, and everything was back to normal once again.



'Our wings have gone!' cried Mr Gregg. 'And our arms have come back!'

'And we are not tiny any more!' laughed Mrs Gregg. 'Oh, I am so glad!'



Philip and William began dancing about with joy.



Then, high above their heads, they heard the call of a wild duck. They all looked up, and they saw the four birds, lovely

against the blue sky, flying very close together, heading back to the lake in the woods.



It must have been about half an hour later that I myself walked into the Greggs' garden. I had come to see how things were going, and I must admit I was expecting the worst. At the gate I stopped and stared. It was a queer sight.

In one corner Mr Gregg was smashing all three guns into tiny pieces with a huge hammer.



In another corner Mrs Gregg was placing beautiful flowers upon sixteen tiny mounds of soil which I learned later were the graves of the ducks that had been shot the day before.



And in the middle of the yard stood Philip and William, with a sack of their father's best barley beside them. They were surrounded by ducks, doves, pigeons, sparrows, robins, larks, and many other kinds that I did not know, and the birds were eating the barley that the boys were scattering by the handful.



‘Good morning, Mr Gregg,’ I said.

Mr Gregg lowered his hammer and looked at me. ‘My name is not Gregg any more,’ he said. ‘In honour of my feathered friends, I have changed it from Gregg to Egg.’



‘And I am Mrs Egg,’ said Mrs Gregg.

‘What happened?’ I asked. They seemed to have gone completely dotty, all four of them.

Philip and William then began to tell me the whole story. When they had finished, William said, ‘Look! There’s the

nest! Can you see it? Right up in the top of the tree! That's where we slept last night!'

'I built it *all* myself,' Mr Egg said proudly. 'Every stick of it.'

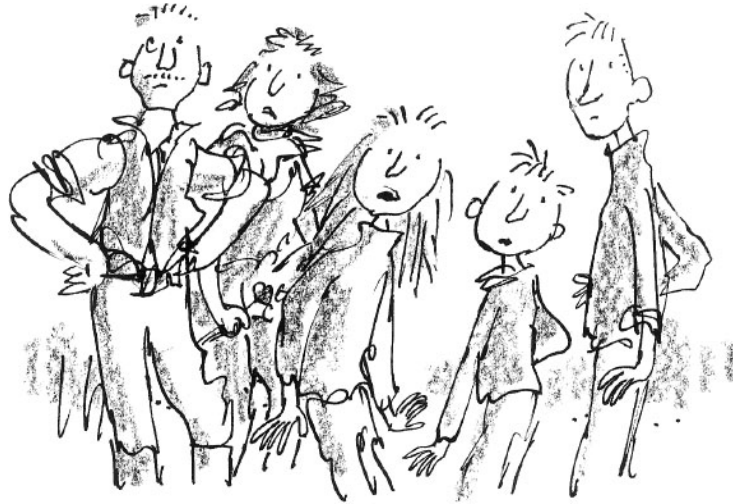


'If you don't believe us,' Mrs Egg said, 'just go into the house and take a look at the bathroom. It's a mess.'

'They filled the tub right up to the brim,' Philip said. 'They must have been swimming around in it all night! And feathers everywhere!'

'Ducks like water,' Mr Egg said. 'I'm glad they had a good time.'

Just then, from somewhere over by the lake, there came a loud BANG!



'Someone's shooting!' I cried.

'That'll be Jim Cooper,' Mr Egg said. 'Him and his three boys. They're shooting mad, those Coopers are, the whole family.'

Suddenly I started to see red ...

Then I got very hot all over ...

Then the tip of my finger began tingling most terribly. I could feel the power building up and up inside me ...

I turned and started running towards the lake as fast as I could.

'Hey!' shouted Mr Egg. 'What's up? Where are you going?'

'To find the Coopers,' I called back.

'But why?'

'You wait and see!' I said. 'They'll be nesting in the trees tonight, every one of them!'



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Are you ready to meet another little girl with an extraordinary gift? You are? Then here's a particularly tricky chapter from ...

MATILDA

Roald Dahl

MATILDA

The Hat and the Superglue

The following morning, just before the father left for his beastly second-hand car garage, Matilda slipped into the cloakroom and got hold of the hat he wore each day to work. She had to stand on her toes and reach up as high as she could with a walking-stick in order to hook the hat off the peg, and even then she only just made it. The hat itself was one of those flat-topped pork-pie jobs with a jay's feather stuck in the hatband and Mr Wormwood was very proud of it. He thought it gave him a rakish daring look, especially when he wore it at an angle with his loud checked jacket and green tie.

Matilda, holding the hat in one hand and a thin tube of Superglue in the other, proceeded to squeeze a line of glue very neatly all round the inside rim of the hat. Then she carefully hooked the hat back on to the peg with the walking-stick. She timed this operation very carefully, applying the glue just as her father was getting up from the breakfast table.



Mr Wormwood didn't notice anything when he put the hat on, but when he arrived at the garage he couldn't get it off. Superglue is very powerful stuff, so powerful it will take your skin off if you pull too hard. Mr Wormwood didn't want to be scalped so he had to keep the hat on his head the whole day long, even when putting sawdust in gear-boxes and fiddling the mileages of cars with his electric drill. In an effort to save face, he adopted a casual attitude hoping that his staff would think that he actually *meant* to keep his hat

on all day long just for the heck of it, like gangsters do in the films.



When he got home that evening he still couldn't get the hat off. 'Don't be silly,' his wife said. 'Come here. I'll take it off for you.'

She gave the hat a sharp yank. Mr Wormwood let out a yell that rattled the window-panes. 'Ow-w-w!' he screamed. 'Don't do that! Let go! You'll take half the skin off my forehead!'

Matilda, nestling in her usual chair, was watching this performance over the rim of her book with some interest.

'What's the matter, Daddy?' she said. 'Has your head suddenly swollen or something?'

The father glared at his daughter with deep suspicion, but said nothing. How could he? Mrs Wormwood said to him, 'It *must* be Superglue. It couldn't be anything else. That'll teach you to go playing round with nasty stuff like that. I expect you were trying to stick another feather in your hat.'

'I haven't touched the flaming stuff!' Mr Wormwood shouted. He turned and looked again at Matilda, who looked back at him with large innocent brown

Mrs Wormwood said to him, 'You should read the label on the tube before you start messing with dangerous products.'

Always follow the instructions on the label.'

'What in heaven's name are you talking about, you stupid witch?' Mr Wormwood shouted, clutching the brim of his hat to stop anyone trying to pull it off again. 'D'you think I'm so stupid I'd glue this thing to my head on purpose?'



Matilda said, 'There's a boy down the road who got some Superglue on his finger without knowing it and then he put his finger to his nose.'

Mr Wormwood jumped. 'What happened to him?' he spluttered.

'The finger got stuck inside his nose,' Matilda said, 'and he had to go around like that for a week. People kept saying to him, "Stop picking your nose," and he couldn't do anything about it. He looked an awful fool.'



‘Serve him right,’ Mrs Wormwood said. ‘He shouldn’t have put his finger up there in the first place. It’s a nasty habit. If all children had Superglue put on their fingers they’d soon stop doing it.’

Matilda said, ‘Grown-ups do it too, Mummy. I saw you doing it yesterday in the kitchen.’

‘That’s quite enough from you,’ Mrs Wormwood said, turning pink.

Mr Wormwood had to keep his hat on all through supper in front of the television. He looked ridiculous and he stayed very silent.

When he went up to bed he tried again to get the thing off, and so did his wife, but it wouldn’t budge. ‘How am I going to have my shower?’ he demanded.

‘You’ll just have to do without it, won’t you,’ his wife told him. And later on, as she watched her skinny little husband skulking around the bedroom in his purple-striped pyjamas with a pork-pie hat on his head, she thought how stupid he looked. Hardly the kind of man a wife dreams about, she told herself.



Mr Wormwood discovered that the worst thing about having a permanent hat on his head was having to sleep in it. It was impossible to lie comfortably on the pillow. 'Now do stop fussing around,' his wife said to him after he had been tossing and turning for about an hour. 'I expect it will be loose by the morning and then it'll slip off easily.'

But it wasn't loose by the morning and it wouldn't slip off. So Mrs Wormwood took a pair of scissors and cut the thing off his head, bit by bit, first the top and then the brim. Where the inner band had stuck to the hair all around the sides and back, she had to chop the hair off right to the skin so that he finished up with a bald white ring round his head, like some sort of a monk. And in the front, where the band had stuck directly to the bare skin, there remained a whole lot of small patches of brown leathery stuff that no amount of washing would get off.



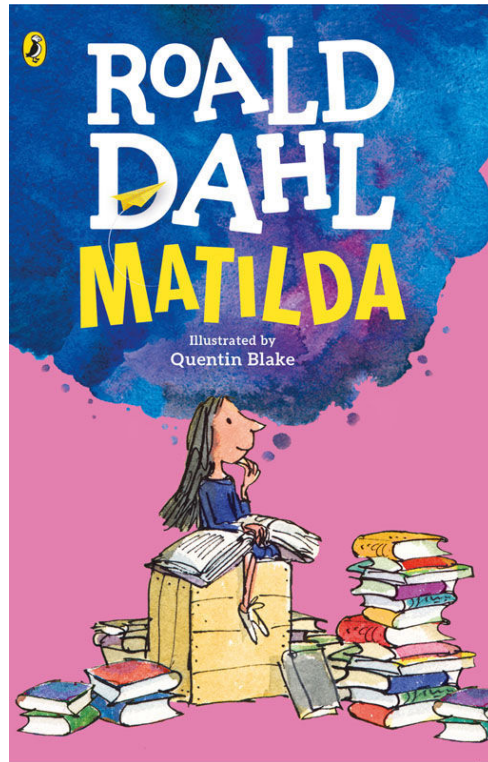
At breakfast Matilda said to him, 'You *must* try to get those bits off your forehead, Daddy. It looks as though you've got little brown insects crawling about all over you. People will think you've got lice.'

'Be quiet!' the father snapped. 'Just keep your nasty mouth shut, will you!'



All in all it was a most satisfactory exercise. But it was surely too much to hope that it had taught the father a permanent lesson.

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That's it.
The end of the book.

HERE IS
one LAST WORD,
invented by **Roald Dahl**
HIMSELF.
Make sure you **KEEP IT SAFE.**

BOOTBOGGLER

Noun: A foolish person.





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First published in the USA by Harper & Row 1966

Published in Great Britain by George Allen & Unwin 1968

Published by Puffin Books 1974

Reissued with new illustrations 1995

Digital edition updated 2016

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ISBN: 978-0-141-95711-1