

Our Pet Carpet

John Daly

August 1, 2009
reformatted July 5, 2026

I was about 14 when Mom and Dad brought the flying carpet home. They didn't know it could fly, of course. To them it was just an old rug which they used to wrap around an antique lamp they brought home from some rummage sale. They tossed the carpet unceremoniously into their own rummage pile in the garage.

But my brother and I had seen it and had thought it was beautiful. It had a strange pattern in shades of blue and green, almost like an animal skin. But it was no animal we had ever seen. It was thick and soft, but incredibly dirty. Somehow, it looked hungry and in need of a friend.

We rescued it, took it to the bathroom and gave it a good scrubbing, then spread it on the grass in a sunny area to dry for a bit. [What do they eat -- how do the children figure it out -- of course, it tells them]. Even after cleaning, it somehow looked bedraggled and dull. We were just a bit disappointed and began to walk away, but we heard a little sigh that wasn't quite the wind. Looking back, it seemed as though the carpet had moved just a bit. As we watched it rippled and moved forward on the grass. Again there was almost a contented sigh, followed by another ripple, then another. In a few minutes it had moved several inches forward on the grass and its colors were becoming more vibrant. Behind it the grass was now just a little shorter and more evenly trimmed. For a minute the carpet lifted completely off the grass and we heard an unmistakeable, "Ah, that feels good. Thank you, children."

We should have been alarmed, but instead the happy colors and pattern of the carpet made us feel remarkably good. We sat on the lawn and watched for the next half hour as the carpet inched along making contented sighing sounds, its color becoming ever more bright and clear.

After a bit the carpet inched toward us and settled down "Ah, you are special children, your parents must be very proud of you."

We looked at each other, Mom and Dad hadn't seemed very proud of us lately. Josh seemed to have felt this much more than I had.

"Actually, we've been in a bit of trouble lately. Mom's hairbrushes have been disappearing. She says we must be taking them and hiding them. But we haven't touched them. What's worse, mine are missing too. I've had to use Josh's hairbrush for days because I don't dare tell mom."

The breeze was getting cooler and I was glad as the carpet snuggled itself closer. I was a little afraid of letting it lay on me, after seeing what it had done to the grass. But it was really very warm and reassuring. Without thinking I stroked the surface and it almost purred.

"Hairbrushes, girl's hairbrushes at that." The carpet muttered. "I wonder, surely not . . ."

I ignored the comment and continued stroking the surface. Josh leaned over, slid his bare legs under a corner, and asked, "What are you?"

"Shhh, " I said. "That's not polite."

"Ahh, I'm sorry. I was so dry and hungry, I wasn't paying attention to the protocols. I really should not have let you see that I was alive. But then I felt as if I nearly wasn't. In truth, we can just go dormant. You're young, do you know what dormant means?"

"I think so. It's like when Mother's lily bulbs go dormant in the winter and don't need any food or water."

"Something very like that. Anyway, my name is Aldrich. I come from, well, it hardly matters right now. My people have been around for many centuries. Have you read of flying carpets?"

"They're just in stories. Carpets can't fly!" Josh said quickly.

I laughed, "Josh, if a carpet can talk, surely it can fly!"

"Could you carry us?" I asked, eyeing the carpet warily. I seemed very small.

"Not so fast, childre," Aldrich said with what might have been a huckle. "I shouldn't even have let you see I was alive. What if your parents saw us? These things are better done under the protection of darkness."

"Ah, it's all make believe," Josh scoffed. At that Aldrich gave a small "Harumph" and floated up off our laps. He skimmed quickly across the lawn and back before settling once more across our laps.

As if to emphasize Aldrich's concern about caution, Mom chose that moment to come around the corner. "There you are, Josh and Annie. It's getting cool out here. Oh, you've got that awful dirty old blanket! Come inside and throw that thing in the trash."

"No, Mom," Josh exclaimed. I thought he was about to spill the beans so I quickly put in, "We've cleaned it all up. It's very pretty." I said, holding it up so she could see the cheerful colors and pattern.

"My goodness, you've done a wonderful job," she exclaimed. Then she asked accusingly, "You didn't use my washer, did you?"

Just like a grownup. "No, Mom," I assured her. "We washed it out in the yard with the hose."

"Then it ate and groomed itself like a cat," Josh put in.

I hoped it was dark enough that Mom wouldn't notice the little trimmed path through the grass.

"It would look nice in my room, Mom, can I keep it? Can I?" Then I hoped that Josh wouldn't insist on having it himself. Mom was apt to just put it away if we couldn't share. But for once Josh was sensibly quiet.

"All right, Annie. You've put enough work into it. At least it's not a pet like that kitten you wanted last month."

I caught a smile on Josh's face, and we went up to my room to lay the carpet on the floor.

But Aldrich was not about to have any of it. "You don't walk on a fine carpet," he grumped.

"A few hours ago you were lying in a rummage heap," I reminded him. "But don't worry," I hastened to add as Aldrich's colors began to turn an angry red. "We wouldn't dream of walking on you."

"We'll see if your Mom feels the same way," grumped, "but beggars can't be choosers. It's so far to home!" and his colors dimmed.

I felt sorry for him then. How sad to be lost and far from home.

"Where is your home?" I asked

"Far away, I fear. I'm not even sure myself. This world is so different."

"Isn't there any way to find out?" Josh asked.

"I came here with a wise Genie. It was she who guided me to this place, and I need here help to return. We were separated in a small battle with an old enemy, Al-Boojum."

"Who is Al-Boojum?" I asked.

"And where does he live?" Josh chimed in. Younger brothers can get right to the point sometimes.

"He typically chooses a convenient cave. Finding him will be the first order of business when we can explore some more. Do you know of a cave you might consider spooky?" he asked.

"You bet!" Josh piped up. "Bartlett's Cave. It's really pretty outside, but no one wants to go inside."

"Is there water?" asked Aldrich.

"Yes," I said. There's a pretty lake just outside the mouth of the cave. A stream

flows out from the cave and into the lake. Then it flows down the valley. It's very clear water. But once you get inside, the cave quickly becomes slimey and dank."

"Does anything live in this clear water?" Aldrich asked. "Is there algae, or little fish, or anything."

I thought for a minute. "No, I don't think so. Mom has commented on how clean it is."

"It could just be the flow of the water, of course," mused Aldrich. "But sometimes when water is too clear, it's because it's poisoned and the living things which make water messy aren't there because of the poison. So the water is very deadly, but looks beautiful. That could be an indication that Al-Boojum lives there."

"Would you be willing to help me get home, children," Aldrich asked politely. "It could be dangerous," he added quietly.

"You bet," Josh said quickly. "What do we have to do?"

"I don't mean the TV kind of danger where people get shot and then just hop up and go about their business," Aldrich said seriously. "Are you sure?" he asked looking first at me, and then at Josh.

"We'll do our best," I said.

"I need to think," Aldrich said. "Can you go out at night?" he asked in a worried tone. "As I said, these things are best done under the protection of darkness."

"Mom would skin us alive," I began thinking of Josh.

"You bet," Josh responded excitedly. "When do we leave?"

"We should wait till the moon is waxing," Aldrich responded. "That will be the best time."

"Waxing," Josh asked. "What does the moon wax?"

"That means the moon is getting more full," I explained with all the confidence of my sixth grade science class. "Waning is when it has been full and is getting smaller every night."

"Very good, Annie," Aldrich said. "I tend to treat you like adults. I need to remember that you're just children. Maybe I shouldn't let you help me." The voice trailed off, and once again his colors began to fade.

"Of course we'll help you," I reassured him. "We know you'll keep us safe."

Aldrich's voice was serious now, "I'll try, Annie, but I'm serious about the danger. I am certain that my friend and guide has been captured and is being held in the cave of Al-Boojum. I have no hands, so I need you and Josh to use yours to help me free her."

And so, with many solemn promises, we went to bed with Aldrich snoozing quietly on the floor by my bed.

The next day I told Mom we didn't want to walk on the carpet after we had put so much work into cleaning him, it. She understood. Dad had built several racks to hold my grandmother's quilts, and he had a spare that he had never used. He mounted it in my room for the carpet. Aldrich took to it immediately. I wasn't sure it would be comfortable, since he had to bend in the middle. But much like a cat, he curled himself around the rack and almost purred his pleasure.

In a few days the moon began to get larger, and Aldrich said it was time to go look at Bartlett's Cave where we thought Al-Boojum might be living. Quietly we opened the window of my bedroom and removed the screen. Aldrich squeezed out first and then hovered outside the window like a giant step. Gingerly I crawled out of the window onto his back, followed by Josh.

"Wow," Josh exclaimed. "This is magic!"

"Humans tend to believe that if you understand it, it must be science, and if you don't understand, then it must be magic," Aldrich said. "Since I understand very well what I do, it's not magic!"

We flew in silence under the half moon. It was harder than I had imagined to

recognize landmarks from the air. Perhaps the dim light didn't help. Then Josh spoke up, "Look! There's the fork in the road. It's to the right and then up that little dirt road." Once I looked where he pointed, I could see it. Little pbrothers do have some value. In another minute Aldrich was hovering just over the little pool at the mouth of the cave.

"Get your flashlights ready!" he said, "but don't turn them on yet."

"Are we going in? How will we see?" Josh wailed. I had been wondering the same thing.

"For a bit you won't. Your eyes will adjust. But more important, I have excellen night vision. There's a good chance that if we're very quiet we can sneak in, grab the bottle with the Genie, and fly out before Al-Boojum knows we're here. Are you ready?" he asked anxiously.

I expected him to zip in immediately without waiting for a reply, but instead he was still until Josh and I both said we were ready to go.

"Okay! Remember it will be dark, there will be scary things, you must not scream or make any noise for the matter."

The light disappeared as we went deeper into the cave. At one point Aldrich slowed and said, "Lie very flat, it's low ahead." We did as we were told. Josh huddled close to me, and little brother or no I was glad to have him near. Aldrich had been right. Our eyes did begin to adjust. There was a faint glow ahead. As we came around a corner we entered a large room filled with stuff. There were shelves and shelves filled with old bottles. Aldrich stopped abruptly. "So many bottles," he whispered. "Which one is she hidden in?" We could feel his fabric sag. I guess he had expected Al-Boojum to have the Genie in some special place. Instead, everything was a horrible jumble, like Dad's workshop only worse.

"Look for one that glows," he said brightly. "That will tell us!"

"There's one," Josh pointed.

"And there's another," I said pointing in the opposite direction.

Aldrich had spotted two more jars which glowed faintly. "We'll take them all," he decided. "I'll manuever close to each one. You carefully pick up the bottle and lay it gently in my center."

The closest was a very plain canning jar like Aunt Susan used for making jelly. I reached out, picked it up, and laid it on Aldrich's back. It sank quietly into the fabric. The next was a pretty cut glass crystal decanter. Grandmother Semmich had one that was very similar. Josh carefully added that to the collection. Just two more. The third was on a high shelf among an array of fragile looking wine glasses. The bottle itself was a very old looking jug with a stopper in the top. Very carefully Josh reached out for it. It was obviously heavy. I watched in horror as it brushed one of the wine glasses which tinkled against its neighbor. But nothing fell. With a sigh of relief we moved toward the last bottle. Piece of cake. It was on my side, on a large shelf with several heavy pans beside it. Nothing to tip here. I reached out and picked it up. Horrors, it was warm and it moved. Without thinking I dropped it and it fell among a pile of old soft drink bottles. They all shattered with a tremendous crash.

A shape in the corner of the room rose up quickly shouting words in a language I didn't recognize. Then it said more calmly, "Don't move, I'll kill you if you don't stay right there."

"We're making a run for it, children!" Aldrich shouted. But before he could move, a voice cried from below, "Not without me!" and I felt my edge of the blanket being pulled down. With a scream I rolled off and fell to the one clear spot on the floor, as a white form with blonde hair climbed onto Aldrich's back.

Aldrich had started for the mouth of the cave, the creature from the corner was lumbering toward us still trailing bed clothes and blankets.

"Aldrich, we've lost one of the children -- where did you get children anyway? Turn back, we can't leave her!"

Aldrich didn't need another word. he swept back and skimmed the floor. The Genie, if that's who she was, reached out and grabed me just as the creature leapt at us. I saw a swarthy face with fierce, black eyes over a huge moustache. Then we were gone from the room and were heading down the passage to the mouth of the cave.

"Remember the low spot," I cried and we all lay very flat as Aldrich swooped through the passage.

The Genie had grabbed the other bottles and was opening each of them in turn. By the time we flew from the mouth of the cave poor Aldrich was carrying two children and four Genies. All four turned and gestured at the cave mouth while murmuring strange words. The cave mouth shimmered momentarily, there was a roar from inside, and then all was quiet.

We flew back toward our house, no longer silent as four Genies jabbered among themselves.

"Aldrich, these children are fantastic. What are we going to do with them? We can't let them free. They've seen too much."

"They'll fit into my old bottle," one laughed cheerily.

"Absolutely not," Aldrich said with authority. "They're going back to their homes and their parents. And they will have tales to tell which will entertain their friends and children and grand children -- so long as they don't expect people to believe them."

I was a child, but I understood just what he meant. Mom had a way of making us regret it when we made up some unbelievable story like this. Even Josh understood that.

We arrived outside our window. "Will we ever see you again?" I asked tearfully. Aldrich had been so much fun to be with.

"Only if I need someone to save my life and help me get home again," he said fondly. "Be good children, study hard, and make me proud of you."

And with that he and his carpet full of Genies was gone.