

refuses to give references, as doing so is a “very old-fashioned idea.” She comes up to the nursery not by climbing the stairs, but by sliding *up* the banister. She brings with her a carpet bag, which the children see is completely empty. Yet from it she extracts a seeming endless number of things, beginning with a starched white apron and ending with a folding bed with blankets and a quilt.

So begins a series of wonderful and highly improbable experiences and adventures the children have with Mary Poppins, who never explains those events but consistently rejects the children's reports and questions about them, implying that they did not happen, although the children often have physical evidence that they did. Each of the three basic books has at least one such adventure that embodies a central theme of the stories: the unity of all life and the order that guides and regulates the cosmos. Moreover, each of those central-theme chapters is set in different one of the traditional archetypal elements: earth, water, and air (which correspond with the Theosophical planes or dimensions of reality: physical, emotional, and mental. In the first book, that adventure is described in chapter 10, “Full Moon.” It is set in a zoo, thus representing the basic earthly, physical, animalistic world.

The occasion described in that chapter is a very rare one, namely, Mary Poppins' birthday coinciding with a full moon (the phases of the moon being another traditional symbol of change). The coincidence of those two events (full moon and birthday) always has a remarkable effect, which this time is witnessed by Jane and Michael. Just before bedtime, those two are counting the pennies they have saved, and Michael says he wants to use his to buy an elephant of his own, like the ones they have at the zoo. That leads him to ask Mary Poppins what happens in the zoo at night, when everyone's gone home. Jane tells him, “It's no good asking her. She knows everything, but she never tells.” The two children are about to find out what happens in the zoo at night.

Mary Poppins puts the children to bed and then hurries away “as though all the winds of the world were blowing behind her.” Almost at once, Jane and Michael hear an invisible voice urging them to get up, get dressed, and to come with the speaker, whom they never see. They are led to the zoo, where they meet a Bear who tells them that he (and the other zoo creatures) are out of their cages “only when the Birthday falls on a Full Moon.” They don't know whose birthday it is, but inside the zoo, they find that all the animals are out of