

# OpenTheo

## Five Children and It—Chapter 6: A Castle and No Dinner

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For the Easter season, I am posting some rather different things on this channel, in addition to my regular output, as a little gift to my followers and supporters. This is the third book I am reading through: 'Five Children and It', by E Nesbit. I hope that you all enjoy!

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### Transcript

Chapter 6. A Castle and No Dinner. The others were to be kept in as a punishment for the misfortunes of the day before. Of course, Martha thought it was naughtiness and not misfortune, so you must not blame her.

She only thought she was doing her duty. You know, grown-up people often say they do not like to punish you, and that they only do it for your own good, and that it hurts them as much as it hurts you, and this is really very often the truth. Martha certainly hated having to punish the children quite as much as they hated to be punished.

For one thing, she knew what a noise there would be in the house all day, and she had other reasons. "'I declare,' she said to the cook, "'it seems almost a shame keeping them indoors this lovely day. But they are that audacious.

They'll be walking in with their heads knocked off some of these days, if I don't put my foot down. You make them a cake for tea tomorrow, dear, and we'll have baby along of us soon as we've got a bit forward with our work. Then they can have a good romp with him out of the way.

Now, Eliza, come, get on with them beds. Here's ten o'clock nearly, and no rabbit's caught.' People say that in Kent when they mean, and no work done. So all the others were kept in, but Robert, as I have said, was allowed to go out for half an hour to get something they all wanted.

And that, of course, was the day's wish. He had no difficulty in finding the sand-ferry, for the day was already so hot that it had actually for the first time come out of its own accord, and was sitting in a pool of soft sand, stretching itself and trimming its whiskers and turning its snail's eyes round and round. Ha! it said when its left eye saw Robert.

I've been looking for you. Where are the rest of you? Not smashed themselves up with those wings, I hope. No, said Robert, but the wings got us into a row, just like all the wishes always do.

So the others are kept indoors, and I was only let out for half an hour to get the wish. So please let me wish as quickly as I can. Wish away, said the Samyad, twisting itself round in the sand.

But Robert couldn't wish away. He forgot all the things he had been thinking about, and nothing would come into his head but little things for himself, like candy, a foreign stamp album, or a knife with three blades and a corkscrew. He sat down to think better of things the others would not have cared for, such as a football or a pair of leg guards, or to be able to lick Simpkin's miner thoroughly when he went back to school.

Well, said the Samyad at last, you'd better hurry up with that wish of yours. Time flies. I know it does, said Robert.

I can't think what to wish for. I wish you could give one of the others their wish without their having to come here to ask for it. Oh, don't! But it was too late.

The Samyad had blown itself out to about three times its proper size, and now it collapsed like a pricked bubble, and with a deep sigh leaned back against the edge of the sand pool, quite faint with the effort. There, it said in a weak voice. It was tremendously hard.

But I did it. Run along home, or they're sure to wish for something silly before you get there. They were quite sure.

Robert felt this, and as he ran home his mind was deeply occupied with the sort of wishes he might find they had wished in his absence. They might wish for rabbits, or white mice, or chocolate, or a fine day tomorrow, or even—and that was most likely—someone might have said, I do wish to goodness Robert would hurry up. Well, he was hurrying up, and so they would have had their wish, and the day would be wasted.

Then he tried to think what they could wish for, something that would be amusing

indoors. That had been his own difficulty from the beginning. So few things are amusing indoors when the sun is shining outside and you mayn't go out, however much you want to do so.

Robert was running as fast as he could, but when he turned the corner that ought to have brought him within sight of the architect's nightmare, the ornamental ironwork on the top of the house, he opened his eyes so wide that he had to drop into a walk, for you cannot run with your eyes wide open. Then suddenly he stopped short, for there was no house to be seen. The front garden railings were gone too, and where the house had stood—Robert rubbed his eyes and looked again—yes, the others had wished, there was no doubt about it, and they must have wished that they lived in a castle, for there the castle stood, black and stately, and very tall and broad, with battlements and lancet windows and eight great towers, and where the garden and the orchard had been, there were white things dotted like mushrooms.

Robert walked slowly on, and as he got nearer he saw that these were tents, and men in armour were walking about among the tents, crowds and crowds of them. Oh, said Robert fervently, they have, they've wished for a castle and it's being besieged. It's just like that sand-ferry.

I wish we'd never seen the beastly thing. At the little window above the great gateway, across the moat that now lay where the garden had been, but half an hour ago, someone was waving something pale dust-coloured. Robert thought it was one of Cyril's handkerchiefs.

They had never been white since the day when he had upset the bottle of combined toning and fixing solution into the drawer where they were. Robert waved back and immediately felt that he had been unwise, for this signal had been seen by the besieging force, and two men in steel caps were coming towards him. They had high brown boots on their long legs, and they came towards him with such great strides that Robert remembered the shortness of his own legs, and did not run away.

He knew it would be useless to himself, and he feared it might be irritating to the foe. So he stood still, and the two men seemed quite pleased with him. By my halidom, said one, a brave valet this.

Robert felt pleased at being called brave, and somehow it made him feel brave. He passed over the valet. It was the way people talked in historical romances for the young, he knew, and it was evidently not meant for rudeness.

He only hoped he would be able to understand what they said to him. He had not been always able quite to follow the conversations in the historical romances for the young. His garb is strange, said the other, some outlandish treachery be like.

Say lad, what brings thee hither? Robert knew this meant. Now then, youngster, what are you up to here, eh? So he said. If you please, I want to go home.

Go then, said the man in the longest boots. None hinderth, and nor lets us to follow. Zooks, he added in a cautious undertone.

I mist out me, but he beareth tidings to the besieged. Where dwellest thou, young knave? inquired the man with the larger steel cap. Over there, said Robert, and directly he had said it.

He knew he ought to have said yonder. Ha! sayeth so, rejoined the longest boots. Come hither, boy, this is matter for our leader.

And to the leader Robert was dragged forthwith by the reluctant ear. The leader was the most glorious creature Robert had ever seen. He was exactly like the pictures Robert had so often admired in the historical romances.

He had armour, and a helmet, and a horse, and a crest, and feathers, and a shield, and a lance, and a sword. His armour and his weapons were all, I am almost sure, of quite different periods. The shield was 13th century, while the sword was of the pattern used in the Peninsular War.

The cuirass was of the time of Charles I, and the helmet dated from the Second Crusade. The arms on the shield were very grand, three red running lines on a blue ground. The tents were of the latest brand approved of by our modern war office, and the whole appearance of camp, army and leader might have been a shock to some.

But Robert was dumb with admiration, and it all seemed to him perfectly correct, because he knew no more of heraldry or archaeology than the gifted artists who usually drew the pictures for the historical romances. The scene was indeed exactly like a picture. He admired it all so much that he felt braver than ever.

Come hither, lad, said the glorious leader, when the men in Cromwellian steel caps had said a few low, eager words, and he took off his helmet, because he could not see properly with it on. He had a kind face and long fair hair. Have no fear, thou shalt take no scathe, he said.

Robert was glad of that. He wondered what scathe was, and if it was nastier than the medicine which he had had to take sometimes. Unfold thy tail without alarm, said the leader kindly.

Whence comest thou, and what is thine intent? My what? said Robert. What seekest thou to accomplish? What is thine errand? That thou wander'st here alone among these rough men at arms. Poor child, thy mother's heart aches for thee, e'en now I'll warrant me.

I don't think so, said Robert. You see, she doesn't know I'm out. The leader wiped away a manly tear, exactly as a leader in a historical romance would have done, and said, Fear not to speak the truth, my child.

Thou hast naught to fear from Wulfric to Talbot. Robert had a wild feeling that this glorious leader of the besieging party, being himself part of a wish, would be able to understand better than Martha or the gypsies or the policemen in Rochester or the clergymen of yesterday the true tale of the wishes and the Samyad. The only difficulty was that he knew he could never remember enough Quothers and Beshroomies and things like that to make his talk sound like the talk of a boy in a historical romance.

However, he began boldly enough with a sentence straight out of Ralph de Crusader. He said, Grimurcy for the courtesy, fair Sir Knight. The fact is, it's like this, and I hope you're not in a hurry, because the story's rather a breather.

Father and mother are away, and when we went down playing in the sand pits we found a Samyad. I cry thee mercy, a Samyad? said the Knight. Yes, a sort of fairy or enchanter.

Yes, that's it, an enchanter. And he said we could have a wish every day, and we wished first to be beautiful. Thy wish was scarce granted.

muttered one of the men at arms looking at Robert, who went on as if he had not heard, though he thought the remark very rude indeed. And then we wished for money, treasure you know, but we couldn't spend it. And yesterday we wished for wings, and we got them, and we had a ripping time to begin with.

Thy speech is strange and uncouth, said Sir Wulfric de Talbot. Repeat thy words. What hathst thou? A ripping, I mean a jolly, no, we were contented with our lot, that's what I mean, only after we got into an awful fix.

What is a fix? A fray, Mayhap? No, not a fray, a tight place. A dungeon? Alas for thy youthful fettered limbs, said the Knight with polite sympathy. It wasn't a dungeon, we just, just encountered undeserved misfortunes, Robert explained, and today we are punished by not being allowed to go out.

That's where I live, he pointed to the castle, the others are in there, and they're not allowed to go out. It's all the Samyads, I mean the Enchanters fault. I wish we'd never seen him.

He's an Enchanter of might? Oh yes, of might and main, rather. And thou deemest that it is the spells of the Enchanter whom thou hast angered that have lent strength to the besieging party, said the gallant leader. But know thou that Wulfric de Talbot needs no Enchanter's aid to lead his followers to victory.

No, I'm sure you don't, said Robert with hasty courtesy. Of course not, you wouldn't, you

know. But all the same, it's partly his fault, but we're most to blame.

You couldn't have done anything if it hadn't been for us. How now, bold boy, asked Sir Wulfric haughtily. Thy speech is dark and eeks scarce courteous.

Unravel me this riddle. Oh, said You're only here because the others must have been idiots enough to wish for a castle, and when the sun sets you'll just vanish away, and it'll be all right. The captain and the men-at-arms exchanged glances at first pitying, and then sterner, as the longest-booted man said, Beware my noble lord, the urchin doth but feign madness to escape from our clutches.

Shall we not bind him? I'm no more mad than you are, said Robert angrily. Perhaps not so much. Only I was an idiot to think you would understand anything.

Let me go. I haven't done anything to you. Whither? asked the knight, who seemed to have believed all the enchanter's story till it came to his own share in it.

Whither wouldst thou wend? Home, of course, Robert pointed to the castle. To carry news of succour? Nay. All right then, said Robert, struck by a sudden idea.

Then let me go somewhere else. His mind sought eagerly among the memories of the historical romance. Sir Wulfric de Talbot, he said slowly, should think foul scorn to keep a chap, I mean one who has done him no hurt, when he wants to cut off quietly, I mean to depart without violence.

This to my face! Beshrew thee for an ave, replied Sir Wulfric. But the appeal seemed to have gone home. Yet thou say'st sooth, he added thoughtfully.

Go where thou wilt, he added nobly. Thou art free. Wulfric de Talbot warreth not with babes, and Jacon here shall bear thee company.

All right, said Robert wildly. Jacon will enjoy himself, I think. Come on, Jacon.

Sir Wulfric, I salute thee. He saluted after the modern military manor, and set off running to the sand-pit, Jacon's long boots keeping up easily. He found the fairy.

He dug it up, he woke it up, he implored it to give him one more wish. I've done two today already, it grumbled, and one was as stiff a bit of work as ever I did. Oh, do, do, do, do, said Robert, while Jacon looked on with an expression of open-mouthed horror at the strange beast that talked, and gazed with its snail's eyes at him.

Well, what is it? snapped the Samoyed with cross sleepiness. I wish I was with the others, said Robert. And the Samoyed began to swell.

Robert never thought of wishing the castle and the siege away. Of course, he knew they had all come out of a wish, but swords and daggers and pikes and lances seemed much

too real to be wished away. Robert lost consciousness for an instant.

When he opened his eyes, the others were crowding round him. We never heard you come in, they said. How awfully jolly of you to wish it to give us our wish.

Of course we understood that was what you had done. But you ought to have told us. Suppose we had wished something silly.

Silly, said Robert, very crossly indeed. How much sillier could you have been? I'd like to know. You nearly settled me.

I can tell you. Then he told his story, and the others admitted that it certainly had been rough on him. But they praised his courage and cleverness so much that he presently got back his lost temper, and felt braver than ever, and consented to be captain of the besieged force.

We haven't done anything yet, said Anthea comfortably. We waited for you. We're going to shoot at them through these little loopholes with the bow and arrows Uncle gave you, and you shall have first shot.

I don't think I would, said Robert cautiously. You don't know what they're like near too. They've got real bows and arrows, an awful length, and swords and pikes and daggers and all sorts of sharp things.

They're all quite, quite real. It's not just a picture or a vision or anything. They can hurt us, or kill us even, I shouldn't wonder.

I can feel my ear all sore yet. Look here, have you explored the castle, because I think we'd better leave them alone as long as they let us alone. I heard that Jakin man say they weren't going to attack till just before sundown.

We can be getting ready for the attack. Are there any soldiers in the castle to defend it? We don't know, said Cyril. You see, directly I'd wish we were in a besieged castle.

Everything seemed to go upside down, and when it came straight we looked out of the window and saw the camp and things and you. And of course we kept on looking at everything. Isn't this room jolly? It's as real as real.

It was. It was square with stone walls four foot thick and great beams for ceiling. A low door at the corner led to a flight of steps up and down.

The children went down. They found themselves in a great arched gatehouse. The enormous doors were shut and barred.

There was a window in a little room at the bottom of the round turret, up which the stair wound, rather larger than the other windows, and looking through it they saw that the

drawbridge was up and the portcullis down. The moat looked very wide and deep. Opposite the great door that led to the moat was another great door, with a little door in it.

The children went through this and found themselves in a big courtyard with the great grey walls of the castle rising dark and heavy on all four sides. Near the middle of the courtyard stood Martha, moving her right hand backwards and forwards in the air. The cook was stooping down and moving her hands, also in a very curious way.

But the oddest, and at the same time most terrible thing, was the lamb, who was sitting on nothing, about three feet from the ground, laughing happily. The children ran towards him. Just as Anthea was reaching out her arms to take him, Martha said crossly, Let him alone.

Do miss, when he is good. But what's he doing? said Anthea. Doing? Why a setting in his highchair as good as gold, a precious.

What's he me doing of the ironing? Get along with you, do. My iron's cold again. She went towards the cook, and seemed to poke an invisible fire with an unseen poker.

The cook seemed to be putting an unseen dish into an invisible oven. Run along with you, do, she said. I'm behind hand as it is.

You won't get no dinner if you come a hindering of me like this. Come, off you goes, or I'll pin a dishcloth to some of your tails. You're sure the lamb's all right? asked Jane anxiously.

Right as ninepence if you don't come unsettling of him. I thought you'd like to be rid of him for today, but take him, if you want him, for gracious sake. No, no, they said, and hastened away.

They would have to defend the castle presently, and the lamb was safer even suspended in mid-air in an invisible kitchen than in the guardroom of the besieged castle. They went through the first doorway they came to, and sat down helplessly on a wooden bench that ran along the room inside. How awful, said Anthea and Jane together, and Jane added.

I feel as if I was in a lunatic asylum. What does it mean? Anthea said. It's creepy.

I don't like it. I wish we'd wished for something plain—a rocking-horse or a donkey or something. It's no use wishing now, said Robert bitterly, and Cyril said.

Do be quiet. I want to think. He buried his face in his hands, and the others looked about them.

They were in a long room with an arched roof. There were wooden tables along it, and one across at the end of the room, on a sort of raised platform. The room was very dim



and dark.

The floor was strewn with dry things like sticks, and they did not smell nice. Cyril sat up suddenly and said. Look here.

It's all right. I think it's like this. You know, we wished that the servants shouldn't notice any difference when we got wishes, and nothing happens to the lamb unless we specifically wish it to.

So of course they don't notice the castle or anything, but then the castle is on the same place where our house was— is, I mean—and the servants have to go on being in the house, or else they would notice. But you can't have a castle mixed up with our house, and so we can't see the house because we see the castle, and they can't see the castle because they go on seeing the house, and so— Oh, don't, said Jane. You make my head go all swimmy, like being on a roundabout.

It doesn't matter. Only I hope we shall be able to see our dinner, that's all, because if it's invisible, it'll be unfeeling as well, and then we can't eat it. I know it will, because I tried to feel the lamb's chair, and there was nothing under him at all but air, and we can't eat air, and I feel just as if I hadn't had any breakfast for years and years.

It's no use thinking about it, said Anthea. Let's go on exploring. Perhaps we might find something to eat.

This lighted hope in every breast, and they went on exploring the castle. But though it was the most perfect and delightful castle you can possibly imagine, and furnished in the most complete and beautiful manner, neither food nor men-at-arms were to be found in it. If you had only thought of wishing to be besieged in the castle thoroughly garrisoned and provisioned, said Jane reproachfully.

You can't think of everything, you know, said Anthea. I should think it must be nearly dinner-time by now. It wasn't, but they hung about watching the strange movements of the servants in the middle of the courtyard, because, of course, they couldn't be sure where the dining-room of the invisible house was.

Presently they saw Martha carrying an invisible tray across the courtyard, for it seemed that, by the most fortunate accident, the dining-room of the house and the banqueting-hall of the castle were in the same place. But, oh, how their hearts sank when they perceived that the tray was invisible! They waited in wretched silence while Martha went through the form of carving an unseen leg of mutton, and serving invisible greens and potatoes with a spoon that no one could see. When she had left the room the children looked at the empty table, and then at each other.

This is worse than anything, said Robert, who had not till now been particularly keen on his dinner. I'm not so very hungry, said Anthea, trying to make the best of things, as

usual. Cyril tightened his belt ostentatiously.

Jane burst into tears.