

OpenTheo

Five Children and It—Chapter 9: Grown Up

May 13, 2020



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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 9. Grown Up. Cyril had once pointed out that ordinary life is full of occasions on which a wish would be most useful, and this thought filled his mind when he happened to wake early on the morning after the morning after Robert had wished to be bigger than the baker's boy, and had been it. The day that lay between these two days had been occupied entirely by getting the governess cart home from Bennhurst.

Cyril dressed hastily. He did not take a bath, because tin baths are so noisy, and he had no wish to rouse Robert, and he slipped off alone, as Anthea had once done, and ran through the dewy morning to the sandpit. He dug up the samoyed very carefully and kindly, and began the conversation by asking it whether it still felt any ill effects from the contact with the tears of Robert the day before yesterday.

The samoyed was in good temper. It replied politely. And now, what can I do for you? It said.

I suppose you've come here so early to ask for something for yourself. Something your brothers and sisters aren't to know about, eh? Now, do be persuaded for your own good.

Ask for a good fat megatherium and have done with it.

Thank you, not today, I think, said Cyril cautiously. What I really wanted to say was you know how you're always wishing for things when you're playing at anything. I seldom play, said the samoyed coldly.

Well, you know what I mean, Cyril went on impatiently. What I want to say is, won't you let us have our wish just when we think of it, and just where we happen to be, so that we don't have to come and disturb you again, added the crafty Cyril. It'll only end in your wishing for something you don't really want, as you did about the castle, said the samoyed, stretching its brown arms and yawning.

It's always the same, since people left off eating really wholesome things. However, have it your own way. Goodbye.

Goodbye, said Cyril politely. I'll tell you what, said the samoyed suddenly, shooting out its long snail's eyes. I'm getting tired of you, all of you.

You have no more sense than so many oysters. Go along with you. And Cyril went.

What an awful long time babies stay babies, said Cyril after the lamb had taken his watch out of his pocket while he wasn't noticing, and with coos and clucks of naughty rapture had opened the case and used the whole thing as a garden spade, and when even a merchant in a washbasin had failed to wash the mould from the works and make the watch go again. Cyril had said several things in the heat of the moment, but now he was calmer, and had even consented to carry the lamb part of the way to the woods. Cyril had persuaded the others to agree to his plan, and not to wish for anything more till they really did wish it.

Meantime it seemed good to go to the woods for nuts, and on the mossy grass under a sweet chestnut tree the five were sitting. The lamb was pulling up the moss by fat handfuls, and Cyril was gloomily contemplating the ruins of his watch. He does grow, said Anthea.

Doesn't he, precious? Me grow, said the lamb cheerfully. Me grow, big boy, have guns and mouses and an... Imagination or vocabulary gave out here, but anyway it was the longest speech the lamb had ever made, and it charmed everyone, even Cyril who tumbled the lamb over and rolled him in the moss to the music of delighted squeals. I suppose he'll be all grown up some day, Anthea was saying, dreamily looking up at the blue of the sky that showed between the long straight chestnut leaves.

But at that moment the lamb, struggling gaily with Cyril, thrust a stout shard little foot against his brother's chest. There was a crack. The innocent lamb had broken the glass of father's second best Waterbury watch, which Cyril had borrowed without leave.

Grow up some day, said Cyril bitterly, plumping the lamb down on the grass. I dare say he will when nobody wants him to. I wish to goodness he would.

Oh, take care, cried Anthea in an agony of apprehension. But it was too late. Like music to a song, her words and Cyril's came out together.

Anthea? Oh, take care, Cyril. Grow up now. The faithful Samyad was true to its promise, and there, before the horrified eyes of its brothers and sisters, the lamb suddenly and violently grew up.

It was the most terrible moment. The change was not so sudden as the wish changes usually were. The baby's face changed first.

It grew thinner and larger. Lines came in the forehead, the eyes grew more deep-set and darker in colour, the mouth grew longer and thinner. Most terrible of all, a little dark moustache appeared on the lip of one who was still, except as to the face, a two-year-old baby in a linen smock and white openwork socks.

Oh, I wish it wouldn't! Oh, I wish it wouldn't! You boys might wish as well! They all wished hard, for the sight was enough to dismay the most heartless. They all wished so hard, indeed, that they felt quite giddy and almost lost consciousness. But the wishing was quite vain, for, when the woods ceased to whirl round, their dazed eyes were riveted at once by the spectacle of a very proper-looking young man in flannels and a straw hat, a young man who wore the same little black moustache which just before they had actually seen growing upon the baby's lip.

This, then, was the lamb, grown up. Their own lamb. It was a terrible moment.

The grown-up lamb moved gracefully across the moss and settled himself against the trunk of the sweet chestnut. He tilted the straw hat over his eyes. He was evidently weary.

He was going to sleep. The lamb, the original little tiresome beloved lamb, often went to sleep at odd times and in unexpected places. Was this new lamb in the grey flannel suit and the pale green necktie like the other lamb, or had his mind grown up together with his body? That was the question which the others, in a hurried council held among the yellowing brake-fern a few yards from the sleeper, debated eagerly.

"'Whichever it is, it will be just as awful,' said Anthea. "'If his inside senses are grown up too, he won't stand our looking after him. And if he's still a baby inside of him, how on earth are we to get him to do anything? And it'll be getting on for dinner time in a minute.' "'And we haven't got any nuts,' said Jane.

"'Oh, bother nuts,' said Robert. "'But dinner's different. I didn't have half-enough dinner yesterday.

Couldn't we tie him to the tree and go home to our dinner and come back afterwards?' "A fat lot of dinner we should get if we went back without the lamb,' said Cyril in scornful misery. "And it'll be just the same if we go back with him in the state he is now. Yes, I know it's my doing.

Don't rub it in. I know I'm a beast, and not fit to live. You can take that for settled, and say no more about it.

The question is, what are we going to do?' "Let's wake him up, and take him into Rochester or Maidstone, and get something to eat at a baker's shop,' said Robert, hopefully. "Take him?' repeated Cyril. "Yes, do.

It's all my fault. I don't deny that. But you'll find you've got your work cut out for you if you try to take that young man anywhere.

The lamb always was spoiled, but now he's grown up. He's a demon, simply. I can see it.

Look at his mouth.' "Well then,' said Robert, "let's wake him up and see what he'll do. Perhaps he'll take us to Maidstone and stand treat. He ought to have a lot of money in the pockets of those extra-special pants.

We must have dinner anyway.' They drew lots with little bits of brake-fern. It fell to Jane's lot to waken the grown-up lamb. She did it gently by tickling his nose with a twig of honeysuckle.

He said, "Bother the flies!' twice, and then opened his eyes. "Hello, kiddies!' he said in a languid tone. "Still here? What's the giddy hour? You'll be late for your grub!' "I know we shall,' said Robert bitterly.

"Then cut along home,' said the grown-up lamb. "What about your grub, though?' asked Jane. "Oh, how far is it to the station, do you think? I've sort of a notion that I'll run up to town and have some lunch at the club.' Blank misery fell like a pall on the four others.

The lamb, alone, unattended, would go to town and have lunch at a club. Perhaps he would also have tea there. Perhaps sunset would come upon him amid the dazzling luxury of club-land, and a helpless, cross, sleepy baby would find itself alone amid unsympathetic waiters, and would wail miserably for pan-tea from the depths of a club-armchair.

The picture moved Anthea almost to tears. "Oh no, lamb-duddy, you mustn't do that!' she cried incautiously. The grown-up lamb frowned.

"My dear Anthea,' he said, "how often am I to tell you that my name is Hillary, or Samoor, or Devereaux! Any of my baptismal names are freed to my little brothers and sisters, but not lamb, a relic of foolishness and far-off childhood. This was awful. He was

their elder brother now, was he? Well, of course he was, if he was grown up, since they weren't.' Thus in whispers Anthea and Robert.

But the almost daily adventures resulting from the Samoyads' wishes were making the children wise beyond their years. "'Dear Hillary,' said Anthea, and the others choked at the name, 'you know Father didn't wish you to go to London. He wouldn't like us to be left alone without you to take care of us.' Oh, deceitful thing that I am!" she added to herself.

"'Look here,' said Cyril, 'if you're our elder brother, why not behave as such, and take us over to Maidstone, and give us a jolly good blow-out? I will go on the river afterwards.' "'I'm infinitely obliged to you,' said the lamb courteously, 'but I should prefer solitude. Go home to your lunch. I'm in your dinner.

Perhaps I may look in about tea-time, or I may not be home till after you are in your beds.' "'Their beds?' speaking glances flashed between the wretched four. Much bed there would be for them if they went home without the lamb. "'We promised Mother not to lose sight of you if we took you out,' Jane said before the others could stop her.

"'Look here, Jane,' said the grown-up lamb, putting his hands in his pockets and looking down at her. "Little girls should be seen and not heard. You kids must learn not to make yourselves a nuisance.

Run along home now, and perhaps, if you're good, I'll give you each a penny to-morrow.' "'Look here,' said Cyril, in the best man-to-man tone at his command. "Where are you going, old man? You might let Bobbs and me come with you, even if you don't want the girls.' This was really rather noble of Cyril, for he never did care much about being seen in public with the lamb, who, of course, after sunset would be a baby again. The man-to-man tone succeeded.

"'I shall run over to Maidstone on my bike,' said the new lamb airily, fingering the little black moustache. "'I can lunch at the Crown, and perhaps I'll have a pull on the river, but I can't take you all on the machine now, can I? Run along home, like good children.' The position was desperate. Robert exchanged a despairing look with Cyril.

Anthea detached a pin from her waistband, a pin whose withdrawal left a gaping chasm between skirt and bodice, and handed it furtively to Robert, with a grimace of the darkest and deepest meaning. Robert slipped away to the road. There, sure enough, stood a bicycle, a beautiful new one.

Of course, Robert understood at once that if the lamb was grown up he must have a bicycle. This had always been one of Robert's own reasons for wishing to be grown up. He hastily began to use the pin.

Eleven punctures in the back tyre, seven in the front. He would have made the total

twenty-two but for the rustling of the yellow hazel leaves, which warned him of the approach of the others. He hastily leaned a hand on each wheel, and was rewarded by the wish of the what was left of her, escaping from eighteen neat pinholes.

"Your bike's run down,' said Robert, wondering how he could so soon have learned to deceive. "'So it is,' said Cyril. "'It's a puncture,' said Anthea, stooping down, and standing up again with a thorn which she had got ready for the purpose.

"Look here!' The grown-up lamb, or Hillary as I suppose one must now call him, fixed his pump and blew up the tyre. The punctured state of it was soon evident. "'I suppose there's a cottage somewhere near, where one could get a pail of water,' said the lamb.

"There was, and when the number of punctures had been made manifest, it was felt to be a special blessing that the cottage provided teas for cyclists. It provided an odd sort of tea and hammy meal for the lamb and his brothers. This was paid for out of the fifteen shillings which had been earned by Robert when he was a giant, for the lamb, it appeared, had unfortunately no money about him.

This was a great disappointment for the others, but it is a thing that will happen, even to the most grown-up of us. However, Robert had enough to eat, and that was something. Quietly but persistently the miserable four took it in turns to try and persuade the lamb, or some more, to spend the rest of the day in the woods.

There was not very much of the day left by the time he had mended the eighteenth puncture. He looked up from the completed work with a sigh of relief, and suddenly put his tie straight. "'There's a lady coming,' he said briskly.

"For goodness' sake, get out of the way! Go home, hide, banish somehow! I can't be seen with a pack of dirty kids.' His brothers and sisters were indeed rather dirty, because earlier in the day the lamb, in his infant state, had sprinkled a good deal of garden soil over them. The grown-up lamb's voice was so tyrant-like, as Jane said afterwards, that they actually retreated to the back garden, and left him with his little moustache and his flannel suit to meet alone the young lady, who now came up the front garden wheeling a bicycle. The woman of the house came out, and the young lady spoke to her.

The lamb raised his hat as she passed him, and the children could not hear what she said, though they were craning round the corner and listening with all their ears. They felt it to be perfectly fair, as Robert said, with that wretched lamb in that condition. When the lamb spoke, in a languid voice heavy with politeness, they heard well enough.

"A puncture!' he was saying. "'Can I not be of any assistance?' "'If you could allow me.' There was a stifled explosion of laughter, and the grown-up lamb, otherwise Devereaux, turned the tail of an angry eye in its direction. "'You're very kind,' said the lady, looking at the lamb.

She looked rather shy, but, as the boys put it, there didn't seem to be any nonsense about her. "'But, oh!' whispered Cyril, "'I should have thought he had had enough bicycle-mending for one day, and if she only knew that really and truly he's only a whiny, piney, silly little baby!' "'He's not,' Anthea murmured angrily. "'He's a deer if people only let him alone.

It's our own precious lamb still, whatever silly idiots may turn him into. Isn't he pussy?' Jane doubtfully supposed so. Now the lamb, whom I must try to remember to call Saint-Maul, was examining the lady's bicycle and talking to her with a very grown-up manner indeed.

No one could possibly have supposed, to see and hear him, that only that very morning he had been a chubby child of two years, breaking other people's Waterbury watches. Devereux, as he ought to be called for the future, took out a gold watch when he had mended the lady's bicycle, and all the hidden onlookers said, oh! because it seemed so unfair that the baby, who had only that morning destroyed two cheap but honest watches, should now, in the grown-upness to which Cyril's folly had raised him, have a real gold watch, with a chain and seals. Hillary, as I will now term him, withered his brothers and sisters with a glance, and then said to the lady, with whom he seemed to be quite friendly, If you will allow me I will ride with you as far as the crossroads.

It is getting late, and there are tramps about. No one will ever know what answer the young lady intended to give to this gallant offer, for directly Anthea heard it made, she rushed out, knocking against a swill-pail, which overflowed in a turbid stream, and caught the lamb, I suppose I ought to say Hillary, by the arm. The others followed, and in an instant the four dirty children were visible beyond disguise.

Don't let him, said Anthea to the lady, and she spoke with intense earnestness. He's not fit to go with anyone. Go away, little girl, said Samoa, as we will now call him, in a terrible voice.

Go home at once. You had much better not have anything to do with him, the now reckless Anthea went on. He doesn't know who he is.

He's something very different from what you think he is. What do you mean? asked the lady, not unnaturally, while Devereaux, as I must term the grown-up lamb, tried vainly to push Anthea away. The others backed her up, and she stood solid as a rock.

You just let him go with you, said Anthea. You'll soon see what I mean. How would you like to suddenly see a poor little helpless baby spinning along downhill beside you, with its feet up on a bicycle it had lost control of? The lady had turned rather pale.

Who are these very dirty children? she asked the grown-up lamb, sometimes called Samoa in these pages. I don't know, he lied miserably. Oh, lamb, how can you? cried

Jane.

When you know perfectly well you're our own little baby brother that we're so fond of. We're his big brothers and sisters, she exclaimed, turning to the lady who, with trembling hands, was now turning her bicycle towards the gate. And we've got to take care of him, and we must get him home before sunset, or I don't know whatever will become of us.

You see, he's sort of under a spell. Enchanted, you know what I mean. Again and again the lamb—Devereaux, I mean—had tried to stop Jane's eloquence, but Robert and Cyril held him, one by each leg, and no proper explanation was possible.

The lady rode hastily away, and electrified her relatives at dinner by telling them of her escape from a family of dangerous lunatics. The little girl's eyes were simply those of a maniac. I can't think how she came to be at large, she said, when her bicycle had whizzed away down the road.

Cyril spoke gravely. Hillary, old chap, he said, you must have had a sunstroke or something, and the things you've been saying to the lady—why, if we were to tell you the things you've said when you were yourself again, say tomorrow morning, you wouldn't ever understand them, let alone believe them. You trust to me, old chap, and come home now, and if you're not yourself in the morning we'll ask the milkman to ask the doctor to come.

The poor grown-up lamb—St. Maure was really one of his Christian names—seemed now too bewildered to resist. "'Since you seem all to be as mad as the whole worshipful company of hatters,' he said bitterly, "'I suppose I had better take you home.

But you're not to suppose I shall pass this over. I shall have something to say to you all tomorrow morning.' "'Yes, you will, my lamb,' said Anthea under her breath, 'but it won't be at all the sort of thing you think it's going to be.' In her heart she could hear the pretty, soft, little, loving voice of the baby lamb, so different from the affected tones of the dreadful grown-up lamb, one of whose names was Devereaux, saying, "'Me love Panty! Wants to come to own Panty!' "'Oh, let's go home for goodness' sake,' she said. "'You shall say whatever you like in the morning, if you can,' she added in a whisper.

It was a gloomy party that went home through the soft evening. During Anthea's remarks Robert had again made play with the pin and the bicycle-tyre, and the lamb, whom they had to call St. Maure, or Devereaux, or Hillary, seemed really at last to have had his fill of bicycle-mending, so the machine was wheeled. The sun was just on the point of setting when they arrived at the White House.

The four elder children would have liked to linger in the lane till the complete sun-setting turned the grown-up lamb, whose Christian names I will not further weary you by

repeating, into their own dear, tiresome baby brother. But he, in his grown-upness, insisted on going on, and thus he was met in the front garden by Martha. Now you remember that, as a special favour, the Samoyad had arranged that the servants in the house should never notice any change brought about by the wishes of the children.

Therefore Martha merely saw the usual party, with the baby lamb, about whom she had been desperately anxious all the afternoon, trotting beside Anthea on fat baby legs, while the children, of course, still saw the grown-up lamb, never mind what names he was christened by. And Martha rushed at him and caught him in her arms, exclaiming, Come to us, O Martha, then, a precious puppet! The grown-up lamb, whose name shall now be buried in oblivion, struggled furiously. An expression of intense horror and annoyance was seen on his face.

But Martha was stronger than he. She lifted him up and carried him into the house. None of the children will ever forget that picture.

The neat, grey-flannel-suited grown-up young man, with the green necktie and the little black moustache—fortunately he was slightly built and not tall—struggling in the sturdy arms of Martha, who bore him away helpless, imploring him as she went, To be a good boy now, and come and have his nice brevic. Fortunately the sun set as they reached the doorstep. The bicycle disappeared, and Martha was seen to carry into the house the real, live, darling, sleepy two-year-old lamb.

The grown-up lamb, nameless henceforth, was gone for ever. For ever, said Cyril, because as soon as ever the lamb's old enough to be bullied, we must jolly well begin to bully him for his own sake, so that he mayn't grow up like that. You shan't bully him, said Anthea Stoutley.

Not if I can stop it. We must tame him by kindness, said Jane. You see, said Robert, if he grows up in the usual way, there'll be plenty of time to correct him as he goes along.

The awful thing to-day was his growing up so suddenly there was no time to improve him at all. He doesn't want any improving, said Anthea, as the voice of the lamb came cooing through the open door, just as she had heard it in her heart that afternoon. Me loves Panty.

Wants to come to own Panty.