

# OpenTheo

## Five Children and It—Chapter 5: No Wings

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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 5 No Wings Whether anyone cried or not, there was certainly an interval during which none of the party was quite itself. When they grew calmer, Anthea put her handkerchief in her pocket and her arm round Jane and said, It can't be for more than one night. We can signal with our handkerchiefs in the morning.

They'll be dry then, and someone will come up and let us out. And find the siphon, said Cyril gloomily, and we shall be sent to prison for stealing. You said it wasn't stealing.

You said you were sure it wasn't. I'm not sure now, said Cyril shortly. Let's throw the thing away among the trees, said Robert.

Then no one can do anything to us. Oh yes, Cyril's laugh was not a light-hearted one, and hit some chap on the head and be murderers as well as—as the other thing. But we can't stay up here all night, said Jane, and I want my tea.

You can't want your tea, said Robert. You've only just had your dinner. But I do want it, she said, especially when you begin talking about stopping up here all night.

Oh, Panther, I want to go home. I want to go home. Hush, hush, Anthea said.

Don't, dear. It'll be all right, somehow. Don't, don't.

Let her cry, said Robert desperately. If she howls loud enough, someone may hear and come and let us out. And see the soda-water thing, said Anthea swiftly.

Robert, don't be a brute. Oh, Jane, do try to be a man. It's just the same for all of us.

Jane did try to be a man, and reduced her howls to sniffs. There was a pause. Then Cyril said slowly, Look here.

We must risk that siphon. I'll button it up inside my jacket. Perhaps no one will notice it.

You others keep well in front of me. There are lights in the clergyman's house. They've not gone to bed yet.

We must just yell as loud as ever we can. Now all scream when I say three. Robert, you do the yell like a railway engine, and I'll do the coo-ee like fathers.

The girls can do as they please. One, two, three. A fourfold yell rent the silent peace of the evening, and a maid at one of the vicarage windows paused with her hand on the blind cord.

One, two, three. Another yell, piercing and complex, startled the owls and starlings to a flutter of feathers in the belfry below. The maid flew from the vicarage window and ran down the vicarage stairs and into the vicarage kitchen, and fainted as soon as she had explained to the manservant and the cook and the cook's cousin that she had seen a ghost.

It was quite untrue, of course, but I suppose the girls' nerves were a little upset by the yelling. One, two, three. The vicar was on his doorstep by this time, and there was no mistaking the yell that greeted him.

Goodness me, he said to his wife, my dear, someone's being murdered in the church. Give me my hat and a thick stick, and tell Andrew to come after me. I expect it's the lunatic who stole the tongue.

The children had seen the flash of light when the vicar opened his front door. They had seen his dark form on his doorstep, and they had paused for breath, and also to see what he would do. When he turned back for his hat, Cyril said hastily, he thinks he only fancied he heard something.

You don't half yell. Now, one, two, three. It was certainly a whole yell this time, and the vicar's wife flung her arms round her husband and screamed a feeble echo of it.

You shan't go, she said. Not alone, Jessie. The maid fainted and came out of the kitchen.

Send Andrew at once. There's a dangerous lunatic in the church, and he must go immediately and catch him. I expect he will catch it, too, said Jessie to herself as she went through the kitchen door.

Here, Andrew, she said. There's someone screaming like mad in the church, and the missus says you're to go along and catch it. Not alone, I don't, said Andrew in low firm tones.

To his master he merely said, Yes, sir. You hear those screams? I did think I noticed a sort of something, said Andrew. Well, come on, then, said the vicar.

My dear, I must go. He pushed her gently into the sitting room, banged the door, and rushed out, dragging Andrew by the arm. A volley of yells greeted them.

Then, as it died into silence, Andrew shouted, Hello, you there. Did you call? Yes, shouted four faraway voices. They seem to be in the air, said the vicar.

Very remarkable. Where are you? shouted Andrew. And Cyril replied in his deepest voice, very slow and loud.

Church! Tower! Top! Come down, then, said Andrew. And the same voice replied, Can't. Door locked.

My goodness, said the vicar. Andrew, fetch the stable lantern. Perhaps it would be as well to fetch another man from the village.

With the rest of the gang about? Very likely. No, sir, if this ear ain't a trap, well, may I never. There's Cook's cousin at the back door now.

He's a keeper, sir, and used to dealing with vicious characters. And he's got his gun, sir. Hello, there, shouted Cyril from the church tower.

Come up and let us out. We're a-coming, said Andrew. I'm a-goin' to get a policeman and a gun.

Andrew, Andrew, said the vicar. That's not the truth. It's near enough, sir, for the likes of them.

So Andrew fetched the lantern and the Cook's cousin, and the vicar's wife begged them all to be very careful. They went across the churchyard. It was quite dark now.

And as they went, they talked. The vicar was certain a lunatic was on the church tower, the one who had written the mad letter and taken the cold tongue and things. Andrew

thought it was a trap.

The Cook's cousin alone was calm. Great cry, little wolf, said he. Dangerous chaps is quieter.

He was not at all afraid. But then he had a gun. That was why he was asked to lead the way up the worn, steep, dark steps of the church tower.

He did lead the way, with the lantern in one hand and the gun in the other. Andrew went next. He pretended afterward that this was because he was braver than his master.

But really it was because he thought of traps, and he did not like the idea of being behind the others for fear someone should come softly up behind him and catch hold of his legs in the dark. They went on and on, and round and round the little corkscrew staircase. Then through the bell ringers loft, where the bell ropes hung with soft furry ends like giant caterpillars.

Then up another stair into the belfry, where the big quiet bells are. And then on up a ladder with broad steps, and then up a little stone stair. And at the top of that there was a little door, and the door was bolted on the stair side.

The Cook's cousin, who was a gameskeeper, kicked at the door and said, Hello you there. The children were holding on to each other on the other side of the door, and trembling with anxiousness, and very hoarse were their howls. They could hardly speak, but Cyril managed to reply huskily, Hello you there.

How did you get up there? It was no use saying, we flew up, so Cyril said, We got up, and then we found the door was locked, and we couldn't get down. Let us out, do. How many of you are there? asked the Keeper.

Only four, said Cyril. Are you armed? Are we what? I've got my gun handy, so you'd best not try any tricks, said the Keeper. If we open the door, will you promise to come quietly down, and no nonsense? Yes, oh yes, said all the children together.

Bless me, said the Vicar. Surely that was a female voice. Shall I open the door, sir? said the Keeper.

Andrew went down a few steps, to leave room for the others, he said afterwards. Yes, said the Vicar. Open the door.

Remember, he said through the keyhole, we have come to release you. You will keep your promise to refrain from violence. How this bolt do stick, said the Keeper.

Anyone would think it hadn't been drawn for half a year. As a matter of fact, it hadn't. When all the bolts were drawn, the Keeper spoke deep-chested words through the keyhole.

I don't open, said he, till you've gone over to the other side of the tower, and if one of you comes at me, I fire. Now. We're all over on the other side, said the voices.

The Keeper felt pleased with himself, and owned himself a bold man when he threw open that door, and stepping out into the ledges, flashed the full light of the stable lantern, on the group of desperados, standing against the parapet on the other side of the tower. He lowered his gun, and he nearly dropped the lantern. So help me, he cried, if they ain't a pack of kiddies.

The Vicar now advanced. How did you come up here? he asked severely. Tell me at once.

Oh, take us down, said Jane, catching at his coat, and we'll tell you anything you like. You won't believe us, but it doesn't matter. Oh, take us down.

The others crowded round him with the same entreaty. All but Cyril. He had enough to do with the soda-water siphon, which would keep slipping down under his jacket.

It needed both hands to keep it steady in its place. But, he said, standing as far out of the lantern-light as possible, please do take us down. So they were taken down.

It is no joke to go down a strange church tower in the dark. But the Keeper helped them. Only Cyril had to be independent because of the soda-water siphon.

It would keep trying to get away. Halfway down the ladder, it all but escaped. Cyril just caught it by its spout, and as nearly as possible lost his footing.

He was trembling and pale when at last they reached the bottom of the winding stair, and stepped out onto the stones of the church porch. Then suddenly the Keeper caught Cyril and Robert each by an arm. You bring along the girls, sir, said he.

You and Andrew can manage them. Let go, said Cyril. We aren't running away.

We haven't hurt your old church. Leave go. You just come along, said the Keeper.

And Cyril dared not oppose him with violence, because just then the siphon began to slip again. So they were marched into the Vicarage study, and the Vicar's wife came rushing in. Oh William, are you safe? she cried.

Robert hastened to allay her anxiety. Yes, he said. He's quite safe.

We haven't hurt them at all, and please we're very late, and they'll be anxious at home. Could you send us home in your carriage? Or perhaps there's a hotel near where we could get a carriage, said Anthea. Martha will be very anxious as it is.

The Vicar had sunk into a chair, overcome by emotion and amazement. Cyril had also sat

down, and was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees because of the soda water siphon. But how did you come to be locked up in the church tower? asked the Vicar.

We went up, said Robert slowly, and we were tired and we all went to sleep, and when we woke we found the door was locked, so we yelled. I should think you did, said the Vicar's wife, frightening everybody out of their wits like this. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves.

We are, said Jane gently. But who locked the door? asked the Vicar. I don't know at all, said Robert with perfect truth.

Do please send us home. Well really, said the Vicar, I suppose we'd better. Andrew, put the horse to, and you can take them home.

Not alone I don't, said Andrew to himself, and the Vicar went on. Let this be a lesson to you. He went on talking and the children listened miserably, but the keeper was not listening.

He was looking at the unfortunate Cyril. He knew all about poachers of course, so he knew how people look when they're hiding something. The Vicar had just got to the part about trying to grow up to be a blessing to your parents and not a trouble and disgrace, when the keeper suddenly said, Asked him what he's got there under his jacket.

And Cyril knew that concealment was at an end. So he stood up and squared his shoulders and tried to look noble, like the boys in books that no one can look in the face of and doubt that they come of brave and noble families and will be faithful to the death. And he pulled out the siphon and said, Well, there you are then.

There was silence. Cyril went on. There was nothing else for it.

Yes, we took this out of your larder and some chicken and tongue and bread. We were very hungry and we didn't take the custard or jam. We only took bread and meat and water and we couldn't help it's being soda kind, just the necessaries of life.

And we left half a crown to pay for it. And we left a letter and we're very sorry. And my father will pay a fine and anything you like, but don't send us to prison.

Mother would be so vexed. You know what you said about not being a disgrace. Well, don't you go and do it to us.

That's all. We're as sorry as we can be there. However, did you get into the larder window? Said Mrs. Vicar.

I can't tell you that. Said Cyril firmly. Is this the whole truth you've been telling me? Asked the clergyman.

No. Answered Jane suddenly. It's all true, but it's not the whole truth.

We can't tell you that. It's no good asking. Oh, do forgive us and take us home.

She ran to the vicar's wife and threw her arms round her. The vicar's wife put her arms round Jane and the keeper whispered something behind his hand to the vicar. They're all right, sir.

I expect it's a pal they're standing by. Someone put him up to it and they won't peach. Game, little kids.

Tell me, said the vicar kindly. Are you screening someone else? Has anyone else anything to do with this? Yes, said Anthea, thinking of the Samyad. But it wasn't their fault.

Very well, my dears, said the vicar. Then let's say no more about it. Only just tell us why you wrote such an odd letter.

I don't know, said Cyril. You see, Anthea wrote it in such a hurry and it really didn't seem like stealing then. But afterwards, when we found we couldn't get down off the church tower, it seemed just exactly like it.

We are all very sorry. Say no more about it, said the vicar's wife. But another time, just think before you take other people's tongues.

Now some cake and milk before you go home? When Andrew came to say that the horse was put to, and was he expected to be led along into the trap that he had plainly seen from the first, he found the children eating cake and drinking milk and laughing at the vicar's jokes. Jane was sitting on the vicar's wife's lap. So you see, they got off better than they deserved.

The gamekeeper, who was the cook's cousin, asked Leib to drive home with them, and Andrew was only too glad to have someone to protect him from the trap he was so certain of. When the wagonette reached their own house, between the chalk quarry and the gravel pit, the children were very sleepy, but they felt that they and the keeper were friends for life. Andrew dumped the children down at the iron gate without a word.

You get along home, said the vicarage's cook's cousin, who was a gamekeeper. I'll get me home on Shanks Mare. So Andrew had to drive off alone, which he did not like at all, and it was the keeper that was cousin to the vicarage cook who went with the children to the door, and when they had been swept to bed in a whirlwind of reproaches, remained to explain to Martha and the cook and the housemaid exactly what had happened.

He explained so well that Martha was quite amicable the next morning. After that, he often used to come over and see Martha, and in the end... But that is another story, as

dear Mr Kipling says. Martha was obliged to stick to what she had said the night before about keeping the children indoors the next day for a punishment, but she wasn't at all ugly about it and agreed to let Robert go out for half an hour to get something he particularly wanted.

This, of course, was the day's wish. Robert rushed to the gravel pit, found the Samoyed and presently wished for... But that, too, is another story.