

# OpenTheo

## Five Children and It—Chapter 11 (and last): The Last Wish

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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 11 and last. The Last Wish. Of course you, who see above that this is the eleventh and last chapter, know very well that the day of which this chapter tells must be the last on which Cyril, Anthea, Robert and Jane will have a chance of getting anything out of the Samyad, or Sand Ferry.

But the children themselves did not know this. They were full of rosy visions, and whereas on the other days they had often found it extremely difficult to think of anything really nice to wish for, their brains were now full of the most beautiful and sensible ideas. This, as Jane remarked afterwards, is always the way.

Everyone was up extra early that morning, and these plans were hopefully discussed in the garden before breakfast. The old idea of one hundred pounds in modern Florence was still first favourite, but there were others that ran it close, the chief of these being the pony-each idea. This had a great advantage.

You could wish for a pony each during the morning, ride it all day, have it vanish at sunset, and wish it back again next day, which would be an economy of litter and

stabling. But at breakfast two things happened. First, there was a letter from mother.

Granny was better, and mother and father hoped to be home that very afternoon. A cheer arose. And of course this news at once scattered all the before-breakfast wish ideas, for everyone saw quite plainly that the wish of the day must be something to please mother, and not to please themselves.

I wonder what she would like, pondered Cyril. She'd like us all to be good, said Jane primly. Yes, but that's so dull for us, Cyril rejoined, and besides I should hope we could be that without sand-ferries to help us.

No, it must be something splendid, that we couldn't possibly get without wishing for. Look out, said Anthea in a warning voice. Don't forget yesterday.

Remember we get our wishes now just wherever we happen to be when we say I wish. Don't let's let ourselves in for anything silly, today of all days. All right, said Cyril, you needn't talk so much.

Just then Martha came in with a jug full of hot water for the teapot, and a face full of importance for the children. A blessing we're all alive to eat our breakfast, she said darkly. Why, whatever's happened? everybody asked.

Oh, nothing, said Martha, only it seems nobody's safe from being murdered in their beds nowadays. Why, said Jane, as an agreeable thrill of horror ran down her back and legs and out at her toes, has anyone been murdered in their beds? Well, not exactly, said Martha, but they might just as well. There's been burglars over at Peasmarsh Place, Beals just told me, and they've took every single one of Lady Chittenden's diamonds and jewels and things, and she's a-going out of one fainting fit into another with hardly time to say, Oh, my diamonds! in between, and Lord Chittenden's away in London.

Lady Chittenden, said Anthea, we've seen her. She wears a red and white dress, and she has no children of her own, and can't abide other folks's. That's her, said Martha.

Well, she's put all her trust in riches, and you see how she's served. They say the diamonds and things was worth thousands of pounds. There was a necklace and a rivet, whatever that is, and no end of bracelets, and a tarot, and ever so many rings.

But there, I mustn't stand talking in all the place to clean down afore your mare comes home. I don't see why she should ever have such lots of diamonds, said Anthea, when Martha had flounced off. She was not at all a nice lady, I thought, and Mother hasn't any diamonds, and hardly any jewels.

The topaz necklace and the sapphire ring Daddy gave her when they were engaged, and the garnet star, and the little pearl brooch with great-grandpapa's hair in it, that's about all. When I'm grown up I'll buy Mother no end of diamonds, said Robert, if she wants

them. I shall make so much money exploring in Africa I shan't know what to do with it.

Wouldn't it be so jolly, said Jane dreamily, if Mother could find all these lovely things, necklaces and rivets of diamonds and tarots? Tiaras, said Cyril, tiaras then, and rings and everything in her room when she came home. I wish she would. The others gazed at her in horror.

Well, she will, said Robert. You wished, my good Jane, and our only chance now is to find the Samyad, and if it's in a good temper it may take back the wish and give us another. If not, well, goodness knows what we're in for.

The police, of course, and... Don't cry, silly. We'll stand by you. Father says we need never to be afraid if we don't do anything wrong, and always speak the truth.

But Cyril and Anthea exchanged gloomy glances. They remembered how convincing the truth about the Samyad had been once before when told to the police. It was a day of misfortunes.

Of course the Samyad could not be found, nor the jewels, though every one of the children searched the Mother's room again and again. Of course, Robert said, we couldn't find them. It'll be Mother who'll do that.

Perhaps she'll think they've been in the house for years and years, and never know they are the stolen ones at all. Oh, yes. Cyril was very scornful.

Then Mother will be a receiver of stolen goods, and you know jolly well what that's worse than. Another and exhaustive search of the sand-pit failed to reveal the Samyad, so the children went back to the house slowly and sadly. I don't care, said Anthea stoutly.

We'll tell Mother the truth, and she'll give back the jewels and make everything all right. Do you think so? said Cyril slowly. Do you think she'll believe us? Could anyone believe about a Samyad unless they'd seen it? She'll think we're pretending, or else she'll think we're raving mad, and then we shall be sent to the madhouse.

How would you like it, he turned suddenly on the miserable Jane, how would you like it to be shut up in an iron cage with bars and padded walls, and nothing to do but stick straws in your hair all day, and listen to the howlings and ravings of the other maniacs? Make up your minds to it, all of you, it's no use telling Mother. But it's true, said Jane. Of course it is, but it's not true enough for grown-up people to believe it, said Anthea.

Cyril's right, let's put flowers in all the vases, and try not to think about the diamonds. After all, everything has come right in the end all the other times. So they filled all the pots they could find with flowers, asters and zinnias, and loose-leaved late red roses from the wall of the stable-yard, till the house was a perfect bower.

And almost as soon as dinner was cleared away, Mother arrived, and was clasped in eight loving arms. It was very difficult indeed not to tell her all about the Samyad at once, because they had got into the habit of telling her everything. But they did succeed in not telling her.

Mother, on one side, had plenty to tell them, about Granny and Granny's pigeons, and Aunty Emma's lame-tamed donkey. She was very delighted with the flowery-boweriness of the house, and everything seemed so natural and pleasant, now that she was home again, that the children almost thought they must have dreamed the Samyad. But, when Mother moved towards the stairs to go up to her bedroom and take off her bonnet, the eight arms clung round her just as if she only had two children, one the lamb and the other an octopus.

"Don't go up, Mummy darling," said Anthea. "Let me take your things up for you." "Or I will," said Cyril. "We want you to come and look at the rose-tree," said Robert.

"Oh, don't go up," said Jane helplessly. "Nonsense, dears," said Mother briskly. "I'm not such an old woman yet that I can't take my bonnet off in the proper place.

"Besides, I must wash these black hands of mine." So up she went, and the children following her exchanged glances of gloomy foreboding. Mother took off her bonnet. It was a very pretty hat, really, with white roses in it, and when she had taken it off she went to the dressing-table to do her pretty hair.

On the table between the ring-stand and the pincushion lay a green leather case. Mother opened it. "Oh, how lovely!" she cried.

"It was a ring. A large pearl with shining many lighted diamonds set round it. "Wherever did this come from?" Mother asked, trying it on her wedding finger, "which it fitted beautifully.

"However did it come here?" "I don't know," said each of the children truthfully. "Father must have told Martha to put it here," Mother said. "I'll run down and ask her." "Let me look at it," said Antia, who knew Martha would not be able to see the ring.

"But when Martha was asked, of course she denied putting the ring there, "and so did Eliza and Cook. "Mother came back to her bedroom, very much interested and pleased about the ring, "but when she opened the dressing-table drawer and found a long case "containing an almost priceless diamond necklace, "she was more interested still, though not so pleased. "In the wardrobe, when she went to put away her bonnet, "she found a tiara and several brooches, "and the rest of the jewellery turned up in various parts of the room during the next half-hour.

"The children looked more and more uncomfortable, and now Jane began to sniff. "Mother looked at her gravely. "Jane," she said, "I'm sure you know something about

this.

"Now think before you speak, and tell me the truth.' "'We found a fairy,' said Jane obediently. "'No nonsense, please,' said her mother sharply. "'Don't be silly, Jane,' Cyril interrupted.

"Then he went on desperately. "'Look here, Mother, we've never seen the things before, "'but Lady Chittenden at Pease Marsh Place lost all her jewellery by wicked burglars last night. "'Could this possibly be it?' "'All drew a deep breath.

They were saved. "'But how could they have put it here? "'And why should they?' asked Mother, not unreasonably. "'Surely it would have been easier and safer to make off with it.

"Suppose,' said Cyril, "'they thought it better to wait for—for sunset—nightfall, I mean—before they went off with it. "'No one but us knew that you were coming back today. "'I must send for the police at once,' said Mother distractedly.

"Oh, how I wish Daddy were here!' "'Wouldn't it be better to wait till he does come?' asked Robert, "'knowing that his father would not be home before sunset. "'No, no, I can't wait a minute with all this on my mind,' cried Mother. "'All this was the heap of jewel cases on the bed.

"They put them all in the wardrobe, and Mother locked it. "'Then Mother called Martha. "'Martha,' she said, "'has any stranger been into my room since I've been away? "'Now answer me truthfully.' "'No, Mum,' answered Martha, "'leastways, what I meant to say—' "'She stopped.

"Come,' said her mistress kindly, "'I see someone has. You must tell me at once. "'Don't be frightened.

I'm sure you haven't done anything wrong.' "'Martha burst into heavy sobs. "'I was a-going to give you warning this very day, Mum, "'to leave at the end of my month, so I was, "'on account of me being going to make a respectable young man happy. "'A gamekeeper he is by trade, Mum, "'and I wouldn't deceive you, of the name of Beale.

"And it's as true as I stand here. "'It was your coming home in such a hurry, and no warning given. "'Out of the kindness of his heart it was, as he says.

"Martha, my beauty,' he says, which I ain't, and never was. "'But you know how them men will go on. "'I can't see you a-toiling and a-moiling, "'and not lend a helping hand, "'which mine is a strong arm, and it's yours, Martha, my dear,' says he.

"And so he helped me of a cleaning of the windows. "'But outside, Mum, the whole time, and me in, "'I'll never say another breathing word, it's gospel truth.' "'Were you with him

the whole time?' asked her mistress. "'Him outside and me in I was, "'except for fetching up a fresh pail and the leather "'that that Eliza'd hidden away behind the mangle.' "'That will do,' said the children's mother.

"'I'm not pleased with you, Martha, but you have spoken the truth, "'and that counts for something.' When Martha had gone the children clung round their mother. "'O Mummy darling!' cried Anthea. "'It isn't Beal's fault, it isn't really.

"'He's a great dear, he is, truly and honourably, "'and as honest as the day. "'Don't let the police take him, Mummy. "'O don't, don't, don't!' It was truly awful.

Here was an innocent man accused of robbery through that silly wish of Jane's, and it was absolutely useless to tell the truth, or long to, but they thought of the straws in the hair and the shrieks of the other frantic maniacs, and they could not do it. "'Is there a cart hereabouts?' asked the mother feverishly. "'A trap of any sort.

"'I must drive into Rochester and tell the police at once.' All the children sobbed. "'There's a cart at the farm, but O don't go, don't go, O don't go! "'Wait till Daddy comes home!' Mother took not the faintest notice. When she had set her mind on a thing she always went straight through with it.

She was rather like Anthea in this respect. "'Look here, Cyril,' she said, sticking on her hat with long, sharp, violet-headed pins. "'I'll leave you in charge.

"'Stay in the dressing-room. "'You can pretend to be swimming boats in the bath or something. "'Say I gave you leave, but stay there "'with the door on the landing open.

"'I've locked the other, and don't let anyone go into my room. "'Remember, no one knows the jewels are there "'except me, and all of you, "'and the wicked thieves who put them there. "'Robert, you stay in the garden and watch the windows.

"'If anyone tries to get in, you must run "'and tell the two farm-men that I'll send up "'to wait in the kitchen. "'I'll tell them there are dangerous characters about. "'That's true enough.

"'Now remember, I trust you both, "'but I don't think they'll try it till after dark, "'so you're quite safe. "'Good-bye, darlings.' And she locked her bedroom door and went off with the key in her pocket. The children could not help admiring the dashing and decided way in which she had acted.

They thought how useful she would have been in organising escape from some of the tight places in which they had found themselves of late in consequence of their ill-timed wishes. "'She's a born general,' said Cyril, "'but I don't know what's going to happen to us. "'Even if the girls were to hunt for that old samoyad and find it "'and get it to take the jewels away again, "'Mother would only think we hadn't looked out properly "'and let the

burglars sneak in and get them, "or else the police would think we've got them, "or else that she's been fooling them.

"Oh, it's a pretty decent, average, ghastly mess this time, "and no mistake.' He savagely made a paper boat and began to float it in the bath, as he had been told to do. Robert went into the garden and sat down on the worn yellow grass and his miserable head between his helpless hands. Anthea and Jane whispered together in the passage downstairs where the coconut matting was, with the hole in it that you always caught your foot in if you were not careful.

Martha's voice could be heard in the kitchen, grumbling loud and long. "It's simply quite too dreadfully awful,' said Anthea. "How do you know all the diamonds are there, too? "If they aren't, the police will think Mother and Father have got them, "and that they've only given up some of them for a kind of desperate blind, "and they'll be put in prison, "and we shall be branded outcasts, the children of felons, "and it won't be at all nice for Father and Mother either,' she added, by a candid afterthought.

"But what can we do?' asked Jane. "Nothing. At least we might look for the Samoyed again.

"It's a very, very hot day. "He may have come out to warm that whisker of his.' "He won't give us any more beastly wishes to-day,' said Jane flatly. "He gets crosser and crosser every time we see him.

"I believe he hates having to give wishes.' Anthea had been shaking her head gloomily. Now she stopped shaking it so suddenly that it really looked as though she were pricking up her ears. "What is it?' asked Jane.

"Oh, have you thought of something?' "Our one chance!' cried Anthea dramatically. "The last lone, lone, forlorn hope! Come on!' At a brisk trot she led the way to the sand-pit. "Oh, joy! There was the Samoyed, "basking in a golden sandy hollow "and preening its whiskers happily in the glowing afternoon sun.

"The moment it saw them it whisked round and began to burrow. "It evidently preferred its own company to theirs. "But Anthea was too quick for it.

"She caught it by its furry shoulders gently but firmly and held it. "Here! None of that!' said the Samoyed. "Leave go of me, will you?' But Anthea held him fast.

"Dear, kind, darling Samoyed,' she said breathlessly. "Oh, yes, it's all very well,' it said. "You want another wish, I expect.

"But I can't keep slaving from morning till night, "giving people their wishes. "I must have some time to myself.' "Do you hate giving wishes?' asked Anthea gently, and her voice trembled with excitement. "Of course I do,' it said.

"Leave go of me or I'll bite. "I really will. I mean it.

"Oh, well, if you choose to risk it.' Anthea risked it and held on. "'Look here,' she said. "'Don't bite me.

Listen to reason. "'If you'll only do what we want today, "'we'll never ask you for another wish as long as we live.' The Samoyed was much moved. "'I'll do anything,' it said in a tearful voice.

"I'd almost burst myself to give you one wish after another, "'as long as I held out. "'If you'd only never, never ask me to do it after today. "'If you know how I hate to blow myself out "'with other people's wishes, "'and how frightened I am always "'that I shall strain a muscle or something, "'and then to wake up every morning and know you've got to do it.

"You don't know what it is. "You don't know what it is. You don't!' His voice cracked with emotion, and the last don't was a squeak.

Anthea set it down gently on the sand. "'It's all over now,' she said soothingly. "'We promise faithfully never to ask for another wish after today.' "'Well, go ahead,' said the Samoyed.

"Let's get it over.' "'How many can you do?' "'I don't know. As long as I can hold out.' "'Well, first I wish Lady Chittenden may find she's never lost her jewels.' The Samoyed blew itself out, collapsed, and said, "'Done!' "'I wish,' said Anthea more slowly, "'Mother mayn't get to the police.' "'Done!' said the creature after the proper interval. "'I wish,' said Jane suddenly, "'Mother could forget all about the diamonds.' "'Done!' said the Samoyed, but its voice was weaker.

"Would you like to rest a little?' asked Anthea considerably. "'Yes, please,' said the Samoyed. "'And before we go any further, will you wish something for me? "'Can't you do wishes for yourself?' "'Of course not,' it said.

"We were always expected to give each other our wishes, "'not that we had any to speak of in the good old Megatherium days. "'Just wish, will you, that you may never be able, any of you, "'to tell anyone a word about me.' "'Why?' asked Jane. "'Why, don't you see? "'If you told grown-ups I should have no peace in my life, "'they'd get hold of me and they wouldn't wish silly things like you do, "'but real earnest things, and the scientific people "'would hit on some way of making things last after sunset, as likely as not.

"And they'd ask for a graduated income tax, and old age pensions, "'and manhood suffrage, and free secondary education, "'and dull things like that, and get them, and keep them, "'and the whole world would be turned topsy-turvy. "'Do wish it, quick!' "'Anthea repeated the Samoyed's wish, "'and it blew itself out to a larger size than they



had yet seen it attain. "'And now,' it said as it collapsed, "'can I do anything more for you?' "'Just one more thing, and I think that clears everything up, doesn't it, Jane? "'I wish Martha to forget about the diamond ring, "'and Mother to forget about the keeper cleaning the windows.

"'It's like the brass bottle,' said Jane. "'Yes, I'm glad we read that, or I should never have thought of it.' "'Now,' said the Samoyed faintly, "'I'm almost worn out. Is there anything else?' "'No.

Only thank you kindly for all you've done for us, "'and I hope you'll have a good long sleep, "'and I hope we shall see you again some day.' "'Is that a wish?' it said in a weak voice. "'Yes, please,' said the two girls together. "'Then, for the last time in this story, "'they saw the Samoyed blow itself out and collapse suddenly.

"'It nodded to them, blinked its long snail's eyes, "'burrowed and disappeared, scratching fiercely to the last, "'and the sand closed over it. "'I hope we've done right,' said Jane. "'I'm sure we have,' said Anthea.

"'Come on home and tell the boys.' "'Anthea found Cyril glooming over his paper boats and told him. "'Jane told Robert. "'The two tales were only just ended when Mother walked in, "'hot and dusty.

"'She explained that as she was being driven into Rochester "'to buy the girls autumn school-dresses, "'the axle had broken, "'and but for the narrowness of the lane and the high soft hedges, "'she would have been thrown out. "'As it was, she was not hurt, but she had had to walk home. "'And, oh, my dearest dear chicks,' she said, "'I am simply dying for a cup of tea.

"'Do run and see if the water boils.' "'So you see it's all right,' Jane whispered. "'She doesn't remember.' "'No more does Martha,' said Anthea, "'who had been to ask after the state of the kettle. "'As the servants sat at their tea, Beale the gamekeeper dropped in.

"'He brought the welcome news that Lady Chittenden's diamonds "'had not been lost at all. "'Lord Chittenden had taken them to be reset and cleaned, "'and the maid who knew about it had gone for a whole day. "'So that was all right.' "'I wonder if we shall ever see the Samoyed again,' "'said Jane wistfully, as they walked in the garden, "'while Mother was putting the lamb to bed.

"'I'm sure we shall,' said Cyril, "'if you really wished it.' "'We've promised never to ask it for another wish,' said Anthea. "'I never want to,' said Robert earnestly. "'They did see it again, of course, but not in this story.

"'And it was not in the sand-pit either, "'but in a very, very, very different place. "'It was in a—' "'But I must say no more.'

