

Five Children and It

The house was three miles from the station, but, before the dusty hired hack had rattled along for five minutes, the children began to put their heads out of the carriage window and say, "Aren't we nearly there?" And every time they passed a house, which was not very often, they all said, "Oh, *is this it?*" But it never was, till they reached the very top of the hill, just past the chalk-quarry and before you come to the gravel-pit. And then there was a white house with a green garden and an orchard beyond, and mother said, "Here we are!"

"How white the house is," said Robert.

"And look at the roses," said Anthea.

"And the plums," said Jane.

"It is rather decent," Cyril admitted.

The Baby said, "Wanty go walky;" and the fly stopped with a last rattle and jolt.

Everyone got its legs kicked or its feet trodden on in the scramble to get out of the carriage that very minute, but no one seemed to mind. Mother, curiously enough, was in no hurry to get out; and even when she had come down slowly and by the step, and with no jump at all, she seemed to wish to see the boxes carried in, and even to pay the driver, instead of joining in that first glorious rush round the garden and the orchard and the thorny, thistly, briery, brambly wilderness beyond the broken gate and the dry fountain at the side of the house. But the children were wiser, for once. It was not really a pretty house at all; it was quite ordinary, and mother thought it was rather inconvenient, and was quite annoyed at there being no shelves, to speak of, and hardly a cupboard in the place. Father used to say that the iron-work on the roof and coping was like an architect's nightmare. But the house was deep in the country, with no other house in sight, and the children had been in London for two years, without so much as once going to the seaside even for a day by an excursion train, and so the White House seemed to them a sort of Fairy Palace set down in an Earthly Paradise. For London is like prison for children, especially if their relations are not rich.

Of course there are the shops and theatres, and entertainments and things, but if your people are rather poor you don't get taken to the theatres; and you can't buy

things out of the shops; and London has none of those nice things that children may play with without hurting the things or themselves – such as trees and sand and woods and waters. And nearly everything in London is the wrong sort of shape – all straight lines and flat streets, instead of being all sorts of odd shapes, like things are in the country. Trees are all different, as you know, and I am sure some tiresome person must have told you that there are no two blades of grass exactly alike. But in streets, where the blades of grass don't grow, everything is like everything else. This is why so many children who live in the towns are so extremely naughty. They do not know what is the matter with them, and no more do their fathers and mothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, tutors, governesses, and nurses; but I know. And so do you, now. Children in the country are naughty sometimes, too, but that is for quite different reasons.

The children had explored the gardens and the outhouses thoroughly before they were caught and cleaned for tea, and they saw quite well that they were certain to be happy at the White House. They thought so from the first moment, but when they found the back of the house covered with jasmine, all in white flower, and smelling like a bottle of the most expensive perfume that is ever given for a birthday present; and when they had seen the lawn, all green and smooth, and quite different from the brown grass in the gardens at Camden Town; and when they found the stable with a loft over it and some old hay still left, they were almost certain; and when Robert had found the broken swing and tumbled out of it and got a bump on his head the size of an egg, and Cyril had nipped his finger in the door of a hutch that seemed made to keep rabbits in, if you ever had any, they had no longer any doubts whatever.

The best part of it all was that there were no rules about not going to places and not doing things. In London almost everything is labelled "You mustn't touch," and though the label is invisible it's just as bad, because you know it's there, or if you don't you very soon get told.

Five Children and It by E. Nesbit

Questions

- 1 Locate and write a synonym for 'carriage' in the first paragraph. [1 mark]
- 2 Which of these words is **not** a synonym for 'quarry'?
- mine peak pit [1 mark]
- 3 What did Mother find problematic about the house? [1 mark]
- 4 Explain what the phrase 'the scramble to get out of the carriage that very minute' suggests about how the children were feeling. [1 mark]
- 5 How does the phrase 'The thorny, thistly, briery, brambly ...' improve our understanding of the wilderness beyond the gate? [1 mark]
- 6 What evidence is there that the White House was isolated? [1 mark]
- 7 How do we know that the family have been poor? Give **two** reasons. [1 mark]
- 8 Explain how the author's use of 'caught' is effective for describing the children's behaviour. [1 mark]
- 9 'London is like prison for children'.
Find **three** examples of why London is not a good place for children to grow up. [1 mark]
- 10 The second-to-last paragraph has just two sentences, one of which is very long. Why do you think the author chose to write the sentence this way? [3 marks]