

Street Child

At last he came to his home, in a house so full of families that he sometimes wondered how the floors and walls didn't come tumbling down with the weight and the noise of them all. He ran up the stairs and burst into the room his own family lived in. He was panting with triumph and excitement.

"I've got the pie! I've got the pie!" he sang out.

"Ssssh!" His sister Emily was kneeling on the floor, and she turned round to him sharply. "Ma's asleep, Jim."

Lizzie jumped up and ran to him, pulling him over towards the fire so they could spread out the pudding cloth on the hearth. They broke off chunks of pastry and dipped them into the brimming gravy.

"What about Ma?" asked Lizzie.

"She won't want it," Emily said. "She never eats."

Lizzie pulled Jim's hand back as he was reaching out for another chunk. "But the gravy might do her good," she suggested. "Just a little taste. Stop shovelling it down so fast, Jim. Let Ma have a bit."

She turned round to her mother's pile of bedding and pulled back the ragged cover.

"Ma," she whispered. "Try a bit. It's lovely!"

She held a piece of gravy-soaked piecrust to her lips, but her mother shook her head and turned over, huddling her rug round her.

"I'll have it!" said Jim, but Lizzie put it on the corner of her mother's bed-rags.

"She might feel like it later," she said. "The smell might tempt her."

"I told you," said Emily. "She don't want food no more. That's what she said."

Jim paused for a moment in his eating, his hand resting over his portion of pie in case his sisters snatched it away from him. "What's the matter with Ma?" he asked.

"Nothing's the matter," said Emily. She chucked a log on the fire, watching how the flames curled themselves round it.

"She's tired, is all," Lizzie prompted her. "She just wants to sleep, don't she?"

"But she's been asleep all day," Jim said. "And yesterday. And the day before."

“Just eat your pie,” said Emily. “You heard what she said. There’s no more shillings in that purse, so don’t expect no more pies after this one.”

“She’ll get better soon,” Lizzie said. “And then she’ll be able to go back to work. There’s lots of jobs for cooks. We’ll soon be out of this place. That’s what she told me, Jim.”

“Will we go back to our cottage?” Jim asked.

Lizzie shook her head. “You know we can’t go there, Jim. We had to move out when Father died.”

“Eat your pie,” said Emily. “She wants us to enjoy it.”

But the pie had grown cold before the children finished it. They pulled their rag-pile close to the hearth and curled up together, Jim between Emily and Lizzie. In all the rooms of the house they could hear people muttering and yawning and scratching. Outside in the street dogs were howling, and carriage wheels trundled on the slushy roads.

Jim lay awake. He could hear how his mother’s breath rattled in her throat, and he knew by the way she tossed and turned that she wasn’t asleep. He could tell by the way his sisters lay taut and still each side of him that they were awake too, listening through the night to its noises, longing for day to come.

Street Child by Berlie Doherty

Questions

- 1 Circle the correct word to complete the sentence.

The gravy in the pie was...

grim brown overflowing leaking [1 mark]

- 2 What does Emily 'chuck' on the fire? [1 mark]
- 3 What animals can the children hear outside? [1 mark]
- 4 What does the phrase '*panting with triumph and excitement*' suggest about how James views the pie? [2 marks]
- 5 Why did Emily turn to Jim '*sharply*'? [1 mark]
- 6 Jim's whole family live in one room. What does this suggest about the family? Use evidence from other parts of the text to support your answer. [2 marks]
- 7 Do you think Emily is telling the truth about Ma's health when she says '*Nothing's the matter*'? Give **two** pieces of evidence about what Ma does in the extract that support your view. [3 marks]
- 8 What do you think the financial future holds for the children? Give evidence from the text to support your answer. [2 marks]
- 9 '*Eat your pie.*'
- Why do you think Emily tells Jim twice to eat his pie? [2 marks]
- 10 Describe how Jim's mood changes between the beginning and the end of the extract. Use evidence from the text to support your answer. [2 marks]