

The Cement Garden – The Family

Father, Mother

Julie (17), Jack (15), Sue (13), Tom (6)

They live in a house with a big cellar. (9, 10)

They only have little money. (11)

“There was an unspoken family rule that none of us ever brought friends home.” (21)

“No one ever came to visit us. Neither my mother nor my father when he was alive had any real friends outside the family. They were both only children, and all my grandparents were dead.” (23)

“There was not even a milkman in our road now.” (23)

Mother tells Jack to consider the following:

“The house must be run properly, Jack, and Tom has to be looked after. You’ve got to keep things clean and tidy otherwise you know what will happen.’ [...] ‘They’ll come and put Tom in care, and perhaps you and Susan too. Julie wouldn’t stay here by herself. So the house would stand empty, the word would get around and it wouldn’t be long before people would be breaking in, taking things, smashing everything up.’ [...] ‘And then when I came out of hospital there would be nothing for us all to come back to.’ [...] ‘I’ve opened an account at the post office for Julie, and money will get paid into it from my savings. There’s enough for you all for quite a while, easily enough till I come out of hospital.’” (50-51)

Jack, Sue and Julie first “burst into tears and embraced each other” (54) when they realise that their mother is dead. Later, they “giggled” (54) and then “laughed uncontrollably” (55).

Then they begin recalling Jack’s birthday: “‘When you did your handstand,’ [...] ‘And you sang “Greensleeves”’” (57).

“‘If we tell them [about Mother’s death] [...] they’ll come and put us into care, into an orphanage or something. [...] ‘ You mean,’ I said to Julie, ‘that we shouldn’t tell anybody.’ [...] ‘we can have a private funeral.’” (58-59)