

A Fresh Start

We stand in the courtyard my brother and I
I am the oldest so try not to cry
There are 4 of us brothers and sweet Mary Anne
We are cold, we are hungry, but we are a clan
We fill up the house with our clamour and noise
Our Ma and our Pa, the baby, us boys
Our Ma takes in washing and makes us our grub
Pa works at the factory then goes to the pub

We came here from Ireland on a great ship
And how we looked forward to making the trip
The harvest had failed, there was nothing to eat
But Pa said "there's work on each Birmingham street".
The priest came to bless us, to wish us farewell
As we boarded the vessel in rain and a swell
The crossing was hellish, so many were ill
But hope for our new life stayed with us still

Pa found a job and a place we could stay
And settle and live in a much better way
But still we are struggling, still we are poor
And every meal leaves us wanting much more.
Just round the corner we find a few shops
And even a park if the rain ever stops
When the weather is better we'll go out and play
With some new friends, some children we met just today

We play in the courtyard just running around
Kicking a ball that somebody found
We play until Ma calls us in for our tea
A bowl of thin soup and some bread usually

The baby keeps crying, I don't think she's well
I don't think she's thriving, somehow you can tell
Perhaps she needs medicine, a doctor to call
But doctors cost money and that isn't all
For we need some boots for the winter ahead
But perhaps it is help for the baby instead
We take turns to rock her, to give Ma a rest
She says not to wake Pa, he's doing his best.

As winter bites deeper we lose Mary Anne
Even Pa has been weeping although he's a man
A neighbour comes round to give Ma a hand
She lost little Charlie so she'll understand

And when it is time, after we have been fed
Top to toe for the brothers in one double bed
Ma comes to hug us and kiss us goodnight
She looks at us fondly and holds us so tight
On cold winter nights when we huddle inside
We think of the children with nowhere to hide
Who wander the city and steal to get by
With no-one to care if they live or they die
For though it is crowded and noisy and cold
Though it is tough for the young and the old

We have a home with a bed and a chair
We have a family and love that we share.



Author's note: This photograph has appeared in the Daily Mail and was originally found in the archives of Liverpool City Library. It is very similar to the one which inspired the poem.