

fight over the free pencil rubber shaped like a vampire that had come with the cornflakes. This should have been enough to make Mum suspicious that they were up to something except that she was too busy thinking about the post. There had been a phone bill and a red reminder from the gas board. Even worse, she'd just read a letter from Gary's teacher, Mrs Johnson, saying that if he didn't stop reading comics in school and start doing his homework, then something very official would have to happen.

'We might . . . pop out, Mum,' said Katie, trying to sound casual.

'Oh, I don't care if we go or not,' added Gary, shining the tops of his trainers with the carpet.

Mum looked at Gary. 'We need to have a talk about school, Gary. You've got to work on your reading.'

'Not now, Mum,' said Joshua. 'Amber will be starving and . . .' At this, the two older ones lost their cool and picked Joshua up between them and left.

'Sorry, Mum,' shouted Gary over his shoulder. 'Got to go.'

Mum sighed the way only mums can.