

Crystal

Life is not fair.

“That’s a good lesson to learn,” Momma always says when I tell her so. But the truth is she could make it fairer if she wanted to. She could let me go adventuring, like my brother Panu, instead of having to stay behind. Instead of having to walk the line for her. Is that too much to ask?

It’s not much better in my best friend Serri’s house. She has to grind the chema pods to powder day after day while her brother is off with Panu. The boys have been to the Outreaches searching for silver. Panu says it’s cold there, with salt in the wind that stings your eyes and whips your cheeks. But I would like to see it.

This morning’s line stretches from our little red door all the way to the dry well in the center circle. The last person in line is a young girl with hair the color of cloves, not from the village. She is leaning over the edge of the well as if she expects to see her reflection in the non-existent water. I can’t see her face but I imagine that she looks scared. I imagine that she is here to find out if her momma will die from the draught cough. I am trained to see these things.

I walk the line slowly and stir the dirt with my toe. There is a chill in the air even though the sun is out, and I know that someday soon Momma will

make me wear my shoes. I don't like walking the line in the winter. People are so bundled that it's hard to see their faces. They look at their feet and rarely want to unwind their scarves to talk. In that case, Momma says, I need to pay attention to the things they carry, the way their bodies slump and shoulders hunch, the condition of their clothes. But I would rather look at faces. Eyes. That's where the truth lies.

Lucky for me today is still warm and there's chitter chatter in the air. I've already reported to Momma on the first three in the line - the old woman with stiff joints, the baker desperate for business, the young man in love with a girl not promised to him. The old woman goes in the red door and soon comes out of the green with a small smile on her face. I wonder what Momma has seen for her. It was my guess that she would rather be told her time was drawing close - too much talk of family lost and friends passed on to be interested in more years to endure. Her eyes were sad and weary. I told Momma as much, but she didn't reveal what she saw in the Crystal. And I didn't ask.

It was my sister Lera who told me not to ask questions. She was the line walker before me, though now she takes care of Grandma Meya who has gone completely blind. Lera taught me how to look for signs, listen for clues, and never ask questions. But there is a lot I'd like to ask. For example, why does Momma need so much information to tell the line-waiters what she sees for



them in the Crystal? Why doesn't she just look in and tell them what is plainly there? That's what I'd do. But nobody asked me.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Why does the narrator feel that life is unfair?
 - a. Because her friend gets to grind chema pods
 - b. Because her brother gets to go adventuring
 - c. Because her brother finds silver
 - d. Because people wear scarves in the winter

2. What is the narrator's sister's name?
 - a. Serri
 - b. Panu
 - c. Lera
 - d. Meya

3. What word does NOT describe the narrator?
 - a. Frustrated
 - b. Spirited
 - c. Curious
 - d. Meek

4. What do you think explains the narrator's questions in the last paragraph?
 - a. She is able to see things in the crystal but her mother is not
 - b. She is able to see things down the well that the little girl cannot
 - c. She is able to see things her grandmother cannot
 - d. She is able to find silver when her brother cannot

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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