

The Ghost of Thomas Kempe

From **The Ghost of Thomas Kempe**

‘Mother,’ said Helen loudly, ‘I do think James might wash his hands before he comes in to tea. Specially when I’ve got a visitor.’ Calling Mum ‘mother’ was a new idea of hers: she thought it elegant. James glared at her.

‘Point taken,’ said Mrs Harrison. ‘Go and wash them, James.’

He stamped up to the bathroom, and washed the backs of his hands, leaving the palms untouched. Helen needn’t think she could win a total victory. His face, freckled, thatched with thick, butter-coloured hair, grinned at him from the mirror: he tried out some of his expressions, the bad-man-in-Western sneer, the Cup-Final captain’s grin (holding Cup, or rather, tooth-mug, in upstretched arms), the boxing-champion’s snarl (quite good, that one, with towel round neck and hair damped back). Overhead, in his bedroom, he heard a thump. That would be Tim, no doubt. He wasn’t supposed to go into the bedrooms, since he made untidy nests on the beds, but there was no known way of stopping him. He was believed to have discovered how to open doors.

His mother’s voice came up the stairs. ‘James! I said “wash”, not have a bath. We’re waiting.’

He took the towel off hastily, arranged it on top of the half-open door as a Helen-trap, and hurried downstairs, saying ‘Coming, mother. Sorry, mother.’

‘That’ll do,’ said Mrs Harrison. ‘I’m beginning to feel like a lady in a Victorian novel. Any more of that and I’ll get you a frilly shirt and satin knickerbockers.’

Helen and the friend tittered. Something with the bristly texture of a pan-cleaner rubbed against James’s leg: it was Tim, dropping hints about the swiss roll. James gave him a puzzled glance. Had he learned to fly, too?

Penelope Lively

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Read the text, and then answer the questions. Don't forget to support your answers with reference to the text.

- 1.** Who do you think Helen is? Give a reason for your answer.

- 2.** What does James do in response to his mother telling him to wash his hands and why?

- 3.** Apart from washing his hands, what else did James do in the bathroom? Why do you think the author described this?

- 4.** What is the 'Helen-trap' and how does it work?

- 5.** Describe James's relationship with Helen. Support your answer from the text.

- 6.** Who or what is Tim? Give a reason for your answer.

- 7.** Why did James give Tim a puzzled glance? Explain fully.

- 8.** What do you think the writer wants the reader to think about James?

- 9.** What does the writer want you to feel at the end of this passage?
