

*Crying Is For Babies Excerpt:*

“Come on, let’s go to the park.” Dolly sat Elly in the pram, and then lifted Davy up and put him on the end with his legs dangling. He could walk all right on his own now, but it was a long way to the park, and he was a slow walker, not like me. I loved the swings so much I sometimes ran ahead in my rush to get there before the others. Elly could walk now too, but she was still only small and because she was always sick Mum liked her to be pushed.

Jeany pulled her own coat on and then did up the buttons on mine. I loved my new coat. Mum was really clever. She went to the market every Saturday and got big clothes then brought them home and cut them down for all of us, so we always had something new, even the boy’s trousers. Often, we only had something for a little while before it went away. Someone told me the things went to the pawnbroker’s shop. I wasn’t sure what that was, except I knew it had something to do with getting money, which Mum was always short of, or so she said.

Maisie told me that her Mum took a lot of their things to this pawnbroker’s shop too and came back with enough money to buy them some meat for a stew. This pawn man must have a lot of money, I decided, as he gave it out in exchange for old clothes, and I wondered what he did with them. One of the shops in the High street had big balls hanging outside the door and Stevie told me that was where Mum took the clothes and got money. I didn’t like the look of that shop—it was dingy and dark and smelled funny, a bit like the ironmonger’s where one of the boys had to go once to get a new cane because he broke the old one playing with it. Mum was very upset and that’s why she made him go to the shop himself. I hoped I never had to go to that horrible shop to buy a new cane.

I was really annoyed because my feet had grown since Christmas and I finally had to own up that the old boots were getting so tight they hurt my feet. Davy wore them for a while but then they went, perhaps to this pawn man or to the rag and bone man who came along every week. I liked the rag and bone man and his old pony. He gave away fish in exchange for old stuff and I decided that one day I would get a goldfish. I would have liked a puppy, but we didn’t have a garden so Dad said I would have to wait until we got a nice house with a garden behind it. I didn’t think we would ever be rich enough for that, but Dad said it was always a good idea to have dreams and hopes. You never knew what was around the next corner, he said.

The swings were all full when we got to the park, so Jeany said, “Come on Vi, we’ll go on the seesaw.” Dolly helped Davy onto the roundabout and sat nursing Elly who had started to cry. She cried a lot. Davy never cried. He liked to laugh, Dad called him a clown.

As we headed home, I asked, “Can we go for a dance, Dolly, eh?” It began to drizzle, so Dolly pulled the shade up on the pram. Elly was asleep and Davy kept yawning so he must have been tired too.

“All right, but only for a little while. Mum will start getting worried when it begins to get dark. You know she doesn’t like us to be out at night, Vi.”

“Why not? What happens after it gets dark?” I’d never been outside once it got dark, except sometimes I went next door to tell the boys that Mum said to stop making so much

noise and to come in for tea. Teddy never made a noise though. Now that he was working, he was a man, and men didn't shout and punch each other like Danny, Stevie and Jimmy did. Our Mum always said the boys were more nuisance than they were worth. I hoped I wasn't a nuisance, although sometimes I misbehaved—I couldn't seem to help it. Dad said I was a scamp, whatever that was.

"Bogeymen roam about and frighten little girls at night," Jeany said, making a funny noise and waving her arms about. That didn't frighten me—well not a lot. But the thought of bogeymen did scare me a bit, so I decided never to go out on my own once it got dark outside. Problem was that in wintertime it got dark almost as soon as school finished, so that meant no visits to the park then except on Saturday. That was my favourite day. The stars in the sky were nice though, we looked at them through the kitchen window up there twinkling. Dad said they were fairies dancing up there among the clouds.

Dolly put the pram in front of the shop next door to the pub and pulled the brake on. I knew it was the pub because when I asked Dolly what the funny smell was that came up from the cellar, she told me it was from the beer that the pub man kept down there. She also told me that men liked beer and the pub was where they went at night to spend their hard-earned money. I wasn't really sure what that meant and didn't think Dolly did either, but when I heard Mum say it too, I knew it must be true. Mum also said that beer was the stuff that made some men fight and some fall over on the street. I was glad our Dad didn't go to the pub but stayed home with us at night.

One day we passed the pub when this beer was being delivered in big wooden barrels. The tubs were all on the back of a huge cart pulled by the loveliest and biggest animals I had ever seen. The carthorses were gentle even though they were bigger than the milkman's horse and let me rub their noses while they stood waiting for the men to finish unloading. Their breath was warm on my face and smelt of the dinner the man put in the bags for them to munch on while they stood there.

The barrels went down into the cellar through these huge doors in the pavement. It was a big job, and lots of shouting went on between the man at the top and the one in the cellar. The doors were made of wood and this is where Dolly and Jeany loved to come to dance when the doors were shut. I couldn't wait until I was big enough to dance with them.

Their feet made a lovely banging noise. Jeany pretended she was on the stage and pulled her skirt out at each side like we saw on a poster outside the music hall. Jeany was always pretending she was a posh lady. Sometimes she posed in front of the shop windows where she could see herself in the glass. This annoyed Dolly who nagged her because she didn't take her turn at caring for the little ones.