Secret Suffragette

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'So this is what I decided: I wouldn't go smashing windows or chaining myself to Buckingham Palace's railings. But I could do something small to start with.'

Daisy O'Doyle

One

That afternoon, it was raining cats and dogs – though I don't know why I say that because there were no cats or dogs to be seen. Just water. Lots of it. Beating down from black clouds and leaving puddles all over the schoolyard.

'Lily!' I yelled as I ran towards the gates. 'Lily, where are you?'

I was late. The schoolyard was empty and there was no sign of my sister. I was supposed to look after her. She was only six.

Dad was always telling me, 'You're twelve now, Daisy. It's up to you to take care of the little ones.'

But here I was, soaking wet and no sign of Lily. Shielding my eyes from the rain and peering around, I shouted 'Lily!' again at the top of my voice.

Suddenly, a head of red curls poked out of the brick building that was the girls' privy. It was Lily. She'd been sheltering from the rain. Very sensible. Good girl.

'I'm here, Daisy,' she called, running across the yard towards me. 'Where've you been? Did Miss Spike keep you in again?'

'Course she did,' I said.

'Why?' she asked as she took hold of my hand.

'Because she asked who knew anything about Florence Nightingale. I said I knew everything about her and I stood up and told the class.'

'Why did she keep you in for that?' asked Lily.

'Cos I knew more than she did, that's why.'

Lily giggled and we ran out of the school gates.

'She'd never heard about the Training School for Nurses. So I told her . . .'

We hit a puddle and soaked our boots. But we didn't stop.

'. . . I said I was going to go to that school one day and Miss Spikey-head said I was showing off. She made me write a hundred lines: "I must not be boastful." Oh she's so *stupid*.'

'And you're so *clever,*' said Lily as we ran along the road, laughing. 'Much cleverer than that teacher. And you'll be a nurse one day, won't you, Daisy?'

Luckily, the rain had started to slow down, which meant we could run faster. We were already late to pick up our baby brothers, Eddy and Frank, from Mrs Griggs. She always looked after them while we were at school but she didn't like it if we were late.

Mrs Griggs lived in Tuttle Street like us – backing on to the railway cutting. It wasn't a nice part of Bow. Our street was dark and narrow with houses crammed together on either side. Most days, there were lines of washing strung across from one bedroom window to

another. I don't know why people bothered because the soot from the factories dropped black spots everywhere. It was a waste of time, if you ask me.

That day, as we ran up the street, the local girls were sitting on the doorsteps, gossiping as usual, with their baby brothers or sisters on their knees. A few lads were kicking a football over the cobbles.

'Pass it here, Daisy,' Tommy Watkins shouted as the football rolled towards me. So I gave it a sharp kick, sent it bowling back up to him and joined in the game. I loved playing football. It was fun. But Tommy was the only lad who didn't mind me playing with them.

The others shouted, 'Go home, Daisy O'Doyle. Football's for lads,' until Tommy told them to shut up.

It was Jacob Isaacs who caused most of the trouble. 'Think you're a footballer, do yer, carrot-top?' he yelled as he dribbled the ball towards me. Showing off, he was. Dribble. Dribble. Dribble. Then . . . *bang!* I toed the ball out of his way. It was a brilliant kick! But Jacob was fuming and he gave me a swift shove on the shoulder, pushing me on to the wet stones. *Wham!* I fell flat on my face, which made the boys laugh. Not one of them helped me up. They just carried on with their game while I struggled to my feet. What a mess I was in! There was a hole in my pinafore and it was covered in mud. My knees were badly grazed and two buttons had burst off my right boot. Mum wouldn't be pleased.

‘Quick! Get up, Daisy,’ said Lily, holding out her hand. ‘We’ll be late and we don’t want Mrs Griggs to shout at us, do we?’

I limped to the top of Tuttle Street where Mrs Griggs lived.

Even from outside the door, you could hear the sound of babies crying. Lots of them. She must be looking after dozens.

‘Go on, Lily. You knock,’ I said.

While I rubbed the grazes on my knees, Lily kept tapping her little fist on the door until it was flung open. Mrs Griggs stood there, her angry face flushed and sweaty. She was holding Eddy in one arm and Frank in the other.

‘Where’ve you been?’ she snapped. ‘Messing about with the lads, was yer? You’re late!’

‘Very sorry, Mrs Griggs. My teacher wanted me to help her after school,’ I lied. ‘I couldn’t say no, could I?’

Mrs Griggs glared at me and sniffed, obviously not believing a word.

‘You’re always late, Daisy O’Doyle,’ she said. ‘So you can tell your mother that when you bring the twins tomorrow, I’ll be charging a penny extra.’ Then she leaned forward and thrust the babies at us.

‘Another penny?’ I gasped as I grabbed hold of Eddy and Lily took Frank. ‘What? Every day?’

Mrs Griggs screwed up her face and folded her arms

over her chest. 'If your mum don't like it, she can find somebody else to look after 'em. I'm not working for nothin'.'

And with that she slammed the door in our faces.