

Littlebody and the Orange Balloon by evangeline epiphany

Littlebody was avoiding the cracks in the pavement, mainly by running along the narrow strip of grass between the pavement and the houses. His brothers were using him as an imaginary target for their alien spacecraft to zoom in on and destroy, but Littlebody didn't know this. He was too busy avoiding cracks or lines ... A broken back or a sudden death didn't appeal to him. He was just rounding the corner when he ran into Grandad who was standing in a hole in the pavement ... Which Littlebody was sure couldn't be good for him, although, technically, it wasn't a crack....

The balloon seller was in town and Grandad wanted to take his grandsons to buy one each... Biggest Brother shrugged and pretended he wasn't interested but Littlebody was, Littlebody loved balloons. He had been playing with a yellow one yesterday, but it had ended badly. It wouldn't float high. It wouldn't fly, it just bobbed along the ground until the cat got it ... At least, that's what mum told him, but there was something about how she held the barbecue skewer with a slightly unhinged glint in her eye that made Littlebody want to believe that the cat had got it ...

Littlebody dreamed of a balloon that would rise up and tug back at him as he held the string ... A balloon that believed that even Littlebody could rise up with it and be lifted to new heights and new experiences. Oh, to have such a balloon. It would be so cool. Totally awesome. Yeah man!

Mum had manoeuvred the stroller so baby brother could see out and she and Grandad were walking along together. Up the hill and across the park, through the woods and past the shops to the river bank where the cliffs rose up steeply to one side of the fast flowing water. It was fun to gather sticks to throw into the river, to race them, encouraging them on with a branch when they stuck against a rock or got caught in the pools at the side which barely moved.

A little way along the path the queue began. Mums, dads, strollers, boys and girls, grandparents and aunties, uncles and big sisters stood in line, occasionally throwing a twig or pebble into the river and cheering the splashes. Coming the other way was a stream of children wearing huge grins and clutching tightly to a ribbon, on top of which, proudly as a lollipop was a fat, shiny balloon, tugging toward the sky...

Littlebody could hardly wait.

He stood on one foot, then the other. He scratched till mum reminded him where he was. He fidgeted and was most impatient until finally the balloon seller was in his sights. He had a wonderful array of balloons adorning the mouth of a cave. The dark place was filled with colour and shining lights. Balloons strained on ribbons of different length, eager to lift off and fly, rising and bobbing on the breeze above.

He chose an orange one. Fat and full of power. It nearly lifted him up off his feet. It stretched his arm and he felt his feet bouncing along the ground. He was smiling, smiling smiling.

Grandad paid for the balloons and the seller shone with delight. Giving people the hope that they could rise and be different was worth spending time in a damp cave at the edge of town...