

Hi there! This chapter didn't make it into the final book, but I wanted to share it with you as a special treat. Enjoy a peek into Billy's world and his friendship with Johnny—one of my favourite moments from the early drafts!

Deleted Chapter: Billy and Johnny.

Billy had been home an hour when there was a knock at the Kitchen door.

"Hello Mrs Bennett, can Billy come out to play."

Standing in front of Helen was Billy's best friend Johnny. He was a funny chap, making his friends laugh without knowing why. He was also much chubbier than the rest of Billy's friends, provoking relentless teasing.

He stood with his shirt buttons bulging, his trousers pasted to his legs, and there was no way his little jacket would meet in the middle, nor the sleeves cover the length of his arms. With his chubby red face and little round rimmed glasses, he looked a picture stood there with a smile from cheek to cheek.

"Billy, Johnny wants to know if you want to go out to play."

Billy and Celie were out the bedroom, heading for the kitchen door, before Helen could finish her sentence.

"Hi Johnny, where were ya this morning. Ya said ya were going to meet us for a game of football."

He turned to his mother. "It's alright if me and Celie go out to play with Johnny for a bit isn't it mum."

He gave her the pleading look he liked to torment her with. It was four o'clock in the afternoon and they were expecting Hammer for dinner at six.

"Ok Billy, but I don't want you to stay out too long. You know your Uncle Hammer is coming around tonight, and we don't want to be sitting around waiting for you. Do I make myself clear, Billy?"

He didn't wait for her to finish. He was out the door making his way across the cobbled court yard before shouting back, "Ok mum."

They headed to the bottom of the field, where just two weeks ago, the boys had built their den—a secret hideout, lookout, and meeting place all rolled into one. They'd dug a round hole two feet deep, piled soil around the edges, and collected branches from the woods to make a roof. A tarpaulin covered the branches, camouflaged with twigs and leaves.

Celie was the first into the den followed by Billy. But when it was Johnny's turn—there was a problem.

"I told you lot when ya built it, ya should make the entrance bigger. I'm having a job fitting through," he grumbled, squeezing and jiggling as he tried to wobble his way in. "Anybody would think ya didn't want me in here!"

"What a load of rubbish, and you know it. It's not our fault we couldn't find a piece of wood long enough," Billy argued, trying to push him back out. "You're not going to fit that way. Back out and see if you can come in feet first."

After much wriggling, Johnny squeezed in beside them.

“Hey, it’s nice in here,” Johnny said, looking around at his friend’s handy work. “It’s pretty cosy when you get in, isn’t it?”

“It’s not too bad. Anyway, what’s wrong with you? You’ve been looking like you’ve been slapped around the face with a wet fish ever since you arrived. And why didn’t you meet us earlier.”

“I’ve run away from home. I’ve had enough. It’s always Johnny do this, Johnny do that—it’s driving me mad, and it’s not fair. I couldn’t come out this morning because I was cleaning the back yard,” he groaned, ruffling Celie’s coat.

“Dad told Steven to do it but he bullied it on to me. I have to do everything, and what thanks do I get. NONE. They just call me fatty and wobbly. I can’t take it anymore—I can’t.”

He was the middle child which only made his problem feel worse.

“Well, where are ya going, and what will ya do?”

“I’m going to London, I’ve decided. I’ll walk there and find work on the way,” he said with a confident grin. “When I get there, I’ll find meself a job and make lots of money. Ya can come with me if ya want.”

“No thanks, I’ll stay here with me mum. Anyway, how are ya going to walk to London? Ya can hardly walk across the fields. And what will you do for food. You’ll starve to death before you get there.”

“Ah, but that’s where you’re wrong. I’ve planned it—look.”

Johnny pulled out a small bundle of grease proof paper from his inside jacket pocket. Billy could see his little eyes light up as he unravelled it.

“Look—smell, jam sandwiches. They will keep me going for a while. I have these too.”

And out of his other jacket pocket he pulled out a small brown paper bag with six ginger biscuits.

“Wow, Johnny. Jam sandwiches and ginger biscuits. Give us one, I’m starving. I haven’t eaten since breakfast.”

“Nah, sorry Billy. These are my rations. They might have to last me a few days,” Johnny mumbled with his nose in the bag.

“Ah, go on. I only want one. It will leave ya with plenty.”

Johnny brought his hand to his chin, and considered for a moment.

“Go on then. But only one,” he ordered, as he organised his bounty on the grease proof paper. “I may as well join ya. I’m a bit peckish meself.”

And their eager hands shot towards the thick jam filled sandwiches.

As they sat there munching, Johnny looked to Billy with a smile.

“I brought this as well,” he said, pulling out a small bundle of newspaper cut into squares from his tight trouser pocket. It was held together with a piece of string.

“I’m not going to be caught short this time,” he said, waving the paper in the air. “No, this time, Billy, I’ve thought of everything.”

Johnny looked down at his supplies and Billy could see the pride in his eyes. He’d taken the decision to become independent. He wasn’t going to be picked on or told what to do by his family anymore.

“There is one thing, Billy,” he said, lowering his voice. “I was hoping to stay in ya barn tonight. So I can get me bearings before setting off in the morning.”

Billy smiled. “Yeh, of course ya can. I wouldn’t want ya sleeping out here in the open. Ya don’t know what might be about.”

They sat in the den for the next forty-five minutes talking over the many adventures Johnny was going to have. He was going to work from farm to farm, village to village until he got to London, where he was going to find lodgings and work. To listen to Johnny talk, Billy couldn’t help but smile.

As they chatted, the ration’s dwindled, and it wasn’t long before they were looking down at the empty grease proof paper, and the makeshift toilet paper hanging from a branch of the den.

When it was time to go, Billy and Celie left the small enclosure, and helped pull Johnny to freedom.

“Come on, I’ll show ya where you’ll be kipping tonight.”

“Nah, it’s alright, Billy. I’ve run out of supplies. I’ll have to go home and re-stock. While I’m there I may as well stay for me dinner as well.”

Johnny put his hands in his little tight trouser pockets, took a deep breath and sighed.

“I don’t reckon you’ll see much of me over the next few days, Billy. I reckon me dad’s going to give me the belt when he finds out I’ve eaten the family biscuits again. I’ll come and see ya when I’m allowed back out.”

He was about to set off, when he turned to his friend.

“Ya don’t mind seeing me under the bridge do ya, Billy.”

“What for? I’ve already told you a thousand times I was kidding. There aren’t any monsters living under the bridge. Run through the main arch, nothing can get you.”

“No! Ever since you told us those stories my imagination runs away with me. I don’t like the bridge now thanks to you. You’ll have to watch me through.”

Billy looked at Johnny and tutted. It was true. It was his fault. He’d frightened his friends with silly monster stories and now he was paying the price.

“Okay, Johnny. I’ll come and watch. But ya should believe me when I say I was joking. There are no monsters.”

Thank you for taking the time to read this lost chapter.

When I first wrote it, I thought it belonged at the start of *The Taciturn Spell*, but in the end, it slowed the story. Still, it always felt a shame to leave hidden in my drafts forever.

Billy’s adventure is only just beginning. The Wishliss waits, with dangers and discoveries of its own. But for now, carry this hidden piece with you, a reminder that even in the quiet corners of a tale, there’s always more to find.

I can’t wait to share some more hidden snippets from *The Taciturn Spell*, with you soon. Until then, thank you again for being part of this world.

Warmly,
L.P. Woodward.