

## ALFIE AND JACK FIND A KEY

Alfie and Jack were in the playground. They were waiting for their Mummy. She was talking to another Mummy. In fact she'd been talking to her for ages.

“What’s that, Alfie?” Jack was pointing at something on the ground. Alfie turned to look.

“It looks like a bone,” said Alfie, picking it up.

Indeed it did look like a bone. But as the boys looked at it more closely, they saw it was also a key.

Just then, they noticed a door right behind them. A door in the middle of the playground. It had not been there before.

Alfie and Jack looked at each other. They looked at Mummy. She was still talking and she had her back to them.

“Shall I try the key?” Alfie asked Jack.

“Yes, yes, go on,” said Jack. He was jumping up and down with excitement.

“All right then,” said Alfie, but he was a little nervous.

Alfie slid the key into the lock. He turned it and the door opened. Both boys went through it quickly and quietly. Alfie put the key safely into his pocket. The door shut behind them.

On the other side of the door, they found themselves on a busy street. There were quite a few dogs walking along the road. None of them wore a lead – or even a collar. Jack was a bit frightened of dogs so he turned to go back through the door. But the door had disappeared. He was about to tell Alfie when he heard another voice.

“Pretty young pups,” said the voice. It sounded like a man but seemed to be coming from a dog.

“Yes, aren’t they gorgeous?” said another voice, like a lady’s, and this was definitely from a dog. “Couldn’t you just gobble them up?”

“Alfie! Look out!” Jack tried to shout a warning. The lady dog was coming up to his brother, but Alfie held out his hands and stroked the dog’s head. Jack screamed as the dog opened its mouth, but it just licked Alfie’s face and walked on.

“Come on. Let’s have a look round,” said Alfie. At least, that’s what he meant to say, but what came out was more like: “Yap! Yap, yap!”

“What’s going on, Alfie?” Jack tried to say, but he actually said: “Bow, wow, wow!”

“Noisy little monsters,” said a cross looking dog.

“Yes – shouldn’t they be on a lead?” said another in a gruff voice.

“Hmmm. They certainly shouldn’t be roaming around loose. I’ll go and tell the guard dog about them.”

“OK. I’ll keep an eye on them.”

Alfie and Jack started to cry, but it just came out like whining.

“There, there,” said the gruff dog in a kindlier tone, “I expect you’re hungry, are you? Don’t worry. You’ll get plenty of food at the home for lost boys.”

Alfie didn’t like the sound of this. He tried to lead Jack away, but the gruff dog called out for help from a big Alsatian who was just passing.

“Come on – give me a hand. They’re trying to get away.”

“Oh, all right then,” said the Alsatian. “I was just off for a meal.”

Alfie and Jack thought they might be the meal. They struggled even harder to get free.

“Yap! Yap!” said Alfie, meaning “Let go!”

“Bow-wow!” said Jack, kicking out at the two dogs.

“Ow! Now, that’s enough!” said the gruff dog, but he let go anyway, licking his bruised leg.

The Alsatian had his paws on Alfie’s shoulders, pressing down to stop him moving. Alfie, thinking quickly, elbowed the Alsatian in the ribs. The Alsatian howled with pain, but he held on tight. Then Jack kicked his back legs. The Alsatian fell over, taking Alfie with him. Alfie got up first. The two brothers ran for it.

After running a little way, the boys found a door. Hoping it would take them back to the playground, they rushed through it.

It was dark behind the door. Something was moving. They could hear it but they could not see it. They tried to get out through the door but it was too late. There was a dragging noise outside and the sound of laughter. Alfie and Jack pushed and pushed against the door but it would not budge.

“Got the little pests safely inside?” It was the gruff dog again.

“Yup. I pushed this old man-kennel against the door to block it.” said another. It sounded like the Alsatian. “These two seem a bit brighter than the others. I can hear them trying to get out. Just using the latch might not be enough.”

“Good thinking. Now it’s just a question of finding their owners. Meanwhile, we’d better wait here until the guard dog arrives.”

Alfie and Jack looked at each other, trying not to cry. Their eyes were getting used to the dark now and they could see each other’s faces. Slowly they looked around them. They were frightened of what was making those sniffing and scratching noises, but they wanted to find another way out.

What they saw made them even more afraid.

They were in a small room with old brick walls on two sides and wire mesh on the other two. It looked like a cage in an old zoo. But they were not the only things in the room.

There were seven or eight other small boys. They were all filthy, with long fingernails and long, dirty hair. And they were all staring at Jack and Alfie, looking even more scared than the brothers were. They were crouching up against the other sides of the cage, keeping as far from Alfie and Jack as possible.

Alfie wanted to suggest they all ganged together to try to get out. He tried to speak to them, but all that came out was: “Yap! Yap, yap!”

One of the other boys growled. Another snarled. But none of them moved.

Alfie and Jack looked at each other and tried and tried and tried to think of a way back to Mummy. Surely she would have noticed by now that they had gone. She would come and find them, wouldn't she? Perhaps she had gone to find Daddy. Daddy and Mummy could sort these dogs out. They must be coming soon.....mustn't they?

An hour passed – or was it six hours? It felt like it. Alfie and Jack were almost asleep. They were tired enough. But they were too frightened to let their eyes shut.

Suddenly, there was movement outside. The dogs were stirring.

“Hey – look over there,” said the gruff-voiced dog.

“What? Oh-ho! It's that ginger Tom back again, is it?” said the Alsatian.

“Let's get him!” the two dogs said together. Alfie and Jack heard them rushing off.

This was the boys' chance. If they could escape from the cage now, they might be able to get away and find Mummy. But how? How could they get the door open?

Alfie remembered the key in his pocket. Perhaps it might loosen the door enough to get it open. He pulled the key out and tried it, but it made no difference. He sat back in despair, but he hit the back of his head on something hard. Alfie had to rub his head for a moment, it was so sore, but soon he realised Jack was standing next to him, his mouth wide open, pointing at something behind Alfie.

“Bow-wow! Bow-wow! Bow-wow!” said Jack.

Alfie turned around to see.....the door. Not the door of the cage, but the door that had appeared from nowhere in the playground.

“Bow-wow!”

Jack was now pointing at the key, but Alfie already knew what he had to do. He slid the key into the lock on the door before it could vanish again. The key turned easily and Alfie pushed at the door with all his strength. Jack joined in.

They were back in the playground.

Without waiting for anything else to happen, Jack slammed the door shut and Alfie threw the key away from them as far as he could. With great relief, he saw it slipping down into a drain. The door disappeared before their eyes.

“And where have you two been?” Mummy sounded cross, but she looked really pleased to see them.

“Mummy! Mummy!” said the two boys together, and they both ran at her and threw their arms around her.

“Mummy! You’ll never believe what happened to us!” said Alfie.

“No, mummy,” Jack added. “It was....it was.....well, listen.”

“Well?” Mummy looked from Alfie to Jack and back again, wondering what had got them so excited in the five minutes since she had seen them last. “What happened?”

“Well, it was like this. Yap! Yap!” said Alfie.

“You see, bow-wow! Bow-wow!” said Jack.

“Yap, yap, yap!”

“Bow-wow-wow-wow!”

“Well, if you’re just going to be silly,” said Mummy, “We’d better get off home for tea.”

“Yes, but, yap, yap, yap!”

“No, listen, bow-wow, bow-wow!”

And so it went on.

And from that day to this, whenever Alfie or Jack try to tell their Mummy or Daddy or anyone about the door and their strange adventure, they start barking.

Now and again, they wonder what happened to that key, and whether anyone else ever picked it up. So do I. Don't you?

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