



Double Trouble

When punishment becomes unfair

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56675/aet5dt>

ISBN: 9789403874098

Design: DOORLORI / Lori Lenssinck



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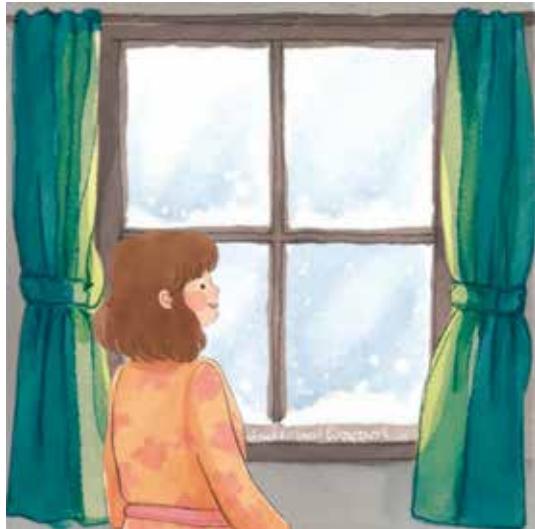
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Chapter 1

Where Alma Wakes Up to a Nice Surprise

When Alma woke up that morning, she was thrilled to look out of the window and see that it had snowed. It was still early and only a few



footprints and tyre tracks marred the pristine white covering the street. Although it was barely daylight outside, Alma hurried to get dressed, careful not to make any noise and wake her parents. She tiptoed out of her bedroom, put on her coat and gloves quietly, and opened the front door.

A sharp breath of cold air rushed into the house, a few snowflakes tickled her face, and the fresh smell of snow made her nose tingle.

Suddenly, she heard her father's voice behind her.

“Alma, you weren't planning on going out without breakfast, were you?

There's no way you can stay out on an empty stomach. Besides, it's far too early to go and play outside. And don't forget you still have to unpack your suitcase. It's been sitting in your bedroom for three days now. The snow can wait!”



A sigh of disappointment escaped the young girl. She looked sadly at the sparkling snow under the streetlights and closed the front door. Why did adults always make children wait? Why did they always ask you to do boring things before you could have fun? Alma wondered, grumbling as she took off her coat. The snow was right there: thick, bright and perfect for playing in. And she, Alma, had to stay inside. It was so **unfair!**



Look up highlighted words in the glossary at the end!

The hours went by and Alma still hadn't been outside.

She had taken a long time to unpack her suitcase, constantly interrupted by messages from her friend Joan on her phone. Looking out of the window, she sadly watched the snow begin to melt. There were still a few untouched piles left on the bonnets of the parked cars. That would have to do. Turning back to her suitcase, Alma hurriedly put away the last few items of clothing lying around, then dashed out of her bedroom.



Where a Snowball Fight Begins

Unfortunately, just as she was putting on her hat, Alma came face to face with her mother and her brother, Tim. Their cheeks were red from the cold and a few snowflakes clinging to Tim's gloves showed Alma that her little brother had just been playing in the snow.

“Where are you going like that, sweetheart?” Alma’s mother asked. “You look in a big hurry!”

“Outside,” Alma replied quickly.

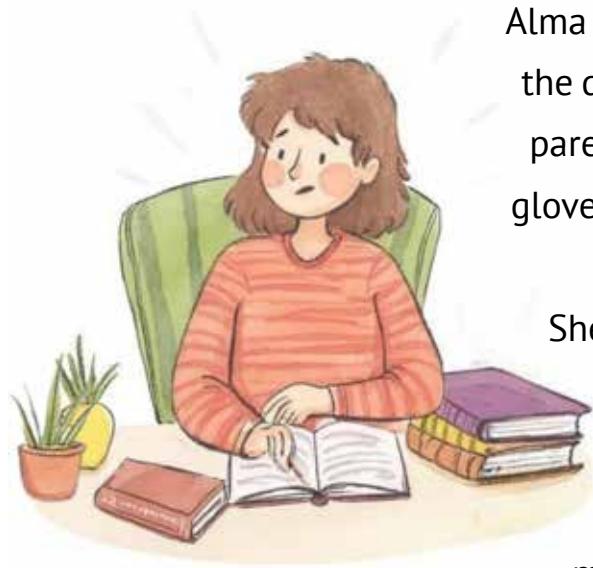
“What about your maths test on Tuesday? Have you studied for it yet?” her mother insisted.

“Yes... um... no, but I’ll do it tomorrow,” Alma mumbled, already feeling her heart sink.

“You know we’re taking your grandmother to lunch at your uncle Ruben’s tomorrow. By the time we go and come back, it will be too late. It’s better to study today,” her mother concluded.

“But Mum, it’s snowing...” Alma protested.

“That’s enough. You can go outside later.”



Alma stormed back to her room and slammed the door. Stupid test! Stupid suitcase! Stupid parents! Stupid Tim and his snow-covered gloves!

She pulled her maths exercises out of her school bag, grumbling. Two hours later, she knew everything about Joan’s holiday in Italy, but she had barely made any progress with her studies.

When Alma finally managed to step outside at sunset, she was terribly

disappointed. Of the beautiful snow from that morning, only small, dirty, lumpy piles remained here and there. Furious, Alma kicked the little mounds, sending muddy chunks flying.

Tim, who had come outside at the same time, kept glancing at her, wondering how he could cheer her up.

“Maybe it will snow again tonight,” he suggested.

“In March? That’s very unlikely,” Alma replied bitterly. Suddenly, her face lit up. She had spotted the garage roof, which was still covered in a thick layer of snow. “There! Look!” she shouted excitedly.

Tim had a bad feeling. His worries were confirmed when



Alma walked towards the garage and returned carrying the ladder their mother used to clean the gutters. Ignoring her brother's warnings, she leaned the ladder against the edge of the roof and started climbing. Once she reached the top, she happily gathered big armfuls of snow and began making a snowman.

“Come on, join me!” she called to her little brother.

“If Mum and Dad see you, you're in serious trouble,” Tim replied.

“They completely forbade us to...” He was interrupted by a huge snowball that hit him right in the face, with a few pieces even getting into his mouth. Alma had aimed well. “Are you serious?”

Tim complained, wiping his face with his sleeve. “What are you—” Another snowball



landed on his chin and slid down his neck. He shivered as he felt the icy water run down his skin. This time, Alma had gone too far! He had to get his revenge!

Tim climbed onto the roof, grabbed a handful of snow and was just about to throw it at his sister when he heard the front door slam. Looking down, he was unpleasantly surprised to see his father standing there, having rushed outside without putting on his coat. His hands were on his hips, and he was glaring up at them.



Where Uncle Ruben Worries About His Hydrangeas



Even for Alma, who was often causing trouble, climbing onto the roof was a very bad idea indeed. As for Tim, his parents gave him a long lecture for once again letting his big sister talk him into it. They said he deserved a **punishment** ✖ too. “It’s too late to talk about it tonight,” their mother said with a sigh. “But don’t think you’re getting away with this so easily!” their father added.

The next day, the mood in the car on the way to Uncle Ruben’s house was heavy and quiet. They had picked up Granny Arlette early that morning and were now driving along a country road. Tim was squeezed between his father and Alma on the back seat of the small car that their mother was driving. Sitting comfortably in the front seat, Granny Arlette finally asked, “What’s going on with you? Why is everyone so gloomy this early in the morning?”



After hearing what had happened the day before, Granny Arlette gave the children a stern glance over her shoulder. “Your parents are right. What you did was really dangerous,” she told them gently. “Ask your Uncle Ruben to tell you how he slipped on the snow yesterday morning. The poor man twisted his ankle! Imagine if one of you had fallen off the roof!”

The children fell silent, feeling a little ashamed of what they had done. Still, Tim was mostly filled with another kind of regret. He hadn't managed to throw the snowball he'd intended to throw at Alma after all the ones she'd thrown at him from the roof. Seeing the piles of snow still lying in the shade at the side of the road, he promised himself he would get his revenge during their visit to Uncle Ruben. A big snowball thrown at just the right moment would catch his sister by surprise and be perfectly fair. Despite the heavy mood in the car, a slight smile crossed Tim's lips as he thought about it.

The village where Uncle Ruben lived, about an hour's drive from Alma and Tim's home, was still covered in snow. When they arrived, the parents and Granny Arlette went inside to warm up, but the children rushed towards the garden, where their uncle had set up a swing. They were disappointed to see that the branch where it usually hung was empty.

"I put it away for the winter," explained Uncle Ruben when he saw their sad faces. He walked towards them, leaning on a pair of crutches.



“You really hurt yourself, didn’t you?” the children’s father said, coming back outside to see why Alma and Tim hadn’t followed them in.

“You don’t say,” Uncle Ruben replied with a long sigh. “This awful sprain is stopping me from clearing the snow covering my young hydrangea shoots. These should bloom into beautiful flowers in June, but I am very worried that the fragile buds might break under the weight of the snow.”

Suddenly, the children’s father had an idea. As a **punishment** ✱ for climbing on the garage roof the night before, they would clear the snow off Uncle Ruben’s hydrangeas and his driveway, as well as the large terrace behind the house. It would teach them a lesson and give them plenty of time to think about what they had done.

“That is very kind of you,” replied Uncle Ruben, “but I only have one shovel to lend them.”

“It doesn’t matter,” the father answered. “They’ll share the shovel and take turns. The one who doesn’t have it will clear the snow with their hands. After all, it’s a punishment. It won’t be fun, but that’s completely fine by me!”

Where the Punishment Becomes Cruel

While the adults sipped hot coffee in Uncle Ruben’s kitchen, Alma and Tim started clearing the snow from the hydrangeas. At first, this seemed like fun, but Alma quickly realised that her woolen gloves were going to be problematic. It had been decided that Tim would use the shovel first while Alma cleared the snow with her hands.



However, her gloves were not waterproof and quickly became soaked. As she felt the cold numbing her fingers, Alma clenched her teeth, but the pain soon grew even stronger.

Meanwhile, Tim could think only about getting his revenge. While his sister was looking the other way, he picked up a handful of snow and quietly shaped it into a ball. It had to be packed tightly to be effective. Once it was ready, he crept towards Alma, but was interrupted by the sound of a door slamming.

Seeing his mother approaching, he quickly dropped the snowball, which crumbled at his feet.

The children's mother had come outside to check that the punishment was going well. One look at her daughter's face told her that something was wrong.

"What's the matter, Alma?" she asked. "You were so eager to play in the snow yesterday, and now you are getting plenty of it!"

"My hands are completely frozen," Alma explained. "I wore my woolen

gloves this morning. I didn't realise I'd have to clean Uncle Ruben's garden. This is no longer fun. It's pure torture!"

Her mother glanced at Tim's hands. He had brought his ski gloves, which kept his hands warm and dry.

"Tim, hand the shovel to your sister," their mother ordered. "From now on, and until all the snow is cleared, you will use your hands and Alma will use the shovel."

"But that's not fair!" Tim protested. "We've barely started, and the snow will probably take all morning to clear!"

"Not fair?" Alma replied. "None of this would have happened if I had been allowed to play outside yesterday morning instead of..."

"That's enough!" their mother interrupted. "You are being punished. I don't want to hear any more complaints! To avoid any further arguments, Tim, you will clear the snow behind the house and Alma, you will take care of the driveway at the front." With that, she walked away briskly.

Tim was furious. Not only would he have to clear the snow by hand

while Alma used the shovel, but he would also have to wait even longer before he could finally throw a snowball at his sister. He went back to work, grumbling to himself. Alma would get what she deserved later.

The rest of the morning passed without any further incidents. The children had just finished clearing the snow when their uncle called them in for lunch. Instead of following his sister straight inside, Tim stayed behind for a moment. Once he was finally alone in the garden, he gathered a large armful of snow and shaped it into a ball. Then he placed it right next to the front door. When they came back outside later, the snowball would be ready to use. This time, Alma would not escape.



Where Uncle Ruben Talks About His Clients in Prison

Tim hurried to join the rest of the family, who were already seated at the table enjoying the delicious roasted chicken that Uncle Ruben had prepared for them.

Noticing her grandson's grumpy face, Granny Arlette asked, "What's the matter, sweetheart?"

"The poor sweetheart is not used to being punished. That's the problem," Alma said with a teasing smile.

"It's not the punishment that bothers me! It's having to pick up snow with my hands because Princess Alma didn't bring the right gloves!"

the little boy burst out.

“What’s this story about gloves?” Granny Arlette asked.

The children’s mother explained that she had given Alma the shovel because her woolen gloves had gotten wet.

“Tim, you understand that the punishment would have been much harder for Alma if she had had to clear the snow with her bare hands,” his father tried to explain. “With your ski gloves, you were much better protected from the cold.”

“Exactly,” their mother added. “By giving the shovel to Alma, I was simply making things fair between you. It was the best solution!”

She was interrupted by Uncle Ruben, who cleared his throat loudly. Everyone turned to look at him.



“Ruben, do you disagree?” Granny Arlette asked.

“Well...” Uncle Ruben hesitated. He didn’t like to interfere with his nephews’ education.

“Come on, Ruben, tell us what you  think!” Alma and Tim’s father encouraged him. “After all, as a lawyer, you probably know more about  punishment than anyone else here.”

“Let’s just say,” Uncle Ruben began, “that the same punishment can be more or less harsh depending on the person. I’m not sure that the best solution is always to balance things between...”

“Ruben,” Granny Arlette interrupted. “That sounds very abstract. Could you give us an example?”

“Of course,” replied Uncle Ruben. “For example, I have several clients in prison,  and I can clearly see that prison is not the same punishment for everyone.”

“Do you mean that some people are less unhappy being locked up?” Alma asked, thinking sadly about the previous day, when she had been stuck at home, forced to tidy and do her homework.



“Uh...” Uncle Ruben hesitated again. “That’s more of a question for psychologists, or even philosophers. I was thinking more about people who find themselves in a more challenging situation than others when in prison.”

“For example, because they have a disability?” suggested the children’s mother.

“Exactly!” Uncle Ruben said, relieved that the others finally seemed to understand what he had been trying to explain. “If someone who uses a wheelchair is sent to prison, they might not be able to enjoy outdoor activities like the other incarcerated people.”

“Are there prisons specially designed for cases like that?” Alma asked, surprised.

“Prisons are supposed to make adjustments for people with disabilities,” explained Uncle Ruben. “For example, they may need to install ramps or provide accessible showers. But not all prisons have the right equipment.”

“That’s putting it mildly!” Granny Arlette exclaimed.

Uncle Ruben nodded slightly. “It’s true,” he said. “Some prisons don’t have what is needed. Sometimes there aren’t enough staff members.

People also often don’t think carefully enough about how much harder prison can be for someone who is different from the majority.”

“But who decides where someone is sent?” Alma asked.

“The judge,” replied Uncle Ruben. “But even then, the prison must make sure the person’s needs are properly taken into account.”

“So, people can’t choose where they go?” Tim asked, wanting to be sure he understood.

“Oh no, not at all,” said Uncle Ruben with a faint, bitter laugh. “Placement depends on many things, such as the crime the person committed, the danger they pose...”

“...And whether they are men or women,” the children’s father added.

“Prisons are not mixed!”

“That’s an interesting point,” Uncle Ruben continued. “I actually have a client whose case is especially complicated. Let me bring dessert first. I made a pear pie. Then I will tell you the fascinating story of my client, Annabelle.”



chapter 6

Where Annabelle Gets into Trouble

Once everyone had finished their pie,  Uncle Ruben began by explaining that Annabelle was a **transgender** woman. Alma and Tim's parents exchanged a glance. They weren't sure if their children knew what that meant. Before they had time to react, Alma spoke in a confident, teacher-like voice.

"It means that her gender identity does not match the gender she was assigned at birth."

Seeing the surprised looks on the faces of the others at the table, she explained that they had discussed transgender identity in class the previous month.

"That's right," said Uncle Ruben.

Noticing Tim's confused look, Granny Arlette added, "Uncle Ruben's client was thought to be a boy when she was born, but she now lives her everyday life as a woman."

"Exactly," Uncle Ruben continued. "In fact, Annabelle has been living as a woman for more than twenty years. That is why she changed her name from Michael to Annabelle, why she wears clothes such as dresses and high-heeled shoes, and why she wears her hair long and often some lipstick."

Tim nodded to show that he was beginning to understand.

"Annabelle had a difficult childhood," Uncle Ruben went on. 

"I'll skip the details because that's part of her **private life**. All you need to know is that she was arrested last year for a series of burglaries and  **sentenced** to two years in prison. The problem is..."

"They don't know which prison to send her to!" Tim exclaimed, guessing where his uncle was going.



“That is indeed one of the difficulties,” Uncle Ruben agreed. “Annabelle wants to be placed in a women’s prison. As her lawyer, I am trying to help her, but for now, she is still in a men’s prison.”

“Not much respect for human rights  here,” Granny Arlette muttered.

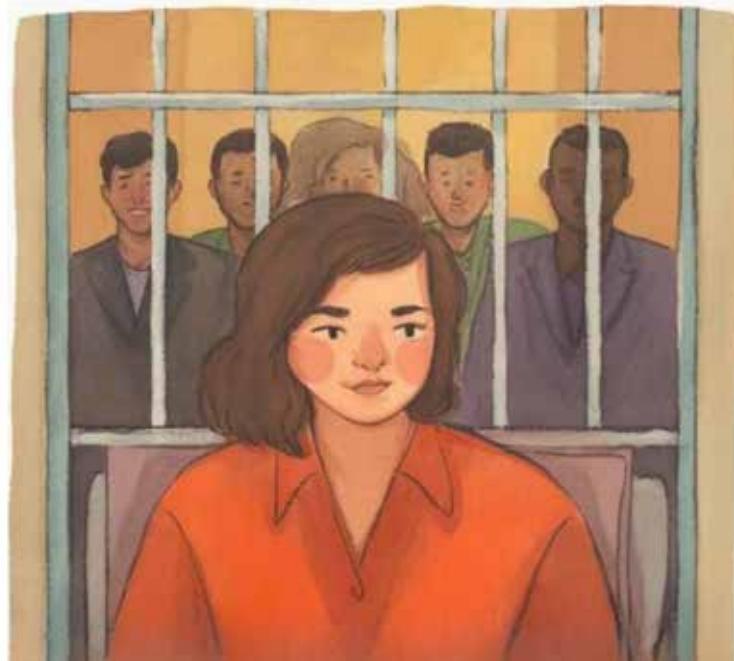
“It’s ridiculous, since she’s a woman!” Alma added.

“It’s not that simple,” Uncle Ruben continued. “Annabelle has not changed her sex on her official documents. That means that on her passport, she is still listed as male.”

“Then the other prisoners must bother her all day...”

Alma said sadly, imagining how lonely it would be to be the only girl in a boys’ school.

Uncle Ruben sighed. Alma and Tim were a little too



young to understand all that Annabelle had been through since her imprisonment, but they were not wrong. His client had been insulted and bullied almost daily by some of the other prisoners. She had even been physically attacked several times.

“Did they hurt her?” Tim asked, worried.

“She was very shocked, but she seems to be recovering well,” Uncle Ruben reassured him. “Since then, Annabelle has been moved to a different unit where she is safer.”

“Let me guess,” Granny Arlette said bitterly. “A separate unit for prisoners with mental health problems, or something like that, right?” Without waiting for Uncle Ruben to answer, she continued: “Prison is already a very difficult place to live, but if people treat you like you’re ill or dangerous, it’s even worse.”

Everyone remained silent for a few moments.

“Shall we have some tea?” Alma and Tim’s father suggested to lighten the mood.

A few minutes later, Uncle Ruben returned with cups and a pot of steaming tea. The conversation moved on to other topics and Uncle Ruben described in great detail how he had twisted his ankle.



Alma remained lost in her thoughts, only half listening. Annabelle's story seemed both tragic and **unfair**. *
"You know, *
sweetheart," said
Granny Arlette
gently, "there are
people who work
very hard to improve
the situation for peo-
ple like Annabelle. Look
at your Uncle Ruben, for ex-



ample. As a lawyer, it is his job to keep fighting to ensure that his clients' rights and **dignity** are respected."

"As a matter of fact," said Uncle Ruben, who had overheard their conversation, "we won Annabelle's **case** last week, and she is finally being transferred to a women's prison." *

Alma let out a sigh of relief.

"That's wonderful news!" Granny Arlette added. "You could have started with that, Ruben! Still, we must not give up. The fight must go on!" The old lady raised her fist in a sign of determination.

The others exchanged amused looks. Clearly, Granny Arlette would never change!

chapter 7

Where Tim Brings Back a Mysterious Blue Box

Soon, it was time to go home. Before leaving, Tim seized a moment when his uncle was alone in the kitchen to whisper in his ear. Uncle Ruben nodded knowingly and went to get a small, blue, rounded-cornered box. He handed it to Tim with a wink. Tim thanked him and hurried to join the rest of the family who were already waiting in the car. It had started to rain, but Granny Arlette brightened the ride home by playing her favourite Edith Piaf songs and singing loudly along with the music.

That evening, after dinner, Tim went to see his sister in her bedroom. He found her staring wistfully out of the window.



“All the snow has melted,” said Alma with a nostalgic sigh.

“After clearing all that snow at Uncle Ruben’s house this morning, I’ve had enough for a long time,” Tim replied, looking tired.

“You know, I’ve been thinking about the glove problem,” Alma continued.

“It’s true that it wasn’t fair to take the shovel away from you. It made your

punishment harder, even though it wasn't your fault that I was wearing woolen gloves."

"At the same time, it wouldn't have been possible to let you keep working with your soaked gloves," Tim admitted.

"Mum should have found a way to make my punishment easier without making yours harder," Alma continued thoughtfully.

Tim nodded. "Since you care so much about justice," he continued, smiling slyly, "I may have something that will help settle an important matter. Wait here. I'll be right back."

A few minutes later, he returned holding the blue box with rounded corners. He stood near the door and unscrewed the lid. Still standing by the window, Alma could not see clearly what was inside the box. It looked a little like cotton... or maybe...



Before she could finish the thought, the snowball landed square on her face, just as her little brother burst out laughing.

the end

to go further...

Did you enjoy Alma and Tim's adventure? Here are some questions to help you think about what happened. Each level gets a bit more challenging, so give them a try!

Understand

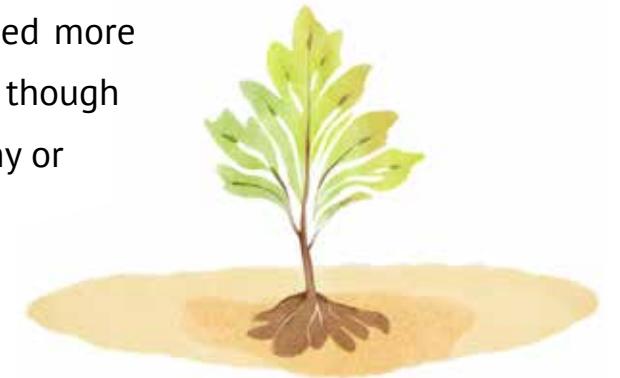
1. Why was the punishment of clearing the snow harsher for Alma than for Tim? How did their parents solve the problem?
2. Why did Uncle Ruben say that prison is not the same punishment for everyone, even if two people have the same **sentence**? *
3. What made Annabelle's time in prison more difficult than for many other prisoners?



4. Why did the prison place Annabelle in a separate unit, and why did Granny Arlette think that solution could still be **unfair**? *

Dig Deeper

1. Uncle Ruben explains that the same punishment can be harder for some people than for others. Do you agree and why?
2. Do you think Annabelle was punished more harshly than other prisoners, even though she received the same sentence? Why or why not?
3. Do you think Annabelle's rights were fully respected while she was in prison? Why or why not?
4. Granny Arlette insists that the fight for rights must continue, even after Annabelle's situation improves. Why might solving one **case** not be enough? *



Explore Big Ideas

1. Should a punishment always be the same for everyone, or should it be adapted to each person's situation? Why?
2. Can a punishment respect the law but still fail to respect human **dignity**? Can you think of an example? *
3. Do you think people should lose their rights when they are sent to prison, or should certain rights always be protected and if so which ones?
4. Do you think prisons should change their rules to better protect prisoners who are more vulnerable? Why or why not?



Legal Glossary

Case

A situation that a judge and lawyers carefully examine to decide what is right, what is wrong, and what should happen next.

Dignity

Being treated as a person who has value, deserves respect, and should not be humiliated or treated badly.

Human rights

Important freedoms and protections that belong to every person, no matter who they are or what they have done.

Incarcerated person

A person who is kept in a closed place, such as a prison, because they

are suspected of breaking the law or have been punished for it.

Lawyer

A professional whose job is to help people understand the law, defend their rights, and speak for them in front of a judge.

Placement

The choice of the prison or place where someone is sent to serve time before or after a court decision has been made.

Prison

A closed place where people must live after being punished for breaking the law, and sometimes before, while waiting for a judge's decision.

Private life

Personal parts of someone's life that must still be respected and protected by human rights, even when someone is sent to prison.

Punishment

Something unpleasant decided by adults or judges when rules or laws are broken, meant to respond to what was done.

Sentence

What a judge decides must happen to someone after deciding they broke the law, such as going to prison or paying a fine.

Transgender

Describes a person whose gender does not match the one they were said to be at birth.

Unfair / unfairness

A situation where people are treated differently or badly without a good or just reason.

The researcher behind the story

Dr. Pauline Jacobs

Pauline is an associate professor of Criminal Law at Tilburg University. She teaches and researches how punishment works and how the law treats people who are suspected of or punished for crimes.

Her focus is on prisons and on making sure people are treated fairly and with dignity, even when they are punished. A big part of her work also looks at the rights of prisoners, including people who are more vulnerable, such as transgender prisoners. This story connects to her research by helping us think about fairness, punishment, and whether everyone is treated equally when they face the law.

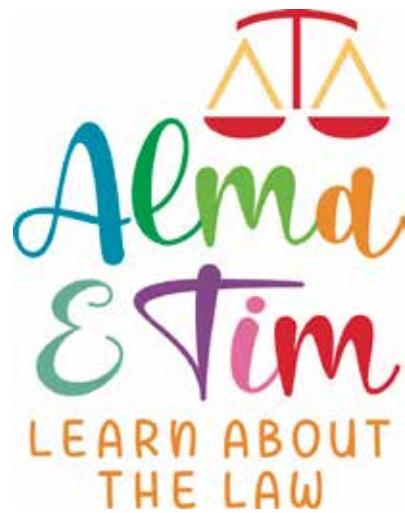


The Author of the story

Dr. Alice Dejean de la Bâtie

Alice is an assistant professor of Criminal Law at Tilburg University. With the advice and explanations from Pauline, Alice wrote this story as part of a project aimed at making academic research more accessible to children. She believes that her colleagues' work is essential and fascinating for understanding our society and building a fairer world. For her, it's important to share this knowledge with children because they are the leaders of tomorrow. Alice is convinced that children can grasp complex ideas, as long as they are explained in simple and clear language. Do you think she is right?





What is the Law?

This story is part of the series *Alma and Tim Learn about the Law*, inspired by the work of researchers at Tilburg University. Designed especially for young readers, it opens a window onto the fascinating world of law, justice, and human rights.

But what are law and justice exactly? Law is made up of rules that help us live together peacefully. These rules tell us what we're allowed to do and what we should avoid so that everyone feels safe and respected. Justice, in turn, makes sure that these rules are followed fairly. It helps resolve conflicts and protects those who need it, ensuring everyone is treated with respect. Through the adventures of Alma and Tim, you'll discover how these ideas of law and justice play an important role in our daily lives.

Is getting the same punishment always fair? When Alma and Tim are punished for climbing onto the garage roof, clearing the snow away seems like an easy task. But things quickly feel unfair. Why is the same task harder for one of them than the other? Later, at their uncle's house, they hear the story of Annabelle, a woman in prison whose punishment turns out to be far more complicated than it first appears. Through snowball fights, family debates and a powerful story, Alma and Tim begin to

explore the question of whether treating everyone the same is always the fairest way to punish someone.

This story is part of the series 'Alma and Tim Learn about the Law', inspired by academic research about justice, criminal law, and human rights. It includes a legal glossary and questions to help young readers explore the social issues, legal principles, and big ideas behind the story.

