



Protest Power

When Activists Break The Rules

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Chapter one

Where Johnson secretly receives visitors

On the way from their house to Granny Arlette's, where they went to play every Wednesday afternoon, Alma and Tim always stopped in front of Mr. McNamara's blue-shuttered cottage. They slipped through a gap in the hedge, walked around the shed, taking care not to crunch the gravel on the driveway, ducked under the kitchen window to avoid being spotted, and headed straight for the back of the garden.



he had the courage to visit Johnson every Wednesday, it was only because Alma was there.

There Johnson, Mr. McNamara's dog, gave them an enthusiastic welcome, despite the rope tying him to a ring on the wall. He wagged his tail and stuck out his tongue to lick their faces, but never barked, for Johnson was a very clever dog.

If grumpy old Mr. McNamara had known the children were sneaking out to see him, who knows what he would have done to them? Just thinking about it made Tim cringe. If

On this particular day, she had saved a ginger biscuit from her snack for Johnson, who munched greedily on it. He then sniffed through the children's bags and pockets, hoping to find another treat, but with no luck. Alma and Tim were already on their way, sad to leave Johnson, who was moaning softly at their departure, but anxious not to be late for Granny Arlette. Their grandmother was a very kind woman, but not a particularly patient one.



CHAPTER TWO

A story about a hammer

When they arrived at Granny Arlette's house, they found her reading the newspaper in her favourite armchair, the one that smelled a little strange, a mixture of lavender and dung. The old lady was frowning behind her horn-rimmed glasses, looking both worried and indignant. She muttered: "In prison? Ah, the devils! They put him in prison!"

"Who put who in prison, Granny?" asked Alma, without even saying hello.



Look up high-
lighted words in
the glossary at
the end!



Seeing the children, the grandmother's face softened.

"Well, the judge, of course! Who else? Read for yourself: *'The **activist** who smashed the window of a police car with a hammer has been sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment.'*"

"With a hammer?" repeated an astonished Tim. "That's pretty violent, isn't it? The driver of the car must have been really scared!"

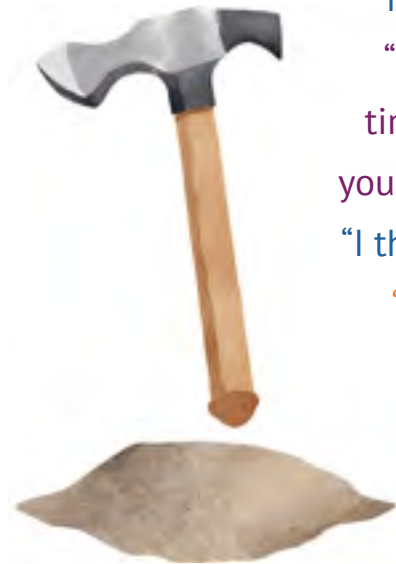
"That's for sure," admitted Granny Arlette. "But sometimes you have to scare people to get them to listen to you."

"I think your activator really went too far," Tim insisted.

"*Activist, you dummy!*" his sister corrected him with a superior air.

Ac-ti-vist. People who defend a great cause, like protecting the environment, the animals, the forests, the rivers, the mountains, the...

"Yes, we get it," Tim interrupted. "I still don't see how smashing a window with a hammer to scare the police helps protect animals," he added, pleased that Alma found nothing to reply.



"It's true that he may have gone a little too far," Granny Arlette conceded in an attempt to calm the debate. "But to deprive him of his freedom is excessive. Especially since several people were arrested that day for demonstrating peacefully."

"Without hammers?"

"Just signs and slogans. They were protesting against a construction project in the dunes," explained Granny Arlette. "And let me tell you something, my darlings: I know all about signs!"

With that, their grandmother mysteriously rose and left the room, leaving Alma and Tim trembling with curiosity.



Chapter Three

Where Granny Arlette reveals her Past

Granny Arlette returned shortly afterwards with her arms full of old sheets, a little yellowed and torn at the edges.

She proudly unfolded them on the floor and the children discovered messages written on them in red and black paint. Their grandmother

✱ often talked about **'May 68'**, but until then they hadn't really understood what it was about. It was probably just adult stuff. That afternoon, Granny Arlette's youthful adventures suddenly took on a touch of reality.



Alma imagined her grandmother, still a student, with her bangs and her big glasses, marching through the streets of Paris for equality, progress, and more say for young people. She saw her marching up and down the main avenues, shouting slogans and waving banners. She heard her singing along with thousands of other demonstrators, hoping for a better world.

“Hey! Are you listening to me?” Tim asked abruptly, interrupting her daydream.

“I was just thinking how much fun it must be to protest,” Alma enthused.

“There are some great moments,” confirmed Granny Arlette, “but it's not always fun. In '68 the police weren't very nice.”

“Did they have hammers?” worried Tim.

“Uh... more like batons,” Granny Arlette corrected. “And some didn't hesitate to use them.”



“You should have filmed them with your phones and reported them!”

“You’re forgetting that we didn’t all have cameras in our pockets back then – it was long before smartphones,” Granny Arlette sighed.

“OK,” Alma conceded, “but you had actual cameras, didn’t you? So you could have had evidence,” she pointed out.

“In any case,” Granny Arlette replied, “the right to demonstrate was not as protected as it is today.”

“Protected by who?” asked Tim with interest.



“The European Court of Human Rights,” said Granny Arlette slowly, knowing that these words were complicated for Tim. “These are judges who make sure that people can demonstrate peacefully.”

“Peacefully?” asked Tim.

“Without hammers,” his sister joked.

“Don’t tease your brother, he’s trying to understand and it’s a difficult

question,” said Granny Arlette. Turning to Tim, she added: “Peaceful means without violence. Everyone has the right to express their ideas and defend them by demonstrating, as long as they don’t do it violently. It’s a very important r...

“But,” Alma interrupted, “the activists you mentioned earlier, the ones who were arrested by the police, they weren’t violent, were they? So why were they arrested? Why hasn’t the European Court said anything?”

“It’s more complicated than that,” Granny Arlette sighed, “and I’m not sure I have the answers to all your questions. But if you’re interested, you could talk to your Uncle Ruben, he’s a lawyer.”

“Anyway,” Alma replied, “I’d really like to go and demonstrate.”

“Demonstrate for what?” asked Tim ironically. “You don’t have much of a cause to defend, do you?”

“We’ll see,” replied his sister.

Chapter Four

Where Alma decides to take action



The following Wednesday, on the way to Granny Arlette's, Tim noticed that Alma was carrying a large canvas bag over her shoulder. When they arrived at Mr. McNamara's house, instead of heading for the hole in the hedge, Alma walked towards the front door with her head held high. Tim followed worriedly, sensing that his sister was up to something and wondering if he was going to get

grounded again because of her. Alma took two placards from the big bag, one saying "Save Johnson" and the other "Animals = Freedom", and handed one to Tim while holding up the other and starting to chant: "A dog tied up is a friend in chains!"

Tim stood stunned for a few seconds, holding the sign in his hand, not knowing how to react. Once again Alma had come up with one of those crazy ideas that would get him into trouble. But this time she wasn't entirely wrong. Johnson was miserable, tied up at the back of the garden all day. It wasn't right for him to be neglected by his master. Maybe Alma's idea wasn't such a bad one after all? With a sudden burst of energy, Tim lifted his placard and ran to join his sister in singing.

It wasn't long before Mr. McNamara was on his doorstep, visibly annoyed at the noise being made by these naughty children outside his house. He waved his cane and shouted threats,



but when these seemed to have no effect on the young demonstrators, he stormed back inside, slamming the door. The respite was short-lived. A few minutes later, Alma and Tim saw their mother's little green car parked on the opposite pavement. As she rolled down the window, they could tell from her expression that they'd better go to her without making a fuss. She had that big wrinkle on her forehead that only appeared when she was really annoyed.



"I've just been interrupted in the middle of a meeting by a call from Granny Arlette, who tells me that her neighbour is furious and is threatening to call the police, and all because you improvised a demonstration in front of his gate! Who do you think you are?"

"It was to help Johnson," Tim timidly tried to explain.

"Who is Johnson?" his mother asked suspiciously. "Is the neighbour called Johnson?"

"Of course not!" Alma said impatiently, "Johnson is his dog! He keeps him tied up at the back of the garden all day, poor thing, he never lets him out."

"And have you spoken to his master about this?"

"How could we? He's far too mean, he wouldn't listen to us," Alma replied dismissively.

"He's not a nice man, Mr. McNamara," Tim added. "He must have a heart of stone to treat his dog so badly."

"Well, children, I don't know what kind of trouble you've gotten yourselves into," their mother sighed, "but I forbid you to bother Granny Arlette's neighbour again. You're not going to get us into trouble just because of a dog!"

Hearing these last words, Tim glanced discreetly at Alma. Their eyes met and they both knew they were thinking the same thing: *just because of a dog?* This was too much, something had to be done!

Chapter five

Where Tim gets angry

Over the next few days, after school, Alma and Tim were busy making lots of new placards, and when the weekend came, they went to Mr. McNamara's door and continued their demonstration. They marched in a circle along the pavement, waving their placards and chanting slogans like 'Free Johnson' and 'McNamara resign'. It wasn't long before their mother burst in, furious.

"This time it's enough! You're grounded for a month."

"But it's Joan's birthday on Sunday and I've been waiting a thousand years to go to her party!"

"Too bad for you, next time you'll think before you act nonsensically," replied her mother.

"Nonsensically? But it's not nonsense," Alma protested. "We're trying to save a living creature! He's a prisoner! We only want to help him!"

Alma's voice broke and Tim saw tears welling up at the corners of his sister's eyes. Not tears of sadness, but tears of incomprehension. He didn't understand why their mother refused to listen to them either, to hear that Johnson's situation worried them. Why were they being punished so severely for trying to help Johnson? It all seemed unbelievably unfair and this unfairness made him very angry. After dinner, Alma came into Tim's room with a conspiratorial air.



She told him her plan: since the adults wouldn't listen to them, they were going to take matters into their own hands. They were going to free Johnson from the cruel rope that was chafing his neck. Tim hesitated. Free Johnson? This time it was serious, he could feel it. Johnson was Mr. McNamara's dog, even if Mr. McNamara treated him badly. Surely it was forbidden to take someone else's dog; it was a kind of theft. Tim didn't want to be a thief. Nor did he

want to upset his parents, or Granny Arlette.

But Alma reminded him how all these adults had refused to listen to them, how they had preferred to let Johnson suffer so as not to upset Mr. McNamara. She reminded him of the severe punishment they had received for trying to help a poor animal. In the face

✦ of such **injustice**, Tim felt that same anger he had felt in the car rise up in him. This time, he let it fill him up until he boiled over. He wasn't a thief, he was a hero.

The next day Alma and Tim snuck out of the house after their parents had gone out. If they were caught outside while



they were grounded, they knew they would be in trouble, but no matter! When they got to Mr. McNamara's house, they slipped quietly through the hole in the hedge and found Johnson in his place, happy to see them and already sniffing through their pockets, hoping to find a ginger biscuit. When Alma untied the rope, Johnson hesitated for a moment, surprised to find himself suddenly free. As he stood there, Tim pushed him towards the road. "Shoo, Johnson! Go, quickly! Run!" The dog gave them one last quizzical look, then, with a sudden burst of speed, jumped over the hedge and trotted off.

Chapter Six

Where Mr. McNamara shows his true colours

It was over dinner that Alma and Tim realized something serious had happened. The telephone rang. It was Granny Arlette telling them that Johnson had been found injured by the side of the road. He had escaped with a broken leg, but it could have been very serious as Johnson was not used to walking alone. Mr. McNamara was in an uproar, accusing Tim and Alma of deliberately untying Johnson. He talked of reporting them to the police, and Granny Arlette had a hard time convincing him to let the children explain what they had done first.



The next day, Alma and Tim, accompanied by their grandmother, arrived shivering at Mr. McNamara's house. He led them into a small living room that smelled of cold tobacco, where Johnson was lying in a large basket, his paw bandaged.

“Look what you’ve done to this poor animal!” growled Mr. McNamara, glancing at him with pity. “You wouldn’t think of breaking into someone’s house and kidnapping their dog!”

“But we didn’t want to kidnap him,” Alma tried to explain. “He looked so unhappy... we just wanted to...”

“I don’t give a hoot about your feelings,” Mr. McNamara shouted. “Ah! it was different in my day, children knew how to behave!”

“Come on, Roger, they’ve only come to apologize, so let them talk instead of shouting,” interrupted Granny Arlette.



“Arlette, stay out of this, you’ve done enough damage already!” Mr McNamara yelled. “Do you think I haven’t recognized your dangerous anarchist ideas in this demonstration craze?”

“It’s certain that if we only rely on cowards like you, we won’t risk going very far,” replied Granny Arlette, starting to feel hot under her collar. “It takes courage to get things done and protect our human rights!”



“As usual, you confuse courage with stupidity,” sneered Mr McNamara.

“You remind me of those obnoxious activists who tried to stop an honest developer from building on the dunes,” he added. “They think they’re being brave when they’re just like babies throwing a tantrum because they don’t want to share their sandbox. Luckily the police came to arrest them and put things in order!”



Alma and Tim remained silent, both relieved that Mr McNamara’s anger was directed at someone else, and worried that their grandmother’s face was turning a crimson red colour that didn’t bode well. She clenched her fists and opened her mouth, obviously ready to give her annoying neighbour a piece of her mind, but then she looked at the children and changed her mind. The fight would have to wait, this dog business had to be sorted out first. Seeing that she remained silent, Mr McNamara struck on.

“Yes, big babies!” he insisted. “And dangerous too! As a matter of fact,” he added, turning to Alma and Tim, “those kids almost killed my poor Johnson because of you!”

“Maybe it wouldn’t have come to that if you’d taken better care of your *poor Johnson*,” retorted Granny Arlette. “They’re not wrong, what an idea to keep that poor beast tied to that rope all day long! It’s tyrannical!”

“Do you think I like leaving him alone in the garden like this?” Mr. McNamara choked. “Since my accident my hip hurts too much to take him for a walk. I haven’t got a choice!”

“There’s always a choice,” Granny Arlette replied dismissively.

Chapter seven

Where Alma suggests a little experiment

A heavy silence fell over the room. Only the tapping of Johnson's tail against the edge of the basket could be heard, and all eyes were on him. This gave Tim the courage to speak.

"Maybe we could take Johnson for a walk now and again," he suggested.

"Certainly not," said Mr. McNamara sharply. "You've clearly shown that you don't know how to look after a dog!"

"Roger, maybe that's not a bad idea," Granny Arlette said thoughtfully.

"We'll be very careful with him, I promise," Alma added.

"He'll never follow you anyway," Mr. McNamara objected. "Johnson is very shy."

Just as Tim was about to protest, explaining that Johnson knew them well as they visited him every Wednesday, Alma gave him a sharp look that silenced him.

"You're right, Mr. McNamara," she said in a soft tone. "We wouldn't want Johnson to escape. I suggest we do a little experiment to see if he wants to come with us."

"An experiment?" Mr. McNamara asked suspiciously.

"Yes," Alma replied.

She led them out into the garden, followed by a bewildered Johnson who was trotting along on three legs. Alma, her hands deep in her pockets, asked her brother to follow her to the other end of the garden. There she called to Johnson who, after a few seconds' hesitation, happily limped over and licked her hands.

Stunned, Mr. McNamara had to admit that his dog seemed perfectly at ease with the children. After meeting Granny Arlette's stern gaze, he finally accepted their offer to walk Johnson three days a week once his leg had healed.

On the way home, when he was alone with Alma, Tim congratulated her on her idea of testing Johnson to reassure Mr. McNamara. “Still, it was a

bit risky! What if Johnson hadn’t come when you called?”

“Impossible!” laughed Alma.

Mischievously, she reached into her pocket and pulled out a handful of ginger crumbs.



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 did Alma and Tim decide to help Johnson?
What was the problem they wanted to solve?
2. Mr. McNamara threatened to call the police because of Alma and Tim's protest. Do you think that was a good reason? Why or why not?
3. Alma and Tim were punished by their mother. Do you think they deserved to be punished? What could they have done differently?
4. Mr. McNamara was upset because Johnson was hurt. Do you think he would have been less angry if he knew Alma and Tim were just trying to help Johnson?



Dig Deeper

1. What are the differences and similarities between the demonstrations Granny Arlette participated in during 1968 and Alma and Tim's protest for Johnson? How was each protest trying to make a difference?
2. The European Court of Human Rights protects the right to demonstrate peacefully. Do you think it's important to protect people's right to protest? Why?
3. Alma and Tim felt like no one was listening to them when they were trying to help Johnson. Have you ever felt like people weren't listening to you? What did you do about it, or what could you do in a similar situation?
4. Do you think it would have been better if Alma and Tim had spoken to Mr. McNamara first instead of protesting? How do you think the situation might have been different?



Explore Big Ideas

1. Do you think sometimes people need to take risks to stand up for what they believe is right? Why or why not? What kinds of risks are worth taking, and which ones might cause more harm than good?
2. When is it okay to protest, and when might it be going too far? How can people make sure their protest helps instead of causing harm?
3. Why do you think people protest? How can demonstrations help change the world?
4. Do you think it's fair to punish people for standing up for what they believe in? When should activism be protected, and when might it cross a line?



Legal Glossary

Activist

A person who is actively involved in defending an important cause, such as the environment or animal rights. Activists often take part in demonstrations, organize campaigns and use various methods to raise awareness of the issues they want to address. Their aim is to bring about positive change in society.

Demonstration, to demonstrate

A demonstration is a gathering of people in a public place to express their views or demand change. It can be peaceful, i.e. without violence, where people express their ideas in a calm and respectful way, often by holding placards, chanting slogans or marching together. They are demonstrating peacefully.

Human rights

Fundamental rights that every person has, regardless of their origin, religion, gender or opinions. These rights include the right to freedom, equality, security, justice, protection from discrimination and freedom of expression. Human rights are protected by international and national laws and courts.

Freedom of expression

The right to say what you think, even if others disagree. It includes the freedom to speak, write, publish and communicate ideas without fear of censorship or punishment. Freedom of expression is essential to a democratic society because it allows people to participate actively in public debate and to defend their opinions.

Justice, injustice

Justice is the principle of treating everyone fairly and giving everyone what they deserve. It also means applying the law impartially, protecting the rights of each individual and punishing wrongdoing. Injustice

happens when the rules aren't followed, people are harmed, or fairness is ignored.

European Court of Human Rights

A court that checks that human rights are respected in European countries. Based in Strasbourg, France, it considers complaints from people who believe their rights have been violated. The European Court of Human Rights can make judgments that are binding on governments, requiring them to remedy human rights violations.

MAY 68

A movement of protests and demonstrations in France in 1968, in which many young people and students demanded more freedom and social change.

The author of the story

Dr. Alice Dejean de la Bâtie

Alice is an assistant professor of criminal law and criminal procedure at Tilburg University. She studies and teaches how laws are applied in different countries and how they impact people's rights. Her research focuses on important issues like the criminalization of activism, protecting freedom of expression, and defending whistleblowers. Alice's work is all about



understanding fairness in the justice system, especially for those who might not have a strong voice.

Alice wrote this story as part of a project aimed at making academic research more accessible to children. She believes that this kind of 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.

How far can you go to help a mistreated animal? Alma and Tim can't bear to see Johnson, a lonely dog tied up in a garden, suffering any longer. Determined to help, they take bold action! Through protests and surprising family secrets, they learn how courage and kindness can make a difference. But is breaking the rules the best way to help Johnson?

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.

