

# Walking Home Alone

When you are three years old the world is full of challenges, but for a strong-minded and resourceful child like Amelia Alice Allen, challenges were there to be met and overcome.

Her day at playschool had come to an end. The schoolroom echoed to the sound of chairs being pushed under tables, and children being told not to run.

Had everyone put on their shoes and coats? Had anyone forgotten anything?

There was much to think about, and much on everyone's minds.

Amelia was feeling impatient, waiting around in her stiff buttoned-up coat, scuffing her shoes against the parquet flooring.

Mothers collected their children, but there was no sign of Amelia's mother. And then she had a thought. She walked up to her teacher and tugged at her patterned dress.

'Oh, my mummy's here,' said Amelia smiling brightly. 'OK, off you go,' replied her distracted teacher.

And so off went Amelia. She had decided to walk home by herself. An adventure. She wanted to do it, and she was going to do it.

Beyond the wrought iron school gates there was a tall hill, a really tall hill, but Amelia was determined, and set off on her journey, her brown-flecked eyes wide to the world.

At the top of the hill she reached the crossroads and the shop. She looked left, and she looked right, as she had been told to do.

'Gosh, this is easy,' she thought.

The shop had fruit and vegetables displayed outside, stacked and crated for easy viewing, labelled and priced with hand-written signs.

Amelia continued past.

No one seemed to take much notice, even when she tripped and fell.

She picked herself up, and did not cry, she was not going to cry even though her hand hurt. She was proud of herself for making the journey, and carried on past the terraces of slate-roofed houses and the tall trees that lined her route home.

‘I don’t know what all the fuss is about,’ thought Amelia. ‘Walking home alone is easy. I could do it every day, all by myself. There really is no need for my mummy to come and collect me.’

Amelia’s mother knew she was late, she didn’t like being late, she considered punctuality to be a virtue. But today, for some inexplicable reason, she’d just lost track of time. She didn’t want to let Amelia down, she wanted to be there for her.

She hurried through the school gates, up the stone steps and through the main doors. She looked around the empty space, and saw Amelia’s teacher sat down, leafing through some papers.

‘Hello, Mrs Allen, how can I help you?’ inquired Amelia’s teacher, looking up.

‘I’m here to collect Amelia,’ said Mrs Allen, politely, removing her elegant white gloves.

‘Mrs Allen, your daughter has already gone,’ stated Amelia’s teacher.

‘What! My daughter can’t have gone, I’m here to collect her,’ declared Mrs Allen.

‘But, Mrs Allen, your daughter’s left with you...’ faltered Amelia’s teacher.

And in that moment both teacher and mother realised. ‘Oh my God!’ exhaled Mrs Allen.

Quick to react, Amelia’s teacher leapt up and raced to the school office, her papers tumbled in a flurry behind her, and scattered across the floor. In the office she grabbed the black telephone receiver and dialled frantically.

‘Police?’

Walking home was taking a long time, but Amelia was not tired. It was her adventure. There were horses in the field. Amelia really liked horses, she thought they looked so free and happy. If she stood on tip-toe, she could see them up-close over the dry-stone wall. They were really big, their coats glistened in the sunlight.

Past the field, Amelia saw her home in the distance, a large white house with a large garden, set in a street of large houses and gardens.

‘Just keep going,’ she told herself.

As Amelia arrived at her house, she could see through the dining room window. She noticed a lot of people.

‘Oh, my mummy must be having a party,’ she thought excitedly. ‘Oh goody!’

Amelia raced up the driveway and knocked on the front door. The door swung open, and her mummy dashed out, and just wrapped her up in her arms, hugging her tightly.

‘Wow, this is a big hug,’ thought Amelia, ‘she’s clearly impressed with me.’

Mrs Allen stepped back, and looked her daughter up and down.

‘Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, child!’ she wailed. ‘You scared the living daylight out of me, Amelia Alice Allen. Don’t ever do that again. Do you realise how worried I was?’

‘But Mummy, I’m fine, I’m fine. I’m a big girl now.’

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