Emmeline and the Plucky Pup

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Prologue

1906

'Alfie, Alfie, wake up!' a voice hissed into the darkness.

Half asleep, Alfie pulled the threadbare blanket over his head and wriggled down further in his lumpy bed. Around him in the dormitory, another hundred boys snored and snuffled as they slept, tired out from the long workhouse day. They were woken at six o'clock in the morning, did lessons till noon and then worked all afternoon, with only gruel and

watery stew or bread for each meal, and went to bed at eight o'clock. Usually work meant putting the heads on pins, or breaking stones into little bits. Sometimes Alfie folded sheets that had been pressed by the mangle in the laundry and once he'd helped to peel hundreds and hundreds of potatoes. But this afternoon he'd been given a new, much more fun job.

'Alfie, take Sniffer for a walk,' Matron had said.

'Me?' Alfie wasn't used to dogs and had never walked one before. He'd looked down at Matron's elderly Yorkshire terrier, which could be very growly at people he wasn't fond of.

The two of them set off round the workhouse yard, with Alfie gently holding Sniffer's lead. This afternoon Sniffer didn't growl even once.

'Sniffer does seem to like you,' Matron said, as Sniffer rolled over on to his back and Alfie

gave him a tummy rub. 'And he doesn't like many people, as you know.'

Alfie liked Sniffer too and hoped he could take him for another walk in the morning.

'Alfie – it's me!' A hand shook his shoulder and gave him a gentle flick on his sleepy shaved head.

Only one person flicked him like that.

Alfie's eyes flew open. 'What are you doing here, Daisy?' he whispered into the darkness. 'You'll be for it if you're caught.'

'Get up.' His big sister pulled the blanket from his bed.

It was freezing in the dormitory and Alfie had put all his day clothes back on over his nightshirt for warmth, even though he knew how much trouble he'd be in if Matron caught him wearing them. Daisy was wearing her grey workhouse dress and long white apron.

'You shouldn't be h–' he said.

Daisy pressed her finger to his lips.

'*Shush!* We're leaving. Right now.'

Alfie gulped. They couldn't just leave the workhouse, not without permission. What if Matron or the governor or the police caught them? They could be sent to prison or brought back to the workhouse and punished. Alfie didn't want to be locked in a little room by himself or beaten with a stick, and he certainly didn't want to be given less food to eat. There was barely enough to stop his belly from rumbling as it was.

'Come on.' Daisy grabbed his wrist and pulled him up.

'We could get sent to prison . . .'

'Sssh!'

Alfie pushed his bare feet into his wooden clogs and wrapped the blanket around his skinny shoulders. He didn't have a coat and he wasn't leaving the blanket behind, even

though all of the boys in the dormitory knew what had happened to the other boys who'd tried to escape and been caught by the police. Not only had those boys been sent to prison but they were given even longer prison sentences because they'd dared to escape wearing *stolen* workhouse clothes.

Daisy was already making her way soundlessly past the sleeping boys, some of them crammed two or three to a narrow bed. Alfie tried to catch up with her, but one of his clogs slipped off and landed with a *clonk* on the floor. He froze with fear. The noise must have woken someone up! They'd be caught and then . . . well, Alfie didn't like to think about that.

Daisy crept back to him, picked up his clog, then took off the one that was on his other foot. She put her finger to her lips and tiptoed to the dormitory door, with Alfie creeping

after her. He was so scared he had to put his hands over his mouth to stop his teeth from chattering.

Daisy had left her own clogs in the corridor outside. She picked them up but didn't put them back on. Alfie's feet were freezing. They made little slapping sounds on the stone floor as he ran after his sister.

He'd often seen Daisy and the other girls on their hands and knees scrubbing the long corridors with hard brushes and soapy water. Matron said it had to be done every day to keep the dirt away. She didn't like dirt. It was why he'd had to have his head shaved. 'Fleas and sneezes spread diseases,' she'd told him, as he watched locks of his dark hair landing on the floor and a small girl quickly gathered them up.

There were lots of sneezes and diseases at the workhouse, as well as fleas.

The stairs were just ahead of them. Downstairs was the room where Matron slept, with her name written on the door. Alfie stopped at the top of the stairs but Daisy took his hand and squeezed it.

'We have to,' she whispered.

The moon was shining through the big window on the landing and he saw that she looked as frightened as he felt.

He looked back along the corridor. Maybe they should go back? Daisy squeezed his hand again.

Alfie nodded but dared not speak. He held on to the polished wooden bannister and stepped as softly as he could. At the bottom he tiptoed across the tiled entrance hall after Daisy.

They were nearly past Matron's door when a dog started yapping and Alfie almost jumped out of his skin.

Sniffer!

The yapping was followed by a great hacking, heaving cough from inside the room.

People were always getting sick at the workhouse. Some of them, like Alfie's mum, didn't get better and died from it. Now it sounded like Matron was sick too. But she was also awake!

Sniffer barked again, then he whined and Alfie heard the little dog scratching at the door.

Daisy grabbed Alfie's arm and dragged him down a corridor leading to the dining hall and kitchens. She stopped so suddenly Alfie bumped into her.

'This way,' she said, pushing up a sash window and climbing out.

After a quick look behind him, Alfie followed her.

Now they were in the yard where Alfie had taken Sniffer for a walk that afternoon. He'd never been out here at night and he moved closer to Daisy. Why had she brought him here? It wasn't safe. The yard was surrounded on three sides by red brick walls. Alfie stared up at them. Had they been seen from one of the windows? Was someone standing there looking out? Or maybe someone was already on their way, running down the stairs to drag them back.

Alfie pulled his blanket over his head to hide his face.

In the fourth wall were the massive wooden gates of the workhouse. They were guarded day and night by a fierce man with a big stick. He lived in a little hut next to the gates. What if he came out? What if he caught them? Alfie didn't want the gatekeeper to swing his stick at him or Daisy.

‘Stay in the shadows,’ Daisy told him, as they edged their way round the yard until they came to a small side door.

She pulled a large key from the pocket of her apron, turned it in the lock, swiftly lifted the latch, and the next moment they were out in the street.

Alfie looked at the workhouse behind him. They were out. Really out. He’d been at the Manchester workhouse since he was three and never been out of it before at night. He swallowed hard and tried not to think about what would happen if they were caught.

Daisy pulled a screwed-up piece of paper from her apron pocket.

‘What’s that?’ Alfie asked.

‘A map,’ she told him, as she peered at it under a gas light.

‘To where?’

‘To Mrs Pankhurst’s.’

'Who's Mrs Pankhurst?'

But Daisy didn't answer. She put the map back in her pocket and pointed to the tall iron gates across the cobbled street.

Alfie gasped. 'Not the cemetery! We can't go in there.'

'You're not scared?' Daisy hissed scornfully. 'We've got a lot more to be frightened of from real-life living people than from any ghosts!'

But Alfie *was* scared and he really didn't want to go into the cemetery – especially not at night. A drop of rain landed on his face and then one fell on his hand. He hoped the rain would keep the cemetery ghosts away.

'If the workhouse gatekeeper comes looking for us, he won't think to look in there, will he?' Daisy said. 'The cemetery's not that big – if we run as fast as we can, we'll be through it in no time. Here, I'll hold your hand.'

Alfie sighed and squeezed through a gap in the padlocked gates after Daisy.

'Run!'

It wasn't easy running in clogs but Alfie moved so fast they didn't have a chance to slip off. He was gasping so hard it felt like his heart was going to burst by the time they reached the other gate.

Daisy clutched her stomach and leant over, drawing in big breaths of freezing night air.

An owl hooted as it flew overhead and they both jumped in fear and then laughed with relief.

'Just an owl.'

'Now where?' Alfie asked Daisy.

'Down Nell Lane,' she said, peering at her map, although Alfie didn't think she could see it properly now it was drizzling with rain.

They headed down Nell Lane and then along the banks of Chorlton Brook, where

there were no street lamps and it was very dark.

Alfie's feet and legs were soon soaked in the long wet grass.

'Is it much further to Mrs Pankhurst's?' he wanted to know when they reached Sandy Lane. 'These clogs are rubbing the skin off my feet.'

They'd been walking for over an hour.

'This is the quickest way,' Daisy told him, as they headed into Ivy Green woods. 'One of the old ladies, Mary Dingle, drew the map to Mrs Pankhurst's house for me. She said we should always keep the river Mersey on our left.'

Alfie listened for the sound of running water. He couldn't swim and he didn't want to end up in the river!

Suddenly he heard someone groaning and icy fingers of terror ran down his spine.

'Daisy –' he started to say.

Daisy let out a great scream as a cow came running out of the bushes straight for her.

Not groaning but lowing!

The cow stopped dead and stared at them with its huge eyes. Alfie had never been close to a cow before but he wasn't frightened. He went to stroke it but the cow backed off and then turned the other way.

'I wasn't really scared,' Daisy said, as they headed onwards.

'I know,' Alfie told her.

Soon they'd left the countryside behind and were back on the cobblestone streets. It started to rain more heavily and Alfie and Daisy huddled together under the workhouse blanket, but they were soaked through in no time.

Just as Alfie was thinking he couldn't go any further, Daisy turned into a wide street

lined with dark houses. Alfie caught a glimpse of the sign: Nelson Street. Daisy pulled him along faster, peering urgently at the house numbers, until finally they stopped at number 62. Daisy marched up to the front door and pulled on the brass bell pull.

Before long it was opened by a young woman wearing a thick dressing gown over her nightclothes, with her hair in white ribbon curlers. She stared at them through the rain.

'Are you here to see Mother?' she asked doubtfully, stepping back so they could come in.

'Yes,' a voice said from behind them. Alfie turned round and saw a thin, dark-haired young woman with clogs on her feet and a blanket-like shawl over her head to protect her from the rain. Just like them.

'Are you from the workhouse too?' Alfie asked her in the dimly lit passageway, and Daisy squeezed his hand to tell him to shush.

'No, I'm Annie Kenney, and if women get the vote there won't be any more workhouses.' She smiled at Alfie as she pulled off her damp shawl and gave it to the young woman who'd let them in. 'Thank you, Adela.'

Adela hid a tired yawn as she took the shawl.

'Mother's still up. She said she wouldn't dream of sleeping until you'd safely arrived,' she said to Annie.

Adela left them in a lamp-lit parlour with embroidered cushions on the chairs and velvet curtains at the window. There were paintings of the countryside on the walls and black-and-white photographs of people on the mantelpiece. Alfie had never been anywhere nearly as grand before. A smart, middle-aged lady with her hair in a bun was sitting in one of the chairs in front of the fire, sewing.

Annie Kenney bobbed a curtsy and Daisy quickly did the same. Alfie had no idea what he was supposed to do in the presence of a great lady, so he bowed low and then stood looking down at the rug on the floor.

'Annie.' The lady smiled.

'I'm sorry I'm so late, Mrs Pankhurst . . .'

'Call me Emmeline,' the lady said.

Annie nodded. 'I couldn't get away from Strangeways Prison until all the forms were signed. And then I hadn't expected there would be so many people at the prison gates waiting to greet me. Friends from the mill, members of the choir, my two sisters, and many suffragettes from your Women's Social and Political Union that I'd never even met before.'

Prison? Alfie thought. What had Annie been in prison for? And what was a suffragette? But he didn't dare ask.

'You're here now and that's all that matters,' the lady told her. 'I expect you're glad to get away from those dreadful, hard plank beds in prison.'

'I am indeed.' Annie nodded. 'But sad that dear Christabel's still in there. Your daughter is so brave, Mrs Pankhurst – I mean, Emmeline. She said she would gladly go through it all again. We have to keep fighting for women to have the right to vote.'

As Mrs Pankhurst stood up, her sewing slipped to the floor and Alfie hurried to pick it up and hand it back to her.

She'd been sewing the words VOTES FOR WOMEN in purple thread on a white sash with a green border.

'Thank you, dear,' Mrs Pankhurst said, as she took the sewing from him. 'What a helpful boy you've brought with you, Annie. Is he your brother?'

'Oh, no, I didn't bring him. We met on your doorstep, Mrs Pankhurst. He and his sister are from the workhouse,' Annie told her.

Alfie looked over at Daisy and bit his bottom lip. He didn't know why they were here or what was happening. All he knew was that they were going to be in terrible trouble if they were sent back to the workhouse. They'd probably be sent to prison to sleep on plank beds.

Daisy swallowed hard. 'You said you wanted to help children like us when you came to the workhouse, Mrs Pankhurst. You said you wished there was more you could do . . .'

Mrs Pankhurst nodded but she looked confused. 'That was a long time ago, when I was on the board of the Poor Law Guardians, dear. I had to give up the post in 1898 when I was widowed.'

Daisy took a deep breath. 'The other girls and women at the workhouse still remember your visits and talk about you all the time. You said how they weren't criminals or bad people just because they'd fallen on hard times and no one who lived there should feel guilty or ashamed.'

Alfie watched as a tear slipped down his sister's face. Then Daisy went on:

'Three eleven-year-old girls from the workhouse were sent to be apprenticed to the cotton mill today. They weren't even allowed to say goodbye to their parents or their brothers and sisters before they left.'

'I was sent to work at a cotton mill when I was ten and still at school,' Annie Kenney told her. She held out her hand and Alfie saw that one of her fingers was missing. 'A whirling bobbin tore it off.'

Alfie was glad he didn't have to work in a mill – yet.

'I'll be sent next and then Alfie – my brother – won't know where I've gone. Or why I've left him all alone.' Daisy's voice cracked as she spoke.

Alfie felt like crying too as his strong big sister started heaving great loud sobs from somewhere deep down inside her. It sounded as if a million tears had been bottled up tight, waiting for a long, long time to burst out of her.

'It's as if we don't matter just because we're poor and live in the workhouse. That we don't have feelings or love our families like rich people do. But we do matter and we do care. We do!'

'Of course you do,' Mrs Pankhurst said. 'Everyone does.'

'That's why women must have the vote,' Annie said. 'So we can make changes. I was sent to prison for trying to make it happen, and I'd gladly go back again, horrible as it was.'

‘We can’t go back to the workhouse,’ Daisy said, wiping her eyes.

‘And you won’t,’ Mrs Pankhurst promised.

Alfie tried to make himself as small as possible as Annie and Mrs Pankhurst comforted Daisy. He couldn’t remember seeing her cry before, not even when they were told that the coughing fever had taken their mother.

Another boy, much older than Alfie, much older even than Daisy, came into the room in his dressing gown and slippers. He was carrying a small dog with a face a bit like a fox’s.

‘Hungry?’ the boy asked Alfie. The little dog wagged its tail.

Alfie nodded – he was always hungry.

‘Bread and jam?’

Alfie nodded even harder. They only got bread, usually stale and sometimes mouldy, with nothing on it, at the workhouse.

'This way,' the boy said.

Alfie wanted to follow him but he didn't want to leave Daisy.

'Don't worry. My mum'll look after her,' the boy said. 'She's very good at sorting out problems. My name's Harry. What's yours?'

'Alfie,' Alfie said softly.

'I bet Annie would like some bread and jam too. Prison food's pretty terrible, according to my mum and sisters. What's your sister's name?'

'Daisy.'

'I bet Daisy's hungry as well,' Harry said, and Alfie smiled at Harry and gave the little fox-faced dog a stroke. It licked Alfie's hand and Alfie wished he could have a dog of his own one day. He wondered if Sniffer had stopped barking back at the workhouse. But that made him think of Matron and he didn't want to think about her.

In the kitchen Harry took a loaf of bread from the larder and started cutting thick slices. 'I've got three big sisters called Christabel, Sylvia and Adela,' he told Alfie. 'And they all help my mum with the Women's Social and Political Union party and her Votes for Women campaign. I help too when I can. Christabel's in prison for holding up a banner saying "Votes for Women" when the MP Winston Churchill was making a speech. She loves dogs and she'd be really jealous if she knew I was looking after this one for a few days. He's a Pomeranian and his name's Brer Fox, after the Brer Rabbit stories. Do you like reading?'

Alfie nodded, although there hadn't been any books for him to read at the workhouse. The only books were the ones the teacher read to them. But at least he'd learnt to read and had gone to school for part of the time. Daisy

said poor children often didn't get to go to school at all if they weren't in the workhouse.

He bit his bottom lip. 'I'm not very good at reading yet,' he admitted.

'It's just practice.' Harry grinned as he spread the thick slices of bread with lots of butter. 'You can borrow some of my books if you like. I bet you'd like the Brer Rabbit stories. And Mark Twain – he writes really exciting books.'

By the time they went back with the bread and jam Daisy had stopped crying.

While Daisy, Alfie and Annie ate hungrily, Mrs Pankhurst said that Annie, who'd been given the sack from her job while she was in prison, should join her daughter Sylvia in London as soon as possible and further the women's suffrage cause there.

'I'd like that very much!' Annie said, her eyes shining.

Mrs Pankhurst took Annie's hand and said: 'I want you to know that as long as I have a home, you must look upon it as yours, Annie. You will never have to return to factory life. Just as you two, Daisy and Alfie, will never have to return to the workhouse. Harry will take your "borrowed" clothes, clogs and blanket back to the workhouse first thing in the morning, along with a letter to the matron saying that from now on Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst, ex-Poor Law Guardian, will be employing Daisy as her maid and Alfie as her messenger boy, when he isn't at school. You may borrow some of Adela's and Harry's clothes until we get you some of your own. I think that's everything sorted out now. How does that sound?' Mrs Pankhurst asked them.

Alfie could hardly believe it. His smile stretched from ear to ear. He was so happy he thought he might never stop smiling again.

Everything had changed in one night, thanks to Mrs Pankhurst.

Brer Fox nuzzled Alfie's hand and Alfie gave him another stroke.

'Th-thank you,' Daisy said. 'We'll work hard and we won't let you down.'

'I'll be the best messenger boy ever!' Alfie told Mrs Pankhurst.

Chapter 1

4 years later – November 1910

The little Staffordshire bull terrier puppy's shiny black nose sniffed at the delicious smells drifting on the cold November air. The puppy was very thin and its ribs were easy to see through its white, brown and black fur.

'Jellied eels – get your jellied eels here!'

'Baked potatoes! Hot baked potatoes!'

'Oysters and whelks! Best oysters and whelks!'

'Chestnuts! Hot chestnuts!'

It was after one o'clock and lots of hungry people were buying food from the stalls and handcarts in Parliament Square Garden, across the road from the Houses of Parliament. No one was taking much notice of the thin little puppy as it trotted round the stalls.

'Meat pies!' called a vendor.

'I'll have two pies,' a man said.

As the man bit into the first pie the puppy looked up at him and gave a whine.

'Get out of it, you,' the man said, some gravy from the pie running down his chin.

A handbell clanged behind them. 'Muffins! Freshly baked muffins!'

The puppy looked longingly at the tray of muffins balanced on the baker's head. But none of the muffins fell off and the baker went on his way ringing his bell.

'Sheep's trotters – fresh sheep's trotters!' a red-faced stallholder shouted to passers-by.

The puppy drooled at the delicious meaty smell.

'Are they really fresh?' a woman asked.

'Won't find fresher,' the stallholder replied. Seizing its moment, the desperate puppy stood on its hind legs and bit into a cooked sheep's trotter from the edge of the stall.

'Hey, you! Come back here!' the stallholder shouted as the tiny dog tore off with it. 'Thief, thief!'

'I'll catch him,' yelled one of the errand boys who was hanging around the stalls hoping for work.

'Penny if you do,' said the stallholder. 'But be quick.'

'I'll be quicker than him,' said a second boy.

'Penny for whoever brings it back,' the stallholder told them.

A third, fourth, fifth and sixth boy joined in the chase. Everyone wanted the penny. They

sped across the grass after the puppy, who had the warm sheep's trotter clamped in its jaws.

The puppy darted in and out of the legs of people. The boys followed, weaving in and out and trying not to trip or bump into anyone. The square was full of tourists marvelling at the majestic Houses of Parliament, where the laws of the land were made.

'Hello, puppy, that looks tasty!' Police Constable Tom Smith laughed as the small piebald dog ran between his legs. He and an elderly constable called Purvis were on their way to join the police officers lining the roads around Parliament Square Garden.

'Don't worry about that now,' Constable Purvis said, as the puppy ran into a bush to devour its prize. 'You don't want to be late, not today. We've got important work to do.'

Tom nodded and they walked on. He'd barely been able to sleep last night, he'd been

so excited. It was his first day on duty as a police constable and he was going to be protecting the Houses of Parliament, because there was going to be a suffragette march. The suffragettes were campaigning for women to have the right to vote, just like men, and Tom knew that they were willing to use force. A couple of years ago there'd been a mass rally in Hyde Park with over 300,000 suffrage supporters. That one had been peaceful because it had been led by the suffragists rather than the suffragettes. Suffragists wanted the same thing as the suffragettes but they went about trying to get it by peaceful campaigning. Suffragettes were more militant. They'd attacked a member of Parliament – Mr Churchill – and rang a muffin bell continually when he'd tried to make a speech. They'd smashed the windows of 10 Downing Street, where the prime minister lived, and

two of them had even chained themselves to the railings outside, in protest at the government not giving them the vote.

Tom didn't know how many women would be marching today. But the papers were full of the news that the prime minister, Mr Asquith, had gone back on his word that women who owned property and were over thirty years old would be given the vote, so there might be lots of protestors. The police had to be ready. Tom was feeling a little nervous, even though he was one of many officers: the Home Secretary, Mr Winston Churchill, had asked for six thousand policemen from all over the country to come to London and protect the Palace of Westminster. Most of them were on foot, but some looked very fierce mounted on huge police horses.

They all stood to attention as the police commissioner gave them his orders: 'The job

of the police is to keep everyone calm. Crowds need to be controlled or members of the public could easily be hurt if the protest gets out of control.'

'There, it's in that bush!' Tom heard an errand boy shout as he and Constable Purvis moved to their positions across the road. He watched as the group of boys charged towards the little puppy, who ran out of the bush, across the grass and away.

Alfie loved the whistles of the steam trains as they came into the station. He and Daisy had worked for Mrs Pankhurst for four years now and had been on lots of trains with her. She travelled all over the country, speaking at rallies and marches to gain support for her political party, the Women's Social and Political Union, which was fighting for women's right to vote. Two years ago,

though, she'd been sentenced to prison for six weeks when she'd tried to enter the House of Commons. That was when she'd sent Alfie and Daisy to live with Herbert and Laura Goulden, her younger brother and his wife, at their house in Winchmore Hill, north London.

'It will be far safer for you there, and I don't want either of you to be in danger or face imprisonment,' Mrs Pankhurst had told them. Daisy and Alfie had said they weren't afraid but she wouldn't listen.

'Laura has been appointed the headmistress of a brand new school called Hazelwood in Palmers Green, Alfie, and I want you to go there. Education is very important if a person is to succeed in life.'

'But –' Alfie had bitten his tongue to stop himself from saying anything more. There was no point arguing with Mrs Pankhurst.

'It's already arranged and Laura is very much in need of your help in the house, Daisy, especially now with baby Joan, and will be glad of a hard-working maid.'

'Yes, Mrs Pankhurst,' Daisy had said.

Now, Alfie had almost forgotten about his time in the workhouse four years ago. He had his own small room at Mr and Mrs Goulden's house instead of sharing a dormitory with a hundred other boys. And he got to go to school – not just in the mornings, but all day.

'We've got a lot to be thankful to Mrs Pankhurst for,' Daisy said, as if she'd read his thoughts.

'Yes, we do,' Alfie agreed, as they got off the train and caught a motorized omnibus to Caxton Street, where Mrs Pankhurst had hired a hall for the suffragettes and their supporters to meet.

'Look, that's it – there's a flag in the WSPU colours,' Daisy said, pointing to a building with a grand arched door. 'Purple for dignity, white for purity and green for hope.'

But Alfie already knew it was the right place because Mrs Haverfield and her gentle dapple-grey horse, Lightning, were there.

He stroked Lightning's soft nose. Mrs Haverfield smiled at Alfie and the horse neighed softly.

'We don't want to be late,' Daisy said, and Alfie followed her inside.

Daisy headed to the kitchen to help with the refreshments. Alfie stood at the back of the hall. The meeting had already started and Mrs Pankhurst was speaking from the stage. She was dressed in a mauve dress and long matching coat, with a dark green hat trimmed with a large white ostrich feather.

'Rather than having vast crowds of women descending on Parliament to protest about the

Prime Minister going back on his word, I have decided it would be better if there were fewer of us, just three hundred or so . . .'

Alfie thought that three hundred suffragettes was still quite a lot. It was almost as many children as there were in his whole school.

'But we will be representing the hundreds of thousands of women that desperately want and need the vote,' Mrs Pankhurst added. 'Now I will hand you over to Mrs Drummond, who will be organizing us into small groups.'

Alfie watched as a short, stout lady came forward. She had a very pink face and was wearing a red military jacket with gold tasselled epaulettes and an officer's cap on her head. Over her left shoulder she had a white sash with VOTES FOR WOMEN written on it in purple. The suffragettes called her 'The General'.

Mrs Drummond started calling out names in her big booming Scottish voice. People

came forward and stood to attention in front of the stage.

Last year, The General had organized a mass rally in Edinburgh, and Alfie and Daisy had watched as a thousand women marched through the city dressed in either their working clothes or as famous women from history. The General, wearing her military clothes, led the march sitting on a horse. 'I was born in Manchester, like you,' she'd told Alfie when he'd held her horse for her. 'But we moved to Scotland when I was still a wee girl and it's where my heart is.' The General had a little son called Keir, who was three. Daisy had looked after him for the day of the march. 'That's my mammy!' he'd kept shouting excitedly as he waved his purple, white and green paper flag.

A woman standing near to Alfie put her hand up. 'Excuse me, but why do we have to

go in small groups to Parliament? Wouldn't it be better if we all went at once?' she asked.

'It would,' Mrs Pankhurst agreed. 'But larger numbers aren't allowed inside and are turned away. So I've decided we'll have lots of small groups arriving at the Strangers' Entrance every few minutes instead.'

When Mrs Pankhurst was ready to leave with the first group of nine people, The General spotted Alfie at the back of the hall.

'Check what's happening out there and report back, Alfie,' she told him. 'But make sure you're not caught spying.'

'Will do,' Alfie said, and he dashed out and ran along Caxton Street, then Victoria Street to Parliament Square Garden. It was almost half a mile and took him less than ten minutes, but he knew the ladies from the WSPU would be much slower. Mrs Pankhurst had some very old ladies in her group, like Miss Neligan,

who was eighty years old and couldn't walk fast, let alone run.

It was freezing and Alfie's hands were very cold, but all the running had made him thirsty, so he stopped to have a drink from the water fountain built inside a little tower on the grass.

'Well, hello there.' Alfie grinned as a little Staffie puppy came racing in, panting, with its tongue hanging out.

'Thirsty?' Alfie cupped his hands to catch some water from one of the four spouts. The puppy lapped greedily from Alfie's palms. But then it suddenly froze, trembled and ran and hid behind his legs.

'You seen a thieving puppy?' a boy wearing an errand boy's cap shouted at Alfie, poking his head round one of the columns.

'No – what did it steal?' Alfie asked him.

'A whole sheep's trotter!'

'Is it your puppy?'

'No, just a stray that's been hanging around.'

'It'll be for it when we catch it,' another boy said, as they ran off.

The puppy came out from behind Alfie's legs as soon as the boys had gone.

'Hope that sheep's trotter was worth it,' Alfie said, and the puppy wagged its tail.

He was giving it a stroke when he saw Mrs Pankhurst and her group making their way slowly towards the public entrance to the Houses of Parliament.

Clopping along behind them was Mrs Haverfield on Lightning, ready to protect the suffragettes. They all knew that confrontations with the police could turn dangerous and it was best to be careful.

'Coast's clear,' Alfie told the puppy.

The puppy looked around, as if it were checking that the shouting boys who'd chased it had really gone.

They set off together across the grass past the statues of former prime ministers. Alfie didn't know what his sister Daisy was going to say when she saw the puppy, but he really, really wanted to be able to keep it. He'd longed to have a dog of his own ever since that day he'd walked Sniffer at the workhouse and then met Brer Fox.

The puppy looked up at Alfie and wagged its tail.