

Meet the characters in this story:



Alfie, a boy with  
rotten teeth

Dad, Alfie's dad



Gabz,  
a little girl

Miss Root,  
a dentist



Fang, her cat

Winnie,  
a social worker



Miss Hare,  
a Science teacher

PC Plank,  
a policeman



Raj,  
a newsagent





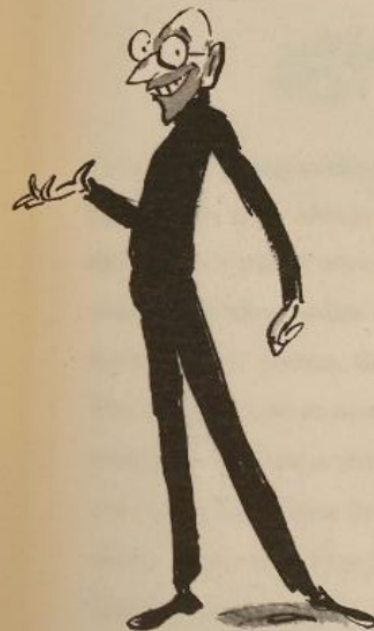
Texting Boy,  
a boy who never  
stops texting



Mr Grey,  
a headmaster



Mr Snood,  
a Drama teacher



Mrs Morrissey,  
an old lady



## A Simple Case of Toothache



Alfie hated going to the dentist. As a result the boy's teeth were almost all yellow. The ones that weren't yellow were brown. They bore the stains of all the goodies that children love, but dentists hate. Sweets, fizzy drinks, chocolate. The teeth that were neither yellow nor brown simply weren't there any more. They had fallen out. One had bitten into a toffee and stayed there. Assorted fruit-flavoured chews had claimed others. This is what young Alfie looked like when he smiled...





That's because this twelve-year-old boy hadn't gone to the dentist since he was very little.

Alfie's last visit was when he was around six. It was a simple case of toothache, but it ended in disaster. The dentist was an ancient man, Mr Erstwhile. Despite his good intentions, Mr Erstwhile should have retired many years before. The dentist looked like a tortoise, an old tortoise at that. He wore glasses so



thick they made his eyes appear to be the size of tennis balls. Mr Erstwhile told Alfie the tooth in question was rotten, a filling wouldn't save it and unfortunately he had no option but to take it out.

The dentist yanked and yanked and yanked with his huge steel forceps. But the tooth wouldn't come. Mr Erstwhile even rested his foot up on the chair by Alfie's head to lever himself against it to help wrench the wretched



tooth out. Still it wouldn't come.

The ancient dentist then enlisted the help of his even older dental nurse. Miss Prig was instructed to hold on to him and tug as hard as she could. Even then the tooth wouldn't come.

Soon the hefty receptionist, Miss Veal, was asked to step into the room to help. Miss Veal weighed more than Mr Erstwhile and Miss Prig put together. But even with all her ballast, the tooth wouldn't come.





Just then the dentist had an idea, and ordered Miss Prig to fetch some particularly thick dental floss. He carefully tied the floss around the forceps, and then looped it around Miss Veal's ample frame. The dentist then instructed his rotund receptionist to leap out of the window on the count of three. But even with all of Miss Veal's immense weight yanking on the boy's tooth, it still wouldn't come.

With poor young Alfie still lying in terror on the dentist's chair, Mr Erstwhile stepped into his waiting room to request reinforcements. The growing crowd of patients waiting to be seen were all called upon to assist. Young and old, fat and thin, the elderly dentist needed all the help he could get.

Nevertheless, even with a lengthy human chain and an army of yankers\*, the tooth stayed



\*Made-up word **ALERT**



### Demon Dentist

well and truly put. By this time poor little Alfie was in great distress. The pain of having his tooth pulled out was a hundred times worse



### A Simple Case of Toothache

than the toothache. However, Mr Erstwhile was determined to finish what he had started. Sweating profusely, the thirsty dentist took a large swig of mouthwash, and gripped on to the forceps as tightly as he could.

Finally, after what seemed like days, weeks, even months of yanking, Alfie heard a deafening

CCCCCCCCC  
CCCCCCCCCCCCC  
RRRRRRRRRRR  
UUUUUUUUUUU  
UUUUUUUUUUU  
UNNNNNNNNNN  
NNNNNNNNNNN  
CCCCCCCCHHHHHH  
HH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



### Demon Dentist

The dentist had gripped so hard he had crushed the tooth. It exploded into thousands of tiny fragments inside Alfie's mouth.

With the ordeal finally over, Mr Erstwhile and all his helpers were lying in a tangled heap on the surgery floor.



### A Simple Case of Toothache

"Well done, everyone!" he announced, as his assistant Miss Prig helped him to his feet. "Oh, that tooth was a stubborn little blighter!"

Just then Alfie realised something. He still had toothache.

The dentist had taken out the wrong tooth!



## Believe

Alfie ran out of the dental surgery as fast as his little legs would carry him. That fateful afternoon the boy vowed that he would never ever go to the dentist's again. To this day he never had. Appointments had come and appointments had gone. Alfie had missed every single one. Over the years there had been a sackful of reminder letters from the dentist, but Alfie had hidden them all from his dad.

Alfie's was a family of two. Just him and his father. The boy's mother had died giving birth to him. He had never known her. Sometimes he

felt sad, as if he missed his mother, but then he would tell himself, how could he miss someone he had never met?

To hide the appointment letters from the dentist, the boy would silently drag a stool across the kitchen floor. Alfie was short for his age. He was, in fact, the second shortest kid at his school. So he would have to balance on his tiptoes on the stool to reach the top of the larder where he would hide the





letters. There must have been a hundred letters buried up there by now, and Alfie knew his father couldn't reach them. That's because for many years Dad had been unwell, and had of late become confined to a wheelchair.

Before ill health forced him out of work, Dad was a coal miner. A great big bear of a man, he had loved working down the pit and providing for his beloved son. However, all those years he spent down the mine took a terrible toll on his lungs. Dad was a proud man, and didn't let on about his illness for many years. He worked harder and harder to dig more and more coal, even taking on extra shifts to help make ends meet. Meanwhile his breathing became shallower and shallower, until one afternoon he collapsed at the coalface. When Dad finally came round at the hospital the doctors told him he could never go down a mine

again. Just one more lungful of coal dust could finish him off for good. As the years passed Dad's breathing worsened. Getting another job became impossible, and even everyday tasks, something as simple as tying a shoelace, grew to be a struggle. Soon Dad could only get around in a wheelchair.

With no mum or brothers or sisters, Alfie had to care for his father alone. Besides having to go to school and do his homework, the boy would do all the shopping, all the cleaning, cook all the meals, and do all the washing up. Alfie never complained though. He loved his dad with all his heart.

Dad's body may have been broken, but his spirit wasn't. He had a great gift for telling stories. "Listen, pup..." he would begin.

Dad would often call his son that, which Alfie loved. The image it conjured up of a big soppy



dog and a little puppy snuggling up together always made the boy feel safe and warm inside.

"Listen, pup..." Dad would say. "All you have to do is close your eyes, and believe..."

From their little bungalow Dad would take his son on all sorts of thrilling adventures. They would ride on magic carpets, dive under the oceans, even drive stakes through the hearts of vampires.



It was a multicoloured world of make-believe, a million miles away from their black-and-white existence.

"Take me to the haunted house again, Daddy!" the boy would beg.

"Perhaps today, my pup, we will take a journey to the old haunted castle...!" Dad would tease.

"Please, please, please..." Alfie would say. Father and son would close their eyes and meet in their daydreams. Together they:

- Went out fishing for the day in Scotland and caught the Loch Ness Monster.
- Climbed the Himalayan Mountains and came face to face with the Abominable Snowman.
- Slew a huge fire-breathing dragon.
- Hid aboard a pirate ship and were forced to walk the plank as stowaways, only to be saved by beautiful mermaids.



- Rubbed a magic lamp and met a genie who gave them three wishes each, although Dad gave all his wishes to his son.
- Rode on the back of Pegasus, the winged horse from Greek mythology.



- Climbed up a stalk to Giant Land and met an extremely hungry Cyclops whose perfect idea of a between-meals snack was a scrawny little twelve-year-old boy, so Dad had to save him.

- Became the first ever father and son team to successfully land on the moon in a home-made rocket.



- Were chased across the misty moors at night by a ferocious werewolf.

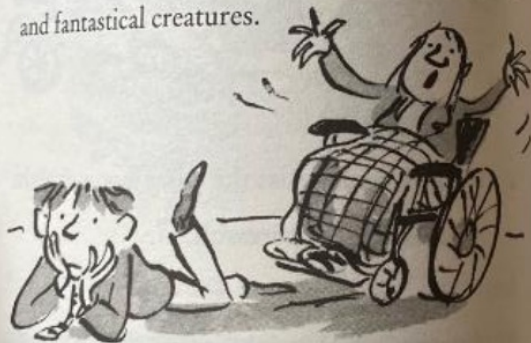
This was the world of the imagination. Anything was possible in Dad's and Alfie's adventures. Nothing could stop them. Nothing.

As Alfie grew older though, he found it



harder and harder to see these things. As his dad spoke, the boy would open his eyes, become distracted, and begin to wish he could play computer games all night like the other kids at his new big school.

"Pup, just close your eyes and believe..." his dad would say. However, Alfie was beginning to think that now he was twelve, nearly thirteen, he was too old to believe in magic and myths and fantastical creatures.



He was about to find out how terribly wrong he was.

## Whiter than White

The whole of the lower school was gathered in the hall. The few hundred children were sitting in rows of chairs awaiting the guest speaker. No one interesting ever visited Alfie's school. On Prize-giving Day the guest of honour had been a man who made the cardboard for cornflake packets. The cornflake-cardboard man's speech was so mind-numbingly boring, even he fell asleep delivering it.

Today there was a talk from the town's new dentist. It was to be a lecture about looking after your teeth. Not wildly exciting, but at