

Cambridge Discovery Readers

Level 3

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Running Wild

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Chapter 1

The phone



It was a grey Sunday afternoon and I was walking home from the shops with my neighbour Alex. Alex had a big stick and he was hitting garden walls with it. The stick made a THWACK sound when it hit the walls.

‘It’s so boring around here,’ Alex said. THWACK! ‘Nothing ever happens.’ THWACK!

‘It’s the holidays soon,’ I said.

‘So what?’ Alex said. ‘Holidays are boring too.’ He threw the stick into the air as hard as he could. When it came down, it hit a car outside someone’s house.

There was a man inside the car.

‘Hey!’ he shouted through the open window.

Alex laughed. The man began to open the car door. ‘Come here!’ he shouted at Alex.

‘Why should I?’ Alex said.

I looked at the man. He was getting out of the car now and he was big as well as angry.

‘Let’s go,’ I said to Alex.

The man began to move towards Alex. We started to run, with Alex laughing all the way. When it was safe to stop, we sat on a wall for a rest. Alex was still laughing.

‘Did you see the size of him?’ he asked. ‘Fat pig.’

A woman came towards us. She had two young children and a baby. Suddenly one of the children fell over. He began to scream loudly.



‘Oh, Jack!’ the woman said. She sounded tired. ‘Wait there,’ she said to the other child. Then she put her bag down on the ground so she could help the little boy up.

‘Come on, Jack,’ she said. ‘You’re all right.’

Alex got down from the wall. He looked at me quickly. I started to get down from the wall. Then Alex began to run over to the woman and her children. I thought he was going to help them or something, but he didn’t. He reached into the woman’s bag and took something out.

The woman turned round and saw him.

‘My phone!’ she shouted. ‘They’ve taken my phone!’

Alex looked at me. ‘Come on!’ he said. ‘Run!’

I could run faster than Alex. Soon I was in front of him. I saw a building ahead; it was the public toilets. I turned away from the street and ran behind the toilet building.

‘Luke?’ Alex called, following me. ‘What have you come down here for?’ His face was red. He looked as hot as I felt.

‘To hide,’ I said.

‘It smells,’ he said.



I didn't answer. I didn't like the smell either. I could think of lots of places I would rather be, like at home waiting for Mum to get back from work. Even school would be better than this, though I'd never tell Alex that. Alex hated school and thought anyone who liked it was mad.

I still couldn't believe what Alex had done.

'Wasn't that great?' he laughed now, his face alive as he remembered.

'Shh!' I said. 'I can hear someone coming.'

Alex gave me a cross look. His face could change so quickly. Light to dark. Sun to rain.

'It won't be *her*, Luke,' he said. 'She couldn't run after us with all those kids to look after.' He stood up. 'Come on. Let's get out of here. It smells awful.' And he began to walk down the side of the toilet building towards the street.

I followed him slowly. I thought we should hide for longer. The woman might tell the police. When I got out to the street, Alex was playing with the woman's phone, trying to make it work. He had forgotten about the smell from the toilets.

'Stupid thing!' Alex said, looking down at the phone.

I put my hands in my pockets and stood by the toilet entrance, waiting for him. I couldn't get the woman's face out of my head. I felt sorry for her. I was worried too. She said '*they've*' taken my phone. I couldn't stop and say 'I didn't take it! It wasn't me!' So I had to run and hide with Alex. What if we saw the woman again? Or if she told the police what we looked like?

'Why won't it work?' Alex was saying angrily now.

If the phone didn't start working soon, he would probably throw it into the road. He used to get angry and throw his toys across the room when we were young children. 'He hasn't changed much,' I thought.



‘Maybe it hasn’t got any credit left,’ I said. Mum’s phone often runs out of credit. Then she has to wait until she gets paid before she can buy some and use her phone again.

Alex didn’t look up. I wasn’t sure if he’d heard me or not. It was raining now and I just wanted to go home. I wished Alex didn’t live next door to me. But it was better to be Alex’s friend. I’d seen what he was like to people who weren’t his friends.

Suddenly it began to rain harder. Alex pushed the phone into his pocket.

‘Come on,’ he said to me angrily, as if the bad weather and the phone not working were all my fault.

And at last we began to walk towards home.

Chapter 2

Escape



Twenty kilometres away Jet was waiting too. Jet was a wild cat – a black panther. The man who kept her had bought her as a baby. But now Jet was an adult – a big adult cat who hated the

dark wooden house the man kept her in. It smelled and very little light got in, except for when the man opened the door to throw her food in.

Sometimes, at night, Jet dreamed of a different type of light, the type of light that comes through forest trees. Dark, light; dark, light; changing all the time, as a panther walks quietly towards the sounds of life and her next meal.

When she was awake, Jet quickly forgot about her dreams. There was an old metal cage inside her wooden house. She walked up and down in this cage for hours. Sometimes she got angry and threw herself at the old metal. Sometimes she was so angry she made a lot of noise. She roared and roared until her throat hurt. There was no one to hear her. The man was out at work all day and the house was in the middle of the countryside. Nobody ever came to help her and afterwards Jet always fell into a hopeless sleep on the dirty floor.

But that evening everything was different. That evening Jet was waiting for more than the old meat the man threw into her house before he went inside his house for the night. That evening Jet was waiting to escape.

At last Jet heard the sound of a door opening and closing. The man was coming. Jet lay quietly, listening as he walked towards her house. The metal cage was old and weak. Earlier that day, when Jet had thrown herself against it, something had broken. And now Jet wasn't in the cage any more. She was out in the wooden house, waiting for the door to open. She was ready to jump.

The man stopped outside the wooden house. Jet didn't move a millimetre. She was listening for the sound of the key in the lock. At last it came. Without making any noise at all, Jet moved even closer to the door. The key turned. The door began to open.



The man still had the meat in his hand when Jet jumped. As her sharp teeth closed on his neck, the meat dropped onto the dirty ground.

It was an almost soundless kill. Jet had never killed a living thing before, but she still knew just what to do. Her teeth held on tight and then she shook the man. Once, twice. By the third time, he was dead.

Jet was hungry, but she didn't stop to eat. She dropped the man on the ground next to the meat and then she ran quickly away, keeping to the dark places away from the late evening sun. She ran past the man's house and up the road towards a wood. Inside the wood, she disappeared into the darkness.

The man had lived alone. He didn't have any friends or family. So it was the postman who found the body a week later, when he drove up to the house with the man's phone bill.

But, by then, Jet had gone.