Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Shouldn't You Be in School?

Written by

Lemony Snicket

Published by

Egmont Books Ltd

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

ALL THE WRONG QUESTIONS 3

"Shouldn't You Be in School?"



LEMONY SNICKET

ART BY SETH

EGMONT

EGMONT
We bring stories to life

Shouldn't You Be in School?
First published in Great Britain 2014
by Egmont UK Limited
The Yellow Building
1 Nicholas Road
London W11 4AN

Text copyright © 2014 Lemony Snicket
Art copyright © 2014 Seth

ALL THE WRONG QUESTIONS: Shouldn't You Be in School?
by Lemony Snicket reprinted by arrangement with Charlotte Sheedy Literary Agency.

Illustrations published by arrangement with Little, Brown, and Company,
New York, New York, USA. All rights reserved.

The moral rights of the author and artist have been asserted

978 1 4052 5623 0

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in Italy.

47913/1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher and copyright owner.

Stay safe online. Egmont is not responsible for content hosted by third parties.

FSC
www.fsc.org
MIX
Paper from responsible sources
FSC® C018306



EGMONT LUCKY COIN

Our story began over a century ago, when seventeen-year-old Egmont Harald Petersen found a coin in the street.

He was on his way to buy a flyswatter, a small hand-operated printing machine that he then set up in his tiny apartment.

The coin brought him such good luck that today Egmont has offices in over 30 countries around the world. And that lucky coin is still kept at the company's head offices in Denmark.

TO: Eratosthenes
FROM: LS
FILE UNDER: Stain'd-by-the-Sea, accounts of; arson, investigations of; Hangfire; pedagogy; Haines family, suspicions concerning; et cetera
3/4
cc: VFDhq


5.5
5
4
3.5
3
21032
2-32



CHAPTER ONE

There was a town, and there was a librarian, and there was a fire. While I was in town I was hired to investigate this fire, and I thought the librarian could help me bring a villain to justice. I was almost thirteen and I was wrong. I was wrong about all of it. I should have asked the question "Why would someone destroy one building when they really wanted to destroy another?" Instead, I asked the wrong questions—four wrong questions, more or less. This is the account of the third.

I was spending a bad morning in a good library. What was bad was the weather, which was unforgivably hot. The sun was having a tantrum so fierce that all the shade had been scared away, and the sidewalks of Stain'd-by-the-Sea, the town in which I had been spending my time, were no place for a decent person to walk. The library, with its calm and cooling silence, was the only comfortable place to spend the early hours of the day.

The weather wasn't the only thing that made the morning bad. There was a man, a vicious villain who went by the name of Hangfire. Every morning that found Hangfire still at large was a bad morning. He was hiding somewhere in town, biding his sinister time and planning his troublesome plans, and hiding and planning with him were his associates in an organization called the Inhumane Society. Recently they had set up shop in the Colophon Clinic, if the phrase "set up shop" can mean "turn an empty hospital

into a place where many children could be kept prisoner for some sinister purpose." Although the Colophon Clinic had been destroyed, I was certain Hangfire was looking for a new location for whatever plot he was cooking up.

For this reason I'd taken to spending my afternoons watching over the town's only remaining school. I guess I was watching to see if any children were being abducted. They weren't, not by Hangfire or anyone else. Most of them were already gone. The ink industry, which had once been the pride of Stain'd-by-the-Sea, had faded away, and most of the town had faded along with it. Stain'd Secondary had a large campus, a phrase which here meant that there was a tall, wide building that curved slightly like a seashell—the auditorium perhaps, or the gymnasium—with a grouping of small buildings in its shadow. Once the campus must have been a loud and busy place when the buzzer signaled the end of the day. Now it was much too large for the

handful of students who walked quietly out into the gray afternoon. Some of them looked familiar from my time in town. Some of them didn't. All of them looked tired and none of them met my eyes. It was lonely work to watch over them, but I didn't learn anything about Hangfire's dark scheme.

I hoped I'd have better luck in the library, and on that bad morning I was reading two things I hoped would help. The first was a book on caviar, and I didn't care who knew it. Caviar is the eggs of a fish, usually a sturgeon, black and shiny and served on small pieces of toast at parties to which you are not invited. As of that morning, at thirteen years of age, I'd never eaten any. I was not interested in eating any. I was reading *Caviar: Salty Jewel of the Tasty Sea* in the hopes of learning something, but as I finished a paragraph about the special tanks they use when the sturgeon are young, I wondered if I was wrong once more.

The other thing I was reading was a secret. It had taken ten days to reach me, through the hard work of a number of people close to my heart but far away on the map. We'd learned together, in what most people would call a history class, that one good way to hide things is in plain sight. People often forget to look at something right in front of them, and as promised I had found something taped to the underside of the table where I always sat. It had been tricky to peel away the tape without anyone noticing, and once it was removed from its hiding place and smoothed out so it would be easier to read, I kept sliding it under the book on caviar whenever I feared I was being watched.

It was silly to hide it. It was just a small newspaper article from the city. Nobody in Stain'd-by-the-Sea cared about it. Nobody but me.

I hid it anyway, when the librarian approached. You cannot have a really terrific library without at least one terrific librarian, the way you cannot

have a really terrific bedroom unless you can lock the door. Stain'd-by-the-Sea's only librarian—or, as he called himself, sub-librarian—was terrific because he was kind and helpful without being irritating or bossy. This sort of person is an endangered species, almost extinct. Spending time in his library was like seeing a rare and strange beast that I might not ever see again, and sure enough, in a few short days this library, the only one in Stain'd-by-the-Sea, would be gone forever.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, Snicket," the librarian said, in his very deep voice. His name was Dashiell Qwerty, a tidy and proper name that didn't match his appearance. As usual, he was wearing a leather jacket decorated with small scraps of metal, a garment so dangerous-looking that Qwerty's hair always seemed to be scurrying away from it. I don't know what a matching name might have been. Wildhairy Oddjacket comes to mind.

"That's quite all right," I said, and heard

the newspaper rustle underneath my book. The article told the story of a young woman who had been arrested in the city for the crime of breaking and entering. Breaking and entering wasn't the right term, I thought. My sister didn't break in, not really. She had simply entered the Museum of Items when the museum was closed. It didn't seem like a good reason to put someone in prison, but according to the article that was likely to happen.

"I was just checking to see if you had found everything you need," Qwerty said, either not noticing or pretending not to notice what I was hiding. "There are some new Italian dictionaries that I thought you might find interesting."

"Maybe another time," I said. "Right now I have just the book I'm looking for. I'm glad to see that the shelves are in order again."

"Yes, it was a bother to reorganize everything," Qwerty said, "but now the sprinkler and alarm system is finally installed. The controls

are right over there in the northeast corner of the room, so I feel much less nervous about the threats that have been made."

"You've mentioned those threats before," I said, "but you've never said anything more about them."

"Yes, I have," Qwerty agreed, with a glance at the article in my lap, "and no, I haven't."

He looked at me and I looked at him. We both wanted to know each other's secrets, and we both wanted the other person to go first. This is something that happens quite a bit, which is why you so often see children and adults staring at one another in nervous silence. We might have stayed there for quite a long time, but a moth flew into Qwerty's line of sight and he swatted at it with a checkered handkerchief. Qwerty was a predator of the moth known as the Farnsworth Pulpeater, as the Farnsworth Pulpeater is a predator of paper. It appeared to be a battle that was

to go on for quite some time without Qwerty or the moths giving up.

"Well, if you're content," Qwerty said, as a moth escaped his attack, "I'll excuse myself and let you be. That young woman looks like she might need my help."

I stood up too quickly. Even when reading two things at once, I had been thinking of something else entirely. The something else was a girl, taller than I was or older than I was or both. She had curious eyebrows, curved and coiled like question marks, and she had a smile that might have meant anything. Her eyes were green and her hair so black it made caviar look beige, and in her possession was a statue that was blacker still. The statue was of a mythical creature called the Bombinating Beast, and it gazed out through hollow, wicked eyes at all the trouble gathered around it. The girl's father was in trouble, captured by Hangfire, and she had tried to save him

by doing favors for the Inhumane Society, so now she was in trouble too. I had promised to help her, but I hadn't seen the girl or the statue in quite some time. The girl, and the promise I'd made, hovered in my head no matter what I was reading, and her name hovered in my ears like the song she played on an old-fashioned phonograph, and on a music box that her father had left behind. I didn't know what the song was, but I liked it.

Ellington Feint. Ellington Feint. Ellington Feint.

It's probably not her, I told myself, as I hurried to the entrance of the library, and it wasn't. It was Moxie Mallahan, a fine journalist and a good friend, with a hat that looked like a lowercase *a* and a typewriter in its own folding case that could type *a* and all the other letters. She put the case down with a small frown of pain. Her arm was still bandaged from a recent encounter with someone good with a knife.

"What's the news, Moxie?" I said.

"It's good to see you, Snicket," she replied. "You're not too busy doing whatever it is you're doing?"

"I always have time for an associate," I said. I led her back to my table, carrying her typewriter case. Her injury was partially my fault, as you can read in an account of mine. You don't have to read about it. I'm sure you have your own troubles.

"I've been looking through the archives of *The Stain'd Lighthouse*, like you asked me to," Moxie said, sitting down across from me. "It was boring work, Snicket."

"I'm sure it was," I said. *The Stain'd Lighthouse* was a newspaper that had once been at the breakfast table of every resident of Stain'd-by-the-Sea, thanks to the hard work of Moxie's family. But now the newspaper had folded, a term Moxie had explained to me. It did not mean folded the way you can fold a newspaper into a hat or a boat or

a man with a sword riding on a swan. It meant that it had surrendered to the ink shortages that had scared so many of the town's citizens away. Moxie was the only journalist left in Stain'd-by-the-Sea, and the only thing left of the newspaper was vast piles of past editions, strewn around the rooms of the Mallahan lighthouse. "I'm sorry I had to ask you to do that," I said, "but I couldn't find anything in the library about Stain'd-by-the-Sea's fishing industry."

"I looked at the business section of the newspaper," Moxie said, "all the way back to before I was born. My mother used to say that the business section had all of the really exciting secrets hidden there in plain sight, but I'm not sure I found any. I wish she were still in town, so she would have been able to help me."

"I'm sure you'll hear from her soon," I said quickly, although I wasn't sure at all.

Moxie nodded, but she wasn't looking at me. She opened her typewriter case and looked at

the page of notes she'd been typing. "The business section might have exciting secrets, but it's very boring to read."

"That's probably why they hide the secrets there."

"Maybe so. It was difficult to stay awake while I was reading it."

"Maybe you should have had some coffee."

"Not I, Snicket. I don't drink coffee. You're thinking of that girl who caused all the trouble with that statue."

"I guess I am thinking of her," I admitted. Ellington liked to sit at the counter of an establishment called Black Cat Coffee, on the corner of Caravan and Parfait. She often had her coffee very late at night and stayed there to watch the sun rise.

"Well, I wish you'd stop," Moxie said sourly. "Anyway, I found something that I thought you might think was helpful. It's from an article published when the town was arguing about

draining the sea: 'Porter Roeman, who runs the Roe House, told reporters that he opposed the draining, as it would adversely affect local marine life.' What's 'adversely' mean?"

"Badly," I said, and we gave each other one grim nod each. Some years ago, the town had decided to drain the sea so the last few octopi could be found and harvested for ink. The idea was to save Ink Inc., which was Stain'd-by-the-Sea's largest and most important company. It was the wrong idea. The draining of the sea had drained the town along with it. The town's stores and restaurants had folded as quickly as *The Stain'd Lighthouse*. A fancy, top-drawer school on an island was now nothing but empty buildings on a pile of craggy rocks, connected by a bridge that was no longer necessary. Where once had been countless fish and swirling waves, there was now the Clusterous Forest, a vast, lawless landscape of shivering seaweed. And Ink Inc. had been affected as adversely as the rest of

town, and had recently shut its doors for good. A young woman of my acquaintance, a brilliant chemist named Cleo Knight, was in a small cottage working on a solution to the ink problem, but I didn't know if she'd finish her work before the town disappeared completely. Nobody knew.

Moxie continued to read from her notes. "A successful fish business requires loyal workers and a steady supply of food. Mr. Roeman said that without a local source of plankton, Roe House would likely go out of business. And it did, Snicket. Stain'd-by-the-Sea's fishing industry is gone, just like everything else." She reached into her typewriter case and took out a photograph. "I developed this photograph myself, in the basement darkroom. It's Roe House on its last day of business. Feast your eyes, Snicket."

My eyes tried to feast but they nearly starved. The photograph showed a large, empty room, with small rectangular marks on the scuffed floor. In the far corner of the room was

a small door, the only thing to look at. I looked at it. It could have led anywhere. A back room, I thought. An exit someplace. "It's a big room," I said finally.

Moxie looked at me. "Big enough to be Hangfire's new headquarters?"

"It doesn't look big enough to hold a large group of kidnapped children," I said, "but perhaps Hangfire has given up on that part of his plan."

"But what's the rest of his plan, Snicket?"

"I don't know," I admitted. "The Inhumane Society had all that aquatic equipment at the Colophon Clinic, so I thought the fishing industry might be involved somehow. But it doesn't seem like your search through the archives has turned up much."

"That's what I thought," Moxie said, and scratched at the bandage on her arm. She had told me to stop asking her if it still hurt. "But then I thought maybe we should go see for ourselves."

"Good idea."

"Come on, then. The address is 350 Wayward Way."

"350 Wayward Way? I don't know where that is."

"Good thing you have an associate who grew up in this town," Moxie said with a smile. "Come on, Snicket. Stop lollygagging."

It is true that I was moving slowly, trying to figure out how to stand up and keep the newspaper article hidden at the same time. "I'll be with you in a moment," I said, using a phrase that rarely works.

Moxie cocked her head at me. "What *is* roe, anyway, Snicket?"

"Fish eggs," I said. "Caviar."

Moxie looked down at my reading. "So all this has to do with that book?"

"I'm not sure."

"Because I thought it might have to do with that newspaper article you're hiding under it."

"What newspaper article?"

"I'm a journalist, Snicket. You'll have to do better than that. Take out that newspaper article nice and slow, and don't use any cheap tricks to try and distract me."

"*Fire! Fire!*" The sudden cry almost made me drop the newspaper. I looked quickly around the library, as I'd been trained to do in such emergencies. Sprinkler system, I thought. Northeast corner. But without a compass, the phrase "northeast corner" might as well have been "I haven't the faintest idea."

"*Help has arrived*," I called. "*Where is the fire?*"

"There isn't one, Snicket," said the voice, familiar now. "I was just looking for you."

Moxie and I sighed, like we were both balloons pricked by the same needle, and down the aisle came the person who had deflated us. Part of my education required each apprentice to have a chaperone, and S. Theodora Markson was mine. The function of a chaperone is to serve as

an example of the adult you might become, and Theodora served as a bad example. Her hair, for instance, was always a frightful mess, particularly when it was struggling against the leather helmet she seemed to enjoy wearing. She refused to tell me what the *S* stood for in her name, no matter how many times I asked her. But neither her hair nor her first name was the main problem with Theodora. I don't need to tell you what the problem is. You have met impossible people, and you know when you are stuck with them. They are of no more use than a heap of old boxes left in the middle of the sidewalk, but you end up tripping on them anyway.

"You're not supposed to scream fire in a library," I said, "unless you mean it."

"I wouldn't have had to scream," Theodora said, "if you'd left me a note saying where you were, as I specifically instructed."

"I did leave a note. It said I'd be at the library."

"Well, I didn't have time to read it all. We're in a hurry, Snicket. We have to stop screaming fire and investigate a case of arson."

"Arson?" Moxie said, rolling a new page into her typewriter. A suspicious fire was just the sort of thing that Moxie liked to write about.

My chaperone looked down at her and frowned. "Who are you?"

Moxie reached into the brim of her hat, which was where she kept printed cards stating her name and occupation. "We've met on a number of occasions," Moxie said, handing her one. "It's lovely to see you, Ms. Markson. Your apprentice was just returning a scrap of newspaper I lent him."

I frowned at Moxie while Theodora frowned at the card. "I believe this is *my* scrap of newspaper," I said, trying to sound dignified. "You must have left your scrap someplace else."

"Be sensible, Snicket," Theodora said. "We don't have time to fight over scraps. Give it to your playmate and let's go."

Moxie gave me a sly smile and held out her hand. I didn't want to give her the newspaper article, and I certainly didn't want to think of her as my playmate. But under Theodora's supervision I could not think what else to do. I surrendered the article, and in no time at all my sister's dilemma was folded up into a neat square and tucked into Moxie's hat.

"Maybe later," Moxie said to me, "you and I can take that trip we were discussing."

I thought of 350 Wayward Way, and the large, empty room in the photograph with the door in the corner and the rectangles on the floor. Secrets, I thought. Hidden in plain sight. "Maybe later," I agreed.

Theodora frowned. "Whatever playdate you two had planned," she said, "it will have to wait. Come along, Snicket. We've got to go to 350 Wayward Way."