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

The Bad Tuesdays: Strange Energy

Written by

Benjamin J Meyers

Published by

Orion Children's Books

All text is copyright of the author

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

First published in Great Britain in 2009
by Orion Children's Books
a division of the Orion Publishing Group Ltd
Orion House
5 Upper St Martin's Lane
London WC2H 9EA
An Hachette UK company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Benjamin J. Myers 2009

The right of Benjamin J. Myers to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted.

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 Orion Children's Books.

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

ISBN 978 1 84255 640 5

Typeset by Input Data Services Ltd
Bridgwater, Somerset

This book proof is printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham, Wiltshire

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

www.orionbooks.co.uk

CHAPTER 1



The razor wire gleamed along the top of the fence. Splinter's eyes narrowed in the darkness as the cold air whipped his face. They would have only seconds to leap from the freight train to the flat roof on the other side of the jagged mesh.

'When I say "Go",' he shouted, 'we jump.'

He crouched on the top of the container, his tatty trousers and long-tailed morning coat blacker than the night, white hair spiky and hanging down to his shoulders.

Chess Tuesday crouched beside him, tugging coils of her thick, chestnut hair away from her face. Next to her squatted Box, knuckles resting against the rusty top of the container, a crowbar in his hands.

'You're sure the codes will work?' he yelled.

'No,' replied Splinter, steadying himself as the train picked up speed and the container rocked slightly.

'What's the point of breaking in if the codes don't work?' shouted Box.

They were nearly at the wire. Splinter switched his ice blue eyes from the razors to Box. 'It's called an "opportunity", fly head.'

Box shook his head. 'An opportunity to end up in the . . .'

'Go,' screamed Splinter and he sprang from the train.

Chess drove her thighs up and dived. She did so without thinking, acting only on her brother's command. She arched her belly and swung her heels backwards so that she tumbled through the air, feeling the razors graze her baggy, purple pullover. She landed on the roof with a roll, finishing neatly on her bare feet. She brushed dry grit from her grime-encrusted, torn jeans and picked a tiny stone out of the palm of her hand

Chess thought nothing of what might have happened if she had floundered onto the sharp, steel blades. She was a street rat. Climbing, jumping, hiding and stealing were all she had ever done. That was how things were: Splinter was always telling her that, telling her to forget about everything else; forget about Ethel, forget about the Committee, forget about the Twisted Symmetry. She was a street rat, she was his little sister, she was eleven and her brothers were fourteen and he, Splinter, was in charge. That was all that mattered.

Box collided with her back and she crashed forwards into Splinter, knocking his legs away so that they fell on top of each other. She tried to avoid landing on him by turning on her side and hitting the roof shoulder first. A bolt of pain jarred her arm.

The crowbar clattered on the roof but the ringing metal was lost beneath the clanking of the freight train.

'Fly head, you moron,' hissed Splinter.

But Chess's large brown eyes turned on Splinter. They didn't have to be here, like this. They didn't have to be

thieving and robbing, taking greater and greater risks as Splinter proved how clever he was, how much better off they were with him in charge. They could have stayed with Ethel. They could have had normal food and somewhere safe to sleep and clothes that weren't filthy and shredded. And they could have helped Ethel, if that was what she wanted. Chess didn't mind helping Ethel. She wanted to be on the same side as the Committee because it was the right side to be on and because she knew that the Twisted Symmetry wouldn't stop hunting her just because Splinter had made them run away.

'What?' snapped Splinter. 'What's up with you?'

'Nothing,' muttered Chess. There was no point arguing with Splinter. He was cleverer than she was; he always told her that and anyway, he had won the argument a month ago when he had left Committee HQ, a week after their return with the slice of the Symmetry's computer brain, and she and Box had followed him.

'Good,' said Splinter.

He wouldn't let them stay at the wharf either. He had said that it was the obvious place for the Committee to come looking. So they'd moved to a derelict block of flats, leaving behind Hex and Pacer, the only remaining members of their gang, and Gemma, Chess's only friend. Splinter hadn't even allowed her that.

He patted his coat and felt inside the pockets. Splinter's inside pockets were full of useful items: string, marbles, a torch, lock picks, tape, matches and his switchblade. He pulled out a piece of notepaper and unfolded it.

'Stupid fat jack, not seeing what I was doing,' muttered

Splinter, sitting cross-legged and studying the writing on the paper.

Chess sniffed to show that she didn't agree with Splinter. He always talked about city people like that, even though they weren't all as bad as he said. But she knelt beside him anyway and looked at the numbers by the glow of the nearby security lights.

'It was a good lift,' said Box in admiration. Splinter had told them how the man had sat at a bench to eat a sandwich only metres from where Splinter was loitering by one of the city's metro stations. It was evening. Probably, the man was on his way home from work. He was leaning forwards, bald head sweating as he devoured the sandwich with hungry grunts. His jacket had ridden up revealing a loose shirt tail, a bulging roll of flesh and, protruding from his back trouser pocket, a fat wallet. Splinter's clever fingers danced and the wallet was his. The man failed even to register the thin, pale boy who drifted into the busyness of the city.

'UNIT 3 VIGO INDUSTRIAL' was written in biro across the top of the paper and below that were three strings of numbers. At the end of the first string was written 'RECEPTION', at the end of the second was written 'ATRIUM'. 'VAULT' was written after the third. When he had pulled the paper from the wallet, Splinter realized immediately that these were security codes for a warehouse. He took the bank notes and the piece of notepaper and threw the wallet and the rest of its contents down a drain. Then he ran to the gutted tower block where his twin brother and his sister were waiting for him.

That was only two hours ago and they had moved fast to

take advantage of what had come into his hands before the loss of the codes was realized. Splinter didn't know what would be in the vault but it was bound to be valuable. The street knowledge was that contraband gems passed through VIGO; too valuable for normal storage but too tricky for the banks. That was why they were smuggled through secure warehouses.

This could be big.

Each of them had taken a rough sack, tied it across their back, and then they had run to where the freight trains passed beneath an old stone bridge on their way out of the city. Splinter knew where the warehouses were and he knew that they were surrounded by high fences. Cutting their way out after stealing would be all right, even if that set the alarms off. Cutting their way in was too risky. That was why he had decided they should jump the fence as the train took them past it.

Now, here they were. No alarm raised, dark as shadows on the rooftop and armed with the codes to disable the security and open the vault. His plan was working. He tucked the paper into a pocket and smiled out of the darkness. Then he tapped the roof.

'Open her up, Box,' he said.

'My pleasure,' said Box and he stepped on the curved tip of the crowbar so that it sprang up to his hand. He spun it in the air and caught it cleanly.

Splinter winced. 'You're such a nobwit, fly head.'

Box dug his fingers into his thick, frizzy black hair and scratched, straightened one of the braces that held up his ragged woollen trousers and loped over to a wide air vent.

Shoving the end of the bar under the lid of the vent, he pushed down and prized it open. It slid from its housing and Splinter's hand was there to catch it before it hit the roof. He put a finger to his lips and frowned at Box. Box knelt and tugged the exposed pipe of the vent.

Chess stayed low and scanned the other warehouses inside the compound; the long, low roofs mottled by the security lights that succeeded in bathing some areas in pools of yellow but leaving the rest in impenetrable darkness. There was no movement and no sound save for the dwindling clank of the train. There would be security guards but Chess knew they posed no risk. Security guards never did. They only found you if you let them know you were there. And nobody knew that they were there.

The Tuesdays hugged the darkness and worked fast but silently.

The pipe was loosened. Box rotated it and pulled. Splinter helped him lift it free of its mount. Now there was an opening into the space beneath the roof. Box was in first, then Splinter and then Chess, making no more noise than a rustle of leaves.

They were sitting in the roof joists. Splinter listened until he was sure nothing was moving below. Then he felt for his pencil torch and clicked it on.

'Over there,' he whispered after the feeble beam had picked out the emptiness beneath them. He directed it at a keypad set in the wall. Next to it was a door with a small iron wheel in its centre. 'That's the door to the vault. Just on the other side of this room.'

'Do we jump down?' asked Box. 'It's not far.'

'It's far enough to break an ankle,' warned Splinter. 'And look.' He pointed the torch at the floor below and then switched it off. The darkness welled in Chess's eyes and then she saw the pin-point red of a floor sensor.

'Could be loads of them down there,' said Splinter. 'Tread on one and we've had it; alarms, security guards, the crashers, more gaol.' He flicked the torch back on and it wobbled at the place where the joist met the wall. 'Water pipes, see? Shin down there and follow the edge of the room round to the vault door.'

It was as he switched the torch off that he felt Box slip from the joist. Aware of a shape toppling to his left, Splinter clawed out and gripped his brother's braces, throwing himself rightwards. His hands closed on elastic and his own body jolted to a stop and swung in the dark. Box hung with his braces looping the joist whilst Splinter was suspended on the other side, the end of the braces that had torn free gripped in his left hand. Box's face was inches from his own. He knew it was there because he could feel the hot breath of his brother's laughter on his skin.

'I've dropped the torch.' Splinter spoke through bared teeth. 'What the hell do you think you're doing?'

'Just hanging around,' gasped Box.

'You idiot.'

'You're the one who switched the torch off as I was putting my hand down and I missed the metal,' bridled Box.

Splinter gulped air. His arm was burning. 'You better lose weight fast, fly head. Not even you could miss the floor.'

'We're not far from the wall. Can't you swing along this bar?' suggested Chess. From the grunts below, she guessed

that her brothers were doing as she said. She heard the scrape of the braces as they were dragged along the joist and then a thump and yelp followed by a sharp crack as her brothers swung into the wall at the same time that the braces snapped.

There was a groan and then Splinter swearing and then Box complaining loudly: 'My trousers won't stay up.'

Chess felt for the pipe with her toes, slipped across to it and slid to the floor. 'Come on,' she said. 'Stop messing about.' She felt long, hard fingers dig into the nape of her neck, pulling her back.

'After me,' Splinter whispered in her ear, and he pushed past her.

When they had felt their way round the walls to the vault entrance, Chess heard the scrape of a match. Splinter's face flared orange and he handed the match to Box.

'Hold this.' He scanned the sheet of notepaper and then lifted his hand to the keypad.

'I can't,' squealed Box and darkness flooded in as the match went out. Chess heard him sucking his burnt fingers.

'Idiot,' hissed Splinter. There was a rattle as he pushed the matchbox at his brother's chest. 'Take them and make sure it stays light. If I press the wrong number we're in trouble.'

A rasping strike and there was light again. Splinter thrust his narrow face up to the pad and pushed the buttons, checking what he was doing against what was written on the paper.

Chess listened to the space around them but heard only the slow hiss and crackle of the flame and the rise and fall of their breathing. There was a tang of smoke.

The match flickered out as Splinter pushed the final key.

He crumpled the paper and shoved it in a pocket and groped for the matchbox which he snatched out of Box's hand. The he grasped the metal wheel that was set in the vault door.

'Now,' he whispered, 'you will see why I am the King of Cunning.' He turned the wheel and pushed. Smoothly, the vault door swung inwards. One after the other, the Tuesdays entered.

The floor was made of steel and it was cold. From the way their bare feet slapped loudly against it, Chess could tell that this was a large chamber, at least the size of the one they had just come from. But it wasn't the size of the vault that mattered. It was what it contained. Or what it didn't.

'Empty!' gasped Box, as Splinter struck another match and lifted it above his head.

The door slammed shut behind them. The flame guttered out.

'Not empty,' growled a voice from the dark.

Chess spun round and grimaced as a bright beam of torch light burst from near to the door. Then the torch was turned off, although her eyes were still flooded with colours, and the vault was illuminated by humming ceiling lights.

As her eyes recovered, she saw a man with one eye and a bristling ginger moustache who sat in a wheelchair next to the door. A large flashlight rested on his lap.

'Professor Breslaw!' she exclaimed. 'What are you doing here?'

Professor Breslaw chuckled with a throat full of phlegm. The web of cables that connected his body to the wheelchair quivered as his body shook. 'Waiting for you, of course. A nice surprise, no?' He nodded towards a large, wooden crate

that sat near to him with its mouth open. 'I came by special delivery.'

Splinter realized what had happened, immediately. 'You set us up.' He advanced on the professor, arms rigid by his sides, fists clenched, face white with fury. 'You made me steal the wallet, you put the codes in it, you knew we'd come here.'

Joachim Breslaw stopped laughing and his eye riveted Splinter. 'We made you steal nothing, my boy. You did the stealing. The fact that you are as predictable as you are dishonest is your fault alone.' He rubbed his moustache. 'You know, Splinter, I confess, I thought you were too smart to fall for this. But Mevrad said you would fall for it.' He wagged his finger. 'She said that getting you to come here would be as easy as knowing you.'

Splinter started towards Joachim but Box rested a hand on his brother's forearm, gently but firmly.

'Careful, Professor,' warned Box. 'This is the King of Cunning you're talking to.' He stifled a grin and hitched up his trousers with his free hand.

Splinter glared at his brother, surprised that Box wasn't more disappointed to see the Professor. Box shrugged, released Splinter's arm and began to wind his braces round his waist like a belt.

'You must come with me now,' said Joachim Breslaw. 'The Committee needs you.'

'Forget it,' snarled Splinter. 'We left because we wanted to get away from you and Ethel, or Mevrad, or whatever you call her, and your stupid Committee.' He leant towards the Professor, spittle spraying.

The Professor leant towards Splinter until his bald, pink head was almost touching Splinter's nose. 'You left because we let you leave,' he rumbled. 'It was better that way and, strange to tell, it was safer for you. And now the time has come for you to help us again, we pull you in like so many little, wriggling fishes.' He jabbed a sausage of a finger at Splinter's midriff. 'Tell me, King of Cunning, who is the stupid one?'

Splinter hid his fury behind a mask of a smile and asked, 'Why are we going to come with you?'

Joachim Breslaw nodded. 'A fair question,' and he directed his finger at a console on the wall beside him. 'Here are the light switches, and next to them there is a red button, see? If I press it, the alarm will sound and the police will come and you will go to prison for a very long time. Unless they hand you over to the hunters.' He brushed his thick moustache with the tip of his tongue. 'I think, probably, they will hand you over to the hunters.'

'You don't want the hunters to take Chess,' Splinter fired back, triumphant.

Joachim Breslaw thumped the red button with the back of his fist. The alarm started to scream. 'Let us make our choices,' he said.