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

This Book is Not Good for You

written by

Pseudonymous Bosch

published by

Usborne Publishing Ltd

All Text is Copyright © of the Author / Illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

M m m m m . . .

. . . good snap . . . melts

a hint of blackberry . . .

mmm . . . yes . . . strong

i s i t c a r d a m o m ?

velvety mouth-feel . . .

f i n i s h . . . m m m . . .

A A A A A A A A

A A A A A A A A

m m m m m . . .

smoothly on the tongue . . .

yet earthy underneath . . .

note of . . . cinnamon and—

or maybe licorice? . . .

not too sweet . . . lovely

must have another . . .

AAAAAAAA

AAAAK . . . !

4 Oh. It's you.

Thank Goodness.

For a second, I thought it was — well, never mind what I thought.

The question is: what am I going to do with you?

You see, I'm — nbot quhgbite rlaaeady —

Sorry, my mouth was full. What I was trying to say was: I'm not quite ready for you. I'm very busy. Didn't you see the **DO NOT DISTURB** sign?

What am I doing? Something important. That's what.

Well, if you must know, I'm eating chocolate. But it's not like it sounds! Trust me. It's work. Research.

This book is all about chocolate. And — ykuh wounbrldbnt wrannt — sorry, I couldn't resist another bite — you wouldn't want me to write about something I didn't know about, would you?

What's that? You wouldn't expect anything else from me?

Great. Thanks for the vote of confidence.

Let me tell you something: I'm not the same scared writer I used to be, and I'm not going to take any guff from you. I have other readers now. Grateful readers. Readers who know how to treat an author.

Take this extra-large box of extra-dark, extra-expensive, extra-delicious chocolates that I'm eating right now. Not to toot my own horn but a fan sent it to me as a present.

For P.B. - the best writer in the world, said the note.

What? It must be a trick? Nobody would say that about me and mean it?

OK, out — now! There's no way I'm going to write this book with you sitting there insulting me.

I'll tell you what: on my desk, there's a chapter I just finished. It's supposed to come much later in the book, but you might as well read it now while I continue . . . researching.

It will be like a prologue, an *amuse-bouche*, if you will — something to tickle your palate before the real meal arrives.*

Speaking of meals, which chocolate shall I have next? The caramel nougat or the raspberry *ganache* . . . ?

Eeny meeny miny moe . . .

*At a fancy restaurant, a chef will often send an *amuse-bouche* to your table before he or she serves the main meal. Translated from French, it means *amuse the mouth*. I don't know about you, but my mouth has a great sense of humor.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN





bird poked his head through the iron bars and nudged the arm of the girl on the other side. The bird was bright green with a red chest, yellow crest, and big, begging eyes.

"Patience, my friend!" said the girl. "My gosh, you are a greedy bird!"

(In reality, she was speaking French and what she said was: *"Patience, mon ami! Zut alors, tu es un oiseau avide!"* But the French version is a little less polite.)

Laughing, the girl opened her hand and revealed a small broken piece of chocolate — the same color as her delicate skin.

The bird swallowed it whole, then looked at her beseechingly.

"Sorry, that's all I could get today."

The bird squawked — whether in thanks or in protest, it was hard to tell — and then flew away, his long tail waving in the wind.

"*You* should be bringing *me* food. I'm the one in the birdcage!" the girl called after him as he disappeared into the dense jungle.

Glum, she sat down on the pile of old newspapers that served as her bed — and as the only source of entertainment in her cement cell. The bird was a

pest but his visits were the highlight of her day. There was nothing to look forward to now.

"Look alive, Simone!"

One of the guards, the large humorless woman named Daisy, stepped up to her cage. "They want you again."

Already? Simone wondered. It had only been an hour since the last time.

They were waiting for her in the Tasting Room.

The three of them, as always, sitting in those tall silver chairs behind that long marble table. In their bright white lab coats. And bright white gloves.

They'd never introduced themselves, but she had names for them: The tan man with the silver hair, she called him the Doctor. The beautiful blond woman with the frozen smile, she was the Barbie Doll. And the blind man behind the dark sunglasses, he was the Pirate.

They were like a tribunal. Like judges.

Only, weirdly, it was *her* judgment they were waiting for.

She sat down opposite them on the low stone bench. The one that made her feel about two feet tall.

Always the same routine. First, they made her drink a glass of water. Twice distilled water without any trace minerals, they'd explained. Absolutely tasteless. To cleanse her palate.

Then the Pirate placed in front of her a small square of chocolate on a plain white plate.

A *Palet d'Or,* he called it. A pillow of gold.*

And then they waited in silence for her response.

They said she was a *supertaster.* Somebody with double the usual number of taste buds in her tongue. But she knew it was more than that.**

For as long as she remembered she'd been able to detect subtle differences in flavors.

Was the honey made from orange blossoms or clover? Clover. *Blackberry or boysenberry?* Gooseberry. *Was that lemon thyme or lemon verbena?* Neither, it was lemongrass.

She was like one of those virtuosos who can play an entire symphony by ear the first time they sit at a piano. She had the taste equivalent of perfect pitch.

Now, in this cold room so far from home, she looked down at the *Palet d'Or.* It was dark to the point of blackness, and it had a silky sheen.

Carefully, she nibbled off a corner. And closed her eyes.

*PALET D'OR IS MORE PROPERLY TRANSLATED AS "PALETTE" OR "DISK OF GOLD." BUT I THINK "PILLOW OF GOLD" IS MUCH MORE ROMANTIC.

**TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT *YOU* ARE A SUPERTASTER, TRY THE TEST IN THE APPENDIX OF THIS BOOK.

For weeks they'd been making her try darker and darker pieces. Some so chocolaty and dense they were like dirt. Some so intensely flavorful they were like a jolt.

But this was something else altogether. It was like ultra chocolate. The quintessence of chocolate.

It was the best thing she'd ever tasted.

And the worst.

Tears streamed down her face as she experienced a lifetime of emotions all at once.

The taste of the chocolate – the *tastes*, that is, because the chocolate tasted of so many things – took her back to her childhood. To her family's old cacao farm in the rainforest.

In flashes, she remembered the gnarled roots of the cacao trees and the damp, fragrant earth. . . .

She remembered the flowers . . . those little pink flowers that bloomed year-round . . . not on branches . . . but right on the trunks of the cacao trees . . . as if each tree had come down with a case of flowery measles . . .

And she remembered the pods . . . red and yellow . . . like fiery sunsets . . . they looked as if they might contain alien spores or perhaps hives of evil fairies . . . but inside was the sweet sticky

pulp that she loved to squish and squeeze between her hands . . .

And the seeds . . . she couldn't believe people made something as wonderful as chocolate from those sour little seeds . . . but soon she could identify any variety at a glance . . . the fragile Criollos . . . the purple Forasteros . . .*

How happy she'd felt on the farm . . . ! How safe . . . !

And then came that terrible day . . . the arrival of the three glamorous strangers . . . asking how she knew so much about chocolate . . . praising her tasting powers . . . promising a better future . . .

And then the crying as she was taken from her parents . . .

The gradual realization that she was a prisoner . . .

That her life was not her own . . .

"It's working!" exulted the Barbie Doll. "Look at her face!"

"She does seem to be . . . reacting," said the Doctor more cautiously. "Simone, can you tell us what you are tasting? What you are seeing?"

*YOU SAY COCAO, I SAY CACAO . . . SINCE SIMONE GREW UP ON A CHOCOLATE PLANTATION, SHE UNDERSTANDS THAT CHOCOLATE IS MADE FROM SEEDS — *CACAO SEEDS*. HOWEVER, I THINK YOU'LL FIND THAT MOST PEOPLE REFER TO CACAO SEEDS AS *COCOA BEANS*. COCOA ESSENTIALLY BEING A MISSPELLING OF CACAO. FOR A FULLER LIST OF CHOCOLATE TERMINOLOGY, SEE THE CHOCOLOSSARY IN THE APPENDIX.

"Yes, tell us!" urged the Pirate, clenching his gloved fist. "Have I found my recipe at last? Is this my chocolate?"

Simone opened her mouth to respond but —

Suddenly, she couldn't see. She couldn't hear. She couldn't even feel her arm.

All her senses were gone.

She tried to scream but she made no sound.

What was happening to her?

What awful thing had she just eaten?


CHAPTER
ONE

a-chew!"

Max-Ernest sneezed so violently his spiky hair quivered for a full five seconds after he was done.

"Hey, did you notice – did I blink?"

He looked down at his friend Cassandra, who was crouched next to him, her pointy ears sticking out above her long braids.

"I read that every time you sneeze, you blink. So I always try to see if I can keep my eyes open."

"Sorry, wasn't looking . . . ," Cass muttered.

She had long ago learned to ignore half of what Max-Ernest said. A necessary survival skill if you were going to be best friends with the most talkative boy in town.

"Now what do soup mix and pest control have to do with each other . . . ?"

She was trying to read words scrawled on a cardboard box, but most had been crossed out:

~~PLUMBING EQUIPMENT~~

~~TEDDY BEARS AND TOY MICE~~

~~Catchers mitt and opera glasses~~

~~PARKING TICKETS~~

Canned tuna/ soup mix/ pest control

"Uh-oh, I think I have to – ka-chew!" Max-Ernest sneezed again. "It's the dust mites, I'm allergic –"

Cass pushed the box aside – it wasn't the one she was looking for – and stood up. Suddenly, she was a good half foot taller than her companion.

"Oh right, how could I forget a single one of your hundred allergies?"

"What do you mean? There's only sixty-three – that I know of," Max-Ernest corrected, not picking up on her sarcasm. "Let's see, there's wheat, walnuts, peanuts, pecans, strawberries, shellfish . . . oh, and chocolate, of course!"

"C'mon," said Cass, moving on to a box behind the one she'd just been looking at. "Are you going to help me find this thing or what?"

It was summertime and Cass was working afternoons at her grandfathers' antiques store:

THE FIRE SALE

EVERYTHING YOU ~~EVER~~ *NEVER* WANTED!

as it was identified on the front door.

As readers of certain unmentionable books will recall, the store was housed on the bottom floor of an old redbrick fire station. Cass's grandfathers, Larry and Wayne, lived upstairs, and every day they crammed their store with more and more stuff. Last year, Cass remembered, the store had already seemed like a maze, but at least there'd been enough space to walk between the shelves. Now you had to climb over piles of junk just to get from one part of the room to another.

Cass had told her mother that she was working at the Fire Sale to save money for a new bicycle, but that wasn't exactly true. It wasn't her *only* reason for working anyway.

In fact, she had an ulterior motive.

She was looking for a box. A special box she knew to be somewhere in her grandfathers' store. And considering there were at least a thousand boxes in the store, not to mention all the things that were *un*-boxed, she figured she would need all summer to find the one she was looking for.

Today, her grandfathers had taken their dog, Sebastian, to the vet, and Cass was taking advantage of the time to redouble her search. Max-Ernest had graciously agreed to assist.

Or more precisely, had reluctantly agreed to keep her company.

He was used to his survivalist friend's quixotic quests, whether she was searching for toxic waste under the school yard or killer mold under the cafeteria sink.* But this particular search, he felt, was particularly hopeless.

"What makes you think the box is still here?" he asked, not moving from his perch on top of a pile of old encyclopedias.

"You know my grandfathers — they never throw anything away." She closed up the next box and moved on to another.

Max-Ernest looked around the store and shook his head. "I think they have an obsessive-compulsive disorder. It's clinical."

Cass bristled. She loved her grandfathers and couldn't stand anyone criticizing them — except possibly herself. "Does everybody have to have a condition? Can't they just like stuff?"

*_Quixotic_ means something like: idealistic or romantic to the point of being completely impractical. It refers to the main character in Cervantes's novel, _Don Quixote_. A character who was always taking off on impossible quests. What an honor to be so famous that your name becomes a word! Come to think of it, my name, _Pseudonymous_, appears in most dictionaries . . .

"So why can't you just ask them where it is?"

"Are you crazy? They'd tell my mom for sure."

"But we don't even know what it looks like. This whole thing doesn't make any sense —"

"I know it says, 'Handle With Care.' And there's a hole cut in the cardboard."

"Like if you were carrying a cat?"

"Max-Ernest!"

"OK, OK."

Max-Ernest wasn't very good at feelings, whether his own or anybody else's. But he noticed that Cass's ears – always a reliable emotional thermometer – were turning bright red.

The box was obviously a sensitive subject.

Indeed, it had been less than six months since Cass had discovered her mother's secret:

That her mother had not given birth to her.

That she was adopted.

That she was a "foundling," as her grandfathers put it.

That Cassandra wasn't even her real name.*

The story went like this:

*Of course, if you've read my other books, you already know that Cassandra wasn't her real name. All the names of my characters are made up; they're code names intended to protect the identities of the people involved. The point here is that the name Cass *thought* was her real name, the name Cass went

SPECIAL DELIVERY

The Arrival of Baby Cassandra

A not-so-long-ish time ago in a place not-so-far-ish away, there lived two not-so-very-old-ish men.

These two men loved collecting things so much that their home filled to the brim with odds and ends and this and that and a lot of bric-a-brac, too.

Knowing the men's acquisitive habits, the neighboring townsfolk were always leaving boxes on their doorstep. Their home was the home of last resort.

Usually, the boxes contained broken musical instruments or mismatched china or outgrown clothing.

Objects. Things. Stuff.

One fateful day, however, the men opened a box on their doorstep and discovered something altogether different. Instead of baby clothing, they found a baby.

An actual. Living. Breathing. Baby.

The men didn't know what to do. Of course, of all things in the world, a baby is the one thing

---

BY IN HER DAILY LIFE, THE NAME HER FRIENDS CALLED HER AND THAT SHE CALLED HERSELF — A NAME I WILL NEVER *EVER* DIVULGE — THAT NAME WAS NOT CASS'S REAL NAME EITHER.

most people would want to keep. But as tenderhearted as these men were, they knew that their home was a difficult and dangerous place to raise a child. There were far too many things to pull and poke and break and burn and rip and ruin.

Luckily, a friend was visiting at the time. This friend, a very smart and successful but also very lonely woman, had just been telling them how very, very much she wanted a baby of her own. They decided that the baby was meant to be hers.

The friend was Mel, short for Melanie, the woman who would become Cass's mother. That same day, the two men, a certain Larry and a certain Wayne, declared themselves Cass's grandfathers.

And they all lived happily ever after.

Almost.

When Cass first learned the truth about her origins, she'd been inclined to forgive her mother for not telling her sooner. She knew her mother hadn't wanted even the littlest thing to come between them. And the fact that Cass was adopted was a pretty big thing.

But as the weeks wore on, instead of softening, Cass's feelings had grown increasingly hard. For

most of her life, as the child of a single mom, Cass had wondered who her father was. Now she had to wonder who her mother was as well?

The worst part was that her mother didn't seem to have any sympathy for Cass wanting to know who her parents were. Her *birth parents*, Cass agreed to call them. Oh, her mother *said* she had sympathy. She *said* she understood. But she wouldn't *do* anything about it.

With a normal adoption, you could march over to the adoption agency and demand to know the names of your birth parents. ("Sure, *when* you turn eighteen," her mother repeatedly reminded her. "Until then, the records are sealed.") Because Cass had been dropped on a doorstep, there was no agency to consult.

To Cass the answer was simple: hire a detective. But her mother refused. Even when Cass said she'd give up her allowance for a year.

So, not for the first time, Cass decided to play detective herself.

"*Please* help me," said Cass. "You have no idea what it's like not to know who your parents are. *Your* parents fight over you every second of your life."

"I said OK, didn't I?"

Max-Ernest made a big show of examining a shoebox on the shelf in front of him. "You think a baby could fit in this —?"

"No."

"What if it was a midget baby —"

"You know what — why don't you just leave?"

Before Max-Ernest could respond:

Thunk!

It was the sound of something very heavy dropping on the ground. Followed by a loud insistent pounding on the front door.