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

A Series of Unfortunate Events 8: The Hostile Hospital

written by

Lemony Snicket

published by

Egmont Books

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

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk



EGMONT

We bring stories to life

First published in the USA 2001
by HarperCollins Children's Books
First published in Great Britain 2003
by Egmont Books Limited
239 Kensington High Street
London W8 6SA

This edition published 2010
by Egmont Books Limited

Published by arrangement with
HarperCollins Children's Books
A division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.
1350 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York, USA

Text copyright © 2001 Lemony Snicket
Inside illustrations © 2001 Brett Helquist
Cover illustration © 2003 Brett Helquist

ISBN 978 1 4052 5383 3
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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

Printed and bound in Great Britain by the CPI Group

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.



Mixed Sources
Product group from well-managed forests and other controlled sources
www.fsc.org Cert no. TT-COC-002332
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council

For Beatrice –

Summer without you is as cold as winter.

Winter without you is even colder.

www.unfortunateevents.com

CHAPTER

One

There are two reasons why a writer would end a sentence with the word "stop" written entirely in capital letters STOP. The first is if the writer were writing a telegram, which is a coded message sent through an electrical wire STOP. In a telegram, the word "stop" in all capital letters is the code for the end of a sentence STOP. But there is another reason why a writer would end a sentence with "stop" written entirely in capital letters, and that is to warn readers that the book they are reading is so utterly wretched that if they have begun reading it, the best thing to do would be to stop STOP. This particular book, for instance, describes an especially unhappy

time in the dreadful lives of Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire, and if you have any sense at all you will shut this book immediately, drag it up a tall mountain, and throw it off the very top STOP. There is no earthly reason why you should read even one more word about the misfortune, treachery, and woe that are in store for the three Baudelaire children, any more than you should run into the street and throw yourself under the wheels of a bus STOP. This "stop"-ended sentence is your very last chance to pretend the "STOP" warning is a stop sign, and to stop the flood of despair that awaits you in this book, the heart-stopping horror that begins in the very next sentence, by obeying the "STOP" and stopping STOP.

The Baudelaire orphans stopped. It was early in the morning, and the three children had been walking for hours across the flat and unfamiliar landscape. They were thirsty, lost, and exhausted, which are three good reasons to end a long walk, but they were also frightened, desperate, and not

far from people who wanted to hurt them, which are three good reasons to continue. The siblings had abandoned all conversation hours ago, saving every last bit of their energy to put one foot in front of the other, but now they knew they had to stop, if only for a moment, and talk about what to do next.

The children were standing in front of the Last Chance General Store—the only building they had encountered since they began their long and frantic nighttime walk. The outside of the store was covered with faded posters advertising what was sold, and by the eerie light of the half-moon, the Baudelaires could see that fresh limes, plastic knives, canned meat, white envelopes, mango-flavored candy, red wine, leather wallets, fashion magazines, goldfish bowls, sleeping bags, roasted figs, cardboard boxes, controversial vitamins, and many other things were available inside the store. Nowhere on the building, however, was there a poster advertising help, which is really what the Baudelaires needed.

"I think we should go inside," said Violet, taking a ribbon out of her pocket to tie up her hair. Violet, the eldest Baudelaire, was probably the finest fourteen-year-old inventor in the world, and she always tied her hair up in a ribbon when she had to solve a problem, and right now she was trying to invent a solution for the biggest problem she and her siblings had ever faced. "Perhaps there's somebody in there who can help us in some way."

"But perhaps there's somebody in there who has seen our pictures in the newspaper," said Klaus, the middle Baudelaire, who had recently spent his thirteenth birthday in a filthy jail cell. Klaus had a real knack for remembering nearly every word of nearly all of the thousands of books he had read, and he frowned as he remembered something untrue he had recently read about himself in the newspaper. "If they read *The Daily Punctilio*," he continued, "perhaps they believe all those terrible things about us. Then they won't help us at all."

"Agery!" Sunny said. Sunny was a baby, and as with most babies, different parts of her were growing at different rates. She had only four teeth, for example, but each of them was as sharp as that of an adult lion, and although she had recently learned to walk, Sunny was still getting the hang of speaking in a way that all adults could understand. Her siblings, however, knew at once that she meant "Well, we can't keep on walking forever," and the two older Baudelaires nodded in agreement.

"Sunny's right," Violet said. "It's called the Last Chance General Store. That sounds like it's the only building for miles and miles. It might be our only opportunity to get some help."

"And look," Klaus said, pointing to a poster taped in a high corner of the building. "We can send a telegram inside. Maybe we can get some help that way."

"Who would we send a telegram to?" Violet asked, and once again the Baudelaires had to stop and think. If you are like most people, you

have an assortment of friends and family you can call upon in times of trouble. For instance, if you woke up in the middle of the night and saw a masked woman trying to crawl through your bedroom window, you might call your mother or father to help you push her back out. If you found yourself hopelessly lost in the middle of a strange city, you might ask the police to give you a ride home. And if you were an author locked in an Italian restaurant that was slowly filling up with water, you might call upon your acquaintances in the locksmith, pasta, and sponge businesses to come and rescue you. But the Baudelaire children's trouble had begun with the news that their parents had been killed in a terrible fire, so they could not call upon their mother or father. The siblings could not call upon the police for assistance, because the police were among the people who had been chasing them all night long. And they could not call upon their acquaintances, because so many of the children's acquaintances were unable to

help them. After the death of the Baudelaire parents, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny had found themselves under the care of a variety of guardians. Some of them had been cruel. Some of them had been murdered. And one of them had been Count Olaf, a greedy and treacherous villain who was the real reason they were all by themselves in the middle of the night, standing in front of the Last Chance General Store, wondering who in the world they could call upon for help.

"Poe," Sunny said finally. She was talking about Mr. Poe, a banker with a nasty cough, who was in charge of taking care of the children following their parents' death. Mr. Poe had never been particularly helpful, but he was not cruel, murdered, or Count Olaf, and those seemed to be reasons enough to contact him.

"I guess we could try Mr. Poe," Klaus agreed. "The worst he could do would be to say no."

"Or cough," Violet said with a small smile. Her siblings smiled back, and the three children pushed open the rusty door and walked inside.

"Lou, is that you?" called out a voice, but the children could not see who it belonged to. The inside of the Last Chance General Store was as crowded as its outside, with every inch of space crammed full of things for sale. There were shelves of canned asparagus and racks of fountain pens, next to barrels of onions and crates full of peacock feathers. There were cooking utensils nailed to the walls and chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, and the floor was made out of thousands of different kinds of tiles, each one stamped with a price tag. "Are you delivering the morning paper?" the voice asked.

"No," Violet replied, as the Baudelaires tried to make their way toward the person who was talking. With difficulty they stepped over a carton of cat food and rounded a corner, only to find rows and rows of fishnets blocking their way.

"I'm not surprised, Lou," the voice continued, as the siblings doubled back past a stack of mirrors and a pile of socks and headed down

an aisle filled with pots of ivy and books of matches. "I usually don't expect *The Daily Punctilio* until after the Volunteers Fighting Disease arrive."

The children stopped looking for the source of the voice for a moment, and looked at one another, thinking of their friends Duncan and Isadora Quagmire. Duncan and Isadora were two triplets who, like the Baudelaires, had lost their parents, along with their brother, Quigley, in a terrible fire. The Quagmires had fallen into Olaf's hands a couple of times and had only recently escaped, but the Baudelaires did not know if they would see their friends ever again or learn a secret that the triplets had discovered and written down in their notebooks. The secret concerned the initials V.F.D., but the only other clues that the Baudelaires had were a few pages from Duncan's and Isadora's notebooks, and the three siblings had scarcely found the time to look them over. Could Volunteers Fighting Disease finally be the answer the children were searching for?

"No, we're not Lou," Violet called out. "We're three children, and we need to send a telegram."

"A telegram?" called the voice, and as the children rounded another corner they almost ran right into the man who was talking to them. He was very short, shorter than both Violet and Klaus, and looked like he hadn't slept or shaved in quite a long time. He was wearing two different shoes, each with a price tag, and several shirts and hats at once. He was so covered in merchandise that he almost looked like part of the store, except for his friendly smile and dirty fingernails.

"You're certainly not Lou," he said. "Lou is one chubby man, and you are three skinny children. What are you doing around here so early? It's dangerous around here, you know. I've heard that this morning's *Daily Punctilio* has a story about three murderers who are lurking around this very neighborhood, but I haven't read it yet."

"Newspaper stories aren't always accurate," Klaus said nervously.

The shopkeeper frowned. "Nonsense," he said. "*The Daily Punctilio* wouldn't print things that aren't true. If the newspaper says somebody is a murderer, then they are a murderer and that's the end of it. Now, you say you wanted to send a telegram?"

"Yes," Violet said. "To Mr. Poe at Mulctuary Money Management, in the city."

"It will cost quite a bit of money to send a telegram all the way to the city," the shopkeeper said, and the Baudelaires looked at one another in dismay.

"We don't have any money with us," Klaus admitted. "We're three orphans, and the only money we have is being looked after by Mr. Poe. Please, sir."

"Sos!" Sunny said.

"My sister means 'It's an emergency situation,'" Violet explained, "and it is."

The shopkeeper looked at them for a moment,

and then shrugged. "If it's really an emergency situation," he said, "then I won't charge you. I never charge anything for things if they're really important. Volunteers Fighting Disease, for instance. Whenever they stop by, I give them gasoline for free because they do such wonderful work."

"What exactly do they do?" Violet asked.

"They fight disease, of course," the shopkeeper replied. "V.F.D. stop by here early each morning on their way to the hospital. Every day they devote themselves to cheering up patients, and I don't have the heart to charge them for anything."

"You're a very kind man," Klaus replied.

"Well, it's very kind of you to say so," the shopkeeper replied. "Now, the device for sending telegrams is over there, next to all those porcelain kittens. I'll help you."

"We can do it ourselves," Violet said. "I built one of those devices myself when I was seven, so I know how to connect the electronic circuit."

"And I've read two books about Morse code," Klaus said. "So I can translate our message into electronic signals."

"Help!" Sunny said.

"What a talented group of children," the shopkeeper said with a smile. "Well, I'll leave you three alone. I hope that this Mr. Poe person can help you with your emergency situation."

"Thank you very much, sir," Violet said. "I hope so, too."

The shopkeeper gave the children a little wave and disappeared behind a display of potato peelers, and the Baudelaires looked at one another in excitement.

"Volunteers Fighting Disease?" Klaus whispered to Violet. "Do you think we've finally found the real meaning of V.F.D.?"

"Jacques!" Sunny said.

"Jacques did say something about working as a volunteer," Klaus agreed. "If only we had a few moments to look over the pages from the Quagmire notebooks. They're still in my pocket."